

## **Auckland Home Solutions CIC** **Resolving Complaints Policy**

### **1. Purpose**

- 1.1. Auckland Home Solutions CIC (AHS) aims to provide positive customer experience; however, we acknowledge that sometimes things go wrong, and customers may need to 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 takes 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 operates within the Housing Ombudsman Complaints Handling Code April 2024.

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

- 2.1. AHS uses the Housing Ombudsman Service's definition of a complaint, which 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. The word 'complaint' does not have to be used for it to be treated as such. Whenever a customer expresses dissatisfaction, we will offer the choice to make a complaint.
- 2.3. A complaint that is submitted via a third party or representative will also be handled in line with this complaints policy. AHS will liaise with the representative once the appropriate consent has been obtained or with the Power of Attorney being established.
- 2.4. Complaints are different to everyday enquiries, such as reporting repairs or reporting anti-social behaviour. Examples of a complaint can include where we have:
  - 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.
- 2.5. A service request is a request from a customer to AHS requiring action to be taken and/or to put something right. Service requests are not complaints, but must be recorded, monitored and reviewed in accordance with the Service Request policy.
- 2.6. A complaint must be raised if a customer expresses dissatisfaction with the response to their service request, even if the handling of the service request remains ongoing. In this situation, AHS will continue efforts to address the service request regardless of the

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complaint being raised.

- 2.7. 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, as the customer has the right to do so. The person handling the survey results will ensure that the Customer is provided with this information as the survey will remind customers of their right to complain, should they be dissatisfied with our services.
- 2.8. No customer will be treated negatively as a result of raising a complaint with AHS as we view complaints as an opportunity to further improve the service we offer and therefore appreciate customers taking the time to raise their concerns with us.

### **3. Who can make a complaint?**

- 3.1. This policy applies to all customers of AHS.
- 3.2. AHS view customers as:
- Customers who are living in our homes.
  - Their families, informal and formal carers and visitors
  - Stakeholders e.g. Superior Landlords
  - Advocates - formal & informal
  - Anybody using our service(s), e.g. repairs and maintenance, general visitors to the site within a customer's home.

### **4. How can a customer make a complaint?**

- 4.1. Customers can make complaints in the following ways:
- Email: [complaints@ahscic.co.uk](mailto:complaints@ahscic.co.uk)
  - Tel: 0191 587 0848
  - In person: with a member of staff
  - AHS website: [www.aucklandhomesolutionscic.co.uk](http://www.aucklandhomesolutionscic.co.uk)
  - By Letter: First Floor, Severn House, Mandale Business Park, Durham, DH1 1TH
- 4.2. A copy of this complaints policy can be found:
- In our office(s)
  - AHS website: [www.aucklandhomesolutionscic.co.uk](http://www.aucklandhomesolutionscic.co.uk)
  - Within the new customer sign-up pack
  - Care Providers – have a copy of AHS's complaints policy and can support with access.
- 4.3. If a customer needs help to make a complaint, they can ask a family member, friend, carer, or advocate to help. We will request confirmation that the customer is comfortable with a 3<sup>rd</sup> party dealing with the complaint on their behalf at the onset. This may be given verbally or in written format.
- 4.4. AHS will record consent and/or the relevant Power of Attorney documentation for the 3<sup>rd</sup> party to deal with the complaint in line with General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) practices and AHS's GDPR policies and procedures.

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## 5. Exclusions

5.1. Some matters 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 concerns 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 in court.
- Matters that have previously been considered under the Complaints Policy.

5.2. If AHS decides that a matter should not be dealt with via the Complaints Policy, 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.

5.3. 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.

5.4. AHS will consider individual circumstances when considering exclusions to ensure a personalised response rather than a 'blanket approach' to such situations.

## 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. 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.

6.3. **Stage 1** - After making a complaint, this will be passed on to the person who manages the complaints procedure at AHS. This person is referred to as the Complaints Officer within this policy. The Complaints Officer's job title is formerly noted as AHS's Customer Engagement Officer, and they will acknowledge receipt of the complaint within 5 working days.

