

Annual Complaint Handling and Service Improvement Report 2025/26

1. Cabinet Member's Introduction

Over the past year, we have continued to strengthen the way we handle complaints, building on the progress recognised by the Regulator of Social Housing during its 2024 inspection. Our aim is straightforward: every resident should feel listened to, treated with respect and confident that their concerns will be considered fairly and responded to as quickly as possible.

This year, we received fewer Stage One complaints than last year. While that is encouraging, complaint numbers on their own do not tell us whether a service is performing well. Across the housing sector, some of the best-performing landlords receive large numbers of complaints because residents have confidence in the process and know they will be heard. Equally, fewer complaints do not automatically mean a better service. What matters is understanding why people complain, responding well when they do and using what we learn, to improve.

One area where we have made real progress is in responding more promptly. Many more residents are now receiving a response to their complaint within the Housing Ombudsman's expected timescales. That reflects the work that has gone into improving our systems, strengthening oversight and supporting staff to resolve issues more effectively.

We have, however, also seen more complaints progress to Stage Two. Last year, we introduced a new complaints system that is easier for residents to use, and it is possible that making the process simpler has contributed to more people asking for a review. Equally, we are considering whether there is more we can do to resolve concerns successfully at the first stage. We are examining this trend carefully so that we fully understand what is driving it and can take any action needed.

One of the clearest messages from this year's complaints is that communication matters. Delays remain the biggest cause of dissatisfaction, but the report also shows that residents are often frustrated when they are not kept informed or do not know what will happen next. Sometimes, putting things right is about improving the service itself; sometimes it is about keeping people updated honestly and consistently throughout the process.

This report explains what residents have told us over the past year, what we have learned from their experiences and, most importantly, what we are doing differently as a result. Complaints are not simply a measure of performance—they are one of the most valuable ways we can understand where services need to improve. We remain committed to listening, learning and making those improvements.

Finally, I would like to thank every resident who has taken the time to tell us about their experience. Whether positive or negative, your feedback helps us improve the services we provide and better meet the needs of Stevenage people.

Councillor Loraine Rossati
Cabinet Member – Housing (Member responsible for Complaints)

2. Purpose of this report

This report provides an overview of how the Council Housing Service as a social landlord has managed complaints during the period April 2025 to March 2026, and the improvements made to services as a result of complaint findings. It supports transparency, accountability and the continuous development of our housing services in line with regulatory expectations and resident feedback. We value customer insight and view complaints as an essential part of understanding where services need to improve.

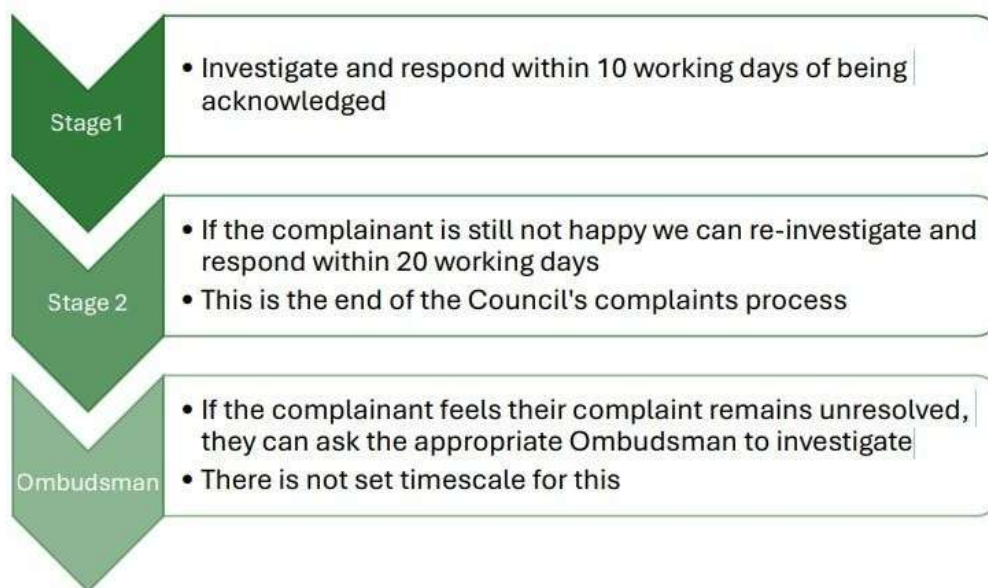
The Housing Ombudsman Service oversees complaints about social housing organisations and regulates dispute resolution for social landlords. It requires us to publish an annual Complaint Handling and Service Improvement Report and to complete an Annual Self-Assessment against its Complaint Handling Code. The findings from this Self-Assessment continue to inform our Complaints Policy and shape our approach to complaint handling, ensuring we remain aligned with sector expectations and resident needs.

This report and its supporting documents will be submitted to the Housing Ombudsman and made available to our tenants as required, alongside any annual reports issued by the Ombudsman relating to our performance as a landlord.

We remain committed to providing excellent customer service and welcome this opportunity to update our tenants, leaseholders and residents on how we have complied with the Complaint Handling Code, and to set out the actions we are taking to improve services based on the complaints we receive.

3. How the Council considers complaints

We operate a two-stage investigation process, with the option for residents to refer their complaint to the Ombudsman if they remain dissatisfied. Our Complaints Policy sets out how we consider, investigate and respond to complaints.



Two Ombudsmen oversee different aspects of our housing-related complaints:

- **Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS)**– covering complaints about our landlord functions, such as repairs, maintenance, estate services, and rent or service charges.
- **Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO)**– covering complaints about our non-landlord housing functions, including homelessness decisions, housing allocations and waiting lists.

The Housing Ombudsman's *Complaint Handling Code*, developed jointly with the LGSCO to ensure consistency across housing and related services, became statutory on 1 April 2024. We have reviewed and updated our Complaints Policy to ensure full alignment with the Code and recognised best practice.

4. Complaint Volumes and Trends

4.1. Total Complaints Received

As shown in Fig 1 and 2 below, we received a total of 597 Stage One complaints in 2025/26, representing a 13% reduction compared with the previous year's total of 688. Of these, 137 complaints were escalated to Stage Two, equating to just under 23% of all Stage One complaints.

During 2025/26, we received 75.85 Stage One complaints and 17.41 Stage Two complaints per 1,000 homes. Housemark benchmarking indicates that these rates are above the national median figures of 54.0 and 10.6 respectively, and the most recent published data for other Hertfordshire Council landlords had levels of between 43 and 101, and 8 to 18 respectively.

Sector research suggests that complaint volumes should not necessarily be associated with poor performance, and the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code makes clear that a high volume of complaints should not be viewed negatively in isolation. Complaint volumes have continued to increase across the sector during the year, which has been attributed in

part to growing resident awareness of, and confidence in, complaints procedures as a means of seeking redress.

