

brighter futures

HOUSING • HEALTH • HOPE

Feedback Policy: Complaints, Compliments and Comments

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Effective date	January 2020	Review date	July 2022
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Version Control

Date	Owner	Version	Reason for Change

Summary of Changes

Section	Change

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1. Policy Statement

- 1.1 At Brighter Futures we believe that all feedback, including complaints, comments and compliments give us an opportunity to review the way we work, identify changes that we can make and lessons we can learn to continually improve the services we operate.
- 1.2 We will make it as easy as possible for people to give us feedback, make comments, compliments, or complaints. We understand that it can be difficult for some people to make their voice heard so people can be accompanied, advised, represented, or supported by a person of their choice at any time.
- 1.3 We aim to make sure that our actions are carried out as quickly as possible and that our communication is timely and polite. We will treat all feedback as an opportunity to build and mend relationships with residents.
- 1.4 We will provide transparent information about our complaints service, trends and data on the types and volumes received and how we are using this information to improve our service.
- 1.5 Our response to feedback is driven by our corporate values and by our compliance with the Regulator of Social Housing's Tenant Involvement and Empowerment standard and the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code.

2. Definitions

- 2.1 We use the definition of a complaint included in the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code 2022:
- A *complaint* is defined 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

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acting on its behalf, affecting an individual resident or group of residents’.

Other definitions:

- A *compliment* is an unsolicited expression of gratitude or praise for a member of staff or service area. It’s feedback that lets us know if we did something really well.
- A *comment* is a volunteered personal opinion or belief, feedback or remark expressed by a tenant or customer or an idea for making changes or improvements to any part of Brighter Futures’ services.
- *Feedback* helpful information or criticism given to indicate what can be done to improve something.
- An *appeal* – will be defined as ‘a disagreement with the decision we have made in line with our published policies and procedures’.

3. Values in action

3.1 The following are Brighter Futures’ Values relevant to our handling of feedback:

- We are passionate about our services and the important role we play in the lives of our customers.
- We empower people to express how they feel about the services they need and to think about how we could improve them.
- We give everyone an opportunity to express an opinion. We respect and listen to them all equally and keep them fully informed of the outcome.
- We will feedback creatively on how we run our services and what we could do to improve them.

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- A sustainable service meets the needs of its customers. We recognise that where we cannot meet our customer needs, we have a responsibility to ensure commissioners understand this and how existing unmet needs could be addressed.

4. The Complaints Process

4.1 Brighter Futures operates a 2 stage complaints process. The process focuses on resolving issues at an early stage. We will therefore seek to remedy issues before a formal complaint is made. We will apologise if we have got things wrong, put things right quickly and let the complainant about what we plan to do.

4.2 We recognise that it is sometimes more difficult to get to a resolution where everyone is satisfied so our second stage enables the findings of the first stage to be reviewed. Our complaints process also signposts complainants to organisations and individuals that can help people make complaints and with appeals.

Stage 1

- The complaint is acknowledged within 2 working days and complainant advised who will be investigating the complaint.
- The investigating officer will contact the complainant to obtain further details including the outcome the complainant is seeking.
- The complaint investigation will be undertaken in an independent and fair manner using the evidence available. The investigation will be kept confidential as far as possible and potential conflicts of interests will be managed.
- Staff and residents who have had complaints made against them will be given the opportunity to give their

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version of events and respond to the investigation's findings.

- A full record of the complaints investigation and correspondence will be maintained.
- Investigations will consider previous complaints and reports made if the complaint relates to an unresolved issue.
- A full response will be provided within 10 working days. The letter will address all areas of the complaint raised.
- If the investigation will take longer, and /or further evidence is required, the complainant will be informed of this. The complainant will be asked to agree to an increase in the time frame to beyond 10 days if necessary.
- Where a formal complaint has been resolved quickly (i.e., within 3 working days), to the satisfaction of the customer, the case will be closed and a formal letter may not be received if the customer agrees.

4.3 Complainant who are not satisfied with the outcome of Stage 1, may escalate their complaint to Stage 2. Complainants must notify Brighter Futures within 10 working days that they wish to take their complaint to Stage 2. Complainants must inform Brighter Futures of their outstanding issues are and what outcome they are looking for.

