



Castle Point Borough Council

**Annual Housing Complaints
Performance and Service
Improvement Report
2024/25**

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

Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report 2024-2025

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This report is an annual requirement put in place by the Housing Ombudsman Service. The Social Housing (Regulations) Act 2023 empowered the Housing Ombudsman to issue a code of practice about how social landlords should deal with complaints.
- 1.2 Landlords are required to share performance details on the complaints they receive and to make improvements to their services as a result of learning from their mistakes. We are also required to complete a self-assessment on how we are meeting the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code (the Code) each year. You can read more about the Housing Ombudsman Service on their website www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk
- 1.3 This report sets out an overview of the complaints we received between 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2025. It looks in detail at the complaints that were made and how we dealt with them. It also sets out the improvements we have made and will take, to ensure that we improve the way in which we handle complaints. It will highlight what we have learnt through the complaints we have received to improve our services.

2. Complaints Summary

- 2.1. This report has been compiled based on 2024-25 data that can be verified. A lack of resources dedicated to dealing with housing complaints resulted in poor monitoring and handling of complaints.
- 2.2. We are committed to building a positive complaints culture, in which we listen to residents and learn from their experiences. We aim to be open and transparent with how we deal with complaints. We acknowledge we have work to do on how we handle complaints and this report sets out our aims for the coming year.
- 2.3. We operate a two-stage complaint process and define a complaint 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'.
- 2.4. We now have a new monitoring system in place and a new Housing Complaints Policy which includes an appendix setting out how we deal with complaints for our social housing tenants and leaseholders. All Housing staff have received training on how we deal with complaints relating to our landlord services.

3. Complaints Overview

- 3.1. Between 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2025, the Housing Service received 47 Stage 1 complaints, with five of these escalating to Stage 2. 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 Housing complaints reported and the number escalated to Stage 2 of the complaints process, compared to the previous year:

Year	Stage 1	Stage 2	Escalation Rate
2023-24	27	8	29.6%
2024-25	47	6	12.5%

- 3.3 We have made it easier for residents to make a complaint by removing the informal step of our complaints process. This has resulted in more complaints being formally recorded.
- 3.4 Of the 47 Stage 1 complaints we received during 2024-25, 20 were upheld. Of the 6 stage 2 complaints, 5 were upheld. We issued 22 formal apologies and paid £2,724 in compensation between 10 complainants.

4. Response Times

- 4.1. In line with the Housing Ombudsman's Code, and our Complaints Policy we are required to meet the following targets:
- Acknowledgement to be sent within 5 days after receipt of the complaint
 - Stage 1 response to be sent within 10 days after acknowledgement
 - Stage 2 response to be sent within 20 days after escalation
- 4.2 This table shows our performance for complaints response times:

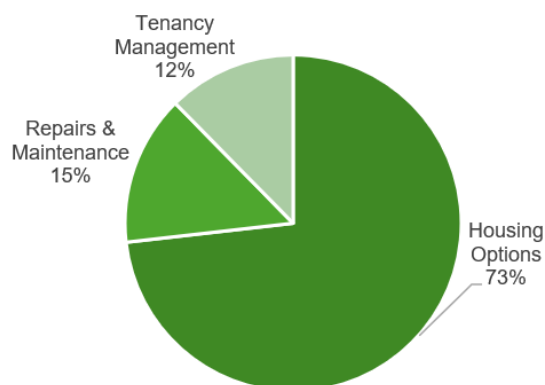
Year	Acknowledgement	Stage 1	Stage 2
2023-24	n/a	66.7%	75.0%
2024-25	58.3%	64.6%	66.7%

- 4.3 We realise that we need to make improvements in responding to complaints promptly. When looking at the reasons for delays, we found that our monitoring process was not good enough. Some complaints were 'lost' and our responses were not always formally made and recorded in writing. This resulted in complaints not always being closed on time and residents feeling their complaint had not been properly dealt with.
- 4.4 Poor monitoring has meant that we have not always had an overview of live complaints. Without an up-to-date 'live' overview, we have not been able to track complaints from their receipt through to closure and ensure a formal and complete response was sent to the complainant.
- 4.5 A formal response ensures residents have a written record of their complaint, including details of our investigation, our decision, including whether the complaint was upheld or not, and any actions we have agreed. It also ensures they know what the next step is if they are unhappy with the outcome of our investigation and proposed resolution.
- 4.6 We introduced a new monitoring system in April 2025 to ensure all complaints are formally recorded and their progress tracked. Weekly updates of open complaints enable us to ensure all complaints are investigated and responded to on time and that senior management have sight of the number and types of complaint we have received.

