

Eden Housing Association's (EHA) compliance with the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code (CHC) - self-assessment (Version 2 revised and updated March 2021)

This self-assessment sets out how the current processes Eden Housing Association have in place to deal with complaints comply with the code.

KEY

YES

Complies with the new Complaint Handling Code

PARTIALLY

Partially complies with the new Complaint Handling Code – but requires work to update and strengthen

NO

Does not comply with the Complaint Handling Code and requires new processes to be developed

Definition of Complaint			
1.0	<i>Does the Complaints process use the following definition of a complaint?</i>	Yes	Partially
	<i>An expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack action by the organisation, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting an individual resident or a group of residents.</i>		
If Yes: How does EHA comply with the code?			
Eden Housing Association uses the definition of a complaint as above.			
If Partially: What is currently in place and what additions are required to ensure compliance? <u>N/A</u>			
If No: What action is required to ensure compliance? <u>N/A</u>			
Actions Completed:		Date: March 2021	

1.1	<i>Does the policy have exclusions where a complaint will not be considered?</i>	Yes	Partially	No
<p>If Yes: How does EHA comply with the code?</p> <p>The Policy clearly sets out the circumstances in which complaints may be excluded.</p>				
<p>If Partially: What is currently in place and what additions are required to ensure compliance? <u>N/A</u></p>				
<p>If No: What action is required to ensure compliance? <u>N/A</u></p>				
<p><i>Are these exclusions reasonable and fair to residents?</i></p> <p>Yes, we feel these exclusions are reasonable and fair. Whilst considering when it would be appropriate to exclude a formal complaint we engaged with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EHA's Tenants Scrutiny Panel • The Housing Ombudsman • Other Housing Association's to review good practice <p>The decision to exclude a formal complaint will be made by a senior officer within the association following the guidelines set out within the policy and procedure. The senior officer will always consider the full facts provided by the complainant and will not apply a "one size fits all approach" when making their decision. If the decision is made to exclude a complaint, the complainant will be provided with full details of how and why this decision has been reached.</p> <p>To date EHA have no record of excluding a formal complaint.</p>				
Actions Completed:				Date: March 2021

Accessibility				
2.0	<i>Are multiple accessibility routes available for residents to make a complaint?</i>	Yes	Partially	No
<p>If Yes: How does EHA comply with the code?</p> <p>In order to encourage feedback from our residents we recognise that we must not put barriers in their way. Residents are able to make complaints and provide feedback in a number of ways for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Telephone • Letter • E-mail • Website • Social Media • Online self-service portal • In person <p>Any complaints received via our social media platforms will be dealt with appropriately to ensure confidentiality and privacy is maintained at all times. If the complaint is raised via a public page we will contact the customer using an alternative secure medium to engage in a one to one dialogue about their areas of concern.</p>				
<p>If Partially: What is currently in place and what additions are required to ensure compliance? <u>N/A</u></p>				
<p>If No: What action is required to ensure compliance? <u>N/A</u></p>				
No Further Action Required:		Date: Dec 2021		
2.1	<i>Is the complaints Policy and Procedure available online?</i>	Yes	Partially	No
<p>If Yes: How does EHA comply with the code?</p>				

The policy and service standard are available on our website, these documents both clearly set out the journey of the complaint including: who will deal with their complaint, timeframe for response and escalation routes if they remain dissatisfied.				
If Partially: What is currently in place and what additions are required to ensure compliance? <u>N/A</u>				
If No: What action is required to ensure compliance? <u>N/A</u>				
No Further Action Required			Date: March 2021	
2.2	<i>Do we have a Reasonable Adjustments Policy</i>			Yes Partially No
If Yes: How does EHA comply with the code? <u>N/A</u>				
If Partially: What is currently in place and what additions are required to ensure compliance? Reference to reasonable adjustments is made in several policies. In order to strengthen our position, we have added an explicit section into our Compliments, Complaints and Feedback Policy.				
If No: What action is required to ensure compliance? <u>N/A</u>				
Actions Completed :			Date:	
2.4	<i>Do we regularly advise residents about our complaints process?</i>			Yes Partially No
If Yes: How does EHA comply with the code? Yes, we regularly advise residents of our complaints process and use the following platforms to do this (this list is not exhaustive):				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whilst corresponding with our residents on a daily basis. This could be while they are an applicant, during the sign up process, throughout the life of their tenancy or as a former tenant • In every edition of our newsletter Viewpoint (currently 4 times per year) 				

- On our website
- In the public areas of our premises

If Partially: What is currently in place and what additions are required to ensure compliance? N/A

If No: What action is required to ensure compliance? N/A

No Further Action Required:

Date: Dec 2020

Complaints Team and Process

3.0 *Is there a complaint officer or equivalent post?*

Yes

Partially

No

If Yes: How does EHA comply with the code?

