



Complaints Policy

Approved by SMT	28 th July 2023
Approved by Committee/Board	Customer Services Committee
Effective date	1 st August 2023
Review date	30 th September 2026
Policy developed by	Head of Communities
Consultations	Customers, Colleagues and Internal Audit
Associated procedure	Complaints Procedure, Compensation Procedure

03332 31 32 33

connexus-group.co.uk

hello@connexus-group.co.uk

[@weareconnexus](https://www.instagram.com/weareconnexus)

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 policy outlines our approach to resolving such situations through a formal complaint and can be made available in alternative formats/languages upon request.
- 1.2 We encourage all feedback from customers and this Complaints Policy sets out how we will ensure that we deal with complaints fairly, effectively and comply with the approach as set out by the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code and associated regulatory standards.
- 1.3 We will ensure that complaints are viewed as an opportunity to improve and learn from our mistakes. Poor practice will be highlighted and put right.
- 1.4 The policy applies to the whole of the Group. This means Connexus Homes Limited, (ultimate parent) and all of its subsidiaries.

2. Problem to Solve

- 2.1 **Provide an accessible complaints process:**
Customers need to know that we welcome their feedback when we do not get something right and how to tell us. This policy clarifies how we will handle formal complaints.
- 2.2 **Define a complaint:**
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 an individual resident or group of residents.
- 2.3 **Define who can make a complaint:**
Any person who requests or receives a service from Connexus or any of its subsidiaries; this includes an authorised advocate to raise a complaint on behalf of a service user.
- 2.4 **Define when we will not accept a formal complaint:**
 - If the matter occurred more than six months ago
 - When the matter is best dealt with under a different policy e.g a complaint about a neighbour (Anti Social Behaviour policy)
 - Where there is a legal or criminal matter which should be dealt with accordingly
 - Where Connexus has already provided a formal complaint response to the issue and what is being reported is the same or a very similar issue to which the response would be the same.
- 2.5 **Define the number of Complaint stages**
Connexus has a two-stage complaint process

- i. Complaint
- ii. Review

2.6 The need to resolve issues promptly and fairly

Sometimes dissatisfaction can be resolved quickly through early intervention by an appropriate person. The Ombudsman encourages the early and local resolution of issues between landlords and customers and recognises that there may be times appropriate action can be agreed immediately. We will therefore discuss the customers concerns and how best to try and resolve them with the customer. These efforts will not obstruct access to the formal complaints procedure or result in any unreasonable delay.

2.7 The timescale in which a complaint can be escalated

Customers are asked to tell us within 28 days of the formal complaint response if they are not satisfied with the response and wish to escalate their complaint to our review stage.

2.8 Provide opportunities for customers to appeal decisions

A customer may object to a decision that has been based on policy if they feel that they have been unfairly treated or the policy is not correct. The Complaints Policy allows the customer to appeal that decision.

2.9 Ensuring Policies are accessible and when to apply reasonable adjustments

Connexus complies with the Equality Act 2010 and has an Equality and Diversity Policy that covers all aspect of equalities. All policies are subject to an Equalities Impact Assessment to ensure that any adaptations to the normal policy or procedure may be applied to accommodate an individual's needs. The Formal Complaints process has been designed to be accessible to all, but should a customer advise that they have a disability that requires a reasonable adjustment to the process, we will consider whether we can meet their request.

2.10 Meeting regulatory requirements

Through our membership of the Housing Ombudsman we are required to abide by their Complaint Handling Code. Non-compliance could result in a non-compliance order. We are also required under the Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard to have a clear, simple and accessible complaints process and ensure that complaints are resolved promptly, politely and fairly.

2.11 Improving our Service through complaints

We want to learn from customer complaints, so by accurately recording and resolving them, we can identify what needs to be 'put right' in terms of a process or systems that will benefit all residents and colleagues; and in turn, stop us from repeating the same mistakes.

3. Method/s

3.1 Connexus will advise all customers about the complaints process and their right to access the Housing Ombudsman service throughout the process, not just when they have been through Connexus' formal complaints process.

3.2 Connexus aims to record and resolve complaints quickly, fairly and effectively. We will: -

- Allow complaints in any format through which it communicates with customers about issues that have occurred within the last six months
- Handle complaints submitted via a non-legal third party or representative in the same way as one received directly from the customer, once we have confirmation they are acting on the customers behalf
- Be positive about complaints
- Aim to put things right quickly for our customers when they go wrong
- Clearly explain the reasons for our decisions
- Seek to learn from complaints to improve future performance
- Direct the complaint to the appropriate organisation if the complaint relates to matters not within the responsibility of Connexus

3.3 Recognising and acknowledging when we have got things wrong and that putting it right is every colleagues' responsibility.

3.4 The Complaints Manager is responsible for supporting colleagues to respond to complaints and ensure that Connexus meets the requirements of the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code.

4. Measurement

4.1 We will resolve complaints within the timescales set out in the Complaints and Compliments procedure.

4.2 We will monitor the root cause of complaints and the outcomes and use this feedback to improve our services and reduce the number of complaints about the same issues.

4.3 We will provide reassurance to customers that we are learning from complaints and demonstrate what we have changed at least annually through our newsletter which goes to every customer, but also via online methods including the website, annual report and our Self-Assessment against the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code.

