



Havebury Housing Partnership

COMPLAINTS POLICY

Policy Number	HS 011
Date reviewed	February 2024
Policy Lead Officer	Amy St Ledger
EIA	Yes
Legal Advice (incl. date)	N/A - This policy follows the Complaint's Handling Code
Leadership Team Review	February 2024
JNC Review	N/A
Tenants' Forum Review	June 2022
Approved by (incl. date)	Operations Committee July 2022
Next Policy Review Due	July 2026 (every 2 years or as policy/legislation changes)

Definitions:

Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS)	The Housing Ombudsman Service is set up by law to look at complaints about the housing organisations that are registered with them.
Energy Ombudsman (EO)	The Energy Ombudsman is set up by law to look at complaints about heat networks and the service in relation to housing organisations that are registered with them.
Shared Owners	A person who has bought a share of a property and pays rent to a landlord on the remainder of the property.
Landlord and Tenant Act	This sets out the rights and responsibilities of landlord and tenant.
Leaseholders	A person who has a legal agreement with a landlord called a 'lease'
Contractor	A person or company that has a contract to do work or provide goods or services for another company.
General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)	Regulation setting out rules relating to the protection of persons with regard to the processing of personal data and rules relating to the free movement of personal data.
Designated Person	See Appendix A.

1 Introduction

- 1.1 We provide services to thousands of residents each year, but we recognise sometimes things can go wrong.
- 1.2 This policy is an important document for our residents. It sets out how we will manage complaints, with the aim of resolving these as swiftly and fairly as possible. We will always align our policy with the Housing Ombudsman Service guidance.
- 1.3 It sets out how we value feedback on the services we provide and what they can expect from us when they complain.
- 1.4 We recognise complaints are an important barometer of the health, performance and our reputation. This, alongside other information, will be used this to help improve the services we provide.
- 1.5 We will treat complaints fairly, processes will be customer focussed and we will seek to resolve these as quickly as possible.
- 1.6 This policy applies to any resident who holds any type of tenancy with us. This includes shared owners and leaseholders within blocks we own. We will also consider complaints about other services in our business under this policy.
- 1.6 Where a complainant does not have a relationship with us under the Landlord and Resident Act 1985, they can only access up to stage 2 of the policy. This is due to the option of going to the Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS) not being open to people outside of this group.

2 Definitions

- 2.1 We define a complaint as an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the organisation or its employees, contractors or other representatives. This can affect an individual resident or group of residents. This is the definition used by the HOS.
- 2.2 The word ‘complaint’ does not need to be used for us to treat this as such. However, we won’t treat a request for service, such as reporting a repair, or anti-social behaviour as a complaint. We will however investigate service failures in the cases of these requests.

3. Who Can Complain?

- 3.1 Current or former residents of our homes, including shared owners and leaseholders; residents renting garages and allotments. We will also accept complaints via third parties or representatives of our residents, where written permission has been obtained.

Some complaints are not able to access the Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS). This includes complaints about garages, allotments; or complaints made by people where we don’t hold a landlord/tenant relationship. Further information on the

HOS can be obtained from their website www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk. In these cases, the complaints process will end at stage 2 of this process. If information on the process is required in printed form, we can provide this on request.

4 Aims and Objectives

4.1 The aims and objectives of this policy are to:

- Encourage feedback from residents, particularly where service levels have fallen short from what we expect.
- Set out what to expect from our complaints process.
- Establish a means for us to learn from mistakes; or when service levels have fallen short from what we expect.
- To ensure a resident is aware of their right to contact the HOS at any point of the complaint, not just when the complaint process is exhausted. This allows the resident to engage with HOS complaints advisors.

5 Policy Statement

5.1 A complaint can be raised in circumstances where:

- We have not delivered a service to an acceptable quality, within a reasonable timeframe; or this has failed to meet any other agreed service standard.
- One of our team members, contractors or other representatives of Havebury have conducted themselves in an unprofessional manner, inconsistent with our values.
- If a complainant does not want to follow the formal process, we will aim to provide a local and early resolution with them. We recognise that many residents may not wish to follow a formal process and just want an issue resolved. We will not restrict access to a formal route if the informal route is unsuccessful in resolving the issue.

5.2 The following are not considered to be a complaint:

- a. A request for service, such as to carry out a repair, or a report of anti-social behaviour. We will however investigate service failures in the cases of these requests.
- b. Claims for compensation outside of those relevant to a complaint (all claims are dealt with in accordance with our Compensation and Payments Policy)
- c. Insurance claims. These will be dealt with in accordance with our Insurance Policy. This includes open/unresolved insurance claims.
- d. The issue giving rise to the complaint occurred more than 12 months ago. This does not apply in instances relating to health and safety or safeguarding. We may use our discretion to accept a complaint outside this timeframe with good reason to do so.
- e. We will not consider a matter where legal proceedings have commenced, or a letter before action has been issued.
- f. We will not consider a matter which has been previously considered under this policy.
- g. Anything that is out of our jurisdiction (for example private land or public rights of way).

