

# Complaints & Compliments Policy

**Purpose:** This policy sets out how we will manage and act upon complaints and other customer feedback including how we will learn from and use the information to improve services for our customers.

The policy is supported by a procedure for colleagues and an information leaflet which will be made available to customers.

**Legal & Regulatory:** This policy is underpinned by the Regulatory Framework, and will reflect guidance and regulatory requirements of:

- Regulator of Social Housing
- Housing Ombudsman, specifically the Complaint handling code and requirements

**Scope:** This is a group policy and is applicable to complaints, comments and compliments made by any customer or any individual that comes into contact with the organisation or its contractors.

This policy will not apply to any matter for which there is an established internal or external appeals procedure allowing the matter to be properly investigated and resolved by another route.

Matters which have already been considered under the complaints process will not be considered.

## Definitions:

**Customer** – A tenant, shared owner or leaseholder, or a person acting on their behalf, or a member of the public directly affected by the services we provide or the actions of our colleagues or contractors whilst they are working for Bernicia.

**Complaint** – is an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions, or lack of action by the organisation, its own colleagues, or those acting on its behalf, affecting an individual or group of residents.

**Service Request** - is a request for one of the services we offer customers, such as a request for a repair to be completed or support with an antisocial behaviour issue. It may also be a query for information or an explanation.

A service request is where we will act on issues and concerns which can be resolved quickly and informally. These service requests can be dealt with through little or no investigation and sit outside of our complaints process. Examples of this may include missed appointments or call back requests.

**Compliment** – is an expression of satisfaction or praise for someone or something, which may be for a service delivered or the person delivering the service.

## Associated documents:

Complaints Procedure

Our Promise

Service Standard Leaflets

Compensation Policy

Managing Unacceptable Behaviour Policy

Tenant Voice Strategy

**Date for review:** March 2027

**Responsibility:** Head of Customer Engagement & Business Intelligence

## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 We aim to ensure that customers wishing to complain or feedback to us about a service they have received are able to do so easily, that colleagues respond positively to resolve any issues quickly and effectively and that we learn from the feedback our customers provide.

## 2. Policy statements

- 2.1 We will listen to our customers when they have a complaint or compliment about us.
- 2.2 We will offer a number of different ways for customers to give feedback and promote these widely.
- 2.3 We will make multiple accessible routes available to make a complaint or enquiry about a complaint. This will include by letter, online including social media, in person, by telephone.
- 2.4 We will accept complaints or enquiries about complaints from local Councillors, Members of Parliament or any other agency or individual acting on behalf of a customer provided permission has been given by the customer; as well as being represented or accompanied at any meeting with ourselves.
- 2.5 We will focus on resolving issues and putting things right as quickly as possible.
- 2.6 Our complaints process supports a 'right first time' approach. Customers can expect a thorough and timely consideration of their grievance and a full, fair, and honest response to the issues they have raised.
- 2.7 We will deal with complaints and compliments effectively within defined timescales in accordance with our procedure that supports this policy. If we can't respond within timescales we will let the customer know why and agree a timescale when a full response will be provided.
- 2.8 We will train and support colleagues at all levels to understand the value of complaints, listen to customer effectively and take steps to resolve complaints at an early stage, to ensure a high quality, consistent approach to the resolution of complaints.
- 2.9 We will keep in regular contact with the customer whilst dealing with their complaint.

- 2.10 On rare occasions we may deny a request for a review of a complaint if for example, the solution requested by the customer relates to something outside of our ability to change or influence. Other reasons why we may refuse a request for a review are set out in our complaints procedure.
- 2.11 We will not normally consider a complaint that is made more than 12 months after the individual first became aware of the issue they want to complain about. We will apply discretion and review any complaints exceeding 12 months on a case by case basis and individuals exceptional circumstances which may have delayed reporting.
- 2.12 We will consider each complaint on an individual basis, in the situation of a group complaint – the lead complainant will be issued with the response.
- 2.13 We will publicise and promote the complaint policy and services of the Ombudsman within Complaint leaflet and on our Website along with the inclusion of contact details of the Ombudsman within appropriate communications within complaint responses.

