

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 2024.

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

The word complaint does not have to be used to identify a complaint, and when a customer expresses dissatisfaction, we will give the customer the choice to have a complaint raised. We will be led by the customer as to how best to deal with their dissatisfaction.

Sometimes it may be appropriate to deal with a customer query as a service request rather than a complaint, a service request is a request from a customer to put something right or where action can be taken immediately to resolve an issue. When this occurs, this will be on agreement with the customer, or upon their request, and will not exclude the customers right to pursue a complaint should they wish.

Service requests are not complaints but will be recorded, monitored and reviewed regularly.

If a customer is not satisfied with the response or resolution offered for a service request, this will then be raised as a complaint.

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

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

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 have 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.

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- 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.
- Disagreement with a decision we have made where there is another procedure involved in the decision, such as a dispute about service charges or successions.
- 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. Each complaint will be considered individually, and Alliance Homes may use its discretion as to whether we accept complaints outside of this time frame where there is good reason to do so.
- A complaint that falls under the Alliance Homes Managed Behaviour policy.
- Where legal proceedings have started. This is defined as details of the claim, such as the Claim Form and Particulars of Claim, having been filed at court.

2.2.1. 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 Housing Ombudsman.

Every complaint will be considered on its own merits.

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

2.3 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 the required repairs are progressed in an appropriate timeline.

2.4 Managed Behaviour

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.

Communication and Escalation Protocol During Investigations

- 2.5 Initial queries will always seek to be resolved by one of our teams where possible before a complaint is recorded. This does not take away the customers' right to make a complain
- 2.6 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.
- 2.7 Where a customer raises additional complaints during the complaint investigation, these will be incorporated into the complaint, however if the issues are unrelated to the original complaint or would unreasonably delay a response, then these would be logged as a new complaint.

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- 2.8. 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.
- 2.9 A complaint response for both Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaints will be provided to the customer when the answer is known, not when all outstanding actions are completed.

3.0 Policy Aim

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.

4.0 Who can make a complaint?

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.

5.0 How can a complaint be made?

- Telephone
- Letter
- E-Mail
- In person
- Social Media
- Connect – Alliance Homes customer portal
- 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.

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6.0. Complaint handling process

We have a defined 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.

At stage 1 of the complaints policy the complaint will be investigated by a Customer Complaints Investigator. We will communicate with you through your agreed method of communication and if required may arrange to meet you in person to resolve efficiently

If a customer remains unhappy after the stage 1 complaint, they may ask us to escalate to stage 2 of the complaints process.

The stage 2 is coordinated by our Customer Complaints Manager. A full investigation will be undertaken and a complete review of the previous response and subsequent actions of stage 1. To provide a quality check of the complaint and the proposed solution, the matter will be reviewed at a case conference, this will include a group of managers and senior managers who look at all complaints to ensure they have been fairly and consistently handled.

The Customer Complaints Investigator who completed the stage 1 investigation will be invited to attend the beginning of the case conference to discuss what actions they have investigated and how they came to their conclusion and will then be asked to leave the meeting, this is to ensure fairness and to remain independent.

The customer will also be given the opportunity to comment on any adverse findings before we determine our final response, this will happen within the 20 working days timescale. We will then further consider any customer comments made. We will then confirm or response to you.

If a complaint is about a third party such as a contractor, this will be handled through the Alliance Homes complaint handling process in the same way, customers will not be expected to go through 2 complaints processes.

7.0. Timescales

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

When acknowledging a complaint, Alliance Homes will set out in writing our understanding of the complaint, the outcome the customer is seeking and set out any aspects of the complaint that Alliance Homes is or is not responsible for. If there is any aspect of the complaint that is unclear a member of the complaints team will ask the customer for clarification.

Customers will receive a full response to their stage 1 complaint within 10 working days of the complaint being acknowledged.

The response will be provided to the customer when the answer is known, not when all outstanding actions are completed.

