Self-Assessment Form (Appendix B of the Housing Ombudsman’s Code)

This self-assessment was completed by the Business Operations Manager and approved by The Abbeyfield Berkhamsted and Hemel Hempstead Society Board on 12th June 2024

As detailed below, this year’s self-assessment shows that Abbeyfield Berkhamsted and Hemel Hempstead Society is non-compliant with one mandatory requirement, and partly compliant with two mandatory requirements and four best practice recommendations. For each recommendation, planned actions to achieve compliance and associated dates are provided.

Section 1 - Definition of a complaint Mandatory ‘must’ requirements

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| **Code section** | | **Code 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.* | | Yes | | **. Definition of a Complaint** in the Complaints, policy (‘policy’). | | |
| **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. | | Yes | | Berkhamsted and Hemel Hempstead recognises that the word complaint does not have to be used in order for it to be treated as such. While the policy is aimed at residents or their representatives, the above definition is extended to cover an expression of dissatisfaction from any stakeholder affected by the standard of service, actions or lack of action from The Abbeyfield Berkhamsted and Hemel Hempstead Society or those working for us. | | |
| **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. | | Yes | | The resident will always be given a complaint form even if they have not requested one. It will be noted on the residents records. |
| **1.7** | | A landlord must accept a complaint unless there is a valid reason not to do so. | | Yes | | Abbeyfield Berkhamsted and Hemel Hempstead will treat any ‘expression of dissatisfaction’ as a complaint under this policy to ensure the identified issue is investigated and responded to appropriately. |
| **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. | | Yes | | Our policy states  “We cannot deal with a complaint if it raises issues that are already the subject of legal proceedings, including insurance claims. If this happens, we will write to you to explain the situation.”  “We are a member of The Abbeyfield Society, but please note that they are a separate legal entity and will not be involved in our complaints process.” |
| **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. | | Yes | | In rare circumstances, Abbeyfield Berkhamsted and Hemel Hempstead reserves the right to deal with a complaint differently (outside the normal complaints handling process) if required. A full record of the reasons why the complaint should be addressed differently will be made and the complainant informed accordingly. The complainant will also be informed of their right to take that decision to the relevant Ombudsman, as applicable.” |

Best practice ‘should’ requirements

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| **Code section** | **Code 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. | Yes | A service request may precede a formal complaint if appropriate action is not taken to resolve the issue for residents as early as possible. A complaint will be raised when the resident raises dissatisfaction with the response to their service request. “ |
| **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. | Yes | The annual Housing Residents’ Satisfaction Survey is issued to the residents. |

Section 2 - Accessibility and awareness Mandatory ‘must’ requirements

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| **Code section** | **Code 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. | Yes | Routes are via the Abbeyfield website, the Abbeyfield Berkhamsted and Hemel Hempstead website, by email, post, telephone (which is managed by Senior Response), through a representative using any of the above channels, or in person to any member of staff who will pass onto the Complaints team. |
| **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. | Yes | The [Making a Complaint Guide](https://www.abbeyfield.com/media/rpgeepak/making-a-complaint-guide-august-2023.pdf) leaflet outlines the number of stages, what is involved at each stage and the timeframes for responding. The leaflet is available on our website with hard copies at each service and was last updated in August 2023 by Abbeyfield.  The Complaints Leaflet will be made available in large print, Braille, audio and in translated versions where the need is identified. |
| **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. | Yes | There is a page on our website here:  https://dacorum.abbeyfield.com/complaints-policy/ |
| **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. | Yes | If the individual has difficulty in making a complaint using one of the options listed above, Abbeyfield Berkhamsted and Hemel Hempstead will make all reasonable adjustments necessary to enable them to raise their complaint. All complainants will be treated in line with our Equality and Diversity policy.  All staff are required to undertake mandatory Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion training. |
| **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. | Yes | The [Making a Complaint Guide](https://www.abbeyfield.com/media/rpgeepak/making-a-complaint-guide-august-2023.pdf) is available on the Abbeyfield website and in hard copy at each service, alongside printed Complaints posters on noticeboards. |
| **2.7** | Landlords must provide residents with contact information for the Ombudsman as part of its regular correspondence with residents. | Yes | A copy of our [Making a Complaint Guide](https://www.abbeyfield.com/media/rpgeepak/making-a-complaint-guide-august-2023.pdf) is given to all prospective residents, displayed on noticeboards at our services, and a downloadable copy is available via the complaints section of the Abbeyfield website (<https://www.dacorum.abbeyfield.com/complaints-process/>). |
| **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. | Yes | Stage 1 response template letter notifies the complainant of their right to contact the Housing Ombudsman at any time for advice. |

