



Doc Number: 10-13	Lead: Manager, Operational Support	Last Full Review: November 2025
Tick one of the below for review/changes made: Full review and changes made <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> (add changes summary to table below) Full review, no changes made <input type="checkbox"/> Changes made but no full review <input type="checkbox"/> (add changes summary to table below)		Reviewer / Editor: CR – Operational Support Changes Approved By: Policies Group <hr/> Reviewed and edited in-line with the Beacon? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No

Have Your Say: Complaints Procedure

Document Change Details

Date	Summary of Changes Made
November 2025	Complete re-write of the Complaints Policy (output of the Complaints project)

1.0PURPOSE

To set out the procedure for receiving, acknowledging, responding to, tracking actions from, learning from and sharing learning from, complaints.

DEFINITIONS

Complaint	An expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The standard of service • Actions or lack of action by Southdown, its own colleagues or those acting on its behalf. This may relate to dissatisfaction with how a Service Request was handled.
Have Your Say form	Online form available to clients, tenants, and the public on our website, and to colleagues via our intranet. A downloadable version will be available. The form can also capture other expressions of dissatisfaction, where the person raising the issue does not wish to make a complaint.
Have Your Say Portal	The IT system we use to record, track, and report on complaints and related improvement actions is the Have Your Say portal. The portal can also capture other expressions of dissatisfaction, where the person raising the issue does not wish to make a complaint.
Reasonable Adjustments	In accordance with the Equality Act 2010, we must keep a record of any reasonable adjustments agreed. These might be communication preferences, Easy Read versions, differently

	coloured paper etc. Any agreed reasonable adjustments must be kept under active review.
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2.0 ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Role	Responsibilities
OPG	Ensuring this procedure is followed by colleagues.
Operational Heads of Service, Director of Housing and Assets	Approving the extension of Stage 1 or Stage 2 investigation timescales (this should be in extremely rare circumstances only). Allocate Stage 2 Investigator via the Portal Accountable for meeting timescales. Accountable for ensuring agreed improvements, and changes to operational policies and procedures (in accordance with policy change protocols), are implemented.
Complaints Subject Matter Experts for Business Areas	Attend Complaints Review Group Act as SMEs for Stage 2 Investigators to support with complaints within LD, Housing, Mental Health, or Housing Support
All Managers	Ensuring all colleagues are aware of, and follow, this procedure, and that they understand the definition of a complaint and the difference between a complaint and a service request.
All colleagues	Being aware of this procedure and the associated policy. Following this procedure.
Manager, Operational Support	Complaints Lead for the organisation, with the following responsibilities: Owner of this procedure and the associated policy. Managing the team covering Complaint Administrator duties. Acting as the escalation route for any issues relating to this procedure that cannot be answered by the Complaints Admin team and or Subject Matter Experts. Reporting on complaints to the Service Quality Committee. Leading the Complaints Review Group. Producing the complaints report for the Operational Performance Group. Producing the complaints data for the Service Quality Committee report.
Complainant	The person making the complaint i.e. raising an expression of dissatisfaction using any method (e.g., direct to a colleague, via our web form or social media)

