

Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code - Self-assessment

Tower Hamlets Homes (THH)

Compliance with the Complaint Handling Code				
1	Definition of a complaint	Yes	No	Comment
	<p>Does the complaints process use the following definition of a complaint?</p> <p>Definition in the new code 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.</p>	✓		THH has adopted the new Housing Ombudsman complaint definition.
	Does the policy have exclusions where a complaint will not be considered?	✓		Exclusions are clearly defined in our Complaints Procedure.
	Are these exclusions reasonable and fair to residents?	✓		Exclusions are consistent with policies of other social landlords. We have also consulted with the THH Residents' Panel.
2	Accessibility			
	Are multiple accessibility routes available for residents to make a complaint?	✓		A variety of routes are open to residents, including, online form; email; post; telephone; via advocates; social media
	Is the complaints policy and procedure available online?	✓		These are published on the THH website alongside the self-assessment.
	Do we have a reasonable adjustments policy?	✓		Our Diversity Policy Statement specifically references accessibility and information on accessibility.

	Do we regularly advise residents about our complaints process?	✓		<p>Advice for residents' on how to complain is prominently available on the THH Website. Housing Call Centre staff routinely provide advice. Information is also featured in the Winter edition of Open Door (all resident publication).</p> <p>From January 2021 a new Stage 1 acknowledgement template will include a link to our complaints procedure on the website and will also provide a summary of the procedure.</p>
3	Complaints team and process			
	Is there a complaint officer or equivalent in post?	✓		THH has service-based officers who are responsible for resolving investigating and drafting responses to complaints. We also have a small Customer Relations Team that monitor and report on compliance
	Does the complaint officer have autonomy to resolve complaints?	✓		Complaints are dealt with by officers who have direct responsibility for resolving complaints. In addition, we routinely monitor to ensure that commitments made in a response are followed up.
	Does the complaint officer have authority to compel engagement from other departments to resolve disputes?	✓		The officer responding to the complaint (complaint owner) will communicate with the relevant departments within THH to ensure that complaints have been fully responded to. An escalation process is in place to ensure that relevant departments engage.
	If there is a third stage to the complaints procedure are residents involved in the decision making?			Not applicable - we have a 2-stage process
	Is any third stage optional for residents?			Not applicable - we have a 2-stage process

	Does the final stage response set out residents' right to refer the matter to the Housing Ombudsman Service?	✓		Final stage responses provide clear advice for residents on their right to refer. We also promote that residents can seek general advice from the Housing Ombudsman at any stage.
	Do we keep a record of complaint correspondence including correspondence from the resident?	✓		All complaint correspondence is stored on the Council's complaint management system (iCasework)
	At what stage are most complaints resolved?	✓		96.5% cases were resolved at Stage 1 between 1 April 20 – 30 November 2020.
4	Communication			
	Are residents kept informed and updated during the complaints process?	✓		In acknowledging complaints, we always provide residents with a deadline for response and our procedure requires staff to keep residents informed of progress throughout. If we are unable to respond by the given deadline, we will contact the resident and explain the reason for delay.
	Are residents informed of the landlord's position and given a chance to respond and challenge any area of dispute before the final decision?	✓		Staff agree the resolution with the resident, and this is confirmed in the response. Residents are contacted after a stage 1 response has been made and given the opportunity to challenge the decision.
	Are all complaints acknowledged and logged within five days?	✓		All complaints are acknowledged within 48 hours of receipt
	Are residents advised of how to escalate at the end of each stage?	✓		All responses provide clear advice for residents on their right to escalate.
	What proportion of complaints are resolved at stage one?			Between April 20 and November 20, 96.6% of complaints are resolved at the first stage
	What proportion of complaints are resolved at stage two?			Between April 20 and November 20, 83% of complaints are resolved at the second stage
	What proportion of complaint responses are sent within Code timescales?	In part		THH are responsible for stage 1 complaints and is required to operate in accordance with London

