

Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code: Self-assessment form

Compliance with the Complaint Handling Code			
1	Definition of a complaint	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>	x	
	<p>Does the policy have exclusions where a complaint will not be considered?</p> <p>In line with the Code, these are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When the complainant is not a customer as the Housing Ombudsman does not take complaints from such people. However, we will still investigate any complaint and respond in a timely manner • When the issue raised is not a complaint as defined above (e.g. ASB issue relating to the actions of another individual, not ndh) • If the incident complained about happened 6 or more months ago • If the matter has already been considered by the complaints process • If legal proceedings are underway. 	X	
	<p>Are these exclusions reasonable and fair to residents?</p> <p>Evidence relied upon: The only areas of exclusion are as outlined by the code, and therefore considered fair by the Housing Ombudsman.</p> <p>The complaints process has been reviewed by our complaints staff, our Executive Team, our customer Scrutiny Group, and our Customer CUSTOMER BOARD PARTNERSHIP Group who have considered our Policy and whether it is fair to customers.</p>	X	
2	Accessibility		
	Are multiple accessibility routes available for residents to make a complaint?	X	

	<p>There are multiple routes we encourage customers who wish to make a complaint to use:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direct to the Customer Complaints Advisor by phone or email (Complaints@ndh-ltd.co.uk) • Direct to a member of front-line staff by phone or face-to face • Completing the complaints forms on the website • Writing in via letter or using the paper complaints forms. <p>In addition, we also take complaints that we receive via social media channels.</p> <p>Staff training has made staff aware of the definition of a complaint, and the way to identify an issue that needs escalating when it cannot be immediately resolved to the satisfaction of the Customer.</p>		
	Is the complaints policy and procedure available online?	X	
	<p>Do we have a reasonable adjustments policy?</p> <p>We are committed to ensuring we support all customers to be able to complain effectively. Our Equality and Diversity Policy outlines the reasonable adjustments that we will make.</p>		
	<p>Do we regularly advise residents about our complaints process?</p> <p>There is a complaints update at every Customer Board Partnership meeting, and the Annual Report to Tenants provides a reminder of how to raise a complaint as well as a summary of Complaints performance for the year.</p>	X	
3	Complaints team and process		
	Is there a complaint officer or equivalent in post?	X	
	Does the complaint officer have autonomy to resolve complaints?	X	
	Does the complaint officer have authority to compel engagement from other departments to resolve disputes?	X	
	If there is a third stage to the complaints procedure are residents involved in the decision making?	N/A	
	<p>Is any third stage optional for residents?</p> <p>There is no third stage.</p>	N/A	
	Does the final stage response set out residents' right to refer the matter to the Housing Ombudsman Service?	X	
	Do we keep a record of complaint correspondence including correspondence from the resident?	X	
	At what stage are most complaints resolved?		

	<p>In 2020/21, most complaints were resolved at the first stage. In the year we had 30 formal complaints at stage one; only three progressed to Stage two.</p> <p>Between April 2021 and October 2021, most were resolved at Stage 1. There were 12 complaints, of which 10 were resolved at Stage 1 and 2 at Stage 2.</p>		
4	Communication		
	Are residents kept informed and updated during the complaints process?	X	
	<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>At Acknowledgement we ensure we understand the complaint and all issues the customer has before we investigate. At the end of stage one, customers can respond, challenge and then escalate to stage 2 before a final decision is made. During the final stage, before the final decision is made, the proposed outcome is discussed with the customer to give them a chance to respond before the final decision is reached.</p>		
	<p>Are all complaints acknowledged and logged within five days?</p> <p>In 2020/21, all 30 complaints were acknowledged within 5 days.</p> <p>Between April and October 2021, all complaints were acknowledged within 5 working days.</p>	X	
	Are residents advised of how to escalate at the end of each stage?	X	
	<p>What proportion of complaints are resolved at stage one?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In 2020/21 – 27 out of 30 – 90% • April-October 2021 – 10 out of 12 – 83% 		
	<p>What proportion of complaints are resolved at stage two?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In 2019/20 – 2 out of 30 – 6.7%. One complaint was not resolved at the final Stage and proceeded to the Housing Ombudsman. • April-October 2021 – 2 out of 12 – 17% 		
	<p>What proportion of complaint responses are sent within Code timescales?</p> <p>Our target is to get the response out within the initial targets (10 working days at Stage 1; 20 working days at Stage 2). If</p>		

