

Complaints Self-Assessment Form

This self-assessment form should be completed by the complaints officer and discussed at the landlord's governing body annually.

Evidence should be included to support all statements with additional commentary as necessary.

Explanations must also be provided where a mandatory 'must' requirement is not met to set out the rationale for the alternative approach adopted and why this delivers a better outcome.

Section 1 - Definition of a complaint

Mandatory 'must' requirements

Code section	Code requirement	Comply: Yes/No	Evidence, commentary and any explanations
1.2	A complaint must be defined as: <i>'an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the organisation, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting an individual resident or group of residents.'</i>	Yes	Published on website: https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/article/7939/Complaints-compliments-and-feedback-on-housing-repairs Corporate complaints policy will need to be changed to recognise the Independent Housing Ombudsman Scheme (IHOS) Complaints Code and definition.
1.3	The resident does not have to use the word 'complaint' for it to be treated as such. A complaint that is submitted via a third party or representative must still be handled in line with the landlord's complaints policy.	Yes	With tenant's consent we have in the past and will continue to accept legitimate third-party representation.
1.6	... if further enquiries are needed to resolve the matter, or if the resident requests it, the issue must be logged as a complaint.	Partial	This matter will be covered in training to ensure complaints are dealt with in this way.
1.7	A landlord must accept a complaint unless there is a valid reason not to do so.	Yes	We will treat any matter as a complaint if it falls within the definition of 1.2. unless the complaint is considered to be: Abusive, persistent or vexatious complaints policy - Uttlesford District Council

1.8	A complaints policy must clearly set out the circumstances in which a matter will not be considered, and these circumstances should be fair and reasonable to residents.	Yes	https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/article/7939/Complaints-compliments-and-feedback-on-housing-repairs
1.9	If a landlord decides not to accept a complaint, a detailed explanation must be provided to the resident setting out the reasons why the matter is not suitable for the complaints process and the right to take that decision to the Ombudsman.	Yes	No examples of this to date.

Best practice 'should' requirements

Code section	Code requirement	Comply: Yes/No	Evidence, commentary and any explanations
1.4	Landlords should recognise the difference between a service request , where a resident may be unhappy with a situation that they wish to have rectified, and a complaint about the service they have/have not received.	Yes	It is stated in the complaints policy.
1.5	Survey feedback may not necessarily need to be treated as a complaint, though, where possible, the person completing the survey should be made aware of how they can pursue their dissatisfaction as a complaint if they wish to.	No	We will be incorporating in, in all surveys including the next tenant satisfaction survey featuring the new Tenant Satisfaction Measures.

Section 2 - Accessibility and awareness

Mandatory 'must' requirements

Code section	Code requirement	Comply: Yes/No	Evidence, commentary and any explanations
2.1	Landlords must make it easy for residents to complain by providing different channels through which residents can make a complaint such as in person, over the telephone, in writing, by email and digitally. While the Ombudsman recognises that it may not be feasible for a landlord to use all of the potential channels, there must be more than one route of access into the complaints system.	Yes	Tenants can complain face to face, with an online form via website, complain by phone, email or write a letter. Sheltered tenants can use feedback boxes in the schemes (this assists residents who work or don't have daily visits) or directly to their Sheltered Housing Officer. Complaints are also accepted via social media, through a Councillor, Tenant and Leaseholder rep, MP or other recognised third party with tenant's consent.
2.3	Landlords must make their complaint policy available in a clear and accessible format for all residents. This will detail the number of stages involved, what will happen at each stage and the timeframes for responding.	Yes	Website and leaflet, tenant panel has reviewed the complaints page on the website.
2.4	Landlord websites, if they exist, must include information on how to raise a complaint. The complaints policy and process must be easy to find on the website.	Partial	https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/article/7939/Complaints-compliments-and-feedback-on-housing-repairs The Corporate complaints policy will need to change to recognise the Independent Housing Ombudsman Scheme (IHOS) Complaints Code and definition.
2.5	Landlords must comply with the Equality Act 2010 and may need to adapt normal policies, procedures, or processes to accommodate an individual's needs. Landlords must satisfy themselves that their policy sets out how they will respond to reasonable adjustments requests in line with the Equality Act and that complaints handlers have had appropriate training to deal with such requests.	Partial	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 (PDF) [1MB] which sets out the council's aims and objectives for treating everyone equally. The council's approach to Equality Impact Assessments is being reviewed by the Communities team.

