

## **COMPLAINTS, SUGGESTIONS AND COMPLIMENTS POLICY AND PROCEDURE**

### **Policy**

Changing Lives Housing Trust understands complaints to be an expression of dissatisfaction requiring a response; communicated verbally, electronically, or in writing. Complaints may be made by any clients, their family members, or advocates acting on their behalf with their consent or in their best interests

Changing Lives Housing Trust takes complaints seriously. We will aim to put things right that have gone wrong and learn lessons to avoid the problem happening again. This policy sets out the framework for how Changing Lives Housing Trust will achieve this. The detail of how Changing Lives Housing Trust will do this will be found in the associated procedures

Changing Lives Housing Trust will comply with legislation, national guidelines, regulation and best practice when managing complaints and suggestions. A systematic approach will be taken with all aspects of complaints and suggestions, in line with the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code.

**In Appendix A we have included the Housing Ombudsman Complaints Code requirements. We are actively working to comply with the code and will incorporate all the code's requirements into our practice. We will be fully compliant by June 2025.**

Complaints or concerns by staff will be addressed via the grievance process if the complaint or concerns relates to them individually, or via the Whistleblowing process where a protected disclosure is made

Although we are not a CQC regulated provider, Changing Lives Housing Trust will follow good practice in respect of the Duty of Candour.

Changing Lives Housing Trust will ensure that the complaints, suggestions and compliments process at Changing Lives Housing Trust is fair and transparent and does not discriminate directly or indirectly because of the following:

1. Age
2. Being or becoming a transsexual/transgender person
3. Being married or in a civil partnership
4. Being pregnant or on maternity leave
5. Disability
6. Race (including colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin)
7. Religion, belief or lack of religion/belief
8. Sex
9. Sexual orientation

The complainant will feel free to complain without fear of reprisals and will be treated with courtesy, respect and compassion. Changing Lives Housing Trust will ensure that the process of how to make a complaint and the feedback is provided in a way that meets the Accessible Information Standards and is in a format that the client can understand.

### **Seeking Views and Engaging with Clients**

Changing Lives Housing Trust will seek out opportunities to obtain feedback from clients and stakeholders. Changing Lives Housing Trust will act with sensitivity, integrity and professionalism by treating individuals who do complain or raise a suggestion with compassion, courtesy and respect. The service will protect the client's right to confidentiality. Changing Lives Housing Trust will ensure that alternative methods of communication are available so that the complaints and suggestions procedures are accessible for Clients who experience difficulties with communication or whose first language is not English.

Staff will undertake training on how to manage complaints in line with their role and responsibilities.

Changing Lives Housing Trust understands that it can be difficult to separate a complaint from a concern, therefore, Changing Lives Housing Trust will follow this policy when any dissatisfaction arises with the service.

A full record will be held of all complaints received regardless of the level of seriousness and means of communication. This approach allows an open and transparent culture around raising concerns in the earliest stage to allow resolution. A record of the complaint will also be held in the Client's support file and reported in line with contractual or regulatory requirements.

### **Safeguarding Concerns**

Where a complaint or concern is raised that relates to a Client being harmed or is likely to be harmed, Changing Lives Housing Trust will follow its safeguarding policies in addition to the complaints procedures, seeking advice and guidance from boroughs' Safeguarding Adults Teams and escalating concerns in line with boroughs' and pan-London Safeguarding Policies and Procedures .

## **Roles and Responsibilities All Staff**

It is acknowledged that all staff working within Changing Lives Housing Trust may be presented with an individual wishing to raise a concern or complaint at any time; therefore, staff need to be able to manage this in a sensitive, structured and timely manner. To do this, staff will:

1. Be trained on induction and as a routine measure to ensure knowledge is embedded and refreshed around the complaints procedure
2. Have access to the Complaints, Suggestions and Compliments Policy and Procedure
3. Be provided with the opportunity to reflect and learn from complaints as a means of developing and driving quality care
4. Appreciate that any feedback from Clients or their representatives that is of concern needs immediate resolution, where possible, to their satisfaction. Care Plans will be updated to reflect the planned changes to support and the Team Leader informed of the feedback. Failing to do this may result in a complaint.
5. Be clearly advised that on presentation of a complaint, swift escalation to management is necessary and purposefully withholding or concealing of concerns expressed by Clients or their representatives may lead to disciplinary action

## **Management Team at Changing Lives Housing Trust**

The management team at Changing Lives Housing Trust is responsible for ensuring compliance with this policy, regulations, improvement planning and having arrangements in place to provide relevant reports and information regarding complaints

CEO Max Kawaters is the main point of contact for the receipt, investigation and management of complaints within Changing Lives Housing Trust. However, this may be delegated to a senior member of staff within Changing Lives Housing Trust who holds the experience, knowledge and competence to investigate and manage complaints

Changing Lives Housing Trust will ensure the procedure for raising a complaint is accessible and displayed prominently in Changing Lives Housing Trust premises, on the website of Changing Lives Housing Trust and within the Client information and guides. Alternative languages and formats will be available on request.

