

Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code: Self-assessment form: Onward Homes

Compliance with the Complaint Handling Code				
1	Definition of a complaint	Yes	No	Comments
	Does the complaints process use the following definition of a complaint? <i>An expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the organisation, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting an individual resident or group of residents.</i>	Yes		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Housing Ombudsman's definition of a complaint has been incorporated within Onwards Complaint Resolution Policy and complaint handling processes
	Does the policy have exclusions where a complaint will not be considered?	Yes		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Details of the exclusions are contained within our Complaint Resolution policy
	Are these exclusions reasonable and fair to residents? Evidence relied upon	Yes		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Our exclusions are driven by factual circumstances, thus preventing inconsistency and/or subjectivity in the event of a complaint being refused We have updated our Complaint Resolution policy to ensure that all elements of the policy are clear, concise, and easy for our customers to understand. This includes the section regarding policy exceptions
2	Accessibility			
	Are multiple accessibility routes available for residents to make a complaint?	Yes		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Our Complaint Resolution policy details the multiple routes available to customers who wish to make a complaint

	Is the complaints policy and procedure available online?	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Onwards Complaint Resolution policy is available on our website under the 'policies' and the 'contact us' sections
	Do we have a reasonable adjustments policy?	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Onward maintains compliance with the Equality Act 2010 We do not have a stand-alone Reasonable Adjustments policy; however, the following policies contain details of the reasonable adjustments available to customers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Repairs handbook (adaptations to homes) b. Equality and Diversity policy (our equality objectives) c. Customer charter (tailoring our services) d. Tenant handbook (adaptations to homes, and providing extra support to vulnerable customers) e. Adaptation's policy (See page 12, 13)
	Do we regularly advise residents about our complaints process?	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We promote our early intervention and escalation process to customers where we identify that they are experiencing issues, or if we believe that an issue requires escalation on their behalf We also use other regular communications to promote our complaints service, such as our Onward Newsletter June 2021 which is issued to all customers and published on our website
3	Complaints team and process		
	Is there a complaint officer or equivalent in post?	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Our Customer Resolutions team is led by our Customer Resolutions Team Leader
	Does the complaint officer have autonomy to resolve complaints?	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Working as the customer advocate, the Customer Resolution team works independently and are tasked

				<p>with delivering customer focussed resolutions to complaints</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The team coordinate complaint investigations and case manage complaints through to resolution. The team also have the autonomy to agree compensation and goodwill payments with customers
	Does the complaint officer have authority to compel engagement from other departments to resolve disputes?	Yes		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Customer Resolution team work with other teams and departments to resolve disputes Established points of communication and escalation routes are utilised both internally and with external stakeholders, enabling fast and effective resolution to disputes
	If there is a third stage to the complaint's procedure are residents involved in the decision making?	N/A		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Onward operates a two-stage complaints process
	Is any third stage optional for residents?	N/A		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> N/A as there is not a third stage
	Does the final stage response set out residents' right to refer the matter to the Housing Ombudsman Service?	Yes		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Our stage 2 correspondence template sets out details of how to refer complaints to the Ombudsman Service, as prescribed by the Housing Ombudsman We have also taken the step to include the Housing Ombudsman's services and contact details in our initial acknowledgement correspondence and stage 1 correspondence templates
	Do we keep a record of complaint correspondence including correspondence from the resident?	Yes		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All complaint information including verbal and written correspondence with customers is recorded on our CRM system
	At what stage are most complaints resolved?			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stage 1
4	Communication			

Are residents kept informed and updated during the complaints process?	Yes		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Our Customer Resolution Specialists case manage each complaint from receipt through to resolution. Each Specialist maintains regular communication throughout the journey of the complaint and records all interactions in our CRM system The introduction of our unified communications platform and our complaints learning and continuous improvement framework has led to process enhancements which have further improved the communication process
Are residents informed of the landlord's position and given a chance to respond and challenge any area of dispute before the final decision?	Yes		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Our Customer Resolution Specialists attempt a closure call with customers prior to issuing the complaint response. This provides an opportunity to discuss any concerns and respond to any further questions from the customer prior to closing the complaint
Are all complaints acknowledged and logged within five days?	Yes		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Our internal service level is to log and acknowledge all complaints within 2 days
Are residents advised of how to escalate at the end of each stage?	Yes		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Our correspondence templates include details of how customers can escalate their complaint at each stage – this includes details of the Housing Ombudsman services
What proportion of complaints are resolved at stage one?			92%
What proportion of complaints are resolved at stage two?			8%
What proportion of complaint responses are sent within Code timescales? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stage one Stage one (with extension) Stage two Stage two (with extension) 			Stage One sent within 10 days = 92% Stage One sent within extension = 8% Stage Two sent within 20 days = 100%

