

## Concerns, complaints & compliments policy

This policy is concerned with how we encourage, respond to, monitor and act on complaints, concerns and compliments from the people we support and their representatives about the services Dimensions provide.

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Policy reviewed by: Tanya Emmons, Quality & Compliance Manager

Policy owner: Jackie Fletcher, Group Director of Quality, Public Affairs & Policy

This policy is to be implemented by all employees.

This policy is addressed to all employees but it especially relevant to Operations team members and managers.

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The purpose of this policy is to help ensure that people we support and their representatives feel as comfortable as possible raising concerns and making complaints about the services we provide.

Its purpose is also to ensure that all employees view complaints and concerns at least as positively as compliments – that is, as a means of increasing customer satisfaction and improving our services. It outlines the procedures we expect staff to follow to resolve complaints as quickly as possible and the regulatory requirements on Dimensions to monitor complaints.

Other guidance to refer to includes:

- *Guidance for providers on meeting the regulations* (Care Quality Commission, 2015)
- *National Minimum Standards for Domiciliary Care Agencies in Wales* (The Welsh Assembly Government, 2004)
- *The Regulatory Framework for Social Housing in England from April 2012* (Homes & Communities Agency, 2012)
- *Listening, Improving, Responding: a Guide to Better Customer Care* (Department of Health, 2009)
- *My expectations for raising concerns and complaints* (Local Government Ombudsman; Healthwatch; Parliamentary Health Ombudsman, England 2014)

This policy replaces OPS: Concerns, Complaints & compliments – version 8.

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In relation to this policy it may be helpful also to refer to the following policies:

- IT: Data management, security & publications
- IT: Data handling & protection
- IT: General conditions of use of computing & network facilities
- IT: Records management
- H&S: Accident/incident reporting
- HR: Confidentiality
- HR: Disciplinary
- HR: Whistle-blowing
- HOU: Maintenance
- OPS: On call
- OPS: Professional boundaries
- OPS: Safeguarding
- QUA: Duty of candour
- Code of conduct.

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This policy or procedure affects or involves the processing of personal data and should therefore be read in conjunction with the IT: Data handling & protection policy.

The IT: Data handling & protection policy sets out the Dimensions Group's approach to managing personal data in accordance with the requirements of the Data Protection Act 1998, or the General Data Protection Regulation from 25 May 2018. It outlines the Group's commitment to the principles enshrined within the legislation, and the need to balance the data and privacy rights of individuals with the functions and operational requirements of Dimensions.

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This policy promotes equality, diversity and human rights by directing Dimensions employees to treat complaints and concerns from people we support and their representatives in exactly the same courteous and helpful way whatever the person's race, age, gender, ethnicity, religion, disability or sexual orientation.

Also, by analysing the diversity of complainants we will identify any pattern revealing issues of inequality and seek to address these proactively.

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# Guidance & procedures

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### 1. Policy statement

- 1.1 At Dimensions, we are committed to providing as high quality a service as possible to the people we support, their families and representatives. We recognise that feedback of all kind contributes vitally to continual improvement. So, we welcome expressions of dissatisfaction with our services just as we welcome compliments.
- 1.2 We aim to ensure that:
  - raising a concern or making a complaint is easy
  - our staff know how to deal with concerns and complaints appropriately – that is, by
    - putting people who make complaints at ease
    - resolving the issue as quickly as possible
    - keeping people who make complaints informed about the progress of investigations, and
    - providing people who make complaints with full explanations and apologies when appropriate
  - people who make complaints are given the opportunity to feed back on their experience of raising a concern or making a complaint
  - we monitor and learn from complaints and improve our services accordingly.

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- 1.3 We hope and intend to resolve all complaints about Dimensions and our employees internally. However, we appreciate that there may be occasions when we cannot resolve an issue to the complainant's satisfaction. When this happens, we recognise the person who makes the complaint's right to involve external agencies and understand our responsibility to draw their attention to these agencies. We will always cooperate fully with any external agency's investigation.
- 1.4 As a Dimensions employee, you should understand that whilst we expect you to help others make complaints, the complaints system is not for your personal use. Should you have a concern, you should raise it with line management or whistle-blow (see the HR: Whistle-blowing policy).
- 1.5 Information held about complaints will be held and processed in line with the principles of the Data Protection Act 1998. Statistical reports will be produced to monitor trends but individuals will not be identified in these reports.