Whilst not considered a significant concern at this stage, the increase in complaints escalating to Stage Two from 12% in 2024/25 to 23% in 2025/26 warrants further investigation to ensure there are no underlying issues in Stage One complaint handling. The increase provides some assurance that residents are aware of their right to request a review and can access the escalation process without unnecessary barriers. However, further analysis will be undertaken during 2026/27 to fully understand the drivers behind this increase. This review will consider to what extent escalations are primarily the result of residents exercising their right to an independent review, and what improvements are required in the quality and effectiveness of our Stage One complaint responses. Findings will be used to identify learning opportunities and support our aim of maintaining an appropriate level of escalations in the year ahead.

Fig 1 - Complaint Volumes 2025/26

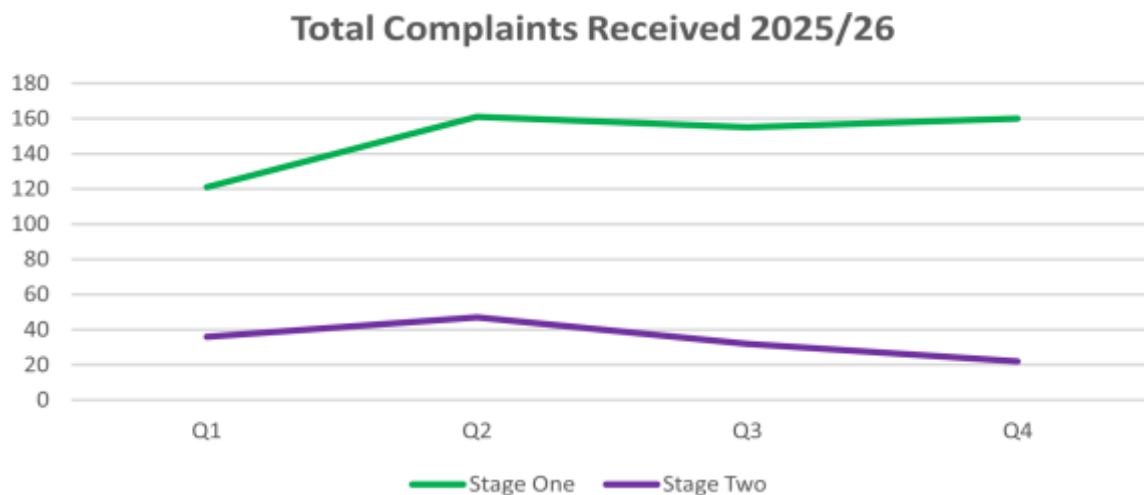
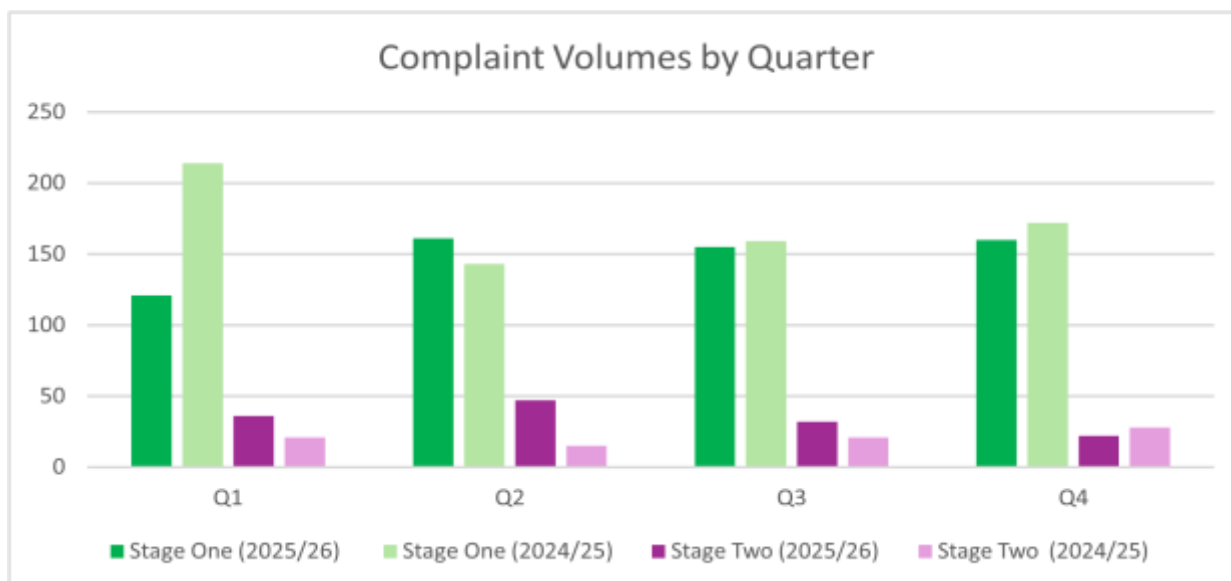


Fig 2 - Complaint Volumes 2025/26 vs 2024/25

Whilst Stage Two complaint volumes increased this year, they remained relatively steady across all four quarters, reflecting the stable pattern seen in previous years. Notably, Stage One complaint volumes were far more consistent than in the past. This improvement aligns with the work we have undertaken to strengthen our Repairs Service, including bringing in new contractors and introducing revised Contractor Standards. These changes were designed to improve the quality and timeliness of repairs, and it is encouraging to see this greater preparedness for seasonal demand now reflected in our complaint trends for the first time.



4.2 Timeliness and Performance

Fig 3 – Proportion of Complaints Responded to Within Timescale

Stage	2025/26	2024/25	Change
Stage 1	98.16%	94.62%	+3.54%
Stage 2	94.16%	81.18 %	+12.98%

As shown in Fig 3, performance against the timescales set out in the Complaint Handling Code has continued to improve across both stages when compared with the previous year.

For Stage One complaints, 98.16% were responded to within the required timescales in 2025/26, an increase of 3.54 percentage points from 94.62% in 2024/25. This reflects sustained high performance and demonstrates that early-stage complaint handling processes are operating consistently and effectively. This performance also compares favourably with the latest Housemark benchmarking median of 94.3% and against other Hertfordshire landlords all achieving levels for Stage One of below 86%, and 77% for Stage Two responses.

Stage Two performance has also shown marked improvement. In 2025/26, 94.16% of Stage Two complaints were responded to within timescale, compared with 81.18% in 2024/25—an increase of 12.98 percentage points. This represents significant progress in an area that has historically been more operationally challenging. Whilst slightly below the Housemark median of 95.9%, with Hertfordshire levels all being below 77% the improvement achieved during the year has significantly narrowed the gap to sector performance.

This improvement reflects a more structured and disciplined approach to complaint handling, supported by strengthened governance and increased accountability. In particular, Complaints Clinics, which brings senior management together to review and drive improvements, has

continued to play an important role in reinforcing expectations, sharing learning and maintaining oversight.

What is the Housing Complaints Clinic?

The Housing Complaints Clinic is a monthly governance forum that reviews housing complaints performance and drives service improvement. It brings together the Cabinet Member for Housing and Complaints, senior managers, service leads and representatives from the Strategic Complaints Management team to review complaint volumes, response time compliance, Ombudsman decisions, emerging themes and lessons learned. This mix of political, strategic and operational oversight provides constructive challenge and accountability, helping to ensure that complaints insights are translated into tangible service improvements and monitored through to completion.

