



# Complaints Policy

Version 1.2

Date of last update: March 2024

## Version Control

*Note: minor updates increase version number by 0.1, major updates increase version number by 1.0.*

Version Number	Sections Amended	Date of update	Approved by
1.0	Full policy reviewed & updated in line with new Ombudsman Code	October 2020	Customer Service and Performance Committee
N/A	Customer Consultation Completed	November 2020	N/A
1.1	Related Policies + Procedures updated, and document owner	March 2022	Performance Committee
1.2	Change of ownership & full policy reviewed & updated in line with new Ombudsman Code & changes in the law	March 2024	Executive Board

Document owner: Executive Director of Operations

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## Table of Contents

1. Introduction.....	4
2. This policy applies to .....	4
3. Policy .....	4
4. Legal & Regulatory Framework .....	7
5. Related Policies .....	7
6. Related Procedures .....	7
7. Appendices .....	7

## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 By providing good quality homes and services, Abri is committed to delivering a great experience. Sometimes things go wrong and when that happens, we want to put things right as quickly as possible.
- 1.2 We want our customers to have confidence that we listen, learn and take prompt action to put matters right. We strive to provide a fair and effective resolution to any complaint and use the learnings to drive service improvements across our business.
- 1.3 We promote a positive complaints handling culture among colleagues and customers, viewing them as an opportunity to put things right quickly, promote positive customer relationships and provide a learning opportunity.
- 1.4 We believe this policy provides an appropriate alternative to making a legal claim against Abri and would expect customers to attempt to resolve any dissatisfaction they may have by going through it before employing lawyers who are likely to expect Abri to pay their legal fees.
- 1.5 This policy is intended to be free to customers, and under no circumstances will Abri expect customers to refund its costs of complying with the policy. If customers employ lawyers to represent them, they may expect to both a share of any financial redress offered, and further legal costs to be paid. Abri would not normally expect to have to pay lawyers' costs.

## **2. This policy applies to**

- 2.1 This policy applies to all our customers<sup>1</sup>. By customers we mean people who have a lease, tenancy, licence or service occupancy or other arrangement to occupy premises owned or managed by us, including ex-occupiers if they were in occupation at the time the matter complained of arose. We also accept complaints from applicants for properties owned or managed by us and we accept complaints from representatives acting on behalf of a customer; these will be handled in line with Abri's complaints policy.
- 2.2 Abri refers to Abri Group Limited, the parent company and all subsidiary companies.

## **3. Policy**

- 3.1 Abri defines a complaint as an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the organisation, our staff, or those acting on our behalf, affecting an individual customer or group of customers. A complaint is different to a service request requiring action to be taken to put something right.

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<sup>1</sup> Service complaints from customers relating to our community cafes are dealt with under a separate procedure.

- 3.2 Abri recognises the difference between a service request and a complaint. A service request is a request from Abri requiring action to be taken to put something right. Service requests are not complaints, but are recorded, monitored, and reviewed regularly. Further details on service requests is set out in Abri's service request procedure.
- 3.3 Customers obtain a written acknowledgement from us that their complaint has been received and recognised as such. If the complaint wasn't made in writing, the colleague who takes the complaint must log/record it using that date on our system and the customer will still receive a written acknowledgement.
- 3.4 Complaints will be accepted via any of our contact methods, these can be found on the website, ensuring it is easy for a customer to make a complaint, including to any member of staff. Should we receive a complaint via a representative or advocate, permission will need to be provided by the customer, where possible.
- 3.5 Abri actively promotes its Complaints Policy. The Complaint Handling Code and information on the Housing Ombudsman Scheme are regularly mentioned in customer correspondence, including newsletters, the customer annual report, and on our customer website.
- 3.6 Everyone within Abri is empowered to accept and handle complaints. The Customer Relations team and Customer Resolutions team are responsible for ensuring complaints are dealt with in line with this policy and the customer relations procedure, and for liaison with the Housing Ombudsman Service.
- 3.7 Abri endeavours to respond to complaints as soon as possible once we have investigated the customer's concerns and the answer to the complaint is known. Complaint responses will not be held whilst outstanding actions required to address the issue are completed and complaints will not be left open for this reason either. Outstanding actions will still be tracked and actioned promptly with appropriate updates provided to the customer. We commit to responding to stage 1 complaints within 10 working days of being acknowledged and stage 2 complaints within 20 days of being acknowledged, where possible. The specific process followed when dealing with a complaint is outlined in our Customer Relations procedure and Making a Complaint Guide. These align with the Housing Ombudsman Service Complaint Handling Code.
- 3.8 Each complaint will be dealt with on its own merits and individual circumstances. There are circumstances where Abri may not accept a complaint or where we may decide to deal with it in a different way to the normal process. Examples include:
  - 3.8.1 The issue giving rise to the complaint occurred over twelve months ago. However, where the problem is a recurring issue or continues because it has not been fixed by us, Abri may consider any older reports as part of the background to the complaint if this will help to resolve the issue. Similarly, Abri will apply discretion and may accept complaints made outside of twelve months where there is a good reason to do so.

