

London Borough of Camden

Self-Assessment – Housing Ombudsman Complaints Handling Code

The Housing Ombudsman updated its Complaints Handling Code in April 2022.

This self-assessment is based on handling complaints relating to services provided by the Council as Landlord i.e. Housing Management and Property Management. The data provided is for the period 1st April 2021 to 31st March 2022.

The Council has a single complaints policy and procedure covering all corporate and statutory complaints handling for all service areas and is not just for Housing complaints. The Housing Ombudsman’s Complaints Handling Code requirements have been incorporated wherever possible into the Corporate Complaints Handling Procedures.

Web pages:

[Complaints - Camden Council](#)

[Housing repairs - Camden Council](#)

Section 1 - Definition of a complaint

Mandatory 'must' requirements

Code section	Code requirement	Comply: Yes/No	Evidence, commentary and any explanations
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 organisation, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting an individual resident or group of residents.'</i>	Yes	The Council uses a Plain English definition that covers complaints relating to all service areas: 'When someone lets us know that they are unhappy with our service and they want us to take action to resolve it' Our policy also provides detail on what defines a complaint: Examples of a complaint <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Failure to follow process • Failure to follow the council's own policy • Significant or repeated failure to provide a service • Failure to do what we said we would do • Failure to respond Tenant's handbook & welcome pack* Contains the definition of a complaint & exceptions <i>*(online version to be available in Autumn 2022 – hard copy to be available TBC (there are a large number of updates to include and these have to be done in a single print run)).</i>
1.3	The resident does not have to use the word 'complaint' for it to be treated as such. A complaint that is submitted via a third party or representative must still be handled in line with the landlord's complaints policy.	Yes	Our complaint e-form allows the resident to use their own words. Complaints are then triaged to check they meet the above definition and are handled in line with our complaints policy. The e-form has a section for a third party or representative to make a complaint on behalf of someone else. It requires proof that the resident has given consent for the third party to act on their behalf. In training guidance staff are advised that if they are unsure if an enquiry is a complaint or not to refer it the Complaints team.
1.6	... if further enquiries are needed to resolve the matter, or if the resident requests it, the issue must be logged as a complaint.	Yes	The council's aim is to resolve complaints for our residents as quickly and simply as possible and initially this is done informally. If a complaint has not been dealt with satisfactorily then the formal procedure is started and it is logged as a complaint.
1.7	A landlord must accept a complaint unless there is a valid reason not to do so.	Yes	When someone lets us know they are unhappy with a service, we will accept it as a complaint unless it does not meet our definition of a complaint (see 1.8)

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<p>1.8</p>	<p>A complaints policy must clearly set out the circumstances in which a matter will not be considered, and these circumstances should be fair and reasonable to residents.</p>	<p>Yes</p>	<p>Our policy states:</p> <p>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 <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. We have an Unreasonable Behaviour Procedure to follow in these cases.</p> <p>In training guidance staff are advised that if they are unsure if a complaint is a valid complaint or not to refer it the Complaints team.</p>
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1.9	If a landlord decides not to accept a complaint, a detailed 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.	Yes	If on triage, an enquiry submitted on the portal is considered “not a complaint” then a template letter is generated which can be tailored explaining why it is not a complaint. The rights to take the decision to the Ombudsman are included.
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Best practice ‘should’ requirements

Code section	Code requirement	Comply: Yes/No	Evidence, commentary and any explanations
1.4	Landlords should recognise the difference between a Service request , where a resident may be unhappy with a situation that they wish to have rectified, and a complaint about the service they have/have not received.	Yes	The portal allows officers to distinguish between “not a complaint” and “complaint”. “Not a complaint” is used if the enquiry does not meet our complaint criteria (see 1.8) or is a “service request” also called “Business As Usual”. In training guidance staff are advised that if they are unsure if a complaint is a complaint or a service request to refer it the Complaints team.
1.5	Survey feedback may not necessarily need to be treated as a complaint, though, where possible, the person completing the survey should be made aware of how they can pursue their dissatisfaction as a complaint if they wish to.	Yes	The Housing survey feedback now has the following information on the final “thank you for submitting” page of the survey: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explain how to make a complaint • Signpost to complaints policy & process • Explain Ombudsman Scheme & Complaint Handling Code • Signpost to Ombudsman including for early advice