6.4. The complaint will then be allocated to the most appropriate and skilled person to resolve the issue. They will contact you to discuss the problem in more detail and clarify what you consider to be a good resolution. Wherever possible the aim will be to bring the situation to a satisfactory conclusion during this discussion.

6.5. Where this is not possible AHS will make further investigations, and the Complaints Officer will provide a full written response to the Stage 1 complaint within 10 working days

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of the complaint being acknowledged.

- 6.6. If, in exceptional circumstances, AHS cannot adhere to this time scale AHS's Complaints Officer will communicate this to you, outlining a clear timeframe for completion (not to exceed a further 10 working days without good reason and will be agreed by both parties). The customer will also be given the contact details for the Housing Ombudsman at this time.
- 6.7. 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.
- 6.8. Where the Stage 1 response has been issued, and the new issues are unrelated to the issues already being investigated, or it would unreasonably delay the response, the new issues will be logged as a new complaint.

#### 6.9. Stage 1 – Outcome

Once AHS has completed its investigation into the complaint, an outcome letter will be sent to the customer covering the following points 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 outcome.
- 6.10. **Stage 2** - If the customer is unhappy with the Stage 1 response, they can escalate the complaint to Stage 2 by contacting the Complaints Officer and requesting that the complaint is reviewed unless an Exclusion now applies as referenced in Point 5 of this policy. The customer does not have to give a reason for the review. (If an Exclusion applies, AHS will write to give details of the reasons why the matter is not suitable for the complaints process and highlight the right to take the decision to the Housing Ombudsman.)
  - 6.11. AHS or the Complaints Officer will acknowledge the escalation request within 5 working days.
  - 6.12. The Performance and Improvement Manager will review the way the complaint has been investigated and managed and the outcome decision to see if there is any more that can be done to resolve the matter and provide a full written response to the Stage 2 complaint within 20 working days of the complaint being acknowledged.
  - 6.13. If, in exceptional circumstances, AHS cannot adhere to this time scale AHS will communicate this to you, outlining a clear timeframe for completion (not to exceed a

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further 20 working days without good reason and will be agreed by both parties). AHS will also provide customers with the Housing Ombudsman's details when we inform them of an extension.

#### 6.14. Stage 2 - Outcome

Once AHS has completed its investigation into the complaint, an outcome letter will be sent to the customer covering the following points 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
- Reference to any relevant policy, law and good practice where appropriate.
- Details of how to escalate the matter to the Housing Ombudsman if the customer is not satisfied with the outcome.

6.15. Where something has gone wrong AHS will acknowledge this and set out the actions it has already taken, or intends to take, to put things right. These can include:

- Apologising.
- Acknowledging where things have gone wrong.
- Providing an explanation, assistance or reasons.
- Taking action if there has been delay.
- Reconsidering or changing a decision.
- Amending a record or adding a correction or addendum.
- Providing a financial remedy.
- Changing policies, procedures or practices.

6.16. Stage 2 is AHS's final response and will involve all suitable staff at AHS who are required to issue such a response.

### 7. The Housing Ombudsman Service

- 7.1 You can contact the Housing Ombudsman Service at any stage of your complaint for advice and support. The website also provides information on how to complain and can be a useful source of support for customers.
- 7.2 If you have completed all stages of AHS's complaints procedure and are not satisfied with the outcome, you can escalate your complaint to the Housing Ombudsman Service.
- 7.3 The Housing Ombudsman Service is contactable via:
- [www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/residents/make-a-complaint](http://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

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- 8.1 Some of AHS's properties are managed by a third party called a 'Managing Agent'. The complaints process for residents of these properties will be that of the Managing Agent.
- 8.2 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 every 3 months to review complaints and identify any lessons to be learned.
- 8.3 Where a landlord's complaint response is handled by a third party at any stage, it must form part of the 2-stage complaints process set out in this Code.
- 8.4 All complaints handled by a third party must be reported to the Board every 3 months as a minimum.

