

## Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code: Self-assessment – August 2021

Compliance with the Complaint Handling Code			
1	<b>Definition of a complaint</b>	Yes	No
	<p>Does the complaints process use the following definition of a complaint?</p> <p><i>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.</i></p>	<b>Yes</b>	
	<p>Does the policy have exclusions where a complaint will not be considered?</p>	<b>Yes</b>	
	<p>Are these exclusions reasonable and fair to customers? Evidence relied upon -</p> <p><i>The Complaints policy acknowledges Aster will accept and record a complaint unless there is a valid reason not to do so. In these circumstances, a detailed explanation will be provided setting out why the matter is not suitable for the complaints process.</i></p> <p><i>Aster's complaint process is accessible to customers who receive a service from Aster or where a tenancy is being applied for.</i></p> <p><i>There are specific examples included in Aster's complaints policy where an issue will not be dealt with via the complaints process including complaints related to Aster's commercial relationships or where the complaint is subject of civil litigation</i></p> <p><i>Aster will normally only investigate complaints made within six months of the event becoming evident.</i></p> <p><i>Development of the latest complaints policy included a full customer consultation process.</i></p>	<b>Yes</b>	
2	<b>Accessibility</b>		
	<p>Are multiple accessibility routes available for customers to make a complaint?</p> <p><u>Comment</u> <i>Customers can make a complaint via any member of staff, via reception, through the contact centre and also through Aster's website. The My Aster portal has a section called "give feedback" where the customer can also let us know if they would like to make a complaint.</i></p>	<b>Yes</b>	

	<p>Is the complaints policy and procedure available online?</p> <p><u>Comment</u>  <i>The complaints policy and a summary complaints procedure document are both available to view and download on the complaints page on Aster's website</i></p>	<b>Yes</b>	
	<p>Do we have a reasonable adjustments policy?</p> <p><u>Comment</u>  <i>Aster complies with the equality Act 2010 and has a Diversity and Inclusion policy. Reference is made to accessibility in our Customer Principals and the Customer Service Promise, and these are currently subject to review. Aster does not have a standalone 'reasonable adjustments' policy. The Diversity and Inclusion policy is being strengthened to include specific reference to reasonable adjustments.</i></p>		<b>No</b>
	<p>Do we regularly advise customers about our complaints process?</p> <p><u>Comment</u>  <i>Customers are informed about the complaints process when either calling the contact centre, expressing dissatisfaction about a service failure. Our neighbourhood and Supported Living teams also advise customers on the complaints process when appropriate. There is a dedicated complaints page on Aster's web site linked to the contact us section which can also be found via the search function, together with a complaint service promise. The new complaints procedure was promoted via a monthly customer e shot. The role of Social Media in promoting the complaints process will be subject of review.</i></p>	<b>Yes</b>	
<b>3</b>	<b>Complaints team and process</b>		
	<p>Is there a complaint officer or equivalent in post?</p> <p><u>Comment</u>  <i>Aster has a centralised and dedicated complaints team with complaints officers and their role is to receive, assess and allocate all complaints to ensure they are dealt with in the most appropriate way. The complaints officers work to dedicated regions and their role is to help and support customers through the complaints process. Complaints are fully investigated and responded to by investigating case managers from the most appropriate service area.</i></p>	<b>Yes</b>	
	<p>Does the case manager have autonomy to resolve complaints?</p> <p><u>Comment</u>  <i>Investigating case managers have the authority to fully investigate and make decisions and resolve complaints. They are supported by the complaints officers in complaint resolution. Where a complaint is</i></p>	<b>Yes</b>	

	<i>escalated through the complaints process a head of service will review and respond to the complaint.</i>		
	<p>Does the case manager have authority to compel engagement from other departments to resolve disputes?</p> <p><u>Comment</u>  <i>Complaints are allocated by the complaints team to the case manager who is best placed to investigate and respond to a complaint. Complaints may cut across other departments and to ensure Aster can provide a full response, case managers have the authority to engage with other departments. They are also assisted by the complaints officers to ensure a fully coordinated response is provided.</i></p>	<b>Yes</b>	
	<p>If there is a third stage to the complaints procedure are customers involved in the decision making?</p> <p><u>Comment</u>  <i>Aster has a 2 stage complaints process. There is a designated Complaints Panel (DCP) consisting of a group of involved customers who are trained to review complaints and make recommendations to Aster to try and resolve complaints locally. Customers can ask the DCP to review a complaint if they remain dissatisfied at the end of Aster's internal 2 stage process. This is in addition to a customer's choice to ask the Housing Ombudsman Service to investigate a complaint if they remain dissatisfied when Aster's internal complaints process has been exhausted.</i></p>		<b>No</b>
	<p>Is any third stage optional for customers?</p> <p><u>Comment</u>  As above</p>	<b>N/A</b>	
	<p>Does the final stage response set out a customers' right to refer the matter to the Housing Ombudsman Service?</p> <p><u>Comment</u>  <i>The right to refer a complaint and the full contact details of the Housing Ombudsman Service are included in Aster's final stage response (stage 2). When a formal complaint is logged customers are sent an information leaflet informing them of the Housing Ombudsman Service. Aster's complaint page on the website explains the role of the Housing Ombudsman and contains a link to both the website and the Ombudsman's Complaints Handling Code.</i></p>	<b>Yes</b>	
	<p>Do we keep a record of complaint correspondence including correspondence from the customer?</p> <p><u>Comment</u>  <i>The complaints team keep a record of all correspondence during a formal complaint investigation and their role is to ensure a complaint is managed in line with Aster's complaints procedure and support a</i></p>	<b>Yes</b>	

