

# Complaints policy

## 1. Policy approval

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<b>Organisational Governance Approval Level Required</b>	Tier 2 – SMT	<b>Approval Date:</b>	June 2024
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## 2. Policy statement

### Purpose and aim of the policy

This policy defines a complaint, and Thames Reach’s process for responding to complaints.

### Scope of policy

Thames Reach can accept complaints from any person or party who has been in contact with the organisation. This could include people using our services, partner agencies or community members in areas where services are delivered.

A list of issues that fall outside this policy are listed in section 7. Complaints about Thames Reach’s fundraising activities are dealt with in a separate policy and details of this are available on our website: [Thames Reach | Fundraising complaints - Thames Reach](#)

This policy applies to the whole Thames Reach group, including its subsidiary Thames Reach Housing.

## 3. Rationale

### Principles

**Organisational commitment to complaints:** Thames Reach will embed a positive complaints culture that is sincere in resolving complaints in the most direct and immediate way possible. Thames Reach will accept complaints unless there is a valid reason not to.

**Fair processes and treatment of all people:** The complaint will be considered fairly and transparently, impartially and free of bias, based on evidence and facts and reasons and comply with the law. No-one will be treated differently if they make a complaint.

**Empower Thames Reach employees** to welcome complaints and work to resolve them quickly. All employees are empowered, able and expected to take available action to resolve a complaint as soon as it is brought to their attention, without needing to seek permission from a manager. The quicker that complaints are responded to the more likely it is that the complaint will be resolved positively.

**Continuous improvement through learning from complaints:** Thames Reach views complaints as an opportunity to improve services. There is a commitment to learn and improve processes and practices. The Leadership team will review complaints and learning quarterly and report to the Services sub-committee of the Board on an annual basis. This information will also be included in the annual report.

**Openness and accountability:** Thames Reach will take responsibility for our organisational behaviour and decision making. Thames Reach will try to resolve any complaints and acknowledge any organisational mistakes or failure.

## 4. Equality statement

Thames Reach is firmly committed to meeting all expectations under the Equality Act 2010 and other relevant legislation. We are committed to providing fair access to our services and equity of outcomes for all people regardless of age, disability, sex, sexual orientation, experience of homelessness, pregnancy and maternity, race or ethnicity, religion or belief, gender identity, or marriage and civil partnership.

## 5. Role and Responsibilities

Role	Responsibility
Member Responsible for Complaints (Thames Reach Charity) and Member Responsible for Complaints (Thames Reach Housing)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lead responsibility for complaints.</li> <li>• Ensure a positive complaint handling culture.</li> <li>• Ensure Thames Reach Boards and Committees receive regular information and insight on Thames Reach’s complaint handling performance.</li> </ul>
SMT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Refer complainant to appropriate external organisation if they are not satisfied with the outcome of their stage 2 complaint.</li> <li>• Ensure training is available and employees understand this policy.</li> <li>• Respond to complaints from councillors or Members of Parliament.</li> <li>• Report on complaints to the Board and Committees annually or as required, including the annual complaints performance and service improvement report produced for the Housing Ombudsman.</li> </ul>

Complaints officer (Director of Services)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overall responsibility for complaint handling.</li> <li>• Liaison with relevant external organisations.</li> <li>• Assess any themes or trends to identify potential systemic issues, serious risks, or policies and procedures that require revision.</li> </ul>
Area Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acknowledge, review and respond to stage 2 complaint.</li> </ul>
Managers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decide whether a contact is a service request or a complaint.</li> <li>• Acknowledge, investigate and respond to stage 1 complaint.</li> <li>• Record complaint on In-Form.</li> <li>• Add an objective on compliance with this policy, including the principles set out in section 3, in their appraisal, annual review and development plan</li> </ul>
All employees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read and understand this policy.</li> <li>• Ensure all service users are aware of how to make a complaint by sharing the complaints leaflet or explaining the process with everyone we work with and supporting them to make complaints and give other feedback.</li> <li>• Where possible, take action(s) to resolve complaints as soon as they are raised.</li> <li>• Log service requests as appropriate (for example, on In-Form, in a repairs log, etc).</li> </ul>

## 6. Resources and definitions

### Complaints

Thames Reach uses the Housing Ombudsman’s definition of a complaint:

*‘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’*

A person does not need to use the word “complaint” for it to be treated in line with this policy.

