



MANCHESTER CITY COUNCIL

Manchester City Council Housing Services Complaints and Compliments policy

Date effective: 1st April 2024

Prepared by: Resident Experience Team	EIA Required? Y
Date effective from: 1 st April 2024	EIA Completed? Y
Policy approved by: Housing Advisory Board	Revision number: 1.1
Review date: 31 st March 2027	Lead officer: Head of Resident Experience

Introduction

The purpose of this policy is to ensure all Manchester City Council Housing Services Residents (or their authorised representatives) can raise a complaint and be confident that this will be investigated and responded to in a timely manner.

This policy sets out the processes we will follow and gives clear guidance about how we will deal with and respond to your complaint. It also sets out how we will respond to other requests which are not complaints, such as service requests and requests for information.

Manchester City Council believes complaints are a valuable source of feedback, and we are committed to using them as a way of understanding what our residents really feel about the homes and services we provide. We commit to use this learning to improve your resident experience, and residents will be involved in effecting change.

Compliments & Feedback

Positive comments (compliments) are valuable feedback and learning opportunities. Compliments will be recorded and the details, where appropriate, will be publicised to promote a positive culture and to provide assurance that services are meeting residents needs. This helps to reinforce positive behaviour and compliance with the organisation's service standards.

Although we recognise the valuable contribution made by colleagues, this is not always recognised by way of a written compliment. Managers will therefore make time to recognise good work, especially if feedback is received directly from a resident; encouraging the resident to submit a written compliment if appropriate to do so.

All compliments will be logged on to our in-house CRM system (QL) and acknowledged with the resident being thanked for taking the time to contact us.

What is a complaint?

In relation to this policy, we have adopted the definition of a complaint as provided by the Housing Ombudsman:

'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'

As per the definition above, a resident does not need to use the word 'complaint' for it to be treated as such.

What is a request for service?

A request for service is defined as a resident requesting for something to be put right. An example would include a resident asking for their heating to be fixed or reporting anti-social behaviour.

Reporting a fault or problem for the 1st time may not always be deemed a complaint. It is however important to note that if there is failure in service, or a failure to address the request for service, this may result in the original enquiry becoming a formal complaint.

All service requests will be logged on our in-house CRM system (QL) and monitored as part of our performance management approach. This will include monitoring the percentage of service requests which become complaints.

Every effort will be made to resolve service requests at the earliest opportunity, to prevent the need for a resident to have to make a formal complaint. However, all residents will be given the opportunity to raise a formal complaint, as Manchester City Council welcomes the opportunity to learn, if a resident is dissatisfied with the service they have received.

Logging High-risk building complaints

High risk buildings are defined as any buildings which are at least 18 metres in height or has at least 7 floors and contains at least two residential units. Manchester City Council will investigate all complaints in relation to high-risk building safety (even where there is a third-party managing agent).

It is expected these complaints may arise from high-risk building issues, or be related to our performance in relation to our duties and responsibilities under the Building Safety Act 2022.

All complaints relating to building safety issues will be investigated by the dedicated Building Safety Manager who has been delegated by the principle accountable person (PAP). These complaints will follow the two-stage process set out in this policy, to allow the complainant to make representations where they don't agree with the initial findings.

The timescales for processing and responding to complaints are set out within this policy, however we will ensure that building safety complaints are handled in a timely manner considering the particulars of the complaint.

The Building Safety Regulator can investigate the following complaints:

- Issues in a high-rise residential building that could lead to fire spreading
- Issues in a high-rise residential building that could lead to part or all of the building collapsing.
- Issues with fire safety or structural integrity in a high-rise residential building that is being designed, built or renovated.
- People and organisations they regulate, for example building inspectors and people accountable for safety in a building.

Any complaints that relate to building safety issues can be escalated to the Building Safety Regulator by telephone 0300 790 6787 or by completing an on-line form <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/contact-the-building-safety-regulator>

General information on the building safety regulator can be found at www.hse.gov.uk/building-safety/regulator.htm

How to make a formal complaint

We have designed our complaints process to be as easy and accessible as possible, so that residents can make a complaint in a way that suits them best.