## **Compliments and Suggestions**

Changing Lives Housing Trust welcomes compliments and suggestions and recognises their importance in celebrating and recognising the success of our service and opportunities for improvement. We will engage with a wide range of stakeholders in addition to Clients to support service development and improvement. We will share feedback with our staff.

## **One Complaint, One Response**

Changing Lives Housing Trust will follow Housing Ombudsman best practice and where Clients are receiving services for more than one organisation, we will ensure they can make a complaint to anyone and be provided with a single response following a joint investigation.

## **Raising Complaints**

A complaint can be received by Changing Lives Housing Trust either verbally or in writing and can be made by:

1. Clients
2. Someone acting on behalf of a Client and with their written consent, e.g. an advocate, relative, Member of Parliament
3. Someone acting on behalf of a Client who is unable to represent his or her own interests, provided this does not conflict with the Client's right to confidentiality or a previously expressed wish of the Client

Changing Lives Housing Trust will ensure that Clients are given information on how to make a complaint and the process once a complaint has been made, including any agreed timescales.

## **Time Limits for Submitting a Complaint**

Complaints should be submitted within 12 months of the incident or concern arising. The time limit, however, can and should be waived, if:

It is still practical and possible to investigate the complaint (the records still exist and the individuals concerned are still available to be questioned, etc.) and

The complainant can demonstrate reasonable cause for delay in making the complaint It is at the discretion of the manager of the service if the time limit can be set aside.

## **Changing Lives Housing Trust (CLHT) Complaints Procedure**

1. Complaints should first be made to your keyworker, but you can also complain via email to [support@clht.org](mailto:support@clht.org) or 0203 343 4101
2. Staff will thank the client for bringing the complaint to our attention and explain the complaints process as described in the procedure steps.
3. When a complaint is raised to staff, staff will try to resolve it immediately to the satisfaction of the complainant.
4. Staff will report the complaint to the most senior member of staff on duty and the complaint will be logged.
5. Formal acknowledgement of all complaints received (whether verbal or written) will be sent within 3 working days to the complainant. This could be via letter or email. CLHT will have a local system in place to manage out-of-hours and weekend complaints received. The acknowledgement will include:
  - An invitation to meet and discuss the complaint
  - Who will be investigating the complaint

- How the investigation will be handled - the response should state what the investigation will be focussed on
  - A time limit for the investigation to be concluded. This should be 10 days; however, some cases may take longer and the complainant will be made aware of this
  - The complaints procedure and contact details of bodies that can be accessed in the event of dissatisfaction with the outcome of the investigation
6. Following a full investigation, a response letter will be sent and this will include the following:
- A summary of the issue from the complainant's point of view
  - Details of the evidence and sources consulted to investigate the issue fully and fairly
  - A presentation of the findings for each issue clearly and concisely described
  - A conclusion, stating clearly whether the issue is "upheld", "partially upheld" or "not upheld"; unless it is ineligible, in which case the reason for this will be given, e.g. out of time or out of jurisdiction
  - An explanation of the outcome and whether any remedial action or learning points arise from the investigation of that issue
  - An apology where the issue is upheld and shortcomings or failings have been found
  - The complainant's rights if not satisfied with the outcome to refer to the Housing Ombudsman
  - A signature from the responsible individual or sent by email in their name

The complaint will be closed once confirmation has been received that there is satisfaction with the outcome. In the event of dissatisfaction, Changing Lives Housing Trust will support the complainant to access further support.

### **The Complaints Log**

A record will be held of all complaints raised and contain the following information:

1. Each complaint received
2. Subject matter and outcome
3. Details of any reason for delay where investigations took longer than the agreed response period
4. The date the report of outcome was sent to the complainant

Where complaints relate to a Client, a copy of the complaint will be held in their care records so that the Client can reflect on the recommendations.

