

Complaints and Feedback Policy

What we do if customers are unhappy or pretty chuffed with the service they've had.

1. Policy Statement

The Yorkshire Housing Business Strategy and Customer Obsession Strategy sets out how we will revolutionise our service offer to customers by being customer obsessed, providing homes and places to be proud of and shifting to pre-emptive ways of working. Having a clear and accessible customer feedback policy is a valuable tool that aligns our strategies and our regulatory requirements.

Yorkshire Housing is committed to delivering an approach to complaints that is clear, simple and accessible, ensuring complaints are dealt with empathetically, quickly and fairly. We're proud of our Yorkshire Housing values, and how we respond to feedback reflects these.

It matters to us what our customers think; if we've got something wrong, we want to make sure that we put things right. When we've provided a great, customer obsessed service we want to recognise that too whilst continuously learning and improving.

This policy sets out Yorkshire Housing's approach to feedback made by customers and other stakeholders. Complaints will also be considered by non Yorkshire Housing tenants if the issues concern Yorkshire Housing services or customers.

2. Policy Aims

This policy is aligned to the new Housing Ombudsman Service Complaint Handling Code April 2024. The aims of this policy are to:

- increase customer satisfaction by resolving complaints empathetically, quickly and fairly in a consistent manner and listening to all feedback;

- continuously improve by understanding and reviewing areas of our service which cause dissatisfaction amongst customers and learn from trends and patterns of behaviour; and
- to ensure continuous improvement by learning from complaints and other feedback.

We'll deliver this by:

- Having a consistent and impartial framework for dealing with complaints, compliments and feedback.
- Encouraging customer feedback both great and not so great.
- Resolving service failures at the first point of contact where possible.
- Giving colleagues and customers clear guidance, on how complaints, compliments and feedback will be dealt with.
- Using complaints as an opportunity to rebuild trust with our customers.
- Training colleagues to provide a top-notch, customer obsessed complaint handling and investigation service.
- Use insight and learning from complaints, compliments and feedback to shape customer obsessed services across Yorkshire Housing.

3. Policy Details

What is a complaint?

In line with the Housing Ombudsman Service Complaints Handling Code, Yorkshire Housing defines a complaint as, **'an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the landlord, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting a resident or group of residents.'**

Our customers do not have to use the word "complaint" in order for us to take action, any expression of dissatisfaction will be considered a complaint, even if our customers do not explicitly use the term 'complaint'. Complaints made to us through a third party or representative on behalf of our customers will also be managed under this policy.

As detailed in Section 1.4 of the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code 2024, we distinguish a service request and a complaint.

What is a service request?

We define a service request as call to action from a customer for us to put something right. Service requests are not complaints. Service requests typically involve request for repairs, maintenance, inspections, safety and security such as installing smoke alarms, the key element is that they are all related to maintaining the habitability, safety and functionality of the customer's home.

Even when a service request is ongoing at any time, we will log a customer complaint when the customer expresses dissatisfaction, at the same time we will continue to action the service request.

Service Recovery

When a customer contacts Yorkshire Housing to make us aware that we haven't done something we said we would, customers can decide whether their concern is handled as a service recovery issue or a complaint.

Service recovery issues must be actioned to the customers satisfaction during that interaction or call. If it cannot be dealt with during that call it will be logged as a complaint.

Any feedback directly through to the Chief Executive at Yorkshire Housing will also be progressed in accordance with this policy.

What is not a complaint?

- An initial request for a service or information including initial reports of fly tipping or vandalism.
- Complaints submitted more than twelve months since the issue occurred, however, we will always apply discretion to accept complaints made outside this time limit where there are good reasons to do so. These include:
 - individual personal circumstances such as bereavement and illness;
 - vulnerabilities; and
 - where the resident has not been aware of the issue and could not reasonably be expected to have brought the complaint forward sooner.
- Matters that have previously been considered under this policy.
- Where a customer is taking legal action against Yorkshire Housing on the same issue or Yorkshire Housing is taking legal action against the customer on the same issue for which Yorkshire Housing is not responsible.
- A dispute with a neighbour which can be dealt with through the terms of the tenancy agreement or the Anti-Social Behaviour and Harassment Policy. However, if a customer expresses dissatisfaction with Yorkshire Housing's handling of their reports of anti-social behaviour or the handling of their anti-social behaviour case, we will raise a complaint and carry out a review of our handling of the anti-social behaviour case as part of our complaint investigation.
- Member of Parliament, Councillor and Citizen Advice enquiries that are not complaints (these are separate enquiries handled by the customer resolution team).
- Complaints relating to rent increases (where the rent increase is driven by government guidance/ regulation).
- Complaints about the actions of an organisation that is not working for or supported by Yorkshire Housing.
- Where the complaint is alleged to be of a discriminatory nature and a potential breach of the Equality Act 2010. These will be dealt with through a legal route.
- A decision or request for review about a housing application that is subject to procedures as part of a Local Authority Choice Based Lettings system, for example, the banding or housing priority that has been given when applying for housing.
- Feedback about something in an existing Yorkshire Housing Policy, for example, policy timescales for repairs. These are treated as suggestions.

