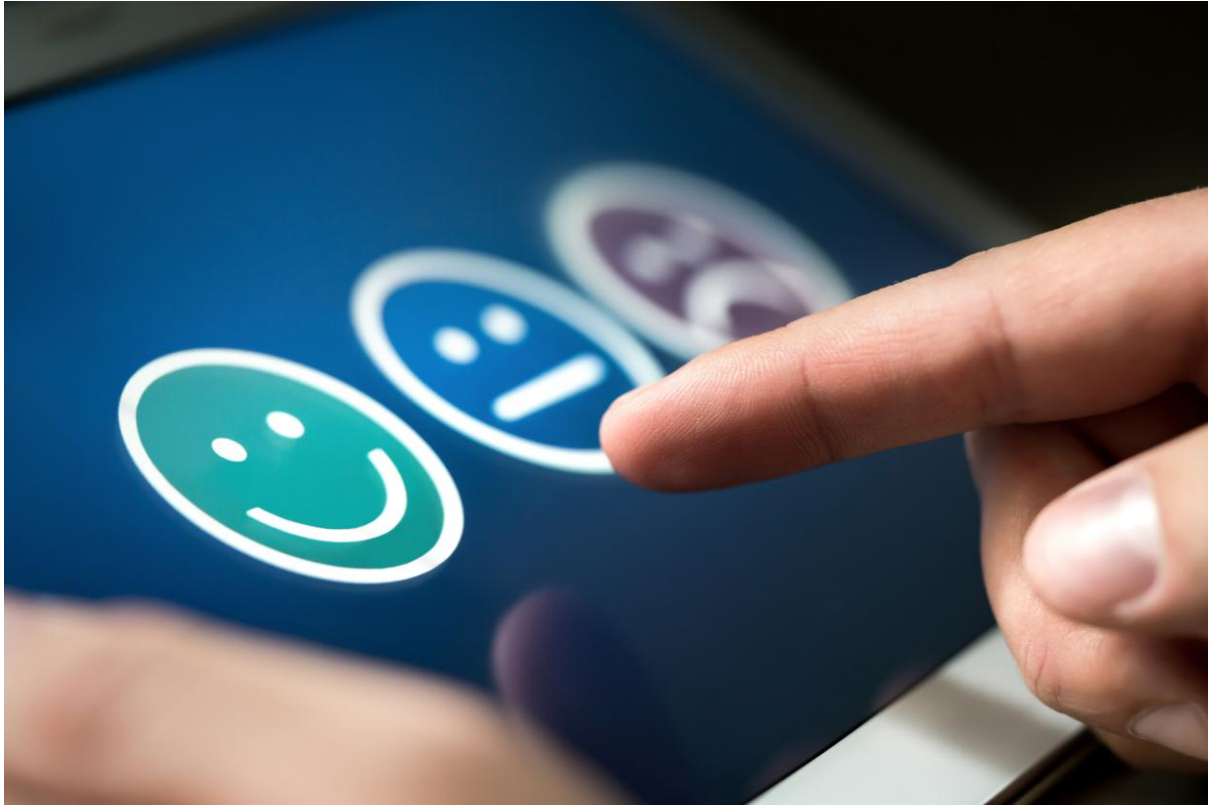

Complaint Handling Policy



**Updated June 2026 | This policy relates to Elmbridge Borough
Council Residential Properties**



Elmbridge
Borough Council

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Introduction

The purpose of this policy is to set out a consistent and fair approach to responding to complaints from tenants of Elmbridge Borough Council's homes and providing a framework for remedies.

We care about our tenants and want to ensure anyone making a complaint is treated with fairness, respect, and empathy. We recognise that, we may not always meet our tenants' expectations. We want to ensure that there is an accessible, easy to follow and robust complaint policy in place to resolve matters as early and effectively as possible. We aim to put things right and listen to our tenants' suggestions for improving services.

This policy has been developed in accordance with the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code, which can be found here <https://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/landlords-info/complaint-handling-code/>, our statutory and legal duties, and best practice.

