



Complaints Policy

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MONITORING, APPROVAL AND REVIEW	
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Complaints Policy

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1 Policy Purpose

- 1.1 First Choice Homes Oldham ('FCHO') recognise that there may be times when our customers are not fully satisfied with the service they receive. The purpose of this policy is to outline how customers can express dissatisfaction about the standard of service received or actions by FCHO.
- 1.2 This policy details our commitment to putting things right for customers. FCHO wants to actively listen to complaints and encourage customers to express any dissatisfaction to us. Expressions of dissatisfaction are viewed as positive opportunities to gather information that will help us improve our service.

1.3 Policy Principles

- 1.4 We are committed to fair, transparent, and effective complaint handling. We recognise that complaints are a valuable source of feedback and an opportunity to improve our services. The Housing Ombudsman's Dispute Resolution Principles guide our approach: Be Fair, Put Things Right, and Learn from Outcomes.

When handling complaints, we aim to:

- Acknowledge and accept responsibility when things go wrong.
- Resolve issues promptly, fairly, and respectfully, treating all customers equally.
- Learn from complaints to drive continuous improvement in our services.
- Communicate openly and honestly, rebuilding trust where needed.
- Ensure consistency and proportionality in how complaints are investigated and resolved.
- Provide a clear, accessible, and easy-to-follow complaints process for all customers.
- Support colleagues in managing complaints effectively and confidently.
- Clarify roles and responsibilities, including who can make a complaint and who handles them.
- Escalate complaints appropriately, including those related to building safety, to the responsible person.
- Report and record complaints in line with the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code.
- Share learning and performance outcomes with customers and stakeholders to demonstrate accountability and improvement.

2 Policy Details

2.1 Definition of a complaint

- 2.2 In line with the Housing Ombudsman's definition a complaint is defined 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 or group of individuals."

- 2.3 It is not necessary for the word "*complaint*" to be used for it to be treated as such. If the expression of dissatisfaction meets the definition above, it will be logged and managed in accordance with this policy.

Examples of complaints may include, but are not limited to:

- Failure to provide a required service.
- Provided a poor standard of service.
- Made a mistake in the way we provided a service.
- Not meeting our own service standards or complying with our policies.

2.4 Service Requests

2.5 We recognise that some service issues can be resolved quickly and informally, without the need to enter the formal complaints process. We actively encourage this early resolution approach, as it allows us to address concerns promptly.

2.6 The Ombudsman defines a Service Request as:

“a request from a customer requiring action to put something right.”

2.7 This typically represents the first time a customer has raised an issue or expressed dissatisfaction with our service.

Examples of service requests include:

- Reporting a new neighbour dispute
- Reporting antisocial behaviour
- Requesting a new repair that has not been reported before.
- Enquiring about their rent account

2.8 If the service request cannot be resolved promptly or the customer requests that we raise a complaint, we will do so immediately in line with our two-stage process. All service requests are logged in our data management system to ensure tracking and resolution.

2.9 Exclusions

2.10 There are some types of issues that we do not consider to be formal complaints.

These include:

- Complaints submitted 12 months or more after the issue occurred (these will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis to see if there are any reasons why they should be treated as complaints e.g., health and safety issues)
- Matters where legal proceedings have started. This is defined as details of the claim, such as the Claim Form and Particulars of Claim, having been filed at court.
- An initial service request (e.g., first report of a repair).
- A dispute with a neighbour which can be dealt with through the terms outlined in a tenancy agreement or the Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) policy.
- Repeat complaints about previously investigated matters.
- Expressions of dissatisfaction within a survey. We do not automatically record these as a complaint but may contact the customer to discuss their concerns.

2.11 If a customer's complaint has not been accepted, we will provide a clear and detailed explanation outlining the reasons why it falls outside the scope of the

complaints process. Customers will also be informed of their right to refer this decision to the Housing Ombudsman for an independent review.

2.12 Who Can Make a Complaint

- 2.13 We ask that customers raise complaints within 12 months of the issue occurring or of becoming aware of it. This allows us to investigate and resolve matters effectively. Complaints received outside this timeframe may not be accepted.
- 2.14 Complaints can be made by anyone who currently has, or previously had, a direct landlord-customer relationship with us. This includes individuals named on a tenancy or lease agreement, or those living at the property at the time the issue occurred.
- 2.15 Complaints may also be submitted on behalf of customers by advocates, support agencies, or other representatives. In these cases, we require written consent from the customer to discuss the complaint with their representative.
- 2.16 Where a Councillor or MP makes an enquiry on behalf of a customer or resident, written consent is not required, as they are elected representatives. These enquiries will be managed through our usual complaints process.
- 2.17 We welcome group complaints and petitions about shared neighbourhood concerns. These can be submitted by any individual or group but must include a named lead contact to manage communication.

