



# Compliments and Complaints Procedure

<b>Approved by</b>	<b>Head of Communities</b>
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# Introduction

## 1. Purpose

- 1.1 No matter how good we make our service, there will be times when we fall short of our customers' expectations or the level of service to which we aspire. This procedure outlines our approach to resolving such situations to offer swift and effective redress where appropriate.
- 1.2 We encourage all feedback from customers (positive and negative) and will deal with complaints effectively and fairly using them as an opportunity to improve the service we deliver.

## 2. Definitions

### 2.1 What is a complaint?

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.

### 2.2 Who is a customer?

A customer is anyone who contacts us to request a service, or is in receipt of a service provided by Connexus or any of its subsidiaries.

## 3. Guiding Principles

- 3.1 We are committed to resolving complaints effectively and without undue delay. We will provide a clear escalation route that is fair and impartial
- 3.2 We will monitor the themes of the complaints we receive and use this to help understand how we can improve our services
- 3.3 We will be open and honest and ensure that complainants are not disadvantaged in their future dealings with us as a result of their complaint
- 3.4 We will respect complainants privacy and ensure that all complaints are treated confidentially

## 4. Our Approach

### 4.1 General Information

- Complaints can be made in any format, these include: letter, e-mail, social media, via telephone or in person
- A customer may instruct a (non-legal) representative to make the complaint on their

behalf. Should they appoint a representative, we will require written authorisation to liaise directly with their representative throughout the complaint process

- Customers will be asked to set out the reasons for their dissatisfaction clearly, provide copies of any background information they consider relevant and outline the action/s they consider would resolve the matter/s
- Complaints should be made within 3 months of the incident giving rise to the concern however Connexus may, at its discretion, consider complaints raised after 3 months
- Complainants will be asked to provide their name and contact details; this information will be held in line with the groups GDPR policy
- Connexus may need to contact other parties in order to properly investigate a complaint. Wherever possible, we will not share the complainants' identity
- A full record shall be kept of the complaint, any review and the outcomes at each stage. This should include the original complaint and the date received; all correspondence with the customer, correspondence with other parties and any reports or surveys prepared

4.2 We hope that most issues can be settled quickly and as close to the source of the problem as possible. Should a customer be dissatisfied they should contact us to discuss and allow us to try and resolve the matter immediately through our feedback process.

Should the customer remain dissatisfied with the response, Connexus has a two-stage complaint process, these being:

- Complaint
- Review

4.3 Should Connexus decide not to accept a complaint, we will give the customer a detailed explanation setting out the reasons why the matter is not suitable for the complaints process.

4.4 We will advise the customer that they have the right to challenge this decision by taking their complaint to the Ombudsman.

#### 4.5 Compliments

Where a customer wishes to compliment a service they have experienced we will record the details on our central database and notify the relevant colleague/teams. Where possible we will immediately thank the customer for providing the feedback.

#### 4.6 Feedback

*Response time (where required) for the feedback stage is close of business the next working day*

Where a customer wishes to express their dissatisfaction with something Connexus has or has not done, but specifically states that they do not want a response, then we will record this on the central database and report it as feedback to the service area concerned. Colleagues should e-mail the feedback to the complaints mailbox with as much information as possible. The Customer Services Team (CST) will update the central database (Pentana).

Where a customer requires a response, the colleague receiving the initial feedback should discuss the issue and, if possible, take action to resolve the matter immediately.

Should the initial colleague be unable to resolve the issue immediately they would e-mail the complaints mailbox with as much information as possible. The customer should be advised that initial contact to discuss the matter will be made by close of business the next working day unless a mutually agreeable alternative date has been agreed. The CST will update the central database (Pentana) and assign the case to the colleague who will be dealing with the feedback.

Upon receipt of the feedback the assigned colleague should review the case. Where the issue impacts multiple teams, to save the customer being contacted by different departments, the assigned colleague should liaise directly with other teams. Colleagues are also encouraged to discuss the feedback with their line manager, especially in cases where there are multiple issues or they are more complex.

The Complaints Manager is also available to provide support and guidance to the colleague to help them reach a resolution with the customer.

We aim to contact the customer by close of business the next working day following receipt of the feedback. The discussion with the customer provides an opportunity to ensure we have fully understood the issue, establish what resolution the customer is seeking (if not already known) and whether we are able to put the matter right there and then.

If the issue cannot be resolved immediately, the assigned colleague should explain to the customer what actions they are going to take and agree when they will next make contact and by what method. The assigned colleague should update their actions in Pentana

If it is possible to resolve immediately, the assigned colleague should clearly explain what they have done, or are going to do and what, if anything, the customer should expect and by when. The customer should be asked to confirm they are happy with the response and if they are, the assigned colleague should update their actions in Pentana

If the customer is not happy with the suggested resolution, colleagues should ascertain why and should there be nothing further the assigned colleague can do, the customer should be advised that they may escalate their issue to our 'complaint' stage.

Should the customer want to escalate the issue, the assigned colleague should note all details (including the reason why the customer wishes to escalate) and escalate to the 'complaint' stage through the central database and assign the complaint to the Complaints Manager. The colleague escalating must acknowledge the escalation in writing (letter template in Pentana) within five working days of the request to escalate the complaint.

The Complaints Manager will receive an automatic notification from the database. If the customer contacts the CST to escalate their feedback to the 'complaint' stage, the CST will action this request.

We will advise the customer that the Complaints Manager will deal with their complaint and that they will receive a response within 10 working days.

#### 4.7 **Complaint**

*Response time for the complaint stage is within 10 working days.*

Upon receipt of a complaint notification the Complaints Manager should review and understand all of the information relating to the complaint. The Complaints Manager should also take the opportunity to discuss with the colleague who initially dealt with the issue (if applicable) and any other colleagues who have been involved to this point.

