

Policy title:	Customer Feedback Policy		
Scope:	Group-wide		
Policy owner & job title:	Tracey Price, Customer Excellence Manager & Tim Edwards, Director of Business Development		
Approver:	Paul Medford, Group Company Secretary		
Date:	02/06/2017	Review Due Date:	02/06/2020

Notes:

Aspire Housing

- The word “customer” relates to “customers”.

PM Training

- The word “customer” relates to “learners” or “customers”.

Realise

- Customers are varied and the policy aim and principles below will be followed for all Realise customers, with reference to the Fundraising Regulations if applicable.

POLICY SUMMARY:

- At Aspire we are committed to delivering customer service excellence to all of customers, we believe in giving customers a mechanism to provide Compliments, Comments, and Suggestions or Complaints for a service we have provided.
- Our commitment is to deal with comments and concerns in a fair and consistent way, maintaining openness and transparency.

Associated Policies & Procedures: The Aspire Housing Customer Feedback Procedure.

1. POLICY STATEMENT

We value customer feedback and have a strong reputation of involving customers in shaping services and improving neighbourhoods and they are at the heart of everything we do.

1.1. Our Aims

- Provide a simple and accessible process. We make it easy for customers to provide feedback through our web site and other methods
- Deal with all customer feedback in strictest confidence
- Respond to the needs of our customers
- Record and analyse all feedback
- Deal with all feedback promptly and courteously
- Investigate and respond
- Keep customers informed

- Use plain language
- Be open and transparent
- Identify opportunities for improvements
- Learn from mistakes

2. COMPLIMENTS, COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS

A **compliment** is a polite expression of praise, admiration or gratitude about a service, contractor or Aspire member of staff. It is great when customers let us know what Aspire are doing well, as we can learn and share good practise across all of Aspire.

A **comment** or **suggestion** is a remark expressing an opinion, reaction or an idea for consideration. We have a strong reputation around involving our customers in shaping services and improving neighbourhoods as we value customer views and understand customers are at the heart of everything we do.

3. COMPLAINTS

A **complaint** is defined as “an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, action or lack of actions by us or our contractors”.

A summary guide to the Aspire Housing complaints procedure is published on the Aspire Housing website.

3.1. Complaint Handling

The following principles apply for all complaints handling:

- Complaints will be looked at objectively from the customer point of view.
- Customers will be advised who is dealing with their complaint.
- Complaints will be dealt with promptly and in strictest confidence.
- Customers will be provided with a clear explanation of the outcome of our investigation including the reasons for the decision, an apology where appropriate, and what action we will take.

Where Aspire undertakes a contract on behalf of another organisation we will adhere to their complaints policy, unless this is not specified as part of the contract. If Aspire is not responsible for dealing with an issue raised through feedback we will aim to identify who is and refer the matter to the relevant agency.

Complaints will not be considered for:

- Issues raised more than six months after the relevant events (unless it is an on-going issue Aspire is aware of).
- Cases where a final decision has been made and no further appeal is possible.

- Cases where legal action is already being taken.
- Issues that have been reported to the Customer Services Team (not as a formal complaint) and are currently in progress of being resolved.
- Anti-Social Behaviour complaints which are investigated by the Housing Team and reported separately.

3.2. Advocacy & Support

- Aspire will accept complaints from advocates although authorisation from the customer will be required before we can discuss the matter with an advocate.
- An advocate may be a family member, friend, or involved customer.
- Colleagues can also support customers to complain as long as there is no conflict of interest with their own role.

3.3. Complaint Stages

Aspire will aim to resolve reported issues as soon as possible. When an immediate solution can be found, for example, the issue can be resolved within two working days, it will not be treated as a formal complaint.

Complaints are investigated and responded to by a three-stage process.

Stage 1: COMPLAINT (Internal investigation by Team or Service Manager)

Where an immediate resolution is not possible because further investigation is required or the customer is not satisfied with the response provided, it will be known as a 'formal complaint' and will usually be addressed within 5 working days.

If this is not possible, we will agree a response date with the complainant. Cases will remain open until all the issues raised have been addressed. Where a complaint covers more than one service area Aspire will respond to each part.

