



COMPLIMENTS, COMMENTS AND COMPLAINTS

We make our Complaints and Compliments Policy publicly available on our website at freebridge.org.uk. Customers can also request a copy by phone, email or in writing, and it is available in alternative formats upon request. Information about the Housing Ombudsman Service, including how to escalate a complaint and access the Statutory Ombudsman's Code, is also available on our website with links to the Ombudsman's guidance. We promote our complaints process through our customer communications, leaflets, and digital channels to ensure tenants know how to make a complaint and understand their rights.

Complaints, comments and compliments are important to us as they help us improve our services.

In addition to making contact with Freebridge about these matters you can also contact the Housing Ombudsman Service direct at any time and speak to their dispute support advisors who will provide assistance throughout the life of a complaint.

They can be contacted at:

**Housing Ombudsman Service,
PO BOX1484
Unit D
Preston
PR2 0ET**

telephone: 0300 111 3000

(Phonelines are open Monday to Friday 9am - 5pm

Lines will be closed for staff training every Thursday from 3.30pm - 5pm))

online complaint form: housing-ombudsman.org.uk/residents/make-a-complaint/

TELL US WHAT YOU THINK

At Freebridge we want you to be happy with the service you receive from us, and to help us understand how we are doing we would like your feedback. We want you to tell us when we do something well, when we get something wrong, or any ideas you have for how we can improve what we do.

We monitor compliments, comments and complaints so that we can learn and improve and provide you with high quality services that you are happy with.

WHEN WE GET SOMETHING WRONG

Sometimes things go wrong with the service we provide, if this happens, you can make a complaint.

We define a complaint as:

"An expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the landlord, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting a resident or group of residents."

Customers do not need to use the word 'complaint' or formally request that a complaint be raised in order for their concern to be dealt with as such; our employees will maintain an awareness of the difference between a request for service and a complaint and be empowered to act in the best interests of a customer to escalate a matter to complaint status proactively.

Raising a complaint will not prevent, stall or impact on actions needed to resolve any immediate issues relating to the service request.

Please note that we will accept complaints referred to us within 12 months of the issue occurring or the customer first becoming aware of the issue. For any complaints which fall outside of the 12-month timeframe, discretion on acceptance will be applied to these.

We define a request for service as:

"A request from a resident to Freebridge requiring action to be taken to put something right. Where a resident raises dissatisfaction with the response to their service request then a complaint will be raised instead."

Customers will be offered the choice of whether they wish to raise a service request or a formal complaint. We will ensure that any customer that expresses dissatisfaction is provided with the choice to make a complaint.

Examples of complaints include, but are not limited to, the following:

- When we haven't met our Service Standards.
- When we haven't done something we should do.
- When a customer is unhappy with a decision or action (if this decision or action is outside of an agreed policy to provide a service).
- When a customer is unhappy with the attitudes and behaviours of our employees or contractors.

What we consider not to be complaints:

In a limited amount of circumstances, and only where a customer has an alternative method of redress such as in the circumstances detailed below, we will write to you within 5 working days from your initial contact to confirm that we do not consider the matter to fall under the complaints policy. If you wish to challenge our decision not to accept a complaint you may contact the Housing Ombudsman who will review the matter and where appropriate will instruct us to take on the complaint.

What we will not consider as a complaint

- Stage 2 complaint escalations received outside of the 60-day timeframe will be considered on a case by case basis.
- Matters that have already been considered under our Complaints policy.
- Complaints about anti-social behaviour or nuisance by Freebridge tenants. Such complaints will be handled by a separate Anti-social Behaviour policy and procedure. However, if the complaint is about the way in which the nuisance has been handled then this will be covered by our policy. See also 'Anti-Social Behaviour and Complaints'
- Initial requests for a service or information, for example initial reporting of a repair. However, when we fail to meet our service standards this will be covered by our policy.
- Complaints where legal action is already taking place or a decision has been made by the court. This does not apply to the initiation of the Pre-Action Protocol for Housing Claims. A complaint will be considered at any stage of the protocol and be considered as a form of Alternative Dispute Resolution, right up until legal proceedings have been issued.
- Complaints about our decision to end a starter tenancy; refusal to offer a tenancy after an applicant has been referred or nominated to us; a tenancy review; refusal of a mutual exchange – these would be dealt with under our Appeals policy. However if the complaint is about the way in which the process has been handled then this will be covered by this policy.

We treat the following as compliments:

- When we have received a formal recognition of good service provided by a Freebridge employee or employees.

Our Complaints and Compliments Policy is available for all of our customers; although not exhaustive, this includes:

- Tenants (current or former).
- Shared Owners (current or former).
- Leaseholders (resident or non resident).

ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR AND COMPLAINTS

When a customer is unhappy about the way in which we are dealing with a case of anti-social or nuisance behaviour, in the first instance we will always look to address this through discussions between the Tenancy Advisor handling the case and the customer concerned. Where a customer remains unhappy with the action being proposed/taken, they can ask for the case to be reviewed by the Head of Housing and Community Services. If the correct criteria is met, customers will also be informed of their ability to activate the Community Trigger – more information is provided in our Anti-Social Behaviour, Harassment and Hate Crime Policy.

We will not usually progress dissatisfaction regarding handling of an anti-social behaviour case via our complaints process, until a final decision or outcome on the case has been reached, or following a case review by the Head of Housing and Community Services. At this point and if the customer remains unhappy then the matter will be formally recorded as a complaint and be covered by this policy.

OUR 2 STAGE COMPLAINTS PROCESS

HOW THE COMPLAINT WILL BE DEALT WITH

When it is established that an enquiry is a complaint rather than a request for service, or when we considers that it meets the definition of a complaint, the matter will be passed immediately to our Customer Complaints Team, for escalation to Stage #1.

STAGE #1

Within **five working days of receipt** you will receive direct contact from the Customer Complaints Team to discuss your complaint, at this point the complaint will be acknowledged, defined and logged followed by an acknowledgement letter detailing the complaint definition including the following:

- The Landlords understanding of the complaint
- The outcomes the resident is seeking
- Which aspects the landlord is and is not responsible for

During the complaints process if any aspect of the complaint is unclear, we will ask the customer for clarification.

- The acknowledgement letter will also include a compliments comments and complaints leaflet. The stage 1 complaint response will be **10 working days** from the date of the acknowledgement letter.
- When the investigation takes longer, you will be kept fully updated of progress; in any event this will not exceed a further **10 working days** without good reason. The Complaints Team will write to you informing you if an extension is necessary in order to fully investigate your complaint explaining the rationale for the extension along with an expected timeframe for the response.

For Stage 1 complaints this is the 10 Working days, plus the agreed further 10 Working days extended timescale (which should be no more than 10 Working days without good reason)

During the agreed extension suitable contact intervals will be agreed with the customer in order to provide updates on their complaint when the response falls outside of the stage 1 timescales set out in the Ombudsman code.

For Stage 1 Complaint extensions customers have the right to approach the Ombudsman if the complaint extension timescales exceed those stated by the Ombudsman code.

- The Customer Complaints Team will carry out an investigation into the complaint, in conjunction with the appropriate departments and managers.
- As part of the investigation process the Complaints Handler will make direct contact with you to understand the nature and the content of the complaint fully. The format for this is not prescriptive, however the Complaints Handler must ensure that they have engaged with you to fully understand your concerns before a conclusion is reached and the Stage #1 outcome letter is sent. Where the complaint concerns, or involves other members of staff, then the Complaints Handler must also engage with each member of staff.

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- The Customer Complaints Team will then write to you with the outcome of the investigation into the complaint, striving to resolve the matter at this stage wherever possible. The stage 1 complaint response will be provided when the answer to the stage 1 complaint is known, not when all outstanding actions have been completed. Where actions remain outstanding following any stage 1 response, updates will be provided to residents on outstanding actions until they are completed.

Within 5 working days of issuing the Stage 1 closing letter, the complaint handler will contact the complainant to confirm receipt of the decision and gather feedback on their experience of the Stage 1 complaints process. This feedback will be recorded for service improvement purposes.

Related and unrelated complaints

If the stage 1 response has not yet been sent and it will not unreasonably delay the response, any related additional complaints should be incorporated in the stage 1 complaint.

Additionally, where a stage 1 response has already been sent, or would unreasonably delay the stage 1 response if not yet sent and the issues are unrelated, these should be logged as a separate new stage 1 complaint.

ESCALATION TO STAGE #2

If you are still unhappy about how your situation has been dealt with, you can ask for your complaint to be progressed to the second stage of our process within 60 days of the date of the decision at Stage #1.

In a limited amount of circumstances we may refuse to escalate a complaint to Stage #2. These are set out below:

- Complaint escalations to stage 2 outside of the 60-day timescale are considered on a case by case basis.
- Matters that have already been considered under our Complaints policy.
- Complaints about anti-social behaviour or nuisance by Freebridge tenants. Such complaints will be handled by a separate Anti-social Behaviour policy and procedure. However, if the complaint is about the way in which the nuisance has been handled then this will be covered by our policy. See also 'Anti-Social Behaviour and Complaints'.
- Initial requests for a service or information, for example initial reporting of a repair. However, when we fail to meet our service standards this will be covered by our policy.
- Complaints where legal action is already taking place or a decision has been made by the court.
- Complaints about our decision to end a starter tenancy; refusal to offer a tenancy after an applicant has been referred or nominated to us; a tenancy review; refusal of a mutual exchange – these would be dealt with under our Appeals policy. However if the complaint is about the way in which the process has been handled then this will be covered by this policy.

