
Complaints Policy

Municipal and Owen Carter Almshouse Charity

Bree Norton-Smith - 4th June 2026

We welcome all feedback, including complaints, from anyone who is affected by a decision or action taken by us including but not limited to:

- Current and Former Residents
- Anyone receiving a service provided by us
- Applicants
- Neighbours of our properties
- Contractors/Consultants/Suppliers
- Employees/Applicant Employees/Volunteers
- Stakeholders/Trustees
- Anyone else who (with permission) represents our customers.

1. Aims of the Policy

This policy applies to the Trustees of The Municipal and Owen Carter Almshouse Charity and complies with the Complaint Handling Code issued by the Housing Ombudsman Service. All complaints dealt with under this policy will be dealt with in a manner consistent with the Code and the Charity will maintain all records as required by the Code.

The aim of the policy is to ensure that the complaints process is flexible and responsive to the needs of individual complaints.

The policy seeks to ensure that:

- Residents who complain are listened to and treated with courtesy and empathy
- Residents will never be disadvantaged as a result of making a complaint
- Complaints are investigated promptly, thoroughly, honestly and openly
- Apologies are given as appropriate
- Complaints handling will comply with confidentiality and data protection policies.

2. What is a 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 charity; it’s trustees, it’s own staff, or those acting on it’s behalf, affecting an individual resident or group of residents”.
- A complaint may relate to a someone being unhappy because a complainant believes we have:
 - done something badly or wrong;
 - failed to do something we should have done in a timely manner;
 - treated someone unfairly or without respect;
 - failed to meet our service standards, for example, replying to a letter within a given timescale.
- 3.2. Some things may not be considered complaints, for example:
 - Service requests (e.g. repair requests) - A request from a resident requiring action to be taken to put something right.
 - Anonymous letters (potential investigation if they are a cause for concern)
 - Reports of neighbour nuisance or disputes between neighbours
 - Complaint about a service where we have no responsibility
 - Claim for damages that should be handled as an insurance claim.
- 3.3. The charity must accept complaints unless there is a valid reason not to do so in which case the charity must evidence the reasoning. Each complaint must be considered on its own merits. Some complaints fall outside this Policy:
 - Any matter where an appeal body or tribunal has been set up to deal with the issue
 - The issue took place more than 12 months ago (unless where there is good reason to apply discretion)
 - Matters which are subject to civil or criminal court proceedings
 - Complaints that have already been before a court or tribunal
 - Complaints regarding legally required policies
- 3.4. We might deal with a complaint differently if there are exceptional circumstances. It may be decided to omit stages of the complaints procedure (e.g. if a complaint is considered to be vexatious/pursued unreasonably/or is about a factual matter over which we have no discretion for management reasons). The Chief Executive or a Trustee will make the decision to deviate from the standard procedure. The reasons for doing so will be fully documented and explained to the complainant.
- 3.5. We make no distinction between complaints. All feedback will be recorded and will help us continuously to improve our services. The word “complaint” does not need to be used expressly for the matter to be considered a complaint. Whenever a resident expresses dissatisfaction, the charity must give them the option to make a complaint. A complaint that is submitted via a third party or representative must be handled in line with the charity’s complaint policy.

- 3.6. A service request is a request from a customer requiring action to be taken to put something right. (e.g., to carry out routine maintenance etc.) **service requests** are not a **complaint**. Service requests should be dealt with in accordance with the Residents' Handbook. Failure to deal appropriately with a service request may lead to the matter being dealt with as a complaint.
- 3.7. Service requests will be recorded, tracked and monitored to completion.
- 3.8. A complaint must be raised when the resident expresses dissatisfaction with the response to their service request, even if the handling of the service request remains ongoing. The Charity must not stop their efforts to address the service request if the resident raises a complaint.
- 3.9. An expression of dissatisfaction with services made through a resident's survey is not defined as a complaint, though wherever possible, the person completing the survey should be made aware of how they can pursue a complaint if they wish to. Where the Charity has asked for wider feedback about their services, they will provide details of how residents can raise a complaint.

3. How To Complain

Complaints can be made to any staff member or Trustee in any way - including but not limited to; Telephone, Face to Face, Email, Letter

- 3.1. Residents should be encouraged to raise complaints in the first instance, preferably verbally, as this can lead to better understanding and very often to a quick resolution of the issue. Please contact the Warden **Pat Anderson** during work hours if not an emergency either in her office or on **07970956459**. Or email at **warden@oldropewalk.co.uk**
- 3.3. Complaints can be made to the Clerk to the Trustees at **clerk@oldropewalk.co.uk** or addressed to **FAO: Clerk, The Office, The Old Rope Walk, Blandford Road, Hamworthy, BH15 4AU**. The clerk will acknowledge receipt of a written complaint within 7 working days. This acknowledgement will indicate the next course of action and the anticipated timescale. The charity will seek to resolve the complaint as a matter of urgency.
- 3.4. Complaints will be investigated by the clerk **Bree Norton-Smith**, alongside the Complaints Officer; Trustee **Julie Mills**. The complaints officer will have access to staff at all levels to facilitate the prompt resolution of complaints. The complaints officer has the authority and autonomy to act to resolve disputes promptly and fairly.
- 3.5. Appeals will be investigated by Trustee **Gill Dipple**
- 3.6. Staff and Trustees should be suitably trained in dealing with complaints