Senior members of staff within the associations management team deal with all formal complaints.

- Stage 1 Formal Complaints are dealt with by a Manager
- Stage 2 Formal Complaints are dealt with by a Director, Chief Executive or Chair, Vice Chair of Board or Chair, Vice Chair of Audit and Risk Committee.

If Partially: What is currently in place and what additions are required to ensure compliance? N/A

If No: What action is required to ensure compliance? N/A

Actions Completed:

Date: March 2021

3.1 *Does the complaint officer have autonomy to resolve complaints?*

Yes

Partially

No

If Yes: How does EHA comply with the code?

The manager dealing with the formal complaint has the autonomy to make decisions within their area of responsibility and acting within their delegated authorities.

If Partially: What is currently in place and what additions are required to ensure compliance? <u>N/A</u>				
If No: What action is required to ensure compliance? <u>N/A</u>				
No Further Action Required:				Date: Dec 2020
3.2	<i>Does the complaint officer have authority to compel engagement from other departments to resolve disputes?</i>			Yes
		Partially	No	
If Yes: How does EHA comply with the code? Whilst dealing with a formal complaint the investigating officer has the authority to request information from or to arrange a meeting/interview with any colleagues they deem appropriate to assist with their investigations. Colleagues are aware that there is a timescale to meet when dealing with formal complaints, therefore will always assign these requests a high priority.				
If Partially: What is currently in place and what additions are required to ensure compliance? <u>N/A</u>				
If No: What action is required to ensure compliance? <u>N/A</u>				
No Further Action Required:				Date: Dec 2020
3.3	<i>If there is a third stage to the complaint's procedure, are residents involved in the decision making?</i>			Yes
	<i>Eden Housing Association does not have a third stage in the Formal Complaints Process</i>			Partially
			No	
If Yes: How does EHA comply with the code? Eden Housing				
If Partially: What is currently in place and what additions are required to ensure compliance?				
If No: What action is required to ensure compliance? <u>N/A</u>				

Actions Completed:		Date:		
3.4	<i>Is any third stage optional for residents?</i> <i>As 3.3 Eden Housing does not have a third stage in the Formal Complaints Process</i>	Yes	Partially	No
If Yes:				
Action Required:		Date:		
3.5	<i>Does the final stage response set out residents' right to refer the matter to the Housing Ombudsman Service?</i>	Yes	Partially	No
If Yes: How does EHA comply with the code? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When the Stage 2 Formal Complaint is logged an acknowledgement, letter is sent to the complainant. This letter clearly confirms how we will deal with the complaint, in addition it also goes on to explain the next stages for the complainant if they are dissatisfied with the response (this includes information on the appointment of a Designated Person or a referral to the Housing Ombudsman). • When the Stage 2 Final Response letter is sent out it advises that the response provided to the Stage 2 Formal Complaint marks the end of the Eden Housing Association complaints process. Should the complainant remain dissatisfied with the response they can discuss it further with the investigating officer alternatively details are provided on how to refer the complaint to a Designated Person or the Housing Ombudsman. • Details of the full process is also provided within the Compliments, Complaints and Feedback Service Standard – this is sent out at each stage of the process. 				
If Partially: What is currently in place and what additions are required to ensure compliance? <u>N/A</u>				
If No: What action is required to ensure compliance? <u>N/A</u>				
No Further Action Required:		Date: March 2021		

3.7	Do we keep a record of complaint correspondence including correspondence from the resident?	Yes	Partially	No
<p>If Yes: How does EHA comply with the code? Yes, we use the Feedback Manager module of our Housing Management System to log, manage and store full details of all formal complaints. All data is stored and managed in line with EHA's Data Retention Policy.</p>				
<p>If Partially: What is currently in place and what additions are required to ensure compliance? <u>N/A</u></p>				
<p>If No: What action is required to ensure compliance? <u>N/A</u></p>				
No Further Action Required:			Date: Dec 2020	
<p>At what stage are most complaints resolved? <i>(Information collated between April 2019 and December 2020)</i></p> <p>The majority of our complaints are dealt with at Stage 1 (91%).</p>				
Communication				
4.0	Are residents kept informed and updated during the complaints process?	Yes	Partially	No
<p>If Yes: How does EHA comply with the code?</p> <p>Throughout the life of the complaint the complainant will be kept updated and informed even if there is no new information to provide, this helps to reassure that we are actively seeking to resolve the issues they have raised, in addition it gives the complainant the opportunity to comment on any adverse findings before a final decision is made. Full details of these conversations will be added onto our recording tool Feedback Manager.</p>				
<p>If Partially: What is currently in place and what additions are required to ensure compliance? <u>N/A</u></p>				
<p>If No: What action is required to ensure compliance? <u>N/A</u></p>				

Actions Completed:		Date: March 2021		
4.1	<i>Are residents informed of the landlord's position and given a chance to respond and challenge any area of dispute before the final decision?</i>	Yes	Partially	No
If Yes: How does EHA comply with the code? As detailed in (4.0) above the investigating officer will keep in contact with the complainant throughout the life of the complaint in an attempt to provide the complainant with an update, obtain additional information and to give the the complainant the opportunity to comment on any adverse findings before a final decision is made.				
If Partially: What is currently in place and what additions are required to ensure compliance? <u>N/A</u>				
If No: What action is required to ensure compliance? <u>N/A</u>				
Actions Completed:		Date: March 2021		
4.2	<i>Are all complaints acknowledged and logged within five days?</i>	Yes	Partially	No
If Yes: How does EHA comply with the code? Yes, an acknowledgement letter is sent to the complainant the day it is logged. The acknowledgement letter includes the complaint reference number, name of the investigating officer and timescale for a response. This letter can be sent via the post, emailed or hand delivered.				
If Partially: What is currently in place and what additions are required to ensure compliance? <u>N/A</u>				
If No: What action is required to ensure compliance? <u>N/A</u>				
No Further Action Required:		Date: Dec 2020		
4.3	<i>Are residents advised of how to escalate at the end of each stage?</i>	Yes	Partially	No

If Yes: How does EHA comply with the code?	
Yes, details of how to escalate the complaint are included within all acknowledgement and response letters at each stage of the process.	
If Partially: What is currently in place and what additions are required to ensure compliance? <u>N/A</u>	
If No: What action is required to ensure compliance? <u>N/A</u>	
No Further Action Required:	Date: Dec 2020
4.4 What proportion of complaints are resolved at stage one?	
<p>Data taken from April 2019 to Dec 2020 - during this period 44 formal complaints were logged, 40 were resolved at Stage 1 and 4 escalated to Stage 2.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 40 (91%) of formal complaints were resolved at Stage 1. 	

4.5 What proportion of complaints are resolved at stage two?	
<p>Data taken from April 2019 to Dec 2020 - during this period 4 complaints were escalated to Stage 2, 3 were resolved at Stage 2 and 1 was escalated and resolved at Stage 3.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3) of 4 formal complaints were resolved at Stage 2 (7% of all or 75% of stage 2) 1 of 4 formal complaint was escalated and resolved at Stage 3 (2% of all or 25% of stage 2) <p>Going forward our process will consist of Stage 1 and Stage 2 only.</p>	
4.6 What proportion of complaint responses are sent within Code Timescales?	

At present our response timescales are as follows:

Data taken from April 2019 to Dec 2020

- **Stage 1** = 15 working days with 82% of responses sent within this timescale
- **Stage 1 (with a customer informed extension)** = 18% of responses were extended
- **Stage 2** = 10 working days with 50% of responses sent within this timescale
- **Stage 2 (with a customer informed extension)** = 50% of responses were extended
- **Stage 3** = 28 working days with 100% of responses were sent within this timescale

The Complaint Handling Code prescribes that the following timescales should be used, EHA's policy and procedure will be updated to incorporate the new timescales.

The following demonstrates the new timescales and our response timescales had we been working to them.

- **Stage 1** (10 working days) = 78% of responses would have been sent within this timescale
- **Stage 1 (with an extension)** = 22% of responses would of have required an extension
- **Stage 2** (20 working days) = 100% of responses would have been sent within this timescale.
- **Stage 2 (with an extension)** = No extensions would have been required

4.6 Where timescales have been extended did we have good reason?

Data taken from April 2019 to Dec 2020

Yes	No

The following have been recorded as valid reasons for an extension:

- A home/site visit has been arranged but could not take place until after the set response timescale due to the availability of the customer/member of staff
- Awaiting information from a third party to assist with the investigations
- Awaiting information from the customer to assist with the investigations

- Illness or an unexpected circumstance preventing the investigation from taking place, (this could either be the complainant, member of staff or a third party)

4.7 Where timescales have been extended did we keep the resident informed?

Yes

No

If we need to extend a timescale the complainant will either be sent a letter, email or receive a phone call to apologise for the delay, in addition we will provide reasons for the extension and a revised response date. Full details will be logged against the individual complaint on Feedback Manager.

4.8 What proportion of complaints do we resolve to residents satisfaction?

Data taken from April 2019 to Dec 2020

Within each response letter we give the complainant the opportunity to escalate their complaint if they remain dissatisfied. The responses include the following information:

If after receiving our response, you remain dissatisfied we will ask you confirm the following and escalate your complaint to the next stage:

- *What you remain dissatisfied with*
- *What action you feel we could take to resolve the complaint to your satisfaction*

From the complaints logged:

- 44 (91%) were resolved to the complainants satisfaction at Stage 1
- 3 (7%) were resolved to the complainants satisfaction at Stage 1
- 1 (2%) formal complaint was escalated and resolved at Stage 3

Co-operation with the Housing Ombudsman Service

5.0 Were all requests for evidence responded to within 15 working days?

Yes

No

Whenever we have been asked to provide the Ombudsman with any information, it has always been supplied within the required timescale.

