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1. Policy statement

1.1 Purpose

1.1.1 Self Help Community Housing (Self Help) aims to provide good quality homes and deliver high quality services to complainants and stakeholders.

1.1.2 However, it is recognised that there may be times when something goes wrong, or complainants are not happy with the services provided. When this occurs, Self Help actively encourages customers to contact staff so that action can be taken.

1.1.3 This policy sets out Self Help's commitment to valuing complaints where our aims are to:

- Ensure complaints are effectively identified and recorded.
- Act responsibly and fairly when things go wrong.
- Put things right quickly for customers.
- To learn from complaints to improve services.


1.2 What is a complaint?

1.2.1 Our definition of a complaint is in line with the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code (2022).

“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.”

1.2.2 There are some circumstances when it is not appropriate to record a complaint because there is another process which is better suited to resolving the problem. Therefore, Self Help will not consider the following under this complaints policy:

- Issues that occurred more than six months ago, unless there is evidence that this has been raised to staff and no action has been taken.


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- An initial request for service when a complainant informs us of a problem for the first time. For example, if the word complaint is used during an initial report of a repair that has not yet been notified to Self Help.
- Initial contact from a customer to chase up a service request, for example a missed appointment that can be resolved there and then with an apology and the provision of a new appointment. However, if a satisfactory resolution cannot be offered to the customer at the time of the contact or if the customer asks, a complaint must be logged.
- Matters that have already been dealt with by the Housing Ombudsman Service or have already exhausted Self Help’s Complaints Process.
- Where legal proceedings have started for example, a matter being reviewed by the Small Claims Court, or First Tier Tribunal.
- Reports about the behaviour of tenants or their households; these are handled in line with the Anti-Social behaviour Policy
- Dissatisfaction with a Self Help policy or procedure where there has not been a service failure; these are recorded as policy feedback and passed to the policy owner to be considered in the next review.
- Disagreement with a decision where there is another procedure to appeal the outcome.
- Personal injury claims or claims for damaged items valued at over £5,000; these will be assessed and usually passed to Self Help’ insurers.
- Enquires or expressions of dissatisfaction from members of the public will be sent directly to the Chief Executive.

1.3 Who can make a complaint?

1.3.1 Self Help will accept and investigate complaints in line with this policy from:

- Any of our customers who fall in scope of this policy including tenants and former tenants.
- An applicant for housing and anyone acting as a representative of a complainant where permission has been given by the complainant

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(including family members, Members of Parliament, Councillors, or third-party organisations).

1.3.2 Correspondence sent to Self Help will be directed to the most appropriate team to respond to. Where the contact relates to dissatisfaction, the issue will be investigated as a new complaint in line with this policy or will be included as further information in a complaint that is already being investigated.

1.4 Complaints process

1.4.1 When handling complaints, we commit to putting customers at the heart of the process by:


- accepting complaints in any format, including verbally, written and online.
- making reasonable adjustments so all customers can access the process.
- giving complainants opportunities to share evidence and suggest solutions;
- using records and evidence to inform decisions rather than speculation.
- ensuring the process remains focussed on identifying a resolution to the issues raised where this is possible.
- Signposting complainants to other organisations for support where needed.

1.4.2 Self Help operates a two-stage complaints procedure in which the first stage, focusses on staff taking swift action to resolve complainants' concerns effectively.

1.4.3 The second stage focusses on providing more detailed independent investigation into complainant concerns and providing a full written report of their findings.

1.4.4 Self Help will aim to acknowledge complaints within five working days of receiving the complaint. When acknowledging a complaint, Self Help will confirm the scope of the complaint and the understanding of outcomes the complainant expects to ensure expectations are clear.

1.4.5 Self Help will attempt to contact complainants to discuss the outcome of both Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaint investigations and to explain our decision before we confirm this in writing.

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- 1.4.6 Self Help will confirm in writing the outcome of all stages of this complaints process, including any findings, proposed actions to put things right, and will provide complainants with information about what options they have if they remain unhappy, including contact details for the Housing Ombudsman.
- 1.4.7 Where Self Help decides not to accept a complaint, this will be explained to the complainant, setting out the reasons why the matter is not suitable for the complaints process. The complainant will be advised of their right to contact the Housing Ombudsman Service to challenge this decision.
- 1.4.8 Self Help aims to acknowledge Stage 1 complaints within five working days and to respond to Stage 1 complaints within ten working days.
- 1.4.2 Complainants have the right to request that their complaint is escalated to Stage 2 of the complaints process if they remain unhappy with the response at Stage 1. Complainants will be asked to explain what they remain unhappy with, and what outcome they would like within **10 working days** of the response. The aim of the second stage of the process is to resolve the complaint through robust investigation of the issues by an independent person, not involved in the complaint at Stage 1.
- 1.4.9 Self Help aims to respond to Stage 2 complaints within 20 working days of the complaint being escalated.
- 1.4.10 There are times when complaint investigations are more complex or need a longer timeframe to provide a complainant with a full response. If this is the case, Self Help may extend the timeframe to respond to a complaint at Stage 1 or Stage 2 by 10 working days. Self Help will contact the complainant to discuss this and explain the reasons for the extension and confirm any extension to the above timescales in writing.
- 1.4.11 If a complainant remains unhappy following Self Help's Stage 2 response, they are encouraged to contact their complaint handler to share why they remain unhappy, provide any additional evidence which has not been considered, and to explain what they are looking for to resolve the complaint, within 10 working days of the initial response.
- 1.4.12 Once this has been provided, Self Help will review any additional information and provide a final response to the complainant, and this will



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explain Self Help's position and the complainant's rights should they wish to pursue their complaint further.

