

NHQB Code of Practice

VERSION 2 (MARCH 2026)



The Register of Developers

The New Homes Quality Board (NHQB) launched in 2022 to improve protection for people buying new-build homes. As long as a housebuilder or developer has followed the correct registration process, including completing the necessary training, introducing a complaints procedure, and following other processes and procedures that are needed to meet the requirements of this New Homes Quality Code (the Code), they will become a registered developer.

Registered developers agree to follow the Code and the New Homes Ombudsman Service, including accepting the decisions of the New Homes Ombudsman in relation to dealings with customers. If a registered developer does not meet the required standards or fails to accept and act in line with the decisions of the New Homes Ombudsman, they may be referred to our Discipline and Sanctions Committee. This committee investigates whether developers have failed to keep to the Code or committed another disciplinary offence and, if so, decides what action to take or disciplinary measures to enforce. The action can range from fines, requiring developers' employees to be retrained, or removing developers from the Register of Developers.

The Code sets out the requirements that registered developers must meet. We may update the Code from time to time to reflect changes to industry best practice as well as the decisions of the New Homes Ombudsman Service. We will decide how and when each amended or updated Code will come into force.

All homes built by registered developers must meet building safety and other regulations. All registered developers must aim to make sure there are no snags or defects in their properties before the keys are handed over to a customer. If there are any snags or defects, regardless of who identifies them, these must be put right within the agreed timescales.

What the Code covers

For the purposes of this Code, 'customer' means a person who is buying a home or intends to buy as a named individual. If a new home is being bought in joint names, 'the customer' includes all the joint customers. We expect registered developers to apply the 10 Guiding Principles of the New Homes Quality Code when dealing with all occupiers, including those in shared ownership.

Areas which are not covered by the Code are:

- a) where the home is bought by a commercial entity (i.e. a company, trust, charity, etc.);
- b) claims for issues that could be dealt with through the structural warranty;
- c) claims for blight (where a home falls in value or becomes difficult to sell because of major public work in the area);
- d) claims related to the tenure or occupancy status of other properties;
- e) claims related to loss of value due to changes in market conditions or due to other factors outside the control of the developer. (Other claims relating to loss of value where there's a breach of the Code that is within the control of the developer, may be considered by the New Homes Ombudsman Service on a discretionary basis, but would normally be considered outside scope and/or better suited to the courts).
- f) personal injury; or
- g) claims that are not covered by the scheme rules of the New Homes Ombudsman Service.

The Code has two parts:

- a) Statement of Principles – a statement of the core principles that registered developers agree to apply to their business and their dealings with customers.
- b) The Practical Steps – a statement of what is expected at each stage of the process.

We may sometimes provide (and amend or add to) developer guidance to help registered developers meet the requirements of the Code. The guidance may include training materials and example documents.

We may sometimes provide (and amend or add to) customer guidance to help customers in matters such as how to make a complaint under the Code and what to expect from their registered developer.

There is a glossary of terms at the end of this document which explains some of the terms used in the Code.

To avoid doubt, nothing in this Code takes away the obligations developers have by law. The developer guidance and customer guidance do not take priority over or replace the statement of principles or the practical steps, which registered developers must keep to.

The transition period

Following their application, developers will have time (expected to be around six months) to confirm they are ready to move to arrangements under the Code, including finalising training, branding and so on, before they are 'live' (activated) under the New Homes Quality Code. This is called the 'transition period' and only from the date of activation can developers use the NHQB logo, and their customers who reserve a home on or after that date be protected by the Code and the New Homes Ombudsman Service. Developers may choose to introduce their new arrangements at different times for different businesses or subsidiaries (if this applies and where they are separate legal entities).

Developers are expected to maintain commitments previously made to customers under other new homes Code schemes prior to activation with the NHQB.

There are some legal differences within the different nations of the UK. Registered developers must get professional advice to make sure they are keeping to all laws that apply to them.

The New Homes Quality Code: Statement of Principles

This **Statement of Principles** (the core principles) sets out the main principles which registered developers agree to follow to benefit their customers.

01. Fairness

treat customers fairly throughout the buying and after-sales process.

02. Safety

carry out and complete work in line with all regulations and requirements that apply to the new home, as set out by the Government, and have the necessary certificates from an appropriately approved body to show they have done this.

03. Quality

complete all work to a high standard in line with all building and other standards and regulations that apply, as well as to the specification for the new home, and make sure that completion does not take place until the new home is complete (see section 2 of this Code).

04. Service

have in place systems, processes and staff training to meet the customer-service requirements of the Code, and not use high-pressure selling techniques to influence a customer's decision to buy a new home.

05. Responsiveness

have in place a reliable after-sales service and effective complaints procedure to make sure responses to customer queries are clear, thorough and provided in good time.

06. Transparency

provide clear and accurate information about buying the new home, including tenure and any costs the customer may have to pay in the future, such as ground rents and service charges.

07. Independence

make sure that customers know they should appoint independent legal advisers when buying a new home and that they have the right to ask for an independent pre-completion inspection before completion takes place.

08. Inclusivity

take steps to identify and provide appropriate support to vulnerable customers and make sure the Code is available to all customers, including in appropriate formats and languages.

09. Security

make sure there are reasonable financial arrangements in place to meet all their obligations under the Code, including repaying deposits when they are due, and any financial awards made by the New Homes Ombudsman Service.

10. Compliance

meet the requirements of the Code and the New Homes Ombudsman Service.

The 10 Guiding Principles:



The Practical Steps

This part of the Code has four parts:



01

Selling a new home



When selling a new home, developers must give customers fair and complete information about the property. They must not give misleading information or use high-pressure sales tactics.

Customers must be able to choose their own legal or other advisers to guide them through the buying process. Developers must be clear about any fees or benefits that they will receive if they recommend a particular professional adviser to a customer.

1.1 Sales information and marketing

Developers must ensure that all sales and marketing material – including visual representations such as photography, CGI, and video – is not misleading. It must be clear, fair and written in plain language, and it must keep to all relevant Codes of advertising and laws. Developers must state in their sales and marketing literature that they are on our register of registered developers.

