



INNISFREE HOUSING ASSOCIATION

2023-24

ANNUAL COMPLAINTS PERFORMANCE & IMPROVEMENT REPORT

ANNUAL COMPLAINTS PERFORMANCE & SERVICE IMPROVEMENT REPORT

CONTENT

1. Introduction	Page 2
2. Compliance with the Complaint Handling Code	Page 2
3. Complaints received	Page 4
4. Escalation to the Housing Ombudsman	Page 7
5. Lessons learned	Page 8
6. Changes made	Page 10
7. Feedback from residents	Page 10
8. Feedback from our Governing Board	Page 12
9. Conclusion	Page 13
10. Our Governing Boards' response to this report	Page 14

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions, or lack of action by the landlord, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting a resident or group of residents. At Innisfree Housing Association (Innisfree), we take every complaint seriously and view it as an opportunity to improve our services.
- 1.2 Complaints can be received through various channels including phone, email, in-person, and via our website. Upon receipt, complaints are logged and categorised for further action. Our team investigates each complaint, aiming for a timely and fair resolution. We outline how we manage complaints through our [Complaints Policy](#).
- 1.3 The Housing Ombudsman is an independent body that looks into complaints about housing organisations. Residents can escalate their complaints to the Ombudsman during any part of a complaint, if they are not satisfied with the way that their complaint is being handled.
- 1.4 This document looks at complaints received and our investigation and handling of them from 1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024.

2. COMPLIANCE WITH THE COMPLAINT HANDLING CODE

- 2.1 We are committed to adhering to the highest standards of complaint handling as set out by the [Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code](#). This code provides a comprehensive framework for effective complaint resolution, ensuring fairness, transparency, and accountability in all interactions with our residents. Our compliance with this code supports our approach of continuous service improvement and resident satisfaction.
- 2.2 On 1st April 2024, the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code became a statutory requirement for landlords to follow. At Innisfree Housing Association, we have been adhering to the Complaint Handling Code for several years, demonstrating our long-standing commitment to high-quality service and resident satisfaction.

- 2.3 In March 2023, we completed an annual self-assessment to ensure that our Complaints Policy and handling processes aligned with changes to the code. The self-assessment process for compliance with the Complaint Handling Code is thorough and detailed, breaking down compliance into several key sections:
- 2.3.1 Definition of a Complaint: We ensure that our definition of a complaint is clear, inclusive, and aligned with the Housing Ombudsman's guidelines. A complaint is any expression of dissatisfaction about our services, actions, or lack of action, and should be considered a complaint regardless of whether the residents has used the word 'complaint' when expressing their dissatisfaction.
 - 2.3.2 Exclusions: Following the Code, our Complaint Policy clearly outlines what falls outside the scope of our complaint handling process, ensuring transparency, and managing resident expectations effectively.
 - 2.3.3 Accessibility and Awareness: We have made significant efforts to increase the visibility and accessibility of our complaint process, making it easy for all residents to submit complaints through various channels, and adhere to the aspects of transparency outlined in the Code.
 - 2.3.4 Complaint Handling Staff: Innisfree staff who handle complaints are well-trained in complaint handling procedures, ensuring that every complaint is managed professionally and empathetically.
 - 2.3.5 The Complaint Handling Process: Through our Complaints Policy we have established a clear, structured process for handling complaints, from initial receipt to final resolution, ensuring consistency and fairness. Our process includes two stages of complaint handling, providing residents with a straightforward path to escalate their concerns if they are not satisfied with the initial response.
 - 2.3.6 Putting Things Right: Following the Code, we are committed to not only resolving complaints but also putting things right by addressing the root causes and preventing recurrence.

2.3.7 Scrutiny and Oversight: Continuous Learning and Development: We ensure ongoing scrutiny and oversight of our complaint handling, using feedback from our residents and ~~Governing~~ Board, and using data to drive continuous learning and development.