- 4.7 Quarterly reports will be made available to senior officers and Members throughout the year to ensure they have regular insight on our complaints handling performance. Regular 'deep dives' will be carried out to maximise learnings, especially for complex complaints that involve more than one service area.

5. Complaints Performance

- 5.1 During 2024-25 we introduced a dedicated resource to manage our complaints process. This ensures every complaint is formally registered and the principles of the Code are followed, including issuing a formal response within the timelines of the Code.
- 5.2 A new Housing Complaints Policy, Compensation Policy and Reasonable Adjustments Policy for the Housing service have been introduced, comprising of all the aspects of the Code. A comprehensive rollout on complaints training has been undertaken with all Housing staff.
- 5.3 Customer feedback has told us that residents have lost confidence in how we deal with their issues. Our performance in recording complaints is not where it needs to be. Historically we have not used the all the data available to us to learn from our mistakes and put in changes to improve our services.
- 5.4 Social landlord complaints are monitored by the number of complaints made for every 1,000 Council properties owned. Last year we received 20 complaints for every 1,000 properties, which we acknowledge is relatively low compared to some other social landlords. With better processes now in place we expect this number to rise for 2025-26.
- 5.5 This compares to 101 MP enquiries and 22 Councillor enquiries received during the same period. The majority of these enquiries relate to our Housing Options team and are from applicants seeking rehousing.
- 5.6 It is worth noting that while the timeframe to respond to complaints is 10 days, for the MP or Councillor enquiries it is 5 days. This could be encouraging people to raise an issue through their MP or Councillor instead of as a complaint.
- 5.7 We also acknowledge that some residents may have found it easier to go through their elected Member than our complaints process. Members enquiries may also be considered as a complaint if it meets the complaints criteria and dealt with through the complaints process.
- 5.8 Each year we are required to carry out a tenant satisfaction survey. Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs) are a set of performance indicators used by the Regulator of Social Housing to assess how well social housing providers are performing in delivering quality homes and services.
- 5.9 For 2024-25 customer satisfaction with our handling of complaints was 23.0%. This compares to a national average of 34.5% and a local authority average of 29.1%. We will be reviewing the detailed feedback of these results to establish