This policy only applies to tenants of Elmbridge Borough Council and the landlord services we provide. It does not apply to complaints about our other Services. These have their own procedure which can be found at <https://www.elmbridge.gov.uk/your-council/step-by-step/complaints>

Most of the services you receive are delivered by a managing agent. This is currently Pinnacle Housing Limited <https://www.pinnaclegroup.co.uk/>

We provide planned maintenance and improvements to your home and are your landlord.

Where a service is not provided directly by us, we remain responsible for ensuring it meets all Regulatory and legal standards and provides the good level of service that our tenants want to receive.

Where to direct complaints?

Most day-to-day housing management and repairs services are delivered on our behalf by our managing agent, Pinnacle Group. However, we remain responsible for ensuring complaints are handled in line with the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code.

We ask that complaints are raised with our managing agent, Pinnacle, in the first instance, as they deliver day-to-day housing services on our behalf and are best placed to investigate and respond at Stage 1.

All complaints form part of a single, two-stage complaints process. Stage 1 complaints are investigated and responded to by Pinnacle on our behalf. We maintain oversight of all Stage 1 complaints, including monitoring the quality of responses and timescales, to ensure they are handled appropriately and in line with this policy.

You do not need to raise your complaint separately with both the Council and the managing agent, as all complaints are managed through this single process.

If you contact us directly to make a complaint, we will pass this to Pinnacle to be logged and responded to at Stage 1. You will not be required to resubmit your complaint.

If you remain dissatisfied with the Stage 1 response, you can request to escalate your complaint to Stage 2. If you contact Pinnacle, they will pass your request to us, and we will ensure it is logged at Stage 2 without delay.

Stage 2 is the final stage of our complaints process and will be reviewed and responded to by us.

Details of how to contact the managing agent to make a complaint are available on our website: [How to contact Pinnacle | Elmbridge Borough Council](#)

Further contact details are also set out in the "How to contact us" section of this policy.

Complaint definition

We have adopted the Housing Ombudsman's definition of 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 of residents.

Complaints are important to us. They help us to understand the quality and performance of the services you receive and to focus on ways to improve them. We treat each complaint as an opportunity for learning. We will ensure that any learning outcomes are captured and where appropriate, implemented.

Whenever a tenant expresses dissatisfaction we will give them the choice to make a complaint. You do not have to use the word 'complaint' for it to be treated as such. Feedback provided through surveys is not treated as a complaint. However, residents will always be informed how they can raise a complaint if they wish to do so.

You can contact the Housing Ombudsman Service for advice at any point throughout our process. See page 11 for details.

Roles and responsibilities

All Employees: All Elmbridge Borough Council employees are responsible for directing complaints to the right place, the managing agent or the relevant team. All employees should recognise and attempt to resolve an initial complaint at the first point of contact. Everyone is encouraged to be honest, recognise mistakes have been made and focus on putting things right.

The housing team will be responsible for dealing with complaints ensuring a coordinated and consistent approach. The team will work with the managing agent to understand what has gone wrong and to find the best way to fix it. In addition, any learning captured during the complaints process will be shared with the managing agent and relevant teams.

Head of Housing: The Head of Housing is the lead person accountable for complaint handling. They will assess any themes or trends to identify potential systemic issues, serious risks, or policies and procedures that require revision. They are responsible for the contract management and performance of the managing agent. This role is the responsible person for the Consumer Standards.

Cabinet: The Cabinet has overall responsibility for this policy and will review it every three years, or earlier, if there is a change in regulation or new guidance from the Housing Ombudsman. The annual Complaint Handling and Service Improvement

report will be presented to the Cabinet each year and their review and response will be published on our website each year.

Council Management Board: The Council Management Board will be notified of any significant or ongoing non-compliance with this policy. Particularly if there are any determinations from the Housing Ombudsman following an investigation into a complaint. The Council Management Board will receive regular reports on complaint handling performance.

