

Complaints Handling Procedure



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We are committed to providing high-quality customer services. We value complaints and use this information to help us improve our services.

If something goes wrong or you are dissatisfied with our services, please tell us. This leaflet describes our complaints procedure and how to make a complaint. It also tells you about how we will handle your complaint and what you can expect from us.

➔ **What is a complaint?**

A complaint is any expression of dissatisfaction about our actions or lack of action, or about the standard of service provided by us or on our behalf.

➔ **What can I complain about?**

You can complain about things like:

- ✓ failure or refusal to provide a service
- ✓ inadequate quality or standard of service, or an unreasonable delay in providing a service
- ✓ delays in responding to enquiries or requests
- ✓ unfairness, bias or prejudice in service delivery
- ✓ lack of provision, or the provision of misleading, unsuitable or incorrect advice or information
- ✓ a repair that has not been carried out properly or in an agreed timeframe
- ✓ dissatisfaction with one of our policies or its impact on the individual
- ✓ failure to properly apply law, procedure or guidance when delivering services
- ✓ failure to follow the appropriate administrative process

- ✓ conduct, treatment by or attitude of a member of staff or contractor (**except** where there are arrangements in place for the contractor to handle the complaint themselves)
- ✓ disagreement with a decision, (**except** where there is a statutory procedure for challenging that decision, or an established appeals process followed throughout the sector).

Your complaint may involve more than one service or be about someone working on our behalf.

➔ **What can't I complain about?**

There are some things we can't deal with through our complaints handling procedure.

These include:

- ✗ a routine first-time request for a service
- ✗ a request for compensation only
- ✗ issues that are in court or have already been heard by a court or a tribunal (if you decide to take legal action, you should let us know as the complaint cannot then be considered under this process)

- ✗ disagreement with a decision where there is a statutory procedure for challenging that decision (such as subject access requests), or an established appeals process followed throughout the sector
- ✗ a request for information under the Data Protection Act
- ✗ a grievance by a staff member or a grievance relating to employment or staff recruitment
- ✗ a concern raised internally by a member of staff (which was not about a service they received, such as a whistleblowing concern)
- ✗ a concern about a child or an adult's safety
- ✗ an attempt to reopen a previously concluded complaint or to have a complaint reconsidered where we have already given our final decision
- ✗ a concern about the actions or service of a different organisation, where we have no involvement in the issue (except where the other organisation is delivering services on our behalf).

If other procedures or rights of appeal can help you resolve your concerns, we will give information and advice to help you.

→ Who can complain?

Anyone who receives, requests or is directly affected by our services can make a complaint to us. This includes the representative of someone who is dissatisfied with our service (for example, a relative, friend, advocate or adviser). If you are making a complaint on someone else's behalf, you will normally need their written consent.

Please also read the section on **Getting help to make your complaint**.

→ How do I complain?

You can complain in person at our office, by phone, in writing, by email or our online complaints form.

It is easier for us to address complaints if you make them quickly and directly to the service concerned. So please talk to a member of our staff at the service you are complaining about. Then they can try to resolve the issue.

When complaining, please tell us:

- your full name and contact details
- as much as you can about the complaint
- what has gone wrong; and
- what outcome you are seeking.

→ Our contact details

- submit an online complaint:
<https://homestorent.placesforpeople.co.uk/form/complaint/>
- email your complaint to:
customerfocusteam@placesforpeople.co.uk
- contact our Customer Service Centre on:
01772 667 002
- tell us in person
- message us on social media (we are mindful of data protection when responding, and will contact you offline)
- send your complaint in writing to:
The Customer Focus Team
Places for People
PO Box 2070
Preston
PR5 9BY

→ How long do I have to make a complaint?

Normally, you must make your complaint within six months of:

- the event you want to complain about; or
- finding out that you have a reason to complain.

In exceptional circumstances, we may be able to accept a complaint after the time limit. If you feel that the time limit should not apply to your complaint, please tell us why.

➔ What happens when I have complained?

We will always tell you who is dealing with your complaint. Our complaints procedure has three stages:

Put it right'

When you let us know that you have had a problem with our service, our priority is to 'Put it right' for you. If the person taking the complaint can 'Put it right' for you within 48 hours, we will consider your complaint as resolved.

Stage 1: Frontline response

If we are unable to resolve the complaint within 48 hours, we will open a Stage 1 complaint in the first instance.

We will acknowledge your complaint within five working days.

We will give you our decision at stage 1 in ten working days or less, unless there are exceptional circumstances.

