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# Uttlesford District Council

Chief Executive: Peter Holt

## Housing Board

**Date:** Monday, 29th April, 2024

**Time:** 12.30 pm

**Venue:** Committee Room - Council Offices, London Road, Saffron Walden,  
Essex CB11 4ER

**Chair:** Councillor A Coote

**Members:** Councillors S Barker, A Dean, G Driscoll, C Fiddy, R Freeman,  
P Lees (Vice-Chair), C Martin, B Regan and M Tayler

**Tenant and Leaseholder Panel Representatives:** John Cotier (Chair) and Susan  
Ovel

## **AGENDA**

**1 Apologies for Absence and Declarations of Interest**

To receive any apologies for absence and declarations of interest.

**2 Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

4 - 7

To consider the minutes of the previous meeting.

**3 Procurement of Repairs and Maintenance Services - preferred operating model and general update**

8 - 12

For consideration.

**4 Housing Ombudsman new statutory Complaints Handling Code self-assessment**

13 - 106

For discussion.

**5 Update on recent complaints handling determination by the Housing Ombudsman**

Verbal update to be provided.

**For information about this meeting please contact Democratic Services**

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# Agenda Item 2

**HOUSING BOARD held at COUNCIL CHAMBER - COUNCIL OFFICES,  
LONDON ROAD, SAFFRON WALDEN, CB11 4ER, on THURSDAY, 8  
FEBRUARY 2024 at 12.30 pm**

Present: Councillor A Coote (Chair)  
Councillors C Fiddy, R Freeman, P Lees (Vice-Chair) and  
M Tayler

Officers in attendance: K Clifford (Director of Housing, Health and Communities),  
C Gibson (Democratic Services Officer), J Snares (Housing  
Strategy and Operations Manager) and M Watts  
(Environmental Health Manager (Protection))

Also present: J Cotier (Chair of Tenant and Leaseholder Panel).

## HB12 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Dean and Barker and S Ovel (Vice-Chair of Tenant and Leaseholder Panel).

John Cotier (Chair of Tenant and Leasehold Panel) introduced himself and was welcomed to the meeting by Committee Members.

There were no declarations of interest.

## HB13 **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minutes of the meeting held on 7 December 2023 were approved as an accurate record; HB8 first bullet point to read "CPI" rather than "CBI".

## HB14 **ENDING INTRODUCTORY TENANCIES**

The Housing Strategy and Operations Manager presented her report.

She said that the aim was to end introductory tenancies. This would free up Housing Officers to undertake more tenancy audits and reduce time spent on administration.

There was some discussion around the possibility of setting up a small sub-committee to discuss the council's succession policy and where discretion can be used in extenuating circumstances.

RESOLVED that:

- Housing Board recommends that Cabinet approves the ending of introductory tenancies and the granting of secure tenancies to all new tenants.
- Housing Board recommends the approval and adoption of the revised Tenancy Policy.
- Housing Board recommends that Cabinet approves the issue of new secure tenancies to all tenants currently on introductory tenancies unless there is current enforcement action being taken to end the tenancy.
- Officers work with Members to review council's succession policy.

## HB15 **DAMP AND MOULD LEAFLET**

The Director of Housing, Health and Communities outlined the contents of the Damp and Mould leaflet.

The Chair said that he had received an email from Councillor Barker asking for details about damages to health being included in the leaflet. Members discussed whether to expand on the information already contained. Members considered that the leaflet should stay focussed from a landlord perspective. Councillor Tayler gave his view from a medical viewpoint that the leaflet was well balanced and that information about damage to health was not considered necessary. Members all supported the leaflet as circulated.

The leaflet will be circulated with rent statements and newsletters.

## HB16 **KPI'S AND PERFORMANCE MATRIX**

The Director of Housing, Health and Communities introduced the report, which was shown on the screen. She said that all KPI's currently recorded had been shown and asked for views from Members as to how this data be brought back to Committee in future.

Members expressed views that:

- There was a need to highlight those cases which could be referred to the Ombudsman and the importance of an index with key dates and explanations.
- As much information as possible should be provided initially and this could subsequently be narrowed down.
- There was a need to understand how each PI had been set, alongside a risk assessment for each. Reference was made to the use of Housemark public data dashboards.
- Private sector information re deadlines could possibly be included.

Clarification was sought re KPI 08a in respect of the average lettings days for sheltered properties being 23 days compared with an average of 7 lettings days for non-sheltered properties. Officers explained the difficulties faced with harder to let dwellings.

The Director of Housing, Health and Communities said that a cover report would be brought back to the next Committee that would provide more narrative. She said that in future the KPI's for the following year should be agreed at Housing Board.

#### **HB17 UPDATE ON UNSL**

The Director of Housing, Health and Communities provided a verbal update. She said that the Extraordinary Cabinet in January 2024 had taken the decision not to continue with the arrangement beyond the five years and that an exit notice had been issued to UNSL. A Project Board had been set up to work on an exit management strategy over the next 15 months. There was a need to define the options moving forward and to seek a best option. Various workshops would be organised.

She said that negotiations continued on an on-going basis with UNSL to ensure that business as usual didn't decline.

#### **HB18 UPDATE ON RESOURCES IN HOUSING**

The Director of Housing, Health and Communities said that she would be leaving the Council on 8 March 2024. A Director of Property was due to start work shortly; the focus would be exiting the UNSL contract; the preferred candidate had experience in this specialist field.

The Director of Housing, Health and Communities said that Simone Russell would be returning on an interim basis as Strategic Director of Housing. There would also be a review undertaken of the functions currently undertaken by Housing Officers.

John Cotier (Chair of Tenant and Leaseholder Panel) asked to be involved in discussions and the Director of Housing, Health and Communities, welcomed this suggestion and tenants would be invited to participate in the options for future service provision.

#### **HB19 RENTERS REFORM BILL**

The Environmental Health Manager (Protection) presented a PowerPoint presentation (copied in the Agenda papers).

Views were expressed that much of the work moving forward would be reliant on the goodwill of Councils and that Government guidelines were awaited as no explanations had been given yet as to how actions would be carried out.

HB20 **FORWARD PLAN**

The Director of Housing, Health and Communities presented the Forward Plan; an addition was required in respect of the KPI's and risk assessments.

As this was her last Housing Board meeting, the Chair thanked the Director of Housing, Health and Communities for all her efforts.

The Director thanked Members of the Committee and her team of officers.

*The meeting finished at 1.45 pm.*

# Agenda Item 3

<b>Committee:</b>	<b>Housing Board</b>	<b>Date:</b>	
<b>Title:</b>	<b>Property Services - Transition</b>		29 <sup>th</sup> April 2024
<b>Portfolio Holder:</b>	<b>Cllr Arthur Coote, Portfolio Holder for Housing &amp; Equalities</b>		
<b>Report Author:</b>	<b>Brian Burton – Interim Director – Property Services</b>		

## Summary

1. This report provides an overview of Cabinet's decision on 18th April 2024 to adopt the mixed economy model (Option 11) as the future operating model for repairs, maintenance and capital works across the council's housing stock of c.2,800 homes.
2. A summary of the 11 options reviewed, including the rationale for discounting alternatives, is included. The mixed economy model's design principles, implementation approach, governance and risk management arrangements are covered in detail.

## Recommendations

3. The Housing Board is asked to note and consider the analysis underpinning Cabinet's approval of the mixed economy model, including:
  - A. Summary of options appraisal and reasons for discounting alternatives
  - B. Technical architecture and segmentation across work streams
  - C. Tailored governance model and clienting arrangements
  - D. Implementation plan, timelines and mobilisation activities
  - E. Risk management approach for transition and interim periods
4. The Housing Board is asked to support the statutory consultation approach with tenants and leaseholders regarding the approved service delivery model changes.

## Background

### Options Appraisal Summary

5. A total of 11 future operating model options were reviewed, as summarised below:



Option	Description	Rationale for Discounting
1	<p><b>Continue UNSL JV to 2030</b></p> <p>Continuing with the existing joint venture arrangement with Uttlesford Norse Services Ltd (UNSL) until the end of the contract term in 2030.</p>	Discounted due to evidenced performance issues
2	<p><b>Renegotiate UNSL JV</b></p> <p>Attempting to renegotiate and reset the service level agreement with the current UNSL joint venture provider.</p>	Discounted as SLA reset negotiations failed
3	<p><b>Single Integrated Contract</b></p> <p>Replacing the current arrangement with a single, consolidated contract with one provider to deliver all repairs, maintenance, and capital works.</p>	Discounted - High risk of over-reliance on single provider
4	<p><b>Dynamic Purchasing System</b></p> <p>Establishing a dynamic purchasing system framework where specific work packages are tendered individually rather than a long-term contract.</p>	Unsuitable as primary model - price uncertainty, limited social value
5	<p><b>Joint Procurement</b></p> <p>Collaborating with other local authorities or housing providers to jointly procure services through a shared contract arrangement.</p>	Unlikely to secure aligned priorities with partners
6	<p><b>Direct Labour Organisation</b></p>	Prohibitive setup costs, limited

	Setting up an in-house team and delivery model within the council to self-deliver repairs and maintenance services.	flexibility, extensive support overheads
7	<b>New Joint Venture</b>  Establishing a new joint venture arrangement with a private sector partner for delivering repairs and maintenance services.	Long procurement timelines, governance concerns from UNSL experience
8	<b>Wholly Owned Subsidiary</b>  Creating a wholly-owned subsidiary company of the council to act as an arm's-length delivery vehicle for repairs and maintenance.	Similar constraints to DLO plus tax implications
9	<b>Multiple Contracts</b>  Dividing the work scope into separate, multiple contracts with different providers for each work stream.	Resource intensive clienting, fragmented delivery
10	<b>Acquire UNSL</b>  The council acquiring and taking ownership of the existing UNSL joint venture company to gain direct control.	Discounted on legal advice - risks, time required, unlikely to resolve issues
11	<b>Mixed Economy Model</b>  Adopting a blended approach with an integrated multi-stream contract complemented by specialist contractors across different work streams.	<b>Selected option</b> - tailored approach, mitigates risks

6. The review of these options included consultation with a cross-party Members' working group and the Tenants and Leaseholders Panel. The decision was also reviewed by UDC's Scrutiny Committee prior to the Cabinet decision on 18<sup>th</sup> April 2024.
7. The mixed economy model (Option 11) was recommended as it enables a tailored approach by combining integrated multi-stream contract(s) with specialist contractors,

leveraging market competencies while ensuring strategic oversight through an insourced asset management function

## **Design Principles**

7. The approved mixed economy model separates service delivery across three core segments:
  - A. Integrated multi-stream contract(s) for recurring responsive repairs, planned & cyclical maintenance programmes, including damp/mould treatment and non-licensed asbestos works.
  - B. Specialist contractors for statutory compliance disciplines (gas, electrical, water hygiene, lifts, fire safety) and major capital investment projects.
  - C. Insourced asset management function to define 30-year capital strategy, manage stock condition data, validate contractor performance and quality assurance.
8. This approach enables tailored governance for each work stream, mitigating issues often faced by single-provider models attempting to cover divergent scopes.
9. Roles and responsibilities across the clienting teams are split thus:
  - A. Asset management - defining programming, monitoring stock condition
  - B. Compliance monitoring - audits, statutory checks and certifications
  - C. Commercial contract management - overseeing performance, VFM
10. Scopes, service levels, KPIs and contractual terms will be tailored based on market norms, technical constraints and council's specific needs for each work stream.

## **Implementation Approach**

11. The implementation plan includes the following key workstreams:
  - A. Statutory consultation (Social Housing Act 2023, Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Act 2002)
  - B. Detailed specification and suite of contracts per work stream
  - C. Procurement strategy utilising appropriate frameworks
  - D. Insourcing the repairs contact centre function and IT integration
  - E. Transition plan from incumbent UNSL model
  - F. Member engagement and further Cabinet decisions, including service specification and contractor selection. This will include regular updates to Housing Board.
  - G. Staff engagement and TUPE considerations
  - H. Resident communications strategy
12. External advisors will supplement the dedicated implementation team to ensure new arrangements are mobilised ahead of March 31, 2025.

## **Governance & Risk Management**

13. Interim measures include escalated UNSL contract management, audits and contingencies to ensure compliance in the final year.
14. Key risks being managed:
  - A. Achieving procurement timelines
  - B. Mobilisation and operational readiness
  - C. Seamless transition of services for residents
  - D. Resilience of insourced functions
15. Clear mechanisms are being established for performance management, enforcement of standards (Social Housing Regulation Act 2023) and budgetary control.

## **Financial Implications**

16. Mobilisation budgets have been approved, replacing c.£9m annual UNSL expenditure.
17. Value for money expected to improve through tailored risk allocation, increased competition and strengthened governance.

## **Conclusion**

18. Following an options appraisal, Cabinet approved the mixed economy model for repairs and maintenance delivery across council homes.
19. This model enables a tailored, value-for-money solution combining integrated multi-stream and specialist contracts, governed by an insourced asset management function.
20. The Housing Board is asked to note the recommendations, technical principles, implementation plans and risk mitigation approach underpinning the approved model.

<b>Committee:</b>	<b>Housing Board</b>	<b>Date:</b>
<b>Title:</b>	<b>Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code self-assessment</b>	29 April 2024
<b>Portfolio Holder:</b>	<b>Cllr Arthur Coote, Portfolio Holder for Housing</b>	Item 4
<b>Report Author:</b>	<b>Simone Russell–Interim Strategic Director Housing Health and Communities</b>	<b>Key decision: No</b>

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## Summary

1. This report updates Housing Board on the Council's self-assessment against the Statutory Complaints Handling Code as issued by the Housing Ombudsman in February 2024.
2. Under the provisions of the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023, UDC is legally required to comply with this Code and to submit its self-assessment of compliance against the Code by 30<sup>th</sup> June 2024.
3. There are some areas where the Council is not currently compliant with the Code. An action plan to achieve compliance is being drawn up by officers and this will be brought back to the Tenants and Leaseholders Panel and to Housing Board.

