

Complaints and Compliments Policy

Date written: April 2009

Date reviewed: December 2022

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.

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.

Definitions:

Customer – A tenant, shared owner, leaseholder, service user 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 staff 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 staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting an individual or group of residents.

Associated documents: Our Promise, Service Standard Leaflets, Compensation Policy, Managing Unacceptable Behaviour Policy, Complaints Procedure, Tenant Voice Strategy.

Date for review: March 2026

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 or our services.
- 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 or enquire about a complaint. This will include by letter, online including social media, in person, or 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.
- 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 other feedback 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 six months after the individual first became aware of the issue they want to complain about.

Resolving the complaint:

2.12 We will always attempt to resolve a complaint at the first point of contact, 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 staff 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 the complaint
- 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.
- Confirming the customer is happy with the resolution.
- Recording the issue and outcome.

There are times when our attempts to resolve complaints 'at point of contact' 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:

Resolution

On receipt of a complaint this will be acknowledged and logged within 5 working days. A response to the complaint will be made within 10 working days of the complaint being logged.

Review

If the customer remains dissatisfied they can request a review. This will be carried out by a Head of Service or Director, in collaboration with two Members of the Customer Services Committee. A request for a review will be acknowledged within 5 working days and a response will be sent within 20 working days of the request for escalation.

In exceptional circumstances we may need to extend timescales for responding, anything over 20 working days will be agreed with the customer.

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 of their complaint.

- 2.13 If a complaint relates to a serious / public interest this will also be considered under our Whistleblowing Policy. This will also apply to complaints made anonymously.
- 2.14 We will assess any claims for compensation on an individual basis as detailed in our Compensation Policy.
- 2.15 We are committed to providing an accessible and inclusive complaints process in accordance with our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy.
- 2.16 We will aim to comply with the regulator's Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Service Standard and the Housing Ombudsman Complaints Handling Code.
- 2.17 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).
- 2.18 We are committed to use customer feedback as a way of learning more about our customers and their needs and expectations.
- 2.19 Learning from compliments will be used to ensure that customer feedback drives improvement in the business.

3. Responsibility for implementation

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

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 We believe all people should be treated with dignity and respect regardless of their age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race (including, nationality, ethnic or national origins), religion, belief or non-belief, sex, or sexuality or by association with someone with any of these characteristics or perception of having any of these characteristics.