



WILLOW TREE

HOUSING PARTNERSHIP

Complaints Policy

Version:	v6
Responsibility for the Policy	Head of Corporate Services
Date approved by Executive	August 2024
Date approved by Board (if applicable)	August 2024
Date due for review:	August 2025

Statement of Intent

Willow Tree Housing Partnership Limited (WTHP) recognises the significant role the Housing Ombudsman has in setting out the standards required for an effective complaints service. The WTHP Complaints Policy and Procedure have been developed in accordance with the statutory obligations set out in the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code, and taking into account the views of the Resident Scrutiny Panel.

The Operations Director is the designated suitably senior lead person accountable for complaint handling within WTHP. WTHP will appoint a designated Board Member who will be the Member Responsible for Complaints (MRC)

Policy Objectives

WTHP will:

- Ensure a collaborative and co-operative approach towards resolving complaints, working together across all teams.
- Take collective responsibility for any shortfalls identified through complaints rather than blaming others.
- Act within the Professional Standards for engaging with complaints as set by the Chartered Institute of Housing.

WTHP is committed to providing services that effectively and efficiently meet residents' needs. WTHP will listen to residents' experiences and respond to comments and complaints. Sometimes things do go wrong and when this happens WTHP will work hard to put things right.

WTHP will consider all complaints made about its services from tenants, former tenants, residents, customers and their relatives and neighbours referred to WTHP within 12 months of the issue occurring, or the resident becoming aware of the issue, unless they are excluded on other grounds. Where a decision is made to not accept a complaint, we will provide a clear explanation to the resident and provide information on their right to contact the Ombudsman.

WTHP has a two-stage procedure that provides for clear stages of progression and supports this policy for dealing with complaints. This Policy and Procedure are publicised on the WTHP website and outlined within the tenants' handbook.

WTHP recognises the difference between a complaint and a request for service in line with the definition of the Housing Ombudsman.

WTHP 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.

WTHP defines a request for service as a specific request from a resident requiring action to be taken to put something right. This is not a complaint but will be recorded, monitored, and reviewed.

WTHP will:

- Make it as easy as possible for residents to raise complaints in any way and with any member of staff. Whenever a resident expresses dissatisfaction but does not use the word 'complaint' they will be given the choice to make a formal complaint through the complaints process.
- Enable a fair complaints process.
- Consider our duty under the Equality Act 2010 and will anticipate the needs and reasonable adjustments of residents who may need to access our complaints process.
- Treat all complaints confidentially, respecting privacy and sensitivity.
- Allow any complainant to nominate a representative to deal with their complaint at any stage of the process.
- Try to resolve issues at the earliest stage possible preferably informally as part of usual day to day business.
- Keep complainants informed of progress, even if there is none, and the outcome of any investigation.
- Inform residents and set out the circumstances where complaints cannot be processed as a formal complaint or escalated to the next stage when acceptable exclusions apply. Exclusions include:
 - The issue giving rise to the complaint occurred over 12 months ago
 - Legal proceedings have started
 - The issue has previously been considered under the complaint policy
- Review and follow up all dissatisfaction expressed through surveys and make residents aware of how they can pursue this through the formal complaints process if required.
- Where appropriate offer mediation between WTHP and the complainant, although the complainant is not obliged to take up the offer.
- Provide contact details of the Housing Ombudsman in all formal complaint responses at Stage 1 and Stage 2, on the website and corporate publications.
- Review the request to escalate a complaint to Stage 2, providing that the request is received within 14 days of the formal complaint response being received. If no request is received within 14 days, the complaint will be closed.
- Refer to the appropriate policy where a complainant is exhibiting unreasonable behaviour.

WTHP will undertake with the Residents Scrutiny Panel to review, learn from and improve practices where complaints give rise to gaps in its service that need to be addressed.

WTHP will ensure all complaint handling staff are trained and aware of the complaints policy and of our commitment to excellent service delivery standards.

WTHP will record all complaints, regularly monitor our progress in handling them, and measure our performance. Details of all complaints and compliments received is presented annually to WTHP's Audit and Risk Committee.

Performance on complaints and how complaints have been used to improve services is reported to our Residents Scrutiny Panel, so that they can hold us to account and recommend improvements.

WTHP will carry out an annual self-assessment against the code to ensure our complaints handling remains in line with its requirements.

Response Timescales

Stage 1

- Acknowledgement within 5 working days of receipt.
- Respond in full within 10 working days of acknowledgement.

Stage 2

- Acknowledgement within 5 working days of receipt of request to escalate.
- Respond in full within 20 working days of the complaint being escalated.

Complaints Officer

The Corporate Services Manager is the nominated Complaints Officer who is responsible for tracking complaints and ensuring that a response is given within the published timescales.

Performance Standards

- Publication of an annual complaints' performance and service improvement assessment in accordance with Ombudsman Code requirements.
- Contact a minimum of 10% of all complainants every quarter for feedback on their experience of the complaint process.
- CEO, MRC and Resident Scrutiny Panel to undertake learning sessions on a minimum of 25% of all Stage 2 complaints received.

Reference Documents

- WTHP Compensation Policy
- WTHP Unreasonable Behaviour Policy
- WTHP Complaints Procedure
- WTHP Internal Complaints handling process
- Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code

When setting policy, the Willow Tree Housing Partnership will ensure a golden thread of best practice runs through all aspects of its operations in respect of equality, diversity and inclusion. It will seek to minimise adverse environmental impacts arising as a consequence of its work. This approach and all policies will be reviewed on their anniversary date or as new guidance or legislation is introduced, whichever occurs sooner.

WTHP will apply this policy consistently and fairly and will not discriminate against anyone based on any relevant characteristics, including those set out in the Equality Act 2010.

WTHP will be transparent about our responsibilities around equality and treat everyone fairly and respectfully, regardless of their: age, gender, marital status, sexual orientation, disability, religion, race, nationality, ethnicity, or national origin.

WTHP will make sure our services and workplaces are as inclusive and accessible as possible and take seriously any concerns that we've not acted in a fair way, dealing with them as quickly as we can.