THE ABBEYFIELD BASILDON SOCIETY LIMITED

Complaints Policy

1 Introduction

1.1 This policy applies to **The Abbeyfield Basildon Society Limited, registered charity number 262505 (Abbeyfield Basildon)** and seeks to ensure that Abbeyfield Basildon's complaints process is flexible and responsive to the needs of individual residents to enable them to be heard and understood.

Abbeyfield Basildon complies with the Complaint Handling Code issued by the Housing Ombudsman Service (**the Code**). All complaints dealt with under this policy will be dealt with in a manner consistent with the Code and Abbeyfield Basildon will maintain all records as required by the Code.

1.2 A **complaint** is defined as: "an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions, or lack of action by Abbeyfield Basildon, its trustees, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting an individual resident or group of residents."

1.3 The word "complaint" does not need to be used expressly for the matter to be considered a complaint. Whenever a resident expresses dissatisfaction, Abbeyfield Basildon will give them the option to make a complaint. Complaints made by residents may be made by the resident's carer, family members or a representative of a resident and these must be handled in line with Abbeyfield Basildon's complaints policy.

1.4 Complaints can be made to any staff member of Abbeyfield Basildon. This can be done in a number of ways which include:

- Telephone
- Face to face
- Email
- Letter

1.5 A service request is a request from a resident requiring action to be taken to put something right. (e.g., to carry out routine maintenance etc.) Service requests are not a complaint. Service requests should be dealt with in accordance with the Residents' Handbook. Failure to deal appropriately with a service request may lead to the matter being dealt with as a complaint.

1.6 Service requests will be recorded, tracked, and monitored to completion.

1.7 A complaint must be raised when the resident expresses dissatisfaction with the response to their service request, even if the handling of the service

request remains ongoing. Abbeyfield Basildon will not stop our efforts to address the service request if the resident raises a complaint.

1.8 An expression of dissatisfaction with services made through a residents' survey is not defined as a complaint, though, wherever possible, the person completing the survey should be made aware of how they can pursue a complaint if they wish to.

1.9 In dealing with complaints Abbeyfield Basildon will ensure that:

(a) individuals who raise a complaint are listened to and treated with courtesy and empathy;

(b) residents will never be disadvantaged as a result of raising a complaint;

(c) complaints will be investigated promptly, thoroughly, honestly, and openly; and

(d) in dealing with complaints Abbeyfield Basildon will comply with confidentiality and data protection policies.

2 Exclusions

2.1 Abbeyfield Basildon must accept a complaint unless there is a valid reason not to do and will ensure we consider the individual circumstances of each complaint.

2.2 The following matters will not normally be considered as complaints:

(a) The issue giving rise to the complaint occurred over twelve months ago.

(b) Legal proceedings have begun, defined as details of the claim, such as the Claim Form and Particulars of Claim, having been filed at Court.

(c) Matters that have previously been considered under the Complaints Policy.

(d) The complainant is anonymous, unless there is sufficient documentary evidence to substantiate the complaint.

2.3 Unless excluded on other grounds, Abbeyfield Basildon will accept complaints referred to them within 12 months of the issue occurring or the resident becoming aware of the issue. Where there are good reasons to do so, Abbeyfield Basildon will also consider whether to apply discretion to accept complaints made outside the time limit.

2.4 If a complaint is not accepted, a detailed explanation will be provided to the resident setting out the reasons why the matter is not suitable for the complaints process and their right to take that decision to the Ombudsman (see details below). The Ombudsman may direct Abbeyfield Basildon to take on the complaint.

3 Unreasonable behaviour

We understand that residents can get upset and frustrated when things have gone wrong.

3.1 If, however, Abbeyfield Basildon feels a complaint is pursued unreasonably, including any actions or behaviours of the resident/representative, this will be reviewed in line with Abbeyfield Basildon's unreasonable behaviour policy.

3.2 All complaints will be reviewed on an individual basis.

3.3 If any restrictions are put in place, these will be proportionate and demonstrate regard for the provisions of the Equality Act 2010.

3.4 Abbeyfield Basildon will ensure that any restrictions will be recorded, monitored and reviewed regularly and the complainant updated following the review.

3.5 Any restrictions in place will not prevent Abbeyfield Basildon from ensuring the complaint can be taken through the full complaints process.

