



Complaints and Customer Care Policy

Regulation and Legislation	This policy demonstrates our commitment to complaint handling and our obligations under the RSH (Regulator of Social Housing) Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard, Housing Act 1996, Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code, Data Protection Act 2018, and Equality Act 2010.
Supporting documents	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Complaint Resolution Policy• Additional Assistance and Reasonable Adjustment Policy• Managing Unacceptable Behaviour Policy• Complaint Resolution Procedure• Orbit Complaints & Customer Care Procedure• Orbit Homes New Sales Complaints Procedure• Additional Assistance and Reasonable Adjustments Procedure
Scope	This policy sets out how we will manage service requests and complaints in line with the Housing Ombudsman code and how we will use this feedback to improve our services.
Reference to 'Orbit' means Orbit Group which consists of Orbit Group Limited, Orbit Housing Association Limited, Orbit Homes (2020) Limited, Orbit Treasury Limited, and Orbit Capital Limited.	

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Our aim is to provide great homes for our customers and cared-for communities. However, we recognise that there are times when we do not meet the expected level of service. Where this is the case, it is important that we provide customers with a simple and accessible way to report this and that we put things right.
- 1.2 At times we recognise that our customer-facing teams have the greatest opportunity to put things right as quickly as possible by dealing with any service requests raised by customers. These teams will work with customers to resolve their issue at the first point of contact.
- 1.3 Where we are unable to resolve this or a customer is expressing dissatisfaction, we will raise the issue as a formal complaint and manage it through our complaints process. We will ensure all customers are treated fairly, compassionately, and professionally.
- 1.4 We welcome all feedback from customers and use this insight to understand what our customers value and where we can improve our services in the future.

- 1.5 Our Complaints and Customer Care Policy is in alignment with the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code. The Code is statutory from 1 April 2024, meaning that we are obliged by law to follow its requirements. The Code aims to achieve best practice in complaint handling and ultimately to provide a better service to residents.

2. Definition of a service request and complaint

- 2.1 A service request is a request from a customer to put something right. Service requests are not complaints, but will still be recorded, monitored, and reviewed regularly.
- 2.2 A complaint is defined as: 'An expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions, or lack of action by Orbit, our employees, or those acting on our behalf, affecting an individual customer or group of customers'.
- 2.3 A complaint will be raised when a customer expresses dissatisfaction with the response to their service request, even if the handling of the service request is ongoing. We will not stop our efforts to address the service request if the customer complains.
- 2.4 An expression of dissatisfaction made through a survey is not defined as a complaint. But wherever possible, we will make it clear to customers who are completing the survey how they can pursue a complaint.

3. Who can make a complaint

- 3.1 We will accept complaints from:
- any of our customers (tenants, shared owners, or leaseholders)
 - former customers
 - people who have applied for housing
 - non-residents
 - members of the public
 - a group of customers, where there is a single representative, and issues are affecting multiple customers.
- 3.2 We will accept complaints on our customers behalf from anyone acting as their representative and support customers to be represented or accompanied at any meeting with us.

4. Types of complaints covered under this policy

- 4.1 Types of complaints covered under this policy include:
- Delays in responding to an enquiry or request for information
 - Failure to provide a service, such as a repair or maintenance of communal areas
 - Treatment by, or attitude of, an employee
 - Complaints about any of our partners who work on our behalf
 - Safeguarding or Health & Safety issues
 - Any building safety issues in relation to any part of a higher- risk building that Orbit own or

manage, including any communal areas used by customers. This may include a complaint about fire safety equipment, the material fire safety of the building, any structural safety concerns, our management of building safety risks or our communication and engagement with customers relating to these issues.

4.2 There are some things, that we will not deal with through our complaint's procedure, which include:

- **An initial request for information or a service.** This will include:
 - initial reports of a repair or damage to a property,
 - initial requests for a copy of a tenancy agreement,
 - an initial enquiry seeking clarification on information included in a service charge budget or accounts.

These will be handled as service requests.

- **A first report of anti-social behaviour (ASB)** (as defined by our ASB Policy) or ongoing nuisance as part of an existing ASB case. Only complaints regarding the handling of an existing ASB case will be logged as a complaint.
- **Disputes about service charges or rents** (for example, whether they are reasonable), unless the complaint is about **how** we dealt with the dispute. For example, we **will** consider complaints about how charges are calculated, communicated, and consulted on, as well as our process for granting access to inspect accounts. However, if the complaint is specifically around the level of service charge, then this will not be dealt with as a formal complaint and should be handled through the First-tier Tribunal (Property Chamber).
- **Issues that have previously been through our complaint procedure**, or that happened over twelve months ago, unless there are valid reasons why the issue was not raised sooner. These will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis and a written explanation will be provided if we refuse the complaint.
- **Matters that have already been determined** under the complaints policy or another policy appeal process (e.g., Housing Ombudsman decision)
- **If legal action has begun.** A disrepair claim is a civil claim through the court system arising from the condition of residential premises and may include a related personal-injury claim. We will try and resolve all issues outside of the legal process via our complaints procedure whilst early action protocol is ongoing. However once legal proceedings have been issued, our complaints team will pass the matter to our Property Management Team who will continue to support you in resolving the matter.
- **Insurance claims** including damage to personal belongings, property over £5,000 or personal injury claims. These will be dealt with in line with our insurance procedures.
- **Anything that is not Orbit's responsibility or is outside our control.** This will include issues such as the collection of bins or increases in Council Tax.

