

## Self-assessment form Exeter City Council

### Compliance with the Complaint Handling Code

#### 1. Definition of a complaint

Question	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> <p><u>Response:-</u></p> <p>The complaints policy was updated during a recent corporate review and the definition was adopted.</p>	Yes	
<p>Does the policy have exclusions where a complaint will not be considered?</p> <p><u>Response:-</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Service requests – e.g. reports of ASB</li> <li>• A complaint would not usually be considered 12 months after noticing the issue</li> <li>• A complaint may not be considered if it is a duplication of a previous complaint – but it could be escalated or referred to the Housing Ombudsman</li> </ul> <p>If the Council decides not to accept a complaint then a detailed explanation is provided setting out the reasons why the matter is not suitable for the complaints process.</p> <p><u>Action:-</u></p> <p>Sections to be considered as part of the corporate policy review:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Matters which are, or could reasonably be expected to be the subject of court or tribunal proceedings, or which are in the hands of the Councils insurers.</i></li> </ul>	Yes	
<p>Are these exclusions reasonable and fair to residents?</p> <p>Evidence relied upon</p>	Yes	

Question	Yes	No
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The exclusions have been reviewed by our acting tenant focus group.</li> </ul>		

## 2. Accessibility

Question	Yes	No
<p>Are multiple accessibility routes available for residents to make a complaint?</p> <p><u>Response:-</u></p> <p>Tenants can access a complaint service via:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Visiting the Council Office</li> <li>A home visit to capture a complaint</li> <li>Phone</li> <li>Letter</li> <li>Email</li> <li>Online form (the Council's website is compatible with accessibility facilities such as browse aloud)</li> <li>Via our Facebook page</li> </ul>	Yes	
<p>Is the complaints policy and procedure available online?</p>	Yes	
<p>Do we have a reasonable adjustments policy?</p> <p><u>Response:-</u></p> <p>We do not have a standalone Reasonable Adjustment Policy but the Council's Equality Policy covers the points which would otherwise be covered in a separate policy.</p>	Yes	
<p>Do we regularly advise residents about our complaints process?</p> <p><u>Response:-</u></p> <p>The website includes information on how to raise a complaint. The latest annual report, a leaflet and previous newsletters all contain information about the complaints service.</p> <p><u>Action:-</u></p> <p>The Stage 1 investigation letter and next newsletter will include advice to residents on their right to access the Housing Ombudsman dispute resolution service during the lifetime of their complaint.</p>	Yes	

### 3. Complaints team and process

Question	Yes	No
Is there a complaint officer or equivalent in post?	Yes	
Does the complaint officer have autonomy to resolve complaints?  <u>Response:-</u>  Complaints are passed to the investigating officer for investigation and resolution.		No
Does the complaint officer have authority to compel engagement from other departments to resolve disputes?  <u>Response:-</u>  The Housing Business Support Officer along with the support staff from Democratic Services have access to other departments and can escalate complaints up to the Corporate Services Manager.	Yes	
If there is a third stage to the complaints procedure are residents involved in the decision making?		No
Is any third stage optional for residents?  <u>Response:-</u>  The Housing services offer a 'local resolution level'. Customers do not have to use this service before accessing the complaints process.		No
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?  <u>Response:-</u>  Complaints are logged on the housing database (OpenHousing). A full record is kept of the complaint and outcome(s) at each stage.	Yes	
At what stage are most complaints resolved?  <u>Response:-</u>  The vast majority of complaints (74%) are resolved at the Stage 1 of the process.	N/A	

#### 4. Communication

Question	Yes	No
<p>Are residents kept informed and updated during the complaints process?</p> <p><u>Response:-</u></p> <p>The Investigating Officer (IO) can provide an update to the resident on their investigation. In addition, the Housing Business Support Officer will provide an update if there are any delays anticipated and/or to discuss the complaint and provide any requested information.</p>	Yes	
<p>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> <p><u>Response:-</u></p> <p>Resident can access the Local Resolution level (feedback level) to challenge any disputes. Residents who access the complaints process are informed of the Council's position in Stage 1 and can challenge any area of dispute and/or can escalate their complaint to Stage 2.</p>	Yes	
<p>Are all complaints acknowledged and logged within five days?</p>	Yes	
<p>Are residents advised of how to escalate at the end of each stage?</p> <p><u>Response:-</u></p> <p>Yes, this information is included in standard letters at both Stage 1 and 2.</p>	Yes	
<p>What proportion of complaints are resolved at stage one?</p>	74%	
<p>What proportion of complaints are resolved at stage two?</p>	26%	
<p>What proportion of complaint responses are sent within Code (10 days) timescales?</p> <p>The Housing Ombudsman Code timescales:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stage one - <b>25%</b> Stage one (with extension) - <b>88%</b></li> <li>• Stage two - <b>75%</b> Stage two (with extension) - <b>100%</b></li> </ul> <p><u>Response:-</u></p> <p>The Council operates a 15 working day response time scale for Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaints across the organisation. The</p>	N/A	