Whilst Stage One performance has remained consistently strong, improvements at Stage Two have been driven by clearer ownership and a revised approach at senior level. As Stage Two investigations are undertaken by Heads of Service, it was recognised that sufficient time needed to be allocated to carry out thorough investigations and provide comprehensive responses to residents. Review of performance throughout the year identified that the time required to undertake robust investigations and prepare detailed responses had, on occasion, been underestimated. This learning was reinforced through the Housing Complaints Clinic and embedded within service areas, contributing to improved performance and a higher proportion of Stage Two responses being issued within timescale.

As a result, Heads of Service have adopted a more considered approach, dedicating appropriate time to Stage Two investigations. This has contributed to a steady improvement in timeliness across the year, rising from 86% of complaints responded to within timescale in Q1 to full compliance in Q4. This reflects the positive impact of strengthened oversight and a greater focus on undertaking thorough investigations and preparing comprehensive responses.

Overall, performance in 2025/26 demonstrates a more consistent and responsive approach to complaint handling. Stage One continues to perform at a very high level and above sector benchmarks, while targeted interventions at Stage Two are delivering measurable improvements and bringing performance closer to the sector median despite the complexity of these cases.

Fig 4 – Stage One Complaints responded to within Complaints Handling Code timescales (2025/26)

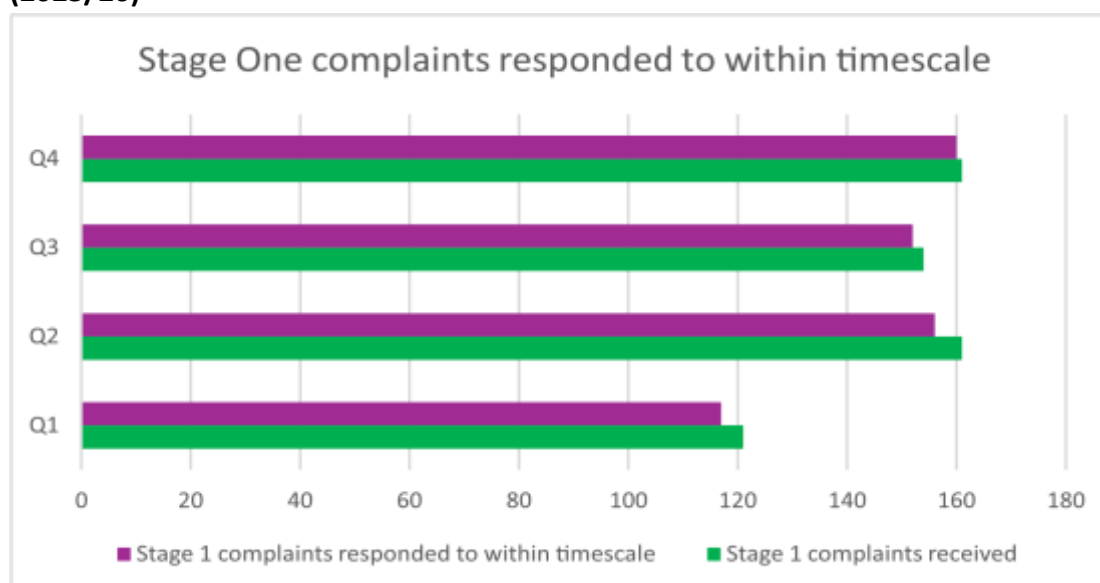
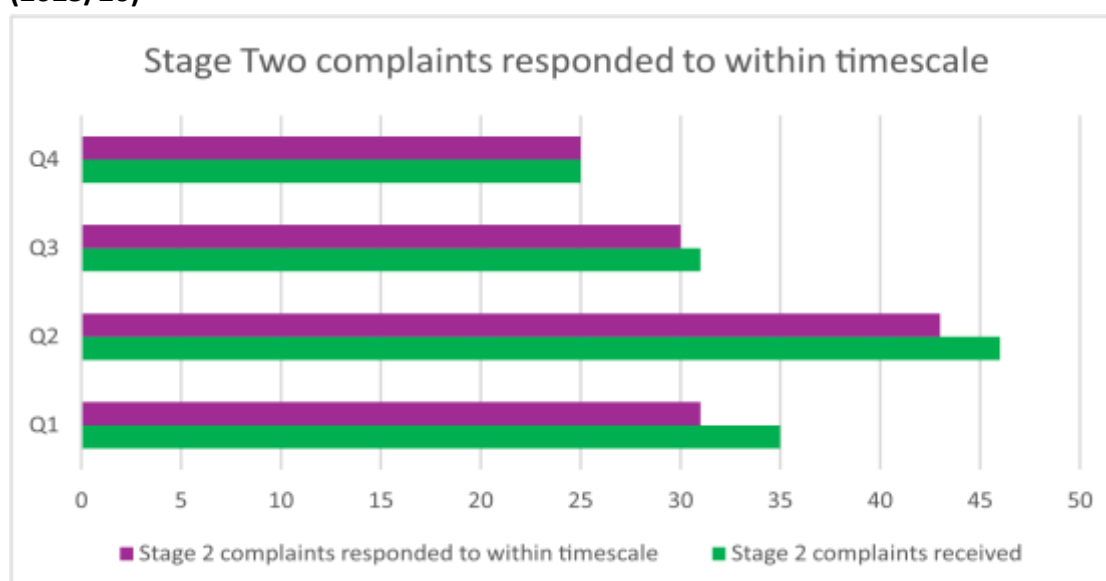


Fig 5 – Stage Two Complaints responded to within Complaints Handling Code timescales (2025/26)



4.3 Complaints by Service Area

As shown in Fig 6 and 7, complaints relating to Repairs continue to account for the largest proportion of cases at both Stage One and Stage Two, representing around half of all complaints received. To provide context, over 25,000 repairs are raised by service users each financial year. Although repairs generate the largest volume of complaints, only 1.7% of repairs raised during the year resulted in a complaint.

Housing Management and Asset Management make up the next largest shares, with broadly similar proportions across both stages, while Building Safety consistently represents the smallest volume of complaints.

Despite variation in complaint volumes, performance in responding within target timescales remains strong across most service areas. At Stage One, timeliness ranges from 97% to 99%, while Stage Two performance ranges from 88% to 100%. Although all service areas have maintained generally high levels of compliance, Repairs recorded the lowest Stage Two timeliness performance at 88%, reflecting the operational complexity and higher volume of complaints managed by the service.

The prominence of repairs-related complaints is consistent with national trends. The Housing Ombudsman continues to identify repairs and property condition as the most common source of complaints across the social housing sector, particularly amongst local authority landlords and medium-sized housing providers. Given the scale of repair activity undertaken each year, it is unsurprising that Repairs generates the highest volume of complaints. Nonetheless, the persistence of complaint volumes and the increase in Stage Two escalations indicate that further improvement is required.

