

Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code: Self-assessment (Brighton & Hove City Council) - May 2026

Section 1: Definition of a complaint

Code provision	Code requirement	Comply: Yes or No	Evidence, commentary or explanation
1.2	A complaint must be defined as: 'an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the landlord, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting a resident or group of residents.'	Yes	Brighton & Hove City Council complaints procedure has been updated to use this wording and it is included in our staff complaint handling training
1.3	A resident does not have to use the word 'complaint' for it to be treated as such. Whenever a resident expresses dissatisfaction landlords must give them the choice to make complaint. A complaint that is submitted via a third party or representative must be	Yes	Section amended based on Housing Ombudsman Compliance feedback. Complaints policy wording now includes offering customers the opportunity to make a complaint and handling representative complaints in line with policy.

	handled in line with the landlord's complaints policy.		
1.4	Landlords must recognise the difference between a service request and a complaint.	Yes	Policy and staff training includes the distinction between a service request and a complaint.
1.5	A complaint must be raised when the resident expresses dissatisfaction with the response to their service request.	Yes	Section amended based on Housing Ombudsman Compliance feedback.
1.6	An expression of dissatisfaction with services made through a survey is not defined as a complaint.	Yes	Residents completing surveys are signposted to complaints process.

Section 2: Exclusions and Acceptance of Complaints

Code provision	Code requirement	Comply: Yes or No	Evidence, commentary or explanation	Additional commentary
2.1	Landlords must accept a complaint unless there is a valid reason not to do so. If landlords decide not to accept a complaint they must be able to evidence their reasoning. Each complaint must be considered on its own merits.	Yes	This is set out in the Brighton & Hove City Council complaint procedure, Appendix B.	
2.2	A complaints policy must set out the circumstances in which a matter will not be considered as a complaint or escalated, and these circumstances must be fair and reasonable to residents. Acceptable exclusions include: the issue giving rise to the	Yes	Exclusions include A matter which has not affected the original complainant personally (this does not apply to someone representing a complainant) or caused them an injustice.	

	complaint occurred over twelve months ago. legal proceedings have started. matters that have previously been considered under the complaints policy.		
2.3	Landlords must accept complaints referred to them within 12 months of the issue occurring or the resident becoming aware of the issue, unless they are excluded on other grounds. Landlords must consider whether to apply discretion to accept complaints made outside this time limit where there are good reasons to do so.	Yes	Section amended based on Housing Ombudsman Compliance feedback Policy wording amended to clarify that 'Complaints should be made within 12 months of the customer becoming aware of the issue, unless there is good reason for them not to have done so, which will be considered on a case-by-case basis.'
2.4	If a landlord decides not to accept a complaint, an explanation must be provided to the resident setting out the reasons why the matter	Yes	This is included in Brighton & Hove City Council complaints procedure All complaints are carefully considered and will only be

	is not suitable for the complaints process and the right to take that decision to the Ombudsman. If the Ombudsman does not agree that the exclusion has been fairly applied, the Ombudsman may tell the landlord to take on the complaint.		rejected if they fall under any of the categories at app B of the council's complaints procedure or if they are more than 12 months old.
2.5	Landlords must not take a blanket approach to excluding complaints; they must consider the individual circumstances of each complaint.	Yes	All complaints will be considered on a case-by-case basis. Instructions to provide full reasons for rejected complaints and signposting to the Ombudsman are included in the Brighton & Hove City Council complaints procedure.

Section 3: Accessibility and awareness

Code provision	Code requirement	Comply: Yes or No	Evidence, commentary or explanation
3.1	Landlords must make it easy for residents to complain by providing different channels through which they can make a complaint. Landlords must consider their duties under the Equality Act 2010 and anticipate the needs and reasonable adjustments of residents who may need to access the complaints process.	Yes	How to make a complaint. Complaints can be made over the phone, by email, by online form, by post, via a third party or face to face to any member of landlord staff visiting their home or area.
3.2	Residents must be able to raise their complaints in any way and with any member of staff. All staff must be aware of the complaints process and be able to pass details of the complaint to the appropriate person within the landlord.	Yes	This is included in staff complaint handling training and in the Customer Experience Induction Briefing which all new starters to the council are encouraged to attend.
3.3	High volumes of complaints must not be seen as a negative, as they can be indicative of a well-publicised and accessible complaints process. Low complaint	Yes	Brighton & Hove City Council performance management framework does not target volumes of complaint or upheld rates (unlike for example, response times

volumes are potentially a sign that residents are unable to complain.

which are targeted), in order not to inadvertently create avoidance of accepting complaints. Volumes are monitored however as they can be indicative of emerging issues.

