



COMPLAINTS POLICY

Issue/Version Number:	5
Date of Issue:	September 2024
Author:	Lauren Kendall
Date Authorised by Board:	November 2024
Review Frequency:	3 years
Next Review Date:	September 2027

COMPLAINTS POLICY

CONTENTS

1.	CHIEF EXECUTIVE’S STATEMENT	3
2.	WHAT IS A COMPLAINT?	4
3.	HOW TO MAKE A COMPLAINT	5
4.	WHO CAN COMPLAIN?	6
5.	WHEN CAN A COMPLAINT BE MADE?	7
6.	‘RESOLVE IT’ REQUESTS	8
7.	FORMAL COMPLAINTS PROCESS	9
7.1.	QUICK GUIDE TO THE FORMAL COMPLAINTS PROCESS	9
7.2.	STAGE 1 - COMPLAINT FIRST RESPONSE	9
7.3.	STAGE 2 - COMPLAINT REVIEW	11
7.4.	COMPLAINT RESPONSE(S)	11
8.	RAISING A COMPLAINT WITH THE OMBUDSMAN (NIPSO)	12
9.	UNREASONABLE AND/OR UNACCEPTABLE BEHAVIOUR	13
10.	LEARNING FROM COMPLAINTS	14
11.	COMPLAINTS TO OTHER BODIES OR ORGANISATIONS	14
12.	MONITORING AND REVIEW	15

1. CHIEF EXECUTIVE’S STATEMENT

- 1.1. Alpha Housing is committed to providing high-quality services to tenants, our tenants are at the centre of everything we do.
- 1.2. Our Customer Promise sets out more about the service you can expect to receive from us, it is available on our website, in the Tenant’s Handbook and within Scheme Offices.
- 1.3. If something goes wrong, or if service is not as you would expect, we want to hear from you. We use your feedback to learn and to make improvements to all our services and activities.
- 1.4. We recognise that there can be situations where tenants, applicants, clients or members of the public are dissatisfied or unhappy with our service and may wish to make a complaint.
- 1.5. We aim to resolve complaints efficiently and effectively and will receive and investigate complaints according to the NIPSO ‘Six Principles of Good Complaints Handling’:



- 1.6. All complaints are considered in accordance with requirements under Section 75 and are treated confidentially in accordance with Data Protection and GDPR regulations.

1.7. This policy takes account of the current regulatory requirements of the Department for Communities (DfC)¹, the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO)² and the Charity Commission of Northern Ireland (CCNI)³ available at the time of writing.

1.8. This policy explains:

- How to make a complaint
- What a complaint is
- How we will deal with complaints
- How we report on, and learn from, complaints.

2. WHAT IS A COMPLAINT?

2.1. A complaint is:

‘An expression of dissatisfaction by a tenant, a stakeholder or one or more members of the public about Alpha Housing’s action or lack of action, or about the standard of service provided by or on behalf of Alpha Housing.’

(Adapted from NIPSO, The Local Government Model Complaints Handling Procedure, 2023)

This could include:

- Failure or refusal to provide a service
- Inadequate quality or standard of service, or an unreasonable delay in providing a service
- Dissatisfaction with a policy or its impact on an individual
- Failure to uphold or apply legal standards when delivering services
- Failure to follow the appropriate administrative process(es)
- Conduct, treatment by or attitude of a member of staff or contractor

¹ DfC, Tenancy Management Guide – Complaints <https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/articles/complaints-tenancy-management-guide>

² NIPSO – Complaints Standards for Northern Ireland - <https://www.nipso.org.uk/service-providers/complaints-standards>

³ CCNI – Support for Charities Dealing with Concerns - <https://www.charitycommissionni.org.uk/concerns-and-decisions/support-for-charities-dealing-with-concerns/>

- Concern about actions or service of another organisation delivering services on Alpha's behalf
- Disagreement with a decision, except where there are statutory procedures for challenging those decisions or an established appeals process
- Dissatisfaction with how an element of a decision was administered.

