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## 1. Context, aims and scope of this policy

Abbeyfield South Downs [ASD] is committed to delivering high-quality service to tenants and other individuals who access our services. While most concerns can be resolved quickly and easily, a formal process is occasionally needed. We welcome suggestions, comments, and complaints from tenants, their families, and representatives to help improve our services. Feedback enables us to identify our strengths and understand our weaknesses, and is crucial in ensuring that we consistently meet a high standard of service.

Landlords must recognise the difference between a service request and a complaint. A service request is a request from a tenant that requires action to rectify an issue. Service requests are not complaints; they are recorded, monitored, and reviewed on a regular basis. Therefore, the first step should be to raise a 'service request' directly with the House/Scheme Manager or the relevant staff member. We will try to resolve the issue informally on the day it is raised and, in most cases, will be able to do so quickly and satisfactorily.

A complaint will be raised if the tenant expresses dissatisfaction with the response to their service request or if the issue cannot be resolved informally. In such cases, a formal complaint can be made using the procedure outlined below.

### This policy aims to:

- Ensure that all complaints are handled promptly, fairly, consistently, and confidentially, in line with data protection regulations.
- Be clear about who is responsible for complaints at each stage.
- Ensure that designated individuals are not the subject of the complaint and that, as the complaint escalates, it is dealt with by a more senior member of the organisation.
- Ensure records of all complaints are kept and their handling is promptly reviewed to drive improvement.
- Ensure details of complaints are provided to tenants and included in our annual report.
- Put things right where a complaint identifies that we have failed to deliver a service to the expected standard.

This policy is intended to cover current and prospective tenants, their representatives and any stakeholder who wishes to make a complaint about Abbeyfield South Downs. Complaints should be made as soon as possible after the event (or come to the complainant's attention), ideally within 12 months.

## 2. Definition

The term complaint is defined here 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 tenant or group of tenants.'***

We recognise that the word complaint does not have to be used for it to be treated as such. This policy is intended for tenants but also covers any expression of dissatisfaction by stakeholders affected by the standard of service, actions, or lack of action by our organisation. A request for a service is not in itself a complaint—it becomes a complaint only when the request for service is not dealt with adequately or within a reasonable timescale.

### 3. Exclusions

- The issue giving rise to the complaint occurred over twelve months ago.
- The issue has previously been considered under the complaints policy.
- Complaints about a tenant from another tenant, for example, bullying or harassment. Our Anti-Social Behaviour Policy addresses these.
- Complaints about a tenant from outside the organisation are dealt with by our Professional, Ethical, and Legal Boundaries Policy.
- Complaints from staff are dealt with in line with our Staff Disciplinary and Grievance Policy.
- Complaints about something Abbeyfield South Downs is not responsible for [for example, care a tenant receives from an external agency], which are dealt with in line with our Safeguarding Policy. With permission, we will share such concerns with the relevant organisation or signpost the complainant to that organisation's complaints procedure.
- Complaints subject to legal proceedings or issues that our insurers will likely deal with.
- Complaints received via social media will receive a generic response and be passed to the Complaints Officer to be addressed through the standard procedure. Confidentiality cannot be protected when the complaint is made publicly on social media.
- An expression of dissatisfaction with services made through a survey is not defined as a complaint. Where possible, the person completing the survey will be informed of how to pursue a complaint if they wish to do so.

The individual circumstances of each complaint will be taken into consideration. If Abbeyfield South Downs does not accept a complaint, an explanation will be provided to the tenant explaining why the matter is unsuitable for the complaints process. You have the right to take that decision to the Ombudsman. If the Ombudsman agrees that the exclusion has been unfairly applied, they may instruct the landlord to address the complaint.

### 4. Accessibility

Any Abbeyfield South Downs staff member can pass the complaint details to the Complaints Officer. When an individual has difficulty making a complaint, we will make and document all reasonable adjustments to assist the complainant in registering the complaint.

