

Self-assessment form 31/3/21

Compliance with the Complaint Handling Code

The Housing Ombudsman issued a new Complaints Handling Code in July 2020 with a requirement for members of the scheme to carry out a self-assessment and to publish it on the website.

We made some changes to our policy in November 2020 to make sure it reflects the requirements of the Code and that Hightown is compliant with the Code. We have since improved our monitoring reports so we can more easily evidence compliance with the Code.

1	Definition of a complaint	Yes	No	Comment
	<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>	Y		Revised Policy agreed by Board November 2020 to comply with Housing Ombudsman Code
	Does the policy have exclusions where a complaint will not be considered?	Y		Complaints Policy Sections 2.7 & 2.9 list the matters not dealt with as complaints
	<p>Are these exclusions reasonable and fair to residents?</p> <p>Evidence relied upon</p>	Y		<p>Alternative means available e.g. tribunal, statutory appeal, legal reps/court, insurance</p> <p>Request for service e.g. repair report</p> <p>Outside scope e.g. not a Hightown resident or a staffing issue</p>
2	Accessibility			
	Are multiple accessibility routes available for residents to make a complaint?	Y		<p>Publicised in leaflets and on website in line with Complaints Policy:</p> <p>Website has information on how to submit a complaint by MyHightown account, email, phone or in writing.</p> <p>Complaints leaflet: "you can make a formal complaint within 20 working days to the relevant Senior Manager. This can be in writing, by phone or in person."</p>
	Is the complaints policy and procedure available online?	Y		Policy is on website. Main stages of procedure summarised in "How we deal with complaints" on website.

	Do we have a reasonable adjustments policy?	Y		Policy 1.5 allows for discretion needed to meet the needs of disabled or vulnerable customers.
	Do we regularly advise residents about our complaints process?	Y		We have given details in tenant newsletters. Policy amended in November 2020 - the complaints process is publicised in leaflets and on the Hightown website, and is included in the tenants' newsletter each spring and the Annual Report to Residents.
3	Complaints team and process			
	Is there a complaint officer or equivalent in post?	Y		Hightown does not have a single Complaints Officer. In Care and Supported Housing this role is fulfilled by the Head of C&SH Support. For general needs residents' complaints the Director of Housing has oversight of the Complaints Process and monitoring of compliance.
	Does the complaint officer have autonomy to resolve complaints?	Y		Heads of Service and Directors have this autonomy.
	Does the complaint officer have authority to compel engagement from other departments to resolve disputes?	Y		Heads of Service and Directors are able to do this.
	If there is a third stage to the complaints procedure are residents involved in the decision making?	Y		n/a - 2 stage process
	Is any third stage optional for residents?	Y		n/a - 2 stage process
	Does the final stage response set out residents' right to refer the matter to the Housing Ombudsman Service?	Y		Stage 2: 7.4 "The response will outline any applicable external sources of dispute resolution the complainant can refer their complaint to if they remain dissatisfied (e.g. Housing Ombudsman Service, CQC, First Tier Tribunal (Property Chamber))." Also Website and complaint leaflet both have information about contacting Ombudsman if not happy with stage 2 outcome. 2 nd stage response letters have standard final paragraph advising of this

	Do we keep a record of complaint correspondence including correspondence from the resident?	Y		Yes, on the Complaints log
	At what stage are most complaints resolved?			Majority of complaints are resolved at the early informal stage.
4	Communication			
	Are residents kept informed and updated during the complaints process?	Y		Resident receives acknowledgement and is informed of timescale. If timescale cannot be met resident is informed and told when a response can be expected.
	Are residents informed of the landlord's position and given a chance to respond and challenge any area of dispute before the final decision?	Y		This has been added to the Policy approved in November 2020 and added as a standard sentence to responses to complainants.
	Are all complaints acknowledged and logged within five days?	Y		Policy states 3 working days. Acknowledgement date is logged. The complaints self-assessment management report monitors adherence.
	Are residents advised of how to escalate at the end of each stage?	Y		<p>Procedure:</p> <p>Stage 1 6.4 "The complainant should be advised that if they remain dissatisfied they are able to escalate their complaint to formal stage 2 of the complaints process within 20 working days of the date of the response"</p> <p>Stage 2: 7.4 "The response will outline any applicable external sources of dispute resolution the complainant can refer their complaint to if they remain dissatisfied (e.g. Housing Ombudsman Service, CQC, First Tier Tribunal (Property Chamber))."</p> <p>Standard sentence at the end of each response letter.</p>

	What proportion of complaints are resolved at stage one?			13 complaints were logged at formal stage 1 in 2019/20. All of these were resolved at this stage. The complaints self-assessment management report monitors these figures.
	What proportion of complaints are resolved at stage two?			13 complaints were logged at formal stage 2 in 2019/20 (these are not the same 13 at stage 1 but relate to complaints logged in the previous year). 61.5% of these were resolved at formal stage 2. The complaints self-assessment management report monitors these figures.
	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% The complaints self-assessment management report monitors these figures.
	Where timescales have been extended did we have good reason?	Y		Reasons for any extended timescales are recorded on the complaints log. The complaints self-assessment management report monitors these.
	Where timescales have been extended did we keep the resident informed?	Y		The complaints self-assessment management report monitors these extended timescales.
	What proportion of complaints do we resolve to residents' satisfaction?			Most complaints resolved at the informal stage, this indicates satisfaction with the outcome; complaints satisfaction surveys not currently conducted.
5	Cooperation with Housing Ombudsman Service			
	Were all requests for evidence responded to within 15 days?	Y		
	Where the timescale was extended did we keep the Ombudsman informed?			n/a

6	Fairness in complaint handling			
	Are residents able to complain via a representative throughout?	Y		<p>Policy 2.6 " The following people are entitled to make a complaint under this policy... A non-legal representative/advocate of any of the above where Hightown has received their express authorisation for that person to pursue a complaint on their behalf"</p> <p>Website: "You can make a complaint to Hightown if you own or rent a home that we own or manage, or represent someone who does"</p>
	If advice was given, was this accurate and easy to understand?	Y		
	How many cases did we refuse to escalate? What was the reason for the refusal?			1 case was refused as out of date for escalation to stage 2. Monitored through complaints self-assessment management report.
	Did we explain our decision to the resident?	Y		Reasons for decisions are set out in response letters.
7	Outcomes and remedies			
	Where something has gone wrong are we taking appropriate steps to put things right?	Y		Residents Annual report – "Learning from complaints", Complaints Scrutiny Group, Quarterly Report to Operations Committee, Complaints Log captures Lessons Learnt
8	Continuous learning and improvement			
	What improvements have we made as a result of learning from complaints?			Residents Annual report – "Learning from complaints", Complaints Scrutiny Group, Quarterly Reports to Operations Committee, Complaints Log captures Lessons Learnt
	How do we share these lessons with: a) residents?			Residents Annual report – "Learning from complaints", and the Complaints Scrutiny Groups where residents and service users review complaints. Individual complainants are told what we have learned from their complaint.

	<p>b) the board/governing body? c) In the Annual Report?</p>			<p>Operations Committee quarterly and annual reports</p>
	<p>Has the Code made a difference to how we respond to complaints?</p>			<p>Template response letters introduced, based on the exemplar on the Ombudsman's website.</p>
	<p>What changes have we made?</p>			<p>We have changed the definition of a complaint in our policy and made other changes set out above. We have introduced template letters to ensure that all key requirements are met. Key staff are having refresher training using the Ombudsman's eLearning modules on complaints handling.</p>