



Complaints Handling Policy

COR-POL-06

Version 7.10

Date approved: 25/02/2026

Approved by: Customer Voice Committee

*'We / us' in this Policy refers to Southway Housing Trust (Southway).
'You' in this policy refers to the tenant(s) and residents.*

A guide to how we deal with complaints – February 2026

This document explains how we approach and resolve complaints.

Southway is committed to ensuring that all residents can access this policy. Alternative formats such as large print, Easy Read, audio or translated versions are available upon request. Please contact us to discuss your specific accessibility needs.

1. Our Values

- 1.1 The way we do things is determined by our values. We are guided by our REACH values: Respect, Equity, Ambition, Compassion and Honesty. We respect our residents and the communities they live in, and we are committed to providing excellent services that reflect their needs and experiences.
- 1.2 We believe in listening to residents and acting with compassion and honesty when things go wrong. This may lead to a complaint, and this policy sets out how we will respond, how we will put things right and how we will learn from complaints to improve our services.
- 1.3 Southway colleagues will work together, and with residents, to resolve complaints. We will take responsibility for any shortfalls identified and act professionally and transparently to address them. Southway colleagues follow these principles when dealing with complaints:
 - **Actively Listen and Show Empathy** – We take time to understand the concern and the impact it has had.
 - **Take Ownership** – We take responsibility for resolving the issue and learning from it.
 - **Focus on Resolution** – We aim to resolve complaints fairly, promptly and effectively.
 - **Follow Through on Agreed Actions** – We ensure that any commitments made during the complaint process are delivered and monitored until complete.

2. What is a service request?

2.1 A service request is a request from a resident requiring action to be taken to put something right. Service requests are not complaints, but we record, monitor and review them regularly. In practice, this usually means:

- Asking for a routine service, such as support to respond to anti-social behaviour.
- Requesting the landlord to address an issue for the first time.
- Any request where you're not expressing dissatisfaction but simply asking us to deliver our services.

3. What is a complaint?

3.1 A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions, or lack of action by Southway, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting an individual resident or group of residents

3.2 Residents are not required to use the word "complaint" for their concerns to be treated as such. Where dissatisfaction is expressed, the resident will be offered the option to have the matter handled as a complaint under this policy.

3.3 Complaints submitted by a representative or third party will be accepted and managed in accordance with this policy.

4. What is not a complaint?

4.1 We will always take your request for us to investigate your concerns seriously. However, in certain circumstances we may not be able to open a new complaint. Every complaint request will be treated on its own merits and if we are unable to open a complaint, we will provide a clear explanation of our decision and direct you to the Housing Ombudsman Service for support.

4.2 Examples of what we don't consider as a complaint are:

- If we have already investigated the concern in line with our Complaint Handling Policy, including providing a Stage 2 response. In these instances, you should refer your concerns to the Housing Ombudsman Service for help.

- If the complaint relates to a service Southway doesn't provide.
- If legal proceedings have started. This is defined as details of the claim, such as the Claim Form and Particulars of Claim, having been filed at court.
- If your complaint is linked to rent increases where the increase is driven by government guidance and regulation.
- If you're reporting anti-social behaviour (ASB) concerns, it will be managed in line with our ASB Policy. If you're raising concerns about how we've delivered our ASB service, it will be investigated as a complaint.

4.2.2 Usually, we will only investigate complaints if the issue occurred within the last 12 months. However, we will make exception if

- you weren't aware of the issue until a later date and the complaint is made within 12 months of becoming aware.
- the complaint relates to safeguarding concerns.
- the complaint involves health and safety risks.
- there is a valid reason for the delay in raising the issue such as vulnerability, illness or lack of support.

4.3 We won't address matters related to our governance structures through our complaints process. Instead, these will be managed in line with the relevant policies and processes.

4.4 We manage unreasonable behaviour according to our Managing Unreasonable Behaviour Policy. If this affects your access to the complaints service, we will inform you, give you the right to appeal, and signpost you to support from the Housing Ombudsman Service.

5. The Housing Ombudsman Service

5.1 The Housing Ombudsman is an independent body set up by law to review housing complaints. The Ombudsman can adjudicate on complaints that have been through Southway's complaints process, and provide independent guidance to residents about their complaints at any point. We will signpost you to the Ombudsman throughout our complaint resolution process.

- 5.2 You can find out more about the Ombudsman by visiting their [website](#) and contact them for advice at any point during your complaint via the following methods:

Complaint form: [Fill in the online complaint form](#)

Email: info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk

Phone: 0300 111 3000

Write: Housing Ombudsman Service, PO Box 1484, Unit D, Preston, PR2 0ET
Fax: 020 7831 1942

- 5.3 Each year Southway conducts a self-assessment against the Complaint Handling Code to make sure that we are compliant, and to identify areas for improvement in how we deal with complaints. We will complete self-assessments when requested by the Housing Ombudsman Service, or if we make a significant change in our procedures or organisational structure.
- 5.4 The latest version is available to view on our website [here](#). We will also provide a hard copy for residents who request it and promote our complaints process directly to customer through our communication channels.