2.6	Landlords must publicise the complaints policy and process, the Complaint Handling Code and the Housing Ombudsman Scheme in leaflets, posters, newsletters, online and as part of regular correspondence with residents.	Yes	Housing News – will signpost to complaints policy and process, complaints handling code and the Housing ombudsman scheme in every issue paper and virtual, website and add leaflet to the annual rent changes letter.
2.7	Landlords must provide residents with contact information for the Ombudsman as part of its regular correspondence with residents.	Partial	Contact details are included on the website currently. See 2.6 we will add to the sign-up pack for new tenants with effect from 1 October. We will also include information regularly in the Tenants Housing newsletter starting from October 2022 edition.
2.8	Landlords must provide early advice to residents regarding their right to access the Housing Ombudsman Service throughout their complaint, not only when the landlord's complaints process is exhausted.	Yes	In acknowledgement letters the Housing Officer who oversees complaints, will quality assure that advice is given.

Best practice 'should' requirements

Code section	Code requirement	Comply: Yes/No	Evidence, commentary and any explanations
2.2	Where a landlord has set up channels to communicate with its residents via social media, then it should expect to receive complaints via those channels. Policies should contain details of the steps that will be taken when a complaint is received via social media and how confidentiality and privacy will be maintained.	Partial	The complaints policy will need to be reviewed in the light of this code requirement. We encourage tenants to directly message e.g. email or letter as this is a more confidential method of communicating.

Section 3 - Complaint handling personnel

Mandatory 'must' requirements

Code section	Code requirement	Comply: Yes/No	Evidence, commentary and any explanations
3.1	Landlords must have a person or team assigned to take responsibility for complaint handling to ensure complaints receive the necessary attention, and that these are reported to the governing body. This Code will refer to that person or team as the "complaints officer".	Yes	We do not have an officer who is dedicated to complaints as we have limited staff resources. However we do have an officer who oversees the complaints process. Resources will be reviewed with a view to ensuring full compliance with the IHOS Complaints code.
3.2	...the complaint handler appointed must have appropriate complaint handling skills and no conflicts of interest.	Yes	Although we acknowledge that we are a small team, we do our utmost to ensure impartiality. This matter will be considered as part of the review of resources and training objectives.

Best practice 'should' requirements

Code section	Code requirement	Comply: Yes/No	Evidence, commentary and any explanations
3.3	Complaint handlers should: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • be able to act sensitively and fairly • be trained to handle complaints and deal with distressed and upset residents • have access to staff at all levels to facilitate quick resolution of complaints • have the authority and autonomy to act to resolve disputes quickly and fairly. 	Yes	Experienced officers deal with complaints and an independent officer oversees the process.

Section 4 - Complaint handling principles

Mandatory 'must' requirements

Code section	Code requirement	Comply: Yes/No	Evidence, commentary and any explanations
4.1	Any decision to try and resolve a concern must be taken in agreement with the resident and a landlord's audit trail/records should be able to demonstrate this. Landlords must ensure that efforts to resolve a resident's concerns do not obstruct access to the complaints procedure or result in any unreasonable delay. It is not appropriate to have extra named stages (such as 'stage 0' or 'pre-complaint stage') as this causes unnecessary confusion for residents. When a complaint is made, it must be acknowledged and logged at stage one of the complaints procedure within five days of receipt .	Partial	Two stage process – see website. This will need to be quality assured by a suitably qualified and empowered complaints lead and will form part of the resources review and training objectives. We will also consider in the review of the complaints policy.
4.2	Within the complaint acknowledgement, landlords must set out their understanding of the complaint and the outcomes the resident is seeking. If any aspect of the complaint is unclear, the resident must be asked for clarification and the full definition agreed between both parties.	Partial	Template letter has been updated incorporating this requirement awaiting Senior Management sign off.
4.6	A complaint investigation must be conducted in an impartial manner.	Partial	We will use case studies as part of the training to highlight the need for impartiality. There is a need to integrate Uttlesford Norse complaints practice into the corporate policy and for a system of assurance to be put in place.

<p>4.7</p>	<p>The complaint handler must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • deal with complaints on their merits • act independently and have an open mind • take measures to address any actual or perceived conflict of interest • consider all information and evidence carefully • keep the complaint confidential as far as possible, with information only disclosed if necessary to properly investigate the matter. 	<p>Partial</p>	<p>Should a conflict of interest arise the complaint will be passed to another member of the team.</p> <p>We will undertake to train all complaint handlers in quality complaint resolution by the end of 2022.</p>
<p>4.11</p>	<p>Landlords must adhere to any reasonable arrangements agreed with residents in terms of frequency and method of communication.</p>	<p>Partial</p>	<p>This requirement will also be included in training and review of corporate policy.</p>

