

Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code: Self-assessment form

Self-Assessment carried out on the current WDH Complaints Policy and Procedure and approved by the Operational Committee on 21 December 2020.

Compliance with the Complaint Handling Code			
1	Definition of a complaint	Yes	No
	<p>Does the complaints process use the following definition of a complaint?</p> <p><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></p>		X
	<p>Does the policy have exclusions where a complaint will not be considered?</p>	X	
	<p>Are these exclusions reasonable and fair to residents?</p> <p>Evidence relied upon</p> <p>The exclusions cover areas outside the remit of the Housing Ombudsman Service jurisdiction that fall within the remit of the courts, or other regulatory or appeal bodies. They also cover matters concerning employees where this would be a HR matter and vexatious complainants.</p>		
2	Accessibility		
	<p>Are multiple accessibility routes available for residents to make a complaint?</p>	X	
	<p>Is the complaints policy and procedure available online?</p>	X	
	<p>Do we have a reasonable adjustments policy?</p> <p>We mention equality within the policy and that reasonable adjustments will be made where necessary for those with protected characteristics. We also have a Diversity and Inclusion Policy that is highlighted within the current Complaints Policy.</p>	X	

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	<p>Do we regularly advise residents about our complaints process?</p> <p>We publish our Customer Guide to Compliments and Complaints on our website and all employees are able to advise residents on our complaints process and have access to our policy and procedure documents.</p>	X	
3	Complaints team and process	Yes	No
	<p>Is there a complaint officer or equivalent in post?</p> <p>While the Customer Relations Team currently monitor and review formal complaints, the team only deal with Stage 2 and Stage 3 complaints in the current process. When the new complaints Policy and Procedure is introduced, the Customer Relations Team will be responsible for the monitoring and allocation of all formal Stage 1 complaints and investigation of Stage 2 complaints.</p>	X	
	<p>Does the complaint officer have autonomy to resolve complaints?</p> <p>Not under the current process, as complaints are initially managed by the relevant service area manager and only come to the Customer Relations Team at Stage 2 of the current process. This will be amended once the new policy and procedure are introduced.</p>		X
	<p>Does the complaint officer have authority to compel engagement from other departments to resolve disputes?</p> <p>The Customer Relations Team will currently allocate complaints to the relevant teams to provide responses.</p>	X	
	<p>If there is a third stage to the complaints procedure are residents involved in the decision making?</p> <p>Stage 3 complaints are heard by a panel of WDH Board Members.</p> <p>Under the new policy and procedure there will be no Stage 3 process and we will revert to a two stage formal complaints process, in line with the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code.</p>		X
	<p>Is any third stage optional for residents?</p> <p>Complainants can request to escalate to Stage 3 and they have the option of attending the panel hearing or submitting a statement in relation to their case if they do not wish to appear at the panel hearing.</p>	X	

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	<p>Does the final stage response set out residents' right to refer the matter to the Housing Ombudsman Service?</p> <p>All final complaint decision letters advise customers on how to progress their complaint to the Housing Ombudsman Service and provides contact details and a leaflet about the service.</p>	X	
	<p>Do we keep a record of complaint correspondence including correspondence from the resident?</p>	X	
	<p>At what stage are most complaints resolved?</p> <p>Most complaints are resolved at the informal stage of our current complaints process and only a small number of informal complaints enter our formal complaints procedure.</p>		
4	Communication	Yes	No
	<p>Are residents kept informed and updated during the complaints process?</p> <p>Customers receive an acknowledgement letter on receipt of their complaint that sets out the timescales for a response to be provided. If we are unable to meet this timescale then the customer is contacted to explain why and agree an alternative response date. Contact will also be made where required throughout the investigation of the complaint.</p>	X	
	<p>Are residents informed of the landlord's position and given a chance to respond and challenge any area of dispute before the final decision?</p> <p>At each stage of our process the customer has the right to request to escalate their complaint further and provide us reasons why their complaint has not been addressed.</p>	X	
	<p>Are all complaints acknowledged and logged within five days?</p> <p>Complaints are acknowledged within two working days.</p>	X	
	<p>Are residents advised of how to escalate at the end of each stage?</p> <p>All complaint letters advise the customer of the next steps if they remain dissatisfied.</p>	X	
	<p>What proportion of complaints are resolved at stage one?</p> <p>In 2019/2020, 94% of complaints were resolved at Stage 1.</p>		

