COMPLAINTS POLICY

Policy Number	YM/V2/POL/066
Date Approved	October 2026
Approved by	Board of Trustees
Date Due for Renewal	October 2027
Responsible Director	Sharon Richards
Version	V2
Circulation	All Staff
Author	Sharon Richards
Contributors	Peter Flynn
Amendments	Revised to reflect the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code 2024 and the Regulator of Social Housing Consumer Standards

1 Introduction

1.1 At YMCA North Staffordshire (YMCANS) we want everyone who lives with us or uses our services to feel heard, respected and supported, and complaints are an important part of that. When something isn't right, we want to know, so that we can put it right and keep improving. This policy explains how we keep our complaints process flexible and responsive to each person's needs, so that everyone can be heard and understood.

We follow the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code 2024 (the Code) and the Regulator of Social Housing's Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard, which asks us to deal with complaints fairly, effectively and promptly. This is our single complaints policy, and it has two simple stages. Every complaint is handled in line with the Code, and no one will ever be treated differently because they have made a complaint.

This policy covers complaints from residents, service users, young people and anyone else who uses or is affected by our services. Complaints about our landlord services are handled in line with the Code and can be taken to the Housing Ombudsman. Complaints about our other services follow exactly the same process; they fall outside the Housing Ombudsman's role, so where it helps we will point people to the right organisation, such as the Charity Commission for concerns about how the charity is run.

We keep a full record of every complaint, including the original complaint and the date we received it, all our correspondence with you and with anyone else involved, any reports or surveys, and the outcome at each stage.

1.2 We use the Housing Ombudsman's definition of a complaint: "an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions, or lack of action by YMCANS, its trustees, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting an individual resident or group of residents."

1.3 You don't need to use the word "complaint" for us to treat it as one. Whenever someone tells us they are unhappy, we will offer them the choice of making a complaint, and our staff will record that they offered this and what the person decided. A carer, family member or representative can also make a complaint on your behalf, and we will handle it in exactly the same way.

1.4 You can raise a complaint with any member of our team, in whatever way suits you best, including:

- Telephone
- Face to face
- Email
- Letter
- Through a representative, advocate, MP or councillor
- At our Customer Forum
- On social media – we will deal with under this policy and move the conversation to a private channel to protect your privacy.

1.5 A service request is when you ask us to do something or put something right, such as a routine repair. Service requests are not complaints, and we deal with them in line with our Maintenance Policy and the Residents' Handbook.

1.6 We record, track and follow every service request through to completion.

1.7 If you are unhappy with how we have responded to a service request, we will log this as a complaint, even if we are still working on the request, and we will carry on putting things right while we look into your complaint.

1.8 Comments made in a resident survey are not treated as complaints, but we value all feedback, and wherever possible we will let the person know how they can make a complaint if they would like to'

1.9 When you make a complaint, we promise that:

(a) you will be listened to and treated with courtesy and empathy;
(b) you will never be disadvantaged because you have made a complaint;
(c) we will look into your complaint promptly, thoroughly, honestly and openly; and
(d) we will respect your confidentiality and follow our data protection policies.

2 When we may not be able to accept a complaint

2.1 We want to hear about anything that isn't right, so we will accept a complaint unless there is a valid reason not to, and we will always consider each person's individual circumstances.

2.2 There are a small number of reasons why we may decide not to accept a complaint:

(a) the issue happened, or you became aware of it, more than twelve months ago;
(b) legal proceedings have started, meaning details of the claim (such as the Claim Form and Particulars of Claim) have been filed at court; or
(c) the matter has already been considered under our complaints policy.

2.3 Unless one of the other reasons applies, we will accept complaints made within 12 months of the issue happening or of you becoming aware of it. Where there are good reasons, we will also consider accepting complaints made after this time.

2.4 If someone raises a concern anonymously, we will still look into it wherever we can, record it and learn from it, although we may not be able to send a written response.

2.5 If we are not able to accept a complaint, we will write to you to explain why, and let you know that you can ask the Housing Ombudsman to look at our decision (see details below). The Ombudsman may ask us to take on the complaint.