4.12	<p>The resident, and if applicable any staff member who is the subject of the complaint, must also be given a fair chance to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • set out their position • comment on any adverse findings before a final decision is made. 	Yes	The complaint handler or an appropriate line management would listen to both parties before concluding any findings. This will be reinforced in training.
4.13	A landlord must include in its complaints policy its timescales for a resident to request escalation of a complaint.	Yes	Included in the policy.
4.14	A landlord must not unreasonably refuse to escalate a complaint through all stages of the complaints procedure and must have clear and valid reasons for taking that course of action. Reasons for declining to escalate a complaint must be clearly set out in a landlord's complaints policy and must be the same as the reasons for not accepting a complaint.	Yes	<p>This requirement will be considered in both training and as part of the review of complaints policy. We consider through the monitoring of complaints that we comply with this requirement. There is a need to ensure that if a complaint is refused escalation that the reasons why are clearly and reasonably specified.</p> <p>Also see: Abusive, persistent or vexatious complaints policy - Uttlesford District Council</p>
4.15	A full record must be kept of the complaint, any review and the outcomes at each stage. This must include the original complaint and the date received, all correspondence with the resident, correspondence with other parties and any reports or surveys prepared.	Yes	Recorded on the house file and on the complaints spreadsheet.
4.18	Landlords must have policies and procedures in place for managing unacceptable behaviour from residents and/or their representatives when pursuing a complaint.	Yes	Abusive, persistent or vexatious complaints policy - Uttlesford District Council

Best practice 'should' requirements

Code section	Code requirement	Comply: Yes/No	Evidence, commentary and any explanations
4.3	Landlords should manage residents' expectations from the outset, being clear where a desired outcome is unreasonable or unrealistic.	Yes	Complaints handlers are comfortable feeding back to residents when the request is unreasonable or unrealistic.
4.4	A complaint should be resolved at the earliest possible opportunity, having assessed what evidence is needed to fully consider the issues, what outcome would resolve the matter for the resident and whether there are any urgent actions required.	Yes	It is the responsibility of the officer dealing with the complaint to assess if it can be resolved quickly or urgent actions are required. This best practice will also be included in the review of the corporate policy.
4.5	Landlords should give residents the opportunity to have a representative deal with their complaint on their behalf, and to be represented or accompanied at any meeting with the landlord where this is reasonable.	Yes	This is accepted as long as clear consent has been provided and will be considered for inclusion in the review of policy.
4.8	Where a key issue of a complaint relates to the parties' legal obligations landlords should clearly set out their understanding of the obligations of both parties.	Yes	The obligations contained within the tenancy agreement will be referred to as necessary with advice from the Legal team where appropriate.
4.9	Communication with the resident should not generally identify individual members of staff or contractors.	No	To be reviewed and covered in training.
4.10	Landlords should keep residents regularly updated about the progress of the investigation.	Yes	The aim is to meet deadlines and if more time is required that tenants are notified. The lead officer on complaints quality assures this. This best practice will be covered in training.

4.16	Landlords should seek feedback from residents in relation to the landlord's complaint handling as part of the drive to encourage a positive complaint and learning culture.	Yes	The Tenants Panel and another group of tenants will be given a selection of anonymised complaints to look at the way in which it was handled to give their feedback on results.
4.17	Landlords should recognise the impact that being complained about can have on future service delivery. Landlords should ensure that staff are supported and engaged in the complaints process, including the learning that can be gained	Yes	Team members will have input into complaints in their area in terms of the response and lesson learned from outcomes.
4.19	Any restrictions placed on a resident's contact due to unacceptable behaviour should be appropriate to their needs and should demonstrate regard for the provisions of the Equality Act 2010.	Yes	Abusive, persistent or vexatious complaints policy - Uttlesford District Council

Section 5 - Complaint stages

Mandatory 'must' requirements

Stage 1

Code section	Code requirement	Comply: Yes/No	Evidence, commentary and any explanations
5.1	Landlords must respond to the complaint <u>within 10 working days</u> of the complaint being logged. Exceptionally, landlords may provide an explanation to the resident containing a clear timeframe for when the response will be received. This should not exceed a further 10 days without good reason.	Yes	Compliments, suggestions and complaints policy - Uttlesford District Council
5.5	A complaint response must be sent to the resident when the answer to the complaint is known, not when the outstanding actions required to address the issue, are completed. Outstanding actions must still be tracked and actioned expeditiously with regular updates provided to the resident.	Yes	Uttlesford Norse used to send a closing letter once works are completed and correspond by telephone/email during the process. Following the self-assessment, the new process has now been adopted. A full response should be sent within 10 working days.

