Complaints & Feedback Policy

Our Vision

Building better lives through social care and housing in local communities.

Our Mission

We co-design and deliver services that offer innovative social care solutions and support people to thrive.

Our Values



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www.lookahead.org.uk

Look Ahead
CARE, SUPPORT AND HOUSING

Supporting Procedures, Documents and Guidance

Housing Ombudsman – Contact Us
Complaints Handling Code
Reasonable Adjustment Policy
Online Feedback Form
Look Ahead Complaints Standards
Managing Unreasonable Complaints
Compensation Policy
Compensation Procedure

Copies of these documents can be supplied on request

1. Introduction

1.1 We encourage our customers to tell us when we fall short of their expectations to give us the opportunity to put things right as quickly as possible.

1.2 We view all customer feedback, including complaints, as a valuable resource to help us improve customers' experience of our services. We know that we can only do this if we listen to and act on what our customers tell us.

1.3 We will offer to support customers through the complaints process and, where the complaint relates to a different landlord or another organisation, we will offer to advocate on their behalf and support them to ensure that their complaint is resolved to their satisfaction.

1.4 Our overarching complaint handling standards ensure that all staff will:

- Ensure that all customers – or their advocates if they lack capacity - have access to our complaints system that is clear, simple and accessible.
- Support customers to report complaints or make comments, where required.
- Listen and respond to all customer feedback and use it to improve services.
- Focus on resolving issues leading to complaints quickly or, where this is not possible, explain why and set timescales for a resolution
- Provide staff with the tools and knowledge to resolve complaints promptly and appropriately.
- Use appropriate forms of redress when we have done something wrong and learn from our mistakes.
- Reduce the impact of any identified unsafe or inappropriate care or treatment.

1.5 Our approach to managing complaints reflects the expectations in the Housing Ombudsman's Complaints Handling Code. Throughout the process we will remind customers of their right to approach the Housing Ombudsman (and/or Ofsted or CQC in regulated services) directly at any point to seek their advice and guidance.

1.6 There will never be reprisals, negative consequences or unfair treatment of any customers who raise a complaint.

1.7 We comply with and understand our duty to be open and honest with customers or their families when something goes wrong that appears to have caused - or could lead to - significant harm in the future.

1.8 This policy applies to all services and departments and sets out our approach to acknowledging, responding, resolving and learning from complaints and feedback.

2. Definitions

2.1 A **complaint** is defined as any expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, action or lack of action by the organisation, its own staff or those acting on its behalf, affecting an individual customer or group of customers.

2.2 Anyone can submit a complaint. All complaints, including complaints submitted by a third party or representative will be managed in line with this policy. A **data protection complaint** arises when an individual believes that we have infringed any aspect of data protection law

2.3 **Feedback** is defined as information provided that lets us know when we've done something well; a compliment about our services or colleagues; a suggestion about how we could improve a service, procedure or process; or constructive criticism that the customer may not wish to formalise as a complaint.

2.4 A **service request** is a request from a customer asking us to take action to put something right. We record and monitor service requests and will raise a complaint if the complainant is dissatisfied with our response. We recognise that most chasers on a service request can be resolved immediately by apologising and remedying the situation, for example re-arranging a missed appointment. However, if further action is required – or the customer requests it – the issue will be acknowledged as a complaint.

2.5 The term **disrepair** relates to any damage that makes a property unsafe or unhealthy to live in. Examples of disrepair may include leaks, damp and mould or non-working heating systems.

3. Complaints

3.1 We will accept complaints - as defined above - relating to incidents or issues that have occurred within 12 months of the incident resulting in the the complaint and which relate to:

- A failure to deliver a service or standards of service delivery relating to support.
- A failure to deliver a service or standards of service delivery relating to accommodation owned or managed by us.

- Concerns or legal claims raised regarding disrepair, including condensation, damp and mould.
- Failing to comply with our policies and/or procedures.
- The behaviour of staff, volunteers or contractors working on our behalf, including neglect or abuse.
- A disagreement with decisions made by us in the course of our work which the complainant feels are unfair or unclear to them.
- Poor quality of repairs and/or maintenance – repairs, cleaning, gardening services etc.
- Delays in responding to enquiries and requests.

