

HOUSING OMBUDSMAN SELF-ASSESSMENT 2025/26 – APPENDIX B

Annual Complaints Handling and Service Improvement Report

Reporting period: 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026

1. Executive summary

- 1.1 This report reviews complaints received during the financial year 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026 in relation to the Council's housing services (Housing Repairs, Housing Rents and Housing Management) covered by the Housing Ombudsman. Housing Options/Needs and Private Sector Housing complaints will be contained within the separate report for the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Annual Self-Assessment.
- 1.2 This intention of this report is to provide assurance on complaint volumes, timeliness, outcomes, Ombudsman findings, learning lessons and service improvement.
- 1.3 In addition to this report, an annual report covering all areas of complaints, including housing, will be submitted to the Governance Committee in December 2026.

2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1 The Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 introduced new social housing consumer standards that contain specific expectations that registered providers of social housing must comply with and detail the outcomes that providers are expected to achieve.
- 2.2 In relation to complaints, the Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard state that the registered provider (the Council) must:
 - Ensure their approach to handling complaints is simple, accessible and publicised.
 - Provide accessible information to tenants about:
 - (a) how tenants can make a complaint about their landlord;
 - (b) the landlord's complaints policy and complaints handling process;
 - (c) what tenants can do if they are dissatisfied with the outcome of a complaint or how a complaint was handled; and
 - (d) the type of complaints received and how they have learnt from complaints to continuously improve services
- 2.3 If the Council cannot resolve a matter to the tenant's satisfaction, they have the option of taking the matter to the Housing Ombudsman Service and asking they investigate the matter.
- 2.4 The Housing Ombudsman published a new statutory Complaint Handling Code that came into effect on 1 April 2024. A similar non-statutory Code was also introduced by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman at the same time.
- 2.5 The statutory guidance provides for a single, robust set of standards for complaints procedures that are accessible, efficient and fair. These will facilitate the development of a framework for high-quality complaint handling that will enable the Council (as landlord) to resolve complaints raised by its residents as efficiently and effectively as possible and imbed lessons learning from complaints to drive service improvements.
- 2.6 A legal duty is also placed on the Ombudsman to monitor compliance with the Code, regardless of whether it receives individual complaints from residents about a landlord.
- 2.7 The revised Complaint Handling Code requires landlords to produce an annual complaints performance and service improvement report for scrutiny and challenge, which includes a self-assessment against the Code.
- 2.8 Dover District Council has always viewed complaints as an opportunity to learn and improve services for its residents and actively encourages tenants and customers to raise comments and

complaints. All expressions of dissatisfaction represent a positive opportunity to learn and provide insight that will help the Council improve its service delivery.

- 2.9 In accordance with the Ombudsmen's Complaint Handling Code, the Member Responsible for Complaints (known as the 'MRC') and the governing body (or equivalent) must receive the following:
- (a) Regular updates on the volume, categories and outcomes of complaints, alongside complaint handling performance;
 - (b) Regular reviews of issues and trends arising from complaint handling;
 - (c) Regular updates on the outcomes of the Ombudsman's investigations and progress made in complying with orders related to severe maladministration findings; and
 - (d) Annual complaints performance and service improvement report.
- 2.10 The Head of Corporate Services and Democracy provides monthly briefings to the 'Member Responsible for Complaints' who is the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Governance, Technology and Resilience, Councillor M J Nee.
- 2.11 In addition, from Quarter 1 2025/26, a dedicated quarterly complaints report was provided to the Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny Committee replacing the limited indicators that had previously been in the quarterly Strategic Performance report. The quarterly complaints report allows the Cabinet to have access to more detailed information than could be provided as one of many key performance indicators that formed part of the quarterly Strategic Performance Report.
- 2.12 The Governance Committee will continue to monitor complaints handling and Ombudsman investigations and, in relation to non-executive functions, to make payments or provide other benefits in cases of maladministration. It will also receive an annual complaints report.
- 2.13 The role of the Member Responsible for Complaints does not prevent other individual Portfolio Holders from receiving updates on complaints in relation to their portfolio area and seeking to work with officers in those portfolios to drive improvements.

