

Complaints performance and service improvement report for the housing landlord service 2024

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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. Dartford Borough Council strives to provide excellent services, recognising that it can always do better. Part of this involves exercising good practice in complaint handling by being open and responsive, listening to residents expressions of dissatisfaction and resolving issues as quickly as possible.
- 1.2. If a formal complaint is made, this follows a three-stage process. Stage 1 is where the resident expresses their dissatisfaction. If there is still dissatisfaction after stage 1, the resident may escalate the complaint to stage 2 for a review.
- 1.3. For landlord related complaints, if the resident remains dissatisfied at the end of stage 2, the resident has the right to escalate the complaint to stage 3 for a Housing Ombudsman investigation. Residents also have a right to contact the Housing Ombudsman for advice before making a complaint to the Council or at any stage during the Council's consideration of their complaint.
- 1.4. Achieving an accessible, positive and effective complaint handling culture includes learning from complaints and making improvements to services as a result. This document presents the Council's housing landlord service annual complaints performance and service improvement report for 2024 in accordance with the requirements set out in the Housing Ombudsman's [Complaint Handling Code](#) (February 2024).
- 1.5. **About this report**
 - 1.5.1. The Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code became statutory from 1 April 2024, which means that social housing landlords are now obliged by law to follow its requirements.
 - 1.5.2. The Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 places a legal duty on the Ombudsman to monitor social housing landlord's compliance with the Code. This means there is a requirement on the Council, as a social housing landlord, to produce an annual complaints performance and service improvement report, which must include:
 - a) An annual self-assessment against the Code to ensure the complaint handling policy remains in line the Ombudsman's requirements;
 - b) A qualitative and quantitative analysis of the social housing landlord service complaint handling performance. This must also include a summary of the types of complaints that the social housing landlord service has refused to accept;
 - c) Any findings of non-compliance with the Code by the Ombudsman;
 - d) The service improvement made as a result of learning from complaints; and
 - e) Any other relevant reports or publications produced by the Ombudsman in relation to the work of the social housing landlord.
 - 1.5.3. The annual complaints performance and service improvement report must be reported to the social housing landlord's governing body (or equivalent) and published on the section of its website relating to complaints. The governing body's response to the report must be published alongside this. Submission of this year's self-assessment to the Ombudsman must be made by 30 June 2024.

2. SUMMARY OF THE COMPLAINT HANDLING CODE SELF-ASSESSMENT FINDINGS

2.1. [Annex 1](#) sets out the full Complaint Handling Code self-assessment by the housing landlord service for 2024.

2.2. In summary, the self-assessment found areas of strong performance in compliance with the Code and exercising best practice. For example:

- Use of the universal definition of a complaint.
- There are only two stages to the complaints process (as stage 3 is a Housing Ombudsman investigation).
- Promotion of the complaints process and the role of the Housing Ombudsman.
- Accessibility of the complaints process.
- Scrutiny of complaints performance and learning from complaints by the Housing Advisory Board.
- Publishing of complaints performance and learning from complaints to residents to promote transparency.

2.3. The self-assessment also found some areas of non-compliance with the Code and areas where, while the assessment has determined compliance, there is further opportunity for improvement. For example:

- Some timescales for accepting complaints, acknowledging complaints, and extensions do not currently align with the Code.
- Use of an informal stage, which can cause unnecessary confusion to residents.
- Not setting out the understanding of the complaint and the outcomes the resident is seeking (“the complaint definition”) in the acknowledgement of the complaint.

2.4. Where there is non-compliance with the Code, the Housing Ombudsman advises that there must be a detailed explanation provided in the self-assessment and the date by which compliance will be achieved. This year’s self-assessment highlights where actions will be taken to achieve full compliance through amendments to the Council’s complaints process by the end of June 2024, and these are collated into an action plan at [Annex 2](#).

3. ANALYSIS OF COMPLAINT HANDLING PERFORMANCE

3.1. This report considers formal complaints made by residents (Council tenants and leaseholders) in 2023-24.

3.2. **Number of landlord related complaints opened**

| Stage 1 | Stage 2 | Stage 3 (Housing Ombudsman) | Total |
|---------|---------|-----------------------------------|-------|
| 27 | 2 | 1 | 30 |

3.3. Types of matters that were not accepted as a complaint

3.3.1. In practice, all complaints should be accepted unless the matter being raised is not covered under the corporate complaints procedure. Some examples include requests for a service, complaints about court proceedings, or complaints for which there is a right of appeal to a Tribunal.

3.4. Complaints by housing landlord service area

| | |
|-------------------------|-----------|
| Repairs and maintenance | 15 |
| Tenancy services | 4 |
| Communal areas | 4 |
| Anti-social behaviour | 3 |
| Housing allocations | 2 |
| Rents | 1 |
| Leasehold service | 1 |
| Total | 30 |

3.5. Stage 1 complaint outcomes

| Upheld | Partially upheld | Not upheld | Withdrawn | Total |
|--------|------------------|------------|-----------|--------------|
| 5 | 5 | 15 | 1 | 26 |

3.6. Stage 2 complaint outcomes

| Upheld | Partially upheld | Not upheld | Withdrawn | Total |
|--------|------------------|------------|-----------|--------------|
| 0 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 3 |

3.7. Stage 3 (Housing Ombudsman) complaint outcomes

3.7.1. [Housing Ombudsman Complaint \(202303482\)](#) - In this reporting year there was one stage 3 complaint opened and investigated by the Housing Ombudsman, which determined no maladministration in the handling of reports of anti-social behaviour, however there was service failure in the complaint handling.

3.7.2. [Housing Ombudsman Complaint \(202203494\)](#) - There was one stage 3 complaint investigation that was opened in the previous reporting year and determined in this reporting year. The Housing Ombudsman's determination was severe maladministration in the handling of anti-social behaviour and the complaint handling.

3.8. Tenant satisfaction measures

3.8.1. The housing landlord service collects, publishes and submits to the Regulator of Social Housing a set of annual tenant satisfaction measures relevant to housing stock that falls into the definition of Low Cost Rental Accommodation (LHRA)¹. These measures show how well the housing landlord service is doing in providing quality homes and services to its tenants (the measures do not include leaseholder residents in the calculations).

¹ LCRA is defined in the Housing and Regeneration Act 2008 as accommodation that is: (a) made available for rent, (b) has rent that is below the market rate, and (c) made available to people whose needs are not adequately served by the commercial housing market.

3.8.2. The following tenant satisfaction measures relate to the effective handling of complaints. The 2023-2024 results for these measures is set out below.

| Management information measures | |
|--|--------|
| CH01 (1) – Number of stage 1 complaints received per 1,000 homes | 4.7 |
| CH01 (2) – Number of stage 2 complaints received per 1,000 homes | 0.5 |
| CH02 (1) Proportion of stage 1 complaints responded to within the Housing Ombudsman’s Complaint Handling Code timescales | 65.0% |
| CH02 (2) – Proportion of stage 2 complaints handled within the Housing Ombudsman’s Complaint Handling Code timescales | 100.0% |
| Tenant perception survey measure | |
| TP09 – Proportion of respondents who report making a complaint in the last 12 months who are satisfied with their landlord’s approach to complaints handling | 30.9% |

3.9.1. Performance in relation to handling complaints within Code timescales could be improved, where just over a third of stage 1 complaints were not handled within timescales. Where it becomes likely that the timescale will not be met, (for example, it is a complex complaint), the resident should be kept informed, and where there is a good reason, an extension agreed between both parties with a clear timeframe on when to expect a response in accordance to the Code extension timescales.

3.9.2. Performance in relation to satisfaction with complaint handling has gone down from last year where a pilot tenant satisfaction measures survey carried out in 2022-2023 reported 37.1% of respondents were satisfied with approach to complaints handling compared to 30.9% this year.

