**Housing Pathways Trust**

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| **Title** | **Complaints Policy** |
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## 1. Introduction

HPT is committed to delivering high-quality services to all residents. We recognise that sometimes we may not meet expectations, and when this happens, we want to address concerns promptly and fairly.

This Complaints Policy outlines our approach to handling complaints in line with the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code 2024, effective from April 2024, and in compliance with the standards set by the Regulator of Social Housing.

## 2. Policy Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to:

- Provide a clear and accessible procedure for residents to raise complaints
- Ensure complaints are handled fairly, promptly, and transparently
- Comply with the requirements of the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code 2024
- Encourage learning from complaints to improve our services.

HPT will comply with the following:

- Equality Act 2010
- Housing Ombudsman Service Complaint Handling Code (and any findings or recommendations made)
- Regulator of Social Housing's Consumer Standards
- Data Protection Act 2018
- Localism Act 2011.

This policy supports our commitment to engagement and learning from our residents, developing our services to meet changing expectations. This policy and approach enable us to continually improve what we do, working collaboratively to resolve complaints amongst the team and third parties, taking collective responsibility for shortfalls rather than blaming others, and acting within professional standards for engaging with complaints as set by any relevant professional body. We will identify root causes, learn from complaints, make improvements, and develop a positive complaint culture.

## 3. Scope

This policy applies to all HPT residents and Almshouse residents who receive services from HPT. It covers all aspects of service delivery, the actions of our staff, and the performance of contractors working on our behalf.

Residents can make complaints about any aspect of our service, providing the complaint refers to an issue in the past 12 months, including:

- repairs and maintenance
- issues with communal areas
- health and safety issues
- anti-social behaviour
- customer service

Complaints made about a matter referring to over 12 months ago will be dealt with at the landlord's discretion, should there be good reason to do so.

Should a complainant raise dissatisfaction through a public channel, we will follow this up directly through a private channel, wherever possible, to ensure the issue is dealt with confidentially. Dissatisfaction via a survey is not defined as a complaint, but the staff member will advise them how they can complain if they wish to do so.

The complainant does not have to use the word 'complaint' to formally make a complaint and can make a complaint to any staff member, who will pass the complaint to the relevant person. The complainant can complain via a third party or representative.

HPT must consider each complaint carefully, including the individual circumstances and / or vulnerabilities of the matter.

If a complaint should require input from a third party at any stage, this will form part of the 2 stage complaints process set out in the complaints handling code. Resident will not be expected to go through 2 separate complaints processes

## 4. Service requests

A service request is different from a complaint. A service request is a request from a tenant to the landlord requiring action to be taken to put something right. Service requests are not complaints, but must be recorded, monitored, and reviewed regularly.

A complaint must be raised when the tenant expresses dissatisfaction with the response to their service request, even if the handling of the service request remains ongoing. Landlords must not stop their efforts to address the service request if the tenant complains.

## 5. Definitions

Complaint: An expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions, or lack of action by HPT staff, or those acting on our behalf.

Complainant: The individual making the complaint or someone acting on their behalf.

Stage 1 Complaint: The initial investigation to the complaint.

Stage 2 Complaint: The review of the complaint following dissatisfaction with the Stage 1 outcome.

Housing Ombudsman: The independent body established to deal with complaints about registered housing providers.

## 6. Complaints Process

How to Make a Complaint

Residents can submit complaints through the following methods:

Online: Via the complaints form on our website at www.yourpathways.org.uk

Email: By emailing info@yourpathways.org.uk

Telephone: By calling 020 8579 7411

Text: By sending a message to our dedicated number 07537410161

In Writing: By sending a letter to HPT, 33 Dean Court, Bowmans Close, Ealing, London W13 9YU

In Person: By making an appointment to visit our office at 33 Dean Court, Bowmans Close, Ealing, London W13 9YU or by requesting a member of the staff team to undertake a home visit.

We will make reasonable adjustments to support residents who may face barriers to making a complaint, including providing assistance for those with disabilities or language needs.

Stage 1 – Formal Complaint

Acknowledgment: We will acknowledge all complaints within three working days of receipt.

Investigation: A team member will be assigned to investigate the complaint. This will involve gathering all relevant information and discussing the issues with the complainant.

Response: A full written response will be issued within 10 working days of the complaint being acknowledged. If more time is needed due to the complexity of the complaint, we will inform the complainant and agree on an extended timeframe of up to a maximum of 10 additional working days.

Resolution: If the complaint is upheld, we will offer appropriate remedies or resolutions, including apologies, action plans, or service improvements.

Stage 2 – Complaint Review

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the Stage 1 response, they can escalate the complaint to Stage 2.

Escalation Request: This request should be made within 15 working days of receiving the Stage 1 decision.

Acknowledgment: We will acknowledge the escalation within three working days.

Review Process: The Stage 2 review will be conducted by a senior manager not previously involved in the complaint. This process includes a fresh examination of the complaint and all related evidence.

Final Response: We will provide a detailed response to the complainant within 15 working days of acknowledging the escalation. If an extension is required, we will communicate this to the complainant, explaining the reasons and providing a revised response timeframe of no more than a further 15 days.

Full complaint responses are required – all points must be addressed with clear reason for the decision made, referencing the relevant policy, law, and good practice where appropriate. If the answer to the complaint is not known, the response cannot be provided and outstanding actions should be tracked, reviewed, and monitored with regular updates to the tenant. All complaints handlers would be expected to:-

- Deal with complaints on their merits, act independently, and have an open mind;
- Give the resident a fair chance to set out their position;
- Take measures to address any actual or perceived conflict of interest;
- Consider all relevant information and evidence carefully.

