

<p><b>Complaints Policy</b></p> <p><b>Policy Owner:</b> <i>Director of Operations</i></p> <p><b>Approved by:</b> <i>HFL Group Board</i></p> <p><b>Approval date:</b> <b>18 November 2020</b></p> <p><b>Current version number:</b> <b>V5</b></p> <p><b>Next review date:</b> <b>November 2022</b></p>	
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## 1. Statement of Intent

- 1.1. Homes for Lambeth Group Limited and its subsidiaries (“**Homes for Lambeth or HFL**”) are committed to providing a high-quality service for HFL Homes’ residents, and the other residents that Homes for Lambeth engages with. We work in an open and accountable way which builds trust and respect.
- 1.2. We use the Housing Ombudsman definition and define a complaint as an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the organisation, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting an individual resident or group of residents.
- 1.3. The objective of the policy is for Homes for Lambeth is to put mistakes right as quickly and effectively as possible.
- 1.4. To achieve this objective, this policy:
  - provides clear guidance on how to submit a complaint, and how the complaint will be processed; and,
  - sets out Homes for Lambeth’s approach to responding to complaints in a manner which is compliant with all relevant legislation and regulations, and which ensures that a timely and satisfactory outcome is achieved.
- 1.5. Homes for Lambeth will operate its Complaints Policy in compliance with the Housing Regulator’s Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard as set out in “The Regulatory Framework for Social Housing in England from April 2012” as updated in 2015 and 2018 and associated guidance documents.
- 1.6. This policy has been developed in line with the 2020 Housing Ombudsman Service’s Complaint Handling Code.
- 1.7. Complaints will be handled in accordance with the requirements of the General Data Protection Regulation 2018 and Data Protection Act 2018 or in accordance with any successor regulations or statute.

## 2. Scope of Policy

- 2.1. Homes for Lambeth is a group of companies wholly owned and controlled by Lambeth Council. Homes for Lambeth operates a group structure. This policy covers all complaints and expressions of dissatisfaction made by residents and customers of Homes for Lambeth. It also covers complaints and expressions of dissatisfaction against: Homes for Lambeth staff, contractors and managing agents.
- 2.2. This policy applies only to the following categories of residents or stakeholders involved

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with one or more of the companies listed above,

- Any residents engaged by Homes for Lambeth in a consultation concerning a new Homes for Lambeth housing development.
- Any residents who have or is receiving social investment, community investment, economic or employment services provided by Homes for Lambeth.
- Residents of any HFL Group company who is or has received landlord services.
- A HFL Homes Shared Ownership leaseholder(s) or HFL Homes leaseholders who is or has received services.
- HFL Build leaseholders who purchased their home outright.
- a representative of any of the above who has the authority to act on their behalf.

### 3. Policy

#### **Complaints Officer**

- 3.1. Homes for Lambeth has a “Complaints Officer”, The Complaints Officer will:
- 3.2. Maintain comprehensive records of all complaints received and how they have been responded to, including monitoring all response times and outcomes
  - Act sensitively and fairly.
  - Be trained to receive complaints and deal with distressed and upset residents.
  - Have access to staff at all levels to facilitate quick resolution of complaints; and
  - Have the authority and autonomy to act to resolve disputes quickly and fairly.
  - Triage the process on behalf of HFL

#### **Approach to Complaints**

- 3.3. Residents whose complaints refer to one of the Homes for Lambeth companies can follow Homes for Lambeth’s two-staged complaints process outlined below.
- 3.4. Homes for Lambeth will operate the policy in line with the objective of seeking swift and effective complaints resolution.
- 3.5. In this context, Homes for Lambeth will work with residents to access the most appropriate channels for matters which fall outside the scope of the policy. For example, in some instances, complaints should instead be made through planning consultations or other statutory processes.
- 3.6. We will not consider a matter a complaint if:
  - The issue giving rise to the complaint occurred over six months before the complaint was raised. Where the problem is a recurring issue, Homes for Lambeth will consider any older reports as part of the background to the complaint if this will help to resolve the issue for the resident.

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- Where legal proceedings have been started, we will take steps to keep the complainant informed (e.g., by letter) but will not consider a new complaint; or
- Where matters have already been dealt with as part of the policy.

