



COMPLAINTS POLICY

Type of Document:	Policy
Reviewed by:	Scrutiny Group, Operations Committee
Approved by:	UHA Board
Date:	10 September 2025

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1. Purpose & Scope

1.1 Unity Homes and Enterprise is committed to providing excellent services to residents and customers. Unity recognises that, at times, things may go wrong. When this happens, Unity wants to hear about it, put things right promptly, and learn from the experience.

1.2 This policy sets out two distinct but connected approaches for handling complaints:

- Service complaints, which are complaints about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by Unity, its staff or those acting on its behalf.
- Information rights, privacy and data protection complaints, which are complaints about how Unity handles personal information, information rights requests, privacy obligations or data protection duties.

1.3 The service complaints route aligns with the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code and reflects Unity's commitment to fairness, transparency and continuous improvement.

1.4 The information rights, privacy and data protection complaints route operates alongside the service complaints route and is led by the Data Protection Officer in line with Unity's data protection policies and information rights procedures.

1.4 This policy applies to all Unity residents, service users, staff, Board members and third-party contractors working on Unity's behalf.

2. Policy objectives

2.1 Our aim is to identify when we have got something wrong and offer and deliver a suitable remedy. We will recognise the impact that the issue has had and identify appropriate solutions.

2.2 In delivering a complaints service we will:

- Take all expressions of dissatisfaction seriously and respond promptly and fairly.
- Identify whether the matter should be handled as a service complaint, an information rights/privacy/data protection complaint, or both.
- Initiate an appropriate response to the issue raised.
- Offer appropriate remedies and follow through with resolution.
- Deliver on promises made to complainants.
- Learn from complaints and use them to improve services.
- Ensure complaint handling is accessible, inclusive and free from detriment.
- Comply with the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code for service complaints.
- Ensure that information rights, privacy and data protection complaints are handled by the Data Protection Officer where appropriate.

3. Unity's approach to complaints

3.1 Definition of a Service Complaint

3.1 A complaint is defined as:

An expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions, or lack of action by the organisation, its staff, or those acting on its behalf,

affecting an individual resident or group of residents.

A tenant or customer does not have to use the word ‘complaint’ to express their dissatisfaction and have their dissatisfaction dealt with via the complaint process.

A service request is a request for action to be taken to resolve a routine matter, such as a repair or information update, and does not constitute a complaint.

3.2 Two Complaint Routes

Unity uses two complaint routes to ensure that complaints are handled by the correct part of the organisation and under the correct external framework.

Route	Used for	Lead role / external route
Route 1 – Service complaint	Complaints about housing services, repairs, customer contact, service failures, staff actions or lack of action, complaints handling and remedies.	Designated Complaints Officer and relevant service managers/directors. External route: Housing Ombudsman where applicable.
Route 2 – Information rights, privacy and data protection complaint	Complaints about Subject Access Requests, information rights requests, refusal or delay in responding to data rights, personal information handling, inaccurate personal data, inappropriate disclosure, breach concerns, or data protection obligations.	Data Protection Officer. External route: Information Commissioner’s Office. Housing Ombudsman route may also be relevant where the issue also involves housing service failure.

3.3 Complaints Excluded from the Housing Ombudsman Complaints Route

Unity will accept all service complaints unless there is a valid reason not to do so. Unity will assess the circumstances of each complaint before deciding whether to accept it under the Housing Ombudsman complaints route.

The following matters will not normally be handled as service complaints under the Housing Ombudsman complaint stages, although they may still be handled through another appropriate route:

- Information rights requests themselves, such as Subject Access Requests, requests for rectification, erasure, restriction, data portability, objection, or requests relating to automated decision-making.
- Complaints about how an information rights request has been handled. These will usually be handled by the Data Protection Officer through the information rights, privacy and data protection complaints route.
- Matters where the issue occurred more than 12 months ago, unless the complaint concerns health and safety or safeguarding matters.
- Matters where legal proceedings have started by either Unity or the complainant.
- Matters previously considered under the complaints policy unless new information is provided.

- Issues that would be covered by insurance claims.
- Complaints about persons or bodies over which Unity has no control.
- Unreasonable complainant behaviour, where Unity considers it appropriate to restrict or manage contact in a different manner.

