

## Appendix 2 - Complaints Handling Code Self-Assessment November 2025

Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council (RCBC) has undertaken early implementation of the new Complaints Handling Code (Code) introduced on the 22 April 2024. The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman require full application of the Code by the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2026.

As part of the annual report to the Governance Committee we are, under the Code, required to undertake an annual self-assessment to demonstrate compliance with the Code. The Council's Corporate Complaints Manager has undertaken the review and below details the requirements under the Code and commentary on RCBC's compliance.

Code Section	Compliance Outcome	Comments
<b>1. Definition of a service request and complaint</b>		
Adopt a shared understanding of what constitutes a service request and what constitutes a complaint. This should be set out within the complaints policy	Yes	Definitions of a service request and a complaint are set out in the Corporate Complaints and Compliments Procedure.
A complaint that is submitted via a third party or representative should still be handled in line with the organisation's complaints policy.	Yes	In line with current practice.
Organisations should have the opportunity to deal with a service request before a complaint is made. A complaint may be raised when the individual expresses dissatisfaction with the response to their service request, even if the handling of the service request remains ongoing	Yes	In line with current practice.
Service requests should be recorded, monitored and reviewed regularly	Yes	In line with current practice.
<b>2. Exclusions</b>		
If the organisation decides not to accept a complaint, it should be able to evidence its reasoning and communicate to the complainant. Each complaint should be considered on its own merits.	Yes	In line with current practice.
Organisations should accept complaints referred to them within 12 months of the issue occurring, or the individual becoming aware of the issue. Discretion may be applied in some circumstances	Yes	In line with current practice.
Exclusions should be set out within the complaint's policy/procedure.	Yes	Exclusions are set out in the Corporate Complaints and Compliments Procedure.
If an organisation decides not to accept a complaint, an explanation should be provided to the individual. Organisations should not take a blanket approach to excluding complaints; they should consider the individual circumstances of each complaint	Yes	In line with current practice.

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<b>3. Accessibility and Awareness</b>		
Organisations should make it easy for individuals to complain by providing different channels through which they can make a complaint.	Yes	In line with current practice and detailed in the Corporate Complaints and Compliments Procedure.
Organisations must consider their duties under the Equality Act 2010 and anticipate the needs and reasonable adjustments of individuals who may need to access the complaints process.	Yes	In line with current practice.
Individuals should be able to raise their complaints in any way and with any member of staff. All staff should be aware of the complaints process and be able to pass details of the complaint to the appropriate person within the organisation	Yes	In line with current practice.
Organisations should make their complaint policy available in a clear and accessible format.	Yes	Available on request and via the council's website.
The policy should include details about the Ombudsman and the Code.	Yes	In line with current practice.
Organisations should give individuals the opportunity to have a suitable representative deal with their complaint on their behalf, and to be represented or accompanied at any meeting with the organisation.	Yes	In line with current practice and detailed in the Corporate Complaints and Compliments Procedure.
Organisations should provide individuals with information on their right to access the Ombudsman service.	Yes	In line with current practice.
Where an organisation asks for feedback about its services through a survey, it should provide details of how individuals can complain.	Partly	Additional work required to ascertain what surveys are undertaken – This will be addressed going forward.
<b>4. Complaint Handling Resources</b>		
Organisations should have designated, sufficient resource assigned to take responsibility for complaint handling, including liaison with the Ombudsman and ensuring complaints are reported to the governing body (or equivalent).	Yes	Resource for complaints is now a centralised team processing all complaints across the council – including statutory complaint processes.
Anyone responding to a complaint should have access to staff at all levels to facilitate the prompt resolution of complaints. They should also have the authority and autonomy to act to resolve disputes promptly and fairly.	Yes	In line with current practice.

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Code Section	Compliance Outcome	Comments
<b>4. Complaint Handling Resources - continued...</b>		
Organisations are expected to prioritise complaint handling and a culture of learning from complaints. All relevant staff should be suitably trained in the importance of complaint handling. It is important that complaints are seen as a core service and resourced accordingly.	Yes	In line with current practice – training is provided by the Complaints team and via the Ombudsman. Complaints training is part of the Management Training programme. Further training sessions are being organised in the New Year.
<b>5. The Complaint Handling Processes</b>		
Organisations should have a single policy for dealing with complaints covered by the Code.	Yes	This is current practice under the Corporate Complaints and Compliments Procedure
Organisations should not have extra named stages (such as 'stage 0' or 'informal complaint') as this causes unnecessary confusion.	Yes	Under current practice there are only 2 stages under the Corporate Complaints and Compliment Procedure.
When an individual expresses dissatisfaction that could meet the criteria for a complaint as set out in section 1 of the Code, they should be given the opportunity to make a complaint.	Yes	In line with current practice
The person responding to the complaint should: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clarify with the individual any aspects of the complaint they are unclear about.</li> <li>Deal with complaints on their merits, act independently, and have an open mind.</li> <li>Give the individual a fair chance to set out their position.</li> <li>Take measures to address any actual or perceived conflict of interest.</li> <li>Consider all relevant information and evidence carefully.</li> </ul>	Yes	In line with current practice
Where a response to a complaint will fall outside the timescales set out in this Code the organisation should inform the individual of when the response will be provided and the reason(s) for the delay.	Yes	In line with current practice
Organisations should keep a record of any reasonable adjustments agreed. Any agreed reasonable adjustments should be kept under active review.	Under Review	Confidence is assured that reasonable adjustments are made where required. Current monitoring is being undertaken to ensure the recording of reasonable adjustments are detailed on the complainant's records.

