

Policy Aims & Overview

Access Community Trust actively encourages any and all complaints, comments or compliments. As a customer-led organisation Access Community Trust actively seeks feedback, both good and bad, in a number of different ways. This approach is undertaken so that Access Community Trust can continually improve the services and products available as well as recognise and reward good, outstanding staff performance.

Whilst Access Community Trust is not a member of The Housing Ombudsmen's scheme, it serves as a 'Gold Standard' which we aim to meet wherever reasonably possible and this policy is based on this code.

Comments & Compliments

We welcome any feedback or compliments about your experience in our services, a particular team that you have encountered, or about a specific member of staff.

Feedback or compliments can be provided in a number of ways, including:

- Via email to enquiries@accessct.org
- Via telephone to 01502 527200
- Via the contact form on our website

Where an individual staff member or team has been named in positive feedback or a compliment, we will let them know.

Customer involvement drives our service development here at Access. Through our LEAF (Lived Experience Advisory Forum) model we are committed to enabling people to participate in decisions and actions that affect their lives. We do this by creating opportunities and activities designed to facilitate a change in how a service or policy is delivered or implemented to improve the experience for the individual as well as the service. Through this commitment to our customers involvement, we are empowering individuals to exercise their rights and to achieve their potential and aspirations, whilst developing services that are innovative, aspirational and effective. If you are a customer of our services then we welcome your comments, compliments and ideas that will help improve your experience. If you would like to be part of our LEAF then please contact our Involvement and Inclusion Manager below.

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Beth Stephens - Involvement and Inclusion Manager - beth.stephens@accessct.org

What is a complaint?

A complaint shall be defined as an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by Access Community Trust, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting an individual complainant or group of complainants.

The complainant does not have to use the word "complaint" in order for it to be treated as such. However, Access Community Trust will recognise the difference between a service request and complaint, and take appropriate steps to resolve the issue for complainants as early as possible.

Access Community Trust will review all legitimate feedback; acknowledge and provide equal sanction, regardless of the involved parties' personal characteristics (under Equality Act 2010) to ensure a fair, and effective workplace. Handling will remain inclusive, unless a characteristic needs to be incorporated, such as within a discrimination complaint.

Access Community Trust will accept a complaint unless there is a valid reason not to do so. All complaints will be considered on their individual merits and any exclusions must be fair and reasonable.

If Access Community Trust decides not to accept a complaint, a detailed explanation will be provided to the complainant setting out the reasons why the matter is not suitable for the complaints process. In such a situation, Access Community Trust's decision is final and there is no option for appeal. Please see Appendix 2 for information on when a complaint may not be appropriate or accepted.

How to make a complaint

The Trust offer a variety of ways for complainants to submit a complaint. Anybody who requires support in providing a written complaint will be given appropriate assistance or guidance by a member of staff. Where appropriate, arrangements will be made for an independent advocate to provide support.

- Telephone
- Live chat via our website
- Paper form

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- Online form
- Speak to a member of staff in any of our services

Access Community Trust's website includes information on how to raise a complaint. The complaints policy and process is easy to access and downloadable, and a copy will be provided to customers upon request.

Access Community Trust's complaints policy is available in a clear and accessible format for customers. It includes a clear process and timeframe (Appendix 1) which is shared with the complainant and made available to our customers when they first engage with our services.

Complaints Process

Access Community Trust is committed to putting complainants at the heart of our complaints process by:

- Accepting complaints in any format, including verbally, written and online
- Making reasonable adjustments so all complainants can access the process
- Giving complainants opportunities to share evidence and suggest solutions
- Using records and evidence to inform decision making
- Ensuring the process remains solutions focused
- Signposting complainants to other organisations for support where needed

Stage 1

- When a complaint is made it is acknowledged and logged at Stage 1 of the complaints procedure
- Stage 1 complaints will usually be allocated to a Coordinator or Service Manager
- Access Community Trust will respond to the complaint within five working days, which will include a copy of Appendix 1.
- Where required, the complainant will be invited to a meeting to discuss their complaint and clarify any information before any investigation takes place.
- Access Community Trust will give complainants the opportunity to have a representative deal with their complaint on their behalf, and to be represented and/or accompanied at any meeting with Access Community Trust, where this has been requested or offered and where this is reasonable.

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- An investigation into the complaint will take place and a response will be sent to the complainant addressing all points raised, clear reasons for the outcome decisions, and provide suitable remedies, which we aim to issue within 10 working days
- Access Community Trust will attempt to contact the complainant to discuss the outcome and to explain our decision before we confirm in writing.

