

Complaints and Compliments policy

October 2023



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Policy:	Complaints and Compliments policy
Version number:	3.3
Date effective from:	October 2023
Policy Owner:	Director of Marketing & Engagement
Policy Author(s):	Customer Voice Lead
Accountable Executive:	Executive Director (Housing)
Approved by:	Chief Executive Officer and full Executive Team
Equality Assessment:	Yes
Next review of policy due:	October 2026
Policy Grade:	0
For the full version history of this policy, see the back page	

Please avoid referring to printed versions of this policy.

Printed versions may quickly go out of date – the latest version will be on the Policy Hub or contact the Governance Team. For support and advice regarding the policy, please contact the Policy Owner.

1.0 Introduction and Scope

- 1.1 The Regulator of Social Housing and The Housing Ombudsman requires that as a registered provider, we must approach complaints in a clear, simple, and accessible manner.

Complaints are very important to us; they help us focus on improving our service and offer us the opportunity to learn when things go wrong. If something does go wrong, we will apologise, investigate what happened and work with the customer to make it right.

- 1.2 The scope of this policy covers:

Gentoo Group	X
Gentoo Homes	
Gentoo Developments	
Gentoo Genie	

- 1.3 It applies to:

General Needs rented properties	X
Supported Housing	X
Sheltered Housing	X
Leasehold/Shared ownership	X
Rent to Buy properties	X
Market rented properties (domestic)	X
Temporary Accommodation	X
Stock owned but not managed by the Group	X
Communal Areas, including those relating to Leasehold/Shared Ownership properties	X*
Commercial Property (offices, depots etc)	X
Stock managed by Gentoo on behalf of a third party	X
Garages and outbuildings	X
Remote plant (district heating, electrical pumps etc)	X
Curtilage	X

*Exceptions apply

2.0 Links to Strategy and the Business Plan

- 2.1 Our vision and values set the direction and shape the culture of our organisation.

- 2.2 Gentoo's **Vision** is:

To provide great homes, strong communities and inspired people for Sunderland.

2.3 The Group's **Values** are:

- We care about people
- We take accountability
- We shape the future
- We bring leadership
- We deliver

2.4 The Group's Board and Executive Team have approved Gentoo's **Strategic Priorities**:

The safety of our customers and colleagues will always be our number one priority. We have identified **six further Priorities** which will guide the delivery of our services:

- We know our customers
- We provide great homes
- We help communities to thrive
- We are a great place to work
- We spend our money wisely
- We are well governed

We live our **Values** in everything we do from the board room to the front room, to deliver our **Priorities** for our customers.

2.5 Gentoo's policies support the delivery of the Group's Vision, Values and Strategic Priorities.

3.0 Regulation and Legislation

3.1 The Director of Marketing and Engagement will ensure this policy has regard to all legislation, regulation and best practice. The regulation and legislation applicable to this policy is attached at Appendix A.

4.0 Our Policy Statement

A complaint is defined as:

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

We are committed to the principles of diversity and inclusion throughout the organisation and aim to:

- meet the needs and choice of people from all backgrounds
- ensure that our services are relevant, responsive and sensitive to the needs of our existing and future customers
- Ensure that all sections of the community in which we work have equal access to our services.

Our Complaints and Compliments policy will ensure that customers will be treated as individuals and with fairness and respect. An Equality Assessment has been completed with regard to this Policy and is attached in Appendix B.

5.0 Roles and Responsibilities

Our approach to handling complaints will be easily accessible and well publicised. It will be simple and easy to understand. Customers can raise a complaint by:

- Emailing us at Feedback@gentooogroup.com
- Speaking to any colleague either in person, by telephone or email
- Submitting an online form through our website
- Contacting us via social media
- Writing to us at Customer Voice Team, Gentoo Group, Emperor House, Sunderland, SR3 3XR.

Examples of complaints include:

- Failure to attend a scheduled appointment.
- Failure to meet our repair service standards (i.e., timescales)
- Failure to deliver a service paid for through a service charge.

The Customer Voice Team will deal with all formal complaints ensuring a coordinated and consistent approach however all colleagues are responsible for recognising and taking accountability for resolving an initial complaint.

