

Title:	Complaints Policy
Issue Date:	Immediate
Effective Date:	31 July 2024
Document Owner:	Natasha Roberts
Post of Document Owner:	Director of Operations
Date Approved by SMT:	24 July 2024
Date Approved by HASC:	31 July 2024 and following amendment 23/04/2025
Version number	5
Date of Next Review	July 2027

1. Introduction

1.1 Women's Pioneer Housing (WPH) aims to provide a high quality of service in all areas of work. Residents' opinions are very important to us. Dealing with complaints quickly, openly and fairly is important not only for residents but also for Women's Pioneer as a business so that mistakes are rectified quickly and lessons learned. The Director of Operations will be designated as the senior lead responsible for overseeing and ensuring accountability in complaint handling.

1.2 WPH are complaint with the Complaint Handling Code. This is published on WPH website.

2. Aim of the policy

2.1 The aims of this policy are to:

- support a service culture which prevents complaints.
- respond quickly when we receive complaints
- agree resolutions with the complainant
- learn from complaints

- resolve complaints to residents satisfaction as early in the process as possible
- ensure good governance and oversight of complaints

3. Definition of a complaint

3.1 A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction, 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. An expression of dissatisfaction does not need to include the word complaint for it to be taken through this process.

3.2 We recognise the difference between a service request, survey feedback and a formal complaint. We will treat every expression of dissatisfaction as a complaint, as per the Housing Ombudsman Code. At this point we will invite residents to confirm whether they would like their dissatisfaction recorded as a complaint.

A service request is a request that we provide a service, or information or for WPH to provide a service or information in a different way. This can include asking why an action has been taken and indicating that you would prefer a different action that is subsequently implemented. Once the request has been resolved, we will confirm the actions we intend to take and the expected time frame.

3.3 We will not accept stage 1 complaints and escalations to stage 2 about:

- issues which have had no impact on the complainant
- matters which have already been considered through the complaints process
- matters which happened more than 12 months before the complaint was raised
- matters which are being raised for the first time, for example a repair which has not yet been reported
- Matters that are under active litigation
- A request to do something differently or for more information about an action we have taken.

3.4 Matters which are being pursued in an unreasonable manner will be dealt with in accordance with our unacceptable behaviour policy.

3.5 If we have not accepted a complaint as it falls into one of the categories listed above, the resident will be informed in writing and given the opportunity to take that decision to the Housing Ombudsman Service.

3.6 We will accept complaints from any of our residents regardless of tenure, though not from tenants of leaseholders, and also waiting list applicants who have met the eligibility criteria and have been accepted onto our list.

4. Accessibility and awareness

- 4.1 Residents can contact us through email, by telephone or in person. We have a dedicated feedback email address feedback@womenspioneer.co.uk
- 4.2 WPH complaints policy and procedure will be easily accessible through our website. Complaints forms can be accessed and submitted directly through our website www.womenspioneer.co.uk. Complaint forms can also be obtained from our head office at Third Floor, 3 Angel Walk, London W6 9HX.
- 4.3 Our website will also publicise the Housing Ombudsman website, enabling residents to seek advice from the Housing Ombudsman at any stage.
- 4.4 The complaints policy and process will also be publicised as required through other means e.g. Pioneer Press. A copy of the policy and procedure will be provided when requested.
- 4.5 Staff will help complainants and make reasonable adjustments, in line with the Equality Act 2010, as necessary to enable residents to access the complaints process. Our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion policy for residents sets this out in more detail.
- 4.6 If a representative or third party, such as an independent advocate, makes a complaint on your behalf, we will require written permission from you before corresponding with them. However, decision makers will always wish to hear from and seek to resolve any issues directly with the complainant.

5. Complaints procedure

- 5.1 Our aim throughout this procedure is to try to work with residents to resolve complaints as quickly and effectively as possible. Any resident who is unhappy with our service will be encouraged to let us know as soon as the issue arises. Residents should contact 020 8749 7112 or email via feedback@womenspioneer.co.uk
- 5.2 The Resident Engagement & Resolution Officer who reports to the Service Manager will lead on complaint handling for WPH. They will work with teams to ensure that complaints are logged appropriately and ensure that complaints are properly managed and considered at each stage of the process.
- 5.3 We will try to resolve any issues informally as quickly as possible. However, if any resident is not happy with our attempts to resolve the issue then they may pursue a formal complaint. We have a two stage formal complaints procedure. Complainants are asked to complete a complaint form to establish the issues in the complaint and their desired resolution. Staff will offer assistance to anyone who needs help completing the complaint form.
- 5.4 **Stage 1:** At stage one, we will acknowledge your complaint within five working days, complaints will be responded to by the most suitable person, which may or may not be a Manager, within ten working days of the date your complaint was acknowledged. The response will address points raised in the complaint and include clear reasons for decisions made. If your complaint is about a staff member, it will be handled by their line manager or other suitable more senior manager. As part of this response the Officer responsible for the service will

seek to make a phone call to the complainant to resolve the matter, unless the issue is their conduct in which case the manager will seek to make contact. Where the issue is complex or involves multiple teams there will be a meeting with the relevant colleagues to establish what has happened and the best course of action for resolution.

