

CHS Group Self-Assessment Form

Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code

Date of self-assessment - 22nd June 2023 with CHS Customer Complaints Panel

This self-assessment form against the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code is completed annually and discussed at CHS's Operations Committee. The Housing Ombudsman Code is also fully considered alongside any review of CHS's Complaints Policy.

Section 1 - Definition of a complaint

Mandatory 'must' requirements

Code section	Code requirement	Comply Yes/No	Evidence, commentary and any explanations
1.2	A complaint must be defined as: <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>	Yes	Complaints Policy Note 'customer' used rather than 'resident' because our complaints policy covers non-residents e.g. community investment services.
1.3	The resident does not have to use the word 'complaint' for it to be treated as such. A complaint that is submitted via a third party or representative must still be handled in line with the landlord's complaints policy.	Yes	Included in Complaints Policy
1.6	Chasers on a service request, such as a missed appointment, can often be resolved 'there and then' with an apology and the provision of another appointment and may not need to enter the complaints system. However, if further enquiries are needed to resolve the matter or if the resident requests it, the issue must be logged as a complaint.	Yes	The Complaints Policy sets out 'Initial Contact' enquiries, including chasers and quickly resolved issues.

1.7	A landlord must accept a complaint unless there is a valid reason not to do so.	Yes	The Complaints Policy sets out specific situations CHS would not accept a complaints.
1.8	A complaints policy must clearly set out the circumstances in which a matter will not be considered, and these circumstances should be fair and reasonable to residents.	Yes	The Complaints Policy sets out specific situations not regarded as complaints.
1.9	If a landlord decides not to accept a complaint, a detailed explanation must be provided to the resident setting out the reasons why the matter is not suitable for the complaints process and the right to take that decision to the Ombudsman.	Yes	Already included in Complaints Policy.

Best practice 'should' requirements

Code section	Code requirement	Comply Yes/No	Evidence, commentary, and any explanations
1.4	Landlords should recognise the difference between a service request , where a resident may be unhappy with a situation that they wish to have rectified, and a complaint about the service they have/have not received.	Yes	This is clearly set out in the Complaints Policy and internal complaint handling guide.
1.5	Survey feedback may not necessarily need to be treated as a complaint, though, where possible, the person completing the survey should be made aware of how they can pursue their dissatisfaction as a complaint if they wish to.	Yes	Our customer service team carry out follow up calls where customers have expressed dissatisfaction.

Section 2 - Accessibility and awareness

Mandatory 'must' requirements

Code section	Code requirement	Comply Yes/No	Evidence, commentary and any explanations
2.1	Landlords must make it easy for residents to complain by providing different channels through which residents can make a complaint such as in person, over the telephone, in writing, by email and digitally. While the Ombudsman recognises that it may not be feasible for a landlord to use all of the potential channels, there must be more than one route of access into the complaints system.	Yes	Our existing policy sets out a number of ways to contact us to make a complaint and says you 'can make a complaint in any way that suits you'. The policy includes a reference to social media - if you complain via social media, we will contact you privately.
2.3	Landlords must make their complaint policy available in a clear and accessible format for all residents. This will detail the number of stages involved, what will happen at each stage and the timeframes for responding.	Yes	The policy clearly sets out the different stages and timescales; it is available on our website. We send a copy to anyone making a formal complaint and on request.
2.4	Landlord websites, if they exist, must include information on how to raise a complaint. The complaints policy and process must be easy to find on the website.	Yes	Our Complaints Policy and leaflet are easily found on our website.
2.5	Landlords must comply with the Equality Act 2010 and may need to adapt normal policies, procedures, or processes to accommodate an individual's needs. Landlords must satisfy themselves that their policy sets out how they will respond to reasonable adjustments requests in line with the Equality Act and that complaints handlers have had appropriate training to deal with such requests.	Yes	This is reflected in our existing policy and we are expanding in our internal complaints handling guidance.
2.6	Landlords must publicise the complaints policy and process, the Complaint Handling Code and the Housing Ombudsman Scheme in leaflets, posters, newsletters, online and as part of regular correspondence with residents.	Yes	These are publicised on our website, Complaints leaflet, newsletter, customer annual report and any correspondence with individual complainants.

2.7	Landlords must provide residents with contact information for the Ombudsman as part of its regular correspondence with residents.	Yes	Anyone making a complaint is reminded of the Housing Ombudsman contact details.
2.8	Landlords must provide early advice to residents regarding their right to access the Housing Ombudsman Service throughout their complaint, not only when the landlord's complaints process is exhausted.	Yes	This is included in all correspondence / contact at any stage of a complaint.