Section 2 - Accessibility and awareness

Mandatory 'must' requirements

Code section	Code requirement	Comply: Yes/No	Evidence, commentary and any explanations
2.1	Landlords must make it easy for residents to complain by providing different channels through which residents can make a complaint such as in person, over the telephone, in writing, by email and digitally. While the Ombudsman recognises that it may not be feasible for a landlord to use all of the potential channels, there must be more than one route of access into the complaints system.	Yes	The main channel is a digital e-form on the Council's complaints webpage. Other available channels are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Telephone ➤ In Writing (Post) ➤ Email ➤ In person ➤ Signvideo (BSL) tool for deaf residents
2.3	Landlords must make their complaint policy available in a clear and accessible format for all residents. This will detail the number of stages involved, what will happen at each stage and the timeframes for responding.	Yes	The complaints policy is available on the Council's website and links to it can be found on Housing-related web pages. The policy is written in Plain English and details of each stage and the timeframes for responding. Printed copies are available on request.
2.4	Landlord websites, if they exist, must include information on how to raise a complaint. The complaints policy and process must be easy to find on the website.	Yes	Housing repairs complaints webpage contains: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complaints policy & process, and how to make a complaint • Explanation of Ombudsman Scheme & Complaint Handling Code • Signposting to Ombudsman including for early advice
2.5	Landlords must comply with the Equality Act 2010 and may need to adapt normal policies, procedures, or processes to accommodate an individual's needs. Landlords must satisfy themselves that their policy sets out how they will respond to reasonable adjustments requests in line with the Equality Act and that complaints handlers have had appropriate training to deal with such requests.	Yes	The Council has accessibility policies for residents to allow them to access all services and communications including making a complaint. Accessibility - Camden Council All council staff receive equality awareness training including: Antiracism awareness, neuro-diversity awareness & trans awareness and disability awareness.

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<p>2.6</p>	<p>Landlords must publicise the complaints policy and process, the Complaint Handling Code and the Housing Ombudsman Scheme in leaflets, posters, newsletters, online and as part of regular correspondence with residents.</p>	<p>Yes</p>	<p>Housing News – newsletter. Summer edition will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explanation of how to make a complaint • Signposting to complaints policy & process • Signposting to Ombudsman including for early advice and Complaint Handling Code <p>Tenant’s handbook & welcome pack* (To include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Definition of complaints & exceptions • Explanation of how to make a complaint • Signposting to complaints policy & process • Explanation of Ombudsman Scheme & Complaint Handling Code • Signposting to Ombudsman including for early advice and Complaint Handling Code <p><i>*(online version to be available in Autumn 2022 – hard copy to be available TBC (there are a large number of updates to include and these have to be done in a single print run)).</i></p> <p>Rent Charges and Statements to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Signposting to complaints policy & process • Explanation of Ombudsman Scheme & Complaint Handling Code • Signposting to Ombudsman including for early advice and Complaint Handling Code <p>Complaint webpages contain:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Definition of complaints & exceptions • Explanation of how to make a complaint • Complaints policy & process • Explanation of Ombudsman Scheme & Complaint Handling Code • Signposting to Ombudsman including for early advice and Complaint Handling Code
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<p>2.7</p>	<p>Landlords must provide residents with contact information for the Ombudsman as part of its regular correspondence with residents.</p>	<p>Yes</p>	<p>Housing News – newsletter. Summer edition will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Signposting to Ombudsman including for early advice and Complaint Handling Code <p>Tenant’s handbook & welcome pack* To include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explanation of Ombudsman Scheme & Complaint Handling Code • Signposting to Ombudsman including for early advice and Complaint Handling Code <p><i>*(online version to be available in Autumn 2022 – hard copy to be available TBC (there are a large number of updates to include and these have to be done in a single print run)).</i></p> <p>Rent Charges and Statements to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explanation of Ombudsman Scheme & Complaint Handling Code • Signposting to Ombudsman including for early advice and Complaint Handling Code <p>All correspondence sent to complainants who are complaining about a Landlord-related issue contain a paragraph on how to contact the Housing Ombudsman.</p>
<p>2.8</p>	<p>Landlords must provide early advice to residents regarding their right to access the Housing Ombudsman Service throughout their complaint, not only when the landlord’s complaints process is exhausted.</p>	<p>Yes</p>	<p>All correspondence sent to complainants who are complaining about a Landlord-related issue contain a paragraph on how to contact the Housing Ombudsman.</p>

Best practice ‘should’ requirements

Code section	Code requirement	Comply: Yes/No	Evidence, commentary and any explanations
2.2	Where a landlord has set up channels to communicate with its residents via social media, then it should expect to receive complaints via those channels. Policies should contain details of the steps that will be taken when a complaint is received via social media and how confidentiality and privacy will be maintained.	Yes	The complaints policy refers to any written medium which includes Twitter, Facebook and other social media channels for submitting a complaint. These are all subject to the same data protection practices to ensure privacy and confidentiality when handling a complaint. The council's communication team manages all social media. If a complaint is identified via social media then it is passed to the complaints team who will then take steps to address the issues privately with the person posting. Complaints are not responded to on any public platforms.

Section 3 - Complaint handling personnel

Mandatory 'must' requirements

Code section	Code requirement	Comply: Yes/No	Evidence, commentary and any explanations
3.1	Landlords must have a person or team assigned to take responsibility for complaint handling to ensure complaints receive the necessary attention, and that these are reported to the governing body. This Code will refer to that person or team as the "complaints officer".	Yes	<p>The Council has a Central Complaints Team managed by the Service Manager – Information Governance who is the designated liaison officer with governing bodies.</p> <p>The Central Complaints Team is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 x Team Leader – Complaints (TL) 5 x Complaints Officer (CO) 2 x Case Co-ordinator (permanent) (CC) 2 x Case Co-ordinator (CC) (fixed term contract) <p>Housing Repairs and Housing Needs have dedicated case management teams for casework & complaint handling.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 x Manager 6-8 x Case management officers
3.2	...the complaint handler appointed must have appropriate complaint handling skills and no conflicts of interest.	Yes	<p>All roles in the Central Complaints Team require skills and experience in complaint handling.</p> <p>The team acts as an independent and objective investigator for complaints. In addition to this the Case Management Officers responses are audited to ensure quality responses are being provided. They also have regular plain English training.</p>

