INSPIRE NORTH

POLICIES

COMPLIMENTS, CONCERNS AND COMPLAINTS (FEEDBACK) POLICY

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Updated by:	Helen Isabella Ferguson, Strategic Governance Lead		
SLT Policy Owner:	Kira Moxon-Lumb / Will Goode	Policy Group:	Quality and Compliance
Last Full Review:	June 2024	Next Review Due:	June 2027
This Policy is required to be reviewed at O&D Committee and Board as part of the NHF Code of Governance.			
Policy Implemented:		31st March 2025	
Replaces previous policies:		n/a	
If you have any queries in relation to this policy, please speak to your line manager.			

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COMPLIMENTS, CONCERNS AND COMPLAINTS (FEEDBACK) POLICY

1. Introduction

1.1 Our clients' opinions truly matter to us as well as those of individuals who interact with our organisation. If we've made a mistake, we're committed to making it right. Conversely, when we deliver exceptional customer service, we want to acknowledge and celebrate that achievement. Through this process, we continuously learn and strive for improvement.

1.2 This policy outlines our approach to receiving, addressing, and resolving compliments, concerns and most specifically complaints within our organisation and applies to all stakeholders, including but not limited to clients, tenants, contractors, and any other individuals or entities engaging with our organisation.

1.3 This policy will be publicised on our website and contains information about the Ombudsman and this Code.

2. Policy Aims

2.1 The aims of this policy are to:

- foster a culture of transparency and accountability within our organisation by providing clear guidelines for stakeholders to submit feedback and ensuring that all feedback is handled promptly, impartially, and with accountability.
- ensure that all compliments, concerns and complaints are addressed in a fair, objective, and effective manner, with appropriate actions taken to resolve issues, address grievances, prevent recurrence and share best practice.
- identify areas for improvement in practices, and policies, facilitating continuous improvement and enhancing stakeholder satisfaction.
- ensure compliance with regulatory requirements and best practices in complaint handling.

3. Statutory and Regulatory Responsibility

3.1 This policy ensures that our organisation recognises and meets the regulatory and statutory obligations as set out in the:

- Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023
- Regulator of Social Housing’s Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard
- Housing Ombudsman and Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code April 2024.
- Data Protection Act 2018
- Equality Act 2010

3.1 We'll deliver these codes by:

- Having a consistent and impartial framework for dealing with complaints, compliments and feedback.
- Encouraging client feedback both great and not so great.
- Resolving service issues at the first point of contact where possible.
- Giving colleagues and clients clear guidance, on how complaints, compliments and feedback will be dealt with.
- Using complaints as an opportunity to rebuild trust with our clients.
- Training colleagues to ensure fair complaint handling and investigation.
- Using insight and learning from complaints, compliments and feedback to shape and improve our service.
- Making literature available in various alternative formats, such as large print and other languages.

4. Policy Details and Definitions

4.1 What is a Complaint?

4.2 In line with the Housing Ombudsman Service Complaints Handling Code, we define a complaint as, *'an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the landlord, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting a resident or group of residents.'*

4.3 The above description aligns with the definition of a complaint outlined by the Housing Ombudsman Service, which is imperative for ensuring compliance with the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code.

4.4 Where the term "resident" is used by the Housing Ombudsman, in our policy, it encompasses any stakeholder. Specifically, we refer to the individual lodging the complaint, addressed as the "complainant" within our context.

4.5 An individual does not have to use the word "complaint" for us to act, any expression of dissatisfaction will be considered a complaint, even if the individual does not explicitly use the term 'complaint'.

4.6 Complaints may include concerns about the conduct, attitude or approach of our employees, contractors or others acting on our behalf, where these are raised by external complainants and relate to the service they have received.

4.7 Complaints made to us through a third party or representative, such as an MP, on behalf of our clients will also be managed under this policy.

4.8 What is a Service Request?

4.9 As detailed in Section 1.4 of the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code 2024, we acknowledge the distinction between a service request and a complaint.

4.10 We define a service request as a call to action from a client for us to put something right. Service requests are not complaints. Service requests typically involve

request for repairs, maintenance, inspections, safety, and security such as installing smoke alarms, the key element is that they are all related to maintaining the habitability, safety, and functionality of the customer's home.

