

The Housing Ombudsman requires landlords to complete a self-assessment which records their compliance with the Complaint Handling Code. The following assessment has been approved by our Customer and Community Network (CCN) group which scrutinises our activities and makes sure that we put our customers at the heart of our decision-making. This group is made up of customers, non-executive directors and senior executives. For more information about the CCN and other involved customer groups please visit our [Customer Voice](#) page.

Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code: Self-assessment - December 2020

Compliance with the Complaint Handling Code			
1	Definition of a complaint	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>	Yes	
	Does the policy have exclusions where a complaint will not be considered?	Yes	
	<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>The Policy, and these exclusions, were subject to scrutiny and agreement by a number of Asters involved customer groups - DCP, CSP and COG.</i></p>	Yes	
2	Accessibility		

	<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>	Yes	
	<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>	Yes	
	<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 currently have a standalone 'reasonable adjustments' policy and a new policy will be developed and introduced.</i></p>	No	
	<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 or are visiting our receptions, expressing dissatisfaction about a service failure. Our neighbourhood and Supported Living teams also advise customers on the complaints process when appropriate.</i> <i>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.</i> <i>The new complaints procedure will be promoted via the monthly customer e shot.</i> <i>Further work is to be conducted to actively promote via posters in Aster's offices and shared residential areas as required in the Social Housing White paper.</i> <i>The role of Social Media in promoting the complaints process will be reviewed.</i></p>	Yes	
3	Complaints team and process		
	<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</i></p>	Yes	

	<i>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>		
	Does the case manager have autonomy to resolve complaints? <u>Comment</u> <i>Investigating case managers are leaders who 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 escalated through the complaints process a senior leader will review and respond to the complaint.</i>	Yes	
	Does the case manager have authority to compel engagement from other departments to resolve disputes? <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>	Yes	
	If there is a third stage to the complaints procedure are customers involved in the decision making? <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 customers 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>	N/A	
	Is any third stage optional for customers? <u>Comment</u> As above	N/A	
	Does the final stage response set out a customers' right to refer the matter to the Housing Ombudsman Service? <u>Comment</u>	Yes	

	<p><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).</i></p> <p><i>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>		
	<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 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></p>	Yes	
	<p>At what stage are most complaints resolved?</p> <p><u>Comment</u> <i>Aster moved from a 4 stage to a 2 stage formal complaints process on 30th November 2020, to comply with the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code. The number of complaints resolved at the new stage 1 and 2 process will be reported on and this information will be available from February 2021 and this self-assessment will be updated.</i> <i>In the 2019/20 financial year 90.2% of formal complaints were resolved at stage 1 and 84.4%, which went to stage 2, were resolved at this stage.</i></p>		
4	Communication		
	<p>Are customers kept informed and updated during the complaints process?</p> <p><u>Comment</u> <i>Aster's complaint process complies with the timescales set out in the Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code. The investigating managers will respond to customers within these published timescales. 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></p>	Yes	
	<p>Are customers informed of the landlord's position and given a chance to respond and challenge any area of dispute before the final decision?</p>	Yes	

	<p>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.</p>		
	<p>Are all complaints acknowledged and logged within five days? <u>Comment</u> Aster's complaint procedure aims to respond to all complaints received by the complaints team within 2 working days. Performance against this target is monitored on a monthly basis. Currently 98% of complaints have been acknowledged within 2 working days since April 2020.</p>	Yes	
	<p>Are customers advised of how to escalate at the end of each stage? <u>Comment</u> 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.</p>	Yes	
	<p>What proportion of complaints are resolved at stage one? <u>Comment</u> Aster moved from a 4 stage to a 2 stage formal complaints process on 30th November 2020. The information about compliance and performance with the new process is not available at this time. This information will be collated on a monthly basis and will be available from February 2021 and this self-assessment will be updated regularly.</p>	N/A	
	<p>What proportion of complaints are resolved at stage two? <u>Comment</u> As above</p>		
	<p>What proportion of complaint responses are sent within Code timescales?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stage one Stage one (with extension) • Stage two Stage two (with extension) <p><u>Comment</u> As above</p>	N/A	

