

complaints, compensation and compliments policy

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1. Policy statement

- 1.1. believe housing aims to provide high quality, modern services that put our customers at the heart of what we do.
- 1.2. We are committed to providing a feedback process that:
 - is fair
 - puts things right
 - learns from outcomes
 - meets the individual needs of our customers
 - is easy to use and understand
 - can be accessed in a range of digital and traditional ways
 - resolves issues as quickly as possible.
- 1.3. We will ensure that this policy:
 - is clear on the steps we will take when handling complaints
 - ensures that the decisions made, and solutions offered are fair and reasonable and appropriate for the individual customer
 - ensures that we listen to, and act upon, the comments our customers give us to improve our services
 - complies with the Complaint Handling Code ('the Code') issued by the Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS). All complaints dealt with under this policy will be dealt with in a manner consistent with the Code and we will maintain all records as required by the Code
 - meets the requirements of the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH), as set out in the Consumer Standards
 - supports colleagues to do the right thing for our customers.

2. Scope

- 2.1. This policy relates to all services provided by believe housing and other organisations that provide services to our customers under contract or are working on our behalf.
- 2.2. The policy applies to all customers¹ that wish to give comments on our services including compliments, suggestions and complaints.
- 2.3. Customers do not have to use the word 'complaint' for it to be treated as such. When a customer expresses dissatisfaction, they are given the choice if they wish to raise a complaint.

¹ Customers, leaseholders, or member/s of the public using our services.

- 2.4. Customers can ask for a representative to deal with a complaint on their behalf if they give us permission to discuss the complaint with this person². We will handle complaints made by a third party in line with this policy³.
- 2.5. We define a complaint as: ‘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 a resident or group of residents.’
- 2.6. There are times when this policy does not apply and when we will not consider opening a complaint. Where a matter is not within the remit of this policy, we will provide an explanation setting out the reasons why and we will provide details of how to refer the matter to the Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS). If appropriate, we will direct the customer to a more suitable alternative process or organisation.
- 2.7. Each complaint will be considered on its own merits, and discretion will be applied when considering exclusions. A customer should not be taken through a two-stage process about the same matter on more than one occasion.
- 2.8. Examples of where we may not investigate as a complaint include:
- matters that have been previously considered under the complaints policy
 - when legal proceedings have begun as defined as details of the claim, such as a Claim Form or Particulars of Claim, having been filed at court
 - when the issue giving rise to the complaint occurred over 12 months ago
 - when the complainant is anonymous, unless there is sufficient documentary evidence to substantiate the complaint
 - complaints regarding lettings and allocations, which will be dealt with under the Lettings and Allocations Policy
 - complaints connected to insurance claims, which will be dealt with in line with the Insurance Policy, including dissatisfaction with insurance claim outcomes
 - complaints from people who aren't customers of believe housing (unless they are receiving a service from us), which will be considered on their own merits, advice will be provided, where possible
 - complaints about customers displaying antisocial behaviour, which will be dealt with under the Antisocial Behaviour Policy.
- 2.9. All customers will be treated with dignity and respect. Household vulnerabilities, reasonable adjustments and communication preferences will be always considered.

² Examples include a family member, friend, carer, or mental health advocate.

³ Complaints received through a Member of Parliament or local Councillor will be dealt with in accordance with this policy.

- 2.10. We will consider the individual circumstances of each complaint on its own merits, and we will consider our duties under the Equality Act 2010.
- 2.11. We will fast track complaints about a Health and Safety issue to our Health and Safety Team for assessment. Our action will depend on the nature of the situation.

3. Comments, compliments, and complaints

- 3.1. We offer a range of ways for customers to give us their comments and complaints. These include:
 - in person
 - by telephone and/or text message on 0300 1311 999
 - through the believe housing customer smartphone app
 - through the [believe housing customer portal](#)
 - by email to feedback@believehousing.co.uk
 - on our website at www.believehousing.co.uk
 - using social media
 - in writing to: Feedback, believe housing, Coast House, Spectrum Business Park, Seaham, SR7 7TT.

General comments and suggestions for service improvement

- 3.2. We welcome customer feedback and are open to receiving suggestions to improve services. Customer feedback helps us to plan future services that meet our customer and business needs. Customer suggestions are forwarded to the relevant service area for consideration and action, where appropriate.
- 3.3. Customers are asked for individual feedback on the service they have received through feedback surveys; this process is currently managed by an external provider. Customer feedback is used to inform and improve services, policies and procedures.

Compliments

- 3.4. We like to hear, and value, praise from our customers when our services are going well and exceeding expectations. Positive customer feedback and examples of great service delivery are shared across the whole organisation and will be used to try to replicate the positive effect in other areas. Compliments can be submitted as specified in section 3.1.