4.11 We will only log a client complaint when the client expresses dissatisfaction with a service request, at the same time we will continue to action the service request.

4.12 What is a Compliment?

4.13 A compliment is an expression of praise or admiration; this can be expressed towards an individual or service.

4.14 Compliments make our day, who doesn't appreciate receiving positive feedback! They do not require a formal response and we'll pass on any compliments we receive to the colleague and their manager. We'll record these for sharing more widely and use them to identify areas of good practice that our organisation can learn from.

4.15 What are Concerns?

4.16 There may be times when individuals don't want to make a complaint but want raise a concern and make suggestions about how our organisation could do things differently or better.

4.17 Concerns are issues which may require further enquiry, advice, or information to resolve them. These are often best dealt with by the service in which the concern originated.

4.18 When a concern is raised which cannot be satisfactorily resolved without an investigation, it will be processed as a complaint. An individual has the option to turn their concern into a formal complaint at any point, and we will pro-actively give guidance on how best to do this.

4.19 Concerns will be shared with service teams and recorded so that we can learn and improve.

4.20 What is a data protection complaint?

4.21 A data protection complaint is raised when an individual believes that we have infringed data protection legislation in the way we have handled their personal information, or the personal information of someone they are acting on behalf of. An individual does not need to refer to data protection law or use specific terminology for their concern to be treated as a data protection complaint.

4.22 Data protection complaints may relate to, but are not limited to:

- how we have collected, used, stored, retained, or shared personal data
- the accuracy of personal information we hold
- how we have responded to a subject access request (SAR) or other individual rights request
- the security measures used to protect personal data, including concerns

arising from a personal data breach
- how long personal data is kept for

4.23 Where an individual raises a complaint and is also exercising a data protection right (for example, requesting access to their personal information), this will not automatically be treated as a data protection complaint. If it is unclear whether an issue constitutes a data protection complaint, we will seek clarification from the individual wherever appropriate.

4.25 Where a complaint includes data protection matters, this will be identified at the earliest stage and referred to the Information Governance Officer for oversight, advice, and compliance assurance.

4.26 We encourage individuals to raise data protection complaints directly with us in the first instance so that we can resolve concerns promptly and fairly. If an individual remains dissatisfied after our response, they have the right to raise their concern with the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO).

5. Making a Complaint

5.1 We recognise that there are times when we may make mistakes or fail to meet the high standards of service our clients and stakeholders anticipate. In such instances, we aim to address these issues or complaints promptly and efficiently, with straightforward and transparent procedures in place.

5.2 We maintain a standard objective concerning complaint handling for all relevant employees or third parties, that reflects the need to:

- have a collaborative and co-operative approach towards resolving complaints, working with colleagues across teams and departments.
- take collective responsibility for any shortfalls identified through complaints, rather than blaming others; and
- act within the professional standards for engaging with complaints as set by any relevant professional body.

5.3 Individuals can make a complaint (or share a compliment or concern):

- In person to any colleague
- By letter sent direct to the service or to our Head Office: Inspire North, 3 Limewood Way, Leeds, LS14 1AB
- By completing our Feedback Form (see appendix A) which is also available to download or print off from our website
- By telephone (see websites for service phone numbers)
- By email info@inspirenorth.co.uk
- By using the electronic complaints forms on our website:
  - www.inspirenorth.co.uk

- Through other channels where we have an active presence, such as social media. Where the channel is not secure, we may ask the individual to provide an alternative contact method.

5.4 When making a complaint we recommend including the following information:

- Name (we can accept anonymous complaints however this removes the ability for us to respond directly to the complainant).
- Contact details including address, email, and phone number.
- The service, employee and/or issue the complaint relates to.
- The details of the complaint, including any supporting documents. If there are several issues it is useful to list these so we can ensure we investigate each issue raised.
- The preferred outcome to the complaint.
- The preferred way to contact the complainant.

5.5 We have a feedback form (see appendix A) which can be used and helps ensure we capture all the information required.

5.6 At any stage, an individual can have a representative to deal with their complaint on their behalf and to be represented or accompanied at a meeting we may arrange.

