

Joint Complaint Handling Code

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Appendix A – Self-Assessment

This self-assessment must be completed and must be shared with the organisation’s governing body (or equivalent) annually as part of the complaints performance and service improvement report.

Evidence must be included to demonstrate compliance in practice as part of the other elements of the annual complaints performance and service improvement report with additional commentary as necessary. For example, this could include records of quality assurance checks on complaint responses, exclusions and feedback from relevant staff. If the failure to meet a requirement only relates to one service area or department this must be made clear in the commentary section.

When completing the self-assessment, organisations should not focus on the number of complaints received. Recording a high number of complaints may be an indication that the organisation welcomes complaints and that individuals are able to access the complaints process easily. Organisations should focus on timescales for responding to complaints and complaint outcomes.

Members of the Housing Ombudsman must submit a copy of their self-assessment as part of their annual complaints performance and service improvement report, following the guidance for submissions. The submissions will be used to assess the organisation’s compliance with the Code in line with the Housing Ombudsman’s duty to monitor against this.

The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman may consider the complaints performance and service improvement report as part of an investigation or its own annual review of complaints.

Self assessment

Section 1 - Definition of a complaint

Code section	Code requirement	Comply: Yes/No	Explanations and Commentary	Evidence
1.2/ 1.4	Complaints are defined in line with the Code and we recognise the difference between a service request and a complaint.	No	When the code is finalised post consultation we will update our definitions of complaints and service requests	Link to Complaints Policy definitions
1.3	Complaints submitted via a third party or representative are handled in line with our complaints policy.	Yes	We establish that the third party has the consent of the complainant to act on their behalf to comply with Data protection regulations .We will need to state this in our complaints policy	
1.5	Individuals completing surveys are made aware of how to complain.	No	This is something that will be implemented across the council	

Section 2 – Exclusions

Code section	Code requirement	Comply: Yes/No	Explanations and Commentary	Evidence
2.1	Our policy clearly states that complaints will be accepted unless there is a valid reason not to do so.	No	We will need to state this in our complaints policy	
2.2	Complaints are accepted when referred to us within 12 months of the issue occurring, or the individual becoming aware of the issue.	No	At the moment we do not give a deadline We will need to state this in our complaints policy	
2.3	We do not exclude complaints about safeguarding, or health and safety issues.	Yes	We will need to state this in our complaints policy	
2.4	Our policy sets out the circumstances in which a matter might not be considered or escalated.	Yes	If a person does not follow up on details within 4 weeks of making a complaint it is closed	
2.5	Where we decline to consider a complaint we explain our reasons to the individual and signpost them to the relevant Ombudsman.	Yes		Link to website

Section 3 - Accessibility and awareness

Code section	Code requirement	Comply: Yes/No	Explanations and Commentary	Evidence
3.1	We provide different channels through which individuals can make a complaint. We have considered our duties under the Equality Act 2010 and anticipated the needs of individuals who may need to access the complaints process.	Yes	We accept complaints via email, letter, telephone and in person We state that we will give assistance to someone needing help to make a complaint	
3.2	Individuals can raise their complaints in any way and with any member of staff. This includes complaints made directly to the organisation via social media. All staff are aware of the complaint process and able to pass details of the complaint to the appropriate person.	Yes	If a clear complaint is made directly to us we signpost them to our complaints page to follow the internal complaints procedure. We will need to state this in our complaints policy	
3.3	We do not view high volumes of complaints as a negative. We analyse areas where there are low volumes of complaints to ensure individuals are able to complain.	Yes		

