

# Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code:

## Self-assessment form – Harlow Council – January 2022

Compliance with the Complaint Handling Code			
1	Definition of a complaint	Yes	No
	<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><b>Harlow Council Response:</b> We use a version of the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) definition which is:</p> <p>We define a complaint as an expression of dissatisfaction about a council service which is either provided directly by us, a contractor or partner that requires a response.</p>		✓
	Does the policy have exclusions where a complaint will not be considered?	✓	
	<p>Are these exclusions reasonable and fair to residents?</p> <p>Evidence relied upon</p> <p><b>Harlow Council Response:</b> Our complaints policy lists exceptions and what to do if you need further help</p>	✓	
2	Accessibility		
	Are multiple accessibility routes available for residents to make a complaint?	✓	
	Is the complaints policy and procedure available online?	✓	
	Do we have a reasonable adjustments policy?		✓
	<p>Do we regularly advise residents about our complaints process?</p> <p><b>Harlow Council Response:</b> The policy and explanation of it is on our website and a copy is sent to all complainants. It is also communicated to customers when they contact us regarding a breakdown in service delivery</p>	✓	

<b>3</b>	<b>Complaints team and process</b>		
	Is there a complaint officer or equivalent in post?	✓	
	Does the complaint officer have autonomy to resolve complaints?  <b>Harlow Council Response:</b> The Customer Services Officer works with the service managers and Assistant Directors to ensure they are resolved		✓
	Does the complaint officer have authority to compel engagement from other departments to resolve disputes?  <b>Harlow Council Response:</b> The Customer Services Officer works with the service managers and Assistant Directors to ensure they are resolved	✓	
	If there is a third stage to the complaints procedure are residents involved in the decision making?  <b>Harlow Council Response:</b> It is a two stage process		✓
	Is any third stage optional for residents?		✓
	Does the final stage response set out residents' right to refer the matter to the Housing Ombudsman Service?  <b>Harlow Council Response:</b> The letter states:  This is our final position, based on the information we have.  If you remain unhappy you can refer your complaint to the Housing Ombudsman Service and the details are provided on the attached complaints summary sheet.  The Housing Ombudsman is unable to consider cases until eight weeks after our final response. During that period you may, if you wish, contact a 'Designated Person' who may be able to help you to resolve the complaint or can refer your complaint on to the Housing Ombudsman Service. A designated person can be an MP or a local councillor.  You will need to provide it with a copy of this letter, and our earlier responses to you, so it can consider your complaint.	✓	
	Do we keep a record of complaint correspondence including correspondence from the resident?	✓	
	At what stage are most complaints resolved?  <b>Harlow Council Response:</b> We moved to a two stage process from 1 January 2022. In our previous three stage process the breakdown across the stages for 2020 - 21 was:		

	Stage 1      83% Stage 2      12% Stage 3      5%		
<b>4</b>	<b>Communication</b>		
	Are residents kept informed and updated during the complaints 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?  <b>Harlow Council Response:</b> This is done following decision letter at each stage		✓
	Are all complaints acknowledged and logged within five days?	✓	
	Are residents advised of how to escalate at the end of each stage?	✓	
	What proportion of complaints are resolved at stage one?  <b>Harlow Council Response:</b> See above		
	What proportion of complaints are resolved at stage two?  <b>Harlow Council Response:</b> See above		
	What proportion of complaint responses are sent within Code timescales?  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stage one – 86.05% Stage one (with extension) – Not captured</li> <li>• Stage two – 47.52% Stage two (with extension) – Not captured</li> </ul>		
	Where timescales have been extended did we have good reason?	✓	
	Where timescales have been extended did we keep the resident informed?	✓	
	What proportion of complaints do we resolve to residents' satisfaction?  <b>Harlow Council Response:</b> 23.55% of complaints were upheld 60.19% were not upheld 16.26% were partially upheld		
<b>5</b>	<b>Cooperation with Housing Ombudsman Service</b>		
	Were all requests for evidence 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?	✓	
	If advice was given, was this accurate and easy to understand?	✓	
	How many cases did we refuse to escalate?  What was the reason for the refusal?  <b>Harlow Council Response:</b> This is not captured although would be a very low amount. Would only be refused if fell outside of the policy.		
	Did we explain our decision to the resident?	✓	
<b>7</b>	<b>Outcomes and remedies</b>		
	Where something has gone wrong are we taking appropriate steps to put things right?	✓	
<b>8</b>	<b>Continuous learning and improvement</b>		
	What improvements have we made as a result of learning from complaints?  <b>Harlow Council Response:</b> The complaints policy has been changed to a two stage process. Complaint data is fed back to the Senior Management Board who then feed this back into service delivery. At the end of every complaint, learning is captured so that trends can be identified and acted upon		
	How do we share these lessons with:  a) residents? These are included in the response to the complaint  b) the board/governing body? A complaints report forms part of the quarterly Joint Finance and Performance.  c) In the Annual Report? A summary is made up from the quarterly reports		
	Has the Code made a difference to how we respond to complaints?	✓	
	What changes have we made?  <b>Harlow Council Response:</b> Complaint templates have been modified across all stages. Complaint process simplified and is now simple to understand.		