Where complaints are raised by telephone, the log will include the date and time of the call and this will be followed up with written confirmation of the areas discussed.

Where a complaint indicates the potential abuse of Clients, safeguarding policies will be followed as per local authority expectation and necessary notifications made to the regulatory

body. Where support is commissioned by Greenwich, their reporting procedure for notifying them of complaints will be followed.

Where complaints are to be shared as part of learning, the complaint will be anonymised so there is no identifiable Client information and in line with UK GDPR and data protection law.

## **Investigations**

All investigations will be managed by using the following approach:

1. Investigating the fact
2. Assessing evidence
3. Review of records
4. Interviewing those involved

Where necessary, advice and support will be sourced via senior managers within Changing Lives Housing Trust. The complaint must be investigated by a member of staff with the knowledge, experience and seniority to undertake the investigation robustly.

Confidentiality of information will be considered at all times and staff will adhere to the confidentiality policies and relevant codes of practice.

If an investigation of a complaint results in disciplinary action of staff within Changing Lives Housing Trust, the complaint will continue to its conclusion. The complainant will be informed that the investigation has led to disciplinary process, but the details of the outcome or ongoing investigation will remain confidential.

## **Unresolved Complaints**

There are many bodies that can support or will need to be informed of unresolved complaints:

### **1. The Housing Ombudsman**

Website: <https://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/residents/when-to-get-help-from-thehousing-ombudsman/>

You can use the online form to bring a complaint to this Service about your landlord if you are a resident of a landlord that is a member of the Housing Ombudsman Scheme, or somebody with authority to act on behalf of a resident.

<https://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/residents/bring-your-complaint-to-the-housingombudsman/>

Email: [casework@housing-ombudsman.org.uk](mailto:casework@housing-ombudsman.org.uk) ; [info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk](mailto:info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk)

Alternatively, you can use phone line during the below hours:

Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday 9am - 5pm

Thursday 9am - 3.30pm

Lines are closed for staff training every Thursday from 3.30pm to 5pm.

Phone: 0300 111 3000

Write to:

Housing Ombudsman Service , PO Box 1484, Unit D, Preston, PR2 0ET

## 2. Local Authority Complaints Teams

Individuals have the right to raise concerns and complaints about our services with the relevant Council. Individuals can make a complaint about organisations who provide services on the Council's behalf. The contact details for the Local Authority Complaints Team are:

### **Bexley:**

- email [complaints@bexley.gov.uk](mailto:complaints@bexley.gov.uk) (please ensure you quote your address and telephone number to ensure we can handle your complaint appropriately)
- by letter to The Complaints Team, London Borough of Bexley, 2 Watling Street, Bexleyheath, DA6 7AT
- telephone 020 8303 7777
- in person at the Civic Offices

### **Dartford:** <https://www.dartford.gov.uk/complaints/complain>

- You can call the Customer Services on 01322 343434 and ask for a complaint form to be sent to you.
- Please send your complaint form or complaint letter to the following address:  
Corporate Complaints Officer, Dartford Borough Council, Civic Centre, Home Gardens, Dartford, Kent, DA1 1DR
- You can call Customer Services on 01322 343434 to make a complaint. We welcome calls via [Relay UK](#).
- You can email [complaints@dartford.gov.uk](mailto:complaints@dartford.gov.uk) to make a complaint

### **Greenwich:**

[https://www.royalgreenwich.gov.uk/info/200161/complaints/548/complaints\\_about\\_the\\_royal\\_borough\\_of\\_greenwich](https://www.royalgreenwich.gov.uk/info/200161/complaints/548/complaints_about_the_royal_borough_of_greenwich)

Contact Customer Services on 020 8854 8888.

In person

Come to one of our service centres in Woolwich or Eltham.

The Woolwich Centre  
35 Wellington Street,  
London SE18 6HQ

The Eltham Centre  
2 Archery Road, London  
SE9 1HA

**Croydon:**

<https://www.croydon.gov.uk/council-and-elections/make-comment-or-complaint-andhave-your-say/comments-and-complaints-procedures/making-complaint>

Complaints can also be submitted in writing, by email, or by telephone to:

Complaints Resolutions Team

7th Floor, Zone D

Bernard Weatherill House

8 Mint Walk

Croydon

CR0 1EA

Phone: 020 8726 6000 ext 44010

Email: [complaints@croydon.gov.uk](mailto:complaints@croydon.gov.uk)

**Merton:**

<https://www.merton.gov.uk/council-and-local-democracy/complaintscomments/complaints/make-complaint>

## Professional Bodies

If a complaint involves the serious misconduct of a housing professional, their relevant professional body can be informed and this is determined on an individual case basis in discussion with the CEO.

