



Complaints Policy

Policy statement

This policy aims to deliver an efficient and effective complaints process which is easily accessible to residents and meets the requirements of the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code.

Paradigm encourage complaints and view them as opportunities to learn how to improve the quality of our services.

Objective

The objectives are to:

- have an approach to complaints which is clear, simple and accessible
- ensure complaints are resolved promptly, politely and fairly
- resolve matters locally and as quickly as possible by being open, accountable and outcome focused
- set out the actions we will take when things have gone wrong
- use the learning from both formal and informal complaints to drive service improvements and publish the learnings identified and highlight where improvements have been made
- meet all regulatory and legal requirements.

Policy

Definition of a complaint

Paradigm defines a complaint in-line with the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code 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'

How complaints can be made

Paradigm will provide a variety of methods for residents to complain. These will be easy to use and accessible and include verbally, face to face, in writing and via our website.

Where complaints are received via social media accounts held by Paradigm, it will not be appropriate for Paradigm to respond on these online channels as this would risk confidentiality. In these circumstances, we will acknowledge receipt of the complaint on Paradigm social media accounts and respond directly to residents using alternative communication methods, within our agreed timescales and adhere to the principles of data protection and [Paradigm's Privacy Statement](#).

Paradigm will publicise its complaints policy through the website and newsletters and as part of regular correspondence with residents. Paradigm will provide a copy of the complaints policy when requested.

Fairness in complaints handling

Paradigm will operate a resident focused complaints process. Residents will be given the opportunity to explain their point of view and the outcome they desire.

Paradigm recognises that many residents may not wish to follow a formal process and just want an issue resolved. Any decision to try and resolve a resident's issue informally will be taken in agreement with the resident.

If a resident expresses a wish for their concerns to be treated as a formal complaint Paradigm will not deny that opportunity. This includes concerns that were previously dealt with informally.

Residents have the opportunity to ask a representative or advocate of their own choice to act on their behalf. We will need to seek permission from the resident to disclose information to their advocate in compliance with data protection requirements before proceeding.

Where a complaint is being made by a group of residents, Paradigm will work with the group to identify a lead spokesperson to allow the efficient handling of the complaint. Any formal responses will be shared with all parties subject to data protection requirements.

Paradigm will view all complaints positively and will investigate complaints in an impartial manner. We will seek full and sufficient information from all parties involved, ensuring a fair and amicable solution is found wherever possible.

Paradigm will advise residents on our website and in our correspondence that they have the right to access the Housing Ombudsman complaints service for advice and support at any time whilst we are investigating their complaint and not just at the point they have exhausted our complaints process.

The Housing Ombudsman will only consider formally investigating a complaint once this has exhausted Paradigm's complaints process.

Reasonable Adjustments

Paradigm is committed to ensuring that disabled and vulnerable residents are not disadvantaged in accessing the complaints process. To this end we will make reasonable adjustments and comply with the Equality Act 2010.

There is no prescribed list of reasonable adjustments; the adjustment will depend on the individual's needs. We will discuss the requirements with residents and seek to reach agreement on what may be reasonable in the circumstances.

We encourage residents to alert Paradigm to any individual needs which may require a reasonable adjustment to be made.

Some examples of the adjustments that can be made include:

- provision of aids such as a language interpreter or a hearing loop
- provision of information in appropriate alternative formats (e.g. large print, audio, coloured paper etc)
- extension of time limits (where it is lawful to do so)
- use of preferred communication method
- use of plain English

- communication through a representative or intermediary
- rest or comfort breaks in meetings.

What Paradigm will not treat as a complaint

The following are examples of issues Paradigm will not treat as a complaint:

- where an issue is, or has been, subject to legal proceedings involving Paradigm (including letters before action)
- outcome of appeals or reviews against service of notices, such as Section 21 notices, Minded To notices, notices seeking possession on mandatory grounds and appeals regarding housing allocation
- where there has been a personal data breach or where a resident is exercising their rights under data protection legislation (such as a subject access request)
- where the issue is subject to an insurance claim against us by residents or third parties (any other elements outside of the insurance claim will still be considered through the complaints procedure)
- where the issue occurred over 6 months ago, (unless there is a justified reason for the delay i.e. ill health, health & safety issues, safeguarding issues or where a resident was unaware of a service failure until it had a detrimental impact)
- matters that have already been considered and exhausted under Paradigm's complaints process
- where the Housing Ombudsman has already determined the outcome of an investigation
- an initial enquiry or request for a service
- a resident fails to specify the grounds of their complaint
- a report of anti-social behaviour (ASB). This will be dealt with under the ASB policy (unless the matter is in relation to how we have managed the ASB)
- where Paradigm are not responsible for delivering the service – e.g. Local Authority decisions about nominations or housing benefit claims (where possible we will sign post the resident to the correct service).

