



## Key Criteria

Birchgrove is committed to providing the highest standards of service to all residents and stakeholders. This policy outlines how complaints will be managed fairly, impartially, and transparently, in accordance with regulatory obligations and resident needs.

## 1. Definitions

### Service Request

A request from a resident that requires action to put something right (e.g., maintenance). Service requests are distinct from complaints and are logged, monitored, and reviewed. However, should a resident express dissatisfaction with the handling of a service request, it will be treated as a complaint.

### Complaint

An expression of dissatisfaction regarding the quality of service, safety concerns, or other issues, including dissatisfaction with the handling of a service request. Complaints must be submitted within 12 months of the issue or the complainant becoming aware of the issue.

### Exclusions from Complaints

A complaint will not be accepted under the following circumstances:

- The issue occurred more than 12 months ago unless exceptional circumstances apply.
- Legal proceedings have commenced.
- The matter has been previously investigated and closed.

## 2. Raising Complaints

Residents can raise a complaint through any of the following channels:

- **Email:** Complaints can be emailed directly to the property's General Manager or sent using the resident's management systems (Lifeloop or Cubigo) communication tools.
- **In-person or by phone:** Residents can contact the General Manager for assistance. The General Manager or staff member will assist in documenting the complaint.

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# Birchgrove – Complaints Procedure

- **Representative:** Residents may appoint a representative to submit a complaint on their behalf.

Birchgrove will ensure that residents have accessible options for submitting complaints, including reasonable adjustments for individuals with disabilities, as required under the Equality Act 2010. Staff will be trained to recognize complaints and escalate them appropriately.

To facilitate a more effective resolution and ensure a timely response, it is recommended that the complainant provide as much information as possible. The following details would be particularly useful if applicable:

- a. **Date and Time:** The date and time of the incident should be provided. If the issue is ongoing, a chronological account is encouraged.
- b. **Location:** The location where the issue occurred should be specified.
- c. **Description:** A detailed description of the issue is advised.
- d. **Individuals Involved:** The names and roles of all individuals involved should be included.
- e. **Supporting Evidence:** Any supporting evidence, such as photos or documents, should be attached.
- f. **Impact:** The impact the issue is having should be explained.
- g. **Desired Outcome and Contact Information:** The desired outcome should be stated, along with contact information.

## 3. Complaints Acknowledgement and Logging

### Acknowledgment

Complaints will be acknowledged in writing within **24 working hours** of receipt by a senior member of the property (General Manager or Assistant Manager) or by a member of the leadership team, depending on the nature of the complaint and taking into consideration any conflicts of interest or aspects that may hinder the objectivity of the response.

### Logging

At the time of acknowledgment, the complaint will be defined in consultation with the resident. If any part of the complaint is unclear, we will seek clarification.

### Record-keeping

A full record of the complaint, including all correspondence and supporting documentation, will be maintained.

## 4. Stages of the Complaint Process

Birchgrove operates a **2-stage complaints process** to ensure timely and effective resolution. The objective in all cases is to address complaints and offer remedies, when appropriate, as efficiently and satisfactorily as possible, without needing to exhaust all the stages and/or timeframes listed below:

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## Stage 1: Initial Investigation

- Complaints will be investigated, and a formal response provided within **7 working days** of the acknowledgment.
- The response will address all issues raised and, where necessary, provide an explanation, apology, or remedy. Remedies may include taking corrective action, reviewing policies, or providing compensation if deemed appropriate.
- If the complaint is complex and requires additional time, Birchgrove will inform the resident, explaining the reasons for the delay and providing an updated timeline (extension not exceeding 10 additional working days).

## Stage 2: Review and Final Response

- If a resident is not satisfied with the outcome at Stage 1, they may request escalation to Stage 2 without having to justify such request. This request must be acknowledged within **5 working days**.
- Stage 2 will involve a senior manager or a designated independent officer, different from the reviewer in Stage 1, conducting a review of the complaint. A final response will be issued **within 14 working days**.
- Should an extension beyond 20 working days be required given the complexity of the matter or the time necessary to fully investigate it, the resident will be informed, and the reasons for the delay will be provided.

## 5. Escalation Beyond Birchgrove

If the resident remains dissatisfied after Stage 2, the matter may be referred to the **Housing Ombudsman**.

