**Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code:**

**Self-assessment form**

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| **Compliance with the Complaint Handling Code** | | | |
| **1** | **Definition of a complaint** | **Yes** | **No** |
|  | Does the complaints process use the following definition of a complaint?  *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** |  |
|  | Does the policy have exclusions where a complaint will not be considered? | **Yes** |  |
|  | Are these exclusions reasonable and fair to residents?  Evidence relied upon  **Response:** Tenancy Agreement, Service User Handbook, Internal Policy, Support Provider House Rules, Reasonableness and Proportionality | **Yes** |  |
| **2** | **Accessibility** |  |  |
|  | Are multiple accessibility routes available for residents to make a complaint? | **Yes** |  |
|  | Is the complaints policy and procedure available online? |  | **No** |
|  | Do we have a reasonable adjustments policy? | **Yes** |  |
|  | Do we regularly advise residents about our complaints process? |  | **No** |
| **3** | **Complaints team and process** |  |  |
|  | Is there a complaint officer or equivalent in post? | **See Notes** | **No** |
|  | Does the complaint officer have autonomy to resolve complaints? | **As above** | **No** |
|  | Does the complaint officer have authority to compel engagement from other departments to resolve disputes? | **Yes** |  |
|  | If there is a third stage to the complaints procedure are residents involved in the decision making? |  | **No** |
|  | Is any third stage optional for residents? |  | **No** |
|  | Does the final stage response set out residents’ right to refer the matter to the Housing Ombudsman Service? |  | **No** |
|  | Do we keep a record of complaint correspondence including correspondence from the resident? | **Yes** |  |
|  | At what stage are most complaints resolved?  **NOTES / RESPONSE STATEMENT:**  **Definition: WIP – Work in Progress**  BeST has incorporated the Complaints definition within our new Complaints Policy.  Bespoke Supportive Tenancies (BeST) are in the process of revising our complaints policy and procedure and as part of this process, we have introduced new software monitoring capabilities.  Historically, individual departmental managers have handled complaints (appropriate person). Whilst this will remain the case, we have appointed a Complaints Officer (effective January 2021). This role will be undertaken by the Compliance Manager, who will oversee the complaints process, provide advice and assistance, and will take over case management in circumstances where the complaint is serious or escalated, or where it is felt appropriate to step in. The Complaints Officer will be notified of all complaints, and will be copied into all correspondence and outcomes, and will be able to follow the progress by use of the Sassha Complaints Monitoring Programme.  Historically, serious complaints have been discussed, and outcomes agreed by method of their being discussed at BeST’s Heads of Service, and Managers, weekly operations meeting. It is often the case that complaints involve more than one department  The Complaints Officer is authorised to compel engagement and actions to be undertaken by other internal departments and will have a deciding influence on the complaint outcomes.  However, depending upon the seriousness, or complex nature of the complaint, BeST’s Executive Team or in some cases, the Board, may be asked to make or participate in the final decision as to the case outcome, particularly if the complaint may have significant financial consequences on the organisation (substantial monetary write-off), or when external agencies or media (example: Adult Social Services, Commissioner) may be involved.  As a result of the historic complaints process requiring individual departments to manage their own complaints, it is acknowledged that a central depositary for storing complaints records, or complaints register, was not in place.  The new software programme to be rolled out in the New Year, will ensure that all complaints will have a full record and audit trail, from January 2021, however it is expected that staff training on the new process and software management, will be completed early in the New Year, and by the 31st March 2021.  In 2020 BeST commissioned a new company website and we have been actively looking at external communications. We have appointed a Tenant Engagement Lead Officer and much work is being done in this area, including the introduction of a Tenant Satisfaction Survey which was rolled out earlier this year.  BeST are actively involved in the setting up of a Tenant Panel, and work is ongoing in this area. This has proven to be complicated due to our housing stock covering a Broad geographical area throughout England and Wales.  Another relevant factor is that BeST’s housing portfolio supplies a mixture of supported and specialised supported housing (the SSH definition is applied to the majority of its housing schemes). The majority of BeST’s service users suffer substantial disability and are vulnerable. As a consequence, due to a variety of factors, which include geographical distance, travel, COVID restrictions, and the lack of adequate broadband provision (which is not an eligible housing benefit service charge), the setting up of a tenant panel has proven to be difficult. Areas BeST are looking into, include exploring digital solutions and the use of technology such as Zoom, and arranging service user training (panel members only) as to usage. We are also looking into other ways this may be achievable. It needs to be noted that no final decision as to how this will work has been taken. Work will continue in this area in the New Year.  BeST are engaged in revising all internal policy and procedures, and in the New Year BeST will continue to roll these out and we will publish customer facing policies on BeST’s company website.  