



Customer Feedback Policy

1. Introduction

At Aequus Group we value our customers and their feedback. This Customer Feedback Policy describes how Aequus expects to manage and respond to customer feedback, whether suggestions, compliments, or complaints. It is designed to reflect best practice both for the customer and Aequus.

2. The Policy – purpose and definition

The main purpose of the customer feedback policy is to enable any matters raised by customers to be received and resolved quickly at the initial point of contact.

3. Customer feedback may include:

- General feedback and suggestions for improvement
- Compliments about good Aequus
- Complaints

Customer feedback is actively encouraged, tracked, monitored and used positively to make Aequus improvements and changes where appropriate. For example, early diagnosis of customer problems with a new business process or a number of repeat requests may decrease the number of complaints if improvements are made and issues resolved at the first point of contact.

We work hard to avoid and minimise complaints but where they do occur this policy defines how they will be fairly and courteously treated.

4. This policy:

- Confirms how to give feedback or make a complaint.
- Highlights any exceptions to the standard customer feedback procedure, for example where specific issues are treated by a defined complaints procedure.
- Defines the standard of Aequus, including response times, to expect when making a complaint.
- Recognises the importance of customer feedback in providing insight to Council Aequus and performance.
- Set out how Aequus monitors customer feedback and uses information to improve Aequus and identify training needs.

For the purposes of this policy, a complaint is defined as:

“an expression of dissatisfaction with the standard of a product provided by Aequus, or with something Aequus or a member of its workforce may or may not have done”

A complaint may be about lack of response, delays, ongoing Aequus problems or the behaviour of Aequus employees.

This includes Aequus:

- Doing something wrong
- Doing something it should not have done
- Failing to do something it should have done
- Behaving unfairly, discourteously or in a discriminatory manner
- Not carrying out a service to an agreed standard
- Not responding to a request for a service within its stated timescale

Exclusions to this Policy

Some complaints are dealt with under separate procedures, some of which are laid down by statute. Others are serious enough to require special consideration. Sometimes Aequus receives complaints about matters over which it has no control. When your complaint is received you will be informed if it is to be handled under a different procedure or if it needs to be redirected to a different Aequus or agency.

This policy is not intended to include appeals against, or objections to, decisions of Aequus which should generally be pursued by way of the appropriate statutory or other appeals procedure. In these cases, advice will be given on how an appeal may be made and about any timescales which apply.

Please note: A complainant cannot demand that this procedure is used. The discretion about how to deal with a complaint lies with Aequus. In certain circumstances Aequus may decide that alternative means of dealing with complaints would be more appropriate and this will include the consideration of offering or agreeing to mediation. In such cases the complainant will be informed of the alternative approach and why Aequus has chosen to adopt it.

5. How we Review and Respond to Complaints

Aequus has a distinct two stage approach:

- Stage 1 response to the complaint by the relevant Aequus Officer
- Stage 2 review by the Managing Director or Chair of the Board (either officers may also seek the support and advice of Aequus internal auditors if it is deemed relevant)

Stage 1

Whenever Aequus receive a complaint, the **Business Manager** will ensure it is logged and an acknowledgement will be sent to the complainant within 5 working days either by email, phone or letter. The **Business Manager** will then direct the complaint to the appropriate Aequus Officer that is responsible for the issues raised. If the complaint is related to an issue outside of Aequus control we will direct it to the relevant body. Stage 1 involves the Officer themselves understanding and reviewing the complaint, whether informally through direct customer contact or more formally through an investigation and a full written response will be sent to the complainant within **15 working days**.

We aim to resolve matters at Stage 1 with a single and accurate response but if this is not possible or if the customer remains dissatisfied, we encourage continued dialogue and personal or written contact between the customer and an Aequus Officer until the issue is satisfactorily closed.

If a customer is not satisfied with the outcome of the Stage 1 process, they may request a Stage 2 Review.

