



WILLOW TREE

HOUSING PARTNERSHIP

Complaints Policy

Version:	V8
Responsibility for the Policy	Head of Corporate Services
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Statement of Intent

Willow Tree Housing Partnership (WTHP) recognises the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code and commits to meeting its requirements.

Where a resident expresses dissatisfaction with the response to a service request, WTHP will register this as a formal complaint even where the service request remains ongoing. Raising a complaint will not prevent, stall or otherwise impact actions required to resolve any immediate service issues.

The Corporate Services Manager is the designated lead person accountable for complaint handling within WTHP. WTHP have a designated Board Member who is the Member Responsible for Complaints (MRC).

Policy Objectives

WTHP will:

- Ensure a collaborative and co-operative approach towards resolving complaints, working together across all teams.
- Take collective responsibility for any shortfalls identified through complaints rather than blaming others.
- Act within the Professional Standards for engaging with complaints as set by the Chartered Institute of Housing.

WTHP is committed to providing services that effectively and efficiently meet residents' needs. WTHP will listen to residents' experiences and respond to comments and complaints. Sometimes things do go wrong and when this happens WTHP will work hard to put things right.

Access and Scope

Complaints can be made via the following channels: online form, email, telephone, letter, in person at WTHP offices, or via a representative. WTHP will accept complaints in any format.

WTHP will consider reasonable adjustments and will provide the complaints policy in accessible formats on request.

This Policy and Procedure are publicised on the WTHP website and outlined within the tenants' handbook.

Complaints relating to data protection

Where a complaint relates specifically to the handling, accuracy, security, or processing of personal data, WTHP will assess whether the issue falls under data protection legislation. Data protection matters will normally be managed through WTHP's Data Protection / Information Governance procedures and overseen by the Data Protection Officer, rather than through the housing complaints process. Where appropriate, WTHP

will explain this to the resident, confirm how their concern will be handled, and provide details of their right to raise the matter with the Information Commissioner's Office. Where a complaint includes both service-related issues and data protection concerns, WTHP will ensure that the service elements are addressed through the complaints process while the data protection aspects are considered under the appropriate data protection arrangements.

Time Limits

WTHP accepts complaints within 12 months of the issue occurring or the resident becoming aware of the issue. WTHP will consider applying discretion to accept complaints outside this timeframe where there are good reasons, taking account of individual circumstances.

Where a decision is made to not accept a complaint, we will provide a clear explanation to the resident and provide information on their right to contact the Ombudsman.

Two Stage Process

Any issue that meets the definition of a complaint will be logged and handled at Stage 1 without delay. WTHP operates a single, two-stage complaints process only.

At Stage 1 and Stage 2 acknowledgement, WTHP will set out: (a) its understanding of the complaint, (b) the outcomes the resident is seeking, and (c) which aspects WTHP is and is not responsible for.

Definitions

WTHP recognises the difference between a complaint and a request for service in line with the definition of the Housing Ombudsman.

WTHP 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.

WTHP defines a request for service as a specific request from a resident requiring action to be taken to put something right. This is not a complaint but will be recorded, monitored, and reviewed.

WTHP will:

- Make it as easy as possible for residents to raise complaints in any way and with any member of staff. Whenever a resident expresses dissatisfaction but does not use the word 'complaint' they will be given the choice to make a formal complaint through the complaints process.
- Enable a fair complaints process.

- Consider our duty under the Equality Act 2010 and will anticipate the needs and reasonable adjustments of residents who may need to access our complaints process.
- Treat all complaints confidentially, respecting privacy and sensitivity.
- Allow any complainant to nominate a representative to deal with their complaint at any stage of the process.
- Try to resolve issues at the earliest stage possible.
- Keep complainants informed of progress, even if there is none, and the outcome of any investigation.
- Inform residents and set out the circumstances where complaints cannot be processed as a formal complaint or escalated to the next stage when acceptable exclusions apply. Exclusions include:
 - Legal proceedings have started
 - The issue has previously been considered under the complaint policy
- Review and follow up all dissatisfaction expressed through surveys and make residents aware of how they can pursue this through the formal complaints process if required.
- Where appropriate offer mediation between WTHP and the complainant, although the complainant is not obliged to take up the offer.
- Provide contact details of the Housing Ombudsman in all formal complaint responses at Stage 1 and Stage 2, on the website and corporate publications.
- Review the request to escalate a complaint to Stage 2, providing that the request is received within 28 working days of the formal complaint response being received. If no request is received within 28 working days, the complaint will be closed.
- Refer to the appropriate policy where a complainant is exhibiting unreasonable behaviour.

