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## Compliments, Suggestions & Complaints Policy

**Policy owner:** Director of Housing & Community

**Policy lead:** Head of Housing & Community

**Trustee committee responsible:** Trustee Board

**Formally endorsed:** December 2023

**Last updated:** November 2023

**Next Review:** November 2024

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### About One YMCA Housing

We provide safe, affordable places to live that feel like home and focus on community spirit and togetherness. Our approach to support is based on strengths, and our residents are always at the centre of their own support plans. The support they receive reflects their aspirations to access education, training, employment and volunteering, their future housing needs, and addresses any physical and mental wellbeing needs. Our aim is to empower residents to gain the tools and skills that enable stability, independent living, promising futures, and connection to their communities. Currently, we provide housing services and supported living across 12 different districts in Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire and we are constantly looking to expand this to help even more vulnerable people in the community, changing and saving their lives.

#### 1. Context

One YMCA has a duty to provide a service which falls in line with the occupancy agreement signed by all residents upon moving into any of our Housing services and our contractual obligations. We recognise that there may be times when a resident wishes to bring to our attention any compliment, suggestion or complaint relating to the service they may receive. One YMCA will treat all compliments, suggestions, or complaints as a learning point for continual improvement of our accommodation services. This Policy links to the charity's obligations under the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code and the Tenant Satisfaction Measures that came into force on 1st April 2023.

#### 2. Scope

This procedure applies to residents and any other person who is affected by One YMCA Housing services. Family members of residents or visitors to the service, health workers, local councillors or other advocates who are making a complaint on behalf of a complainant; providing the complainant has authorised them to do so.

#### 3. Purpose



YMCA enables people to develop their full potential in mind, body and spirit. Inspired by, and faithful to our Christian values, we create supportive, inclusive and energising communities, where young people can truly belong, contribute and thrive.

To allow residents the opportunity to offer their compliments, suggestions or express their dissatisfaction regarding the services provided by One YMCA. To continually assess One YMCA's performance to identify ways that we can improve the services we provide.

We will attempt to resolve expressions of dissatisfaction as quickly as possible and encourage residents to speak to support staff as soon as a problem arises. We will aim to resolve matters, and prevent escalation, by understanding and putting in place simple remedies. If we fail to resolve an expression of dissatisfaction and the individual wishes to pursue the matter, then it will become a formal complaint.

#### **4. Equality Impact**

We are committed to treating everyone fairly, recognising the protected characteristics set out in Equalities legislation. We will make appropriate arrangements where necessary to ensure that individuals with distinct communication needs are not unreasonably and disproportionately affected. This could involve providing communication in alternative languages or formats.

#### **5. Definitions**

When considering feedback, we will consider whether it is either:

- a) A Service Request
- b) A Complaint

These terms are defined below, and in the Complaint Handling Code and wishes of the customer will be considered when deciding which category is appropriate.

**Expression of dissatisfaction** – An individual may express dissatisfaction with an aspect of our service.

**Service request** – A request from an individual requiring action to be taken by the charity to put something right. A complaint should be raised when the customer raises dissatisfaction with the response to their service request.

**Suggestion** – We recognise that sometimes an expression of dissatisfaction is not a complaint, but a suggestion as to how we can improve our service. We will actively encourage people to make suggestions for improvement. This includes:

- Talking to individuals while they are residents/involved in services
- Monitoring social media and online forums
- Asking employees about resident and other feedback
- Reading online reviews by residents and customers –
- Resident feedback surveys, suggestion forms and forums led by Project Voice

We recognise that suggestions may be things that take a longer time to respond to as they may make suggestions of significant change to services or property standards. We will respond to all suggestions but on a bespoke timeline in line with the suggestions raised. Project Voice will lead on acting on suggestions made to improve services and capture “you said, we did” to feedback to individuals on points made.

**Complaint** – an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the charity, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting an individual or group. Where dissatisfaction is expressed about a Housing service and we have been unable to remedy the situation to the individual's satisfaction, the individual chooses to

formalise the matter, a complaint must be lodged within 3 months of the occurrence which is being complained about.

