

POLICY DOCUMENT

Group Member: Progress Housing Group

Service Area: Customer Experience

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 Progress Housing Group (the Group) aims to provide customers/residents with the best possible service at all times and actively encourages feedback to identify any areas of improvement.
- 1.2 The Group will ensure that we deal with all feedback consistently and in a way that reflects our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy and Strategy. An effective complaints service allows the Group to rectify any service failures through lessons learnt. The Group will use feedback for transparent accountability and continuous improvement of service delivery and policy development.
- 1.3 The Group recognises that occasionally the level of service provided may result in inconvenience or loss to our customers/residents. This Policy defines where the Group will make an apology and consider making a discretionary payment of compensation (i.e. without accepting any liability for any loss) as a goodwill gesture.
- 1.4 Any payment made is not a substitute for statutory compensation and any situation where the Group has a statutory duty will be dealt with specifically under other policies.
- 1.5 This Policy has been created in line with the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code. You can access the code at: Complaint Handling Code 2024 Housing Ombudsman (housing-ombudsman.org.uk)
- 1.6 An individual making a complaint will not be subject to any reprisal or detriment for making a complaint or representation
- 1.7 A complainant has the option to speak to a person of a gender of their choosing when making a complaint. This may be particularly important for someone who has, or is experiencing domestic abuse.

2. Scope of the Policy

- 2.1 This Policy applies to all Group customers/residents, including:
 - People living in our properties
 - People receiving a service from us such as Progress Lifeline and Progress Futures
 - Leaseholders and Commercial tenants
 - Advocates (authorised to act on behalf of a tenant or Group of tenants)
 - Private residents neighbouring our properties

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- Applicants for our properties or a service provided by the Group
- Key Unlocking Futures Limited customers
- Customers within this policy refers to all complainants and include tenants, residents, customers of the Group and third parties or representatives
- 2.2 This Policy does not apply to:
 - Concert Living customers/residents

Exclusions

- 2.3 The following matters will not be considered as a complaint or escalated under this Policy:
 - 2.3.1 Matters for which the Group has a more specific policy in place, for example, where the issue is a report of anti-social behaviour or neighbour nuisance.
 - 2.3.2 Service requests a service request is a request from a customer requiring action to be taken to put something right. Service requests are not complaints. However, a service request may progress to a complaint if the customer expresses dissatisfaction with the response to their service request.
 - 2.3.3 Appeals concerning an unsuccessful housing application under the Choice Based Lettings schemes of which we are a partner member. The partnership policy will apply should an applicant challenge the Choice Based Lettings review/appeal decision.
 - 2.3.4 If the complaint relates to any formal legal proceedings that have commenced against the Group or issued by the Group this is defined as details of the claim, such as the Claim Form and Particulars of Claim, having been filed at court. However, should a complaint include any matters that will not be addressed as part of the legal proceedings, a course of action will be agreed upon between the Legal Director, the Customer Feedback Co-ordinator and any other relevant colleagues as to the approach to take and communicated to the customer.
 - 2.3.5 Parties whose services are not commissioned or endorsed by the Group.
 - 2.3.6 Historical matters that occurred over twelve months before the customer raised (or became aware of) the complaint/dissatisfaction to the Group for the first time or when a request to progress a complaint to Stage 2 has not been

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made within three months of a Stage One response having been provided.

- 2.3.7 Matters that have previously been considered under this Policy.
- 2.4 If the Group decide not to accept a complaint or progress a complaint to Stage Two of this process, a detailed explanation will be provided to the customer setting out the reasons why the matter is not suitable for our complaints process and include their right to take that decision to the Ombudsman.

3. Responsibility

- 3.1 It is the responsibility of the Group's Executive Board to approve this Policy.
- 3.2 It is the responsibility of the Head of Customer Experience to review and implement the Policy. The Policy is monitored through regular board reporting and business intelligence reporting.
- 3.3 Senior Leadership Team are responsible for promoting the value of feedback.
- 3.4 It is the responsibility of our Heads of Service/Directors to investigate and respond to Stage Two complaints as Senior Managers, ensuring that their review of the case is independent and thorough. The Heads of Service are responsible for monitoring their department's performance as a key performance indicator for the Group and promoting the importance of feedback.
- 3.5 Non Executive Leads and Executive Director, (Operations, Services and Support) provide oversight of complaints reporting and monitoring for the Group.
- 3.6 Managers of the relevant department, (responsibility can be delegated where agreed in advance by the Customer Feedback Coordinator) are responsible for ensuring that the Policy is followed and are accountable for Stage One complaints.
- 3.7 With support from the Customer Feedback Team, the Customer Feedback Co-ordinator is responsible for coordinating the feedback process. The team will ensure that all written guidance is kept up to date, provide advice and training to Managers and report upon performance. Lessons learned from complaints will be communicated to the Group and tenants, with any service improvements shared.

