

## **Complaints Policy**

Author/s	Customer Complaints Panel
Ratified by Operations Committee	November 2022
Tenant Committee	October 2022
Implementation date	November 2022
Review date	November 2025



## **CHS Group<sup>1</sup>**

### **Complaints Policy and Procedure**

#### **What is the Complaints Policy based on?**

The Policy is based on the values of the CHS Group which are:

**Respect** - We treat everyone with fairness, respect and dignity

**Approach** - We put as much emphasis on the way we do things as on what we do

**Partnership** - We develop open communication and equal relationships with our customers, staff and partners which value their contributions and enable us to work together effectively

**Openness** - We are open, positive and flexible towards new ideas and encourage innovation and creativity that will improve the outcomes from our services

**Deliver** - We do what we say we will do and are accountable for our actions

CHS Group complies with the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code and will self-assess our complaints handling against the Code each time this policy is reviewed.

#### **How will we handle complaints?**

We will:

- Make it easy for you to complain in the way that suits you e.g. by phone, letter, email, on our website or in person
- Do our best to find a solution as soon as possible
- Recognise every complaint is important
- Ensure you have a named officer to contact who is responsible for your formal complaint
- Keep the complaints process simple
- Deal with complaints efficiently and courteously
- Keep you informed about progress with your complaint
- Keep a record of complaints to monitor progress
- Ask for feedback on how we have handled completed formal complaints
- Compensate where we have caused harm or significant inconvenience over an issue
- Apologise where we have made mistakes
- Follow the requirements of the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code and self-assess our compliance with it each year.

This Complaints Policy and Procedure will be reviewed every 3 years and ratified by the Operations Committee after consultation with the Tenant Committee. We will also carry out a self-assessment of our policy against the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code each year. You can find the Complaints Policy on our website, and also our last self-assessment.

---

<sup>1</sup> CHS Group includes CHS services (housing, advice, care, and support, sales / development)

We will use the valuable learning and feedback received when we conclude each complaint in order to improve the services we provide. The CHS Operations Committee will receive an annual report on complaints including the number, type and stages of complaints and lessons learned. This will also be included in the annual customer report plus the amount of any compensation awarded.

### **1) What is a Complaint?**

CHS Group has adopted the definition of a complaint set out by the Housing Ombudsman Service. We consider a complaint to be 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 customer or group of customers.

You can make a complaint about any aspect of our service and you do not have to use the word 'complaint' for it to be treated as such. Of course there are some things we cannot change, but we will always try to help. We will inform you if your complaint is about something over which we have no control. We will also let you know if your complaint is about something which is not covered by this Procedure – see section 2 below.

After you make an initial contact with CHS, the stages of our Complaints process are:

- Formal Complaint
- Formal Review

### **2) What is not covered by this Procedure?**

The following are not considered to be complaints:

- The reporting of repairs or other service requests unless we fail to respond satisfactorily, when it will become a complaint.
  - Complaints which are criticisms or disagreement with CHS Policies or Strategies. (Although CHS is happy to accept feedback about policies & strategies) Complaints about the way in which these Policies and Strategies have been carried out are covered by this Procedure.
  - Complaints which are a disagreement with or refusal to accept a legal or statutory requirement (e.g. gas servicing). Complaints about the way in which these legal or statutory requirements have been carried out are covered by this Procedure.
  - Complaints which are made at the same time as legal proceedings<sup>2</sup> have started for the same or a related matter. We may take legal advice on whether it is appropriate or not to use this Complaints Procedure in this situation. We may, at our discretion, follow this Procedure at the same time as legal action is taken.
  - Claims for compensation outside those relevant to a complaint (we have a separate compensation policy)
  - Complaints about issues which occurred more than six months previously.
  - Complaints that have already been considered under the complaints policy.
  - Services that we are not responsible for providing.
- Complaints being made in an unreasonable manner (see section 9)

---

<sup>2</sup> Legal proceedings are defined as when a Claim Form and Particulars of Claim have been filed at court.

If CHS decides not to accept a complaint there will be a valid reason which will be explained in writing to the customer. A customer is entitled to challenge this decision by raising their complaint with the CHS Complaints Panel and/or The Housing Ombudsman.

### **3) Complaints Panel**

The purpose of the Complaints Panel is to assist CHS and its customers to resolve complaints effectively, quickly and locally. The Panel consists of CHS customers who are members of the Tenant Committee. The Panel takes an independent view of each complaint.

