



# Complaints Policy

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## **1.0 Introduction**

- 1.1 This policy outlines Housing for Women's (HfW) approach to dealing with and resolving complaints. This policy covers all customers that live in HfW owned and/or managed properties including household members and people that use our services.

## **2.0 Policy scope**

- 2.1 This policy does not cover complaints that become involved in a legal process for example, a legal disrepair case reported through a legal team, solicitor. Similarly, this policy does not cover situations where legal action is undertaken by HfW against a customer to enforce the terms of an occupancy agreement (tenancy agreement, licence, or lease) or when dealing with disputes concerning the occupancy agreement.
- 2.2 HfW has a positive approach to receiving feedback from customers. Complaints provide HfW with valuable information; enabling us to assess performance, inform learning and define continuous improvements. We believe that complaints, when handled well, strengthen the landlord/resident relationship.
- 2.3 HfW recognises that providing consistently high standards of service, including the proper handling of complaints, is crucial. Colleagues are trained to handle complaints in objective and appropriate ways.

## **3.0 Aims and objective of the policy**

- 3.1 The aim of this policy is to:
- Deliver a complaints service that meets HfW's expected service standards and supports a positive complaint handling culture
  - Facilitate organisational learning
  - Promote a 'get it right first-time' approach
  - Provide easy to understand information on how to manage complaints
- 3.2 The objective of this policy is to:
- Work collaboratively with internal and external stakeholders, where necessary, to coordinate comprehensive outcomes to complaints
  - Facilitate effective and prompt resolution of complaints
  - Use the analysis of complaints to help HfW continually improve its services and reduce the level of complaints
  - Manage all complaints in open, transparent, and accountable ways

## **4.0 Key definitions and references**

### **4.1 What is a complaint?**

4.2 HfW defines a complaint as an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, action, or lack of action by the organisation, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting an individual resident or group of residents.

- **Expression of dissatisfaction:** this includes negative comments made about the standard of service that has been received or the absence of a service and is managed as an informal complaint.
- **Formal complaint:** this includes complaints that are deemed as such by the complainant and/or who has requested a formal written response. This can also include a complaint that cannot be resolved swiftly.
- **Unreasonable and Vexatious Complainants:** This is someone who pursues their complaints or issues in a way which might hinder the investigation into their complaint/issue or that of other people, and which can have significant resource implications for HfW. We understand that the circumstances leading to someone making a complaint may have been upsetting or distressing, and that behaviour may be out of character. However, some individuals who contact us are so angry and/or persistent that their behaviour results in unreasonable demands on, or behaviour towards our staff. Housing for Women has adopted a policy for working with those complainants that become unreasonably persistent or vexatious. This policy will only be applied when all other courses of action have been exhausted and only under limited circumstances.

### **4.3 When our complaints process does not apply**

4.4 In some situations, some issues do not fall within the definition of a complaint within this policy, including when:

- You are taking legal action related to your complaint
- The complaint you want to make is not about us but about another organisation or person
- A claim is being dealt with by our insurers
- You have made repeated complaints about the same or related matters that we have already addressed
- You have made an unreasonable number of complaints over a short period of time about minor matters
- You want to make a complaint six months or more after the alleged incident you are complaining about
- The volume or content of any contact from you is unreasonable
- A court, Tribunal or Ombudsman has already considered the matter
- There is a neighbour dispute, anti-social behaviour, domestic abuse, hate crime matter (unless you want to complain about the way we handled this)
- You want to appeal against correctly applied policies
- If you are a tenant and have a query about elements of your service charge you can contact your Neighbourhood officer. However, if you wish to query the overall level of your service charge or rent or the amount it has risen by you

may need to contact the First-Tier tribunal- Property Chamber (Residential Property).

- If you are a leaseholder and have a query concerning your service charge, their calculation or how this information was communicated you would need to contact the go to the Leasehold Advisory Service

4.5 Where HfW decides that a complaint does not fall within the scope of this policy, we will write to the complainant and provide an explanation for this. The resident can challenge this decision through the Housing Ombudsman.

