

CUSTOMER COMPLAINTS POLICY



1. Background and objectives

- 1.1. Customer feedback is important to us. Alliance Homes are committed to providing great service to our customers but recognise that, on occasion, customers may complain about the service they have received. When this happens, the way we manage, resolve, and learn from our mistakes is critical to improving the way we deliver our services to our customers moving forward.
- 1.2. We encourage feedback from our customers, and when things go wrong, we will listen, resolve things quickly and make sure we clearly explain the decision we have made.
- 1.3. We welcome your views and opinions on how to improve our services together with praise when colleagues do things well.
- 1.4. This policy has been developed in line with the Housing Ombudsman's Code for Complaint Handling 2022.

2. Policy detail

2.1 Definition of a complaint

A complaint is 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 and individual resident or group of residents. The complainant does not need to use the word 'complaint' for it to be treated as such.

2.2 Definition of a service request

We define a service request as where we have failed to provide a service that has not met your expectations and can be resolved immediately, for example chasing up a missed repair appointment. We refer to these requests as sort on the spots and these are recorded, monitored and reviewed regularly.

When a customer raises dissatisfaction with the response or resolution to their service request a formal complaint will be raised even if the issue is still being addressed.

2.3 We will not consider as a complaint or any expression of dissatisfaction which relates to:

- Matters already being dealt with by the Housing Ombudsman service that has already gone through the Alliance Homes complaints process.
- A first-time customer service request. It's important we have an opportunity to provide a response or resolve our customer's issues.
- Liability issue that is subject to an insurance claim.
- An anti-social behaviour (ASB) or Tenancy Management case that has not yet reached resolution, unless the complaint concerns the management of the case. We will manage cases of neighbour disputes or complaints of ASB through our ASB case handling process.
- The level of rent or service charge that is being charged (unless wrongly applied).
- Disagreement with a decision we have made where there is another procedure involved in the decision, such as a dispute about service charges, successions or right to repair.
- Where the complaint is being pursued in an unreasonable manner.
- A matter that was not raised within 12 months of its occurrence or has already been fully considered.

CUSTOMER COMPLAINTS POLICY



- A complaint that falls under the Alliance Homes unacceptable behaviour policy.

2.3.1. If Alliance Homes determines that a complaint falls under any of these categories, we will provide a detailed explanation setting out the reasons why the matter is not suitable for the complaints process and will advise of the right to take that decision to the Ombudsman.

Alliance Homes may also decline to escalate a complaint for any of these reasons.

2.3.2. Legal complaints process

We will wherever possible, continue to engage with our customers when a complaint or damp and mould issue has the potential to become a disrepair case.

We will continue to progress the complaint until the court papers have been issued, at which point the court case takes precedence. This is defined as details of the claim, such as the Claim Form and Particulars of Claim, having been filed at court.

We will ensure throughout this process that required repairs are progressed in an appropriate timeline.

2.3.3. In line with the Ombudsman Code, we aim to deal fairly, honestly, and consistently with all customers. Where a customer's actions are considered unacceptable, such as aggressive or abusive behaviour, unreasonable demands, or persistent and / or unsubstantiated complaints, the complaints process may be withdrawn or otherwise restricted. Where appropriate we may refer matters to the police or other agencies.

2.3.4. Initial queries will always seek to be resolved by one of our teams where possible before a formal complaint is recorded.

2.3.5. Correspondence sent to Alliance Homes Senior Leadership Team or Board members will be directed to the appropriate team for action. Where the contact relates to dissatisfaction, the issue will either be investigated as a new complaint or will be included as further information in a complaint that is already being investigated.

2.3.6. A complaint made in the form of a petition on behalf of multiple customers will be treated as one complaint; interactions and correspondence will be directed to the nominated signatory.

2.4 Policy Aim

2.4.1. This policy sets out to resolve complaints efficiently, whilst ensuring learning from them to improve our services and prevent complaints arising in the future.

Our principles are to provide a quality service by:

- Putting things right within agreed timescales.
- Making it as easy as possible to provide us with feedback.
- Keeping our customer informed.
- Be consistent, open, and fair in the way we deal with complaints and comments.
- Following our policy and procedures.
- Fully and accurately, record details, actions, and investigations of the complaint at all stages.

Use lessons learned from the complaints to improve our service and prevent complaints.

2.4.2. Who can make a complaint?

CUSTOMER COMPLAINTS POLICY



Anyone who requests or receives a service from us can make a complaint under this policy. They may complain either individually or collectively with other customers similarly affected. We will also address complaints received by an advocate or someone else acting on behalf of a customer.

