



Group Member: Progress Housing Group
Service Area: Progress Connect
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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Progress Housing Group (the Group) aims to provide customers with the best possible service at all times and actively encourages complaints and feedback.
- 1.2 The Group will ensure that complaints and feedback are dealt with consistently across the Group and in a way that reflects our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy and Strategy. An effective complaints service provides the Group with the opportunity to rectify any service failures by way of lessons learnt. Feedback will be used for transparent accountability and continuous improvement of service delivery and policy development.

2. SCOPE OF THE POLICY

- 2.1 This policy applies to all Group customers including:
- People living in our properties including Progress Living & Refuge.
 - People receiving a service from us such as Progress Lifeline and Progress Futures.
 - Leaseholders.
 - Advocates (authorised to act on behalf of a tenant or group of tenants).
 - Private residents neighbouring our properties.
 - Applicants for our properties or for a service provided by the Group.
- 2.2 This policy does not apply to:
- Key customers.
- 2.3 The policy does not cover:
- Matters for which the Group has a more specific policy in place including complaints regarding anti-social behaviour or neighbour nuisance
 - Appeals in relation to an unsuccessful housing application under the Choice Based Lettings schemes of which we are a partner member. Should an applicant wish to challenge the Choice Based Lettings review/appeal decision, then this policy will apply.

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- Where the complaint is linked to any formal legal proceedings that have commenced (either against the Group or issued by the Group). 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 between the Legal Director, the Complaints Co-ordinator and any other relevant officers as to the approach to be taken and this will be clearly communicated to the customer.
- Parties whose services are not commissioned or endorsed by the Group.
- Historical matters that occurred over six months prior to the complaint/dissatisfaction being raised to the Group for the first time.
- Matters that have already been considered under the Complaints and Feedback policy.

3. RESPONSIBILITY

- 3.1 It is the responsibility of the Directors, Service Managers, and the Complaints Co-ordinator across the Group to implement this Policy. All staff members have a responsibility to follow the policy and procedures at all times.
- 3.2 The Head of Progress Connect is responsible for the coordination, monitoring and reporting of customer complaints and feedback.
- 3.3 It is the responsibility of the Complaints Co-ordinator to meet with the Complaints and Feedback Forum on a quarterly basis, to review the handling of complaints and any Stage 2 complaints and feedback to the Group.

4. POLICY

4.1 Aims & Objectives

- The Group will offer a range of ways for our customers to make a complaint or provide feedback to us. We 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.
- We will ensure that the complaints process is clear, simple and accessible and that we investigate and respond to complaints in a timely manner, and in line with our Complaints and Feedback policy and procedure.

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- We will inform our customers via newsletters, our website and customer scrutiny meetings, how we use complaints to improve our services. We will also include this in our Tenants Annual Report.

4.2 Definitions of Feedback

- 4.2.1. **Complaint (expression of dissatisfaction, as defined in the Housing Ombudsman’s Complaint Handling Code):** A complaint, i.e. 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.
- 4.2.2. **Compliment (positive feedback):** Satisfaction with the standard of service they have received from the Group, or one of our staff or contractors, and makes this known to us.
- 4.2.3. **Anonymous Feedback:** Where the identity of the person reporting the matter is not disclosed. The anonymity of the person does not prevent us from recording the feedback provided or carrying out any investigations that may be required.
- 4.2.4. **MP Enquiry:** All MP/Councillor correspondence is to be treated as an MP enquiry and not as a formal complaint unless the MP/Councillor specifically asks for a complaint to be recorded. If this is requested, an expression of dissatisfaction will be logged in line with our Complaints and Feedback process.
- 4.2.5. **Comment:** This is where a customer provides a comment or suggestion about the service we provide. When such comments are provided that are not an expression of dissatisfaction or a compliment, then these will be recorded on our systems and the relevant Departments made aware.

4.3 Managing Feedback: Complaint handling

- Complaints/dissatisfaction can be provided to the Group verbally, in writing, by email, by telephone, via webchat, via our website. All complaints/dissatisfactions will be recorded and managed in

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accordance with the Complaints and Feedback policy and procedure.

- Should a group of customers wish to raise the same complaint by way of a petition or group communication, then one member of the customer group should be selected as the designated lead. It will then be the responsibility of the lead to provide the other members of the group of any updates or responses the Group provides.
- The Groups complaints process will involve two stages.

Stage 1 – Complaint

We will record and acknowledge receipt of a complaint within two working days and aim to respond/resolve this within five working days from acknowledgement. We will aim to respond as quickly as possible.

It may be that some complaints remain open for a longer period while investigations are carried out, however, the customer will be updated if an extension is required, within the original five working day time scale. A response can be given to the customer either by telephone, email or in writing.

