Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code:

Self-assessment form

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Compliance with the Complaint Handling Code | | | | |
| 1 | Definition of a complaint | Yes | No | Status (explanation where necessary) |
|  | Does the complaints process use the following definition of a complaint?  *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*. | Y |  | An amendment to the existing policy has been made to adopt the Housing Ombudsman definition of a complaint and was approved by Citizen board on the 9th November 2020. |
|  | Does the policy have exclusions where a complaint will not be considered? | Y |  | Our Complaints policy states that we will not normally consider a complaint where the problem happened more than 12 months before the complaint was raised.  A complaint will not be registered where the issue is already going through a court, or tribunal (including disrepair cases). In these circumstances court proceedings, timescales and judgements would take precedence.  Once a complaint investigation is closed, new evidence is required before re-opening the complaint. The escalation will be registered, and the customer dissatisfaction reviewed, prior to advising the customer of their next steps, if they remain dissatisfied. |
|  | Are these exclusions reasonable and fair to residents? | Y |  | Citizen consider 12 months to be a more than reasonable timescale to ensure that a comprehensive and fair investigation can be conducted.  It is a conflict of interest for Citizen to conduct a complaint investigation whilst a matter is being considered legally. We will supply sufficient evidence in support of any legal case.  Escalations of complaints are reviewed by an independent investigating officer and the customer will be notified in writing if the complaint is not going to be re-opened and investigated.  The customer is advised of their rights under the localism act to refer the complaint to the Housing Ombudsman if they remain dissatisfied. This avoids unnecessary delays. |
| 2 | Accessibility |  |  |  |
|  | Are multiple accessibility routes available for residents to make a complaint? | Y |  | Citizen offer a comprehensive range of ways for customers to raise dissatisfaction and this is outlined on our website.   Customers have easy access to report dissatisfaction via our customer services team by telephone, email or letter; a customer portal and the customer feedback platform.  Citizen staff have access to our housing management system should they receive a complaint directly from a customer. |
|  | Is the complaints policy and procedure available online? | Y |  |  |
|  | Do we have a reasonable adjustments policy? | Y |  | Citizen have an Equality & Diversity Policy.  An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) has been conducted on the Complaints policy. |
|  | Do we regularly advise residents about our complaints process? | Y |  | Details on how to review a complaint are updated on our website and in posters displayed (where available) in customer communal areas.  Customers can register a complaint via the online portal My Account or by telephoning, emailing or writing to us.  Customer Service Advisers are trained and ready to help with logging and resolving complaints.  Complaints are acknowledged by email or letter which also includes a summary of the process. |
| 3 | Complaints team and process |  |  |  |
|  | Is there a complaint officer or equivalent in post? | Y |  | Feedback and Resolution team |
|  | Does the complaint officer have autonomy to resolve complaints? | Y |  |  |
|  | Does the complaint officer have authority to compel engagement from other departments to resolve disputes? | Y |  |  |
|  | If there is a third stage to the complaints procedure are residents involved in the decision making? |  | N | Citizen offer a two stage complaints procedure which is endorsed in the Housing Ombudsman Code. |
|  | Is any third stage optional for residents? |  | N | No plans for a third stage. |
|  | Does the final stage response set out residents’ right to refer the matter to the Housing Ombudsman Service? | Y |  |  |
|  | Do we keep a record of complaint correspondence including correspondence from the resident? | Y |  |  |
|  | At what stage are most complaints resolved? | Stage 1 |  | In the period April 2020- March 2021, 80% of formal complaints were resolved at stage 1, totalling 308 complaints.  Citizen also record informal complaints (reports of dissatisfaction which can be dealt with at point of contact or within 72 hours). 91% of customer dissatisfaction is handled in this way. |
| 4 | Communication |  |  |  |
|  | Are residents kept informed and updated during the complaints process? | Y |  | Customers are contacted at the start of any investigation, during the course of the investigation as necessary and at when the investigation is complete.  Customers are informed of any delay in completing an investigation and are given an estimated time for completion. |
|  | Are residents informed of the landlord’s position and given a chance to respond and challenge any area of dispute before the final decision? | Y |  |  |
