

Appendix B – Self-Assessment Form

This self-assessment form should be completed by the complaints officer and discussed at the landlord’s governing body annually.

Evidence should be included to support all statements with additional commentary as necessary.

Explanations must also be provided where a mandatory ‘must’ requirement is not met to set out the rationale for the alternative approach adopted and why this delivers a better outcome.

Section 1 - Definition of a complaint

Mandatory ‘must’ requirements

Code section	Code requirement	Comply: Yes/No	Evidence, commentary and any explanations
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 organisation, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting an individual resident or group of residents.'</i>	Yes	Included in Comments, Compliments & Complaints Policy ('Complaints Policy') wording
1.3	The resident does not have to use the word 'complaint' for it to be treated as such.	Yes	Included in Complaints Policy

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	A complaint that is submitted via a third party or representative must still be handled in line with the landlord's complaints policy.	Yes	Included in Complaints Procedure
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	We would raise a complaint when a resident raises dissatisfaction with the response to a service request.
1.7	A landlord must accept a complaint unless there is a valid reason not to do so.	Yes	Subject to the exclusions in 1.8.
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	<p>Specific exclusions included in Comments, Compliments & Complaints Policy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Where the issue being complained about happened more than 6 months ago (unless the complaint is about a recurring issue and some instances occurred more recently than 6 months ago) · Where the client has already begun to address the issues being complained of via a legal process. In these cases the issue will be dealt with as part of the legal process. · Where the issue being complained about has already been dealt with via

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			<p>our Comments, Compliments and Complaints Procedure.</p> <p>· Where the complaint is the first report of anti-social behaviour as it relates to a Southdown property or tenant. (Complaints which relate to Southdown's handling of previous reports of anti-social behaviour are deemed to be within scope of the complaints process, subject to the above exclusions).</p> <p>We will seek to consult tenants and clients on this as part of tenant involvement.</p>
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	Included in Complaints Policy document wording

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Best practice 'should' requirements

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	We process service requests in the ordinary course of business, and recognise the situations, where escalation to a complaint is necessary.
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	We send an anonymised annual survey to tenants and provide the option for them to include their contact details for us to investigate their dissatisfaction.

Section 2 - Accessibility and awareness

Mandatory 'must' requirements

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	We accept complaints by our website, email, post, telephone, social media, or in-person. Also see Complaints Policy.
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	Included within Feedback and transparency sections of the website, and we have a Complaints Leaflet that summarises the policy.
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	Included within Feedback and transparency sections of the website. We also have an Easy to Read version of the leaflet on our website.
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	Yes	Included as a separate section within the Complaints Policy.

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	and that complaints handlers have had appropriate training to deal with such requests.		
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	We include within our tenants handbook, website, tenants sign-up packs, Complaints leaflet, and the Annual Report to Tenants.
2.7	Landlords must provide residents with contact information for the Ombudsman as part of its regular correspondence with residents.	Yes	As above. We will be including contact information for the Ombudsman on our Quarterly Tenants Newsletter from February 2023.
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	See Compliments, Comments & Complaints Leaflet.

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Best practice 'should' requirements

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	See Complaints Procedure, Complaints Leaflet, and Data Protection Policy.

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Section 3 - Complaint handling personnel

Mandatory 'must' requirements

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	We have a central complaints coordinator ('coordinator') role but, due to the diversity of the business, we keep the investigation and response to complaints within the individual operational teams. The responses, timescales and related actions are recorded by the coordinator: any learning outcomes are also reported back to them. The coordinator provides a summary of complaints to the Executive Team on a monthly basis, and an Annual Complaints Report is submitted to the Board.
3.2	...the complaint handler appointed must have appropriate complaint handling skills and no conflicts of interest.	Yes	The investigating officers/managers are at a minimum line managers. There is an annual request for all staff to submit a conflicts of interest declaration, and this is reported to the Board.

