

## **Abbeyfield Bishop's Castle Society complaints policy**

### Complaints policy

We are committed to providing you with an excellent service. We understand, however, that sometimes the service we provide may not meet your expectations. If this is the case, we want to know about it.

### Context, aims and scope of this policy

We are committed to providing a high-quality service to residents and others who access our service. We recognise that while most concerns can be resolved quickly and easily, occasionally a formal process is needed. We welcome suggestions and comments from residents, their families and representatives, to help improve the services we provide. Feedback gives us the opportunity to learn about our strengths, understand our weaknesses and is key to ensuring that we consistently meet a high standard of service.

This policy aims to:

- ensure that all complaints are handled promptly, fairly, consistently and confidentially (in line with data protection regulations)
- be clear about who is responsible for complaints at each stage, ensuring that designated individuals are not the subject of the complaint and that, as the complaint is escalated, it is dealt with by a more senior member of the Society. In particular, the Chair will not usually be involved at Stage 1
- ensure records are kept of all complaints and prompt review of their handling to drive improvement
- ensure details of complaints are provided to residents and included in our annual report. 'put things right' where a complaint identifies that we have failed to deliver a service to the expected standard

This Policy is intended to cover current and prospective residents and their representatives but, with the exclusions below\* also applies to any stakeholder who wishes to make a complaint about our Society. Complaints should be made as soon after the event as possible (or came to the attention of the complainant), and ideally within twelve months.

If the complainant expresses a desired outcome that we believe to be unreasonable, we will explain our position at the outset, while continuing to investigate.

If a complaint is accompanied by inappropriate behaviour, we will seek to manage this behaviour separately in line with the Equality Act 2010.

\*The following are excluded from the scope of this policy:

- resident complaints about another resident, for example of bullying or harassment, or
- complaints about a resident from someone outside the Society. These are dealt with in line with our Professional, Ethical and Legal Boundaries Policy
- staff complaints, which are dealt with in line with our Staff Disciplinary and Grievance Policy

- complaints about something for which our Society is not responsible (for example, care a resident receives from an external agency). With permission, we will share such concerns with the relevant organisation, or signpost the complainant to the organisation's complaints procedure.
- complaints already subject to legal proceedings, or relating to an issues likely to be dealt with by our insurers.

If we think the matter is not suitable for the complaints process, we will write to the complainant explaining our reasons for the decision and advise the complainant that they still have the right to take the issue to the Housing Ombudsman. The Ombudsman's contact details will be included in any correspondence. If the Ombudsman does not agree that the exclusion has been fairly applied, the Ombudsman may tell the landlord to take on the complaint.

Where there is doubt about which policy is applicable, the Chair will decide.

#### Defining a complaint

The term complaint is defined here 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.'*

We recognise that the word complaint does not have to be used for it to be treated as such. This policy is intended for residents but also covers an expression of dissatisfaction by any stakeholder affected by the standard of service, actions or lack of action by our Society. Conversely, a request for a service is not in itself a complaint – it is only where the request for service is not dealt with adequately or within a reasonable timescale that it would become a complaint.

#### Our Complaints Process

Our Society aims to make it easy for residents and stakeholders to make a complaint by offering a choice of channels that can be used and ensuring that the Society's policy is publicised by:

- displaying information on the complaints process on the noticeboard
- giving information on the complaints process to residents on admission
- putting information on the complaints process on the Society website

Where a resident or their representative is dissatisfied with any aspect of the service provided by our Society, the first course of action should be to raise the problem directly with the relevant manager or individual concerned. We will try to resolve the issue informally on the day it is raised, and, in most cases, will be able to do so quickly and satisfactorily.

Where an individual is having difficulty in making a complaint, we will make all reasonable adjustments to assist the complainant in registering the complaint.

At all stages, please provide contact details, details of the complaint and any suggestions you may have for resolving the complaint. Anonymous complaints will be investigated under the same procedure; however, it is better where contact details are provided so that we can inform the complainant of the outcome of our investigation.

Complaints received via social media will receive a generic response and be passed to our Administrator to be addressed through the standard procedure. Where the complaint is made publicly on social media, confidentiality cannot be protected.