6. I want to complain. How do I go about it?

- 6.1 Southway accepts complaints through a range of channels including telephone, letter, email, website, social media and in person. You can raise a complaint through any colleague, and we will proactively signpost you to our Customer Experience Team for support. Residents may express dissatisfaction in any format, and all concerns will be considered in line with this policy.
- 6.2 Where complaints are received via social media, we will respond using private channels to protect confidentiality and ensure appropriate handling. We regularly survey residents about the services they receive. Where negative feedback is provided residents will be informed of their right to make a complaint and offered support to do so.
- 6.3 Complaints may be submitted by a representative, including friends, relative, support workers, councillors or anyone else you would like to represent you. We will always check that you have given your consent for someone to contact us on your behalf to make sure that we protect your privacy and comply with Data Protection Legislation.

- 6.4 All complaints will be handled in line with Southway's Customer Care standards. When you make a complaint, we will still continue to progress the original service request without delay. Residents who make a complaint will be treated with fairness and respect and will receive the same level of service as all other residents.
- 6.5 We will keep a full record of your complaint and our responses, including your correspondence with us at every stage.

7. Equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) and Reasonable Adjustments

- 7.1 EDI is central to how we work, how we treat each other, and how we serve our communities. We believe everyone deserves to feel respected, valued and included. We ensure that these principles are applied fairly and consistently as outlined in our Equalities Scheme.
- 7.2 We carry out an annual Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) of our complaints policy and use customer voice, feedback and insight to ensure our complaints service is accessible to customers, reporting our performance regularly to our People & Places Committee.
- 7.3 Reasonable adjustments will be considered to support residents who may face barriers to access the service. Examples include:
- Use of translation services for residents whose first language is not English.
 - Tailored communication methods for residents who are hearing or visually impaired.
 - Accepting and recording verbal complaints where written communication is not possible.
 - There may also be other ways to assist you to complain that are not listed above. Please contact us to discuss how we can help and ensure that you are not denied access to our complaints service.
- 7.4 Where a resident requests a reasonable adjustment to support access to the complaints process and provides consent, Southway will retain this information to ensure future complaints can be handled appropriately and without delay.

8. What Happens Next?

- 8.1 We have a dedicated Customer Experience Team whose job it is to try and resolve problems, but you can make your initial complaint to any member of Southway staff, and they will ensure it is dealt with correctly. The Customer Experience Team is Southway's 'Complaints Officer'.
- 8.2 All Southway Staff understand the importance of customer feedback and will work with the Customer Experience Team and to make sure that they are properly resolved and provide all necessary information. All relevant colleagues have objectives linked to delivering our complaint service in a collaborative way acting in line with professional standards.
- 8.3 If you're dissatisfied with the response to a service request, you will be asked if you want it to be treated as a complaint under this policy.
- 8.4 We will define, log and acknowledge your complaint within 5 working days at both Stage 1 and Stage 2. When a complaint is logged at Stage 1 or escalated to Stage 2, we will set out our understanding of the complaint and the outcomes you're seeking. If any aspect of the complaint is unclear, we will ask you for clarification. In our acknowledgement, we will also explain which parts of the complaint we are responsible for, which parts we are not, and clarify anything where this is not clear.
- 8.5 If we don't believe we should deal with your request as a complaint we will explain the reasons why in line with this policy.
- 8.6 Where actions have been agreed as part of the complaint resolution but remain outstanding, this will not delay the complaint response. Southway will provide progress updates on outstanding action at least every two weeks until they are completed.

9. Our Complaint Resolution Process

- 9.1 In line with the Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code, Southway has a two-stage complaints process.

Stage 1

- 9.2 Your complaint will be assigned to an officer who will be responsible for dealing with it and keeping you up to date with what is happening. All officers that handle Southway complaints will be trained and understand the complaints policy. If there is a potential conflict of interest (the officer is part of the complaint or is known to you in a way that might compromise

impartiality) we will assign the complaint to a different officer. We will confirm this to you no later than five working days after you make the request in our acknowledgement letter.

