

Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code: Self-assessment form

Compliance with the Complaint Handling Code				
1	Definition of a complaint	Yes	No	Evidence / Actions
	<p>Does the complaints process use the following definition of a complaint?</p> <p><i>An expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the organisation, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting an individual resident or group of residents.</i></p>	✓		<p>Complaints Policy – updated October 2020 with this definition.</p> <p>Verified by Tenant Scrutiny Panel Nov 2020.</p>
	<p>Does the policy have exclusions where a complaint will not be considered?</p>	✓		<p>Complaints Policy – there are no blanket exclusions. All complaints which meet the complaint definition in the policy are considered on a case by case basis.</p> <p>Exclusions detailed in the policy include; <i>‘The issue giving rise to the complaint occurred over six months ago. (N.B. it may not be appropriate to rely on this exclusion where complaints concern safeguarding or health and safety issues.)</i></p> <p><i>Legal proceedings have started. We will take steps to ensure that residents are not left without a response for lengthy periods of time.</i></p>

			<p><i>Matters that have already been considered under the complaints policy.'</i></p> <p>The policy also explains that where complaints are being made in an unacceptable way such as persistent, vexatious or malicious we may invoke the Unacceptable Service User Policy. Where this happens Torus will write to the complainant advising of their decision and what that means for their contact with the organisation.</p> <p>Verified by Tenant Scrutiny Panel Nov 2020.</p>
	<p>Are these exclusions reasonable and fair to residents?</p>		<p>Complaints Policy states <i>'Any restrictions placed on a resident's contact due to unacceptable behaviour should be appropriate to their needs and should demonstrate regard for the provisions of the Equality Act 2010.</i></p> <p><i>One of the key principles underlying our approach to complaint management is that we will always aim to treat customers fairly. We do not operate blanket exclusions and will consider each complaint on its merits before applying an exclusion.</i></p> <p><i>If we decide not to accept a complaint, a detailed written explanation will be provided to the complainant setting out the reasons why the matter is not suitable for the complaints process.</i></p>

			<p><i>A resident has the right to challenge this decision by bringing their complaint to the Ombudsman. Where appropriate the Ombudsman can instruct a landlord to take on a complaint.'</i></p> <p>Verified by Tenant Scrutiny Panel Nov 2020</p> <p>Scrutiny Panel to assess a sample of cases excluded to verify if fair and reasonable.</p>
2	Accessibility		
	Are multiple accessibility routes available for residents to make a complaint?	✓	<p>Complaints Policy <i>'We welcome complaints and provide a range of options for customers to use, including in person, in writing, by e mail, 'on line', or by phone. Customers can relay or hand in their complaint in person at any Torus office or customer facing staff. Customers who make a complaint on social media (e.g. Facebook or Twitter) will be directed to our on-line complaints form.</i></p> <p><i>We will identify service failures and do not expect customers to specifically say "I wish to complain."</i></p> <p>Verified by Torus Tenant Inspectors Nov 2020</p> <p>Review of website and testing of information provided by Customer Hub on making a complaint.'</p> <p>Website improvements identified will be implemented.</p>

	Is the complaints policy and procedure available online?	✓	<p>Complaints policy and procedure published on website.</p> <p>Verified by Tenant Inspectors November 2020.</p>
	Do we have a reasonable adjustments policy?	✓	<p>The policy states that we will comply with the Equality Act 2010 and acknowledges that we may need to adapt our processes, procedure and policy to accommodate an individual customers needs.</p> <p>The complaint policy supports Torus' Equality and Diversity Policy, it aims to complement value for money principles in delivering excellent cost-effective services and protecting the investment in Torus properties and neighbourhoods. It states that</p> <p><i>“ In recognition of this we aim to deliver a Complaints Service that is;</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>• Relevant and fully accessible to all</i> <i>• Tailored to meet both the specific needs of the individual, including those with additional support needs, and the diverse needs of the wider community</i> <i>• Compliant with all aspects of Equality and Diversity legislation, and specifically the Equality Act 2010”</i>
	Do we regularly advise residents about our complaints process?	✓	<p>The complaints policy is published on the website.</p> <p>Torus annual report provides information on complaints.</p> <p>The Customer Hub are trained to provide information on complaints.</p>