4.4 Cases will only be escalated where the substance of the case remains the same as Stage 1. If new elements are raised, which would result in a different resolution than would normally have been offered in Stage 1, a new complaint will be opened.

Stage 2

- The Stage 2 complaint will be acknowledged within 2 working days with the complainant advised who will be investigating. The complainant will be informed of Brighter

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Future's understanding of the unresolved complaints issues.

- The complaints investigation will be undertaken by a more senior member of staff than in Stage 1.
- If agreed between the investigating officer and the complainant, or requested by the complainant, a meeting may be arranged for the case to be discussed in person at an agreed location.
- Complainants can choose to be accompanied if they advise Brighter Futures two days in advance and state in what capacity they are attending.
- A full record of the complaints investigation and correspondence will be maintained.
- After Stage 2, a customer will normally receive the outcome of the investigation within 20 working days. If the investigation takes longer than 20 days the complainant will be provided with regular updates and asked to agree to the extension in timeframes.
- The complainant will be informed in writing of the complaint investigated, the outcome of the investigation and the reasons for decisions made, actions taken and to be taken to remedy the complaint and how the complainant can escalate their complaint to an Ombudsman.

5. How To Submit Complaints, Comments, Comments and Feedback

5.1 Our complaints officer is the Assistant Director of Governance, contracts and procurement.

5.2 Complaints can be sent by email to: complaints@brighter-futures.org.uk

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- 5.3 Complaints can be posted to: Assistant Director of Governance, contracts and procurement, Unit 5 Whittle Court, Town Road, Hanley, Stoke-On-Trent. ST1 2QE
- 5.4 Complaints can be made by phone by ringing 01782 406000.
- 5.5 Tenants, customers and others can also make complaints, comments, compliments and give feedback directly by talking to a member of Brighter Futures staff.
- 5.6 Brighter Futures also acknowledges that groups of tenants and customers may submit petitions, and these will be treated as complaints.
- 5.7 Brighter Futures will also review comments and other forms of feedback, and identify those which constitute a complaint and treat those as complaints to be managed through the complaint process.
- 5.8 Tenants and customers are not encouraged to make complaints by social media but to make complaints through the channels specified in this policy. This enables compliance with data protection rules, maintains privacy and reputations.
- 5.9 Tenants, customers and others can make complaints and give feedback, make comments and compliments in person or get an agent such as a friend or relative or an independent advocate to make them on their behalf.
- 5.10 The Brighter Futures' complaints officer, the Assistant Director of Governance, contracts and procurement will help complainants find an independent advocate if requested.
- 5.11 Confidentiality and data protection apply to the complaints process; Brighter Futures will not share personal or property

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information gathered as part of the complaint investigation with any third party who is not entitled to receive it, in line with data protection legislation.

6. Other Options Available to Tenants and Customers

Designated person

6.1 A social housing tenant may approach a 'designated person' (as set out in the Localism Act 2011) if they are still dissatisfied after exhausting the Brighter Futures complaints process. The role of a 'designated person' is to help resolve tenant complaints by providing advice to tenants, advocating on their behalf, discussing matters with the landlord, engaging with other designated persons and carrying out other actions. The list of 'designated persons' comprises:

- MPs (Members of Parliament)
- Councillors
- Tenant Panels.

6.2 'Designated persons' may also refer complaints to the Housing Ombudsman if they are unable to resolve a complaint locally and the complainant agrees.

Housing Ombudsman

6.3 The Housing Ombudsman Service can provide advice and support to tenants throughout the life of a complaint. If the complaint remains unresolved at the end of the Brighter Futures complaint process, tenants can contact them to request a review. They must wait eight weeks unless a designated person refers the complaint.

6.4 The Housing Ombudsman can be contracted at:
Housing Ombudsman Service, PO Box 152, Liverpool. L33 7WQ
Telephone: 0300 111 3000

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Email: info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk

Web: ww.housing-ombudsman.org.uk

The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.

6.5 Local Complaints about support services can be taken to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman. Any customer receiving care services may choose to access their local council's complaints process instead of the Brighter Futures complaints process before approaching the Ombudsman.

