

Wokingham Borough Council Housing Ombudsman Self-assessment – Completed December 2020

For the purpose of this Self-Assessment Wokingham Borough Council includes only the Housing Service – which, as Managing Agent and complaints handler includes, Loddon Homes and Berry Brook Homes.

Compliance with the Complaint Handling Code				
1	Definition of a complaint	Yes	No	Comments
	<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>The Complaint definition that Wokingham Borough Council currently use is similar.</p> <p>We are in the process of reviewing the complaints policy and Processes. We will use recommendations from the new complaints code, in partnership with the Involved Tenant Volunteers' suggestions to include a robust and clear definition of a complaint.</p>
	Does the policy have exclusions where a complaint will not be considered?	X		<p>As a separate team handles the report of anti-social behaviour, we have added in to the policy that unless a complaint is about how anti-social was handled or due to lack of communications, this is not considered as a complaint.</p> <p>We feel this has not been made clear enough in the current policy or website guidance so the service is reviewing both.</p>
	Are these exclusions reasonable and fair to residents?			See above.

	Evidence relied upon			
2	Accessibility			
	Are multiple accessibility routes available for residents to make a complaint?	Y		Via telephone, email (dedicated Customer Care Officer email address), face-to-face, via our website and in writing.
	Is the complaints policy and procedure available online?	Y		<p>Via a central complaints page for Wokingham Borough Council, however we are working closely with the Wokingham Borough Council Customer Relations Team to improve the webpages as there are currently multiple pages, which may be confusing to tenants and Borough residents alike.</p> <p>https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/contact-us/complaints-and-compliments/</p> <p>https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/housing-and-tenants/tenant-services/housing-complaints/</p>
	Do we have a reasonable adjustments policy?		N	<p>Under the current complaint and corporate complaints policy reviews, we are looking at accessibility formats including for those who require reasonable adjustments.</p> <p>When our Customer Care Specialist receives a complaint, they will ask the Tenant if any reasonable adjustments are required when a complaint is logged.</p> <p>The service will ensure that reasonable adjustments guidance is added to the new complaints policy as part of the current review.</p>

	Do we regularly advise residents about our complaints process?	Y		It is on our website and our Customer Care Specialist will advise residents of the process when a complaint is logged. https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/housing-and-tenants/tenant-services/housing-complaints/
3	Complaints team and process			
	Is there a complaint officer or equivalent in post?	Y		The Customer Care Specialist sits within the Tenancy Involvement Specialist Team, part of Housing Services, Wokingham Borough Council.
	Does the complaint officer have autonomy to resolve complaints?	Y		With the full support of the Housing Senior Management team.
	Does the complaint officer have authority to compel engagement from other departments to resolve disputes?	Y		With the full support of the Housing Senior Management team.
	If there is a third stage to the complaints procedure, are residents involved in the decision making?		N	Not currently, but this is something that we are discussing and planning in partnership with our Involved Tenant Volunteers.
	Is any third stage optional for residents?		N	There is an early resolution stage within the Housing Services complaints process which, is pre Stage 1. Wokingham Borough Council want to provide the best possible services to Tenants through our contractors and staff, but sometimes there are times when things go wrong, The early resolution stage is the opportunity to put things right as soon as possible, therefore ensuring, with the complainants agreement, that they do not need to go any further through the complaints process.
	Does the final stage response set out residents' right to refer the matter to the Housing Ombudsman Service?	Y		All communications to Tenants at all stages of the Complaints process, set out Tenant's right to refer to the Ombudsman. The Team, in partnership with the Involved Tenant Volunteers, are reviewing all of the

