

## SELF-ASSESSMENT – COMPLIANCE WITH THE COMPLAINT HANDLING CODE

### Introduction

In July 2020 the Housing Ombudsman issued a revised Complaint Handling Code to all member landlords including Sandbourne. Members are to follow the Code in their handling and management of complaints.

The Code included a self-assessment to be completed and published by each landlord. This is reproduced below with the responses and actions from Sandbourne shown in blue.

This document should be considered in conjunction with the:

- Complaints and Compliments Policy
- Resident booklet concerning complaints

1.	Definition of a complaint	Yes	No
	<p>Does the complaints process use the following definition of a complaint?</p> <p><i>An expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the organisation, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting an individual resident or group of residents.</i></p> <p>Yes – Complaints and Compliments Policy amended to reflect this definition in December 2020.</p>		
	<p>Does the policy have exclusions where a complaint will not be considered?</p> <p>Yes.</p> <p>3.2 Some things are not complaints, for example:</p> <p>(a) service requests, for example asking for something to be repaired;</p> <p>(b) anonymous letters, although these may be investigated if they are a cause for concern;</p> <p>(c) reports of neighbour nuisance or disputes between neighbours. These are dealt with through our Anti-Social Behaviour Policy;</p>		

	<p>(d) a complaint about a service where we have no responsibility, such as local authority nomination procedures;</p> <p>(e) a claim for damages that should be handled as an insurance claim.</p> <p>3.3 Some complaints fall outside this Policy:</p> <p>(a) any matter where an appeal body or tribunal has been set up to deal with the issue;</p> <p>(b) matters which are subject to civil or criminal court proceedings;</p> <p>(c) complaints that have already been before a court or tribunal;</p> <p>(d) any complaints about a legally determined policy.</p>		
	<p>Are these exclusions reasonable and fair to residents?</p> <p>Yes.</p> <p>Examples of exclusions included in the Code are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Where the issue giving rise to the complaint occurred over 6 months ago. If the issue is a re-occurring one, 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.</li> <li>• Where legal proceedings have started. Landlords should take steps to ensure that residents are not left without a response for a lengthy period of time.</li> </ul> <p>Evidence relied upon,</p> <p>Whilst the exclusions stated in the Policy are more specific than those specified in the Code they do not unreasonably prevent the resident from obtaining a resolution, either by an alternative third party or another Sandbourne Policy.</p>		
<b>2.</b>	<b>Accessibility</b>		
	<p>Are multiple accessibility routes available for residents to make a complaint?</p> <p>Yes. The complaints booklet available to residents states:</p> <p>'At the end of this booklet you will find a form that can be returned to us, or you can contact us by telephone, email, via our website or by post if you want to discuss how to report an issue to us.'</p>		

	<p>Is the complaints policy and procedure available online?</p> <p>Yes.</p>	✓	
	<p>Do we have a reasonable adjustments policy?</p> <p>Yes. Approved by the Board September 2020.</p>	✓	
	<p>Do we regularly advise residents about our complaints process?</p> <p>Yes. Residents have the opportunity to provide 'feedback' which is included with every quarterly edition of Sandbourne News. 'Feedback' can be provided in writing or verbally.</p> <p>Residents are provided with a copy of the Complaints Booklet at the start of their tenancy, and these are also available at the 'drop – in' points at 60+ schemes.</p>	✓	
<b>3.</b>	<b>Complaints team and process</b>		
	<p>Is there a complaint officer or equivalent in post?</p> <p>No, the size of the organisation and the number of complaints received do not warrant this. Complaints are managed in the first instance by front line staff with support if required. The Complaints and Compliments Policy was amended in December 2020 to increase the oversight role of the Head of Housing to better match the requirements of the Code.</p>		✓
	Does the complaint officer have autonomy to resolve complaints?		N/A
	Does the complaint officer have authority to compel engagement from other departments to resolve disputes?		N/A
	<p>If there is a third stage to the complaints procedure are residents involved in the decision making?</p> <p>There are 3 stages to the complaints procedure with involvement from Board Members in the third stage. Complaints Panels are convened as required and may or may not include the involvement of Resident Board Members.</p>		
	<p>Is any third stage optional for residents?</p> <p>Yes. The third stage is optional for residents only if they are dissatisfied with the responses provided at stages one and two and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>They feel that the decision is based on inaccurate facts that could change our decision</li> </ul>	✓	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They have new and relevant information that was not previously available that could change our decision</li> <li>• They feel that we overlooked or misunderstood parts of the complaint or did not take account of relevant information, which could impact the decision</li> <li>• They believe that there is evidence that they have not been treated fairly, or in line with a policy or procedure.</li> </ul>		
	<p>Does the final stage response set out residents' right to refer the matter to the Housing Ombudsman Service?</p> <p>Yes.</p>		
	<p>Do we keep a record of complaint correspondence including correspondence from the resident?</p> <p>Yes.</p>		
	<p>At what stage are most complaints resolved?</p> <p>Stage 1.</p>		
<b>4.</b>	<b>Communication</b>		
	<p>Are residents kept informed and updated during the complaints process?</p>		
	<p>Are residents informed of the landlord's position and given a chance to respond and challenge any area of dispute before the final decision?</p> <p>Yes, at all stages of the procedure.</p>		
	<p>Are all complaints acknowledged and logged within five days?</p> <p>Yes. Complaints log to be amended to show date of acknowledgement.</p>		
	<p>Are residents advised of how to escalate at the end of each stage?</p> <p>Yes.</p>		
	<p>What proportion of complaints are resolved at stage one?</p> <p>Since September 2017, a total of 19 complaints have been received. 13 (68%) have been resolved at stage 1.</p>		

