

Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code

Bristol City Council Self-assessment December 2021

The Housing Ombudsman publishes a Complaint Handling Code which helps social landlords to respond to complaints effectively and fairly. As part of the Code, we must complete a self-assessment at least once every 12 months. Our most recent self-assessment has now been published on the [website](#) and a summary of the key elements are set out below. The detailed checklist is at Appendix 1.

Performance

- Between November 2020 and October 2021, we received 891 landlord service complaints. Of those complaints:
 - 90.6 percent were resolved at stage one, with 78.2 percent of these responded to within the 15-working day target, up 12 percent from last year
 - 8.4 percent were resolved at stage two, with 84.6 percent of these responded to within the 20-working day target, up 17.6 percent from last year
- Timescales were extended on 33 complaints. There were good reasons for those extensions on 74.2 percent of cases and we informed the resident about the extension before the target date on 54.5 percent of cases
- 35.7 percent of residents rated the overall resolution of their complaint as good or very good

Improvements made in 2021

- changed our review procedures for residents living in sheltered accommodation and who have opted out of regular well-being checks
- updated our policy regarding out of hours emergency calls about no hot water or heating during winter months
- include details about how to complain and the Housing Ombudsman service in Housing News and in our annual report
- recruited a customer experience analyst to focus on complaints and feedback
- updated our corporate complaints policy
- ran Housing Ombudsman webinars for Housing and Landlord Services staff
- began developing a complaint handling training programme
- developed a quality audit process
- created a performance reporting framework

Improvement plans for 2022

- finalise and roll out our training programme for all officers handling landlord service complaints
- finalise and roll out our quality audit process across all landlord service areas
- start including details of the Housing Ombudsman service on our rent statements and in our new tenant starter packs
- in an effort to be more transparent with residents, we also aim to present complaint performance data:
 - in Housing News, our bi-annual newsletter
 - to the Housing Scrutiny Panel (tenant panel) bi-annually
 - to the Housing Management Board quarterly
 - at the Estate Services, Planned Programme and Response Repairs Service User Groups

APPENDIX 1

Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code

Bristol City Council Self-assessment December 2021

Compliance with the Complaint Handling Code				
1	Definition of a complaint	Yes	No	Comments
	<p>Does the complaints process use the following definition of a complaint?</p> <p><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></p>		<p>✓</p> <p>BCC Complaints Policy Chapter 3</p>	<p>As our Complaints Policy applies to all services provided by the Council, not just housing, we use the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's definition, as follows:</p> <p><i>A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction about a council service (whether that service is provided directly by the council or by a contractor or partner) that requires a response.</i></p> <p>The Housing Ombudsman has approved our use of the LGSCO definition and we include information about the Housing Ombudsman in our Complaints Policy, along with their definition of a complaint.</p>
	<p>Does the policy have exclusions where a complaint will not be considered?</p>	<p>✓</p> <p>BCC Complaints Policy Chapter 6</p>		
	<p>Are these exclusions reasonable and fair to residents?</p> <p>Evidence relied upon</p>	<p>✓</p> <p>BCC Complaints Policy Chapter 6</p>		<p>We exclude on the following grounds, which we consider to be reasonable and fair:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • time limits • illegal activity • court proceedings • negligence claims • right of appeal • complaints about data • complaints against elected members or the elected Mayor • policy decisions • complaints about schools • complaints from professionals or external contractors • complaints from staff • unreasonable complainant behaviour • statutory complaints about adult services

