



# HONEYCOMB GROUP

## COMPLAINTS POLICY



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## Complaints Policy

Who's this for?	Honeycomb Group (Staffs Housing, Revival, Concrete and Glow)
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### 1. Introduction and Purpose

**1.1** The Honeycomb Group aims to provide high quality services for all customers. Our value of 'being dead genuine' means being authentic with customers and creating a memorable experience.

**1.2** There will be times when we get things wrong, and customers may have a reason to complain about the actions or activities of Honeycomb or the way they feel they have been dealt with. A customer may feel they have not received the standard of service they wanted or an outcome they expected.

**1.3** We will investigate complaints in a confidential and respectful manner, agreeing with the customer how they will be kept informed throughout the process. We will keep accurate records of all complaints.

**1.4** We will always offer the customer a choice over whether they want a response to put things right quickly, or they choose to request a formal complaint investigation through our internal process.

**1.5** We will take a positive and conciliatory approach to complaints. When we get it wrong, we will be open and transparent about it, apologise and learn from it. If a complaint is not upheld, we will explain why.

**1.6** Complaints will be treated as an opportunity to put something right or to do something better. They will be an indicator to learn from and will help prevent further problems from happening. Customers include people living in Honeycomb properties and accessing its

services. This may also include stakeholders such as local authorities, health agencies, partner organisations and contractors.



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**1.7** We will ensure that our complaints policy and approach complies with the requirements of the Housing Ombudsman and the Regulator of Social Housing.

**1.8** We will provide customers with information on their right to access the Ombudsman service and how the individual can engage with the Ombudsman about their complaint at any time.

**1.9** We will publish our Complaints Handling Code self-assessment as part of our annual complaints performance and service improvement report on our website, after it has been reported to our Board. The Board will publish its response to the report.

**1.10** We have a standard staff objective to work together and be accountable, to resolve complaints.

## **2. What is a complaint?**

**2.1** We regard a complaint 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 customer or group of customers.

**2.2** A customer does not have to use the word 'complaint' for it to be treated as such. Whenever a customer expresses dissatisfaction we will give them the choice to make a complaint. A complaint that is submitted via a third party or representative will be handled in line with the landlord's complaints policy.

**2.3** We must recognise the difference between a service request and a complaint. A service request is a request from a customer to us requiring action to be taken to put something right. Service requests are not complaints, but must be recorded, monitored and reviewed regularly.

**2.4** A complaint must be raised when the customer expresses dissatisfaction with the response to their service request, even if the handling of the service request remains ongoing. We will continue with our efforts to address the service request if the customer complains.

**2.5** An expression of dissatisfaction with services made through a survey is not defined as a complaint, though wherever possible, the customer completing the survey will be made

aware of how they can pursue a complaint if they wish to. When we ask for wider feedback about our services, we will provide details of how customers can complain separately.

## **3. Exclusion grounds**

**3.1** We will accept a complaint, and escalate a complaint, unless there is a valid reason not to do so.



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### 3.2 Exclusions include:

- The issue giving rise to the complaint occurred over 12 months ago. We will consider whether to apply discretion to accept complaints made outside this time limit where there are good reasons to do so
- 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
- Matters that have previously been considered under the complaints policy

**3.3** We will look at each complaint on its own merits and tell you the reason for our decision (and how we propose to address the customer's concerns) and inform the customer that they have the right to take that decision to the Housing Ombudsman.

## 4. Who can make a complaint?

### 4.1 We accept complaints from:

- A customer (tenant, leaseholder or shared owner, service user)
- Anyone who is in receipt of a service or is affected by a service that we provide
- Anyone who may potentially receive a service from us

**4.2** Customers can make a complaint via an advocate. An advocate could be a friend, relative, or an advocacy service such as the Citizens Advice Bureau. Where a complaint is made via an advocate we will obtain the customer's written consent. Where correspondence is received on behalf of a customer from a Councillor, MP, or Advocacy Service, consent will be assumed. An advocate can accompany or represent the customer throughout the complaints process.

## 5. How complaints can be made

**5.1** We accept complaints made in person, by phone, in writing, by email, our website and digitally. Our teams are aware of the complaints process and are able to pass details of the complaint to the appropriate team.

