

Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code: Self-assessment form

Compliance with the Complaint Handling Code			
1	Definition of a complaint	Yes	No
1a	<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>Separate Housing Services Complaints & Enquiries Standard details this definition under Section 4.</p> <p>4.1 A complaint is any expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions, or lack of action, by the Housing Service, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf (such as a partner or contractor), affecting and individual resident or group of residents and that requires a response.</p> <p>4.2 A complaint could be in relation to any of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There has been a significant delay in providing a service. • We have made a mistake in the way we provided a service. • We have failed to deliver a service: this could relate to the quality, standard or service level. • We have not listened properly. • Our processes or policies have not been followed. 	Corporate Policy does not.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our legal or regulatory obligations have not been met. • We have not delivered against a commitment or promise. • Our staff have been rude, inappropriate, or unprofessional. 	
1b	Does the policy have exclusions where a complaint will not be considered?	<p>Housing Services Complaints and Enquiries Standard - Details the exclusions where a complaint will not be considered. These are under Section 6:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where the matter is survey feedback, a request for service, work to be done or information - these requests alert us to work to be done and only become a complaint if we do not deal with them appropriately and within the agreed timescale. • Where the matter is a request for service, work to be done or information - these requests alert us to work to be done and only become a complaint if we do not deal with them appropriately and within the agreed timescale • Appeals processes against a decision made - for some services there are alternative statutory appeals, tribunal processes or other policies in place which must be used rather than this Standard or the Corporate Complaints Policy. Examples include but are not limited to Decisions under Part 6 & 7 of the Homelessness Act, Landlord's decisions to end and Introductory Tenancy. • Where dissatisfaction with a decision or judgment is expressed in the absence of any 	Corporate policy does not

		<p>fault or failure on the part of the Housing Service, such as those listed in section 4.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complaints about Councillors and Members of Parliament (MP's) • Complaints made more than one year after the resident or service user became aware of the issue (unless there are exceptional circumstances), due to the passage of time • Staff personnel issues, such as disciplinary, grievance, recruitment, and selection • Allegations of fraud, theft, or corruption by a member of staff. <p>It is likely that complaints not considered complaints within the Housing Services Enquiries & Complaints Standard will be caught in other local and corporate policies.</p>	
<p>1c</p>	<p>Are these exclusions reasonable and fair to residents?</p> <p>Evidence relied upon</p>	<p>Housing Services Complaints & Enquiries Standard working group has considered in drafting the standard what exclusions are reasonable and fair. The exclusions have been considered as a group and benchmarked against other current policies within the sector. The standard will also be approved by the Corporate Management Team (CMT) and will be subject to an Equalities Impact Assessment</p> <p>Housing Services has recently gone through a major re-structure and are currently revising all relevant housing and property services specific policies. Some policies will, by their nature, have their own review and appeal processes built in to ensure there is a fair, transparent, and legislatively compliant process in place. For example, the Allocations and Introductory Tenancy Management Policy contains</p>	<p>Corporate Policy - As no to Q1b then n/a</p>

		<p>within them appeals process to ensure that any decision has a right of review or appeal to the relevant decisions, therefore ensuring that the tenant enjoys a built in and fair process while ensuring complaints are held separate to these contractual obligations.</p> <p>These legislative factors have informed the exclusions written into the Housing Standards to ensure that there is always opportunity for residents and service users voices to be heard and some avenue of investigation and redress to any decision or action made by the Housing Service</p>	
2	Accessibility		
2a	<p>Are multiple accessibility routes available for residents to make a complaint?</p>	<p>Yes, residents and service users can use:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Web Form – RBC website: https://www.redditchbc.gov.uk/council/corporate/we-want-your-feedback/compliments-and-complaints.aspx • Telephone • Email direct to the Senior Reviewing Officer (Complaints Handler) for Housing Services • Written communication • Face to Face (when services re-open to the public) • Via an advocate, re • • • • • • • • • 	

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2b	Is the complaints policy and procedure available online?	The Corporate Policy is available online and once the Housing Services Complaints & Enquiries Standard is ratified at corporate management and member level it will be available online for tenants, residents and users of homelessness and housing solutions services	
2c	Do we have a reasonable adjustments policy?	<p>Corporately, there is a Corporate Equality Strategy which involves the use of an Equality Impact Assessment.</p> <p>There is a corporate action plan to fulfil moral, social and legal obligations. This covers all the inequalities and is aimed at those that live, work and visit the district. This includes the delivery of all services, including housing.</p>	
2d	Do we regularly advise residents about our complaints process?	<p>Corporately, this is detailed on the web page.</p> <p>The Housing Services Complaints and Enquiries Standard is now (as of 28th July 2021) ratified by the Corporate Management Team and has Housing Portfolio Holder support. Therefore, we will publish the standard once all relevant briefings have been undertaken.</p>	

