



Bristol City Council Housing and Landlord Services

Housing Complaints Policy

Version 1

Approved by: EDM/Executive Director Housing

Author: Policy and Practice Team

Date approved: 5th August 2026

Date for Review: 5th August 2029

Service Area: Housing and Landlord Services

Classification: Operational

History of most recent policy changes			
Date	Page	Change	Origin of change (e.g. legislation)

Contents

Definitions	2
1. Purpose.....	3
2. Scope.....	3
3. Aims and objectives.....	3
4. Roles and Responsibilities and Authority	4
5. The Policy	4
5.1 Legal Context and Consumer Standards	4
5.2 Tenants Rights	5
5.3 Definition of a Complaint.....	5
5.3.1 Exclusions	6
5.4 How to Complain	7
5.5. Complaint Handling Principles.....	7
5.6 The Complaints Process.....	8
5.7 Stage 1 Complaints.....	9
5.8 Stage 2 Complaints (Final Response).....	10
5.9 Putting Things Right.....	10
5.10 Learning and Continuous Improvement	11
5.11 Self-Assessment, Reporting and Compliance	11
5.12 Governance and Oversight.....	12
5.13 Equality and Diversity	12
6. Quality Assurance.....	12
6.1 Publishing.....	12
6.2 Review.....	12
6.3 Monitoring and Reporting Requirements.....	12
7. Appendices	13
Appendix A – Roles and Responsibilities	13
Appendix B – Legal and Policy Context	14
Appendix C – Associated Documents	14
Appendix D – External Bodies and Contact Details	14

Definitions

Advocate	A person who supports a resident in presenting their complaint, which may include a family member, friend, or professional representative.
Complaint	When someone tells us they are unhappy with something we've done (or not done) and want it put right.
Complaint Handling Code	A set of rules from the Housing Ombudsman that explains how organisations should deal with complaints fairly and consistently.
Complaint Outcome	The Council's decision on a complaint following investigation, including whether it is upheld, partially upheld, or not upheld, and any resulting actions or remedies.
Complaint Stage	A defined step within the complaints process (for example, Stage 1 or Stage 2), each with its own requirements and timescales.
Early Resolution	Resolving a problem as quickly as possible, often at first point of contact, without the need for a formal complaint investigation.
Escalation	The process by which a complaint is progressed from Stage 1 to Stage 2 where the resident remains dissatisfied.
Final Response	The Council's response at the end of the complaints process (Stage 2), which sets out its final decision and informs the resident of their right to refer the complaint to the Housing Ombudsman.
Housing Ombudsman	An independent body that looks at complaints about social housing landlords if the issue hasn't been resolved.
Reasonable Adjustments	Changes made to the complaints process to remove barriers and ensure accessibility for residents, in line with the Equality Act 2010.
Resident	A person who lives in a property owned or managed by the landlord.
Representative	Someone acting on behalf of a resident (for example, a family member, friend, support worker, or advocate).
Remedy	What the landlord does to put things right - this could be an apology, a repair, compensation, or a change to processes.
Resolution	The outcome of a complaint - how the issue has been settled or dealt with.
Service Failure	A failure by the Council to deliver a service to the expected standard, including delays, errors, poor communication, or failure to act.
Service Request	A request for a service to be carried out (like asking for a repair), rather than a complaint about something going wrong.
Stage 1 Complaint	The first formal stage of the complaints process where the issue is investigated and responded to.
Stage 2 Complaint	The second stage, where the complaint is reviewed if the resident is not satisfied with the Stage 1 response.

1. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to set out how the Council will manage complaints relating to its housing and landlord services, in line with the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code. It ensures that complaints are handled in a fair, transparent, and timely manner, and that residents are listened to, understood, and treated with respect throughout the process.

Bristol City Council (BCC) is committed to delivering high-quality housing services and to ensuring that residents are treated fairly, consistently and with respect. We recognise that, from time to time, things may go wrong, and residents may wish to raise concerns about the service they have received.

2. Scope

This policy applies to complaints relating to the Council's housing and landlord services, including services delivered directly by Bristol City Council or on its behalf by contractors or partners in its role as a social housing landlord.

