

COMPLAINTS POLICY

MISSION & VALUES

OUR MISSION

To be a strong and diverse organisation, making the most of our strengths to deliver positive outcomes, improving life chances for our customers and the wider communities which we serve.

OUR VALUES

Commitment: We put our customers and our people at the heart of everything we do

Communities: We help create places where people want to live

Innovation: We are optimistic, passionate and forward thinking and we deliver better value every day

IMPACT ASSESSMENTS AND KEY CONSIDERATIONS

Value for Money

The ethos that underpins complaints policy is to get it right first time for our customers.

The process is designed to focus on the learning so that we continually act upon this and demonstrate examples of service improvements as a result.

Getting it right first time means that we are able to remove or reduce unnecessary costs incurred for repeated poor service delivery, delivering a more efficient customer service.

Customer Engagement

The basis of how the service is to be shaped also takes into account feedback from our customers.

Fairness

Ensuring that all customer care comments are responded to equally and fairly is imperative to this policy. Learning will also help to shape and tailor services that better meet the needs of our customers. We will ensure any customer-facing information is available in a range of formats that suit the needs of our customers.

Sustainability

By making the policy more accessible and responsive, this will not only encourage customers to provide feedback, but also empower our people to receive feedback on behalf of Accord, and to act upon it quickly and effectively without any unnecessary delay.

POLICY STATEMENT

We aim to provide high-quality services to all our customers but recognise that sometimes we may fail to meet their expectations or our own service standards. If this happens, it is important that customers tell us so that we can make changes and put things right.

It is important that we hear whether customers are unhappy with the services provided. Likewise, compliments also help us to continue to get things right first time and we are grateful for this feedback.

What is a Complaint?

As defined by the Housing Ombudsman Service is:

A complaint shall be defined 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.

When a complaint is received, our aim is to show customers that we **care** about the complaint; that we can be **trusted** to act upon the feedback, and demonstrate that we are **committed** to improving the service.

This policy is designed to deliver good practice as well as meet the regulatory requirements of the Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS), Regulator of Social Housing, Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman, Public Services Ombudsman Wales, Care Quality Commission (CQC), Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) and OFSTED (Office for Standards in Education) Our policy also complies with the contractual expectations of commissioners.

For services regulated by CQC/ CIW, the customer retains the right to contact CQC/ CIW regarding their concerns, as well as raising these issues direct with Accord. Although CQC/ CIW will not investigate individual complaints, they will use the feedback to link into how they monitor and inspect our services. Although we would always welcome the opportunity to resolve issues directly with customers, anyone wishing to raise a concern with CQC can contact the CQC contact centre, at any point in Accord's internal complaints process:

CQC National Customer Service Centre
Citygate
Gallowgate
Newcastle upon Tyne
NE1 4PA

Telephone: 03000 616161

E-mail: www.CQC.org.uk

For care services registered with Care Inspectorate Wales, contact details are:

Care Inspectorate Wales
Welsh Government office
Sarn Mynach
Llandudno Junction
LL31 9RZ
Telephone: 0300 7900 126

E-mail: CIW@gov.wales

Who is covered by this Policy?

This policy covers all services for all customers, whether they live in our properties or receive care or specialist support from our Care and Support team. This includes Shared Owners and Leaseholders, advocates and those with legal Power of Attorney or acting as a Court of Protection appointed Deputy.

Who/What is not covered by this Policy?

- Applicants for housing or services who are not a current tenant/customer with us
- Feedback regarding any of our published Policies, where the Policy in question has not been breached – this will be captured as feedback and will be reported on internally at least annually, and is referred to when these Policies are reviewed
- Homeowners who are not customers of Accord e.g. receiving care and support or advice services
- Initial service or information requests, or requests seeking clarity (i.e. reporting of repairs)
- Reports of anti-social behaviour, nuisance, hate crime or harassment
- Insurance claims
- Allegations of housing disrepair or other such legal claims
- Any issues which have already been fully investigated through this Policy
- Rent & Service Charge levels – these queries are reviewed in line with the appropriate Policy
- Compensation claims (the reason for claiming compensation MAY need investigation as a complaint, however the compensation claim itself is considered in line with the Compensation Policy & Guidelines)
- People applying for jobs, including apprenticeships and volunteering opportunities
- Grievances between staff, or staff concerns, which are dealt with through the grievance procedure
- Issues raised via Accord's Whistleblowing Procedure
- Customer complaints about other customers (unless this relates to Accord's approach or response in dealing the matters previously raised)
- Queries raised by professionals that are not direct complaints about services e.g. questions or misunderstandings about the nature and staffing of services