We will always aim to ensure that we resolve a complaint to the customer's satisfaction, however, if we have been unable to do this, then we will advise the customer of the next stage of our complaints process.

Stage 2 – Senior Manager Review

Should a customer remain dissatisfied after Stage 1 has been completed, they can request that their complaint be progressed to the next stage of the Group's complaints process, a Senior Manager Review (HOS or Senior Manager). The Senior Manager carrying out the review will not have had any involvement in the Stage 1 process.

Should a complaint progress to Stage 2, we will acknowledge that the complaint/dissatisfaction has been progressed to a Senior Manager Review within two working days of receipt.

We will aim to provide a full written response within ten working days from the date of acknowledgement. However there may be some instances when investigations take longer than expected and extension is required, should this be the case the customer

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will be updated on this within the ten working day time scale and advised of a new date that they can expect a full response to be provided.

Not considered at Stage 2

In some circumstances, there will be some elements to complaints that cannot be considered by a Senior Manager Review. Should this be the case, we will ensure that we advise our customer of any elements that will not be considered and our reasons why.

The following circumstances **cannot** be considered at Stage 2:

- Rent/service charges – where correctly applied.
- Where Leasehold matters should be progressed to a Tier Tribunal (for example service charge increases).
- Where, formal legal proceedings have been issued either against or by the Group, including those issued as a result of the Stage 1 outcome. In such instances, the legal process will direct the case through to its conclusion and appropriate legal advice will be taken. However, should the Stage 2 request include any matters that will not be addressed as part of the legal proceedings, a course of action will be agreed between the Legal Director, the Complaints Co-ordinator and any other relevant officers as to the approach to be taken and this will be clearly communicated to the customer. Such cases will be reviewed on an ad hoc case by case basis.
- When a Stage 1 response has been given to a complaint/dissatisfaction, and a request to progress the complaint to Stage 2 has not been made within the six months from the date of response.
- Where a response has been given and no additional information is provided.
- When compensation/goodwill has been accepted and the acceptance form completed and returned to the Group following a Stage 1 complaint.

Completion of the Group's complaints process

Once both stages of the Group's complaints process has been completed, should a customer remain dissatisfied they can either:

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- Approach a Designated Person (MP/ Councillor or designated tenant panel that is recognised by the Group). A designated person can try to resolve the complaint/dissatisfaction themselves or refer their complaint/dissatisfaction straight to the Housing Ombudsman on behalf of the customer.
- Progress their complaint/dissatisfaction to the Housing Ombudsman directly. However, they will be required to wait for a period of eight weeks from the date of the final response letter/email from the Group before doing so.

Should the Group receive any communications from an MP/Councillor or the Housing Ombudsman in relation to a complaint/dissatisfaction, then we will respond to them directly and within the requested timescales.

4.4 Role of the Designated Person

- A 'Designated Person' can be an MP, local Councillor for the district in which a complainant's home is located. The role of the Designated Person is to facilitate the resolution of complaints which may involve providing advice, acting as advocates and/or discussing matters with the Group. They can forward a complaint on behalf of the customer, to the Housing Ombudsman should they feel that they are unable to assist any further.
- Designated Persons cannot overrule the Groups policies and procedures.
- Designated Persons are not a tribunal; they do not carry out the role of the Ombudsman and are not an additional bureaucratic stage in a complaints procedure.
- Complainants can approach a local Councillor or MP to act on their behalf at any point in the complaints process. However, they will only be formally recognised as the 'Designated Person' following the conclusion of the Group's Complaints Procedure.
- Only councillors from the district in which the tenant lives can be a Designated Person under the Localism Act 2011. However, PHG and tenants can choose to work with other councillors if it would help resolve the complaint locally.
- Where a Designated Person is involved, written authorisation from the complainant will need to be provided before any

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information can be released about the case by Progress Housing Group.

A list of designated persons, i.e. Local Councilors/MP's can be accessed by; <http://www.parliament.uk/mps-lords-and-offices/mps/>

The nature of the complaint will determine which Ombudsman the complainant should contact.

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The Housing Ombudsman Service is contactable via:

Housing Ombudsman Service

PO Box 152

Liverpool

L33 7WQ

Tel: 0300 111 3000 (Monday to Friday 9:15 to 17:15).

Email: info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk

Website: www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk

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 , <http://www.lgo.org.uk/make-a-complaint>

Information on the First-Tier Tribunal (Property Chamber) and the contact details for the nearest service can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/courts-tribunals/first-tier-tribunal-property-chamber>

4.5 Managing Feedback – Compliments (Positive Feedback)

- Compliments can be given verbally, in writing, email, telephone, via webchat, social media, or via the website. All compliments will be recorded. A compliment can be described as when a customer is satisfied with the standard of service that they have

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received from Progress Housing Group or one of our staff or contractors and makes this known to us.