Complainant Advocate	Someone making a complaint on someone else's behalf (with that person's consent) and/or supporting a Complainant as needed.
Complaint Recipient	<p>The person to whom a complaint is initially raised. This could be any team member and raised to them in any way. They are responsible for acknowledging and logging the complaint in line with guidance.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If a complaint is raised via the Complaints Form the Complaints Administrators will act as Complaints Recipient. • If a complaint is made via social media, a member of the Communications Team will act as Complaint Recipient.
Complaints Administrator	<p>Responsible for Complaints Administrator activities, which include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allocating complaints raised via the Have Your Say form or inbox; feedback@southdown.org. • Responding to administrative queries from colleagues, complaints handlers.
Complaint Handler	<p>Accountable for all activity with a Stage 1 Complaint. Accountable for tracking, logging and ensuring all improvement actions related to Stage 1 findings. The Complaint Handler may also be the Complaint Recipient. Usually, this will be one of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Team Manager (MHHS) • Co-ordinator (MHSS) • Service Manager/ Deputy Manager (LD) • Manager, Housing Services • Manager, Property Services • Partnership Leads (for complaints received from partnership sub-contractors, grantees and/or their clients) <p>... unless it requires subject matter expertise from a central services manager.</p>
Stage 2 Investigator	Manages a Stage 2 Complaint. Must be Grade 8 or above. Typically, Manager, Operations, Manager, Housing Services and Manager, Property Services.
Systems Specialist	Maintaining the Have Your Say Database – functionality, access rights, dashboard etc.
Client Tenant Involvement Lead	Supports clients and tenants to have 'voice', such as in scrutiny exercises that clients and tenants review complaints. These activities are delivered without staff.
Complaint Review Group	Manager, Operational Support, Complaints Administrator, and Subject Matter Experts, clients and tenants meet quarterly to review complaints, exploring themes, learnings, and process developments.

3.0 PROCEDURE

3.1 A Complaint is Made to You by a Complainant or Advocate

Responsible: Complaint Recipient

Timeframe: Immediate

Action Required: Respond to the complainant, using the **Have Your Say form** to guide your conversation:

- Acknowledge sincerely and thank them for raising, in accordance with guidance
- Let them know we will look into this – offer choice on their involvement in the investigation.
- Log their complaint using the **Have Your Say form**, assigning to your Team Manager.
- Inform your Team Manager (if not you).

You must fill out and submit all fields in the form.

Please note:

- It is the Complaint Recipient's responsibility to ensure that the complaint is received by the Complaint Handler / Complaints Admin Team.
- You are welcome to print the [Have Your Say Form](#) to guide the conversation, but *you must then log this online*
- If you're unclear about who should manage this complaint, send it immediately to the Complaints Administrators team.
- If the complainant has stated that they wish to raise the issue but do not want to be contacted again, document this clearly in the complaint form. Explain that we will investigate as far as possible without further input. Clarify that if the investigation requires information only they can provide, it may be limited or closed if they choose not to engage.
Try to understand why they do not want any contact or involvement and explore whether there are any agreed ways to overcome these concerns. Explain that their involvement can help us investigate more effectively, which in turn supports learning from mistakes and improving our services.

3.2 Allocate the Complaint Handler for Stage 1 Complaint

Responsible: Team Manager

Timeframe: Within 1 working day

Action Required: When you are notified of the complaint, consider...

- Is there any reason that it may be inappropriate for you to handle the complaint — for example, due to the nature of the complaint, your history with the complainant, if the complaint is about you, or if the complainant has specifically requested that the complaint be investigated by someone independent from the service.
- Do you have any leave or exceptional circumstances coming up in the next 10 days that mean you are unable to handle this

If yes, agree with your manager who is most appropriate to handle the complaint.

3.3 Complaint Acknowledgement

Responsible: Complaint Handler

Timeframe: Within 3 working days from receipt of complaint, with the next working day being day one.

Action Required: Use the portal to acknowledge the complaint by sharing in writing that you have:

- You have logged their concerns and desired resolution, reflecting and quoting the language they have used, and managing expectations as to what is within our remit of control
- You have logged any agreed communication preferences or adaptations needed
- Where to find further information on our complaints process and support available
- The next steps with timeframes

Please note:

If a complaint is being made by an advocate on someone else's behalf, and that person has capacity, the complaint handler must write to the individual, outlining the nature of the complaint and giving them the option to refuse that person acting on their behalf. If they inform us that they do not want the advocate to represent them, we will not be able to proceed with the complaint, and you will need to let the advocate know.

If the person does not have capacity, you will need to determine whether the advocate has a legitimate interest — for example, if they are the client's parent or legal representative. If you are unsure whether the advocate has a legitimate interest, you must contact them to find out more.