## Recommendations

4. Housing Board is asked to discuss the draft self-assessment, raise any questions with officers and make any observations, before the self-assessment is reviewed by the Corporate Management Team and then ratified by Cabinet on 13<sup>th</sup> June 2024.

The draft self-assessment is attached as Appendix 1.

## Financial Implications

5. There are no direct financial implications associated with this report. Any follow-on actions arising from the self-assessment will be delivered within the existing staff establishment.

## Background Papers

6. Housing Ombudsman Complaints Handling Code 2024 – attached as Appendix 2.

7. Uttlesford District Council Complaints Policy (Housing Services) – attached as Appendix 3.

## **Background**

### **The Housing Ombudsman's Complaints Handling Code**

8. The Housing Ombudsman issued its first Complaints Handling Code (the Code) in July 2020, with a requirement that social housing providers carry out and publish a self-assessment against it by December 2020. Thereafter landlords have been required to carry out an annual review of their compliance against the version of the Code in place at the time.
9. Following the passage of the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023, an updated Code became Statutory on 1 April 2024. UDC must, by law, comply with the Code.
10. The Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 places a duty on the Housing Ombudsman to monitor compliance with the statutory Complaint Handling Code. This means that in turn, the Ombudsman is required to ensure that all landlords meet the standards set out in the Code.
11. The duty allows the Ombudsman to assess landlords even where no complaints have been referred to it for investigation. The aim is to ensure that residents receive a quality complaint handling service, regardless of who their landlord is, or what they are complaining about.
12. The key elements of the Code include:
  - universal definition of a complaint
  - providing easy access to the complaints procedure and ensuring residents are aware of it, including their right to access the Housing Ombudsman Service
  - the structure of the complaint's procedure - only 2 stages necessary and clear times set out for responses
  - ensuring fairness in complaint handling with a resident-focused process
  - taking action to put things right and appropriate remedies
  - creating a positive complaint handling culture through continuous learning and improvement
  - demonstrating learning in annual reports
  - annual self-assessment against the Code
  - requirement to appoint a lead Member for Complaints, to receive assurance that the Code is being complied with

### **Uttlesford District Council's approach**

13. Since the publication of the first Code in 2020 UDC has put in place a number of measures to improve its approach to complaints handling and in 2023 developed an updated Complaints Policy for Housing Services, which at that time, reflected the requirements of the Code. A copy of the Policy is attached as Appendix 2.

14. A number of other measures have also been put in place, including the introduction of weekly complaints monitoring meetings to ensure that complaints (and follow up actions) are responded to properly and within the required timescales.
15. The Tenants and Leaseholders Panel and Housing Board have previously had the opportunity to comment on the annual self-assessments of compliance against the Code, which has been published on the Council's website.
16. Officers have reviewed afresh the Council's approach managing complaints in light of the newly published Statutory Code and have completed a draft self-assessment.
17. The revised Code is more prescriptive in some areas than previous versions. As such items of non-compliance have been identified which previously were not given the same level of consideration. An action plan will be developed, with target completion dates against each action.

### **Key areas identified as requiring actions to achieve compliance**

18. Key improvement actions identified through the self-assessment activity, and which will feature within the improvement plan include the following:
  - Introducing training for all staff involved in complaints handling within the Council and briefings for Members, the Tenants and Residents Panel and the Corporate Management Team on the expectations of the new Code.
  - Introducing a formalised approach for learning from complaints and ensuring this involves service managers.
  - Developing a complaints performance dashboard, providing a range of metrics to build a clear picture of performance, themes emerging from complaints and residents' satisfaction with complaints.
  - Developing an annual complaints report.
  - Updating UDC's Complaints Policy to reflect the new Code.
  - Introducing a new compensation framework which reflects Ombudsman's guidance on remedies for complaints.
  - Reviewing the Council's approach to monitoring follow-on actions from complaints (remedies).
  - Carrying out a fresh equalities review of the Council's policies and practices in relation to complaints handling, including the first point of contact for residents wishing to make a complaint.
  - Appointing a new Member Complaints Lead (Cabinet decision)

### **Resident Engagement**

19. The Chair and the vice-Chair of the Tenants and Residents Panel have had the opportunity to review the Council's self-assessment and the final self-assessment will be brought back to the next full meeting of the Tenants and Residents Panel.
20. The Council will facilitate ongoing scrutiny by tenants and leaseholders of its complaint handling arrangements, and this will be discussed with the next full meeting of the Tenants and Residents Panel. This discussion will include the proposed Action Plan for achieving compliance with the Code and agreement

as to how the Tenants and Leaseholder’s Panel will oversee the delivery of the Action Plan.

**Impact**

**21.**

Communication/Consultation	<p>There has been, and will continue to be, communication and consultation with tenants on the management of complaints within UDC in general and specifically, UDC’s compliance with the Code.</p> <p>This includes facilitating ongoing scrutiny through the Tenants and Leaseholders Panel, as referred to in points 19 and 20 above.</p>
Community Safety	There are no impacts in relation to community safety.
Equalities	<p>The complaints process will be accessible to all residents, regardless of their background and protected characteristics, and follow on actions will be appropriate to the diverse needs of residents. The Council’s approach to complaints handling will be subject to a fresh review by the Council’s Partnerships Officer. This is referenced within the self-assessment document.</p>
Health and Safety	There are no direct impacts in relation to health and safety.
Human Rights/Legal Implications	<p>Compliance against Code is linked to the Social Housing Regulation Act 2023/Tenant Satisfaction Measures. Non-compliance may be self-referred to the Regulator of Social Housing by the Housing Ombudsman and the Council’s approach will also be subject to scrutiny by the Regulator as part of the new housing inspection regime.</p>
Sustainability	There are no direct impacts in relation to sustainability.
Ward-specific impacts	All Wards.



Workforce/Workplace	There are no direct impacts in relation to the workforce/workplace.
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**Next steps**

- 22. The self-assessment will be updated following this meeting to take into account feedback from Housing Board. It will be presented to the Corporate Management Team for comment and any further amendments as required.
- 23. The self-assessment will be considered by Cabinet at its next meeting on 13<sup>th</sup> June, prior to being submitted to the Housing Ombudsman by the statutory deadline of 30<sup>th</sup> June 2024. Cabinet will be asked to nominate the lead Member for Complaints, as required by the Code.

**24. Risk Analysis**

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigating actions
Non-compliance with the Code would result in intervention and enforcement by the Housing Ombudsman and the Regulator of Social Housing	1 – the purpose of the self-assessment is to identify non-compliance and put in place actions to resolve this	3 –Regulatory enforcement, reputational damage and in some cases orders to pay compensation to residents	Fulfil the obligations of the Council by completing and publishing the self-assessment and delivering improvement actions identified.  Updating the Council's policy and ensuring that staff are trained on how to implement the policy.

## 1.1 Appendix A: Self-assessment form


This self-assessment form should be completed by the complaints officer, and it must be reviewed and approved by the landlord's governing body at least annually.

Once approved, landlords must publish the self-assessment as part of the annual complaints performance and service improvement report on their website. The governing body's response to the report must be published alongside this.

Landlords are required to complete the self-assessment in full and support all statements with evidence, with additional commentary as necessary.

We recognise that there may be a small number of circumstances where landlords are unable to meet the requirements, for example, if they do not have a website. In these circumstances, we expect landlords to deliver the intentions of the Code in an alternative way, for example by publishing information in a public area so that it is easily accessible.

## Section 1: Definition of a complaint


Code provision	Code requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence	Commentary / explanation/improvement actions
1.2	<p>A complaint must be defined as:</p> <p><i>‘an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the landlord, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting a resident or group of residents.’</i></p>		<p>The Council’s definition is published on the website <a href="https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/article/7939/Complaints-compliments-and-feedback-on-housing-repairs">https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/article/7939/Complaints-compliments-and-feedback-on-housing-repairs</a></p> <p><a href="#">The definition is also included in the Complaints Policy:</a></p> <p><a href="#">Uttlesford Housing Complaints Policy 2023</a>  <a href="#">The Council has a published Complaints Leaflet. The leaflet does not include the definition.</a></p>  <p>Complaints leaflet 2024.pdf</p>	<p>The policy and website explain the definition of a complaint.</p> <p>The Council sent a copy of the complaints leaflet to the Housing Ombudsman who approved its contents. Improvements would be to add the definition of a complaint to the leaflet when it is next reviewed.</p>
1.3	<p>A resident does not have to use the word ‘complaint’ for it to be treated as such. Whenever a resident expresses dissatisfaction landlords must give them the choice to make complaint. A complaint that is submitted via a third party or representative must be</p>	Yes	<p>Complaints policy can be found here: <a href="https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/article/7939/Complaints-compliments-and-feedback-on-housing-repairs">https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/article/7939/Complaints-compliments-and-feedback-on-housing-repairs</a></p>	<p>We will be rolling out training for all relevant Council staff on the requirements of the new statutory code. This will include asking residents who express dissatisfaction whether they wish to raise a complaint.</p>

	handled in line with the landlord's complaints policy.			All 3 <sup>rd</sup> party complaints are accepted.
1.4	Landlords must recognise the difference between a service request and a complaint. This must be set out in their complaints policy. A service request is a request from a resident to the landlord requiring action to be taken to put something right. Service requests are not complaints, but must be recorded, monitored and reviewed regularly.	Yes	Complaints policy can be found here: <a href="https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/article/7939/Complaints-compliments-and-feedback-on-housing-repairs">https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/article/7939/Complaints-compliments-and-feedback-on-housing-repairs</a>	When it is obviously a request for service and not a complaint it is forwarded to the correct department for action. When it is not obvious, we check with the complainant if they are looking to raise a complaint or a request for service. As part of the complaints training all staff will be taught to recognise the difference between a service request and a complaint. Currently service requests are not recorded however this will be incorporated into the review of Northgate/NEC.
1.5	A complaint must be raised when the resident expresses dissatisfaction with the response to their service request, even if the handling	Yes	Complaints policy can be found here: <a href="https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/article/7939/Complaints-compliments-and-feedback-on-housing-repairs">https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/article/7939/Complaints-compliments-and-feedback-on-housing-repairs</a>	We always aim to resolve service requests even if there is an ongoing complaint.

	of the service request remains ongoing. Landlords must not stop their efforts to address the service request if the resident complains.			We will ensure that service requests are being carried out alongside complaint investigations as part of the weekly complaint review meetings.
1.6	An expression of dissatisfaction with services made through a survey is not defined as a complaint, though wherever possible, the person completing the survey should be made aware of how they can pursue a complaint if they wish to. Where landlords ask for wider feedback about their services, they also must provide details of how residents can complain.	Yes	Our TSM's were carried out by a third party via telephone, who take forward any complaints for requests for service. This enabled us to deal with any complaints very quickly, those with red flags, amber and green accordingly.	All in-house surveys will in future include reference to how to complain and details of the Ombudsman service.

## Section 2: Exclusions

Code provision	Code requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence	Commentary / explanation/improvement actions
2.1	Landlords must accept a complaint unless there is a valid reason not to do so. If landlords decide not to accept a complaint, they must be able to evidence their reasoning. Each complaint must be considered on its own merits	Yes	Complaints policy can be found here: <a href="https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/article/7939/Complaints-compliments-and-feedback-on-housing-repairs">https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/article/7939/Complaints-compliments-and-feedback-on-housing-repairs</a>	All key staff to complete appropriate in-house and Ombudsman training so they are aware of valid reasons for refusing a complaint.
2.2	A complaints policy must set out the circumstances in which a matter will not be considered as a complaint or escalated, and these circumstances must be fair and reasonable to residents. Acceptable exclusions include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The issue giving rise to the complaint occurred over twelve months ago.</li> </ul>	Yes	Complaints policy can be found here: <a href="https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/article/7939/Complaints-compliments-and-feedback-on-housing-repairs">https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/article/7939/Complaints-compliments-and-feedback-on-housing-repairs</a>	The policy will be reviewed to include these specific exclusions as set out in 2.2

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Legal proceedings have started. This is defined as details of the claim, such as the Claim Form and Particulars of Claim, having been filed at court.</li> <li>Matters that have previously been considered under the complaints policy.</li> </ul>			
2.3	Landlords must accept complaints referred to them within 12 months of the issue occurring or the resident becoming aware of the issue, unless they are excluded on other grounds. Landlords must consider whether to apply discretion to accept complaints made outside this time limit where there are good reasons to do so.	Yes	Complaints policy can be found here: <a href="https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/article/7939/Complaints-compliments-and-feedback-on-housing-repairs">https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/article/7939/Complaints-compliments-and-feedback-on-housing-repairs</a>	We consider all complaints on an individual basis including those raised more than 12 months after the issue occurring.
2.4	If a landlord decides not to accept a complaint, an explanation must be provided to the resident setting out the reasons why the matter is not suitable for the complaints process and	Yes	 Complaints - Non Complaint Letter.pdf	The Council has a template letter for not accepting a complaint. This makes reference to the resident being able to refer the matter to the Ombudsman if they are





	the right to take that decision to the Ombudsman. If the Ombudsman does not agree that the exclusion has been fairly applied, the Ombudsman may tell the landlord to take on the complaint.			not satisfied with the Council's decision. An officer to discuss the complaint with the resident to check all issues have been raised and possible actions fully explored.
2.5	Landlords must not take a blanket approach to excluding complaints; they must consider the individual circumstances of each complaint.	Yes	Complaints policy can be found here: <a href="https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/article/7939/Complaints-compliments-and-feedback-on-housing-repairs">https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/article/7939/Complaints-compliments-and-feedback-on-housing-repairs</a>	We consider all complaints on an individual basis.



