Complaints, Compliments and Feedback Policy

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 We are committed to ensuring that the process for customer complaints, customer feedback and claiming compensation is clear and accessible, and ensures that these are resolved promptly, politely, and fairly.

1.2 We will handle customer complaints and feedback in a timely and effective way and ensure that customers are listened to and their views acted upon.

2.0 Purpose

2.1 The purpose of this policy is to:

- Have a customer-focused complaints process that is fair, simple and accessible
- Put things right for our customers where we need to
- Learn from complaints and feedback to improve outcomes for all customers

3.0 Principles

3.1 The principles of this policy are aligned to Livin's five organisational values which are set out below and reflect the Housing Ombudsman's dispute resolution principles of being fair, putting things right and learning from outcomes:

- Trust – we put things right for customers to restore their trust by addressing complaints fairly, effectively and promptly
- Respect – we take complaints seriously and treat people as individuals
- Innovate – we use the valuable insight from complaints to find new solutions to improve services based on learning
- Working together – we work with tenants and partner organisations to positively resolve complaints, and we have a positive complaint handling culture
- Own it – Our employees and contractors are empowered to make sure the right customer experience and standard of service is provided to our customers

4.0 Definitions

4.1 The key terms used in this policy are defined below.

Customer	For this Policy, our definition of customer includes all tenants, prospective tenants, leaseholders or any member of the public wishing to make a complaint or provide feedback or a compliment.
Tenant/landlord Relationship	A tenant/landlord relationship exists between Livin and a customer where Livin is responsible for providing a home or housing service to a customer under a tenancy, lease, licence, or similar housing agreement.
Complaint	"Any expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the organisation, its own employees, or those acting on its behalf, affecting an individual resident or groups of residents."
Service Request	A Service Request is a request from a customer that requires action to be taken to put something right. An example could be where a customer has not received a call back from us and to resolve it, they would like us to call them back. We then call the customer back, which resolves the issue, and the customer is satisfied. If the customer is not satisfied with the action taken, this becomes a complaint.
Feedback	Feedback is where a customer provides us with information about their experience of our services. For example, they may complete a customer satisfaction survey about their recent experience.

Compliment	A compliment is where a customer gives positive feedback about their experience of the service they have received.
Complaint Handling Code (The Code)	The Code is statutory and forms part of the Housing Ombudsman's powers under the Housing Ombudsman Scheme. The Code aims to achieve best practice in complaints handling and provide a better service to customers.
Social Tenant Access to Information Requirements (STAIRs)	Gives tenants of Private Registered Providers (PRPs) statutory rights to access information about the management of their homes and landlord services, helping them to better understand decision-making and hold their landlord to account. STAIRs complaints will be considered in line with published STAIRs guidance and through our STAIRs Policy.
Complaints investigator	A person responsible for investigating and resolving a complaint.

5.0 Scope

5.1 The scope of this policy covers any customer accessing our services who may wish to complain or give feedback about the service received and/or actions or lack of action from employees, including those working on our behalf. The customer does not have to use the word 'complaint' for it to be treated as such.

5.2 A complaint that is submitted via a third party or representative will still be handled in line with our complaints policy.

5.3 This policy applies to all Board members, employees and partners/contractors working on behalf of Livin.

<u>Exclusions</u>

5.4 Every complaint is different, and, in some cases, this policy will not apply, and a complaint will not be opened. If this happens, we will carefully consider why a complaint should not be opened based on the individual circumstances. We will provide an explanation of this to the customer setting out the reasons why the matter is not suitable for the complaints process and

advising of the right to seek support from the Housing Ombudsman. We will also provide advice to the customer on the correct route for redress, where applicable.

