

Housing Complaints Policy

Report Author(s): Richard Dunsire
Strategic Housing and independence senior manager
01508 533620
Richard.Dunsire@southnorfolkandbroadland.gov.uk

Portfolio: Supporting People

Ward(s) Affected: All

Purpose of the Report:

To present the Housing Complaints Policy for approval

Recommendations:

1. To approve the Housing Complaints Policy attached at Appendix 1.
2. To require the Monitoring Officer to determine the correct committee to receive the report on the annual self-assessment and to update the relevant committee's terms of reference accordingly.

1. Summary

- 1.1 This report introduces the appended Housing Complaints Policy and seeks approval for implementation.
- 1.2 This complaint policy is for Housing complaints only, specifically for those that need to complain about their temporary accommodation as we currently do not provide other types of housing. This policy does not cover anyone who wishes to complain about their Housing and Homelessness case. These complaints will remain under the current complaints policy.
- 1.3 The policy clarifies how the council will support tenants in making their complaint and how it will deal with said complaint.
- 1.4 It also explains how we will use the complaint to continually improve our services and use the information to learn from.
- 1.5 The policy is applicable to tenants of South Norfolk Council.

2. Background

- 2.1 The Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 empowered the Housing Ombudsman to issue a code of practice about the procedures members of the Scheme should have in place for considering complaints against them following consultation on the code. It also placed a duty on the Ombudsman to monitor compliance with a code of practice that it has issued. The Ombudsman consulted on the code and its intended approach to the duty to monitor in late 2023. This is the first statutory Complaint Handling Code ('the Code') and it will take effect from 1 April 2024; the duty to monitor compliance will go-live at the same time.
- 2.2 Guidance regarding implementation was provided to officers on the 21st February 2024 regarding implementation timeframes, and their unrealistic nature within local government governance processors however the Housing Ombudsman made it clear that a policy must be in place by April 2024.
- 2.3 The Ombudsman believes all members should comply with all provisions in the Code as this represents best practice in complaint handling.
- 2.4 The Local Government Organisation has also provided guidance which aligns with the Housing Ombudsman's recommendations however with far more achievable deadlines. This will be presented to cabinet and council in September and October. Officers will aim to align the approach so that the new policy presented to member in September will incorporate both the Housing Ombudsman and the Local Government Ombudsman approach.

3. Proposed action

- 3.1 The aims of this Policy are to:

1. To show how the Council handles complaints through increased transparency, accessibility, and complaint handling governance, demonstrating that residents are core to its service delivery and good complaint handling is central to that.
2. It aims to support the earliest resolution of complaints while the matters are still within the Council's own procedure. This can avoid issues escalating with potentially prolonged detriment to the resident, as well as requiring significantly more time and resource by the landlord to remedy.
3. It provides a guide to residents of what to expect if they make a complaint, as well as improving access and awareness to the procedure when they need it.
4. Ensure that the policy operates consistently within The Housing Ombudsman's code of guidance and other South Norfolk Council priorities and policies.

4. Other options

- 4.1 Council may choose not to adopt but the consequences of this would be that the Council would not meet The Housing Ombudsman's code of guidance and therefore be at risk of challenge.

5. Issues and risks

- 5.1 The Council will not be compliant with The Housing Ombudsman's Code of Guidance if it doesn't adopt a fit for purpose Housing Complaints Policy from 1st April 2024.
- 5.2 **Resource Implications** – there are no resource implications associated with this report.
- 5.3 **Legal Implications** – If this policy is not adopted we would not comply with the requirements of being a Registered Provider by not being compliant with The Housing Ombudsman's Code of Guidance.
- 5.4 **Equality Implications** – There are equality implications associated with this report.
- 5.5 **Environmental Impact** – There are no environmental impact implications associated with this report.
- 5.6 **Crime and Disorder** – there are no crime and disorder implications associated with this report
- 5.7 **Risks** – the appended policy has taken into account all risks

6. Conclusion

- 6.1 As a Registered Provider we need to operate with an adequate Housing Complaints Policy and comply with The Housing Ombudsman's Code of Guidance.

7. Recommendations

1. To approve the Housing Complaints Policy attached at Appendix 1.
2. To require the Monitoring Officer to determine the correct committee to receive the report on the annual self-assessment and to update the relevant committee's terms of reference accordingly.