

Housing Services

Formal Complaints annual report

1 April 2024 – 31 March 2025

Welcome and introduction

Welcome to Brentwood Borough Council's Annual Complaints Report 2024/25.

In line with our commitment to being open and honest, this report details how the Council managed tenant complaints about Housing Services for the year 2024/2025. It includes a summary of the number of complaints received, the types of issues raised, and the steps taken to resolve them.

The Council is dedicated to improving the quality of life for all residents. By clearly documenting and sharing how we handle both complaints and compliments, we aim to build trust and continuously improve our services. This report highlights our efforts to address current concerns and our proactive approach to preventing future issues and enhancing overall service delivery.



Complaint process

The Council follows a two-stage handling process outlined in its Complaints Policy, which aligns with the Local Government Ombudsman and the Housing Ombudsman's joint Complaint Handling Code. This policy serves as a guide for individuals, explaining what they can expect when making a complaint.



Social Housing Regulator

The Social Housing Regulation Act 2023, introduced in April 2024, aims to balance the relationship between landlords and residents by adopting a proactive approach to regulating social housing landlords on consumer issues. This Act empowers the regulator with new enforcement powers to ensure landlords comply with consumer standards. The Social Housing Charter outlines what residents should expect from their landlords, including safety in their homes, transparency in landlord performance, and prompt handling of complaints. Below is a summary of how the Act aims to fulfil these commitments:

To know their landlord is performing

- The Act implements policy measures to ensure residents are informed about their landlord's performance and can hold them accountable.

Social Housing Regulator continued

- It introduces an access to information scheme, allowing tenants to obtain information about the management of their homes.
- Registered providers must collect and provide information related to the Regulator's Tenant Satisfaction Measures, enabling residents to assess their landlord's performance.
- Providers are required to inform the regulator of any significant issues related to non-compliance or potential non-compliance with consumer standards.

To have their complaints dealt with promptly

- The Act formalises the relationship between the regulator and the housing ombudsman, enhancing cooperation and tenant protection.
- It empowers the Housing Ombudsman to issue a code of practice for handling complaints against social housing providers.
- The Ombudsman can issue guidance on good practices and require providers to annually self-assess their compliance with this guidance.
- The Act allows the regulator to inspect properties more quickly by reducing the notice period to 48 hours.

Housing Ombudsman Service Complaint Handling Code



The Social Housing Regulation Act 2023 grants the Housing Ombudsman the authority to create a code of practice for handling complaints that social housing providers must adhere to. The Ombudsman is also responsible for ensuring compliance with this code.

A complaint is defined as: “An expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions, or lack of action by the landlord, its staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting a resident or group of residents.”

Residents do not need to use the term “complaint” for their issues to be recognised as such. Whenever a resident expresses dissatisfaction, the Council must provide them with the opportunity to file a complaint.

Complaint stages

Stage 1

The Council must have procedures in place to determine which complaints can be addressed quickly and which require further investigation. Factors such as the complexity of the complaint and whether the resident is vulnerable or at risk must be considered. Most stage 1 complaints can be resolved promptly, with an explanation, apology, or resolution provided to the resident.

Stage 2

If the complaint is not fully resolved to the resident's satisfaction at stage 1, it must proceed to stage 2 of the landlord's procedure. Stage 2 represents the Council's final response.

Self-assessment

Landlords are required to complete the Housing Ombudsman's self-assessment.

The Council completed the self-assessment in December 2024 which can be viewed [here](#).