3.2 We will accept complaints from our customers and anyone representing or advocating on their behalf, e.g. MPs, family or friends. We will always seek a customer's permission to share information and confirm that they agree to be represented by that person or persons in line with our Data Protection & Confidentiality Policy.

3.3 We will not record enquiries from legal representatives as a complaint.

3.4 Where a customer expresses dissatisfaction when responding to a survey, we will contact them to ask if they want to make a formal complaint or to determine what action we can take to resolve the issue.

3.5 The following matters will not be considered as a complaint:

- The issue occurred more than 12 months before a complaint was made unless there is a pattern of concern, a potential breach of the Equalities Act or the complaint is linked to a regulated care activity (social care activity).
- A request for a service.
- A report of anti-social behaviour – which will be managed in line with our Anti-Social Behaviour Policy.
- Raising a safeguarding concern – which will be managed in line with our Safeguarding Policies and Incident Management Policy.
- Complaints made by employees – which will be managed in line with our Grievance Policy.
- Complaints relating to another organisation (unless this it relates to our contractors or others working on our behalf).
- Appeals against warnings, notices to quit or evictions.
- Legal proceedings that have started, such as the Claim Form and Particulars of Claim have been filed at court.

3.6 Where we do not accept a complaint, we will write to the person seeking to make a complaint giving them a detailed explanation of why the matter is not suitable for the complaints process. We will advise them of their right to approach the Housing Ombudsman (or Ofsted or CQC in regulated services) to ask them to review our decision.

3.7 All staff are required to undertake mandatory Feedback and Complaints one-off E-learning course within 3 months of starting with the organisation.

3.8 All managers are required to complete the mandatory Investigating Complaints one-off E-learning course with their initial 3 months of starting their role.

3.9 To remain compliant with our 100% completion rate, weekly returns will be shared by the Customer Service Manager with line-managers to ensure that the appropriate E-learning course has been completed within the required timeframe.

3.10 Both courses will be monitored by the Customer Service Manager and reports will be shared with the Heads of Service and Senior Leadership Team as part of our monthly complaint's performance meetings and our annual service improvement plan.

4. Access to our Complaints Process

4.1 We take every, reasonable opportunity to promote customers' right to make a complaint and how they can do this. We employ a dedicated Customer Services Manager to be responsible for:

- handling complaints and co-ordinating a response/remedy.
- ensuring complaints receive the necessary – and appropriate – attention.
- reporting on performance in relation to complaints and any trends or patterns to our Board.

4.2 We make sure our customers are aware of how to access the service via:

- posters and information leaflets in services
- at sign-up
- via our website
- requiring employees to promote the service and support customers to make a complaint
- Customer Handbook

4.3 Complaints can be made in several ways, including:

- By phone (0207 368 6989) or in person to their individual service
- Calling our customer contact centre – during office hours - on 0333 010 4600
- By email to feedback@lookahead.org.uk
- Using our online feedback form

4.4 We will offer the support of an interpreter if this assists a customer to make a complaint. All information relating to a complaint will be made available in a format that meets the individual customer's needs, e.g. large print, braille, bionic font etc

4.5. Where complaints are received from MPs, colleagues must be aware these are managed centrally by the Chief Executive's office. The complaint must be initially directed to the Customer Service Manager as soon as possible on the same

working day to ensure the correspondence can be acknowledged and responded within 5 working days by the Chief Executive.

4.6 The Chief Executive will reserve the right to delegate the response to their executive team and extend the response time frames (to reflect the complaints handling code timeframes) where the nature of the complaint is complex.

5. Complaint Handling

5.1 **All employees are trained to handle complaints and to:**

- be able to act sensitively and fairly
- deal with potentially distressed and upset customers
- have the authority and autonomy to act to resolve disputes quickly and fairly

5.2 The Customer Services Manager provides support for employees and managers in handling complaints and to co-ordinate a response with staff at all levels to resolve disputes quickly and fairly.

