

Complaints Policy

Version Control						
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2024 Review				24.05.2024	24.05.2026	Operations Director

1. Introduction

- 1.1. Westmoreland Supported Housing Limited (WSHL) is committed to providing a high-quality service for our customers and working in an open and accountable way that builds trust and respect. One of the ways in which we can continue to improve our service is by listening and responding to the views of our customers and in particular by responding positively to complaints and by putting mistakes right when things have gone wrong.
- 1.2. We will use complaints as an opportunity to learn and drive improvements in service delivery throughout the business. We will also record and share compliments with our staff to foster a successful culture.
- 1.3. This policy explains how customers can make a complaint if they are not satisfied with our services and how we will respond.
- 1.4. We will make a distinction between a complaint, service request and reporting of incidents e.g., Anti-Social Behaviour, rubbish dumping. If we do not respond to service requests or incidents to your satisfaction, they may become a complaint.
- 1.5. Complaints about the provision of the care service should be made to the Care Provider in the first instance.

2. Purpose

- 2.1. The overall aim of this policy is to outline the approach to handling complaints, to identify what is in and out of scope of the complaints policy and detail how WSHL will learn from complaints.

3. Scope

- 3.1. This policy applies to all customers and their representatives and relates to any action or service provided by WSHL or anyone on its behalf.



- 3.2. The Complaint Handling Code defines a Complaint as *an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions, or lack of action by the organisation, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting an individual resident or group of residents.*
- 3.3. For us, this means that a complaint is when a customer is unhappy with a service provided by WSHL and wants us to put it right.
- 3.4. Examples of Complaints are:
- Where we have failed to provide a service, or there has been a delay in providing one.
 - Where we have failed to follow our policies and procedures or have been unfair or inconsistent in applying them.
 - Where we have failed to keep a customer informed through lack of or insufficient information.
 - Where there has been inappropriate behaviour or attitude from our staff.
 - If a customer is unhappy about the way we have delivered a service.

4. Legal and regulatory responsibilities

- 4.1. This Policy is designed to comply with our legal and regulatory responsibilities.
- 4.2. The Regulator of Social Housing's Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard (April 2024) requires Registered Providers to ensure complaints are addressed fairly, effectively and promptly and that complaint handling is simple, accessible and publicised.
- 4.3. Adherence to the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code has been made mandatory via the Social Housing (Regulation Act) 2023 and has been developed to make complaints handling and learning a part of the whole organisation and will enable boards to foster a culture of learning to drive improvements in service delivery and lead to better relationships with our customers. As part of this a self-assessment will be published by WSHL every 12 months.
- 4.4. Regulator for Social Housing 2023 Rent Standard sits alongside the 2020 Rent Standard but does not apply to any type of supported housing. The setting of rent for supported housing must continue to comply in full with all the requirements and expectations set out in the 2020 Rent Standard.
- 4.5. This policy also meets any legal obligation outlined in the following legislation:
- Housing Act 1996
 - Localism Act 2011
- 4.6. Relevant legislation is all that legislation either by way of Common Law, Act of Parliament or Statutory Instrument which relates to this policy. and is in force at the relevant date.

5. Policy Principles

5.1. Our policy is based on the following principles:

- We will deal with Complaints promptly, courteously, systematically, and fairly.
- All Complaints will be dealt with in confidence.
- We will keep complainants informed of progress and the outcome of any investigation.
- Complaints will be recorded, monitored and acknowledged unless it is not appropriate to do so.
- Complainants will have the right, at their own cost, to have a friend or advocate present at any interview.
- We will provide support and assistance to help a complainant make a Complaint where needed.
- We will use complaints to learn from any mistakes and to seek to improve our service.
- Where any complaint is upheld we will offer an appropriate apology and will seek to compensate for any significant periods of inconvenience, distress or monetary loss.

5.2. A service request will not be logged as a complaint, but action will be taken to address the issues raised. A service request is a request from a customer or someone on their behalf who requests that action is taken to put something right, whereas a complaint is when a customer expresses dissatisfaction with the response to address the service request or about the standard of a service, action or lack of it.

6. Making a Complaint

6.1. Normally a complaint must be received by WSHL within six months of the issue taking place or the customer finding out they have a reason to complain, but must be no longer than 12 months after the issue took place.