Where the issue raised cannot be resolved informally, a formal complaint can be made using the procedure below.

#### Stage 1: Investigation

Complaints can be made:

- In person or via a representative to the Complaints Officer (Administrator) or another member of staff
- By email, to the Complaints Officer (Administrator) at [abbeyfield.bishops@btconnect.com](mailto:abbeyfield.bishops@btconnect.com)
- By telephone to the Complaints Officer (Administrator) at 01588 630 000
- By post, address to the Complaints Officer (Administrator) at Abbeyfield House, Oak Meadow, Bishop's Castle SY9 5PA

If the complaint relates to the Complaints Officer (Administrator) complainants may contact the Chairman. A form is included with this policy for complaints to use to record their complaint, if desired.

We will log details of the complaint and acknowledge it in writing to the complainant within **5 working days** of receipt. This correspondence will include the 'complaint definition', i.e. the details of the complaint and the outcomes the complainant is seeking. If any aspect of the complaint is unclear, the complainant will be asked for clarification.

An investigation will be carried out and a full written response, including any actions planned, will be provided within **10 working days**, which may be extended by a further **10 working days**, where necessary, subject to agreement with the complainant. We will provide the complainant with the contact details of the Housing Ombudsman. The complainant will be asked if their complaint is resolved and if they are happy with the way in which it has been dealt.

If the complainant remains dissatisfied, they may escalate the complaint to **stage 2** by notifying the Complaints Officer (Administrator) (same as above) in person or using the contact details above.

#### Stage 2: Review

When a complaint is escalated, the complaint and its Stage 1 investigation will be subject to a full review by The Chairman.

We will provide a full written response within **20 working days** from the request to escalate. Where this is not possible, an explanation will be given and an agreement reached with the complainant to extend the response period by no more than a further **10 working days**. We will provide the complainant with the contact details of the Housing Ombudsman. The complainant will be informed that the response following Stage 2 concludes the Society's internal complaints procedure.

After conclusion of our complaints process

The Society is registered with the Ombudsman service – Housing The complainant can be referred to the Housing Ombudsman Service, PO Box 152, Liverpool, L33 7WQ (Tel: 0300 1113000, website: [www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk](http://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk))

A complainant is required to wait eight weeks following the conclusion of the Society's complaints process before taking the complaint to the Ombudsman directly. They may choose to refer the complaint to a 'Designated Person' (such as their MP or local councillor) during this time to help them resolve the complaint or refer the complaint to the Housing Ombudsman on their behalf.

Our Society will co-operate with the Ombudsman during any investigation and comply fully with the resulting final decision, which will be binding.

#### Putting things right

Where we have failed to deliver a service to the expected standard, we will seek to resolve the complaint and to 'put things right' – this may include an apology, corrective action, including, where appropriate, making a compensation payment. Any significant findings will result in a review and any lessons learned will be recorded.

#### Reporting on Complaints

The executive committee will have access to full records of any complaints received at the Society. A [self-assessment](#) to review the volume, outcomes, complainant satisfaction and compliance with timeframes will be undertaken on an annual basis.

Legislation requires that details of the number, content and results of complaints received are to be shared with residents and published in the [Annual Report](#).

#### Changes since last version of this Policy

The 2020 version was substantially updated in line with the Ombudsman's Code, with changes to time limits, stages and how complainant behaviour will be managed as required.

On review in 2024, note that in 'Reporting on Complaints' it is now a regulatory requirement rather than recommendation.

Further amendments to the policy were added in the first quarter of 2025. This was to clarify certain procedures, particularly in relation to those occasions when we do think a complaint is suitable for our complaints process (see section 1).

This policy has been assessed under the requirements issued by the Housing Ombudsman.

There are no other significant changes.

In line with the Housing Ombudsman's Code, we complete an annual self-assessment of our complaint handling procedures.

[You can download our self-assessment here](#)

[Read our Executive Committee Annual Complaints Performance Report 2024](#)

[Read our Annual Complaints Performance Report 2024](#)

[Download our Complaints Form](#)