



Complaints Policy

VERSION: 2.0

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AUTHOR(S): Head of Customer Service

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Complaints Policy

1. Our policy statement

- 1.1 Sparrow Shared Ownership Limited (Sparrow) is committed to providing excellent services to you by being open and honest when things go wrong so that we can learn and continually improve the way we work.
- 1.2 Our approach to handling complaints is simple, timely, and transparent and is in line with the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code so that we keep ourselves accountable for the work that we do. You can contact the Housing Ombudsman Service at any point throughout our process for advice.
- 1.3 We encourage you to let us know when things go wrong so that we can put them right. We accept complaints in a variety of ways including in person, over the telephone, in writing, by email and through our customer portal.
- 1.4 Our trained staff will respond to your feedback in a fair, consistent, impartial, and professional manner. All feedback will be dealt with confidentially and your privacy will always be maintained.
- 1.5 We will consider your individual needs and circumstances in finding a solution and keep you informed throughout the process.
- 1.6 We have the best interests of customers and staff at heart. We expect our customers to behave in a reasonable manner whilst we work with you to resolve your complaint. Whilst we understand that service failure can cause frustration, we have a zero-tolerance approach to rude or vexatious communications and may close your complaint, or apply restrictions, in these circumstances.
- 1.7 This policy has been developed in line with any best practice guidance issued by the Housing Ombudsman Service, including any temporary guidance on the management of complaints due to unforeseen events, and the:
 - Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard
 - Localism Act 2011
 - Equality Act 2010.
- 1.8 This policy is available on our website, where we also provide information about the Housing Ombudsman and include details about the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code. Additionally, all our complaint responses include information about the Housing Ombudsman. For more information, please visit our website.
- 1.9 Sparrow will ensure that:
 - All team members who engage with customers receive training on our Complaints policy, internal complaints procedure and are knowledgeable about how to escalate any expressions of dissatisfaction to the Customer Service team.
 - All teams are aware of our obligations to meet the timelines set out in the Complaints Policy and the Ombudsman's Code.
 - Our Customer Service team, along with all complaint handlers and decision makers, are thoroughly trained in complaint handling and are authorised to make decisions in accordance with our Policies and Procedures.

2. The scope of this policy

- 2.1 This policy applies to all shared ownership and leasehold properties owned by Sparrow, and any organisation providing services on behalf of Sparrow will be expected to follow this policy.
- 2.2 For the purposes of this policy, a complaint is any expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about our standard of service, action, or lack of action (by our staff or those acting on our behalf) affecting a customer or group of customers.
- 2.3 We will also accept complaints from a third party, on your behalf. If someone is raising a complaint on your behalf, such as a Member of Parliament (MP) or Councillor, third party agency (such as a social worker, or charity representative), or friend or family member, we will require written consent from you to discuss your case with them.

3. Definitions

- 3.1 We 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 If a customer or their representative expresses any form of dissatisfaction they will be offered the option to use our formal complaints process. They do not have to state the word 'complaint' or request that an issue be treated as a formal complaint to be offered access to the complaints process.
- 3.3 A service request is a new request from a customer to the landlord requiring action to be taken to put something right. Service requests are not complaints as Sparrow must be given the chance to put something right in the first instance, but must be recorded, monitored, and reviewed regularly

4. Complaints Time Limits

- 4.1 Sparrow will always accept complaints if made:
 - Within 12 months of the issue occurring
 - Within 12 months of our customer becoming aware of the issue
- 4.2 Sparrow will apply discretion to accept complaints outside of these time periods, considering the specific circumstances of the case and if there is a good reason to do so.

5. Complaints Stages

- 5.1 There are two stages to Sparrow's complaints process. At stage one your complaint will be investigated and you will receive our response. If you remain dissatisfied with our response you can request your complaint to be escalated to be reviewed at Stage two.
- 5.2 The raising or escalation of a complaint, at any stage, will not stop or delay any actions required by Sparrow.

