



COMPLAINTS POLICY

The Wrekin
Housing Group

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Target Audience:	Customers and Stakeholders of the Wrekin Housing Group. Employees of the Wrekin Housing Group.
Version:	V2
Date of Final Ratification / Approval:	1 September 2020
Name of Ratifying Committee / Board	Executive Management Group
Review Date:	June 2023
Expiry Date:	August 2023
Associated Policies / Procedures	Customer Service Policy Compensation Policy Repairs Policy Choices Complaints & Compliments policy Code of Conduct The Wrekin Tenants Charter National Consumer Standards The Housing Ombudsman Scheme The Complaints Handling Code
Reporting	Individual service leads – reported on a monthly basis; EMG – quarterly basis; Customer Voice Panel – quarterly basis; Board – annually through the Complaints Handling Code compliance statement; Housing Ombudsman Service – annually via the Complaints Handling Code compliance statement; Customers & Stakeholders – via the website on a quarterly basis and annually within the Annual Report.
Review / Update	Three year review cycle or earlier should the need arise.
Policy Location	Intranet The Wrekin Housing Group website
Policy Category	Customer Service

1. Introduction / Context

1.1 The Groups vision is “*making a difference to people’s lives*”. We aim to do this by delivering the following values:

- Inspire positive change;
- Everyone matters;
- Communicate clearly;
- Grow together.

1.2 To inspire positive change we will ensure that we will make our complaints service easily accessible. Complaints can be received:

- In writing to the Wrekin Housing Group;
- By email;
- In person;
- By telephone;
- By social media.

1.3 We will be fair when dealing with your complaints and if reasonable and possible we will put right what we got wrong, while always learning from the outcomes of a complaint.

1.4 We will promote a culture of openness and honesty in which staff are encouraged to acknowledge mistakes and learn from them.

2. Scope

2.1 This Policy covers all complaints received by:-

- Wrekin Housing Group tenants or prospective tenants, residents, leaseholders, service users or their advocates and stakeholders;
- Groups of tenants or residents who wish to complain collectively;
- Choices Housing Association tenants and service users, their family members or advocates;
- The general public.

The regulatory bodies for Housing Associations are the Regulator of Social Housing and the Housing Ombudsman Service.

The regulatory body for Care Services is the Care Quality Commission (CQC).

3. Definition of a complaint

3.1 We have adopted the definition of a complaint as set out in the Housing Ombudsman’s Complaints Handling Code 2020:

‘A complaint shall be defined 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’.

3.2 The following are excluded from the general Groups complaints policy:

- A complaint by an employee about any matter relating to their employment;
- A complaint already under investigation, or already investigated (unless there is new evidence);
- The issue giving rise to the complaint occurred over six months ago. Where the problem is a recurring issue we will consider any older reports as part of the background to the complaint;
- A complaint relating to anti-social behaviour where a case has not been opened and investigated, not about the service that has been received (a request for a service);
- A complaint that is being dealt with through the Leasehold Tribunal in relation to service charges.

4. Policy Statement

4.1 While we aim to get everything right first time, we appreciate that on occasions our customers may not be satisfied with a service we have provided or where we have failed to provide a service that was our responsibility. We encourage customers to tell us when something has gone wrong or when they are dissatisfied - we can then do something about it and learn from it to continually improve.

4.2 While we will treat all of our customers with fairness and respect, we acknowledge that we have customers whose behaviour is unacceptable, either through repetitively complaining without substance, those who continually complain about the same issue or those who make vexatious complaints. We will acknowledge and investigate their complaint but will have a procedure to follow separately, which forms part of this policy document. (*Appendix 1 Unreasonable Behaviour procedure*).

4.3 Our aim will be to deal with and resolve any complaints at first point of contact by any member of staff. These are to be logged as “dissatisfaction” (informal complaint) on our Housing Management System.

4.4 Where the complaint cannot be immediately resolved to the customers satisfaction at first point of contact, or where the customer states at the outset that they wish to make a formal complaint, the complaint will be logged as a Stage 1 complaint and will be fully investigated by the relevant manager.

4.5 Housing and other services (excluding care)

4.5.1 The emphasis will always be on the resolution for the customer. If someone should complain, we will sort it out wherever we can. When any complaint is resolved we will investigate how it happened and improve or implement changes to the service if necessary or reasonable to do so.

4.5.2 Stage 1 complaints will be acknowledged within one working day (24hrs) and resolved as soon as possible. If the complaint requires further investigation it should be resolved within 5 working days. If it will take longer to investigate we will let the customer know why and when it should be resolved.

- 4.5.3 The Group will provide a three stage escalation process which culminates in the Complaints Panel, made up of a Senior Manager, Director and a Customer Voice Panel member. Throughout the process the emphasis will continue to be on local resolution for the customer. We will ensure the customer is aware of the Housing Ombudsman Service throughout the complaints process.
- 4.5.4 There are 3 formal stages in the complaints process for the Wrekin Housing Group housing and non-care related services:

Stage 1 – Initial resolution by Service Manager within 5 working days.

Stage 2 – Senior Manager review, within 10 working days*.

Stage 3 – Complaints Panel: at an agreed date between both parties where possible within 20 working days of the request to escalate the complaint**.

Following completion of this process, if the complainant remains dissatisfied with the outcome, they will be able to appeal to the Housing Ombudsman Service through its approved process.

*The complainant has 14 days to request an appeal about their initial resolution if they are unhappy.

**In some instances we may feel that it is clear that the Complaints Panel will not be able to reach a different decision and will advise the complainant to go directly to the Housing Ombudsman. Our complaints process will end at this stage.

- 4.6 **Care Services:** There are three stages within the complaints process for care services:

Stage 1 – Informal complaint that is resolved at point of contact.

