Cheshire West & Chester Council

Council Housing

Council Housing Complaints Policy

Issue date: June 2025

Review date: June 2028



Cheshire West and Chester

1. Management Information

Approval Date:	June 2025
Next Review Date:	June 2028
Policy Owner:	Janet Lawton, Head Council Housing Management Service
Responsible Service Area:	Council Housing Management Board
Responsible Director:	Director of Economy and Housing

2. Introduction

We welcome complaints and actively encourage customers to express their dissatisfaction to us. All expressions of dissatisfaction are a positive opportunity to gather insight that will help us improve our services.

Our approach aligns to The Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code, April 2024, which sets out the requirements on how to respond to complaints effectively and fairly.

3. Aim of Policy

This policy outlines how we seek to resolve complaints as quickly as possible by being fair, putting things right and learning from complaint outcomes.

Exclusions

We will consider each complaint on its own merits and consider the individual circumstances. There will be exceptional situations when a matter will not be considered as a complaint or escalated, which could include:

- An initial request for a service, e.g. first reporting of a repair, which will be dealt with as a service request.
- Reports of anti-social behaviour or breaches of tenancy which will be dealt with by the appropriate policies.
- The issue giving rise to the complaint occurring over twelve months ago, however, we will apply discretion to this where there are good reasons to do so.
- Closed complaints which have previously been raised and have already been considered under our Complaints Policy.
- Where the HOS has already determined the outcome of an investigation.
- Legal proceedings have started. This is defined as details of the claim, such as the Claim Form and Particulars of Claim, having been filed at court.
- Insurance matters where an insurance claim has been made e.g. damages or personal injury.
- Complaints about services, people or bodies which the Council has no control.

Anonymous complaints will be recorded, depending on the issue we may still investigate outside of this policy.

If the Council decides not to accept a complaint, an explanation will be provided to the customer setting out the reasons why the matter is not suitable for the complaints process and the right to take that decision to the Housing Ombudsman. If the Ombudsman does not agree that the exclusion has been fairly applied, the Ombudsman may advise the Council to investigate the complaint.

This policy provides the framework for handling complaints. We will not treat customers differently if they complain. The early and local resolution of issues between the Council and our customers is key to effective complaint handling.

External Utility and Infrastructure Failures

The landlord is responsible only for services, installations and assets within its ownership or control. Where a service failure is caused by a utility provider, statutory undertaker, telecommunications provider, or other external infrastructure operator, the landlord's published service standards and repair timescales may not apply. The landlord will provide reasonable assistance and information where practicable but cannot guarantee restoration times, updates, or outcomes that are controlled by third parties.

4. Strategic context

This policy helps the Council to meet the following national and local strategic aims.

Social Housing Regulations Act 2023 – Consumer Standards

- Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard
- Quality and Safety Standard
- Awaab's Law and associated statutory requirements.

CWAC Borough Plan 2024 – 2028 - sets out how the Council will work with all its residents to build a stronger future where the Council and residents all play their part in creating thriving, caring and sustainable communities.

The Borough Plan has six missions as follows:

- Starting well - The best start for the borough`s children and young people, with improved opportunity, a healthier start, greater resilience in families and the best possible support and care when it is needed.
- Tackling hardship and poverty - More people feel more financially secure as the causes and impact of hardship and poverty are addressed by working alongside residents.
- Resilient people living their best lives - Local people are enabled to flourish, be healthy, happy and independent for longer in supportive communities.

- Opportunity in a fair local economy - Local people and businesses contribute to and benefit from a strong and fair local economy.
- Neighbourhood pride - Residents live in well maintained, connected and safe places with good and affordable homes.
- Greener communities - Individuals, public services and businesses take action to move to tackle the climate emergency, achieve net zero, protect the natural environment and adapt to the impact of climate change.

Together with Tenants Charter | Cheshire West and Chester Council
Tenant Engagement Strategy 2025-30
Council Housing Asset Management Strategy

5. Definition and legislation

A complaint is defined as "an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of services, actions or lack of action by the Council, its staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting a customer or group of residents".
A resident does not have to use the word *'complaint'* for their dissatisfaction to be recognised and handled under this policy. Where a resident expresses dissatisfaction with a service or the response to a service request, we will treat this as a complaint and handle it in line with this policy, unless the resident clearly indicates that they do not wish it to be handled as such.

Where appropriate, residents will be given the opportunity to have their concerns handled as a formal complaint. Complaints will normally be accepted within twelve months of the issue occurring or the date the resident became aware of the issue. We will use discretion to consider complaints outside this timescale where appropriate (see exclusions).

A complaint submitted by a representative, advocate or third party acting on behalf of a resident will be handled in line with this policy.

