
The Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code

Self-Assessment

Last review date: June 2021

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Section 1: Summary

The Housing Ombudsman’s Complaint Handling Code (“the Code”) requires a self-assessment of our complaints handling processes and policy. The results to the individual questions are below and the following actions are required to ensure that we comply fully with the code:

Required Actions:

- Publish and advertise the 2021 annual report for customers in a friendly and accessible format which advertises what we have done, how this has improved services and how to access the service.
- Include information on complaints and feedback in “Housing News and Views”.
- Continuous review of service improvement / complaints function to increase focus within the organisation, incorporating a review of where ownership of complaints best sits to ensure effective resolution and continuous improvement.
- Make Stage 2 of the complaints process more collaborative to ensure that both CBH and the customer understand and have taken account of each other’s views. The new housing management system should assist with this.
- To review the resource and processes to allow more regular detailed insight into satisfaction with how we deal with complaints.
- Develop the new housing management system with workflow to support efficient resolution of complaints.

Section 2: Definition of a Complaint

Does our current complaints process use the following description to define a complaint?

“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.”

Yes

✓

No

Complaint Policy reflects the above. The management of complaints will now exclude informal complaints and will be treated as a stage 1 complaint because they are expressions of dissatisfaction.

Does our policy have exclusions where a complaint would not be considered and are these exclusions reasonable and fair to residents?

Yes

✓

No

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In line with guidance, the following areas are excluded under the new policy: insurance claims, where the matter is subject to legal proceedings, where the right to a legal review exists under homelessness legislation or policy, where the service is not provided on or behalf of CBH and where the issue has not previously been reported (e.g. reporting a repair for the first time) or where the appropriate timescale has not elapsed (e.g. a complaint being made about a 21-day repair not being completed before the 21 days have elapsed).

Section 2: Accessibility

Do we have multiple accessible routes available for customers to be able to make a complaint to us?

Yes

✓

No

Customers can complain to us via website submission, phone call, via letter or email, in person to any CBH officer, via social media or through an elected member.

Is our current complaints policy available online?

Yes

✓

No

<https://cbhomes.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/CBH-Complaints-policy.pdf>

Do we have a reasonable adjustments policy?

Yes

No

✓

The Complaints Policy reflects reasonable adjustments. This includes communicating with customers in a way that reflects specific needs for impairments such as but not limited to larger print documents, braille, easy read versions of decisions or use of an interpreter. To ensure we comply with the Equality Act 2010 we will ensure new policies have an Equality Impact Assessment to ensure identified disproportionate negative impacts are effectively mitigated.

Do we regularly advise our customers about our complaints process?

Yes

No

x

Recommendations:

- Publish and advertise the 2021 annual report for customers in a friendly and accessible format which advertises what we have done, how this has improved services and how to access the service.
- Include information on complaints and feedback in “Housing News and Views”

Target date:
31/8/2021

Target date:
31/8/2020

Section 3: The Complaints team and processes

Is there a complaint officer or equivalent in post?

Yes

No

✓

Does our complaints officer have autonomy to resolve complaints?

Yes

No

✓

Currently ownership for resolving complaints resides with the service areas about which the complaints originate, with the relevant Head of Service ultimately responsible for resolution of complaints. Complaints are managed by the Customer Experience Team Leader, who also has the authority to resolve complaints.

Recommendation: Continuous review of service improvement / complaints function to increase focus within the organisation, incorporating a review of where ownership of complaints best sits, to ensure effective resolution and continuous improvement.

Target date 31/03/2022

Does our complaints officer have authority to compel engagement from other departments to resolve disputes?

Yes

No

✓

The Customer Excellence Team can escalate issues to ensure that actions are taken.

If there is a third stage to our complaints procedure and are residents involved in the decision making?

Yes

No

✓

Is any third stage optional for residents?

Yes

No

x

In line with the Housing Ombudsman code the process has been streamlined to two stages. Our customers are reminded they can contact the Housing Ombudsman for advice at every stage of the complaint process. They are also given access to the complaints policy.

Recommendation: Consider an easy read leaflet to be sent to complainants rather than the whole policy for ease of reference.

Target date

31/09/2021

Do our responses to our final stage (currently stage two) set out the customer's right to refer the matter to the Housing Ombudsman?

Yes

✓

No

Do we keep a record of our complaint correspondences, including correspondence from our customers?

Yes

✓

No

Recommendation: To create a standardised way to ensure all documents relating to a case are kept in the same place with a timeline of events. The new Housing System should help with this in future implementation.

Target Date

31/03/2022

At what stage are most of our complaints resolved?

Stage 1. In 2020/21 92% of complaints were resolved at Stage 1.

Section 4: Communication

Are customers kept informed or updated during the complaints process?	
Yes ✓	No <input type="checkbox"/>
We have introduced personalised acknowledgements from the complaints team to let the customer know who will be investigating initially, what they will be investigating and encouraging further information. Investigating officers are encouraged to contact the customer directly. If extensions are required to allow full investigation, this is agreed with the customer.	
Recommendations:	Target date 31/03/2023
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Build workflow and task management functionality in the new housing management system to allow closer tracking of communications. 	