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Code Section	Compliance Outcome	Comments
<b>5. The Complaint Handling Processes – continued...</b>		
Organisations should not refuse to escalate a complaint through all stages of the complaints procedure unless there are valid reasons to do so. Organisations should set out these reasons, and they should align with the exclusions set out in section 2 of the Code.	Yes	In line with current practice.
A full record should be kept of the complaint, and the outcomes at each stage. This should include the original complaint and the date received, all correspondence with the individual, correspondence with other parties, and any relevant supporting documentation such as reports. This should be retained in line with the organisation's data retention policies.	Yes	In line with current practice.
Organisations should have systems in place to ensure that a complaint can be remedied at any stage of its complaints process. Individuals should not have to escalate a complaint in order to get an appropriate remedy.	Yes	In line with current practice.
Organisations should have policies and procedures in place for managing unacceptable behaviour from individuals and/or their representatives. Organisations should be able to evidence reasons for putting any restrictions in place and should keep an individual's restrictions under regular review. Restrictions should be proportionate and have regard for the Equalities Act 2010.	Yes	In line with current practice – these issues are dealt with under the Council's Vexatious Complainant Procedure.
<b>6. Complaint Stages</b>		
Organisations should have processes in place to consider which complaints can be responded to as early as possible, and which require further consideration. Organisations should consider factors such as the complexity of the complaint and whether the individual is vulnerable or at risk. Most stage 1 complaints can be resolved promptly, and an explanation, apology or resolution provided.	Yes	In line with current practice.
Complaints should be acknowledged and logged at stage 1 of the complaint's procedure within five working days of the complaint being received.	Yes	In line with current practice.
Organisations should provide a full response to stage 1 complaints within 10 working days of the complaint being acknowledged.	Yes	In line with current practice.

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Code Section	Compliance Outcome	Comments
<b>6. Complaint Stages – continued...</b>		
Any extension should be no more than 10 working days without good reason, and the reason(s) should be clearly explained to the individual. When an organisation informs an individual about an extension to these timescales, they should be provided with the details of the relevant Ombudsman.	Yes	In line with current practice.
A complaint response should be provided to the individual when the answer to the complaint is known, not when the outstanding actions required to address the issue are completed. Outstanding actions should still be tracked and actioned promptly, with appropriate updates provided to the individual.	Yes	In line with current practice.
Organisations should address all points raised in the complaint and provide clear reasons for any decisions, referencing the relevant policy, law and good practice where appropriate. Organisations should be clear which aspects of the complaint they are, and are not, responsible for and clarify any areas where this is not clear.	Yes	In line with current practice.
At the conclusion of stage 1 organisations should provide details of how to escalate the matter to stage 2 if the individual is not satisfied with the response.	Yes	In line with current practice.
Where individuals raise additional complaints during stage 1, these should be incorporated into the stage 1 response if they are related, and the stage 1 response has not been provided. Where the stage 1 response has been provided, the new issues are unrelated to the issues already being considered, or it would unreasonably delay the response, the new issues should be logged as a new complaint.	Yes	In line with current practice.
If all or part of the complaint is not resolved to the individual's satisfaction at stage 1, it should be progressed to stage 2 of the organisation's procedure. Stage 2 is the organisation's final response.	Yes	In line with current practice.
Requests for stage 2 should be acknowledged and logged at stage 2 of the complaint's procedure within five working days of the escalation request being received.	Yes	In line with current practice.

