



COMPLAINTS & COMPLIMENTS POLICY



Complaints and Compliments Policy			
Last Reviewed	April 2026	Next Review	April 2027
Responsible Officer	Director of Operations		

Policy Statement: We will rectify problems promptly, efficiently and sensitively and in accordance with the Housing Ombudsman’s Complaints Handling Code. We are committed to treating complaints as a valuable source of learning and insight, using them to understand what went wrong, identify patterns or service gaps, and make meaningful improvements for all customers. Compliments allow us to identify best practices across Freebridge and recognise individuals who deliver exemplary customer service.

Freebridge is committed to increasing satisfaction through delivering an excellent service. We will identify potential improvements through the complaints process and through collecting and monitoring customer compliments. We value complaints and compliments as they enable us to learn, improve, and deliver services, which increase customer satisfaction.

Policy Detail:

We shall:

- Recognise problems
- Rectify the problem promptly, efficiently and sensitively
- Identify potential improvements
- Try to resolve issues before they become formal complaints
- Ensure that there are no adverse effects to the customer as a result of making a complaint or comment
- Monitor complaints and compliments through quarterly reports, identifying any areas for improvement
- Provide feedback to customers on complaints and compliments received, appropriate actions, learning and improvements through a range of methods
- We will also provide an overview of complaints and compliments received throughout the year in Freebridge’s annual report to tenants
- Ensure all Freebridge employees understand the importance of complaints, and compliments for increasing satisfaction and continuous improvement, and are aware of their role in capturing, collating and responding to these

Definition of 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 organisation, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting an individual 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.

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.

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.

Raising a complaint will not prevent, stall or impact on actions and efforts needed to resolve any immediate issues related and raised in the service request.

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

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

What we consider not to be complaints:

In limited circumstances, and only where a customer has an alternative method of redress such as in the following circumstances:

- Matters that have already been considered under our complaints policy
- Stage 2 complaint escalations received outside of the 60-day timeframe will be considered on a case-by-case basis
- 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.
- Matters 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.

If we do not accept a complaint we will write to the customer within 5 working days from their initial contact to confirm that we do not consider the matter to fall under the complaints policy.

If customers 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.

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

We treat the following as compliments:

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

Scope

Our Complaints and Compliments Policy is available for all 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

We make our Complaints and Compliments Policy publicly available on our website at www.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

Contacting us

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

- In person at any of our offices,
- By phone 03332 404 444, **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, and
- 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 contacting 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 further below.

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.

Support Needs

When considering all complaints we will take into consideration your individual and household situation, circumstances, the impact of the matter on you, and your support needs so that we can support you in the best way possible.

Accessibility

We are committed to ensuring that all our customers are able to access our complaints process. We will provide information regarding the process, in the most suitable and accessible format for each customer.

Examples of support we can provide are:

- Supplying auxiliary aids to assist in communication regarding your appeal (such as sign language, interpreters and Induction Loops).
- Providing information in alternative formats (e.g. large print, braille, coloured paper, audio etc.)
- Giving extra time for you to provide information
- Sending emails or communicating via telephone in preference to hard copy letters
- Communicating with a nominated family member or third party such as support agencies or advocates.

Customers can let us know about any additional support needed at any point during this process. We will always try and meet the needs of our customers. There may be instances where this isn't possible. When this happens, we will do our best to work with you to find another solution.

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 the colleague receiving the enquiry 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.

Our complaints policy and procedures are subject to internal audit for review. If a case presents impropriety or control failure, then we will seek assurances and review of the process by an independent investigation. Complaints made against a member of the Freebridge Board or Leadership Team will follow internal grievance and disciplinary procedures.

Stage 1

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

- Our understanding of the complaint
- The outcomes the customer is seeking
- Which aspects Freebridge are and are 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, the customer 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 informing if an extension is necessary to fully investigate the complaint explaining the rationale for the extension along with an expected timeframe for the response.

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.

Extension of the complaint

For Stage 1 complaints this is the original 10 working days, plus a maximum of a further 10 working days.

During the agreed extension suitable contact intervals will be agreed with the customer 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 customers 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 customers fully to understand 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 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 customers on outstanding actions until they are completed.

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 the customer remains unhappy about how their situation has been dealt with, they can ask for their complaint to be progressed to the second stage of our process **within 60 days of the date of the decision at Stage 1, considered on a care by care basis.**

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.
- Matters 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 the customer concerned with a response detailing the reasons for this; if a customer wishes 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** the customer 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:

- Freebridge's understanding of the complaint
- The outcomes the customer is seeking
- Which aspects Freebridge are and are 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, Assistant Director or the Complaints Manager not previously involved in the original complaint.

As part of the investigation process the relevant Head of Service, Assistant Director or Complaints Manager will make contact 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 person reviewing the complaint must ensure that they have engaged fully to understand the 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, Assistant Director or Complaints Manager will write 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.

Within 5 working days of issuing the Stage 2 response 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.

When the investigation takes longer, the customer 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 formally explain the rationale for the

decision to extend the complaint, informing why an extension is necessary in order to fully investigate the complaint, explaining the extension reason along with an expected timeframe for the response.

For Stage 2 complaints this is the original 20 working days, plus a maximum of a further 20 working days extended timescale.

During the agreed extension suitable contact intervals will be agreed with the customer 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 customers 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

<https://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/residents/>

The contact details for the Housing Ombudsman Service are:

Online complaint form: [housing-ombudsman.org.uk/residents/make-a-complaint/](https://www.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

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
020 7964 1000 www.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

01223 841 524 rpeastern@justice.gov.uk

Complaints reviewed by the Housing Ombudsman

If a complaint is reviewed by the Housing Ombudsman, any subsequent determination letter and accompanying reports will be provided to the Board and the Customer Influence Panel for scrutiny purposes.

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 is also 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.