



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.

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 three 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 Executive Team is responsible for ensuring that this policy is communicated and implemented. The Customer Experience Manager is responsible for monitoring and review of this policy.

4. Responsibilities

The Customer Experience Manager 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.

5. Scope

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.

6. Policy Statement

North Devon Homes' Executive Team 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 Customer Experience Manager will provide training for staff to ensure that they fully understand the wider issues surrounding this policy and the procedure.

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

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.

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.

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

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

We will monitor, review and learn from our complaints.

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

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.

6.1 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
- Tenant Satisfaction Measures survey
- New home surveys
- Complaints satisfaction survey.

Customers can also choose to give feedback to any member of staff or to the Customer Complaints Advisor 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 Customer Complaints Advisor 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 Customer Complaints Advisor 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.

6.2 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 staff recognition schemes such as 'Living the Facts'.

6.3 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 appropriately.

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. 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.

A customer does not have to use the word "complaint"; we will investigate all expressions of dissatisfaction.

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 behaviour / neighbour dispute (which should be directed to the Customer Care Team).

In addition, the Housing Ombudsman Code and Scheme makes 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 individuals (or their chosen representative) who do not have a contractual relationship with NDH. 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 twelve 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 in our approach to help support the customer as required. We will make all reasonable adjustments to ensure customers can access our complaints process.

Complaints must be made within twelve 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 and make Customers aware throughout of how the Housing Ombudsman can support them. Our procedure 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 progress their complaint to 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 Customer Complaints Advisor 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.

6.4 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.

6.5 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 Customer Board Partnership Group and annually to the Board – with an update on complaints going to every meeting of both groups. Both the Board and Customer Board Partnership 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 Involved customers at a dedicated Customer Complaints Review Group where they actively look at the learning and track changes as a result, this will then be shared with the wider customers through the newsletter and annual report to tenants.

We have appointed a member of the Board to Champion complaints and they will meet the Head Of Customer and Housing Services and Director of Neighbourhoods quarterly to review all complaints received.

Progress will be monitored by the Customer Experience Manager.

6.6 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 Customer Board Partnership 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.

6.7 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 review what we know about a customer when applying this policy to ensure that customers are given the best possible support to engage with us appropriately.

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.

7. Consultation

Who has been consulted in developing the Policy?

| Date | Consultation methodology | Challenge / impact / result |
|----------------|--|-----------------------------|
| 15 August 2023 | Review and discussion at Customer Board Partnership as part of self assessment review. | |

7 Equality Impact Assessment

Section 1: Contact details

Please complete your details and contact information in the spaces provided:

| | |
|-------------------------|--|
| EIA Author: | |
| Job title: | |
| Department: | |
| Submission date: | |

Section 2: About the policy

Please describe what you are impact assessing and who it applies to:

| | | | |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Title: | | | |
| Aims / description / purpose: | | | |
| People it applies to: | <input type="checkbox"/> Staff | <input type="checkbox"/> Customers | <input type="checkbox"/> Contractors |

Section 3: Gathering data and evidence

Have you identified relevant evidence (qualitative and quantitative) to establish whether this policy could potentially affect some equality groups more than others?

| | | |
|--|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Have you analysed equality data for each of the groups identified in Section 2? | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
|--|------------------------------|-----------------------------|

| | | |
|---|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Have you identified / researched anecdotal or alternative evidence? | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| Have you attached the evidence to this impact assessment? | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |

Section 4: Assessing the impact

Based on your evidence, which equality groups might this policy affect more or less than others (if any)?

| | | | |
|---|--------------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Age | <input type="checkbox"/> | Sexual orientation | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Disability | <input type="checkbox"/> | Caring responsibilities | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Gender reassignment | <input type="checkbox"/> | Fuel and food poverty | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Marriage and civil partnership | <input type="checkbox"/> | Young People who may be vulnerable | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Pregnancy and maternity | <input type="checkbox"/> | Single parents | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Race | <input type="checkbox"/> | Drug and alcohol dependency | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Religion and belief (including no belief) | <input type="checkbox"/> | Homelessness | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Gender / sex equality | <input type="checkbox"/> | Rural Isolation | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Using examples from the evidence you have collected, please describe the impact (positive, negative or neutral) on the equality groups you have identified above and highlight any different needs required for this protected characteristic.

Note: if you are reviewing a policy/ guidance please reflect on the scope, language used and its application - does it fully promote equality and inclusion?

Section 5: Addressing any impact: action planning

Please describe any actions or mitigation required as a result of this assessment – include the timescale for each and who is responsible:

| Action / Mitigation | Timescale | Responsibility |
|---------------------|-----------|----------------|
| | | |
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| | | |

Section 6: Involvement and Consultation

What involvement / consultation activity has been undertaken or is planned in relation to this policy?

| Involvement / consultation activity | Results / Feedback |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------|
| | |
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| | |

Section 7: Approval and Publishing

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|--------------------------|
| Signature of EIA author: |
| Date: |

| | |
|---|--------------------------|
| Next review date | |
| Every 3 years Next review date: June 2027 | |
| Author | Related Documents |
| Head of Customer & Housing Services Complaints@ndh-ltd.co.uk | |