- Complaints made by a third party where the customer on whose behalf the complaint is being made does not give consent for the individual to act on their behalf

What is potentially not covered by this Policy?

On some occasions, we receive complaints which may be frivolous or vexatious* and where it is not possible to reach a reasonable solution or where the complainant will not accept a reasonable solution.

Such complaints may be as a result of someone being unreasonable or “vexatious.” Being persistent in trying to resolve an issue or complaint is not in itself vexatious and we will assess each case individually. If we consider a complaint may be vexatious, we will carry out an assessment/investigation and liaise closely with any support/external agencies involved. We will not pre-judge the validity of a complaint.

A senior manager will provide independent oversight if a complaint is thought to be vexatious or frivolous and then agree with the Customer Care Team how to deal with the situation based on the individual circumstances. We may apply a different means of communicating with the customer having considered their individual circumstances.

* A vexatious complaint is recognised in law as one that is brought without sufficient reason and/or serves only to annoy or harass. Feedback through our governance structure will include information on the number of complaints deemed to be vexatious.

POLICY OUTLINE

This policy and associated procedure embody the following principles, which ensure compliance with regulation and demonstrate our commitment to customers:

- Ensuring that all expressions of dissatisfaction are taken seriously and acted upon appropriately – if a customer is unhappy, we accept that they are
- Welcoming complaints as an opportunity to gather feedback and improve service, in a confidential way where this is required
- Provide multiple ways to submit a complaint – all of which are fed into the central system and processes to ensure adherence and consistency
- Ensuring the colleague receiving the complaint logs it on the appropriate systems at the point of initial contact, to ensure the timescales of the Policy can be met
- Providing Customers (or their advocates) with a convenient and easy process for reporting their concerns and compliments, giving them a choice of options to follow based on what is important to them and offering support as required throughout the process
- Ensuring customers are at the heart of service provision by listening to and responding to them using a person-centred approach
- Setting out a clear process of how customers can make a complaint, and the stages and timescales for responses and what they need to do if they remain dissatisfied
- Support, develop and train our people to have the flexibility to resolve complex problems and provide them with the tools they need to be solution-focused

- Providing value for money by constantly looking for new and better ways of doing business, ensuring that the quality of our services remains uncompromised
- Keeping customers informed about the progress of complaints and what we plan to do next
- Protect complainant's anonymity as far as reasonably practicable
- Encouraging and engaging in mediation where this will bring a quicker resolution to any issues raised
- Making decisions on complaints which are objective, evidence based and address all issues raised in an open and transparent manner
- Ensuring that people who raise concerns or complaints are protected from discrimination, harassment or disadvantage

In line with consumer law, we **will not**:

- Pressure, intimidate or discourage someone from making a complaint by suggesting or giving an impression that there may be a reprisal that affects the service they receive from us
- Create any barriers to raising or pursuing a complaint e.g. by insisting that complaints can only be submitted in writing

MONITORING, REVIEW & PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT

Our performance on complaints is a key indicator as to how successful we are as an organisation in delivering our commitments to customers.

We will:

- Measure the overall satisfaction with the way complaints have been managed by way of quarterly satisfaction surveys
- Provide information to customers on the number of complaints made, their nature, and the outcomes via annual reports, including identifying trends to support our commitments to equality, diversity and inclusion.
- We will engage with customers to review a proportion of upheld complaints on a bi-annual basis, to review the processes in place and to ensure they are fit for purpose
- Carry out an end-to-end examination of the Complaints Procedure to make it simple for customers to give feedback and use this information effectively to improve services