3. Key Headlines

- 3.1 The key headlines for 2025/26 are as follows:

- 201 Stage 1 housing complaints were opened in 2025/26, compared with 163 in 2024/25.
- 39 Stage 2 housing complaints were opened in 2025/26, compared to 21 in 2024/25.
- For 2025/26, approximately three out of every four complaints were resolved at Stage 1.
- Stage 1 housing compliance improved through the year and reached 100% in Quarter 4. Full-year compliance was 96.52%.
- All Stage 2 housing complaints were responded to within 20 working days or an agreed extension.
- Housing Repairs continued to account for the clear majority of housing complaints, with 159 out of the 201 Stage 1 complaints received during the year.
- Two Housing Ombudsman cases were determined in 2025/26 and both were upheld against the Council.

4. The Importance of Complaints and Compliments

- 4.1 Complaints and compliments are viewed as valuable feedback, and the Council should endeavour to use the lessons learnt from this feedback to improve the services it provides. There are many benefits to be gained from an effective and efficient complaints process:
- Good complaint handling promotes a positive relationship between the Council and service users.
 - Complaints allow an issue to be resolved before it becomes worse. Those issues not resolved promptly can take significant resource and time to remedy.
 - Involvement in complaint resolution develops staff ownership, decision-making and engagement.
 - Complaints provide senior staff with essential insight into day-to-day operations, allowing them to assess effectiveness and drive a positive complaint handling culture.
 - Data collected about complaints can be analyzed and used to inform key business decisions to drive improvements in service provision.

5. The Complaints Policy

- 5.1 The Council operates the required two-stage complaints process as set out in the Complaint Handling Code by the Housing Ombudsman. The definitions in use under the Complaints Policy are those defined by the Ombudsman as follows:
- Service Request – “A service request is a request from a resident to the landlord (“the Council”) requiring action to be taken to put something right.”
 - Complaint – “An expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the landlord (“the Council”), its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting a resident or group of residents.”
- 5.2 Service Requests are not considered to be complaints under the Complaints Policy but if not resolved, satisfactorily may lead to a formal complaint. The majority of Service Requests are received directly by the individual service and dealt with without requiring further intervention from outside the service. For example, a tenant requesting a responsive repair.
- 5.3 For complaints, the Council operates the Ombudsman required two-stage complaints process. All complaints are primarily received by (through the website, telephone, email or letter) Corporate Services though on some occasions complaints are passed on by a service or customer services on behalf of an individual/resident to Corporate Services. This provides for a comprehensive single record of all complaints received by the Council.
- 5.4 Stage 1 complaints are responded to by individual services with support and advice from Corporate Services if required. A copy of all Stage 1 documentation is held on the complaints database. If a complainant is not satisfied with the Stage 1 response, they can escalate the complaint to Stage 2, asking for it to be reviewed.
- 5.5 Stage 2 complaints are handled by the Corporate Services Officer responsible for complaints. This provides an independent challenge to the response to the Stage 1 complaint and if required the Corporate Services Officer can take a different view to the Stage 1 response and recommend alternative actions.
- 5.6 Although Stage 2 completes the Council's complaints process, complainants have the right to escalate a complaint to the relevant Ombudsman. The Ombudsman will consider a request for

review of the Council's handling of a complaint and may choose to investigate the complaint further. The Ombudsmen may uphold a complaint in full, in part or not at all. Corporate Services will liaise with the Ombudsman in respect of any cases that have been referred by a resident to them.

