



alpha

shaped around you

## Complaints Policy

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## **1. Introduction**

Alpha Living aims to provide a high quality and value for money service to its customers. We welcome complaints and feedback as a means of correcting failures in performance and improving services and levels of satisfaction with our customers by actively listening to and understanding the needs to influence continuous improvement.

We will endeavour to resolve any service failure to the complainant's satisfaction at the first point of contact. At all stages of the complaints process we will deal with the matter as quickly as possible.

This policy will outline how the organisation will receive, react and respond to complaints from customers in a way that is clear, timely, fair and accessible.

## **2. Statement of Intent**

Through this policy Alpha Living intends to:

- encourage and welcome feedback, both positive and negative through a publicised and easily accessible two-tier procedure
- where possible, resolve all complaints at the first point of contact and as quickly as possible
- provide a full and fair resolution within published timescales
- prevent the need for repeat complaints
- recording, monitoring and analysing feedback, so as to examine service performance and improve future service delivery
- promote and monitor performance against agreed service standards
- apply data from complaints to support intelligence for risk management and assurance purposes
- have a range of options available to put things right when there has been a service failure including compensation
- comply with the Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code (July 2020)
- comply with the Localism Act 2011 and advise how customers can access the Ombudsman services
- Act within the Professional Standards for engaging with complaints as set by the Chartered Institute of Housing

## **3. Managing Complaints**

Alpha Living will have an accessible complaint process available in various formats, that will provide consistency to customers and offer a single point of contact. Complaints will be handled centrally by the Customer Experience Team (CEXT). Regular communications will be maintained with customers to ensure they are fully informed of progress throughout the process. The complaint process is initiated when the complaint is brought to the attention of the organisation by the customer

or their representative. A speedy satisfactory resolution will always be the primary outcome that the organisation aims to achieve for its customers. Consequently, the Customer Experience Manager will have both the autonomy and authority to facilitate early dispute resolutions.

As a continuous learning organisation, Alpha Living aims to achieve a customer centric culture that sees its customers as the key drivers of service excellence and performance improvement. Lessons learnt from customer complaints will therefore be regularly reported to the Board and Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and to all staff to embed the values of engaging with customers in all we do.

#### **4. Reasonable Adjustments**

Alpha Living is committed to ensuring that disabled people are not disadvantaged in accessing its services. To this end we will make reasonable adjustments when needed, ensuring compliance with the Equality Act 2010.

Many of the arrangements that we offer for disabled people can also be made available for those who do not have disabilities. For example, provision of documents in larger font than our usual font. Full details can be found within our Reasonable Adjustments Policy.

#### **5. Complaint Definition**

Alpha Living will recognise the difference between a service request, where a resident may be unhappy with a situation that they wish to have rectified or general feedback and a complaint about the service that they have/have not received and will action accordingly.

It is not therefore necessary that the customer uses the word 'complaint' in raising a dispute. Alpha-Living's definition of a complaint aligns with the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code (published July 2020) 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 an individual resident or group of residents <https://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/landlords/complaint-handling-code/>

#### **6. Customer Definition**

For the purposes of this policy Alpha Living defines a customer as:

- tenants and leaseholders
- members of the public
- third parties who have permission to represent the interests of an individual
- neighbours of our properties
- visitors to our properties and offices
- Board Members and Co-optees
- Members of Parliament
- Solicitors

- Citizens Advice Bureau and other similar advocacy agencies

## 7. Complaint Investigation Principles

A complaint investigation will be conducted by the Customer Experience Manager in an impartial manner, seeking sufficient reliable information from both parties so that fair and appropriate findings and recommendations can be made. To ensure that a complaint investigation is fair we will:

- deal with each case on its merits
- act independently and have an open mind
- take measures to address any actual or perceived conflict of interest
- consider all information and evidence carefully
- keep the complaint confidential as far as possible. We will only disclose details of the complaint more widely where this proves necessary in order to allow us to conduct a thorough investigation.

## 8. Complaints Process

Customers may raise a complaint through a range of formats including email, phone, letter, face to face, website or social media. Alpha Living will manage the reasonable expectations of its customers and will operate a simple two-stage process as noted below.

Complaints will be acknowledged by the CExT within two working days and recorded as stage one of the process. The Customer Experience Manager will contact the customer to discuss the nature of the complaint and their desired outcome or remedy will be confirmed by either email or in writing for clarity.

Chasers of a service request, such as a missed appointment, can often be resolved 'there and then' with an apology and the provision of another appointment and may not need to enter the complaints system. However, if further enquiries are needed to resolve the matter, or if the resident requests it, the issue must be logged as a complaint.

When a complaint is received via social media channels the CExT will contact the complainant and acknowledge the complaint and ask for contact details or that the complainant contacts Alpha Living using telephone or email so as to ensure confidentiality is maintained.

Survey feedback may not necessarily need to be treated as a complaint, though, where possible, the person completing the survey should be made aware of how they can pursue their dissatisfaction as a complaint if they wish to.

- **Stage 1** Complaints will be resolved as early as possible at this stage with a response provided within 10 working days. The date may be extended by up to 10 further working days if justifiable, e.g., complex complaints. Where a complaint has not been resolved to the customer's reasonable satisfaction the customer may request that it is escalated to stage 2. Residents who wish to

escalate a complaint to Stage 2 must do so within 20 working days. Alpha Living will not unreasonably refuse to escalate a complaint through all stages of a complaint. Reasons for declining to escalate a complaint are detailed in Section 13 - Exclusions from this policy.

