

Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code: Self-assessment form

Compliance with the Complaint Handling Code			
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> <p>The definition used by the Council, in the MDDC Complaints and Feedback policy, as published on-line at: https://www.middevon.gov.uk/your-council/customer-services/customer-feedback-and-complaints/how-our-complaints-procedure-works/ states the following:</p> <p><i>"An expression of dissatisfaction about the council's action or lack of action or about the standard of a service, whether the action taken or the service was provided by the council itself or a body acting on behalf of the council".</i></p> <p>No changes are deemed to be necessary in relation to this definition due to the fact that it is very close to the definition suggested by the Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS). It is based on the definition provided by the Local Government Ombudsman.</p> <p>However, we recognise that there may be some confusion relating to the difference between a complaint and a service request and will endeavour to address this in relevant training with staff.</p>		x
	Does the policy have exclusions where a complaint will not be considered?	x	
	<p>Are these exclusions reasonable and fair to residents?</p> <p>Evidence relied upon</p> <p>In line with our policy relating to Complaints and Feedback, the Council will not treat an initial request for a service to be delivered as a complaint.</p>	x	

	<p>The policy identifies situations and ways of responding where a complainant might be considered to be making complaints which are unreasonable, unreasonably persistent and vexatious. The policy contains explicit reference to this: "The policy is intended to assist in managing people by categorising them within these terms and agreeing the actions to be taken". It also states that: "Officers and Members will endeavour to respond appropriately according to the individual complainant's needs, and in compliance with our complaints policy, but this guidance is to cover occasions where nothing further can be reasonably done to assist or rectify a real or perceived problem."</p>		
2	Accessibility		
	Are multiple accessibility routes available for residents to make a complaint?	x	
	Is the complaints policy and procedure available online?	x	
	Do we have a reasonable adjustments policy?	x	
	Do we regularly advise residents about our complaints process?	x	
3	Complaints team and process		
	<p>Is there a complaint officer or equivalent in post?</p> <p>We are proposing a restructure which will be implemented during the first part of 2021 and, if this is agreed, a new post will be created within the Landlord Service. Currently, our Housing Finance & Performance team administers complaints and investigations are undertaken by relevant team leaders at first stage. Service managers review these responses should a complainant wish to escalate the complaint.</p>		x
	<p>Does the complaint officer have autonomy to resolve complaints?</p> <p>Although the response is no, currently, our team leaders, who have responsibility for investigating complaints at stage one of our procedure, have autonomy to do so.</p>		N/A
	<p>Does the complaint officer have authority to compel engagement from other departments to resolve disputes?</p> <p>The Council's policy relating to complaints and feedback sets out the aims of the policy and is such that all teams, departments and other services are bound by the provisions of it.</p>		N/A
	If there is a third stage to the complaints procedure are residents involved in the decision making?		x
	<p>Is any third stage optional for residents?</p> <p>However, as part of our plans to modernise our Landlord Service, and our review of opportunities relating to tenant involvement, we will consult with tenants to see whether there is any appetite for</p>		x

	tenant involvement in the complaints procedure. The rationale for this will be to see if there are any opportunities to resolve complaints at an earlier stage.		
	Does the final stage response set out residents' right to refer the matter to the Housing Ombudsman Service?	x	
	Do we keep a record of complaint correspondence including correspondence from the resident?	x	
	At what stage are most complaints resolved? The majority of complaints are resolved at Stage One.		
4	Communication		
	Are residents kept informed and updated during the complaints process?	x	
	Are residents informed of the landlord's position and given a chance to respond and challenge any area of dispute before the final decision? In some cases, we do speak to tenants before and after the investigation in order to resolve their issues. However, we will be amending our procedure in the Landlord Service to provide a "minded to" letter which will offer an opportunity for discussion before a decision is made.		x
	Are all complaints acknowledged and logged within five days?	x	
	Are residents advised of how to escalate at the end of each stage?	x	
	What proportion of complaints are resolved at stage one? 83%		
	What proportion of complaints are resolved at stage two? 17%		
	What proportion of complaint responses are sent within Code timescales? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stage one 79% Stage one (with extension) 21% Stage two 100% Stage two (with extension) 0 		
	Where timescales have been extended did we have good reason?	x	
	Where timescales have been extended did we keep the resident informed?	x	
	What proportion of complaints do we resolve to residents' satisfaction Total 107 complaints: In response to these, 9 satisfaction surveys were returned		

