

## Complaints Policy

### 1. Our policy is...

- 1.1. To ensure a positive complaints culture and process that supports a strong relationship between Vico Homes and its customers and enables things to be put right for customers when they have gone wrong.
- 1.2. The policy also includes requirements for learning from complaints, so we can develop and improve services, while meeting the requirements of the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code 2024, the Building Safety Act 2022 and The Heat Regulations 2025.
- 1.3. Every complaint offers us an opportunity to learn and improve our services to customers. While we aim to provide excellent customer service, we know sometimes things may go wrong and when this happens our aim is to resolve the matter at the earliest opportunity.
- 1.4. This Complaints Policy includes our approach to both the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code 2024, the requirements of the Building Safety Act 2022 (BSA) and The Heat Regulations 2025.
- 1.5. We recognise the difference between a service request and a complaint. A complaint may be raised while handling of a service request is ongoing.
  - **A service request is defined as:** a request from a customer requiring action to be taken to provide a service or fix a problem. Service requests are not complaints but will be recorded, monitored and reviewed regularly.

#### **A complaint is defined as:**

- an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by us, our colleagues, or those acting on our behalf, affecting an individual resident or group of residents.

#### **A 'relevant complaint' relating to Building Safety is defined as:**

- a building safety risk relating to a higher risk building which concerns:
  - spread of fire or smoke;
  - structural safety risk; and
  - failure of the Principal Accountable Person (Vico Homes) to carry out their duties to manage Building Safety Risks.

- **A ‘relevant complaint’ relating to district heating is defined as:** A complaint relating to a district heating network, that is connected to one of our homes, and we are recognised as the heat supplier under The Heat Network Regulations.
- 1.6. Complaints will be managed in line with data protection legislation and our **Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy**. We will consider reasonable adjustments under the Equality Act 2010 to accommodate our customers’ needs, where requested to do so.
  - 1.7. We will publicise this policy along with our **‘Guide to Complaints’** on our website and other channels, when asking for customer feedback and to all Vico Homes’ colleagues.
  - 1.8. The Complaints Policy will be displayed prominently in higher risk buildings to inform customers, residents and building users. If necessary, it will be displayed in residential buildings connected to a district heat network, where we are recognised as a heat supplier under The Heat Network Regulations. The Complaints Policy will also be publicised from time to time in other communication with our customers, along with details for the Housing Ombudsman Service, the Building Safety Regulator and Energy Ombudsman as necessary.
  - 1.9. The Complaints Policy will be made available in alternative formats as requested.

## 2. We’ll...

### Complaints

- 2.1. If something has gone wrong, we’ll aim to resolve matters to the customer’s satisfaction, at the earliest opportunity, through local resolution in the first instance.
- 2.2. If the complaint relates to building safety in a higher risk building, the Building Safety and Compliance Team will determine whether an emergency response is required. The timescales and process for responding to a complaint will remain the same.
- 2.3. If the complaint relates to a district heat network connected to one of our homes, where we are recognised as the heat supplier under The Heat Network Regulations. We will investigate and respond to the complaint within the maximum eight week timescales set out by the Energy Ombudsman. This will include escalating the complaint to Stage 2 of our complaints procedure, where requested by the customer.
- 2.4. A range of channels are available to make a complaint, and customers can use the method they prefer, unless they are subject to restrictions under our **Managing Behaviour Protocol**.
- 2.5. We’ll offer the facility for photos or evidence in other appropriate formats such as video footage, to be provided as part of the complaint being made.
- 2.6. Customers who make a complaint using social media will be privately messaged to ensure we protect their privacy and confidentiality in line with data protection.

2.7. When customers are asked and / or provide feedback telling us they are dissatisfied, we will explain to them how to make a complaint, if that is what they want to do.

2.8. We'll accept complaints made by:

- tenants (a person who is or who was in a landlord / tenant relationship with us at the time the problem occurred);
- leaseholders (domestic premises only);
- Homesearch applicants;
- customers with a licence to occupy;
- customers who have a service agreement with us;
- petition or groups; or
- third party advocates acting on behalf of any of the above.

We may choose to accept complaints from individuals who do not fall into the above categories.

If the complaint relates to building safety in a higher risk building, we'll accept complaints from anyone who lives in or is a user of a higher risk building or their advocate. If the complaint relates to a district heating network, connected to one of our homes, where we are recognised as a heat supplier under The Heat Network Regulations, we'll accept complaints from anyone who lives in that home or their advocate.