### Section 3: Accessibility and Awareness



Code provision	Code requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence	Commentary / explanation/improvement actions
3.1	Landlords must make it easy for residents to complain by providing different channels through which they can make a complaint. Landlords must	Yes	Complaints policy can be found here: <a href="https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/article/7939/Complaints-compliments-and-feedback-on-housing-repairs">https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/article/7939/Complaints-compliments-and-feedback-on-housing-repairs</a>  <a href="#">Equality Policy (PDF) [1MB]</a>	More information on how to complain has been added to Housing News, complaints feature on the front page of the website. Complaints can be made






	<p>consider their duties under the Equality Act 2010 and anticipate the needs and reasonable adjustments of residents who may need to access the complaints process.</p>			<p>by telephone, email, in person or any reasonable form of communication. Where there is a need, we will visit a resident to discuss a complaint.</p> <p>Complaints are taken and actively encouraged at regular sheltered housing residents' meetings.</p> <p>There is a dedicated email box for complaints. This enables them to be directed to the appropriate officer efficiently.</p> <p>Uttlesford District Council believes that no person should be treated unfairly and is committed to eliminate all forms of discrimination. We do this by complying with our Equality Policy which sets out the Council's aims and objectives for treating everyone equally.</p>
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<p>3.2</p>	<p>Residents must be able to raise their complaints in any way and with any member of staff. All staff must be aware of the complaints process and be able to pass details of the complaint to the appropriate person within the landlord.</p>	<p>Yes</p>	<p>  Ombudsman Training - Dec 2022.pdf   Applying Dispute Resolutions - Ombud:Ombudsman - Know   Housing Ombudsman - Know         </p>	<p>Housing staff have had instruction on the complaints process and how to advise tenants wishing to make a complaint and who to pass complaints to. Key staff have completed Ombudsman training</p> <p>In the complaints training programme being developed, this will include refreshing staff on the Council's published complaints process.</p> <p>An improvement would be to add complaints discussion to team meeting agendas.</p>
<p>3.3</p>	<p>High volumes of complaints must not be seen as a negative, as they can be indicative of a well-publicised and accessible complaints process. Low complaint volumes are potentially a sign that residents are unable to complain.</p>	<p>Yes</p>	<p>  TSM - Report 23-24.pdf         </p>	<p>Complaints are logged and recorded and submitted on monthly pulse surveys on HouseMark.</p> <p>TSM results can also be benchmarked.</p>

				<p>Complaint stats are recorded across the Council and presented to Senior Management.</p> <p>In the new training programme, we will reinforce the message that complaints should be seen as a positive rather than a negative.</p>
3.4	<p>Landlords must make their complaint policy available in a clear and accessible format for all residents. This will detail the two-stage process, what will happen at each stage, and the timeframes for responding. The policy must also be published on the landlord's website.</p>	Yes	<p>Complaints policy can be found here:  <a href="https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/article/7939/Complaints-compliments-and-feedback-on-housing-repairs">https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/article/7939/Complaints-compliments-and-feedback-on-housing-repairs</a></p>  <p>Complaints leaflet 2024.pdf</p>	<p>The Council widely publishes its complaints policy. The complaints policy is available on the website, housing news, leaflet in sign up packs. Improvement – add to Facebook account.</p>
3.5	<p>The policy must explain how the landlord will publicise details of the complaints policy, including information about the Ombudsman and this Code.</p>	Yes	<p>Complaints policy can be found here:  <a href="https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/article/7939/Complaints-compliments-and-feedback-on-housing-repairs">https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/article/7939/Complaints-compliments-and-feedback-on-housing-repairs</a></p>  <p>Complaints leaflet 2024.pdf</p>	<p>Policy contains information about how to contact the Ombudsman.</p>

3.6	Landlords must 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.	Yes	<p>Complaints policy can be found here:  <a href="https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/article/7939/Complaints-compliments-and-feedback-on-housing-repairs">https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/article/7939/Complaints-compliments-and-feedback-on-housing-repairs</a></p>	The Council's policy specifically addresses 3 <sup>rd</sup> party complaints.
3.7	Landlords must provide residents with information on their right to access the Ombudsman service and how the individual can engage with the Ombudsman about their complaint.	Yes	<p>Complaints policy can be found here:  <a href="https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/article/7939/Complaints-compliments-and-feedback-on-housing-repairs">https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/article/7939/Complaints-compliments-and-feedback-on-housing-repairs</a></p> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; align-items: center;"> <div style="text-align: center;">         Complaints leaflet        2024.pdf     </div> <div style="text-align: center;">         Complaints - Stage 1        Response - Letterhear     </div> </div>	Complaint letters and leaflet outline how to contact the Ombudsman at any point during the complaint investigation.

## Section 4: Complaint Handling Staff

Code provision	Code requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence	Commentary / explanation/improvement actions
4.1	Landlords must have a person or team assigned to take responsibility for complaint handling, including liaison with the Ombudsman and ensuring complaints are reported to the governing body (or equivalent). This Code will refer to that person or team as the 'complaints officer'. This role may be in addition to other duties.	Yes	Specific officer corresponds with the Ombudsman and tracks all stage 1 and 2 complaints to ensure they are allocated to the appropriate officer and replies are sent out within the specified timeframe.	Uttlesford District Council is a small Council. There is a specific officer dedicated to co-ordinating and monitoring complaints with regular weekly meetings including key frontline service representatives. The same representatives attend each meeting to ensure consistency.
4.2	The complaints officer must have access to staff at all levels to facilitate the prompt resolution of complaints. They must also have the authority and autonomy to act to resolve disputes promptly and fairly.	Yes	 Housing Ombudsman - Know  Applying Dispute Resolutions - Ombuds  Ombudsman Training - Dec 2022.pdf	The officer overseeing complaints has access to staff both senior and junior to be able to deal efficiently with complaints. They have carried out the online Ombudsman training. Weekly meetings held with relevant officers led by complaints officer.



4.3	Landlords are expected to prioritise complaint handling and a culture of learning from complaints. All relevant staff must be suitably trained in the importance of complaint handling. It is important that complaints are seen as a core service and must be resourced to handle complaints effectively	Partial	 Ombudsman Training - Dec 2022.pdf  Applying Dispute Resolutions - Ombud:  Housing Ombudsman - Know	Key staff have completed the Ombudsman training, but further training is required as roles and responsibilities for responding to complaints has changed. Where there are learning outcomes from complaints these are discussed at team meetings. Where appropriate, changes are made to service provision on the basis of learning outcomes from complaints.
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## Section 5: The Complaint Handling Process


Code provision	Code requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence	Commentary / explanation/improvement actions
5.1	Landlords must have a single policy in place for dealing with complaints covered by this Code. Residents must not be treated differently if they complain.	Yes	Complaints policy can be found here: <a href="https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/article/7939/Complaints-compliments-and-feedback-on-housing-repairs">https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/article/7939/Complaints-compliments-and-feedback-on-housing-repairs</a>	We have a single policy in place for all complainants.
5.2	The early and local resolution of issues between landlords and residents is key to effective complaint handling. It is not appropriate to have extra named stages (such as 'stage 0' or 'informal complaint') as this causes	Yes	Complaints policy can be found here: <a href="https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/article/7939/Complaints-compliments-and-feedback-on-housing-repairs">https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/article/7939/Complaints-compliments-and-feedback-on-housing-repairs</a>	We have a 2-stage policy.

	unnecessary confusion.			
5.3	A process with more than two stages is not acceptable under any circumstances as this will make the complaint process unduly long and delay access to the Ombudsman.	Yes	Complaints policy can be found here: <a href="https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/article/7939/Complaints-compliments-and-feedback-on-housing-repairs">https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/article/7939/Complaints-compliments-and-feedback-on-housing-repairs</a>	We have a 2-stage policy.
5.4	Where a landlord's complaint response is handled by a third party (e.g. a contractor or independent adjudicator) at any stage, it must form part of the two stage complaints process set out in this Code. Residents must not be expected to go through two complaints processes.	Yes		Where a complaint is about a contractor, we consult with the contractor as part of the complaint investigation process.



5.5	Landlords are responsible for ensuring that any third parties handle complaints in line with the Code.	Yes		The Council maintains the responsibility for investigating and responding to all complaints so we can ensure that they are dealt in line with the Code.
5.6	When a complaint is logged at Stage 1 or escalated to Stage 2, landlords must set out their understanding of the complaint and the outcomes the resident is seeking. The Code will refer to this as “the complaint definition”. If any aspect of the complaint is unclear, the resident must be asked for clarification.	Yes	 Complaints - Stage 1 Response - Letterhear	<p>The acknowledgement letters and stage 1 response letter clearly set out what the complaint is and what the resident is seeking as an outcome.</p> <p>We will ensure stage 2 letters contain this information.</p> <p>We regularly contact residents to ensure we understand the complaints especially where there is not complete clarity on the reason for the complaint and what the complainant would like as a resolution.</p>
5.7	When a complaint is acknowledged at either stage, landlords must be	Yes	 Complaints - Acknowledgement lett	This is defined in the letters.

	<p>clear which aspects of the complaint they are, and are not, responsible for and clarify any areas where this is not clear.</p>		<p>Complaints policy can be found here:  <a href="https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/article/7939/Complaints-compliments-and-feedback-on-housing-repairs">https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/article/7939/Complaints-compliments-and-feedback-on-housing-repairs</a></p>	
<p>5.8</p>	<p>At each stage of the complaints process, complaint handlers must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. deal with complaints on their merits, act independently, and have an open mind.</li> <li>b. give the resident a fair chance to set out their position.</li> <li>c. take measures to address any actual or perceived conflict of interest; and</li> <li>d. consider all relevant information and</li> </ul>	<p>Yes</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">               Complaints - Stage 1              Response - Letterhea         </p>	<p>Our template letters set out the complaints as we understand it so that the tenants can agree that we are clear on what their complaint is.</p> <p>We also state who will be dealing with the complaint.</p> <p>Staff who respond to complaints will be required to complete Ombudsman's online training.</p> <p>All necessary measures are taken to ensure there is no conflict of interest with those who are responding to complaints.</p>

	evidence carefully.			
5.9	Where a response to a complaint will fall outside the timescales set out in this Code, the landlord must agree with the resident suitable intervals for keeping them informed about their complaint.	Yes	<p>Complaints policy can be found here: <a href="https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/article/7939/Complaints-compliments-and-feedback-on-housing-repairs">https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/article/7939/Complaints-compliments-and-feedback-on-housing-repairs</a></p>  <p>Complaints - Extension Letter.pdf</p>	When it is necessary to take longer than the specified timeframes to respond to a complaint, a letter is sent to the resident requesting an extension.
5.10	Landlords must make reasonable adjustments for residents where appropriate under the Equality Act 2010. Landlords must keep a record of any reasonable adjustments agreed, as well as a record of any disabilities a resident has disclosed. Any	Yes	<p>Complaints policy can be found here: <a href="https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/article/7939/Complaints-compliments-and-feedback-on-housing-repairs">https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/article/7939/Complaints-compliments-and-feedback-on-housing-repairs</a></p> <p><a href="#">Equality Policy (PDF) [1MB]</a></p>	We will make adjustments to ensure fair access to the service. Such as large font used for responses. Improvement – records to be kept of where reasonable adjustments have been made.

	agreed reasonable adjustments must be kept under active review.			
5.11	Landlords must not refuse to escalate a complaint through all stages of the complaints procedure unless it has valid reasons to do so. Landlords must clearly set out these reasons, and they must comply with the provisions set out in section 2 of this Code.	Yes	Complaints policy can be found here: <a href="https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/article/7939/Complaints-compliments-and-feedback-on-housing-repairs">https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/article/7939/Complaints-compliments-and-feedback-on-housing-repairs</a>  <a href="#">Abusive, persistent or vexatious complaints policy - Uttlesford District Council</a>	We would refuse to escalate a complaint where a complainant reaches the criteria of a vexatious complainant, as defined in the Council's Abusive, Persistent or Vexatious complainants Policy.
5.12	A full record must be kept of the complaint, and the outcomes at each stage. This must include the original complaint and the date received, all correspondence with the resident,	Yes	Documents saved on internal document management system. Complaint spreadsheet accessible to all key staff.	All documents are saved to the house file on the Councils document management system.  We also log all complaint details on a complaints log spreadsheet.

	correspondence with other parties, and any relevant supporting documentation such as reports or surveys.			
5.13	Landlords must have processes in place to ensure a complaint can be remedied at any stage of its complaints process. Landlords must ensure appropriate remedies can be provided at any stage of the complaints process without the need for escalation.	Yes	We actively seek to remedy all complaints at the earliest available opportunity. We monitor this using the complaints log.	If it becomes clear that a remedy is readily available to resolve a complaint this be in enacted even if the complaint process continues.
5.14	Landlords must have policies and procedures in place for managing unacceptable	Yes	<a href="https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/article/6312/Abusive-persistent-or-vexatious-complaints-policy">https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/article/6312/Abusive-persistent-or-vexatious-complaints-policy</a>	If it becomes necessary to put restrictions in place, we will reference the Abusive, persistent or vexatious complaints policy.

	behaviour from residents and/or their representatives. Landlords must be able to evidence reasons for putting any restrictions in place and must keep restrictions under regular review.			
5.15	Any restrictions placed on contact due to unacceptable behaviour must be proportionate and demonstrate regard for the provisions of the Equality Act 2010.	Yes	<a href="https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/article/6312/Abusive-persistent-or-vexatious-complaints-policy">https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/article/6312/Abusive-persistent-or-vexatious-complaints-policy</a>	Proportionate action will always be taken.


