

Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code:

Self-assessment form V3 09/05/2022

Compliance with the Complaint Handling Code				
1	Definition of a complaint	Yes	No	Comments
	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>	Y		The policy has been reviewed and updated to include this definition.
	Does the policy have exclusions where a complaint will not be considered?	Y		Exclusions include: ASB reporting though we will look at ASB complaints regarding quality or lack of service by ASB team, Complaints about Housing Allocation Decision though we will look at Housing Needs complaints regarding quality or lack of service by housing needs team, Complaints already going through a legal process, A query, A first request for service and if the complaint has already been through the process and has been provided with an in-depth response to their complaint.
	Are these exclusions reasonable and fair to residents? Evidence relied upon	Y		Yes, these are reasonable and have been signed off by the involved tenants (Strategy, Communications, Chairs Panel and TLIP – Tenant and Landlord Improvement Panel).
2	Accessibility			
	Are multiple accessibility routes available for residents to make a complaint?	Y		Via telephone, email (CCOHousing@wokingham.gov.uk), face-to-face, via an online form on the website and letter in writing. This

			can be direct to the Customer Care Officer, over the phone with a Housing Assistant or using all of these formats to another staff member who will send on to the Customer Care Officer.
	Is the complaints policy and procedure available online?	Y	Via a Housing Complaints Page for Wokingham Borough Council. However, contact can also be made via enquiry and complaints form linked to other pages online.
	Do we have a reasonable adjustments policy?	Y	The May 2022 Complaints policy includes an extract of the reasonable adjustments policy.
	Do we regularly advise residents about our complaints process?	Y	It is published on our website and our Customer Care Specialist will advise residents of the process when a complaint is logged. The New May 2022 complaints policy will also be advertised in the next Housing Matters publication, a magazine which goes to all WBC tenants and is produced by the involved tenants volunteers Communications Group.
3	Complaints team and process		
	Is there a complaint officer or equivalent in post?	Y	The Customer Care Officer
	Does the complaint officer have autonomy to resolve complaints?	Y	With full support of the management team.
	Does the complaint officer have authority to compel engagement from other departments to resolve disputes?	Y	With full support of the management team. The Customer Care Officer works heavily with all departments within housing when resolving complaints. They also work with other council departments when they believe beneficial to do so for the complainant.
	If there is a third stage to the complaints procedure where residents are involved in the decision making?	Y	The involved tenants have decided that a tenants panel should come after Stage 1 and Stage 2. This tenants panel is open to all tenants to join and allows tenants to be more involved in complaint resolution. The involved tenant groups have been heavily consulted on throughout the complaints review and have been involved in the decision making of the policy.

	Is any third stage optional for residents?	Y		The Tenants Panel is optional to residents to escalate to once they have received a response at Stage 1 and Stage 2 of the Complaint Process.
	Does the final stage response set out residents' right to refer the matter to the Housing Ombudsman Service?	Y		All stages set out resident's right to refer to the Ombudsman. All of our letter templates (acknowledgements and responses) indicate the right to refer to the Housing Ombudsman. These also include the Housing Ombudsmans contact details.
	Do we keep a record of complaint correspondence including correspondence from the resident?	Y		All correspondence is filed within password protected folders and are compliant with GDPR.
	At what stage are most complaints resolved?			Stage 1, previously Early Resolution.
4	Communication			
	Are residents kept informed and updated during the complaints process?	Y		Once the Customer Care Specialist acknowledges the complaint, it goes to the relevant Officer or Manager who talks/writes to the tenant directly. The review of the Complaints Policy will include processes that ensures the Customer Care Officer will stay in contact throughout the process.
	Are residents informed of the landlord's position and given a chance to respond and challenge any area of dispute before the final decision?	Y		Previously this did not, we felt that this would add an extra stage to the process and also make sensitive complaints more complicated to resolve. However, we have now reviewed the process and believe that providing Stage 1 the option to have a phone call directly with the Service Manager before the formal response is provided does provide a good understanding to the tenant from the start of the process on where the service stands on this and how they will work to resolve the concerns. The resident is able to respond and escalate complaints accordingly.