2.18 How to Make a Complaint

- 2.19 We offer a range of ways in which customers can make a complaint:

Online – by [filling in a complaint form](#)

By telephone – 0161 393 7117 - lines are open from 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday and 9am to 4pm Saturday.

By post – to our registered address: FCHO Tellus, First Place, 22 Union Street, Oldham, OL1 1BE

In person – at our central office: First Place, 22 Union Street, Oldham, OL1 1BE, 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday

Social media - via direct message on Facebook or X, formerly known as Twitter (complaints via this channel will be taken offline to ensure privacy and confidentiality)

- 2.20 **Directly Addressed Requests** - all correspondence or communication directed to our colleagues including a member of the Executive Team, or a Board Member will be logged and managed in accordance with our complaints process. This ensures that all concerns are properly recorded, responded to consistently, and handled fairly, regardless of the recipient.

2.21 Complaint Stages

Stage 1

- 2.22 Where possible, we aim to resolve customer concerns immediately. However, if we are unable to resolve a service request straight away, or if a customer remains dissatisfied with the actions taken, we will follow our formal complaints procedure.

FCHO operates a two-stage complaints process to ensure concerns are handled fairly and thoroughly.

2.23 When a complaint is received, we will:

- Acknowledge, define, and log the complaint at Stage 1 of our complaint's procedure within 5 working days of receipt.
- Issue the customer with a full response to their Stage 1 complaint within 10 working days of the complaint being acknowledged.
- If an extension to this timescale is needed, we will inform the customer of the expected timescale for response. Any extension must be no more than 10 working days without good reason, and the reason(s) will be clearly explained.
- When informing the customer about an extension, we will also provide the Housing Ombudsman's contact details.

2.24 Where a customer raises additional complaints during the investigation, these will be incorporated into the Stage 1 response if they are related and the response has not yet been issued. If the Stage 1 response has already been issued, or the new issues are unrelated or would unreasonably delay the response, the new issues will be logged as a new complaint.

2.25 Stage 1 complaints will be assigned to a member of our Complaints Team. They will be suitably trained in the importance of complaint handling and given the authority and autonomy to resolve complaints promptly and fairly.

2.26 If a customer is unhappy with our Stage 1 response, or they feel all or part of their complaint has not been resolved, they can request for this to be escalated to Stage 2. Requests to escalate a complaint to Stage 2 should be received within 28 working days of the customer receiving the Stage 1 outcome. Discretion will be applied in extenuating circumstances.

Stage 2

2.27 If the customer feels the matter has not been resolved, a senior manager will review the investigation and complaint decision, along with any additional information provided, to ensure the initial investigation was carried out appropriately. This review will involve all relevant staff members necessary to provide a thorough and informed response.

2.28 Requests to escalate a complaint to Stage 2 will be acknowledged, defined, and logged at Stage 2 of our complaint's procedure within 5 working days of receipt.

2.29 Customers are not required to justify their request for a Stage 2 escalation. However, as part of our Stage 2 response, we will make reasonable efforts to understand the reasons the customer remains dissatisfied, to ensure their concerns are fully considered.

2.30 Following the investigation, we will:

- Issue a final response to the Stage 2 complaint within 20 working days of the complaint being acknowledged.
- If an extension to this timescale is needed, we will inform the customer of the expected timescale for response. Any extension must be no more

than 20 working days without good reason, and the reason(s) will be clearly explained.

- When informing the customer about an extension, we will also provide the Housing Ombudsman's contact details.

2.31 Where a customer raises additional complaints during the Stage 2 investigation, these will be incorporated into the Stage 2 response if they are related and the response has not yet been issued. If the Stage 2 response has already been issued, or the new issues are unrelated or would unreasonably delay the response, the new issues will be logged as a new complaint.

2.32 Stage 2 complaints will be considered by someone different from the person who handled Stage 1 and will usually be a Head of Service for the service in question. Where the complaint is multi-faceted, one area will take the lead.

2.33 At both stages of our complaints process, we will:

- Be clear which aspects of the complaint we are, and are not, responsible for.
- Provide the customer with an opportunity to set out their concerns and outcomes being sought.
- Confirm our understanding of the complaint.
- Consider all relevant information and evidence in investigating the customer's concerns.
- Address all points raised and provide clear reasons for any decisions made.
- Consider remedies at any point within the complaints process to resolve the complaint as early as possible.

2.34 The customer will receive a response to their complaint when the answer is known. In some cases, actions may still be ongoing or outstanding after the complaint has been closed. We will ensure that any agreed actions are tracked and monitored, and that the customer is kept informed of any updates or progress relating to those actions.