## **9. Compensation**

- 9.1. Once a complaint has been investigated, it may be appropriate to offer service recovery and/or discretionary compensation. This will be managed in line with AHS's Compensation Policy.
- 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 upon, is acceptance of the issue being resolved to their satisfaction (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 the same rights. AHS expects our customers to be polite and well-mannered when contacting us. We will (do) not tolerate aggressive or abusive behaviour.
- 10.2. If customers are unnecessarily aggressive or abusive, their behaviour will be managed through a separate process, for example, explanations, warnings or contact restrictions. AHS will continue to investigate or escalate the complaint. AHS will refer to the Managing Unreasonable Behaviour policy in this instance.
- 10.3. A very small number of complaints may be classified as unreasonable due to the frequency of complaints; the way in which complaints are raised with staff; or how customers respond when they receive feedback about the complaint. These may include customers who:
  - Make frequent complaints which are not valid.
  - Persistently make the same complaint.
  - Request a complaint to be escalated when AHS are in the process of carrying out

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an investigation into the initial complaint and have not yet responded to all the issues raised within the relevant timelines.

- Are seeking an unreasonable or unrealistic outcome.

AHS will investigate complaints raised but will manage this alongside the Managing Unreasonable Behaviour Policy.

## **11. Compliments**

- 11.1. Compliments provide valuable positive customer feedback, enabling AHS to continually develop services for customers, as well as raising staff morale and motivation. We share compliments across the Company to learn from best practice.

## **12. Recording**

- 12.1. The complaints will be handled by the Complaints Officer. This includes ensuring that all correspondence/information is stored within the complaint database file, in line with the GDPR and Confidentiality Policy; a copy of this policy is available on our website.
- 12.2. To minimise recurring complaints of the same nature and ensure continuous improvement, the Complaints Officer will ensure that any lessons learnt are captured within the complaints database and shared internally within AHS in accordance with our GDPR and Confidentiality Policy.
- 12.3. AHS will report complaints' performance via our Performance Measures Report to the Board, every 3 months, as a minimum. AHS will also report its Complaint Handling Code Annual Submissions to the Board to be reviewed in advance of our submission to the Housing Ombudsman Service.

## **13. Self-assessment, Reporting and Compliance**

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

## **14. Continuous Learning & Improvement**

- 14.1. The Complaints Officer will take responsibility for complaints handling, including liaison with the Housing Ombudsman and ensuring complaints are reported to AHS's Board. In addition, a member of the Board has been appointed to take responsibility for complaints and support a positive complaint culture. This person is referred to as the Member Responsible for Complaints ("the MRC").
- 14.2 As a minimum, the MRC and AHS Board must receive:
- Regular updates on the volume, categories and outcomes of complaints, alongside complaint handling performance. (Minimum every 3 months).
  - Regular reviews of issues and trends arising from complaint handling
  - Regular updates on the outcomes of the Ombudsman's investigations and progress

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made in complying with orders related to severe maladministration findings, and the annual complaints performance and service improvement report.

## 15. Staff Training

- 15.1. On commencement of employment all staff will undertake training appropriate to their role in relation to the Complaints Policy and supporting procedures as part of their induction. Mandatory refresher training will also be completed by relevant employees on an annual basis to ensure continued understanding and compliance with the policy.
- 15.2. This will also be supported by information sharing, procedural updates and training identified in response to 'lessons learnt' from reviewing our handling of complaints.
- 15.3. The aim of the above is to nurture a positive attitude to customer feedback, seeing it as a useful tool to support continual improvement of the service we provide for our customers. Staff 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 person responsible for managing complaints (Customer Engagement Officer)
  - Give appropriate information to make it easy for someone to complain in a way that suits the customer. Alternative ways of making a complaint are mentioned in section 4 of this Policy.

