

# How Folkestone and Hythe District Council meets the Housing Ombudsman Service Complaint Handling Code

The Housing Ombudsman Service has published their Complaint Handling Code for all providers of social housing, which includes Folkestone and Hythe District Council's housing service.

This Code acts as a guide for residents living in council managed homes, setting out what they can, and should, expect from the housing services if they make a complaint. We aim to resolve any complaints quickly, effectively and fairly, and to make sure we learn from the complaints we receive so we can try and stop the same thing happening in future.

We have carried out this self-assessment against the Complaint Handling Code, showing what the Code expects of us, how we meet each of the standards and what we will do to improve.

## Section 1: Definition of a complaint

What is expected of us	How we meet this standard
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Give a clear definition of what a complaint is</li><li>• Handle all complaints in line with our policy, including those submitted by third parties on behalf of residents</li><li>• Accept all complaints unless there is a valid reason not to. Clearly state when a complaint will not be considered, and why</li><li>• Recognise the difference between a service request and a complaint</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>✓ The council's corporate complaints policy includes our definition of a complaint</li><li>✓ We accept all complaints (including those submitted by third parties) unless the matter has already exhausted the corporate complaints process set out in our policy.</li><li>✓ Our complaints policy explains what types of issues are not considered as complaints. If we are unable to accept a complaint, the resident is advised why, and that they can escalate the matter to the Housing Ombudsman</li><li>✓ Our complaints policy sets out the difference between a service request and a complaint and staff are experienced in recognising the difference between these</li></ul>

## Section 2: Accessibility and awareness

What is expected of us	How we meet this standard
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide different channels for residents to make a complaint</li> <li>• Make our complaints policy available in a clear and accessible format. Include information on our website about how residents can make a complaint</li> <li>• Make reasonable adjustments to the way we handle complaints in line with the Equality Act 2010</li> <li>• Publish our complaints policy and process, the Complaint Handling Code and Housing Ombudsman Scheme in leaflets, posters, newsletters and online</li> <li>• Give residents contact details for the Housing Ombudsman, as well as letting them know they can access the Ombudsman at any point during their complaint</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Residents can make a complaint via our online form, by email, in writing, by telephone, by social media, webchat or in person</li> <li>✓ The council's corporate complaints policy is published on our website and can be found simply by searching for "complaints". Paper copies are available on request</li> <li>✓ Our Corporate Reasonable Adjustment Policy was adopted in 2021 and includes a statement about how we deal with requests for reasonable adjustments. All complaint handling staff are conversant with this policy</li> <li>✓ The complaints procedure is published on our website alongside our complaints policy and this self-assessment against the Housing Ombudsman's Code. The complaints process has been promoted via our tenant and leaseholder Facebook group</li> <li>✓ All responses to complaints give residents contact details for the Ombudsman</li> </ul>

### Section 3: Complaint handling personnel

What is expected of us	How we meet this standard
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Have a designated officer or team responsible for complaint handling.</li><li>• They must have the right skills and no conflict of interest. They should be fully trained and able to act fairly, access staff at all levels and have the authority to resolve complaints as quickly as possible</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>✓ We have a Housing &amp; Corporate Complaints Officer who deals with all Stage 1 complaints for the housing service. Stage 2 complaints are dealt with by the manager of the department they relate to</li><li>✓ Our Housing &amp; Corporate Complaints Officer has worked in housing for many years and is knowledgeable and experienced in all aspects of the housing service. They meet all of the requirements of the code</li></ul>

## Section 4: Complaint handling principles

What is expected of us	How we meet this standard
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seek agreement from the resident about how to resolve the issue</li> <li>• Do not have extra named stages of the complaints process such as “Stage 0” or “pre-complaint”</li> <li>• Acknowledge all complaints within five days of receipt</li> <li>• Set out the council’s understanding of the complaint and the outcome we believe the resident is seeking. Ask for clarification if unsure</li> <li>• Complaint handlers should deal with complaints on their own merit, act independently and consider all information and evidence carefully</li> <li>• Give residents the chance to set out their position and comment on the council’s findings before a final decision is made</li> <li>• Include a timescale in our complaints policy for residents to request an escalation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ We always work with residents to agree how to put things right</li> <li>✓ Our complaints process consists of Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaints. We do not have any extra named stages</li> <li>✓ We acknowledge all Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaints within five days of receipt</li> <li>✓ Our complaint acknowledgement clearly sets out what we understand the complaint to be. We will always clarify with the resident if unsure</li> <li>✓ These points are always adhered to as a matter of course and are a fundamental part of our complaints handling</li> <li>✓ Any comments received will always be considered and will be used to inform any amendments to the final complaint decision where necessary</li> <li>✓ Our complaints policy states that a complaint must be raised within 12 months of the issue occurring unless there is a justification for why this can’t be done. The</li> </ul>