- 2.3 We are proud to report that we are fully compliant with all aspects of the Complaint Handling Code, as verified through [our self-assessment](#). This comprehensive compliance demonstrates our commitment to best practices and our dedication to providing a high-quality service to our residents.
- 2.4 In addition to the current year, we also completed self-assessments for the years 2022 and 2023. These assessments have allowed us to stay in line with the evolving standards of the Complaint Handling Code, ensuring that our processes are up-to-date and effective. Although the completion of the self-assessment became compulsory only in 2024, our proactive approach in previous years reflects our ongoing commitment to excellence in complaint handling.

3. COMPLAINTS RECEIVED

- 3.1 Over the past year, Innisfree has focused on increasing the visibility and accessibility of our complaints process to ensure that all residents have the opportunity to voice their concerns and seek resolutions.
- 3.2 We believe that making it easier for residents to submit complaints is a crucial step in improving our services and addressing issues proactively. Consequently, we anticipated an increase in the number of complaints received as residents became more aware of how to reach out to us and felt more confident in our ability to address their issues.

3.3 Number of Complaints

3.3.1 This year, we received a total of 16 complaints, categorised as follows:

- Stage 1 Complaints: 16
- Stage 2 Complaints: 6

3.3.2 We anticipated a rise in complaints due to our efforts to enhance accessibility and encourage residents to share their feedback. This increase is viewed positively as it indicates that residents are more engaged and willing to communicate their concerns, allowing us to take necessary actions to improve our services.

3.4 Topics

3.4.1 The complaints received covered a range of topics, highlighting key areas for improvement within our organisation:

- Repairs and Maintenance service: 9 complaints
- Service Failure – Noise Nuisance Management: 2 complaints
- Housing Management service: 1 complaint
- Cleaning and Grounds Maintenance: 1 complaint
- Service Failure – Antisocial Behaviour Management: 1 complaint
- Customer Service: 1 complaint
- Complaint against Contractor: 1 complaint

3.4.2 Repairs and Maintenance remained the most frequently cited issue, reflecting the critical importance of these services to our residents. Complaints regarding how Antisocial Behaviour was managed, and how Innisfree communicate also provided valuable insights into areas where residents felt improvements were needed.

3.5 Response Times

3.5.1 We are committed to resolving complaints promptly and effectively. Our response times for this year were as follows:

- Stage 1 Complaints: Average response time of 8 days (meeting our target of 10 days)
- Stage 2 Complaints: Average response time of 11 days (well within our target of 20 days)

3.5.2 Maintaining prompt response times is crucial in ensuring resident satisfaction and trust in our complaint handling process. We are pleased to report that we have consistently met or exceeded our response time targets for both Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaints.

3.6 Findings

3.6.1 Each complaint is thoroughly investigated to determine the most appropriate resolution. The outcomes of the complaints received this year were:

- **Stage 1**

Upheld: 6 complaints

Partially upheld: 2 complaints

Not upheld: 8 complaints

- **Stage 2**

Partially upheld: 2 complaints

Not upheld: 4 complaints

3.6.2 The majority of complaints were not upheld. The partially upheld and upheld complaints provided us with specific areas for improvement, ensuring that we learn from each case to prevent recurrence.

3.7 In 2022/2023 we received 5 complaints, compared to this year where we received 16 complaints. The increase in the number of complaints received this year was expected and is seen as a positive development in our ongoing efforts to engage with residents and enhance our services. By making it easier for residents to submit complaints, we have gathered valuable feedback that will guide our continuous improvement. Our commitment to prompt response times and thorough investigations ensures residents' concerns are addressed effectively, reinforcing our dedication to providing high-quality services and maintaining strong relationships.