5.5 Examples of where a complaint might not be opened include:

- A matter that has previously been fully investigated through the complaints process and a full written response was given, in line with this policy
- Something which happened, or which the customer knew of, more than twelve months before contacting us
- An issue where legal proceedings have started where the Claim Form and Particulars of Claim have been filed at court
- An anonymous complaint that does not provide enough information to investigate. In these cases, the Customer Experience Manager will decide if a complaint can be opened depending on the seriousness and if it is possible to investigate it
- Complaints from customers who do not have a landlord/tenant (or prospective tenant) relationship with Livin, have not directly received a service from us and are not authorised third party representatives of a Livin tenant, will not be excluded from our complaints process. However, the usual compensation and redress arrangements may not apply. In these cases, Livin will use discretion to determine the most appropriate outcome, which may include providing information, an explanation, advice, or other suitable resolution.
- Complaints or concerns relating to the publication of information under STAIRs, a STAIRs information request, or the handling of a STAIRs review request will be redirected and handled in accordance with our STAIRs Policy and STAIRs Review Procedure.
- Complaints about a tenant's behaviour will be redirected and investigated through our Anti-Social Behaviour Policy. However, if the complaint relates to our handling of antisocial behaviour, we can consider this under this Policy.

6.0 Contribution to Plan A

6.1 The 'Consistently Delivering Excellent Customer Experience and Digital Services chapter of Plan A sets out our customer experience vision of 'excellent services that are consistent, reliable, innovative and influenced by customers'. Responding to feedback and resolving complaints, then learning from this insight is key to achieving this vision.

6.2 We are committed in our strategy to delivering an accessible and fair complaints process supported by a culture of learning and ownership to put things right and reduce avoidable complaints.

7.0 Legislative and regulatory framework

7.1 The Transparency, Influence and Accountability (TIA) Standard sets out the following required outcomes which social housing providers must deliver:

"2.5 Complaints

2.5.1 Registered providers must ensure complaints are addressed fairly, effectively, and promptly.

2.5.2 Registered providers must ensure their approach to handling complaints is simple, accessible and publicised.

Registered providers must provide accessible information to tenants about:
a) how tenants can make a complaint about their registered provider

b) the registered provider's complaints policy and complaints handling process

c) what tenants can do if they are dissatisfied with the outcome of a complaint or how a complaint was handled, and

d) the type of complaints received and how they have learnt from complaints to continuously improve services."

7.2 The TIA Standard also sets out the importance of treating all tenants and prospective tenants with fairness and respect. This should be central to all services including complaints.

7.3 Landlords are required by law to follow the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code (The Code). The Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 empowered the Housing Ombudsman (HO) to issue a code of practice about the procedures members of the Scheme should have in place for considering complaints against them following consultation on the Code. It also placed a duty on the Ombudsman to monitor compliance.

7.4 The Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) has the power to award compensation to a victim of a failure on the part of a Registered Provider. This is an enforcement power and is set out in Chapter 7 and Sections 236 to 245 of the Housing and Regeneration Act 2008 (the Act) in conjunction with the Regulatory Framework for Social Housing in England from April 2012 and The Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023. Direct reference of a complaint or claim for compensation to the RSH can only be made in circumstances where it is believed we have acted illegally.

8.0 Policy Statements

Accessing the complaints and feedback service

8.1 We will collect feedback from customers in relation to:

- Complaints
- Service requests
- Compliments
- General suggestions for service improvement.

8.2 We will offer a range of options to give feedback for both digital and non-digital customers through the following channels:

- In person to any member of staff
- Via telephone
- In writing
- Email
- Website
- Live Chat
- Satisfaction Surveys
- My Livin App
- Social media (we will invite customers to direct message us to maintain confidentiality)

8.3 We will respond to reasonable adjustment requests in line with the Equality Act 2010, and we will work with customers who have specific needs and vulnerabilities to make sure they can access the service, have their views listened to and receive their complaint response in a way that meets their needs. For example, we can provide a tailored approach to communication, such as only discussing the complaint via phone call, or facilitating access to a translation service. We will also accept complaints via an authorised third party or representative such as a carer, other family member or an MP or councillor. This must be with the written consent of the complainant.

8.4 We will ensure that any personal information collected will be treated in accordance with the UK General Data Protection Regulation provisions of the Data Protection Act 2018.