Best practice ‘should’ requirements

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| **Code section** | **Code requirement** | **Comply:**  **Yes/No** | **Evidence, commentary and any explanations** |
| **2.2** | Where a landlord has set up channels to communicate with its residents via social media, then it should expect to receive complaints via those channels. Policies should contain details of the steps that will be taken when a complaint is received via social media and how confidentiality and privacy will be maintained. | Yes | This process is not used currently.  Abbeyfield Berkhamsted and Hemel Hempstead hold a social media policy |

Section 3 - Complaint handling personnel Mandatory ‘must’ requirements

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| **Code section** | **Code requirement** | **Comply: Yes/No** | **Evidence, commentary and any explanations** |
| **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”. | Yes | This is identified in the complaints policy. |
| **3.2** | …the complaint handler appointed must have appropriate complaint handling skills and no conflicts of interest. | Yes | The Complaints Officer will direct all complaints received to the appropriate manager for investigation. Each manager is responsible for addressing complaints within their area of responsibility, unless there is a conflict of interest in which case another senior manager would investigate the issues raised.”  While the Business Operations Managers handle complaints for their services, we would reallocate complaints to alternative investigators where a conflict of interest is identified. |

Best practice ‘should’ requirements

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| **Code section** | **Code requirement** | **Comply: Yes/No** | **Evidence, commentary and any explanations** |
| **3.3** | Complaint handlers should:   * 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. | Yes | The Business Operations Managers can act sensitively and fairly, have access to staff at all levels, and have the authority and autonomy to resolve disputes. Abbeyfield Berkhamsted and Hemel Hempstead undertakes values-based interview processes to ensure those investigating complaints are suitable to do so.    In addition, all staff will receive Customer Service training in the future via our new training portal. |

Section 4 - Complaint handling principles Mandatory ‘must’ requirements

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| **Code section** | **Code requirement** | **Comply: Yes/No** | **Evidence, commentary and any explanations** |
| **4.1** | 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. 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. When a complaint is made, it must be acknowledged and logged at stage one of the complaints procedure **within five days of receipt**. | Yes | Where a resident, or their representative, is dissatisfied with any aspect of the service provided by Abbeyfield Berkhamsted and Hemel Hempstead, the first course of action should be to raise the problem directly with the relevant manager or individual concerned. All staff members are expected to seek to resolve any issue causing dissatisfaction immediately. In many cases, the issue causing dissatisfaction will be resolved and no further action will be required… However, where the issue cannot be raised or resolved locally, or the local response is deemed unsatisfactory, a formal complaint can be made. |
| **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. | Yes | The investigation notes where applicable will be given to the complainant. |
| **4.6** | A complaint investigation must be conducted in an impartial manner. | Yes | The Business Operations Managers normally handle complaints– however, we will reallocate complaints to alternative Investigating Officers where a conflict is identified, or this is requested by the complainant. |
| **4.7** | The complaint handler must:   * 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. | Yes | The complaint handler would be fully aware of the process required to be followed. |
| **4.11** | Landlords must adhere to any reasonable arrangements agreed with residents in terms of frequency and method of communication | Yes | We will communicate with complainants by telephone, email, post or other preferred communication format. Each complainant always receives a standard written letter for their Stage 1 and 2 response letters (either by email or by post), alongside any other method of communication requested. |
| **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:   * set out their position * comment on any adverse findings before a final decision is made. | Yes | The complainant always the opportunity to set out their position and comment on adverse findings at Stage 1 as part of an escalation to Stage 2, which would be the final decision on any complaint.  For complaints about a staff member, these would be referred to the Business Operations Manager and an investigation carried out in line with our Disciplinary Policy.  **The Investigating Officer** of the procedure: *“If the complaint relates to a staff member, the Investigating Officer should access HR Advice to confirm whether the substance of the complaint could be deemed a disciplinary matter. If the complaint is of a disciplinary nature, the investigation must be carried out in line with the Disciplinary procedure policy. The timescale for a response may need to be extended due to the need to instigate disciplinary proceedings and the complainant should be advised accordingly, while protecting the confidentiality of the staff member*.” |
| **4.13** | A landlord must include in its complaints policy its  timescales for a resident to request escalation of a complaint | Yes | . It is stated that they can appeal the outcome within 10 days. |
| **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. | Yes | If there is doubt about how a matter should be addressed, external professional advice would be obtained. |
| **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. | Yes | All complaints received and subsequently investigated will be recorded fully on the residents file and a copy of relevant documentation kept.  **Final response** of the procedure: “The Investigating Officer should provide a copy of correspondence with the complainant and any reports prepared to the Complaints Officer to file”  **Stage 2: Review of the complaint and subsequent investigation by a Director** (“The Reviewing Director should provide a copy of correspondence with the complainant, and further investigation notes or reports prepared to the Complaints Officer to file.”) | |
| **4.18** | Landlords must have policies and procedures in place for managing unacceptable behaviour from residents and/or their representatives when pursuing a complaint. | Yes | If a complaint is accompanied by inappropriate behaviour (e.g. aggressive or abusive) from the complainant, Abbeyfield Berkhamsted and Hemel Hempstead will seek to manage this behaviour separately…Actions to manage a complainant’s behaviour may include warning the individual about their behaviour and requesting modifications, appointing a specific point of contact, or communicating only in writing. Any restrictions due to unacceptable behaviour will be agreed with the HR Partners, be proportionate and in line with the Equality Act 2010.” | |