## **2. Ensuring everyone who may wish to raise a concern or complaint can**

Registered managers are responsible for ensuring that the people they support and their representatives have the confidence and means to raise concerns, make complaints and pay compliments. Whilst remaining ultimately accountable, registered managers of domiciliary care services may delegate this responsibility to locality managers. However, they must keep a record of which responsibilities they have delegated to whom.

It is the head of housing & asset management's responsibility to provide Dimensions tenants with the appropriately formatted means to raise concerns and pay compliments.

- 2.1 At Dimensions, we want everybody we support, their representatives and all other stakeholders to appreciate that we welcome and will act on any concerns or complaints they may have. Whatever your role within Dimensions (but this is especially relevant to Operations team members), you have a responsibility to ensure they do.
- 2.2 Accordingly, you should inform people at the earliest opportunity in our relationship with them that we will address their concerns and complaints howsoever they wish to raise them. (See [3. Receiving a concern, complaint or compliment](#)). You should make clear that this includes verbally but also share with them our dedicated:
  - complaints telephone line: 0300 303 9024
 and
  - email address: [Complaints@dimensions-uk.org](mailto:Complaints@dimensions-uk.org) .

And you should ensure they continue to feel free and able to complain throughout our relationship with them. (We provide this information in our welcome pack, but you should reassure verbally too.)

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2.3 If a person wishes to appoint an advocate, or you feel they may benefit from an advocate's assistance in making a complaint, you should do all that you can to help them appoint one. Example national advocacy agencies include:

- NYAS – contact details:

[www@nyas.net](http://www@nyas.net)

Tel: 0808 808 1001

- PoHWER – contact details:

[www.pohwer.net](http://www.pohwer.net)

Tel: 0300 456 2370

But bear in mind, there will be smaller local agencies in your area too.

2.4 Additional to our telephone line and email address, the Marketing Department has produced a range of formats that might better suit the needs of people we support. So, if you think any of the following formats may help a person raise and express their concern, you should offer and assist as appropriate:

- [appendix 1: Making a complaint or speaking out easy-read booklet](#)
- appendix 2: Making a complaint or speaking out CD (request from [complaints@dimensions-uk.org](mailto:complaints@dimensions-uk.org))
- [appendix 9: Making a complaint or speaking out animation](#)
- [appendix 3: What to do if you are unhappy with your home](#) (for Dimensions tenants).

2.5 For representatives of people we support and all concerned others – for example, members of the public – in addition or as an alternative to the means detailed in paragraph [2.2](#), you may wish to offer them [appendix 4: Complaints form](#).

### 3. Dealing with & investigating a concern or complaint

Heads of service and registered managers are responsible for familiarising team members with our expectations around dealing with concerns and complaints. Whilst remaining ultimately accountable, registered managers of domiciliary care services may delegate this responsibility to locality managers. However, they must keep a record of which responsibilities they have delegated to whom.

Anyone receiving a complaint is responsible for dealing with it in the first instance.

Operations directors, heads of service and their line managers are responsible for appointing investigators, and where appropriate, may request the Compliance Team to investigate.

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3.1 Whatever your role, you **must** recognise and treat all concerns and expressions of dissatisfaction with our services seriously – that is, even when the person says, for example, that they don't wish to complain or cause trouble.

This means, you **must** follow the guidance set out in paragraph [3.2](#) and record as directed in [4. Recording & monitoring concerns, complaints & compliments](#), just as you would when somebody more obviously makes a complaint.

By treating concerns or 'grumbles' in this way, you will save people further aggravation and help prevent concerns from developing into full-blown formal complaints.

