# RUNNYMEDE BOROUGH COUNCIL

## Housing Services

# Housing Complaints Policy
# 2026 - 2028

**Review due: September 2028**

Runnymede BOROUGH COUNCIL

# 1. Introduction

1.1 The Council strives to provide high-quality services to all residents and customers in line with our Customer Charter . In handling complaints about Housing services we aim to:

- deal with complaints on their merits, act independently, and have an open mind
- give the resident a fair chance to set out their position
- take measures to address any actual or perceived conflict of interest
- consider all relevant information and evidence carefully.

1.2 The Housing Ombudsman monitors compliance against the statutory Complaint Handling Code for registered providers of social housing. The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman can investigate complaints about the Council's services such as housing allocations and homeless applications. While the Local Government Ombudsman and Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Codes are aligned, this policy specifically clarifies the Council's approach to dealing with complaints as required by the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code (the Code).

1.3 We aim to make it easy for residents to complain, and complaints can be raised with any member of Council staff as all staff are made aware of the corporate complaints process and how to log a complaint.

1.4 A complaint is defined, as in the Code, as "an expression of dissatisfaction, however, made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the landlord, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting a resident or group of residents."

# 2. Policy Details

2.1 Housing Services aims to have a have a collaborative and co-operative approach to resolving complaints. We welcome feedback including compliments and complaints; and are committed to enabling a positive complaints culture, with effective procedures, well trained staff, putting things right for residents when they have gone wrong and demonstrating learning from complaints and a desire for continuous improvement. We will use complaints to identify issues and consider whether service improvements can be made as a result of learning from complaints. An annual self-assessment against the Code will be carried out with the involvement of tenants, presented to the Housing Committee for its endorsement and published on the website.

2.2 Residents can make a complaint using the Council's two stage complaints procedure online through the Council's website, in writing, by phone, by text, email or in person. Staff will assist a resident who needs help to make a complaint.

2.3 A complaint can be about quality of service, behaviour of staff or perceived failure to adhere to policy. It is not a service request (for example a request for a repair), request for information,

explanation of Council policy, or feedback (for example in a survey). The resident does not have to use the word complaint for it to be treated as such. Whenever a resident expresses dissatisfaction, we will give them the choice to make a complaint. A service request is a request requiring action to be taken to put something right. Service requests are not complaints, but are recorded, monitored, and reviewed regularly. A complaint will be raised when the resident expresses dissatisfaction with the response to their service request, even if the handling of the service request remains ongoing. The Council will not stop its efforts to address the service request if the resident complains. Raising a complaint about the handling of a service request will not delay or stall the resolution of the service request.

2.4 An expression of dissatisfaction with services made through a survey is not defined as a complaint, though wherever possible, the person completing the survey will be made aware of how they can pursue a complaint if they wish to. When we ask for wider feedback about our services, we will provide details of how residents can complain.

2.5 Complaints about antisocial behaviour are dealt with in line with our Antisocial Behaviour Policy at Problems with neighbours – Runnymede Borough Council

2.6 Residents will not be treated differently if they complain.

2.7 The Council deals with all complaints about contractors, at both stages. Where a complaint is made to a contractor acting on the Council's behalf, the contractor will pass the complaint to the Council. All such complaints will be logged, investigated, and responded to by the Council in accordance with this policy and the Code. Tenants will not be required to pursue their complaint directly with a contractor.

2.8 Complaints may be made by residents or by an authorised representative or third party on their behalf. Complainants will be given the opportunity to be represented or accompanied at any relevant meeting. Staff will clarify if it is appropriate to take a complaint from a representative, including Councillors and MPs, by checking if they have the complainant's consent to act on their behalf and are satisfied they are acting in the complainant's best interests. Complaints submitted by third parties or representatives on behalf of a resident will follow this policy and will not be treated differently.

2.9 If an issue is raised on social media, it is sometimes possible to address it via social media. However, we will usually suggest that this is formalised by the complainant so it can be logged and dealt with in line with this policy. We cannot investigate a complaint where data protection could be compromised as a result of responding, without the explicit consent of the person the complaint concerns.