Analysis of complaints data, learning from complaint investigations, and qualitative feedback gathered through the Tenant Perception Survey and Complaint Satisfaction Survey highlights recurring themes relating to delayed repair completion, multiple visits to resolve the same issue, poor communication, and residents needing to chase for updates. Whilst communication is often cited as the presenting issue, complaint investigations frequently identify that the root cause is a repair not being resolved at the first opportunity. Where additional visits are required, residents are more likely to experience uncertainty around appointments, seek updates on progress, and make repeated contact with services or the call centre. Achieving good first-time fix rates therefore remains a key priority, as resolving repairs correctly at the earliest opportunity has the potential to reduce customer effort, minimise avoidable contact, improve satisfaction levels, and reduce the likelihood of complaints escalating through the complaints process.

The Repairs Improvement Programme has been designed to address these underlying causes by strengthening record keeping, improving communication with residents, making better use of customer vulnerability information, and reducing avoidable delays within the repairs process. Alongside these improvements, there is a focus on improved scheduling, and ensuring operatives have the information, skills and materials required to resolve issues during the initial visit wherever possible. Over time, these improvements are expected to enhance the customer experience, reduce complaint volumes, and decrease the number of complaints requiring escalation to Stage Two.

It is also important to recognise the wider operating environment in which the Repairs Service is currently working. The introduction of Awaab's Law and the increased focus on responding to damp and mould cases within prescribed timescales have placed significant additional demands on housing providers across the sector. While this is a positive and necessary development for residents, it has inevitably increased pressure on repairs resources and

service capacity. This contextual factor is particularly relevant when considering complaint handling performance, as Repairs manages approximately half of all complaints received by the organisation whilst also responding to a substantially higher volume of service requests than any other department.

Whilst improvements to the underlying service remain the primary priority, it is equally important that complaint-handling arrangements within Repairs remain appropriately resourced to manage current demand. The Stage Two response rate of 88% should therefore be viewed in the context of both the significantly higher volume of complaints managed by the service and the evolving legislative and regulatory requirements being placed upon it. Continued management oversight, resource planning and service improvement activity will be required to maintain performance, improve the customer experience and reduce the demand that drives complaints in the first place. As service improvements begin to take effect, particularly through increased first-time fix rates and reduced repeat visits, we would expect both complaint volumes and escalation rates to reduce, creating further opportunities to improve complaint-handling performance.

Fig 7 – Stage One Complaints by service area and response timeliness (%) (2025/26)

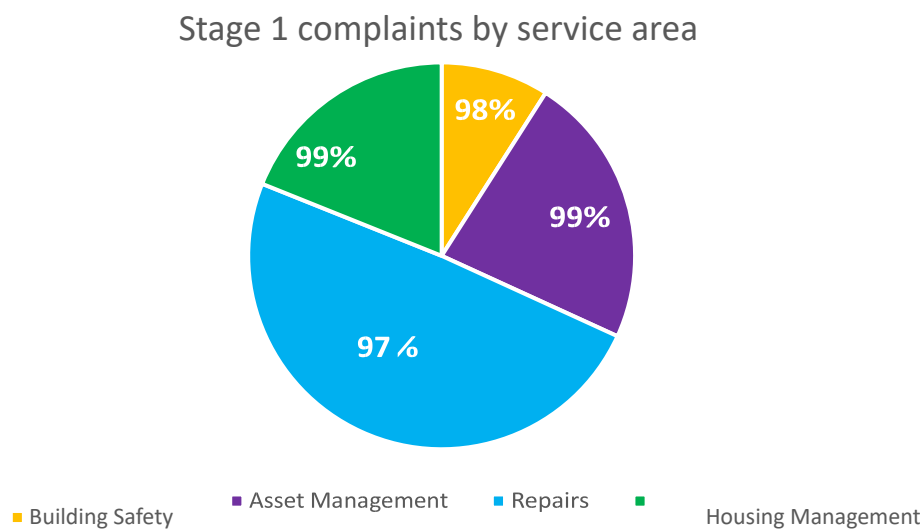


Fig 8 – Stage Two Complaints by service area and response timeliness (%) (2025/26)



4.4 Complaint Outcomes

As shown in Figures 9, 10 and 11, the majority of complaints at both Stage One and Stage Two were either upheld or partially upheld, demonstrating the Council's commitment to recognising where service standards have not been met and taking action to address identified shortcomings. In 2025/26, 76.0% of Stage One complaints and 69.4% of Stage Two complaints were upheld or partially upheld. Compared with the previous year, the proportion of Stage One complaints upheld or partially upheld increased modestly from 70.4% to 76.0%, whilst the overall proportion of Stage Two complaints upheld or partially upheld reduced slightly from 71.8% to 69.4%. Despite this small decrease at Stage Two, the figures continue to demonstrate a positive complaints culture in which concerns are investigated thoroughly, service failures are acknowledged where identified, and appropriate action is taken to resolve issues and improve services. Whilst a high uphold rate can indicate areas where services have fallen short of expectations, it also reflects the Council's willingness to listen to residents and use complaint investigations as a source of learning and improvement.

The proportion of complaints fully upheld increased at both stages of the complaints process, rising from 55.7% to 60.8% at Stage One and from 31.8% to 38.8% at Stage Two. Conversely, partially upheld outcomes reduced, particularly at Stage Two where they fell from 40.0% to 30.6%. This suggests that complaint investigations are increasingly reaching clearer conclusions regarding whether service standards have or have not been met, providing greater transparency and certainty for residents.

