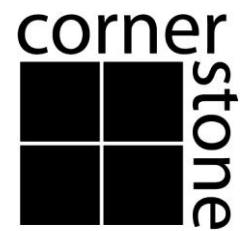


Customer Complaints and Feedback Policy

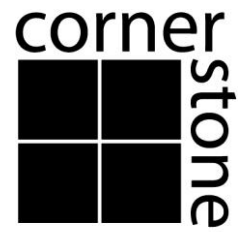


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Policy name;	Customer Complaints and Feedback
Executive responsible;	Chief Executive
Review by;	Head of Housing
Tenant involvement;	In March 2021, not for this review
Type of review;	Minor to reflect changes in the Housing Ombudsman Code
Authority to amend;	Board
Supporting Documents;	Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code
Frequency of review;	Every three years
Last review;	March 2021
Next review;	March 2024
Strategy;	Corporate Strategy
Associated risk;	Risk 8 Inadequate and ineffective customer service and/or engagement
Health & safety;	Breach of this policy unlikely to have direct impact on H&S.
Equality & diversity;	See Appendix A – Reasonable adjustments.
VFM & benchmarking;	None

VERSION CONTROL			
Version Number	Sections Amended	Date of update	Approved by
1.0	First issue in new template	11/12/13	Board
1.1	General review	29/03/17	Initial Board approval 14/12/16, PP approval 01/03/17, Final Board 29/03/17
1.1	Definition as per ombudsman code	Dec 2020	Board
2.0	Full review	17 Mar 2021	Board
2.1	Minor amendments throughout to reflect changes in the complaint handling code	9 November 2022	Board

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WHAT IS FEEDBACK?

This is when a customer provides a comment or view on something. Feedback can be positive, such as compliments, or it could be a response to a survey or suggestions for improvement.

These are not complaints but they will be recorded and learned from. Staff will be recognised for good service and suggestions for improvement will be collated and reviewed.

WHAT IS A COMPLAINT?

A complaint is defined as dissatisfaction expressed by a customer, whether justified or not, regarding a service, action or lack of action by Cornerstone Housing, our staff, or anyone acting on our behalf.

The customer does not need to ask to make a complaint or use the word 'complaint', we will recognise what a complaint is from talking to them.

A complaint can be made by any method of communication we normally use including:

- Telephone - 01392 273462
- Online - www.cornerstonehousing.net/contact-us
- Email - mail@cornerstonehousing.net
- Letter - Cornerstone House, Western Way, Exeter, EX1 1AL
- In person

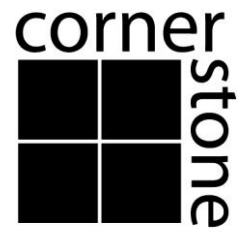
We take complaints made via social media but we will deal with them privately and not publicly. Complaints made via other media, for example the press, will be logged and this policy will be followed.

Customers can make a complaint via a third party, for example friends or family, a neighbour, their MP, a Councillor or another advocate. These will be logged and this policy followed.

WHAT IS NOT A COMPLAINT?

- A service request, for example a customer calls to report an issue with their boiler, our Repairs Policy will be followed in this example.
- A first time customer enquiry, where we haven't had an opportunity to provide a response or resolve the customer's issues.
- Complaints from one resident about another, the customer should be referred to the housing team for advice on neighbour disputes.
- Issues regarding anti-social behaviour (ASB), these will be dealt with under our ASB policy. We will manage complaints about how we are handling the ASB process under this policy.
- Issues regarding safeguarding, these will be dealt with under our safeguarding policies. We will manage complaints about how we are handling safeguarding matters under this policy.

