

Complaints annual performance and service development report **2023/24**

Response from Cabinet Member for Housing Operations, Councillor Andy Frampton

As a council we welcome feedback and complaints from our residents. We recognise how important it is to have positive approach towards dealing with complaints. We strive to act effectively to resolve issues, implement learning and to prevent reoccurrences. We also know how important it is to put things right when our service has not been up to customers' expectations.

The introduction of the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code has provided the opportunity for us to review how we are dealing with complaints. We have made improvements in our service to meet statutory obligations and customer expectations. We have committed to review how we manage the customer journey to ensure the fairness, effectiveness and timeliness of our complaint handling.

As Cabinet member responsible for Housing, I have scrutinised and challenged the self-assessment to make sure it is a true reflection of our complaint handling. The required improvements are highlighted in the report and have been transferred into an improvement plan. This plan will be closely monitored and reviewed to ensure residents receive the best possible service.

Introduction

The report is written in the context of obligations under the Housing Ombudsman new Complaint Handling Code (the Code) and the Social Housing Regulator which both came into effect from April 2024.

This report relates to complaints received regarding Southampton City Council's (SCC) Housing Services between April 2023 – March 2024. Complaints data includes complaints from or relating to council properties and tenants and also those complaints received regarding Allocations, Homelessness, City Telecare, and Leaseholder services which are not under the jurisdiction of the Housing Ombudsman and may not have been submitted by Southampton City Council housing tenants or regarding SCC properties.

Under section 8.1 of the Code, the Council in its role as a social housing landlord must produce an 'Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report' for scrutiny and challenge, which must include:

- a. an annual self-assessment against the Housing Ombudsman Code to ensure our complaint handling policy remains in line with their requirements. A self-assessment of our adherence to the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code can be found [here](#).
- b. a qualitative and quantitative analysis of our complaint handling performance, which must include a summary of the types of complaints we have refused to accept.
- c. any findings of non-compliance with the Code by the Ombudsman.
- d. the service improvements made as a result of the learning from complaints.

- e. any annual report about the landlord’s performance from the Ombudsman; and
- f. any other relevant reports or publications produced by the Ombudsman in relation to the work of the landlord. In addition, section 8.2 of the Code states that the annual complaints performance and service improvement report must be reported to the landlord’s governing body (or equivalent) and published on the on the section of its website relating to complaints. The governing body’s response to the report must be published alongside this.

Accessibility

Customers can access the complaints service across multiple channels including:

- Online at [How to make a complaint \(southampton.gov.uk\)](https://www.southampton.gov.uk/how-to-make-a-complaint)
- By telephone to a Local Housing Office on 023 8083 3006
- In person by talking to a member of staff at any of our Council venues
- In writing to their Local Housing Office. Addresses can be found [online](#)
- By email via mytenancy@southampton.gov.uk

Social media should not be used to make a complaint. If a customer makes contact to complain in person, or by phone, they will be directed to either complete the complaints online form or a member of staff will offer to complete the complaints online form on their behalf. This is to ensure that there is a full audit trail of information captured to allow the Council to follow the Complaints Procedure, to conduct a thorough investigation and to provide a full response to the complainant.

Self-assessment

A self-assessment against the Code is available on our [website](#). Below is a summary of the self-assessment findings:

Housing Ombudsman Code	Self-Assessment Score	Gaps Identified
Section 1 – Definition of a complaint	Compliant	1.6 underway
Section 2 – Exclusions	Compliant	
Section 3 – Accessibility and Awareness	Compliant	3.2 underway, 3.3 underway
Section 4 – Complaint Handling Staff	Compliant	
Section 5 – The Complaint Handling Process	Non-compliant	5.6, 5.7 A resource need has been identified and a plan is in place to fill this need
Section 6 – Complaints Stage 1 & Stage 2	Non-compliant	6.12 work needs to be planned
Section 7 – Putting things right	Compliant	
Section 8 – Self assessment, reporting and compliance	Non-compliant	8.1 underway, 8.2 planned on completion of 8.2 (completion by end Quarter 2 2024/25)

Section 9 – Scrutiny & oversight	Compliant	
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The areas of non-compliance are being addressed.

Summary of complaint volumes and outcomes

The Council has a two-stage complaint system. This is aligned with the Housing Ombudsman requirements.