**There will be times when it is not possible to close the complaint within 10 (or 20) days, for various reasons and the customer will be kept up to date throughout. All cases which are not closed within this timescale will be reported to the Senior Leadership Team for review.**

- **Stage 2.** The complaint will be considered by an independent head of service for a response within 20 working days from receipt of the escalation request. The date may be extended by up to 10 further working days if justifiable. Throughout this internal process, the CE<sub>XT</sub> will maintain regular contact with the customer.

## **9. Responding to Complaints**

We will respond to all Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaints in writing either by email or letter, and will:

- identify the complaint stage
- state the outcome of the complaint
- outline the reasons for any decisions made
- detail suggested remedies offered to resolve the issue
- identify any outstanding actions
- provide clear guidance on how to escalate the matter if the complainant remains dissatisfied
- include contact details for the Housing Ombudsman

## **10. Putting Things Right**

Effective dispute resolution requires a process designed to resolve complaints. Where something has gone wrong Alpha Living must acknowledge this and set out the actions it has already taken, or intends to take, to put things right. These can include:

- acknowledging where things have gone wrong
- providing an explanation, assistance or reasons
- apologising
- taking action if there has been a delay
- reconsidering or changing a decision
- amending a record
- providing a financial remedy
- changing policies, procedures or practices.

## **11. Compliance**

If a customer has exhausted Alpha Living's internal procedure and remains unhappy with the outcome of their complaint, details will be provided about how to approach the Ombudsman. Within the first eight weeks, the customer may do this through a 'designated person' e.g. local MP or directly with the Ombudsman after 8 weeks.

Details will be provided to customers as requested or can be found in Alpha Living's Complaints leaflet and on our website. Alpha Living will cooperate with the requirements of the Ombudsman and provide relevant evidence and documentation within 15 working days. If it is not possible to meet this timescale, the organisation will provide details to the Ombudsman and if accepted, will agree a revised date. Failure to respond to the Ombudsman may result in Alpha Living being issued with an Ombudsman Complaints Handling Failure Order and possible notification to the Regulator for Social Housing.

## **12. Anonymous Complaints**

Anonymous complaints will be considered as feedback and may influence change. However, due to the anonymity, the provisions of this policy will not apply.

## **13. Petitions**

Petitions will be treated as complaints where appropriate. Responses will be provided to the representative lead, submitting petitioner. Petitions about political issues, matters beyond the control of the organisation or about planning applications will not be considered within this policy.

## **14. Exclusions from this policy**

There may be occasions when a complaint will not be dealt with in line with this policy they include:

- An initial request for service, such as the first report of a repair or an enquiry about a service
- Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) or nuisance managed within the ASB Policy unless the complaint is in relation to staff conduct
- Nominations for properties which falls within the responsibilities of the Statutory Housing Authority
- Legal cases and insurance claims. This is defined as details of the claim, such as the Claim Form and Particulars of Claim, having been filed at court.
- Any serious allegations of inappropriate conduct from an Alpha Living Board member or member of staff. These will be handled in line with Human Resource policies or the Governance structure of the Company
- Issues that fall outside the remit of Alpha Living as a landlord and outside of its area of control.
- Unless there are exceptional or extenuating circumstances, the organisation will not investigate complaints that have already been dealt with under this policy or are over six months old

If a landlord decides not to accept a complaint, a detailed explanation must be provided to the resident setting out the reasons why the matter is not suitable for the complaints process and the right to take that decision to the Ombudsman. If the Ombudsman does not agree that the exclusion has been fairly applied, the Ombudsman may instruct the landlord to take on the complaint.

## **15. Unreasonable and Vexatious Complaints**

We recognise that on occasion complaints made can be vexatious. Alpha Living will not tolerate continuous vexatious complaints and will take appropriate action through the enforcement of the tenancy or advise the customer the way in which their tenancy and communication with us will be managed in future. Alpha Living will ensure that it acts proportionately and in accordance with this policy and related procedures.

## **16. Implementation**

This policy and its procedures were implemented from 1<sup>st</sup> December 2020. The key principles of this operational policy will also be reinforced to managers in team meetings and copies of the policy will be available.

## **17. Consultation**

The views of the Senior Leadership Team, other relevant staff and Alpha Living residents have and will be incorporated within the continuous development of this policy.

## **18. Equality Impact Assessment**

We believe all people should be treated with dignity and respect regardless of their age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, race, religion, belief or non-belief, sex or sexuality or by association with someone with any of these characteristics or perception of having any of these characteristics. An Equality impact assessment has been undertaken.

## **19. Monitoring**

The effectiveness of this policy will be measured and monitored by the CExT through Performance Indicators (PI's) in line with the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code ('the Code'). The primary focus will be on timeliness, quality, customer relationships, outcomes and lessons learnt.

A Self-Assessment will be required under the Code that will be submitted for approval to Alpha Living Board, and will be published on the website.

The Head of Housing will take responsibility for monitoring performance of the CExT and for ensuring service areas meet required internal protocols to support the requirements of the Code. Regular reports will be submitted to Board.

Quarterly reports relating to complaints, compensation, and surveys will also be produced for senior leadership team and a summary of 'Lessons Learnt' will be published on the Alpha Living website.

Complaints fall under the Consumer Standard, Tenant Involvement and Empowerment of the Regulator for Social Housing standards. This policy also provides a mechanism for responding effectively and clearly to customer complaints as expected of the Regulator.

## **19. Policy Review**

The policy will be reviewed every 2 years or earlier if deemed necessary resulting from the performance monitoring process. Next full Review will be November 2024. However, continuous amendments will be made as necessary continuous and recorded through the amendment log.