

The Housing Ombudsman Service has published a new Complaint Handling Code which provides a framework for effective complaint handling and greater consistency across landlords' complaint procedures. It is designed to enable all landlords to resolve complaints raised by their residents quickly and to use the learning from complaints to drive service improvements.

The Code sets out good practice that will allow landlords to respond to complaints effectively and fairly. The key areas of the code are:

- 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 two stages necessary and clear timeframes 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.

As well as setting out expectations for boards, management and frontline staff, the Code ensures residents know what to expect from their landlord when they make a complaint and how to progress their complaint.

Landlords have been asked to self-assess against the new code by 31 December 2020 and the Guinness self-assessment, agreed by our Board, is included here below. We are pleased to report that in most areas Guinness complies with the Code. There are a few areas where we are strengthening our approach. We are carrying out a further review of our Complaints and Compensation Policy and we are working closely with residents on this. This is due to complete early in 2021. We will carry out a further self-assessment against the Code at this time and again we'll publish the results.



Trafford Wilson
Executive Director of Customer Services

Compliance with the Complaint Handling Code				
1	Definition of a complaint	Yes	No	How we adhere to the code and any improvements we will be making
	Does the complaints process use the following definition of a complaint? <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>	✓		
	Does the policy have exclusions where a complaint will not be considered?	✓		
	Are these exclusions reasonable and fair to residents?	✓		
2	Accessibility			
	Are multiple accessibility routes available for residents to make a complaint?	✓		
	Is the complaints policy and procedure available online?	✓		
	Do we have a reasonable adjustments policy?		X	Reasonable adjustments are currently covered in all policies by way of Equality Impact Assessments. For greater clarity, in consultation with our residents, we will be agreeing our Reasonable Adjustments Policy in January 2021
	Do we regularly advise residents about our complaints process?	✓		Information about our complaints process is provided on our website. We also include details in newsletters and reports to residents.
3	Complaints team and process			
	Is there a complaint officer or equivalent in post?	✓		
	Does the complaint officer have autonomy to resolve complaints?	✓		
	Does the complaint officer have authority to compel engagement from other departments to resolve disputes?	✓		

3	Complaints team and process continued...	Yes	No	How we adhere to the code and any improvements we will be making
	If there is a third stage to the complaint's procedure are residents involved in the decision making?		X	We have a two-stage complaints process to promote fast resolution of complaints. This is in line with the Housing Ombudsman's guidance.
	Is any third stage optional for residents?		X	
	Does the final stage response set out residents' right to refer the matter to the Housing Ombudsman Service?	✓		
	Do we keep a record of complaint correspondence including correspondence from the resident?	✓		
	At what stage are most complaints resolved?			We resolve 94% of complaints at Stage One
4	Communication			
	Are residents kept informed and updated during the complaints process?	✓		
	Are residents informed of the landlord's position and given a chance to respond and challenge any area of dispute before the final decision?	✓		
	Are all complaints acknowledged and logged within five days?	✓		
	Are residents advised of how to escalate at the end of each stage?	✓		
	What proportion of complaints are resolved at stage one?			94% of our complaints are resolved at stage one (2019/20)
	What proportion of complaints are resolved at stage two?			6% of complaints are resolved at stage two (2019/20)
	What proportion of complaint responses are sent within Code timescales? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stage one Stage one (with extension) • Stage two Stage two (with extension) 			Stage one = 70% Stage one (with extension) = 100% Stage two = 52% Stage two (with extension) = 100%
	Where timescales have been extended, did we have good reason?	✓		
	Where timescales have been extended, did we keep the resident informed?	✓		
	What proportion of complaints do we resolve to residents' satisfaction			95% of complaints are resolved to residents' satisfaction (2019/20)
5	Cooperation with Housing Ombudsman Service			
	Are residents able to complain via a representative throughout?	✓		
	Where the timescale was extended, did we keep the Ombudsman informed?	✓		

6	Fairness in complaint handling	Yes	No	How we adhere to the code and any improvements we will be making
	Do we regularly advise residents about our complaints process?	✓		
	If advice was given, was this accurate and easy to understand?	✓		
	How many cases did we refuse to escalate? What was the reason for the refusal?			We have not refused any complaint escalations that met our complaints policy criteria
	Did we explain our decision to the resident?	N/A		
7	Outcomes and remedies			
	Where something has gone wrong are we taking appropriate steps to put things right?	✓		
8	Continuous learning and improvement			
	What improvements have we made as a result of learning from complaints?	✓		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Updated Responsive Repairs Policy. - Change of repairs contractor. - Revised Compensation and Complaints Procedure. - Improved tenancy sign-up process. - Upgrade to case management system to evidence better record keeping. - Review of operational policies and procedures (various)
	How do we share these lessons with: a. Residents? b. The board/governing body? c. In the Annual Report?	✓		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. By way of communications of complaints outcomes, publication of quarterly service performance, coverage in our residents' magazine, coverage in our Annual Report to Residents. b. By way of monthly reporting to the Executive and quarterly reporting to the Board c. By way of publication on our website
	Has the Code made a difference to how we respond to complaints?	✓		
	What changes have we made? Examples of Key changes	✓		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Revision of our Stage One written letter detailing the outcome of complaints. - Promotion of Housing Ombudsman Service throughout all stages of the complaints process. - We will be developing a new Reasonable Adjustments Policy.