

Abbeyfield Chalfonts Society Ltd
Austenmead, 56 School Lane,
Chalfont St. Peter, SL9 9BB

Complaints Policy

1. Context, aims and scope of this policy

We are committed to providing a high-quality service to residents and others who access our service. We recognise that while most concerns can be resolved quickly and easily, occasionally a formal process is needed. We welcome suggestions and comments from residents, their families and representatives, to help improve the services we provide. Feedback gives us the opportunity to learn about our strengths, understand our weaknesses and is key to ensuring that we consistently meet a high standard of service.

This policy aims to:

- ensure that all complaints are handled promptly, fairly, consistently and confidentially (in line with data protection regulations).
- be clear about who is responsible for complaints at each stage, ensuring that designated individuals are not the subject of the complaint and that, as the complaint is escalated, it is dealt with by a more senior member of the Society. In particular, the Chair will not usually be involved at Stage 1.
- record all complaints and to review how we handled them, in order to drive improvement.
- publish information about complaints handled in our annual report.
- take action to 'put things right' where a complaint identifies that we have failed to deliver a service to the expected standard.

This Policy is intended to cover current and prospective residents and their representatives but, with the exclusions below* also applies to any stakeholder who wishes to make a complaint about our Society. Complaints should be made as soon after the event as possible (or came to the attention of the complainant), and ideally within 12 months.

If the complainant expresses a desired outcome that we believe to be unreasonable, we will explain our position at the outset, while continuing to investigate.

If a complaint is accompanied by inappropriate behaviour, we will seek to manage this behaviour separately in line with the Equality Act 2010.

*The following are excluded from the scope of this policy:

- resident complaints about another resident, for example of bullying or harassment, or
- complaints about a resident from someone outside the Society. These are dealt with in line with our Anti-Social Behaviour Policy.
- Staff complaints, which are dealt with in line with our Disciplinary and Grievance Policy.
- complaints about something for which our Society is not responsible (for example, care a resident receives from an external agency). With permission, we will share such concerns with the relevant organisation, or signpost the complainant to the organisation's complaints procedure.

- complaints already subject to legal proceedings or relating to any issues likely to be dealt with by our insurers.

Where there is doubt about which policy is applicable, the Chair will make a decision.

2. Defining a Complaint

The term complaint is defined here 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'

We recognise that the word complaint does not have to be used in order for it to be treated as such. This policy is intended for residents but also covers an expression of dissatisfaction by any stakeholder affected by the standard of service, actions or lack of action by our Society. Conversely, a request for a service is not in itself a complaint – it is only where the request for service is not dealt with adequately or within a reasonable timescale that it would be become a complaint.

3. Our Complaints Process

Our Society aims to make it easy for residents and stakeholders to make a complaint by offering a choice of channels that can be used and ensuring that the Society's policy is publicised by:

- Displaying information on the complaints process on the noticeboard
- Giving information on the complaints process to residents on admission
- Putting information on the complaints process on the Society website

Where a resident or their representative is dissatisfied with any aspect of the service provided by our Society, the first course of action should be to raise the problem directly with the relevant manager or individual concerned. We will try to resolve the issue informally on the day it is raised, and, in most cases, will be able to do so quickly and satisfactorily.

Where an individual is having difficulty in making a complaint, we will make all reasonable adjustments to assist the complainant in registering the complaint.

At all stages, please provide contact details, details of the complaint and any suggestions you may have for resolving the complaint. Anonymous complaints will be investigated under the same procedure; however, it is better where contact details are provided so that we can inform the complainant of the outcome of our investigation.

Complaints received via social media will receive a generic response and be passed to the Business Manager to be addressed through the standard procedure. Where the complaint is made publicly on social media, confidentiality cannot be protected.



Where the issue raised cannot be resolved informally, a formal complaint can be made using the procedure below.

Stage 1: Investigation

Complaints can be made:

- In person or via a representative to Business Manager at Austenmead
- By email, to Business Manager at admin@austenmead.org.uk
- By telephone to Business Manager at 01753 887267
- By post, address to Business Manager at Austenmead, 56 School Lane, Chalfont St. Peter, SL9 9BB

If the complaint relates to the Business Manager, complainants may contact the Chairman. A form is included with this policy for complaints to use to record their complaint, if desired.

We will log details of the complaint and acknowledge it in writing to the complainant within **5 working days** of receipt.

An investigation will be carried out and a full written response, including any actions planned, will be provided within **10 working days**, which may be extended by a further **10 working days**, where necessary, subject to agreement with the complainant. The complainant will be asked if their complaint is resolved and if they are happy with the way in which it has been dealt.

If the complainant remains dissatisfied, they may escalate the complaint to **stage 2** by notifying the Business Manager (or Chair) (same as above) in person or using the contact details above (if Chair; Chair@austenmead.org.uk).

Stage 2: Review

When a complaint is escalated, the complaint and its Stage 1 investigation will be subject to a full review by the Chair, or another trustee, if the complaint concerns the Chair or s(he) is compromised in the investigation in any way.

We will provide a full written response within **20 working days** from the request to escalate. Where this is not possible, an explanation will be given, and an agreement reached to extend the response period by no more than a further **10 working days**. The complainant will be informed that the response following Stage 2 concludes the Society's internal complaints procedure.



4. After conclusion of our complaints process

The complainant can be referred to the Housing Ombudsman Service, PO Box 152, Liverpool, L33 7WQ (Tel: 0300 1113000, website: www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk).

A complainant is required to wait eight weeks following conclusion of the Society's complaints process before taking the complaint to the Ombudsman directly. They may choose to refer the complaint to a 'Designated Person' (such as their MP or local councillor) during this time to help them resolve the complaint or refer the complaint to the Housing Ombudsman on their behalf.

Our Society will co-operate with the Ombudsman during any investigation and comply fully with the resulting final decision, which will be binding.

5. Putting things right

Where we have failed to deliver a service to the expected standard, we will seek to resolve the complaint and to 'put things right' – this may include an apology, corrective action, including, where appropriate, making a compensation payment. Any significant findings will result in a review and any lessons learned will be recorded.

6. Reporting on Complaints

The Executive Committee will have access to full records of any complaints received at the Society. A self-assessment to review the volume, outcomes, complainant satisfaction and compliance with timeframes will be undertaken on an annual basis. The results of which will be shared with residents and details published in the Annual Report.

Approval date:

Approved by:

