

Complaints Procedure Summary

If an issue cannot be resolved in the course of the day-to-day management of a service, the Complaints team will assist customers (or their representative) to make a formal complaint.

Our aim is to:

- Be fair.
- Easy to reach and helpful at all times, with a customer friendly process that enables customers to be heard and understood.
- Try to resolve our customer's problem as quickly as possible.
- Offer help and support to our customers.
- Fully investigate formal complaints
- Learn from our mistakes.
- Use complaints to improve the services we provide to our customers.

Customers can make a complaint to any member of staff by telephone, letter, email, a personal visit or by completing the complaints form via the website. A customer does not have to use the word complaint in order for it to be treated as such.

A complaint is defined in the Housing Ombudsman Service's Complaint Handling Code. For the purposes of this procedure a complaint is -

An expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by Aster, Aster's staff or those acting on Aster's behalf, affecting an individual customer or group of customers.

This can include:

- Something we have said we would do – and didn't.
- The time it's taken us to sort out an issue.
- A decision we have made.
- Something we have done – and shouldn't have done.

A complaint is not about an issue which Aster has not previously been told about, for example

- Reporting a repair
- Reporting Neighbourhood issues
- Reporting anti-social behavior
- Issues that have already been considered under the Complaints Policy.

We will consider and recognise the difference between a service request and a complaint utilising the Housing Ombudsman's guidance and example case studies in the Complaint Handling Code. A complaint should be raised when a customer remains dissatisfied with their response to their service request. Complaints that are from other businesses which form part of a commercial relationship will not be dealt with through this procedure.

Where a customer is seeking compensation for personal injury, the circumstances around the alleged service failure may be investigated as part of the complaints process, but complainants will be advised to contact our insurers to respond to that aspect specifically regarding the personal injury claim.

This procedure applies to customers where a service is being provided by Aster or where an application is being made for a tenancy with Aster. This includes customers receiving a service from Aster, who are individuals or private owners, who are not in a Housing landlord/tenant relationship with Aster.

If a complaint is made by an ex-customer, it will be dealt with via this procedure only if the customer had a legal relationship with Aster, at the time the matter complained of arose.

Customers will be provided with early advice regarding their right to access the Housing Ombudsman service. The Housing Ombudsman Service can assist customers throughout the life of a complaint and customers can engage with the Housing Ombudsman dispute support advisors, which will be supported by the complaints team.

The Housing Ombudsman will only investigate and adjudicate on complaints where there is, or was, a landlord/tenant relationship which includes customers who have a lease, tenancy, licence to occupy, service agreement or other arrangements to occupy premises owned or managed by Aster.

A customer has the right to challenge any decision not to record a complaint with the Housing Ombudsman.

The role of the Complaints team, and where appropriate trained Contact Centre team coaches, is to conduct an assessment of an issue raised by a customer who wishes to make a complaint. This assessment will determine if the issue raised falls within our complaints policy and procedure, and if so, the most appropriate way to deal with the complaint in line with our procedure, and any immediate actions that may be required.

This assessment will be completed within 5 working days of receipt of the complaint. If this is not possible an explanation will be provided to the customer together with a date by when the complaint will be assessed.

Fast Track Complaints Procedure

Where it is assessed, the complaint can be:

- Resolved and dealt with quickly and efficiently as part of normal 'day to day business'.
- Is of benefit and in the best interests of the customer
- It does not feature a repetitive service failure for the customer and the investigation doesn't necessarily need a written response –

The customer will be advised it will be classed and logged and investigated as a Fast-Track complaint.

An explanation will be given for the reasons for recording the complaint under the Fast Track process and if the complaint is not resolved to the customers satisfaction, they can request that the issue is logged as a formal complaint for a full investigation.

Formal Complaints Procedure

There are 2 stages to our formal complaints' procedure each with clear time scales which are compliant with The Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code.

Formal complaints are owned by the relevant service area and investigated by case managers who have been trained in managing complaints and Aster's complaints process.

Within 5 working days of the Complaints team receiving the complaint they will log the complaint and advise the customer, either by letter or email the complaint has been recorded and who will investigate it. If clarity is required as to the outcomes being sought, or if the basis of the complaint is not clear, the Complaints team will make contact with the customer.

Stage 1

A written decision will be given within 10 working days from logging and allocation of the complaint. If this is not possible, an explanation and a date by when the stage 1 response will be given. This should not exceed a further 10 days without good reason.

Good reasons for not being able to meet these timescales may include where a customer cannot be contacted or has made a request to be contacted at specified times which are outside of the complaint response timescales.

Stage 2

When a customer is dissatisfied with the outcome of the stage 1 response, they will be provided with the opportunity to explain why they feel the complaint has not been resolved. A written response will be given within 20 working days from the request to escalate. If this is not possible, an explanation and a date by when the stage 2 response will be given. This should not exceed a further 10 days without good reason.

For stage 2 a different case manager will be appointed to ensure an independent review of the stage 1 investigation.

Should there be delays in being able to provide either a stage 1 or 2 response within these timescales, the Complaints Officer will ensure this is fully explained to the customer with an explanation for the delay. Where possible any extension outside of these timescales will be agreed with customer. Where a customer is dissatisfied or is in dispute with the proposed response timescales, the customer will be reminded of the ability to refer this to the Housing Ombudsman Service and their details will be provided.

Following the provision of the Stage 2 response the Complaints team will close the complaint.

Complaints referred to a Designated Person or Panel

If a customer remains dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint following stage 2 of the complaint's procedure, they are able to refer their complaint to a Designated Person or Panel.

Aster has a Designated Complaints Panel consisting of Aster's tenants and leaseholders who have carried out extensive training. The Panel act independently and objectively to help resolve complaints locally which have completed Aster's complaints process. The Designated complaints panel is registered with the Housing Ombudsman Service.

For complaints referred to a DCP the Complaints team will assist the DCP in the review process.

Complaints referred to the Housing Ombudsman Service

Customers have the right to refer their complaint to the Housing Ombudsman at any point during the investigation and details of how to do this will be included in the complaint correspondence.