Complaints from customers living in homes managed as part of Swarcliffe PFI are not covered under this policy. These will be dealt with by the Swarcliffe PFI Team, following the Swarcliffe PFI complaints good practice notes. Customers can raise complaints in the same way as customers living in Yorkshire Housing homes.

Whilst we don't treat these issues as a complaint under this policy, we'll deal with them appropriately. We'll respond to the customer to let them know why it's not being picked up as part of the complaints policy and explain what we can do to help.

Complaints about colleagues

Depending on the severity of a colleague complaint, we may need to complete an internal review using our people policies. Complaints against colleagues will be reviewed and acknowledged by the customer resolution team and passed to the individual's manager to investigate and respond within 10 working days. In these circumstances, to protect colleague privacy, full details of any action taken against an individual colleague won't be disclosed to the customer.

What is a compliment?

We define a compliment as “***praise or say thanks for the service offered by a YH colleague or contractor***”.

Compliments make our day, who doesn't love getting great feedback! We'll pass on any compliments we receive to the colleague and their manager. We'll log these for sharing more widely and use them to identify areas of good practice that Yorkshire Housing can learn from.

Passing on comments and suggestions

There may be time when customers don't want to make a complaint but want to comment and makes suggestions about how Yorkshire Housing could do things differently or in a better way. Feedback will be shared with our customers and service teams and logged in the customer resolution team so that we can learn and improve.

How a customer can give us feedback

Customers can make a complaint, pass on a compliment comment or suggestion by:

- Email: customerservices@yorkshirehousing.co.uk.
- Website: www.yorkshirehousing.co.uk.
- The Customer portal.
- Phone: 0345 3664404.
- Letter: The Place, 2 Central Place, Leeds, LS10 1FB.
- Social Media, although complaints by this channel can be taken offline to maintain confidentiality.
- Customer review sites.
- In person to any colleague.

- Via a local Councillor or Member of Parliament.

Having a representative or advocate act on your behalf

Customers can ask an advocate or representative to raise a complaint on their behalf. Yorkshire Housing will ask for consent to speak to them beforehand. This could be a family member, friend, social worker or support worker. Advocates or representative of the customer can raise a complaint on behalf of the customer where the customer:

- is unable to complain themselves because of physical incapacity or a lack of capacity within the meaning of the Mental Capacity Act 2005;
- has requested the representative to act on their behalf (we require written consent from our customer that they have authorised the representative to act on their behalf, alternatively we may write to the customer to indicate that we have been contacted by an individual claiming to be their representative with authority to act on their behalf and give the customer the opportunity to refute it); or
- has passed away.

We adopt the Housing Ombudsman's own procedure when it comes to having a representative or advocate act on your behalf regarding a complaint, we will contact them and not the customer. When our customer agrees to this, they accept that Yorkshire Housing may give their representative information about them and the complaint. Customers can only have **1** representative acting on their behalf of a resident per complaint. We will not liaise with multiple representatives.

Member Enquiries

We will handle enquiries from Member of Parliament's or Councillors in the same way we would handle contact made by a customer. Often, Member Enquiries start as enquiries and lead to service requests being raised.

We will respond to Member Enquiries as service requests for issues reported for the first time. Where we decide to respond in this way, the Member should be informed of the decision and the next steps.

Members or customers that express dissatisfaction with our approach to resolving the substantive issue, or the outcome, will be given the opportunity to make a complaint. The complaint should be raised at stage 1 of our complaint's procedure.

When we receive Members Enquiries and our records show previous repeat contact from a resident about the same issue, this indicates the resident is still dissatisfied with the handling or outcome of the issue / concern and that they have had to escalate the matter to try and get it resolved. In this scenario, we will contact the customer to explore the reasons they remain dissatisfied and ask if they would like the matter investigated as a complaint. We will respond to the Member Enquiry to explain the action it has taken.