If we decide not to accept a complaint, we will provide an explanation which sets out the reasons why the matter is not suitable for the complaints process and explains the right to take that decision to the Housing Ombudsman.

5. How to make a complaint

- 5.1 We will make it easy for customers to make a complaint and tell us that they are not happy with something about their home or our services. We accept that customers may have different communication preferences and we accommodate for this where possible.
- 5.2 We will accept complaints made in any way, including:
- Phone 0800 678 1221
 - Letter (Orbit Group, PO Box 6406, Coventry, CV3 9NB)
 - Email info@orbit.org.uk
 - Via our website <https://www.orbitcustomerhub.org.uk/contact-us/complaints/>
 - Face-to-face via our independent living scheme managers, property managers, tenancy services teams or any other Orbit employees
 - Through social media (using our official pages only, as we are unable to monitor any other feeds)

6. Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion

- 6.1 We are committed to making our complaints process accessible and easy to use for all our customers in line with our statutory duties – as set out in the Equality Act 2010.
- 6.2 Customers can request a reasonable adjustment from us through the officer they are engaging with or by contacting our Customer Hub.
- 6.3 Examples of the support we can provide, or reasonable adjustments we can make, but are not limited to, include:
- Providing information in accessible or alternative formats
 - Allowing more time for a complaint to be brought to our attention or liaising with representatives acting on customers' behalf
 - Adapting our communication method
 - Providing translation services or sign language interpreter

7. The Process

- 7.1 A follow-up on a service request, such as a missed appointment, can often be resolved 'there and then' with an apology and by providing another appointment. A case like this may not need to enter our formal complaints process. These will be dealt with as service requests and all records will be stored and recorded. If further dissatisfaction about the issue occurs, or if further enquiries are needed to resolve the complaint or if a customer requests it, the issue will be logged as a formal complaint. We will not stop our efforts to address the service request if the customer complains.
- 7.2 To ensure complaints can be investigated effectively, all complaints should be submitted to us within twelve months of the event occurring or it becomes known. In exceptional circumstances, we may use our discretion when considering whether to accept a complaint submitted outside of

these timescales. Each case will be treated on its own merits.

- 7.3 Where a complaint request is rejected in line with our policy, the customer will be contacted explaining the reasons why their request will not be treated as a complaint. We will include any alternative solutions to their request and explain in the customer's right to take that decision to the Housing Ombudsman.
- 7.4 Our complaints process has two stages. New complaints are logged and acknowledged as a stage one complaint within **five working days of it being received**. The acknowledgement will set out our understanding of the complaint and the outcomes the customer is seeking and will clarify which aspects of the complaint we are responsible for.
- 7.5 A stage one complaint response will usually be provided within **ten working days of it being acknowledged** unless an extension is required.
- 7.6 Where a response to a complaint will fall outside the timescales set out in this policy, we will agree suitable intervals with customers for keeping them informed about their complaint.
- 7.7 If an extension is required to allow us to fully complete our investigation before a response is provided, we will provide an explanation to the customer containing a clear timeframe and a date by which they will receive the stage one response. We will not exceed a further ten working days without good reason. If an extension at stage one is required beyond ten working days, this will be agreed by both parties.
- 7.8 When we inform a customer about an extension to these timescales, they will be provided with the contact details of the Housing Ombudsman.
- 7.9 The stage one investigation will be carried out by a Complaints and Customer Care Officer who is fully trained to handle complaints. The Officer will investigate and respond to all issues and confirm the outcome of the complaint using the customers preferred communication preference.
- 7.10 We recognise that some complaints might be more complex and therefore, we will conduct an assessment to identify this. Complex cases will be assigned to specialist officers.
- 7.11 A complaint response will be provided to the customer when the answer to the complaint is known, not when the outstanding actions required to address the issue are completed. Outstanding actions will still be tracked and actioned promptly with appropriate updates provided to the customer through our Customer After Care team.
- 7.12 The response will address all points raised in the complaint definition and provide clear reasons for any decisions, referencing the relevant policy, law and good practice where appropriate.
- 7.13 Where customers raise additional complaints during the investigation, these will be incorporated into the stage one response if they are related, and the stage one response has not been issued. Where the stage one response has been issued, the new issues are unrelated to those already being investigated or it would delay the response unreasonably, the new issues will be logged as a new complaint.

