



Policy & Procedure

Field Lane's Complaint Code & Policy

Reviewed On: 1st January 2025
Date of Trustee Approval: 15th March 2024
Target Audience: All Field Lane Services
Review Manager: Jacky Owen, Director of Operational Services

Version History			
Version	Approved By	Date	Description Of Change
1	Q&D	15/03/2021	Removed reference to Badgers
2	JO	07/01/2022	Updated Ombudsman contact details
3	JO	04/01/2023	Updated stage 1 contact details
4	Q&D	24/06/2024	Updated HR contact details
5	JO	08/11/2024	Comprehensive changes in line with guidance from the Ombudsman Services.
6	TE	19/03/2025	Exclusions for complaints (section 8)



1. Introduction

Field Lane's Complaint Code has been introduced in line with the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023. This act empowered the Housing Ombudsman to issue a code of practice about the procedures and processes that housing organisations like Field Lane should have in place for addressing and considering complaints.

The statutory Code took effect from the 1st of April 2024 and this policy explains how Field Lane will meet the requirements of the Code.

The Housing Ombudsman also has responsibility for monitoring how Field Lane responds to the requirements of the code and our responses to complaints.

Key to compliance with the Code is Field Lane's commitment and ability to ensure there is a positive culture within the organisation in terms of responding and managing complaints.

2. What is a Positive Complaints Culture?

A positive complaints culture is one where there are good strong relationships between the people who use our services and accommodation and members of the Field Lane staff teams.

A positive complaints culture supports values of justice and fairness for all that is the key to effective social housing.

Field Lane is committed to the Code working well as it recognises that effective handling of complaints demonstrates good service delivery and a commitment to the people using the services.

Field Lane is committed to listening to people, putting things right when they are wrong and being open to views and ideas from the people using our services.

3. The Definition of a Complaint

Making it clear to everyone what a complaint is helps communication and collaboration. This then supports a positive culture.

The code defines a complaint as.

“ 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 pf residents.”

A service request is different to a complaint.

If someone using our services raised an issue about “ something not working properly” and Field Lane fixed the problem, then that would be a service request.

If Field Lane didn't sort the problem out in a timely or appropriate way then a person could make a complaint about the way in which we responded. It is important that service requests are managed separately from complaints.

4. Access to Making a Complaint

Under the Code Field Lane must make it easy for people to make complaints. We must provide different ways to do this, we consider the Equality Act 2010 and try to anticipate and make reasonable adjustments for everyone who might need to access the complaints process.

People must be able to raise complaints with any member of staff and we will make sure that all staff members can respond appropriately to any complaint that is raised.

Any person using Field Lanes services can use a representative or advocate to make the complaint on their behalf. We want you to feel able to raise any complaint and you can choose who you wish to help you with this. This representative or advocate can also represent you at meetings if you choose.

We will also make sure that the Policy is accessible to everyone and provide an easy read version and translations if that is needed.

5. The Complaint Handling Process

If you wish to make a complaint you can do this in a number of ways. Complaints can be made to us in writing, in person, via email or by phone.

- Field Lane has a single policy in place for managing complaints covered by the Code. Everyone will be treated equally and fairly.
- Field Lane's complaints procedure has two stages in line with the Code to avoid making the process too long and delaying any approach to the ombudsman.

- Field Lane will make sure that if a third party is involved in any complaints they will comply with the Code.
- At each stage of the complaints process Field Lane staff will.
 - a. Deal with complaints on their merits, act independently and have an open mind.
 - b. Give the person a fair chance to set out their position.
 - c. Identify and manage any conflict of interest.
 - d. Consider any information and evidence carefully and fully.
- A full record of the complaint will be kept including any correspondence, evidence and supporting documentation.
- Any restrictions placed on contact due to unacceptable behaviour will always be proportionate.

6. Complaints Stages

Stage One

- Field Lane has a process in place that considers which complaints can be responded to very quickly and which might require further investigation. We respond as quickly as we can to Stage 1 complaints, and we will provide an explanation, apology or resolution promptly.
- A complaint will be acknowledged and logged within 5 working days of the complaint being received.
- Field Lane will ensure that a full response to Stage 1 complaints is sent within 10 working days of the complaint being acknowledged.
- We can extend this time by only 10 days if the investigation and evidence gathering is complex, but this will be clearly explained to the person making the complaint.
- If an extension to the time frame is made, then the person making the complaint will be given the Ombudsman's contact details.
- A response to the complaint will be given even if there are outstanding actions for Field Lane. As the actions are completed a full update and explanation will be provided to the person making the complaint.
- If the person raising the complaint wishes to add more issues during the complaint process, then these will be added to the original complaint. If the issues raised do not relate to the original complaint, then a new complaint process should be started.
- Field Lane will confirm the following in writing to the person making the complaint at the end of Stage 1 in clear and plain language.
 - a. The complaint stage
 - b. The definition of the complaint
 - c. The decision on the complaint
 - d. The reasons for any decisions made.
 - e. The details of any remedy or solution offered to put things right.
 - f. Details of any outstanding issues or actions

- g. Details of how to take the matter to Stage 2 if the person is not happy with the response.

Stage 2

- If all or part of the complaint is not resolved to the persons satisfaction at Stage 1 then it must be progressed to Stage 2
- Stage 2 is Field Lanes final response.
- Requests for Stage 2 will be acknowledged, defined and logged at Stage 2 within 5 working days of the request for Stage 2 being received.
- The person who will consider the complaint at Stage 2 will not be the same person who investigated the complaint at Stage 1.
- Field Lane will give a final response to the complaint at Stage 2 within 20 working days of the complaint being acknowledged.
- If the complaint is complex and requires a comprehensive investigation, then an extension to the timescale can be put into place. This will not be any longer than 20 working days.
- If Field Lane adds an extension to the timeframe, then we will provide the person making the complaint with the contact details for the Ombudsman.
- Field Lane will provide a response to the complaint even if there are outstanding actions or issues to be completed.
- Field Lane will provide a response that addresses all the point raised in the complaint. We will provide clear reasons for any decisions.
- Field Lane will confirm the following in writing to the person making the complaint at the completion of Stage 2 in clear and plain language.