4. ESCALATION TO THE HOUSING OMBUDSMAN

- 4.1 When a resident feels that their complaint has not been resolved satisfactorily through our internal processes, they have the right to escalate the issue to the Housing Ombudsman.
- 4.2 If the Housing Ombudsman decides to take on a resident's complaint, they will formally write to Innisfree to request detailed information about the case. This request includes documentation of the initial complaint, our investigation process, communications with the resident, and the outcome. The Ombudsman thoroughly reviews this information and conducts an independent investigation to assess the complaint.
- 4.3 Upon completing their investigation, the Ombudsman issues their determination through a final report detailing their findings. This report evaluates Innisfree's handling of the complaint, identifies any service failures or maladministration, and may include orders or reparations to rectify the issues. The Ombudsman's decisions are binding, and housing providers are required to comply with any directives issued.
- 4.4 In the past year, Innisfree received two Ombudsman reports relating to two complaints from the 2022/2023 period. The first report identified that whilst Innisfree had handled the residents' complaint appropriately through their Antisocial Behaviour Policy, we had failed to handle it through our Complaints Policy from the outset. As a result, the Ombudsman ordered Innisfree to pay £100 in reparations to the resident affected by this delay.
- 4.5 The second report determined that, in accordance with paragraph 52 of the Housing Ombudsman Scheme, there was no maladministration by the landlord in respect of its handling of allegations of Antisocial Behaviour made against the resident, or no maladministration by the landlord in respect of its response to a Housing Management enquiry. They did identify service failure in respect of Innisfree's handling of the complaint and ordered Innisfree to pay £300 in reparations to the resident affected by this delay and in recognition of the time and trouble spent pursuing their complaint. Additionally, the Ombudsman advised us to reinvestigate specific aspects of the complaint to ensure a comprehensive resolution, and to apologise to the resident.

- 4.6 Innisfree promptly complied with the Ombudsman's orders, made the reparations payments, and undertook further investigation as directed. We also informed the Ombudsman of our compliance, demonstrating our commitment to rectifying service failures and improving our complaint handling processes.

5. LESSONS LEARNED

- 5.1 This year's complaints have provided valuable insights into areas where our services can be improved. By analysing the nature and outcomes of these complaints, we have identified several key lessons that will inform our future actions and policies.

5.2 **Enhanced Communication**

One of the most prominent lessons learned is the critical importance of effective communication. Several complaints highlighted that residents felt uninformed or inadequately updated regarding the status of their issues, particularly in the areas of repairs and maintenance. This has underscored the need for clearer, more frequent, and more transparent communication channels between our teams and the residents.

5.3 **Streamlined Processes**

We identified inefficiencies in our processes, especially concerning repairs and maintenance. Complaints about delays and mismanagement indicated the need to review and streamline these processes. Ensuring that maintenance requests are logged, tracked, and the resident kept informed throughout, will help in managing any unavoidable delays and improving service delivery.

5.4 **Staff Training**

Several complaints pointed out areas where staff interactions did not meet residents' expectations. This highlighted the necessity for enhanced training programmes focusing on customer service, keeping in contact with residents, and overall complaint handling. By refreshing our staff's skills in these areas, we aim to provide a more empathetic, proactive, responsive, and effective service to our residents.

5.5 **Robust Complaint Tracking**

The analysis of our complaints and the Housing Ombudsman's orders revealed the need for a more robust system to track and analyse complaints. This includes not just the logging of complaints, but also monitoring response times, resolutions, and patterns over time. We have improved our complaint tracking processes which will help us identify recurring issues and trends over the next year, allowing us to address root causes more effectively.

5.6 **Resident Involvement**

Through the complaints received, it became clear that involving residents directly in the problem-solving process can lead to better outcomes. Residents who felt heard and involved in finding solutions were generally more satisfied with the outcome. This has taught us the value of increased resident engagement and collaboration in resolving issues.

5.7 **Policy and Procedure Review**

We continuously review and revise our policies to ensure they are up-to-date and aligned with best practices. We have reviewed policies such as the Antisocial Behaviour Policy, Pet Policy, Income Management Policy, and Complaints Policy; continuous review and improvement of our policies will help us stay responsive to residents' needs and regulatory changes.

5.8 **Feedback Integration**

Finally, integrating feedback from complaints into our continuing improvement is essential. The lessons learned from this year's complaints have emphasised the need to using feedback for continuous improvement. By ensuring that insights from complaints are incorporated into our strategic planning, we can enhance our services and better meet the needs of our residents.