4. Exclusions

4.1. If a landlord decides not to accept a complaint, an explanation must be provided to the resident setting out the reasons why the matter is not suitable for the complaints process and the right to take that decision to the Ombudsman. If the Ombudsman does not agree that the exclusion has been fairly applied, the Ombudsman may tell the landlord to take on the complaint

4.2. Landlords must not take a blanket approach to excluding complaints; they must consider the individual circumstances of each complaint.

5. Complaints Process

5.1 At each stage of the complaints process, complaint /appeals officers must:

- a) Deal with complaints on their merits;
- b) Act independently and have an open mind but may consider reports of previous complaints that relate to the same issue being complained about;
- c) Give the resident a fair chance to set out their position;
- d) Take measures to address any actual or perceived conflict of interest; (which may include asking another trustee to investigate the complaint);
- e) Consider all relevant information and evidence carefully.
- f) Keep the details of the complaint confidential as far as possible, with information only being disclosed if necessary to properly investigate the matter.
- g) Record in full the details and outcome of all complaints and date received, all correspondence with resident and other parties and any relevant supporting documents.

5.2 Stage One of the Complaints Process

The Charity will acknowledge the complaint and make a record, within 7 working days. The acknowledgement will:

1. Summarise the Charity's understanding of the complaint
2. Make clear which aspects of the complaint the Charity is, and is not, responsible for and clarify any areas where this is not clear
3. Summarise the Charity's understanding of what the Complainant is seeking as an outcome under the "complaint definition"
4. Raise any questions that require clarification from the Complainant; and
5. Set out the next course of action and anticipated timescale.

5.3 The Charity will issue a full response within 10 working days from the complaint being acknowledged. In exceptional cases, if the Complaints Officer anticipates that the complaint will take longer to resolve, this will be explained to the resident with a clear timeframe set out for the resolution of the complaint which will not exceed a further 10 working days, without good reason. If any further extensions are required, this will be in agreement with resident who will be updated at regular intervals. Such explanation should also include the contact details of the Housing Ombudsman.

5.4 A complaint response will be provided to the resident when the answer to the complaint is known, not when the outstanding actions required to address the issue are completed. Outstanding actions will be tracked and actioned promptly with appropriate updates provided to the resident.

5.5 The Complaints Officer will investigate the complaint in an impartial manner permitting all relevant parties to provide information. The resident and any third parties involved in the complaint should be given the opportunity to set out their position before any final decision is made. The Complaints Officer may delegate the management and investigation of the complaint to another individual.

5.6 If the Complaints Officer is conflicted, or the complaint relates to the Complaints Officer/Clerk, the complaint should be directed to the Chair of trustees whose details are in the Residents' Handbook.

5.7. If the complaint involves questions relating to the Charity or the Complainant's legal obligations, the Complaints Officer will set out clearly their understanding of the respective legal obligations and may seek legal advice before doing so.

5.8. If new issues are raised by the resident during the stage one process, these should be dealt with as part of the process if they are relevant. However, if the issues relate to a different issue and/or are raised after the response has already been issued, the issues will be dealt with as a separate complaint.

5.9 In responding to the complaint, the Complaints Officer will confirm in writing:

- 1) The complaint stage
- 2) The complaint definition
- 3) The decision on the complaint
- 4) The reasons for any decisions made
- 5) The details of any remedy offered to put things right
- 6) Details of any outstanding actions; and
- 7) Details of how to escalate the matter to stage two if the individual is not satisfied with the result.

5.10 The charity can provide remedies at any stage of the complaint process

5.11. Stage Two of the Complaints Process

If the resident is not satisfied with the response from the Complaints Officer, they have 20 working days to submit an appeal (stage 2) in writing by email, via telephone call or in person to the Appeals Officer. The Appeals officer will not be the same person that responded at Stage 1 and whose details can be found in the Residents' Handbook and this policy. The charity will ensure that any request received after the 20 working days to escalate a complaint, will be assessed and dealt with on an individual basis.

5.11 The resident does not need to provide reasons for requesting the complaint to be escalated

5.12. The Appeals Officer will acknowledge the appeal within 7 working days of receipt and will;

- (a) Summarise the Charity's understanding of the appeal;
- (b) Summarise the Charity's understanding of what the resident is seeking as an outcome;
- (c) Raise any questions that require clarification from the resident; but acknowledge that reasons do not need to be given for the complaint to be escalated to appeal;
- (d) Set out the next course of action and anticipated timescale.

