AWOL London Limited
Customer Complaints Policy

1. Introduction

AWOL is committed to providing a high-quality service to all our customers. We recognise that, at times, customers may be dissatisfied with our services and may wish to raise a complaint.

A customer does not have to use the word 'complaint' for it to be treated as one. Whenever a customer expresses dissatisfaction with our services, we give them the choice to make a complaint. If they choose to do so, we handle it in line with the requirements of the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code.

We investigate complaints in a confidential, fair, and respectful manner. We agree with customers how they wish to be kept informed and ensure clear, timely communication throughout the process.

Where a complaint can be resolved quickly, we still record and log it as a Stage 1 complaint and confirm the outcome to the customer.

We are committed to learning from complaints and using this insight to improve our services.

2. What is a Complaint

We define a complaint as:

> "An expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by AWOL, its staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting an individual resident or group of residents."

We log complaints at the point they are first raised, regardless of the channel used.

3. Service Requests and Complaints

A service request is a request from a customer asking us to provide or carry out a service, such as reporting a repair or requesting information.

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by AWOL, its staff, or those acting on its behalf.

A service request is treated as a complaint if:

- The customer expresses dissatisfaction with how the request has been handled
- There is a failure to provide the service within a reasonable timeframe
- The service provided does not meet expected standards

We do not delay the handling of a complaint by requiring a service request to be completed first. Where a customer expresses dissatisfaction, we give them the choice to make a complaint and, where they do, we handle it in line with this policy.

4. Who Can Make a Complaint

We accept complaints from:

- A resident (tenant, leaseholder or shared owner)
- Anyone receiving or affected by a service we provide

- Anyone who may potentially receive a service from us

Customers may appoint an advocate (e.g. friend, relative, MP, councillor or advice service). Where appropriate, we obtain consent to act on the customer's behalf.

5. How Complaints Can Be Made

Complaints can be made:

- In person
- Email: complaints@awol.co.uk
- Online complaints form: Complaints Form - AWOL
- Post: AWOL Complaints Department, 7 Portal Way, North Acton, London, W3 6RT
- Phone: +44 20 4583 3687
- Through digital or social media channels

Where complaints are raised via social media, we respond privately to protect confidentiality.

Contact details for making a complaint and for the Housing Ombudsman Service are available on our website and can be provided in alternative formats upon request.

6. Exclusions and Refusal to Consider a Complaint

We only refuse to consider a complaint in limited circumstances. These may include where the issue:

- Has already been fully considered under this policy
- Is subject to legal proceedings, meaning the details of the claim, such as the Claim Form and Particulars of Claim, have been filed at court

We do not unreasonably refuse to accept a complaint. Each case is considered on its individual merits.

Some complaints involve an insurance claim, for example damage covered by buildings or contents insurance, or a claim about liability. We still handle any dissatisfaction about our own service, such as delay or poor communication, as a complaint. The assessment of the claim itself, including any decision on liability or the value of a settlement, is a matter for the relevant insurer. Where part of a complaint is better dealt with by an insurer, we explain why, signpost you to the insurer, and confirm your right to refer the matter to the Housing Ombudsman Service. We consider each case on its merits and do not refuse a complaint simply because insurance is involved.

We accept complaints about an issue that occurred, or that the customer became aware of, within the last 12 months. Where an issue falls outside this period, we consider whether it is still appropriate to investigate, taking into account the individual circumstances of the case and whether it is fair and reasonable to do so.

If we decide not to accept a complaint, we:

- Clearly explain our reasons
- Explain how we will address the issue (if appropriate)
- Inform the customer of their right to refer the decision to the Housing Ombudsman Service

Customers can seek advice from the Housing Ombudsman Service at any stage of their complaint.

7. Complaints Handling Process

We operate a two-stage complaints process.

Stage 1

Once we receive your complaint, we acknowledge, define and log it within 5 working days.

Our acknowledgement sets out our understanding of the complaint, the outcomes you are seeking, and which aspects of the complaint we are and are not responsible for. Where any aspect is unclear, we will ask you to clarify it.

We will assign your complaint to the relevant team or individual for investigation and provide a full response within 10 working days of acknowledging your complaint.

Our response includes:

- The complaint stage
- Our decision
- The reasons for our decision
- Details of any remedy offered
- Any outstanding actions and timescales
- Information on how to escalate to Stage 2

We provide our response once we know the answer to your complaint, not once all outstanding actions are complete. We track any outstanding actions and keep you updated on progress until they are resolved.

If you raise additional issues while we are investigating, we include them in our Stage 1 response where they are related and we have not yet issued that response. Where the Stage 1 response has already been issued, the new issues are unrelated, or including them would unreasonably delay our response, we log them as a new complaint.

