

Karbon Homes

Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code: Self-Assessment Form

December 2020

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The following form has been designed by the Housing Ombudsman Service to support landlords in self-assessing against their recently published Complaint Handling Code. Each landlord is expected to answer the following questions in order to understand their position against the expectations of the code. Karbon Homes have completed the below assessment in December 2020 and pledge to continuously refer to the code regularly; and in the design of any complaint service improvements.

There are a small number of items within the code that Karbon are not yet compliant with – we are currently working to correct these items and aim to have these improvements in place by the end of March 2021. Where it has been identified that there are changes to be made, we have made this clear and transparent in the below document.

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><i>Our complaint definition does not match the above currently, however we have made plans to revise this within our policy and process documents and in existing training before March 31st 2021.</i></p>		X
	<p>Does the policy have exclusions where a complaint will not be considered?</p> <p><i>Our policy exclusions are:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- <i>A first time request for a service</i>- <i>A request for information or an explanation</i>- <i>A matter being dealt with through legal action or an insurance claim, or is currently subject to legal action, an insurance claim or a claim for damages</i>	X	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Dissatisfaction with a decision where a complainant has not used the relevant review procedure e.g. if a customer is not happy with a rent increase/decrease letter an alternative appeals procedure exists</i> - <i>Complaints about services provided by individuals/companies not within our control e.g. Utility Companies, Local Authorities etc</i> 		
	<p>Are these exclusions reasonable and fair to residents?</p> <p>Evidence relied upon</p> <p><i>We actively encourage customer feedback and have taken steps to ensure our list of exclusions is minimal to ensure there is an opportunity for complaints to be heard. We believe the above to be fair and reasonable as:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>A first time request for service should be treated exactly as such and Karbon should be allowed an opportunity to respond to the request. Should our customer have a complaint about the way in which that service was provided then they will of course have the opportunity to then have a complaint heard and managed</i> - <i>A request for information or an explanation should be treated as above</i> - <i>A matter being dealt with through legal action or an insurance claim is subject to specific and often binding guidance from a legal entity; therefore It would not be appropriate to also hear a complaint separately that may interfere with or duplicate the outcome</i> - <i>In instances whereby an alternative appeals process exists, this should be exhausted first – following which customers would of course have the opportunity to complain should they be unhappy with the outcome</i> - <i>Companies outside of the Karbon Group (not including those subcontracted to provide services on our behalf) are not subject to management by Karbon and we are not in a position to influence their policies or processes.</i> 	X	
2	Accessibility		
	<p>Are multiple accessibility routes available for residents to make a complaint?</p> <p><i>Customers are currently able to make a complaint through a number of accessible channels as follows:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>By telephone on 0808 1640111</i> 	X	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In writing to Number Five, Gosforth Park Avenue, Gosforth Business Park, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE12 8EG - In person with any member of our team either during a home visit or at one of our offices (our offices are currently closed to the public due to the Covid 19 pandemic, please check our website for more information on re-opening www.karbonhomes.co.uk) - By email to our Customer Relations Team at info@karbonhomes.co.uk - Via Facebook messenger: www.facebook.com/karbonhomes <p><i>Karbon Homes also offer a translation service which can be accessed via our Customer Relations Team Colleagues and also our customer's appointed Housing Officer.</i></p>		
	<p>Is the complaints policy and procedure available online?</p> <p><i>Our complaint policy can be found on our website under the 'About Us' tab, within the 'Important Information, Documents and Policies' page:</i></p> <p>https://www.karbonhomes.co.uk/media/10644/karbon-homes-complaint-compliments-and-suggestions-policy.pdf</p>	X	
	<p>Do we have a reasonable adjustments policy?</p> <p><i>Whilst we do not have a stand-alone reasonable adjustments policy, we believe reasonable adjustments are embedded within our complaints policy. Karbon Homes is committed to providing accessible services and we will always work with our customers to understand their individual needs and requirements and in ensuring these are met when having their complaint heard.</i></p>		X
	<p>Do we regularly advise residents about our complaints process?</p> <p><i>Our complaints process and policy is available on our website at all times and our front line teams have received process training to enable them in advising customers on how to access this. We are also planning some future scheduled communications through social media pages and customer magazine to support customers in understanding that this key service exists.</i></p>	X	

3	Complaints team and process		
	Is there a complaint officer or equivalent in post? <i>We have recently appointed a Customer Feedback Specialist, who is Karbon's nominated Complaint Officer.</i>	X	
	Does the complaint officer have autonomy to resolve complaints?	X	
	Does the complaint officer have authority to compel engagement from other departments to resolve disputes?	X	
	If there is a third stage to the complaints procedure are residents involved in the decision making? <i>Karbon do operate a three stage process, however our first stage (Stage 0) is intended for speedy, informal, same-day resolution of low level issues. Having sought clarity from the Housing Ombudsman Service, the above question relates to formal handling stages (our Stage 1 and Stage 2). Therefore in this respect, Karbon has two formal complaint handling stages, in line with Ombudsman recommendations.</i>	N/A	
	Is any third stage optional for residents? <i>As per the above explanation, this relates to formal handling stages, of which there are two within Karbon's policy. There is no third formal stage.</i>		X
	Does the final stage response set out residents' right to refer the matter to the Housing Ombudsman Service?	X	
	Do we keep a record of complaint correspondence including correspondence from the resident?	X	
	At what stage are most complaints resolved? <i>Stage 0, our first 'informal' stage – during which the vast majority are resolved to our customer's satisfaction within the same day.</i> <i>31/10/19-01/11/20 – 97.8% of total complaints recorded were resolved at Stage 0.</i>		
4	Communication		
	Are residents kept informed and updated during the complaints process? <i>We seek to update residents verbally where possible, but also by email and letter depending on the circumstances.</i>	X	

