

2024-25 ANNUAL COMPLAINTS PERFORMANCE AND IMPROVEMENT REPORT

1 Introduction from Cabinet (Governing Body Response)

- 1.1 The Council is committed to improving quality of service and the experience of customers using our service. Whilst we aim to put the customer at the heart of everything we do, we know that on occasion, our customers will have cause to complain.
- 1.2 When this happens, it is important that we have an effective and transparent complaints process in place, and that we share our performance with the community.
- 1.3 This report sets out our annual complaint's performance for 2024-25. It summarises the how many complaints we have received, what they were about, and how we have handled them.
- 1.4 This year, we have continued to improve our response performance as well as ensuring we are working in line with the updates we made to our Complaints policy, in August 2024, to better align with the Ombudsman Complaint Handling Codes.
- 1.5 However, we know there is more we can do and an area of focus for improvement this year is to make sure we continue to improve our response times, improve the quality of our communication and using lesson learned to identify where we need to make improvements in our service.

2 Our Approach to Complaints

- 2.1 Our priority is to resolve complaints first-time right and as soon as they come to our attention.
- 2.2 Complaints are managed in line with our Complaints Policy, and we operate a two-stage complaints process. At Stage 1, we aim to investigate and respond to complaints within 10 Working Days. If a customer is not satisfied with our response at Stage 1, they can request it is escalated to Stage 2 for re-investigation and review of our original investigation.
- 2.3 At Stage 2, we aim to investigate and respond to complaints within 20 Working Days. If the customer is dissatisfied with our Stage 2 response, we advise them to contact the Ombudsman, who may be able to provide dispute support and resolution for our customers.
- 2.4 Where we receive a complex complaint that takes more time to investigate, we allow for our complaint response times to be extended for a further 10 Working Days for Stage 1 complaints and 20 Working Days for Stage 2 complaints.

Improvements to our Approach:

- 2.5 During 2024-25, we updated our Complaints Policy and working processes to improve our compliance against the Ombudsman Complaint Handling Codes. This included:

- 2.6 **Improving consistency in how we check and log complaints.** All complaints are now checked by a member of the Customer Service team before being allocated to the relevant service team. This ensures that service requests are relogged, customer vulnerabilities flagged, and the complaint is assigned to the correct team first time. Any complaints that require input from multiple teams are also now centrally managed by the council's Complaint Insight Officer.
- 2.7 **Improving our communication with customers.** If we need to extend our response time, a customer now receives an automated email advising them of the new response deadline.
- 2.8 **Improving the quality of our responses.** We have reviewed and updated our complaint response templates, ensuring that we make it clear about how customers can escalate their complaints to Stage 2, as well as sharing the details about the relevant Ombudsman at each stage of our complaints process.
- 2.9 **Increased Staff Training & Awareness.** Staff involved in our complaints process received refresher training on our updated customer service policies and associated system processes during Autumn 2024. We also make sure new staff receive complaints handling training as well as being a topic covered in our Corporate Induction.

3 **Our Performance**

Landlord Services:

- 3.1 This year, we have seen an overall increase in the number of Stage 1 complaints, with 890 complaints logged and investigated – this is an increase of 34% compared to last year. This trend is in line with the sector-wide increase in the number of reported complaints due to increased publicity about landlord services, stories in the news.
- 3.2 We have also continued to promote our complaints process with our Residents' Panel and tenants and leaseholders through our newsletter, Community Edit, as well as making the process accessible online in addition to other contact channels.
- 3.3 However, we also know an increase in complaints can help us identify where there may be more serious service issues. 83% of complaints received in 2024-25 relate to our housing repairs service and an incorrect/poor delivery of this service. During the same period, we completed 24,931 responsive repairs; so, complaints account for 3% of completed jobs.

	2022/23	2023/24	2024-25
Council housing planned works and safety	45	58	62
Council housing rents and arrears	10	4	5
Council housing repairs	393	467	736
Council housing tenancy matters	54	56	86
Leaseholders	4	3	0
Sheltered housing	3	2	1
Total Stage 1 Complaints	509	590	890

- 3.4 The key complaint reasons are broadly similar to the previous years, although there has been a decrease in the number of complaints about staff and contractors acting inappropriately and the council refusing to provide a service.