Developers must prominently display the Code logo in public areas related to the process of selling new homes, including areas such as the sales office and selling agents' offices, as well as in their sales brochures and on their websites.

The Code must be available, free of charge, to any customer who is interested in buying a new home and must be made available in appropriate formats and languages.

Developers must consider the needs of vulnerable customers in all their sales and marketing literature.

1.2 Describing the new home

Developers must properly inform and not mislead customers, taking into account their obligations set out in Part 2 and under the Material Information obligations within the Digital Markets, Competition & Consumers Act 2024 for property listings (where information is relevant and available). Information must include the following as a minimum, plus anything else the developer is aware of, and which would likely impact a consumer's decision:

- a) size of property (room and total home in either m² or sq ft dimensions). Calculation of home dimensions must comply with the RICS Code of Measuring Practice for gross internal area.
- b) tenure (including the length of any lease).
- c) specification of the property (including items that are not included within the standard specification that customers may reasonably expect to be included, i.e. floorcoverings, turf, etc.).
- d) indicative energy performance ratings.
- e) the price of the property.
- f) mobility adaptations.
- g) estimated legal completion dates.
- h) the warranty that applies to the new home.
- i) management services.
- j) service charges.
- k) future phases of the development (including expected timescales, where known).
- l) any agreements or restrictions that may affect the customer if they want to sell the property in the future.
- m) costs and benefits of, and the cover provided by, any additional products such as insurances or warranties and guarantees that are provided.
- n) which Council Tax band the new home is expected to be placed in (Rates in Northern Ireland).

1.3 No high-pressure selling techniques

Developers must not use high-pressure selling techniques to influence a customer's decision. This includes:

- a) encouraging a customer to reserve or buy a new home by suggesting there are other people interested in the property or that the price will soon increase (if this is not true);
- b) offering a financial incentive in return for an immediate decision to reserve or buy a new home. In the case of time-bound events such as launch weekends, then customers who attend must be given seven days to consider the purchase – even if this goes beyond the incentive timescale – during which time the incentive (but not any specific home) will be held open for them. Sales teams must be clear with customers who wish to take this additional time, that the home could still be sold to other buyers;
- c) encouraging a customer to reserve a new home by telling them they will lose the opportunity to personalise it, when the stage of construction would still allow this;
- d) encouraging a customer to buy any unnecessary or inappropriate additional insurance products, warranties or guarantees; or suggesting that a sale may not go ahead unless a customer uses a specific third-party professional adviser, such as conveyancer or mortgage broker;
- e) 'drip pricing' of elements of a new home that customers may reasonably expect would be included.

1.4 Part-exchange and assisted-move schemes

When a developer offers a part-exchange or assisted-move scheme to a customer, the terms must be clear, fair and not misleading, and must not be used to pressurise the customer into a sale. The developer must give the customer enough time to consider the information they have been given.

The terms of the part-exchange scheme must be explained in plain language and must include the following details:

- a) the full terms and conditions that apply, including any leasehold or tenure conditions. The terms and conditions must include the price offered for the part-exchange property and how long the offer is valid for.
- b) how a fair market valuation has been decided on. This must be independent and come from more than one suitably qualified source.
- c) any deductions that will be applied to the market valuation.
- d) how the customer can qualify for the part-exchange scheme.
- e) the date the customer needs to accept the offer by.
- f) what will happen if the customer does not accept the offer by the date they were given.
- g) the date (or dates) the part exchange and purchase of the new home are expected to complete by, and what will happen if they do not occur on the same date.

1.5 Considering vulnerable customers

Developers must consider whether a customer is vulnerable and, if so, take any appropriate steps to help them make informed decisions.

Developers must take all reasonable steps to provide vulnerable customers with appropriate advice and help that is suitable to their needs, and must make sure that their employees do not make assumptions about the degree of knowledge that a customer has.

As buying a home is not something that most people do very often, developers must consider all customers as being situationally vulnerable, and offer extra support if needed.

1.6 Customer service standards and training

Developers must make sure they have in place all systems, procedures and permissions they need, including permission to share customers' information (if this applies), to be able to accurately and reliably meet the requirements of the Code.

Our compliance team will undertake audits and may ask developers for information about how they are keeping to the Code, and the developer must provide this within 30 days.

We provide online training on keeping to the Code, and developers must make sure that all employees who deal with customers complete this. Also, any agents a developer uses must make sure they are familiar with and meet the requirements of the Code.

1.7 Legal and other advisers, commission and incentives for goods and services

Developers must make customers aware that they should get independent legal advice when buying a new home.

Developers may recommend professional advisers to a customer. This includes legal representatives, pre-completion inspectors, financial advisers or mortgage intermediaries. However, developers must make it clear to the customer that they are free to choose their own advisers and do not have to use one they recommended. Developers cannot offer incentives when recommending a professional adviser.

If a customer is dealing with a developer online (for example, through a website, an app or by email), and the website, app or email includes a link to the services of a specific professional adviser (such as a legal representative, financial adviser or mortgage intermediary), the developer must clearly identify the specific third-party provider and ask the customer to confirm that they want to continue before leaving the main page by following the link.

If a developer will receive any fee, commission or any other reward or advantage for introducing a professional adviser or recommending certain products or services to a customer, they must tell the customer the nature of the reward, the expected amount being received, who will receive it and for what activity, when they refer the customer to the professional adviser or when the customer buys or reserves the goods or services. This information must be clear and disclosed in writing before the customer makes any commitment.



02

Legal documents, information, inspection & completion



There are a number of stages to buying a new home. These can include the following:

- a) an opportunity for the customer to reserve a particular plot early. This is sometimes called an early bird or plot-option arrangement (see section 2.1).
- b) entering into a Reservation Agreement. This is a contract between a customer and the developer, where a home is reserved (see sections 2.2 to 2.5).
- c) the developer makes specific information about the proposed purchase (pre-completion information) available to the customer or their legal adviser (see section 2.6).
- d) the developer and customer enter into a contract of sale. This is the formal legal document committing both parties to complete the sale unless exceptional circumstances apply (see section 2.7).
- e) notice of the completion date is issued. This is the formal notice which tells the customer that their new home will be ready for completion (and for them to move into) from a specific date (see section 2.7a).
- f) an opportunity for the customer to visit their new home before completion. They can also arrange for a suitably qualified inspector to carry out a pre-completion inspection, using the template Pre-Completion Inspection Checklist, before the completion date (see section 2.8).
- g) completion. This is when ownership of the new home transfers from the developer to the customer and the customer can move into their new home (see section 2.11).

