

Title: Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code Self-Assessment

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1. Background

- 1.1. As previously reported to board, each December we undertake a self-assessment of our complaints management activity against the Housing Ombudsman's [Complaint Handling Code](#).
- 1.2. A copy of the recently completed assessment is attached as an appendix.
- 1.3. The Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 makes the Complaints Handling Code statutory from April 2024. Whilst landlords sought to meet the standards of the Code since it was introduced three years ago, we will now have to demonstrate we are meeting the requirements of the Code, including submitting our completed self-assessment to the Housing Ombudsman.
- 1.4. Following the last complaints update to the Board in November, we have since met with tenant board members to also explore the 'champion' role of members. This is in line with newer versions of the code seeking greater assurances from landlords that the leadership and culture of our complaints handling is a strong and positive one, that helps drive service improvement.
- 1.5. The Tenant Board members confirmed that they would collectively like to take on the role of complaints champions. In line with the current [guidance about the role of members from the Housing Ombudsman](#) a member can be tenant board member and/or a role for an elected ward member.
- 1.6. We have the opportunity during 2024 to share a range of information and provide opportunities to the board complaints champions, for example, by
 - a) Giving an additional briefing on future complaints papers to support members to ask questions and offer more challenge.
 - b) Show the complaints dashboard to give more insight about the internal management information available and how this is being used by teams.
 - c) Share for awareness and feedback anonymised complaints responses to help identify improvements and to help connect the board with the day to day service reality.

2. Findings of the self-assessment

- 2.1. The attached document outlines each requirement of the code and our current position (if we are compliant or not) and some additional narrative. Following enhancements to our complaints policy earlier in the

year we are compliant with the requirements of the code. However, we can continue to strengthen our compliance in some areas, namely:

- a) *Section 5.1 and 5.13:* Improving our performance related to timescales and being more consistent with the application of extensions for more complex cases when additional time is needed. As of October 2023, we are 87% compliant in relation to stage 1 complaints and 91% for stage 2. i.e. we have responded in timescale or have agreed an extension with the customer. However, this is an area of our performance that we wish to improve further and be as close to 100% as possible.
- b) *Section 7.2:* Promoting more internally and externally, as well as reporting to the board, how we are learning from complaints so staff and customers make the positive correlation between good complaints management and improvements to services.
- c) *Section 7.4:* Providing further insight to the board about complaints trends and themes. Whilst we have provided some high-level information to the board in previous reports, we could strengthen this further by providing more information on what the new or emerging issues are and how we're responding.

2.2. To strengthen our compliance with the Code based on last years self-assessment we updated our Complaints policy, so that:

- a) The complaint definition in the policy matches the exact wording in HOS Complaint Handling Code.
- b) We make more explicit reference to considering reasonable adjustments in how we manage and respond to complaints.
- c) There is more clarity on how we maintain a persons confidentiality and how we handle complaints received through social media.
- d) More guidance is available on dealing with persistent and vexatious complainants.

2.3. In November, we responded to the HOS consultation about changes to the Code for April 2024. The Housing Ombudsman has also partnered with the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman to extend the Code across all local government functions. For councils who are landlords, this will 'end the two-tier system with housing management and corporate complaints'.

2.4. Key proposed changes are:

- a) Changing timescales to respond to complaints within 10 working days of the complaint being received by the council (not 10 days from acknowledgement)

- b) The removal of a 'partially upheld' status
 - c) More emphasis on the role of a Member (councillor or board) responsible for complaints and more information on the governance related to complaints management.
- 2.5. At the point of any updated Code being issued in 2024, we will undertake a further self-assessment and report findings to the board.
- 2.6. A summary of the outcomes from the self-assessment has been published [on our website](#) and a link/short explanation of what done and found will be included in the January 24 email to all residents.
- 2.7. The Code also expects landlords to share with their governing bodies the [Ombudsman's annual performance report](#) (also attached). This was received in August and covers the period 2022/23. The report describes our performance similar to that of other landlords by size and type. With the Leeds Housing Board now established, the report for 2023/24 can be included within the boards forward plan for the year ahead.
- 2.8. Key points from the report include:
- a) Overall, we performed similarly when compared to similar landlords by size and type. The national maladministration rate is 55%, for Housing Leeds during 2022/23 this was 57%
 - b) The total value of compensation the HOS instructed us to award to residents increased from £4,785 in 2021/22 to £7,781 for 2022/23
 - c) Within the 45 findings made by the Ombudsman during 2022/23, there were:
 - 1 severe maladministration case, related to property condition that has been previously reported to board.
 - 11 cases of maladministration, 9 related to property condition and 2 related to complaints handling.
 - 13 service failures – across a range of issues including property condition, complaints handling, anti-social behaviour, estate management and rents/charges.
 - 16 cases of no maladministration, the majority relating to property condition.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1. The Leeds Housing Board is recommended to:
- a) Note and comment on the Complaint Handling Code Self-Assessment
 - b) Support the greater involvement of tenant board members within the complaints champion roles.
 - c) Note the content of the Housing Ombudsman's annual performance report for 2022/23.