

Zen Housing Ltd: Complaints Policy

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1 | Introduction

- 1.1. At Zen Housing Limited (“**Zen**”) we are committed to high standards of customer service. However, there may be occasions when we do not meet those high standards which we set for ourselves. We welcome feedback and we also take any form of complaint seriously. We will try wherever possible to resolve a complaint to the customer’s satisfaction.
- 1.2. This policy explains how residents can make a complaint if they are not satisfied with our services.
- 1.3. This policy has been developed in line with the Complaint Handling Code (“**CHC**”) published by the Housing Ombudsman Service (“**HOS**”) published in 2020 and updated in 2022 and 2024.

2 | Scope

- 2.1. This policy applies to all residents of Zen and to any managing agents or sub-contractors working with or on behalf of Zen.
- 2.2. A resident does not have to use the word complaint for it to be recognised as a complaint and for the policy to be applied.

3 | Definitions

- 3.1. Complaint: we use the Housing Ombudsman definition and define 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.

- 3.2. Complainant: any customer who makes a 'complaint' about Zen or associated representatives.
- 3.3. Service Request: These are first time requests from a resident to the landlord requiring action to put something right. This includes a first-time request for service, a complaint about anti-social behaviour or a request for information or explanation. These are not complaints but will be recorded, monitored and reviewed.
- 3.4. Member Responsible for Complaints: Member of the governing body who is nominated to have lead responsibility for complaints.
- 3.5. Housing Ombudsman Service – an independent and impartial service provided to all residents of registered providers of social housing which can assist residents throughout the life of a complaint and be used if complaints should be escalated

4 | Exclusions

- 4.1. We will not consider a matter a complaint if:
 - The issue giving rise to the complaint occurred over twelve months before the complaint was lodged. Where the problem is a recurring issue, Zen will consider any older reports as part of the background to the complaint if this helps to resolve the issue for the resident.
 - Where legal proceedings have been started, we will take steps to keep the complainant informed (e.g. by letter) but will not consider a new complaint.
 - Where matters have already been dealt with as part of the policy.
- 4.2. Where a complaint is refused or not considered as a complaint or escalated, the reason will be explained to the resident and details of the Housing Ombudsman Service provided. Each complaint will be considered on its own merits.

5 | Accessibility and Awareness

- 5.1. Zen allows complaints to be made via e-mail, by phone, in person or via a representative.
- 5.2. Zen does not currently operate social media channels or accept complaints through social media. This may be reviewed in the future.
- 5.3. Zen complies with the Equality Act 2010 and has processes in place to accommodate an individual's needs and will make reasonable adjustments regarding access to an appropriate channel raising a complaint. The Zen website will include information on how to raise a complaint. This complaints policy and process shall be easily found and downloadable.

- 5.4. A complaint may be submitted to any member of Zen's staff or managing agents, who will forward the details to the complaints officer.

6 | Complaints Officer

- 6.1. Zen has a dedicated "Complaints Officer", whose role may or may not be dedicated to complaints handling. The Complaints Officer will:
- Act sensitively and fairly
 - Be trained to receive complaints and deal with distressed and upset residents
 - Have access to staff at all levels to facilitate quick resolution of complaints
 - Have the authority and autonomy to act to resolve disputes quickly and fairly.
 - Ensure a full record is kept of all complaints including correspondence and supporting documentation
- 6.2. Zen's appointed Complaints Officer is [Sergey Pichugin].

7 | Formal Complaints

- 7.1. Zen has a two stage formal complaints process as required by the CHC. Handling of complaints in this process will be compliant with the requirements of the CHC.

8 | Behaviour

- 8.1. Zen will ensure that all residents are dealt with fairly, appropriately and professionally including when making a complaint. However, on occasions residents may demonstrate behaviour that is considered unreasonable as it could include harassment, or the complaint being malicious or vexatious. This includes, but not limited to, threats to staff, repeatedly raising the same complaint, excessive requests for information, malicious, exaggerated or unfounded complaints against staff or other residents.
- 8.2. Such cases will be assessed by a senior staff member who, if they agree that the behaviour is unreasonable, may take proportionate actions or apply restrictions, having regard to the Equality Act 2010. This can include, but is not limited to:
- Restricted contact including being required to communicate only in writing
 - Having to use a single point of contact
 - Reduced contact

- Legal action being taken.
- Restrictions will be applied for the minimum period required and will be reviewed at least one per annum, so they are not applied longer than is necessary.

9 | Compensation

- 9.1. Where it is acknowledged that we have not met the high standards of customer service we aim to, we will look to deal with the complaint and offer appropriate redress to the resident.
- 9.2 Any compensation or redress offered will be in line with the HOS guidance and will be fair and proportionate, taking into account the individual's circumstances.
- 9.3 The aim is to restore the resident to the position they would have been in had the service failure not occurred.
- 9.4 Compensation may include financial recompense and/or other actions or gestures of goodwill.

