

Housing Ombudsman, Complaints Handling Self-Assessment – 1st April 2021 to 31st March 2022

Compliance with the Complaint Handling Code			
1	Definition of a complaint	Yes	No
a	<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</p> <p>4. Definitions</p> <p>4.1 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</p>	
b	<p>Does the policy have exclusions where a complaint will not be considered?</p>	<p>Yes</p> <p>5.2 A complaint may be refused or terminated under the following exceptional circumstances with a Senior Manager agreement:</p> <p>5.2.1 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)</p> <p>5.2.2 Complaint escalation may be refused at Senior Management Team 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.</p> <p>5.2.3 Where a complaint is persistent, vexatious, or unreasonable (see paragraph 5.3) 5.2.4 Housing Solutions will not meet excessive or unreasonable demands. In such</p>	

		<p>circumstances Housing Solutions might find it reasonable to terminate the complaint, giving a full explanation as to why the complaint has been terminated</p> <p>5.3 Persistent or vexatious complaints</p> <p>5.3.1 If a resident has made unreasonable complaints in the past, Housing Solutions will not assume that their next complaint is unreasonable. Each case will be considered on its merits. All relevant correspondence will be evaluated to consider the circumstances including:</p> <p>5.3.2 Whether a resident has made unreasonable demands</p> <p>5.3.3 Whether there is a strong likelihood that complaints are being made to Page 4 of 11 intentionally cause aggravation, divert resources, or disrupt the function of Housing Solutions operatives</p> <p>5.3.4 Whether the resident or their representative has been abusive or threatening to Housing Solutions staff or has produced excessive correspondence.</p>	
c	Are these exclusions reasonable and fair to residents?	<p>Yes</p> <p>The exclusions contained within our Complaints Policy, section 5.2 as detailed below, align with the Ombudsman Complaints Handling Code.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 	

		<p>received or issued but no court proceedings are started, or settlement agreement reached.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Matters that have already been considered under the complaints policy. 	
2	Accessibility		
a	Are multiple accessibility routes available for residents to make a complaint?	<p>Yes</p> <p>Section 6 of the Complaints Policy states:</p> <p>6. Making a complaint or compliment</p> <p>6.1 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.</p> <p>6.2 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.</p> <p>6.3 All complaints informal or formal will be recorded and used to help improve our services</p> <p>6.4 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)</p> <p>6.5 The complaints process may not apply when:</p> <p>6.5.1 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</p>	

		<p>6.5.2 Legal proceedings have started</p> <p>6.5.3 Matters have already been considered and have exhausted the complaints policy</p> <p>6.5.4 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</p> <p>6.6 Should Housing Solutions do 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.</p> <p>6.7 Should the resolution not satisfy the complainant; the complainant will be entitled to contact the Housing Ombudsman https://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/</p>	
b	Is the complaints policy and procedure available online?	<p>Yes</p> <p>https://www.housingsolutions.co.uk/about-us/your-feedback-comments-compliments-and-complaints/ <u>Housing solutions policies</u></p>	
c	Do we have a reasonable adjustments policy?	<p>Yes</p> <p>Whilst we do not have a separate reasonable adjustments policy, this is explained in section 17 of our complaint and compliment policy</p> <p>17. Accessibility</p> <p>17.1 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</p>	

		It is cover within our Equality and Diversity policy Housing solutions policies - Page 2	
d	Do we regularly advise residents about our complaints process?	Yes We do this via several methods, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Calls received into the organisation • Website feedback area and policy • Webchat • Email • Web forms • Social Media • Face to face 	
3	Complaints team and process		
a	Is there a complaint officer or equivalent in post?	Yes. The Customer Service Manager is responsible for the management and reporting of the complaints. The Customer Service Advisor assists in coordination of complaints. Managers and supervisors are responsible for the handling of complaints in their area	
b	Does the complaint officer have autonomy to resolve complaints?	Yes. The manager and supervisor responsible will resolve the complaints directly and the Customer Service Advisor will work with the relevant manager / supervisor for the area, to ensure the complaint is logged and updated in line with the policy.	
c	Does the complaint officer have authority to compel engagement from other departments to resolve disputes?	Yes. The Customer Service Manager ensures all complaints are completed by the relevant manager within the area where the service failure has occurred. The Customer Service Manager is authorised to instruct engagement and resolve complaints as quickly as possible. Regular catch ups occur with all managers to review, update and report back on complaints.	

d	If there is a third stage to the complaint's procedure are residents involved in the decision making?	<p>Yes We have a well-established complaints process that includes a third stage, as per section 7.3 Stage three</p> <p>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:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Board member • A member of the Service Improvement Team • A member of the Executive Team <p>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.</p>	
e	Is any third stage optional for residents?		No
f	Does the final stage response set out residents' right to refer the matter to the Housing Ombudsman Service?	<p>Yes <u>What you can do now</u></p> <p>You have now exhausted our internal complaints process. If you wish to pursue your complaint further, there are several options that you can take.:</p>	

