

Complaints Policy

Operating Company:	Aster Group		
Approved by:	<i>Customer & Community Network</i>		
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Author & responsible officer:	Systems and Compliance Manager		
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Supersedes:	Aster Group complaints policy (April 2014)		

1 Introduction

1.1 Aim

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. Where appropriate we use complaints as an opportunity to put things right and improve our services.

1.2 Scope

This policy is for all customers.

1.3 Corporate Plan

This policy is in line with our corporate strategy and supports our vision of 'Everyone has a home'. Through this policy we aim to meet our corporate objective to ensure we are both regulatory and legally compliant as well as supporting our four ambitions:

- We will grow our business
- We will be brave and bold
- We will be financially strong and well governed
- We will deliver value and offer choice

1.4 Regulation and Legislative Frameworks

This policy acknowledges relevant regulatory requirements issued by our regulators, including:

- HCA Regulatory Framework April 2015
- FCA
- Charities Commission

- Care Quality Commission

In addition, and to promote good practice, this policy and the complaints procedure is underpinned by the Housing Ombudsman's Dispute Resolution Principles, which provide high level guidance to achieve effective dispute resolution. These are:

- Be fair - treat people fairly and follow fair processes
- Put things right
- Learn from outcomes

2 Policy statement

2.1 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.

2.2 Definition

A complaint is considered to be any oral or written expression of dissatisfaction, whether justified or not, about the provision or failure to provide a service.

2.3 We will ensure everyone is treated fairly and without discrimination, taking into account the nine protected characteristics as defined in the Equalities Act 2010:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Marriage and civil partnership
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race
- Religion and belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation

2.4 We will listen, discussing complaints with our customers to understand where our service has not met expectations or agreed standards and policies and respond appropriately.

2.5 In accordance with our published standards, we will ensure a consistent approach to dealing with complaints across all of our teams and ensure colleagues are empowered and confident when responding to our customers.

2.6 Aster considers a complaint to be where it's thought we have:

- Not met the published service standards
- Not met our responsibilities, or followed a policy or provided an agreed service
- Not considered the right factors when making or carrying out a decision
- Acted unfairly
- Behaved rudely or discourteously

2.7 Roles and Responsibilities

When a complaint has been logged, this will be passed to the manager responsible for the service area and our complaints procedure will be followed in order to investigate it.

2.8 When a third party acts on behalf of a customer wishing to make a complaint, Aster will ensure the relevant paperwork is shared and completed, after obtaining the customer's permission, ensuring compliance with data protection regulations.

2.9 All complaints will be reviewed and processed fairly and honestly.

2.10 We will take a 'get it right first time' approach and ensure complaints are dealt with appropriate speed.

2.11 We will ensure we are approachable and helpful throughout the complaints procedure, measuring our application of this policy through internal audit and compliance checks.

2.12 We will ensure all complaints are investigated fully by the service area responsible, keeping the customer informed throughout.

2.13 We will learn from complaints and identify any trends, root causes or systemic issues, making changes where we can to improve our services. Involved customer groups will review our approach to complaint management from time to time, making recommendations to improve the service where appropriate.

2.14 We will be clear about how the process works and what steps are involved should a customer not be satisfied with the outcome of their complaint, such as a referral for a director to review or the involvement of the customer led Designated Complaints Panel.

2.15 We will normally only investigate complaints made within six months of the event becoming evident.

2.16 We will consider discretionary compensation on a case by case basis and where a complaint is upheld, in line with our compensation policy.

- 2.17 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 policy and guidance on dealing with unreasonable behaviour in complaints, and advice from the Housing Ombudsman Service where appropriate.
- 2.18 In the event that 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 so as to ensure that our actions are in no way prejudicial to any such proceedings.
- 2.19 Complaints about issues which are subject to litigation will not be considered by the Housing Ombudsman Service.

3 Policy Implications

3.1 Service/Performance Standards

We will regularly monitor our performance on complaints, reporting this to the Group Leadership Team bi-annually and regularly to senior teams and service managers across the business.

3.2 Risk

Senior leaders will be kept informed of cases referred to the Housing Ombudsman Service, or the Care Quality Commission, with details of the determination reached and any recommendations provided.

4 Related Policies and Procedures

- 4.1 The following policies and procedures are related to the complaints policy:
- Aster complaints procedure
 - Aster Group compensation policy
 - Aster Group claims for compensation guidance

5 Appendices

- 5.1 No appendices

6 Reference documents

- 6.1 The Housing Ombudsman Service
- <http://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/>

6.2 The Care Quality Commission (CQC)

- <http://www.cqc.org.uk/content/fundamental-standards>