Resident or their representatives can complain to us by:

- Completing a web form on our [Website](#)
- By emailing us at mcchscontact@manchester.gov.uk
- Telephoning our Customer Service Centre on 03000 123 123 (open 08:30-16:30 Monday to Friday)

- Visiting us in person – Whitemoss Road Housing office is open Mon, Tues, Weds, Fri – 9am–4pm and Cheetham Hill Housing office is open Thursday's between 9am-4pm
- In writing - posting a letter to your local MCC Neighbourhood Office
- Complaints can be raised verbally with any staff member working on behalf of Manchester City Council, including our contractors
- Complaints can be raised by board members or elected members, and they will be dealt with in accordance with this policy

If a resident is struggling to make their complaint and would like some help to do so, we can offer extra support and guidance. We will also make other reasonable adjustments to enable a customer to fully access the complaints process in consideration of their needs. We urge residents to contact us using the methods outlined above to discuss any support needs or reasonable adjustment requirements they may have with us.

By way of an example, some of the ways we can assist a resident to make a complaint are:

- offering home visits: especially for elderly, disabled or vulnerable residents
- engaging with support or care workers, especially when attempting to meet with residents or arranging home visits
- offering the services of the translation and interpretation services as per MCC policy, including the use of a BSL signer
- offering a choice of male or female investigating officer where this is practicable, and the circumstances warrant it

What we will investigate

We will investigate any complaint where it is alleged that MCC Housing Services is:

- Failing to fulfil its responsibilities as a landlord
- Failing to achieve the standards of service it commits to provide its residents
- Failing to take into account matters that ought to have been considered when coming to, or implementing, a decision
- Failing to communicate effectively, causing detriment to the resident
- Acting unfairly or with bias towards the resident
- Not listening or acting upon residents views sufficiently
- Acting in a manner that could be deemed unsafe and present risks to residents
- Employing a sub-contractor to carry out work which is not meeting the residents expectations

MCC Housing Services works closely with its partnering contractors to monitor performance and make improvements. When a complaint is received involving their performance, we will work together to produce a response so that all parties agree and learn lessons from the complaint.

Anonymous Complaints

We will investigate and respond to all complaints, even if the source of the complaint is unknown, or wishes to remain anonymous. Complaints are an opportunity to identify possible areas for service improvement, so should be investigated unless they fall outside the scope of this policy.

Anonymous complaints should be dealt with in the same way as other complaints, in line with the guidance contained in this policy. The details of the complaint should be logged with the Resident Experience Team, along with any response(s) sent.

Exclusions

The following requests would not normally be considered under the Complaints Policy. This is not designed to be an exhaustive list, but to provide guidance:

- Any claim for damages or personal injury, which should be dealt with as an insurance claim
- Any report regarding neighbour nuisance or disputes between neighbours or other anti-social behaviour, which is managed in line with Manchester City Council's Anti-Social Behaviour Policy (unless the complaint refers to Manchester City Council's failure to deal with the matter appropriately in accordance with that policy)
- Complaints which relate directly to the subject of a Housing Conditions Claim (often referred to as Disrepair), where the action has progressed **beyond** the pre-action protocol stage and is now the subject of legal proceedings. That said, MCC Housing Services will do everything possible to resolve the repair issue in a timely manner and will work collaboratively with the resident and their legal representative to deal with the matter under MCC Housing Services Disrepair Procedure.
- We will not open a new complaint for an issue that has been responded to fully under our Complaints Policy, unless new and relevant information is provided within 12 months, which may have materially changed the findings and outcome of the complaint investigation. The only time a complaint would be re-opened without new information is if the case involves any safeguarding issues, or was linked to a serious health and safety risk which could have worsened
- Matters relating solely to services or decisions outside Manchester' City Council's control
- Appeals against tenancy enforcement action (unless the complaint relates to processes not being followed correctly)
- Where the issue that is the subject of the complaint took place more than twelve months ago (however we will apply discretion to this where there are good reasons for the delay in raising the complaint).

If we do not accept a complaint, we will provide a detailed explanation why the matter isn't being considered as part of the complaints policy. Residents will have the right to refer the matter to the [Housing Ombudsman](#) for their consideration, if they do not agree with our decision.

Although not excluded, complaints about the wider performance of Manchester City Council will be dealt with under the relevant Complaints policy. As there are various services provided, specific areas will adopt their own policies to ensure that they meet the needs of residents, service users and members of the public.

Where complaints are received by Housing Services, and they relate to other services of Manchester City Council or a third party not instructed by Housing Services, we will actively assist the resident and direct them to the relevant person who can deal with their complaint.

