



Complaints Policy

1. Purpose

- 1.1. Falcon Housing Association C.I.C (FHA) aims to provide a positive customer experience; however, we acknowledge that sometimes things go wrong, and residents complain. When this happens, we aim to be as helpful as possible and provide a process which is simple and easy to follow.
- 1.2. FHA take all complaints about our service seriously because they make it clear to us where we need to improve. We work hard to resolve them quickly and fairly and use them as opportunities to learn and improve the service we deliver.
- 1.3. This policy sets out how FHA will manage and resolve customer complaints.

2. What is a complaint?

- 2.1. The Housing Ombudsman Service's definition of a complaint is *"an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack by the organisation, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting an individual resident or group of residents,"* Examples of complaints and or concerns are:
 - Where we have failed to provide a service, or there has been a delay in providing this against our published service standard.
 - Where we have failed to follow our policies and procedures or have been unfair or inconsistent in applying them.
 - Where we have failed to keep a customer informed through lack of or insufficient information with regards to their chosen service enquiry.
 - Where there has been inappropriate behaviour, or a poor attitude demonstrated from any member of staff when dealing with the service enquiry.
 - If a customer is in any way unhappy about how we have delivered a service.
 - A complaint can be made by anyone who is entitled to receive a service from FHA or is affected by that service provision.
- 2.2. Customers do not have to use the word complaint for it to be treated as such and we recognise the difference between a service request, survey feedback and a complaint and will take appropriate steps to resolve the issue for customers as early as possible. When a customer expresses dissatisfaction FHA will give them the choice to make complaint.
- 2.3. Chasers on a service request, such as a missed appointment, can often be resolved 'there and then' with an apology and the provision of another appointment and may not need to enter the complaints system. However, if further enquiries are needed to resolve the matter, or if the resident requests it, the issue must be logged as a complaint.
- 2.4. Survey feedback may not necessarily need to be treated as a complaint, though, where possible, the person completing the survey should be made aware of how



they can pursue their dissatisfaction as a complaint if they wish to.

- 2.5. FHA seek to deal with cases of anti-social behaviour (ASB) as efficiently and effectively as possible, in line with legislation, regulations and the FHA ASB Policy. Where a resident does not feel that a report of ASB has been dealt with appropriately or effectively, they can make a complaint under this policy.
- 2.6. FHA is committed to the principles of equality and diversity in service delivery and seeks to adhere to the provisions of the Equality Act 2010. In line with the legislation and the FHA Equality and Diversity Policy, we are committed to ensuring that reasonable adjustments to policies, procedures and processes will be made to assist residents in overcoming disadvantages of their impairment. To discharge these responsibilities, the wrap around care that is provided to our residents who are all vulnerable adults, is tailored to meet their specific needs. In addition, the FHA web site includes an accessibility tool and tenancy sign up packs can be provided in a range of formats to aid residents. Where residents feel reasonable adjustments have not been made, they can make a complaint under this policy, where the matter will be dealt with by a complaints handler who is trained to deal with such requests
- 2.7. A complaint is about service failure. If there is no evidence of a service failure it will not be dealt with as a complaint.

3. Exclusions

- 3.1. FHA will accept all complaints unless there is a valid reason not to do so, which must be fair and reasonable to residents. For example:
 - Normally a complaint must be received by FHA within 12 months of the issue taking place or the tenant finding out they have a reason to complain. However, due consideration will be given to extending these timelines where it is fair and reasonable. For example where there are matters of safeguarding or health and safety. If a customer feels that the time limit should not apply, they will need to tell us why, to enable a decision to be made.
 - If legal proceedings have been started and resulted in a Claim Form and Particulars of Claim being filed at court, then consideration of a complaint will be suspended pending the outcome of the legal action. However, this will not preclude FHA from taking appropriate action, to remedy any deficiencies that may cause harm e.g., a case of damp or mould.
 - If a complaint has previously been considered under the complaints policy.
- 3.2. Complaints will be considered on their individual merit and FHA will not use a blanket approach to exclude complaints. If FHA decides not to accept a complaint, a detailed explanation will be provided to the resident setting out the reasons why the matter is not suitable for the complaints process and the right to take that decision to the Ombudsman. If the Ombudsman does not agree that the exclusion has been fairly applied, the Ombudsman may instruct FHA to take on the complaint.



