

Eastlight Community Homes Complaints and Resolutions Policy

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1. Introduction

Eastlight Community Homes (ECH) recognises that people have a right to complain about the failure, non-provision, or standard of services. This policy sets out the ECH approach to resolving complaints and how resolutions are handled.

1.1 Principles

1.11 ECH are committed to providing an effective and efficient resolutions service, with the key focus on complaint resolution and learning from complaint outcomes to drive service improvements.

1.12 ECH will be fair, reasonable, and consistent in our approach to handling complaints.

1.13 Wherever possible ECH will look to put things right, where this is not possible, we will look to agree mutually acceptable solutions for the parties involved.

1.2 Definition of a complaint

1.21 A complaint is defined as *‘an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions, or lack of actions by Eastlight, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting an individual resident or group of residents’*.

1.22 Customers are not required to use the word ‘complaint’ for ECH to handle it like one.

1.23 A complaint that is submitted via a third party or representative will still be handled in line with this policy.

1.24 As guided by the Housing Ombudsman, Eastlight recognise the difference between a “service request” and a “complaint”. A service request is a request from a resident requiring action to be taken to put something right. Eastlight record, monitor and review service requests regularly, but they are not dealt with under this policy. A complaint will be raised if a resident raises dissatisfaction with the response to their service request. Please refer to Appendix A - flowchart for more details on what is considered a complaint and what is a service request.

1.3 Exclusions

1.31 Complaints may not be dealt with under this policy where there are reasonable circumstances not to do so. Examples of exclusions which would be considered fair and reasonable are:

- Legal proceedings have been started. This is defined as details of the claim, such as the Claim Form and Particulars of Claim, having been filed at court.

- Insurance claims are outstanding or ongoing.
- The issue occurred more than six months ago (recurring issues will be reviewed if this will help resolve a current issue).
- Matters that have already been considered under the complaints policy.
- Where issues raised are considered unreasonable or vexatious (section 4).

1.32 Where ECH feel a complaint should not be dealt with under this policy, ECH will provide a detailed explanation, setting out the reasons why a complaint may not be considered.

2. Scope

2.1 Who can make a complaint

2.11 ECH will accept requests for resolution from the following:

- An individual with an existing or previous relationship with us as a landlord. This includes people who have a lease, tenancy, licence to occupy, service agreement or other arrangement to occupy premises owned or managed by ECH.
- An applicant for a property owned or managed by ECH.
- Those with no existing or previous relationship with ECH, but who feel they are affected by our service or actions. These complaints will not be eligible for escalation to the Housing Ombudsman.
- A representative of any of the people above who are authorised by them to make a complaint on their behalf.
- A representative of any of the people above who do not have the capacity to authorise a representative to act on their behalf. ECH 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 whom are deceased.

2.2 How to make a complaint

2.21 Complaints will be accepted in any format. ECH will accept contact verbally, written, by telephone, email, online or via social media. All complaints will follow the same process.

2.22 Where complaints are raised via social media, to maintain confidentiality and privacy we will request contact details for the complainant via private message, and then any complaint details not fit for the public domain will be removed from the social media platform. This may include names of staff, names of customers, or customer address details.

2.23 Residents have a right to access the Housing Ombudsman Service throughout the life of a complaint.

2.24 ECH will treat anonymous complaints seriously and they will be fully investigated.

3. Complaints Process

3.1 Process overview

3.11 ECH has a two stage formal complaints process.

3.2 Stage 1 – Managing formal complaints

3.21 An acknowledgement of a Stage 1 complaint will be issued via email no later than one working day after the complaint is registered.

3.32 A member of the ECH team will contact the resident who has made a complaint no later than three working days after the complaint is received. The purpose of this contact is to provide detail of the complaint reference number, progress updates, and to make any necessary enquiries that will help the resolution process.

3.24 Actions for resolutions of complaints will be allocated to staff members as appropriate.

3.25 All complaints will be monitored by ECH's Resolution Team, who will ensure the following:

- All details of the complaint are clear.
- Define the outcome sought by the customer.
- The resolutions procedure is followed.
- The customer is provided with any necessary support (e.g., reasonable adjustments, language needs, hearing difficulties) to understand and participate in the resolution procedure.

3.26 ECH will investigate a complaint and provide a full written response within 10 working days of a Stage 1 complaint being registered. Where unable to do so, a revised timescale and dates for progress updates will be agreed with the customer. Any extended response times should not exceed a further 10 working days without full explanation and formal agreement with the customer.

3.27 Wherever appropriate, corrective, and preventative actions will also be identified and allocated to the staff member for completion. Customers will be notified of these actions as part of the resolution outcome.

3.28 Customers may be entitled to receive compensation or redress as a consequence of a service failure and as part of ECH's remedy to put things right. This is covered by ECH's Compensation Policy.

3.3 Stage 2 – Appeal

3.31 In the event of dissatisfaction with the outcome from Stage 1, the customer should contact the Resolutions Team within 90 days of receiving the Stage 1 final response.

3.32 The Resolutions Team will review all appeal requests from the customer’s point of view to determine whether further action is required. New emerging issues or concerns raised at this stage maybe raised as a new complaint.

3.33 There may be occasions where ECH will not escalate the complaint to Stage 2 for reasons such as:

- It involves a claim for payments that is contrary to ECH’s compensation policy.
- Previous resolution offered is in line with policy and procedures.
- The customer has started legal proceedings to address the issues raised.
- The customer’s intended outcome is beyond the duty or remit of ECH.

