

Complaints & Compliments Policy

2020 – 2023

Document control

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Responsible Executive Director	Executive Director – Customer Insight
Author	Customer Engagement Consultant
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Version	Date of review	Details of review
1	July 2020	New policy – a simpler, more streamlined approach to complaints and compliments, created jointly with Livv Housing Group customers
2	March 2021	Policy converted to new format

1. **Introduction**

This policy highlights how we use compliments to recognise individuals and teams and to understand where we are performing well. It also sets out how we deal with customer complaints by aiming to resolve problems quickly, consistently and fairly for our customers. It explains how we use complaints as an opportunity to learn, develop and use our customer's experiences and feedback to improve our services. It also sets out our approach to compensation and goodwill gestures.

The policy applies to all our customers, including anyone who receives a service provided by us and covers actions by all Livv Housing Group entities and subsidiaries, including contractors, sub-contractors and agents. Livv Housing Group subsidiaries are Livv Homes, Livv Maintenance, and First Ark Social Investment (operating as Livv Investment).

The policy reflects all current legislative and regulatory requirements for a social housing provider up to the date of writing however, we are aware of pending changes to the legal framework and the introduction of a new regulator with a responsibility for complaints emerging from the Building Safety Bill (pending enactment in parliament and due by end Dec 2020). The policy will be reviewed to ensure compliance with this new regulatory requirement once details are published. Until that date, all complaints relating to building safety will be managed under this overarching complaints policy.

Compliments

We take pride in delivering an amazing service and where we succeed, we welcome the compliments customers share with us. We know how powerful positive feedback can be, so we endeavour to use this to improve our service and recognise our employees. When customers take the time to praise a colleague or team, we will always share your compliment with them.

2. **Scope**

The implementation and scope of the policy applies and is applicable to:

Livv Housing Group	
Livv Homes	
Livv Maintenance	
First Ark Social Investment (Operating as Livv Investment)	
All entities	X

3. **Compliance**

The policy is in place in order to support:

Regulatory Compliance, in particular the Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard	X
Legislative Compliance, in particular the Membership of Housing Ombudsman Service	X
Best Practice (Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code)	X

The Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard requires us to:

- Have an approach to complaints that is clear, simple and accessible that ensures that complaints are resolved promptly, politely and fairly.
- Providers shall offer a range of ways for tenants to express a complaint and set out clear service standards for responding to complaints, including complaints about performance against the standards, and details of what to do if they are unhappy with the outcome of a complaint. Providers shall inform tenants how they use complaints to improve their services. Registered providers shall publish information about complaints each year, including their number and nature, and the outcome of the complaints. Providers shall accept complaints made by advocates authorised to act on a tenant's/tenants' behalf.

The Housing Ombudsman Service requires us to:

- To be a member of the Housing Ombudsman Service as a social landlord

4. **Policy Statement**

We want to hear from our customers when they feel dissatisfied about their home or a service provided by Livv Housing Group or any contractor or agent acting on our behalf. This policy sets out:

- how we make it easy for our customers to tell us their concerns in the way that is most convenient to them;
- that we welcome complaints because they are important to us. We want to take the opportunity to fix an immediate problem, rebuild our relationship of trust with our customers, learn from the event(s) and improve our services. We will always try to resolve a customer's complaint;
- how we may offer a gesture of goodwill where we agree we should have offered a better customer experience; and
- that we may offer compensation where a customer has incurred expenses or losses if something has gone wrong and it is our responsibility.

We welcome complaints made to us through all routes, including those raised with employees over the phone or face-to-face, by way of written letters or emails, using the internet, web chat, Livv Online and social media, or by advocates or other people who are authorised to act on a customer's behalf.

We adopt The Housing Ombudsman's definition of 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 customer or group of customers."

Sometimes we will be told about something that is actually a request for service and not a complaint. When this happens, we will make sure the customer understands this and we will seek to resolve the request quickly and effectively. In all cases, if the customer specifically asks for the issue raised to be treated as a complaint, then we will accept this and investigate their issue as such.

