

Parasol Homes Limited

Complaints Policy and Procedure

Policy Checklist	
Policy Owner	Head of Operations
Version No.	3
Approved by ELT	Yes
Approved by Board	Yes
Approval Date	April 2025
Review Date	April 2026
Published on Website	Yes

Complaints Policy and Procedure

Introduction

Parasol (Parasol) welcomes all feedback from customers and their representatives and recognises that this feedback provides valuable information that we can use to improve the services we offer.

A key part of this feedback is customer complaints, which allow us to learn from experiences where things may have gone wrong and make amendments to our working practices to ensure that they don't happen again. We encourage feedback by providing different channels through which customers can easily make a complaint.

The Board and Senior Managers at Parasol recognise that complaint handling is an important strategic role, providing vital insight on our performance and reputation.

Performance data on complaint handling against policy will be considered by the Board alongside other key performance indicators to provide assurance, assess any risks, identify emerging trends and learning points to improve services to customers.

Parasol completes its self-assessment against the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code, this promotes the progressive use of complaints and provides a useful framework to support effective handling and prevention of complaints. This is uploaded onto our website and reviewed annually. Should an assessment not be possible ie Cyber incident, Parasol shall inform their customers, stakeholders, and notify the Housing Ombudsman with a timescale for its completion.

The Board has visibility of the volume and type of complaints received and the impact of our complaint handling on customers are considered. In addition, it also provides feedback on any improvements made as a result of learning from complaints.

What is a Complaint - Definition

Parasol recognise that effective complaint handling is a customer focused process that enables customer voices to be listened to and understood.

We have used the Housing Ombudsman definition of a complaint which is *'an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the organisation, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting a resident or group of residents.'*

What is not a Complaint - Exclusions

There are a number of circumstances in which a matter will not be considered a complaint, and which we consider to be fair and reasonable in accordance with the Housing Ombudsman's Code. These are:

- A comment, or series of comments, where the customer is making a suggestion about how we may improve or maintain our service
- A question, or series of questions, where a customer is requesting information about a service we provide

- A service request, where the customer is letting us know about a particular issue for the first time; for example, reporting a repair or an incident of anti-social behaviour. Service requests will be recorded, monitored and reviewed regularly. A complaint will be raised when the customer raises dissatisfaction with the response to their service request
- The issue giving rise to the complaint occurred over 12 months ago unless the complaint relates to Safeguarding or Health & Safety, although a case by case basis will be applied.
- Legal proceedings have been started. This is defined as details of the claim, such as the Claim Form and Particulars of Claim, having been filed at court
- Matters that have already been considered under the Complaints Policy
- Insurance claims, these are dealt with by the insurers

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 bringing their complaint to the Housing Ombudsman.

Who can make a Complaint

Complaints are welcomed from all those affected by an activity or service provided by the Association, including:

- Current tenants/licensees and members of their households
- Former tenants/licensees
- Housing applicants
- MPs and Councilors
- Advocates of the complainant such as friends, relatives or other representatives (written consent from the complainant is required)

Reasonable Adjustments

Parasol will ensure that disabled people are not disadvantaged in accessing our services. To this end we will make reasonable adjustments and will adapt the normal policy and procedure to accommodate an individual's needs. We will respond to reasonable adjustments requests in line with the Equality Act and the Parasol Complaint handlers have had training to deal with such requests. Examples of adjustments we can make include:

- Allowing more time than we would usually for someone to provide information
- Providing additional support such as a sign language interpreter
- Providing a copy of this policy in a clear and accessible format for all customers

Making a Complaint

We will always attempt to resolve a complaint at the first point of contact and empower our staff to resolve any concerns there and then. At this stage we will confirm our understanding of the complaint and the outcomes being sought with the customer.

Parasol also recognises that every customer interaction represents an opportunity for to gain feedback and insight. We will record all complaints on our system and run regular reports to identify if there are any trends in customer dissatisfaction and any lessons that can be learnt.