				<p>Process verified by Tenant Inspectors November 2020. All staff receive regular training on the Torus Complaints policy to recognise complaints and provide information and advise customers.</p>
3	Complaints team and process			
	Is there a complaint officer or equivalent in post?	✓		<p>Torus has one Customer Feedback Officer. The role is dedicated to coordinating the complaints process. Complaints sits within the Tenant Voice Team within Landlord Services. Managers across the organisation have responsibility for complaint investigation and responding to customers in line with the Torus Complaints Policy.</p> <p>Verified by Tenant Scrutiny Panel Nov 2020</p>
	Does the complaint officer have autonomy to resolve complaints?	✓		<p>Complaints are assigned to the relevant service area for investigation to ensure that managers have authority and the authority to offer a resolution. Complaints are escalated to senior managers for authorisation when required.</p>
	Does the complaint officer have authority to compel engagement from other departments to resolve disputes?	✓		<p>Each department has the authority to resolve complaints within the service area. Group Leadership Team receive daily reports on open complaints and are involved in resolving disputes when required.</p>
	If there is a third stage to the complaints procedure are residents involved in the decision making?	n/a		<p>To ensure a quick and effective resolution of complaints there is no third stage in the process. The Tenants Scrutiny Panel are involved in scrutinising complaints customer journeys and providing challenge. The Landlord Operations committee with 7 tenant members receive</p>

				quarterly reports on complaints performance and review and Housing Ombudsman investigations.
	Is any third stage optional for residents?	n/a		No third stage
	Does the final stage response set out residents' right to refer the matter to the Housing Ombudsman Service?	✓		Standard complaints response letter outlines right to refer to the Housing Ombudsman. Verified by Scrutiny Panel November 2020.
	Do we keep a record of complaint correspondence including correspondence from the resident?	✓		All complaints correspondence is stored on the Housing Management systems. This provided a record of the complaint throughout the stages of the process. Staff have received training on requirements. Quality audits are carried out to ensure procedures are followed correctly, any issues are addressed with relevant staff and training needs identified.
	At what stage are most complaints resolved?			95% of complaints received between April and September 2020 were resolved at stage 1.
4	Communication			
	Are residents kept informed and updated during the complaints process?	✓		Complaints Policy outlines role of investigating officer in keeping the customer informed 'Contacting a resident within 2 working days of formal complaint registration Maintaining contact with the complainant throughout the course of the complaint even where there is no new information to provide.' Quality audits and customer satisfaction surveys identify and address any failures with the 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?	✓		<p>Customers are kept informed throughout the process 'We will maintain contact with the resident and keep them regularly updated throughout the course of the complaint'</p> <p>Complaints Policy states that 'If a resident is not satisfied with our Stage 1 response, they can ask us to escalate their complaint to Stage 2.' The standard complaints response letter advised customers they have 28 working days to contact us if they are not satisfied and wish to escalate their complaint. Any appeal request is automatically accepted.</p> <p>The stage 2 response is our final response and provides details on the right to escalate the complaint to the Housing Ombudsman.</p>
	Are all complaints acknowledged and logged within five days?	✓		<p>Complaints reported by phone or in person are acknowledged verbally. Complaints reported online receive an acknowledgement email. Investigating Officers contact the customer within 48 hours to acknowledge they are investigating the complaint.</p>
	Are residents advised of how to escalate at the end of each stage?	✓		<p>Standard complaints letters are used which outline the escalation process at each stage. Verified by Tenants Scrutiny Panel November 2020. Quality audits monitor that the process is correctly followed.</p>
	What proportion of complaints are resolved at stage one?			95% of complaints received between April and September 2020
	What proportion of complaints are resolved at stage two?			5% of complaints received between April and September 2020
	What proportion of complaint responses are sent within Code timescales?			Complaints received between April and September 2020

