

## **The Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code Self-Assessment**

In July 2020, the [Housing Ombudsman](#) introduced a new [Complaint Handling Code](#).

The code sets out good practice that enables landlords to respond to complaints effectively and fairly. It requires a clear and easily accessible complaints procedure and a positive complaints handling culture with appropriate resolutions and continuous learning.

As a social landlord, we are required to complete a self-assessment of our position against the code and publish the results. The purpose of the self-assessment is for landlords to regularly assess their performance against the code and take corrective action when required.

We are committed to complying with the Complaint Handling Code and have assessed our position against it. The results of this assessment and our current position as at December 2020 can be viewed below. We intend making further improvements to how we manage complaints over the coming months and will update our self-assessment again by 31/03/21.

# Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code: Self-assessment form as at December 2020

Compliance with the Complaint Handling Code			
<b>1</b>	<b>Definition of a complaint</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
	Does the complaints process use the following definition of a complaint?  <i>An expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the organisation, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting an individual resident or group of residents.</i>	<b>Yes</b>	
	Does the policy have exclusions where a complaint will not be considered?	<b>Yes</b>	
	Are these exclusions reasonable and fair to residents?  <i>Evidence relied upon – Our exclusions are limited and are in line with the Ombudsman guidance and include where legal proceedings/external appeals processes are in progress or where a time limit of 6 month has passed from when the event originally occurred. We also exclude complaints from our own staff and around the recruitment process and provide clarity on what we see as enquiries, requests and reports of ASB rather than complaints. Residents from our consultation group were involved in reviewing the policy including the exclusions earlier in 2020.</i>	<b>Yes</b>	
<b>2</b>	<b>Accessibility</b>		
	Are multiple accessibility routes available for residents to make a complaint?	<b>Yes</b>	
	Is the complaints policy and procedure available online? <i>Our Policy is available on-line along with our guidance leaflet 'How to make a complaint'.</i>	<b>Yes</b>	
	Do we have a reasonable adjustments policy? <i>Within the Complaints Policy we advise that we will make reasonable adjustments and will ensure a Reasonable Adjustments Policy is in place by 31/03/21.</i>		<b>No</b>
	Do we regularly advise residents about our complaints process?	<b>Yes</b>	
<b>3</b>	<b>Complaints team and process</b>		
	Is there a complaint officer or equivalent in post?	<b>Yes</b>	

	Does the complaint officer have autonomy to resolve complaints? <i>Each complaint is allocated an Investigating Officer with complaint resolution sitting within the teams. However, the Complaints Officer can work with them and across teams to help facilitate a resolution as well as escalate to members of the Leadership Team if they have concerns about how complaints are being handled.</i>		<b>No</b>
	Does the complaint officer have authority to compel engagement from other departments to resolve disputes?	<b>Yes</b>	
	If there is a third stage to the complaints procedure are residents involved in the decision making?		<b>N/A</b>
	Is any third stage optional for residents?	<b>N/A</b>	
	Does the final stage response set out residents' right to refer the matter to the Housing Ombudsman Service?	<b>Yes</b>	
	Do we keep a record of complaint correspondence including correspondence from the resident?	<b>Yes</b>	
	At what stage are most complaints resolved?	<b>Stage 1</b>	
<b>4</b>	<b>Communication</b>		
	Are residents kept informed and updated during the complaints process?	<b>Yes</b>	
	Are residents informed of the landlord's position and given a chance to respond and challenge any area of dispute before the final decision? <i>This may happen on an ad-hoc basis but is not currently part of our process. We will be making further changes to our procedure and working practices and will be looking at how we include this.</i>		<b>No</b>
	Are all complaints acknowledged and logged within five days?	<b>Yes</b>	
	Are residents advised of how to escalate at the end of each stage?	<b>Yes</b>	
	What proportion of complaints are resolved at stage one? <i>Figures for 01.04.2019 – 31.03.2020</i>	<b>73%</b>	
	What proportion of complaints are resolved at stage two? <i>Figures for 01.04.2019 – 31.03.2020</i>	<b>100%</b>	
	What proportion of complaint responses are sent within Code timescales? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stage one Stage one (with extension)</li> <li>• Stage two Stage two (with extension)</li> </ul> <i>Our current timescales are to acknowledge within 2 working days and respond within 10 working days of the acknowledgment* for both Stage 1 and 2. For 2019/20 we were 100% for this and where we required an extension. We are aware we need to change Stage 1 so that responses are completed within 10 working days of receipt of the complaint. This will require changes to our housing management system which will be put in place by 31/03/21.</i>	<b>100%*</b>	

	Where timescales have been extended did we have good reason?	Yes	
	Where timescales have been extended did we keep the resident informed?	Yes	
	What proportion of complaints do we resolve to residents' satisfaction <i>We receive very limited feedback on this – just 5 responses in 2019/20. We are looking at how we can improve this.</i>	60%	
<b>5</b>	<b>Cooperation with Housing Ombudsman Service</b>		
	Were all requests for evidence responded to within 15 days?	Yes	
	Where the timescale was extended did we keep the Ombudsman informed?	N/A	
<b>6</b>	<b>Fairness in complaint handling</b>		
	Are residents able to complain via a representative throughout?	Yes	
	If advice was given, was this accurate and easy to understand?	Yes	
	How many cases did we refuse to escalate?  What was the reason for the refusal?	None  N/A	
	Did we explain our decision to the resident?	N/A	
<b>7</b>	<b>Outcomes and remedies</b>		
	Where something has gone wrong are we taking appropriate steps to put things right?	Yes	
<b>8</b>	<b>Continuous learning and improvement</b>		
	What improvements have we made as a result of learning from complaints? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Revision to housing application process</i></li> <li>• <i>Revised the Emergency Access Procedure</i></li> <li>• <i>Complaints Policy and Procedure updated in 2020 which incorporate various improvements based on feedback</i></li> <li>• <i>Reviewed our Compensation Policy in 2020 to reflect feedback on levels of compensation</i></li> <li>• <i>Undertook resident consultation and incorporated feedback into these reviews</i></li> <li>• <i>Feedback to our contractors and ironing out issues around communication and delays.</i></li> </ul>		
	How do we share these lessons with: a) residents? <i>In 2021 we will focus on how we share learning from complaints through our newsletter and other forms of communication. In the last year, our focus was on sharing feedback and actions following on from the procurement of new repairs and estate service contracts, areas which had resulted in the majority of our complaints in previous years.</i>		

	<p>b) the board/governing body?  <i>We provide some information on complaints to the Board as part of our Resident Engagement and Feedback Report. This will be expanded on to meet the requirements of the Code going forward.</i></p> <p>c) In the Annual Report?  <i>Our last report did not include sharing of learning from complaints, but we will ensure this is included in the 2020/21 report.</i></p>		
	<p>Has the Code made a difference to how we respond to complaints?  <i>As a result of the Code, we have made some initial changes to our policy and developed an Action Plan which will be delivered by 31/03/2020 and will make a difference to how we respond to complaints.</i></p>	<p><b>Yes</b></p>	
	<p>What changes have we made?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Definition updated in policy in line with the code recommendation</i></li> <li>• <i>Minor amendments made to policy and procedure including adding in the Ombudsman's contact details with further changes planned in 2021</i></li> <li>• <i>A review of our complaints leaflet which will be published by the end of January 21</i></li> <li>• <i>Minor amendments to our website with further changes planned in 2021</i></li> <li>• <i>Developed an Action Plan to deliver further changes over the coming months</i></li> </ul>		