

# COMPLAINTS POLICY

## 1. Scope

Our complaints policy sets out how we will deal with complaints by aiming to resolve problems quickly, consistently, and fairly for our residents. The policy applies to all our residents, including anyone who receives a service provided by us, and covers actions by all ISHA employees including contractors, sub-contractors, agents and volunteers. Our complaints policy is informed by the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code ([April 2024](#)).

## 2. Policy Statement

We want to hear from residents when they feel dissatisfied about their home, or a service provided by us or anyone acting on our behalf. We will make it easy for residents to tell us about their concerns in the way that is most convenient to them.

We welcome complaints because they are important to us. We want to take the opportunity to fix an immediate problem, rebuild our relationship with our residents, learn from this and improve our services. We will always try to resolve a resident's complaint.

### 2.1 Definition of a complaint

We define a complaint using the Housing Ombudsman's standard definition:

**"an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by ISHA, our own staff, or those acting on our behalf, affecting an individual resident or group of residents."**

Our residents do not have to specifically use the word 'complaint'. Whenever a resident expresses dissatisfaction we will give them the choice to make a complaint.

When the resident does not wish to complain but has made a service request, requiring us to take action to put something right, we will record, monitor and review the request regularly. A complaint will be raised when the resident expresses dissatisfaction with the response to their service request, even if the handling of the service request remains ongoing. We will continue to address the service request if a complaint is raised. Complaints submitted via a third party or representative are handled in line with our complaints policy.

Where we ask for feedback from resident surveys, we will provide information about our complaints process in case residents wish to raise any issues with us.

**2.2. We accept all complaints unless there is a valid reason not to. ISHA will consider all complaints on their own merits; however, we may not accept a complaint if:**

- The issue giving rise to the complaint occurred more than 12 months ago.
- Matters are being taken through ISHA's insurance claims procedure

- The complaint is made by one ISHA resident against another resident. ISHA has a separate Anti-Social Behaviour policy to investigate such claims. However, we will investigate a complaint about how an ASB case or service request has been handled
- a complaint is already being dealt with as a complaint (unless there is new evidence/information provided regarding a closed complaint)
- The complainant is unreasonable, in line with our 'Dealing with unreasonable or unreasonably persistent customers' guidance.
- The issue is part of an ongoing legal matter, which has been initiated by the resident or ISHA
- it is a complaint about an outcome or judgment made by a court or tribunal
- If we receive legal instruction or correspondence during the handling of a complaint, we reserve the right to hand over the case to our legal representative and write to inform the resident the complaint is closed.

If we decide not to accept a complaint, we will provide a detailed explanation about why it is not suitable for our complaints process and providing information about the right to take the decision to the Housing Ombudsman.

Where complaints are submitted anonymously, we will investigate the matter as much as we can and implement any identified improvements.

### **2.3. How to make a complaint**

Residents can raise a complaint with any member of staff or through all our usual contact points:

- By telephone: 0300 131 7300
- By email: [isha@isha.co.uk](mailto:isha@isha.co.uk)
- Through our website: [www.isha.co.uk](http://www.isha.co.uk)
- In writing, or in person: Islington and Shoreditch Housing Association, 102 Blackstock Road London N4 2DR

### **2.4 Who can complain?**

Our residents and anyone who has received a service from ISHA (or those acting on behalf of ISHA) and is dissatisfied with that service.

A representative or advocate can act on behalf of a resident. They must provide signed authority from the resident. This could be a friend, relative or a representative of an external organisation such as the Citizens Advice Bureau or MIND. MPs and councillors can also enquire on behalf of a resident.

Where a resident needs help to make a complaint, we will provide support needed including reasonable adjustments in line with the Equality Act 2010 and encouraging (with permission from the resident) the use of a representative or advocate where appropriate.

So that our residents understand their right to complain and how to do so, we will provide clear information about our complaints policy on our website and make it available through other channels whenever requested. This will include information about the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code and how to raise a complaint directly with the Housing Ombudsman.

### **2.5 Resolving complaints**

ISHA has a two-stage complaints policy to comply with the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code. All complaints are managed by our Complaints and Resolution Team. The Complaints and Resolution Team will contact the resident to find out more about the complaint and liaise with relevant staff to investigate it. At each stage of the complaints process, our Complaints and Resolution Officers will deal with complaints on their merits, act independently and have an open

mind. They will provide residents with a fair chance to set out their position and they will take measures to address any actual or perceived conflict of interest. They will consider all relevant information and evidence carefully. Importantly, the Complaints and Resolution Team have the authority and autonomy to act to resolve disputes quickly and fairly.

## **2.6 Stage 1 complaints**

We will send written acknowledgement of the complaint within five (5) working days of receipt by ISHA. This will include a 'complaint definition', our understanding of the complaint and the outcomes the individual is seeking. When defining the complaint, we will be clear which aspects of the complaint ISHA is responsible for and which we are not.

The assigned Complaints and Resolution Officer will investigate the complaint, make a decision, and inform the resident of that decision in writing, within 10 working days of ISHA acknowledging the complaint.