Service requests

- 3.5. A service request is a request from a customer requiring us to take action to put something right. A first-time request for a service is not a complaint. Service requests are recorded and monitored regularly and are usually dealt with by the relevant service area.
- 3.6. We recognise that we do not always get things right and encourage our people to take responsibility and try to resolve issues the first time that we are told about them as a service request. Examples of service requests could include a contractor that has not turned up on time or the customer wanting to bring an appointment forward. If further enquiries are needed to resolve the matter or the customer requests it, we will open a formal complaint if it is within the remit of this policy.

Social media

- 3.7. A complaint may be submitted through a social media channel.
- 3.8. If a complaint is submitted using a social media channel, we will ask the customer to private message us with their full name and address to confirm their identity. To ensure confidentiality and privacy is maintained, further contact with the customer is likely to be necessary to carry out security checks and to discuss how to progress their complaint.
- 3.9. We will not add any personal details on open forums on social media channels. We will take the required measures to protect any confidential information that may be shared by customers on social media, such as deleting a post or contacting the customer directly to ask the customer to move the information to another method of communication, if appropriate.

Complaints about staff

- 3.10. We take complaints about staff extremely seriously and they will be dealt with in line with our People policies.
- 3.11. Each complaint will be considered on its own merits; however, generally, complaints about staff will be investigated by the relevant manager or assistant director. They will decide if it is appropriate to offer the complainant feedback.

- 3.12. Due to the sensitive nature of the complaint, it may not be reasonable for us to offer the complainant specific feedback regarding any outcomes of an internal investigation. However, as part of the complaints process, we will confirm what we will do to investigate the concerns raised and confirm who is responsible for investigating the matter. This will be sensitively logged and recorded against the complaint on the appropriate ICT system.
- 3.13. If allegations are received about the gross misconduct of an employee of believe housing or the issue is under investigation by the police, we will escalate the matter to our People Team. We will automatically notify the People Team if there are allegations of discrimination, harassment, safeguarding concerns, or potential breaches of professional boundaries.
- 3.14. Complaints about staff are sensitively recorded and monitored in line with this policy.

Complaints about third parties

- 3.15. The Customer Insight Team will investigate complaints about contractors or any other third parties who are working on behalf of believe housing in line with this policy.

Complaints process

- 3.16. We have a two stage complaints process. All complaints will be investigated impartially by the Customer Insight Team to ensure objectivity, equality, and consistency of service.
- 3.17. The Customer Insight Team will review how the matter should be handled, confirm preferred communication method and any vulnerabilities or support needs to help inform the process.

Stage One

- 3.18. The customer insight advisor will contact the customer (or third party) to acknowledge that the issue has been received, set out an understanding of the complaint and confirm what is needed to put things right. If any aspect of the complaint is unclear, the advisor may ask the customer for clarification. The advisor will ask the customer to provide any relevant information to assist them in making an informed decision. The advisor will agree the frequency and method of ongoing contact with the customer and if a home visit is appropriate. The complaint will be formally acknowledged in writing within five working days of receipt.

- 3.19. The customer insight advisor will provide a full written response to the complaint within 10 working days from when they issued the acknowledgement to the customer, unless there are valid reasons to extend this period.⁴ On rare occasions when it is not possible to respond to the complaint within 10 days, the advisor will clearly explain the reasons to the customer and give a date within an additional 10 days where they aim to fully respond to the customer. The advisor will advise the customer of their right to refer the matter to the Housing Ombudsman Service.
- 3.20. While investigating the complaint the customer insight advisor will:
- deal with complaints on their own merits, considering individual customer circumstances, household vulnerabilities and reasonable adjustments
 - act independently, fairly and reasonably
 - take measures to address any actual or perceived conflict of interest
 - consider all information and evidence carefully
 - consider if there are any alternative options to support the customer.
- 3.21. A complaint response will be provided to the customer when the answer to the complaint is known, not when the outstanding actions required to address the issue are complete. Any outstanding actions, such as repairs, will continue to be tracked by the customer insight advisor with appropriate updates offered to the customer.
- 3.22. Before issuing the complaint outcome letter, the customer insight advisor will always attempt to talk through and explain the findings with the customer. The outcome letter will address all points confirmed with the customer at the acknowledgement stage and provide clear reasons for the decision, referencing any relevant policy, law and/or good practice.
- 3.23. Where a customer raises additional complaints during the investigation, the customer insight advisor will incorporate these into their investigation. If the issues are unrelated to issues already being investigated or it would unreasonably delay the response, the issues will be logged as a new complaint.