This part of the Code sets out the requirements and expectations that relate to these stages.

2.1 Early bird arrangements

Developers may offer customers an option to be told when a plot (or plots) on a development is available to buy, before it goes on general sale. This is sometimes known as an early bird or plot-option arrangement.

Developers can charge a fee for these arrangements but must meet the following conditions:

- a) they must not charge more than £150 (or any future maximum amount that we may set).
- b) they must make it clear to the customer, before the customer pays the fee, how long they have to accept the early bird offer and how long they will have to change their mind and still receive a full refund of the fee they have paid (see below).

If a developer charges a fee, they must refund this in full if the customer tells them, within 24 hours of being told the plot is being released for sale (or within a longer period that the developer tells the customer before they pay the fee), that they do not want to go ahead with the purchase. If the customer tells the developer they do not want to go ahead with the purchase after this time, the developer may deduct administration costs from the refund, as long as they explained this to the customer when they paid the fee.

If there is any difference between the rights and expectations customers have regarding early bird arrangements and the information given in this Code, this Code will take priority.

2.2 Reservation Agreements

If a customer wants to reserve a new home, they must enter into a formal Reservation Agreement with the developer.

The customer and the developer must not enter into a Reservation Agreement until all the information outlined in the list below has been provided.

The developer must make sure that the terms of the Reservation Agreement are clear, fair and written in plain language, and that they keep to all relevant legislation.

The developer and the customer must sign the Reservation Agreement (digitally or in person), and the developer must give the customer a copy.

The terms of the Reservation Agreement must include the following details:

- a) who the customer is buying their new home from.
- b) the amount of the reservation fee.
- c) the customer's right to cancel within the reservation period.
- d) the terms under which the reservation fee can be refunded, and any administration fees or similar costs that the developer may deduct from the refund.
- e) that there is a 14-day cooling-off period, during which the customer can cancel the agreement and receive a refund of the full reservation fee.
- f) how the customer can cancel the Reservation Agreement, including as a result of a major change (as set out in part 2.9).
- g) that the sale is 'subject to contract' (England, Wales & Northern Ireland only). This means that although the sale has been agreed, it is not legally binding until the contract has been signed.
- h) details of the new home, including the type of property, plot number, development name, postal address (if available) and parking arrangements.
- i) the purchase price of the new home.
- j) how long the price and the Reservation Agreement are valid for.
- k) how and when the Reservation Agreement will end.
- l) contact details for the provider of any warranty for the new home, together with a summary document of the warranty cover provided.
- m) the date by which exchange of contracts (conclusion of missives in Scotland) must take place. This date must be reasonable in the circumstances of the transaction, taking account of when all the information listed in part 2.6 is provided, and not less than six weeks after the reservation date (28 days plus 14 days cooling-off period) unless the customer asks for an earlier date. If exchange and completion take place within the cooling-off period, it must only be with the express consent of the customer.
- n) any matters that the sale depends on, for example details of the part exchange (if this applies).
- o) details of how the customer can include in the contract of sale any spoken statement that is to be relied on.
- p) the estimated yearly cost of any management services (factoring costs in Scotland), together with other costs the customer will have to pay.
- q) the tenure of the new home (for example, leasehold, freehold, commonhold and so on) and all costs associated with this, including how these costs may change in the future.

r) any event fees that might apply and how these will be assessed.

s) the process for asking for changes to the new home, and the type of changes the customer can ask for (for example, paint colour, design changes, specification changes).

t) the mechanism by which shared spaces, roads and amenities on the development are to be managed (i.e. local authority, management company, etc.).

The developer must also provide an Affordability Schedule for any expected costs. This is a list of any costs that are likely to be directly associated with the tenure and management of the new home over the five years following the sale, and which the developer can reasonably be expected to be aware of.

The Affordability Schedule must include the following details:

- a) details of any ground rent, including the amount, the payment dates and the formula used to calculate it.
- b) estimated amounts of any additional costs that the developer knows or expects will arise directly from the sale. This includes management fees (for example, to maintain the landscaping and highways that the local authority is not responsible for, and so on), event fees and other charges. This information must bring to the customer's attention any service charges that may increase or be charged in the future as more facilities become available or sinking fund charges that may be introduced for repairs or maintenance. If the developer does not know the actual value of costs or charges, they must give the customer a schedule of costs without including the values.
- c) details of known or expected costs or charges for regular maintenance of built-in equipment at the development, such as the shared heating system, equipment which collects grey water (water from sinks, baths, showers and washing machines), air-source heat pumps and so on, if these are not already included in the management fees or event fees (for example, following a change of circumstances). If the developer does not know the actual value of costs or charges, they must give the customer a schedule of costs without including the values.
- d) estimated costs for maintaining the property (for example, painting render and so on) and repairing or replacing any fixtures or appliances as necessary during the first five years.

2.3 Cooling-off period

All Reservation Agreements must include a cooling-off period of at least 14 days. If the customer wants to cancel the reservation, for any reason, during the cooling-off period, the developer must refund the full reservation fee.

2.4 If the customer cancels the reservation after the cooling-off period

The Reservation Agreement may set out deductions that will be taken from the refund the customer will receive if they cancel the reservation after the cooling-off period.

The developer must refund the reservation fee, less any deductions set out in the Reservation Agreement, within 14 days of the date of the customer's notice of cancellation (see section 2.2), subject to compliance with anti-money laundering regulations.

2.5 No right for the developer to cancel the reservation

While the Reservation Agreement remains valid, the developer does not have the right to cancel the reservation and must not enter into a new Reservation Agreement or sale agreement with another customer for the same new home.

Subject to any data protection requirements, at the end of the Reservation Agreement period, the developer must give the home warranty provider full details of the buyer and the home they have reserved, if the provider requires this.

