

Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code:

Self-assessment form

1	Definition of a complaint	Response	Evidence
	<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>No</p>	<p>Policy</p> <p>The current definition used by our policy is:</p> <p><i>“An expression of dissatisfaction by a customer about the organisation, its staff or its contractors with an action, lack of action, or about the standard of service they have received.”</i></p> <p>The updated definition is part of the updated policy which will go live in January 2021.</p>
	<p>Does the policy have exclusions where a complaint will not be considered?</p>	<p>Yes</p>	<p>Policy</p> <p>The policy contains the following:</p> <p><i>“The policy will not apply where there is an appeal or grievance, or where legal proceedings are underway. The existing and relevant procedure, contract or agreement should be followed.”</i></p> <p>With regards to unreasonable complaints the policy states:</p> <p><i>“In a minority of cases some customers may decide to pursue their complaints in a way that is</i></p>

			<p><i>unreasonable. They may behave unacceptably or be unreasonably persistent in their contacts with the organisation. This behaviour can impede an investigation and have a significant impact on resource.</i></p> <p><i>For those customers who present unreasonable behaviour, believe housing may choose to enact the Person of Interest policy in order to reduce the impact on resources a customer has on the organisation.”</i></p>
	<p>Are these exclusions reasonable and fair to residents?</p> <p>Evidence relied upon</p>	Yes	<p>The exclusions set within the policy follow the principles set out in the code to ensure that these are reasonable, and we do not unreasonably refuse to investigate a complaint.</p>
2	Accessibility		
	<p>Are multiple accessibility routes available for residents to make a complaint?</p>	Yes	<p>Policy</p> <p><i>Customers can raise a complaint by:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>via the customer app (Download from the app store or google play)</i> • <i>email to Feedback@believehousing.co.uk</i> • <i>through any member of staff either in person or by telephone on 0300 1311 999.</i> • <i>logging it on our website (here), or through our social media channels</i> • <i>writing to us at believe housing, First floor, Spectrum 4, Spectrum Business Park, Seaham, SR7 7TT</i>

	Is the complaints policy and procedure available online?	Yes	It is available on the believe housing website
	Do we have a reasonable adjustments policy?	Yes	In addition to our Equality and Diversity Framework, we have included an additional section in the revised complaints policy specifically around reasonable adjustments to support customers to access the complaints process.
	Do we regularly advise residents about our complaints process?	Yes	Newsletter (December included article on the complaints process and learning from recent complaints) Information provided on our website Any employee dealing with a customer who is unhappy about the service they have received will advise them how to make a complaint.
3	Complaints team and process		
	Is there a complaint officer or equivalent in post?	Yes	We have a team of 4 staff including a Customer Insight Team Leader and 3 Customer Insight officers
	Does the complaint officer have autonomy to resolve complaints?	Yes	Each individual customer insight officer has the autonomy to resolve complaints, working with the customer and service area to reach a resolution.
	Does the complaint officer have authority to compel engagement from other departments to resolve disputes?	Yes	As above, the customer insight officers work with services across the organisation to try and resolve complaints, taking an objective and impartial view of the complaint.
	If there is a third stage to the complaints procedure are residents involved in the decision making?	N/A	N/A
	Is any third stage optional for residents?	N/A	N/A
	Does the final stage response set out residents' right to refer the matter to the Housing Ombudsman Service?	Yes	The Stage 2 letter states: <i>"If you remain unsatisfied with our investigation into your complaint you can:</i>

		<p><i>Request for the complaint to be escalated to a 'designated person' of your choice; or wait eight weeks and then refer the complaint directly to the Housing Ombudsman at:</i></p> <p><i>Housing Ombudsman Service PO Box 152 Liverpool L33 7WQ Telephone: 0300 111 3000 Email info@housingombudsman.org.uk Or, online: www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk</i></p> <p><i>Please be aware a 'designated person' can be an MP or local councillor. The designated person can review the previous decisions made at stages 1 and 2 and act on your behalf in resolving your complaint.</i></p> <p><i>If decide to refer your complaint to a designated person, believe housing will supply details of how our decisions were made and any other relevant information. This will be supplied within 14 days of it being requested.</i></p> <p><i>You would be required to sign a disclaimer allowing believe housing to release your information to the designated person as part of the review.” In addition, the information on the Housing Ombudsman is provided on the complaints leaflet providing access at any point during our complaints process.</i></p>
--	--	---