2.10 The Council will accept a complaint unless there is a valid reason not to do so and we will evidence our reasoning not to accept a complaint. Each complaint made will be considered on its own merits. We will not take a blanket approach to excluding complaints and will consider the individual circumstances of each complaint. An issue may not be treated as a complaint if:

- It has already been considered at Stage 2 of the complaints policy.
- It is more than 12 months since the issue occurred or the resident becoming aware of it, although complaints may be accepted outside this time limit for example due to ill health or incapacity.
- Legal proceedings have started, with details of the claim, such as the Claim Form and Particulars of Claim, having been filed at court.
- The issue has already been decided by a court or independent tribunal.
- There is a designated appeals process, specific statutory review or right of appeal (for example for homelessness, disrepair etc.) unless the complaint is specifically about officer conduct and not the statutory process.

2.11 If the Council decides not to accept a complaint, an explanation will 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 relevant Ombudsman. If the Ombudsman does not agree that the exclusion has been fairly applied, the Ombudsman may tell us to take on the complaint.

2.12 Complaints will be acknowledged, defined and logged at stage 1 within 5 working days of the complaint being received. The full response to stage 1 complaints will be issued within 10 working days of the complaint being acknowledged. We will provide the response to the resident when the answer is known, not when the outstanding actions required to address the issue are completed. Outstanding actions will be tracked and actioned promptly, with updates provided to the resident.

2.13 We will consider which complaints can be responded to as early as possible, and which require further investigation, with consideration to the complexity of the complaint and whether the resident is vulnerable or at risk. We aim to resolve most stage 1 complaints promptly, with an explanation, apology or resolution provided to the resident.

2.14 Complaint investigations will be conducted impartially, and complaints will be responded to by a senior manager with authority and autonomy to act to resolve disputes promptly and fairly.

2.15 Complaints at Stage 2 will be handled by a senior manager who has not been involved in the investigation at Stage 1 and will involve all officers as needed to issue a thorough final response.

2.16 Where additional issues are raised during the investigation that are related to the original complaint and the Stage 1 response has not yet been issued, these will be incorporated into the Stage 1 investigation and response.

2.17 Where additional issues are raised that are unrelated to the original complaint, are received after a response has been issued, or would unreasonably delay the Stage 1 response, the Council will log these as a separate new complaint.

2.18 Where the problem is a recurring issue, we will consider any older reports as part of the background to the complaint if this helps resolve the issue for the tenant.

2.19 Stage 1 complaint acknowledgements will set: our understanding of the complaint, the outcomes the resident is seeking, and which aspects of the complaint the Council is, or is not, responsible for. If any aspect of the complaint is unclear we will ask the resident for clarification. The acknowledgement will also confirm the expected response timescale and explain the next steps in the process.

2.20 If an extension beyond the 10 working days target is required at Stage 1 due to the complexity of the complaint, we will inform the resident of the expected timescale for response. Any extension must be no more than 10 working days without good reason, and the reason(s) will be clearly explained to the resident. If the timescale for a response is extended, the resident will be provided with the contact details of the relevant Ombudsman and reminded of their right to seek support.

2.21 Where a complaint response identifies actions that are still outstanding, we will keep the resident informed of progress and provide updates until those actions are completed.

2.22 We will address all points raised in the complaint definition and provide clear reasons for any decisions, referencing the relevant policy, law, and good practice where appropriate. We will confirm the following in writing to the resident:
a) the complaint stage
b) the complaint definition
c) the decision on the complaint
d) the reasons for any decisions made
e) the details of any remedy offered to put things right
f) details of any outstanding actions
g) details of how to escalate the matter to stage 2 if the resident is not satisfied with the response.

2.23 If all or part of a complaint is not resolved to the resident's satisfaction at stage 1, it will be progressed to stage 2. Residents are not required to explain their reasons for requesting a stage 2 consideration, rather we will make reasonable efforts to understand why a resident remains unhappy, as part of the stage 2 response.

2.24 Stage 2 complaints will be acknowledged, defined and logged within 5 working days of the escalation request being received. The acknowledgement will confirm that the complaint has been accepted at Stage 2, the Council's understanding of the complaint, the outcomes the resident is seeking and the aspects of the complaint the Council is and is not responsible for. If any aspect of the complaint is unclear, we will ask the resident for clarification. The acknowledgement will also set out the anticipated response timescale and explain the next step in the process.

