

Appendix A: Self-assessment form

This self-assessment form should be completed by the complaints officer and it must be reviewed and approved by the landlord's governing body at least annually.

Once approved, landlords must publish the self-assessment as part of the annual complaints performance and service improvement report on their website. The governing body's response to the report must be published alongside this.

Landlords are required to complete the self-assessment in full and support all statements with evidence, with additional commentary as necessary.

We recognise that there may be a small number of circumstances where landlords are unable to meet the requirements, for example, if they do not have a website. In these circumstances, we expect landlords to deliver the intentions of the Code in an alternative way, for example by publishing information in a public area so that it is easily accessible.

Section 1: Definition of a complaint

Code provision	Code requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence	Commentary / explanation
1.2	A complaint must be defined as: <i>'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.'</i>	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	See Section 3
1.3	A resident does not have to use the word 'complaint' for it to be treated as such. Whenever a resident expresses dissatisfaction landlords must give them the choice to make complaint. A complaint that is submitted via a third party or representative must be handled in line with the landlord's complaints policy.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	The Council has adopted the definition in 1.2 which does not require a resident to use the complaint. Nor did our previous definition. This is covered in our training.
1.4	Landlords must recognise the difference between a service request and a complaint. This must be set out in their complaints policy. A service request is a request from a resident to the landlord requiring action to be taken to put something right. Service requests are not complaints, but must be recorded, monitored and reviewed regularly.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	The Council has separate and robust processes in place to consider requests for service and complaints.
1.5	A complaint must be raised when the resident expresses dissatisfaction with the response to their service request, even if the handling of the service request remains ongoing. Landlords	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	This happens as a result of the afore mentioned process and is covered in our training.

	must not stop their efforts to address the service request if the resident complains.			
1.6	An expression of dissatisfaction with services made through a survey is not defined as a complaint, though wherever possible, the person completing the survey should be made aware of how they can pursue a complaint if they wish to. Where landlords ask for wider feedback about their services, they also must provide details of how residents can complain.	Yes		Details of how to complain are included in our Satisfaction Surveys.

Section 2: Exclusions

Code provision	Code requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence	Commentary / explanation
2.1	Landlords must accept a complaint unless there is a valid reason not to do so. If landlords decide not to accept a complaint they must be able to evidence their reasoning. Each complaint must be considered on its own merits	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	The Council's approach has always been based on best practice and we look for every reason to accept a complaint, before deciding it does not qualify for investigating. Where we decide a complaint is non-qualifying we explain our reasons and advised the individual of their right to refer the matter to the HOS.
2.2	A complaints policy must set out the circumstances in which a matter will not be considered as a complaint or escalated, and	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	See Section 7

	<p>these circumstances must be fair and reasonable to residents. Acceptable exclusions include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The issue giving rise to the complaint occurred over twelve months ago. • Legal proceedings have started. This is defined as details of the claim, such as the Claim Form and Particulars of Claim, having been filed at court. • Matters that have previously been considered under the complaints policy. 			
2.3	<p>Landlords must accept complaints referred to them within 12 months of the issue occurring or the resident becoming aware of the issue, unless they are excluded on other grounds. Landlords must consider whether to apply discretion to accept complaints made outside this time limit where there are good reasons to do so.</p>		Darlington BC - Housing complaints	See Section 7
2.4	<p>If a landlord decides not to accept a complaint, an 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. If the Ombudsman does not agree that the exclusion has been fairly applied, the Ombudsman may tell the landlord to take on the complaint.</p>	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	Where we decide a complaint is non-qualifying we explain our reasons and advised the individual of their right to refer the matter to the HOS.
2.5	<p>Landlords must not take a blanket approach to excluding complaints; they must consider the</p>	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	See Section 7

	individual circumstances of each complaint.			
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Section 3: Accessibility and Awareness