In the event that we do not agree to escalate a complaint we will provide you with a response detailing the reasons for this; if you wish to challenge our decision not to accept a complaint they may contact the Housing Ombudsman who will review the matter – and where appropriate will instruct us to take on the complaint.

STAGE #2

Within a **maximum of 5 working days of receipt of a request to escalate** you will receive contact from the Customer Complaints Team, at this point the complaint will be acknowledged, defined and logged followed by an acknowledgement letter detailing the complaint definition including the following:

- The Landlords understanding of the complaint
- The outcomes the resident is seeking
- Which aspects the landlord is and is not responsible for

During the complaints process if any aspect of the complaint is unclear, we will ask the customer for clarification.

Customers are not required to provide a reason for requesting their stage 1 complaint to be escalated to stage 2.

- At Stage 2 the complaint will then be reviewed by a Head of Service / Complaints manager not previously involved in the original complaint.
- As part of the investigation process the relevant Head of Service / Complaints Manager will make contact with you to understand the nature and the content of the complaint fully. The format for this (i.e. meeting, telephone call etc) is not prescriptive, however the Head of Service must ensure that they have engaged with you to fully understand their concerns before a conclusion is reached and the Stage Two outcome letter is sent. Where the complaint concerns, or involves other members of staff, then the relevant Head of Service will also engage with each member of staff.
- The Head of Service / Complaint Manager will write to you with their final decision **within 20 working days** of the complaint being acknowledged where actions remain outstanding following any stage 2 response updates will be provided to the complainant on outstanding actions until they are completed.

When the investigation takes longer, you will be kept fully updated of progress; in any event this will not exceed a further 20 working days without good reason. The Complaints Team will write to you formally to explain the rationale for the decision to extend the complaint informing you why an extension is necessary in order to fully investigate your complaint, explaining the extension reason along with an expected timeframe for the response.

Within 5 working days of issuing the Stage 2 closing letter, the Head of Service will contact the complainant to confirm receipt of the decision and gather feedback on their experience of the Stage 2 complaints process. This feedback will be recorded for service improvement purposes.

For stage 2 complaints this is the **20 working days**, plus the **agreed further 20 working days** extended timescale (Which should be no more than 20 working days without good reason).

During the agreed extension suitable contact intervals will be agreed with the customer in order to provide updates on their complaint when the response falls outside of the stage 2 timescales set out in the Ombudsman code.

For Stage 2 Complaint extensions customers have the right to approach the Ombudsman if the complaint extension timescales exceed those stated by the Ombudsman code.

FURTHER OPTIONS

If you remain unhappy with the response following the second stage of our process, you can take your complaint to the Housing Ombudsman.

The Housing Ombudsman website

housing-ombudsman.org.uk/residents/

The contact details for the Housing Ombudsman Service are:

Online complaint form: housing-ombudsman.org.uk/residents/bring-your-complaint-to-the-housing-ombudsman/

Telephone: **0300 111 3000**

(Phonelines are open Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm).

Lines will be closed for staff training every Thursday from 3.30pm to 5pm.

Postal address:

Housing Ombudsman Service,

PO BOX1484

Unit D

Preston

PR2 0ET

or the Financial Ombudsman, if the complaint relates to Debt Advice or Finance Conduct Authority Matters, their address is:

Financial Ombudsman Service Exchange Tower

Harbour Exchange

London

E14 9SR

telephone: **020 7964 1000** website: financial-ombudsman.org.uk

For Leaseholder and Shared Owner customers, leasehold disputes (such as those regarding service or administration charges, leasehold management etc.) can also be considered by the First-tier Tribunal (Property Chamber), they can be contacted at:

Residential property: Eastern region

Cambridge County Court

197 East Road

Cambridge

CB1 1BA

telephone: **01223 841 524** email: rpeastern@justice.gov.uk

COMPLAINTS REVIEWED BY THE HOUSING OMBUDSMAN

In the event that a complaint is reviewed by the Housing Ombudsman, any subsequent determination letter and accompanying reports will be provided to Freebridge's Board and Customer Voice Panel for scrutiny.

MONITORING AND FEEDBACK

Complaints and compliments are monitored on an ongoing basis to ensure learning opportunities are identified, implemented and embedded to improve services. We will also undertake case closure satisfaction surveying with customers to better understand how we can continually improve our process.

