

Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code: Self-assessment form

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>	<p>Yes – the definition is similar and we accept complaints from a variety of methods.</p>	
	<p>Does the policy have exclusions where a complaint will not be considered?</p>	<p>Yes</p>	
	<p>Are these exclusions reasonable and fair to residents?</p> <p>Evidence relied upon</p>	<p>Yes – they are in line with guidance from the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) and Housing Ombudsman (HO) guidance.</p>	
2	Accessibility		

	Are multiple accessibility routes available for residents to make a complaint?	Yes	
	Is the complaints policy and procedure available online?	<p>Yes – this is at https://www.southwark.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/complaints-comments-and-compliments/making-a-complaint</p> <p>This page also has a link to the LGSCOO and HO so residents are aware of this prior to making a complaint.</p>	
	Do we have a reasonable adjustments policy?	<p>Complaints are handled in line with the wider Council Equality & Diversity policies – as per https://www.southwark.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/equality-and-diversity</p>	
	Do we regularly advise residents about our complaints process?	<p>As well as the website pages, complaints handling literature is available in Libraries and other face-to-face services.</p>	

		We received 8496 (not including Social Care) complaints in 2019-20 and residents seem to be aware how to raise complaints.	
3	Complaints team and process		
	Is there a complaint officer or equivalent in post?	Yes – there is a central Corporate Team (Customer Resolution Team) who handle Stage 2 complaints and services have their own officers/teams for Stage 1 cases.	
	Does the complaint officer have autonomy to resolve complaints?	Yes – remedies are usually discussed with local services.	
	Does the complaint officer have authority to compel engagement from other departments to resolve disputes?	Yes – the Customer Resolution Team can escalate to management where there is a failure to assist in resolving disputes.	
	If there is a third stage to the complaints procedure are residents involved in the decision making?	N/a – there is not a 3rd complaint stage but	

		there is a separate Arbitration process which has a resident representative on the Panel.	
	Is any third stage optional for residents?	N/a – there is not a 3rd complaint stage. Residents can escalate to the Ombudsman after the Stage 2 investigation.	
	Does the final stage response set out residents' right to refer the matter to the Housing Ombudsman Service?	Yes	
	Do we keep a record of complaint correspondence including correspondence from the resident?	Yes – this is on our iCasework system.	
	At what stage are most complaints resolved?	Stage 1 – escalation to Stage 2 is traditionally around 6-8%.	
4	Communication		
	Are residents kept informed and updated during the complaints process?	Yes – this varies from case to case but updates are offered during investigations where necessary.	
	Are residents informed of the landlord's position	Yes – there is usually	

	and given a chance to respond and challenge any area of dispute before the final decision?	communication during an investigation and between Stage 1 and 2.	
	Are all complaints acknowledged and logged within five days?	Yes – the policy is for Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaints to be acknowledged within 3 working days.	
	Are residents advised of how to escalate at the end of each stage?	Yes – the escalation rights are offered in the Stage 1 response template. The Ombudsman is signposted in the Stage 2 response.	
	What proportion of complaints are resolved at stage one?	92% in 2019/20 (8% of Stage 1 cases went to Stage 2).	
	What proportion of complaints are resolved at stage two?	There were 722 Stage 2 complaints logged in 2019/20 and 72 Ombudsman enquiries logged. This would imply that 91% of Stage 2 cases were resolved.	

	<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>Our casework system does not currently record extension times and how many cases were closed within the extension time period.</p> <p>77% were closed on time at Stage 1 during 2019/20.</p> <p>94% were closed on time at Stage 2 during 2019/20.</p> <p>The Council's Complaints Policy differs slightly from the Code in that we have a 15 working day Stage 1 period and a 25 working day Stage 2 period. Given the number of complaints we receive and that our Policy covers our non-landlord functions, we believe these timescales are reasonable.</p>	
	<p>Where timescales have been extended did we</p>	<p>Our iCasework system</p>	

	have good reason?	does not report this easily but Stage 1 time extensions are usually due to services keeping the complaint open pending completion of repairs works for instance.	
	Where timescales have been extended did we keep the resident informed?	Yes – residents are generally updated with progress. Where a resident seeks to escalate the complaint due to not being informed, the Customer Resolution Team will liaise with local services to ensure either a full Stage 1 response or an update is offered urgently.	
	What proportion of complaints do we resolve to residents' satisfaction	There were 8496 complaints in 2019/20 and 72 Ombudsman cases – this would imply that 99% of cases were resolved satisfactorily.	
5	Cooperation with Housing Ombudsman		

	Service		
	Were all requests for evidence responded to within 15 days?		No – not all but the vast majority are. Where there is a delay, this is usually due to a problem in retrieving information from the local Council service involved.
	Where the timescale was extended did we keep the Ombudsman informed?	Yes – Investigations Officers on the Customer Resolution Team are required to update the Ombudsman where timescales are not going to be met.	
6	Fairness in complaint handling		
	Are residents able to complain via a representative throughout?	Yes – if authority to discuss is provided.	
	If advice was given, was this accurate and easy to understand?	Yes – Investigations Officers have been trained in writing clearly. Where a resident seeks further explanation, we will endeavour to explain again.	
	How many cases did we refuse to escalate?	We do not presently keep a record of these cases.	

	What was the reason for the refusal?	The reasons for refusal are usually due to a resident having commenced legal action or because the complaint is out of date. We will offer the resident rights to escalate to the Ombudsman when we refuse to escalate to Stage 2.	
	Did we explain our decision to the resident?	Yes – we will always explain to a resident where we do not intend to escalate a complaint.	
7	Outcomes and remedies		
	Where something has gone wrong are we taking appropriate steps to put things right?	Yes – we take actions and award compensation amongst other forms of remedy. We endeavour to use the LGSCOO and HO guidance on remedies where fault is found.	
8	Continuous learning and improvement		
	What improvements have we made as a result of learning from complaints?	A learning log has been commenced for 2020/21	

		for learning as a result of Stage 2 or Ombudsman decision outcomes.	
	<p>How do we share these lessons with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) residents? b) the board/governing body? c) In the Annual Report? 		
	Has the Code made a difference to how we respond to complaints?		No – there is not a difference as to how we respond to complaints.
	What changes have we made?		