



ASPIRE HOUSING

ANNUAL SELF ASSESSMENT AGAINST THE COMPLAINT HANDLING CODE DECEMBER 2021

The Housing Ombudsman published a Complaints Handling Code in July 2020, setting out good practice to help landlords respond to complaints effectively and fairly. A key requirement of the code was for landlords to publish a self-assessment against the Code's key complaint handling principles by December 2020. Aspire's first self-assessment was published by the deadline and can be found at aspirehousing.co.uk.

Best practice set out in the Code recommends regular re-assessments and Aspire intends to complete the exercise annually. This is Aspire's second self-assessment. It has been completed by an internal complaints panel, led by the Executive Director of Customer Experience. It has been reviewed with Aspire's customer group OASIS and the final assessment was approved by the Aspire Housing Board in December 2021. **All data refers to 2020/21.**

The Ombudsman's full Complaint Handling Code can be found [here](#).

1. Definition of a complaint	Yes/No	Notes
Does the complaints process use the following definition of a complaint? <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>	Yes	As set out within the Customer Feedback Policy
Does the policy have exclusions where a complaint will not be considered?	Yes	These include complaints that are no longer appropriate, such as historic, already dealt with, part of ongoing legal action, and relating to anti-social behaviour
Are these exclusions reasonable and fair to residents? Evidence relied upon:	Yes	These relate to circumstances where complaints have already been dealt with or have alternative routes of resolution. Exclusions are outlined in our Customer Feedback Policy

2. Accessibility	Yes/No	Notes
Are multiple accessibility routes available for residents to make a complaint?	Yes	Customers can make a complaint through any contact method
Is the complaints policy and procedure available online?	Yes	See our Customer Feedback Policy via this link
Do you have a reasonable adjustments policy?	Yes	This is included within the 'Equalities Impact Assessment' section and references the Equality & Diversity Policy
Do we regularly advise residents about our complaints process?	Yes	Examples include the Customer Annual Report, Annual Rent Statement (due March), and on relevant letter templates. Customers are also invited to give feedback on the website which has links to ' Contact us ' from other pages. A new ' Get Involved ' area of the website was launched during 2021.
3. Complaints team and process	Yes/No	Notes
Is there a complaint officer or equivalent in post?	Yes	Head of Customer Services
Does the complaint officer have autonomy to resolve complaints?	Yes	
Does the complaint officer have authority to compel engagement from other departments to resolve disputes?	Yes	
If there is a third stage to the complaints procedure are residents involved in the decision making?		N/A - there is a two-stage process before escalation to the Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS)

3. Complaints team and process (cont'd)	Yes/No	Notes
Is any third stage optional for residents?	No	In line with 3.8 of the Complaint Handling Code which states <i>"The Ombudsman does not believe a third stage is necessary as part of a complaints process."</i>
Does the final stage response set out residents' right to refer the matter to the Housing Ombudsman Service?	Yes	Details are included within the response letter template
Do we keep a record of complaint correspondence including correspondence from the resident?	Yes	Complaint details, including correspondence, is stored on the integrated housing management system, called Orchard
At what stage are most complaints resolved?		94.2% of all complaints were resolved at stage one in 2020/21 vs. 97.6% in 2019/20. This reduction was expected as we were unable to complete some seasonal work (such as damp, roofing, fencing etc) due to the coronavirus restrictions which resulted in customer frustration and dissatisfaction.
4. Communication	Yes/No	Notes
Are residents kept informed and updated during the complaints process?	Yes	This is explicit within the Customer Feedback Policy and a key element of the complaints handling process, training, and quality assurance checks
Are residents informed of the landlord's position and given a chance to respond and challenge any area of dispute before the final decision?	Yes	Customers have a right to appeal at the end of stage one
Are all complaints acknowledged and logged within five days?	Yes	Customers are provided with a reference number as evidence

4. Communication (cont'd)	Yes/No	Notes
Are residents advised of how to escalate at the end of each stage?	Yes	This is included within the response letter template
What proportion of complaints are resolved at stage one?		94.2% in 2020/21 as above
What proportion of complaints are resolved at stage two?		20 out of 21 appeals. One case was formally investigated by the HOS during the year, with no maladministration being found
<p>What proportion of complaint responses are sent within Code timescales?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Stage one - Stage one (with extension) - Stage two - Stage two (with extension) 	-	<p>In 2020/21:</p> <p>Stage 1 – 10 days = 87% vs. 75% in 2019/20</p> <p>Stage 1 – 10 + 10-day extension = 9% vs. 20% in 2019/20</p> <p>Stage 2 – 20 days = 95% vs. 94% in 2019/20</p> <p>Stage 2 – 20 + 10-day extension = 0% vs. 6% in 2019/20</p> <p>Aspire’s target times are currently a response at stage one within 5 days and stage two within 10 days</p>
Where timescales have been extended did we have good reason?	Yes	The reason for extensions is to achieve a fair and full resolution
Where timescales have been extended did we keep the resident informed?	Yes	In line with the Customer Feedback Policy and complaints handling training
What proportion of complaints do we resolve to residents’ satisfaction?	62.5%	<p>62.5% of customers surveyed in 2020/21 were satisfied with the resolution to their complaint vs. 50% in 2019/20</p> <p>Satisfaction surveying was strengthened later in 2020/21 with the introduction of specialist feedback software and the increase in survey activity.</p>

5. Co-operation with the Housing Ombudsman Service	Yes/No	Notes
Were all requests for evidence responded to within 15 days?	Yes	
Where the timescale was extended did we keep the Ombudsman informed?	Yes	
6. Fairness in complaint handling	Yes/No	Notes
Are residents able to complain via a representative throughout?	Yes	
If advice was given, was this accurate and easy to understand?	Yes	
How many cases did we refuse to escalate? What was the reason for the refusal?		None
Did we explain our decision to the resident?		N/A
7. Outcomes & remedies	Yes/No	Notes
Where something has gone wrong are we taking appropriate steps to put things right?	Yes	This is regularly reviewed by the internal Complaints Panel

8. Continuous learning and improvement	Yes/No	Notes
<p>What improvements have we made as a result of learning from complaints?</p>		<p>Key improvements in 2020/21 include: additional resource for damp and mould work and reviewed the process to manage both the survey and remedial works; ASB policy and processes have been reviewed in line with the new locality working model; income team has reviewed resources, training and processes where necessary; a significant element of the maintenance programme is being brought in-house over the next few years to increase control over service delivery.</p>
<p>How do we share these lessons with:</p> <p>a) residents? b) the board/governing body? c) In the Annual Report?</p>		<p>a) Through the website and scrutinised by involved customers b) An annual Board report and quarterly updates. Housing Ombudsman guidance on a Board's role in complaint review was shared with Board in July 2021. c) In the Customer Annual Report published on the website here.</p>
<p>Has the Code made a difference to how we respond to complaints?</p> <p>What changes have we made?</p>	<p>Yes</p>	<p>Have strengthened approach to complaint handling satisfaction and feedback is shared with managers monthly; Complaint Panel continues to meet quarterly with a renewed focus on causes of escalation to appeal, including a review of cases considered by the HOS; involvement of customers in complaint reviews is being considered by the Complaints Panel for introduction in 2022.</p>