

Policy Title	Comments, Compliments and Complaints
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## Comments, Compliments and Complaints Policy

Nehemiah Housing is committed to providing a high-quality service to all its customers but recognises that on occasions we may fail to provide a service to our customers satisfaction.

Our mission is to build successful, sustainable and diverse communities by providing housing and well-being services in a culturally sensitive way to our current and our future customers.

We recognise that comments, compliments and complaints are valuable customer feedback and a positive contribution to the development and improvement of our services. Nehemiah Housing welcomes all feedback from customers.

- **Policy statement**

Comments, compliments and complaints will be used to continuously improve our services to customers. We will deal with all complaints fairly and without bias.

We will use this policy to:

- Provide services customers want and need
- Identify problems and thereby improve services
- Be part of a positive can-do culture
- Be a learning organisation
- Reveal where processes are not user friendly
- Improve customer relations, employee morale and company credibility
- Prevent repeat problems
- Record all comments, compliments and complaints
- Resolve complaints effectively with set targets
- Deal with all complaints fairly
- Promote conciliation in all cases
- Resolve complaints at an early stage in the process, whilst giving customers a fair opportunity to appeal against the decisions if they remain unhappy
- Provide a clear outcome of the investigation of the complaint to the customer

## Policy purpose and aims

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that staff continue to be committed to listening to complaints and putting things right, treating them seriously, and learn from them as well as comments and compliments so that we can continuously improve our services. This is to also comply with the new Housing Ombudsman complaints handling code.

Nehemiah Housing is committed to providing a high-quality service for its customers and working in an open and accountable way that builds trust and respect.

We know that on occasions sometimes things go wrong, and customers may be dissatisfied and wish to complain. Comments, compliments and complaints give us valuable customer feedback which we use to develop and improve our services. We will listen to our customers and address issues where our customers are unhappy with our services.

This policy is designed to comply with our legal and regulatory responsibilities. Nehemiah Housing has a procedure to comply with this policy, which outlines the process for handling comments, compliments, and complaints from customers.

## Our Policy

### 3.1. Who can offer us feedback?

Anyone who receives or requests a service from us or is affected by a decision or action taken by us can give us feedback. This includes:

- tenants, leaseholders, shared owners, and owner occupiers.
- Former tenants/leaseholders
- Applicants for housing
- Partnership agencies
- Contractors or consultants
- Applicants for employment
- Any other person or organisation affected by our services, including those representing our customers (e.g. legal services, advice agencies such as the CAB, MPs or Councilors) providing necessary authority to act has been provided.

### 3.2. What is a complaint?

Definition: *'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'* (Source: Housing Ombudsman)

We will investigate a complaint when a customer tells us:

- We have done something poorly
- We have failed to do something that we said we would
- Staff have demonstrated poor attitude/conduct/performance
- We have failed to follow policy or procedure

### 3.3. What is a compliment?

Definition: A compliment is an expression of satisfaction with the services we provide.

We want to hear from customers when they have received excellent customer service. Compliments can be given to us by telephone, in writing, via email, our social media sites, via our website, using our feedback leaflet or talking to us at customer appointments.

### **3.4. What is a comment?**

Definition: A person may raise a concern with a member of staff which is either resolved at first point of contact or the person does not want to follow the formal complaints route. Learning from these informal pieces of customer feedback can help us improve services by doing more of what is good and what works well.

We welcome constructive comments or suggestions that customers believe would improve our service or benefit their neighborhood. Comments can be given to us by phone, in writing, via email, our social media sites, via our website, using our feedback leaflet or talking to us at customer appointments.

### **3.5. When should the complaints process not be used?**

The complaints process should not be used if a customer:

- Is asking for a service from us for the first time (for example the reporting of a repair)
- Is making an initial request for information or an explanation of a decision made or
- Wants to report incidents of anti-social behaviour or racial harassment. These issues are dealt with under other procedures.
- The issue is identified as an informal complaint
- The complaint relates to a legal claim or personal injury claim. (HO self-assessment 1.3)
- An issue which happened over 6 months ago; a complaint should be made no later than 6 months after the date the event occurred, unless there are exceptional circumstances which mean the complainant was unable to notify us of their concerns sooner. We may consider historic complaint outcomes however, to resolve the issue for the complainant.

#### **3.5.1 Informal Complaints**

Where a customer reports a repair or requests a service, and we fail to action or deliver that service and they have to contact us again to repeat their request this is identified as an informal complaint. For example:

- A repair request is not actioned, so the customer has to report it again.
- A customer requests a rent statement and it's not sent so they have to make the same request again
- The customer contacts the office and leaves a message for a member of staff to contact them and the telephone call is not returned.