Fig 9 – Stage One Complaint Outcomes 2025/26 vs 2024/25

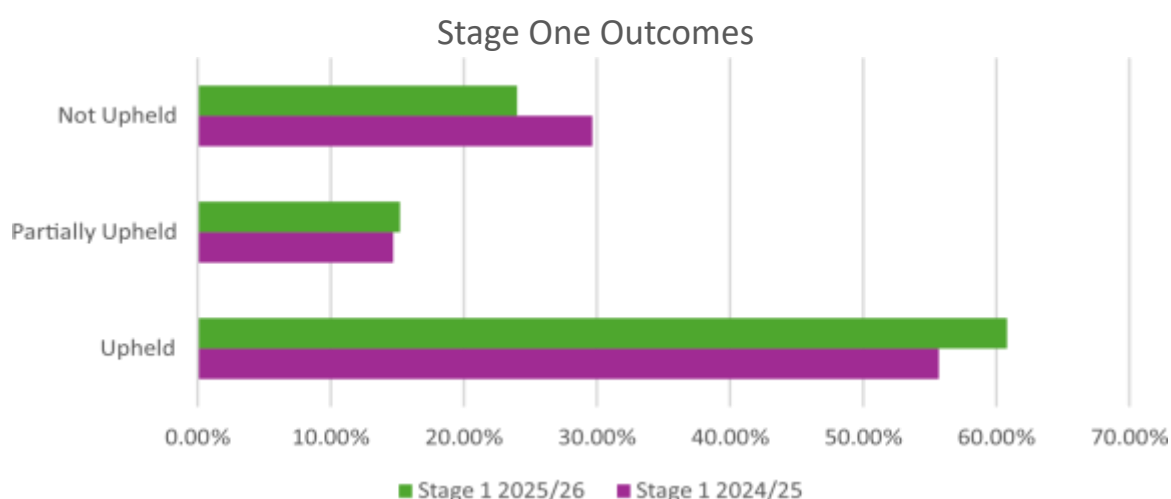
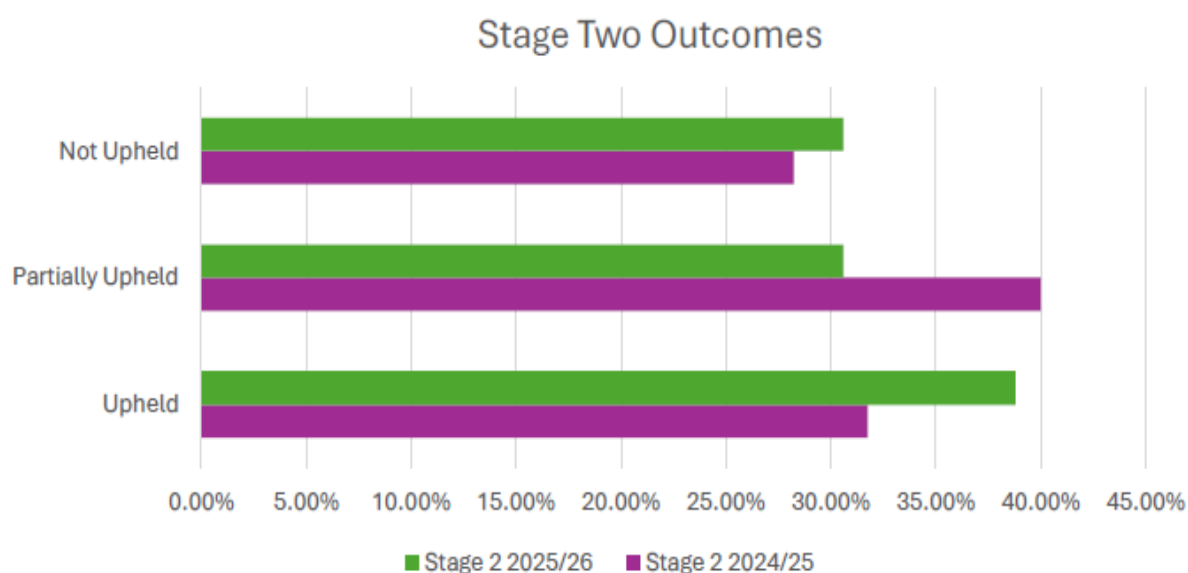


Fig 10 – Stage Two Complaint Outcomes 2025/26 vs 2024/25



Repairs continued to account for the highest proportion of upheld complaints, with almost 80% of Stage One complaints and 59% of Stage Two complaints being upheld. This reflects the ongoing challenges associated with delivering a responsive repairs service and reinforces the need to maintain momentum in service improvement activity, contractor management and performance monitoring. Whilst this remains a key area of focus, complaint outcomes are being used to identify recurring issues and drive targeted improvements in service delivery.

Building Safety also recorded relatively high levels of upheld complaints across both stages of the process, highlighting the importance of continuing to strengthen communication, case management and customer engagement within this service area.

In contrast, Housing Management recorded the highest proportion of complaints that were not upheld at Stage One, suggesting that in a number of cases service standards had been met, although resident expectations may not always have aligned with service outcomes. This

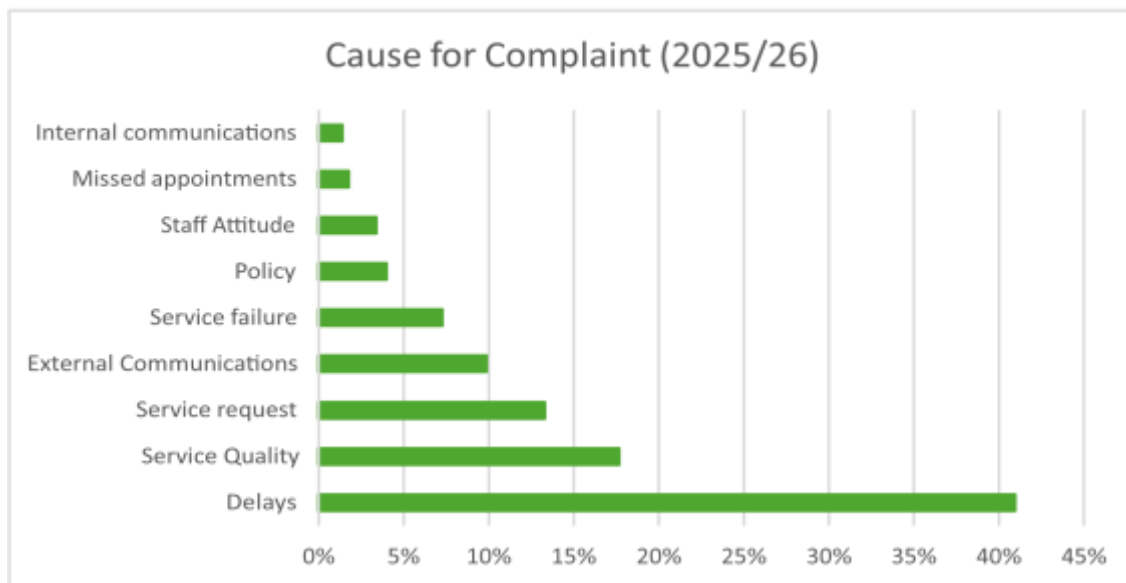
reinforces the importance of clear communication, expectation management and ensuring residents understand the scope of the Council's powers and responsibilities when responding to concerns.

Learning from upheld and partially upheld complaints continues to inform service improvement activity across the organisation. Complaint investigations have highlighted opportunities to improve communication, strengthen expectation management, enhance record keeping and ensure services are delivered consistently against agreed standards. The Council remains committed to using complaint outcomes as a source of insight, recognising that upheld complaints provide valuable opportunities to learn, improve services and prevent similar issues from recurring in the future.

Fig 10 – Complaint Outcomes by Service Area 2025/26

Stage One			
-	Complaints Upheld (%)	Complaints Partially Upheld (%)	Complaints Not Upheld (%)
<i>Asset Management</i>	47.76	18.66	33.58
<i>Repairs</i>	79.86	10.24	9.90
<i>Housing Management</i>	30.77	27.89	41.35
<i>Building Safety</i>	51.92	23.08	25.00
Stage Two			
<i>Asset Management</i>	31.25	15.63	53.13
<i>Repairs</i>	59.38	25.00	15.63
<i>Housing Management</i>	2.86	60.00	37.14
<i>Building Safety</i>	57.14	14.29	28.57

Fig 12 – Root cause of complaints2025/26



As shown in Fig 12, delays were the most frequently reported cause of complaints during 2025/26, accounting for approximately 41% of all cases. This represents a notable increase compared with the previous year and indicates that the timeliness of service delivery remains the greatest source of customer dissatisfaction.

