

## COMPLAINTS POLICY

### 1 Introduction

- 1.1. The provision of services to residents is a core aspect of the business of Outreach Housing Limited. While we are committed to always providing as high-quality a service as possible, residents may at times have cause for complaint in relation to our services. This policy outlines Outreach's approach to responding to complaints and explains how residents can make a complaint if they are not satisfied with Outreach's services.

### 2 Aims

- 2.1. Through this policy, we set out an approach to responding to resident's complaints effectively which ensures that a timely and satisfactory outcome is achieved. This policy sets out how we comply with all relevant legislation and regulations..
- 2.2. Outreach will operate its Complaints Policy in compliance with the Regulator of Social Housing's Regulatory Standards and associated guidance documents.
- 2.3. This policy has been developed in line with the 2024 Housing Ombudsman Service's Complaint Handling Code and the Regulator of Social Housing's Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard.

### 3 Commitment

- 3.1. Outreach is committed to providing a high-quality service for its residents, and to working in an open and accountable way which builds trust and respect. We will provide clear guidance to residents on how to submit a complaint and how their complaint will be processed
- 3.2. Listening to and responding to the views of our residents is central to Outreach's commitment to improving services. We will always endeavour to respond positively to complaints and put mistakes right where things have gone wrong. Where mistakes have been made, apply the learnings from the complaints to improving our services.

### 4 Definitions

- 4.1. **Complainant:** any resident who makes a 'complaint' about Outreach Housing. A complaint can be made by anyone who is entitled to receive a service from Outreach or

anyone who is affected by that service provision. This can include former Outreach residents, where applicable. A family member, friend or advocate may act on behalf of a complainant if desired – the complainant must provide consent for this.

- 4.2. **Complaint:** we use the Housing Ombudsman definition and define a complaint as 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.
- 4.3. Examples of complaints are:
- (a) Where we have failed to provide a service or there has been a delay in providing one
  - (b) Where we have failed to follow our policies and procedures, or have been unfair and inconsistent in applying them
  - (c) Where we have failed to keep a resident informed through lack of, or insufficient information
  - (d) Where there has been inappropriate behaviour or attitude from a member of our staff
  - (e) Where a resident is in any way unhappy about the way in which we have delivered a service
- 4.4. Our complaints procedure includes two kinds of complaints:
- (a) **Quick Resolution:** Negative feedback where Outreach’s response is much quicker than in the case of a formal complaint (for example, when a resident contacts Outreach to arrange further repair). In these instances, Outreach will seek to resolve the issue at the point of call.
  - (b) **Formal complaints:** complaints which require some degree of investigation and / or follow-up and cannot therefore be resolved.
- 4.5. **Service Request:** A service request is where a resident asks Outreach to take action to put something right. Service requests are not complaints but, for example could be a first-time request for a service or information or explanation, or a report of anti-social behaviour. Service requests are recorded, monitored and reviewed regularly.
- 4.6. **Complaints Officer:** Outreach will have a dedicated “Complaints Officer”, whose role may or may not be dedicated to complaints handling. The Complaints Officer will:
- (a) Act sensitively and fairly;

- (b) Be trained to receive complaints and deal with distressed and upset residents;
- (c) Have access to staff at all levels to facilitate quick resolution of complaints; and
- (d) Have the authority and autonomy to act to resolve disputes quickly and fairly.

4.7. **Member Responsible for Complaints (MRC):** Member of the governing body who is nominated to have lead responsibility for complaints.

4.8. **Housing Ombudsman Service:** a service provided to all residents of registered providers of social housing which can assist residents throughout the life of a complaint and also be used if complaints should be escalated.

## 5 Approach

### Accountability

5.1. The Outreach Board of Directors accepts that they are ultimately responsible for ensuring compliance with this policy, and for providing leadership and control on matters relating to the handling and resolving of complaints. Responsibility for the day-to-day oversight and implementation of this policy is delegated to the housing manager.

### Complaints process

5.2. A resident should make a complaint via e-mail, by phone or in person to a member of Outreach Staff.

5.3. We will not consider the matter a complaint if:

- It is a service request;
- The issue giving rise to the complaint occurred, or the resident became aware of it, over twelve months before the complaint was raised;
- Where legal proceedings have been started, we will take steps to keep the complainant informed (e.g. by letter) but will not consider a new complaint; or
- Where matters have already been dealt with as part of the policy.

5.4. Where a complaint is refused or not considered as a complaint or escalated, the reason will be explained to the resident and details of the Housing Ombudsman Service provided. Each complaint will be considered on its own merit

- 5.5. A complaint may be submitted by a representative on behalf of a resident and it will be treated in line with this Complaints Policy. It will be confirmed with the resident that the representative has consent to act on their behalf.
- 5.6. Outreach will make reasonable adjustments to meet residents diverse needs to ensure their access to the complaints process and in the decision making in response to the complaint.
- 5.7. Normally a complaint must be received by Outreach within twelve months of the issue taking place, or of the complainant finding out that they have a reason to complain. In exceptional circumstances, Outreach may be able to accept a complaint after this time limit has passed – if a resident feels that the time limit should not apply or as part of the background to the complaint if this will help to resolve the issue for the resident, the resident will need to provide evidence to support this view so that a decision can be made.
- 5.8. Outreach follows a two-stage complaints process:

- (a) **Stage One (Complaint)** – Outreach will log and acknowledge the complaint and may contact the complainant to understand the nature of the complaint and / or to clarify outcomes being sought by the resident within 5 working days. We will refer to our 'complaints officer' who will investigate the complaint and provide a written response within 10 working days of receiving the complaint. We aim to fully resolve the complaint within 20 working days (where it is the responsibility of Outreach or one of our contractors). If we require longer, we will contact the resident to agree a new timescale.

