

Complaints Policy

COMPLAINTS POLICY	
Purpose	This policy sets out how Harrison Housing manages complaints.
Applies to	This policy applies to all residents of Harrison Housing and all licences managed by Harrison Housing.
Date first implemented	May 2024
Author	Chief Executive
Date first approved by Leadership Team	May 2024
Date first approved by Board of Trustees	May 2024
Review Frequency	Every 3 years or as required by the Housing Ombudsman
Service Area	Housing
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CONSEQUENTIAL AMENDMENTS (made prior to full policy revision)		
Amendment Date	Nature of Amendment	Revised by

VERSION HISTORY			
Revision Date	Version No.	Revised by	Approved by

CURRENT POLICY REVISION	
Date revised	April 2024
Revised by	Chief Executive
LT approval date	May 2024
Board of Trustees Approval date	May 2024
Next revision due	May 2027

1. Policy Statement

- 1.1 We aim to provide a consistently high standard of service to everyone who uses or is impacted by our services, and we care about getting it right, first time. We recognise however the importance of putting things right once we know something has not happened as it should. Our aim is always to maintain good working relationships with our residents and other stakeholders,
- 1.2 Harrison Housing is committed to ensuring views about our services are valued and we actively encourage feedback. Complaints, compliments and suggestions give us the opportunity to continually improve our service. We strive to foster a culture which welcomes customer feedback and listening and responding effectively is very important to us.
- 1.3 We deal with complaints impartially and will not treat complainants differently because they have made a complaint. It is not necessary for the word 'complaint' to be used for us to treat it as such. We define a complaint 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”***
- 1.4 Harrison Housing is open to all forms of feedback and will look to consider all interactions that may help us to improve. These may include face to face, in writing (both letter and email) and by telephone.

2. Implementation

- 2.1 All staff will be made aware of this policy through Harrison Housing's internal communication channels, including email.
- 2.2 Changes to this policy and its associated procedure, if applicable, will be communicated to all staff.
- 2.3 All staff will be required to read this policy, and to confirm that they have read and understood it.
- 2.4 This policy will be published to residents through our website.

3. Other Policies

- 3.1 This policy should be used in conjunction with the following policies:
- Compensation Policy
 - Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults Policy
 - Vexatious Complaints Policy

- Whistleblowing Policy

4. Roles and Responsibilities

4.1 The Chief Executive is accountable for the overall policy and is responsible for its implementation and for ensuring compliance.

4.2 All employees are responsible for:

- Answering complaints when required
- Ensuring they take collective responsibility for any shortfalls identified rather than blaming others, and working collaboratively across teams and departments towards resolving complaints effectively.

5. Getting in Touch

5.1 Often the quickest way to put things right is to speak with the Scheme Manager (if there is one) for your scheme. Where this is not possible, you can contact us in any of the following ways:

- **Telephone us on:** 020 7603 4332
- **Write to us at:** Harrison Housing, 42-46, St. James' Gardens, London, W11 4RQ
- **Email us at:** enquiries@harrisonhousing.org.uk

6. Timescales

6.1 We operate a two-stage complaints procedure:

6.2 Stage One

Stage One complaints will be considered by a member of the Harrison Housing Leadership Team and will be subject to the following timescales:

Logging and acknowledgement of the complaint – 5 working days from receipt of the complaint.

Stage One decision – 10 working days from logging and acknowledging of the complaint.

Exceptionally, if this is not possible, we will provide an explanation and a date by when the Stage One response will be received. This will not be more than a further 10 working days total without good reason. If an extension beyond 20 working days is required to enable us to respond to the complaint fully, this should be with the

agreement of the person complaining. If agreement cannot be reached, the person making the complaint will be provided with the details of the Housing Ombudsman Service so the complainant can challenge our plan for responding and/or the timeliness.

6.3 **Stage Two**

Escalations to Stage Two should be requested by the person making the complaint as soon as possible, usually within 30 days of receipt of the Stage One response. We will however make exceptions to this timeframe. Details of when we would refuse to escalate a complaint are explained in the section of this policy titled 'Refusing to Accept or Escalate a Complaint'.

At Stage Two, the person making a complaint will have the choice of having their complaint considered either by the Chief Executive or by a panel comprising the Chief Executive and at least one, but no more than two, members of the of the Board of Trustees. If the person making the complaint chooses the second option, they will be invited to present their complaint at a Complaint Hearing, either in person or virtually (via Microsoft Teams or Zoom).

Stage Two complaints will be subject to the following timescales:

Stage Two (response to any appeal made on a Stage One decision) – 20 working days from the date the request to escalate to Stage Two was received.

Exceptionally, if this is not possible, we will provide an explanation and a date when the Stage Two response will be received. This will not be more than 10 working days total without good reason. If an extension beyond 10 working days is required to enable us to respond to the complaint fully, this should be agreed with the person making the complaint. If agreement cannot be reached the complainant will be provided with the details of the Housing Ombudsman Service so that the person making the complaint can challenge our plan for responding and/or the timeliness.

