

Annual Housing Complaints Performance and Service Improvements Report 2023-24

Governing Body Response

Councillor Robert Lillis, Portfolio Holder for Health, Wellbeing and Housing and Member Responsible for Complaints.

While performance has been disappointing I am assured by the information in the report that Castle Point Borough Council's Housing Service has identified and acknowledges the failings in the complaint handling process.

The report highlights the result of poor record keeping and the impact on the service when complaints are not monitored effectively. Customers have found it difficult to make a complaint and we have not always met our agreed timescales to respond. There is little evidence of any learnings through the complaints we received and of how we have involved residents in the process.

Lack of reporting during 2023-24 meant that there have been a number of individual failures in meeting our customers' needs. New processes need to be put in place to ensure transparency with the Housing Service's performance on complaint handling, especially for residents, senior officers and elected members.

The Council are committed to improving services for customers. We want our residents to feel listened to and that their views have been acted upon. We recognise and appreciate how effective complaint handling and learning from customer feedback is key to improving services and achieving the best outcomes for customers.

While the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code became a statutory requirement from 1 April 2024, the Council failed to prepare for this change and ensure they were compliant from day one.

Improvements highlighted in the report to be brought in without delay, include:

- Introducing a dedicated resource to improve how complaints are recorded, monitored and reported on.
- Introducing new policies and processes to deal with complaints.
- Address poor communication with residents accessing the repairs service.

The self-assessment against the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code highlights areas where the Council's Housing Service does not comply. This Policy was replaced in October 2024 and with a new Housing Complaints Policy planned to ensure full compliance with the Code.