APPENDIX 1

2	Accessibility	Yes	No	Comments
	Are multiple accessibility routes available for residents to make a complaint?	✓ BCC Complaints & Feedback		Complaints can be submitted via our webpage , by post, in person at our Citizen Service Point
	Is the complaints policy and procedure available online?	✓ BCC Complaints Policy		
	Do we have a reasonable adjustments policy?	✓ BCC Equality and Inclusion Policy and Strategy 2018-2023		
	Do we regularly advise residents about our complaints process?	✓		<p>Our complaints policy is published online for residents and any member of the public to access. For those residents who do not access the internet our frontline staff will advise enquirers about our complaints process and the Housing Ombudsman as required.</p> <p>Since last year's assessment, we also include information about the Housing Ombudsman and how to complain in our Annual Report to Tenants and our newsletter, Housing News.</p>
3	Complaints team and process	Yes	No	Comments
	Is there a complaint officer or equivalent in post?	✓		
	Does the complaint officer have autonomy to resolve complaints?	✓		
	Does the complaint officer have authority to compel engagement from other departments to resolve disputes?	✓		
	If there is a third stage to the complaints procedure are residents involved in the decision making?	N/A		We have a two stage complaints procedure that meets the timescales and requirements of the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code.
	Is any third stage optional for residents?	N/A		
	Does the final stage response set out residents' right to refer the matter to the Housing Ombudsman Service?	✓		Our customer relations team inform complainants about the Housing Ombudsman if their complaint reaches our final stage and falls within the jurisdiction of the Housing Ombudsman.

APPENDIX 1

	Do we keep a record of complaint correspondence including correspondence from the resident?	✓		
	At what stage are most complaints resolved?			Stage 1
4	Communication	Yes	No	Comments
	Are residents kept informed and updated during the complaints process?	✓		
	Are residents informed of the landlord's position and given a chance to respond and challenge any area of dispute before the final decision?	✓		If residents wish to respond and/or challenge our response to stage 1, they have the opportunity to do this at stage 2 before our final decision is made.
	Are all complaints acknowledged and logged within five days?	✓		
	Are residents advised of how to escalate at the end of each stage?	✓		
	What proportion of complaints are resolved at stage one?			90.6%
	What proportion of complaints are resolved at stage two?			8.4%
	What proportion of complaint responses are sent within Code timescales? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stage one • Stage one (with extension) • Stage two • Stage two (with extension) 			Stage 1 = 78.2% Stage 1 with extensions = 59.3% Stage 2 = 84.6% Stage 2 with extensions = 71.4%
	Where timescales have been extended did we have good reason?		✓	We extended the timescales on 33 cases. Of those, 23 (74.2%) were extended with good reason. Extension reasons were not acceptable on 5 (16.1%) cases. On 3 (9.7%) cases, the reasons for extending were either not stated or were unclear.

APPENDIX 1

				On 2 (6.1%) cases, the extension was not necessary.
	Where timescales have been extended did we keep the resident informed?		✓	<p>We extended the timescales on 33 cases.</p> <p>Of those, the resident was informed about the extension before the target date on 18 (54.5%) cases.</p> <p>On 4 (12.1%) cases, the resident was not informed about the extension until after the target date had passed.</p> <p>On 9 (27.3%) cases, there was no evidence on the case that the resident was informed about the extension.</p> <p>On 2 (6.1%) cases, the extension was not necessary.</p> <p>With the introduction of a new process to monitor and remind officers about responses due before target dates are reached and to offer guidance about extensions, we expect to see improved results going forward in terms of timely communications with residents and only extending cases for good reasons.</p>
	What proportion of complaints do we resolve to residents' satisfaction			35.7% of residents rated the overall resolution of their complaint as Good or Very good.
5	Cooperation with Housing Ombudsman Service	Yes	No	Comments
	Were all requests for evidence responded to within 15 days?	✓		
	Where the timescale was extended did we keep the Ombudsman informed?	✓		

APPENDIX 1

6	Fairness in complaint handling	Yes	No	Comments
	Are residents able to complain via a representative throughout?	✓		
	If advice was given, was this accurate and easy to understand?	✓		
	How many cases did we refuse to escalate? What was the reason for the refusal?			We refused to escalate one case (1.2% of escalation requests) because work was ongoing with the Responsive Repairs team. The resident was invited to escalate again after the work was complete if they remained unhappy.
	Did we explain our decision to the resident?	✓		
7	Outcomes and remedies	Yes	No	Comments
	Where something has gone wrong are we taking appropriate steps to put things right?	✓		
8	Continuous learning and improvement	Yes	No	Comments
	What improvements have we made as a result of learning from complaints?			<p>Customer Relations Team Improvements and learning points are taken on a case-by-case basis. We report monthly to senior management about trends and work is active to encourage the service areas to implement remedies and learning improvements.</p> <p>Housing Management and Estates We have changed our review procedures for residents living in sheltered accommodation and who have opted out of regular well-being checks.</p> <p>Responsive Repairs We have updated our policy regarding out of hours emergency calls about no hot water or heating during winter months.</p> <p>Whole service A significant improvement in 2021 was the implementation of a performance reporting framework, resulting in performance reports and trends being produced monthly, quarterly and annually. This has enabled us to identify the key problem areas in our complaint handling and to implement processes to bring about positive cultural and behavioural change across the service.</p>