- 9.3 The officer will be proactive, find out what you are seeking as an outcome and consider this when conducting their investigation and making their decision.
- 9.4 The officer will consider all information and evidence carefully, be independent, impartial and focus on a solution to the problem with an open mind.
- 9.5 We will consider previous complaint reports if it helps us to understand and resolve the issue.
- 9.6 If you raise additional issues during the investigation, we will determine whether they are directly related to the original complaint and whether including them would cause any unreasonable delay to our Stage 1 response. Where the new issues are related and can be considered without delaying the Stage 1 response we will incorporate them into the existing complaint. Where the Stage 1 response has already been issued, or the new issues are unrelated, or including them would unreasonably delay our response, the new issues will be logged as a new complaint and handled in line with our two-stage complaints procedure. You will usually receive a full written response within 10 working days of the complaint being acknowledged, written in plain English that sets out our decision on the complaint and what steps we intend to take next.
- 9.7 The response will address all points raised in the complaint and provide clear reasons for any decisions, referencing the relevant policy, law, and good practice where appropriate.
- 9.8 If we cannot provide a response within 10 working days of acknowledging your complaint we will explain why and agree a date that you will receive it by. This will not normally be longer than another 10 working days and we will keep you informed about the reasons for the delay. If the delay is due to staff absence, we will assign your complaint to another officer. We will also agree with you suitable intervals for keeping you updated on the progress of the complaint. We will also provide you with contact details for the Ombudsman.
- 9.9 If you inform us that you are not satisfied with part or all of the outcome of your complaint, we will progress your complaint to be reviewed at Stage 2 of our process. Usually this should be within fifteen working days of receiving your Stage 1 outcome. You will not be required to explain why you wish to escalate your complaint.

Stage 2

- 9.10 Your complaint will be assigned to a senior officer, with no prior involvement in your Stage 1 complaint, who will be responsible for dealing with it and keeping you up to date with what is happening.
- 9.11 All officers that handle Southway complaints will be trained and understand the complaints policy. If there is a potential conflict of interest (the officer is part of the complaint or is known to you in a way that might compromise impartiality) we will assign the complaint to a different officer. We will confirm this to you no later than five working days after you make the request.
- 9.12 The officer will be proactive, find out what you are seeking as an outcome and consider this when conducting their investigation and making their decision.
- 9.13 The officer will consider all information and evidence carefully, be independent, impartial and focus on a solution to the problem with an open mind.
- 9.14 We will consider previous complaint reports if it helps us to understand and resolve the issue. We will conduct a full review of your complaint and provide you with rationale for our decision.
- 9.15 You will receive a full written response within 20 working days of Southway acknowledging your complaint, written in plain English that sets out our decision on the complaint and what steps we intend to take next. If, for some reason, we cannot provide a response within 20 working days of acknowledging your complaint we will explain why and agree a date that you will receive it by. This will not normally be longer than another 20 working days and we will keep you informed about the reasons for the delay. If the delay is due to staff absence, we will assign your complaint to another officer. We will also provide you with contact details for the Ombudsman.
- 9.16 The response will address all points raised in the complaint and provide clear reasons for any decisions, referencing the relevant policy, law, and good practice where appropriate. Our Stage 2 complaint represents our final decision, and we will make sure all necessary team members have provided input.
- 9.17 The response will not be delayed because outstanding actions required to address the issue, have not been completed. For example, we have agreed to carry out a repair, to resolve the complaint, but we are awaiting a part to complete it. We will track actions that we agree as part of complaints

resolution and provide you with regular updates until the point that they are complete. Whatever the outcome of the review, we will give you advice on how to contact the Ombudsman if you wish to do so.

10. Complaint Outcomes

10.1 When you make a complaint, we will either uphold, partially uphold or not uphold it. This means

- **Upheld.** This means the outcome of the investigation has found in your favour. We will take the necessary action to resolve the situation.
- **Partially upheld.** This means the investigation found that some parts of the complaint were justified and we will take appropriate action to address those issues.
- **Not Upheld.** This means the outcome of the investigation has not found in your favour. If this is the case we will tell you how to appeal, or contact the Ombudsman as appropriate

10.2 If a complaint is upheld or partially upheld at any stage of the process, Southway will:

- Say sorry for the things we got wrong.
- Apologise to you for the inconvenience caused.
- Take some practical action to put things right. We will agree the actions with you and set a realistic deadline to complete them.
- Ensure that the same situation does not happen again.
- Changing Policies or Procedures
- Reconsidering or changing a decision
- Amending or correcting a decision.
- Explain what will happen and when and make sure we deliver what we promise.
- Offer a financial remedy or compensation in some circumstances. You can find more detail about this in our [Customer Compensation Policy](#).