## 16. Policy Review

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

## Equality Impact Assessment for This Policy

Is it likely that the Policy <u>could</u> have a positive or negative impact on customers from minority ethnic groups? What evidence (either presumed or otherwise) do you have for this?	Yes	It is possible there could be language barriers. AHS would overcome this for example, by providing a translation service. In accordance with AHS's service improvement plan, developing our website includes accessibility functions and translating tools to prevent any ethnic groups from being excluded from accessing our complaints policy. Improved recording of customer characteristics will enable us to enhance our analysis of complaints to better understand any impacts for customers with protected characteristics in future.
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Is it likely that the policy <b>could</b> have a positive or negative impact on customers due to gender (including pregnancy and maternity)? What evidence (either presumed or otherwise) do you have for this?		<b>No</b>	AHS has not excluded any customers based on gender, maternity or other within this policy.
Is it likely that the policy <b>could</b> have a positive or negative impact on customers with a disability? What evidence (either presumed or otherwise) do you have for this?	<b>Yes</b>		<p>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. AHS will only look to deal with a complaint through a customer's representative as long as the relevant consent and/or Power of Attorney documentation has been provided, there could be delays within the complaint being responded to within this time. AHS are therefore to request such details as Power of Attorney documentation at the point of a tenancy sign-up and annually in case there are any changes.</p> <p>It is possible there could be language barriers. AHS would overcome this for example, by providing easy-to-read documents. In accordance with AHS's service improvement plan, we are working to produce a final easy-read document that can be supplied to customers where required. AHS are also developing our website to include accessibility functions to prevent any groups from being excluded from accessing our complaints policy.</p>
Is it likely that the policy <b>could</b> have a positive or negative impact on customers due to sexual orientation? What evidence (either presumed or otherwise) do you have for this?		<b>No</b>	AHS do not exclude any customers based on sexuality. AHS's demographic is inclusive of all sexual orientation.
Is it likely that the policy <b>could</b> have a positive or negative impact on customers due to their age? What evidence (either presumed or otherwise) do you have for this?	<b>Yes</b>		Older customers may have communication issues such as sight or hearing impairments or with the use of IT. AHS's Housing Staff are to provide additional support through our Enhanced Housing Management Service on site visits if this should occur.

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Is it likely that the policy <b>could</b> have a positive or negative impact on customers due to their religious belief? What evidence (either presumed or otherwise) do you have for this?		<b>No</b>	In line with AHS's Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity policy, customers are not subject to discrimination as a result of their religious background. As a result of the CEO change happening in October this policy is due to be reviewed by the Board by the end of March 2026.  Enhanced recording of customer characteristics will enable us to better assess impacts in future.
Is it likely that the policy <b>could</b> have a positive or negative impact on customers with dependents/caring responsibilities? What evidence (either presumed or otherwise) do you have for this?		<b>No</b>	Due to the nature of our housing stock type, AHS will only grant tenancy based upon their need for support. If a customer does not require support, we would not offer tenancy. On these premises, a customer is not likely to have caring responsibilities.
Is it likely that the policy <b>could</b> have a positive or negative impact on customers due to being transgender or transsexual? What evidence (either presumed or otherwise) do you have for this?		<b>No</b>	Refer to ED&I Policy.
Is it likely that the policy <b>could</b> have a positive or negative impact on customers due to their marital or civil partnership status? What evidence (either presumed or otherwise) do you have for this?		<b>No</b>	Refer to ED&I Policy.
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 non-disabled people is permissible under law).		<b>No</b>	Not applicable to this Policy.
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)	<b>Yes</b>		AHS website has been updated to include a link for customers to make a complaint making complaint reporting more accessible.

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Has the policy been amended or developed to take account of changes in legislation, statutory guidance or accepted good practice?	<b>Yes</b>	<p>Versions 3 and 4 of this policy have been amended and reviewed annually to develop AHS's compliance with the code and to stay up to date with relevant legislation in accordance with the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code April 2024.</p>
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