**Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code:**

**Self-assessment form**

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| **Compliance with the Complaint Handling Code** | | | |
| **1** | **Definition of a complaint** | **Yes** | **No** |
| **a** | Does the complaints process use the following definition of a complaint?  *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*. | **Yes**  Section 4.1 of the draft Complaints Policy states:  *A complaint is where a Housing Solutions resident raises an expression of dissatisfaction however made about Housing Solutions’ action or lack of action, about the standard of service provided by or on behalf of Housing Solutions affecting an individual resident or a group of residents* |  |
| **b** | Does the policy have exclusions where a complaint will not be considered? | **Yes**  Section 5.2 of the draft Complaints Policy states:  *A complaint may be refused or terminated under the following exceptional circumstances with a Senior Manager agreement:*   * *If the complaint is about the same matter that has already been considered with only very minor differences and has exhausted the complaints process, Housing Solutions will advise that the matter is closed. The resident may then have the right to seek redress from external parties (designated persons, Housing Ombudsman, relevant authorities)* * *Complaint escalation may be refused at SMT discretion, if the resolution required by the complainant is out of the remit or responsibility of Housing Solutions. This will be explained to the resident.* * *Where a complaint is persistent, vexatious or unreasonable (see paragraph 5.3)* * *Housing Solutions will not meet excessive or unreasonable demands. In such circumstances Housing Solutions might find it reasonable to terminate the complaint, giving a full explanation as to why the complaint has been terminated* |  |
| **c** | Are these exclusions reasonable and fair to residents? | **Yes**  The exclusions contained within our draft Complaints Policy, section 5.2 as detailed below, align with the Ombudsman Complaints Handling Code.   * *The issue giving rise to the complaint occurred over six months ago. Where the problem is a recurring issue, the landlord should consider any older reports as part of the background to the complaint if this will help to resolve the issue for the resident. (N.B. it may not be appropriate to rely on this exclusion where complaints concern safeguarding or health and safety issues.)* * *Legal proceedings have been started. Landlords should take steps to ensure that residents are not left without a response for lengthy periods of time, for example, where a letter before action has been received or issued but no court proceedings are started, or settlement agreement reached.* * *Matters that have already been considered under the complaints policy*. |  |
| **2** | **Accessibility** |  |  |
| **a** | Are multiple accessibility routes available for residents to make a complaint? | **Yes**  Section 6 of the draft Complaints Policy states:   * *Complaints and compliments can be made in person, by phone, by email, by webchat, by website, Social media or in writing to any member of staff within Housing Solutions. Upon receiving the complaint via your chosen method Housing solutions will log the complaint on your housing file and agree an appropriate method for response. All complaints will be dealt with in line with our complaint policy timescales.* * *Complaints should be made no later than six-months after the complainant is aware of the problem or should reasonably become aware of it. In exceptional circumstances Housing Solutions may be able to accept a complaint after the time limit has passed.* * *All complaints informal or formal will be recorded and used to help improve our services* * *There are some instances where the issue that you raise will not be dealt with via the complaints process and will be dealt with under the relevant policy or procedure please refer to (Appendix 1)* * *The complaints process may not apply when:* * *The issue giving rise to the complaint occurred over six months ago where the problem is a recurring issue. Housing Solutions will consider older reports as part of the background to the complaint if this will help resolve the issue for the resident. This may not apply where concerns relate to safeguarding and Health and safety issues* * *Legal proceedings have started* * *Matters have already been considered and have exhausted the complaints policy* * *The complainant refuses to reasonably engage with us, is abusive to staff or acts unreasonably. In this instance the complaint will be logged but may not be responded to or pursued* * *Should Housing Solutions not accept a complaint a detailed explanation will be provided to the resident setting out the reasons why the matter is not suitable for the complaints process.*   Should the resolution not satisfy the complainant, the complainant will be entitled to contact the Housing Ombudsman <https://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/> |  |
| **b** | Is the complaints policy and procedure available online? | **Yes**  <https://www.housingsolutions.co.uk/about-us/your-feedback-comments-compliments-and-complaints/>  <https://www.housingsolutions.co.uk/media/1197/complaints-policy-2016-1.pdf> |  |
| **c** | Do we have a reasonable adjustments policy? | **Yes**  Whilst we do not have a separate reasonable adjustments policy, this is included as part of our complaints policy and also is covered within our Equality and Diversity policy  <https://housingsolutions.interactgo.com/Interact/Pages/Content/Document.aspx?id=2233>  An additional section has been added to the draft Complaints Policy, at section 17.1 to ensure that this is explicitly references, the section states:  *Accessibility*  *Housing Solutions provides adjustments for disabled people under the Equality Act 2010 It is important that everyone has equal access to our information and resources and that people find it easy to communicate with us. We have an inclusive approach to engaging with people and recognise that we are all different and may have different needs. If you have a disability, health problem or mental health issue, let us know if we can help you by making reasonable  adjustments to remove or reduce barriers you might be facing* |  |