2.2. The following are not covered by Alpha's complaints policy and/or are not treated as complaints:

- A first-time routine request for service for example reporting a repair or initial action in relation to anti-social behaviour.
- An enquiry such as a request for help with your tenancy.
- Issues that have previously been addressed through the complaints process and where we have given you a final complaint response.
- Staff disciplinary matters or staff grievances, these are handled under our HR and Grievance procedures.
- Fraud concerns and investigations.
- Subject Access Requests or Data Protection requests.
- Tenant/Neighbour disputes
 - Our housing officers will provide support where possible with matters/issues with neighbours/fellow tenants. If you are unsatisfied by the response of the housing team, you can raise a complaint.

3. HOW TO MAKE A COMPLAINT

3.1. You can complain in person, in writing, by phone, by email or via our website.

Our contact details are below:

Telephone	028 9078 7750
Email	info@alphahousingni.org

Postal Address	Alpha Housing (Northern Ireland) Ltd Alpha House 6 Edgewater Road Belfast BT3 9JQ
Website	www.alphahousingni.org

3.2. If you raise an issue and you wish for this to be treated as a formal complaint, please tell us:

- Your full name
- Your address and contact details
- How you prefer to be contacted and the times we can contact you
- Details of your complaint and what has gone wrong
- Any evidence you have
- How you would like us to resolve the matter

3.3. Please tell us as much information as you can, this will enable us to investigate your complaint promptly. You can submit evidence at a later stage, but we may not be able to investigate your complaint until we have received the evidence that we need from you.

4. WHO CAN COMPLAIN?

4.1. Anyone who meets the definition under 2.1 can make a complaint about their experience with us.

4.2. If you have difficulty raising a complaint or need further support or adjustments to enable you to make a complaint, we will help you. We can assign a member of staff to help you (for example to write down the complaint for you) or you can ask someone to complain on your behalf. If you do ask someone else to raise a complaint on your behalf, we will require that person to demonstrate that they have your authority and consent to do so. This is because your information may

need be shared as part of the complaints handling process and this may include personal or sensitive information.

- 4.3. Complaints may be made anonymously. We aim to investigate all complaints, even those made anonymously however where limited identifiable details are given, it may be difficult to investigate the issue thoroughly. If a manager or member of the senior leadership team decides that there is not enough information to investigate, the complaint will be recorded along with the reason why no further investigation was being conducted.

5. WHEN CAN A COMPLAINT BE MADE?

- 5.1. Normally we ask that you make a complaint within three months of the event or issue that you wish to complain about, this allows us to undertake a timely investigation of the issue or concern (it can be difficult to investigate complaints after significant time has passed).
- 5.2. If you remain unhappy after the 'Stage 1 First Response', you can request that your complaint is further investigated at 'Stage 2'. We ask that you let us know that you want your complaint to be investigated at stage 2, no later than 30 days after the Stage 1 response was issued.
- 5.3. We may accept a complaint after these time periods in exceptional circumstances. If the period for raising a complaint has elapsed and you would like your complaint to be considered, you will need to tell us why you think we should accept the complaint after the time period.
- 5.4. In deciding whether to investigate a complaint raised outside of these time limits, we will consider:
- The seriousness of the issue
 - The availability of relevant records
 - Staff involved (if any)
 - How long ago the event(s) occurred
 - The likelihood that an investigation will lead to a practical outcome or useful learning for the organisation.

We will tell you whether your complaint has been accepted, or not, and give you the reasons why.

6. 'RESOLVE IT' REQUESTS

6.1.1. In many instances we can act on issues or concerns, resolving them quickly and informally without a need to go through the formal complaints process.

A **'Resolve It' Request** is a potential minor service failure or issue that can be rectified quickly and to everyone's satisfaction.

6.1.2. Where something has gone wrong and you want it resolved, any member of staff (usually scheme coordinators, technical and housing officers working closely with you regularly) can help to resolve the issue.