Code section	Code requirement	Comply: Yes/No	Explanations and Commentary	Evidence
3.4	Our complaints policy is available in a clear and accessible format for all individuals. The policy is published on our website.	Yes		Link to website
3.5	Our complaints policy explains how we will publicise details of the complaints policy and information about the relevant Ombudsman schemes.	Yes		Link to website
3.6	We give individuals the opportunity to have a suitable representative deal with their complaint on their behalf, and to be represented or accompanied at any meeting with us.	Yes	We establish that the third party has the consent of the complainant to act on their behalf to comply with Data protection regulations .We will need to state this in our complaints policy	
3.7	We provide individuals with information on their right to access the relevant Ombudsman service and how the individual can engage with the relevant Ombudsman about their complaint.	Yes		Link to website

Section 4 - Complaint handling staff

Code section	Code requirement	Comply: Yes/No	Explanations and Commentary	Evidence
4.1	We have a person or team assigned to take responsibility for the complaint handling process, including liaison with the relevant Ombudsman and ensuring that complaints are reported to our governing body (or equivalent).	Yes	We do not have a dedicated complaints team or complaints officer. The Monitoring Officer is the 'owner' of the complaints policy and procedures	Link officer with LGO in Democratic Services
4.2	The complaints officer has access to staff at all levels to facilitate the quick resolution of complaints and report on complaint handling performance. They have the authority and autonomy to act to resolve disputes quickly and fairly.	No	We do not have a dedicated complaints team or complaints officer. The Monitoring Officer is the 'owner' of the complaints policy and procedures	
4.3	We prioritise complaint handling and a culture of learning from complaints. All staff are suitably trained in the importance of complaint handling. Complaints teams are seen as a core service and not given additional roles that impact their ability to handle complaints effectively.	No	We do not have a dedicated complaints team or complaints officer. The Monitoring Officer is the 'owner' of the complaints policy and procedures	

Section 5 - Complaint handling process

Code section	Code requirement	Comply: Yes/No	Explanations and Commentary	Evidence
5.1	We have a single policy for dealing with complaints covered by the Code.	Yes	Housing has its own complaints policy in line with the Housing Ombudsman's requirements	
5.2	We do not have extra named stages (such as 'stage 0' or 'informal complaint').	Yes	We will need to state this in our complaints policy	
5.3	We register complaints when an individual expresses dissatisfaction. We then set out our understanding of the complaint and the outcomes the individual is seeking. We seek clarification from individuals if the complaint is unclear.	Yes	We will need to state this in our complaints policy	

Code section	Code requirement	Comply: Yes/No	Explanations and Commentary	Evidence
5.4	<p>Our complaint handlers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) clarify with the individual any aspects of the complaint they are unclear about; b) deal with complaints on their merits, act independently, and have an open mind; c) give individuals a fair chance to set out their position; d) take measures to address any actual or perceived conflict of interest; and e) consider all relevant information and evidence carefully. 	Yes	This will be done by the relevant first tier manager dealing with the complaint or on their behalf if delegated to another member of staff	
5.5	We are clear with individuals about which aspects of the complaint we are not responsible for.	Yes	We will signpost complainants to the relevant body that is responsible. For example the County Council for Highways, Education and Adult Social Care. We will need to state this in our complaints policy	
5.6	Our communication with individuals does not generally identify individual members of staff or contractors.	No	If a complaint is made about a named member of staff we will have to identify them in our response	

Code section	Code requirement	Comply: Yes/No	Explanations and Commentary	Evidence
5.7	Where a response to a complaint will fall outside the timescales set out in the Code we agree with individual suitable intervals for keeping them informed about their complaint.	Yes	We will need to state this in our complaints policy	
5.8	We make reasonable adjustments for individuals where appropriate under the Equality Act 2010. We keep a record of agreed reasonable adjustments and keep these under review.	No	We will need to state this in our complaints policy and implement making a record of adjustments made	
5.9	We do not refuse to escalate complaints unless there are valid reasons for doing so.	Yes	We will need to state this in our complaints policy	
5.10	We keep a full record of the complaint, and the outcomes at each stage. This includes the original complaint and the date received, all correspondence with the individual, correspondence with other parties and any relevant supporting documentation such as reports or surveys.	Yes	This is a message that will need to be communicated to everyone that handles complaints to ensure every business centre is doing this	
5.11	We have systems in place to ensure that a complaint can be remedied at any stage of our complaints process.	Yes	We will need to state this in our complaints policy	

