

# housing ombudsman complaint handling code: self-assessment form

## Compliance with the Complaint Handling Code

1	Definition of a complaint	Response	Evidence	Rag
	<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>	Yes	<p><b>Policy</b></p> <p>Updated policy from January 2021</p> <p><a href="https://www.believehousing.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Complaints-Compensation-and-Compliments-policy-web.pdf">https://www.believehousing.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Complaints-Compensation-and-Compliments-policy-web.pdf</a></p>	
	<p>Does the policy have exclusions where a complaint will not be considered?</p>	Yes	<p><b>Policy</b></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 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>	

			<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>	
	Are these exclusions reasonable and fair to residents? Evidence relied upon	<b>Yes</b>	<i>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.  We have only refused one complaint this year where it related to an issue outside of our remit. This was explained to the customer and advice given on how to take it forward.</i>	
<b>2</b>	<b>Accessibility</b>	<b>Response</b>	<b>Evidence</b>	<b>Rag</b>
	Are multiple accessibility routes available for residents to make a complaint?	<b>Yes</b>	<p><b>Policy</b></p> <p>Customers can raise a complaint by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• via the customer app and portal</li> <li>• email to Feedback@believehousing.co.uk</li> <li>• through any member of staff either in person or by telephone on 0300 1311 999.</li> <li>• logging it on our website (here), or through our social media channels</li> <li>• writing to us at believe housing, First floor, Spectrum 4, Spectrum Business Park, Seaham, SR7 7TT</li> </ul> <p>The number of complaints received in the first 6 months of this year compared to last year have significantly increased which would suggest that people are readily able to make a complaint.</p> <p>In this year’s STAR survey (being conducted in November) however we have included a question on customer’s awareness of how to make a complaint so we can follow this up if any issues are identified.</p>	
	Is the complaints policy and procedure available online?	<b>Yes</b>	<p><b>Website</b></p> <p><a href="https://www.believehousing.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Complaints-Compensation-and-Compliments-Policy.pdf">https://www.believehousing.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Complaints-Compensation-and-Compliments-Policy.pdf</a></p>	

	Do we have a reasonable adjustments policy?	<b>Yes</b>	In addition to our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Framework, we have included an additional section in the revised complaints policy specifically around reasonable adjustments to support customers to access the complaints process. We are able to demonstrate where we have made reasonable adjustments to support customers to be able to make complaints, this includes, for example, providing information on coloured paper for a dyslexic customer, our policy being available to read in different languages through Reciteme on our website.	
	Do we regularly advise residents about our complaints process?	<b>Yes</b>	Information is 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. Awareness was raised with all employees through the Own it Sort it campaign of both our informal approach and the formal complaints process so that they can effectively raise awareness with customers.  We have also provided information previously through our customer newsletter.	
<b>3</b>	<b>Complaints team and process</b>	<b>Response</b>	<b>Evidence</b>	<b>Rag</b>
	Is there a complaint officer or equivalent in post?	<b>Yes</b>	We have a team of 4 staff including a Customer Insight Team Leader and 3 Customer Insight officers. Due to the increase in volume we are recruiting additional support to be able to respond to customers initial request to make a complaint more quickly and keep in touch more regularly during their investigation.	
	Does the complaint officer have autonomy to resolve complaints?	<b>Yes</b>	Each individual customer insight officer has the autonomy to resolve complaints, working with the customer and service area to reach a resolution.  We also used a review of some Stage 2 complaints to understand whether there was anything we could have done at the first stage to reach a resolution and prevent an escalation.	
	Does the complaint officer have authority to compel engagement from other departments to resolve disputes?	<b>Yes</b>	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.  We have also set up regular meetings with Directors in areas of the business where volumes are high to highlight issues and reach a resolution more quickly.	