2.4.3. How can a complaint be made?

- Telephone
- Letter
- E-Mail
- In person
- Social Media
- The Hive – Our online customer engagement platform

If a complaint is received via social media, Alliance Homes will take the complaint offline and manage the complaint via private message. This will ensure privacy and confidentiality are maintained.

A customer may raise a complaint to any Alliance Homes colleague.

Where none of the above are suitable for the customer, we can make reasonable adjustments where necessary and consider duties under the equality ACT 2010.

CUSTOMER COMPLAINTS POLICY



2.4.4. Complaint handling process

We have a formal process for handling complaints to ensure consistency of response. This is a two-stage process that refers the customer to the Housing Ombudsman Service if the matter is unresolved.

2.4.5. Timescales

All complaints will be acknowledged within five working days and thereafter processed as quickly as reasonably possible, and within the timescales stated in the Complaints procedure.

If a formal complaint or appeal cannot be resolved within the initial 10-day investigation period, the customer will be contacted to update them on progress, explain what actions remain to be taken, and agree an extension of no more than 10 additional working days for those actions to be completed. Any further extensions will only be requested if there is a good reason.

If a customer remains unhappy after Stage 1 of the complaints process, they may ask us to escalate to a Stage 2, this should be requested within 10 working days.

Any stage 2 complaints will be acknowledged, defined, and logged within 5 working days of an escalation request.

A final response will be given after the stage 2 acknowledgement has been given and this will be within a 20-day period. If we are unable to resolve the stage 2 complaint within these timescales, the customer will be contacted to update them on progress, explain what actions remain to be taken, and agree an extension of no more than 20 additional working days for those actions to be completed.

Any further extensions will only be requested if there is a good reason.

2.4.6. Learning lessons from feedback

We are keen to learn the lessons from our customers when they tell us they have been dissatisfied with the service that they have received from us. We will hold 'lessons learned' sessions following a complaint investigation to ensure that things change, and we handle similar situations better in the future as well as inform any changes to our procedures and policies where necessary.

3. Monitoring, consultation, and review

3.1. We monitor our performance in delivering the objectives of this policy by reporting to our leadership teams and the member responsible for complaints a range of measures including:

- Monitoring of complaints for each service and report monthly to the relevant meeting for discussion.
- Ensure actions agreed as part of the lessons learned process are fully implemented.
- Report quarterly to Board on feedback received, lessons learned, and any changes made as a result of customer feedback.

3.2. This complaints policy including information about the Housing Ombudsman Handling Code and self-assessment will be publicised on our website.

3.3. The Customer Experience Manager is responsible for the implementation and review of this policy.

3.4. Customers, colleagues, and service users be involved in giving feedback on this policy, leading to amendments where appropriate.

CUSTOMER COMPLAINTS POLICY



3.5. This policy will be reviewed within one year of its approval date.

4. Equality and Diversity

- 4.1. This policy is subject to a periodic Equality Impact Assessment (EIA).
- 4.2. The purpose of such an assessment is to consider the effect of the policy regarding the recognised protected characteristics of equality and ensure that it does not unfairly impact any individual or group. The protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity or other grounds set out in our Equality and Diversity Strategy and Single Equality Scheme. Remedial action will be undertaken if a detrimental effect is identified.
- 4.3. The EIA also requires the policy author to consider whether the policy is likely to negatively impact on a person's Human Rights.
- 4.4. This policy and any other related Alliance Homes publications can be provided in other formats for those with visual, literacy or language difficulties.

5. Associated Documents

- 5.1. Complaints Handling Procedure
- 5.2. Housing Ombudsman Self-Assessment

6. Version control and approval dates

Approval stage	Date completed
Equality Impact Assessment completed	June 2024
EIA reviewed by Equality & Diversity Manager	June 2024
SLT review / approval	June 2024
Board or Committee approval	June 2024
Next review date	June 2025

7. Appendices

Appendix 1 – Equality Impact

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Equality Impact Assessment

An Equalities Impact Assessment must be conducted alongside the review of an existing policy or the creation of a new one.

GUIDANCE ON COMPLETING AN EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT IS AVAILABLE [HERE](#)

1. Name the Strategy, Policy, Procedure or Function (SPPF) being assessed and name of author.

Customer Complaints Policy

2. Aims of the SPPF being assessed.

- *Whose need is it designed to meet?*
- *Are there any measurable elements such as time limits or age limits?*

Outlines our approach to managing feedback and complaints across AHG

3. Who has been consulted in developing the SPPF?

- *Make reference or links to consultation/evidence documents.*

- Head of Customer Experience- Housing
- Customer Experience Manager
- Assistant Managers, ACT
- Senior Customer Experience Advisor – ACT
- Feedback Manager

4. Does the SPPF promote equality of opportunity?

We have aligned our policy to run alongside the Housing Ombudsman self-assessment.