**Working Days-** Working days are defined as Monday to Friday, excluding bank holidays.

## **6. Procedure**

The following types of complaint cannot be pursued through the Complaints process where the issue:

- Has already been raised through the complaints process
- Is, has or may be handled under the appeals process (e.g. evictions)
- It, has or should be handled through legal action
- Is an initial notification or request for service or information
- Is an initial report of anti-social behaviour
- Is an internal staff or volunteer complaint (which should instead be treated in line with the grievance or whistleblowing policies)
- Is raised anonymously or without any means of speaking to the complainant in order to substantiate their complaint

If a resident wishes to request a repair, report another resident's behaviour or ask about replacement furniture, they are not making a complaint and it will not fall under the scope of this policy.

## **7. Exceptional Variation**

A tiny minority of individuals may account for a disproportionately and unreasonably high volume of complaints, diverting significant time and resource away from other residents. The following are examples where a complainant could be considered to be placing an unreasonable demand on the charity:

- Requesting large volumes of information, asking for responses within a short space of time, refusing to speak to an individual or insisting on speaking to another.
- Refusing to accept the answer that has been provided continuing to raise the same subject matter without providing any new evidence, continuously adding or changing the subject matter of the complaint
- Refusal to cooperate (e.g. complaining without responding to clear and appropriate requests to clarify the complaint) and or requests for further information to investigate it
- Verbal abuse, aggression, violence (this is not just limited to actual physical or verbal abuse but can include derogatory remarks, rudeness, inflammatory allegations, and threats of violence)
- Overload of letters, calls, emails or contact via social media (this could include the frequency of contact as well as the volume of correspondence received as well as the frequency and length of telephone calls)

A Head of Service must confirm that a complainant is acting unreasonably. Where this is so, we will be:

- Providing a single point of contact
- Limiting contact to a single form i.e. writing, email or telephone only
- Limiting contact to certain times or to a limited number of times per week or month
- Declining to give any further consideration to an issue unless any additional evidence or information is provided
- Only considering a certain number of issues in a specific period

The above course of action will be confirmed in writing to the complainant, alongside an explanation of where their complaint is considered unreasonable and what action is required to address this.

#### **8. Resident or external complaint about a Trustee, Chief Executive or member of the Executive Leadership Team**

Where a complaint is received about a trustee, the Chief Executive or a member of the Executive Leadership Team, the investigation will be commissioned by the Chair of the Governance and People committee in the first instance. In commissioning this work, the committee may choose to bring in an independent person to carry out the investigation if they consider it necessary to do so. Where the complaint is about a member of the People & Governance committee, then the Chair of Trustees will work with the Company Secretary and Chief Executive to commission an investigation. For the avoidance of doubt, this Complaints Policy is for residents or external complaints.

#### **9. Data Protection & Information sharing**

We will share relevant information with appropriate agencies in line with Data Protection Legislation that governs when and how we can share personal information.

#### **10. Staff training**

We will use anonymised complaints to support staff with training in delivering the Complaints Policy.

#### **11. Procedure Statements**

One YMCA welcomes compliments, suggestions and complaints from all residents, volunteers, visitors, and contractors.

One YMCA aims to resolve complaints at the first point of contact.

One YMCA actively seeks to improve its service and compliments, suggestions and complaints are an important part of this process.

One YMCA will take learning points from all compliments, suggestions, and upheld complaints.

One YMCA will acknowledge all complaints in writing within the time frame detailed in the procedure. This time frame differs for each stage of the process.

One YMCA will write to all complainants in response to their complaint once the matter has been fully investigated, within the time frame detailed in the procedure. This time frame differs for each stage of the process.

One YMCA keeps a record of all formal complaints received and a separate record for all formal complaints upheld.

One YMCA will report on complaints as per its contractual requirements with commissioners.

One YMCA reports numbers of complaints received, and numbers of complaints upheld to the Board of Trustees as part of its KPI reporting requirements.

The same complaint will only be addressed through our internal procedure once, except for escalation in accordance with the procedure.

Response times and compliance with this procedure will be monitored through our database, Inform, and will be reported to the relevant Supported Housing Manager. 4

If, having been through One YMCA's complaints process, a resident is still not satisfied, the resident is entitled to:

- Contact a 'Designated Person' (local MP or councillor)
- Have the complaint reviewed by the Housing Ombudsman

One YMCA agrees to abide by any decisions reached by the Ombudsman.