- 7.14 If a customer remains unhappy with our stage one response, we will include information on how to progress the complaint to stage two of our complaints process. Stage two is our final response stage. All requests for escalation to stage two must be received within thirty working days of the stage one response.
- 7.15 Requests for stage two will be acknowledged and logged in stage two of the complaint's procedure within **five working days of the escalation request being received**.
- 7.16 Our stage two responses are usually sent within **twenty working days of the complaint being acknowledged at stage two**. If we need more time, we will provide an explanation to the customer containing a clear timeframe of when the response will be received and will not exceed a further twenty days without good reason.
- 7.17 When we inform a customer about an extension to these timescales, we will provide the contact details of the Housing Ombudsman.
- 7.18 Stage two complaints will be reviewed by an independent Complaints and Customer Care team who will follow the same process as above.
- 7.19 In a small number of cases, a customer may remain dissatisfied after going through our internal complaint's procedure. In such cases, we will advise customers of any external options available to them if they wish to pursue the matter further. These will include the Housing Ombudsman, as well as the Building Safety Regulator for any relevant building safety complaints.
- 7.20 A customer can contact the Housing Ombudsman Service if they remain unhappy during any part of our complaints process or are dissatisfied with our final response to their complaint. A customer can consult with the Housing Ombudsman Service at any time before, or during, the complaints process for advice and the contact details will be regularly shared with customers throughout the process.
- 7.21 All complaint resolutions will be tracked and monitored by our After Care team, who will contact customers to ensure resolutions are completed and that customers are satisfied.
- 7.22 Following the completion of our complaints process, we will send customers a transactional survey to request their feedback on how we handled their complaints, and how we can improve further.

8. Learning from Complaints

- 8.1 We recognise that feedback from customers through our complaints service is a great way to understand where we can improve our services in the future.
- 8.2 Our Complaints Insight Leads analyse feedback through our complaints service, as well as learnings from determinations issued to Orbit and other Housing Associations by the Housing Ombudsman, to understand where to focus efforts on service improvement.

- 8.3 We recognise complaints as a source of intelligence to identify issues and introduce positive changes in service delivery for our partners too. We share information with them regularly to review performance and identify opportunities for improvement.
- 8.4 We will conduct root cause analysis exercises based on key themes or trends to identify areas where we can improve or increase services that will prevent future complaints. We will work with engaged customers to help shape these service improvements to ensure that they are based on the voices and experiences of our customers.
- 8.5 We regularly report back on wider learning and improvements from complaints to customers and other stakeholders through a variety of methods:
- Customer annual report
 - Customer website
 - Regular reports to our Customer Committee and Customer Engagement groups

9. Discretion

- 9.1 We will ensure that we manage complaints in line with this policy. However, we recognise that individual issues and complaints can vary significantly and can often be complex. We reserve the right to consider each complaint and situation on a case-by-case basis to ensure fairness for our customers and effectiveness in our complaint investigation.
- 9.2 Responsibility for exercising discretion in managing complaints is outlined below in the roles and responsibilities.

10. Unreasonable behavior

- 10.1 We understand that making a complaint can be frustrating. However, we expect people to behave in a reasonable and appropriate way when making a complaint. It is unacceptable for anyone making a complaint to be abusive, harass our employees, communicate with Orbit in an inappropriate way, or refuse to accept the decisions we take, in line with this policy. Where there is an ongoing, persistent, or profoundly serious issues, we will consider the case under our Managing Unacceptable Behaviour policy.
- 10.2 The actions we may take include:
- The introduction of a communication plan setting out appropriate and agreed communication guidelines including people, days, times, and methods.
 - A final warning letter
 - Our refusal to discuss the issue further if a response has been provided.
 - Injunctions

11. Data retention

- 11.1 In line with best practice, data will be retained for a period of six years. This approach aligns with points 17.7 and 17.8 of Orbit's Corporate data retention schedule and legal obligations.
- 11.2 When required, data will be securely removed at the end of the retention period by the Complaints and Customer Care Management team.
- 11.3 We may need to review these arrangements in the event of any updated guidance, best practice or relevant legislative changes being introduced.