Best practice 'should' requirements

2.2	Where a landlord has set up channels to communicate with its residents via social media, then it should expect to receive complaints via those channels. Policies should contain details of the steps that will be taken when a complaint is received via social media and how confidentiality and privacy will be maintained.	Yes	Included in our policy - if you complain via social media, we will contact you privately.
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Section 3 - Complaint handling personnel

Mandatory 'must' requirements

3.1	Landlords must have a person or team assigned to take responsibility for complaint handling to ensure complaints receive the necessary attention, and that these are reported to the governing body. This Code will refer to that person or team as the "complaints officer".	Yes	We have not designated a specific Complaints Officer; each operational team is responsible for handling complaints. We have a team drawn from different parts of CHS acting as a Complaints Team and a Customer Complaints Panel to monitor good practice and guidance, and learn from complaints.
3.2	...the complaint handler appointed must have appropriate complaint handling skills and no conflicts of interest.		Heads of Service ensure that each complaint is handled by someone with the appropriate skills and that they do not have a conflict of interest.

Best practice 'should' requirements

Code section	Code requirement	Comply Yes/No	Evidence, commentary and any explanations
3.3	<p>Complaint handlers should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • be able to act sensitively and fairly • be trained to handle complaints and deal with distressed and upset residents • have access to staff at all levels to facilitate quick resolution of complaints • have the authority and autonomy to act to resolve disputes quickly and fairly 	Yes	Those handling formal complaints are managers and Heads of Service who have authority to resolve them effectively including offering compensation. Customer facing teams have training on effective customer first-response to complaints, and during 2022 we held complaints handling workshops.

Section 4 - Complaint handling principles

Mandatory 'must' requirements

Code section	Code requirement	Comply Yes/No	Evidence, commentary and any explanations
4.1	<p>Any decision to try and resolve a concern must be taken in agreement with the resident and a landlord's audit trail/records should be able to demonstrate this. Landlords must ensure that efforts to resolve a resident's concerns do not obstruct access to the complaints procedure or result in any unreasonable delay. It is not appropriate to have extra named stages (such as 'stage 0' or 'pre-complaint stage') as this causes unnecessary confusion for residents. When a complaint is made, it must be acknowledged and logged at stage one of the complaints procedure within five days of receipt.</p>	Yes	<p>The policy requires a formal complaint to be logged and acknowledged within 5 days of being received; and a written reply within a further 10 working days. The case management module in our housing database prompts each key step and allows detailed notes to be recorded. The policy refers to 'Initial Contact' where an issue can be resolved quickly and recorded, and clear criteria for moving to the Formal Complaint stage.</p>

4.2	Within the complaint acknowledgement, landlords must set out their understanding of the complaint and the outcomes the resident is seeking. If any aspect of the complaint is unclear, the resident must be asked for clarification and the full definition agreed between both parties.	Yes	This is prompted by the acknowledgment letter template.
4.6	A complaint investigation must be conducted in an impartial manner.	Yes	Formal Reviews have not found complaint handling to be biased.
4.7	The complaint handler must: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • deal with complaints on their merits • act independently and have an open mind • take measures to address any actual or perceived conflict of interest • consider all information and evidence carefully • keep the complaint confidential as far as possible, with information only disclosed if necessary to properly investigate the matter. 	Yes	We will include these points as a reminder in our internal complaint handling guide.
4.11	Landlords must adhere to any reasonable arrangements agreed with residents in terms of frequency and method of communication	Yes	
4.12	The resident, and if applicable any staff member who is the subject of the complaint, must also be given a fair chance to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • set out their position • comment on any adverse findings before a final decision is made. 	Yes	The complainant is encouraged to set out their position in making a complaint; where a staff member is the subject of the complaint they also have the opportunity to set out their view and to comment on any findings in relation to them.
4.13	A landlord must include in its complaints policy its timescales for a resident to request escalation of a complaint	Yes	This is clear in the policy.
4.14	A landlord must not unreasonably refuse to escalate a complaint through all stages of the complaints procedure and must have clear and valid reasons for taking that course of action. Reasons for declining to escalate a complaint must be clearly set out in a landlord's complaints policy and must be the same as the reasons for not accepting a complaint.	Yes	The reasons are set out more fully in the policy. We don't believe the reasons for not escalating a complaint would be the same as not considering the complaint in the first place as it can't be escalated if we didn't treat as a complaint.

