



Complaints Handling Policy

COR-POL-06

Version 7.9

Date approved: 11 November 2025

Approved by: People & Places Committee

***‘We / us’ in this Policy refers to Southway Housing Trust (Southway).
‘You’ in this policy refers to the tenant(s) and residents.***

A guide to how we deal with complaints – September 2025

This document explains how we approach and resolve complaints.

1. Our Values

- 1.1 The way we do things is determined by our values.
- 1.2 We are guided by our REACH values: Respect, Equity, Ambition, Compassion and Honesty.
- 1.3 We respect our residents and the communities they live in, and we are committed to providing excellent services that reflect their needs and experiences.
- 1.4 We believe in listening to residents and acting with compassion and honesty when things go wrong. This may lead to a complaint, and this policy sets out how we will respond, how we will put things right and how we will learn from complaints to improve our services.
- 1.5 Southway colleagues will work together, and with residents, to resolve complaints. We will take responsibility for any shortfalls identified and act professionally and transparently to address them.
- 1.6 Southway colleagues follow these principles when dealing with complaints:
 - 1.6.1 **Actively Listen and Show Empathy** – We take time to understand the concern and the impact it has had.
 - 1.6.2 **Take Ownership** – We take responsibility for resolving the issue and learning from it.
 - 1.6.3 **Focus on Resolution** – We aim to resolve complaints fairly, promptly and effectively
 - 1.6.4 **Follow Through on Agreed Actions** – We ensure that any commitments made during the complaint process are delivered and monitored until complete.

2. What is a complaint?

- 2.1 A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions, or lack of action by Southway, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting an individual resident or group of residents
- 2.2 Residents are not required to use the word “complaint” for their concerns to be treated as such. Where dissatisfaction is expressed, the resident will be offered the option to have the matter handled as a formal complaint under this policy. Complaints submitted by a representative or third party will be accepted and managed in accordance with this policy.

3. The Housing Ombudsman

- 3.1 The Housing Ombudsman is an independent body set up by law to review housing complaints. The Ombudsman can adjudicate on complaints that have been through Southway’s complaints process, and provide independent guidance to residents about their complaints at any point.
- 3.2 You can find out more about the Ombudsman by visiting their [website](#) and contact them for advice at any point during your complaint via the following methods:

Complaint form: [Fill in the online complaint form](#)

Email: info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk

Phone: 0300 111 3000

Write: Housing Ombudsman Service, PO Box 1484, Unit D, Preston, PR2 0ET
Fax: 020 7831 1942

- 3.3 Each year Southway conducts a self-assessment against the Complaint Handling Code to make sure that we are compliant, and to identify areas for improvement in how we deal with complaints.
- 3.4 The latest version is available to view on our website [here](#). We will also provide a hard copy for residents who request it and promote our complaints process directly to customer through our communication channels. Southway is committed to ensuring that all residents can access this policy. Alternative formats such as large print, Easy Read, audio or translated versions are available upon request. Please contact us to discuss any specific accessibility needs.

4. I want to complain. How do I go about it?

- 4.1 Southway accepts complaints through a range of channels including telephone, letter, email, website, social media and in person. Residents may express dissatisfaction in any format, and all concerns will be considered in line with this policy.
- 4.2 Where complaints are received via social media, we will respond using private channels to protect confidentiality and ensure appropriate handling. We regularly survey residents about the services they receive. Where negative feedback is provided residents will be informed of their right to make a formal complaint and offered support to do so.
- 4.3 Complaints may be submitted by a representative, including friends, relative, support workers, councillors or anyone else you would like to represent you. We will always check that you have given your consent for someone to contact us on your behalf to make sure that we protect your privacy and comply with Data Protection Legislation.
- 4.4 All complaints will be handled in line with Southway's Customer Care standards. Residents who make a complaint will be treated with fairness and respect and will receive the same level of service as all other residents.

5. Equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI)

- 5.1 EDI is central to how we work, how we treat each other, and how we serve our communities. We believe everyone deserves to feel respected, valued and included. We ensure that these principles are applied fairly and consistently as outlined in our Equalities Scheme.
- 5.2 We carry out an annual Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) of our complaints policy and use customer voice, feedback and insight to ensure our complaints service is accessible to customers, reporting our performance regularly to our People & Places Committee.
- 5.3 Reasonable adjustments will be considered to support residents who may face barriers to access the service. Examples include:
- Use of translation services for residents whose first language is not English.
 - Tailored communication methods for residents who are hearing or visually impaired.

- Accepting and recording verbal complaints where written communication is not possible.
- There may also be other ways to assist you to complain that are not listed above. Please contact us to discuss how we can help and ensure that you are not denied access to our complaints service.

