

To: Housing & Homelessness Panel
Date: 6th March 2025
Report of: Director of Housing
Title of Report: Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code – Self-Assessment 2025

| Summary and recommendations | |
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| Decision being taken: | For members to note and comment on the outcome of the annual self-assessment against the Housing Ombudsman’s Complaint Handling Code. |
| Key decision: | No |
| Cabinet Member: | Councillor Linda Smith, Cabinet Member for Housing |
| Corporate Priority: | Supporting thriving communities |
| Policy Framework: | Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023-2028 |

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| Recommendation(s): That Cabinet resolves to: |
| 1. Note and comment on the-assessment |

| Appendix No. | Appendix Title | Exempt from Publication |
|---------------------|---|--------------------------------|
| Appendix 1 | Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code – Self-Assessment 2025 Feb 25 | No |

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 a landlord to our tenants and 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 202 and updated and strengthened the Code in April 2022. This introduced the requirement

for landlords to complete a self-assessment against their compliance with the Code's requirements. These requirements (and therefore the self-assessment) have increased significantly since the Code was first launched.

3. On 1st April 2024, the Housing Ombudsman updated the Code, and it became a statutory requirement. The self-assessment requirements were updated accordingly.
4. The last self-assessment against the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code was presented to the Housing and Homelessness Panel in March 2024.
5. The self-assessment must be reviewed at least annually, submitted to the Housing Ombudsman, and published on our website.
6. This report introduces the 2025 self-assessment against the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code.
7. The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman also have an aligned Code of Complaint Handling, however compliance with it is currently voluntary, although recommended. It is expected to become mandatory in 2026/27.

The Self-Assessment

8. The updated self-assessment is grouped in nine themes. All elements are 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
9. There have been changes in our handling of complaints since the last self-assessment, and these are reflected in the 2025 version.

Commentary Against the Code

10. 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, although there are areas where we are looking to improve, notably 9.3, 9.6 and 9.7.
11. Improvements made since the last self-assessment, include:
 - Updating the procedure published on our website to better reflect the requirements of the Code.
 - Introducing a process for rejecting complaints when necessary.
 - Ensuring customers being surveyed for their opinions are advised on how they can complain.
 - Carrying out training with various teams within the Council on recognising complaints and our procedures.
 - We have amended our letter templates to ensure the required information is included.

12. Further work planned for the coming year to improve complaint handling against the Code includes:
13. Developing a survey for residents to complete following a complaint to gain a better understanding of their experience and needs in relation to our complaints handling.
14. Exploring how we can introduce more transparency and share our insights and service improvements more frequently, in addition to the steps detailed below. We are currently involved in a knowledge-sharing group made up of complaints managers from other registered providers and are looking at whether we can implement any elements of their approaches to address this.
- Setting up a group of tenants and leaseholders to examine our procedures, trends and learning from complaints.
 - Publishing complaints data and service improvements (You said, we did) on our website and in our tenant publications on a more regular basis.
 - Producing more regular updates, for example quarterly for the Member Responsible for Complaints ('the MRC') and Cabinet
15. Providing the MRC and Cabinet with information on Housing Ombudsman determinations as they are received.
16. Given the significant increase in the volume of complaints received, an additional officer is being recruited to cover this and provide capacity to focus on these improvements.

Next Steps

17. The self-assessment will be published on the Council's website and submitted to the Housing Ombudsman.
18. The self-assessment will also be included in the Annual Complaint Performance & Service Improvement Report that will be reported to Cabinet later in the year. This will include a full overview of our complaints for 2024/25, as well as the details of Housing Ombudsman determinations, an analysis of trends, and service improvements that have been identified.
19. The self-assessment will be reviewed in early 2026, unless an earlier review is requested by the Housing Ombudsman.

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