

## **About this Policy**

This policy is designed to effectively manage complaints about Aves Housing's services with a focus on learning lessons and improving services. Complaints are a core Aves Housing service

## **Complaints Policy**

At Aves Housing we aim to deliver excellent services to residents but we recognise that sometimes things go wrong and, when this happens, we want to put things right to stop it from happening again. We value feedback from residents and will use this to improve our services.

If there is a cause for complaint, we want to make sure the process is easy, and our aim is to resolve any issue as quickly as possible. We will thoroughly investigate and review all complaints.

## **What is a complaint?**

'an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the landlord, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting a resident or group of residents.'

A resident does not have to use the word 'complaint' for it to be treated as such. Whenever a resident expresses dissatisfaction Aves Housing will give you 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.

## **What is a Service Request?**

Service requests are requests made by residents requiring action from Aves Housing to put something right, such as a missed appointment, or a complaint about a neighbour. Where these are issues that can be easily put right by contacting a contractor on the resident's behalf, or raising a case for a Housing Officer to investigate antisocial behaviour, for example, we will not raise these as a complaint. If, however, the resident is dissatisfied with the repetitiveness of issues with handling

a repair, or the resident is dissatisfied with how we've managed previous complaints of ASB, for example, then the issue should be logged as a formal complaint.

### **Escalation of Service Request to a Complaint**

"When an issue arises that either should not or could not be resolved as a Service Request, then the member of staff should log a call on the ActiveH CRM and raise a task to the Customer Services team."

### **What is not a complaint?**

Some areas of dissatisfaction fall outside the scope of our complaints policy and we will not investigate them as a complaint. These are when:

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- The issue that is being complained about happened over twelve months ago. If there is a good reason why the issue wasn't raised prior to this time we may consider this as a complaint, but this will be at our discretion.
  - Legal proceedings have started and a claim has been filed at court.
  - Matters have previously been dealt with as a formal complaint.
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### **Ways to make a complaint**

"We aim to make it as easy as possible to make a complaint. A complaint can be made to Aves Housing by:

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- Telephone
  - Face to face
  - SMS
  - The Aves Housing website • In writing by letter or email •

- A third party such as an MP, Councillor, advocate, friend or family member. Although the complainant will have to give permission in most circumstances.
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If a resident raises a complaint via social media, we will not deal with the complaint via social media, but we will advise how they can raise a formal complaint using another channel.

Residents can raise their complaints with any member of Aves Housing staff, who will advise the Customer Services team of the complaint so that it can be formally logged on our systems.

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- Contacting us by phone, text message, or letter
  - In person
  - Through a third party such as an MP, councillor, advocate, friend or family member. The complainant will need to give permission in most circumstances.
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## **How your complaint will be handled**

“At each stage of the complaints process, complaint handlers will:

- Deal with the complaint on its merits, act independently, and have an open mind.
- Give the complainant the opportunity to set out their position.
- Take measures to address any actual or perceived conflict of interest (which may include referring the complaint to an alternative complaint handler).”

## **On receipt of the complaint**

On receipt of the complaint in ActiveH the stage 1 complaint handler should contact the resident to introduce themselves and summarise what they will be investigating and what the resident has requested as an outcome following the acknowledgement letter sent by the Customer Services team. They should confirm with the resident if this is correct and whether they have anything they wish to add to this.

As part of the investigation, the stage 1 complaint handler may need to request additional evidence to support the resident's complaint. They should advise the resident on how to provide this evidence and when they will need this to enable the complaint investigation and response to be made within the 10 working day deadline."

### **Reasonable Adjustments**

Reasonable adjustments will be made to accommodate a complainant's needs in accordance with the Equality Act 2010. This may include changes to the complaints policy, procedure or process. When investigating a complaint, the complaint handler will consider whether reasonable adjustments should have been made to policies, procedures or processes relevant to the complaint to accommodate the needs of the complainant."