The Complaints Resolution Process

Yorkshire Housing acknowledges that sometimes we get things wrong or don't meet the high levels of service that our customers expect. When this happens, we want to resolve these issues or complaints as quickly as possible and have simple and clear processes for doing so. Our policy adheres to the principles outlined in the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code 2024 regarding complaint resolution.

Yorkshire Housing has a specialist, centralised in-house team of colleagues who manage all complaints, seeking the support of colleagues in other business areas when necessary.

The team will always try to resolve things quickly for the customer as part of our customer obsessed complaints handling processes. We want to be able to put things right as soon as possible and get a positive outcome for customers.

We operate a two-stage complaint resolution process. In the rare occurrence we refuse to escalate a complaint through each stage of our complaints procedure we will always provide you with the reasons for refusing to do so.

Stage 1 formal complaint

A Complaint must be submitted within twelve months since the issue occurred, however, we will always apply discretion to accept complaints made outside this time limit where there are good reasons to do so, and we will always consider the individual circumstances of each complaint such as vulnerability or those at risk.

When a complaint is made it will be acknowledged, defined and logged at Stage 1 of our procedure **within five working days of the complaint being received.**

The customer resolution team will get in touch with the customer to get a clear understanding of the complaint and the outcomes that the customer is expecting and confirm in an acknowledgement letter. If any aspect of the complaint is unclear the customer must be asked for clarification and the full definition agreed between both parties. In addition, the customer is made aware of any parts of the complaint that Yorkshire Housing isn't responsible for.

We aim to deal with Stage 1 complaints within **10 working days of the complaint being acknowledged.** We assess each complaint and aim to respond to them as early as possible. If this isn't possible, we'll extend the complaint giving a clear explanation to the customer and details of when a response will be received. We will also include the Housing Ombudsman's contact details. This will not exceed 10 days without good reason. The complaints officer will agree with the customer suitable intervals for keeping them informed about their complaint and give them an opportunity to comment on findings before a decision is made.

Where our customers raise additional points during the investigation, these will be incorporated into our Stage 1 response if they are related, and the Stage 1 **has not been** issued.

Where we have already issued the Stage 1 response, and the new issues are unrelated to the issues that have already been investigated, or it would unreasonably delay the response, the issues will be logged as a **new complaint**.

At the completion of Stage 1, we will ensure that customers are communicated with and advised of the following information:

- the complaint stage;
- the complaint definition;
- address all the points raised in the complaint definition;
- the decision on the complaint;
- the reasons for any decisions made;
- the details of any remedy offered to put things right;
- details of any outstanding actions and how often we'll update the customer on any outstanding actions, to ensure actions are completed satisfactorily;
- details of how to escalate the matter to Stage 2 if dissatisfied with our response;
- Housing Ombudsman contact details.

Stage 2 review formal complaint

If a customer believes Yorkshire Housing has failed to resolve all or part of their complaint to their satisfaction, then they can ask for an escalation to Stage 2 of our complaints process. This is our final response. Our customers are not required to explain their reasons for requesting a Stage 2 consideration.

We'll log, define and acknowledge a Stage 2 complaint within five working days of the customer request to escalate. We'll make reasonable efforts to understand why the customer remains unhappy and what they are expecting from the Stage 2 review.

The colleague considering the complaint at Stage 2 will not be the same person that considered the complaint at Stage 1, and we will issue a final response to the Stage 2 within **20 working days** of the complaint being acknowledged.

We aim to deal with Stage 2 complaints within **20 working days of the complaint being acknowledged**. If this isn't possible, we'll extend the complaint giving a clear explanation and details of when a response will be received. The extension details will be communicated to the customer by either letter or email and in this communication, we will also include the Housing Ombudsman's contact details. This will not exceed 20 working days without good reason. The complaints officer will keep in touch with the customer throughout the process and give them an opportunity to comment on findings before a decision is made.

In the Stage 2 response to the customer, we will address all points raised in the complaint definition and provide clear reasons for any decisions, referencing the relevant policy, law and good practice where appropriate.

At the completion of Stage 2, we will include in our Stage 2 determination letter to the customer the following information:

- the complaint stage;
- the complaint definition;
- address all the points raised in the complaint definition;
- the decision on the complaint;
- the reasons for any decisions made;
- the details of any remedy offered to put things right;
- details of any outstanding actions and how often we'll update the customer on any outstanding actions, to ensure actions are completed satisfactorily;
- details of how to escalate the matter to the Housing Ombudsman Service.

