

London Borough of Hounslow

Housing Landlord Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement report for 2024/25

1. Introduction

1.1. This report has been produced by the Council to identify the performance of the housing landlord complaints function from April 2024 to March 2025, presenting some of the themes and demonstrating some areas of improvement from learning from these complaints. The report is produced in line with requirements set out in the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code.

2. The Council's self-assessment against the complaint handling code

2.1. The self-assessment allows the Council to review practices against the Code annually and ensure policies and procedures are compliant. It shows a true reflection of the complaint handling service, and sets out evidence where requirements are met. It is reviewed annually, or more frequently where significant changes take place.

2.2. The Council completed a review of the self-assessment against the Complaint Handling Code in May 2025. This document is at Appendix 2 and is published on the Council website.

2.3. The self-assessment will be submitted to the Housing Ombudsman Service and has been used as part of a programme of continuous improvement to ensure that the complaints function meets the requirements of the code and has a focus on the needs and interests of residents.

3. Complaint Volume and Trends

3.1. The below charts and table show the number of complaints received month by month and in total over 2024/25.

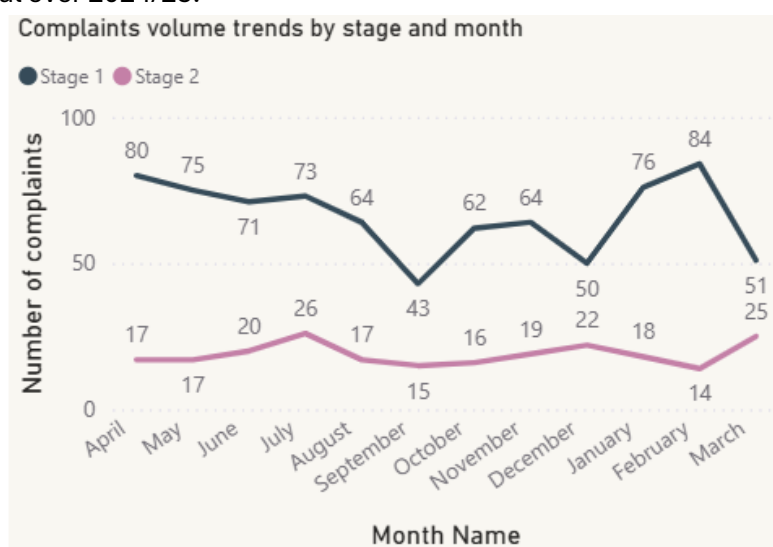


Chart 1: Number of complaints received month by month

| Stage 1 complaints | Number received 2024/25 | % upheld |
|--------------------|----------------------------|-----------|
| | 793 (497 2023/24) | 56% (46%) |
| Stage 2 complaints | Number received 2024/25 | % upheld |
| | 226 (111 2023/24) | 57% (37%) |
| Total | 1019 (608 2023/24) | 56% (45%) |

Table 1: Total complaints received 2024/25

3.2. Over 72% of the total stage 1 complaints received were relating to assets, repairs and grounds maintenance with 28% about Housing and Tenancy management services. This is a similar pattern to the previous year. Many housing repair complaints would have previously been categorised as a pre-stage 1 complaint but are now accepted as a stage 1 complaint in line with the Complaint Handling Protocol.

3.3. 56% of stage 1 complaints were upheld, accepting that there some fault was found. For Housing and Tenancy complaints 44% of cases were upheld or partially upheld. These are both higher than the previous year showing acknowledgement of failures in service and the willingness to learn and improve.

| Repairs and Asset Management | Housing Tenancy Management |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Delay waiting for a repair | Lack of communication |
| Dissatisfaction with repairs | Poor customer service |
| Lack of communication | Service dissatisfaction |
| Health and safety | ASB |
| Job not completed/poor workmanship | Condition of communal areas |
| Damp and Mould | Health and Safety |
| Maintenance of communal areas | Delay waiting for reimbursement |

Table 2: Top reasons for complaints

3.4. Table 2 above shows the reasons for complaints with delay waiting for repair and lack of communication being the main frustrations for tenants. Complaint handling for stage 2 complaints and quality assurance checks are being centralised within the Tenancy Management Service, so shared learning and understanding will take place across both repairs and housing tenancy complaints. The number of complaints and Ombudsman cases about Anti-social Behaviour (ASB) has reduced, with the dedicated ASB and Tenancy Sustainment Teams now embedded in the service since 2022.

| Stage 1 complaints | Number acknowledged in 5 working days | % acknowledged in 5 working days | Number responded to in 10 working days | % responded to in 10 working days | Number within overall complaint target | % within overall complaint target |
|--------------------|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------|--|-----------------------------------|--|-----------------------------------|
| | 630 / 793 | 79% | 437 / 793 | 55% (84%) | 336 / 793 | 42% |
| Stage 2 complaints | | | | % responded to in 20 working days | | |
| | 178 / 226 | 79% | 165 / 226 | 73% (73%) | 128 / 226 | 57% |
| Total | 808 / 1019 | 79% | 602 / 1019 | 59% (82%) | 464 / 1019 | 46% |

