

Summary of findings from The Abbeyfield Society's self-assessment of our complaint handling procedures in 2023



Abbeyfield adheres to The Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code (the Code). As part of compliance with the Code, an annual self-assessment of our complaint handling procedures is completed.

The self-assessment for the year ending 31 December 2023 was completed by the Complaints Officer and approved by the Customer Committee, on behalf of The Abbeyfield Society Board, on 1st February 2024.

The self-assessment showed Abbeyfield was fully compliant with 63 recommendations and non-compliant with one mandatory requirement, and partly compliant with two mandatory requirements and four best practice recommendations. For each recommendation, planned actions to achieve compliance and associated dates are provided. You can download the full self-assessment, which includes planned actions to achieve compliance and associated dates, from the Abbeyfield website.

The latest version of our Complaints, Concerns and Compliments policy was approved by the Customer Committee on 1st February 2024. See our Making a Complaint guide for residents and their representatives for full details of our policy.

Definition of a complaint

Abbeyfield has adopted the standard 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 resident or group of residents."

Exclusions from the policy are clearly set out and deemed to be reasonable and fair. Where an issue cannot be addressed via the complaint's procedure, details of an alternative means of resolving the issue would be given to the complainant and they would be advised of their right to access the Ombudsman, as appropriate.

While we recognise the difference between a service request and a complaint, work is underway to ensure repair and maintenance requests are escalated into the complaints process at standard junctures, if the request is not completed in a timely or satisfactory way.

Accessibility and awareness

There are multiple routes available to make a complaint, including by email, telephone, by post, or by speaking to any member of staff. Representatives may submit complaints on a resident's behalf provided they have authority to do so. Information on how to make a complaint is included on the abbeyfield.com website.

Abbeyfield has a commitment to make any reasonable adjustments necessary, where an individual has any difficulty in raising a complaint, in line with our Equality, Diversity & Inclusion, and Accessible Information policies.

We regularly advise residents about our complaints process. Our Making a Complaint guide is given to all prospective residents, and on display in our houses and homes, alongside posters advertising the complaints process.

Complaint handling personnel

We have a named Complaints Officer, who administers and coordinates any complaints received. As the Customer Quality Manager, the Complaints Officer has sufficient seniority to ensure complaints are resolved quickly and fairly.

The relevant Regional Operations Manager for the house or home would investigate any complaints – although we reallocate investigations to another senior Manager if a conflict of interest is identified.

All Managers and Directors have received face-to-face training on the complaints process from the Complaints Officer – a permanent e-learning module is currently in development.

Complaints handling principles

We will always try to resolve a complaint at the earliest opportunity, in agreement with the complainant.

We have developed a clear procedure for frontline staff on how to address service-level complaints to ensure issues raised to the staff team at a house or home are resolved within the same day, or escalated to the complaints process.

When a complaint is made, we aim to log and acknowledge the complaint within two working days. In 2023, 90% of complaints were acknowledged and logged within five working days (the timescale

required by the Code). Our complaint acknowledgement letters set out our understanding of the complaint and the desired outcomes for the complainant to confirm.

While a standard opportunity for complainants to comment on the Stage 1 investigation findings is no longer in place, complainants have the opportunity to comment on adverse findings as part of a request to escalate to Stage 2.

In line with the Code, we have developed a procedure for managing unacceptable behaviour from residents and/or their representatives when pursuing a complaint.

A complaints handling satisfaction survey is sent to all complainants following the final response. In 2023, the results show that 76% of respondents were satisfied with how their complaint was handled, and 66% would use the complaints process again, if they had a similar concern in the future - although it is recognised that some complainants are satisfied but do not wish to complete and return the survey.

Complaint stages

Our complaints procedure now has two stages in line with best practice outlined in the Code.

The Stage 1 response is provided within ten working days from acknowledgement of the complaint – unless an extension has been arranged. Extensions of more than ten working days are subject to agreement with the complainant.

The Stage 1 response letter will always include details of the findings, actions or proposals to resolve the complaint, details of how to escalate and the contact details for the Ombudsman, if relevant to the complainant. In 2023, 85% of complaints received were resolved at Stage 1.

Complainants are not required to put a request to escalate to Stage 2 in writing. A letter acknowledging the escalation request will be sent to the complainant setting out our understanding of the outstanding issues and the desired outcomes. At Stage 2, a Director will review the complaint and the Stage 1 investigation.

Following Stage 2, complainants may take their complaint directly to the Housing Ombudsman (where it relates to a housing service) or the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (where it relates to a care service). Details of the relevant Ombudsman are provided at every stage.

Putting things right

Where something has gone wrong, we will acknowledge this and take appropriate steps to put things right. The template response letters include a section on what actions have been taken as a result of the complaint. Where appropriate,

Abbeyfield will offer remedies that reflect the extent of any failure in the service provided and the subsequent impact on the complainant as a result.

We will follow our organisational lessons learnt process to ensure that we review systems and processes beyond the individual circumstances of the complaint.

Continuous learning and improvement

We regularly report on the volume, category and outcome of complaints, as well as complainant satisfaction and compliance with set timeframes, to the Executive Committee and the Board, via the Customer Committee. The Chair of the Customer Committee has lead responsibility for complaints and decides what data is required by the Customer Committee to provide insight on our complaint handling performance.

Self-assessment and compliance

We publish the results of the annual review of the organisation's complaints handling procedures to the Customer Committee, circulate a summary for display on noticeboards at houses and homes, and publish the full self-assessment on the Abbeyfield website. Data related to complaints will be published in the organisation's Annual Report.