If necessary, the deadline may be extended for up to a further 10 working days with a valid explanation. We will also provide the contact details for the Housing Ombudsman at this time. If we need more time to fully respond to the complaint, we will obtain the resident's agreement.

As part of the investigation, we will work with the resident to agree on a course of action and keep them updated on the progress of their complaint. Where additional complaints are raised during the investigation, these may be incorporated into the Stage 1 response if they are related, and the Stage 1 response has not been issued. Where the response has been issued, the new issues are unrelated to the investigation, or it would unreasonably delay the response, the new issues raised will be logged under a new complaint. Where a key issue of a complaint relates to legal obligations, we will clearly set out our understanding of the obligations of all parties.

The frequency of contact between the complaint handler and the resident will be agreed as part of the investigation and updates provided to the resident based on the agreement made.

If a staff member is the subject of a complaint, we will examine all supporting evidence and the staff member will be given the opportunity to set out their position and comment on any findings before a final decision is made. Where a resident is the subject of a complaint, this is handled separately, in line with our anti-social behaviour policy.

We will address all points raised in the complaint definition and provide clear reasons for any decisions, referencing the relevant policy, law and good practice where appropriate.

## **2.7 Closing Stage 1 complaints**

Once the investigation is complete, we will write to the resident with the outcome of their complaint. This will include:

- The complaint stage
- The complaint definition
- The decision on the complaint
- The reasons for any decisions made
- The details of how we are putting things right
- any outstanding actions to resolve the issues raised and how they will be tracked and completed. The complaint handler will remain in contact with the resident until these actions are completed.
- Details of how to escalate to Stage 2 if the resident is not satisfied with the response.

ISHA will clearly state whether a complaint has been upheld, not upheld or partially upheld. Where the complaint contains multiple issues, each issue will be dealt with separately.

If the resident does not feel the complaint has been sufficiently resolved, they may request their complaint is reviewed at Stage 2 of the complaints process.

Residents have up to 20 working days from the date of the Stage 1 response to request an escalation to Stage 2 of our complaints process. We will accept all requests for escalation to Stage 2 of our complaints handling process unless we have a clear reason not to, and this will be considered on the merits of individual complaints, taking into account the exclusions below.

#### **2.8. We will not take complaints to Stage 2 of our process if:**

- The complaint is still open at Stage 1 of the complaints process
- The resident complaining is demonstrating unreasonable behaviour, in line with our 'Dealing with unreasonable or unreasonably persistent customers' guidance
- The request for escalation is more than 20 working days after the Stage 1 response
- The complaint meets any of the points under 2.2.

Where this is the case, the resident will be notified that the complaint has been closed, the reasons why. The resident retains the right to take their complaint to the Ombudsman and we will provide information on how to do this.

#### **2.9 Stage 2 complaints**

If a resident remains dissatisfied with all or part of their Stage 1 response, the complaint can be progressed to Stage 2, the final stage of ISHA's complaints process.

Requests for Stage 2 will be acknowledged and logged within five working days of the escalation request being received. This acknowledgement will set out our understanding of any outstanding issues and the outcomes sought to resolve the issue.

The Stage 2 investigator is not the same person who conducted the Stage 1 investigation. The Stage 2 investigator will review the Stage 1 decision and how it was reached, as well as any new and relevant information not previously considered. This Stage 2 investigation will usually involve a meeting or telephone call to fully understand why the complaint has not been resolved.

The resident will be notified of the outcome of the review within 20 days of the acknowledgement of their complaint being escalated to Stage 2. If the Stage 2 investigator feel the matter is complex and an extension may be required, an expected timescale for response will be provided. Any extension will not exceed a further 20 working days without good reason, and the reasons must be clearly explained. The Housing Ombudsman's contact details will be provided whenever an extension is required.

During the Stage 2 review, the investigator may identify further actions that could resolve the complaint. These actions will be carried out and the complaint closed, if there is nothing further to add and consequently the complaint has exhausted our complaints process, the complaint will be closed.

#### **Closing the Stage 2 complaint**

The Stage 2 response will include:

- The complaint stage
- The complaint definition
- The decision on the complaint
- The reasons for any decisions made
- The details of how we will put things right
- Details of any outstanding actions
- Details of how to escalate to the Housing Ombudsman if the resident remains dissatisfied with the final outcome.

We will clearly state whether a complaint has been upheld, not upheld or partially upheld. Where the complaint contains multiple issues, each issue will be dealt with separately.

We will notify the resident that the complaint has been closed and our complaints process has been exhausted, as well as providing contact information for the Ombudsman.

### **2.10 Complaining directly to the Independent Housing Ombudsman**

Residents may complain directly to the Independent Housing Ombudsman after exhausting ISHA's complaints process.

The contact details for the Housing Ombudsman Service are:

- **Online complaint form:** [www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/residents/make-a-complaint/](http://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/residents/make-a-complaint/)
- **Phone:** 0300 111 3000
- **Email:** [info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk](mailto:info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk)
- **Postal address:** Housing Ombudsman Service, PO Box 1484, Unit D, Preston. PR2 0ET

Residents may also contact the Ombudsman if they are having issues accessing ISHA's complaints process, do not agree with a proposed extension period, or if we have not responded in line with our complaints policy. The Ombudsman does not investigate complaints before the complaints process has been completed but can take steps to encourage resolution.