2.35 As Stage 2 is the final stage of our internal complaints process, if the customer feels that their complaint has still not been resolved, they have the opportunity to contact the relevant commissioning organisation or regulatory body. For the majority of issues, this will be the Housing Ombudsman, and more information can be found at: www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk

The Housing Ombudsman Service can be contacted at:

The Housing Ombudsman Service

PO Box 1484, Unit D, Preston, PR2 0ET

Tel: 0300 111 3000

Email: info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk

Website: www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk

These contact details are also included in all our complaint correspondence.

2.36 Once the Ombudsman has completed their investigation, they will issue a formal decision, known as a determination. We will contact the customer to discuss the outcome, and any recommendations made.

2.37 Building Safety Complaints

- 2.38 If the complaint relates to building safety and meets the criteria below, the customer has the right to escalate to the Building Safety Regulator once they have exhausted our two stage complaints process. Under the Building Safety Act 2022, a complaint is considered 'relevant' if the customer lives in a higher-risk building and the issue concerns:
- 2.39 The performance of FCHO where we act as the principal accountable person or an accountable person.
- 2.40 The performance of a third-party accountable person
- 2.41 Building safety risks, such as structural safety concerns or fire spread risks, including:
- Flammable cladding on the building's exterior
 - Faulty or missing fire doors or smoke extraction systems
 - Structural failures, such as collapsing sections, significant cracks, or falling building components.
- 2.42 If we determine that the complaint does not meet the criteria of a 'relevant complaint,' the customer may still contact the Building Safety Regulator for a final decision.

2.43 Heat Network Complaints

- 2.44 We are committed to resolving all complaints fairly and efficiently. If a customer's complaint relates to a heat network service, it will be managed through our standard two-stage complaints process.
- 2.45 If, after completing both stages, the customer remains dissatisfied with the outcome, they have the right to escalate the complaint to the Energy Ombudsman. This is a free and independent service that can investigate issues such as billing, customer service, supply interruptions, and other heat network-related concerns.
- 2.46 Customers may refer their complaint to the Energy Ombudsman if:
- They have received a final response and are still unhappy, or it has been 8 weeks since the complaint was first raised, and it remains unresolved.

Contact details:

Website: www.energyombudsman.org

Phone: 0330 440 1624

Email: enquiry@energyombudsman.org

2.47 Putting Things Right

- 2.48 We are committed to resolving complaints fairly and effectively. When things go wrong, we will acknowledge the issue and explain what we have done or plan to do to put it right.

Our actions may include:

- Acknowledging the mistake
- Providing an explanation or support
- Offering a sincere apology
- Addressing any delays
- Reviewing or changing a decision
- Updating records
- Offering financial compensation (where appropriate)
- Improving policies or procedures
- Remedies will be fair and reflect the impact of the issue. We aim to manage expectations honestly and avoid making promises we cannot keep.
- We also look at whether changes to our systems or processes could help prevent similar issues for other customers.

When deciding on a remedy, we may consider:

- How long and how often the issue occurred.
- The seriousness and number of service failures
- The overall impact on the customer
- Any personal circumstances or vulnerabilities

2.49 All remedies will clearly state what will be done and by when. We will agree this with the customer where appropriate and make sure the actions are completed.

2.50 Anonymous Complaints

2.51 From time to time, we may receive anonymous complaints. Whilst accepting there will be limitations on the action we can take and the feedback that we can offer, such complaints will be investigated in line with the policy and associated procedures, including our whistleblowing arrangements where appropriate.

2.52 Persistent, unreasonable complainants

2.53 We consider that all customers have the right to be heard and understand that customers may act out of character in times of distress or due to frustration. Equally, colleagues have the right to protection against unreasonable actions or behaviours which may negatively impact on their physical and mental wellbeing.

2.54 If a customer pursues their complaint in an aggressive, abusive, or threatening manner, or repeatedly pursues complaints which have already been through and exhausted the complaints process, consideration will be given to taking action in line with the Unacceptable and Unreasonable Behaviour Policy.

2.55 Governance and Oversight

2.56 The Member Responsible for Complaints (MRC) holds strategic responsibility for promoting a positive complaint-handling culture. The MRC and Board receive regular updates on complaint volumes, categories, outcomes, performance, trends, systemic issues, Housing Ombudsman investigations and findings, and annual complaints performance and service improvements. The MRC has access to the necessary data, colleagues, and resources to fulfil this role.

