

Housing Complaints Policy

Policy and Procedure

1.0. Introduction

Papworth Trust aim to maintain high standards in everything we do. One of the ways in which we try to achieve this is by listening and responding to feedback. We encourage and welcome this from tenants who live in our homes.

We all work very hard to get the job right the first time but sometimes we get things wrong. Feedback in the form of complaints helps us to resolve mistakes as quickly as possible and learn how we can do things better in the future. It's important that our staff handle all feedback appropriately and consistently.

As a registered housing provider we adhere to the Regulator of Social Housing Standards, which includes a specific requirement for our approach to complaints to be clear, simple and accessible that ensures that complaints are resolved promptly, politely and fairly. Additionally we are a member of Housing Ombudsman Scheme. The Housing Ombudsman is an independent body that looks at complaints about housing providers and they have created a Compliant Handling Code that we have adopted.

This Policy and Procedure sets out how the housing service deals with complaints in line with our regulatory responsibilities and relevant legislation. It does not cover complaints raised about other services and areas of the Papworth Trust.

2.0. Aims and objectives

We aim to be open, honest and fair with any complaint and we endeavor to operate a tenant-focused complaints policy. This means that we will give tenants the opportunity to explain their point of view and the outcome they are seeking before we reach a decision. We aim to resolve any complaint through dialogue and mutual understanding and we will provide sufficient opportunity for the complaint to be discussed and resolved.

In receiving complaints about our delivery or service we aim to ensure that:

- We respond positively to complaints, and correct any mistakes

- Making a complaint is as easy as possible
- We have a broad definition of a complaint to ensure that even where a formal investigation and response is not required, we log, monitor and use as much intelligence on complaints as possible
- We deal with complaints promptly, politely and with transparency
- We respond in the right way – for example, with an explanation, or an apology where we have got things wrong or information on any action taken.
- We learn from complaints, use them to improve our service and review our complaints policy and procedures where there is a need.

3.0. Definitions

The following definitions are used in this policy

Complaint

For the purposes of this policy a complaint shall be defined as:

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

Formal Complaint

A complaint under the definition above where it has not been possible to resolve satisfactorily and therefore has now proceeded to the stages of the complaints process

Vexatious Contact/Complaint

Contact or complaint from a tenant that we consider unreasonable due to the manner in which they have been reported, frequency or the conduct of the tenant in raising the complaint.

Tenant

For the purposes of this policy where 'tenant' is used, this refers to the tenancy holder and/or any nominated representative.

4.0. Complaints Procedure

4.1. Approach

We recognize that tenants communicate with the Trust through different channels, to make raising a complaint simple this can be done in the same way. We accept complaints in the following methods:

- By email; we would encourage complaints to be sent to housing@papworthtrust.org.uk or repairsandmaintenance@papworthtrust.org.uk
- To a member of Housing staff in person
- Over the telephone by calling 0330 678 0008
- By directly messaging the official Papworth Trust Facebook account at <https://www.facebook.com/papworthtrust/>
- In writing to 1 Saxongate, Bradbury Place, Huntingdon, PE29 3RR

Where we have an email address for a tenant, unless another method is requested correspondence relating to the complaint will be letter issued via email.

We operate with a broad definition of a complaint, where a complaint can be easily resolved or does not require further investigation (e.g. negative feedback) we will still record the details of the complaint. This is to ensure as much feedback is captured from our tenants as possible which can then be used for monitoring purposes and fed into service improvements.

We will allocate each complaint a unique reference number to ensure it can be easily tracked, all complainants should keep a record of the reference number.

The Trust operates a **three stage complaints process**. The first two stages will be carried out by internal staff only. In stage 1 the complaint will be heard by a member of staff with no previous involvement in the matter. At stage 2 the complaint will be investigated by a senior manager. This ensures that a tenant has the opportunity to challenge any initial decision by escalating their complaint.

The final stage is referring the matter to our Tenants Complaints Panel. This comprises anonymous representatives from our tenant panels. This involves our tenants in a crucial role as part of the complaints process and ensures that tenants have the opportunity to have their case heard by their peers. All information received from the customer and any responses by the Trust are anonymized and given to the Panel to consider alongside any relevant policies or legislation.

We will conduct complaint investigations in an impartial manner, seeking sufficient reliable information from both parties so that fair and appropriate findings and recommendations can be made. It is important that tenants comply with any reasonable request for information to support any investigation. We will be honest with tenants from the outset where the desired expectation is unreasonable or unrealistic.

Where a complaint is not resolved to the tenant's satisfaction the process has a mechanism to refer it to the next stage should they wish.