4. Who can make a complaint?

- 4.1. This policy applies to all customers of FHA.
- 4.2. FHA view customers as:
 - Tenants living in our homes
 - Their families, informal and formal carers and visitors
 - Stakeholders
 - Advocates
 - Anybody using our service(s)

5. How can a customer make a complaint?

- 5.1. FHA encourage complainants to initially contact the member of staff dealing with the delivery of the service, to allow them to resolve the matter quickly where possible.
- 5.2. Customers can also make complaints in the following ways:
 - Email: hello@falconha.org which is detailed on our web site: www.falconha.org
 - Email: with any member of the FHA team
 - In person: with any member of staff
 - By phone: with any member of staff or to the Customer Services Hub: 0191 406 4857
 - By Letter: Office 3.30, 3rd Floor, 2 Lighthouse View, Spectrum Business Park, Seaham, Co Durham, SR7 7PR
 - Via social media:
 - <https://www.facebook.com/falconhousing>
 - https://www.instagram.com/falcon_housing_association/

*Raising concerns or complaints via social media. If a customer raises a concern or complaint via FHA social media feeds, this will be acknowledged with a responding post, and request for further discussions to take place offline. The customer will be given the option to contact FHA by providing their contact details via a direct message on the social media platform being used, where a member of the FHA team will communicate directly.

- 5.3. The Head of Data Integrity oversees the FHA complaints process and ensuring that the Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code is complied with. FHA's Housing Manager is the nominated Complaints Officer, who is responsible for overseeing all complaints.
- 5.4. A copy of the FHA Complaints Policy, the Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code and the Housing Ombudsman Scheme can be found:
 - In our office(s)
 - Online www.falconha.org
 - Within the new tenant sign up pack



- If requested from a member of staff

5.5. To publicise the FHA Complaints Policy, the Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code and the Housing Ombudsman Scheme, information will be posted on information boards at all schemes, highlighted in resident newsletters and correspondence. This is in addition to the help and advice section of the FHA web site www.falconha.org. All information will be available in accessible formats tailored to the needs of our residents.

5.6. If a resident needs help to make a complaint, they can ask a family member, friend, carer or advocate to help. We will request confirmation that the complainant is comfortable with a third party dealing with the complaint on their behalf at onset. This can either be in writing from the complainant or alternatively we will write to the complainant asking them for confirmation or the option to refute it. This will be completed in a timely manner to ensure there are no unreasonable delays. All correspondence will be kept as part of the complaint audit trail.

6. Complaints Handling Principals

6.1. FHA encourages the early and local resolution of issues between landlords and residents and recognises that there may be times appropriate action can be agreed immediately. Any decision to try and resolve a concern will be taken in agreement with the resident and FHA's audit trail/records will be able to demonstrate this.

6.2. FHA will ensure that efforts to resolve a resident's concerns do not obstruct access to the complaints procedure or result in any unreasonable delay.

6.3. FHA requires any contractor that provides services on our behalf to comply with this policy by:

- Recording and responding to customers' feedback within the stated timescales.
- Providing us with any information relating to a complaint when requested.
- Assisting FHA with complaints investigations as appropriate.

7. Complaint Process

7.1. We recognise that our complaints process should be easy to understand and use. We have therefore adopted a two stage complaints process, as recommended by the Housing Ombudsman.

7.2. Complaints should be made within 12 months or as close as possible to the time the issue arose. However, due consideration will be given to extending these timelines where it is fair and reasonable. For example where there are matters of safeguarding or health and safety.