Managing unacceptable behaviour

We believe that our Residents have a right to be heard, understood and respected, and we work hard to be open and accessible to everyone.

Occasionally, the behaviour or actions of a resident, or their advocate, can make it difficult for us to deal with their complaint. In a small number of cases the actions of individuals become unacceptable, because they involve abuse of staff and/or our processes.

When this happens, we must take action to protect the health and wellbeing of our staff, who have a right to do their jobs without fear of being abused or harassed. We also consider the impact of the behaviour on our ability to provide services to other residents.

Some examples of unacceptable behaviour may include:

- Unreasonable demands (e.g. requesting large volumes of information, asking for responses within a short space of time, refusing to speak to an individual or insisting on speaking with another)
- Unreasonable persistence (e.g. refusing to accept the answer that has been provided, continuing to raise the same subject matter without providing any new evidence, continuously adding to or changing the subject matter of the complaint)
- Any acts of abuse, aggression, violence or discriminatory behaviour (this is not just limited to actual physical or verbal abuse, but may include written abuse either online or in written correspondence)
- Overload of letters, calls, emails or contact via social media (this could include the frequency of contact, as well as the volume of correspondence received. It may also relate to the frequency and/or length of telephone calls or face-to-face visits, which could prohibit a member of staff being able to help other residents).
- Malicious / Vexatious complaints which have been addressed previously, but continue to be made without any reasonable basis

Actions we may take

When we experience behaviour or demands which are unacceptable, we may consider taking more formal action. The actions we will consider can include the following:

- Warning the resident about their behaviour and requesting that they modify their behaviour in future contact with us.
- Appointing a specific point of contact for the resident
- Communicating only in writing or via a representative
- Deciding not to investigate a complaint on the basis that it has been pursued in a way that is unacceptable.
- Restricting or limiting contact a resident can make
- In exceptional circumstances, notify relevant public authorities

Where it is decided that formal action must be taken to manage someone's behaviour (for example, declining to investigate a complaint), we will inform them of this decision in writing, and a record of this will be placed on the tenancy file.

Our commitment to residents when handling their complaint

Competence of staff

We will make sure that officers responsible for handling complaints receive appropriate training to deal with these effectively, and compliantly with this policy, and that they are empowered to address and resolve complaints appropriately – with an emphasis on early resolution.

A positive complaint handling culture

Complaints are treated as a valuable source of feedback and will be used to make sure lessons are learned from mistakes or omissions. We will provide an explanation when something goes wrong and offer an apology if appropriate. Where necessary, further remedies will be offered in line with MCC Housing Services Compensation Policy.

The numbers and type of complaints are publicised on our website, and we monitor trends in complaints to make sure overall performance, including the work that our contractors and sub-contractor's carry out, continually improves, ensuring a 'right first time' approach.

All complaints will be considered in a fair and impartial manner. Managers have a responsibility to seek advice, if needed, before responding to a complaint and if appropriate will consider asking a colleague, not directly responsible for the service area that is being complained about, or at a different work location, to investigate a complaint. This could be particularly helpful if impartiality or bias is being alleged, or if the complaint were about the person who would normally respond to the complaint.

The person responding to the complaint will be responsive, approachable and helpful at all stages of the process, making time to contact the complainant personally by telephone or face to face to discuss their concerns prior to, or as part of their investigation.

Personal Contact with the Complainant

Residents have told us that they appreciate a personal contact when making a complaint. Therefore, the expectation is that the officer investigating the complaint will speak to the complainant, either face to face or by telephone - unless expressly asked not to by the complainant.

Exceptions to this would be where such contact would be inappropriate for health and safety, legal or operational reasons; or, in the case of independent review where the case is no longer being dealt with by us as an organisation.

The initial contact should be used to clarify the complaint, and if appropriate this contact can be used to progress the investigation, for example if it is necessary to organise to visit the resident at home to carry out an inspection.

All contacts must be recorded on the central in-house complaints system (QL) and this includes where unsuccessful attempts have been made to contact the complainant.

The Resident Experience team act as the main point of contact for residents, should they need to contact MCC Housing Services about their complaint.