Best practice ‘should’ requirements

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| **Code section** | **Code requirement** | **Comply: Yes/No** | **Evidence, commentary and any explanations** |
| **4.3** | Landlords should manage residents’ expectations from the outset, being clear where a desired outcome is unreasonable or unrealistic | Yes | Managers are aware to inform residents “*in the event that a complainant’s desired outcome is unreasonable or unrealistic, Abbeyfield Berkhamsted and Hemel Hempstead will seek to explain the reasoning to the individual at the outset.”* |
| **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. | Yes | We encourage all residents “Please provide as much information as possible to help us consider all of the facts and respond quickly.” |
| **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. | Yes | Our complaint form states” If you would like us to send a copy of this form to someone else who may be able to help sort out your complaint, please enter their contact details overleaf.” |
| **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. | Yes | Where a complaint relates to a specific legal obligation, we would procure Legal advice to support with the response to ensure we set out our understanding of the obligations in the response letter. |
| **4.9** | Communication with the resident should not generally identify individual members of staff or contractors. | Yes | If the complaint relates to a staff member…The timescale for a response may need to be extended due to the need to instigate disciplinary proceedings and the complainant should be advised accordingly, while protecting the confidentiality of the staff member.  The Complaints Officer monitors complaint response letters prior to forwarding these onto complainants to ensure staff, resident, or contractor names are not used and, if required, names are replaced with titles, e.g. Manager, wherever possible. |
| **4.10** | Landlords should keep residents regularly updated about the progress of the investigation. | Yes | As per **Complaints** policy: *“The complainant will be kept informed of any delays to the expected completion date of the investigation”* and “*Once the Stage 1 investigation has concluded, the findings will be communicated to the complainant, alongside any action taken and our proposals to resolve the complaint.”* |
| **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. | Yes | The annual 2023/24 Resident Satisfaction Survey for social housing tenants took place in January 2024 and included the following questions (i and ii are Tenant Satisfaction Measures):   1. “*Have you made a complaint to Abbeyfield in the last 12 months?* 2. *If Yes, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with Abbeyfield’s approach to complaints handling?* 3. *If No, are you aware of how to make a complaint?”* |
| **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. | Yes | For complaints about a staff member, these would be referred our HR partner and an investigation carried out in line with the Disciplinary Policy. The Operational teams  have confirmed that support is provided to staff members where they are the subject of a complaint. |
| **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. | Yes | Where there are issues with how a complainant is engaging with the complaints process, the first action will be for the Complaints Team to ask the individual to explain what adjustments they need to ensure they can access the complaints procedure.” |