- Compliments or positive feedback will be passed on to the relevant member of staff via their Line Manager.
- Compliments will be reported at least annually to Executive Board.

4.6 Managing complaints – Resolution

Where a complaint is upheld, the Group will:

- Apologise where appropriate.
- Take practical action to put things right.
- Consider compensation/goodwill/reimbursement in some instances. Staff should refer to the Group's Compensation and Goodwill Payments Policy for guidance.
- Review where service improvements can be made to prevent further complaints of a similar nature.

Where a complaint is not upheld, the Group will:

- Ensure that the response contains a statement of regret for any inconvenience or distress that may have been suffered.
- Be clear in providing reasons as to why the complaint/dissatisfaction was not upheld.
- Review complaints/dissatisfactions that were not upheld and look at what actions can be taken/implemented from a lessons learnt point of view.

4.7 Vexatious or Habitual Complainants

- In exceptional cases, we may decide that a person or group of people are making habitual or vexatious complaints. Staff will refer to the Behaviour procedure for guidance on how to proceed with any complaints/dissatisfaction that fall under this category.

4.8 Managing Feedback – Support and Mediation

- It is important to consider that complainants who are behaving in an inappropriate or unacceptable manner may have support needs, and we should discuss with them a referral to an appropriate agency.

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- Mediation may be useful in dealing with complaints, and we should consider the possibility of its use when appropriate.
- Where appropriate, it is recommended that customers with identified support needs have an advocate to assist them through the complaints process.

4.9 Managing Feedback – Requests for Service

- When a customer makes contact to inform us that something requires our attention, this is a request for service and is not (automatically) a complaint or a dissatisfaction.

However, it may progress to a complaint/dissatisfaction if we discover that the problem had arisen as a result of our inaction when we had a duty to act, or if we fail to respond to their request for service appropriately.

4.10 Managing Feedback – Petitions/group complaints/dissatisfactions

- Where a petition is received by the Group, it will be responded to as a complaint/dissatisfaction under the Stage 1 process, however, should a group of customers (i.e. from the same building or scheme) wish to raise the same complaint/dissatisfaction then one member of the customer group should be selected as the designated lead. It will then be the responsibility of the lead to provide the other members of the group of any updates or responses the Group provides.

4.12 Managing Complaints and Feedback – MP Letters

- Where a letter is received from an MP or Councillor, it will be recorded, and we will acknowledge receipt for the letter within two working days and aim to respond within ten working days.

Reasonable adjustments

The Group will make reasonable adjustments where required, dependent on the individual needs of the customer.

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5. IMPLEMENTATION

5.1 Training

- Customer facing and contact staff will receive complaint/dissatisfaction and feedback training through the induction process and refresher training when required.
- Managers, Team Leaders, Contact Centre and Progress Connect staff will receive training on complaints handling as and when appropriate in addition to general refresher training.
- Ongoing guidance, support and additional training will be provided by the Group's Complaints Co-ordinator.

5.2 Monitoring and reporting

- The Head of Progress Connect will ensure the monitoring and coordination of all complaints and feedback covered in this policy.
- Analysis and reporting will be undertaken each quarter and presented to the relevant board (Executive Board unless reports to other board are requested), including that of lessons learnt.
- The Customer Complaint and Feedback Group will meet twice a quarterly to analyse and discuss complaints and feedback.
- Quarterly complaints blog for internet and intranet
- Customers will be provided with general information about complaints via the website and through tenant newsletters. This will include analysis of complaint handling and meeting our service standards.
- Statistics around volumes, response times and lessons learnt will be provided to customers via the website and through tenant newsletters, about service improvements we have made as a result of customer feedback as and when applicable.
- The Group will report back on wider learning and improvements from complaints to their residents, managers and staff. Feedback shall be regularly provided to relevant scrutiny panels, committees and boards and be discussed, alongside scrutiny of the Ombudsman's annual landlord performance report.
- The Group will report on customer satisfaction regarding complaint handling.

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- The Group will provide an annual report to our tenants and board on the feedback that has been received and the Groups learnings from this.

5.3 Policy and procedure references

Feedback Procedures

ASB Policy/Procedures

CBL/My Home Choice Procedures

Group Compensation and Goodwill Payments Policy

Group Equality Policy

Group Code of Conduct

Group Customer Focus Policy

HO Complaints Handling Code

Group Unacceptable behaviour procedure

6. CONSULTATION

- 6.1 Consultation for this policy has been taken with the Tenant Scrutiny Pool, Senior Management Team and The Housing Ombudsman.

7. REVIEW

- 7.1 This policy will be reviewed at least every three years or where there is a change to legislation or the relevant regulatory requirements. It will also be reviewed where there is a significant change in the way we manage our complaints handling process.

8. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 8.1 An Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out and is found to be of neutral impact to the nine protected characteristics.