3.4	Landlords must make their complaint policy available in a clear and accessible format for all residents. This will detail the two stage process, what will happen at each stage, and the timeframes for responding. The policy must also be published on the landlord's website.	Yes	The council's full complaints procedure is published on our website with brief, simplified descriptions of how we operate our corporate and statutory complaints procedures. How to make a complaint
3.5	The policy must explain how the landlord will publicise details of the complaints policy, including information about the Ombudsman and this Code.	Yes	Brighton & Hove City Council Corporate Complaints Policy and Procedure. This is set out in the complaint procedure.
3.6	Landlords must give residents the opportunity to have a representative deal with their complaint on their behalf, and to be represented or	Yes	Brighton & Hove City Council Corporate Complaints Policy and Procedure. This is set out in the complaint procedure.

	accompanied at any meeting with the landlord.		
3.7	Landlords must provide residents with information on their right to access the Ombudsman service and how the individual can engage with the Ombudsman about their complaint.	Yes	This is included in complaint correspondence at the appropriate points. We also publish this information in Homing In newsletter – sent electronically or hard copy to each tenant and leaseholder every quarter. Exploring other options such as inclusion in rent statements/gas safety check letters.

Section 4: Complaint handling staff

Code provision	Code requirement	Comply: Yes or No	Evidence, commentary or explanation
4.1	Landlords must have a person or team assigned to take responsibility for complaint handling, including liaison with the Ombudsman and ensuring complaints are reported to the governing body (or equivalent). This Code will refer to that person or team as the 'complaints officer'. This role may be in addition to other duties.	Yes	Brighton & Hove City Council Corporate Complaints Policy and Procedure. The Customer Feedback team. The complaints procedure has been updated to include that officers within the Customer Feedback Team fulfil the role of "complaints officer".
4.2	The complaints officer must have access to staff at all levels to facilitate the prompt resolution of complaints. They must also have the authority and autonomy to act to resolve disputes promptly and fairly.	Yes	This is covered in training. Additionally, complaints are of a high priority for the administration and leadership team of the council. We would not usually experience any barriers to resolving complaints.
4.3	Landlords are expected to prioritise complaint handling and a culture of learning from complaints. All relevant staff must be suitably trained in the importance of complaint	Yes	Dedicated complaint resource is set aside in the highest complaint volume areas. Complaints are a very high priority for the administration and leadership

handling. It is important that complaints are seen as a core service and must be resourced to handle complaints effectively.

team of the council and are discussed at quarterly performance sessions. In house training is provided and it is run quarterly available for all council staff who respond to complaints. The Customer Feedback team also offer tailored training to teams with high volumes of complaints

Section 5: The Complaint Handling Process

Code provision	Code requirement	Comply: Yes or No	Evidence, commentary or explanation
5.1	Landlords must have a single policy in place for dealing with complaints covered by this Code. Residents must not be treated differently if they complain.	Yes	Brighton & Hove City Council Corporate Complaints Policy and Procedure. Brighton & Hove City Council complaint policy covers all complaints.
5.2	The early and local resolution of issues between landlords and residents is key to effective complaint handling. It is not appropriate to have extra-named stages (such as 'stage 0' or 'informal complaint') as this causes unnecessary confusion.	Yes	Section amended based on Housing Ombudsman Compliance feedback. Policy wording clarifies no additional stage between service request and formal complaint and includes detailed wording on early and local resolution.
5.3	A process with more than two stages is not acceptable under any circumstances as this will make the complaint process unduly long and delay access to the Ombudsman.	Yes	Brighton & Hove City Council Corporate Complaints Policy and Procedure. Regular high volume contractors handle Stage 1 complaints, then escalation to Stage 2 as standard, with no additional stages.
5.4	Where a landlord's complaint response is handled by a third	Yes	Regular high volume contractors handle Stage 1

	party, it must form part of the two stage complaints process. Residents must not be expected to go through two complaints processes.		complaints, then escalation to Stage 2 as standard, so there are no additional stages.
5.5	Landlords are responsible for ensuring that any third parties handle complaints in line with the Code.	Yes	Complaint handling clause is included in relevant contracts and regular contractors attend complaint handling training.
5.6	When a complaint is logged at Stage 1 or escalated to Stage 2, landlords must set out their understanding of the complaint and the outcomes the resident is seeking.	Yes	Brighton & Hove City Council Corporate Complaints Policy and Procedure. Section amended based on Housing Ombudsman Compliance feedback and supported by template letters and training.
5.7	When a complaint is acknowledged at either stage, landlords must be clear which aspects of the complaint they are and are not responsible for.	Yes	Brighton & Hove City Council Corporate Complaints Policy and Procedure. Section amended based on Housing Ombudsman Compliance feedback and supported by templates and training.
5.8	At each stage of the complaints process, complaint handlers must deal with complaints on their	Yes	Brighton & Hove City Council inhouse complaint handling training and Ombudsman best practice guidance.

merits, act independently, and consider all relevant evidence carefully.