3.4 Initial Contact with the Complainant

Responsible: Complaint Handler

Timeframe: As soon as practicable (ideally, within 1 working day of written acknowledgement)

Action Required: Contact the complainant using their preferred communication method to:

- Introduce yourself (if not the Complaint Recipient)
- Understand their concerns
- Ask what a good outcome will look like for them, managing expectations
- Understand any reasonable adjustments required (recording and acting upon these)
- Agree communication format and frequency during the investigation process, confirming that the final response will be in writing.
- Explain the next steps and confirm the process timeframes

Please note: If there is to be any calls / texts, ensure the complainant has the Complaint Handler's number so they know it is legitimate.

If you are unable to contact the complainant or advocate after several attempts, proceed with investigating the complaint based on the evidence available. Ensure you document all attempts to make contact, including dates and methods used.

Record your actions into the Have Your Say portal.

3.5 Identify and Undertake Stage 1 Complaints Activity

Responsible: Complaint Handler

Timeframe: Agreed with the complainant (no longer than 10 working days from date of acknowledgement, day one being the date the acknowledgement was made).

Action Required:

- Collect and review all relevant files, correspondence (letters, emails), notes, and any other evidence.
- Familiarise yourself with the relevant policies, processes, and regulatory frameworks.
- Investigate thoroughly: be fair and investigate all aspects of the complaint. This may involve speaking to the complainant or advocate again, other staff members, or third parties.
- Determine what happened versus what should have happened. If there is a gap, establish why.

- Assess the impact on the complainant or the person whom the complaint is on behalf of.
- Identify any appropriate action to be taken to remedy the matter, and when it must be done by.
- Where appropriate, share your initial findings with the complainant or advocate, and any other people involved in the complaint.
- Invite and consider their comments before reaching your conclusion.
- Based on your investigation, and taking into account any proposed remedies, decide whether you find the complaint to be resolved, partially resolved, or not resolved.

If you continue to be unable to make contact with the client, proceed with the investigation based on the evidence you have. Do not delay the investigation. Document all attempts to make contact, including dates and methods used and ensure the investigation is as thorough as possible within the limits of the information available.

Record your action into the Have Your Say portal. Contact with anyone involved as part of the exploration must be noted and logged in line with GDPR.

Extension of Deadline in Extenuating Circumstances

The initial **Stage 1 investigation** must be completed and the response letter sent within **10 working days** of Southdown acknowledging the complaint, In exceptional cases, the deadline may be extended, subject to approval by the relevant Operational Head of Service or the Director of Housing and Assets. Any extension must not exceed **10 working days** unless there is a valid reason, which **must** be clearly explained to the complainant.

Extensions should be rare and only granted in extenuating circumstances, such as absence of the complainant or witness, unexpected absence of the handler, additional investigation required following initial findings, or third-party delays. General capacity issues, workload pressures, or difficulty contacting the complainant are not valid reasons for extending the deadline.

Pause Field – Emergency Situations

If a client or tenant is actively engaging in the process but becomes unavailable due to an emergency—such as being admitted to hospital—and you need to pause the process, indicate this by completing the **'Pause' field** on the Have Your Say portal.

Please note: **This does not stop the clock**, and you will still need to extend the deadline as outlined above. However, it enables us to more easily report on the reason for the missed deadline.

Use the portal to confirm the extension with the complainant.

3.6 Share Findings with the Complainant or Advocate – Stage 1 Response

Responsible: Complaint Handler

Timeframe: Within 10 working days of acknowledgement, day one being the date the acknowledgement was made, unless an extension has been agreed.

Action Required: Respond using the complainant's communication preference.

