




# HOUSING COMPLAINTS AND COMPLIMENTS Corporate Policy


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Signed off by	 Chief Executive
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## 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Creative Support aims to provide high quality homes, housing management and housing services that meet the needs of residents. We also strive to be good neighbours and to contribute positively to our local communities.
- 1.2 We are committed to achieving the highest standards of customer care. In order for us to achieve this, we seek feedback from our residents and other stakeholders. We are always grateful for suggestions as to how we can improve our services. We view complaints positively as a means of being able to identify and make changes and improvements.
- 1.3 When something has gone wrong or has fallen short of the required standards we will endeavour to take timely and appropriate steps to put things right.
- 1.4 Creative Support is registered with The Regulator of Social Housing and is committed to meeting the Regulator's standards in respect of its social housing properties and tenancy management as well as legal frameworks relevant to housing, the environment, health and safety, data protection and safeguarding.

## 2. BASIC PRINCIPLES

- 2.1 We are committed to making it as easy as possible for residents to provide feedback to us, and to using this feedback to improve our services.
- 2.2 We recognise that effective complaint handling enables residents to be heard and understood. The starting point for this is to establish a shared understanding of what constitutes a complaint.
- 2.3 Through our Complaints and Compliments policy, we aim to resolve complaints about our housing provision and housing services quickly, effectively and fairly. We will ensure that a complaint can be remedied at any stage of our complaints process without the need for escalation.
- 2.4 When dealing with complaints, it is our aim to resolve the complaint to the satisfaction of residents as far as possible and leave them feeling that their concerns were handled fairly and appropriately. The tone of our contact will be open, responsive and avoid unnecessary formality. Our written correspondence will use plain English, and will be backed up with positive action to resolve the complaint.
- 2.5 We are committed to treating all residents and customers fairly and we are mindful of our duties under the Equality Act 2010. We will anticipate the diverse needs of residents who may need to access the complaints process and take individual needs into account in a personalised way. We will make any reasonable adjustments that are required. We will keep a record of reasonable adjustments agreed, as well as a record of any disabilities a resident has disclosed. Any agreed reasonable adjustments will be kept under active review.
- 2.6 This policy is available in a large print and accessible version which details the two stage process, what will happen at each stage, and the timeframes for responding. The policy is published on our website.

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- 2.7 Complaints of discrimination and harassment are taken very seriously and will be dealt with sensitively. We will take account of the nature of the issues raised when appointing an investigator into such concerns.
- 2.8 We welcome the involvement of advocates, and where it is felt that a complainant would benefit from the support of an advocate, depending on the nature of the complaint, we may signpost the complainant to an appropriate advocacy service.
- 2.9 We ask our residents to work with us in the first instance by letting us know if they are unhappy or dissatisfied and to give us the chance to put things right. We believe it is better to resolve any concerns quickly at a local level where possible. However, we recognise that this is not always appropriate and we encourage people to use our Complaints Procedure as required as set out below. This policy is promoted to residents at the point of signing a new tenancy and via tenants meetings and posters on noticeboards.
- 2.10 As part of our commitment to wider customer care and continuous improvement we will look beyond the circumstances of the individual complaint and consider whether service improvements can be made as a result of any learning from the complaint. We will use complaints as a source of intelligence to identify issues and introduce positive changes in service delivery. We will share learning from complaints and pass on feedback and compliments to relevant people, departments and stakeholders.
- 2.11 We believe that a positive complaint handling culture based on accountability, transparency and professional standards is integral to the effectiveness with which we resolve concerns. We induct our staff into this positive culture and we expect all our employees to:
- take a collaborative and co-operative approach towards resolving complaints, by working with colleagues across teams and departments;
  - take collective responsibility for any shortfalls identified through complaints, rather than blaming others; and
  - act within professional standards for engaging with complaints as set by any relevant professional body.
- 2.12 We will report on wider learning and improvements from complaints to stakeholders, such as residents' panels, staff and relevant committees.