For any external bodies managing complaints Changing Lives Housing Trust will work with the external body providing information as requested within any agreed timescales expected.

## **Compliments**

Receiving compliments is an opportunity to celebrate and recognise success. Changing Lives Housing Trust will ensure that:

1. All compliments are shared with staff and displayed in a public area to highlight good practice
2. Compliments are anonymised or permission sought before displaying
3. Numbers of compliments received are logged as part of a quality assurance programme
4. Verbal positive feedback from Clients and relatives is also deemed as compliments and will be recorded and shared with colleagues
5. Compliments form a core agenda item at staff, Client and relative meetings

## **Suggestions**

Suggestions can be made verbally or in writing and generally are in response to seeking a means of changing practice for the better.

Suggestions are not complaints, but in some circumstances, if they are not considered or actioned they could lead to a complaint

When suggestions are raised in meeting or as part of a conversation, these will be documented and then outcomes of such suggestion recorded to show consideration

Staff will be encouraged to share their suggestions or suggestions received by relatives and Clients to managers

Max Kawaters will consider implementing a suggestions system to encourage comments from Clients, staff, and visitors

## **Audit and Evaluation**

Changing Lives Housing Trust will monitor, review and analyse all information received about the service as a means of continuously reviewing performance, quality and safety.

Changing Lives Housing Trust will also:

1. Share themes and trends with Project Workers working for Changing Lives Housing Trust
2. Ensure that staff are trained to deal with complaints and understand the procedure for managing complaints

## **Anonymous Complaints**

Anonymous complaints will be investigated in the same way as named complaints. They will be logged and any corrective action necessary will be taken and also logged.

## **One Complaint, One Response**

Where more than one organisation is involved in the Client's support, they or their representative will be able to complain to any of them and Changing Lives Housing Trust will contact the other organisations, carry out a joint investigation and provide a single joint response. Clients should not have to contact each organisation separately.

If someone complains and Changing Lives Housing Trust is not responsible for the care or service complained about, rather than turning them away, Changing Lives Housing Trust will share the concerns with the correct organisation(s). You will need the individual's permission to do this. If the person prefers that their complaint is not shared with another organisation (or organisations), Changing Lives Housing Trust will signpost them to the right organisation instead and provide the person with their contact details. Changing Lives Housing Trust will follow LGO guidance for managing this.

All efforts will be made by Max Kawaters to resolve all complaints within Changing Lives Housing Trust. If a Client does not wish to raise a complaint directly to management within Changing Lives Housing Trust in the first instance, staff will try to sensitively establish their reasons why and aim to resolve and address any concerns that present.

Decisions to raise complaints outside of Changing Lives Housing Trust will be fully respected and the Client will be supported to raise their complaint to the commissioner of the service or to seek the support of an independent advocate or representative. Staff can also refer to section 5.6 for a further list of organisations that can be accessed.

Clients can also be signposted to the Citizens advice guidance.

## **Vexatious Complaints**

Occasionally, Changing Lives Housing Trust may receive complaints that are vexatious in that they cause considerable disruption to the work at Changing Lives Housing Trust, disproportionate cost and time to handle, and impact the wellbeing of staff (because of the way the complaint is made or because of its repetitive nature).

Changing Lives Housing Trust will ensure that it meets the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 to make 'reasonable adjustments' for disabled Clients. In some circumstances, Clients may have a disability that makes it difficult for them to either express themselves or communicate clearly and/or appropriately. Where there is an indication that this may be the case, Changing Lives Housing Trust will consider the needs and circumstances of the Client or complainant in the first instance and use this information to inform any decisions that are made.

Where appropriate, Changing Lives Housing Trust will consider complaints to be vexatious, but would not label an individual complainant as vexatious. Even if Changing Lives Housing Trust decides that an individual's complaint about the service is vexatious, that does not preclude that person from making a formal complaint. Changing Lives Housing Trust would still consider any such complaints in line with the usual procedures, as outlined in this policy.