Do not wait for follow up actions relating to the complaint to be completed before responding. Using the portal, you must follow up in writing to the complainant (and/or their advocate). Your response must:

- Summarise the complaint, including complaint stage, reference number and key points raised.
- Confirm whether you consider the complaint to be resolved, partially resolved or not resolved. Give your reasons why
- Where relevant, detail actions both taken and planned to put things right, with timeframes
- Provide clear reasons for any action or decisions, referencing relevant policy, laws and good practice where appropriate.
- Explain how they can escalate their complaint to Stage 2 if they don't feel it has been satisfactorily resolved.
- Inform them they will be contacted to complete the Complaint Follow-Up survey
- Consider the complainant and use your discretion to decide whether to offer an optional meeting or phone call to explain the findings.

Record your actions into the **Have Your Say** portal.

3.7 Stage 1 Complaint Follow-Up Survey

Responsible: Complaints Admin Team

Timeframe: Within 5 working days of the Stage 1 Response being sent, which closes the case.

Action Required:

- Using the complainant's preferred contact method, please contact them with the survey - [Southdown Complaints Process Follow-Up](#)
- IF EMAIL OR POST: Send either the link or the letter as appropriate.
- IF CALL OR TEXT: Please ring and ask, or text, the seven questions.

Log responses into the **Have Your Say** portal.

3.8 If the Complainant is Dissatisfied with Stage 1 Outcome, Progress to Stage 2

*If the complainant is not satisfied with the response provided at Stage 1, they may escalate the complaint to Stage 2. This escalation can be made in any format—verbally, in writing, or otherwise—but must occur within **30 calendar days** of receiving the Stage 1 response.*

*If the complainant chooses to escalate verbally, you must record the details of the conversation on the **Have Your Say** portal. This includes the **date of the discussion** and a **summary of what was said**.*

Responsible: The Complaint Handler or Complaints Admin Team, depending on who the complainant informs of their wish to escalate the complaint

Timeframe: Within 24 hours

- Notify the relevant Head of Service or Director of Housing Assets that the complainant has requested their complaint be escalated to Stage 2. Provide a brief description of the complaint and a summary of the Stage 1 findings.
- Record the Stage 2 escalation request in the Have Your Say portal. This action will re-open the complaint.

Please note: If the Head or Director of Service is out of the office, please contact Matt Gough (Chief Operating Officer).

3.9 Allocate the Complaint Investigator for Stage 2 Complaint

Responsible: Operational Heads of Service/ Director of Housing and Assets

Timeframe: Within 24 hours

Action Required: Allocate a Stage 2 investigator

3.10 Acknowledgement of Complaint at Stage 2

Responsible: Complaint Handler

Timeframe: Within 3 working days from receipt of complaint, with the next working day being day one.

Action Required: Use the portal to acknowledge the complaint by sharing in writing that:

- You acknowledge they are not happy with the outcome of their complaint at Stage 1, reflecting and quoting the language they have used.
- The complaint will progress to Stage 2.
- You will review the complaint and how it was handled.
- You note their communication preferences
- Where to find further information on our complaints process and support available
- The next steps with timeframes

Record your actions on the **Have Your Say** portal.

3.11 Identify and Undertake Stage 2 Complaints Activity

Responsible: Stage 2 Investigator

Timeframe: Within 3 working days of the request to escalate, day one being the next working day.

Action Required:

- Collect and review all relevant files, correspondence (letters, emails), notes, and any other evidence.
- Familiarise yourself with the relevant policies, processes, and regulatory frameworks.
- Investigate thoroughly: be fair and investigate all aspects of the complaint. This may involve speaking to the complainant, advocate, other staff members, or third parties.
- Consider how the Stage 1 complaint was handled, the steps taken to understand the concerns, resolution agreed, actions taken, and response.
- Identify whether the investigation has been open, fair, and transparent.
- Make a final decision about the complaint based on your investigation, including whether you agree with the Stage 1 complaint outcome, or believe the outcome should be different, and if so, what you think it should be.
- Identify any alternative proposals for a resolution of the complaint, including any action to be taken and when it must be done by.
- Ask another Stage 2 Investigator to peer review your findings and recommendations. Ensure they are aware of your deadline for the response to be sent.

