

Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code:

Self-assessment form Exeter City Council

Compliance with the Complaint Handling Code

**1. Definition of a complaint**

Question	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><u>Response:-</u></p> <p>The complaints policy was updated in 2020 following a corporate review and this definition was adopted.</p>	Yes	
<p>Does the policy have exclusions where a complaint will not be considered?</p> <p><u>Response:-</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Service requests – e.g. reports of ASB</li> <li>• A complaint would not usually be considered 12 months after noticing the issue</li> <li>• A complaint may not be considered if it is a duplication of a previous complaint – but it could be escalated or referred to the Housing Ombudsman</li> </ul> <p>If the Council decides not to accept a complaint then a detailed explanation is provided setting out the reasons why the matter is not suitable for the complaints process.</p>	Yes	
<p>Are these exclusions reasonable and fair to residents?</p> <p>Evidence relied upon Yes, the exclusions have been reviewed by our acting tenant focus group in 2020.</p>		

**2. Accessibility**

Question	Yes	No
Are multiple accessibility routes available for residents to make a complaint?	Yes	

Question	Yes	No
<p><u>Response:-</u></p> <p>Tenants can access a complaint service via:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Phone</li> <li>• Letter</li> <li>• Email</li> <li>• Visiting the Council Office (suspended during lockdowns)</li> <li>• A home visit to capture a complaint (suspended during lockdowns)</li> <li>• Online form (the Council's website is compatible with accessibility facilities such as browse aloud)</li> <li>• Via our Facebook page</li> </ul>		
<p>Is the complaints policy and procedure available online?</p> <p><u>Response:-</u></p> <p>The policy is available online which includes procedure details about making a complaint.</p>	Yes	
<p>Do we have a reasonable adjustments policy?</p> <p><u>Response:-</u></p> <p>We do not have a standalone Reasonable Adjustment Policy but the Council's Equality Policy includes the points which would otherwise be covered in a separate policy.</p>	Yes	
<p>Do we regularly advise residents about our complaints process?</p> <p><u>Response:-</u></p> <p>The website includes information on how to raise a complaint. The latest annual report and previous newsletters all contain information about the complaints service.</p> <p><u>Action:-</u></p> <p>The next newsletter will include advice to residents on their right to access the Housing Ombudsman services, including the dispute resolution service.</p>	Yes	

### 3. Complaints team and process

Question	Yes	No
Is there a complaint officer or equivalent in post?	Yes	
Does the complaint officer have autonomy to resolve complaints?		No
<u>Response:-</u>		

Question	Yes	No
Complaints are passed to the appropriate Investigating Officer for investigation and resolution.		
Does the complaint officer have authority to compel engagement from other departments to resolve disputes?  <u>Response:-</u>  The Housing Business Support Officer has access to other departments and can escalate complaints up to the Corporate Manager who can also compel engagement.	Yes	
If there is a third stage to the complaints procedure are residents involved in the decision making?		No
Is any third stage optional for residents?  <u>Response:-</u>  We offer a 'local resolution level' which we call 'Feedback'. Customers do not have to use this service before accessing the complaints process.	NA	
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?  <u>Response:-</u>  Complaints are logged on the housing database (OpenHousing). A full record is kept of the complaint and the outcome(s) at each stage.	Yes	
At what stage are most complaints resolved?  <u>Response:-</u>  The vast majority of complaints (85%) are resolved at the Stage 1 of the process.		

#### 4. Communication

Question	Yes	No
Are residents kept informed and updated during the complaints process?  <u>Response:-</u>  The Investigating Officer (IO) can provide an update to the complainant about the investigation. In addition, the Housing Business Support Officer will provide an update if there are any delays anticipated and/or to discuss the complaint and provide any requested information.	Yes	