When we receive an expression of dissatisfaction, we will seek to distinguish whether it is a complaint or a service request, having regard to the resident's views and the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code.

What is a Service Request?

The Council will not normally treat service requests as complaints. A service request is a request from a resident requiring action to be taken to put something right, for example a request for a repair, reporting a neighbourhood issue or anti-social behaviour. Service requests are recorded separately from complaints and are monitored and reviewed regularly.

Where a resident expresses dissatisfaction with the handling of a service request, or the response provided, we will treat this as a complaint and handle it in line with this policy, even where the service request remains ongoing.

Raising a complaint will not stop or delay efforts to resolve the underlying service request. Service delivery and complaint handling will continue in parallel where appropriate.

Where a complaint identifies a housing hazard that may present a significant risk of harm, the matter will be referred to the appropriate service for assessment and action. Any required investigation, safety measures or remedial works will continue alongside the complaints process.

Legislation

Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code 2024
The Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023
The Building Safety Act 2022
Data Protection Act 2018
The Equality Act 2010
Localism Act 2011
Housing Act 1985 and 1996
Landlord and Tenant Act 1985
Regulator for Social Housing Consumer Standards
Awaab's Law and associated statutory requirements

6. How the policy will be delivered

Who can make a complaint

Any person accessing the Landlord service can make a complaint. This includes any tenant or customer including leaseholders, residents, shared owners or housing waiting list applicants, or any person acting on their behalf, who communicates an expression of dissatisfaction to us.

The individual can also authorise a representative to make a complaint on their behalf. This could be a friend, partner, relative or someone from an external organisation. If you would like someone to act on your behalf, let us know. We need your consent to share details with your representative.
Where a complaint is made by a group of residents or any other group of people, in order to handle the complaint efficiently, we will ask for a single point of contact to be nominated.

Building Safety complaints

A 'relevant complaint' is a concern about a high-rise residential building safety risk. A tenant or leaseholder can raise concerns about building safety risks, which are structural safety issues and spread of fire issues. For example:

- flammable cladding on the outside of a building
- fire doors or smoke extraction which are not working or missing that may increase the risk of fire spread

- failure of the building's structure, such as parts of the building collapsing, cracks, or parts of the building falling off

A tenant or leaseholder can also raise a complaint about the performance of the Council as the principal accountable person doing what it needs to do under the Building Safety Act 2022. Any concerns may be about the Council's performance in relation to:

- the Council`s high-rise residential buildings safety communications to tenants and leaseholders
- responses to raised concerns
- how we manage building safety risks

If a tenant or leaseholder are not satisfied with the outcome of their relevant complaint about building safety, they can send the complaint to the Building Safety Regulator. We will tell them how to do this during the complaints process.

Accessibility and awareness.

We want the complaints process to be easily accessible and simple to follow. Customers and their representatives can report a complaint in several ways.

If you have downloaded the My tenancy + app, you can report a complaint and will be redirected to our website to log the details of your complaint.

Website: Contact our Council Housing Team
By writing: Cheshire West and Chester Council, Council Housing Management Service, The Portal, Wellington Road, Ellesmere Port, CH65 0BZ.
Phone: 0300 123 7724
In person: The Portal, Wellington Road, Ellesmere Port

If you believe that we can make reasonable adjustments to enable you to fully access our complaints service, we will agree with you about what may be reasonable based on your individual needs.

We are committed to providing excellent customer services, which are fair, equitable and inclusive. As such, we will endeavor to understand and make any reasonable adjustments required for customers in line with our Reasonable Adjustment Statement and the Equality Act 2010. Any reasonable adjustment provided will be recorded and kept under active review.

Examples of reasonable adjustments we might make include providing a translator or information in a different format.

This Complaints Policy is published on our website and available in other accessible formats on request.

The Housing Ombudsman Service can also provide advice and support in relation to complaints under their jurisdiction. The details of how to access their services are provided on our website, in complaint outcome letters if relevant, the link to their

website is included here : www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk.

The Housing Ombudsman Service contact details:
Housing Ombudsman Service, PO Box 1484 Unit D Preston PR2 0ET
Telephone: 0300 111 3000
Email: **info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk**
Website: **www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk**

Taking a building safety complaint to the Building Safety Regulator

Tenants and leaseholders can bring a building safety complaint to the Building Safety Regulator for investigation if they have completed the Council's complaint process and the issues have not been resolved. They can also refer a building safety complaint to the Building Safety Regulator if they feel unable to raise their concerns with the Council.

Guidance on how to complain about a building safety risk in a high-rise residential building can be found at:

Complain about a building safety risk in a high-rise building - GOV.UK

An online portal for asking the BSR a question, or to log a complaint, can be found at:

https://www.contact-building-safety-regulator.service.gov.uk/

Complaint Handling

The Council has a two stage complaints process.