Effective communication

The Regulator of Social Housing sets out the requirements of housing providers to comply with the Tenant Involvement and Empowerment standard. We will always look at complaints from the customer's perspective and seek to understand and respond to the needs of all our customers and treat people fairly and with respect. By listening, not assuming, we will find out what the customer would like to happen in order to inform resolution of the issue and putting things right.

Compliance

When investigating a complaint and providing a resolution, we will abide by the law and relevant regulatory standards and consider Livv Housing Group's policies and service standards. We aim to only make promises we know we can keep and will operate within our policy framework at all times. These policies are available for customers to see on our website or they can be provided on request.

Timescales and escalation

Unless there are exceptional circumstances, we will only accept and respond to complaints that are made within six months of the event to which the complaint relates.

We will acknowledge receipt of your complaint within one working day and aim to resolve all complaints within ten working days of receiving them. This is the first stage of our process. We will discuss the complaint with you to try and agree an effective solution. We will keep you informed at regular intervals about what we are doing to fix the issue and confirm the outcome in writing once we have concluded our discussions. In exceptional circumstances, we may need a little longer to resolve your complaint; in this instance we will explain why and give a date for when you can expect it to be concluded.

If you remain dissatisfied with our resolution, you can ask to move to the second stage of our complaints process.

You must ask for your complaint to be reviewed at stage two within 21 days of receiving the stage one complaint review response.

We will look again at your complaint and a manager or director, who has not previously been involved will complete an independent review within a further twenty working days from your request to escalate. The manager or director will work with you throughout this time to resolve your complaint and may need to meet with you, using video or tele conferencing facilities, or in person, at our offices, or your home. Customers can have a friend, family member or advocate to accompany them. In exceptional circumstances, we may need a little longer to fully resolve your complaint, for example, if complex works are needed in your home. In these circumstances, we will work with you to explain why and when a response can be expected.

At the end of our second stage, we will summarise our position and confirm our outcome with you in writing.

When we have exhausted both stages of our internal complaints process, if we are unable to resolve the issue to your satisfaction, we will explain all the further options available to you. For customers living in a Livv Housing Group home, this includes seeking advice from a “designated person”, such as an MP or local councillor, or referring the matter directly to the Housing Ombudsman which, according to the Housing Ombudsman’s protocols, can be done after eight weeks have lapsed since exhausting the Livv Housing Group complaints process. For all other customers, you may seek advice from a “designated person” and this becomes the final stage under our Complaints Policy.

Compensation and goodwill

We know how important it is to say sorry when we get things wrong. We will always let our customers know how we plan to put things right as a result of their complaint.

Sometimes this may involve a goodwill gesture, which may be given where we agree we should have provided a better customer experience and an apology alone would not be proportionate. Goodwill gestures are different to compensation payments, which are intended to recompense customers for financial loss or expenses incurred because of our actions or inactions, which can be evidenced. In the case of damage to property or decorations, we will look individually at your complaint, taking into consideration things like the age and condition of personal effects and the cost of materials for redecoration. Compensation won’t apply if something has gone wrong, but it is not our fault however, we will carry out repairs to remedy any situation where it is our responsibility to do so.

Where a customer accepts a goodwill gesture in the form of a financial payment from Livv Housing Group and they are in arrears with their rent, the payment will be paid directly to their rent account to offset their arrears. This is the position unless there are exceptional circumstances which are agreed with the Head of Service/Director. This does not automatically apply to compensation payments where there has been a financial loss however, we will discuss each case with the customer to agree their preference.

When we will not investigate a complaint

We recognise that sometimes our service failures will upset customers and they may be angry, frustrated or upset. Our staff are trained and supported to deal with all customers in a respectful way and we want our customers to treat us in the same way. If a customer behaves in a way which could be considered inappropriate, abusive, where harassment occurs or in any instance where our member of staff feels uncomfortable dealing with the customer's behaviour, we will not be able to investigate the complaint. All of our calls are recorded for training purposes and cases like this will be reviewed by a manager who will write to the customer setting out their findings and explaining the decision and implications for the complaint after listening to the call.

