

# Housing

Ombudsman Service

## **The Complaint Handling Code 2024**

# Introduction

Working with landlords, residents and staff, we first published our Complaint Handling Code in 2020 as set out in the Housing Ombudsman Scheme. The Code aims to:

- Support resolution of complaints within the landlord's own procedures
- Set out what landlords must do procedurally to handle complaints
- Enable landlords to embed a positive complaint handling culture

In July 2023, the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 amended the Housing Ombudsman's powers:

- The power to issue a statutory 'code of practice' for complaint handling (the Code)
- In order to issue the Code, the Ombudsman must carry out a statutory consultation
- Once issued, the Ombudsman has a duty to monitor compliance with the Code

# The Consultation

We opened our consultation in September 2023. In total, we spoke to over 1,200 individuals about our proposals across a variety of channels including webinars, in person events and meetings.

We received over 600 formal responses from residents, landlords and stakeholders. This included over 1,400 comments – all of which were carefully considered. We found that:

- Overall, there was support for the provisions of the Code and the approach to monitoring compliance
- Key themes from residents were barriers to making complaints, delays and the need for independent review
- Key themes from landlords were volumes, resource and capacity whilst delivering a quality service
- Both residents and landlords asked for more guidance and support to ensure Code compliance is met
- We also received a large number of suggestions, ideas and recommendations for our work

We recognised the difference in operating models and service across our membership

Further details can be found in our [Consultation Response document](#).

# Outcome of the Consultation

We have now issued the statutory [Complaint Handling Code](#). This applies to all members of the Housing Ombudsman Scheme.

Housing Associations with wider service provisions will note that this is aligned with the LGCSO Complaint Handling Code, but separate.

## Alongside the Code, we have also published:

- Self-Assessment against the Code
- Frequently Asked Questions
- Equality Impact Assessment of the Code
- Code Compliance Framework
- Complaint Handling Failure Order (CHFO) guidance

Further details can be found in our dedicated [webpage](#).

# Key changes to the Code

We have created an [easy reference guide](#) to detail the full changes to the Code.

## Key points of difference relate to:

- That processes must have two stages only (including any 3<sup>rd</sup> party arrangements)
- Timescales and requirements for acknowledging complaints at each stage
- Timescales for responding to complaints at each stage (including extensions)
- Exclusions to raising and/or escalating complaints
- Resourcing arrangements, including the Member Responsible for Complaints
- The requirement to produce and publish an annual complaints performance and service improvement report

# Duty to Monitor Compliance

The statutory Code applies from **1 April 2024**.

The Ombudsman's duty to monitor compliance also takes effect from this date.

We have published our [Code Compliance Framework](#) which details our approach. Key highlights are:

- We will monitor compliance in three ways:
  - Compliance in oversight and scrutiny
  - Compliance in policy
  - Compliance in practice
- When assessing compliance, we will engage with landlords and give them opportunities to resolve any issues identified and support them where appropriate.
- If there is evidence of non-action we may issue Complaint Handling Failure Orders
- Complaint Handling Failure Orders will be published, and may be as individual Orders

# Support for landlords

Our key documents are published on our website on a dedicated webpage.

We will continue to enhance our offering through:

- Guidance for completing self-assessments
- Guidance on submitting the self-assessments (including timescales)
- Code e-learning via our Centre for Learning
- 'Micro-learn' e-learning modules, focussing on key aspects of the Code
- Continued Code webinars throughout 2024/2025

Landlords can contact us using our dedicated email [compliance@housing-ombudsman.org.uk](mailto:compliance@housing-ombudsman.org.uk)

# Questions

We will focus on pre-submitted questions with additional answers provided if there is sufficient time

We will respond to any pre-submitted questions not answered in a follow up email