If additional complaints are raised during the investigation process these must be incorporated into the stage 1 response (if they are related). Otherwise, new issues must be logged as new complaints.

HPT will not refuse to raise a complaint through all stages of the complaints procedure unless we have valid reason to do so. We will clearly set out the reasons for this and ensure the provision in section 2 of the Code are complied with.

HPT Complaints Officer is the Senior Property Manager supported by the supported by the Executive Assistant as the first point of contact for all complaints.

Our final response will remind complainants of their right to go to the Housing Ombudsman Service for review if they are still dissatisfied

Housing Ombudsman: Our final response will remind complainants that if they remain dissatisfied after the Stage 2 review, they have the right to refer their complaint to the Housing Ombudsman.

Guidance and Support: We will provide clear instructions on how to contact the Housing Ombudsman and offer support to the complainant in making their referral if needed.

Ombudsman Contact Details:

**Online:** housing-ombudsman.org.uk

**Email:** info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk

**Telephone:** 0300 111 3000

**Write to:**
Housing Ombudsman Service
PO Box 1484
Unit D
Preston
PR2 0ET

## 7. Compliance with the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code 2024

We are fully committed to adhering to all aspects of the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code 2024, which includes:

Accessibility: Ensuring the complaints procedure is easy to access and understand.

Fairness: Treating all complainants fairly and without bias.

Timeliness: Meeting the prescribed response times at each stage.

Transparency: Providing clear, evidence-based decisions with explanations.

Learning and Accountability: Using complaint outcomes to drive service improvements and reporting on these improvements internally and externally.

## 8. Monitoring and Review

To ensure our compliance with the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code 2024, HPT will:

- Review complaints data regularly to identify trends, recurring issues, and areas for service improvement
- Conduct an annual review of this policy to assess its effectiveness in line with the Complaint Handling Code requirements
- Seek feedback from residents on the complaints process to ensure it remains accessible and effective
- Report complaint handling performance, including lessons learned and service improvements, to our governing board and publish a summary of this information annually on our website.

In accordance with the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code, on an annual basis, we will publicize to our residents (on our website) and submit a report to our governing body (Board Members)

a) the annual self-assessment

b) an analysis of performance including a summary of the types of complaints the landlord has refused to accept

c) any findings of non-compliance with the code

d) service improvements made because of learning from complaints

e) an annual report about the landlord's performance from the ombudsman, and

f) any other relevant reports of publications.

The governing bodies (Board Members) response to the report will also be published alongside this once received.

The self-assessment should also be completed following any major change such as merger or significant restructuring or following an Ombudsman investigation.

HPT's nominated Member Responsible for Complaints (MRC) will be appointed in February 2025 who will be a trustee board member. The MRC will also meet with appointed residents who have oversight of our complaints handling performance.

The MRC will have access to all complaints related data and performance information, and will have direct access to the employees responsible for administering complaints.

The governing body (Board Members) will be provided with all complaints data & any additional complaints related reports or information on a quarterly and annual basis. This will include details of our performance, volumes and categories of complaints, and any complaints that have been escalated to the Housing Ombudsman. The report will also detail any outcomes or findings from any Housing Ombudsman investigations.

## 9. Learning from Complaints

We recognise the value of complaints in driving continuous improvement. We will:

- Implement corrective actions promptly where complaints highlight areas of failure
- Share lessons learned across our teams to prevent similar issues from arising in the future
- Report on changes made as a result of complaints in our annual performance report to residents.

## 10. Confidentiality and Data Protection

All complaints will be handled in accordance with our Data Protection Policy and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Personal data related to complaints will be stored securely and only used for the purpose of resolving the complaint.

## 11. Unacceptable Behaviour

We understand that residents may feel upset or frustrated when making a complaint and nothing in this policy seeks to avoid dealing with complaints on that basis. However, there are some behaviours or actions that we consider unacceptable.

These include:

• Aggressive or abusive behaviour – examples include, but are not limited to, threats, physical violence, personal verbal abuse, derogatory and discriminatory remarks, rudeness, inflammatory statements and unsubstantiated or malicious allegations

• Unreasonable demands – examples include, but are not limited to, demanding responses within unreasonable timescales, refusing to speak to employees who can assist and/or insisting on speaking only to a particular member of staff, repeatedly changing the substance of a complaint or raising unrelated concerns

• Unreasonable persistence – examples include, but are not limited to, persistent refusal to accept decisions or explanations made in relation to a complaint, continuing to pursue a complaint without presenting any new information, making excessive and unwarranted contacts taking up a disproportionate amount of staff time and resources - see the unreasonably persistent complaints procedure.

HPT will always try to deal with any complaints but if these behaviours are demonstrated, we will invoke our unacceptable behaviour policy to properly protect staff and resources.

Due consideration will be given to the Equality Act 2010 before any restrictions are placed on the residents' contact, and this should be appropriate to their needs.

## 12. **Matters Not Covered by the Complaints Policy**

Complaints will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis; however, the following issues will likely not be dealt with through HPT's complaints procedure, and complaints will not be escalated if;

- The issue giving rise to the complaint occurred over twelve months ago.
- Legal proceedings have 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 previously been considered under the complaints policy.

We will provide an explanation in writing to the tenant setting out the reasons why the matter is not suitable for the complaints process and explain the tenant has the right to take this directly to the Housing Ombudsman. If the Ombudsman does not agree that the exclusion has been applied correctly, the Ombudsman may tell the landlord to take on the complaint.

## **13. Policy Review**

This policy will be reviewed every 3 years or sooner if there are significant changes in regulatory requirements, guidance from the Housing Ombudsman, or best practices in complaint handling. Any amendments will be approved by the board and communicated to residents as necessary.