

1 Scope

- 1.1 Aster aims to get it right first time. However, we do accept that sometimes we may fall short of what we would expect, and customers may complain. We will use complaints as an opportunity to put things right and improve our services.
- 1.2 This policy is for all customers who receive a service from Aster or where an application is being made for a tenancy with Aster. It does not apply to complaints that are related to our commercial relationships with other parties.
- 1.3 Everyone at Aster is responsible for the service we deliver and when something goes wrong the way we respond to a complaint will reflect our values. We value the opportunities complaints provide us to review and improve our processes and the way we deliver our services.

2 Policy Statement

- 2.1 We will ensure everyone is treated fairly and without discrimination in line with Aster's Equality and Diversity policy.
- 2.2 We will promote a positive, no blame complaint handling culture.
- 2.3 We will listen and discuss complaints with our customers to understand where our service has not met expectations, or agreed standards and policies, and respond appropriately. We will ensure the management of complaints is a customer focused and friendly process that enables customers to be heard and understood to try and resolve issues as early as possible. Customers will be given a fair opportunity to set out their position and comment on any adverse finding before a final decision is made by Aster.
- 2.4 We will ensure a consistent approach to dealing with complaints across all of our teams promoting a positive, accountable and transparent complaints culture. We will ensure colleagues are empowered and confident when responding to our customers and in accordance with our published standards and procedures.
- 2.5 Our Complaints Policy, Procedure and Process is aligned to, and follows the requirements and principles, of the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code and our obligations set out in the Housing Ombudsman Scheme and the Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Regulatory Consumer Standard.
- 2.6 A complaint is defined in the Housing Ombudsman Service's Complaint Handling Code, providing a clear understanding of what constitutes a complaint. For the purposes of this policy 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

A complaint will not be recorded about an issue which Aster has not previously been told about, for example

- Reporting a repair
- Reporting neighbourhood issues
- Reporting anti-social behaviour.

- 2.7 When a third-party acts on behalf of a customer wishing to make a complaint, we will ensure the relevant paperwork is completed and shared, after obtaining the customer's permission, ensuring compliance with data protection regulations.
- 2.8 All complaints will be reviewed and processed fairly and honestly.
- 2.9 We will take a 'get it right first time' approach and ensure complaints are dealt with at an appropriate speed.
- 2.10 We will ensure we are approachable and helpful throughout the complaints procedure, measuring our application of this policy through internal audit and compliance checks.
- 2.11 We will proactively assess and analyse complaints to identify any trends, root causes or systemic issues, to learn and make changes to improve our services, policies and procedures.
- 2.12 Involved customer groups will review our approach to complaint management from time to time, making recommendations to improve the service where appropriate. We will consult with customers on the formation of complaint policies and procedures, and where appropriate include customers in dispute resolution through the Designated Complaints Panel.
- 2.13 We will accept and record a Formal complaint unless there is a valid reason not to do so and, in these circumstances, a detailed explanation will be provided setting out why the matter is not suitable for the complaints process.
- 2.14 Where it is assessed a complaint can be dealt with quickly and efficiently as part of normal 'day to day' business it may be logged as a Fast Track complaint and dealt with outside of the Formal complaints process. Customers will be advised if it is felt this is the most appropriate course and the reasons why. If a customer is dissatisfied with this proposed approach, the issue will be recorded and dealt with as a Formal complaint.
- 2.15 We will normally only investigate complaints made within six months of the event becoming evident.
- 2.16 We aim to deal openly, honestly, and in good faith with all customers. We recognise, however, that from time to time, those who complain to us may behave unreasonably. In those circumstances, we may consider whether it is reasonable to persist in engaging with the complainant further. This will be considered in line with the appropriate guidance on dealing with unreasonable behaviour in complaints, and advice from the Housing Ombudsman Service where appropriate.
- 2.17 If during the course of a complaint investigation, or at any point, a customer or a third party on the customer's behalf brings any litigation claim or legal proceedings against Aster, we will cease our complaint management process. This is to ensure our actions are in no way prejudicial to any such proceedings.
- 2.18 Where a customer is seeking compensation for injury, this will be dealt with as a personal injury claim via our insurers and not through the complaints procedure.

- 2.19 Complaints are logged by the Complaint Officers working within our dedicated complaints team and passed to the Case Manager responsible for the service area, where the complaint will be fully investigated, and we will keep the customer informed throughout.
- 2.20 The Complaints policy and the procedure for dealing with complaints will be readily available on our Website and publicised, including leaflets, newsletters and other correspondence with our customers. Copies of the policy and the procedure will be provided when requested.
- 2.21 We will be clear about how the process works, the steps and the timescales involved, and the escalation process should a customer not be satisfied with the outcome of their complaint
- Timeframes for responses
- 2.22 Complaints will be acknowledged, logged and allocated for investigation, within 2 working days, by the complaints team.
- 2.23 There are 2 stages in our Formal complaints procedure, each with clear time scales:
- 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 working 10 days without good reason (for example if 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 unhappy 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 working 10 days without good reason.
- 2.24 If a customer remains dissatisfied following the exhaustion of Aster's complaints procedure, they are able to refer their complaint to the Housing Ombudsman for investigation. 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.
- 2.25 We will consider discretionary compensation on a case by case basis and where a complaint is upheld, in line with our compensation policy.

3 Monitoring and Review

- 3.1 The effectiveness of this policy will be scrutinised after 12 months by the Customer Experience Panel
- 3.2 We will regularly monitor our performance on complaints, reporting this annually to the Customer and Community Network, quarterly to involved customer groups and regularly to senior teams and service managers across the business
- 3.3 Senior leaders will be kept informed of cases referred to the Housing Ombudsman Service with details of the determination reached and any recommendations provided.

3.4 This policy will be reviewed in 1 years' time to bring it in line with the housing policy review schedule

4 Related Policies and Procedures

- 4.1 Aster's Complaints Procedure
- 4.2 Aster's Compensation Policy
- 4.3 Aster's Honesty Policy

5 Governance

Effective From:	30/10/2020	Expires:	05/03/2021
Policy Owner:	Customer Experience and Strategy Director		
Policy Author:	Complaints Manager		
Approved by:	<i>Customer Community Network</i>		
Delegation Matrix Reference:	V7.1.A.17.R068	Version Number:	6.0