

Complaints procedure

Who's this for?	Residents and colleagues
To be reviewed	July 2026
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Other related documents	Complaints policy Compensation policy & guidance Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code Unreasonable Behaviour Policy Reasonable Adjustments policy

Definition of a complaint

We consider a **complaint** to be any expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action taken by us, or those acting on our behalf, affecting a resident or group of residents.

A resident does not have to use the word 'complaint' for it to be treated as such. Whenever a resident expresses dissatisfaction, we will give them the choice to make complaint. We will accept complaints via third parties or representatives and handle these in line with our complaints policy.

We define a **service request** as a request that Settle provides a service or fixes a problem, for example a property repair or neighbourhood issue, when reported in line with our customer offer, policies and procedures. This is not a complaint but if we fail to carry out the request this may become a complaint. Similarly, a resident may raise an enquiry where they ask us about something relating to their home or tenancy. For example, information about their rent account. This too would not be a complaint but may become one if we fail to provide the information requested. All service requests are to be logged on our CRM system. Service

requests are recorded, monitored and reviewed regularly. A complaint must be raised when a resident raises dissatisfaction with the response to their service request. If the service requests remains ongoing, we will not stop our efforts to address the request while we investigate and respond to the complaint.

Leaseholders and shared owners can get advice from The Leasehold Advisory Service if there is a dispute regarding a lease. They can be contacted on 020 7832 2500, Email: info@lease-advice.org.uk, Website: www.lease-advice.org.uk

Leaseholders can also apply to the First Tier Tribunal (Property Chambers) to resolve complaints that have been through all stages of the complaints policy regarding service charges and the terms of lease agreements. The Tribunal is a special branch of the UK legal system that deals with property disputes. It is independent of the Government but can be reached through the gov.uk website: <https://www.gov.uk/housing-tribunals>

Should a resident raise dissatisfaction through a public social media channel or via their MP, we will initially follow this up directly through a private channel to make sure the issue is dealt with confidentially.

A complaint made in the form of a petition on behalf of multiple residents will be treated as one complaint. Interactions and correspondence will be directed to the nominated signatory.

Exclusions

We always look at the individual circumstances of each complaint. However, in some instances it may not be appropriate to consider the complaint, such as:

- The complaint is about something that happened over 12 months ago, or it has been longer than 12 months since the resident became aware of the issue
- Matters that have already been considered under the complaints policy
- A report about neighbour nuisance or antisocial behaviour is not a complaint about our service unless specifically around the management of an existing case. These will be dealt with under our Antisocial Behaviour Policy. If we do not follow what we say in our policy, this may become a complaint
- If there is legal action, a claim for damaged items through an insurance claim, a personal injury claim, or a case is being dealt with by the First Tier Tribunal, these will not be dealt with under our Complaints Policy.
- A complaint about the level of rent or service charges is not a complaint about our service. If we do not follow what we say in our policy or if services are not being delivered, this may become a complaint.
- We may withdraw the complaints procedure from a complainant whose behaviour is unreasonable, or we may have to restrict contact. An example of this would be if someone raises the same complaint several times in different ways. We will explain why we have taken this action to the complainant or their advocate (See Unreasonable Behaviour Policy)

- If the complaint is about the way we have handled personal information or about exercising rights within our privacy notice, in the first instance contact should be made to our Data Protection Officer - dpo@settlegroup.org.uk or by post at 'The Data Protection Officer', Settle, Blackhorse Road, Letchworth Garden City, Hertfordshire. SG6 1HA. For independent advice about data protection and privacy concerns in the UK, the Information Commissioner (ICO) can be contacted online at www.ico.org.uk or by phone on 0303 123 1113.
- A complaint about our published policies, or services that Settle does not offer, will be reviewed as feedback. If we do not follow what we say in our policy, this may become a complaint.

We do not take a blanket approach and apply discretion depending on the circumstances. If we decide not to accept a complaint, an explanation will be provided to the resident in writing setting out the reasons why the matter is not suitable for the complaints process and the right to take that decision to the Housing Ombudsman Service.