5.3 We must always consider an apology as an opportunity to repair the relationship with the customer where things have gone wrong. An apology must be appropriate for the situation, sincere, timely and reflect the impact on the customer.

5.4 Our focus is on early and local resolution wherever possible. There will be occasions when action can be agreed with a customer and taken immediately to resolve a problem. These actions must be recorded on our case management system as a "Local Resolution" (formerly referenced as "Informal Complaints") However, where the issue is more complex or requires more than one action, we will make sure that the complaints process does not delay the action being taken.

5.5 We offer a 2 stage complaints process and offer complainants the opportunity at Stage 1 to discuss their concerns in person, as appropriate, and escalate to Stage 2 if they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of the complaint.

5.6 When a complaint is made, we will log it at Stage 1 of the process and acknowledge this within five working days of receipt. Day 1 will start on the next working day of the complaint being acknowledged.

5.7 The complaint acknowledgement will set out:

- our understanding of the complaint and the outcome the customer is seeking. Where this is not clear we will ask the customer for clarification.
- whether the desired outcome is reasonable and, if not, what they might realistically expect
- their right to have a representative deal with their complaint on their behalf and to be accompanied at any meeting
- their right to approach the Housing Ombudsman at any time to seek their advice/guidance or a young person's right to complain direct to Ofsted or CQC in relation to regulated services

- any urgent actions will be taken immediately, for example to make a situation safe or to prevent further damage

5.8 The Customer Service Manager will identify an impartial investigating manager to lead an investigation within the required timescale (5 working days).

5.9 Where there is a conflict of interest preventing the local service manager/team leader from investigating the complaint, the Head of Service will support the Customer Service Manager to assign an investigating manager.

5.10 The Customer Service Manager is responsible for ensuring regular contact is made with the complainant to update them on progress – at times/dates agreed with them.

5.11 The Customer Services Manager will ensure that customers are given a fair chance to set out their position and comment on any findings from the investigation before a final decision is made.

5.12 Prior to providing a written outcome response to a complainant, the investigating manager will be responsible for ensuring verbal communication is made, informing them of the outcome and any relevant actions (as long as it is safe/possible to do so).

5.13 The investigating manager must have completed Look Ahead Managing Complaints Investigations E-learning's and adhere to our complaint handling quality standards throughout.

Complaints Relating to High Rise Buildings

5.14 **High-Rise Building** is a building of at least 7 storeys or at least 18 meters high and which contains at least 2 residential units. For the purpose of High-Rise Buildings, a Relevant Complaint is a complaint relating to the structural failure and spread of fire (building safety risks) or the performance of an Accountable Person.

5.15 The Principle Accountable Person ('PAP') is responsible for operating complaints relating to High Rise Buildings. At Look Ahead, the Principle Accountable Person is the Executive Director of Asset & Property. The Customer Service Manager will (on behalf of the PAP) retain a record of any Relevant Complaint for 7 years, including:

- The information contained in the complaint
- The steps taken by any Accountable Person for the higher-risk building in response to the complaint
- Any involvement of the regulator in relation to or in response to the complaint
- The outcome of the complaint

5.16 If more than one Relevant Complaint is made about the same issue within a 7-year timeframe, for each recurring Relevant Complaint the Customer Service Manager will keep a record of:

- The subject and nature of the recurring complaint
- The date that the recurring complaint was made

Data Protection Complaints

5.17 A data protection complaint arises where someone believes we have failed to comply with data protection law. Staff must refer any data protection complaints to the Information Governance (IG) Team IG@lookahead.org.uk without delay. The IG Team will acknowledge the complaint within five working days.

5.18 They will investigate the concerns and aim to respond within 30 days from the date the complaint was received. If the 30 days falls on a non-working day, the IG Team will respond by the next working day. In exceptional circumstances, where the IG Team are unable to meet this deadline, they will update the complainant and provide a revised response date. This will be no later than three months from the date of receipt.

