

Unity Homes and enterprise (UHE)

Housing Ombudsman - Complaints Self-Assessment

Issued: 18th December 2020 Author: Parveen Sidhu – Deputy CEO and Operations Director

Contact: parveen@Unityha.co.uk

Introduction: The Housing Ombudsman published a new Complaint Handling Code in July 2020, setting out good practice that will allow landlords to respond to complaints effectively and fairly. The Code is part of the Ombudsman’s new powers in the revised Housing Ombudsman Scheme. Landlords are expected to carry out regular self-assessment against the code to ensure their complaint handling is in line with the code. This forms the completed self-assessment for Unity Homes and Enterprise relates to the period July to November 2020. The changes agreed will be implemented by April 2021 and thereafter a self-assessment will be carried out annually and the results included in the annual report on complaints performance to the Operations Committee. Any significant changes to service provision as a result of complaints will be highlighted in the resident newsletter.

Complaint Handling Code Requirement	%/ Yes/No	The commentary below explains how UHE meets or intend to comply with the Code
<p>Definition of a complaint 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	Unity’s Operations Committee agreed to adopt the Ombudsman’s definition as Unity policy and this change took place on the 12th November 2020 replacing the previous definition.
Does the policy have exclusions where a complaint will not be considered?	yes	The exclusions are Petitions, complaints that are part of legal proceedings, complaint part of insurance claims, Complaints about the termination of a starter tenancy and complaints made by tenants whose behaviour is found to be a risk to our staff. Also we do not investigate complaints about third parties
Are the exclusions reasonable?	yes	There are separate arrangements for dealing with petitions, insurance claims, legal cases and termination of Starter tenancies. Where possible third party complaints are forwarded to the appropriate body for them to investigate. We do not progress complaints by tenants who behave unreasonably in order to protect our staff

Accessibility Are multiple accessibility routes available for residents to make a complaint?	yes	A resident can make a complaint verbally in person or by phone, by text, in writing, emails, via their MP or Councillor, on the Website, via social media and on a tenant's behalf by a third party
Is the complaints policy and procedure available online?	yes	The Policy is on the website The procedure also will now be put on the website 23/12/20
Do we have a reasonable adjustments policy?	No	But Staff investigating complaints are subject to our Equality and Diversity Policy which requires them to make reasonable adjustments in the delivery of services to take account of particular needs. Examples would include sourcing interpreters or translations, removing barriers to access premises, altering interview times to suit the customer
Do we regularly advise residents about our complaints process?	yes	We advise customers about our complaints process when they contact us, and the information on how to report a complaint is available on the website. From March 2021 we will advertise the complaints process in the quarterly newsletter and consider adding a strapline to standard letters
Complaints team and process Is there a complaint officer or equivalent in post?	yes	We have had a full time Complaints Officer for at least six years.
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?	yes	The first stage is informal and is geared towards early resolution while the Third stage allows residents to get involved in the process. The Tenant Panel reviews all 3 rd stage complaints. In light of the HOS recommendation we will ask the Scrutiny Panel to review the efficacy of a three stage process in January next year.
Is any third stage optional for residents?	no	As stated above we will be seeking resident opinion on whether to revert to a two stage process
Does the final stage response set out residents' right to refer the matter to the Housing Ombudsman Service?	yes	We are considering changing 1 st and 2 nd stage letters to advise residents the Ombudsman can provide them with early advice regarding their rights at any stage of the process
Do we keep a record of complaint correspondence including correspondence from the resident?	yes	All cases and related material are logged on a complaints database
At what stage are most complaints resolved?		The first stage

Communication Are residents kept informed and updated during the complaints process?	yes	The Complaints officer maintains contact with the complainant while the case is live
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	Because residents do not have to pass any evidential hurdle to take their case to the next stage. Furthermore there are different people dealing with the case at each stage
Are all complaints acknowledged and logged within five days?	yes	Based on result for 2019/20
Are residents advised of how to escalate at the end of each stage?	yes	
What proportion of complaints are resolved at stage one?	100%	Based on 19/20
What proportion of complaints are resolved at stage two?	N/A	There were no stage two complaints in the year 19/20
What proportion of complaint responses are sent within Code timescales? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stage one • Stage one (with extension) • Stage two • Stage two (with extension) 	100% N/A	There were no stage two complaints
Where timescales have been extended did we have good reason?	N/A	No timescales were extended in 19/20
Where timescales have been extended did we keep the resident informed?	yes	
What proportion of complaints do we resolve to residents' satisfaction	66%	This is based on performance in 2019/20
Cooperation with the Ombudsman service Were all requests for evidence responded to within 15 days?	yes	We complied with the timescales when we last had an Ombudsman case. There were no cases referred to the Ombudsman in 19/20
Where the timescale was extended did we keep the Ombudsman informed?	yes	When we last had a case we complied with the timescales. There were no cases referred to the Ombudsman in 19/20
Fairness in complaint handling Are residents able to complain via a representative throughout?	yes	But we have decided to make this more explicit in the revised Policy and Guidance Procedure
If advice was given, was this accurate and easy to understand?	yes	We carry out complaint satisfaction surveys. We have a trained Complaints officer who gives this advice and it is followed up with a leaflet summarising the information
How many cases did we refuse to escalate? What was the reason for the refusal?	None	

Did we explain our decision to the resident?		Not applicable
Outcomes and Remedies Where something has gone wrong are we taking appropriate steps to put things right?	yes	In dealing with a complaint we make it clear to staff that putting something right when it has gone wrong is their first priority. That is why so many of our complaints are resolved at the first stage
Continuous learning and improvement What improvements have we made as a result of learning from complaints?		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Timely shut down of closed ASB cases • Components with multiple repairs complaints are now considered for the planned programme • Change of practice to record all complaints about the behaviour of a neighbour even if it appears minor
How do we share these lessons with: a) The board/governing body? b) Residents c) In the Annual Report?		<p>a)The Operations Committee receives a quarterly and annual report on complaints performance which among other things details both the lessons learnt and consequential changes to the way we work</p> <p>b) Afterwards the same Complaints Performance Report is presented to the Tenant Panel</p> <p>c)We do not cover complaints performance in the Annual report but will do so in future where we have changed an aspect of the service in response to customer complaints</p>
Has the Code made a difference to how we respond to complaints?	yes	As a result of adopting the Code's definition of a complaint
What changes have we made?		Apart from changing the definition we are doing more to highlight the service, encourage residents to use it if they are not satisfied with our performance and we will be telling residents more about the improvements we make to the service as a result of complaints. We also plan to consult tenants on reverting to a two stage process.