

HORTON HOUSING ASSOCIATION
COMPLAINTS POLICY & PROCEDURE

SUMMARY

Please note: there are separate and specific procedures for dealing with complaints in relation to Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB), Abuse and Harassment. This procedure should not be used for complaints of this type.

If you are not happy, please tell us.

- You just need to tell a manager or any other Horton colleague.
- You can speak to a colleague within the specific service relating to your complaint, or if you prefer, any another service, or Horton Head Office; or you can ask someone from outside of Horton to speak to us on your behalf.
- If you can, tell us the outcome you are looking for.
- We will try to sort things out straight away.
- If we can't sort things out straight away, we will treat this as a formal complaint. We will contact you within 4 working days to say we have received your complaint and tell you who is dealing with it.
- We will try our best to sort the complaint out within 10 working days. If we can't do this, we will explain to you why and tell you when we think we will have sorted things out.
- If you are not happy about the outcome of your complaint, tell us and a senior manager will look at your complaint again. They will tell you the outcome within 10 working days.
- Someone from Horton will offer to support you through every step of making a complaint or help you get an advocate if you prefer someone from outside the organisation.

ADVICE AND ADVOCACY

Horton has compiled a list of advice and advocacy agencies that may be willing to assist a person wishing to make a complaint. If you would like a copy of this list, ask us or contact Head Office and we will give you a copy. It is also available on our website.

Telephone: 01274 370689

Email: head.office@hortonhousing.co.uk

Write: Horton Housing Association, Chartford House, 54, Little Horton Lane BD5 0BU

You can also complain to some organisations outside Horton Housing Association for example, the organisation that funds or regulates the service Horton Housing is delivering to you. (See Section 8 below)

Everything is explained below and in our Handbook for people accessing our services.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Horton Housing Association (HHA) is a charitable association which provides housing related support services and temporary accommodation to people in Yorkshire. There are a number of other business entities within the 'Horton Housing Group', including Horton Housing Support Limited (HHS), Chartford Housing Limited (CHL) who are a Registered Provider and Base (Social Enterprise).
- 1.2 HHA is the parent body of Horton Housing Group and this Policy applies to all entities within the Group.
- 1.3 HHA takes pride in providing both high quality accommodation and service delivery across all areas of the organisation, however we recognise that there are occasions when things go wrong and the service we provide may not meet expectations.
- 1.4 The Complaints Policy and Procedure is one of the ways that you can raise concerns and give feedback to us. The Policy sets out how to tell us that we have got things wrong, what will happen as a result and how and when we will let you know what we intend to do to make things right.
- 1.5 HHA is committed to continuous improvement of service delivery and your feedback helps us to improve. We want to provide a positive experience for everyone who comes across us and for people to feel confident to speak up if they feel that this is not the case. For these reasons, HHA welcomes and encourages complaints.
- 1.6 HHA complies with the Housing Ombudsman Complaints Handling Code. This sets out good practice for landlords to respond to complaints effectively and fairly. We apply this good practice to all of our services, even if not part of our accommodation provision.
- 1.7 Throughout the Policy we refer to colleagues, this includes anyone employed, working on behalf of or representing HHA, such as students, volunteers and trades people
- 1.8 **What is a complaint?**

A complaint is:

'an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the organisation, its own colleagues, or those acting on its behalf, affecting an individual resident or group of residents.'¹

HHA apply this definition to people who are not residents also.

A complaint may also be in relation to our legal responsibilities as a landlord, for example, expectations as set out in your occupancy agreement or in relation to health, safety, security or regulatory requirements.

¹ This definition of complaint is from, The Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code, 09 March 2022, Housing Ombudsman Service. Note: amendments made to terminology for staff and residents.

If the service you receive makes you feel unhappy or that something is not quite right, this is a complaint. You do not have to use the word 'complaint'. You can just tell us what the issue is.

All complaints will be accepted and investigated, unless there is a valid reason not to do so, in which case we will explain this to you.

1.9 What is not a Complaint?

If we decide not to accept your complaint, we will provide you with a detailed explanation setting out the reasons why the matter is not suitable for the HHA Complaints Process. If you are not satisfied with this explanation or decision, you will have the right to take this to the Housing Ombudsman.

Examples of when a complaint may not be accepted are:

- a) The issue giving rise to your complaint happened over 12 months ago (unless this relates to Safeguarding or Health and Safety concerns). We will also consider whether to apply discretion to accept complaints made outside this time limit where there are good reasons to do so.
- b) Matters that have previously been considered under HHA Complaints Policy
- c) Legal Proceedings in relation to the matter have started e.g. details of the claim, such as the Claim Form and Particulars of the claim have been filed at court

If your complaint is in relation to Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB), for example, **behaviour by someone else** that makes you feel frightened, annoyed or intimidated, this will be addressed through HHA Anti-Social Behaviour Policy.