Code provision	Code requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence	Commentary / explanation
3.1	Landlords must make it easy for residents to complain by providing different channels through which they can make a complaint. Landlords must consider their duties under the Equality Act 2010 and anticipate the needs and reasonable adjustments of residents who may need to access the complaints process.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints Darlington BC - Complaints compliments and comments	
3.2	Residents must be able to raise their complaints in any way and with any member of staff. All staff must be aware of the complaints process and be able to pass details of the complaint to the appropriate person within the landlord.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	Training provided to officers.
3.3	High volumes of complaints must not be seen as a negative, as they can be indicative of a well-publicised and accessible complaints process. Low complaint volumes are potentially a sign that residents are unable to complain.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	
3.4	Landlords must make their complaint policy available in a clear and accessible format for all residents. This will detail the two stage	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	

	process, what will happen at each stage, and the timeframes for responding. The policy must also be published on the landlord's website.			
3.5	The policy must explain how the landlord will publicise details of the complaints policy, including information about the Ombudsman and this Code.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	See Section 1
3.6	Landlords must 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.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	See Section 8
3.7	Landlords must provide residents with information on their right to access the Ombudsman service and how the individual can engage with the Ombudsman about their complaint.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	See Section 12. This is also included response and extension letters

Section 4: Complaint Handling Staff

Code provision	Code requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence	Commentary / explanation
4.1	Landlords must have a person or team assigned to take responsibility for complaint handling, including liaison with the Ombudsman and ensuring complaints are reported to the governing body (or equivalent). This Code will refer to that person or team as the 'complaints	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	See Section 2.

	officer'. This role may be in addition to other duties.			
4.2	The complaints officer must have access to staff at all levels to facilitate the prompt resolution of complaints. They must also have the authority and autonomy to act to resolve disputes promptly and fairly.	Yes		The Council's Complaints Manager, Complaints Investigator and the Housing Complaints Officer have access to staff at all levels to facilitate the prompt resolution of complaints and have the authority and autonomy to act to resolve disputes promptly and fairly.
4.3	Landlords are expected to prioritise complaint handling and a culture of learning from complaints. All relevant staff must be suitably trained in the importance of complaint handling. It is important that complaints are seen as a core service and must be resourced to handle complaints effectively	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints Darlington BC - Annual reports	See Section 1 of the Complaints Procedure. The Council's culture in respect of complaints handling is detailed in its procedures, annual reports and its reports to its Scrutiny Committees and Cabinet . All staff are suitably trained. The sufficiency of resources is subject to the budget constraints of the Local Authority.

Section 5: The Complaint Handling Process

Code provision	Code requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence	Commentary / explanation
5.1	Landlords must have a single policy in place for dealing with complaints covered by this Code. Residents must not be treated differently if they complain.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	See Section 1.2

5.2	The early and local resolution of issues between landlords and residents is key to effective complaint handling. It is not appropriate to have extra named stages (such as 'stage 0' or 'informal complaint') as this causes unnecessary confusion.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	
5.3	A process with more than two stages is not acceptable under any circumstances as this will make the complaint process unduly long and delay access to the Ombudsman.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	
5.4	Where a landlord's complaint response is handled by a third party (e.g. a contractor or independent adjudicator) at any stage, it must form part of the two stage complaints process set out in this Code. Residents must not be expected to go through two complaints processes.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	See Section 6.5
5.5	Landlords are responsible for ensuring that any third parties handle complaints in line with the Code.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	See Section 6.5
5.6	When a complaint is logged at Stage 1 or escalated to Stage 2, landlords must set out their understanding of the complaint and the outcomes the resident is seeking. The Code will refer to this as "the complaint definition". If any aspect of the complaint is unclear, the resident must be asked for clarification.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	See Section 11
5.7	When a complaint is acknowledged at either stage, landlords must be clear which aspects of	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	We set this out in our acknowledgment letters

