

Complaints Policy Statement

- We understand that we will not get it right all the time. We will treat complaints as an opportunity to improve our services or our communication.
- Our complaints handling will reflect the Complaint Handling Code, provided by the Housing Ombudsman.
- We recognise the rights of our residents to contact the Housing Ombudsman (info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk, 0300 1113000) at any point in the complaint handling process and we will seek to notify them of this wherever appropriate, usually by providing a copy of this Policy and Procedure.
- We will accept complaints through any of Elim's communication channels.
- We are happy to accept complaints from parties representing our customers, provided that the customer has given consent.
- Elim will make reasonable adjustments in line with the Equality Act 2010 to ensure that all residents have equality of access to this procedure.

Complaints Policy Scope

We 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*. The person complaining does not have to use the word 'complaint' for their concern to be treated as a complaint.

Although this Policy is directed primarily at our residents, we will accept complaints from any other service users, professional partners or members of the public and they will be handled under this procedure as far as possible. We are happy to accept complaints from representatives of our residents and will communicate this to all complainants. Where a resident expresses that they are struggling to manage the complaints process independently, we will signpost them to an independent agency for further support, typically this would be either the Citizen's Advice Bureau or the Housing Ombudsman.

There are some circumstances where we may choose not to use this procedure. These circumstances may also be reasons for declining to escalate a complaint:

- Where a resident is notifying us about a situation they wish to have rectified or where a complaint is solely focused on the action or behaviour of another resident or neighbour, this may be treated as a service request rather than a complaint.
- Where a complainant is abusive or threatening towards staff when making a complaint.
- Where a complainant makes repeated complaints about similar or linked issues where these issues are being or have already been investigated.

- Where an unreasonable period of time has elapsed between incidents to which a complaint refers and the complaint being made (this time period may be extended in some circumstances, e.g. where the resident has only become aware of an issue in the past 12 months).
- Where legal proceedings relating to the subject of the complaint have been entered into.
- Where a complainant is making unreasonable demands of staff time and resources that are out of proportion to the complaint.

In any case where a decision is taken not to respond to a complaint in accordance with this procedure, the complainant will be notified in writing with a full explanation provided. More information can be found in our Unacceptable Behaviour Policy.

The Complaint Handling Procedure

Stage One

Acknowledgement and prompt resolution

Once a complaint has been made, it will be acknowledged, defined and formally recorded within 5 working days of the complaint being received by Elim.

Within this period, we will try and respond to the complaint as early as possible and will provide a prompt resolution to the complaint where this is satisfactory to the resident.

The colleague receiving a complaint will attempt to resolve it in the first instance. They will do this by clarifying with the Complainant:

- a) The detail of their complaint, and
- b) How they would like to see the complaint resolved.

They will then attempt to offer an appropriate resolution. This may take the form of an explanation, apology or alternative action that is satisfactory to the complainant.

Where a complaint is not made directly to a colleague, e.g. when it is made to our 'info' email address or on social media, then the complaint will be passed to the most appropriate member of staff to acknowledge the complaint and offer a prompt resolution where appropriate.

When a complaint has been promptly resolved, and no further investigation is required, confirmation of the complaint and the resolution will be provided to the Complainant in writing. All information should be passed to the Complaints Officer who will ensure the complaint and satisfactory resolution is recorded.

This process should take no more than 5 working days. At any point in this process, the Complainant has the right to reject any proposed resolution and to request that the complaint is further investigated.

In some cases, the colleague receiving the complaint may choose to immediately proceed the complaint to further investigation. They will always explain the reason for doing this, which might typically be one of the following:

- a) They believe that the complaint involves matters that require a more formal investigation.
- b) The resolution requested cannot be agreed within the 5 working day time period.
- c) The complaint is about a colleague, or about the colleague receiving the complaint themselves.

Further investigation and stage 1 response – 10 Working Days

If further investigation is required, the complaint will be passed to the Complaints Officer. The Complaints Officer will conduct an investigation, usually involving further discussion with the Complainant, and will respond to the Complainant within 10-working days of the complaint being first acknowledged.

If an extension to this timescale for the stage 1 response is required, for example, due to the complexity of the complaint or the nature of the investigation required, we will clearly communicate the reason for this extension to the resident and agree a revised response date with them. A stage 1 extension should only be required in exceptional circumstances and should be no more than 10 working days.

If the Officer chooses not to uphold the complaint or if there are any findings that contradict the information provided, the Complainant will be given the opportunity to respond to these findings prior to the formal response being sent.