It applies to complaints made by:

- Council tenants
- Leaseholders and shared owners
- Applicants for, or users of, housing and landlord services
- Representatives acting on behalf of residents, where appropriate

This policy covers complaints about the Council's housing and landlord functions, including the quality and delivery of services, actions or lack of action by the Council or those acting on its behalf.

This policy forms part of the Council's overall complaints framework and should be read alongside the Corporate Complaints Policy. Complaints relating to housing and landlord services will be handled in accordance with this policy and the requirements of the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code.

Where a concern raised by a resident is not considered to be a complaint, or cannot be progressed under this policy, the Council will explain the reasons for this decision and, where appropriate, direct the resident to an alternative process. This may include, for example, directing a resident to raise a new service request, pursue a legal or insurance claim, or use an alternative appeal or statutory process.

3. Aims and objectives

The aims and objectives of this policy are to:

- Ensure complaints are handled fairly, consistently, and within the timescales set out in the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code
- Provide a clear and accessible process for residents to raise complaints and be heard
- Resolve complaints at the earliest opportunity

- Take appropriate and proportionate action to put things right where service failures are identified
- Use learning from complaints to improve services and prevent recurrence

4. Roles and Responsibilities and Authority

The Director of Housing and Landlord Services is accountable for ensuring that this policy is implemented effectively and that complaints are handled in line with the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code.

Responsibility for the delivery of this policy sits across Housing and Landlord Services. All staff are responsible for recognising complaints, ensuring they are recorded appropriately, and supporting their timely resolution.

The Council has a designated complaints function, led by the Customer Relations Team, which is responsible for:

- Overseeing the management of Stage 2 complaints across housing services
- Ensuring compliance with the Complaint Handling Code
- Monitoring performance and identifying learning from complaints
- Liaising with the Housing Ombudsman where required

The Resident Experience Team:

- Investigating complaints at Stage 1
- Providing clear, accurate, and timely responses
- Identifying service failures and taking appropriate action to put things right
- Working with services to implement learning

Stage 2 complaints will be reviewed independently by the Customer Relations Team to ensure a fair and impartial final response.

A more detailed breakdown of all roles and responsibilities can be found in [Appendix A](#).

5. The Policy

5.1 Legal Context and Consumer Standards

This policy is underpinned by the statutory and regulatory framework governing the Council's responsibilities as a social housing landlord.

Bristol City Council is a member of the Housing Ombudsman Scheme and is required to comply with the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code. This Code sets out the standards that landlords must meet when handling complaints, including requirements around accessibility, fairness, timeliness, and learning from complaints.

This policy also supports compliance with the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023, which places a duty on the Housing Ombudsman to issue and monitor compliance with a statutory Complaint Handling Code. The Council will ensure its complaints handling aligns with these requirements and will complete regular self-assessments in line with the Code.

In addition, the Council is required to meet the Consumer Standards set by the Regulator of Social Housing. These standards require landlords to:

- Provide fair and accessible services to residents
- Communicate clearly and transparently
- Respond effectively to complaints and feedback
- Use learning to improve service delivery

This policy forms part of the Council's wider approach to managing feedback and service improvement, ensuring that complaints are handled consistently and that appropriate action is taken where things have gone wrong.

5.2 Tenants Rights

Residents have the right to live in safe, well-maintained homes and to receive housing services that are delivered to an appropriate standard. Where the Council fails to meet these obligations, residents have the right to raise concerns and make a complaint.

Residents have the right to:

- Raise a complaint where they are dissatisfied with the standard of service, actions, or lack of action by the Council or those acting on its behalf
- Have their complaint acknowledged, investigated, and responded to in a fair, consistent, and timely manner
- Be treated with respect and have a reasonable opportunity to set out their concerns and the outcomes they are seeking
- Receive clear explanations of decisions made and, where appropriate, be offered a remedy where service failures are identified
- Escalate their complaint through the Council's complaints procedure where they remain dissatisfied
- Escalate their complaint to the relevant Ombudsman if they remain dissatisfied with the Council's final response. The Housing Ombudsman deals with complaints relating to the Council's role as a social housing landlord. The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman deals with complaints relating to other Council services.

