

## Local Housing Company - Housing Ombudsman Self-assessment – Completed December 2020

For the purpose of this Self-Assessment Local Housing Companies refers to Loddon Homes and Berry Brook Homes. This self assessment was conducted in partnership with Wokingham Borough Council who as Managing Agent acts as complaint handler for the Local Housing Companies.

Compliance with the Complaint Handling Code				
1	Definition of a complaint	Yes	No	Comments
	<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>	X		<p><b>The Complaint definition that the Local Housing Companies currently use is similar.</b></p> <p><b>We will undertake a review of the complaints policy and processes. We will use recommendations from the new complaints code, in partnership with Wokingham Borough Councils Involved Tenant Volunteers' suggestions to include a robust and clear definition of a complaint.</b></p>
	<p>Does the policy have exclusions where a complaint will not be considered?</p>		X	<p><b>There are currently no exclusions where a complaint will not be considered however time limitations to apply.</b></p> <p><b>The LHC appoints a separate team to handle the reports of anti-social behaviour, an exclusion to these</b></p>

				reports should be applied and made clear, and will be amended within our policy and procedures accordingly.
	Are these exclusions reasonable and fair to residents?  Evidence relied upon			See above.
<b>2</b>	<b>Accessibility</b>			
	Are multiple accessibility routes available for residents to make a complaint?	Y		Via telephone, email (dedicated WBC Customer Care Officer email address), face-to-face, via our website and in writing. This information is not currently cited within our policy and so will be considered as part of our policy review.
	Is the complaints policy and procedure available online?		N	This is not currently available on line. Provision will be made for future on line access of our complaints policy.
	Do we have a reasonable adjustments policy?		N	As our complaints are currently managed by WBC their the LHC will be included within the current complaint and corporate complaints policy reviews, were accessibility formats including for those who require reasonable adjustments will be considered  When our Customer Care Specialist receives a complaint, they will ask the Tenant if any reasonable adjustments are required when a complaint is logged.

				<p><b>WBC and LHC will ensure that reasonable adjustments guidance is added to the new complaints policy as part of the ongoing review.</b></p>
	Do we regularly advise residents about our complaints process?	Y		<p><b>New residents are informed of the complaints process via tenant guides that they receive at sign up. When a complaint is made the dedicated WBC Customer Care Specialist will advise residents of the process.</b></p> <p><b>This information will be added to our website alongside our complaints policy.</b></p>
<b>3</b>	<b>Complaints team and process</b>			
	Is there a complaint officer or equivalent in post?	Y		<p><b>A Customer Care Specialist sits within the Tenancy Involvement Specialist Team, part of our Managing Agents Housing Services, Wokingham Borough Council.</b></p>
	Does the complaint officer have autonomy to resolve complaints?	Y		<p><b>With the full support of the LHC Operations Manager.</b></p>
	Does the complaint officer have authority to compel engagement from other departments to resolve disputes?	Y		<p><b>With the full support of the LHC Operations Manager.</b></p>
	If there is a third stage to the complaints procedure, are residents involved in the decision making?		N	<p><b>Not currently, but this is something that we are discussing and planning in partnership with WBC and the Involved Tenant Volunteers.</b></p>
	Is any third stage optional for residents?		N	<p><b>There is an early resolution stage within the LHC complaints process which, is pre Stage 1. The LHC want to provide the best possible services to Tenants through our contractors and staff, but sometimes there are times when things go wrong, The early resolution stage is the opportunity to put things right as soon as possible, therefore ensuring, with the</b></p>

				complainants agreement, that they do not need to go any further through the complaints process.
	Does the final stage response set out residents' right to refer the matter to the Housing Ombudsman Service?	Y		<b>All communications to Tenants at all stages of the Complaints process, set out the next stage of the complaints process. As part of our stage two response the complainant is informed of their right to refer the matter to the Housing Ombudsman Service. WBC as managing agent and complaint handler in partnership with the Involved Tenant Volunteers, are reviewing all of the letter / email templates to ensure they comply with the new Housing Ombudsman Complaints Code.</b>
	Do we keep a record of complaint correspondence including correspondence from the resident?	Y		<b>All correspondence to and from Tenants are filed within password-protected folders and are compliant with GDPR.</b>  <b>Each complaint is given a reference number to aid communications and filing.</b>  <b>The service has a central database called 'Respond', which is being reviewed to ascertain if it is still fit for purpose.</b>
	At what stage are most complaints resolved?			<b>Stage 1.</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>Communication</b>			
	Are residents kept informed and updated during the complaints process?	Y		<b>Once the Customer Care Specialist acknowledges the complaint, (within 5 days), it is sent to the relevant Manager to speak to the tenant directly followed by a</b>

