



Report to Policy Committee:

Author/Lead Officer of Report: Vicky Kennedy, Operational Team Manager (Author) / Bev Mullooly, Head of Service (Lead Officer)

Tel: 07896 793842

Report of: Executive Director, Operational Services

Report to: *Housing Policy Committee*

Date of Decision: *15th September 2022*

Subject: ***Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code - Self-Assessment***

Has an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) been undertaken?	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If YES, what EIA reference number has it been given? (<i>Insert reference number</i>)				
Has appropriate consultation taken place?	Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
Has a Climate Impact Assessment (CIA) been undertaken?	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information?	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Purpose of Report:

The Complaint Handling Code was introduced in July 2020 by the Housing Ombudsman and updated further in April 2022. It sets out how the Housing Ombudsman expects social landlords to manage customer complaints, describes best practice and supports landlords in responding to complaints effectively and fairly.

A requirement of the Code is that social landlords assess their complaints handling against the Code annually, using a standard template provided by the Housing Ombudsman. Local Authority landlords must report the outcomes of the assessment to Elected Members and publish the assessment on their website and in their annual report.

An assessment against the code was undertaken in July 2022 and the purpose of this report is to:

- Inform Housing Policy Committee of the outcomes of the assessment, and of the actions agreed to address non-compliance.
- Seek the Housing Policy Committee's approval to publish the outcomes of the assessment.

Recommendations:

- That the Housing Committee notes the outcomes of the self-assessment against the Code.
- That the Housing Committee gives their approval for the outcomes of the assessment to be published.

Background Papers:

(Insert details of any background papers used in the compilation of the report.)

- SCC's completed Housing Ombudsman Complaints Handling Code Self-Assessment Form

Lead Officer to complete:-		
1	I have consulted the relevant departments in respect of any relevant implications indicated on the Statutory and Council Policy Checklist, and comments have been incorporated / additional forms completed / EIA completed, where required.	Finance: Tina Sharp
		Legal: <i>Stephen Tonge</i>
		Equalities & Consultation: <i>Louise Nunn</i>
		Climate: <i>N/A – no climate-related implications of the proposals</i>
	<i>Legal, financial/commercial and equalities implications must be included within the report and the name of the officer consulted must be included above.</i>	
2	EMT member who approved submission:	<i>Ajman Ali</i>
3	Committee Chair consulted:	Cllr Douglas Johnson
4	I confirm that all necessary approval has been obtained in respect of the implications indicated on the Statutory and Council Policy Checklist and that the report has been approved for submission to the Committee by the EMT member indicated at 2. In addition, any additional forms have been completed and signed off as required at 1.	
	Lead Officer Name: Bev Mullooly <i>(Insert name)</i>	Job Title: Head of Service, Housing and Neighbourhoods Service <i>(Insert job title)</i>
	Date: <i>26th August 2022</i>	

1. PROPOSAL

1.1 In July 2020, the Housing Ombudsman introduced its Complaint Handling Code, with which all social landlords are expected to comply. Updated further in April 2022, the Code sets out how the Housing Ombudsman expects social landlords to manage customer complaints. It also requires social landlords to assess their handling of complaints against the Code annually and publicly share the outcomes.

1.2 Most of the elements within the Code are 'must do' requirements and all social landlords are expected to comply with these. A smaller number of requirements are given as 'best practice guidance' and social landlords should aim to comply with these wherever possible. Our initial priority will be to address any gaps against the must-do mandatory elements, but longer term our aim is to also be fully compliant with all best-practice guidelines.

1.3 Officers from the Housing and Neighbourhoods Service, Repairs and Maintenance Service and Customer Services have undertaken this year's self-assessment over the last 3 months. This has involved reviewing policies, procedures, information provided to customers, training materials, customer satisfaction data and performance information – to assess how well we comply with each element of the Code.

1.4 In total, there are 70 elements within the Code and overall, we measure well against the requirements and are compliant with the majority. Our complaints policies, procedures and principles are in line with the Code, our tenants have access to clear and comprehensive complaints information on the Council's website, staff are suitably trained in handling complaints, and we put things right.

1.5 However, there are 2 'best practice' elements against which we are currently non-compliant, and a further 10 against which we can demonstrate only partial compliance (4 of which are mandatory elements).

1.6 An action plan has been developed which addresses all the gaps identified. Main ones are:

(i) Improving the time taken to respond to complaints.

(ii) Improving the complaints information available to those customers without online access

(iii) Expanding performance measures to capture all data required by the Housing Ombudsman

(iv) Improving how we capture, report, and utilise the wider learning from complaints.

1.7 The action plan is a working document and will be updated as actions are completed. A new Customer Services Improvement Group – consisting of key officers from Housing and Neighbourhoods, Repairs and Maintenance Service and Customer Services – will be responsible for overseeing the action plan and ensuring / supporting its implementation.

2. HOW DOES THIS DECISION CONTRIBUTE?

2.1 By completing the self-assessment against the Housing Ombudsman's code, sharing the outcomes, and taking actions to address the gaps identified, we are demonstrating a clear commitment to effectively handling and learning from housing-related complaints. This contributes to the commitment in the corporate One Year Plan to *"Improve the ways in which people can get in touch with the council and improve the experience that they have when they do."*

3. HAS THERE BEEN ANY CONSULTATION?

- 3.1 Officers from the Housing and Neighbourhood Service, Repairs and Maintenance Service and Customer Services team have worked together to draft the self-assessment.
- 3.2 Once the self-assessment has been approved by Housing Policy Committee, it will be published on the Council's website and to residents via our usual communications channels (e.g., tenant newsletters and our Facebook page). We will consult with the Housing and Neighbourhoods Advisory Panel (a group which consists of elected tenant representatives from across the city) on the action plan and seek their views on how we can improve how we manage and learn from complaints.

4. RISK ANALYSIS AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE DECISION

4.1 Equality Implications

- 4.1.1 There are no equalities implications arising from this report. However, it is a key requirement of adherence to the Housing Ombudsman's Code that all complaints are handled consistently and fairly, regardless of who has submitted them. The Code also requires us to facilitate reasonable adjustments in how we deal with complaints where the customer requires this. Therefore, adherence to the code promotes equality and fairness in how we deal with complaints.

4.2 Financial and Commercial Implications

- 4.2.1 There are no financial or commercial implications arising from this report.

4.3 Legal Implications

- 4.3.1 The Housing Ombudsman Scheme is approved by the Secretary of State under section 51 of and Schedule 2 to the Housing Act 1996. The Act requires social landlords, as defined by section 51 (2) of the Act, to be members of an approved scheme. It is mandatory for all local authorities and registered social housing providers to be members of the Ombudsman Scheme.

4.3.2

A new version of the Housing Ombudsman's "Complaint Handling Code" came into effect on 1 April 2022, but landlords have until 1 October 2022 to become compliant with it. Landlords are expected to do their self-assessment on this new version of the Code at a time that best assists them with auditing compliance and/or the work they are intending to do to achieve compliance by 1 October.

4.4 Climate Implications

- 4.4.1 There are no climate implications arising from this report.

4.5 Other Implications

- 4.5.1 There are no other implications arising from this report.

5. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

5.1 Self-assessment against the Housing Ombudsman's Code and publication of the outcomes, are a requirement of all social landlords. Therefore, in this respect there were no other alternatives considered.

6. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Housing Policy Committee is being asked to note the self-assessment and to give its approval for publication of the assessment on the Council website because this will help us achieve transparency and accountability in how we manage with housing-related complaints. It is also a requirement of the Housing Ombudsman for all social landlords that we do so.

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