

JUNE 2024

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, 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

Once a complaint has been made, it will be responded to within 2 working days. 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 a resolution that is satisfactory to the complainant. This process should take no more than 5 working days and at any point in this process, the Complainant has the right to request that the complaint is handled at Stage 1 of this Procedure (see below).

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 provide an initial response and a quick resolution.

In some cases, the colleague receiving the complaint may choose to proceed the complaint to Stage 1 immediately. 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 provided within the 5 working day time period.
- c) The complaint is about a colleague, or about the colleague receiving the complaint themselves.

When a complaint has been resolved at the Quick Resolution stage, confirmation of the complaint and the resolution will be provided to the Complainant in writing.

It benefits both the Complainant and the colleague handling the complaint to have clarity throughout these 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. Whilst not set in stone throughout the Complaint process, 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.

Stage 1

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 acknowledged. 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:

- Further confirmation of the complaint and the desired resolution.
- Details of the investigation.
- A decision as to whether the complaint has been upheld or not.
- Any actions being taken as a result of the complaint and investigation.
- Details of how the Complainant can escalate the complaint if they are not satisfied.

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

Once a complaint has been escalated, it will be passed to a member of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT). The escalation will be acknowledged in writing within 2-working days of receipt and a deadline – no more than 20-working days from the date of escalation – provided for a final response.

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 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 appropriately reflected the findings of the investigation.

The outcome of this review will be communicated in writing by the deadline provided.

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/>.

Complaints Policy 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%)
- b) Customer satisfaction with the complaint handling process.

Both these indicators are reported to the Board People and Culture Committee (PAC) on a quarterly basis. We will also report to PAC and through our website quarterly on the impact of complaints.

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, our customer portal and 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 review of complaints, providing 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 impact of the complaints received in the year. This review will feature in our organisational Annual Review and will be accessible on our website.