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Refer your complaint to a 'Designated Person': this is a Member of Parliament, local Councillor or Designated Tenants Panel. ➤ Member of Parliament Write to the House of Commons, London, SW1 OAA or search for a Member of Parliament online at www.gov.uk ➤ A local Councillor through your Local Authority or www.gov.uk ➤ HS Service Improvement Team resident panel member Deborah.white@housingsolutions.co.uk ➤ Wait eight weeks (a statutory timescale) from the date of this letter and refer your complaint to the Housing Ombudsman Service. Website: www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/ E-mail info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk Telephone: 0300 111 3000 Housing Ombudsman Service PO Box 152 Liverpool L33 7WQ 	
g	Do we keep a record of complaint correspondence including correspondence from the resident?	<p>Yes</p> <p>Each housing file has a communication logged stating what stage complaint the resident has logged updated with correspondence and all letters saved in the document management system</p>	
h	At what stage are most complaints resolved?	<p>During 1st April 2021 to 31st March 2022</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 114 informal complaints were logged. 83% resolved at informal stage - 8 informal complaints were moved to Stage 1 due to incorrect logging or escalated to fully resolve - 151 formal Stage 1 complaints logged / handled - 14.5% (22) Escalated to Stage 2 and 5.2% (8) Escalated to Stage 3. 	

4	Communication		
a	Are residents kept informed and updated during the complaints process?	<p>Yes Under the complains policy and procedure 7. Formal Complaints stages</p> <p>When a complaint is received it will be logged in accordance with the policy. Housing Solutions operates an internal three stage process.</p> <p>7.1 Stage one: When the complaint is received it will be acknowledged and logged to the relevant manager responsible for handling the stage one complaints. The relevant manager will contact the complainant within 5 working days to acknowledge the complaint and discuss with the complainant how they will investigate the complaint. Following investigation and review the relevant manager will aim to respond to the resident within 10 working days. If the complaint is complex the relevant manager will aim to resolve within 15 working days or Page 5 of 11 under exceptional circumstances within an agreed timeframe with the resident. Following closure of the stage one complaint a formal response will be provided in writing giving the complainant 21 days to accept the complaint resolution. Should the complainant not accept the Stage one resolution the complainant should inform the manager in writing as soon as possible of the stage 1 points they have not accepted or resolved, this should include what they see as a fair and reasonable outcome to the complaint to allow the manager to confirm a further final resolution.</p> <p>7.2 Stage two Should the complainant not accept the Stage one final resolution the complaint can escalate to stage two of the complaints process within 21 days of the complaint resolution. The complainant should inform the manager of the stage one points that have not been resolved including what they see as a fair and reasonable outcome to the</p>	

		<p>complaint. The stage one response will be investigated by a Senior Manager and a response provided within 20 working days. Under exceptional circumstances the Senior Manager will agree an extended timeframe with the resident. Following closure of the stage two complaint a formal response will be provided in writing giving the complainant 21 days to accept the complaint resolution. Should the complainant not accept the Stage Two resolution the complainant should inform the manager in writing of the stage 2 points they have not accepted or resolved, this should include what they see as a fair and reasonable outcome to the complaint to allow the manager to confirm a further final resolution.</p> <p>7.3 Stage three</p> <p>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:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Board member • A member of the Service Improvement Team • A member of the Executive Team <p>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. (See Appendix 2)</p>	
b	Are residents informed of the landlord's position and given a chance to respond and	<p>Yes</p> <p>Residents are informed of the decision and a letter is then sent confirming the outcome. Residents are asked in the response letter <i>'If you have not accepted the outcome, please advise</i></p>	

	challenge any area of dispute before the final decision?	<i>what areas of the complaint you remain either dissatisfied with or remain unresolved and what you feel is a fair and reasonable outcome.'</i>	
c	Are all complaints acknowledged and logged within five days?	<p>Yes</p> <p>Complaints are received through the Customer Service team via email , webchat, face to face or phone or through the operational members of staff . The officers 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 / team leader or manager to respond to the resident.</p> <p>Residents sending complaints via email receive an auto reply advising the that the complaint has been received</p> <p>Complaints via social media are acknowledged by PR team and passed to the relevant team leader /supervisor or manager to respond in line with our policy</p>	
d	Are residents advised of how to escalate at the end of each stage?	<p>Yes</p> <p>The decision letter at the end of each stage includes details of how to escalate should the resident continue to feel dissatisfied.</p> <p>Extract from the final resolution letter <i>"If you are dissatisfied with our response, you should reply by date (21 days) explaining why you remain dissatisfied and what you are seeking as an outcome. Your complaint will then be reviewed at the next stage of the internal complaint procedure."</i></p>	
e	What proportion of complaints are resolved at stage one?	In 2021-2022 85.5 % of complaints received formally at Stage 1 were resolved .	
f	What proportion of complaints are resolved at stage two?	14.5% (22) Escalated to Stage 2 and resolved.	