Some complaints are service requests. This is where you may be unhappy with a situation that you wish to have rectified, or a complaint about a service you have or have not received. For example, a reasonable request to have an adjustment made to your property.² Where these requests can be resolved straight away, and with your agreement, we will not log this as a formal complaint. These types of requests will be recorded in your support records.

We will not unreasonably refuse to escalate a complaint at any stage of the complaints procedure without providing clear and valid reasons for taking this course of action. Reasons for declining to escalate a complaint will be the same as the reasons for not accepting a complaint, as the examples a) to c) detailed above.

1.10 Feedback, Complaints and Learning

We want to ensure that we provide a welcoming, flexible, safe and caring environment. Feedback from people accessing our services and stakeholders helps us to improve in all areas of our work and provide a better service to all who use it. We seek, welcome and act upon all kinds of feedback from many sources, including:

² As detailed in our Horton Standard Policy.

- Compliments, Comments, Complaints
- Suggestion Boxes
- Exit Questionnaires
- Annual Satisfaction Survey
- Stakeholder Surveys and Events
- Stakeholder Evaluation Forms
- Repairs Satisfaction Feedback
- Annual evaluation of complaints and compliments

All feedback is valuable to us. Whether compliments, negative feedback or complaints, we are committed to learning from them and using them to improve service delivery.

2. Publication and Information

This Policy and Procedure are widely publicised and available on HHA Website to everyone involved in our services including stakeholders and the wider community.

<https://hortonhousing.co.uk/contact/making-a-complaint/>

We explain the complaints process to all people during their induction to our services and there is a written version included in the Handbook provided

Colleagues will explain the Policy and Procedure verbally to anyone who wishes to use it.

‘Compliments, Complaints, Comments’ postcards are available to everyone accessing or involved with our services to send back to us at any time. These can be posted or they can be handed directly to any of our colleagues, dropped in to any of our offices or placed in the suggestion boxes provided in our accommodation services.

‘Compliments, Complaints, Comments’ Posters are displayed in Horton offices and accommodation buildings to encourage people to provide feedback.

3. Accessible Information and Reasonable Adjustments

In compliance with the Equality Act 2010, we are committed to providing information to meet individual needs.

- Alternative accessible formats of the Policy and Procedure can be made available on request, for example, in large print or other languages.
- Correspondence will be provided in formats that are appropriate, accessible and easy to understand to the person receiving it.
- If a person making a complaint needs anyone with them to translate or interpret, HHA will try to arrange this service with their agreement.
- Reasonable requests in terms of method and frequency of communication
- Any other reasonable adjustments for complainants, where appropriate under the Equality Act 2010. We keep a record of any reasonable adjustments agreed, as well as a record of any disabilities that an individual has disclosed. Any agreed reasonable adjustments will be kept under active review.

We have a dedicated Communication Team that assist with accessible information and who provide guidance to colleagues.

Further information is available in HHAs Accessible Information Standard Policy.

4. Resources and Training

An assigned named member of HHA's Senior Management Team is responsible for overseeing the Complaints Policy and Procedure, which includes:

- Complaints monitoring, annual reviews, and evaluations
- Ensuring access to colleagues at all levels to facilitate quick resolution of complaint
- The authority and autonomy to act to resolve disputes quickly and fairly
- Reporting to the organisations governing Boards

They are the Lead Complaints Officer. They delegate this role to the Managers and Heads of Service receiving complaints as appropriate.

Where a potential conflict of interest is identified, the complaint will be passed to an alternative, appropriate and trained person to investigate.

HHA's objective is to ensure that colleagues receive training in relation to complaint handling including how to:

- recognise and respond to complaints positively and effectively
- deal with complaints professionally, respectfully and fairly
- treat all complaints sensitively, with the strictest confidentiality to protect all parties involved, and adhere to HHAs Data Protection Policy
- provide empathetic support to any distressed and upset complainants
- have a collaborative and co-operative approach towards resolving complaints, working with colleagues across teams and departments
- take collective responsibility for any shortfalls identified through complaints rather than blaming others
- act within the Professional Standards for engaging with complaints as set by the Chartered Institute of Housing
- ensure any restrictions placed on contact due to unacceptable behaviour are proportionate and demonstrate regard for the provisions of the Equality Act 2010

5. When to make a complaint

If you are not happy with Horton Housing Association, please tell us.