When a complaint is logged at Stage 1 or escalated to Stage 2, the Council will set out our understanding of the complaint and the outcomes the customer is seeking. This is referred to as "the complaint definition". If any aspect of the complaint is unclear, we will ask the customer for clarification. We will be clear about which aspects of the complaint we are, and are not, responsible for investigating and clarifying any areas where this is not clear.

At each stage of the complaints process, the complaint handlers will:

- deal with complaints on their merits, act independently, and have an open mind.
- give the customer a fair chance to set out their position.
- take measures to address any actual or perceived conflict of interest.
- and consider all relevant information and evidence carefully.

Where a response to a complaint will fall outside the timescales set out in this policy, the Council will agree with the customer suitable intervals for keeping them informed about their complaint.
A full record will be kept of the complaint, and the outcomes at each stage. This will include the original complaint and the date received, all correspondence with the customer, correspondence with other parties, and any relevant supporting

documentation such as reports or surveys.

The Council will ensure appropriate remedies can be provided at any stage of the complaints process without the need for escalation.

The Council has a policy and procedure in place for managing unacceptable behaviour from customers and/or their representatives. Please see our Unacceptable Behaviour Policy for further information.

The Council has a two stage complaints process. We will consider which complaints can be responded to as early as possible, and which require further investigation. We will consider factors such as the complexity of the complaint and whether the customer is vulnerable or at risk.

Complaints that identify a housing hazard which may present a significant risk of harm to a resident will be referred to the appropriate service area without delay for assessment and action. Any investigation, safety measures or remedial works required will be progressed alongside the complaints process and will not be delayed pending the complaint outcome.

Most Stage 1 complaints can be resolved promptly with an explanation, apology or resolution provided to the customer.

The Council will ensure that any communication and information will be provided to the customer in their preferred method to meet accessibility needs.

Stage 1

Will be acknowledged, defined and logged within **5 working days the complaint being received**.

The Council will issue a full response to Stage 1 complaints within **10 working days of the complaint being acknowledged**. If an extension to this timescale is needed when considering the complexity of the complaint, we will inform the customer of the expected timescale for response. Any extension will be no more than 10 working days without good reason, and the reason(s) will be clearly explained to the customer, and they will be provided with contact details of the Housing Ombudsman Service.

A complaint response will be provided to the customer when the answer to the complaint is known, not when the outstanding actions required to address the issue are completed.

Outstanding actions will be tracked and actioned promptly with appropriate updates provided to the resident. The response will address all points raised in the complaint definition and provide clear reasons for any decisions, referencing the relevant policy, law and good practice where appropriate.

Where customers raise additional complaints during the investigation, these will be incorporated into the Stage 1 response if they are related, and the Stage 1 response has not been issued. Where the Stage 1 response has been issued, the new issues

are unrelated to the issues already being investigated or it would unreasonably delay the response, the new issues will be logged as a new complaint.

The written complaint response to the customer at the completion of Stage 1 will be in clear, plain language and include:

- the complaint stage.
- the complaint definition;
- the decision on the complaint;
- the reasons for any decisions made;
- the details of any remedy offered to put things right;
- details of any outstanding actions; and
- details of how to escalate the matter to Stage 2 if the individual is not satisfied with the response.

Stage 2

If all or part of the complaint is not resolved to the satisfaction of the customer at stage 1, it will be escalated to Stage 2. The Stage 2 investigation is not conducted by the same person that considered the complaint at stage 1.

Requests for Stage 2 must be acknowledged, defined and logged at Stage 2 of the complaint's procedure within **5 working days of the escalation request being received**.

Customers are not required to explain their reasons for requesting Stage 2. The Council will make reasonable efforts to understand why a customer remains unhappy as part of its Stage 2 response.

We will issue a final response to Stage 2 within **20 working days of the complaint being acknowledged**. If an extension to this timescale is needed when considering the complexity of the complaint, we will inform the customer of the expected timescale for response. Any extension must be no more than 20 working days without good reason, and the reason(s) will be clearly explained to the customer, and they will be provided with contact details of the Housing Ombudsman Service.

A complaint response will be provided to the customer when the answer to the complaint is known, not when the outstanding actions required to address the issue are completed.

Outstanding actions will be tracked and actioned promptly with appropriate updates provided to the resident. The response will address all points raised in the complaint definition and provide clear reasons for any decisions, referencing the relevant policy, law and good practice where appropriate.
The written complaint response to the customer at the completion of Stage 2 will be in clear, plain language and include:

- the complaint stage;
- the complaint definition;
- the decision on the complaint;

- the reasons for any decisions made;
- the details of any remedy offered to put things right;
- details of any outstanding actions; and
- details of how to escalate the matter to the Ombudsman Service if the individual remains dissatisfied.