- 3.8.2 Where matters have already been the subject of legal proceedings which have come to an end after a final hearing;
- 3.8.3 Where in all cases except complaints about housing conditions, legal proceedings have started or are threatened (that is a letter of claim or equivalent has been sent to us).
- In housing conditions complaints, we will ask customers to use the complaints procedure first so that a solution which satisfies their needs and wants can be agreed to avoid the need to instruct lawyers and bring a legal claim.
  - A customer who has been through the complaints process remains free to pursue a legal claim, even if they've been offered redress and have accepted it.
- 3.8.4 Matters that have already been considered under the complaints policy and have been through both stages of the complaints process. In this case we can refer the complainant directly to the Housing Ombudsman;
- 3.8.5 Complaints relating to consumer credit regulated activity which may be able to be referred to the Financial Ombudsman Service; or
- 3.8.6 If a complaint is being made unreasonably or the customer is demonstrating unacceptable behaviour when pursuing their complaint, whilst we'll still consider the individual circumstances of the complaint. We have a separate procedure giving guidance on dealing with unreasonable contact.
- 3.8.7 If Abri has valid reason not to accept a complaint, or to deal with it differently, we will be able to evidence the reasoning, and explain to the customer the reasons why the matter is not suitable for the complaints process or outline how we are dealing with it and why, and the right to escalate the complaint, including to the Ombudsman Service.
- 3.9 We will handle the complaint sensitively, telling only those who need to know and complying with relevant data protection requirements. Where there is a safeguarding of vulnerable adults or child protection issue, we have a duty of care to fully investigate and follow the appropriate procedures.
- 3.10 Abri operate a two stage complaints process. Details of the process, what will happen at each stage, and timeframes for responding are set out in our Customer Relations procedure.
- 3.11 If a customer remains dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint having been through our internal complaints process, they have the right to take their complaint to a 'Designated Person' (e.g. a MP or local councillor) and/or the appropriate Ombudsman service and/or start or continue a legal claim. We will provide contact information for the Housing Ombudsman, or other relevant Ombudsman service, as part of the complaints process. We are bound by the terms of the Housing Ombudsman's scheme and will fully co-operate with all requests for information made by the Ombudsman, work with them in resolving complaints effectively, and adhere to orders and recommendations made to put things right.

- 3.12 We will encourage all customers at the end of the complaints process to feed back on the process and we will report outcomes, learning points and statistical performance to relevant customer groups, our board and Committees. Any themes or trends will be assessed to identify any systemic issues, serious risks or areas for improvements from complaints will also be included in our customer annual report.
- 3.13 Not everyone is able to exercise their right to raise concerns or complain about the service they have received due to their individual needs. We have a Reasonable Adjustments Policy in place to address this.
- 3.14 An Equality Impact Assessment was undertaken to support planning and the delivery of this policy. It is available upon request.

#### **4 Legal & Regulatory Framework**

- Housing Ombudsman’s Complaint Handling Code February 2024
- Regulator of Social Housing’s Regulatory Framework
- Equality Act 2010
- General Data Protection Regulations 2016 (GDPR) and Data Protection Act 2018

#### **5 Related Policies**

- Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Policy
- Safeguarding Policy
- Reasonable Adjustments Policy
- Unacceptable Behaviour Policy

#### **6 Related Procedures**

- Customer Relations Procedure
- Service Request Procedure

#### **7 Appendices**

1. Housing Ombudsman contact information
2. Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code