5.7 Where a complaint relates to personal data, and there is reasonable doubt about the complainant's identity or authority to act on behalf of another person, we may request proportionate evidence at the earliest opportunity. We will not request additional identification where we are already satisfied as to the complainant's identity or authority.

5.8 This support could be from a friend, carer or agency (e.g. advocate). If the complainant requires support to arrange this, we can provide details of advocacy organisations. We can also arrange interpreters if required.

5.9 We will routinely consider whether a complainant has any disability, language or communication needs that may affect their ability to access or engage with the complaints process. Where appropriate, we will offer additional support or provide information in accessible formats to ensure the process is fair and inclusive.

5.10 At each stage of the complaints process, we will:

- deal with complaints on their merits, act independently, and have an open mind.
- give the complainant a fair chance to set out their position.
- take measures to address any actual or perceived conflict of interest; and
- consider all relevant information and evidence carefully.

5.11 If a complaint involves a third party, we may need to share details for investigation, and if sensitive, we'll consult with the complainant before disclosure.

5.12 The Complaints Resolution Process

5.13 We will accept complaints referred to us within 12 months of the issue occurring

or the individual becoming aware of the issue.

5.14 If a complaint alleges harassment, bullying, discrimination or abuse, we will follow the procedures outlined in our safeguarding policies. We will promptly assess whether there are any immediate safeguarding or equality concerns and take action where required. Where such issues are raised, we will ensure the matters are clearly identified, appropriately investigated, and responded to with due regard to the impact on the complainant, in line with relevant legislation and this policy.

5.15 We will always accept a complaint unless there is a valid reason not to do so.

5.16 Each complaint will be assessed independently, considering its unique circumstances. Acceptable exclusions include situations where:

- the matter prompting the complaint occurred more than twelve months ago.
- legal proceedings have commenced, which is defined as the filing of details of the claim, such as the Claim Form and Particulars of Claim, at court.
- the issue have been previously addressed under the complaints policy; these will not be revisited.

5.17 If we decide not to accept a complaint, an explanation will be provided to the complainant setting out the reasons why the matter is not suitable for the complaints process and the right to take that decision to the Ombudsman.

5.18 Individuals have the right to access the services of both the Housing Ombudsman and the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman at all stages of their complaint.

5.19 A full record will be kept of the complaint, and the outcomes at each stage. This will include the original complaint and the date received, all correspondence with the complainant, correspondence with other parties, and any relevant supporting documentation.

5.20 Where complaints are received or discussed by telephone, we will ensure an accurate and timely record is made of the conversation and retained on the complaint file. This supports transparency, consistency and effective investigation.

5.21 We operate a **two-stage** complaint resolution process:

5.22 Stage 1 Complaint Investigation and Resolution

5.23 An Investigating Officer, typically a Project or Service Manager, will be assigned to investigate and address the complaint. In cases where the complaint involves a Project or Service Manager, it will be assigned to a more senior manager at Stage 1.

5.24 The Investigating Officer will acknowledge the complaint in writing **within 5 working days** from the day the complaint is received.

5.25 The acknowledgement will include:

- The name and contact details of the investigating officer.
- The timescale and deadline for a full response.
- An offer to meet or speak by telephone.
- Outline the ‘complaint definition’, this is an outline of our understanding of the complaint and the outcomes the individual is seeking.
- A copy of the complaints leaflet.

5.26 We will contact the complainant at an early stage to confirm our understanding of the complaint and the outcomes being sought, and will keep the complainant regularly updated on progress throughout the investigation.

5.27 If the complainant wishes to meet, or speak, with the Investigating Officer this will be arranged as soon as practicable, considering the deadline for a full response.

5.28 The Investigating Officer will carefully review each issue raised within the complaint and collaborate with the complainant to establish a clear "complaint definition," ensuring mutual agreement. This process involves:

- Reviewing and acknowledging the preferred outcome expressed by the complainant.
- Planning the scope of the investigation to address all relevant aspects of the complaint.
- Obtaining and assessing any pertinent evidence or documentation to inform the investigation.
- Conducting interviews with other parties involved, such as employees or witnesses, to gather additional insights.
- Maintaining a thorough record of each action taken and meeting conducted as part of the investigation process.