### 3. HOW TO MAKE A COMPLAINT OR GIVE FEEDBACK

- 3.1 In order to make it as accessible and easy as possible to make complaints or give feedback to us residents or their representatives can communicate a complaint or feedback to us via a variety of means including:
- By telephone: 0161 236 0829, asking for the Housing Complaints Officer
  - By email: [housing.complaints@creativesupport.co.uk](mailto:housing.complaints@creativesupport.co.uk)
  - Submitting a webform: <https://www.creativesupport.co.uk/Custom-Care>
  - In person: to staff on-site locally or to Head Office's address below.
  - By post to: Housing Complaints Officer, Creative Support, 131 Wellington Road, Wellington House, Stockport, SK1 3TS

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3.2 Complaints received by Creative Support's Chief Executive will be acknowledged in writing and passed to the Housing Complaints Officer who will respond to the complainant directly.

#### 4. SCOPE OF THE POLICY

4.1 This policy is for:

- Tenants and residents
- Their carers and families
- Representatives of tenants and residents
- Referrers and workers from other agencies
- Members of the public

4.2 This policy is for any of the above who may wish to: make a complaint, share a concern, give a compliment, make a suggestion, or give feedback in respect of any of Creative Support's housing or housing services.

4.3 We will give residents the opportunity to nominate a representative to deal with their complaint on their behalf, and to be represented or accompanied by their representative or another person at any meeting with us.

#### 5. WHAT IS A COMPLAINT?

5.1 A complaint under this policy is defined as an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the organisation, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting an individual resident or group of residents.

5.2 Our operational managers are usually able to resolve most issues of minor dissatisfaction at a local level as part of their job, without the need to make a complaint.


5.3 However there may be times when a more formal approach or further investigation is required, which may need the involvement of other staff to find out what has happened. We will address this through the housing complaints procedure.

5.4 A resident does not have to use the word 'complaint' for it to be treated as such. Whenever a resident expresses dissatisfaction we will give the resident the choice of making a complaint. A complaint that is submitted via a third party or representative will be handled in line with our complaints policy.

5.5 An expression of dissatisfaction made through a 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. When we ask for wider feedback about our housing provision and services we will also provide details of how residents can complain to us.

#### 6. WHAT IS A SERVICE REQUEST?

6.1 A service request is a request from a resident requiring that action is taken to put something right. Service requests are not complaints, but will be recorded, monitored and reviewed regularly.

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6.2 A complaint should be raised when the resident expresses dissatisfaction with the response to their service request, even if the handling of the service request remains ongoing. We will not stop our efforts to address the service request if the resident complains.

## 7. WHAT IS A COMPLIMENT?

7.1 A compliment is an expression of satisfaction about the standard of service we provide. We are always pleased to hear from residents who are satisfied with the homes and services we offer. All compliments are recorded, and a copy is sent to the relevant service manager to provide feedback to the member of staff or service. Compliments are also collated and reported to the Creative Support Board of Trustees.

## 8. WHAT CONCERNS CANNOT BE DEALT WITH UNDER THIS POLICY

8.1 Not all complaints to us will be dealt with under this policy. Please see below for guidance on what we cannot deal with:

- Complaints made about Local Authorities
- Complaints made about Health Services
- Complaints about services provided by other landlords or organisations
- Complaints by staff in respect of Creative Support services or employment issues. These should be dealt with through the Grievance Procedure described in the Employee Handbook


8.2 Complaints we cannot deal with under this policy could be in relation to repairs to a property not owned by Creative Support, wider environmental issues or neighbour disputes. Notification of a service failure that is not provided by Creative Support may also fall outside the remit of this policy. However, in this situation we may support residents and others to complain to the correct body, to access appropriate advocacy and escalate their concerns if needed.

8.3 We will not accept complaints referred to us more than 12 months after the issue occurred or the resident became aware of the issue. However, we will consider whether to apply discretion to accept complaints made outside this time limit where there are good reasons to do so.