		Housing Services is also working with the policy and engagement team to recruit to a resident's complaints, enquiries and feedback panel and actively encourage feedback and engagement of all kinds from all sections of the local community, including local partners in the process of learning and continuous improvement.	
3	Complaints team and process		
3a	Is there a complaint officer or equivalent in post?	<p>For Housing Services there is a Tier 6 Senior Reviewing Officer, who is responsible for independently logging, co-ordinating and handling all complaints and enquiries, including monitoring and review directly with the Departmental Manager.</p> <p>The standard gives the relevant senior (Tier 6) officer (if available in the structure) or tier 5 service manager to respond and informally resolve the complaint or enquiry at first point of contact and with a backstop of 5 working days.</p> <p>If first point of contact resolution becomes frustrated and the tenant, resident, member or service user wishes to escalate their complaint or enquiry, then the Senior Reviewing Officer will escalate the complaint to Stage 1 and investigate, providing a formal written response within the timescales set out in the standard. Similarly, if the complaint or enquiry cuts across housing services and other service areas within the Council then the Senior Reviewing Officer will manage the complaint or enquiry from first point of contact within the timescales set out in the standard.</p>	<p>Corporately This is not defined within the policy – complaints are directed to the relevant service manager</p>

		<p>If the tenant, resident, member or service user remains dissatisfied with the Stage 1 response then they may request it be escalated to Stage 2, whereby the tier 4 departmental manager, or tier 3 Head of Service in their absence, will independently review the complaint and enquiry and firstly decide if escalation is appropriate. If so, then the Stage 1 investigation and response to the complaint or enquiry will be reviewed and responded to in accordance with the timescales set out within the standard.</p> <p>There is no Stage 3. The handler of Stage 2 will advise, within their response, of how the complainant or enquirer can recourse to the relevant Ombudsman</p>	
3b	Does the complaint officer have autonomy to resolve complaints?	<p>Corporately, the relevant service managers have autonomy to resolve the complaint.</p> <p>Within Housing Services, all officers and managers as set out in Section 3a have autonomy to resolve the complaint at the appropriate level</p>	
3c	Does the complaint officer have authority to compel engagement from other departments to resolve disputes?	<p>For Housing Services, the Senior Reviewing Officer has full authority to compel engagement from other departments to resolve complaints and enquiries in accordance with our service standards.</p> <p>Where the SRO experiences blockages, barriers or difficulties two Tier 4 Housing and Property Services Managers or Heads of Service, will support the SRO in compelling anyone to contribute to resolving complaints and enquiries.</p>	Corporately – this is not set out in the policy

3d	If there is a third stage to the complaint's procedure are residents involved in the decision making?		<p>Corporately, it does not expressly state there is a staged process, however the policy inexplicitly states that if the complainant is unhappy with the outcome of their complaint, they may contact the relevant Head of Service.</p> <p>For Housing Services, it has been agreed that the third stage is unnecessary as it is unlikely yield a more effective outcome than the Ombudsman. This also adds a further hoop for complainants to jump through which we consider to be excessive.</p> <p>For Housing Services, although residents are not currently involved in the decision making, we will be engaging residents, tenants and service users by forming resident panels to ensure our standards are robust and being overviewed by those it will impact upon most, and to consider our standards from the resident perspective. We are also looking to ensure this is a regular exercise not just for the inception of the standard but going forwards to fully ensure our services that are being continuously improved and strengthened. We are looking to actively engage residents and service users in all our continuous service improvements and the complainants in the complaints process as we go along to ensure there is a concrete 3D approach. Therefore, we do not just receive and answer complaints but seize every complaint as an opportunity to learn and improve continuously.</p>
3c	Is any third stage optional for residents?		No but they have opportunity to engage in panels

3d	Does the final stage response set out residents' right to refer the matter to the Housing Ombudsman Service?	<p>Corporately there is only reference in the policy to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.</p> <p>The Housing Services Complaints and Enquiries Standard does provide for the final stage response to set out the residents' rights to refer the matter to either the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman or the Housing Ombudsman, depending on the nature of the complaint and which area of housing services the complaint relates to I.e., homelessness and housing solutions or housing and property services.</p>	
3e	Do we keep a record of complaint correspondence including correspondence from the resident?	<p>Corporately this is held on the complaints and compliments portal. This information can be input directly from the customer and be updated by investigating officers but there are currently no set standards for recording correspondence or monitoring recording of correspondence.</p> <p>Housing Services does currently refer to the corporate system, however Housing Services, through the Senior Reviewing Officer will be responsible for a system of recording all correspondence in relation to complaints and enquiries for Housing Services until such time that the new housing management system, Civica Cx is fully implemented with cases, tasks, and forms module in 2022. Then all correspondence in relation to complaints or enquiries will be held centrally on this housing management system and be reported upon and to ensure compliance and for trend mapping and further to ensure we have all documentation that may be required upon request</p>	