	<i>customer throughout the life of their complaint. Should any requests for information be made by the customer, The Housing Ombudsman Service or the Designated Complaints Panel, the complaints team will coordinate and provide this information. Data is maintained in accordance with the GDPR protocols</i>		
	At what stage are most complaints resolved? <u>Comment</u> <i>Most complaints are resolved at stage 1.</i>		
<b>4</b>	<b>Communication</b>		
	Are customers kept informed and updated during the complaints process? <u>Comment</u> <i>From the acknowledgment of logging a formal complaint through each stage of the process the complaints team, and case managers, will keep a customer fully updated as to the progress of their complaint. Where a complaint is escalated, or where more information is required by a customer, the complaints team will support the customer through this process.</i>	<b>Yes</b>	
	Are customers informed of the landlord's position and given a chance to respond and challenge any area of dispute before the final decision? <i>Customers are provided with full details of how to escalate a complaint after stage 1, should they be dissatisfied with the response. The point of contact to respond and challenge is the complaints team who will record why a customer remains dissatisfied and the resolution they are seeking. The complaints team will then coordinate the provision of the final stage 2 response. Should a customer wish the DCP to review the complaint, after the exhaustion of the complaints process at stage 2, the complaints team will again coordinate this and provide support to the DCP.</i>	<b>Yes</b>	
	Are all complaints acknowledged and logged within five days? <u>Comment</u> <i>Aster's complaint procedure aims to acknowledge and log all complaints received by the complaints team within 2 working days. Once complaints are logged and acknowledged case managers must respond to the complaint within 10 working days or send a holding response, advising when a full response will be made.</i>  <i>Performance against this target is monitored on a monthly basis and periodically is reported on via this self-assessment. From 1<sup>st</sup> April to 31<sup>st</sup> July2021, the complaints team acknowledged and allocated 90% of complaints within 2 working days.</i>	<b>Yes</b>	

<p>Are customers advised of how to escalate at the end of each stage?  <u>Comment</u>  <i>A written response is provided to customers at each stage of the formal complaints process with full details of how to escalate and the point of contact. The escalation process is managed by the complaints team.</i></p>	<p><b>Yes</b></p>	
<p>What proportion of complaints are resolved at stage one?  <u>Comment</u>  <i>Between 1<sup>st</sup> April and 31<sup>st</sup> July 2021, a total 169 formal complaints were closed. Of these 169 complaints, 120 were concluded at stage 1 of the complaints process</i></p>		
<p>What proportion of complaints are resolved at stage two?  <u>Comment</u>  <i>Between 1<sup>st</sup> April and 31<sup>st</sup> July 2021, of the 169 complaints closed, 49 were concluded at stage 2.</i></p>		
<p>What proportion of complaint responses are sent within Code timescales?  <u>Comment</u>  <i>Between 1<sup>st</sup> April and 31<sup>st</sup> July 2021, a total of 218 formal complaint responses were sent. Overall, 93.6% of all responses were sent within the code timescales. This is broken down to -</i></p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;"> <i>Stage one – 125 in target, 2 out of target  Stage one (with extension) - 38 in target, 5 out of target  Stage two - 37 in target, 4 out of target  Stage two (with extension) – 4 in target 3 out of target</i></p>		
<p>Where timescales have been extended, did we have good reason?  <u>Comment</u>  <i>If a timescale is extended the reasons are provided by the complaints team, together with the date when the full response will be sent.</i></p>	<p><b>Yes</b></p>	
<p>Where timescales have been extended, did we keep the customer informed?  <u>Comment</u>  <i>The Complaints team ensure a customer is kept fully updated about a timescale extension and the reasons for this.</i></p>	<p><b>Yes</b></p>	
<p>What proportion of complaints do we resolve to customers' satisfaction?  <u>Comment</u>  <i>We are in the process of surveying our customers to assess satisfaction with the complaints service and will report this information when it is available.</i></p>		