Service Requests

8.5 If a customer is unhappy with a situation that they wish to have rectified, we will deal with this as a service request and aim to resolve it within a timeframe that is acceptable to the customer and will keep them updated on progress. If further enquiries are needed to resolve the matter, or if the customer requests it, the issue will be logged as a formal complaint.

The complaint handling procedure

8.6 All complaints (see definition at 4.1) we receive will be referred to the Customer Feedback Team for oversight regardless of who the complaint is initially referred to. This will ensure that all customers receive equality of service in complaints resolution and that they are kept informed of progress.

8.7 Complaints will be dealt with impartially and confidentially, by a 'Complaints investigator'.

8.8 Our complaints procedure is made up of two stages. The complaint outcome will either be 'upheld' or 'not upheld'.

Stage One

8.9 We aim to deal with all complaints promptly. We will acknowledge, define, and log the complaint within five working days of the complaint being received, and contact the customer to clarify the exact complaint definition and desired resolution.

8.10 The complaint will then be assigned to a complaints officer who will:

- Deal with the complaint on its merits, act independently, and have an open mind,
- Give the customer a fair chance to set out their position,
- Take measures to address any actual or perceived conflict of interest; and
- Consider all relevant information and evidence carefully to decide the outcome of the complaint and how to put things right.

8.11 A full written response of the investigation will be issued within 10 working days of the complaint being acknowledged, and we can extend this timescale by 10 working days if required. All points raised in the complaint definition will be addressed, with clear reasons for the decision to uphold, or not uphold, referencing the relevant policy, law, and good practice where appropriate.

8.12 If there are mitigating reasons to extend this period further, any extension will be at the agreement of the customer and will be no more than 10 working days without good reason. For example, the customer may be uncontactable, or the complaint may be complex. The customer will also be provided with the contact details of the Housing Ombudsman if an extension is needed.

8.13 The complaint response will be provided when the answer to the complaint is known, not when the outstanding actions required to address the issue are completed. Outstanding actions will be tracked, and the customer will be kept informed.

8.14 A customer can raise additional complaints during the investigation; these will be incorporated into the Stage One response if they are related, and the response has not yet been issued. Where a response has not been issued but the issues are unrelated, or it would unreasonably delay the response, the new issues will be logged as a new complaint.

8.15 Stage Two

If all, or part of the complaint is not resolved to the customer's satisfaction at Stage One, the customer can ask to escalate their complaint to Stage Two. This should be done within 20 working days of the written complaint response being issued to the customer. We will acknowledge, define, and log the Stage Two complaint within five working days of the request being received or explain if there is a reason the complaint will not be investigated further.

8.16 The Complaint Investigator for the Stage Two investigation will be different to Stage One, and it will be given to a senior manager, independent of the service area being complained about. They will review the handling and decision-making at Stage One and make reasonable efforts to understand why the customer remains unhappy.

8.17 The customer will be issued a full written response within 20 working days of the complaint being acknowledged, and we can extend this timescale by 20 working days if required. All points raised in the complaint definition will be addressed, with clear reasons for the decision to uphold, or not uphold the complaint provided, referencing the relevant policy, law, and good practice where appropriate.

8.18 If there are mitigating reasons to extend this period further, any extension will be with the agreement of the customer and will be no more than 10 working days. The customer will also be provided with the contact details of the Housing Ombudsman if an extension is needed.

8.19 The complaint response will be provided when the answer to the complaint is known, not when the outstanding actions required to address the issue are completed. Outstanding actions will be tracked, and the customer will be kept informed.

8.20 If new evidence or information is provided that was not presented by the customer when reporting the Stage One complaint, we reserve the right to open and investigate this as a new Stage One complaint.

Escalation to the Housing Ombudsman

8.21 Stage Two is our final response to the complaint. If the customer is not satisfied with the outcome of the investigation at Stage Two, they can take their complaint to the Housing Ombudsman, who will advise if their complaint falls within its jurisdiction.

