



Customer Complaints and Feedback Policy

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1. Purpose

This policy sets out North Devon Homes values for supporting continuous improvement by letting customers know how to make a complaint and encouraging our customers to provide feedback. Both complaints and other feedback help us improve the services we offer based on the experience customers have.

For clarification customers include:

- Tenants
- Leaseholders
- Shared Owners
- Devon Homelink customers
- Garage tenants
- Managed and Commercial property tenants

It does not include private owners including those on our estates that have no contractual relationship with ndh.

North Devon Homes will monitor, review and use customer feedback in all service planning to support effective service delivery and continuous improvement.

All feedback should be considered as an opportunity to learn. Positive feedback might reinforce what we are doing or help us to further develop effective strategies. Negative feedback can help us to refine what we do, provide challenge and inform changes in the way we deliver services.

This policy sets out the responsibilities and obligations on North Devon Homes to listen to its customers and use the information they provide to improve its services.

Customer feedback can be provided in a variety of ways and includes any information that helps us to understand where:

- We have done something well
- We have exceeded expectations
- A member of staff has gone out of their way to provide a good service
- We have done something badly or we have failed to do something we should have done
- Customers are unhappy with the manner in which they have been dealt with

- We could have done something differently to be more effective in meeting our aims

2. Principles

The following principles will apply to this policy:

- It will be open, fair and transparent
- It will reflect the current standards of operation and will be reviewed whenever industry standards, legislation or guidelines change
- It will be influenced by the views of staff, customers and Board Members
- It will be realistic, achievable and provide value for money

3. Review

We will review this policy at least once every 3 years to ensure that it continues to operate within best practice, achieve measurable results, and achieve continuous service improvement.

Alternatively, the policy and all associated procedures will be reviewed immediately following any relevant change to government policy, regulation or legislation.

The Service Improvement Co-ordinator will be responsible for ensuring that policy reviews are undertaken, that appropriate consultation takes place and that revisions are reported to the Exec Team for its approval.

4. Application

North Devon Homes' Board will approve this policy and delegate responsibility to the Head of Customer and Housing Services for ensuring that this policy is communicated and implemented.

The Service Improvement Co-ordinator will provide training for staff to ensure that they fully understand the wider issues surrounding this policy and the procedure.

5. Policy Statement

Statement	Further Detail
NDH will seek to collect customer feedback in all service planning to support effective delivery and continuous improvement in all that we do.	Section 5.1
Positive feedback will be monitored, shared with staff and used in service planning to ensure that we listen to what our customers value the most and that we recognise staff who are delivering excellent service	Section 5.2
Where we cannot immediately resolve a complaint to the satisfaction of a customer, we will seek to resolve the issue through our formal Customer Complaints procedure.	Section 5.3
We will support customers in accessing a Designated Person and co-operate with them to try and resolve the complaint.	Section 5.4
We will support customers in accessing the Housing or Financial Ombudsman as appropriate, recognise the Ombudsman's decision and act upon any recommendations made	Section 5.5
We will monitor, review and learn from our complaints	Section 5.6
We will ensure that customers have the ability to review and influence our complaints process	Section 5.7
We will apply this policy with appropriate regard to the personal circumstances of each customer. We will always consider what we know about our customers and make reasonable adjustments as set out in our Equality and Diversity Policy; considering for example mental health issues, literacy levels and possible contributory factors.	Section 5.8

5.1 Customer Feedback

NDH will seek to collect customer feedback in all service planning to support effective delivery and continuous improvement in all that we do.

We proactively seek feedback from our customers on the services we provide and aim to use feedback to strengthen and improve our services.

We will be proactive in seeking feedback on a number of our core services through the use of satisfaction surveys. This will be done in a variety of ways and includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- Response repairs satisfaction surveys
- Planned Maintenance satisfaction surveys
- Survey of Tenants And Residents (STAR)
- New home surveys
- Complaints satisfaction survey.

Customers can also choose to give feedback to any member of staff or to the Service Improvement Co-ordinator in person, via the telephone, via e-mail, via the internet, in writing or through a third party.

In all cases feedback will be shared with the Service Improvement Co-ordinator and the appropriate Service Managers and/or Team Leaders. The Service Manager will have the responsibility to review all feedback and respond where required. The Service Improvement Co-ordinator will monitor progress and provide support to ensure that there is a timely and professional response to feedback in line with this policy and the customer complaints process.