5.4 Where a resident requests a reasonable adjustment to support access to the complaints process and provides consent, Southway will retain this information to ensure future complaints can be handled appropriately and without delay.

6. What Happens Next?

6.1 We have a dedicated Customer Experience Team whose job it is to try and resolve problems, but you can make your initial complaint to any member of Southway staff, and they will ensure it is dealt with correctly.

6.2 All Southway Staff understand the importance of customer feedback and will work with the Customer Experience Team and to make sure that they are properly resolved and provide all necessary information.

6.3 Some issues, such as a missed repair or a request for an update may be resolved quickly without the need for a complaint investigation. These are treated as service requests. Service requests will continue to be addressed while any related complaint is being investigated.

6.4 We will define, log and acknowledge your complaint within 5 working days at both Stage 1 and Stage 2. If we don't believe we should deal with your request as a complaint we will explain the reasons why (see Section 13- Exceptions) for more detail.

6.5 If a resident is dissatisfied with the response to a service request, they will be asked if they want it to be treated as a complaint under this policy. Where actions have been agreed as part of the complaint resolution but remain outstanding, this will not delay the complaint response. Southway will provide progress updates on outstanding action at least every two weeks until they are completed.

7. Complaints

- 7.1 In line with the Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code, Southway has a two-stage complaints process.

Stage 1

- 7.2 Your complaint will be assigned to an officer who will be responsible for dealing with it and keeping you up to date with what is happening. All officers that handle Southway complaints will be trained and understand the complaints policy. If there is a potential conflict of interest (the officer is part of the complaint or is known to you in a way that might compromise impartiality) we will assign the complaint to a different officer. We will confirm this to you no later than five working days after you make the request.
- 7.3 The officer will be proactive, find out what you are seeking as an outcome and consider this when conducting their investigation and making their decision.
- 7.4 The officer will consider all information and evidence carefully, be independent, impartial and focus on a solution to the problem with an open mind.
- 7.5 We will consider previous complaint reports if it helps us to understand and resolve the issue.
- 7.6 If you want to raise another issue during this period, we will consider it alongside your original complaint. We will try to provide you with one response that covers both issues, unless it means that the response to your first complaint will be delayed, or you do not want us to.
- 7.7 You will usually receive a full written response within 10 working days of the complaint being acknowledged, written in plain English that sets out our decision on the complaint and what steps we intend to take next.
- 7.8 The response will address all points raised in the complaint and provide clear reasons for any decisions, referencing the relevant policy, law, and good practice where appropriate.
- 7.9 If, for some reason, we cannot provide a response within 10 working days we will explain why and agree a date that you will receive it by. This will not normally be longer than another 10 working days and we will keep you informed about the reasons for the delay. If the delay is due to staff absence, we will assign your complaint to another officer. We will agree with the

resident suitable intervals for being updated on the progress of the complaint. We will also provide you with contact details for the Ombudsman. If you inform us that you are not satisfied with part or all of the outcome of your complaint, we will progress your complaint to be reviewed at Stage 2 of our process, you will need to contact us, within fifteen working days of the date of receiving the outcome and explain why you are still dissatisfied.

Stage 2

- 7.10 Your complaint will be assigned to a senior officer, with no prior involvement in your Stage 1 complaint, who will be responsible for dealing with it and keeping you up to date with what is happening.
- 7.11 All officers that handle Southway complaints will be trained and understand the complaints policy. If there is a potential conflict of interest (the officer is part of the complaint or is known to you in a way that might compromise impartiality) we will assign the complaint to a different officer. We will confirm this to you no later than five working days after you make the request.
- 7.12 The officer will be proactive, find out what you are seeking as an outcome and consider this when conducting their investigation and making their decision.
- 7.13 The officer will consider all information and evidence carefully, be independent, impartial and focus on a solution to the problem with an open mind.
- 7.14 We will consider previous complaint reports if it helps us to understand and resolve the issue. We will conduct a full review of your complaint and if we do not change our original decision we will notify you as soon as possible, explaining the reasons why.
- 7.15 Whatever the outcome of the review, we will give you advice on how to contact the Ombudsman if you wish to do so. We will also provide you with contact details for the Ombudsman
- 7.16 You will receive a full written response within 20 working days, written in plain English that sets out our decision on the complaint and what steps we intend to take next. If, for some reason, we cannot provide a response within 20 working days we will explain why and agree a date that you will receive it by. This will not normally be longer than another 20 working days and we will keep you informed about the reasons for the delay. If the delay is due to staff absence, we will assign your complaint to another officer.

