

NEW FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

HOUSING OMBUDSMAN COMPLAINT HANDLING CODE SELF ASSESSMENT – JUNE 2024

Section 1: Definition of a complaint

Code provision	Code requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence	Commentary / explanation
1.2	A complaint must be defined as: <i>‘an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the landlord, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting a resident or group of residents.’</i>	Yes	The Council’s Corporate Complaints Procedure , at section 3.1 includes the following definition: A corporate complaint is ‘an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the Council, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting a resident or group of residents’.	
1.3	A resident does not have to use the word ‘complaint’ for it to be treated as such. Whenever a resident expresses dissatisfaction landlords must give them the choice to make complaint. A complaint that is submitted via a third party or representative must be handled in line with the landlord’s complaints policy.	Yes	The Corporate Complaints Procedure , at section 3.1 states: ‘Where the above definition is met, the matter will be dealt with as a corporate complaint, even if the complainant does not refer to the matter themselves as a ‘complaint’ The Council does allow complaints submitted by a third party. However, appropriate authority is sought where	

			<p>a third party or representative submits a complaint on someone's behalf. (section 5.2 of the Corporate Complaints Procedure):</p> <p>'A corporate complaint may also be submitted on behalf of a complainant by a third party such as a family member or representative. However, the Council will seek confirmation from the complainant directly that this third party has authority to act on their behalf and have personal information disclosed to them'.</p>	
1.4	<p>Landlords must recognise the difference between a service request and a complaint. This must be set out in their complaints policy. A service request is a request from a resident to the landlord requiring action to be taken to put something right. Service requests are not complaints, but must be recorded, monitored and reviewed regularly.</p>	Yes	<p>The Corporate Complaints Procedure, at section 4 includes 'what is not a corporate complaint'.</p> <p>This includes reference to service requests as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Service requests where an individual is requiring the Council to take action to put something right. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Such service requests will be recorded, monitored and reviewed regularly. o Where an individual expresses dissatisfaction with the response to their service request, a complaint will be raised. Efforts to address the 	

			service request will continue'.	
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1.5	A complaint must be raised when the resident expresses dissatisfaction with the response to their service request, even if the handling of the service request remains ongoing. Landlords must not stop their efforts to address the service request if the resident complains.	Yes	See 1.4 above.	It has been identified through our annual complaints performance and service improvement report that there may be service requests which are not always being dealt with in this way. We have identified steps to try and improve this.
1.6	An expression of dissatisfaction with services made through a survey is not defined as a complaint, though wherever possible, the person completing the survey should be made aware of how they can pursue a complaint if they wish to. Where landlords ask for wider feedback about their services, they also must provide details of how residents can complain.	Yes	<p>The Corporate Complaints Procedure, at section 4 includes 'what is not a corporate complaint'.</p> <p>This includes the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An expression of dissatisfaction with services made through a survey or in response to a request for feedback. <p>o However, individuals will be given details of how to complain should they wish to.</p>	

Section 2: Exclusions

Code provision	Code requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence	Commentary / explanation
2.1	Landlords must accept a complaint unless there is a valid reason not to do so. If landlords decide not to accept a complaint they must be able to evidence their reasoning. Each complaint must be considered on its own merits	Yes	<p>All complaints are accepted, subject to limited exceptions as set out in section 4 of the Corporate Complaints Procedure, 'what is not a corporate complaint'.</p> <p>Section 4.3 states:</p> <p>'Where the Council decides that a complaint cannot be dealt with as a corporate complaint in accordance with this Procedure, we will write to the complainant explaining the reasons for this and advising them of their right to take that decision to the relevant Ombudsman. Each complaint will be considered on its own merits. Please see section 11 below.'</p> <p>Section 11 of the procedure includes information regarding contacting the Ombudsman.</p>	