7.3. Stage 1- When a complaint is made, it will be acknowledged and logged at stage 1 of the complaints procedure within 5 working days of receipt. The details of the



complaint will be passed to the relevant member of staff and/or manager to investigate and resolve. They will then contact the complainant to discuss the complaint and ask how they would like it to be dealt with and resolved. Wherever possible, we will try to resolve the problem immediately. At the very least, we will aim to send a full response within 10 working days.

- 7.4. If an extension beyond 10 working days is required to enable a more detailed investigation, this will be communicated, and we will seek agreement with the complainant. FHA will provide the complainant with the contact details of the Housing Ombudsman at the point for requesting an extension.
- 7.5. A complaint response will be sent to the resident as soon as the answer to the complaint is known. Any actions that remain outstanding will be tracked and actioned expeditiously with regular updates provided to the resident.
- 7.6. At the completion of Stage 1, FHA will confirm the following in writing to the resident 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 2 if the resident is not satisfied with the response
- 7.7. Where additional complaints are raised during the investigation, these will, where possible be incorporated into the Stage 1 response if they are relevant and the Stage 1 response has not been issued. Where the Stage 1 response has been issued, or it would unreasonably delay the response, the additional complaint will be logged as a new complaint.
- 7.8. On receipt of an escalation request, which should be raised within 10 days, FHA will set out our understanding of issues outstanding and the outcomes the resident is seeking. If any aspect of the complaint is unclear, the resident must provide clarification.
- 7.9. FHA will not unreasonably refuse to escalate a complaint and will provide clear and valid reasons (as detailed in section 3 of this policy) where a request to escalate is not agreed. The timescales for a resident to request escalation of a complaint is 10 days from receipt of our response, although we will consider extending timelines where there are reasonable grounds. FHA's response to an escalation request will be provided within 10 working days of being informed of the escalation.
- 7.10. Stage 2 - If all or part of the complaint is not resolved to the resident's satisfaction at stage 1 the complaint will be progressed to stage 2 unless an exclusion as detailed in section 3 applies.



- 7.11. FHA will only escalate a complaint to stage 2 once we have completed stage 1 and at the request of the resident. Complainants are not required to explain their reasons for requesting a stage 2 consideration. FHA will make reasonable efforts to understand why the complainant remains unhappy as part of its stage 2 response. The person considering the complaint at stage 2, will not be the same person that considered the complaint at stage 1.
- 7.12. FHA will respond to the stage 2 complaint within 20 working days of the complaint being escalated. Exceptionally, FHA may provide an explanation to the resident containing a clear timeframe for when the response will be received. This will not normally exceed a further 10 days without good reason. FHA will provide the complainant with the contact details of the Housing Ombudsman at the point for requesting an extension.
- 7.13. If an extension beyond 10 working days is required to enable FHA to respond to the complaint fully, this will be agreed by both parties. Where agreement over an extension period cannot be reached, FHA will provide the Housing Ombudsman's contact details so the resident can challenge the plan for responding and/or the proposed timeliness of a response.
- 7.14. FHA will confirm the following in writing to the resident at the completion of stage 2 in clear, plain language and in accessible formats where requested:
- 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 the Housing Ombudsman Service if the resident remains dissatisfied.

8. Communicating with our Customers

- 8.1 We will keep our customers / their advocates / personal representatives regularly updated and informed even where there is no new information to provide. At the completion of each stage of the complaints process we will write to the customer / their personal representative / advocate, advising them of the following details.
- The complaint stage reached
 - The outcome of the complaint
 - The reasons for any decisions made
 - Details of any outstanding actions
 - Details of how to escalate the matter if they remain dissatisfied



9. Independence and Confidentiality

- 9.1 All complaints, will be recorded on a central register, overseen, and monitored by the Housing Manager who is the company's Complaints Officer and reports directly to the Chief Operating Officer.
- 9.2 Any complaint(s) relating directly to a member of the Leadership Team, will follow the two stage complaints process and be referred to and investigated by a member of the Leadership Team not mentioned in the complaint, as nominated by the Chief Executive.
- 9.3 A customer has the right to contact the Housing Ombudsman Service at any stage throughout the FHA complaints process, or if they wish to escalate their complaint further after completing the FHA process.
- 9.4 All complaints will be treated fairly and in the strictest confidence.