- 5.3 If Sparrow believes that it is necessary to extend a complaint response deadline at any stage, we will contact you to explain the reason for the extension and the expected timescale for the response.
- 5.4 If a complaint response falls outside our policy timescales at any stage, Sparrow will agree suitable intervals with our customer to keep them informed about their complaint.
- 5.5 At all complaint stages, Sparrow will provide our customers with a complaint response when the answer to the complaint is known. Sparrow will not stop or delay a complaint response due to any actions needing to be completed.
- 5.6 If there are any actions pending, at any complaints stage, they will be included in Sparrow's complaints outcome response. Sparrow will provide regular updates on any outstanding actions until they are completed.
- 5.7 At each stage we will consider your individual needs and circumstance, alongside any reasonable adjustments that are required. We will work with you to understand all the issues relating to your complaint, and what outcomes you are seeking to resolve with the complaint. We will maintain clear and consistent communication throughout the investigation and will provide you with a response that addresses the issues raised and offer suitable outcomes.
- 5.8 Where something has gone wrong, we will acknowledge this and set out the actions we have already taken or intend to take, to put things right. At each stage of the complaints process, we will deal with complaints on their merits, act independently, and have an open mind; give the customer 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.
- 5.9 Where residents raise additional complaints during the investigation, these must be incorporated into the Stage One/ Two response if they are related, and the response not been issued. Where the Stage One/ Two response has been issued, if 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.
- 5.10 At the end of each stage, we will confirm whether your complaint has been upheld, partially upheld, or not upheld. Definitions of each outcome are:
 - **Upheld:** we agree that you have not received the service we expect, or we have identified failure against our policies and/or procedures.
 - **Partially upheld:** we agree with aspects of your complaint and have identified failures against our policies and/or procedures. However, some aspects of your complaint we do not agree with and have not identified any failures.
 - **Not upheld:** we do not agree with your complaint and have not identified any failures.
- 5.11 When providing you with a resolution to your complaint, we will acknowledge what has gone wrong and set out the actions we have taken, or intend to take, to put things right. These can include:

- Apologising;
- Acknowledging where things have gone wrong;
- Providing an explanation, assistance or reasons;
- Taking action if there has been delay;
- Reconsidering or changing a decision;
- Amending a record or adding a correction or addendum;
- Providing a financial remedy;
- Changing policies, procedures or practices.

Stage One

5.12 We will acknowledge, define and log your complaint within five working days of your complaint being received.

5.13 Within the Stage One complaint acknowledgement Sparrow will make it clear which aspects of the complaint they are and are not responsible for. Sparrow will provide an explanation of what our understanding of the complaint and the resolution the customer is seeking.

5.14 Your complaint will be investigated by a member of staff from the Customer Service team who will, where necessary, contact you to confirm their understanding of your complaint and the resolution you are seeking.

5.15 We will provide you with our Stage One investigation outcome, in the form of a written response, within ten working days of it being acknowledged. If the complaint is complex, or additional areas of investigation are required, we will contact you to confirm our estimated resolution time. This will not exceed a further ten working days without legitimate reason. If we cannot agree on an extended timeframe, you are entitled to escalate your complaint to Stage Two, and/or contact the Housing Ombudsman. Within our Stage One complaint outcome response, we will confirm:

- the complaint stage;
- the complaint definition;
- the decision on the complaint;
- the reasons for any decisions made;
- the details of any remedy offered to put things right and the timeframes in which these will happen;
- details of any outstanding actions; and
- details of how to escalate the matter to Stage 2 if the customer is not satisfied with the response.

Stage One Escalation

- 5.16 If you are not happy with aspects of the complaint investigation, or the resolution offered, you have the right to request an escalation of your complaint to Stage 2 of our complaints process.
- 5.17 You can request an escalation to Stage Two within 20-working days of the date your Stage One response was issued. We may use our discretion when requests are received outside of the 20-working day timescale.
- 5.18 We will acknowledge your complaint within five working days of the escalation request being received.
- 5.19 When escalating to Stage Two, in order to understand why you remain dissatisfied, we may ask you questions, points of clarification or for further evidence. You are not required to provide this or to explain your reasons for escalating your complaint to have it considered at Stage Two.

