

Grainger Trust Limited ('GT') Complaints Policy

December 2024

1. Introduction & Statement of Intent

Grainger Trust Limited ('GT') recognises that, as a member of the Housing Ombudsman Service, it has an obligation to provide a fair and impartial service which, under the Social Housing Regulation Act 2023, empowered the Housing Ombudsman to issue and monitor a Code of Practice and this statutory duty came into effect on 1 April 2024.

As such GT welcomes the Complaints Handling Code ('CHC') and recognises this as best practice in complaints handling. As such we welcome Complaints (expressions of dissatisfaction) as:

- An opportunity to put things right by having a positive Complaint handling culture
- A means to strengthen our relationships with our Customers and Customer loyalty by resolving Complaints at the earliest opportunity
- A way to learn what works and what doesn't.
- Important feedback which we can use to improve.

Our policy is:

- To provide a fair complaints process which is clear and easily accessible to use for anyone wishing to make a Complaint ensuring multiple channels of access are available
- To publicise the existence of our complaints process so that people know how to contact us to make a Complaint.
- To make sure any person working on behalf of GT knows what to do if a complaint is received.
- To make sure all Complaints are investigated fairly and professionally adhering to the Chartered Institute of Housing's Professional standards expectations.
- To make sure that Complaints are, wherever possible, resolved at the earliest possible opportunity, within the timeframes set out in the Housing Ombudsman Service CHC.
- Take collective responsibility for shortfalls and working collectively with staff, Customers and key stakeholders to drive continuous improvement in service delivery

GT will ensure that a Complaints Coordinator is appointed to ensure that all Complaints are managed within the terms of the CHC and meets the required timeframes. The Head of GT is the designated senior lead accountable for Complaints handling. A Member of the GT Board has been appointed as Member Responsible for Complaints ('MRC') to oversee and seek assurance that complaints are being managed effectively and that future learnings are implemented.

2. Definitions

A **Complaint** is 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 Customer or group of Customers.

This means that when any Customer who encounters GT makes a statement that we have failed in some way, something we have or have not done is unsatisfactory or

unacceptable, whether justified or not, and they require a response from us should be treated as a complaint.

Dissatisfaction is a matter of perception and may lead to a request for service. It includes where we are perceived to have failed to fulfil our promises, or meet expectations. An issue such as a boiler breaking down may or may not lead to a Complaint but is not a Complaint in and of itself, it is a request for service. However, where we fail to respond to a telephone call promptly about the breakdown or fail to return a call as promised, this is likely to be a Complaint.

Other examples (include but are not limited to):

- Poor quality of service provided e.g. unresolved property repair issues or the standard of a repair carried out;
- A member of GT has provided incorrect information or failed to respond;
- Unhelpful staff or third parties for which GT is responsible e.g. managing agents or contractors;
- Where we have failed to follow our policies and procedures, or have been unfair and inconsistent in applying them.

Associated people are those who are contracted by GT to undertake work, services, repairs or maintenance. This includes managing agents, valuers, surveyors, lawyers, builders and other trades.

A **Complainant** is any customer who lives in a GT home (including household members of sole tenants) who makes a Complaint about GT or its associated people. A Complaint can be made by anyone who is entitled to receive a service from GT or anyone who is affected by that service provision. This can include former GT customers where applicable. A third party such as a family member, friend or advocate may act on behalf of a Complainant if desired and authorised in writing to do so.

A **Customer** is anyone to whom GT delivers (or should deliver) a service or who is impacted by a service we provide (or should provide) e.g. tenants, relatives of tenants, neighbours of tenants. Please note that people who are not customers as defined, such as contractors, may also have “complaints” but such matters are dealt with outside of this policy under a different process (e.g. contractor management).

Unacceptable Behaviour can be defined in numerous ways and so could result in exclusion, each case will be reviewed based on its own merits and will consider the provisions of the Equality Act 2010. This may include:

Vexatious Complaints are where a Customer intends to cause inconvenience, harassment or expense to the company. The behaviour is deemed to be unreasonable, and sanctions may be considered such as single point of contact

or issues which are not landlord responsibility matters (that is ensuring their homes are safe and secure) will not be considered and any such Complaints not accepted.