Best practice ‘should’ requirements

Code section	Code requirement	Comply: Yes/No	Evidence, commentary and any explanations
3.3	Complaint handlers should: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • be able to act sensitively and fairly • be trained to handle complaints and deal with distressed and upset residents • have access to staff at all levels to facilitate quick resolution of complaints • have the authority and autonomy to act to resolve disputes quickly and fairly. 	Yes	Mandatory Safeguarding awareness training is required for all roles in the Complaints Team to allow them to spot possible safeguarding issues when dealing with distressed residents. Specific training on handling challenging customers and for dealing with people with mental health issues is planned for Autumn 2022. Staff attend Effective Complaints Handling provided by governing bodies as available. TL and COs facilitate training to all other staff in the Council on the Council’s complaints processes including IT systems and from Autumn 2022 will provide training on Effective Complaints Handling (to include writing responses, dealing with challenging people etc.) The Complaints Team staff are able to directly contact all staff in the Council (Chief Executive, Leader of the Council, Executive Directors, Directors, Head of Service, Managers, Officers, Councillors) in order to resolve complaints. There is an escalation process followed when a complaint response is nearing its deadline or has got “stuck”: Complaints Officer/Case Co-ordinator escalates to Team Leader, TL escalates to Service Manager, Service Manager escalates to Directors/Exec Directors/Heads of Service.

Section 4 - Complaint handling principles

Mandatory ‘must’ requirements

Code section	Code requirement	Comply: Yes/No	Evidence, commentary and any explanations
4.1	<p>Any decision to try and resolve a concern must be taken in agreement with the resident and a landlord’s audit trail/records should be able to demonstrate this. Landlords must ensure that efforts to resolve a resident’s concerns do not obstruct access to the complaints procedure or result in any unreasonable delay. It is not appropriate to have extra named stages (such as ‘stage 0’ or ‘pre-complaint stage’) as this causes unnecessary confusion for residents. When a complaint is made, it must be acknowledged and logged at stage one of the complaints procedure within five days of receipt.</p>	Yes	<p>Complaints submitted using the online form are logged automatically onto the Complaints Dashboard System. Complaints submitted using other channels are logged manually by the complaints team.</p> <p>The system generates an automatic acknowledgement with reference number that is sent immediately to the resident. Complaints are acknowledged and logged less than 24 hours from receipt.</p> <p>The complaint is then assigned to the relevant service area. Assigning should be done within 24 hours of receipt. Another email is auto-generated and sent to the resident giving them the name of the person handling their complaint. The assigned officer should accept the case within 24 hours of receipt.</p> <p>All of this has a full audit trail and documents are held on the system within the case record.</p> <p>There is no other named stage before Stage 1.</p>

<p>4.2</p>	<p>Within the complaint acknowledgement, landlords must set out their understanding of the complaint and the outcomes the resident is seeking. If any aspect of the complaint is unclear, the resident must be asked for clarification and the full definition agreed between both parties.</p>	<p>Yes</p>	<p>The first acknowledgement is an auto-generated template used for ALL complaints across the Council (not just Landlord-related complaints). <i>Dear [RECEIVER_FULL_NAME],</i> <i>[CASE_REFERENCES]</i> <i>Thank you for contacting us about your concerns.</i> <i>Your complaint is in the Local Resolution stage of our Complaints Procedure which aims to resolve your concerns within 10 working days.</i> <i>If you require any special assistance or support to communicate with us then please let us know.</i> <i>Kind regards,</i> <i>Complaints Team</i></p> <p>If the responding officer has any queries about the complaint then they can send an email via the system to the resident asking for clarification. The resident can respond via a link. All of this has a full audit trail and documents are held on the system. The responding officer can also telephone the resident to ask for clarification. A record of this contact can be placed on the case notes. (Note: telephone calls handled by the complaints team are not recorded).</p> <p><i>Dear [RECEIVER_FULL_NAME]</i> <i>[CASE_REFERENCES]</i> <i>We need further information before we can consider your complaint/review request.</i> <i>Please provide the following (this is editable)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The dates and names of any officers you have spoken to</i> • <i>Attach emails you have sent to us and any responses you have received</i> • <i>Tell us the outcome you are looking for</i> • <i>Tell us why you are dissatisfied with the local resolution response and the outcome you are looking for</i> • <i>Complete and return the attached Complaints Consent form</i> <p><i>Please click on the link below and enter your clarification. The link is one use only.</i> [RESPONSE_URL]</p>
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<p>4.6</p>	<p>A complaint investigation must be conducted in an impartial manner.</p>	<p>Yes</p>	<p>Stage 1 complaint investigations are conducted by the relevant service. Housing repairs complaints and Housing needs complaints are investigated by dedicated case management teams that work alongside the service areas but remain impartial.</p> <p>Stage 2 investigations are conducted by the Complaints Officers in the Complaints Team, acting as an objective investigator separate to the service areas.</p>
<p>4.7</p>	<p>The complaint handler must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • deal with complaints on their merits • act independently and have an open mind • take measures to address any actual or perceived conflict of interest • consider all information and evidence carefully • keep the complaint confidential as far as possible, with information only disclosed if necessary to properly investigate the matter. 	<p>Yes</p>	<p>Stage 1 When carrying out a Stage 1 we ensure that all decisions are based on facts and evidence available to us. Officers act independent and have an open mind ensuring the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that residents have a fair and effective way to provide feedback about our services • Respond to feedback in a fair, consistent, and professional manner • Make the complaints experience as simple as possible • Resolve any issues and find a suitable outcome and identify service failure to ensure service improvements are made where required <p>Stage 2 Complaints Officers are trained on how to conduct an investigation that is objective and independent.</p> <p>All staff are required to do Data Protection Awareness training which includes keeping information secure and data sharing principles.</p>
<p>4.11</p>	<p>Landlords must adhere to any reasonable arrangements agreed with residents in terms of frequency and method of communication</p>	<p>Yes</p>	<p>The online form includes a question asking the resident's preferred method of communication. During the complaints handling the responsible officer will agree with residents the frequency of communication if necessary.</p>

