



Complaints Policy - All Services

Policy statement

We aim to provide a consistently high standard of service to everyone who uses or is impacted by our services, and we care about getting it right, first time. We recognise however the importance of putting things right once we know something hasn't happened as it should. Our aim is always to maintain good working relationships with our residents and other stakeholders.

Anchor is committed to ensuring views about our services are valued and we actively encourage feedback. Complaints, compliments and suggestions give us the opportunity to continually improve our service. We foster a culture which welcomes customer feedback and listening and responding effectively is very important to us. We deal with complaints impartially and will not treat complainants differently because they have made a complaint.

We define a complaint as '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.'

Anchor is open to all forms of feedback and will look to consider all interactions that may help us to improve. These may include face to face, in writing (both letter and email), telephone and via social media.

Scope of the document

The policy applies to Anchor Housing operations, care services and all other Anchor functions.

Roles and responsibilities

The Customer Relations Manager is accountable for the overall policy and is responsible for its implementation and for ensuring compliance.

All colleagues are responsible for:

- answering complaints when required,
- ensuring they take collective responsibility for any shortfalls identified rather than blaming others and, working collaboratively across teams and departments towards resolving complaints effectively.

Getting in touch

Often the quickest way to put things right is to speak with the local manager (who manages the location). We do however appreciate that sometimes this isn't possible.

Alternatively, the Customer Relations Team can be contacted in any of the following



ways –

- Telephone - **0800 731 2020** (Monday to Friday 8am - 6pm)
- Email – Customer.Relations@Anchor.org.uk
- Webform – www.anchor.org.uk
- Post – Anchor Customer Relations Team, 2 Godwin Street, Bradford, BD1 2ST or by completing one of our 'We welcome your feedback' forms¹.
- Social Media – using our Facebook page or twitter.

Timescales

We operate a two-stage complaints procedure, the timescales for responses are:

*When stated in this document 'working days' refer to standard Monday-Friday working days.

- **Logging and acknowledgement of a complaint** – 5 working days from receipt.
- **Telephone call to the complainant by the complaint handler** - within 2 working days (from logging and acknowledgement).
- **Stage one decision** – 10 working days from logging and acknowledging of the complaint. Exceptionally, if this is not possible, we will provide an explanation and a date by when the stage one response will be received. This will not be more than a further 10 working days total without good reason.

If an extension beyond 20 working days is required to enable us to respond to the complaint fully, this should be agreed by the complainant. If agreement cannot be reached the complainant will be provided with the details of the Housing Ombudsman Service so the complainant can challenge our plan for responding and/or the timeliness.

- **Escalations to Stage two** should be requested as soon as possible, usually within 30 days of receipt of the Stage one response. We will however make exceptions to this timeframe. Details of when we would refuse to escalate a complaint are explained in the section 'Refusing to accept or escalate a complaint'.
- **Stage two** (response to any appeal made on a stage 1 decision) – 20 working days from escalation. Exceptionally, if this is not possible, we will provide an explanation and a date when the stage two response will be received. This will not be more than 10 working days total without good reason.

If an extension beyond 10 working days is required to enable us to respond to the complaint fully, this should be agreed by the complainant. If agreement cannot be reached the complainant will be provided with the details of the Housing Ombudsman Service so the complainant can challenge our plan for responding and/or the timeliness.

Our approach to complaints

¹ Feedback forms are available at locations with an internal communal area.



We aim to welcome, understand, and resolve individual complaints in a timely manner; applying an approach that allows for monitoring. We will seek to identify any lessons arising from complaints and use these to improve our service provision across Anchor.

Making a complaint

We welcome complaints from anyone, or the representative of anyone, who is affected by the services provided by Anchor. This includes but is not limited to:

- residents
- customers seeking to rent or purchase a property
- family members
- friends, representatives, or advocates of residents
- neighbours
- service providers or professionals.

We can engage with a third party pursuing a complaint on the complainant's behalf as long as we have evidence that this person has their specific approval to act on their behalf. and to have information provided to them by us. We will always work within what our Data Protection Policy allows.

Accessing our service

To make it as easy as possible and in keeping with our obligations under the Equality Act, we will take reasonable steps to adapt our normal complaint handling policies, procedures, and processes where appropriate to accommodate a disabled person's needs, for example providing correspondence in large print or identifying an auxiliary aid or service. We will also look to take steps, when reasonable, to accommodate the communication needs of others, for example accessing a language line service for those whose first language is not English.