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- 3.8 The Customer Contact Centre and Customer Feedback Team are responsible for logging new expressions of dissatisfaction and resolving any complaints at the first point of contact where posible. The teams are responsible for ensuring that they log all communication accurately and follow this Policy, taking responsibility for updating any guidance, scripting and work instructions as needed.
- 3.9 All colleagues of Progress Housing Group are responsible for following this Policy and aiming to resolve issues for customers before they become a complaint.

4. Policy

4.1 Aims & Objectives

- 4.1.1 The Group will offer a range of ways for our customers to provide feedback. The Group will set out clear service standards for responding to complaints and provide guidance on any next steps of what to do should they remain dissatisfied.
- 4.1.2 The Group will ensure that the complaints process is clear, simple and accessible and will investigate and respond to complaints promptly and in line with our Complaints, Feedback and Redress Procedure.
- 4.1.3 The Group will take a transparent and accountable approach to receive feedback and will use customer insight to improve services.
- 4.1.4 The Group will update customers on the Group's performance via newsletters, website, and customer scrutiny meetings highlighting how feedback is used to improve services. The Group will also include this in the tenant's Annual Report.

4.2 **Definitions of Feedback**

4.2.1 Complaint (expression of dissatisfaction, as defined in the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code): "An expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the landlord, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting a resident or group of residents." The word complaint does not have to be used for it to be treated as such. A complaint that is submitted via a third party or representative will still be handled in line with this policy.

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- 4.2.2 Resolved at point of contact expression of dissatisfaction (early resolution): When there has been an expression of dissatisfaction received and immediate action can be agreed to the satisfaction of the individual contacting the group, without progressing through the complaints process.
- 4.2.3 **Compliment (positive feedback):** An expression of satisfaction with the standard of service received from the Group, one of the Group's employees or contractors.
- 4.2.4 **Anonymous feedback**: Feedback provided where the identity of the person is not disclosed. The person's anonymity does not prevent the Group from recording the feedback provided or carrying out any investigations that may be required.
- 4.2.5 **Comments:** This is where a customer provides general comments or suggestions about the service the Group provides. When comments are not an expression of dissatisfaction or a compliment, but there may be learning to take from it, the Group will record these on the Group's systems and the relevant departments will be made aware.

4.3 Expressions of Dissatisfaction (EOD)

- 4.3.1 EODs can be provided to the Group verbally, in writing, by email, by telephone, via webchat, via the Group's website or via social media. All EODs will be recorded and managed following the Complaints, Feedback and Redress Procedure.
- 4.3.2 Residents have the opportunity to have a representative deal with their complaint on their behalf, and to be represented or accompanied at any meeting with the Group where this is reasonable.
- 4.3.3 Should a group of customers wish to raise the same complaint through a petition or group communication, one member of the customer group should be selected as the designated lead contact. It will then be the responsibility of the lead contact to provide the other members of the group with any updates or responses the Group provides.
- 4.3.4 Should a complaint be raised regarding employee conduct, this will be handled by the relevant manager and where appropriate, by the People and Culture Team.
- 4.3.5 The Group's EOD process will involve two stages.

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- 4.3.6 Should a dissatisfaction be raised, the Group will aim to resolve the matter in the initial contact where possible. The Group will confirm with the customer that the matter has been resolved to their satisfaction and record this feedback as EODs, resolved at point of contact.
- 4.3.7 Customers can seek early resolution, advice and support from the Housing Ombudsman Service at any time to help resolve an issue or complaint with the Group. If a customer remains dissatisfied after going through both complaint stages, they can refer the complaint to the Housing Ombudsman.
- 4.3.8 Any complaints received via social media will follow the Complaints, Feedback and Redress procedure. There may be instances where confirmed identification is sought before an EOD can be recorded.
- 4.3.9 All complaint information will be handled sensitively and in accordance with relevant data protection requirements. Where a customer posts a specific complaint publically on one of the Group's official social media pages, they will be directed to an alternative contact method such as live chat or telephone to ensure privacy and confidentiality.