10. How will we learn from complaints?

- 10.1 A complaint is seen as an opportunity to learn about how we can improve our service. We therefore want to learn from every complaint, irrespective of the nature, and to capture and share the things that we learn so that improvements can be made where appropriate.
- 10.2 In order to do this, we will:
- Record and monitor every complaint including details such as what the complaint was about, how it was resolved, how quickly it was resolved.
 - Implement a lesson learnt action plan following the closure of a complaint, to ensure that changes in our services are embedded to avoid future complaints of a similar nature.
 - Our Leadership Team will carry out bi-monthly reviews of all complaints, to appraise and look at how / if we can improve our handling of complaints and the services we provide.
 - Our Board will receive a quarterly summary of complaints.
 - Survey tenants to measure their satisfaction with the way their complaint investigation was handled.

11. Staff Training and Development

- 11.1 All staff within the organisation will be briefed on this policy and its application to their work. Any training needs will be identified and addressed as part of embedding the policy into current housing practice and procedures.
- 11.2 FHA will continually strive to provide excellent customer services to our residents, partners and wider customers. Managers will undertake regular 1:2:1 reviews with their teams which includes objectives in relation to complaints, to review performance and any training and development needs will be identified and implemented.



12. Housing Ombudsman Service

12.1 The Housing Ombudsman Service normally investigate a complaint after an organisation's internal complaints process is exhausted, however, the Housing Ombudsman Service has the discretion to take on a complaint if there is reason to believe a registered provider is causing unnecessary delay in handling it. Note that the Ombudsman can only investigate a complaint made by a person who is or has been in a landlord/tenant relationship with a member or an advocate of associate of that person.

12.2 The Housing Ombudsman Service is contactable via:

- Tel 0300 111 3000 - 9.15am-5.15pm: Monday to Friday
- Email info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk
- www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk
- Housing Ombudsman Service, PO Box 152, Liverpool, L33 7WQ.

13. Compensation

13.1. Once a complaint has been investigated it may be appropriate to offer service recovery and/or discretionary compensation.

13.2. In awarding compensation, FHA will consider the extent of any service failures and the level of detriment caused to the resident as a result. This will consider whether any statutory payments are due, if any quantifiable losses have been incurred, the time and trouble a resident has been put to, as well as any distress and inconvenience caused.

13.3. In response to the complaint, we will write to the customer informing them why we are offering compensation and clearly set out what will happen and by when, in agreement with the resident where appropriate. Any remedy proposed will be followed through to completion.

13.4. Residents should be aware that they are able to pursue a complaint regardless of acceptance of a compensation offer.

14. Unacceptable Behaviour / Unreasonable Complaints and / or Persistence

14.1. FHA believe that all customers have a right to be heard, understood and respected, we also believe that staff have these same rights. FHA expect our customers to be polite and well-mannered when contacting us. We do not tolerate aggressive or abusive (challenging) behaviour, from residents or from FHA employees.

14.2. If customers are unnecessarily aggressive or abusive, we reserve the right to refuse to deal with the complaint and will consider further action, where required, to protect our staff from unacceptable behaviour.

14.3. Where possible we will give the customer time to change their behaviour before implementing any contact restrictions.