- 7.17 The response will address all points raised in the complaint and provide clear reasons for any decisions, referencing the relevant policy, law, and good practice where appropriate.
- 7.18 The response will not be delayed because outstanding actions required to address the issue, have not been completed. For example, we have agreed to carry out a repair, to resolve the complaint, but we are awaiting a part to complete it. We will track actions that we agree as part of complaints resolution and provide you with regular updates until the point that they are complete..

8. Complaint Outcomes

- 8.1 When you make a complaint, we will either uphold, partially uphold or not uphold it. This means
- **Upheld.** This means the outcome of the investigation has found in your favour. We will take the necessary action to resolve the situation.
 - **Partially upheld.** This means the investigation found that some parts of the complaint were justified and we will take appropriate action to address those issues.
 - **Not Upheld.** This means the outcome of the investigation has not found in your favour. If this is the case we will tell you how to appeal, or contact the Ombudsman as appropriate
- 8.2 If a complaint is upheld or partially upheld at any stage of the process, Southway will:
- Say sorry for the things we got wrong.
 - Apologise to you for the inconvenience caused.
 - Take some practical action to put things right. We will agree the actions with you and set a realistic deadline to complete them.
 - Ensure that the same situation does not happen again.
 - Changing Policies or Procedures
 - Reconsidering or changing a decision
 - Amending or correcting a decision.

8.2.2 Offer compensation in some circumstances. You can find more detail about this in our Customer Compensation Policy.

- Explain what will happen and when and make sure we deliver what we promise.

8.3 When offering a financial remedy or compensation, we will take into account the impact the issue you complained about had on you and refer to Ombudsman guidance

I'm still not satisfied. What do I do now?

8.4 A very small minority of complaints are not resolved by our internal process and therefore need to be reviewed externally. This is done by the Housing Ombudsman.

8.5 The Ombudsman investigates complaints after they have been through our internal complaints process and will require proof that Southway have considered the complaint. This would usually be copies of the Stage 1 complaint and Stage 2 review letters.

9. Learning From our Mistakes

9.1 We see complaints as an opportunity to learn, do things differently, and improve our services. We will discuss complaints with individuals and teams, so that we can do better next time.

9.2 We will include lessons learned in our complaint responses, if applicable, so you understand how your complaint has helped us to improve services at Southway.

9.3 Every year we will report to our tenants and residents how many complaints we received, how many were reported to the Ombudsman, but more importantly the service improvements we have made as a result. We will publish the information on our website, and in our tenant newsletter, Southway Stories.

9.4 The Southway Board will appoint a Member Responsible for Complaints, with responsibility and accountability for complaints. Our complaints handling approach is the responsibility of our People and Places Committee. This Committee has delegated authority from the Board and is mainly made up of tenants, residents and local councillors.

- 9.5 The People and Places Committee receive an annual complaints performance and service improvement report on our complaint handling performance, which includes a self-assessment against the Complaint Handling Code.

10. Customer Voice

- 10.1 We recognise that the best way to make our services customer friendly is to involve customers in designing and reviewing them. This extends to our approach to complaints.
- 10.2 We obtain customer feedback on complaint handling. We involve customers when amending our complaints policy and process.
- 10.3 Complaints made regarding service failure linked to our customer involvement services will be managed in line with this policy.

11. Review

- 11.1 We will review this guide at least every year to make sure that it is up to date, relevant and is compliant with the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code.

11. Complaints Exceptions

- 11.1 Southway will apply discretion to accept complaints raised about issues occurring over 12 months ago. Exceptions may include but are not limited to:
- The resident was not aware of the issue until a later date and the complaint is made within 12 months of becoming aware.
 - The complaint relates to safeguarding concerns.
 - The complaint involves health and safety risks
 - There is a valid reason for the delay in raising the issue such as vulnerability, illness or lack of support.

12. ASB Complaints

- 12.1 Complaints from a customer about anti-social behaviour from another tenant or resident will be dealt with under the terms of the Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) policy.
- 12.2 Any complaint received about the outcome of an ASB case may be dealt with through an ASB case review. This will be carried out by an officer, or manager with no prior involvement in the case.
- 12.3 The investigating officer will have different options available to them including reopening an investigation or taking other action. The reasons for their decision will be communicated and advice provided on how to seek review via a designated person, or the Ombudsman.
- 12.4 Complaints about the way a case has been handled, or the behaviour of a staff member will be dealt with through the normal complaints policy.

13. Commercial or Legal Complaints

- 13.1 We will not consider complaints where:
 - Legal proceedings have started. This is defined as details of the claim, such as the Claim Form and Particulars of Claim, having been filed at court.
 - Your complaint is related to a commercial transaction with Southway, that arises from your employment. We will deal with these matters through referring to the relevant contract.