Accessibility, Respect and Support

MCC Housing Services recognises that it can be a daunting experience for some residents to pursue a complaint, especially if they are worried about how it will be received, or if they feel anxious about the potential outcome. We will approach complaints in a positive and proactive manner, communicating empathy and concern to the complainant. We will treat complainants with respect, considering residents' individual communication needs.

We will consider where possible the capacity of the resident to understand the process and / or the outcome of the investigation; and if necessary, seek additional support for the resident to support communication e.g. working in partnership with interpreters, carers or other agencies.

If we are signposting the complaint to a different department, we will do this by liaising with the relevant department within Manchester City Council or the third party and inform the

resident of the action that we have taken to assist them. In the case of dealing with a particularly vulnerable resident we will take steps to ensure that they are provided with appropriate assistance throughout the process, to make sure their complaint is owned and responded to by the correct department.

The right to escalate your complaint

Whilst every effort is made to resolve complaints at the earliest opportunity, to the resident's satisfaction, we recognise it isn't always possible to reach a mutual agreement. All correspondence with residents will clearly set out their right to escalate their complaint, and details of the appropriate ombudsman will be provided.

In most instances this is the Housing Ombudsman Service, who will conduct its own investigation, if a resident's complaint is eligible under their criteria.

We aim to ensure that resident satisfaction with the complaints process is high, even where a complaint is not upheld.

Quality monitoring and Learning from Complaints

The quality of our complaints handling is an important focus for MCC. As such, a sample of complaints are monitored regularly by residents, our Senior Leadership Team and the Member Responsible for Complaints (MRC)¹. Findings from these reviews are collated and reported to the Housing Advisory Board at least annually.

Relevant service area managers must provide evidence that lessons have been learned and, if necessary, training needs identified. Where service improvement(s) are identified, these must be embedded and reported to Senior Leadership Team.

Guiding Principles

- All complaints will be taken seriously and acted upon regardless of perceived severity.
- We will accept complaints from advocates acting on behalf of residents providing we have received evidence that they are authorised to act on the resident behalf.
- It is not necessary for complaints to be made in writing, although the person listening to the complaint may choose to keep a written record of the complaint in addition to recording this on the central logging system (QL).
- All formal Stage 1 and 2 complaint responses we issue will be made in writing, which could include via email. We will use plain language and avoid the use of technical jargon wherever possible.
- Responses will be concise and clear and adhere to the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code.
- Where it is determined that a complaint includes different and distinct elements, which need to be investigated by multiple officers, this should be clearly communicated to the resident in the acknowledgement letter with details of who the complaint has been assigned to (this person will be known as the Lead Officer).
- At all stages the resident should be kept up to date, and where an extension is required, this must be agreed with the complainant before being actioned.
- Where a complaint involves complex issues which need further explanation or discussion, we will talk directly to the complainant. If required, we will discuss the

¹ This is a [position](#) required under the Statutory Complaint Handling Code 2024

outcome of the investigation with the resident, prior to sending them a written response which may be of a technical nature.

The Complaints process and timescales

Stage 1 Complaints

Stage 1 constitutes a formal investigation, and the complaint will be assigned to the appropriate officer, manager or team to investigate.

Residents can expect that their complaint will be;

- Acknowledged within 5 working days of the complaint being received
- A written response will be provided within 10 working days from the date the complaint is acknowledged

In complex cases it may not be possible to respond within these timescales. Should that happen, the resident will be contacted by telephone to explain the reason for the delay, and to ask for agreement to extend the deadline. Any extension agreed will be **no more than 10 working days**. Extensions must be confirmed in writing and the details of the Housing Ombudsman should be provided to the resident.

A complaint response must be provided to the resident **when the answer to the complaint is known, not when the outstanding actions required to address the issue are completed**.

Outstanding actions must still be tracked and actioned promptly, with appropriate updates provided to the resident.

The investigating officer must address all points raised in the complaint definition and provide clear reasons for any decisions, referencing the relevant policy, law and good practice where appropriate.

Where a resident raises additional complaints during the investigation, these must be incorporated into the stage 1 response if they are related, and the stage 1 response has not been issued.

Where the stage 1 response has been issued, the new issues are unrelated to the issues already being investigated or it would unreasonably delay the response, the new issues must be logged as a new complaint. It is possible for a resident to have more than one complaint open, if required.