If you are not satisfied with the response we give at this stage, we will tell you what you can do next. If you choose to, you can take your complaint to stage 2. You must normally ask us to consider your complaint at stage 2 either:

- within six months of the event you want to complain about or finding out that you have a reason to complain; or
- within two months of receiving your stage 1 response (if this is later).

In exceptional circumstances, we may be able to accept a stage 2 complaint after the time limit. If you feel that the time limit should not apply to your complaint, please tell us why.

Stage 2: Investigation

Stage 2 deals with two types of complaint: where you remain dissatisfied after stage 1 and those that clearly require investigation, and so are handled directly at this stage. If you do not wish your complaint to be handled at stage 1, you can ask us to handle it at stage 2 instead.

When using stage 2:

- we will acknowledge receipt of your complaint within three working days
- we will confirm our understanding of the complaint we will investigate and what outcome you are looking for
- we will try to resolve your complaint where we can (in some cases we may suggest using an alternative complaint resolution approach, such as mediation); and
- where we cannot resolve your complaint, we will give you a full response as soon as possible, normally within 20 working days.

If our investigation will take longer than 20 working days, we will tell you. We will tell you our revised time limits and keep you updated on progress.



➔ What if I'm still dissatisfied?

After we have given you our final decision, if you are still dissatisfied with our decision or the way we dealt with your complaint, you can ask this to be reviewed by our Independent Complaints Panel or investigated by the Housing Ombudsman Service.



The Housing Ombudsman Service is an independent organisation that investigates complaints. They are not an advocacy or support service (but there are other organisations who can help you with advocacy or support).

You can ask the Housing Ombudsman Service to look at your complaint if:

- you have gone all the way through the complaints handling procedure
- it is less than 12 months after you became aware of the matter you want to complain about; and
- the matter has not been (and is not being) considered in court.

The Housing Ombudsman Service will ask you to complete a complaint form and provide a copy of our final response to your complaint.

You can do this online at:

www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/residents/make-a-complaint

or call them on:

Freephone **0300 111 3000**.

You may wish to get independent support or advocacy to help you progress your complaint.

See the section on **Getting help to make your complaint**.

The Housing Ombudsman Service contact details are:

Housing Ombudsman Service
PO Box 152
Liverpool
L33 7WQ

→ **Care complaints**

If your complaint relates to a care service we provide, you can choose whether to complain to us or the Care Quality Commission. You can find out more about their complaints procedure, or make a complaint, by contacting them via their website:

www.cqc.org.uk

→ **Reporting a significant performance failure to the Regulator of Social Housing**

The Housing Ombudsman (HO) and Regulator are working together.

This means the Housing Ombudsman investigates beyond the initial complaint or landlord to establish evidence of service failure or systemic failing. Where this is the case the HO will refer the matter to the Regulator.

→ **Getting help to make your complaint**

We understand that you may be unable or reluctant to make a complaint yourself. We accept complaints from the representative of a person who is dissatisfied with our service. We can take complaints from a friend, relative, or an advocate if you have given them your consent in writing to complain for you.

→ **How do I find an advocate?**

Advocacy Alliance is a national charity and has advocates in many areas. You can find their details online or ask us and we will provide contact details for your local branch.

You can also find out about advisers in your area through Citizens Advice:

www.citizensadvice.org.uk

We are committed to making our service easy to use for all members of the community. In line with our statutory equalities duties, we will always ensure that reasonable adjustments are made to help you access and use our services.

If you have trouble putting your complaint in writing, or want this information in another language or format, such as large font, or Braille, please tell us in person, contact us on:

01772 667 002

or email us at:

customerfocusteam@placesforpeople.co.uk

We may share your name and contact details with In House Research, an external company who we have appointed to carry out surveys so that we can obtain feedback from you on our complaints service. The appointed company will work on our behalf and will never use your information for any other purposes.



Quick guide to our complaints procedure

Our complaints process

You are dissatisfied with the service and want to make a complaint



We will aim to 'Put it right' within 48 hours

- If this is not possible, we will move this to the next stage.



Stage 1 – Frontline response
Complaint reviewed by complaints handler

- We will acknowledge your complaint within five working days.
- We will provide a final outcome letter within 10 working days, unless complaint extended.
- We will tell you how you can escalate your complaint to Stage 2.



Stage 2 – Investigation
Complaint considered by reviewing manager

- We will acknowledge your complaint within three working days.
- We will contact you to discuss the complaint further.
- We will provide a final outcome letter within 20 working days, unless complaint extended.
- We will tell you how you can progress your complaint for an independent external review or to the Housing Ombudsman.



Independent external review –
Your next options

- You can refer the complaint to our independent complaints panel, or the Ombudsman.