



## **Complaints Policy**

**WHH views complaints as an important source for identifying any areas of our performance that do not meet our commitment to providing an excellent level of customer service, and as a means to improve how we deliver our services.**

**Our objectives are:**

1. To have a clear complaints procedure which makes it easy for users of our services, or any organisation we work with, to make a complaint
2. To publicise our complaints procedure so that people know how to contact us to make a complaint
3. To make sure everyone at WHH knows what to do if a complaint is received
4. To define, at the earliest time possible, what outcome the complainant is seeking
5. To make sure all complaints are investigated fairly and in a timely way
6. To make sure that complaints are, wherever possible resolved promptly and that good relationships are maintained
7. To gather information which helps us to improve what we do
8. For our Board to retain a role in dealing with any complaints that reach the Final Stage of this policy and for the Board to receive a report at each meeting on complaints received, outcomes, and actions taken to improve service delivery

### **Definition of a Complaint**

**A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by WHH, our staff, or those acting on our behalf, affecting any individual or group of residents.**

### **Complaints may come from:**

1. Users of our services
2. From someone acting on the behalf of a resident who has legal or statutory authority to act on their behalf, with written evidence that that person has authority to act on the resident's behalf
3. From an organisation who we have business relationship with
4. From any person or organisation who has a relationship with WHH

This policy does not apply to members of staff, who have access to other routes to raise any dissatisfaction which are detailed in the Staff Handbook.

### **How Complaints Can Be Made**

A complaint can be received verbally, by telephone, by email, or in writing, and must be received within 6 months of the incident occurring.

Any complainant whose first language is not English, uses Braille or sign language, or requires any other assistance in making a complaint should contact our office. In compliance with the Equality Act 2010, we will take all necessary actions and make reasonable adjustments to assist people to understand our policy and the related procedure and to raise complaints where they believe that there has been a failure of service. All complaints should be addressed to the Complaints Officer, Megan Cash, at our office.

### Exclusions

WHH will not deal with / escalate complaints under this policy, where:

- They are *not* received from, one of the four named groups on page 1 of this policy Where Complaints Can Come From;
- They are not received within six months of the issue that is the substance of the complaint occurring;
- The subject of the complaint is already the subject of legal proceedings that are in process at Court; or,
- It is the decision of both the Complaints Officer and the Company Secretary that the complaint falls under WHH's Complaints: Unreasonable Behaviour policy ( which is available on our website and on request )

### Confidentiality

All complaints will be handled sensitively, with discretion, and with regard to relevant data protection requirements.

### Responsibility

Overall responsibility for this policy and its implementation lies with the Board of WHH.

### Review

This policy was adopted in April 2023, and will be reviewed again by the Board in October 2023.

## **Complaints Procedure**

### **Base Principles**

Wherever possible, we aim to resolve complaints promptly. All complaints will be recorded.

Where we receive a complaint, we will:

- give the complaint a unique reference number
- define what outcome the complainant is seeking
- respond and investigate without any undue delay
- ensure that an appropriate person investigates the complaint
- where a complaint is about a member of staff, the complaint will be investigated by someone who is not that member of staff's line manager
- keep the complainant informed throughout the investigation process
- offer a right of internal appeal, and make the complainant aware of that they can appeal to the Housing Ombudsman if they wish to

### **Receiving Complaints**

Complaints may arrive through and will be accepted through any medium.

**All complaints will be recorded. Complaints will only be dealt with if they are received within 6 months of an incident occurring.**

### **Complaints received by telephone or in person:**

The person who receives a complaint by telephone or in person will:

1. Write down the complaint, where possible in the complainant's own words
2. The time and date of the complaint must be noted
3. Record the complainant's name, address, e mail address, and telephone number
4. State the relationship of the person making the complaint to WHH
5. Inform the complainant that we have a complaints procedure and if they do not have a copy send them one by e mail or by post
6. Inform the complainant in writing that we will give their complaint a unique reference number, giving details of the investigating officer and the target date for a full reply
7. Record in the Complaints Log the date the complaint was passed to the Complaints Officer and the target date for reply
8. Explain to the complainant that if WHH cannot resolve the issue within its own policy, the complainant may contact the Housing Ombudsman Service