Extension of Stage 2 Deadline in Extenuating Circumstances

The initial **Stage 2 investigation** must be completed and the response letter sent within **20 working days** of Southdown acknowledging the complaint, In exceptional cases, the deadline may be extended, subject to approval by the relevant Operational Head of Service or the Director of Housing and Assets. Any extension must not exceed **20 working days** unless there is a valid reason, which **must** be clearly explained to the complainant.

Extensions should be rare and only granted in extenuating circumstances, such as absence of the complainant or witness, unexpected absence of the handler, additional investigation required following initial findings, or third-party delays. General capacity issues, workload pressures, or difficulty contacting the complainant are not valid reasons for extending the deadline.

Pause Field – Emergency Situations

If a client or tenant is actively engaging in the process but becomes unavailable due to an emergency—such as being admitted to hospital—and you need to pause the process, indicate this by completing the 'Pause' field on the Have Your Say portal.

Please note: This does not stop the clock, and you will still need to extend the deadline as outlined above. However, it enables us to more easily report on the reason for the missed deadline.

Record your actions into the Have Your Say portal. Send any evidence that cannot be saved directly to the portal to the Complaints Admin team, who will save it in their Complaints Teams Channel, using a reference number to link it back to this complaint.

3.12 Share Findings with the Complainant or Advocate – Stage 2 Response

Responsible: Stage 2 Investigator

Timeframe: Within 20 working days of acknowledgement, day one being the date the acknowledgement was made, unless an extension has been agreed.

Action Required: Respond using the complainant's communication preference. **Do not wait** for follow up actions relating to the complaint to be completed before responding. Using the portal, you must follow up in writing to the complainant (and/or their advocate). Your response must:

- Summarise the complaint, including complaint stage, reference number and key points raised.
- Confirm whether you agree with the Stage 1 complaint outcome, or believe the outcome should be different, and if so, what you think it should be.
- Where relevant, detail actions both taken and planned to put things right, with timeframes
- Provide clear reasons for any action or decisions, referencing relevant policy, laws and good practice where appropriate.
- Advise them of the appropriate regulator, commissioner, or other organisation they can contact to escalate their complaint or obtain independent advice if they are not satisfied with the response.
- Inform them they will be contacted to complete the Complaint Follow-Up survey
- Consider the complainant and use your discretion to decide whether to offer an optional meeting or phone call to explain the findings.

Add your actions into the **Have Your Say** portal.

3.13 Stage 2 Complaint Follow-Up Survey

Responsible: Complaints Admin Team

Timeframe: Within 5 working days of the Stage 1 Response being sent, which closes the case.

Action Required:

- Using the complainant's preferred contact method, please contact them with the survey - [Southdown Complaints Process Follow-Up](#)
- IF EMAIL OR POST: Send either the link or the letter as appropriate.
- IF CALL OR TEXT: Please ring and ask, or text, the seven questions.

Log responses into the **Have Your Say portal**.

3.13 Stage 2 Complaint Follow-Up Survey

Responsible: Complaints Admin Team

Timeframe: Within 5 working days of the Stage 1 Response being sent, which closes the case.

Action Required:

- Using the complainant's preferred contact method, please contact them with the survey - [Southdown Complaints Process Follow-Up](#)
- IF EMAIL OR POST: Send either the link or the letter as appropriate.
- IF CALL OR TEXT: Please ring and ask, or text, the seven questions.

Log responses into the **Have Your Say portal**.

3.14 Organisational/Service Actions After the Complaint is Closed

Responsible: Action owner as designated by action plan in the **Have Your Say portal**. Heads of Service and Director of Housing and Assets are accountable for ensuring actions related to complaints are completed on time in their business area.

Timeframe: As per actions timescales.

