

Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code: Self-assessment form

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As a member of the Housing Ombudsman Service, settle is committed to working within the guidelines of the new Complaint Handling Code. This self-assessment is a requirement of the Code and will be published on our website and updated quarterly.

1. Definition of a complaint

Housing Ombudsman	Yes/No	Our response
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>	Yes	We have adopted the Ombudsman definition, updating our policy and procedure to comply with the Housing Ombudsman Code.
Does the policy have exclusions where a complaint will not be considered?	Yes	Our Complaints policy states: In some circumstances it may not be appropriate to consider the complaint, such as when the complaint occurred over six months ago; legal proceedings have been started; or matters that have already been considered under the complaints policy. In these cases, the customer will be clearly told why and given the option to state their case or bring it to the Ombudsman.
Are these exclusions reasonable and fair to residents? Evidence relied upon	Yes	Exclusions are limited to the reasons provided above. Support and the appropriate steps would be provided to any resident unable to access our complaint procedure. The exclusions detailed above are in line with the Complaint Handling Code.

2. Accessibility

Housing Ombudsman	Yes/No	Our response
Are multiple accessibility routes available for residents to make a complaint?	Yes	Our residents can complain to us through any channel of communication to which we sign up to. Further details can be found our customer care and complaint resolution policy.

Is the complaints policy and procedure available online?	Yes	You can read our Customer care and complaint resolution policy and procedure on our how we handle complaints page .
Do we have a reasonable adjustments policy?	Yes	At settle, we understand making an adjustment to mean making a physical change to premises or to change work practices to avoid or correct any disadvantages. A link to our reasonable adjustments policy can be found on our how we handle complaints page .
Do we regularly advise residents about our complaints process?	Yes	We regularly update residents regarding the complaints process in the following ways: Regular updates on our website Customer service updates Customer annual report Through our e-newsletters

3. Complaints team and process

Housing Ombudsman	Yes/No	Our response
Is there a complaint officer or equivalent in post?	Yes	A new position of Customer Resolution Manager has recently been created providing oversight of complaint handling with effect from 12 th April 2021.
Does the complaint officer have autonomy to resolve complaints?	Yes	The complaint officer has autonomy to work with customers to achieve a fair resolution. Our Complaints panel has oversight of all complaints and resolutions.
Does the complaint officer have authority to compel engagement from other departments to resolve disputes?	Yes	The complaints officer works with service leads and senior management to agree a complaint resolution.

If there is a third stage to the complaints procedure are residents involved in the decision making?	No	settle has a two-stage process in line with the Complaint Handling Code.
Is any third stage optional for residents?	No	settle has a two-stage process in line with the Complaint Handling Code.
Does the final stage response set out residents' right to refer the matter to the Housing Ombudsman Service?	Yes	Our written response to the resident details how to access the Housing Ombudsman Service. This is also outlined in our policy and procedure.
Do we keep a record of complaint correspondence including correspondence from the resident?	Yes	Complaints are recorded and copies of correspondence kept on our customer records for the length of the tenancy.
At what stage are most complaints resolved?	N/A	40% of complaints are resolved informally at first point of contact. Of the complaints referred for investigation, 85% are resolved at stage one. This is based on complaints received from 1 st January to 31 st March 2021.

4.Communication

Housing Ombudsman	Yes/No	Our response
Are residents kept informed and updated during the complaints process?	Yes	Residents receive a written acknowledgement providing the name of the complaint officer, a copy of our complaints' procedure and our timescale for a resolution. We also recognise the importance of keeping in touch with our residents informally and will keep in touch in the way that works best for them.
Are residents informed of the landlord's position and given a chance to respond and challenge any area of dispute before the final decision?	Yes	Wherever possible we will talk to the resident and explain our position before making our final decision. A resident also has the right to challenge our decision through the escalation process to stage 2 as detailed in our policy and procedure.