**5.2** Where a complaint or comment about service failure is made through social media, we will contact the customer via direct messages to protect their confidentiality and privacy. We aim to establish the preferred contact method for their complaint.

## 6. How complaints will be handled

**6.1** We have a two-stage complaints process.

**6.2** At each stage of the complaints process, complaint handlers must:

- deal with complaints on their merit, act independently, and have an open mind
- give the customer 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



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- consider the complexity of the complaint and whether the customer is vulnerable or at risk

**6.3** We will ensure appropriate remedies can be provided at any stage of the complaints process without the need for escalation.

## 7. Stage 1

**7.1** When a complaint is made, it will be acknowledged and logged at Stage 1 within 5 working days of receipt. We will set out our understanding of the complaint and be clear about which aspects of the complaint we are, and are not, responsible for. We will also acknowledge the outcomes the customer is seeking. We will seek clarification of the customer's views where this is necessary. We will provide a response to the complaint within 10 working days of the complaint being acknowledged. We will respond when the answer to the complaint is known, not when any outstanding actions required to address the issue have been completed. Our response will be in writing and include:

- the complaint stage
- the complaint definition
- our decision on the complaint
- the reasons for any decisions made, referencing relevant law, policy and good practice where relevant
- the details of any remedy offered
- details of any outstanding actions
- details of how to escalate the matter to Stage 2 if the customer is not satisfied with the answer

**7.2** In complex cases, where we are unable to investigate and respond within 10 working days, we may apply an extension to the complaint, we can apply anything up to 10 working days, allowing us 20 working days in total to investigate and respond to you the issues raised. In this case, we will provide an explanation to the customer and confirm a clear timeframe for when the response will be received.

**7.3** In exceptional circumstances, where we are unable to investigate and respond within 20 working days, we will contact the customer to discuss and agree a further extension. Where agreement over the extension period cannot be reached, we will provide the Housing Ombudsman's contact details so the customer can challenge our plan for responding and the proposed timeliness of our response.

**7.4** Where customers raise additional complaints during the investigation, these will be incorporated into the stage 1 response if they are related and the stage 1 response has not been issued. Where the stage 1 response has been issued, the new issues are unrelated to



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the issues already being investigated or it would unreasonably delay the response, the new issues must be logged as a new complaint.

### **8. Stage 2**

**8.1** Once Stage 1 has been completed, if all or part of the complaint is not resolved to the customer's satisfaction it will be progressed to Stage 2, unless an exclusion ground applies.

**8.2** A Stage 2 complaint will not be considered by the same person who considered the complaint at Stage 1.

**8.3** Customers are not required to explain their reasons for requesting a stage 2 consideration. We will make reasonable efforts to understand why a customer remains unhappy as part of the stage 2 response. We must be clear about which aspects of the complaint we are, and are not, responsible for and clarify any areas where this is not clear.

**8.4** We will acknowledge and log a complaint at Stage 2 within 5 working days of receipt. A response to the complaint will be provided within 20 working days of the complaint being acknowledged. We will respond when the answer to the complaint is known, not when any outstanding actions required to address the issue have been completed. Our response will be in writing and include:

- the complaint stage
- the complaint definition
- our decision on the complaint
- the reasons for any decisions made, referencing relevant law, policy and good practice where relevant
  
- the details of any remedy offered
- details of any outstanding actions
- details of how to escalate the matter to the Housing Ombudsman service if the customer remains dissatisfied.

**8.5** Where something has gone wrong we will recognise this and set out the actions the organisation has already taken, or intends to take, to put things right. These can include:

- Apologising
- Acknowledging where things have gone wrong and take into account the impact on the customer
- Providing an explanation, assistance
- Taking action if there has been delay
- Reconsidering or changing a decision
- Amending a record
- Providing a financial remedy
- Changing policies, procedures or practices

**8.6** The remedy offer must clearly set out what will happen and by when, in agreement with the customer where appropriate. Any remedy proposed must be followed through to completion and take into account guidance issued by the Ombudsman.