4.15	A full record must be kept of the complaint, any review and the outcomes at each stage. This must include the original complaint and the date received, all correspondence with the resident, correspondence with other parties and any reports or surveys prepared.	Yes	The case management module in our housing database prompts each key step and allows detailed notes to be recorded, plus copies of any correspondence.
4.18	Landlords must have policies and procedures in place for managing unacceptable behaviour from residents and/or their representatives when pursuing a complaint.	Yes	See separate policy on managing unreasonable customer behaviour.

Best practice 'should' requirements

Code section	Code requirement	Comply Yes/No	Evidence, commentary and any explanations
4.3	Landlords should manage residents' expectations from the outset, being clear where a desired outcome is unreasonable or unrealistic	Yes	This is included in our staff training plan / guidance.
4.4	A complaint should be resolved at the earliest possible opportunity, having assessed what evidence is needed to fully consider the issues, what outcome would resolve the matter for the resident and whether there are any urgent actions required.	Yes	
4.5	Landlords should give residents the opportunity to have a representative deal with their complaint on their behalf, and to be represented or accompanied at any meeting with the landlord where this is reasonable.	Yes	This is included in our policy.
4.8	Where a key issue of a complaint relates to the parties' legal obligations landlords should clearly set out their understanding of the obligations of both parties.	Yes	
4.9	Communication with the resident should not generally identify individual members of staff or contractors.	Yes	While this is generally the case, we feel there may be instances where it is appropriate to name a member of staff or contractor, although CHS takes overall responsibility for our services.

4.10	Landlords should keep residents regularly updated about the progress of the investigation.	Yes	Timescales for regular updates are included in the policy.
4.16	Landlords should seek feedback from residents in relation to the landlord's complaint handling as part of the drive to encourage a positive complaint and learning culture.	Yes	An automated phone call is made when a formal complaint is closed, and a follow up call if they express dissatisfaction with complaint handling.
4.17	Landlords should recognise the impact that being complained about can have on future service delivery. Landlords should ensure that staff are supported and engaged in the complaints process, including the learning that can be gained	Yes	
4.19	Any restrictions placed on a resident's contact due to unacceptable behaviour should be appropriate to their needs and should demonstrate regard for the provisions of the Equality Act 2010.	Yes	This is included in the Managing Unreasonable Behaviour policy.

Section 5 - Complaint stages

Mandatory 'must' requirements Stage 1

Code section	Code requirement	Comply: Yes/No	Evidence, commentary and any explanations
5.1	Landlords must respond to the complaint <u>within 10 working days</u> of the complaint being logged. Exceptionally, landlords may provide an explanation to the resident containing a clear timeframe for when the response will be received. This should not exceed a further 10 days without good reason.	Yes	A 5 day timescale for logging and acknowledging a complaint is clear in the re-drafted policy, and also a further 10 working days for the response.
5.5	A complaint response must be sent to the resident when the answer to the complaint is known, not when the outstanding actions required to address the issue, are completed. Outstanding actions must still be tracked and actioned expeditiously with regular updates provided to the resident.	Yes	Included in our policy and in internal guidance.

5.6	Landlords must address all points raised in the complaint and provide clear reasons for any decisions, referencing the relevant policy, law and good practice where appropriate.	Yes	This will be monitored by the Complaints Panel and senior officers when reviewing complaints.
5.8	Landlords must confirm the following in writing to the resident at the completion of stage one in clear, plain language: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the complaint stage • the decision on the complaint • the reasons for any decisions made • the details of any remedy offered to put things right • details of any outstanding actions • details of how to escalate the matter to stage two if the resident is not satisfied with the answer 	Yes	This was confirmed in an internal audit February 2022.

Stage 2

Code section	Code requirement	Comply: Yes/No	Evidence, commentary and any explanations
5.9	If all or part of the complaint is not resolved to the resident's satisfaction at stage one it must be progressed to stage two of the landlord's procedure, unless an exclusion ground now applies. In instances where a landlord declines to escalate a complaint it must clearly communicate in writing its reasons for not escalating as well as the resident's right to approach the Ombudsman about its decision.	Yes	The full list of reasons is included in the policy.
5.10	On receipt of the escalation request, landlords must set out their understanding of issues outstanding and the outcomes the resident is seeking. If any aspect of the complaint is unclear, the resident must be asked for clarification and the full definition agreed between both parties.	Yes	
5.11	Landlords must only escalate a complaint to stage two once it has completed stage one and at the request of the resident.	Yes	
5.12	The person considering the complaint at stage two, must not be the same person that considered the complaint at stage one.	Yes	This is clear in our policy.