Delays can arise from a range of factors, including contractor performance, supply chain pressures, demand for services and the complexity of individual cases. The prominence of this category highlights the importance of improving end-to-end process efficiency, and ensuring customers are provided with clear information about repair timescales from the outset. This allows expectations to be managed effectively and supports timely communication where circumstances mean agreed timescales cannot be met.

Further qualitative and quantitative analysis of customer feedback suggests that complaints relating to delays are not always the result of excessive service times. Rather, they often reflect residents' perception of delay, arising where expectations have not been clearly set, updates have not been provided at key stages, or customers have been left uncertain about timescales and next steps. This indicates that, alongside improving service efficiency, there is a continuing need to strengthen communication throughout the customer journey. Ensuring residents receive clear information from the outset, understand expected timescales and are kept informed of progress can help reduce dissatisfaction and improve the overall customer experience, even where service delivery times remain unchanged.

Service quality remained the second most common cause of complaint at approximately 18%, followed by service requests at 13%. While these themes continue to feature prominently within complaint investigations, the reduction in complaints relating to service requests and service quality compared with the previous year suggests that targeted improvements in service delivery and case handling may be having a positive impact. Nevertheless, the continued volume of complaints in these areas demonstrates the need to maintain a focus on

service standards, quality assurance, responsiveness and customer engagement, alongside ongoing analysis of complaints trends to identify and address recurring issues within specific services, contractors or providers.

Complaints relating to service failure, policy, staff attitude, missed appointments and internal communication remained comparatively low, each accounting for less than 10% of total complaints, indicating that customer interactions and internal coordination are generally performing effectively. These areas will continue to be monitored to ensure performance remains stable and to identify any emerging trends at an early stage.

5. Ombudsman Cases

During 2024-25, the Ombudsman investigating made determinations on 20 of our cases, split between the Housing Ombudsman Service (16) and the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (4).

5.1 Housing Ombudsman Service

The most recent year for which a [Housing Ombudsman Landlord Performance Report](#) is available is 2024-2025.

The Housing Ombudsman report relating to the year 2025-26 is not due to be published until later this year. Once published, it will reflect the 16 HOS determinations captured below.

Of the 16 determined cases of 2025/26, the Housing Ombudsmen Service made 32 findings. The number of findings exceeds the number of cases because individual investigations may consider several complaint issues, with separate findings reached for each issue. Consequently, a single case may contain a combination of findings, including both maladministration and no maladministration, across different aspects of the complaint.

No Maladministration	10
Mediation	1
Redress	4
Service Failure	6
Maladministration	11

The Council has taken the following action to comply with the recommendations set out by the Housing Ombudsmen Service:

- ✓ Issued apologies;
- ✓ Financial redress;
- ✓ Carried out repairs;
- ✓ Home surveys and inspections; and
- ✓ Reviewed complaint handling procedures.

We anticipate a maladministration rate of 53% for 2025/26, representing a reduction from the previous year and indicating positive progress in addressing the root causes of complaints.

Maladministration findings continue to provide valuable learning opportunities by highlighting areas where services can be improved and issues resolved more effectively at an earlier stage. In response to Ombudsman determinations, the Council continues to review individual cases to identify missed opportunities for early resolution and to implement targeted service improvements where recurring themes are identified.

While any finding of maladministration is taken seriously, the reduction suggests that actions taken to strengthen service delivery, decision-making and complaint handling processes are having a positive impact.

As part of the Council's Corporate Performance Framework, all Housing Ombudsman determinations are reported to Cabinet and published on the Council's website. These reports include details of findings, outcomes and actions taken, ensuring transparency, accountability and ongoing oversight of service improvement activity.

5.2 Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman

The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) has published its Annual Review of complaint handling performance for the year ending 31 March 2026. The review can be accessed here: [Stevenage Borough Council - Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman](#).

Of the 30 complaints considered by the LGSCO during the year, four were investigated, of which three were upheld (75%). There are a range of reasons that the LGSCO would not have investigated a case which included: -

- There being an alternative route for appeal for resolution
- The Council had not had a reasonable opportunity to investigate first
- The case fell outside of the remit of the Ombudsman
- The Ombudsman considers that an investigation would be unlikely to achieve a worthwhile or alternative outcome.

Stevenage Borough Council achieved a 100% compliance rate with all recommendations made by the Ombudsman, with 67% of recommendations implemented within the agreed timescales.

As a result of Ombudsman findings, the Council has taken the following actions:

- ✓ Issuing apologies;
- ✓ Financial redress;

- ✓ Reinforced guidance to housing staff on recording decision-making, ensuring there is clear evidence of how the suitability of interim accommodation is assessed and how any refusals by applicants are considered;
- ✓ Reviewed arrangements for sourcing larger accommodation to identify opportunities to increase the availability of suitable properties for larger households;
- ✓ Engaged directly with an affected household to ensure housing options were clearly explained, enabling informed decision-making and supporting agreed plans to secure suitable accommodation;
- ✓ Reconsidered a homelessness review request to ensure decisions were reviewed appropriately and in line with statutory requirements; and
- ✓ Undertook a fresh consideration of a homelessness review request, ensuring the decision was communicated through a clear written response that fully explained the evidence considered, the reasons for the decision and how the conclusion had been reached.

Again, in all cases details of determinations are reported as part of the Corporate Performance Framework to Cabinet and published on the Council's website.

6. Complaints not accepted

During 2025/26, 54 cases were assessed and not accepted as formal complaints under the Council's Complaints Policy. In line with the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code, each case was reviewed to determine whether it met the definition of a complaint and whether the complaints process was the appropriate route for resolution. The majority of cases not accepted (43) were service requests, where residents were reporting a problem or requesting a service that had not previously been brought to the Council's attention and therefore had not yet been given the opportunity to be resolved through normal service delivery channels.

Other cases not accepted included:

- 5 cases where a statutory right of appeal or alternative legal process was available.
- 3 duplicate complaints where the issue was already being considered through an existing complaint.
- 3 cases where an alternative route was more appropriate for resolving the matter. •
2 cases relating to matters that were not the responsibility of Stevenage Borough Council.
- 1 case that had previously been considered and determined through the complaints process.
- 2 cases that were withdrawn after actions had been taken to address the residents' concerns.

Where a complaint was not accepted, residents were provided with a clear explanation of the decision, signposted to the appropriate service or process, and advised of their right to challenge the decision, where applicable. Monitoring the reasons for non-acceptance provides

valuable insight into customer demand and helps us identify opportunities to improve communication, service access, and the overall customer experience.

7. Tenant Satisfaction Measures - Tenant Perception Survey

The Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs), introduced in 2023/24, are a regulatory requirement for all Registered Providers of Social Housing in England. Of the 22 TSMs, 12 are perception measures that assess tenants' views of the services they receive and are collected through a tenant perception survey. One of these measures, TP09, relates specifically to satisfaction with the landlord's approach to handling complaints.