Stage 2 (Appeal)

- Complainants have the right to request that their complaint is escalated to Stage 2 (Appeal) if they are dissatisfied with the response at Stage 1.
- The Stage 2 investigation will be separate to the Stage 1 investigation and a different complaint manager at a senior level will consider the appeal.
- Complainants will be asked to outline what element of the complaint response they are appealing and provide evidence for this.
- Access Community Trust aims to respond to Stage 2 complaints within 20 working days of the complaint being escalated. Where an investigation is more complex, Access Community Trust may extend the timeframe at Stage 1 or 2 by 20 working days. The manager who is handling the complaint will contact the complainant to discuss this and explain the reasons for the extension, and any extension will be confirmed in writing.
- There is no facility to appeal the decision, finding and outcome of the Stage 2 (Appeal), as this is the end of the process.

Safeguarding

Access Community Trust is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of all its young people and vulnerable adults using our services.

If the complaint is of a serious nature and/or involves an allegation against a member of staff working with vulnerable people, the Trust's Safeguarding Manager will be informed and will be consulted throughout the complaints handling process.

Where the complaint alleges that a crime has been committed, the Police will be informed. In this instance it may not be appropriate for Access Community Trust to continue to investigate the complaint. If this is the case, the complainant will be informed if the Police state that it is acceptable for us to do so.

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If the complaint raises Child Protection issues or there is an allegation of abuse against a person who works with children and young people, the Local Area Designated Officer (LADO) who works within Children Services will be informed.

If the complaint raises an allegation of abuse against a person who works with vulnerable adults, the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) will be informed.

Safeguarding is our foremost priority. In instances where allegations are made against a member of staff, we are committed to thoroughly investigating the matter to ensure the safety and wellbeing of all individuals involved. Due to the nature of these investigations, we may not be able to adhere to our usual complaints timescales. In this instance, the complainant will be informed throughout the process to ensure transparency and that adequate support is in place.

Putting things right

Complaints can be resolved in a number of ways. These shall include but are not limited to:

- Acknowledging where things have gone wrong
- Providing an explanation, assistance or reasons
- Apologising
- Taking action if there has been a delay
- Reconsidering or changing a decision
- Amending a record
- Changing policies, procedures or practices

Any remedy offered must reflect the extent and impact of the incident(s) outlined in the complaint and any potential detriment caused to the complainant as a result.

Factors to consider in formulating a remedy can include, but are not limited to the:

- Length of time that a situation has been ongoing
- Frequency with which something has occurred
- Severity of any incident or omission
- Number of incidents or omissions
- Cumulative impact on the complainant
- A complainant's individual circumstances or vulnerabilities

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Recording of Complaints

A full record shall be kept of the complaint, any review and the outcomes at each stage. This will include (but is not limited to) the original complaint and the date received; all correspondence with the complainant including responses, any correspondence with other parties and any reports or surveys prepared.

Access Community Trust will abide by GDPR legislation in the recording of complaints.

Continuous Learning

An effective complaints process enables Access Community Trust to learn from any issues that may arise and to take steps to improve the services it provides and its internal processes. Access Community Trust operates a system to look at the complaints received, their outcome and proposed changes as part of its reporting and planning process.

Any themes or trends are assessed by senior management to identify any systemic issues, serious risks or areas for improvement for appropriate action.

Access Community Trust will continue to proactively use learning from complaints to revise policies and procedures, train staff and contractors and improve communication and record-keeping.

Access Community Trust will provide information on complaints to the Board of Trustees to enable them to perform governance. This includes:

- Regular updates on the volume, category and outcome of complaints, alongside complaint handling performance including timely compliance with the Ombudsman's stated response timeframe(s)
- Review, at least once a year, of issues and trends arising from complaint handling, including discussion within senior management meetings and if deemed necessary the Annual Report and/or Trustee away day. As part of this review, The Organisation needs to satisfy itself that it's adhering to the policy/expectations and that outcomes are in line with the Access Community Trust's requirements and expectations