	the complaint they are, and are not, responsible for and clarify any areas where this is not clear.			
5.8	<p>At each stage of the complaints process, complaint handlers must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> b. deal with complaints on their merits, act independently, and have an open mind; c. give the resident a fair chance to set out their position; c. take measures to address any actual or perceived conflict of interest; and d. consider all relevant information and evidence carefully. 	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	All complaint handlers are appropriately trained to ensure complaints are handled in this manner.
5.9	Where a response to a complaint will fall outside the timescales set out in this Code, the landlord must agree with the resident suitable intervals for keeping them informed about their complaint.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	The Council informs the resident the date by which they can expect a response in the extension letter/email. Where the resident requires more frequent updates we agree this on an individual basis.
5.10	Landlords must make reasonable adjustments for residents where appropriate under the Equality Act 2010. Landlords must keep a record of any reasonable adjustments agreed, as well as a record of any disabilities a resident has disclosed. Any agreed reasonable adjustments must be kept under active review.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	See Section 10
5.11	Landlords must not refuse to escalate a complaint through all stages of the complaints procedure unless it has valid reasons to do so. Landlords must clearly set out these reasons,	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	On the rare occasion we may refuse to escalate a complaint, for example where the resident or the Council has commenced legal

	and they must comply with the provisions set out in section 2 of this Code.			proceedings in relation to the matter being complained about, we would explain this to the resident in writing and advise them of their right to refer the matter to the HOS.
5.12	A full record must be kept of the complaint, 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 relevant supporting documentation such as reports or surveys.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	See Section 17 of the Complaints Procedure. This information is held in the Council's Complaints Management Database. Some information is also held on the tenancy record.
5.13	Landlords must have processes in place to ensure a complaint can be remedied at any stage of its complaints process. Landlords must ensure appropriate remedies can be provided at any stage of the complaints process without the need for escalation.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	See Section 13
5.14	Landlords must have policies and procedures in place for managing unacceptable behaviour from residents and/or their representatives. Landlords must be able to evidence reasons for putting any restrictions in place and must keep restrictions under regular review.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	See Section 16 of the Complaints Procedure. The Council operates an Unreasonably Persistent Complainants Procedure and an Employee Protection Register to manage unacceptable behaviour from residents and/or their representatives.
5.15	Any restrictions placed on contact due to unacceptable behaviour must be proportionate and demonstrate regard for the provisions of	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints Darlington BC - Equality information	

	the Equality Act 2010.			
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Section 6: Complaints Stages

Stage 1

Code provision	Code requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence	Commentary / explanation
6.1	Landlords must have processes in place to consider which complaints can be responded to as early as possible, and which require further investigation. Landlords must consider factors such as the complexity of the complaint and whether the resident is vulnerable or at risk. Most stage 1 complaints can be resolved promptly, and an explanation, apology or resolution provided to the resident	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	See Section 11
6.2	Complaints must be acknowledged, defined and logged at stage 1 of the complaints procedure <u>within five working days of the complaint being received.</u>	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints Darlington BC - Annual reports	
6.3	Landlords must issue a full response to stage 1 complaints <u>within 10 working days</u> of the complaint being acknowledged.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints Darlington BC - Annual reports	
6.4	Landlords must decide whether an extension to this timescale is needed when considering the complexity of the complaint and then inform the resident of the expected timescale for	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	

	response. Any extension must be no more than 10 working days without good reason, and the reason(s) must be clearly explained to the resident.			
6.5	When an organisation informs a resident about an extension to these timescales, they must be provided with the contact details of the Ombudsman.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	This is included in our extension letter/email.
6.6	A complaint response must 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 must still be tracked and actioned promptly with appropriate updates provided to the resident.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	Response are issued when the answer to the complaint is known. All actions are allocated to a responsible officer and tracked via the Council's complaint management system.
6.7	Landlords must 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.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	We have template response letters and investigation reports which assist complaints officers in ensuring they address all points raised in the complaint definition.
6.8	Where residents raise additional complaints during the investigation, these must be incorporated into the stage 1 response if they are related and the stage 1 response has not been issued. Where the stage 1 response has been issued, the new issues are unrelated to the issues already being investigated or it would unreasonably delay the response, the new issues must be logged as a new complaint.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	This is something we have always done and will continue to do.
6.9	Landlords must confirm the following in writing to the resident at the completion of stage 1 in	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	We have template response letters and investigation reports

	clear, plain language: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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; and g. details of how to escalate the matter to stage 2 if the individual is not satisfied with the response. 			which ensure this information is provided in the response.
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Stage 2