If a customer posts personal or sensitive details on a public post, for example, an address, contact number, or names another individual, this will be removed to protect the individual's privacy and confidentiality. Any information the customer provides through social media will only be used for the purpose it was provided for and as set out in the Privacey Statement. https://www.progressgroup.org.uk/get-intouch/your-data-rights/. Data Protection Policy https://corporate.progressgroup.org.uk/policies-andpublished reports/policies/ and communit rules. https://www.progressgroup.org.uk/get-in-touch/follow -us-onsocil-media/

Stage One

4.3.10 The Group acknowledge, define and log receipt of a complaint within 5 working days of the complaint being received. A full written response will be issued within 10 working days of the complaint being acknowledged.

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- 4.3.11 An extension to this timescale may be needed when considering the complexity of the complaint. If this is the case, the customer will be advised of the expected timescale for the response and the reason why, which will be no more than ten working days without good reason. In the event a further extension is required, the customer will be advised and be provided with the Housing Ombudsman contact details.
- 4.3.12 The Group will aim to resolve a complaint to the customer's satisfaction, however, will advise the customer of the next stage of the complaints process if this is unable to be achieved.

Stage Two

- 4.3.13 Should a customer remain dissatisfied after Stage One has been completed, they can request that their complaint progress to the next stage of the Group's process. The Senior Manager carrying out the review will not have had any involvement in the outcome of the Stage One process and will carry out an independent investigation.
- 4.3.14 A request to progress a complaint to Stage Two must be made within three months from the date that the Stage One response was provided/dated. Consideration will be given to those raised outside of the three months on a case by case basis.
- 4.3.15 Should the EOD progress to Stage Two, this will be acknowledged, defined and logged within 5 working days of the escalation request being made.
- 4.3.16 A full written response will be provided within 20 working days from the date of acknowledgement. An extension to this timescale may be needed when considering the complexity of the complaint. If this is the case, the customer will be advised of the expected timescale of the response and the reasons why, which will be no later than 20 working days without good reason. In the event a further extension is required, the customer will be advised and provided with the Housing Ombudsman contact details.

Housing Ombudsman

4.3.17 A customer can contact the Housing Ombudsman at any time throughout the Group's complaints process and can refer their complaint to them should they remain dissatisfied once the complaints process has been completed.

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- 4.3.18 Should the Group receive any communications from the Housing Ombudsman concerning a current or completed EOD, the Customer Feedback Team will respond to them directly within 10 working days or by the specified timescales provided by the Housing Ombudsman, whichever is soonest.
- 4.3.19 The nature of the complaint will determine which Ombudsman the complainant should contact.

The Housing Ombudsman Service is contactable via:

Housing Ombudsman Service

PO Box 1484

Unit D Preston

PR2 0ET

Email: <u>info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk</u>
Web: <u>www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk</u>

Telephone: 0300 111 3000

(Monday - Friday: 9:00am - 5:00pm)

(Lines closed every Thursday from 3:30pm - 5:00pm)

The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman

(LGSCO) is contactable via:

The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman

PO Box 4771

Coventry

CV4 0EH

Tel: 0300 061 0614

Website: www.lgo.org.uk How to Complain - Local

Government and Social Care Ombudsman

Applications, appeals and references relating to disputes over property and land can be found at the First Tier Tribunal (Property Chamber) https://www.gov.uk/courts-tribunals/first-tier-tribunal-property-chamber

4.4 Where a complaint is found that the Group got it wrong, the Group will:

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- 4.4.1 Apologise where appropriate.
- 4.4.2 Take practical action to put things right.
- 4.4.3 Consider compensation/goodwill/reimbursement. See Appendix 1.
- 4.4.4 Review where service improvements can be made to prevent further complaints of a similar nature.

4.5 Where a complaint is found that the Group got it right, the Group will:

- 4.5.1 Ensure that the response contains a statement of regret for any inconvenience or distress experienced where appropriate.
- 4.5.2 Be clear in providing reasons why the Group believe it got it right.
- 4.5.3 Review complaints where the Group did get things right and look at what actions can be taken/implemented from a lessons learned point of view.

4.6 Support and mediation

- 4.6.1 The Group's Reasonable Adjustments policy will be considered when dealing with and throughout the journey of all complaints.
- 4.6.2 The Group will make reasonable adjustments where required, dependent on the individual needs of the customer. This will be with the customer's agreement and may include, for example:
 - Allowing more time than usual for someone to provide information that is needed.
 - Provision of information in appropriate alternative formats (eg large print, Braille, coloured paper etc).
 - Use of email or telephone in preference to hard copy letters.
 - Communication through a representative or intermediary.
- 4.6.3 Mediation will be used where appropriate to support a customer with their complaint.
- 4.6.4 A customer is able to request an advocate to assist them through the complaints process.