3 Respectful communication and unacceptable behaviour

We understand that people can feel upset and frustrated when things have gone wrong, and we will always respond with patience and understanding.

3.1 Very occasionally, the way a resident or their representative behaves when pursuing a complaint may be unacceptable. If this happens, we will manage it in line with our Behaviour Management, Discipline, Sanctions & Exclusion Policy.

3.2 We will always look at each situation individually.

3.3 Any restrictions we put in place will be proportionate and will take account of the Equality Act 2010.

3.4 We will record, monitor and regularly review any restrictions, and let the person know the outcome of each review.

3.5 Restrictions will never stop a complaint being taken through our full complaints process.

4 Making it easy to complain

4.1 We will deal with complaints in line with our Equality & Diversity Policy and our duties under the Equality Act 2010.

4.2 If you need us to make reasonable adjustments to support you, just let us know, or ask your representative to contact us, by phone, email or in person, and we will talk through what we can do. We will keep a record of any adjustments we agree and of any disability you tell us about, keep the adjustments under active review, and hold this information safely in line with our data protection policy.

4.3 We welcome complaints. A high number of complaints is not a bad thing; it often shows that people know how to complain and feel confident doing so. A low number could mean people find it hard to complain, which is something we always want to avoid.

4.4 You can find this policy in the Residents' Handbook and on our website, www.ymcans.org.uk. We will also hand deliver it to residents, display it in communal areas, and provide it in other formats and languages on request. Alongside the policy we share information about the Housing Ombudsman and the Code, and we publish the Code, our annual self-assessment and our annual complaints performance and service improvement report, with the Board's response, on our website.

4.5 You are welcome to have a representative deal with your complaint for you, and to bring someone with you, or be represented, at any meeting. We will always follow data protection rules when sharing information with anyone else.

4.6 We will make sure you know about your right to contact the Housing Ombudsman Service, that you can ask them for advice and support at any stage of your complaint, and how you can engage with them about your complaint.

5 Who will deal with your complaint?

5.1 At Stage 1, your complaint will be looked into by our Complaints Officer. The Complaints Officer leads our complaint handling, liaises with the Housing Ombudsman, makes sure complaints are reported to our Board, and can call on colleagues at every level to help resolve things quickly.

5.2 At Stage 2, your complaint will be looked at afresh by the Director of Governance and Excellence who was not involved at Stage 1 (the Stage Two Lead).

5.3 If the Complaints Officer or the Stage Two Lead has a conflict of interest, or the complaint is about them, it will be passed to an alternative senior manager.

5.4 Complaint handling is a priority for us, and we see every complaint as a chance to learn and improve. All our staff are trained in why good complaint handling matters; this training is part of induction, is refreshed regularly and is recorded, and supports the Regulator of Social Housing's Competence and Conduct Standard.

6 How we handle ever complaint

6.1 At every stage we will:

(a) deal with your complaint on its merits;
(b) act independently and with an open mind;
(c) give you a fair chance to explain your side;
(d) deal with any actual or perceived conflict of interest, which may include asking another suitably senior member of staff to look into the complaint;
(e) consider all the relevant information and evidence carefully;
(f) keep the details of your complaint confidential as far as possible, only sharing information where we need to in order to look into it properly;
(g) make sure that anyone handling a complaint on our behalf, such as a contractor, does son in line with this policy and the Code; and
(h) if our response will take longer that the timescales in this policy, agree with you how often we will keep you updated.

7 Stage 1 - resolving your complaint

7.1 We will acknowledge and record your complaint within 5 working days of receiving it. In our acknowledgement we will:

(a) summarise our understanding of your complaint (the complaint definition);
(b) make clear which parts of the complaint we are, and are not, responsible for, and clarify anything that is not clear;
(c) summarise what you would like to happen as a result;
(d) ask any questions we need to clarify with you; and
(e) explain what will happen next and when.

7.2 We will send you a full response within 10 working days of acknowledging your complaint. If, exceptionally, we need longer, we will explain why and give you a clear timeframe, which will not be more than a further 10 working days without good reason. Any further extension will be agreed with you, and we will keep you updated at intervals we agree together. Whenever we explain an extension, we will also give you the contact details of the Housing Ombudsman.