Where the timescale was extended did we keep the Ombudsman informed?

Yes

No

N/A

Fairness in Complaint Handling

6.0 Are residents able to complain via a representative throughout?

Yes

No

We will accept complaints from family members, local councilors or any other advocate acting in the best interests of our residents (providing they are authorised by the resident to do so).

If advice was given, was this accurate and easy to understand?

Yes

No

If the resident or advocate require assistance to use our service, we will do everything we reasonably can to assist them by:

- Providing advice and assistance about the process
- Providing information in other formats such as large print, braille and other languages
- Providing an interpreter
- Providing a same sex interview
- Extension of time limits (where it is lawful to do so)
- Use of email or telephone in preference to hard copy letters
- Rest or comfort breaks in any meeting

We will not make assumptions about whether a customer requires a reasonable adjustment or about what those adjustments might be. We will discuss the requirements of a reasonable adjustment with the individual customer and seek to reach

agreement on what will be reasonable in the circumstances to best suit the customer's needs.

How many complaints did we refuse to escalate?

To date we have not refused to escalate any formal complaints.

What was the reason for refusal?

N/A

Did we explain our decision to the resident?

Yes

No

N/A

Outcomes and remedies

7.0 Where something has gone wrong are we taking appropriate steps to put things right?

Yes

No

Details of any learning points and/or actions that can be taken to prevent similar complaints in the future are all recorded against the complaint.

In addition manager of the service will:

- Ensure that the complainant is made aware of any learning points/actions following the complaint
- Discuss learning points/actions with staff/management team
- Discuss complaint trends on a quarterly basis with management team reporting to board when required
- Ensure learning points/actions are implemented
- Put an appropriate article on ERNIE (internal staff intranet) if relevant/appropriate
- Ensure that we monitor trends and action where appropriate

Continuous learning and improvement

8.0 What improvements have we made as a result of learning from complaints?

We have:

- Updated and strengthened several of our policies and procedures
- Met with contractors and implemented changes in the way they communicate with our customers
- Improved communication between EHA and our contractors
- Ceased using “blanket style letters” instead tailoring them to the individual needs of our residents
- Carried out a Complaints Handling refresher session with relevant staff (led by the Chief Executive and Customer Service Manager)
- Agreed to process void re-charges as soon as possible after the termination of tenancy
- Made reasonable adjustments to meet the individual needs of our customers

How do we share these lessons with:

A) Residents?

Updates are provided within each edition of our quarterly newsletter Viewpoint
Complainants are made aware of the learning outcomes within their complaint response

B) The board/governing body?

From January 2021 a summary of all complaints will be presented to Board as part of our quarterly tenant engagement report.

C) In the Annual Report?

We haven't recently included explicit lessons learnt from our complaints within our Annual Report but will ensure that this information is included from 2020 onwards.

Will the code make a difference to how we respond to complaints?

We already have a robust process in place for dealing with and responding to formal complaints, however recommendations from the code will see us encouraging challenge from our complainants at a much earlier stage. , The desired outcome of this will be to allow us the opportunity to put things right much more swiftly, prevent ongoing dissatisfaction and the need to escalate, this will be a positive development for both the complainant and the association.

What changes will we make?

Areas for improvement detailed below were identified when V1 of the Complaints Handling Code self- assessment was completed in December 2020, these have now all been implemented and published in V2 of the Self Assessment in March 2021

- Update our service standard to include a flowchart which clearly sets out the complaint journey (including timescales) from the point the complaint is raised to resolution
- We will make explicit reference to our approach to Reasonable Adjustments within our Equality and Diversity Policy.

We will update and strengthen our policy and procedure by amending, adding to or expanding the information already provided within the following areas:

- Updating the definition of a complaint
- Expanding on how we will deal with Formal Complaints received via Social Media
- Adding in a section on Exclusions
- Publicising access to the Housing Ombudsman Service at a much earlier stage. Not only at the point the complainant has exhausted our complaints process but throughout the life of the complaint, encouraging them to engage with the Ombudsman's dispute support advisors
- Amending the current response timescales:

Stage 1 will go from 15 to 10 working days

Stage 2 will go from 10 to 20 working days

- Removing Stage 3 of the Formal Complaints Process
- Introducing contact with the complainant whilst the complaint is live. Giving the complainant the opportunity to respond and challenge us prior to a final decision being made
- Strengthen how we continuously learn and improve from complaints
- Make reference to the Ombudsman's complaint handling failure and orders guidance