All informal complaints will be recorded so we know where we are getting it wrong. Informal complaints can be resolved at the repeat point of contact, to the customer's satisfaction whilst they are on the phone or in the office. Recording and collecting information around informal complaint helps us move to a *right first time* way of working making the business more efficient.

**3.5.2** Complaints will not usually be considered when the case is already going through a court or tribunal (including disrepair cases). In these circumstances court procedures, timescales and judgements would take precedence.

**3.5.3** Any complaints received regarding our policies will be considered for any potential inclusion in the next review of the policy concerned.

**3.5.4** Consultants, contractors, and partnership agencies may have features and steps contained within their contracts or management agreements. Where this is not the case, this policy and the complaints procedure should be used.

**3.5.5** If further enquiries are needed to resolve the matter, or if the complainant requests it, the issue must be logged as a complaint.

### **3.6. How can our customers complain?**

Complainants can tell us about their complaint in the most convenient way to them. We will accept complaints in any way the customer wishes, including but not limited:

Letter

Email

Internet (includes social media platforms, e.g., google review)

Face-to-Face

Telephone

Via an advocate (e.g. a relative, support worker, tenant advocate)

A complainant does not have to use the word 'complaint' for it to be treated as such. A complaint that is submitted via a third party or representative will still be handled in line with our complaint process.

We aim to communicate and respond quickly and appropriately, in the style, language and format requested.

### **3.7. Anonymous complaints**

If a complaint is made anonymously, it should be logged and investigated via the complaints' procedure, bearing in mind it will not be possible to contact the customer to investigate further or supply them with a response. However, there may be substance to the complaint that could result in a service improvement.

### **3.8. Complaints about contractors**

Nehemiah Housing retains the responsibility for investigating complaints about contractors and responding to customers about this type of complaint. Complaints about contractors/managing agents etc. will be investigated by a senior officer or manager.

### **3.9. Complaints procedure**

Nehemiah Housing's complaints process has 2 stages.

Stage 1 – Investigation

A Senior officer/Manager will take responsibility for investigating the complaint and advising the customer of the outcome.

Stage 2 – Review

Where a customer is unhappy with the outcome at stage 1 they can appeal to a member of the senior management team or Executive Team who will review the initial resolution.

For example, if the complaints are in relation to a member of staff or service in our sheltered and supported housing the first stage will be the senior supported housing officer and then this will escalate to the Housing Services Manager at stage 2.

Where a tenant remains unhappy with the outcome, they can contact the Housing Ombudsman.

### **3.10. Housing Ombudsman Service**

Nehemiah Housing is a member of the Housing Ombudsman service and will cooperate fully with them throughout any investigation and will abide by any decisions reached by the ombudsman. As members of the Housing Ombudsman scheme Nehemiah is committed to implement and follow the new complaints handling code when dealing with complaints.

### **3.11. Information for Customers**

All customers will be kept informed of their complaint throughout the investigation. We will publish details of our complaints process including timescales for dealing with complaints. We will notify complainants if we are unable to meet the target response times. Where an investigation about individual colleagues and their actions is undertaken in line with our Staff Policies, we will not disclose the detailed outcome directly to the customer due to the confidentiality rights of our staff.

### **3.12 Timescales**

We will not normally consider complaints regarding a problem that occurred more than 6 months prior to the complaint being made.

#### **Stage 1**

- We will acknowledge a complaint within 5 Working days.
- We will investigate a complaint and respond to customer within 10 Working Days from when complaint is logged – if this is not possible, an explanation and a date for stage 1 will be sent to the customer. Where the complaint is complex for example involvement of a third party/ statutory agencies, we will try not to exceed a further 10 working days. The complainant has 20 working days to appeal if they are not satisfied with the outcome. At the completion of stage one we will confirm the following:
  - Complaint stage;
  - Complaint definition;
  - Decision on the complaint;
  - Reasons for any decisions made;
  - Details of any remedy offered to put things right;
  - Details of any outstanding actions
  - Details of how to escalate the matter to stage two if the customer is not satisfied with the answer.

#### **Stage 2**

We will investigate your complaint within 20 Working days from request to escalate if this is not possible an explanation and a date for stage 2 completion will be sent to the customer. In exceptional circumstances we may have to extend the time to complete further investigations. If this is the case, we will provide an explanation to the complainant containing a clear timeframe for when the response will be received. However, this will not exceed a further 10 days without good reason.