### **Publication of Complaints Policy**

This policy will be publicised on our website, resident newsletters, the annual tenant report and via other communications such as appropriate emails and letters and by our own staff in conversation with residents.

### **Who is responsible for this procedure**

"The CEO has responsibility for ensuring that complaints are reported to the Board and will lead in liaison with the Housing Ombudsman. The CEO will act as the 'complaints officer' as defined by the Housing Ombudsman's complaint handling code."

## **Accountability**

The CEO is accountable for complaint handling and will assess themes or trends to identify potential systemic issues, serious risks, or policies and procedures that require revision.

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## **Additional Board Governance to MRC**

A member of the Board will have lead responsibility for complaints to support a positive complaint handling culture. This person(s) will be referred to as the Member Responsible for Complaints (MRC).

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## **Updates to the MRC and the Board**

The Member Responsible for Complaints (MRC) and the Board will 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.
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## **Housing Ombudsman**

At any stage of your complaint, you can access the Housing Ombudsman Service by contacting them in a number of ways:

- Online: [www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk](http://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk)
  - By phone: 0300 111 3000
  - In writing to: Housing Ombudsman Service, PO Box 1484, Unit D, Preston, PR2 0ET
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## **Reasonable adjustments**

Throughout the complaints process, we will make reasonable adjustments to accommodate your needs in accordance with the Equality Act 2010. This may include changes to the complaints policy, procedure or process.

## **Learning from complaints**

We publish our complaints performance, and any improvements made as a result of the complaints we receive, in our Annual Report for Tenants.

We invite residents to scrutinise our complaints performance. This enables us to learn from resident experiences and to improve our services.

Aves Housing also carries out regular self assessments against the Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code and takes appropriate action to ensure complaint handling is in line with the framework.

## **Member Responsible for Complaints (MRC)**

A member of the Board is designated as a lead in complaints. The MRC does not deal with the investigation of individual complaints. They promote the importance of good complaints handling in the organisation, monitor complaints performance and attend resident scrutiny sessions.

## **Tenant Panel**

We have developed a number of groups which enable residents to scrutinise key areas of our service and identify where improvements can be made. This includes the way we manage our complaints process. Board members with responsibility for

complaints also join our Residents' Complaint Scrutiny Group. If you are interested, please get in touch.

## **How we deal with complaints**

When you request to make a complaint, a member of the Customer Services team will contact you to make sure we know what you are dissatisfied with and what you would like as an outcome. Within 5 working days of you making the complaint, they will then acknowledge your complaint in writing and allocate it to a complaint handler.

## **Acknowledgement of complaints**

All complaints received will be raised as a stage one complaint. These will be logged and acknowledged within 5 working days of receipt. The acknowledgement will clearly detail what the complaint is about and what the complainant would like as an outcome to their complaint.”

## **Stage 1 - Internal Investigation**

At Stage 1, the complaint will be investigated by the relevant Service Manager, who will liaise with the officers and contractors for the service. We aim to acknowledge a Stage 1 complaint within two working days of receipt and to provide a written response within 10 working days.

## **Stage 1 Response**

Once the stage one response has been sent to the complainant, or their third party representative, any outstanding actions left to address the issues or service improvements to be implemented must be detailed in the Incident tab in the complaint case in Osiris. The incident tab must be kept updated by the stage one complaint handler for each contact made to the resident in relation to progress with these actions or other action the complaint handler has taken. The complaint must be left open and regularly monitored by the stage one complaint handler until all actions are completed. The stage one complaint handler must provide the resident with regular updates.

### **Stage 1 - Result - Dissatisfied**

If the complainant remains dissatisfied following the stage one response then it must be escalated to stage two of the process.

### **Stage 2 - Independent Investigation**

If you remain dissatisfied following receipt of the Stage 1 response, you can ask for your complaint to be progressed to a review at Stage 2 of the statutory procedure. A request for a Stage 2 review should be made within 20 working days from receipt of the Stage 1 response. We expect you to explain why the initial Stage 1 response has not resolved your complaint and what outcome you require as a resolution to your complaint. We aim to acknowledge a Stage 2 complaint within two working days of receipt.

