

Auckland Home Solutions Resolving Complaints Policy

1. Purpose

- 1.1. Auckland Home Solutions CIC (AHS) aims to provide a positive customer experience; however, we acknowledge that sometimes things go wrong, and customers complain. When this happens, we aim to be as helpful as possible to those customers and provide a process which is simple and easy to follow.
- 1.2. AHS take all complaints about our service seriously, because they make it clear to us where we need to improve. We work hard to resolve them quickly and fairly and use them as opportunities to learn and improve the service we deliver.
- 1.3. This policy governs how AHS resolves complaints received.
- 1.4. AHS operate within the Housing Ombudsman Complaints Handling Code.

2. What is a complaint?

- 2.1. The Housing Ombudsman Service’s definition of 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”*.
- 2.2. Complaints are different to everyday enquiries such as reporting repairs or reporting anti-social behaviour. Examples of a complaint can include where the Association has:
 - Failed to do something that should have been done.
 - Failed to meet service standards.
 - Treated a customer unfairly.
 - Made a mistake.
 - Not carried out a repair properly
- 2.3. A service request is a request from a customer to AHS requiring action to be taken to put something right. Service requests are not complaints, but must be recorded and, monitored and reviewed accordingly
- 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.
- 2.5. An expression of dissatisfaction with services made through a survey is not defined as a complaint. However, AHS will provide information on how to make a complaint.

3. Exclusions

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3.1 Some problems are not covered by this Complaints Policy. These include the following:

- The issue giving rise to the complaint occurred over twelve months ago. However, it may not be appropriate to exclude any complaints or concern regarding safeguarding or health and safety issues.
- 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.

3.2 If AHS decide not to accept a complaint, a detailed explanation will be provided to the customer setting out the reasons why the matter is not suitable for the complaints process and the right to take that decision to the Ombudsman. If the Ombudsman does not agree that the exclusion has been fairly applied, the Ombudsman may instruct AHS to take on the complaint.

3.3 AHS will accept complaints referred to them within 12 months of the issue occurring or the customer becoming aware of the issue, unless they are excluded on other grounds. AHS will consider whether to apply discretion to accept complaints made outside of this time limit where there are good reasons to do so.

4. Who can make a complaint?

4.1. This policy applies to all customers of AHS.

4.2. AHS view customers as:

- Customers living in our homes.
- Their families, informal and formal carers and visitors
- Stakeholders
- Advocates
- Anybody using our service(s)

5. How can a customer make a complaint?

5.1. Complainants can make complaints in the following ways:

- Email: info@ahscic.co.uk
- Tel: 0191 5870848
- In person: with a member of staff
- AHS website: www.aucklandhomesolutionscic.co.uk
- By Letter: First Floor, Severn House, Mandale Business Park, Durham, DH1 1TH

5.2. A copy of this complaints policy can be found:

- In our office(s)
- AHS website: www.aucklandhomesolutionscic.co.uk
- Within new customer sign up pack
- Care Providers

5.3. If a customer needs help to make a complaint, they can ask a family member, friend,

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carer, or advocate to help. We will request confirmation that the complainant is comfortable with a 3rd party dealing with the complaint on their behalf at onset. This may be given verbally or in written format.

6. Complaint Process

- 6.1. By informing AHS what has gone wrong, we can help put things right; at AHS we aim for a first-time fix approach.
- 6.2. AHS will acknowledge complaints within 5 working days of the complaint being received.
- 6.3. To deal with complaints efficiently we have a 2-stage process. We will deal with a complaint at Stage 1 initially and pass through to Stage 2 if this is needed.
- 6.4. **Stage 1** - After making a complaint, your feedback will be passed to the Complaints Officer. The Complaints Officer will allocate complaints handling to another person. The complaint handler appointed must have appropriate complaint handling skills and no conflicts of interest. They will then contact you to discuss the problem / issues raised with you and ask you how you would like your problem / issue to be dealt with and resolved. Wherever possible, we will try to resolve your problem immediately. AHS will provide a full response to Stage 1 complaints within 10 days of the complaint being acknowledged. Exceptionally, AHS provide an explanation to the customer containing a clear timeframe for when the response will be received. This will not exceed a further 10 working days without good reason and will be agreed by both parties.
- 6.5. 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 the issues already being investigated or it would unreasonably delay the response, the new issues must be logged as a new complaint.
- 6.6. **Stage 1 – Outcome**

Once AHS have completed their investigation into the complaint, an outcome letter will be sent to the customer covering the following in clear, plain language:

- The complaint stage.
- The complaint definition
- The decision of the complaint
- The reasons for any decisions made.
- The details of any remedy offered to put things right.
- Details of any outstanding actions
- Details of how to escalate the matter to stage 2 if the customer is not satisfied with the answer.