APPENDIX 1

<p>How do we share these lessons with:</p> <p>a) residents?</p> <p>b) the board/governing body?</p> <p>c) In the Annual Report?</p>			<p>a) Improvements made as a result of lessons learned from complaints and from our self-assessment process are shared with residents on our website as part of our published annual self-assessment results: Housing Ombudsman: Complaint Handling Code - bristol.gov.uk</p> <p>Starting in 2022, we also aim to present complaint performance data:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • in Housing News, our bi-annual newsletter • to the Housing Scrutiny Panel (tenant panel) bi-annually • to the Housing Management Board quarterly • at the Estate Services, Planned Programme and Response Repairs Service User Groups <p>b) Detailed complaint performance data is presented to the Housing Senior Leadership Team quarterly and annually. From 2022 we will include information about improvements made in the annual performance reports and we will investigate the feasibility of including this quarterly</p> <p>c) We have already made changes to the Annual Report to Tenants to include information about the Housing Ombudsman and how to complaint, but in 2022 we will also include a summary of any improvements made as a result of lessons learned from complaints and this self-assessment process</p>
<p>Has the Code made a difference to how we respond to complaints?</p>	<p>✓</p>		
<p>What changes have we made?</p>			<p>Since our first assessment in December 2020, we:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • now include details about how to complain and the Housing Ombudsman service in our newsletter Housing News • now include details of how to complain, the Housing Ombudsman service and information about our complaint handling performance in our annual report • recruited a customer experience analyst to monitor, analyse and report on landlord service complaints and feedback, provide training and guidance, champion continuous improvement and drive positive behavioural and cultural change • improved the way that we analyse and report on complaint related satisfaction data from residents • carry out a self-assessment of our landlord service complaint handling at least once every 12 months and publish the findings

APPENDIX 1

				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • updated and republished our corporate complaints policy, which now includes information about the role of the Housing Ombudsman and their definition of a complaint • ran a series of webinars to ensure our housing and landlord services staff are aware of the changes to the Housing Ombudsman service and the Complaint Handling Code • began developing a comprehensive training programme to cover best practice and compliance when handling complaints as well as practical information on capturing data properly and using our complaints system effectively • developed a quality audit process to enable us to assess a cross-section of closed cases routinely and impartially – this is currently being trialled in one service area • reviewed our stage 2 response template to ensure that we explicitly signpost residents to the Housing Ombudsman if they remain dissatisfied
	<p>Improvements going forward</p>			<p>Since our first self-assessment in December 2020, we have made significant improvements, but we want to get better. Our improvement plans moving forward into 2022 are as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • finalise and roll out our training programme for all officers who handle landlord service complaints • finalise and roll out our quality audit process across all landlord service areas • review and update the way that we classify our complaints and their root causes, so that we can more quickly and easily identify potentially systemic problems • look at how we can increase the number of residents who provide satisfaction data after we have resolved their complaint • consider developing a process to personally reach out to a cross-section of residents who provided satisfaction data in order to obtain more specific feedback and suggestions for improvement • start including details of the Housing Ombudsman service on our rent statements and in our new tenant starter packs • in an effort to be more transparent with residents, we also aim to present complaint performance data: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • in Housing News, our bi-annual newsletter • to the Housing Scrutiny Panel (tenant panel) bi-annually • to the Housing Management Board quarterly • at the Estate Services, Planned Programme and Response Repairs Service User Groups