



Complaints Policy

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1. Introduction

1.1 Manchester Jewish Housing Association (MJHA) is committed to the provision of a high-quality service to all of our customers, and every member of staff is responsible for delivering that service.

1.2 We welcome complaints, comments, suggestions and compliments and we use customer feedback as an opportunity to learn about what we are doing well and where we need to improve. This helps us to improve the services we deliver.

1.3 All complaints are managed in line with data protection legislation and our Equality and Diversity policy.

1.4 It is noted that when the term 'working day' is used, this refers to any day on which the office is open. This does not include any days which fall on closures due to Bank Holidays or Jewish High Holy days.

2. Scope

2.1 This policy covers occasions when residents or applicants are dissatisfied with the level or type of service they have received and wish to make a complaint, whether formally or informally.

2.2 This policy is invoked for any appeals against housing decisions when an applicant or resident believes that they have not been given the correct level of priority or banding, or if their application or nomination is refused.

3. Purpose

3.1 To have a process in place that is clear, simple and accessible so complaints are resolved promptly, consistently and fairly, in compliance with all regulatory and statutory requirements.

4. Defining a complaint

4.1 Following the introduction of the Housing Ombudsman's complaint handling code in September 2020, a complaint is universally 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."

4.2 A service request is a request from a resident to their landlord requiring action to be taken to put something right. Service requests should be recorded, monitored and reviewed regularly. If further enquiries are needed following a service request in order to resolve the matter or if a resident requests it the issue must be logged as a complaint.

4.3 An enquiry is when a customer contacts us to ask about something concerning their home or tenancy. For example, a customer might ask for information about their rent account, or to query or clarify something on their rent statement. This is not a complaint. If we fail to provide or clarify this information, then this could become a complaint.

4.4 A comment or suggestion is when a customer expresses an idea or opinion on an aspect of their home, tenancy, or in relation to the wider day-to-day running of MJHA. This is not a complaint. If we fail to acknowledge or respond to a comment or suggestion with respect, then this could become a complaint.

4.5 Staff are trained to recognise the difference between a complaint, service request, enquiry and a comment/ suggestion. Staff are encouraged to take appropriate steps to resolve the issue for residents as early as possible.

4.6 We will ensure that customers are aware of how we are deciding to record any of the above, and ensure that they are in agreement with this.

4.7 There are a number of exceptions to when we will not initialise the Complaint procedure and these are:

- The issue of the complaint occurred over twelve months ago (where the problem is a recurring issue, MJHA will consider any older reports as part of the background to the complaint if this will help to resolve the issue for the resident). This will not be the case where there is a safeguarding or health & safety issue.

- The matter has already been considered under the complaints policy.
- A resident complains about the behaviour of another resident. This may be dealt with under MJHA's anti-social behaviour policy. This policy is available on our website at www.mjha.org.uk or you can request a copy by contacting us on 0161 740 0001 or by email at hello@mjha.org.uk. If the matter has not been acted upon or if the resident is unhappy with the way the matter has been dealt with, then this would be logged as a complaint.
- A resident complains about their level of rent and service charge e.g., they are unhappy with the amount of increase rather than believing it has been incorrectly calculated.
- The issue is subject to legal action or to an enforcement notice or other statutory notice.
- Compensation claims for damage to personal property or personal injury. Where appropriate these will be dealt with directly or through insurers.
- Several related complaints are made which would be more effectively dealt with together rather than on an individual basis. However, in this instance the complaints will be logged, although the policy timescales may not apply depending upon the components to be investigated.
- If a complainant is rude or non-co-operative during the complaint's procedure. In this case the Unreasonable and Persistent policy would be referred to.
- Complaints about employee conduct that require the involvement of the HR & Resources Manager. The outcome of any internal investigation will remain confidential and will not be disclosed to the customer, in line with data protection.

We consider these exclusions to be fair and reasonable to residents.

