

# Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code Self Assessment

## Incommunities

2021



## Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code Self Assessment

| Compliance with the Complaint Handling Code |  |     |    | The detail below explain how Incommunities meets the compliance and/or our plans to improve  |
|---|--|-----|----|--|
| 1   | Definition of a complaint  | Yes | No |  |
|   | <p><b>Does the complaints process use the following definition of a complaint?</b></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> | Y   | N  | Our policy was updated in January 2021 to include this definition.   |
|   | <p><b>Does the policy have exclusions where a complaint will not be considered?</b></p>  | Y   |    | <p>The exclusions within our policy are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Where Incommunities have been unable to deliver a service due to circumstances beyond our control, Incommunities may use discretion to limit access through the complaint procedure</li> <li>• If the complaint is not regarding social housing or a landlord/ tenant/leaseholder relationship, Incommunities may use their discretion to limit access through the complaint procedure; however the complaint may still be investigated and responded to by appropriate level of officer</li> <li>• Incommunities may use their discretion to limit</li> </ul> |

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|   |  |   | <p>access through the complaint procedure where the behaviour of a complainant is unacceptable and will apply the 'Managing Unacceptable Behaviour Guide'</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Complaints which have entered the legal process such as court action or disrepair claims where a solicitor has been instructed are excluded from the complaint procedure</li> <li>We will only consider complaints which are presented within 6 months of the matter arising unless there are exceptional circumstances. Where a complaint has already been considered, complaints may be re-opened within a 6 month period on presentation of new evidence or information.</li> </ul> |
|   | <p><b>Are these exclusions reasonable and fair to residents? Yes</b></p> <p><b>Evidence relied upon:</b><br/>Exclusions are consistent with the code. Involved customers were consulted on the policy when in development.</p> |   | <p>We asked our Tenant Panel to consider if the exclusions are fair as part of their review of the self assessment in October 2020 (October 2020). They felt the exclusions are 'fair, practicable and reasonable'.</p>   |
| <b>2</b>                                    | <b>Accessibility</b>   |   |   |
|   | <p><b>Are multiple accessibility routes available for residents to make a complaint?</b></p>   | Y | <p>Complaints can be made by customers in whichever way they choose. This can be in person, over the telephone, by email, letter, in writing using our</p>  |

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|---|--|---|--|
|   | Is the complaints policy and procedure available online?   | Y | <p>This is available online at <a href="https://www.incommunities.co.uk/compliments-comment-and-complaints">https://www.incommunities.co.uk/compliments-comment-and-complaints</a></p> <p>This page also contains a copy of our leaflet that describes our complaints procedure.</p> |
|   | <p>Do we have a reasonable adjustments policy?</p> <p>This is contained within our Equality and Diversity policy.</p> <p>Our Complaint Handling Policy refers to being fair and supporting vulnerable customers to access the complaint service.</p> | Y | <p>This is contained within our Equality and Diversity policy.</p> <p>Our Complaint Handling Policy refers to being fair and supporting vulnerable customers to access the complaint service.</p> <p>We are developing a Vulnerable Person policy to support this work.</p>          |
|   | <p>Do we regularly advise residents about our complaints process?</p> <p>Examples are in decision letters, conversations, newsletter articles, and website.</p>  | Y | <p>We tell customers about our complaints process when they contact us. We have information in letters to customers, newsletter article and on our website.</p>  |
| <b>3</b>                                    | <b>Complaints team and process</b>   |   |  |

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| Is there a complaint officer or equivalent in post?  | Y   |  | We have reviewed our complaint handling structure. From April 2021 we now have a centralised team who acknowledge and monitor complaints. They offer support with stage 1 responses and investigate complaints at stage 2. They ensure timescales are met or the customer is informed of any extended timescales. They ensure learning from complaint is disseminated and acted upon. |
| Does the complaint officer have autonomy to resolve complaints?  | Y   |  | The case worker (investigating officer) has autonomy to resolve complaints.   |
| Does the complaint officer have authority to compel engagement from other departments to resolve disputes? | Y   |  | Yes, this is one of the roles of the Complaint Support team. Regular meetings are now in place with service heads. Performance on complaints is a high priority for the Board. Performance on complaints is included with in the KPI dashboard to Board and Operations Committee  |
| If there is a third stage to the complaints procedure are residents involved in the decision making?       | N/A |  | The Housing Ombudsman does not recommend a three stage process. Incommunities use the recommended two stage process.  |
| Is any third stage optional for residents?   | N/A |  | We do not have a third stage.   |

|  |  |   |   |
|--|--|---|---|
|  | Does the final stage response set out residents' right to refer the matter to the Housing Ombudsman Service? | Y | Yes, we have letter templates that contain this information.<br>We also have a link to their website on our complaint page. |
|--|--|---|---|

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|   | Do we keep a record of complaint correspondence including correspondence from the resident? | Y | Yes, we keep this information on our computer systems.<br>We are looking at how we can make access to information across our systems more seamless for officers. |
|   | At what stage are most complaints resolved?   |   | At the first stage.  |
| <b>4</b>                                    | <b>Communication</b>  |   |  |
|   | Are residents kept informed and updated during the complaints process?                      | Y | Yes, the Complaint Support team ensure that complainants are kept up to date.  |