Abbeyfield South Downs aims to make it easy for tenants and stakeholders to make a complaint by offering a choice of ways that can be used and ensuring that the organisation's policy is publicised by:

- Displaying information on the complaints process on the noticeboard
- Giving information on the complaints process to tenants
- Putting information on the complaints process on our website

If the complainant expresses an unreasonable desired outcome, we will explain our position at the outset while continuing to investigate the matter. If a complaint is accompanied by inappropriate behaviour, we will seek to manage this behaviour separately in line with the Equality Act 2010 and the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974.

At all stages, please provide your contact details, details of the complaint, and any suggestions you may have for resolving the issue. Anonymous complaints will be investigated under the same procedure; however, it is preferable to provide contact details so that we can inform the complainant of the outcome of our investigation.

## 5. Complaints Process

### Stage 1: Investigation

Complaints can be made:

- In person or via a representative to the **General Manager** acting as Complaints Officer for ASD
- By email: **info@abbsd.co.uk**
- By telephone: **01435 866539**
- By post: **Complaints Officer, Abbeyfield South Downs Holdenhurst Mill Road Heathfield, TN21 0GG**

We will log the details of the complaint and acknowledge it in writing to the complainant within **five working days** of receipt, setting out our understanding of the complaint and the outcomes the tenant is seeking. The tenant must be asked for clarification if any aspect of the complaint is unclear. If the designated complaints officer is the subject of the complaint, the complaint will be passed to a more senior member of the organisation.

An investigation will be carried out, and a written response will be provided within **ten working days**. This may be extended by up to ten additional working days, as necessary, subject to agreement with the complainant.

Where additional complaints arise during the investigation, these must be incorporated into the stage 1 response if they are related to the original complaint and the stage 1 response has not yet been issued. When a stage 1 response has been issued, new issues should be logged as separate complaints.

Stage 1 & 2 responses will detail

- 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
- details of any outstanding actions
- escalation route if they remain dissatisfied

The complainant will be asked if their complaint has been resolved and if they are satisfied with how it has been handled. If the complainant remains dissatisfied, they may escalate the complaint for a stage 2 review.

### Stage 2: Review

Requests can be made:

- In person or via a representative to the **Company Secretary**
- By email: **company.secretary@abbsd.co.uk**
- By telephone: **01435 866539**
- By post: **Company Secretary, Abbeyfield South Downs Holdenhurst Mill Road Heathfield TN21 0GG**

We will log the details of the stage 2 complaint and acknowledge it in writing to the complainant within **five working days** of receipt. When a complaint is escalated, the complaint and its stage 1 investigation will be subject to a full review, directed by the Company Secretary on behalf of the Board of Trustees.

We will provide a final written response within **20 working days** of the request to escalate. Where this is not possible, an explanation will be given, and an agreement will be reached to extend the response period by no more than **ten working days**. The complainant will be informed that the response following stage 2 concludes Abbeyfield South Downs internal complaints procedure.

### **After the conclusion of our complaints process**

Abbeyfield South Downs is registered with the Housing Ombudsman Service

The complainant can be referred to the Housing Ombudsman Service, PO Box 152, Liverpool, L33 7WQ (Tel: 0300 1113000, website: [www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk](http://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk)).

A complainant is required to wait eight weeks following the conclusion of our internal complaints process before submitting the complaint directly to the Ombudsman. During this time, they may choose to refer the complaint to a 'Designated Person' (such as their MP or local councillor) to help them resolve the complaint or refer the complaint to the Housing Ombudsman on their behalf.

Abbeyfield South Downs will cooperate with the Ombudsman during any investigation and fully comply with the resulting binding final decision.

## **6. Putting things right**

Where we have failed to deliver a service to the expected standard, we will seek to resolve the complaint and 'put things right'—this may include an apology, corrective action, and, where appropriate, a compensation payment, having considered [Guidance on remedies | Housing Ombudsman](#). Our complaint response must set out what will happen and by when. Remedies will be provided at any stage of the complaints process and should not wait until the complaint process has been concluded. Any significant findings will result in a review, and any lessons learned will be recorded.

## **7. Reporting on Complaints**

Abbeyfield South Downs board of trustees are advised quarterly of the complaints the organisation receives. An annual self-assessment will review the volume, outcomes, complaint satisfaction, and compliance with time frames. Legislation requires that details of the number, content, and results of complaints received be shared with tenants and published in the Annual Report.