	<p>Where timescales have been extended, did we have good reason? <u>Comment</u> <i>If a timescale is extended the reasons will be provided by the complaints team, together with the date when the full response will be sent. The reasons and how often the time scales are extended will be monitored and reported on regularly by the complaints team.</i></p>	N/A	
	<p>Where timescales have been extended, did we keep the customer informed? <u>Comment</u> <i>The Complaints team will ensure a customer is kept fully updated about a timescale extension and the reasons for this.</i></p>	N/A	
	<p>What proportion of complaints do we resolve to customers' satisfaction? <u>Comment</u> <i>A new customer satisfaction survey will be launched in January 2021. This will capture customers satisfaction both during and at the end of the complaints process. Work is currently underway to capture customer satisfaction with complaints recently closed under the 'old complaints process' so we can measure the difference and where we may need to make any changes to our new complaints process.</i></p>	N/A	
5	Cooperation with Housing Ombudsman Service		
	<p>Were all requests for evidence responded to within 15 days? <u>Comment</u> <i>All requests for information by the Housing Ombudsman are managed by the complaints team. All responses have been within the timescales requested. A new process ensuring all requests for information are monitored and can be fully and regularly reported on is being introduced.</i></p>	Yes	
	<p>Where the timescale was extended, did we keep the Ombudsman informed? <u>Comment</u> <i>As above</i></p>	Yes	
6	Fairness in complaint handling		
	<p>Are customers able to complain via a representative throughout? <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>	Yes	
	<p>If advice was given, was this accurate and easy to understand? <u>Comment</u></p>	Yes	

	<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.</i>		
	<p>How many cases did we refuse to escalate? <u>Comment</u> <i>Aster moved from a 4 stage to a 2 stage formal complaints process on 30th November 2020. No complaints have therefore been refused escalation following the introduction of the new process. 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>	N/A	
	<p>Do we explain our decisions to our customers? <u>Comment</u> All decisions made are clearly communicated with customers throughout all stage of Asters complaints process.</p>	Yes	
7	Outcomes and remedies		
	<p>Where something has gone wrong, are we taking appropriate steps to put things right? <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>	Yes	
8	Continuous learning and improvement		
	<p>What improvements have we made as a result of learning from complaints? <u>Comment</u> <i>Through the complaints process we have identified learning and made changes to the way in which we work. The Designated Complaints Panel (DCP), made up of Aster's customers and acting independently to review complaints, have also made recommendations which have been adopted and implemented into our working processes.</i> <i>To ensure we maximise and improve the opportunities to learn from complaints we are refreshing how we capture learning, implement and monitor the changes we make. These changes will be led by the newly structured complaints team and making the most of the opportunities to learn from complaints forms a central pillar of the new refreshed complaints process.</i></p>		
	How do we share these lessons with:		

<p>a) residents? <i>It is proposed to share learning from complaints via Asters Web site Asters annual report To explore sharing of learning via My Aster</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 is included in the annual report and will provide an overview of examples of the learning identified and implemented.</i></p>		
<p>Has the Code made a difference to how we respond to complaints? <u>Comment</u> <i>Aster’s complaint process has been refreshed and changed to reflect the requirements of the code. Aster had a transparent and customer focused process in place and the changes made have strengthened this further.</i></p>	<p>Yes</p>	
<p>What changes have we made? <u>Comment</u> <i>Aster has moved to a 2-stage process. This will ensure complaints are resolved in a more timely manner complying with the code timescales. All of the communication used throughout the process has been refreshed, again to comply with the code, to ensure each stage of the process is clearly explained and customers are aware of the role of the complaints team and how to contact them. Our communication highlights a customer’s accessibility to the Housing Ombudsman Service and their role in complaint resolution throughout a complaint. The web site has been updated to include links to our policy and a summary of the procedure can now be viewed and downloaded. Further work is to take place to ensure the complaints service and access to it is regularly promoted and how learning from complaints is captured and shared. The complaints team was restructured in autumn 2020 and their role expanded. Aster is very well placed to support the changes needed to comply with complaints code. 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</i></p>		

	<i>customers and assist them in navigating through the complaints process.</i>		
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