A quarterly report is provided to the Board and the Customer Voice Panel, which will also be made available

on our website.

Annually we will review the Ombudsman's Landlord Performance Report along with our own compliance with the Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code, to make further improvement to our services.

REPRESENTATION

Complaints submitted by a third party or representative will be handled in line with this policy, after the necessary consent has been obtained from the customer concerned.

Where enquiries are made on behalf of a customer by a local councillor or Member of Parliament, and where the nature of the enquiry meets the definition of a complaint, the matter will be dealt with in accordance with this policy.

Customers wishing to make a complaint can choose at any stage in the process to have a representative deal with their complaint on their behalf, which includes attendance at any relevant meeting.

REASONABLE ADJUSTMENTS

We are committed to ensuring that all of our customers are able to access our Complaints and Compliments service, and will seek to make reasonable adjustments to do so.

Reasonable adjustments will depend on individual need but may include things such as:

- Provision of auxiliary aids.
- Provision of information in alternative formats (e.g. large print, Braille, coloured paper etc.).
- Allowing extra time for customers to make a response.
- Use of email or telephone in preference to hard copy letters.
- Use of plain English or Easy Read service.
- Communication through a representative or intermediary.
- Rest or comfort breaks in meetings.

Customers can request reasonable adjustments or additional support at any point during the process; where we are aware that a customer may require a reasonable adjustment we will seek to provide these proactively.

CONTACTING US

Complaints, comments, and compliments are important to us as they help us improve our services. Customers can contact us in the following ways:

- In person at any of our offices.
- By phone 03332 404 444, option #1 (Customer Experience Team).
- By e-mail feedback@freebridge.org.uk.
- By writing to us at Juniper House, Austin Street, King's Lynn, Norfolk, PE30 1DZ.
- Via the Tenant Web Portal - once they have registered tenants will be able to send a comment/complaint directly to us from here as well as report a repair and view their rent statement.
- Via our social media accounts.

When complaints, comments and compliments are made to us via social media we will correspond with the customer via direct messaging and seek to move the matter offline as soon as we are able to ensure privacy is maintained.

In addition to making contact with Freebridge, customers can also contact the Housing Ombudsman Service direct at any time and speak to their dispute support advisors who will provide assistance throughout the life of a complaint. The Housing Ombudsman contact details are provided on the previous page.

Housing

Ombudsman Service

How to contact us

To find out if we can help:

Online complaint form: housing-ombudsman.org.uk/residents/make-a-complaint/

Telephone: **0300 111 3000**

(Phonelines are open Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm).

Lines will be closed for staff training every Thursday from 3.30pm to 5pm.

Postal address:

Housing Ombudsman Service,

PO BOX1484

Unit D

Preston

PR2 0ET

For further information on the Housing Ombudsman Service you can contact the Housing Ombudsman at: housing-ombudsman.org.uk/residents/resident-panel/

IF YOU NEED ANY HELP TO UNDERSTAND THIS LEAFLET, PLEASE GET IN TOUCH

Freebridge Community Housing
Juniper House
Austin Street
King's Lynn
Norfolk PE30 1DZ

Email: feedback@freebridge.org.uk

Main Switchboard Telephone: 03332 404 444

Office Opening Hours:

8:45am - 5.15pm (Mon-Thurs)

8:45am - 4.45pm (Fri)

Bank Holidays, Saturday and Sunday Closed

Out of Office Hours:

The main telephone number (03332 404 444) will divert to 24 hour emergency service.

DATA PROTECTION PRIVACY STATEMENT

Freebridge Data Protection Privacy Statement: We take your privacy seriously and you can find out more about your privacy rights and how we collect, use, share and secure your personal identifiable information ("personal information") by referring to our Privacy Notice which can be found on our website (<https://www.freebridge.org.uk/media/pages/who-we-are/our-policies/7300bd50da-1669130428/privacy-notice-tenants.pdf>) or by requesting a hard copy from us.

How we use your personal information will depend on the services we provide to you. However, we obtain your personal information so we may conduct our normal business operations as a registered social housing provider.

The Privacy Notice provides information about how we use your personal information with effect from 25th May 2018 and updates any previous information we have provided about using your personal information.

If we make any significant changes affecting how we use your personal information, we will make changes to the Privacy Notice, and we will contact you to inform you of these changes.

Our Data Protection Officer (DPO) provides help and guidance to make sure we apply the law to the processing and protection of your personal identifiable information. Should you have any questions about how we use your personal identifiable information, our DPO can be reached by writing to us and addressing your letter to:

Data Protection Officer, Freebridge Community Housing, Juniper House, Austin Street, Kings Lynn, Norfolk PE30 1DZ; or email us at DataProtectionOfficer@freebridge.org.uk