5.2 Customer Compliments

Positive feedback will be monitored and shared with staff and contractors and used in service planning to ensure that we listen to what our customers value the most and that we recognise staff who are delivering excellent service

We value customer feedback and will share positive comments and compliments with the staff, teams and contractors involved.

We will record compliments to ensure that we listen to our customers and are aware of the aspects of service delivery that are most valued.

Where staff have gone 'above and beyond' normal expectations of customers compliments will be shared with the Executive Team and staff will be recognised through the formal 'Thank You' and / or 'Bright Star' Staff recognition schemes.

5.3 Customer Complaints

Where we cannot immediately resolve a complaint to the satisfaction of a customer, we will seek to resolve the issue through our formal Customer Complaints procedure

In the first instance, with the agreement of the Customer, we will look to resolve any negative feedback to the satisfaction of the customer quickly and effectively (e.g. at first contact). Where this occurs, the issue will be logged as an informal (stage zero) complaint. A stage zero complaint is defined as an expression of dissatisfaction which can be resolved quickly and effectively to the Customer's satisfaction.

Where this is not the case, we will seek to resolve the issue through our formal complaints procedure. As a member of the Housing Ombudsman Scheme, our approach, procedures, and timescales align with the expectations set out in the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code (July 2020). We will self assess ourselves against the Code annually and publish the assessment on our website, as required by the Ombudsman.

As outlined in the Code, 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 resident or group of residents.

For clarification purposes, and based on this definition, a customer complaint is not:

- A request for service
- The initial report of a fault or defect
- A query about a Company policy
- A request for information
- A Report of anti-social behavior/neighbour dispute (which should be directed to the Customer Care Team).

In addition, the Housing Ombudsman Code and Scheme make reference to a number of instances where complaints need not be taken. In these instances, the Customer would be sent a response setting out the reasoning for their complaint not being taken. The reasons for not taking a complaint are:

- When the complainant is **not a customer** as the Housing Ombudsman does not take complaints from such people. However, we will still investigate any complaint and respond in a timely manner
- When the issue raised is **not a complaint as defined above** (e.g. ASB issue relating to the actions of another individual, not ndh)
- If the incident complained about **happened 6 or more months ago**
- If the matter has **already been considered** by the complaints process
- If **legal proceedings are underway**.

If a customer believes that we have failed to put in place policies and practices which will ensure that our residents have the rights required by regulation, or if they believe NDH to be acting illegally or improperly they may use the NDH complaints procedure, go to the Regulator, or complain directly to the Housing Ombudsman Service.

If a Customer believes that an ndh failure may have left their property in disrepair, they should in the first instance address this through the Complaints procedure to allow any issues to be resolved.

Customers wishing to complain about a service charge may go to the Residential Property Tribunal Services (formerly the Leasehold Valuation Tribunal) or use the NDH complaint procedure.

If we receive a complaint from a third party on behalf of a customer, we will need that customer's permission (usually in writing) before we can start investigating the complaint, unless there is a Power of Attorney. Where there are known literacy issues we will assist a customer in providing appropriate permission and be flexible to support the customer as required. We will aim to make reasonable adjustments to ensure all customers can access our complaints process.

Complaints must be made within six months of the matter arising. If a customer has moved out of an NDH property, the complaint will still be considered as long as it is made within three months of moving out. This does not affect a customer's statutory rights.

Our aim is to deal fairly, reasonably and professionally with all complaints and resolve them as promptly as possible.

We will fully investigate formal customer complaints through our publicised procedure. This provides two clear stages for progression of a complaint. If, at the end of the internal complaint procedure a customer is not satisfied with the investigations or outcomes of their complaint, they will be made aware (where applicable) of their right to approach a Designated Person and the Housing Ombudsman Service.

If during the complaints process NDH feels that the customer is behaving unreasonably, the Head of Customer & Housing Services will review the complaint and the complainant's behaviour and may implement the reasonable behaviour policy.

If a member of the public (i.e. with no tenant / landlord relationship with ndh) makes a complaint their complaint will be investigated by the Service Improvement Coordinator and the response agreed with a Senior Manager. If the complainant is unsatisfied with the response they will be advised to seek

independent legal advice because the Housing Ombudsman does not have jurisdiction.

5.4 Designated Persons - Local Resolution

We will support customers in accessing a Designated Person and co-operate with them to try and resolve the complaint.