5.9	Where a response will fall outside timescales, landlords must agree suitable intervals with residents for updates.	Yes	Policy wording includes requirement to contact customer, explain delay and agree update intervals at both Stage 1 and Stage 2.
5.10	Landlords must make reasonable adjustments for residents and keep records of adjustments and disabilities disclosed.	Yes	This is in line with the council's equalities policy and working practices across departments.
5.11	Landlords must not refuse to escalate a complaint unless there are valid reasons.	Yes	Complaint policy Appendix B sets out valid reasons and applies equally at Stage 2.
5.12	A full record must be kept of the complaint and outcomes at each stage.	Yes	Captured in the complaint case management database.
5.13	Landlords must ensure complaints can be remedied at any stage.	Yes	Included in staff training and guidance on identifying appropriate remedies.
5.14	Landlords must have policies for managing unacceptable behaviour.	Yes	Managing unreasonable customer behaviour policy referenced in complaints procedure.

5.15

Any restrictions must be proportionate and comply with Equality Act 2010.

Yes

Managing unreasonable customer behaviour policy and complaints procedure guidance.

Section 6: Complaints stages

Stage 1

Code provision	Code requirement	Comply: Yes or No	Evidence, commentary or explanation
6.1	Landlords must have processes in place to consider which complaints can be responded to as early as possible, and which require further investigation. Landlords must consider factors such as the complexity of the complaint and whether the resident is vulnerable or at risk. Most stage 1 complaints can be resolved promptly, and an explanation, apology or resolution provided to the resident.	Yes	This is included in Brighton & Hove City Council complaints handling training.
6.2	Complaints must be acknowledged, defined and logged at stage 1 of the complaints procedure within 5 working days of the complaint being received.	Yes	This is set out in the Brighton & Hove City Council Corporate Complaints Policy and Procedure. This is included in complaints handling training.
6.3	Landlords must issue a full response to stage 1 complaints within 10 working	Yes	This is set out in the Brighton & Hove City Council

		days of the complaint being acknowledged.		Corporate Complaints Policy and Procedure and training.
6.4		Landlords must decide whether an extension to this timescale is needed when considering complexity and inform the resident. Extensions must be no more than 10 working days without good reason.	Yes	Brighton & Hove City Council Corporate Complaints Policy and Procedure has been updated to reflect this.
6.5		When informing a resident about an extension, they must be provided with Ombudsman contact details.	Yes	Included in complaints handling training.
6.6		A complaint response must be provided when the answer is known, not when outstanding actions are completed.	Yes	Policy updated based on Housing Ombudsman Compliance feedback including delay wording and timeframes.
6.7		Landlords must address all points raised and provide clear reasons referencing policy, law and good practice.	Yes	Included in complaints handling training.
6.8		Additional complaints raised must be incorporated if related, or logged separately if not.	Yes	Policy amended with detailed wording under section 7 and Appendix B updates.

6.9	Landlords must confirm key details in writing at stage 1 completion including decision, reasons, remedy and escalation.	Yes	Templates, internal guidance and training updated to reflect requirements.
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Stage 2

Code provision	Code requirement	Comply: Yes or No	Evidence, commentary or explanation
6.10	If not resolved at stage 1, complaint must progress to stage 2 which is final response.	Yes	Set out in complaint procedure and training.
6.11	Stage 2 requests must be acknowledged and logged within 5 working days.	Yes	Set out in complaint procedure and training.
6.12	Residents must not be required to explain reasons for stage 2 request.	Yes	Set out in complaint procedure and training.
6.13	Stage 2 must be handled by a different person than stage 1.	Yes	Handled by independent Customer Feedback Managers.
6.14	Final response must be issued within 20 working days.	Yes	Policy updated and reflected in procedure and training.

