



ANNUAL COMPLAINTS REPORT

1 April 2023 – 31 March 2024



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Introduction

I am pleased to introduce FCHO's Annual Complaints Report for the period 1 April 2023 – 31 March 2024.

Our customers are at the heart of everything we do, we believe in continuously learning from feedback we receive to enhance the quality of services provided to everyone living in our homes. By working together, we're committed to giving the best landlord service possible.



Our goal is to provide outstanding customer service to all, but we know that we don't always get it right. We understand that when customers feel dissatisfied, they need to be able to voice their concerns.

We value the learning that complaints bring from customers, who are actively contributing to enhance our services.

Jean Mira, First Choice Homes Oldham (FCHO) Board Member

Complaints Received

The table below outlines the number of complaints received in 2023/2024, compares them with 2022/2023, and shows how FCHO responds in accordance with Housing Ombudsman (HO) guidelines.

Stage 1 Complaints		Stage 2 Complaints	
Complaints received	744	Complaints received	79
Complaints acknowledged within Ombudsman time scales (5 working days)	100%	Complaints acknowledged within Ombudsman time scales (5 working days)	100%
Complaints responded to within Ombudsman time scales (10 working days)	100%	Complaints responded to within Ombudsman time scales (20 working days)	98%
% Reduction in complaints from 2022/2023	19%	% Increase in complaints from 2022/2023	80%

Complaint reasons

The below table provides a breakdown of all complaint reasons, the number of complaints received, and the corresponding percentage.

Complaint Reason	Number	%
Poor Communication	270	32.8%
Repairs, Safety Checks and Asset Delivery **	183	22.2%
Damp, Mould and Condensation	114	13.9%
Contractors Complaint	100	12.2%
Anti-social Behaviour	33	4.0%
Staff Behaviour	28	3.4%
Communal Areas	22	2.7%
Process Failing Complaint	18	2.2%
Pest Complaint	13	1.6%
Rent Complaint	12	1.5%
Leaseholder Complaint	8	1.0%
Health and Safety Complaint	7	0.9%
New Lettings	5	0.6%
Recharge Appeals	5	0.6%
Service Charges	3	0.4%
Customer Inconvenience	1	0.1%
Environmental Protection Act	1	0.1%

** Complaints include all aspects of service delivery i.e. repair taken too long, cancelled / late appointments, poor workmanship, and damage to property.

Learning from Complaints

Listening to customers is crucial for improving service delivery. This is what our customers said and the improvements FCHO has made during 2023/2024:

What did customers say	Actions FCHO took in Response
Not receiving call backs when requested.	Call backs are tracked through FCHO's in-house system and have 48 hour deadline. If the deadline expires, this is highlighted and acted upon. As a result, customer complaints about this problem have reduced.
Lack of communication from the Neighbourhood and ASB team after reporting anti-social behaviour (ASB).	FCHO Community Legal team is situated within the Neighbourhood team, this provides a more supportive service ensuring better communication from both teams. This has led to an increase in customer satisfaction with the service area and an increase in compliments.
Customers were unaware of what to expect when FCHO completed a programme of re-wires.	FCHO provides information prior to any major works including photos and videos, making clear what can be expected during and after the works. Consequently, customer complaints about this problem have reduced.
Customers were reporting disrepair cases where they had not gone through the complaints process, or the complaint was closed once legal action commenced.	Following the Housing Ombudsman guidelines, FCHO was encouraged to use an alternative dispute resolution. FCHO contacts all disrepair claimants advising of the complaints process, explaining the benefits of using this route. Customers can still decide to use the legal route if they choose to. 32 customers chose to pursue the non-legal disrepair route saving the organisation £160,000 in disrepair cost.
Customers advised that repairs automated texts cancelling appointments were confusing and didn't inform of next steps.	FCHO has reworded texts to give further clarity of the cancellation and offering an alternative appointment. The Contact Centre has seen a reduction in call backs regarding texts.

Improvements for 2024/2025

To improve the complaints process, FCHO is focussing on the main reasons why customers complain. This is what FCHO will focus on in the coming year:

1. Improving customer communication

All customer complaints will be discussed with the customer either by telephone or in person at each stage of the complaint process prior to written communication being sent. All letters will be written in plain English, or other formats as required, provide a full explanation why the issue occurred, and detail actions to be taken to rectify the problem.

2. Reviewing end to end process of the Repairs Team

A complete review of the repair process will be undertaken, identifying failures in the process, and putting changes in place to improve customer satisfaction.

3. Damp and Mould Process

FCHO has a process for dealing with damp and mould dissatisfaction, this will be reviewed to ensure all issues have been considered to improve the process.

4. Contract Management

The Asset Strategy team monitors all contracts where sub-contractors are used; this will be reviewed to ensure all customers dissatisfaction has been addressed and improvements are put into place.

5. Understanding customers complaint journey

FCHO are meeting Stage 2 complainants to discuss what actions are needed to improve all stages of the complaint process.