We will support customers who wish to approach a designated person who can be an MP, local councilor.

If a customer wishes to approach the Ombudsman without approaching a designated person they will be able to do so after an 8 week period from the date of the response letter at the end of the final stage of the NDH internal complaints process. We will also make customers aware that they can seek advice from the Ombudsman whatever stage their complaint is at.

5.6 Ombudsman Service

We will support customers in accessing the Housing and Financial Ombudsman as appropriate; recognise the Ombudsman's decision and act upon any recommendations made.

The Housing Ombudsman is set up by law to look at complaints about housing organisations that are registered with them, including housing associations. Their expectations of complaints handling are set out in their Code.

The Ombudsman has the power to consider complaints and decide what is 'fair in all the circumstances of the case'. When things go wrong they can make orders or recommendations to put things right or to improve services in the future.

The Ombudsman is keen to resolve complaints at a local level and will provide advice throughout the complaint process to the customer and North Devon Homes.

When a final response is sent to a customer at the end of our complaints process we will enclose contact information of the Housing or Financial Ombudsman Service, whichever is appropriate.

On receipt of a request from the Ombudsman we will make all relevant files and records available to the Ombudsman as promptly as possible, and within the requested timeframe.

5.7 Learning from Complaints

We will monitor, review and learn from our complaints

We will produce reports as requested and report at least quarterly to the C90 Group and annually to the Board. Both the Board and C90 will review the annual Complaints Self Assessment prior to publication.

A complaints review group made up of Service Managers, Senior Managers and the Executive Team will meet regularly to review all complaints received and take responsibility for monitoring and challenging learning.

Any improvements will be documented, actioned and monitored by the group. This will be shared with customers through the newsletter and annual report to tenants.

Progress will be monitored by the Service Improvement Co-ordinator.

5.7 Customer Involvement

We will ensure that customers have the ability to review and influence our complaints process

In order to ensure accountability to our customers, complaints information will be shared with customer groups when requested and with our C90 group quarterly. The customers will have the opportunity to comment and challenge the decisions made and make recommendations for service improvements. Any recommendations will be fed back to the Complaints Review Group for consideration.

5.8 Equality and Diversity

We will apply this policy with appropriate regard to the personal circumstances of each customer. We will always consider what we know about our customers and make reasonable adjustments as set out in our Equality and Diversity Policy; considering for example mental health issues, literacy levels and possible contributory factors.

We will seek to apply this policy in line with what we know about our customers' circumstances. Specifically, where we are aware of issues

associated with a customer's mental health, sensory deprivation and / or literacy levels we will seek to provide appropriate support and make reasonable adjustments.

Through monitoring of Complaints, we will identify any themes or issues that suggest any inequality arising through our service delivery, so that it can be addressed.

We seek to embrace equality and diversity in all aspects of our business.

6. Implementation

The Executive Team are responsible for ensuring that this policy is communicated and implemented.

The Service Improvement Co-ordinator is responsible for monitoring and review of this policy.

7. Equality Impact Assessment

7.1 Who has been consulted in developing the Policy?

Date	Consultation methodology	Challenge/impact/result
10 th November 2020	Review and discussion at C90.	Re-naming the Policy and making it clear that it relates specifically to Complaints.

7.2 Identify potential impact on each of the diversity “groups”

Strand	No impact	Negative impact	Positive impact	Comments / evidence
Race			x	For those people who don't speak English we offer language line, card identification We will do home visits to investigate complaints as required
Disability			x	
Gender	x			
Gender Reassignment	x			
Sexual orientation	x			
Religion or belief	x			
Age			x	

				Home visiting service, support advisors are able to make and process complaints on behalf of our customers. We offer a variety of ways for customers to feedback including telephone and e-mail, monitoring suggests that customers are using a range of methods We accept third party reporting on behalf of those who feel unable to engage directly. Work with other agencies and provide large print or audio information
Rural issues			x	
Social Inclusion issues	x			
Pregnancy and maternity	x			
Marriage and civil partnership	x			

7.3 Does the Policy promote equality of opportunity?
Yes

7.4 If "adverse impact" identified in the table above, please state how this policy addresses this

7.5 A full EIA is not required for this policy.

7.6 If suggestions for improvement have been suggested, what should the positive outcome be for North Devon Homes' customers and stakeholders?
None received

Next review date	
Every 3 years Next review date: December 2023	
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