If an extension beyond 10 working days is required to enable Nehemiah to respond to the complaint fully, this will need to be agreed by both parties.

Where agreement over an extension period cannot be reached, Nehemiah will provide the Housing Ombudsman's contact details so the complainant can challenge the landlord's plan for responding and/or the proposed timeliness of our response.

At stage 2 completion we will confirm the following in writing to the tenant:-

- Complaint stage;
- Complaint definition;
- Decision on the complaint;
- Reasons for any decisions made;
- Details of any remedy offered to put things right;
- Details of any outstanding actions and how to escalate the matter to the Housing Ombudsman Service if the tenant remains dissatisfied.

### **Persistent, Unreasonable and Behaviour**

Nehemiah Housing is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially. Staff are trained to respond with professionalism, patience, and empathy to the needs of all those making a complaint. However, staff or contractors are not expected to tolerate behaviour by complainants that is unreasonable, for example abusive, offensive, or threatening behaviour or a complainant makes a large number of unreasonable and persistent demands.

In these instances, we will reserve the right to restrict or change access to our complaints service. We will tell the person in writing why we have decided to restrict access, what the restrictions are and how long they will last.

### **General Data protection (GDPR) and Third Parties**

Nehemiah has a responsibility under the Data Protection Act 2018 to hold, obtain, record, use and store all personal data relating to identifiable individual in a secure and confidential manner.

We are committed to safeguarding the rights of our customers to confidentiality and privacy. All Nehemiah colleagues are required to maintain a duty of care towards information regarding customers and applicants, in line with data protection legislation and Data Protection Policy 2018. The Data Protection Policies applies to all Nehemiah's employees, members, volunteers, contractors and to staff members of any other bodies with whom we work who handle data in jointly.

When we receive a complaint on behalf of a customer, we will only deal with the third party on receipt of a signed Authorization from the complainant for the organisation/ individual to act on their behalf. This will include Councillors or MPs letters.

### **Compensation**

At any stage we can offer an apology or discretionary payment of compensation. Compensation will be offered in accordance with our compensation policy.

## **Learning from Complaints and Monitoring**

- All comments, compliments and complaints will be logged on a data base to maintain a record for the organisation.
- Every comment, compliment or complaint is a learning opportunity for Nehemiah Housing and should be encouraged.
- We will record any service development or customer care issues identified during a complaint investigation. These will be recorded, and evidence gathered to support changes made or planned to improve our services and learn from complaints, comments and compliments. We will regularly review issues and trends arising from complaint handling,
- Where we have made changes to services or improvements as a result of complaints, comments or compliments we will report these to our customers in our customer annual report.
- Complaints data will be reported to Board & Operations Committee.
- We will monitor any individual complaint and their outcomes where necessary, including cases referred to the Ombudsman or referred to regulatory bodies. We will track any implementation of management responses to ensure we are delivering to agreed timescales.
- We will review the annual self-assessment against the Complaint Handling Code.

### **Customer feedback**

We will aim to obtain feedback from 20% of complainants about their experience of making a complaint to Nehemiah Housing. We will use the information collated in this survey to continually evaluate and improve the complaints service and will include the survey outcomes in our performance reports to Operations Committee and our customers.

### **Training and Support for Staff**

All Nehemiah Housing staff will be fully supported in the operation of this policy through training on the policy principals, the procedure for implementing the policy, and use of IT to record, monitor and report on complaints. Nehemiah will have a recognised Complaints Champion who will develop a level of expertise in dealing with complaints and enable staff to reflect on issues from a customer's point of view. The role of the Complaints Champion (Customer Engagement Officer) will be to help staff with specific complaints if required.

## **Related Policies, Acts and Strategy**

- Compensation Scheme Policy
- Anti-Social Behaviour Policy
- Complaints Procedure
- Customer Complaints Leaflet
- General Data Protection Act 2018, (GDPR)
- Equality Act 2010
- (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2011/20/contents>)
- Human Rights Act
- Customer Engagement Strategy
- New Complaints Handling Code
- Housing Ombudsman Self – Assessment form (Complaints Handling)  
<https://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/landlords-info/complaint-handling-code/>
- Safeguarding Adults and Children Policy
- Housing Act 1996 (schedule 2)
- Tenant and Involvement Empowerment Standards.
- Damp and Mould Policy

## **Review**

This policy will be reviewed every 3 years or sooner if legislation or good practice dictates.