Code section	Code requirement	Comply: Yes/No	Explanations and Commentary	Evidence
5.12	We have a policy and procedure in place for managing unacceptable behaviour from individuals and/or their representatives. We are able to evidence reasons for putting any restrictions in place and keep these restrictions under review. Restrictions are subject to an annual review as a minimum.	Yes		Link to website
5.13	Any restrictions placed on an individual's contact due to unacceptable behaviour are proportionate and have regard to the provisions of the Equality Act 2010.	Yes	We will need to state this in our unreasonable complainant behaviour protocol	Link to website

Section 6 - Complaint stages

Code section	Code requirement	Comply: Yes/No	Explanations and Commentary	Evidence
Stage 1				
6.1	We have processes in place that allow us to identify whether complaints can be responded to quickly or whether they require further consideration.	Yes		
6.1	We take account of the complexity of the complaint and whether individuals are vulnerable or at risk when deciding how quickly we should respond to a complaint.	Yes	We will need to state this in our complaints policy	
6.2	Complaints are acknowledged and logged within five working days of receipt.	Yes	Our current policy states 3 working days This will need to be implemented when the code is published	
6.3	We issue a final response to stage 1 complaints <u>within 10 working days</u> of the complaint being received.	Yes	Our current policy states this	

Code section	Code requirement	Comply: Yes/No	Explanations and Commentary	Evidence
6.4	Any extension to this timescale is taken in line with the “comply or explain” principles set out in the Code and clearly communicated to the complainant. Extensions to timescales for responding do not exceed 10 days.	No	This will need to be implemented when the code is published	
6.5	When we inform an individual about an extension to these timescales we provide them with the contact details of the relevant Ombudsman.	No	This will need to be implemented when the code is published	
6.6	A complaint response is sent to individuals when the answer to the complaint is known, not when the outstanding actions required to address the issue are completed. Outstanding actions are tracked and actioned promptly with appropriate updates provided to the individual.	Yes	We will need to state this in our complaints policy	

Code section	Code requirement	Comply: Yes/No	Explanations and Commentary	Evidence
6.7	We address all points raised in the complaint definition and provide clear reasons for any decisions, referencing the relevant policy, law and good practice where appropriate.	Yes	This is a message that will need to be communicated to everyone that handles complaints to ensure every business centre is doing this	
6.8	Where we have got something wrong we record the complaint as “upheld” even if there are elements of the complaint which are not “upheld”. We do not record complaints as being “partially upheld”.	No	This will need to be implemented when the code is published This is a message that will need to be communicated to everyone that handles complaints to ensure every business centre is doing this	
6.9	We deal with additional complaints raised during the investigation or after a stage 1 response has been issued in line with the requirements of the Code.	Yes	This is a message that will need to be communicated to everyone that handles complaints to ensure every business centre is doing this	

Code section	Code requirement	Comply: Yes/No	Explanations and Commentary	Evidence
6.10	<p>We confirm the following in writing to individuals at the completion of stage 1 in clear, plain language:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. the complaint stage; b. the complaint definition c. the decision on the complaint; d. the reasons for any decisions made; e. the details of any remedy offered to put things right; f. details of any outstanding actions; and g. details of how to escalate the matter to stage 2 if the individual is not satisfied with the response. 	Yes	This is a message that will need to be communicated to everyone that handles complaints to ensure every business centre is doing this	
6.11	We have systems in place to ensure that a complaint can be remedied at any stage of our complaints process.	Yes	This is a duplication of 5.11	