3.9.3. This year’s survey found the drivers for satisfaction on complaint handling are, as follows:

- All complaints should be taken seriously
- Make it easy for tenants to raise a complaint
- Listen more to tenant when they make a complaint
- Communicate better and keep tenants informed about their complaints
- Deal with complaints quickly
- Take action on complaints

4. IMPROVEMENTS AS A RESULT OF LEARNING FROM COMPLAINTS

4.9. Improvements as a result of learning from complaints is an important element of a positive and effective complaint handling culture, which aims to ultimately increase resident satisfaction with complaint handling.

4.10. Learning from complaints is much more than scrutinising data, such as the level of complaints, decisions made and whether complaints were handled within timescales. Understanding where things have gone wrong, why they have gone wrong, and how to make sure the same thing does not happen again, is central to learning and improving services.

4.11. Responses to complaints are taken in the form of an apology and putting things right. This reporting year the housing landlord service has learned from its complaints and from feedback received from its residents and the Housing Ombudsman in its determinations. For example:

- A pattern of complaints were received about the standard of cleaning of communal areas. This matter was discussed with the cleaning contractor who was instructed to make improvements. Since then, performance of the cleaning contract has improved and there have to date been no further complaints received regarding this issue.
- Following a complaint about the handling of anti-social behaviour, the housing landlord service needed to improve its response to supporting victims of anti-social behaviour, particularly where they are vulnerable. In response to this, an Anti-social Behaviour Procedure is in development to complement the Anti-social Behaviour Policy. The procedure sets out in detail the process for supporting vulnerable residents, including risk ratings.

4.12. Below sets out the steps the housing landlord service is taking to make improvements as a result of learning from complaints, which has been incorporated into the action plan at [Annex 2](#).

| Improvement | Steps being taken |
|---|---|
| <p>Improve performance on handling complaints within timescales.</p> <p>Keep residents informed of the progress with their complaint and if an extension is needed.</p> | <p>To recruit two additional officers whose roles will include to oversee the effective handling of complaints including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitoring of complaints to ensure they are handled within timescales, including ensuring, where an extension may be needed, considering the complexity of the complaint, that the resident is informed of the expected timescale for a response. • Oversight and quality assurance on complaint investigations and findings. • Sharing complaints performance data and learning from complaints regularly with housing landlord services staff. • Overseeing the carrying out of transactional satisfaction surveys following closure of a complaint and learning from feedback received. |
| <p>Awareness of the various ways to make a complaint and the role of the Housing Ombudsman</p> | <p>Continue to publish Link newsletter articles about how to make a complaint, the role of the Housing Ombudsman and complaints handling performance information.</p> <p>Ensure an informative on how to make a complaint and the role of the Housing Ombudsman is included in standard letters and satisfaction surveys.</p> |
| <p>Housing landlord service staff awareness and understanding of the corporate complaints procedure and the Code.</p> | <p>Issue best practice guidance on complaint handling to housing staff to complement the corporate complaints procedure and the Code.</p> |

ANNEX 1 – SELF-ASSESSMENT

Section 1: Definition of a complaint

| Code provision | Code requirement | Comply: Yes / No | Evidence | Commentary / explanation |
|----------------|--|------------------|---|---|
| 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 landlord, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting a resident or group of residents.'</i> | Yes | Complaints Procedure - Section 3, pages 10-11 How to complain webpage Housing complaints webpage | Dartford Borough Council's ("the Council's") Corporate Complaints Procedure Code of Practice for Staff ("the Complaints Procedure") uses the Complaint Handling Code definition of a complaint. This is also clearly defined for residents on the Council's website. |
| 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. | Yes | Complaints Procedure – Section 3.3, page 11, Section 4.2, page 19 Complaints Procedure – Section 2.5, page 5 Stages of the Complaints Procedure webpage | The Complaints Procedure states that a complainant does not have to use the word 'complaint' when expressing dissatisfaction. The Complaints Procedure explains those who can use the complaints procedure as any person or organisation receiving or seeking to receive a service from the Council and someone acting on behalf of a person or organisation receiving or seeking a service from the Council e.g. Councillor, MP, next of kin. The 'Stages of the Complaints Procedure' webpage advises residents that they can ask someone to help them with their complaint at any of the stages of the complaints procedure as long as they have permission to represent the resident. |

| Code provision | Code requirement | Comply: Yes / No | Evidence | Commentary / explanation |
|----------------|--|------------------|---|--|
| 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 Procedure - Section 4, pages 19-21 | <p>The Complaints Procedure includes advice as to what constitutes a complaint, emphasising the importance of recognising the difference between a formal complaint and a service request. The Procedure explains that a first time request for a service or for information that is properly for the Council to give should not be seen as a complaint. A repeated request may well take the form of a complaint. A complaint should be raised when the customer raises dissatisfaction with the response to their service request.</p> <p>Where a service request is received via the complaints process, this is forwarded onto the relevant team to deal with. Service requests are recorded separately to complaints on the housing landlord service case management systems.</p> |
| 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. | Yes | Complaints Procedure - Section 3.1, page 11. | The Complaints Procedure states that delays, non-provision of services or finance, policy issues etc. should be included as a complaint. This includes failure to provide a service at the level or standard expected of the Council. Complaints are processed even if the handling of the service request remains ongoing. |
| 1.6 | An expression of dissatisfaction with services made through a survey is not defined as a complaint, though wherever | Yes | Tenant Satisfaction Measures Survey | The Council's Housing Service uses transactional survey feedback to measure satisfaction with the services provided. In 2022, the Housing Service developed an informative to be included in survey feedback forms and standard letter |

| Code provision | Code requirement | Comply: Yes / No | Evidence | Commentary / explanation |
|-----------------------|--|-------------------------|---|---|
| | 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. | | Code of Practice on Resident Satisfaction Surveys | <p>templates to explain how residents can make a complaint if they are dissatisfied with services received.</p> <p>In 2023, the Housing Service developed a Code of Practice on Resident Satisfaction Surveys, which reinforces the need to ensure that where survey feedback raises a service request or a complaint, that this is passed onto the relevant team to address.</p> <p>The informative was used in the Tenant Satisfaction Measures perception survey for 2023-24 but is not evident at this stage that that it has been fully embedded into other satisfaction survey forms or standard letter templates. This will be addressed in an improvement plan (see 9.1).</p> |

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 | Yes | Complaints Procedure Section 3.6, pages 11-12 | In practice, all complaints will be accepted unless the matter being raised is not covered under the Council's Complaints Procedure (see 2.2). |
| 2.2 | A complaints policy must set out the circumstances in which a matter will not be considered | Yes | Complaints Procedure - Section 3.6, pages 11-12 | In practice, all complaints will be accepted unless the matter being raised is not covered under the Council's Complaints Procedure, including: |

| Code provision | Code requirement | Comply: Yes / No | Evidence | Commentary / explanation |
|----------------|--|------------------|----------|---|
| | <p>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"> • 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. | | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requests for a service, for instance initial reporting of a faulty street light • Complaints about court proceedings • Complaints about personnel matters concerning employees of the Council • Complaints about something which affects all or most of the inhabitants of the Borough for instance the amount of Council Tax being levied • Complaints about matters for which there is a right of appeal to a Tribunal or to a Government Minister, for instance refusal of planning permission • Complaints for which there is a legal remedy, for instance, an injury claim Complaints already being dealt with by the Local Government/Housing Ombudsman • Complaints from employees of the Council (except as external users of services) • Matters which have arisen more than three months before the complaint is made, unless there are very special circumstances (see 2.3 for clarification that the 3 month timescale will be changed to 12 months) • Matters connected with 'internal malpractice' and the employment protection for individuals disclosing certain information in relation to the workplace (refer to the Whistleblowing Policy) • Matters connected with the level of Housing Benefit/ Council Tax Benefit awarded • Policy issues, e.g. the allocation of resources or prioritisation of works |

