

<b>Policy Name</b>	GreenSquareAccord Complaints Policy		
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<b>Customer Information Leaflets (where applicable)</b>	Complaints Procedure for Customers		
<b>Forms and Other Links (e.g. hyperlinks for intranet-based storage of forms and documents and / or legislation or other helpful information)</b>	Template Letters		
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2	Section 6	Addition of: Member of the public and anyone living in our communities	06 May 2021
	Section 7	Addition of: Where issues raised are excluded from this policy, we will ensure feedback is captured and used when this policy is reviewed.	06 May 2021


## GreenSquareAccord Complaints Policy

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### 1. Our Mission and Values

#### **Building better lives.**

We exist to meet the greatest need in society through building better lives. We do this as both as an actively developing and tenant-focused landlord, and as a major provider of care, support and a range of local initiatives to address social injustice and inequality.

We empower people through tenant-led, co-operative and mutual housing – creating diverse neighbourhoods where each individual, family and community has the best opportunities to live independently. Through development we create quality new homes and sustainable communities where people can enjoy happiness, health and prosperity – the vital foundations for successful and fulfilling lives.

Where other services can no longer deliver, when opportunities dry up, when funding is unavailable, we remain the organisation that can and will help the people in the greatest need.

## 2. Overview

Our Complaints Policy ensures all customers have easy access to tell us when things go wrong, so we can promptly address concerns and improve our services.

When a complaint is received we want to show customers we:

- ◆ care about their complaint
- ◆ can be trusted to act upon the feedback
- ◆ are committed to improving the service.

## 3. Service standards

Each year GreenSquareAccord provides services for thousands of customers. We recognise sometimes things can go wrong and our customers may not always be happy with the level or type of service they receive from us. How we manage complaints when we receive them is important to improving our service delivery, and achieving high levels of customer satisfaction in all we do.

We encourage, welcome and value complaints as a form of customer feedback and we want to:

- ◆ put things right for our customers as soon as possible
- ◆ say sorry when we need to and
- ◆ learn from our mistakes.

We want the service we offer to be fair, consistent and easy to access for all customers.

In order to achieve our aims we will follow and meet a set of service standards which are:

- ◆ Encouraging customers to let us know when they are unhappy with the service they have received
- ◆ Ensuring staff and customers know about and have access to this policy
- ◆ Giving customers clear information about how they can make a complaint. This includes making it easy for them to give us feedback by accepting complaints in a range of ways including in person, by phone, by email, through our customer website, by social media or by letter or form. We will investigate complaints in the same way regardless of what channel a customer uses to report them.

- ◆ Supporting customers who ask for or need help in making their complaint. Customers can be supported by anyone they choose; an advocate, friend or family member for example. With the customer's written permission this person may complete forms and attend meetings with the customer
- ◆ Accepting the customer's view that they have a genuine complaint and make them feel we are taking it seriously; considering the individual circumstances and understanding what the customer wants to see happen as a result of their complaint
- ◆ Empowering our staff to take responsibility for and to respond to complaints positively, quickly and fairly by offering apologies and resolutions at the first point of contact wherever possible
- ◆ Ensuring customers are aware of their rights to access Ombudsman and any other relevant regulatory services
- ◆ Keeping customers informed of how their complaint is progressing, any action taken and the outcomes following our investigations and ensuring those actions happen
- ◆ Respecting confidentiality and ensuring we manage complaints in accordance with Data Protection legislation
- ◆ Ensuring good, clear records of complaints are made and kept, actions are taken and lessons are learnt using all feedback to improve our future service delivery
- ◆ Monitoring, analysing and publishing information on complaints performance to customers and staff
- ◆ Delivering customer service training to all staff which highlights the importance of complaints and includes how to respond to them and how we can learn from them

#### 4. Impact assessments and key considerations

##### **Value for money**

The main principle supporting our complaints policy is to get it right first time for our customers.

Our process is focussed on the learning to enable and ensure we continually act on it and can demonstrate service improvements as a result of it. Its also equally important that we tell our customers and staff about these improvements.

Getting it right first time means we're able to remove or reduce the unnecessary costs of repeated poor service delivery and deliver a more efficient customer service.

We will use external benchmarking to ensure we deliver cost effective and efficient services.

##### **Customer engagement**

The basis of how the services are to be shaped also takes into account feedback from our customers.

##### **Fairness**

Ensuring all customer requests, suggestions and comments are responded to equally and fairly is essential to this policy. Learning from these will also help to shape and tailor services that better meet the needs of our customers.

We will ensure any customer-facing information is available in a range of formats to suit the needs of our customers and ensure it is truly accessible to all.

## Sustainability

By making the policy more accessible and responsive it will:

- ◆ encourage customers to provide feedback
- ◆ empower our people to receive feedback on behalf of GreenSquareAccord, and to act upon it quickly and effectively without any unnecessary delay

## 5. Our policy

### What is a complaint?

The Housing Ombudsman Service defines 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.*

We expect and hope a customer might contact us to complain about being unhappy because we have:

- ◆ done something badly or wrong
- ◆ done something we should not have done
- ◆ failed to do something we should have done
- ◆ treated them unfairly or without respect
- ◆ failed to deliver what was promised

We will treat any expressions of dissatisfaction as a complaint, unless there is a valid reason for us not to. Should this be the case, the customer will be fully updated regarding the reasons for our decision.

