



ELIZABETH DOWELL'S ALMSHOUSE TRUST

Office at Dowell's Close, Moseley

Birmingham, B13 8ES

manager@dowellstrust.org.uk

0121 442 6633 | 07913 103239

Complaints Policy and Procedures

1 Introduction

1.1 This policy applies to the trustees of Elizabeth Dowell's Almshouse Trust (the **Charity**) and seeks to ensure that the Charity's complaints process is flexible and responsive to the needs of individual complainants.

1.2 The Charity complies with the Complaint Handling Code (the **Code**) issued by the Housing Ombudsman Service. All complaints dealt with under this policy will be dealt with in a manner consistent with the Code and the Charity will maintain all records as required by the Code.

1.3 In dealing with complaints the Charity will ensure that:

- (a) individuals who complain are listened to and treated with courtesy and empathy;
- (b) residents will never be disadvantaged as a result of making a complaint;
- (c) complaints will be investigated promptly, thoroughly, honestly and openly and on a case-by-case basis; and
- (d) in dealing with complaints the Charity will comply with confidentiality and data protection policies.

1.4 For the purposes of this policy:

(a) The **Complaints Officer** is:

Name: The Manager, currently Miriam Bergin

Telephone number: 07913 103239

Address: The Office, Dowell's Close, Moseley, Birmingham B13 8ES

Email address: manager@dowellstrust.org.uk

(b) The **Appeals Officer** is:

Name: Chair, currently Charles Wall

Telephone number: 0121 442 6633



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The Trustee designated as Member responsible for Complaints (MRC) is Chair of Welfare, currently Anne Durbin .

Address and Tel no as above

- 1.5 A **complaint** is defined as: an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the Charity, its trustees, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting an individual resident or group of residents. The word "complaint" does not need to be used expressly for the matter to be considered a complaint.
- 1.6 A request from a resident to act to put something right (e.g., to carry out routine maintenance etc.) is considered to be a **service request** and not a complaint. Service requests should be dealt with in accordance with the Residents' Handbook. Failure to deal appropriately with a service request may lead to the matter being dealt with as a complaint.
- 1.7 Complaints made by residents may be made by the resident's carer, family members or a representative of a resident.
- 1.8 Complaints made by individuals affected by the Charity, who are not residents, must be made by the individual themselves or a legal representative. Residents have the right to legal representation.

2 Exclusions

- 2.1 The Charity will not be able to deal with an issue through the complaints process if:
 - (a) a complaint relates to a legal matter that is already being dealt with by a solicitor or where legal proceedings have been issued;
 - (b) the complainant is anonymous, unless there is sufficient documentary evidence to substantiate the complaint;
 - (c) the issue giving rise to the complaint occurred over twelve months ago, unless relating to safeguarding or health and safety issues; or
 - (d) the matter has already been considered under the complaints policy and a decision issued.
- 2.2 If a complaint is not accepted, a detailed explanation will be provided to the Complainant setting out the reasons why the matter is not suitable for the complaints process and their right to take that decision to the Ombudsman (see details below). The



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Ombudsman may direct the Charity to take on the complaint, in which case this policy will apply.

3 Accessibility

- 3.1 Complaints will be dealt with in a manner that is consistent with the Charity's Equality & Diversity Policy.
- 3.2 If any individual making a complaint wishes the Charity to make reasonable adjustments to accommodate an individual's particular needs they, or their representative, should contact the Chair of Trustees by phone or by email or in person to discuss what adjustments may be possible.

4 Stage One of the Complaints Process

- 4.1 Complaints should be made either in writing or by email to the Complaints Officer.
- 4.2 The initial complaint should include sufficient detail, and where appropriate supporting documentation, to enable the Charity to investigate the matter.
- 4.3 The Complaints Officer will acknowledge the complaint and make a record, within 5 days. The acknowledgement will:
 - (a) Confirm the complaint Stage 1 or 2
 - (b) summarise the Charity's understanding of the complaint - the complaint definition;
 - (c) summarise the Charity's understanding of what the Complainant is seeking as an outcome and any impact on the resident;
 - (d) raise any questions that require clarification from the Complainant; and
 - (e) set out the decision, next course of action and anticipated timescale along with reasons for any decision.
 - (f) Set out details of any outstanding actions
 - (g) Provide details of how to escalate the matter to the Ombudsman Service if the individual remains dissatisfied.
 - (h) Highlight any learnings from the complaint and confirm whether this will result in review of any Policies or Procedures
- 4.4 In most cases the Charity will aim to resolve complaints within 10 working days from the receipt of the complaint. In exceptional cases, if the Complaints Officer anticipates that the particular complaint will take longer to resolve, this should be explained and a clear



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timeframe set out for the resolution of the complaint which should not exceed a further 10 working days, without good reason.