2.2	<p>A complaints policy must set out the circumstances in which a matter will not be considered as a complaint or escalated, and these circumstances must be fair and reasonable to residents. Acceptable exclusions include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The issue giving rise to the complaint occurred over twelve months ago. • 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. • Matters that have previously been considered under the complaints policy. 	Yes	<p>The Corporate Complaints Procedure, at section 4 includes 'what is not a corporate complaint'.</p> <p>These include: service requests, complaints against a councilor, anonymous complaints, cases where the council or the complainant has started legal proceedings, complaints which have already exhausted the procedure.</p>	
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2.3	Landlords must accept complaints referred to them within 12 months of the issue occurring or the resident becoming aware of the issue, unless they are excluded on other grounds. Landlords must consider whether to apply discretion to accept complaints made outside this time limit where there are good reasons to do so.	Yes	The Corporate Complaints Procedure , at section 4 includes 'what is not a corporate complaint'. This includes the following: 'When the complaint is over 12 months old, and the complainant was aware of the issue but did not report it to the Council. However, exceptions may be made if there is a good reason for the delay'	
2.4	If a landlord decides not to accept a complaint, an explanation must be provided to the resident setting out the reasons why the matter is not suitable for the complaints process and the right to take that decision to the Ombudsman. If the Ombudsman does not agree that the exclusion has been fairly applied, the Ombudsman may tell the landlord to take on the complaint.	Yes	See 2.1 above.	
2.5	Landlords must not take a blanket approach to excluding complaints; they must consider the individual circumstances of each complaint.	Yes	See 2.1 above.	

Section 3: Accessibility and Awareness

Code provision	Code requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence	Commentary / explanation
3.1	Landlords must make it easy for residents to complain by providing different channels through which they can make a complaint. Landlords must consider their duties under the Equality Act 2010 and anticipate the needs and reasonable adjustments of residents who may need to access the complaints process.	Yes	<p>The Corporate Complaints Procedure, at section 6, states that complainants can contact the Council in a number of ways, including by email, via the website, by telephone, by post, through social media or in person.</p> <p>The Corporate Complaints Procedure, at section 7 explains what help can be provided to use the procedure.</p> <p>The Council, as a public authority, will make reasonable adjustments where required to do so. All staff receive equalities training.</p>	
3.2	Residents must be able to raise their complaints in any way and with any member of staff. All staff must be aware of the complaints process and be able to pass details of the complaint to the appropriate person within the landlord.	Yes	<p>The Corporate Complaints Procedure, at section 6, states that complainants can contact the Council in a number of ways, including by email, via the website, by telephone, by post, through social media or in person.</p> <p>Staff awareness is raised periodically through corporate communications and cascading through the Council's Leadership Team.</p>	<p>We are developing training for all staff on complaint handling, recognising complaints, the difference between service requests and complaints and the importance of learning from complaints.</p> <p>We will provide service specific training for services most likely to receive or deal with complaints, including Housing Services and Customer Services.</p>

3.3	High volumes of complaints must not be seen as a negative, as they can be indicative of a well-publicised and accessible complaints process. Low complaint volumes are potentially a sign that residents are unable to complain.	Yes	<p>The Corporate Complaints Procedure, at section 1.1 sets out our aim when it comes to complaints:</p> <p>'New Forest District Council ('the Council') is committed to providing residents, tenants and customers with quality services. However, sometimes things do go wrong. The Council encourages complainants to tell us when this happens so we can put things right, explain what has happened, learn from our mistakes and improve our services.'</p>	We are looking at ways to promote our complaints procedure and ensure complaints are being fully recorded.
3.4	Landlords must make their complaint policy available in a clear and accessible format for all residents. This will detail the two stage process, what will happen at each stage, and the timeframes for responding. The policy must also be published on the landlord's website.	Yes	<p>The Corporate Complaints Procedure is available on the Council's website under the Feedback, comments and complaints page.</p> <p>It is also published in an accessible format.</p> <p>Section 9 sets out the two stage process.</p>	

3.5	The policy must explain how the landlord will publicise details of the complaints policy, including information about the Ombudsman and this Code.	Yes	<p>The Corporate Complaints Procedure, at section 1.4 states:</p> <p>'This Procedure will be published on the Council's website and hard copies will be made available on request'.</p> <p>Section 1.5 states:</p> <p>'This Procedure has been prepared in accordance with the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code and the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code'.</p> <p>The Corporate Complaints Procedure at section 11 includes information about contacting the Ombudsman.</p>	
3.6	Landlords must give residents the opportunity to have a representative deal with their complaint on their behalf, and to be represented or accompanied at any meeting with the landlord.	Yes	The Council does allow complaints submitted by a third party or for a third party representative to act on a complainant's behalf. However, appropriate authority is sought where a third party or representative submits a complaint on someone's behalf. See section 5.2 of the Corporate Complaints Procedure .	