3.2 When you receive a concern or complaint you **must**:

- express sympathy to the person raising the concern
- if you don't already have the person who's making the complaint's contact details, write them down for future reference, checking spellings and numbers with them
- assure them that any information they give you will be shared on a need-to-know basis only, as per our Confidentiality policy
- offer them the right to anonymity but explain that if they wish to remain anonymous, we may not be able to communicate to them the outcome of their complaint or offer the opportunity of feedback
- reassure them that their having raised the concern will not compromise our care for them or the person concerned in any way
- ask them what outcome they would like and record this in your report
- take all reasonable steps to resolve the complaint informally – that is, to their satisfaction but without the need for a full-blown investigation
- if you cannot resolve their concern immediately, tell them what steps you are going to take to resolve it as soon as possible.

3.3 As a non-manager, whether or not you immediately resolve a concern or complaint, you **must** inform your line manager as soon as possible and within 24 hours at most. This is so they can address the complainant if necessary, log it on the Complaints/compliments management system (CMS) and, if necessary, formalise it as soon as possible (see [4. Recording & monitoring concerns, complaints & compliments](#)).

If unable to inform your line manager within 24 hours, you **must** inform their line manager or the on call manager.

3.4 You should also be aware that a complaint might amount to a serious allegation that requires immediate action additional to the usual procedures for dealing with a complaint – for example, raising a safeguarding alert and/or the suspension of a colleague. Such serious allegations include – but this list is not exhaustive:

- injury or risk of injury to a person we support resulting from a Dimensions

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employee's actions

- any kind of abuse to a person we support by a Dimensions employee, including neglect
- any kind of discrimination by a Dimensions employee on the basis of:
  - race
  - age
  - gender
  - ethnicity
  - religion
  - disability
  - sexual orientation
- any criminal act by a Dimensions employee
- alcohol or drug abuse by a Dimensions employee
- bullying or harassment by a Dimensions employee.

If somebody brings such an allegation to your attention, you **must** inform a more senior colleague immediately – that is, whether day or night – so they may take appropriate action. (See the H&S: Accident/incident reporting, OPS: Safeguarding policies and OPS: On call policies.)

3.5 You **must** appreciate that if you receive a concern or complaint that results in a safeguarding alert or even police investigation, it does not stop being a complaint. Meaning, you have the same duty to keep the complainant informed and to update the complaint record that you would have if their concern hadn't gone to further investigation.

3.6 On rare occasions, the mental capacity of the person concerned may be a factor when considering how to proceed with a concern or complaint. For example, a person's parent may object to our 'allowing' the person to do something when, actually, they have the capacity and therefore legal right to make that decision for themselves.

In such a circumstance, you **must** treat the person making the complaint's concern in exactly the same respectful way you would any other concern or complaint but with reference to the OPS: Mental capacity & DOLS policy. You may wish to involve care management or other relevant agencies in a mediating role if necessary.

3.7 As a locality manager, operations director or head of service, if a team member has not resolved the concern already, you **must** contact the person making the complaint as soon as possible and within two working days at most to assure them that you will deal with their concern. You should do this in person or by phone.

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If the team member reports that they have resolved the concern, you should consider contacting the person making the complaint out of courtesy anyway, just to check they are happy with the resolution.

And you **must** log the concern or complaint on the CMS as soon as possible.

- 3.8 You have five working days from the date the person making the complaint raised their concern to resolve it informally. This means without the need for Dimensions to launch an investigation.

However, be aware that it may be in everybody's interest to formalise the complaint at the earliest opportunity. This is because:

- the complainant may need reassurance that we are treating their concern seriously
- whoever investigates the complaint will need as much time as possible to conduct their investigation.

So, when deciding whether to formalise a concern or complaint immediately, always take into consideration:

- its seriousness from the complainant's point of view
- the difficulty you or another investigator is likely to have resolving the issue, and the time it will take.

- 3.9 In any case, if you have not been able to resolve the issue within five working days of the person making the complaint raising their concern, you **must** formalise it. (See [4. Recording & monitoring concerns, complaints & compliments](#) and [appendix 5: Guidance - complaints/compliments management system](#)). Formalising a complaint means notifying your line manager so they can appoint an investigator. As a locality manager, this means referring to your operations director.