Important: The data and table below have been produced from internal quarterly reports and represents all complaints received within each of these quarters and their current position within the complaints process at the end of each quarter. In the future, we would look to run a report over the whole reporting year to ensure closer accuracy.

- **Stage 1**
 - Complaint volume – 329 received
 - 66.2% of closed complaints resolved within 20 working days which was the corporate response timescale at the time (the service was working towards the Housing Ombudsman’s Complaint Handling Code which became statutory from April 2024 which has a response target of 10 working days. Between April 2023 and March 2024 53.9% of closed complaints were responded to within 10 working days).
 - 33.5% not upheld
 - 13.9% partially upheld
 - 46.9% upheld
 - 5.6% unclear outcome
 - There were no complaints refused

- **Escalated to Stage 2**
 - Complaint volume – 68 received (20% of Stage 1 complaints received)
 - 100% resolved within 20 working day target (or within agreed time extension)
 - 58.8% not upheld
 - 5.8% partially upheld
 - 26.4% upheld
 - 2 complaints were withdrawn and 4 had no further action

What does it mean?

Not upheld - No service failures were identified

Partially upheld – some service failures were identified

Upheld – we got it wrong and will learn from it

Complaint by department

Stage 1 complaints received often contain more than one reason for the complaint. The highest number of complaints are for the following reasons:

- 70.2% of complaints were about Housing Operations including repairs:

- 19.1% of complaints mention wait time for repair appointment
- 14.5% of complaints mention multiple appointments required to complete repairs
- 9.4% of complaints mention standard of repair
- 19.4% of complaints were about Housing Management including Local Housing Offices:
 - 4.2% of complaints mention cleanliness of communal areas
 - 4.2% of complaints mention antisocial behaviour
 - 2.7% of complaints mention neighbourhood conditions
- 4.5% of complaints were about Allocations
- The remainder of the complaints were regarding other areas of the business such as Homelessness, Shared Ownership, Leasehold & Right To Buy, and Customer Payments & Debt.

Complaints progressed to Stage 2 according to department:

- Housing repairs = 18 complaints
- Housing Investment/ Ops (Local Housing Office or tenancy related) = 15 complaints
- Housing Allocations = 23 complaints
- Leaseholders = 8 complaints
- Supported Housing = 3 complaints
- Homelessness = 1 complaints

Complaints escalated to the Housing Ombudsman Service

The Council signposts tenants to the Housing Ombudsman Service if they are still unhappy after the Stage 2 response. The latest Housing Ombudsman annual report (2023/24) can be found. [here](#).

The Council is not notified of the number of complaints referred to the Housing Ombudsman versus those they decide to investigate.

- Our figures for 2023-24 identify five proceeded to full investigation.
- Our maladministration rate is 76%. This compares to a Local Authority average of 78%
- Three of the complaints were upheld:
 - One case related to noise / anti-social behaviour reported by one tenant against another. An order for £300 compensation was agreed together with an undertaking to apologise and review our guidance and training for officers on record keeping around the analysis of noise recordings and on ensuring it has proper regard to its ASB powers when it receives complaints (disconnect between housing services and noise nuisance services identified).
 - A second case related to damp and mould and delays remedying that. A total of £2,857.70 compensation was payable in that case, together with orders to rectify the condition of the property.

The remaining case related to a failure in a heating system with £450 compensation and repairs ordered.

Learning from complaints

Complaints are a valuable source of information that help us as identify underlying problems and potential improvements. The number of complaints alone do not tell everything about the attitude towards complaints internally, or how the complaint journey is perceived by the customer. With this in mind, we want to learn from the impact complaints, and their responses, have on people, which allows us to learn practical lessons, make changes and improve the experience for others. Lessons can usually be learned from complaints that were upheld or, in some instances, where no fault was found but the Council recognises that improvements to services can be made.

Service improvements made so far

- Review of our complaints policy in line with Housing Ombudsman requirements and trained managers dealing with complaints in the new obligations. The new complaints policy was published online.
- Self-assessment undertaken to identify gaps in service and an action plan developed to address these gaps.
- A suite of templates uploaded to intranet for staff to use to ensure consistency of response.
- Improved complaints information on the Housing webpages to include performance data and information about the Housing Ombudsman and how to make a complaint.
- Development of a communication plan focused on informing tenants about their right to complain with the aim of empowering residents to feel that their voice will be heard and helping us to learn and improve from complaints.

