



Bristol City Council

The Private Housing and Adaptations Service - how we deal with complaints concerning privately owned or rented properties

About these service standards

We offer advice and guidance on housing conditions to private tenants and owners in Bristol and improve standards using legal powers where that is in line with our Enforcement Policy and procedures.

This leaflet tells you what you can expect from us when you have made a service request.

Our aims

We want our customers to experience a good standard of service every time they contact us. Our staff will make sure that we deal with your enquiry and complaints appropriately and proceed with enforcement action where required.

We will monitor performance against these service standards.

Our customer service commitment

We are committed to providing the following service to customers who contact the Private Housing Service:

- We can be contacted via e-mail, phone or by post. As we are not a public access building we cannot see you in person at our office. We can arrange an appointment at a customer service point should you wish, or visit you at home.
- We will answer telephone calls within 15 seconds. The person who answers the phone will give their name, service area and team.
- We will deal with telephone calls immediately or, where this is not possible, call you back within three working days (if we transfer your call, we will tell the other member of staff your name and why you are calling).
- We will acknowledge your initial letter or e-mail to us within three working days, letting you know what we plan to do. We will respond to any further correspondence from you in 12 working days.
- We will provide you with clear, relevant advice and information in response to any query (although the nature of our work sometimes requires us to use technical or legal terms).
- We will visit you in your own home if necessary.
- We will leave a calling card if you are not in when we visit you at home.

- Staff will carry identity documentation at all times. Please always ask to see identification before letting anyone into your home.
- We will keep you informed of any significant developments and keep you updated on the progress of your enquiry.
- Once your request/complaint has been resolved we will contact you to let you know what the outcome is, that we are closing the case, and why.
- We will send you a questionnaire asking you for feedback on our service.

When we will not investigate a complaint concerning privately owned and rented properties:

We will not investigate complaints made by a 'third party' unless there appears to be a serious public health and safety issue or the people affected are children under 18, or vulnerable adults.

In some cases we may suggest that a private tenant contacts their landlord first, to allow the landlord an opportunity to resolve the problem before we become involved.

We may not have the staff to respond to all enquiries; in these cases we will let you know how else you might be able to resolve the problem.

When making a complaint regarding your housing conditions:

If your housing conditions involve an imminent risk to health such as overflowing sewage, heating failure in cold weather where there is an elderly person or someone who is disabled or ill and where a warrant has been obtained by a gas, electricity or water company which will be used to disconnect a supply in the next 3 days, your case will be treated as an emergency and initial contact would be made with you within 24 hours. Each case will be assessed on risk.

You will be contacted about all other requests within 3 working days.

A case officer will contact you to discuss and investigate your complaint and make an appointment to inspect your property if necessary.

As the complaints we deal with vary enormously, it is impossible to give a timescale for how long it will take to deal with a request. However, generally you can expect:

- The officer visiting will inspect your property; this may include the garden, any common parts and outbuildings.
- After the inspection the case officer will complete an assessment and will let you know whether we can or cannot help you.

Where problems are found that can be dealt with by law and our enforcement policy there is usually a duty on the Council to act so we must contact your landlord. This may happen even if the problem identified is not what you originally complained about. We will explain what the problems we can deal with are and specify a time limit for getting the matter completed (time limits will differ depending on the case).

Where there are problems at a property but we cannot require work to be carried out, but you still want us to continue, we may, if we believe it appropriate, make recommendations to your landlord / your letting agent / the owner. However, we would be unable to ensure that these are acted upon.

If you are a private tenant who has applied for rehousing and your accommodation is overcrowded we will contact the Homeless Prevention or Rehousing teams within the council as this may assist with your application. However, for problems other than overcrowding our action will be to improve your living conditions and this may not assist your application.

The complaint will be dealt with on an informal basis wherever possible unless there is a history of non-compliance by the landlord, letting agent or owner or if the condition of the property presents a serious risk of harm or an imminent risk of serious harm to the health and safety of the occupiers.

If there is an imminent risk of serious harm to the health and safety of the occupiers the case officer may need to take formal emergency action. For example, if there were exposed live electrical wires a child could easily reach or the main staircase at the property was about to collapse.

Copies of any notices served will be sent to you and you will have opportunity to make comments to the case officer about the work required.

The work may be inspected whilst in progress and on completion if necessary. The case will only be marked off when it is completed to our satisfaction.

If the work requested has not been completed within the original time frame but there is an acceptable reason for this and reasonable progress has been made, the case officer may extend the timescale.

If there has been little or no progress to carry out or complete the works on an informal basis then legal notice/s requiring works or other remedial action may be served (if we have not already done so). In this case the officer will revisit the property after giving both the occupiers and the owner a minimum of 24 hours' notice of the visit to ensure our legal obligations are met.

If at the end of the given timescale on a formal notice requiring work or other remedial action an unreasonably small amount of work or no work at all has been undertaken the case officer and manager will consider whether it is appropriate for us to arrange for the work to be carried out.

We will consider prosecuting for the offence of non-compliance with a statutory notice where we have sufficient evidence, there is a reasonable chance of conviction and it is in the public interest to do so.

We Will:

Treat you with respect and deliver our service in a way that meets your needs.

Train all our staff in equality and diversity issues.

Provide all of our customers with equal access to our services regardless of age, disability, gender, race, religion or sexual orientation.

Communicate clearly, although the nature of our work will sometimes require us to use legal or technical terms.

Provide written documents that are easy to read and offer to translate them where necessary into different languages or large print/braille (except legal notices).

Collect and monitor customer satisfaction and profiles of our service users

Make sure our policies do not treat any group unfairly.

Your views count, contact us.

You will be asked to complete a customer service survey once we have dealt with your request.

We value feedback to help develop our services. If you have any comments please contact us:-

Write to: Private Housing Service, Bristol City Council, PO Box 3399 (100TS), Bristol, BS1 9NE
Telephone: 0117 3525010
E-mail: private.housing@bristol.gov.uk