6.2. This time limit is in line with the Housing Ombudsman Service guidance on Complaints and the timescales they operate. In exceptional circumstances, we may be able to accept a complaint after the time limit has passed. If a customer feels that the time limit should not apply, they will need to tell us why so that we can consider the case and a decision can be made.

6.3. A complaint can be made by anyone who is entitled to receive a service from WSHL or is affected by the service. With written consent, a family member, friend or advocate may act on behalf of a complainant.

6.4. WSHL will make it easy for customers to make a complaint by providing different channels and we will make reasonable adjustments to access our service in line with the Equality Act 2010. Complaints can be made face to face, via our website, by phone, by email by letter, or through any social media channel.



- 6.5. In order to try and resolve complaints as quickly as possible, we may initially deal with the problem or service failure under our 'Priority Response' process.
- 6.6. We aim to resolve the failure in service and get it 'back on track' within 5 working days. A priority response is dealt with much quicker than a formal complaint, we will not normally carry out an investigation or send formal letters but will look to get the problem resolved as quickly as possible. A customer is still eligible to then proceed to a formal complaint if they wish.
- 6.7. We operate a two-stage formal complaint process:

Stage 1 Complaint

- If a customer is unhappy with a service we have provided or if we have been unable to resolve an issue to their satisfaction under our Priority Response process, a Complaint can be logged under stage one of our formal complaints process.
- The complaint will be logged and an acknowledgment sent within 5 working days.
- A Head of Service will investigate the complaint and provide a written response within 10 working days of receiving the complaint and will keep the customer informed of the progress until resolution. A further 10 days may be agreed with the customer if this is not possible.
- Where a complaint is upheld and there were significant periods of inconvenience, distress or loss we will offer compensation in line with our Compensation Policy.

Stage 2 Complaint

- If a customer is dissatisfied with the outcome of the complaint review at stage 1 the customer can make a request for their complaint to be escalated to a more senior level within 28 days of the stage 1 response - this will be one of the Executive Team.
- Where there is not a member of the Executive Team who has not been involved in the Complaint, it will be escalated to a Non-Executive Director of the Board.
- The complaint will be reviewed and a written response will be sent to the customer within 20 working days. A further 10 days may be agreed with the customer if this is not possible.
- This is the final stage of the WSHL Complaints process.

Housing Ombudsman

- A customer can contact the Housing Ombudsman at any time. If the complaints process is still ongoing the Ombudsman is likely to wish to remain informed but not intervene. If following the completion of the process the customer remains dissatisfied, the Housing Ombudsman may choose to review the case.

7. Complaints relating to WSHL Contractors

- 7.1. We require any contractor that provides services on our behalf to comply with this policy by:
- Recording and responding to customers' direct feedback and complaint to them within the stated timescales.
 - Providing us with any information relating to a Complaint when requested.
 - Assisting us with Complaints investigations as appropriate.

8. Vexatious Complaints

- 8.1. We are committed to providing clear and prompt responses to people who contact us. We have adopted procedures to support staff when, on the rare occasion, they are faced with dealing with a complainant who becomes unreasonably persistent or vexatious. These will only be applied when other courses of action have been exhausted and only under limited circumstances.

9. How we learn from Complaints and Compliments

- 9.1. A complaint or compliment is seen as an opportunity to learn about what or how we need to improve our service. We therefore want to learn from every complaint and capture and share the things that we learn so that improvements can be made where appropriate.
- 9.2. In order to do this, we will:
- Record and monitor all complaints and compliments including details such as what the complaint was about, how it was resolved, how quickly it was resolved, what we learnt and what changes we have made as a result.
 - Carry out regular complaint reviews in order to continuously look at how we can improve our handling of complaints and the services we provide.
 - Survey customers on their satisfaction with the way the complaint was handled.

10. Monitoring and Review

- 10.1. Performance and learning from complaints and compliments will be published monthly to the Board.
- 10.2. We must comply with the Housing Ombudsman scheme and complete and publish an annual self-assessment against the code.
- 10.3. We will publish annual performance metrics on complaints management and any learnings from complaints in our Customer Annual Report.



- 10.4. We will carry out an publish annual Tenant Satisfaction Measures, which includes feedback on complaints
- 10.5. This policy will be reviewed every two years.