Question	Yes	No
<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?</p> <p><u>Response:-</u></p> <p>Residents are informed of the Council's position at Stage 1 and can challenge the outcome of their complaint before escalating to Stage 2. If an alternative outcome is agreed at Stage 1, then we write to the resident issuing an 'additional response'</p>	Yes	
<p>Are all complaints acknowledged and logged within five days?</p> <p>Are residents advised of how to escalate at the end of each stage?</p> <p><u>Response:-</u></p> <p>Yes, this information is included in standard letters at both Stage 1 and 2.</p>	Yes	
<p>What proportion of complaints are resolved at stage one? 85%</p>		
<p>What proportion of complaints are resolved at stage two? 15%</p>		
<p>What proportion of complaint responses are sent within Code (10 days) timescales?</p> <p><u>Response:-</u></p> <p>The Council operates a 15 working day response timescale for Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaints across the organisation. The Housing Ombudsman recommends that Stage 1 complaints should be responded within 10 working days and Stage 2 within 20 working days. However, the Housing Ombudsman also understands that it is not always possible to operate a two tier complaint process within an organisation. As such, the Housing Ombudsman recommended timescales will not be adopted at this time.</p> <p>The Council's current timescale (15 working days):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stage one – <b>87%</b> Stage one (with extension) - <b>100%</b></li> <li>• Stage two – <b>43%</b> Stage two (with extension) – <b>100%</b></li> </ul> <p>Figures taken from October 2020 – September 2021 – 39 Stage One complaints + 7 Stage Two complaints</p>		
<p>Where timescales have been extended did we have good reason?</p> <p><u>Response:-</u></p> <p>More investigation time was required due to staff availability issues and complex cases requiring additional investigation time, also, the</p>	Yes	

Question	Yes	No
<p>Covid-19 pandemic response workload was a major contributing factor during this time.</p> <p>The number of Responding Officers at Stage 2 has recently been increased from one person to three in order to increase staff capacity.</p>		
Where timescales have been extended did we keep the resident informed?	Yes	
<p>What proportion of complaints do we resolve to residents' satisfaction</p> <p><u>Response:-</u></p> <p>Feedback using the Housemark survey template has demonstrated an 89% satisfaction rate for complaint handling and 80% satisfaction rate for the outcome of their complaint.</p> <p><u>Action:-</u></p> <p>We will continue to promote the surveys and collect responses in different formats such as phone, mail and email</p>		

## 5. Cooperation with the Housing Ombudsman Service

Question	Yes	No
Were all requests for evidence responded to within 15 days?	Yes	
Initial requests were responded to within 15 working days.		
Where the timescale was extended did we keep the Ombudsman informed?	Yes	

## 6. Fairness in complaint handling

Question	Yes	No
Are residents able to complain via a representative throughout?	Yes	
<p><u>Response:-</u></p> <p>Protocols are in place to ensure GDPR compliance.</p>		
If advice was given, was this accurate and easy to understand?	Yes	
<p>How many cases did we refuse to escalate?</p> <p>None</p> <p>What was the reason for the refusal?</p> <p>N/A</p>		
Did we explain our decision to the resident?	N/A	

## 7. Outcomes and remedies

Question	Yes	No
<p>Where something has gone wrong are we taking appropriate steps to put things right?</p> <p><u>Response:-</u></p> <p>Complaint KPIs along with commentary are reported to the Housing Management Team on a monthly basis. This provides an opportunity to identify trends, learning opportunities and decide and implement any remedies.</p>	Yes	

## 8. Continuous learning and improvement

Question	Yes	No
<p>What improvements have we made as a result of learning from complaints?</p> <p><u>Response:-</u></p> <p>Internal processes:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contractor appointment cancellations have been addressed, we were able to ensure staff could prevent further instances of appointment handling errors through vigorous monitoring.</li> <li>• Following receipt of a damp and mould complaint, we have implemented a new damp and mould inspection service. This will speed up the treatment times and allow us to keep improved records of damp properties.</li> </ul> <p>Complaints process:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The stage in which complaints are logged is now decided within the department by the Housing Business Support Officer in order to ensure more accurate logging.</li> <li>• The claims and compensation process is currently being reviewed.</li> </ul>		
<p>How do we share these lessons with:</p> <p>a) Residents?</p> <p>The full self-assessment will be published on the website.</p> <p>b) The board/governing body?</p> <p>The full self-assessment will be reported to the Council Housing &amp; Development Advisory Board. Any</p>		

Question	Yes	No
<p>outcomes/recommendations will be reported to the Council's Executive Committee.</p> <p>c) In the Annual Report?</p> <p>Details of the self-assessment will be included in the Annual Report.</p>		
<p>Has the Code made a difference to how we respond to complaints?</p> <p><u>Response:-</u></p> <p>In 2020 we amended our Stage 1 response letter to reflect the Ombudsman's complaint response template</p>	Yes	
<p>What changes have we made?</p> <p><u>Implemented changes:-</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complaint webpages have been updated</li> <li>• Response letters have been updated to reflect the Ombudsman's new templates</li> <li>• The Housing Business Support Officer now logs all complaints for the department to ensure more accurate results</li> <li>• The number of Responding Officers at Stage 2 has increased from one to three</li> <li>• Reports of damp and mould now follow a new path of action</li> <li>• The issue of contractor appointment cancelling has been addressed</li> </ul>		