5.6	Landlords must address all points raised in the complaint and provide clear reasons for any decisions, referencing the relevant policy, law and good practice where appropriate.	Yes	This will be covered in training and the Lead Officer on complaints will ensure this will happen in practice.
5.8	Landlords must confirm the following in writing to the resident at the completion of stage one in clear, plain language: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the complaint stage • the decision on the complaint • the reasons for any decisions made • the details of any remedy offered to put things right • details of any outstanding actions • details of how to escalate the matter to stage two if the resident is not satisfied with the answer 	Yes	All specified in template letters.

Stage 2

Code section	Code requirement	Comply: Yes/No	Evidence, commentary and any explanations
5.9	If all or part of the complaint is not resolved to the resident's satisfaction at stage one it must be progressed to stage two of the landlord's procedure, unless an exclusion ground now applies. In instances where a landlord declines to escalate a complaint it must clearly communicate in writing its reasons for not escalating as well as the resident's right to approach the Ombudsman about its decision.	Yes	States in stage 1 response letter how to escalate if not satisfied.
5.10	On receipt of the escalation request, landlords must set out their understanding of issues outstanding and the outcomes the resident is seeking. If any aspect of the complaint is unclear, the resident must be asked for clarification and the full definition agreed between both parties.	No	We will cover in training and quality assurance.
5.11	Landlords must only escalate a complaint to stage two once it has completed stage one and at the request of the resident.	Yes	This will be monitored by the complaints lead.

5.12	The person considering the complaint at stage two, must not be the same person that considered the complaint at stage one.	Yes	The complaint is then escalated to the Assistant Director Housing Health and Communities in their absence another director in the Council
5.13	Landlords must respond to the stage two complaint <u>within 20 working days</u> of the complaint being escalated. Exceptionally, landlords may provide an explanation to the resident containing a clear timeframe for when the response will be received. This should not exceed a further 10 days without good reason.	Yes	We aim to respond within 10 working days.
5.16	Landlords must confirm the following in writing to the resident at the completion of stage two in clear, plain language: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the complaint stage • the complaint definition • the decision on the complaint • the reasons for any decisions made • the details of any remedy offered to put things right • details of any outstanding actions and <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • if the landlord has a third stage, details of how to escalate the matter to stage three • if this was the final stage, details of how to escalate the matter to the Housing Ombudsman Service if the resident remains dissatisfied. 	Yes	No stage 3

Stage 3

Code section	Code requirement	Comply: Yes/No	Evidence, commentary and any explanations
5.17	Two stage landlord complaint procedures are ideal. This ensures that the complaint process is not unduly long. If landlords strongly believe a third stage is necessary, they must set out their reasons for this as part of their self-assessment. A process with more than three stages is not acceptable under any circumstances.	No stage 3	N/A

5.20	<p>Landlords must confirm the following in writing to the resident at the completion of stage three in clear, plain language:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the complaint stage • the complaint definition • the decision on the complaint • the reasons for any decisions made • the details of any remedy offered to put things right • details of any outstanding actions • details of how to escalate the matter to the Housing Ombudsman Service if the resident remains dissatisfied 	No stage 3	N/A
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Best practice 'should' requirements

Stage 1

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

Stage 2

Code section	Code requirement	Comply: Yes/No	Evidence, commentary and any explanations
5.14	If an extension beyond 10 working days is required to enable the landlord to respond to the complaint fully, this should be agreed by both parties.	Yes	A letter/email etc would be sent asking if an extension can be agreed
5.15	Where agreement over an extension period cannot be reached, landlords should provide the Housing Ombudsman's contact details so the resident can challenge the landlord's plan for responding and/or the proposed timeliness of a landlord's response	Yes	Standard to provide this on complaints correspondence

Stage 3

Code section	Code requirement	Comply: Yes/No	Evidence, commentary and any explanations
5.18	Complaints should only go to a third stage if the resident has actively requested a third stage review of their complaint. Where a third stage is in place and has been requested, landlords must respond to the stage three complaint <u>within 20 working days</u> of the complaint being escalated. Additional time will only be justified if related to convening a panel. An explanation and a date for when the stage three response will be received should be provided to the resident.	No stage 3	N/A
5.19	Where agreement over an extension period cannot be reached, landlords should provide the Housing Ombudsman's contact details so the resident can challenge the landlord's plan for responding and/or the proposed timeliness of a landlord's response.	No stage 3	N/A

