

Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code

Self-assessment 2020-2021

London Borough of Camden

All data is based on complaints relating to services provided by the Council as Landlord ie Housing Management and Property Management for the period April 2020 to March 2021.

The self-assessment will be reviewed and updated annually.

Compliance with the Complaint Handling Code			
1	Definition of a complaint	Yes	No
	<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> <p>London Borough of Camden uses a Plain English definition:</p> <p>‘When someone lets us know that they are unhappy with our service and they want us to take action to resolve it’.</p>	√	
	Does the policy have exclusions where a complaint will not be considered?	√	
	<p>Are these exclusions reasonable and fair to residents?</p> <p>Evidence relied upon</p> <p>Our policy states: When we are unable or may not investigate a complaint</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We may not investigate if legal proceedings are pending. The complaints manager will decide whether to investigate each case on an individual basis having taken legal advice when necessary • We cannot investigate any complaints where the Court has made a decision about the subject of the complaint • We cannot investigate when the complaint is not about Camden Council or a contractor or partner acting on our behalf 	√	

	<p>There are some types of complaints that fall outside the scope of this policy because there are other more suitable processes for dealing with them.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complaints about Councillors. Complaints of this nature are dealt with by Camden’s Standards Committee • Complaints about your planning application. If we have refused your planning application for development or works where consent is required by planning law, in most cases you have a right to appeal to the Planning Inspectorate. We cannot investigate any decisions made by the Planning Inspectorate Make an appeal to the Planning Inspectorate • You disagree with a housing benefit decision. You can ask us to explain the reasons for the decision. If you still disagree, you can: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ask us to reconsider the decision or ○ Appeal to an independent appeals tribunal Dispute a housing benefit decision • You want to challenge a Penalty Charge Notice (PCN), you can: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ask us to reconsider the decision or ○ Appeal to the Environment and Traffic Adjudicators Dispute a Penalty Charge Notice <p>We will not accept a complaint outside of the following timescales except where exceptional reasons for the delay can be demonstrated.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the complaint is submitted longer than 12 months after the date of the incident • a request for a stage 2 review is submitted longer than 28 calendar days of the stage 1 response <p>If we receive persistent malicious, rude, offensive or vexatious communications that we consider to be unreasonable behaviour, we may refuse to handle the complaint (and close the complaint). We have an Unreasonable Behaviour Procedure to follow in these cases.</p>		
2	Accessibility		
	<p>Are multiple accessibility routes available for residents to make a complaint?</p> <p>Residents can make a complaint via:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Telephone • Online e-form • Email • Social media • Letter (Post) • 	√	

	Is the complaints policy and procedure available online? Complaints - Camden Council	√	
	Do we have a reasonable adjustments policy? There is no formal policy directly in relation to complaints handling but the council does have accessibility policies for residents to allow them to access all services and communications that includes making reasonable adjustments. Accessibility - Camden Council	√	
	Do we regularly advise residents about our complaints process? In all communications and interactions with residents, all staff advise residents of the complaints procedures should they want it. Our complaints webpages give details of our policy and procedures, annual reports and escalation procedures.	√	
3	Complaints team and process		
	Is there a complaint officer or equivalent in post? There is a centralised complaints team co-ordinating the complaints handling across the council. This is made up of complaints officers, case co-ordinators and a complaints team leader who manages the team. Above this is the service manager. Some service areas have local case management officers who handle complaints for the specified areas. These are in Housing Repairs and Housing Needs	√	
	Does the complaint officer have autonomy to resolve complaints? All the above roles have autonomy to resolve complaints. All the service-based roles (case management officers, service officers and managers) that deal with complaints to their service area also have autonomy to resolve stage 1 complaints.	√	
	Does the complaint officer have authority to compel engagement from other departments to resolve disputes? All the above roles have authority to compel engagement from other departments. There is an escalation process.	√	
	If there is a third stage to the complaints procedure are residents involved in the decision making?		√

