



Hartlepool Borough Council's Annual Complaint Performance and Service Improvement Report

Forward

Hello and welcome to the Council's second annual Complaint Performance and Service Improvement Report. As Chair of the Finance and Corporate Affairs Committee it continues to be my responsibility to lead a positive complaints handling culture for our housing management service here at the Council.

I believe handling complaints well isn't just a case of following the procedure. How we respond to, and handle complaints, is indicative of the wider organisational culture. Our organisational values and behaviours feed through to the way complaints are dealt with to ensure residents are listened to, complaints are welcomed and problems are resolved quickly and effectively. Effective and timely resolution of complaints is a top priority for the Council and we view complaints as an opportunity for learning, to continually improve services, as well as our customer's experience.

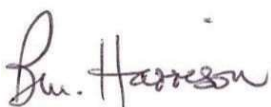
Since the introduction of the Housing Ombudsman's new statutory Complaint Handling Code we have seen an increase in the number of complaints that have been raised by our residents last year about the housing management service – with 7 complaints being raised in total, up from 1 complaint in 2023/24. Whilst this may initially seem negative, complaints are used to provide valuable feedback and make a positive contribution to improving how our services are delivered.

We hoped the Housing Management Complaints Policy coming into effect on 1st April 2024 would improve resident awareness and allow residents to feel more empowered to voice concerns and ensure that they are aware of their rights and how to escalate issues when necessary. Making it as easy as possible for residents to make a complaint.

The service is now also proactive in seeking continuous feedback from residents and I am hopeful that the introduction of the repairs service satisfaction survey has provided residents over the past year with the opportunity to let us know, after each repair, if they are unhappy with the service they have received.

The complaints we have received, together with the service requests that have been recorded last year, have been carefully considered to ensure that emerging trends and performance issues are closely scrutinised and changes are implemented.

Our aspiration is for everyone to live in a well-managed, safe and well-maintained home, but if you feel we are not delivering this at any time, we want to hear from you.



Brenda Harrison

Chair of Finance and Corporate Affairs Committee and
Member Responsible for Complaints (MRC)

Introduction

Since the introduction of the Housing Management Service Complaints Policy on the 1st April 2024 the Council has closely monitored complaints and has had a welcoming, open and transparent approach to complaint handling.

This report along with our self-assessment, sets out how we are performing as a service in terms of complaint handing including the volumes, categories and outcomes of complaints and explores our learning and future service improvements.

Summary of complaints

Year	Number of service requests	Number of complaints	Number of stage 1 complaints	Number of stage 2 complaints	Number upheld or partially upheld at stage 2	Percentage upheld or partially upheld	Refusals	Complaint referrals to the Housing Ombudsman
2023/24	N/A	1	1	0	0	0%	0	0
2024/25	21	7	7	1	1	100%	0	0

Year	Stage 1 response within 10 working days	Percentage stage 1 response within 10 working days	Stage 2 response within 20 working days	Percentage stage 2 response within 20 working days
2023/24	1	100%	N/A	N/A
2024/25	6	83%	1	100%

Reason for complaints

Five of the seven stage 1 complaints received were related to the repairs service carried out by Hartlepool Borough Council in residents’ homes. The reason for these complaints were cited as dissatisfaction with our response time to carry out repairs and then completing the necessary follow up works in a timely manner.

Communication from the repairs service to the resident was also raised as a reason for the complaint.

One of the repair complaints was regarding a repair, which had been recharged to a resident and disputed.

In addition, one complaint related to advice provided by the Housing Management Team relating to notice periods when ending a tenancy.

The stage 2 complaint (also dealt with at stage 1) was initially regarding staff conduct and concerns about a letter sent regarding arrears, but then also included how the Council responded to the individual needs of our resident and how services should be tailored to meet those needs.

Trends and risks

The majority of service requests and complaints received in 2024/25 related to the repairs service provided to residents in their homes. 19 of the 21 service requests and five of the seven stage 1 complaints were raised by tenants due to dissatisfaction regarding these repairs. For context, the Council carried out 1446 responsive repairs in residents’ homes within the financial year and therefore expressions of dissatisfaction received equate to 1.7% of overall jobs completed.

Since April 2024, on the completion of a repair, our residents are now contacted to complete a short satisfaction survey. Whilst overall satisfaction is high, the survey has given residents a greater opportunity to feedback on the repairs service and has actively encouraged complaints. It is likely that this has therefore contributed to the increased number of complaints received about the repairs service.

Each of the complaints received were investigated and feedback provided to the resident. The findings of each of these stage 1 complaints did not determine that the Council was at fault and whilst improved communication could have enhanced the residents experience, no errors were found in the service that was delivered. The volume and nature of the complaints does not highlight any additional levels of risk within the service the Council is delivering to residents. It does suggest that customers are aware of how to make a complaint and are confident to express dissatisfaction to us and that the complaint handling process is working efficiently.

Service improvement and learning

As a result of some of the repair complaints received the Housing Maintenance Team has introduced some additional ‘tool box talks’ to cover topics such as communication with residents and the quality standards that are expected. These are helpful to instill a positive complaints handling culture and to improve the repairs service provided to our residents. As future issues are raised by residents these ‘tool box talks’ will be tailored to cover any relevant issues. We will continue to seek feedback from residents on completion of all repairs and welcome complaints regarding the housing management service.

In terms of service development and improvement, the next stage will be to enable residents to report repairs online to improve access to our repairs service. This will also help to communicate with our residents details about the repairs process and provide clear timescales for delivery of any repairs and follow up works that may be required. It is anticipated that the online reporting of repairs will be available for residents to access later this year.

Reporting performance

Under the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code we have completed the self assessment, which is to assess our compliance with the Code. The self-assessment accompanies this report as Appendix 1. This annual report and our self-assessment will be published to our residents following Finance and Corporate Affairs Committee (formally Finance and Policy Committee) in September 2025.

Year	Findings of non-compliance with the Code by the Housing Ombudsman
2023/24	0
2024/25	0

Future improvements

We recognise that our residents are more frequently making the service aware of specific needs and vulnerabilities relating to physical and mental health conditions. This can be in the context of requesting quicker response times for repairs to be undertaken or when staff are dealing with a tenancy enforcement case. The ongoing programme of home inspection visits is helping to identify any vulnerabilities and support tenants where necessary to ensure we are able to provide them with the service that best meets their needs. Formally recording this data is an area for future development, exploring options like establishing a Priority Services Register so that services can be effectively delivered to meet the individual needs of our residents to support vulnerable customers.

Continue to embed the complaints handling culture across the organisation and keep staff training up to date on recognising customer dissatisfaction and effective complaints handling.