3.7	Landlords must provide residents with information on their right to access the Ombudsman service and how the individual can engage with the Ombudsman about their complaint.	Yes	The Council currently advises complainants in the acknowledgement of their corporate complaint, in the stage 1 response and in the stage 2 response that they can escalate their complaint to the Ombudsman when they have exhausted the procedure. See sections 9.4 and 9.6 of the Corporate Complaints Procedure.	
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Section 4: Complaint Handling Staff

Code provision	Code requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence	Commentary / explanation
4.1	Landlords must have a person or team assigned to take responsibility for complaint handling, including liaison with the Ombudsman and ensuring complaints are reported to the governing body (or equivalent). This Code will refer to that person or team as the 'complaints officer'. This role may be in addition to other duties.	Yes	The Information Governance and Complaints Team has responsibility for complaint handling.	
4.2	The complaints officer must have access to staff at all levels to facilitate the prompt resolution of complaints. They must also have the authority and autonomy to act to resolve disputes promptly and fairly.	Yes	<p>The Information Governance and Complaints Team facilitate the handling of complaints.</p> <p>Stage 1 complaints are dealt with by senior experienced managers and Stage 2 complaints are dealt with by the Council's Monitoring Officer. All of whom have authority and autonomy to resolve complaints.</p> <p>See section 9.6 and 10 of the Corporate Complaints Procedure.</p>	

4.3	Landlords are expected to prioritise complaint handling and a culture of learning from complaints. All relevant staff must be suitably trained in the importance of complaint handling. It is important that complaints are seen as a core service and must be resourced to handle complaints effectively.	Yes	<p>The Council has a culture of learning from complaints.</p> <p>The Corporate Complaints Procedure, at section 1.1 sets out our aim when it comes to complaints:</p> <p>'New Forest District Council ('the Council') is committed to providing residents, tenants and customers with quality services. However, sometimes things do go wrong. The Council encourages complainants to tell us when this happens so we can put things right, explain what has happened, learn from our mistakes and improve our services.'</p> <p>Training is delivered to the Leadership Team on the importance of complaint handling and the importance of learning from complaints.</p>	We are developing training for all staff on complaint handling, recognising complaints, the difference between service requests and complaints and the importance of learning from complaints.
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Section 5: The Complaint Handling Process

Code provision	Code requirement	Comply : Yes / No	Evidence	Commentary / explanation
5.1	Landlords must have a single policy in place for dealing with complaints covered by this Code. Residents must not be treated differently if they complain.	Yes	All complaints are dealt with in accordance with the Corporate Complaints Procedure .	
5.2	The early and local resolution of issues between landlords and residents is key to effective complaint handling. It is not appropriate to have extra named stages (such as 'stage 0' or 'informal complaint') as this causes unnecessary confusion.	Yes	The Corporate Complaints Procedure includes a two stage process which is set out at section 9.	
5.3	A process with more than two stages is not acceptable under any circumstances as this will make the complaint process unduly long and delay access to the Ombudsman.	Yes	See 5.2 above.	
5.4	Where a landlord's complaint response is handled by a third party (e.g. a contractor or independent adjudicator) at any stage, it must form part of the two stage complaints process set out in this Code. Residents must not be	Yes	The Council does not refer complaints to external contractors.	

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	expected to go through two complaints processes.			
5.5	Landlords are responsible for ensuring that any third parties handle complaints in line with the Code.	Yes	The Council does not refer complaints to external contractors.	
5.6	When a complaint is logged at Stage 1 or escalated to Stage 2, landlords must set out their understanding of the complaint and the outcomes the resident is seeking. The Code will refer to this as “the complaint definition”. If any aspect of the complaint is unclear, the resident must be asked for clarification.	Yes	<p>The Corporate Complaints Procedure at section 9.6 includes the following:</p> <p>‘Complaint acknowledged within 5 working days by the Information Governance and Complaints Team. This acknowledgement will set out our understanding of the complaint and the outcome the complainant is seeking. Complainant informed of officer dealing with complaint and expected response date.’</p> <p>If any part of the complaint or the outcome that is being sought is not clear, we include the following in the acknowledgement:</p> <p>‘Please can you confirm by return email what outcome you are seeking to resolve your complaint’.</p> <p>‘If you disagree with the way I have summarised your complaint, please let me know as soon as possible’.</p>	