5.19 Should the complainant remain dissatisfied with the response, they may escalate their concern to the regulator, the Information Commissioner's Office: Make a complaint | ICO.

6. Stage 1 Complaints

6.1 When a complaint is received, we will acknowledge receipt and log it on our complaints management system within 5 working days of receipt. We will respond to the complaint within 10 working days of the complaint being acknowledged.

6.2 Day 1 of the process starts from next working day of the complaint being acknowledged. This allows for complaints received late in the afternoon or outside of core office hours and Bank Holidays.

6.3 Where it is not possible for us to respond within 10 working days, – for example due to the complexity of the complaint or the absence of a key member of staff/witness/complainant – we will contact the complainant to agree an extension of time to respond. Any extension will not exceed 10 working days unless there are exceptional circumstances. Where it is not possible to agree an extension period, the complainant will be advised to contact the Housing Ombudsman to ask for support in challenging the proposed timeline.

6.4 Complaint extensions can only be made by the Customer Services Manager and the Head of Customer Services. All extensions must be recorded along with the reason, extension date and complainant's agreement.

6.5 Where the complaint is a recurring issue, we reserve the right to consider older reports as part of the background to the complaint, where appropriate.

6.6 We will close the complaint when the resolution has been agreed. This may result in agreed actions taking place after the date the complaint is closed. The person assigned to an action will be responsible for maintaining contact with the complainant to update them on progress. The Customer Service Manager will be responsible to monitor the actions tracker to ensure their completion.

6.7 Where a complainant raises additional complaints or concerns during the investigation, these will be added to the Stage 1 complaint. Where this would unreasonably delay the response to the original complaint, the additional issues will be raised as a new complaint.

6.8 At the end of the Stage 1 investigation we will write to the complainant setting out:

- the complaint stage
- the definition of the complaint
- 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
- how to escalate the matter to Stage 2 if they remain dissatisfied
- their right to contact the Housing Ombudsman for advice and guidance – or Ofsted or CQC in the case of regulated

6.9 The outcome letter will include a link to our complaints handling satisfaction survey.

7. Stage 2 Complaints

7.1 If the complainant remains dissatisfied with the response at Stage 1 of the process, they can ask for their complaint to be escalated to Stage 2. The request to escalate a complaint to Stage 2 of the process must be received within 15 working days of the date of the Stage 1 outcome letter. An extension of this time will be granted based on the complainant's request and circumstances.

7.2 Stage 2 complaints will be managed by the Customer Services Manager. The escalation must dispute the investigation findings and if the complainant has no apparent reasons or grounds for the appeal, we may decide not to investigate the complaint at Stage 2 but will make every effort to support the complainant. This may include mediation. A decision not to escalate the complaint to Stage 2 must be authorised by the Director of Housing and Customer Services or, in their absence, the Executive Director of Group Operations and Customer Experience.

7.3 Where the decision is taken not to escalate the complaint, we will write to the complainant setting out the reasons for not escalating as well as their right to approach the Housing Ombudsman to review the decision. Young people living in supported accommodation regulated by Ofsted or CQC will be advised of their right to complain to Ofsted or CQC directly.

7.4 Complaints will only be escalated to Stage 2 of the process when they have completed Stage 1 and at the request of the complainant. A request to escalate to Stage 2 will be logged and acknowledged within 5 working days of the request being received. We will aim to respond to Stage 2 complaints within 20 working days of the complaint being acknowledged.

7.5 Day 1 of the process starts from next working day of the complaint being acknowledged. This allows for complaints received late in the afternoon or outside of core office hours and Bank Holidays.

7.6 Where this is not possible, for example the absence of a key individual or the complexity of the complaint, we will write to the complainant with an explanation and setting out a clear timeframe for the response. This will not exceed a further 20 working days without good reason and must be agreed with the complainant.

7.7 Where agreement on an extension cannot be reached, we will advise the complainant of their right to approach the Housing Ombudsman for support in challenging this.