- If you are unhappy about any HHA service, speak to a HHA colleague or manager.

- If you are unhappy with an individual in HHA (for example, your support worker, maintenance worker, students or volunteer), sometimes it is best to tell them directly. If you feel that this is difficult or inappropriate, then speak to the person's manager or another manager in HHA.
- Making a complaint will not adversely affect your support, accommodation or the way you are treated.
- Often when you tell us that you are unhappy about a matter relating to the accommodation or service we provide, we will be able to give you a response straight away if the matter can be easily rectified.
- When the complaint is more complicated or we are unable to resolve the matter straight away, or we need to investigate further to resolve the matter, it will be logged and treated as a formal complaint. (See Stage 1 below).
- When the complaint is in relation to Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB), we will treat this under our ASB Policy.

5.1 Timeliness

You can tell us about your complaint at any time.

- It is best to tell us about your complaint as soon as possible to enable us to investigate it.
- We understand that people may not have realised that something was wrong or was not done in the best way until sometime later.
- If this is the case, you must still let us know and we will do our best to put things right.
- Having assessed what evidence is needed to fully consider the issues and what outcome would resolve the matter for you, we will try to resolve your complaint at the earliest possible opportunity.
- Where any urgent actions are identified, we will work with you to ensure that these are addressed as a priority

6. Aims of the Complaints Procedure

- 6.1 The procedure aims to provide transparent, accessible, clear and concise guidance on complaints handling for everyone who might want to use it.

The Complaints Procedure is set out in two stages. We hope to resolve the situation with you at stage one, however if you are still unhappy, you can ask for it to be reviewed; this is stage two.

If after the review (stage two), we are still failing to come to a satisfactory agreement with you, you have the right to escalate the complaint outside of the organisation. (See section 8 Pages below for further details)

To help us to resolve your complaint in a satisfactory manner, always try to tell us the

outcome you are looking for.

Where the desired complaint outcomes or expectations are found to be unreasonable or unrealistic, we will discuss this further with you and we will explain the reasons why we are unable to meet or fully meet the desired outcome or your expectations.

7. Making a Complaint

7.1 Who can make a complaint?

Anyone can make a complaint.

This includes – applicants, people receiving a service including those who live in our accommodation; family or friends of people accessing any of our services; referral agencies and other professionals; any other stakeholders; neighbours of our offices and accommodation services; the wider community.

A complaint can also be made by anyone on your behalf.

7.2 Who do you tell if you have a complaint?

You can raise a complaint with anyone working for or on behalf of Horton.

You can do this:

- Verbally by speaking to a colleague in person or by telephone.
- In writing by letter, email, text messaging, or via our 'send us a message' form, available on our website.

Horton colleagues can provide information and assistance with the complaints process at any time, or if you prefer, they can help to find someone else to support you with it.

We can provide a list of advice and advocacy agencies to help you. This list is also available on the website.

Any complaints received via social media will also be dealt with via this Policy. See Appendix 1 below.

7.3 What do you need to tell us?

As much information as you can tell us about what the complaint is.

Details can include:

- What happened or what didn't happen
- Names of people involved, names of any witnesses
- Date/s, times and location
- What you would like the outcome of your complaint to be.

Do not worry if you cannot remember all the details, we will still do our best to look into your complaint.

7.4 **What will happen?**

If raised verbally, we will ask you some questions, so that we can gain as much information as possible about the issue and record the details. This is to help us resolve the issue for you as quickly as possible.

If the complaint is received in writing, and we need further details, we will contact you and ask you some questions to help us understand, before investigating further and resolving your complaint.

If we cannot resolve the issue immediately, or further investigation is needed, we will treat this as a formal complaint.

7.5 **Stage One - Formal Complaint**

All formal complaints are recorded in our Complaints Log and you will receive a written acknowledgement within 4 working days.

Who looks into your complaint? The manager of the scheme or department will have initial responsibility for dealing with your complaint and is normally the nominated Complaints Officer.

Where the complaint involves the manager, their line manager will be the Complaints Officer and have responsibility for dealing with it.

What does the Complaints Officer do? They are responsible for making sure that records are kept and conducting an investigation to see what happened. They have the authority to resolve the complaint. This may include looking through documents, case files, speaking to colleagues involved, questioning or involving other departments, in order to resolve the issue.

How long will it take? Our aim is to investigate your complaint properly and give you a reply within 10 working days.

If this is not possible and a longer period is required, an interim response will be made informing you of, the reasons why it is taking longer, any action taken to date or being considered.

If an extension beyond 20 working days is required to enable us to respond fully to your complaint, we will let you know and ask for your agreement to extend.

