

# Findings from the Abbeyfield Society's self-assessment of our complaint handling procedures



The Abbeyfield Society's Complaints, Concerns and Compliments Policy (3.0) was approved by the Board in December 2020. See our [Making a Complaint](#) guide for residents and their representatives for full details.

## Definition of a complaint

Abbeyfield has adopted the standard definition of 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.”

The exclusions from the policy are clearly set out, and deemed to be reasonable and fair. Where an issue cannot be addressed via the complaints procedure, there are details of what alternative means of resolving the issue should be used instead.

## Accessibility

There are multiple routes available to make a complaint, including by email, telephone, by post, by speaking to any member of staff or via a representative.

Details of our complaints policy and procedure are available on the [abbeyfield.com](http://abbeyfield.com) website.

Abbeyfield has a commitment to make any reasonable adjustments necessary, where an individual has any difficulty in raising a complaint, in line with our Equality, Diversity & Inclusion, Aids & Adaptations, and Accessible Information policies.

We regularly advise residents about our complaints process, via the Making a Complaint guide which is given to prospective and current residents, as well as on display in all of our houses and homes.

## Complaints team and process

We have a named Complaints Officer, who is the Quality and Safety Officer. The Complaints Officer works within our Legal and Compliance team to ensure complaints are resolved quickly and fairly.

Our complaints procedure has an optional Stage 3; complainants may take their complaint directly to the Housing Ombudsman (where it relates to a housing service) or the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (where it relates to a care service) following Stage 2.

Our final response letter sets out the right of complainants to refer to the matter to the relevant Ombudsman for an independent review.

We hold a record of all correspondence related to a complaint in line with the requirements of data protection legislation.

Over 90% of the complaints we receive are resolved at Stage 1 (based on data from August 2019 to August 2020)

## Communication

We keep complainants informed and updated during the complaints process. It is a requirement of our policy that any changes to our timescales for responding to a complaint must be agreed with the complainant.

The complainant will be offered a phone call or a meeting to discuss our findings before receiving a written response, to enable any areas of dispute to be challenged prior to the final decision.

All complaints are acknowledged and logged within five days – it is our policy to acknowledge complaints within two working days.

Residents are advised of how to escalate their complaint further, should they wish, via the standard template letters in use at the end of each stage. At each stage, if the complainant remains dissatisfied, they can ask for the complaint to be escalated by letting the Complaints Officer know – they do not need to put this request in writing.

In the last 12 months, 91% of complaints received were resolved at Stage 1 (based on data from August 19 to August 20), with 3% resolved at Stage 2.

56% of Stage 1 responses in the last year were sent within the Housing Ombudsman's Code's timescale of 10 working days. Our previous procedure allowed 20 working days from receipt to response at Stage 1 so we plan to improve this over the coming year.

Of those resolved at Stage 2, 66% (two complaints) were resolved within the Housing Ombudsman's timescale.

Where timescales have been extended, the majority of cases are due to more time being needed to investigate, particularly complex matters involving other authorities or stakeholders.

Complaints have not historically always been informed when timescales have been extended. The need to agree extensions to our set timescales is clearly outlined within our policy, and will be covered within our Complaints Handling training for staff members.

We have introduced a complainant satisfaction survey from December 2020 to monitor the proportion of complaints that we have resolved to the complainant's satisfaction.

### **Cooperation with Housing Ombudsman Service**

We responded to all requests from the Housing Ombudsman within 15 days, as required.

### **Fairness in complaint handling**

Complainants may complaint via a representative – we will co-operate with anyone formally authorised to act on behalf of a complainant.

Where advice is given, we seek to ensure it is accurate and easy to understand.

There have been no complaints that we have refused to escalate.

### **Outcomes and remedies**

Where something has gone wrong, we take appropriate steps to put things right.

### **Continuous learning and improvement**

We have implemented improvements to our organisational policies, ways of working and staff training as a result of learning from complaints – although this is not always systematically logged.

We will share lessons with residents via this annual summary.

We share details of our complaints handling performance with our Quality Committee, a sub-committee of the Board, on a quarterly basis, while details will be included in the Annual Report from year ending 20/21.

The Housing Ombudsman's Code has resulted in significant overhaul of our complaints handling procedures and will make a real difference to residents and others making a complaint.

As part of our suite of changes, we have clarified the channels that can be used to make a complaint, shortened our response timescales, made Stage 3 optional for complainants and simplified our approach to addressing anonymous complaints.