6. One Team Approach

All teams will focus on working together to identify trends for complaints, leading to service improvements, better communication, enhancing processes, reducing the number of complaints, and increasing customer satisfaction.

Housing Ombudsman’s Complaint Handling Code

FCHO is committed to meeting the requirements of the Complaint Handling Code (the Code) set out by the HO, in June 2023. FCHO responded to feedback from the HO on compliance of the Complaints Policy against the Code and made the changes below to strengthen our approach: -

- Enhanced FCHO Complaints Policy to clarify complaint definitions, complaint stages with timescales and roles within the process.
- Implemented a Reasonable Adjustments Policy to ensure all customers receive a fair and equitable complaint handling service, strengthening Equality, Diversity and Inclusion to all customers.

In August 2023, FCHO received confirmation from the HO that they were satisfied with the changes implemented. This is part of FCHO’s plan to provide better services. Customers can be reassured that our approach meets the high standards of the Code.

Housing Ombudsman’s Determinations 2023/2024

The table below outlines all HO investigations that FCHO has received this year, indicating those that have advanced to a determination stage and the number that resulted in a finding of maladministration. FCHO has not received any findings of severe maladministration during 2023/2024.

FCHO can confirm that all orders and recommendations have been implemented.

Date Case Sent	Case Details	Determination
4 April 2023	Customer request for designated parking space.	FCHO’s approach was fair. No maladministration
26 April 2023	FCHO handling of bathroom and kitchen adaptations. FCHO complaint handling and communication.	Maladministration identified. Ordered to compensate the customer £400 within 4 weeks: £340 for delays, poor communication, and inadequate record-keeping related to toilet and kitchen adaptations and repairs, and £60 for incomplete complaint response. Self-assess against the Knowledge and Information Spotlight report.

Date Case Sent	Case Details	Determination
3 August 2023	FCHO handling of a fault with the heating when the customer moved into the property.	Maladministration regarding the lack of explanation on how to use the heating system when customer first moved in. FCHO was ordered to pay £300 in compensation to the customer.
21 September 2023	Customer request to replace their floor covering and underlay.	FCHO's approach was fair. No maladministration
23 January 2024	FCHO handling of the purchase of the property freehold	Maladministration identified. FCHO's handling of the complaint was unfair and inappropriate, contrary to the Code. Despite acknowledging delays and failures, the landlord's reluctance to accept responsibility prevented timely and proportionate redress. FCHO was ordered to review its complaint responses to ensure compliance with the code and to pay £300 in compensation to the customer.

Housing Ombudsman Benchmarking

FCHO's performance is benchmarked against eight housing providers within Greater Manchester concerning HO determinations and findings of severe maladministration. The table below shows FCHO's current position in the ranking.

Benchmarking Questions	Ranking
Number of determinations, regardless of outcome and relative to the size of landlord	2 nd out of 8 providers
Number of severe maladministration findings, relative to size of landlord	1 st out of 8 providers

Overview of Complaints for 2023/2024

Overall Complaints received	Complaints refused	Service Requests received
823	0	507

During 2023/2024, the HO updated the Code to include service requests. This enables FCHO to promptly address issues and correct them. A service request allows FCHO to respond to a customer's request to put something right. It is important to note that service requests are not considered complaints.

Complaints Process

FCHO is a member of the HO Scheme and adheres to their Code.

FCHO acknowledges Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaints within 5 working days. Responses to Stage 1 complaints are provided within 10 working days, and responses to Stage 2 complaints are provided within 20 working days.

FCHO is regulated by the Regulator for Social Housing (RSH), who introduced new Consumer Standards in April 2024 and FCHO completed a self-assessment against them.

FCHO's Complaints Procedure and a link to The Code self-assessment for 2024 is available on our website www.fcho.co.uk/complaints

FCHO Board's response to our Annual Complaints Report 2023/2024

The FCHO Board has responded to our Annual Complaints Report 2023/2024:

The Board of FCHO welcomes the content of the Annual Complaints Report 2023/2024 and acknowledges the current position presented and our role in relation to complaints.

We have appointed a Board Member Responsible for Complaints, whose role is to provide assurance to the Board on the effectiveness of the complaints process and to challenge where appropriate. We value our customers' feedback as we build a culture that is inclusive and makes it easy for our customers to engage with us.

This Annual Complaints Report clearly establishes the reasons customers complain and supports the focused service improvements set out in the report during 2024/2025 as a result.

Continued...

The benchmarking data shows FCHO is in a good position in comparison with other housing providers in the Greater Manchester region, however we are not complacent and will continue to with our ambitions to ensure that we are proud of every call we take, every repair we carry out, every investment we make and every transaction or process we implement.

We will continue to encourage and make it as easy as possible for customers to send us any feedback, whether this is in the form of a complaint or compliment. This information is crucial to ensuring our services can be tailored to meet the various needs of our diverse customers.



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