Where Unity does not accept a matter under the Housing Ombudsman complaint route, Unity will explain the reason and explain any other relevant route, including the Data Protection Officer, the Information Commissioner's Office, or the Housing Ombudsman where applicable.

3.4 Accessibility & Reasonable Adjustments

We are committed to ensuring all customers can access the complaints process. To do this we will:

- widely promote and publicise our complaints service and ensure that it is accessible to all tenants and customers through a variety of channels including digitally.
- Accept complaints via any channel (email, letter, phone, in person, digital platforms)
- Make reasonable adjustments to support and assist individuals with disabilities, vulnerabilities or any other special needs to make a complaint
- Accept complaints from authorised representatives or advocates subject to having permission from the complainant
- Provide materials in alternative formats or languages where needed.
- Never penalise or discriminate against any person for making a complaint.
- We will also ensure that we publicise information about the Ombudsman's Complaints Handling Code and contact information for the Ombudsman.
- Accept complaints from other person(s) acting on behalf of the complainant if they have written permission to do so from the complainant. The advocate may be a friend, relative or representative from an external organisation such as the Citizens Advice Bureau. The advocate may not be a solicitor or legal professional unless they are acting in a "lay" capacity i.e., not representing the complainant in a legal capacity.
- The advocate may not be a tenant or former tenant who is either currently in breach of their tenancy agreement, been evicted or had been informed they have previously had access to the Complaints Policy restricted.

Annual training is provided to Unity staff to share best practice and updates to the complaint handling code.

3.5 Resourcing our complaints handling service

Unity will have a Designated Complaints Officer who will lead on and take responsibility for service complaint handling. The Designated Complaints Officer will communicate with the Housing Ombudsman and ensure complaints are reported through Unity's governance arrangements.

The Data Protection Officer will lead on information rights, privacy and data protection complaints and will maintain appropriate records of information rights complaints, outcomes, lessons learned and any involvement from the Information Commissioner's Office.

3.6 Complaint Handling Procedure- Service Complaints

Service complaints will be dealt with through Unity's two-stage Housing Ombudsman complaint process.

Stage 1:

When we receive a complaint, it will be defined, logged and acknowledged within **5 working days** of receipt.

The complaint will be investigated by a manager from the relevant service area and a response provided within **10 working days of the complaint being acknowledged**.

If an extension to this timescale is needed we will inform the resident of the expected timescale for response, which will be no more than **10 working days**, the reason(s) will be explained to the resident and details of the Housing Ombudsman service will also be provided.

When we deal with a complaint at Stage 1, the complaint handler will:

- Establish the detail of the complaint in line with our definition of a complaint and set out in our response the outcome the complainant is seeking
- Investigate impartially with an open mind
- Consider information and evidence carefully
- Consider any additional complaints that are raised during the investigation and include these in the response
- Provide a full response that includes the decision, reason for the decision and details of any remedy offered
- Details of how to escalate the matter
- Respond to the complaint when the answer to the complaint is known not when the outstanding actions are completed
- Provide contact details of the Housing Ombudsman in our response

Stage 2:

If a complaint cannot be resolved at Stage 1 the tenant or customer can request that the matter is escalated to Stage 2. The request to escalate must be made **within 10 working days** of receiving the Stage 1 response.

The complainant does not need a reason to escalate the complaint to stage 2 but we will make sure we understand why the complainant was not satisfied with the stage 1 response.

The request for stage 2 will be logged and acknowledged within 5 days of the escalation request. The complaint will be reviewed by a Director and a response provided **within 20 working days of the complaint being acknowledged**.

If an extension to this timescale is needed we will inform the resident of the expected timescale for response, this will be no more than **20 working days**, the reason(s) will be explained to the resident and details of the Housing Ombudsman service will also be provided.

When we deal with a complaint at Stage 2, the complaint handler will:

- Establish the detail of the complaint and the outcome the complainant is seeking.
- Review the handling of the complaint at Stage 1.
- Determine whether the complaint or part of it should be upheld.
- Set out any outstanding actions and any remedies offered.
- Confirm that this is the final stage of Unity's complaints process and explain how to escalate to the Housing Ombudsman.
- Respond when the answer to the complaint is known, not only when all outstanding actions are complete.