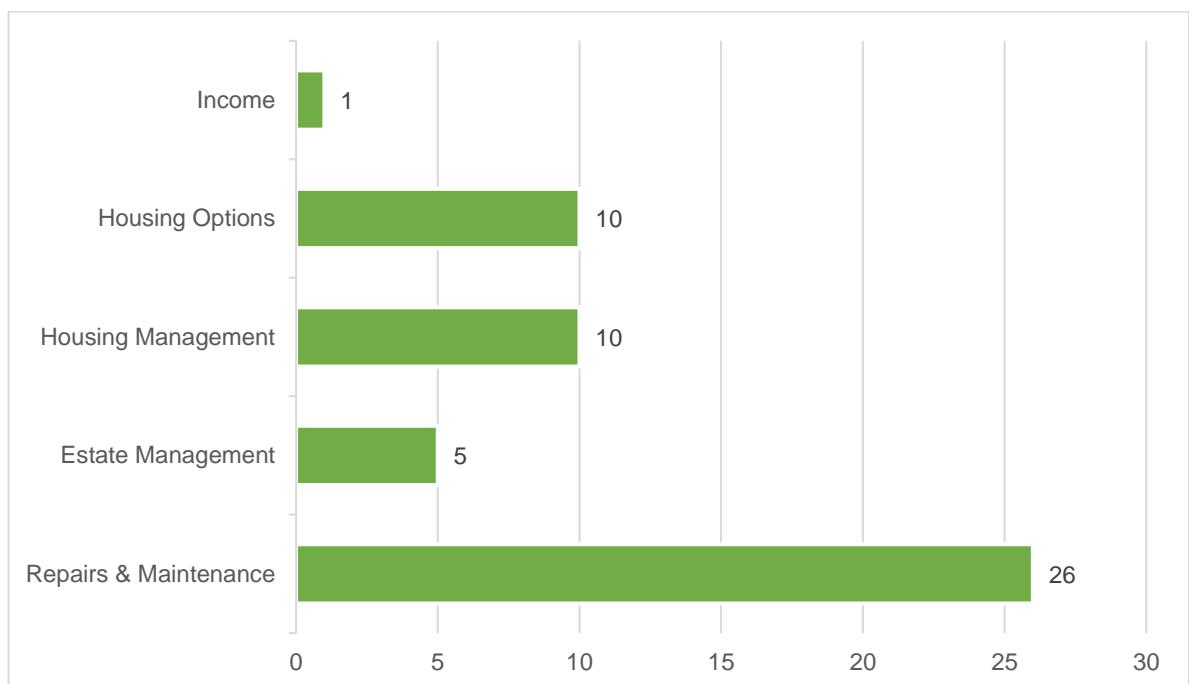


what we need to introduce to increase satisfaction from those who have made a complaint.

- 5.10 For 2025-26 we will be introducing transactional complaint handling satisfaction surveys. Capturing customer feedback after a complaint will help us understand how we are doing and where we can improve. This will enable us to act quickly, contacting the resident to see why their issue has not been resolved and how we can resolve it. It will also enable us to make changes to our processes as necessary.