Complaint remedies and resolutions

Yorkshire Housing aims to ensure that any remedy offered in response to a complaint reflects the extent of any and all service failures, and the level of impact caused to the resident as a result. These may include:

- acknowledging where things have gone wrong;
- providing an explanation, assistance or reasons why a certain approach was taken;
- apologising;
- Taking action if there has been a delay and letting the customer know what will happen and when;
- reconsidering or changing a decision;
- amending a record;
- providing a financial remedy;
- changing policies, procedures or practices.

We will take into account the guidance issued by the Housing Ombudsman when deciding on appropriate remedies. Any remedy that we offer will reflect the impact on the resident as a result of any fault identified.

The remedy that we offer will clearly set out what will happen and by when, in agreement with the customer where appropriate, and we will follow through all remedies to completion.

Guidance on remedies can be found on the Housing Ombudsman website.

Anonymous Complaints and Petitions

Anonymous complaints are not dealt with through the customer feedback policy but will be recorded by the customer resolution team. Depending on the nature of the complaint, we may need to investigate this to protect ours and our customer's interests, especially if it could cause serious detriment. If so, the customer resolution team will review the complaint, complete any necessary actions, and record any lessons learned.

Complaints or petitions from groups of customers are accepted. Responses will be sent to all members named in the complaint unless there is a specific request to coordinate through one lead complainant.

Outcomes and learning from anonymous complaints and petitions are reported to the Customer Complaints Forum so that they can review and make recommendations to the Customer Voice and Review Committee as necessary.

Statutory and Regulatory Responsibility

We're committed to ensuring that all personal data is managed in-line with the Data Protection Act 2018 and any associated regulations and codes of conduct. Where a complaint involves a third party, it might be necessary for Yorkshire Housing to share the details of the complaint for them to investigate. If the information is sensitive, we'll discuss this with the customer before we share any information. Our Data Protection and Privacy Policy and Consents Procedure is available upon request.

This policy ensures that Yorkshire Housing meets the regulatory and statutory obligations as set out in the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 and the Regulator of Social Housing's Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard.

We also adhere to the requirements in the 2024 Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code.

Compensation

Where financial compensation is requested or is being considered, each case will be reviewed on its own merits. In-line with the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code; when awarding compensation, we will take account of the guidance issued by the Housing Ombudsman when deciding on appropriate remedies. In addition, we'll consider whether any statutory payments or quantifiable losses have been incurred. We'll also consider time and trouble and any distress and inconvenience caused.

Unreasonable, persistent and vexatious complainants

Yorkshire Housing is committed to providing a customer feedback service that is accessible to all customers, however, on the rare occasion that a customer's actions are found to be unreasonable, we reserve the right to restrict or change this access.

Some customers may make what we consider unreasonable demands if they impact substantially on our services due to the amount of information they seek or provide, the nature and scale of service they expect, or the regularity or number of approaches they make.

Examples of this behaviour include:

- asking for responses within an unreasonable timescale.

- insisting on communicating with a particular colleague.
- continual phone calls, emails, or letters.
- repeatedly changing the substance of the complaint or raising unrelated concerns.
- refusal to co-operate with the complaint investigation process while still requesting their complaint be resolved.
- persistent refusal to accept a decision.
- persistent refusal to accept explanations relating to what Yorkshire Housing can or cannot do.
- continuing to pursue a complaint case without presenting any new information.

Customers who pursue complaints in such a way will be managed using the Unreasonable Customer Behaviour Policy.

The Housing Ombudsman Service

The Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS) is an independent and impartial organisation that is responsible for handling complaints about registered providers of social housing, such as Yorkshire Housing.

The primary goal of the Housing Ombudsman is to improve the quality of life for customers and enhance the services provided by landlords through the resolution of housing complaints. They offer a dispute resolution service for complaints that have not been resolved after going through a landlord's complaint procedure. This means that if you have a problem with Yorkshire Housing that you cannot resolve directly with us, you can turn to the Housing Ombudsman for help.

The Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code

The Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code (revised April 2024) is a set of guidelines that Yorkshire Housing must follow to handle complaints effectively and fairly.

Key areas of the Code include:

- Universal definition of a complaint.
- Providing easy access to the complaints procedure and ensuring residents are aware of it, including their right to access the Housing Ombudsman Service.
- The structure of the complaint's procedure - only 2 stages necessary and clear times set out for responses.
- Ensuring fairness in complaint handling with a resident-focused process.
- Taking action to put things right and appropriate remedies.
- Creating a positive complaint handling culture through continuous learning and improvement.
- Demonstrating learning in annual reports.
- Annual self-assessment against the Code.