2.6 Pre-contract of sale

The developer must give the customer's legal adviser suitable and relevant information to help the customer get appropriate advice and make fully informed decisions relating to buying the new home.

In all cases, this information must include the following:

Information about the property and planning matters

- a) a written Reservation Agreement.
- b) a summary of the cover provided by the home warranty and contact details of the relevant warranty provider.
- c) the tenure of the new home (for example, leasehold, freehold, commonhold).
- d) the reference number of the planning consent which applies to the new home and details of any future building phases that the developer has planning consent for, and any facilities which the developer may build or pay for on the development, where this is known.
- e) a list of contents in the new home that are included in the price (for example, cooker, fridge, washing machine, curtains, carpets, wall tiles, door-entry systems, plug sockets and bathroom fittings).
- f) confirmation that the specification of the new home will be as advertised, including the type of materials used for the main structural frame of the building (masonry, timber, steel frame or other).
- g) information relating to the standards the new home is being built to, including confirmation that it will meet the building regulations, the relevant home warranty provider's standards and the manufacturers' and suppliers' performance and installation standards.
- h) any exceptional restrictions relating to using, living in or the appearance of the new home and its grounds. This does not include standard terms covered in the title deeds, plot transfer of ownership or equivalent document. The developer must recommend that the customer asks their legal adviser about any exceptional restrictions that apply.
- i) details of any services, facilities and responsibilities which may not immediately transfer from the developer to the customer on the completion date (for example, responsibility for the water and drainage systems and utilities). If these will transfer to the customer on a later date, the developer must explain this in full and give the customer written details.

Information about actual and expected costs

- a) a description of any management services (and the organisations that will provide them) which the customer will be committed to.

- b) an indicative costs schedule. This is a reasonable indication of the costs that are likely to be directly associated with the tenure and management of the new home over the next five years, and which the developer can reasonably be expected to be aware of. This includes any obligation to contribute towards the costs of maintaining or replacing services and facilities. It does not include everyday maintenance and replacement costs for things such as systems, equipment and appliances inside the new home, or utilities. The indicative costs schedule must include the following:
 - i) details of any ground rent, including the amount, the payment dates and the formula used to calculate it.
 - ii) estimated amounts of any additional costs that the developer knows or expects will arise directly from the sale, such as management fees, event fees and other charges. This information must bring to the customer's attention any service charges that may increase or be charged in the future as more facilities become available or sinking fund charges that may be introduced for repairs or maintenance. If the developer does not know the actual value of costs or charges, they must give the customer an indicative costs schedule without including the values.
 - iii) details of known or expected costs or charges for regular maintenance of built-in equipment at the development, such as the shared heating system, equipment which collects grey water, air-source heat pumps and so on if these are not already included in the management fees or event fees (for example, following a change of circumstances). If the developer does not know the actual value of costs or charges, they must give the customer an indicative costs schedule without including the values.

The developer does not have to tell the customer about the normal costs and charges associated with owning the new home (for example, the cost of utilities, energy bills, and home insurance). The customer should make separate enquiries to find out about these and take steps to consider whether they can afford the new home, taking account of information about additional and expected costs relating to the new home.

The indicative costs schedule does not need to set out estimated possible costs which will depend on decisions made by a management or service company and which are not necessary costs associated with maintaining the new home and its facilities. However, it must clearly show who owns and is responsible for the surrounding land, services and facilities (for example, street lighting, parks, landscaping and so on).

If the new home is not yet completed, the developer must also give the customer:

- a) the expected completion date (the developer's estimate of when the new home will be ready for the customer to move into); and
- b) brochure or plan showing the size, specification, general layout, plot position and facing direction of the new home. This must include details of any steep slopes in the garden and grounds of the new home and information on how the surfaces and any fences and or boundary walls will be finished. All outbuildings and garages must be clearly marked and include details of finishes and construction if this will be different to the structure of the new home.

The developer must tell the customer (and their legal advisers), in writing, who to contact (with names and contact numbers) if they have any questions before ownership of the new home transfers to them, and how their questions will be answered.

The developer must keep the customer informed about any additional costs that they know or expect will arise for the new home (as far as is reasonably possible) as well as any restrictions that apply to services (for example, gas, electricity, broadband, water, sewerage or other standard services) and the service providers.

2.7 Contract of sale

The developer must make sure that the terms of the contract of sale are clear, fair and written in plain language, and that they keep to all relevant legislation. The contract of sale must do the following:

- a) define the completion notice period (that is, the period from the date the notice to complete is served to the completion date).
- b) clearly set out the circumstances in which the customer can cancel the contract of sale.
This might include, for example, if there is:
 - i a change to the new home that the customer has not agreed to and which affects the size, value or appearance of the new home (including, the size and layout of the rooms); or
 - ii an excessive or unreasonable delay in completing the construction of the new home and sending the customer notice to complete.
- c) clearly explain what will happen if the new home will not be ready for the sale to complete by the date the developer said it would be ready.
- d) clearly explain how deposits will be protected.
- e) make suitable arrangements to provide a two-year builders' liability period for the customer.
This also applies to any 'special purpose vehicles' (see glossary) and other short-term trading arrangements which may be formed to build a specific new home or development.

To avoid disputes over spoken statements, immediately before contracts are exchanged, the developer must make sure that the customer, through their legal representative, states in writing any spoken statements they are relying on when entering into the contract of sale.

2.8 Keeping the customer informed and pre-completion inspection checks

The developer must give the customer the opportunity to undertake a pre-completion inspection of the new home or appoint a suitably qualified inspector to carry out the inspection. Any inspection should take place before the completion date and after the notice to complete (estimated completion date in Northern Ireland) has been served (or earlier if the developer and the customer both agree to this).

Developers must inform customers who wish to undertake the inspection themselves that there is a standard checklist that must be used for the inspection (NHQB Pre-Completion Inspection Checklist – available on the NHQB website). The checklist includes guidance on how to conduct the inspection (for example, internal walls must be inspected in natural daylight from a minimum distance of two metres and not shining a light on the surface). If a customer intends to undertake the inspection themselves, developers must inform them that the inspection was designed to be carried out by a professional and so they may miss or interpret differently some of the requirements or the standards with which the builder is required to adhere.

