



Somerset Council

Tenants' Strategic Group – 24 July 2022

Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code - Self-Assessment update

This matter is the responsibility of Executive Councillor Member for Communities.

Report Authors: Name of author Roxane McLean, Senior Case Manager – Customer Resolution team

1. Executive Summary / Purpose of the Report

The report is to update the Tenants' Strategic Group on work being undertaken by the Customer Resolution team, to ensure that the Housing Directorate is compliant with the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code.

2. Recommendations

The Tenants' Strategic Group is asked to note this report and are invited to ask questions.

3. Background and Full details of the Report

The Housing Ombudsman self-assessment against the complaint handling code to ensure our complaint handling remains in line with the requirements set out and makes this information accessible. The power to issue a Complaint Handling Failure notice for non-compliance should this not be actioned every 12 Months. The Code

acts as a point of reference for residents and tenants supporting to help provide guidance on what should be expected from their landlord.

The Housing Ombudsman acknowledges that there may be reasons why a landlord is unable to fully comply with the Code for reasons which are beyond their control. For example, as a local authority landlord, our complaints handling falls under the Council's Complaints Policy. A few areas of non-compliance were identified in the June and September assessment, due to the Housing Directorate being bound by the wider, Somerset West and Taunton Complaints Policy and IT systems.

A request has been made to have the below information accessible as part of the recently created Somerset Council website;

- Adding the Housing Ombudsman details to the website
- To ensure that residents are aware of how to access the Complaints Policy through alternative formats
- Ensure the Self-Assessment and Housing Ombudsman Complaints Handling Code have links to access on our website

To ensure best practice and that residents have access to all information effectively and easily and although we are compliant, we have requested the above action take place to support **code section 1.9 - 2.3 -2.4** in the self-assessment.

Currently work has been carried out to upskill and support the service areas with their knowledge of the Housing Ombudsman and the codes of practice so that we affiliate. As part of these discussions training and coaching will take place for the service area to support when answering a complaint.

Currently we are not compliant with mandatory **code section 5.1** and best practice **code section 5.13** as on balance we have had to extend a high volume of stage 1 and 2 complaints. The Customer Resolution team are working with the service areas to ensure high standards in complaint responses and get it right at stage 1. Further work has been undertaken changing working practices to ensure that we proactively get the complaint reply sent in the prescribed 10 working days. With the changes that are now in affect we are confident that this will see a reduction in the number of complaints requiring an extension at stage 1.

Following this self-assessment, we were able to establish a compliance rate of 97% for the *mandatory 'must' requirements* and 97% for the *best practice 'should' requirements* of the Code.

4. Risk Assessment (if appropriate)

A risk assessment is not required to accompany this report.

5. Are there any **Finance / Resource, Legal implications directly to do with this report?**

There are no financial implications directly to do with the recommendations in this report

6: Are there any Equality and Diversity Implications?

There are no equality implications directly to do with this report

7. Are there any Data Protection Implications?

There are no equality implications directly to do with this report

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