

## Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code: Self-Assessment Form – North Star

| Compliance with the Complaint Handling Code |  |  |    |
|---|--|--|----|
| 1   | Definition of a Complaint  | Yes  | No |
|   | <p>Does the complaints process use the following definition of a complaint?</p> <p>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.</p> | <p><b>Yes</b></p> <p>The revised Complaints Policy now includes the definition of a complaint provided by the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code.</p>   |    |
|   | <p>Does the policy have exclusions where a complaint will not be considered?</p>   | <p><b>Yes</b></p> <p>A list of exclusions has been added to the revised Complaints Policy following the guidance included in the Housing Ombudsman's Complaints Handling Code</p>  |    |
|   | <p>Are these exclusions reasonable and fair to residents?</p>  | <p>They follow the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code and include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• when the incident/service failure occurred more than six months prior unless it is a safeguarding or health and safety issue,</li> <li>• when legal action is being taken against North Star on a related issue</li> </ul> <p>When repeated complaints are made about the same or related matters that we have already addressed.</p> |    |

| 2 | Accessibility   | Yes  | No |
|---|---|--|----|
|   | <p>Are multiple accessibility routes available for residents to make a complaint?</p> | <p><b>Yes</b></p> <p>The Complaints Policy sets out multiple accessibility routes for a customer to make a complaint.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In person</li> <li>• In writing</li> <li>• By telephone</li> <li>• Via MyNorthStar, our online service</li> <li>• By email on customer.services@northstarhg.co.uk</li> <li>• Via our website, www.northstarhg.co.uk</li> <li>• Through another person, perhaps an advocate, social worker, solicitor, etc.</li> <li>• Through comments made on surveys</li> <li>• Through comments on social media such as Facebook, Twitter, etc.</li> </ul> |    |
|   | <p>Is the complaints policy and procedure available online?</p>                       | <p><b>Yes</b></p> <p>A customer version of the policy is currently available on the website and this will be updated once the reviewed policy is completed.</p>  |    |
|   | <p>Do we have a reasonable adjustments policy?</p>                                    | <p><b>Yes</b></p> <p>Paragraph five of the policy.</p>   |    |
|   | <p>Do we regularly advise residents about our complaints process?</p>                 | <p><b>Yes</b></p> <p>The Customer Services Team shares details of the complaints process when they have an issue that would come under the policy. An article is to be included in the Tenant newsletter in Winter 2020.</p>   |    |

| 3 | Complaints Team and Process  | Yes   | No   |
|---|--|---|--|
|   | Is there a complaint officer or equivalent in post?  | <b>Yes</b><br>North Star has a Complaints co-ordinator, whose role is to record and administer the complaints process.  |  |
|   | Does the complaint officer have autonomy to resolve complaints?  | <b>Yes</b>  |  |
|   | Does the complaint officer have authority to compel engagement from other departments to resolve disputes?   | <b>Yes</b>  |  |
|   | If there is a third stage to the complaints procedure are residents involved in the decision making?         | <b>Yes</b><br>The current process include a Stage Three which is a panel hearing with a tenant representative on the panel. This process is being reviewed in line with the Housing Ombudsman's guidance and will reduce to a two stage process |  |
|   | Is any third stage optional for residents?   |   | <b>No</b><br>The current Stage Three is not optional for residents if they wish to pursue the complaint to the Housing Ombudsman they would have needed to complete Stage Three first. However, once the process is amended to remove Stage Three this will not be relevant. |
|   | Does the final stage response set out residents' right to refer the matter to the Housing Ombudsman Service? | <b>Yes</b><br>The response letter at Stage Three includes a standard paragraph on the right to refer the complaint to the Housing Ombudsman with contact  |  |