8.22 We will assist the Housing Ombudsman in its investigations and will act upon and fully implement any orders made following the written outcome of a case review by the Housing Ombudsman.

Anonymous complaints

8.23 Complaints made anonymously are more difficult to investigate and will be considered at the discretion of the Customer Experience Manager. The factors to be considered would include:

- the seriousness of the issues raised
- the level of information available about the complaint; and
- the complaint can be verified by a reliable source.

Unreasonable customer behaviour

8.24 We will apply our Unreasonable Customer Behaviour Procedure where the criteria for unreasonable behaviour are met. Any action taken will be proportionate to the circumstances and will not unreasonably restrict a customer's access to our complaints process or other routes of redress.

8.25 Where unreasonable customer behaviour is believed to be linked to a disability, illness, vulnerability or other support need, we will consider whether any reasonable adjustments are required before deciding to impose any restrictions. Customers will be treated with sensitivity and may be offered the opportunity to appoint an advocate or representative to act on their behalf. Any restrictions placed on contact will be proportionate and in line with the Equality Act 2010 and our Customer Vulnerability Policy.

8.26 Violent, abusive or threatening behaviour towards employees handling a complaint will not be tolerated and may be managed in accordance with our Anti-Social Behaviour Policy. Any restrictions imposed will be proportionate to the risk presented and, wherever possible, alternative arrangements will be considered to enable continued access to the complaints process.

Learning and improvement

8.27 Customer feedback from complaints is valuable to us and we will look beyond the circumstances of the individual tenant and use this as a source of intelligence to drive positive change, development, and improvement to our services.

8.28 We will ensure that we are accountable and transparent in our complaint handling and will report on wider learning and improvements to our Board, the Housing and Communities Committee, the Housing Ombudsman and customers.

Compliments

8.29 We welcome positive feedback from customers and will refer this to the relevant service area. We will share areas of good practice to improve services, and we will report analysis of compliments to the Housing and Communities Committee, Board and customers.

Compensation

8.30 We aim to provide high-quality services and to resolve any issues before the need for a compensation payment arises.

8.31 The Compensation and Remedies Procedure aims to ensure that:

- Problems are resolved quickly and efficiently
- Practical solutions are explored completely to remedy the situation
- Where financial payments are appropriate, they are proportionate to the loss or inconvenience caused
- Financial payment is considered against clear agreed guidelines, and
- All customers are treated in a fair and equitable way

8.32 The following list is an example of the types of remedies that may be made in relation to a complaint, but it is not exhaustive:

- Loss of / damage to personal possessions
- Financial loss
- Payment for distress and inconvenience
- Payment for time and trouble

8.33 Compensation is a type of remedy we may offer but is not automatic, even where it is clear mistakes have been made. Where a practical solution would provide all or part of the remedy, this will be discussed with the customer.

8.34 Service standards and performance

The following service standards are monitored to make sure this policy, associated timescales and quality of service is complied with:

- Percentage of complaints handled within policy timescales
- Percentage of complainants satisfied with the way their complaint was handled
- Percentage of Stage One complaints dealt with in time
- Percentage of Stage Two complaints dealt with in time

8.35 Customers will be informed about how we perform against these service standards through our annual report to tenants and information provided on the website. Information can also be provided in alternative formats, where required.

Communication

8.36 We are committed to the provision of seamless, responsive and convenient services and as such are a digital-first organisation. We advocate, encourage and support our tenants to engage with us via the most efficient and effective method, suitable to their needs, and will assist tenants or their advocates to engage with us digitally, where possible. Digital copies of this policy and related guidance are available on our website, and we can provide these in an alternative format for tenants who may not be able to access services digitally or experience other communication barriers. Information on how to access the service will be promoted across different channels to ensure all customers are aware of how to make a complaint and what their rights are.

8.37 Details of the Housing Ombudsman will be published on our website, in key information provided to tenants and in communications from the complaints and feedback service.