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Code Section	Compliance Outcome	Comments
<b>6. Complaint Stages – continued...</b>		
Individuals should not be required to explain their reasons for requesting a stage 2 consideration. Organisations should make reasonable efforts to understand why an individual remains unhappy as part of its stage 2 response.	Yes	In line with current practice.
The person considering the complaint at stage 2 should not be the same person that considered the complaint at stage 1.	Yes	In line with current practice.
Organisations should issue a final response to the stage 2 within 20 working days of the complaint being acknowledged.	Yes	In line with current practice.
Any extension should be no more than 20 working days without good reason, and the reason(s) should be clearly explained to the individual.	Yes	In line with current practice.
Organisations should confirm the following in writing to the individual at the completion of stage 2 in clear, plain language: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The complaint stage.</li> <li>• The organisation's understanding of the complaint.</li> <li>• The decision on the complaint.</li> <li>• The reasons for any decisions made.</li> <li>• Details of any remedy offered to put things right.</li> <li>• Details of any outstanding actions.</li> <li>• Details of how to escalate the matter to the Ombudsman if the individual remains dissatisfied.</li> </ul>	Yes	In line with current practice.
Where an organisation's complaint response is handled by a third party (e.g. a contractor) or independent adjudicator at any stage, it should form part of the two stage complaints process set out in this Code. Individuals should not be expected to go through two complaints processes.	Yes	In line with current practice.
Organisations are responsible for ensuring that any third parties handle complaints in line with the Code.	Partly	Further activity is required to ensure the new expectations and monitor compliance.

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Code Section	Compliance Outcome	Comments
<b>7. Complaint Stages</b>		
Where something has gone wrong an organisation should acknowledge this and set out the actions it has already taken, or intends to take, to put things right.	Yes	In line with current practice.
Any remedy offered should reflect the impact on the individual as a result of any fault identified. The remedy offer should clearly set out what will happen and by when and be followed through to completion.	Yes	In line with current practice.
If a proposed remedy cannot be delivered the individual should be informed of the reasons for this, provided with details of any alternative remedy and reminded of their right to complain to the Ombudsman. Organisations should take account of the good practice guides when deciding on appropriate remedies.	Yes	In line with current practice.
<b>8. Performance Reporting and Self-Assessment</b>		
Organisations should produce an annual complaints performance and service improvement report for scrutiny.	Yes	Changes to the annual report have been incorporated.
An annual self-assessment against this Code to ensure its complaint handling policy remains in line with its requirements.	Yes	This is the self-assessment
A qualitative and quantitative analysis of the organisation's complaint handling performance. This should also include a summary of the types of complaints the organisation has refused to accept.	Yes	In line with current practice – Additionally, quarterly complaint reporting has commenced across all complaint procedures and an overall summary reported to Governance Committee on a six-monthly basis.
The service improvements made as a result of the learning from complaints.	Partly	Work is currently underway to have a procedure to record and monitor completion of all learning outcomes across all Directorates. This procedure will be fully integrated by March 2026.
The annual letter about the organisation's performance from the Ombudsman reported.	Yes	Included as Appendix 1 in the Annual report to Governance Committee in November 2025.
Any other relevant reports or publications produced by the Ombudsman in relation to the work of the organisation.	Yes	Although no reports have been produced by the Ombudsman regarding RCBC during the past 12months.

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<b>8. Performance Reporting and Self-Assessment – continued...</b>		
The annual complaints performance and service improvement report should be reported through the organisation's governance arrangements and published on the section of its website relating to complaints. The response to the report from the relevant governance arrangement should be published alongside this.	Yes	In line with current practice – although already published on the website under the Governance Committee arrangements - the annual report will also be available on the 'Complaints' section of the council website.
Organisations should also carry out a self-assessment following a significant restructure, merger and/or change in procedures.	Yes	In line with current practice – this is detailed in the Corporate Complaints and Compliments procedure.
<b>9. Scrutiny &amp; Oversight: Continuous Learning and Improvement</b>		
Organisations should 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.	Partly	This will be undertaken comprehensively once the procedure for recording and monitoring of learning outcomes has been implemented across all Directorates.
A positive complaint handling culture is important to the effectiveness with which organisations resolve disputes. Organisations should use complaints as a source of intelligence to identify issues and introduce positive changes in service delivery.	Yes	In line with current practice – having a centralised Complaints team has been particularly effective in developing a positive complaint handling culture.
Organisations should report back on wider learning and improvements from complaints to stakeholders, such as citizens' panels, staff and relevant committees.	No	No current arrangements are in place but will be incorporated once the procedure for recording and monitoring of learning outcomes has been implemented across all Directorates.
The organisation should appoint a suitably senior person to oversee its complaint handling performance. This person should assess any themes or trends to identify potential systemic issues, serious risks, or policies and procedures that require revision	Yes	In line with current practice the senior person is the council's Monitoring Officer.
The organisation should appoint a 'Member responsible for complaints' they should receive regular information on complaints performance.	Yes	The 'Member' responsible for complaints is the Governance Committee who now receive six monthly updates on complaints performance – development of which will continue over the coming months.

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<b>9. Scrutiny &amp; Oversight: Continuous Learning and Improvement – continued...</b>		
Organisations should have a standard objective in relation to complaint handling for all relevant employees or third parties (includes taking responsibility, collaboration across departments and acting within professional standards).	Yes	In line with current practice.