Table 3: Complaints responded within SLA target (2023/24 figure)

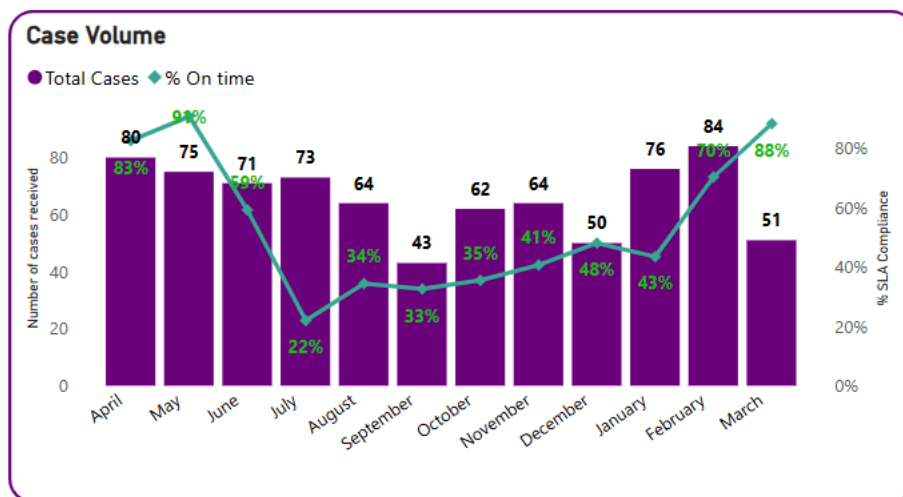


Chart 2: % of stage 1 complaints responded in target by month

3.5. The Council only started recording the date cases were received from April 2024 and there is no previous data for comparison to the percentage of complaints acknowledged in target.

3.6. The overall percentage of Stage 1 complaints responded within 10 working days was 59% compared to 82% for the previous financial year. Chart 2 shows that the reduction from 15 working days to 10 working days to respond to a Stage 1 complaint had an impact on the ability to respond in target. Significant changes were made to the process, resources and ways of working. These were successful in improving performance leading to February figures up to 70% and March 88%. The upward trend ends the financial year in a positive position.

3.7. Tenant Satisfaction Measures are collected by housing landlords according to requirements set by the Regulator of Social Housing. These are intended to be a tool to allow tenants to scrutinise their landlord's performance, give insights to landlords on where they might look to improve their services, and provide a source of intelligence to

the regulator on how far landlords are meeting the outcomes of the new consumer standards. The performance of CH02 – Complaints responded to within Complaint Handling Code timescales where both the percentage of cases acknowledged and percentage of cases responded in target is shown in the last column of Table 3 above and was 42% for Stage 1 and 57% for Stage 2 with the total for all complaints at 46%.

- 3.8. Benchmarking with other London Boroughs will be completed once annual reports are published, this report will be updated with comparisons for information. This will include the London Borough of Ealing who hold a similar size housing stock.

Complaints refused

- 3.9. Some complaints were not accepted during this period, however limitations with the system means that the exact number cannot be reported. Approximately 14 cases a month logged through the Council's complaint portal were identified to be general enquiries or service requests and not accepted as a corporate complaint. Reasons for other complaints to be refused included where the complaint was a duplication and the matter had already been investigated, where there was already a legal case underway or if the complaint was about a staff member which was dealt with through internal staff processes.
- 3.10. A new Case Management System will be introduced in 2025, which will give the Council the ability to report on the number and reason for complaints to be refused. This detail will be reported in the Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report covering the 2025/26 financial year and will be used to improve systems, information and guidance to residents to reduce the number of complaints refused.

4. Learning from Complaints

- 4.1. Managed correctly, and with clear follow through to learning and implementing change, the data held on complaints can help the Council improve services and processes and increase resident satisfaction.
- 4.2. Learning from complaints takes place through spot checks of responses, reviews of stage 2 complaints and Ombudsman decisions, tracking post response actions and regular case reviews bringing together teams to review improvements that could be made to prevent issues in the future. Updates on Housing Tenancy and Repair cases are presented at monthly housing performance meetings so all areas of the service can learn from trends and ensure effective oversight of all housing landlord cases.
- 4.3. Analysis of complaints has identified where focus is needed. This year an end-to-end review of housing repairs was carried out which considered best practice, the resident's experience of each stage of the process from raising a repair through to completion of all final works and a review of all policy and processes. Improvements started in April and will continue through Q1 of 2025 and include a new online reporting repair form

allowing residents to self-serve to raise repairs online. Changes will be made to how multi-trade repairs are scheduled with an increase in post-inspections, improved communication options for residents, dynamic scheduling of jobs, co-location of contact centre and repairs colleagues and increased use of data to be more proactive in managing housing stock.