## Section 6: Complaints Stages


### Stage 1


Code provision	Code requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence	Commentary / explanation/improvement actions
6.1	Landlords must have processes in place to consider which complaints can be responded to as early as possible, and which require further investigation. Landlords must consider factors such as the complexity of the complaint and whether the resident is vulnerable or at risk. Most stage 1 complaints can be resolved promptly, and an explanation, apology or resolution provided to the resident.	Yes	Complaints policy can be found here: <a href="https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/article/7939/Complaints-compliments-and-feedback-on-housing-repairs">https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/article/7939/Complaints-compliments-and-feedback-on-housing-repairs</a>	<p>We endeavour to resolve all complaints at stage 1 without requesting an extension.</p> <p>The complaints log records the dates that complaints are responded to, showing that some are completed in as timely a manner as possible. We actively encourage colleagues across the service to respond to and resolve complaints as soon as practicably possible. We will include this in the complaints training programme to reinforce the message.</p>

6.2	Complaints must be acknowledged, defined and logged at stage 1 of the complaints procedure <b><u>within five working days of the complaint being received.</u></b>	Yes	Complaints policy can be found here: <a href="https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/article/7939/Complaints-compliments-and-feedback-on-housing-repairs">https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/article/7939/Complaints-compliments-and-feedback-on-housing-repairs</a>  The Complaints log	This is in done in line with the Code and the Council's complaints policy.  The weekly complaints management meeting goes through each open complaint and reviews progress with relevant officers. Officers are asked to explain where complaints have gone out of time. Also, the complaints officer sends reminders where a milestone in the complaints process is soon going to go out of time.
6.3	Landlords must issue a full response to stage 1 complaints <b><u>within 10 working days</u></b> of the complaint being acknowledged.	Yes	Complaints policy can be found here: <a href="https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/article/7939/Complaints-compliments-and-feedback-on-housing-repairs">https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/article/7939/Complaints-compliments-and-feedback-on-housing-repairs</a>  The Complaints log	This is in done in line with the Code and the Council's complaints policy.



6.4	Landlords must decide whether an extension to this timescale is needed when considering the complexity of the complaint and then inform the resident of the expected timescale for response. Any extension must be no more than 10 working days without good reason, and the reason(s) must be clearly explained to the resident.	Yes	<p>Complaints policy can be found here: <a href="https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/article/7939/Complaints-compliments-and-feedback-on-housing-repairs">https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/article/7939/Complaints-compliments-and-feedback-on-housing-repairs</a></p> <p>The Complaints log</p>	This is in done in line with the Code and the Council's complaints policy.
6.5	When an organisation informs a resident about an extension to these timescales, they must be provided with the contact details of the Ombudsman.	Yes	<p>Complaints policy can be found here: <a href="https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/article/7939/Complaints-compliments-and-feedback-on-housing-repairs">https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/article/7939/Complaints-compliments-and-feedback-on-housing-repairs</a></p>  <p>Complaints - Extension Letter.pdf</p>	Informed at all stages of Ombudsman details.
6.6	A complaint response must be provided 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	Yes	<p>Complaints policy can be found here: <a href="https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/article/7939/Complaints-compliments-and-feedback-on-housing-repairs">https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/article/7939/Complaints-compliments-and-feedback-on-housing-repairs</a></p>	Outstanding actions will be detailed in response letters, and these are noted on the Complaints Log so that they can continue to be tracked.



	promptly with appropriate updates provided to the resident.			
6.7	Landlords must address all points raised in the complaint definition and provide clear reasons for any decisions, referencing the relevant policy, law and good practice where appropriate.	Yes	<p>Complaints policy can be found here:  <a href="https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/article/7939/Complaints-compliments-and-feedback-on-housing-repairs">https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/article/7939/Complaints-compliments-and-feedback-on-housing-repairs</a></p>  <p>Complaints - Stage 1 Response - Letterhear</p>	Response letters state how the decisions have been made.
6.8	Where residents raise additional complaints during the investigation, these must be incorporated into the stage 1 response if they are related and the stage 1 response has not been issued. Where the stage 1 response has been issued, the new issues are unrelated to the issues already being investigated or it would unreasonably delay the response, the new issues must be logged as a new complaint.	Yes	<p>Complaints policy can be found here:  <a href="https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/article/7939/Complaints-compliments-and-feedback-on-housing-repairs">https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/article/7939/Complaints-compliments-and-feedback-on-housing-repairs</a></p>	<p>Where secondary matters are raised the complaints, officer will consider whether these need to be added to the complaint or a secondary complaint raised.</p> <p>The officer monitoring complaints will seek a second opinion whether a new complaint needs to be logged.</p>


6.9	<p>Landlords must confirm the following in writing to the resident at the completion of stage 1 in clear, plain language:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. the complaint stage.</li> <li>b. the complaint definition;</li> <li>c. the decision on the complaint;</li> <li>d. the reasons for any decisions made;</li> <li>e. the details of any remedy offered to put things right;</li> <li>f. details of any outstanding actions; and</li> <li>g. details of how to escalate the matter to stage 2 if the individual is not satisfied with the response.</li> </ul>	Yes	 <p>Complaints - Stage 1 Response - Letterhead</p>	<p>Template letters are used and cover all the bullet points .</p>
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Stage 2

Code provision	Code requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence	Commentary / explanation/improvement actions
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6.10	If all or part of the complaint is not resolved to the resident's satisfaction at stage 1, it must be progressed to stage 2 of the landlord's procedure. Stage 2 is the landlord's final response.	Yes	Complaints policy can be found here: <a href="https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/article/7939/Complaints-compliments-and-feedback-on-housing-repairs">https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/article/7939/Complaints-compliments-and-feedback-on-housing-repairs</a>	Stage 1 letters state that if residents are not happy with the outcome, they may escalate to a stage 2 complaint.
6.11	Requests for stage 2 must be acknowledged, defined and logged at stage 2 of the complaints procedure within five working days of the escalation request being received.	Yes	Complaints policy can be found here: <a href="https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/article/7939/Complaints-compliments-and-feedback-on-housing-repairs">https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/article/7939/Complaints-compliments-and-feedback-on-housing-repairs</a>	This is done in line with the Code and the Council's complaints policy.
6.12	Residents must not be required to explain their reasons for requesting a stage 2 consideration. Landlords are expected to make reasonable efforts to understand why a resident remains unhappy as part of its stage 2 response.	Yes	Complaints policy can be found here: <a href="https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/article/7939/Complaints-compliments-and-feedback-on-housing-repairs">https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/article/7939/Complaints-compliments-and-feedback-on-housing-repairs</a>	Our policy currently does ask complainants to give some explanation as to why they remain unsatisfied. This is to ensure that the Stage 2 response can fully cover all matters. We will change the way the policy is phrased to read that we will say it may be helpful to us to understand the reason for the complainant to request the complaint is escalated to stage 2.

6.13	The person considering the complaint at stage 2 must not be the same person that considered the complaint at stage 1.	Yes	Complaints policy can be found here: <a href="https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/article/7939/Complaints-compliments-and-feedback-on-housing-repairs">https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/article/7939/Complaints-compliments-and-feedback-on-housing-repairs</a>	Stage 2 complaints are escalated to the more senior manager as detailed in Stage 1 response letter.
6.14	Landlords must issue a final response to the stage 2 <b>within 20 working days</b> of the complaint being acknowledged.	Yes	Complaints policy can be found here: <a href="https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/article/7939/Complaints-compliments-and-feedback-on-housing-repairs">https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/article/7939/Complaints-compliments-and-feedback-on-housing-repairs</a>	We currently aim for 10 working days.
6.15	Landlords must decide whether an extension to this timescale is needed when considering the complexity of the complaint and then inform the resident of the expected timescale for response. Any extension must be no more than 20 working days without good reason, and the reason(s) must be clearly explained to the resident.	Yes	 Complaints - Extension Letter.pdf	Reason outlined in correspondence to resident.
6.16	When an organisation informs a resident about an extension to these timescales, they must be provided with the contact	Yes	 Complaints - Extension Letter.pdf	The Ombudsman details are provided at all stages.

	details of the Ombudsman.			
6.17	A complaint response must be provided 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 promptly with appropriate updates provided to the resident.	Yes	Outstanding actions are outlined in the complaint response, so they are clear.	Outstanding actions will be detailed in response letters, and these are noted on the spreadsheet so that they can continue to be tracked.
6.18	Landlords must address all points raised in the complaint definition and provide clear reasons for any decisions, referencing the relevant policy, law and good practice where appropriate.	Yes	Complaints policy can be found here: <a href="https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/article/7939/Complaints-compliments-and-feedback-on-housing-repairs">https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/article/7939/Complaints-compliments-and-feedback-on-housing-repairs</a>	Reasons and justifications are provided in response letters.
6.19	Landlords must confirm the following in writing to the resident at the completion of stage 2 in clear, plain language: a. the complaint stage; b. the complaint definition;	Yes	 Complaints - Stage 2 Response - Letterhear	Template letters are used and cover all the bullet points.

	<p>c. the decision on the complaint;</p> <p>d. the reasons for any decisions made;</p> <p>e. the details of any remedy offered to put things right;</p> <p>f. details of any outstanding actions; and</p> <p>g. details of how to escalate the matter to the Ombudsman Service if the individual remains dissatisfied.</p>			
6.20	Stage 2 is the landlord's final response and must involve all suitable staff members needed to issue such a response.	Yes	Senior managers investigating complaints will consult with all appropriate staff.	Investigated and responded to be by Senior Officer at Service Manager Level or above.

### Section 7: Putting things right

Code provision	Code requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence	Commentary / explanation/improvement actions
7.1	Where something has gone wrong a landlord must acknowledge this and set out the actions it has already	Yes	Template letters are used and cover all the bullet points.	Where fault is found it is acknowledged and apologised for and

	<p>taken, or intends to take, to put things right. These can include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Apologising;</li> <li>• Acknowledging where things have gone wrong;</li> <li>• Providing an explanation, assistance or reasons;</li> <li>• Taking action if there has been delay;</li> <li>• Reconsidering or changing a decision;</li> <li>• Amending a record or adding a correction or addendum;</li> <li>• Providing a financial remedy;</li> <li>• Changing policies, procedures or practices.</li> </ul>			<p>rectification completed as soon as possible.</p> <p>Compensation is paid where appropriate. A new compensation policy in line with the Ombudsman compensation policy is currently being developed.</p> <p>Learning from complaints is discussed at team meetings.</p>
7.2	Any remedy offered must reflect the impact on the resident as a result of any fault identified.	No	<p>We cannot say we are compliant because we have not yet updated our compensation policy. We do not have a formal procedure in place to liaise with the resident to agree the remedy.</p>	<p>Compensation is paid in line with Housing Ombudsman policy. Formal Compensation policy being progressed. There will be a compensation framework for officers that will provide consistency on how we calculate and offer compensation payments. Residents consulted with to ensure the appropriate remedy is offered. This is not always financial.</p>



7.3	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.	Partial	Whilst we have a robust approach to holding staff to account for delivering the remedies, we need to improve how we agree the remedy with the resident (see 7.2 above).	Outstanding actions noted on the Complaints Log so that they can be tracked to completion. There is a weekly meeting at which officers are robustly held to account to deliver agreed actions, however, we need to improve how we arrive at the remedies.
7.4	Landlords must take account of the guidance issued by the Ombudsman when deciding on appropriate remedies.	Yes		Compensation made in line with Ombudsman guidance. Policy being developed

## Section 8: Putting things right

Code provision	Code requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence	Commentary / explanation/improvement actions
8.1	<p>Landlords must produce an annual complaints performance and service improvement report for scrutiny and challenge, which must include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. the annual self-assessment against this Code to ensure their complaint handling policy remains in line with its requirements.</li> <li>b. a qualitative and quantitative analysis of the landlord's complaint handling performance. This must also include a summary of the types of complaints the landlord has refused to accept;</li> <li>c. any findings of non-compliance with this Code by the Ombudsman;</li> <li>d. the service improvements made as a result of the learning from complaints;</li> </ul>	No	<p>There is no composite annual complaints report, however, we report complaints performance on a quarterly basis to CMT.</p> <p>Self-assessment completed and published on website.  <a href="https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/housing-Ombudsman-complaint-handling-code">https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/housing-Ombudsman-complaint-handling-code</a></p>	<p>There is more work to do on collecting information which would enable the Council to learn from complaints and for service managers to be an essential part of this process. This will include creating an annual report on complaints. The first annual complaints report will be delivered by the end of September 2024.</p> <p>Quarterly statistics are provided to the Corporate Management Team and Cabinet; however, we recognise there is a need for a wider range of metrics to be reported, including learning from complaints.</p>

	<p>e. any annual report about the landlord's performance from the Ombudsman; and</p> <p>f. any other relevant reports or publications produced by the Ombudsman in relation to the work of the landlord.</p>			
8.2	The annual complaints performance and service improvement report must be reported to the landlord's governing body (or equivalent) and published on the on the section of its website relating to complaints. The governing body's response to the report must be published alongside this.	No	Our current arrangements for reporting complaints performance and activity do not meet the new requirement as set out in the Code.	The annual complaints report will be developed by the end of September 2024.
8.3	Landlords must also carry out a self-assessment following a significant restructure, merger and/or change in procedures.	Yes	<a href="https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/housing-Ombudsman-complaint-handling-code">https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/housing-Ombudsman-complaint-handling-code</a>	Annual self-assessment carried out and after policy changes.
8.4	Landlords may be asked to review and update the self-assessment following an Ombudsman investigation.	N/A		We would if required to do so.
8.5	If a landlord is unable to comply with the Code due to exceptional circumstances, such as a cyber incident, they must inform the Ombudsman, provide information to residents who may be	N/A		We would if this was an occurrence.

	affected, and publish this on their website Landlords must provide a timescale for returning to compliance with the Code.			
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## Section 9: Scrutiny & oversight: continuous learning and improvement

Code provision	Code requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence	Commentary / explanation/improvement actions
9.1	Landlords must look beyond the circumstances of the individual complaint and consider whether service improvements can be made as a result of any learning from the complaint.	Partial	N/A	Learning from complaints is currently done on an ad hoc basis at an operational level. We recognise the need to formalise our approach to this and create a framework adopted by all teams across the landlord service.
9.2	A positive complaint handling culture is integral to the effectiveness with which landlords resolve disputes. Landlords must use complaints as a source of intelligence to identify issues and introduce positive changes in service delivery.	Yes	N/A	Officers approach complaints in a positive way, however, there is no formal framework for learning from complaints and as such we are unable to evidence this.
9.3	Accountability and transparency are also integral to a positive complaint handling culture. Landlords must report back on wider learning and improvements from complaints to stakeholders, such as residents' panels, staff and relevant committees.	No	N/A	We report to Members, Senior Management and Tenant Panel complaints and any Ombudsman judgement. This is not formalised, so we are unable to evidence this but recognise the need to formalise our approach.

