

# New Homes Ombudsman

## Case Study: **Poor appearance of property's external walls**



### Issue

The customer complained to the New Homes Ombudsman Service (NHOS) about the appearance of the property on completion, particularly the large size of the mortar joints around the exterior.



### Relevant sections of the New Homes Quality Code

Part 2

**Legal documents, information, inspection and completion**

Part 3

**After-sales, complaints and the NHOS**



### Circumstances

- After moving in, the customer noticed that the size of their property's mortar joints on the external walls were much larger than others on the same road.
- The customer raised concerns with the developer about the quality of the workmanship and structural stability of the property. The developer replaced some stonework, but the customer remained unhappy. The developer agreed to the customer's request to appoint an independent company to inspect the property.
- Two independent surveyors concluded there was no risk to the structural integrity of the building, but that the stonework was untidy and the value of the property at resale could be affected by the quality.
- Before completing the decision, the NHOS met with both surveyors to discuss their findings. The experts agreed that the structural integrity of the property is fine, but there is a problem with the appearance of the property, caused partly by poor workmanship.

### Ombudsman decision

The Ombudsman concluded that there were clear defects in the exterior of the property, which the developer had also acknowledged as falling beneath their quality standards.

Although the customer wanted to appoint a separate contractor to undertake the corrective work, the Ombudsman considered that the most appropriate remedy was for the developer to put these defects right, taking into account the findings of the two independent experts.

The developer also accepted that the customer had been frustrated by delays and poor communication in their response to the customer's concerns. The developer offered a compensatory payment of £1000, which the Ombudsman considered to be appropriate.

The Ombudsman asked the developer to reimburse the customer for the cost of the expert report they paid for themselves, bringing the total level of compensation to £1540.

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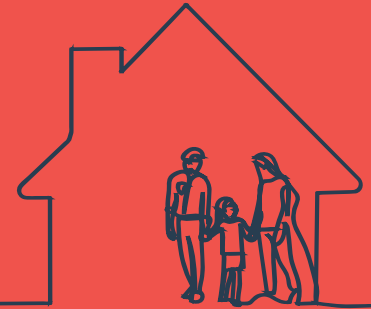
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### Outcome

The complaint was **upheld**.

### Learnings



- Discussing potential issues upfront with the customer can help speed up the resolution process and reduce disappointment. In this case, the difference in brickwork compared to neighbouring properties was clearly visible which led to further frustration.
- Shifting the blame for issues to different teams or subcontractors undermines customer confidence in the overall resolution process. This customer lost all confidence in their developer and insisted on third-party support for rectifying issues.
- Customers broadly accept there can sometimes be issues with their new home, but concerns are exacerbated by delayed and poor communication from the developer.

### Recommendations for developers

Resolve quality issues before handover. Even if it involves additional costs or inconveniences, it is always cheaper for developers to resolve issues before the customer has moved in or noticed the defect themselves.

Empower customer-facing teams to be open about quality issues and accept responsibility on behalf of the whole team when needed.

Responding efficiently with customers can help reduce frustrations and may prevent issues from needing a full Ombudsman adjudication.