|  | Are all complaints acknowledged and logged within five days? | Y |  |  |
|  | Are residents advised of how to escalate at the end of each stage? | Y |  | Customers are provided with a summary of the complaint process at acknowledgement stage.  At completion of stage 1 customers are advised how to contact us if they want to discuss their complaint further or escalate it to the next stage.  At completion of stage 2 customers are advised that this is our final response and should they want to discuss their complaint further or escalate it to the next stage, we provide details of the Housing Ombudsman. |
|  | What proportion of complaints are resolved at stage one? | 80% |  | Results from our 2020-21 annual performance data for formal stage 1 complaints closed.  This excludes informal complaints (reports of dissatisfaction which can be dealt with at point of contact or within 72 hours). 91% of customer dissatisfaction is handled in this way. |
|  | What proportion of complaints are resolved at stage two? | 20% |  | 2020-21 data |
|  | What proportion of complaint responses are sent within Code timescales?  Stage one  Stage one (with extension)  Stage two  Stage two (with extension) | 67%  72%  82%  75% |  | The stage 1 response time is 10 working days. In 2020-21 67% were responded to within that timescale. 72% of stage 1 complaints were completed within an extended timeframe agreed with the customer.  The stage 2 response time is 20 working days. In 2020-21 82% were responded to within that timescale. 75% of stage 2 complaints were completed within an extended timeframe agreed with the customer. |
|  | Where timescales have been extended did we have good reason? |  | N | Our computer system currently records the revised target date. Our system does not include an option for noting the reason for extension.  Details are recorded within the notes of the investigation. |
|  | Where timescales have been extended did we keep the resident informed? | Y |  |  |
|  | What proportion of complaints do we resolve to residents’ satisfaction? | Update  due  Oct 21 |  | Customer satisfaction surveys for complaints handling started in April 2021 and will be reported half yearly and updated by 31 Oct 2021. |
| 5 | Cooperation with Housing Ombudsman Service |  |  |  |
|  | Were all requests for evidence responded to within 15 days? | Y |  |  |
|  | Where the timescale was extended did we keep the Ombudsman informed? | Y |  |  |
| 6 | Fairness in complaint handling |  |  |  |
|  | Are residents able to complain via a representative throughout? | Y |  |  |
|  | If advice was given, was this accurate and easy to understand? | Y |  | Our staff have completed Citizen First training focussed to ensure we communicate effectively. |
|  | How many cases did we refuse to escalate?  What was the reason for the refusal? | Not available | | We are currently unable to measure and report this data on our computer system. A new computer system for managing complaints is currently under consideration and this functionality is a requirement.  Our complaint procedure states that we will not escalate and investigate a complaint if there is no new evidence. However, we will always review first and advise the customer of their rights under the localism act. |
|  | Did we explain our decision to the resident? | Y |  |  |
| 7 | Outcomes and remedies |  |  |  |
|  | Where something has gone wrong are we taking appropriate steps to put things right? | Y |  |  |
| 8 | Continuous learning and improvement |  |  |  |
|  | What improvements have we made as a result of learning from complaints? | Y |  | Citizen is a learning organisation and have a processes in place to capture learning from complaints and any other feedback.  Positive examples of how complaints have influenced service improvements are published in our annual report. The next report will be accessible on the website by September 2021. |
|  | How do we share these lessons with:   1. residents? 2. the board/governing body? 3. In the Annual Report? | N  N  Y |  | We currently share our lessons learnt in our annual report.  We are exploring how we can improve the information we provide to our residents and our board/ governing body via our website and through our customer portal. |
|  | Has the Code made a difference to how we respond to complaints? | Y |  | The code has influenced our structure and how complaints are managed, influencing the creation of a Feedback and Resolution team, focussed on responding to and resolving dissatisfaction. |
|  | What changes have we made? | Y |  | To date:   * Minor policy change – complaint definition * Restructure to existing complaints team to create ‘Feedback & Resolution team’ * Adoption of the 20 days target timescale for stage 2 complaint investigations * Drafting a revised unacceptable behaviour policy * Implemented customer satisfaction surveys via our customer feedback platform * Implemented a standard operating process for complaints handling * Implemented focussed complaints handling training and rewritten all our letters to be more customer friendly |