g	<p>What proportion of complaint responses are sent within Code timescales?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stage one 10 working days • Stage one (with extension 15 working days) • Stage 1 over 15 working days • Stage two 20 working days • Stage two with extension • Stage 2 	<p>151 complaints logged</p> <p>81 (54%) completed within 10 working days</p> <p>22 (14.%) within 15 working days</p> <p>48 (32%) over 15 working days</p> <p>Stage 2 - 22 complaints 13 (59%) were completed within 20 working days 9 (41%) with ongoing communication, some requiring 3rd party involvement to resolve fully to resident expectations.</p>	
h	<p>Where timescales have been extended did, we have good reason?</p>	<p>Yes, in some cases</p> <p>This is largely completed in consultation with the resident and with an explanation of the reason for a required extension. E.g., this may have been necessary due to the resident wishing to keep the complaint open until the remedial works have been completed.</p> <p>In a small number of cases, Covid-19 has also affected the length of time required to resolve complaints as our priority times for non-emergency repairs were increased to 60 days. Specialist contractors to complete repairs or awaiting utility companies</p>	<p>Further consistency can be achieved to ensure wherever possible complaints are completed within timescales.</p>
i	<p>Where timescales have been extended did, we keep the resident informed?</p>	<p>Yes. Regular monitoring and lessons learned is undertaken to ensure consistency in ensuring all residents / complainants are kept informed when there is a need there is a need for an extension.</p>	

j	What proportion of complaints do we resolve to residents' satisfaction?	Of complaints closed from 1 st April 2021 – 31 st March 2022 residents who completed the complaint surveys Satisfaction with complaint handling for 2021 /22 is 60% Satisfaction with overall outcome for 2021 / 22 is 44%	
5	Cooperation with Housing Ombudsman Service		
a	Were all requests for evidence responded to within 15 days?	Yes, or within the timescale provided by the HO case handler	
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 continue to face challenges with the Housing Ombudsman ability to access shared folders from the casework email address. This has been raised informally to service manager and formally to the HO as an area of improvement when working together.	
6	Fairness in complaint handling		
a	Are residents able to complain via a representative throughout?	Yes Section 5.1 of the complaints policy 5. Who can complain? 5.1 A complaint may be made by anyone affected by the services provided by Housing Solutions. Residents can 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?	1 case was refused escalation. The complainant has taken legal action, and resolution will be determined via legal proceedings.	
d	Did we explain our decision to the resident?	Yes. The resident was sent a letter of explanation.	

7	Outcomes and remedies		
a	Where something has gone wrong are, we taking appropriate steps to put things right?	<p>Yes</p> <p>We measure the satisfaction with complaint outcomes and monitor escalation, this enables us to understand where perhaps things have gone wrong and act to remedy these, including putting in place additional training where required. We also work with resident groups to influence where we could do better.</p>	
8	Continuous learning and improvement – outcome report		
a	What improvements have we made as a result of learning from complaints?	<p>Learning form complaints during 2021 / 2022 has resulted in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customer Service Advisor acknowledges complaints within 2 days and informs residents who is managing their case. • Monthly reporting to managers to encourage open communications, advise of open complaints in departments to manage individual performance • External HQN mandatory training for front line staff to understand and ensure complaints are logged correctly • External HQN training for Middle, Senior, and Executive managers providing case studies to improve responses, timelines, investigations, and communication for residents to comply with the HO code Inclusion of disrepair claims into the quarterly complaint report • Annual Housing Ombudsman e-learning for all middle-managers to increase knowledge on responding to and handling complaints <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Be fair- treat people fairly ○ Put things right ○ Learn from outcomes 	

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Changes and improvements in service areas reported quarterly to Middle Management, Senior Management, Executive Team, and Board 	
b	Who do we share these lessons with?	<p>a) Residents</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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 Scrutiny & Improvement Team panel on which residents sit Sharing outcomes and learning with individual complainants <p>b) The Board/Governing body</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quarterly Complaint and Compliment reporting including outcomes to Middle Management, Senior Management, and the Executive Team together with reporting to Board through the Operations Report at each Board meeting. <p>c) In the Annual Report</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The annual report includes information on our complaint performance 	
c	Has the Code made a difference to how we respond to complaints?	<p>Yes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Approval of a new complaints policy took place in September 2020 and regular reporting is in place - An internal complaints audit was initiated in August 2021 to review our processes and procedures with compliance. This provided substantial assurance with processes etc - Clarity for those dealing with complaints, and improvements in handling consistency across the organisation 	

d	What changes have we made?	<p>To ensure compliance with the Code; minor amendments were made in 2020, within the policy including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 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 	
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