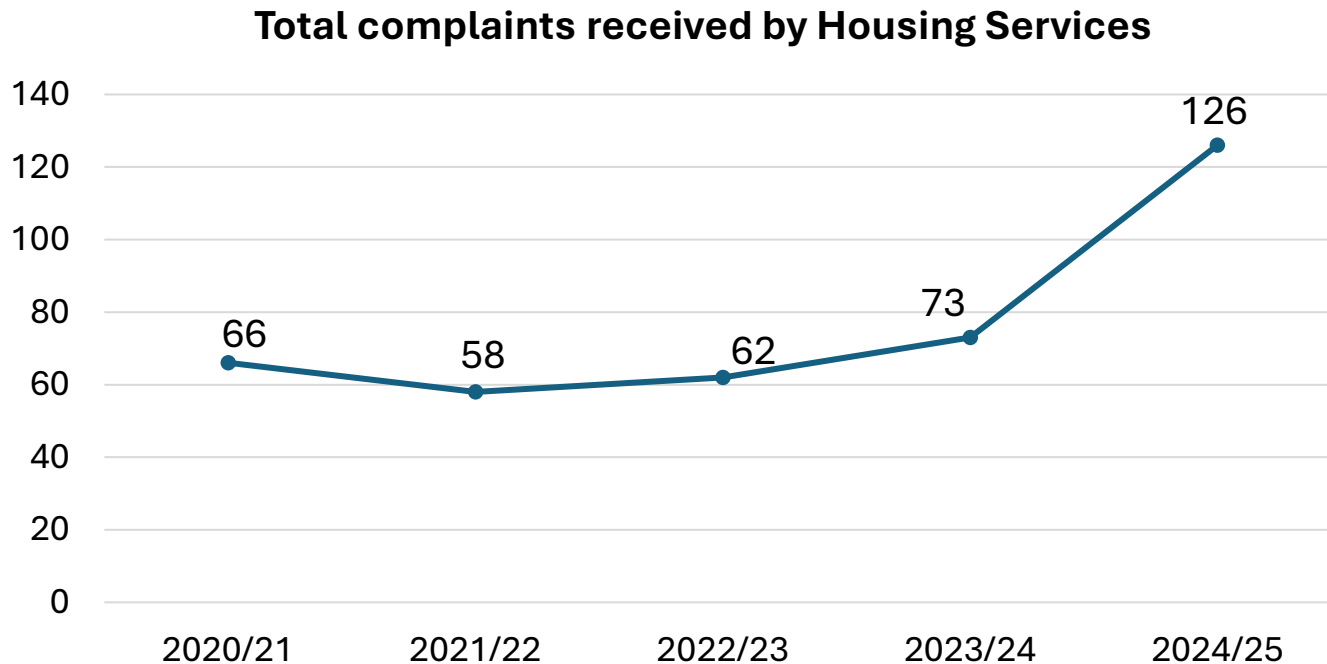
If the Housing Ombudsman finds any issues with a landlord's adherence to the Code, they will work with the landlord to quickly restore compliance. Should there be continued non-compliance, the Ombudsman may use their broader authority, such as issuing Complaint Handling Failure Orders.

The Council must publish the self-assessment along with the annual complaint performance and service improvement report on our website. The governing body's response to the report must be published alongside this.

Complaints overview

This graph shows the total number of complaints received in the last 5 years.

Between 1st April 2024 and 31st March 2025, Housing Services received 126 complaints in total. 30 (26%) were escalated to stage 2. The increase in complaints highlights our commitment to transparency and our dedication to recording all expressions of dissatisfaction enabling greater insight to improve our services.