The formal response will be provided in writing and will contain:

- Confirmation of the complaint stage, the complaint definition and the desired resolution.
- Details of the investigation.
- A decision as to whether the complaint has been upheld or not and the reasons for this decision
- Any actions being taken as a result of the complaint and investigation
- The detail of any further remedy offered to put things right
- Details of how the Complainant can escalate the complaint to stage 2 if they are not satisfied with the stage 2 response

If the Complainant is not satisfied with the outcome, then they would follow the escalation instructions within 10 working days and proceed to Stage 2.

Stage 2:

Escalation and stage 2 response – 20 working days

Once a request for stage 2 consideration has been made, it will be acknowledged, defined and formally recorded within 5 working days of the escalation request being received.

Once a complaint has been escalated, it will be passed to a member of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and a deadline will be provided for a final response. This deadline will be no more than 20 working days from the date of escalation.

The SLT Manager will then conduct a review of the handling of the complaint, the investigation and the outcome. The purpose of the review will be to determine the following:

- Whether the stage 1 investigation was thorough and proportionate to the complaint.
- Whether the decision to uphold or not uphold the complaint was correct with reference to Elim's policies and procedures.
- Whether the outcome of the stage 1 appropriately reflected the findings of the investigation.

The formal response will be provided in writing and will contain:

- Confirmation of the complaint stage, the complaint definition and the desired resolution.
- Details of the investigation.
- A decision as to whether the complaint has been upheld or not and the reasons for this decision
- Any further actions being taken as a result of the complaint and investigation
- The detail of any further remedy offered to put things right
- Details of how the Complainant can escalate the complaint to the Ombudsman Service if they remain dissatisfied.

If an extension to this timescale for the stage 2 response is required, for example, due to the complexity of the complaint or the nature of the investigation required, we will clearly communicate the reason for this extension to the resident and agree a revised response date with them. A stage 2 extension should only be required in exceptional circumstances and should be no more than 20 working days.

If the Complainant remains dissatisfied with the outcome of their escalated complaint, they can raise the complaint with the Housing Ombudsman. The Ombudsman can be contacted by phone on 0300 1113000 or through their website: <https://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/>.

Complaint Definition

It benefits both the Complainant and the colleague handling the complaint to have clarity throughout all stages of the complaint handling process. We will typically seek to clarify the detail of a complaint and desired resolution as early as possible in the process and confirm this in writing with the Complainant.

We recognise that additional complaints may arise during the complaints process. Where these are related to the initial complaint and raised before the response is issued to the Complainant, we will ensure these issues are considered and incorporated into the stage one response.

If the detail and desired resolution of a complaint is changing frequently throughout the process or if unrelated matters are introduced, then the Complainant may be advised that the timescales of the complaint handling process for their complaint will be revised or that they should submit another, separate complaint.

Actions arising from Complaints

Where action has been identified as outstanding or where new actions have been proposed as part of a complaint response, it will be the responsibility of the member of staff who has identified or proposed these actions to ensure that these actions are tracked and completed within an appropriate timeframe.

For the avoidance of doubt, the complaint responses will be provided to the resident when the answer to the complaint is known, not when the outstanding actions required to address the issue are completed.

Updates on the progress of any outstanding actions must be provided to the resident after the complaint response has been provided.

Complaints Handling Review and Monitoring

Monitoring complaints received and our complaint handling processes enable us to identify areas for improvement within our service delivery and help to ensure accountability in our response to complaints.

We record the following performance indicators in relation to our complaints handling:

- a) Complaints resolved at or before Stage 1 (target 90%) – reported quarterly
- b) Customer satisfaction with the complaint handling process - reported six monthly.

Both these indicators are reported to the Board Customer Services Committee (CSC) on a quarterly basis. We will also report to Customer Services Committee on the impact of complaints, and will share learning with our customers through 'You said, we did' reports on our website.

We self-assess annually against the Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code and will publish each annual self-assessment on our website, along with the impact of complaints.

Complaints Communication and Publicity

We will make our customers aware of this Policy at sign up, through our website and via social media and customer newsletters throughout the year.

We will also ensure that residents are provided with information about the Ombudsman and the Ombudsman's Code at least annually.

We will publish an annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report which will provide a review of all the complaints we have received within the financial year. This will include information on the number of complaints resolved at Stage 1, the number resolved within the timescales detailed above, the proportion of complaints that have been upheld and the learning we have taken from the complaints received in the year. We will also ensure any findings from the Ombudsman are included in this report.

This report will be accessible on our website, along with our annual self-assessment against the Complaints Handling Code