

BLACKPOOL COASTAL HOUSING COMPLAINTS APPEAL PANEL



BEING A CUSTOMER REPRESENTATIVE

BLACKPOOL COASTAL HOUSING

CUSTOMER REPRESENTATIVE

Being a panel member

Thank you for your interest in becoming a member of the Blackpool Coastal Housing's Complaints Appeals Panel.

This pack provides information on the operation of the Panel and the complaints process. Hopefully it will give you all the information you need to help you decide whether to apply to become a Panel Member, however if you need anything further please contact The Involvement and Communications Team on 01253 477911. Alternatively you can email us at customerinvolvement@bch.co.uk

Role of an Appeal Panel

The role of the appeal panel is to assess and reach a decision as to the handling of a customer complaint, where the complainant has exercised their right to appeal the decision made at Stage 1 of the complaints procedure.

The panel will meet within 15 days of the customer lodging their appeal.

Appeal Panel membership

The appeal panel comprises the Director responsible for the service area and a customer who has been trained to deal with complaints.

One of the Involvement and Communications Team responsibilities is to ensure that every Panel is properly constituted. There may be appeals for certain complaints that you will not be able to hear, for example because you have, or have had a connection with an interested party which might raise doubts about your ability to act impartially, for example you may be a neighbour or know one of the appellants.

The team will have some of this information from your application but you will need to consider whether your independence and objectivity could be challenged each time you are asked to sit on a panel.

Panel members

There are no specific qualifications or experience that you need to become a Panel Member and almost anyone can take on the role. We welcome people with all types of knowledge, background and experience. Panel Members are expected to read all of the papers that are sent to them and to play an active part in questioning all parties at the hearing, showing favour to neither party. It is also necessary to avoid expressing personal opinions during the course of a hearing or making the case for either party and being conscious at all times of acting, and being seen to act, independently of Blackpool Coastal Housing.

Panel Members need the ability to carefully consider the cases of all parties and then make a balanced and reasoned decision based on what they have read and heard.

Everyone involved in an appeal hearing needs to be familiar with Blackpool Coastal Housing's complaints policy and procedure and background legislation but don't worry you'll be offered help and guidance to enable you to carry out your role.

Panel Members are also expected to attend training and briefing sessions.

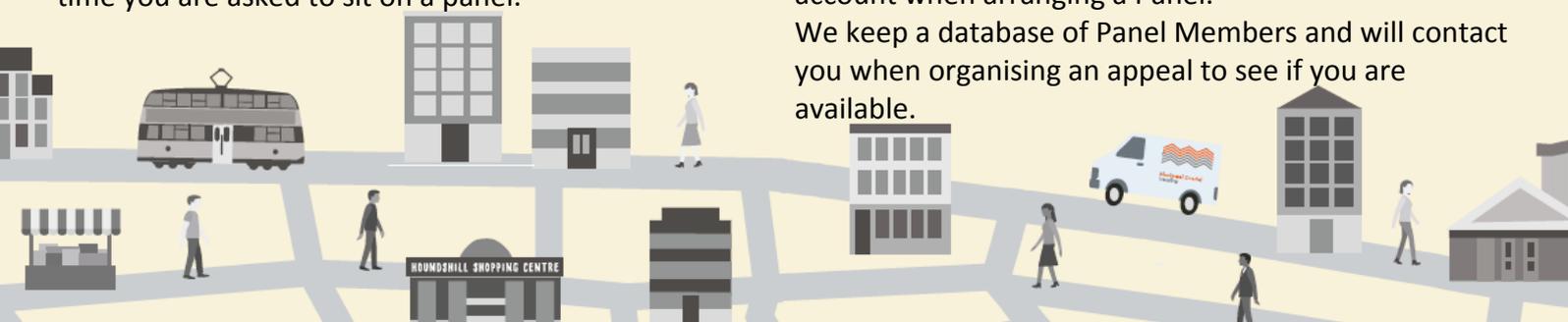
The role is voluntary although expenses are paid for attending panel hearings and briefing/training sessions. On joining you will be invited to a meeting to discuss case studies and meet with others who have experience of being a panel member.

Availability of Panel Members

The amount of time that Panel Members spend at appeal hearings will vary depending on the amount of time that they have available.

Due to work or other commitments you might find it difficult to sit on appeals on a frequent basis or for consecutive days. Please let us know this when you complete your application so that we can take this into account when arranging a Panel.

We keep a database of Panel Members and will contact you when organising an appeal to see if you are available.



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Skills profile

Most people will already have a range of skills to help them become a Panel Member and we offer access to good quality training, support and technical expertise, so don't worry if you think you don't yet have some of the skills or confidence to take on the role.

