

POLICY NUMBER:	GEN 04	DATE REVIEWED BY BOARD:	July 2024
DEPARTMENT:	GENERAL	DATE OF NEXT REVIEW:	April 2025

1. Purpose and context

1.1 Squared views complaints and any other feedback including comments and compliments as an opportunity to learn, improve service delivery and team member development, as well as to communicate with our customers and stakeholders more effectively. It aims to:

- Continuously review and improve our services
- Offer equality and fair access to our complaints procedure regardless of race, gender or gender reassignment, religion, sexual orientation, age, or disability in line with our Fairness Policy.
- Provide an effective procedure for members of the public, our customers and their representatives to be listened to, acknowledged and a resolution offered, if they have suffered a failure in any of Squared’s services
- Take complaints seriously and try to resolve them without avoidable delay
- Provide responses that are clear and easy to understand
- Provide where necessary, explanations for decisions
- Learn from our mistakes
- Treat all individuals fairly and with respect
- Be open and honest
- Be confidential

2. Scope of this policy

2.1 This policy applies to and is available to any member of the public, any customer of Squared, any stakeholder(s) or contractor(s).

3. Roles and responsibilities

3.1 Squared has an appointed Complaints Officer from within its senior management team. This person’s role is to ensure that complaints are correctly processed from the outset and that the procedure is followed correctly. Also, ensuring the correct monitoring and analysis of

complaints to identify any trends or issues both internal and external, in addition to ensuring complaint or other feedback information is passed on to the Squared's Leadership Team and Board of Management. All team members at Squared are trained in handling complaints and all other feedback in line with this policy including the interpretation of and Squared's philosophy regarding complaints.

3.2 A member of the Board of Management is responsible for collecting or receiving all information regarding complaints or other feedback prior to each board meeting.

4. Definitions and reference to legislations used in this policy

4.1 A complaint must be defined 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 an individual resident or group of residents'

A complainant does not have to use the word 'complaint' for it to be treated as such. A complaint that is submitted via a third party or representative must still be handled in line with the landlord's complaints policy.

4.2 Relevant Legislation

- The Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023
- The Complaint Handling Code 2024
- The Equality Act 2010
- The Care Act 2014
- The Mental Capacity Act 2005
- Data Protection Act 2018

4.3 Internal definitions/acronyms

- The SDM – Housing management tool and database used by Squared

5. Main Body (how we will meet our obligation)

5.1 All complaints should be handled in accordance with the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code published in February 2024, last revised April 2024. In the first instance complaints should be centrally logged onto our Housing Management System along with all correspondence and evidence, to ensure that our complaints handling remains fair and transparent.

5.2 There are two stages to our complaints process. Customers have the right at any stage in the complaints process to access the Housing Ombudsman service for support and advice (www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk, Tel 0300 111 3000).

5.3 Customers can make complaints by telephone, e-mail, letter, during a visit by a team member, through the tenant portal, social media channels or by calling at our office. In the interests of confidentiality, any contacts made via social media that include confidential details will be removed from such platform as quickly as possible. Customers are also able to make a

complaint using a third party or representative and their complaint will be handled in line with this complaints policy. We will attempt to resolve any issues at the point of contact with the aim that the issue is resolved before escalation is required as per our procedure, by gaining a quick understanding of the issue and the outcome that the individual requires.

5.4 We will record and log all complaints as per the definitions in this policy. This information will be examined and analysed monthly, or if an occurrence caused us to do so beforehand, recommendations to processes or policies may arise from this.