A **Frivolous Complaint** has no serious purpose or value. It may have little merit or be trivial. Investigating it would be disproportionate to the seriousness of the issue. Again, this behaviour is deemed to be unreasonable – an example may be where a historic complaint has been investigated previously but a Customer continues to raise concerns that have been appropriately managed. A Complaint of this nature will not be accepted or considered

Abusive Correspondence from a resident as part of the complaints process means communication that is intended to upset or offend. If this occurs consistently once again this is unreasonable behaviour and sanctions such as, a resident may be asked to continue correspondence in writing only to protect staff wellbeing, this will be kept under review.

Upheld or 'to uphold a Complaint' means that the Complaint, once investigated, are found to be justified or partially justified

A **Service Request** differs from a Complaint because it is a request from a resident to GT requiring action to put something right. If a resident is dissatisfied with our handling of their service request however, it will be raised as a complaint.

Complaint Exclusions

GT will accept all valid Complaints and where a Complaint is deemed to be excluded a valid rationale will be provided. For the avoidance of doubt a Complaint which is deemed to be excluded may, without limitation, include:

- The issue that is being raised occurred over 12 months ago, however, if relevant, GT can use their discretion in whether they will accept such a Complaint, for example if it forms part of a wider investigation.
- Legal proceedings have commenced that is the claim, claim form and particulars have been filed at court.
- The Complaint has been previously considered under the GT Complaint Policy.
- Matters which are deemed to involve Unacceptable Behaviours and or are classified as Frivolous Complaints. Each case will be considered on its own merits and will take the provisions of the Equality Act 2010 into account.

1. **Treating a Complainant fairly** means:

- Handling the Complaint in a timely manner in compliance with the timeframes within the Housing Ombudsman Service CHC

- Ensuring that outcomes are proportionate and fair, ensuring that individual circumstances have been considered.

2. **Good complaint handling** means:

- Getting it right – Complaints should be valued as an opportunity to put things right, ensuring lessons are learnt and ensuring staff are empowered to act decisively to resolve Complaints.
- Being customer focused – taking Complaints seriously, having clear and simple procedures, ensuring Complaint handling arrangements are easily accessible, avoiding unnecessary delays and communicating in a way that is easy to understand.
- Focusing on the outcomes – identify and implement any improvements highlighted as part of the Complaint investigation. Remove wastage through improving processes and systems. Create a positive impression.

3. **Objectives**

The aim of the Complaints Policy is to set a clear, consistent and fair approach for Complaint handling. This ensures GT meets its obligations, treats its customers fairly in an open and accountable way which builds trust and respect and continues to learn and improve its operations as a result. We will provide clear guidance on how to submit a Complaint and how the Complaint will be processed

Listening to and responding to the views of our customers is central to GT's commitment to improving services – we will always endeavour to respond positively to Complaints and put mistakes right where things have gone wrong. In terms of frequency and method of communication, we aim to adhere to any reasonable arrangements agreed in advance.

4. **Roles and Responsibilities**

Complaints Officer

GT will have a dedicated Complaints Officer, whose role may or may not be dedicated to complaints handling. The role of the Complaints Officer is to

- Ensure that GT adheres to the timeframes within the CHC
- Will oversee the Complaints process to ensure Complaints are logged and responded to in a sensitive and proportionate manner taking into account individual circumstances
- Has responsibility to liaise with statutory bodies such as the Housing Ombudsman service requests
- Ensures Complaints are reported to GT Board and MRC on a regular basis.
- Ensure that Complaints are resolved promptly and facilitating access to staff at all levels to ensure Complaints are prioritised

- Have the authority and autonomy to act to resolve disputes quickly and fairly.

Senior Lead Responsible for Complaints

The role of the Senior Lead Person accountable for Complaint Handling will be overseen by the Head of GT. This person must:

- Regularly review and assess themes or trends occurring in Complaints to ensure that systemic issues or serious risk are mitigated.
- Ensure that the Complaints Policy and procedures are regularly reviewed and kept current.
- Ensure that all relevant staff are suitably trained in the importance of complaints handling.
- Support the embedding of a positive complaints handling culture ensuring that Complaints are seen as a core service and therefore resourced effectively.
- Determine if a Complaint meets the definitions for exclusion and recording valid reasons so that, reporting under the CHC Self Assessment can be completed.
- Ensure that the annual self-assessment with the CHC is completed on time and in line with statutory obligations.
- Meet at regular intervals with the MRC to provide assurance on the volumes, resolution times and emerging themes from Complaints providing updates on learnings and on service improvement