Are all complaints acknowledged and logged within five days?	Yes	From October 2020 we have adopted the timescales outlined by the Code and aim to acknowledge a complaint in writing within 2 working days.
Are residents advised of how to escalate at the end of each stage?	Yes	Details of how to escalate a complaint are given at the end of every written response. This information is written into our letter templates to avoid omission.
What proportion of complaints are resolved at stage one?		84% of investigated complaints were resolved at stage one.
What proportion of complaints are resolved at stage two?		16% of investigated complaints were resolved at stage two.
What proportion of complaint responses are sent within Code timescales? Stage one Stage one (with extension)		96% of complaints were responded to within Code timescales. 4% (3 complaints) were outside of target. 77% of complaints were responded to at stage 1. 8% of complaints were responded to at stage 1 with an extension.
Stage two Stage two (with extension)		12% of complaints were responded to at stage 2. 3% of complaints were responded to at stage 2 with an extension.
Where timescales have been extended did we have good reason?	Yes	During the reporting period, complaints that required an extension were for the following reasons: Decisions were reliant on the outcome of an inspection or visit, which incurred delays due to Covid-19 restrictions or the availability of the customer. Road works required specific weather conditions to be undertaken. Remedy decision was dependent on completion of decoration works. We were awaiting supporting information from the resident regarding an insurance claim. Coordination across multiple service teams needed to organise complex complaint response involving a decant.

Where timescales have been extended did we keep the resident informed?	Yes	We kept the customer informed either in writing or by telephone.
What proportion of complaints do we resolve to residents' satisfaction?	N/A	We have begun to survey each customer after the complaint is closed to understand how satisfied they were with the way the complaint was handled. We have only received 6 responses so far. Of these, 2 were satisfied, while 4 required follow-up/escalation. 62% of complaints were upheld. 27% were partially upheld and 11% were not upheld.

5. Cooperation with the Housing Ombudsman Service

Housing Ombudsman	Yes/No	Our response
Were all requests for evidence responded to within 15 days?	N/A	No Ombudsman requests have been received in this reporting period.
Where the timescale was extended, did we keep the Ombudsman informed?	N/A	No extensions required.

6. Fairness in complaint handling

Housing Ombudsman	Yes/No	Our response
Are residents able to complain via a representative throughout?	Yes	Please see section 2 of our complaints policy.
If advice was given, was this accurate and easy to understand?	N/A	

How many cases did we refuse to escalate? What was the reason for the refusal?	N/A	None.
Did we explain our decision to the resident?	Yes	Wherever possible we will talk to the resident (or their representative) and explain our position before making our final decision. A resident also has the right to challenge our decision through the escalation process to stage 2 as detailed in our policy and procedure.

7. Outcomes and remedies

Housing Ombudsman	Yes/No	Our response
Where something has gone wrong, are we taking appropriate steps to put things right?	Yes	Our procedure and written responses to residents provide the steps we will take to put things right. We also monitor complaint outcomes through our Complaints Panel and work to improve our services for the benefit of all residents. We intend to engage customers in the panel this year.

8. Continuous learning and improvement

Housing Ombudsman	Yes/No	Our response
What improvements have we made as a result of learning from complaints?		We share learning from complaints on the you said we did page on our website , which we update quarterly. We also share learning in our Customer Annual Report, which can be found on our publications page .

<p>How do we share these lessons with:</p> <p>Residents The board In the Annual Report</p>		<p>Residents Individual complainants are informed of specific lessons learnt within their complaint responses. We share lessons learnt and improvements made more widely on the you said we did page on our website which is updated every 3 months. We also email a regular service update directly to residents with a link to our complaints page.</p> <p>Audit and Risk Committee Our Audit and Risk committee is a subcommittee of our board. We present regular reports of performance trends, complaint case studies, root cause analysis and evidence of continuous improvement. We also flag any systematic issue and risks and agreed remedial action.</p> <p>Customer Annual Report We publish our annual report which provides an overview of our complaint handling and lessons learnt.</p>
<p>Has the Code made a difference to how we respond to complaints?</p>	<p>Yes</p>	<p>settle has welcomed the Complaint Handling Code which provides a high-level framework to support effective complaint handling and the importance of continuous learning and improvement from resident feedback.</p>
<p>What changes have we made?</p>		<p>We have made several changes including: A full review of our policy and procedure, making changes to align to the Complaint Handling Code. Established a new Complaints panel Delivered refresher training for colleagues Created two new positions to support with the complaint officer responsibilities.</p>

		Made changes to our systems so that we can capture lessons learnt to help drive continuous improvement.
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