5.29 We aim to deal with Stage 1 complaints within **10 working days of the complaint being acknowledged**.

5.30 We will assess each complaint and aim to respond to them as early as possible. If this isn’t possible, we’ll extend the complaint giving a clear explanation to the complainant and details of when a response will be received. We will also include the relevant Ombudsman’s contact details.

5.31 This will not exceed **10 working days** without good reason. The Investigating Officer will agree with the complainant suitable intervals for keeping them informed about their complaint and give them an opportunity to comment on findings before a decision is made.

5.32 Where a complainant raises additional points during the investigation, these will be incorporated into our stage 1 response if they are related, and the stage 1 response **has not** been issued.

5.33 Where we have already issued the stage 1 response, and the new issues are unrelated to the issues that have already been investigated, or it would

unreasonably delay the response, the issues will be logged as a **new complaint**.

5.34 At the completion of Stage 1 (when the answer to the complaint is known), we will provide a clear, comprehensive response, we will communicate with the complainant in writing and provide them with the following information:

- the complaint stage.
- the complaint definition.
- address all the points raised in the complaint definition.
- the decision on the complaint.
- the reasons for any decisions made.
- the details of any remedy offered to put things right.
- details of any outstanding actions and how often we'll update the complainant on these, to ensure actions are completed satisfactorily.
- details of how to escalate the matter to stage 2 if dissatisfied with our response.
- relevant Ombudsman contact details

5.35 Stage 2 Complaint Investigation and Resolution

5.36 If an individual believes we have failed to resolve all or part of their complaint to their satisfaction, then they can ask for an escalation to Stage 2 of our complaints process.

5.37 This is our final response. Individuals are not required to explain their reasons for requesting a Stage 2 consideration. We'll log, define, and acknowledge a Stage 2 complaint **within five working days of the complainant's request to escalate**.

5.38 We'll make reasonable efforts to understand why the individual remains unhappy and what they are expecting from the Stage 2 review.

5.39 A more senior manager, not previously involved with the complaint, will be assigned as the Investigating Officer, and will carry out a robust review of the complaint. The review will usually be restricted to the matters included in the stage 1 complaint unless we decide otherwise, for example where they relate directly to the original complaint. Any new issues not dealt with as part of stage 2, will need to be dealt with as a new complaint.

5.40 The Investigating Officer at Stage 2 will be responsible for:

- Understanding the issues and the outcome sought.
- Reviewing the stage 1 investigation and actions to assess whether we have met our responsibilities.
- Identify any additional actions that may be required to ensure that the complaint can be resolved.

5.41 We aim to deal with Stage 2 complaints within **20 working days of the complaint being acknowledged**. If this isn't possible, we'll extend the complaint giving a clear explanation and details of when a response will be received.

5.42 The extension details will be communicated to the complainant in writing and in this communication, we will also include the relevant Ombudsman's contact details. This will not exceed **20 working days** without good reason.

5.43 The Investigating Officer will keep in touch with the complainant throughout the process and give them an opportunity to comment on findings before a decision is made.

5.44 At the completion of Stage 2 (when the answer to the complaint is known), we will provide a clear, comprehensive response, communicating with the complainant in writing.

5.45 We will 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. Our response will include:

- the complaint stage.
- the 'complaint definition', this is an outline of our understanding of the complaint and the outcomes the individual is seeking.
- the decision on the complaint.
- the reasons for any decisions made.
- the details of any remedy offered to put things right.
- details of any outstanding actions; and
- details of how to escalate the matter to the relevant Ombudsman if the individual remains dissatisfied.

5.46 In cases where the decision is that no further action is required and all reasonable and appropriate measures have been taken, the complainant will be notified that they have reached the end of the process. We will also provide advice on the next available steps.