*For example:
An issue is raised about a contractor not turning up to carry out maintenance when they should have. You contact the maintenance team, and they raise the issue with the contractor. The maintenance team get back to you to say that the contractor will be out with you the next day. When the contractor arrives, they apologise and offer an explanation and carry out the maintenance task.*

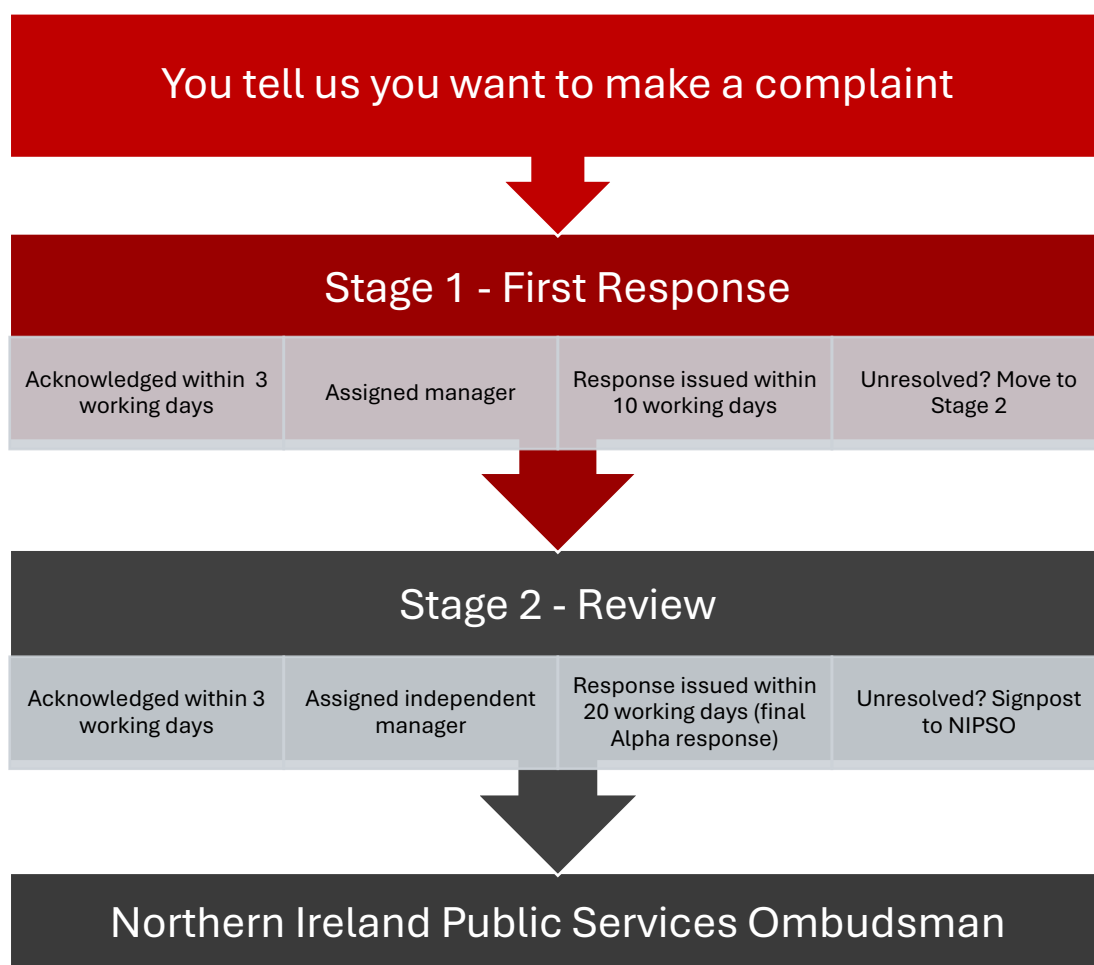
6.1.3. Our team will aim to provide a response and/or 'Resolve It' quickly, usually no later than five working days. Our team will get back to you to let you know how they intent to resolve the issue, either face-to-face, by telephone or by email.

6.1.4. Sometimes concerns raised can be more difficult to resolve quickly, due to staff on leave or contractor scheduling for example. Where we can't resolve it quickly, we will let you know, give you a reason and indicate when we expect the issue will be resolved.

