



# Quality Assurance Framework – Complaints

## 1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This framework explains how we ensure Southern Housing colleagues understand what's acceptable when responding to and managing formal complaints.

This framework enables us to:

- Meet our complaints objectives:
  - deliver a great customer experience in line with our [Customer Service Promise](#)
  - respond and acknowledge in time
  - reduce maladministration and prevent negative determinations
  - reduce escalations to stage two and reduce case extensions
  - provide empathetic customer-friendly responses.
- Comply with the [Housing Ombudsman Service \(HOS\) Complaint Handling Code](#) and recommendations of spotlight [reports](#)
- Comply with policy and procedure
- Mitigate risks.

- 1.1.1 This framework also covers how we manage complaints on behalf of Triathlon Homes in line with their [Complaints Policy](#).

- 1.2 This framework applies to all complaints logged against Southern Housing or Triathlon Homes at stage one or stage two of our complaints process. It covers the entire process from service dissatisfaction through to resolution.

- 1.3 This framework doesn't apply to complaints about care and support services; these have their own policy and are monitored by the Care Quality Commission.

- 1.4 The terms 'we', 'our' and 'us' mean Southern Housing.

## 2.0 General principles

- 2.1 Where possible, we'll co-create and develop new services, processes, and policies, or improve existing ones, with residents and colleagues who use our services.

- 2.2 We have a dedicated Complaints Resolution team responsible for coordinating and handling complaints, liaising with the Housing Ombudsman service and complaints reporting to our governing body.
- 2.3 Complaints Resolution Leads:
- Act sensitively and fairly
  - Offer a great customer experience
  - Ensure the service is inclusive and tailored to diverse needs of residents
  - Are appropriately trained; this includes the Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS) online Dispute Resolution training
  - Are able to help distressed and upset residents with respect and sensitivity
  - Have access to colleagues at all levels to aid efficient complaint resolution
  - Have the authority and autonomy to resolve disputes quickly and fairly.
- 2.4 When investigating, we:
- Demonstrate empathy and respect
  - Keep an open mind, remaining impartial and deal with complaints on their own merit
  - Give the resident a fair chance to set out their position
  - Take measures to address any actual or perceived conflicts of interest
  - Consider all information and evidence clearly
  - Keep each complaint confidential as far as possible, only disclosing information if necessary to properly investigate or if there's a safeguarding concern.
- 2.5 We resolve complaints at the earliest opportunity, having assessed:
- What evidence is needed to fully consider the issue(s) raised
  - What outcome would resolve the matter
  - Whether there are any urgent actions required
  - Whether the resident is vulnerable or at risk.
- 2.6 We call the resident to ensure we have a full understanding of the complaint definition. If we've been unable to contact, we'll summarise our understanding in written form and ask the resident to contact us to confirm.
- We acknowledge and respond to complaints by email, unless the resident has requested a different communication method or we don't hold a valid email address<sup>1</sup>. Complaints Resolution Leads check User Defined Characteristics (UDCs) or 'visual cues' for communication needs and preferences.
- 2.7 We use language and tone of voice in accordance with our [Brand Guidelines](#). The words we use show we've taken account of any special circumstances, vulnerabilities, or obligations under the [Equality Act 2010](#). See our [Reasonable Adjustments & Vulnerable Needs Policy](#) for more information.
- 2.8 We acknowledge and respond to complaints within the deadlines set out in our [Complaints Policy](#). If we've failed to do so, we acknowledge this and provide an

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<sup>1</sup> In which case, we'd write to the resident's address

appropriate remedy. If we need to extend the deadline, we explain why and agree a new date, and how we'll keep the resident informed.

- 2.9 We tell residents they're able to contact the Housing Ombudsman at any point throughout the process, giving their contact details.
- 2.10 When investigating complaints, we consider any previous reports relating to the complaint if it will help us resolve the issue for the resident.
- 2.11 If residents raise additional complaints during the investigation, we incorporate them into the stage one response if:
  - They're relevant
  - It wouldn't unreasonably delay our response
  - We haven't issued the stage one response yet.
- 2.12 Where a resident may have a legal entitlement to redress, we obtain legal advice to ensure we word our offer of resolution appropriately.

### **3.0 Acknowledging complaints (stage one and two)**

- 3.1 We summarise our understanding of the concerns raised and the outcomes the resident is seeking. We give the resident the opportunity to tell us if we've missed or misunderstood any aspect of the complaint.
- 3.2 We manage residents' expectations, being clear where a desired outcome is unreasonable or unrealistic.
- 3.3 We give residents the date by which they can expect to receive our response.

### **4.0 Responding to complaints (stage one and two)**

- 4.1 We send a response as soon as we know the outcome of the complaint. This may be before we've completed all the actions required to remedy the issue.
- 4.2 We address all points raised in the complaint and set out the investigation findings clearly and concisely. Our response:
  - Confirms the complaint stage
  - Gives our decisions and clear reasons for those decisions
  - Conveys empathy, fairness, and reasonable thinking to show we've considered all points raised
  - Acknowledges and sincerely apologises for any service failures
  - References the relevant policy, law, and good practice where appropriate
  - Includes details of any remedy we're offering to put things right, including how we've calculated any compensation (in line with our [Compensation Policy](#))
  - Details any outstanding actions and what the resident can expect from us next. Any action plans focus on a quality, speedy, and satisfactory resolution.
  - Explains the resident's escalation rights, as detailed in our [Complaints Policy](#)

- Outlines the dates by which the resident can escalate their complaint if they're unhappy with our response (stage one only).

## 5.0 Escalating complaints

- 5.1 We escalate complaints at the resident's request. If we decline to escalate a complaint, we clearly explain our reasons in line with our [Policy](#).
- 5.2 We remind residents they're able to contact the Housing Ombudsman at any point throughout the process, or how to escalate to them if they remain dissatisfied after stage two, giving their contact details.
- 5.3 The person investigating a stage two complaint is not the same person who investigated the complaint at stage one.
- 5.4 Complaints Resolution Leads must involve all suitable colleagues to review and issue the Stage two response. A senior member of the Complaints Resolution team must review this before it's issued.

## 6.0 Managing complaints

- 6.1 We keep detailed records of all contact with complainants on our central complaints system to ensure there's a clear audit trail. This includes:
  - Phone conversations
  - Emails
  - Letters
  - Visits.
- 6.2 We confirm with residents, using timespeak, how often we'll keep them updated throughout the investigation.
- 6.3 We communicate with the complainant by phone or email prior to issuing a stage one or stage two response. Where there's an adverse finding, we'll attempt to contact the resident via their preferred method of communication to discuss it before issuing the outcome.
- 6.4 If further actions are needed, the Complaints Resolution Lead, overseen by a senior officer, proactively monitors the case until it's fully resolved and provide regular progress updates.
- 6.5 We close complaints after we've sent the response. Tasks/activities will remain open until complete.

## 7.0 Monitoring and compliance controls

- 7.1 A senior member of the Complaints management team completes monthly quality control audits on 5% of stage one complaints and 10% of stage two complaints closed within the previous month. The checks include compliance against:
  - This framework

- Our [Complaints Policy](#)
- Our Complaints Procedure
- Specific requirements of the HOS Complaint Handling Code 2024 that are not detailed within our Policy.

7.2 Outcomes of audits are shared with the Complaint Resolution team member who managed the complaint. The outcomes include:

- Actions to be addressed within five days
- Future learnings
- An overall complaint handling performance score for the complaint.

7.3 We record overall scores and trends centrally for analysis and audit purposes.

## 8.0 Review

8.1 We will review this framework to address legislative, regulatory, best practice or operational issues.

### Controls

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