

Rother District Council

Report to:	Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Date:	17 October 2022
Title:	Rother District Council Owned/Leased Accommodation Complaints Handling Policy
Report of:	Joe Powell (Head of Service Housing and Community)
Ward(s):	All
Purpose of Report:	To propose the implementation of the Rother District Council Owned/Leased Accommodation Complaints Handling Policy
Officer	
Recommendation(s):	It be RESOLVED : That the Rother District Council Owned/Leased Accommodation Complaints Handling Policy be recommended to Cabinet and full Council for adoption.

Introduction

1. In 2020, Rother District Council (RDC) became a Registered Provider of accommodation. Thus far, we have 24 units of accommodation that we own and one unit of accommodation that we lease and manage. The number of units of accommodation we own and lease is set to rise further as we increase the scale of the Temporary Accommodation Support Scheme (TASS) and leasing scheme.
2. This is the first Policy that we are statutorily required to have as part of the emerging Social Housing White Paper, which includes a range of improvements to the safety and management standards of social housing following the tragic events of Grenfell. A suite of further policies is presently in development as we prepare for the Social Housing (Regulation) Bill to progress through its readings in Parliament. The Bill is currently approaching the third reading in the House of Lords. These policies will include, but not limited to, a Reasonable Adjustments Policy, Rent Setting Policy, Tenant Involvement Policy, Anti-Social Behaviour Policy, Unacceptable Behaviour Policy and Domestic Abuse Policy.
3. The Policy applies to RDC tenants of temporary accommodation and leased properties only. The complaints handling policy will apply to all activity undertaken by Council staff or contractors that may be involved in property management and support of tenants. The policy can be read in full at Appendix A.

Complaints Policy

4. In July 2020, the Housing Ombudsman introduced the Complaint Handling Code which sets out good practice that would allow landlords to respond to complaints effectively and fairly. An updated Code took effect from 1 April 2022,

with Landlords having until 1 October 2022 to become compliant. The Council has already adopted the new Policy standards in practice, ahead of formal adoption therefore.

5. There are a range of benefits to be gained from having an effective and efficient complaints policy:
 - Complaints allow an issue to be resolved before it becomes worse. Those issues not resolved quickly can take significant resource and time to remedy.
 - Involvement in complaint resolution develops staff ownership, decision-making and engagement.
 - Complaints provide senior staff with essential insight into day-to-day operations allowing them to assess effectiveness and drive a positive complaint handling culture.
 - Good complaint handling promotes a positive landlord and resident relationship
6. It was felt, after consulting with the Council's Complaints Team, that a separate complaints policy was needed as the standards required by the Housing Ombudsman for housing tenant complaints are higher than the Council's complaints standards.
7. To complement the Policy there is a leaflet that will be given to all tenants at tenancy sign-up to ensure the tenant is aware of the complaints process and standards to expect.
8. We will also have to complete an internal self-assessment of our complaints handling performance annually. Following each self-assessment, we must:
 - report the outcome of our self-assessment to elected Members; this will be to the Audit and Standards Committee when standards related matters are considered at the December meetings, commencing in December 2023;
 - publish the outcome of our assessment on our website and make accessible to residents; and
 - include the self-assessment in our annual report to tenants.

Conclusion

9. It is a requirement of the Housing Ombudsman that we have a housing Complaints Handling Policy adopted and we recommend that Members approve the Complaints Handling Policy proposed at Appendix A.

Equalities

10. An equality impact assessment has been completed.

Financial Implications

11. If we are found to be in breach of the Complaints Handling Code, RDC could be prosecuted which is likely to include a significant fine and may impact on future funding bids.

Legal Implications

12. All bodies registered with the Regulator for Social Housing must be in the Ombudsman's jurisdiction by effect of the 1996 Housing Act and 2011 Localism Act. Through having this membership, RDC are held accountable and if we do not follow our complaints handling policy then compensation may be requested by Ombudsman to our tenants.

Other Implications	Applies?	Other Implications	Applies?
Human Rights	No	Equalities and Diversity	No
Crime and Disorder	No	External Consultation	No
Environmental	No	Access to Information	No
Risk Management	No	Exempt from publication	No

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Appendices:	Appendix A - RDC Owned Accommodation Complaints Handling Policy
Relevant previous Minutes:	N/A
Background Papers:	None
Reference Documents:	None