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<p>4.12</p>	<p>The resident, and if applicable any staff member who is the subject of the complaint, must also be given a fair chance to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • set out their position • comment on any adverse findings before a final decision is made. 	<p>Yes</p>	<p>The resident is given the opportunity to set out their position at any stage of the complaints handling process.</p> <p>At Stage 1 the response is sent to the resident who is told if they remain dissatisfied they can request a Stage 2. It would not be possible to send out draft responses for comment to all complainants due to the volume and would cause delays in meeting the required deadline. This would also cause confusion for the resident.</p> <p>At Stage 2 the resident is told if they remain unhappy then they can contact the Ombudsman. Contact details of the HO is given at all stages.</p>
<p>4.13</p>	<p>A landlord must include in its complaints policy its timescales for a resident to request escalation of a complaint</p>	<p>Yes</p>	<p>The complaints policy states: <i>We ask that you:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Submit the complaint within 12 months after the date of the incident.</i> • <i>Submit a request for a stage 2 review within 28 calendar days of the stage 1 response.</i>
<p>4.14</p>	<p>A landlord must not unreasonably refuse to escalate a complaint through all stages of the complaints procedure and must have clear and valid reasons for taking that course of action. Reasons for declining to escalate a complaint must be clearly set out in a landlord's complaints policy and must be the same as the reasons for not accepting a complaint.</p>	<p>Yes</p>	<p>The complaints policy states: <i>We will not accept a complaint outside of these timescales except where exceptional reasons for the delay can be demonstrated. When we are unable or may not investigate a complaint</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>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</i> • <i>We cannot investigate any complaints where the Court has made a decision about the subject of the complaint</i> • <i>We cannot investigate when the complaint is not about Camden Council or a contractor or partner acting on our behalf</i>

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4.15	A full record must be kept of the complaint, any review 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 any reports or surveys prepared.	Yes	The complaints case management system keeps a record of the journey of a complaint. The Stages can be linked together so a clear chronology is available. All correspondence done outside of the system and records of phone calls can be uploaded to the case record making a full case record.
4.18	Landlords must have policies and procedures in place for managing unacceptable behaviour from residents and/or their representatives when pursuing a complaint.	Yes	The Council has an Unreasonable Complainant Behaviour Procedure.

Best practice 'should' requirements

Code section	Code requirement	Comply: Yes/No	Evidence, commentary and any explanations
4.3	Landlords should manage residents' expectations from the outset, being clear where a desired outcome is unreasonable or unrealistic		Housing Repairs web pages provide information on what repairs are the responsibility of the Council and what are the responsibility of the tenant/leaseholder. Consequently, it is made clear what can be accepted as a complaint. The Council has a remedies policy and procedure which sets out what remedies could be expected in particular the levels of financial remedy that can be expected.

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<p>4.4</p>	<p>A complaint should be resolved at the earliest possible opportunity, having assessed what evidence is needed to fully consider the issues, what outcome would resolve the matter for the resident and whether there are any urgent actions required.</p>		<p>On receipt of a complaint, it is triaged and assessed to whether it is a formal complaint to enter the procedure or can be dealt as a 'business as usual' request. The complaint is screened to check for any safeguarding or urgent actions required. Formal complaints are then passed on to the relevant service to assess what is required to resolve it as quickly as possible. Housing Repairs: A triage team acknowledges the complaint and contacts the relevant person(s)/departments to gather relevant information to start the investigation process to avoid delay. Our triage team will also provide the complainant with the name of the investigating officer. Officers will contact the complainant to ensure we have listened and understood the complaint and gather any further information required. The Officer will introduce themselves and provide direct contact details. In addition, they will discuss with the complaint their desired resolution if this has not been listed in the complaint and will also agree what they are going to do to investigate the complaint.</p>
<p>4.5</p>	<p>Landlords should 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 where this is reasonable.</p>	<p>Yes</p>	<p>Representatives can submit a complaint on behalf of someone else. The e-form asks the question: Is this your own complaint or are you doing it on behalf of someone else? Under Data Protection we are required to get authorisation from the resident that the representative can act on their behalf.</p>
<p>4.8</p>	<p>Where a key issue of a complaint relates to the parties' legal obligations landlords should clearly set out their understanding of the obligations of both parties.</p>	<p>Yes</p>	<p>Central complaints and service areas work closely with the Council's legal team when legal advice and guidance is required. Any advice is clearly explained to all parties.</p>

