

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.

Local authority members 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 3rd 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

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