

2025-26 ANNUAL COMPLAINTS PERFORMANCE AND IMPROVEMENT REPORT

1 Introduction from Members Responsible for Complaints

- 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 This report sets out our annual complaint's performance for 2025/26. It summarises the how many complaints we have received, what they were about, and how we have handled them.
- 1.3 This year, we have continued to improve our response performance as well as ensuring we are working in line with the Ombudsman Complaint Handling Codes.
- 1.4 However, we recognise there is still more we can do. This year, a key priority is to act on feedback and implement the recommendations from the Residents' Panel review of our complaint handling—particularly by improving the quality of our communication and ensuring customers understand what they can expect from us to put things right.

Cllr Max Holloway, Executive Member for Leisure & Community

Cllr Gemma Moore, Executive Member for Housing

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.

3 Our Performance

Landlord/Housing Services:

- 3.1 This year, we have seen an overall decrease in the number of Stage 1 complaints, with 852 complaints logged and investigated – this is a decrease of 5% compared to last year.

- 3.2 We have 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 Responsive repairs continues to be the main cause of complaint, with a high volume of repairs taking place across a housing stock of 8,745 social housing properties and 1,344 leasehold properties. The top three repair types complained about are plumbing (12%), damp and mould (7%) and heating and gas (6%).

Table 1: Total Number of Stage 1 Complaints Received about Housing Services

	2022/23	2023/24	2024-25	2025-26
Council housing planned works and safety	45	58	62	93
Council housing rents and arrears	10	4	5	11
Council housing repairs	393	467	736	623
Council housing tenancy matters	54	56	86	116
Leaseholders	4	3	0	3
Sheltered housing	3	2	1	6
Total Stage 1 Complaints	509	590	890	852

- 3.4 The key complaint reasons are broadly similar to the previous year, although there has been a slight increase in the number of complaints about staff and contractors acting inappropriately and the council refusing to provide a service as highlighted in the Table below.
- 3.5 Cases regarding behaviour of staff and contractors have been reviewed by the relevant line managers and discussions have taken place i.e. toolbox talks for contractors. Feedback was used to provide training for staff and contractors.

Table 2: Complaint Reasons

	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
A member of council staff (or any of our contractors or agents) behaving inappropriately	5.0%	2.7%	4%
Failure of council staff to follow the correct policy or procedure	9%	9.6%	9.4%
Incorrect or poor delivery of a service	72%	76%	73%
Refusal of the council to provide a service which it should be providing	14.0%	12%	13%

- 3.6 Since 2022-23, the escalation rate has steadily increased to 21% in 2025-26 with 175 Stage 2 complaints logged and investigated.
- 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.

Table 3: Percentage of Complaints Escalated to Stage 2

	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
Escalation Rate	9%	13%	18%	21%

Table 4: Total Number of Stage 2 Complaints Received about Housing Services

	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
Council housing planned works and safety	4	6	6	17
Council housing rents and arrears	2	0	0	3
Council housing responsive repairs	37	66	143	139
Council housing tenancy matters	3	7	7	23
Total Stage 2 Complaints	46	79	156	182

- 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 to 91% this year.

Table 5: Percentage of Complaints Responded to on Time

	Target	Stage 1: % in target	Stage 2: % in target
2022/23	95%	54%	64%
2023/24	95%	63%	56%
2024/25	95%	72%	75%
2025/26	95%	89%	91%

Council Services:

- 3.9 This year, we have seen an increase in the number of Stage 1 complaints, with 1,400 complaints logged and investigated – this is an increase of 16% 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. In the same period, we have emptied nearly 5 million bins.