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4.9	Communication with the resident should not generally identify individual members of staff or contractors.		Contractors are often referred to in communications with the resident where it is pertinent that the resident knows a contractor is involved. Where complaints are about a contractor then it is passed on directly to the contractor to respond to. and individuals are named on occasion. The Council considers it good practice that responses are provided by named members of staff. The resident is informed who is dealing with their complaint and provided with contact details should they have any queries.
4.10	Landlords should keep residents regularly updated about the progress of the investigation.	Yes	When a resident submits a complaint, they are sent an acknowledgement with a unique reference number, when the case is allocated to a service officer, the resident is informed via the system. If it is going to take longer than 10 days then the officer can send an explanation for the delay and estimated timeframes. Housing Repairs: Officers keep the complainant informed and updated along the way of the progress of the investigation and to also to notify if there is a delay and commit to a new timescale in which the complainant will receive a response Officers will contact the complainant to advise what we have done and why we have done it with the outcome and reasons for the decision.
4.16	Landlords should seek feedback from residents in relation to the landlord's complaint handling as part of the drive to encourage a positive complaint and learning culture.	Yes	When a resident submits a complaint using the e-form then there is the functionality to provide feedback about the e-form and the process. Housing repairs customer services ask residents to complete a feedback survey which encourages them to feedback on the repairs process including any complaint handling.
4.17	Landlords should recognise the impact that being complained about can have on future service delivery. Landlords should ensure that staff are supported and engaged in the complaints process, including the learning that can be gained	Yes	The case management system contains a mandatory section for recording learning and remedy outcomes. These can then be collated and analysed to identify trends and ensure learning is acted on Housing repairs: Once a case has been completed officers fill out a data capture form to capture any relevant information to identify service failures, which is shared with relevant management to ensure improvements are made.
4.19	Any restrictions placed on a resident's contact due to unacceptable behaviour should be appropriate to their needs and should demonstrate regard for the provisions of the Equality Act 2010.	Yes	The Unreasonable Behaviour procedure takes into consideration the Equality Act 2010. Where restrictions are applied, communications are diverted to the central complaints team and all communications are reviewed to ensure that any needs or new issues raised by the resident are actioned as necessary.

Section 5 - Complaint stages

Mandatory ‘must’ requirements

Stage 1

Code section	Code requirement	Comply: Yes/No	Evidence, commentary and any explanations									
5.1	Landlords must respond to the complaint <u>within 10 working days</u> of the complaint being logged. Exceptionally, landlords may provide an explanation to the resident containing a clear timeframe for when the response will be received. This should not exceed a further 10 days without good reason.	Yes	<p>Note: The Council policy is for ALL complaints for ALL service areas not just Landlord-related services.</p> <p>The Council’s policy states “The following are guidelines which we will follow although some complaints may be resolved sooner than this and others that are more complex may take longer”.</p> <p>Stage 1 complaints within 10 working days. (Extended to 20 working days in complex cases eg adult or children social care cases).</p> <p>When a complaint is going to take longer than 10 days, the resident is provided with an explanation for the delays and given an amended timeframe.</p> <p>Template for extension: Dear [\$RECEIVER_FULL_NAMES] [\$CASE_REFERENCES] Following my discussion with you on INSERT DATE HERE I am extending your complaint response date to [\$DUE_DATES]. This is to ensure that we are able to gather and consider all the information before we make a final decision on your complaint.</p> <p>Stage 1 Performance for Housing services 2021/22</p> <table border="0" data-bbox="1088 925 1523 1021"> <tr> <td></td> <td style="text-align: center;">10 w/d</td> <td style="text-align: center;">20 w/d</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Property Mgt</td> <td style="text-align: center;">53%</td> <td style="text-align: center;">78%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Housing Mgt</td> <td style="text-align: center;">24%</td> <td style="text-align: center;">47%</td> </tr> </table> <p>The pandemic continued to impact on service provision in 2021/22 and effective complaint handling. In January, a new case management system was introduced which allows for better logging and monitoring of complaints and performance in responding has improved.</p>		10 w/d	20 w/d	Property Mgt	53%	78%	Housing Mgt	24%	47%
	10 w/d	20 w/d										
Property Mgt	53%	78%										
Housing Mgt	24%	47%										
5.5	A complaint response must be sent 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 expeditiously with regular updates provided to the resident.	Yes	The case management system has two options to close a case “response sent with outstanding actions” & “response sent no outstanding actions”. Any outstanding actions are logged with due dates and monitored until complete.									