## 12. Logging Compliments and Suggestions

Individuals can log a complaint by:

- using the form provided (Appendix 1) and handing in to any One YMCA Housing site - Submitting in writing or verbally to a member of One YMCA staff
- Via social media platforms
- By letter or email to [admin@oneymca.org](mailto:admin@oneymca.org)

A summary step by step guide to the complaints policy will be made available at Housing sites and on our website. Where an individual may need help completing a form, assistance can be provided by One YMCA staff or by a third party such as Citizens Advice Bureau.

Where the complaint concerns a safeguarding issue relating to people living in the YMCA then the One YMCA safeguarding policy will apply.

The officer reviewing the complaint will also consider whether the seriousness of the matter triggers any regulatory reporting requirements. If there are any questions over the most appropriate steps to take, then the advice of the Executive Director will be sought.

Compliments and suggestions should be logged on our database, Inform. Services should display number of compliments, complaints, suggestions and outcomes periodically on their notice boards / display screens.

Staff members receiving notification of a verbal complaint must record it on our system, Inform and issue the acknowledgement letter. All completed complaint forms must be uploaded onto Inform.

## 13. Stage 1

A complaint will first be investigated at **stage 1** of the policy. One YMCA will progress a complaint in a fair and transparent manner:

- a) Within **5 working days** we will acknowledge receipt of the complaint and provide an indication of when a substantive response to the complaint might be given. If we consider the matter to be a Service Request rather than a Complaint, then we will confirm that at this stage.
- b) After acknowledging the complaint, we will contact the complainant (where appropriate) to arrange to meet, review the complaint and gather further information. We will also meet with members of staff and stakeholders as necessary to agree a response.
- c) After arranging to meet the complainant (or acknowledging the complaint if no meeting is proposed) we will write to the complainant setting out our findings and **if** necessary, offering resolution. We will respond with a decision **within 10 working days** of receipt of the complaint. If this time limit cannot be met, we will write to the complainant within 10 working days of receiving the complaint, explaining the reason for the delay and

providing a revised date (which should not exceed a further 10 days without good reason)

If the complainant is not satisfied with the response to the complaint, they will have 2 weeks in which to appeal. The procedure for making an appeal will be set out in the complaint response. If no appeal is forthcoming, then the complaint will be closed.

The complainant will be asked to state the outcome being sought.

A member of One YMCA staff will investigate the complaint, as directed by a Deputy or Supported Housing Manager. Usually, this will be the person the individual has complained to.

Complaints cannot be dealt with by volunteers or workers from outside agencies.

#### **14. Stage 2 Appeal against the decision**

If the resident is not satisfied with the outcome of stage 1 of the procedure, or feels that the procedure has not been followed, the next stage is to ask for a review of the decision.

Grounds for appeal are:

- Any aspect of their complaint has not been upheld
- They are not satisfied with the method of redress (e.g., the action taken in response to a complaint)

A review of the decision will be taken by a member of the Senior Leadership Team or other appointed person who is not involved in the original decision. Where the complaint is about the Chief Executive, an Executive Director or Trustee, then this appeal stage will be coordinated by the Governance & People committee or Chair of the Board as is necessary and appropriate in the circumstances.

We will respond with a decision within **20 working days** from receipt of the request to escalate/appeal. If this time limit cannot be met, we will write to the complainant within 20 working days of receiving the escalation, explaining the reason for the delay and providing a revised date (which should not exceed a further 10 days without good reason).

#### **15. Investigating and Responding to Complaints**

Investigations should include contact with the complainant to clarify the issue, the outcome being sought and the complainant's understanding of the process.

Once the investigation is complete, the investigating staff member should issue the final response letter which should include the complaint category, a summary of the outcome of the investigation, whether we uphold the complaint or not, an apology or an expression of regret and a clear statement that the letter is the final response and that complainants who are dissatisfied with the final response will need to refer to the next stage of the process.

All action taken to handle the complaint should be logged on Inform against the relevant 'CCIA' record.

Learning points from any complaint should be discussed with staff by the Supported Housing Manager e.g. in team meetings

## 16. Remedies

Appropriate remedies include:

- An apology
- An explanation of what went wrong
- Delivery of the service
- Action required to correct the failure and actions to prevent it occurring in the future

### **Alternative Options – residents only**

Where the complaint relates to regulated housing services then complaints may be passed directly to the Ombudsman if the complaint has passed through all the internal procedures for considering complaints against the landlord.

