

BIRMINGHAM CIVIC HOUSING ASSOCIATION LIMITED

BOARD OF MANAGEMENT – 20th FEBRUARY 2025

REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Complaints Performance & Service Improvement Report

Purpose of Report

To present the annual report on complaints performance and service improvements and a self-assessment against the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code (the Code).

To provide the Board of Management with the information and assurance it needs to prepare and publish a response to the report and the self-assessment.

Background

We welcome feedback from tenants, as it provides an opportunity to review our performance and identify areas for improvement. Our complaints policy is published on the website and periodically in newsletters to tenants. The policy reflects a two stage complaints process, ensuring all complaints are investigated thoroughly and, if required, the findings reviewed. Should a complainant remain dissatisfied after the second stage, the policy supports people to escalate their complaint to the independent Housing Ombudsman.

The Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 strengthened the powers of the Regulator of Social Housing and the Housing Ombudsman. It empowered the Ombudsman to issue a code of practice for complaint handling and placed a duty on the Ombudsman to monitor compliance with it. The Ombudsman published a new, more prescriptive, version of the Complaint Handling Code in February 2024 effective from 1st April 2024.

The new code requires landlords to produce an annual complaints performance and service improvement report, including a self-assessment against the code. The report must be published on the website along with a response from the board.

This report provides a summary of the number and types of complaints received in 2024 and an overview of the service improvements made as a result. It also provides a self-assessment against the 2024 Complaint Handling Code Appendix 1).

Performance on Complaint Handling - 2024

In 2024 a total of 11 complaints were received, however one complainant did not pursue their complaint, accordingly 10 complaints were completed in the year. Of these, 9 were resolved at Stage 1 (90%) the other was resolved at Stage 2 (10%). No complaints escalated to the Housing Ombudsman.

The table below provides a summary of the types of complaint received:

Service Area	Stage 1	Stage 2	Upheld Yes/No
Repairs Service (gas contractor attending without appointment)	1	0	No
Repairs Service (repair to shower not effective)	1	0	No
Repairs (quality of work)	2	0	Yes x 2
Improvements (wall insulation, time taken and mess left behind)	1	1	Yes
Repair (delay before work started)	1	0	No
Customer Service (attitude of staff)	2	0	Yes x 2
Repairs (attitude of operative)	2	0	No x 2
Total	10	1	

Under the Regulator of Housing's Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs), the number of complaints must be expressed per 1000 units (e.g. 10/217 x 1000):

	Number per 1000 units
Stage 1 complaints	46
Stage 2 complaints	5

There is insufficient data available to reliably compare this performance indicator to other associations, Acuity Benchmarking (for small associations) have not published performance against this indicator.

The target response times for complaints (based on the 2024 code) is as follows:

Stage 1 – acknowledge, define and log within 5 days of receipt and respond within 10 working days of acknowledgement (unless further time is agreed with the complainant)

Stage 2 – acknowledge, define and log within 5 working days and respond within 20 working days of escalation to Stage 2 (unless further time is agreed with the complainant)

Performance against these targets in 2024 is as follows:

Target	% within target time
Stage 1	90%
Stage 2	100%

Complaints made by telephone are acknowledged at the time, although it is our practice to also send a written acknowledgement. The target for acknowledging complaints that come in by email is more challenging as several days may have passed over a weekend before the email is opened.

In the 2023 tenant satisfaction survey, tenants were asked how satisfied they are with the association's approach to handling complaints:

TSM	% Satisfied	Acuity (small providers)	Acuity (all providers)
Satisfaction with the association's approach to handling complaints	70%	50%	33.8%

Although the 70% is down from 74% in the 2018 tenant satisfaction survey, performance compares favourably with other associations.

There is not necessarily a correlation between the tenant satisfaction survey and the complaints made in 2024, as the tenant satisfaction survey includes the views of tenant's that did not make a complaint in the year.

It is worth noting that of the 113 tenants that took part in the tenant satisfaction survey in 2023, 19% said that they had made a complaint in the last 12 months which equates to 22 tenants. The difference between this and the 10 complaints received in 2023 (4.6% of all tenants) is very likely explained by perception of what is a service request as opposed to a complaint.

The complaints policy provides the following definition of a service request and a complaint, these are consistent with the Ombudsman's code of practice:

A service request is ***"a request from a tenant requiring action to be taken to put something right"***

A complaint is ***"an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions, or lack of action by the organisation, its own staff or those acting on its behalf, affecting an individual resident or a group of residents"***.

Learning from Complaints

Although, 8 (80%) of complaints relate to repairs or improvement work there was no common factor, the complaints involved three different contractors and different personnel. The contractors have received feedback on their performance and made good the repairs. The contractor involved in the external insulation job has been warned that we may cease to use their services if there is a repeat of the failure to clean up.

A member of staff has received feedback on their performance in relation to two of the complaints, I am confident that this will lead to improvement.

Other measures implemented in 2024 to improve our complaint handling include:

- Review of the Complaints Policy to comply with the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code.
- Completion of a self-assessment against the Code (Appendix 1)

- New complaints letter templates for Stage 1 and Stage 2 of the policy.
- Improvements to the case management register to improve oversight of complaints and achievement of timelines.

Member Responsible for Complaints

The Complaint Handling Code requires the Board of Management to appoint a Member Responsible for Complaints (MRC) to have lead responsibility for complaints, in 2024 this role was undertaken by Mrs Damaris Kanco-Hammond.

Having undertaken a review of complaints received in the year and the responses to them, the MRC's findings are as follows:

Following the completion of the recent audit of all complaints, several key observations have emerged. Encouragingly, the majority of complaints received did not escalate beyond the initial stages, demonstrating the effectiveness of our complaint resolution process. A significant proportion of complaints related to external contractors failing to meet satisfactory standards, rather than issues originating within the association itself.

It is reassuring to note that all complaints were addressed within the timelines our complaints policy, with responses provided in a timely manner. Moreover, the investigations into these complaints were conducted with a commendable level of thoroughness, with some recommendations exceeding the standard procedures set out in our policy.

Additionally, it was particularly positive to see a strong emphasis on care in cases where complaints involved instances of poor mental health. The sensitivity and diligence demonstrated in handling such concerns underscore our commitment to tenant well-being.

Overall, I am very satisfied with the complaints handling process. Staff have shown a clear dedication to resolving issues effectively, ensuring that tenants receive the support they need.

This report reflects their positive attitude and thorough approach.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that:

- i) The Board of Management agree a response to this report for publication on the complaints section of the website.
- ii) The Board of Management approve the self-assessment and authorise the Chief Executive to submit it to the Housing Ombudsman.

Helen Marson - Chief Executive

February 2025