Stage 2 is the Councils final response and will involve all suitable members needed to issue such a response.

Putting things right

Where something has gone wrong the Council will acknowledge this and set out the actions it has already taken, or intends to take, to put things right. This can happen at any stage of the process, without the need for escalation. These can include:

- Apologising;
- Acknowledging where things have gone wrong;
- Providing an explanation, assistance or reasons;
- Taking action if there has been delay;
- Reconsidering or changing a decision;
- Amending a record or adding a correction or addendum;
- Providing a financial remedy;
- Changing policies, procedures or practices

Any remedy will reflect the impact on the customer as a result of any fault identified and take account of the guidance issued by the HOS. The remedy offer will clearly set out what will happen and by when, in agreement with the customer where appropriate. Any remedy proposed will be followed through to completion.

Any financial remedy will be offered in conjunction with our Compensation Policy.

Scrutiny and oversight

We recognise the importance of learning from complaints and value the opportunities they give us to make improvements. We will share what we've learned and the service improvements we implement with customers, colleagues, and relevant committees. The following people have lead responsibilities for complaints in our organisation:

- The Member Responsible for Complaints (the MRC) is a member of the Council Housing Management Board who is appointed to have lead responsibility for complaints to support a positive complaint handling culture. This is the Cabinet Member for Homes and Planning
- The senior lead person is a senior manager who is accountable for complaint handling. This person must assess any themes or trends to identify potential systemic issues, serious risks, or policies and procedures that require revision. Currently, this is the Performance Lead.
- The Complaints Panel regularly reviews complaints learnings and trends and to ensure compliance with this policy and to make recommendations for future handling and management of complaints**.** A summary of all building safety complaints will also be provided to the Complaints Panel**.** A copy of the

Complaint Panels Terms of Reference is available at appendix 1.

We will publish learning from complaints on the website 'You Said, We Did' and in annual report as per measurements set out in the Tenants Together Charter (TTC). Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) are reported to the Council as part of the monthly Housing Management Contract reporting requirements.

Self-assessment, compliance and reporting

We will produce an annual complaints performance and service improvement report. This report, alongside our Council Housing Management Board, is published in the complaints section of our website.

The Housing Ombudsman requires that we self-assess against its Complaint Handling Code 'the Code' each year. We must also carry out a self-assessment following a significant restructure, merger and/or change in procedures.

If we are unable to comply with the Code due to exceptional circumstances, such as a cyber incident, we will inform the Ombudsman, provide information to residents who may be affected and publish this on our website. We will include a timescale for returning to compliance with the Code.

7. Equality and reasonable adjustment statement

We value diversity and work to create an inclusive environment for customers and staff, where everyone has access to the same opportunities. We welcome our responsibility to comply with equalities legislation and regulatory requirements that relate to equity, diversity and inclusion and aim to do more.

Through our activities we aim to remove systemic barriers to equal opportunities and eliminate all forms of discrimination, harassment, and victimisation within our organisation. We are committed to providing excellent customer services, which are fair, equitable and inclusive. As such, we will endeavour to understand and make any reasonable adjustments required for customers in line with our Reasonable Adjustment Statement and the Equality Act 2010. Any reasonable adjustment provided will be recorded and kept under active review.

8. Related Documents

Reasonable Adjustment Statement
Compensation Policy
Unreasonable Behaviour Policy
Complaints Panel Terms of Reference

9. Equality Analysis

Results of EA / Actions taken forward to mitigate any potential negative impacts	Inform that this policy can be provided in alternative formats.

	Inform about the ongoing equality and diversity training for staff in the delivery of this policy.

See appendix 2 for full Equality and Diversity Impact Assessment.

10. Consultation and Business Intelligence

The policy was created in consultation with the Council`s tenants, leaseholders and staff.

11. Monitoring and review

The Council Housing Management Board has responsibility for the monitoring and review of this policy. This policy will be reviewed every three years starting from the date it is approached and adopted.

Complaints will be recorded through the housing management system and reported via a dynamic dashboard which is available to teams and managers across the Council Housing Management Service.

There will be continuous monitoring of complaints insight using intelligence from a complaint's dashboard and satisfaction surveys.

Reports will be shared with Service managers, Complaints Panel, and other Council departments as deemed required. The Complaint Panel will undertake regular reviews of complaint management.

For complaints in relation to building safety, the Council`s Head of Council Housing Management Service (Principal Accountable Person), will be provided with an update of any complaints received, the outcome of the complaint and any action taken in response to the complaint. A record of all building safety complaints is to be maintained by the Council Housing Management Service.