| Code provision | Code requirement | Comply: Yes / No | Evidence | Commentary / explanation |
|----------------|---|---------------------------------------|--|--|
| | | | Most commonly raised complaints that are not within the remit of our procedure webpage | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Systematic failure of the Council to discharge a function for which it is responsible. <p>The 'most commonly raised complaints that are not within the remit of our procedure' webpage provides clarification to customers on complaints that fall outside the remit of the Complaints Procedure.</p> |
| 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 (full compliance by 30 June 2024) | Complaints Procedure - Section 3.6, pages 11-12 and Section 3.11, page 16 | <p>As at April 2024, the Complaints Procedure states that matters that have arisen more than 3 months before the complaint is made, unless there are very special circumstances, is not covered by the Complaints Procedure. The 3 month timescale will be changed to 12 months.</p> <p>ACTION - Amend the Complaints Procedure to state that complaints referred to the Council within 12 months of the issue occurring or the resident becoming aware of the issue, will be accepted (by 30 June 2024).</p> |
| 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 | Yes (full compliance by 30 June 2024) | Complaints Procedure Section 3.6, pages 11-12 | All stage 1 complaints are accepted unless the matter being raised is not covered under the Council's Complaints Procedure (as covered in 2.2). While as a matter of course and in practice residents are provided with a reason if their complaint is not accepted, the Procedure as at April 2024, does not explicitly advise to provide the resident with this explanation and the right to take that decision to the Ombudsman. This will be clarified in the Procedure. |

| Code provision | Code requirement | Comply: Yes / No | Evidence | Commentary / explanation |
|----------------|--|------------------|----------|--|
| | 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. | | | <p>The Complaints Procedure states that, where discretion to not escalate a complaint to stage 2 is exercised, the complainant must be provided with an explanation and of their right to complain to the Ombudsman.</p> <p>ACTION - Amend the Complaints Procedure to state that where a decision is made not to accept a stage 1 complaint, an explanation will 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 (by 30 June 2024).</p> |
| 2.5 | Landlords must not take a blanket approach to excluding complaints; they must consider the individual circumstances of each complaint. | Yes | | While there are some exclusions to accepting a complaint under the Complaints Procedure (as covered in 2.2), these are due to matters that do not come under the remit of the Procedure, for example, there are alternative routes for redress such as through the courts or First-tier Tribunal. A blanket approach to excluding complaints is not taken. Each complaint is considered on its own merits on a case-by-case basis. |

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 | Yes | <p>Equality & Diversity Document Framework</p> <p>Customer Access Review on the Complaints Procedure</p> | Complaints can be made using a range of options including in person, by phone (including Relay UK), by email/internet, on audiotape, in writing, in Braille and in languages other than English. In 2023-24, the majority of housing landlord related complaints were received online (46.7%) and by email (40.0%). |

| Code provision | Code requirement | Comply: Yes / No | Evidence | Commentary / explanation |
|----------------|---|------------------|--|---|
| | Equality Act 2010 and anticipate the needs and reasonable adjustments of residents who may need to access the complaints process. | | Housing landlord-related complaint methods used by residents 2023-24: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online form – 46.7% • Paper form 3.3% • Email – 40.0% • Letter – 3.3% • Telephone – 0% • In person – 0% • Via Ombudsman - 6.7% | The Council has a corporate Equality & Diversity Document Framework, which sets out how it will comply with the Public Sector Equality Duty under the Equality Act 2010. (Note: this framework is currently in the process of being reviewed and updated). The Complaints Procedure has been subject to a Customer Access Review (last reviewed in December 2022), to assess the equality impact the procedure will have on the protected characteristic groups in terms of accessing and using the process, including and how reasonable adjustments are in place. |
| 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. | Yes | | Complaints can be raised in any way and with any member of staff. Any complaints raised directly to staff are forwarded on to the team responsible for logging complaints onto the complaint management system. The complaint is then allocated to the relevant officer to investigate it. |
| 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. | Yes | Number of housing landlord-related complaints opened (stages 1 to 3): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2021-2022 – 43 • 2022-2023 – 39 • 2023-2024 – 30 | Complaint volumes, types of complaints, complaint outcomes and learning from complaints, is monitored by the Council's Housing Service. The Housing Service will also be looking to benchmark on the Tenant Satisfaction Measures to understand how complaint volumes compare with other social housing providers of similar type and size of stock (CH01 number of stage 1 complaints received per 1,000 homes and number of stage 2 complaints received per 1,000 homes). |

| Code provision | Code requirement | Comply: Yes / No | Evidence | Commentary / explanation |
|----------------|--|--|--|---|
| | | | Tenant Satisfaction Measures 2023-2024: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CH01 (1) No. of stage 1 complaints received per 1,000 homes – 4.7 • CH01 (2) No. of stage 2 complaints received per 1,000 homes – 0.5 | |
| 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. | Yes | Corporate complaints webpage Complaints leaflet and form | The complaints process is available in a clear and accessible format for all customers on the Council’s website. This includes the following information: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formal complaints procedure and form • The stages of the complaints procedure and timeframes for responding • Help and advice on the complaints procedure |
| 3.5 | The policy must explain how the landlord will publicise details of the complaints policy, including information about the Ombudsman and this Code. | Yes (full compliance by 30 June 2024) | Complaints Procedure– Section 2.8, page 7, 8.2.1, page 34 Complaints leaflet and form Corporate complaints webpage | The Complaints Procedure includes how the process to complain will be publicised. This includes via the ‘How to Complain to Dartford Borough Council’ leaflet, which is available on the website, at Customer Services and other Council service outlets, and available to all staff who receive complaints. The Council publicises the Ombudsman services and the Code in various ways, such as on the ‘Stages of the Corporate Complaints Procedure’ webpage, the ‘Complaints relating to the Council’s Housing Landlord |

| Code provision | Code requirement | Comply: Yes / No | Evidence | Commentary / explanation |
|----------------|--|------------------|---|---|
| | | | Stages of the Corporate Complaints Procedure webpage Complaints relating to the Council's Housing Landlord Functions webpage Housing complaints webpage The Link newsletters | <p>Functions' webpage, the 'Housing complaints' webpage and the Housing Services' tenant and leaseholders newsletter 'the Link' articles. While this is publicised in practice, as at April 2024, the Complaints Procedure does not set out that this is the approach to publicising the Ombudsman and Code. This detail will be included in the Procedure for clarification.</p> <p>ACTION - Amend the Complaints Procedure to include information about how the Ombudsman and Complaint Handling Code will be publicised (by 30 June 2024).</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 Procedure – Section 2.5, page 5, 2.6, page 6</p> <p>Stages of the Complaints Procedure webpage</p> | <p>The Complaints Procedure explains that someone acting on behalf of a person or organisation receiving or seeking a service from the Council e.g. Councillor, MP, next of kin can use the complaints procedure on their behalf. It also recognises that some complainants will have special needs and it is important to be aware of this and the complainants needs, which can include the complainant wishing to enlist the help of a friend, relative, Councillor, MP, professional person, e.g. doctor or priest, or an advocacy service.</p> <p>The 'Stages of the Complaints Procedure' webpage advises residents that they can ask someone to help them with their complaint at any of the stages of the complaints procedure as long as they have permission to represent the resident.</p> |

| Code provision | Code requirement | Comply: Yes / No | Evidence | Commentary / explanation |
|----------------|--|------------------|---|---|
| 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 | Stages of the corporate complaints procedure webpage Complaints relating to the Council's landlord functions webpage Housing complaints Link newsletter to tenants and leaseholders Stage 2 decision letter | <p>The 'stages of the corporate complaints procedure' and 'complaints relating to the Council's landlord functions' and 'Housing complaints' webpages include information on how customers can access the relevant Ombudsman.</p> <p>The Housing Services' tenant and leaseholder newsletter 'The Link' also contains a regular article on how to make a complaint and information about the right and how to access the Ombudsman.</p> <p>The stage 2 decision letter templates includes information on how to escalate the matter to the relevant Ombudsman if the customer remains dissatisfied at the end of the Council's complaints process.</p> <p>An informative on how to make a complaint and the role of the Housing Ombudsman is included in standard letters and satisfaction surveys (as covered in 9.1).</p> |