4.7 MP/Councillor Communication

4.7.1 Communication from an MP / Councillor will be treated in line with this policy. Their contact will be assessed to determine if

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it is a complaint or service request, that they are a representative of the tenant and respond within timescales set out in the policy.

4.7.2 Where there is no report of dissatisfaction in MP/Councillor communication, the Customer Feedback Team will record and acknowledge receipt of the the service request enquiry within 5 working days and provide a full written response within 10 working days from acknowledgement.

4.8 Unacceptable Behaviour

4.8.1 In exceptional cases, the Group may decide that a person or group of people makes vexatious or habitual complaints. Colleagues will refer to the Unacceptable Behaviour Procedure for guidance on proceeding with any dissatisfaction that falls under this category. The Group will consider this procedure as a last resort and after all reasonable measures have been taken to resolve the complaint, considering the customer's circumstances.

4.9 Compensation, goodwill, and reimbursement payments

- 4.9.1 The Group will consider suitable redress under the following circumstances and at the Groups' discretion (see Appendix 1 for further guidance):
 - Loss of amenity for which the Group is responsible for providing.
 - Where the Group has accepted that the level of service provided has not met required standards.
 - The repair or provision of a shared facility between the Group's tenants, leaseholders, or other occupiers/service users.
 - Where it has been proven that the Group's colleagues or contractors have caused damage to property/belongings.

4.10 Compliments (positive feedback)

- 4.10.1 Compliments can be given verbally, in writing, email, telephone, via webchat, social media, or via the website. All compliments will be recorded.
- 4.10.2 Compliments or positive feedback will be passed on to the relevant employee(s) via their line manager.

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If the line manager feels that additional recognition should be provided for the compliment received, they may escalate it to senior leaders to consider appropriate reward and recognition.

5. Implementation

5.1 **Training**

- 5.1.1 All employees will receive training on managing feedback as and when appropriate relevant to their roles and responsibilities in addition to general refresher training.
- 5.1.2 The Group's Customer Feedback Co-ordinator will provide ongoing guidance, support and additional training.

5.2 Monitoring, reporting and publicising

- 5.2.1 The Head of Group Customer Experience will ensure the monitoring and coordination of all complaints and feedback covered in this Policy.
- 5.2.2 Analysis and reporting will be undertaken each quarter and presented to the relevant board (Executive Board unless reports to other board are requested), including lessons learned; updated on volume, categories, outcomes and complaint handling performance; trend analysis.
- 5.2.3 The Group's customer forums will review complaints and feedback to help identify any lessons learned or possible service improvements.
- 5.2.4 Customers will be provided with general information about complaints and lessons learnt via the website, social media, tenant newsletters, and customer forums.
- 5.2.5 The Group Complaints, Feedback and Redress Policy is publicised on the website, social media, tenant newsletters and customer forums.
- 5.2.6 The Group will report on wider learning and improvements from complaints to their residents, managers, and employees. Feedback will be regularly provided to relevant scrutiny panels, committees, and boards and be discussed alongside scrutiny of the Ombudsman's annual landlord performance report, should a report be produced by them.

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- 5.2.7 The Group will provide an annual report to tenants and board on feedback received and the Group's learning from this.
- 5.2.8 The Group Board will receive an annual complaints performance and service improvement report, as well as the Housing Ombudsman self assessment.
- 5.2.9 Oversight will be undertaken by Non Executive Director leads, Executive Director Operations, Service and Support.

5.3 Policy and procedure references

- Complaints, Feedback & Redress Procedure
- ASB Policy/Procedure
- Allocations Policy
- Group Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Policy
- Group Code of Conduct
- Housing Ombudsman Complaints Handling Code
- Group Unacceptable Behaviour Procedure
- Group GDPR Data Protection Policy
- Insight Strategy
- Reasonable Adjustments Policy

6. Consultation

6.1 Consultation for this Policy has been undertaken with involved customers, internal colleagues, the Senior Leadership Team and non executive director complaint leads.

7. Review

7.1 The Group will review this Policy at least every three years or when there is a change to legislation or the relevant regulatory requirements. It will also be reviewed where there is a significant change to how we manage our feedback process.