2.25 We will not refuse to escalate a complaint to stage 2 unless there is a valid reason to do, for example:

- the issue giving rise to the complaint occurred over 12 months ago
- legal proceedings have started, with details of the claim having been filed at court
- matters that have previously been considered under the complaints policy.

We will clearly set out for the resident the reasons for not accepting a request to escalate a complaint to stage 2.

2.26 The Council will issue a final response to a stage 2 complaint within 20 working days of the complaint being acknowledged or decide whether an extension to this timescale is needed and inform the resident of the expected timescale. If an extension is needed it will not exceed 20 days. Any extension will only be for a justified reason, which will be explained to the resident. When informing the resident of an extension, we will provide the resident with the contact details of the relevant Ombudsman.

2.27 The stage 2 response will be provided 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 will be tracked and actioned promptly with appropriate updates provided to the resident. We will address all points raised in the complaint definition and provide clear reasons for our decisions, referencing the relevant policy, law, and good practice where appropriate.

2.28 We will confirm the following in writing to the resident at the completion of stage 2 in clear, plain language:

a) the complaint stage
b) the complaint definition
c) the decision on the complaint
d) the reasons for any decisions made
e) the details of any remedy offered to put things right
f) details of any outstanding actions
g) details of how to escalate the matter to the Ombudsman Service if the individual remains dissatisfied.

2.29 At the end of stage 2, we will advise the complainant of their right to refer the complaint to the relevant Ombudsman Service.

2.30 An appropriate remedy can be provided at any stage of the Council's complaints process without the need for escalation to stage 2 or to the relevant Ombudsman.

2.31 If the response to a complaint at either stage 1 or stage 2 will exceed the timescales beyond the 10 or 20 working days extension timescale respectively, we will agree with the resident suitable intervals for providing them with updates until their complaint is resolved.

2.32 We will follow the Council's unreasonable behaviour protocol if a complaint is considered vexatious or unreasonably persistent, or if a resident or their representative makes a complaint in an unreasonable way, for example repeatedly or aggressively, or their behaviour disrupts the fair provision of services to all residents for example racist, sexist, homophobic or other discriminatory language. We will write to them explaining what action we are taking in response to their behaviour which could include restricting how they should contact us (for example written communication only) or who they can contact (for example a named Officer only). In the case of council tenants behaving unreasonably we may take enforcement action in line with their tenancy agreement. There is a right of appeal to the Council's Monitoring Officer against a decision that certain behaviour is unreasonable and any restrictions imposed. We will evidence reasons for putting any restrictions in place and will keep restrictions under regular review. Any restrictions placed on a resident's contact due to unacceptable behaviour should be appropriate to their needs and will demonstrate regard for the provisions of the Equality Act 2010.

2.33 The Council is committed to ensuring that disabled people are not disadvantaged in accessing its housing services. To this end, we will anticipate and make reasonable adjustments for disabled people and for people with support needs in applying this policy and our internal complaints procedure. We will keep a record of any reasonable adjustments agreed, as well as a record of any disabilities a resident discloses. Any agreed reasonable adjustments will be kept under active review.

## 3. Putting things right

3.1 Where something has gone wrong, we will acknowledge this and set out the actions to put things right, for example:

- acknowledging where things have gone wrong
- providing an explanation, assistance or reasons
- an apology
- correcting the error
- taking action if there has been a delay
- reconsidering or changing a decision; or correcting a record
- changing policies or procedures
- a financial remedy, including compensation.

3.2 The remedy will reflect the impact on the resident of any fault on the part of the Council or its contactors, will be clearly explained and followed through to completion.

## 4. Communication and training

4.1 The Council publishes this policy, advice about how to make a complaint, information about the Code, a resident's right to access the relevant Ombudsman Service and contact information for the Ombudsmen on the Council's website, in correspondence about complaints and as part of its regular correspondence and publications for tenants, for example newsletters and annual reports.

4.2 The Council will publish this Complaints Policy and the annual complaints performance and service improvement report on the Council's website. We will share results of complaint handling performance on the website, through tenant engagement and in newsletters and annual reports to tenants.