14. Complaints about colleagues and involved tenants and residents

- 14.1 'Southway supports tenant involvement, with several influencing groups and places reserved for tenants on our Board and Committees.
- 14.2 Complaints made by these tenants regarding service failure will be dealt with in the timescales set out in this policy. Complaints relating to involvement in Tenant groups or Southway's Governance structure will be dealt with separately, under the appropriate policy.
- 14.3 If your complaint is about one of Southway's involved residents, or a member of staff, we will consider whether the complaints policy is the most

appropriate route depending on the nature of the allegation We will discuss this with you when you make your initial complaint.

- 14.4 If your complaint is about another resident, or a member of staff, they will be given the chance to set out their position or comment on any findings before a final decision is reached.

15. Complaints about financial advice

- 15.1 We offer a free debt advice service to our tenants and residents. If complaints about this service cannot be resolved in line with this Policy, complainants will be advised of the opportunity to seek redress through the Financial Ombudsman Service, enclosing a copy of the Financial Ombudsman Services standard explanatory leaflet and the contact details of the Financial Ombudsman Service.

16. Complaints to the Regulator of Social Housing Standards

- 16.1 We adhere to the consumer standards as set out by the housing regulator. The standards cover a range of issues around quality of accommodation and tenancy management.
- 16.2 Tenants and residents have the right to report alleged breaches for the regulator to investigate. Further details can be found by visiting <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/regulator-of-social-housing/about/complaints-procedure>

17. Complaints About Other Organisations

- 17.1 We work with a number of different organisations to provide services to our tenants and residents. Should you have a complaint about their service while carrying out business or activity for Southway, we will investigate this through the Complaints Policy. If the complaint does not relate to Southway activity we will we will advise you of the best course of action.

18. Anonymous Complaints

- 18.1 Southway will investigate and respond to all complaints even if the source is unknown. We will hold the outcome on file, but for obvious reasons will not be able to provide a written response to the complainant.

19. Unreasonable Complaints

- 19.1 If we decide we cannot accept your complaint, we will provide a full explanation for the reasons why. We will consider the merits of each complaint when doing this and the individual circumstances. If we are unable to accept your complaint, we will signpost you to the Ombudsman for support.
- 19.2 Each case will be considered individually to ensure fairness and accessibility. All complaints will be considered carefully. If, however, the subject has already been dealt with effectively or the complaint is deemed unreasonable, the matter will be discussed with the appropriate manager and Director and dealt with outside the normal complaints procedure. Examples of what we consider unreasonable include:
- We will not consider complaints if they have already been dealt with under the complaints handling policy.
 - If a customer's behaviour is unreasonable in line with our Unacceptable Behaviour Against Staff Policy.
- 19.2.1 Matters related to governance structures will be managed in line with the appropriate policies and processes.
- Refusing to specify the grounds of a complaint despite offers of help.
- 19.2.2 Concerns about decision which have been made in accordance with our statutory obligations, or in line with legislation or regulation to a policy approved by our Board, for example, rent setting. Issues relating to how we handled the matter may be dealt with as a complaint.
- It relates to a service charge, unless the service hasn't been delivered in accordance with the service requirement, or there has been a mistake made in the calculation of a charge.
 - Insisting on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with our complaint procedure or with good practice.
 - Making unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues and seeking to have them replaced.
 - Making excessive demands on the time and resources of staff with lengthy and/or repeated phone calls, emails to numerous staff or detailed letters every few days and expecting immediate responses

POLICY REVIEW HISTORY	
<i>To be completed during each review</i>	
Previous versions	
Date of last EIA:	November 2025
Review lead by:	Assistant Director of Customers and Communities
Main points or amendments made and reasons Section 5 - Further to the Equality Impact Assessment, we've grouped all EDI pertinent information in a standalone section to increase its prominence within the policy. This also highlights our commitment to use customers' EDI data to ensure our complaints service is accessible, which is regarded as best practice and demonstrates compliance with the Complaint Handling Code. Clause 7.9- This updates the timelines by which customers should request a stage 2 escalation to 15 working days rather than six weeks. This will support us to promote faster complaint resolution by encouraging customers to report concerns in a timely way. Clause 9.4- This confirms that we have appointed a Member Responsible for Complaints, which supports us to demonstrate compliance with the Complaint Handling Code. Section 10- We have retitled this section as 'Customer Voice' to align with our Customer Voice strategy. Section 19- is expanded to provide several additional examples of unreasonable complaints. This picks up Board's request that we clarify that concerns raised around governance matters or unacceptable behaviour will be managed via the appropriate policy and process. We have also added clarity around potential complaints around rent and service charge setting to manage customers' expectations.	
Next review due:	Q2 2026/27
Approval level:	People and Places Committee