5.13	Landlords must respond to the stage two complaint within 20 working days of the complaint being escalated. Exceptionally, landlords may provide an explanation to the resident containing a clear timeframe for when the response will be received. This should not exceed a further 10 days without good reason.	Yes	This is now reported as part of the Tenant Satisfaction Measures.
5.16	<p>Landlords must confirm the following in writing to the resident at the completion of stage two in clear, plain language:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the complaint stage • the complaint definition • the decision on the complaint • the reasons for any decisions made • the details of any remedy offered to put things right • details of any outstanding actions and • if the landlord has a third stage, details of how to escalate the matter to stage three • if this was the final stage, details of how to escalate the matter to the Housing Ombudsman Service if the resident remains dissatisfied. 	Yes	

Stage 3

Code section	Code requirement	Comply Yes/No	Evidence, commentary and any explanations
5.17	Two stage landlord complaint procedures are ideal. This ensures that the complaint process is not unduly long. If landlords strongly believe a third stage is necessary, they must set out their reasons for this as part of their self-assessment. A process with more than three stages is not acceptable under any circumstances.	Yes	Our policy clarifies that we have a 2 stage policy, although issues can be resolved (and recorded) at initial contact.

5.20	<p>Landlords must confirm the following in writing to the resident at the completion of stage three in clear, plain language:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the complaint stage • the complaint definition • the decision on the complaint • the reasons for any decisions made • the details of any remedy offered to put things right • details of any outstanding actions • details of how to escalate the matter to the Housing Ombudsman Service if the resident remains dissatisfied 	N/A	
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Best practice 'should' requirements

Stage 1

Code section	Code requirement	Comply Yes/No	Evidence, commentary and any explanations
5.2	If an extension beyond 20 working days is required to enable the landlord to respond to the complaint fully, this should be agreed by both parties.	Yes	This is included in our policy
5.3	Where agreement over an extension period cannot be reached, landlords should provide the Housing Ombudsman's contact details so the resident can challenge the landlord's plan for responding and/or the proposed timeliness of a landlord's response.	Yes	This is included in our policy
5.4	Where the problem is a recurring issue, the landlord should consider any older reports as part of the background to the complaint if this will help to resolve the issue for the resident.	Yes	
5.7	Where residents raise additional complaints during the investigation, these should be incorporated into the stage one response if they are relevant and the stage one response has not been issued. Where the stage one response has been issued, or it would unreasonably delay the response, the complaint should be logged as a new complaint.	Yes	This is included in our policy

Stage 2

Code section	Code requirement	Comply Yes/No	Evidence, commentary and any explanations
5.14	If an extension beyond 10 working days is required to enable the landlord to respond to the complaint fully, this should be agreed by both parties.	Yes	This is included in our policy
5.15	Where agreement over an extension period cannot be reached, landlords should provide the Housing Ombudsman's contact details so the resident can challenge the landlord's plan for responding and/or the proposed timeliness of a landlord's response	Yes	This is included in our policy

Stage 3

Code section	Code requirement	Comply Yes/No	Evidence, commentary and any explanations
5.18	Complaints should only go to a third stage if the resident has actively requested a third stage review of their complaint. Where a third stage is in place and has been requested, landlords must respond to the stage three complaint within 20 working days of the complaint being escalated. Additional time will only be justified if related to convening a panel. An explanation and a date for when the stage three response will be received should be provided to the resident.	N/A	
5.19	Where agreement over an extension period cannot be reached, landlords should provide the Housing Ombudsman's contact details so the resident can challenge the landlord's plan for responding and/or the proposed timeliness of a landlord's response.	N/A	

