

AMBER HOUSING

HOUSING & PROPERTY POLICIES, PROCEDURES & GUIDELINES

HM17 – COMPLAINTS

1. POLICY STATEMENT

- 1.1. We aim to provide the highest standards of service, despite these efforts there may be occasions when customers, tenants, applicants, their relatives, or advocates feel dissatisfied with the service we provide. We welcome your feedback. This provides us with the opportunity to work with you, to tell us what you feel went wrong, enabling us to work with you to help put things right and rebuild your trust. To ensure that your interests are safeguarded, in cases where you feel this expectation has not been fulfilled, we ask for any complaints to be submitted via the complaints process set out in this document.
- 1.2. This policy sets out our approach on how we deal with complaints from our customers, anyone who is affected by our services or by our homes, or enquiries made by representatives, such as MPs, Local Councillors or other advocates acting on their behalf. The following people can log a complaint under this policy and where appropriate escalate it through both stages of our complaints procedure:
- Any Amber Housing customer
 - Anyone who is in receipt of a service or is affected by a service that is provided by Amber Housing
 - Anyone who may potentially receive a service from Amber Housing, for example someone who is applying for a service
- 1.3. Amber Housing limited is a wholly owned subsidiary of Ambient Support and our complaints process supports our commitment to providing an excellent customer experience and is in line with the Housing Ombudsman Code of Practice.
- 1.4. The purpose of this policy is to have a process which staff should follow when they are responding to complaints, enabling these to be responded to consistently, effectively, appropriately and as quickly as possible.

2. Definition of a Complaint and Exclusions

- 2.1 We follow the Housing Ombudsman's definition of 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.***'

- 2.2 We want to make it clear that customers do not need to use the word complaint for us to treat it as such.
- 2.3 Sometimes, we receive service requests from our customers, these are requests from a customer requiring action to be taken to put something right which has not been raised to us previously. Below are a few examples of a service request:
- Contractor has not arrived on the agreed time.
 - Customers calling to report a repair.
 - Customers calling regarding a missed appointment.

When this happens, we will contact the customer and advise on which service area or team will be resolving their service request and when they can expect resolution.

- 2.4 As part of our approach we will always attempt to speak to the customer in person, unless they have requested an alternative method of communication.
- 2.5 Complaints must be raised by the customer within six months of a problem arising. However, we will consider complaints outside of the six months in very exceptional circumstances.
- 2.6 Complaints where legal proceedings have started such as the Claim Form and Particulars of Claim, having been filed at court will be excluded from our complaints policy.
- 2.7 Complaints relating to matters that have previously been considered under the complaints policy will also be excluded.
- 2.8 Where we decide not to accept a complaint, we will provide detailed explanation to the customer setting out the reasons why the matter is not suitable for the complaints process and the right to take that decision to the Housing Ombudsman.

3. Complaint Accessibility

- 3.1 We aim to provide the highest standards of service, in cases where the customer feels this expectation has not been fulfilled, any complaints can be submitted to us by writing, emailing or calling us. Please ensure that you provide us with all your contact details so we can get back to you:
- Writing to our Complaints department at the following address below:
Amber Housing
Unit 9 Bourne Court
Southend Road
Woodford Green
IG8 8HD

- Alternatively, you may email: Complaints@amberhousing.co.uk
- By Phoning us on: 0208 502 3933

3.2 Effective complaint handling enables residents and tenants to be heard and understood. Our staff have effective complaint handling skills to ensure that the complaints handling works well. Our complaint handlers are:

- able to act sensitively and fairly.
- trained to handle complaints and deal with distressed and upset customers.
- have access to staff at all levels to facilitate quick resolution of complaints.
- have the authority and autonomy to act to resolve disputes quickly and fairly.

3.3 The role of the Housing Ombudsman is to resolve complaints when customers feel the outcome is unfair. Customers can contact the Housing Ombudsman at any given point throughout the life of a complaint.

3.4 We will treat all customers with fairness and respect. We recognise that we have an ethical and a legal duty (through the Equalities Act 2010) to advance equality of opportunity and prevent discrimination on the grounds of age, sex and sexual orientation, disability, race, religion or belief, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, marriage and civil partnership.

3.5 We recognise we may need to adapt our policies, procedures or processes to accommodate the different needs of our customers. We will readily make reasonable adjustments to our ways of working to achieve equal and fair treatment of all customers. All customers will have access to this Complaints Policy document and an explanation of our process, either through the customer website amberhousing.co.uk or on request.

3.6 This document and any related leaflet may be translated or interpreted or provided in accessible formats such as large print or Braille according to customers' needs.