- 14.4. A very small number of complaints may be unreasonable because of the way or frequency that complaints are raised with staff, or how complainants respond when they receive feedback about the complaint. These may include tenants who make frequent complaints which are not valid; who persistently make the same complaint; who request a complaint to be escalated when we have fully responded to all points; or are seeking an unreasonable or unrealistic outcome. In these circumstances we reserve the right to refuse to deal with the complaint.
- 14.5. Some complainants will not or cannot accept that FHA is unable to assist them further or provide a service or level of service other than that already provided. Some complainants may persist in disagreeing with the actions or decisions taken about their complaint or contact the office persistently about the same issue. In these circumstances, we reserve the right to refuse to deal with complaints that are pursued unreasonably or in an aggressive or abusive manner.
- 14.6. Where FHA employees have been found to be unreasonable, aggressive or abusive (challenging) behaviour to residents, they will be subject to disciplinary procedures in accordance with relevant company HR procedures and policies.

15. Compliments

- 15.1 Compliments provide valuable positive customer feedback, enable FHA to develop services and raise staff moral and motivation. We share compliments across the association to learn from best practice.

16. Recording

- 16.1. Administration with regards to the complaints will be handled by the designated staff lead and overseen, and monitored by the Housing Manager, who is the company's Complaints Officer. This includes ensuring all correspondence / information is stored within the complaint database file.
- 16.2. To minimise reoccurring complaints of the same nature, the staff lead will ensure that any lessons learnt are captured within the complaints database and shared within the association as appropriate.
- 16.3. FHA will report annually to Board on all aspects of complaints handling performance.

17. Self-assessment and Compliance

- 17.1 FHA will carry out an annual self-assessment against the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code to ensure the handling of all complaints remains in line with all Housing Ombudsman requirements. In addition to the annual review, FHA will carry out a self-assessment following any significant changes that may affect the complaints process.

18. Governance Reporting

- 18.1 The statutory Complaint Handling Code requires landlords to have a Board Member



Responsible for Complaints on their governing body. The role is to champion a positive complaint handling culture. To provide assurance to the governing body on the efficacy of its complaints system, including challenging the data and information provided to the Board. To seek assurances from the complaints team and where appropriate the operational teams that complaints are being managed, change is happening and that residents are being heard through the process. To ensure complaint handling promotes service improvement for residents and learning and business improvement for the organisation. Attached as Appendix A and B are the following documents to support the role of the Board Member Responsible for Complaints:

- Housing Ombudsman Service - Expectations for the Member Responsible for Complaints Role
- Housing Ombudsman Service - Effective Involvement of Governing Bodies: Best Practice Guidance for Landlords

18.2 Governing bodies have a powerful role to promote a positive complaints culture within their organisations. Achieving this is essential to fulfilling the landlord's social purpose and strengthening the tenant and landlord relationship. They have an important role seeking assurance that their organisation has a learning culture which manages risk, that there are robust learning processes in place and that service improvements are being implemented, which has been reinforced by the National Housing Federation Code of Governance.

18.3 The Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code promotes accessibility to the complaint process and high numbers of complaints should not necessarily be viewed as negative.

19. Policy Review

19.1 The contents of this policy have been reviewed and benchmarked against recommendations within the Housing Ombudsman Services' Complaint Handling Code (April 2024) and should be read alongside the related documents listed in this document.

19.2 This policy will be reviewed annually. In addition, FHA will carry out a self-assessment following any significant changes that may affect the complaints process, including: - restructures, lessons learnt, and changes to best practice guidelines and legislation.



Review Process			
Policy review frequency:		Responsible for review:	
This policy / procedure will be reviewed on an annual basis, subject to section 19.2		This policy will be reviewed by the Head of Data Integrity	
Version Control			
Version	Date approved	Next review date	Author / Title
V13	28/02/2026	28/02/2027	Chris Voisey – Head of Data Integrity
Amendments: V13			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Updated sections 5.3, 9.1 and 16.1 to include Housing Manager as Complaints Officer. - Updated appendices 			

Appendix A

Housing Ombudsman Service - Expectations for the Member Responsible for Complaints Role

[Expectations for the MRC role | Housing Ombudsman](#)

Appendix B

Housing Ombudsman Service - Effective Involvement of Governing Bodies: Best Practice Guidance for Landlords

<https://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/app/uploads/2022/03/Governing-bodies-guidance-published-March-2022.pdf>