Table 6: Total Number of Housing Complaints Received about Council Services

Service	2022/23	2023/24	2024-25	2025/26
Household waste and recycling	655	590	497	523
Grounds maintenance and trees	146	186	203	162
Housing benefit, rates and council tax	149	160	204	235

Parking and car parks	73	109	86	108
Homelessness and housing needs	54	57	39	72
Various services - community, licensing, estate and pests	33	44	166	182
Anti-social behaviour and noise nuisance	43	39	29	22
Flytipping, graffiti, clearance of rubbish	32	36	32	43
Customer service and communications	20	33	17	24
Planning services	29	30	17	20
Contracted and lease customers	24	24	5	5
Cemetery or funeral services	3	10	10	4
Total Stage 1 Complaints	1261	1318	1305	1400

Table 7: Complaint Reasons

	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
A member of council staff (or any of our contractors or agents) behaving inappropriately	5.5%	4.1%	2.9%
Failure of council staff to follow the correct policy or procedure	11.1%	11.3%	9.7%
Incorrect or poor delivery of a service	72.2%	70.1%	71.9%
Refusal of the council to provide a service which it should be providing	15.9%	13.6%	15.3%

3.12 Since 2022-23, the escalation rate has remained steady, with 152 Stage 2 complaints logged and investigated in 2025-26.

3.13 We also know an increase in complaints can help us identify where there may be more serious service issues.

3.14 As per the trend in Stage 1 complaints, most Stage 2 complaints relate to some of our most busy, frontline services, such as grounds maintenance, waste collection and household waste and recycling.

3.15 However, an unusually high proportion of stage 2 complaints relate to homelessness and housing needs. Following a review of the service, the majority of these complaints relate to a customer wanting their application to be reviewed. From this year, the council will implement the LGSCOs guidance that complaints will not need to be logged if a review or appeal of a decision is already underway and the outcome of this will be deemed the council's final position. This will also avoid any delay or confusion for the customer.

Table 8: Percentage of Complaints Escalated to Stage 2

	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
Escalation Rate	9%	8%	10%	11%

Table 9: Total Number of Stage 2 Complaints Received about Council Services

	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
Anti-social behaviour and noise nuisance	6	9	1	3

Cemetery or funeral services	12	6	1	1
Contracted and lease customers	11	10	1	0
Customer service and communications	7	11	1	1
Fly tipping, graffiti, clearance of rubbish	12	6	5	5
Grounds maintenance and trees	10	5	23	21
Homelessness and housing needs	6	5	9	23
Household waste and recycling	12	14	45	36
Housing benefit, rates and council tax	7	5	15	29
Parking and car parks	18	8	8	11
Planning services	8	10	6	5
Various services - community, licensing, estate and pests	7	10	16	17
Total Stage 2 Complaints	116	99	131	152

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.

Table 10: Percentage of Complaints Responded to on Time

	Target	Stage 1: % in target	Stage 2: % in target
2022/23	95%	84%	66%
2023/24	95%	82%	60%
2024/25	95%	83%	65%
2025/26	95%	84%	78%

4 Ombudsman Investigations

Landlord Services - Housing Ombudsman Cases:

- 4.1 The Housing Ombudsman will investigate complaints relating to landlord services, including property condition, tenancy matters, estate management, tenant behaviour, rents and service charges, and leasehold services.
- 4.2 Customers can contact the Housing Ombudsman at any point in the complaints process; however, typically they will only undertake a full investigation if a customer has completed our complaint process, and the issue(s) has still not been resolved.
- 4.3 The Housing Ombudsman can instruct landlords to take corrective action through orders, make recommendations and issue a formal notice (Complaint Handling Failure Order) where there is a significant failing.
- 4.4 The Housing Ombudsman's Annual Report is expected to be published later this year, however, they have written to us this summer as a landlord who has received more than 5 determinations in the year.
- 4.5 During 2025-26, the Housing Ombudsman has investigated 13 complaints, with determinations made on 11 of these (out of the other two, 1 was withdrawn

during the investigation process and the other deemed to be out of the Housing Ombudsman's jurisdiction). The comparison to previous year's performance is summarised in the table below.

Table 11: 2025-26 Housing Ombudsman Investigations

	Stage 1 Complaints	Stage 2 Complaints	Ombudsman Investigations (determinations received)	Maladministration Rate	% of complaint findings by the ombudsman compared to total number of Stage 1 Complaints
2022-23	509	46	4	89%	0.8%
2023-24	590	79	9	86%	1.5%
2024-25	890	156	5	90%	0.6%
2025-26	851	175	11	77%	1.3%

- 4.6 A detailed summary of the cases investigated during 2025-26 are summarised in Attachment 1.

Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman Cases

- 4.7 During 2025-26, the LGSCO received 48 escalated complaints to them. 16 of these were deemed ready to investigate, with 6 going to full investigation. This represents 3% of Stage 1 complaints received and 4% of Stage 2 complaints received.

Table 12: 2025-26 LGSCO Investigations

	Stage 1 Complaints	Stage 2 Complaints	Ombudsman Investigations (determinations received)	% of cases upheld	% of complaint findings by the Ombudsman compared to total number of Stage 1 Complaints
2022-23	1261	116	7	88%	0.6%
2023-24	1318	99	5	80%	0.4%
2024-25	1305	131	5	80%	0.4%
2025-26	1400	152	6	83%	0.4%

- 4.8 83% of cases were upheld. This is slightly higher than the average number of cases upheld in other councils of similar size (74%). The council has complied with 100% of Ombudsman orders, as well as achieving a 100% timely compliance rate (average of other similar organisations is 75%).

Table 13: 2025-26 LGSCO Investigations

	Number of Complaints Investigated	% of Complaints Upheld	Compliance with Ombudsman recommendations	Service Improvements Identified
2023-2024	4	80%	100%	3
2024-2025	5	80%	100%	2
2025-2026	6	83%	100% compliance rate 100% timely compliance rate	2

- 4.9 A detailed summary of the cases investigated during 2025-26 are summarised in Attachment 2, along with the LGSCOs annual report.

5 Using Lessons Learned & Customer Satisfaction to Improve our Performance

- 5.1 During 2025/26, we have continued to gain more insight from our complaints through reviewing lessons learned.

Table 14: Complaint Outcomes

Complaints Outcome	Landlord/Housing Services (%)	Council Services (%)
Upheld	68%	58%
Not Upheld	25%	31%
Not a Complaint	7%	11%

Housing/Landlord Services

- 5.2 Lessons Learned reported for complaints received show us that the key areas where improvement is needed relates to communication and customer services.
- 5.3 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. Case studies of Ombudsman findings have been presented to management meetings to support positive attitudes to learning from being honest about mistakes and good practice. This insight has been used to identify a number of actions for improvement, with some highlighted in the report.

- 5.4 During 2025/26, satisfaction survey responses were received for 130 Stage 1 complaints and 40 Stage 2 complaints (170 responses in total).

Table 15: Housing Services Complaint Satisfaction

	2024-25 % of Customers Very or Fairly Satisfied (117 Responses)	2025-26 % of Customers Very or Fairly Satisfied (170 Responses)
Satisfaction with Approach	25%	23%
Satisfaction with Process	33%	28%
Satisfaction with Staff	29%	29%
Satisfaction we addressed all areas of the complaint	21%	22%
Satisfaction with the complaint outcome	21%	17%

- 5.5 The transactional satisfaction rates (above) are in line with the annual Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSM) survey, which indicates an overall satisfaction rate of 24% with our approach to handling complaints. This is disappointing as is likely to put us in the bottom quartile nationally (based on Government published data for 2024/25, where the bottom quartile was satisfaction below 30%).
- 5.6 Areas for improvement across the whole housing service have been identified and form the new 'Housing Excellence Plan' which will drive improvements in all operational areas and is likely to reduce overall numbers of complaints in the future and improve satisfaction in our complaint handling. In addition, the recommendations made by the Residents' Panel on complaint handling will also be implemented during 2026-27 with the intention of further improving satisfaction.
- 5.7 **Lessons Learned Case Study:** A case review was undertaken following a Housing Ombudsman finding of maladministration. This provided a valuable opportunity to identify learning and strengthen our processes. The complaint highlighted issues relating to repair records not being accurately logged, unclear communication with the resident, concerns about staff conduct not being fully investigated or documented, and a Stage 2 complaint review that did not provide sufficient independent reassessment of the Stage 1 response. In response, targeted training has been delivered to staff to improve record keeping for both repairs and allegations relating to staff conduct. Additional guidance and training have also been provided to reinforce Stage 2 complaint review requirements, helping to ensure more robust investigations, clearer communication, and better outcomes for residents.