Action Required: Update actions on the **Have Your Say portal** as identified in the Stage 1 and/or Stage 2 responses until all are complete.

IF the complainant has requested to be kept informed, let them know at appropriate points when actions have been undertaken using their communication preference.

3.15 Escalation to an External Agency

If a complainant is not happy with the Stage 2 outcome, they have the right to raise their complaint with the relevant external agency, e.g., the Housing Ombudsman, our commissioners etc.

Responsible: Most senior operational lead (typically, the Head of LD, Head of MHHS or the Director of Housing & Assets)

Timeframe: Varies

Action Required:

- Record the escalation to an external agency in the **Have Your Say portal**.
- Review and respond to the agency as per their requirements
- Record any actions and correspondence arising from external agency on the **Have Your Say portal**

3.16 COMPLAINTS VIA EXTERNAL AGENCIES

Where a complaint comes in via an external agency, the relevant lead will proceed as appropriate.

4.0 ASSOCIATED POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

- 1-10a Complaints Policy
- NMHT Standard Operating Procedure
- Operating Procedure

Complaints Procedure – Further Guidance

We work to resolve complaints using our values to centre and guide our approach.

Our values

Our values shape how we deliver our strategy and define success beyond numbers.

They guide how we work with each other, with our partners, and with the people we support. Our values influence every conversation, every decision, and every service we deliver. They help us stay grounded in what matters most and ensure that we remain a compassionate, trustworthy, and forward-thinking organisation focused on making a lasting difference.

- Force for good**
We are passionate about making a positive difference in people's lives, championing their strengths and potential.
- Brilliant with people**
Compassionate, inclusive, and welcoming - ensuring belonging and individuality are at the heart of everything we do.
- United**
Achieving success through working together with local authorities, the NHS, and voluntary sector partners, so everyone feels safe and connected.
- Trustworthy**
Acting with integrity and transparency in all operations, nurturing a sense of safety for staff and clients alike.
- Responsive**
Listening, learning, and adapting to changing need - recognising each person's experiences and choice in shaping support.

The focus of a complaint should be to resolve the issue and improve the relationship with the complainant.

TOP TIPS AND KEY THEMES LEARNED FROM CLIENT AND TENANT FEEDBACK

- Be mindful that complaints can create anxiety
- Complainants want to feel heard and understood
- Be clear on boundaries – don't over-promise or be vague
- Reassure complainants that they made the right decision in raising their concern
- Help clients, tenants, and advocates understand confidentiality issues. Reassure them that only a limited number of people have access to the information about the complaint. However, any member of staff named in a complaint can request to see information recorded about them by making a Data Subject Access Request.
- Feedback is valuable for us to develop our practice
- Complaints can occur from broken trust and relationships – consider how we can repair bonds and build trust

GENERAL GUIDANCE FOR...

Complaints Recipients

When speaking with complainants, you might say or do the following:

- Be apologetic e.g., *'I'm sorry that's happened'*
- Be empathetic e.g., *'I can imagine that was tough'*
- Be grateful for the opportunity to put it right e.g., *'Thank you for sharing this, we appreciate you letting us know so that we can put this right'*
- Be curious to understand and clarify how they want it to be resolved e.g., *'What does the best outcome look like for you?'*
- Be clear and advise them of the complaints process and where to find further information.
- Be curious of communication preferences e.g., *'Would you like to be involved in our investigation? If yes, how's best to contact you?'*
- Be informative of the support available to them whilst this is going on e.g., *they can have friends, families, or advocates act as their representative*

Complaints Handlers and Stage 2 Investigators

- Save all evidence to the Have Your Say portal, or for those documents that cannot be saved there, send them to the Complaints Admin team. Do not save to Teams folders or OneDrive.
- Analyse all evidence and consider the facts carefully

- Assess the merit of the complaint only. Do not allow any previous experience with the complainant to influence your objectivity
- Anyone involved (clients, tenants, colleagues) can make a Data Subject Access Request and see what has been recorded, so records need to be factual

Heads of/Directors

Allocate an appropriate Stage 2 Investigator, considering:

- Knowledge – whose knowledge set most appropriately lends itself to this complaint?
- Capacity – who has reasonable capacity, both emotional and resource, to complete it in the timeframe?
- Interest – who is passionate about complaints or wants to increase their skillset?