When we receive a complaint, we aim to deal with it there and then if we can. If we are unable to resolve the complaint at the first point of contact, we will investigate under the formal complaints process.

A formal complaint can occur when:

- A customer is unhappy about a service that they have received from Parasol or the attempts that Parasol has made to resolve the issue
- A customer requests that the service they have received be reviewed by a Manager, or the customer has expressly asked for a complaint to enter the formal complaints process
- A member of staff has triggered the formal complaints process, with the agreement of the customer to reach a resolution

A full record will be kept of the complaint, any review and the outcomes at each stage, including all correspondence with the customer, correspondence with other parties etc.

At the completion of each stage of the complaints process we will ensure that customers are communicated with and advised of the following information:

- the complaint stage
- the outcome of the complaint
- the reasons for any decisions made
- the details of any remedy offered to put things right
- details of any outstanding actions
- details of how to escalate the matter if dissatisfied

The process has 2 stages and will be co-ordinated by our dedicated Complaints Officer

Complaints can be resolved in a number of ways, any remedy will reflect the failure and level of impact caused to the complainant.

Stage 1 - Investigation

We will make it easy for our customers to make a complaint in a way that is the most convenient for them, this could be in writing, over the telephone, via email, through social media or in person to a member of Parasol staff. The complaint will be acknowledged and logged within five working days. We'll investigate the complaint and then discuss with the customer what needs to be done to resolve the issue. We will provide a full written response within ten working days. If this is not possible, an explanation and a date when the stage one response will be received will be communicated. This should not exceed a further 10 working days without good reason. If new information is provided during Stage 1 and is related to the current investigation, this information must be considered before determining the outcome, if the information is unrelated then a new complaint must be made and dealt with separately.

Stage 2 – Review

If the complaint is not resolved to the customer's satisfaction, the customer can request a review of the complaint within 10 days of receipt of the outcome unless an exclusion ground applies. If Parasol declines to escalate a complaint, we will set out the reasons for this in writing and also advise of the customer's right to approach the Housing Ombudsman about this decision.

A senior Manager will consider the initial findings of the complaint investigation, make reasonable effort to seek and understand the customer's complaint and may choose to take further action. The review outcome will be completed within 20 working days of the request. If this is not possible, an explanation and a date when the stage two response will be received will be communicated. This should not exceed a further 10 working days without good reason.

Parasol may refuse to escalate a complaint to the next stage where a customer introduces new information. In these circumstances, and where the information changes the nature of the investigation or may have a material effect to the outcome we will reopen the case at the existing stage. Our aim is to resolve the customer's issue wherever possible, rather than needlessly escalating through our process. We will always explain to a customer where we refuse to escalate a complaint in these circumstances, giving the reasons for this in writing.

All complaints will be responded to at the earliest opportunity which may be before the remedial actions have been considered. This is done in writing and ensuring the Housing Ombudsman contact information is provided.

Complaints Outcome

All outcomes will reflect the failure proportionately, the remedy offer must be agreed with the complaint and must be communicated clearly, this includes, when and how the remedy will be rectified. All remediation must be tracked and seen through to completion.

Housing Ombudsman

If the customer remains unhappy or dissatisfied with the response to the complaint they can appeal to the Housing Ombudsman.

