



Hartlepool
Borough Council



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

Forward

Welcome to this year's edition of the Annual Complaint Performance and Service Improvement Report.

Being new to the role of Chair of the Finance and Corporate Affairs Committee and the Member Responsible for Complaints (MRC), I have taken some time to review published guidance by the Housing Ombudsman to learn about the Code, how it can be applied and how we can use the self-assessment to scrutinise the service effectively. As Chair of the Committee it is my responsibility to drive a positive complaint handling culture across the organisation for the Council's Housing Management service and overseeing improvements where they are needed.

During the reporting period, most complaints related to the repairs service. It is important that we deliver a responsive and reliable customer-focused repairs service with improved response times and improvements to the quality of the repairs carried out whilst assuring value for money. I welcome the suggested changes to both policy and procedures to enhance the service being delivered to residents.

Complaints provide an invaluable opportunity to hear directly from our residents and I fully support the additional work being carried out to seek feedback, improve resident communication and adapt services to be responsive to the individual needs of residents. It is vital that we do not lose focus on both handling complaints effectively in practice and use learning from these as a valuable tool to drive change.

By listening and learning we are improving the service we provide to our residents and on behalf of the Committee I would like to thank all residents who have taken the time to raise their concerns.



Graham 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
2025/26	8	6	6	1	0	0%	0	1

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%
2025/26	6	100%	0	0%

Reason for complaints

All 6 stage 1 complaints received were related to the repairs service carried out by Hartlepool Borough Council in residents’ homes. In summary, the reasons cited in these complaints included:

- Dissatisfaction with the response time to carry out repairs;
- Attitude of contractors whilst undertaking works;
- Initial repairs not resolving the problem with further follow-up repairs required; and
- Dissatisfaction with the decisions not to replace a kitchen and repair an appliance.

The stage 2 complaint (also dealt with at stage 1) was due to the Housing Management Team’s decision not to replace the kitchen at the request of the resident. The kitchen was deemed in suitable condition and this decision was upheld at stage 2 complaints process by a qualified surveyor.

Whilst this stage 2 complaint was responded to outside the 20 working days deadline, the resident was notified of this extension to the initial deadline. It is this complaint which has now been referred to the Housing Ombudsman and the outcome of the Ombudsman’s investigation is pending.

Trends and risks

All of the service requests and complaints received in 2025/26 related to the repairs service provided to residents in their homes. For context, the Council carried out 1370 responsive repairs in residents' homes within the financial year and therefore expressions of dissatisfaction received equate to 1.1% of overall jobs completed.

On the completion of a repair, residents continue to be 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 continues to actively encourage complaints.

Each of the complaints received were investigated and feedback provided to the resident. In all but one of the complaints at stage 1, it was determined that the Council was not at fault. On one occasion fault was found with the attitude of two staff members in the Housing Maintenance Team and an apology issued to the resident by the Construction Manager.

Complaints received for 25/26 are consistent with the level of complaints received for 24/25. The consistency of complaints suggests that residents 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

All negative feedback relating to repairs from repair satisfaction surveys is fed back to the Construction Manager and as a result the issue is reviewed and rectified as required and any lessons learned shared with the Housing Maintenance Team through the ongoing 'tool box talks' to ensure the quality standards are met. These are helpful to instill a positive complaints handling culture and to improve the repairs service provided to our residents. We will continue to seek feedback from residents on completion of all repairs and welcome complaints regarding the Housing Management service. A member of the Housing Management Team also follows up each completed repair when no feedback has been received to help improve satisfaction survey response rates. Online repair reporting has also been introduced and available for all residents. This option will be promoted further over the next year.

In terms of service development and improvement, the complaints have indicated that the Council requires a clearer policy in relation to timescales for the replacement of key property features such as kitchens and bathrooms. Whilst the Council follows the industry standard and Decent Homes Standard for 'reasonably modern services' when deciding to replace, this is not set out within our repairs policy. To improve clarity on this, it is suggested that average replacement timescales are included within a revised repairs policy with any planned maintenance programmed. Residents will then know what to expect from the Council.

Reporting performance

Following the submission of the 2024/25 annual Complaint Handling Code Submission Form to the Housing Ombudsman, the Ombudsman has reviewed the Council's Housing Management Service Complaints Policy, as part of its duty to monitor compliance with the Complaint Handling Code.

The review was focused on ensuring landlords have met the requirements of the Code based on what residents can reasonably expect to be included in a policy document. By taking this approach, the Housing Ombudsman aims to achieve consistency across the sector and ensure that residents receive a fair service regardless of where they live and who provides housing services.

The Housing Ombudsman has commended the Council as a landlord for pro-actively deciding for the benefit of residents, and despite its small number of units, to separate its housing complaints policy from its corporate complaints policy.

The Housing Ombudsman review identified 11 recommendations to the Housing Management Complaints Policy, which have been carefully considered and, the recommended changes have been made to the policy. Our response to the Housing Ombudsman's recommendations will be reviewed through next year's annual submission process.

Under the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code we have completed the self-assessment for 2025/26, which is to assess our compliance with the Code. The self-assessment accompanies this report as Appendix A. This annual report and the self-assessment will be published to our residents following the meeting of the Finance and Corporate Affairs Committee in September 2026. To date there have been no findings of non-compliance with the Code by the Housing Ombudsman.

Future improvements

We recognise that our residents are more frequently making the Housing Management 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 helps to identify any vulnerabilities and to support residents where necessary. We have started work identifying our vulnerable residents so that services can be effectively delivered to best meet individual needs.

We are currently working with the Construction Manager to develop a dedicated resource to support the Council's Housing Management Service with the intent of improving the delivery of services to our tenants. It is intended for this solution to be implemented within the next reporting period.

Continue to embed the complaints handling culture across the organisation and keep staff training up to date on recognising customer dissatisfaction and the effective handling of complaints. Continue to use the range of reports the Housing Ombudsman publishes to share incites from complaints it has investigated to help landlords drive positive change in service provision.

