

Connect Housing Self-Assessment of the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code (July 2020)

		Are Connect Compliant	Information
1	Definition of a complaint		
	Does the complaints process use the following definition of a complaint?	Y	Our complaints Policy (available at www.connecthousing.org.uk/complaints - Section 2) Goes further and deeper than this.
	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.		
	Does the policy have exclusions where a complaint will not be considered?	Y	Our policy states (1.13: Connect reserve the right to refuse to deal with complaints that are pursued unreasonable or in an abusive or aggressive manner' based on the Housing Ombudsman document 'Unacceptable User Actions and Behaviour). In addition, 1.16 Complaints are not progressed through the complaints process when the complainant has started a specific insurance claim against us and 1.17: MP enquiries are not treated as complaints.
	Are these exclusions reasonable and fair to residents? Evidence relied upon	Y	The above is fair and reasonable and is informed by https://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/about-us/corporate-information/policies/dispute-resolution/unacceptable-user-action-policy/
2	Accessibility		
	Are multiple accessibility routes available for residents to make a complaint?	Y	Our Complaints booklet shows that complaints can be raised over the phone, in person, via email or written correspondence. Our Policy states that we welcome complaints. Our Complaints page on our website encourages multi-channel methods for raising a complaint.
	Is the complaints policy and procedure available online?	Y	www.connecthousing.org.uk/complaints
	Do we have a reasonable adjustments policy?	Y	We adhere to Connects Adjustments policy. We address this on a case by case basis

	Do we regularly advise residents about our complaints process?	Y	Our complaint performance is in both our annual report and our tenants report.
3	Complaints team and process		
	Is there a complaint officer or equivalent in post?	Y	Yes our Customer Insights Service Manager is responsible for Complaints
	Does the complaint officer have autonomy to resolve complaints?	Y	Yes - Where authorisation levels are exceeded, the Customer Insights Manager has direct access to Senior Managers and the Leadership team to enable complaints to be resolved.
	Does the complaint officer have authority to compel engagement from other departments to resolve disputes?	Y	Yes - Senior Managers are responsible for resolving their own complaints to ensure that any lessons to be learned from the complaint are understood by the person responsible. The Customer Insight Manager monitors the process and collates the feedback, in addition to providing support where required.
	If there is a third stage to the complaints procedure are residents involved in the decision making?	N	This was removed by Connect in 2019.
	Is any third stage optional for residents?		This was removed by Connect in 2019.
	Does the final stage response set out residents' right to refer the matter to the Housing Ombudsman Service?	N	<p>This is being reintroduced from January 1st 2021. The following information will be included on all stage 2 complaints final responses;</p> <p>Your rights <i>This is our final response to your complaint and we consider the matter closed. If you believe we have acted unfairly or unreasonably, you have the right to refer your complaint to the Housing Ombudsman Service.</i></p> <p><i>The Housing Ombudsman Service is set up by law to look at complaints about the housing organisations that are registered with them. Their service is free, independent and impartial. For more information, please visit https://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/</i></p>

	Do we keep a record of complaint correspondence including correspondence from the resident?	Y	This is recorded internally using an Electronic Document Management system. A Complaint reference number is generated when a complaint is received and all correspondence including acknowledgement letters and evidence received in relation to any investigation is stored under this reference including any correspondence with the complainant
	At what stage are most complaints resolved?		Stage 1 (92%)
4	Communication		
	Are residents kept informed and updated during the complaints process?	Y	Our complaints system generates an acknowledgement letter on receipt of the complaint. The target date for resolution (14 days) is then set. A weekly report every Monday to all senior managers. Any delays to resolving the complaint are requested through the system which generates correspondence for the customer advising of amended target dates.
	Are residents informed of the landlord's position and given a chance to respond and challenge any area of dispute before the final decision?	Y	All managers are encouraged to discuss the complaint with the complainant. When raising a Complaint, we ask the complainant to tell us what they want us to do to put things right. If this can be met in full, we do not always need to discuss this issue with the complainant.
	Are all complaints acknowledged and logged within five days?	Y	All complaints are logged on the day of receipt. I am not aware of any complaint that has not been logged correctly.