6. Complaints the Council Refused to Accept

- 6.1 The complaints that the Council refused to accept that related to the Council's role as landlord were for the following reasons in 2025/26 were in line with those set out in our Complaints Policy. They were:
- Where the resident/individual has known about the issue for more than 12 months unless there is good reason for the delay or if there are safeguarding or health and safety issues.
 - Where legal proceedings have already started. This is defined as details of the claim, such as the Claim Form or Particulars of Claim, have been filed at Court.
 - Matters that have already been considered under the Council's Complaints Policy or by the Ombudsman.
 - Something for which there is a statutory right of appeal or that can be appealed about to a tribunal (such as the Housing Benefit Appeals Service) or go to court about, unless there is a good reason the resident/individual should not be expected to use that appeal right.
 - Anonymous complaints will not normally be accepted as it would not be possible for the Council to respond to them. However, the Head of Corporate Services and Democracy in consultation with the Council's Monitoring Officer will consider any anonymous complaint received on a case-by-case basis as to whether it should be investigated further.
 - Allegations that a Councillor has failed to comply with the Code of Conduct for Members. A summary of the arrangements for handling complaints against Members is set out in Annex C of the Complaints Policy. It should be noted that there are certain circumstances where the Council may accept complaints about handling of complaints under the Code of Conduct.
- 6.2 Complaints against the conduct/behaviour of members of staff or contractors will be accepted under the Complaints Policy. For example, if a contractor was rude or abusive to a resident whilst completing a repair, the resident should be able to raise this with the Council to investigate. However, if the Council needs to take disciplinary or other HR action that information would not be included in a complaint response. However, the Council can still address the behaviour and impact on the resident/individual in its response.
- 6.3 If the Council takes the decision not to accept a complaint, a detailed explanation will be provided to the complainant, setting out the reasons why the matter is not suitable for the complaints process and the right to take the decision to the appropriate Ombudsman. Where the Ombudsman does not agree the Council may be instructed to accept the complaint. The Council will always comply with such instructions.

7. Housing Ombudsman Recommendations in respect of the Complaints Policy

- 7.1 The Council reported an area of non-compliance with the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code as part of the annual Self-Assessment report last year. The Housing Ombudsman acknowledged the area of non-compliance and the Council's improvement plan for dealing with this in its letter of 30 October 2025. However, subsequently on the 4 February 2026 the Housing Ombudsman notified the Council of its intention to review the Council's Complaints Policy as part of a wider programme of prioritising reviews of all local authority complaint policy. On 20 March

2026 the Council received the findings of the Housing Ombudsman recommending 7 areas for review and improvement.

- 7.2 The Cabinet and the full Council in May 2026 approved an updated Complaints Policy that incorporated the changes required to meet the recommendations of the Housing Ombudsman. That report can be found on the Council's website – [Council 13 May 2026](#)
- 7.3 The recommendations and the Council's responses were in summary:

Housing Ombudsman Recommendation	Revisions to Complaints Policy
We have noted that the landlord has included in the introduction page of the complaints policy the following paragraph: “The Council's Complaints Policy has been updated in line with the provisions of the Joint Complaint Handling Code developed by the Housing Ombudsman and the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.” The information is not correct and should be removed from the policy. The Housing Ombudsman and the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman have separate Codes	While the Codes are functionally very similar, they are separate Codes. We accept this point and it has been re-worded accordingly. It now reads: “The Council's Complaints Policy has been updated in line with the provisions of the separate Complaint Handling Codes developed by the Housing Ombudsman and the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.”
Recommendation 1 - DDC should include in its complaints policy residents that express dissatisfaction is given a choice to make a complaint.	We acknowledge this point and have taken the steps below to implement it. Amended Paragraph 1.5 – “If a resident or individual expresses dissatisfaction at any point as part of a service request they will be given the choice to escalate the matter to a formal complaint.” In addition, Council staff are made aware that to be a complaint, a resident/individual does not have to use the word “complaint” and that an assessment of all contacts needs to be done to determine if a matter is a service request or a complaint. In the overwhelming majority of situations, the distinction between the two will be clear. Corporate Services are available to provide advice if anyone is unsure about a direct contact from a resident/individual as to whether it should be treated as a complaint. See also paragraph 2.3 of the Complaints Policy.
Recommendation 2 - DDC should amend section 6.5 on page 10 of its complaints policy to reflect that complaints about	We acknowledge this point and have taken the steps below to implement it.

Housing Ombudsman Recommendation	Revisions to Complaints Policy
members of staff will be handled in line with the 2 stage complaints process. The section should be moved to the list of exclusions on page 6 of its complaints policy.	Deleted Paragraph 6.5 that previously read “complaints about the behaviour of a member of staff or a councillor are dealt with under different arrangements outside the scope of this policy. For further information please see Annex B and Annex C respectively of this Policy.” New paragraph 3.4 added under exclusions to read as follows: “Complaints against the conduct/behaviour of members of staff or contractors will be accepted under the Complaints Policy. For example, if a contractor was rude or abusive to a resident whilst completing a repair, the resident should be able to raise this with the Council to investigate. However, should the Council need to take disciplinary or other HR action, that would not be included in a complaint response, but the Council can still address the behaviour and impact on the resident/individual in its response.” Deleted Annex B relating to staff complaints. The new paragraph 3.4 reflects existing practice in many cases where the complaints against staff were relatively minor allegations.
Recommendation 3 - DDC should amend its complaints policy and include an explanation of how it publicises the complaints policy. This can include the landlord's website and the bi-annual newsletter as reported in the self-assessment. The landlord can also include anything else that applies i.e. a tenant handbook or if the policy is displayed in communal areas in shared properties.	We acknowledge this point and have taken the steps below to implement it. The Accessibility and Awareness section has been expanded to set out more information on how the Council raises awareness of its Complaints Policy. As a result of this recommendation, consideration has been given to how the Council can better promote the complaints policy and complaints performance information to tenants beyond promotion in the tenant news publication and website pages. Accordingly, Corporate Services will attend a meeting with the tenant representative group in September 2026 to provide a review of housing related complaints performance for the year as the Housing Ombudsman Self-Assessment is due to be submitted by 30 September 2026.

Housing Ombudsman Recommendation	Revisions to Complaints Policy
	Taking the view that tenants are best placed to advise us how to communicate with tenants on this matter, we will also discuss with the tenant representatives at that meeting as to the most effective ways in which the Complaints Policy can be promoted to tenants.
Recommendation 4 - DCC should remove the informal stage in its complaints policy. Having more than two stages is not acceptable under any circumstances as this will make the complaint process unduly long and delay access to the Ombudsman.	We acknowledge this point and have taken the steps below to implement it. This relates to an interpretation of the section titled “the complaints procedure” (section 6 of the current Complaints Policy and section 7 in the revised Complaints Policy attached at Appendix 1). This section is meant to refer to the handling of service requests but does not convey this clearly based on the feedback from the Housing Ombudsman. It is not meant to imply the existence of a ‘Stage 0’ in the Complaints Policy. Paragraph 6.1 has therefore been deleted to resolve this matter. It previously read as follows: “When an individual or resident contacts the Council the member of staff should do all they can to resolve the issue and if this is not possible refer the matter to their line manager. If further enquiries are needed to resolve the matter, or if the individual or resident requests it, the issue must be logged as a complaint with Corporate Services.”
Recommendation 5 - DDC should amend its complaint policy to include where a response to a complaint falls outside the timescales set out in the Code, DDC will agree with the resident suitable intervals for keeping them informed about their complaint.	We acknowledge this point and have taken the steps below to implement it. A new paragraph has been added at 8.6 (Stage 1) and 9.8 (Stage 2) as follows: “Where a response to a complaint will fall outside the timescales set out in this process (i.e. where an extension is required), the Council will agree with the resident/individual, suitable intervals for keeping them informed about their complaint.” We believe this currently happens in an unstructured manner at this time, with

Housing Ombudsman Recommendation	Revisions to Complaints Policy
	residents/individuals notified during the extension as matters arise that officers believe should be relayed to the resident/individual. These changes will provide for a consistent approach.
Recommendation 6 - DDC should include in section 7 of its complaints policy that DDC will provide the resident with the complaint definition in its stage 1 acknowledgement.	We acknowledge this point and have taken the steps below to implement it. The complaint definition is set out at paragraph 9.10 (Stage 2) of the Complaints Policy at Appendix 1. This has now been replicated in a new paragraph 8.15 for Stage 1. The Council does require as part of the template letter used for Stage 1 responses for officers to set out the complaint. However, it is accepted that this should be stated in the Complaints Policy as well.
Recommendation 7 - DCC should include in its complaints policy at stage 2 that a response will be provided to the resident when the answer is known not when outstanding actions are completed and any outstanding actions will be tracked, actioned and updates are provided to the resident. To ensure DCC is compliant with provision 6.6 and 6.17 of the Code.	We acknowledge this point and have taken the steps below to implement it. New paragraphs added at 8.6 (Stage 1) and 9.8 (Stage 2) as follows: “Where a response to a complaint will fall outside the timescales set out in this process (i.e. where an extension is required), the Council will agree with the resident/individual, suitable intervals for keeping them informed about their complaint.”