	2023/24	2024/25
A member of council staff (or any of our contractors or agents) behaving inappropriately	5.0%	2.7%
Failure of council staff to follow the correct policy or procedure	9%	9.6%
Incorrect or poor delivery of a service	72%	76%
Refusal of the council to provide a service which it should be providing	14.0%	12%

- 3.5 Since 2022-23, the escalation rate has steadily increased to 18% in 2024-26 with 156 Stage 2 complaints logged and investigated.
- 3.6 We have been more proactive in letting customers know how they can escalate their complaint, and we also focussed on closing a number of outstanding Stage 1 repairs complaints during summer 2024. This resulted in more Stage 1 cases being escalated to Stage 2 during the period.
- 3.7 However, we also know an increase in complaints can help us identify where there may be more serious service issues. Most Stage 2 complaints relate to our housing repairs service.

	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Escalation Rate	9%	13%	18%

	2022/2	2023/24	2024/25
Council housing planned works and safety	4	6	6
Council housing rents and arrears	2	0	0
Council housing responsive repairs	37	66	143
Council housing tenancy matters	3	7	7
Council tenant rehousing	0	0	0
Leaseholders	0	0	0
Sheltered housing	0	0	0
Total Stage 2 Complaints	46	79	156

- 3.8 We aim to fully investigate and respond to 95% of all complaints within the agreed timescales. We have continued to work hard to improve our response times and have seen a steady improvement in our response rates.

	Target	Stage 1: % in target	Stage 2: % in target
2022/23	95.0%	54%	64%
2023/24	95.0%	63%	56%
2024/25	95.0%	72%	75%

Council Services:

- 3.9 This year, we have seen negligible reduction in the number of Stage 1 complaints, with 1,305 complaints logged and investigated – this is a decrease of 1% compared to last year.
- 3.10 We know an increase in complaints can help us identify where there may be more serious service issues, and the majority of our complaints relate to an incorrect or poor delivery of service.
- 3.11 The majority of complaints logged this year relate to household waste and recycling collections. During the same year, we emptied over 4.5 million bins, so the number of complaints relate to a very small proportion of bins emptied.
- 3.12 This year, we have also seen an increase in complaints in our grounds maintenance and tree services – this is attributed to the service challenges experienced during summer 2024. We have also seen an increase in complaints in our Housing Benefits, Business Rates and Council Tax services – this is attributed to the system migration during December 2024 which resulted in some disruption as customers were unable to access their accounts for a short period of time.

	2022/23	2023/24	2024-25
Household waste and recycling	655	590	497
Grounds maintenance and trees	146	186	203
Housing benefit, rates and council tax	149	160	204
Parking and car parks	73	109	86
Homelessness and housing needs	54	57	39
Various services - community, licensing, estate and pests	33	44	166
Anti-social behaviour and noise nuisance	43	39	29
Flytipping, graffiti, clearance of rubbish	32	36	32
Customer service and communications	20	33	17
Planning services	29	30	17
Contracted and lease customers	24	24	5
Cemetery or funeral services	3	10	10
Total Stage 1 Complaints	1261	1318	1305

	2023/24	2024/25
A member of council staff (or any of our contractors or agents) behaving inappropriately	5.5%	4.1%
Failure of council staff to follow the correct policy or procedure	11.1%	11.3%
Incorrect or poor delivery of a service	72.2%	70.1%
Refusal of the council to provide a service which it should be providing	15.9%	13.6%

- 3.13 Since 2022-23, the escalation rate has remained steady, with 131 Stage 2 complaints logged and investigated in 2024-25.
- 3.14 We also know an increase in complaints can help us identify where there may be more serious service issues.
- 3.15 Most Stage 2 complaints relate to our ground's maintenance and tree services and household waste and recycling service, which is to be expected due to the scale of services we provide.

	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Escalation Rate	9%	8%	10%

	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Anti-social behaviour and noise nuisance	6	9	1
Cemetery or funeral services	12	6	1
Contracted and lease customers	11	10	1
Customer service and communications	7	11	1
Flytipping, graffiti, clearance of rubbish	12	6	5
Grounds maintenance and trees	10	5	23
Homelessness and housing needs	6	5	9
Household waste and recycling	12	14	45
Housing benefit, rates and council tax	7	5	15
Parking and car parks	18	8	8
Planning services	8	10	6
Various services - community, licensing, estate and pests	7	10	16
Total Stage 2 Complaints	116	99	131

- 3.16 We aim to fully investigate and respond to 95% of all complaints within the agreed timescales. Performance in this area has remained relatively steady.

	Target	Stage 1: % in target	Stage 2: % in target
2022/23	95.0%	84%	66%
2023/24	95.0%	82%	60%
2024/25	95.0%	83%	65%

Improvements to our Performance

- 3.17 During 2024-25, we have focussed on improving our response rates and quality of our responses. This has included:
- 3.18 **Creating dedicated complaints officers.** During Summer 2024, we appointed a Complaints Insight Officer who is responsible for oversight of complaints

performance across the council. We also appointed a Repairs Complaints Resolution Officer.