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stage one Stage one (with extension) • Stage two Stage two (with extension) 		<p>Borough of Tower Hamlets policy which sets a 20-day response target. We always endeavour to respond to complaints sooner.</p> <p>96.5% Stage 1 complaints were responded to within 20 days (1 April 2020 to 30 November 2020).</p> <p>The London Borough of Tower Hamlets is responsible for stage 2 complaints. From 1 April 2020 to 30 November 2020 17% Stage 2 complaints were responded to within 20 day.</p> <p>From January 2021 we will be able to provide details of cases which had extensions.</p>
	Where timescales have been extended did we have good reason?	✓	Approval of the independent Customer Relations Team is required to ensure there is good reason to extend.
	Where timescales have been extended did we keep the resident informed?	✓	Our procedure requires that staff contact residents to explain reasons for extending deadlines and follow up the discussion in writing
	What proportion of complaints do we resolve to residents' satisfaction.		<p>x</p> <p>We currently contact all residents following a response to ensure complaints are resolved to a residents satisfaction. Formal satisfaction results are not currently recorded.</p> <p>We plan to introduce a formal survey to comply with this aspect of the code.</p>

5	Cooperation with Housing Ombudsman Service			
	Were all requests for evidence responded to within 15 days?	✓		THH aim to provide requested evidence to the Housing Ombudsman within 15 working days. If there are any issues, we always agree a new timescale with the Housing Ombudsman.
	Where the timescale was extended did we keep the Ombudsman informed?	✓		We keep an open dialogue with the Ombudsman always update on any extension.
6	Fairness in complaint handling			
	Are residents able to complain via a representative throughout?	✓		As part of reasonable adjustment we allow for a representative to complain on behalf of a resident.
	If advice was given, was this accurate and easy to understand?		x	We plan to introduce a formal survey to comply with this aspect of the code.
	How many cases did we refuse to escalate? What was the reason for the refusal?			The Council refused to escalate 5 cases to Stage 2 between 1 April 2020 and 30 November 2020 for the following reasons: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Matter to be dealt with under the Whistle Blowing procedure. • Matter not for THH to resolve • Complaint withdrawn by resident • Complainant was an unauthorised occupant • Resident failed to provide reasons for escalation
	Did we explain our decision to the resident?	✓		Residents are provided with a written explanation of the decision.
7	Outcomes and remedies			
	Where something has gone wrong are we taking appropriate steps to put things right?	✓		If a complaint is not fully resolved by the time a response is given, a corrective action is recorded on the complaints management system. These actions are monitored to ensure issues are fully resolved

8	Continuous learning and improvement		
	What improvements have we made as a result of learning from complaints?	✓	<p>We regularly assess learning from complaints. Recent examples of improvements we have made through this learning process includes;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improvements to how we communicate with residents when undertaking certain types of electrical works • Introduction of new processes for managing window repairs to reduce the number of inspections, enable a more structured decision-making process and properly manage the expectations of our residents. • Additional steps put in place to ensure service charge bills are reviewed for accuracy before being issued to residents.
	<p>How do we share these lessons with:</p> <p>a) residents?</p> <p>b) the board/governing body?</p> <p>c) In the Annual Report?</p>	✓	<p>Learning is shared with the Residents' Panel and through our Board led Customer Experience Task Force. Going forward, we will have a regular slot in our all resident publication (Open Door)</p> <p>Our Annual Report highlights some learning, and this is to be expanded for next year.</p>
	Has the Code made a difference to how we respond to complaints?	✓	<p>To a large extent our existing practice was in line with the code. Carrying out the self-assessment has given us an opportunity to review and strengthen, and engage with staff and residents about the importance of complaints.</p>

	What changes have we made?	✓	Changes include: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• amended response templates• updated and more prominent information on our website• changes to complaints handling system to enable compliance tracking• updated procedure• staff refresher training• plan to commence formal satisfaction survey• commitment to publish learning more frequently
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