8. Equality impact assessment

8.1 An Equality Impact Assessment was carried out in March 2024 and is found to have a neutral impact on the 9 protected characteristics. The Group does not believe that this policy has an adverse impact on any protected characteristic, however the Group welcome feedback on the procedures and the way it operates. The Group are interested to know any possible or actual adverse impact that this policy may have

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on groups in response of gender, marital status, race, disability, sexual orientation, religion or believer, age or any other characteristic.

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Appendix 1 Redress Guidance

Where customers wish to claim compensation or reimbursement, they should do so within 28 days of the incident(s). In some extenuating circumstances, the Group may consider redress outside of this timescale. However, the Group will not normally consider a compensation claim made after six months of the incident(s).

Should the offer be accepted, the customer must confirm their acceptance within 28 days from the date of the offer. Any acceptance made after this time will be paid at the discretion of the Manager.

The Group policy for compensation will not include service failures which are:

- 1. Relating to insurance claims such as personal injury/illness.
- 2. Relating to the right to repair
- 3. Subject to a tribunal or legal proceedings (including disrepair cases) or orders made by the Housing Ombudsman service or courts.
- 4. Relating to the right to reimbursement for improvements made to properties.
- 5. Relating to issues already compensated through Match Funding payments.
- 6. Relating to issues already compensated through home loss/disturbance, i.e., decant payments.
- 7. Any loss or damage as a result of the actions of a customer, including:
 - Failure to report repairs promptly and/or failure to allow access to undertake works/inspections or keep appointments.
 - The loss or damage arises from an alteration or repair which the customer has arranged or carried out themselves.
- 8. Loss or damage due to the result of acts of negligence by a third party, for example, a visitor or contractor who is not acting on behalf (or instruction) of Progress Housing Group.
- 9. The loss or damage results from the routine failure of a building's component, fixture, or fittings where Progress Housing Group has not been negligent.
- 10. Service failure results from extreme or unforeseen conditions (such as weather conditions or a pandemic) where Progress Housing Group has taken all reasonable steps to restore services or facilities under the prevailing conditions.

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Types of payment offers

Compensation – When there has been service failure, and the customer is offered payment, for example, loss of facilities or inconvenience. If a customer has arrears on their rent/service charge account, the amount offered will be credited to their account to help clear any arrears. Should the amount cover more than the arrears, the Group will pay the customer the surplus amount by either cheque or BACS payment upon receipt of the completed acceptance form.

Reimbursement – When there has been a failure in service and the Group has offered to make payment for costs that the customer has incurred. Receipts or evidence will be requested, along with the completed acceptance form, before we pay reimbursement by cheque or BACS payment.

Level of redress	Likely associated finding	Impact on resident	Circumstances
£50 to £100	Service Failure	Minimal Short duration May not have significantly affected the overall outcome for the resident Might include distress & inconvenience, time & trouble, disappointment, loss of confidence & delays in getting matters resolved	Minor failure in the service provided and did not appropriately acknowledge these and / or put them right. Service user is caused mild inconvenience as a direct result of the Group actions or failure to act PHG may have made an offer of action / compensation but it does not quite reflect the detriment to the resident and/or is not quite proportionate to the failings identified by a HOS investigation.

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£100 to £600	Maladministration	No permanent impact	There was a failure which adversely affected the resident.
			PHG has failed to acknowledge its failings and/or has made no attempt to put things right.
			Or
			PHG has acknowledged failings and/or made some attempt to put things right but failed to address the detriment to the resident and/or the offer was not proportionate to the failings identified by a HOS investigation.
			Can include situations where supported living schemes decide against a project but the potential customer has incurred costs.
£600 to £1000	Maladmininstration / severe maladministration	Significant impact Physical and/or emotional impact	There was a failure which had a significant impact on the resident.
			Serious or prolonged poor service or situation where the actions of the Group cause severe stress, disruption, inconvenience, loss of income or incur costs to the customer.
			The circumstances for maladministration apply and the redress needed to put things right is substantial.
			Or
			The circumstances for severe maladministration apply but the redress needed to put things right is at the lower end of that scale.

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£1000+	Severe maladministration	Severe long-term impact	There have been serious failings by PHG.
			There was a single significant failure in service or a series of significant failures which have had a seriously detrimental impact on the resident.
			PHG's response to the failures (if any) exacerbated the situation and further undermined the landlord / resident relationship.
			PHG repeatedly failed to provide the same service which had a seriously detrimental impact on the resident; demonstrating a failure to provide a service, put things right and learn from outcomes.
			The failures accumulated over a significant period of time (however, this will not necessarily be the case as a single significant service failure may be sufficient).