Complaints relative to the size of the landlord

126 stage 1 complaints/circa 3000 properties x 1000 =

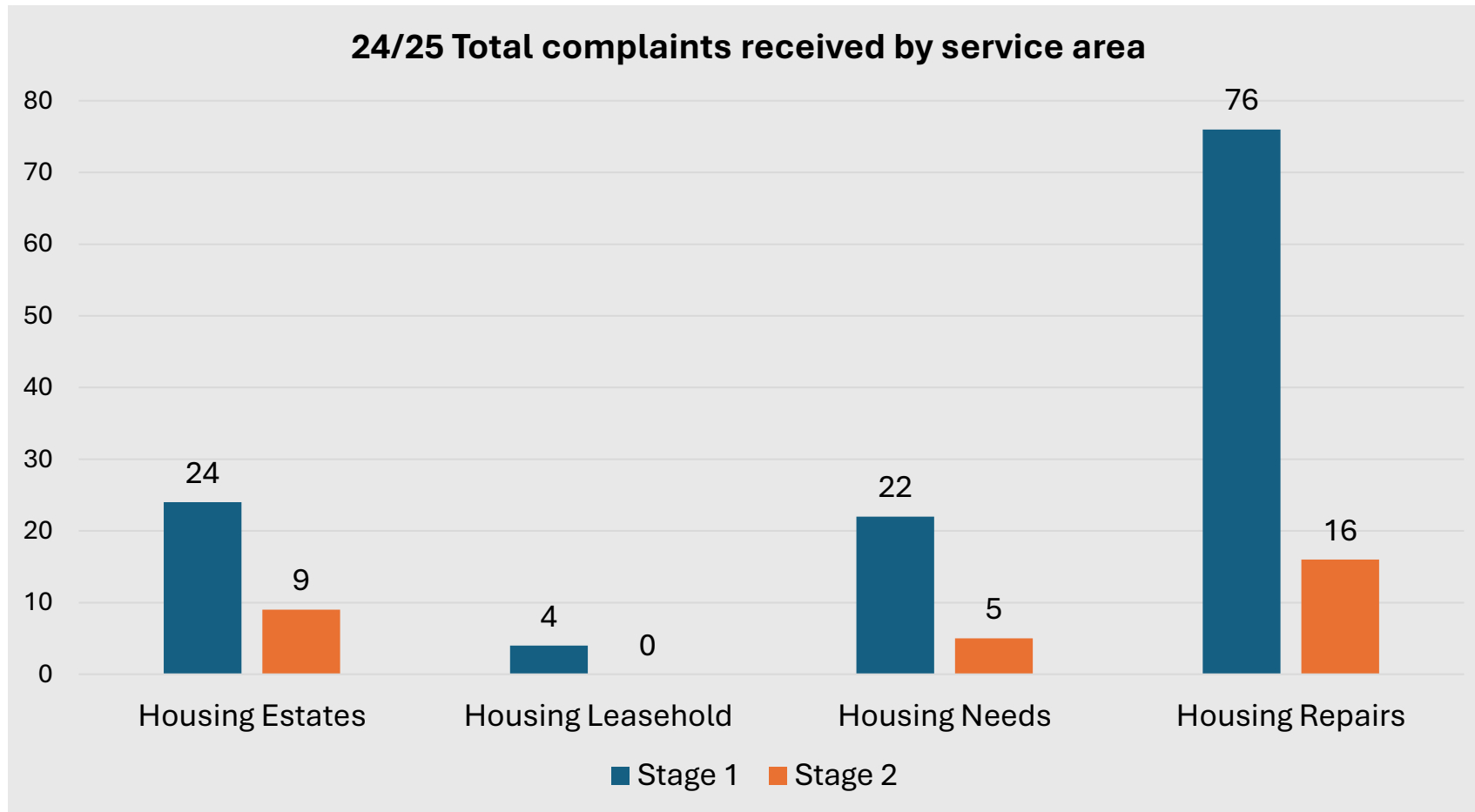
42 complaints per 1000 units

30 stage 2 complaints/circa 3000 properties x 1000 =

10 stage 2 complaints per 1000 units

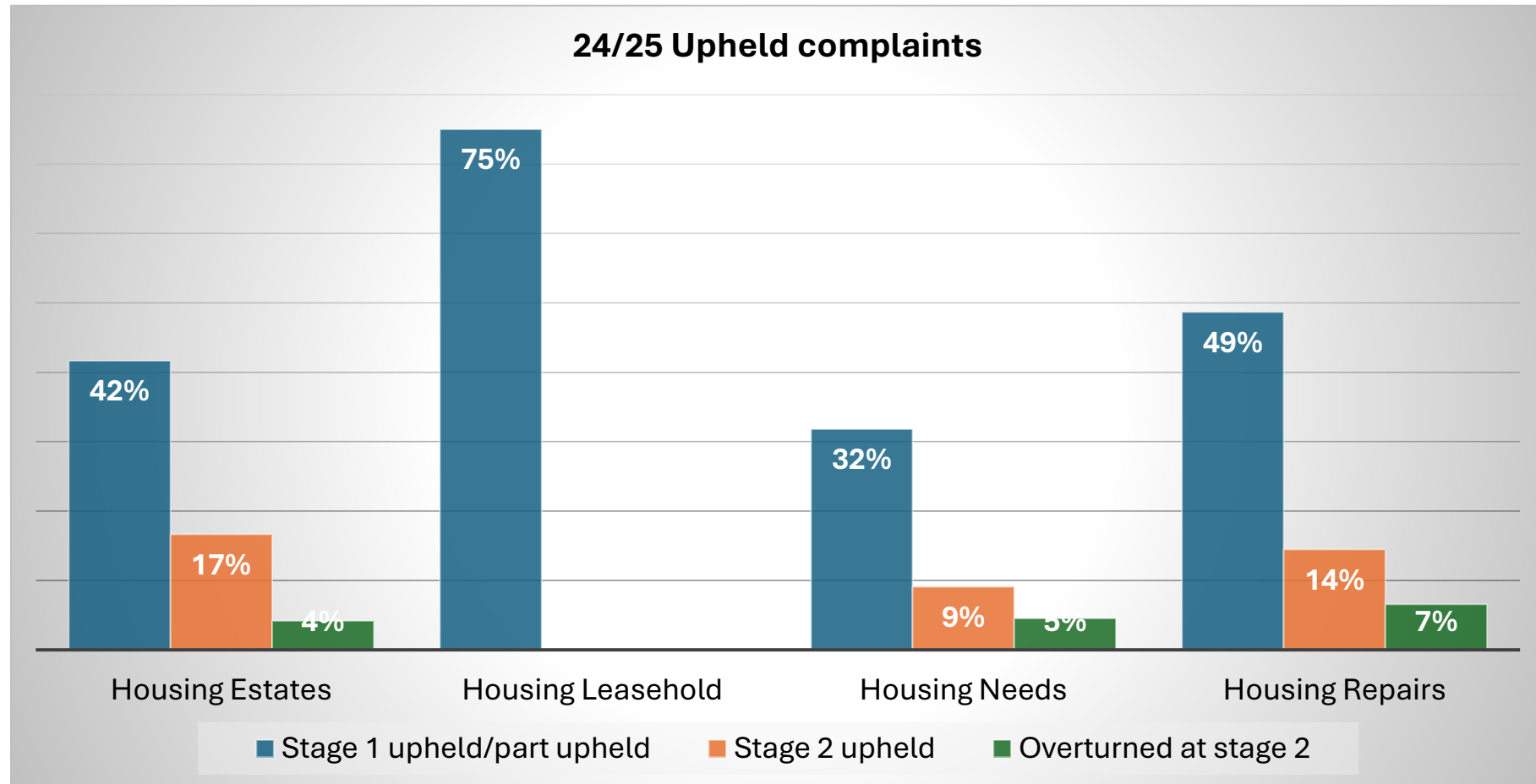
Complaints by service

The below chart shows the total number of stage 1 and 2 complaints received by service area.



Upheld complaints

The below chart shows the percentage of stage 1 and stage 2 complaints upheld included those overturned at stage 2.