A Stage 2 investigation is conducted by an Investigating Officer (IO) and an Independent Person (IP) who oversees the fairness and transparency of the investigation process. The IO and IP will look into the complaint and produce a report, following their investigation, which will make findings and identify any recommendations to resolve the complaint. After considering the findings and recommendations of the investigation team, a Senior Manager will provide a written response to the complainant setting out the findings and conclusions. The timescale for responding to a Stage 2 complaint is between 25 and 65 working days, depending on the complexity of the complaint.

### **Stage 2 - Acknowledgement**

The stage two complaint must be acknowledged and logged within five working days of the request to escalate being received. The acknowledgement must be clear on what the complaint is in relation to and what the complainant is requesting as an outcome.

### **Stage 2 - Consideration**

The complainant is not required to explain their reasons for escalating the complaint, but the stage two complaint handler will try to contact the complainant to understand why they remain unhappy.

## **Stage 2 - Complaint Handler**

The stage two complaint handler will ordinarily be the director responsible for the service area complained about, but may be any Director of the organisation.

## **Stage 2 - Response**

The stage two full response must be made within 20 working days of the complaint being acknowledged. The complaint handler must decide whether an extension to this timescale is needed when considering the complexity of the complaint then inform the complainant of the expected timescale for response. Any extension must be no more than 20 working days without good reason, and the reason(s) must be clearly explained to the complainant.

## **Stage 2 Response - Implementation**

Once the stage 2 response has been sent to the complainant, or their third party representative, any outstanding actions left to address the issues or service improvements to be implemented must be detailed in the Incident tab in the complaint case in Osiris. The incident tab must be kept updated by the stage two complaint handler for each contact made to the resident in relation to progress with these actions or other action the complaint handler has taken. The complaint must be left open and regularly monitored by the stage two complaint handler until all actions are completed. The stage two complaint handler must provide the resident with regular updates.

## **Remedies**

“Remedies Where something has gone wrong we will acknowledge this and set out, as part of the complaint response, actions already taken or we intend to take to put things right. These may include:

- An apology
- Acknowledging where things have gone wrong

- Providing an explanation, assistance or reasons
- Taking action if there has been a delay
- Reconsidering or changing a decision • Amending a record or adding a correction or addendum
- Providing a financial remedy (this will be in accordance with our compensation policy)
- Changing policies, procedures or practices

Any remedy offered will reflect the impact on the complainant as a result of any fault identified. The remedy offer will clearly set out what will happen and by when, in agreement with the complainant where this is appropriate. Any remedy proposed must be followed through to completion. When considering an appropriate remedy the complaint handler will take account of the guidance issued by the Housing Ombudsman:

<https://www.housingombudsman.org.uk/landlordsinfo/guidance-notes/ombudsmans-policyand-guidance-on-remedies/>

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## **Acceptable Behaviour**

From time to time a small minority of complainants may behave in a way that makes it difficult to effectively investigate their complaint and become overly time consuming to manage. Staff handling complaints from residents or their representatives displaying unacceptable behaviours should refer to the Acceptable Behaviour policy. “

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## **Process for responding to complaints**

A full written response to the complaint should be made within 10 working days of the complaint being acknowledged. The complaint handler must decide whether an extension to this timescale is needed when considering the

complexity of the complaint and then inform the complainant of the expected timescale of the response. Any extension must be no more than 10 working days without good reason, and the reason(s) must be clearly explained to the resident.

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### **Extension of Timescales**

“When extending the timescale, the complainant must also be provided with the contact details for the Housing Ombudsman.”

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### **Complaint Response**

The response to the complaint must be provided to the complainant when the answer to the complaint is known, not when the outstanding actions required to address the issues are completed. Outstanding actions must be tracked by the complaint handler until all issues are resolved. The complaint handler must provide regular updates to the complainant.

