

Paragon Asra Housing Limited

# PA Housing Complaints Policy

May 2024

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<b>Department</b>	Customer Experience
<b>Approved by</b>	EMT
<b>Next review date</b>	May 2027

		<b>Page</b>
<b>1</b>	Introduction	2
<b>2</b>	Definitions and Scope	2-3
<b>3</b>	Our Complaint Approach	3-5
<b>4</b>	Exclusions	5
<b>5</b>	Rejections	5-6
<b>6</b>	Data Protection	6
<b>7</b>	Training	6
<b>8</b>	Equality, Diversity and Inclusion	6
<b>9</b>	Safeguarding	6
<b>10</b>	Unacceptable Behaviour	6-7
<b>11</b>	Monitoring and Reporting	7
<b>12</b>	Legislation	7
<b>13</b>	Audit Log	8

## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 We understand that there may be instances where we fall short of people's expectations. This policy outlines how we handle complaints at Paragon Asra Housing (PA Housing). Our goal is to ensure that our actions are prompt and that our communication is clear, timely, and respectful. We strive to deliver a dependable service to all our customers and view all feedback as an opportunity to enhance our services. We see complaints as valuable feedback and are committed to using them to improve our services.
- 1.2 This policy should be considered in conjunction with various other PA Housing policies, including but not limited to:
- Data Protection Policy
  - Compensation Policy
  - Unacceptable Behaviour Policy
  - Equality and Diversity Policy
  - Reasonable Adjustment Policy
  - Safeguarding Policy
  - Antisocial Behaviour Policy

## **2. Definitions and scope**

- 2.1 The Housing Ombudsman's new Complaints Handling Code became statutory on 1 April 2024, meaning that landlords are obliged by law to follow its requirements. We have adjusted our complaints approach to align with the Code, adopting the Housing Ombudsman's definition of a complaint.

“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.”

- 2.2 A customer does not need to explicitly use the word 'complaint' for us to recognise it as such. Even if a complaint is submitted through a third party or representative, we will still handle it in accordance with our Complaints Policy.
- 2.3 The types of complaints addressed by this Policy are as follows:
- Delays in responding to an inquiry or request for information. Failure to deliver a service.
  - Treatment or attitude exhibited by a staff member, including allegations of discrimination.
  - Complaints concerning building safety.
- 2.4 Customers have the flexibility to raise complaints through various channels, including by telephone, via our website's online form, in-person communication, letters, and social media. Attachments like pictures or letters can be attached to webform submissions and included as additional evidence.
- 2.5 If a customer needs help making a complaint, we'll assist them during the first contact, which can also be made via the My PA app, letter, telephone, in

person, email, our website, social media, or customer feedback.

Contact details for PA Housing are as follows:

- Contact Services Team for immediate response: 0300 123 2221
- Complaints team mailbox: [Complaints@pahousing.co.uk](mailto:Complaints@pahousing.co.uk)

- 2.6 Complaints submitted through social media will be redirected offline to ensure the protection of personal privacy.
- 2.7 We ensure accessibility to our services without disadvantage and make reasonable adjustments as needed, outlined in the Reasonable Adjustment Policy.
- 2.8 Complaints addressed to Senior Management also follow this policy and are managed by the Complaints Team.
- 2.9 Petition-based complaints are treated as one, with communication directed to the lead signatory. Outcome details are shared with the lead signatory for wider distribution. We will consider providing multiple copies as requested.
- 2.10 Complaints may come from advocates with the complainant's consent and in accordance with our third-party authorisation process.
- 2.11 If a customer lacks capacity under the Mental Capacity Act 2005, complaints will be accepted from a representative acting in their best interests and based on relevant consent and authority being provided, as outlined above.
- 2.12 Anonymous complaints undergo investigation, and outcomes are reported to our residents' forum.
- 2.13 For complaints concerning properties 18 meters or taller, or those with 7 storeys (or deemed high-risk for other reasons) where PA Housing serves as the Principal Accountable Person or an Accountable Person, the central complaints team conducts the initial investigation. If necessary, relevant PA Housing teams and colleagues are consulted, with the Building Safety Team kept informed. If a complaint cannot be resolved initially, it is escalated to the Building Safety team for further investigation and coordinated with the Central Complaints Team until completion.

