

Code section	Code requirement 'must' requirement	Comply: Yes/No	Evidence, commentary and any explanations
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Code section	Best practice 'should' requirement	Comply: Yes/No	Evidence, commentary and any explanations
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Section 1 - Definition of a complaint

Code section	Code requirement 'must' requirement	Comply: Yes/No	Evidence, commentary and any explanations
1.2	A complaint must be defined as: '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.	✓	N:\Corporate\Policies and Procedures\Customer Service and Complaints Policy Jan 2021.pdf
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.	✓	N:\Corporate\Policies and Procedures\Customer Service and Complaints Policy Jan 2021.pdf
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.	✓	N:\Corporate\Policies and Procedures\Customer Service and Complaints Policy Jan 2021.pdf

Code section	Best practice 'should' 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.	✓	The Landlord recognises this, however the procedure needs to be reviewed to be able to achieve and evidence this, and better recording is required.
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.	✓	We would expect this to be the case - procedure to be reviewed in order to evidence this.

Code section	Code requirement 'must' requirement	Comply: Yes/No	Evidence, commentary and any explanations
1.7	A landlord must accept a complaint unless there is a valid reason not to do so.	✓	N:\Corporate\Policies and Procedures\Customer Service and Complaints Policy Jan 2021.pdf
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.	✓	N:\Corporate\Policies and Procedures\Customer Service and Complaints Policy Jan 2021.pdf
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.	✓	No complaints have been refused since the introduction of the new Policy in Jan 2021.

Code section	Best practice 'should' requirement	Comply: Yes/No	Evidence, commentary and any explanations

Section 2 - Accessibility and awareness

Code section	Code requirement 'must' requirement	Comply: Yes/No	Evidence, commentary and any explanations	Code section	Best practice 'should' 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.	✓	Whilst reception may not be open, complaints can be made, via the telephone, via email, or via the website.	2.2	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".	✓	Peter Shackley
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.	✓	It is clearly linked at the bottom of the EPIC website home page. We email it to anyone that requests it. https://epichousing.co.uk/manage-my-home/feedback-form/				
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.	✓	It is clearly linked at the bottom of the home page. https://epichousing.co.uk/manage-my-home/feedback-form/				

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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.	✓	Whilst we do not currently have a specific reasonable adjustments policy, the Customer Service and Complaints policy does incorporate on page 4: EPIC will comply with the Equalities Act 2010 and will adapt normal policies and procedures as required to accommodate an individual's needs. For the purpose of complaints EPIC will make reasonable adjustments as required for individual's needs.				
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.	✓	The policy is on the website (which includes the Ombudsman details) The website, telephone number, address and email address were published in the customer newsletter (Jan 2022)				
2.7	Landlords must provide residents with contact information for the Ombudsman as part of its regular correspondence with residents.	✓	This is included at all stages within the complaints process and is being issued in the latest tenant newsletter				

Code section	Code requirement 'must' requirement	Comply: Yes/No	Evidence, commentary and any explanations
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.	✓	The complaints acknowledgement includes the policy with the contact details and this line "I have attached a copy of our Complaints Policy for your attention, which includes the contact details for the Ombudsman if desired."

Code section	Best practice 'should' requirement	Comply: Yes/No	Evidence, commentary and any explanations

Section 3 - Complaint handling personnel

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".	✓	This is currently Peter Shackley
3.2	...the complaint handler appointed must have appropriate complaint handling skills and no conflicts of interest.	✓	Complaints are ordinarily allocated to Team Leader level or above, with people not connected to the case wherever reasonably possible to do so.

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. 	✓	Complaint handlers can : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • act sensitively and fairly • 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 (within their limits).

Section 4 - Complaint handling principles

Code section	Code requirement 'must' requirement	Comply: Yes/No	Evidence, commentary and any explanations	Code section	Best practice 'should' 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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>When a complaint is made, it must be acknowledged and logged at stage one of the complaints procedure within five days of receipt.</p>	✓	<p>A complaint will be logged as such. Concerns that are raised will be logged as communications and email trails should be able to give an audit of this if recorded in accordance with CX protocols. If anyone wishes to raise a complaint there is no obstruction to this process. Work is still required on the IT system to ensure all communications are definitely recorded to ensure audit trails are available.</p>	4.3	<p>Landlords should manage residents' expectations from the outset, being clear where a desired outcome is unreasonable or unrealistic</p>	✓	<p>Most staff in the organisation are aware of realistic expectations and if not advised prior, at the point of acknowledging a complaint any unreasonable or unrealistic desires would be managed.</p>

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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.	✓	The understanding of the complaint is set out within the acknowledgement, as well as the opportunity to respond with further details, or a request for clarification if not clear.	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.	✓	All staff would aim to resolve any issue at the earliest opportunity even before it reaches a complaint.
4.6	A complaint investigation must be conducted in an impartial manner.	✓	All complaint investigations are completed in an impartial manner, and where reasonably practical by a member of staff not connected with the case.	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.	✓	We would not prevent representation, however we do not highlight it as we would prefer to deal directly with residents where possible as this often helps reduce the likelihood of miscommunication and avoids any breaches of confidentiality/GDPR issues.

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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. 	✓	Complaint handlers should comply with this.	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.	✓	Generally legal issues would be responded to by the housing director who would include this within their response.
4.11	Landlords must adhere to any reasonable arrangements agreed with residents in terms of frequency and method of communication	✓	As a responsible landlord we would endeavour to meet any reasonable requests.	4.9	Communication with the resident should not generally identify individual members of staff or contractors.	✓	Generally individual members of staff or contractors are not identified. An exception may be where the complaint is about a specific individual.