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). | Yes | Complaints Procedure – Sections 1.4 to 1.6, page 3 and 2.9, page 7 | The Head of Legal Services is the Council's Corporate Complaints Officer and has overall responsibility for the Complaints Procedure and its administration, maintenance and annual reporting to the Audit Board. The Corporate Complaints Officer remains independent of any decisions, but may give guidance and advice on procedure; and is the liaison with the relevant Ombudsman. The Council's Audit Board receives an annual report from the Corporate |

| Code provision | Code requirement | Comply: Yes / No | Evidence | Commentary / explanation |
|----------------|--|------------------|----------|--|
| | This Code will refer to that person or team as the 'complaints officer'. This role may be in addition to other duties. | | | <p>Complaints Officer on complaints activity for all complaints across the Council in the previous year, including landlord related complaints.</p> <p>Directors are responsible for the effective operation of the Complaints Procedure within their areas of responsibility. Each Director will nominate a Senior Officer as a Directorate/ Departmental Complaints Officer (DCO), responsible for ensuring that complaints are dealt with in accordance with the Complaints Procedure.</p> <p>Complaints are allocated to officers, as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stage 1 complaints – the complaint is allocated to the relevant service Manager and copied to the relevant DCO and Corporate Complaints Officer. • Stage 2 complaints – the Corporate Complaints Officer allocates the complaint to the relevant Director and this is copied to the relevant DCO. The relevant Director will identify/nominate an officer independent of the stage one decision to investigate the complaint. <p>In light of the increased expectations and standards on complaint handling, both from residents and the Housing Ombudsman, approval has been given for the creation of two additional posts within the Council's housing landlord service whom will be responsible for overseeing and co-ordinating effective complaint handling (as covered in 9.1).</p> |
| 4.2 | The complaints officer must have access to staff at all levels | Yes | | The Corporate Complaints Officer and officers assigned to handling complaints have access to staff at all levels and |

| Code provision | Code requirement | Comply: Yes / No | Evidence | Commentary / explanation |
|----------------|---|------------------|--|--|
| | to facilitate the prompt resolution of complaints. They must also have the authority and autonomy to act to resolve disputes promptly and fairly. | | | autonomy to resolve complaints. The Corporate Complaints Officer is also available to all complaint handling officers to provide guidance and advice on procedure and best practice. |
| 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 | Yes | Complaints Procedure – Section 2.13, page 10 Tenancy Services Team training presentation (January 2024) | <p>The Complaints Procedure sets out the level of training and support to be provided to complaints handlers. Guidance notes and training on best practice in complaints handling will be offered to all staff involved in dealing with complaints. Complaints handling will be included as a core module in the Customer Services training programme.</p> <p>Refresher courses will be run by the Corporate Complaints Officer. Directors, the Corporate Complaints Officer and DCOs will offer guidance and support. The whole ethos of the complaints system is to improve the Council's performance and perceptions of its performance; to learn from mistakes; and to build trust by being open and honest in handling complaints.</p> <p>In response to a Housing Ombudsman recommendation in 2023, staff training on the complaints process was delivered to the Tenancy Services Team in the Housing Service in January 2024. Best practice guidance on complaint handling will also be issued to all Housing Service staff to complement the complaints procedure, training and the Code (as covered in 9.1).</p> |

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. | Yes | Complaints Procedure – Section 2.7, page 6, Section 8.2.1, page 32 | <p>There is a single procedure for dealing with housing covered by the Code. However, as at April 2024, the Complaints Procedure does allow for different response timescales for stage 1 complaints between the Housing Service and all other Council service areas (10 working days for housing service complaints and 15 working days for all other service area complaints). This differentiation in timescales will be removed to ensure all stage 1 complaints to all service areas of the Council are handled within 10 working days.</p> <p>ACTION - Amend the Complaints Procedure to ensure all stage 1 complaints received by all Council service areas are responded to within 10 working days (by 30 June 2024).</p> |
| 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. | Yes (full compliance by 30 June 2024) | Complaints Procedure - Section 8.1, pages 31-32 | <p>As at April 2024, the Complaints Procedure has an 'Informal stage/on-the-spot resolution' section. The informal resolution process was in place to ensure that complaints are resolved as quickly as possible at the point of contact. If the complainant is not satisfied with the response given at this informal stage, they are entitled to ask for their complaint to be dealt with formally under the procedure. This informal stage in the Complaints Procedure will be removed.</p> <p>ACTION - Amend the Complaints Procedure to remove the 'Informal stage/on-the spot resolution' stage (by 30 June 2024).</p> |

| Code provision | Code requirement | Comply: Yes / No | Evidence | Commentary / explanation |
|----------------|---|------------------|--|--|
| 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 Procedure – Section 8.2.3, pages 37-38 and 8.2.4, pages 38-39 | The Complaints Procedure is a two-stage process for complaints handled by the Council. While the Complaints Procedure has a 'stage 3' section, the stage 3 element is where the complaint is investigated by an Ombudsman. Therefore, stage 2 is the Council's final response under the procedure and it does not prevent access to an Ombudsman past this stage. |
| 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 | Complaints Procedure – Section 5.6, page 23 and 5.7, page 23 | <p>Complaints handled by contractors form part of the two stage complaints process. The Complaints Procedure states that the service Directorate/Department will be responsible for ensuring that specific contract clauses relating to complaints handling are incorporated in contracts. The service Directorate/Department is also responsible for monitoring its contractors' compliance with the Complaints Procedure.</p> <p>Complaints against contractors will be treated as complaints against the service area employing the contractors. Although complaints against contractors are categorised in the Complaints Procedure as a 'special case', such complaints will normally be dealt with in accordance with the Complaints Procedure and referred by the Directorate/Departmental DCO to the contractor. The DCO will liaise with the contractor and agree how the matter will be handled, by whom, within what timescales etc. and will notify the complainant accordingly. In appropriate cases, the relevant Director may require the contractor to take certain interim measures to protect the interests of persons using its services.</p> |

| Code provision | Code requirement | Comply: Yes / No | Evidence | Commentary / explanation |
|----------------|--|--|---|--|
| 5.5 | Landlords are responsible for ensuring that any third parties handle complaints in line with the Code. | Yes | Complaints Procedure – Section 5.6, page 23 and 5.7, page 23 | Complaints handled by contractors will normally be dealt with in accordance with the Complaints Procedure which follows the Code requirements. |
| 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 (full compliance by 30 June 2024) | Complaints procedure – Section 8.2.1, pages 32-34, Section 8.2.2, pages 34-37 | <p>As at April 2024, the Complaints Procedure does not instruct complaint handling staff to set out a “complaint definition” at stage 1 and stage 2 of the complaints process when the complaint is acknowledged and logged. The requirement for setting out the complaint definition will be included in the procedure and in acknowledgement letter templates.</p> <p>ACTION - Amend the Complaints Procedure and acknowledgement template letters to include that stage 1 and stage 2 acknowledgements should set out the “complaint definition” (by 30 June 2024).</p> <p>If the basis of the complaint is not evident or clear enough, the service Manager will contact the complainant to clarify the focus of their complaint and then decide how the complaint should be taken forward. Options may include answering a question; providing further information; clarifying a misunderstanding; acknowledging and/or rectifying an error.</p> |
| 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 | Yes | Complaints procedure – Section 5.7 and 5.9, pages 23-24 | The Housing Service is clear on which aspects of a complaint it is, or is not, responsible for. One of the expectations a resident can expect is that if the Housing Service cannot deal with an issue it is not responsible for, |

| Code provision | Code requirement | Comply: Yes / No | Evidence | Commentary / explanation |
|----------------|---|------------------|--|--|
| | and clarify any areas where this is not clear. | | Complaints procedure – Section 5.14, page 26-27. | <p>this is explained to the resident with information on how they can pursue the matter further elsewhere.</p> <p>The Complaints Procedure provides clarification on areas not within the Council’s remit, for example complaints about third parties and partner organisations.</p> <p>The Complaints Procedure further clarifies examples of most commonly raised complaints not within the remit of the procedure, for example, complaints about Councillors, highways, homelessness decisions, Housing Benefit/Council Tax decisions, liability for Council Tax or Business Rates, Parking Penalty Charge Notices, licensing decisions, refusal to grant planning permissions.</p> |
| 5.8 | <p>At each stage of the complaints process, complaint handlers must:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 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. | Yes | | <p>All residents should expect from complaint handlers the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To objectively determine, based on the information and evidence provided, whether the facts of the case have been determined • To listen to the voice of the resident • That no complaint is investigated or responded to by a member of staff about whom the complaint has been made, or who has a conflict of interest in the matter. Officers, partners, Councillors and contractors must distance themselves from the investigation of or involvement in any complaint in which they are directly or indirectly implicated; • That any request for the identity of the complainant to remain confidential will be respected as far as possible. |