Member Responsible for Complaints (MRC)

The MRC will be appointed from the GT Board to have lead responsibility for Complaints. This role will ensure that:

- Help support and embed a positive complaint handling culture within GT.
- Ensure that the Board receives regular update information on Complaints which provide insight on complaint handling performance.
- Have access to all suitable information including the volumes of Complaints, categories and resolution outcomes, complaint handling performance, reviewed on issues and trends arising from Complaints received.
- The MRC will be updated on Housing Ombudsman investigations and outcomes as well as where if any maladministration findings have been made how compliance with orders are made.
- Have oversight of an annual Complaints performance and service improvement report.

5. Our approach

Complaints must be treated seriously and handled as a priority with the focus being on early and local resolution .

Complaint handling has a standardised 2 stage approach and process throughout GT.

GT will promote the Complaints Policy, availability of the Housing Ombudsman and our compliance with the CHC through our website and other direct communication methods such as App posts, posters, annual reports etc.

A Customer can make a Complaint in whatever manner is accessible to them, including via e-mail, over the phone, via a nominated representative, through our resident App or in person to a member of GT Staff.

A Customer does not have to specifically use the word complaint for a Complaint to be logged, and for the avoidance of doubt staff will check with the Customer if they wish for the matter to be raised as a Complaint.

GT will deal with Complaints at each stage of the process by:

- Dealing with Complaints on their merit, with an independent approach and open mind;
- Ensure the Customer has opportunities to set out their position;
- Address actual or perceived conflicts of interest;
- Complete a thorough investigation considering all evidence;
- Ensure there is reasonable adjustments made for residents who needs support as appropriate under the Equality Act 2010; and
- Keep a full and detailed record of Complaints made at each stage including all correspondence made and received plus associated and relevant reports or surveys.

6. Process

GT follows a two-stage complaints process:

Stage One Complaint

- GT will log and acknowledge the Complaint within 5 working days. We may contact the Complainant to understand the nature of the Complaint and/or to clarify outcomes being sought.
- The GT nominated Complaints Officer will record and log the details of the Complaint and will nominate a complaint investigator.

- The Customer will be advised as part of the Complaint acknowledgement of who will be investigating the Complaint and that a written response will be provided within 10 working days.
- For Stage 1 Complaints that may be complex in nature or there is a delay if a third-party consultant is required to provide advice for example the Complaint Coordinator will contact the customer to fully explain the rationale to extend the Complaint timeline. This will not be for any longer than a further 10 working days.
- Where possible the complaint investigator will make contact and speak to the Customer raising the Complaint to clarify the Complaint and to understand what outcomes the customer would expect to resolve the matter. This may be by visiting or telephoning the Customer.
- Whilst a Complaint resolution may be agreed with the Customer this does not mean the issue will be fully resolved and whilst GT aim to remedy issues fully within 20 working days this is dependent on the nature of the issue.
- The Complaint will be marked as responded within the CHC stipulated timelines but will not be marked as closed until the matter is fully resolved and the Customer has agreed.
- The GT Complaints Coordinator will have oversight of all ongoing Complaints and will ensure that there is regular communication with the Customer to manage expectations whilst the final remedy is being completed.
- All Complaint responses will provide Customers with details on how they can contact the Housing Ombudsman Service providing a variety of channels of contact.
- The GT Complaints Coordinator will regularly meet with partnering contractors Axis to ensure that Complaints that are being managed by them are fully recorded and that all correspondence meets the expectations of the GTL Complaints Policy and Housing Ombudsman Complaints Handling Code
- Should the Customer raise additional Complaints during the course of an ongoing investigation then these must be incorporated into the Stage 1 response if they are relevant or related to the original Complaint and if the Stage 1 response has not been issued.
- Where a Stage 1 response has been issued and new unrelated issues are raised or it would cause a disproportionate delay to the Complaint these matters should be raised as a new Stage 1 Complaint.

Stage Two Complaint Review

- If the Customer remains dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage One, the Complaint will then be escalated to the Stage 2 process which is the final stage of the landlord complaint process. This should be escalated in 30 working days otherwise the Stage 1 complaint will be deemed accepted and the complaint closed pending the completion of any outstanding remedies.
- The Complaints Coordinator will acknowledge, define and log the escalated Complaint as a Stage 2 Complaint within 5 working days of receipt of the Complaint.
- The Head of GT or another senior member of staff will be nominated to

investigate and review the Stage 2 Complaint.