Satisfaction with handling complaints is part of the tenant satisfaction measures that are collected and reported in line with regulatory guidance.

Regular audits will be carried out to ensure compliance with policy and guidance.

This policy will be reviewed annually or where there have been significant changes to regulation, legislation, operations or best practice to warrant a further policy review.

12. Approval and Review History

The approval route for all policies and procedures is via the Cabinet Member for Homes and Planning who has delegated powers for policy approval from the Council`s Executive Cabinet.

Version	Approved by	Date
Approval V1.3	Cabinet Member for Homes and Planning	30 June 2023.
Approval V2.	Cabinet Member for Homes and Planning	12 June 2024
Approval V2.1	Cabinet Member for Homes and Planning	4 August 2024
Approval V2.2	Cabinet Member for Homes and Planning	3 July 2025
Approval V2.5	Cabinet Member for Homes and Planning	28 May 2026
Approval V2.6	Cabinet Member for Homes and Planning	29 October 2026

13. Document Revision History

Date amended	Version	Key Changes
30/06/2023	V1.3	New policy to comply with Housing Ombudsman Code of Conduct replacing CW&C Complaints, Compliments and Suggestion Policy.
15/05/2024	V2	Revised policy to comply with Housing Ombudsman new Handling Code (April 2024)
26/06/2024	V2.1	Revised version following tenant feedback: • Further clarification on exclusion around anti-social behaviour. • Improvement of layout to policy document. • Additional information within the Scrutiny and Oversight section around reporting and monitoring. • Additional information in the Complaint Handling section around communication and information. • Additional information in the Accessibility and Awareness section around examples of reasonable adjustments. • Made clear that this policy document can be provided in alternative formats. Informed about the ongoing equality and diversity training being provided to staff in the delivery of this policy.
02/06/2025	V2.2	Added specific text around building safety complaints.
17/09/2025	V2.3	Revised version to take into account the insourcing of the housing management service from ForHousing to the Council.
01/05/2026	V2.4	Revised to take into account Ombudsman suggestions for amendments
22/05/2026	V2.5	Policy revised following insourcing of housing management services, updates to revised service structure and contact information. No substantive changes have been made to the policy.
29/10/2026	V2.6	Policy revised to include reference to Awaab Law phase 2 hazards in relation to complaint handling. Additional

		information in relation to external utility and infrastructure failure.

Appendix 1 – Equality and Diversity Impact Assessment

Area of activity or change	**Complaints Policy**
IMDF Approval	**Allan Batty, Senior Housing Policy Officer**

STAGE ONE - SCOPING	**Outlines the decision that is being made any why**
STAGE TWO - RESEARCH	**Outlines the collaboration and research that will inform this decision**
STAGE THREE - FINDINGS AND NEXT STEPS	**Considers how learnings from research and engagement are being embedded, the potential impact of the decision on different people and how these can best be managed.**

STAGE ONE – SCOPING	
Consider points such as: • Where has the proposed activity or change come from and why is it needed? • Why is it important to Council? • How will this affect the tenant / customer journey or colleague experience?	**What activity or change is being proposed and why?** • The new code comes into effect on the 1st April 2024 when we need to be compliant from. Housing Associations with more than 1,000 homes have until 30th June 2024 to confirm compliance by the completion of the Handling Code. Our re-designed process is almost complete and so it provides the perfect opportunity to bring everything together and develop new policies that align with our focus of providing a sector-leading complaints service, with a full end to end experience for both customers and colleagues alike, placing the customer at the centre; ensuring that the new service offer is consistent, efficient and easy to navigate with regular communication to the customer, keeping them informed and updated on the progress of their complaint, whilst also ensuring that we are compliant with the new code.
	What benefits are you trying to achieve? • Compliance with the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code • A process and policy that aligns to the new and improved customer focussed complaints service • A fair and consistent complaints service • A complaints service which aligns to the Regulator of Housing Consumer Standards
STAGE TWO – RESEARCH	
Consider points such as:	**Who will help develop your thinking so that different experiences and perspectives are included?**

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<tr><td rowspan="2">

What groups or individuals will you approach to discuss this?
How will you ensure that these people are diverse and representative? (See Equity and Diversity table in stage three)
Is there any data you can look at to support you?

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We are planning to consult with the Complaints Feedback Panel who will be key in ensuring that the policies are developed with customers at the forefront and that decisions made around compensation levels etc are fair and ensure equality for all customers.
We also have a deeper level of understanding about the frustrations felt by customers when making a complaint following on from the discovery work undertaken by the Business Analysts as well as the feedback received via the central team with their ongoing communication with customers when handling their complaints. The stage 2 reviews are a really valuable tool to understand how our processes and policies can support or indeed hinder the effective handling of complaints and this too will be considered when developing the new policies.
We have also liaised with local Housing Associations to review their complaints and compensation policies.
It must be noted that there are certain elements of the complaints policy in particular that will be quite prescriptive as it is requested by the Housing Ombudsman and therefore must be detailed in the policy to ensure we are complaint.

