



Solihull
Community Housing
Shaping our neighbourhoods



Solihull
METROPOLITAN
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Housing Complaints Policy



1. Introduction

- 1.1 As a Registered Social Landlord, Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council (the Council) is responsible for how complaints about landlord services are handled. The Council is also legally responsible for ensuring compliance with the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code.
- 1.2 Solihull Community Housing (SCH) delivers landlord services to Council tenants and leaseholders on behalf of the Council. SCH is responsible for managing complaints on the Council's behalf and for implementing this policy.
- 1.3 In this policy, "we" means the Council and SCH working together to handle complaints and improve services.
- 1.4 The Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code became statutory on 1 April 2024, meaning that landlords are obliged by law to follow the requirements of the Code. This policy has been developed to support adherence to the Complaint Handling Code.
- 1.5 The Council and SCH are committed to providing the best possible service to customers. We want to know when a customer is unhappy or pleased with a service delivered by SCH on the Council's behalf, or if there are any concerns about the way the service has been provided, including how staff have behaved, something that has been done, or something that has not been done. Complaints and compliments are valuable feedback; they provide an opportunity to put things right for complainants. The Council and SCH are committed to learning from complaints and compliments and using the feedback to improve services and the way we work.

2. Publication of the Complaints Policy

- 2.1 The Council and SCH publish the Complaints Policy on their websites. The Council website also includes information about the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code and signposts customers to the SCH website for more detailed complaints information. SCH publicises the Code to customers through its website, newsletters and noticeboards. Customers can request the Complaints Policy in accessible formats, including audio, large print or other languages.

3. Scope of Policy

- 3.1 This policy applies to customers receiving services delivered by SCH on behalf of the Council, including services provided to customers via contractors and external agents appointed by SCH and any individual or group affected by those services.
- 3.2 It does not apply to:
 - Internal complaints about services or other employees
 - Complaints about Elected Members or Members of the Board.

- People who receive non-housing related services directly or indirectly from the Council.

3.3 Policies that are considered alongside this complaint policy are:

- Reasonable Adjustment Policy for Customer Complaints
- Unreasonable Communication Policy 2024
- Remedies Policy 2024
- Building Safety Guidelines
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy

4. Definitions

4.1 For clarity, we define a complaint as per the Housing Ombudsman Code which states that a complaint is:

‘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 an individual resident or group of residents’

4.2 A complaint is when someone tells us they are unhappy with a service we have provided, something we have done, or something we have failed to do.

4.3 Customers do not have to use the word "complaint" for us to treat it as one. If a customer tells us they are unhappy, we will give them the option to make a complaint.

4.4 Complaints may include, but are not limited to:

- Dissatisfaction with the standard or quality of a service.
- Dissatisfaction with actions or lack of action by SCH, its staff or contractors.
- Delays in providing services.
- Failure to follow policies, procedures or legal obligations.
- Dissatisfaction with communication, advice or information provided.
- Concerns regarding staff attitude, conduct or behaviour.
- Concerns regarding the handling or use of personal information.

4.5 Should a complaint be submitted via a third party or representative it will be handled in line with this policy. Complaints may be submitted by a representative acting on behalf of a customer where appropriate consent has been provided. Representatives may include family members, carers, advocates, voluntary or community organisations, elected members, legal representatives, or officers acting on behalf of Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council.

4.6 Where consent is required, SCH will obtain appropriate authorisation before sharing personal information relating to the complaint.

5. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

- 5.1 We are fully committed to ensuring that all customers are treated fairly, with dignity and respect. We comply with the Equality Act 2010 and do not discriminate directly or indirectly on the ground of someone's age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy/maternity status, race/ethnicity, religion/belief, sex, sexual orientation or marriage/civil partnership status.
- 5.2 We will make our complaints service accessible to all customers, including those who require reasonable adjustments due to disability, health conditions, language needs and other communication barriers. This means that SCH will identify and minimise barriers appropriately and that:
- Customers can request reasonable adjustments at any stage of a complaints process.
 - SCH will record, review and implement reasonable adjustments promptly or as reasonably speedily as possible.
 - SCH will accept complaints in formats and languages that suit customers.

6. Service Requests

- 6.1 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. SCH will record all service requests and action as appropriate. If a customer expresses dissatisfaction regarding the service they have received or if SCH has not done what it promised to deliver, the customer will be given the option to make a complaint. Should a complaint be made, this won't prevent SCH from delivering the requested service request.

7. Exclusions

- 7.1 As landlord, the Council will accept complaints in line with the Complaint Handling Code. SCH administers the complaints process on the Council's behalf and will only decline to accept a complaint where there is a valid reason under this policy and the Complaint Handling Code.
- 7.2 Where a complaint is not accepted, SCH will write to the customer on the Council's behalf explaining the reasons for the decision and advising them of their right to contact the appropriate Ombudsman.
- 7.3 The following are examples that do not fall within the scope of the complaints policy:
- a. First time reporting issues of Anti-social Behaviour
 - b. First time request for service
 - c. A specific issue being dealt with by Insurance claim/legal action whereby the legal proceedings have started. This is defined as the details of the claim, such as the Claim Form and Particulars of Claim having been filed at

court. If legal proceedings have not started, SCH will accept the complaint. Customers can complain about the handling of insurance claims.