A written response will be provided to the complainant detailing the outcome. If the complainant does not respond to contact within 14 days of the written response being sent, the outcome will be deemed to be accepted by the complainant and no further appeal will be possible.

Stage 2: APPEAL (Internal investigation by Head of Service)

If the complainant is not satisfied with the response to their complaint they have the right to appeal within 14 days of receiving the written response. The decision of the appeal will be final.

Stage 3: OMBUDSMAN (External investigation)

For Aspire's Housing customers the complainant has the right to progress the complaint to the Housing Ombudsman following the appeal panel. This does not apply to PM Training or Realise customers.

Complaints and enquiries received through MPs/Councillors will be dealt with using the 3 stage process outlined above.

3.4. Mediation

Aspire may fund mediation if it is determined a viable option for resolving the situation. If this is offered, the complainant will still be able to progress and appeal their complaint response using the standard procedure.

3.5. Compensation

Compensation is not awarded as standard practice. Aspire will, at its discretion, only consider compensation when there has been loss or damage, and will only be paid in cases where Aspire is at fault.

- There must be evidence to support the compensation claim.
- Requests **must** be made within 7 days of the initial complaint.
- Awards will only be back dated to the date the service failure was first reported to Aspire and only until the satisfactory resolution of the complaint.
- Any decision to award compensation must be approved by a Head of Service.

Compensation will not be considered when:

- Legal proceedings are underway or have taken place.
- Where Aspire has not been negligent, or the loss or damage is the result of unforeseen circumstances (such as extreme weather) and the loss is covered by the customer's own contents insurance.
- Where a personal injury claim is being managed, unless with the express consent of Aspire's Insurers.

All compensation awarded will be recorded. If the customer has debts with the Group, then compensation will be used to offset these.

3.6. Unreasonable Complainant Behaviour

Our aim is to deal with complaints in an open, fair and impartial way. If a complainant because of their actions and behaviour, or nature and frequency of their contacts with us, hinders theirs, or other people's interactions with the Aspire, or delays our ability to investigate the complaint, we will consider such behaviour to be unreasonable.

Unreasonable behaviour which can be habitual and/or vexatious includes;

- Refusing to cooperate with Aspire during the investigation.
- Repeatedly contacting several members of staff about the same complaint, and making unnecessary demands on staff time.

- Submitting repeat complaints, relating to the same events.
- Continually raising new issues during the complaint investigation which should have been included in the original complaint.

For the purpose of this policy, abuse, aggression or violence is defined as ‘an incident in which employees feel they have been verbally abused, threatened or attacked in circumstances relating to their duties either in or out of work’, including, but not limited to:

- Abusive or threatening behaviour towards Aspire colleagues or property.
- Physical attack - whether visible injury occurs or not.
- Animal attack - when an animal is used as a threat.
- Verbal abuse - when an employee feels threatened or intimidated and the abuse is personally directed. This also includes cyber-aggression through texts, email messages or social networking sites
- Any derogatory comments or behaviour in relation to age, disability, gender, gender identity, marriage or civil partnership, pregnancy or maternity, religion and belief, race, sexual orientation – in some areas this can constitute a hate crime
- Attack or damage to property or belongings of the employee or the Aspire.
- Any work-related incident involving an employee, or their family, which happens away from the workplace.

If it is felt that during the management of the complaints process the relationship between the customer and Aspire employees has broken down to such an extent it is felt beyond repair, then Aspire reserve the right to cease communication with the customer and refer them to an advocate/designated person to act on their behalf.

4. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

All customers and colleagues are treated with fairness and respect. We value diversity and will work to prevent and tackle unlawful discrimination. Customers will be supported to provide feedback in a method that is suitable for them.

5. RESPONSIBILITIES OF EMPLOYEE

All employees of Aspire have a responsibility to pass on customer feedback and where possible to resolve issues as they arise.

6. RESPONSIBILITY OF ASPIRE

The Aspire has a responsibility to gather feedback from customers, in particular complaints, and respond to them in a timely and fair manner.