

Complaints

PCHA aims to provide an excellent service to all our residents and we welcome suggestions, comments and views on how to improve the services we offer. We recognise that from time to time things go wrong, but we believe most problems can be easily resolved. We will endeavour to get it right first time, so every effort will be made to resolve matters informally at the point of a complaint being made.

What is a complaint?

The Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code defines a complaint 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". In broader terms, a complaint could be when a resident feels:

- We have failed to adequately respond to their initial request
- We have been unhelpful or rude
- We have failed to meet our stated standards or promises
- We have given unclear, misleading or unsuitable advice
- We have not complied with our policies or procedures.

What is *not* a complaint?

A complaint is **not** a first attempt to request a service or an enquiry.

A complaint is **not** a report of anti-social behaviour. We have special procedures for reporting anti-social behaviour and neighbour/nuisance disputes (please see our Anti-Social Behaviour leaflet) and these will not be dealt with through our complaints process unless we have failed to meet our stated standards or promises.

We will not be able to deal with the following via the complaints process:

- Complaints about other residents
- Any matter that is being (or has been) dealt with by a solicitor
- Any matter that is being dealt with by our insurers
- Complaints already being dealt with by the Ombudsman or MP
- Any matter that occurred more than 6 months ago
- Complaints that have already been through the complaints process or that, in PCHA's opinion, are being pursued in an unreasonable manner
- Complaints that fall outside our jurisdiction (e.g. complaints about utilities)
- Decisions where there is already a right of appeal, unless we have not followed our own processes
- Service charge queries, unless we have failed to provide an acceptable service.

If we decide not to accept a complaint, you will be provided with a full explanation of why the matter is not suitable for the complaints process.

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How can I make a complaint?

You can make a complaint on the telephone, in writing, by email or in person to any member of our staff. We see complaints as an opportunity rather than a threat and so our staff are encouraged to actively identify complaints. If you would feel more comfortable, you can also ask a friend or a family member to complain on your behalf. However, you would need to confirm in writing or in person that you are happy for us to speak to them before we respond to the complaint.



How will we respond to your complaint?

We will do everything we can to resolve a query or complaint informally and as quickly as possible. It may be possible to resolve the complaint immediately at the time it is reported, or we may need to gather further information – for example, visit a property, carry out a survey or get professional advice. If this is the case, we will let you know how long this will take.

If an informal approach does not resolve the query or complaint, we will then escalate this to our two-stage formal complaints process as outlined below.

Formal complaints

Complaints Officer

The officer responsible for complaint handling is the Director of Operations.

Stage 1 Complaint

If your issue or complaint cannot be resolved informally, we will escalate it to a Stage 1 formal complaint and the Director of Operations, or other relevant senior manager, will contact you within two working days to discuss the matter and try to find a positive resolution. Wherever possible we will discuss this with you in person. At this point the manager will agree a timescale with you. They will aim to complete the investigation as quickly as possible and will feed back to you, normally in person, followed by an outcome letter detailing the outcome and any agreed actions.

Stage 2 Complaint—Review

If you feel that we have not dealt with your complaint effectively at Stage 1, you can request for your complaint to be reviewed. The complaint will only be escalated to this stage if you are seeking a clear resolution. The review may be carried out by our Chief Executive or a member of our Board, who will investigate the matter as quickly as possible, providing an outcome letter detailing any agreed actions. Their decision is final.



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Timescales for responding to formal complaints:

Our timescales for a decision at each stage will aim to comply with the timescales set out by the Ombudsman, as follows:

- Stage 1 decision—10 working days from receipt of complaint. If this is not possible, you will receive an explanation and a date by when the stage one response should be received. This will not normally exceed a further 10 working days without good reason.
- Stage 2 decision—20 working days from the request to escalate. If this is not possible, you will receive an explanation and a date when the stage two response will be received. This will not normally exceed a further 10 working days without good reason.

What if I am still not satisfied with the outcome of my complaint?

If a complaint is not resolved at the end of our internal complaints process, you can:

- Refer the matter to a Designated Person OR
- Wait 8 weeks and refer the matter directly to the Housing Ombudsman.

For more information about Designated Persons or the Ombudsman, you can visit the Ombudsman's website www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk or phone them on 0300 111 3000.

Unreasonable complaints

We reserve the right to refuse to consider or review complaints when a resident's actions or behaviours are deemed to be unreasonable or unacceptable. We will always try to find a way to work with residents before reaching this stage and we always aim to respond in a proportionate and fair way. However, very occasionally, we will have to use this clause in order to ensure the safety and wellbeing of our staff and protect PCHA's resources. We are a small organisation and one complainant behaving in an unreasonable manner can take up significant resources in a very small team; this in turn can have an impact on the service offered to other residents.

The following are examples of when a complaint may be deemed to be 'unreasonable':

- The resident is using threatening, aggressive or offensive language or behaviour
- The volume of emails or calls received are extensive and unmanageable
- The outcomes sought are completely unreasonable
- There is nothing further PCHA can reasonably do to assist
- The complainant continues to raise the same or a closely related complaint even after the complaint process has been fully exhausted
- The resources needed to deal effectively with the complaint are disproportionate to the benefit of the outcome being sought.

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Unreasonable complaints (continued)

If we identify a complaint as being unreasonable, in the first instance we will:

- Explain this clearly to the resident and set out our expectations going forward
- Assess the resident's needs and refer them for support if required.

If the above does not result in a change to behaviour, we will warn the resident that this is deemed unacceptable and that the Unacceptable Behaviour Policy will be applied.

For further advice or information:

Contact us on **020 8659 3055** or email housing@pcha.co.uk.



Housing
Ombudsman Service

www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk

0300 111 3000