Section 6 - Putting things right

Mandatory 'must' requirements

Code section	Code requirement	Comply: Yes/No	Evidence, commentary and any explanations
6.1	Effective dispute resolution requires a process designed to resolve complaints. Where something has gone wrong a landlord must acknowledge this and set out the actions it has already taken, or intends to take, to put things right.	Yes	
6.2	Any remedy offered must reflect the extent of any service failures and the level of detriment caused to the resident as a result. A landlord must carefully manage the expectations of residents and not promise anything that cannot be delivered or would cause unfairness to other residents.	Yes	This is included in our Complaint handling guidance and Compensation Policy.
6.5	The remedy offer must clearly set out what will happen and by when, in agreement with the resident where appropriate. Any remedy proposed must be followed through to completion.	Yes	
6.6	In awarding compensation, a landlord must consider whether any statutory payments are due, if any quantifiable losses have been incurred, the time and trouble a resident has been put to as well as any distress and inconvenience caused.	Yes	We have a separate compensation policy which takes these factors into account. It is a separate policy because a customer may receive compensation without making a complaint.

Best practice 'should' requirements

Code section	Code requirement	Comply: Yes/No	Evidence, commentary and any explanations
6.3	Landlords should look beyond the circumstances of the individual complaint and consider whether anything needs to be 'put right' in terms of process or systems to the benefit of all residents.	Yes	We discuss such issues with our Customer Complaints Panel and include in the annual report to customers.
6.7	In some cases, a resident may have a legal entitlement to redress. The landlord should still offer a resolution where possible, obtaining legal advice as to how any offer of resolution should be worded.	Yes	

Section 7 - Continuous learning and improvement

Mandatory 'must' requirements

Code section	Code requirement	Comply: Yes/No	Evidence, commentary and any explanations
7.2	Accountability and transparency are integral to a positive complaint handling culture. Landlords must report back on wider learning and improvements from complaints in their annual report and more frequently to their residents, staff and scrutiny panels.	Yes	This is included in our annual report to customers.

Best practice 'should' requirements

Code section	Code requirement	Comply: Yes/No	Evidence, commentary and any explanations
7.3	A member of the governing body should be appointed to have lead responsibility for complaints to support a positive complaint handling culture. This role will be responsible for ensuring the governing body receives regular information on complaints that provides insight to the governing body on the landlord's complaint handling performance.	Yes	The Chair of Operations Committee has agreed to take on his role.
7.4	As a minimum, governing bodies should receive: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regular updates on the volume, categories and outcome of complaints, alongside complaint handling performance including compliance with the Ombudsman's orders Regular reviews of issues and trends arising from complaint handling The annual performance report produced by the Ombudsman, where applicable Individual complaint outcomes where necessary, including where the Ombudsman made findings of severe maladministration or referrals to regulatory bodies. The implementation of management responses should be tracked to ensure they are delivered to agreed timescales. The annual self-assessment against the Complaint Handling Code for scrutiny and challenge. 	Yes	The Director's report to Operations Committee includes our customer feedback dashboard. Team annual reports to Operations Committee includes lessons learned from complaints in each team. Any complaint escalated to the Housing Ombudsman is reported in detail to the Operations Committee. This self-assessment will be conducted annually and reported to the Operations Committee.

7.5	Any themes or trends should be assessed by senior management to identify potential systemic issues, serious risks or policies and procedures that require revision. They should also be used to inform staff and contractor training.	Yes	
7.6	Landlords should have a standard objective in relation to complaint handling for all employees that reflects the need to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • have a collaborative and co-operative approach towards resolving complaints, working with colleagues across teams and departments • take collective responsibility for any shortfalls identified through complaints rather than blaming others • act within the Professional Standards for engaging with complaints as set by the Chartered Institute of Housing. 	No	These requirements are included in the CHS Complaint Handling Guide which applies to all employees. All employees have required behaviours linked to their role, e.g. customer focus, teamwork, flexible and adaptable.

Section 8 - Self-assessment and compliance

Mandatory 'must' requirements

Code section	Code requirement	Comply Yes/No	Evidence, commentary and any explanations
8.1	Landlords must carry out an annual self-assessment against the Code to ensure their complaint handling remains in line with its requirements.	Yes	Included in our policy.
8.2	Landlords must also carry out a self-assessment following a significant restructure and/or change in procedures.	Yes	Not applicable to date.
8.3	Following each self-assessment, a landlord must: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • report the outcome of their self-assessment to their governing body. In the case of local authorities, self- assessment outcomes should be reported to elected members • publish the outcome of their assessment on their website if they have one, or otherwise make accessible to residents • include the self-assessment in their annual report section on complaints handling performance 	Yes	Outcome of this self-assessment will be reported to Operations Committee and published on website. Annual Customer Report includes learning from complaints and will include link to website self-assessment.