Are customers informed of our position and given a chance to respond or challenge any area of dispute before the final decision?	
Yes ✓	No <input type="checkbox"/>
<p>The current process allows for the customer to escalate the complaint following the outcome of Stage 1 to stage 2 to challenge the outcome, but the customer is not able to challenge before the decision of each stage is made. The outcome is made clear at the end of each investigation.</p> <p>We will consider any comments received following the outcome of stage 2 to determine whether any additional support or change can be made to our outcome or investigation. If we are confident in our stage 2 investigation and outcome, we will support the customer to contact the Housing Ombudsman service for consideration.</p>	
Recommendations:	Target date 31/03/2022
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make Stage 2 of the complaints process more collaborative to ensure that both CBH and the customer understand and have taken account of each other's views. The new housing management system should assist with this. 	

Are all our complaints acknowledged and logged within five days?	
Yes ✓	No <input type="checkbox"/>
We currently aim to acknowledge complaints within 1 day	

Are residents advised of how to escalate at the end of each stage?	
Yes ✓	No <input type="checkbox"/>

What percentage of complaints are resolved at stage one?
92% (April 2020 – March 2021)

What percentage of complaints are resolved at stage two?
7% (April 2020 – March 2021)

What percentage of our stage one responses are sent:

- within 10 days? **77%**
- within 20 days (with an extension) – **no data available**

April 2020 – March 2021

The implementation of a new Housing System will help improve and automate the process so that extensions of time can be recorded and monitored.

What percentage of our stage two responses are sent:

- within 20 days? **67%**
- within 30 days (with an extension) **33%**

April 2020 – March 2021

The implementation of a new Housing System will help improve and automate the process so that extensions of time can be recorded and monitored.

Where timescales have been extended, did we have a good reason?

Yes No

✓

Where extensions are agreed with the customer, this is normally to allow further time necessary for a full investigation or to accommodate periods of absence. Extensions agreed with the customer will be monitored and reported on monthly.

Where timescales have been extended, did we keep the customer informed?

Yes No

✓

Extensions are agreed in advance with the customer. Our new housing management system can be set up to allow extensions to deadlines, generate reminders and send communications directly from the system.

What proportion of complaints did we resolve to the customer's satisfaction?

60% - Data taken from April 2020 – March 2021 records (based on 5 customers who completed the satisfaction survey – of 86 complaints in total)

40% of customers who responded, were dissatisfied with the outcome where their complaint was not upheld (46% of complaints). Surveys were completed online via a link to the form in the complaint response

Recommendation: To review the resource and processes to allow more regular detailed insight into satisfaction with how we deal with complaints.

Target date 31/03/2022

Section 5: Co-operation with The Housing Ombudsman Service

Were all requests for evidence responded to within 15 days?

Yes No

✓

Where the timescale was extended did we keep the Ombudsman informed?

Yes No

✓	□
No cases were extended	

Section 6: Fairness in Complaint handling

Are our customers able to complain via a representative throughout?	
Yes	No
✓	□
Customers frequently contact their local Councillors or MP to complain or enquire to CBH on their behalf and are made aware at each stage they can contact them for support on their case. CBH has a dedicated e-mail address for member enquiries.	

If advice was given, was this accurate and easy to understand?	
Yes	No
✓	□
We try to use a customer-centred approach. Company-wide training has taken place to ensure that team members are equipped to offer advice and solutions which enable the customer to help themselves where appropriate. There are many examples of good practice in our responses. The forthcoming service review should allow further focus on the quality of responses to the customer.	

How many cases did we refuse to escalate?	
None	
If yes, what was the reason for the refusal?	
-	
If yes, did we explain our decision to the resident?	
Yes	No
□	□

Section 7: Outcomes and remedies

Where something has gone wrong are we taking appropriate steps to put things right?	
Yes	No
✓	□
We have a log of learning actions resulting from complaints. We have a specific remedies policy to cover how we put things right, including remedying the original issue and other remedies such as financial compensation.	

Section 8: Continuous learning and improvements

What improvements have we made as a result of learning from complaints?

We have a log of actions resulting from complaints which includes process improvements to avoid the same problems reoccurring. From this we also identify the measure of change such as improvement to customer experience or decrease in need for customer contact.

We are developing a better experience for our customers when contacting complaints via our website. This will include a triage form to identify the reason for contact. This should decrease the amount of service requests, freeing up the team to focus on customer feedback.

Customer feedback from across the company will now be centralised so that we can gain better insight into what our customers are telling us. This will improve our learning objectives in the future.

Communication with prospective leaseholders has been improved to ensure that people enquiring about the Right to Buy have all the information they may need to make an informed decision before entering the process, thus saving them time and money.

We also ensure to capture how each change feeds into our company's objectives such as value for money, customer plan and community plan. This way we can measure the impact on an individual basis and on a strategic level.

How do we share these lessons:

On an individual level, any learning and changes identified via customer feedback are noted in our responses to the customer. Our corporate management team receives regular reports on complaints and enquiries, and these are discussed at monthly management meetings. The reports highlight trends, case studies and improvements and make recommendations for service improvements.

Recommendation: To produce an annual complaints report in an accessible format for customers and to advertise through suitable media.

Target date 31/12/2022

Has the Housing Ombudsman Code made a difference to how we respond to complaints?

Yes

✓

No

What changes have we made?

Initial complaints acknowledgements are now personalised, and specific reference is made to the nature of the complaint. Responses to complaints now include more information on our Complaints Policy, the Ombudsman Service, and other forms of escalation.

Other changes are happening within the organisation such as the new system and service review which are aimed at improving the service and helping deliver the requirements of the code.