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- Where issues giving rise to the complaint occurred over six months ago.
- Disagreement with a decision we have made where there is already an appeal process, for example a letting decision or a dispute about service charges.
- Feedback about our policies and procedures from customers or other parties, these will be noted and taken into account for future reviews.
- Issues we received in an unreasonable manner or where the customer is behaving unacceptably¹ towards Cornerstone, a member of staff or our representatives.
- Where legal action has begun in relation to the issue.
- Liability or personal injury claims.
- An issue that is being investigated or reviewed by other agencies, for example a police investigation, serious case review or fatal fire review.
- An issue already being dealt with by the Housing Ombudsman service.
- Any complaint that has already been dealt with under this policy unless:
 - There are issues ongoing related to the complaint – e.g. repairs or ASB.
 - An MP or the Housing Ombudsman has asked us to review the complaint.

Initial concerns or queries will be logged and resolved by one of our teams where possible. If it hasn't been resolved a formal complaint will be recorded. We will explain to the customer the reasons why the issue is not suitable for the complaints process if we decide not to accept it as a complaint.

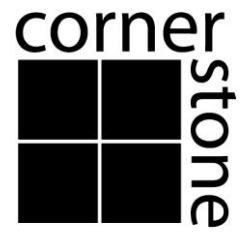
¹Unacceptable behaviour includes but is not limited to harassment, threats, violence, malicious communications, unreasonable persistence which disproportionately affects resources.

OUR COMPLAINTS STANDARDS

We will provide a quality service by:

- welcoming and encouraging feedback and complaints
- making it easy for customers to contact us about their issue
- making reasonable adjustments² to ensure this policy is accessible and inclusive
- being friendly, respectful, open minded and professional
- listening to ensure we understand the complaint
- working collaboratively with colleagues across teams, taking collective responsibility
- attempting to resolve issues quickly
- keeping our customers informed, agree reasonable communication plans, including what will happen next
- managing customer expectations
- taking ownership of issues raised
- saying 'sorry' if we got things wrong
- investigating complaints carefully, fully and in an impartial manner
- doing all we can to put things right within reasonable timescales
- keep the complaint confidential as far as possible, with information only disclosed if necessary to properly investigate the matter

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- following our policy and procedures
- fully and accurately recording details, actions and investigations at all stages
- learning from complaints to improve our service and prevent complaints
- providing training and guidance to our staff.

²See Appendix A for more information about reasonable adjustments.

OUR COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

We have a two-stage procedure, which is co-ordinated by our Governance Officer.

Stage One – Complaint

If an initial attempt to resolve the issue is unsuccessful, a formal complaint will be recorded and we will:

- log and acknowledge the complaint within 5 working days
- tell the customers who will be dealing with their complaint and how to contact them
- give the customer a fair opportunity to set out their concerns
- investigate the complaint fully
- aim to resolve the complaint within 10 working days
- provide the customer with a written response to their complaint
- explain their right to progress to stage two
- explain their right to contact the Housing Ombudsman for advice at any stage

Complaints at this stage will usually be dealt with by a senior member of staff, such as a senior officer or manager.

Where a complaint is made by a third party on behalf of a customer, the third party will receive an acknowledgment and a copy of the response to the customer.

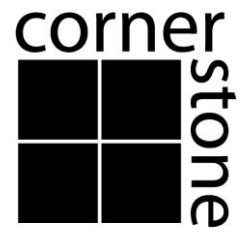
Stage Two – Review

A customer can request a review or an escalation of their complaint once stage one has been completed and within 4 weeks of stage one having been closed. Customers will need to be clear on what they wish to be considered as their desired outcome and what specifically they are not accepting. We will:

- not unreasonably refuse to escalate a complaint to this stage
- acknowledge the complaint has progressed to this stage within 5 working days
- tell customers who will be dealing with their complaint and how to contact them
- aim to resolve the complaint within 20 working days
- allow customers to comment on any adverse findings before a final decision is made
- provide the customer with a written response to their complaint
- explain their rights if the complaint is not resolved at this stage.

Complaints at this stage will usually be dealt with by a member of our Executive Team, that person will have had no involvement in stage one of the complaints process so that the

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review can be independent. We may involve Board Members as part of the review and customers can ask for our Tenant Performance Panel to be involved.