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What research will you do to inform your understanding?

Review all relevant requirements, including good practice
Feedback gathered via Complaints Feedback Panel
Extensive research undertaken by other housing associations
Customer satisfaction surveys – perception (TSMs) and transactional surveys
Complaints feedback
Stage 2 reviews
Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code
Feedback from colleagues dealing with complaints

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<tr><td colspan="2">STAGE THREE – FINDINGS AND NEXT STEPS</td></tr>
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Consider points such as:

What have people told you are some of the key issues?
What good practice is happening in other organisations?
What changes are you planning to make because of the things you’ve found out?

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What have you learnt from your research and engagement?

Consultation with tenants and leaseholders informed on minor changes to the policy which is recorded in the final document.
In addition to the above, the Complaints Panel agreed with the content of the Complaints Policy, a considerable amount of the content is non-negotiable as it must align to the Handling Code so we are compliant. Panel supported the inclusion of the following within the Complaints Policy;

Definition of a complaint
Complaint Exclusions
Accessibility and Awareness to complaints process
Complaint Handling Staff – team assigned to take responsibility

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	➢ **Complaint Handling Process – stage 1 and stage 2 process** ➢ **Putting things right** ➢ **Scrutiny and Oversight** Panel made some suggestions to the Compensation Policy which included. • Compensation payments must be fair and proportionate • Considered on its individual merits but promotes consistency The policy should be **clear** that the aim of providing redress is to restore a person to the position they would have been in had the service failure not occurred. It should also emphasise that there are other remedies available to put a situation right but that in some instances, financial compensation may be the only and appropriate form of redress.
	How will you embed what you've learnt into your activity or change? • Make relevant minor changes to the policy • Inform within the document that this can be provided in alternative formats. • Inform about the ongoing equality and diversity training being provided to staff in the delivery of this policy. • In addition to the above, enhanced scrutiny has been introduced to ensure that compensation payments are fair and proportionate. All compensation offers over £250 are reviewed by the Complaints Lead to align with policy. Additionally, compensation offers at Stage 2 are reviewed and signed off by the Executive Management Team (EMT) during Stage 2 review meetings.

Equity and Diversity - Not everyone has the same access to opportunities or services, and the things that make us different – such as the characteristics listed below – can affect our experiences and outcomes. Therefore, it is important to consider how different people could be impacted by any activity or change we want to bring about.				
How could the proposed activity or change affect people with these characteristics (positively or negatively)?		-		+
Age (Younger or older people)	The new complaints policies will aim to provide a much more customer focused service that makes it easier for all our customers to let us know when they are dis-satisfied and no matter what age the tenant making the complaint is, they should feel listened to and supported throughout the process.			
Caring responsibilities (Parents and those looking after an older or disabled person)	The new complaints policies will aim to support colleagues to resolve complaints in an efficient and effective manner. For customers with additional caring responsibilities, the new process has key points within the complaints journey to keep customers updated about their complaint, so they feel informed and involved in the resolution process. This will be detailed in the policy guidance of how to effectively handle complaints.			
Digital inclusion (People without access to digital platforms or devices)	Customers can make a complaint in a number of ways – some do require a digital platform or device however, customers can call the customer connect hub to speak a member of the hub to log a complaint and they can also speak to any colleague who can log a complaint for them. Letters can be sent to the tenant with updates on their complaint if they would prefer this channel of communication to emails or texts. The ways in which customers can log a complaint will be detailed in the policy and/or the guidance			
Educational attainment (People who have experienced barriers to formal education)	The new policies need to consider how the new complaints service will ensure that customers in this category will access information about their complaint, as communication in written format may not be suitable and place customers who struggle to read for example, in a detrimental position.			
Ethnicity, race and nationality (Including migrants, refugees and asylum seekers)	For customers in this characteristic group, they need to be confident that they will be treated fairly and listened to and need to be able to log a complaint in the same way as other customers. Information about logging a complaint needs to be available in different languages and translators made available if needed to ensure that customers can share their concerns and complaints with the Council and also ensure they understand the complaints process and the progress being made with their complaint.			