### **Process to Making Complaints**

- 3.7. Homes for Lambeth follows a two-staged complaints process. At all stages, Homes for Lambeth will keep a record of all correspondence with the complainant. Where Homes for Lambeth is unable to adhere to timescales set out in the process, Homes for Lambeth will provide the complainants with a good reason why this is the case [and will provide a response in advance of or by the deadline set out notifying of a delay and the likely time for resolution].
- 3.8. Petitions would be treated as a complaint with correspondence been undertaken primarily with the person who submits the petition.

#### Stage One (Complaint)

- 3.9. A complainant may make a complaint via e-mail, letter, telephone, online or in person to a member of Homes for Lambeth staff.
- 3.10. If a complainant is disabled any necessary reasonable adjustments will be made, in accordance with our policy, to the process so that their complaint can be registered and responded to in the usual way.
- 3.11. If a complaint is determined to be a “Dissatisfaction” only, Homes for Lambeth will log the complaint and will provide an acknowledgment within 2 working days. The acknowledgment will contain a link to the complaints policy.
- 3.12. If complaint is determined to be an informal (Quick Resolution) complaint and no further clarification is required to understand the nature of the complaint, Homes for Lambeth will log the complaint and provide a response confirming its understanding of the complaint and the resolution within two working days. If further clarification is required, an additional two working days will be extended on receipt of the information.
- 3.13. If the complaint is determined to be a Formal complaint, Homes for Lambeth will log the complaint and will contact the complainant to understand the nature of the complaint. It will confirm receipt of the Formal complaint within 2 working days of receiving the complaint. If the complaint requires further investigation to resolve, Homes for Lambeth will provide a written response within 10 working days of receiving the complaint and in this time either:
- provide a response confirming its understanding of the complaint and the resolution; or
  - provide a response confirming its understanding of the complaint explaining why the complaint cannot be resolved and providing an estimated time frame by which the Stage One decision will be made.
- 3.14. We aim to fully resolve Stage One complaints within 15 working days.
- 3.15. In Stage One, the complaint will be handled by the Head of the Service the complaint refers to. If the complaint involves the relevant Head of Service, then it will be handled by the Director of that service. This process will be managed by the Complaints Officer.

#### Stage Two (Complaint Review)

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- 3.16. If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage One, the complainant will be given the chance to comment on any adverse findings. The Formal complaint and any follow-up will then be reviewed by a Homes for Lambeth Executive Team Member. The Formal complaint details and the relevant correspondence will be carefully reviewed, and Homes for Lambeth will provide a written response within 10 working days of the escalation detailing how the organisation intends to resolve the Formal complaint. If longer is required, the complainant will be informed as soon as possible of an estimated time frame by which a decision will be made.
- 3.17. We aim to resolve any Stage Two escalations within 25 working days of receiving the request to escalate.
- 3.18. Where the Executive Team Member dealing with the complaint, having reviewed all the relevant information, is minded to issue a decision at Stage Two that the complaint is not upheld, s/he will write to the complainant advising them of the position. The letter will include an opportunity for the complainant to respond and challenge any area of dispute before the final decision is made. Wherever possible this stage of the process, including the period for consideration of any new submissions before the issuing of the final decision, should be completed within the 25 working days allocated for responding to the complaint.
- 3.18. Where there is sufficient interest from residents Homes for Lambeth companies will also consider setting up residents' panels, to advise on the complaints process and to have an involvement in the resolution of complaints at Stage Two of the process. If a number of residents have the same or similar concerns, these can be raised on their behalf as a collective formal complaint by the Residents' Panel.
- 3.19. If a complainant has escalated their complaint through the two-stage process and the issue has still not been resolved to their satisfaction, they can refer their complaint to the
- Housing Ombudsman Service. Homes for Lambeth will cooperate with The Housing Ombudsman's requests for information (including providing evidence within 15 working days of it being requested if possible). The Housing Ombudsman Service can be accessed here: <http://www.housingombudsman.org.uk/home/>
  - Residents can also seek early resolution, advice and support from the Housing Ombudsman Service at any stage to resolve an issue with their landlord. Where the Ombudsman service becomes involved with an issue at this stage Homes for Lambeth will provide any information required and ensure that the Service has all the information needed to contribute to an informal resolution of the matter.
  - For the other categories of resident listed at 2.2 above, complaints cannot be escalated to the Housing Ombudsman Service. Where such complainants are dissatisfied with the outcome of the two-stage process they will be advised to pursue the matter by seeking advice from a solicitor, Citizen Advice Bureau or other advice agency, or by contacting their local Councillor or Member of Parliament.