**Section 5 - Complaint stages**

**Mandatory ‘must’ requirements Stage 1**

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| **Code section** | **Code requirement** | **Comply:**  **Yes/No** | **Evidence, commentary and any explanations** |
| **5.1** | Landlords must respond to the complaint **within 10 working days** 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. | Yes | “*Stage 1 decision - a full written response will be provided within 10 working days of the acknowledgement. If this is not possible, Abbeyfield Berkhamsted and Hemel Hempstead will contact the complainant, explain why, and agree a new response time, which will only exceed a further 10 days by exception.”*  **Investigating a Complaint** of the procedure states: *The Investigating Officer is expected to: Provide a full written response to the complainant within 10 working days. If this is not possible, the Investigating Officer should contact the complainant to provide a clear explanation for the delay and a revised date (of up to 10 additional working days) for when the Stage 1 response will be given. In the event that more than 10 working days is required, the Investigating Officer should contact the complainant and seek their agreement on the new timescale, prior to confirming in writing. The new timescale and the reason for the delay should be communicated to the Complaints Officer.*” |
| **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. | Yes | “*Where the investigation (Stage 1) or the subsequent review (Stage 2) identifies that a complaint should be upheld, the Investigating Officer or Reviewing Director should…Ensure the required actions are taken through to completion*.”  The Complaints Officer monitors extension requests and advises against a delay to the complaint response as a result of waiting for outstanding actions (e.g. a repair) to be completed. |
| **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. | Yes | *Once collated, the evidence should be reviewed against:*   * *Abbeyfield Berkhamsted and Hemel Hempstead’s policies and procedures* * *Relevant legislation and regulations, where applicable* * *Resident information and literature”*   **Final response** of the procedure states: **“***The final response letter should include: details of the findings…*”  The Stage 1 template response letter has a section for the findings to be detailed.  The Complaints Officer monitors complaint responses whenever possible to ensure these cover all relevant points before issue. |
| **5.8** | Landlords must confirm the following in writing to the resident at the completion of stage one in clear, plain language:   * 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 | Yes | **Final response** of the procedure: “*The final response letter should include:*   * *details of the findings;* * *any action that has been taken;* * *our proposals to resolve the complaint (see ‘Putting things right’); and* * *details of how to escalate the complaint if the complainant remains dissatisfied* * *the contact details for the Ombudsman, if relevant for the complainant.”*   The Stage 1 template response letter is structured to ensure all of these areas are covered, which is monitored by the Complaints Officer prior to issuing response letters, as far as possible. |

Stage 2

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| **Code section** | **Code 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. | Yes | Where a complainant expresses dissatisfaction with the Stage 1 response, the complaint case will be escalated to Stage 2 without the complainant making a specific request.  Abbeyfield Berkhamsted and Hemel Hempstead did not encounter this |
| **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. | Yes | **Stage 2: Review of the complaint and subsequent investigation by a Director** of the procedure: **“***The Complaints Officer will send the standard written acknowledgement of escalation letter to the complainant(s) within five working days of receipt of the request*” and “*If it is unclear, the Reviewing person will ask the complainant to clarify which aspects of the complaint have not yet been resolved and what outcome they are seeking from the review*.”  The standard acknowledgement of escalation letter states: “*We understand that your outstanding dissatisfaction relates to < details to be added, e.g. the Stage 1 response failing to provide adequate compensation for the delay xxx> We understand that you would like < e.g. further compensation and an apology in recognition of the manner in which the situation has been handled >. If the above is not an accurate summary of the reason for the request to escalate your complaint, please let us know or by using the contact details provided below.”* |
| **5.11** | Landlords must only escalate a complaint to stage two once it has completed stage one and at the request of the resident. | Yes | **Stage 2: Review of the complaint and subsequent investigation by a Director of the procedure:**  The Complaints Officer will notify a complainant if their request to escalate is received prior to the Stage 1 response. |
| **5.12** | The person considering the complaint at stage two, must not be the same person that considered the complaint at stage one. | Yes | The person considering the complaint at Stage 2 will not be the same person that considered the complaint at Stage 1.”  This is monitored by the Business Operations Manager |
| **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. | Yes | **Timescales** of the policy, Abbeyfield Berkhamsted and Hemel Hempstead’s Stage 2 response timescale is 10 working days (not 20): “*Stage 2 decision – a full written response will be provided within 10 working days from the request to escalate. If this is not possible, Abbeyfield Berkhamsted and Hemel Hempstead will contact the complainant, explain why, and agree a new response time, which will only exceed a further 10 days by exception.*” |
| **5.16** | Landlords must confirm the following in writing to the resident at  the completion of stage two in clear, plain language:   * 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. | Yes | **Stage 2: Review of the complaint and subsequent investigation by a Director** of the procedure:“*The response letter must include:*   * *the outcome of the review;* * *any further action that has or will be taken, if appropriate (see ‘Putting things right’);* * *confirmation that the internal complaints procedure has now concluded;* * *details of how to escalate the complaint if the complainant remains dissatisfied – by contacting the relevant Ombudsman and requesting a review, if appropriate.”*   The Stage 2 template response letter is structured to ensure all of these areas are covered. The Complaints Officer monitors complaint responses whenever possible to ensure these cover all relevant points before issue. |