| Code provision | Code requirement | Comply: Yes / No | Evidence | Commentary / explanation |
|----------------|--|------------------|---|--|
| 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 | Complaints Procedure – Section 2.7, page 6, Section 8.2.1, page 33 and Section 8.2.2, page 35 | The Complaints Procedure states that if it is not possible to provide the complainant with a full response within target timescales, the complainant must be kept informed and told when to expect a reply. |
| 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. | Yes | Complaints Procedure – Section 9, pages 39-40. | <p>The Complaints Procedure notes the requirement on the Council to make reasonable adjustments. Complaints can be made using a range of options including in person, by phone (including Relay UK), by email/internet, on audiotape, in writing, in Braille and in languages other than English.</p> <p>The Council endeavours to collect equality data, for the purposes of statistical analysis only, so as to monitor compliance with its obligations under the Equality Act 2010, in particular, the Public Sector Equality Duty.</p> |
| 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 | Yes | | In practice, all complaints will be accepted unless the matter being raised is not covered under the Council's Complaints Procedure (as covered in 2.2) or there is a valid reason not to accept the complaint. |

| Code provision | Code requirement | Comply: Yes / No | Evidence | Commentary / explanation |
|----------------|---|------------------|--|--|
| | 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. | Yes | Pentana Risk Management System Infreemation | All formal complaints and correspondence are logged on a central corporate complaints management system (Pentana Risk Management System). This ensures that complaints records are fully maintained and preserved. The Council has procured a new system for logging complaints (Infreemation) with the aim to provide improved functionality so that efficiency is increased along with the ability to interrogate data more effectively and easily. The new system is due to be operational in 2024. |
| 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 | | A complaint can be remedied at any stage of the Complaints Procedure. It is the Housing Service aim to ensure that the remedy provided is appropriate and proportionate to redress the matter sufficiently without the need for escalation. Out of 27 stage 1 landlord related complaints in 2023-24, there were only 2 complaints escalated by residents to stage 2. |
| 5.14 | Landlords must have policies and procedures in place for managing unacceptable behaviour from residents | Yes | Policy on Unreasonably Persistent and/or Vexatious | The Council has a Policy on Unreasonably Persistent and/or Vexatious Complainant's Behaviour. This includes reasons for putting any restrictions in place. |

| Code provision | Code requirement | Comply: Yes / No | Evidence | Commentary / explanation |
|----------------|---|------------------|--|--|
| | and/or their representatives. Landlords must be able to evidence reasons for putting any restrictions in place and must keep restrictions under regular review. | | Complainant's Behaviour | |
| 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 | Policy on Unreasonably Persistent and/or Vexatious Complainant's Behaviour Employee Code of Conduct | <p>The Council's Policy on Unreasonably Persistent and/or Vexatious Complainant's Behaviour sets out that the Council must be mindful that it has responsibilities under equality and diversity legislation concerning the way it provides its services. Of equal importance, is the Employee Code of Conduct which requires staff to maintain high standards when dealing with customers. However, the need to be patient or make adjustments when providing our services does not extend to having to deal with unacceptable behaviour from customers. The Council must also be fair to all customers by prioritising its resources effectively. The time spent with each customer should be appropriate and proportionate.</p> <p>The Council is committed to providing services that are accessible to the broadest range of customers. This commitment also encompasses legal obligations under the Equality Act 2010. If a customer is having difficulty accessing services for any reason, the Council will adjust the way it provides its services where it is reasonable to do so. Where a customer is behaving in a difficult, persistent or unacceptable manner, the Council must consider whether this may be caused by any personal difficulties or</p> |

| Code provision | Code requirement | Comply: Yes / No | Evidence | Commentary / explanation |
|----------------|------------------|------------------|----------|--|
| | | | | characteristics they have, which may be making services more difficult to access or use. |

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. | Yes | Complaints Procedure – Section 8.2.1, page 32-34 | <p>The Complaints Procedure states that under stage 1, resolution and apology should be immediate where possible. Residents most often want an explanation, an apology and reassurance that the same thing will not happen to others.</p> <p>If the basis of the complaint is not evident or clear enough, the service Manager will contact the complainant to clarify the focus of their complaint and then decide how the complaint should be taken forward. Options may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • answering a question; • providing further information; • clarifying a misunderstanding; • acknowledging and/or rectifying an error. |
| 6.2 | Complaints must be acknowledged, defined and logged at stage 1 of the complaints procedure within 5 | Yes (full compliance by 30 June 2024) | Complaints Procedure - Section 3.13, page 17 and 8.2.1. page 33 | As at April 2024, the Complaints Procedure states that acknowledgement of stage 1 complaints should be made within 7 working days of receipt of the complaint. This will be amended to the required timescale of 5 working days. |

| Code provision | Code requirement | Comply: Yes / No | Evidence | Commentary / explanation |
|----------------|---|--|---|--|
| | <u>working days of the complaint being received.</u> | | | <p>ACTION - Amend the Complaints Procedure to state that complaints must be acknowledged, defined and logged at stage 1 of the complaints procedure within 5 working days of the complaint being received (by 30 June 2024).</p> <p>The Complaints Procedure also states that if the complaint is simple to deal with and a full response can be provided in a short period of time, initial acknowledgement may be unnecessary. However, where a response is likely to take more time to prepare, for instance in more complex cases, an acknowledgement should be sent prior to providing the full response. This will be removed from the Procedure to ensure that all complaints have an acknowledgement sent.</p> <p>ACTION - Remove reference around circumstances where an acknowledgement may be unnecessary from the Complaints Procedure (by 30 June 2024).</p> |
| 6.3 | Landlords must issue a full response to stage 1 complaints <u>within 10 working days of the complaint being acknowledged.</u> | Yes (full compliance by 30 June 2024) | Complaints Procedure – Section 2.7, page 6, Section 8.2.1, page 33 Proportion of stage 1 complaints responded to within the Housing Ombudsman’s Complaint Handling Code timescales 2023-24 – 65.0% | As at April 2024, the Complaints Procedure states that the target for replying to housing landlord-related complaints is 10 working days of receipt by the Council. The Procedure will be aligned to responding within 10 working days of the complaint being acknowledged . ACTION - Amend the Complaints Procedure to clarify when the 10 working day timescale commences – 10 working days from the complaint being acknowledged as opposed to 10 working days from the complaint being received (by 30 June 2024). |
| 6.4 | Landlords must decide whether an extension to this timescale is | Yes | Complaints Procedure – Section 8.2.1. page 33 | As at April 2024, the Complaints Procedure does not specifically include any extension timeframes for stage 1 |

| Code provision | Code requirement | Comply: Yes / No | Evidence | Commentary / explanation |
|----------------|--|---------------------------------------|--|--|
| | 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. | (full compliance by 30 June 2024) | | <p>complaints. The procedure only states that in such cases where it is not possible to provide the complainant with a full response within the standard 10 working day timescales, the complainant must be told when to expect a reply. The 10 working day extension timeframe will be clarified in the Procedure.</p> <p>ACTION - Amend the Complaints Procedure to clarify that an extension must be no more than 10 working days without good reason (by 30 June 2024).</p> |
| 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 (full compliance by 30 June 2024) | | <p>As at April 2024, the Complaints Procedure does not mention that when informing of an extension that contact details of the relevant Ombudsman must be given. The requirement to provide contact details of the Ombudsman when using an extension will be clarified in the Procedure.</p> <p>ACTION - Amend the Complaints Procedure to make clear that when an extension happens, the relevant Ombudsman contact details are provided (by 30 June 2024).</p> |
| 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 | Yes | Complaints Procedure – Section 8.2.1 – page 33 | The Complaints Procedure states that if the complaint is upheld or partially upheld (i.e. the facts have been established), the complaint handler will consider whether any other actions and/or remedies are appropriate at the point of issuing the decisions on the complaint. The decision on the complaint is not postponed for the purpose of completing outstanding actions required for redress. |