8.4 We will not consider complaints about matters that have previously been considered under the Complaints Procedure.

8.5 We are unable to address a complaint under the Complaints Procedure when legal proceedings have commenced or a legal challenge is being made regarding whether a decision, action (or lack of action) is lawful. This is defined as details of the claim, such as the Claim Form and Particulars of Claim, having been filed at court.

8.6 We will accept a complaint unless there is a valid reason not to do so. If we decide not to accept a complaint an explanation will be provided to the resident or their representative setting out the reasons why the matter is not suitable for the complaints process and the right to take that decision to the Ombudsman to determine whether the exclusion has been fairly applied.

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8.7 We will not take a blanket approach to excluding complaints; each complaint will be considered on its own merits and we will consider the individual circumstances of each complaint.

## 9. OUR COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

9.1 Creative Support has a two stage process for addressing complaints. However, it is good practice to try and resolve concerns informally at a local level first.

9.2 When a concern is raised locally it should be dealt with immediately as part of good customer care. Low level complaints should still be logged locally as a complaint even if dealt with immediately. For example: Residents complaining that the communal heating is too hot. This is something that can be fixed immediately by changing the heating settings but would not be classed as a complaint unless expressly requested or if unresolved. However as a matter of good practice the concern and the response should be logged locally.

9.3 Our aim is to resolve concerns quickly and as close to where we provide the service as possible. However if residents consider that their concern cannot be resolved locally or if local resolution has failed, they can submit a complaint to the Housing Complaints Officer directly.

9.4 When a complaint is acknowledged at either stage, we will be clear about which aspects of the complaint we are, and are not, responsible for. We will clarify any areas where this is not clear and provide information as to how to take make complaints to other parties where we are not responsible for any aspect of the complaint.

9.5 A full record will be kept of the complaint, and the outcomes at each stage. This will include the original complaint and the date received, all correspondence with the resident, correspondence with other parties, and any relevant supporting documentation such as reports or surveys.

### 9.6 Stage One

9.6.1 This is the first stage, usually overseen by the Housing Complaints Officer. Where a complaint includes issues for more than one part of our service, the investigation will be led by the person who has responsibility for the major part of the complaint. We will aim to provide the complainant with a single response whenever possible.

9.6.2 We will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing by letter and/or email as soon as possible and within **5 working days**. The acknowledgement will outline our understanding of the concerns raised, and if known, the outcomes the resident is seeking. This is known as the 'complaint definition'. If any aspect of the complaint is unclear, the resident will be asked for clarification. We will also advise the complainant as to:

- The name and job title of the person who is dealing with the complaint
- A date or timeframe by which the complainant can expect to receive a response to their complaint and what will happen if we cannot meet the agree timeframe


9.6.3 We will generally talk to the resident directly about their concern and we will seek to establish what the resident would like to see happen as a result of their complaint.

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- 9.6.4 We aim to investigate and to respond to complaints in writing by letter and/or email within **10 working days** where possible.
- 9.6.5 We will decide whether an extension to this timescale is needed when considering the complexity of the complaint. If it will not be possible to deal with complaint within 10 days we will offer an explanation and a date by which a response should be received. This generally will not exceed a further **10 days** without good reason. If it is taking longer than anticipated we will inform the resident of the reason for the delay and when a response can be expected. Where a response to a complaint falls outside of these timescales we will agree with the resident or their representative the intervals for keeping them informed about the progress of their complaint. When we inform a resident about an extension to these timescales, we will provide the contact details of the Ombudsman.
- 9.6.6 The person investigating the complaint will contact the complainant for further information to assist with their investigation. Where necessary a meeting, conference call or video meeting may be arranged to investigate concerns as thoroughly as possible. In some cases a visit to the property which is the subject of the complaint will be required.
- 9.6.7 Where residents raise additional complaints during the investigation, these will be incorporated into the Stage One response if they are related and the Stage One response has not been issued. Where the Stage One response has been issued, the new issues are unrelated to the issues already being investigated or it would unreasonably delay the response, the new issues will be logged as a new complaint.
- 9.6.8 We will confirm the following in writing to the resident at the completion of Stage One in clear, plain language:
- the complaint stage;
  - the complaint definition;
  - the decision on the complaint;
  - the reasons for any decisions made;
  - the details of any remedy offered to put things right;
  - details of any outstanding actions; and
  - details of how to escalate the matter to Stage Two if the individual is not satisfied with the response.