Code provision	Code requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence	Commentary / explanation
6.10	If all or part of the complaint is not resolved to the resident's satisfaction at stage 1, it must be progressed to stage 2 of the landlord's procedure. Stage 2 is the landlord's final response.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	See Section 11
6.11	Requests for stage 2 must be acknowledged, defined and logged at stage 2 of the complaints procedure within five working days of the escalation request being received.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	See Section 11
6.12	Residents must not be required to explain their reasons for requesting a stage 2 consideration. Landlords are expected to make reasonable efforts to understand why a resident remains unhappy as part of its stage 2 response.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	See Section 11
6.13	The person considering the complaint at stage 2	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	See Section 11

	must not be the same person that considered the complaint at stage 1.			
6.14	Landlords must issue a final response to the stage 2 <u>within 20 working days</u> of the complaint being acknowledged.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	See Section 11
6.15	Landlords must decide whether an extension to this timescale is needed when considering the complexity of the complaint and then inform the resident of the expected timescale for response. Any extension must be no more than 20 working days without good reason, and the reason(s) must be clearly explained to the resident.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	See Section 11
6.16	When an organisation informs a resident about an extension to these timescales, they must be provided with the contact details of the Ombudsman.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	This is included in our extension letter/email.
6.17	A complaint response must 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 must still be tracked and actioned promptly with appropriate updates provided to the resident.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	Complaint responses are issued when the answer to the complaint is known. All actions are allocated to a responsible officer and tracked via the Council's complaint management system.
6.18	Landlords must 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.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	This is standard investigative practice and something we do in all cases. We have template response letter and investigation report templates and good investigative practice guidance for complaints officers to ensure this happens. Complaints Officers also receive training on good

				investigative practice.
6.19	Landlords must confirm the following in writing to the resident at the completion of stage 2 in clear, plain language: <ol 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 details of how to escalate the matter to the Ombudsman Service if the individual remains dissatisfied. 	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	We have template response letters and investigation reports which ensure this information is provided in the response.
6.20	Stage 2 is the landlord's final response and must involve all suitable staff members needed to issue such a response.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	All officers involved are consulted and the Assistant Director are given the opportunity to comment on the response/provide any further evidence that may lead the complaints office to a different conclusion prior to the response being sent.

Section 7: Putting things right

Code provision	Code requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence	Commentary / explanation
7.1	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. These can include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Apologising; 	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	See Section 13

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acknowledging where things have gone wrong; • Providing an explanation, assistance or reasons; • Taking action if there has been delay; • Reconsidering or changing a decision; • Amending a record or adding a correction or addendum; • Providing a financial remedy; • Changing policies, procedures or practices. 			
7.2	Any remedy offered must reflect the impact on the resident as a result of any fault identified.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	See Section 13
7.3	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.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	See Section 13 of the complaints procedure. All remedy actions are allocated to a responsible officer and tracked via the Council's complaint management system.
7.4	Landlords must take account of the guidance issued by the Ombudsman when deciding on appropriate remedies.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	Complaints officers use the HOS Guidance on Remedies.

Section 8: Self-assessment, reporting and compliance

Code provision	Code requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence	Commentary / explanation
8.1	Landlords must produce an annual complaints performance and service improvement report for scrutiny and challenge, which must include: a. the annual self-assessment against this Code to ensure their complaint handling policy remains in line with its requirements. b. a qualitative and quantitative analysis of the landlord's complaint handling performance. This must also include a summary of the types of complaints the landlord has refused to accept; c. any findings of non-compliance with this Code by the Ombudsman; d. the service improvements made as a result of the learning from complaints; e. any annual report about the landlord's performance from the Ombudsman; and f. any other relevant reports or publications produced by the Ombudsman in relation to the work of the landlord.	Yes	Darlington BC - Annual reports Agenda for Cabinet on Tuesday, 9th September, 2025, 5.00 pm Darlington Borough Council	
8.2	The annual complaints performance and service improvement report must be reported to the landlord's governing body (or equivalent) and published on the on the section of its website relating to complaints. The governing body's response to the report must be published alongside this.		Darlington BC - Annual reports Agenda for Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee on Thursday, 4th September, 2025 Agenda for Cabinet on Tuesday, 9th	The annual report is also considered by Council Officers at the Chief Officers Board.