The Complaints Panel may:

- Act as advocates for complainants who need help to use the complaints process at any stage;
- Give informal advice to complainants at any stage of the complaint process;
- Review completed complaints to identify learning for CHS;
- When requested, carry out the Formal Review of a complaint where the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of a formal complaint.

The Complaints Panel has formal Terms of Reference setting out its role, membership and code of conduct.

### **4) How to complain**

You must contact an employee of CHS Group to tell them that you want to complain. There are lots of ways of doing this and remember that others can make a complaint on your behalf. If someone else complains on your behalf, we will need to get your permission before we can discuss the issue with them. You can make a complaint in any way that suits you, including:

- Telephone: 0300 111 3555
- Mini-com: 01223 713784
- E-mail: [info@chsgroup.org.uk](mailto:info@chsgroup.org.uk)
- Write: CHS Group, Endurance House, Chivers Way, Histon, Cambridge CB24 9ZR
- Speak in person with a CHS employee.
- Website: [www.chsgroup.org.uk](http://www.chsgroup.org.uk)

We accept initial complaints made by social media, but will then discuss the details with you privately.

We understand that some customers have disabilities or health conditions which may make it difficult for them to express themselves or communicate clearly. CHS complies with the Equality Act 2010 to ensure that there is equal access to the complaints service and we will make reasonable adjustments to assist any customer who needs them. Examples of reasonable adjustments include using a customer's communication preference for the duration of the complaint and providing information in alternative formats e.g. Braille, large print or on coloured paper.

If you receive personal care from CHS, either in your own home or at one of our Care Homes, you can raise your concerns directly with the external regulators (see sections 10 and 11 for details). An external regulator is a government agency that oversees CHS's Older People's or Care Services.

We will provide a copy of the Complaints Policy if we fail to resolve your complaint in the first instance, or if you request one.

At any stage you can ask for assistance from the CHS Complaints Panel to support you in making your complaint. The Complaints Panel consists of customers and is formally recognised by CHS Group for informal advice at any stage of a complaint. Email: [ComplaintsPanel@chsgroup.org.uk](mailto:ComplaintsPanel@chsgroup.org.uk). If you are a tenant or shared owner with CHS you have the right to access the Housing Ombudsman Service at any stage of your complaint for advice and to ask the Ombudsman to investigate how your complaint has been handled by CHS.

## **5) Initial contact**

If you have a problem with any aspect of our service, then please contact us. If we can resolve the issue quickly and to your satisfaction, we will record it as a 'first response' resolution so we can review any lessons to be learned. If you are dissatisfied about a repair issue, we will usually ask you to raise this directly with our contractor as they are often best placed to put something right.

If your issue cannot be resolved quickly, we will let you know who is going to come back to you and an estimated timescale, which will usually be within 5 working days. Some issues can be complex and/or rely on external input/advice e.g. from contractors, so cannot be answered in full within 5 working days. In this case we will agree a reasonable timescale with you when we inform you about progress.

## **6) Formal complaint**

If you are dissatisfied with our response to your initial contact then get in touch with us again and we will treat your concerns as a Formal Complaint. You must do this within 30 working days of receiving our response about your original complaint. (We will be more flexible where there is a valid reason for taking longer to request this e.g. health reasons)

We will also treat a complaint as a formal complaint if:

- it is a problem that has happened before
- it is a complaint about a serious failure in our services
- you have asked us to treat it as a formal complaint
- it is a major complaint about a CHS employee's conduct (or Board member)

CHS will let you know within 5 working days the name of the manager who is dealing with the complaint and how long it will take to investigate. They will try to deal with your complaint and give you a full written reply within a further 10 working days. You will be informed if it will take longer and we will contact you every 10 working days to explain progress, with any further extension being for a justifiable reason. We will seek to agree an extension beyond 20 working days with you; if you disagree you can challenge this timescale by contacting the Housing Ombudsman.

After we send a response to the complaint there may be outstanding actions for CHS to complete to address the issue. We will keep you informed of the progress of such actions

however this should not prevent us from answering your complaint in the required timescale.

If you raise further relevant issues with us during our investigation we will try to answer these at the same time so long as it does not delay the reply to your original complaint; or we will log a separate complaint.