In line with the Regulator of Social Housing's prescribed methodology, 987 residents were surveyed. While the minimum sample size required to achieve a 95% confidence level with a margin of error of +/-3% was a minimum of 558 completed surveys, the Council commissioned a larger survey to improve the reliability and representativeness of the results. A total of 987 completed surveys were achieved. These respondents were asked:

"Have you made a complaint to Stevenage Borough Council in the last 12 months?"

Of those surveyed, 233 residents (23.6%) reported that they had made a complaint, while 705 residents (71.4%) reported that they had not.

Residents who had made a complaint were then asked:

"How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with Stevenage Borough Council's approach to complaints handling?"

As shown in Figure 13, 34.5% of respondents who had made a complaint reported being satisfied with the Council's approach to complaint handling, compared with 52.6% who reported being dissatisfied. This indicates that among residents who said they had made a complaint, levels of dissatisfaction exceeded levels of satisfaction by 18.1 percentage points.

Fig 13 – TSM Results 2025/26 - Satisfaction with Landlords approach to complaint handling (TP09)



Whilst our ambition remains to achieve higher levels of satisfaction than dissatisfaction with complaint handling, we are encouraged to see a modest improvement this year. Satisfaction with the Council's approach to complaints handling increased from 34.1% in 2024/25 to 34.5% in 2025/26, while dissatisfaction reduced from 54.6% to 52.6%. Although dissatisfaction continues to outweigh satisfaction, this suggests that the actions taken to strengthen our approach are beginning to have a positive impact.

Complaint handling remains one of the most important drivers of overall tenant satisfaction. Residents who were very dissatisfied with the way their complaint was handled reported an overall satisfaction score of just 26.7%, compared to 77.4% amongst those who were very satisfied. More broadly, overall satisfaction amongst residents who had made a complaint was 43.8%, compared to 76.0% for those who had not.

These findings demonstrate the importance of handling complaints well. When complaints are managed effectively, with clear communication, regular updates and fair outcomes, they provide an opportunity to rebuild trust and improve residents' perceptions of the Council.

As in previous years, a number of respondents who said they had made a formal complaint within the last 12 months could not be readily identified within the complaints system. This suggests that some residents may have a different understanding of what constitutes a formal complaint. Feedback from across the social housing sector indicates that residents will often report having made a complaint when, in practice, they have submitted a service request. The wording of the TSM survey question does not enable this distinction to be explored further, which has been recognised by many providers as a limitation of the measure and an area where greater clarity would be beneficial. This highlights the need to continue improving residents' awareness and understanding of the complaints process, including the distinction between a service request and a formal complaint.

Improving complaint handling will remain a key priority during the coming year. We will continue to focus on clear ownership of complaints, timely responses, proactive communication and learning from complaints to improve services and increase resident confidence in the process.

Learning from complaints and customer feedback will continue to be reviewed through our Complaints Clinics and used to inform service improvement activity across housing services.

8. Transactional Satisfaction Survey Results

We carry out transactional satisfaction surveys with all complainants once their complaint has been closed. These surveys provide valuable insight into residents' experiences of our complaints process and help us identify opportunities for improvement.

Since July 2025, the surveys have been administered by an independent external provider. This approach helps ensure residents feel comfortable providing honest feedback and gives additional assurance regarding the independence and credibility of the results.

All complainants received the satisfaction survey via email. As the survey was introduced from Q2 onwards, it was not issued to complainants during Q1. During the period covered by the survey, 76 responses were received, comprising 57 Stage One complainants and 19 Stage Two complainants. This represents a response rate of **13.2%** of all complainants who were invited to participate.

While the feedback received provides valuable insight into residents' experiences, the response rate remains relatively low. As part of our continuous improvement approach, we will work with the external provider to identify opportunities to increase participation and ensure the survey results are representative of a broader range of complainants.

The survey results showed that:

- Just over 33% of respondents were satisfied with their overall complaints experience
- Nearly 43% agreed that their views had been taken into account
- Half of respondents felt that they had been treated with fairness and respect
- Just over 33% agreed with the outcome of their complaint
- Almost 63% of respondents found it easy to make a complaint

While the results indicate some positive aspects of the complaints process, particularly in relation to accessibility and the way residents are treated, they also highlight significant opportunities for improvement. Levels of overall satisfaction and agreement with complaint outcomes remain relatively low and are broadly consistent with findings from the Tenant Satisfaction Measures survey. The results reinforce the importance of continuing to improve communication, complaint handling and customer confidence in the complaints process.

8.1 Overall Customer Feedback

During the reporting period, customers shared a wide range of experiences of our complaints service. Communication emerged as one of the most significant factors influencing customer satisfaction, a theme that has also been identified through other customer feedback channels, including our Tenant Perception Survey.

However, customers also identified areas where their experience fell short of expectations, particularly in relation to communication, repairs and contractor performance, confidence that agreed actions would be delivered and the overall handling of their concerns.

While feedback highlighted examples of good practice, it also demonstrates that further improvement is required to increase satisfaction with the complaints process and build greater trust and confidence among residents.

8.2 Learning and Improvement

The feedback received is helping shape our improvement activity. Residents told us they wanted:

- Better communication and more frequent updates.
- Repairs to be completed more quickly.
- Greater confidence that agreed actions will be delivered.
- Improved support for residents with additional needs.
- Clear evidence that their feedback has been considered.

In response, we are:

- Strengthening communication throughout the complaints process.
- Improving oversight of repairs and contractor performance.
- Monitoring delivery of remedies and compensation to ensure agreed actions are completed.
- Reviewing how we support residents with additional needs through the complaints process and using recorded vulnerability information to assess whether customer feedback varies across different resident groups, helping us identify and address any unequal outcomes.
- Using customer feedback to inform service improvements, staff learning and future service design.

9. Governance

Over the past three years, the Council has continued to strengthen its housing complaints governance arrangements to ensure greater accountability, transparency and service improvement. We have made further enhancements for the year ahead, including to Member oversight, service-level accountability and the use of complaints data and feedback to drive learning and improvement.

Our governance structure now comprises the following:

9.1 Strategic Complaints Managers (SCMs)

We have a team of SCMs who oversee housing complaints and work closely with services to facilitate prompt and fair resolution. SCMs have access to staff at all levels of the organisation, enabling them to resolve disputes effectively, promote consistency and ensure learning is captured from complaints outcomes.

9.2 Housing Complaints Clinic

The Housing Complaints Clinic meets monthly and provides operational oversight of housing complaints performance. The group reviews complaint volumes, compliance with response times, Ombudsman decisions, emerging trends and lessons learned.

The Clinic supports a proactive approach to identifying service improvements and ensuring that agreed actions are implemented and monitored and reviewed. It also provides a forum for tracking progress against learning actions arising from complaints and Ombudsman determinations, helping to embed continuous improvement across housing services.

As part of our commitment to continuous improvement, the Housing Complaints Clinic is currently being reviewed with attendees to identify opportunities to strengthen its effectiveness, enhance oversight arrangements and further improve both service delivery and the complaints process.

9.3 Members' Complaints Clinic

In 2026/27, we introduced a quarterly Members' Complaints Clinic to strengthen elected Member oversight of complaint handling and service improvement.