Stage Two

- 5.20 We will acknowledge, define and log your request to escalate your complaint to Stage 2 within five working days of your complaint being received.
- 5.21 Within the Stage Two complaint acknowledgement Sparrow will make it clear which aspects of the complaint they are and are not responsible for. Sparrow will provide an explanation of what our understanding of the complaint and the resolution the customer is seeking.
- 5.22 Your complaint will be investigated by a different independent team member who was not involved with the Stage One investigation and response. This team member will, where necessary, contact you to confirm their understanding of your complaint and the resolution you are seeking.
- 5.23 We will provide you with our Stage Two investigation outcome, in the form of a written response, within 20 working days of it being acknowledged. If the complaint is complex, or additional areas of investigation are required, we will contact you to confirm our estimated resolution time. In most cases, this will not exceed a further twenty working days. If we cannot agree on an extended timeframe, you are entitled to contact the Housing Ombudsman for guidance.
- 5.24 Within our Stage Two complaint outcome response, we will confirm:
 - the complaint stage;
 - the complaint definition;
 - the decision on the complaint;
 - the reasons for any decisions made;
 - the details of any remedy offered to put things right and the timeframes in which they will happen;

- details of any outstanding actions; and
- details of how to escalate the matter to the Ombudsman Service if the individual remains dissatisfied.

Their contact details are below:

Housing Ombudsman Service

PO Box 1484

Unit D

Preston

PR2 0ETE

Email: info@housingombudsman.org.uk Phone: 0300 111 3000

6. EXCLUSIONS

6.1 There are some instances where we are not able to consider a complaint. Please note, whilst this list is intended to provide a guide on circumstances where a complaint won't be considered, discretion will be used on a case-by-case basis to ensure fairness and equality. This policy does not apply in the following situations:

- The issue has not previously been reported to us and will therefore be treated as a service request. Examples of service requests include:
 - A repair that hasn't previously been reported
 - A new neighbourly dispute
 - A new instance of antisocial behaviour (ASB).
- The complaint is raised by a non-Sparrow customer.
- Neighbour disputes – these will be handled in line with our ASB policy, except where you are complaining about the handling of an existing ASB case, or whether we have followed our ASB policy.
- The issue(s) causing the complaint occurred over 12 months ago or the customer became aware of the issue over 12 month ago. Sparrow will consider discretion to accept complaints made outside these time limits where there are good reasons to do so, on a case-by-case basis.
- The matters have previously been considered under the complaints policy.
- Requests which are dealt with under specific legislation, which includes (but is not limited to) Subject Access Requests and Data Protection breaches.
- Where the issue is subject to legal proceedings, either pending, or complete.

- Objections to decisions which have been made in line with our statutory obligations, legislation, and/or regulation, for example, the right to rent, or succession.
- Feedback about our policies and procedures from customers or other parties will be recorded and form part of future reviews.
- A first request for service, including an initial enquiry about the cost or reasonableness of rent, service charges or utility costs.
- An expression of dissatisfaction made through a survey, though wherever possible, the resident making the complaint should be made aware of how they can pursue a complaint should they wish to.

6.2. A detailed explanation will be provided to you setting out the reasons why the matter is not suitable for the complaints process and your right to take that decision to the Housing Ombudsman

7. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

7.1. Sparrow is committed to make sure all services are accessible to all our residents. Our staff will be trained to communicate appropriately with you, and they have the relevant information and access to translation services to make sure they fully understand you.

7.2. This policy will be applied in a way which makes sure we treat all customers with fairness and respect. We recognise our duty to advance equality of opportunity and prevent discrimination or victimisation on the grounds of age, sex, sexual orientation, disability, race, religion or belief, gender re-assignment, pregnancy and maternity, marriage and civil partnership and any other defined within the Equality Act 2010. We will keep a copy of any reasonable adjustment agreed, as well as a record of any disabilities a resident has disclosed.

7.3. On request we will provide translations of all our documents, policies and procedures in various languages and formats including braille and large print. Our website also has accessibility tools allowing you to personalise each web page to make it easier to read and to download content as audio files.

8. DELIVERY OF THIS POLICY

8.1. This policy should be read alongside: • Remedies Policy • Unacceptable Behaviour Policy • Antisocial Behaviour Policy.

8.2. The effective delivery of this policy including learning from complaints, training, guidance, and support required by staff for implementation of this policy will be provided by the Customer Service team.



Sparrow
Shared Ownership