Improvement Plans 2024/25

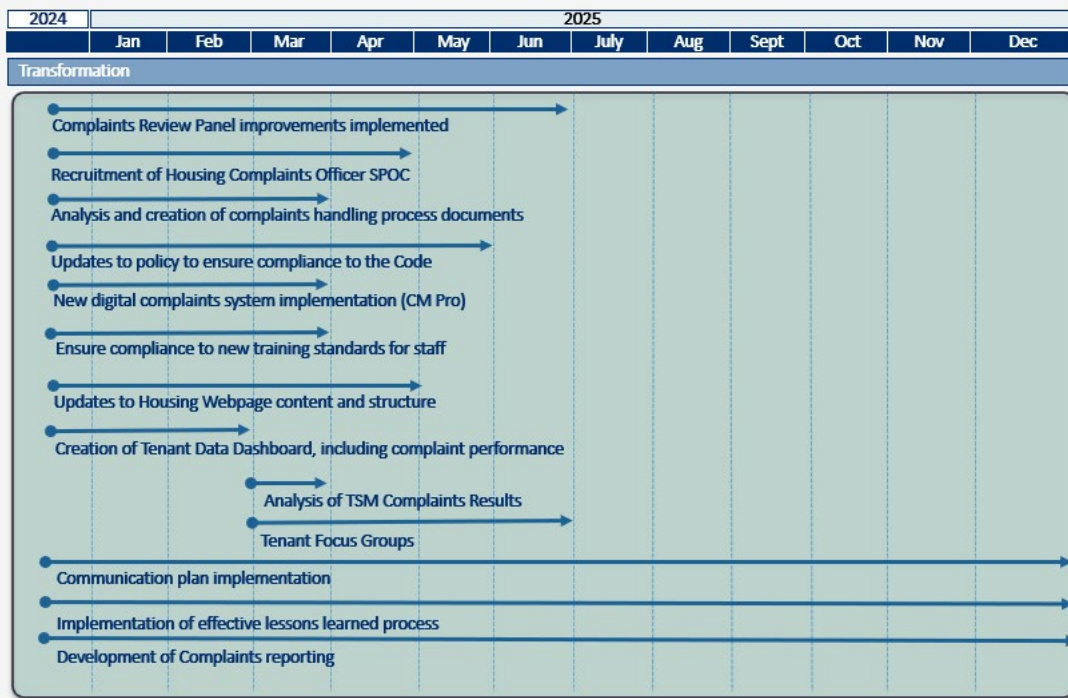
Learning identified from complaints:

- Refresh staff training with an emphasis on the difference between a service request rather than a complaint
- Improve internal process of dealing with complaints when a complaint is regarding a council property but the area of complaint is outside of the Housing department

To ensure compliance with the Housing Ombudsman code:

- Improve our complaint response within 10 working days
- Improve communication to the complainant if an investigation will take longer than 10 working days to complete and an extension would be needed
- All Housing staff to complete complaints e-learning training
- Improve coordination of complaint responses when the complaint spans multiple council departments

Complaints Management Board: Improvement Plan



adapt | grow | thrive



Identified from self-assessment:

- Creation of a bi-monthly Complaints Review Panel for officers from all areas of Housing, Service Centre and Legal Services to share learning from Upheld Stage 2 complaint outcomes and Housing Ombudsman reports including compilation of a learning log to record improvements made as a result
- Identification of the need for a new role to act as a Single Point of Contact for Housing complaints resultant on successful funding allocation
- Refine process for Stage 1 complaint handling – self-assessment highlighted areas we need to improve on.
- Ensuring all Housing staff have easy access on the intranet to all the information they need when investigating and responding to complaints
- Improved benchmarking with comparator landlords
- A plan to highlight to our customers how they can make a complaint and what they can expect when they do
- Develop how we can include customers’ voices in our complaints reporting
- Work needs to be done to identify if we have any access needs to enable people to make a complaint if they need to. Do we have ‘hard to reach’ groups that are not empowered to make a complaint?