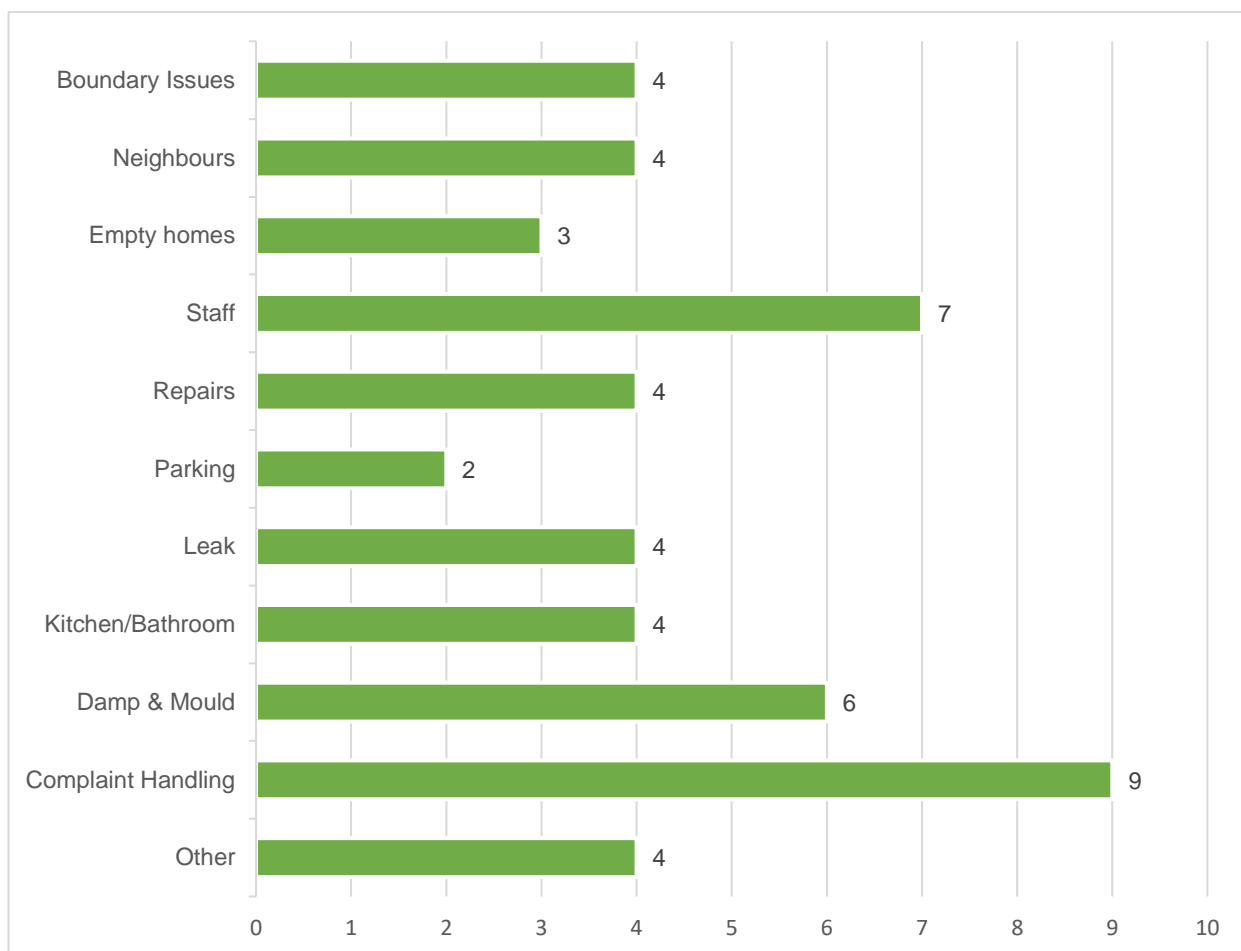
6. Complaints Themes

- 6.1 Part of understanding complaints is to consider which service area they relate to and what they are about. As we would expect, the majority of our complaints relate to our repairs and maintenance service which is the service our tenants must commonly use.
- 6.2 The lack of a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system makes it difficult to track service requests which later turn into complaints. We are looking to introduce a monitoring system to help us to identify service requests which later escalate into complaints. This will help us understand the reasons complaints are made and identify common themes earlier.
- 6.3 This table sets out complaints by department:



- 6.4 The main themes emerging for complaints in 2024-25 were services not provided, delays to repairs, action not taken, poor or lack of communication and the conduct of staff and contractors.
- 6.5 Complaint training for all Housing staff and our main repairs contractor will ensure that going forward all complaints are welcomed and acknowledged as such. This will enable us to identify common areas of concerns within all departments and review our services and delivery of services to ensure a better customer experience.

- 6.6 There has been some evidence to suggest some departments have been more willing to acknowledge a complaint for what it is, while others will try to resolve an issue without accepting a resident's dissatisfaction as a complaint.
- 6.7 By investing in front line services and focusing on our core values, we aim to create a culture of collective responsibility by ensuring we listen and act on feedback.
- 6.8 We also looked at what the issues have been about. This enables us to carry out further analysis to identify trends and areas of concerns. We have identified three main areas of concern from this year's complaints.



- 6.9 We have looked into detail in these areas and have identified failings and areas for improvement. These improvements are set out in the Complaints Service Improvement Plan at the end of this report.
- 6.9.1 **Complaint Handling** – we have found a number of failings as highlighted in this report. Our complaint handling process has been fully reviewed and a number of changes put into place.
- 6.9.2 **Staff** – we recognise our staff sometimes have to have difficult conversations with customers and will ensure they have the skills to ensure they treat all customers with respect and empathy.
- 6.9.3 **Damp and Mould** – we have introduced a new Damp, Mould and Condensation Policy and procured a damp and mould specialist to ensure all reports are dealt with promptly and in line with the new Policy.

7. Housing Ombudsman

- 7.1. Throughout our complaint process, we make residents aware of their right to contact the Housing Ombudsman. They can contact them at any stage of their complaint for advice and can ask that they investigate how we have handled their complaint once they have been through our complaint process.
- 7.2. During 2024-25 we received two determinations from the Housing Ombudsman.

Date Complaint made	Date of Determination	Outcome
13 September 2023	05 November 2024	Service Failure
02 February 2024	31 March 2025	Service Failure

- 7.3. **Case 1:** The complaint was relating to a resident's complaint about antisocial behaviour and safeguarding. The Council was ordered to apologise, pay £200 compensation and carry out a review of the resident's case to identify learnings. We were also required to consider the Ombudsman's Spotlight report on Knowledge and Information Management and our contingency processes for communicating with vulnerable residents.
- 7.4. **Case 2:** The complaint related to landlord's response to a resident's concerns about damp and mould. The Council was ordered to pay £200 compensation and contact the resident to discuss further works.

8. Communications

- 8.1. Our communication around complaints handling needs to improve. Complaints are sometimes closed prior to being fully resolved. This can create a feeling of not being listened to and/or not being treated with sufficient respect.
- 8.2. Feedback from residents who have experience of our complaints handling process has told us that we don't always respond to them, and that we often take too long to provide a response and/or our response does not provide a satisfactory resolution.
- 8.3. Historically, some complaints responses have been informal. We have now adopted the practice where every response for a formal complaint will be in the form of a letter using a template recommended by the Housing Ombudsman.
- 8.4. We are also in the process of updating our website with clearer information on complaints and compensation. This will ensure residents are better informed on their rights to make a complaint, how they can expect it to be handled and whether their complaint will be considered for compensation.