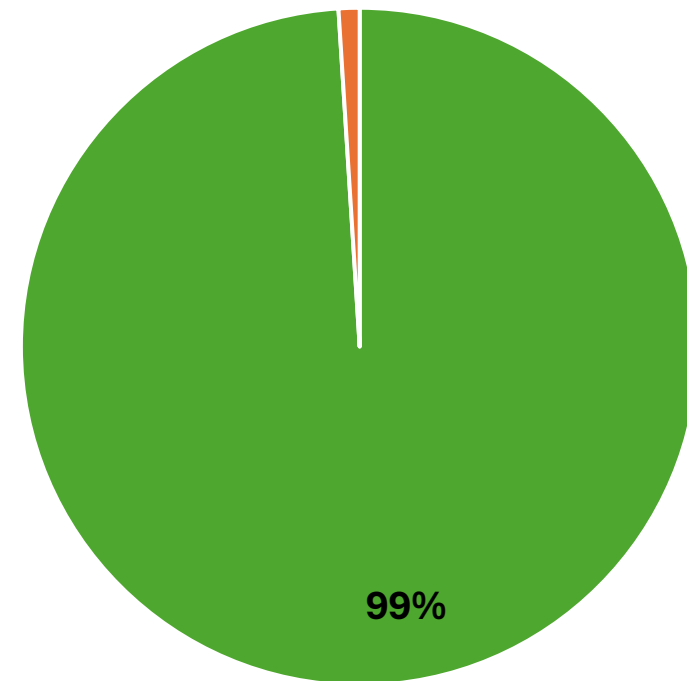
Timely responses

The Council are committed to providing timely responses to complainants in line with the policy and timeframes set out in the Ombudsman's guidance. Stage 1 complaints are to be responded to within 10 working days and stage 2 complaints are to be responded to within 15 working days. 100% of complaints were acknowledged within 5 working days.

This chart below shows the percentage of complaints responded to within the set timeframes. Significant improvements have been achieved since the 2023/24 period.