- 5.5 If further investigations are required this timeline may be extended, usually by no more than a further ten working days. We will let the complainant know if this is the case and will seek to agree a new timescale. Should an extension beyond a further ten working days be needed we will seek to agree a new timescale with the complainant. If an agreed timescale cannot be reached the resident will be given the opportunity to take that decision to the Housing Ombudsman Service.
- 5.6 If any issues are not resolved, residents will be invited to escalate to Stage 2 within one month of receiving the Stage 1 response. We recognise that there will be certain complaints where it may be appropriate to extend the escalation timescale. A Stage 2 complaint form is used to establish which issues at Stage 1 have not been resolved. Staff will offer assistance to anyone who needs help completing the complaint form.
- 5.7 **Stage 2:** We will acknowledge your stage 2 complaint within five working days. Complaints at stage two will usually be considered by a more senior manager than at stage one. If a member of SMT handled your complaint at Stage 1, it will be considered by a different member of SMT at Stage 2. The manager handling the complaint at stage two will usually arrange a phone call with the complainant and then seek to send a formal written response within twenty working days of the date your stage 2 complaint was acknowledged. The response will address points raised in the complaint and include clear reasons for decisions made. If further investigations are required this may be extended, usually by no more than ten working days. Should an extension beyond a further ten working days be needed we will seek to agree a new timescale with the complainant. If an agreed timescale cannot be reached the resident will be given the opportunity to take that decision to the Housing Ombudsman Service.
- 5.8 A lessons learned exercise will take place following the complaint, this may involve a meeting with the staff involved, particularly if the complaint involved multiple colleagues.
- 5.9 We will monitor to ensure the actions we have promised as part of the resolution have been completed following the complaint being closed.
- 5.10 We will record all complaints in our Housing Management system, noting the date received, any actions taken, and all contact made throughout the investigation process. All documents reviewed or created as part of the complaint will also be stored in our systems.
- 5.11 Where a determination from the Ombudsman is made which includes carrying out works in someone's home as part of the resolution, we will carry out these works as soon as possible. Where works have not been able to take place e.g due to the resident not being able to provide access to the home, we will contact the resident every three months for a period of 12 months to enquire if works can be completed. If after 12 months the resident has not provided

access to complete the works we will provide in writing that the resident is now responsible to inform WPH when they are able to accommodate the works and that this communication should come in via the feedback@womenspioneer.co.uk inbox.

6. Fairness in complaint handling

- 6.1 At all stages complaints will be considered fairly and impartially. Any reasonable adjustments required will be implemented at each stage of the process as per our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy.
- 6.2 All staff involved in complaint handling will be trained in complaint handling and resolution and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion.
- 6.3 Decisions will supported by reasons. All decisions will include reference to the right to refer the complaint to the Housing Ombudsman Service. Our website includes a link to the HOS website so residents can consult HOS at any time.

7. Putting things right

- 7.1 The decision maker will consider carefully how best to put things right. All complainants will be asked for their views on how the complaint could be resolved.
- 7.2 The decision maker will ensure that the outcome reflects the extent of any service failure and the level of detriment caused to the resident as a result. Examples of actions which may be recommended are:
 - acknowledging where things have gone wrong
 - providing an explanation
 - apologising
 - taking action if there has been a delay
 - reconsidering or changing a decision
 - amending a record
 - providing compensation as per our Compensation and Loss of Amenity Policy
 - changing policies, procedures or practices

8. Learning from complaints

- 8.1 We monitor all complaints made and the outcomes will be used to drive improvements to our services to residents. Improvements may be identified even where a complaint is not upheld.
- 8.2 We will monitor KPI's on complaint handling related to the time taken to respond, escalation and satisfaction with the process and outcome.
- 8.3 The Chief Executive will report to WPH Board quarterly on the volume, category and outcome of complaints. This report will set out complaint handling performance, including progress on any actions required by a WPH or HOS decision. There will be a lead Board Member on complaints.

- 8.4 An annual review of complaints will be presented to the Board once a year. This will set out issues and trends arising from complaint handling including discussion of the Ombudsman's yearly landlord performance report. Any organisational learning from complaints will be included in WPH's Annual Report.