



Blackpool Coastal
Housing

BCH Complaint Report

23/2024

INSPIRING PEOPLE TO BUILD SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

Blackpool Coastal Housing (On behalf of the landlord Blackpool Council) Complaint Performance 2023/24

This report covers complaints received by Blackpool Coastal Housing from 1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024.

The annual self-assessment against the Housing Ombudsman Complaint handling Code has been submitted on (date) and published on the BCH website, along with this report.

Complaint Volume

	2022/23	2023/24	% Difference
Stage 1	83	211	Up 154%
Stage 2	27	45	Up 66%
Housing Ombudsman Determinations	2	4	Up 50%
TSM Complaints per 1000 properties	23.34	53.48	
TSM Complaints completed within timescale	88.89%	96.71%	

There has been a significant increase in the number of complaints received, compared to last year. This is not unique to BCH and follows the same national trend of increased complaint volume.

Alongside this there are ongoing campaigns regarding complaints within social housing, specifically 'Know your Rights' and 'Four Million Homes'. BCH support these campaigns and promote our own complaint process and ensure that customers are aware of the complaint process and can access it.

The influx of complaints has resulted in an additional resource of a full time Involvement and Communications Officer within the Involvement and Communications Team to ensure that complaint handling is managed effectively.

Complaint Areas

A complaint may have more than one recorded category.

Stage 1

Service	Upheld	Not Upheld	Partially Upheld	Escalated
Adaptations	0	0	2	0
ASB	3	11	5	10
Assets	2	2	5	0
Bambers	0	0	1	0
Capital Works	0	0	1	1
Care and Repair	0	0	1	2

Choice Based Lettings	2	2	0	5
Fylde Borough Council	0	3	1	0
Homeownership / Leasehold Services	0	1	0	1
Hotline	8	1	2	1
Involvement & Communications	0	1	0	0
Neighbourhoods	1	9	5	0
Read & Errington	0	1	1	1
Rents	3	3	2	0
Responsive Repairs	20	18	5	19
Resilience Housing - Sheltered	1	2	4	3
Services (Inc Gas & Electrical)	0	2	1	2
Technical & Electrical	1	0	0	0
Vitaline	1	1	0	0
Voids	2	1	0	0
WRPS	1	0	0	0
Total	45	58	36	45

Stage 2

Service	Upheld	Not Upheld	Partially Upheld	Escalated
ASB	4	2	6	0
Care and Repair	1	1	0	0
Choice Based Lettings	1	1	3	0
Homeownership / Leasehold Services	0	0	1	0
Hotline	0	1	0	0
Read & Errington	1	0	0	0
Responsive Repairs	11	0	3	1
Resilience Housing - Sheltered	2	1	0	0
Services (Inc Gas & Electrical)	2	0	0	0
Total	22	6	13	1

Complaint Reasons/Root Causes

A complaint may have more than one recorded root cause.

Complaint Type	Stage 1 Total	Stage 2 Total
Dissatisfied with Service	123	28
Staff Issue	60	9
Poor Communication	26	4

Damp / Mould Issues	17	5
Procedural	13	2
Repairs Fix	12	2
Missed Appointments	11	5
Neighbourhood Concern	4	0
Discrimination	3	0
Repairs Request	2	0
Tenant wants to move	2	2
Deceased - Contact with NOK	1	0
Service Update	1	0

Complaint Outcomes

A complaint may have more than one recorded outcome.

Complaint Outcome	Stage 1 Total	Stage 2 Total
Apology Provided	79	31
Change to Process / Policy / Procedure	10	17
Compensation Awarded	10	14
Compromise Reached	4	0
Expectation Not Managed	0	1
Explanation Provided	114	12
Good will Gesture Made	7	9
Individual / Team Discussion	28	11
Individual / Staff Training	16	14
Mediation Offered	1	1
Remedial Service	7	2
Remedial Works	4	2
Unreasonable Expectation	5	4

Complaints we have refused

There have been no complaints made which BCH have refused to accept.

Service improvements and lessons learnt from complaints

A theme arose around complaints relating to the length of time for a plumbing appointment just prior to Christmas. This was addressed by putting in extra resource from a contractor.

Poor communication remains to be a theme around dissatisfaction. This is both with the customer directly and between different teams who may be working with the same customer on a different matter. The implementation of a new customer dashboard will support with this, along with the Right First Time Training.

Telephony recording has been implemented onto the Repairs Hotline.

Complainant Action plans are now completed with all customers who report an ASB issue and this has become a Service Standard. This supports managing expectations and also outlines communication frequency and method.

We have changed the wording of our ASB Acknowledgement letters to help customers understand the difference between an ASB report, which is a service request and a complaint.

We have amended the wording of our first contact ASB letters we send when we receive an ASB report, so that there is a distinction between a warning letter and an advisory letter.

We have provided additional guidance to Neighbourhood Officers on the expectation of the role and what would be deemed as a breach of tenancy.