Stage 2 - Initial resolution by Head of Service. The Head of Service must respond to the complainant setting out the action to be followed within 5 working days and notify the complainant of the outcome of the complaint in writing within 25 days from the date of receipt.

Stage 3 – Appeal to the Managing Director. This should be acknowledged within 5 working days and a written response to the appeal received by the complainant within 25 working days.

Should the complainant remain unhappy then they may appeal to the Care Quality Commission (CQC) as the regulatory body for care services.

Information on the Group's complaints processes will be available on the website or on request.

At every stage we will inform customers who remain unhappy with the resolution of the next stage in the process. At which ever point we close our complaints process, we will notify the customer and ensure they are aware of the details for the relevant regulatory body for the area of service they are complaining about.

5. Roles and Responsibilities

- 5.1 Designated Complaints Officer: Will be responsible for ensuring that all complaints are managed within this policy and that the organisation meets the Housing Ombudsman's Complaints Handling Code or the complaints handling requirements of the CQC. The Complaints Officer (landlord functions) will be the contact point between the organisation and the Housing Ombudsman service, ensuring that all timescales are met for the provision of information.
- 5.2 Service Managers: Will be responsible for the investigation and resolving of complaints in co-operating with the Complaints Officers as well as implementing any resolutions resulting from complaints or improvements generated by the learning from complaints.
- 5.3 Senior Managers will be responsible for reviewing a complaint if the customer is unhappy with the initial resolution or being part of a Complaints Panel Hearing.
- 5.4 Heads of Service will be responsible for ensuring that a quality complaints service is provided within their area of responsibility and that complaints are used to learn from and improve service delivery.
- 5.5 The Executive Director's will be responsible for approving the Group Complaints Policy, ensuring compliance with the Complaints Handling Code and convening and chairing Complaints Panel hearings, which will also include a tenant representative.
- 5.6 The Tenants' Panel is a designated Tenants' Panel approved by the HOS scheme and as such can refer complainants to the Housing Ombudsman under the Democratic Process.

6. Learning from complaints and reporting

- 6.1 Wherever possible we will learn from the cause and outcomes of individual complaints and trends in both informal and formal complaints in order to improve service delivery to the customer and generate greater value for money.
- 6.2 Wider learning and improvements from complaints will be reported to residents, managers and staff. Feedback will be regularly provided to tenant scrutiny panels and through the Executive Management Team to the Board, alongside scrutiny of the Ombudsman's annual landlord performance report. Performance and outcomes will also be reported within the Annual Report.
- 6.3 An annual self-assessment against the Ombudsman's Complaints Handling Code will be carried out, agreed by EMG and the Board and submitted to the Housing Ombudsman within its required timescales.

7. Training

- 7.1 All relevant employees will receive training in complaints handling and the Complaints Handling Code as part of their induction process.
- 7.2 Refresher or update training will be provided to individual employees or teams as the need arises.
- 7.3 Where necessary, members of the Complaints Panel will receive necessary training.
- 7.4 The Designated Tenant Panel will receive training in their role.

Appendix 1

4.2 Unreasonable behaviour procedure

The Group will not discriminate against any of our customers, but where a customer is deemed to be a habitual complainer we will follow the below guidelines.

We will always investigate the initial complaint thoroughly through the complaints procedure and address any new complaints detailed.


A customer may be deemed a habitual complainer if:

1. They persist in pursuing a complaint when the complaint procedure has been fully and properly implemented and exhausted, including the Housing Ombudsman's process.
2. The substance of the complaint is changed or they continually raise new issues or prolong contact by continually raising further concerns. (Ensure all new issues are raised and investigated through the complaints process.)
3. The complainant is unwilling to accept documented evidence as being factual;
 - Digital records
 - Denying receipt of an adequate response
4. The complainant does not clearly identify the exact issues which should be investigated, despite reasonable efforts by staff.
5. They have threatened, harassed, and been abusive verbally or physically on more than one occasion towards staff. This will cause the complaint to be dealt with by written communication only. All incidents must be documented.
6. The complainant has made excessive contact while seeking redress in the complaints process. Contact will be in person, by email, by phone, by letter or through social media. Discretion will be used in determining precise numbers, but all contact must be documented.
7. They display unreasonable demands or expectations e.g. insist on responses to complaints or enquiries being provided in an unrealistic time period. Refusing to communicate with certain members of staff.

In determining arrangements for handling these complaints we need to ensure that the complaints process has been correctly implemented and that no element of the complaint has been overlooked. The complaint will then be dealt with by a single person contact throughout the process and this person will be identified to the complainant.

We may decide in liaison with the Manager and appropriate Executive Director to handle a complainant where their behaviour is unacceptable in the following ways:

1. Once it is clear that complainants meet the unacceptable behaviour criteria it will be appropriate to inform them in writing. (Complaints policy and procedure to be given)
2. We will notify the complainant in writing that all of the complaints have been addressed fully and we will not enter into further discussions regarding the complaint. Advising of who their single point of contact will be.
3. We will inform the complainant that any future correspondence received will be acknowledged but not answered unless the correspondence contains new complaints or relevant additional information.
4. Inform the complainant that in extreme circumstances the Group reserve the right to pass unreasonable behaviour to our Legal department and contact the Police if harassment or physical abuse have taken place.



This may be withdrawn should the complainant demonstrate a more reasonable approach. Mediation can be offered to repair the tenant landlord relationship.

A review date of no longer than 3 months should be given to the complainant or if a new complaint is raised in which case the usual complaints procedure will be followed.

In all cases the complainant will be advised to seek independent legal advice and the details of Citizens Advice will be given.