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5.6	Landlords must address all points raised in the complaint and provide clear reasons for any decisions, referencing the relevant policy, law and good practice where appropriate.	Yes	On receipt of a complaint it is triaged and case coordinators look at all points to decide the lead service area to respond. The lead responding officer is then responsible for collating all information from other services to provide a single response to all the points raised. When relevant the response includes reference to policy, law and good practice in Plain English.
5.8	Landlords must confirm the following in writing to the resident at the completion of stage one in clear, plain language: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the complaint stage • 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 • details of how to escalate the matter to stage two if the resident is not satisfied with the answer 	Yes	Responding officers are given training on how to write a response in Plain English and what needs to be included: It is important to give the decision first followed by the reasons for the decision and any remedies offered. Details of how to escalate to stage 2 (and how to contact the Housing Ombudsman for advice) are given at the end of the response.

Stage 2

Code section	Code requirement	Comply: Yes/No	Evidence, commentary and any explanations
5.9	If all or part of the complaint is not resolved to the resident's satisfaction at stage one it must be progressed to stage two of the landlord's procedure, unless an exclusion ground now applies. In instances where a landlord declines to escalate a complaint it must clearly communicate in writing its reasons for not escalating as well as the resident's right to approach the Ombudsman about its decision.	Yes	Reasons for declining an escalation to Stage 2: Refusal to provide appeal information to investigate (eg reasons for dissatisfaction, desired outcome) Out of time – Stage 1 decision over 12 months old
5.10	On receipt of the escalation request, landlords must set out their understanding of issues outstanding and the outcomes the resident is seeking. If any aspect of the complaint is unclear, the resident must be asked for clarification and the full definition agreed between both parties.	Yes	The escalation request is logged on the case management system and allocated a complaints officer to investigate. Clarification can be sought through the system with a template that is amendable Dear [\$RECEIVER_FULL_NAME\$] [\$CASE_REFERENCE\$] We need further information before we can consider your complaint/review request. Please provide the following (delete as applicable or add) The dates and names of any officers you have spoken to Attach emails you have sent to us and any responses you have received Tell us the outcome you are looking for Tell us why you are dissatisfied with the local resolution response and the outcome you are looking for Complete and return the attached Complaints Consent form.
5.11	Landlords must only escalate a complaint to stage two once it has completed stage one and at the request of the resident.	Yes	The council advises residents that a stage 2 can only be carried out if a stage 1 has been completed. The case management system links all Stage 1s to the relevant stage 2 so a complete record of the resident's complaint is held in one place.

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5.12	The person considering the complaint at stage two, must not be the same person that considered the complaint at stage one.	Yes	All stage 1s are responded to by officers in the relevant service area. All Stage 2 reviews are investigated and considered by a Complaints Officer in the Central Complaints Team which is an independent team.
5.13	Landlords must respond to the stage two complaint <u>within 20 working days</u> of the complaint being escalated. Exceptionally, landlords may provide an explanation to the resident containing a clear timeframe for when the response will be received. This should not exceed a further 10 days without good reason.	No	<p>The Council provides many statutory and non-statutory services to residents and is not just a Social Housing Landlord. Its complaints handling policies and procedures therefore have to cover both statutory and non-statutory requirements from various governing bodies. In 2019 it was decided to bring all the different complaints policies together into one single overarching complaint policy. This was welcomed by residents as it provided a clearer approach to complaints handling. Complaints often cover a range of service areas so having a single policy and procedure meant that complaints could be handled more fairly and in a holistic way.</p> <p>The Council's policy states that the timescale for stage 2 review complaints is 25 working days. This timescale is considered best practice for all types of complaint both statutory and non-statutory at stage 2. We are aware that this does not fully comply with the HO's complaint handling code but we explain in our annual self-assessment the reasons for this. We cannot have different timescales for different functions of the Council as this causes confusion and inconsistency.</p>

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<p>5.16</p>	<p>Landlords must confirm the following in writing to the resident at the completion of stage two in clear, plain language:</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 <p>and</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • if the landlord has a third stage, details of how to escalate the matter to stage three if this was the final stage, details of how to escalate the matter to the Housing Ombudsman Service if the resident remains dissatisfied. 	<p>Yes</p>	<p>Stage2 response template <i>Thank you for contacting the Complaints Team, regarding (insert complaint definition)</i> <i>I do not uphold/partly uphold/uphold your complaint.</i> Your complaint <i>You first contacted the council on (insert date) and (insert name of responding officer for Stage 1) emailed you on (date) and did not uphold your complaint</i> <i>You contacted the Complaints Team on (date) and your complaint was registered at Review stage (Stage 2)</i> My investigation <i>The Complaints Team is independent of the service you have complained about.</i> <i>(enter details of investigation and findings)</i> My decision <i>Having taken the above investigation into account, I am unable to uphold/ I uphold/ I partly uphold your complaint. (enter reasons why)</i> <i>Your right of appeal to the Housing Ombudsman</i></p> <p><i>If you are dissatisfied, the Housing Ombudsman may be able to consider your complaint. Please contact your Member of Parliament or Councillor. You can also approach the Housing Ombudsman direct, eight weeks from the date of this letter. The address is:</i> <i>Housing Ombudsman Service</i> <i>PO Box 152</i> <i>Liverpool</i> <i>L33 7WQ</i> <i>0300 111 3000</i> <i>www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk</i></p>
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Stage 3

Code section	Code requirement	Comply: Yes/No	Evidence, commentary and any explanations
5.17	Two stage landlord complaint procedures are ideal. This ensures that the complaint process is not unduly long. If landlords strongly believe a third stage is necessary, they must set out their reasons for this as part of their self-assessment. A process with more than three stages is not acceptable under any circumstances.	N/A	The Council does not have a Stage 3 process for Landlord Complaints.
5.20	Landlords must confirm the following in writing to the resident at the completion of stage three in clear, plain language: <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 • details of how to escalate the matter to the Housing Ombudsman Service if the resident remains dissatisfied 	N/A	The Council does not have a Stage 3 process for Landlord Complaints.