	Are all complaints acknowledged and logged within five days?	Y		
	Are residents advised of how to escalate at the end of each stage?	Y		In correspondence sent to tenant. This has been added to all template letters and in the appendices to the policy.
	What proportion of complaints are resolved at stage one?			26% resolved at Stage 1, the other 71% resolved through our (Previous) Early Resolution and 5% at Stage 2 (2021/22 Financial Year data). This will be shared and update as the complaint policy process changes to stage 1, stage 2 and Tenant Panel.
	What proportion of complaints are resolved at stage two?			See Above.
	What proportion of complaint responses are sent within Code timescales? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stage one Stage one (with extension) • Stage two Stage two (with extension) 			100% across all stages except for Stage 2, which are handled by our Customer Relations Team. We have reviewed the previous Stage 2 Process with the Customer Relation Team and Involved Tenants and have now implemented the Tenant Panel. This will help to streamline the service to ensure better service for our tenants and residents.
	Where timescales have been extended did we have good reason?	Y		Yes, and we are transparent with the complainant.
	Where timescales have been extended did we keep the resident informed?	Y		The Customer Care Specialist will inform a complainant if timescales have to be extended and agree delays beyond the timescales suggested in the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling code published in March 2022.
	What proportion of complaints do we resolve to residents' satisfaction			From our 2020 STAR Survey it was 50%, which was increase on our 2014 result which was 37%. We are developing a satisfaction survey regime for all areas of housing including complaints.
5	Cooperation with Housing Ombudsman Service			
	Were all requests for evidence responded to within 15 days?	Y		We have responded to requests for evidence within the allocated timescales provided by the Housing Ombudsmans Dispute Resolution Team. In cases where further time

				was needed, requests for an extension have been raised and agreed with the Dispute Resolution Team.
	Where the timescale was extended did we keep the Ombudsman informed?	Y		Yes, we have remained in contact with the Housing Ombudsman during these cases.
6	Fairness in complaint handling			
	Are residents able to complain via a representative throughout?	Y		Yes but representatives are made aware that we require written permission/consent from the resident in line with GDPR regulations. The Customer Care Officer will seek this consent and this may cause a delay in a response being provided to the representative, as suggested in the complaint policy.
	If advice was given, was this accurate and easy to understand?			Yes, as checked with the involved tenant volunteer communications group.
	How many cases did we refuse to escalate? What was the reason for the refusal?			<p>In the current financial year, there were 13 Stage 2 requests that were refused by the Customer Relations team (outside of Housing).</p> <p>This is because an independent verifier from the Customer Relations Team reviewed the cases and determined that the cases could not be escalated.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 – HN – escalated as they did not like the decision – we reviewed the cases and informed the customers – No further action as Stage 1 answered questions. • 2 – Goodwill Payment – Customers was advised it is not in Corporate Complaints remit- No investigation. • 1 – Data breach - Customers was advised it is not in Corporate Complaints remit this is ICO- No investigation. • 2 – Service request/ongoing work – Customer advised as the work was still ongoing, we could not investigate a service failure.

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 – No information from customer – Stage 2 request came from CCO via customer. Request for information sent – No reply from customer- Closed • 3 – Maintenance issues – Didn't like answers - we reviewed the cases and informed the customers – No further action as Stage 1 answered questions. <p>Moving forward, the Customer Relations team will not be reviewing cases and this will go to Tenant Panel to review instead.</p>
	Did we explain our decision to the resident?	Y	
7	Outcomes and remedies		
	Where something has gone wrong are we taking appropriate steps to put things right?	Y	<p>See above.</p> <p>WBC continuously provide monthly data on complaints to make sure that any issues are noted and remedies found in conjunction with the involved tenants.</p> <p>The Tenant Panel will be reviewing complaint data on a monthly basis via performance frameworks.</p>
8	Continuous learning and improvement		
	What improvements have we made as a result of learning from complaints?		<p>Governance – complaints reviewed by Tenant Groups monthly allows the service to identify areas with issues. Contractor meetings monthly where complaints are reviewed, discussed and plans made for improvement. Council wide complaints review – Review of 'customer journey' through the complaints process and how this can be improved for tenants and residents of the Borough.</p> <p>We are also making recommendations to teams within the Housing Service on additional information that can be provided at the beginning and after a decision is</p>

			<p>made to ensure tenants have as much information as possible.</p> <p>This will cut down on the amount of complaints regarding decision made using regulations where the tenant does not understand the thought process behind the decision.</p>
<p>How do we share these lessons with:</p> <p>a) residents?</p> <p>b) the board/governing body?</p> <p>c) In the Annual Report?</p>			<p>A) Through formal Tenant Groups.</p> <p>B) Through our Tenant and Landlord Improvement Panel, which is effectively the Housing Service board.</p> <p>C) Through our Housing Matters magazine which includes our Annual Report and is created by the Involved Tenants for the tenants.</p> <p>D) Customer Relations team liaise with Customer Care Officer on a quarterly basis to share to senior WBC staff and chief executive.</p> <p>E) The Customer Care Officer can take complaint challenges to service managers on a two weekly basis in operational meetings to track progress and resolve response issues.</p>
<p>Has the Code made a difference to how we respond to complaints?</p>			<p>Has prompted a complaints policy review, consultations have occurred with staff and tenants and a new policy is to be implemented in May 2022.</p>
<p>What changes have we made?</p>			<p>New Complaints policy consulted on and created. Unacceptable behaviour policy, Reasonable adjustments policy and tenants panel which will have the Housing Ombudsman made aware of to gain designated status.</p>