Line Managers

If a complaint is raised about a team member, it is the responsibility of their manager to ensure they are supported and updated throughout the process.

Team members who have been through this experience have shared they want:

- To be made aware of the issues as soon as possible
- Any questions to be curious and not accusative
- To know where they can access advice and support because it can feel personal
- To be kept up to date with the outcomes and next steps
- Clarity as to whether this becomes part of any other procedures such as disciplinary
- To know the complainant will also be held accountable for their behaviour where appropriate

COMPLAINTS PORTAL

Throughout the complaints process, the Have Your Say portal must be kept up to date with all activity to enable central oversight of complaints handling. This ensures a clear audit trail is maintained, supporting accurate reporting and accountability. All relevant data fields must be completed in full to provide a complete and reliable record of the complaint and its progress.

See links below for portal and user guide:

[Have Your Say Portal](#)

[Have Your Say Portal User Guide](#)

TIMESCALES – FURTHER EXPLANATION

Our timescales for responding to complaints are informed by the Housing Ombudsman’s Complaint Handling Code. This sets out clear expectations for landlords, including a two-stage complaints process and defined timescales for responses.

Southdown has chosen to adopt a single complaints procedure across its diverse range of operations, aligning its approach with the principles and standards set out in the Ombudsman’s Code.

	Acknowledgement	Response
Stage 1	The initial complaint must be acknowledged, in writing, within 3 working days of Southdown receiving the complaint, with day one starting the next working day.	The Stage 1 investigation must be completed and the response letter sent within 10 working days of Southdown acknowledging the complaint , with day one being the date the complaint is acknowledged. An extension may be granted in extenuating circumstances, but this must not exceed an additional 10 working days . The extension must be approved by the relevant operational Head of Service or Director of Assets and Housing.
Stage 2	The request to escalate to Stage 2 must be acknowledged, in writing, within 3 working days of receiving the request, with day one starting the next working day.	The Stage 2 investigation must be completed and the response letter sent within 20 working days of Southdown acknowledging the complaint , with day one being the date the complaint is acknowledged. An extension may be granted in extenuating circumstances, but this must not exceed an additional 20 working days . The extension must be approved by the relevant operational Head of Service or Director of Assets and Housing.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Is it still a complaint if someone sounds unhappy but hasn’t used the word “complaint”?

It might be. An expression of dissatisfaction can still be considered a complaint, even if the word “complaint” isn’t used. People have the right to decide whether they want to make a complaint, and if that’s not clear, it’s important to check with them.

Regardless of whether the person wants it treated as a complaint or not, the main priority is to work with them to try to resolve the situation.

If the person has made it clear that they do not wish to make a complaint, you must still:

- Record a summary of their concerns on the Have Your Say portal.

- Acknowledge that you've received their feedback.
- Provide a written response outlining any actions taken to try to resolve the matter.

Use the Stage 1 Complaints section of the portal to guide you through the steps and to record your progress.

Please note: Do not use the *Complaint Acknowledgement* and *Stage 1 Response* template wording in the portal, as these are bespoke for the complaints process. Use the Expression of Dissatisfaction – Non-Complaint Acknowledgement and Response templates instead.

If you need further advice on how to record expressions of dissatisfaction that aren't complaints—and how you've responded to them on the portal—please contact the **Complaints Admin Team**, who will be able to advise you.

What do I do if someone raises a complaint, but it's a service request?

