

Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code

Self-assessment 2019-2020

London Borough of Camden

All data is based on complaints relating to services provided by the Council as Landlord ie Housing Management and Property Management for the period April 2019 to March 2020.

The self-assessment will be reviewed and updated annually.

Compliance with the Complaint Handling Code			
1	Definition of a complaint	Yes	No
	<p>Does the complaints process use the following definition of a complaint?</p> <p><i>An expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the organisation, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting an individual resident or group of residents.</i></p> <p>London Borough of Camden uses a Plain English definition:</p> <p>‘When someone lets us know that they are unhappy with our service and they want us to take action to resolve it’.</p>	√	
	Does the policy have exclusions where a complaint will not be considered?	√	
	<p>Are these exclusions reasonable and fair to residents?</p> <p>Evidence relied upon</p> <p>Our policy states: When we are unable or may not investigate a complaint</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We may not investigate if legal proceedings are pending. The complaints manager will decide whether to investigate each case on an individual basis having taken legal advice when necessary • We cannot investigate any complaints where the Court has made a decision about the subject of the complaint • We cannot investigate when the complaint is not about Camden Council or a contractor or partner acting on our behalf 	√	

	<p>There are some types of complaints that fall outside the scope of this policy because there are other more suitable processes for dealing with them.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complaints about Councillors. Complaints of this nature are dealt with by Camden’s Standards Committee • Complaints about your planning application. If we have refused your planning application for development or works where consent is required by planning law, in most cases you have a right to appeal to the Planning Inspectorate. We cannot investigate any decisions made by the Planning Inspectorate Make an appeal to the Planning Inspectorate • You disagree with a housing benefit decision. You can ask us to explain the reasons for the decision. If you still disagree, you can: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ask us to reconsider the decision or ○ Appeal to an independent appeals tribunal Dispute a housing benefit decision • You want to challenge a Penalty Charge Notice (PCN), you can: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ask us to reconsider the decision or ○ Appeal to the Environment and Traffic Adjudicators Dispute a Penalty Charge Notice <p>We will not accept a complaint outside of the following timescales except where exceptional reasons for the delay can be demonstrated.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the complaint is submitted longer than 12 months after the date of the incident • a request for a stage 2 review is submitted longer than 28 calendar days of the stage 1 response <p>If we receive persistent malicious, rude, offensive or vexatious communications that we consider to be unreasonable behaviour, we may refuse to handle the complaint (and close the complaint).</p>		
2	Accessibility		
	<p>Are multiple accessibility routes available for residents to make a complaint?</p> <p>Residents can make a complaint via:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Telephone • Online e-form • Email • Social media • Letter (Post) 	√	
	Is the complaints policy and procedure available online?	√	
	Do we have a reasonable adjustments policy?		√

	<p>There is no formal policy directly in relation to complaints handling but the council does have accessibility policies for residents to allow them to access services and communications.</p>		
	<p>Do we regularly advise residents about our complaints process?</p> <p>In all communications and interactions with residents, all staff advise residents of the complaints procedures should they want it.</p> <p>Our complaints webpages give details of our policy and procedures, annual reports and escalation procedures.</p>	√	
3	Complaints team and process		
	<p>Is there a complaint officer or equivalent in post?</p> <p>There is a centralised complaints team co-ordinating the complaints handling across the council. This is made up of complaints officers, case co-ordinators and a complaints team leader who manages the team. Above this is the service manager.</p> <p>Some service areas have local case management officers who handle complaints for the specified areas. These are in Housing Repairs and Housing Needs</p>	√	
	<p>Does the complaint officer have autonomy to resolve complaints?</p> <p>All the above roles have autonomy to resolve complaints. All the service-based roles (case management officers, service officers and managers) that deal with complaints to their service area also have autonomy to resolve stage 1 complaints.</p>	√	
	<p>Does the complaint officer have authority to compel engagement from other departments to resolve disputes?</p> <p>All the above roles have authority to compel engagement from other departments. There is an escalation process.</p>	√	
	<p>If there is a third stage to the complaints procedure are residents involved in the decision making?</p> <p>There is no third stage for Housing complaints.</p>		√
	Is any third stage optional for residents?		√
	Does the final stage response set out residents' right to refer the matter to the Housing Ombudsman Service?	√	
	Do we keep a record of complaint correspondence including correspondence from the resident?	√	