Section 6 - Putting things right

Mandatory 'must' requirements

Code section	Code requirement	Comply: Yes/No	Evidence, commentary and any explanations
6.1	Effective dispute resolution requires a process designed to resolve complaints. Where something has gone wrong a landlord must acknowledge this and set out the actions it has already taken, or intends to take, to put things right.	Yes	Example of a change we have made: following contacting deceased tenants in error a new process involving several departments has now been set up to ensure all relevant parties are aware when a tenant dies to avoid this occurring in the future. Family notified of the changes made.
6.2	Any remedy offered must reflect the extent of any service failures and the level of detriment caused to the resident as a result. A landlord must carefully manage the expectations of residents and not promise anything that cannot be delivered or would cause unfairness to other residents.	Yes	Any remedies offered are inline with existing Council policies.
6.5	The remedy offer must clearly set out what will happen and by when, in agreement with the resident where appropriate. Any remedy proposed must be followed through to completion.	Yes	Responses will state if action to be taken and by when.
6.6	In awarding compensation, a landlord must consider whether any statutory payments are due, if any quantifiable losses have been incurred, the time and trouble a resident has been put to as well as any distress and inconvenience caused.	Yes	Compensation considered on an individual basis where there has been clear financial detriment. Take legal advice.

Best practice 'should' requirements

Code section	Code requirement	Comply: Yes/No	Evidence, commentary and any explanations
6.3	Landlords should look beyond the circumstances of the individual complaint and consider whether anything needs to be 'put right' in terms of process or systems to the benefit of all residents.	Yes	See 6.1.
6.7	In some cases, a resident may have a legal entitlement to redress. The landlord should still offer a resolution where possible, obtaining legal advice as to how any offer of resolution should be worded.	Yes	Standard practice to take legal advice.

Section 7 - Continuous learning and improvement

Mandatory 'must' requirements

Code section	Code requirement	Comply: Yes/No	Evidence, commentary and any explanations
7.2	Accountability and transparency are integral to a positive complaint handling culture. Landlords must report back on wider learning and improvements from complaints in their annual report and more frequently to their residents, staff and scrutiny panels.	No	Capture learning, share with tenant panel and add to annual report and share via Housing News. Learning will be shared with staff.

Best practice 'should' requirements

Code section	Code requirement	Comply: Yes/No	Evidence, commentary and any explanations
7.3	A member of the governing body should be appointed to have lead responsibility for complaints to support a positive complaint handling culture. This role will be responsible for ensuring the governing body receives regular information on complaints that provides insight to the governing body on the landlord's complaint handling performance.	No	Governance Audit Performance Committee – oversee all complaints to the Council including housing.
7.4	As a minimum, governing bodies should receive: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regular updates on the volume, categories and outcome of complaints, alongside complaint handling performance including compliance with the Ombudsman's orders Regular reviews of issues and trends arising from complaint handling, The annual performance report produced by the Ombudsman, where applicable Individual complaint outcomes where necessary, including where the Ombudsman made findings of severe maladministration or referrals to regulatory bodies. The implementation of management responses should be tracked to ensure they are delivered to agreed timescales. The annual self-assessment against the Complaint Handling Code for scrutiny and challenge. 	Partial	This will form part of the new practice as defined in the code.

7.5	Any themes or trends should be assessed by senior management to identify potential systemic issues, serious risks or policies and procedures that require revision. They should also be used to inform staff and contractor training.	Yes	Assistant Director will periodically examine learning arising from complaints with a view to reviewing risks and policies and procedures and training requirements.
7.6	Landlords should have a standard objective in relation to complaint handling for all employees that reflects the need to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • have a collaborative and co-operative approach towards resolving complaints, working with colleagues across teams and departments • take collective responsibility for any shortfalls identified through complaints rather than blaming others • act within the Professional Standards for engaging with complaints as set by the Chartered Institute of Housing. 	Partial	Currently working on improvement practices with UNSL.

Section 8 - Self-assessment and compliance

Mandatory 'must' requirements

Code section	Code requirement	Comply: Yes/No	Evidence, commentary, and any explanations
8.1	Landlords must carry out an annual self-assessment against the Code to ensure their complaint handling remains in line with its requirements.	Yes	Completed Sept 22
8.2	Landlords must also carry out a self-assessment following a significant restructure and/or change in procedures.	Yes	Following updated Code
8.3	Following each self-assessment, a landlord must: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • report the outcome of their self-assessment to their governing body. In the case of local authorities, self-assessment outcomes should be reported to elected members • publish the outcome of their assessment on their website if they have one, or otherwise make accessible to residents • include the self-assessment in their annual report section on complaints handling performance 	Yes	Tenants Panel 22/9/22 Housing Board 27/9/22