24/25 Total complaints responded to within set timeframe

- Responded within timeframe
- Responded to outside of timeframe

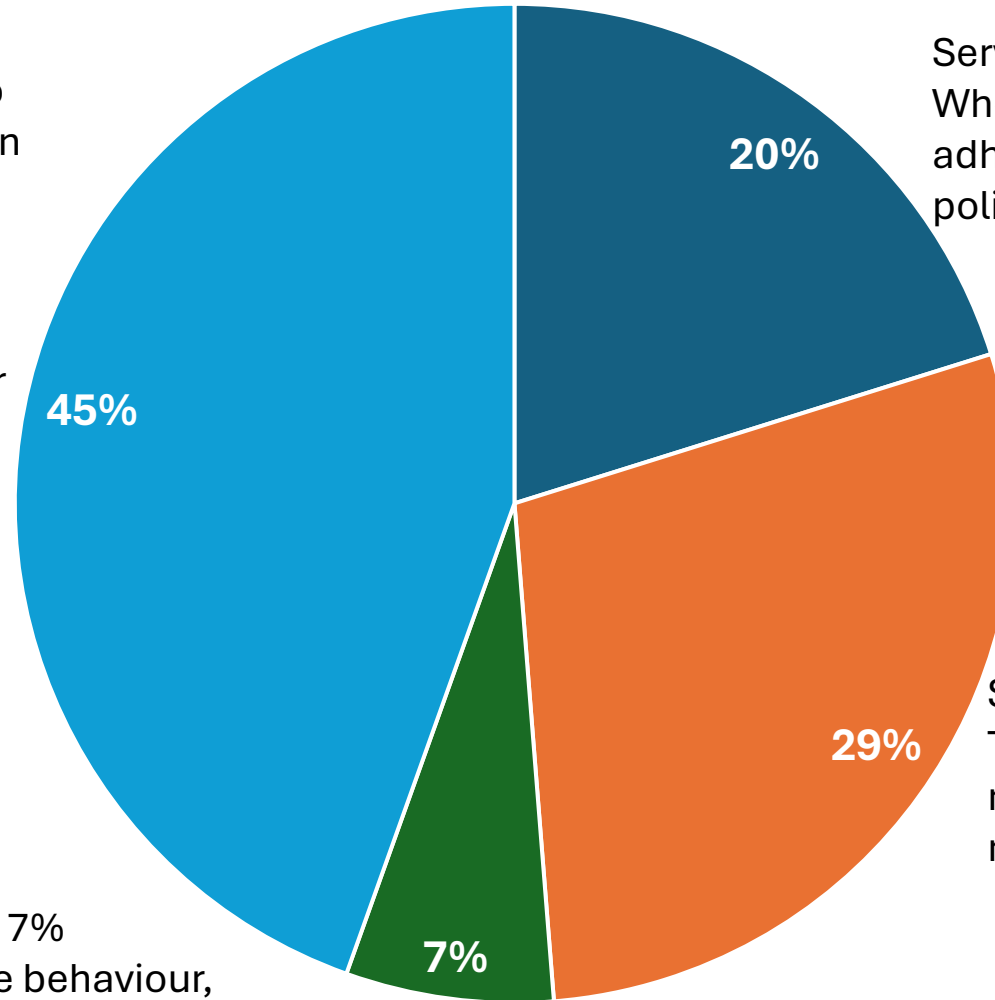


Reason for complaint

This chart provides analysis of the category of the complaints made to Housing Services, showing common trends.

Time/delay 45%

A delay in communications or actions by an officer or team



Service – process not followed 20%
When an officer or team fails to adhere to established protocols or policies

Service – other 29%
This category includes all other reasons for complaints, primarily related to housing repairs.

Staff conduct 7%
Relating to the behaviour, professionalism or actions of officers

Upheld complaint learning

We value all customer feedback, including complaints, as a vital part of improving our services.

We are committed to learning from every complaint and taking meaningful action to prevent similar issues in the future. Where faults are identified, we consider a range of remedies, including apologies, corrective measures, service enhancements, and, where appropriate, financial redress.

Complaints in 2024/25 were reviewed quarterly by the Director of Housing and relevant Corporate Managers. These reviews were then considered by the Performance, Complaints & FOI Member Working Party before being presented to the Scrutiny, Performance and Standards Committee for further oversight.



The upheld complaints cover a wide range of issues, including;

- Repeated delays in completing repairs
- Missed appointments and poor communication from contractor
- Incomplete or poor-quality remedial works
- Issues escalating to damp and mould due to inaction
- No responses to emails or follow ups
- Lack of updates or clarity on repair timelines
 - Delays in resolving neighbour disputes
- Inadequate handling of rent accounts and statements



Remedies and actions included;

- Apologies
- Scheduled works to be carried out
- Compensation (ranging from £50-£200)
- Staff training on improving communication and support to tenants

Local Government & Housing Ombudsman Complaints

The Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) deals with council housing services other than social housing. This includes homelessness, housing allocations, housing benefit and improvement services.