	At what stage are most complaints resolved? Stage 1		
4	Communication		
	Are residents kept informed and updated during the complaints process?	√	
	Are residents informed of the landlord's position and given a chance to respond and challenge any area of dispute before the final decision? At stage 1 a response from the landlord will explain our position and the resident is free to respond back and challenge. The service will then try to resolve any ongoing issues before formally going to stage 2. If ongoing issues remain unresolved then a formal stage 2 is offered. The complaints officer will speak to the resident about their complaint and they have a chance to provide their views to inform the stage 2 investigation.	√	
	Are all complaints acknowledged and logged within five days? This is currently not formally measured but spot checks are carried out periodically as part of staff performance management. The majority of complaints are acknowledged and logged within 5 days. A new case management system to be introduced in Autumn 2021 will be able to measure each task carried out in the workflow and this will become a formal KPI. Time taken to acknowledge and log will be measured.		√
	Are residents advised of how to escalate at the end of each stage?	√	
	What proportion of complaints are resolved at stage one? [* LB Camden has taken this to mean 'the number of complaints that did <u>not</u> progress to stage 2'.] Stage 1 complaints = 564 Stage 2 complaints = 55 Proportion resolved at stage 1 = 90%		
	What proportion of complaints are resolved at stage two? [* LB Camden has taken this to mean 'the number of complaints that did <u>not</u> progress to a Housing Ombudsman decision'.] Stage 2 complaints = 55 HO decisions = 19 Proportion resolved at stage 2 = 65%		

<p>What proportion of complaint responses are sent within Code timescales?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stage one (1-10 working days) 27% • Stage one (with extension) (11-20 working days) 24% • Stage two (1-20 working days) • Stage two (with extension) (21-30 working days) <p>LB Camden works to 25 working days to respond to a stage 2 complaint in relation to any Council service (not just Housing related) in order to be consistent across all service areas and avoid any confusion.</p> <p>For all stage 2 complaints (76) LB Camden responded within 25 working days to 64% of these.</p> <p>It is not currently possible to determine time taken by specific service areas. However, given the majority of stage complaints were housing related (55), it can be assumed that just over 60% of these were responded to within 25 working days.</p>		
<p>Where timescales have been extended did we have good reason?</p>	√	
<p>Where timescales have been extended did we keep the resident informed?</p>	√	
<p>What proportion of complaints do we resolve to residents' satisfaction [LB Camden takes this to mean the proportion of complaints that are not escalated to a further stage].</p> <p>88% of complaints are resolved to residents' satisfaction</p>		
<p>5 Cooperation with Housing Ombudsman Service</p>		
<p>Were all requests for evidence responded to within 15 days?</p>		√
<p>Where the timescale was extended did we keep the Ombudsman informed?</p>	√	
<p>6 Fairness in complaint handling</p>		
<p>Are residents able to complain via a representative throughout?</p> <p>Our policy states:</p> <p>We accept feedback from third parties on behalf of someone else, such as family members, friends or representatives, solicitors, advice agencies or advocacy workers. This also includes ward councillors who are able to assist people through the process. To comply with the Data Protection Laws, we must have written and signed consent from the citizen before we respond to a third party.</p>	√	