| **d** | Do we regularly advise residents about our complaints process? | **Yes**  We do this via a number of methods, including:   * Calls received into the organisation * Website feedback area and policy * Webchat * Email * Web forms * Social Media |  |
| **3** | **Complaints team and process** |  |  |
| **a** | Is there a complaint officer or equivalent in post? | **Yes**  Lianne Reid – Complaints coordinator  Deborah White Customer Service Manager |  |
| **b** | Does the complaint officer have autonomy to resolve complaints? | **Yes**  The Complaint Coordinator will work with the relevant manager for the area within which the complaint has been identified and is responsible for ensuring the complaint is logged and updated in line with the policy. On closure the Coordinator will attach the final response to the customers housing file. Following the closure letter being sent the Complaint Coordinator will complete a satisfaction survey with the complainant and advise again of the next stages in the process if the customer remains unhappy.  The Coordinator arranges the monthly operational meetings to review all complaints within each area with the relevant management team. |  |
| **c** | Does the complaint officer have authority to compel engagement from other departments to resolve disputes? | **Yes**  All complaints are completed by management within the area the complainant is unhappy with. The coordinator will weekly catch up with all managers with complaints open to review and update |  |
| **d** | If there is a third stage to the complaint’s procedure are residents involved in the decision making? | **Yes**  We have a well-established and accepted complaints process that includes a third stage, as per section 7.3 of the draft complaints policy, this stage involved a member of our customer Service Improvement Team and a member of the Board. Our Service Improvement Team are supportive of a three stage progress.  Section 7.3 of the draft Complaints Policy states:  *Stage three*  *Should the complainant not accept the Stage two resolution the complaint can be escalated to Stage three. The complainant should inform the manager of Stage two of the points that are disputed or remain unresolved including a summary of what the complainant feels is a fair and reasonable outcome to the complaint. The complaint will be reviewed by a Panel consisting of a minimum of one of the following:*   * *A Board member* * *A member of the Service Improvement Team* * *A member of the Executive Team*   *The panel will consist of three panel members in total for the Panel meeting. The meeting will be arranged with the complainant and the complaints panel. Where reasonable, the complainant may choose to be represented and/or accompanied at the meeting. The complaints panel will report on their final decision within 10 working days following the meeting.* |  |
| **e** | Is any third stage optional for residents? |  | **No**  We have a well-established and accepted three-stage complaints process, that is supported by our residents panel |
| **f** | Does the final stage response set out residents’ right to refer the matter to the Housing Ombudsman Service? | **Yes**  [N:\Organisational Share\Complaints\complaint response templates\JO Stage 3 Formal Response.docx](file:///N:\Organisational%20Share\Complaints\complaint%20response%20templates\JO%20Stage%203%20Formal%20Response.docx) |  |
| **g** | Do we keep a record of complaint correspondence including correspondence from the resident? | **Yes**  Each housing file has a communication logged stating what stage complaint the customer has logged updated with correspondence and all letters saved in the EDRM system |  |
| **h** | At what stage are most complaints resolved? | The majority of complaints are resolved at Stage 1, during 2019/20 92% of complaints were resolved at this stage.  In Q1 2020/21 – 90% of complaints were resolved at Stage 1 (3 complaints were not resolved at Stage 1) |  |
| **4** | **Communication** |  |  |
| **a** | Are residents kept informed and updated during the complaints process? | **Yes**  The draft Complaints Policy details how we will keep residents informed throughout the complaints process. |  |
| **b** | 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**  Residents are informed of the decision and a letter is then sent confirming the outcome. Residents are asked in the response letter ‘*If you have not accepted the outcome, please advise what areas of the complaint you remain either dissatisfied with or remain unresolved and what you feel is a fair and reasonable outcome.’* |  |
| **c** | Are all complaints acknowledged and logged within five days? | **Yes**  Complaints are received through the Customer Service team via email , webchat, face to face or phone. The advisor will acknowledge the complaint and advise who they will be referring the complaint to for investigation and respond. The complaint is logged on the Open Housing system and referred to the relevant supervisor or manager to respond to the resident.  Residents sending complaints via email receive an auto reply advising the that the complaint has been received and we aim to respond within 5 working days  Complaints via Social Media are responded to by PR and logged on to the system. |  |
| **d** | Are residents advised of how to escalate at the end of each stage? | **Yes**  The decision letter at the end of each stage includes details of how to escalate should the resident continue to be dissatisfied. |  |
| **e** | What proportion of complaints are resolved at stage one? | 92% of complaints in 2019/20 were resolved at stage one.  In Q1 of 2020/21, 90% of complaints have been resolved at stage one. |  |
| **f** | What proportion of complaints are resolved at stage two? | 6% of the total number of complaints in 2019/20 were resolved at stage two.  For quarter one of 2020/21, 10% of complaints have been resolved at stage two. |  |