| Code provision | Code requirement | Comply: Yes / No | Evidence | Commentary / explanation |
|-----------------------|---|-------------------------|----------------------------------|---|
| | 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 | Stage 1 response letter template | The stage 1 response letter template is structured so that each individual point of a complaint is set out followed by what was found in the investigation, and details of the reasons for the decision on that point by setting out the facts and conclusions. |
| 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 | | Additional complaints raised during the investigation that are related to the original complaint will be incorporated into the stage 1 response. If after the response to stage 1 is issued and the resident raises a further complaint regarding an issue unrelated to the first complaint, this is logged as a new complaint. |
| 6.9 | Landlords must confirm the following in writing to the resident at the completion of | Yes | Stage 1 response letter template | The stage 1 response letter template includes the required information. |

| Code provision | Code requirement | Comply: Yes / No | Evidence | Commentary / explanation |
|----------------|---|------------------|----------|--------------------------|
| | <p>stage 1 in clear, plain language:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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

| 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. | Yes | Section 8.2.2, pages 34-37 | The Complaints Procedure has a stage 2 process for escalating the complaint should the complaint not be resolved to the residents' satisfaction after stage 1. Stage 2 is the Council's final response. |
| 6.11 | Requests for stage 2 must be acknowledged, defined and logged at stage 2 of the | Yes (full compliance) | Complaints Procedure – Section 8.2.2, page 35 | As at April 2024, the Complaints Procedure states the acknowledgement for a request for request for a stage 2 investigation will be sent within 7 working days of receipt |

| Code provision | Code requirement | Comply: Yes / No | Evidence | Commentary / explanation |
|----------------|---|------------------|---|--|
| | complaints procedure within 5 working days of the escalation request being received. | by 30 June 2024) | | <p>by the Council. This will be amended to the required timescale of 5 working days.</p> <p>ACTION - Amend to Complaints Procedure to state that complaints must be acknowledged, defined and logged at stage 2 of the complaints procedure within 5 working days of the complaint being received (by 30 June 2024).</p> |
| 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 Procedure – Section 8.2.2, pages 34-37 | <p>The Complaints Procedure states that stage 2 is an opportunity to consider a case completely afresh through a formal investigation. The investigating officer will agree with the resident, a detailed, written statement of the complaint before embarking on a formal investigation, and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make sure the complaint is clear • Consider the complaint against any document submitted by the resident and/or associated with the complaint • Check the stage 1 process has been completed • Consider any new evidence • Review with the service Manager, the reasons for their stage 1 conclusion/decision in order to build a full picture as to how the decision was arrived at • Consider whether an interview with the resident is necessary • Consider the issues afresh for themselves • Consult Legal Services if there are any doubts about the Council’s statutory powers relevant to the issues • Consider whether fast track action is required e.g. referral to another organisation/body or procedure for investigation |

| Code provision | Code requirement | Comply: Yes / No | Evidence | Commentary / explanation |
|----------------|---|--|---|--|
| | | | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Decide upon their own findings in light of these considerations Write to the resident setting out their findings |
| 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 Procedure – Section 8.2.2, page 34 | The Complaints Procedure states that the relevant Director will identify/nominate an investigating officer independent of the stage 1 decision. The person will normally be a representative from management other than the line manager e.g. the head of service or the relevant Director may choose to investigate personally. |
| 6.14 | Landlords must issue a final response to the stage 2 <u>within 20 working days of the complaint being acknowledged.</u> | Yes (full compliance by 30 June 2024) | Complaints Procedure – Section 2.7, page 6 Complaints Procedure – Section 8.2.2, page 35 Proportion of stage 2 complaints responded to within the Housing Ombudsman’s Complaint Handling Code timescales 2023-24 – 100.0% | As at April 2024, the Complaints Procedure states that the target for replying to stage 2 complaints is within <u>20 working days</u> (for all service areas) from when the complaint is <u>received</u> . The Procedure will be aligned to responding within 20 working days of the complaint being <u>acknowledged</u> . <u>ACTION</u> - Amend the Complaints Procedure to clarify when the 20 working day timescale commences – 20 working days from the complaint being <u>acknowledged</u> as opposed to 20 working days from the complaint being <u>received</u> (by 30 June 2024). |
| 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 | Yes (full compliance by 30 June 2024) | Complaints Procedure – Section 8.2.2, page 35 | As at April 2024, the Complaints Procedure does not specifically include any extension timeframes for stage 2 complaints. The procedure only states that in such cases where it is not possible to provide the complainant with a full response within standard 20 working day timescales, the complainant must be told when to expect a reply. The |

| Code provision | Code requirement | Comply: Yes / No | Evidence | Commentary / explanation |
|----------------|---|--|--|--|
| | be no more than 20 working days without good reason, and the reason(s) must be clearly explained to the resident. | | | 20 working day extension timeframe will be clarified in the Procedure. ACTION - Amend the Complaints Procedure to clarify that an extension must be no more than 20 working days without good reason (by 30 June 2024). |
| 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. | Yes (full compliance by 30 June 2024) | | As at April 2024, the Complaints Procedure does not mention that when informing of an extension that contact details of the relevant Ombudsman must be given. The requirement to provide contact details of the Ombudsman when using an extension will be clarified in the Procedure. ACTION - Amend the Complaints Procedure to make clear that when an extension happens, the relevant Ombudsman contact details are provided (by 30 June 2024). |
| 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 | Complaints Procedure – Section 8.2.2 – pages 34-38 | The Complaints Procedure states that if the complaint is upheld or partially upheld (i.e. the facts have been established), the complaint handler will consider whether any other actions and/or remedies are appropriate at the point of issuing the decisions on the complaint. The decision on the complaint is not postponed for the purpose of completing outstanding actions required for redress. |
| 6.18 | Landlords must address all points raised in the complaint definition and provide clear reasons for any decisions, | Yes | Stage 2 response letter template | The stage 2 response letter template is structured so that each individual point of a complaint is set out followed by what was found in the investigation, and details of the |

| Code provision | Code requirement | Comply: Yes / No | Evidence | Commentary / explanation |
|----------------|--|------------------|----------------------------------|---|
| | referencing the relevant policy, law and good practice where appropriate. | | | reasons for the decision on that point by setting out the facts and conclusions. |
| 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. | Yes | Stage 2 response letter template | The stage 2 response letter template includes the required information. |
| 6.20 | Stage 2 is the landlord's final response and must involve all suitable staff members needed to issue such a response. | Yes | | Stage 2 is the Council's final response. The Complaints Procedure does not have a further stage for consideration by the Council. |

