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Complaints Handling Policy

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Approved by Leadership team

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1 Purpose

1.1 At Evolve Housing + Support we want to ensure that all complaints are dealt with in a consistent, fair and transparent way.

1.2 We view complaints as a valuable source of feedback and learning for our services, helping to drive improvement and maintain a positive relationship with our residents.

1.3 This policy sets out our approach for complaints handling and is published on our website, along with information about the Housing Ombudsman Service and is publicised in our residents 'Welcome Guide,' which all residents receive upon sign up.

2 Scope

2.1 This policy applies to all complaints about our landlord services and support services, received from residents and other customers (including prospective residents), and third parties making a complaint on their behalf. This policy also applies to complaints from MPs and local councillors on behalf of their constituents.

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2.2 Where a complaint concerns discrimination, harassment, bullying or safeguarding, this policy should be read alongside the following documents.

- Safeguarding Children and Young People Policy and Procedure
- Safeguarding Adults' Policy and Procedure
- Bullying and Harassment Policy and Procedure
- Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Policy

What This Policy Covers

2.3 Residents can complain about our standard of service, actions, or lack of action by us or anyone working for us (such as contractors).

This Policy Does Not Cover

2.4 We will consider each complaint on its own merits and will not apply exclusions as a blanket rule. Where we decide not to accept a complaint, we will explain why and advise the resident of their right to take that decision to the Housing Ombudsman.

2.5 There are some things that we will not deal with through this policy.

- A service request, where the resident is asking us to take action to put something right for the first time. However, if the resident expresses dissatisfaction with our response to the service request, it will be treated as a complaint.
- The issue giving rise to the complaint occurred over 12 months ago, unless there is a good reason why the complaint could not reasonably have been raised sooner.
- Matters that have previously been considered under the complaints policy, unless there are ongoing issues related to the complaint – e.g. Damp or Mould.
- Neighbour disputes themselves are outside the scope of this policy. Complaints about Evolve's service, including our investigation, communication, decisions or response to a neighbour dispute, will be considered under this policy.
- Reports of anti-social behaviour, unless residents are unhappy with our response to these.
- Matters already being dealt with at determination stage by the Housing Ombudsman Service.
- Liability or personal injury claims.
- Where we are advised that legal proceedings have been issued (this is defined as details of the claim, such as the Claim Form and Particulars of Claim, having been filed at court) we will close the complaint explaining the reason.
- If the complaint is disputing the service charge we have set, residents may resolve the dispute either directly with Evolve or through the First Tier Tribunal. However, this does not prevent customers raising their complaint with the Housing Ombudsman.
- We will not normally investigate anonymous complaints. However, we will record them and may investigate where the information provided indicates a significant service failure, safeguarding concern or other serious risk.

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- Survey feedback is not treated as a complaint, though the survey will include information so the person completing the survey can pursue their dissatisfaction as a complaint if they wish to.
- Feedback about our policies and procedures from customers or other parties will be recorded and form part of future reviews.

3 Definitions

Term	Definition
Complaint	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 an individual resident or group of residents.
Service request	A request from a resident or resident asking us to take action to put something right.
Resolution	Where a complaint is dealt with to the satisfaction of the person complaining.
SMT	Senior Management team which includes Director of Operations
Leadership	Includes Director of Operations and CEO
Local Resolution	Where a complaint is dealt with at the initial point of contact to the satisfaction of the person complaining, without the need for a formal complaint investigation.
Housing Ombudsman	An independent external body which investigates complaints against an organisation. The service is free, independent, and impartial.
Regulator	An independent external body with statutory powers to monitor, investigate and enforce regulatory compliance on an organisation.
MRC	The Member Responsible for Complaints is a member of Evolve's Board with responsibilities for overseeing good governance. Their role is to ensure complaints are handled fairly, effectively, and in line with the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code, while using complaint outcomes to drive continuous service improvement and organisational learning

4 Principles

4.1 We welcome complaints as an opportunity to resolve dissatisfaction and improve our services. Evolve will treat all complaints with respect and a personalised response that recognises everyone as an individual.