- 2.57 The annual complaints performance and service improvement report will be reported to our Board and published on the section of the website relating to complaints. The Board's response to the report will be published alongside the report.'
- 2.58 We conduct an annual self-assessment against the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code, and additional assessments following any major changes. The outcomes of these assessments are reported to the Board, published on our website, and included in our Annual Report.
- 2.59 We monitor and report on complaint-related Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs) in line with the Regulator of Social Housing's requirements. These insights help us improve service delivery and transparency.

2.60 Monitoring and Learning

- 2.61 Complaints are a key source of insight into service performance and customer experience. With the support of the Complaints Policy, the Head of Customer Services is responsible for assessing themes and trends to identify potential systemic issues, serious risks, or areas where policies and procedures may require revision.

This is achieved through:

- Monitoring and reporting on performance, trends, and serious cases.
 - Analysing complaint data to identify risks and opportunities for service improvement.
 - Sharing learning with teams and using it to shape training.
 - Capturing customer satisfaction to improve the complaints process.
- 2.62 Senior management plays a key role in reviewing these insights and escalating any significant themes or risks. The Business Intelligence Team provides regular reports to Managers, Leadership, the Customer Voice Panel, and our Board to ensure transparency and accountability.
- 2.63 All colleagues involved in complaint handling are expected to collaborate, take shared responsibility, and uphold professional standards. Senior leaders meet monthly to review learning, and we keep customers informed about changes made as a result of their feedback.
- 2.64 A positive complaint handling culture is integral to the effectiveness with which we resolve disputes, the quality of the service provided, the ability to learn and improve, and the relationship with customers. Complaints are regarded as a source of intelligence to identify issues and introduce positive changes to service delivery.

3 Legislative, Regulation and Good Practice

- 3.1 We regularly review this policy and the process that supports it, ensuring compliance with relevant legislation and regulation. This list is not exhaustive but includes:
- The Housing Ombudsman scheme including the Complaint Handling Code

- The Social Housing Regulatory framework, including Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard.
- General Data Protection Regulation 2018 (GDPR) guidance.
- Housing Ombudsman Guidance on Pre-Action Protocol for Housing Condition Claims and Service Complaints (Disrepair)
- This Complaints Policy ensures we comply with the Housing Ombudsman Code of Practice.

4 Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion

- 4.1 We are committed to promoting equality, diversity, and inclusion in everything we do. Oldham is a vibrant and diverse borough, and we recognise the importance of reflecting and responding to the needs of our local communities.
- 4.2 We ensure that all colleagues, customers, and stakeholders are treated fairly, with dignity and respect, regardless of their background or personal characteristics. This includes, but is not limited to, age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation.
- 4.3 This policy is available in alternative formats or languages upon request. Please contact us if you require support accessing or understanding this document.

4.4 Reasonable Adjustment and Support

- 4.5 We are committed to fairness and equality for all regardless of their colour, race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, sexual orientation, marital status, disability, age, religion or belief, family circumstances or offending history, as referred to in our relevant policies. Our aim is to ensure that our policies and procedures do not create an unfair disadvantage for anyone, either directly or indirectly. An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed on this policy.
- 4.6 Further details can be found in our Reasonable Adjustments Policy [Reasonable Adjustments - First Choice Homes Oldham](#)

5 Links to First Choice Home's Policies and Procedures

- Compensation Policy
- Data Protection Policy
- Vulnerability Policy
- Complaints and related documents
- Reasonable Adjustments Policy
- Unacceptable and Unreasonable Behaviour Policy

Appendix A - Incidents of Discrimination

The Equality Act 2010 provides it is unlawful to discriminate against people based on the Protected Characteristics, i.e. because of their age, sex, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief and sexual orientation. It applies to work (and with the exception of marriage and civil partnership) to the provision of services, the exercise of public functions and in managing or letting premises.

The law prohibits:

Direct discrimination – where someone is treated less favourably than another person because of a protected characteristic. Indirect discrimination this can occur when you have a rule or policy that applies to everyone but disadvantages a person with a particular protected characteristic.

Discrimination by association – this is direct discrimination against someone because they are associated with another person who possesses a protected characteristic.

Discrimination by perception – this is direct discrimination against someone because others think that they possess a particular protected characteristic. They do not necessarily have to possess the characteristic, just be perceived to.

Harassment - this is behaviour that is deemed offensive by the recipient; unwanted behaviour relating to someone's protected characteristic(s).

Victimisation – this occurs when someone is treated badly because they have made or supported a complaint or grievance under this legislation.

Why should FCHO collect data on discriminatory complaints?

The Public Sector Equality Duty at section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 requires public authorities, in the exercise of their functions, to have due regard to the need to:

Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Act.

Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and people who do not share it.

Foster good relations between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it.

In addition, we ensure that issues are recorded together with evidence of the actions and outcomes, so that we can learn from experiences reported to us.