Stage 3

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| **Code section** | **Code 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. | Yes | As per the **Complaints** policy: “*In line with the Housing Ombudsman’s Complaint Handling Code, there are two stages to our internal complaints process.”* |
| **5.20** | Landlords must confirm the following in writing to the resident at the completion of stage three in clear, plain language:   * 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 | Yes | All information will be provided.  The society has never encountered this |

Best practice ‘should’ requirements Stage 1

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| **Code section** | **Code requirement** | **Comply: Yes/No** | **Evidence, commentary and any explanations** |
| **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. | Yes | In the event that more than 20 working days is required, the Reviewing person should contact the complainant and seek their agreement for the delayed timescale, which should then be confirmed in writing. The new timescale and the reason for the delay should be communicated to the Complaints Officer.”  The society has never encountered this. |
| **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. | Yes | This has been added onto the complaints policy as of March 2024. |
| **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. | Yes | As part of the Stage 1 investigation, the Business Operations Manager would review the associated records to see if the issue had arisen previously at the service and would also liaise with relevant teams/house to identify if the subject of the complaint was a recurring issue. |
| **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. | Yes | Where residents raise additional complaints during the investigation either to the Complaints team or directly to the Investigating Officer (or other staff member), these will be incorporated into the Stage 1 response if they are relevant, and the Stage 1 response has not been issued. Where the Stage 1 response has been issued, or it would unreasonably delay the response, the new issues will be logged as a new complaint and the complainant informed.”  This happens in practice which can result in more than one open complaint from the same complainant, when necessary. |

Stage 2

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| **Code section** | **Code requirement** | **Comply: Yes/No** | **Evidence, commentary and any explanations** |
| **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. | Yes | In the event that more than 10 working days is required, the Reviewing person should contact the complainant and seek their agreement for the delayed timescale, which should then be confirmed in writing. The new timescale and the reason for the delay should be communicated to the Complaints Officer.”  The society has never encountered this. |
| **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. | Yes | This has been added onto the complaints policy as of March 2024. |

Stage 3

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| **Code section** | **Code requirement** | **Comply: Yes/No** | **Evidence, commentary and any explanations** |
| **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 |  |
| **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 |  |

Section 6 - Putting things right Mandatory ‘must’ requirements

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| **Code section** | **Code requirement** | **Comply:**  **Yes/No** | **Evidence, commentary and any explanations** |
| **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. | Yes | This will be followed and completed under our outlined process:  “*Where the investigation (Stage 1) or the subsequent review (Stage 2) identifies that a complaint should be upheld, the Investigating Officer or Reviewing Director should: Ensure the failure is acknowledged…Clearly outline the actions that Abbeyfield Berkhamsted and Hemel Hempstead has or intends to take to put things right to the complainant.”* |
| **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. | Yes | “*The specific actions that may be taken include:*   * *Providing an apology to the complainant,* * *Providing information or an explanation to the complainant.* * *Reviewing resident literature (leaflets, posters etc.)* * *Reviewing an operational process.* * *Reviewing a contractual agreement with a third party supplier.* * *Requesting a review of a policy.* * *Arranging training or guidance for staff members involved*.” |
| **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. | Yes | This will be followed and completed under our outlined process: “Where the investigation (Stage 1) or the subsequent review (Stage 2) identifies that a complaint should be upheld, the Investigating Officer or Reviewing Director will clearly outline the actions that Abbeyfield Berkhamsted and Hemel Hempstead has or intends to take to put things right to the complainant; Ensure the required actions are taken throughto completion. |