To help decide whether a complaint is vexatious, Changing Lives Housing Trust will consider the full history and context of interactions with the individual making the complaint, and will look at both the nature of the complaint and the manner in which it is made. The particular issues that will inform a decision will include whether:

1. The primary purpose and/or effect of the complaint is to disturb, disrupt and or/pressurise Changing Lives Housing Trust, its staff or an individual member of staff
2. The primary purpose and/or effect of the manner in which the complaint is made is to disturb, disrupt and or/pressurise the Changing Lives Housing Trust, its staff or an individual member of staff
3. The complaint is otherwise clearly unreasonable

If at any point in the handling of a complaint a member of staff believes it meets the criteria to be deemed vexatious, it must be referred to the Registered Manager with a summary of why it is thought to be vexatious.

Max Kawaters will consider the complaint, seek external advice if appropriate, and will either declare the complaint as being vexatious or not. Where a complaint is not deemed to be vexatious, it will be returned to the appropriate point in the complaints handling process.

If a complaint is deemed to be vexatious, the Registered Manager will respond directly to the complainant explaining why it is thought to be so and will explain that the complaint will be closed with no further action. The Registered Manager will also consider if the making of a vexatious complaint also requires the application of a restriction on communication following unreasonable behaviour.

The decision to declare a complaint as vexatious will be recorded in the complaints register for future reference.

Any declaration that refers to the specific complaint being vexatious and any further complaints from the same individual will still be considered.

If any individual wishes to challenge a decision made in relation to this policy, and all attempts to resolve the complaint locally have been unsuccessful, details of the Complaints Team of the Housing Ombudsman will be shared with the complainant.

Updated: 24/01/2025

Review date: 27/06/2025

## Section 1: Definition of a complaint

1.2 A complaint must be defined as:

‘an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the landlord, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting a resident or group of residents.’

1.3 A resident does not have to use the word ‘complaint’ for it to be treated as such. Whenever a resident expresses dissatisfaction landlords must give them the choice to make complaint. A complaint that is submitted via a third party or representative must be handled in line with the landlord’s complaints policy.

1.4 Landlords must recognise the difference between a service request and a complaint. This must be set out in their complaints policy. A service request is a request from a resident 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.

1.5 A complaint must be raised when the resident 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 resident complains.

1.6 An expression of dissatisfaction with services made through a survey is not defined as a complaint, though wherever possible, the person completing the survey should be made aware of how they can pursue a complaint if they wish to. Where landlords ask for wider feedback about their services, they also must provide details of how residents can complain.

## Section 2: Exclusions

2.1 Landlords must accept a complaint unless there is a valid reason not to do so. If landlords decide not to accept a complaint they must be able to evidence their reasoning. Each complaint must be considered on its own merits

2.2 A complaints policy must set out the circumstances in which a matter will not be considered as a complaint or escalated, and these circumstances must be fair and reasonable to residents. Acceptable exclusions include:

- 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.

2.3 Landlords must accept complaints referred to them within 12 months of the issue occurring or the resident becoming aware of the issue, unless they are excluded on other grounds. Landlords must consider whether to apply discretion to accept complaints made outside this time limit where there are good reasons to do so.

2.4 If a landlord decides not to accept a complaint, an explanation must 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. If the Ombudsman does not agree that the exclusion has been fairly applied, the Ombudsman may tell the landlord to take on the complaint.

2.5 Landlords must not take a blanket approach to excluding complaints; they must consider the individual circumstances of each complaint.

### **Section 3: Accessibility and Awareness**

3.1 Landlords must make it easy for residents to complain by providing different channels through which they can make a complaint. Landlords must consider their duties under the Equality Act 2010 and anticipate the needs and reasonable adjustments of residents who may need to access the complaints process.

3.2 Residents must be able to raise their complaints in any way and with any member of staff. All staff must be aware of the complaints process and be able to pass details of the complaint to the appropriate person within the landlord.

3.3 High volumes of complaints must not be seen as a negative, as they can be indicative of a well-publicised and accessible complaints process. Low complaint volumes are potentially a sign that residents are unable to complain.

3.4 Landlords must make their complaint policy available in a clear and accessible format for all residents. This will detail the two stage process, what will happen at each stage, and the timeframes for responding. The policy must also be published on the landlord's website.

3.5 The policy must explain how the landlord will publicise details of the complaints policy, including information about the Ombudsman and this Code.

3.6 Landlords must give residents the opportunity to have a representative deal with their complaint on their behalf, and to be represented or accompanied at any meeting with the landlord.

3.7 Landlords must provide residents with information on their right to access the Ombudsman service and how the individual can engage with the Ombudsman about their complaint.