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**8.7** In exceptional circumstances where we are unable to respond within this timeframe, it may be extended. We will provide an explanation to the customer and confirm a clear timeframe for when the response will be received. This should not exceed a further 10 working days without good reason. If an extension beyond 20 working days is required to enable us to respond to the complaint fully, we will agree this with customer. Where agreement over an extension period cannot be reached, we will provide the Housing Ombudsman's contact details so the customer can challenge our plan for responding and the proposed timeliness of our response.

**8.8** We will clearly communicate in writing any decision we make to decline to escalate a complaint to Stage 2. In doing so, we will explain our reasons for not escalating as well as confirm the customer's right to approach the Ombudsman about our decision.

**8.9** If a customer remains dissatisfied with our final stage 2 response, we will provide details of how to escalate the matter to the Ombudsman Service.

### **9. Customer communication**

**9.1** We will maintain regular contact with a customer throughout the complaints process, even if there is no new information. We will agree with the customer suitable intervals for keeping them informed about their complaint, either verbally or in writing.

### **10. Compensation**

**10.1** In some circumstances, it will be appropriate to offer compensation as part of a complaint response. Compensation offers will be considered on a case-by-case basis and will take account of the following:

- the length of time that a situation has been ongoing
- the frequency with which something has occurred
- the severity of any service failure or omission
- the number of different failures
- the cumulative impact on the customer
- the customer's particular circumstances or vulnerabilities.

### **11. Restrictions**

**11.1** We may place restrictions on a customer's contact with us where their behaviour becomes unacceptable, impacts upon our ability to consider their complaint or to serve other customers or they engage in abusive or threatening behaviour.

**11.2** In these instances, we will explain the reason for our decision and how we propose to engage with the customer to address their concerns. We will ensure our decision takes account of the customer's needs and demonstrates regard for the provisions of the Equality Act 2010.



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### **12. Promoting awareness of our approach to complaints**

**12.1** We will ensure that our complaints policy and process, the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code and the Housing Ombudsman scheme (including contact information) is promoted in leaflets, posters, newsletters, online and as part of our regular correspondence with customers.

### **13. Diversity and inclusion**

**13.1** We will ensure that our complaints policy and process is accessible to all customers. This means we will:

- Fulfil our legal duties under the Equality Act 2010 to advance equality of opportunity and prevent discrimination
- Adapt our approach and make reasonable adjustments to ensure a customer can raise and address their complaint with us.
- Ensure that all staff who handle complaints receive diversity and inclusion training

### **14. Data Protection and Confidentiality**

**14.1** For processing, storing and sharing the personal data associated with this policy, we will ensure that it is carried out in accordance with current data protection legislation (UK GDPR and Data Protection Act 2018).

### **15. Learning from complaints**

**15.1** We are committed to learning from complaints to establish a positive complaint handling culture. We have a complaints officer in post, all employees understand our expectations and senior management considers themes and trends to enable service improvements to be identified and delivered.

**15.2** We will ensure that our Board appoints one of its members to have lead responsibility for complaints and the Board will receive regular information on complaints to enable it to understand our complaints handling performance.

**15.3** We will seek feedback from customers after a complaint has been closed and use the findings to learn and improve our approach and the customer experience, working closely with our scrutiny group and engaged customers.

**15.4** We will publish summary details of complaints and learning and improvements arising from them in our annual report and in our engagement with customers.

### **16. Performance measures**

**16.1** As a minimum, we will collect and report the following measures. These are all Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs) which the Regulator of Social Housing requires us to collect:





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- Complaints relative to the size of the landlord (Complaint Handling - CH01)
- Complaints responded to within Complaint Handling Code timescales (Complaint Handling - CH02)
- Satisfaction with the landlord's approach to handling complaints (Tenant Perception - TP09)

**16.2** If we are unable to comply with the Code due to exceptional circumstances, such as a cyber incident, we will inform the Ombudsman. We will provide information to customers who may be affected, and publish this on our website, with a timescale for returning to compliance with the Code.

## **17. Review**

**17.1** This policy shall be reviewed every three years. We will also carry out a self-assessment and policy review following a significant restructure, merger and/or change in procedures. We may be asked to review and update the self-assessment following an Ombudsman investigation.

**June 2024**