We listen to complaints, treat them seriously, respond to them within agreed timeframes and learn from them so that we can continuously improve our service. A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction, whether justified or not.

### Service requests

A service request is a request from someone using our services asking us to put something right. Service requests are not complaints, but we will record, monitor and review them regularly.

If someone expresses dissatisfaction with our response to their service request, this will be treated as a complaint.

### **Relevant external organisations**

Depending on the service, this could include the commissioner or funder, Housing Ombudsman or health authority.

### **Other forms of feedback**

Feedback is also provided to Thames Reach through feedback forms and satisfaction surveys. Negative feedback received through these does not need to be treated as a complaint, as it will often not be possible to identify the respondent, but the form or survey should provide information about how complaints can be made.

### **Links**

- Housing Ombudsman <https://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/>
- Housing Ombudsman guidance on remedies: [Guidance on remedies | Housing Ombudsman \(housing-ombudsman.org.uk\)](https://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/guidance-on-remedies)
- Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman <https://www.ombudsman.org.uk/>
- Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman <https://www.lgo.org.uk/>
- [Thames Reach | Fundraising complaints - Thames Reach](#)
- [Thames Reach fundraising with people in vulnerable circumstances policy](#)

## **7. Making it happen**

The complaints policy is simple and easy to understand for everyone who wishes to use it. Leaflets explaining the policy are available and can be translated and explained. Information is also available on the Thames Reach website.

We have a two stage complaints procedure and work to quickly resolve all complaints. This ensures that the complaint process is not unduly long.

Complaints can be received verbally, in writing, email or on a form. Complainants may choose to seek the support of an advocate to complain. This can happen at any or all stages, including at any meetings with Thames Reach.

Thames Reach will record and monitor all complaints on In-Form, this will include the original complaint and the date received, and copies of all correspondence held as attachments.

## Complaint stages

### Stage 1

Complaints can be received verbally or in writing, or through a third party, with consent of the person complaining. All complaints should be investigated at stage 1.

#### **Acknowledgement**

Thames Reach will acknowledge the complaint within 5 working days (Monday to Friday), in writing; this can include request for clarifications. This acknowledgement will set out our understanding of the complaint and the outcome(s) that the person complaining is seeking ('the complaint definition'). It will include the designated complaint handler, who will be responsible for investigating and answering the complaint. In most cases it will be the local manager, although if the complaint is regarding the manager this will not be appropriate. The acknowledgement needs to include all of the elements above and so it may be necessary to give an initial acknowledgement that the complaint has been received, followed by the formal acknowledgement.

Where there are some aspects of the complaint which Thames Reach is not responsible for, this will be explained clearly.

#### **Additional complaints**

Where someone raises additional complaints during the investigation, these must be incorporated into the stage 1 response if they are related and the stage 1 response has not been issued. Where the stage 1 response has been issued, 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.

#### **Written response**

A written response to the complaint will be sent no more than 10 working days (Monday to Friday) after this and will include:

- the complaint stage
- the complaint definition
- the decision on all aspects of the complaint
- the reasons for any decisions made (referencing any relevant policy, law or good practice)
- the details of any remedy offered to put things right
- details of any outstanding actions
- details of how to escalate the matter to stage two if the person is not satisfied with the answer.

The written response will be provided as soon as possible within these timescales, even if there are outstanding actions required to address the issue.

If an extension to these timescales is required, Thames Reach will agree suitable intervals with the person complaining for keeping them informed and the expected timescale for response. Any extension must be no more than 10 working days (Monday to Friday) without good reason, and the reason(s) must be clearly explained to the person making the complaint. Where applicable, they will be given the contact details of the Housing Ombudsman.

## **Stage 2**

If the complainant is not satisfied, they can ask for a review of the process carried out at stage 1. In normal circumstances, this should be received by Thames Reach within 28 days of stage 1 response.

### **Acknowledgement**

The manager of the first complaint handler will review this complaint, the first act is to acknowledge the request for review and propose a timetable within 5 working days (Monday to Friday) of receipt. This acknowledgement will set out our understanding of the complaint and the outcome(s) that the person complaining is seeking ('the complaint definition').

Where there are some aspects of the complaint which Thames Reach is not responsible for, this will be explained clearly.

The response to a stage 2 complaint will be our final response and so all relevant colleagues need to be involved in order to issue such a response.