<p>necessary, we use the additional 10 working days allowed in the Code at each Stage – letting the customer know when the response will be received.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stage one: In 2020/21, 29 out of 30 complaints were responded to within 10 working days; one was responded to at eleven days – this was because the Customer delayed a surveyor visit needed to resolve the complaint and a new timescale for responding was agreed with the customer. Between April and October 2021, 9 out of 12 complaints were responded to within 10 working days; two were responded to at 13 days and one at 11 days following agreement with Customers (e.g. to facilitate a face to face visit). Therefore in the period, all were responded to within the full 20 working days allowed. • Stage two <u>20 days</u>: In 2020/21 all complaints were completed within the 20 working day target. Between April and October 2021, both Stage 2's were completed at 21 days, with customers made aware of the delay. Therefore in the period, all were responded to within the full 30 working days allowed. <p>In exceptional instances where there is good reason (e.g. expert advice needed; customer needs to pause the process) we will pause the process or take longer if there is mutual agreement between the Customer and ndh.</p>		
<p>Where timescales have been extended did we have good reason?</p> <p>No timescales were extended beyond the targets outlined in the Code.</p>	X	
<p>Where timescales have been extended did we keep the resident informed?</p> <p>Customers are always kept updated where responses take longer than originally envisaged.</p>	X	
<p>What proportion of complaints do we resolve to residents' satisfaction</p> <p>Historically, satisfaction data has not been not captured on complaints due to low numbers of complaints, and the time taken to elicit responses – so no historical data is available.</p> <p>A survey is now in place for customers to provide feedback on the service, using benchmarkable questions provided by Housemark. The questions cover satisfaction with outcome; satisfaction with complaint handling; and how easy NDH was to</p>		

	<p>deal with. We will review and update the survey in line with upcoming consumer regulation. In addition, we take on board any feedback that complainants provide throughout the process.</p> <p>All those who submitted a formal complaint from April 2020 onwards have received the survey. To date there are not enough responses for a robust assessment. As noted above, the fact that the majority of complaints are resolved at Stage 1 suggests that customers understand and / or are content with the outcome.</p> <p>We will review our approach to gathering feedback in Quarter 1 2022/23 to see how effective it has been.</p>		
5	Cooperation with Housing Ombudsman Service		
	<p>Were all requests for evidence responded to within 15 days?</p> <p>During 2020/21 and April to October 2021, all requests were responded to within the timescale.</p>	x	
	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?	X	
	If advice was given, was this accurate and easy to understand?	X	
	<p>How many cases did we refuse to escalate?</p> <p>All cases were escalated between stages when requested by the Customer.</p> <p>What was the reason for the refusal?</p> <p>N/A</p>	0	
	Did we explain our decision to the resident?	N/A	
7	Outcomes and remedies		
	<p>Where something has gone wrong are we taking appropriate steps to put things right?</p> <p>There is a process in place to ensure that we learn from Complaints, and can use findings from investigations to ascertain what went wrong and why to continuously improve our services. Broadly this involves:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customer Complaints Advisor / Complaints Team discussing findings of complaints investigations with process owners to ensure they understand points of failure • Teams reviewing Complaints relating to their service at Team meetings, and determining how they could address the issues 	X	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Complaints Review Group, made up of all Senior Managers, discussing and reviewing Complaints and learning. 		
8	Continuous learning and improvement		
	<p>What improvements have we made as a result of learning from complaints?</p> <p>All complaints are logged and reviewed by the Customer Complaints Advisor and then Complaints Review Group Appendix A sets out the learning from Complaints (informal and formal) between April 2020 and the time of writing.</p>		
	<p>How do we share these lessons with:</p> <p>a) residents? We review complaints at our Customer Board Partnership group and report to all residents via our annual report to tenants and Home News newsletters. These are also available to all on our website.</p> <p>Customer Board Partnership has reviewed a draft of the Self Assessment and Appendix.</p> <p>Complaints are also considered as part of any service review undertaken by Scrutiny.</p> <p>b) the board/governing body? The Chair of the Board and 2 other Board members sit on our Customer Board Partnership group and also receive a report on our Annual report to tenants and access our Home News letter as above.</p> <p>There is a dedicated annual complaints report that sets our performance, issues and learning in this area that the Board receive. The Board also sign of the Complaints self assessment annually in December, and see the Performance report produced by the Ombudsman.</p> <p>Under the two Stage process, Board members are involved in significant Stage 2 reviews alongside the Executive Team. Where there is a Housing Ombudsman referral this is reported through to the Board.</p> <p>c) In the Annual Report? Yes – the annual report shares a summary of complaints and feedback received alongside service improvements made or being considered.</p>		

	<p>Has the Code made a difference to how we respond to complaints?</p> <p>Broadly, our complaints process was similar to that outlined in the Code when it was launched. However, a few key changes were made, and we have continued to refine it.</p>		
	<p>What changes have we made?</p> <p>The key changes to our practice and procedures arising from the Code when it was published were: Implementation of a revised two stage complaints process to replace the old three stage process; Alignment of timelines to meet the expectations of Code; and, adoption of the definition of a complaint as outlined in the Code.</p> <p>In the current year, we are revising our Compensation Policy to be clearer for Customers, and to align to the guidance set out in the Housing Ombudsman’s ‘Guidance on remedies’.</p> <p>We continue to refine and improve our process when we identify areas we could optimise further. We have continued to engage with the Housing Ombudsman training (completion of online modules and training through HQN) to ensure we are interpreting the Code and learning about new expectations and good practice from elsewhere. We also use the Housing Ombudsman publications – e.g. Spotlight reports – to ensure we learn from complaints elsewhere and understand the expectations of the Ombudsman.</p>		