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	<p><b>The Stage 2 letter states:</b></p> <p><i>"If you remain unsatisfied with our investigation into your complaint you can:</i></p> <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</i>  <i>PO Box 152</i>  <i>Liverpool</i>  <i>L33 7WQ</i>  <i>Telephone: 0300 111 3000</i>  <i>Email info@housingombudsman.org.uk</i>  <i>Or, online: www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk</i></p> <p><i>Please be aware a 'designated person' can be an MP or local councillor.</i></p> <p><i>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."</i></p> <p>In addition, the information on the Housing Ombudsman is provided on the complaints leaflet providing access at any point during our complaints process.</p>	
Do we keep a record of complaint correspondence including correspondence from the resident?	Yes	<p>All information relating to complaints is stored on our housing management system so we have a record on contact with the customer. As part of a complaints investigation, we use this contact information to create a timeline of events.</p> <p>In our last internal audit of complaints carried out during 2020/21, this included reviewing a sample of complaints to ensure that we had accurate records held.</p>	

	At what stage are most complaints resolved?	<b>Stage 1</b>	The majority of complaints are resolved at Stage 1. Between April and September 2021, Stage 1 complaints made up 88.9% of complaints responded to.	
<b>4</b>	<b>Communication</b>	<b>Response</b>	<b>Evidence</b>	<b>Rag</b>
	Are residents kept informed and updated during the complaints process?	<b>Yes</b>	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. We have recognised that due to the volume of complaints this year, this has created a challenge to continue to keep in touch with customers as regularly as we would like and, as a result, we have identified the need for some additional resource to help us deal with this.	
	Are residents informed of the landlord's position and given a chance to respond and challenge any area of dispute before the final decision?	<b>Yes</b>	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.  In some cases we have agreed to extend the complaint with a customer where they are disputing the findings or have identified additional areas requiring investigation.	
	Are all complaints acknowledged and logged within five days?	<b>Yes</b>	We aim to acknowledge complaints within 2 working days. Between April and September 2021 we acknowledged 88.2% of complaints within 2 working days. There were 10 complaints where we have not logged an acknowledgement within 5 days, however all 10 complaints were fully responded to within timescale.	
	Are residents advised of how to escalate at the end of each stage?	<b>Yes</b>	<b>The Stage 1 letter states:</b>  <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 reasons why, and the alternative outcome you are seeking."</i>  The Stage 2 response includes the information relating to the Housing Ombudsman as outlined previously.	

What proportion of complaints are resolved at stage one?		87% (188) of complaints were responded to at Stage 1, of these there were 26 Stage 2 requests.	
What proportion of complaints are resolved at stage two?		12.1%(26) stage 2 complaints were responded to within this period.	
<p>What proportion of complaint responses are sent within Code timescales?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stage one Stage one (with extension)</li> <li>• Stage two Stage two (with extension)</li> </ul>	<p>84.5% 14.4%</p> <p>80.8% 19.2%%</p>	<p>We have improved the proportion of complaints completed within timescales compared to last year even in light of increased numbers of complaints.</p> <p>2 complaints were completed in excess of the timescales including the extension.</p> <p>All Stage 2 responses were completed within either the first 20 days or within an extension.</p>	
Where timescales have been extended did we have good reason?	<b>Yes</b>	<p>We work to respond within the timescale wherever possible. We have seen complaints increase significantly.</p> <p>We have seen significant increases in the number of formal complaints and requests via MPs and this has impacted our ability to respond within the timescales in some cases, alongside pressures on the teams that need to provide information or organise works.</p> <p>Wherever we have extended the timescale it has been to ensure that we can provide the relevant information to the customer.</p> <p>In these cases we have apologised and kept the customer informed with a revised date of when they can expect to receive a response.</p>	
Where timescales have been extended did we keep the resident informed?	<b>Yes</b>	We provide a holding response to any customer where we have extended the complaint.	
What proportion of complaints do we resolve to residents' satisfaction	<b>STAR survey</b>	<p>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 out of 10.</p> <p>In the last year we carried out a survey of people who had escalated their complaint to understand if there was anything we could learn from this. The feedback from these surveys helped us to ensure that our officers had autonomy at the first stage of the complaints process to try and resolve this with the customer.</p> <p>We have started carrying out transactional surveys where people have made a complaint but are in the process of reviewing the questions to ensure that we gain useful feedback to help us improve.</p>	