- 3.10 As the investigating manager, you **must** acknowledge the person making the complaint in writing, introducing yourself and outlining the expected timescales – that is, aiming to complete your investigation within 15 working days of the date the person first raised their concern. You should use [appendix 6: Complaint acknowledgement letter](#) to do this, editing as appropriate.

- 3.11 You **must also** keep the person making the complaint informed about the investigation's progress. This is especially important when you cannot keep to agreed timeframes. It is also important to record all developments on the CMS.

- 3.12 If you cannot resolve the issue within 15 working days of the complaint being made, you **must** notify your line manager for a decision on how to proceed. The longest we should take to resolve a concern or complaint is 20 working days.

If a 20-working day resolution looks unlikely or impossible for whatever reason, your line manager will advise you on what exactly to communicate to the person making

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the complaint. It may be the case, that they refer the complaint to our Compliance Team. In this case, the Quality & Compliance Team will keep the person informed of any revised timescales.

- 3.13 When you have finished your investigation, you **must** set out your conclusion and recommendations for action in [appendix 7: Complaint resolution letter](#). However, before sending the letter to the person making the complaint, you **must** have authorisation from your operations director, head of service or more senior manager if appropriate.

You must also share any information or actions with other relevant Dimensions colleagues. Typically, relevant colleagues will be those responsible for causing the complaint or those dealing most often with the complainant and their line manager.

- 3.14 Additionally, you **must** follow both the requirements placed on us by the HSCA 2008 (Regulated Activities) Regulations 2014 duty of candour to apologise *and* our own protocols for apology.

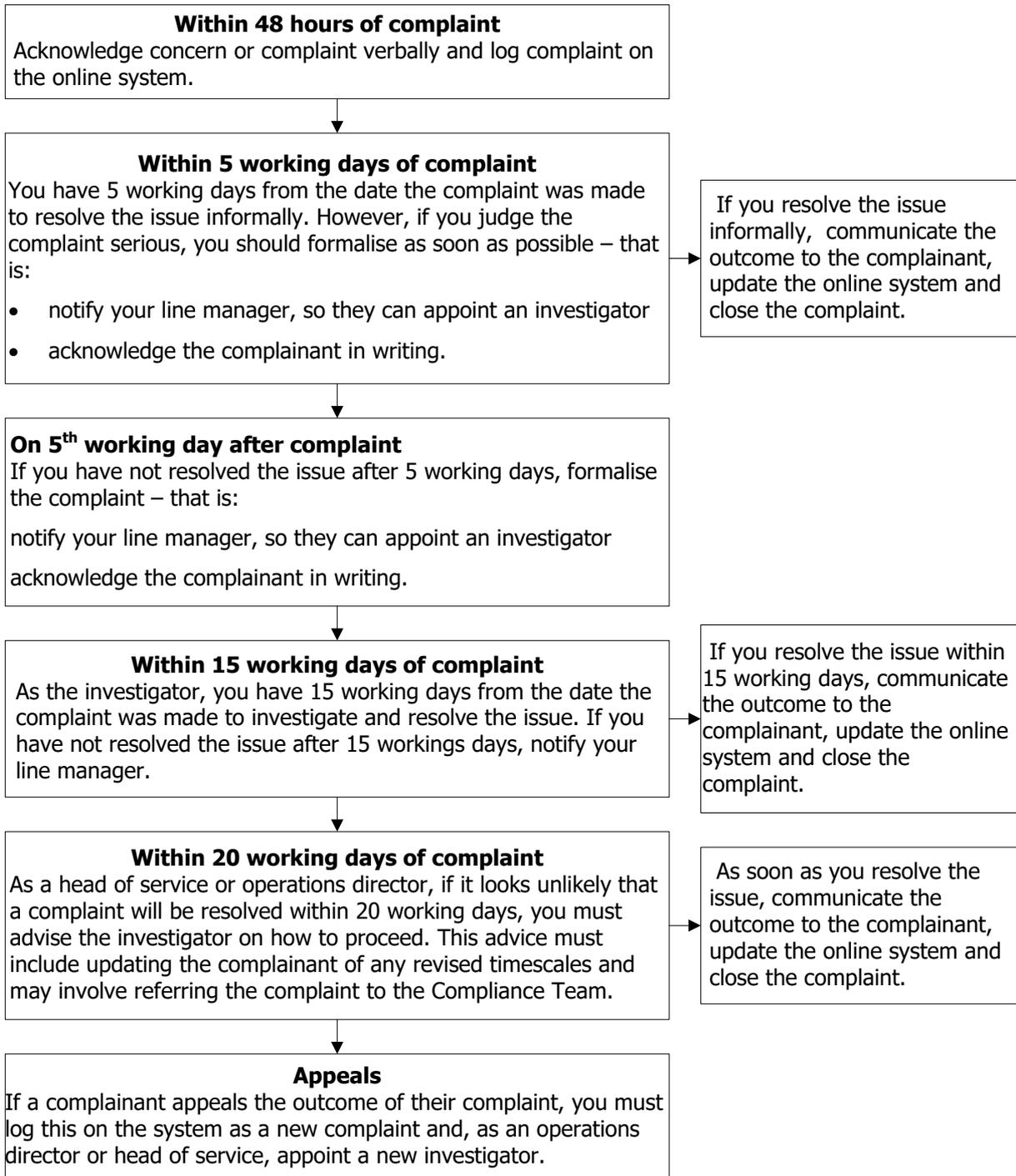
In brief, this regulation means that where Dimensions staff have, or have not done, something which results in death or harm (moderate, severe) or prolonged psychological harm to a person we support, we have a legal duty to:

- provide the person and/or their representatives with us much information as we can about the incident
- provide the person with all the support they need in relation to the incident
- advise and, if possible, agree with the person or their representative what further enquiries we should make into the incident
- apologise for the incident
- make a record of all notifications.

However, our own protocol sets the bar for apology lower than this legal requirement. (See QUA: Duty of candour policy.)

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3.15 Complaints flowchart 1



3.16 Whatever your involvement in a complaint, you **must** share all information on a need-to-know basis only, as per our HR: Confidentiality policy and you **must** abide by the Data Protection Act, as per our IT: Data management, security & publication policy.

3.17 Our Marketing Team routinely monitors social media to help ensure against bad publicity for Dimensions. However, since it is impossible to ‘police’ all social media in real time, you may become aware of a complaint about our services before anybody

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else. If this happens, do not attempt to address the matter yourself but inform the Marketing Team either by emailing them, [marketingteam@dimensions-uk.org](mailto:marketingteam@dimensions-uk.org), or if out-of-hours, by messaging them on one of our social media accounts.

### Appeals

- 3.18 If a person making a complaint is dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint, they have the right to appeal. Ideally, they should do this within two weeks of being informed of the outcome. As the investigating manager, you **must** explain this in your resolution letter ([appendix 7: Complaint resolution letter](#)). Investigation managers **must** forward any requests for appeal to their operations director or head of service (or more senior manager, if appropriate) as soon as possible, so they may appoint an appeal investigator.
- 3.19 The investigator of an appeal should be senior to the original investigator.
- 3.20 As the investigator of an appeal, you should follow the same procedure for a first-time complaint from the point it is considered formal. This means you have fifteen days to consider it. It also means recording the appeal on the CMS (be clear in the report which original complaint it pertains to (see [4. Recording & monitoring concerns, complaints & compliments](#))). It also means seeking appropriate authorisation before sending your resolution letter.
- 3.21 If your decision is to uphold the original decision not to uphold a complaint, then you must inform the complainant in your resolution letter of their right to refer to the external agencies set out in [5. External agencies](#).

## **4. Recording & monitoring concerns, complaints & compliments**

Locality managers, operations directors, heads of service, Compliance Team members and designated others are able to log concerns, complaints and compliments on the CMS.

The Complaints Team is responsible for monitoring information, compiling reports on concerns, complaints and compliments and managing the Customer complaints satisfaction survey.

