



Lets for Life

Complaints Policy and Procedure

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Our Commitment

Lets for Life is committed to dealing with any concerns or complaints you may have about our service effectively. We aim to clarify any issues about which you are not sure. If possible, we will put right any mistakes we may have made. We wish to provide a service and if we have failed to deliver; if we got something wrong, we will apologise and where possible we will try to put things right. We also aim to learn from our mistakes and use the information we gain to improve our services.

We comply with the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code and annually self-assess are compliance to it and publish the results on our website.

When to use this policy

When you express your concerns or complain to us, we will usually respond in the way we explain below. Sometimes you might be concerned about matters that are not decided by us, we will then advise you about how to make your concerns known.

Also, this policy does not apply if the matter relates to a Freedom of Information or Data Protection issue.

Have you asked us yet?

If you are approaching us for a service for the first time, (e.g. reporting a fault, requesting an appointment etc.) then this policy does not apply. You should first give us a chance to respond to your request. If you make a request for a service and then are not happy with our response, you will be able to make your concern known as we describe below and log a formal complaint.

Informal resolution of concerns

If possible, we believe it is best to deal with things straight away rather than try to sort them out later. If you have a concern, raise it with your Housing Officer. He or she will try to resolve it for you there and then. If there are any lessons to learn from addressing your concern then your Housing Officer will draw them to our attention. If the Housing Officer cannot help, they will explain why and you can then ask for a formal investigation.

How to complain formally – Stage 1 complaints

You can express your complaint in any of the ways below:

- You can ask for a copy of our form from your Housing Officer – they can help you complete it. Tell them that you want us to deal with your complaint formally.
- You can get in touch with our Team on 01625 462880 if you want to make your complaint over the phone.
- You can e-mail us at enquiries@letsforlife.org.uk
- You can write a letter to us at the following address: Lets for Life, Hensmill House, 9-13 Manchester Road, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 1BQ

We will provide complaint forms at our office. (see below address). We will contact you to acknowledge receipt of the complaint within **5 working days**.

Investigation

We will tell you who we have asked to look into your complaint. If your complaint cannot be resolved direct with your Housing Officer, it will be escalated and then dealt with the relevant Manager. On very rare occasions, for more complex complaints, we may need to appoint an independent investigator.

We will set out to you our understanding of your complaint and ask you to confirm that we've got it right. We'll also ask you to tell us what outcome you're hoping for.

The person looking at your complaint will usually need to see the files we hold relevant to your complaint. If you don't want this to happen, it's important that you tell us.

If there is a simple solution to your problem, we may ask you if you're happy to accept this. For example, where you asked for a service and we see straight away that you should have had it; we will offer to provide the service rather than investigate and produce a report.

We will aim to resolve complaints as quickly as possible and expect to deal with the vast majority within **10 working days**. If your complaint is more complex, we will:

- let you know within this time why we think it may take longer to investigate
- tell you how long we expect it to take.
- let you know where we have reached with the investigation, and give you regular updates, including telling you whether any developments might change our original estimate.

The person who is investigating your concerns will aim first to establish the facts. The extent of this investigation will depend on how complex and how serious the issues you have raised are. In complex cases, we will draw up an investigation plan.

In some instances, we may ask to meet you to discuss your concerns. Occasionally, we might suggest mediation or another method to try to resolve disputes.

We'll look at relevant evidence. This could include files, notes of conversations, letters, e-mails or whatever may be relevant to your particular complaint. If necessary, we'll talk to the staff or others involved and look at our policies and any legal entitlement and guidance.

Outcome

If we formally investigate your complaint, we will let you know what we have found in keeping with your preferred form of communication. If necessary, we will produce a longer report. We'll explain how and why we came to our conclusions.

It will include:

- a) the complaint stage;
- b) the complaint definition;
- c) the decision on the complaint;
- d) the reasons for any decisions made;
- e) the details of any remedy offered to put things right;
- f) details of any outstanding actions; and
- g) details of how to escalate the matter to stage 2 if you are not satisfied with the response.

If we find that we got it wrong, we'll tell you what and why it happened. We'll show how the mistake affected you.

If we find there is a fault in our systems or the way we do things, we'll tell you what it is and how we plan to change things to stop it happening again.

If we got it wrong, we will always apologise.

If you are not happy with the outcome – Stage 2 complaints

We would hope that you are satisfied with our response and the outcome to your complaint and believe that we have handled it fairly and appropriately. If you are not happy with the outcome of your complaint, then you can request we escalate it to a Stage 2 complaint. We will write and acknowledge your wish to escalate the complaint within **5 working days** of receiving your request.

This means it will be escalated internally in Lets for Life and handled by a different, often more senior member of staff.

In investigating your complaint, they will respond to check to see it has been recorded, investigated properly and the proposed outcome was fair. We will provide you with an outcome of this stage of complaint within **20 working days**. If it takes longer, we will write to you to let you know.

