

Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code: Self-assessment form.

In July 2020, the Housing Ombudsman published a new Complaints Handling Code. The purpose of the Code is to enable landlords to resolve complaints raised by their residents quickly and to use the learning from complaints to drive service improvements. It will also help to create a positive complaint handling culture amongst staff and residents.

White Horse Housing has always had a positive approach to complaints, underpinned by a robust Complaints Policy and high quality customer service standards. We are proud of our successes in resolving complaints quickly and taking measures, where possible and practical, to ensure further service failures in that area does not occur again. We monitor all complaints we receive and report the overall headlines to our Board every quarter.

The new Complaint Handling Code requires all landlords to undertake a self-assessment of their current policy and procedure and make any adjustments necessary to ensure full compliance is achieved. *A copy of the self-assessment for White Horse Housing is attached below.* Whilst some minor amendments were needed – included using the new Ombudsman’s complaint definition - we are pleased to say that our existing policy was both comprehensive and robust and met most of the new requirements.

A copy of the Association’s Complaints Leaflet is available on our website – www.whitehorsehousing.co.uk and a full copy of the Complaints Policy is available on request.

Steve Warran
Chief Executive

Compliance with the Complaint Handling Code – Self-Assessment

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>	Yes. Definition amended. The policy now achieves full compliance.	
	Does the policy have exclusions where a complaint will not be considered?	Yes. These are explained in full within the policy.	
	<p>Are these exclusions reasonable and fair to residents?</p> <p>Evidence relied upon – Complaints policy – a full list and explanation, other policies (e.g. ASB policy).</p>	Yes. (e.g. it excludes reports of ASB against other residents as this is dealt with under a different policy).	
2	Accessibility		
	Are multiple accessibility routes available for residents to make a complaint?	Yes	
	Is the complaints policy and procedure available online?	Yes	
	Do we have a reasonable adjustments policy?	Yes	
	Do we regularly advise residents about our complaints process?	Yes	
3	Complaints team and process		
	Is there a complaint officer or equivalent in post?	The Operations Manager manages all complaints	No – we are too small to have a ‘complaints team’ or ‘dedicated officer’.
	Does the complaint officer have autonomy to resolve complaints?	Yes, the Operations Manager does have autonomy, if required.	
	Does the complaint officer have authority to compel engagement from other departments to resolve disputes?	Not applicable. All staff are fully engaged and have a desire to rectify complaints whenever they happen.	

	If there is a third stage to the complaints procedure are residents involved in the decision making?		No. Stage 3 is currently heard by a panel of Board members. We believe this approach is a fair and transparent way for the Stage 1 & 2 processes to be judged and holds staff to account at the highest level. However, we will consider having a Scrutiny Panel member on the panel in the future to give a tenants perspective.
	Is any third stage optional for residents?		No. See above.
	Does the final stage response set out residents' right to refer the matter to the Housing Ombudsman Service?	Yes	
	Do we keep a record of complaint correspondence including correspondence from the resident?	Yes. Complaints are logged on the IT system and all correspondence is kept in the tenants electronic file.	
	At what stage are most complaints resolved?	Stage 1. Very few are ever escalated to Stage 2.	
4	Communication		
	Are residents kept informed and updated during the complaints process?	Yes	
	Are residents informed of the landlord's position and given a chance to respond and challenge any area of dispute before the final decision?	Yes	
	Are all complaints acknowledged and logged within five days?	Yes	
	Are residents advised of how to escalate at the end of each stage?	Yes – a leaflet is provided with this information.	

	What proportion of complaints are resolved at stage one?	95% approx	
	What proportion of complaints are resolved at stage two?	5% approx	
	What proportion of complaint responses are sent within Code timescales? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stage one Stage one (with extension) • Stage two Stage two (with extension) 	100% 100%	
	Where timescales have been extended did we have good reason?	N/A	
	Where timescales have been extended did we keep the resident informed?	N/A	
	What proportion of complaints do we resolve to residents' satisfaction	100% (so far)	
5	Cooperation with Housing Ombudsman Service		
	Were all requests for evidence responded to within 15 days?	N/A - No referrals made in last 6 years. But they would be.	
	Where the timescale was extended did we keep the Ombudsman informed?	N/A. Yes we would if the situation arose.	
6	Fairness in complaint handling		
	Are residents able to complain via a representative throughout?	Yes	
	If advice was given, was this accurate and easy to understand?	Yes	
	How many cases did we refuse to escalate? What was the reason for the refusal?	None	
	Did we explain our decision to the resident?	N/A	
7	Outcomes and remedies		
	Where something has gone wrong are we taking appropriate steps to put things right?	Yes (we have examples)	
8	Continuous learning and improvement		
	What improvements have we made as a result of learning from complaints?	Improved quality control processes	

		<p>for planned works.</p> <p>Change of a sub-contractor where poor performance was identified.</p> <p>Review of internal procedures – estate inspections, neighbourhood wardens etc.</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>‘You said - We did’ section in tenants newsletters and the Annual Report.</p> <p>Quarterly complaints reported to Board</p>	
	<p>Has the Code made a difference to how we respond to complaints?</p>	<p>It will improve the process and ensure our policy is clear, transparent and consistent with other landlords.</p>	
	<p>What changes have we made?</p>	<p>Improved recording processes on our IT system (including learning points) and changes to the escalation process.</p>	