

Making a complaint

A guide for residents and their representatives



Making a complaint

The Abbeyfield Society aims to provide high quality services across all of our properties; however, sometimes things can go wrong and we don't do as well as we should.

If this happens, please tell us so that we can try to put things right. Abbeyfield is committed to dealing with complaints quickly, fairly and effectively. We welcome complaints and aim to use any complaint received as an opportunity to learn and improve our services. We will not treat you any differently if you make a complaint.

We aim to:

- encourage residents to give us feedback to help us to improve our services
- handle all complaints received in a consistent, fair and timely way
- keep you up-to-date with how we are dealing with your complaint
- make sure that our staff know how to resolve complaints
- treat complaints confidentially
- record, monitor and report on the complaints we receive
- ensure that the learning from complaints and other forms of feedback is used to drive service improvements.

What is a complaint?

A complaint can be defined 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.”

Who can make a complaint?

In line with the above definition, our complaints process is intended for residents, or prospective residents, of houses and homes that we directly manage and their representatives.

Reasonable adjustments

This leaflet is available in large print, Braille, audio and in translated versions on request. If you have any difficulty in raising a complaint, please let us know and we will make all reasonable adjustments necessary to enable you to make your complaint and to support you to get it resolved.

What you can complain about?

You can make a complaint if you are dissatisfied with any aspect of our service. Your dissatisfaction may be as a result of when Abbeyfield, or someone working on our behalf:

- did something wrong
- did something that should not have been done
- failed to do something that should have been done
- treated someone unfairly; or
- failed to deliver what was promised

Complainants will be informed if their complaint is about something which Abbeyfield is not responsible for, such as a complaint related to another organisation. We also have specific procedures for reporting neighbour nuisance or anti-social behaviour, which sit outside of this process for managing complaints about Abbeyfield services.

In rare circumstances, we reserve the right to deal with a complaint differently from the procedure outlined here. However, you will be informed of the reasons why the complaint needs to be addressed differently – the most likely reason is where the subject of the complaint is something which must be handled by our insurers.

Complaints and insurance claims

In the event of a complaint relating to damage to or loss of property which has also resulted in a claim using Abbeyfield's content insurance, only the aspects of the complaint which are related to the service provided by Abbeyfield will be investigated under the complaints process.

In the event of a complaint relating to a personal injury which has resulted in a public liability claim against Abbeyfield, instructions from Abbeyfield's insurers on the action to be taken will be followed.

How to make a complaint

In the event that you are dissatisfied with any aspect of the service provided by Abbeyfield, please raise the issue directly with the relevant manager or staff member concerned. In many cases, the issue will be resolved at the time and no further action will be required.

Where the issue cannot be raised or resolved locally, or you are dissatisfied with the initial response, please make a complaint using the procedure below. Our complaints process has two stages (with an optional third stage) and we will aim to resolve your complaint at the earliest stage possible.

Stage 1

You can make a complaint in many ways – and you don't have to put it in writing if you don't want to. The simplest way to raise a complaint is to contact our Complaints Officer.

Email: complaints@abbeyfield.com

Post: Complaints Officer
The Abbeyfield Society
St Peter's House
2 Bricket Road
St Albans
Herts
AL1 3JW

Tel: 01727 857536
Fax: 01727 734060

We will accept a complaint from a representative on your behalf, who may use any of the channels outlined above, provided that you tell us that they have permission to act for you.

You can also make a complaint directly to any staff member, who will support you to pass the complaint onto the Complaints Officer using one of the above options.

When making a complaint, please tell us what went wrong, how you would like the matter to be resolved and your contact details so we can keep you up-to-date as we investigate and provide you with our response.

All complaints are treated confidentially and in accordance with the requirements of data protection legislation. Information will only be shared with staff as necessary to the investigation.

While Abbeyfield welcomes feedback in various formats, our social media channels, such as Facebook and Twitter, are not recommended as a means of making a complaint, as it is not possible to provide investigation details and our response via social media.

Similarly, anonymous complaints will be investigated fully; however, it is better if contact details are provided so that we can inform you of the outcome of our investigation.

Time limits

Complaints should be made as soon as possible after the date on which the event occurred or came to the complainant's notice, and ideally no more than 12 months after that date.

What happens next?

We will acknowledge your complaint in writing within two working days. Where a complaint is received by telephone, we will make a written record and provide you with a copy of our record to ensure that we have understood the issues raised.

We will let you know the name of the manager who will be investigating the complaint (known as the Investigating Officer).