The following qualities and skills will help you to undertake the work of the Panel:

- The ability to communicate effectively with a wide range of people
- The ability to read and assess information and identify key points/issues;
- The ability to listen to information and identify key points and issues;
- The ability to ask questions to obtain information and clarify points being made;
- The ability to analyse information and use it to form opinions and conclusions;
- The ability to obtain and weigh up evidence to reach reasoned decisions based on that evidence;
- Willingness to work as part of a team;
- Willingness to take advice;
- Willingness to develop your own skills and knowledge.

Training for Panel Members

All newly appointed Panel Members will receive full training and you will not be able to take part in hearings until you have completed an induction.

The Involvement and Communications Team provides an independent source of advice on procedure for all parties.

Regular training sessions and briefings are offered on an ongoing basis.

Appeal panel meetings take place during the day and usually take one to two hours. They can, however continue all day. Refreshments, including lunch, are provided.

There are usually two parties who attend:

- The complainant
- The manager of the service at stage 1

Each of the above may attend and state their case to the Panel. It is the role of the Panel to listen to the presentations and also to question the parties so that they have enough information to reach a decision.

Once the parties have stated their case and all questions have been asked, the parties leave the room and the Panel makes a decision in private.

The Panel will decide, on the balance of probabilities, whether the complaint was dealt with satisfactorily at Stage 1. They will consider the basis of the decision to uphold the complaint decision, taking account of a number of factors; and then decide whether the complaint has satisfactorily been dealt with and the decision made at Stage 1 was justified.

This is recorded by the PA to the Chief Executive, who subsequently notifies the parties of the Panel's decision.

Full training will be given on the decision-making process.

Panel meetings

Meetings are usually held at Blackpool Coastal Housing Offices or at a community centre convenient to the complainant but may be held at another venue.

Application process

If you feel you have the personal skills and qualities required to become a Panel Member please contact the Involvement and Communications Team on

T 01253 477911 or

E customerinvolvement@bch.co.uk



BLACKPOOL COASTAL HOUSING



COMPLAINTS POLICY AND PROCEDURE

BLACKPOOL COASTAL HOUSING COMPLAINTS POLICY AND PROCEDURE

Blackpool Coastal Housing views complaints as an opportunity to learn and improve for the future, as well as a chance to put things right when we have failed customers.

Our policy is:

- To provide a fair complaints procedure which is clear and easy to use for anyone wishing to make a complaint
- To publicise the existence of our complaints procedure so that people know how to contact us to make a complaint
- To make sure everyone at Blackpool Coastal Housing knows what to do if a complaint is received
- To make sure all complaints are investigated fairly and in a timely way
- To make sure that complaints are, wherever possible, resolved and that relationships are repaired

To gather information which helps us to improve what we do

Definition of a Complaint

A complaint for the purposes of this policy is regarded as “a formal expression of dissatisfaction made about the standard or quality of service provided by Blackpool Coastal Housing, or by our staff or contractors.

Complaints must be received within 3 months of an incident or experience of dissatisfaction. In exceptional circumstances, Blackpool Coastal Housing will consider complaints up to 12 months, but cannot consider any complaints made after 12 months under any circumstances.

What is not a complaint?

BCH does not class any of the following as a complaint or service failure:

- Reports of fly tipping or vandalism
- Request for a repair
- Neighbour nuisance or anti-social behaviour reports

Complaints about the actions of an organisation that is not working for, or supported by, BCH

Although we do not treat these issues as a complaint under this procedure, we will deal with them in an appropriate manner.

Who can make a complaint?

Complaints may be made by a person who receives or has received services from Blackpool Coastal Housing or any person affected or likely to be affected by Blackpool Coastal Housing’s actions, omissions or decisions.

A representative of a person may also make a complaint. The representative must be acting on behalf of a person who had a right to complain where this person:

(i) is unable to complain themselves because of: a physical incapacity or a lack of capacity within the meaning of the Mental Capacity Act 2005; or (ii) has requested a representative to act on their behalf (proof must be provided in this instance); or has died

We may refuse to deal with complaints made without permission from the person who is the subject of a complaint or if it is felt that the representative is not acting in the customer’s best interest.

How to make a complaint

A complaint can be received in person, by phone, by email or in writing.

Publicised Contact Details for Formal Complaints:

Written complaints may be sent to Complaints, c/o Involvement and Communications Team, Blackpool Coastal Housing, Coastal House, 17-19 Abingdon Street, Blackpool, FY1 1DG, e-mail to complaints@bch.co.uk via our website www.bch.co.uk/complaints

Verbal complaints may be made by phone to 01253 477911 or in person at our offices:

Coastal House
17-19 Abingdon Street
Blackpool
FY1 1DG

Grange Park
67 Chepstow Rd,
Blackpool
FY3 7PH

We are committed to making our complaints process accessible to all and can offer help and support to ensure any concerns from customers are listened to and understood.