7.8 On completion of the Stage 2 investigation we will write to the complainant setting out:

- the complaint stage
- the definition of the complaint
- 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
- their right to approach the Housing Ombudsman (or Ofsted or CQC in relation to regulated services) to ask them to review their complaint

8. Complaint Decisions & Remedy

8.1 We aim to resolve most complaints at Stage 1 of the process. On occasions a complaint may be completely or partially upheld. The following descriptions will be used to determine the outcome of a complaint at each stage.

Decision	Description
Upheld	The customer was fully justified in making their complaint. The Compensation Policy should be used to decide what, if any, form of remedy or redress should be offered to the complainant.
Partially Upheld	Some, but not all the customer's complaint was justified. This can sometimes happen where a customer has made a complaint covering multiple issues. Where the complaint is justified, the above steps apply.
Not Upheld	The customer's complaint was not justified. This might occur where it is found, following investigation, that the complaint is groundless.

8.2 The investigating manager must always consider an apology being an opportunity to repair the relationship with the customer where things have gone wrong. An apology should be appropriate for the situation, sincere, timely and reflect the impact on the customer.

8.3 The investigating manager must consider the impact and potential risks to the complainant in the event the complaint is not upheld. They must consider the best way to communicate the outcomes of the complaint prior to the formal written response being sent.

8.4 Where a complaint is partially or fully upheld there may be several ongoing or outstanding actions that need to be completed to resolve the complaint. The investigating manager is responsible for agreeing these with the relevant manager, ensuring that they are completed and progress is communicated to the complainant outside of the formal complaints process.

8.5 Some remedies will require a commitment to longer term actions, for example the replacement of a kitchen or bathroom:

a) This should not delay the complaint been responded to within the policy timeframes; and

b) In these circumstances the investigating manager should clearly set out and confirm the actions and timescales as part of the resolution. There should be an assigned lead responsible for monitoring longer term actions and communicating with the complainant.

8.6 The investigating manager should also consider whether any compensation or discretionary good will gesture should be made as part of their final decision-making process. The complainant does not have to directly request compensation but may be entitled to such under our Compensation Policy and procedures.

9. Other Landlords

9.1 We provide a wide range of care and support services in other landlords' buildings. The local management teams must ensure they display and support customers to access the landlord's complaints policy where customers are not satisfied with the service, facilities or repairs and maintenance etc provided by the landlord.

9.2 The service must record dissatisfaction, signposting to advocacy or support under our complaints' management system "Local Resolution – Other Landlords".

9.3 Where the landlord is not responding to the customer's complaint in accordance with the Housing Ombudsman Complaints Handling Code, the support team should contact our Customer Services Manager for support or the Agency Partnership Team and/or support the customer to escalate their complaint to the Housing Ombudsman.

9.4 Where the customer is not satisfied that we have fulfilled our responsibilities as a managing agent, the complaint must be acknowledged as a Stage 1 complaint and managed as per our complaints' procedure.

10. Unreasonable Complaint Behaviour

10.1 We have adopted the Housing Ombudsman and Local Government definitions of unreasonable complaint behaviour and unreasonable persistent complaints.

10.2 We define unreasonably persistent and vexatious complaints as those that, because of the frequency or nature of a complainant's contact with us, it is hindering our consideration of their (or other people's) complaints. Please refer to Managing Unreasonable Complaint Behaviour procedural guidance on how to manage complaints that have been deemed unreasonable or vexatious.

11. Monitoring & Reporting

11.1 The Customer Experience & Quality Directorate will assume day to day responsibility for monitoring complaints' performance and compliance with the policy.

11.2 The Customer Services Manager will work with local services and departments in relation to the quality of case management, compliance with procedural deadlines, investigations and communication.

11.3 The Customer Services Team will undertake quality assurance audits monthly and put in place improvement plans with managers.

11.4 The Quality Audit Team will monitor adherence with the policy in operational services through the Quality Management Framework.