4.2 A resident does not have to use the word 'complaint' for it to be treated as such.

4.3 Residents can expect to be treated with courtesy, respect and fairness at all times. In return, we expect that residents will treat our staff dealing with your complaint with the same courtesy, respect and fairness.

4.4 We will not stop our efforts to address the service request if the resident complains.

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4.5 If we decide not to accept a complaint, an explanation will be provided to the resident setting out the reasons why the matter is not suitable for the complaints process and the right to take that decision to the Ombudsman.

4.6 All colleagues will:

- Ensure residents know how they can make a complaint.
- Ensure neighbours and stakeholders have service contact details and are aware of ways to contact us easily.
- Apologise and be personal in the responses provided.
- Encourage our residents to complain if they are not happy with any aspect of the service, welcome this feedback and make improvements where necessary.
- Take verbal complaints as seriously as written ones.
- Not treat complainants less favourably than people who have not complained.
- Look to resolve a complaint in the most efficient way and provide excellent resident service.
- Ensure residents who present with a disability are provided with additional support, including the provision of advocates and considered accessibility

5 The Complaint Handling process

5.1 We have a two-stage complaint process. The table below sets out our timescales for responding to complaints:

Complaint	Action	Timescale
Stage 1	Acknowledge and log the Complaint.	Within five working days
	We provide a response to the stage 1 Complaint	Within 10 working days of the stage 1 complaint being received
Stage 2	Acknowledge and log the Complaint at stage 2	Within five working days
	We provide a response to the stage 2 review	Within 20 working days of a complaint being escalated

Stage 1: Initial Complaint

5.2 When a complaint is made, we acknowledge and log it within five working days. We carry out a non-biased investigation and share a comprehensive answer within 10 working days of the complaint being received.

5.3 Where we are unable to provide a Stage 1 response within 10 working days, we will explain the reason for the delay and agree suitable arrangements for keeping the resident updated. Any extension will normally be no more than a further 10 working days unless there is a good reason. When notifying a resident of an extension, we will also provide details of the Housing Ombudsman Service.

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Stage 2: Complaint Escalation

5.4 If a resident is not happy with the way we've dealt with a complaint or our decision at stage 1, they should let us know within 20 working days of the stage 1 decision if they wish to move to stage 2. We accept a request to escalate the complaint to the next stage unless an exclusion applies (see section 2)

5.5 When a complaint is escalated, we acknowledge and log it within five working days.

5.6 Stage 2 will normally review the issues considered at Stage 1. Where additional issues are raised, we will consider whether they are related to the original complaint and should be included in the Stage 2 review, or whether they should be logged as a separate complaint.

5.7 We will provide a response to complaints escalated to stage 2 within 20 working days of the complaint being escalated.

5.8 Where we are unable to provide a Stage 2 response within 20 working days, we will explain the reason for the delay and agree suitable arrangements for keeping the resident updated. Any extension will normally be no more than a further 20 working days unless there is a good reason. When notifying a resident of an extension, we will also provide details of the Housing Ombudsman Service.

The Housing Ombudsman Service

5.9 A complaint can be raised with the Housing Ombudsman Service at any stage of the process for an independent review of the case.

5.10 The Housing Ombudsman service can be contacted in the following ways:

Online: www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/residents

Telephone: 0300 111 3000

Email: info@housingombudsman.org.uk

In writing to: Housing Ombudsman Service PO Box 1484, Preston, PR2 0ET

6 Compliance with the Complaint Handling Code

6.1 The Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code is the mandatory framework that social housing landlords must follow when handling resident complaints. It aims to ensure complaints are handled fairly, consistently, transparently and promptly across the sector

6.2 Under the Code, Residents must be able to make complaints easily, through a range of accessible channels, without unnecessary barriers. The Code sets out the structure, management, responses, timescales and governance of complaints and should be investigated objectively, considering all available evidence and the impact on the resident. It sets how to out things right and the expectations it has on Evolve.

6.3 If Evolve is unable to comply with the Code due to exceptional circumstances such as a cyber-attack, we will inform the Housing Ombudsman and set out and publish to our residents a timescale for returning to compliance with the Code of Practice.