	<p>What proportion of complaints are resolved at stage two?</p> <p>The Complaint Log indicates that no complaints were resolved at stage 2. One escalated to stage 3 and action taken but no resolution date recorded for a further 3. There are 2 recorded complaints from 2018 where no action has been recorded. These have both been addressed, but the log needs to be updated.</p>		
	<p>What proportion of complaint responses are sent within Code timescales?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stage one – 100% Stage one (with extension)</li> <li>• Stage two – 100% Stage two (with extension)</li> </ul>		
	<p>Where timescales have been extended did we have good reason?</p>	<p>N/A</p>	
	<p>Where timescales have been extended did we keep the resident informed?</p>	<p>N/A</p>	
	<p>What proportion of complaints do we resolve to residents' satisfaction?</p> <p>We do not currently record the level of satisfaction with the way in which we deal with complaints.</p>		
<p><b>5.</b></p>	<p><b>Co-operation with Housing Ombudsman Service</b></p>		
	<p>Were all requests for evidence responded to within 15 days?</p> <p>Yes.</p>	<p>✓</p>	
	<p>Where the timescale was extended did we keep the Ombudsman informed?</p> <p>Yes.</p>	<p>✓</p>	
<p><b>6.</b></p>	<p><b>Fairness in complaint handling</b></p>		
	<p>Are residents able to complain via a representative throughout?</p> <p>Yes.</p>	<p>✓</p>	
	<p>If advice was given, was this accurate and easy to understand?</p> <p>Yes.</p>	<p>✓</p>	
	<p>How many cases did we refuse to escalate?</p> <p>None.</p>		

	What was the reason for the refusal?		
	Did we explain our decision to the resident?	N/A	
<b>7.</b>	<b>Outcomes and remedies</b>		
	<p>Where something has gone wrong are we taking appropriate steps to put things right?</p> <p>Yes. The steps Sandbourne will take are detailed in the Complaints and Compliments Policy.</p>	✓	
<b>8.</b>	<b>Continuous learning and improvement</b>		
	<p>What improvements have we made as a result of learning from complaints?</p> <p>Better communication with residents when ASB has been reported. Helping tenants to understand the process and what Sandbourne is actually able to do.</p> <p>Better communication in relation to repairs which have been ordered. Tenants can opt in to text messaging which will let them know when the repair has been ordered, who the contractor is and I think the order number.</p> <p>Complaint about lack of parking at Stourwood Avenue. Planning application made to increase number of spaces. Work due to start in the autumn of 2020.</p>		
	<p>How do we share these lessons with:</p> <p>(a) residents?</p> <p>The outcome of stage 3 complaints is reported to residents via the quarterly newsletter.</p> <p>(b) the board/governing body?</p> <p>A summary of all stage 3 complaints is provided to the Board, both before and following the meeting of the Complaints Panel.</p> <p>(c) In the Annual Report?</p> <p>The Code states that 'learning and improvement from complaints should be included in the landlords Annual Report'.</p> <p>To be included with next Annual Report for residents.</p>		

<p>Has the Code made a difference to how we respond to complaints?</p> <p>Yes.</p>		
<p>What changes have we made?</p> <p>(a) Incorporating the Housing Ombudsman definition of a complaint into the Complaints Policy.</p> <p>(b) Identified the need for Sandbourne to have a 'Reasonable Adjustments Policy' to reflect the requirements of the Equality Act 2010.</p> <p>(c) A review of information provided to residents highlighting the fact that they have the right to access the Housing Ombudsman Service, not just when the complaints process has been exhausted.</p> <p>(d) The Code requires that the landlord has a person or team assigned to take responsibility for complaint handling, whilst recognising that their role may not be dedicated to complaint handling. The Complaints Policy has been amended to increase the role of the Head of Housing in the oversight of complaints.</p> <p>(e) The Ombudsman does not believe that a third stage is necessary as part of a complaints process, but that if a landlord strongly believes that it needs one then this should be set out as part of the self-assessment.</p> <p>Sandbourne will retain a 3 stage Complaints Policy because:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The number of complaints received is small and the majority are resolved at stage 1</li><li>• The 3 stage process allows complaint handling to be reviewed independently by senior staff (stage 2) and Members (stage 3)</li><li>• Sandbourne has a good record of capturing, acknowledging and responding to complaints within the timescales specified in the Complaints Policy and in accordance with the timescales specified in the Code.</li></ul>		