

REDWOOD HOUSING CO-OPERATIVE SERVICE COMPLAINTS POLICY

Aims of the Service Complaints Policy

The aims of the Service Complaints Policy are:

- To ensure Redwood members and others have the right to complain about the provision, or non-provision, of services through an accessible, confidential and easy to use procedure, which offers rapid action and response
- To ensure complaints are dealt with effectively and fairly, even where complaints outcomes are not to the satisfaction of the complainant
- To ensure complaints are taken seriously and used positively to improve how the co-op operates
- To ensure the complaints procedure complies with the Involvement and Empowerment standard and with the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code [<https://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/landlords-info/complaint-handling-code/>]

1 Welcoming Service Complaints

2 Redwood Housing Co-operative welcomes complaints from its members and encourages anyone using or directly affected by our services to make complaints. A member does not have to use the word complaint for it to be treated as a complaint, however, is advised to do so to make it explicit that it is lodging a complaint.

3 The co-op will also accept complaints from agencies and others representing complainants (although the co-op needs to have written evidence that anyone representing a complainant is authorised by the complainant to act on their behalf and a member of the Management Committee may not act on behalf of a complainant). The co-op will usually allow such representatives to attend meetings with the complainant if the complainant wishes them to. Representatives must be external to Redwood (not an existing member/tenant/resident) and cannot be legal representation as at this stage, this process is internal to Redwood.

4 A complainant could also be anyone who is affected by a decision or action taken by the co-op, including:

- any non-member service users and ex-service users
- applicants for housing
- partnership organisations and agencies
- contractors or consultants
- neighbours to co-op properties

- other members of the public.

5 **Resolving Service Complaints informally**

the co-op will offer complainants the opportunity to have their complaint resolved informally **without the need to use the complaints procedure**. Resolving a complaint informally means:

- Logging the complaint with Redwood's current Managing Agent
- Agreeing how the problem will be resolved with the complainant
- Ensuring that the action agreed is carried out.

The co-op would like to encourage members to resolve their complaints informally wherever possible. However, it is the decision of the complainant whether their complaint is dealt with informally and following the informal procedure, the complainant will always have the right to make a formal complaint which is dealt with in accordance with the Service Complaint procedure.

- 6 **What is a complaint?** A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the co-op, by our service providers (LFSA) or by others acting on the co-op's behalf, affecting an individual member or group of members.

A complaint, whether justified or not, may be about something that the co-op should or should not have done or has done badly or has done or not done in accordance with its policies. A complaint may also be about a complainant feeling that they have not been treated fairly or they have been discriminated against in the provision of a service.

- 7 The co-op will accept and act on Service Complaints unless there is a valid reason not to do so. For example, if the police are involved or if it falls into the categories listed below.

- 8 The following would not usually be considered through a co-op's complaints procedure unless there are valid reasons to consider them:

- requests for a particular service (e.g. a complaint about a repair or something else that has not yet been formally requested i.e. following the Maintenance Policy (please add version number/date here)
- requests to deal with an Anti-Social Behaviour (i.e. an Southwark Environment Health issue like noise) issue or Neighbour Nuisance or Neighbour Disputes which should be dealt with in accordance with Redwood's Anti-Social Behaviour Policy and other relevant policies.
- new issues which arise during a complaints investigation unless they are **relevant to the original/initial complaint** under investigation
- anonymous complaints – complaints cannot be investigated if they are anonymous
- matters which relate to legal proceedings which have started

- complaints about something more than **six months** old
 - matters which have already been considered under the complaints policy
 - issues relating to how the co-op is governed which need to be dealt with through the co-op's Code of Conduct.
- 9 If the co-op chooses not to receive a complaint for one of the above reasons, a Redwood Representative will formally write to the complainant setting out our reasons why.
- 10 **Receiving Service Complaints** – members and others can make complaints through our current service provider and Managing Agent This might be by phone, by letter, or by email.
- 11 The co-op will ensure it maintains strict confidentiality in the handling of complaints to those managing them. You will be required to check a box within the Service Complaint Form (version no. or embed form/link here for use of access) to provide consent that your complaint/personal details held by Redwood can be shared with investigators to facilitate the communication and investigation. **Every appropriate effort will be made to resolve complaints within the procedures and without a formal process.** Emphasis timescales will be placed on correcting any service that has failed. If due to the nature of the complaint and information provided, additional time is required, Redwood will inform the complainant of the estimated timescales.
- 12 The co-op will comply with the UK Equality Act 2010 and may need to adapt its existing policies, procedures, or processes to accommodate an individual member's needs.
- 13 **Complaints Liaison Officer (CLO)** / independent Complaints Officer (ICO) the co-op has designated an independent Complaints Officer, who will always be independent of the complaint being managed. They may convene an **Independent Complaints Panel (ICP) as appropriate to the specific complaint being investigated.** The co-op will have a CLO which will manage communication between the Officer and Redwood MC and ensure Redwood's policies and procedures are being adhered to by the ICO/ICPP. It will also present any ICO/ICP reports or recommendations to Redwood MC.
- 14 Our intention is that our independent Complaints Officer is competent, applying policy and procedure consistently, professionally empathetically and is efficient. They should be able to act sensitively and fairly; should be able to receive complaints and deal with distressed and upset members; and should have access to individuals in the co-op and the service provider at all levels to facilitate quick resolution of complaints. Wherever possible, the Independent Complaints Officer will

be able to have quick and direct access to co-op officers who are delegated to make decisions that can resolve complaints quickly. However, it is often the case that complaints are complex and refer to matters that are not covered by co-op policies and therefore may require consideration by the Redwood Management Committee.