				letter / email templates to ensure they comply with the new Housing Ombudsman Complaints Code.
	Do we keep a record of complaint correspondence including correspondence from the resident?	Y		<p>All correspondence to and from Tenants are filed within password-protected folders and are compliant with GDPR.</p> <p>Each complaint is given a reference number to aid communications and filing.</p> <p>The service has a central database called 'Respond', which is being reviewed to ascertain if it is still fit for purpose.</p>
	At what stage are most complaints resolved?			Stage 1.
4	Communication			
	Are residents kept informed and updated during the complaints process?	Y		<p>Once the Customer Care Specialist acknowledges the complaint, (within 5 days), it is sent to the relevant Manager to speak to the tenant directly followed by a written reply.</p> <p>The review of the Complaints Policy will include additional processes that ensure the Customer Care Specialist will call the complainant regularly to update them, but as a minimum, five days into the process (from a ten-day target response time).</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?		N	The team are concerned that this would add an extra stage to the process, thus delaying a timely outcome for the tenant and also making sensitive complaints more complicated to resolve.

				However, it is important to confirm, that if a complainant is unhappy with the final response, it will reviewed and escalate 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 all formal correspondence sent to tenants. The team feel it would be appropriate to add template letters in the appendices to the new reviewed policy.
	What proportion of complaints are resolved at stage one?			75% of the complaints are resolved at Stage 1, 24.5% are resolved through the Early Resolution
	What proportion of complaints are resolved at stage two?			.5% are resolved at Stage 2 (2019/20 Financial Year data).
	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. The team are reviewing the Stage 2 process with the Customer Relations Team and Involved Tenants to streamline the process to ensure a better service to tenants and residents.
	Where timescales have been extended did we have good reason?	Y		Yes, and the team are always transparent with the complainant and will ensure a courtesy call all email is sent.
	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, but only with prior agreement from the Senior Manager.
	What proportion of complaints do we resolve to residents' satisfaction			From the 2020 STAR Survey it was 50%, which was an increase on the 2014 result, where it was 37%. The Team 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		All except one, where the service had a Housing Ombudsman determination in 2019. The outcome of the determination included a request for an update to the complaints policy, which now includes an escalation process.
	Where the timescale was extended did we keep the Ombudsman informed?	Y		
6	Fairness in complaint handling			
	Are residents able to complain via a representative throughout?	Y		As long as there is written permission from the Tenant (via email or letter) in line with GDPR regulations.
	If advice was given, was this accurate and easy to understand?			The Team will ensure a Tenant Permission template letter is included in the new policy review to aid tenants in the future with this.
	How many cases did we refuse to escalate? What was the reason for the refusal?			In the current financial year, one complaint was refused escalation from Stage 1 to Stage 2. The reason behind this was that an independent verifier from the Customer Relations Team reviewed the full case and determined that the Stage 1 response was full and final and that there would be no further mediation or resolution if it went to Stage 2.
	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		See above in regards to the policy review.
8	Continuous learning and improvement			
	What improvements have we made as a result of learning from complaints?			Governance – complaint stats are reviewed by formal Tenant Groups monthly and this helps to identify areas with issues or reoccurring complaints, where changes to services or processes may be needed.

			<p>Contractor meetings are held monthly, where complaints are reviewed, discussed and plans made for improvements.</p> <p>Council wide complaints review – A review of the ‘customer journey’ through the complaints process and how this can be improved for tenants and residents of the Borough is in progress, outcomes of this will also be published and publicised.</p> <p>The team are also making recommendations within the Housing Service on additional information, which can be provided to Tenants at the beginning and after an application, where a decision is to be made. This is to ensure tenants have as much information as possible; this will help to cut down on the amount of complaints regarding decision outcomes. These have mainly been because a tenant may not be fully aware of the process or laws being used to make these decisions.</p>
How do we share these lessons with:	<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 the Tenant and Landlord Improvement Panel, which is effectively the Housing Service board.</p> <p>C) Through the Housing Matters magazine, which includes the Annual Report and is created by the Involved Tenants for the tenants.</p>

	Has the Code made a difference to how we respond to complaints?			This has helped to shape the current complaints policy review, which will include new actions that are included in the code. Please see above for further details.
	What changes have we made?			A new complaints policy, with subsequent processes and clearer communications, is being developed within the Housing Service and Council wide. Please see above for further information.