9.4	Landlords must appoint a suitably senior lead person as accountable for their complaint handling. This person must assess any themes or trends to identify potential systemic issues, serious risks, or policies and procedures that require revision.	Yes		Complaints are overseen by the Strategic Director for Housing.
9.5	In addition to this a member of the governing body (or equivalent) must be appointed to have lead responsibility for complaints to support a positive complaint handling culture. This person is referred to as the Member Responsible for Complaints ('the MRC').	No		To be appointed by the end of June 2024.
9.6	The MRC will be responsible for ensuring the governing body receives regular information on complaints that provides insight on the landlord's complaint handling performance. This person must have access to suitable information and staff to perform this role and report on their findings.	No		Once appointed.
9.7	As a minimum, the MRC and the governing body (or equivalent) must receive: a. regular updates on the volume, categories and outcomes of complaints, alongside complaint handling performance;	No		Once appointed.

	<p>b. regular reviews of issues and trends arising from complaint handling;</p> <p>c. regular updates on the outcomes of the Ombudsman’s investigations and progress made in complying with orders related to severe maladministration findings; and</p> <p>d. annual complaints performance and service improvement report.</p>			
<p>9.8</p>	<p>Landlords must have a standard objective in relation to complaint handling for all relevant employees or third parties that reflects the need to:</p> <p>a. have a collaborative and co-operative approach towards resolving complaints, working with colleagues across teams and departments;</p> <p>b. take collective responsibility for any shortfalls identified through complaints, rather than blaming others; and</p> <p>c. act within the professional standards for engaging with complaints as set by any relevant professional body.</p>	<p>Yes</p>		<p>The Council as a whole works collaboratively on complaints that cross departments and where learning is identified that is cross departmental are discussed and implemented. This process needs to be formalised.</p>

# Housing

## Ombudsman Service

# Complaint Handling Code

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## Foreword

The heartbeat of this Code is enabling a positive complaints culture across the social housing sector.

This positive culture matters regardless of size or type of landlord. It supports strong resident-landlord relationships. It means things can be put right for residents when they have gone wrong. It helps organisations to develop and improve services. And, perhaps above all, it supports the values of justice and fairness that embodies so much of the sector's social purpose.

This Code considers complaints to be more than transactions. Nonetheless, good complaint handling requires effective procedures and well-trained staff alongside a positive complaints culture that enables those procedures to achieve maximum impact. This Code sets out what landlords must do procedurally to handle complaints. Compliance with the Code is most effective within landlords that operate within established dispute resolution principles: to be fair, puts things right, and learn from outcomes.

Landlords must embrace complaints through increased transparency, accessibility, and complaint handling governance, demonstrating that residents are core to its service delivery and good complaint handling is central to that.

This Code aims to support the earliest resolution of complaints while the matters are still within the landlord's own procedure. This can avoid issues escalating with potentially prolonged detriment to the resident, as well as requiring significantly more time and resource by the landlord to remedy.

This Code provides a guide to residents of what to expect if they make a complaint, as well as improving access and awareness to the procedure when they need it. The adoption of this statutory Code and associated duties ensures residents do not experience a postcode lottery in complaint handling.

Embracing the Code can also empower staff. Involvement in complaint resolution develops staff ownership, decision-making and engagement, and should ensure appropriate resources and tools are deployed to handle complaints. It provides senior staff with essential insight into day-to-day operations, allowing them to assess

effectiveness and identify any organisational risks or issues. Lastly, data collected about complaints can be analysed and used to inform key business decisions to drive improvement in service provision.

Landlords are expected to annually self-assess against the Code, to engage its governance in that exercise and to publish the outcome. We also encourage landlords to see this exercise as an opportunity to engage residents in setting their approach to complaints to drive a positive complaints and learning culture. This approach must be captured by the landlord in a single policy for handling complaints.

The positive engagement of landlords in the Code and its principles has brought focus on the importance of complaints and the advent of this statutory Code will drive further change to the benefit of both residents and landlords.

## Introduction

### Statutory powers

The Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 (the Act) empowered the Housing Ombudsman to issue a code of practice about the procedures members of the Scheme should have in place for considering complaints.

It also placed a duty on the Ombudsman to monitor compliance with a code of practice that it has issued.

The Ombudsman consulted on the Complaint Handling Code (the Code) and our intended approach to the duty to monitor in late 2023. The statutory Code will take effect from 1 April 2024 and our duty to monitor compliance will commence at the same time.

### Compliance with the Code

The Ombudsman believes all members must comply with all provisions in the Code as this represents best practice in complaint handling.

Where the Housing Ombudsman finds an organisation has deviated from the Code in policy or practice, it may use its powers to put matters right and ensure compliance with the Code. Where a landlord's policy does not comply with the Code, it must provide a detailed explanation for non-compliance in its self-assessment and the date by which it intends to comply.

Where there are exceptional circumstances which mean a landlord cannot meet specific requirements of Code, for example a small provider does not have a website, the Ombudsman will take a proportionate approach. In these circumstances, landlords must undertake all reasonable endeavours to deliver the intentions of the Code in an alternative way, for example by publishing information in a public area so that it is easily accessible.

Where a landlord is unable to comply with the Code due to exceptional circumstances, such as a cyber incident, it must inform the Ombudsman of its reasons, provide information to residents who may be affected and publish this on their website. The landlord must provide all parties with a timescale for returning to compliance with the Code and the reasonableness of exemptions to the Code during this period may be assessed by the Ombudsman.

### Monitoring compliance with the Code

The Ombudsman would like all landlords to have strong local complaint handling and a positive complaint handling culture – resolving complaints earlier and potentially without referral to the Ombudsman extends fairness to the benefit of all residents. This also leads to better services and strengthens relationships with residents. We will use the duty to monitor compliance to further these aims by supporting better practice and providing opportunities for landlords to demonstrate complaint handling improvements.

Support for improvement will be provided through the Centre for Learning, accessible via our website, which hosts an ever-growing range of tools targeted at complaints handlers, senior managers and governing bodies.

We will monitor compliance in three ways. This will involve ensuring that the landlord:

- has scrutinised and challenged its compliance with the Code at its governing body through review of its self-assessment against the Code, its complaints handling performance and its learning from complaints, and published the outcome on its website annually;
- complies with the Code in policy; and
- complies with the Code in practice.

Where a landlord does not meet the requirements in any of the areas and does not move into compliance within a reasonable timescale, the Ombudsman may issue a

Complaint Handling Failure Order (CHFO). The Ombudsman provides separate guidance on CHFOs on its website.

## The Complaint Handling Code

### 1. Definition of a complaint

- 1.1 Effective complaint handling enables residents to be heard and understood. The starting point for this is a shared understanding of what constitutes a complaint.
- 1.2 A complaint must be defined as:  
*'an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the landlord, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting a resident or group of residents.'*
- 1.3 A resident does not have to use the word 'complaint' for it to be treated as such. Whenever a resident expresses dissatisfaction landlords must give them the choice to make complaint. A complaint that is submitted via a third party or representative must be handled in line with the landlord's complaints policy.
- 1.4 Landlords must recognise the difference between a **service request** and a **complaint**. This must be set out in their complaints policy. A service request is a request from a resident to the landlord requiring action to be taken to put something right. Service requests are not complaints, but must be recorded, monitored and reviewed regularly.
- 1.5 A complaint must be raised when the resident expresses dissatisfaction with the response to their service request, even if the handling of the service request remains ongoing. Landlords must not stop their efforts to address the service request if the resident complains.
- 1.6 An expression of dissatisfaction with services made through a survey is not defined as a complaint, though wherever possible, the person completing the survey should be made aware of how they can pursue a complaint if they wish to. Where landlords ask for wider feedback about their services, they also must provide details of how residents can complain.

## 2. Exclusions

- 2.1 Landlords must accept a complaint unless there is a valid reason not to do so. If a landlord decides not to accept a complaint it must be able to evidence its reasoning. Each complaint must be considered on its own merits.
- 2.2 A complaints policy must set out the circumstances in which a matter will not be considered as a complaint or escalated, and these circumstances must be fair and reasonable to residents. Acceptable exclusions include:
- The issue giving rise to the complaint occurred over twelve months ago.
  - Legal proceedings have started. This is defined as details of the claim, such as the Claim Form and Particulars of Claim, having been filed at court.
  - Matters that have previously been considered under the complaints policy.
- 2.3 A landlord must accept complaints referred to them within 12 months of the issue occurring or the resident becoming aware of the issue, unless it is excluded on other grounds. Landlords must consider whether to apply discretion to accept complaints made outside this time limit where there are good reasons to do so.
- 2.4 If a landlord decides not to accept a complaint, an 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. If the Ombudsman does not agree that the exclusion has been fairly applied, the Ombudsman may tell the landlord to take on the complaint.
- 2.5 A landlord must not take a blanket approach to excluding complaints; it must consider the individual circumstances of each complaint.

## 3. Accessibility and awareness

- 3.1 Landlords must make it easy for residents to complain by providing different channels through which they can make a complaint. A landlord must consider its duties under the Equality Act 2010 and anticipate the needs and reasonable adjustments of residents who may need to access the complaints process.



- 3.2 Residents must be able to raise their complaints in any way and with any member of staff. All staff must be aware of the complaints process and be able to pass details of the complaint to the appropriate person within the landlord.
- 3.3 High volumes of complaints must not be seen as a negative, as they can be indicative of a well-publicised and accessible complaints process. Low complaint volumes are potentially a sign that residents are unable to complain.
- 3.4 A landlord must make its complaint policy available in a clear and accessible format for all residents. This will detail the two stage process, what will happen at each stage, and the timeframes for responding. The policy must also be published on the landlord's website.
- 3.5 The policy must explain how the landlord will publicise details of the complaints policy, including information about the Ombudsman and this Code.
- 3.6 Landlords must 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.
- 3.7 Landlords must provide residents with information on their right to access the Ombudsman Service and how the individual can engage with the Ombudsman about their complaint.

#### 4. Complaint handling staff

- 4.1 Landlords must have a person or team assigned to take responsibility for complaint handling, including liaison with the Ombudsman and ensuring complaints are reported to the governing body (or equivalent). This Code will refer to that person or team as the 'complaints officer'. This role may be in addition to other duties.
- 4.2 The complaints officer must have access to staff at all levels to facilitate the prompt resolution of complaints. They must also have the authority and autonomy to act to resolve disputes promptly and fairly.
- 4.3 Landlords are expected to prioritise complaint handling and a culture of learning from complaints. All relevant staff must be suitably trained in the importance of complaint handling. It is important that complaints are seen as a core service and must be resourced to handle complaints effectively.

## 5. The complaint handling process

- 5.1 Landlords must have a single policy in place for dealing with complaints covered by this Code. Residents must not be treated differently if they complain.
- 5.2 The early and local resolution of issues between landlords and residents is key to effective complaint handling. It is not appropriate to have extra named stages (such as 'stage 0' or 'informal complaint') as this causes unnecessary confusion.
- 5.3 A process with more than two stages is not acceptable under any circumstances as this will make the complaint process unduly long and delay access to the Ombudsman.
- 5.4 Where a landlord's complaint response is handled by a third party (e.g. a contractor or independent adjudicator) at any stage, it must form part of the two stage complaints process set out in this Code. Residents must not be expected to go through two complaints processes.
- 5.5 Landlords are responsible for ensuring that any third parties handle complaints in line with the Code.
- 5.6 When a complaint is logged at Stage 1 or escalated to Stage 2, landlords must set out their understanding of the complaint and the outcomes the resident is seeking. The Code will refer to this as "the complaint definition". If any aspect of the complaint is unclear, the resident must be asked for clarification.
- 5.7 When a complaint is acknowledged at either stage, landlords must be clear which aspects of the complaint they are, and are not, responsible for and clarify any areas where this is not clear.
- 5.8 At each stage of the complaints process, complaint handlers must:
  - a) deal with complaints on their merits, act independently, and have an open mind;
  - b) give the resident a fair chance to set out their position;
  - c) take measures to address any actual or perceived conflict of interest; and
  - d) consider all relevant information and evidence carefully.

- 5.9 Where a response to a complaint will fall outside the timescales set out in this Code the landlord must agree with the resident suitable intervals for keeping them informed about their complaint.
- 5.10 Landlords must make reasonable adjustments for residents where appropriate under the Equality Act 2010. Landlords must keep a record of any reasonable adjustments agreed, as well as a record of any disabilities a resident has disclosed. Any agreed reasonable adjustments must be kept under active review.
- 5.11 Landlords must not refuse to escalate a complaint through all stages of the complaints procedure unless it has valid reasons to do so. A landlord must clearly set out these reasons, and it must comply with the provisions set out in section 2 of this Code.
- 5.12 A full record must be kept of the complaint, 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 relevant supporting documentation such as reports or surveys.
- 5.13 Landlords must have processes in place to ensure that a complaint can be remedied at any stage of its complaints process. Landlords must ensure that appropriate remedies can be provided at any stage of the complaints process without the need for escalation.
- 5.14 Landlords must have policies and procedures in place for managing unacceptable behaviour from residents and/or their representatives. Landlords must be able to evidence reasons for putting any restrictions in place and must keep restrictions under regular review.
- 5.15 Any restrictions placed on contact due to unacceptable behaviour must be proportionate and demonstrate regard for the provisions of the Equality Act 2010.