Where Paradigm will not accept a complaint, a full and detailed explanation will be given setting out the reasons why the matter is not suitable for the complaints process.

Residents will have a right to challenge this decision by raising their complaint directly to the Housing Ombudsman, details of which can be found within this policy.

Putting things right

Paradigm will acknowledge through our correspondence with residents when we get things wrong and we will set out what action we will take to put things right.

Examples of where things go wrong include:

- where there was an unreasonable delay
- inaccurate or inadequate explanation or information was provided to the resident
- our policy or procedure was not followed correctly
- unprofessional behaviour by staff.

Where failures have been identified, Paradigm will offer a number of remedies including:

- acknowledging where things have gone wrong
- providing an explanation, assistance or reasons
- apologising
- taking action if there has been a delay
- reconsidering or changing a decision
- providing a financial remedy
- changing policies, procedures or practices
- Offering a gesture of goodwill (covered via our Compensation Policy)

Any compensation awarded will be considered in line with our Compensation Policy and take into account any statutory payments that are due, service failures identified and if any quantifiable losses have been incurred.

Informal Complaints

We recognise that some residents may not wish to make a formal complaint and just want an issue resolved. Where there is the opportunity for us to put things right quickly and easily, this will be treated and logged as an informal complaint.

Any action to try and resolve a resident's complaint informally will be taken in agreement with the resident. Where a resident expresses a wish for their concerns to be treated as a formal complaint Paradigm will not deny that opportunity.

Formal complaint stages

Paradigm's complaints procedure will consist of two stages. Where a formal complaint has been made, Paradigm will log this at stage one of the complaints procedure.

If the complaint has not been resolved to the residents satisfaction it shall be progressed to the next stage (stage two) in accordance with Paradigms complaints procedure.

Complaints will be logged and acknowledged within five working days of being received by our Customer Insight & Experience Team who oversee Paradigm's complaints process.

Paradigm will seek to understand the nature of the complaint and the outcome being sought by the resident and if this is not clear, Paradigm will seek to clarify this with the resident.

A stage one complaint will be allocated to a staff member at a team leader or higher level to investigate. Paradigm reserves the right to allocate complaints to a team leader or more senior member of staff that is independent of the service area that is being complained about.

A decision will be reached and communicated within 10 working days from receipt of complaint. Where this is not possible, an explanation and a date by when the stage one response will be received will be communicated to the resident. This will not exceed a further 10 working days without good reason.

Examples of a good reason why a complaint may be extended could include:

- a delay by a third party, over which Paradigm has no control, in providing information
- requiring further time to undertake interviews
- needing longer to acquire all the information required from multiple sources to enable a landlord to properly investigate a long-standing, complex case.

Paradigm will formally respond to a stage one complaint in writing detailing the stage of the process and the next steps available if they remain dissatisfied. Where a resident is unhappy with the stage one resolution or remedy, they have the right to request to escalate their complaint to stage two.

Paradigm will not unreasonably refuse to escalate a complaint through all stages of the complaint's procedure. Where the Customer Insight & Experience Team in liaison with a head of service or higher level member of staff decides it is not appropriate to escalate a complaint, we will provide a full explanation to the resident regarding this decision. At this point, it will be made clear that the response is a full and final response and information will be provided on referral to the Housing Ombudsman.

Examples why Paradigm may not escalate a complaint include:

- changing the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds
- requesting an escalation prior to a stage one response being received within Paradigm's published timescales
- requesting escalation 6 months after the stage one response is issued (unless there is a justified reason for the delay i.e. ill health, health & safety issues, safeguarding issues or where a resident was unaware of a service failure until it had a detrimental impact)
- not co-operating with the complaint's investigation process at stage one.