### **3. Our Complaint Approach**

- 3.1 Often, customers' concerns can be addressed at the initial point of contact and don't need to go through our two-stage complaints process. These are termed as Service Requests. Our staff should always attempt to assist customers and resolve any issues right away, focusing on prompt problem-solving and correction.
- 3.2 While not all requests can be resolved immediately, we empower our staff to take steps to address concerns at the first point of contact. This might involve a manager callback, for instance. For straightforward issues that require

minimal or no investigation, we aim to provide an immediate apology, explanation, or action to resolve the request on the spot, unless there are exceptional circumstances.

- 3.3 We follow a two-stage process for complaints to ensure our customers can challenge our decisions and have them reviewed. We aim to provide regular updates, even if there's no final resolution yet, to reassure customers that we're actively addressing their concerns. We're committed to fostering a culture where all employees listen to, update on, resolve, and learn from customer complaints.
- 3.4 Upon receiving a complaint, our Complaints Team will keep the customer informed and liaise with relevant parties to address any outstanding issues promptly and effectively. If the complaint is upheld, PA Housing will offer an explanation and an apology. We'll also take the necessary actions to fully resolve the issue, which may include compensation payment if appropriate.

### **Stage 1 - Complaint Investigation**

- 3.5 When we first receive a complaint, we will formally acknowledge it in writing within 5 working days and aim to agree on a solution with the complainant within 10 working days from the date of acknowledgment. If the complaint is particularly complex, we may occasionally require more than 10 days to resolve it. In such cases, we will keep the customer informed and provide regular updates on the reasons for the delay. If the customer does not agree to an extension for the Stage 1 response, we will provide them with the Housing Ombudsman's contact details.

### **Stage 2 Escalated Complaints**

- 3.6 If the customer isn't satisfied with our Stage 1 decision, they can request a review at Stage 2. The timeframe to request escalation is typically 28 days, extendable in exceptional cases. At Stage 2, a different complaints specialist will handle the case, and higher management will review the investigation.
- 3.7 Upon receipt of the Stage 2 escalation, an acknowledgment will be sent within 5 working days. A comprehensive response will be provided within 20 working days from the date of acknowledgment.
- 3.8 Following a thorough investigation of the issues raised; a final response will be provided within 20 working days. However, if the complaint is exceptionally complex, it may take longer than 20 days to resolve. In such cases, we'll keep the customer informed about the reasons for the delay and provide regular updates. If the customer disagrees with an extension for the Stage 2 response, we'll provide them with the contact details for the Housing Ombudsman.

### **Putting Things Right**

- 3.8 Following a complaint, we'll take the necessary steps to make things right and

offer an apology if we're at fault. We value feedback as a tool for learning from our mistakes. If a complaint leads to changes in policy or service, we'll document this and regularly update our residents.

- 3.9 We'll consider a case resolved once we've agreed on a solution with the complainant, sometimes committing to delivering a service within a specific timeframe after the formal complaint response has been issued.
- 3.10 We'll engage our resident groups in reviewing our complaint handling performance, incorporating feedback and lessons learned to enhance services. This ensures fairness and transparency in our complaint resolution process.

### **External Escalation**

- 3.11 If all steps outlined in the Complaints policy have been exhausted and the complainant remains dissatisfied with the outcome, they can request further escalation externally.
- 3.12 The complainant has the option to contact the Housing Ombudsman Service, although typically, the Ombudsman will advise on the complainant exhausting the organisation's Complaints Policy first. The Housing Ombudsman Service is independent, impartial, and free. The Ombudsman will assess if the complaint falls within their scope.

The Housing Ombudsman Service contact details are as follows:

- 0300 111 3000
  - Housing Ombudsman Service, PO Box 1484, Unit D, Preston, PR2 0ET
  - [info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk](mailto:info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk)
  - [www.housingombudsman.org.uk](http://www.housingombudsman.org.uk)
- 3.13 For disputes concerning leases, long leaseholders, shared owners, and freeholders advice can be sought from The Leasehold Advisory Service
    - 020 7832 2500
    - [info@lease-advice.org.uk](mailto:info@lease-advice.org.uk)
    - [www.lease-advice.org.uk](http://www.lease-advice.org.uk)
  - 3.4 Leaseholders can also appeal to the First-tier Tribunal (Property Chambers) to resolve complaints related to Service Charges and lease agreement terms. This Tribunal, specialised in property disputes, operates independently of the Government and can be accessed through the gov.uk website:  
[www.gov.uk/housing-tribunals](http://www.gov.uk/housing-tribunals)

## **4. Exclusions**

- 4.1 In some cases, certain issues won't be treated as complaints and won't go through our complaints procedure. These include:

- Initial requests for services, like reporting repairs, or Antisocial Behaviour, or seeking information, which may become complaints if not handled properly.
- Insurance claims or appeals related to property damage or personal injury against PA Housing.
- Matters already resolved through our Complaints Policy or another appeals process.
- Cases already in legal proceedings or once the pre-action protocol has been exhausted and legal papers have been served.
- Complaints about incidents older than twelve months, with exceptions considered on a case-by-case basis.
- Disputes concerning PA Housing policy wording or landlord responsibilities, noted for future policy reviews.
- Complaints about property transfers or allocations will only be considered if our policy wasn't correctly followed or if the complaint pertains to the service rendered.
- In rare cases, we may suspend the complaints procedure from a complainant displaying unreasonable behaviour or limit contact, such as repeated complaints about the same issue. We'll transparently communicate the reasons behind this decision, adhering to our Unacceptable Behaviour Policy.

## **5. Complaint Rejections**

- 5.1 In such cases referred to in 4 above, or if a stage 1 complaint is not eligible for stage 2 escalation, we'll notify the customer, explaining why their matter didn't meet our complaint handling criteria. We'll also provide them with information about the Housing Ombudsman if they want to challenge this decision. If the Ombudsman disagrees with the exclusion, they may direct us to handle the complaint or escalate it to stage 2.
- 5.2 Staff will ensure a smooth referral and handover from complaints to relevant internal teams and specialists, where necessary.

## **6. Data Protection**

- 6.1 PA Housing's Data Protection Policy details how staff must handle personal information. Additionally, staff undergo training in this area. If complainants have concerns or are dissatisfied with how we've managed their personal information throughout our complaints process, they can consult our Customer Privacy Notice on our website, contact our Data Protection Officer, or notify the Information Commissioner's Office.

## **7. Training**

- 7.1 We'll conduct induction and refresher training for all staff to ensure they understand the Complaints Policy and our commitment to maintaining excellent service delivery standards and meeting targets. Additionally, all managers will receive specialised training to equip them with the skills and knowledge needed to adhere to this Policy.

## **8. Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion**

- 8.1 This policy aligns with our broader commitment to equality, diversity, and inclusion by supporting vulnerable individuals and fostering inclusive communities.
- 8.2 We ensure accessibility and provide support for all customers throughout the complaints process. We are dedicated to ensuring that our complaints procedure is accessible and user-friendly for all our customers, aligning with our legal obligations outlined in the Equality Act 2010. If a customer requires assistance in submitting their complaint in writing, please inform us.
- 8.3 We will make reasonable adjustments for residents where appropriate under the Equality Act 2010. We will keep a record of any reasonable adjustments agreed, as well as a record of any disabilities a resident has disclosed. Any agreed reasonable adjustments will be kept under active review.
- 8.4 You can request a reasonable adjustment from us through the point of contact you are communicating with or, by contacting Customer Services on telephone 0300 1232221. Examples of the assistance we can offer include providing information in alternative formats, adapting our communication methods, and allowing additional time for a complaint to be raised with us.
- 8.5 We will ensure that a policy specific Equality Impact Assessment has been completed and undertake continual analysis of the protected characteristics of complainants to identify any negative effects and inform future process and service improvements.

## **9. Safeguarding**

- 9.1 If we receive a complaint related to safeguarding, we will adhere to the procedures outlined in our Safeguarding Policy to address it. Our detailed procedures align with local safeguarding information sharing protocols. The Executive Director of Resources serves as the safeguarding lead and is responsible for reporting the information.

## **10 Unacceptable Behaviour**

- 10.1 We will not tolerate threatening, abusive, or violent behaviour to our staff. As noted in our Unacceptable Behaviour Policy, in extreme cases such as physical violence or harassment towards our staff, actions could include involving the police, taking legal action and ending direct contact with the customer.

## **11. Monitoring and Reporting**

- 11.1 We record all complaints, regularly track our progress in addressing them, and evaluate our performance against set targets. We internally assess our performance at PA Housing and compare it against industry standards. We



provide regular reports to our Executive and Senior Management Teams, and Board, outlining complaint performance including volumes, trends and outcomes, Housing Ombudsman Service enquiries, lessons learned, service improvement recommendations, and policy adjustments resulting from feedback received through complaints.

