

Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code Self-Assessment Form

Self-assessment carried out on the new WDH Complaints Policy and Procedure

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>An expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the organisation, its own employees, or those acting on its behalf, affecting an individual resident or group of residents.</p>	X	
	Does the policy have exclusions where a complaint will not be considered?	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 and processes. They also cover matters concerning employees where this would be a HR matter and vexatious complainants.</p>	X	
2	Accessibility		
	Are multiple accessibility routes available for residents to make a complaint?	X	
	Is the complaints policy and procedure available online?	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 Complaints Policy.</p>	X	
	<p>Do we regularly advise residents about our complaints process?</p> <p>We publish our Guide to 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>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	

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	<p>Does the complaint officer have autonomy to resolve complaints? The Customer Relations team will be allocating Stage 1 complaints and reviewing requests to escalate to Stage 2. This will allow them to assess each complaint and consider if a resolution could be offered that would resolve the complaint without the need for further investigation.</p>	X	
	<p>Does the complaint officer have authority to compel engagement from other departments to resolve disputes? The Customer Relations team has authority to allocate complaints to the relevant department who will then take responsible for investigation and where possible resolution of the complaint.</p>	X	
	<p>If there is a third stage to the complaints procedure are residents involved in the decision making? We do not have a three stage process.</p>		N/A
	<p>Is any third stage optional for residents? N/A</p>		N/A
	<p>Does the final stage response set out residents' right to refer the matter to the Housing Ombudsman Service? All final complaint decision letters provide the customers will information on how they can progress their complaint to the Housing Ombudsman Service. Contact details and a leaflet about the HOS are provided in the decision letter.</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? Most complaints will be resolved at the informal stage of our complaints process. Those complaints entering the formal stages are generally resolved at Stage 1.</p>		
4	Communication	Yes	No
	<p>Are residents kept informed and updated during the complaints process? On formal complaints customers will receive an acknowledgement letter that provides contact information for the investigating manager and the timescales for a response being provided. This provides a clear line of communication and keeps the customer informed on when they can expect to receive a response. At Stage 1 the investigating manager will contact the customer to reconfirm the basis of their complaint and the resolution they require and obtain any further information relevant to the complaint. At Stage 2 the Customer Relations Manager will contact the customer to discuss their request to escalate their complaint. They will then liaise with the customer during the course of the</p>	X	

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investigation to notify them of progress. Where we are unable to meet the deadline date the customer will be notified, and we will agree a revised response date with the customer.		
<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 formal process the customer has the right to request to escalate their complaint further and provide us with reasons why they believe their complaint has not been fully addressed.</p> <p>Stage 1 and Stage 2 decision letter provide contact information for the investigating managers and advice the customer to contact them directly if they are dissatisfied with the outcome or the information provided in the decision letter. This allows the customer an opportunity to respond and challenge.</p>	X	
<p>Are all complaints acknowledged and logged within five days?</p> <p>Complaints are acknowledged and logged within five working days.</p>	X	
<p>Are residents advised of how to escalate at the end of each stage?</p> <p>All complaint decisions letters advise the customer of the next steps if they remain dissatisfied. A guide to complaints accompanies the acknowledgement letter and explains the complaint process to the customer and provides contact information.</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>		
<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 timescales 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	

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	<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 our reasons for this and agree with the customers a revised response date.</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. 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
	<p>Were all requests for evidence responded to within 15 days?</p> <p>The Customer Relations team respond to requests from the HOS and 100% of responses to the HOS were within the timescale given or the extended timescale agreed in conjunction with the HOS.</p>	X	
	<p>Where the timescale was extended did, we keep the Ombudsman informed?</p> <p>Where a timescale needed to be extended this was only done after speaking with the HOS to confirm their agreement for the revised response date. Timescales are only extended where the complaint is complex and there is a large amount of evidence that needs to be compiled and sent to the HOS.</p>	X	
6	Fairness in complaint handling	Yes	No
	<p>Are residents able to complain via a representative throughout?</p> <p>Customers can complain through a third party providing we have the consent of the customer to deal with that individual, in line with data protection.</p> <p>Groups of customers can also make complaints but again will ask them to confirm they are happy to elect a nominated single point of contact for the complaint.</p>	X	
	<p>If advice was given, was this accurate and easy to understand?</p> <p>All letters are sent in plain English.</p>	X	
	<p>How many cases did we refuse to escalate?</p> <p>During 2019/2020 we refused three requests to escalate.</p> <p>What was the reason for the refusal?</p>		

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	The reason for the refusals were that the customers were unable to provide valid reasons for escalating their complaint, for example on one complaint it had been upheld and the resolution offered was proportionate to the circumstances of the complaint.		
	<p>Did we explain our decision to the resident?</p> <p>Whenever we refuse to escalate a complaint, we write to the customer advising them of our decision and the reasons why and provide them with information on how they can progress their complaint.</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 use each complaint as an opportunity to learn and improve the services we provide to our customers.</p> <p>Where we have made a mistake, we will apologise and aim to put the customer back in the position they would have been in. We have a range of remedies available to try to resolve complaints to the customers satisfaction.</p> <p>A report on learning from complaints and action plan is presented to the Operational Committee, each quarter. The committee is made up of tenants and Board members and it reports directly to the Board.</p>	X	
8	Continuous learning and improvement	Yes	No
	<p>What improvements have we made as a result of learning from complaints?</p> <p>During the last financial year, the following improvements have been made following 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 <p>reviewed our Unacceptable Behaviour Protocol to include the option of a warning letter, and an appeals process.</p>		

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<p>How do we share these lessons with:</p> <p>a) Residents?</p> <p>Neighbourhood panel members form part of the Operational Committee and they receive information on learning from complaints and actions taken forward for improvements.</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 content of 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>		
<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, the requirements of the code have helped us to streamline our informal and formal complaint stages so the customer will receive a response to their complaint at the earliest opportunity. The new definition of a complaint will also make it easier for employees to determine if the matter can be dealt with through the complaints process.</p>	<p>X</p>	
<p>What changes have we made?</p> <p>The following changes have been made:</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 instead of our previous three stage process; and • 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. 		