Refusing to accept or escalate a complaint

We will not discriminate against anyone who makes a complaint. If a complainant behaves inappropriately in making a complaint, we will seek to manage that behaviour as necessary, while treating the complaint like any other. However, there will be some rare occasions when we will not accept a complaint, examples of this are given below (this list is not exhaustive):

- Inappropriate or unacceptable behaviour, which is threatening, abusive or aggressive.
- Where the issue giving rise to the complaint happened over 6 months ago. Though an exception will likely be made for any complaint that has a safeguarding or health and safety element.
- The same matters have been fully addressed under a previous closed complaint.
- Where the complaint is a dispute over legislation or is a matter that is already the subject of legal proceedings.



- The complaint is disputing the term of a lease, cost, or reasonableness of a service charge, sinking fund/reserve fund contribution, or rent increase. These disputes are dealt with by the First Tier Tribunal (see details below in the 'contact' section).

If we do not accept a complaint for any of the reason, including those described above, we will write to the complainant within 10 working days (of its acknowledgement and logging) providing our reasons. The complainant will also be told of their option to appeal this decision by contacting the Housing Ombudsman Service.

Mediation

We will explore the use of mediation by an external organisation where it is appropriate.

Compensation

We may consider an offer of compensation or good will when we have, through our own actions or inactions, failed to deliver services of an acceptable standard.

Internal escalation and appeals

A complainant can request that their complaint be escalated to stage 2 if they are dissatisfied with the initial response at stage 1.

There may be rare and exceptional circumstances where it is necessary to immediately escalate a new complaint to the final stage of the internal process. This will be at the Customer Relations Manager's discretion.

Referring a complaint to an ombudsman

a) Housing complaints

Complainants may formally refer their complaint to the Housing Ombudsman, after it has completed stage two of Anchor's complaints process (contact details are shown below).

Complainants may, however, wish to consider referring their complaint to Anchor's Independent Resident Complaint Panel.

The Independent Residents' Complaints Panel is made up of Anchor Residents from rented and home ownership locations. These residents all have an interest in providing an impartial view on how a complaint has been handled throughout the process. If a complainant decides to ask the Panel to look at their complaint, they will review all the correspondence relating to the matter and provide a response based on how they feel the case has been handled. Contact details for the panel are given below.

Please note: the Housing Ombudsman Service is available for advice or support throughout the complaints process not just when they are formally asked to respond (please see contact details below).

b) Care complaints



In the case of complaints relating to care, a resident may refer a complaint to The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman who provides a free, independent service. This can be done directly; however, the Ombudsman will require an internal process to be completed before they become involved.

Our care services are registered with the Care Quality Commission (CQC) and although the CQC are unable to investigate individual complaints they are, however, happy to receive information regarding our services. Contact details are provided below:

c) Contact details

Housing Ombudsman Service (Tenants and Leaseholders only)

PO Box 152, Liverpool, L33 7WQ

Tel: 0300 111 3000

E-mail: info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk

Note: The Housing Ombudsman Service is not available for those who own the freehold of their property.

The Complaint Handling Code is available via the Housing Ombudsman Website, or you can request a copy via your local manager

The Independent Residents' Complaints Panel

E-mail: IRCP@anchor.org.uk

Telephone: 0345 602 5516

Post: IRCP, 2 Godwin Street, Bradford, BD1 2ST

Local Councillor or a Member of Parliament (MP)

Names of local councillors can be found in local libraries or via the local council.

Names and contact details of MP's can be found by phoning the House of Commons Information Office on 020 7219 4272 or online at www.parliament.uk.

The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman

PO Box 4771, Coventry, CV4 0EH

Tel: 0300 061 0614

www.lgo.org.uk

Care Quality Commission Customer Service Centre

Citygate, Gallowgate, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 4PA

Tel: 03000 616161

www.cqc.org.uk

Energy Ombudsman

P.O. Box 966, Warrington, WA4 9DF

Tel: 0330 440 1624

Email: enquiry@energyombudsman.org

www.energyombudsman.org

The Energy Ombudsman handles disputes between consumers energy suppliers (in some situations this will be Anchor).