5.10 **Conclusion**

In summary, the lessons learned from the complaints received this year have been instrumental in guiding our efforts to improve. By focusing on enhanced communication, streamlined processes, better staff training, proactive issue identification, robust complaint tracking, resident involvement, and feedback integration, we are committed to delivering higher quality services and fostering stronger relationships with our residents. These lessons will be the foundation for our continuous improvement in the coming year.

6. CHANGES MADE

6.1 Following the complaints received, we have implemented the following changes to our services:

- **Automated Text Notifications**

Following several complaints regarding not feeling appropriately updated through the repairs process, we have sourced and will begin implementation automated text notifications to residents when a repair is raised, issued to a contractor, and completed. This will automatically keep a resident abreast of their repair and improve the repair service overall.

- **Enhanced Training Programmes**

As the number of complaints submitted has increased this year, we have introduced detailed training for staff on effective complaint handling and customer service. Focusing on the nuances of these areas will help us to be proactive in engaging with residents and resolving issues quickly, and efficiently.

- **Process Improvements**

We have introduced a new Housing Management system internally, which has streamlined many of the processes we do behind the scenes. For example, our new system provides more detail and better automation and tracking of complaints received. We have also looked at our maintenance request processes and improved efficiency.

7. FEEDBACK FROM RESIDENTS

7.1 At Innisfree, we place significant importance on resident feedback to continually improve our services. To systematically gather this feedback, we use Acuity, an independent service that surveys approximately 60 of our residents each quarter – this number is in line with Acuity and Regulator of Social Housing recommendations. These surveys are designed to provide an unbiased assessment of our performance, and asks a range of questions, including how satisfied a person is with our complaints service.

- 7.2 Through the Tenant Satisfaction Measures, tenants are asked by Acuity how satisfied or dissatisfied they are with Innisfree's approach to complaint handling. For the year, residents surveyed reported 40% satisfaction. Whilst this figure is low, when we investigated, we identified that the majority of residents answering the survey to say they had submitted a complaint, were not complaining but were requesting a service from Innisfree for the first time.
- 7.3 When benchmarked against the 148 other housing providers with under 1000 homes that use Acuity's service, Innisfree are above the Acuity median for complaint handling satisfaction, which is 35%.
- 7.4 For this coming year, Innisfree have added 6 additional survey questions designed to gather more in-depth feedback from those that have submitted a complaint, and their views on the service.
- 7.5 The feedback from these surveys is invaluable, offering us detailed insights into our strengths and areas needing improvement. Here are some key findings from this year's Tenant Satisfaction surveys:
- Of the residents surveyed across the year, 88% were satisfied with Innisfree's services as a whole.
 - Communication: While many residents were satisfied with how Innisfree communicate, some indicated a need for more timely and frequent communication.
 - Response Timeliness: Generally, residents felt that our response times were adequate, though there is always room for improvement.
- 7.6 In addition to the surveys conducted by Acuity, our Resident Engagement Officer plays a crucial role in following up with residents to delve deeper into their feedback. Where a resident has given permission for Innisfree to do so, the Officer makes phone calls to residents to discuss their survey responses in more detail. This personal touch ensures that any lingering concerns are addressed promptly.
- 7.7 If residents express ongoing dissatisfaction during these follow-up calls, the Officer escalates these issues as Stage 1 complaints for further investigation. This process ensures that no residents' concerns are overlooked and that we continue to address and resolve issues effectively.

- 7.8 The feedback gathered through Acuity and our follow-up processes has a direct impact on our service improvement, as mentioned in section 5.
- 7.9 By gathering and acting on feedback from our residents, we aim to ensure that their voices are heard, and their needs are met. The use of Acuity for independent surveys provides us with reliable data on our performance, while follow-ups by our Resident Engagement Officer ensure that any unresolved issues are promptly addressed. This dual approach not only helps us to improve our services but also reinforces our commitment to transparency, accountability, and continuous improvement.