There has been a higher volume in complaints relating to the Repairs Hotline and this has been around alleged conduct and misdiagnosed repairs. Ongoing training and guidance is being provided to staff, along with the implementation of call recording.

We have identified an issue with the cleaning of communal areas in 2 storey blocks and will be conducting a consultation exercise with customers around this.

Where there are several or larger scale repairs required to a property, a project management approach has now been adopted so that such cases are co-ordinated and overseen by the Assets Team to improve communication and timescales.

Our ASB and Neighbourhoods staff will be undergoing neurodiversity training.

We have developed and implemented an Authority to Act and Advocacy policy.

[Housing Ombudsman findings of non-compliance with the Complaint Handling Code](#)

In 2023/24 there were no complaint handling failure orders made.

There have been 4 cases determined by the Housing Ombudsman within the period. (One case related to a complaint from the previous year) Links to the full reports published by the Housing Ombudsman are at the end of this report.

Case 202121118:

- a. Severe maladministration in the landlord's complaint handling.
- b. Maladministration in the landlord's response to the resident's reports that that his sofa, stored in a garage rented from the landlord, was damaged by a leak.

- c. Maladministration in the landlord's handling of the resident's request for the replacement of a communal washing line during the Covid lockdown.
- d. Service failure in the landlord's response to the resident's reports of an infestation of squirrels in their loft-space.
- e. No maladministration in the landlord's response to the resident's concern regarding asbestos in his loft space.
- f. No maladministration in the landlord's response to the resident's concerns that there was insufficient insulation in the loft;
- g. No maladministration in the landlord's handling of access to the resident's property for gas servicing.
- h. No maladministration in the assistance given to the resident to try to find a ground floor flat to transfer to.

The complaint in question was received by BCH in January 2022 and since then, the complaint policy and process has been updated in line with the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code, both in June 2022 and April 2024.

All orders made on the determination have been complied with and an action plan was devised by the BCH Board and Senior Management Team and outlined below:

Action	Lead Responsible Officer	Timescale	Outcome	Completed
Details of the adverse judgement and a re-statement of our complaints policy to all staff through our regular Staff Awareness sessions	Chief Executive	Completed on 12 th and 17 th October 2023	Heightened awareness of the need to follow the complaints policy and good practice codes	Yes
Details of the learning points from the 202121118 case shared at every Team meeting by either the Chief Executive or a Director.	Chief Executive	By the end of November 2023	Increased awareness of the complaints code and the expectations on complaint handling. To understand any barriers identified by staff to implementing the complaints policy.	Yes
Complaints data to be a feature of all Team meeting agendas	Chief Executive	By November 23	To ensure regular awareness of complaints in each service area.	Yes

Regular review of complaints as a standing item at Senior Management Team (SMT) meetings and all Team meetings supported by a performance scorecard.	Chief Executive and Directors	Action already in place for SMT and will be on all Team agendas from November 2023	Increased awareness of complaints detail and performance for all staff on a regular basis	Yes
A business wide compulsory programme of training for all staff bespoke to our complaints policy and customer service standards	Human Resources Manager in conjunction with our senior management team and Council customer service staff facilitated by external providers	By the end of 2023	Improved understanding of the requirements of our complaints handling policy and improved customer service skills	Yes
Appointment of a board champion for complaints	BCH Board	Completed on 18 th October, the champion is an experienced NED and Chair of Audit committee	Additional scrutiny and challenge for complaints handling. Deep dive Board scrutiny of complaints policy and practice in addition to performance reporting at every board meeting	Yes
An independent review of BCH's complaint handling process by the Council	Company secretary and board	Completed by the end of 2023 (copy attached as approved by the board 6/11/23)	Additional external challenge to give the board and council assurance	Yes
Complaints handling added to the internal audit plan to review the implementation of any changes to the complaint handling process and the implementation of this action plan.	Director of Resources, the Audit Committee and Director of Resources	Completed during the 2024 calendar year	Detailed review of current policy and practice and the effectiveness of this action plan	Yes
Customer scrutiny to be asked to add complaints handling to their work programme for 2023/24	Tower Scrutiny Panel	Agreed at the 20 th October meeting of the panel.	Detailed review of current policy and practice and the effectiveness of this action plan from a customer viewpoint	To follow Repairs scrutiny

An additional standalone report to be added to each board agenda detailing the numbers of complaints at each stage with detail as required to allow board oversight on all cases at stage 2 or likely to progress to the Ombudsman.	Chief Executive, Customer Engagement and Communications Manager, Board champion, company secretary	Completed for the 6 th December 2023 Board meeting	Increased board and Council oversight of the complaints process and live cases	Yes
A senior member of BCH management will join the Councils customer service group and regular reports on complaints handling will also go to the Council Shareholder Committee	Chief Executive	Dec-23		Yes

An independent review of BCH's complaint process was also undertaken by the Customer Relations Manager at Blackpool Council. The review resulted in recommendations, all of which have been implemented as outlined below:

No.	Recommendations	Priority	Management Response	Owner	Completion Date
1	BCH to consider repeating the annual self-assessment following this recent determination (Housing Ombudsman's Code 8.4)	3	Completed	Suzanne Tomlinson	08.11.2023

	To support the work that is already in place and ongoing to promote a positive complaint handling culture, it is recommended that external training be arranged for the BCH workforce on effective complaint handling and dealing with distressed and upset residents	2	Right First Time customer care and complaint training sourced and mandatory for all employees	Suzanne Tomlinson/ Kirsten Kennedy	In place and sessions until June 2024. Ongoing training for new starters.
3	<p>To consider the Report: My Expectations for Raising Concerns and Complaints</p> <p>This report researches and describes the expectations patients and service users have for good complaint handling across health and social care; however there are good principles within this report that could be transferrable to other sectors.</p>	3	Shared on Intranet as news item and added to complaint section of Intranet	Suzanne Tomlinson	30.11.23

	<i>The Report was published jointly by the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman (PHSO), the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) and Healthwatch England.</i>				
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4	To review the process for dealing with MP and Elected Member enquiries to ensure that where necessary the enquiry is also treated as a complaint and processed accordingly.	2	MP and Councillor Enquiries are dealt with centrally by the PA to the Chief Executive. Reviewed process with PA and any enquiries that raise dissatisfaction are referred to the IC Team and logged as complaints and actioned as per process.	Suzanne Tomlinson/ Sam Fowler	Nov-23
5	To utilise the Housing Ombudsman's template response letter, or equivalent, if not already in use.	3	Template shared with all managers and directors and now used as consistent response template. IC Team check this prior to response being sent.	Suzanne Tomlinson	Nov-23
6	To update the policy wording to specify how complaints involving contractors/third party complaints are dealt with	2	Completed and policy reviewed and updated with this and self-assessment don	Suzanne Tomlinson	08.11.2023
7	BCH and third party workforce to be directed to review the BCH Complaint Process and the Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code (or summary of the Code) and any revised/updated version that comes into force in April 2024. (Bi-annual reminders)	2	Staff comms updated on Intranet and Shared with all staff by email. Staff managing contractors requested to share policy with contractors. https://blackpoolcouncil365.sharepoint.com/sites/BCHI/ntranet/SitePages/BCHComplaint-Policy.aspx	Suzanne Tomlinson	08.11.2023

8	To ensure that there is guidance available to the workforce on dealing with service requests and what constitutes a service request.	3	Staff FAQ's already in effect and routinely shared with staff and new starters. HO flow charts uploaded to the BCH intranet. Toolbox talk conducted by IC Manager with Repairs hotline arranged for 05.12.23. IC Manager will attend all other team meetings to provide refresher on complaints and service requests.	Suzanne Tomlinson	08.11.2023
	<i>The Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code Appendix A provides some information (flow charts and case studies) on whether a matter should be treated as a service request or a complaint.</i>		Flow charts uploaded to the complaint section of Intranet and shared with staff. Reiterated at IC Manager attendance at ongoing team meetings.	Suzanne Tomlinson	Nov-23
9	BCH to ensure that its policy is clear and can support the following aspects of the Code whilst dealing with all complaints at Stage 1 of the complaint procedure: "procedures in place for to facilitate quick resolution of complaints" "the Ombudsman encourages the early and local resolution of issues between landlords and residents and recognises that there may be times appropriate action can be agreed immediately."	3	This is contained within the Policy and Staff Complaint FAQ's.	Suzanne Tomlinson	08.11.2023

10	BCH and third party workforce to be reminded that “an expression of dissatisfaction, however made” should be treated as a formal stage 1 complaint, as per the Ombudsman’s Complaint Handling Code.	2	Staff FAQ's already in effect and routinely shared with staff and new starters. HO flow charts uploaded to the BCH intranet. Toolbox talk conducted by IC Manager with Repairs hotline completed 05.12.23. Contract Managers asked to add complaints on agenda for client/contractor meetings. To be covered in ongoing internal comms, team meetings and training.	Suzanne Tomlinson/ Contract Managers	11.12.23
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Case 202213281:

There was service failure in the response to the resident’s repairs reports and concerns about the letting condition of her former property.

The property in question is now used for dispersed emergency accommodation as a result of the complaint and the recommendation to review record keeping for Void properties has been implemented.

Case 202122535:

No maladministration in the decision to charge rent while seeking possession of the resident’s property

Case 202207680

No maladministration with regards to the response to the residents request for a driveway to be created at the front of the property.

[Housing Ombudsman Annual Report on Performance](#)

The Housing Ombudsman Annual report on landlord performance can be found below:
[Landlord Report - Blackpool Council \(bch.co.uk\)](#)

Complaint case published by the Housing Ombudsman:

[Blackpool Council \(202121118\) - Housing Ombudsman \(housing-ombudsman.org.uk\)](#)

[Blackpool Council \(202122535\) - Housing Ombudsman \(housing-ombudsman.org.uk\)](#) Case

202213281 not published

202207680 not published