- 4.1 It is vitally important that our complaints records are extensive and accurate for two reasons:
- firstly, we wish to respond positively wherever there is the slightest dissatisfaction with our services and to improve wherever possible
  - secondly, Dimensions' different regulators all require monitoring of complaints if in slightly different ways and for different reasons. For example:
    - the Care Quality Commission may request a summary of complaints, responses and other related correspondences or information at any given time and can prosecute if we don't provide it within 28 days

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- the Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales requires a system that enables us to identify and analyse patterns of complaint
- The Homes & Communities Agency requires us to publish information annually about complaints received and their outcomes.

4.2 So, to enable effective monitoring for productive analysis, as a manager you **must** log and update as quickly as possible all concerns and complaints on the CMS.

This includes uploading all relevant documents – for example written correspondence to and from complainants and investigation reports. For details on how to use the CMS, see [appendix 5: Guidance - complaints/compliments management system](#).

4.3 The recording of compliments is not a regulatory requirement. However, our regulators do consider compliments when making judgments on our services, so it is important that we are able to evidence them. As a manager, you should also consider the positive impact on team members’ morale that acknowledgement of good work has and how well it reflects on your management performance.

So, be sure to record all compliments using the CMS (see [appendix 5: Guidance - complaints/compliments management system](#)). You may do this for compliments paid verbally, but you may also offer people the opportunity to record their compliment themselves using [appendix 8: Making a compliment](#). You can then upload the form onto the system.

4.4 On resolution of a complaint, we will ask the person making the complaint to complete a Customer complaint satisfaction survey.

4.5 The Quality & Compliance Team will produce a quarterly report on concerns, complaints and compliments for the Executive Team and Board of Management and share this report with the different departments and operations regions as appropriate.

4.6 As far as we are able – that is, based on information that people making complaints provide – we will analyse Dimensions’ response to complaints in relation to diversity and address any issues of inequality we identify.

4.7 Where required, we will share information on complaints with our regulators but we will depersonalise data to preserve confidentiality as per Data Protection Act (1998). (See FIN: Data management, security & publications policy.)

## 5. External authorities

Registered managers are responsible for ensuring that all the people their teams support and their representatives are aware of the relevant external authorities they may access if they wish to complain about Dimensions’ handling of a complaint. Whilst remaining ultimately accountable, registered managers of domiciliary care services may delegate this

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responsibility to locality managers. However, they must keep a record of which responsibilities they have delegated to whom.

The head of housing & asset management is responsible for ensuring that Dimensions tenants are aware of the relevant external authorities they may access if they wish to complain about Dimensions handling of a complaint.

- 5.1 If a person is not satisfied with our response to a concern or complaint they have raised, they have the right to appeal. (See paragraph [3.15](#).) However, in England, they may wish to take their complaint to the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LG&SCO) whose job it is to investigate complaints about adult social care services. In Wales, it is the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales (PSOW).

Whatever your role, if dealing with somebody who is dissatisfied with our response to a concern or complaint, you should refer them to the LG&SCO or PSOW as relevant. Contact details:

[www.lgo.org.uk](http://www.lgo.org.uk)

Tel: 0300 061 0614

[www.ombudsman-wales.org.uk](http://www.ombudsman-wales.org.uk)

Tel: 0300 790 0203

- 5.2 Other external authorities a person we support or their representative may wish to contact when dissatisfied with the service we provide or our response to a complaint include:

- the Care Quality Commission – contact details:

Citygate  
Gallowgate  
Newcastle upon Tyne  
NE1 4PA

[www.cqc.org.uk](http://www.cqc.org.uk)

Tel: 0300 061 6161

- the Care Inspectorate Wales – contact details:

Welsh Government Office  
Rhydycar Business Park  
Merthyr Tydfil  
CF48 1UZ

[www.careinspectorate.wales](http://www.careinspectorate.wales)

Tel: 0300 790 0126

- the person's local authority (you **must** add its contact details to the person's accessible [appendix 1: Making a complaint or speaking out booklet](#))

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- the person's landlord.

5.3 Dimensions tenants or their representatives may wish to refer to the Housing Ombudsman Service when dissatisfied with our response to a complaint.

Contact details:

Housing Ombudsman Service  
PO Box 152  
Liverpool L33 7WQ

[www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk](http://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk)

Tel: 300 111 3000

### Review history

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Communication & implementation directive sent date:	

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