	This will be referenced within the policy and/or guidance and also make reference to the other relevant policies across the Council.	
Financial inclusion (People experiencing financial barriers or challenges)	Customers who are dis-satisfied with a service may need to be compensated to ensure that they are not negatively impacted from a financial perspective. Whatever a tenant's financial status is, they should expect to receive the same standard and be considered for compensation in a fair and consistent manner and this will form the basis of the remedies and compensation policy.	
Marriage / civil partnership (Legal union between different-sex or same-sex couples)	Whatever customer's marital status, they should receive a consistent and fair service when logging a complaint. The new complaints service should not negatively impact any one and so being married or in a civil partnership should not be an issue and this will be reflected in the new policies/guidance.	
Mental health (People with a mental disability or ill-health)	We need to ensure that customers feel comfortable and confident logging complaints. If a customer is living with mental health issues, the way in which colleagues liaise and work with the customer may need to be adjusted, to ensure that the customer feels supported and listened to appropriately. This again will be reflected in the new policies/guidance.	
Neurodiversity (Such as people with ADHD, Autism, Dyslexia, Dyspraxia)	Our approach to customers in this characteristic group needs to be very similar to that for mental health – we need to be able to support our neurodiverse customers and understand how to do this. Training will again play a key role in supporting colleagues to do this and will need to be part of the bespoke training packages developed and will be reflected in the new policies/guidance.	
Physical health (People with a physical disability or ill-health)	Customers with a physical disability or ill-health need to be confident that their complaint will be managed in a timely and effective manner so that it does not negatively impact on their health. We also need to ensure that if a complaint involves a repair and maintenance issues for example, that the tenant is still able to access their home how they need to.	
Pregnancy and maternity (Someone who is pregnant or has recently given birth)	Customers who are pregnant or recently given birth should not be negatively impacted by the changes being made to the complaints service and this will be reflected in the new policies/guidance. Customers should be clear on the process of logging a complaint and what they should expect throughout the complaint journey.	
Religion, faith or belief (All religions and faiths, including people with no religion)	Through improved processes related to data that we hold, we will have a greater understanding in terms of the religion/belief of customers. This data will be used by the complaints team to ensure we tailor services to suit the needs of customers with different religious beliefs. Examples include understanding religious activity and	

	knowing to check with the tenant if an appointment is appropriate on certain days or times of day.	
Sex (Men and women)	Customer profiling data, including gender, will be collated, stored and utilised to ensure that services are equitable, making the new complaints service fair and consistent for all customers.	

Managing positive and negative effects	
Consider points such as: • Do you need to escalate any issues or seek legal advice? • Can you see any opportunities to promote or celebrate positive outcomes? • How will you build monitoring into the implementation of your activity or change and who will you report to?	**If potential negative effects have been identified, how will any harm be reduced or avoided?** All characteristics should feel valued and listened to when logging a complaint and whilst waiting for a resolution and this will be detailed within the new policies and guidance. We will continually test the development of the new complaints journey and service with the above characteristics in mind to ensure that the end result produces the high-quality service we are striving for, for every one of our customers and is reflected withing the policies and guidance.
	If potential positive effects have been identified, how can we ensure these are realised? The complaints team will be asked to continually reflect on whether the new service and associated policies being developed meets the project aims and objectives and supports the positive impact we are aiming for, for all customers.
	How and when will the impacts of your activity or change be monitored moving forward? The policies and associated guidance will be published by 30th June 2024 and will form part of the review of the new process when this takes place once the system has been operational for 6 months. The policies will then be reviewed on at least an annual basis.

Appendix 2 – Complaints Panel Terms of Reference

1. Background

The Complaints Panel was established to provide a specialist focus on complaints across all housing management services provided to our tenants and leaseholders. We see the complaints process as an opportunity for our tenants to provide us with feedback about the services we provide so that we can use their feedback and take appropriate action to help us continuously improve.

Complaints are an important measure of the organisation's performance. The purpose of the Complaints Panel is to drive change across our housing management service and raise standards for our tenants and leaseholders. The Panel will achieve this by undertaking quality checks on all aspects of complaint handling and performance, analysing and understanding themes for complaints and spotlighting areas for further investigation. The Panel will ensure learning from complaints drives improvements for all our tenants and leaseholders. To protect our tenants and leaseholders, all information provided to the Complaints Panel will be in an anonymised format.

2. Role of the Complaints Panel

It should be noted that the role of the Complaints Panel is not to deal with individual complaints instead, the Panel is:

- To ensure that we are following best practice as set out within the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code, including their dispute resolution principles and there is a positive complaint handling culture developing through continuous listening, learning and improvement.
- To meet the requirements of the Housing Regulator's Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard that states that Landlords should: "have an approach to complaints that is clear, simple and accessible that ensures that complaints are resolved promptly, politely and fairly".
- To have an overview of our quarterly performance and challenge emerging themes and performance trends in complaint performance and tenant satisfaction with complaint handling and outcome.
- To report quarterly to the Council Housing Management Board the following:
  - Their view that the mechanisms are in place to identify and deal with the root cause of complaints and escalate any gaps / weaknesses.
  - To review and provide feedback on a random sample of anonymised customer complaint journeys.
  - To review learning from complaints and any Housing Ombudsman Service determinations.
  - To review evidence that the lessons learnt have been put into practice and embedded within the organisation that demonstrate positive outcomes for tenants.