If the resident's complaint is complex, then we will inform the resident of the expected timescale for a response. We aim for any extension to be no more than 10 working days without good reason. We will explain the reasons for extension to the resident.

- (b) **Stage Two (Complaint Review)** – If the resident is dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage One, Outreach will log and acknowledge the Stage Two complaint within 5 working days. The complaint will then reviewed by a board member. The complaint details and relevant correspondence will be carefully reviewed, and we will provide a written response within 20 working days detailing how we intend to resolve the complaint. If we require longer, we will contact the resident to agree a new timescale.

If the resident's complaint is complex, then we will inform the resident of the expected timescale for a response. We aim for any extension to be no more than 20 working days without good reason. We will explain the reasons for extension to the resident.

### Beyond the Two-Stage Process

- 5.9. If the resident has escalated their complaint through the stages detailed above and the issue has still not been resolved to the resident's satisfaction, the resident can contact the following:
- (a) **Designated Person** – A Designated Person can be a Councillor or MP of the resident's choice. The Designated Person will help resolve the complaint in one of two ways; they can try and resolve the complaint themselves, or they can refer a complaint directly to the Housing Ombudsman Service
  - (b) **Housing Ombudsman Service** – If a complaint has not been resolved to the resident's satisfaction eight weeks after the completion of the Outreach two-stage internal complaints process, you can contact the Housing Ombudsman Service directly, or the case can be referred to the Ombudsman by a Designated Person. The Housing Ombudsman Service can be accessed here: <http://www.housingombudsman.org.uk/home/>.

## 6 Complaints relating to Outreach contractors

- 6.1. This policy requires any contractor providing services on our behalf to:
- (a) Record and respond to resident and other resident complaints within the timescales detailed in our internal complaints process
  - (b) Providing Outreach with any information relating to a complaint upon request
  - (c) Assisting Outreach with investigating complaints where appropriate

## 7 How we learn from complaints

- 7.1. A complaint is seen as an opportunity to learn about what or how we need to improve our service at Outreach. We want to learn from every complaint and capture and share the things which we learn so that improvements can be made where necessary. In order to do this, we will:
- (a) Record and monitor every complaint, including details such as what the complaint was about, how it was resolved, how quickly it was resolved and what we learned
  - (b) Carry out regular reviews of complaints received in order to continuously look at how we can improve our handling of complaints and the services we provide.

- (c) Assess the percentage of complaints resolved at the first stage and second stage of the internal process
- (d) Assess the percentage of complaints escalated beyond the internal process.

7.2. The Board will also receive and review an annual complaints performance and service improvement report which will cover:

- A qualitative and quantitative analysis of Outreach's complaint handling performance in the year, including a summary of the types of complaints Outreach has refused to accept
- TSM feedback for complaints and performance
- Any findings of non-compliance with the Complaints Handling Code by the Housing Ombudsman Service
- the service improvements made as a result of the learning from complaints
- Outreach's actions following any annual report about its performance from the Ombudsman
- Outreach's actions following any other relevant reports or publications produced by the Ombudsman.

7.3. The Board will provide a response to the annual complaints performance and service improvement report which will be published on Outreach's website alongside it. The response will set out how the member responsible for complaints has scrutinised and challenged Outreach's Complaints Handling Code self-assessment and how any risks identified as part of the review have been addressed. Any lessons learnt from the self-assessment process and actions taken as a result will also be included.

## **8 Equality and Diversity**

8.1. Outreach recognises that there could be support, language or comprehension issues for a minority of residents and that these could contribute to the comprehension of this policy and associated messages. Outreach will work closely with residents to overcome these barriers and offer a range of ways to support accessibility (such as translation services).

## **9 Training and Promotion**

9.1. We will publicise this policy, including about the Housing Ombudsman's Complaints Handling Code to our staff, managing agents and tenants through:

- (a) Internal communication/Website; and
- (b) Policy briefings and training.

## 10 Monitoring and Compliance

- 10.1. This policy will be reviewed by Outreach at least every two years or in line with legislation and regulation changes and approved by the Outreach Board of Directors.
- 10.2. The log of complaints received will be reviewed by the Board at least annually in the complaints performance and service improvement report as per paragraph 7.2.

## 11 Regulatory code and legal framework

- 11.1. In observing this policy, Outreach will comply with all of the legal and regulatory expectations outlined in the following:
- (a) Regulator of Social Housing’s Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard
  - (b) Housing Ombudsman Service’s Complaints Handling Code 2024
  - (c) General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) (UK) 2018
  - (d) Housing Act 1996
  - (e) Localism Act 2011
  - (f) Equality Act 2010

## 12 Related policies

- 12.1. Prior to submitting a complaint, residents may wish to review the policy under which they feel their complaint falls (e.g. ASB Policy, Neighbourhoods Policy).

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