## 6. Scope

This policy applies to anyone who has been affected by us, our homes or our services which includes:

- ◆ Current, former and potential customers (including shared owners & leaseholders) whether they live in our properties or receive care or specialist support from our Care and Support team

- ◆ Owner occupiers
- ◆ Members of the public and anyone living in our communities
- ◆ Suppliers and contractors
- ◆ Partner agencies
- ◆ Family members, health workers, MPs, local councillors or other advocates and those with legal Power of Attorney, or acting as a Court of Protection appointed Deputy making a complaint on someone's behalf, providing the customer has authorised (in writing) for them to do so

## 7. Policy exclusions

- ◆ Decisions made where a GreenSquareAccord policy has been followed
- ◆ Initial service or information requests, or requests seeking clarity ( reporting of repairs for example) or explanations on why a decision was made
- ◆ Reports of anti-social behaviour, nuisance, hate crime or harassment as these are covered by the Anti Social Behaviour Policy
- ◆ Insurance and liability claims
- ◆ Allegations of housing disrepair or other legal claims may be excluded, once this policy is exhausted
- ◆ Any issues which have already been fully investigated through this policy
- ◆ Compensation claims (the reason for claiming compensation may need investigation as a complaint, however the compensation claim itself is considered in line with the Compensation Policy and Guidelines)
- ◆ Anonymous reports, although these may be investigated if they are a cause for concern and in order to protect our interests
- ◆ Complaints about matters outside our control including legislation, government or local authority policy, a contract, tenancy agreement or lease for example
- ◆ Complaints regarding disagreement with our legal requirements rather than the way something has been carried out
- ◆ A consultation petition or objections to building work or planning applications
- ◆ We will not normally consider complaints relating to things that happened more than six months ago. Discretion can be used if there is a valid reason for the delay.

When a decision is made not to deal with an issue through our complaints process, the full reasons for this will be clearly explained to the customer. Where issues raised are excluded from this policy, we will ensure feedback is captured and used when this policy is reviewed.

## 8. Unacceptable behaviour

We believe all customers have the right to be heard and understood. We will always treat them with respect and we expect our staff to be treated in the same way. Whilst we recognise circumstances relating to a complaint may be distressing and cause some people to act out of character, we will not tolerate unacceptable behaviour.

If a customer continues to contact us about a closed complaint, or a complaint that is very similar to the closed complaint, we will acknowledge the contact and take no further action unless there is new evidence or information to consider.

When a customer's contact becomes excessive or increasingly resource intensive, we may consider putting a contact management plan in place. This could be contact by email only no more than once every two weeks, to one named GreenSquareAccord member of staff, unless it is an emergency for example.

When a decision is made to do this, we will explain to the customer why we are doing this and what the conditions are, and when this will be reviewed.

## 9. Roles, responsibilities and duties

This policy applies to all staff, and is approved by our Executive to ensure it is current and complies with our legal and moral obligations.

Heads of Service and their departmental managers ensure the policy is followed by all teams, and adherence to the policy is required by all staff.

## 10. Monitoring and reporting

We monitor and analyse the types of complaints we receive and the way they have been handled. The monitoring and analysis we do helps us to ensure:

- ◆ responses are fair, consistent and appropriate
- ◆ we do not discriminate against any group in society
- ◆ service standards meet customer needs and reflect demand
- ◆ customers have the opportunity to provide feedback on how we handled their complaint
- ◆ our policy and procedure are fit for purpose
- ◆ complaint volumes and resolution stages are tracked and trends are identified
- ◆ we achieve our timescales and deliver our resolution promises
- ◆ lessons learnt are shared and used to reduce complaints and improve services
- ◆ our staff training programme is appropriate
- ◆ staff feedback is given on good and poor areas of performance

We regularly report on complaints performance to our leadership and management teams, Boards and relevant Committees and Panels.

A summary of the performance reports produced, complaints outcomes and improvements made is included in our Annual Report and shared on our website.

This policy will be reviewed on an annual basis, unless there are significant changes in legislation or where there are findings from any independent organisation.

## 11. Diversity and inclusion

We will ensure this policy is applied fairly and consistently to all of our customers and in accordance with our values and the principles contained in our internal policies.

In summary this means no person or group of persons will be treated less favourably than another person or group of persons on account of any diversity strand.

We will also ensure customers have fair access, which suits their individual needs, to our complaints service. This could include providing translations for community languages and additional support for customers who have difficulty reading and writing when required for example.

In line with consumer law, we **will not**:

- ◆ pressure, intimidate or discourage someone from making a complaint by suggesting or giving an impression there may be a comeback which affects the service they receive from us
- ◆ create any barriers to raising or chasing a complaint by insisting complaints can only be made in writing for example.

## 12. Quality assurance

Adherence to this policy is subject to review by internal audit. Where required, and in full compliance with GDPR, we will provide external agencies with data in connection with the policy.