The Council will ensure that residents are supported to access the complaints process, including making reasonable adjustments where required, and allowing residents to be represented or supported by a third party where appropriate.

5.3 Definition of a Complaint

A complaint is defined as:

'An expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the Council, its staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting a resident or group of residents.'

A resident does not have to use the word "complaint" for their concern to be treated as a complaint. Where a resident expresses dissatisfaction, they will be offered the choice to have their concern treated as a formal complaint.

Complaints may be made directly by residents or by a third party or representative acting on their behalf. Where a complaint is made by a third party, the Council will seek confirmation that they have the resident's consent to act unless there are exceptional circumstances. Where a resident may lack capacity, the Council will take all reasonable steps to ensure the complaint is investigated fully and fairly, acting in the resident's best interests.

The Council recognises the difference between a service request and a complaint. A service request is a request for service or action where an issue has been raised for the first time. Where a resident expresses dissatisfaction with the response to a service request, or the way it has been handled, this will be treated as a complaint.

A complaint will not be delayed or refused where a resident has expressed dissatisfaction, including where the related service request is ongoing. A complaint will not delay, prevent, or impact any ongoing or required service action, and the Council will continue to take appropriate steps to resolve the underlying issue while the complaint is being investigated.

5.3.1 Exclusions

The Council will accept a complaint unless there is a valid reason not to do so. Each case will be considered on its individual merits, and the Council will not take a blanket approach to excluding complaints.

A complaint may not be considered under this policy where:

- The issue giving rise to the complaint occurred more than 12 months ago, or more than 12 months have passed since the resident became aware of the issue, unless there is a good reason to accept it outside of this timeframe.
- Complaints relating to matters where legal proceedings have been issued (for example, where a Claim Form and Particulars of Claim have been filed with the court) may be limited in scope. The Council will still consider and respond to complaints about the service provided, including issues not being considered by the court, but may not be able to comment on matters that are subject to active legal proceedings.
- The issue has already been considered under the Council's complaints process or by the Housing Ombudsman or another relevant body
- Where the matter is subject to a statutory or internal right of appeal, and is more appropriately considered through that process
- The complaint raises safeguarding concerns, which will be managed in accordance with the Council's safeguarding procedures

The following are not considered complaints under this policy:

- Initial requests for a service, where the issue has not previously been reported (service requests)
- Matters that are more appropriately dealt with through alternative processes, such as insurance claims, legal claims, or statutory appeal procedures
- Complaints relating solely to policy decisions or matters outside the Council's role as a landlord

Where the Council decides not to accept or progress a complaint, it will clearly explain the reasons for its decision. The Council will also provide details of any alternative process that may be available and inform the resident of their right to refer the decision to the Housing Ombudsman or relevant statutory body.

Discretion may be exercised to accept complaints outside of these criteria where there are good reasons to do so, including where the resident may be vulnerable or where there is a continuing impact.

Complaints about issues where an insurance claim or legal action may also be taken will still be considered under this policy. The fact that a claim is being made, or may be made, does not stop the Council from looking into the complaint and responding to concerns about the service provided.

However, if formal legal proceedings have already started, the Council may not be able to consider some parts of the complaint. Legal proceedings are considered to have started when a claim has been formally submitted to a court. In these situations, the Council will clearly explain which parts of the complaint it can still look at and which parts it cannot, and why.

5.4 How to Complain

Residents can make a complaint in any way that is convenient to them. Complaints can be made through a range of channels, including:

- Online via the Council's website
- By email
- By telephone
- In writing
- In person to any member of staff

A complaint can be made to any Council employee. Staff who receive a complaint are responsible for ensuring that it is passed to the appropriate team to be recorded and responded to.

The Council will ensure the process is accessible by providing information in alternative formats, making reasonable adjustments where required, and enabling residents to be supported or represented where appropriate. The Council will also provide this complaints policy in accessible formats on request, including alternative languages, large print, or other formats to meet the needs of residents.

Anonymous complaints will be accepted and recorded. These will be considered where sufficient information is provided to enable an investigation, although it may not be possible to provide a response.

Information about how to make a complaint, including contact details and the complaints process, will be made available on the Council's website and through other appropriate channels.