The Housing Ombudsman (HO) addresses complaints concerning registered social housing providers including councils' role as social landlords.

The Council recorded 3 cases, whereby investigations were undertaken and complaints upheld by the LGO and HO between 1st April 2024 and 31st March 2025.

Housing Ombudsman Case 1

Complaint Summary: The complaint concerned the landlord's handling of and response to the resident's reports of noise nuisance, anti-social behaviour, and criminal damage.

Findings: In accordance with paragraph 52 of the Housing Ombudsman Scheme, there was service failure by the landlord regarding its handling of the resident's reports of noise nuisance.

Orders:

- Issue a formal apology letter
- Pay £100 in compensation to the resident

Recommendation:

- Review its approach to noise complaints against the Housing Ombudsman's Spotlight Report on Noise Complaints to identify areas for improvement.

Local Government & Housing Ombudsman Complaints continued

Housing Ombudsman Case 2

Complaint Summary: The complaint related to the landlord's handling of anti-social behaviour (ASB), specifically noise nuisance from neighbouring properties.

Findings: The Housing Ombudsman found maladministration in the landlord's response to the resident's ASB reports. Failures included delays in action between February and August 2023, lack of risk assessments, inadequate investigation, poor engagement with external agencies, and missing records of a key phone call.

Orders:

- Issue a written apology acknowledging the service failures.
- Pay £500 compensation for the distress and inconvenience caused.
- Conduct a follow-up risk assessment and support the resident with any ongoing transfer or rehousing needs.

Recommendations:

Deliver refresher training for housing and ASB staff, focusing on:

- Timely risk assessments, especially where vulnerabilities are known or suspected.
- Thorough ASB investigations and accurate record-keeping.
- Prompt referrals to the Community Support Partnership.
- Clear documentation of resident engagement, including welfare checks and follow-up actions.

Local Government & Housing Ombudsman Complaints continued

Local Government Ombudsman Case 3

Complaint Summary: The Ombudsman investigated the Council's homelessness procedures, specifically:

- The practice of closing cases if applicants did not provide all required information within 14 days.
- The advice, information, and support given to applicants served notice to leave private tenancies.

Findings: The Ombudsman found fault in the Council's approach, which caused injustice to individuals who had not complained. The actions recommended aim to remedy current injustice and prevent recurrence.

Orders:

- Issue a written apology acknowledging the service failures.
- Conduct a review of current triage cases to identify applicants potentially eligible for support and proceed with appropriate decisions.
- Contact applicants whose cases were closed in the last 56 days and invite them to continue their applications.

Recommendations:

Amend the triage process to avoid gatekeeping and ensure fair assessment of individual circumstances.

- Stop automatically closing cases after a set period without considering available information.
- Ensure decisions are made based on all correspondence and forms where there is reason to believe the applicant may be eligible and homeless or threatened with homelessness.
- Provide interim accommodation immediately to applicants who appear eligible, homeless, and in priority need.

Service Improvement Plan

Priority	Actions	Timeframe
Review complaint handling processes	Review the potential of a complaints management system to effectively record, assist and report on formal complaints	September 2025
KPI response rate	A rate of 90% has been introduced for responses issued within the relevant timeframe	May 2025
Improve contractor standard of work	Continue with repairs service improvement plan	Ongoing
Officer training	Training for housing officers to detect, review potential complaints and raise to complaints team	June 2025
	Inductions for new team members on the complaints process and the Council's customer service standards	Ongoing
Internal performance/governance reporting	Maintain and strengthen the corporate governance framework by continuing to report complaint performance to relevant boards, ensuring ongoing accountability and enabling strategic monitoring of trends and emerging issues	August 2025

Service Improvement Plan

Priority	Actions	Timeframe
Engagement with tenants	Undertake training and capacity for building representatives of ‘Tenant Talkback’ engagement service	September 2025-March 2026
	Review opportunities for residents wider than the Talkback representatives to scrutinise and influence decisions	December 2025-December 2026
Categorisation of complaints	Enhance the categorisation of complaints by incorporating more detailed information to enable deeper insight and analysis of specific issues	July 2025
Improvements to housing system (MRI upgrade)	Develop tenant self-service portal, enabling tenants to manage services independently	September 2025
Tenant Satisfaction measures (TSM’s)	Contact TSM complaint respondents to gather more information on how they complained and why they were dissatisfied	October 2025