### **Written response**

A written response to the complaint will be sent no more than 20 working days (Monday to Friday) after this which include

- the complaint stage
- the complaint definition
- the decision on all aspects of the complaint
- the reasons for any decisions made (referencing any relevant policy, law or good practice)
- the details of any remedy offered to put things right, with timescales
- details of any outstanding actions

**and**

- details of how to escalate the matter to the appropriate external organisation if the person remains dissatisfied.

The written response will be provided as soon as possible within these timescales, even if there are outstanding actions required to address the issue.

If an extension to these timescales is required, Thames Reach will agree suitable intervals with the person complaining for keeping them informed and the expected timescale for response. Any extension must be no more than 20 working days (Monday to Friday) without good reason, and the

reason(s) must be clearly explained to the person making the complaint. Where applicable, they will be given the contact details of the Housing Ombudsman.

## Responses

People who complain often want one or more of the following:

- a thorough investigation and explanation of what happened and why;
- assurance it won't happen again;
- an apology - a sincere expression of regret.

Actions to put something right can also include:

- Acknowledging where things have gone wrong;
- 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.

Any remedy offered must reflect the impact on the resident as a result of any fault identified. Where appropriate, guidance from the Housing Ombudsman will be considered when deciding on appropriate remedies.

## Financial redress

In responding to complaints the complaint handler should consider if there is a need for any financial redress by considering the following questions:

- Has the complainant incurred financial loss as a result of an error or failure?
- Did the complainant incur any minor or generally un-quantified expenses? For example, significant postage or telephone costs, or loss of earnings.
- Any redress will be limited to the actual loss/expense incurred.

If financial redress is appropriate then the relevant **Area Manager** and **Head of Finance** need to agree an appropriate level with a member of **SMT** and sign it off. It should be paid to the complainant within a reasonable timeframe and if possible with the response.

## Reporting

We will produce an annual report on complaints for the Boards and Committees of Thames Reach group. This will include the annual complaints performance and service improvement report produced for the Housing Ombudsman. The report will also consider feedback from other sources, such as focus groups and surveys.

The annual report, and the Boards' response to this, will be published on our website.

### Other linked policies

- **Neighbour nuisance or anti-social behaviour**

[AntiSocialChallengingBehaviourPolicy.docx \(sharepoint.com\)](#)

Thames Reach will work with people who report experiencing persistent nuisance or antisocial behaviour in a variety of circumstances, including where we have housing management responsibilities and where we do not. Initially these will be treated as a service request. If the matter is not satisfactorily resolved it can then be dealt with as a formal complaint.

- **Safeguarding**

[SafeguardingAdultsPolicy.docx](#)

Complaints may highlight issues that fall under safeguarding legislation, such as exploitation, financial abuse, intimidation or neglect. The service manager will create a safeguarding action plan.

- **Discrimination**

[EqualityDiversityInclusionPolicy.docx](#)

Complaints may highlight situations where discrimination has taken place, this could include hate crime or exclusion from services. These incidents can be investigated through the complaints process, and matters arising to equality, diversity and inclusion can be discussed with management for next steps. If the aggrieved is an employee, this falls outside of this policy, see below.

### Matters outside the complaints policy

- **Employees complaints or concerns** – should be raised through the grievance procedure or whistleblowing.
- **Matters that have already been fully investigated through this complaints process.** These can be referred to the relevant external organisation (see above).
- **Historical complaints** – if the issue giving rise to the complaint occurred over 12 months ago, it will not be considered unless there are good reasons to do so. This will be at Thames Reach's discretion.
- **Anonymous complaints** can be investigated and resolved, and recorded, but we will be unable to respond to the complainant.
- **Legal proceedings** – where a service user has started legal action against Thames Reach (excluding threatened legal action).
- **Members of Parliament or Councillor complaints** – these will be dealt by the Chief Executive and the Departmental Director, unless they are acting as the complainant's advocate.



- **Commercial relationships** – Suppliers or customers with commercial concerns will be dealt with through procurement.
- **Fundraising complaints** – these are dealt with in a separate policy

If Thames Reach decides not to accept a complaint or to escalate it to stage 2, an explanation must be provided to the person complaining setting out the reasons why the matter is not suitable for the complaints process and the right to take that decision to the relevant external organisation. If the relevant external organisation does not agree that the exclusion has been fairly applied, the relevant external organisation may tell Thames Reach to take on the complaint.