BeST have undertaken work on setting up a support provider group email address (to be finalised in the New Year), and much work has been done in updating all Support Provider contact information. BeST’s policies, procedures, and other communications will be delivered, via that media, at minimum on a regular quarterly basis or more often as required.  BeST’s Support Providers manage our housing Schemes and deliver CSS (care, support and supervision) on BeST’s behalf.  BeST also publishes a quarterly Newsletter, ‘’Snippets’’. The onset of the COVID 19 pandemic, has impacted on all aspects of our working and living arrangements during 2020.  Snippets, as a consequence, has been distributed digitally to our support providers, for distribution and communication to our service users.  Prior to COVID, the newsletter had been mailed out to individual service users in hard copy form. This is an area which we will re-visit in 2021, and decision, as to whether to continue to mail out in digital form, or re-introduce hard copy, will be taken.  The changes which have been introduced within BeST’s Complaints Policy and Procedure have been considered when drafting our new policy and procedure. The Policy document will be made published on our website before 31st March 2021.  **Important Note:**  BeST has answered the questions on this self-assessment questionnaire, and has measured the responses, against its previous and current company policy and procedure (noting that this has been under review), as compared against the new Code.  BeST have acknowledged its previous policy as measured against the new code (introduced in July 2020 due to be formally implemented by 1st January 2021), as being inadequate in some key areas, most notably in terms of historical record keeping,  The self-assessment has been completed, in accordance with BeST’s principals, of being fair, honest, and transparent in its dealings with our service users and other external agencies, and we are pleased to announce that work is ongoing as regards the implementation of these changes and staff training will be organised where appropriate.  Whilst records have in the main been retained by BeST’s departmental managers, due to the lack of a central repository system, the recovery of these records can be problematic and time consuming, particularly as far as historic complaints are concerned. BeST therefore has insufficient data, produced over a period of time, in terms of our ability to provide complaints statistics and as a consequence, provide accurate measurement.  Following the recent publication of the Social Housing White and the introduction of the Housing Ombudsman New Complaints Code, further work will be done to ensure we are fully compliant with the new code.  No complaints have been escalated to the housing ombudsman in recent times, we are however unable to establish whether this has been the case historically. |  |  |
| **4** | **Communication** |  |  |
|  | Are residents kept informed and updated during the complaints process? | **Yes** |  |
|  | Are residents informed of the landlord’s position and given a chance to respond and challenge any area of dispute before the final decision? | **Yes** |  |
|  | Are all complaints acknowledged and logged within five days? | **Yes** |  |
|  | Are residents advised of how to escalate at the end of each stage? | **Yes** |  |
|  | What proportion of complaints are resolved at stage one? | **Data not available\*** |  |
|  | What proportion of complaints are resolved at stage two? |  |  |
|  | What proportion of complaint responses are sent within Code timescales?  **Response:** Best has Insufficient Data as denoted by use of the question mark**.**   * Stage one   Stage one (with extension)   * Stage two   Stage two (with extension) | **See Notes** | **Data not available\*** |
|  | Where timescales have been extended did we have good reason? | **Yes** |  |
|  | Where timescales have been extended did we keep the resident informed? | **Data not available\*** |  |
|  | What proportion of complaints do we resolve to residents’ satisfaction | **See**  **Notes** |  |
| **5** | **Cooperation with Housing Ombudsman Service** |  |  |
|  | Were all requests for evidence responded to within 15 days? |  | **N/A** |
|  | Where the timescale was extended did we keep the Ombudsman informed? |  | **N/A** |
| **6** | **Fairness in complaint handling** |  |  |
|  | Are residents able to complain via a representative throughout? | **Yes** |  |
|  | If advice was given, was this accurate and easy to understand? | **Yes** |  |
|  | How many cases did we refuse to escalate? None  What was the reason for the refusal? N/A | **0** |  |
|  | Did we explain our decision to the resident? | **N/A** |  |
| **7** | **Outcomes and remedies** |  |  |
|  | Where something has gone wrong are we taking appropriate steps to put things right? | **Yes** |  |
| **8** | **Continuous learning and improvement** |  |  |
|  | What improvements have we made as a result of learning from complaints?  **Response:** See Notes – Substantial improvementsundertaken | **Yes** |  |
|  | How do we share these lessons with:   1. residents? No (currently) 2. the board/governing body? Yes 3. In the Annual Report? No (currently) |  | **No** |
|  | Has the Code made a difference to how we respond to complaints? | **Yes** |  |
|  | What changes have we made?  **Response:** Substantial changes are in progress  Our new Policy will adhere to the Complaints handling code in as far as possible. It may be difficult in some cases to explain our decisions to the resident, dependant on the extent of capacity issues. However in these cases we engage and dialogue fully with the support providers and legal representatives. The majority of the complaints have been satisfactorily resolved. | **Yes** |  |