2.9. The following complaints would normally fall outside the scope of this policy:

- Complaints made 12 months after a problem occurred, or the customer became aware of it.
- Complaints where legal proceedings have been started or issued or concern matters that must be decided by a court.
- Complaints of nuisance or antisocial behaviour (ASB) are dealt with by our Antisocial Behaviour Policy and Antisocial Behaviour Procedure. However, we will consider complaints about how nuisance or ASB reports were managed.
- Compensation claims for damage to personal property or personal injury, as these will be dealt with directly or through our insurers.
- Where an alternative review / appeal process or other regulatory body exists, for example the Information Commissioners Office, or Homesearch review.
- In some circumstance, complaints from customers whose contact with us is restricted under our **Managing Behaviour Protocol**, or the customer refuses to engage with us or behaves in an unacceptable manner, may be excluded.
- Complaints about repairs in new build properties, within the developer's 12 month defect period, will be managed by our New Build Customer Care Team. They will liaise with the customer and developer through to completion of the repairs. However, we'll consider complaints about how we have managed this process on completion of the repairs.
- Complaints about action for breach of the terms and conditions of a tenancy or lease agreement. However, we'll consider complaints about how any enforcement action in relation to the breach has been managed.

- Matters that have previously been considered under our Complaints Policy.
  - Complaints about the conduct of colleagues will be investigated internally and in line with data protection legislation the outcome must remain confidential and will not be disclosed to the customer. However, following an internal investigation we will provide customers with a written response.
- 2.10. We may exercise discretion and decide to accept a complaint, which would normally fall outside the scope of our complaints policy for the reasons explained in 2.09 above.
- 2.11. Where we decide that we will not investigate a complaint under our complaints policy. An explanation will be provided as to why the matter is not suitable for the complaints process, along with the contact details of the Housing Ombudsman Service, Building Safety Regulator, Energy Ombudsman or other regulatory bodies as appropriate. We'll comply with any instructions from them to enter a complaint into our Complaints Procedure.
- 2.12. We will not tolerate verbal or physical abuse of our colleagues and this may result in closure of the complaint and action being considered under our **Managing Behaviour Protocol**.
- 2.13. A Board Member is appointed to have lead responsibility for complaints to support a positive complaint handling culture. This person is referred to as the Member Responsible for Complaints (MRC).

### Service Request

- 2.14. In accordance with the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code 2024, we'll aim to resolve issues locally at the earliest opportunity. Where a customer tells us that they are unhappy with our service, if an explanation and resolution cannot be given on first contact with the service provider (relevant department or contractor) we'll log a Stage 1 complaint.

### Complaint Stages

- 2.15. We have a **two stage** Complaints Procedure managed and monitored by our Customer Relations Team, in line with the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code 2024.
- 2.16. Colleagues handling a complaint will:
- have the ability to resolve disputes quickly and fairly;
  - have access to colleagues at all levels to make sure complaints are responded to quickly;
  - act sensitively and fairly towards the customer; and
  - be trained in the importance of complaint handling and to receive complaints and support distressed and upset customers.

- 2.17. At each stage of the complaints handling process, complaint handlers will;
- deal with complaints on their own merits, act independently and have an open mind;
  - give the customer a fair chance to set out their position;
  - take measures to address any actual or perceived conflict of interest; and
  - consider all relevant information and evidence carefully.
- 2.18. For complaints relating to building safety in a higher risk building, all responses will be issued in writing, and will include:
- writing in a form which allows the recipient to understand the content of the information given, including explanations of technical language used, or with plain English summaries of complex or technical provisions;
  - response to all material points relating to the ‘relevant complaint’;
  - reasons for decisions;
  - details of any action undertaken; and
  - details of any action planned, including a timeframe for that action to begin and be completed.
- 2.19. Stage 1 complaints will be logged and acknowledged within **five working days** from being received. They will be responded to within 10 working days from the complaint being acknowledged.
- 2.20. Where a complaint is complex or further information is required, we may extend the response time by up to a further 10 working days.
- 2.21. Extensions will only be made in exceptional circumstances and in agreement with the customer. Customers will be provided with the contact details of the Housing Ombudsman Service, Building Safety Regulator, Energy Ombudsman or other regulatory body as appropriate, to allow them to challenge the proposed response date if required.
- 2.22. If the complaint relates to building safety in a higher risk building, the customer will be informed whether or not the complaint has been accepted as a ‘relevant complaint’ under the Building Safety Act 2022. If the complaint has not been accepted as a ‘relevant complaint,’ reasons will be given for the decision and the customer will be informed of their right to contact the Building Safety Regulator for the final determination. The complaint will still be investigated by Vico Homes following the Complaints Policy and Procedure.
- 2.23. Where a complaint is not resolved to a customer’s satisfaction at Stage 1 it will be escalated to a Stage 2 complaint. Where they remain dissatisfied, the customer can request to escalate to Stage 2 of our Complaints Procedure.
- 2.24. If the complaint relates to building safety in a higher risk building and has been accepted as a ‘relevant complaint,’ the customer will be informed of their right to request a reconsideration of the Stage 1 response.

