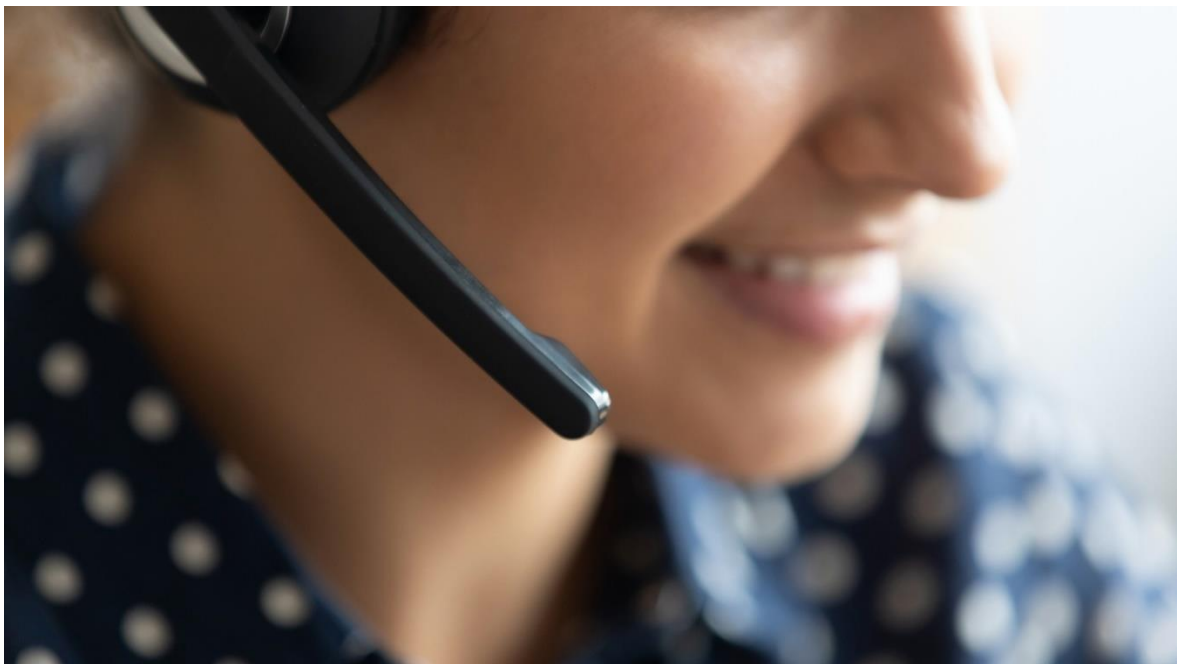


Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code Self-Assessment

Milton Keynes Council



Summary

Our Customer Feedback Policy and Procedures reflect Milton Keynes (MK) Council's commitment to valuing complaints, comments and compliments. Customer feedback provides a first-hand account of what people using our services think of them. It can highlight issues to help us to improve the quality of services we deliver.

The Complaint Handling Code, introduced by The Housing Ombudsman, sets out good practice for Social Housing Landlords to enable landlords to resolve complaints raised by their tenants quickly and to use the learning from complaints to improve services.

This document is MK Council's self-assessment against the code, to identify areas where we are doing well, and where we recognise the need to further improve our service.

The full Complaint Handling Code can be accessed via the following link –

<https://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/landlords/complaint-handling-code/>

Compliance with the Complaint Handling Code

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>	Yes		<p>Our feedback policy defines a complaint as:</p> <p><i>“A clear expression of dissatisfaction about a Council service (whether that service is provided directly by the Council or by a contractor or partner) including; the standard of service, action or lack of action, decision taken by the Council, or the way in which staff carry out their duties.”</i></p>
	<p>Does the policy have exclusions where a complaint will not be considered?</p>	Yes		<p>These exclusions are listed in our feedback policy. This states that a complaint is <u>not</u>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A housing repair • A request for compensation • Issues that are in court or have already been heard by a court or a tribunal • Commercial or contract matters • Wanting information or an explanation of a council policy or practice • An appeal against a Housing application or statutory notices (these are dealt with under other procedures)
	<p>Are these exclusions reasonable and fair to residents?</p>	Yes		<p>Our feedback policy lists a number of exclusions where a complaint will not be considered due to existing processes being in place to manage them.</p>
2	Accessibility	Yes	No	Comments

	Are multiple accessibility routes available for residents to make a complaint?	Yes		Residents can make a complaint online using digital forms, by telephone or post, to a Housing Officer or through their local Councillor. Repairs customers can also make a complaint to our repairs provider.
	Is the complaints policy and procedure available online?	Yes		This is available on our complaints, comments and compliments page
	Do we have a reasonable adjustments policy?	Yes		<p>We make reasonable adjustments, and as a local authority we not only have a duty to comply in terms of policy, but to have due regard throughout our housing function to the elimination of discrimination and the advancement of equal opportunity.</p> <p>Key to this commitment, found in our equality policy, is our commitment to offer our services in a manner that is accessible and provide information in an accessible format, including having the top-rated accessible website.</p> <p>However, we go further, understanding issues of language and mental impairment within our policies to ensure that we support and provide tenants with an accessible service that considers their individual needs.</p>
	Do we regularly advise residents about our complaints process?	Yes		Housing and repairs staff advise residents of the complaints process as appropriate, through their day to day interactions with residents. We also advise residents of the process through the Annual Report.
3	Complaints team and process	Yes	No	Comments
	Is there a complaint officer or equivalent in post?	Yes		To ensure the complaints are dealt with effectively and efficiently, we have a dedicated Customer Feedback Team, who liaise between complainants and the service areas, to resolve the complaint to the customer's satisfaction.

