

Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code: Self-assessment form

Compliance with the Complaint Handling Code				
1	Definition of a complaint	Yes	No	Further Action/Explanation
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>			
b	<p>Does the policy have exclusions where a complaint will not be considered?</p>			
c	<p>Are these exclusions reasonable and fair to residents?</p> <p>Evidence relied upon</p>			<p>We believe that they are.</p> <p>Our current policy states that</p> <p><i>All complaints will be considered carefully. If, however, the subject has already been exhausted or the complaint is deemed unreasonable, the matter will be discussed with the appropriate line manager and Director and dealt with outside the normal complaints procedure.</i></p>

			During the last twelve months we have only applied this once. The complainant in question had already received a decision from the Ombudsman relating to their complaint but persisted in asking Southway to reverse the decision that had been made. We offered support to the tenant and continued to engage with her on other matters, while making clear that we would not review the complaint.
2	Accessibility		
a	Are multiple accessibility routes available for residents to make a complaint?		
b	Is the complaints policy and procedure available online?		
c	Do we have a reasonable adjustments policy?		We have a Single Equality Scheme which sets out our approach to reasonable adjustments. This is also set out within the Complaints Policy
d	Do we regularly advise residents about our complaints process?		We include complaints performance in the annual report. We have advised residents about the process in the past, but we could probably be more systematic about this. We will highlight the changes to Policy as set out in the code in the

				December edition of our tenant newsletter and will then do this on an annual basis
3	Complaints team and process			
a	Is there a complaint officer or equivalent in post?			<p>We have a complaints team within our customer hub. We are creating a new position of complaints super user who will have a specific remit to deal with complaints.</p> <p>The Company Secretary is also responsible for liaising with the Ombudsman during their investigations into complaints that have gone beyond</p>
b	Does the complaint officer have autonomy to resolve complaints?			
c	Does the complaint officer have authority to compel engagement from other departments to resolve disputes?			
d	If there is a third stage to the complaints procedure are residents involved in the decision making?	N/A		
e	Is any third stage optional for residents?			
f	Does the final stage response set out residents' right to refer the matter to the Housing Ombudsman Service?			
g	Do we keep a record of complaint correspondence including correspondence from the resident?			
h	At what stage are most complaints resolved?			Southway did previously have an informal complaints stage. This has now been removed from the Policy. Therefore most complaints are resolved at stage one

4	Communication			
a	Are residents kept informed and updated during the complaints process?			This is something that has improved through the work of the Complaints Team in the Hub
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?			Officially no, but we do encourage staff to ask what outcome tenants want to see if we can reach a compromise and a better resolution for the customer.
c	Are all complaints acknowledged and logged within five days?			
d	Are residents advised of how to escalate at the end of each stage?			
e	What proportion of complaints are resolved at stage one?			2019/20-82% 2020/21 (Q1 and Q2)-86%
f	What proportion of complaints are resolved at stage two?			2019/20-18% 2020/21 (Q1 and Q2)-14%
g	What proportion of complaint responses are sent within Code timescales?			Stage one 19/20 – 59 20/21 - 41 Stage one (with extension) 19/20 – 26 20/21 – 20 Stage two 19/20 – 13 20/21 - 6 Stage two (with extension) 19/20 – 6 20/21 - 4

h	Where timescales have been extended did we have good reason?			There were a number of extensions during Q1/Q2 2020/21 due to Covid-19 restrictions. However this is an area where could improve, as there have been occasions when complaint deadlines were extended due to lack of planning and prioritisation. This will be addressed during Quarter 3 and 4, with a particular focus on communicating with the complainant and ensuring timescale extensions are reasonable.
i	Where timescales have been extended did we keep the resident informed?			We did, but there could be improvements in letting the customer know at an earlier stage that the deadline is likely to be exceeded.
j	What proportion of complaints do we resolve to residents' satisfaction?			We currently have a satisfaction score of 4.4/5 for our complaints service
5	Cooperation with Housing Ombudsman Service			
a	Were all requests for evidence responded to within 15 days?			There was one occasion when the deadline was missed. This was as a result of a staff error and the Ombudsman was not informed. It was a one-off incident that we do not expect to happen again.
b	Where the timescale was extended did we keep the Ombudsman informed?			See above

6	Fairness in complaint handling		
a	Are residents able to complain via a representative throughout?		
b	If advice was given, was this accurate and easy to understand?		
c	How many cases did we refuse to escalate? What was the reason for the refusal?		We have not refused to escalate any cases
d	Did we explain our decision to the resident?		
7	Outcomes and remedies		
a	Where something has gone wrong are we taking appropriate steps to put things right?		Yes, but needs to be more systematic. We have introduced a complaints complete stage so that complaints that promise further action are properly monitored.
8	Continuous learning and improvement		
a	What improvements have we made as a result of learning from complaints?		Strengthened complaints team, assigning members as a single point of contact and given them more authority to deal with complaints across the organisation Commissioned specialist complaints training with a focus on improving culture Formed a Complaints Working Group.

			<p>Carried out a lean review of the complaints process and are in the process of implementing recommendations.</p> <p>Introduced a complaint complete stage, so that a repair cannot be closed simply with a response from the investigating officer. Instead any promised follow up work/actions must be undertaken</p>
<p>b</p>	<p>How do we share these lessons with:</p> <p>a) residents?</p> <p>b) the board/governing body?</p> <p>c) In the Annual Report?</p>		<p>Article to go in December edition of Tenant Newsletter</p> <p>Our People and Places Committee have delegated authority from the Board to deal with Complaints policy and procedure. They received their annual Customer Care report in July 2020, as well as a report explaining the changes in policy and the new Code of Practice in November</p> <p>Customer Care report is made available on Southway website</p>

c	Has the Code made a difference to how we respond to complaints?			
d	What changes have we made?			Changed policy so that it fully aligns with Code of Practice.