	Do we keep a record of complaint correspondence including correspondence from the resident?	Yes	All information relating to complaints is stored on our housing management system so we have a record on contact with the customer.
	At what stage are most complaints resolved?	Stage 1	Between 1 April 2020 and 30 September 2020 69 Stage 1 complaints were responded to with 9 resulting in a Stage 2.
4	Communication		
	Are residents kept informed and updated during the complaints process?	Yes	Customers receive an acknowledgement of their complaint and then during the investigation will be contacted via email/telephone or letter depending on the customer's preference.
	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	As part of our process, the Customer Insight Officer will try to contact the customer prior to sending any response to talk through the findings. If they are unable to make contact we will issue the complaint response whilst still attempting to make contact to talk through the findings.
	Are all complaints acknowledged and logged within five days?	Yes	We acknowledge complaints within 2 working days.
	Are residents advised of how to escalate at the end of each stage?	Yes	The Stage 1 letter states: <i>"I hope that the above explanation clarifies believe housing's position. However, if you feel that parts of your complaint remain unresolved, you can request for it to be escalated by contacting us within 10 working days of this response, using the details at top of this letter. You will need to clarify which points covered in the letter you do not agree with, the</i>

			<p><i>reasons why, and the alternative outcome you are seeking.</i></p> <p>The Stage 2 response includes the information relating to the Housing Ombudsman as outlined previously.</p>
	What proportion of complaints are resolved at stage one?	86.9%	Out of 69 Stage 1 complaints, 9 resulted in a stage 2 requested and therefore were not resolved at the first stage.
	What proportion of complaints are resolved at stage two?	88.9%	Out of the 9 Stage 2 complaints received during this period, 1 complaint has been escalated to the Ombudsman.
	<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>75.4%</p> <p>23.2%</p> <p>77.8%</p> <p>22.2%</p>	<p>From 1 April 2020 to 30 September 2020, out of 69 Stage 1 complaints, 1 was completed in excess of the timescales including the extension. The average time taken to respond was 8.08 days.</p> <p>All Stage 2 responses were completed within either the first 10 days or within an extension. The average time to respond was 6.44 days. In the revised policy in place from January 2020, we will use the Ombudsman timescales for Stage 2's of 20 days.</p>
	Where timescales have been extended did we have good reason?	Yes	<p>We work to respond within the 10 working day timescale wherever possible. Overall between 1 April 2020 and 30 September 2020 we responded in 7.11 days.</p> <p>Timescales are only extended where we either need to gather additional information, require external information or if we are waiting for a response from the customer.</p>

	Where timescales have been extended did we keep the resident informed?	Yes	We provide a holding response to any customer where we have extended the complaint.
	What proportion of complaints do we resolve to residents' satisfaction	STAR survey	Through STAR survey customers were asked if they had made a complaint. Of those that said they had, the average score for satisfaction with the outcome for the complaint was 8.3 out of 10. We don't currently carry out transactional survey for each complaint closed. We are reviewing our approach to gathering satisfaction from complaints handling and will look to introduce surveys from April 2021.
5	Cooperation with Housing Ombudsman Service		
	Were all requests for evidence responded to within 15 days?	Yes	
	Where the timescale was extended did we keep the Ombudsman informed?	N/A	
6	Fairness in complaint handling		
	Are residents able to complain via a representative throughout?	Yes	We have made this more explicit in the updated policy.
	If advice was given, was this accurate and easy to understand?	Yes	Examples of letters and emails could be provided to demonstrate the advice that we have given. We will work with any representatives to make sure that information is clear.
	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	
7	Outcomes and remedies		
	Where something has gone wrong are we taking appropriate steps to put things right?	Yes	<p>Our policy sets out that our aim is to put things right at the earliest stage of a complaint.</p> <p>In the section focussed on compensation, we outline how we will determine any remedies to support this.</p> <p>The latest Board report as of 29 September 2020 stated:</p> <p>When dealing with any complaint, the aim is to try and find a resolution for the issue the customer has faced. In the majority of cases, this is not a financial remedy and could be: an apology for the poor service they received: works being carried out or different arrangements put in place. However, where we are considering awarding any compensation, this is carefully considered against our guidance, previous complaints of a similar nature and any awards issued by the Housing Ombudsman for similar cases. The compensation section of the policy has been updated in May 2020 and is now aligned to the same guidance as the Housing Ombudsman as per the new code of guidance.</p> <p>Our recent assessment against the Housemark Complaints Accreditation stated:</p> <p><i>Your values state you should 'do the right thing for our customer, business and people'. There is a clear</i></p>