|          |  |  |           |
|----------|--|--|-----------|
|          |  | details. The policy provides details on the Housing Ombudsman.   |           |
|          | Do we keep a record of complaint correspondence including correspondence from the resident?  | <b>Yes</b><br>The Data and Information Officer keeps a record of all correspondence in relation to a complaint.  |           |
|          | At what stage are most complaints resolved?  | Most complaints are resolved at Stage One.<br><ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2019/20: 93% complaints resolved at Stage One</li> <li>• 2020/21: YTD (Q2) 100% resolved at Stage One</li> </ul>    |           |
| <b>4</b> | <b>Communication</b>   | <b>Yes</b>   | <b>No</b> |
|          | Are residents kept informed and updated during the complaints process?   | <b>Yes</b><br>Residents are contacted by the Service Manager during investigation of a complaint and the outcome discussed with the complainant.   |           |
|          | Are residents informed of the landlord's position and given a chance to respond and challenge any area of dispute before the final decision? | <b>Yes</b><br>Amendments have been made to the revised policy to specify that the customer must be contacted and informed of the outcome and allowed to challenge any dispute prior to the final response. |           |
|          | Are all complaints acknowledged and logged within five days?   | <b>Yes</b><br>Complaints are acknowledged and logged within two working days.  |           |
|          | Are residents advised of how to escalate at the end of each stage?   | <b>Yes</b><br>The final response letters at the end of each stage advises the complainant how they can progress the complaint to the next stage, this is covered in the policy.                            |           |

|             | What proportion of complaints are resolved at Stage One?                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2019/20: 93% resolved at Stage One</li> <li>2020/21: YTD (Qu two) 100% resolved at Stage One</li> </ul>   |           |                   |                |             |       |       |             |                         |      |  |
|-------------|---|--|-----------|-------------------|----------------|-------------|-------|-------|-------------|-------------------------|------|--|
|             | What proportion of complaints are resolved at Stage Two?                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2019/20: 86% (6/7 Cases)</li> <li>2020/21: There have been no Stage Two complaints to date</li> </ul>   |           |                   |                |             |       |       |             |                         |      |  |
|             | What proportion of complaint responses are sent within Code timescales? | <table border="0"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th><b>Q2 2020/21</b></th> <th><b>2019/20</b></th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>• Stage One</td> <td>97.6%</td> <td>92.2%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>• Stage Two</td> <td>No Stage Two complaints</td> <td>100%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> |           | <b>Q2 2020/21</b> | <b>2019/20</b> | • Stage One | 97.6% | 92.2% | • Stage Two | No Stage Two complaints | 100% |  |
|             | <b>Q2 2020/21</b>   | <b>2019/20</b>   |           |                   |                |             |       |       |             |                         |      |  |
| • Stage One | 97.6%   | 92.2%  |           |                   |                |             |       |       |             |                         |      |  |
| • Stage Two | No Stage Two complaints   | 100%   |           |                   |                |             |       |       |             |                         |      |  |
|             | Where timescales have been extended did we have good reason?            | <b>Yes</b>   |           |                   |                |             |       |       |             |                         |      |  |
|             | Where timescales have been extended did we keep the resident informed?  | <b>Yes</b><br>We currently measure responses by the original timescale. If we need to extend the response time this is discussed with the customer and is set out in writing.  |           |                   |                |             |       |       |             |                         |      |  |
|             | What proportion of complaints do we resolve to residents' satisfaction  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2019/20 66% - This was mainly due to some final response letters not being received by residents.</li> <li>2020/21: YTD 100%</li> </ul>   |           |                   |                |             |       |       |             |                         |      |  |
| <b>5</b>    | <b>Cooperation with Housing Ombudsman Service</b>                       | <b>Yes</b>   | <b>No</b> |                   |                |             |       |       |             |                         |      |  |
|             | Were all requests for evidence responded to within 15 days?             | <b>Yes</b><br>We received one request from the Housing Ombudsman service in 2020/21 which was responded to within the given timescales.  |           |                   |                |             |       |       |             |                         |      |  |
|             | Where the timescale was extended did we keep the Ombudsman informed?    | <b>Yes</b>   |           |                   |                |             |       |       |             |                         |      |  |
| <b>6</b>    | <b>Fairness in Complaint Handling</b>                                   | <b>Yes</b>   | <b>No</b> |                   |                |             |       |       |             |                         |      |  |
|             | Are residents able to complain via a representative throughout?         | <b>Yes</b><br>The policy outlines that tenants are able to complain via a representative   |           |                   |                |             |       |       |             |                         |      |  |

