



Castle Point Borough Council

**Annual Housing Complaints
Performance and Service
Improvements Report
2023/24**

Lead Officer responsible for implanting the action plan: Damien Ghela

Lead Member and Member body responsible for monitoring implementation of the action plan: Councillor Robert Lillis, Portfolio Holder for Health, Wellbeing and Housing

Annual Complaint Performance and Service Improvement Report 2023-2024

Introduction

- 1.1 This report is an annual requirement put in place by the Housing Ombudsman Service. Since April 2024 social landlords are required to make public their performance on complaints handling. They must carry out a self-assessment on how they are meeting the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code (the Code) and publish an Annual Complaint Performance Report.
- 1.2 This report sets out an overview of the complaints we received between 01 April 2023 and 31 March 2024. It looks at the complaints that were made and sets out the learnings we have identified to ensure we improve the way in which we handle complaints.
- 1.3 Information on the Housing Ombudsman and the requirements they have placed on social landlords can be found on their website www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk.

2. Complaint Summary

- 2.1 Poor record keeping during 2023-24 has meant we are unable to produce this report to the quality we would like to. This report has been compiled based on 2023-24 data that can be verified. We know we have a long way to go before we are able to handle complaints as well as our residents deserve. While we have made some improvements we recognise that there are further improvements we need to make.
- 2.2 Castle Point Borough Council have a two-stage complaints process. Complaints are defined in line with the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code as 'an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of a service, actions or lack of actions by us, our staff, or those acting on our behalf, affecting an individual resident or a group of residents'.

3. Complaint Overview

- 3.1 Between 01 April 2023 and 31 March 2024, the Housing Service received 27 stage one complaints, with five of these escalating to stage two. While no complaints have been refused, only those complaints that can be evidenced are included in this report.
- 3.2 The table below shows the number of all complaints reported and the number escalated to stage 2 of the complaints procedure.

Year	Stage 1	Stage 2	Escalation Rate
2023-24	27	8	29.6%

- 3.4 Of the 27 stage 1 complaints we received during 2023-24, 11 were upheld. Of the 6 stage 2 complaints, 5 were upheld. Six complaints were extended as they could not be answered in time.

4. Response Times

4.1 In line with the Housing Ombudsman's Code and our Policy, we are required to meet the following targets:

- Acknowledgement to be sent 5 days after receipt of complaint
- Stage 1 response to be sent 10 days after acknowledgement
- Stage 2 response to be sent 20 days after escalation

4.2 This table shows our performance for complaint response times:

Year	Acknowledgement	Stage 1	Stage 2
2023-24	40.7%	66.7%	75.0%

4.3 Without a robust complaints process in place, we have not been able to ensure all complaints have been acknowledged and answered within our published response times. Without sufficient monitoring of the complaints we have received, we have not been able to track complaints to ensure a thorough investigation took place and response sent.