4.4 We will provide twice yearly updates to the Customer Services Committee to include: -

- i. Number and outcomes of complaints received broken down by stage and month
- ii. Response times; including where cases have had timescales extended
- iii. % where timescales have been extended
- iv. Themes and learning from feedback received
- v. Housing Ombudsman determinations; including a deep dive on any specific case where maladministration has been found

4.5 The Head of Communities will meet at least twice-yearly with the nominated lead Board member for complaints.

4.6 Colleagues who as part of their role either respond to, or receive complaints, will receive ongoing training to ensure their skills and knowledge are maintained.



Equality Impact Assessment Form

Strategy / policy / procedure / service / function / project being assessed	Complaints Policy
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Stage 1		
Lead officer	[REDACTED]	
Date of assessment	19 th July 2023	
Date for next review	Upon policy review	
Reason for assessment	Policy amendments following audit	
Agreed and signed off by lead officer's line manager	Manager's signature [REDACTED]	Date 19/07/2023
Stage 2		
Aims of the service / function / policy/project under assessment	We encourage all feedback from customers and this Complaints Policy sets out how we will ensure that we deal with complaints fairly, effectively and comply with the approach as set out by the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code and associated regulatory standards.	
Main stakeholders / beneficiaries	Any person who requests or receives a service from Connexus or any of its subsidiaries; this includes an authorised advocate to raise a complaint on behalf of a service user.	
Who is likely to be affected by the service/ function/ policy/project?	As noted above in main stakeholders.	
What are the arrangements for monitoring and reviewing the actual impact of the service/function/policy/project?	The policy is reviewed every 3 years and key measurements are outlined in the policy under 'measurement'.	

Stage 3 Collect and evaluate the evidence				
Key questions	Positive impact	Negative impact	No specific impact on any one group	Evidence
Does the policy or service have a positive or negative impact on any racial groups? Describe how and which.			X	
Does the policy or service have a positive or negative impact on individuals where English is not their first language? Describe how and which.		X		Copies can be translated, and translation services are available to ensure the policy is understood by all when/where required, this is emphasized within the policy.
Does the policy or service have a positive or negative impact on women or men? This includes Transgender people / Trans people. Describe how and which.			X	
Does the policy or service have a positive or negative impact on people with disabilities? Describe how and which.			X	The policy at 2.9 provides assurance that the process has been designed to be accessible to all, but should a customer advise that they have a disability that requires a reasonable adjustment to the process, we will consider whether we can meet their request.
Does the policy or service have a positive or negative impact on people of a particular age? (e.g. children, young people, older people). Describe how and which			X	A service user or customer will be at least 16 years old, therefore children would not be able to access this policy, however, an advocate could make a complaint on their behalf.
Does the policy or service have a positive or negative impact on people with particular sexuality / sexual orientation? Describe how and which			X	

Key questions	Positive impact	Negative impact	No specific impact on any one group	Evidence
Does the policy or service have a positive or negative impact on people in terms of marriage/civil partnership status? Describe how and which			X	
Does the policy or service have a positive or negative impact on people with a particular religion or belief? Describe how and which			X	
Does the policy or service have a positive or negative impact on people in terms of pregnancy/maternity? Describe how and which			X	
Is it possible that the service/function/policy could discriminate or unfairly disadvantage those that do not have access to digital equipment?		X		<p>A hard copy of the policy can be made available in print for those unable to view the actual policy on the Connexus Website or receive a copy via e-mail. Any action/outcome would consider the preferences of the customer, for example, those who are not able to access digital services would not receive electronic communications or asked to communicate only via e-mail.</p> <p>The complaints process is explained in the customer newsletter at least annually.</p>
Is it possible that the service/function/policy could discriminate or unfairly disadvantage or cause an individual/community financial hardship?			X	

Outsourced services	
If delivery of your strategy, policy, project or service is partly or wholly provided by external organisations / agencies, please list any arrangements you plan, to ensure that they promote equality and diversity.	Language Line is in place for translation services as part of the reasonable adjustments we put in place for all Connexus customers.
Relations between different equality groups	
Does your assessment show that a policy, project or service may have a differential impact between any discrete groups? If yes, please explain how this issue is going to be tackled	N/A
Stage 4 – Summary of replies from individuals and stakeholders consulted, including any previous complaints on equality and diversity issues about the policy or service	
This specific update to the policy is derived from findings from the recent internal audit (Apr-23). As part of that process numerous discussions were held to review our approach and ensure that the policy is fit for purpose, this process meant that a significant number of complaints were reviewed to determine compliance and where gaps in the policy were identified.	
Stage 5 – Options resulting from this equality impact assessment, including measures necessary to minimise or remove any adverse impact and better promotion of equality and diversity. Consider any alternative solutions	
None.	

Stage 6 – Arrangements for regular monitoring of the impact of the policy, project or service
<p>Section 4 (Measurement) within the policy describes how the policy will be monitored.</p> <p>The Policy has a set review date, at which point it will be reviewed and a refreshed EIA completed.</p> <p>If we receive several complaints about the policy or access to the complaints process, we would review our approach early to decide if any amendments were necessary to ensure it is accessible and fair to all.</p>
Stage 7 – Any actions and outcomes, including how these are to be communicated both internally and externally as required
<p>Policy will be uploaded to the website and the intranet upon approval.</p> <p>Communication through the customer newsletter within the next year.</p>