If issues are identified that breach the warranty technical standards, then the developer is responsible for addressing these, ideally before legal completion or within 30 days if this is not possible. The inspection must be carried out and recorded in line with the Pre-Completion Inspection Checklist. The checklist can be reproduced in an electronic or digital format.
However, they must carry out the checks shown on the original template.

In the event that a customer elects to engage a third-party to undertake this inspection on their behalf, then this must be a suitably qualified inspector. Any suitably qualified inspector must:

- a) be a member of a recognised professional association experienced with undertaking surveying services in the residential housing sector (e.g. CABE, CIOB, ICWCI, RICS, RPSA etc.).
- b) hold relevant professional indemnity insurance.
- c) only work within their competency.
- d) only use the standard template Pre-Completion Inspection Checklist.

The completion notice period is usually expected to be at least 14 calendar days (unless the developer and the customer agree otherwise). This is to make sure there is enough time for all the necessary legal requirements to be met and for the pre-completion inspection to be carried out.

To avoid doubt, the Pre-Completion Inspection Checklist is not intended to delay or prevent completion happening in line with the notice to complete, but the developer must respond to the results of the inspection in line with the requirements set out in part 3.

The developer must explain the process for keeping the customer up to date on the timetable for when the new home is likely to be ready and give them updates at appropriate times.

The developer must make sure that their sites meet all relevant health and safety legislation and give appropriate guidance to visitors.

The developer must tell the customer about the health and safety precautions they must take if they are allowed to visit a construction site before the work is finished. The developer can refuse to give the customer (or any representative, inspector or professional acting on their behalf) access if they do not take any health and safety precautions the developer has told them they must take.

2.9 Changes, agreeing to major changes, and the customer's right to cancel

The developer must tell the customer about their right to cancel the Reservation Agreement and contract of sale, and the specific circumstances when they can exercise this right in the event of a major change. The developer must tell the customer in writing if there is a major change to the details shown in the Reservation Agreement or contract of sale after the customer enters into the Reservation Agreement.

A major change is any change that the developer is responsible for, that can be reasonably considered as significantly and substantially affecting the size, appearance or value of the home (including the internal layout) from what the customer was shown in the Reservation Agreement or contract of sale.

The developer must tell the customer that they should ask their professional legal adviser for advice.

If the customer finds the major changes unacceptable, they have the right to cancel the Reservation Agreement or contract of sale and receive a full refund of their contract deposit, reservation fee and any other payments they have made, as long as they cancel within 14 days of receiving written details of the major change. The notice to complete cannot be served during the 14-day cancellation period.

The developer must keep the customer informed of changes to the design, construction or materials of the new home which are not major changes. The customer does not have the right to cancel the Reservation Agreement or contract of sale following changes such as these, and they do not have to formally agree to them. However, they still have the right to complain about any snags even if they have not agreed to the changes.

If the developer has agreed to do extra work for the customer which will change the timescale for finishing the new home, the anticipated completion date may need to be delayed, and other amendments may need to be made to the Reservation Agreement or contract of sale (or both). The developer must tell the customer they should get legal advice about the extra work and any changes this may lead to.

In Scotland, if the developer changes the materials that will be used in the new home, they must make sure that the new materials still meet the relevant building warrant. Nothing in this section relating to discussions with the customer takes away this legal obligation.

2.10 Complete new home

Legal completion (and occupation) can only take place on a complete new home which meets the building regulations and all building safety requirements that apply. Legal completion must not take place on a new home that is not a complete new home, and the developer must not offer the customer an incentive (financial or otherwise) to move into, or complete the purchase of, a new home that is not a complete new home.

A complete new home is one that has evidence that a new home warranty insurance is in place and meets the following further conditions.

Further conditions for houses

If the new home is a house, it is a complete new home if all rooms, spaces and facilities are in a finished condition for the purpose they were designed and intended for, the property has a safe entrance and emergency exit routes, and any further work needed:

- a) is just decorative or to correct any faults;
- b) relates to shared areas; or
- c) relates to moving from temporary to permanent utilities and services;

and this does not affect the owner's ability to live safely in the house and will not cause significant disruption or inconvenience.

Further conditions for apartment and flats

If the new home is an apartment or a flat, it is a complete new home if all rooms, spaces and facilities within the specific apartment or flat are in a finished condition for the purpose they were designed and intended for, the building has a safe entrance and emergency exit routes, and any further work needed:

- a) is just decorative or to correct any faults;
- b) relates to shared areas and facilities; or
- c) relates to moving from temporary to permanent utilities and services;

and this does not affect the owner's ability to live safely in the apartment or flat and will not cause significant disruption or inconvenience.

Further conditions for all new homes in Scotland

In Scotland only, a new home is a complete new home if the local authority (building control) has confirmed the property is ready to be lived in.

2.11 Completion

At the point of completion, the developer must have done the following:

- a) completed the construction of the new home to the standards agreed.
- b) carried out a developer's final quality assurance inspection of the new home and given the customer a Schedule of Incomplete Work (Home), and a statement explaining the timescales for completing the work or putting right the defects, and that they will need access to the home at suitable times to do the work.
- c) confirmed that the relevant local authority has inspected the new home and passed as being habitable and fit for occupation (Scotland only).
- d) given the customer the opportunity to inspect the new home or appoint a suitably qualified inspector to carry out a pre-completion inspection (see 2.8 above).
- e) provided an appointment for a home demonstration, including an explanation of how to use any appliances that are included with the new home. This can take place at the same time as the pre-completion inspection.
- f) provided full details of any guarantees and warranties that apply to the new home and any appliances.
- g) provided, or arranged for the home warranty provider to provide, confirmation of cover or the new home warranty cover note or insurance certificate and policy documentation, and to give clear details of the cover provided by the new home warranty, giving the customer details of any exceptions, exclusions, limits, excesses or conditions that apply to the new home warranty cover.
- h) given the customer a copy of their complaints procedure.
- i) provided a health and safety file for the new home in line with relevant legislation. For apartments, the health and safety file must be given to the managing agent or management company.
- j) given the customer:
 - i a copy of the building regulation control inspection records if they ask for this (England, Wales & Northern Ireland); or
 - ii confirmation that the relevant local authority has inspected the new home and confirmed it is ready to be lived in (Scotland).
- k) provided the building regulation completion certificate (or confirmation that the relevant local authority has inspected the new home and passed as being habitable and fit for occupation in Scotland) if this is available. If the certificate is not available, the developer must tell the customer that it will not be available until after completion (for example, if the new home is an apartment, the certificate may not be issued until the whole apartment block is completed), or signpost the customer to the organisation that can provide it.