		Y	<p>Within our complaints leaflet (attached) the full process is included. From January 1 2021, the following will be included in each stage 1 response in addition to the statement that will be include in stage 2 and referenced above.</p> <p><u>Your Rights</u></p> <p><i>This is our formal response to your complaint under Stage 1 of our complaint procedure. If you believe we have acted unfairly or unreasonably, you have the right to ask us to refer your complaint to stage 2 of our procedure. You should do this within 28 days of the date of this letter.</i></p> <p><i>If you ask us to refer this matter to stage 2, you can do so in writing or by email stating;</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Where we have failed to respond to any area of your complaint.</i> • <i>Where you believe our response to your complaint is wrong</i> • <i>What you would like us to do to put things right.</i> <p><i>For more information, please visit www.connecthousing.org.uk/complaints</i></p>
	Are residents advised of how to escalate at the end of each stage?		
	What proportion of complaints are resolved at stage one?	92%	This is system generated data and is reported on monthly through the PI report
	What proportion of complaints are resolved at stage two?	80%	This is system generated data and is reported on monthly through the PI report
	What proportion of complaint responses are sent within Code timescales?		
	Stage one	79.80%	This is system generated data that is reported on monthly
	Stage one (with extension)	100%	This is system generated data that is reported on monthly
	Stage two	100%	This is system generated data that is reported on monthly
	Stage two (with extension)	-	This is system generated data that is reported on monthly
	Where timescales have been extended did we have good reason?	Y	This is usually to allow time for visits or to gather evidence in support of the complaint response
	Where timescales have been extended did we keep the resident informed?	Y	The system generates correspondence that is sent to the complaint when an extension is requested.

	What proportion of complaints do we resolve to residents' satisfaction? Not currently measured – restarting Dec '20		From the 1 January 2021, we will recommence measuring satisfaction with complaints
5	Cooperation with Housing Ombudsman Service		
	Were all requests for evidence responded to within 15 days?	Y	This is centrally reported data
	Where the timescale was extended did we keep the Ombudsman informed?	Y	This is centrally reported data
6	Fairness in complaint handling		
	Are residents able to complain via a representative throughout?	Y	This is standard practice in Connect to support customers via representatives as required - subject to Data Protection etc.
	If advice was given, was this accurate and easy to understand?	Y	This is standard practice in Connect to support customers via representatives as required - subject to Data Protection etc.
	How many cases did we refuse to escalate?	0	It would be reasonable to refuse to escalate where complaints have gone out of timescale or additional complaint reasons are provided between stage 1 and 2 - however this has not occurred.
	What was the reason for the refusal?	N/A	
	Did we explain our decision to the resident?	n/a	
7	Outcomes and remedies		
	Where something has gone wrong are we taking appropriate steps to put things right?	Y	On completion of the complaint, managers complete a checklist to collate learnings and outcomes. This is reviewed annually and reported to board. In addition, as Senior Managers resolve their own complaints they can easily identify where improvements need to be implemented in their own service areas
8	Continuous learning and improvement		
	What improvements have we made as a result of learning from complaints?		Improvements mainly centre on feedback to individuals. The most common area cited is a failure in communication which is currently being addressed through Project Vault.
	How do we share these lessons with:		
a)	residents?	Y	Via Get Connected, Website updates and annual tenant report
b)	the board/governing body?	Y	Annual Complaints report and regular performance data
c)	In the Annual Report?	Y	Complaints is included in the Annual Report.

	Has the Code made a difference to how we respond to complaints?	Y	
	What changes have we made?		The new code is ensured we reintroduce measuring Satisfaction with complaints and we are increasing the transparency of complainants rights to escalate complaints at each stage.