4.6 This policy has been written with reference to the Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS) – Complaint Handling Code

## 5.0 **Policy statement**

5.1 HfW recognises that proper handling of complaints is essential, therefore:

- We will manage complaints impartially, objectively, and fairly
- Making a complaint will not place the complainant at a detriment
- We will act with integrity, candour, and transparency. We will be open when we have made a mistake and will take reasonable steps to make good. We will seek to resolve the complaint to the customer's satisfaction
- We will be clear about timescales and inform customers throughout the investigation
- We will make reasonable attempts to provide the complainant with opportunities to respond and challenge ahead of the outcome
- We will use plain and appropriate language in our response. We will provide clear reasons for decisions made and details relating to proposed remedies to put things right. We will also detail how to escalate the matter should the complainant remain dissatisfied.

## 5.2 **How to make a complaint**

Complaints can be made by email, letter, phone, customer portal or in person.

Complaints can be made on HfW social media channels though there are limitations to social media. HfW can only respond to complaints received in this way where a complainant provides HfW with sufficient details that enables us to investigate the matter and provide a confidential response to a verified person who has received a service from us, this can be achieved through the complainant privately messaging us and/or responding to HfW privately through direct messaging. In making a complaint on social media, the complainant is choosing to share their information within the public domain and therefore that information is not covered under General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

HfW has a dedicated central email inbox for complaints, this email address is [complaints@h4w.co.uk](mailto:complaints@h4w.co.uk)

## 5.3 **Who can make a complaint?**

5.4 Any person who has received a service from HfW can make a complaint, as can an organisation or another person acting on behalf of an HfW customer who is dissatisfied with service provision, this includes advocates, MPs, councillors, agencies such as Citizens Advice Bureau. Direct complainants include prospective, current, and former residents and people who use our support services.

5.5 **Time limits and Timeframe for responses**

5.6 A complaint must be made within six months of the matter occurring, unless it has only recently become known, or where it concerns an on-going delay to something that is already in process. This time limit is in line with the Housing Ombudsman service guide on complaints. We reserve the right to dismiss any complaint outside of the time limitation.

Action by us	Days to respond
<b>Logging and acknowledgement</b> of a complaint	5 days
<b>Stage 1 decision-</b> we will contact you if we are not able to meet this timeframe to advise the customer of when we will send a concluding response. We will try our utmost not to exceed this beyond another 10 working days	10 days
<b>Stage 2 response-</b> 20 working days from request to escalate – if this is not possible an explanation and a date when the stage 2 response will be received by the customer	20 days

5.7 **Reasonable adjustments**

HfW will make reasonable adjustments, where possible, in line with the Equality Act 2010.

Reasonable adjustments include offering interpreting or translation services, the provision of information in alternative formats including large print, Braille, coloured paper; extension of time limits, agreeing to a preferred method of communication for example by email; communication through a third party or intermediary.

HfW will determine decisions on reasonable adjustments by considering the:

- Effectiveness of the adjustment(s) in preventing or reducing disadvantage for the individual
- Practicality of making the adjustment
- Availability of resources including external assistance and finance
- Disruption to the service that making an adjustment might cause

Any request for reasonable adjustments will be assessed within 10 working days and the outcome will be communicated to the complainant.

## **6.0 Complaint stages**

### **6.1 Early Resolution**

HfW strive to resolve issues that customers raise with us swiftly. We recognise that customers do not always want to raise issues formally and might simply want the matter resolved. To that end, we will seek 'early resolution' following the receipt of an issue raised by a customer and we will confirm this with them. We will focus on resolving your complaint, apologise and put things right quickly when we have done something wrong and let you know within 5 working days what we plan to do. These issues will be recorded as expressions of dissatisfaction, managed as informal complaints within five working days.

#### **What will happen if you are not satisfied after the 'early resolution step':**

6.2 HfW provides two formal stages within the complaint's procedure. Complaints will normally be dealt with from Stage 1 of the policy.

