

Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code:

Ipswich Borough Council Self-assessment December 2020

Compliance with the Complaint Handling Code

1	Definition of a complaint	Yes	No	Comments
	<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>		No	<p>The Council's complaint procedure does not provide a definition of a complaint.</p> <p>The Ombudsman advised that the starting point for effective complaint handling is a mutual understanding of what constitutes a complaint.</p> <p>The complaints procedure will be updated to include a definition of a complaint.</p>
	Does the policy have exclusions where a complaint will not be considered?	Yes		
	<p>Are these exclusions reasonable and fair to residents?</p> <p>Evidence relied upon: exclusions have been kept to a minimum and have been clearly identified and explained in the complaint's procedure. Alternative routes for these exclusions are given.</p>	Yes		<p>Exclusions relied upon are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • requests for service change or improvement • requests for information or an explanation of Council policy or practice • matters where there is a formal right of appeal (such as a planning decision, a parking penalty charge notice of benefit application).
2	Accessibility	Yes	No	Comments
	Are multiple accessibility routes available for residents to make a complaint?		No	The Council's complaint procedure states that complaints should be made using the online form or by letter.

				<p>The Ombudsman emphasises the importance of easy access to the complaint's procedure. Restricting access to the complaint's procedure to one sole method of entry is likely to breach the Complaint Handling Code.</p> <p>Routes available for residents to make a complaint will be reviewed to ensure that residents are easily able to access the complaints procedure through different channels.</p>
	Is the complaints policy and procedure available online?	Yes		
	Do we have a reasonable adjustments policy?		No	<p>The Council does not have a reasonable adjustments policy but does have an Equality and Diversity Policy.</p> <p>The Code sets out the requirement to have a Reasonable Adjustment Policy, explaining how the landlord will approach compliance in relation to this element of the Equality Act. This can be a stand-alone document or incorporated into a broader policy e.g. an Equality and Diversity Policy.</p> <p>The Council's Equality & Diversity policy is currently being reviewed/consulted on. It has a commitment to "ensuring equal access to our complaints and other procedures, including making reasonable adjustment to allow for flexibility in the procedure where the Council's adopted method for access is not most suitable for the individual concerned".</p>

	Do we regularly advise residents about our complaints process?		No	<p>The Council's website includes information on how to raise a complaint. The procedure is easily found and downloadable.</p> <p>The Council does not regularly advise residents about our complaint's procedure. The Ombudsman advised that it should be published in leaflets, newsletters, online and as part of regular correspondence with residents.</p> <p>Opportunities available for regularly advising residents about our complaints process will be looked at.</p>
3	Complaints team and process	Yes	No	Comments
	Is there a complaint officer or equivalent in post?	Yes		
	Does the complaint officer have autonomy to resolve complaints?	Yes		
	Does the complaint officer have authority to compel engagement from other departments to resolve disputes?	Yes		
	If there is a third stage to the complaint's procedure?	Yes		
	Are residents involved in the decision making?		No	<p>Residents are not involved in the decision making. In 2013 a report was presented to Executive asking for direction on whether Tenant panels would be recognised as a 'designated person' within the Localism Act 2011. This Act brought in new provisions regarding the way complaints about social landlords are referred and consider by the Housing Ombudsman Service. It was resolved not to recognise tenant panels for the purpose of acting as the 'designated person'.</p>

				<p>The Ombudsman considers the involvement of residents to be an effective part of managing disputes and a sign of a healthy complaint-handling culture. There is no requirement in the Code to have resident involvement in the complaint procedure although it is something that is encouraged. It should be noted that the draft Building Safety Bill includes amendments that will remove the designated person requirements if the Act becomes law.</p> <p>The Council will look at creating a Tenants Panel to provide overview and scrutiny of the Complaint process.</p>
	Is any third stage optional for residents?		No	<p>The third stage is not optional.</p> <p>The Housing Ombudsman does not believe a third stage is necessary as part of the complaints process.</p> <p>The Council believes a third stage is required as that gives the final view of the Chief Executive Officer.</p>
	Does the final stage response set out residents' right to refer the matter to the Housing Ombudsman Service?	Yes		<p>Yes, however this information should be included in the Council's complaint procedure as well.</p> <p>Access to Housing Ombudsman Service should also be promoted throughout the procedure not only at the point residents have exhausted the complaints process.</p> <p>The Council will update the process so access to the Housing Ombudsman's service will be promoted throughout.</p>