Council Services

- 5.8 During 2025/26, satisfaction survey responses were received for 222 Stage 1 complaints and 28 Stage 2 complaints (250 responses in total).

Table 16: Council Services Complaint Satisfaction

	% of Customers Very or Fairly Satisfied (100 Responses)	% of Customers Very or Fairly Satisfied (250 Responses)
Satisfaction with Approach	41%	34%
Satisfaction with Process	49%	42%
Satisfaction with Staff	47%	43%
Satisfaction we addressed all areas of the complaint	31%	31%
Satisfaction with the complaint outcome	27%	33%

- 5.9 **Lessons Learned Case Study:** We received a finding of no maladministration from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) in relation to a complaint that was investigated. While this was a positive outcome, we took the opportunity to review the case to identify both good practice and areas for further improvement. The review highlighted that staff had responded appropriately, working proactively with the complainant and offering a range of potential solutions to help resolve the issues raised. It also identified a valuable learning opportunity around the earlier use of our Unreasonably Persistent and Abusive Behaviour Policy. Introducing this policy sooner, where appropriate, could help manage expectations more effectively and reduce the risk of cases escalating unnecessarily. As a result, we have identified the need to raise awareness of the policy and provide additional training to ensure staff feel confident in applying it consistently and at the earliest appropriate stage. This will support fairer outcomes for residents while also helping to protect staff when requests cannot reasonably be progressed.

6 Complaints Improvement Plan

- 6.1 We have a Complaints Improvement Plan in place with the overall objective of continuing to create a positive complaint handling culture across the organisation. During 2025-26, the following actions were completed, with further actions identified for 26-27:
- 6.1.1 Continuous self-assessment against the Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code:

- a) The council submitted its self-assessment to the Housing Ombudsman in September 2025. Following this, the Housing Ombudsman's compliance team has undertaken a full review of the council's Complaints Policy and Complaints Self-Assessment and has deemed overall compliance, with only two minor clarification changes requested to the policy. These have been made, in consultation with the updated policy published on the website in April 2026.
- b) Officers have continued to review its performance against the code and will resubmit the self-assessment included in Appendix XX to the Housing Ombudsman in September 2026.
- c) In addition, the LGSCO will also be more closely considering complaints in line with their Complaint Handling Code from this year, and the council will continue to review its performance against this code.

6.1.2 Reviewing the effectiveness of the current approach to corporate complaint reporting.

- a) In addition to the monthly complaint KPI reporting in line with the council's Annual Business Plan, detailed monthly complaints reports are provided to Assistant Directors.

6.1.3 Engage Resident's Panel on complaints process.

- a) The Resident's Panel undertook a review of how well the council managed complaints in line with policies, as well as reviewing a sample of anonymised housing complaints to assess the quality of responses against the Housing Ombudsman's guidance on effective communication ensuring responses are timely, transparent, tailored and strike the right tone. Several recommendations were made, which are being actioned through the improvement plan.

6.1.4 Introduce monthly auditing of complaint responses.

- a) The council's Complaints Insight Officer will undertake a monthly audit of a sample of complaints across services. Any concerns regarding non-compliance with policy for example not including escalation or Ombudsman details, are highlighted to the investigating officer.

6.1.5 Enhance complaint lessons learned performance.

- a) Lessons learned are included within the detailed monthly complaints reports and a centralised tracker is used to monitor improvements made from lessons learned and case reviews.

6.1.6 Introduce regular reviews for complaints and Ombudsman cases.

- a) Ombudsman case reviews have been introduced to ensure determinations are being actioned in line with orders, as well as identifying areas for improvement to reduce repeated mistakes being made. The outcomes of the case reviews are shared at internal meetings, such as Officer Housing Boards and officer governance groups.

6.1.7 Identify staff training requirements.

- a) Service officers are encouraged to attend the relevant Ombudsman Complaint Handling training, as well as attending different in-house training sessions and briefings. Throughout summer 2026, officers involved in complaint handling are receiving in-house refresher training which includes feedback from Residents Panel as well as training on the new templates.

6.1.8 Publish the Annual Complaints Performance and Improvement Report and ensure it is promoted internally.

- a) The annual report, alongside other annual reports will continue to be published and promoted.