Our response to the complaint will be set out clearly in relation to all the points raised in the complaint definition and provide clear reasons for any decisions, referencing the relevant policy, law and good practice if appropriate. The response will be provided by letter and/or email. In some cases it may also be helpful to communicate the outcome by telephone or by a video or in-person meeting. Where a response is given by telephone or in person, we will provide written confirmation of our response. We will advise the complainant that if they are not satisfied that the complaint has been resolved at this stage they can escalate the complaint to Stage Two. We will advise that Stage Two is the final stage and that all complaints are logged and reviewed centrally by our Board of Trustees.

- 9.6.9 A complaint response will be provided to the resident when the answer to the complaint is known, not when all 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. We will address all points raised in the complaint

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definition and provide clear reasons for any decisions, referencing the relevant policy, law and good practice where appropriate.

9.6.10 We will not refuse to escalate a complaint through to the second stage of the complaints procedure unless we have valid reasons for doing so which we will clearly set out in writing to the complainant.

## 9.7 Stage Two

9.7.1 Stage Two addresses complaints that have not been resolved to the complainant's satisfaction at Stage One. A request to escalate the complaint to Stage Two should be made to the Housing Complaints Officer within **14 days** of the date we provided the response to the initial complaint at Stage One.

9.7.2 At this stage, we will ask the complainant to provide details to aid the review of their response at Stage Two, to explain the reasons given for the continued dissatisfaction and to provide any information in support of the complaint, including any significant new evidence.

9.7.3 We will appoint a different senior member of staff to review the complaint. This will be someone who was independent of the Stage One investigation and outcome.

9.7.4 The Stage Two complaint will be logged and acknowledged in the same way as at the initial stage, by email and/or letter within **5 working days** of the request to escalate to Stage Two.

9.7.5 The review will consider the points made and the reasons given for continued dissatisfaction. We will look at how we dealt with the complaint at the first stage and we will also respond to any further related issues that the complainant has raised with us. If there is significant new information or evidence we may undertake additional investigations.

9.7.6 Our policy is to work within a reasonable and agreed timescale. Our aim is to provide a thorough response that addresses the resident's complaint in a comprehensive manner. We aim to respond to Stage Two complaints where possible within **20 working days** from the date of acknowledgement. If it is taking longer than anticipated we will inform the resident of the reason for the delay and when a response can be expected. Where a response to a complaint falls outside of these timescales we will agree with the resident or their representative the intervals for keeping them informed about the progress of their complaint. When we inform a resident about an extension to these timescales, we will provide the contact details of the Ombudsman.

9.7.7 We will confirm the following in writing to the resident at the completion of Stage Two in clear, plain language:

- the complaint stage;
- the complaint definition;
- the decision on the complaint;
- the reasons for any decisions made;
- the details of any remedy offered to put things right;
- details of any outstanding actions; and
- details of how to escalate the matter to the Ombudsman Service if the individual remains dissatisfied.

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9.7.8 Where something has gone wrong we will acknowledge this and set out the actions that we have already taken, or intend 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 adding a correction or addendum;
- Providing a financial or other remedy;
- Changing policies, procedures or practices

Any remedy offered must reflect the impact on the resident as a result of any fault identified. We will take account of the guidance issued by the Ombudsman when deciding on appropriate remedies. The remedy offer must clearly set out what will happen and by when, in agreement with the resident where appropriate. Any remedy proposed must be followed through to completion.

