

 <p>HOUSING MANAGEMENT SECTION</p>	DOCUMENT NO: HM-07			
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Complaints Policy HM-07				
No.	Change	Approved by	Date	Effective
1.	Following merger 2014: Updated Association name	Board	Nov 2014	Nov 2014
2.	Reviewed to include Ombudsman new contact details.	A&R Sub Committee	May 2015	May 2015
3.	Reviewed to include further stage between IO/Director and Board	Housing Sub Committee	April 2017	April 2017
4	2 yearly review	HMSC	April 2019	April 2019
5.	Tenant Consultation 2020 No recommended changes. Ombudsman contact details updated.	HMSC	Oct 2020	Oct 2020

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1. Scope

To ensure that staff fully understand the process for dealing with complaints in regard to services provided by the Association.

2. Objective

This procedure will ensure that all tenants have equal service offered and that the process for managing complaints is open, fair and transparent. The process will ensure the complaint is investigated fully, have target response time for each stage, and shall be used to improve the services offered by the Association.

3. Definitions & Abbreviations

NB Housing	North Belfast Housing Association Ltd
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
DHCS	Director of Housing & Corporate Services
IO	Investigation Officer

4. Responsibilities

IO/Director	Decision maker at Stage 1 Ensure all information is investigated, prepare report.
CEO	Decision maker at Stage 2 (if complainant is dissatisfied with outcome at Stage 1)
Management Committee	Independent panel to make decision on complaint at Stage 3. (if complainant is dissatisfied with outcome at Stage 2)
All Staff	To be able to inform tenants, contractors or others in respect to the complaints process. Offer assistance to those who have requested support or assistance in completing the form.

5. Related Documents

Allocation & Transfer Policy HM-01
Anti-Social Behaviour Policy HM-06
Rent Recovery Policy HM-08
Introductory Tenancy Agreement
Secure Tenancy Agreement

6. Policy Statement

A complaint is any dissatisfaction expressed about a decision made by the Association or about the performance of any aspect of its work. Complaints

may be made about decisions, about lack of service, or about the manner in which a service was provided.

The NI Ombudsman has suggested that a complaint can be defined as: “Any oral or written expression of dissatisfaction by any person, however made, about the service, actions or inactions of a body or its officers which requires a response.”

In the NI Ombudsman office publication “Rights, Responsibilities and Redress - a Framework for Effective Complaint Handling” it cites the following principles as being at the core of the Framework for effective complaint handling:

- Accessible and simple
- Fair and impartial
- Timely, effective and consistent
- Accountable
- Delivers continuous improvement

The Association shall adopt these principles in dealing with complaints.

The Association will endeavour to ensure its systems and procedures are adequate to meet minimum standards as set out in the Tenant’s Guarantee in providing housing accommodation. The Association will investigate and respond to any complaint raised by the complainant, particularly where allegations seek to show unreasonable delay, bias, failure to follow proper procedures or a decision badly made.

Procedures:

Complaints Procedure:

1. An individual may wish to complain verbally on a service matter to any officer. On such occasions the officer will act diligently and professionally in investigating and answering such. The Association is aware that many such instances are quickly clarified or resolved, but where they are not the formal complaints procedure may be adopted.
2. In all cases the person receiving the request should inform the person that a formal complaints policy is available, and that every assistance will be given to complete the information required.
3. Where an individual wishes to make a formal complaint they will be advised to do so in writing and be issued the Complaint Form (Appx 1) and Complaints Policy document. A member of staff will facilitate a written signed statement from the individual.
4. An acknowledgement letter and a further copy of the association’s complaints policy will be issued within 5 working days of the complaint being received.

Stage 1

5. The complaint will be investigated by the Director of Housing & Corporate Services (DHCS) or by the most senior officer in his/her absence. Dependent on the nature of the complaint, the investigating officer may be another Director.
6. Where the Director is directly involved, the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) will investigate. Where the CEO is directly involved, a member of the Management Committee will be appointed. The individual dealing with the complaint will be known as the Investigating Officer (IO).
7. Where a member of staff, a committee member, a contractor or any other agent of the Association is directly involved, they will be interviewed by the IO, and may further be asked to give a written account of their involvement.
8. The IO may need to interview the complainant, and it is expected that they cooperate and make themselves available for interview throughout the course of the investigation.
9. The IO may choose to avail of legal advice during the course of the investigation. Such advice will be acted upon accordingly.
10. Once the complaint has been resolved the DHCS will include the nature and outcome in a complaints report to the Management Committee on a quarterly basis
11. Where a complaint is not upheld, this too will be included in the quarterly report to Management Committee. The Association will maintain a complaint register of all complaints made in relation to the service.
12. The complainant will receive a written response, ideally not more than 10 working days after the original complaint was made, unless there were extenuating circumstances. Where a delay is experienced, an appropriate holding letter should be sent to the complainant.
13. Stage 1 of the process should be complete within 10 days of the complaint being received.

Stage 2

14. Where the complainant is not satisfied with the IO/Director response, an appeal to the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) may be facilitated.
15. Complainants who wish to use this course of action should contact the CEO at NB Housing within 5 days of receipt of the response letter.

Stage 3

16. Where the complainant is not satisfied with the CEO response, an appeal to the Management Committee may be facilitated. Complainants who wish to use this course should write to the Secretary of the Management Committee C/O Gatelodge, 8 Flax Street, Belfast BT14 7EQ within 5 days of receipt of the response letter.
17. The Management Committee shall convene a panel to review the complaint. If they consider necessary the Secretary will arrange to hold a meeting with the complainant and Committee panel. The meeting will take place within 10 days of the request. The committee will aim to make their decision within 5 days. Their decision at any such appeal will be the Association's final stage of the Association's internal Complaints policy.

Stage 4

18. Where the complainant is still not satisfied they can complain to the NI Public Services Ombudsman.
19. At this stage, the complainant will be advised to make a formal complaint to the NI Public Services Ombudsman should they wish to pursue the matter further. The office can be contacted for advice on **Freephone 0800 34 34 24**, by writing to the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman, **Progressive House, 33 Wellington Place, Belfast, BT1 6HN or email nipso@nipso.org.uk**
20. It should be noted that the Ombudsman normally expects that a complainant will have used the Association's internal complaints procedure before bringing a complaint to him.

7. Review

This policy will be subject to systematic 2 yearly review, or as and when required.