2.12 Incomplete and additional work

At the point of completion, the developer must give the customer a Schedule of Incomplete Work (Development) with the best available information on future phases under the relevant planning consent, and estimated timescales for when the work is expected to be completed (where this is known).

The developer must tell the customer of any future phases of work on the development that they are committed to do. As construction work is carried out, the developer must identify and consider reasonable steps to reduce any significant negative effect on the customer.

The developer must try to keep the customer informed of the design and impact of any utility boxes or other estate infrastructure (such as lamp posts, bins and bike shelters) that will be installed after completion and could have a significant effect on the new home.

2.13 Repaying deposits and fees

The developer must have in place adequate arrangements to protect deposits, reservation fees and other fees. This may include:

- a) insuring the full contract deposit through the new home warranty;
- b) putting the contract deposit, the reservation fee and any other payments the customer has made in a suitable client account designed for holding customers' money (the money must be held in a separate account from the one used for the developer's cash flow and assets, and the developer must not be able to withdraw it until the completion date); or
- c) any other legal arrangement within the developer's course of business which they can reasonably use to repay the above amounts if necessary. This must apply to the whole of the contract deposit or any uninsured amounts (if the developer has arranged insurance in line with a above).

If the customer has paid extra money for adaptations or upgrades but then cancels the contract, the developer must refund the payments less any costs they have had to pay in connection with the adaptations or upgrades.

If the developer changes or cancels the contract of sale, they must give the customer accurate information so that they can assess whether the customer is entitled to any compensation.

The developer must refund the contract deposit and pay any other amounts due to the customer within 28 days of the contract being cancelled.



03

After-sales service, complaints & the New Homes Ombudsman



A developer's obligations do not end when a customer becomes the owner of a new home. Developers must provide an after-sales service and a complaints procedure.

Customers have two years from the date of the reservation or completion (whichever is later) to make a complaint under the complaints procedure and to refer the complaint to the Ombudsman if they are not happy with the outcome. If developers arrange for a third party to provide their after-sales service, the developer will still be responsible for providing the complaints procedure and keeping to this Code.

3.1 After-sales service

When a developer sells a new home, they must give the customer a full and accessible after-sales service for at least two years following the date of completion.

To make sure the customer understands how to access the after-sales service, the developer must give them suitable information about the service, including the following:

- a) a clear written statement of their after-sales service procedures.
- b) an explanation of the developer's responsibility for putting right any issues or problems (including snags and defects) that arise in the property during the first two years. The customer should identify any issues or problems (including snags and defects) and report them to the developer as soon as possible so that the developer can meet their responsibilities.
- c) an explanation of how the developer will manage any issues or problems and service calls. This explanation must include timescales for dealing with problems, details of how the customer can report any problems and the names and contact information of the people they should report them to.
- d) details of how the customer can make a formal complaint about any issue or problem (including snags and defects) if they are not happy with how the developer proposes to deal with it.
- e) an explanation of the process for reporting and dealing with emergency issues, including details of what qualifies as an emergency issue and how the developer will deal with them. Emergency issues include matters relating to health and safety that could seriously affect a person's health and well-being or cause injury or loss of life.
- f) clear guidance on what is considered to be normal maintenance which the customer is responsible for.

If building work will continue on the development after the customer buys the new home, the developer must tell the customer about the health and safety precautions they must take while living there and the measures the developer has put in place to protect them.

3.2 After-sales issues and complaints

The developer must have a system and procedures for receiving and dealing with any issues or problems the customer raises about the after-sales service. This applies in addition to the customer's right to make a formal complaint under the Code.

The developer must give the customer a written statement of the process for raising an issue or problem they have with the after-sales service, as well as the process for making a formal complaint. The developer can provide the written statement in a letter, brochure or leaflet or by email, or they can provide it clearly on their website.

The information the customer receives must include details of how to refer the complaint or dispute to the New Homes Ombudsman Service if they cannot reach an agreement with the developer as to how to resolve the matter.

Customers have two years from the date of the reservation or completion (whichever is later) to make a complaint under the complaints procedure and to refer the complaint to the Ombudsman if they are not happy with the outcome.

The developer must co-operate with any appropriately qualified professional adviser the customer appoints to help settle a complaint before it becomes a dispute. The developer must provide the same level of co-operation to anyone authorised by the customer to represent them (for example, a family member, friend or professional adviser) as they would to the customer, as long as they keep to their data-protection, confidentiality and health and safety processes.

In the unlikely event of work that would require customers to be moved into alternative accommodation, then this must be at the developer expense, and take account of any specific customer needs and the duration of the requirement.

3.3 Snags

It is widely acknowledged that there are usually some finishing or other issues which need putting right after moving into a new home, and these are commonly known as ‘snags’ or ‘snagging issues’.

After completion, developers are expected to work with their customers to identify and put right any snags.

The developer must make sure that snags are covered by the after-sales service and are dealt with as soon as possible.

The developer must acknowledge any snags, issues or problems raised through the after-sales service as soon as possible. In most situations the developer must be able to settle an after-sales issue or problem within 30 days, unless there is a significant reason for a delay. If there is a delay, the developer must explain clearly to the customer the reasons for this, and must give them updates at least once a month until the matter is settled. If the customer is not satisfied with the after-sales service, they can make a formal complaint under the developer’s complaints procedure.

To avoid doubt, emergency issues are not snags and if the customer is not satisfied with how these are dealt with, they can make a formal complaint from the date of completion.

3.4 Complaints procedure

The customer can make a formal complaint under the developer’s complaints procedure if they are not satisfied with the outcome of an issue or problem they have raised in connection with the obligations under:

- i Part 1: Selling a new home;
- ii Part 2: Legal documents, information, inspection and completion; or
- iii Part 3: After-sales service, complaints and the New Homes Ombudsman.