8. FEEDBACK FROM OUR GOVERNING BOARD

- 8.1 Feedback from our Board is integral to our commitment to transparency and continuous improvement. Our Board is actively involved in overseeing our complaint handling processes, ensuring that we adhere to high standards of accountability and service quality.
- 8.2 Our Board receives detailed quarterly updates on the performance of our complaint handling. These updates include comprehensive data on the number and types of complaints received, response times, resolutions, and any trends or recurring issues. This regular reporting allows the Board to monitor our performance closely and ensures that complaint handling remains a priority at the highest level of governance.
- 8.3 To strengthen our focus on complaints, and to ensure we remain in line with the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code, we have appointed a dedicated 'Member Responsible for Complaints' (MRC) on the Board. This member plays a crucial role in our complaints management by:
- **Receiving Information:** The Member Responsible for Complaints will be kept fully informed about all aspects of our complaint handling throughout the year. They receive quarterly reports and updates on individual complaints, overall trends, and the effectiveness of our responses.
 - **Enquiring About Trends:** The Member Responsible for Complaints will be responsible for enquiring about any emerging trends in the complaints data. They analyse patterns to identify underlying issues that may require strategic attention or changes in our policies and practices.

- **Challenging Decisions:** When necessary, the Member Responsible for Complaints will challenge decisions made in the complaint handling process.

8.4 The insights and feedback provided by our Board have been invaluable in enhancing our complaint handling processes. For example, the Board's emphasis on resident satisfaction has reinforced our commitment to maintaining open lines of communication with our residents and ensuring their concerns are addressed effectively.

8.5 The active involvement of our Board ensures that our complaint handling processes are subject to rigorous oversight and continuous improvement. Their regular updates, enquiries about trends, and challenges to decisions contribute significantly to our goal of providing high-quality, responsive services to our residents. This collaborative approach between our management and the Board strengthens our commitment to accountability and excellence in all aspects of our operations.

8.6 In line with our commitment to transparency, at the end of this document we have published the Board's feedback on our complaints handling performance. Their feedback will include their comments on this report, offering residents a clear view of how our complaint handling processes are monitored and improved at the governance level.

9. CONCLUSION

9.1 At Innisfree we are dedicated to providing high-quality services and ensuring that our residents' voices are heard and valued. This report has outlined our commitment to effective complaint handling, compliance with the Complaint Handling Code, and our continuous efforts to learn from and improve based on the feedback we receive.

9.2 Through increased visibility and accessibility, we have encouraged residents to share their concerns, leading to valuable insights and subsequent improvements in our processes. The lessons learned from the complaints received this year have been instrumental in guiding our strategic actions, and the changes made have already started to enhance our service delivery.

- 9.3 Our engagement with residents, facilitated by independent surveys conducted by Acuity and follow-ups by our Resident Engagement Officer, ensures that we remain responsive to the needs and expectations of our community. Additionally, the active oversight and involvement of our Governing Board, particularly through the dedicated Member for Complaints, provide a strong framework for accountability and continuous improvement.
- 9.4 We believe that by maintaining open channels of communication and fostering a culture of transparency and responsiveness, we can continue to improve our services and build stronger relationships with our residents.
- 9.5 We encourage all readers to contact us with any questions, concerns, or feedback. Your input is invaluable in helping us to refine our services and ensure that we meet your needs effectively. Please contact us at complaints@innisfree.org.uk or call us on 0207 625 1818.

10. OUR GOVERNING BOARD'S RESPONSE TO THIS REPORT

- 10.1 One of our core values at Innisfree is that our service provision should be personal. This means we need to be customer focused, responsive and always thinking about the individual in our relationships and plans. It is for this reason that we particularly value the role played by the complaints process in ensuring we have an opportunity to learn from resident's experiences and improve the ways in which we deliver our services. The Annual Complaints Performance and Improvement Report set out above demonstrates that we are compliant with the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code but of course we recognise that there is always room for improvement. The Board will continue to monitor progress on complaints handling, both through reports to Board and through oversight via the Member Responsible for Complaints, and will provide constructive challenge where appropriate.



INNISFREE HOUSING ASSOCIATION
190 IVERSON ROAD
LONDON NW6 2HL

Tel: 020 7625 1818

www.innisfree.org.uk

Email: housing@innisfree.org.uk

Version: Annual Complaints Performance & Service Improvement Report 2024