Explain what a service request is. This is a request that the organisation provides or improves a service, fixes a problem or reconsiders a decision. Service Requests are NOT complaints; however they could become a complaint if someone is not happy with the way the service request was handled. The most important thing however is to focus on a resolution.

What do I do if the complainant says they want to raise a complaint but not until...?

We will ask them to raise the complaint when they are ready.

What if the Complaint is about a member of C-Suite?

If the complaint relates to the Chief Experience & Transformation Officer, the Chief Operating Officer or the Chief Finance Officer, the Chief Executive will act as Complaint Handler and the Chair of the Board as Stage 2 Investigator
If the complaint relates to the Chief Executive, the Chair of People and Pay Committee will act as Complaint Handler. If this progresses to Stage 2, the Chair of the Board will be Stage 2 Investigator.

What if a Complaint made to me is about a partner organisation?

If the complaint is made about a...

- a) *service that we work in partnership with and Southdown delivers the service*, i.e., Staying Well, we will lead on the complaint, with the partner supporting. Follow the procedure above.

- b) *Southdown colleague working in a partner service*, for example, in a GP practice as part of the Neighbourhood Mental Health Team (NMHT) This will depend on the type of service and the nature of the complaint. Staff should follow the process set out in the NMHT standard operating procedures. If you are unsure what action to take, speak to the relevant MHSS Manager, Operations for guidance.
- c) *service that we subcontract*, i.e., they are a client of a UOK service, we will support the complainant to find the right contact details to raise their complaint. We will act as the escalation route where necessary.
- d) *third party that is not linked to Southdown*, we will support the complainant to find the right contact details to raise their complaint.

What should I do if the complaint relates to an issue that occurred over 12 months ago?

Send to the Complaints Admin Team. They will escalate this to the Organisational Lead for Complaints to take a view. If they agree to accept the complaint, follow the usual process.

If it is determined that there is no reason to accept the complaint out of time, contact the complainant using wording as directed by the Organisational Lead for Complaints.

What if the complainant raised a similar complaint just last month and a couple of months before that!

Hopefully, by building relationships, we can manage expectations of what we can realistically deliver for this complainant. Not everyone will be happy with the outcome so professional curiosity here is key.

We can decline complaints if we feel we have resolved a similar issue in the last 12 months and there are no further changes to be had. We can create communication contracts with individuals if the behaviour appears ill-intended or is bringing harm to colleagues.

What if the someone asks to go to Stage 2 but they are outside the 30 days deadline?

Send to the Complaints Admin Team. They will escalate this to the Organisational Lead for Complaints, who will review and determine if there have been extenuating circumstances.

If it is determined that there is no reason to accept the escalated complaint out of time, contact the complainant using wording as directed by the Organisational Lead for Complaints.

The Head of Service or Director of Housing and Assets should review and see if there have been extenuating circumstances.

What if the complainant wants a follow up survey from someone else?

That's OK. It's good to understand how we can improve. We want the complainant to feel safe in sharing their experience and we understand their past experiences may impact how they go about this. We can explore the reasons and relationship after we've resolved their concerns

What happens if my manager is off?

Contact your next-in-line manager and they will allocate accordingly.

What if the complaint is about a member of your team?

This can be tricky, as we need to be fair and considerate to both the complainant and team member. For transparency, it's important to explain to the complainant that you need to talk to the team member to understand what has happened. Make both the complainant and team member aware of support available to them. It's recommended to follow up with a team member to confirm the outcome of the complaint and debrief with them.

Please note: Complaints will not be held on a colleague's central HR file unless there is related formal action (e.g. a disciplinary).

How do I tell another manager there are actions to take from my findings?

Have an open discussion with the service or department manager before you respond to the complainant. Think about how you would want to receive feedback and suggestions. Speak to your manager if you're not sure, and they will support you. It's important that there are no surprises and that we work together to resolve issues and improve our practice.

FURTHER HELP

If, having read the policy, procedure and additional guidance you still have a question, please contact the Complaints Administrators.