9.7.9 Our response to a resident's complaint at Stage Two is final. Within our final response, we will inform the resident of their right to take their complaint to the Housing Ombudsman if they remain dissatisfied. We will provide the contact details for the Housing Ombudsman Service.

## 10. HOUSING OMBUDSMAN SERVICE

10.1 The Housing Ombudsman Service says that the first step with any complaint is to tell your landlord about the problem. This will give the landlord the opportunity to put things right. Residents can contact the Housing Ombudsman Service if they are having difficulty reporting an issue, if they feel the landlord is not responding correctly or if they are dissatisfied with the response from the landlord.

10.2 Creative Support will promote the details of the Housing Ombudsman Service to residents:

Housing Ombudsman Service  
Exchange Tower  
Harbour Exchange Square  
London  
E14 9GE


[www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk](http://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk) (online complaints form available from this website)

Tel: 0300 111 3000

Email: [info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk](mailto:info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk)

## 11. REQUESTING AN EXTERNAL INVESTIGATION

11.1 Creative Support at times may feel it is appropriate to appoint an external individual to investigate a complaint. The complainant does not have the right to request an external individual to investigate their complaint.

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## 12. COMPLAINTS ABOUT DATA PROTECTION

- 12.1 If the complaint is about how Creative Support has processed personal data, or sensitive personal data, under the [Data Protection Act](#) (2018), for example, complaints about information sharing, disclosure, retention, or information security, this will be investigated by the senior member of staff with responsibility for data protection.
- 12.2 If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome of the complaint regarding data protection at Stage One, they can escalate this to Stage Two.
- 12.3 Under the Data Protection Act, an individual is entitled to request an assessment from the Information Commissioner's Office ("the ICO") as to whether Creative Support has complied with the requirements of the Act. The details as to how to appeal are set out on the Information Commissioner's website at <https://ico.org.uk/make-a-complaint/> However, Creative Support is committed to trying to resolve all complaints at an early stage and encourages individuals to raise any concerns with us before contacting the ICO.

## 13. ALLEGATIONS OF FRAUD, THEFT, OTHER CRIMES OR SAFEGUARDING CONCERNS

- 13.1 We are committed to being open and accountable for the actions of our staff and others acting on our behalf. If residents have concerns about our staff we encourage them to come forward and let us know. If a fraud, theft or other crime may have been committed we will be obliged to inform the police of the concerns. If the complaint involves the safeguarding of children and/or vulnerable adults we will be obliged to report the concerns via the local authority's safeguarding procedures.

## 14. COMPLAINTS AGAINST MEMBERS OF STAFF


- 14.1 If a resident has a complaint about a member of our staff, and our investigation finds that a member of staff acted in such a way as to require disciplinary action, our normal disciplinary policies will apply. The level of detail we can share relating to internal disciplinary actions may be limited by the need to maintain employee confidentiality, but we will advise that this is the course of action being taken.

## 15. ANONYMOUS COMPLAINTS

- 15.1 Anonymous complaints will be investigated as far as possible, and a record of the complaint, the investigation and outcome kept.

## 16. DEALING WITH PERSISTENT OR VEXATIOUS COMPLAINANTS

- 16.1 There are a small number of customers who may be deemed by us to be a 'persistent or vexatious complainant' due to the behaviours they demonstrate in pursuing the resolution of their complaint. For example:
- A 'persistent or vexatious complaint' displays behaviours/actions which are disproportionate, are harassing and/or repetitive

