

	Policy Name:	<b>CUSTOMER COMPLAINTS POLICY</b>
	Version	<b>009</b>
	Review Date	April 2027

Effective complaint handling should be a customer friendly process that enables customers to be listened to and understood. The starting point for this is a mutual understanding of what constitutes a complaint. In accordance with the Housing Ombudsman’s Complaint Handling Code, a complaint is 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 a resident or group of residents.”*

While customers may not use the word ‘complaint,’ if it is evident that they are dissatisfied, we will always give them the option to make a complaint.

Customers may also make a service request which requires action to be taken by us to put something right. Complaints will be raised when a customer expresses dissatisfaction with our response to their service request.

### **Social Tenant Access to Information Requirements (STAIRs)**

In addition to this complaints process, AHC complies with the Social Tenant Access to Information Requirements (STAIRs).

STAIRs provide tenants and their authorised representatives with the right to access certain information about the management of their homes and housing services.

Requests for information under STAIRs, and dissatisfaction with how those requests are handled, follow a separate STAIRs review process and are not treated as service complaints.

Nothing in the STAIRs process limits a tenant’s right to raise a service complaint where dissatisfaction relates to the delivery of housing services.

### **Purpose**

This policy ensures that residents and stakeholders understand how to raise complaints and information concerns and how these will be handled fairly, transparently, and in line with regulatory requirements.

It is also to ensure that all complaints are monitored; any underlying causes effectively identified and managed; and that relevant issues are shared throughout the organisation to learn from, assist in service

development and quality improvement across all AHC and Platinum Skies Communities.

### **Scope**

This policy applies to all residents, visitors, contractors, and other stakeholders affected by AHC services.

AHC will make reasonable adjustments for residents who require additional support, including those with disabilities, language needs, or vulnerabilities, to ensure fair access to the complaints and STAIRs processes.

This policy will be published on our website and is available on request via email or telephone.

### **Complaints Process**

Stage One: Acknowledgement within five working days. Response within ten working days.

Stage Two: Escalation to a senior manager. Response within twenty working days.

### **STAIRs Information Requests**

AHC will acknowledge STAIRs information requests and respond within 30 calendar days. Where information cannot be disclosed, a clear explanation will be provided.

### **STAIRs Review Process**

If dissatisfied, tenants may request a STAIRs review. Reviews will be conducted by a senior officer not involved in the original response. Outcomes will be provided within 30 calendar days.

### **Escalation to Housing Ombudsman**

Following completion of either the complaints process or STAIRs review, tenants may escalate the matter to the Housing Ombudsman Service.

Tenants are not required to refer their complaint to a designated person before contacting the Housing Ombudsman.

## **Exclusions**

Complaints may not be investigated where:

- The complaint falls outside the remit of Affordable Housing Communities' or First Port's responsibility
- The complaint is considered vexatious, or the complainant's behaviour is considered unacceptable (Please refer to the Unacceptable Resident Behaviour Policy)
- Legal proceedings have commenced
- The complaint cannot be upheld
- The issue relates solely to a STAIRs request and has not completed the STAIRs review process
- The issue giving rise to the complaint occurred more than twelve months ago (excluding matters relating to health and safety or safeguarding)
- We have already provided a formal stage 2 response to the issue

This does not prevent AHC from considering related service complaints alongside a STAIRs request where appropriate.

## **Policy:**

Our policy is intended to develop an environment of fairness across Platinum Skies developments, encouraging residents, relatives, and their representatives to provide feedback on any aspect of the service.

When issues are raised, it is our policy to ensure that feedback and complaints are fully investigated and dealt with promptly and in a fair and effective manner. Many complaints can be avoided by dealing with concerns as they arise, so we ask that issues are raised directly with the Community Manager or Estate Manager in the first instance, in order to achieve a pragmatic outcome.

Residents are not required to raise concerns informally before making a formal complaint if they do not wish to do so.

This policy will be made readily available and easily accessible for all residents and visitors. Different formats (such as braille or large print) can be made available on request. If you require support to make a complaint, please let us know and we will assist wherever possible.

All staff receiving a complaint, either verbally or in writing must report this to the AHCL Customer Team as soon as possible; this will enable trends to be spotted and remedial measures identified. It is hoped that most complaints can be dealt with immediately by the employee receiving the complaint.

It is the AHCL Customer Team's responsibility to encourage customer feedback in all forms, and to provide any help or assistance that is required. Residents can ask for assistance in finding an advocate without revealing the reason for making this request. To achieve this, we will ensure that contact information for local services is available when requested.

A record of the complaint received will be kept together with the details of the ensuing investigation and any action taken as a result of the complaint. All complaints will be investigated fairly and resolved in line with policy and regulatory requirements.

All outcomes will be carefully considered and used to reflect on AHC/FP's ability to achieve standards and adhere to required regulations or to assess any risk of being unable to do so.