Any complaints escalated to stage two will be determined by the Customer Insight & Experience Team.

A stage two complaint will be allocated to a staff member at a head of service or higher level to investigate. Paradigm reserves the right to allocate complaints to a head of service or higher staff member that is independent of the service area that is being complained about.

A decision will be reached and communicated within 20 working days from the request to escalate. Where this is not possible, an explanation and a date by when the stage two response will be received will be communicated to the resident. This will not exceed a further 10 working days without good reason.

Paradigm will formally respond to a stage two complaint in writing detailing the stage of the process and the next steps available if they remain dissatisfied.

Next steps available for the resident

If a resident is dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint once it has exhausted Paradigm's complaints procedure, the resident may take their complaint to a designated person. A designated person can be an MP or a councillor from the local authority area their home is in. A designated person can review a complaint themselves or refer the complaint directly to the Housing Ombudsman Service.

Alternatively, a resident can contact the Housing Ombudsman directly 8 weeks after the final decision.

Formal Complaints Process Maps

Stage 1 - The complaint will be acknowledged in writing within 5 working days and allocated to a team leader or manager to investigate who will aim to formally respond in writing within 10 working days

Unable to resolve complaint at stage 1

Stage 2 -The escalated complaint will be acknowledged in writing within 5 working days and allocated to a head of service or director to investigate who will aim to formally respond in writing within 20 working days

Internal complaints process exhausted

Refer to Designated Person or Housing Ombudsman

Compliance with Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code

Paradigm will cooperate with the Housing Ombudsman's requests for evidence and provide this within 15 working days.

Where Paradigm is unable to provide this information to the Housing Ombudsman within this timeframe, Paradigm will provide the Housing Ombudsman with an explanation for the delay.

Housing Ombudsman Contact details:

The Housing Ombudsman can be contacted via:

Housing Ombudsman Service
81 Aldwych London WC2B 4HN

Telephone: 0300 111 3000

Minicom: 0207 404 7092

info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk

www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk

Dealing with persistent complainants

Paradigm recognises that being persistent in trying to resolve an issue or a complaint is not in itself vexatious and senior managers will assess each case individually.

Where it has been determined by the Customer Insight & Experience Team in liaison with the complaint manager that a complaint or complainant is frivolous or vexatious, we will apply the principles of our Managing Unacceptable Behaviour Policy, taking into account the individuals needs and circumstances.

Some examples (but not limited) of the type of behaviour that fall under unacceptable are:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> insisting on the complaint being handled in ways which are incompatible with our procedure or the Housing Ombudsman's Complaints Handling Code making excessive demands on the time and resources of staff with lengthy phone calls, emails to numerous staff or detailed letters every few days and expecting immediate responses once Paradigm's complaint process has been exhausted, refusing to accept the outcome of Paradigm's decision and repeatedly complaining about the same issue with no new evidence.
<p>Scope</p>	<p>This policy applies to current tenants, former tenants, shared owners, leaseholders and landlords.</p> <p>Recourse to the Housing Ombudsman is limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a person who is or has been in a landlord/tenant relationship with Paradigm. This includes people who have a lease, tenancy, licence to occupy, service agreement or other arrangement to occupy premises owned or managed by a member if the complaint is made by an ex-occupier, they must have had a legal relationship with Paradigm at the time that the matter complained of arose an applicant for a property owned or managed by Paradigm a representative of any of the people above who is authorised by them to make a complaint on their behalf a representative of any of the people above who does not have the capacity to authorise a representative to act on their behalf. The Housing Ombudsman must be satisfied that the representative has the legitimate authority to act on the person's behalf a person with authority to make a complaint on behalf of any of the people above who is deceased.
<p>Roles and Responsibility</p>	<p>Assistant Director – Customer Experience and Service Improvement is responsible for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ensuring the resources are in place to deliver an effective complaints process across the organisation ensuring support from the Leadership Team in Paradigm adhering to their roles and responsibilities for complaint management and learning from complaints to improve service delivery. <p>Customer Insight and Experience Manager is responsible for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> overseeing the development and implementation of Paradigm's complaints policy, systems, training and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) ensuring high standards are maintained conducting an annual self-assessment against the Housing Ombudsman's Complaints Handling Code to ensure compliance reviewing the Housing Ombudsman's best practice guidance notes and any changes to legislation that may impact the complaints handling process and making necessary changes to policy ensuring there is a structured approach in place to learn from complaints and wider resident feedback to support the business to identify priority areas for service improvement ensuring the Complaints Policy is reviewed regularly (minimum every 3 years)