8. Scope of Annual Complaints Handling and Service Improvement Report 2025/26

- 8.1 The figures below apply to complaints opened during the period 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026.
- 8.2 For the purposes of this report, only complaints relating to the following housing services are provided:
- Housing Management
 - Housing Rents
 - Housing Repairs
- 8.3 These services are within the remit of the Housing Ombudsman. Complaints relating to other services within the Council will be reported elsewhere and include Housing Needs/Options and

Private Sector Housing which fall under the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's separate Self-Assessment.

- 8.4 During 2025/26, the Council has put significant efforts into making it easier for residents to make a complaint and for that complaint to be dealt with more efficiently. This has included improvements to the complaints digital system, a redesigned webpage for making complaints and the introduction of regular meetings with tenant representatives in 2026/27.

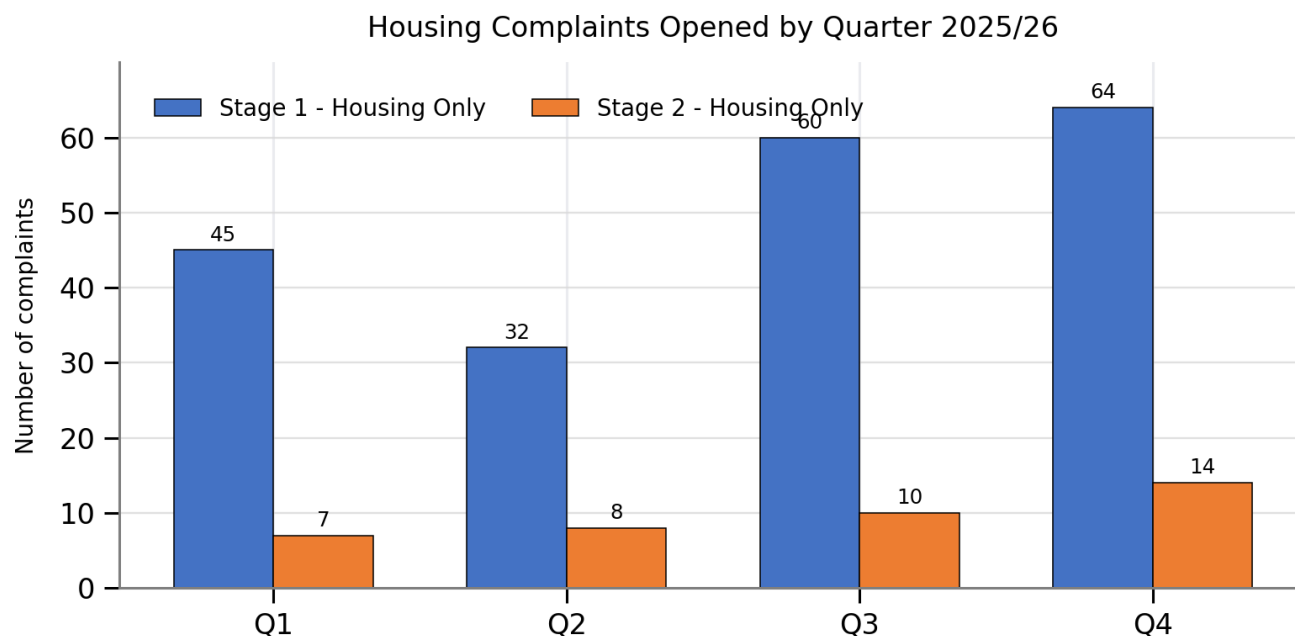
9. Complaints received in 2025/26

- 9.1 Overall, complaints have increased year-on-year across the Council. This is also true of housing complaints which increased in 2025/26. The increase should be considered alongside work undertaken by the complaints team to make the complaints process more accessible and to improve identification and recording of complaints.