The Investigating Officer will investigate your complaint and aim to provide a full written response to you within 10 working days. If it is not possible to meet this timescale, the Investigation Officer will contact you to agree a new date by when the response will be provided, which will not exceed a further 10 working days without good reason.

In all cases, the Investigating Officer will contact you to discuss their findings prior to sending the written response so that you have an opportunity to ask any questions you may have.

If you do not feel we have fully addressed your complaint or you remain dissatisfied, you can ask for your complaint to be reviewed by letting the Complaints Officer know – you do not need to put this request in writing.

Stage 2

If escalated, the complaint and its Stage 1 investigation will be subject to a full review by the relevant Director (Stage 2).

You will be asked to clarify which aspects of the complaint have not yet been resolved and what outcome you would like to achieve from a further review.

The Director will aim to provide a full written response to you within 15 working days. If it is not possible to conclude their review in this timescale, the Director will contact you to agree a new date by when the response will be provided, which will not exceed a further 10 working days without good reason.

The Director will contact you to discuss their findings prior to providing a written response.

Stage 3

If you remain unhappy with our response at Stage 2, you can ask for your complaint to be escalated further internally by seeking an appeal to the Board of Trustees (Stage 3). Stage 3 is optional and you may approach the relevant Ombudsman following Stage 2 – see below for further details. Again, please let the Complaints Officer know that you wish to escalate to Stage 3 – your request does not need to be in writing.

The panel will consist of three Trustees or two Trustees and the Chief Executive, and it will be convened at the earliest possible opportunity. You will be invited to attend the panel hearing and / or to send a representative. The decision of the panel will be final and it concludes Abbeyfield's internal complaints procedure (unless new evidence becomes available).

How long will it take to resolve my complaint?

Unless a later deadline has been agreed with you, we will provide our final decision to your complaint within a maximum of 56 calendar days of when we first received the complaint.

All complaints are managed at each stage within the following timescales:

- Stage 1 decision - a full written response will be provided within 10 working days.
- Stage 2 decision – a full written response will be provided within 15 working days from the request to escalate.
- Stage 3 decision – the Panel will be convened at the earliest possible opportunity, normally within 10 working days, with a full written response provided within 10 days of the hearing.

If we are unable to meet the above timescales at any point, we will contact you and agree a revised deadline, which will never exceed a further 10 days without good reason.

Putting things right

If a complaint identifies that Abbeyfield has failed to deliver a service to the expected standard, we will seek to resolve the complaint and to ‘put things right’. When something has gone wrong, we will apologise and take corrective action.

If you are still not happy

If you remain dissatisfied following the conclusion of our internal complaints process (at Stage 2, if you do not wish to use Stage 3), you may refer the complaint to the relevant Ombudsman for a free independent review. You may contact the Ombudsman at any point but they will not normally investigate a complaint until our internal complaints procedure has concluded.

Abbeyfield will co-operate fully with the relevant Ombudsman during any investigation and comply with the final decision, which will be binding on us.

Housing and Independent Living

Tenants, leaseholders or housing applicants can ask the Housing Ombudsman to review the complaint. To do so, a ‘Designated Person’, such as a local councillor or MP, should be contacted who will assist you to resolve the complaint or will refer it to the Ombudsman on your behalf. Alternatively, you can wait eight weeks from the conclusion of the internal procedure and refer directly.

The Housing Ombudsman
Exchange Tower
Harbour Exchange Square
London E14 9GE
Tel: 020 7421 3800
www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk

Care and Nursing Services

Where a complaint relates to a care service, they may be referred immediately following the conclusion of Abbeyfield’s internal complaints process to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO).

LGSCO
PO Box 4771
Coventry
CU4 0EH
Tel: 0300 061 0614
www.lgo.org.uk

NHS and local authority-funded care

Where care is funded by the NHS or local authority, the resident also has a right to take the complaint to the funder for them to investigate. There is a duty on the funder to deal with complaints about a service they have purchased.

Care Quality Commission

Our care services are regulated by the Care Quality Commission (CQC). While the CQC cannot get involved in individual complaints about care providers, they welcome information about services from residents or their representatives and use this information to inform their inspections.

CQC National Customer Service Centre
Citygate
Gallowgate
Newcastle upon Tyne
NE1 4PA
Tel: 03000 616161
www.cqc.org.uk/give-feedback-on-care

In developing our complaints process, Abbeyfield has adopted the principles outlined in the Housing Ombudsman’s Complaint Handling Code (July 2020), the single complaints statement and good practice guide produced by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman and Healthwatch England (July 2018), as well as the ARCO (The Associated Retirement Community Operators) Consumer Code (Section 8: Handling and resolving complaints).