	Where timescales have been extended did we have good reason?	Yes		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Every effort is made to respond to complaints quickly and effectively. Where we anticipate there may be a delay and an extension is required, we advise our customer of the delay, explain the reason for the delay and agree a further timescale and contact arrangements • Timescale extensions are very much the exception, but circumstances such as the complex nature of a complaint, factors beyond our control, or inability to contact customers may result in the requirement for an extension • Monitoring of extensions is incorporated within our quality management framework
	Where timescales have been extended did we keep the resident informed?	Yes		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes
	What proportion of complaints do we resolve to residents' satisfaction			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • YTD 19% of customers are satisfied with the outcome of their complaint
5	Cooperation with Housing Ombudsman Service			
	Were all requests for evidence responded to within 15 days?	Yes		
	Where the timescale was extended did we keep the Ombudsman informed?	N/A		
6	Fairness in complaint handling			
	Are residents able to complain via a representative throughout?	Yes		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Details are contained within our Complaint Resolution Policy
	If advice was given, was this accurate and easy to understand?	Yes		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To improve the communication process our Customer Resolution Specialists aim to liaise with customers via telephone wherever possible • Our colleagues refrain from using jargon and use a standard response template to ensure all information is cascaded in a structured, comprehensive, and easy to understand format • Our colleague's communication with customers is

				regularly monitored as part of our quality management framework to ensure consistency and effectiveness
	How many cases did we refuse to escalate? What was the reason for the refusal?			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 case rejected YTD • The complaint related to legal matters associated with a disrepair claim which had previously been settled. We provided the Ombudsman's referral details in the response
	Did we explain our decision to the resident?	Yes		
7	Outcomes and remedies			
	Where something has gone wrong are we taking appropriate steps to put things right?	Yes		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Within our complaint outcome responses, we always apologise and provide confirmation of whether the complaint is upheld or not. We also include full details of our investigation, our findings and how we intend to remedy the issue • Onward has adopted the Ombudsman guidance on remedies and utilises an internal compensation and goodwill policy to ensure fairness and consistency when determining financial remedy
8	Continuous learning and improvement			
	What improvements have we made as a result of learning from complaints?			<p>Informal complaints 2021/22 (YTD) = 746 Informal complaints resolved 2021/22 (YTD) = 78% Informal complaints ave resolution 2021/22 = 1.3 days</p> <p>Stage 1 2019/20 = 57.4% resolved within 10 days Stage 1 2020/21 = 77.1% resolved within 10 days Stage 1 2021/22 (YTD) = 91.8% resolved within 10 days</p> <p>Stage 2 2019/20 = 52.8% resolved within 10 days</p>

			<p>Stage 2 2020/21 = 76.0% resolved within 10 days Stage 2 2021/22 (YTD) = 82.9% resolved within 10 days</p> <p>Stage 1 2019/20 average days to resolve = 13.8 days Stage 1 2020/21 average days to resolve = 10.8 days Stage 1 2021/22 (YTD) average days to resolve 8.5 days</p> <p>Stage 2 2019/20 average days to resolve = 13.2 days Stage 2 2020/21 average days to resolve = 12.1 days Stage 2 2021/22 (YTD) average days to resolve = 8.8 days</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our learning and continuous improvement framework is being expanded beyond our Property teams to include other teams across Onward • Further development of our unified communications platform has enabled improvements to our complaints process, particularly in relation to the way we keep our customers informed, and by increasing the number of communication channels available to customers • The successful introduction and embedment of our informal complaints process means that more of our customers are having their concerns addressed quickly and at the first point of contact, without the need to navigate through our formal complaints process
	<p>How do we share these lessons with:</p> <p>a) residents?</p> <p>b) the board/governing body?</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Via our annual complaints report • Scrutiny and internal reporting structures • Performance Reporting to Board • Customer Complaints Forum

	c) In the Annual Report?			
	Has the Code made a difference to how we respond to complaints?	Yes		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In conjunction with our internal improvement programme, the Code has enabled us to align our complaint handling processes with the Ombudsman's good practice
	What changes have we made?			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our colleagues have attended many of the webinars and training sessions held by the Ombudsman • We have adopted many of the Ombudsman's recommendations in terms of complaint handling good practice • Using the insight published by the Ombudsman, and the feedback and intelligence gathered internally, we have established a successful learning and continuous improvement framework