- a. The complaint stage
- b. The definition of the complaint
- c. The decision
- d. The reasons for any decisions that are made.
- e. The details of any remedy offered to put things right.
- f. Details of any outstanding actions or issues
- g. The details of how to contact the Ombudsman Service if you are unhappy with the result.

Stage 2 is Field Lanes final response and will have involved staff members who are suitably qualified and senior to make the decisions.

7. Putting Things Right

When something has gone wrong Field Lane will always acknowledge this and set out the actions we have already taken and those we intend to take to put things right.

These can include.

- a. Apologising

- b. Acknowledging where things have gone wrong.
- c. Providing a full explanation, assistance or reasons
- d. Taking quick action if there has been a delay.
- e. Changing a record, adding a correction or making an amendment to a document.
- f. Providing a financial solution
- g. Learning from a complaint which could mean changing a policy, process or the way we do something.

Any solution we offer will always take into account the impact that the complaint has had on the person making the complaint.

Field Lane will always consider the guidance from the Ombudsman when we look at solutions.

8. Exclusions

In some instances, we will not consider requests that have been made to us as a complaint. The complaints handling code details some of the circumstances that we are not required to address within our complaints policy and process.

Circumstances that will not be considered under our complaints policy are as follows:

- A service request as defined in the above section.
- Complaints regarding issues that have occurred over 12 months ago in line with the Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code. We will at our discretion consider complaints outside this timeframe where there are reasons to do so, for example, personal circumstances, vulnerabilities or you were not aware of the issues and could not have been reasonably expected to have made the complaint sooner.

However, we will consider complaints that could be related to a health and safety issue or safeguarding when making any decision.

- Complaints that have already been considered under the complaints policy.
- Complaints relating to services that we do not provide or are not provided on our behalf by a third party.
- Damages to personal property unless it has caused by something we have done or a third party acting on our behalf.
- Where the complainant has stated court action or an insurance claim against us about specific issues that have been covered in their complaint.
- Where a person exhibits unreasonable behaviour or persistently complains, these may be excluded and will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

- Where we have previously refused to accept a complaint. We will inform you of the reasons for this and advise you that you can contact the Housing Ombudsman for advice.

9. Field Lane's Commitment to Compliance

Under the Complaints Handling Code there are several things that Field Lane must do.

One of these is to produce an Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report. We have to provide our governing bodies with a copy of this report and publish the report on our website. The response from our governing bodies will also be published on our website. This supports developing an open and transparent culture around complaints.

The Report has to include the following.

- a. Field Lane's annual self-assessment which should demonstrate our compliance with the Code.
- b. A review of Field Lane's handling of complaints, this would include statistical information and a review of the quality of our responses.
- c. Any findings of non-compliance with the Code made by the Ombudsman.
- d. Any service improvements we have made as a result of learning from complaints.
- e. Any other relevant reports or publications produced by the Ombudsman about Field Lane.

10. Continuous Learning and Improvement – Scrutiny and Oversight

Field Lane will look beyond any complaint and make sure that any learning or improvements that can be made are actioned and change is introduced. Every complaint should be viewed as an opportunity to make things better.

To ensure that a positive complaint handling culture is established and working well it is really important that Field Lane uses complaints to inform service changes and delivery.

Field Lane has appointed a suitably senior lead person, Tony Ellmer as accountable for the organisation's complaint handling.

In addition to this, Field Lanes Quality and Development Committee lead by the Committee Chair will have the lead responsibility for complaints. This is referred to as the MCA (Member Responsible for Complaints)

As a minimum the Quality and Development Committee will receive

- a. Regular updates on the volume, categories and outcomes of complaints alongside complaint handling performance.
- b. Regular reviews of issues and trends arising from complaint handling

- c. Updates on the outcome of any Ombudsman investigations.
- d. The Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report

Field Lane is committed to achieving a standard of compliance in relation to complaint handling that reflects the need to.

- a. Have a collaborative and co-operative approach towards resolving complaints.
- b. Ensure that responsibility is taken collectively with collaboration.
- c. That people are supported to recognise where things have gone wrong and that there is not a blame culture.
- d. To always act within best practice and the standards set by governing bodies.

11. How to Make a Complaint

Stage One

Tony Ellmer is the designated complaint handler for Field Lane in line with the Code. Complaints can be made in writing, in person, via email or by phone.

Please send your complaint to Tony Ellmer who will lead the complaint process, he may ask a suitably qualified and experienced member of staff to complete the investigation.

Tony Ellmer – Director of Housing (Complaint Handler)

Field Lane Foundation
16, Ashdown Close
Reigate
RH2 7QS
tellmer@fieldlane.org.uk

Stage Two

Jacky Owen – Director of Operational Services
Field Lane Foundation
Ground Floor
85 Buckingham Gate
London
SW1E 6PD
jowen@fieldlane.org.uk

Ombudsman Service

Housing Ombudsman

If your complaint is housing related which means it could be about maintenance, repairs, rent or service charge then you would need to contact the Housing Ombudsman housing ombudsman.@org.uk or **0300 111 3000** or

Complaint Code

Housing Ombudsman Service
PO Box 1484
Unit D
Preston PR2 OET

Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman

If your complaint is related to care and support which could be about the care you or your relative receives from Field Lane, then you should contact the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman lgo.org.uk or call **0300 061 0614**