### **2.11 Further options**

- Further options are outlined in the Appendix.

## **3. Learning from complaints**

Complaints help us improve our service to residents and we strive to maintain a positive complaint handling culture.

The Director of Culture, Communications and Involvement oversees complaint handling performance. With the complaints team, the Director is responsible for assessing themes and trends to identify potential systemic issues, serious risks or policies and procedures that require revision. The Director will help to set a standard objective for complaint handling for all relevant staff. The Director is also responsible for ensuring ISHA undertakes the annual complaints self-assessment and complies with other requirements under the legislation.

We report regularly to ISHA's Board about our complaint's performance. A member of ISHA's Board is appointed to have lead responsibility for complaints and ensuring the Board receives regular information and insights, including updates on the volume, categories and outcomes of complaints, as well as reviews of issues and trends arising. The Board also reviews updates on the outcomes of the Ombudsman's investigations and progress made in complying with orders.

We report to residents on the learning and actions taken as a result of complaints received. We do this on our website and social channels, in resident newsletters and in our Residents' Annual Report. Our resident involvement strategy includes creation of a Resident Complaint Panel, which we are working towards. For information about joining the panel, please email .

In line with requirements of the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code, we produce an annual complaints performance and service improvement report, which is reviewed by the Board and published on our website.

#### **4. Equality and diversity**

4.1 ISHA is committed to valuing and promoting equality and diversity. We recognise that we have a duty to eliminate unfair treatment and discrimination in the services we provide and to promote and value respect in everything we do. We expect our staff to share these values and treat all customers with fairness and respect.

4.2 Our ED&I strategy is in place and addresses our approach to inclusion. We adapt our approach as required or requested to accommodate an individual's needs in line with the Equality Act 2010.

#### **5. Data protection and GDPR**

5.1 We are committed to protecting personal information in line with the UK GDPR. All complaints are dealt with in line with our data protection policies and procedures.

5.2 Third parties representing residents are required to provide a letter of authorisation to act on their behalf. Where there is no evidence to prove that they have been authorised to represent our residents in this way, we will ask for any other evidence which proves the resident is happy to be represented by the third party.

# APPENDIX

**Further Options for a customer after a complaint has exhausted ISHA's complaint process include (depending on their original complaint issue):**

## **The Housing Ombudsman**

If you remain dissatisfied with our response to your complaint, you can go directly to the Housing Ombudsman Service, and they may be able to investigate how we dealt with the matter.

The contact details for the Housing Ombudsman Service are:

- [Online complaint form: www. Housing-ombudsman.org.uk/residents/make-a-complaint/](http://www.Housing-ombudsman.org.uk/residents/make-a-complaint/)
- Phone: 0300 111 3000
- Email: [info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk](mailto:info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk)
- Postal address: Housing Ombudsman Service, PO Box 1484, Unit D, Preston. PR2 0ET

## **First-Tier Tribunal (Property Chamber – Residential Property)**

Anyone who is a landlord, tenant, freeholder or leaseholder can apply. They will consider cases regarding:

- Rent increases for fair or market rates
- Leasehold disputes e.g. variable service charges
- Leasehold enfranchisement e.g. extending a lease

[www.gov.uk/housing-tribunals](http://www.gov.uk/housing-tribunals)

Residents may want to get help and advice from the Leasehold Advisory Service before they apply to the First-Tier Tribunal. For this, they should contact the Leasehold Advisory Service.

Telephone      020 7832 2500 Website      [www.lease-advice.org](http://www.lease-advice.org)

## **Alternate Dispute Resolution (ADR)**

- Provides an alternative to going to court to settle disagreements.
- Methods include arbitration and mediation
- Arbitration – disagreeing parties agree to be bound by the decision of an independent third party
- Mediation – a third party attempts to arrange a settlement between the two sides.

Reference	Version	Created	Author	Review	Board Approved
Complaints policy	4	<u>March 2024</u>	Thea McNaught-Reynolds	February 2026	March 2024
Complaints Policy	4.1	<u>November 2024</u>		February 2026	4 December 2024
Changes from V4 to V4.1	4.1	2.9 Clarification re Stage 2 timescales: Acknowledge within 5 days of escalation request and Response within 20 days of the Acknowledgement  2.10 and Appendix: update to the postal address of the Housing Ombudsman			
Complaints Policy	4.2	<u>October 2025</u>		February 2026	4 December 2024
Changes from V4.1 to V4.2	4.2	Removed social media from the reporting channels  <b>2.3. How to make a complaint</b>			

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Via our social channels: Twitter @ISHA_London and <u>Facebook</u></li> </ul> <p>When complaints are received by social media, they are acknowledged publicly on the channel. To maintain confidentiality and privacy, we do not discuss details on public channels. Residents are advised of our <a href="#">social media house rules</a> and requested to provide further details by direct message or another private channel. Once contact has been made directly, complaints are handled as usual, in line with our policy.</p>			