5.5. Complaint Handling Principles

The Council operates a positive complaint handling culture, and the following principles will be applied when handling complaints:

- Complaints will be considered on their individual merits, with an open and impartial approach.
- Residents will be given a fair opportunity to set out their concerns and the outcomes they are seeking.
- The Council will seek to resolve complaints at the earliest opportunity, where appropriate.
- Complaints will be handled in a consistent manner, without unnecessary stages or barriers to escalation.
- The Council will work collaboratively across services and relevant third-party organisations to resolve complaints and put things right.

These principles underpin all aspects of the Council's complaints handling and ensure that residents receive a fair, transparent, and consistent service.

In some cases, residents may pursue complaints in a way that is considered unreasonable, persistent, or vexatious, for example through excessive contact or repeatedly raising the same issues without new evidence. Where this occurs, the Council may take proportionate action to manage contact, in line with its Unacceptable Behaviour Policy.

Any such action will be reasonable and proportionate, will not prevent the complaint from being investigated, and will be clearly explained to the resident, including how they can continue to engage with the complaints process.

5.6 The Complaints Process

The Council operates a single, two-stage complaints process for housing and landlord services, in line with the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code and the expectations of the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO). There are no additional or informal stages within this process.

The aim of the complaints process is to resolve issues as quickly as possible while ensuring that complaints are investigated fairly and thoroughly.

When a complaint is received, the Council will:

- Acknowledge the complaint and confirm its understanding of the issues raised and the outcomes the resident is seeking
- Record the complaint and allocate it to the appropriate service for investigation
- Investigate the complaint based on the available evidence, taking into account the resident's views
- Provide a clear written response that addresses all points raised and sets out the reasons for any decisions

Where possible, complaints will be resolved at the earliest opportunity. However, where a resident remains dissatisfied, they have the right to escalate their complaint through the two-stage process.

Complaints will be handled consistently and without unnecessary delay. The Council will ensure that appropriate action can be taken to put things right at any stage of the process, without requiring the complaint to be escalated.

Where a complaint relates to services delivered by a contractor or third party on behalf of the Council, the Council remains responsible for the handling of the complaint and for providing the response to the resident. The Council may contact the contractor or third party for information as part of its investigation but will ensure that the complaint is handled in line with this policy.

Full details of the two-stage complaints process, including timescales and escalation requirements, are set out in the sections below.

5.7 Stage 1 Complaints

Stage 1 is the first stage of the Council's formal complaints process. The aim is to investigate the complaint and provide a fair and timely response.

Complaints will be acknowledged and logged at Stage 1 within 5 working days of being received. The acknowledgement will confirm the Council's understanding of the complaint, the outcomes the resident is seeking, and set out which aspects of the complaint the Council is responsible for and, where relevant, which aspects it is not responsible for. Where necessary, the resident will be contacted to clarify the details of the complaint.

The Council will carry out an appropriate investigation, considering all relevant information and evidence.

A full written response will be provided within 10 working days of the complaint being acknowledged.

Where additional time is required due to the complexity of the complaint, the Council may extend this timescale by up to a further 10 working days. The resident will be informed of the reason for the delay in writing, provided with an updated timescale, and given the contact details of the relevant statutory bodies including the Housing Ombudsman, Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman or Building Safety Regulator. Where the response falls outside of the timescales set out in the Code, the Council will agree with the resident suitable intervals for keeping them informed about the progress of their complaint.

The Stage 1 response will be issued once the Council has reached its findings, even if any follow-on actions remain outstanding. These actions will be outlined to the resident and will be progressed and monitored to completion. The Council will provide updates to the resident on the progress of any outstanding actions until they are completed.

The Stage 1 response will include:

- The complaint stage
- A summary of the complaint
- The decision and reasons for that decision
- Details of any remedy offered
- Information about any outstanding actions
- Details of how to escalate the complaint to Stage 2

If additional related issues are raised before the Stage 1 response is issued, these will be incorporated into the Stage 1 investigation and response where appropriate. Where new issues are raised after the Stage 1 response has been issued, or where the issues are unrelated or would unreasonably delay the response, these will be logged and handled as a new complaint.