	Do we keep a record of complaint correspondence including correspondence from the resident?	Yes		
	At what stage are most complaints resolved?			Stage 1
4	Communication	Yes	No	Comments
	Are residents kept informed and updated during the complaints process?	Yes		
	Are residents informed of the landlord's position and given a chance to respond and challenge any area of dispute before the final decision?		No	
	Are all complaints acknowledged and logged within five days?	Yes		
	Are residents advised of how to escalate at the end of each stage?	Yes		
	What proportion of complaints are resolved at stage one?			The self-assessment covered the reporting period of April – September 2020 Number received - 48 Number escalated - 5 90% resolved
	What proportion of complaints are resolved at stage two?			The self-assessment covered the reporting period of April – September 2020 Number received - 5 Number escalated - 1 80% resolved
	What proportion of complaint responses are sent within Code timescales?			The self-assessment covered the reporting period of April – September 2020

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stage one Stage one (with extension) • Stage two Stage two (with extension) 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 41% (18 of the 48 received were responded to within 10 days) • n/a as the Council do not apply extensions • 80% (within the 20 days) • n/a as the Council do not apply extensions
	Where timescales have been extended did we have good reason?			<p>The Council does not record extensions of complaints, they will show as a missed deadline.</p> <p>An extension process will be added into the Complaints procedure and reasons recorded.</p>
	Where timescales have been extended did we keep the resident informed?			<p>Not recorded - we do not have a formal process agreed for extending deadlines.</p> <p>An extension process will be added into the Complaints procedure.</p>
	What proportion of complaints do we resolve to residents' satisfaction			<p>We do not record this however the number of cases not escalated could show satisfaction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stage 1 – 90% • Stage 2 – 80%
5	Cooperation with Housing Ombudsman Service	Yes	No	Comments
	Were all requests for evidence responded to within 15 days?			<p>Unknown – we do not record this information.</p> <p>The Council will start to record this information.</p>

	Where the timescale was extended did we keep the Ombudsman informed?			Unknown – we do not record this information The Council will start to record this information.
6	Fairness in complaint handling	Yes	No	Comments
	Are residents able to complain via a representative throughout?	Yes		The Council does accept complaints via a representative with a resident's permission, but this is not included in the written procedure. The Code advocates accessibility to the complaints service and would encourage landlords to accept representatives where requested by residents. The procedure will be updated to detail what circumstances complaints can be made via a representative and how permissions will be handled.
	If advice was given, was this accurate and easy to understand?			This is assessed at Stage 2 complaints. Complaints are checked by another person prior to complaint response being submitted. No checks are carried out at Stage 1.
	How many cases did we refuse to escalate? What was the reason for the refusal?			Unknown – this information is not recorded. The Council will consider ways of recording this.
	Did we explain our decision to the resident?			As above
7	Outcomes and remedies	Yes	No	Comments

	Where something has gone wrong are we taking appropriate steps to put things right?	Yes		Yes, but no detail is recorded. The Council will start to record this information.
8	Continuous learning and improvement	Yes	No	Comments
	What improvements have we made as a result of learning from complaints?			This information is not recorded. The Ombudsman encourages landlords to use complaints as a source of intelligence to identify issues and introduce positive changes in service delivery. The Council will start to record this information to demonstrate what improvements have been made as a result of learning from complaints.
	How do we share these lessons with: a) residents? b) the board/governing body? c) In the Annual Report?			The Council only report numbers of complaints received and % responded to on time. The Code requires a landlord to share its learning with residents, including a specific requirement to include any organisational learning in its Annual Report. The Ombudsman recognises that it may be difficult for some landlords to include this information in the Annual Report for 2020/21. They would expect to see this information included in future Annual Reports. The Council will include this information in our annual report from 2021/22
	Has the Code made a difference to how we respond to complaints?	Yes		The code has been useful in allowing the Council to assess and improve the way it manages complaints

	What changes have we made?			An action plan has been put together and an officer Task and Finish Group has been established to complete a review and update of Council policies and procedures.
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