4.8 If we decide not to accept a complaint the reasoning for this decision will be logged and evidenced as to the reasoning for this decision.

4.9 If we decide not to accept a complaint, an explanation will be provided to the resident setting out the reasons why the matter is not suitable for the complaints process and the right to take that decision to the Ombudsman. If the Ombudsman does not agree that the exclusion has been fairly applied, the Ombudsman may tell us to take on the complaint.

4.10 MJHA reserves the right to refuse to deal with complaints, or to deal with them differently, if they are pursued unreasonably or could be handled more effectively in a different manner.

4.11 Additionally, a complaint will not be re-opened at the complainant's request if, after review by MJHA, it is established that no new evidence relevant to the complaint has been provided.

5. Policy Aims and Objectives

5.1 We aim to resolve all complaints as quickly as possible. MJHA wishes to ensure that at each stage of the complaint, it is dealt with objectively and that we apologise where MJHA is at fault. We will compensate people in line with our compensation policy where it is warranted.

5.2 We aim to respond formally to all complaints in writing within 10 working days of a complaint being received. Where a resident/applicant remains dissatisfied with the service, they can ask for a review by the appropriate Manager, Director, or where applicable, the Chief Executive.

5.3 For all complaints, the complainant is provided with a named person responsible for their complaint who is their point of contact throughout the complaint. MJHA has a lead “complaints officer” who oversees all complaints; this is the Housing Coordinator. Contact details are found below under ‘making a complaint’.

5.4 The complaints officer role is to ensure that complaints handling works well. The role is to ensure that MJHA:

- acts sensitively and fairly
- staff are trained to receive complaints and deal with distressed and upset residents
- enables access to staff at all levels to facilitate quick resolution of complaints
- staff have the authority and autonomy to act to resolve disputes quickly and fairly.

5.5 MJHA will learn from mistakes and we will publish information about complaints each year, including their number and nature, and the outcome of the complaints.

5.6 On receipt of a complaint we will manage the customers’ expectations so that we do not promise anything that cannot be delivered or would cause unfairness to other customers.

6. Equality and diversity and data protection

6.1 We are mindful of our duties as outlined in The Equality Act 2010, to make reasonable adjustments for individuals with disabilities. We will make reasonable adjustments where necessary for those people with protected characteristics, to ensure that we provide the same services, as far as is possible, as residents who are not disabled.

6.2 In respect of a complaint, this may mean allowing additional time to provide information, respond to enquiries etc. If you would like us to consider any reasonable adjustments to enable you to make a complaint, please contact the complaints officer. Contact details are found below under ‘making a complaint’.

6.3 We will manage customers information in line with current data protection legislation and our Data Protection policy.

7. Making a complaint

7.1 A range of channels are available to make a complaint and customers can use the method they prefer, unless they are subject to restrictions under our Unreasonable and Persistent behaviour policy.

These are:

- Email using hello@mjha.org.uk (available for use 24/7)

- In writing to 85 Middleton Road, Manchester, M8 4JY
- Telephone by calling 0161 740 0001
- In person by visiting the office at 85 Middleton Road, Manchester, M8 4JY, it is always best to telephone first to make an appointment.
- In person, speaking to a MJHA staff member on site
- Via social media platforms such as LinkedIn.

7.2 Customers who make a complaint using social media will be privately messaged to ensure we protect their privacy and confidentiality in line with data protection.

7.3 All complaints received will be acknowledged within 5 working days of receipt. The same timeframe applies when a stage 2 complaint escalation is received.

7.4 The member of staff dealing with the complaint will:

- clarify what did happen
- ascertain what should have happened
- identify what was the cause of any identified failings identify what can be done to resolve the problem.

7.5 We will adapt our normal policies, procedures, or processes to accommodate an individual's needs as much as possible, where it is reasonable to do so.

