



Blue Square Residential (BSR) Complaints Policy 2024

Aims of the Complaints Policy

- To guarantee that all tenants, applicants for housing, and those who come into contact with BSR services can file complaints about the services provided or not provided through a procedure that is accessible, confidential, and easy to use, ensuring quick action and response.
- To ensure complaints are handled efficiently and fairly, even if the outcomes do not satisfy the complainant.
- To take complaints seriously and use them constructively to enhance the BSR operations.
- To ensure the complaints procedure adheres to the Housing Ombudsman's Complaints Handling Code, referred to as "The Code" in this policy.

Appointed Authority

The BSR's Management Committee has assigned the management of the complaints policy to its Housing Team, which will appoint a Complaints Officer from their staff. The Complaints Officer is tasked with:

- Responding to complainants
- Investigating complaints through discussions with complainants and other involved parties
- Initiating actions as outlined in this complaints policy
- Involving other Housing Team staff in resolving complaints as deemed necessary and appropriate.

The Housing Team will inform the BSR's director of all complaints, or, if the director is absent or has a conflict of interest, another senior member such as CEO. They will then agree on the actions to be taken regarding the complaints. Complaints that require significant actions will generally need Directors and CEO approval. Urgent actions should typically be approved by Director and the Complaints Officer. A Director will be designated to take the lead on complaints, fostering a positive complaint-handling culture and will receive regular updates from the Housing Team on complaints, offering insights into BSR's complaints handling performance.

Welcoming Complaints

- BSR welcomes complaints and encourages anyone using or directly affected by its services to voice their concerns.
- BSR is pleased to receive as many complaints as members wish to make, as this indicates the complaints policy is user-friendly.
- Examples of individuals who may file a complaint include:
 - Tenants and ex-tenants
 - Applicants for housing
 - Partnership organisations and agencies
 - Contractors or consultants
 - Neighbours to BSR properties
 - Other members of the public

What is a Complaint?

- A complaint is any expression of dissatisfaction, regardless of how it is communicated, about the quality of service, actions, or inactions by BSR, its staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting a tenant or group of tenants.
- A complaint can be about something BSR should or should not have done, did poorly, or did not do according to its policies. It can also be about a complainant feeling unfairly treated or discriminated against in service provision.
- A tenant does not need to use the word “complaint” for it to be treated as such. Whenever a tenant expresses dissatisfaction, BSR will offer them the option to file a complaint.
- A service request is a request from a member to BSR to take action to correct something. Service requests are not complaints, but BSR will record and monitor their progress.
- A complaint will be raised if a tenant is dissatisfied with the response to their service request, even if the service request is still being handled. BSR will continue to address the service request if the tenant complains.
- If a tenant expresses dissatisfaction through a survey, it will not be treated as a complaint, but the tenant will be informed of how to pursue a complaint if they wish. When BSR asks for feedback on its services, it will provide information on how to make a complaint.
- BSR will accept and act on complaints unless there is a valid reason not to. If BSR refuses to accept a complaint, it will explain the reasons to the complainant and advise them that they can take the decision to the Ombudsman. If the Ombudsman disagrees with the exclusion, BSR will comply with the Ombudsman’s requirement to accept the complaint.
- The following matters are usually not considered through BSR’s complaints procedure (although BSR may choose to accept complaints about these matters):
 - Issues related to ongoing legal proceedings where a Claim Form or Particulars of Claim have been filed at court

- Complaints about incidents more than twelve months old unless there are valid reasons for delay.
- Matters previously considered under the Complaints Policy.
- Governance issues that need to be addressed through BSR's Code of Conduct.

BSR does not have a fixed method for handling each complaint. Each complaint will be considered on its merits. Those handling complaints must act independently and with an open mind, giving complainants a fair chance to present their case. They must carefully consider all relevant information and evidence and any conflicts of interest.

Receiving Complaints

BSR aims to make it easy for tenants to file complaints. Complaints can be submitted:

- In person at the office
- By phone at the office
- By letter addressed to BSR's Registered Office
- By email to the Housing Team
- Through the form on BSR website

Any staff member can receive a complaint. Whoever receives a complaint must ensure a complaints form is completed detailing the issue. BSR will maintain confidentiality in handling complaints, and any reports to the Director will be made anonymously. If a tenant raises a complaint with any of the senior Management Team, they will encourage the tenant to use one of the above methods to file the complaint. Additionally, they will inform the Complaints Officer, who will offer the tenant the opportunity to make a complaint.

BSR will comply with the Equality Act 2010 and adapt its policies, procedures, and processes to accommodate individual tenants' needs when making a complaint. Records of any necessary reasonable adjustments will be kept and regularly reviewed. Every effort will be made to resolve complaints promptly. Actions to address complaints will be carried out as quickly as possible and will not be delayed while the complaint is being resolved. The focus will be on correcting any service failures and ensuring the problem is resolved.

Complaints Officer

- When selecting the Complaints Officer, BSR ensures they are competent, empathetic, and efficient. They must be able to act sensitively and fairly, handle complaints from distressed and upset tenants, and have access to staff at all levels to facilitate quick resolution of complaints.
- Whenever possible, the Complaints Officer has the authority to make decisions to resolve complaints (with the agreement of the Director or CEO if Director is unavailable or has a conflict of interest). However, some complaints may be complex and involve issues not covered by BSR policies, requiring Director's consideration.
- The Complaints Officer is responsible for acknowledging receipt of complaints, conducting investigations, and maintaining communication with the complainant throughout the process

and regarding outcomes. They are also responsible for ensuring complaints are reported anonymously to Director.