			<p>written reply.</p> <p>The review of the Complaints Policy will include additional processes that ensure the Customer Care Specialist will call the complainant regularly to update them, but as a minimum, five days into the process (from a ten-day target response time).</p>
Are residents informed of the landlord's position and given a chance to respond and challenge any area of dispute before the final decision?		N	<p>The team are concerned that this would add an extra stage to the process, thus delaying a timely outcome for the tenant and also making sensitive complaints more complicated to resolve.</p> <p>However, it is important to confirm, that if a complainant is unhappy with the final response, it will be reviewed and escalated accordingly.</p>
Are all complaints acknowledged and logged within five days?	Y		
Are residents advised of how to escalate at the end of each stage?	Y		<p>In all formal correspondence sent to tenants.</p> <p>It is considered appropriate to add template letters in the appendices to the new reviewed policy.</p>
What proportion of complaints are resolved at stage one?			<p>75% of the complaints are resolved at Stage 1, 24.5% are resolved through the Early Resolution</p>
What proportion of complaints are resolved at stage two?			<p>.5% are resolved at Stage 2 (2019/20 Financial Year data).</p>
What proportion of complaint responses are sent within Code timescales?			<p>100% across all stages except for Stage 2, which are handled by our Customer Relations Team.</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stage one Stage one (with extension)</li> <li>• Stage two Stage two (with extension)</li> </ul>			The team are reviewing the Stage 2 process with the Customer Relations Team and Involved Tenants to streamline the process to ensure a better service to tenants and residents.
	Where timescales have been extended did we have good reason?	Y		Yes, and the customer relations team are always transparent with the complainant and will ensure a courtesy call or email is sent.
	Where timescales have been extended did we keep the resident informed?	Y		The Customer Care Specialist will inform a complainant if timescales have to be extended, but only with prior agreement from the Senior Manager.
	What proportion of complaints do we resolve to residents' satisfaction			From the 2020 STAR Survey it was 50%, which was an increase on the 2014 result, where it was 37%.  The Team are developing a satisfaction survey regime for all areas of housing, including complaints.
<b>5</b>	<b>Cooperation with Housing Ombudsman Service</b>			
	Were all requests for evidence responded to within 15 days?	Y		All were responded to within 15 days
	Where the timescale was extended did we keep the Ombudsman informed?			
<b>6</b>	<b>Fairness in complaint handling</b>			
	Are residents able to complain via a representative throughout?	Y		As long as there is written permission from the Tenant (via email or letter) in line with GDPR regulations.
	If advice was given, was this accurate and easy to understand?			A new Tenant Permission template letter will be included in the new policy review to aid tenants in the future with this.
	How many cases did we refuse to escalate?			In the current financial year no complaints were refused escalation.
	What was the reason for the refusal?			

	Did we explain our decision to the resident?	Y		
<b>7</b>	<b>Outcomes and remedies</b>			
	Where something has gone wrong are we taking appropriate steps to put things right?	Y		<b>See above in regards to the policy review.</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>Continuous learning and improvement</b>			
	What improvements have we made as a result of learning from complaints?			<p><b>Governance – complaint Key Performance Indicators are reviewed bi-monthly by our independent Board this helps to identify areas with issues or reoccurring complaints, where changes to services or processes may be needed.</b></p> <p><b>Contractor meetings are held by our managing agent on monthly basis, where complaints are reviewed, discussed and plans made for improvements.</b></p> <p><b>WBC as managing agent and handler for complaints is undertaking a Council wide complaints review of the ‘customer journey’ through the complaints process and how this can be improved for tenants and residents of the Borough is in progress, outcomes of this will also be published and publicised.</b></p> <p><b>The team are also making recommendations within the Housing Service on additional information, which can be provided to Tenants at the beginning and after an application, where a decision is to be made. This is to ensure tenants have as much information as possible;</b></p>

				<b>this will help to cut down on the amount of complaints regarding decision outcomes. These have mainly been because a tenant may not be fully aware of the process or laws being used to make these decisions.</b>
How do we share these lessons with:				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) residents?</li> <li>b) the board/governing body?</li> <li>c) In the Annual Report?</li> </ul>				<p><b>A) Any lessons learnt will be shared in writing</b></p> <p><b>B) Through the KPI exception reports to the independent Boards.</b></p> <p><b>c) Through our annual report to customers where details of complaint numbers are published.</b></p>
Has the Code made a difference to how we respond to complaints?				<b>The code will impact out complaint handing moving forward to ensure that customers are more informed about our processes.</b>
What changes have we made?				<b>A revised complaints policy, with subsequent processes and clearer communications, will be issued and easier access to information via our website will be implemented. Please see above for further information.</b>