4.3 All Housing staff will receive guidance on the value of learning from complaints in order to improve services, and training on the complaint's procedure.

4.4 Contractors working for the Council will receive clear guidance on the requirement for complaints to be handled by the Council, instructions for referring complaints to the Council and provision of information to enable compliance with the Code.

## 5. Monitoring and performance management

5.1 Phone calls may be recorded for training and monitoring purposes.

5.2 A full record is kept of each complaint, and the outcomes at each stage. This includes the original complaint and the date received.

5.3 The Housing Service Improvement Manager has lead responsibility for ensuring that complaint handling is compliant with the Code, for liaison with the Housing Ombudsman, for ensuring complaints handling is reported to the Housing Committee and for analysing themes or trends to identify potential systemic issues, serious risks, or policies and procedures that require revision.

5.4 The Chair of the Housing Committee has lead responsibility for supporting a positive complaint handling culture and acts as the Member Responsible for Housing Complaints (MRC). The Chair of the Housing Committee, as MRC, is responsible for ensuring the Committee receives regular information on complaints that provides insight into complaint handling.

5.5 The MRC and Housing Committee will receive:

a) regular information on the volume, categories and outcomes of complaints
b) complaint handling performance
c) regular reviews of issues and trends arising from complaint handling
d) regular updates on the outcomes of Ombudsmen investigations and progress made in complying with orders related to severe maladministration findings
e) the annual complaints performance and service improvement report.

5.6 The Council will produce an annual complaints performance and service improvement report for scrutiny and challenge by tenants and Housing Committee, including:

a) the annual self-assessment against the Complaint Handling Code

b) a qualitative and quantitative analysis of complaint handling performance, including a summary of the types of complaints not accepted
c) any findings of non-compliance by the Ombudsmen
d) the service improvements made as a result of the learning from complaints
e) any annual report about the landlord's performance from the Ombudsmen
f) any other relevant reports or publications produced by the Ombudsmen.

5.7 The annual complaints performance and service improvement report will be published on the Council's website, along with the Housing Committee response to it. We will also report on learning from complaints and service improvements to staff and to tenants' groups. Learning from complaints informs our risk management, audit functions and contracting arrangements, aids governance and helps us make improvements to policies, internal procedures, and training.

5.8 We aim to review this policy in two years to ensure it reflects current legislation, the Code, corporate guidance and that it is accessible and clear.

## 6. Equalities Implications

6.1 The Council is committed to ensuring that disabled people are not disadvantaged in accessing its Housing complaint handling service.

6.2 We will make reasonable adjustments for residents where appropriate under the Equality Act 2010. We will keep a record of any reasonable adjustments agreed, as well as a record of any disabilities a resident has disclosed. Any agreed reasonable adjustments will be kept under active review. The reasonable adjustments required may be physical, but we will also adjust our services to ensure that the objectives of this policy are delivered equally well for all our residents including people with, for example, learning disabilities and those who cannot read or write or speak English. We will keep under review the needs and reasonable adjustments of residents who may need to access the complaints process and ensure appropriate channels are easily available to make a complaint.

6.3 To ensure this policy document is as accessible as possible, it will be made available on request in alternative accessible formats, including for example (but not limited to) large print, digital formats, translated and audio versions.

## 7. Related policies/Documents

## 8. Version Control

| Version Number | Date Amended | Comments | Date Approved | Author | Approved By |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **2024 – 2026 Policy** V1 | January 21 | First draft completed | January 21 | Angela Horsey | Housing Committee |
| V2 | April 23 | Recommendations from Self As-assessment against the Complaints Handling Code incorporated | January 23 | Angela Horsey | HMT |
| V3 | April 24 | Amendments to policy | June 24 | Angela Horsey | Housing Committee |
| V4 | October 25 | Reference to 'days' corrected to 'working days', designated person' removed at 2.6 and requirement to act within 14 days removed at 2.13 | November 26 | Angela Horsey | HMT |
| **2026 – 2028 Policy** | June 26 | Revisions in line with HoS review of the self-assessment including clarification that complaints about contractors are handled by RBC | September 26 | Angela Horsey | Housing Committee |