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stage one Stage one (with extension) Stage two Stage two (with extension) 			83% 5% 100% 0%
	Where timescales have been extended did we have good reason?	✓		Timescales are only extended where evidence is provided to the Customer Feedback Officer. Reasons accepted for extension include unable to contact customer by phone and email and letter required sending, site visit required and unable to be completed within timescale due to customer availability, complexity of investigation requires additional time to thoroughly complete. All extensions to timescales require the agreement of the customer. Where the customer does not consent then a response based on available information is provided and follow up arrangement provided.
	Where timescales have been extended did we keep the resident informed?	✓		Extensions to timescales are only provided with customer agreement. This is monitored through quality audits and customer satisfaction surveys.
	What proportion of complaints do we resolve to residents' satisfaction			95% resolved at stage 1 5% resolved at stage 2 To date we are not aware of any complaints received between April and September 2020 that have been escalated to the Housing Ombudsman.
5	Cooperation with Housing Ombudsman Service			
	Were all requests for evidence responded to within 15 days?	✓		All responses submitted within required timescale.
	Where the timescale was extended did we keep the Ombudsman informed?	n/a		All responses submitted within required timescale

6	Fairness in complaint handling			
	Are residents able to complain via a representative throughout?	✓		Complaints policy states 'Complaints are welcomed from all of our residents, customers, advocates on behalf of customers and non-customers who may be affected by the organisation's services or residents' We establish the representative's authority to act on behalf of the complainant at point of contact.
	If advice was given, was this accurate and easy to understand?	✓		Staff have received training on the complaints policy and procedure.
	How many cases did we refuse to escalate? What was the reason for the refusal?			The complaints policy was updated in November 2020 to include an automatic right for complaints to be escalated. Staff have received training on the new policy.
	Did we explain our decision to the resident?			A standard letter is issued when complaints are not escalated.
7	Outcomes and remedies			
	Where something has gone wrong are we taking appropriate steps to put things right?	✓		Complaints policy outline the approach to resolution We will adopt the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code 2020 and its dispute resolutions principles namely to be fair, to put things right and to learn from outcomes. We will do this by; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resolving matters locally and as quickly as possible by being open, accountable and outcome focused • Resolving complaints at the first point of contact wherever possible

				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acknowledging that sometimes things go wrong, that complaints are viewed positively and that they provide us with an opportunity to put things right • Having a range of options available to us to put things right when there has been a service failure including compensation. <p>The Discretionary Compensation Policy is based on the Housing Ombudsman Remedies Guidance.</p>
8	Continuous learning and improvement			
	What improvements have we made as a result of learning from complaints?			Learning from complaints is captured at case closure. Examples of learning from complaints are shared in the annual report. Capturing and publishing learning from complaints is an area for development.
	How do we share these lessons with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) residents? b) the board/governing body? c) In the Annual Report? 			Complaints response letters explain learning from the individual complaint and any changes will be made to prevent issues reoccurring e.g. staff training, changes to processes. Examples of learning form complaints are shared with the Landlord Operations Committee and Scrutiny Panel are involved in reviewing a complaints journey and making recommendations to improve the customer experience. Examples of learning form complaints are shared in the annual report to residents.
	Has the Code made a difference to how we respond to complaints?	✓		Complaints service reviewed to align to the principles of the code.

	What changes have we made?		<p>A revised policy has been published based on the principles of the code including an automatic right to escalate a complaint.</p> <p>A programme of staff training has taken place to raise awareness of the code and promote a positive complaints culture.</p> <p>Tenant Scrutiny Panel and Tenant Inspectors have been involved in reviewing evidence of how Torus complies with the code and making recommendations for service developments.</p>
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