If we're not able to resolve a customers complaint within the timeframes set out for each stage, we will:

- explain the reasons of why
- provide revised timescales
- keep the customer informed of progress,
- notify them of the Housing Ombudsman contact details should they not agree to the proposed timeline.

Where we refuse to escalate a complaint we will explain to the customer why we are doing so. Reasons for this are set out in the section on 'what is not a complaint'.

Unresolved complaints

If complaints are not resolved at stage 2 and the customer remains dissatisfied they can contact the Housing Ombudsman Service for further advice. It should be noted that customers can engage with the Housing Ombudsman at any stage of the complaints process for advice or information.

How to contact the Housing Ombudsman Service:

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

RESOLVING COMPLAINTS

When attempting to resolve complaints we will take into account the personal circumstances of the customer and will make reasonable adjustments where needed. Appendix A sets out what we mean by reasonable adjustments. Reasonable adjustments can be relevant to the customer accessing the complaints service but also in finding a resolution.

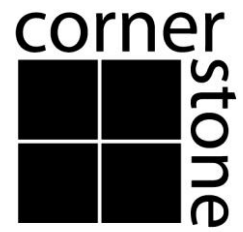
Mediation can often support two parties in finding a resolution, this is something that we will consider and use as part of our complaints process where it is felt appropriate.

Where we have failed in providing a service, our aim in resolving the situation will be to restore a customer to the position they would have been in had we delivered the service.

When providing resolutions we will:

- ensure any remedy reflects the extent of the of the service failure and level of detriment caused to the customer,
- carefully manage customer expectations by not offering something we cannot deliver or that would cause unfairness to other customers,
- be clear about what will happen and by when, in agreement with the customer where possible,

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- ensure that any agreed remedy is followed through to completion.

There could be many solutions to putting a situation right but in some instances financial compensation might be the only appropriate route. Our approach to compensation can be found in our Compensation Policy.

MONITORING & LEARNING

We will promote complaints and all feedback to our staff and customers as an opportunity to reflect, learn and improve.

We will monitor the following in relation to complaints:

- The number of complaints received
- The type of complaints received
- The timescales for resolving complaints
- Customer satisfaction with how complaints are resolved

This information and any trends and learning from complaints will be reported to the Performance Panel and the Board on a regular basis. It will also be shared more widely with residents via our tenant newsletter and tenant annual report.

Training on this policy will be provided to existing staff and new staff when they join. Training will be on-going through regular discussion with staff about complaints received and learning from them.

Successful complaint handling and positive feedback from residents will also be shared so that we can praise and motivate staff and demonstrate the standards we expect for our customers.

Appendix 1 - Reasonable Adjustments for Complaints Handling

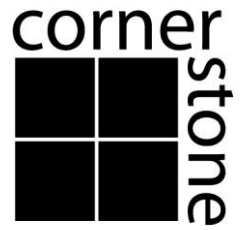
We want to ensure that our complaints procedure is inclusive and does not discriminate or disadvantage any customers because of their protected characteristics. The protected characteristics are; age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation.

The aim is to minimise barriers to customers in accessing and engaging fully with the complaints process. It is also to ensure that when considering the complaint, communicating with the customer and formulating our findings and resolutions that we make reasonable adjustments appropriate to a customer's protected characteristics.

The Equality Act 2010 does not define what is 'reasonable', but we consider the most following to be relevant:

- how effective the adjustment(s) could be in preventing or reducing disadvantage
- the practicality of making the adjustment

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- the availability of resources including external support and finances
- any disruption to services that making the adjustment might cause.

Here are a few examples of reasonable adjustments we would make:

- making it clear in customer promotion of this policy that information can be provided in alternative formats
- allowing more time than would usually be allowed for customers to provide any information needed to resolve their complaint and/or respond to enquiries and other queries.
- providing specialist support where required, such as a sign language interpreter.