### **6.3 Stage 1**

6.4 The Complaints Coordinator acknowledges the receipt of your complaint within 5 working days. The Complaints Coordinator will allocate your complaint to the appropriate manager of the service your complaint relates to.

6.5 You will be contacted by the manager handling the complaint to discuss the case and seek to understand what you would like to have happen. You will also be contacted to discuss the findings ahead of issuing the outcome of the complaint, enabling you to have an opportunity to respond and challenge.

6.6 You will receive a response to the complaint within 10 working days, or the manager will let you know when you will receive a response, should further time be needed to investigate, which ordinarily will be within a further 10 calendar days.

### **6.7 Stage 2**

6.8 If you are not satisfied with our Stage 1 response, you can contact us within 10 working days to let us know what your outstanding issues are and what outcome you are seeking. You can choose to have the Stage 1 response reviewed by instigating your preferred route:

#### **Route 1: Executive Director**

- The Complaints Coordinator will contact you within two working days to confirm that we have received your Stage 2 request for a review undertaken by an Executive Director.
- The Complaints Coordinator will allocate your complaint to a member of the Executive Team and will let you know who will be reviewing your complaint.
- The Executive Director handling your complaint will provide a full response to you within 10 working days or will let you know when you will receive a response, should further time be needed to investigate, which ordinarily will be within a further 10 calendar days.

- You will need to provide reasonable grounds for us to review your complaint and will be given the opportunity to discuss resolution actions such as compensation amounts, incomplete works at your home or lack of communication.

**Or**

### **Route 2: Complaint Panel**

- Our Complaint Panel will comprise Executive Team members and/or members of the Board of Trustees. A technical specialist might also be invited, at our discretion, to provide technical insight relating to your case.
- The Complaints Coordinator will contact you within two working days to confirm that we have received your request for a review to be undertaken by a Complaints Panel.
- The Complaint Panel will take place within 20 working days.
- You will be able to present your complaint to Complaints Panel members and can also bring an appropriate person with you to the meeting (please confirm this with the Complaints Coordinator 24 hours ahead of the scheduled meeting). If you do not want to attend the Complaints Panel, that is okay, and the panel will be held in your absence
- The Complaint Panel will issue its written decision to you within 10 working days of the meeting.

6.9 The internal complaints process is exhausted once Stage 2 process is concluded. If the complainant remains dissatisfied, the complainant can choose to seek external redress.

### **7.0 Housing Ombudsman**

7.1 If your complaint is about a housing matter, you can take your complaint to the Housing Ombudsman within 1 year of receiving the Stage 2 outcome and after eight weeks following the Stage 2 outcome.

7.2 During the eight weeks period following the Stage 2 outcome, you can approach a designated person (your local ward councillor or MP) to help you resolve the complaint and can also refer the complaint to the Housing Ombudsman without waiting the eight weeks.

7.3 The Housing Ombudsman will investigate your complaint and write to both you and us about their decision and any recommendations.

7.4 The Housing Ombudsman service can be contacted as follows:

Housing Ombudsman Service  
PO BOX 152  
Liverpool L33 7WQ  
Email: [info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk](mailto:info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk)  
Website: [www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk](http://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk)

- 7.5 Customers who use or have used our support services can contact the commissioning organisation such as the local authority or funding body to seek external redress. Details will be available on site locally within the service and/or from a member of staff.

## **8.0 MP and Councillor Enquiries**

MP and Councillor Enquires, often ask for details on how an issue or complaint is being managed or request that a matter is looked in to. These enquires should be logged separately as a “MP Enquiry” and assigned to the manager responsible for the service the enquiry relates to. A response should be provided within 5 working days. Enquiries should not be treated as the complaint but should be managed alongside it, ensuring the complaint itself is managed in line with this policy.

## **9.0 Learning and continuously improving our services**

- 9.1 Effective management of our complaints process is important to us and as such we closely monitor our performance and identify learning from all complaints.
- 9.2 We will proactively seek feedback from you by providing you with a survey to complete that is sent to you alongside your complaint response.
- 9.3 Following your feedback we will learn from the issues that arise and work to improve and shape our services for our residents and improve our internal processes.