3.7 Diversity and inclusion training is mandatory for all staff.

4. Complaint Process - Stage 1

4.1 When a complaint is made, it will be acknowledged and logged at stage one of the complaints procedure **within five days of receipt**.

4.2 Within the complaint acknowledgement, we will set out our understanding of the complaint and the outcomes the customer is seeking. If any aspect of the complaint is unclear or where a desired outcome is unreasonable or unrealistic, we will ask the customer for clarification and the full definition will be agreed between us.

- 4.3 We will try to resolve the complaint at the earliest possible opportunity, having assessed what evidence is needed to fully consider the issues, what outcome would resolve the matter for the customer and whether there are any urgent actions required.
- 4.4 We will give the customer the opportunity to have a representative to deal with their complaint on their behalf, and to be represented or accompanied at any meeting with us where this is reasonable.
- 4.5 We will respond to the complaint **within 10 working days** of the complaint being logged. Exceptionally, we may provide an explanation to the customer containing a clear timeframe for when the response will be received. This will not exceed a further 10 days without good reason.
- 4.6 If an extension beyond 20 working days is required to enable us to respond to the complaint fully, we will need to get agreement from the customer.
- 4.7 If the customer remains dissatisfied with our response and wishes to escalate their complaint, they need to inform us of any issues that have not been resolved. We will review these reasons and decide whether an escalation is required.
- 4.8 Where agreement over an extension period cannot be reached, we will provide the Housing Ombudsman's contact details so the customer can challenge our plan for responding and/or the proposed timeliness of our response.
- 4.9 Where the problem is a recurring issue, we will consider any older reports as part of the background to the complaint if this helps us to resolve the issue for the customer.
- 4.10 Where the customer raises additional complaints during the investigation, we will try to incorporate it into the stage one response if they are relevant and the stage one response has not been issued. Where the stage one response has been issued, or it would unreasonably delay the response, the complaint will be logged as a new complaint.
- 4.11 We will confirm the following in writing to the customer at the completion of stage one in clear, plain language:
- the complaint stage
 - the complaint definition
 - the decision on the complaint
 - the reasons for any decisions made
 - the details of any remedy offered to put things right
 - details of any outstanding actions
 - details of how to escalate the matter to stage two if the customer is not satisfied with the answer

4.12 There may be occasions where we will not escalate the complaint to Stage 2 for reasons such as:

- it involves a claim for payments that is contrary to our compensation policy
- previous resolution offered is in line with policy and procedures
- the customer has started legal proceedings to address the issues raised
- the customer's intended outcome is beyond the duty or remit of Amber Housing

4.13 Where we decide not to escalate a complaint, we will provide the Housing Ombudsman's contact details so the customer can contact them.

5. Complaint Process - Stage 2

5.1 If the customer is not satisfied with our resolution of the whole complaint or part of the complaint in stage 1, they can decide to escalate the complaint to stage 2 for a review.

5.2 An independent review of the complaint and previous decisions made will be conducted by a Senior Manager who has not previously been involved in the complaint or directly responsible for the service provided, so that the Manager can provide an impartial review of the complaint.

5.3 We will set out our understanding of issues outstanding and the outcomes the customer is seeking. If any aspect of the complaint is unclear, the customer must be asked for clarification and the full definition will be agreed between both parties

5.4 We will respond to the stage two complaint within **20 working days of the complaint being escalated**. Exceptionally, we may provide an explanation to the customer containing a clear timeframe for when the response will be received. This will not exceed a further 10 working days without good reason.

5.5 If an extension beyond 10 working days is required to enable us to respond to the complaint fully, this will be agreed by both parties.

5.6 Where agreement over an extension period cannot be reached, we will provide the Housing Ombudsman's contact details so the customer can escalate appropriately.

5.7 We will confirm the following in writing to the customer at the completion of stage two in clear, plain language:

- the complaint stage
- the complaint definition
- the decision on the complaint

- the reasons for any decisions made
- the details of any remedy offered to put things right
- details of any outstanding actions

6. Making a Complaint to the Housing Ombudsman Service

- 6.1 If the customer remains dissatisfied after Stage 2 then they can ask the Housing Ombudsman Service to investigate. They can be contacted by:
- Phone on 03001113000
 - By emailing at info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk
 - By post at Housing Ombudsman Service. P.O. Box 152 Liverpool L33 7WQ

7. Continuous Learning and Improvements

- 7.1 We are building positive complaint handling culture, which is integral to the effectiveness of resolving disputes, the quality of the service provided, the ability to learn and improve, and the relationship with our customers. We will use complaints as a source of intelligence to identify issues and introduce positive changes in service delivery.
- 7.2 We believe accountability and transparency are integral to a positive complaint handling culture. We will report back on wider learning and improvements from complaints in our annual report and more frequently to our customers.