## 6. Complaints stages

### Stage 1

- 6.1 Landlords must have processes in place to consider which complaints can be responded to as early as possible, and which require further investigation. Landlords must consider factors such as the complexity of the complaint and whether the resident is vulnerable or at risk. Most stage 1 complaints can be resolved promptly, and an explanation, apology or resolution provided to the resident.
- 6.2 Complaints must be acknowledged, defined and logged at stage 1 of the complaints procedure **within five working days of the complaint being received**.
- 6.3 Landlords must issue a full response to stage 1 complaints **within 10 working days** of the complaint being acknowledged.
- 6.4 Landlords must decide whether an extension to this timescale is needed when considering the complexity of the complaint and then inform the resident of the expected timescale for response. Any extension must be no more than 10 working days without good reason, and the reason(s) must be clearly explained to the resident.
- 6.5 When an organisation informs a resident about an extension to these timescales, they must be provided with the contact details of the Ombudsman.
- 6.6 A complaint response must be provided 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 promptly with appropriate updates provided to the resident.
- 6.7 Landlords must address all points raised in the complaint definition and provide clear reasons for any decisions, referencing the relevant policy, law and good practice where appropriate.
- 6.8 Where residents raise additional complaints during the investigation, these must be incorporated into the stage 1 response if they are related and the stage 1 response has not been issued. Where the stage 1 response has been issued,

the new issues are unrelated to the issues already being investigated or it would unreasonably delay the response, the new issues must be logged as a new complaint.

6.9 Landlords must confirm the following in writing to the resident at the completion of stage 1 in clear, plain language:

- a) the complaint stage;
- b) the complaint definition;
- c) the decision on the complaint;
- d) the reasons for any decisions made;
- e) the details of any remedy offered to put things right;
- f) details of any outstanding actions; and
- g) details of how to escalate the matter to stage 2 if the individual is not satisfied with the response.

## Stage 2

6.10 If all or part of the complaint is not resolved to the resident's satisfaction at stage 1, it must be progressed to stage 2 of the landlord's procedure. Stage 2 is the landlord's final response.

6.11 Requests for stage 2 must be acknowledged, defined and logged at stage 2 of the complaints procedure within **five working days of the escalation request being received**.

6.12 Residents must not be required to explain their reasons for requesting a stage 2 consideration. Landlords are expected to make reasonable efforts to understand why a resident remains unhappy as part of its stage 2 response.

6.13 The person considering the complaint at stage 2 must not be the same person that considered the complaint at stage 1.

6.14 Landlords must issue a final response to the stage 2 **within 20 working days** of the complaint being acknowledged.

6.15 Landlords must decide whether an extension to this timescale is needed when considering the complexity of the complaint and then inform the resident of the

expected timescale for response. Any extension must be no more than 20 working days without good reason, and the reason(s) must be clearly explained to the resident.

6.16 When an organisation informs a resident about an extension to these timescales, they must be provided with the contact details of the Ombudsman.

6.17 A complaint response must be provided 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 promptly with appropriate updates provided to the resident.

6.18 Landlords must address all points raised in the complaint definition and provide clear reasons for any decisions, referencing the relevant policy, law and good practice where appropriate.

6.19 Landlords must confirm the following in writing to the resident at the completion of stage 2 in clear, plain language:

- a) the complaint stage;
- b) the complaint definition;
- c) the decision on the complaint;
- d) the reasons for any decisions made;
- e) the details of any remedy offered to put things right;
- f) details of any outstanding actions; and
- g) details of how to escalate the matter to the Ombudsman Service if the individual remains dissatisfied.

6.20 Stage 2 is the landlord's final response and must involve all suitable staff members needed to issue such a response.

## 7. Putting things right

7.1 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. These can include:

- Apologising;
- Acknowledging where things have gone wrong;
- Providing an explanation, assistance or reasons;
- Taking action if there has been delay;
- Reconsidering or changing a decision;
- Amending a record or adding a correction or addendum;
- Providing a financial remedy;
- Changing policies, procedures or practices.

7.2 Any remedy offered must reflect the impact on the resident as a result of any fault identified.

7.3 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.

7.4 Landlords must take account of the guidance issued by the Ombudsman when deciding on appropriate remedies.

## 8. Self-assessment, reporting and compliance

8.1 Landlords must produce an annual complaints performance and service improvement report for scrutiny and challenge, which must include:

- a) the annual self-assessment against this Code to ensure their complaint handling policy remains in line with its requirements.
- b) a qualitative and quantitative analysis of the landlord's complaint handling performance. This must also include a summary of the types of complaints the landlord has refused to accept;
- c) any findings of non-compliance with this Code by the Ombudsman;
- d) the service improvements made as a result of the learning from complaints;
- e) any annual report about the landlord's performance from the Ombudsman;  
and
- f) any other relevant reports or publications produced by the Ombudsman in relation to the work of the landlord.

- 8.2 The annual complaints performance and service improvement report must be reported to the landlord's governing body (or equivalent) and published on the on the section of its website relating to complaints. The governing body's response to the report must be published alongside this.
- 8.3 Landlords must also carry out a self-assessment following a significant restructure, merger and/or change in procedures.
- 8.4 Landlords may be asked to review and update the self-assessment following an Ombudsman investigation.
- 8.5 If a landlord is unable to comply with the Code due to exceptional circumstances, such as a cyber incident, it must inform the Ombudsman, provide information to residents who may be affected, and publish this on its website. Landlords must provide a timescale for returning to compliance with the Code.

## 9. [Scrutiny & oversight: continuous learning and improvement](#)

- 9.1 Landlords must look beyond the circumstances of the individual complaint and consider whether service improvements can be made as a result of any learning from the complaint.
- 9.2 A positive complaint handling culture is integral to the effectiveness with which landlords resolve disputes. Landlords must use complaints as a source of intelligence to identify issues and introduce positive changes in service delivery.
- 9.3 Accountability and transparency are also integral to a positive complaint handling culture. Landlords must report back on wider learning and improvements from complaints to stakeholders, such as residents' panels, staff and relevant committees.
- 9.4 Landlords must appoint a suitably senior lead person as accountable for its complaint handling. This person must assess any themes or trends to identify potential systemic issues, serious risks, or policies and procedures that require revision.
- 9.5 In addition to this, a member of the governing body (or equivalent) must be appointed to have lead responsibility for complaints to support a positive



complaint handling culture. This person is referred to as the Member Responsible for Complaints ('the MRC').

9.6 The MRC will be responsible for ensuring the governing body receives regular information on complaints that provides insight on the landlord's complaint handling performance. This person must have access to suitable information and staff to perform this role and report on their findings.

9.7 As a minimum, the MRC and the governing body (or equivalent) must receive:

- a) regular updates on the volume, categories and outcomes of complaints, alongside complaint handling performance;
- b) regular reviews of issues and trends arising from complaint handling;
- c) regular updates on the outcomes of the Ombudsman's investigations and progress made in complying with orders related to severe maladministration findings; and
- d) the annual complaints performance and service improvement report.

9.8 Landlords must have a standard objective in relation to complaint handling for all relevant employees or third parties that reflects the need to:

- a) have a collaborative and co-operative approach towards resolving complaints, working with colleagues across teams and departments;
- b) take collective responsibility for any shortfalls identified through complaints, rather than blaming others; and
- c) act within the professional standards for engaging with complaints as set by any relevant professional body.

## Appendix A: Self-assessment form

This self-assessment form should be completed by the complaints officer and it must be reviewed and approved by the landlord's governing body at least annually.

Once approved, landlords must publish the self-assessment as part of the annual complaints performance and service improvement report on their website. The governing body's response to the report must be published alongside this.

Landlords are required to complete the self-assessment in full and support all statements with evidence, with additional commentary as necessary.

We recognise that there may be a small number of circumstances where landlords are unable to meet the requirements, for example, if they do not have a website. In these circumstances, we expect landlords to deliver the intentions of the Code in an alternative way, for example by publishing information in a public area so that it is easily accessible.

**Section 1: Definition of a complaint**

Code provision	Code requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence	Commentary / explanation
1.2	<p>A complaint must be defined as:</p> <p><i>‘an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the landlord, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting a resident or group of residents.’</i></p>			
1.3	<p>A resident does not have to use the word ‘complaint’ for it to be treated as such. Whenever a resident expresses dissatisfaction landlords must give them the choice to make complaint. A complaint that is submitted via a third party or representative must be handled in line with the landlord’s complaints policy.</p>			
1.4	<p>Landlords must recognise the difference between a service request and a complaint. This must be set out in their complaints policy. A service request is a request from a resident to the landlord requiring action to be taken to put something right. Service requests are not complaints, but must be</p>			

	recorded, monitored and reviewed regularly.			
1.5	A complaint must be raised when the resident expresses dissatisfaction with the response to their service request, even if the handling of the service request remains ongoing. Landlords must not stop their efforts to address the service request if the resident complains.			
1.6	An expression of dissatisfaction with services made through a survey is not defined as a complaint, though wherever possible, the person completing the survey should be made aware of how they can pursue a complaint if they wish to. Where landlords ask for wider feedback about their services, they also must provide details of how residents can complain.			

## Section 2: Exclusions

Code provision	Code requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence	Commentary / explanation
2.1	Landlords must accept a complaint unless there is a valid reason not to do so. If landlords decide not to accept a complaint they must be able to evidence their reasoning. Each complaint must be considered on its own merits			
2.2	<p>A complaints policy must set out the circumstances in which a matter will not be considered as a complaint or escalated, and these circumstances must be fair and reasonable to residents. Acceptable exclusions include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The issue giving rise to the complaint occurred over twelve months ago.</li> <li>• Legal proceedings have started. This is defined as details of the claim, such as the Claim Form and Particulars of Claim, having been filed at court.</li> </ul>			

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Matters that have previously been considered under the complaints policy.</li> </ul>			
2.3	Landlords must accept complaints referred to them within 12 months of the issue occurring or the resident becoming aware of the issue, unless they are excluded on other grounds. Landlords must consider whether to apply discretion to accept complaints made outside this time limit where there are good reasons to do so.			
2.4	If a landlord decides not to accept a complaint, an 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. If the Ombudsman does not agree that the exclusion has been fairly applied, the Ombudsman may tell the landlord to take on the complaint.			
2.5	Landlords must not take a blanket approach to excluding complaints; they must consider the individual circumstances of each complaint.			

**Section 3: Accessibility and Awareness**

Code provision	Code requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence	Commentary / explanation
3.1	Landlords must make it easy for residents to complain by providing different channels through which they can make a complaint. Landlords must consider their duties under the Equality Act 2010 and anticipate the needs and reasonable adjustments of residents who may need to access the complaints process.			
3.2	Residents must be able to raise their complaints in any way and with any member of staff. All staff must be aware of the complaints process and be able to pass details of the complaint to the appropriate person within the landlord.			
3.3	High volumes of complaints must not be seen as a negative, as they can be indicative of a well-publicised and accessible complaints process. Low complaint volumes are potentially a sign that residents are unable to complain.			
3.4	Landlords must make their complaint policy available in a clear and accessible format for all residents. This will detail the two stage process, what			

	will happen at each stage, and the timeframes for responding. The policy must also be published on the landlord's website.			
3.5	The policy must explain how the landlord will publicise details of the complaints policy, including information about the Ombudsman and this Code.			
3.6	Landlords must 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.			
3.7	Landlords must provide residents with information on their right to access the Ombudsman service and how the individual can engage with the Ombudsman about their complaint.			



**Section 4: Complaint Handling Staff**

Code provision	Code requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence	Commentary / explanation
4.1	Landlords must have a person or team assigned to take responsibility for complaint handling, including liaison with the Ombudsman and ensuring complaints are reported to the governing body (or equivalent). This Code will refer to that person or team as the 'complaints officer'. This role may be in addition to other duties.			
4.2	The complaints officer must have access to staff at all levels to facilitate the prompt resolution of complaints. They must also have the authority and autonomy to act to resolve disputes promptly and fairly.			
4.3	Landlords are expected to prioritise complaint handling and a culture of learning from complaints. All relevant staff must be suitably trained in the importance of complaint handling. It is important that complaints are seen as a core service and must be resourced to handle complaints effectively.			

## Section 5: The Complaint Handling Process

Code provision	Code requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence	Commentary / explanation
5.1	Landlords must have a single policy in place for dealing with complaints covered by this Code. Residents must not be treated differently if they complain.			
5.2	The early and local resolution of issues between landlords and residents is key to effective complaint handling. It is not appropriate to have extra named stages (such as 'stage 0' or 'informal complaint') as this causes unnecessary confusion.			
5.3	A process with more than two stages is not acceptable under any circumstances as this will make the complaint process unduly long and delay access to the Ombudsman.			
5.4	Where a landlord's complaint response is handled by a third party (e.g. a contractor or independent adjudicator) at any stage, it must form part of the two stage complaints process set out in this Code. Residents must not be			

	expected to go through two complaints processes.			
5.5	Landlords are responsible for ensuring that any third parties handle complaints in line with the Code.			
5.6	When a complaint is logged at Stage 1 or escalated to Stage 2, landlords must set out their understanding of the complaint and the outcomes the resident is seeking. The Code will refer to this as “the complaint definition”. If any aspect of the complaint is unclear, the resident must be asked for clarification.			
5.7	When a complaint is acknowledged at either stage, landlords must be clear which aspects of the complaint they are, and are not, responsible for and clarify any areas where this is not clear.			
5.8	At each stage of the complaints process, complaint handlers must: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. deal with complaints on their merits, act independently, and have an open mind;</li> <li>b. give the resident a fair chance to set out their position;</li> <li>c. take measures to address any actual or perceived conflict of interest; and</li> </ul>			

	d. consider all relevant information and evidence carefully.			
5.9	Where a response to a complaint will fall outside the timescales set out in this Code, the landlord must agree with the resident suitable intervals for keeping them informed about their complaint.			
5.10	Landlords must make reasonable adjustments for residents where appropriate under the Equality Act 2010. Landlords must keep a record of any reasonable adjustments agreed, as well as a record of any disabilities a resident has disclosed. Any agreed reasonable adjustments must be kept under active review.			
5.11	Landlords must not refuse to escalate a complaint through all stages of the complaints procedure unless it has valid reasons to do so. Landlords must clearly set out these reasons, and they must comply with the provisions set out in section 2 of this Code.			
5.12	A full record must be kept of the complaint, 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 relevant supporting documentation such as reports or surveys.			
5.13	Landlords must have processes in place to ensure a complaint can be remedied at any stage of its complaints process. Landlords must ensure appropriate remedies can be provided at any stage of the complaints process without the need for escalation.			
5.14	Landlords must have policies and procedures in place for managing unacceptable behaviour from residents and/or their representatives. Landlords must be able to evidence reasons for putting any restrictions in place and must keep restrictions under regular review.			
5.15	Any restrictions placed on contact due to unacceptable behaviour must be proportionate and demonstrate regard for the provisions of the Equality Act 2010.			