A complaint (or compliment) that is submitted via a third party will still be handled in line with this policy however we require permission from the customer to discuss their complaint with a third party. A complainant may choose to have a suitable representative deal with their complaint on their behalf, and to be represented or accompanied at any meeting with Gentoo.

6.0 “Own It, Fix It”

- 6.1 A customer does not have to use the word ‘complaint’ for it to be treated as such, however, some complaints can be dealt with informally through little or no investigation with the expectation that each service area is responsible to investigate this form of complaint. These are recorded as ‘own it fix it’ complaints.
- 6.2 Colleagues are expected to take accountability of ‘own it fix it’ complaints however, if further enquires are needed to resolve the matter, or if the customer requests it, the issue must be logged as a complaint, and it will be passed on to The Customer Voice Team to investigate.
- 6.3 If a customer is unhappy with the outcome of an ‘own it fix it’, they may wish to raise this as a complaint, and it will be passed to The Customer Voice Team.

7.0 MP and Councillor Enquiries

- 7.1 MP and Councillor enquiries will be dealt with using an 'own it fix it' approach.
- 7.2 The Customer Voice Team have a designated email inbox for MP and Councillor enquires. MP and Councillor enquiries will be responded to within 10 working days.
- 7.3 Usually, if a customer wishes to raise a complaint following a MP or Councillor enquiry, we will speak to the customer directly to understand their complaint, we will ask the customer if they require us to include the MP or Councillor in future communication.

8.0 Social Media

- 8.1 A complaint may be submitted through social media e.g., Facebook or Twitter.
- 8.2 If a complaint is submitted using a social media channel, we will ask the customer to private message us with their full name and address to confirm their identity. To ensure confidentiality and privacy is maintained, further contact with the customer may be necessary to carry out security checks.
- 8.3 We will not add any personal details on open forums on social media channels. We will take the required measures to protect any confidential information that may be shared by customers on social media such as deleting a post or contacting the customer directly to ask the customer to move the information to another method of communication, if appropriate.

9.0 Complaints

Complaints process

Stage 1 Complaints

- 9.1
- We will assign the complaint to a Customer Voice Partner
 - The Customer Voice Partner will acknowledge receipt of the complaint within 5 working days from the date the complaint is received. The complaint acknowledgment will be confirmed in writing and the customer will be provided a unique complaint reference number.
 - The customer will be provided with a copy of this policy.
 - The customer will be asked what they are unhappy with, the reasons why they are unhappy and what we can do to resolve their complaint.
 - We will aim to respond fully within 10 working days or less.
 - The Customer Voice Partner will agree how often the customer wants to be updated and their preferred method of contact.

- If the complaint cannot be resolved within 10 working days or less, The Customer Voice Partner will agree a mutually agreed resolution date with the customer (MARD). This will not extend by a further 10 working days and the customer will be offered the contact details of the relevant Ombudsman.
- The Customer Voice Partner will provide a written response to the customer. The Customer Voice Partner will provide the customer with appeal details, the customer has 15 working days to request an appeal.

Stage 2 Complaints

- 9.2 These are escalated from stage 1 where a customer has provided further information or remains dissatisfied with the stage 1 response.
- 9.3 These complaints will be dealt with by a Customer Voice Lead or a Senior Manager from the relevant service area.
- 9.4 We reserve the right to refuse an appeal escalation if the customer responds beyond the 15 working days or does not objectively explain what specific parts of the original complaint, they remain dissatisfied with. If this applies, we will write to the customer explaining why we will not accept their appeal and offer details on how to contact the relevant Ombudsman Service.
- 9.5
- The Customer Voice Lead or Senior Manager will acknowledge receipt of the complaint escalation within 5 working days from the date the complaint appeal is received. The complaint appeal will be acknowledged in writing and the customer will be provided a new unique complaint reference number.
 - We will make reasonable efforts to understand why a customer remains unhappy however if it is unclear how the complaint can be resolved, the customer will be asked which specific part of the complaint has not been investigated, which part of the response they remain dissatisfied with and what we can do to resolve the complaint.
 - We will aim to respond fully within 20 working days or less.
 - If the complaint cannot be resolved within 20 working days or less, a mutually agreed resolution date (MARD) will be agreed with the customer. (This will not extend a further 10 days, unless there are exceptional circumstances to the case)
 - The Customer Voice Lead or Senior Manager will provide a written response to the customer.
 - The internal complaints process is now complete, if the customer remains unhappy with the outcome, they are advised to request an external review from the relevant Ombudsman Service.
- 9.6 Customers may access The Housing Ombudsman Service for advice at any point throughout their complaint, not only when the internal complaints process is exhausted. Customers are offered a copy of this policy at both stages within their complaint.