The developer’s complaints procedure must include the following steps (as a minimum):

- a) written acknowledgement: no later than five days from the first business day after receiving the complaint (the complaint start date), the developer will send the customer a written acknowledgement of the complaint.
- b) Path to Resolution Letter: no later than 10 days from the complaint start date, the developer will send the customer a written ‘path to resolution’ which outlines how they will investigate the complaint. This will include telling the customer whether they can refer the complaint to a dispute resolution service that is offered by their warranty provider, if they are not satisfied with the outcome of the complaints procedure.

- c) Complaint Assessment and Response Letter: no later than 30 days from the complaint start date, the developer will send the customer a Complaint Assessment and Response Letter.

The Complaint Assessment and Response Letter must include the following information:

- i details of and a separate report on each complaint.
- ii if a complaint has been settled, what action has been taken to do this.
- iii if a complaint has not been settled, and the developer needs more time to look into the matter, an estimate of how long they will need to reach a decision and a brief explanation as to what further steps are needed and why.
- iv if a complaint has not been settled but the developer accepts that they need to carry out correction work, details of what that work will be and an estimate of when it will be completed.
- v if further investigation or correction work is needed, when the developer will give the customer an update (which must be within 28 days).
- vi if the developer does not accept a complaint, a clear explanation of the reasons for the decision.
- vii information about any dispute resolution service, offered by the warranty provider, that the customer can refer the complaint to.
- viii how the customer can refer the complaint to the New Homes Ombudsman Service.

- d) Eight-Week (56-day) Letter: if the complaint is not closed, and no later than 56 days from the complaint start date, the developer will send the customer an Eight-Week Letter.

The Eight-Week Letter must include the following information:

- i a clear summary of what action has been taken to date.
- ii clear details of what is still outstanding, a reason why and the actions to be taken.
- iii an idea of when the complaint will be settled.
- iv how often the developer will give the customer updates (which must be at least every 28 days).

- e) Closure Letter: the developer can send a Closure Letter to the customer at any stage after the complaint start date.

The Closure Letter must include the following:

- i a list of the items agreed in the Complaint Assessment and Response Letter and confirmation that each item has been resolved.
- ii information about how to refer matters to the New Homes Ombudsman Service if the customer is not satisfied.

To avoid doubt, the developer can choose to combine a number of complaints into a single complaint, but the timetable will apply from the date they received the first complaint.

3.5 Referrals to the New Homes Ombudsman Service

If any defects or snags are not dealt with in line with the developer’s complaints procedure, the customer can refer a dispute to the New Homes Ombudsman Service.

In line with established best practice, a complaint that arose within the first two years after the date of completion can be referred to the New Homes Ombudsman Service after 56 days of the complaint start date, whether or not the date the customer refers the complaint to the New Homes Ombudsman Service is within the first two years after completion.

However, the customer should refer the complaint to the New Homes Ombudsman Service as soon as possible. The New Homes Ombudsman Service will follow its scheme rules when deciding whether to look into the complaint.

The developer must co-operate with any request from the New Homes Ombudsman Service to provide all relevant information about a complaint a customer has asked them to review.

3.6 Resale

If the customer sells the new home, the after-sales service provided by the developer applies only to after-sales matters reported within two years of the completion date of the original purchase of the new home. Any potential future owners should get legal advice about this.



04

Solvency, legal rights & jurisdiction



The developer (and seller, if different to the developer) must make sure that it has the necessary finances, or insurance cover to provide reasonable protection against insolvency and can meet its obligations under this Code, including repaying deposits when these become due and any financial awards made by the Ombudsman.

Nothing in this Code affects any other rights the customer has by law and does not replace any legislation that applies to the new home. Customers do not have to make a complaint to the New Homes Ombudsman Service if they are not satisfied with a matter that is covered by the Code. They may decide to take other action, such as through the civil courts or other ombudsman or regulator.



Glossary



Activation	The final stage of a developer's registration with us. From the activation date, all reservations are covered by the New Homes Quality Code and the New Homes Ombudsman Service.
After-sales service	The service, provided by the developer, to deal with any emergency issues, snags, defects or complaints during the first two years following completion.
Agent	A person, firm or company (for example, an estate agent or contractor) used by a developer to deal with any matter on their behalf.
Builder	The firm or person who is responsible for constructing or converting the new home. This may or may not be the same person or firm as the developer.
Building regulations	The building regulations that govern the construction of the new home, which were in force at the time the notice to build was submitted to the local authority or approved inspector (or, in Scotland, at the time the application for the building warrant was submitted to the local authority).
Code	The New Homes Quality Code, which all developers must keep to. The Code includes the statement of principles and practical steps, which set the requirements that govern the marketing, sales and after-sales service relating to a new home for two years after completion.
Code Council	An organisation which runs and manages the Code and reports to us on how effective the Code is and whether developers are meeting its requirements.
Complaint	Any spoken or written expression of dissatisfaction, whether justified or not, made by or on behalf of a customer about a service or product a developer has provided or failed to provide, or about a developer not keeping to the Code. (See also snags.)
Completion	The point at which ownership of the new home transfers from the developer to the customer. In Scotland, this stage is known as settlement. (See also contract of sale.)
Completion period	The time between the date the developer gives the customer the notice to complete and the date of completion.