7. **Escalation and Appeals**

7.1 A person making a complaint can request that their complaint be escalated to Stage Two if they are dissatisfied with the initial response at Stage One. There may be a rare and exceptional circumstance where it is necessary to immediately escalate a new complaint to the final stage of our internal process. This will be at the discretion of the Chief Executive.

8. **Our Approach to Complaints**

8.1 We aim to welcome, understand, and resolve individual complaints in a timely manner and we will seek to identify any lessons arising from complaints and use these to improve our service provision at Harrison Housing.

9. Making a Complaint

- 9.1 We welcome complaints from anyone, or the representative of anyone, who is affected by the services we provide. This includes, but is not limited to: residents, customers seeking to live in one of our properties, family members, friends, representatives or advocates of residents, neighbours, service providers, healthcare or other professionals, regulatory bodies, or local authorities.
- 9.2 We can engage with a third party pursuing a complaint on behalf of the person wishing to make a complaint as long as we have evidence or assurance that this person has their specific approval to act on their behalf and to have information provided to them by us. We will always work within what our Data Protection & Confidentiality Policy allows.

10. Accessing Our Service

- 10.1 To make it as easy as possible and in keeping with our obligations under the Equality Act, we will take reasonable steps to adapt our normal complaint handling policies, procedures, and processes where appropriate to accommodate a person's individual needs. For example, providing correspondence in large print or identifying an auxiliary aid or service. We will also look to take steps, when reasonable, to accommodate the communication needs of others, for example accessing a language line service for those whose first language is not English.

11. Refusing to Accept or Escalate a Complaint

- 11.1 We will not discriminate against anyone who makes a complaint. If a person making a complaint behaves inappropriately, we will seek to manage that behaviour as necessary, while treating the complainant like any other. However, there will be some rare occasions when we will not accept a complaint, examples of this are given below (this list is not exhaustive):
- Inappropriate or unacceptable behaviour, which is threatening, abusive, or aggressive.
 - The issue giving rise to the complaint happened over 12 months ago (although an exception will likely be made for any complaint that has a safeguarding or health and safety element).
 - The same matters have been fully addressed under a previous closed complaint.
 - The complaint is a dispute over legislation or is a matter that is already the subject of legal proceedings.

- Complaints which we deem to be 'vexatious', as defined in our Vexatious Complaints Policy. A copy of our Vexatious Complaints Policy can be found on our website, or can be provided on request.

11.2 If we do not accept a complaint for any reason, including those described above, we will write to the person making the complaint within 10 working days (of its acknowledgment and logging) providing our reasons. The complainant will also be told of their option to appeal this decision by contacting the Housing Ombudsman Service.

12. Mediation

12.1 We will explore the use of mediation by an external organisation where it is appropriate.

13. Compensation

13.1 We may consider an offer of compensation or goodwill gesture when we have, through our own actions or inactions, failed to deliver services of an acceptable standard. We have a separate Compensation Policy, which can be provided on request.

14. Referring a Complaint to the Housing Ombudsman

14.1 A person making a complaint can refer their complaint to the Housing Ombudsman after they have completed Stage Two of Harrison Housing's complaints process (contact details are shown below). Please note, the Housing Ombudsman Service is available for advice or support throughout the complaints process not just when they are formally asked to respond.

14.2 Housing Ombudsman's contact details:

Address: Housing Ombudsman Service PO Box 152, Liverpool, L33 7WQ

Telephone: 0300 111 3000

Email: info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk

14.3 The Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code is available via the Housing Ombudsman Website, or you can request a copy from us. We will co-operate fully with the Ombudsman Service during any investigation and comply fully with the resulting decision which will be binding on us.

15. Complaint Governance, Reporting and Internal Monitoring

- 15.1 The Chief Executive and Board Trustee (Member Responsible for Complaints) fulfil the requirement under the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code to have a lead person responsible for complaints within Harrison Housing. The roles support a positive complaint handling culture and ensure that the Housing Ombudsman is provided with regular information on complaints and insights into our complaint handling performance.

16. Commitment and Review

- 16.1 The Board of Trustees looks to the support and professionalism of staff at all levels in making this policy truly effective. This policy statement, along with other related supporting policies and procedures in use, will be regularly reviewed and revised as and when necessary.

17. Accessibility

- 17.1 This document can be made available in large print, braille, audio, or electronic formats and other languages on request.

18. Data Protection

- 18.1 We are committed to applying this policy in line with data protection regulations, as set out in our Data Protection & Confidentiality Policy.

19. Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion

- 19.1 For Harrison Housing, diversity is about respecting people's individual differences and ensuring that all people that come into contact with us have access to the same high standards of behaviour and service.
- 19.2 We are committed to ensuring that no resident or team member will be treated less favourably because of their age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion and belief, sex or sexual orientation.