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	<p>What proportion of complaints are resolved at stage two?</p> <p>In 2019/2020 only three complaints escalated to Stage 2 and none of these complaints escalated to Stage 3.</p>		
	<p>What proportion of complaint responses are sent within Code timescales?</p> <p>In 2019/2020:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stage one 38 answered in 10 days. Stage one (with extension); nine extended timescale agreed. • Stage two; two answered in 15 days. Stage two (with extension); one extended timescale agreed. 		
	<p>Where timescales have been extended did we have good reason?</p> <p>We will only extend a timescale where necessary, for example where the complaint is complex and further time is required or we are awaiting information from another source.</p>	X	
	<p>Where timescales have been extended did we keep the resident informed?</p> <p>We always inform residents of any extensions to the timescales and explain the reasons for this and agree a revised response date with them.</p>	X	
	<p>What proportion of complaints do we resolve to residents' satisfaction?</p> <p>Only 6% of Stage 1 complaints escalated to Stage 2 during 2019/2020.</p> <p>In the last financial year, 2019/2020, we dealt with 50 formal complaints. Of these, 47 were responded to at Stage 1 and three at Stage 2. Out of these complaints 50% were upheld, 34% were partially upheld, meaning some part of the complaint was justified, and 16% of these complaints were rejected.</p>		
5	Cooperation with Housing Ombudsman Service	Yes	No
	Were all requests for evidence responded to within 15 days?	X	
	Where the timescale was extended did we keep the Ombudsman informed?	X	

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6	Fairness in complaint handling	Yes	No
	<p>Are residents able to complain via a representative throughout?</p> <p>In line with data protection we always request the complainants consent to deal with a third party representative, however, this option is available.</p>	X	
	<p>If advice was given, was this accurate and easy to understand?</p> <p>The information we provide is in plain English so it is easy to understand.</p>	X	
	<p>How many cases did we refuse to escalate?</p> <p>We refused three requests to escalate during 2019/2020.</p> <p>What was the reason for the refusal?</p> <p>The reason for the refusals was that the customers were unable to provide any valid reasons for escalating their complaint following the decision that had been made at the previous stage. On one particular complaint it had been upheld and a resolution offered.</p>		
	<p>Did we explain our decision to the resident?</p>	X	
7	Outcomes and remedies	Yes	No
	<p>Where something has gone wrong are we taking appropriate steps to put things right?</p> <p>We see complaints as a learning opportunity to improve the services that we provide and report on learning from complaints to the Operational Committee, who are made up of tenants and Board members and report directly to the Board. This includes a learning from complaints action plan that monitors progress of the actions through to completion.</p>	X	

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8	Continuous learning and improvement	Yes	No
	<p>What improvements have we made as a result of learning from complaints?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Started a review of the information provided to tenants who report antisocial behaviour or nuisance complaints; • amended the process for name change requests; • made changes to the handover process for Shared Ownership customers; • reviewed our internal autism awareness training alongside an autistic complainant to ensure the content was relevant; • changed the content of our initial Universal Credit letter to customers transitioning onto Universal Credit to ensure its purpose was clear; • reviewed the 'take a break' service offered by Care Link to make it more robust; and • reviewed our Unacceptable Behaviour Protocol to include the option of a warning letter, and an appeals process. 		
	<p>How do we share these lessons with:</p> <p>a) residents?</p> <p>Neighbourhood panel members form the Operational Committee and they receive information on learning from complaints.</p> <p>The actions and learning from complaints is published in our Annual Report.</p> <p>b) the board / governing body?</p> <p>The Board receive updates directly from the Operational Committee and consider the Annual Report before publication.</p> <p>c) In the Annual Report?</p> <p>Details of our complaint figures and any learning outcomes are published in our annual report.</p>		

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	<p>Has the Code made a difference to how we respond to complaints?</p> <p>We have always had a robust and well managed complaint procedure, however, there are some requirements of the code which will mean our current process needs to be amended and these areas will be included in the new complaint policy and procedure which is currently under consultation with managers, following consultation with tenants and customers.</p>	X	
	<p>What changes have we made?</p> <p>When the new policy and procedure is introduced the changes will be as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Definition of a complaint will mirror the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code. • Complaints made within four months of an event occurring or the customer becoming aware of it will change to six months in line with the code. • We will introduce a quick informal complaint process that will sit outside the formal process, so that complaints that can be easily resolved and dealt with quickly for the customer. • We will have a two stage formal process. • The Customer Relations Team will manage and monitor all formal complaints and have autonomy to resolve complaints, where appropriate to do so, or refer them back to the investigating manager. 		