In line with the Housing Ombudsman Service Code of Complaint Handling we will also publish our Self Assessment on Complaints on the GreenSquareAccord website.

We also complete post-complaint satisfaction surveys with our customers and complainants.

## 13. Communication, training and implementation

The policy is communicated to all colleagues who are directly or indirectly involved in the receiving and management of complaints. It is available to all colleagues on our internal intranet and is also published on the GreenSquareAccord website.

Colleagues will receive appropriate training on this policy and associated procedures.

## 14. Legal and regulatory framework



The Regular for Social Housing Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard 2017 states that:

## **1.1 Customer service, choice and complaints**

1.1.1 Registered providers shall:

- a. provide choices, information and communication that is appropriate to the diverse needs of their tenants in the delivery of all standards
- b. have an approach to complaints that is clear, simple and accessible that ensures that complaints are resolved promptly, politely and fairly.

and

2.1.2 Providers shall offer a range of ways for tenants to express a complaint and set out clear service standards for responding to complaints, including complaints about performance against the standards, and details of what to do if they are unhappy with the outcome of a complaint. Providers shall inform tenants how they use complaints to improve their services. Registered providers shall publish information about complaints each year, including their number and nature, and the outcome of the complaints. Providers shall accept complaints made by advocates authorised to act on a tenant's/tenants' behalf.

## The Charter for Social Housing Residents (Social Housing White Paper)

Point 3 of the Charter states that every social housing resident should be able to expect:

***To have your complaints dealt with promptly and fairly, with access to a strong Ombudsman who will give you swift and fair redress when needed.***

The Charter also empowered the Ombudsman to issue the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code (July 2020) which states we should:

- use a universal definition of a complaint
- provide easy access to the complaints procedure and ensure residents are aware of it, including their right to access the Housing Ombudsman Service
- have a maximum of two stages in our process and clear timeframes for responses
- ensure fairness in complaint handling with a resident-focused process
- take action to put things right and offer appropriate remedies
- create a positive complaint handling culture through continuous learning and improvement
- demonstrate learning in Annual Reports.

***For services registered with CQC, the Health and Social Care Act 2008 (Regulated Activities) Regulations 2014: Regulation 16 covers the management of complaints:***

*The intention of this regulation is to make sure that people can make a complaint about their care and treatment. To meet this regulation, providers must have an effective and accessible system for identifying, receiving, handling and responding to complaints from people using the service, people acting on their behalf or other stakeholders. All complaints must be investigated thoroughly and any necessary action taken where failures have been identified*

*For services registered with Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) our approach to complaint handling must be in line with the requirements of the Regulated Service (Service Providers and Responsible Individuals) (Wales) Regulations 2017. The key regulations are:*

- ◆ Regulation 12: Guidance – all registered care services must include a complaints policy in its policies and procedures
- ◆ Regulation 19: Information About the Service – should include the complaints procedure, how to make a complaint, and how to escalate an unresolved complaint to the relevant body
- ◆ Regulation 64: Complaints Policy and Procedure

*In England, it is a legal requirement of the Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) that providers have in place a written procedure for dealing with concerns and complaints from parents and/or carers. To comply with the requirements, providers must also:*

- ◆ Investigate written complaints relating to their fulfilment of the EYFS requirements and notify complainants of the outcome of the investigation within 28 days of having received a complaint
- ◆ Keep a written log/record of complaints and make these available to Ofsted on request
- ◆ Make available to parents and/or carers details about how to contact Ofsted if they believe the provider is not meeting the EYFS requirements

This policy is designed to deliver good practice as well as meet the regulatory requirements of the Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS), Regulator of Social Housing, Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman, Public Services Ombudsman Wales, Care Quality Commission (CQC), Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) and OFSTED (Office for Standards in Education) Our policy also complies with the contractual expectations of commissioners.

For services regulated by CQC/ CIW, the customer retains the right to contact CQC/ CIW regarding their concerns, as well as raising these issues direct with GreenSquareAccord. Although CQC/ CIW will not investigate individual complaints, they will use the feedback to link into how they monitor and inspect our services. Although we would always welcome the opportunity to resolve issues directly with customers, anyone wishing to raise a concern with CQC can contact the CQC contact centre, at any point in GreenSquareAccord's internal complaints process:

CQC National Customer Service Centre  
Citygate  
Gallowgate

Newcastle upon Tyne  
NE1 4PA

**Telephone:** 03000 616161      **E-mail:** [www.CQC.org.uk](http://www.CQC.org.uk)

For care services registered with Care Inspectorate Wales, contact details are:

Care Inspectorate Wales  
Welsh Government office  
Sarn Mynach  
Llandudno Junction  
LL31 9RZ

**Telephone:** 0300 7900 126      **E-mail:** [CIW@gov.wales](mailto:CIW@gov.wales)

Ofsted:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted/about/complaints-procedure>

**Telephone:** 0300 123 4666      **E-mail:** [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)

Housing Ombudsman Service  
PO Box 152  
Liverpool  
L33 7WQ

**Telephone:** 0300 111 3000      **E-mail:** [info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk](mailto:info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk)

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