Accessibility and Awareness

We want to make it as easy as possible for residents to get their complaint resolved. If English is not your first language, we can arrange for a translator during discussions with us and arrange translations of documents into another language.

We can provide printed copies of information about your complaint, our policies and other information about our work in large print or Braille. Please let us know if you would like us to arrange this. We will always do our best to provide information in the format that works best for you.

You can also have a friend family member or a representative contact us on your behalf if you have given us permission to speak to them about your complaint.

We are committed to ensuring that residents are not disadvantaged in accessing our services. As such we will make reasonable adjustments as required. Please see our Reasonable Adjustment Policy for further details.

Resident feedback and surveys

We are listening to residents in a number of ways and sometimes we use other companies to carry out surveys or conduct further research for us. In all cases, we make sure we protect the resident's data.

An expression of dissatisfaction with services made through a survey or focus group is not defined as a complaint, though wherever possible, the resident would be made aware of how they can raise a complaint if they wish to. Where we ask for wider feedback about our services, we will provide details of how residents can complain.

Satisfaction and perception surveys are conducted by an independent company and residents are provided with the option to raise a complaint if they wish. This will be passed to our customer resolution team and acknowledged within 5 working days.

Every three months, all colleagues, including our Executive team and Board members, personally contact residents through our Big Door Knock to understand what residents think of our service. Where a resident expresses dissatisfaction with our service they are provided with the option to raise a complaint. This is passed to our customer resolution team and acknowledged within 5 working days.

Roles and Responsibilities

Complaints are everyone's responsibility at Settle, and all colleagues and contractors acting on our behalf are required to understand the complaint handling process and make sure that any complaints made to them are passed to the customer resolution team within 2 working days of the complaint being reported.

Where the service request remains ongoing, colleagues must continue their efforts to address the service request if the resident raises a complaint. It is important that we do not stop any action while the complaint is being investigated as this could have a detrimental impact on the resident.

Our customer resolution team deal with complaints independently and impartially. We are focussed on putting things right, delivering fair outcomes and learning from when things go wrong.

We provide residents with the opportunity to set out their position when they raise a complaint and consider all relevant information and evidence carefully. We take measures to address any actual or perceived conflict of interest, in line with our code of conduct.

Our customer resolution team are responsible for investigating complaints in line with the requirements of the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code and Settles policies and procedures. The customer resolution team liaise with residents and work collaboratively and collectively with colleague across teams and departments to put things right, deliver a fair outcome and identify and share learnings from when things go wrong. Our customer resolution team are the main point of contact for the resident and will keep oversight of the complaint until the matter has been resolved.

The customer resolution team are also the main point of contact for the Housing Ombudsman Service and will work with them to support with any enquires and requests for information.

The Executive Director of Customer Service is responsible for oversight of complaint handling, compliance with the Housing Ombudsman Scheme and the Complaint Handling Code. They are also responsible for reporting complaints to the Board.

The Member Responsible for Complaints (MRC) is a member of the Board and the Chair of the Operations Committee. The MRC has lead responsibility for ensuring the Board receives regular information on complaints that provides insight on Settles complaint handling performance in line with the requirements of the Complaint Handling Code.

The MRC meets regularly with the senior lead for complaints and the assistant director of customer experience who works closely day to day with the customer resolution team.

How we handle complaints

We always want to provide the best possible service, but we know sometimes things go wrong. If this happens, we want to hear from you so that we can put things right, but also to learn from where things go wrong and improve our services for you and other residents in the future.

Stage 1

A member of our customer resolution team will contact you within **5 working days** to discuss your complaint and explain what will happen next. If there is a straightforward answer, we will aim to provide a resolution there and then.

We will acknowledge your complaint in writing, confirming our understanding of your complaint and the outcome you are seeking to put things right. We will also let you know who your point of contact will be and provide you with a complaint reference number.