Stage 1 – Formal Complaint

The Complaints Officer will ensure that:

- The complaint is acknowledged in writing within 5 working days of receipt.
- An investigation is conducted, including interviews with the complainant and other relevant parties, and a formal written response regarding the investigation's outcomes is provided within 10 working days of acknowledging the complaint.

If it is not possible to meet these timescales due to the complexity of the complaint, the Complaints Officer will inform the complainant in writing that the investigation will take longer than the target times (and will provide contact details for the Housing Ombudsman). Any extension should not exceed an additional 10 working days.

The Complaints Officer will also ensure that BSR retains records (in accordance with General Data Protection Regulations) regarding complaints and their follow-up, and that outcomes are successfully implemented.

If a new issue arises during the investigation of a complaint, it will be considered alongside the existing complaint if related. If unrelated, it will be treated as a new complaint.

At the end of Stage 1 of a formal complaint, the Complaints Officer will ensure that BSR writes to the complainant in plain language, detailing:

- The current stage of the complaint
- A definition of the complaint
- BSR's decision regarding the complaint
- The reasons for the decisions made
- Any remedies offered to resolve the issue
- Details of outstanding actions
- Information on how to escalate the matter to Stage 2 if the complainant is not satisfied with the response.

Stage 2 – Review of the Complaint and BSR Final Response

- If the complainant is dissatisfied with any part of the outcome, they may request a review. This request will be acknowledged in writing within 5 working days.
- BSR will form an independent review panel consisting of two senior people (Director and CEO), both of whom will be sufficiently independent of the complaint and the Complaints Officer. Both the complainant and the Complaints Officer will have reasonable opportunities to present their points of view to the Review Panel.

- The Review Panel will make reasonable efforts to understand why the tenant remains unhappy and will provide a final response within 20 working days of acknowledging the complaint, with feedback to the complainant.
- If it is not possible to meet these timescales, the Review Panel will inform the complainant in writing (including contact details for the Housing Ombudsman) that the investigation will take longer than the target times. Any extension will not exceed an additional 20 working days.
- At the end of Stage 2 of a formal complaint, the Complaints Officer will ensure that BSR writes to the complainant in plain language, detailing:
 - The current stage of the complaint
 - A definition of the complaint
 - The Review Panel's decision regarding the complaint
 - The reasons for the decisions made
 - Any remedies offered to resolve the issue
 - Details of outstanding actions
 - Information on how to escalate the matter to the Housing Ombudsman if the complainant is not satisfied with the response.
- Sending written communication to the complainant constitutes BSR's final response.

Making Amends and Putting Things Right

- When something goes wrong, BSR will acknowledge the issue and outline the actions already taken and what will be done to correct it. Actions BSR may take include:
 1. Apologising
 2. Recognising where things went wrong
 3. Providing an explanation for the issue
 4. Taking action if there was a delay
 5. Reconsidering or changing a decision
 6. Amending a record or adding a correction
 7. Providing compensation (usually following the Ombudsman's guidance)
 8. Revising policies and procedures
- In correcting issues, BSR will consider the impact on its tenants.
- BSR will outline in writing what actions will be taken and by when, in agreement with the tenant where appropriate. BSR will ensure that any agreed actions are completed by the specified date.
- BSR will consider guidance from the Ombudsman when deciding on appropriate remedies.

Communicating with Tenants about Our Complaints Policy

The Complaints Policy will be accessible and downloadable from BSR's website including an easy read version. BSR will provide a copy of the Complaints Policy to tenants upon request, either as a paper copy or via email. The Complaints Policy will also be promoted through Welcome Pack, posters, easy read leaflets and notice boards.

BSR will include contact information for the Housing Ombudsman Service in regular correspondence with tenants. Tenants can access the Housing Ombudsman Service at any time and may receive assistance from the Ombudsman during the complaint process.

BSR will cooperate with the Ombudsman's requests for evidence, providing it within 3 weeks or 15 working days. If a response cannot be provided within this timeframe, BSR will explain the delay to the Ombudsman. If the explanation is reasonable, the Ombudsman will agree on a revised date with BSR.

Expectation of mutual respect

BSR expects all complaints to be handled with mutual respect and reasonable behaviour.

BSR considers all harassment, verbal abuse, aggression and violence to be unacceptable behaviour. This will not be tolerated and will be handled according to BSR's "Managing Unacceptable Behaviour from Complainants" Policy.

Annual Review of Complaints Performance

BSR will produce an annual report on complaints performance and service improvements for review and scrutiny. This report will include:

1. The annual self-assessment against the Code to ensure compliance with its requirements.
2. A qualitative and quantitative analysis of BSR's complaint handling performance, including a summary of the types of complaints that were not accepted.
3. Any findings of non-compliance with the Code by the Ombudsman.
4. Service improvements made based on lessons learned from complaints.
5. Any annual report on BSR's performance from the Ombudsman.
6. Any other relevant reports or publications from the Ombudsman related to BSR.

The Complaints and Service Improvements report will be published on BSR's website at the end of each year.

The board will receive:

1. Regular updates on the volume, categories, and outcomes of complaints, as well as complaint handling performance.
2. Regular reviews of issues and trends arising from complaint handling.
3. Regular updates on the outcomes of any Ombudsman investigations and progress in complying with orders related to severe maladministration findings.
4. The annual complaints performance and service improvement report.