- d. A complaint that has already been through the SCH complaints process
- e. An appeal against a decision where there is an appeals process - e.g. homelessness decision, or right to review a decision e.g. joining the housing waiting list
- f. Issues /incidents referred to us whereby the customer was aware of the issue over 12 months ago, unless there are exceptional circumstances
- g. First time reports of an issue which falls under the Building Safety Guidelines
- h. Statutory Disrepair Claims, whereby legal proceedings have started.

- 7.4 SCH will consider each complaint request on its individual merits and may, at times, deviate from the above guidance. Where this happens, the complainant will be informed.

8. Building Safety

- 8.1 If a complaint relates to a Building Safety concern, the complaint will be processed as set out in this policy. When SCH concludes the complaint and advises the customer about the appropriate Ombudsman it may be necessary to also include details of the Building Safety Regulator.

9. Feedback & Support

- 9.1 Customers can give us feedback in a variety of ways:

- Online Contact us page – Give us feedback
- Letter
- Telephone our Contact Centre (0121 717 1515)
- Personal contact with staff
- Via Social media
- Via carers and family members who have the customer's permission
- Via elected members and MPs

- 9.2 Where a customer may have difficulty in making a complaint or pursuing a complaint, they are entitled to appoint an advocate to act on their behalf. We will require notification from the customer to confirm that we have permission for full disclosure of all relevant information in respect of the complaint being shared with their advocate. SCH is not responsible for any costs or other resources incurred as a result of a customer using a third-party advocate to act on their behalf.

- 9.3 Should a customer need support making or pursuing a complaint and they would like Solihull Community Housing to help find them support they can make the request for support via the Contact Centre 0121 717 1515.

10. Complaints Process

Stage 1

- 10.1 When a complaint is received, it will be logged and acknowledged within 5 working days, and an investigating officer will be assigned. An acknowledgement letter will be sent to the complainant, it will confirm:
- The name of the investigating officer
 - The target date for completion
 - The complaint reference number
 - Details of how vulnerable customers may seek reasonable adjustments
 - Details of the relevant ombudsman
 - The Complaint definition, which includes:
 - a. Our understanding of the complaint
 - b. Our understanding of the outcomes the customer is seeking
 - c. The aspects of the complaint that SCH is and is not responsible for.
- 10.2 The investigating officer should investigate the complaint within 10 working days. The 10 working days commence from the date the complaint is acknowledged.
- 10.3 SCH will send a written response to the complainant when the investigation is complete. The response will provide full details of the investigation findings, any proposed remedial actions and the proposed timescales for any remedies SCH will undertake. The customer will be kept updated on progress with remedial actions and their agreement will be sought if there are any delays in delivering them.
- 10.4 If a complaint is complex or requires information from different SCH teams, external contractors and other technical data, the investigating officer will give an update on progress and advise the customer that the due date has had to be extended. Extensions will be no more than 10 working days without good reason.
- 10.5 If the complaint due date is extended SCH will write to the customer and confirm:
- Rationale for the extension
 - Expected timescale for a response
 - Contact details of the appropriate Ombudsman, as customers have the right to refer the decision to the Ombudsman.
- 10.6 If a customer raises related additional complaints during the investigation, these will be included in the Stage 1 response where the response has not yet been sent. If the Stage 1 response has already been issued, the new issues are unrelated to the complaint being investigated, or including them would unreasonably delay the response, the new issues will be logged as a new Stage 1 complaint.
- 10.7 A response will be provided to the customer when the answer is known, not

when outstanding actions are completed. When a complaint investigation has been completed the full findings will be confirmed in writing to the complainant. Should there be any outstanding actions, updates will be provided to the customer.

- 10.8 If a customer is not satisfied with the Stage 1 response, they may discuss this with the Stage 1 investigating officer. The officer will not provide a follow-on response but will advise the customer that they can escalate their concerns to Stage 2.
- 10.9 If the customer exercises their right to escalate the complaint to Stage 2, SCH will follow the procedures set out in this complaints process unless one of the exclusions listed in section 7 apply. If one of these exclusions apply, the customer will receive a letter setting out the reasons as well as the right to contact the appropriate Ombudsman.
- 10.10 Appropriate remedies will be considered throughout the complaints process and applied in accordance with SCH's Remedies Policy. Remedies may include apologies, corrective actions, service improvements, financial redress or other measures considered appropriate to put matters right.

Stage 2

- 10.11 When an escalation to Stage 2 is received, it will be acknowledged, defined and logged within 5 working days of the escalation request being received. An investigating officer who has not been previously involved with the complaint will be assigned to investigate and liaise with the complainant. An acknowledgement letter will be sent to the complainant within 5 working days; it will confirm:
- The name of the investigating officer
 - The target date for completion
 - The complaint reference number
 - Details of how vulnerable customers may seek reasonable adjustments
 - Details of the relevant ombudsman
 - The Complaint definition, which includes:
 - a. Our understanding of the complaint
 - b. Our understanding of the outcomes the customer is seeking
 - c. The aspects of the complaint that SCH is and is not responsible for.
- 10.12 In most cases, the Senior Investigating Officer at Stage 2 will be from the Customer Feedback Team. However, this role may be carried out by any Head of Service or Senior Manager, usually from a different service area to the one originally complained about.
- 10.13 The 20 working days for the independent investigation will commence from the date of the acknowledgement letter. The investigating officer will contact the complainant (wherever possible) and relevant staff to gather details regarding

the complaint and confirm understanding of any unresolved issues. The investigating officer will write a detailed report on their findings including recommendations to avoid similar situations arising in the future.

- 10.14 The investigating officer will share the findings with the relevant Head of Service to agree to any remedial actions /changes in working practices or learning from the complaint.
- 10.15 The investigating officer will aim to conclude the investigation and advise the complainant of the findings and recommendations within **20 working days**. If the complaint cannot be dealt with within the time limit, the customer will be contacted to explain the reason for the delay and advise of the new due date. Extensions will be no more than 20 working days without good reason.
- 10.16 When a complaint due date is extended SCH will write to the customer and confirm:
- Rationale for the extension
 - Expected timescale for a response
 - Contact details of the appropriate Ombudsman, as customers have the right to take the decision to the Ombudsman.
- 10.17 If a complaint is complex or requires information from different SCH teams, external contractors and other technical data, the investigating officer will give an update on progress and advise the customer that the due date has had to be extended. Extensions will be no more than 20 working days without good reason.
- 10.18 A response will be provided to the customer when the answer is known, not when outstanding actions are completed. When a complaint investigation has been completed the full findings will be confirmed in writing to the complainant. Should there be any outstanding actions, updates will be provided to the customer.
- 10.19 Appropriate remedies will be considered at Stage 2 of the complaints policy and will be linked to our Compensation policy.
- 10.20 This ends the complaints procedure.

11. Learning and Improvement

- 11.1 Complaints are used to help improve services.
- 11.2 For each complaint, we will identify what has gone wrong and whether there are any wider issues or learning points. Where appropriate, actions will be put in place to prevent similar issues happening again.
- 11.3 Learning from complaints will be recorded, monitored and shared with relevant service areas to support service improvement.

12. Ombudsman and Other Relevant Bodies

12.1 Housing Ombudsman

- 12.2 At the end of the Stage 2 investigation, the customer will be advised that they have reached the end of SCH's complaints procedure. If they remain dissatisfied with the outcome, they have the right to refer the matter to the Housing Ombudsman Service.

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

Tel: 0300 111 3000

www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk

- 12.3 The Housing Ombudsman Service may not always be the appropriate body for a customer to contact. In those cases, the investigating officer may confirm a different relevant body, such as:

- Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman www.lgo.org.uk
- Telephone: 0300 061 0614
- Building Safety Regulator www.hse.gov.uk/building-safety

13. Unreasonable Communication

- 13.1 On rare occasions customers may become unreasonable in the way they pursue their complaint. To ensure everyone is treated fairly SCH has developed a guide for staff and customers.
- 13.2 Please refer to SCH's Unreasonable Communication Policy for guidance on how SCH will respond when customers repeatedly make complaints about the same issue or communicate in an unreasonable way.

14. Governance and oversight

- 14.1 The Council is the landlord and retains overall accountability for compliance with the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code.
- 14.2 SCH manages complaints on the Council's behalf and provides regular performance, learning and compliance information to the Council.
- 14.3 The Council reviews this information through its governance and assurance

arrangements to ensure complaints are handled effectively and that lessons learned are used to improve services.

15. Responsibilities

15.1 The Council

- Owns this policy as landlord.
- Retains responsibility for compliance with the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code.
- Receives assurance regarding complaint handling performance, learning and service improvement.

15.2 Solihull Community Housing

- Manages complaints on behalf of the Council.
- Maintains procedures to support delivery of this policy.
- Investigates complaints and provides responses.
- Identifies learning and service improvements arising from complaints.
- Reports performance, trends and learning outcomes to the Council.

15.3 Head of Customer Experience (SCH)

- Responsible for operational delivery of the policy.
- Responsible for monitoring complaint handling performance and learning outcomes.

15.4 Executive Director of Customer Experience and Corporate Support (SCH)

- Responsible for ensuring sufficient organisational oversight and resources are in place to support effective complaint handling.

Approval

Version number	6
Effective from	1 October 2026
Policy Owner	Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council
Policy Lead (Operational Delivery)	Head of Customer Experience - SCH
Policy Author	Customer Contact Manager - SCH
Review Date	September 2027 (or earlier where there is a change in Legislation or Service Review)
Policy Links	Unreasonable Communication Policy Remedies Policy Reasonable Adjustment Policy