Are residents informed of the landlord's position and given a chance to respond and challenge any area of dispute before the final decision? <i>Our colleagues will seek to speak to our customer before a final decision is made. When we write out to customers with a final decision at both stage 1 and stage 2, we will always offer the opportunity to discuss anything within the letter that our customer may not agree with.</i>		X	
Are all complaints acknowledged and logged within five days?		X	
Are residents advised of how to escalate at the end of each stage?		X	
What proportion of complaints are resolved at stage one? <i>31/10/19-01/11/20</i> <i>Complaints resolved to Stage 1 - 1.8% of total complaints recorded</i>			
What proportion of complaints are resolved at stage two? <i>31/10/19-01/11/20</i> <i>Complaints resolved to Stage 2 = 0.4% of total complaints recorded</i>			
What proportion of complaint responses are sent within Code timescales? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stage one • Stage one (with extension) • Stage two • Stage two (with extension) <i>31/10/19-01/11/20 - Current reporting restrictions do not allow breakdown between responses sent by either Stage 1 or 2 – only a combined figure is available and this is 78% sent within code timescales. Our current reporting restrictions do not allow for measurement of timescale extensions – we are currently seeking to resolve this within the ongoing work to improve our internal</i>			

	<i>complaint handling system, which is intended for completion in 2021.</i>		
	Where timescales have been extended did we have good reason?	X	
	Where timescales have been extended did we keep the resident informed?	X	
	What proportion of complaints do we resolve to residents' satisfaction <i>We currently do not obtain satisfaction feedback at the end of complaint handling, though we plan to implement this in 2021.</i>	N/A	
5	Cooperation with Housing Ombudsman Service		
	Were all requests for evidence responded to within 15 days?	X	
	Where the timescale was extended did we keep the Ombudsman informed?	N/A	
6	Fairness in complaint handling		
	Are residents able to complain via a representative throughout?	X	
	If advice was given, was this accurate and easy to understand?	X	
	How many cases did we refuse to escalate? <i>To our knowledge, all requests for escalation have been met – however this is not a piece of data we currently capture as part of our process. We will seek to implement this in the design of our new internal complaint handling system, which is currently in development and expected for completion in 2021.</i> What was the reason for the refusal? <i>Not Applicable</i>	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?	X	
8	Continuous learning and improvement		
	What improvements have we made as a result of learning from complaints? <i>We have recruited a Customer Feedback Specialist to support our customers and colleagues in managing complex complaints.</i> <i>We have implemented a large scale review of service charges within sheltered accommodation schemes (underway).</i>		

	<p><i>We have made several changes within our repairs service including:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Improvements in communication to customers when a second visit is needed</i> - <i>A full review of our parts supply chain and stock management to improve availability and opportunity to repair first time</i> <p><i>We have invested to recruit additional advisors within our Customer Relations team following complaints and feedback from customers who experienced long wait times.</i></p> <p><i>We have made significant changes to the management of our Grounds Maintenance service, bringing a large portion of our service delivery 'in house' to improve our opportunity to manage.</i></p> <p><i>We have sought to refine elements of our complaint handling service, including but not limited to:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>The development of a new complaints management system for internal use, ensuring we are capturing complaint insight accurately</i> - <i>Revision of our handling timescales</i> - <i>Process training to all of our colleagues to support in recording and managing complaints</i> <p><i>We have launched a project to provide substantial Customer Service Skills Training to all colleagues (underway).</i></p> <p><i>We have implemented Customer Experience Action Meetings (CEAM) which seek to deliver customer views directly to service teams in order to bring about continuous learning, action planning and service improvement.</i></p>		
	<p>How do we share these lessons with:</p> <p>a) residents?</p> <p><i>Our Strategic Resident Involvement Group receive a copy of our quarterly Performance Committee complaints and compliments report.</i></p> <p>a) the board/governing body?</p>		

<p><i>Our Performance Committee receive a quarterly report on complaints and compliments.</i></p> <p>b) In the Annual Report?</p> <p><i>Our annual report currently includes statistics on our complaint handling performance. We will seek to also include learning opportunities in future editions.</i></p>		
<p>Has the Code made a difference to how we respond to complaints?</p>	<p>Yes</p>	
<p>What changes have we made?</p> <p><i>We have made plans to change Karbon’s complaint definition to match the universal definition within the code and to subsequently update our internal process training packs to reflect changes.</i></p> <p><i>We are organising a refresh of process training with our colleagues, so that understanding of any changes is well understood.</i></p> <p><i>We have appointed a nominated colleague as our ‘Complaints Officer’.</i></p> <p><i>We are currently reviewing our website to make the information contained on complaints even clearer to our customers; and we are seeking to include a specific contact form to register complaints through this channel in 2021.</i></p> <p><i>We are seeking to increase and formalise the way our Strategic Residents group support us in complaint management.</i></p> <p><i>We are seeking to implement complaint reviews involving colleagues and customers to support Karbon in identifying and formally capturing learning opportunities.</i></p> <p><i>We have developed the scope for our new complaints system to include elements within the code not previously captured – e.g. learning outcomes, ombudsman involvement and number of complaints whereby escalation was refused.</i></p>		

	<i>We are developing a specific module within our Customer Service Skills training programme that focusses on Complaint Handling best practice.</i>		
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