WTHP will undertake with the Residents Scrutiny Panel to review, learn from and improve practices where complaints give rise to gaps in its service that need to be addressed.

WTHP will ensure all complaint handling staff are trained and aware of the complaints policy and of our commitment to excellent service delivery standards.

WTHP will record all complaints, regularly monitor our progress in handling them, and measure our performance. Details of all complaints and compliments received is presented annually to WTHP's Audit and Risk Committee.

Performance on complaints and how complaints have been used to improve services is reported to our Residents Scrutiny Panel, so that they can hold us to account and recommend improvements.

WTHP will carry out an annual self-assessment against the code to ensure our complaints handling remains in line with its requirements.

Response Timescales

Stage 1: response within 10 working days of acknowledgement.

Where an extension is required at Stage 1, this will not exceed a further 10 working days without good reason. WTHP will explain the reasons, agree suitable update intervals with the resident and provide contact details for the Housing Ombudsman.

Stage 2: response within 20 working days of acknowledgement.

Where an extension is required at Stage 2, this will not exceed a further 20 working days without good reason WTHP will explain the reasons, agree suitable update intervals with the resident and provide contact details for the Housing Ombudsman.

Outstanding Actions

Complaint responses will be issued when the answer is known, not when outstanding actions are completed. Outstanding actions will be tracked and residents kept updated at agreed intervals (Stage 1 and Stage 2).

Compensation

Where a complaint is upheld, WTHP will consider whether compensation or another form of remedy is appropriate.

Any offer of compensation will be made in line with the WTHP Compensation Policy and will take into account the circumstances of the case, including any distress, inconvenience, time and trouble experienced by the resident, and the extent of any service failure.

Compensation is considered on a case-by-case basis and is not an automatic outcome of every complaint.

Additional Issues Raised

Any related issues identified during the investigation will be included in the Stage 1 response, where this has not yet been issued. If the issues are unrelated, already addressed, or would cause unreasonable delay if included, they will be recorded and managed as a new complaint.

Escalation to Stage 2

If all or part of the complaint remains unresolved at Stage 1, it will progress directly to Stage 2. Residents are not required to provide reasons for requesting escalation. WTHP will review requests to escalate a complaint to Stage 2 where the request is received within 28 working days of the Stage 1 response. WTHP will apply discretion

to this timeframe where there are good reasons, taking account of individual circumstances.

Stage 2 complaints will be considered by a person not involved at Stage 1.

Complaints Officer

The Corporate Services Manager is the nominated Complaints Officer who is responsible for tracking complaints and ensuring that a response is given within the published timescales.

Performance Standards

- Publication of an annual complaints' performance and service improvement assessment in accordance with Ombudsman Code requirements.
- Contact a minimum of 10% of Stage 1 complainants and all Stage 2 complainants every quarter for feedback on their experience of the complaint process.
- CEO, MRC and Resident Scrutiny Panel to undertake learning sessions on a minimum of 25% of all Stage 2 complaints received.

Reference Documents

- WTHP Compensation Policy
- WTHP Unreasonable Behaviour Policy
- WTHP Complaints Procedure
- WTHP Internal Complaints handling process
- Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code

When setting policy, the Willow Tree Housing Partnership will ensure a golden thread of best practice runs through all aspects of its operations in respect of equality, diversity and inclusion. It will seek to minimise adverse environmental impacts arising as a consequence of its work. This approach and all policies will be reviewed on their anniversary date or as new guidance or legislation is introduced, whichever occurs sooner.

WTHP will apply this policy consistently and fairly and will not discriminate against anyone based on any relevant characteristics, including those set out in the Equality Act 2010.

WTHP will be transparent about our responsibilities around equality and treat everyone fairly and respectfully, regardless of their: age, gender, marital status, sexual orientation, disability, religion, race, nationality, ethnicity, or national origin.

WTHP will make sure our services and workplaces are as inclusive and accessible as

possible and take seriously any concerns that we've not acted in a fair way, dealing with them as quickly as we can.