Contract deposit	A deposit the customer pays to the developer at exchange of contracts. The contract deposit shows the customer's commitment to buy the new home and acts as part payment towards it.
Contract of sale	A legally binding agreement between the customer and the developer to buy or build the new home. In Scotland, this document is known as the missive (or builder's missive), and in Northern Ireland this is known as a building agreement or an agreement for transfer/lease.
Cooling-off period	The 14 days after the Reservation Agreement is signed, during which the customer can decide to end the agreement and have their reservation fee refunded in full.
Customer	A person who makes enquiries about buying a new home, and who may then go on to reserve or buy a new home from a developer. If two or more people buy or reserve a new home jointly, they will each have the same rights as joint customers.
Defects, defective or faulty items	Incomplete work, or faults in completed work, that does not meet the expected quality or finish as set out in the contract of sale, including the new home warranty provider's standards or the manufacturer's standards for that part of the building or new home.
Developer	A person or firm who is registered with us and who: a) meets the description of developer specified in regulations made by the Secretary of State; b) registered the original building plot with the new home warranty provider; and c) carries out or commissions someone else to carry out: • the construction of a new building that will be or include a new home; • the conversion of an existing building so that it is or includes a new home; or • the conversion of an existing building to alter the number of new homes it contains.
Development	The buildings and facilities included in the detailed planning consent that applies to the new home.
Dispute	A disagreement where the customer and the developer do not agree on the outcome of a complaint the customer has made (under the developer's published complaints procedure) about a matter that is covered by this Code.

Glossary



Drip pricing	A pricing technique where only part of an item's price is advertised, with the total amount revealed at the end of the buying process.
Early bird arrangements	Arrangements a developer puts in place to allow customers to register an interest in a new home which has not yet been released for sale but which is likely to be released within a defined period of time.
Emergency issue	An issue that poses an immediate threat to safety, security, health or well-being.
Estate charges	The amount payable by owner/occupiers as a contribution towards the upkeep of communal areas on the development, including services, repairs and maintenance.
Event fees	A fee charged under or relating to a residential lease or the freehold of a new home if certain events take place (for example, if the property is sublet or sold again). Event fees are sometimes referred to as exit fees, transfer fees, deferred management fees, estate fees, consent fees, covenant fees, contingency fees and selling service fees.
Exchange of contracts	The term used in England, Wales and Northern Ireland to describe the formal stage when the contract of sale is exchanged between the developer and the customer. In Scotland, this is known as conclusion of missives.
Health and safety file	A collection of information appropriate to the characteristics of the development and the new home, which contains relevant health and safety information needed to allow future building work, cleaning, maintenance, alterations, refurbishment and demolition to be carried out safely. Developers must provide a health and safety file under the Construction Design and Management Regulations.
Home warranty provider	Any organisation that provides a warranty for the new home.
Leasehold	This is where the owner of the new home does not own the land the home is on so leases it from the landowner for a fixed period.

Major change	A major change is any change that the developer is responsible for, that can be reasonably considered as significantly and substantially affecting the size, appearance or value of the home (including the internal layout) from what the customer was shown in the Reservation Agreement or contract of sale.
Management services	The maintenance and supply services the customer will have to receive under the contract of sale after they buy the new home.
Management services charges	The charges the customer must pay for the management services they receive at the new home after they buy it. Management services charges include event fees and leasehold charges.
New home	The new-build, or newly converted property (including its gardens, boundary, fencing, shared areas and any land) shown in the contract of sale, which the customer buys for their own use.
New Homes Ombudsman Service (NHOS)	The New Homes Ombudsman Service will investigate and settle, make a decision on or make recommendations in relation to disputes and complaints between a customer and a developer, where the customer believes the developer has failed to meet the requirements of the Code.
New home warranty	An insurance-backed warranty and insurance policy that provides some protection if structural defects are discovered in the new home and those defects are covered in accordance with what is set out in the policy documents.
Notice to complete	The formal notice issued by the developer to tell the customer the date the new home will be ready for completion. In Northern Ireland this is known as the estimated completion date.
Part-exchange or assisted-move scheme	Schemes offered by some developers to help customers move by offering to buy their existing home to use as a deposit for the new home.
Pre-completion inspection	An inspection carried out by a suitably experienced inspector, using the Pre-Completion Inspection Checklist, before the completion date.

Glossary



Pre-Completion Inspection Checklist	The standard template checklist which suitably qualified inspectors use to carry out pre-completion inspections by checking the finish of a new home to identify any snags before completion.
Professional adviser	A suitably qualified or accredited person acting for the customer. When dealing with a complaint or dispute, professional advisers may include trading standards departments, Citizens Advice, consumer centres and professional advisers such as solicitors and qualified surveyors, formally appointed under a relevant professional institute's rules.
Reservation agreement	An agreement in which a customer and a developer make a joint written statement giving the customer a certain period of time to enter into a contract of sale to buy a new home.
Reservation fee	The fee a customer must pay when entering into a Reservation Agreement with a developer.
Requirements	The obligations developers must meet under the Code.
Service charges	The amount payable by a lessee as a contribution to the costs of services, repairs, maintenance, insurance, improvements or costs of management etc., as set out in the lease. The amount payable may vary according to the costs incurred or to be incurred.
Sinking fund	A fund in which money is regularly set aside to cover the cost of replacing assets (such as lifts or play equipment) when necessary.
Snag	A minor imperfection or fault in the new home which does not meet the expected quality or finish as set out in the contract of sale. A snag is usually something which is damaged, broken, not fitted properly or looks unfinished. Snags may be identified during a pre-completion inspection or after completion. Snags that are reported to a developer are not automatically considered a complaint. However, if a developer does not put a snag right within 30 days of the date it was reported to them, the customer can ask for it to be dealt with under the developer's formal complaint process.
Special purpose vehicle (SPV)	A subsidiary created by a parent company with a single purpose. SPVs are used to carry out financial transactions, such as buying assets, construction, joint ventures, or to keep a company's assets or operations separate from its parent company's.

Tenure	The conditions under which land or buildings are held or occupied, usually freehold (where the owner of the home owns the land it is built on) or leasehold (where a third party owns the land and the homeowner pays to lease the land for a specified period).
Transition period	The period between a developer applying to register with us and them becoming a registered developer. During the transition period the developer must make any preparations that are needed to be able to meet the requirements of the Code.
Utility	Electricity, gas, water or sewerage services.
Vulnerable customer	A customer who is significantly less able than a typical customer to protect or represent their interests or is significantly more likely than a typical customer to suffer disadvantage during the process of buying a new home. Vulnerability can be temporary or permanent and can come and go. Developers must be flexible when dealing with a vulnerable customer and must tailor their response when necessary.
We (us, our)	The New Homes Quality Board (NHQB). We are the independent organisation who appoints the New Homes Ombudsman Service and the Code Council.

nhqb.org.uk