6.1.5. 'Resolve It' requests are not recorded as formal complaints.

7. FORMAL COMPLAINTS PROCESS

7.1. Quick guide to the formal complaints process



7.2. Stage 1 - Complaint first response

7.2.1. In most circumstances our aim is to solve problems quickly and informally to everyone's satisfaction but sometimes this is not possible. The formal complaints process is used where:

- You tell us you wish to make a complaint
- Concerns or issues have not been able to be resolved quickly and informally
- Where a concern or issue requires further investigation
- Where a concern or issue requires a more detailed response.

7.2.2. It is helpful if you tell us that you wish to **'Make a Complaint'** so that we know you want your concern or issue to be dealt with under the formal

complaints process. We may raise concerns or issues that have been shared with us to Stage 1 of the formal complaints if we feel that this is the most appropriate response.

7.2.3. Complaints will be dealt with at Stage 1 before they can be dealt with at Stage 2.

7.2.4. Where possible, we ask that you put your complaint in writing however you can raise your complaint verbally. If you are unable to do so, or you need support, we will assist you.

7.2.5. We will acknowledge your complaint within three working days in writing (or using an alternative method where appropriate). We will confirm who is looking into the matter and provide a suggested timescale for response. If a complaint is received after 4pm, it will be treated as received on the following working day. Complaints raised over the weekend will be treated as received on the first working day following the weekend.

7.2.6. Your complaint will be dealt with by a member of the management team (usually from the area to which your complaint relates). If you raise a complaint about a specific member of the management team, the investigation will be assigned to an alternative member of the management team.

7.2.7. The member of staff assigned to deal with your complaint may contact you, after receiving your complaint, to discuss the issue further and understand the issue better to enable them to carry out a thorough investigation into the matter.

7.2.8. The Stage 1 response will be issued to you within 10 working days. This will be a written response via email or letter. If we cannot meet this timescale, we will tell you why and provide a new timescale for response, up to a maximum of 20 working days.

7.2.9. Within the written response, you will be provided with details of how to take your complaint to Stage 2 if you are unhappy with the response given at Stage 1.

7.3. Stage 2 - Complaint review

- 7.3.1. If you are unhappy with the response at Stage 1, then you can ask for a review at Stage 2 which will explore the complaint in more depth.
- 7.3.2. Please tell us the reason why you are dissatisfied with the proposed response and/or resolution to your complaint given at Stage 1, and how you would like us to resolve it.
- 7.3.3. Your complaint will be investigated by an independent member of the management team and reviewed by the Chief Executive or the Chief Operating Officer. The person looking into your complaint at Stage 2 will be someone who has not been involved in any aspect of your complaint before.
- 7.3.4. Your request for review at Stage 2 will be acknowledged within 3 working days.
- 7.3.5. The person reviewing the complaint at Stage 2 may need to contact you to discuss the matter further or to gain greater understanding of the issues in order to carry out a thorough investigation.
- 7.3.6. Response will be made formally to you in writing (or in writing and through another method if you have requested adjustments to be made), within 20 working days. In exceptional circumstances, we may need to extend this timeline. If an extension is needed, we will advise you of the reason for delay and agree a new timescale with you.
- 7.3.7. In the written response, you will be provided with details of how to take your complaint to the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO) should you remain unhappy with the outcome.
- 7.3.8. The response received at Stage 2 is the final response concluding Alpha's complaints process.

7.4. Complaint response(s)

- 7.4.1. Outcomes and responses to complaints raised at Stage 1 or Stage 2 will be either:
 - *Complaint upheld* – which means we agree that the complaint was justified in its entirety.

- *Complaint partially upheld* – which means that we agreed that you had grounds for at least one or more, but not all, elements of the complaint.
- *Complaint not upheld* – which means that we did not agree that the complaint was justified.

7.4.2. In all responses we will give you the outcome and the reason for that outcome. In the case of upheld or partially upheld complaints we will suggest actions and/or a remedy for example:

- Offer an apology
- Provide explanation or assistance
- Take action, for example, to rectify a service that has been delayed or not provided
- Review a procedure or practice, retrain staff or share learning.