Yorkshire Housing must carry out an annual assessment against the Code to ensure our complaint handling remains in line with its requirements and we publish the results on our website.

The new Complaint Handling Code became statutory from 1st April 2024, meaning that landlords have to follow its requirements. Yorkshire Housing will complete the self-assessment in partnership with its customers annually or when any changes are made to the Code or if asked to review and update following an Ombudsman investigation.

How to contact the Housing Ombudsman Service

Website: <https://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk>

mail: info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk

Phone: 0300 111 3000

Write to:

Housing Ombudsman Service

PO Box 152

Liverpool

L33 7WQ

Fax: 020 7831 1942

Learning from Complaints

Yorkshire Housing are committed to learning from customer feedback that we receive and will ensure that feedback is provide at an operational level to service teams across Yorkshire Housing to ensure immediate learning on Individual cases.

The customer resolution team will produce regular reports on complaints and lessons learned which are shared with managers, senior leadership teams, Homes and Places Committee and YHL Board. Lessons learned and satisfaction with complaints handling is reviewed and monitored through the customer lens by the customer complaints forum with quarterly reports provided to the Customer Voice and Review Committee. We will include these in our customer annual report, and this will be shared on the Yorkshire Housing website.

Reports will highlight themes and trends which will allow senior management to review and identify any systemic issues, serious risks or areas for organisational improvement. Annual reporting to Board will include the Housing Ombudsman's Self-Assessment against the Code.

Training

Yorkshire Housing promotes a positive complaint handling culture and the embedding of learning opportunities from feedback. We'll give service-related training to all colleagues, which includes induction and refresher training as appropriate. Additionally, providing specific skills and knowledge training for complaint officers.

We also have set standard objective in relation to complaint handling for all relevant employees in the Complaints team that reflect the need to:

- a. have a collaborative and co-operative approach towards resolving complaints, working with colleagues across teams and departments;
- b. take collective responsibility for any shortfalls identified through complaints, rather than blaming others; and
- c. act within the professional standards for engaging with complaints as set by any relevant professional body.

Customer Satisfaction

When a complaint is closed, we ask the customer to tell us about their experience of the complaints process. A short customer satisfaction questionnaire will be sent to customers by text or email, or a telephone survey will be carried out if preferred.

All customer satisfaction results are reported to the Customer Complaints Forum for review and analysis, with recommendations for improvement reported to the relevant service area and to the Customer Voice and Review Committee.

4. Diversity and Inclusion Implications

Fairness and accessibility are key aims of this policy. There are no parts of this policy that have equality and diversity implications on any of the protected characteristics of our customers.

5. Reporting and Monitoring

This policy will be reviewed regularly to reflect current legislation and any changes to the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code. Compliance is monitored through customer feedback and key performance indicators (KPI's). We produce an annual self-assessment against the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code ensuring that this policy remains in line with its requirements.

We have an established method of performance reporting and regularly report on the following to customers, management teams, YHL Board, Homes and Places Committee and Customer Voice and Review Committee:

- Number of complaints, feedback and compliments by stage, type, service area and outcome.
- Customer satisfaction.
- Review of issues and trends.
- Housing Ombudsman enquiries and determinations broken down by theme and service area.
- Lessons learned by service area, type and theme including root causes.
- Implementation of service improvements.

Date approved	15/04/2024
Approved by	Homes and Places Committee
Recommended / scrutinised by	Customer Complaints Forum
Summary of changes	The changes made are as a result of the revised Housing Ombudsman Compliant Handling Code and ensure that Yorkshire Housing are compliant with our legislative and regulatory requirements. This policy has been updated in line with new policy format and Yorkshire Housing tone of voice.
Frequency of review	Every 3 years or in line with legislative changes
Next review date	April 2027
Policy owner	Director of Customer Success
Policy author	Interim Director of Customer Experience
Associated policies or guidelines	Housing Ombudsman Complaints Handling Code 2024 Unreasonable Customer Behaviour Policy Accessible Services Policy Yorkshire Housing Internal Complaints Procedures Compensation Policy
Associated procedure	Stage 1 Complaints Handling Procedure Stage 2 Complaints Handling Procedure Housing Ombudsman Procedure Consents Procedure Remedies Guidance Compensation procedure