Where agreement over an extension period cannot be reached, you will be able to challenge the proposed timeliness and we will provide you with the contact information for the Housing Ombudsman.

What if the issue has happened before? If the problem is a recurring issue, we will consider any older reports as part of the background to our complaint investigation if this will help to resolve the issue for you.

What if other issues are raised? If you raise additional matters during the investigation, that are relevant to your initial complaint, we will look into these during our stage one response, providing we have not already responded to your initial complaint. If we have already responded to your initial complaint or it would unreasonably delay our response, the additional matter will be logged as a new complaint

How will we explain the outcome? At the end of the investigation, we will inform you in writing whether the complaint is:

- upheld or not upheld
- the reasons for the decision made, and
- action that will be taken to put the issue right, if any.

We can also verbally explain the outcome to you.

We will consider on a case-by-case basis, whether any statutory payments are due, for example-in relation to legal obligations or if any quantifiable losses have incurred, the time and trouble a person has been put to distress and inconvenience caused.

7.6 Stage Two-Complaint Review

If you are not satisfied with the response to your complaint (stage one), you can tell us why and you can ask for the complaint to be reviewed.

If you would like to request a review of the complaint outcome, you should let us know within 14 days of receiving your complaints outcome decision.

A senior manager who has not previously been involved will undertake the review. They will acknowledge this in writing to you, within 4 working days.

The review involves investigating the complaint again, considering how the complaint was originally handled and reporting their findings in writing to you within 10 working days.

If a longer period is required, we will let you know and provide you with an expected timescale. This will be no longer than a further 10 days.

We will inform you in writing whether we have agreed or not with the original complaint investigation outcome, explain the reasons for the decision and action that will be taken, if any. We can also explain this verbally.

If you are still unsatisfied with the outcome, there is an option to take the complaint externally. The service will tell you who you can complain to and how to do this.

7.7. Complaints handled by a third party

Where a landlord's complaint response is handled by a third party (e.g. a contractor or independent adjudicator) at any stage, we will liaise with the third party to ensure that the process forms part of the two stage complaints process set out in this Code. Complainants will not be expected to go through two separate complaints processes.

8. The Role of the Regulator and other External Bodies

- 8.1 If your complaint is about HHA and you are still unhappy with the response after you have followed the whole procedure set out above, you may be able to take your complaint to a relevant outside body or the service's funding body. Some of these are listed below.

If you are not sure which outside body to complain to, please ask, or get an advocate to ask any Horton colleague or contact Head Office:

Horton Housing Association
Chartford House
54 Little Horton Lane
Bradford
BD5 0B

Telephone: 01274 370689

Email: head.office@hortonhousing.co.uk

- 8.2. **Services Involving a Housing Association registered with the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) – A Housing Management Related Issue Only** (for example, in accommodation based schemes and matters related to Chartford Housing Limited)

Complaints can be made to the appropriate Registered Provider (RP). Ask a Horton colleague for details of who this is for your accommodation.

Complaints must be in writing and are limited to breach or non-performance of obligations set out in the Occupancy Agreement supplemented by the Regulator of Social Housing's Consumer Standards.³

If you are still dissatisfied after the RP's Complaints Procedure has been exhausted, you have the right to refer the matter to the Housing Ombudsman Service:

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

Telephone: 0300 111 3000

Email: info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk

³ Regulatory standards that registered providers of social housing must meet: Published 1 April 2015. Last updated 20 July 2018 — Regulator of Social Housing

8.3 Local Authority Funding and Contractual Arrangements

If your service is funded by a local authority, you may be able to ask them to look at your complaint.

Bradford	Kirklees
<p>Department of Adult & Community Services Adult Services Complaints Team FREE POST BRADFORD COUNCIL (Please write 'Complaints Unit' on the back of the envelope) Tel. 01274 436820 Email: sscomplaintsunit@bradford.gov.uk</p>	<p>Kirklees Adult Social Care Complaints Freepost: RTHS-EUEY-ZYCB, Adult Social Care Services PO Box 1720 Huddersfield HD1 9EL Tel: 01484 225115 SSCU@kirklees.gov.uk</p>
<p>How to make a comment or complaint about Children's Services, e.g. Group Living Service (GLS) https://www.bradford.gov.uk/compliments-and-complaints/childrens-social-care/how-to-make-a-comment-or-complaint-about-childrens-services/</p> <p>or you can write to BRADFORD COUNCIL FREEPOST Please write 'Complaints Unit' on the back of the envelope Phone : 01274 436820 Email : complaints.officer@bradford.gov.uk</p>	<p><u>HIPS (only)</u> Kirklees Better Outcomes Partnership (KBOP) The Media Centre Office F49 7 Northumberland Street Huddersfield HD1 1RL Tel: 01484 483 000</p>
Calderdale	North Yorkshire
<p>Complaints and Compliments FREEPOST Town Hall Crossley Street Halifax HX1 1ZS</p> <p>Telephone: 01422 288001 Email: complaintsandcompliments@calderdale.gov</p>	<p>Health & Adult Service FREEPOST DL76 North Yorkshire County Council County Hall Northallerton DL7 8BR Tel: 0800 515875 social.complaints@northyorks.gov.uk</p>