Confidentiality

All complaint information will be handled sensitively, telling only those who need to know and following any relevant data protection requirements.

Protecting the vulnerable

Some complaints received by Blackpool Coastal Housing may have “safeguarding” issues. This could be where someone’s life is at risk or a serious crime has been committed. When complaints of this nature are received, the relevant Service Manager will pass the complaint to the relevant Director who will immediately action the correct procedures, process the safeguarding referral and ensure the safety of the individual, in line with Blackpool Coastal Housing Safeguarding Policy & Procedures.

Whilst the details of the complaint will be considered, the safety of the service user is paramount and takes precedent over any other procedures.

There are also occasions when it is not appropriate to use this Complaints procedure. Below are some examples:

- When matters are raised that are already being considered by the Courts
- If a criminal Police Investigation is invoked
- If a complaint has arisen out of the alleged failure to comply with a request for information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

If a complaint has arisen out of the alleged failure to comply with a request for information under the Data Protection Act 1998.

Habitual and vexatious complaints

In some cases, Blackpool Coastal Housing may have to refuse to deal with complainants who become habitual or vexatious. In such circumstances BCH will follow the Habitual & Vexatious Complaint Policy.



BLACKPOOL COASTAL HOUSING RESOLVING COMPLAINTS

RESOLVING COMPLAINTS

Informal complaints

Due to the nature of our services, our residents may present a wide range of problems or queries to staff members on a daily basis.

In many cases, informal complaints are best resolved by the person responsible for the issue being complained about. If the informal complaint has been received by that person, they may be able to resolve it swiftly and should do so if possible and appropriate; these will not be recorded as formal complaints. Such issues should be dealt with immediately wherever possible.

Customers must be made aware of the formal complaints process and should be able to make a complaint if they are unhappy with Blackpool Coastal Housing's informal response.

Members Enquiries

From time to time, customers will contact a parliamentary representative to act on their behalf. Enquiries from such sources will be handled in the same way as Stage 1 of this complaints policy.

Formal Complaints

Formal complaints will be handled as part of a 2 stage process with targets for responses set for each stage. Where it is not possible to respond within set timescales, the complainant will be informed of the reason for the delay and an expected date for the response will be given.

Stage 1 – (Formal)

Complaint requiring further investigation

If a customer has made an informal complaint and they are unhappy with the way we have dealt with it, or the service is still poor despite our efforts to resolve the issue, the complaint will be passed to the Manager responsible for the area of the service they are complaining about.

The Manager will investigate the complaint and will respond in writing to the complainant within 10 working days of receipt to advise the outcome. If the Manager of the service cannot send a response within 10 working days, a letter will be sent to explain why and how long it will take.

Stage 2 – Appeal Panel (Appeal)

If the customer is unhappy with the outcome of a Stage 1 complaint, they can then appeal against the decision. Their appeal will be heard by a Panel comprising of the Director responsible for the service area and a customer who has been trained to deal with complaints within 15 days of the customer lodging their appeal.

The Manager who dealt with the complaint will explain to the panel why they made that decision. An acknowledgement letter will be sent to the customer, which may include an invitation to attend the panel hearing to provide evidence. If the customer is required to attend the appeal panel, the customer can ask that the panel is held at a venue other than BCH's Head Office (for example at a Community Centre or at an Area Housing Office).

The panel will then decide whether the complaint has been dealt with properly or not. The panel will write to the customer to explain their decision within 10 working days.

If the customer is unhappy with the outcome of the Appeal Panel and feels they have exhausted all of BCH's internal processes they can request for their complaint to be heard by:

A designated person

A designated person is independent of BCH and is somebody who works in the locality and is aware of local housing issues. The designated person for BCH is the Cabinet Member for Housing, Public Protection and Street Scene at Blackpool Council. If a customer requests that their complaint is investigated by the Designated Person, the Involvement & Communications Team will arrange for all of the paperwork relating to the complaint to be forwarded to the Designated Person. They will also act as the liaison between the Designated Person and the customer.

Housing Ombudsman Service (External)

A customer can complain to the Housing Ombudsman Service at any time but the complaint will usually be referred back to BCH if it has not been through the full internal complaints process.

If after the Appeal Panel have made their final decision, the customer is still unhappy with the outcome or that the issue is still unresolved following investigation by the Designated Person, the customer can refer their complaint to the Local Government Housing Ombudsman by:

Visiting <http://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk>

Calling the LGO Advice Team on 0300 111 3000

(Mon – Fri 9.15am – 5:15 pm)

Texting 'call back' to 0762 481 1595

Emailing: info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk

Writing to: The Housing Ombudsman, Exchange Tower, Harbour Exchange Square, London E14 9GE.



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