- 6.7. **Stage 2** - If you are unhappy with the response from Stage 1, you can then escalate your complaint to Stage 2 by contacting the Complaints Officer to request that your complaint

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is reviewed (unless an Exclusion ground now applies – in these instances, AHS will clearly communicate in writing its reasons for not escalating as well as the customer’s right to approach the Ombudsman about its decision). AHS will acknowledge your complaint within 5 working days from the complaint being received. The Complaints Officer will then look at how your problem / issue has been managed and decide whether there is more we could do. AHS will send you a full response within 20 working days of the complaint being acknowledged. Exceptionally, AHS may provide an explanation to the customer containing a clear timeframe for when the response will be received. This will not exceed a further 20 days without good reason and will be clearly explained to the customer.

6.7. **Stage 2 - Outcome**

Once AHS have completed their investigation into the complaint, an outcome letter will be sent to the customer covering the following in clear, plain language:

- The complaint stage.
- The complaint definition
- The decision of the complaint
- The reasons for any decisions made
- The details of any remedy offered to put things right.
- Details of any outstanding actions
- Details of how to escalate the matter to the Housing Ombudsman if the customer remains unsatisfied.

6.8. Stage 2 is AHS’s final response and will involve all suitable staff needed to issue such a response.

7. **Contact The Housing Ombudsman Service**

7.1 You can ask the Housing Ombudsman Service to escalate your complaint after you have completed AHS complaints procedure.

7.2 The Housing Ombudsman Service is contactable via:

- www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/residents/make-a-complaint
- Tel: 0300 111 3000 (Monday – Friday 9:15 to 17:15)
- PO Box 152, Liverpool, L33 7WQ

8. **Managing Agents**

8.1 Some of AHS properties are managed via a third party – Managing Agents. The complaints process which will be followed for these particular properties will be that of the Managing Agent. AHS will ensure they have reviewed the Managing Agent Complaints Policy to ensure it complies with the Housing Ombudsman Complaints Handling Code. AHS will meet with the Managing Agent and review its complaints on a quarterly basis and identify if learnings can be made.

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9. Compensation

- 9.1. Once a complaint has been investigated it may be appropriate to offer service recovery and/or discretionary compensation.
- 9.2. In response to the complaint, where compensation is offered, we will write to the customer informing them why we are offering compensation and what form this will take.
- 9.3. Customers will be made aware that acceptance of compensation offered, and any other action agreed, is acceptance of resolution of the issue.

10. Unacceptable Behaviour / Unreasonable Complaints and/or Persistence

- 10.1. AHS believe that all customers have a right to be heard, understood and respected, we also believe that staff have these same rights. AHS expect our customers to be polite and well-mannered when contacting us. We do not tolerate aggressive or abusive behaviour.
- 10.2. If customers are unnecessarily aggressive or abusive, the customers behaviour will be managed through a separate process, for example, explanations, warnings or contact restrictions. AHS will continue to investigate or escalate the complaint.
- 10.3. A very small number of complaints may be classified as unreasonable because of the way or frequency that complaints are raised with staff, or how complainants respond when they receive feedback about the complaint. These may include customers who make frequent complaints which are not valid; who persistently make the same complaint; who request a complaint to be escalated when we have fully responded to all points; or are seeking an unreasonable or unrealistic outcome. AHS will investigate complaints raised but will manage this alongside the Managing Unreasonable Policy.

11. Compliments

- 11.1. Compliments provide valuable positive customer feedback, enable AHS to develop services and raise staff morale and motivation. We share compliments across the Association to learn from best practice.