Unity will not unreasonably refuse to escalate a complaint through the complaints process. However, we may decline to escalate a complaint and if we do this we will provide the complainant with clear reasons.

Where it is considered appropriate, Unity may engage the services of a third party to investigate a complaint. Unity may also employ alternative dispute resolution arrangements such as mediation where this would assist in resolving a complaint.

Where the services of a third party are used to investigate the complaint this will still form part of the 2-stage process.

3.7 Information Rights, Privacy and Data Protection Complaints

Information rights, privacy and data protection complaints are handled separately from the Housing Ombudsman service complaint stages. This is because they concern Unity's compliance with data protection and information rights obligations and are led by the Data Protection Officer.

This route should be used where the complaint relates to:

- A Subject Access Request or other information rights request.
- Failure to respond to an information rights request within relevant timescales.
- Refusal of a data subject right.
- Requests for rectification, erasure, restriction, data portability or objection.
- A concern about automated decision-making or profiling.
- Personal data disclosed to the wrong person.
- Inaccurate personal data.
- A suspected personal data breach.
- How Unity has handled, stored, shared, retained or otherwise processed personal data.

The Data Protection Officer will acknowledge within **5 working days** of receipt in line with Unity's data protection procedures and will investigate data protection complaints and respond within **30 days of receipt**; where there are any delays, such as if need to get in touch for more information, this will be noted and will not count toward the 30 days. Where a separate statutory information rights deadline applies, that deadline will be managed through the Information Rights Procedure and not replaced by the Housing Ombudsman complaints timetable.

Responses to information rights, privacy and data protection complaints should explain the outcome, any action taken, any exemptions or legal reasons relied upon, and how the individual can complain to the Information Commissioner's Office. Where the matter also relates to housing service failure, the response should also signpost the Housing Ombudsman where relevant.

3.8 Mixed Complaints

Some complaints may include both a service complaint and an information rights, privacy or data protection complaint. For example, a resident may complain about poor service and also complain that a Subject Access Request was delayed, or that personal information was disclosed incorrectly.

Where a mixed complaint is received, Unity will:

- Identify the service complaint elements and the information rights/data protection elements at the point of acknowledgement or as soon as practicable.
- Manage the service complaint elements under the Housing Ombudsman complaints route.
- Manage the information rights, privacy or data protection elements through the Data Protection Officer route.
- Ensure the two routes are coordinated so the complainant receives clear information about which issues are being handled under which route.
- Avoid using the complaints process to delay or override statutory information rights timescales.
- Record lessons learned across both routes where the complaint identifies improvement actions.

3.9 Putting Things Right

Where service failures or data protection failings are identified, Unity will acknowledge the failure, apologise where appropriate, explain what went wrong and why, consider the impact on the complainant, set out actions to put things right, set clear timescales, offer compensation where appropriate in line with relevant policies, and monitor completion of agreed actions.

3.10 Continuous learning and improvement

Unity will use complaints as an opportunity to learn and improve. Unity will identify learning from service complaints and from information rights, privacy and data protection complaints, including any complaints involving the Information Commissioner's Office or the Housing Ombudsman.

Unity will use this learning to improve policies, procedures, training, communication, record keeping, privacy notices, information rights handling and service delivery.

4. Reporting

4.1 Unity is committed to accountability and transparency in complaint handling. Unity will regularly share insights and improvements from complaints and compliments with key stakeholders, including the Board, colleagues and customers.

4.2 Each year, Unity will publish a Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report. This report will include complaint handling performance, a summary of complaints not accepted, service improvements made as a result of complaints, and relevant reports or assessments issued by the Housing Ombudsman Service.

4.3 Information rights, privacy and data protection complaints will be monitored by the Data Protection Officer and may be reported through data protection governance routes, including complaint outcomes, ICO involvement, lessons learned and improvement actions.

5 Responsibilities

5.1 The Designated Complaints Officer will oversee service complaint handling to ensure service complaints receive appropriate attention and are handled in line with the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code.