Measure	2024/25	2025/26	Change
Stage 1 housing complaints	163	201	+38 (+23.3%)
Stage 2 housing complaints	21	39	+18 (+85.7%)

- 9.2 Housing Repairs accounted for 159 of the 201 Stage 1 housing complaints in 2025/26, which is to be expected given the nature of the service providing responsive repairs and scheduled works to tenants through a variety of contractors. Housing Management and Housing Rents together accounted for the remaining 42.

Figure 1: Housing complaints opened by quarter, 2025/26



Quarter	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
Stage 1 Housing Services	45	32	60	64	201

Quarter	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
Stage 2 Housing Services	7	8	10	14	39

Acknowledgement within five working days

- 9.3 The causes of non-compliance at Stage 1 and Stage 2 fall into two broad categories – at Stage 1 this relates to the transition from a service request or disrepair claim into a formal complaint not being recognised as a formal complaint quickly enough to enable the complaint acknowledgement to be issued within the timeframe. At Stage 2, this is similarly where the escalation of the complaint has not been identified and acknowledged quickly enough, usually due to on-going dialogue from the Stage 1 complaint between the relevant service with the complainant delaying the escalation step.
- 9.4 In terms of performance in 2025/26, there was one Stage 1 Housing Repairs complaint that was acknowledged outside the five-working-day requirement during Quarter 1. At Stage 2, there were three instances of late acknowledgement: two in Quarter 2 and one in Quarter 4. The complaints team has reviewed its procedures and is working with services to improve the prompt recognition and notification of escalation requests.

Figure 2: Stage 1 Housing complaint acknowledgements within five working days

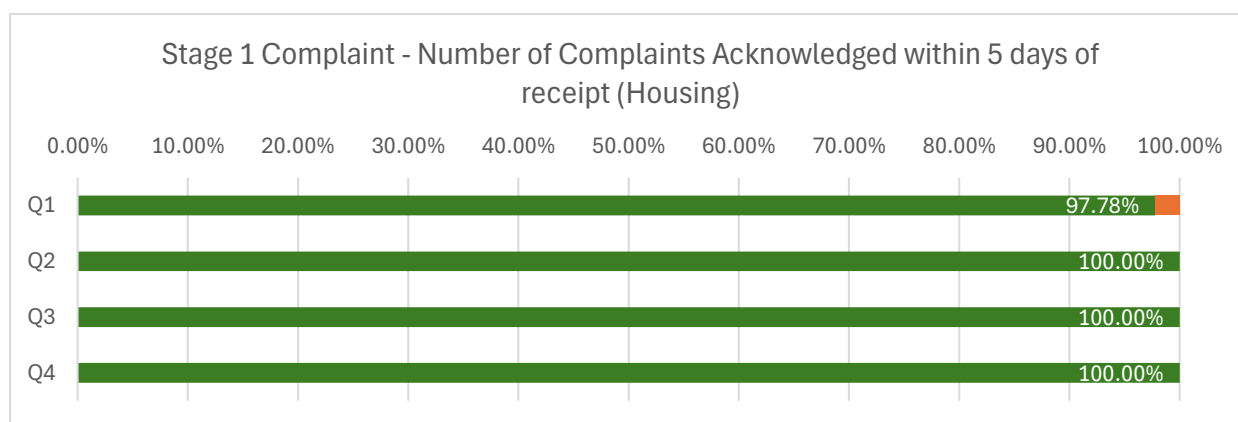
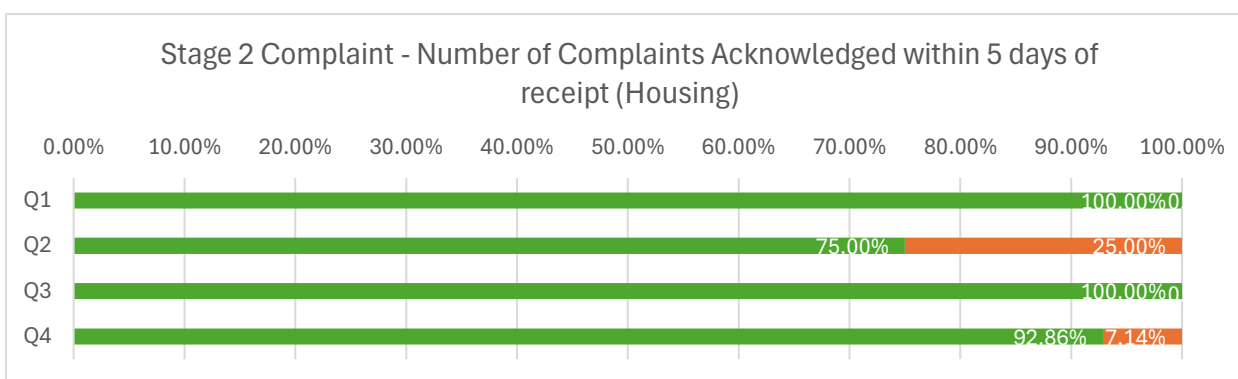


