



<b>Policy Control</b>	
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## 1. Introduction

**1.1** This policy outlines how we handle complaints in accordance with the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code. Complaints are a core service and as we are committed to providing a continuously improving service, we want to hear about occasions where we have not met our service standards. We welcome complaints as a valuable form of feedback as they help us identify where we can improve our services. All complaints are to be dealt with fairly, promptly, and effectively, aiming to resolve them to the satisfaction of the person making the complaint, wherever reasonably possible. This policy is in line with the Housing Ombudsman's guidance and has been assessed against their Complaints Code.

## 2. What is a complaint?

**2.1** As per the Housing Ombudsman, a complaint is defined as:

*"An expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the landlord, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting an individual resident or group of residents."*

**2.2** Complaints are unlike everyday enquiries such as reporting repairs or reporting anti-social behaviour issues. These types of enquiries are not covered by our complaints policy but are covered by the individual service areas' policies and procedures. These are available on request.

**2.3** A service request is a request from a resident to the landlord requiring action to be taken to put something right.

**2.4** Service requests are not complaints but are recorded, monitored, and reviewed

**2.5** We will treat any expression of dissatisfaction as a complaint, even if the word 'complaint' is not used.

**2.6** We will also treat dissatisfaction with how a service request was handled as a complaint and will not stop efforts to address the service request if a complaint is raised.

**2.7** At any time a resident expresses dissatisfaction they will be given the option to raise a complaint

**2.8** An expression of dissatisfaction with services made through a survey is not defined as a complaint. Our interviewers are trained to inform residents of how to lodge a complaint and guide them to the appropriate resources

**2.9** We will attempt to manage multiple complaints from the same individual collectively where appropriate.

**2.10** Any related additional complaints are incorporated into the stage 1 response if it has not been issued. Any new issues must be logged as a new complaint if the stage 1 response has been issued, the issues are unrelated or it would unreasonably delay the response.

### **3. Who can complain?**

- 3.1 A complaint can be made by any person or group of people affected by an activity or service provided by the Landlord, including but not limited to:
  - Current licensees and members of their households
  - Former licensees
  - Members of the community
  - Advocates of the complainant such as friends, relatives or other representatives (written consent from the complainant is required)
- 3.2 We will accept complaints referred to us within 12 months of the complainant being made aware of the issue, or the issue occurring.

### **4. Exclusions**

- 4.1 There are some circumstances in which a matter will not be considered as a complaint. When we decide not to accept a complaint, we will provide an explanation setting out the reasons why the matter is not suitable for the complaints process. Customers have the right to challenge this decision by making an approach to the Housing Ombudsman
- 4.2 We will not be able to accept, or escalate, the following:
  - Complaints made without the complainant's consent
  - Complaints that have already exhausted our policy
  - Complaints referring to statutory or other external obligations
  - Policy interpretation or challenges to a policy itself
  - Insurance claims or legal proceedings
  - Matters over 12 months old (unless justified)
  - New service requests
- 4.3 Complaints raised to us where the issue occurred over 12 months ago may be reviewed on discretionary grounds
- 4.4 We assess each complaint on its own merits and do not apply exclusions as a blanket policy.

### **5. Accessibility and Awareness**

- 5.1 We accept complaints via any of our communication channels: phone, email, website, social media, representative, or any member of our staff.
- 5.2 Complaints can be received on behalf of residents through other agencies or third parties, such as advocates or support groups. These complaints will be handled in line with our complaints policy, but we will require written consent from the resident in line with our Data Protection Policy.
- 5.3 Where a Councillor or MP makes an enquiry on a resident's behalf, we do not require written consent as they are elected representatives.
- 5.4 We provide reasonable support, such as translation or advocacy services,

to ensure everyone can access the complaints process.

5.5 The complaints policy is accessible on our website

## 6. Reasonable Adjustment and Support

6.1 We do not hold a prescribed list of adjustments as this will depend on the individual's needs. Should an adjustment be required this will be discussed with the individual concerned and we shall reach a reasonable agreement.

6.2 A record of any reasonable adjustments agreed will be kept, as well as a record of any disabilities a resident has disclosed. These will be kept under active review.

6.3 Our policy is available on our website: <https://reliancehousing.co.uk>. We are committed to providing our policy in accessible formats, including easy read and other languages, upon request.