The Member Responsible for Complaints: The Portfolio Holder for Housing has lead responsibility for ensuring a positive complaint handling culture at Elmbridge Borough Council residential properties. This role must have access to suitable information and employees support to carry out this role and report on their findings. The Member Responsible for Complaints is responsible for ensuring the Cabinet receives regular information on complaint handling performance including:

- Regular updates on the volume, categories and outcomes of complaints, alongside complaint handling performance.
- Regular reviews of issues and trends arising from complaint handling.
- Regular updates on the outcomes of the Ombudsman's investigations and progress made in complying with orders related to severe maladministration findings.
- Annual complaints performance & service improvement report.

Service requests

The Housing Ombudsman Service defines a service request as 'a request from a resident to their landlord requiring action to be taken to put something right'.

When you first let us know about your concern, as a starting point we'll ask you what you'd like us to do to put things right. We can often resolve service requests, such as a missed appointment or repair delay, immediately with an apology and by providing another appointment.

We may be able to resolve this outside of our complaints process, recording it as a service request and monitoring it to completion. If we need to make further enquiries to resolve the matter, or if you ask us to at any point, we will log it as a complaint. We will continue to address any service requests after we have logged a complaint.

Who can make a complaint?

Anyone can make a complaint about the services we, or anyone working for us (for example our managing agent or contractors), provide. You are only able to escalate your complaint to the Housing Ombudsman Service if you are one of our tenants.

If you prefer, you can authorise someone else to make a complaint on your behalf such as an 'advocate'. This could be a friend, relative or representative from an external organisation such as Citizens Advice. If you would like an advocate to act on your behalf, represent you or accompany you at any meetings with us, let us know.

We treat complaints received through petitions or a group of tenants in the same way as all other complaints. In terms of handling the complaint efficiently, we will ask for a single point of contact to be nominated.

If your home is in a building that is not owned by Elmbridge Borough Council, and which is managed by a third party we will:

- Liaise with the relevant parties to get all the information we need and resolve the matter
- Investigate and respond to your complaint in line with this Policy.

What can you make a complaint about?

You can complain about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by us or anyone working for us such as our managing agent or contractors, within 12 months of the issue happening or of you becoming aware of the issue.

We may use our discretion to accept older complaints if there is a good reason you had not raised it before. For example, if the problem is a recurring or ongoing issue, we will consider any older reports as background to the investigation.

We will always look at the individual circumstances of each complaint and consider these before responding.

In some circumstances it may not be appropriate to consider or escalate the complaint.

- Legal proceedings have started involving a tenant, landlord or the managing agent.
- If you make a complaint and we complete our process, we are unlikely to accept another complaint about the same issue unless you provide new information.
- We will not accept new complaints that have already been investigated or are under investigation by the Housing Ombudsman Service unless the Housing Ombudsman directs us to.
- There may be some circumstances where your complaint is better dealt with outside of our complaints process. If this is the case, we will provide the reason why and the action you can take. You will be able to approach the Housing Ombudsman Service once you have received our decision.
- Complaints made about the actions of a neighbour. This is managed through our managing agent's neighbour dispute and antisocial behaviour policies.
<https://www.pinnaclegroup.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/Anti-social-Behaviour-Policy-Spaces.pdf>
- Where you are unhappy with how our managing agent has dealt with a neighbour dispute and antisocial behaviour, you can raise a complaint.
- The rent increase that is set by government.
- Any decisions that we make to comply with our statutory obligations, legislation or regulation.

If we decide not to accept a complaint, we will provide you with the reason why. If you are unhappy with our decision, you can contact the Housing Ombudsman Service for advice.

How to contact us

We will publish details of how you can make a complaint and access the Housing Ombudsman Service on our website and in our complaint responses.

You can contact us or our managing agent using the details below:

Pinnacle

Website: www.pinnaclegroup.co.uk

Email: elmbridge@pinnaclegroup.co.uk

Telephone: 0333 241 4635

Using the Ark App

Elmbridge Borough Council

Our website: www.elmbridge.gov.uk

Email: EBClandlord@elmbridge.gov.uk

Telephone: 01372 474 474

In person or write to us at: Housing Services Team, Elmbridge Borough Council, Civic Centre, Esher, Surrey, KT10 1SD

Other: Via your Councillor or Member of Parliament

We proactively monitor these channels for complaints from tenants. If you post a negative comment, we will deal with this as a direct response to you or log as a complaint. Once logged as a complaint, it is then dealt with according to this complaints policy and procedure.