- 10.3 When offering a financial remedy or compensation, we will take into account the impact the issue you complained about had on you and refer to Ombudsman guidance

11. Learning From our Mistakes

- 11.1 We see complaints as an opportunity to learn, do things differently, and improve our services. We will discuss complaints with individuals and teams, so that we can do better next time.
- 11.2 We will include lessons learned in our complaint responses, if applicable, so you understand how your complaint has helped us to improve services at Southway.
- 11.3 Every year we will report to our tenants and residents how many complaints we received, how many were reported to the Ombudsman, but more importantly the service improvements we have made as a result. We will publish the information on our website, and in our tenant newsletter, Southway Stories.
- 11.4 The Southway Board appoints a Member Responsible for Complaints, with responsibility and accountability for complaints. Our complaints handling approach is the responsibility of our Customer Voice Committee. This Committee has delegated authority from the Board and is mainly made up of tenants, residents and local councillors.
- 11.5 The Customer Voice Committee receive an annual complaints performance and service improvement report on our complaint handling performance, which includes a self-assessment against the Complaint Handling Code.

12. Customer Voice

- 12.1 We recognise that the best way to make our services customer friendly is to involve customers in designing and reviewing them. This extends to our approach to complaints.
- 12.2 We obtain customer feedback on complaint handling. We involve customers when amending our complaints policy and process.
- 12.3 Complaints made regarding service failure linked to our customer involvement services will be managed in line with this policy.

13. Review

- 13.1 We will review this guide at least every year to make sure that it is up to date, relevant and is compliant with the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code.

14. Complaints about colleagues and involved tenants and residents

- 14.1 Southway supports tenant involvement, with several influencing groups and places reserved for tenants on our Board and Committees.
- 14.2 Complaints made by these tenants regarding service failure will be dealt with in the timescales set out in this policy. Complaints relating to involvement in Tenant groups or Southway's Governance structure will be dealt with separately, under the appropriate policy.
- 14.3 If your complaint is about one of Southway's involved residents, we will consider whether the complaints policy is the most appropriate route depending on the nature of the allegation, We will discuss this with you when you make your initial complaint.
- 14.4 Complaints about colleagues will be investigated in line with this Policy. Depending on the severity of the complaint, a Disciplinary or Capability procedure may need to be invoked. In these circumstances, full details of any action taken against an individual colleague cannot be disclosed to the complainant.
- 14.5 If your complaint is about another resident, or a member of staff, they will be given the chance to set out their position or comment on any findings before a final decision is reached.

15. Complaints about financial advice

- 15.1 We offer a free debt advice service to our tenants and residents. If complaints about this service cannot be resolved in line with this Policy, complainants will be advised of the opportunity to seek redress through the Financial Ombudsman Service, enclosing a copy of the Financial Ombudsman Services standard explanatory leaflet and the contact details of the Financial Ombudsman Service.

16. Complaints to the Regulator of Social Housing Standards

- 16.1 We adhere to the consumer standards as set out by the housing regulator. The standards cover a range of issues around quality of accommodation and tenancy management.
- 16.2 Tenants and residents have the right to report alleged breaches for the regulator to investigate. Further details can be found by visiting <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/regulator-of-social-housing/about/complaints-procedure>

17. Complaints About Other Organisations

- 17.1 We work with a number of different organisations to provide services to our tenants and residents. Should you have a complaint about their service while carrying out business or activity for Southway, we will investigate this through this Complaints Policy. If the complaint does not relate to Southway activity we will we will advise you of the best course of action.

18. Anonymous Complaints

- 18.1 Southway will investigate and respond to all complaints even if the source is unknown. If we have no way to share the outcome with the complainant, we will record the outcome on file.

POLICY REVIEW HISTORY	
<i>To be completed during each review</i>	
Previous versions	
Date of last EIA:	February 2026
Review lead by:	Assistant Director of Customers and Communities

Main points or amendments made and reasons

3.2, 6.2 and throughout - Removed references to a “formal” procedure to avoid implying there is an additional informal route.

2 and throughout - Simplified the definition of service requests, using the Ombudsman’s guidance.

4 -Combined previous Unreasonable Complaints, ASB, Legal Complaints and Complaint exceptions sections to create a clearer, simpler “what is not a complaint” list and fixed formatting issues with the previous version.

4.4 - This makes reference to how we will manage complaints where a customer’s behaviour is found to be unreasonable in line with our Managing Unacceptable Customer Behaviour Policy. We have also changed the name of the Managing Unacceptable Behaviour Policy from Managing Unacceptable Behaviour Against Staff Policy.

5.3- Clarifies compliance with the Ombudsman’s self-assessment requirements.

8.5 and 9.6 - Added detail on how we will clarify complaints with customers.

9.6 - Confirmed our approach if a customer reports additional issues during the complaint process.

9.10 - Confirmed that customers do not need to give a reason to escalate to Stage 2.

14.3 - Clarified when other processes may be used if concerns relate to another customer.

14.3 and 14.4 - Confirmed that staff complaints will be managed under this policy and explained limits on sharing outcomes from HR processes.

Throughout -Clarified acknowledgement and response times.

Next review due:

Q3 2026/27

Approval level:

Customer Voice Committee