4 Accessibility and awareness

4.1 Complaints will be dealt with in a manner that is consistent with Abbeyfield Basildon's Equality & Diversity Policy and Abbeyfield Basildon's duties under the Equality Act 2010.

4.2 If any individual making a complaint wishes Abbeyfield Basildon to make reasonable adjustments to accommodate an individual's particular needs, they, or their representative, can contact Abbeyfield Basildon by phone, email or in person to discuss what adjustments may be possible.

4.3 Abbeyfield Basildon acknowledges that a high volume of complaints must not necessarily be seen as negative, as this can be indicative of a well-publicised and accessible complaints procedure. Low complaint volumes could be a sign that residents are unable to complain.

4.4 The Complaints Policy is referred to in the Residents Handbook and published on Abbeyfield Basildon's website. It is also readily accessible in communal areas.

4.5 Residents will have the opportunity to have a representative deal with their complaint on their behalf, and to be represented or accompanied at any meeting. We will always follow data protection requirements when disclosing any information to a third party.

5 Complaint handling staff

5.1 Complaints will be investigated by the Complaints Officer at Stage One.

5.2 Complaints will be investigated by the Appeals Officer at Stage Two.

5.3 If the Complaints Officer and/or the Appeals Officer are conflicted, or the complaint relates to the Complaints Officer and/or the Appeals Officer, the complaint should be directed to a different manager or Trustee.

5.4 Staff will be suitably trained in the importance of complaint handling.

6 Complaints process

6.1 At each stage of the complaints process, Abbeyfield Basildon will:

a) deal with complaints on their merits;

b) act independently and have an open mind but may consider reports of previous complaints that relate to the same issue being complained about;

c) give the resident a fair chance to set out their position in a meeting with the person deciding the complaint;

d) take measures to address any actual or perceived conflict of interest; (which may include asking another person to investigate the complaint);

e) consider all relevant information and evidence carefully; and

f) keep the details of the complaint confidential as far as possible.

7 Stage One of the Complaints Process

7.1 Abbeyfield Basildon will acknowledge the complaint and make a record, within 5 working days. The acknowledgement will:

(a) summarise Abbeyfield Basildon's understanding of the complaint;

(b) make clear which aspects of the complaint Abbeyfield Basildon is, and is not, responsible for;

(c) summarise Abbeyfield Basildon's understanding of what the resident is seeking as an outcome;

(d) raise any questions that require clarification from the resident; and

(e) set out the next course of action and anticipated timescale.

7.2 Abbeyfield Basildon will issue a full response within 10 working days from the complaint being acknowledged. In exceptional cases, if we anticipate that the complaint will take longer to resolve, this will be explained to the resident with a clear timeframe set out for the resolution of the complaint which will not exceed a further 10 working days, without good reason. The resident will, at the same time, be provided with contact details for the Housing Ombudsman. If any further extensions are required, this will be in agreement with the resident who will be updated at regular intervals.

7.3 A complaint response will be provided to the resident when the response to the complaint is decided, not when the outstanding actions required to address the issue are completed. Outstanding actions will be tracked and actioned promptly with appropriate updates provided to the resident.

7.4 We will investigate the complaint in an impartial manner, permitting all relevant parties to provide information. The resident and any third parties involved in the complaint should be given the opportunity to set out their position before any final decision is made. To this end, the resident will be invited to a meeting with the person hearing the complaint.

7.5 If the staff member dealing with the complaint is conflicted, or the complaint relates to that staff member, the complaint should be directed to a Trustee.

7.6 If new issues are raised by the resident during the stage one process, these should be dealt with as part of the process if they are relevant. However, if the issues relate to a different matter and/or are raised after the response has already been issued, the issues will normally be dealt with as a separate complaint.

7.7 In responding to the complaint, we will confirm in writing:

(a) the complaint stage;

(b) the complaint definition;

(c) the decision on the complaint;

(d) the reasons for any decisions made;

(e) the 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 Two if the individual is not satisfied with the result.

8 Stage Two of the Complaints Process

8.1 If the resident is not satisfied with the response at Stage One, they can escalate their complaint to Stage Two. This can be done in writing by email, via telephone call or in person. The person dealing with the complaint at Stage Two will not be the same person that responded at Stage One.

8.2 The resident does not need to provide reasons for requesting the complaint to be escalated although it will obviously be important for the person hearing the complaint at Stage Two to understand why the resident has sought escalation.