- To oversee the implementation of agreed improvements via an action plan that the Panel monitor and sign off.

- To co-create the Annual Ombudsman Complaint Handling self-assessment with all tenant board member colleagues.
- To keep up to date with wider sector trends and ensure learning from the Housing Ombudsman Annual Complaints review and their determinations publicised on their website.
- To consider complaint processes against complaint handling procedures and make any recommendations for improvement.
- Identifying areas for Tenant Inspectors and Mystery Shoppers (TIMS) when required.
- Influencing future service reviews for a particular service area (when required).
- Reporting any findings back that are relevant to other committees/panels e.g. Building Safety Forum.
- To provide a lived experience viewpoint on decision making when required.
- Ensuring equality, diversity and inclusion considerations are paramount when taking into account all aspects of complaint resolution.
- Contribute to the Together with Tenants Charter Annual Report and assist in the reviewing of the Complaints Policy every three years or as required.

3. Operation of the Complaints Panel

3.1 Frequency of meetings

The Complaints Panel will meet each quarter, additional meetings may be set to cover training and development.

3.2 Attendance

Members of the Complaints Panel should make every effort to attend meetings, however, should a member be unable to attend then they should send their apologies to the Chair.

Any member missing a meeting without giving prior apologies may be contacted by the chair and/or the Housing Management Service Contracts Manager. If a Complaints Panel member fails to attend three meetings in any rolling 12-month period without giving prior apologies, it will be assumed they no longer wish to be a member of the Panel and their membership will be terminated.

3.3 Administration

Information relating to the complaint sample will be produced and circulated five working days prior to each meeting. A “meeting summary” detailing action points from each Complaints Panel will be recorded and circulated to all members within ten days of the meeting date. These documents will be reviewed at the beginning of each meeting.

3.4 Panel Membership

Membership of the Complaints Panel will comprise of the following:

- a maximum of 4 tenants selected and recruited based on their skills of which two tenants must be tenant board members.
- the Chair must be a Councillor who is also a member of the Council Housing Management Board.
- The Council`s Housing Management Service Contracts Manager and the Senior Housing Policy Officer will also be part of the Panel as advisors to the Chair.
- The quorum of the Panel will be 2 members plus the Chair.

The Chair will receive additional appropriate training and will be responsible for agreeing with the Contracts Manager meeting agendas, identifying any training needs and proposing discussion items.

Membership will be for 3 years but can be extended if required. Where a member leaves the Panel before the end of the term, a recruitment process will be undertaken. All terms are subject to an annual review. Membership of the Complaints Panel is only open to those who meet at least one of the following criteria:

- Current council tenant; or
- Current customers of council housing management services, i.e., are currently in receipt of, and pay for, regular or periodic ongoing services, e.g., leaseholder.
- Exclusions apply to the following groups: whom may not be eligible to apply:
  - Members of staff; or
  - Tenants who are in material or serious breach of their tenancy or lease agreements
  - Anyone under 18

All vacancies are publicised, and anyone who is interested and eligible can express an interest. New members to the Complaints Panel will be appointed through a selection process and will participate in complaint and resolution training when required.

We estimate that the time commitment for the role is around 3 hours per quarter. This is likely to feel busier at the beginning with induction.

4. Panel Member rules and responsibilities

All Panel members will be required to abide by the following rules and responsibilities:

- Panel members with a live complaint within the complaints process will be asked to declare an interest until the complaint has been fully resolved.
- Members will be expected to act as individuals and not represent any interested group, area or political party.
- Any member who is in breach of their tenancy conditions or becomes involved in any activity which brings the Panel into disrepute will be suspended, pending investigation, and may be asked to resign.
- If a group member wishes to resign, they should inform the Chair in writing or by email.

- All members must sign the code of conduct and confidentiality agreement.
- Any Panel member who breaches the code of conduct will be asked to leave the Panel and therefore will no longer be a member of the Complaints Panel.

5. Equal opportunities

The Complaints Panel is an advisory panel to the Customer Experience Committee Subgroup and will ensure that it meets the public sector equality duty namely: that the Complaints Panel take account of equality as part of its work and will consider the impact of any policies on tenants who share protected characteristics.

6. Review

The Complaints Panel will review its operation and terms of reference after the first year and thereafter every three years.