5.8 Stage 2 Complaints (Final Response)

Stage 2 is the final stage of the Council's complaints process. It provides a further opportunity to review the complaint where the resident remains dissatisfied with the Stage 1 response.

If a resident requests escalation, the complaint will be acknowledged and logged at Stage 2 within 5 working days. Residents are not required to explain their reasons for requesting a Stage 2 review, although the Council may seek to understand why they remain dissatisfied.

Stage 2 reviews will be carried out by the Customer Relations Team, which sits outside of Housing, ensuring an independent and impartial review.

The Council will carry out a thorough review of the complaint, considering all relevant information and evidence.

A final written response will be provided within 20 working days of the complaint being acknowledged.

Where additional time is required due to the complexity of the complaint, the Council may extend this timescale by up to a further 20 working days. The resident will be informed of the reason for the delay in writing, provided with an updated timescale, and given the contact details of the Housing Ombudsman. Where the response falls outside of the timescales set out in the Code, the Council will agree with the resident suitable intervals for keeping them informed about the progress of their complaint.

The Stage 2 response will be issued once the Council has reached its final decision, even if any follow-on actions remain outstanding. These will continue to be progressed and monitored to completion. The Council will provide updates to the resident on the progress of any outstanding actions until they are completed.

The Stage 2 response will include:

- The complaint stage
- A summary of the complaint
- The decision and reasons for that decision
- Details of any remedy offered
- Information about any outstanding actions
- Details of the resident's right to refer the complaint to the Housing Ombudsman

5.9 Putting Things Right

Where a complaint is partly upheld, upheld, or it is identified that something has gone wrong, appropriate action will be taken to put things right.

The Council will acknowledge where service failures have occurred and will set out the actions it has taken, or intends to take, to resolve the issue. Remedies will take account of the resident's requested action, impact on the resident, including any distress, inconvenience, or financial loss experienced.

Remedies may include:

- An apology
- A clear explanation of what has happened
- Taking action to resolve the issue
- Reconsidering or changing a decision
- Providing a financial remedy or other form of redress
- Making changes to policies, procedures, or service delivery

Any remedy offered will be clearly explained and will include details of what will happen and when. The Council will ensure that any agreed actions are monitored and completed within a reasonable timeframe.

Where appropriate, financial remedies will be considered in line with the Council's Compensation and Discretionary Payments Policy.

The Council will ensure that appropriate remedies can be provided at any stage of the complaints process, without requiring the complaint to be escalated.

5.10 Learning and Continuous Improvement

The Council is committed to learning from complaints and using this information to improve services. Complaints will be used as a source of insight to identify recurring issues, service failures, and areas for improvement. The Council will consider not only the individual circumstances of each complaint, but also any wider themes or trends.

The Council will use complaint information to identify potential health and safety concerns, including damp and mould and other hazards within residents' homes. Where complaints highlight actual or potential hazards, these will be referred to the appropriate service for assessment and action.

Where appropriate, action will be taken to improve services and prevent similar issues from occurring, review and update policies, procedures, and working practices, and share learning across teams and services to promote consistency and improvement.

Learning from complaints will be regularly reviewed and reported as part of the Council's performance and governance arrangements. The Council will ensure that complaints contribute to a positive complaint handling culture, where feedback is valued and used to improve service delivery.

5.11 Self-Assessment, Reporting and Compliance

The Council will ensure that its complaints handling arrangements comply with the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code. An annual self-assessment will be carried out against the requirements of the Code, which will be reviewed and approved through the Council's governance arrangements to ensure that complaints policy and practices remain compliant.

An Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report will be produced. This will include:

- An assessment of compliance with the Complaint Handling Code
- Performance information relating to complaint handling
- A summary of learning from complaints and resulting service improvements
- Details of any findings or determinations made by the Housing Ombudsman

Where non-compliance is identified by the Housing Ombudsman, appropriate action will be taken to address this, including the implementation of any recommendations or orders issued. Complaints handling arrangements will also be reviewed following any significant changes to legislation, regulation, or service delivery.

The council will publish the self-assessment, annual complaints report on its website.