| **g** | What proportion of complaint responses are sent within Code timescales?   * Stage one   Stage one (with extension)   * Stage two   Stage two (with extension) | 2019/20  80% of stage one complaints were responded to within the Code timescales, a further 17.5% of complaints were responded to at stage one with an agreed extension to the timescale. The remaining 2.5% of complainants at stage one did not agree to an extension of time and therefore these fell outside of the Code response timescales.  Of those complaints that went to stage two 65% were responded to within the Code timescales whilst the remaining 35% were responded to at stage two with an agreed extension to the timescale. |  |
| **h** | Where timescales have been extended did, we have good reason? | **Yes**  Should it be necessary to extend timescales, this is always done in consultation with the resident and with an explanation of the reason for a required extension. For example, this may have been necessary due to the resident agreeing to keep the complaint open until the remedial works have been completed. Most recently, in a small number of cases, Covid-19 has also affected the length of time required to resolve complaints. |  |
| **i** | Where timescales have been extended did, we keep the resident informed? | **Yes** |  |
| **j** | What proportion of complaints do we resolve to residents’ satisfaction? | Of complaints closed in 2019/20 84% were satisfied with the handling of their complaint and 63% were satisfied with the compliant outcome.  During Q1 2020/21 satisfaction with complaint handling is 87% and 75% of customers satisfied with the overall outcome. |  |
| **5** | **Cooperation with Housing Ombudsman Service** |  |  |
| **a** | Were all requests for evidence responded to within 15 days? | **Yes** |  |
| **b** | Where the timescale was extended did, we keep the Ombudsman informed? | **Yes**  We maintain regular contact with the Ombudsman to ensure information is provided within the timescales agreed. We had one occasion in 2019/20 where information was sent within the agreed timescale, however the Ombudsman had technical difficulties accessing the information via the shared folders, which had to then be re-sent. |  |
| **6** | **Fairness in complaint handling** |  |  |
| **a** | Are residents able to complain via a representative throughout? | **Yes**  Section 5.1 of the draft Complaints Policy states:  *A complaint may be made by anyone affected by the services provided by Housing Solutions. Residents have the opportunity to choose to have a representative deal with their complaint on their behalf.* |  |
| **b** | If advice was given, was this accurate and easy to understand? | **Yes** |  |
| **c** | How many cases did we refuse to escalate?  What was the reason for the refusal? | Two cases were refused escalation during 2019/20. In Q1 of 2020/21 there have been no cases where escalation has been refused.  Of the two cases refused escalation in 2019/20, one was refused as their complaint was not upheld at either Stage 1 or Stage 2. The second case was refused escalation as the subject matter of the complaint was not the responsibility of Housing Solutions. |  |
| **d** | Did we explain our decision to the resident? | Letters explaining the refusal to escalate were sent to the resident and recorded within our Document Management System |  |
| **7** | **Outcomes and remedies** |  |  |
| **a** | Where something has gone wrong are, we taking appropriate steps to put things right? | **Yes**  We measure the satisfaction with complaint outcomes and monitor escalation, this enables us to understand where perhaps things have gone wrong and take action to remedy these, including putting in place additional training where required. |  |
| **8** | **Continuous learning and improvement – outcome report** |  |  |
| **a** | What improvements have we made as a result of learning from complaints? | We constantly look for ways to improve and enhance our procedures throughout the complaints process. For example, learning form complaints during 2019/20 has resulted in:   * Further training for managers to ensure complaints are resolved within the policy timescales * Housing Ombudsman e-learning for all middle-managers to increase knowledge on responding to and handling complaints * Focussed training modules on:   + Be fair- treat people fairly   + Put things right   + Learn from outcomes * Review of complaint handling procedures has been carried out |  |
| **b** | How do we share these lessons with? | 1. residents?    * We include any changes to our procedures or policies, or lessons learnt within the complaint outcome letter to the resident concerned    * We share learning with our Service Improvement Team panel on which residents sit 2. the board/governing body?    * There is regular reporting on complaints and outcomes to Senior Management and the Executive Team together with reporting to Board through the Operations Report at each Board meeting. 3. In the Annual Report?    * The annual report includes information on our complaint outcomes and handling.    * Information on complaints is also included within the annual Tenants Report |  |
| **c** | Has the Code made a difference to how we respond to complaints? | **Yes**  Please see below, the changes made to the policy as a result of the new Code.  We will be implementing refresher training for staff on the application of the new policy. |  |
| **d** | What changes have we made? | The draft Complaints Policy has been reviewed to ensure compliance with the Code; minor amendments have been made, including:   * Minor amendment to the definition of a complaint * Explicit reference to residents having the opportunity to have a representative at all stages * Explicit reference to the logging of complaints through social media channels. * Adjustment to the section on when the complaints process may not apply, including:   + the timescale when the complaints process may not apply – amending from 3 months to 6 months from the issue giving rise to the complaint occurring   + Legal proceedings have started   + Matters have already been considered and have exhausted the complaints policy   + Explicit reference to entitlement to contact the Ombudsman should the complainant not be satisfied * The addition of an accessibility statement |  |