Stage 2

Stage 2 provides the opportunity of the **Managing Director** to investigate the complaint by undertaking an independent review. If the complaint is in anyway connected to the Managing Director, then the **Chair of the Board** will be assigned as the investigating officer. It may be appropriate for the Managing Director or Chair of the Board to invite the company internal auditors to provide independent views and advice. They will review the Stage 1 investigation to consider whether all matters raised in the original complaint have been comprehensively and accurately addressed, and if not, may refer it back to the Aequus Officer to ensure this now happens. Through consideration of Stage 1 communications between the complainant and the Aequus concerned, the Stage 2 Review will determine:

- if your complaint may still reasonably be resolved by any further Stage 1 consideration by the Aequus, or;
- if a full independent Stage 2 investigation is appropriate, or;
- whether you would be better served by referring your complaint direct to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) if it deemed to be within the scope of their remit, for example Aequus has fully and reasonably sought to resolve the issue and a Stage 2 review is unlikely to change the position, such that effectively Aequus complaints process has been fully exhausted and any further review by Aequus would cause unnecessary delay.

Key to this decision being made will be a review of communications with the customer to understand the outcome or remedy that the complainant seeks and the best way that may be achieved, if at all possible.

6. Outcome Resolutions

Our policy in replying to complaints is to resolve them to one of the following three outcomes and advise the customer accordingly:

Outcome category	Communication with customer will:
1. Complaint upheld	Say complaint is upheld, state reasons why and give an apology
2. Complaint not upheld	Give an explanation about why Aequus operates/performs as it does and say why complaint cannot be upheld

3. Complaint partially upheld*	Say what part of the complaint is upheld and give an apology where due. Say what part of the complaint is not upheld and explain why Aequus operates/performs as it does.
--------------------------------	--

*Sometimes a complaint may contain a number of parts or elements and so our communication will seek to resolve and determine the outcomes of each. This can mean that one element of a complaint might be upheld whilst another is not.

7. What you can expect of us

- We aim to deal with complaints quickly, effectively and in a fair and honest way
- Each complaint will be recorded on receipt
- Each complaint will be acknowledged in an appropriate format within **5 working days** of receipt
- Response standards will be set and customers will be told what they can expect to happen and by when
- **Stage 1** - A full response will be provided within **15 working days** from receipt of the complaint or any feedback including compliments and suggestions.
- **Stage 2** - We will review and determine a request for a Stage 2 Review within a period of **10 working days**. This allows us time to gather and review the Stage 1 complaint correspondence and come to a view on the best way forward. We schedule Stage 2 Reviews in order of receipt. Dates for determining a review will be advised to the customer. If we determine a Stage 2 Investigation is appropriate, it will be undertaken, and a full response provided within **30 working days** of it being initiated. Customers will be kept informed of progress in dealing with their complaints and, if they cannot be resolved within the agreed time scales, we will inform you of the reason for delay and give you a target date for our final response. Customers will be told at the end of each stage how they may pursue their complaint further if they should be dissatisfied with our response.

8. And what we expect of you

When we write to you in response to your complaint, we will explain what you can do if you are still dissatisfied and the timeframe you need to act in. We have set timescales to keep your complaint open or otherwise close it on our systems.

Stage 1:

When we write to you with our response to your complaint, we will give you the option to come back to us if you think we have not fully resolved your issue. If we haven't heard from you again after **20 working days** from the date of our reply we will assume the issue is resolved to your satisfaction and we will close your complaint on our system.

Requesting a Stage 2 Review:

If you continue to be dissatisfied with the response from the Aequus at Stage 1, you need to tell us the reasons why and what outcome or remedy you were expecting, preferably in writing, so that we can properly consider whether escalation to a Stage 2 Review is appropriate.

9. Complaint about New Home

We put the same high standards of care into looking after our customers as we do into building our homes. However, we do appreciate that sometimes things can go wrong and so we take complaints very seriously. We are a Registered Developer with the New Homes Quality Board (www.nhqb.org.uk) and comply with the New Homes Quality Code.

If you do have a complaint, we do ask you to let us know so that we may have the opportunity to resolve the issue for you and learn from it.

Reporting an issue:

Although we hope you will not have any problems after you move into your new home, our commitment continues after your sale has been completed.

If you have a complaint that we have:

- Failed to do something we should have done
- Done something badly
- Treated you unfairly or discourteously

Then please do contact us and allow us the opportunity to put it right.