			<i>link between this and your approach to disputes resolution, focusing on putting things right.</i>
8	Continuous learning and improvement		
	What improvements have we made as a result of learning from complaints?	Annual complaints report extract of learning outcomes (2019/20)	<p>Improvements as a result of learning from complaints include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There has been a focus on right first time for repairs, this was flagged in some complaints during 2018/19 and early 2019/20 where it was highlighted that an operative would attend without having the necessary parts to complete the job. We have seen performance against right first time improve during the year with repairs satisfaction also remaining high. This also would reflect in the lower numbers of repairs complaints this year. • Complaints in relation to roofing in 2018/19 led to a review in the way the service operated with members of the team involved in the review. This identified that making the DRS calendar system open and fully viewable to staff could have a positive impact on resolving issues for customers. Staff can now view future jobs which allows them to plan each visit more thoroughly, this has resulted in repairs completed within target timescale improving from a range of in time taken to complete these repairs ranging from 50-70% historically to now reaching 96%. • Where there are complaints regarding multiple service areas, meetings or calls will be setup at the earliest opportunity with everyone present so that everyone is aware of the actions that

		<p>need to be taken, these are co-ordinated in their approach and we prevent the customer getting multiple contacts from different people about the same complaint.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Working with our investment contractor, Engie, and the capital team to develop a co-ordinated approach to dealing with complaints and potential claims which involve the contractor. This will support us to provide a clearer and more effective response to the customer.• Following some complaints from customers about information they were given in relation to their rights for the right to buy and right to acquire, the scripting used by the contact centre and information referred to during sign up has been amended to make this clearer.• Following a complaint regarding the reporting of a repair which was blocking one of the property's exits and this not being regarded as an emergency, the policy and scripting for the out of hours service has been amended and these will now be attended during out of hours.• Building surveyors have been advised to use the same equipment when assessing dampness, building surveyors will also conduct a thorough inspection of the entire property as opposed to just the specific area reported to be able to identify potentially wider issues.• Following complaints regarding delays to repairs works being completed, repairs operatives have been advised to ensure that any follow up work
--	--	---

			<p>is reported and not to mark jobs as complete, to ensure that this can be monitored and addressed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where a complaint relates to an employee, detailed statements need to be taken at the earliest opportunity so that there is a full account from both a customer and employee perspective. • Following a complaint regarding Japanese knotweed and the service Durham County Council provided on behalf of believe, a new process and recording system has been set up to deal with these issues and share information between the two organisations • Repairs and Safer Neighbourhoods have a new process in place to help with issues where staff may be put into a difficult situation with a customer who has challenging behaviour.
	<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? 	<p>Board – Annual report</p>	<p>Values group received all complaints information for 2018/19 and 2019/20 as part of the Complaints Review.</p> <p>They also receive a Mid-year complaints review including learnings (December 2020).</p> <p>Our Performance and Standards Committee (made up of members of our Board) also receive the annual complaints report, alongside performance on complaints response times as part of our quarterly performance scorecard.</p> <p>Customer Newsletter in December 2020 includes a section on the complaints process and lessons learned.</p>

			Information provided on our website and will be in the Annual Report 2020/21.
	Has the Code made a difference to how we respond to complaints?	Yes	Policy
	What changes have we made?	<p>Removed the option to decline to escalate</p> <p>Information in newsletter</p> <p>Strengthened our policy relating to reasonable adjustments</p>	<p>The option for us to decline to escalate has been removed from the policy.</p> <p>We have provided information to customers through the Customer Newsletter in December and this will become a more regular feature.</p> <p>Amended our policy to make this clearer.</p>