4.2. Housing Ombudsman

Tenants can also access the Housing Ombudsman Service for advice and assistance at any point during the life of the complaint.

If the complaint remains unresolved at the end of the three stages we have the right to refer the complaint to the Housing Ombudsman Service.

A Tenant can also refer their complaint to the Housing Ombudsman Service upon exhaustion of our complaints process.

4.3. Representatives and Advocates

Where a tenant raising a complaint wishes to have a representative or advocate act on their behalf; we will not unreasonably refuse this and will liaise with them through the process.

Where we reasonably suspect that a representative or advocate is not acting in a tenant's best interests, we reserve the right to seek a tenant's assurance on the matter.

In certain circumstances we will cease contact with a representative or advocate where we are unable to verify this.

4.4. Stage Timescales

Initial Contact

New complaints will be assessed by the staff member in receipt of the initial complaint to determine whether this is an issue that can be resolved (or has already been resolved) quickly without the need to escalate it further. Where this is the case the complaint will be logged and closed.

Where it cannot be resolved informally it will be logged as a formal complaint and move into the three stage process:

Stage 1

Acknowledgement of the complaint will be sent within 5 working days. This will detail who is dealing with the complaint. In most cases stage 1 complaints will be responded to within 10 working days. In certain circumstances it may be necessary to extend this by an additional 10 days. Where this is the case the complainant will be informed with a reason for this.

Stage 2

If a tenant is not satisfied with the outcome of stage 1, they can request to escalate it to stage 2 within 10 working days.

Acknowledgement of the escalation will be sent within five working days. This will detail who is dealing with the stage 2 escalation. In most cases stage 2 complaints will be responded to within 20 days. In certain circumstances it may be necessary to extend

this by an additional 10 days. Where this is the case the complaint will be informed with a reason for this

Stage 3 - Tenant Complaints Panel

If the tenant is still not satisfied at level 2 outcome to the complaint, they have the right to escalate this to stage 3 within 10 working days.

Acknowledgement of the escalation will be sent within five working days. This will detail the process for the complaint to be referred to our Tenant Complaints Panel and include timescales for this.

Tenants will be informed of the outcome of the Tenants Complaints Panel within 5 working days of the panel hearing the complaint.

4.5. Exclusions

We will accept a complaint unless there is a reasonable reason not to do so. Circumstances in which we would not accept a complaint include (list not exhaustive):

- Where the issue giving rise to complaint is over six months' old
- Where it is relation to a housing decision and a review of the decision has already been heard
- Legal proceedings have started against the tenant for a related matter
- A matter has already been considered under this policy
- Where the contact and/or complaint from the customer is unreasonably persistent or vexatious
- The deadline for escalation has passed and there is no reasonable reason to justify extending it

Where a complaint or escalation is not accepted the tenant will be advised as such and provided with a reason within 10 working days.

5.0. Complaint Monitoring

All complaints are processed and recorded using the agreed standard documentation.

Trends with complaints and compliments will be monitored through the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).

Complaints will be analyzed monthly internally and quarterly with the Tenant Scrutiny Panel.

6.0. Recording of Complaints

All complaints should be recorded centrally on the complaint log and will be updated at each stage of the process.

Each file will include all the evidence compiled, be clear on the root cause of the complaint, identify the outcome of the complaint, distinguish between fact, feelings, and opinion as well as being written in plain language.

7.0. Confidentiality and Data Sharing

In dealing with complaints, all staff members are aware of the need to maintain confidentiality when dealing with personal information.

Communication with the tenants will not generally identify individual members of staff or contractors as their actions are undertaken on behalf of the Papworth Trust.

Information should only be shared as necessary to progress the complaints investigation.

As part of any complaint investigation if access to personal and/or confidential files is required, staff will seek the appropriate authority from the relevant Director and/or Human Resources.

Where a complaint involves a third party, for example the conduct of a contractor, it may be necessary for us to disclose some of the details about a complaint to them in order for us to investigate. Where the information is of a sensitive nature, we will discuss this with the tenant and gain consent before we share any data. Any data shared will be done so, in line with the GDPR Data protection.

Associated Documentation

The following documents can be read in conjunction with this policy:

- The RSH Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard
- Housing Ombudsman Service Complaint Handling Code

Document control

Author Business Manager –
Housing Management

Approvers Leadership Team

With assistance from Tenant Scrutiny Panel

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Version tracker

Version number	Date	Comments/Reason for issue
1.0	December 2020	First Issue in response to Housing Ombudsman Complaints Handling Code
1.1	November 2023	Under review. Review date extended.
1.2	February 2024	Under review. Review date extended.