

British Association of Removers Ltd (BAR) – Consumer Code of Practice Desktop Audit July 2021

Background Information

The British Association of Removers Limited (BAR) Code of Practice is one of the most established CCAS Codes. It has consistently been a source of enhanced consumer protection within the removals sector. As of June 2021, there were 385 members in the code.

BAR is bound under the Code to provide surety for advance payments (cash, BACS payments and/or debit card payments only) for private residential removal and storage contracts concluded in the United Kingdom. This is an excellent form of consumer protection in the case of a BAR member suffering financial failure whilst responsible for un-discharged removal contracts. During 2020 the Advanced Payments Guarantee Scheme settled 71 claims amounting to over £43,000.

Audit Process

A Trading Standards Practitioner from the Chartered Trading Standards Institute carried out a desk-top audit. The audit focused on the following areas:

- Member application and exit process including checks completed on new applicants and process for members leaving the scheme
- Member auditing - content and process
- Terms and conditions and other pre-contractual Information.
- Sanctions for non-complaint member businesses including the disciplinary process
- Customer service provisions including process for consumers to leave feedback
- Consumer complaints process (including ADR)
- Customer satisfaction

Audit Summary

Across all CCAS criteria the BAR Code continues to work effectively. Constant review of membership criteria and strengthening where necessary have ensured the Code continues to be effective in protecting consumer detriment.

New Members

In the year to date there have been 9 applications to join BAR. Two completed applications were examined containing the application form, inspectors written reports and initial inspection reports. Evidence was supplied to confirm any non-conformities identified by the inspector were followed up and re-checked by BAR.

Best Practice:

A full application checklist is followed to ensure consistency in processing applications.

All new applications are reviewed and approved/rejected by the BAR Advisory Committee

Existing Member Inspections/Audit

The Member Inspection process is managed by BAR but carried out by an external team of qualified auditors employed by Quality Service Standards Ltd, a UKAS (United Kingdom Accreditation Service) a wholly owned subsidiary of BAR and covers the whole of the United Kingdom.

Five of the most recently completed audit sheets were examined. There was evidence that those members with nonconformities had received a PDF report highlighting any issues requiring action. 100% of members are inspected annually and this remains a key strength of the BAR Code. The inspections assess compliance against each element of the membership criteria and BAR Code of Practice.

In 2020 BAR carried out 508 inspections remotely in accordance with Government guidance regarding COVID-19. This includes annual inspections for current members, new applicant inspections and code follow-up inspections.

Best practice:

In line with the constant review of membership criteria and Code strengthening as part of the audit process a copy of the members terms and conditions of business are monitored for compliance with the BAR's Model Terms and Conditions which in turn are compliant with current legislation. This is particularly important as it allows BAR to check additional clauses have not been added that are detrimental to the consumer or do not comply with the latest legislation.

Membership Withdrawal and Sanctions for Non-Compliant Member Businesses

There were 21 members who left in the year to date. Exit letters relating to three members who left in the last year were examined. All complied with Code requirements.

The code sponsor was asked to provide one completed disciplinary case summary. Documents were provided indicating formal warning letters had been sent to the member following nonconformances identified during an inspection. However, the member had instituted corrective action avoiding a referral to the disciplinary panel.

Terms and Conditions and other Pre-Contractual Information

BAR has continued to provide its members with assistance in relation to legal updates. Members have direct access to a dedicated Legal Advice helpline. In addition a magazine R&S is published quarterly and emails fortnightly. This will be reviewed post COVID. Members also have access to CTSI's Business Companion website.

Consumer Complaints Process

Alternative Dispute Resolution is provided by The Furniture & Home Improvement Ombudsman. In 2020 129 complaints were logged by the Ombudsman. Of these, 77 was found in favour of the Member; 1 where the decision was split; 17 out of scope and 4 settled prior to conciliation.

Customer Satisfaction and Feedback

The partnership between BAR and Referenceline to provide online customer feedback is increasingly popular with members. Not all members use Referenceline so BAR must continue to remain vigilant that all members seek customer feedback. Some members use alternative online surveys or a simple form that they hand to the customer after every move. However, it is a Code requirement that all members provide each customer with an opportunity to leave feedback after a move. This is checked as part of the annual inspection.

Conclusions

BAR is continuing to fulfil its obligations as a Code Sponsor. The continued use of The Furniture & Home Improvement Ombudsman as ADR provider to the Furniture Ombudsman and the plans in place to utilise all that the service offers are encouraging moves in terms of consumer protection. Overall, the BAR Code continues to provide significant protection for consumers in the removals sector.