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"> • 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. | Yes | Complaints Procedure – Section 11, pages 41-42 | <p>The Complaints Procedure states that remedies for complainants under the procedure will normally take the form of putting things right and an apology. The options for redress are any, or a combination, of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • an apology where appropriate; • an explanation of the events or policy concerned; • agreeing to change a decision or action; • agreeing to put right a mistake or the consequences of a mistake; • a review of a policy or project, or its implementation, to take into account the complaint; • improving communication to staff or the public to avoid the same grounds for complaint as previously; • improving staff training to eliminate the root cause of the complaint. <p>Any remedies that will be taken are set out in the complaint decision letter.</p> |
| 7.2 | Any remedy offered must reflect the impact on the resident as a result of any fault identified. | Yes | Complaints Procedure – Section 11, pages 41-42 | <p>The Complaints Procedure recommends that complaint handlers refer to Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman guidance on remedies. Key questions in considering an appropriate remedy include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What outcome does the complainant want to achieve by complaining? |

| Code provision | Code requirement | Comply: Yes / No | Evidence | Commentary / explanation |
|----------------|---|------------------|--|---|
| | | | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What has gone wrong? • What is the personal injustice? • Can action be taken to put the person affected back in the position they would have been in if nothing had gone wrong? • Is there an actual quantifiable financial loss, such as costs incurred or payments not received? • On what basis can loss of non-monetary benefit be calculated? • How severe was any other impact in terms of distress, harm or risk? • Did the actions or inactions of the complainant or a third party contribute to or lessen the injustice? • Is there a more appropriate form of payment than monetary? • Overall, is the remedy proportionate, appropriate and reasonable? |
| 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. | Yes | | The decision letter will clearly set out any remedial actions. Such actions are logged on the complaints management system. |
| 7.4 | Landlords must take account of the guidance issued by the Ombudsman when deciding on appropriate remedies. | Yes | Complaints Procedure – Section 11, pages 41-42 | The Complaints Procedure recommends that complaint handlers refer to Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman guidance on remedies. As at April 2024, the Procedure does not currently reference Housing Ombudsman guidance on remedies. Reference to Housing |

| Code provision | Code requirement | Comply: Yes / No | Evidence | Commentary / explanation |
|----------------|------------------|------------------|----------|---|
| | | | | <p>Ombudsman Guidance on remedies will be added to the procedure.</p> <p>ACTION - Amend the Complaints Procedure to make reference to Housing Ombudsman Guidance on remedies (30 June 2024).</p> |

Section 8: Putting things right

| 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> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> the annual self-assessment against this Code to ensure their complaint handling policy remains in line with its requirements. 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; | Yes | Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report for the Housing Landlord Service (2024) | The annual complaints performance and service improvement report for 2024 has been produced containing the required information. |

| Code provision | Code requirement | Comply: Yes / No | Evidence | Commentary / explanation |
|----------------|--|------------------|--|--|
| | 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. | Yes | Cabinet report (23 May 2024) and minutes of meeting Complaints relating to the Council's housing landlord functions webpage | The 2024 annual complaints performance and service improvement report is being reported to the Council's governing body (Cabinet) on 23 May 2024. Then it will be published on the 'Complaints relating to the Council's housing landlord functions' page of the website alongside Cabinet's response. |
| 8.3 | Landlords must also carry out a self-assessment following a significant restructure, merger and/or change in procedures. | Yes | | Not applicable at this time. |

| Code provision | Code requirement | Comply: Yes / No | Evidence | Commentary / explanation |
|----------------|---|------------------|--|--|
| 8.4 | Landlords may be asked to review and update the self-assessment following an Ombudsman investigation. | Yes | | To date there has not been an instruction from the Housing Ombudsman to review and update the self-assessment. |
| 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. | Yes | Cyber Security Strategy Cyber Incident Playbook Information Security Policy Business Continuity Plans Risk Registers | The Council has various strategies, policies and plans in place for exceptional circumstances, including cyber incidents. The Council's Communications Team is responsible for providing information to residents who may be affected, such as through social media channels and the website. Where the housing landlord service is unable to comply with the Code due to exceptional circumstances, this will be communicated to residents and the Ombudsman. |

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. | Yes | | The 2023-24 Tenant Satisfaction Measures survey returned a 30.9% satisfaction score with complaint handling. Respondents to the survey were asked what the Housing Service could do to improve complaint handling. The key feedback received was, as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen more to residents when they make a complaint • Communicate better with residents when they make a complaint |

| Code provision | Code requirement | Comply: Yes / No | Evidence | Commentary / explanation | | | | |
|---|---|------------------|----------|--|--------------------|--------------------------|---|---|
| | | | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take action on complaints • Deal with complaints quickly • Follow-up on complaints, look into them properly • Make it easy for residents to raise a complaint • Keep residents informed about their complaints • Show compassion, empathy and understanding, be considerate to diverse needs and treat residents fairly <p>Based on the feedback and insight received from the Tenant Satisfaction Measures Survey and learning from complaints, an improvement plan has been developed in order to improve performance and satisfaction. The table below sets out the steps the Housing Service is taking to make improvements as a result of learning from complaints:</p> <table border="0" style="width: 100%;"> <thead> <tr> <th data-bbox="1279 836 1491 871" style="text-align: left;">Improvement</th> <th data-bbox="1610 836 1883 871" style="text-align: left;">Steps being taken</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td data-bbox="1279 922 1570 1082"> <p>Improve performance on handling complaints within timescales.</p> <p>Keep residents informed of the progress with their complaint and if an extension is needed.</p> </td> <td data-bbox="1610 922 2063 1452"> <p>To recruit two additional officers whose roles will include to oversee the effective handling of complaints including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitoring of complaints to ensure they are handled within timescales, including ensuring, where an extension may be needed, considering the complexity of the complaint, that the resident </td> </tr> </tbody> </table> | Improvement | Steps being taken | <p>Improve performance on handling complaints within timescales.</p> <p>Keep residents informed of the progress with their complaint and if an extension is needed.</p> | <p>To recruit two additional officers whose roles will include to oversee the effective handling of complaints including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitoring of complaints to ensure they are handled within timescales, including ensuring, where an extension may be needed, considering the complexity of the complaint, that the resident |
| Improvement | Steps being taken | | | | | | | |
| <p>Improve performance on handling complaints within timescales.</p> <p>Keep residents informed of the progress with their complaint and if an extension is needed.</p> | <p>To recruit two additional officers whose roles will include to oversee the effective handling of complaints including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitoring of complaints to ensure they are handled within timescales, including ensuring, where an extension may be needed, considering the complexity of the complaint, that the resident | | | | | | | |

| Code provision | Code requirement | Comply: Yes / No | Evidence | Commentary / explanation |
|----------------|------------------|------------------|----------|---|
| | | | | <p>is informed of the expected timescale for a response.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oversight and quality assurance on complaint investigations and findings. • Sharing complaints performance data and learning from complaints regularly with housing landlord services staff. • Overseeing the carrying out of transactional satisfaction surveys following closure of a complaint and learning from feedback received. (by July 2024) <p>Awareness of the various ways to make a complaint and the role of the Housing Ombudsman</p> <p>Continue to publish Link newsletter articles about how to make a complaint, the role of the Housing Ombudsman and complaints handling performance information. (Ongoing)</p> <p>Ensure an informative on how to make a complaint and the role of the Housing Ombudsman is included in standard letters and</p> |

| Code provision | Code requirement | Comply: Yes / No | Evidence | Commentary / explanation |
|----------------|---|------------------|----------|--|
| | | | | <p>satisfaction surveys. (by July 2024)</p> <p>Housing landlord service staff awareness and understanding of the corporate complaints procedure and the Code.</p> <p>Issue best practice guidance on complaint handling to housing landlord staff to complement the corporate complaints procedure and the Code. (by July 2024)</p> |
| 9.2 | <p>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.</p> | Yes | | <p>The Housing Service uses complaints as a source of intelligence. For example, in 2023-24:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The housing landlord service received a pattern of complaints regarding the standard of cleaning of communal areas. This matter was discussed with the cleaning contractor who was instructed to make improvements. Since then, performance of the cleaning contract has improved and there have to date been no further complaints received regarding this issue. • Following a complaint about the handling of anti-social behaviour, the housing landlord service needed to improve its response to supporting victims of anti-social behaviour, particularly where they are vulnerable. In response to this, an Anti-social Behaviour Procedure has been developed to complement the Anti-social Behaviour Policy. The |