In cases of extreme aggression or abusive behaviour we may additionally refer the matter to the Serious Threat Assessment Group (STAG). STAG deal with unacceptable behaviour towards employees, contractors or partners. If appropriate the incident will also be referred to the relevant authorities, including the Police. Livv Housing Group will inform the complainant of what action has been taken and why.

There will be times when we feel that a complaint is unreasonable, based on its content, where we have received a high level of unsubstantiated complaints or where the frequency of their individual contact with Livv Housing Group could hinder our consideration of their, or other people's complaints. On these very rare occasions, we will be unable to investigate your complaint, explaining our reasons to you in writing.

Where a customer's complaint relates to an active insurance claim, this is out of scope of our Complaints Policy and will be managed by our insurers who will contact the customer directly.

Complaints relating to another service provider that is not a sub-contractor of Livv Housing Group cannot be investigated and will need to be directed to the relevant provider – e.g. any complaints about services delivered by the local authority such as bin collections, or a utility supplier such as a power cut.

Issues that are subject to legal action or proceedings are out of scope for this policy and will be managed by the solicitor appointed to act on our behalf. This would include Disrepair cases where there is a specific process in place.

5. Policy Outcomes

To recognise the positive feedback the organisation and individuals receive from our customers.

To ensure that we have robust processes in place for the investigation of customer complaints, that meets the requirements set out within both the Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard and the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code.

The policy will also ensure that we learn from feedback by making changes to our services to improve the overall customer experience.

6. Monitoring and Review

We will report on how we have performed in dealing with complaints each year in line with the requirements of our Regulator. To ensure that we are continually improving the way in which we handle complaints, we may ask customers who have need to complain about their views on how their case was handled and what we can do to improve our service.

We will record where we have made improvements to our services and procedures, as a result of customer feedback, including the learning we take from complaints, on the Livv Housing Group website “You said we did” page.

Furthermore in line with the Group’s Policy Framework, this policy is scheduled to be reviewed every three years. Unless due to a change in Government legislation or regulatory requirements, then the review period will be brought forward in order to ensure compliance.

7. Roles and Responsibilities

The Policy Framework documents the approval routes for all Policies & Strategies, however under this policy the following teams/employees have the following responsibilities.

Executive Director’s Team (EDT)	Final approval of the policy
Executive Director – Customer Insight	Oversight and lead
Interim Customer Experience Lead	To strategically oversee the complaint and compliment process
Advisor – Complaints Management	Coordinating the complaint and compliment process
Complaints Team	Overseeing the complaint and compliment process
Individual Teams	To ensure that they provide full cooperation into the investigation of complaints

8. Equality & Diversity

In order to comply with the Equality Act 2010, an equality analysis (EA) was completed as part of the policy review. Upon completing the EA it was found that the implementation of the policy would support and encourage the aims of the public sector duty. The equality analysis was completed and approved June 2020.

Annex 1: Definitions

Definition terms	Description
Compensation	A payment designed to recompense the customer for actual evidenced expenses or losses incurred as a result of our actions or inactions. A compensation payment will not be more than the
Complaint	An expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by Livv Housing Group, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting an individual customer or group of customers.”
Compliment	A customer’s expression of satisfaction with Livv Housing Group’s service and/or a Livv Housing Group employee providing the service.
Designated person	<p>Customers can ask for their complaint to be considered by a designated person when our internal complaints process is finished. Designated persons can help to resolve complaints locally and can be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The customer’s local MP; or • The customer’s local councillor. <p>A customer can ask their designated person to refer their complaint to the Housing Ombudsman at any time. After eight weeks have lapsed since exhausting Livv Housing Group’s complaints process, in line with the Housing Ombudsman’s protocols, a customer can go directly to the Housing Ombudsman.</p>
Goodwill gesture	A payment or other gift that is made to the customer by way of apology when we feel we could have delivered a better customer experience. This is not a payment for loss of service or for an expense.
Service failure	When we have not delivered a service we are responsible for in the way we should.