7.3 We will send our response as soon as we know the answer to your complaint, rather than waiting until every action has been

completed. We will track any outstanding actions, complete them promptly and keep you updated.

7.4 We will look into your complaint fairly and impartially, giving you and anyone else involved the chance to share information and explain your position before we reach a decision. We may ask another colleague to manage and investigate the complaint.

7.5 If the staff member dealing with your complaint has a conflict of interest, or the complaint is about them, we will pass it on as set out in 5.3.

7.6 If your complaint involves our legal obligations or yours, we will clearly explain our understanding of them, and we may take legal advice first.

7.7 If you raise new issues while we are looking into your complaint, we will include them in our Stage 1 response if they are related and we have not yet responded. If they are unrelated, are raised after our response, or would unreasonably delay it, we will log them as a new complaint.

7.8 Our written response will be in clear, plain language. It will address every point you have raised and give clear reasons for our decisions, referring to the relevant policy, law and good practice where appropriate. It will confirm:

(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) How to take your complaint to Stage 2 if you are not happy with the outcome.

8 Stage 2 - taking a fresh look

8.1 If you are not happy with our Stage 1 response, you can ask for your complaint to go to Stage 2, using any of the ways set out in 1.4. A different person from the one who dealt with Stage 1 will look at your complaint. We will not refuse to escalate a complaint unless there is a valid reason under section 2, and if this happens we will explain why in writing.

8.2 You don’t need to give a reason for asking for your complaint to go to Stage 2.

8.3 We will acknowledge your Stage 2 request within 5 working days of receiving it. In our acknowledgment we will:

(a) summarise our understanding of your complaint (the complaint definition);
(b) make clear which parts of the complaint we are, and are not, responsible for, and clarify anything that is unclear;
(c) summarise what you would like to happen as a result;
(d) ask any questions we need to clarify with you, while recognising that you don't need to give reasons for escalating your complaint; and
(e) explain what will happen next and when.

8.4 We will send you our Stage 2 response in writing within 20 working days of acknowledging your request. Stage 2 is our final response, and we will involve everyone needed to get it right. As part of this, we will make every reasonable effort to understand why you are still unhappy.

8.5 If we need longer than 20 working days, we will explain why and give you a clear timeframe, which will not be more than a further 20 working days without good reason. Any further extension will be agreed with you, and we will keep you updated at intervals we agree together. Whenever we explain an extension, we will also give you the contact details of the Housing Ombudsman.

8.6 We will send our response as soon as we know the answer to your complaint, rather than waiting until every action has been completed. We will track any outstanding actions, complete them promptly and keep you updated.

8.7 If your complaint involves our legal obligations or yours, we will clearly explain our understanding of them, and we may take legal advice first.

8.8 If you raise new issues during Stage 2, we will include them in our response if they are related and we have not yet responded. If they are unrelated, are raised after our response, or would unreasonably delay it, we will log them as a new complaint.

8.9 Our written Stage 2 response will be in clear, plain language. It will address every point you have raised and give clear reasons for our decisions, referring to the relevant policy, law and good practice where appropriate. It will confirm:

(a) The complaint stage
(b) The complaint definition
(c) The decision on the complaint
(d) The reasons for any decision made
(e) The details of any remedy offered to put things right

(f) Details of any outstanding actions; and
(g) How to take your complaint to the Housing Ombudsman if you are still not happy

9 Putting things right

9.1 When we get something wrong, we will say so, and explain what we have already done, or will do, to put it right. This could 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 adding a correction or addendum;
- Providing a financial remedy;
- Changing policies, procedures, or practices.

9.2 Any remedy we offer will reflect how much went wrong and the impact it has had on you.

9.3 We will be clear about what we will do and by when, agreeing this with you where appropriate, and we will see every remedy through to completion.

9.4 We use the Housing Ombudsman's Remedies Guidance to help us decide on fair remedies. Financial remedies are authorised in line with our delegated authority levels.

10 Learning & oversight

10.1 We have a senior lead who is accountable for our complaint handling. They look at themes and trends to spot any wider issues, serious risks, or policies and procedures that need updating.