- 2.25. We'll decide the most appropriate option for escalating a complaint with the focus being on achieving a quick resolution, customer satisfaction and best use of resources.
- 2.26. A request to escalate to Stage 2 will be acknowledged **within five working days** from it being received. Where we decide a complaint cannot be escalated, an explanation will be provided as to why, along with the contact details of the Housing Ombudsman, Building Safety Regulator, Energy Ombudsman or other regulatory body as appropriate.
- 2.27. Stage 2 complaints will be investigated by the Complaints Manager or Customer Relations Officer, on behalf of the relevant director or their nominated deputy, and will be responded to within 20 working days from the complaint being acknowledged.
- 2.28. Where a complaint is complex or further information is required, we may extend the response time by up to a further 20 working days.
- 2.29. Extensions will only be made in exceptional circumstances and in agreement with the customer. Customers will be provided with the contact details of the Housing Ombudsman, Building Safety Regulator, Energy Ombudsman or other regulatory body as appropriate, to allow them to challenge the proposed response date if required.
- 2.30. If a customer remains dissatisfied with our final response they have the right to directly contact the following services:
- The Housing Ombudsman or other relevant regulatory body. We will provide their contact details and information on how to contact them.
  - The Regulator of Social Housing, where it is believed our actions have breached one of their standards.
  - The Residential Property Tribunal Service, if the complaint relates to the level and amount of rent or service charge increases.
  - The Building Safety Regulator, if the complaint relates to a building safety risk in a higher risk building.
  - The Energy Ombudsman, if the complaint relates to a district heating network that is connected to one of our homes, and we are recognised as the heat supplier under The Heat Network Regulations 2025.
- 2.31. We will maintain an open channel of communication with the customer during the investigation of a complaint and all communication with the customer will be in plain English ensuring decisions are clear and easy to understand.

### **Putting things right**

- 2.32. When we receive a complaint, we'll aim to manage the customer's expectations so we do not promise anything that cannot be delivered or causes unfairness to other customers.

- 2.33. We'll acknowledge where something has gone wrong, apologise and provide an explanation for any failure. We'll consider a range of remedies to resolve complaints and each complaint will be considered on an individual basis, however, we'll aim to ensure consistency in our approach.
- 2.34. When determining an appropriate and proportionate remedy, we'll consider several factors to ensure any redress offered reflects the individual circumstances of the complaint.
- 2.35. A range of remedies will be available and any offers of redress will be fair, appropriate and proportionate to the complaint. We'll refer to the Housing Ombudsman Service guidance when considering what is an appropriate remedy.
- 2.36. An apology or an offer of redress will not amount to an admission of negligence or statutory duty.
- 2.37. Where compensation is offered, we reserve the right to offset this against any monies owed to us by the customer.
- 2.38. Claims for compensation for damage to personal items or property, above the limit of our insurance cover, fall outside the remit of this policy. These, along with any personal injury claims, will be referred directly to our insurers.
- 2.39. Customers will be required to provide evidence of any financial loss they claim to have incurred. If this cannot be provided, compensation may not be considered further.

### **3. Our assurance...**

We'll ensure this policy is effective through:

#### **Monitoring**

- 3.1. Our Customer Committee will receive regular monitoring reports to evaluate the effectiveness of this policy in meeting our customers' expectations.
- 3.2. We'll undertake surveys to monitor the satisfaction of our customers with the service provided and where appropriate we'll publish the results.
- 3.3. Where relevant information is available, we'll benchmark our performance against other organisations to ensure the highest standards of service delivery.
- 3.4. We'll involve customers in the scrutiny of our learning from complaints to ensure actions have been taken to prevent future complaints.
- 3.5. Our Board will have oversight of this policy and the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code self-assessment will be presented to them annually.

## Legislation and regulations

3.6. We'll ensure this policy complies with all relevant legislation and regulation.

- Housing Ombudsman Scheme.
- Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code.
- Energy Ombudsman Scheme
- Consumer Credit Act 1974.
- Regulator of Social Housing, Consumer Standards.
- Data Protection Regulations 2016.
- Data Protection Act 2018.
- Housing Act 1996.
- Equality Act 2010.
- Building Safety Act 2022.
- The Higher-Risk Buildings (Management of Safety Risks and so on) (England) Regulations 2023.
- Heat Network Regulations 2025.
- Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs).

## Review

3.7. We'll review this policy at least every three years or when changes in legislation, regulations or best practice prompt an early review.

<b>Version Control</b>			
<b>Version number</b>	<b>Reason</b>	<b>Approved by</b>	<b>Approved date</b>
2025.01	Interim Review following Complaint Code Self-Assessment	Customer Committee	13 May 2025
2025.02	Minor changes to paragraphs 2.8, 2.9, 2.10, 2.17 and 2.25 following Internal Audit and external independent review recommendations	Director of Strategic Services	30 September 2025
2026.01	Minor changes to following a Housing Ombudsman determination recommendation and updates in line with requirements of The Heating Network Regulations 2025	Customer Committee Chair on behalf of Customer Committee (under urgent decision protocol)	26 March 2026