Complaint process

Stage 1 complaint:

We will acknowledge, define and log your complaint within **five working days**. In doing so, we will confirm:

- our understanding of your complaint, including the key issues you have raised
- the outcomes you are seeking
- which aspects of the complaint we are, and are not, responsible for
- any points where we need further clarification

A complaint response will be provided when the answer to your complaint is known, not when all outstanding actions have been completed. Any outstanding actions will be tracked, actioned promptly, and we will provide you with appropriate updates until they are completed.

Where you raise further complaints during our investigation, these will be included into the stage 1 response if the response has not yet been issued. Where the response has been issued, or it would reasonably delay the response, the additional issues will be logged as a new complaint.

We will investigate your complaint and give you a written response within **10 working days of the complaint being acknowledged**. If we are unable to meet

this timescale, we will explain why and may extend the response time by up to a further 10 working days where there is good reason. Where an extension is required, we will confirm the revised response date and agree suitable intervals with you to keep you informed of progress, until a full response is provided. When we notify you of an extension, we will also provide details of how to contact the Housing Ombudsman Service for independent advice.

The stage 1 response will include:

- a) our complaint stage
- b) details of your complaint
- c) our decision
- d) our reasons for any decisions made
- e) details of any remedy offered to put things right
- f) details of any outstanding actions and
- g) details of how to escalate the matter to stage 2 if you are not satisfied with our response.

Stage 2 complaint:

If you are unhappy with our complaint investigation and response you can request to escalate your complaint to stage 2, we will not unreasonably refuse a request to escalate a complaint. We ask that you do this within 28 calendar days of our stage 1 response. Requests received after 28 calendar days will only be accepted where the Council considers there to be a valid reason for the delay.

You do not need to explain your reasons for requesting escalation to stage 2. However, we may ask whether there is anything that remains unresolved so that we can fully understand your complaint and address it appropriately.

We will acknowledge, define and log your request to escalate your complaint within **five working days**. In doing so, we will confirm:

- our understanding of your complaint, including the key issues you have raised
- the outcomes you are seeking
- which aspects of the complaint we are, and are not, responsible for
- any points where we need further clarification

We will then provide a full written response within **20 working days of the complaint being acknowledged**. If we are unable to provide a full response within 20 working days of acknowledging your complaint, we will explain why and may extend the response time by up to a further 20 working days where there is good reason.

Where an extension is required, we will confirm the revised response date and agree suitable intervals with you to keep you informed of progress, until a full response is provided. When we notify you of an extension, we will also provide details of how to contact the Housing Ombudsman Service for independent advice.

A stage 2 response will be provided when the answer to your complaint is known, not when all outstanding actions have been completed. Any outstanding actions will be tracked, actioned promptly, and we will provide you with appropriate updates until they are completed.

The Stage 2 review will be carried out by the Head of Housing, or another appropriate senior officer who has not been involved in the Stage 1 investigation, ensuring an independent and impartial review.

The stage 2 response will include:

- a) our complaint stage
- b) details of your complaint
- c) our decision
- d) our reasons for any decisions made
- e) details of any remedy offered to put things right
- f) details of any outstanding actions and
- g) details of how to escalate the matter to the Ombudsman Service if you remain dissatisfied

If you disagree with our review decision at stage 2?

You can contact the Housing Ombudsman Service at any point throughout your complaint for advice.

Once you have exhausted our complaints process at stage 2, you may ask the Housing Ombudsman Service to mediate or investigate the case on your behalf.

You can find Housing Ombudsman Service contact details below, on our website, or at www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk

- [online complaint form](#)
- **Email:** info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk
- **Phone:** [0300 111 3000](tel:03001113000)
- **Write to:**
Housing Ombudsman Service
PO Box 1484
Unit D
Preston
PR2 0ET

What we can do to put things right

We appreciate that at times things go wrong and we will always look at various solutions to try and resolve a complaint. We want to do the right thing for you and solutions can be offered at any stages of our complaint process.