	Does the complaint officer have autonomy to resolve complaints?		No	The complaint officer has some autonomy, but this doesn't extend to all complaints, such as those that are more technical in nature.
	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	Although a designated tenants' panel was previously in place, this was rarely used and therefore this third stage of the process was removed. We may re-consider adding back this third stage in the future if residents indicate that this is something that would add value.
	Is any third stage optional for residents?		N/A	
	Does the final stage response set out residents' right to refer the matter to the Housing Ombudsman Service?	Yes		This is clearly stated in the final response letter.
	Do we keep a record of complaint correspondence including correspondence from the resident?	Yes		This is recorded in our customer relationship management system.
	At what stage are most complaints resolved?			Most complaints are resolved at Stage 1
4	Communication	Yes	No	Comments
	Are residents kept informed and updated during the complaints process?	Yes		Investigating officers must keep residents informed and updated during the complaints process as stated in our customer feedback policy. On occasion however, we recognise that this has not always been the case. To resolve this, we have been reviewing our complaints handling processes to ensure any blockages or issues are eliminated, complaints are being dealt with in the most efficient way and residents kept informed throughout.

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		This is part of our complaints process and policy.
Are all complaints acknowledged and logged within five days?	Yes		All complaints are logged through our customer relationship management system which provide an immediate response including a unique reference number within 5 working days.
Are residents advised of how to escalate at the end of each stage?	Yes		This is included in the response to the complaint at the end of each stage.
What proportion of complaints are resolved at stage one?			92% in 2019/20
What proportion of complaints are resolved at stage two?			100% in 2019/20
What proportion of complaint responses are sent within Code timescales?			92.5% in 2019/20
Where timescales have been extended, did we have good reason?	Yes		In exceptional circumstances, where there are clear and justifiable reasons for doing so, we may agree an extension to the complaint.
Where timescales have been extended, did we keep the resident informed?	Yes		<p>Investigating officers must keep residents informed and updated during the complaints process and when timescales are extended as stated in our customer feedback policy.</p> <p>On occasion however, we recognise that this has not always been the case. To resolve this, we have been reviewing our complaints handling processes to ensure any blockages or issues are eliminated, complaints are being dealt with in the most efficient way and residents kept informed throughout.</p>

	What proportion of complaints do we resolve to residents' satisfaction?			We have not conducted a complaint satisfaction survey in 2019/20 or 2020/21, but in 2021/22 we aim to include an online survey on our complaints page to address this.
5	Cooperation with Housing Ombudsman Service	Yes	No	Comments
	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	Comments
	Are residents able to complain via a representative throughout?	Yes		Residents are able to complain via a representative and can choose to keep a representative informed of the progress of their complaint.
	If advice was given, was this accurate and easy to understand?	Yes		We have not received any complaints from our residents that would indicate if our advice was not accurate or easy to understand.
	How many cases did we refuse to escalate? What was the reason for the refusal?			4 cases in 2019/20. These escalations were refused as the complaints had already been considered under the Council's complaints procedure and there was no further evidence that the outcome would change after a further investigation.
	Did we explain our decision to the resident?	Yes		
7	Outcomes and remedies	Yes	No	Comments
	Where something has gone wrong, are we taking appropriate steps to put things right?	Yes		We aim to resolve complaints by putting things right where there has been a failure. Our approach will be fair and consistent across all the complaints we uphold.

				<p>Where we are at fault, we will provide appropriate redress by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apologising for the failure • Explaining what went wrong • Saying what we have done to put things right • Where appropriate, saying how we have learned from the complaint <p>When dealing with customer dissatisfaction, our focus will always be on resolution. This may mean that alternative methods to the complaints procedure could be considered such as conciliation or mediation.</p> <p>In some circumstances we may also make an ex gratia payment in goodwill to settle the complaint.</p>
8	Continuous learning and improvement	Yes	No	Comments
	What improvements have we made as a result of learning from complaints?			<p>Cross-functional working and improvement project, aimed at improving current processes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying blockages in our complaints process • Identifying more efficient ways of dealing with complaints • Looking for solutions that will help reduce number of repetitive complaints
	<p>How do we share these lessons with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) residents b) the board/governing body? c) In the Annual Report? 			<p>We share our lessons learnt from complaints with;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Residents – As a part of our complaints process, we inform our residents how we have learnt from their complaint. We also publish some of the information regarding lessons learnt in the Annual Report. We recognise that more communication with our residents regarding sharing lessons learnt would be very beneficial, and this will be included in the project aimed at improving our current complaints process.

				<p>b) Housing Leadership Team - via quarterly reports</p> <p>c) The 19/20 Annual Report for tenants and leaseholders included some information regarding complaints and lessons learnt – this will be strengthened in the 20/21 report.</p>
	Has the Code made a difference to how we respond to complaints?	Yes		
	What changes have we made?			<p>Completing this self-assessment has been a good opportunity for us to review our existing Customer Feedback Policy and Procedure, as well as the content we provide to our customers on our website.</p> <p>The code reassured us that our Policy and Procedures are mostly in line with The Housing Ombudsman’s expectations.</p> <p>To further improve our services, we have been reviewing our complaints handling processes to ensure any blockages or issues are eliminated, complaints are being dealt with in the most efficient way and residents kept informed throughout.</p>