### **Complaints received by post:**

1. The correspondence will be date stamped on receipt, and a photocopy of the complaint retained with the Complaints Log until the investigation is concluded
2. The complaint must be given a unique reference number, and a brief description of the complaint should be entered into the Complaints Log
3. The complaint must be acknowledged in writing ( e mail or by post ), giving details of the name and job title of the Complaints Officer and the target date for a full reply

## **Complaints received by e mail or social media or via the company website**

These must be dealt with like complaints received by post, with hard copies kept, acknowledgements sent, and target dates for full replies given

### **The Two Stage Internal Process**

At the outset it is important to clearly establish what the complaint is about, what outcome the complainant is seeking, and what is their preferred method (s) of communication.

#### **Stage 1**

In many cases, a complaint is best resolved by the person responsible for the issue being complained about. If the complaint has been received by that person, they may be able to resolve it quickly and should do so if possible and appropriate. Whether or not the complaint has been resolved, details should be passed to the Complaints Officer within 2 working days.

On receiving the complaint, the Complaints Officer will record it in the Complaints Log, giving the case a unique reference number, and write to the complainant within 5 days explaining how their complaint is being dealt with and who is dealing with it; and, if WHH's understanding is that the matter has been resolved. When writing to the complainant, a copy of the Complaints Policy will be attached. A response to the complaint will be sent within 10 working days of the complaint being logged. If the complainant wishes to request an escalation to Stage 2 of the process, this request must be made within 15 working days of being informed of the outcome a Stage 1.

#### **Stage 2**

If it has not been possible or appropriate to resolve the complaint at Stage 1 the Complaints Officer will nominate a member of staff to who was not involved at Stage 1 to lead the investigation. All investigations must be evidence based, to establish whether the complaint can be substantiated or not.

If the complaint relates to a member of staff, they should be informed and given an opportunity to respond. If it appears that there is evidence of misconduct, failure to comply with company policy, or associated best practice, the investigating officer should inform the Chief Executive as this may be a situation that needs to be dealt with through WHH's internal disciplinary procedure.

The Complaints Officer should arrange for the investigation to begin without any unnecessary delay. The Complaints Officer must write to the complainant, explaining that their complaint has been moved to Stage 2, giving details of the member of staff leading the investigation, and confirming that a response will be sent within 20 working days. The Complaints Officer will also confirm to the complainant(s) of their right to contact the Housing Ombudsman, and include a copy of the Complaints Policy.

The decision taken at Stage 2 is final, and concludes the internal complaints process unless by mutual agreement independent external assistance is arranged to attempt to seek a satisfactory resolution ( e.g., mediation, ACAS ).

### **External Appeal**

Where a complainant remains dissatisfied, having explored all stages of the internal complaints procedure, they may request a review of their case by:

The Housing Ombudsman Service  
P.O. Box 152  
Liverpool  
L33 7WQ

Telephone: 0300 111 3000  
[www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk](http://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk)

### **Board reporting**

The Board will receive a report on the operation of the Complaints Policy at each meeting, showing:

- The number of complaints received since the last meeting, with details of how many were resolved at which Stages of the Policy;
- What learning points arose from the complaints received and how these have been used to enhance service delivery

At each Annual General Meeting, the Board will appoint a Board member to be the lead member for complaints.

### **Reporting to Residents**

Details of the operation of the Complaints Policy and outcomes will be reported to residents at all group meetings each year, with summary information given within the Annual Report To Residents at the end of each calendar year.

### **Complaints About Members of the Board**

Complaints about individual Board members will be investigated by the Chair and Vice Chair, with support from the Chief Executive ( as Company Secretary ).

Complaints about the Chair will be investigated by the Vice Chair and one other Board member; about the Chair by the Vice Chair and one other Board member. In both situations with the support of the Chief Executive and with access to independent advice where appropriate.