9.0 Roles and responsibilities

9.1 Roles and responsibilities under this policy are outlined below.

Board	The Board has overall responsibility for this policy, including approval and will seek assurance on compliance with this Policy.
Housing and Communities Committee (HACC)	The HACC is responsible for seeking and receiving assurance on monitoring and compliance with this policy.
Member Responsible for Complaints (MRC)	The MRC is also Chair of the Housing and Communities Committee and seeks assurance that complaint handling drives service improvement and learning and also champions a positive complaint handling culture.
Executive Management Team (EMT)	The EMT must have oversight over complaints performance, trends and learning from complaints.
Director of Customer Experience and Insight	The Director of Customer Experience and Insight is responsible for overseeing the implementation of this policy, including learning and improvement from complaints, and providing assurance to the HACC and Board on its effectiveness and compliance.
Heads of Service	Heads of Service are responsible for ensuring this policy is applied across all services within their remit, that they act on complaint findings and learning, and will also act as Complaints Officer on Stage Two complaints.
Customer Experience Manager	The Customer Experience Manager has responsibility for the overall implementation and monitoring of this policy, driving learning and improvement, and is the organisation's designated Complaints Officer.
Managers	Managers are responsible for applying this policy in the day-to-day work of their teams, acting on complaint findings and implementing learning and ensuring their teams cooperate and assist with resolving complaints.

Complaints and Feedback Manager	The Complaints and Feedback Manager is responsible for managing the Complaints and Feedback service in line with this policy and identifies and implements learning and improvements.
Employees	Employees are responsible for following this policy when a customer raises a complaint or service request and must assist the Complaints Officer in resolving complaints, where needed.
Complaints and Feedback Team	The team is responsible for ensuring all team processes are delivered in line with this policy and facilitating learning and improvement from complaints.

9.2 This policy will be communicated to our employees via the Intranet and communicated to customers via our website and other formats where needed. Those who have responsibilities under this policy will be required to formally accept and confirm understanding of the policy and will receive appropriate training, advice, and/or guidance.

10.0 Related policies and procedures

10.1 This policy should be read in conjunction with the key related documents shown in the table below:

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy	Sets out Livin's commitment to treating customers fairly and with respect, understanding and responding to diverse needs, removing barriers to accessing services, and ensuring fair and equitable outcomes for all customers.
Customer Vulnerability Policy	Sets out how we identify, understand and respond to customer vulnerabilities, including making reasonable adjustments and tailoring services to ensure customers can access and receive services in a fair and equitable way.
STAIRs Policy	Sets out how we comply with the Social Tenant Access to Information Requirements (STAIRs), including the publication of information, responding to information requests, handling review requests and managing STAIRs complaints.

Customer Voice Policy	Sets out how we involve and engage customers to ensure their views influence decision-making, service improvements, and the review and scrutiny of our policies, strategies and services.
Access to Services Policy	Sets out how customers can access our services and information, the standards of service they can expect, and how we ensure services remain accessible, fair and convenient for all customers.

11.0 Monitoring, assurance and review arrangements

11.1 Assurance that the Policy is being complied with and meets its stated aims will be sought via the following reporting, monitoring and review arrangements:

Type of assurance	Key Source	Frequency
Management assurance	Quality Checks on complaints	Monthly
	Complaints and service request dashboards	Monthly
	Performance Management Framework	Quarterly
	Complaints upheld, not upheld and complaints escalation to Stage Two and the Housing Ombudsman	Quarterly
Corporate Oversight	Tenant Satisfaction Measures perception survey	Annual
	Complaints Performance and Learning Report to Housing and Communities Committee and Member Responsible for Complaints	Quarterly
	Customer Complaints and Feedback report to Board	Annual
	Performance and service improvement report to the Housing Ombudsman (also reported to Board)	Annual
	Performance Management Framework Reported to Board	Quarterly

11.2 This policy is subject to a three-year review period. The Director of Customer Experience and Insight will oversee its implementation, and an early review of the Policy will take place if material changes are required.