Stage Two

- 3.24. If all or part of the complaint is not resolved to the customer's satisfaction, it must be progressed to Stage Two of the complaints procedure. To progress to Stage Two of the complaints procedure, the customer must request this within six months of the closure of the Stage One complaint. Exceptions will be considered.

⁴ Examples include where the customer cannot be contacted, has delayed in providing the evidence required to make an informed decision, or the complaint is complex or about several service areas and more time is needed.

- 3.25. The Customer Insight Team will log and acknowledge a Stage Two request within five working days of it being received. Stage Two complaints will be reviewed by a senior member of staff. The overall aim of a Stage Two appeal is to:
- make sure the complaint has been handled correctly
 - confirm whether the original decision at Stage One is suitable
 - review that the resolution offered is fair and reasonable
 - consider further opportunities to resolve the issue.
- 3.26. A formal written response will be provided within 20 working days of the date the Stage Two request is acknowledged. If we require further time to investigate the complaint, we will inform the customer and advise of a new target date to provide our response; this will not exceed a further 20 working days. If this cannot be agreed, then we will provide a response based on the information available to us and provide contact information for the Housing Ombudsman Service to prevent delays in accessing their service.
- 3.27. In our Stage Two written response, we will explain our findings, address all points confirmed by the customer, and provide clear reasons for our decision. We will outline any learning or opportunities for service improvement that have been identified from the complaint. We will always attempt to talk through and explain our findings before sending the final letter.
- 3.28. We will also outline the remedies offered to resolve the complaint and monitor these to ensure they are completed. We will also provide contact details for the Housing Ombudsman Service⁵.

4. Putting things right

- 4.1. We sometimes get things wrong and consider various ways to try and resolve a complaint. We will apologise when mistakes have been made. Compensation payments are not automatic, but we are committed to doing the right thing for our customers. Some of the remedies considered may be a practical solution, but we recognise that in some situations an apology may not always compensate for a situation or the impact of poor service the customer may have received.
- 4.2. We always ask our customers at the beginning of the complaint what is required to put things right for them so that these expectations can be managed right from the start about what is a reasonable and fair.

⁵ We will not do this if the customer does not come under the jurisdiction of the Housing Ombudsman Service.

- 4.3. In awarding compensation, we will consider whether any statutory payments are due, if any quantifiable losses have been incurred and the impact the matter has caused.
- 4.4. All claims for compensation will be considered and made in accordance with our Compensation and Remedies Guidance. This provides more detail on our approach to compensation decisions and is based on the guidance and best practice outlined by the Housing Ombudsman Service.

5. Unacceptable complainant behaviour

- 5.1. We know that most of our customers behave reasonably and politely toward us when making a complaint. However, there are occasions where they pursue their complaints in a way that is unreasonable and unacceptable. This can affect our ability to provide a fair and timely service to our other customers.
- 5.2. For those customers acting in an unreasonable and persistent manner we will consider further action in line with our Unacceptable Complainant Behaviour Policy. A case conference with appropriate colleagues will be held and documented before considering application of the Unacceptable Complainant Behaviour Policy.
- 5.3. Violent and threatening behaviour and/or abusive language towards our employees will not be tolerated and will be handled in accordance with our Antisocial Behaviour Policy and our Person of Interest Procedure. This may include any threatening behaviour displayed on social media. If necessary, we will take relevant legal action to protect our staff and contractors.
- 5.4. Where unacceptable behaviour is caused by severe physical or mental ill health, the customer will be offered the opportunity to appoint an advocate to act on their behalf to prevent further delay to resolving the complaint.

6. Transparency, learning and monitoring

- 6.1. We will publicise this policy on how to give feedback in plain English. We will make this policy, information about the Housing Ombudsman Service and The Complaint Handling Code available to all customers through a variety of digital and non-digital means such as on social media, the website and within the other types of customer publications.
- 6.2. We will collect, monitor, and analyse the information we receive from complaints to identify areas where we can do better. We will include this learning in our written complaint response letter, where appropriate. We will also regularly publish service improvements that have been made on our website and in our annual report to customers.

- 6.3. We will share information regularly with the Board Member Responsible for Complaints in line with the Housing Ombudsman Service guidance and provide regular reporting to our Board, Customer Voices group and Customer Complaints Panel.
- 6.4. We will benchmark and publicise our performance in complaints handling annually with other landlords every year through the Regulator of Social Housing's (RSH) Tenant Satisfaction Measures. The Tenant Satisfaction Measures will be published on our website and in customer-facing publications.