- **Building Safety Regulator:**
  - **Phone:** 0300 790 6787 (Call charges apply)
  - **Hours:** Monday to Friday, 8:30am to 5pm (closed on public holidays)
- **Housing Ombudsman:**
  - **Website:** [www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk](http://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk)
  - **Phone:** 0300 111 3000

We will provide the necessary information to contact these bodies at the conclusion of Stage 2, along with any further instructions required by the complainant.

## 6. Circumstances Where Complaints Will Not Be Considered

There are situations where complaints may not be accepted, including:

- Complaints about issues that are older than **12 months** (unless there are good reasons to accept them).
- Issues that are subject to active legal proceedings.
- Duplicate complaints that have already been considered.

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If a complaint is rejected, we will provide the resident with a clear explanation and details on how to appeal this decision with the Housing Ombudsman.

### 7. Handling Unacceptable Behaviour

Birchgrove is committed to handling all complaints respectfully. However, we reserve the right to manage unacceptable behaviour from residents or their representatives. If restrictions on communication are required due to such behaviour, these will be proportionate, regularly reviewed, and consistent with the Equality Act 2010.

### 8. Complaints Performance Monitoring and Learning

#### Performance Reporting

Birchgrove will produce an **Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report** to ensure transparency and accountability. This report, which will be showcased in our website, will include:

- Analysis of complaint handling performance, types of complaints, and outcomes.
- Service improvements resulting from learning through complaints.
- Compliance with the Housing Ombudsman’s Complaint Handling Code.

#### Governance

The governing body (ARCO) will receive regular reports on complaints, including trends and service improvements, and will be responsible for overseeing the effectiveness of complaint handling procedures.

### 9. Commitment to Continuous Improvement

Birchgrove recognises that high volumes of complaints can indicate an accessible and well-publicised process. Birchgrove is therefore, committed to creating a culture of learning from complaints and will ensure that outcomes are used to improve services and resident satisfaction.

All new employees receive training on Birchgrove’s complaints policy and internal procedures as part of their induction. Additionally, they are provided with regular updates and refresher training during their shift briefings. Furthermore, in a spirit of openness and responsibility, Birchgrove will ensure regular updates on key lessons and improvements gained from complaints are shared with important and relevant stakeholders, such as residents, staff members, and other parties, promoting transparency and collective accountability. The means, timings and extent of these communications will be determined on a case-by-case basis by the pertinent manager or management team.

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## 10. Equality and Accessibility

Birchgrove will ensure that all residents have equal access to the complaints process. Reasonable adjustments will be made for those with disabilities, and information will be provided in accessible formats upon request. All staff will receive training on handling complaints in accordance with the Equality Act 2010.

## 11. Complaint Handling Officer

A designated **Complaints Handling Officer** or team will oversee complaint management, liaise with the Ombudsman, and report on complaints to Birchgrove’s governing body. This officer will have the authority to act independently to resolve disputes promptly and fairly.

Upon acknowledging the complaint, the complainant will be informed of the Birchgrove staff member or team responsible for managing the matter. The assignment will be determined based on the nature of the complaint, staff availability, and other pertinent factors related to the situation. Should a complaint involve a leadership team member, the CEO will be the most senior member of staff assuming oversight of the entire process to guarantee thorough and unbiased handling of the matter.

## 12. Exceptional Circumstances and Non-Compliance

In the event that Birchgrove is unable to comply with this procedure due to exceptional circumstances, such as a cyber incident, natural disasters or other unforeseen disruptions affecting our capacity to properly deal with the complaint, we will take the following actions:

1. **Inform the Ombudsman:** Birchgrove will promptly notify the Housing Ombudsman of the non-compliance and the reasons for it.
2. **Resident Notification:** All affected residents/complainants will be informed of the nature of the incident and any potential impacts on the handling of their complaint.
3. **Compliance Timescale:** Birchgrove will provide a clear timeline for returning to compliance, outlining any interim measures to manage the complaint and or provide remedies until full compliance is restored.

## 13. Satisfaction Surveys Vs. Complaints

Each year, Birchgrove conducts a detailed satisfaction survey to gather direct feedback from residents on various aspects of our service offerings. As part of our internal process, we thoroughly analyse the results and engage with individuals who have provided comments. If, during this follow-up stage, a resident feels that their feedback or suggestions have not been adequately addressed, they are reminded of the option to file a formal complaint.

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