			September, 2025, 5.00 pm Darlington Borough Council	
8.3	Landlords must also carry out a self-assessment following a significant restructure, merger and/or change in procedures.	Yes	See this document	This is our annual return and is being completed shortly after the recently restructure of Housing Services
8.4	Landlords may be asked to review and update the self-assessment following an Ombudsman investigation.	Yes		
8.5	If a landlord is unable to comply with the Code due to exceptional circumstances, such as a cyber incident, they must inform the Ombudsman, provide information to residents who may be affected, and publish this on their website Landlords must provide a timescale for returning to compliance with the Code.	Yes		

Section 9: Scrutiny & oversight: continuous learning and improvement

Code provision	Code requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence	Commentary / explanation
9.1	Landlords must look beyond the circumstances of the individual complaint and consider whether service improvements can be made as a result of any learning from the complaint.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	See Section 13 of the complaints procedure. Regular reports to the MRC and the annual report enable the Council to ensure this happens.
9.2	A positive complaint handling culture is integral to the effectiveness with which landlords resolve disputes. Landlords must use complaints	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	See Section 13 of the complaints procedure. Regular reports to the MRC and the annual report

	as a source of intelligence to identify issues and introduce positive changes in service delivery.			enable the Council to ensure this happens.
9.3	Accountability and transparency are also integral to a positive complaint handling culture. Landlords must report back on wider learning and improvements from complaints to stakeholders, such as residents' panels, staff and relevant committees.	Yes	Darlington BC - Annual reports Agenda for Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee on Thursday, 4th September, 2025 Agenda for Cabinet on Tuesday, 9th September, 2025, 5.00 pm Darlington Borough Council	See Section 14 of the complaints procedure. The report is also considered by the Chief Officer's Board and the Tenant's panel.
9.4	Landlords must appoint a suitably senior lead person as accountable for their complaint handling. This person must assess any themes or trends to identify potential systemic issues, serious risks, or policies and procedures that require revision.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	See Section 1. This is the Complaints and Information Governance Manager
9.5	In addition to this a member of the governing body (or equivalent) must be appointed to have lead responsibility for complaints to support a positive complaint handling culture. This person is referred to as the Member Responsible for Complaints ('the MRC').	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	See Section 1. This is the Assistant Director, Housing and Revenues Services
9.6	The MRC will be responsible for ensuring the governing body receives regular information on complaints that provides insight on the landlord's complaint handling performance. This person must have access to suitable information and staff to perform this role and report on their findings.	Yes	Darlington BC - Annual reports Agenda for Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee on Thursday, 4th September, 2025 Agenda for Cabinet on Tuesday, 9th September, 2025, 5.00 pm Darlington Borough Council	Regular information is also provided to the MRC and they have regular contact with the Complaints and Information Governance Manager.

9.7	<p>As a minimum, the MRC and the governing body (or equivalent) must receive:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. regular updates on the volume, categories and outcomes of complaints, alongside complaint handling performance; b. regular reviews of issues and trends arising from complaint handling; c. regular updates on the outcomes of the Ombudsman's investigations and progress made in complying with orders related to severe maladministration findings; and d. annual complaints performance and service improvement report. 	Yes	<p>Darlington BC - Annual reports</p> <p>Agenda for Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee on Thursday, 4th September, 2025</p> <p>Agenda for Cabinet on Tuesday, 9th September, 2025, 5.00 pm Darlington Borough Council</p>	The MRC receives all of the items listed and has direct access to all officers as the relevant Assistant Director.
9.8	<p>Landlords must have a standard objective in relation to complaint handling for all relevant employees or third parties that reflects the need to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. have a collaborative and co-operative approach towards resolving complaints, working with colleagues across teams and departments; b. take collective responsibility for any shortfalls identified through complaints, rather than blaming others; and c. act within the professional standards for engaging with complaints as set by any relevant professional body. 	Yes	<p>Darlington BC - Housing complaints</p>	

