

Handling customer complaints



Protection for new-build home buyers

FACTSHEET: Right first time

Complaints handling is consistently one of the most common causes of disputes raised through the Code's Independent Dispute Resolution Scheme. But handling complaints effectively can improve your buyer's experience and enhance your reputation.

The Code requires builders to have in place, and follow, procedures for handling customer calls and complaints. The Fifth Edition of the Code also sets timescales which your policy should adhere to (or improve on):

- Acknowledge complaints in writing within five working days
- Provide a more detailed response within 20 working days.

You must give buyers a copy of your complaints procedure both at reservation stage and at legal completion, and it must be made available on your website. You should make it easy for customers to raise complaints. These tips will help you get complaints handling right first time:

1. **Provide a clear complaints process and stick to it.** Be open about your procedures for handling complaints and stick to the promises you set out.
2. **Ensure all customer-facing staff are properly trained on the Code requirements as well as your own complaints process.** Code training is free and should be refreshed annually.
3. **Take time to acknowledge and understand each complaint.** In responding, set out what you agree with, as well as, where applicable, anything you disagree with and why. If further investigation work is needed to determine the outcome of your decision to either accept or reject the complaint, explain this to your buyers, including timescales for a response.
4. **Keep communication lines open.** Complex complaints may take longer to resolve but you should still provide an update within your normal timescales, including reasons for the delay and when you expect to be able to resolve the issue. Regular updates will help give buyers confidence that things are progressing.
5. **Communication alone is not enough.** While updates are important, adjudicators will often find against builders who do not to resolve a complaint in a timely manner unless there are clear and unavoidable reasons why.
6. **Set clear service standards for contractors.** Where work to resolve complaints is undertaken by sub-contractors, make sure they are aware of the standards you expect when liaising with your customers and completing remedial works on your behalf.

Remember: Throughout the selling process, good record keeping and recording in writing all conversations with your buyers will help avoid misunderstandings that could lead to complaints later.

"... it was incumbent on a home builder, in implementing a complaints handling system, to reach a resolution and carry it out."

IDRS adjudicator

Resources:

[Code Requirements with Builder Guidance](#)

[Code Compliance Starter Pack](#)

[Guide to effective complaint handling](#)

[Code training](#)

[Case studies with lessons learned](#)

The Code defines a complaint as 'an expression of dissatisfaction about an issue brought to the builder's attention by the buyer'