

In April 2022, the Housing Ombudsman launched the updated Complaints Handling Code. Compliance with the code forms part of our member obligations as a Registered Social Landlord for Foundation.

The code aims:

Colleagues and Employees- the Code supports excellent complaint handling and engagement with the Ombudsman. If the requirements of the Code cannot be delivered this should prompt discussion about what needs to change.

Chief executives and senior leaders – the Code supports learning from complaints and promotes the open and transparent use of information to assess performance and risks.

Boards - the Code supports culture setting and intelligence for assurance exercises, using complaint data alongside other management information on stock, services, and customer feedback to provide insight into their organisation. It is important for governance to understand the complaints their organisations are receiving and the impact of their complaint handling on residents.

Residents - the Code will act as a guide for residents setting out what they can and should expect from their landlord when they complain. The requirements in the Code also provide residents with information about how to make a complaint and how to progress it through the landlord's internal complaints procedure.

Landlords must carry out an annual assessment against the Code to ensure their complaint handling remains in line with its requirements and publish the results. As of the 1st October 2022, we have updated our self-assessment as below.

Appendix B – Self-Assessment Form

This self-assessment form should be completed by the complaints officer and discussed at the landlord’s governing body annually.

Evidence should be included to support all statements with additional commentary as necessary.

Explanations must also be provided where a mandatory ‘must’ requirement is not met to set out the rationale for the alternative approach adopted and why this delivers a better outcome.

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	Feedback Policy and Procedure
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	Feedback Policy and Procedure section 1.10
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	Feedback Policy and Procedure section 5.1
1.7	A landlord must accept a complaint unless there is a valid reason not to do so.	Yes	Feedback Policy and Procedure section 9

1.8	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.	Yes	Feedback Policy and Procedure section 9
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	Feedback Policy and Procedure section 9.6. Complaint response letters contain prompts to meet these requirements. Samples of previous responses have been collected in an audit that demonstrate this is being met.

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	Mandatory employee and manager training, Feedback Policy and Procedure
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.	No	Our Feedback survey contains the question 'do you know how to make a complaint?', and we are looking at ways we can direct the person to our complaints procedure if they select 'no' as part of our Client and Tenant Voice project. The Feedback Policy and Procedure is however linked on the same page as the feedback survey.

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	Feedback Policy and Procedure section 1.8
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	Feedback Policy and Procedure section 1.7 A Complaints leaflet in plain English containing information on how to make a complaint is circulated in services. A graphic containing Housing Ombudsman contact details and a QR that links through to our feedback page is included in regular correspondence to residents.
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	Our websites have a clear link to all complaints information on the top bar. Our complaints page contains our Feedback Policy and Procedure, the Housing Ombudsman Scheme, feedback form and Code of Complaints Self-Assessment
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	Information for All Policy Section 4

2.6	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.	Yes	Inspire North/ Foundation website has a 'Complaints, Concerns & Compliments' section which contains the Feedback Policy and Procedure, information on how to make a complaint, and Housing Ombudsman Scheme. A graphic which contains information about the Housing Ombudsman scheme and a QR code that links through to the Foundation Complaints page has been added social media, flyers, and posters.
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2.7	Landlords must provide residents with contact information for the Ombudsman as part of its regular correspondence with residents.	Yes	Complaints graphic with QR code and Housing Ombudsman information is included in regular correspondence
2.8	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.	Yes	Housing Ombudsman information is included in all complaints response letter templates. Samples of letters response letters containing this information have been collected in an audit.

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	Feedback Policy and Procedure Section 1.9

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	Quality Assurance Lead role and Investigating Officer.
3.2	...the complaint handler appointed must have appropriate complaint handling skills and no conflicts of interest.	Yes	Covered in mandatory employee and manager complaint handling training.

Best practice 'should' requirements

Code section	Code requirement	Comply: Yes/No	Evidence, commentary and any explanations
3.3	<p>Complaint handlers should:</p> <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	<p>Covered in mandatory employee and manager complaint handling training.</p> <p>Our complaint handling procedure as seen in the Feedback Policy and Procedure facilitates this.</p>

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	Feedback Policy and Procedure section 5

4.2	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.	Yes	Complaint acknowledgement letters contain prompts to ensure both parties have a shared understanding of the complaint. Samples of letters are collected in an audit.
4.6	A complaint investigation must be conducted in an impartial manner.	Yes	Feedback Policy and Procedure section 3.2
4.7	The complaint handler must: <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. 	Yes	Covered in mandatory employee and manager complaints handling training
4.11	Landlords must adhere to any reasonable arrangements agreed with residents in terms of frequency and method of communication	Yes	Information for All policy section 4
4.12	The resident, and if applicable any staff member who is the subject of the complaint, must also be given a fair chance to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • set out their position • comment on any adverse findings before a final decision is made. 	Yes	Covered in mandatory manager and employee training
4.13	A landlord must include in its complaints policy its timescales for a resident to request escalation of a complaint	Yes	Feedback Policy and Procedure sections 4.2.3 & 4.2.4
4.14	A landlord must not unreasonably refuse to escalate a complaint through all stages of the complaints	Yes	Feedback Policy and Procedure Section 9

	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.		
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	Inspire North has an in-house system for feedback using a well-known system called Datix
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	Feedback Policy and Procedure Section 9

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	No	The remedy for the complaint is set out clearly in response letters, however there is nothing formally in place currently to ensure unreasonable and unrealistic expectations are being managed in the outset. Action- to review this in 6 months' time.
4.4	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.	Yes	Feedback Policy and Procedure section 1.3
4.5	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.	Yes	Feedback Policy and Procedure section 3.5
4.8	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.		