6.6 The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman can be contacted at: PO Box 47771, Coventry. CV4 0EH
Telephone: 0300 061 0614

Web: www.lgo.org.uk

6.7 Complaints about welfare benefits advice can be taken to the Financial Ombudsman Service if you are not satisfied with our response.

6.8 The Financial Ombudsman Service can be contacted at:
Exchange Tower, Harbour Exchange Square, London. E14 9GE

Telephone: 0800 023 4567

Email: complaint.info@financial-ombudsman.org.uk

7. Exemptions

7.1 In some situations, and circumstances, we will deal with your complaint differently. These include, for example:

- The issue you are raising is better dealt with using another Brighter Futures policy or process, anti-social behaviour or repairs are examples
- A request for a service, such as the first report of a repair
- Reports of anti-social behaviour or nuisance (not the handling of an existing ASB case)

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- the complainant is taking legal action related to their complaint
- the complaint is not about Brighter Futures but about another organisation or person
- the complainant has or is also making a significant insurance claim (unless you want to complain about the way we handled this)
- the complainant has made repeated or clearly unfounded complaints
- the complainant has made repeated complaints about the same or related matters that we have already addressed
- the complainant has made an unreasonable number of complaints over a short period of time about matters that are minor
- the complaint is made more than six months after the alleged incident the complaint is about occurred
- the volume of contact from a resident or customer is unreasonable (in which case response times in our service standards may not apply)
- the content or tone of the contact causes a disproportionate or unjustified level of disruption.

7.2 Where Brighter Futures believes complaints are being made in an unacceptable way including persistent, vexatious, or malicious, they may be dealt with under its unacceptable behaviour policy. This may involve Brighter Futures liaising with external bodies such as the Housing Ombudsman to resolve the complaint. Brighter Futures will consider the implications of the Equality Act when managing complaints through its unacceptable behaviour policy.

7.3 Any complaints / appeals that are more than 6 months old will not normally be investigated unless the complainant is able to demonstrate that there are ongoing / unresolved issues.

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7.4 If Brighter Futures decides not to accept a complaint, the complainant will be provided with a detailed explanation of the reasons why and will be provided with information on how the complaint can be escalated to outside organisations including the Housing Ombudsman.

8. Statutory Appeals

8.1 In addition to 'general appeals' there are a number of areas of service delivery where Brighter Futures' customers have a legal right to an internal appeal, known as 'statutory appeals' as below).

8.2 All statutory appeals are on a 1 stage process and will be heard via an appeal meeting, at which the customer may choose to make personal representation, submit evidence, and be accompanied by a person of their choice, giving Brighter Futures 48 hours' notice in advance of the meeting. All statutory appeals will be heard by a more senior officer than sanctioned the original decision.

8.3 Any subsequent changes to this evidence or change of the person accompanying may result in the review being postponed, the evidence not being considered or a refusal to hear the customer(s) representative.

8.4 If having requested an internal appeal hearing the customer(s) fail to attend or inform Brighter Futures of the reasons why they cannot attend, the reviewing officer may proceed with the hearing in their absence.

8.5 On a discretionary basis, Brighter Futures may choose to postpone a hearing if requested by the customer(s) and there is a justifiable reason for doing so or if the person due to hear the appeal is unavailable for any reason.

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- 8.6 This may, however, not always be possible if the delay would prevent Brighter Futures from taking expedient legal action to remedy a tenancy breach or it would result in hearings being outside the permitted legal framework.
- 8.7 If during a hearing an adjournment is requested by either Brighter Futures, the tenant, customer(s) or their representatives and a further meeting is necessary, Brighter Futures will give reasonable notice of the date, time, and venue of the adjourned hearing.
- 8.8 When hearing internal statutory appeals, the reviewing officer will assess the following:
- If the legal procedures and notice periods have been adhered to in serving of notices or letters sent to customer(s) advising of actions to be taken
 - It was appropriate in terms of evidence provided
 - The decision will stand up to scrutiny

9. External Complaint and Appeals Process

- 9.1 Where the internal complaints process is exhausted, and the complainant is not satisfied with the response, they may take their complaint to the independent Housing Ombudsman.
- 9.2 The Independent Housing Ombudsman will only review cases:
- That have exhausted Brighter Futures' internal complaint and appeal handling process
 - Are referred by a 'Designated Person' or have the authorisation from the 'Designated Person' to be forwarded directly from the customer
 - Where a 'Designated Person' has reviewed a complaint, but it remains unresolved
 - Where customers make direct referrals when eight weeks have elapsed from the end of the internal complaints process