## Section 6: Complaints Stages

### Stage 1

Code provision	Code requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence	Commentary / explanation
6.1	Landlords must have processes in place to consider which complaints can be responded to as early as possible, and which require further investigation. Landlords must consider factors such as the complexity of the complaint and whether the resident is vulnerable or at risk. Most stage 1 complaints can be resolved promptly, and an explanation, apology or resolution provided to the resident.			
6.2	Complaints must be acknowledged, defined and logged at stage 1 of the complaints procedure <b><u>within five working days of the complaint being received.</u></b>			
6.3	Landlords must issue a full response to stage 1 complaints <b><u>within 10 working days</u></b> of the complaint being acknowledged.			
6.4	Landlords must decide whether an extension to this timescale is needed when considering the complexity of the complaint and then inform the resident			

	of the expected timescale for response. Any extension must be no more than 10 working days without good reason, and the reason(s) must be clearly explained to the resident.			
6.5	When an organisation informs a resident about an extension to these timescales, they must be provided with the contact details of the Ombudsman.			
6.6	A complaint response must be provided 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 promptly with appropriate updates provided to the resident.			
6.7	Landlords must address all points raised in the complaint definition and provide clear reasons for any decisions, referencing the relevant policy, law and good practice where appropriate.			
6.8	Where residents raise additional complaints during the investigation, these must be incorporated into the stage 1 response if they are related and the stage 1 response has not been issued. Where the stage 1 response has been issued, the new issues are unrelated to the issues already being			

	investigated or it would unreasonably delay the response, the new issues must be logged as a new complaint.			
6.9	Landlords must confirm the following in writing to the resident at the completion of stage 1 in clear, plain language: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. the complaint stage;</li> <li>b. the complaint definition;</li> <li>c. the decision on the complaint;</li> <li>d. the reasons for any decisions made;</li> <li>e. the details of any remedy offered to put things right;</li> <li>f. details of any outstanding actions; and</li> <li>g. details of how to escalate the matter to stage 2 if the individual is not satisfied with the response.</li> </ul>			

### Stage 2

Code provision	Code requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence	Commentary / explanation
6.10	If all or part of the complaint is not resolved to the resident's satisfaction at stage 1, it must be progressed to stage 2 of the landlord's procedure. Stage 2 is the landlord's final response.			
6.11	Requests for stage 2 must be acknowledged, defined and logged at stage 2 of the complaints procedure			



	within five working days of the escalation request being received.			
6.12	Residents must not be required to explain their reasons for requesting a stage 2 consideration. Landlords are expected to make reasonable efforts to understand why a resident remains unhappy as part of its stage 2 response.			
6.13	The person considering the complaint at stage 2 must not be the same person that considered the complaint at stage 1.			
6.14	Landlords must issue a final response to the stage 2 <b><u>within 20 working days</u></b> of the complaint being acknowledged.			
6.15	Landlords must decide whether an extension to this timescale is needed when considering the complexity of the complaint and then inform the resident of the expected timescale for response. Any extension must be no more than 20 working days without good reason, and the reason(s) must be clearly explained to the resident.			
6.16	When an organisation informs a resident about an extension to these timescales, they must be provided with the contact details of the Ombudsman.			
6.17	A complaint response must be provided 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 promptly with appropriate updates provided to the resident.			
6.18	Landlords must address all points raised in the complaint definition and provide clear reasons for any decisions, referencing the relevant policy, law and good practice where appropriate.			
6.19	Landlords must confirm the following in writing to the resident at the completion of stage 2 in clear, plain language: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. the complaint stage;</li> <li>b. the complaint definition;</li> <li>c. the decision on the complaint;</li> <li>d. the reasons for any decisions made;</li> <li>e. the details of any remedy offered to put things right;</li> <li>f. details of any outstanding actions; and</li> <li>g. details of how to escalate the matter to the Ombudsman Service if the individual remains dissatisfied.</li> </ul>			
6.20	Stage 2 is the landlord's final response and must involve all suitable staff members needed to issue such a response.			

## Section 7: Putting things right

Code provision	Code requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence	Commentary / explanation
7.1	<p>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. These can include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Apologising;</li> <li>• Acknowledging where things have gone wrong;</li> <li>• Providing an explanation, assistance or reasons;</li> <li>• Taking action if there has been delay;</li> <li>• Reconsidering or changing a decision;</li> <li>• Amending a record or adding a correction or addendum;</li> <li>• Providing a financial remedy;</li> <li>• Changing policies, procedures or practices.</li> </ul>			
7.2	Any remedy offered must reflect the impact on the resident as a result of any fault identified.			
7.3	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.			

7.4	Landlords must take account of the guidance issued by the Ombudsman when deciding on appropriate remedies.			
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**Section 8: Self-assessment, reporting and compliance**

Code provision	Code requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence	Commentary / explanation
8.1	<p>Landlords must produce an annual complaints performance and service improvement report for scrutiny and challenge, which must include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. the annual self-assessment against this Code to ensure their complaint handling policy remains in line with its requirements.</li> <li>b. a qualitative and quantitative analysis of the landlord's complaint handling performance. This must also include a summary of the types of complaints the landlord has refused to accept;</li> <li>c. any findings of non-compliance with this Code by the Ombudsman;</li> <li>d. the service improvements made as a result of the learning from complaints;</li> <li>e. any annual report about the landlord's performance from the Ombudsman; and</li> <li>f. any other relevant reports or publications produced by the Ombudsman in relation to the work of the landlord.</li> </ul>			

8.2	The annual complaints performance and service improvement report must be reported to the landlord's governing body (or equivalent) and published on the on the section of its website relating to complaints. The governing body's response to the report must be published alongside this.			
8.3	Landlords must also carry out a self-assessment following a significant restructure, merger and/or change in procedures.			
8.4	Landlords may be asked to review and update the self-assessment following an Ombudsman investigation.			
8.5	If a landlord is unable to comply with the Code due to exceptional circumstances, such as a cyber incident, they must inform the Ombudsman, provide information to residents who may be affected, and publish this on their website Landlords must provide a timescale for returning to compliance with the Code.			

**Section 9: Scrutiny & oversight: continuous learning and improvement**

Code provision	Code requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence	Commentary / explanation
9.1	Landlords must look beyond the circumstances of the individual complaint and consider whether service improvements can be made as a result of any learning from the complaint.			
9.2	A positive complaint handling culture is integral to the effectiveness with which landlords resolve disputes. Landlords must use complaints as a source of intelligence to identify issues and introduce positive changes in service delivery.			
9.3	Accountability and transparency are also integral to a positive complaint handling culture. Landlords must report back on wider learning and improvements from complaints to stakeholders, such as residents' panels, staff and relevant committees.			
9.4	Landlords must appoint a suitably senior lead person as accountable for their complaint handling. This person must assess any themes or trends to identify potential systemic issues, serious risks, or policies and procedures that require revision.			

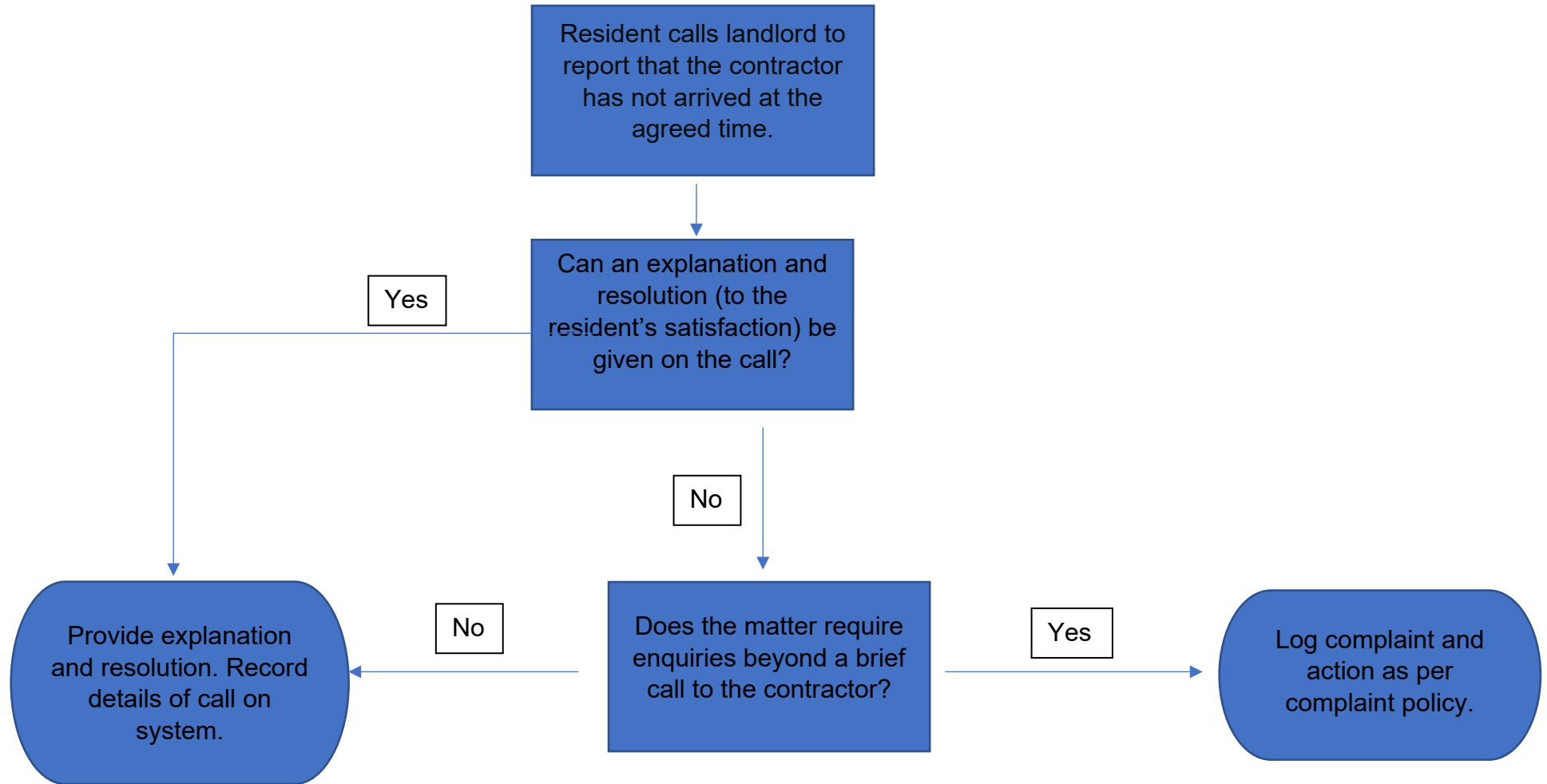
9.5	In addition to this a member of the governing body (or equivalent) must be appointed to have lead responsibility for complaints to support a positive complaint handling culture. This person is referred to as the Member Responsible for Complaints ('the MRC').			
9.6	The MRC will be responsible for ensuring the governing body receives regular information on complaints that provides insight on the landlord's complaint handling performance. This person must have access to suitable information and staff to perform this role and report on their findings.			
9.7	As a minimum, the MRC and the governing body (or equivalent) must receive: a. regular updates on the volume, categories and outcomes of complaints, alongside complaint handling performance; b. regular reviews of issues and trends arising from complaint handling; c. regular updates on the outcomes of the Ombudsman's investigations and progress made in complying with orders related to severe maladministration findings; and			

