

Appendix A

RUNNYMEDE BOROUGH COUNCIL

Housing Services Complaints Policy

Review due: April 2025

1. Introduction

The Council strives to provide high-quality services to all our residents and customers in line with our Customer Charter. It has adopted the following definition of a complaint which has been suggested by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman:

An expression of dissatisfaction about a Council service, whether the service is provided directly by us or by one of our partners or contractors, which requires a response.

2. Policy Details

2.1 RBC's two stage complaints procedure is at <https://www.runnymede.gov.uk/comments-complaints-and-compliments>. It is also publicised in the tenants' newsletter and as part of regular correspondence with residents as appropriate, along with contact information for the relevant ombudsman.

2.2 A complaint can be about quality of service, behaviour of staff or perceived failure to adhere to policy. It is not a request for service (e.g., request for a repair), request for information, explanation of Council policy, or feedback (e.g. in a survey). The resident does not have to use the word complaint for it to be treated as such.

2.3 This policy seeks to build on the Council's corporate policy and add specific details relevant to Housing Services. Housing Services welcomes feedback from residents including compliments and complaints. Complaints are dealt with fairly and in a timely manner. Where mistakes have been made, we will take steps to put things right. Complaints about someone causing antisocial behaviour are dealt with separately.

2.4 The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman can investigate complaints about the Council's services including housing allocations and homeless applications. Our landlord function comes under the jurisdiction of the Housing Ombudsman, and the Housing Ombudsman's Complaints Handling Code sets out requirements for registered social landlords to respond to complaints effectively.

2.5 There is much commonality between the Local Government Ombudsman's guide to complaint handling and the Housing Ombudsman's Complaints Handling Code (the Code). Their respective definitions of a complaint are marginally different, but both are clear that what matters is that complaints are properly identified and investigated. We have satisfactorily completed a self-assessment of compliance with the Code and shared the outcome of this assessment with residents by putting it on the Council's website. We will promote the Code and undertake regular reviews to ensure it is being applied.

2.6 Learning from complaints informs our risk management, audit functions and contracting arrangements, aids governance and helps us make improvements to policies, processes, and training.

2.7 Some issues can be resolved through discussion with the customer and appropriate member of staff. If this does not resolve the matter, a customer can complain formally using the Council's two stage complaints procedure by completing the e-form on the website,

emailing or writing, phoning or complaining in person. Staff will assist a customer who needs help to make a formal complaint.

2.8 Staff will also clarify if it is appropriate to take a complaint from a representative, including councillors and MPs, by checking if they have the complainant's consent to act on their behalf and are satisfied, they are acting in the complainant's best interests. A complainant can approach their Ward Councillor for advice at any time. A designated person, such as a Councillor, may help resolve the complaint or refer the complaint straight to the Housing Ombudsman (complainants can refer a complaint to the LGO without a designated person). Councillors have an important dual role scrutinising the delivery of council services and also signposting and pursuing complaints on behalf of the public.

2.9 In some circumstances we may be able to resolve an issue raised via social media, but we will usually suggest this is formalised by the complainant so it can be logged and dealt with in line with this policy. We cannot investigate a complaint where data protection could be compromised as a result of responding, without the explicit consent of the person the complaint concerns.

2.10 The matter will probably not be treated as a complaint if:

- It has already been considered at Stage 2 of the complaints policy.
- The issue giving rise to the complaint occurred over six months ago (except for safeguarding or health and safety issues). However, if it is a recurring issue, we will consider any older reports as part of the background to the complaint if this will help to resolve the issue for the resident.
- Legal proceedings have been started.
- The issue has already been decided by a court or independent tribunal.
- There is a designated appeals process, specific statutory review or right of appeal (for example for homelessness, disrepair etc.) unless the complaint is specifically about officer conduct and not the statutory process.

2.11 Customers have the right to challenge our decision not to accept their complaint by going to the Ombudsman, who can instruct us to take on the complaint.

2.12 Complaints will be acknowledged within 5 days and be responded to within 10 working days if all possible. If this is not possible the complainant will be kept informed and be given a timescale for a full response.

2.13 Complaint investigations will be conducted in an impartial manner and complaints will be responded to by a senior manager.

2.14 If a complaint is not resolved to the complainant's satisfaction it will be progressed to stage two to ensure the customer can challenge the decision by correcting any errors or raising any additional concerns. At the end of a stage two, we will advise the complainant of their right to refer the complaint to the relevant Ombudsman Service.

2.15 If a customer makes a complaint in an unreasonable way, for example repeatedly or aggressively, we will write to them explaining what action we are taking to resolve the matter. This could include restricting how the complainant should contact us and who they can contact. If a complaint is considered vexatious or unreasonably persistent, we may follow the Council's [unreasonable complainant behaviour protocol](#) and explain this to the complainant in writing. In the case of council tenants behaving unreasonably we may take enforcement action in line with their tenancy agreement. Any restrictions placed on a resident's contact due to unacceptable behaviour should be appropriate to their needs and will demonstrate regard for the provisions of the Equality Act 2010.

2.16 The Council is committed to ensuring that disabled people are not disadvantaged in accessing its housing services. To this end, we will make reasonable adjustments for disabled people and those with support needs in applying this policy and our complaints procedure.

3. Communication and training

3.1 The Council will provide residents with advice about how to make a complaint and also contact information for the relevant Ombudsman as part of its regular correspondence with tenants and residents.

3.2 Staff will receive guidance on the value of learning from complaints in order to improve services and training on the complaints procedure.

4. Monitoring and performance management

4.1 We aim to review this policy in two years to ensure it reflects current legislation and best practice.

4.2 We log and monitor all formal complaints received and report on these to the Standards and Audit Committee. In addition, we report regularly to Housing Committee and the Housing Management Team reviews the volume and outcome of complaints and complaint handling performance to drive service improvements. Phone calls about complaints may be recorded for training and monitoring purposes.

5. Equalities Implications

5.1 In producing this document an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) has been carried out.

5.2 An EIA is a way of assessing the impact, or likely impact, that a particular policy, procedure or decision will have on particular groups. This is used to assess whether in making the decision whether the Council has complied with its public sector equality duty under S149 of the Equality Act 2010 (as amended) to; eliminate discrimination and any other conduct that is prohibited under this act and to advance equality between those who share a protected characteristic.

5.3 In accordance with the Equality Act we will make changes in our approach as necessary to ensure our services are accessible to disabled people as well as everybody else. The reasonable adjustments required may be physical, but we will also adjust this policy and procedure, as well as staff training, to ensure that the objectives are delivered equally well for all our customers including people with, for example, learning disabilities and those who cannot read or write or speak English.

6. Version Control

Version Number	Date Amended	Comments	Date Approved	Author	Approved By
V1	January 21	First draft completed	January 21	Angela Horsey	Housing Committee
V1.1	April 23	Review of first draft. Recommendations from Self Assessment against the Complaints Handling Code incorporated		Angela Horsey	