- A final response to the Stage 2 Complaint will be issued within 20 working days of the Complaint being acknowledged.
- If due to the complexity of the Complaint an extension of time is required then the Complaints Coordinator must advise the Customer of the reasons why. The extension should not be any longer than 20 working days without good reason which should be outlined to the Customer.
- The Complaint response must be provided within the defined timescales and the Complaint can be logged as responded however the Complaint will not be logged as resolved or closed until all outstanding remedies are completed to Customer satisfaction.
- During this period the Complaints Coordinator must ensure that the Customer expectations are managed and that there are regular updates provided and all contact logged.
- The Stage 2 Complaint is the final stage of the landlord process, in all correspondence with the Customer information will be provided about how they can get in touch with the Housing Ombudsman Service, providing multi-channel options.
- Where the Stage 2 Complaint is in regard to contracting partners Axis these should be referred to GT to review and oversee. The Complaints Coordinator will log and record all Complaints which have been sent through by Axis.
- The Stage 2 investigator will review the Complaint with the Axis Customer Service Manager but GT will own and respond with the applicable timeframes.

Beyond the Two-Stage Process

If the Customer has escalated a Complaint through the stages detailed above and the issue has still not been resolved to the Customer's satisfaction, the Customer has the option to refer to the Housing Ombudsman Service. GTL will comply fully to any requests made by the Housing Ombudsman Service.

7. Complaints relating to GT contractors

This policy requires any contractor providing services on our behalf to:

- Record and respond to Customers Complaints within the timescales detailed in our internal complaints process;
- Provide GT with any information relating to a Complaint upon request; and
- Assist GT with investigating Complaints where appropriate

8. Performance Management

A Complaint is seen as an opportunity to learn about what or how we need to improve

our service at GT. We want to learn from every Complaint and capture and share the things which we learn so that improvements can be made where necessary. In order to do this, we will:

- Record and monitor every Complaint, including details such as what the Complaint was about, how it was resolved, how quickly it was resolved and what learnings were found;
- Provide regular reports to the GT Board to provide the opportunity for scrutiny and oversight on how Complaints are being managed and to support the ethos of embedding a positive Complaints handling culture;
- Conduct a quarterly review with the MRC to oversee of Complaint handling performance including:
 - Updates on the volume of Complaints received
 - Categories of Complaints
 - Outcome and Complaint resolutions
 - Review of trends, or issues arising from Complaints
 - Updates on Housing Ombudsman investigations, including if relevant compliance with any maladministration orders
 - Oversight of the provision of Annual Board Complaints Performance Report
 - Ensure the completion and publication of the Annual CHC Self Assessment Return and provide Board statement
- Seek feedback from Customers on our Complaints handling as part of the annual Tenant Satisfaction Measures survey and share the findings with Customers in an open and transparent manner

9. Communication of policy

All employees must read, understand and comply with this policy and refer to their areas detailed procedure for further guidance. We will publicise this policy to our employees, managing agents and Customers through:

- Internal communication/Website; and
- Policy briefings and training.

10. Personal commitments

Employees are encouraged to value and learn from Complaints.

If you are unsure whether a matter constitutes a Complaint you must refer it to your line manager immediately.

11. Equality and Diversity

GT recognises that there could be support, language or comprehension issues for a minority of Customers and that these could contribute to the comprehension of this policy and associated messages. GT will work closely with Customers to overcome these barriers and provide appropriate coaching, training and support as required.

12. Regulatory code and legal framework

In observing this policy, GT will comply with all of the legal and regulatory expectations outlined in the following:

- Regulator of Social Housing Consumer Standard: Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard
- Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023
- General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR)
- Equality Act 2010
- Housing Ombudsman Service: Statutory Complaints Handling Code 2024

13. Review

This policy will be reviewed every two years or when there is a change in circumstances, in work practices or the introduction of new regulation or legislation.

Document Owner and Approval

The Data Protection Owner is the owner of this document and is responsible for ensuring that this procedure is reviewed in line with the review requirements of Data Protection.

A current version of this document is available to all members of staff on the corporate intranet.

Document History

Policy Owner	Head of Grainger Trust
GT Board Sign Off	December 2024
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