In the outcome, we will provide you with:

- a) the complaint stage;
- b) the complaint definition;
- c) the decision on the complaint;
- d) the reasons for any decisions made;
- e) the details of any remedy offered to put things right;
- f) details of any outstanding actions; and
- g) details of how to escalate the matter to the Housing Ombudsman if you remain unsatisfied.

Putting things right

If we didn't provide a service you should have had, we'll aim to provide it now if that's possible. If we didn't do something well, we'll aim to put it right. If you have lost out as a result of a mistake on our part we'll try to put you back in the position you would have been in if we'd got it right.

If you had to pay for a service yourself, when you should have had one from us, or if you were entitled to funding you did not receive we will usually aim to make good what you have lost.

Ombudsman

If we do not succeed in resolving your complaint following a Stage 2 complaint, you may complain to the Housing Ombudsman Service. The Ombudsman is independent of all government bodies and can look into your complaint if you believe that you personally, or the person on whose behalf you are complaining:

- have been treated unfairly or received a bad service through some failure on the part of the body providing it.
- have been disadvantaged personally by a service failure or have been treated unfairly.

The Ombudsman expects you to bring your concerns to our attention first and to give us a chance to put things right.

You can contact the Ombudsman by phone on 0300 111 3000 (lines are open Monday to Friday from 9:15 to 17:15), by e-mail info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk, the website is <https://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk> or by writing to

Housing Ombudsman Service
PO Box 152
Liverpool
L33 7WQ

There are also other organisations that consider complaints. We can advise you about such organisations.

Learning lessons

We take your concerns and complaints seriously and try to learn from any mistakes we've made. Our Management Team considers a summary of all complaints as well as details of any serious complaints.

Where there is a need for change, we will develop an action plan setting out what we will do, who will do it and when we plan to do it by. We will let you know when changes we've promised have been made.

What if I need help?

Our Housing Officers will aim to help you make your concerns known to us. If you need extra assistance, we will try to put you in touch with someone who can help. You can have a representative log the complaint on your behalf.

What we can expect from you

In times of trouble or distress, some people may act out of character. There may have been upsetting or distressing circumstances leading up to a concern or a complaint. We do not view behaviour as unacceptable just because someone is forceful or determined. However, the actions of complainants who are angry, demanding or persistent may result in unreasonable demands on the office or unacceptable behaviour towards employees.

We believe that all complainants have the right to be heard, understood and respected. However, we also consider that our staff have the same rights. We, therefore, expect you to be polite and courteous in your dealings with us. We will not tolerate aggressive or abusive behaviour, unreasonable demands or unreasonable persistence and have set out how we manage situations where we find that someone's actions are unacceptable.

Unacceptable behaviour by complainants

This is to set out by the charity's approach to the relatively few complainants whose actions or behaviour is considered unacceptable and which puts unnecessary pressure and demands on staff and resources to the disadvantage of other complainants or functions. The term complainant includes anyone acting on behalf of a complainant or who contacts the charity in connection with a complaint.

The Charity aims to:

- To be open and clear in their dealings with complainants.
- To deal fairly, honestly, equitably, consistently and appropriately with all complainants, including those whose actions are considered unacceptable.
- To provide a service that is accessible to all complainants.
- To ensure that other complainants and employees do not suffer any disadvantage from complainants who act in an unacceptable manner.

Defining Unacceptable Actions by Complainants:

- Aggressive or abusive behaviour or language including derogatory remarks, inflammatory or unsubstantiated comments.
- Unreasonable demands in terms of the amount of information sought; the nature and scale of the service expected or the number of approaches made to the charity. It also includes repeatedly changing or adding to the complaint.
- Unreasonable persistence or refusal to accept a decision made in relation to a complaint, or refusal to accept explanations on what the charity is able to do.

When complainant's actions are considered unacceptable the charity will:

- Restrict their contact with the charity; this may be in person, by telephone, fax, and letter or electronically or by any combination of these.
- In extreme cases there may be "no personal contact"; only by written communication or through a third party.
- If physical violence, verbal abuse or harassment towards employees is experienced this is likely to end all direct contact with the charity and will in some cases be reported to the police.
- Staff have the right to end phone calls if the caller is considered aggressive, abusive or offensive.
- For unreasonably persistent behaviour where complainants have exhausted all internal mechanisms but still continue to dispute the decision of the charity/ombudsman they will be advised that no further contact on the matter will be accepted unless significant new information relating to the complaint becomes available.

Deciding to Restrict Complainant Contact:

- Staff who directly experience aggressive or abusive behaviour from a complainant have the authority to deal immediately with that behaviour in a manner they consider appropriate to the situation and in line with this policy.

- With the exception of such immediate decisions taken at the time of an incident, decisions to restrict contact with the charity are only taken after careful consideration of the situation by a more senior member of staff. Wherever possible, we give a complainant the opportunity to modify their behaviour or action before a decision is taken. Complainants are told in writing why a decision has been made to restrict future contact, the restricted contact arrangements and, if relevant, the length of time that these restrictions will be in place.

Process Flow