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### **Addressing all Points**

The complaint response must address all points raised in the complaint and provide clear reasons for any decisions, referencing the relevant policy, law and good practice as appropriate.

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### **Additional Points Raised**

Where the complainant raises additional complaints during the investigation, these must be incorporated into the stage one response if they are related and the stage one response has not been issued. Where the stage one 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.

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## **Standards of the Completion of Stage 1, 2 letter**

The complaint response letter will be clear and contain the following information:

- The complaint stage
  - The detail of the complaint and what the complainant requested as an outcome.
  - The decision on the complaint
  - The reasons for any decisions made
  - The details of any remedy offered to put things right.
  - Details of any outstanding actions and,
  - Details of how to escalate the complaint to stage two if the complainant remains dissatisfied.
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## **Customer Vulnerability**

When discussing the complaint with the resident, the Customer Services Advisor should try to establish whether the resident is vulnerable or at risk and their communication preferences with the complaint handler.

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## **Annual complaints performance and service improvement report**

A report of complaints performance and service improvements will be produced on an annual basis and reported to the Board. This report will include:

- The annual self-assessment against the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code.
- A quantitative and qualitative analysis of our complaint handling performance, including a summary of the types of complaints we have refused to accept.
- Any findings of non-compliance with the Complaint Handling Code made by the Housing Ombudsman.
- Service improvements made as a result of complaints.
- Any annual report about our performance from the Ombudsman.
- Any other relevant reports or publications produced by the Ombudsman in relation to our work.

This is due to be reported to the Aves Housing Board in August 2024.

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### **Following significant restructure, merger or change in procedure**

Self-assessment against the complaint handling code will also be carried out.

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### **Stage 3 - Review Panel**

While not part of our formal procedure. Tenant Panel can review the decision. If you are dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 2, you can request that your complaint be progressed to a review panel at Stage 3. The review panel consists of three independent people who consider the complaint.

Aves Housing must ensure that the Review Panel Hearing takes place within 30 working days from the receipt of the Stage 3 request. Following the Review Panel Hearing, the Review Panel will produce a report of its findings and recommendations and will aim to send this to you and the Aves housing within five working days.

### **The type of complaints we receive**

The two service areas we receive the majority of complaints about are:

1) **Repairs.** carried out by our in-house repairs team or our contractors, this is unsurprising given the high volume of jobs being managed on a daily basis.

2) **Our Neighbourhoods team.** These are mostly around antisocial behaviour (ASB). This includes how residents feel the issue is being handled or progressed or when they are not happy with the outcome of an ASB case.

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## **Learning from complaints and improving our services**

It's really important to take on board the feedback our customers give us as part of our complaints process and learn from it. Here you can find details of some of the areas we're currently reviewing and improvements we're looking to introduce.

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## **How we deal with antisocial behaviour (ASB) and transfer requests**

From some of the complaints we've received that relate to this area, we've identified that we need to manage residents' expectations better and also provide explanations for why we have taken a certain decision or course of action in a clearer and more empathetic way. The feedback from customers who ask to be moved because of ASB has already led to improvements in the wording of the letters we send about transfer requests, and also the information the lettings team are provided with about the types of vacant properties we have so they can keep residents better informed.

We have also identified that we need to improve our ways of working relating to record keeping, this ensures that we have accurate information to record the things we do and why we do them.

We are also working to improve the way we work with residents who have vulnerabilities to ensure we take these fully into account before or during a complaint is made and that all decisions and outcomes are fair in the circumstances.

We are currently working on these areas and hope that by providing our neighbourhood teams with more training and guidance it will help to reduce the number of complaints and provide a better overall service for our residents.

### **Other useful sources of ideas for improving services**

It isn't only feedback from customers who raise complaints that results in improvements to the way we deliver services, however. We take into account feedback from a range of sources, including: our ongoing customer satisfaction surveys; from determinations that the Housing Ombudsman issues; and suggestions from our teams who are well placed to see where we can do things more effectively and deliver better customer service.