12. Recording

- 12.1. Administration with regard to the complaints will be handled by the Complaints Officer. This includes ensuring all correspondence / information is stored within the complaint database file, in line with GDPR and Confidentiality Policy.
- 12.2. To minimise reoccurring complaints of the same nature, the Complaints Officer will ensure that any lessons learnt are captured within the complaints database and shared within the Association as appropriate.

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12.3. AHS will report annually to Board on all aspects of complaints handling performance.

13. Self-assessment, reporting and Compliance

- AHS will produce an annual complaints performance and service improvement report. This report will be published on the AHS Board and the AHS website which will include the Board response to the report

14. Continuous Learning & Improvement

AHS will appoint a Complaints Officer to take responsibility for complaints handling, including liaison with the Housing Ombudsman and ensuring complaints are reported to AHS Board. In addition, a member of the Board will be appointed to have lead responsibility for complaints to support a positive complaint culture. This person is referred to as the Member Responsible for Complaints (“the MRC”).

As a minimum, the MRC and AHS Board must receive:

- Regular updates on the volume, categories and outcomes of complaints, alongside complaint handling performance
- Regular reviews of issues and trends arising from complaint handling
- Regular updates on the outcomes of the Ombudsman’s investigations and progress made in complying with orders related to severe maladministration findings, and the annual complaints performance and service improvement report

15. Staff Training

15.1. Staff will be trained to ensure the proper implementation of the Complaints Policy and supporting procedures, and this will be included in induction training for all new members of staff. Staff will be trained to adopt a positive attitude to customer feedback. They will be expected:

- To try to put things right quickly if this is within their power. If it is not, they will refer the matter to the appropriate person as outlined in the Complaints Policy
- To give appropriate information to make it easy for someone to complain in a way that suits them.

16. Policy Review

16.1. This policy will be reviewed periodically and every three years. It can also be updated at any time to incorporate suggested improvements, lessons learnt, best practice guidelines and changes to legislation.

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Equality Impact Assessment For This Policy

Is it likely that the Policy could have a positive or negative impact on minority ethnic groups? What evidence (either presumed or otherwise) do you have for this?	Yes		Please explain It is possible there could be language barriers. AHS would overcome this for example, by providing easy read documents or a translation service.
Is it likely that the policy could have a positive or negative impact due to gender (including pregnancy and maternity)? What evidence (either presumed or otherwise) do you have for this?		No	Please explain
Is it likely that the policy could have a positive or negative impact due to disability? What evidence (either presumed or otherwise) do you have for this?	Yes		Please explain. It is possible that due to learning difficulty or mental health concerns that the process for complaints may need to be adapted in order for the complainant to be able to put forward their complaint. The policy is for guidance and should be adapted as required to ensure this does not happen.
Is it likely that the policy could have a positive or negative impact due to sexual orientation? What evidence (either presumed or otherwise) do you have for this?		No	Please explain
Is it likely that the policy could have a positive or negative impact due to their age? What evidence (either presumed or otherwise) do you have for this?		No	Please explain
Is it likely that the policy could have a positive or negative impact due to their religious belief? What evidence (either presumed or otherwise) do you have for this?		No	Please explain
Is it likely that the policy could have a positive or negative impact on people with dependants/caring responsibilities? What evidence		No	Please explain

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(either presumed or otherwise) do you have for this?			
Is it likely that the policy could have a positive or negative impact due to them being transgender or transsexual? What evidence (either presumed or otherwise) do you have for this?		No	Please explain
Is it likely that the policy could have a positive or negative impact due to their marital or civil partnership status? What evidence (either presumed or otherwise) do you have for this?		No	Please explain
Can any adverse impact be justified on the grounds of promoting equality of opportunity for a particular group? (For example, the policy may be deliberately designed to promote equality for disabled people but may run the risk of this being at the expense of nondisabled people is permissible under law).		No	Please explain
Has this policy been amended or developed in the last review in order to promote equality of opportunity for any particular group? (please note any changes made)	Yes		Please explain. Equality Impact Assessment Completed for this policy. AHS website been updated to include a link for customers to make a complaint making complaint reporting more accessible to everyone.
Has the policy been amended or developed to take account of changes in legislation, statutory guidance or accepted good practice?	Yes		Please explain. Amended as part of the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code April 2024

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