### **Exceptional circumstances**

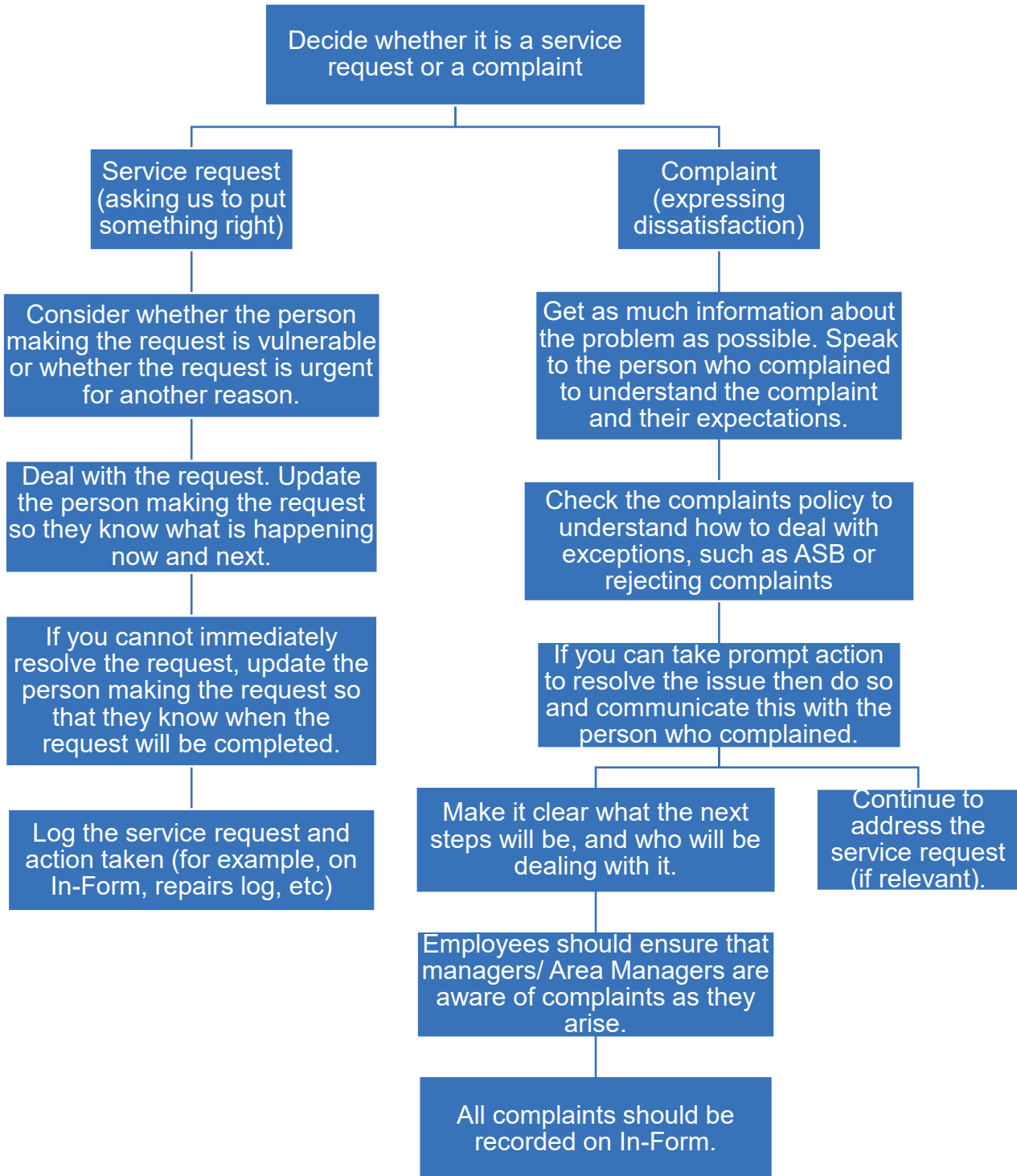
If Thames Reach is unable to comply with this policy due to exceptional circumstances, such as a cyber incident, we will provide information to people using our services via our website and project teams.

Where applicable, we will inform the Housing Ombudsman and provide a timescale for returning to compliance with the Complaint Handling Code.

**Appendices**

**Appendix 1: Guidance for employees on handling complaints**

**Receiving a complaint**



## Investigating a complaint