The Complaints Manager is encouraged to make contact as soon as possible with the customer to discuss their concerns. If practical and appropriate, the Complaints Manager will meet with the customer face to face, however, as a minimum, a telephone conversation should be undertaken. The customer should be allowed to explain clearly their issue/s, clarify the reasons why they were not happy with the initial response and clarify their expectations.

The Complaints Manager will fully investigate the matter and may call upon any relevant colleagues to discuss the situation in order to reach a resolution. The Complaints Manager will have the authority and autonomy to act to resolve the complaint quickly and fairly.

Following the investigation, the Complaints Manager should contact the customer to clearly explain what they have done, or are going to do and what, if anything, the customer should expect and by when. The Complaints Manager should ask if the customer is happy with their response and upon confirmation of this, close the complaint down and complete the relevant sections in central database.

In accordance with the Housing Ombudsman's complaint handling code, the Complaints Manager will write to the customer and confirm the following:

- the complaint stage
- the outcome of 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 if dissatisfied

This should be sent within the original 10 working day time frame. For clarity, this can be via letter or e-mail so long as the attachment is in a secure format, such as a PDF.

Should it not be possible to resolve at this stage, the Complaints Manager should record all details (including the reason why the customer wishes to escalate the issue) upload all files and escalate to the 'review' stage through the central database.

The Complaints Manager will confirm the escalation to the review stage in writing (letter template in Pentana) within five working days of the request to escalate the complaint.

The customer should be advised who will be reviewing their complaint and be advised they will receive a response within 20 working days. The customer should also be informed that as part of the review stage we will engage with an independent involved customer who will provide an independent customer led view of the issue. Should the customer making the complaint not want an involved customer to be involved they should inform us immediately.

## 4.8 Review

*Response time for the review stage is within 20 working days*

The 'review' stage is the final stage of our complaints procedure and enables the customer to have their complaint reviewed by a member of the Senior Management Team and by an independent involved customer should they wish.

The Complaints Manager will be responsible for co-ordinating the review stage. They will ensure that the information contained within the central database is up to date and work with the Communities Manager to arrange support from an involved customer (where not declined by the complainant).

The Head of Service or Director should use the involved customer to support them in their investigation and if appropriate, accompany them on any customer visit.

The Complaints Manager will arrange a handover meeting to initially discuss the complaint with the Head of Service or Director to review and understand the complaint and all of the information held in the central database.

The Head of Service or Director should then also take the opportunity to discuss with any other colleagues who have been involved to this point.

The Head of Service or Director is encouraged to discuss the complaint with their Line Manager, especially in cases where there are multiple issues or where they are more complex. In some cases it may be more appropriate for the Director to complete the review. Should this be the case, the central database should be updated and the review re-assigned.

The colleague reviewing the complaint is encouraged to make contact as soon as possible with the customer to discuss their complaint. If practical and appropriate, colleagues are encouraged to meet with the customer face to face, however, as a minimum, a telephone conversation should be undertaken. The customer should be allowed to explain clearly the initial issue/s, clarify the reasons why they were not happy with the responses to date and clarify their expectations.

Once in possession of all the facts and evidence, the colleague reviewing the complaint should contact the customer to advise the suggested outcome. This provides one final checkpoint to ensure the customer is satisfied with the outcome before the end of our procedure.

The customer should be issued with a full written response within the original 20 working days deadline. In some more complex cases it may not be possible to meet the deadline. Should this be the case the reviewing colleague should advise the customer at the earliest opportunity and agree a date when they will send the full response. This should not exceed a further 10 working days without good reason.

The central database should be fully updated with all relevant information and associated documents.

In accordance with the Housing Ombudsman's complaint handling code, the final letter to the customer will confirm the following:

- the complaint stage

- the outcome of 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 if dissatisfied

As this is the final stage of Connexus' complaints procedure, the response letter will advise the customer of their right to escalate the issue to the Ombudsman should they remain dissatisfied.

## 5. Ombudsman/Designated Persons

Social housing residents can seek early resolution, advice and support from the Housing Ombudsman Service at any time to help resolve an issue or complaint with their landlord.

Customers retain the right to escalate their complaint following completion of our process, or in the event where we advise they have exhausted our complaints procedure.

Customers can also self-refer to a designated person. "Designated persons" are defined as an MP, a local councillor for the district in which a customer's home is located.

The Complaints Manager will be the principle liaison for the Ombudsman.

Someone in receipt of CQC regulated care e.g. home care or re-ablement has the right to complain to the Local Authority if they remain dissatisfied after the stages have been exhausted.

Customers of commissioned services, for example, the Independent Living Service, the Foyer and Refuge have the right to complain direct to the commissioner of the service (i.e. the Local authority). In such cases, customers have the right to appeal to the Local Government Ombudsman or the relevant Ombudsman for the service. We will ensure that we advise customers accordingly.

## 6. Recording of compliments and complaints

6.5 We will use a central database to record all compliments, complaints and feedback.

6.6 It is critical that all colleagues keep accurate records in line with the Connexus GDPR policy. Records include case notes, records of any conversation, correspondence and letters including any evidence that has been used as part of the investigation. Information entered into the database will be held for a maximum of 6 years.

6.7 Complaint records will include details of the complainant, information relating to the issue and any evidence gathered as part of an investigation.

6.8 The data collected will be used to produce regular reports and analysis of:

- Number and nature of complaints received
- Complaints that have not been responded to in time
- Themes and outcomes at each stage
- Learning and examples of what has changed as a result

6.5 The Complaints Manager will collate the relevant data required to comply with the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code and ensure the annual self-assessment is completed and submitted.