7. Legislation and guidance

Regulator of Social Housing

- 7.1. The Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) has responsibility for the regulation of social housing providers in England. The RSH has set out a regulatory framework, which includes regulatory standards providers must meet. This includes the Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard, which outlines expectations in complaint handling.

Housing Ombudsman

- 7.2. The Housing Ombudsman Scheme is approved by the Secretary of State under section 51 of, and Schedule 2 to, the Housing Act 1996 as amended by the Localism Act 2011, the Building Safety Act 2022 and the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 (the Act). The Scheme came into effect on 1 April 2024 and replaces the previous Scheme. The role of the Ombudsman is to resolve disputes involving members of the Scheme, including making awards of compensation or other remedies when appropriate, as well as to support effective landlord and tenant dispute resolution.
- 7.3. We regularly seek guidance and advice from the Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS) to try and resolve issues in the right way. If a customer remains dissatisfied with our investigation into their complaint, they can also contact the HOS to review our handling of it for them. We signpost customers to the HOS in leaflets, newsletters, online and by placing HOS posters in our communal areas. A customer can also contact the HOS at any time while going through our internal complaints process to seek advice or guidance using the following contact details:

Housing Ombudsman Service
PO Box 1484
Unit D
Preston
PR2 0ET

Telephone: 0300 111 3000
Online: www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk

Self-assessment against the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code

- 7.4. As members of the Housing Ombudsman Scheme, we are required to complete an annual self-assessment of our complaints processes to ensure compliance with the requirements of the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code. We will publish the results of the annual self-assessment on our website, along with an Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report.
- 7.5. The key areas of legislation in this policy are:
- Landlord and Tenant Act 1985
 - Housing Act 2004
 - Housing and Regeneration Act 2008
 - The Equality Act 2010
 - Localism Act 2011
 - The Data Protection Act 2018
 - UK General Data Protection Regulation 2021
 - Housing Ombudsman Complaints Handling Code 2024
 - The Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023
 - Building Safety Act 2022.
- 7.6. Policies relevant to this policy include:
- Unreasonable Complainant Behaviour Policy
 - Antisocial Behaviour Policy
 - Health and Safety Policy
 - Compensation and Remedies Guidance
 - Lettings and Allocations Policy
 - Vulnerability Policy
 - Customer Strategy
 - EDI Framework
 - Durham Key Options Policy
 - Insurance Policy.
- 7.7. There may be alternative routes that are more appropriate for a complainant. We will signpost, where applicable, examples such as:
- The Leasehold Advisory Service
 - The Information Commissions Office
 - First Tier Tribunal
 - Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.

7.8. Service request or complaint flowchart:
[Complaint Handling Code](#)

8. Heat networks complaints

This section of the Complaints, Compensation and Compliments Policy applies to customers who wish to complain in relation to our heat networks.

We supply and charge for the heat and hot water for some of our customers through a heat network and, therefore, we are considered to be the 'heat network supplier'.

There are two types of heat networks:

1. Communal heat networks – serve a single building or small site with multiple occupants, such as a block of flats or offices.
2. District heat networks – serve multiple buildings across a larger geographical area, such as a housing estate or university campus.

From 1 April 2025, the Energy Ombudsman can accept disputes relating to all heat networks. Heat network complaints will be recorded and responded to in line with Ofgem guidance.

Before contacting the Energy Ombudsman, you should first notify us if there is an issue connected to your heat network.

If you have a complaint about the heat network, contact us first to start our complaints process.

We offer a range of ways for customers to get in touch regarding a complaint, including:

- in person
- by telephone and/or text message on 0300 1311 999
- through the believe housing customer smartphone app
- through the [believe housing customer portal](#)
- by email to feedback@believehousing.co.uk
- on our website at www.believehousing.co.uk
- using social media
- in writing to: Feedback, believe housing, Coast House, Spectrum Business Park, Seaham, SR7 7TT.

If you still need help, Citizens Advice can provide free and impartial advice and support on heat network issues.

You must allow us eight weeks to resolve your concerns before asking for a review from the Energy Ombudsman. If we are unable to resolve your concerns within eight weeks we will issue you with a deadlock letter, which instructs you to escalate your issue to the Energy Ombudsman.

You can contact the Energy Ombudsman on 0330 440 1624 with heat network complaints.

Examples of heat networks complaints include:

- a customer contacts us to explain they are waiting to receive an updated bill, several weeks after providing a meter reading to correct an incorrect bill and having been promised a response by us.
- a consumer contacts their supplier following an unexpected increase in their Direct Debit amount, and states they haven't received an explanation or breakdown of charges.

We will publish information regarding Heat Network complaints in our annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report, which is published on our website.