- providing the Management Team, Board and relevant resident panels with complaint KPI information including trends, learnings and service improvement actions
- providing residents with information on trends identified via complaints and where service improvement actions have been implemented.

Customer Insight and Experience Team Leader is responsible for:

- overseeing the day to day management of complaints for the business ensuring these are progressed in-line with policy, process and timescales
- ensuring all Housing Ombudsman and final stage complaints are minimised and managed effectively, providing advice in the management of complex complaints as and when required
- determining whether a complaint is frivolous and vexatious taking into account an individual's needs and circumstances in liaison with senior managers
- overseeing our relationship with the Housing Ombudsman
- regularly preparing and delivering complaints reports to the Customer Insight and Experience Manager
- providing service areas with their complaint handling performance information
- working with the business to analyse complaint trends, identifying overarching themes and making recommendations to the relevant service areas and the wider business for service improvement
- ensuring regular communication updates are published to the business and residents, demonstrating complaints performance, learnings and improvements made to services as a result of resident feedback.

Customer Insight and Experience Team are responsible for:

- logging and acknowledging complaints within five working days of being received
- processing and allocating complaints to investigating complaint managers in-line with policy timescales
- monitoring complaints and working with complaint managers to ensure they are progressing the complaint to resolution in line with process and timescales
- reviewing complaint responses and coaching staff to ensure complaint responses are consistent, clearly set out remedies for resolution and next steps available to the resident
- acting as an independent point of contact for the resident throughout a complaint investigation
- managing escalated or complex matters relating to the management of complaints
- agreeing where Paradigm will not accept a complaint in-line with the policy exclusions and providing a full and detailed explanation to the resident why the matter is not suitable for the complaints process
- deciding to accept a complaint where the issue occurred over 6 months ago, and there is a justified reason to do so
- agreeing and implementing any reasonable adjustments identified in liaison with the resident
- agreeing extensions to complaint timescales in liaison with the complaint manager and the resident
- liaising with a head of service or higher level staff member to identify where a complaint will not be escalated to stage two and providing a full explanation to the resident
- liaising with the complaint manager to identify where a complainant is frivolous or vexatious and to refer to the Managing Unacceptable Behaviour Policy and process

- highlighting poor complaint handling performance at stage one to the relevant head of service or higher level
- coordinating information requested by the Housing Ombudsman where complaints are being investigated
- work with key service areas to conduct complaint case review meetings for complex cases and ensure learnings are captured, document decisions and monitor actions to ensure delivery.

Team Leaders and Managers are responsible for:

- leading on stage one complaints allocated to them for their own service area or independent of their service area
- where a complaint is regarding more than one service area housing managers are responsible for leading on the investigation
- investigating complaints thoroughly, impartially, promptly, politely and fairly ensuring all matters raised are responded to
- taking responsibility for setting out clear responses and appropriate remedies to resolve a complaint
- adhering to all timescales set out within the complaints policy and process
- keeping residents regularly updated during complaint investigations
- minimising complaint escalations via thorough and fair investigation of stage one complaints
- ensuring that all notes including emails, letters, meeting minutes and phone calls related to the complaint are accurately recorded
- taking ownership of lessons learnt and liaising with the relevant teams to share feedback on failings identified and service improvements
- understanding trends identified via complaints and implementing actions to drive service improvements identified via complaints and wider resident feedback.