6. Complaint Remedies and Resolutions

6.1 We strive to ensure that any remedy provided in response to a complaint aligns with the severity of any service failures and the resulting impact on the complainant or individuals involved. Remedies may include:

- Acknowledging where things have gone wrong.
- Providing an explanation, assistance, or reasons why a certain approach was taken.
- Apologising.
- Taking action if there has been a delay and letting the complainant know what will happen and when.
- Reconsidering or changing a decision.
- Amending a record.
- Providing a financial remedy.
- Changing policies, procedures, or practices.

6.2 Where an apology is provided as a remedy, it will be timely, personal and sincere, and proportionate to the impact of the service failure. Apologies will acknowledge

what went wrong, the impact on the complainant, and, where appropriate, the organisation's responsibility. We will avoid generic or impersonal language and will explain what has been learned and what actions are being taken to prevent a recurrence.

6.3 When determining suitable remedies, we will consider the guidance provided by the Housing Ombudsman and the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman. Our offered remedies will accurately reflect the impact on the complainant or individuals affected by any identified fault.

6.4 The remedy that we offer will clearly outline the proposed actions and timelines, in agreement with the complainant, as appropriate. Furthermore, we will ensure that all remedies are followed through to completion.

7. Complaint Escalation

7.1 The Stage 2 outcome response is final and there is no further right of appeal within the organisation.

7.2 If the complainant remains dissatisfied, they have the right to contact and refer their complaint to the Housing Ombudsman or Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman for final review within 12 months of our Stage 2 response:

Housing Ombudsman
Phone: 0300 111 3000 Address: PO Box 152, Liverpool, L33 7WQ
Website: https://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/residents/make-a-complaint/

Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman
Phone: 0300 061 0614 Address: PO Box 4771, Coventry, CV4 0EH
Website: https://www.lgo.org.uk/make-a-complaint/how-to-register-a-complaint
For Social Care complaints involving clients who are also residents of ours, the Housing Ombudsman will handle these initially and, if required, forward them to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman for escalation.

8. Compensation

8.1 Where financial compensation is requested or is being considered, each case will be reviewed on its own merits. The Investigating Officer can agree an appropriate amount up to £100 with their Operational Manager or appropriate Director. Any recommendation for compensation above this amount should be referred to the Senior Leadership Team.

8.2 In-line with the Housing Ombudsman and Local Government and Social Care Complaint Handling Code; when awarding compensation, we will take account of the guidance issued by the Housing Ombudsman when deciding on appropriate remedies. In addition, we'll consider whether any statutory payments or quantifiable losses have been incurred. We'll also consider time and trouble and any distress and inconvenience caused. See Compensation guidance for more information.

9. Unreasonable, Persistent and Vexatious Complainants

9.1 While all complaints should be handled with empathy and patience, there may be cases where certain complainants consume a disproportionate amount of time and resources, even after thorough investigation and attempts to address their concerns. It's crucial to ensure that the complaints procedure has been correctly followed and all reasonable measures have been taken to resolve the issues raised.

9.2 Examples of this behaviour include:

- asking for responses within an unreasonable timescale.
- insisting on communicating with a particular colleague.
- continual phone calls, emails, or letters.
- repeatedly changing the substance of the complaint or raising unrelated concerns.
- refusal to co-operate with the complaint investigation process while still requesting their complaint be resolved.
- persistent refusal to accept a decision.
- persistent refusal to accept explanations relating to what the organisation can or cannot do.
- continuing to pursue a complaint case without presenting any new information.

9.3 In such circumstances, a senior manager will review the case and decide as to how future correspondence will be dealt with. It may be necessary to obtain legal advice before a decision is made.

9.4 Any decision to restrict contact will be proportionate, time-limited and clearly explained to the complainant in writing. The arrangements will set out how long the restriction will apply, when it will be reviewed, and how the complainant can challenge or request a review of the decision. Where a single point of contact is put in place, this will be applied consistently for the duration of the arrangement.

9.5 If necessary, the complainant will receive written notification explaining the rationale behind the decision. A code of behaviour could be put in place to define mutual expectations for ongoing support within the organisation, particularly if they are currently receiving support from one of our services. This code may involve stipulations such as requiring the complainant to communicate in a specific manner (e.g., in writing only) or with a designated employee, which will be documented in their complaint record or client record, depending on whether they are a client of ours.

