

Refuge Complaints Policy

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1. Policy Statement

At Refuge we are committed to using every concern raised as an opportunity to review the quality and safety of the services we provide and improve what we do. Our Complaints Policy aims to ensure that complaints are addressed respectfully, efficiently, and effectively, promoting continuous improvement and stakeholder satisfaction.

We believe that most complaints can be resolved promptly when an explanation, apology or resolution is offered to the service user.

Aligned with Refuge’s Safeguarding Policy, this policy supports our dedication to maintaining the highest standards of service and support for survivors. We provide clear, accessible procedures for raising and resolving complaints, emphasising the importance of open communication and stakeholder engagement. Through a structured approach we strive to address and rectify any issues at the earliest possible opportunity, ensuring that our services continually evolve to meet the needs and expectations of those we support

2. What is a complaint?

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions, or lack of action by Refuge, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting a service user or group of service users.

For complaints relating to Refuge's fundraising activities please refer to Refuge's Fundraising Complaints Procedure.

3. What will not be treated as a complaint?

Refuge does not take a blanket approach to excluding complaints and the individual circumstances of each complaint must be considered. However, in most circumstances the following will not be treated as complaints under Refuge's complaints policy:

- Request from a service user to Refuge requiring action to be taken to put something right e.g. reporting a repair or raising a concern about another resident in a refuge, unless the service user expresses dissatisfaction with how the service request has been handled.
- A complaint relating to an issue that occurred over twelve months ago where the service user has been aware of the issue for over 12-months.
- Where 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.
- Matters that have previously been considered under the complaints policy.
- An expression of dissatisfaction with services made through a survey, focus group or similar process is not defined as a complaint, though wherever possible, the person providing the feedback should be made aware of how they can pursue a complaint if they wish to

If Refuge decides not to accept a complaint, we will provide the reasons why. A service user has the right to take the decision not to investigate their complaint to the Housing Ombudsman Service.

There may be occasions when a resident in refuge accommodation wants to complain about something that is the responsibility of the owner or leaseholder of the property. In these circumstances, where Refuge is not the owner or leaseholder of the property, we will support the resident to complain to the landlord of the building following the landlord's complaint procedure.

4. Who can make a complaint?

Any person accessing Refuge's services who expresses dissatisfaction will be given the choice to make a complaint, they do not need to use the word "complaint" for it to be treated as such. A complaint that is submitted via a third party or representative will be handled in line with Refuge's Complaints Policy.

5. How should complaints be made?

Service users can make complaints by their preferred method, this could be verbally, in writing, via text or email. Complaints can also be submitted via a third party or representative on their behalf.

Any Refuge employee can accept a complaint and will ensure that it is handled in line with Refuge's Complaints Policy.

Complaints can also be sent via email to complaints@refuge.org.uk this email is monitored by Refuge employees who are not involved in the direct management of individual services.

It is helpful if the complaint includes the following information:

- Name and contact details of the service user
- Name, position, and contact details of the person submitting the complaint on their behalf (if applicable)
- Details of the complaint including which service the complaint is about, who was involved and any relevant dates
- The outcome the service user would like from their complaint

6. Representation and reasonable adjustments

Refuge will make reasonable adjustments for service users where appropriate under the Equality Act 2010. Refuge will maintain records of any reasonable adjustments which have been agreed with the service user, as well as a record of any disabilities a service user has disclosed. Any agreed reasonable adjustments will be kept under review.

A service user can have a representative deal with their complaint on their behalf and can be accompanied at any meeting to discuss their complaint. The details of the person representing them and/or accompanying should be shared with the person responsible for handling their complaint in advance of any meeting.

Any third party representing or supporting the service user cannot be a person whose abuse the service user is fleeing and must be over 18 years of age.

Refuge will endeavour to identify an independent advocate to support the service user through the complaints procedure if this is what the service user wishes.

We understand that making a complaint can be difficult and although we cannot guarantee anonymity, we aim to create a safe space for service users to raise their concerns, this may include offering support from an alternative worker or service whilst the complaint is being investigated.

7. Complaints procedure

There are two simple stages to Refuge's complaints procedure:

Stage 1

- The complaint will be acknowledged **within 5 working days** of receiving the complaint. The acknowledgement will include:
 - who will investigate the complaint
 - complaint details
 - outcome the service user is seeking
 - aspects of the complaint that are not Refuge's responsibility

If the complaint details or outcome sought is unclear, the service user will be asked for clarification.

- The person investigating the complaint will provide a full response **within 10 working days** of the complaint being acknowledged.
- If an extension is necessary, this must be no more than **10 working days** and the reason(s) must be clearly explained to the service user. The service user must be provided with the contact details for the Housing Ombudsman Service when being informed of the extension.
- The outcome will be confirmed in writing to the service user in clear, plain language and will include:
 - the complaint stage
 - details of the complaint being investigated
 - the decision on the complaint
 - the reasons for the decision
 - the details of any remedy offered to put things right
 - details of any outstanding actions
 - details of how to escalate the matter to stage 2 if dissatisfied with the response

Where service users raise 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.