### **Raising a formal complaint**

We aim to get things right first time, however, we accept that things can go wrong. We aim to resolve complaints as quickly as possible but recognise that there are some occasions where it might take a little longer to resolve the problem. If this is the case, we will let you know.

Our commitment to you:

- We will listen to your complaint and make sure that we understand your concerns.
- We will try to put things right straight away.
- We will respond to your complaint in a positive, open and timely way.
- We will keep you informed on the progress of your complaint.
- We will treat you with respect and courtesy.
- We will also explain what we are going to do to put things right and will confirm this with you in writing.

Please email your landlord at [AHC.landlord@ahh.org.uk](mailto:AHC.landlord@ahh.org.uk) to raise a complaint or speak to a community team member on site.

### **Our Complaints Process**

When we receive your complaint, we will aim to resolve it immediately. If we're not able to resolve it straight away, the complaint will be handed over to the relevant specialist team member. We will acknowledge the complaint within five working days of receiving it.

There are two stages to the complaints process, stage one and stage two.

#### **Stage One**

At stage one, we will acknowledge your complaint within five working days and aim to respond to it within ten working days. If you are unhappy with the response at stage one, you can ask for the complaint to be escalated to stage two.

#### **Stage Two**

A senior manager will be asked to look at your complaint. At stage two, we aim to respond to your complaint within twenty working days.

## **When we can't reach an agreement**

When we've done all we reasonably can to resolve a complaint but you are still unhappy, you can ask the Housing Ombudsman Service to look at your complaint.

The ombudsman service is a free and independent dispute resolution service. The ombudsman will contact us to get the facts of the case from our point of view.

The ombudsman will then make a final decision and inform you and us.

## **Housing Ombudsman**

Residents are not required to refer their complaint to a designated person before contacting the Housing Ombudsman Service. You have the right to access the Housing Ombudsman Service throughout the duration of your complaint. They will offer support and guidance throughout the complaint process and will ensure we remain compliant with their Complaint Handling Code.

The contact details for the Housing Ombudsman Service are:

- [Online complaint form](#)
- Phone: 0300 111 3000
- Postal address: Housing Ombudsman Service, PO Box 1484, Unit D, Preston, PR2 0ET

## **First Tier Tribunal (property Chamber) Southern region**

If the complaint relates to leaseholders' service charges or the terms of a lease, please refer the matter to the First Tier Tribunal

- Residential Property, Havant Justice Centre, The Court House, Elmleigh Road, Havant, Hampshire PO9 2AL
- Email: [rpsouthern@justice.gov.uk](mailto:rpsouthern@justice.gov.uk)
- Phone: 01243 779394

## **Data Protection and Privacy**

All personal data is processed under UK GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018. Information will only be used for complaint handling and service improvement and stored securely.

## **Complaints Are Free of Charge**

No fees or charges will be applied at any stage of the complaints process.

## **Anonymous Complaints**

Anonymous complaints will be reviewed, but responses may be limited without contact information.

## Reasonable Adjustments

We have a legal duty under the Equality Act 2010 to make reasonable adjustments for residents with disabilities. Adjustments may include alternative formats, support submitting a complaint, different communication methods, or extended timescales.

## Learning From Complaints

We analyse complaint trends, report to senior management/Board, and use outcomes to improve our services.

## Interaction with Other Procedures

Safeguarding, health and safety, discrimination, fraud or criminal issues will be handled through appropriate statutory procedures.

## Access to the Housing Ombudsman at Any Time

Residents may contact the Housing Ombudsman at any stage of their complaint for advice or support.

Version	Date	Author	Sections Updated	Principal Changes
002	31/03/21	Mike Lyons	All	Added Housing Ombudsman definition, added procedure, added escalation
003	26/10/21	Claire McKenna	“When we can’t reach an agreement”	Addition of non-exec board member independent option
004	08/03/23	Claire McKenna	Full review in accordance with Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code	Simplified and updated in accordance with the Ombudsman’s prescribed response times
005	04/07/23	Claire McKenna	Removal of stage 3 in accordance with the Ombudsman	Stage 3 escalation to AHCL NED removed. Circumstances when a complaint will not be investigated added.

			Complaint Handling Code	
006	09/01/2024	Claire McKenna	Removal of PSM and replaced with FP Ltd.	Updated with First Port’s details.
007	30/04/2024	Claire McKenna	When a complaint will not be investigated.	Extension of time where a complaint will be considered – 12 months from 06 months
008	30/06/2024	Claire McKenna	Added service request definition	
009	05/02/2026	Grace Robinson	Complies with the requirements placed on Registered Providers of Social Housing, including	

			emerging statutory requirements under the Social Tenant Access to Information Requirements (STAIRs), and aligns with the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code.	
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