#### **Section 4: Complaint Handling Staff**

4.1 Landlords must have a person or team assigned to take responsibility for complaint handling, including liaison with the Ombudsman and ensuring complaints are reported to the governing body (or equivalent). This Code will refer to that person or team as the 'complaints officer'. This role may be in addition to other duties.

4.2 The complaints officer must have access to staff at all levels to facilitate the prompt resolution of complaints. They must also have the authority and autonomy to act to resolve disputes promptly and fairly.

4.3 Landlords are expected to prioritise complaint handling and a culture of learning from complaints. All relevant staff must be suitably trained in the importance of complaint handling. It is important that complaints are seen as a core service and must be resourced to handle complaints effectively

#### **Section 5: The Complaint Handling Process**

5.1 Landlords must have a single policy in place for dealing with complaints covered by this Code. Residents must not be treated differently if they complain.

5.2 The early and local resolution of issues between landlords and residents is key to effective complaint handling. It is not appropriate to have extra named stages (such as 'stage 0' or 'informal complaint') as this causes unnecessary confusion.

5.3 A process with more than two stages is not acceptable under any circumstances as this will make the complaint process unduly long and delay access to the Ombudsman.

5.4 Where a landlord's complaint response is handled by a third party (e.g. a contractor or independent adjudicator) at any stage, it must form part of the two stage complaints process set out in this Code. Residents must not be expected to go through two complaints processes.

5.5 Landlords are responsible for ensuring that any third parties handle complaints in line with the Code.

5.6 When a complaint is logged at Stage 1 or escalated to Stage 2, landlords must set out their understanding of the complaint and the outcomes the resident is seeking. The Code will refer to this as "the complaint definition". If any aspect of the complaint is unclear, the resident must be asked for clarification.

5.7 When a complaint is acknowledged at either stage, landlords must be clear which aspects of the complaint they are, and are not, responsible for and clarify any areas where this is not clear.

5.8 At each stage of the complaints process, complaint handlers must:

- a. deal with complaints on their merits, act independently, and have an open mind;
- b. give the resident a fair chance to set out their position;
- c. take measures to address any actual or perceived conflict of interest; and
- d. consider all relevant information and evidence carefully.

5.9 Where a response to a complaint will fall outside the timescales set out in this Code, the landlord must agree with the resident suitable intervals for keeping them informed about their complaint.

5.10 Landlords must make reasonable adjustments for residents where appropriate under the Equality Act 2010. Landlords must keep a record of any reasonable adjustments agreed, as well as a record of any disabilities a resident has disclosed. Any agreed reasonable adjustments must be kept under active review.

5.11 Landlords must not refuse to escalate a complaint through all stages of the complaints procedure unless it has valid reasons to do so. Landlords must clearly set out these reasons, and they must comply with the provisions set out in section 2 of this Code.

5.12 A full record must be kept of the complaint, and the outcomes at each stage. This must include the original complaint and the date received, all correspondence with the resident, correspondence with other parties, and any relevant supporting documentation such as reports or surveys.

5.13 Landlords must have processes in place to ensure a complaint can be remedied at any stage of its complaints process. Landlords must ensure appropriate remedies can be provided at any stage of the complaints process without the need for escalation.

5.14 Landlords must have policies and procedures in place for managing unacceptable behaviour from residents and/or their representatives. Landlords must be able to evidence reasons for putting any restrictions in place and must keep restrictions under regular review.

5.15 Any restrictions placed on contact due to unacceptable behaviour must be proportionate and demonstrate regard for the provisions of the Equality Act 2010.

## **Section 6: Complaints Stages**

### Stage 1

6.1 Landlords must have processes in place to consider which complaints can be responded to as early as possible, and which require further investigation. Landlords must consider factors such as the complexity of the complaint and whether the resident is vulnerable or at risk. Most stage 1 complaints can be resolved promptly, and an explanation, apology or resolution provided to the resident.

6.2 Complaints must be acknowledged, defined and logged at stage 1 of the complaints procedure within five working days of the complaint being received.

6.3 Landlords must issue a full response to stage 1 complaints within 10 working days of the complaint being acknowledged.

6.4 Landlords must decide whether an extension to this timescale is needed when considering the complexity of the complaint and then inform the resident of the expected timescale for response. Any extension must be no more than 10 working days without good reason, and the reason(s) must be clearly explained to the resident.