5.7	When a complaint is acknowledged at either stage, landlords must be clear which aspects of the complaint they are, and are not, responsible for and clarify any areas where this is not clear.	Yes	Our acknowledgement template includes the following if applicable: [You also refer to xxxxxxxx. Please note the Council is not responsible for this element of your complaint. This should be raised with xxxxxxxx]	
5.8	At each stage of the complaints process, complaint handlers must: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. deal with complaints on their merits, act independently, and have an open mind; b. give the resident a fair chance to set out their position; c. take measures to address any actual or perceived conflict of interest; and d. consider all relevant information and evidence carefully. 	Yes	All complaints are dealt with by experienced managers. Training is delivered to the Leadership Team on the importance complaint handling and the requirements of 5.8 of the code.	

5.9	Where a response to a complaint will fall outside the timescales set out in this Code, the landlord must agree with the resident suitable intervals for keeping them informed about their complaint.	Yes	<p>The Corporate Complaints Procedure at section 9.5 includes the following:</p> <p>'Every effort will be made to resolve complaints without undue delay. The Council will aim to meet the timescales set out in this Procedure. However, if an unavoidable delay occurs we will notify the complainant with the reason and provide a revised due date for response. We will aim for any extension to be no more than 10 working days for stage 1 complaints and 20 working days for stage 2 complaints. We will keep the complainant informed including, where appropriate, how often updates will be provided'.</p>	
5.10	Landlords must make reasonable adjustments for residents where appropriate under the Equality Act 2010. Landlords must keep a record of any reasonable adjustments agreed, as well as a record of any disabilities a resident has disclosed. Any agreed reasonable adjustments must be kept under active review.	Yes	<p>The Corporate Complaints Procedure, at section 7 explains what help can be provided to use the procedure.</p> <p>The Council, as a public authority, will make reasonable adjustments where required to do so. All staff receive equalities training.</p> <p>Section 7.5 states:</p> <p>'Where a complainant requires reasonable adjustments to be made to enable them to use this Procedure in accordance with the Equality Act</p>	

			2010 we will make these and keep them under review'	
5.11	Landlords must not refuse to escalate a complaint through all stages of the complaints procedure unless it has valid reasons to do so. Landlords must clearly set out these reasons, and they must comply with the provisions set out in section 2 of this Code.	Yes	Complaints will go through both stages of the Corporate Complaints Procedure , unless they are not considered as a corporate complaint in accordance with section 4, or where it is appropriate for them to be escalated to the final stage in accordance with section 9.3: 'Where it is appropriate, taking into consideration the circumstances of a particular complaint, the Monitoring Officer or the Chief Executive may use their discretion to personally deal with that complaint at stage 2 of this Procedure even if the earlier stage has not been completed. The reasons for this will be explained to the complainant.'	
5.12	A full record must be kept of the complaint, and the outcomes at each stage. This must include the original complaint and the date received, all correspondence with the resident, correspondence with other parties, and	Yes	The Information Governance and Complaints Team keep a full record of all complaints.	

	any relevant supporting documentation such as reports or surveys.			
5.13	Landlords must have processes in place to ensure a complaint can be remedied at any stage of its complaints process. Landlords must ensure appropriate remedies can be provided at any stage of the complaints process without the need for escalation.	Yes	<p>The Corporate Complaints Procedure, at section 1.1 sets out our aim when it comes to complaints:</p> <p>'New Forest District Council ('the Council') is committed to providing residents, tenants and customers with quality services. However, sometimes things do go wrong. The Council encourages complainants to tell us when this happens so we can put things right, explain what has happened, learn from our mistakes and improve our services.'</p> <p>Section 10 sets out requirements for the outcome of complaints. Remedies can be offered at any stage.</p>	
5.14	Landlords must have policies and procedures in place for managing unacceptable behaviour from residents and/or their representatives. Landlords must be able to evidence reasons for putting any restrictions in place and must keep restrictions under regular review.	Yes	The Corporate Complaints Procedure , at section 12, sets out our policy for 'management of unreasonable complainant behaviour'.	