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|   |  |   |  |
|   | 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 | Our letter templates include this information.   |
|   | What proportion of complaints are resolved at stage one?   |   | 96% (1 <sup>st</sup> April 2021 – 31 August 2021)  |
|   | What proportion of complaints are resolved at stage two?   |   | 4% (1 <sup>st</sup> April 2021 – 31 August 2021)   |
|   | What proportion of complaint responses are sent within Code timescales? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stage one</li> </ul>        |   | For the period 1 <sup>st</sup> April to 31 <sup>st</sup> August 2021<br><b>Stage 1</b><br>Average days taken to close complaints during this period for those logged during this period reports at 9.2 days which is below our set target of 10 days |

Below table shows the % of complaints closed for stage 1 against days taken those over 10 days had received a holding letter of 10 days so those between 11-20 are still within time those 21+ exceeded the extension time.

| <b>Dates</b>       | <b>% Completed</b> |
|--------------------|--------------------|
| 0-10 Days          | 72.14%             |
| 11-20 Days         | 18.74%             |
| 21-30 Days         | 5.80%              |
| 31-50 Days         | 2.65%              |
| 51+ Days           | 0.66%              |
| <b>Grand Total</b> | <b>100.00%</b>     |

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|---|------------------|--------|--|------|------------------|---|-----------|---|--------|-------|----|--------|-----|---|--------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stage one (with extension)</li> <li>• Stage two</li> <li>• Stage two (with extension)</li> </ul> |                  |        | <p>Average days taken to close a stage 2 from the day it was reported stands at 14.6 days</p> <table> <thead> <tr> <th>Days</th> <th>no of complaints</th> <th>%</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>0-10 days</td> <td>8</td> <td>30.77%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>11-20</td> <td>11</td> <td>42.31%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>21+</td> <td>7</td> <td>26.92%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> | Days | no of complaints | % | 0-10 days | 8 | 30.77% | 11-20 | 11 | 42.31% | 21+ | 7 | 26.92% |
| Days  | no of complaints | %      |  |      |                  |   |           |   |        |       |    |        |     |   |        |
| 0-10 days   | 8                | 30.77% |  |      |                  |   |           |   |        |       |    |        |     |   |        |
| 11-20   | 11               | 42.31% |  |      |                  |   |           |   |        |       |    |        |     |   |        |
| 21+   | 7                | 26.92% |  |      |                  |   |           |   |        |       |    |        |     |   |        |
| Where timescales have been extended did we have good reason?  | Y                |        |  |      |                  |   |           |   |        |       |    |        |     |   |        |
| Where timescales have been extended did we keep the resident informed?<br><br>As above  | Y                |        |  |      |                  |   |           |   |        |       |    |        |     |   |        |
| What proportion of complaints do we resolve to residents' satisfaction  |                  |        | <p>1 April 2021 – 31 August 2021<br/>Satisfaction 78% (complaint handling) 17%<br/>response rate</p>   |      |                  |   |           |   |        |       |    |        |     |   |        |

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|   |  |     |  |
| <b>5</b>                                    | <b>Cooperation with Housing Ombudsman Service</b>                    |     |  |
|   | Were all requests for evidence responded to within 15 days?          | Y   |  |
|   | Where the timescale was extended did we keep the Ombudsman informed? | N/A |  |
| <b>6</b>                                    | <b>Fairness in complaint handling</b>                                |     |  |
|   | Are residents able to complain via a representative throughout?      | Y   |  |
|   | If advice was given, was this accurate and easy to understand?       | Y   | We offer a 'buddy system' where complainants can be supported by an involved customer. A follow up survey will be carried out to check once the new system has embedded. |

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| How many cases did we refuse to escalate?   |   |  | <p>1 case (April – August 2021)</p> <p>What was the reason for the refusal?</p> <p>This was due to legal complexity</p> <p>1 case (September 2021)</p> <p>Due to unreasonable behaviour</p>   |
| Did we explain our decision to the resident?  | Y |  |   |
| <b>7 Outcomes and remedies</b>  |   |  |   |
| Where something has gone wrong are we taking appropriate steps to put things right? | Y |  | <p>Steps are in place to improve learning from complaints. Now regular monthly meetings with Neighbourhoods and Asset management teams. This includes a learning action plan specific service complaint reports.</p>  |
| <b>8 Continuous learning and improvement</b>  |   |  |   |
| What improvements have we made as a result of learning from complaints?             |   |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We looked at current processes to ensure that we meet customer expectations of completing the job correctly first time</li> <li>• We reviewed our scheduling arrangements to make improvements</li> <li>• We are ensuring that customers are aware of dates that have to be rescheduled</li> <li>• We are ensuring that the length of time given to complete a repair is accurate</li> </ul> |

|  |  |  |  |  |
|--|--|--|--|--|
|  |  |  |  | <p>We are using equipment to monitor damp in homes for recurring complaints and where damp was initially misdiagnosed leading to a delay</p>   |
|  | <p>How do we share these lessons with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) residents?</li> <li>b) the board/governing body?</li> <li>c) In the Annual Report?</li> </ul> |  |  | <p>We give feedback to individual complainants on learning from their complaint.</p> <p>We publish 'You said we did' our website and in our newsletter.</p> <p>We have developed customer insight reporting to our</p> |

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|   |   |  | Boards.<br><br>We will publish learning from complaints in our annual report.   |
| Has the Code made a difference to how we respond to complaints? | Y |  |   |
| What changes have we made?                                      |   |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We now have a dedicated Complaint team</li> <li>• Regular meetings with service areas have been set up to look at learning</li> <li>• All complaints are acknowledged and complainants are advised by letter if the timescales needs to be extended</li> <li>• All complainants receive a written response</li> <li>• The Stage 2 are carried out by a dedicated team (not the service area).</li> </ul> <p>Increased monitoring and reporting on performance on complaints.</p> |