Best practice ‘should’ requirements

Stage 1

Code section	Code requirement	Comply: Yes/No	Evidence, commentary and any explanations
5.2	If an extension beyond 20 working days is required to enable the landlord to respond to the complaint fully, this should be agreed by both parties.	Yes	If the responding officer considers that a response will take longer than 10 working days and also the extended 20 working days then they will contact the resident and explain the reasons for the delay and agree a timeframe.
5.3	Where agreement over an extension period cannot be reached, landlords should provide the Housing Ombudsman’s contact details so the resident can challenge the landlord’s plan for responding and/or the proposed timeliness of a landlord’s response.	Yes	The Housing Ombudsman’s contact details are made available to residents throughout the process should they need advice and guidance during any dispute with the Council.
5.4	Where the problem is a recurring issue, the landlord should consider any older reports as part of the background to the complaint if this will help to resolve the issue for the resident.	Yes	The responding officer will review all background documents and previous complaints when investigating a complaint.
5.7	Where residents raise additional complaints during the investigation, these should be incorporated into the stage one response if they are relevant and the stage one response has not been issued. Where the stage one response has been issued, or it would reasonably delay the response, the complaint should be logged as a new complaint.	Yes	A responding officer will try to include any related complaints raised during the investigation but this will usually delay the provision of a response so these are logged as a new complaint.

Stage 2

Code section	Code requirement	Comply: Yes/No	Evidence, commentary and any explanations
5.14	If an extension beyond 10 working days is required to enable the landlord to respond to the complaint fully, this should be agreed by both parties.	Yes	If the responding officer considers that the stage 2 response will take longer than 25 working days and also the extended 30 working days then they will contact the resident and explain the reasons for the delay and agree a timeframe.
5.15	Where agreement over an extension period cannot be reached, landlords should provide the Housing Ombudsman's contact details so the resident can challenge the landlord's plan for responding and/or the proposed timeliness of a landlord's response.	Yes	The Housing Ombudsman's contact details are made available to residents throughout the process should they need advice and guidance during any dispute with the Council.

Stage 3

Code section	Code requirement	Comply: Yes/No	Evidence, commentary and any explanations
5.18	Complaints should only go to a third stage if the resident has actively requested a third stage review of their complaint. Where a third stage is in place and has been requested, landlords must respond to the stage three complaint within 20 working days of the complaint being escalated. Additional time will only be justified if related to convening a panel. An explanation and a date for when the stage three response will be received should be provided to the resident.	N/A	The Council does not have a third stage
5.19	Where agreement over an extension period cannot be reached, landlords should provide the Housing Ombudsman's contact details so the resident can challenge the landlord's plan for responding and/or the proposed timeliness of a landlord's response.	N/A	The Council does not have a third stage

Section 6 - Putting things right

Mandatory ‘must’ requirements

Code section	Code requirement	Comply: Yes/No	Evidence, commentary and any explanations
6.1	Effective dispute resolution requires a process designed to resolve complaints. 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.	Yes	The Council’s complaints policy states: The principle focus at all stages is to provide a high quality response that resolves all the issues you raise and finds a suitable outcome for you in a timely way.
6.2	Any remedy offered must reflect the extent of any service failures and the level of detriment caused to the resident as a result. A landlord must carefully manage the expectations of residents and not promise anything that cannot be delivered or would cause unfairness to other residents.	Yes	The Council has a Remedies Policy and Procedure. This document provides guidance on the offering of remedies which are proportionate, appropriate and reasonable and that take into consideration the facts and issues raised in complaints about service failures.
6.5	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’s case management system has a section called “Remedy Outcomes”. All remedies are set out here with dates for completion. These are monitored until they are complete. All outcomes can be collated and analysed to see trends and where service improvement is required.
6.6	In awarding compensation, a landlord must consider whether any statutory payments are due, if any quantifiable losses have been incurred, the time and trouble a resident has been put to as well as any distress and inconvenience caused.	Yes	The Council’s Remedies Policy states: When deciding on suitable remedies the investigating officer will consider the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amount of time the citizen spent trying to resolve the issue • Difficulty the citizen experienced trying to resolve the issue • Distress to the citizen and/or others • Risk of harm to the citizen and/or others • Actual harm caused (We will consider if an insurance claim is more appropriate on a case by case basis). • Previous responses sent to the citizen • Any other attempts to address the issue • Administrative costs such as travel, cost of phone calls etc.