- 4.5 If the Complaints Officer believes that the complaint will take longer than 20 working days to resolve then the Complaints Officer will seek to agree the timeframe with the Complainant. If no agreement can be reached with the Complainant, the Complainant should be advised to raise the matter with the Housing Ombudsman (see details below).
- 4.6 The Complaints Officer will investigate the complaint in an impartial manner permitting all relevant parties to provide information. The Complainant and any third parties involved in the complaint should be given the opportunity to set out their position before any final decision is made. The Complaints Officer may delegate the management and investigation of the complaint to another individual.
- 4.7 If the Complaints Officer is conflicted, or the complaint relates to the Complaints Officer, the complaint should be directed to the Chair of Trustees whose details are in the Residents' Handbook and shown above.
- 4.8 The Complaints Officer will:
 - (a) deal with all complaints on their merits;
 - (b) act independently and have an open mind but may consider reports of previous complaints that relate to the same issue being complained about;
 - (c) take appropriate measures to address any actual or perceived conflict of interest (which may include asking another trustee to investigate the complaint);
 - (d) consider all information and evidence carefully; and
 - (e) keep the details of the complaint confidential as far as possible, with information only being disclosed if necessary to properly investigate the matter.
- 4.9 If the complaint involves questions relating to the Charity or the Complainant's legal obligations, the Complaints Officer will set out clearly their understanding of the respective legal obligations and may seek legal advice before doing so.
- 4.10 The Complaints Officer will provide the Complainant with a response to the complaint at the earliest opportunity, which will be copied to all of the trustees.
- 4.11 If the Complaints Officer identifies that further actions are required to address the complaint these may be carried out after the response has been given and should not delay the Complainant receiving a response to the complaint.
- 4.12 In responding to the complaint, the Complaints Officer will:



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- (a) address all issues that have been raised, provide clear reasons for any decisions and, where appropriate, refer to relevant policy, law and good practice;
- (b) Seek clarification if the complaint and resultant action is unclear; and
- (c) give a clear decision; and
- (d) if appropriate, set out any steps that will be taken to remedy the issue and/or to provide details of Stage 2 if the complaint is rejected or the remedy is not accepted by the complainant.

4.13 If new issues are raised by the Complainant during the stage one process, these should be dealt with as part of the process if they are relevant. However, if the issues relate to a different issue and/or are raised after the response has already been issued, the issues will be dealt with as a separate complaint.

5 Stage Two

- 5.1 If the Complainant is not satisfied with the response from the Complaints Officer they have 5 working days to submit an appeal in writing or by email to the Appeals Officer.
- 5.2 The Appeals Officer will acknowledge the appeal within 5 working days of the receipt of the appeal. The acknowledgment may include any requests for clarification that relate to the appeal to ensure understanding.
- 5.3 The Appeals Officer will arrange a meeting with the Complainant to be held within 10 working days of the appeal being submitted. The Appeals Officer will be assisted by two trustees at the meeting.
- 5.4 The Appeals Officer will respond in writing to the complainant within 20 working days of the appeal being submitted, informing them of the outcome of the appeal process and the decision of the Appeals Panel.
- 5.5 If the Appeals Officer believes that the appeal will take longer than 20 working days (no longer than a further 20 working days) to resolve then this should be agreed with the Complainant. If no agreement can be reached with the Complainant, the Complainant should be advised to raise the matter with the Housing Ombudsman (see details below).
- 5.6 In responding to the appeal, the Appeals Officer will:
 - (a) Confirm the complaint is Stage 1 or Stage 2
 - (b) Confirm the complaint definition
 - (c) address all issues that have been raised, provide clear reasons for any decisions, and, where appropriate, refer to relevant policy, law and good practice and any impact on the resident;



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- (d) Seek clarification if the complaint and resultant action is unclear; and
- (e) set out the clear decision (including any reasons for the decision) of the Appeals Panel; and
- (f) if appropriate, set out any steps that will be taken to remedy the issue.
- (g) Details of any outstanding actions
- (h) State that the decision of the Appeal is the final response
- (i) Details of how to escalate the matter to the Ombudsman Service if the individual remains dissatisfied
- (j) Highlight any learnings from the complaint and confirm whether this will result in review of any Policies or Procedures

5.7 If the complainant is not satisfied with the response to the appeal then the Complainant should progress the matter through the Housing Ombudsman Service.

6 Circumstances in which a complaint may be closed

- 6.1 If a complaint is pursued unreasonably or where a Complainant's actions or behaviours are deemed to be unreasonable, the Charity reserves the right to close the complaint.
- 6.2 If a Complainant displays threatening or abusive behaviour or language (whether verbal or written), that causes staff or trustees to feel threatened, abused and/or continues to contact the Charity with unreasonable demands during/following a complaint investigation a complaint may be closed and, if the Complainant is a resident, this may be grounds for their appointment to be set aside.
- 6.3 In cases where the trustees bring the complaint to an end in accordance with this section of the policy, they will inform the Complainant of their reasons taking into account any consideration from our Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Policy.

7 Housing Ombudsman Service

The contact details for the Housing Ombudsman Service are:

Telephone: 0300 111 3000

Email: info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk

Website: www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk

Address: Housing Ombudsman Service,
PO Box 152, Liverpool, L33 7WQ.



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8 Annual Review

8.1 This policy will be reviewed on an annual basis.

8.2 The Charity will carry out an annual self-assessment in accordance with the Code.

This policy has been approved for issue by the board of trustees

Signature:

Name: Charles Wall

Date: 27 January 20

Date of next review - January 2026