	Of those 9, in 2 cases, the responses showed that the outcome was satisfactory, making the proportion of residents who responded to the survey, who were satisfied - 22%.		
5	Cooperation with Housing Ombudsman Service		
	Were all requests for evidence responded to within 15 days?	x	
	Where the timescale was extended did we keep the Ombudsman informed?	x	
6	Fairness in complaint handling		
	Are residents able to complain via a representative throughout?	x	
	If advice was given, was this accurate and easy to understand?	x	
	How many cases did we refuse to escalate? What was the reason for the refusal?		N/A
	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?	x	
8	Continuous learning and improvement		
	What improvements have we made as a result of learning from complaints? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More robust communication has been put in place between the Council, tenants and contractors. • Council Officers have been encouraged to update the integrated electronic housing management system in all cases following contact with tenants so that an accurate record is kept. • Refresher training has been carried out, when a need has been highlighted via the complaints process. • Amendments to policy and procedures. • Improvement of communication and working practices between different services. 		
	How do we share these lessons with: a) residents? We publish information relating to performance on complaints on the Housing webpages of the Council's website (see pages 3 and 4): https://www.middevon.gov.uk/residents/housing/council-housing/our-performance/council-housing-performance/		

	<p>We previously sent the report which identified lessons learnt to our Tenants' Together resident scrutiny group. This was disbanded last year following some issues but we are working on a review of tenant involvement using data collected in a Tenant Census earlier this year. We will be looking at new ways of engaging with our tenants which can be used during this period when face to face interaction must be minimised.</p> <p>From time to time, we also publish some positive lessons learnt on our MDDC Housing Facebook page.</p> <p>b) the board/governing body?</p> <p>We publish information relating to performance on complaints on the Housing webpages of the Council's website:</p> <p>https://www.middevon.gov.uk/residents/housing/council-housing/our-performance/council-housing-performance/</p> <p>The monthly performance report is circulated to senior Officers, the Cabinet Member for Housing and the Leader of the Council.</p> <p>We would usually send the report detailing lessons learnt from complaints to our Housing Performance & Improvement Board, which is a meeting of senior managers, the Cabinet Member for Housing and the Chair of the Homes Policy Development Group. However, this meeting has gone into abeyance in recent months due to conflicting priorities arising since the Covid-19 pandemic started.</p> <p>c) In the Annual Report?</p> <p>This is a standard item in the Annual Report.</p>		
	Has the Code made a difference to how we respond to complaints?		x
	<p>What changes have we made?</p> <p>A number of changes have been identified which will be implemented during the early part of 2021. These changes were first discussed in July 2020 but have been delayed as a result of conflicting priorities arising from the pandemic.</p> <p>The changes are as follows:</p>		

	<p>Our policy on complaints and feedback currently states that: “When contacting us you need to make it clear that you are making a complaint.” The policy will be reviewed to explain that residents do not have to use the word complaint in order for it to be treated as such. This review of what is the Corporate policy will take place during 2021 and a number of stakeholders will be involved, including staff. We will publicise a number of customer-related projects to our tenants with the intention of recruiting some volunteers to get involved.</p> <p>The policy will be amended to show that the Housing Service is planning to introduce a new post which will be known as a complaints officer and that this officer will be responsible for investigating all complaints made in relation to the work of the Landlord Service. Other officers involved in the work associated with complaints, including officers in our Customer First team, will be provided with relevant training to enable them to correctly identify complaints when they are made. All customer-facing staff are trained to respond to distressed and upset residents in all circumstances but staff will be reminded that those responding to individuals reporting complaints need to be able to act in a sensitive and fair way.</p> <p>Our information relating to the management of complaints will be updated to show that we will endeavour to investigate and to respond to complaints within 10 working days. Furthermore, we will amend the information to show that if this is not possible, we will provide an explanation and a date by when the stage one response should be received and that this will not exceed a further 10 days without good reason.</p> <p>With regard to informing residents prior to sending our final decision, we will implement an additional step as part of our procedure in the Landlord Service. We will issue a “minded to” letter once the investigation is complete in order to inform complainants about our position and to give them an opportunity to respond and to challenge any areas of dispute before the final decision.</p> <p>We will endeavour to publicise more information about complaints which have been investigated including lessons learnt on our MDDC Housing Facebook page.</p> <p>We will try to recruit some “Complaints Champions”, involved tenants who can work with us to review complaints received and our response, check that we have implemented any lessons learnt and recommend any necessary changes to procedures.</p>		
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