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6.4 The Area Manager (Strategic Partnerships and Business Development) acts as the 'Complaints Officer' for complaints. The Complaints Officer will have access to colleagues at all levels of the organisation and the authority to seek information, challenge delays and support prompt and fair resolution.

6.5 A Board member fulfils the role of 'Member Responsible for Complaints and receives quarterly reports on complaints, including volumes and trends and any updates and correspondence from the Housing Ombudsman.

6.6 As part of our complaint's assurance and governance structure, we produce an annual complaints performance and service improvement report which is reviewed by our board and published on our website.

6.7 This includes information on volume of complaints, trends and outcomes. Learning and improvements will also be included in the report. This is shared with our residents in newsletters in in services.

6.8 The annual report will include any findings from the Housing Ombudsman and performance on meeting deadlines and targets. The annual report will be linked to our Self-Assessment and published together.

7 Accessibility and Awareness

7.1 We to make it easy for residents to complain and have a range of different channels through which they can make a complaint. Complaints can be received face to face, by letter, email or through the website.

7.2 Residents are able to have a representative deal with their complaint on their behalf, and to be represented or accompanied at any meeting with the us.

7.3 Support can be provided to any individual who feel they want to make a complaint but unable to do so using these routes.

7.4 This policy, including information about the Ombudsman and the Complaint Handling Code will be publicised on the website, and discussed at resident forums. Residents are made aware of the complaints process and this policy during as part of their induction, in newsletters and included in the resident welcome guide as part of the move in procedure.

8 Monitoring and Organisational Learning

8.1 Evolve will seek feedback from residents after responding to their complaint; to ask how satisfied they were with the complaints process, and if they have any suggestions for improvements. These will be shared with residents in newsletters and at the complaints advisory group.

8.2 The Complaints Manager will use an outcome tracker to monitor all complaints as they come in, to ensure they are followed up with on time and have an outcome.

8.3 A complaints Advisory group will meet quarterly to go through any new policy update or guidance provided externally, look at trends and themes and outcomes of complaints. This group will be overseen by the Complaints Manager and have resident representation throughout.

8.4 Any changes to the complaints policy will be reviewed by the organisation resident security group.

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8.5 The Complaints Manager will use a lessons learnt matrix and report to the advisory group.

8.6 A monthly outcomes meeting will be held with Area Managers and department leads to confirm outcomes are achieved and evidenced.

8.7 The Area Manager overseeing complaints will review complaints monthly to identify themes and issues, and to consider any changes or improvements that can be made.

8.8 Complaints will be monitored on a quarterly basis and a report provided to our Board.

8.9 Evolve will review complaints annually to test the effectiveness of this procedure, and to identify learning points.

8.10 Evolve will participate in external benchmarking group exercises to share best practice and data across the sector.

8.11 Questions about residents' experience of the complaints process at Evolve will be included as part of our annual resident satisfaction survey and internal audits.

8.12 Service teams will include complaints on their weekly team meeting agenda. Area Managers will discuss complaints in 1-1 sessions, and the Director of Operations will discuss at 1-1s with Area Managers.

9 Diversity impact assessment

9.1 Complaints will be monitored annually by the demographics of the complainant to ensure fair and equal treatment across all groups.

9.2 We recognise that our residents come to us from a wide range of backgrounds, with individual beliefs, values and needs. The use of this policy and procedure will ensure consistency is applied when colleagues are dealing with residents' complaints, comments and suggestions.

9.3 This policy aims to respect and value the diversity of our residents. We strive to create a positive environment where everyone is treated with dignity and respect. We will challenge any instance of inequality and ensure all our colleagues are trained in equal opportunities.

9.4 We capture any reasonable adjustments our residents request on our Resident Relationship Management system and tailor our services, accordingly, including how we support residents to make, and how we investigate, complaints.

9.5 Evolve complies with the Equality Act 2010 and are aware that normal policies, procedures, or processes may sometimes need to be adapted in order to accommodate an individual's needs.

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10 Relevant documents

- Complaint procedure flowchart
- Complaint acknowledgement letter template
- Complaint stage 1 response letter template
- Permission to share personal data
- In-Form guidance – Complaints
- Complaints leaflet for residents
- Complaints poster for services