- Don't unreasonably refuse to escalate a complaint. If refusing to escalate a complaint, tell the resident why
- Give residents the option of allowing a representative to deal with a complaint on their behalf
- Seek resident feedback on complaint handling

policy doesn't currently include a timescale for requesting an escalation but this will be added when the policy is next updated

- ✓ This is always the case. Our complaints policy says we will not further consider complaints that have already been investigated or are being pursued in an unreasonable manner. We always set out our reasons for not escalating a complaint, in line with our policy
- ✓ Our complaints policy explains that we will accept complaints from representatives of individual customers
- ✓ We send out complaint handling satisfaction surveys 10 days after each complaint is closed

## Section 5: Complaint stages

What is expected of us	How we meet this standard
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Respond to Stage 1 complaints within 10 working days and Stage 2 complaints within 20 working days, or tell residents when this is not possible</li>   <li>• Send the complaint response when the investigation is complete, not when the issue is resolved</li>   <li>• Complaint responses must:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Address all points raised</li> <li>○ Say which stage of the complaints process it is</li> <li>○ Give our decision on the complaint, and why</li> <li>○ Say what we will do to put things right</li> <li>○ Let residents know how they can escalate the matter if they are unhappy with the response</li> </ul> </li>   <li>• Where a complaint is escalated to Stage 2, it must not be dealt with by the same person who considered the Stage 1 complaint</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ All Stage 1 complaints were responded to within 10 working days this year, with many being responded to much earlier than this. All Stage 2 complaints dealt with this year except for one were responded to within 10 working days. The Stage 2 complaint responded to late was due to awaiting information from a service area. The customer was issued a holding response notifying them and apologising of a further two day delay in receiving their final Stage 2 complaint response</li>   <li>✓ We carry out spot checks of responses issued which confirm this is the case</li>   <li>✓ The format of our complaint response template letters ensures all these points are covered. Our spot checks of responses issued also confirm this is the case</li>   <li>✓ This is in line with our complaints policy. Stage 1 complaints are dealt with by our Housing &amp; Corporate Complaints Office and Stage 2 complaints are considered by the senior officer for the area the complaint relates to</li> </ul>

## Section 6: Putting things right

What is expected of us	How we meet this standard
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="226 357 1032 475">• Be honest when things go wrong and say what we are doing, or will do, to put things right. Say what will happen next and when by</li><li data-bbox="226 671 999 790">• If awarding compensation, consider whether the resident is entitled to any statutory payments and/or quantifiable loss payments</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="1133 357 1951 603">✓ Our complaint letter templates are designed to ensure that this is the process followed for an upheld or partially upheld complaints. Any lessons learnt and/or actions taken are recorded and monitored to ensure that the necessary steps are taken following the completion of the complaint</li><li data-bbox="1133 655 1854 774">✓ Our <a href="#">Housing Compensation Policy</a> outlines our approach to mandatory and discretionary compensation and quantifiable loss payments</li></ul>



## Section 7: Continuous learning and improvement

What is expected of us	How we meet this standard
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Report on learning and improvements from complaints, in our annual report and more frequently to residents, staff and scrutiny panels</li><li>• Appoint a member of staff to have lead responsibility for complaints and make sure they provide regular information on complaint handling</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>✓ Lessons learned and improvements made from complaints are reported annually to our Cabinet and published on our website. The Strategic Tenant Advisory Panel receives regular updates on complaint volumes, trends and learning</li><li>✓ Our Senior Performance Officer and Housing &amp; Corporate Complaints Officer submit monthly reports to the Housing Management Team. An annual complaints report is submitted to the council's Corporate Leadership Team</li></ul>

## Section 8: Self-assessment and compliance

What is expected of us	How we meet this standard
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Carry out an annual self-assessment against the Housing Ombudsman Code. Report the outcome of this assessment to councillors, publish it on our website and include it in our annual report</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>✓ Annual self-assessments are carried out and published on our website. They are shared with our Cabinet Member for Housing. Details will be linked to in our annual report section on complaint handling</li></ul>