		from the Ombudsman and any FOI or SAR from the complainant.	
3f	At what stage are most complaints resolved?	<p>Corporately, from reporting that is available to the Council at this time, the complaints are answered in line with the Corporate Policy, which does not clearly define stages.</p> <p>Housing Services aspire first and foremost to first point resolution and if not then at Stage 1. However, it is too early to tell at what stage most complaints are resolved as we have only very recently implemented the new structure, position of SRO and standard in order to be able to collect data to inform this question.</p>	
4	Communication		
4a	Are residents kept informed and updated during the complaints process?	<p>Corporately it is the responsibility of the service manager to keep residents updated during the process but there are no standards expressly set out in the policy.</p> <p>For Housing Services, the standard is that residents are kept updated:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informal resolution – First point of contact with a backstop of five working days • Logging and acknowledgement of formal complaint – Five Working Days • Stage One Decision – Ten working days from receipt of complaint. If this is not possible, an explanation and a date when the stage one response can be received will be provided to the complainant. This should not exceed a further ten working days without good reason. 	

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stage Two Response (Accepted) – Twenty working days from the request to escalate. If this is not possible an explanation and date when stage two response will be received. This should not exceed a further ten working days. • Stage Two Response (Declined) – Ten working days from the request to escalate. 	
4b	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>Corporately it is the responsibility of the relevant service manager to give the complainant opportunity to respond and challenge before any final decision is communicated</p> <p>Housing Services standards actively encourage all officers and managers working with the complainant to engage with the complainant or enquirer personally in the process wherever possible, giving opportunity to respond and challenge at each stage before reaching and communicating a final decision. All communication is recorded and clearly auditable in the case files</p>	
4c	Are all complaints acknowledged and logged within five days?	<p>Corporately?</p> <p>Housing Services Standards stipulate that the complaint or enquiry is acknowledged and logged within 5 days by the relevant service manager or senior officer at first point of contact. We also expect that the implementation of the new housing service management system will assist in the automatic notification process, to ensure acknowledgement falls within the set standards.</p>	

4d	Are residents advised of how to escalate at the end of each stage?	<p>Corporately it is the responsibility of the relevant service manager to advise of how to escalate a complaint, however there is nothing expressly written in the policy, other than that a request can be made to escalate to the Head of Service.</p> <p>The Housing Services Standard sets out, within each formal communication at each stage, of how and where tenants, residents and service users can escalate their complaint if they remain unsatisfied.</p>	
4e	What proportion of complaints are resolved at stage one?	Housing Services aspire first and foremost to first point resolution and if not then at Stage 1. However, it is too early to tell at what stage most complaints are resolved as we have only very recently implemented the new structure, position of SRO and standard in order to be able to collect data to inform this question.	The Corporate Policy does not adopt a formal stage approach
4f	What proportion of complaints are resolved at stage two?	As above	As above
4g	<p>What proportion of complaint responses are sent within Code timescales?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stage one • Stage one (with extension) • Stage two 	The Housing Services Standard aims to comply with the Complaint Handling Code's timescales at all stages.	There are no definitive timescales in the corporate policy

	Stage two (with extension)		
4h	Where timescales have been extended did, we have good reason?	The Housing Services Standard incorporates the requirement to give good reason for extending timescales for investigation and response	The Corporate Policy does not make provision for giving reason for extending timescales as no timescales are set out
4i	Where timescales have been extended did, we keep the resident informed?	The Housing Services Standard incorporates the requirement to keep the resident formally informed for any reason for extending timescales for investigation and response	As above
4j	What proportion of complaints do we resolve to residents' satisfaction?	Currently unknown as Housing Services have only very recently implemented the Standard, however the Standard incorporates a mechanism for checking and measuring satisfaction, but so far the service has no data to report	
5	Cooperation with Housing Ombudsman Service		
5a	Were all requests for evidence responded to within 15 days?		Ombudsman requests are initially directed to another department (Legal Services) However, communications that Housing Services receive from Legal Services around Ombudsman requests currently almost always involve complaints to the Ombudsman that are premature because the complainant has not sought to go through and exhaust the corporate complaints policy. It is not known currently whether this is a communication and / or awareness issue of the process and it is hoped

			that a clear communications strategy of the Housing Services Standard as the next steps will rectify this, and Housing Services will record and monitor timescales for responses.
5b	Where the time scale extended did, we keep the Ombudsman informed?		
6	Fairness in complaint handling		
6a	Are residents able to complain via a representative throughout?	Yes, both corporately and within Housing Services, usually via a member or MP	
6b	If advice was given, was this accurate and easy to understand?	The Senior Reviewing Officer for Housing Services will be keeping and monitoring all records of complaints, including advice given and we will regularly review our communications for clarity and plain English and check with the complainant that the any advice they have been given was clear and understandable, making reasonable adjustments for individuals and to our processes where necessary	No data is currently collected corporately to be able to answer this question as outcomes tends to be made verbally or in electronic communications by various relevant service managers
6c	How many cases did we refuse to escalate?	While not yet operational, the Housing Services Complaints and Enquiries Standard makes provision for refusal to escalate, and the decision will be taken by a Tier 4 manager. We will monitor and report on refusals and reasons. So far, in the informal piloting of the Standard the tier 4 manager has received 2 requests to escalate, and	The current corporate policy does not provide for such events.