12. Roles and responsibilities

12.1 The table below sets out who is responsible for delivering and monitoring this policy.

All Colleagues	<p>Deal with any service requests for customers at the first point of contact where this is possible.</p> <p>If unable to resolve a customer's issue, then escalate the complaint to the Complaints and Customer Care team by logging the complaint on our system in line with this policy and our complaints procedure.</p> <p>Respond in agreed timescales to Complaints and Customer Care, as set out in our complaint's procedure, when information is requested to support a complaint investigation.</p>
Complaints and Customer Care Stages One and Two Teams	Manage all stage one and stage two customer complaints in line with this policy including logging, acknowledging, investigating, communicating, and resolving complaints.
Complaints and Customer Care After Care Team	Ensure that all remedies and/or actions committed to within complaint responses (stages one and two) are completed.
Complaints and Customer Care Managers and Team Leader	<p>Manage the Customer Relations team's day-to-day activity, ensuring the Customer Relations team implement this policy correctly and effectively and supporting the team with escalations.</p> <p>Overall responsibility for the operational day-to-day implementation of this policy.</p> <p>Monitor performance indicators and management information and day to day oversight of the quality-assurance framework for Complaints and Customer Care.</p> <p>Overall decision for discretion to be applied to complaints including refusals to investigate.</p>
Quality Assurance Manager	Day-to-day quality assessments of Complaints and Customer Care activity to confirm compliance with this policy.

Head of Complaints and Customer Care	Accountable for the implementation of this policy and for reporting performance to key stakeholders including SMTs (Senior Management Teams), ET (Executive Team) and CCB.
Head of Engagement and Improvement	Accountable for the implementation of this policy, around learning from complaints and managing all Housing Ombudsman activity.
Complaints Policy and Insight Team	Respond to Housing Ombudsman enquiries, instructions, requests, and orders. Ensuring that all orders issued by the Housing Ombudsman Service are completed within the timescales set by their service. Complete reviews of complaints insight to identify areas and/or service provisions which are falling below standards. Complete root cause analysis activities with stakeholders across Orbit to identify and implement service improvements to learn from complaints and improve services.
Complaints Policy Manager	Overall responsibility for the operational day-to-day implementation of this policy. Monitor performance indicators and management information and day-to-day oversight of the activity of the Complaints Policy and Insight Team.

13. Performance controls and business risk

- 13.1 The Complaints and Customer Care Management Team, overseen by our Head of Complaints and Customer Care, will monitor day-to-day implementation of this policy. All employees are responsible for making sure they keep to and deliver this policy.
- 13.2 We will make sure we engage regularly with customers through our customer engagement framework, to monitor whether this policy is effective and how we learn from complaints.
- 13.3 We will report regularly on numbers of, and trends in, complaints, including on Housing Ombudsman cases, to a range of people, including our:
- Board(s)
 - Executive Management team;
 - Senior management teams;
 - Directorate Management teams
 - Heads of Service
 - Customers
- 13.4 We will conduct root cause analysis and case study reviews on complaints received. We will share recommendations and learning from complaints to support operational business areas and our partners to drive improvements to services and reduce further complaints in the future.
- 13.5 We will report each year to all customers on our performance regarding complaints through our annual report and more regularly through our customer website.

- 13.6 The annual complaints performance and service improvement report will be co-produced with customers. It will be reported to our Board(s) and published in the complaints section of our customer website. The governing body's response to the report will also be published alongside this.
- 13.7 Orbit will carry out a fundamental review of this policy every three years subject to legal, regulatory changes or in accordance with the agreed Policy Review programme.

14. Essential information

- 14.1 All Orbit policies and procedures are developed in line with our approach to, data protection statement, equality diversity and inclusion (EDI) approach, complaints and customer care policy and our regulatory and legal obligations to ensure we deliver services in a lawful manner and treat people equally and fairly. Details of these are found on the declaration document for strategy policy and procedure summary and have been an integral part of the formulation of this document. Orbit's privacy policy can be accessed on our website www.orbitcustomerhub.org.uk/publications/policies/
- 14.2 We use a data compliant social media monitoring tool to monitor complaints and messages from customers and have a process to log, reply and resolve these. We ask customers to privately message us details so we can investigate cases and delete any data that is shared publicly to maintain tight privacy and confidentiality.

EA	Equality Analysis was reviewed March 2024 and is available to view.
DPIA	A DPIA will be completed following the publication of this document in agreement with our Information Governance team and will be made available to view.
Consultation	Internal: Customer and Communities Leadership Team
	External: Customer Engagement Complaints Scrutiny & Co-creation Group Customers consulted on 07/02/2024 and 22/02/2024
Applies to	All colleagues

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Revision History

Version Number	Date	Comments/Reason for revision
V4.0	March 2024	<div>Following changes to Housing Ombudsman Code, which are effective from 1st April 2024 and following complaints restructure the following changes have been necessary.<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Timescales for extensions at stage 2 have been extended to 20 working days.• Requirement to acknowledge complaints at stage 2.• All name changes are reflective of new structure.• Removed right to repair.• Aligns to new building safety regulation.• Added in after care process & complaints insight.</div>