6.5 When an organisation informs a resident about an extension to these timescales, they must be provided with the contact details of the Ombudsman.

6.6 A complaint response must 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. Outstanding actions must still be tracked and actioned promptly with appropriate updates provided to the resident.

6.7 Landlords must address all points raised in the complaint definition and provide clear reasons for any decisions, referencing the relevant policy, law and good practice where appropriate.

6.8 Where residents raise additional complaints during the investigation, these must be incorporated into the stage 1 response if they are related and the stage 1 response has not been issued. Where the stage 1 response has been issued, the new issues are unrelated to the issues already being investigated or it would unreasonably delay the response, the new issues must be logged as a new complaint.

6.9 Landlords must confirm the following in writing to the resident at the completion of stage 1 in clear, plain language:

- a. the complaint stage;
- b. the complaint definition;
- c. the decision on the complaint;
- d. the reasons for any decisions made;
- e. the details of any remedy offered to put things right;
- f. details of any outstanding actions; and

- g. details of how to escalate the matter to stage 2 if the individual is not satisfied with the response.

## Stage 2

### Code provision      Code requirement

6.10 If all or part of the complaint is not resolved to the resident's satisfaction at stage 1, it must be progressed to stage 2 of the landlord's procedure. Stage 2 is the landlord's final response.

6.11 Requests for stage 2 must be acknowledged, defined and logged at stage 2 of the complaints procedure within five working days of the escalation request being received.

6.12 Residents must not be required to explain their reasons for requesting a stage 2 consideration. Landlords are expected to make reasonable efforts to understand why a resident remains unhappy as part of its stage 2 response.

6.13 The person considering the complaint at stage 2 must not be the same person that considered the complaint at stage 1.

6.14 Landlords must issue a final response to the stage 2 within 20 working days of the complaint being acknowledged.

6.15 Landlords must decide whether an extension to this timescale is needed when considering the complexity of the complaint and then inform the resident of the expected timescale for response. Any extension must be no more than 20 working days without good reason, and the reason(s) must be clearly explained to the resident.

6.16 When an organisation informs a resident about an extension to these timescales, they must be provided with the contact details of the Ombudsman.

6.17 A complaint response must 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. Outstanding actions must still be tracked and actioned promptly with appropriate updates provided to the resident.

6.18 Landlords must address all points raised in the complaint definition and provide clear reasons for any decisions, referencing the relevant policy, law and good practice where appropriate.

6.19 Landlords must confirm the following in writing to the resident at the completion of stage 2 in clear, plain language:

- a. the complaint stage;

- b. the complaint definition;
- c. the decision on the complaint;
- d. the reasons for any decisions made;
- e. the details of any remedy offered to put things right;
- f. details of any outstanding actions; and
- g. details of how to escalate the matter to the Ombudsman Service if the individual remains dissatisfied.

6.20 Stage 2 is the landlord's final response and must involve all suitable staff members needed to issue such a response.

## Section 7: Putting things right

7.1 Where something has gone wrong a landlord must acknowledge this and set out the actions it has already taken, or intends to take, to put things right. These can include:

- Apologising;
- Acknowledging where things have gone wrong;
- Providing an explanation, assistance or reasons;
- Taking action if there has been delay;
- Reconsidering or changing a decision;
- Amending a record or adding a correction or addendum;
- Providing a financial remedy;
- Changing policies, procedures or practices.

7.2 Any remedy offered must reflect the impact on the resident as a result of any fault identified.

7.3 The remedy offer must clearly set out what will happen and by when, in agreement with the resident where appropriate. Any remedy proposed must be followed through to completion.

7.4 Landlords must take account of the guidance issued by the Ombudsman when deciding on appropriate remedies.

## Section 8: Putting things right

8.1 Landlords must produce an annual complaints performance and service improvement report for scrutiny and challenge, which must include:

- a. the annual self-assessment against this Code to ensure their complaint handling policy remains in line with its requirements.
- b. a qualitative and quantitative analysis of the landlord's complaint handling performance. This must also include a summary of the types of complaints the landlord has refused to accept;
- c. any findings of non-compliance with this Code by the Ombudsman;
- d. the service improvements made as a result of the learning from complaints;
- e. any annual report about the landlord's performance from the Ombudsman; and
- f. any other relevant reports or publications produced by the Ombudsman in relation to the work of the landlord.

8.2 The annual complaints performance and service improvement report must be reported to the landlord's governing body (or equivalent) and published on the on the section of its website relating to complaints. The governing body's response to the report must be published alongside this.

