

Board/Committee:	Standards and Audit Sub-Board
Date of meeting:	19 September 2024
Title:	Housing Service annual complaints performance and service improvement report 2023/24
Author:	Head of Housing
Status:	For noting/ comment

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to present the

- Housing Services annual complaints performance and service improvement report for the period 01 April 2023 to 31 March 2024, in accordance with the Housing Service Complaints Policy and the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code.
- The annual Self-Assessment Form against the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code

Recommendation

That the Board considers the report and the learning from complaints across the Housing Service and notes the completed self- assessment form for scrutiny and challenge.

1.0 Background

- 1.1** The Housing Ombudsman is an executive, non-departmental public body, sponsored by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. Its role is to resolve disputes involving members of its Housing Ombudsman Scheme (the Scheme), including making awards of compensation or other remedies when appropriate, as well as to support effective landlord/ tenant dispute resolution by others, such as the Regulator for Social Housing.
- 1.2** All local authorities that are registered providers of social housing must be members of the Housing Ombudsman Scheme. A condition of the Scheme is that members must establish and maintain a complaints procedure in accordance with any good practice recommended by the Ombudsman, including its Complaint Handling Code (the Code).
- 1.3** This supports the Charter for Social Housing Residents requirement for landlords to be responsible and accountable for the management of complaints relating to landlord functions.
- 1.4** In October 2022, (updated 2024) the Housing Ombudsman Service published an updated Code, setting out how it expects social landlords to manage landlord specific complaints. The Code describes best practice, supports landlords in responding to complaints effectively and fairly, and using any learning from complaints to drive service improvements.

1.5 In order to comply with the Code, the Charter for Social Housing and the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023, it was necessary to change the original process for managing landlord specific complaints, and introduce a stand-alone Housing Service Complaints Policy that is separate from the Corporate approach to complaint handling.

1.6 The Housing Service Complaints Policy was formally approved at P and O Board and is published on the Council's website.

2.0 Report

2.1 Complaint self- assessment

2.2 The Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code is mandatory for member landlords. Completing a self-assessment against the Code forms part of the annual complaint performance and service improvement report as set out in section 8.1 of the Code.

2.3 The purpose of the self-assessment is to set out how landlords demonstrate their complaint handling complies with the provisions of the Code.

2.4 Completion of the self-assessment typically requires landlords to:

- Review current practices to identify any gaps or actions required to comply
- Take any necessary action to ensure that Code requirements are met
- Gather and document evidence to support the assessment of compliance
- Scrutinise and challenge the assessment, to provide assurance
- Publish the self-assessment and wider documentation
- Communicate and embed changes made through the self-assessment

2.5 A self-assessment form was completed and submitted to the Housing Ombudsman in June 2024, and is appended to the report (Appendix A)

2.6 Member landlords are required to make an annual submission to the Housing Ombudsman and must provide the following documents:

- The annual self-assessment against the Code
- An annual complaints performance and service improvement report
- A response from the governing body, and
- The complaints policy (Appendix B)

2.7 Annual complaints performance and service improvement report

2.8 The Housing Service is committed to providing an excellent service for its customers, but we know we don't always get it right. We recognise our

customers have a right to complain when they feel we have fallen short of their expectations.

- 2.9** As well as giving us the chance to put things right, complaints provide valuable feedback on our services that help us to continually improve what we do by identifying root causes, learning from complaints, making improvements and developing a positive complaint culture.
- 2.10** Prior to the introduction of the Housing Service Complaint Policy in April 2024, all complaints were dealt with by the Corporate Complaints team, and followed a three-stage escalation process. No analysis of complaints was formally undertaken or reported on.
- 2.11** In order to comply with the Complaint Handling Code, we have analysed all complaints about the Housing Service landlord function received during the period 01 April 23 to 31 March 24. There is no analysis from previous years to compare this with.
- 2.12** The following table provides a breakdown of the number of stage one, stage two and stage three complaints received by the Housing Service, and the percentage of complaints managed within the policy timescales.

Complaint stage	Number of complaints	Number of complaints responded to within timescale	% of complaints responded to within timescale
Stage one	49	45	92%
Stage two	7	6	86%
Stage three *	4	3	75%

*The Housing Service Complaints policy published in April 2024 introduced a two stage complaints process in line with the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code.