|          |   |   |           |
|----------|---|---|-----------|
|          |   | throughout their complaint and have them at any meetings.   |           |
|          | If advice was given, was this accurate and easy to understand?                      | <b>Yes</b>  |           |
|          | How many cases did we refuse to escalate?<br>What was the reason for the refusal?   | <b>One</b><br>The complaint was out of timescale as the incident had occurred two years prior to the complaint being raised with North Star.  |           |
|          | Did we explain our decision to the resident?  | <b>Yes</b>  |           |
| <b>7</b> | <b>Outcomes and Remedies</b>  | <b>Yes</b>  | <b>No</b> |
|          | Where something has gone wrong are we taking appropriate steps to put things right? | <b>Yes</b><br>On investigation of a complaint, where something has gone wrong we put this right at the earliest opportunity for the tenant, with an apology and any appropriate redress through the compensation and claims policy.   |           |
| <b>8</b> | <b>Continuous Learning and Improvement</b>  | <b>Yes</b>  | <b>No</b> |
|          | What improvements have we made as a result of learning from complaints?             | <p>To date in 2020/21, 52% of complaints have related to poor communication regarding repairs or time taken to complete repairs.</p> <p>Monthly meetings are being held with our main contractors to discuss complaints and performance areas; this is being held at Director level.</p> <p>Operational Managers have been working closely with contractors to reduce the backlog of repairs resulting from COVID-19 and as at November 2020 backlog jobs have reduced from 300 to 50.</p> <p>The tenant voice scrutiny panel has been involved in reviewing repairs performance and will be sharing status updates with customers.</p> <p>Work on communicating with tenants to keep them informed of a repair is ongoing and satisfaction with repairs is increasing.</p> |           |

|   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| <p>How do we share these lessons with:</p> <p>a) residents?</p> <p>b) the Board/governing body?</p> <p>c) In the Annual Report?</p> | <p>a) It is made clear in individual complaint responses what will be done differently to learn from a complaint. A quarterly briefing is provided to the Tenants Scrutiny panel on complaints received and actions taken.</p> <p>b) A complaints summary is reported to Board annually with which details any improvement actions identified as a result of the complaints.</p> <p>c) A summary of the number and nature of complaints is provided in the annual report and improvement are being made to the 2019/20 report to include lessons learned.</p>  |  |
| <p>Has the Code made a difference to how we respond to complaints?</p>  | <p><b>Yes</b></p>  |  |
| <p>What changes have we made?</p>   | <p>A number of adjustments to our policy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Utilise the complaint definition provided by the Ombudsman.</li> <li>• Provide greater clarify of the circumstances where a matter will not be considered as a complaint.</li> <li>• Improve guidance on how we deal with complaints via social media.</li> <li>• Strengthen the communication with the customer during the complaints process.</li> <li>• Provide greater clarity on dealing with complaints via social media.</li> <li>• Provide greater clarity on the legal obligations of both the customer and North Star where relevant to a complaint.</li> <li>• Reviewed the number of stages in our complaints process.</li> <li>• Developed an action plan to further improve our approach to complaints including; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Reducing our approach to two stages.</li> <li>- Ensure monitoring arrangements lead to change.</li> <li>- Clarifying the remit of the complaints officer in the two stage approach</li> <li>- Delivering training to staff on the new model and principles of the complaints approach.</li> <li>- Providing more regular information and feedback to customers and Board on complaints, learning and change made as a result of complaints.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> |  |