## Resolving the complaint:

2.14 We will always attempt to resolve issues quickly through service requests using our normal practices. We will equip our customer facing colleagues to recognise when a customer is unhappy with our service and provide them with the tools to resolve any concerns quickly and effectively. Our colleagues will be equipped to deal with an unhappy customer by:

- Dealing with the customers concerns immediately where possible
- Taking responsibility for the customer concerns
- Being sympathetic
- Listening and understanding
- Taking ownership of the issue
- Letting the customer know what we will do, when they should expect it to be done and if there is a delay for any reason and the reason for the delay.

There are times when our attempts to resolve queries at an operational level through service requests are not sufficient to address the customer concerns and it is necessary to investigate these using our formal complaint process:

We operate a 2 stage internal complaints procedure:

### **Stage 1 - Resolution**

On receipt of a complaint the customer will be contacted, and their complaint acknowledged within 5 working days. An investigation will be carried out and a response in writing will be provided within 10 working days from acknowledgement.

## **Stage 2 - Review**

If the customer remains dissatisfied with all or part of the Stage 1 response they can request a Stage 2 Review. This will be carried out by a Housing Manager, Head of Service or Director, as appropriate, who has not previously been involved at Stage 1. A request for a review will be acknowledged within 5 working days and a request for a response will be sent within 20 working days of acknowledgement.

## **Designated person and/or Housing Ombudsman**

Customers who feel their complaint has not been resolved have the right to approach their MP or local councillor to seek a local resolution or contact the Housing Ombudsman directly at any stage within their complaint.

- 2.15 If a complaint relates to a serious / public interest this will be also considered under our Whistleblowing Policy. This will also apply to complaints made anonymously.
- 2.16 We will assess any claims for compensation on an individual basis as detailed in our Compensation Policy.
- 2.17 We are committed to providing an accessible and inclusive complaints process in accordance with our Equality and Diversity.
- 2.18 To ensure we comply with the regulatory standard and the Housing Ombudsman Complaints Handling Code.
- 2.19 We will investigate all complaints in line with our Complaints Policy and on an individual basis however, if as part of the investigation there are circumstances where a complainant or complaint falls into the remit of the Unacceptable Behaviour policy, we will take appropriate action (See Unacceptable behaviour policy for details).
- 2.20 We are committed to use customer feedback as a way of learning more about our customers, their needs, and expectations.

2.21 To ensure that customer feedback drives improvement in the business when necessary.

### 3. Responsibility for implementation

3.1 All colleagues are responsible for upholding the policy when dealing with customers who wish to make a complaint or compliment.

### 4. Actioning the policy

4.1 This policy will be actioned whenever a customer wishes to make a complaint, compliment, or comment within the definitions of this policy.

### 5. Monitoring the policy

5.1 We will review our performance on a monthly basis

5.2 Heads of Service will review all complaints and compliments relevant to their service area and use the information to ensure that policies, systems, and processes are working effectively.

5.3 Performance will be reported to the Customer Service Committee on a quarterly basis

5.4 We will enable our involved customers to scrutinise complaints by providing them with information about complaints performance, trends and learning outcomes.

### 6. Resources

6.1 This policy will be implemented using existing resources.

### 7. Equality and Diversity

7.1 An equality and diversity impact assessment has been undertaken on this policy.

7.2 In carrying out our services, we are committed to:

- Treating all customers with fairness and respect. We value diversity and work to promote equality and tackle unlawful discrimination. We

will provide support for all customers to ensure that they understand their rights and responsibilities.

- We will monitor all complaints, particularly focussing on people protected under diversity legislation, to identify trends and consider actions to address any disproportionate impact.

**Uncontrolled if printed – This may not be the latest version of the policy**

**All policies must be printed from Connect only – please make sure it is the latest version.**

*Non-scheduled major update May 2024 - new version of the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code 2024 and also amendment of Stage 2 process and persons involved.*