## 7. Complaints Process

### 7.1 Stage 1

Where a complaint is received, our complaints officer will process this through Stage 1 of our complaints procedure as outlined below:

- We will acknowledge, define and log at stage 1 of the complaints procedure within 5 working days of the complaint being received
- Issue a full response to stage 1 complaints within 10 working days of the complaint being acknowledged.
- The complaint and desired outcome are to be defined with the complainant
- When acknowledging a complaint, we shall clarify which areas we are and are not responsible for
- If an extension to this timescale is needed, we will inform the complainant of the expected timescale for response. Any extension must be no more than 10 working days without good reason, and the reason(s) must be clearly explained to the complainant.
- Our response will confirm the complaint stage, the complaint definition, our decision and reasoning, any remedy or outstanding actions, and how to escalate to Stage Two.
- A complaint will not prevent or impact on actions needed to resolve any immediate issues
- Any related additional complaints are incorporated into the stage 1 response if it has not been issued.
- Any new issues must be logged as a new complaint if the stage 1 response has been issued, the issues are unrelated or it would unreasonably delay the response.

### 7.2 Stage 2

Where a complainant has expressed dissatisfaction with their stage 1 response, the complaint can be escalated to stage 2 of the process within 20

working days of the Stage 1 response as outlined below:

- Requests for stage 2 must be acknowledged, defined, and logged at stage 2 of the complaint procedure within 5 working days of the escalation request being received.
- When acknowledging a complaint, we shall clarify which areas we are and are not responsible for
- A final stage 2 response should be issued within 20 working days of the complaint being acknowledged.
- If an extension for this time timescale is needed, then we will inform the complainant of the expected timescale for response. Any extension must be no more than 20 working days without good reason, and the reason(s) must be clearly explained to the complainant.
- Stage Two is our final internal stage. If the complaint remains unresolved, the complainant can approach the Housing Ombudsman.
- Our response will confirm the complaint stage, definition, decision and reasons, any remedy or outstanding actions, and how to escalate to the Housing Ombudsman.

7.3 Complaints can be remedied at any stage. This will be proportionate to the impact and clearly set out what will be done and by when, tracking all actions to completion.

7.4 Should an extension be issued, the resident must be provided with the contact details of the Ombudsman and suitable intervals will be agreed upon to keep the complainant informed about their complaint.

7.5 At each stage of the complaint, our complaints officer will:

- deal with complaints on their merits, act independently, and have an open mind
- give the resident a fair chance to set out their position
- take measures to address any actual or perceived conflict of interest
- consider all relevant information and evidence carefully.

7.6 Complaints at Stage 1 of our process will be assigned to a member of our Complaints team. They are trained in the importance of complaint handling and hold authority and autonomy to resolve complaints promptly and fairly.

7.7 Complaints addressed at Stage 2 are dealt with by a different officer, who will set out their understanding of issues that have not been resolved and the outcomes the complainant is seeking.

7.8 Our complaint response is not handled by any third parties (such as Managing Agents). The only exception to this would be any legal proceedings, in which case the matter falls outside of this policy.

7.9 You will receive a response to your complaint as soon as an answer is available. In some cases, actions may still be in progress or outstanding even after a complaint is closed. We will continue to track these actions and keep you updated on their status.