If this is the case, the Resolutions Team will notify customers of the decision not to escalate the complaint within five working days.

3.34 If the complaint is escalated to Stage 2, an independent review of the complaint will be carried out by a Senior Manager or Head of Service who has not previously been involved in the complaint or directly responsible for the service provided. This is to ensure that the individual conducting the review can provide an impartial view.

3.35 Once the review is complete, the customer will receive an explanation of the decision made in writing within 20 working days of the appeal date. Customers will also be informed at this point that it is the end of ECH’s formal complaints process.

3.4 Referring a complaint to an Ombudsman Service

3.41 Customers who remain dissatisfied with ECH’s final decision can make an external appeal within 8 weeks to the Housing Ombudsman via a 'Designated Person' or appeal directly to the Housing Ombudsman after 8 weeks. A designated person is a Member of Parliament, or Local Councillor.

3.42 The Housing Ombudsman will only review complaints if the customer is an applicant for housing or is a customer, leaseholder, or licensee of one of ECH’s homes.

4. Unreasonable Customer Behaviour

4.1 Definition of unreasonable behaviour

4.11 ECH aims to provide a fair service and to work together with our customers to provide a resolution as quickly and effectively as possible where things go wrong. In some cases, the excessive frequency of contact or unreasonableness from specific customers inhibits our ability to properly consider their issues and those relating to other customers.

4.12 More examples of unreasonable customer behaviour include but are not limited to: threatening behaviour, intimidation, making repeated unsubstantiated complaints and contacting any of ECH team via their personal social media accounts.

4.2 Sanctions for unreasonable behaviour

4.21 Where ECH considers that a customer is behaving unreasonably, action may be taken to limit the amount of contact the customer has with us. This may include the following:

- Limiting the customer to only contact the organisation in writing.
- Limiting the customer to only contact a named team member.
- Limiting the frequency or timing of contact.
- Responding only to new issues or complaints (all correspondence will be reviewed).

4.22 These sanctions will only be applied in exceptional circumstances. The customer will be advised in writing that ECH are considering these actions if their behaviour does not change.

4.23 The customer will be advised in writing that the sanction has been applied and explain the reasons why. The customer will also be informed of how to appeal against the sanction.

4.24 Appeals against sanctions will be reviewed by the Housing Services Director or the Executive Director, Customer Services.

4.25 Appeals against sanctions must be sent to the relevant Director in writing within 10 working days of the date of the letter of notification of the sanction being applied. Assistance will be provided to customers who may find it difficult to put their case in writing.

4.26 All sanctions will be reviewed by ECH after 6 months and the customer will be notified in writing of the outcome of the review.

5. Fairness in Complaint Handling

5.1 Equality, diversity, and inclusion

5.11 An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed for this policy. There are no specific policy considerations/actions arising from the Equality Analysis and it is not expected that this policy will positively or negatively impact any particular group.

5.12 ECH make a commitment to enable our customers to raise any concerns and make a complaint by making reasonable adjustments and providing support to enable customers to do so. When recording a complaint, our process includes asking complainants if they require any adjustments, documenting these as part of the complaints handling process, and ensuring they are always adhered to.

5.13 Any individual or group about whom a complaint is made, will never investigate the complaint. The investigation will be carried out by a team member not involved in the original issue.

5.2 Confidentiality

5.21 All complaints will be considered confidential between the customer, ECH team members and partner organisations.

5.22 ECH acknowledges that some customers may wish to raise concerns in confidence or may wish to have their name and address details withheld on occasions. ECH will respect customer confidentiality wherever possible and will advise customers in cases where this would not be possible.

5.23 When a confidential complaint relates to an ECH team member, they will be notified that a complaint has been made against them but will not be given the customer's details.

5.3 Statutory and regulatory requirements

5.31 The Housing Ombudsman expects ECH to act within the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code and to carry out regular self-assessment against this Code.

5.32 In line with the Housing Ombudsman Code, ECH will publish a self-assessment on our website and will review the assessment as appropriate.

5.4 Use of discretion

5.41 ECH reserve the right to exercise discretion and deal with complaints outside of this policy where individual circumstances merit it. In these circumstances ECH will ensure that the discretion is applied fairly and appropriately.

6. Monitoring

6.1 Continuous learning

6.11 All timescales within the policy will be monitored by the Resolutions Team.

6.12 Key performance indicators including the number of complaints received and outcomes will be reported to Customer Influence Committee quarterly.

6.13 Senior management will regularly review resolutions performance to identify any systemic issues, serious risks, or areas for improvement to ECH's services and internal processes.

6.14 All complaints will be logged and stored on ECH's Feedback Manager IT system.

7. Contact Information

7.1 Contact Information for Eastlight Community Homes

To contact Eastlight for more information or queries, please use the following details:

Address: Eastlight House, Charter Way, Braintree CM77 8FG
Tel: 0330 128 0330
Email: customer.services@eastlighthomes.co.uk
Web: www.eastlighthomes.co.uk

7.2 Contact Information for Housing Ombudsman Service

For more information about the Housing Ombudsman's service or to contact them please use the following details:

Address: Exchange Tower, Harbour Exchange Square, London E14 9GE
Tel: 0300 111 3000
Email: info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk
Web: www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk

Appendix A – Service request or complaint – flow charts