7.6 MJHA has 2 stages to our formal complaint's procedure:

- Stage 1 - investigation of the complaint: The investigation is usually carried out by the member of staff appropriately placed to deal with the area of complaint raised, and is overseen by the "complaints officer". There are also occasions when the complaints officer will carry out the stage 1 investigation. The target time for responding to complaints is 10 working days from the receipt date. It may not always be possible to complete all agreed actions within this time period, if an extension is required this should not exceed a further 10 working days without good reason. Throughout the extension period we will agree with the resident suitable intervals for keeping them informed. We will then keep in touch by telephone or other means, to let the complainant know the progress of the complaint. When any extension is agreed, the complainant is provided with the contact details of the Housing Ombudsman. Where residents raise additional complaints during the stage 1 investigation which were not included in the original complaint, these should be incorporated into the stage 1 response if they are relevant and the stage 1 response has not been issued. Where the stage 1 response has been issued, or it would unreasonably delay the response, the complaint should be logged as a new complaint.

- Stage 2 - reviewing the decision: If the complainant is not happy with the outcome of Stage 1, the complainant should contact the complaints officer, stating why the outcome is not acceptable. This can be carried out in several ways, as listed in "how to make a complaint" above. The contact must be made within 20 working days of receipt of the outcome letter in Stage 1, otherwise we will consider the matter closed. The complaints officer will review the

decision in consultation with a member of the Management or Executive Management Teams. A formal response will be sent within 20 working days of the request for review being received.

If an extension is required this should not exceed a further 20 days without good reason. Throughout the extension period we will agree with the resident suitable intervals for keeping them informed. We will then keep in touch by telephone or other means, to let the complainant know the progress of the complaint. When any extension is agreed, the complainant is provided with the contact details of the Housing Ombudsman. Should the complaints officer have investigated stage 1 then the appropriate details will be given with the outcome as to who to direct any stage 2 complaint to.

7.7 The complaint handler at stage 2 will be a different officer to the one who dealt with stage 1.

7.8 There is no appeals process following stage 2, If a resident remains dissatisfied with how their individual situation has been handled and / or with the outcome, they can contact the Housing Ombudsman.

7.9 MJHA will cooperate with the Housing Ombudsman's requests for evidence and provide this within 15 working days. If a response cannot be provided within this timeframe, we will provide an explanation for the delay. And if accepted as reasonable, the Housing Ombudsman will agree a revised date with us.

7.10 In cases where the complaint involves the complaint officer, a member of management or the Executive team then the complaint will be directed to the Board.

7.11 Anonymous complaints are not dealt with through this complaints policy. However, depending on the nature of the complaint, it may be necessary to investigate the matter to protect the Association's interest.

7.12 Complaints from groups of residents will be accepted. The response will be sent to all members of the group who are named in the complaint.

7.13 We reserve the right to deal with complaints in an alternative way (outside the normal procedures) if circumstances require this. In such a rare case, the Association records why the complaint has been dealt with differently and informs the complainant accordingly.

7.14 We also reserve the right to extend the timescales detailed in stage 1 and 2 should the complaint be in regard to a complex issue, taking into account the size and resources of the association. This will only be done in agreement. If this is the case then the complainant will be updated regularly and the communication channels will be made clear. Throughout the extension period we will agree with the resident suitable intervals for keeping them informed. We will then keep in touch by telephone or other means, to let the complainant know the progress of the complaint. When any extension is agreed, the complainant is provided with the contact details of the Housing Ombudsman.

8. Putting things right

8.1 Where something has gone wrong, we will acknowledge this and set out the actions we have already taken, or intend to take, to put things right. These can include:

- Apologising;
- Acknowledging where things have gone wrong;
- Providing an explanation, assistance or reasons;
- Taking action if there has been delay;
- Reconsidering or changing a decision;
- Amending a record or adding a correction or addendum;
- Providing a financial remedy;
- Changing policies, procedures or practices.

8.2 Any remedy offered to the complainant will reflect the impact caused by any fault identified. It will also clearly set out what will happen and by when.