5.15	Any restrictions placed on contact due to unacceptable behaviour must be proportionate and demonstrate regard for the provisions of the Equality Act 2010.	Yes	<p>The Corporate Complaints Procedure, at section 12.12 and 12.13 states:</p> <p>12.12 We understand that some complainants may find it difficult for them to express themselves or communicate clearly, especially when they are anxious or upset. We ask that complainants explain what adjustments they're looking for and how this will ensure they can make a complaint to us in a reasonable way.</p> <p>12.13 However, this 'Management of Unreasonable Complainant Behaviour' section of this Procedure may still be applied if there are actions or behaviours which are having a negative effect on our staff or our work even where a reasonable adjustment has been made. Restrictions imposed will also be appropriate to a complainants' needs and reasonable adjustments can be made where required.'</p>	
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Section 6: Complaints Stages

Stage 1

Code provision	Code requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence	Commentary / explanation
6.1	Landlords must have processes in place to consider which complaints can be responded to as early as possible, and which require further investigation. Landlords must consider factors such as the complexity of the complaint and whether the resident is vulnerable or at risk. Most stage 1 complaints can be resolved promptly, and an explanation, apology or resolution provided to the resident.	Yes	See 5.13 above.	
6.2	Complaints must be acknowledged, defined and logged at stage 1 of the complaints procedure <u>within five working days of the complaint being received.</u>	Yes	The Corporate Complaints Procedure at section 9.6 includes the following: 'Complaint acknowledged within 5 working days by the Information Governance and Complaints Team. This acknowledgement will set out our understanding of the complaint and the outcome the complainant is seeking. Complainant informed of officer dealing with complaint and expected response date.'	

6.3	Landlords must issue a full response to stage 1 complaints <u>within 10 working days</u> of the complaint being acknowledged.	Yes	The Corporate Complaints Procedure at section 9.6 includes the following: 'Stage 1 response sent within 10 working days advising the complainant of the right to escalate the complaint by contacting the Information Governance and Complaints Team (complaints@nfdc.gov.uk). The response will also advise the complainant of their right to escalate their complaint to the relevant Ombudsman when they have exhausted this Procedure'	
6.4	Landlords must decide whether an extension to this timescale is needed when considering the complexity of the complaint and then inform the resident of the expected timescale for response. Any extension must be no more than 10 working days without good reason, and the reason(s) must be clearly explained to the resident..	Yes	The Corporate Complaints Procedure at section 9.5 states: 'Every effort will be made to resolve complaints without undue delay. The Council will aim to meet the timescales set out in this Procedure. However, if an unavoidable delay occurs we will notify the complainant with the reason and provide a revised due date for response. We will aim for any extension to be no more than 10 working days for stage 1 complaints and 20 working days for stage 2 complaints. We will keep the complainant informed including, where appropriate, how often updates will be provided'	

6.5	When an organisation informs a resident about an extension to these timescales, they must be provided with the contact details of the Ombudsman.	Yes	Our template extension of time wording includes details of how to contact the Ombudsman:	
6.6	A complaint response must be provided to the resident when the answer to the complaint is known, not when the outstanding actions required to address the issue are completed. Outstanding actions must still be tracked and actioned promptly with appropriate updates provided to the resident.	Yes	<p>A complaint response may include that further action will be completed. This is followed up by the relevant manager.</p> <p>Section 10 of the Corporate Complaints Procedure includes that complaint responses will set out 'details of any outstanding actions'.</p> <p>Section 10.5 states:</p> <p>'Where a complainant has completed this Procedure but there are outstanding actions to address the issue complained about, these will be followed up and suitable updates will be provided to the complainant'</p>	
6.7	Landlords must 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.	Yes	A template complaint response has been prepared for responders to follow to meet these requirements.	

