



Complaints Policy

Version: 2.1

Document Owner: Head of Service Improvement

See also: Reasonable Adjustments Policy, Complaints Procedure, The Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code.

Date last reviewed: March 2024

Date due for next review: March 2027

This policy will be applied in a way that will not discriminate on the grounds of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

Version number	Amendment	Amended by	Date
1.0	Separated from combined policy and procedure and published as a standalone policy for the first time.	Annette Morrison	25th February 2021
1.1	Amended policy to reflect changes to how Stage 2s are managed.	Annette Morrison	26 th January 2022
1.2	Amended policy to reflect changes to Ombudsman.	Annette Morrison	6 th September 2022
1.3	Amended policy to reflect changes in the way residents can complain due to hybrid working arrangements.	Fiona Morrall	14 th September 2022
1.4	Added timescales for responses following ombudsman determination on 13 th June 2023.	Annette Morrison	13 TH June 2023
1.5	Tweaked some wording around policy – added line about which staff it applies to; gave a few more examples of what a complaint is and made clear timescales around Stage 1 in line with Code.	Annette Morrison	19 th September 23
2.0	Updated to reflect revised Ombudsman Code.	Annette Morrison	15 th March 2024
2.1	Updated to reflect change in approach around triaging complaints and also how to log a refused complaint.	Annette Morrison	11 th October 2024

1. Complaints and compliments policy

This policy applies to all levels of Newlon employees, including but not restricted to the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Directors, Assistant Directors, non-Executive directors, Heads of Service, Service Resolution Managers, advisors, administrators, volunteers, contractors, and sub-contractors who work on behalf of Newlon and those employed or who act on behalf of Newlon in any other capacity.

We value complaints from residents and aim to use the learnings from them to drive service improvements. We aim to ensure that complaints are resolved promptly, politely, and fairly.

We are committed to using customer feedback to improve the services that we provide. We aim to:

- Provide a resolution to the resident's complaint promptly.
- Communicate the resolution or response clearly.
- Put things right when they go wrong and resolve the complaint quickly.
- Act sensitively, empathetically, and fairly.
- Record, analyse and learn from all customer feedback to drive service improvements.
- Monitor our response times and publicise our performance.
- Deal with as many complaints as possible at the first point of contact.

This policy is supplemented by our Complaints Procedure. Both the policy and procedure follow the guidance set out in the Housing Ombudsman Service Scheme and Complaint Handling Code and have been assessed against the Ombudsman's self-assessment criteria.

1.1. How can residents make a complaint?

Complaints can be made through a variety of channels including:

- Online.
- By letter.
- By e-mail.
- By phone.
- In person – by appointment only. (Newlon has adopted hybrid working arrangements which means that many staff are spending their time working from home and part time in the office. If you have a pre-arranged appointment, it means that the member of staff that you need to see will be in the office on that day. Please do not come to the office unless you have a pre-arranged appointment.)

Where complaints are made via social media channels that Newlon uses, if it is possible to identify the complainant then the Communications Team will notify the Service Resolution Team of this in order that they may manage this complaint from then on. Where it is not possible to identify the complainant, a reply will be sent asking them to contact the Service Centre.

Where residents are expressing clear dissatisfaction with a service as part of their feedback in a survey that Newlon have carried out, this should be passed on to the Service Resolution Team to log as a complaint.

The complaints process must comply with the Equality Act 2010, and we may need to adapt normal policies, procedures, or processes to accommodate an individual's needs and make reasonable adjustments to address this. (See our Reasonable Adjustments Policy for further details.)

2. How do we publicise this policy?

- During the sign-up process, when you first become a Newlon resident.
- On our website, in our 'contact us' section.
- In our reception area.
- From any staff members.
- In our newsletter, where there is also information on how we use feedback.

3. Who can make a complaint?

- Newlon residents – tenants, leaseholders, licensees.
- A person who has applied for housing through Newlon.
- Any person who pays a service charge to Newlon. Complaints relating to service charges are managed differently please see Appendix 2 of our Complaints Procedure which you can find at www.newlon.org.uk/residents/making-a-complaint/ for information on this.
- A group of residents who wish to complain about common issues (explicit consent should be obtained by named residents who are part of the complaint group). Newlon will write to one named point of contact whose role it will be to communicate with the other residents. Any individuals named as part of the joint complaint cannot make separate complaints about the same issues being considered as part of the joint complaint.
- A person acting on behalf of a resident. A third party can make a complaint on behalf of a resident tenant, but unless Newlon has express permission in writing to liaise with them as an advocate, all communication around the complaint will be with the resident. If a resident lacks capacity to authorise a representative, adequate evidence of their legitimate authority must be provided. This also includes a person with authority to make a complaint on behalf of any people described above who are deceased.
- An ex-occupier who had a legal relationship with Newlon at the time the matter complained about arose.

4. What is a compliment?

Feedback about how staff delivered a good service. When we receive this, we will acknowledge receipt and pass this onto the staff member and their manager.

5. What is 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.

The resident does not have to use the word complaint for it to be treated as such. Staff should recognise the difference between a service request (pre-complaint), survey feedback and a formal complaint and take appropriate steps to resolve the issue for residents as early as possible.

Newlon will not accept any formal complaint at stage 1 or stage 2 which would not be within the remit of the Housing Ombudsman Service. Please see our Complaints Procedure for details of exceptions which would not fall within the Ombudsman's jurisdiction, and which will therefore not be dealt with by Newlon as formal complaints.

An expression of dissatisfaction, requiring our response, could include:

- A delay in something we have done – not meeting published timescales.
- Broken appointments.
- Where we have failed or refused to do something.
- Where we have provided a poor-quality service or made a mistake.
- Giving incorrect or misleading information.
- A policy or service that has been unfairly implemented, should not have been applied or is simply wrong.

If a request to make a complaint is not accepted, (see Complaints Procedure section on exceptions to procedure for more details) then the reasons for this must be clearly outlined and the person given the right to appeal. Any complaint that is refused should be logged as an Information & Advice case, Cat 1 – Refused Complaint, Category 2 – as per exceptions outlined in procedure. Each case should be considered on its own merits. This appeal should be considered by the Assistant Director for Housing or in their absence the Head of Service Improvement. When writing to advise the resident of the decision, this should include information on their right to take that decision to the Ombudsman.

6. Responding to complaints (see Complaints Procedure for more detail)

Newlon has a two stage complaints process:

- Stage 1 is managed by the service resolution team. Responses should be sent within 10 working days of complaint being logged.
- Stage 2 is managed by the service resolution team (an officer not involved at the 1st stage), and the review will involve directors when the matter is complex. Responses are due within 20 working days.

We aim to 'triage' complaints to ensure complaints that can be resolved promptly are done so and that where there are vulnerabilities these are prioritised to reduce any risk or impact on the resident.