9. Learnings

- 9.1. It is crucial for us to learn from complaints and identify areas where we can improve our customer service. The contents of this report have been shared with all Housing staff and the Portfolio Holder for Health, Wellbeing and Housing. The complaints we have received have shown that there have been instances when staff have not been responsive enough to residents' concerns.

- 9.2. We will set up a formal resident engagement opportunity so residents can directly influence our handling of complaints. Although in the early planning stages we will take this forward in 2025-26.
- 9.3. It will take some time to embed the changes in our new Housing Complaints Policy and for all staff to welcome complaints as an opportunity to learn and improve our services. We will ensure training on complaints handling is provided to front-line staff throughout the year.
- 9.4. We have identified a number of learnings from complaints made in 2024-25:

Complaint	Learning
Unhappy with quality of fencing	Review with contractors understanding of replacement components
No response to correspondence	Better monitoring and staff training on the importance of responding promptly to communications from residents
Reports of estate issues not acted upon	Improved recording of estate issues
Programme of improvement works not communicated	Review how improvement programmes are communicated to residents
New neighbour parking on shared drive	Review sign-up process to ensure parking restrictions are included
Delay to rent payment showing on account	Review how payments are uploaded to improve automated updates
Waiting 15 months for repair to be completed	Review how repairs are monitored until closed when the job is complete

10. Summary / Focus for the year ahead

- 10.1. We are committed to providing the best service for our residents and understand the value of using feedback to improve. We will regularly review our performance, to include:
- Number of complaints we receive
 - Types of complaints received
 - Number of complaints that are escalated
 - Time taken to resolve complaints
 - Common themes and trends
 - Outcomes of complaints and resolutions offered
 - Identify and implement learnings
 - Housing Ombudsman interventions
- 10.2 We will introduce a formal Resident Engagement Framework during 2025-26 that sets out a range of opportunities for residents to influence our services. The complaints process is a key service area for our residents to work with us to ensure we are delivering on our commitments to them.

Complaints Service Improvement Plan 2025-26

Complaint Themes	Action	Timeframe
Complaint Handling	Develop complaints monitoring systems to ensure all stages can be tracked and reported on.	May 2025
	Roll out complaints handling training for all Housing staff and main contractor so complaints are dealt with consistently and within the requirements of the Code.	May 2025
	Software introduced for surveyors to record details of inspections which can be downloaded and stored in the repairs system.	May 2025
	Update the complaints page on website to ensure transparency and provide residents with key information on how to make a complaint and our performance on dealing with complaints.	July 2025
	Roll out new Compensation Policy, embedding a culture of offering appropriate redress when we have done something wrong.	July 2025
	Launch new Housing Services Complaints Policy to ensure Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code is met.	July 2025
	Introduce transactional customer satisfaction surveys to identify trends and failings in our complaint handling process.	July 2025
	Produce regular reports on complaint handling, which will measure performance, identify trends and learnings, provide assurance on complaint handling process.	July 2025
	Improve our recording of disabilities and vulnerabilities on the Housing Management System to ensure we know when reasonable adjustments may be needed.	September 2025
Staff	Train all staff on how to have difficult conversations.	September 2025
	Train all staff involved with complaints in the importance of making reasonable adjustments	September 2025
	Introduce call recording for all calls to monitor the quality of conversations and identify those who need extra support and tailored training.	September 2025
	All staff to be reminded of the need to act professionally in team meetings and one-to-ones.	December 2025
Damp and Mould	New Damp, Mould and Condensation Policy to be rolled out with mandatory training for all staff.	September 2025
	Introduce recording system for damp and mould cases to track works and identify trends.	September 2025

Estate issues	Review how reports of issues on our estates are managed.	August 2025
	Increase number of estate inspections to identify issues and monitor those reported until identified issues are resolved.	September 2025
Outstanding repairs	Improve monitoring of complaints that are not completed and ensure residents are kept informed of delays and expected timeframes.	August 2025
Communication	Review information on housing complaints available on our website to ensure residents can easily make a complaint, understand what will happen once they do and what they can do if they remain unhappy.	August 2025
	Review with new residents group how we communicate when things go wrong to ensure our complaints process meets the needs of residents.	September 2025
	Undertake a campaign to increase the number of emails and mobile numbers we hold so we keep residents up to date on their service requests and programmed improvement work.	December 2025