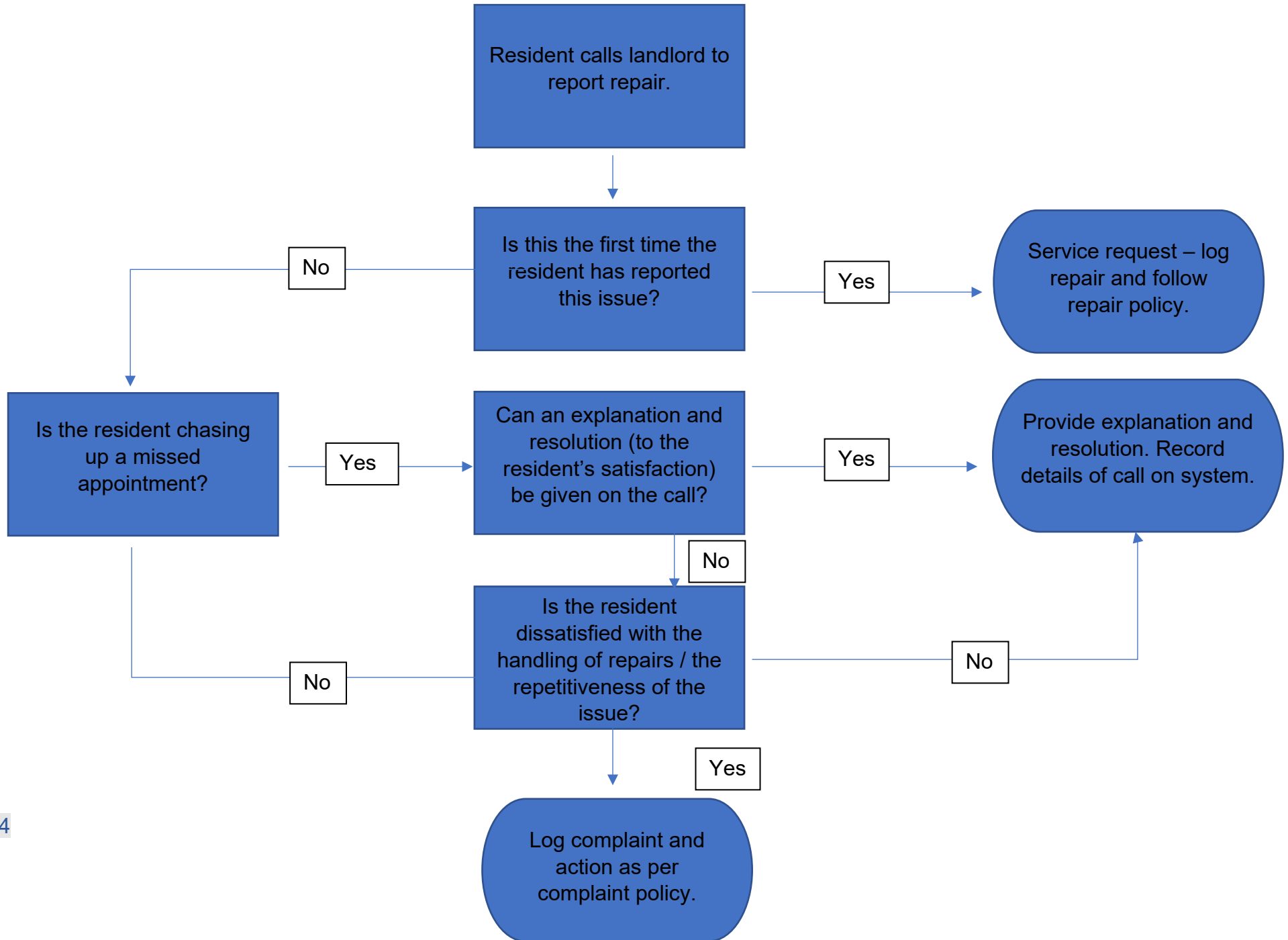


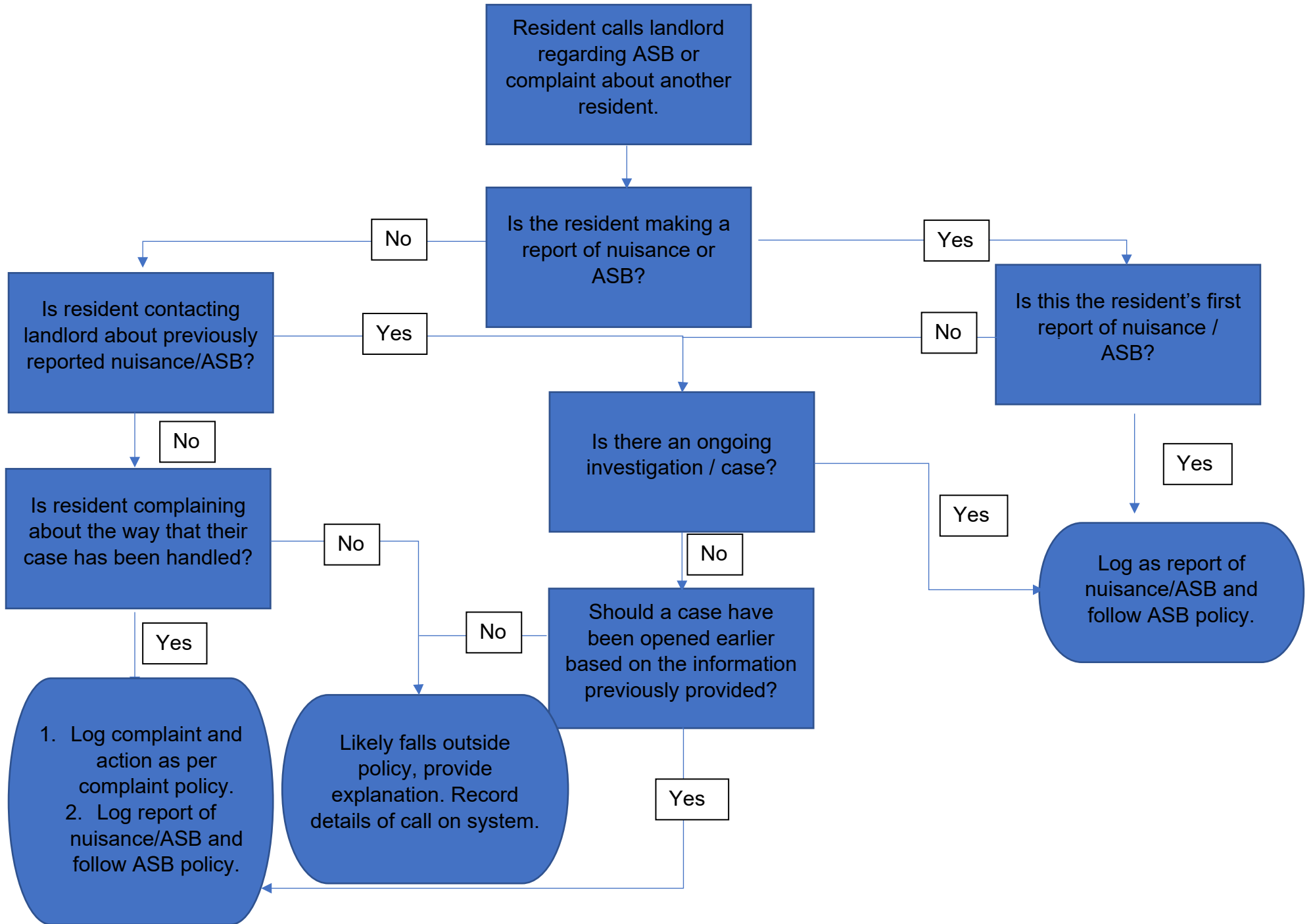
	d. annual complaints performance and service improvement report.			
9.8	Landlords must have a standard objective in relation to complaint handling for all relevant employees or third parties that reflects the need to: a. have a collaborative and co-operative approach towards resolving complaints, working with colleagues across teams and departments; b. take collective responsibility for any shortfalls identified through complaints, rather than blaming others; and c. act within the professional standards for engaging with complaints as set by any relevant professional body.			

## Appendix B – Service request or complaint – flow charts

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# How to complain and give us feedback on our housing services

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## **Our approach to customer feedback and complaints**

Uttlesford District Council always aims to provide you with a high-quality service and welcomes all feedback about the services that we provide and how they could be improved.

We recognise that sometimes things go wrong, and you may be dissatisfied with the service you receive. We will take time to listen and understand the experience of our customers.

This document explains how Uttlesford District Council will manage the feedback we receive from our customers.

If you have a suggestion or complaint, please let us know. We will do our best to put the matter right and make sure that we improve the service we provide. We would also like to know if you are pleased with the service provided. We can share this with our staff and use the information to further improve our services.

## **Compliments**

You may want to congratulate us or an individual officer for a job well done, or a service provided in a way which has exceeded your expectations. We will share your views with those involved and encourage others to follow similar ways of working. Compliments are regularly reviewed by the Corporate Management Team and are shared through staff briefings.

## **Suggestions**

You may have an idea for improving our services. If you do, we would like to hear about it. We will acknowledge your suggestions and let you know how we will use them or explain why we are unable to.

## **Complaints**

We realise there may be times when things go wrong, and you may not be satisfied with the service you receive. The Council expects everyone who is involved in delivering services to always work to the highest standards of conduct and integrity, whether directly employed by the Council, suppliers and contractors. We will always investigate when standards have not been met.

We welcome and value your complaints and will try our utmost to resolve them and involve you in this. We aim to be fair, put things right and learn from our mistakes and improve services to prevent the same thing happening again. We would prefer

not to receive anonymised complaints; however, we recognise that not everyone is comfortable complaining. Information about complaints made by tenants is reviewed by the Corporate Management Team in order to identify any learning and address any trends.

The Governance, Audit and Performance Committee receives an annual report on complaints, including any escalated to the Housing Ombudsman.

## **What is a complaint?**

We would consider a complaint to be **‘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 individual or group of individuals.’**

## **How can you help us investigate complaints?**

It is important to provide as much information as possible so we can deal with your complaint promptly. This may include:

- The location/site of the subject of your complaint
- Relevant dates
- Names of any Council staff involved, if known
- How our service failed to meet your expectations
- What you would like us to do to put things right
- How you or others have been adversely affected by the service failure

If you are unable to complain yourself, we will accept complaints made on your behalf but will ask for your written permission for us to talk to a third party. Our Customer Services team can also provide advice and support in helping you to make a complaint.

## **What you should do if you have a complaint**

### **Make a complaint (Stage 1)**

- You can make a complaint by email, letter or through the online form on our website at [Complaint or comment on a housing repair - Uttlesford District Council](#). We will also accept a complaint over the telephone on 01799 510510.
- We will log your complaint and send you an acknowledgement that we have received your complaint within 5 working days (not including weekends and bank holidays).
- We will investigate and always aim to respond to your complaint in writing within 10 working days of the complaint being logged. Please note that complex complaints may take longer to investigate. Should this be the case, we will keep you informed of the likely timescale for fully resolving your complaint. If we need more than the 10 working days to resolve your complaint, we will discuss this with you first and provide clear reasons why we need to extend the timescale for a further period of time.

- If you ask us to deal with an issue that does not fall within our complaint's procedure, we will let you know what other options may be available to you. For example, by asking other Council services or outside organisations.
- We will also let you know how to move your complaint to Stage 2 of the procedure if you are not happy with the response at Stage 1, you have 7 days in which to escalate your complaint to stage 2.

### **Ask for a review of your complaint (Stage 2)**

- Once the manager has responded at Stage 1, if you are unhappy with the way your complaint has been dealt with, you have 7 days to contact us, and we will escalate your complaint to the relevant Director.
- For complaints which relate to the conduct of a Director these will be reviewed by a Director of another Council service or the Chief Executive. Complaints relating to the Chief Executive will be reviewed by the Leader of the Council.
- In the correspondence you should let us know why you were not satisfied with either the way we handled your complaint at Stage 1 or the response we gave you.
- We will log your complaint and send you an acknowledgement that we have received your Stage 2 complaint within 5 working days.
- The Stage 2 Investigating Officer will investigate your complaint further and again aim to respond within 10 working days of the complaint being logged.
- The purpose of Stage 2 is to ensure that everything you raised in your original complaint has been looked at in detail and correctly addressed and, if not, to make sure that this now happens.

### **Refer to the Housing Ombudsman**

Once the Council's complaints procedure has concluded you can refer the matter to the [Housing Ombudsman](#). The Housing Ombudsman Service is a government-sponsored, independent body which investigates and resolves complaints about social landlords, including local authorities. The Ombudsman has powers to ask the Council to resolve complaints in a certain way, including putting things right and paying compensation to tenants.

You can also contact the Housing Ombudsman for general advice about making complaints about the housing service.

You can contact the Housing Ombudsman:

- by phone 0300 111 3000
- by email [info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk](mailto:info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk)
- [using an online form](#)
- by writing to Housing Ombudsman Service, PO Box 152, Liverpool L33 7WQ

The Housing Ombudsman's investigations are free and confidential.



## Making a complaint about other Council services

Not all housing-related complaints are dealt with by the Housing Ombudsman. These include complaints about your homeless application or private sector accommodation. For complaints about these services, please refer to the Council's general [Complaints Policy](#).

For complaints relating to housing applications, housing options, homelessness enquiries and private sector housing issues, or any other Council services not covered in the Housing Complaints Policy you can also contact the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.

You can contact the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman:

- by phone on 0300 061 0614
- through the [Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman website](#)
- by writing to Local Government Ombudsman, PO Box 4771, Coventry CV4 0EH

## What our Housing Complaints Policy does not cover

- We generally do not investigate complaints where you are complaining about something that happened 12 months ago or longer. However, we will look at each case separately and, in some cases, we may accept the complaint.
- Complaints relating to non-housing services, or services relating to homelessness applications or private sector housing. Please refer to the [Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman website](#).
- Routine requests for housing services, such as reporting a repair or another issue, or asking for us to deliver a service to you for the first time. [Find out how to get in touch with us](#).
- [Routine requests for services](#) which are not housing related.
- [Reporting fraud](#).
- Services provided by Essex County Council or another organisation. Where you contact us to make a complaint and the service you are complaining about is not delivered by Uttlesford District Council, we will do our best to advise you which organisation you should contact.
- Complaints about councillors. If your complaint is about a councillor, please tell us in writing by sending an email to: [MonitoringOfficer@uttlesford.gov.uk](mailto:MonitoringOfficer@uttlesford.gov.uk) or you can write to the Monitoring Officer at Uttlesford District Council, Council Offices, London Road, Saffron Walden, Essex, CB11 4ER.

## Abusive, Persistent or Vexatious Complaints

The Council has a separate process available on our website for dealing with complaints which meet our definition of "unreasonable complainant behaviour" and "unreasonable persistent complaints".

## **Support Agencies**

If you would like to receive support from an independent Support Agency such as Citizens Advice, Shelter and Age UK we will do our best to assist you.

## **Confidentiality**

We will comply with the requirements of the data protection law.

## **Statutory and Regulatory Requirements**

The Councils approach to complaints will comply with all relevant statutes and regulations including but not limited to the Localism Act, Housing Act, General Data Protection Act, Equality Act and the regulatory requirements of the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman and Housing Ombudsman.

## **Contact Uttlesford District Council**

Email: [uconnect@uttlesford.gov.uk](mailto:uconnect@uttlesford.gov.uk)

Complete an [online enquiry form](#)

Telephone: 01799 510510

Date of policy: October 2023