8. RAISING A COMPLAINT WITH THE OMBUDSMAN (NIPSO)

8.1. The Stage 2 final response concludes Alpha's complaints process. If you remain unhappy with the response, you can complain to the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman - NIPSO.

8.2. NIPSO is independent of Alpha Housing, and we will cooperate fully with any investigation carried out by them.

8.3. Usually, before your complaint is considered by NIPSO, you will have needed to have complained via Alpha's complaints process at Stage 1 and Stage 2.

8.4. You can contact NIPSO:

How to contact the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO)

Via their <https://www.nipso.org.uk/>

Website Using their complaints form which you can download or fill in online

By Email nipso@nipso.org.uk

By Freephone 0800 34 34 24

Telephone Telephone 02890 233821

By post Freepost NIPSO
Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman
Progressive House, 33 Wellington Place
Belfast
BT1 6HN

9. UNREASONABLE AND/OR UNACCEPTABLE BEHAVIOUR

9.1. Sometimes people who make complaints may have expectations that we are unable to meet, however we will always strive to listen to you and to try find acceptable and practical solutions to any issues that arise.

9.2. We accept that when issues arise, this can be frustrating, emotions can be involved, and this can cause people to act out of character. We will not consider actions or behaviour as unacceptable simply because you are raising an issue in a determined, frustrated or assertive way. However, we do consider behaviour that is angry, abusive and/or threatening to be unacceptable.

9.3. Behaviour that we consider is unacceptable includes, but is not limited to:

- Unreasonable levels of contact with staff that affect their ability to carry out their normal tasks and duties.
- Pursuing the complaint after the Complaints Procedure has been completed at Stage 1 and 2.
- Threats of violence, abusive language or behaviour, harassment.
- Recording staff without their permission.
- Unreasonable demands or expectations.
- Refusal to cooperate with the complaints or investigation process.
- Raising vexatious or untruthful complaints.

9.4. If behaviour is considered to be unacceptable, we will write to you to tell you the behaviour we consider to be unacceptable and what action (if any) may be taken should the behaviour continue. Actions that may be taken include:

- Stop engaging with you until behaviour is considered to be acceptable
- Refuse to register and process any further issues or complaints

- Place a limit on the number of times that you can contact staff
- Suggest a third-party, advocate or mediator engage with us on your behalf.

If we do decide to take action, we will notify you of that action and how you can appeal against the decision.

10. LEARNING FROM COMPLAINTS

10.1. Complaints are a valuable learning tool for Alpha. We use information from complaints to improve our services for our tenants and to avoid similar issues occurring in the future.

10.2. We collect data about complaints and report these to the Board via our Committees and to the Department for Communities as our regulator. All data and information shared with others is anonymised and aggregated in line with our Data Protection and GDPR policies. The data includes:

- The number of Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaints
- The number responded to within the set timescales
- Percentage of complaints satisfied at Stage 1
- Percentage of complaints satisfied at Stage 2

10.3. We also use data from complaints when we train our staff.

11. COMPLAINTS TO OTHER BODIES OR ORGANISATIONS

11.1. Sometimes we receive complaints about issues that are not related to Alpha's activities and services, or which need to be dealt with by an alternative organisation or public body. Below are contact details for other organisations which be able to help you with an issue you have:

Organisation	Description	Contact Details
Your Local Council	Councils in Northern Ireland are responsible for local services including planning, environmental health, fly tipping, noise, pests, animal welfare, street cleaning and waste collection.	https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/contacts/local-councils-in-northern-ireland
Equality Commission	Looks into issues relating to equality law and discrimination (age, race, disability etc.)	https://www.equalityni.org/Individuals 028 90 500 600
Health Trusts	Health and care related matters including social work.	https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/contacts/health-and-social-care-trusts
ICO	Personal data and information handling	https://ico.org.uk/for-the-public/i-m-worried-about-how-an-organisation-has-handled-my-information/

12. MONITORING AND REVIEW

12.1. The Board will review the Complaints Policy every three years at minimum.