8.3 Abbeyfield Basildon will acknowledge the complaint at Stage Two within 5 working days of receipt and will:

(a) summarise Abbeyfield Basildon's understanding of the complaint;

(b) summarise Abbeyfield Basildon's understanding of what the resident is seeking as an outcome;

(c) raise any questions that require clarification from the resident; and

(d) set out the next course of action and anticipated timescale.

8.4 The resident will be invited to attend a meeting with the person hearing the complaint at Stage Two to give them the opportunity to talk through why they are not happy with the outcome at Stage One. Abbeyfield Basildon will respond in writing to the resident within 20 working days of the Stage Two complaint being acknowledged, informing them of the outcome.

8.5 If Abbeyfield Basildon believes that the response will require longer than 20 working days, this will be explained to the resident with a clear timeframe set out for the resolution of the complaint which will not exceed a further 20 working days. The resident will, at the same time, be provided with contact details for the Housing Ombudsman. If any further extensions are required, this will be in agreement with the resident who will be updated at regular intervals.

8.6 A complaint response will be provided to the resident when the response to the complaint is decided, not when the outstanding actions required to address the issue are completed. Outstanding actions will be tracked and actioned promptly with appropriate updates provided to the resident.

8.7 In responding to the Stage Two complaint, we will confirm in writing:

(a) the complaint stage;

(b) the complaint definition;

(c) the decision on the complaint;

(d) the reasons for any decisions made;

(e) the details of any remedy offered to put things right;

(f) details of any outstanding actions; and

(g) provide details of how to escalate the matter to the Housing Ombudsman if the resident is not satisfied with the response.

9 Putting things right where something has gone wrong

9.1 Where something has gone wrong, Abbeyfield Basildon will acknowledge this and set out the actions it has already taken, or intends to take, to put things right. These can include:

• apologising;

• acknowledging where things have gone wrong;

• providing an explanation, assistance or reasons;

• taking action if there has been delay;

• reconsidering or changing a decision;

• amending a record or making a correction or addition;

• providing a financial remedy; and

• changing policies, procedures, or practices.

9.2 Any remedy offered must reflect the impact on the resident as a result of any fault identified.

9.3 The remedy offer must clearly set out what will happen and by when, in agreement with the resident where possible. Any remedy proposed must, where practicable, be followed through to completion.

9.4 Abbeyfield Basildon will take account of the guidance issued by the Housing Ombudsman when deciding on appropriate remedies.

10 Scrutiny & oversight

10.1 Abbeyfield Basildon has a senior lead person who is accountable for our complaint handling. This person will assess any themes or trends to identify potential systemic issues, serious risks, or policies and procedures that require revision.

10.2 A member of the Board of Trustees has been appointed to have lead responsibility for complaints to support a positive complaint handling culture. This person is known as the Member Responsible for Complaints (the MRC).

11 Annual Review

11.1 This policy will be reviewed on an annual basis

11.2 Abbeyfield Basildon will carry out an annual self-assessment in accordance with the Code.

11.3 The Trustees will consider any findings or recommendations of the annual self-assessment and the annual complaints performance and service improvement report.

12 For the purposes of this policy:

12.1.1 Contact for Stage One at **Octagon House**:

Name: Karen Swindells, House Manager

Telephone number: 01268 530414

Address: Abbeyfield Octagon House

Bridge Street, Basildon SS15 4AY

Email address: karenswindellsprivate@outlook.com

12.1.2 Contact for Stage One at **Timberlog House**:

Name: Sian Moloney, House Manager

Telephone number: 01268 550880

Address: Abbeyfield Timberlog House

200 Timberlog Lane, Basildon SS14 1PG

Email address: sianabbeyconfi@outlook.com

12.1.3 Contact for Stage Two:

Name: Sean Stanton-Dunne, Trustee

Telephone number: 01245 460 303

Address: The Generals, Main Road, Boreham CM3 3HJ

Email address: ssd@stanton-dunne.co.uk

13 Housing Ombudsman Service

The contact details for the Housing Ombudsman Service are:

Telephone: 0300 111 3000

Email: info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk

Website: www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk

Address: Housing Ombudsman Service,

PO Box 1484, Unit D, Preston, PR2 0ET

This policy has been approved for issue by the Trustees of The Abbeyfield Basildon Society Limited, registered charity number 262505.

Date: 16 June 2025