



COMPLIMENTS, COMMENTS AND COMPLAINTS

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/

email: info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk

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."

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."

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.

We do not treat the following as complaints:

- 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 the 'Anti-Social Behaviour and Complaints' section on following page for further information.
- 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 accept 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 you may contact the Housing Ombudsman who will review the matter – and where appropriate will instruct us to take on the complaint.

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, followed by an acknowledgement letter and 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.
- 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.
- 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.

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:

- 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, followed by an acknowledgement letter and leaflet.
- At Stage 2 the complaint will then be reviewed by a Head of Service not previously involved in the original complaint.
- As part of the investigation process the relevant Head of Service 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 will write to you with their final decision **within 20 working days** of Freebridge being asked, and agreeing, to escalate the complaint to this stage.
- 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 or without your agreement.

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 contact details for the Housing Ombudsman Service are:

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.

Email: info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk

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 #5.
- 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

Information for residents about the Housing Ombudsman Service

How we can help

The Housing Ombudsman Service is set up by law to look at complaints about housing organisations that are registered with us, including housing associations and local authorities.

When to contact the Housing Ombudsman Service

You can contact us at any point during the complaint process. The assistance we can offer depends on whether the landlord's complaints procedure has been completed and when.

Making a complaint to your landlord

If you have not yet complained to your landlord, we can offer assistance on how to make your complaint and discuss what outcomes and actions would put things right for you. We can help you obtain details of the complaints procedure so you know what to expect.

Getting a response

If you have already been in contact with your landlord about the problem we can help you find out whether a formal complaint has been logged. We can make sure the landlord understands that you wish to make a complaint and make sure the correct process is followed. We will also find out when you can expect to receive a response.

Next steps

If you have received a response from your landlord but remain dissatisfied with the outcome, we can discuss your options and help you identify the most appropriate action.

What if we can't help?

There are some complaints that we will not be able to consider, for example if your complaint has been considered by a court. We will tell you as soon as possible if we are unable to consider any element of your complaint. Wherever possible we will provide you with details of any organisation that may be able to assist you to resolve the dispute.

Can you complain on my behalf?

We are an independent organisation and we are impartial. This means we cannot represent you or make the complaint on your behalf. We do not act on behalf of your landlord either.

We believe that the best way to resolve a dispute is quickly and locally, by a resident and their landlord. Before the landlord's complaints procedure has finished, our role is to help you and your landlord resolve the complaint between yourselves.

Once the landlord's complaints procedure is complete

The landlord's final response to your complaint should be set out in writing and should state that it is the final response. It should include a paragraph advising that you may now refer your complaint to a "designated person" (an MP, councillor or tenant panel), or wait eight weeks and then refer the complaint to us for investigation. (These arrangements are set out in law and we have no power to investigate your complaint until they are complied with).

If your landlord's letter does not include a paragraph stating that it is a final response, there may be more that your landlord can do. We can make checks with your landlord to help you know whether the complaints process has finished.

Why contact a designated person?

Your MP, local councillor or tenant panel may be able to help resolve the complaint. They may have knowledge and experience of local issues that can offer a solution. If they are unable to resolve the dispute they can refer the complaint to us for investigation.

Not all areas have a tenant panel. Your landlord will be able to tell you if one operates in your location.

If you do not wish to contact a designated person you can refer your complaint to us. Although we will be able to consider and advise on the complaint at any time, we will not be able to investigate until eight weeks after your landlord has given you its final response.

For more information about the designated person please see the factsheet on our website: www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/useful-tools/fact-sheets/3123-2/

What does the Ombudsman do with the complaint?

All complaints are different. Once we have had time to consider the individual circumstances of your complaint, we will decide the best way to resolve it. For example, we may:

- Advise you to contact a different organisation if it is an issue that they are better placed to resolve. In some cases, we may be able to refer the complaint straight to the other organisation if you want us to do so.
- Help you get a response from your landlord and to progress the matter through the internal complaints procedure.
- Work with you and your landlord to resolve the dispute through agreement.
- Carry out an investigation into the way your landlord dealt with the initial problem and how it dealt with your complaint. We will assess whether this was fair in all the circumstances by looking at all the evidence.

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.

Email: info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk

Postal address:

Housing Ombudsman Service,

PO BOX1484

Unit D

Preston

PR2 0ET

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