Best practice ‘should’ requirements

Code section	Code requirement	Comply: Yes/No	Evidence, commentary and any explanations
6.3	Landlords should look beyond the circumstances of the individual complaint and consider whether anything needs to be ‘put right’ in terms of process or systems to the benefit of all residents.	Yes	<p>The Council’s learning outcomes include any improvements to service provision or processes and systems to the benefit of all residents.</p> <p>The Council’s complaints policy states: We are committed to learning from complaints and promoting a culture of continuous improvement.</p> <p>We will:</p> <p>Share and apply lessons learnt across the Council always respecting the privacy of our residents</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide relevant training to staff • Review and make changes to policies and procedures where necessary.
6.7	In some cases, a resident may have a legal entitlement to redress. The landlord should still offer a resolution where possible, obtaining legal advice as to how any offer of resolution should be worded.	Yes	The complaints team and service areas work closely with the Council’s legal team when required.

Section 7 - Continuous learning and improvement

Mandatory 'must' requirements

Code section	Code requirement	Comply: Yes/No	Evidence, commentary and any explanations
7.2	Accountability and transparency are integral to a positive complaint handling culture. Landlords must report back on wider learning and improvements from complaints in their annual report and more frequently to their residents, staff and scrutiny panels.	Yes	The Annual Complaints Reports contain a section on Learning Outcomes and Service Improvements which is presented to the Resources & Corporate Performance Scrutiny Committee and Full Cabinet. Directorate Management Teams (DMTs) receive quarterly reports on complaints handling performance and future reports will include learning outcomes. It is proposed to present quarterly complaints handling reports to DMCs and to have a residents panel to review complaints handling processes.

Best practice 'should' requirements

Code section	Code requirement	Comply: Yes/No	Evidence, commentary and any explanations
7.3	A member of the governing body should be appointed to have lead responsibility for complaints to support a positive complaint handling culture. This role will be responsible for ensuring the governing body receives regular information on complaints that provides insight to the governing body on the landlord's complaint handling performance.	Yes	The Cabinet Member for Finance and Transformation is a member of RCP Committee Scrutiny and Cabinet and has lead responsibility for complaints and presentation of complaints performance and reports to Cabinet.

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<p>7.4</p>	<p>As a minimum, governing bodies should receive:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular updates on the volume, categories and outcome of complaints, alongside complaint handling performance including compliance with the Ombudsman’s orders • Regular reviews of issues and trends arising from complaint handling, • The annual performance report produced by the Ombudsman, where applicable • Individual complaint outcomes where necessary, including where the Ombudsman made findings of severe maladministration or referrals to regulatory bodies. The implementation of management responses should be tracked to ensure they are delivered to agreed timescales. <p>The annual self-assessment against the Complaint Handling Code for scrutiny and challenge.</p>		<p>Directorate Management Teams (DMTs) are provided with Quarterly performance reports on complaints. All Ombudsman decisions are given to DMTs.</p> <p>The annual complaints report is presented to RCP Scrutiny Committee and Full Cabinet which includes a section for the Ombudsman’s annual report and outcomes and the self-assessment (Complaint Handling Code).</p> <p>Any cases of severe maladministration are reported to the Cabinet Member and relevant senior managers.</p>
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7.5	Any themes or trends should be assessed by senior management to identify potential systemic issues, serious risks or policies and procedures that require revision. They should also be used to inform staff and contractor training.	Yes	The annual report identifies any themes or trends that need to be addressed and service improvements made accordingly. The new case management system now allows trends and themes to be identified at any point which will allow services to respond quicker to any identified systemic issues.
7.6	Landlords should have a standard objective in relation to complaint handling for all employees that reflects the need to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • have a collaborative and co-operative approach towards resolving complaints, working with colleagues across teams and departments • take collective responsibility for any shortfalls identified through complaints rather than blaming others • act within the Professional Standards for engaging with complaints as set by the Chartered Institute of Housing. 	Yes	Our good practice states that a complaint should receive one single response even if there are multiple issues covering various service areas. The triage teams allocate a complaint to a lead responding officer who has responsibility for obtaining information from other services as required and collating everything into a single response. This avoids complaints being passed between teams and no clear ownership

Section 8 - Self-assessment and compliance

Mandatory 'must' requirements

Code section	Code requirement	Comply: Yes/No	Evidence, commentary and any explanations
8.1	Landlords must carry out an annual self-assessment against the Code to ensure their complaint handling remains in line with its requirements.	Yes	An annual assessment is carried out in June each year assessing the Council's compliance to the Code for the previous financial year. Data to support the compliance is for the previous financial year.
8.2	Landlords must also carry out a self-assessment following a significant restructure and/or change in procedures.	Yes	Any restructures within Housing-related services or complaints-related services will include a review of the self-assessment.
8.3	<p>Following each self-assessment, a landlord must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> report the outcome of their self-assessment to their governing body. In the case of local authorities, self-assessment outcomes should be reported to elected members publish the outcome of their assessment on their website if they have one, or otherwise make accessible to residents include the self-assessment in their annual report section on complaints handling performance. 	Yes	<p>The self-assessment is included in the Council's annual complaints report which is presented to the Resources and Corporate Performance Scrutiny Committee and Full Cabinet in November each year.</p> <p>The self-assessment is published on the complaints web pages.</p> <p>Complaints - Camden Council</p> <p>For 2022/23 the Council intends to engage tenants in preparation of the self-assessment in order to include the customer experience of complaints handling. District Management Committees will be involved in providing feedback via surveys and engagement with the self-assessment.</p>