The Clinic is attended by the Cabinet Member for Housing, who also fulfils the role of Member Responsible for Complaints (MRC), alongside senior officers and elected Members from across the Council. This dedicated forum supports the MRC in meeting their responsibilities under the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code while increasing Member awareness of complaint performance, emerging trends, key learning and service improvement activity.

By bringing together elected Members, senior managers and complaints specialists, the Clinic provides constructive challenge and scrutiny, ensuring that performance issues, emerging risks and improvement opportunities are considered from a range of perspectives. Through increased oversight and accountability, the Clinic helps to ensure that learning from complaints is translated into tangible service improvements and positive outcomes for residents.

9.4 Service Manager Complaint Reviews

Dedicated service-level complaint review meetings are held between Strategic Complaints Managers (SCMs) and managers across Housing Services. These sessions focus on complaint performance within individual service areas, recurring themes, lessons learned, and opportunities to share and embed best practice.

This approach strengthens accountability and ownership of complaints at a service level, ensuring that learning is translated into tangible service improvements and helping to drive a culture of continuous improvement across Housing Services.

9.5 Executive Housing Working Group (EHWG)

The Executive Housing Working Group provides strategic oversight of the Council's Housing Management Services.

The Group is chaired by the Cabinet Member for Housing and includes attendance from the Leader and Co-Deputy Leaders of the Council, together with the Strategic Director, Assistant Directors and relevant Service Heads.

The Group meets monthly and receives regular updates on complaints performance, Housing Ombudsman determinations, the annual self-assessment against the Complaint Handling Code and progress against improvement actions.

9.6 Cabinet Meetings

Housing complaints performance metrics are included within the Corporate Performance Report submitted to Cabinet on a quarterly basis. Reports also include details of housing related Ombudsmen determinations and the actions taken in response to recommendations and learning identified through complaints. Reports are published on the Council's website.

9.7 Impact

The continued improvement in our complaints performance is supported by these strengthened governance arrangements. The combination of strategic oversight, Member scrutiny, service-level accountability and regular performance monitoring helps ensure that learning from complaints is embedded across the organisation. This enables evidence and evidence based decision making, supports continuous service improvement and helps us deliver better outcomes for residents.

10. Assessment against the Complaints Handling Code

As part of our commitment to continuous improvement, we completed our annual self assessment against the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code and published the results alongside this report. During the year, the Housing Ombudsman Service also undertook a review of the Council's Complaints Policy, identifying a number of recommendations to strengthen alignment with the Code and further improve resident experience. The review made 12 recommendations, focused primarily on clarifying policy wording and ensuring that good complaint-handling practice is more explicitly reflected within the policy itself.

In response, we undertook a comprehensive refresh of our Complaints Policy, incorporating the Ombudsman's recommendations and reinforcing our commitment to fair, accessible and effective complaint handling. The updated policy provides greater clarity for residents and staff, strengthens arrangements for complaint acknowledgements and communication, and ensures our approach remains fully aligned with the expectations of the Complaint Handling Code.

The self-assessment and policy review have provided valuable assurance regarding our approach while also helping us identify opportunities for further improvement. Below, we highlight some of the key developments delivered during the year, alongside the areas that will remain a focus for improvement in the coming year.

11. 2025/26 Achievements

Last year, we have:

- Improved the transactional surveys process by outsourcing to an external supplier, adding credibility to the survey results
- Continued to refine the new complaint handling system, developing further its reporting capabilities, including records of complaints that are not accepted.
- Implemented a revised Complaints policy, incorporating the Housing Ombudsman's recommendations and providing greater clarity for residents and staff
- Significantly increased the proportion of complaints that were responded to within Complaint Handling Code timescales.
- Continued to Implement the Repairs Improvement Programme using complaint learning
- Strengthened governance further through the introduction of Members' Complaint Clinics
- Implemented an Access to Homes Policy to ensure a consistent and resident focused approach across all housing services
- Implement a Compensation Policy and supplementary Compensation Framework, to ensure consistency across cases where compensation is offered, incorporating learning from compensation cases to date and Housing Ombudsman best practice.
- Commenced a programme of complaint case reviews, to be assured of the quality of our responses, adherence with the Complaint Handling Code and consistency across teams.

12. 2026/27 Commitments

In the year ahead, we will:

- Review Stage Two escalations to understand the causes of increased escalation rates and identify opportunities to improve the quality and effectiveness of Stage One complaint responses.
- Improve complaint handling within the Repairs service by ensuring sufficient resources are in place, strengthening oversight, and using complaint and escalation data to reduce repeat issues and improve response times.
- Continue to deliver the Repairs Improvement Programme, focusing on reducing delays, improving communication, improving quality control, and increasing first time fix rates
- Improve customer communication and expectation management by providing clearer information about service standards, timescales, progress and next steps throughout the customer journey and complaints process
- Use complaint feedback, customer insight and Ombudsman learning to drive continuous service improvement, ensuring lessons learned are embedded across housing services. With Members being engaged, informed and driving the improvements.
- Strengthen monitoring of service standards and agreed actions, including complaint remedies and compensation, to ensure commitments are delivered and recurring issues are addressed.
- Review how we support residents with additional needs and vulnerabilities to ensure the complaints process remains fair, accessible and responsive.
- Increase awareness and understanding of the complaints process, helping residents understand the difference between a service request and a formal complaint and how to raise concerns when services fall short.
- Strengthen monitoring of complaint remedies, service improvements and Ombudsman recommendations, ensuring agreed actions are delivered within the required timescales and learning is embedded across housing services.
- Identify opportunities to increase participation in our transactional satisfaction survey and ensure the survey results are representative of a broader range of complainants.

13. Conclusion

During 2025/26 we continued to strengthen our approach to complaint handling, achieving significant improvements in response times, governance and policy compliance. Complaints remain an important source of resident feedback and organisational learning. Whilst challenges remain, particularly around repairs-related complaints and resident perceptions of complaint handling, the progress made during the year provides a strong foundation for further improvement. We remain committed to listening to residents, learning from complaints and using that learning to improve services and outcomes for our residents.

14. Response of the Executive Housing Working Group

Our Executive Housing Working Group (EHWG) was formed to provide strategic oversight of the Council's Housing Management Services.

This Group is chaired by the Cabinet Member for Housing (the Member Responsible for Complaints (MRC)), with attendance from the Leader and Co-Deputy Leaders of the Council, along with the Strategic Director, Directors and relevant Service Heads.

In accordance with the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code, this report has been reviewed by the EHWG on 29th July 2026 and subsequently approved by Cabinet. The Council's response, including its observations on complaints performance, learning outcomes and proposed service improvement actions, is set out below.

The Council welcomes this report and the progress made during 2025/26 to strengthen complaint handling, governance and service improvement. Improved performance, enhanced Member oversight and a continued focus on learning from complaints demonstrate our commitment to openness, accountability and delivering better outcomes for residents.

We recognise that further improvements are needed, particularly in relation to customer satisfaction, communication and repairs. The Council remains committed to using resident feedback, and Ombudsman learning to drive continuous improvement across housing services.