- 9.7 Where customers raise additional complaints during an investigation, these will be incorporated into the response if they are relevant, and the response has not been issued. Where the response has been issued, or it would unreasonably delay the response, the complaint should be logged as a new complaint.
- 9.8 Complaints will be closed when investigation is complete, and any future actions are agreed, complaints are not kept open unnecessarily. For example, when a repair cannot be conducted within the 10 working day complaint response timeframe, the complaint will be closed when the repair dates are agreed. The Customer Voice Partner (or Lead) is responsible for ensuring that actions are followed through to completion.
- 9.9 Where agreement over any required extension on a complaint investigation cannot be agreed, we will offer the customer details for The Housing Ombudsman Service.

10.0 Exclusions

- 10.1 We will comply with the Equality Act 2010 when considering if a complaint falls into an exclusion category, we will adapt our procedure to accommodate individual needs, if required. We will consider if excluding a complaint is fair and reasonable and each complaint will be considered on its own merits.
- We do not class service requests as complaints. A service request is defined as “a request from a resident to their landlord requiring action to be taken to put something right”. For example, a customer reports their fence is broken. It would be considered a complaint if the customer reports their fence, and we fail to repair it. Service requests are not complaints but are recorded, monitored, and reviewed regularly.
 - We do not class Anti-Social Behaviour as complaints. If a customer raises a complaint about their neighbour, this will be dealt with in accordance with the Anti-Social Behaviour policy. If a customer was unhappy about the way a case was handled, this would be considered a complaint.
 - We do not class housing application banding appeals as complaints. If a customer raises a concern about their banding, this will be dealt with in accordance with the Allocations Policy. If a customer was unhappy about the way the Allocations Policy has been applied, this would be considered a complaint.
 - We do not accept complaints about damage to personal property unless it has been caused by something we have done. We advise customers to take out their own home contents insurance to claim in the event of any unforeseen incidents. If personal property has been damaged due to our negligence, we will offer information on how to submit a public liability claim.

- We do not accept complaints where a complainant has raised a legal claim against us in respect of the specific issue(s) covered by their complaint for example a personal injury claim or an insurance claim, the complaint will be removed from our complaints process. If mediation applies, we reserve the right to remove the complaint from the process and re-investigate later, if appropriate.
- We do not accept complaints when the issue(s) being raised have previously exhausted our complaints process and no new facts or evidence has been offered. If this applies, the customer has the right for their complaint to be reviewed externally by The Housing Ombudsman Service.
- We do not accept complaints reported to us after twelve months of the issue occurring unless there are mitigating circumstances as to why the complaint could not be raised within a reasonable period. The stages of our complaints process are designed to achieve resolution for the customer as promptly and efficiently as possible.
- We will use our discretion about a complaint raised from someone who is not a Gentoo customer. We will offer appropriate advice, where possible.
- There are alternative routes which may be more appropriate for leaseholders to follow for an external review of their complaint. This will vary depending on their tenure. If a managing agent is present, we will direct the leaseholder to raise their complaint with the managing agent.

Further information regarding alternative routes can be found at Appendix C.

- 10.2 If we decide not to accept a complaint, we will provide an explanation to the customer setting out the reasons why the matter is not suitable for the complaints process. We will explain that the customer has the right to take that decision to the relevant Ombudsman Service.

11.0 Unreasonable Behaviour

- 11.1 We do not accept complaints if the customer behaviour is considered 'unreasonable'.
- 11.2 We define unreasonable behaviour as unreasonable or persistent complainants which may impede an investigation or hinder our consideration of their, or other customers complaints.
- 11.3 Unreasonable behaviour can have significant impact on resource. Some examples of unreasonable behaviour are:
- A customer refusing to specify the grounds for a complaint, despite offers of assistance from colleagues.
 - Refusing to co-operate with complaint investigation but still wishing for their complaint to be resolved.