	What was the reason for the refusal?	both have been refused because there was no new information or evidence to consider, and the Stage 1 response was reviewed and deemed to have 1) Investigated the allegations of service failure 2) Found work processes that led to the service failure 3) Provided an explanation of any action or improvement that we intend to undertake	
6d	Did we explain our decision to the resident?	Corporately there tends to be a verbal resolution. The Housing Services Standard sets out a requirement to explain our decisions both formally in writing and personally wherever necessary	
7	Outcomes and remedies		
7a	Where something has gone wrong are we taking appropriate steps to put things, right?	Corporately there is nothing expressly stated in the policy about appropriate redress. The Housing Services Standard sets out how complaints can be resolved in several ways and that any remedy offered reflects the extent of all service failures, and the level of detriment caused to the resident as a result. Such remedies may include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acknowledging where things have gone wrong. • Providing an explanation, assistance, or reasons. • Apologising. • Acting promptly if there has been delay. • Reconsidering or changing a decision. • Amending a record. 	

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing a financial remedy (Using a Compensation Matrix) • Changing Policies, Procedures and working practices, with inclusion of a resident panel and within the confines of legislation and regulation. <p>The factors we consider in formulating a remedy may include, but are not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Length of time that a situation has been ongoing. • Frequency with which something has occurred. • Severity of any service failure or omission. • Number of different failures. • Cumulative impact on the resident. • Any circumstances or vulnerabilities of the resident <p>Financial compensation may also be considered with regards to payments for quantifiable losses incurred, time lost, distress and inconvenience caused to the complainant, and this is calculated using a matrix</p>	
8	Continuous learning and improvement		

8a	<p>What improvements have we made because of learning from complaints?</p>		<p>Corporately it is not understood if this takes place.</p> <p>Housing Services is at the start of this journey. Tier 4 Managers of Housing Services recognise that the service needs to learn from mistakes to continuously improve our offer to our residents and service users. We have begun by creating a new structure that will deliver our aspirations, including a new role of Senior Reviewing Officer to support the Tier 4 service managers in achieving our aims for the service.</p> <p>We will also be working with the Councils Policy and Engagement Team to recruit a resident, tenant and service user scrutiny panel where changes to policies procedures and working practices are required.</p>
8b	<p>How do we share these lessons with?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) residents? b) the board/governing body? c) In the Annual Report? 		<p>Corporately it is not understood if this takes place</p> <p>Housing Services is working on learning and developing monitoring and reporting mechanisms that will enable us to sharing lessons learned at every level. For residents this might take the form of utilising the internet and / or social media, newsletters or officers communicating with residents through their residents' groups.</p> <p>Housing Services will develop indicators as part of its performance monitoring process and use the data to share reports at corporate level at least quarterly, to inform corporate reporting.</p>

<p>8c</p>	<p>Has the Code made a difference to how we respond to complaints?</p>	<p>The Code is making a significant difference to how Housing Services responds to its residents and service users. We are aware of the important difference the Regulator of Social Housing and Housing Ombudsman will make to the future of complaints handling for stock holding Local Authorities within the social housing sector. Therefore, Housing Services have restructured and introduced a designated specialist role to which all complaints are channelled and co-ordinated for response in accordance with a new set of standards that have been developed for the service. Housing Services are also implementing a new Housing Management System that will allow the service to better manage and track our housing and property related complaints and trends so that we proactively improve what and how we do things.</p> <p>Through a comprehensive review and because of the White Paper, Housing Services has recognised the need for resident engagement to make lasting and impactful change to the way we deliver services to residents and will be involving them accordingly as part of our plans.</p> <p>Corporately, Redditch Borough Council have recognised the need to review its Corporate Complaints Policy and that a separate Housing Services Complaints Standard is required beneath the corporate policy to ensure that both RBC and The Housing Service are compliant with statutory and contractual obligations in the present time. However, discussions are taking place around consistency in approach and process between the corporate policy and the Housing Services Standard.</p>	
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8d	What changes have we made?	Housing Services has been under review since January 2020 and has just completed a large-scale restructure and is now embarking on the service improvement phase with the foundations in customer satisfaction and the White Paper. A senior officer post has been created to meet the new regulatory requirements and is working on process & service standards aligned with the new code.	