- 5.3 Where we are not considering a matter under this policy, we will contact the resident and give a detailed explanation of this. In these instances, the resident has the right to contact the HOS (unless the type of complaint is except), asking them to review this decision. The HOS may then instruct us to deal with this complaint.
- 5.4 We will accept complaints through any channel - this includes our social media platforms. Where a complaint is reported through these, we expect the resident to contact us privately to discuss this separately outside of social media. This is to ensure privacy and confidentiality is maintained.
- 5.5 We will accept complaints on behalf of residents, from a third party or other agency. In line with GDPR, we will require written permission from the resident to discuss this on their behalf.

Where a complaint is received via an MP or councillor, we will check with either the resident or MP/councillor, if they wish for queries to be treated as a formal complaint.

- 5.6 Where a complaint is made about a contractor or supplier that we use, we will initially investigate and determine the best course of action. This could involve referring the complaint for resolution to the third party/service provider.
- 5.7 We will manage expectations in our complaints handling. This includes where the expectation for resolution is too high.
- 5.8 A complaints officer will take responsibility for complaints handling. They will have the authority and autonomy to resolve disputes quickly and fairly.
- 5.9 We will ensure residents are aware of the role of HOS and if applicable to the energy ombudsman, including being able to access dispute resolution advisors at any part of the complaints process.
- 5.10 We will give the resident a fair chance to set out their position as well as comment on any adverse findings before a final decision is made.
- 5.11 We operate a two-stage approach in managing complaints:

Acknowledgement: residents will receive an acknowledgement of the complaint within five working days.

Stage 1 - the complaint is handled by a complaints officer. A formal response will be provided 10 working days from acknowledgement of complaint. If this is not possible, for example the complaint is particularly complex, we will extend this for another 10 days maximum. In these instances we will contact the complainant and discuss the reasons for this, as well as keep in touch.

Where a stage 1 response has been issued and a resident wants to include an additional issue that is unrelated to the original complaint, we will log this as a new response. We may also do this if the additional issue could cause an unreasonably delay to the response.

We will not ask you to explain the reasons you would like to escalate.

Stage 2 - this will be reviewed by a panel made up of a member of the leadership team and involved residents. A response will be sent out no more than 20 working days from the request to escalate. If this is not possible, for example the complaint is particularly complex, we will extend this for another 10 working days maximum. In these instances we will contact the complainant, discuss the reasons for this and seek their agreement to extend for a specified period. We will always keep them updated during this process.

If a response is provided that includes compensation, this must be accepted (or rejected and escalated accordingly) by the appeal period end date as outlined in each stage above. If no response is received after this appeal period, further contact will be made to allow a further 10 working days to accept the compensation. If after this time has elapsed and no contact or appeal/escalation is received, we will close the complaint and no monies will be paid. We will assume that you are satisfied with our response.

- 5.12 At any time during the complaint, a resident can seek assistance from the HOS, we will always provide details of the HOS in our complaint responses. Once our internal complaints process has been exhausted, the next step, if applicable, is to refer to the HOS. The same applies for any heat network complaints escalating to the Energy Ombudsman.
- 5.13 We aim to resolve complaints as quickly, constructively and effectively as possible; and will engage with third parties, mediation and advocates for the complainant (with signed authority) where it is beneficial in finding a timely resolution.
- 5.14 We will keep in regular contact with residents around how complaints investigations are progressing.

6 Review and Reporting

- 6.1 We will keep accurate records of all complaints we have received, lessons learned and how we have implemented any changes from these. This information will be shared with teams across the business.
- 6.2 We will review our method of engagement with residents whose behaviour is deemed unreasonable in pursuing a complaint. We may change our approach in dealing with these complaints, which will be agreed by an executive or assistant director.
- 6.3 Board will have overall responsibility for our complaint's performance, but the Resident Experience Committee (REC) will also receive regular updates, including themes and lessons learnt.
- 6.4 The chair of REC has the role of Member Responsible for Complaints.

7 Legislation and Regulation

- 7.1 The Localism Act 2011 introduced a single housing ombudsman as a point of recourse for social housing residents and Leaseholders in resolving complaints. It allowed for 'designated persons' to act on behalf of complainants to resolve complaints locally before proceeding to the Ombudsman.

- 7.2 The Regulator of Social Housing’s Resident Involvement and Empowerment Standard sets out that providers shall have an approach to complaints that is clear, simple and accessible that ensures that complaints are resolved promptly, politely and fairly.
- 7.3 Data Protection Policy
- 7.4 Equality Act 2010
- 7.5 Housing Ombudsman Scheme Complaint Handling 2024.
- 7.6 Energy Ombudsman as part of Ofgem 2025.

8. Diversity and Inclusion

- 8.1 We will ensure this policy is applied fairly and consistently to residents, in line with our Diversity and Inclusion policy. We will ensure no person or group of persons is treated no less favourably than any other person or group of persons.
- 8.2 We have completed an equality impact assessment on this policy and consulted with the Equality Diversity and Inclusion group to ensure this is accessible to all.
- 8.3 we will use the data we hold about a resident and any additional information provided to us to ensure we respond in a reasonable and individual way, making adjustments as necessary.

9 List of Related Internal Documents (including procedures relating to the Policy)

P032	Complaints Procedure
HS012	Compensation and Payments Policy
HS054	Managing Unacceptable Behaviour