**Housing Ombudsmen Self-Assessment**

In July 2020 the Housing Ombudsman published a new Complaint Handling code, setting out good practice that will allow us and other landlords to respond to complaints effectively and fairly. This includes how we use learning from complaints to drive service improvements.

1. **Definition of a Complaint**

Medway Council’s complaints process follows the definition of a complaint:

*‘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*.’

1. **Accessibility**

Medway Council’s complaints process can be found on our website: <https://www.medway.gov.uk/info/200138/your_council/470/complaints_compliments_or_comments>.

If a resident is showing dissatisfaction officers will advise residents how they can make a complaint, if they wish to do so. The complaints process is also published in various locations such as Housing newsletters, the Housing Facebook page as well as information provided by Neighbourhood Officers. In order to make these accessible, written information can also be provided in alternative formats.

Residents have several routes to make a complaint which include by online, in person, by letter, by telephone, through an MP or a Councillor using an agreed third party and any other reasonable request. Medway Council would consider on request any other reasonable adjustments and we welcome feedback.

Medway Council’s policy does have exclusions where a complaint will not be considered, such as if the resident is already taking a more appropriate route such as following an appeal process or legal process. These exclusions are fair as the resident may have the same outcome, or (if they are seeking compensation) even an outcome that addresses their concerns better.

1. **Complaints team and process**

The Customer Relations Manager oversees the complaints for the whole of Medway Council, however Housing has their own dedicated Customer Relations Officer who works alongside the council’s Customer Relations team.

The Customer Relations Manager along with their team can resolve complaints in consultation with the complainant and the Service area. This may include regular liaison with the relevant department leaders and assistant directors.

Medway Council has two steps to its complaint's procedure, however if clients feel their complaint is not resolved after stage 2, Housing have a third step ‘designated person’ which allows Medway Council Tenants to contact either an MP or Councillor to make the complaint on their behalf. However, residents are advised how to contact the Housing Ombudsman Service once the stage 2 complaint response is issued.

The Customer Relations team keep a record of all complaint correspondence, including resident’s initial complaint, other correspondence and complaint responses.

1. **Communication**

Residents are kept informed and updated during the complaints process, 100% of complaints during 2019/20 were acknowledged within three days of receipt, logged to the Service responsible and the complainant is informed within this acknowledgment of the timelines, we also keep residents informed if their complaint response is going to be delayed.

Residents are informed of the landlord’s position and given a chance to respond and challenge any area of dispute before the final decision. Following the Stage 1 response the resident is given a year to raise a stage two complaint should they remain dissatisfied. The response will outline what to do if they remain dissatisfied on receipt of the Stage 1 and Stage 2 response.

Most complaints are resolved at Stage 1.

In 2019/20 the Housing Management team received 38 stage 1 complaints and only 3 complaints were escalated to stage 2.

However, where the complaints were escalated to stage 2, only one complaint was partially upheld, and two complaints were not upheld.

We follow the Housing Ombudsman Code of Practice and the proportion of complaint responses sent within timescales are listed below

97.3% of Stage 1 complaints were responded to within Code timescales

100% of Stage 2 complaints were responded to within Code timescales

Where the complaint is complex, or a key member of staff is not available, and the investigation requires their input we would apply a reasonable extension and agree this with the resident. Again, Medway Council will keep the resident informed if there is going to be a delay.

94.8% of complaints were resolved to residents’ satisfaction in 2019/20. This has been calculated by the number of Stage 1 complaints received compared with the referrals received by the Housing Ombudsman Service.

1. **Cooperation with Housing Ombudsman Service**

Requests for evidence from the Ombudsman were responded to within 15 days unless Medway Council contacted the Ombudsmen to request an extension and where an extension was agreed.

1. **Fairness in complaint handling**

Residents can complain via a representative throughout in order that they are supported. All advice given will be accurate and easy to understand.

In 2019/20 only one complaint was refused to be escalated to stage 2 as the complainant made three stage one complaints regarding the same issue. Therefore, a further investigation at stage two would not have changed the outcome of the decision. The resident was advised of this by writing and by phone.

1. **Outcomes and remedies**

Where something has gone wrong, we take appropriate steps to put things right through regular performance monitoring and outcome management. This is done by recording any complaints on a trend analysis that feeds into Housing Services Quality Management System. This then informs a Test and Review program that looks at possible corrective, preventative actions and any other opportunities from improvement, with a focus on continuous improvement.

The councils aims to seek a local resolution to complaints where possible and is proactive in doing so.

1. **Continuous learning and improvement**

If a complaint has been upheld, we endeavour to share these lessons with the residents involved, this is explained within their complaint response letter. We also hold focus groups with tenants and detail in our Housing Annual Report ‘You Said, We Did’ to show tenants we have listened to their feedback.

Complaints are a part of the council’s quarterly plan monitoring. Data and analysis, in respect of volumes of complaints, timeliness performance, and theme identified are reported to Service Managers, Assistant Directors and the Corporate Management Team on a quarterly and annual basis. All Ombudsman decisions are reported to cabinet and to the Business Support Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Portfolio holder for Housing Services and Resources are also briefed regularly.

The Complaint Handlers Group, which meets quarterly, are encouraged to share learning identified from complaints, and action plans that they have developed as a result.

In the year 2019/20 the Housing Management team have not made any direct improvements or changes as a result from learning from complaints (as we have not upheld any complaints). However, with the 2020 revision of Housing Services Quality Management System we use complaints trend analysis to inform our Test and Review program with the driver being a focus on continuous improvement. This is then reported on quarterly leading to the development of continuous improvement action plans for Housing Services.

Although Medway Council follows the existing guidance, we welcome the Housing Code of Practice.

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