### **Housing Ombudsman**

The Localism Act 2011 introduced changes to the Housing complaints process from 1 April 2013. You can now contact a designated person to consider your complaint when you have reached the end of our process. Designated persons are impartial and they will try to resolve local housing issues.

#### **Who is a designated person?**

- Local Ward Councillor
- Any MP in the country

#### **What can they do?**

A designated person will try to resolve your issues with us. If they are unable to do this, they will advise you that there is nothing further we can do for you or refer your complaint to the Housing Ombudsman.

#### **Contacting the Housing Ombudsman directly**

If you do not wish to go through a designated person, you may contact the Housing Ombudsman yourself. They can be reached directly at: Housing Ombudsman Service, PO Box 152, Liverpool L33 7WQ

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

### **Ofsted**

As above, any parent/carer at any time can submit a complaint to Ofsted about any aspect of registered childcare provision. Ofsted will consider and investigate all complaints received. They can be contacted at:

OFSTED, Piccadilly Gate, Store St, Manchester M12WD  
Tel: 0300 1231231 [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

## 17. Monitoring of Compliments, Suggestions and Complaints

Response times will be monitored via our system, Inform, by the relevant Supported Housing Manager on a regular basis. We will use complaints as an opportunity to learn and implement

remedies to prevent future recurrences where appropriate. When closed, complaints will be analysed to:

- Assess whether the service standards set out in this policy have been met - Assess quality of response to complaints
- Assess that appropriate action has been taken within reasonable response times
- Assess whether the policy has been applied fairly and consistently
- Identify lessons learned
- Decide on any necessary communication to staff and residents
- Identify any required amendments to procedures
- Report on the number of complaints deemed vexatious or repetitive

We will routinely monitor our performance in implementing this policy and report outcomes to the Executive Leadership Team and Trustee Board.

We will conduct regular customer satisfaction surveys, led by Project Voice.

### **18. Reporting responsibilities**

The Director of Housing & Community will produce:

- a quarterly complaints report to the Governance and People committee and
- an annual complaints report to the Trustee Board

The Head of Housing Quality & Impact will hold the Complaints Officer designation for the purposes of the Housing Ombudsman Code.

The Director of Housing & Community is responsible for liaising with the various nominated individuals, the Chief Executive, and the Chair of the Board about reporting complaints to Regulators.

### **Read this procedure in conjunction with**

- Anti-social Behaviour, Harassment, and Resident Behaviour Management Procedure
- The relevant occupancy agreement

**Date reviewed: November 2023**

**Next review: November 2024**



**Appendix 1 – Complaint form**

For Office Use: InForm Ref .....

PLEASE COMPLETE IN FULL & RETURN TO RECEPTION

**Complaint Form**

Your name: .....

Your accommodation site and room number .....

Please indicate the member of staff, if you have discussed your complaint with staff previously:

Name of staff member.....

**Nature of complaint** (please tick)

Standard of service provided

Failure to provide an agreed service

Attitude or conduct of a staff member

ONE YMCA has not followed agreed procedure

Other (please specify)

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Date of initial complaint (if made at Stage 1):

The following are examples of the types of things that residents/visitors might complain about – this is not an exhaustive list.

<p><b>Standard of service provided</b> Dissatisfaction with the standard of a repair or the way the repair was carried out. Dissatisfaction with the standard of housekeeping. Dissatisfaction with the standard of catering service. Discrepancies with your rent account / arrears.</p>
<p><b>Failure to provide an agreed service</b> Failure to fulfil a statutory Health &amp; Safety, Hygiene or Environmental standard. Failure to fulfil contractual responsibility.</p>
<p><b>Attitude or conduct of staff member</b> Unsatisfactory conduct of a member of staff. Missed or late appointments by staff. Unsatisfactory attitude of a member of staff</p>
<p><b>YMCA has not followed agreed procedure or policy</b> How the application / referral process was dealt with. Dissatisfaction with how we have dealt with discrimination, harassment, nuisance or anti-social behaviour. Dissatisfaction with the way ONEYMCA has carried out policies/procedures (but not a criticism of the procedure itself) including handling of complaints. Failure to meet service standards.</p>