

## **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 complaint 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 our latest assessment and our position as of March 2021 can be viewed below.

We will periodically update the self-assessment to reflect any changes in our position against the Code.

# Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code: Self-assessment form as of March 2021

Compliance with the Complaint Handling Code			
1	Definition of a complaint	Yes	No
	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>	Yes	
	Does the policy have exclusions where a complaint will not be considered?	Yes	
	Are these exclusions reasonable and fair to residents?  Evidence relied upon – <i>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. Residents from our consultation group were involved in reviewing the policy including the exclusions earlier in 2020.</i>	Yes	
2	Accessibility		
	Are multiple accessibility routes available for residents to make a complaint?	Yes	
	Is the complaints policy and procedure available online?	Yes	
	Do we have a reasonable adjustments policy? <i>Within the Complaints Policy we advise that we will make reasonable adjustments. We will ensure a separate Reasonable Adjustments Policy is developed as part of our new Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2021.</i>		No
	Do we regularly advise residents about our complaints process?	Yes	
3	Complaints team and process		
	Is there a complaint officer or equivalent in post?	Yes	

	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 is now incorporated into our process by requesting the appointed Investigating Officer give the resident a fair opportunity to set out their position and comment on any adverse findings before a final decision is made.</i>	<b>Yes</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>Up to 31/03/2021 our timescales were to acknowledge within 2 working days and respond within 10 working days of the acknowledgment* for both Stage 1 and 2. From 01/04/21, our timescales will be aligned with the code.</i>	<b>100%*</b>	
	Where timescales have been extended did we have good reason?	<b>Yes</b>	

	Where timescales have been extended did we keep the resident informed?	<b>Yes</b>	
	What proportion of complaints do we resolve to residents' satisfaction? <i>We receive very limited feedback on this – just 5 responses in 2019/20 and 7 in 2020/21. For 2021/22, we are considering using an external research company to gather this information on our behalf.</i>	<b>100%</b>	
<b>5</b>	<b>Cooperation with Housing Ombudsman Service</b>		
	Were all requests for evidence responded to within 15 days?	<b>Yes</b>	
	Where the timescale was extended did we keep the Ombudsman informed?	<b>N/A</b>	
<b>6</b>	<b>Fairness in complaint handling</b>		
	Are residents able to complain via a representative throughout?	<b>Yes</b>	
	If advice was given, was this accurate and easy to understand?	<b>Yes</b>	
	How many cases did we refuse to escalate?  What was the reason for the refusal?	<b>None</b>  <b>N/A</b>	
	Did we explain our decision to the resident?	<b>N/A</b>	
<b>7</b>	<b>Outcomes and remedies</b>		
	Where something has gone wrong are we taking appropriate steps to put things right?	<b>Yes</b>	
<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 December 2020 and March 2021 which incorporate various improvements based on feedback and the introduction of a separate Complaints Procedure for residents</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> <li>• <i>Revised our pest control procedure and provided clearer guidance to staff</i></li> <li>• <i>Introduced a new 'How to Make a Complaint' leaflet which will be provided to all residents at the start of a complaint</i></li> </ul>		

<p>How do we share these lessons with:</p> <p>a) residents?  <i>In 2021/22 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> <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. In 2021/22, this will be expanded on to meet the requirements of the Code.</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 which will be published in Autumn 2021.</i></p>		
<p>Has the Code made a difference to how we respond to complaints?  <i>As a result of the Code, we have changed our policy and procedure and developed an Action Plan to bring us in line with the Code. Our initial plan has now been delivered and we are working on a new plan for 2021/22 to further improve our management of complaints in line with the Code.</i></p>	<b>Yes</b>	
<p>What changes have we made?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Definition, exclusions and timescales updated in line with the code.</i></li> <li>• <i>Reviewed and updated our policy, procedure, letter templates and housing management system.</i></li> <li>• <i>Introduced separate resident and staff procedures.</i></li> <li>• <i>Reviewed and updated our complaints leaflet.</i></li> <li>• <i>Updated our website with the new publications and incorporated additional information and guidance on how to make a complaint and what to expect.</i></li> <li>• <i>Made clearer reference throughout our documentation and on our website about the Ombudsman, how to contact them and the support they can offer complainants.</i></li> <li>• <i>Developed an awareness campaign for complaints to be rolled out in 2021/22.</i></li> <li>• <i>Promoted the importance of effective complaints management to staff and provided guidance on this with further training to follow.</i></li> <li>• <i>Further changes are planned for 2021/22 and have been documented in our phase 2 Action Plan.</i></li> </ul>		