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Best practice 'should' requirements

Code section	Code requirement	Comply: Yes/No	Evidence, commentary and any explanations
3.3	<p>Complaint handlers should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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	<p>See the first part of 3.2.</p> <p>The handlers have access to staff at all levels including the Housing Team, and Property Services Team.</p> <p>We are a Supported Housing Provider, and as such, acting sensitively and fairly are inherent in our values. These include being brilliant with people, responsive and a force for good. We are in the process of becoming a psychologically-informed organisation through embedding our psychologically-informed approach: The Southdown Beacon. Over the coming year, all colleagues will develop the knowledge and skills necessary to respond to people's psychological needs, as well as an understanding of trauma.</p> <p>This approach will inform both how we respond to distressed or upset residents and how we support each another.</p>

Section 4 - Complaint handling principles

Mandatory 'must' requirements

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	All conversations with residents regarding a concern are recorded on our database. Tenants are given the option of resolving the concern informally verbally and are advised that if their preference is to follow a formal route, then this is managed in line with our Complaints procedure. We acknowledge and log all Stage One complaints within 3 days, in accordance with our procedure.
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	See template acknowledgement letter that all Compliant Handlers must use.
4.6	A complaint investigation must be conducted in an impartial manner.	Yes	See Complaints Policy.
4.7	The complaint handler must: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • deal with complaints on their merits • act independently and have an open mind 	Yes	See Complaints Policy.

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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. 		
4.11	Landlords must adhere to any reasonable arrangements agreed with residents in terms of frequency and method of communication	Yes	Tenants are asked at sign-up, and during Annual Tenant Visits. The preferences are noted on our database, and staff will review these before contacting a tenant.
4.12	<p>The resident, and if applicable any staff member who is the subject of the complaint, must also be given a fair chance to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> set out their position comment on any adverse findings before a final decision is made. 	Yes	Included in Complaints Procedure.
4.13	A landlord must include in its complaints policy its timescales for a resident to request escalation of a complaint	Yes	We have updated our Complaints Policy to include timescales for a resident to request escalation of a complaint.
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	We would not unreasonably refuse to escalate a complaint, and therefore have not included a reference to this in our Complaints Policy.

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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	A full record is kept on our database.
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	We have an Anti-Social Behaviour Policy and procedure, updated in January 2023 .

Best practice 'should' requirements

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	Part of standard Complaints policy and process.
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	Part of standard Complaints policy and process.
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	We would always do this as long as we have the tenant's written consent. We have a standard letter for this purpose.

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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	We refer back to Tenancy Agreements.
4.9	Communication with the resident should not generally identify individual members of staff or contractors.	Yes	We only use the names of individual members of staff where appropriate.
4.10	Landlords should keep residents regularly updated about the progress of the investigation.	Yes	Procedure is to phone initially, acknowledge the complaint in writing within 3 days, and provide a full response within 10 days.
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	See the Complaints Policy
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	. There is a lessons learnt meeting after a response letter is sent. Impacted staff are always included and supported in the process.
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	We have a section within the Anti-Social Behaviour Policy & Procedure covering Individuality

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Section 5 - Complaint stages

Mandatory 'must' requirements

Stage 1

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	Included in Complaints Procedure
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	Included in Complaints Procedure
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	Included in Complaints Procedure
5.8	Landlords must confirm the following in writing to the resident at the completion of stage one in clear, plain language: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 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	Included in Complaints Procedure

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Stage 2

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	Included in Complaints Policy and Complaints Procedure. We do not decline to escalate complaints
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	Template acknowledgement letter - template sets out what should be included in the letter, ie understanding of issues and outcomes required.
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	Included in Complaints Procedure
5.12	The person considering the complaint at stage two, must not be the same person that considered the complaint at stage one.	Yes	As per Complaints Procedure
5.13	Landlords must respond to the stage two complaint <u>within 20 working days</u> 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	As per Complaints Procedure We inform tenants in writing if the response will take longer than 20 days
5.16	Landlords must confirm the following in writing to the resident at the completion of stage two in clear, plain language: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the complaint stage 	Yes	As per Complaints Procedure, and Stage Two Response Letter template

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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 <p>and</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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. 		
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Stage 3

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	Stage Three of the Complaints Procedure removed in 2020.
5.20	Landlords must confirm the following in writing to the resident at the completion of stage three in clear, plain language: <ul 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 	N/A	Stage Three of the Complaints Procedure removed in 2020.