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- They seek unrealistic outcomes relative to the issues being raised and state that their intention is to persist until that outcome is achieved
  - They repeatedly make the same complaint with minor differences, but do not accept the outcome of any investigation into their complaints
- 16.2 The inclusion of this section within the policy is to ensure that those customers who we deem to be 'persistent or vexatious complainants' are still dealt with fairly, honestly and properly, whilst also ensuring that the wellbeing of Creative Support staff and managers is not adversely affected.
- 16.3 We have policies and procedures in place for managing unacceptable behaviour from residents and/or their representatives. We will be able to evidence reasons for putting any restrictions in place and will keep restrictions under regular review. Any restrictions placed on contact due to unacceptable behaviour will be proportionate and demonstrate regard for the provisions of the Equality Act 2010.
- 16.4 When a customer is being dealt with under this section of the policy, information concerning the restrictions will be shared with relevant Creative Support managers and staff to ensure that they are still dealt with fairly, honestly and properly, whilst also ensuring that other service users or staff are not adversely affected. Information about the restrictions will also be registered on the customer's records whilst they are in force.
- 16.5 There is no right of appeal regarding the implementation of this section of the policy. We will, however, direct the customer to the Housing Ombudsman should they not agree with these restrictions.

## 17. ROLE OF THE HOUSING COMPLAINTS OFFICER

- 17.1 We will appoint a person as the 'Housing Complaints Officer' supported by a wider team to take responsibility for complaint handling, including liaison if required with the Ombudsman and for reporting complaints to Board of Trustees.
- 17.2 At each stage of the complaints process the person handling the complaint will:
- deal with complaints on their merits, act independently, and have an open mind;
  - give the resident and/or their representative a fair chance to set out their position;
  - take measures to address any actual or perceived conflict of interest;
  - and consider all relevant information and evidence carefully

## 18. ROLE OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

- 18.1 Details of complaints will be reported to the Board of Trustees on a regular basis in order that they may have an overview of the number, trends, causes and outcomes of complaints. This will be done with a view to reducing the incidence of complaints or dissatisfaction with our homes and services and improving the satisfaction of those using the complaints procedure. The Board of Trustees will receive an annual report on all complaints received which analyses numbers and types of complaint, trends, lessons learned and actions taken to prevent re-occurrence or improve our properties and services.

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- 18.2 A member of the Board of Trustees will be appointed to have lead responsibility for complaints to support a positive complaint handling culture. This person is referred to as the Member Responsible for Complaints ('the MRC'). The MRC will be responsible for ensuring the governing body receives regular information on complaints that provides insight on the landlord's complaint handling performance. This person must have access to suitable information and staff to perform this role and report on their findings.
- 18.3 As a minimum, the MRC and the Board of Trustees (or equivalent) must receive:
- regular updates on the volume, categories and outcomes of complaints, alongside complaint handling performance;
  - regular reviews of issues and trends arising from complaint handling;
  - regular updates on the outcomes of the Ombudsman's investigations (if any) and progress made in complying with orders related to maladministration findings.
  - the Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement report.

## 19. ANNUAL COMPLAINTS PERFORMANCE AND SERVICE IMPROVEMENT REPORT

We will produce an annual report for scrutiny and challenge by the Board of Trustees, which will include:

- the annual self-assessment against the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code to ensure that our complaint handling remains in line with its requirements. We will also carry out a review and self-assessment following a restructure, merger and/or other significant change and following any investigation by the Ombudsman.
- a qualitative and quantitative analysis of our complaint handling performance, which analyses numbers and types of complaint, trends, lessons learned and actions take to prevent re-occurrence or improve our properties and services.
- a summary of any complaints we have refused to accept
- any findings of non-compliance with this Code by the Ombudsman
- any report about our performance from the Ombudsman
- any service improvements made as a result of the learning from complaints

The annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report will be published on the section of our website relating to complaints. The Board of Trustees' response to the report will be published alongside this.

## 20. COMPLIANCE WITH THE COMPLAINT HANDLING CODE AND REVIEW OF THIS POLICY

- 20.1 The Housing Ombudsman Service has published a new Complaint Handling Code for Landlords which became statutory on 1 April 2024, meaning that landlords are obliged by law to follow its requirements. The Code sets out what can be expected when a complaint is made to a landlord and aims to achieve best practice in complaint handling. We will self-assess ourselves against the new Code on an annual basis to ensure that we are complaint.
- 20.2 We will review this policy on an annual basis and whenever changes are made to the Complaint Handling Code.

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