6.8	Where residents raise additional complaints during the investigation, these must 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	Yes	This is how additional complaints are dealt with.	
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	investigated or it would unreasonably delay the response, the new issues must be logged as a new complaint.			
6.9	Landlords must confirm the following in writing to the resident at the completion of stage 1 in clear, plain language: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. the complaint stage; b. the complaint definition; c. the decision on the complaint; d. the reasons for any decisions made; e. the details of any remedy offered to put things right; f. details of any outstanding actions; and g. details of how to escalate the matter to stage 2 if the individual is not satisfied with the response. 	Yes	<p>Section 10 of the Corporate Complaints Procedure includes that complaint responses will set out:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 if the complainant is not satisfied with the response. <p>A template complaint response has been prepared for responders to follow to meet these requirements.</p> <p>Training is delivered to the Leadership Team on the importance complaint handling and the requirements of 6.9 of the code.</p>	

Stage 2

Code provision	Code requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence	Commentary / explanation
6.10	If all or part of the complaint is not resolved to the resident's satisfaction at stage 1, it must be progressed to stage 2 of the landlord's procedure. Stage 2 is the landlord's final response.	Yes	<p>The Corporate Complaints Procedure at section 9.6 states:</p> <p>'Request to escalate complaint received.</p> <p>Escalation request acknowledged within 5 working days by the Information Governance and Complaints Team. This acknowledgement will set out our understanding of the complaint and the outcome the complainant is seeking. Complainant informed of officer dealing with complaint and expected response date.</p> <p>Stage 2 response sent within 20 working days, advising the complainant that they have completed this Procedure and they are entitled to refer their complaint to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman or, for Housing Complaints (by Council tenants/ leaseholders about the Council as their landlord), the Housing Ombudsman if they remain dissatisfied.'</p>	

6.11	Requests for stage 2 must be acknowledged, defined and logged at stage 2 of the complaints procedure within five working days of the escalation request being received.	Yes	See 6.10 above.	
6.12	Residents must not be required to explain their reasons for requesting a stage 2 consideration. Landlords are expected to make reasonable efforts to understand why a resident remains unhappy as part of its stage 2 response.	Yes	Complainants are not required to state their reasons for escalating their complaint.	
6.13	The person considering the complaint at stage 2 must not be the same person that considered the complaint at stage 1.	Yes	The Corporate Complaints Procedure at section 9.6 sets out the responsible Officers for dealing with complaints. Stage 2 will also be dealt with by the independent Monitoring Officer on behalf of the Chief Executive.	
6.14	Landlords must issue a final response to the stage 2 <u>within 20 working days</u> of the complaint being acknowledged.	Yes	The Corporate Complaints Procedure at section 9.6 includes the following: 'Stage 2 response sent within 20 working days, advising the complainant that they have completed this Procedure and they are entitled to refer their complaint to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman or, for Housing Complaints (by Council tenants/ leaseholders about the Council as their landlord), the Housing Ombudsman if they remain dissatisfied.'	

6.15	Landlords must decide whether an extension to this timescale is needed when considering the complexity of the complaint and then inform the resident of the expected timescale for response. Any extension must be no more than 20 working days without good reason, and the reason(s) must be clearly explained to the resident.	Yes	The Corporate Complaints Procedure at section 9.5 states: 'Every effort will be made to resolve complaints without undue delay. The Council will aim to meet the timescales set out in this Procedure. However, if an unavoidable delay occurs we will notify the complainant with the reason and provide a revised due date for response. We will aim for any extension to be no more than 10 working days for stage 1 complaints and 20 working days for stage 2 complaints. We will keep the complainant informed including, where appropriate, how often updates will be provided'	
6.16	When an organisation informs a resident about an extension to these timescales, they must be provided with the contact details of the Ombudsman.	Yes	Our template extension of time wording includes details of how to contact the Ombudsman.	
6.17	A complaint response must be provided to the resident when the answer to the complaint is known, not when the outstanding actions required to address the issue are completed. Outstanding actions must still be tracked and actioned promptly with appropriate updates provided to the resident.	Yes	A complaint response may include that further action will be completed. This is followed up by the relevant manager. Section 10 of the Corporate Complaints Procedure includes that complaint responses will set out 'details of any outstanding actions'. Section 10.5 states:	