5	Cooperation with Housing Ombudsman Service	Response	Evidence	Rag
	Were all requests for evidence responded to within 15 days?	<b>No</b>	We requested an extension on two requests for evidence during the last six months due to the volume of information that we needed to pull together for these complaints.	
	Where the timescale was extended did we keep the Ombudsman informed?	<b>Yes</b>	An extension of 3 days was requested and all information supplied within that time.	
6	Fairness in complaint handling	Response	Evidence	Rag
	Are residents able to complain via a representative throughout?	<b>Yes</b>	We made this more explicit when the policy was updated in January 2021.  In the last year we have seen an increase in the contacts we have received via MPs and local councillors on behalf of our customers. We have recorded 102 contacts via this route.	
	If advice was given, was this accurate and easy to understand?	<b>Yes</b>	Examples of letters and emails could be provided to demonstrate the advice that we have given.  The STAR survey included questions on the explanations of the complaints process (score of 7.4 out of 10).  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?	<b>None</b> <b>N/A</b>		
	Did we explain our decision to the resident?	<b>N/A</b>		

7	Outcomes and remedies	Response	Evidence	Rag
	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 opportunity. Our 'Own it sort it' approach is focussed on encouraging our employees to try and take hold of an issue as a customer raises this and resolve at the earliest opportunity without the need for this to require a formal complaint. We have issued guidance and case studies to employees to help them understand this approach and encourage people to accurately report these so we can see repeat issues and put these right. We are now regularly monitoring these alongside our formal complaints process.</p> <p>Where we are dealing with a formal complaint, in the section focussed on compensation in our policy, we outline how we will determine any remedies to support this.</p> <p>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 is aligned to the guidance of the Housing Ombudsman as per the code of guidance.</p>	
8	Continuous learning and improvement	Response	Evidence	Rag
	What improvements have we made as a result of learning from complaints?	Annual complaints report extract of learning outcomes (2020/21)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The repairs team have implemented a new procedure where follow on work would be raised before leaving the customer's property. If follow on work is required, then the repairs operative makes the appointment with the planners prior to leaving the customer's home.</li> <li>• Five of the 10 complaints relating to new build properties were about gardens waterlogging, the Development Team have implemented a new procedure which will see them work closely with the customer, contractor and the National House Building Council to resolve issues for a customer facing this problem.</li> <li>• The Neighbourhoods Team have developed a new procedure due to a series of complaints about garage refurbishment and demolition programmes. The procedure will have a greater emphasis on consultation with customers and stakeholders.</li> <li>• The Assets Team have developed a new way of working with Engie and the Customer Insight Team whereby complaints are shared across the three teams on a weekly basis.</li> </ul>	

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Repairs Team have introduced a standard letter template to help communicate with residents who could be affected by works to void properties following a series of complaints about the impact of void works for other residents.</li> <li>• Following a complaint, the Lettings Team have amended the offer letter to explain that the offer can be subject to occupational therapy approval where necessary.</li> <li>• The customer decant policy has been amended to include the requirement to carry out a lock change when the customer has temporarily vacated the home.</li> <li>• The Customer Insight Team have implemented a new own it, sort it process with the emphasis on first time resolution.</li> </ul>	
	<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>	<b>Board – Annual report</b>	<p>We produce an annual complaints report which was presented to Performance and Standards Committee and our Values group in September and October of this year.</p> <p>Members of our Values group have supported us to complete this review of our compliance with the Code of Guidance, including reviewing our learning. This feeds into a mid-year review which goes to the wider Values Group and our Board.</p> <p>Information on complaints was provided in our annual report for customers 2020/21.</p>	
	Has the Code made a difference to how we respond to complaints?	<b>No</b>	Changes made in 2020 resulting in an updated policy in January 2021. There have been no further changes required.	
	What changes have we made?			