<b>5</b>	<b>Cooperation with Housing Ombudsman Service</b>		
	<p>Were all requests for evidence responded to within 15 days?</p> <p><u>Comment</u>  <i>All requests for information by the Housing Ombudsman are managed by the complaints team and were acknowledged within 15 days. The information requested was provided in majority of cases within 15 days. Where a complaint is complex and requires the collation of extensive information an extension is requested and agreed with the Ombudsman – all information was supplied within these agreed timescales.</i>  <i>A new process for collating information will be introduced to assist with the compliance of the Housing Ombudsman timescales.</i></p>	<b>yes</b>	
	Where the timescale was extended, did we keep the Ombudsman informed?	<b>Yes</b>	
<b>6</b>	<b>Fairness in complaint handling</b>		
	<p>Are customers able to complain via a representative throughout?</p> <p><u>Comment</u>  <i>Aster has a permission to share process in place to enable a representative to make a complaint or support a customer throughout the complaints process.</i></p>	<b>Yes</b>	
	<p>If advice was given, was this accurate and easy to understand?</p> <p><u>Comment</u>  <i>Representatives are supported by the complaints team to ensure that all advice given is clear to enable the complaints process, escalation process and outcomes to be clearly understood. Aster has undertaken a programme of training to support case managers to provide clear responses to customers.</i></p>	<b>Yes</b>	
	<p>How many cases did we refuse to escalate?</p> <p><u>Comment</u>  <i>No complaints have been refused escalation.</i>  <i>It is foreseen the only reason to refuse to escalate a complaint will be when it is assessed the complaint falls outside of Aster’s complaints process following an initial investigation and response.</i></p> <p>What was the reason for the refusal?  <i>Full details of any refusal to escalate a complaint will be provided by the complaints team.</i></p>		
	<p>Do we explain our decisions to our customers?</p> <p><u>Comment</u>  <i>All decisions made are clearly communicated with customers throughout all stages of Aster’s complaints process.</i></p>	<b>Yes</b>	

<b>7</b>	<b>Outcomes and remedies</b>		
	<p>Where something has gone wrong, are we taking appropriate steps to put things right?</p> <p><u>Comment</u> Where Aster has failed to deliver a service or hasn't done something as well as we should or would have hoped to do, we will acknowledge our mistakes and apologise. We will let customers know, as part of the process to try and resolve a complaint, what we are going to do to put things right and the timescales in which we aim to do this.</p>	<b>Yes</b>	
<b>8</b>	<b>Continuous learning and improvement</b>		
	<p>What improvements have we made as a result of learning from complaints?</p> <p><u>Comment</u> <i>As part of the complaints process case managers are required to complete a learning record for every complaint. Examples of learning are reported to the senior management team on a quarterly basis and learning will be included in Aster's annual report.</i> <i>The Designated complaints panel (DCP) also make service improvement recommendations to Aster as part of their review process.</i></p>		
	<p>How do we share these lessons with:</p> <p>a) residents? <i>It is proposed to share examples of learning from complaints via Asters Web site and via customer e-shots</i></p> <p>b) the board/governing body? <i>Via aster's senior leadership teams on a quarterly basis</i></p> <p>c) In the Annual Report? <i>A dedicated section for complaint management will be included in the annual report and will provide an overview of complaints and examples of the learning identified and implemented.</i></p>		
	<p>Has the Code made a difference to how we respond to complaints?</p> <p><u>Comment</u> <i>Aster's complaint process was refreshed and changed to reflect the requirements of the code.</i> <i>Complaints are now dealt with more quickly enabling customers to escalate their complaint to the Housing Ombudsman or Designated Complaints Panel (DCP) should they remain dissatisfied.</i></p>	<b>Yes</b>	

<p>What changes have we made?</p> <p><u>Comment</u></p> <p><i>Aster moved to a 2-stage process to ensure complaints are responded to in a timely manner.</i></p> <p><i>Our communication highlights a customer's accessibility to the Housing Ombudsman Service and their role in complaint resolution throughout a complaint.</i></p> <p><i>The web site includes links to our policy and a summary of the procedure can be viewed and downloaded.</i></p> <p><i>The complaints team was restructured in Autumn 2020 and their role expanded. The complaints officers now work regionally with the case managers supporting them in trying to reach a resolution. With an in-depth knowledge of each complaint the complaints officers are able to offer a high level of support to customers and assist them in navigating through the complaints process.</i></p>		
--	--	--