- 3.19 **Closing 'old' complaints in our system.** During summer 2024, we focussed our efforts on closing old complaints on the system. Customers were contacted and received full responses to their original complaint. This resulted in an above-average number of Stage 1 complaints escalated to Stage 2 in July and August.
- 3.20 **Improving our response times.** The Complaints Insight Officer produces weekly reports summarising overall performance, highlighting complaints that have been extended and those that are due to be responded to. In addition, there is a dedicated weekly Repairs Complaint Meeting where complaints are reviewed, and courses of action agreed upon. Service teams also receive a monthly performance report which highlights lessons learned, and information from this report is also shared with the relevant Executive Member.

4 Using Lessons Learned & Customer Satisfaction to Improve our Performance

- 4.1 During 2024-25, we have made progress to gain more insight from our complaints through reviewing lessons learned. We also introduced a satisfaction survey that is sent out by email following every Stage 1 and Stage 2 response.

Complaints Outcome	Landlord Services (%)	Council Services (%)
Upheld	72%	52%
Not Upheld	21%	29%
Not a Complaint	7%	19%

Landlord Services

- 4.2 Lessons Learned reported for complaints received show us that the key areas where improvement is needed relates to communications and customer services.
- 4.3 We have also introduced case reviews for Ombudsman cases that go to full investigation to help us understand where things might have gone wrong and to agree any actions for improvement. This insight has been used to develop a number of service improvement plans.
- 4.4 During 2024-25, satisfaction survey responses were received for 88 Stage 1 complaints and 29 Stage 2 complaints (117 responses in total).

	% of Customers Very or Fairly Satisfied
Satisfaction with Approach	25%
Satisfaction with Process	33%
Satisfaction with Staff	29%

Satisfaction we addressed all areas of the complaint	21%
Satisfaction with the complaint outcome	21%

4.5 The satisfaction rates are in line with the latest Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSM) survey, which indicates an overall satisfaction rate of 24% with our approach to handling complaints. This year, we are also using our TSM survey to ask some additional questions around complaints to gain further insight about our process.

4.6 **Lessons Learned Case Study:** We found a number of complaints where repairs works had not been finished as pre grounds maintenance works were needed, such as cut backing a hedge or removing ivy. We have introduced a new system whereby these cases are flagged as a priority for our grounds maintenance team to action.

Council Services

4.7 During 2024-25, satisfaction survey responses were received for 79 Stage 1 complaints and 21 Stage 2 complaints (100 responses in total).

	% of Customers Very or Fairly Satisfied
Satisfaction with Approach	41%
Satisfaction with Process	49%
Satisfaction with Staff	47%
Satisfaction we addressed all areas of the complaint	31%
Satisfaction with the complaint outcome	27%

4.8 Case Study: Following an increase in complaints about grass cutting during spring and summer 2024, we have worked collaboratively with our ground's maintenance contractor Krinkels to review the maintenance schedules. We have introduced a new zonal approach to maintenance to ensure all tasks such as grass cutting, strimming and blowing are completed in a specific zone before moving on to the next zone. So far this year, we have seen a reduction in the number of Stage 1 complaints by 67% and a reduction by 85% in June 2025, compared to June 2024.

5 Housing Ombudsman Self-Assessment

5.1 Each year, we are required to submit a self-assessment against the Housing Ombudsman to demonstrate our compliance against their Complaint Handling Code. Please refer to Attachment 1 for a copy of the updated self-assessment.

This will be submitted to the Housing Ombudsman by their deadline (30 September 2025).

6 Complaints Improvement Plan 2025-26

- 6.1 We have an Improvement Plan in place for 2025-26, with the overall objective of continuing to create a positive complaint handling culture across the organisation through:
 - 6.1.1 Continuous self-assessment against the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code.
 - 6.1.2 Reviewing the effectiveness of the current approach to corporate complaint reporting.
 - 6.1.3 Introduce monthly auditing of complaint responses.
 - 6.1.4 Enhance complaint lessons learned performance.
 - 6.1.5 Introduce regular reviews for complaints and Housing Ombudsman cases.
 - 6.1.6 Identify staff training requirements.
 - 6.1.7 Engage Resident's Panel on complaints process.
 - 6.1.8 Publish the Annual Complaints Performance and Improvement Report and ensure it is promoted internally.