Informal complaints:

If you are able to resolve any issue informally with our office and are happy with the outcome, then you need not use our formal complaints procedures. If, however, you are not satisfied that the problem has been resolved or handled to your satisfaction, you may wish to make a formal complaint. You can do this by using our formal complaints procedure set out below.

Formal complaints process:

We have a robust process to ensure that your complaint is properly investigated and followed up:

- Please raise your complaint with the Business Manager (katie.gould@aequusdevelopments.co.uk)
- We will acknowledge all complaints within 5 calendar days of the complaint initiation date*.
- We will investigate your concerns and send a response which details our proposed pathway to resolution within 10 calendar days of the complaint initiation date*. This should explain how we plan to resolve the issue, along with the steps and anticipated timescales.
- We will send a full complaint assessment response by no later than 30 calendar days. If the complaint has been resolved, this will confirm what steps were taken. In the event that the resolution is still underway, the response will detail what has caused the delay, and the anticipated date for resolution.
- Once the complaint has been resolved, we will send a closure response which confirms what action has been taken.
- In the very unlikely event that the complaint remains unresolved after 56 calendar days of the complaint initiation date*, we will send a further response to provide information on what has caused the delay, what are the next steps and the anticipated date for resolution. We will also keep you updated no less than every 30 days until the matter is resolved.

- We hope we can resolve most matters without the need for further escalation. However, if your complaint is not resolved in accordance with this procedure, or you remain dissatisfied with the outcome, then you may be able to refer your complaint to any dispute resolution service offered by your warranty provider, or the New Homes Ombudsman Service.
- It is within the New Homes Ombudsman Service' discretion to decide when or if to accept a complaint, in accordance with the scheme rules. The New Homes Ombudsman Service can accept complaints that have arisen within two years of legal completion. After this, disputes within the structural warranty period may be referred to the New Home Warranty Provider if relevant.

10. How we measure response times

For clarification on how we measure our response times, we consider that:

- For customer communications received by Aequus, the day of receipt by Aequus is day 0 and the next whole working day is day 1.
- When Aequus replies to customers, the date of the communication is day 0 and the next whole working day is day 1.

11. Who can make a Complaint, Suggestion or Compliment?

Any member of the public or their representative, businesses, public and voluntary bodies may give us feedback and make a complaint, suggestion or compliment.

12. Steps to making a complaint

If you can, speak to the member of staff involved directly, or their manager, giving the opportunity for the complaint to be resolved straight away. If you do not know who to speak to, please contact the **Business Manager** on katie.gould@aequusdevelopments.co.uk

Any complaint can also be made or handed in to any of Aequus employee.

You can contact us:

By post: Cambridge House, Henry Street, Bath, BA1 1BT

Email: enquiries@aequusdevelopments.co.uk

We will request the following information:

- Your name and where and how you can be contacted. You do not have to provide this in order to submit a complaint; however we may not be able to investigate or reply to your complaint fully if you do not provide your name and a contact email address or telephone number.

Comments on methods of improving Aequus delivery or compliments regarding the quality of Aequus provided are always welcome. Please feel free to share your views with our team.

Compliments and suggestions will be recorded and fed back to the relevant staff.

13. Assistance in giving feedback

If you need assistance in giving any form of feedback whether it be a complaint, compliment or suggestion, Aequus will provide this as promptly as possible. Some assistance, such as translation Aequus, can involve a delay. You will be told when the assistance can be provided and kept informed of what is happening. Officers dealing with a complaint will ensure that any required assistance is made available and is planned for throughout the procedure.

14. Record Retention

Schedule for Customer Feedback correspondence below which details the period of time that Aequus will hold records of customer feedback.

Level of feedback	Retained for	Rational
Enquiries resolved at Stage 1	Current year + 2 years	Aligns with existing corporate Retention Policy for general correspondence
Enquiries reaching Stage 2	Current year + 6 years	Supports 1980 Statute of Limitations Act
Enquiries referred to the Local Government Ombudsman	10 years after case closes	Corporate decision

*V2 Approved by Aequus Developments Board of Directors
30.03.2023*