2.13 The Housing Ombudsman (HO) Cases

During the year 2023/24 the Council received three initial complaint enquiries from the HO, of which the HO investigated two.

Date	Complaint Issue	HO Outcome (brief overview)
17.07.2023	Handling of repairs/outstanding repairs.	HO instructed landlord to pay compensation, and continue with repairs until completion.
24.01.2024	Handling repairs/outstanding repairs	HO instructed landlord to pay compensation, and continue to engage tenant to complete repairs.
13.10.2023	Anti-Social Behaviour	Not Investigated: Tenant did not pursue following the

	stage3 response.
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- 2.14** 14% of stage one complaints were escalated to stage two. Most complaints were escalated because the customer disagreed with elements of the stage one response and there was merit in further investigation, or the stage one response was not answered fully.
- 2.15** Support is provided for managers investigating complaints as part of on-going work to improve the robustness of stage one complaint responses so that fewer complaints need to be escalated to stage two of the process. For quality assurance, all stage one responses are now reviewed by the Head of Housing to ensure compliance with the Complaint Handling Code.
- 2.16** The Housing Service Complaints Policy clearly sets out the complaint handling principles managers need to apply when investigating a complaint. The policy also provides guidance for managers in how to set out their response to ensure all points are addressed and appropriate remedies are considered.

3.0 Key themes

- 3.1** The larger proportion of stage one complaints relate to Property Services followed by Neighbourhood Operations:

Section	Number of complaints	% of complaints
Property Services	25	51%
Neighbourhood Operations	18	37%
Hostel	2	4%
Service Provider	4	8%
Total	49	100%

- 3.2** Of the 49 complaints received, 20 were upheld, 7 were partially upheld, and 22 were not upheld.
- 3.3** The main tenancy management complaints related to anti-social behaviour and noise nuisance whereas the main property condition complaints related to damp and mould, disabled adaptations and general property condition.

Complaint Theme	Number of complaints
Tenancy Management	14
Property Condition	9
Repair – Quality/ time taken	7
No response/poor communication	6
Staff conduct	5
Contractor issues	4

Repair – lack of action	4
Total	49

3.4 Initially 16 complaints were recorded as staff conduct, but further analysis showed that the cause of the complaint was more aligned with the complainant being unhappy with either the way a repair was dealt with or poor communication by officers, rather than staff misconduct.

4.0 Learning Points

4.1 The Housing Service treats every complaint as an opportunity to identify learning outcomes and improve service provision. Complaints are valuable, not only in identifying service improvements, but in improving tenant perception and satisfaction with the service as a whole.

4.2 Examples of some of the learning points and improvements made as a result of complaints during 2023/24 include:

- Raising staff awareness of appropriate communication and behaviours when dealing with tenants.
- Ensuring that all relevant parties are kept informed of progress on repairs and tenancy management matters.
- Ensuring staff and contractors maintain good record keeping.
- Ensuring our repairs and maintenance contractor understands that communication between tenants, housing staff and themselves is a priority.
- Wherever possible, the manager investigating the complaint will visit the complainant in their home to fully understand the issue.

5.0 Risk Assessment

5.1 The Housing Service wants the complaint process to be easily accessible for residents and does not view complaints as a negative. It is important to know when things go wrong so that we can put them right and learn from our mistakes. This approach enables us to continually improve what we do by identifying the root causes, learning from complaints, making improvements and developing a positive complaint culture.

5.2 The Housing Service will continue to refine how complaints are recorded, managed and analysed to fully understand root causes to improve tenant satisfaction.

6.0 Conclusion

6.1 The consistency of complaint reporting suggests that the complaints

process is working effectively, and that customers are able to make a complaint with ease.

- 6.2** This report and any comments from the Standards and Audit Sub-Board will be published on the Council's website and reported to the Housing Ombudsman.

Financial Services comments:	N/A
Legal Services comments:	N/A
Equality and Diversity:	An IIA was completed when the Housing Service Complaints policy was written.
Climate Change implications:	N/A
Crime and Disorder:	N/A
Corporate Plan:	BAU
Risk Assessment:	Contained within the report
Background Papers:	None
Appendices:	Appendix A - Self-assessment Appendix B – Housing Service Complaints Policy
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