5.12 Governance and Oversight

The Council has established governance arrangements to ensure effective oversight of complaints handling and to support a positive complaints culture.

A Member Responsible for Complaints (MRC) has been appointed to provide oversight of complaints handling and to ensure that the governing body receives regular and meaningful information about complaints performance.

5.13 Equality and Diversity

The Council will ensure that the complaints process is fair, accessible, and responsive to the needs of all residents. This includes:

- Making reasonable adjustments where required in line with the Equality Act 2010
- Providing information in alternative formats
- Supporting residents who may require assistance to access or engage with the complaints process

Relevant equality considerations will be considered when handling complaints, including the individual circumstances and needs of residents, to ensure that no one is disadvantaged in accessing or navigating the complaints process.

An Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) has been completed for this policy and has been reviewed and agreed by the Council's Equality and Inclusion Team.

6. Quality Assurance

6.1 Publishing

The Council will publish this policy on its website and promote awareness of the complaints process through a range of channels, including tenant communications, service webpages, and other appropriate methods. Information about how to make a complaint will be made easily accessible to residents.

6.2 Review

This policy will be reviewed in 3 years or sooner if there is a change to legal or regulatory requirements, in accordance with our procedures.

6.3 Monitoring and Reporting Requirements

Service delivery and performance is measured against the Housing and Landlord Services Performance Framework. BCC uses performance management to enhance service standards and to improve resident experience.

Services need to meet the KPI's set and other reporting responsibilities to the regulator as required.

7. Appendices

Appendix A – Roles and Responsibilities

Role	Responsibilities
All BCC staff	• Recognise expressions of dissatisfaction as potential complaints or service requests • Treat residents fairly, respectfully, and in line with Council standards • Ensure complaints are passed promptly to the appropriate team • Support early resolution where appropriate • Deliver complaint resolutions for residents
Service Managers and Team Managers	• Investigate Stage 1 complaints within their service area • Ensure responses are clear, accurate, and issued within timescales • Identify and address service failures • Take appropriate action to resolve issues and prevent recurrence
Customer Relations Team	• Oversee complaint handling across housing services • Ensure compliance with the Complaint Handling Code • Manage and coordinate Stage 2 investigations • Monitor performance, trends, and learning from complaints • Liaise with the Housing Ombudsman where required
Head of Service	• Provide oversight of complaint handling within their service area

	• Ensure learning from complaints is implemented • Monitor performance and drive service improvements • Support resolution of complex or high-risk complaints
Director of Housing and Landlord Services	• Ensure effective implementation of this policy • Provide accountability for complaint handling performance • Provide overall accountability for compliance with regulatory requirements and the Complaint Handling Code
Member Responsible for Complaints (MRC)	• Provide strategic oversight of complaints handling across the Council • Ensure governance arrangements are effective • Receive assurance on complaint performance, learning, and compliance • Promote a positive complaints culture

Appendix B – Legal and Policy Context

- Housing Act 1985
- Housing Act 1996
- Local Government Act 1974
- Housing Ombudsman Scheme
- Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code (2024)
- Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023
- Regulator of Social Housing Consumer Standards
- Equality Act 2010
- Human Rights Act 1998
- Data Protection Act 2018
- UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR)
- Freedom of Information Act 2000
- Landlord and Tenant Act 1985
- Defective Premises Act 1972
- Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation) Act 2018
- Building Safety Act 2022

Appendix C – Associated Documents

- [Bristol City Council Complaints Policy](#)
- [Bristol City Council Service Standards](#)
- [Repairs and Maintenance Policy](#)
- Compensation and Discretionary Payments Policy

- Reasonable Adjustments Policy
- [Damp and Mould Policy](#)
- Unacceptable Behaviour Policy

Appendix D – External Bodies and Contact Details

Housing Ombudsman

- Website: www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk
- Telephone: 0300 111 3000
- Email: info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk
- Address: Housing Ombudsman Service, PO Box 1484, Unit D, Preston, PR2 0ET

Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman

- Website: www.lgo.org.uk
- Telephone: 0300 061 0614
- Address: PO Box 4771, Coventry, CV4 0EH

Building Safety Regulator

- Website: www.hse.gov.uk/building-safety