10.2 We look beyond each individual complaint to see how we can improve our services, use complaints data to spot trends, and share what we have learned with residents.

10.3 Everyone who handles complaints for us, including staff and third parties, has a standard objective to: (a) work collaboratively with colleagues across teams to resolve complaints; (b) take shared responsibility for anything that has gone wrong, rather than blaming others; and (c) act within the professional standards for complaint handling set by any relevant professional body.

10.4 Peter Dartford, a member of our Board of Trustees, is our Member Responsible for Complaints (MRC). The MRC champions a positive

complaint handling culture and is not involved in deciding individual complaints, so that they can provide independent oversight and assurance to the Board.

10.5 The MRC makes sure the Board receives regular information that gives real insight into how well we handle complaints, has access to the information and staff needed for the role, and reports on their findings. As a minimum, the MRC and the Board receive: regular updates on the number, types and outcomes of complaints and how well we are handling them; regular reviews of issues and trends; regular updates on the outcomes of any Housing Ombudsman investigations and our progress with any orders; and our annual complaints performance and service improvement report.

11 Reviewing and reporting

11.1 We review this policy every year.

11.2 Each year we complete a self-assessment against the Code, and we will also do so after any significant restructure, merger or change in our procedures.

11.3 We publish an annual complaints performance and service improvement report. It includes a qualitative and quantitative analysis of our complaint handling, any findings of non-compliance with the Code by the Housing Ombudsman, the improvements we have made as a result of what complaints have taught us, any annual report from the Housing Ombudsman about our performance, and any other relevant reports.

11.4 Our Trustees consider the self-assessment and the annual report, along with any findings or recommendations. We publish both on our website with the Board's response and send them to the Housing Ombudsman.

11.5 If exceptional circumstances ever prevent us from meeting the Code, we will tell the Housing Ombudsman, let residents know, and publish this on our website.

11.6 We use our complaints data to produce the Tenant Satisfaction Measures CH01 (complaints relative to the size of the landlord) and CH02 (complaints responded to within Code timescales), which we publish every year in line with the Regulator of Social Housing's Tenant Satisfaction Measures Standard.

12 How to contact us

12.1 Contact for Stage 1:

Name:	Complaints Officer
Telephone number:	01782 222376
Address:	YMCA North Staffordshire Harding Road Stoke on Trent ST1 3AE
Email address:	hello@ymcans.org.uk

12.2 Contact for Stage 2

Name:	Director of Governance and Excellence
Telephone number:	01782 222376
Address:	YMCA North Staffordshire Harding Road Stoke on Trent ST1 3AE
Email address:	hello@ymcans.org.uk

13 Housing Ombudsman Service

You can contact the Housing Ombudsman Service at:

Telephone:	0300 111 3000
Online:	online complaint form at www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk
Website:	www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk
Address:	Housing Ombudsman Service, PO Box 1484 Unit D Preston PR2 0ET

New complaints are no longer accepted by email, and the Ombudsman encourages people to use the online form rather than post, as post may be delayed. You can contact the Housing Ombudsman for advice at any stage of your complaint, and you can ask them to look at your complaint once you have completed our complaints process, or sooner if we have not progressed your complaint in line with this policy.

