

Arun District Council

REPORT TO:	Housing and Wellbeing Committee 25 January 2023
SUBJECT:	Housing Ombudsman Self-assessment
LEAD OFFICER:	Moh Hussein – Interim Head of Housing
LEAD MEMBER:	Councillor Jacky Pendleton
WARDS:	All

CORPORATE PRIORITY / POLICY CONTEXT / CORPORATE VISION:

The report will support the following areas in the corporate vision

Delivering the right homes in the right places

Support those in our community that need help, providing a safety net where necessary and working with people and organisations to meet different needs.

- Ensure the existing housing stock in the district (private sector and council owned) is maintained to a high standard
- Support households with complex needs to secure suitable accommodation

The report will share with members the outcome of our self-assessment against the Housing Ombudsman complaint handling code, this will ensure that the council is being transparent with the decisions made and that it is compliant against the requirements of the code, ensuring we are delivering an effective and fair complaint process.

DIRECTORATE POLICY CONTEXT:

It is a requirement of the Housing Ombudsman complaint handling code that we present an annual self-assessment to members to evidence our performance against the code and publish the results on our website.

As a member of the Housing Ombudsman scheme, we must

- agree to be bound by the terms of the Scheme
- establish and maintain a complaints procedure in accordance with any good practice recommended by the Ombudsman
- as part of that procedure, inform residents of their right to bring complaints to the Ombudsman under the Scheme
- publish its complaints procedure and where applicable, its membership of the Scheme, and make information about both easily accessible to those entitled to complaints on its website and in correspondence with residents
- manage complaints from residents in accordance with its published procedure or, where this is not possible, within a reasonable timescale

Failure to comply with the conditions of membership may result in a Complaint Handling Failure Order and a requirement to rectify within a given timescale

FINANCIAL SUMMARY:

There are no financial implications regarding this report

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report is to present the results of our self-assessment against the Housing Ombudsman's complaint handling code.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Housing and Wellbeing Committee
- 2.2 Note the contents of the self-assessment completed in accordance with the requirements of the Housing Ombudsman complaint handling code
- 2.3 Note that the self-assessment will be published on our website in accordance with the requirements of the Housing Ombudsman complaint handling code

3. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 3.1 The Housing Ombudsman published an updated complaint handling code in April 2022, setting out requirements for social housing providers to meet to respond to complaints effectively and fairly.
- 3.2 The code sets out a requirement for the council to self-assess against the code annually and report the results to members and publish the results on our website.
- 3.3 Non-compliance with the code could result in the Ombudsman issuing complaint handling failure orders.

4. DETAIL

- 4.1 Housing Ombudsman Complaint handling code
- 4.2 The Housing Ombudsman introduced the complaint handling code in July 2020 which set out good practice to allow landlords to respond to complaints effectively and fairly.
- 4.3 They carried out a review of the code one year later and updated it to strengthen provisions to support a positive complaint handling culture. The changes took effect from 1 April 2022, but landlords had until 1 October 2022 to become compliant.

4.4 Key areas of the code

1. Universal definition of a complaint
2. Providing easy access to the complaints procedure and ensuring residents are aware of it, including their right to access the Housing Ombudsman Service
3. The structure of the complaint's procedure - only two stages necessary and clear timeframes set out for responses
4. Ensuring fairness in complaint handling with a resident-focused process
5. Taking action to put things right and appropriate remedies
6. Creating a positive complaint handling culture through continuous learning and improvement
7. Demonstrating learning in annual reports
8. Annual self-assessment against the Code.

4.5 Compliance with the code forms part of our membership obligations set out in the Housing Ombudsman Scheme. Non-compliance with the code could result in the Housing Ombudsman issuing complaint failure handling orders.

4.6 The complaint handling code is attached as Appendix 1

4.7 Self-assessment

4.8 The Housing Ombudsman expects landlords to carry out a self-assessment against the Code and take appropriate action to ensure their landlord/tenant related complaints handling is in line with the Code.

4.9. Local authority landlords are required to report the outcome of their self-assessment to elected Members and for these assessments to be published. While self-assessments are not required to be submitted to the Housing Ombudsman, it may request sight of the self-assessment and evidence in support.

4.10 The Councils self-assessment has been completed and is attached at **Appendix 2**. Where the self-assessment refers to something landlords 'must' do this is a mandatory requirement. Where the self-assessment refers to something landlords 'should' do this is determined to be best practice and landlords are able to use their discretion in how they achieve this.

4.11 The self-assessment concludes that the council is compliant with the complaint handling code. Areas that we acted on to ensure compliance by 1 October 2022 are set out below.

- We updated our Corporate Feedback and Complaint Policy to ensure it complied with the updated Complaint Handling Code, removing our service level stage to only operate a two-stage complaint process.
- Letter templates were developed to ensure consistency in our response to complaints

- All housing staff completed the Housing Ombudsman e-learning on dispute resolution
- Included a regular article in our resident's magazine Arun at Home

4.12 Future improvements

- 4.13 Following the recent approval of the updated corporate complaint policy we are developing an internal process for housing staff to ensure that the policy is fully implemented and complied with, and to ensure ongoing compliance with the complaint handling code
- 4.14 We are developing further training for complaint handlers to ensure consistency when responding to complaints and that they remain up to date with their requirements against the Complaint Handling Code
- 4.15 The implementation of our new housing management system will allow us to improve the ways we capture and report on complaints.

5. CONSULTATION

- 5.1 There is no requirement to consult but moving forward residents will be involved in the annual assessment against the code.

6. OPTIONS / ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

- 6.1 The report is for noting only as it is a requirement of the Housing Ombudsman that we present our self-assessment to elected members on an annual basis

7. COMMENTS BY THE INTERIM GROUP HEAD OF FINANCE/SECTION 151 OFFICER

- 7.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from the report, so no comment is made.

8. RISK ASSESSMENT CONSIDERATIONS

- 8.1 Officers have not identified any requirement for any additional risk assessment process to be conducted in relation to the recommendations in this report.
- 8.2 An annual assessment against the complaint handling code will be carried out to ensure ongoing compliance with the Housing Ombudsman Scheme.

9. COMMENTS OF THE GROUP HEAD OF LAW AND GOVERNANCE & MONITORING OFFICER

9.1 This report raises no implications for the Monitoring Officer and no specific legal implications have been identified.

10. HUMAN RESOURCES IMPACT

10.1 No impact identified

11. HEALTH & SAFETY IMPACT

11.1 No impact identified

12. PROPERTY & ESTATES IMPACT

12.1 No impact identified

13. EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT (EIA) / SOCIAL VALUE

13.1 Completing the self-assessment is a requirement of the Complaint Handling Code, by publishing on our website we are ensuring that our performance against the code is transparent. The outcome of the self-assessment shows that we are compliant with the complaint handling code and that our complaint handling is in line with the requirements of the Housing Ombudsman and supports the equal and consistent treatment of our residents in the way we handle their complaints.

14. CLIMATE CHANGE & ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT/SOCIAL VALUE

14.1 No impact identified

15. CRIME AND DISORDER REDUCTION IMPACT

15.1 No impact identified

16. HUMAN RIGHTS IMPACT

16.1 No impact identified.

17. FREEDOM OF INFORMATION / DATA PROTECTION CONSIDERATIONS

17.1 There are no specific FOI or Data Protection implications

CONTACT OFFICER:

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BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:

Appendix 1 Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code

[The Housing ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code \(housing-ombudsman.org.uk\)](https://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk)

Appendix 2 Housing Ombudsman self-assessment