The Stage 1 response letter **must** confirm the following, in writing, to the resident at the completion of stage 1 in clear, plain language:

- the complaint stage
- the complaint definition
- the decision on the complaint (e.g. upheld, partially upheld, not upheld)
- the reasons for any decisions made
- the details of any remedy offered to put things right
- details of any outstanding actions
- details of how to escalate the matter to stage 2 if the individual is not satisfied with the response

To assist in meeting the requirements of the Housing Ombudsman, officers should use template responses as provided by the Resident Experience Team, to ensure none of these requirements are missed.

Stage 2 Complaints

If all or part of the complaint is not resolved to the resident's satisfaction at stage 1, they can request it be progressed to stage 2. Stage 2 is the final stage and any response issued will be MCC Housing Services final response.

Residents can expect that their stage 2 complaint will be;

- Acknowledged within 5 working days of the complaint being received
- Investigated by someone different to the stage 1 complaint
- A written response will be provided within 20 working days from the date the complaint is acknowledged

In complex cases it may not be possible to respond within these timescales. Should that happen, the resident will be contacted by telephone to explain the reason for the delay, and to ask for agreement to extend the deadline. Any extension agreed will be **no more than 20 working days**. Extensions must be confirmed in writing and the details of the Housing Ombudsman should be provided to the resident.

A complaint response must be provided to the resident **when the answer to the complaint is known, not when the outstanding actions required to address the issue are completed**.

Outstanding actions must still be tracked and actioned promptly with appropriate updates provided to the resident.

The investigating officer must address all points raised in the complaint definition and provide clear reasons for any decisions, referencing the relevant policy, law and good practice where appropriate.

The Stage 2 response letter must confirm the following, in writing, to the resident at the completion of stage 1 in clear, plain language:

- the complaint stage
- the complaint definition
- the decision on the complaint (e.g. upheld, partially upheld, not upheld)
- the reasons for any decisions made
- the details of any remedy offered to put things right
- details of any outstanding actions
- details of how to escalate the matter to the Housing Ombudsman service, if the individual is not satisfied with the response

To assist in meeting the requirements of the Housing Ombudsman, officers should use template responses as provided by the Resident Experience Team, to ensure none of these requirements are missed.

Decisions

The investigating officer in any complaint will decide whether a complaint is 'upheld', 'partially upheld', or 'not upheld', and this will be set out in the response.

Where an officer finds evidence of service failure on the part of MCC Housing Services, they will uphold (or partially uphold, for the relevant part) the complaint. This acknowledges to the complainant that MCC Housing Services has accepted they have failed, and they will set out in their response the steps/actions they will take to remedy this.

Where a complaint is not upheld, the reasons will be clearly explained in the response. A complaint will not be upheld where there is no evidence of service failure found, or there are mitigating circumstances which need to be considered.

MCC Housing Services will report its performance to residents in respect of complaints upheld and not upheld, to ensure transparency and allow for scrutiny. This is also something the Member Responsible for Complaints (MRC) will oversee and scrutinise, to ensure accuracy in decision making.

Independent Review by the Housing Ombudsman

If a Resident remains unhappy with the final response or the way their complaint has been handled, they can go directly to the Housing Ombudsman Service. The responding individual will always provide contact details for the Housing Ombudsman in any responses sent.

The Housing Ombudsman is a free, independent and impartial service and can be contacted via:

Website: [Home - Housing Ombudsman \(housing-ombudsman.org.uk\)](http://housing-ombudsman.org.uk)

Tel: 0300 111 3000

Email: info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk

Address: Housing Ombudsman Service, PO Box 152, Liverpool, L33 7WQ

Remedies and Compensation

When a complaint has been investigated and a service failure identified, the officer responsible for the complaint must determine what the most appropriate remedy is. In some cases this may include offering one, a combination of, the following remedies.

- Organising for work to be completed to the home / neighbourhood
- Putting right any damage caused by MCC Housing Services nominated contractors
- Providing additional services, beyond our agreed service standards
- Making a goodwill gesture to the resident
- Offering a contribution towards decorating costs
- Offering financial compensation (in line with MCC Housing Services Compensation Policy)

MCC Housing Services ensures it follows the good practice and guidance set out in the Housing Ombudsman's Remedies Policy and Complaint Handling Code.

Ownership, Monitoring and Review

The Complaints and Compliments Procedure is owned by the Resident Experience Team.

This procedure will be reviewed every three years, or in response to service demands, regulation changes or resident feedback.