

Governing bodies response to housing annual complaints report 2024-25

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Version: 1.0 (published)

Last updated: November 2025

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29 annual complaints report 2024-25 (ref 8)

The head of housing operations presented the report (ref 8) for the committee to note the recommendations. She informed the committee there was a reduction in stage 1 complaints with an increase in stage 2. This was due to the promotion by housing and the housing ombudsman who recently introduced a complaint handling code to encourage the move towards stage 2 complaints.

There had also been an increase in service complaint requests which had not been seen before and now reclassified and require authorisation from managers to ensure none are missed and recorded accurately.

In terms of performance, the number of complaints answered on time increased however, calls answered late had decreased and the overall performance at the end of the year was lower for this financial year and regarded as a good rating.

A lot of time was spent on complaint reporting and a complaints handling group set up with representation from all of housing and meets fortnightly to review complaints received.

The main themes areas for complaints were around delay in providing a service, failure to provide a service and lack of contact or not returning contact which were standard categories on the caseworker system where complaints are logged. There was also some staffing issues during the year related to that feedback.

Governing bodies response - November 2025

The figures in the report do not include member enquiries received outside the caseworker system of which there were many and acknowledge the need to work better in responding to those on time and included in the work of the complaints handling group. 126 freedom of information requests (FOI) were received which was slightly lower than the previous year.

For complaints completed on time the percentage increased during the year which was positive, and the service also received 60 complements related to sheltered housing events and staff behaviour. 9 complaints were escalated to the housing ombudsman with 8 incurring a financial penalty the largest being £4,855.

There was a need to have a compensation policy in place which was a requirement from the housing ombudsman. The total number of financial penalties incurred during the year amounted to £10,605 with the largest compensation payments relating to repair works such as damp and mould.

Work had already started on many of the recommendations in the report and mandatory training for complaint handlers is being provided by the Customer Service Complaints team with additional resource for a dedicated housing complaints officer.

The complaints handling code had been implemented leading to more robustness on defining complaints of those received at the request of services. Issues with staffing had improved with recruitment underway to fill the vacant posts remaining and a further review of staffing being conducted within the service where low staff numbers were identified.

Housing Service training is provided to members via Business and Member Support services to be rolled out during the year with training focused on identifying areas of challenge from member enquiries.

The annual report is a requirement of the Housing Ombudsman and regulator for social housing.

Comments from the governing body

Councillor Franks commented on paragraph 8 in the report on the number of FOI requests which showed a small reduction and contradicted the figure in paragraph 9 where the overall number had increased and asked which was correct and who was responsible for the recommendations in paragraph 13.

The officer agreed to provide a written response to the Councillor Franks and did not have the information to hand. In relation to the recommendations in the report the head of housing operations replied those were because of failings identified by management.

Councillor Bridgen commented on the maladministration cases and asked whether a recourse analysis was conducted and were the 5 Whys used. He further asked whether training had been identified by the recourse analysis or by something else systemic.

the head of housing operations replied that maladministration cases were reviewed individually due to each being slightly different, there was one serious case with one last year relating to Building Technical Services (BTS) with the ombudsman required to come back and do a detailed response on what was required on failure identified.

A report is then produced with an action plan on what needs to be addressed to ensure the correct officers are deployed to the service area with the ombudsman having oversight to ensure delivery. There was also a lack training among staff due on the handling of complaints evident in housing and on the corporate complaint side identified by the ombudsman on the serious cases from last year.

The customer service complaints officer further added that complaint handling training was now introduced across the council resulting in 61% of staff trained and looking to make a recommendation for training to be carried out annually as a refresher.

Work had also started on the caseworker system to develop the recording functionality on lessons learnt for outcomes to be recorded on actions and other development requirements recommended by the housing ombudsman and regulatory housing office.

Councillor Fry commented the achievements made on stage 1 and 2 complaints and asked why stage 2 complaints had increased. The Head of Housing Operations replied that the increase was due to promoting and encouraging people to make complaints. More resources had been put into this with stage 2 being the review stage and provides the opportunity for an independent look.

Most stage 2 complaints were upheld and provides confidence of robustness in the process.

Councillor Begum asked how gaps in areas such as English not being the first language and those with a speech impairment were being addressed.

The Officer acknowledged it was a challenging area and was meeting with the caseworker provider to look at the EDI impact which was also being looked at by adult social care. In the meantime, a variety of different methods were in place for complaints to be made such as the web, by phone, in person and through advocates on their behalf.

Members were encouraged to provide complaint feedback from the community. Councillor Begum further added many councillors were not comfortable logging complaints in caseworker and was why many complaints were received via email. The officer replied that complaints logged on caseworker was the council's preference, and the Customer Service Complaints Team would support any councillor that required further training on caseworker.

Councillor Roche, the Executive Lead reiterated that members need to get accustomed to using the caseworker system to register complaints rather than sending emails which were more difficult to log and for officers to decide how to handle the request.

Resolved: That the Overview and Scrutiny Board noted the recommendations set out at paragraph 13 in the report (Ref 8).