- 11.2 Furthermore, our complaints service undergoes internal audits to ensure its effectiveness.
- 11.3 We will transparently report our complaints performance and how feedback from complaints has contributed to service enhancements on a quarterly basis to our engaged residents. This will enable them to hold us accountable and suggest improvements. Additionally, we will publish monthly updates on complaints performance to our residents on our website.
- 11.4 We will complete an annual review of Complaints Performance and Service improvement in accordance with the Complaints Handling Code, which will include our self-assessment against the Code. This will be shared with our Governing Board and submitted to the Housing Ombudsman as well as being published on our website.

## **12. Legislation**

12.1 The key pieces of legislation aligned to this policy are the:

- Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023
- Housing Act 1985, 1988, 1996 and 2004
- Localism Act 2011
- Landlord and Tenant Act 1985 as amended by the Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Act 2002
- Equality Act 2010
- Data Protection Act 2018
- Building Safety Act 2022

12.2 Further information can be found in 'The charter for social housing residents: social housing white paper', which sets out the actions the government will take to ensure that residents in social housing are safe, are listened to, live in good quality homes, and have access to redress when things go wrong:

[www.gov.uk/government/publications/thecharterforsocialhousingresidentssocialhousingwhitepaper](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/thecharterforsocialhousingresidentssocialhousingwhitepaper)

### 13. Audit Log

Date of change	Who updated	Details of change
26 March 2021	Derek Crook	<p>This document details PA Housing’s new Complaints Management Policy, taking into account the Housing Ombudsman’s (HOS) complaint handling code.</p> <p><b>Key changes:</b></p> <p>Use of the HOS definition of a complaint</p> <p>Removal of the process details – these have been included in a separate procedure.</p> <p>Details the two stage complaint process, and the stage 0 service request designed to prevent issues escalating into complaints.</p> <p>Response times for a Stage 2 complaint changed from 10 days to 15 days.</p> <p>Provision of more detail on reasonable adjustments and access to complaints, including referrals from solicitors if acting on behalf of a customer.</p> <p>Enhances the lessons learnt and role of residents in terms of helping us to learn from issues and taking steps to improve services.</p> <p>Timescale for accepting complaints changed from 12 months to 6 months.</p>
23 March 2021	Resident Complaint Panel	Positive feedback about new complaint approach and confirmation that PA are focusing on the right things.
26 July 2022	Resident Complaint Panel	Introduced the current Policy and briefed residents on the revised HOS Complaint Handling Code. We gained their feedback on the way forward and areas to consider for the revised policy This included the changes to how long we take to acknowledge and log a complaint, the Exclusions for when we do not raise a complaint and the change to the time to respond to a stage 2 complaint.
24 August 2022	Housing Ombudsman	Sought advice and guidance from the HOS on our Exclusions. Our Policy has been updated accordingly.

08 September 2022	Mohammed Umerji	<p>This document details PA Housing’s updated Complaints Management Policy, taking into account the Housing Ombudsman’s (HOS) updated complaint handling code (April 22).</p> <p><b>Key changes:</b></p> <p>Use of the HOS definition of a complaint.</p> <p>Removing Stage 0 and introducing Service Request designed to prevent issues escalating into complaints.</p> <p>Response times for a Stage 2 complaint changed from 15 days to 20 days as per the HOS revised Handling Code.</p> <p><b>Clearer expectations on complaint exclusions around ASB issues</b></p> <p>Clarified how and when complaints can be referred to the HOS throughout the complaints process.</p> <p>Included details on how PA Housing will deal with complaints made publicly through Social Media platforms.</p> <p>Removed details around the localism act 2011, as from October 1, 2022, the Ombudsman will remove the democratic filter’ process.</p> <p>Updated the Safeguarding lead details.</p>
February 2023	Mohammed Umerji	<p>Following feedback from the Housing Ombudsman Service, additional clarity provided on how exclusions are also relevant at Stage 2 of the complaints process.</p>
May 2024	Mohammed Umerji / Kimberley Ellis	<p>Clarity added on how the Complaints Policy will comply with the Building Safety Act 2022</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Safeguarding lead details updated</li> <li>• Clarity on exceptions involving legal claims following guidance from the Housing Ombudsman Service.</li> </ul> <p>In line with the Housing Ombudsman Service’s updated Code, the policy has been updated to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Duration of accepting a complaint extending from 6 months to 12 months</li> </ul> <p>Details of where the policy and Housing Ombudsman Service details are published</p>

October 2024	Kimberley Ellis	The complaints policy was updated to specify acknowledgment and response timescales for Stage 2 escalations. An acknowledgment will be sent within 5 working days of receipt, and a response will be provided within 20 working days from the acknowledgment date.
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