5.5 Our Commitment:

On receipt of a complaint, we will:

- Acknowledge and log all complaints **within 5 working days** of receipt of complaint
- Give the customer the contact details of the person dealing with the complaint
- Fully investigate the complaint
- Make sure that the information given to us by the customer is treated confidentially
- At Stage One, provide a response to the complaint **within 10 working days** from the date of acknowledgement unless the complaint is particularly complicated and needs further investigation and, if this is the case, we will discuss with the customer the expected time frame and confirm in writing
- Inform the customer they have 28 days from receipt of outcome to inform us if they wish their complaint to move to Stage Two
- Acknowledge and log all Stage Two complaints within 5 working days of receipt of the request to escalate the complaint
- At Stage Two, provide a response to the complaint within 20 working days of acknowledgment of the escalated complaint. If this is not possible, we will provide an explanation to the customer and we will discuss with the customer the expected time frame and confirm in writing

A complaint response will be provided to the customer when the answer to the complaint is known, not when the outstanding actions to address the complaint are completed.

Sometimes timeframes may need to be extended, for example if further investigation is needed due to the complexity of the complaint or major works that cannot physically be completed during the timeframe. If this is the case, the manager responsible for responding to the complaint will agree a timeframe with the complainant and keep them regularly updated. The extension should be no more than 20 working days without good reason, and if so, we will discuss with the customer the expected time frame and confirm in writing clearly explaining the reason for the extension. Should we need to inform a customer of an extension to these timescales, we will also provide contact details of the Ombudsman.

5.6 From time to time an individual may not be happy with the outcome or resolution of a complaint, however, Squared will not tolerate any form of abuse during the outcome of a complaint being delivered or throughout the process. The complaint process may cease if there is any unacceptable behaviour levied to team members or others involved. The police service may also be contacted. Squared will consider a person's needs as per the Equality Act 2010.

5.7 There may be, at times, circumstances that will prevent an issue being considered under this policy, such as:

- The issue giving rise to the complaint occurred over twelve months ago (excluding any complaints that concern safeguarding or health and safety issues, which we will continue to consider outside of this timescale)
- Legal proceedings have started. This is defined as details of the claim, such as the Claim Form and Particulars of Claim, having been filed at court.
- Matters that have previously been considered under the complaints policy.

A detailed explanation will be provided to the complainant in such circumstances.

6. Compliance and Monitoring

6.1 All complaints will be logged and analysed centrally so that we can identify trends or internal or external issues to recommend any necessary changes. The Complaints Officer will ensure production of quarterly complaint statistical reports for the Board of Management. Complaints data will be shared with customers through Squared publications and meetings.

6.2 Satisfaction Surveys:

As part of Squared's on-going commitment to customer care, a satisfaction survey will be included with each stage of the process. This is to ensure that the customer has an opportunity to tell us how their complaint has been dealt with, as well as offering them an opportunity to put forward any suggestions as to how our service can be improved.

6.3 Accurate and sufficiently detailed records will be kept during all stages of the complaints process. This will be stored on our Housing Management System. Individual's may request copies of these records under the Data Protection Act. In addition, the Housing Ombudsman Service may require copies of all relevant documentation should the customer choose to refer the matter to them.

7. Other Relevant Policies

- Fairness Policy
- Complaints procedure
- Compensation Policy

8. Equality and Diversity

In terms of the Equality and Diversity Impact Assessment, this Policy helps all customers to express their dissatisfaction freely, as well as offering them the opportunity to put forward any suggestions as to how our service can be improved.

If customers need help or support with their complaint, they can ask someone to act for them, for example, a friend or relative, Age Concern or the Citizen's Advice Bureau. Where necessary we can arrange:

- Translation and interpretation services, including sign language, to be made available
- To accept and respond to correspondence in any language, large print, audio or in Braille
- For the services of an advocate to be made available

Squared will respond to any request of reasonable adjustment to be made to assist any individuals or group involved in this process. Team members will be trained to identify and offer adjustments or to respond to such requests.

This policy can be viewed via the Squared website, Tenant Portal, hard copy (upon request) and will accompany letters pertaining to complaints.

Information about the Housing Ombudsman, the Complaint Handling Code and our self-assessment against the code can be viewed on the Squared website.

Reviewed April 2024