10 | Complaints Procedure

10.1. General Overview

10.1.1. Zen Housing operates a two-stage approach to handling complaints, ensuring detailed documentation throughout the process. Should there be any deviation from standard timelines, we will inform the complainant of the reasons.

10.2. Early local resolution of issues

10.2.1. Upon receipt of a complaint, our objective is to address it swiftly, aiming for immediate resolution or otherwise within 5 working days. If resolution is not immediate, or if the initial outcome is not satisfactory to you, we will advance the issue through the designated stages. Zen Housing is committed to understanding the specific situations and adjusting its approach on a case-by-case basis.

10.3. Communication and Outcomes

10.3.1. Throughout the investigation, Zen will maintain clear and consistent communication, ensuring that responses address customer concerns comprehensively and offer appropriate solutions. At each stage's conclusion, Zen will clarify the status of the complaint—whether it is upheld, partially upheld, or not upheld—and provide detailed explanations for each determination:

10.3.2. **Upheld:** Acknowledgement of lapses in service or errors in procedures.

10.3.3. **Partially Upheld:** Recognition of valid aspects of the complaint with some issues confirmed, while others are not substantiated.

10.3.4. **Not Upheld:** Disagreement with the grounds of the complaint, with no errors identified.

10.4. Stage One (Initial Complaint)

10.4.1. **Complaint Lodging:** Complaints should initially be directed to the designated property manager via email, phone, or website/customer portal. Alternatively, complaints can be lodged directly with Zen Housing through email or via the website.

10.4.2. **Complaint Logging:** The designated property manager or Zen Housing directly will log the complaint and may contact the customer to understand the complaint better and discuss desired outcomes.

10.4.3. **Acknowledgement:** Formal complaints are acknowledged within 5 working days, with confirmation of the aspects being investigated.

10.5. Resolution Process

10.5.1. **Written Response:** A written response will be issued within 10 working days from the acknowledgment, outlining the understanding of the complaint and the intended resolution, or explaining why immediate resolution is unfeasible, with an estimated timeframe for decision-making provided.

10.6. Stage Two (Complaint Review)

- 10.6.1. **Escalation:** Should the Stage One resolution be unsatisfactory, the customer may escalate the complaint within 4 weeks of the initial response. Late requests may be declined, with reasons provided in writing along with details of your right to appeal to the Housing Ombudsman.
- 10.6.2. **Acknowledgement of Escalation:** Escalation requests are acknowledged within 5 working days, requiring no further explanation from the customer.
- 10.6.3. **Review Process:** The escalated complaint and all relevant correspondence are thoroughly reviewed, and a written response is provided within 20 working days of the escalation acknowledgment.
- 10.6.4. If the complaint is escalated to the appeal panel, the customer or those acting on their behalf will be given the opportunity to provide additional written information to the panel.
- 10.6.5. The appeal panel will consist of an independent board member, and a senior staff member acting on behalf of Zen who were not involved previously with the case. The appeal panel will review the case and provide a written response to the resident within 20 working days. This is the final stage of Zen's complaints process.

10.7. Extended Response Time

- 10.7.1. In exceptional cases, with just cause, Zen may extend the response time by up to 10 days at Stage 1 and 20 additional days at Stage 2. If such extensions are necessary, Zen will communicate the reasons and provide contact details for the Ombudsman.

10.8. External Resolution

- 10.8.1. If unresolved through Zen's internal processes, the customer may contact the Housing Ombudsman Service. Zen will cooperate fully with the Housing Ombudsman's information requests.

10.9. Housing Ombudsman Contact Details

- 10.9.1. Email: info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk
- 10.9.2. Phone: 0300 111 3000
- 10.9.3. <http://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk>

11 | Learning from complaints

- 11.1. We aim to learn from complaints and use this information to improve how we work. Therefore, copies of all complaints will be forwarded to the Chair. When something changes as a result of a complaint, we will inform our residents of what has been changed and also publish a regular update on our website about how we are using complaints to improve services.
- 11.2. The board will receive 6 monthly reports about the volumes of complaints received, at which stage they were resolved, any trends or themes within the complaints, lessons learned from the complaints and how this has been used to deliver continuous service improvement.
- 11.3. Zen will nominate a suitably senior lead person accountable for complaint handling. They will assess themes and trends to identify possible systemic issues, risks and where policies and procedure may need revision.

12 | Monitoring and Performance

- 12.1. The board is responsible for ensuring this policy is kept up to date, implemented within the organisation and monitored and evaluated.
- 12.2. The annual report and supporting information and self-assessment will be produced and published in line with the requirements of the Housing Ombudsman.
- 12.3. The board is responsible for appointing a Complaints Officer.
- 12.4. Zen is committed to proactively monitor feedback on the Policy and its implementation through customer forums and surveys.
- 12.5. This policy will be **reviewed annually** or more frequently when there is a change in circumstances, in work practices, the introduction of new legislation or if instructed to do so by the Housing Ombudsman.
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