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| **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. | Yes | The appointed Legal Team will support in advising any compensation to offer related to a complaint case. |

Best practice ‘should’ requirements

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| **Code section** | **Code requirement** | **Comply:**  **Yes/No** | **Evidence, commentary and any explanations** |
| **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. | Yes | Lessons learnt process (led by the Business Operations Manager) will support a review beyond the circumstances of the individual complaint where the procedure is followed. |
| **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. | Yes | The organisations will appoint a Legal team for advice if a resident has a legal entitlement to redress and they will seek external advice when required. |

Section 7 - Continuous learning and improvement

**Mandatory ‘must’ requirements**

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| **Code section** | **Code 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. | Yes | Where a complaint investigation uncovers significant findings, Abbeyfield Berkhamsted and Hemel Hempstead will undertake a review in line with our Lessons learnt policy. The findings of lessons learnt exercises from complaints will be shared with the Board, via the Business Operations Manager.  Regular reports on the volume, category and outcome of complaints, as well as complainant satisfaction and compliance with set timeframes, will be provided to the Board, via the Business Operations Manager. The Business Operations Manager, who has lead responsibility for complaints, will decide what data is required by the Board to provide insight on Abbeyfield Berkhamsted and Hemel Hempstead’s complaint handling performance.  *On an annual basis, the Business Operations Manager will review the organisation’s complaints handling procedures, and publish the results of the self-assessment to the Board, circulate to houses for display on noticeboards and place on Abbeyfield’s website. Data related to complaints will also be published in the organisation’s Annual Report.”* |

**Best practice ‘should’ requirements**

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| **Code section** | **Code requirement** | **Comply:**  **Yes/No** | **Evidence, commentary and any explanations** |
| **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. | Yes | The Business Operations Manager, who has lead responsibility for complaints, will decide what data is required by the Board to provide insight on Abbeyfield Berkhamsted and Hemel Hempstead’s complaint handling performance. |
| **7.4** | As a minimum, governing bodies should receive:   * 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 Complaint Handling   Code for scrutiny and challenge. | Yes | Regular reports on the volume, category and outcome of complaints, as well as complainant satisfaction and compliance with set timeframes, will be provided to the Board, via the Business Operations Manager. The Chair of the Board, who has lead responsibility for complaints, will decide what data is required by the Business Operations Manager to provide insight on Abbeyfield Berkhamsted and Hemel Hempstead’s complaint handling performance.  On an annual basis, the Business Operations Manager will review the organisation’s complaints handling procedures and publish the results of the self-assessment to the Board, circulate to houses for display on noticeboards and place on Abbeyfield’s website. Data related to complaints will also be published in the organisation’s Annual Report.  The details of any cases involving the Ombudsman are shared with the Board on a quarterly basis. |
| **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. | Yes | Abbeyfield Berkhamsted and Hemel Hempstead review any findings that are uncovered and implement internal training. |
| **7.6** | Landlords should have a standard objective in relation to complaint handling for all employees that reflects the need to:   * 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. | Yes | Our policy sets out the standard objective for all staff members.  The Abbeyfield Berkhamsted and Hemel Hempstead Behaviours, which all staff are expected to model. Individual role profiles, particularly for Managers within the organisation, have reference to specific competencies in relation to customer service and complaints where relevant. |

Section 8 - Self-assessment and compliance Mandatory ‘must’ requirements

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| **Code section** | **Code requirement** | **Comply: Yes/No** | **Evidence, commentary and any explanations** |
| **8.1** | Landlords must carry out an annual self-assessment against the Code to ensure their complaint handling remains in line with its requirements. | Yes | Completed annually in April and presented to Board in June before being published on our website ([www.dacorum.abbeyfield.com/complaints-process](http://www.dacorum.abbeyfield.com/complaints-process)). |
| **8.2** | Landlords must also carry out a self-assessment following a significant restructure and/or change in procedures. | Yes | The self-assessment will be completed if required. No significant restore or change in procedures occurred. |
| **8.3** | Following each self-assessment, a landlord must:   * report the outcome of their self-assessment to their governing body. * 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 | Yes | :  On an annual basis, the Business Operations Manager will review the organisation’s complaints handling procedures and publish the results of the self-assessment to the Board, circulate to houses for display on noticeboards and place on Abbeyfield’s website. Data related to complaints will also be published in the organisation’s Annual Report. |