8.3 Landlords must also carry out a self-assessment following a significant restructure, merger and/or change in procedures.

8.4 Landlords may be asked to review and update the self-assessment following an Ombudsman investigation.

8.5 If a landlord is unable to comply with the Code due to exceptional circumstances, such as a cyber incident, they must inform the Ombudsman, provide information to residents who may be affected, and publish this on their website Landlords must provide a timescale for returning to compliance with the Code.

## Section 9: Scrutiny & oversight: continuous learning and improvement

9.1 Landlords must look beyond the circumstances of the individual complaint and consider whether service improvements can be made as a result of any learning from the complaint.

9.2 A positive complaint handling culture is integral to the effectiveness with which landlords resolve disputes. Landlords must use complaints as a source of intelligence to identify issues and introduce positive changes in service delivery.

9.3 Accountability and transparency are also integral to a positive complaint handling culture. Landlords must report back on wider learning and improvements from complaints to stakeholders, such as residents' panels, staff and relevant committees.

9.4 Landlords must appoint a suitably senior lead person as accountable for their complaint handling. This person must assess any themes or trends to identify potential systemic issues, serious risks, or policies and procedures that require revision.

9.5 In addition to this a member of the governing body (or equivalent) must be appointed to have lead responsibility for complaints to support a positive complaint handling culture. This person is referred to as the Member Responsible for Complaints ('the MRC').

9.6 The MRC will be responsible for ensuring the governing body receives regular information on complaints that provides insight on the landlord's complaint handling performance. This person must have access to suitable information and staff to perform this role and report on their findings.

9.7 As a minimum, the MRC and the governing body (or equivalent) must receive:

- a. regular updates on the volume, categories and outcomes of complaints, alongside complaint handling performance;
- b. regular reviews of issues and trends arising from complaint handling;
- c. regular updates on the outcomes of the Ombudsman's investigations and progress made in complying with orders related to severe maladministration findings; and
- d. annual complaints performance and service improvement report.

9.8 Landlords must have a standard objective in relation to complaint handling for all relevant employees or third parties that reflects the need to:

- a. have a collaborative and co-operative approach towards resolving complaints, working with colleagues across teams and departments;
- b. take collective responsibility for any shortfalls identified through complaints, rather than blaming others; and
- c. act within the professional standards for engaging with complaints as set by any relevant professional body.

## Changing Lives Housing Trust (CLHT) Complaints Procedure

1. Complaints should first be made to your keyworker, but you can also complain via email to [info@clht.org](mailto:info@clht.org) or 0203 343 4101
2. Staff will thank the client for bringing the complaint to our attention and explain the complaints process as described in the procedure steps.
3. When a complaint is raised to staff, staff will try to resolve it immediately to the satisfaction of the complainant.
4. Staff will report the complaint to the most senior member of staff on duty, and the complaint will be logged.
5. Formal acknowledgement of all complaints received (whether verbal or written) will be sent within 3 working days to the complainant. This could be via letter or email. CLHT will have a local system in place to manage out-of-hours, and weekend complaints received. The acknowledgement will include:
  - An invitation to meet and discuss the complaint
  - Who will be investigating the complaint
  - How the investigation will be handled - the response should state what the investigation will be focussed on
  - A time limit for the investigation to be concluded. This should be 28 days; however, some cases may take longer, and the complainant will be made aware of this
  - The complaints procedure and contact details of bodies that can be accessed in the event of dissatisfaction with the outcome of the investigation
6. Following a full investigation, a response letter will be sent, and this will include the following:
  - A summary of the issue from the complainant's point of view
  - Details of the evidence and sources consulted to investigate the issue fully and fairly
  - A presentation of the findings for each issue clearly and concisely described
  - A conclusion, stating clearly whether the issue is "upheld", "partially upheld" or "not upheld"; unless it is ineligible, in which case the reason for this will be given, e.g. out of time or out of jurisdiction
  - An explanation of the outcome and whether any remedial action or learning points arise from the investigation of that issue
  - An apology where the issue is upheld and shortcomings or failings have been found
  - The complainant's rights if not satisfied with the outcome to refer to the Housing Ombudsman
  - A signature from the responsible individual or sent by email in their name

The complaint will be closed once confirmation has been received that there is satisfaction with the outcome. In the event of dissatisfaction, Changing Lives Housing Trust will support the complainant to access further