	There is no third stage for Housing complaints.		
	Is any third stage optional for residents?		√
	Does the final stage response set out residents' right to refer the matter to the Housing Ombudsman Service?	√	
	Do we keep a record of complaint correspondence including correspondence from the resident? From Dec 2021 a new case management system will be introduced for complaint handling. This will keep all documents, files and correspondence relating to a case in one central place, accessible to all those involved in complaints handling.	√	
	At what stage are most complaints resolved? Stage 1		
4	Communication		
	Are residents kept informed and updated during the complaints process?	√	
	Are residents informed of the landlord's position and given a chance to respond and challenge any area of dispute before the final decision? At stage 1 a response from the landlord will explain our position and the resident is free to respond back and challenge. The service will then try to resolve any ongoing issues before formally going to stage 2. If ongoing issues remain unresolved then a formal stage 2 is offered. The complaints officer will speak to the resident about their complaint and they have a chance to provide their views to inform the stage 2 investigation.	√	
	Are all complaints acknowledged and logged within five days? A new case management system to be introduced in December 2021 will be able to measure each step of the process and each task carried out in the workflow and logging and acknowledgement within 5 days will become a formal KPI. In the period 2020/2021 due to the pandemic acknowledging and logging of complaints took longer than usual and caused a backlog of complaints. As at November 2021 this backlog has now been cleared and acknowledgement of all complaints is within 5 days.		√
	Are residents advised of how to escalate at the end of each stage?	√	
	What proportion of complaints are resolved at stage one? [* LB Camden has taken this to mean 'the number of complaints that did not progress to stage 2'.]		

<p>Stage 1 complaints = 632 Stage 2 complaints = 70 Proportion resolved at stage 1 = 89%</p>		
<p>What proportion of complaints are resolved at stage two? [* LB Camden has taken this to mean ‘the number of complaints that did <u>not</u> progress to a Housing Ombudsman decision’.]</p> <p>Stage 2 complaints = 70 HO decisions = 26 Proportion resolved at stage 2 = 63%</p>		
<p>What proportion of complaint responses are sent within Code timescales?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stage one (1-10 working days) 30% • Stage one (with extension) (11-20 working days) 55% • Stage two (1-20 working days) • Stage two (with extension) (21-30 working days) <p>LB Camden works to 25 working days to respond to a stage 2 complaint in relation to any Council service (not just Housing related) in order to be consistent across all service areas and avoid any confusion.</p> <p>For all stage 2 complaints (100) LB Camden responded within 25 working days to 57% of these.</p> <p>It is not currently possible to determine time taken by specific service areas. However, given the majority of stage 2 complaints were housing related (70), it can be assumed that just over 55% of these were responded to within 25 working days.</p>		
<p>Where timescales have been extended did we have good reason?</p>	√	
<p>Where timescales have been extended did we keep the resident informed?</p>	√	
<p>What proportion of complaints do we resolve to residents’ satisfaction [LB Camden takes this to mean the proportion of complaints that are not escalated to a further stage].</p> <p>89% of complaints are resolved to residents’ satisfaction</p>		

5	Cooperation with Housing Ombudsman Service		
	Were all requests for evidence responded to within 15 days? In the period 2020/2021 the impact of the pandemic meant that it took longer to provide responses to the HO.		√
	Where the timescale was extended did we keep the Ombudsman informed?	√	
6	Fairness in complaint handling		
	Are residents able to complain via a representative throughout? Our policy states: We accept feedback from third parties on behalf of someone else, such as family members, friends or representatives, solicitors, advice agencies or advocacy workers. This also includes ward councillors who are able to assist people through the process. To comply with the Data Protection Laws, we must have written and signed consent from the citizen before we respond to a third party.	√	
	If advice was given, was this accurate and easy to understand?	√	
	How many cases did we refuse to escalate? We do not currently formally monitor this. The new case management system to be introduced in December 2021 will enable us to capture this data. What was the reason for the refusal? Reasons for refusal to escalate are the same as the exclusions to consider a complaint in the earlier section: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will not escalate if legal proceedings are pending or the complaint is about a Court decision. • We will not escalate when the complaint is not about Camden Council or a contractor or partner acting on our behalf • We will not escalate when complaints fall outside the scope of this policy because there are other more suitable processes for dealing with them (see earlier section on “refusing a complaint”) • We will not accept a complaint outside of the timescales • We will not escalate a complaint if we receive persistent malicious, rude, offensive or vexatious communications that we consider to be unreasonable behaviour 		
	Did we explain our decision to the resident?	√	
7	Outcomes and remedies		
	Where something has gone wrong are we taking appropriate steps to put things right?	√	