Heads of Service and Directors are responsible for:

- leading on stage two complaints allocated to them for their own service area or independent of their service area
- investigating escalated stage two complaints thoroughly, fairly and impartially providing full responses and setting appropriate remedies to complaints at the required level
- identifying and acknowledging where complaints have not been thoroughly investigated at stage one and addressing performance concerns
- determining when a complaint has exhausted the complaints process and clearly communicating the next steps
- ensuring that all notes including emails, letters, meeting minutes and phone calls related to the complaint are accurately recorded
- taking ownership of lessons learnt and liaising with the relevant teams to share feedback on failings identified and service improvements
- leading a service improvement and resident focused complaints culture within the organisation that takes complaints seriously
- ensuring their teams are adhering to the complaints policy and process
- monitoring complaints for their service areas to ensure Key Performance Indicators are achieved
- driving continuous service improvements from trends and themes identified from complaints and wider resident feedback.

**Monitoring /
Reporting and
Assurance
Controls**

External Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) used to measure the effectiveness of this policy are:

- all complaints logged and acknowledged in writing within 5 working days
- all stage one complaints responded to in writing within 10 working days from receipt of complaint (unless there is a justified reason to extend by a further 10 working days)
- all stage two complaints responded to in writing within 20 working days from request to escalate (unless there is a justified reason to extend by a further 10 working days)
- all Housing Ombudsman's request for information provided within 15 working days.

To ensure effective management and learning from complaints we will:

- train staff in successful complaint management and root cause analysis
- maintain records of training
- provide staff with complaint process guidance and template letters
- have enhanced IT systems to allow the Customer Insight and Experience Team to review all open complaints and monitor adherence to timescales – this will be done through a weekly summary report
- auto reminders will be generated through the system and sent to complaint managers to ensure response timescales are met
- have supporting dashboards that alert the Customer Insight and Experience Team where timescales are not being adhered to
- use the weekly summary report to escalate non-adherence to service leads
- ensure accessibility of dashboards are available for managers and services leads to monitor their team's complaint management performance
- have enhanced IT systems to capture outcomes and learnings
- hold case review meetings following complex or serious complaints to ensure learnings and service improvements are made and document the decisions, actions and track the delivery
- provide service leads and the business with in-depth quarterly reports and seek feedback on these to aid learning and influence service improvement action plans.

Provide complaints management information in the format of:

- quarterly reports provided to service managers detailing performance against KPI's including non-adherence to complaint management and trends for their service areas to enable them to drive improved complaint handling performance, identify service improvement actions and take accountability for addressing non-adherence to the complaints process and implementing improvements
- quarterly reports provided to Management Team detailing performance against KPI's, trends and service improvement actions to enable Management Team to hold service areas to account, drive improved performance and ensure delivery of service improvements actions
- quarterly reports provided to Board to highlight performance against KPI's, Housing Ombudsman results (including timely compliance with any Housing Ombudsman orders) and actions taken to drive service improvement against trends to enable the Board to hold Paradigm to account
- quarterly reports provided to the Resident Services Panel (RSP) detailing performance against KPI's, trends and service improvement actions to enable the RSP to scrutinise performance and to challenge low performance

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • quarterly communication updates published to the business demonstrating complaints performance, volume of complaints, complaint trends and learnings via internal intranet and staff newsletters • quarterly communication updates published to residents promoting accessibility of the complaints process and demonstrating complaints performance, volume of complaints, complaint trends and learnings via the resident's newsletter • Annual Report to residents published via our website to include complaints performance, learnings and actions taken to improve service delivery (promotion of You Said, We Did) • annual Housing Ombudsman landlord performance report and self-assessment against the Housing Ombudsman's Complaints Handling Code.
Cross References	<p>Compensation Policy Managing Unacceptable Behaviour Policy</p>

Policy Owner	Assistant Director – Customer Experience and Service Improvement
Prepared by	Customer Insight and Experience Manager
Approved by	Amalgamated Board
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Record of Amendments

Date	Version	Approved By	Details of Amendments
November 2020	V3	Amalgamated Board	<p>Complaints Policy reviewed to take into account Housing Ombudsman’s Complaint Handling Code which includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • definition of complaints • timescales for acknowledging and responding to complaints • two stage process and removal of Appeals Panel as per recommendation of the Code • clarifying the complaints process • defining roles and responsibilities.
May 2021	V4		<p>Complaints Policy reviewed to take into account the internal advisory complaint audit (March 2021 report) which includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confirmation of acknowledging social media complaints • Referencing gesture of goodwill • Narrative on informal complaints • Formal Complaints Process Map