- 15 The independent Complaints Officer will take responsibility for ensuring that receipt of the complaint is acknowledged; that an investigation of the complaint takes place; and that there is written communication on progress of each step with the complainant throughout and regarding outcomes. There must exist a written audit trail of communication to support any future reviews (Stage 2) which may challenge the original decision.

16 **Complaints Procedure Stages**

- 17 Redwood Co-op and/or a designated representative will manage Service Complaints using the following two stages:

Stage 1

Step 1

Acknowledgement and logging - complaints will be acknowledged and logged when received by the Managing Agent.

Step 2

Confirmation of the complaint - using Redwood co-op's Service Complaint Form (version no. and embed link to form), the complainant will confirm in writing to Redwood what the complainant is complaining about. Redwood co-op's Service Complaints Form encourages complainants to be specific about what they are complaining about and what outcomes/resolution they are seeking. This is sent to the Complaints Officer for investigation.

Step 3

- **Investigation** – the Complaints Officer will investigate the complaint (and may convene an ICP for this purpose) – giving the complainant and any other parties to the complaint the opportunity to state their account on the subject matter of the complaint. Matters that are easily resolvable in the complaint will be addressed as soon as possible.
- **Step 4**
- **Decision-making** – the Complaints Officer will produce an anonymised written summary report of its investigation findings to include steps take, dates, times
- Confirm its recommendation to Redwood MC to uphold/not uphold the complaint

- Make recommendations for resolution of the complaint, initially to co-op officers and then to the Management Committee if co-op officers do not have delegated authority to agree the recommendations. The proposed resolution will be communicated to the complainant as soon as either co-op officers or the Management Committee have agreed it.

Stage 2

- **Complaint Review**-if the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome of the investigation, they may request a review via the Complaints Officer and this will be heard by someone independent of the complaint so far (new ICP members) – offering the complainant and other parties to the complaint the opportunity to put forward their views. The outcome of the review will be communicated to the complainant and this concludes the co-op's complaints procedure. The decision taken following the review is final.

- 18 The co-op sets the following maximum target times for the Service Complaint Procedure:

Step	Complaints Procedure	Timescales
1	Logging and acknowledgement of the complaint	One week or 5 working days.
2	Results of the investigation of a complaint	Two weeks or 10 working days from receipt of the complaint **All parties must make themselves available to meet this timescale/alternatively decision can be taken without witness statements/accounts**.
3	Results of a subsequent review of a complaint	Four weeks or 20 working days from the request for a review

- 19 If it is not possible for the co-op to achieve these timescales, the co-op will communicate how much extra time is needed to the complainant and the reasons why there will be a delay. The target times for the investigation and review stages will not be exceeded by more than two weeks or 10 working days without good reason.
- 20 If the co-op chooses not to either investigate a complaint or to hold a review when asked, it will be clear about our reasons why it is not so doing, and these reasons will be communicated to the complainant.
- 21 **Communications** – the co-op will make our complaint policy available in a clear and accessible format for members. The co-op will periodically

publicise the policy in emails and letters to all members and as part of regular correspondence with members. The co-op will provide copies of the complaint policy to members on request. The complaints policy will also be easily found and downloadable on the co-op website.

- 22 The co-op will provide members with contact information for the Housing Ombudsman Service as part of our regular correspondence with members. Members can access the Housing Ombudsman Service when they wish to and they can assist members throughout the life of a complaint.
- 23 When communicating with members about complaints, the co-op will use plain language and do so in writing. The co-op 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.
- 24 At the end of the complaint investigation and at the end of the review (if there is one) the co-op will write to the member to say:
 - what the outcome of their complaint is
 - the reasons why decisions have been made
 - what offers the co-op is making to put things right
 - what actions remain outstanding
 - how the complainant can take the matter further if they are dissatisfied with the outcome or what the co-op is offering
 - that the complainant may refer the complaint to the Housing Ombudsman Service.

Service Complaint Investigation

- 25 During the complaint investigation and in any review, members will be given a fair opportunity to set out their account of events, and comment on any findings before a final decision is made.
- 26 Communication with the complainant will not generally identify individuals involved in delivering the service (volunteers, staff, service provider or contractors) because all are acting on behalf of the co-op. Whilst the co-op will seek to put right any problems and learn from mistakes, the co-op will not seek to blame particular co-op officers or the service provider to the complainant.
- 27 The co-op will keep complainants regularly updated (in writing) and informed even where there is no new information to provide.
- 28 **The Housing Ombudsman Service** – if a member remains dissatisfied at the end of the co-op's complaints procedure, they may bring their complaint to the Ombudsman. The Redwood's Compliant Liaison

Officer (CLO) will co-operate with the Ombudsman's requests for evidence and will provide this within 3 weeks or 15 working days. The Redwood CLO will inform Redwood MC that the complainant has reported their dissatisfaction to the Ombudsman's immediately. If a response cannot be provided within this timeframe, the CLO will provide the Ombudsman with an explanation for the delay. If the explanation is reasonable, the Ombudsman will agree a revised date with the CLO.

- 29 **Keeping records** –Redwood, the CLO and its Managing Agent will document all informal and formal complaints in writing and will keep copies of all complaint correspondence to and from the complainant. Full details of the complaint will only be held by its Managing Agent and the CLO. The CLO will be responsible for ensuring that outcomes to complaints are implemented.
- 30 **Learning from Service Complaints** – the co-op's Management Committee will consider all complaints it has received and what could be improved as a result of the complaint.

Potential risks to be avoided

- Members are deterred from complaining when there is reason for them to do so or are dissatisfied with the outcome
- The co-op considers that members should not make complaints because it is a co-op
- The co-op does not follow through on complaints
- The co-op does not manage complaints in accordance with legal and regulatory requirements