

Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code: Self-assessment Dec 2021

Table 1 Compliance with the Complaint Handling Code

No.	Text	Responses (yes)	Responses (no)
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>	<p>Yes. In the SBC Customer Feedback and Complaints Handling Policy a complaint is defined as ‘where the customer expresses dissatisfaction about the standard of a service, actions, or lack of actions by the Council and/or its staff.</p>	
	<p>Does the policy have exclusions where a complaint will not be considered?</p>	<p>Yes, the SBC Customer Feedback and Complaints Handling Policy sets out the following exclusions: - There are some exclusions that apply when submitting a complaint, which relate to statutory, legal limitations and include the following:</p> <p><i>- Requests for services are not classified as complaints (e.g. I want to report that a street light is not working)</i></p> <p><i>- Complaints about non-council services, organisations or individuals, such as noise disturbance complaints or food hygiene complaints. Appeals, which are dealt with as part of the standard appeals process (e.g. decisions about Policy Planning, Housing, Council Tax, Benefits etc.)</i></p> <p><i>- Issues which are, or could be, the subject of court or tribunal proceedings, or which are likely to be put in the hands of the Council’s insurers</i></p> <p><i>- Complaints concerning a disagreement about, or refusal to accept, a lawful discretion that the Council is applying</i></p>	
	<p>Are these exclusions reasonable and fair to residents?</p>	<p>It is considered that the exclusions and fair and reasonable to residents.</p>	

No.	Text	Responses (yes)	Responses (no)
	Evidence relied upon	There is no evidence that residents challenge the exclusions.	
2	Accessibility		
	Are multiple accessibility routes available for residents to make a complaint?	Yes. Online via the Council's website. Email to Customer Services. Phone to Customer Services Post to Customer Services In person – at Customer Services reception (not available during Covid pandemic)	
	Is the complaints policy and procedure available online?	Yes, available on SBC website.	
	Do we have a reasonable adjustments policy?	There is no specific policy, however we will consider all requests for reasonable adjustments: <i>If you should experience any issues when trying to make a complaint, or require any further assistance or adjustments, please contact our Customer Services team, who will be able provide you with the necessary help, advice and support you need.</i>	
	Do we regularly advise residents about our complaints process?	Yes, alongside having details on the SBC website, posters advising residents about the complaints process can be found in the Neighbourhood Warden offices, Sheltered Housing Schemes and High Rise buildings. Information is also posted on our Housing Facebook page. Additionally, complaints data is published quarterly in Tenants Focus, our monthly tenant newsletter. This informs tenants of how many complaints were received, how they were dealt with, what lessons were learned and what has been actioned.	
3	Complaints team and process		
	Is there a complaint officer or equivalent in post?	Yes.	

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		<p>SBC Customer Insight and Feedback Officer - coordinates the management of complaints across the Council.</p> <p>Housing Business Development Manager - has an overview of housing complaints.</p> <p>Housing Complaints Review group meets monthly.</p>	
	Does the complaint officer have autonomy to resolve complaints?	Each Housing Head of Service and their line managers have autonomy to resolve complaints.	
	Does the complaint officer have authority to compel engagement from other departments to resolve disputes?	Yes	
	If there is a third stage to the complaints procedure are residents involved in the decision making?	Yes, there is an optional 3 rd stage where tenants can request the Tenant Complaint Panel to review their case	
	Is any third stage optional for residents?	Yes	
	Does the final stage response set out residents' right to refer the matter to the Housing Ombudsman Service?	Yes this is included in the Stage 2 and Stage 3 letters.	
	Do we keep a record of complaint correspondence including correspondence from the resident?	Yes, this is held within the Customer Services portal (Jadu) and or within the Housing software database	
	At what stage are most complaints resolved?	<p>Stage 1.</p> <p>April- Oct 2020</p> <p>120 complaints resolved at Stage 1</p> <p>16 complaints resolved at Stage 2</p> <p>1 complaint escalated to Stage 3</p> <p>April to October 2021-</p> <p>170 complaints resolved at Stage 1</p> <p>13 complaints resolved at Stage 2</p> <p>1 complaint escalated to Stage 3</p>	
4	Communication		
	Are residents kept informed and updated during the complaints process?	Yes, as per Complaints Handling Policy. An automatic acknowledgement is sent to customers that log complaints online immediately. Any complaints received in writing are acknowledged within 3 days of being received.	

No.	Text	Responses (yes)	Responses (no)
	Are residents informed of the landlord's position and given a chance to respond and challenge any area of dispute before the final decision?	Yes, if they are not satisfied with the Stage 1 response, the tenant can escalate to Stage 2 and then Stage 3, Stage 3 is the final decision.	
	Are all complaints acknowledged and logged within five days?	Yes	
	Are residents advised of how to escalate at the end of each stage?	Yes	
	What proportion of complaints are resolved at stage one?	Between April – October 2021 92% of complaints were resolved at stage one.	
	What proportion of complaints are resolved at stage two?	Between April – October 2021 7% of complaints were resolved at stage two.	
	<p>What proportion of complaint responses are sent within Code timescales?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stage one Stage one (with extension) • Stage two Stage two (with extension) 	<p>April- October 2020 Stage 1: 82% Stage 2: 75%</p> <p>April- October 2021 Stage 1: 93.5% Stage 2: 92%</p> <p>Generally, extensions have not been offered to residents so there are no figures to record. Officers will be reminded that an offer of an extension should be considered in some instances.</p>	
	Where timescales have been extended did we have good reason?	The number of complaints which require an additional ten working days to investigate due to complexity are recorded.	
	Where timescales have been extended did we keep the resident informed?	In the procedure an email notification is sent, or we will call or write to the tenant, depending on their preference.	
	What proportion of complaints do we resolve to residents' satisfaction	We do not follow up complaints with a satisfaction survey, however very few complaints (<1%) exhaust the complaints procedure and require Ombudsman intervention, suggesting they are resolved satisfactorily.	
5	Cooperation with Housing Ombudsman Service		

No.	Text	Responses (yes)	Responses (no)
	Were all requests for evidence responded to within 15 days?	Yes One of our upheld cases from Ombudsman we were asked to pay compensation to the customer. The Ombudsman had to chase us a number of times for the evidence of the payment, however we had difficulty getting the bank details from the customer.	
	Where the timescale was extended did we keep the Ombudsman informed?	Yes	
6	Fairness in complaint handling		
	Are residents able to complain via a representative throughout?	Yes	
	If advice was given, was this accurate and easy to understand?	Yes	
	How many cases did we refuse to escalate? What was the reason for the refusal?	None N/A	
	Did we explain our decision to the resident?	N/A. If we did reject an escalation, this would be fully explained.	
7	Outcomes and remedies		
	Where something has gone wrong are we taking appropriate steps to put things right?	Yes – a Housing Complaints Review group has been established which has focussed on Stage 2 complaints. Lessons learnt have been recorded and actioned.	
8	Continuous learning and improvement		
	What improvements have we made as a result of learning from complaints?	All Stage 2 review notes are recorded and actioned and where service improvements and changes are required, these are monitored.	
	How do we share these lessons with: a) residents? b) the board/governing body? c) In the Annual Report?	Information on lessons learned are shared with tenants and Cabinet Member quarterly in the tenant newsletter. Quarterly meeting with Tenant Scrutiny Panel to review Stage 3 complaints.	

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	Has the Code made a difference to how we respond to complaints?	Yes – the new revisions mean we have to look at trends and lessons learned with more rigour and how we report to tenants and Members.	
	What changes have we made?	More information available to tenants, housing officers and Cabinet Member. Service improvements made on lessons learned.	