8	Continuous learning and improvement		
	<p>What improvements have we made as a result of learning from complaints?</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Housing Repairs</p> <p>In 2020/2021 Housing repairs have adopted a proactive approach to addressing customer concerns through its new customer services and case management team which went live in August 2020. Unfortunately, due to Covid restrictions, many non-emergency repair types were unable to be actioned in 2020/21. To try and address any dissatisfaction in advance, we extensively communicated with our residents about the types of repairs they could report now and where to see advice and support from us about other concerns. This approach included emails and letters sent to residents and regular updates on our social media pages and local press adverts.</p> <p>An essential improvement during the year was to introduce our new damp, mould and condensation team. Residents who want to report these concerns can now do so easily via our dedicated web pages or by seeking advice from the contact centre team, who have been retrained to provide a solution-based response. In addition, we have proactively visited many properties and offered advice and, where appropriate, take action to deal with this.</p> <p>Housing Management Services have recognised that a number of the complaints are linked to issues related to another resident and will provide reassurance without breaching confidentiality. The service has returned to neighbourhood working and expects to see more problems resolved more quickly</p> <p>Neighbourhood staff are participating in the development of the new complaints case management system which when implemented will allow complaints to be better monitored and trends identified more easily for ongoing service improvement</p> <p>The new tenant survey provides a source of valuable information on our new tenants' experiences and we are surveying, responding to and learning from these.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Complaints handling – service improvements</p> <p>A large proportion of complaints at all stages relate to how the council services handle those complaints in a timely and satisfactory way.</p> <p>2020/21 was a challenging year due to the pandemic and even though the council continued to handle complaints, it has not always been as effective or as timely as we would like. The following service improvements identified last year have been actioned:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New IT case management system to log and monitor complaints will go live in Autumn 2021. • The reporting cycle for collation of the annual complaints report 2020/2021 has started much earlier in July 2021 to 		

	<p>ensure better service involvement and contribution in the process to focus on lessons learnt.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rollout and training on the new case management system will start in Autumn 2021 • Service-specific complaints handling training including writing in Plain English will be rolled out alongside training on the new system. • Research to be conducted into understanding why people don't progress complaints. 		
	<p>How do we share these lessons with:</p> <p>a) residents? We write any lessons learnt into the response letter to the resident. On wider communication to residents in general, we publish our annual report which contains lessons learnt</p> <p>b) the board/governing body? The annual report containing lessons learnt is presented to the Revenue and Corporate Performance Scrutiny Committee and to full Cabinet on an annual basis.</p> <p>c) In the Annual Report? The annual report contains a section on lessons learnt for the key service areas</p> <p>Annual Report 2020/21: http://democracy.camden.gov.uk/documents/s99651/LBC%20Annual%20Complaints%20Report%2020202021%20CS202118.pdf</p>		
	<p>Has the Code made a difference to how we respond to complaints?</p>	<p>√</p>	
	<p>What changes have we made?</p> <p>The Code has been very useful in the development of the case management system to ensure the workflow and the data captured meets the requirements of the code. This includes ensuring accessibility, defining KPIs and quality of responses to make the end to end process for complaint handling as effective as possible.</p>		