| Code provision | Code requirement | Comply: Yes / No | Evidence | Commentary / explanation |
|----------------|---|------------------|---|---|
| | | | | <p>procedure sets out in detail the process for supporting vulnerable residents, including risk ratings.</p> |
| 9.3 | <p>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.</p> | Yes | <p>Audit Board Report and meeting minutes</p> <p>Housing Advisory Board reports and meeting minutes</p> <p>Annual Report to tenants and leaseholders</p> <p>Link newsletter to tenants and leaseholders</p> | <p>The Council's Audit Board receives an annual report from the Corporate Complaints Officer on complaints activity for all complaints across the Council in the previous year, including landlord related complaints. The Audit Board committee reports are publically available on the Council's website.</p> <p>In terms of Housing Service complaints, performance and learning from complaints has been reported to the Council's Housing Advisory Board on a quarterly basis since October 2022. The Housing Advisory Board is made up of elected Members, senior Officers and representatives from the Dartford Tenant and Leaseholders' Forum. The main purpose of the group is to have oversight of, and act in an advisory role, in relation to the implementation and progression in meeting the requirements of the Government's Charter for Social Housing Residents (Social Housing White Paper), in order to comply with the statutory housing governance requirements set out by the Regulator of Social Housing. This Board considers reports on proposed policy, strategy and performance in relation to housing issues and makes recommendations to the decision making body (Cabinet) as appropriate.</p> <p>Complaints Handling performance and learning from complaints is reported in the Annual Report to tenants and leaseholders.</p> |

| Code provision | Code requirement | Comply: Yes / No | Evidence | Commentary / explanation |
|----------------|--|------------------|----------|---|
| | | | | Complaint handling performance and learning from complaints is also reported in the quarterly 'Link' newsletter to Council tenants and leaseholders. |
| 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 | | <p>The Head of Legal Services is the Council's Corporate Complaints Officer and has overall responsibility for the Complaints Procedure and its administration and maintenance. The Corporate Complaints Officer remains independent of any decisions, but may give guidance and advice on procedure.</p> <p>Directors are responsible for the effective operation of the Complaints Procedure within their areas of responsibility. Each Director will nominate a Senior Officer as a Directorate/ Departmental Complaints Officer (DCO), responsible for ensuring that complaints are dealt with in accordance with the Complaints Procedure.</p> <p>Directors are responsible for discussing with their managers, patterns of complaints and possible service improvements etc. with a view to remedying any acknowledged deficiencies as quickly as possible.</p> |
| 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'). | Yes | | The Council's Member Responsible for Complaints (MRC) is the Council's Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Housing (also the chairman of the Housing Advisory Board – see 9.3). |

| Code provision | Code requirement | Comply: Yes / No | Evidence | Commentary / explanation |
|----------------|--|------------------|----------|--|
| 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. | Yes | | The MRC will be supported by the Housing Service in their role to ensure the governing body (Cabinet) receive regular information and insight on complaints, and access to suitable information and staff. |
| 9.7 | As a minimum, the MRC and the governing body (or equivalent) must receive: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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 | Yes | | <p>The MRC receives the required information at the quarterly Housing Advisory Board meeting and this is recorded in the minutes (see 9.3) To ensure the decision making body (Cabinet) receive regular updates as well, it will be proposed that Housing Advisory Board minutes will be added to the Cabinet agenda.</p> <p>The annual complaints performance and service improvement report will be reported to the Housing Advisory Board to consider and comment on it before being reported to Cabinet.</p> |

| Code provision | Code requirement | Comply: Yes / No | Evidence | Commentary / explanation |
|----------------|--|------------------|---|--|
| | 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. | Yes | Complaints Procedure – Section 2, pages 4-5 | The Complaints Procedure contains the objectives in relation to complaint handling for all relevant employees and third parties, which include to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • accept that things can go wrong but that the Council can put things right and learn from its mistakes; • provide residents with an effective way to complaint about Council services; • if possible, resolve complaints straight away; • deal with complaints fairly and consistently; • define the standards the public can expect when they make a complaint; • recognise the importance of complaints in providing feedback about Council services and performance; • set out how the Council will monitor complaints, and use that information to improve services and identify training needs; • ensure that residents are entitled to have the same access to this procedure, regardless of whether the service is being provided by the Council or a contractor. |

ANNEX 2 – SELF-ASSESSMENT ACTION PLAN

| Code provision | Code requirement | Action | Target date | Responsible officer |
|--------------------------------|--|--|-------------|------------------------|
| Exclusions | | | | |
| 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. | Amend the Complaints Procedure to state that complaints referred to the Council within 12 months of the issue occurring or the resident becoming aware of the issue, will be accepted. | June 2024 | Head of Legal Services |
| 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. | Amend the Complaints Procedure to state that where a decision is made not to accept a stage 1 complaint, an explanation will 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. | June 2024 | Head of Legal Services |
| Accessibility and Awareness | | | | |
| 3.5 | The policy must explain how the landlord will publicise details of the complaints policy, including information about the Ombudsman and this Code. | Amend the Complaints Procedure to include information about how the Ombudsman and Complaint Handling Code will be publicised. | June 2024 | Head of Legal Services |
| 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. | Amend the Complaints Procedure to ensure all stage 1 complaints received by all Council service areas are responded to within 10 working days. | June 2024 | Head of Legal Services |

| Code provision | Code requirement | Action | Target date | Responsible officer |
|-----------------------------------|--|--|--------------------|----------------------------|
| 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. | Amend the Complaints Procedure to remove the 'Informal stage/on-the spot resolution' stage. | June 2024 | Head of Legal Services |
| 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. | Amend the Complaints Procedure to include that stage 1 and stage 2 acknowledgements should set out the "complaint definition". | June 2024 | Head of Legal Services |
| Complaint stages – stage 1 | | | | |
| 6.2 | Complaints must be acknowledged, defined and logged at stage 1 of the complaints procedure within 5 working days of the complaint being received. | Amend the Complaints Procedure to state that complaints must be acknowledged, defined and logged at stage 1 of the complaints procedure within 5 working days of the complaint being received. | June 2024 | Head of Legal Services |
| | | Remove reference around circumstances where an acknowledgement may be unnecessary from the Complaints Procedure. | June 2024 | Head of Legal Services |
| 6.3 | Landlords must issue a full response to stage 1 complaints within 10 working days of the complaint being acknowledged. | Amend the Complaints Procedure to clarify when the 10 working day timescale commences – 10 working days from the complaint being acknowledged as opposed to 10 working days from the complaint being received. | June 2024 | Head of Legal Services |
| 6.4 | Landlords must decide whether an extension to this timescale is needed when considering the complexity of the complaint and then inform the | Amend the Complaints Procedure to clarify that an extension must be no more than 10 working days without good reason. | June 2024 | Head of Legal Services |

| Code provision | Code requirement | Action | Target date | Responsible officer |
|-----------------------------------|---|---|--------------------|----------------------------|
| | 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. | Amend the Complaints Procedure to make clear that when an extension happens, the relevant Ombudsman contact details are provided. | June 2024 | Head of Legal Services |
| Complaint stages – stage 2 | | | | |
| 6.11 | Requests for stage 2 must be acknowledged, defined and logged at stage 2 of the complaints procedure within 5 working days of the escalation request being received. | Amend to Complaints Procedure to state that complaints must be acknowledged, defined and logged at stage 2 of the complaints procedure within 5 working days of the complaint being received. | June 2024 | Head of Legal Services |
| 6.14 | 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. | Amend the Complaints Procedure to clarify that an extension must be no more than 20 working days without good reason. | June 2024 | Head of Legal Services |
| 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. | Amend the Complaints Procedure to make clear that when an extension happens, the relevant Ombudsman contact details are provided. | June 2024 | Head of Legal Services |
| Putting things right | | | | |
| 7.4 | Landlords must take account of the guidance issued by the Ombudsman when deciding on appropriate remedies. | Amend the Complaints Procedure to make reference to Housing Ombudsman Guidance on remedies. | | Head of Legal Services |

| Code provision | Code requirement | Action | Target date | Responsible officer |
|---|--|--|-------------|---------------------|
| 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. | To recruit two additional officers in the Tenancy Services Team whose roles will include to oversee the effective handling of housing complaints. | July 2024 | Head of Housing |
| | | Continue to publish Link newsletter articles about how to make a complaint, the role of the Housing Ombudsman and complaints handling performance information. | July 2024 | Head of Housing |
| | | Ensure an informative on how to make a complaint and the role of the Housing Ombudsman is included in standard letters and satisfaction surveys. | July 2024 | Head of Housing |
| | | Issue best practice guidance on complaint handling to housing landlord staff to complement the corporate complaints procedure and the Code. | July 2024 | Head of Housing |