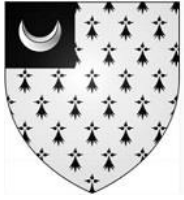


Shepton Mallet United Charities

www.alms1627.org.uk

Complaints Policy



Shepton Mallet United Charities

www.alms1627.org.uk

1. Introduction

At Shepton Mallet United Charities, we are very proud of our warm and supportive relationships between our residents, our Trustees and our staff. But we recognise that in any community there may be a time when things go wrong. This policy is designed to help you decide whether or not to make a formal complaint. It is publicly available on our charity's website <https://alms1627.org.uk/>

This policy complies with the Complaint Handling Code issued by the Housing Ombudsman Service.

2. What is a complaint?

The Housing Ombudsman describes a complaint (even if you don't call it 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'*.

They also give advice about 'service requests'. A service request might be asking for gutters to be cleared, a repair to a roof or a window or telling us about a problem with vermin: these are a normal part of our role as landlords and aren't treated as complaints, although we do keep a note for future reference.

3. Before you start

It is your right to make a formal complaint, but it may help to think first about whether this is the best way forward for you. Once a complaint becomes formal, it has to be handled in a certain way: careful records must be kept and our regulators may need to be informed. It may be helpful to try to resolve things through an informal conversation first. Our Trustees will be happy to talk things through, as will our hard-working Warden. Our Clerk is also our Complaints Officer and will be happy to offer advice (contact details at the end).

If you do decide that a formal complaint is the right thing for you, though, we will do our best to be helpful. The stages of the process are explained below.

4. Stage 1

This is where your complaint is carefully considered by a panel of Trustees: usually 3, depending on availability. No Trustee will be part of the panel if they have a conflict of interest: for example if they are part of the complaint.

If the complaint is a very straightforward one, it may be possible for the Complaints Officer to deal with it without calling a panel, which should lead to a quicker outcome. Everyone involved undertakes to be fair and impartial. It will help if you can provide the information they need at the start, although do keep in mind that if you include too much detail it's possible to miss something important. Your information might include:

- Is the complaint against an individual person/s? If so, who?
- What happened?
- Where did it happen?
- When did it happen?
- What ill effects have you suffered as a result?
- (Very important) What would you like as an outcome of your complaint?

There are timescales for dealing with a formal complaint:

- Within 5 working days of receipt* your complaint will be acknowledged. We will tell you either that your complaint will be considered by a panel, or that it is outside the scope of this policy.



Shepton Mallet United Charities

www.alms1627.org.uk

- The process of investigating your complaint will obviously vary depending on what research needs to be done, but the final outcome will be sent to you within 20 working days* of the final meeting of the panel. At that point, you will be given 10 working days* to decide to appeal (stage 2).

If we can't keep to these timescales for any reason, we will let you know.

* *Monday to Friday*

If you introduce new information while stage 1 is being processed, we will take it into account if it is relevant to your original complaint. If it isn't, we will ask you to start a new, separate complaint.

5. Stage 2

If you aren't satisfied with the outcome of stage 1, you are able to appeal and a similar process will apply, with a new panel of Trustees who weren't involved in stage 1. The same precautions around conflict of interest as in Stage 1 will apply. Stage 2 will usually involve the Chair of Trustees, who is also the charity's MRC (Member with Responsibility for Complaints). It may not be possible to change the outcome of stage 1, but they will also look at how the panel handled that stage. You need to ask for stage 2 with 10 working days* of receiving the outcome of stage 1, with details of why you are appealing the decision, for example:

- You don't think the outcome was fair.
- You think the panel missed some important information.
- Other reasons (please explain).

Again, there are timescales:

- Within 5 working days of receipt* your appeal will be acknowledged. We will tell you either that your appeal will be considered by a panel, or that it is not eligible for stage 2.
- The process of investigating your appeal will obviously vary depending on what research needs to be done, but the final outcome will be sent to you with 20 working days* of the final meeting of the panel. At that point, the decision of the panel will be final.

If we can't keep to these timescales for any reason, we will let you know.

* *Monday to Friday*

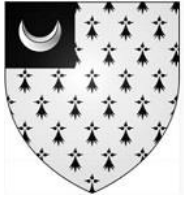
Again, if you introduce new information while stage 2 is being processed, we will take it into account if it is relevant to the appeal. If it isn't, we will ask you to start a new, separate complaint.

6. If you're still not satisfied

There aren't any further stages for Shepton Mallet United Charities to deal with your complaint, but you are able to take it to the Office of the Housing Ombudsman for consideration. Contact details are at the end.

7. If you need help

Our complaints procedure is open to anyone who needs it and you are welcome to ask us for any support you may need. This might include writing in a larger font, having a friend with you for a face-to-face meeting (see 9, below), a more accessible venue or anything else that would help you. Because a formal complaint has to be recorded carefully, it's important to send us the information in writing but this can be via email, typed or hand-written letters. Remember that if you're using Royal Mail this might have an impact on the timescales.



Shepton Mallet United Charities

www.alms1627.org.uk

7. Will Shepton Mallet United Charities always accept a complaint?

We do have the right to refuse to accept a complaint if necessary: it might be clearly untrue, out of date (normally more than a year old) or vexatious. We can't intervene if legal proceedings are under way.

However, we've already explained that we value our good relationships with our residents and this is not something that we ever expect to happen.

8. Whistleblowing

It is important that when you are making the complaint you are acting in your own interest and not acting as a (possibly self-appointed) spokesperson on behalf of some or all of the other residents.

We will also accept approaches from third parties who have concerns they would like to raise. Whistleblowing will be handled in line with the policy for complaints, including timescales. Please be aware that because of privacy legislation, it may not be possible to share the outcome of the process with you.

9. Putting things right

If your complaint shows that something has gone wrong, we will acknowledge this and set out the actions we have already taken, or intend to take, to put things right. These can include:

- Apologising or acknowledging where things have gone wrong;
- Providing an explanation, assistance or reasons;
- Reconsidering or changing a decision or a record or adding a correction or addendum;
- A financial remedy;
- Changing policies, procedures, or practices.

Any of these actions will take into account the impact the problem had on you.

10. Privacy

The information that you give to us will not be used for any purpose other than for helping the Trustees to consider your application, to manage your residency and to handle any of your issues. For more information about how SMUC handles your data, please ask to see our 'data protection policy', which gives full information about your rights under General Data Protection Regulations or GDPR. It is available on the SMUC website or you can request a paper copy.

Please be aware though that the written record of your complaint may be retained as both a historical record and as a precedent for the future, but it will not be shared with third parties without your permission. If you have asked for a face-to-face meeting, whether with a friend or not, it may be necessary to take written notes for accuracy. We undertake that you will not be penalised in any way for raising your complaint and your relationship with us will not be affected.

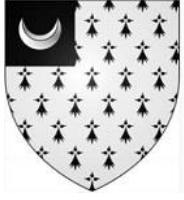
11. Contact details

Clerk to Trustees (Complaints Officer):

Mrs Gill Baker

gillybaker2010@hotmail.co.uk

Fir Tree House, Coxley, Wells, BA5 1QZ



Shepton Mallet United Charities

www.alms1627.org.uk

MRC or 'Member with Responsibility for Complaints'

Chair of Trustees, Mr P G H Davies

Mr Paul Davies

pghdaves@yahoo.co.uk Bowermead House, Whitstone Hill,
Pilton, BA4 4DT

The Office of the Housing Ombudsman:

Website:

[online complaint form](#)

Email:

info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk

Phone:

[0300 111 3000](tel:03001113000)

This policy will be reviewed every two years by the Trustee Board.

Last updated: September 2024