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> details of how to escalate the matter to the Housing Ombudsman Service if the resident remains dissatisfied 		
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Best practice 'should' requirements

Stage 1

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	Standard template letter is used to advise of an extension beyond 20 working days.
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	Contact details included in the complaints leaflet. We have included a section on a tenant's right to refer to the Housing Ombudsman in all letter templates.
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	This forms part of the complaint fact finding exercise.
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	This forms part of our Complaints Procedure

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Stage 2

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	Standard template letter is used to advise of an extension beyond 10 working days.
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	We have included a section on a tenant's right to refer to the Housing Ombudsman in all letter templates.

Stage 3

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	Stage Three of the Complaints Procedure removed in 2020.
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	Stage Three of the Complaints Procedure removed in 2020.

Section 6 - Putting things right

Mandatory 'must' requirements

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	Included in the Response Letter. An Actions Tracker is also used internally.
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	Included in the Response Letter.
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	Clearly set out in the Response Letter. An Actions Tracker is used internally. Our Coordinator always follows through with staff to ensure implemented.
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	Refer to Tenant Compensation and Payments Policy

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Best practice 'should' requirements

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	This forms part of our continuous improvement culture. We publish regular feedback on Complaints received with lessons learnt, and how we are going to do things differently in the future.
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	This is part of our normal practice. We would always seek legal advice before responding.

Section 7 - Continuous learning and improvement

Mandatory 'must' requirements

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	See our Annual Tenants Report, quarterly Newsletter. Staff receive feedback throughout the Complaints Process. An Annual Complaints Report is presented to the Executive and the Board.

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Best practice 'should' requirements

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	We do not have a Board Member specifically designated for Complaints. However, we have two Board Members, Michelle Baker, and Simon Anderson, who provide the lead on Client/Tenant Voice.
7.4	As a minimum, governing bodies should receive: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. 		The Executive Team receive a monthly, and annual report, the latter of which is presented to the Board.
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	Our senior management are provided with both an Annual Report, identifying themes, and a monthly Complaints Report to identify these issues and areas for improvement

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7.6	<p>Landlords should have a standard objective in relation to complaint handling for all employees that reflects the need to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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	<p>These form part of our values to be a force for good, brilliant with people, united, trustworthy, and responsive.</p> <p>The Southdown Beacon guides employees to build relationships that value working together. This means we adopt a collaborative approach, with both clients and colleagues, and value multiple perspectives and voices.</p> <p>We also advocate against a blame culture, instead adopting shared responsibility with a commitment to a Growth Mindset and continuous improvement to ensure we learn from complaints and provide the best service possible.</p>
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Section 8 - Self-assessment and compliance

Mandatory 'must' requirements

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	Southdown created a working group, made up of key stakeholders, to assess the organisation's compliance against the revised 1 April 2022 Code. Enhancements to existing policies and procedures, and templates, have been

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			implemented following the assessment. We note that our Self-Assessment is overdue (deadline October 2022), and this has been rectified going forward, by including the requirement on the Board Timetable of Works. The Self-Assessment, against the original Code, was completed by the organisation in December 2020 (and published to our website).
8.2	Landlords must also carry out a self-assessment following a significant restructure and/or change in procedures.	Yes	We will carry out a self-assessment following a significant restructure and/or change in procedures. No such changes have taken place.
8.3	<p>Following each self-assessment, a landlord must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • report the outcome of their self-assessment to their governing body. In the case of local authorities, self-assessment outcomes should be reported to elected members • 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	<p>The outcome of the Self-Assessment will be reported at our May 2023 Board Meeting and published on our website.</p> <p>Our annual report to customers will include a section on complaints handling performance</p>