Stage 2 – Final stage

Stage 2 of the Complaint's Procedure aims to check that the actions and decisions taken at stage 1 were thorough, reasonable, and fair.

- If all or part of the complaint is not resolved to the service user's satisfaction at stage 1, it must be progressed to stage 2 of the procedure to be reviewed. The service user is not required to provide a reason for requesting the review
- A stage 2 complaint review cannot be considered by the same person who considered stage 1
- Requests for a stage 2 review must be acknowledged, defined, and recorded within **5 working days of the escalation request being received**.
- A final response to the stage 2 must be provided to the service user **within 20 working days** of the complaint being acknowledged.
- The outcome of the stage 2 review will be confirmed in writing to the service user in clear, plain language and will include:
 - the complaint stage
 - the details of the complaint under review
 - the decision on the complaint
 - the reasons for the decision
 - the details of any remedy offered to put things right
 - details of any outstanding actions

- how to contact the Housing Ombudsman Service should the service user be dissatisfied with the outcome

8. Extensions

Refuge will decide whether an extension to the timescales within this policy are needed when considering the complexity of the complaint and then inform the service user of the expected timescale for response. During the extension period the service user must be kept informed about progress with their complaint at mutually agreed intervals.

An extension must be no more than:

Stage 1 - 10 working days

Stage 2 - 20 working days

There must be a good reason to extend the timescales beyond those set out above, and the reason(s) must be clearly explained to the service user.

When informing a service user of an extension to the timescales within this policy the service user must also be provided with the contact details for the Housing Ombudsman Service.

9. Putting things right

Where something has gone wrong Refuge will acknowledge this and set out the actions it has already taken, or intends to take, to put things right. These can include:

- apologising
- acknowledging where things have gone wrong
- providing an explanation, assistance, or reasons
- taking action if there has been delay
- reconsidering or changing a decision
- amending a record or adding a correction or addendum
- changing policies, procedures, or practices

The remedy offered should reflect the impact of the mistake on the service user and must clearly set out what will happen and by when, in agreement with the service user where appropriate. Any remedy proposed must be followed through to completion and the service user must be kept informed of progress.

For residents Refuge will take account of [the guidance issued by the Ombudsman](#) when deciding on appropriate remedies.

10. Compliance with Complaint Handling Code

Refuge is committed to providing a clear and accessible complaints process which complies with the requirements of the Housing Ombudsman Service's [Complaint Handling Code](#)

Each year we report our complaints performance to Refuge's Board of Trustees and publish this information on our website.

11. Useful links and contact details:

Refuge's Complaints Policy

This policy is made available to everyone accessing Refuge's services, it is included in the Welcome Pack in our refuges, is available on request from any of our services and is published on [Refuge's website](#).

Housing Ombudsman Service

The Housing Ombudsman Service is an independent, impartial, and free service for social housing residents. The Service makes the final decision on disputes between residents and landlords that are registered members of the Housing Ombudsman Scheme.

Contact details for the Housing Ombudsman Service are:

Housing Ombudsman Service
Exchange Tower
Harbour Exchange Square
London E14 9GE

Telephone: 0300 111 3000

E-mail: info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk

Website: www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk

[Make a complaint to the Housing Ombudsman Service](#)

[How to make a complaint to your landlord](#)

Charity Commission

The Commission is the independent regulator of charities. Its job as regulator is to ensure that charities are accountable, well run and meet their legal obligations.

The Charity Commission's involvement in looking at complaints is limited to issues that pose a serious risk of significant harm to a charity's assets, services, reputation, or service users.

Contact details for the Charity Commission are:

Charity Commission
PO Box 211
Bootle
L20 7YX

Telephone: 0300 066 9197

[Make a complaint to the Charity Commission](#)

Police Service

If you suspect illegal activity, such as abuse or terrorism you should contact the police.

If someone is in immediate danger call 999. To report a crime which is not urgent you can call 101 or report it online.

[Report a non-urgent crime](#)

The Fundraising Regulator

The Fundraising Regulator helps to protect the public from poor fundraising practices and investigate complaints about charitable fundraising where these cannot be resolved by organisations themselves or where it has caused, or has the potential to cause, significant public harm.

[Contact the Fundraising Regulator](#)

Complaint Procedure Flowchart

Stage 1 Investigation

- Complaint acknowledged within 5 working days of receipt
- Written outcome provided within 10 working days of acknowledgement
- Maximum extension 10 working days

Stage 2 Review

- Request for review acknowledged within 5 working days of receipt
- Final written outcome provided within 20 working days of acknowledgement
- Maximum extension 20 working days

Still dissatisfied?

- You can refer your complaint to the Housing Ombudsman Service or another regulatory body (see Section 11. Useful links and contact details) if Refuge have asked for longer to consider your complaint at Stage 1 or Stage 2 or if you are dissatisfied with Refuge's response at Stage 2.