- 4.4. Learning from themes of complaints about repairs, actions have been taken to improve complaint handling through the implementation of weekly performance meetings, Housing Ombudsman Service training, complaint case studies, review of information on the Council website. An interim team were recruited, and complex case meetings have been introduced to oversee, manage complex, and post complaint works.
- 4.5. Lack of timely communication continues to feature in upheld complaints. Whilst responses make apologies for this and provide assurance that the relevant staff will be reminded of the importance of responding to requests for call backs and to written correspondence outlined in our Customer Promises, Assistant Service Managers and Team Leaders now ensure that such conversations take place formally and are documented. Common themes about upheld complaints are also highlighted at monthly team meetings for all service areas thus timely communication features in those also.
- 4.6. This year, most upheld complaints for Estate Services and Caretaking determined that where scheduled cleaning had not taken place, the main reason was because the Caretaker normally assigned to an estate was away because of annual leave or sickness and the stand-in was not familiar with the schedule. As a result, all interim staff are provided with a schedule and are fully briefed on any anomalies or areas that may not be common sensical as being part of that schedule.
- 4.7. Some complaints were received from residents about not being informed in advance of tenancy audits. Whilst responses to such complaints have explained that scheduling such visits would defeat the purpose of tenancy audits, benchmarking was done with other Local Authorities and confirmed the Council's approach was consistent to other London Councils and current practice will remain. Housing and Tenancy Officers identified the benefits of explaining the reasoning behind such audits and why they will be unannounced, to new residents during the sign-up process and reiterating this during the resettlement visits. This will also be highlighted in communications through the tenant's newsletter, social media and letters to existing tenants.
- 4.8. Over the coming year focus will continue to improve service failure and complaint handling through:
 - Increased training and development programme
 - Improved best practice guide taken from Ombudsman briefings
 - New CRM system to ensure better trend analysis

- Improved webpages for residents to access details about complaints
- Increased communications to residents about complaints and better scrutiny through the Residents Voice group
- Regular lessons learnt case discussions with an improved log to record the impact for residents on changes made
- Updating the Housing service compensation policy
- Introducing a new method to collect and review compliments

5. Ombudsman Determinations

5.1. Where tenants have completed the complaints process but are still dissatisfied with the Council's response, they can approach the Housing Ombudsman Service. An annual report is created by the Housing Ombudsman Service for each landlord and details the number of cases investigated by them, their outcomes and how this compared to the previous financial year and other landlords by size and type. This report will be published on the Council's website once received.

5.2. 15 final decisions leading to a determination, were received from the Housing Ombudsman between 1st April 2024 and 31st March 2025.

| Ombudsman cases | Ombudsman determinations which were upheld | Ombudsman determinations which were partially upheld |
|---|--|--|
| Asset Management/Repairs | 8 | 3 |
| Housing Tenancy Management | 3 | |
| Joint Asset management/Repairs and Housing Tenancy Management | | 1 |
| Total | 11 | 4 |

5.3. These determinations were from cases ranging back to 2019 with most complaints between 2022 and 2023. Since this date there have been changes to ways of working, internal systems, digital solutions, legislation and best practice with many improvements implemented so to resolve the root cause for the Ombudsman determination.

5.4. In 3/15 cases there was determined to be a service failure. In 12/15 cases there was deemed to be maladministration which included severe maladministration in 1 of the cases. The main orders received were related to compensation with £10,580 being ordered to be paid. The majority of this was due to failure to handle repairs or due to property condition followed by complaints handling. Apologies, case reviews and policy

or process changes were also ordered, with all orders being complied within time frames set.

- 5.5. The complaints process should aim to aid early resolution, be fair and help to put things right so we can learn from outcomes. A key focus for 2024/25 has been to learn from the previous Ombudsman determinations and use these to drive forward improvements in complaints handling and within services. While this year's maladministration level increased, a reduction should be seen next year where cases from 2024/25 are considered by the Ombudsman.

6. Compliments

- 6.1. Feedback in all forms can allow us to improve services. This year we have included compliments in our annual report and are using these to identify where things work well so this can be replicated across other areas of the service.
- 6.2. We recorded compliments from the repairs service and from Housing Tenancy Management however a consistent approach on collecting these was not in place for 2024/25. Here are a sample of the compliments received.

"Operative has done an amazing job, he was clean and tidy"

"Very polite excellent manner, clean, very happy with the work. Thank you"

"The operatives were very good and polite"

"I just want to say keep up the good works you are all doing helping the community and the residents."