8.3 We will take into account guidance issued by the Housing Ombudsman when deciding on appropriate remedies.

9. Housing decisions

9.1 Any appeal against a housing decision will be dealt with via this policy.

9.2 We will consider requests to review housing decisions when we have done any of the following:

- Not accepted an application because of insufficient housing need
- Placed an application in a lower band than applied for
- Refused an application or offer of housing on affordability grounds
- Suspended or cancelled an application because of a tenancy breach
- Not awarded priority, or granted a management transfer
- Withdrawn management transfer status because the resident has refused a reasonable offer
- Where a case is reassessed after a period of time and the justification and need for a management transfer has gone.
- Not accepted an application due to ineligibility for housing e.g., no status to reside in UK

10. The Housing Ombudsman Service

10.1 MJHA hopes that any complaints are resolved at Stage 1 or stage 2 at the most. However, should the complainant remain dissatisfied following this, they can ask for a review of the case by the Housing Ombudsman Service. The Housing Ombudsman service can also assist residents throughout the life of the complaint not just when the process has been exhausted. The contact details below can be used at any time during the complaint.

10.2 The Ombudsman will only investigate a complaint where the complainant has exhausted MJHA's Complaints procedure, although this must be done within 6 months. The complainant must be an MJHA resident or an MJHA applicant for housing to raise this with the Ombudsman.

10.3 Contact details for the Housing Ombudsman Service are as follows

PO Box 1484 Unit D Preston PR2 0ET

Tel: 0300 111 3000

E-mail: info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk

Web: www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk

11. The use of advocates

11.1 Complainants may ask another person to act on their behalf in bringing their complaint to MJHA's attention. This advocate may be a friend, relative or representative from an external organisation such as the Citizens Advice. An advocate may not be a solicitor or other legal professional unless they are acting in a 'lay' capacity i.e., not representing the complainant on a professional basis. If you would like further support or to enquire about an advocate acting for you, please contact us on 0161 740 0001 or hello@mjha.org.uk

12. Governance

12.1 MJHA's complaints policy meets the requirements of our regulator, the Regulator for Social Housing (RSH), Resident Involvement and Empowerment Standard and the Housing Ombudsman's complaints handling code.

12.2 To ensure complaints are used to help improve services, regular updates on the volume, category and outcome of complaints, alongside complaint handling performance is provided to the board governance structure. The use of complaint data alongside other management information on stock, services and resident feedback provides greater insight into the organisation.

12.3 Complaints data, handling and lessons learnt may also be used as part of directed task and finish work within MJHA's Resident engagement framework. This framework will also assist MJHA in the drafting of appropriate policies and procedures involving complaints.

12.4 Annually, any issues and trends arising from complaint handling, including discussion of the Ombudsman's yearly landlord performance report and the inclusion of any organisational learning is discussed by the Board and shared in our annual report.

12.5 Consideration of individual complaint outcomes where necessary, including findings of severe maladministration of the Ombudsman or any referrals by it to regulatory bodies, including scrutiny of any subsequent procedural or organisational changes, will be reported.

12.6 In addition, annually MJHA will confirm that the complaint handling code is being applied.

12.7 Where a complaint involves a third party, MJHA will need to disclose some of the details about the complaint for it to be properly investigated e.g., with contractors. Any data shared will be done so in line with the relevant Data Protection legislation.

12.8 MJHA is registered with the Housing Ombudsman Service; this service provides individuals with an independent review should they remain dissatisfied at the end of the MJHA complaints process. Contact details can be found on our website at mjha.org.uk

13. Confidentiality

13.1 The Association will, as far as possible respect the confidentiality of complaints. In normal circumstances the identity of the complainant will only be known by those dealing with the complaint, all of whom are not at liberty to inform others of who has lodged the complaint. It should be noted, however, that in cases where a complaint refers to a particular resident, it may be necessary to disclose the identity of the complainant to allow a fair assessment to be carried out.

13.2 The relevant Data Protection legislation will be upheld at all times during the complaint's procedure