	If advice was given, was this accurate and easy to understand?	√	
	How many cases did we refuse to escalate? We do not currently formally monitor this. What was the reason for the refusal? Reasons for refusal to escalate are the same as the exclusions to consider a complaint in the earlier section: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will not escalate if legal proceedings are pending or the complaint is about a Court decision. • We will not escalate when the complaint is not about Camden Council or a contractor or partner acting on our behalf • We will not escalate when complaints fall outside the scope of this policy because there are other more suitable processes for dealing with them (see earlier section on “refusing a complaint”) • We will not accept a complaint outside of the timescales • We will not escalate a complaint if we receive persistent malicious, rude, offensive or vexatious communications that we consider to be unreasonable behaviour 		
	Did we explain our decision to the resident?	√	
7	Outcomes and remedies		
	Where something has gone wrong are we taking appropriate steps to put things right?	√	
8	Continuous learning and improvement		
	What improvements have we made as a result of learning from complaints? Housing Repairs As part of the restructure started in 2019/2020 and completed in August 2020, we established the Property Customer Services and Engagement Team. Within this team we have brought together all of our case management officers who are analysing our casework and complaints and identifying what needs to be addressed within the service. A new priorities timeframes policy means we are open and upfront with residents about how long it would take for a job to be completed. This approach is now showing a general decrease in complaints about wait times. Extensive work is being undertaken with our heating contractors to improve their service to residents.		

<p>The team has also implemented improved communications for lift repairs where parts need to be ordered and services are offline for a period of time.</p> <p>A new approach to managing complaints with extensive focus on reducing poor service delivery and where needed improvement plans in place.</p> <p>Completion of data capture sheets, following completion of every complaint that adopts a lessons learnt approach for relevant action to be taken.</p> <p>Customer satisfaction engagement surveys with residents on a monthly basis. Any negative feedback is followed up directly.</p> <p>The Case Management team has been restructured so that individuals are not just focussing on one area of the service. They now support other colleagues in this team and already the number of cases classed as overdue is now the lowest level to date.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Landlord Services - Service Improvement</p> <p>Throughout 2018/2019, Tenancy Services carried out a systems thinking review to find out what matters to residents in order to redesign the service to meet that demand. The review looked at that demand and included looking at the complaints residents made when things went wrong. As a result in Summer 2019 the new Landlord Service was introduced. The approach is based on knowing the neighbourhood and residents trying to address issues early and helping to build community resilience. Staff are receiving ongoing training and support on how to manage this complex area of work, so they can provide reassurance, involve relevant support agencies early on and take timely legal action as necessary.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Complaints handling – service improvements</p> <p>A large proportion of complaints at all stages relate to how the council services handle those complaints in a timely and satisfactory way.</p> <p>Since April 2019 improvements to the way complaints are handled have been made:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A review of the council’s complaints policies and procedures resulting in a single complaints policy and procedure • Development of a new IT case management system to log and monitor complaints due to be rolled out for complaints in Spring 2021 • Review of Stage 2 investigations processes resulting in a 50% reduction in number of complaints escalating to Stage 2. 		
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Starting the reporting cycle for collation of the annual complaints report 2019/2020 much earlier (from July 2020) to ensure better service involvement and contribution in the process to focus on lessons learnt (however, the coronavirus pandemic has meant services across the council have had to prioritise other work and have not been able to contribute to reports as quickly) • To formally log and report on compliments. This is still in development. • Rollout and training on the new case management system • Service-specific complaints handling training 		
	<p>How do we share these lessons with:</p> <p>a) residents? We write any lessons learnt into the response letter to the resident. On wider communication to residents in general, we publish our annual report which contains lessons learnt</p> <p>b) the board/governing body? The annual report containing lessons learnt is presented to the Revenue and Corporate Performance Scrutiny Committee and to full Cabinet on an annual basis.</p> <p>c) In the Annual Report? The annual report contains a section on lessons learnt for the key service areas</p>		
	<p>Has the Code made a difference to how we respond to complaints?</p> <p>The Code was published in July 2020. The information in this first self assessment is for the period pre-publication of the handling code (April 2019 – March 2020) so the Code was not applied to this data.</p> <p>LB Camden is currently working on its annual report for April 2020 – March 2021 and the Code will have been applied to this data and how it has made a difference.</p> <p>Future self-assessments will include this impact.</p>	<p>N/A for (2019/ 2020)</p>	
	<p>What changes have we made?</p> <p>See above</p>		