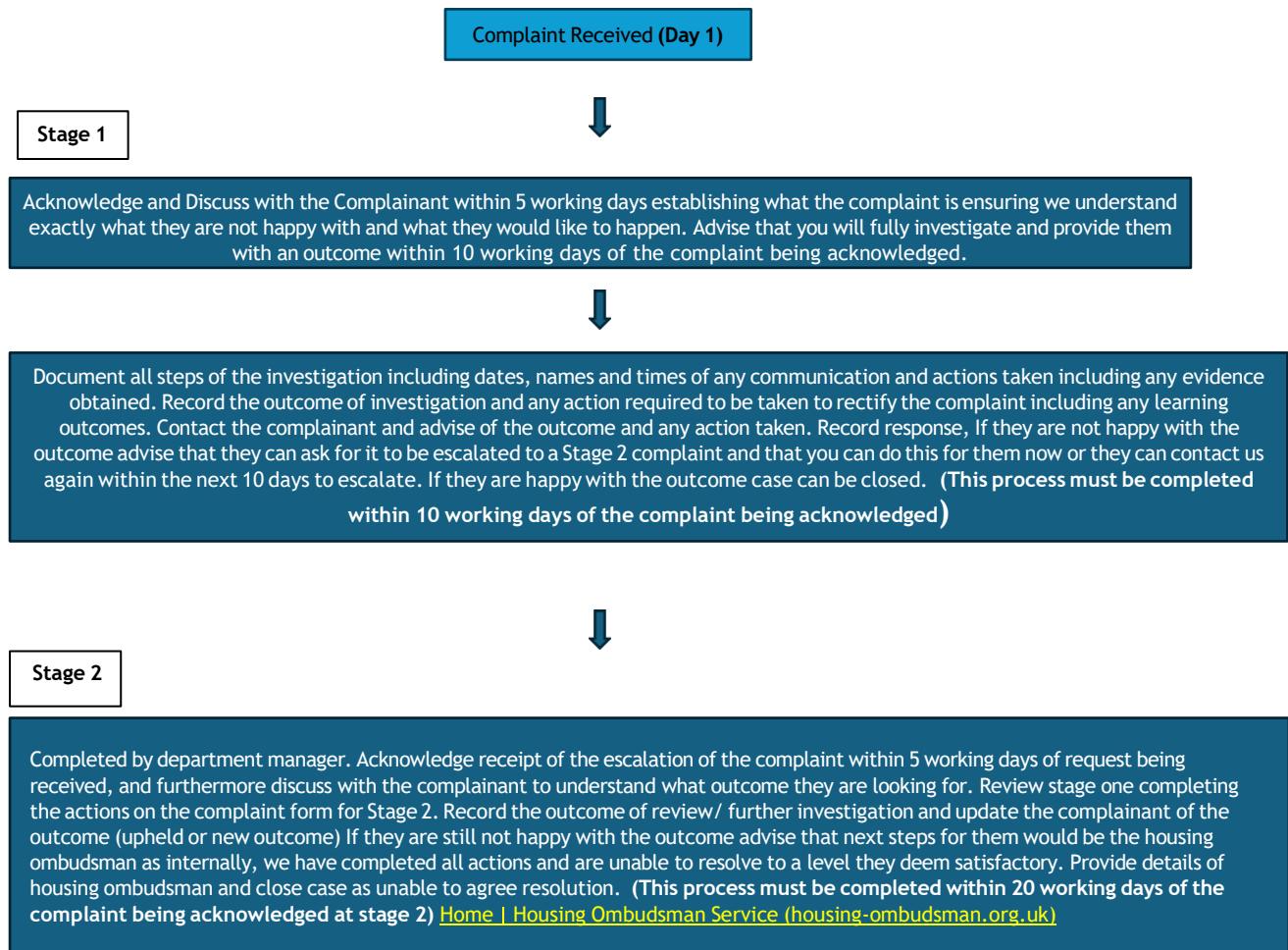
7.10 A full record of the complaint will be kept and the outcomes at each

stage. This will include the original complaint, the date received, all correspondence with the resident, correspondence with other parties, and any relevant supporting documentation

7.11 Residents can access the Independent Housing Ombudsman Service at any time by contacting them at:

Housing Ombudsman Service  
PO Box 1484, Unit D, Preston, PR2 0ET  
Telephone: 0300 111 3000  
Website: [www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk](http://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk)  
Email: [info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk](mailto:info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk)

## 8. Complaints Process



## 9. Putting things right

9.1 Where something has gone wrong, we will ensure our response sets out the action we have taken or intend to take to put things right. This will be assessed on an individual basis and will reflect the impact on the resident should any fault

be identified. This can include:

- Apologising
- Acknowledging where things have gone wrong
- Providing an explanation, assistance or reasons
- Taking action if there has been delay
- Reconsidering or changing a decision
- Amending a record or adding a correction or addendum
- Providing a financial remedy
- Changing policies, procedures or practices.

9.2 Financial compensation will be considered in cases where appropriate. This will be in line with our compensation policy and the Housing Ombudsman's guide.

9.3 Before compensation is paid, any monies owed to Reliance Social Housing will be taken into consideration.

9.4 The resolution will set out what will happen and by when, in agreement with the resident where appropriate. Any remedy proposed must be followed through to completion.

## 10. Learning from Complaints

10.1 We are committed to using complaints to drive continual service improvement. This is done by:

- Recording all complaints and their outcomes
- Identifying and tracking lessons learned
- Share learning internally and through performance reviews
- Report learning and trends to senior leadership and governance bodies

10.2 The Member Responsible for Complaints (MRC) will be responsible for providing the Board, regular updates on the following:

- the volume, categories and outcome of complaints
- the volume of refused or rejected complaints and the reasons.
- complaint handling performance including a qualitative and quantitative report
- compliance with the Ombudsman's orders
- reviews of issues and trends arising from complaint handling,
- the annual complaints performance and service improvement report.
- the annual self-assessment against the Complaint Handling Code
- where applicable, the Board will be provided with details of where the Ombudsman has raised concerns

10.3 Reliance Social Housing will ensure our complaints policy is accessible on our website, including details of how to contact the Housing Ombudsman and the self-assessment code.