## **7) Formal Review.**

If you are dissatisfied with our response to your formal complaint then contact us again within 30 working days of our response, letting us know why you feel the issue is not resolved and what you think should be done differently. Your complaint may be reviewed by a senior manager or Director who has not already been involved in your complaint, who will let you know within 5 working days how long it will take to review or to advise you that no further action will be taken by CHS.

Alternatively you may request that the Formal Review is carried out by the Complaints Panel, or CHS may suggest this where this would be an appropriate way to review the handling of the complaint or to help CHS learn from it. The Complaints Panel would be free to decline to accept such a referral where it believes it does not have the skills or resources to give it the proper consideration (e.g. due to legal or regulatory issues).

The Review will look at the way your complaint has been handled and provide you a full written reply within 20 working days. If it will take longer than 20 working days you will be kept informed of progress. We will seek to agree an extension beyond 20 working days with you; if you disagree you can challenge this timescale by contacting the Housing Ombudsman.

We will not unreasonably decline to escalate a complaint to the next stage. We may tell you that it is not appropriate to take your complaints any further due to :

- unreasonable use of the process (see section 9 below)
- you request a review more than 30 working days after our previous complaint reply
- you have not given a reason that you are dissatisfied with the response you have received
- You are raising new issues that it would be unreasonable to add to the original complaint (which may then be considered as a separate complaint).

## **8) After Formal Review**

If you are still dissatisfied with how we have dealt with your complaint and you disagree with the response from the Formal Review, we will advise that your complaint has gone as far as it can within CHS.

You may refer your complaint directly to the Housing Ombudsman Service. The Ombudsman is a free, impartial and independent organisation which provides a service for tenants and leaseholders who have a complaint about their landlord that they have not been able to resolve through their landlord's complaints procedure. The Ombudsman may work with you and CHS to resolve a dispute under their mediation procedure; or carry out an investigation.

The contact details for the Housing Ombudsman are:

Housing Ombudsman Service  
PO Box 152  
Liverpool L33 7WQ  
Tel. 0300 111 3000  
[www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk](http://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk)  
E-mail: [info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk](mailto:info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk)

### **9) Unreasonable use of the complaints process**

Individuals with complaints about CHS have a right to pursue their concerns through a range of means. They also have the right to complain more than once if subsequent incidents or problems occur. This contact becomes unreasonable when the effect of the repeated complaints is to harass, or to prevent an organisation from pursuing a legitimate aim or implementing a legitimate decision.

We consider access to a complaints system to be important and it will only be in exceptional circumstances that we would consider such repeated use is unacceptable. In such cases we may decline further consideration of a complaint, making our reasons clear in writing. CHS has a separate policy on unacceptable customer behaviour which sets out our approach to such behaviour more widely than in using the complaints process alone.

### **10) Complaints about Care Services**

If you receive personal care from CHS, either in your own home, at an Extra Care Scheme, or at one of our Registered Care Homes, you can raise your concerns directly with the regulators:

#### **The Care Quality Commission –**

**Email:** [enquiries@cqc.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@cqc.org.uk)

**Telephone:** or 0300 061 6161

**Write:** Care Quality Commission

Citygate  
Gallowgate  
Newcastle upon Tyne  
NE1 4PA

#### **Cambridgeshire Adult Social Care Team -**

**Email:** [feedback@Cambridgeshire.gov.uk](mailto:feedback@Cambridgeshire.gov.uk)

**Write:** Adult Care & Support

Castle Court  
Castle Hill  
Cambridge  
CB3 0AP

All complaints investigated by the Care Quality Commission or Cambridgeshire Adult Social Care Team will be recorded by CHS, provided we are aware of them.

### **11) Complaints about our housing managed by other agents.**

If you are a Licensee living in CHS owned supported housing managed by an Agent, and you have a complaint about **services** provided by the Agent, you can complain to the Agent. The Agent will deal with the complaint in accordance with its own Complaints Procedure. If the Agent fails to deal with the complaint you can complain to an employee of CHS, and follow the CHS Complaints Procedure set out above up to and including a Final Review. If you are not happy with the outcome of this Final Review you can then contact the Housing Ombudsman Service (see section 8 above).

If you have a complaint about a CHS service you can complain to the Agent. The Agent will check that CHS is responsible for the service and if so the Agent will help you raise the complaint with CHS, using the procedure set out above up to and including a Final Review. If you are not happy with the outcome of your review you can then contact the Housing Ombudsman (see section 8 above).