Stage 2 Review				
6.12	We progress complaints to stage 2 where all or part of the complaint has not been resolved to the individual's satisfaction. This is sent by a staff-member authorised to speak on behalf of the organisation.	Yes	This is a message that will need to be communicated to everyone that handles complaints to ensure every business centre is doing this	
6.13	Requests for stage 2 are acknowledged and logged at stage 2 of the complaints procedure within five working days of receipt.	Yes	Our current policy is 3 working days This will need to be implemented when the code is published	
6.14	Individuals do not have to explain their reasons for wanting a stage 2, simply that they remain unhappy.	Yes	We encourage people to articulate why they remain unhappy	
6.15	Stage 2 consideration is a review of the adequacy of the stage 1 response as well as any new and relevant information not previously considered. Stage 2 is not a more thorough, detailed investigation of the complaint.	Yes	This is a message that will need to be communicated to everyone that handles complaints to ensure every business centre is doing this	

6.16	If any aspect of the complaint is unclear, we ask the individual for clarification. On receipt of the escalation request, we set out our understanding of any outstanding issues and the outcomes the individual is seeking.	Yes	This is a message that will need to be communicated to everyone that handles complaints to ensure every business centre is doing this	
6.17	The person considering the complaint at stage 2 is never the same person that considered the complaint at stage 1.	Yes	This is a message that will need to be communicated to everyone that handles complaints to ensure every business centre is doing this	Link to website
6.18	We respond to the stage 2 reviews <u>within 20 working days</u> of the complaint being escalated by the individual.	Yes	Our current policy is 10 working days This will need to be implemented when the code is published	
6.19	Extensions to the stage 2 timescale are taken in line with the “comply or explain” principles set out in the Code and clearly communicated to the complainant.	Yes	This is a message that will need to be communicated to everyone that handles complaints to ensure every business centre is doing this	
6.19	Extensions to the timescale for a response do not exceed 20 working days.	Yes	Generally yes, but sometimes it is longer This is a message that will need to be communicated to everyone that handles complaints to ensure every business centre is doing this	

6.20	When we inform an individual about an extension to stage 2 timescales they are provided with the contact details of the relevant Ombudsman.	No	This will need to be implemented when the code is published	
6.21	<p>We confirm the following in writing to the individual at the completion of stage 2 in clear, plain language:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. the complaint stage; b. the complaint definition; c. the decision on the complaint; d. the reasons for any decisions made; e. the details of any remedy offered to put things right; f. details of any outstanding actions; and g. details of how to escalate the matter to the relevant Ombudsman Service if the individual remains dissatisfied. 	Yes	This is a message that will need to be communicated to everyone that handles complaints to ensure every business centre is doing this	

6.22	If a complaint is upheld at stage 1, and the stage 2 response agrees with those findings, we record the complaint as upheld. This is the case even if the stage 2 response finds no fault in the way the stage 1 complaint was handled.	Yes	This is a message that will need to be communicated to everyone that handles complaints to ensure every business centre is doing this	
Further stages				
6.24	Our complaint process has no more than two stages.	Yes		Link to website
6.25	Complaints handled by third parties on our behalf (e.g contractors) follow the two stage process set out in the code. Individuals are not expected to go through two complaints processes.	Yes	This is a message that will need to be communicated to everyone that handles complaints to ensure every business centre is doing this	
6.26	We ensure that any third parties handle complaints in line with the Code	Yes	This is a message that will need to be communicated to everyone that handles complaints to ensure every business centre is doing this	

Section 7 - Putting things right

Code section	Code requirement	Comply: Yes/No	Explanations and Commentary	Evidence
7.1	Where something has gone wrong we acknowledge this and set out the actions we have already taken, or intend to take, to put things right.	Yes	This is a message that will need to be communicated to everyone that handles complaints to ensure every business centre is doing this	
7.2	Remedies offered reflect the impact on the individual as a result of any fault identified.	Yes	This is a message that will need to be communicated to everyone that handles complaints to ensure every business centre is doing this	
7.3	Remedies offered clearly set out what will happen and by when, in agreement with the individual where appropriate. Any remedy proposed is followed through to completion.	Yes	This is a message that will need to be communicated to everyone that handles complaints to ensure every business centre is doing this	
7.4	Remedies take account of the guidance on remedies issued by the relevant Ombudsman when deciding on appropriate remedies.	Yes	This is a message that will need to be communicated to everyone that handles complaints to ensure every business centre is doing this	