8.4 Services involving a Health body for example Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG)

If your complaint is about health or social care, you may make a complaint to either the organisation that provided your healthcare or the organisation that commissioned that Health Service. The commissioning body will be either the local clinical commissioning group (CCG) for hospital care, or NHS England for GP, dental, pharmacy and optical services

Every CCG will have its own complaints procedure, which is often displayed on its website. [NHS England Complaints and Feedback](#) or you can contact the relevant Local Authority Complaints Team on the number above.

9. Monitoring, Evaluation and

- 9.1 HHA will maintain a log of all formal complaints and complaint reviews.
- 9.2 HHA will annually review all complaints, compliments and feedback to help improve service delivery. The annual review of complaints and compliments can be found here: <https://hortonhousing.co.uk/about-us/annual-review-of-complaints-compliments/>
- 9.3 HHA will ask you for feedback about how satisfied you are with the complaints process.
- 9.4 HHA will consult with tenants and other stakeholders every three years when the Policy is due for review.
- 9.5 HHA will produce regular reports on complaints received, timeliness of response to complaints, how satisfied complainants have been with the process, and the number of Complaints referred to the Housing Ombudsman. These reports will be made to the Management Board of HHA and published in the Here at Horton Newsletter.
- 9.6 The Complaints Policy Lead evaluates this procedure annually. The Lead considers any feedback received via the complaints satisfaction process and the annual satisfaction survey. This includes whether there is sufficient awareness of the Policy and Procedure, any barriers to raising complaints and any actions identified that may improve the process.
- 9.7 In addition to the Policy Lead, a named member of the governing body, Chartford Housing Limited (CHL) will take lead responsibility for complaints to support a positive complaint handling culture. This person is referred to as the Member Responsible for Complaints ('the MRC').
- 9.8 The MRC is responsible for ensuring the governing body (CHL) receives regular information on complaints that provides insight on the organisations complaint handling performance. This person has access to suitable information and support to perform this role to enable them to report on their findings
- 9.9 A summary of Lessons Learnt is published in HHA Annual Report and Here at Horton Annual Report.
- 9.10 The Complaints Lead will complete the Housing Ombudsman Complaints Code of Practice Self-Assessment compliance check. The outcome is reported to the Boards of Management, and is published on the Horton website. This includes publishing a copy of the completed Self-Assessment and any improvements we need to make. This is

completed annually or sooner if there are any significant organisational changes.

- 9.11 Complaints in relation to Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) will be monitored separately in accordance with HHA ASB Policy.
- 9.12 HHA is required to store all information regarding complaints received, including the original complaint, date received, any reviews, any correspondence and investigation reports or other reporting, in relation to the complaint. All information is stored confidentially and in line with our Data Protection Policy.

Appendix 1

Complaints received online via social media or website

- A complaint received online via social media or website will be dealt with in the same way as one received via email or telephone.
- When the complaint is made via private message, we will acknowledge receipt of the message within four working days and advise the complainant how to make a complaint. In most cases, we will send a link to our website or give the head office telephone number to encourage people to use the standard complaints procedure.
- If the complaint is made publicly on one of our sites, we will do the same and respond asking the complainant to send any confidential or sensitive information via private message or email or to telephone us.

Sensitive, Personal and Abusive Information

- We may remove messages that contain private or sensitive information or that could potentially put the user at risk, for example if someone publicly posts their address or phone number. We will still contact the complainant to assist with making a complaint.
- We will screenshot or download, and then remove messages that are abusive or use profane language and any that refer to individuals by name.
- We may block social media accounts who are persistent or particularly abusive in their messages.
- In very serious circumstances (for example defamation, harassment or malicious allegations) we may take further action for example reporting the user to the social media provider or referring the matter to the police.
- We will still endeavour to engage with the sender of the complaint via private message even if we have removed their message.
- All complaints received via social media will be sent to the Customer Services Team and the 'Assigned Service Director' to be dealt with as per any other complaint.