



COMPLIMENTS, COMMENTS AND COMPLAINTS

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 follows:

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.

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.
- 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 full 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.

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).
- Applicants for our properties.

OUR COMPLAINTS PROCESS

Early Resolution

- When we are first made aware of your dissatisfaction, our Customer Service Team will try to resolve the matter within three working days.

Where this is not possible, or if you remain dissatisfied and wish to pursue the complaint further, the matter will be escalated to Stage 1.

STAGE #1

- Any complaint that is not resolved within the initial period of three working days will be referred to the Customer Services Manager.
 - Within a further two working days you will receive an acknowledgement letter.
 - Within 10 working days and following investigation, you will receive a full response.
 - If the investigation takes longer, we will keep you fully updated on its progress. This will not exceed a further 10 working days without good reason.
- As part of the investigation, the manager looking into the matter will make contact with you to understand the nature of your complaint, the impact the matter has had on you and what you would like us to do to resolve the problem.

If you are still unhappy about how your complaint has been dealt with, you can then ask for the complaint to be escalated to Stage 2.

STAGE #2

- At the second stage of our complaints process your complaint will be reviewed by a Director at Freebridge not directly involved in the original matter.
- As part of the investigation, the Director will make contact with you to understand your complaint, the impact it has had on you and what you would like us to do to resolve the problem.
 - The Director will then write to you with their final decision within 10 working days of Freebridge being asked to progress the case to this stage.
- Where the complaint relates to debt advice or our other Financial Conduct Authority regulated activities this update will take the form of a final response letter which will be sent to you within eight weeks of the complaint first being received

If you still remain unhappy with the response following the second stage of our process, the following options are available to you.

- Within eight weeks of our final decision, you can ask a 'designated person' to refer the matter to the Housing Ombudsman.
 - Alternatively, eight weeks after our final decision, you can take your complaint direct to the Housing Ombudsman.
- If your complaint relates to Debt Advice or Finance Conduct Authority Matters, you will need to contact the Financial Ombudsman.
- 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).

Contact details for these organisations are on the following pages.

REPRESENTATION

At any stage in our complaints process you can choose to have a representative deal with your complaint on your behalf, including attending any meetings with or for you.

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 where necessary.

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.

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

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.
- 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 move the matter offline as soon as we are able to ensure privacy is maintained.

In addition to making contact with Freebridge 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. The Housing Ombudsman contact details are provided on a later page.

OTHER CONTACTS

A designated person is:

- a Member of Parliament (MP),
- a local councillor, or a
- recognised Tenant Panel (Freebridge's Tenant panel is not a recognised Tenant Panel in this instance).

The Housing Ombudsman Service can be contacted at:

Housing Ombudsman Service
PO Box 152
Liverpool
L33 7WQ
0300 111 3000

email: info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk **web:** www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk

The Financial Ombudsman can be contacted at:

Financial Ombudsman Service Exchange Tower
Harbour Exchange
London
E14 9SR

tel: 020 7964 1000 **web:** www.financial-ombudsman.org.uk

The First-tier Tribunal (Property Chamber) can be contacted at:

Residential property: Eastern region
Cambridge County Court
197 East Road
Cambridge
CB1 1BA

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

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:

- See our website at www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk
- Call us on 0300 111 3000
- Email us: info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk
- Write to us at Housing Ombudsman Service, PO Box 152, Liverpool L33 7WQ

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