6.15	Any extension must not exceed 20 days without good reason.	Yes	Policy wording updated accordingly.
6.16	Residents must be given Ombudsman contact details when extensions applied.	Yes	Policy wording updated and included in procedure and training.
6.17	Response must be provided when answer known.	Yes	Policy updated to reflect monitoring and updates requirement.
6.18	All points must be addressed with reference to policy and law.	Yes	Complaint handling training covers this.
6.19	Stage 2 completion must confirm decision, remedy, actions and Ombudsman escalation.	Yes	Set out in complaint procedure and training.
6.20	Stage 2 is final response and must involve relevant staff.	Yes	Customer Feedback Managers coordinate with services to ensure accuracy and agreement.

Section 7: Putting things right

Code provision	Code requirement	Comply: Yes or No	Commentary or explanation
7.1	Where something has gone wrong a landlord must acknowledge this and set out the actions it has already taken, or intends to take, to put things right. These can include apologising; acknowledging where things have gone wrong; providing an explanation; taking action if there has been delay; reconsidering a decision; amending a record; providing a financial remedy; changing policies.	Yes	Putting things right – guidance on remedying faults in service delivery and complaint handling. Included in staff training and guidance for identifying appropriate remedies.
7.2	Any remedy offered must reflect the impact on the resident as a result of any fault identified.	Yes	Putting things right – guidance on remedying faults in service delivery and complaint handling. Included in guidance on remedies.
7.3	The remedy offer must clearly set out what will happen and by when, in agreement with the resident where appropriate. Any remedy	Yes	Any actions or service improvements identified through the complaint process are logged and reported up through departmental management

proposed must be followed through to completion.

teams for monitoring to conclusion.

7.4

Landlords must take account of the guidance issued by the Ombudsman when deciding on appropriate remedies.

Yes

Our remedy guidance has been created based on the guidance from both the Housing Ombudsman Service and the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.

Section 8: Self-assessment, reporting and compliance

Code provision	Code requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence, commentary or explanation
8.1	Landlords must produce an annual complaints performance and service improvement report including self-assessment, analysis of performance, refusals, Ombudsman findings, improvements, and relevant reports.	Yes	Annual complaints and service improvement report for the Housing Management service. The published report meets these criteria.
8.2	The report must be reported to the governing body and published with their response.	Yes	Annual complaints and service improvement report for the Housing Management service. The published report meets these criteria.
8.3	Landlords must carry out a self-assessment following significant restructure or procedural change.	Yes	We will do this as the need arises.
8.4	Landlords may be asked to update the self-assessment following an Ombudsman investigation.	Yes	We will do this as requested.
8.5	If unable to comply due to exceptional circumstances,	Yes	We commit to doing this if an incident arises.

landlords must inform
Ombudsman and residents
and provide a compliance
timescale.

Section 9: Scrutiny and oversight: continuous learning and improvement

Code provision	Code requirement	Comply: Yes or No	Evidence, commentary, explanation
9.1	Landlords must look beyond the circumstances of the individual complaint and consider whether service improvements can be made as a result of any learning from the complaint.	Yes	Brighton & Hove City Council Corporate Complaints Policy and Procedure. This is set out in section 4 of the policy and is included in complaint handling training.
9.2	A positive complaint handling culture is integral to effectiveness. Landlords must use complaints as intelligence to identify issues and introduce positive changes.	Yes	Reporting on trends and issues is provided regularly to senior managers in services to support introduction of positive changes to service delivery.
9.3	Accountability and transparency are integral. Landlords must report back on learning and improvements to stakeholders.	Yes	Reporting on actions, learnings and service improvements are provided back to services on a quarterly basis and included in quarterly briefings to members.
9.4	Landlords must appoint a suitably senior lead person accountable for complaint	Yes	Head of Tenancy Services performs this role and is also the SRO for the complaint handling review project.

	handling and identifying trends and risks.		
9.5	A member of the governing body must be appointed as the Member Responsible for Complaints (MRC).	Yes	Yes, the Cabinet member for Housing.
9.6	The MRC must ensure the governing body receives regular information and has access to staff and insight.	Yes	MRC receives quarterly briefings and has full access to suitable staff to provide further information.
9.7	As a minimum the MRC and governing body must receive updates on complaint volumes, trends, Ombudsman outcomes, and annual reports.	Yes	MRC receives quarterly briefings including these matters and Corporate Director is copied to Ombudsman decisions.
9.8	Landlords must have a standard objective for complaint handling that emphasises collaboration, collective responsibility, and professional standards.	Yes	This is embedded in staff objectives, training and organisational values relating to complaint handling. This is contained within the complaint handling training and reiterated at all forums where complaints are discussed, including at senior decision-making level. A project is underway to

review complaint handling
processes to further improve
these aspects of complaint
handling.

