



Response from Barnsley Council Member Responsible for Complaints, Cllr Franklin, Cabinet Spokesperson for Regeneration and Culture to:

Barneslai Homes Annual Complaint and Learning Report and Self-Assessment against the Housing Ombudsman Code (HOS) 2024

Barnsley Council has confidently delegated the handling of complaints about our social housing service to our ALMO, Barneslai Homes. But it is our responsibility as Landlord to make sure that Barneslai Homes does this in a way that is aligned to the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code 2024 and importantly to make sure that Barneslai Homes respectfully listens to those who are dissatisfied, considers individual needs, puts things right in a timely and reasonable manner and then learns from the complaints to deliver an improved service for tenants

BMBC Cabinet on 26th June 2024 agreed that the updated Complaint Policy (developed by Barneslai Homes and published in April 2024) fully meets the requirements of the Housing Ombudsman Service Complaint Handling Code. We acknowledged the new and robust arrangements to ensure both operational and governance oversight of complaint handling from both the Council and Barneslai Homes. We supported their thorough self-assessment against the code which recognises the challenges they face in delivering against the code and their policy.

I attended a meeting on 18th June 2024 with officers from Barneslai Homes and Barnsley Council, where I scrutinised, considered and challenged Barneslai Homes 2023/24 Complaint Handling and Learning report.

Whilst the report clearly highlights an unprecedented volume of complaints, it is a transparent and honest reflection of their performance in challenging times, and importantly how they are putting in place changes to improve not just complaint handling but wider service improvements. I have some concerns about the pace at which Barneslai Homes is implementing learning but I acknowledge their continued efforts to prioritise and implement change including

- a new repairs and maintenance policy;
- improved communications for planned repairs and improvements;
- increased transparency re timescales for repairs and maintenance and communication of same to tenants;
- plans to reduce wait times for planned repairs;
- a good neighbour policy; and
- changes to staffing structures and bringing in additional capacity to respond more effectively to repair and maintenance issues.

Their self-assessment against the HOS code which only came into effect from 1st April 2024, is another honest reflection which confirms compliance in policy but highlights challenges in practical application due to the volume of complaints and the volume of accumulated works to be delivered through the repairs and maintenance function. It is good to see that Berneslai Homes has adjusted its complaint team's staffing levels and handling processes so that over the coming year more Stage 1 complaints are responded to in time and fewer complaints progress to Stage 2 – putting things right first time. I'm reassured that their Customer First Training, which all staff will attend this year, will refresh their understanding and ability to deliver the service that our tenants deserve in a way that meets their needs. This along with their specific complaint handling training will reaffirm their positive complaint handling culture.

From 1st April 2024, we have strengthened our oversight of Berneslai Homes complaint handling which will increase accountability and give the council greater assurance that Berneslai Homes will continue to hear residents, manage their complaints, put things right for the individual and use complaints as a tool to improve services and business efficiency. These new arrangements will give me an opportunity to share resident voices and views with Cabinet.

In summary, on behalf of Barnsley Council, I fully endorse Berneslai Homes' Annual Complaint and Learning Report and their alignment with the HOS Complaint Handling Code.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. Franklin', written in a cursive style.

Councillor Robin Franklin

Cabinet Spokesperson for Regeneration and Culture

28 June 2024



**Response from Berneslai Homes Board Complaints Champion, Eric Smith to:
Berneslai Homes Annual Complaint and Learning Report and Self-Assessment
against the Housing Ombudsman Code (HOS) 2024**

Berneslai Homes is responsible for handling of complaints in a way that is aligned to the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code, and it is the role of the Board, through our Customer Services Committee to give assurance to Barnsley Council (your landlord), that we have done this properly. To put it simply, that we've made it easy for people to complain, we responded quickly and honestly, we put things right for individuals, we learnt and improved services for all tenants.

On 16th May 2024, Customer Services Committee gave assurance to our Executive Management Team that their newly developed Complaint Policy was fully aligned to the code. We also considered our Annual Complaint Performance and Learning Report and our annual self-assessment against the Complaint Handling Code.

As Board Complaint Champion, I was pleased to endorse the updated policy as a transparent and thorough policy aimed at putting and keeping things right for tenants. The Annual Performance and Learning Report highlighted some challenges in the officers' ability to keep on top of the increased volume of complaints and implement learning. However, Committee were fully supportive of the temporary increase in staffing resources to not just handle complaints more effectively but to improve learning capacity and most importantly, to address the root cause of complaints (in the main planned repairs and communication). We will keep a watchful eye on performance through committee and board meetings and will support officers in managing any ongoing and emerging concerns. In my role as Board Complaint Champion, I will continue to meet residents to discuss complaint handling and learning at the Complaint Review Group Meetings. It's great to see things at grass root level. I will also meet with officers and Barnsley Council's Member Responsible for Complaints at least four times each year so that we can jointly consider complaint performance and learning and swiftly take action where we need to, increasing assurance to and improving services for tenants.

Eric Smith

Berneslai Homes Board Complaint Handling Champion

20 June 2024