- Submitting repeat complaints about the same matter, after the complaints process has been exhausted, adding variations with an expectation that a new complaint should be raised.
 - Customers who exhibit abusive or threatening behaviour.
- 11.4 A Senior Manager will review unreasonable behaviour exclusions ensuring that the Equality Act 2010 has been considered. The customer will be advised of the decision to decline their complaint for 'unreasonable behaviour' in writing, giving clear reasons why the complaint will not be accepted.

12.0 Disrepair claims

- 12.1 We will continue to seek complaint resolution with customer pursuing pre-action protocol for housing condition claims. The complaint will be closed once legal proceedings have been issued and/or a resolution has been agreed.

13.0 Compliments

- 13.1 Compliments are equally important to us; we aim to recognise the good work of our colleagues and contractors, we offer individual feedback to colleagues when a compliment is received.
- 13.2 We welcome feedback and compliments from our customers, we use this information to help shape the services we deliver. Customers can raise a compliment by:
- Emailing us at Feedback@gentooogroup.com
 - Speaking to any colleague either in person, by telephone or email
 - Submitting an online form through our website
 - Contacting us via social media
 - Writing to us at Customer Voice Team, Gentoo Group, Emperor House, Sunderland, SR3 3XR.

All compliments are logged on our internal system, MRI and all colleagues are responsible for logging compliments.

14.0 Escalation

- 14.1 Where a Board has concerns about significant issues in any area of compliance regarding this policy, they must escalate these concerns to the Executive Director (Housing)
- 14.2 Where a member of staff has concerns about significant issues in any area of compliance regarding this policy, they must escalate these concerns through their line management structure, ultimately to The Executive Team.

- 14.3 Where a member of staff continues to have concerns about significant issues in any area of compliance regarding this policy, they should refer to the Group Whistleblowing Policy.

15.0 Monitoring and Review

- 15.1 The Complaints and Compliment Policy will be reviewed every three years, or in line with business need.
- 15.2 Overall responsibility for this Policy lies with the Director of Marketing and Engagement, accountability lies with the Executive Director (Housing).
- 15.3 This policy may be subject to an audit in line with internal audit plan.
- 15.4 This Policy is Grade 0 and changes will need the approval of the Chief Executive Officer and the full Executive Team.

16.0 Policy Outcomes

This policy aims to achieve the following outcomes:

- 16.1 Our service is fair, accessible and customers are communicated with in a way they prefer.
- 16.2 Issues with services are dealt with so that complaints are prevented from arising in the first place – ‘Own it Fix It’.
- 16.3 Prompt action is taken to investigate complaints and agree an appropriate resolution, occasionally referring to our Compensation Policy.

17.0 Learning from Complaints and Compliments

- 17.1 Our services are improved by identifying themes and trends in complaint and compliment data, themes and trends are assessed by Senior Management to identify any risks and potential procedure and policy issues, complaints and compliments are used for staff training and development.
- 17.2 Our complaint and compliment data is shared with The Customer Committee at least quarterly and with our involved customers in quarterly Tenant and Community Voice Meetings.
- 17.3 Customers who have complained are asked to offer us feedback on the handling of their complaint to ensure The Customer Voice Team are operating effectively.
- 17.4 Service improvements are communicated to customers on our website, through social media, in our annual report and on our online engagement platform ‘Your Gentoo Voice’. Learnings from complaints are communicated with operational managers on a re-occurring basis.

Version Control

Version	Reason	Issuer	Date
2.0	Changed formatting of policy	Kirsty Collins	15/02/2018
2.1	Amendment to job titles, added accountable exec director to front page, amended review date to 3 years	Sarah Treadwell	09/05/2019
2.2	Removed toolkit as this has been reviewed	Sarah Treadwell	29/08/2019
3.0	Fundamental review	Catherine Loftus	21/09/2020
3.1	Removal of 'via telephone' from stage 2 complaint process	Jo-Anne Parkinson	07/01/2021
3.2	Job title changes	Emma Peat	April 2021
3.3	Fundamental review, added compliments to policy, review of toolkit and process maps – policy amended with feedback from customer scrutiny members	Ashleigh Hopkins	October 2023

Procedure/Toolkit

The procedure should describe how the policy will be put into action. It can be just a few bullet points, a set of instructions and/or a flowchart. It should outline:

- a. Who will do what
- b. What steps they need to take.