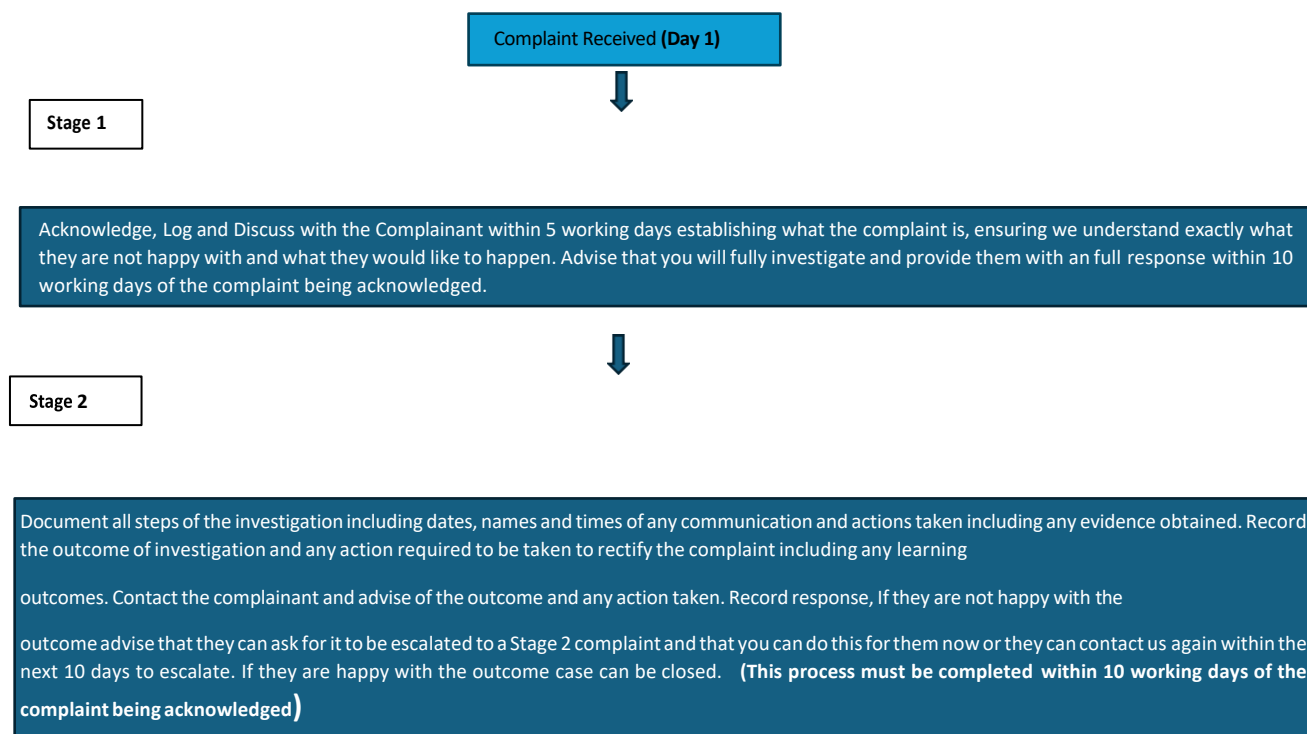
Making a referral to the Ombudsman is free and further details can be found at: <http://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/>

This can either be done by the customer directly or can be co-ordinated through the dedicated Complaints Officer. The referral must be made within eight weeks of the final decision.

Complaint Process

Stages

Early resolution (The first time they have contacted us about the issue, and we have successfully resolved) Complaint handlers have the training and authority to resolve at this stage.	Stage One (They have contacted us more than once about the issue, they weren't happy about previous action/they shared their dissatisfaction and wanted to make a complaint) Complaints handlers have the training and authority to resolve at this stage and have access to the team supervisor to discuss more complex cases.	Stage Two (Early resolution and stage one has failed to reach a resolution the complainant is not happy with outcome and they have requested a review within 20 days of outcome) All stage 2 complaints are handled by the department manager who will consult with ELT.	Ombudsman (Should only get here when all internal stages have failed but be prepared that it may be the first we know about them not being happy)
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Related policy, Documents, Legislation

Regulator of Social Housing - Consumer Standards - Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard

Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code

Parasol Anti-Social Behaviour Policy

Reporting Structure and Learning Points

- Quarterly performance reports will be presented to the Board on the volume, category, and outcome of complaints.
- We will continue to monitor and share trends arising from complaint handling and any learning or changes made as a result of complaints.
- The Board will review any orders from the Housing Ombudsman and findings of severe maladministration of the Housing Ombudsman, or any referrals by it to regulatory bodies.
- The Board will review annually the self-assessment to confirm that the Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code is being applied.
- Any themes or trends will be assessed by senior management to identify potential systemic issues, serious risks or policies and procedures that require revision. They will also be used to inform staff and contractor training.