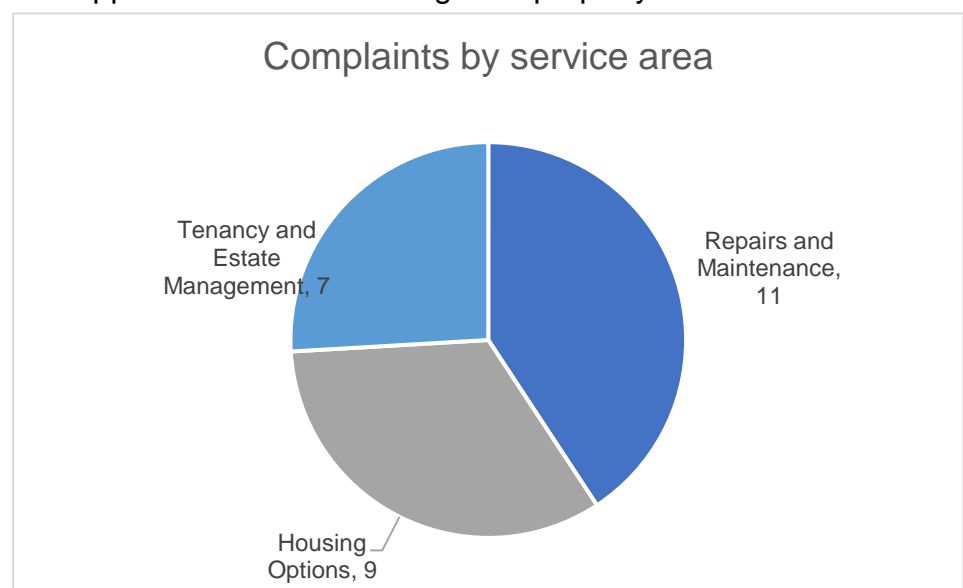
5. Complaint Handling Performance

5.1 Residents have told us they are not happy with how we deal with their issues. We are not handling complaints as well as we should be and need to introduce new ways of working to ensure transparency with our complaint process. Not formally recording complaint information in a robust way has meant we are not able to demonstrate when we have learnt from our mistakes. Changes in how we monitor complaints means that going forward we will be able to demonstrate all learning opportunities.

5.2 As part of understanding and learning from complaints we need to consider which service area they relate to and what they are about. The table below sets out how many complaints were received for each service. Most complaints relate to the repairs and maintenance service. The most common reason for a complaint is relating to the length of time it has taken for the repair to be completed.

5.3 The most common reason for a complaint against our Housing Options team is regarding the time an applicant has been waiting for a property to become available.

5.4 Complaints about the tenancy and estate management service mainly relate to how we are handling a concern with a neighbour.



6. Housing Ombudsman

- 6.1 Residents can approach the Housing Ombudsman for advice and to ask that they investigate how we have handled their complaint. During 2023-24 we received one determination from the Housing Ombudsman.

Date Complaint made	Date of Determination	Outcome
September 2021	29 April 2023	Maladministration

- 6.3 The complaint was relating to how the Council had dealt with a resident's complaint about antisocial behaviour (ASB). We were ordered to pay £450 compensation and to provide an update to the resident on what actions had been taken by the Council to tackle the ASB they had been experiencing .
- 6.4 As part of this Complaint Performance Report we are required to carry out a self-assessment against how our complaint processes met the requirements set out in the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code (the Code). The self-assessment (Appendix 1) was carried out based on the Complaints Policy in place during 2023-24 and identified a number of failings.
- 6.5 Our Policy did not specify how to handle complaints relating to the Housing Service. This means that a number of requirements set out in the Code could not be demonstrated. This included:
- Providing an explanation if we did not accept a complaint
 - Not ensuring complaints were considered on their own merits
 - Providing relevant information on the Housing Ombudsman
 - Responding to complaints as required by the Code
 - Not formally reporting complaint performance
- 6.6 Since the self-assessment we have developed a new process solely for complaints made against the Housing Service. This new Policy compiles fully with the requirements set out in the Code.

7. Learnings

- 7.1 Our main learning from 2023-24 is that our complaints process needs a complete review. This has now been completed and we have introduced a number of new processes which are starting to embed. We have received some positive feedback from residents who have used the complaints process.
- 7.2 We recognise we need to improve our communications with residents and the quality of the data we hold. We do not involve residents enough when we are reviewing services and we will ensure this is done going forward.
- 7.3 We have identified a number of learnings from complaints made in 2023-24.

Complaint	Learning
Delay to carry out repairs	Improve communication with residents when works are delayed
Unhappy with bidding system	Review information provided on bidding for application
Damp and mould	Introduce new process with timeline to deal with reports of damp and mould

Condition of neighbours garden	Review how neighbour issues are dealt with and monitored and the advice given to complainants
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7. Focus for the year ahead

7.1 We have introduced a number of service improvements to the complaint handling service. These include:

- Improve how we monitor complaints
- Provide training to all front-line staff on dealing with complaints
- Formally involve residents in the complaints process
- Introduction of new policies and processes to deal with complaints.