5.12. The Appeals Officer will respond in writing to the resident within 20 working days of the appeal being acknowledged, informing them of the outcome of the appeal process and the decision of the Appeals Panel.

5.13. If the Appeals Officer believes that the appeal will take longer than 20 working days, this will be explained to the resident with a clear timeframe set out for the resolution of the complaint which will not exceed a further 20 working days. If any further extensions are required, this will be in agreement with resident who will be updated at regular intervals. Such explanation should also include the contact details of the Housing Ombudsman.

5.14. A complaint response will be provided to the resident when the answer to the complaint is known, not when the outstanding actions required to address the issue are completed. Outstanding actions will be tracked and actioned promptly with appropriate updates provided to the resident.

In responding to the appeal, the Appeals Officer will confirm in writing:

- 1) The complaint stage
- 2) The complaint definition
- 3) The decision on the complaint
- 4) The reasons for any decisions made
- 5) The details of any remedy offered to put things right
- 6) Details of any outstanding actions; and
- 7) Details of how to escalate the matter to the Housing Ombudsman will be provided if the complainant is not satisfied with the response to the appeal. The decision of the Appeals Panel will be final.

6. Unreasonable Behaviour

We understand that complainants can get upset and frustrated when things have gone wrong.

6.1 If the Charity feels a complaint is pursued unreasonably, including any actions or behaviours of the resident/representative, these complaints will be reviewed in line with the charity's unreasonable behaviour policy.

6.2 All complaints will be reviewed on an individual basis

6.3 If any restrictions are put in place, these will proportionate and demonstrate regard for the provisions of the Equality Act 2010.

6.4 The charity will ensure any restrictions will be recorded, monitored and reviewed regularly and the complainant updated following the review.

5.5 Any restrictions in place will not prevent the Charity from ensuring the complaint can be taken through the full complaints process and must be proportionate (regard for Equality Act 2010).

7. Approach to Complaints

7.1. If we make a mistake, we will try to take practical action to put things right. We will ask the complainant to suggest what they would like us to do. We may decide that one or more of the following should be done to put things right:

- Apologise
- Acknowledge where things have gone wrong
- Provide/Change a service
- Provide an explanation or information;
- Review our literature (leaflets, poster and so on);
- Policy/Procedure Review
- Take action or Enforce decision
- Reconsider or changing a Decision
- Organise training and/or guidance for employees;
- Compensation
- Mediation Service

8. Possible Outcomes

- 8.1. If your complaint is upheld (i.e. the outcome of the review finds in your favour), you will receive an apology and, where appropriate, be given details of any action that we will take to remedy the situation or at least put things right for the future.
- 8.2. Any remedy offered must reflect the impact on the resident as a result of any fault identified
- 8.3. If your complaint is partially upheld (i.e. the outcome of the review finds in your favour, in part), you will receive an apology and explanation and, where appropriate, be given details of any action that we will take to remedy the situation, or at least put things right for the future.
- 8.4. If your complaint is not upheld (ie the outcome of the review does not find in your favour) you will be given an explanation.
- 8.5. The decision of the trustees will be final. Charities must take into account guidance issued by the Housing Ombudsman when deciding on appropriate outcomes.

9. Accessibility and Awareness

Complaints will be dealt with in a manner that is consistent with the Charity's Equality & Diversity Policy and the Charity's duties under the Equality Act 2010.

- 9.1. If any individual making a complaint wishes the Charity to make reasonable adjustments to accommodate an individual's particular needs, they, or their representative, should contact the nominated lead for Safeguarding matters (Christine Saville) whose details are in the Residents' Handbook, by phone or by email or in person to discuss what adjustments may be possible. The charity must keep a record of any reasonable adjustments agreed as well as a record of any disabilities the resident has disclosed. Any agreed reasonable adjustments must be kept under active review.
- 9.2. The Charity acknowledges that a high volume of complaints must not be seen as negative, as this can be indicative of a well-publicised and accessible complaints procedure. Low complaint volumes are potentially a sign that residents are unable to complain.
- 9.3. The Complaints Handling Policy including information about the Housing Ombudsman and the code will be hand posted to residents and published in communal areas
- 9.4. Residents will have the opportunity to have a representative deal with their complaint on their behalf, and to be represented or accompanied at any meeting. We will always follow data protection measures when disclosing any information to a third party.

10. Annual Review

This policy will be reviewed on an annual basis. The Charity will carry out an annual self-assessment in accordance with the Code.

10.1. The Trustees of the Charity as a whole will consider any findings of the annual self-assessment and the annual complaints performance and service improvement report.

11. Housing Ombudsman Service

All residents have the right to access the Housing Ombudsman Service about their complaint.

The contact details for the Housing Ombudsman Service are:

Telephone: 0300 111 3000

Email: info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk

Website: www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk

Address: Housing Ombudsman Service,
PO Box 1484, Unit D, Preston, PR2 0ET

This policy has been approved for issue by the board of trustees

Signature: 

Name: **Carol Evans**

Date: **7th July 2026**