			'Where a complainant has completed this Procedure but there are outstanding actions to address the issue complained about, these will be followed up and suitable updates will be provided to the complainant'	
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6.18	Landlords must 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.	Yes	A template complaint response has been prepared for responders to follow to meet these requirements.	
6.19	Landlords must confirm the following in writing to the resident at the completion of stage 2 in clear, plain language: a. the complaint stage; b. the complaint definition; c. the decision on the complaint; d. the reasons for any decisions made; e. the details of any remedy offered to put things right; f. details of any outstanding actions; and g. details of how to escalate the matter to the Ombudsman Service if the individual remains dissatisfied.	Yes	<p>Section 10 of the Corporate Complaints Procedure includes that complaint responses will set out:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 if the complainant is not satisfied with the response. <p>A template complaint response has been prepared for responders to follow to meet these requirements.</p> <p>Training is delivered to the Leadership Team on the importance complaint handling and the requirements of 6.19 of the code. The Monitoring Officer is part of the Leadership Team.</p>	

6.20	Stage 2 is the landlord's final response and must involve all suitable staff members needed to issue such a response.	Yes	<p>The Corporate Complaints Procedure at section 9.2 states:</p> <p>'The final, stage 2, response is dealt with by the Council's Monitoring Officer on behalf of the Chief Executive. At this stage, the Monitoring Officer ensures that the Chief Executive is aware of the complaint and the response to it.'</p>	
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Section 7: Putting things right

Code provision	Code requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence	Commentary / explanation
7.1	<p>Where something has gone wrong a landlord must acknowledge this and set out the actions it has already taken, or intends to take, to put things right.</p> <p>These can include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. 	Yes	<p>The Corporate Complaints Procedure at section 10 includes:</p> <p>10.2 The complaint response will advise complainants if their complaint is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Upheld • Partially upheld or • Not upheld. <p>10.3 If a complaint has been Upheld or Partially Upheld steps will be taken to try and resolve the complaint. This may include as appropriate to the circumstances:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • acknowledging that things have gone wrong, apologising and explaining why • taking action where there has been a delay • changing a decision • reviewing a policy or procedure • making a goodwill or time and trouble payment • providing compensation for a loss' 	
7.2	Any remedy offered must reflect the impact on the resident as a result of any fault identified.	Yes	The Corporate Complaints Procedure at section 10, sets out that both the Local Government and Social Care	

			Ombudsman and the Housing Ombudsman guidance on remedies will be considered.	
7.3	The remedy offer must clearly set out what will happen and by when, in agreement with the resident where appropriate. Any remedy proposed must be followed through to completion.	Yes	The Council meets this requirement. Section 10.5 states that: 'Where a complainant has completed this Procedure but there are outstanding actions to address the issue complained about, these will be followed up and suitable updates will be provided to the complainant'	
7.4	Landlords must take account of the guidance issued by the Ombudsman when deciding on appropriate remedies.		The Corporate Complaints Procedure at section 10, sets out that both the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman and the Housing Ombudsman guidance on remedies will be considered.	

Section 8: Putting things right

Code provision	Code requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence	Commentary / explanation
8.1	<p>Landlords must produce an annual complaints performance and service improvement report for scrutiny and challenge, which must include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. the annual self-assessment against this Code to ensure their complaint handling policy remains in line with its requirements. b. a qualitative and quantitative analysis of the landlord's complaint handling performance. This must also include a summary of the types of complaints the landlord has refused to accept; c. any findings of non-compliance with this Code by the Ombudsman; d. the service improvements made as a result of the learning from complaints; e. any annual report about the landlord's performance from the Ombudsman; and f. any other relevant reports or publications produced by the Ombudsman in relation to the work of the landlord. 	Yes	The Council will produce an annual complaints performance and service improvement report to include all required information.	

8.2	The annual complaints performance and service improvement report must be reported to the landlord's governing body (or equivalent) and published on the on the section of its website relating to complaints. The governing body's response to the report must be published alongside this.	Yes	The Council will report annual complaints performance and service improvement report to Cabinet and it will be published, alongside Cabinet's response, online here: Feedback, comments and complaints - New Forest District Council	For the year 2023/24 the report will be made to the MRCs (who are Portfolio Holders) and who will issue the response on behalf of Cabinet. The Housing Ombudsman have confirmed this approach for this year is acceptable. For future years the annual complaints performance and service improvement report will be taken to Cabinet.
8.3	Landlords must also carry out a self-assessment following a significant restructure, merger and/or change in procedures.	Yes	This will be actioned as appropriate.	
8.4	Landlords may be asked to review and update the self-assessment following an Ombudsman investigation.	Yes	This will be actioned as applicable.	
8.5	If a landlord is unable to comply with the Code due to exceptional circumstances, such as a cyber incident, they must inform the Ombudsman, provide information to residents who may be affected, and publish this on their website Landlords must provide a timescale for returning to compliance with the Code.	Yes	This will be actioned as applicable.	