### **Guidance for Contractors**

- 3.20. This policy requires any contractor providing services on Homes for Lambeth's behalf to:
- Record and respond to customer complaints within the timescales detailed in Homes for Lambeth 's internal complaints process. Additionally, to monitor outcomes, underlying trends and incorporate relevant learning to improve service provision.

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- Provide Homes for Lambeth with any information relating to a complaint upon request.
- Assist Homes for Lambeth with investigating complaints where appropriate.

### **Learning from Complaints**

- 3.21. Homes for Lambeth views complaints as opportunities to learn about how it can improve its services. Homes for Lambeth will record and monitor every complaint, including details such as the subject of the complaint, resolution time and any learning points.
- 3.22. Homes for Lambeth will regularly review this register of complaints received in order to identify recurring subjects and continuously improve how the organisation handles complaints. Where possible, Homes for Lambeth will share with residents how learnings are being applied.
- 3.23. In addition, Homes for Lambeth will proactively monitor the effects of its complaint's procedure including any underlying trends. Areas to be monitored will include
- Total number of complaints.
  - Who the complaints are from.
  - Nature of complaints (e.g., ASB, repairs issues, contactor issues).
  - Percentage of complaints resolved at the first stage of the internal process.
  - Percentage of complaints resolved at the second stage of the internal process.
  - Percentage of complaints escalated beyond the internal process, including those to the Housing Ombudsman.

These will also be monitored for expressions of dissatisfaction.

### **Equalities and Diversity**

- 3.24. We adhere to the provisions of the Equality Act 2010. Homes for Lambeth does not discriminate against tenants or residents on account of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation.
- 3.25. This means Homes for Lambeth has processes in place to accommodate an individual's needs regarding access to an appropriate channel for raising a complaint.
- 3.26. We work in accordance with our Equality and Diversity Policy, ensuring that appropriate advice and assistance is given to those disadvantaged in the community, and that adequate translation and interpretation facilities, large print material, Minicom, induction loops etc. are available.

### **Training and Promotion**

- 3.27. We will publicise this policy to our staff, managing agents and tenants through:
- Our website.

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- Policy briefings and training.

### Policy Review

- 3.28. This policy will be reviewed as required or at least every two years to incorporate any changes in legislation or good practice.
- 3.29. HFL Homes residents will be consulted as a part of this review. This consultation may be undertaken with the representative structures of HFL Homes has with residents such as resident associations or resident groups.

### 4. Definitions

<b>Word or Term</b>	<b>Meaning of Word or Term</b>
Dissatisfaction	This is negative feedback where the complainant expresses dissatisfaction, but in expressing this complaint they have not directed this directly at Homes for Lambeth and/or are not expecting or asking for a response.
Informal (Quick Resolution) complaint	Negative feedback where Homes for Lambeth's response is much quicker than in the case of a formal complaint. These complaints do not normally require an investigation or sending of formal letters but will involve ensuring the problem is resolved as quickly as possible. Informal (Quick Resolution) complaints are dealt with through a response within 2 working days of the complaint being lodged.
Formal complaints	Complaints which cannot therefore be resolved quickly.
Complainant	Any resident who makes a 'complaint' about a Homes for Lambeth company.
Complaint	We use the Housing Ombudsman definition and define a complaint as an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the organisation, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting an individual resident or group of residents.
Complaints Officer	The person responsible for complaints at Homes for Lambeth.
Housing Ombudsman Service	Ad service provided to all residents of registered providers of social housing which can assist residents throughout the life of a complaint and also be used if complaints should be escalated. Only HFL Homes is a

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	member of the Housing Ombudsman Scheme.
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### 5. Legal & Regulatory Framework

<b>List relevant legislation or regulation, such as social housing regulation</b>
Data Protection Act 2018
“The Regulatory Framework for Social Housing in England from April 2012” as updated in 2015 and 2018 and associated guidance documents.
2020 Housing Ombudsman Service’s Complaint Handling Code.
General Data Protection Regulation 2018 and Data Protection Act 2018
Equality Act 2010

### 6. Related HFL Policies

This policy links to the following HFL policies:

- Data Protection Policy
- Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Policy

### 7. Version Control

<b>Version Number</b>	<b>Revision Date</b>	<b>Summary of Changes</b>	<b>Author</b>
V5	November 2020	Wholesale review of policy led by Interim Director of Operations and reviewed by HFL Executive Team November 2020	Paul Simpson