First Tier Tribunal (Property Chamber) - (leaseholders and tenants)

An application can be made to the Tribunal to address certain types of disputes (such as service charge disputes or rent increases). For a full list of their areas of jurisdiction please see the website detailed below.

Contact details for your regional office can be found by visiting <https://www.gov.uk/courts-tribunals/first-tier-tribunal-property-chamber>

We will co-operate fully with the relevant Ombudsman Service during any investigation and comply fully with the resulting decision which will be binding on us.

Complaint governance, reporting and internal monitoring

The Executive Director of Housing Services fulfils the requirement under the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code to have a lead person responsible for Complaints within Anchor.

The role ensures that Anchor supports a positive complaint handling culture and that the Service Quality Committee (Governing Body) is provided with regular information on complaints and insights on Anchor's complaint handling performance. As well as the Service Quality Committee we provide regular reports about complaints and learning from complaints to the following:

- **involved residents** - Independent Resident Complaints Panel, Resident Scrutiny panel, Resident Council).
- **Anchor committees and boards** – Service Quality Committee, Housing Services Committee, Care Services Committee, Executive Committee and Management Committee. Our internal Key Performance Indicator (KPI's) are as follows:
 - Housing services – we aim to resolve 100% of all complaints within 10 working days
 - Care services - we aim to resolve 85% of all complaints within 10 working days.

Monthly performance reports tracking compliance against the above KPIs are provided to the following senior managers: - Regional Heads of Service, Directors, and Operations Managers. This data is also provided to the Service Quality Committee.

Accessibility

This document can be made available in large print, Braille, audio or electronic formats and other languages on request.

Contact our Customer Centre on 0800 731 2020. Alternatively, speak to your local manager if you need audio or large print versions.

The complaints policy is available online in large print at www.anchor.org.uk (search 'Complaints'),

Equality and diversity



We are committed to respecting diversity in all aspects of our work and meeting our obligations under the Equality Act. In line with this, we welcome feedback on any aspect of this policy where there is a question over its adherence to the above legislation.

As part of the review and development of this policy an Equality Impact Assessment was completed.

Data Protection

We are committed to applying this policy in line with the General Data Protection Regulations as set out in our Data Protection Policy.

Other relevant documents

- Complaints Procedure and Helpsheet
- Compensation Policy
- Complaints & Managing Unacceptable Behaviour Guidance
- Hate incident and hate crime Policy and Procedure
- Reasonable Adjustments Policy
- Safeguarding Policy and Procedure
- Whistleblowing Policy

Recording and monitoring

Complaints and their resolution are recorded in KPI reports.

Commitment and review

The Group Board looks to the support and professionalism of staff at all levels in making this policy truly effective. This policy statement, along with other related supporting policies and procedures in use, will be regularly reviewed and revised as and when necessary.

Approved by the Service Quality Committee on 12th September 2023

Complaint's policy

Document Ref: AHG/AS/Com/1.5
Issue Date: October 2023
Review Date: October 2026

Version Control

Version No	Purpose/Change	Author	Approved for publication by;	Date
AHG/AS/Com/1.0	Original	Sarah Jones, Chief Financial Officer, AHG	AHG Shadow Board	11 September 2018
AHG/AS/Com/1.1	Changes made to ensure compliance with the Housing	Abigail Poole – Compliance and Policy	Anchor Hanover Board	21 January 2021



	Ombudsman Complaints Code	Officer		
AHG/AS/Com/1.2	Changes made following ARCO compliance assessment and Re-branding.	Abigail Poole Corporate Compliance and Policy Officer	Management Board	23 rd September 2021
AHG/AS/Com/1.3	Changes made to ensure compliance with the updated (April 22) Housing Ombudsman Code and self-assessment.	Abigail Poole Corporate Compliance and Policy Officer	Service Quality Committee	29 th September 2022
AHG/AS/Com/1.4	Small changes made as a result of ARCO audit.	Abigail Poole Corporate Compliance and Policy Officer	Service Quality Committee	12 September 2023
AHG/AS/Com/1.5	Telephone number update and note added to clarify jurisdiction of the Housing Ombudsman service re freeholders	Abigail Poole Corporate Compliance and Policy Officer	Dan Rhodes – Director of Customer Experience	31 October 2023