If we are unable to respond within 10 working days, we may extend this by up to a further 10 working days. We:

- Explain the reason for the delay
- Provide a revised response date

If more time is required beyond this, we agree this with the customer. If agreement cannot be reached, we provide details of the Housing Ombudsman Service.

Stage 2

If the customer is dissatisfied with the Stage 1 response, the complaint is escalated to Stage 2 unless there is a valid reason not to do so. A valid reason is one of the exclusions set out in section 6. Where we do not accept all or part of a complaint at Stage 2, we explain our reasons, set out the exclusion we have relied on, and confirm your right to refer the matter to the Housing Ombudsman Service.

You do not have to give reasons for asking us to escalate your complaint to Stage 2.

- The complaint is reviewed by someone not involved at Stage 1
- We acknowledge, define and log the escalation within 5 working days of receiving it

Our acknowledgement sets out our understanding of the complaint, the outcomes you are seeking, and which aspects we are and are not responsible for. Where any aspect is unclear, we will ask you to clarify it.

We provide a full response within 20 working days of acknowledging the Stage 2 complaint.

Our response includes:

- The complaint stage
- Our decision
- The reasons for our decision
- Details of any remedy offered
- Any outstanding actions
- Details of how to refer the complaint to the Housing Ombudsman Service

We provide our response once we know the answer to your complaint, not once all outstanding actions are complete. We track any outstanding actions and keep you updated on progress until they are resolved.

If we need to extend the timeframe, we:

- Explain why
- Provide a new deadline (no more than an additional 20 working days)

If further time is required, we agree this with the customer or provide Ombudsman contact details if agreement cannot be reached.

If we refuse to escalate a complaint, we clearly explain why and inform the customer of their right to contact the Housing Ombudsman Service.

8. Customer Communication

We maintain regular contact with customers throughout the complaints process, including where there is no new information.

We consider customers' communication needs and preferences and make reasonable adjustments where required.

9. Remedies and Compensation

Where appropriate, we take action to put things right. This may include:

- Apologies
- Service improvements
- Practical remedies
- Financial compensation

Compensation is considered on a case-by-case basis, taking into account:

- Duration of the issue
- Severity and impact
- Frequency of failures
- Customer vulnerability
- Cumulative effect

10. Unacceptable Behaviour

We may place reasonable restrictions on contact where a customer's behaviour is abusive or impacts our ability to provide services.

Any restrictions:

- Are proportionate and clearly explained
- Take account of the customer's circumstances
- Comply with the Equality Act 2010

11. Accessibility, Equality and Inclusion

We are committed to ensuring our complaints process is accessible to all.

We:

- Make reasonable adjustments where required
- Provide information in accessible formats
- Ensure staff are trained in equality, diversity and inclusion
- Meet our duties under the Equality Act 2010

12. Learning from Complaints

We are committed to using complaints to improve our services.

We:

- Analyse complaint trends and themes
- Share learning across the organisation
- Implement service improvements
- Provide regular performance reports to senior management and the Board

13. Roles and Responsibilities

We have clear roles and responsibilities to ensure effective complaint handling:

Complaints Officer / Handler

A Complaints Officer has been appointed and is responsible for the day-to-day management of complaints, including logging, monitoring progress, ensuring timescales are met, and supporting high-quality responses.

Stage 2 Reviewer (Senior Manager)

Stage 2 complaints are reviewed by a senior manager or appropriately independent person not involved at Stage 1, with authority to make final decisions.

Member Responsible for Complaints (MRC)

A member of the Board has been appointed as the Member Responsible for Complaints (MRC). This role provides oversight, ensures accountability, and promotes a positive complaints handling culture across the organisation.

Senior Management Team

Senior management regularly reviews complaint performance, trends and learning to drive continuous service improvement.

All Staff

All employees are responsible for recognising expressions of dissatisfaction and ensuring they are recorded and handled in line with this policy.

14. Complaint Records

We maintain accurate and complete records of all complaints, including:

- The complaint details
- Correspondence and decisions
- Outcomes and remedies

These records are used to monitor performance, support learning and ensure accountability.

15. Complaint Handling Code Compliance

We:

- Comply with the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code
- Complete an annual self-assessment against the Code
- Publish the results of this assessment
- Take action to address any areas of non-compliance

Customers can contact the Housing Ombudsman Service for independent advice at any stage of their complaint.

16. Performance Monitoring

We monitor our complaints handling performance to ensure we are delivering a high-quality service and meeting regulatory requirements.

This includes:

- The number of complaints we receive relative to the size of the organisation
- The percentage of complaints responded to within required timescales
- Customer satisfaction with how we handle complaints

17. Promoting Awareness

We ensure information about our complaints process and the Housing Ombudsman Service is widely available through:

- Our website
- Resident communications
- Leaflets and publications

18. Review

This policy is reviewed annually, or sooner if required due to:

- Changes in legislation or regulation
- Feedback from customers
- Internal or external audit findings