Code section	Code requirement	Comply: Yes/No	Explanations and Commentary	Evidence
8.1	<p>We produce an annual complaints performance and service improvement report for scrutiny and challenge, which include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) the annual self-assessment against this Code to ensure their complaint handling policy remains in line with its requirements. b) a qualitative and quantitative analysis of the organisation's complaint handling performance. This must also include a summary of the types of complaints the organisation has refused to accept; c) any findings of non-compliance with this Code; d) the service improvements made as a result of the learning from complaints; e) any annual report about the organisation's performance 		<p>This will need to be implemented when the code is published</p> <p>We produce quarterly reports on complaints to the Standards and Audit Committee</p> <p>We produce an annual report on the Ombudsman's dealing with complaints</p>	

Code section	Code requirement	Comply: Yes/No	Explanations and Commentary	Evidence
	<p>from the relevant Ombudsman; and</p> <p>f) any other relevant reports or publications produced by the relevant Ombudsman in relation to the work of the organisation.</p>			
8.2	<p>Our annual complaints performance and service improvement report is reported to our governing body (or equivalent) and published to residents.</p> <p>The governing body's response to the report is published alongside this</p>		<p>This will need to be implemented when the code is published</p>	

Section 8 - Self-assessment, reporting and compliance

Section 9 – Scrutiny & oversight: Continuous learning and improvement

Code section	Code requirement	Comply: Yes/No	Explanations and Commentary	Evidence
9.1	We look beyond the circumstances of the individual complaint and consider whether any service improvements should be made as a result of any learning.	Yes	This is a message that will need to be communicated to everyone that handles complaints to ensure every business centre is doing this	
9.2	We use complaints as a source of intelligence to identify issues and introduce positive changes in service delivery.	Yes	This is a message that will need to be communicated to everyone that handles complaints to ensure every business centre is doing this	
9.3	We report back on wider learning and improvements from complaints in an annual report and more frequently to other stakeholders, such as individuals, staff and relevant committees or panels.	Yes	This is a message that will need to be communicated to everyone that handles complaints to ensure every business centre is doing this	
9.4	A suitably senior executive oversees our complaint handling performance. They assess any themes or trends to identify potential systemic issues, serious risks or policies and procedures that require revision.	Yes	This will need to be implemented when the code is published Identify the Officer – still the Monitoring Officer?	

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Code section	Code requirement	Comply: Yes/No	Explanations and Commentary	Evidence
9.5	A member of the governing body (or equivalent) has been appointed to have lead responsibility for complaints to support a positive complaint handling culture.		This will need to be implemented when the code is published Identify the Officer – still the Monitoring Officer?	
9.6	The appointed person ensures the governing body (or equivalent) receives regular information on complaints that provides insight on the organisation’s complaint handling performance. This person has access to suitable information and staff to perform this role and report on their findings.		This will need to be implemented when the code is published Identify the Officer – still the Monitoring Officer?	
9.7	Our governing body (or equivalent) receives the information required under this section of the Code.		This will need to be implemented when the code is published	

Code section	Code requirement	Comply: Yes/No	Explanations and Commentary	Evidence
9.8	<p>We have a standard objective in relation to complaint handling for all employees that reflects the need to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • have a collaborative and co-operative approach towards resolving complaints, working with colleagues across teams and departments; • take collective responsibility for any shortfalls identified through complaints rather than blaming others; and • act within the professional standards for engaging with complaints as set by any relevant professional body. 	Yes	This is a message that will need to be communicated to everyone that handles complaints to ensure every business centre is doing this	