Section 9: Scrutiny & oversight: continuous learning and improvement

Code provision	Code requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence	Commentary / explanation
9.1	Landlords must look beyond the circumstances of the individual complaint and consider whether service improvements can be made as a result of any learning from the complaint.	Yes	Learning from complaints is captured and procedural changes logged and followed up.	
9.2	A positive complaint handling culture is integral to the effectiveness with which landlords resolve disputes. Landlords must use complaints as a source of intelligence to identify issues and introduce positive changes in service delivery.	Yes	<p>The Council has a culture of learning from complaints.</p> <p>The Corporate Complaints Procedure, at section 1.1 sets out our aim when it comes to complaints:</p> <p>‘New Forest District Council (‘the Council’) is committed to providing residents, tenants and customers with quality services. However, sometimes things do go wrong. The Council encourages complainants to tell us when this happens so we can put things right, explain what has happened, learn from our mistakes and improve our services.’</p> <p>Training is delivered to the Leadership Team on the importance complaint handling and the importance of learning from complaints.</p>	<p>We are planning to introduce quarterly meetings with senior managers to consider complaint trends, complaints decided, learning identified and service improvements.</p> <p>We plan to support services with the development of any proposed service improvement plans.</p>

9.3	Accountability and transparency are also integral to a positive complaint handling culture. Landlords must report back on wider learning and improvements from complaints to stakeholders, such as residents' panels, staff and relevant committees.	Yes	<p>Complaint handling will be reported to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cabinet. • Executive Management Team. • Overview and Scrutiny Panels • Leadership Team <p>The Council's Tenants Involvement Group will also receive reports on complaint handling.</p>	
9.4	Landlords must appoint a suitably senior lead person as accountable for their complaint handling. This person must assess any themes or trends to identify potential systemic issues, serious risks, or policies and procedures that require revision.	Yes	The Information Governance and Complaints Manager has this role. They are part of the Leadership Team and report to the Monitoring Officer.	

9.5	In addition to this a member of the governing body (or equivalent) must be appointed to have lead responsibility for complaints to support a positive complaint handling culture. This person is referred to as the Member Responsible for Complaints ('the MRC').	Yes	<p>As the Council is a local authority, also under the jurisdiction of the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman, we have two MRCs who are part of Cabinet:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing and Homelessness Portfolio Holder – Housing complaints • Planning and Economy Portfolio Holder – All other complaints. 	
9.6	The MRC will be responsible for ensuring the governing body receives regular information on complaints that provides insight on the landlord's complaint handling performance. This person must have access to suitable information and staff to perform this role and report on their findings.	Yes	The MRCs will receive this through their regular portfolio holder briefings.	

9.7	<p>As a minimum, the MRC and the governing body (or equivalent) must receive:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. regular updates on the volume, categories and outcomes of complaints, alongside complaint handling performance; b. regular reviews of issues and trends arising from complaint handling; c. regular updates on the outcomes of the Ombudsman’s investigations and progress made in complying with orders related to severe maladministration findings; and d. annual complaints performance and service improvement report. 	Yes	<p>The MRCs will receive this through their regular portfolio holder briefings.</p> <p>Cabinet will receive two briefings per year as a minimum. One general update and one to include the annual complaints performance and service improvement report.</p>	<p>For the year 2023/24 the report will be made to the MRCs (who are Portfolio Holders) and who will issue the response on behalf of Cabinet. The Housing Ombudsman have confirmed this approach for this year is acceptable.</p> <p>For future years the annual complaints performance and service improvement report will be taken to Cabinet.</p>
9.8	<p>Landlords must have a standard objective in relation to complaint handling for all relevant employees or third parties that reflects the need to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. have a collaborative and co-operative approach towards resolving complaints, working with colleagues across teams and departments; b. take collective responsibility for any shortfalls identified through complaints, rather than blaming others; and act within the professional standards for engaging with complaints as set by any relevant professional body. 	Yes	<p>Training is delivered to the Leadership Team on the importance complaint handling and the requirements of 9.8 of the code.</p>	