We will then investigate your concerns and agree the actions we can take to put things right. We will respond in writing within **10 working days** from acknowledging your complaint. Where more time is needed, we may contact you to agree to extend this timeframe by up to a further **10 working days**, clearly explaining why we need more time to resolve your complaint. We will also agree how often we will keep in touch to provide updates on the progress of your complaint.

We will provide a written response as soon as the complaint has been fully investigated. Where we are agreeing actions, such as repairs, we will outline the commitments and the dates we expect to complete them by.

Our complaint response will always include:

- the complaint stage
- our understanding of your complaint and the outcome sought
- the decision we have reached and the reasons why
- the details of any actions we are taking or offering to put things right
- the details of any outstanding actions and when they will be completed by, for example commitments to complete repairs
- the details of how to escalate to stage 2 if you are not satisfied with the response to your complaint
- the details of how to contact the Housing Ombudsman Service for support and guidance.

If you raise additional complaints during the investigation, these will be incorporated into the stage 1 response if they are related, and the stage 1 response has not been issued.

Where the stage 1 response has been issued, the new issues are unrelated to those already being investigated, or it would unreasonably delay the response, the new issues will be logged as a new complaint.

Stage two

Our aim is to work with you to resolve all complaints at stage 1, however if you are unhappy with our response, you can escalate your complaint to stage two of our complaint's procedure for a final response. You may want to provide further information about your complaint however, you are not required to do so.

The timeframe for escalation is set at **28 days** from the issue of the stage 1 response, however this can be extended in exceptional circumstances. We will acknowledge the escalation to stage 2 within **5 working days**. The complaint will be reviewed by the next level of management, who will respond in writing within **20 working days** with our final response. Where more time is needed, we may contact you to agree to extend this timeframe up to a further **20 working days**, clearly explaining why we need more time to resolve your complaint. We will also agree how often we will keep in touch to provide updates on the progress of your complaint.

We will provide a written response as soon as the complaint has been fully investigated. Where we are agreeing actions, such as repairs, we will outline the commitments and the dates we expect to complete them by.

Our complaint response will always include:

- the complaint stage
- our understanding of your complaint and the outcome sought
- the decision we have reached and the reasons why
- the details of any actions we are taking or offering to put things right
- the details of any outstanding actions and when they will be completed by, for example commitments to complete repairs
- the details of how to escalate the matter to the Housing Ombudsman Service if you remain unhappy with the outcome of your complaint.

If you raise additional complaints during the investigation, these will be incorporated into the stage 2 response if they are related, and the stage2 response has not been issued.

Where the stage 2 response has been issued, the new issues are unrelated to the issues already being investigated, or it would unreasonably delay the response, the new issues will be logged as a new complaint.

Escalation to the Housing Ombudsman Service

If you are unhappy with the final response to your complaint, you can contact the Housing Ombudsman Service who will consider investigating it for you. Their service is free, independent, and impartial. You can contact the Ombudsman directly on:

Telephone: 0300 111 3000

Housing Ombudsman Service, PO Box 1484, Unit D, Preston, PR2

OET Website: www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk

Putting things right

Where something has gone wrong, we will acknowledge this and set out the actions we have already taken or intend to take to put things right. These may include:

- an apology
- acknowledging where things have gone wrong
- providing an explanation, assistance or reasons
- taking action where there has been a delay
- reconsidering or changing a decision previously made
- amending a record or adding a correction
- providing a remedy, such as financial compensation or agreeing to do something that is outside of our service offer
- changing policies, procedures and working practices

We will consider the guidance provided by the Housing Ombudsman Service and our compensation policy. Any remedy offered will reflect the service failure, the length of time and impact on the resident and their household.

Where additional information or new issues are raised during the complaint investigation these will be incorporated into our investigation if they are related, and the complaint response has not been issued.

Where the response has been issued, the new issues are unrelated to the issues already being investigated or it would unreasonably delay the response, the new issues will be logged as a new complaint or managed as a service request as applicable.