4.9	Communication with the resident should not generally identify individual members of staff or contractors.	Yes	Feedback Policy and Procedure Section 3.4
4.10	Landlords should keep residents regularly updated about the progress of the investigation.	Yes	Feedback Policy and Procedure Section 4. Employee and manager mandatory complaint handling training
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.	No	Action- to investigate gathering feedback form complainants. Review this action in 6 months' time.
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	No	Action- review this in 6 months to see how this can be integrated into training and procedure
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	Feedback Policy and Procedure Section 9

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	Feedback Policy and Procedure section 4.3.10
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	Feedback Policy and Procedure Section 4.3.8

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	Covered in mandatory employee and manager complaint handling training. Feedback Policy 4.3.10 Samples of complaint response letters have been collected in an audit.
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	Stage 1 complaint response letter templates contain prompts to cover these. A sample of stage 1 complaint response letters has been collected in an audit.

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	Feedback Policy and Procedure section 4
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	Feedback Policy and Procedure section 4.3.8
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	Feedback Policy and Procedure section 4.5

5.12	The person considering the complaint at stage two, must not be the same person that considered the complaint at stage one.	Yes	Feedback Policy and Procedure Section 4
5.13	Landlords must respond to the stage two complaint within 20 working days 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.	Yes	Feedback policy 4.2.3
5.16	Landlords must confirm the following in writing to the resident at the completion of stage two 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 and <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. 	Yes	Complaint response letter templates prompt these responses. A sample of complaint responses has been collected in an audit.

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.	No- but this does not make us non-compliant	The Inspire North group is made up of a housing association and mental health charity. Due to the unique structure and client needs, Inspire North strongly believe a third stage is necessary to ensure it is for purpose for all clients within the group. This is covered in our Duty of Candour, Whistleblowing and Diversity and Inclusion Policies.

5.20	<p>Landlords must confirm the following in writing to the resident at the completion of stage three 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 • details of how to escalate the matter to the Housing Ombudsman Service if the resident remains dissatisfied 	Yes	Complaint response letter templates contain prompts for this information. A sample of stage 3 complaint letters has been collected in an audit.
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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.	No	No applicable to all or clients
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	Housing Ombudsman details are included in all complaint response letters
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	Feedback Policy and Procedure section 4.3.8.5 & 10.2
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 unreasonably delay the response, the complaint should be logged as a new complaint.	No	Inspire North processes treat these as separate complaints

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.	No	See 5.2
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	Housing Ombudsman contact details are included in all correspondence to residents

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.	Yes	Feedback Policy & Procedure Section 4.4
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.	Yes	Housing Ombudsman contact details are included in all complaint response letters.

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	Feedback Policy and Procedure section 1.3 & 4
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	Covered in mandatory managers and employee complaint handling training. A sample of stage 3 response letters have been collected in an audit demonstrating this practise.
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	Covered in mandatory managers and employee complaint handling training. A sample of stage 3 response letters have been collected in an audit demonstrating this practise.
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	Feedback Policy and Procedure 4.3.10.8 & 4.3.6

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	Feedback Policy & Procedure sections 1.3, 4.3.13 & 9 Culture of continuous improvement at Inspire North- You Said We Did
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	Feedback Policy & Procedure section 4.3.6

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	Feedback Policy & Procedure Section 4.3.13. 'You Said We Did' is shared at client board and published on our website. Client and Tenant Voice plan aims to build on this by discussing complaints, trends and opportunities for further learning and improvement. Complaints regularly go the Board of trustees for scrutiny and review.

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.	No	Inspire North's Board of Trustees has an appointed member responsible for internal/whistleblowing complaints. External complaints regularly go to Trustees at the Operations and Development sub-committee for review, however there is no official appointee for external complaints.
7.4	As a minimum, governing bodies should receive: <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. The annual self-assessment against the Complaint Handling Code for scrutiny and challenge. 	Yes	Regular update reports on complaints are given to Board of Trustees for review.

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	Complaints report that goes to Operations & Development Board quarterly You Said We Did will go bi-annually to O&D
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	Feedback Policy & Procedure Covered in mandatory managers and employee complaints handling training

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	Inspire North do bi-annual self-assessment as best practise
8.2	Landlords must also carry out a self-assessment following a significant restructure and/or change in procedures.	Yes	Not applicable- no significant restructure
8.3	Following each self-assessment, a landlord must: <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	Self-assessment will go to Operations and Development sub-committee for review by Board of Trustees. Self-assessment will be published on the website and annual review.