The policy promotes equality of opportunity across the protected characteristics as follows:

Our tailored approach to customers.

Access to provide feedback at the first point of contact through ACT or any other channels such as TAWK, ORLO or email.

Colleagues will always try to provide a resolution at the first point of contact. However, if this is not possible customers will be advised of a single point of contact in relation to their complaint and advised of the timescales attached to our service offer.

When a customer enters the formal complaints process, they will have their complaint acknowledged within 5 working days and they will also be updated at regular intervals by the investigating manager holding the cases. The information will be given in plain English around the service offer and what they can expect.

CUSTOMER COMPLAINTS POLICY



If customers continue to remain unhappy and we are unable to find a resolution, that matter will be escalated to stage 2. This will always be coordinated by the Feedback manager to ensure that customer receives an objective viewpoint that has not been involved in the stage 1 process.

With a simplified process customers will have clarity around the process, timescales and will be offered a consistency of service.

5. Identify potential impact on each of the diversity “groups” by considering the following questions:

(The list is not exhaustive but an indication of the sort of questions assessors should think about):

- *Might some groups find it harder to access the service?*
- *Do some groups have particular needs that are not well met by the current SPPF?*
- *What evidence do you have for your judgement (e.g. monitoring data, information from consultation/research/feedback)?*
- *Have staff/residents raised concerns/complaints?*
- *Is there local or national research to suggest there could be a problem?*

Protected Characteristic	No impact	Negative impact	Positive impact	Information source/s*	Comments/evidence
Race			x	CX	Information can be provided in several different formats and languages. We can use Language line for customers and use google translate for emails and text messaging. We will use data we have available to us through customer census forms and will ensure that we target any campaigns appropriately.
Disability			x		Reasonable adjustment can be made for customers. Office space can meet customers and is accessible. We ensure that we provide wrap around services for customers, particularly those with the highest level of need. We may identify these issues with the customer whilst working with them regarding their complaint. We provide support services, financial inclusion services and work in partnership with key partners such as NSC,

CUSTOMER COMPLAINTS POLICY



Protected Characteristic	No impact	Negative impact	Positive impact	Information source/s*	Comments/evidence
					DWP and CAB to support customers.
Gender	x				No Evidence
Transgender	x				No Evidence
Sexual orientation	x				No Evidence
Religion or belief			x		Data captured through customer census information allows us to ensure that we respond to a customer practice of religion or belief in a respectful way and being mindful of practices. Data ensures that we target campaigns appropriately.
Age	x				No Evidence
Marriage and Civil Partnership			x		All communications to joint tenants are sent separately to ensure consistency in access to information.
Pregnancy and Maternity	x				
Rural issue			x		A significant number of our homes are in rural communities. We ensure that we are accessible by several ways to contact and engage with us.
Social mobility	x				

* Possible information sources for assessing impact or understanding issues related to target group, such as:

- demographic data, studies of deprivation, statistics on health etc
- results of consultations, results of equality monitoring data, complaints, customer feedback
- information collected from partner agencies and groups, support groups, professional expertise, 'peer review', project leads/teams, inspection reports etc

Was there a negative impact identified in question 5? If yes go to question 6. if not go to question 7.

6. If "negative impact" identified in table (4) above, is it?

CUSTOMER COMPLAINTS POLICY



Legal	YES	NO
What is the level of impact?	YES	NO

If it is not legal and/or high impact (i.e.: if you have highlighted NO to legal and HIGH to impact) **then the document should be referred to Head of HR**

7. If positive impact has been identified in table 4 above, how can it be improved upon or maximised, either in this SPPF or others?

- Introduction of the customer portal will provide further visibility for customers around feedback.
- Regular communications via websites, leaflets, newsletter to inform customers about complaint data and how Alliance homes is learning from complaints.
- Quarterly meetings to be introduced with the customer panel to discuss recent complaints and learning and to see where we can make improvements.
- We will continue to monitor the data available to us and ensure that we learn from case outcomes and make necessary changes to service design and delivery to continuously improve and meet customer needs.

8. Full EIA (or if you decide full EIA is not necessary but some changes should be considered)

- *Are there changes you could introduce which would make this SPPF work better for this group of people?*
- *Is further research or consultation required?*

YES	NO
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9. Does this proposal have any potential Human Rights implications?

If yes, please describe (if necessary, please refer to the Alliance Homes Group Human Rights Policy)

- This policy meets the requirements of Article 14, Prohibition of discrimination, ensuring that all customers have equal access to service delivery, regardless of a protected characteristic.
- It also meets the requirement of Article 8, respect for family life and home, by ensuring that we provide a tailored, fair, and consistent approach out customers.