10. Learning and Continuous Improvement

10.1 We believe that fostering a culture of positive complaint handling is essential for effectively resolving disputes. At the heart of our ethos lies a genuine commitment to ongoing improvement. We understand that minor mistakes are natural in any journey, and we embrace them as chances to learn and evolve.

10.2 We are fully dedicated to gleaning insights and trends from the feedback we receive. We'll make certain that this feedback is disseminated to service teams throughout the organisation and improvements are reflected upon, updates to policies, procedures, and employee training. This approach ensures learning from individual cases, facilitating continuous improvement in our services.

10.3 We will ensure that accountability and transparency remain central to fostering a positive complaint handling culture by reporting back on wider learning and improvements from complaints to stakeholders, including client' panels, employees, and Board Members.

10.4 Where analysis of complaints identifies recurring themes, emerging risks or potential systemic issues across services, these will be escalated internally through appropriate governance and assurance arrangements. This may include reporting to Senior Leadership Team and, where appropriate, the Board to support oversight, challenge and effective action.

10.5 Consideration of any external regulatory referral will follow internal escalation and review and will be made in accordance with relevant regulatory requirements and organisational policies, including the Regulatory Notifiable Events Policy. External escalation will be considered only where thresholds are met and senior oversight has taken place.

10.6 We have designated a member of our team to oversee and manage all complaints received to work alongside our Member Responsible for Complaints (MRC). These individuals play a crucial role in ensuring that complaints are handled promptly, fairly, and in line with our organisation's values and the standards set forth by relevant regulatory bodies, including the Housing Ombudsman and the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.

10.7 Once a complaint is resolved, we will invite the complainant to share their experience with us. We'll send them a brief satisfaction questionnaire to gather feedback on their experience with the complaints process.

10.8 We will use the feedback gathered through the satisfaction questionnaire to assess the effectiveness of our complaints process. This information will help us identify areas where we excel and areas where we can make improvements. By understanding the complainants' experiences, we can refine our procedures and ensure that we continue to provide a high level of service.

Feedback Form

Please tick if you wish to remain anonymous, then go straight to Section B: Please note this will leave us unable to contact you to discuss your complaint or outcome	☐

SECTION A			
Name:		**Date of Birth** (if current or ex-client)	
Address:			
Email:		**Phone No.:**	
Preferred method of contact:	**Post:** ☐	**Email:** ☐	**Phone:** ☐

SECTION B				
I wish to:	**Raise a concern** ☐	**Make a complaint** ☐	**Give a compliment** ☐	
Name of Service (your feedback is in relation to)				
Name/s of any employees your feedback is in relation to				
Please indicate your relationship with the service (tick)	**Current client / Resident** ☐	**Ex-client / Ex-Resident** ☐	**Family member / Carer** ☐	**Other** (please see below) ☐
If "Other", please provide details here				

Details of your feedback (In relation to a concern or complaint) If you wish to raise a number of issues, it is useful to list there so we can ensure we investigate each issue raised.

SECTION C: FOR COMPLIMENTS ONLY		
Where you have taken the time to pay us a compliment about one of our services or employees we would love to pass this on, we may even want to showcase this in external publications. Are you happy for us to do this? (it will always be anonymous) Should you no longer wish us to use your comments in publications, please send an email to informationgovernance@inspirenorth.co.uk	Yes ☐	No ☐

SECTION D: FOR COMPLAINTS ONLY			
Would you like to meet / speak with the Investigating Officer?	Yes (in person) ☐	Yes (by phone) ☐	No ☐
Have you previously raised this as a complaint or concern? (For concerns or complaints only)	Yes (concern / part of feedback) ☐	Yes (complaint) ☐	No ☐
What would you like the outcome of your complaint to be?			
Do you have anything additional you wish to be taken in consideration?			

To return this form you can either:

- Scan and email it to info@inspirenorth.co.uk
- Hand it in at your service
- Post – this is a freepost address (no stamp required)
- Please address the envelope as follows:

Freepost RTCA-TUXU-YRYR
Inspire North
3 Limewood Way
LEEDS
LS14 1AB