5.2 The Data Protection Officer is responsible for overseeing information rights, privacy and data protection complaints, maintaining information rights records, monitoring compliance, advising on data protection obligations and liaising with the Information Commissioner's Office where required.

5.3 Monitoring of the implementation of this policy will be the responsibility of the Senior Management Team and the Operations Committee. The Member Responsible for Complaints Board member will ensure that complaints remain a key focus area for the organisation.

6. Consultation and customer involvement

Unity recognises the importance of working in partnership with tenants and customers to develop and continuously improve services. Unity will seek feedback on complaint handling and provide information to customers on how Unity is performing in delivering the complaints service.■

7. Confidentiality and Data Protection

7.1 Unity has a clear policy on data protection and sharing data with partners and third parties under the requirements of the UK General Data Protection Regulation, the Data Protection Act 2018 and other associated legislation and codes of practice. The Privacy and Data Protection Policy and associated procedures must be followed throughout the operation of this policy.

7.2 Unity securely collects and stores relevant information to manage complaints and compliments, identify trends and root causes, and use this insight to improve services.

7.3 Where a complaint involves a third party, it may be necessary to share relevant details to facilitate a thorough investigation. Where information is sensitive, Unity will consider the appropriate lawful basis, necessity, proportionality and confidentiality requirements before sharing information.

7.4 Where a complaint relates to an information rights request or personal data handling, the Data Protection Officer must be informed and the matter must be handled in line with the Information Rights Procedure and Privacy and Data Protection Policy.

8. Equality and Diversity Statement

Unity HA are committed to treating people fairly, and without bias and discrimination. We promote equal opportunities to all our customers and stakeholders regardless of race, religious or non-religious belief, gender, age, ethnic origin, disability, marital status or sexual orientation.

We also recognise that we have a diverse customer base and will therefore make reasonable adjustments to ensure all residents can access the complaints service and understand this policy.

We will continue to monitor and analyse our complaints data to understand the impact of any service failures within different groups.

All staff receive Equality and Diversity training at Unity HA and are responsible for ensuring that the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion policy is incorporated into all aspects of their work.

9. Review

This policy will be reviewed every three years and will be amended sooner where required to reflect changes in legislation, regulation, Housing Ombudsman requirements, Information Commissioner's Office guidance, or Unity's internal procedures.

10. Associated documents

- Compensation Policy
 - Data Protection Policy
- Equality & Diversity Policy

Appendix A – Service Complaint handling process

	Acknowledge by	Respond by	Respondent
Stage 1	5 working days of receiving complaint	10 working days from acknowledgment	Service Manager
Stage 2	5 working days from escalation request	20 working days from acknowledgement	Director

Appendix B – Information Rights, Privacy and Data Protection Complaint**Route**

Route	Examples	Lead	External escalation
Data Protection Rights Complaint	Subject Access Request, failure to respond within statutory timescales, refusal of a data subject right, rectification, erasure, restriction, objection, automated decision-making concern, other information rights concern.	Data Protection Officer	Information Commissioner's Office; Housing Ombudsman where relevant to housing service issues.
Privacy and Personal Information Complaint	Personal data disclosed to the wrong person, inaccurate personal data, inappropriate sharing, excessive retention, security concern, suspected data breach or concern about personal information handling.	Data Protection Officer	Information Commissioner's Office; Housing Ombudsman where relevant to housing service issues.

Policy review summary

Policy title	Complaints
Date created	August 2026
Version	6
Person responsible	Director of Housing Operations
Reviewed by:	Scrutiny Group 20.08.25 Operations Committee 03.09.25
Approved by	UHA Board
Review period	3 years unless required sooner
Date of next review	August 2028

Document review history			
Version	Date amended	Date approved	Key changes
1.	August 2012	August 2012	Original document.
2.	August 2018	August 2018	Routine review.
3.	November 2020	November 2020	Interim review to adopt the standard definition of a complaint contained in the HOS Complaints Handling Code.
4.	August 2022	August 2022	Full review to align with the revised HOS Complaints Handling Code issued in April 2022.
5.	July 2025	July 2025	Reviewed in line with the HOS Complaints Handling Code April 2024
6.	July 2026		Reviewed and added Route for Data Protection Complaints