This could be offering an apology and acknowledging where we have gone wrong, reconsidering or changing a decision, taking action if there has been a delay, or offering compensation.

When something goes wrong, we will work with you to find the best way to make it right. This might mean arranging repairs, doing some redecoration, or replacing any damaged items. We will always try to respond in a way that feels fair and thoughtful, based on each individual situation

When making decisions on solutions to resolve a complaint, we will use the Housing Ombudsman's approach as guidance. <https://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/centre-for-learning/key-topics/our-orders/ombudsmans-policy-and-guidance-on-remedies/>

We will work closely with our insurance team where there is a claim for personal injury or damage to belongings as part of the complaint. This may mean that we hold off on providing any other solutions until the insurance investigation for liability is assessed.

We will contact you after 28 days if you have not accepted the solutions offered.

We will pay compensation by two methods, via bacs transfer to an account of your

choice or into your rent account if requested by you.

Reasonable adjustments

We will take your preferences into account when communicating with you and we will make reasonable adjustments in line with the Equality Act 2010.

We want to make sure you can access our services and have a smooth and fair experience when making a complaint.

We will talk to you to understand your individual needs. We will take account of any medical conditions and any individual needs. We will not make assumptions about whether you require any reasonable adjustments or about what those adjustments should be. This will be based on what you tell us you need and what we can reasonably provide. Any adjustments made will be kept under review. We will keep a record of any reasonable adjustments agreed and review these regularly.

Some examples of adjustments we may make include:

- Providing information in alternative formats, for example large print, Braille, coloured paper.
- Use of email or telephone in preference to letters.
- Providing additional time for you to make decisions.

Unreasonable tenant behaviour

We understand that people may be upset or frustrated when things go wrong. We will always try to support you and resolve your concerns in a fair and respectful way.

We ask that you or your representatives treat our employees with respect and behave in a way that allows us to resolve your complaint or the underlying issues effectively. Where behaviour or the level of contact makes this difficult, we may manage contact in line with the council's Unreasonable Customer Behaviour and Persistent Complaints Policy.

Where behaviour is aggressive, abusive or causes harm or distress to our employees, contractors or councillors, we will take appropriate action in line with the council's Zero Tolerance Policy.

Where behaviour or the level of contact makes it difficult to resolve your complaint,

we will take steps to manage contact appropriately and explain this to you.

We will explain what we are doing to resolve your complaint and decide what we will do the next time you contact us about the same issue.

Any restrictions we put in place will be reasonable and proportionate. They will not prevent you from making a complaint or progressing a complaint through our complaints process, including escalating your complaint to Stage 2 where appropriate.

This may include, in line with the provisions of the Equality Act 2010:

- acknowledge the contact but not offer any further response.
- ask you to only contact one named employee.
- ask you to only contact us using a channel of our choice.
- ask you to contact us at mutually agreed times.

Any restrictions put in place will be reviewed at least annually. If you wish to challenge how your contact is being managed, you can request a review. This will be carried out by the Head of Housing or an equivalent role within the managing agent.

Further information is available in the council's [Unreasonable Customer Behaviour and Persistent Complaints](#) Policy and [Zero Tolerance](#) Policy, which apply alongside this policy.

Learning from complaints

We want to learn from complaints as this helps us improve our services. We use insights from our complaints to improve services. We will share our annual Complaint Handling and Service Improvement report, along with the Cabinet's response, on our website each year.

Training

We are committed to ensuring our employees are well-trained and fully competent in handling complaints. All team members receive regular training to understand our policy and processes, so they can respond to complaints fairly, professionally, and efficiently.

Monitoring and review

We will monitor the effectiveness of this policy on an ongoing basis to ensure complaints are handled fairly, consistently, and in line with the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code.

This policy and its implementation will be formally reviewed every three years, or sooner where required due to legislative changes, operational needs, or updates to the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code or relevant determinations.