Question	Yes	No
<p>Housing Ombudsman recommends that Stage 1 complaints should be responded within 10 working days and Stage 2 within 20 working days. However, the Housing Ombudsman also understands that as it is not always possible to operate a two tier complaint process within an organisation. As such, the new Housing Ombudsman recommended timescales will not be adopted at this time.</p> <p>The Council's current timescale (15 working days):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stage one – <b>70%</b>  Stage one (with extension) - <b>70%</b>  Stage one delays – 14 of the 16 of complaints were responded to within deadline. The two overdue complaints were a result of staff availability issues which were exacerbated by the Covid-19 response workload. Complainants were informed of all delays.</li> <li>• Stage two – <b>50%</b>  Stage two (with extension) – <b>75%</b>  Stage one &amp; two overall – <b>80%</b>  Stage two delays –One Stage 2 response was overdue. This was a result of staff availability issues which were exacerbated by the Covid-19 response workload. The complainant was informed of the delay.</li> </ul> <p>Figures taken from April – Sept 2020, sixteen Stage 1 complaints and four Stage 2 complaints</p>		
<p>Where timescales have been extended did we have good reason?</p> <p><u>Response:-</u></p> <p>More investigation time was required due to staff availability, the Covid-19 pandemic response workload was a major contributing factor during this time.</p>	Yes	
<p>Where timescales have been extended did we keep the resident informed?</p>	Yes	
<p>What proportion of complaints do we resolve to residents' satisfaction</p> <p><u>Response:-</u></p> <p>The STAR survey demonstrated 40% customer satisfaction with the outcome of their response. However, feedback from a tenant focus group indicated that responses may have also included general request for services.</p> <p><u>Action:-</u></p>	N/A	

Question	Yes	No
Increase feedback levels by implementing the Housemark survey.		

## 5. Cooperation with the Housing Ombudsman Service

Question	Yes	No
Were all requests for evidence responded to within 15 days?	Yes	
Where the timescale was extended did we keep the Ombudsman informed?	Yes	

## 6. Fairness in complaint handling

Question	Yes	No
Are residents able to complain via a representative throughout?  <u>Response:-</u>  Protocols are in place to ensure GDPR compliance.	Yes	
If advice was given, was this accurate and easy to understand?	Yes	
How many cases did we refuse to escalate? None  What was the reason for the refusal? N/A	N/A	
Did we explain our decision to the resident?	N/A	

## 7. Outcomes and remedies

Question	Yes	No
Where something has gone wrong are we taking appropriate steps to put things right?  <u>Response:-</u>  Complaint KPIs along with commentary are reported to the Housing Management Team. This provides an opportunity to identify trends, learning opportunities and decide and implement any remedies.	Yes	

## 8. Continuous learning and improvement

Question	Yes	No
What improvements have we made as a result of learning from complaints?  <u>Response:-</u>	N/A	

Question	Yes	No
<p>Internal processes:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Senior Housing Officers (Estates Department) now review complaints and investigate before passing to the Department Lead to review and issue our response</li> <li>• Lettings Officers now check if translators/interpreters are required when a case is passed from Devon Home Choice.</li> <li>• Central complaint inboxes have been created for Planned Repairs &amp; Estates to ensure timely responses.</li> </ul> <p>Complaints process:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Claims submitted for damaged personal items are now categorised as a claim and do not have to be logged with a complaint.</li> </ul> <p>Service level:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information sent to tenants about discarded personal items in our standard letter, will be changed from the current term 'fly-tipping' to a more appropriate term, to avoid any confusion.</li> </ul>		
<p>How do we share these lessons with:</p> <p>a) Residents?</p> <p>This self-assessment will be published on the website.</p> <p>b) The board/governing body?</p> <p>This self-assessment will be reported to the Council Housing &amp; Development Advisory Board. Any outcomes/recommendations will be reported to the Council's Executive Committee.</p> <p>c) In the Annual Report?</p> <p>An overview of the results of the self-assessment will be published in the 2020-2021 Tenant Annual Report along with details of the complaints service and how residents can access the Housing Ombudsman services.</p>	N/A	

Question	Yes	No
<p>Has the Code made a difference to how we respond to complaints?</p> <p><u>Response:-</u></p> <p>Stage 1 response letter will be amended to reflect the Housing Ombudsman new dispute resolution service.</p>	Yes	
<p>What changes have we made?</p> <p><u>To be implemented:-</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Update the housing complaints leaflet to reflect the policy changes</li> <li>• Website to be reviewed</li> <li>• Update the Stage 1 response letter to include early advice about the right to access the Housing Ombudsman's dispute resolution service. Publish this service along with the Housing Ombudsman contact details in the next newsletter.</li> <li>• Increase customer satisfaction monitoring</li> </ul>	N/A	