1.4.13 In all instances, this will involve a referral to the Housing Ombudsman Service, but other agencies may be signposted, should this be appropriate.

1.5 Managing challenging or unacceptable behaviours

1.5.1 Whilst staff do understand that there are times that complainants may become upset, frustrated, or anxious and will endeavour to respond positively and sensitively, there are occasions that complainants behave in ways that are challenging or unacceptable.

1.5.2 Where's behaviour prevents staff from carrying out their duties effectively or is rude, abusive or threatening, Self Help will take action in line with the Managing Difficult behaviour Policy.

1.6 External review

1.6.1 Whilst Self Help always aims to resolve concerns through the internal complaints process, complainants do have the right to refer their complaint to the Housing Ombudsman Service should they remain unhappy with the final response.

1.6.2 The complainant may approach the Housing Ombudsman Service directly once their complaint has exhausted Self Help's complaint process.

1.6.3 Self Help will direct complainants to the Ombudsman Service within any responses provided at Stage 1 or Stage 2 of the complaints process.


1.7 Putting things right - compensation/redress

1.7.1 Self Help will investigate any requests for compensation associated with a complaint, in line with this policy.

1.7.2 Staff may offer financial compensation or an alternative goodwill gesture, within the guidelines of Self Help's Compensation Guidance, which gives advice on appropriate redress based on the circumstances involved.

1.8 Learning from complaints

1.8.1 Self Help uses all complainant feedback, including complaints to inform service delivery and has put the following measures in place to ensure that lessons are learned from complainants' experiences:

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- Records of any service failures and the actions taken in response.
- Feedback opportunities given to complainants to assess the process
- Regular reports detailing performance to relevant management teams

1.8.2 More broadly, Self Help looks for opportunities to work with the wider sector to identify, share and embed best practice through:

- Actively engaging with the Housing Ombudsman Service and using its regular insight reports to review and improve services as required; • taking part in recognised training and development activities, where appropriate; and
- participating in sector-wide reviews, assessments, and feedback activities, wherever the opportunity arises.

2. Roles and responsibilities

2.1 The CEO is responsible for the adoption of, and adherence to, this policy across Self Help.

2.2 This is supported by the Housing Services Manager, who provides guidance and support to staff and maintains independent oversight of all complaints handled through this policy. Additionally, the SMT are responsible for ensuring that complaints are used to inform service delivery and that action is taken in response to lessons learned.

2.3 Managers have day to day responsibility for the implementation of the policy and associated procedure in practice. They are responsible for ensuring:

- Communication to all staff.
- Suitable and sufficient training and instruction is provided.
- Adherence to the policy by all staff.
- The provision of the necessary equipment, resources, and records to make sure that compliance is achieved.

2.4 Communication with complainants is centred on the concept that all enquiries are resolved at the first point of contact wherever possible. Therefore, all staff, particularly those who may interact with complainants and receive complaints must:

- Be aware of, understand and implement this policy and associated



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procedure.

- Support resolution of complaints and concerns at the first point of contact.
- Provide assistance to colleagues handling complaints where requested.
- Participate in any training that Self Help makes available.
- Communicate any issues with implementing this policy to their line manager and identify any areas for continuous improvement promptly.

3. References and sources

- Housing Ombudsman Service
- Disability Discrimination Act 1995
- Data Protection Act 2019
- Human Rights Act 1998
- Equality Act 2010

4. Impact on diversity

- 4.1 Self Help demonstrates its commitment to diversity and promoting equality by ensuring that this policy is applied in a manner that is fair to all sections of the community, with due regard to the protected characteristics identified under the Equality Act 2010 and in accordance with its Equality and Diversity Policy.
- 4.2 Self Help recognises that some complainants have disabilities or communication needs, which may make it difficult for them to express themselves or communicate clearly; especially when they are anxious or upset.
- 4.3 Where Self-help is made aware that a complainant is disabled or has particular needs, staff will make reasonable adjustments to meet their needs. Examples of adjustments that may be made include (but are not limited to):
- Using different ways to communicate with a complainant.
 - Arranging for translation services, large print or braille where required.
 - Signposting complainants to advocacy or mediation services if appropriate.



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5. **Monitoring and compliance**

- 5.1 This policy, and associated procedures, will be monitored through regular review by the CEO, who will ensure compliance with the policy across operations by maintaining independent oversight of action taken under this policy.
- 5.2 Governance - The Chair of the Trustees will lead on complaints at Board level and liaise monthly with the CEO to review any complaints. Complaints will be reported to the Board quarterly with an emphasis on learning and implementing improvements.
- 5.3 The Housing Ombudsman Service ensure compliance with the policy where individual complaints are referred to it for consideration.
- 5.4 Complaint performance information and compliance with the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code will be reported regularly to the Board.
- 5.5 The Association will comply with the Housing Ombudsman Code in respect of completion and publication of a self-assessment against their complaints code each year.