11.5 Central Services' customer service standards audits will monitor adherence to the policy across Central Services Teams.

11.6 The Head of Customer Services will review customer satisfaction with the complaints' process and outcomes.

11.7 Reports will set out performance against procedures, trends, actions, learning, satisfaction and outcomes.

11.8 Reports to the Senior Leadership Team and Board will include both complaints and feedback.

11.9 The Customer Experience & Quality Directorate will oversee a Complaints and Feedback Service Improvement Plan and report against progress.

12. Governance

12.1 The Customer Experience & Quality Directorate is responsible for reporting on complaints' performance to the Senior Leadership Team, Board and customer scrutiny groups.

12.2 The Senior Leadership Team and the Board are responsible for overseeing compliance against the regulatory code of conduct, annual review, action plan and publication.

Record Keeping

We will comply with our Retention & Disposal Schedule which can be found by clicking Here or visiting our website at www.lookahead.org.uk

Policy Sign Off and Ownership	
Document Name	021.00_Complaints
Version	6.2
Who was consulted?	Policy Manager, Information Governance Manager, Director of Marketing and Communication, Head of Positive Behaviour Support, Operations Manager Support, Head of Housing, Customer Service Manager
Approved By/Date	Policy Group, 26 October 2026
Date for Review	October 2029
Author	Head of Customer Service
Owner (if different)	Executive Director Group Operations & Customer Experience
Document Location	SharePoint
Compliance Measures	Board Monitoring and Review
Related Policies/Procedures	Compensation Reasonable Adjustment Data Protection & Confidentiality Policy Managing Investigations Policy Contractor Code of Conduct Customer Service Standards
Relevant Legislation and Regulatory Requirements	Housing Ombudsman Complaints Handling Code The Charter for Social Housing Tenants in England Regulation 19 of the Health & Social Care Act 2020 (Regulated Activities) UK GDPR Data Protection Act 2018 Data Use and Access Act 2025 Supported Accommodation (England) Regulations 2023 Duty of Candour

Version History			
Version	**Date**	**Description of Changes**	**Author**
6.2	October 2026	Emphasis on Apology as part of remedial action at stage 1 and 2 New Paragraph relating to data protection complaints	Ola Taiwo
6.1	Dec 2025	Updated to reflect the requirements of Ofsted regulations – there will be no reprisals against customers making a complaint.	Philippa Nancoo
6.0	Nov 2025	Amend the Feedback number for circulation from **0800 389 6567 to 0207 368 6989** Inclusion of completion of E-learning course within 3 months of joining LA Clarity of staff roles responsible for new complaint assignment. Changed job titles in line with organisational role changes Responsibility of Investigating manager to keep contact with complainant during investigation and provide decision verbally before despatch of outcome. Following closure of an complaint Customer Service Manager to monitor action tracker. Monthly quality assurance audits on all stage 1 and 2 responses replacing 10% dip sample audits.	Ola Taiwo
5.0	Dec 2024	Updated to reflect guidance on complaints relating to high rise buildings	Ola Taiwo
4.0	Feb 2024	Changed job titles in line with organisational role changes Added Disrepair and Damp and Mould examples of complaints. Removal of “Informal Complaints”	Nicole Njie – Exec Director Customer Experience & Quality

		Changes to complaint handling timeframes to meet housing Ombudsman Complaint handling code at stages 1 and 2. Made clear that day 1 of the timeframe starts on the next working day Reference to consideration of compensation and goodwill as part of decision-making process. Link to policy and procedure Remedies – Long term actions should not delay communicating the outcome of the complaint and a lead to oversee the actions should be agreed and hold responsibility for keeping the complainant updated Reference to complaint management where customers live in other landlords' buildings. Updated complaints standards Removed stage 3 in line with new code	
3.0	April 2014	Clarification on who the policy applied to. New template only	Beth Wagstaff Customer Services & Policy Manager
2.0	Nov 2013	Stage 3: A member of the CSC will sit on the stage 3 panel rather than a board member.	Graham Beadham Customer Services & Policy Manager