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10. Putting Things Right

- 10.1 If our own complaint investigation or reviews by outside agencies including the Housing Ombudsman find that we have failed in our duties to our tenants, customers and other stakeholder we will seek to put things right to the satisfaction of the complainant. We will make a sincere apology, put things right and offer compensation where appropriate in line with our Compensation policy. We will seek to honour all our legal obligations for redress.
- 10.2 Brighter Futures will act upon and fully implement any recommendations or determinations that are made because of cases that have been reviewed by the Independent Housing Ombudsman.

11. How we manage and use complaints

- 11.1 With strategic direction from the Board and Executive Leadership Team (ELT), a positive approach is provided for complaints, appeals and all forms of customer feedback, with this information being used to deliver improvements in customer services.
- 11.2 The Chair of the Customer Services Committee will be the member of the Board with lead responsibility for driving the positive complaints handling culture.
- 11.3 Brighter Futures will ensure that it provides complaints, comments, compliments and feedback opportunities that are easy to understand and easy to access for all customers. This will be done by:
- Involving customers in designing and improving all information on complaints, appeals and feedback to ensure it is jargon free and easy to understand.
 - Making relevant information available in alternative languages and formats such as large print, on request

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- Ensuring customers receive support from Brighter Futures staff, or via working in partnership with community support agencies and advocacy grounds
- Analysing complaints, appeals and feedback information against our known customer profile information and the diversity of the community where Brighter Futures operates
- Resolving complaints to customers' satisfaction, efficiently and learning from it to improve customer service.

11.4 Brighter Futures will use appropriate resources to gather, analyse and act upon complaints, comments, compliments, and feedback. We will do this by:

- Ensuring staff are trained and regularly assessed in complaints, appeals and feedback handling including being aware of the relevant policies and procedures and taking ownership of the issue with an aim to resolve at the first point of contact.
- Ensuring we use complaints, appeals and customer feedback to improve the service delivered to customers.

11.5 Brighter Futures will constantly monitor its standards of service and the way it responds to complaints / compliments and feedback. To achieve this, we will:

- Provide information to our managers, customers, and Board to show trends and responses provided and subsequent actions taken to improve the service
- Set targets to benchmark performance against our peers
- Undertake regular reviews of the policy and best practice in dealing with complaints, compliments, and feedback to improve the service to customers
- Publish data including lessons learned so that performance and satisfaction overall is improved.

12. Feedback

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- 12.1 Brighter Futures will maximise all types of formal and informal customer feedback to drive service improvement. The intelligence gained from all forms of feedback including performance and satisfaction information is regularly shared with customers. The information is used to identify improvement opportunities and may trigger a service review and remedial actions when there are any dips in performance.
- 12.2 Brighter Futures aims to capture informal interactions which are not complaints, appeals, suggestions, or compliments, whether positive or negative comments about the services it delivers and will use this information to identify issues that are common to several customers and detail the action taken as a result in customer newsletters and on the website.
- 12.3 Brighter Futures encourages customers to let us know when we have done something well, in addition to areas it needs to improve in. A register of all compliments received is maintained to improve future service delivery.
- 12.4 All customers (internal / external) are encouraged to submit suggestions on how it can change and improve the ways in which it works to deliver better services.
- 12.5 Surveys will be used to gain customer intelligence and assess satisfaction with the ways in which it is delivering services. Brighter Futures has a programme of surveys that is reviewed annually with the tenant led Service Review Groups and includes STAR (Survey of Tenants and Residents) surveys, on-going in-house surveys, and one-off service-specific surveys. People participating in surveys will be informed of the complaints process as a mechanism to remedy dissatisfaction with services provided by Brighter Futures.

13. **Legislation/Regulation / Other Policies**

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- i. Regulator of Social Housing, Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard
- ii. Equality Act 2010
- iii. Human Rights Act 1998
- iv. Localism Act 2011
- v. Compensation Policy
- vi. Tenancy Policy.

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