Appendix 1: Process and Timeframes

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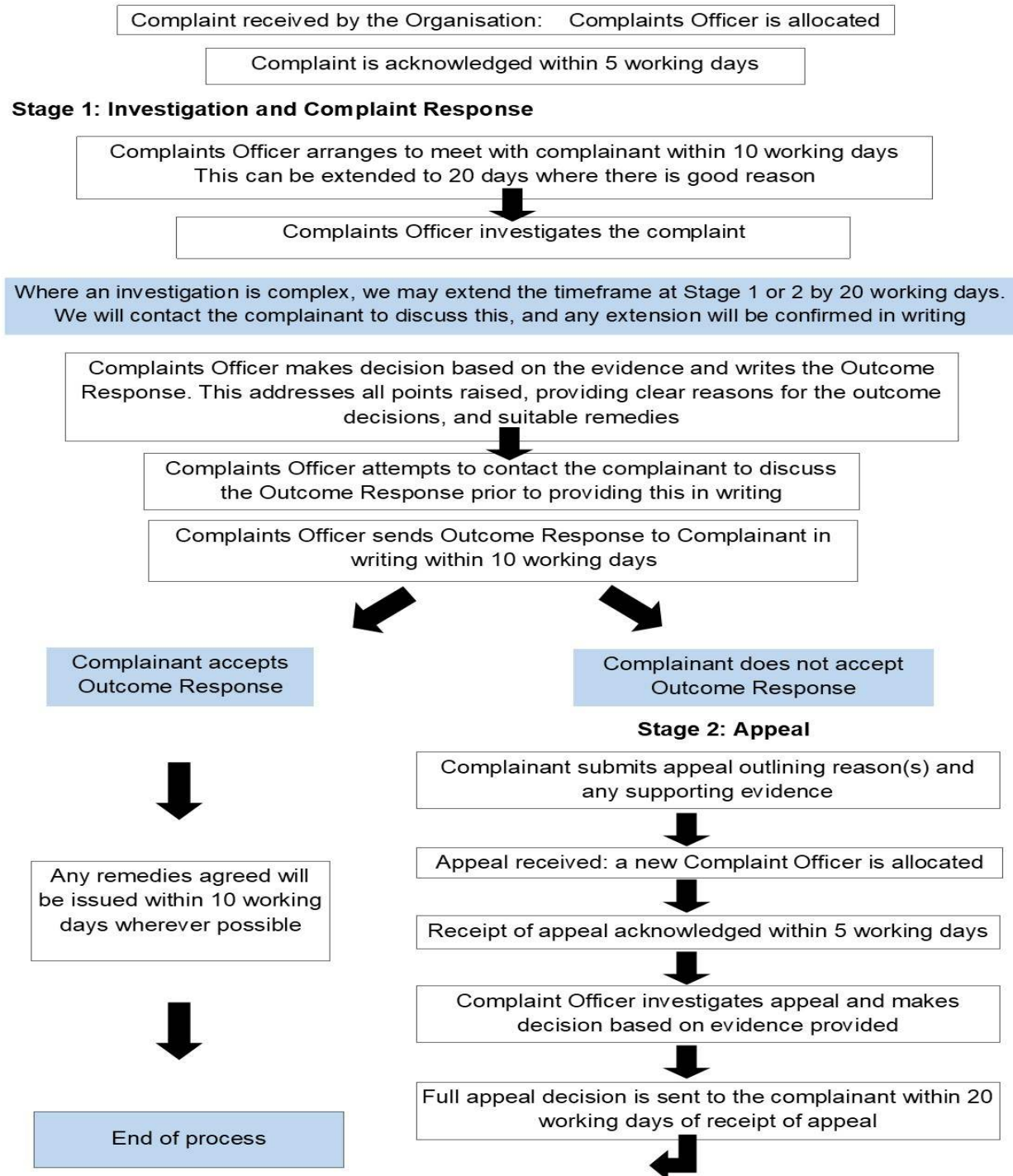


COMPLAINTS, COMMENTS & COMPLIMENTS

Access Community Trust recognises that situations that lead individuals to making a complaint can be frustrating and distressing, however it is important that complainants give the organisation an opportunity to investigate and respond to the complaint. Access Community Trust reserves the right to use appropriate policies and procedures to manage unacceptable behaviour from complainants and/or their representatives when pursuing a complaint.

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Appendix 2: Circumstances that are not appropriate to record as a complaint

There are some circumstances when it is not appropriate to record a complaint because there is another process which is better suited to resolving the problem. Therefore, we will not consider the following under this complaints policy:

- Where Access Community Trust are not responsible for a given outcome e.g. housing decisions
- An initial request for service when a complainant informs us of a problem for the first time. For example, if the word complaint is used during an initial report of a repair that has not yet been notified to Access Community Trust
- Matters that have already exhausted Access Community Trust's Complaints Process
- Where legal proceedings have started for example, a matter being reviewed by the Small Claims Court
- Dissatisfaction with a policy or procedure where there has not been a service failure; these are recorded as policy feedback and passed to the policy owner to be considered in the next review
- Personal injury claims or claims for damaged items valued at over £5,000; these will be assessed and usually passed to Access Community Trust's insurers

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