

**To:** Housing and Homelessness Panel  
**Date:** 07 March 2024  
**Report of:** Head of Housing Services  
**Title of Report:** Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code – Self-Assessment 2024

<b>Summary and recommendations</b>	
<b>Purpose of report:</b>	To inform Panel Members on the Council’s landlord function self-assessment against the Housing Ombudsman’s Complaint Handling Code.
<b>Key decision:</b>	No
<b>Cabinet Member with responsibility:</b>	Councillor Linda Smith, Cabinet Member for Housing
<b>Corporate Priority:</b>	Support Thriving Communities
<b>Policy Framework:</b>	Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023-2028
<b>Recommendation(s): That the Panel resolves to:</b>	
1. <b>Note and comment on</b> the self-assessment and <b>agree</b> any recommendations.	

<b>Appendices</b>	
<b>Appendix 1</b>	Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code – Self-Assessment 2024

## Introduction and background

1. The Housing Ombudsman Service was introduced by the Localism Act 2011 and from April 2013 it took over responsibility for all new complaints about social housing. This includes complaints about the Council’s relationship as landlord to our tenants or leaseholders. The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman cover complaints that do not relate to the landlord function.
2. The Housing Ombudsman launched its Complaint Handling Code in July 2020 and updated and strengthened the code in April 2022. Part of the code requires landlords to complete a self-assessment against the requirements of the code. The requirements of the code and the self-assessment have increased significantly since the code was first launched.

3. In October 2023, the self-assessment against the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code was presented to this committee.
4. In autumn 2023, the Housing Ombudsman and the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman each launched a consultation on having a single Complaint Handling Code for local government, covering housing and non-housing functions. Although the changes for the Council as a whole are quite significant, in terms of the housing landlord function that the Housing Ombudsman covers, there are only five, relatively minor clarifications or changes.
5. At the time of writing, the changes to the Complaint Handling Code have not yet been confirmed, although they are expected to be in place by 01 April 2024. As such, to remain compliant from a housing landlord function perspective, it is necessary to carry out a further self-assessment against the updated code and to have reported it to this committee.
6. This report introduces the Council's landlord function Self-Assessment 2024 against the Housing Ombudsman's proposed Complaint Handling Code.
7. Note that the Council will in due course need to provide a self-assessment against the Complaint Handling Code for the whole Council. This self-assessment does not seek to represent a self-assessment against the whole Council.

### **The Self-Assessment**

8. The updated self-assessment is grouped in nine themes. All elements are now mandatory requirements. The nine themes are:
  - Definition of a complaint
  - Exclusions
  - Accessibility and awareness
  - Complaint handling staff
  - Complaint handling principles
  - Complaint handling process
  - Complaints stages
  - Putting things right
  - Scrutiny & oversight: continuous learning and improvement

### **Commentary Against the Code**

9. The commentary on the Self-Assessment sets out the views relating to the landlord function only. The landlord function broadly meets the requirements of the Code, except where the commentary is shown in red: sections 8.1 & 8.2 and sections 9.3 to 9.8.
10. The actions set out in these sections show how full compliance with each element will be achieved. While we can demonstrate how the landlord function meets the requirements, some corporate activity is also required to provide full assurance.

## Next Steps

11. The self-assessment for the housing landlord function will be reviewed in early 2025.

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**Background Papers:** None

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