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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. 	✓	In the acknowledgement residents are asked to provide any further information, and any adverse findings given to tenants can be escalated to stage 2. If a valid challenge is made to a stage 1 complaint it would be rectified at the earliest opportunity.	4.10	Landlords should keep residents regularly updated about the progress of the investigation.	X	An acknowledgement is sent within 5 working days and a full response within 10 working days ordinarily at stage 1, if extensions are required this would be communicated ordinarily. We are aware of the failings in this area in the previous year due to the exceptional circumstances
4.13	A landlord must include in its complaints policy its timescales for a resident to request escalation of a complaint	✓	N:\Corporate\Policies and Procedures\Customer Service and Complaints Policy Jan 2021.pdf	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.	X	This has not been completed currently however this will be reviewed.
4.14	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.	✓	EPIC have not refused to escalate a complaint through it's stages and signpost the escalation progress in the responses.	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	✓	EPIC try to support those complained about in respect of learning and engagement.

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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.	✓	Saved in access database	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.	✓	There are currently no restrictions in place
4.18	Landlords must have policies and procedures in place for managing unacceptable behaviour from residents and/or their representatives when pursuing a complaint.	✓	N:\Corporate\Policies and Procedures\Tenancy Breach Policy v2.1.pdf				

Section 5 - Complaint stages

Stage 1

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.	✓	Ordinarily this is the case, however it is acknowledged due to exceptional circumstances that in the last year these timescales have been breached.	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.	X	Ordinarily this is the case, however it is acknowledged due to exceptional circumstances that in the last year these timescales have been breached.
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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.	✓	Complaint responses sent when completed. Outstanding Actions are monitored.	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.	✓	This would be the case.
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.	✓	Template letters are available with each section of the complaint responded to with reasoning.	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.	✓	Learning in this area has commenced and action has taken place in this respect in 2021/22.

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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 	✓	Template letters are available, plain language is used and reasons are given as well as a clear indication of whether a complaint has been upheld and any outstanding actions.	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.	✓	This would be the case.
	Stage 2				Stage 2		

Code section	Code requirement 'must' requirement	Comply: Yes/No	Evidence, commentary and any explanations	Code section	Best practice 'should' 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.	✓	Complaints are escalated when requested.. If we were to refuse an escalation we would clearly communicate in writing why this was the case as well as giving the contact details for the Ombudsman	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.	✓	This would be the case. It is acknowledged due to exceptional circumstances that in the last year these timescales have been breached.
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.	✓	Acknowledgement is given and confirmation of remaining issues is sought where unclear.	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	✓	This would be the case.

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5.11	Landlords must only escalate a complaint to stage two once it has completed stage one and at the request of the resident.	✓	We escalate at the customers request once stage one has been completed and communicated.				
5.12	The person considering the complaint at stage two, must not be the same person that considered the complaint at stage one.	✓	The escalation is always a separate person.				
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.	✓	This is ordinarily the case, however we accept that timescales for stage 2 complaints has fallen below standards in this exceptional year with the whole SLT team leaving and interims being in place. Going forwards we expect this to be adhered to again.				

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5.16	<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 and •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>Epic confirm the complaint stage, decision, reasons, remedies, outstanding actions, and lessons learned. The complaint definition is not given at the end of a complaint as it has already been accepted at this stage.</p>				
	Stage 3						

Code section	Code requirement 'must' requirement	Comply: Yes/No	Evidence, commentary and any explanations	Code section	Best practice 'should' 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	N/A	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	N/A

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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	N/A	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	N/A
Section 6 - Putting things right							
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.	✓	This is set out in the complaint response on an individual level, and any systemic failings would be identified in the annual reporting.	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.	✓	The lessons learned section of the complaint response is forwarded to the head of the relevant department

Code section	Code requirement 'must' requirement	Comply: Yes/No	Evidence, commentary and any explanations
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.	✓	Any failings would be accepted and appropriate remedies offered.
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.	✓	Remedies are clearly explained and the relevant team monitor outstanding actions to completion.
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.	✓	Compensation awards are reviewed by managers to ensure they are appropriate.

Section 7 - Continuous learning and improvement

Code section	Best practice 'should' requirement	Comply: Yes/No	Evidence, commentary and any explanations
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.	✓	Legal responses are dealt with by the surveyor/team leader, however resolutions will be forwarded through legal channels where and when appropriate.

Code section	Code requirement 'must' requirement	Comply: Yes/No	Evidence, commentary and any explanations	Code section	Best practice 'should' 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.	✓	Reporting is completed in the quarterly KPI's and published in the annual reports.	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.	X	Not currently in place

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				7.4	<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. • The annual self-assessment against the 	X	Complaint reporting is being reviewed, with the intention of complaints being reviewed 6 monthly.

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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.	✓	Any themes or trends are reviewed at SMT
				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. 	✓	Training is required to provide evidence of this.

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Section 8 - Self-assessment and compliance

8.1	Landlords must carry out an annual self-assessment against the Code to ensure their complaint handling remains in line with its requirements.	✓	Annual self assessments are to be carried out after the end of the financial year.
8.2	Landlords must also carry out a self-assessment following a significant restructure and/or change in procedures.	✓	An assessment would be completed following any significant restructure or change in procedures.
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 	✓	This self assessment has been shared with the Board, and will be published on the website.