If a 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, or any agreed actions have not been completed satisfactorily they may ask us to escalate to a Stage 2, this should be requested within 10 working days where possible

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

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When escalating a complaint, Alliance Homes will set out in writing our understanding of the complaint, the outcome the customer is seeking and set out any aspects of the complaint that Alliance Homes is or is not responsible for. If there is any aspect of the complaint that is unclear the Customer Complaints Manager will ask the customer for clarification. A customer will not be required to provide reasons for requesting their complaint to be escalated to Stage 2.

A final response will be given after the stage 2 acknowledgement has been given and this will be within a 20-working 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 the reason why the extension is needed, and then 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.

The response will be provided to the customer when the answer is known, not when all outstanding actions are completed.

If a complaint falls outside of any of these timescales, we will agree with the customer suitable intervals to update them on their complaint.

Stage 2 is Alliance Homes final response to the complaint, if a customer remains unhappy after this stage the next steps are to escalate to the Housing Ombudsman.

Customers may also escalate to the Housing Ombudsman at any stage of the complaints process if the extension timescales of a complaint exceed those stated in the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code.

8.0 Housing Ombudsman

The role of the Housing Ombudsman is to resolve complaints between landlords and residents. This includes investigating the complaint independently to decide if the landlord or managing agent has acted appropriately, along with making decisions around compensation or other remedies if needed. The Housing Ombudsman support effective landlord and resident dispute resolution.

Customers can contact the Housing Ombudsman regarding enquiries and advice at any point before or during the complaint process.

The contact details are: Complaint form: <https://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/residents/make-a-complaint/>

Email: info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk

Phone: 0300 111 3000

Write to: Housing Ombudsman Service PO Box 1484 Unit D Preston PR2 0ET

9.0 . 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.

We also hold quarterly meetings with service managers to scrutinise themes and trends and consider where service improvements can be made as a result of these complaints.

10 Monitoring, consultation, and review

- 10.1. 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.
- 10.2. The Service Delivery Manager Customer Experience is responsible for the implementation and review of this policy.
- 10.3. Customers, colleagues, and service users are involved in giving feedback on this policy, leading to amendments where appropriate.
- 10.4. This policy, the Housing Ombudsman's self-assessment and the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code will be shared on the Alliance Homes website, and any updates will be publicised on the website and social media channels. This policy will also be shared in the welcome pack for new customer tenancies.
- 10.5. This policy will be reviewed within one year of its approval date.

11 Equality and Diversity

- 11.1. This policy is subject to a periodic Equality Impact Assessment (EIA).
- 11.2. 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.
- 11.3. The EIA also requires the policy author to consider whether the policy is likely to negatively impact on a person's Human Rights.
- 11.4. This policy and any other related Alliance Homes publications can be provided in other formats for those with visual, literacy or language difficulties.

12 Associated Documents

- 12.1. Complaints Handling Procedure
- 12.2. Housing Ombudsman Self-Assessment

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13 Version control and approval dates

Approval stage	Date completed
Equality Impact Assessment completed	April 2025
EIA reviewed by Equality & Diversity Manager	May 2025
SLT review / approval	May 2025
Board or Committee approval	TBA
Next review date	June 2026

14. Appendices

Appendix 1 – Equality Impact

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Appendix 1

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.*

- Service Director Customer Service Operations
- Service Manager Customer Experience
- Customer Experience Managers, ACT
- Lead 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, Connect 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.

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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 Customer Complaints 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.

Where a customer has shared disabilities or any vulnerabilities with us this is taken into account and reasonable adjustments made when managing customer complaints.

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 where we have been informed of a vulnerability. 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.

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Protected Characteristic	No impact	Negative impact	Positive impact	Information source/s*	Comments/evidence
					We provide support services, financial inclusion services and work in partnership with key partners such as NSC, 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.

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

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?

- 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.
- The life through a lens project and data collection will allow us to shape our services and make reasonable adjustments where required.

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?*

	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.