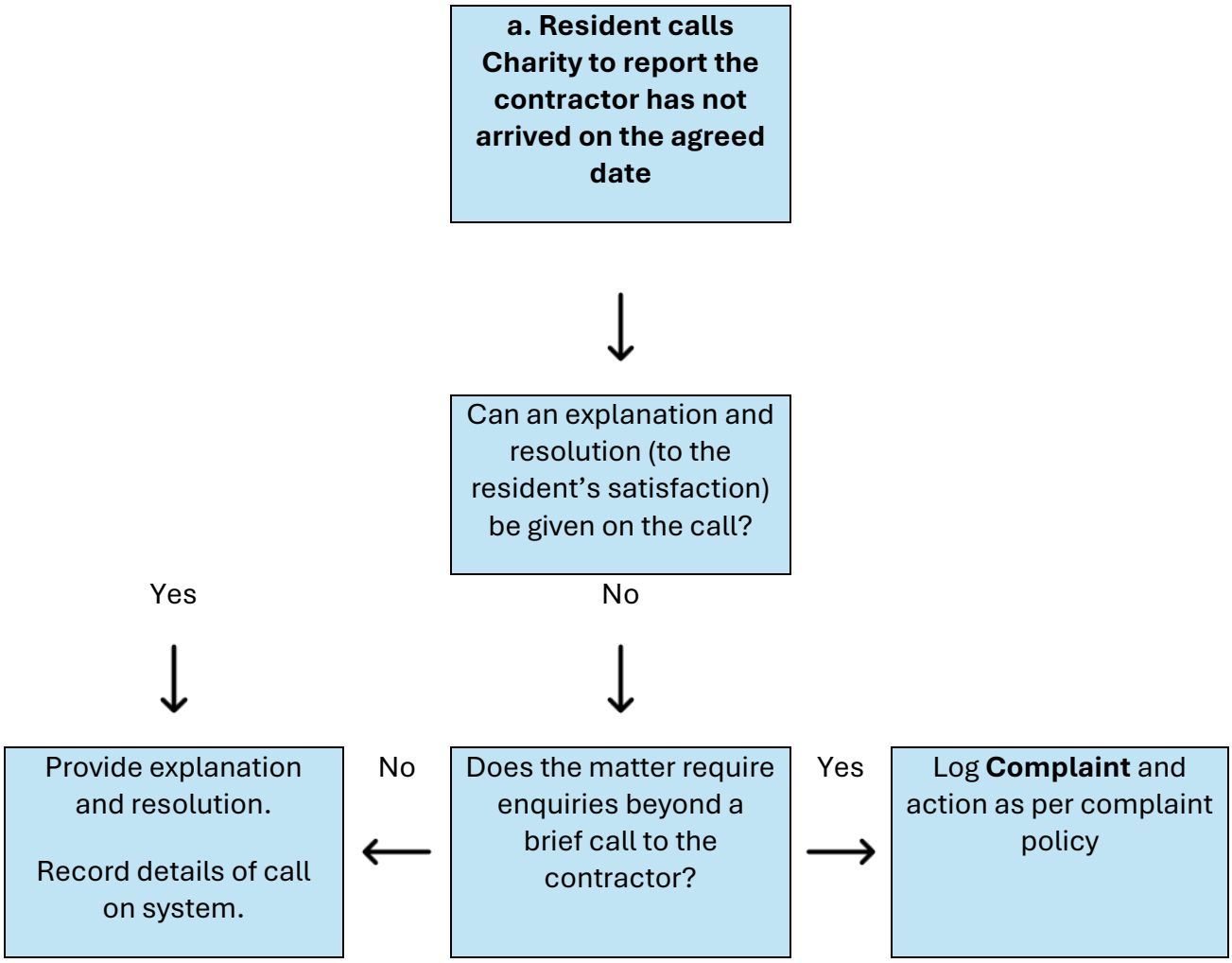
YMCA North Staffordshire

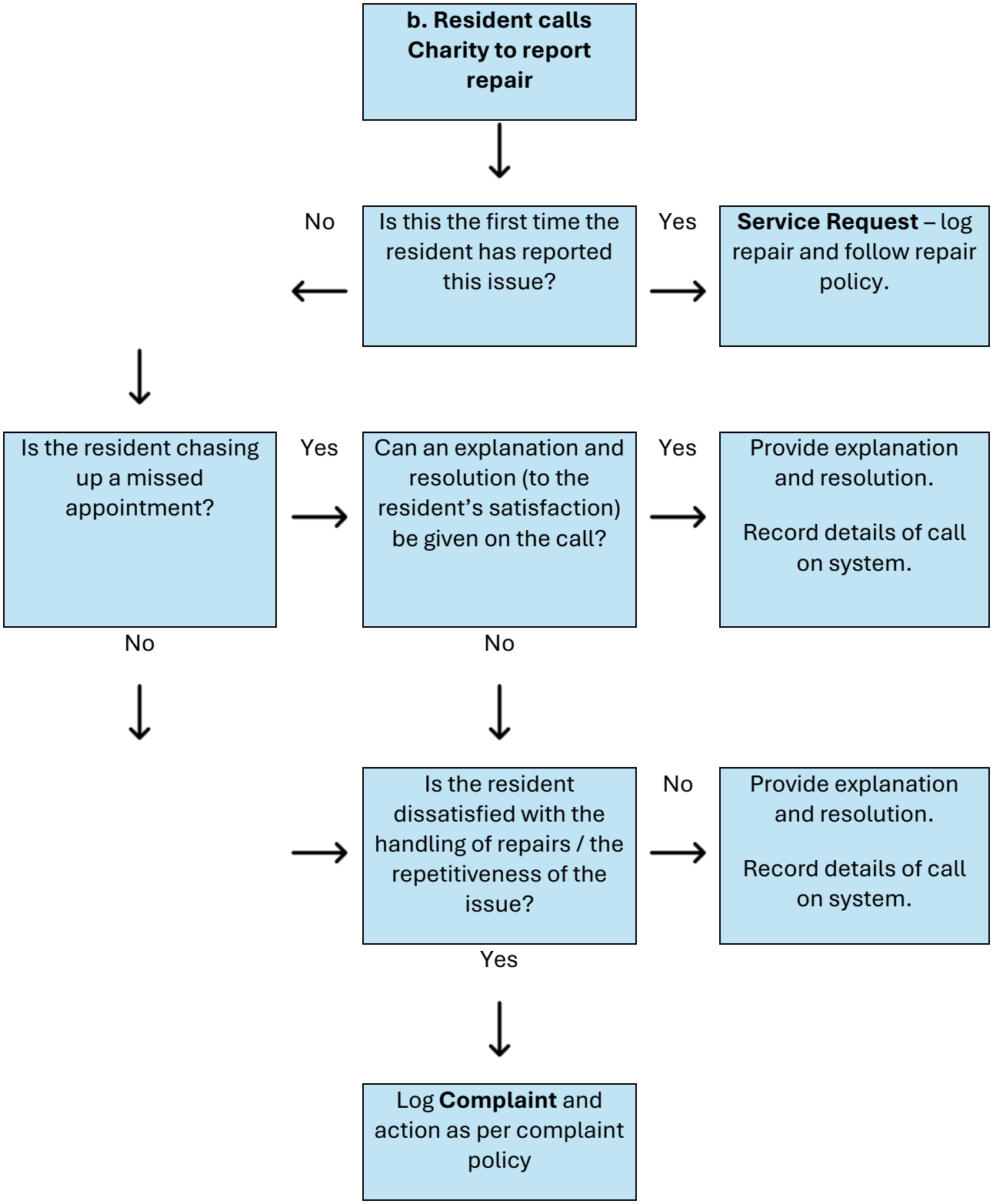
Registered charity number: 0011749

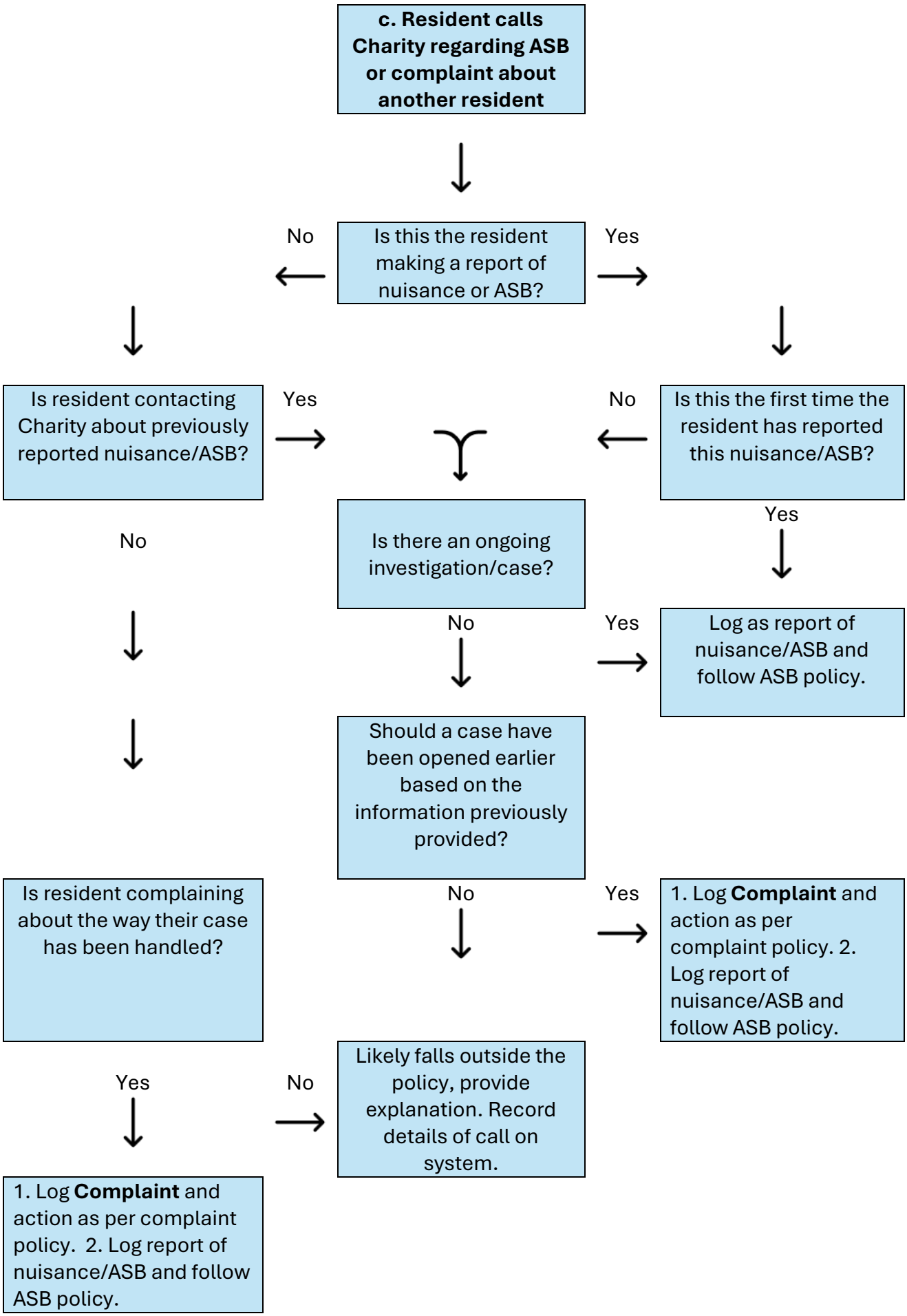
Appendix for internal use only

Service request or complaint?

(Flow Charts with 3 example scenarios)




b. Resident calls Charity to report repair
Is this the first time the resident has reported this issue?
No
Yes
Service Request – log repair and follow repair policy.
Is the resident chasing up a missed appointment?
Yes
No
Can an explanation and resolution (to the resident's satisfaction) be given on the call?
Yes
No
Provide explanation and resolution.
Record details of call on system.
Is the resident dissatisfied with the handling of repairs / the repetitiveness of the issue?
No
Yes
Provide explanation and resolution.
Record details of call on system.
Log Complaint and action as per complaint policy


c. Resident calls Charity regarding ASB or complaint about another resident
Is this the resident making a report of nuisance or ASB?
No
Yes
Is resident contacting Charity about previously reported nuisance/ASB?
Yes
No
Is this the first time the resident has reported this nuisance/ASB?
Yes
No
Is there an ongoing investigation/case?
No
Yes
Log as report of nuisance/ASB and follow ASB policy.
Should a case have been opened earlier based on the information previously provided?
Is resident complaining about the way their case has been handled?
No
Yes
1. Log Complaint and action as per complaint policy. 2. Log report of nuisance/ASB and follow ASB policy.
Yes
No
Likely falls outside the policy, provide explanation. Record details of call on system.
1. Log Complaint and action as per complaint policy. 2. Log report of nuisance/ASB and follow ASB policy.