Figure 3: Stage 2 Housing complaint acknowledgements within five working days



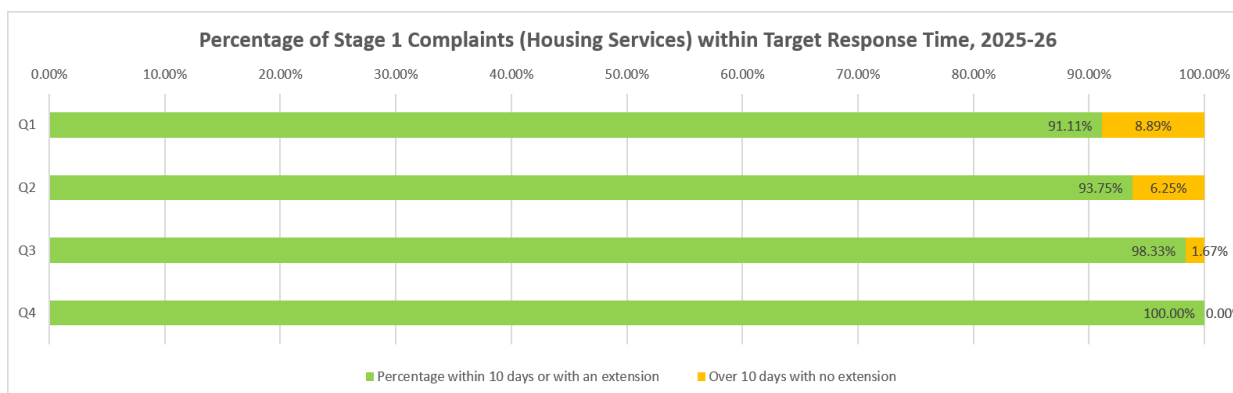
- 9.5 The complaints team has reviewed its own procedures in 2025/26 to ensure that Stage 2 complaints are acknowledged within the 5-day window where they arrive directly to the team and

has worked with services to ensure that the importance of recognising an escalation request and notifying the complaints team as soon as it is identified is emphasised.

Stage 1 response times

- 9.6 The principal improvement is the return to full performance compliance in Quarter 4, following steady improvement during the year. The average number of days for responding to a Stage 1 complaint was 9.33 in quarter 4.

Figure 4: Stage 1 Housing complaints responded to within 10 working days (or with an extension)



Stage 1 Response Timescales by Working Days 2026/27 (Housing)				
	Quarter 1 25/26	Quarter 2 25/26	Quarter 3 25/26	Quarter 4 25/26
Within Target ¹	41	30	59	64
Overdue	4	2	1	0
Total	45	32	60	64
PCT within Target	91.11%	93.75%	98.33%	100.00%
Average Days	8.62	8.50	10.67	9.33

- 9.7 As can be seen from the figures, this involved a steady improvement in each quarter and for the year overall there was a 96.52% compliance with target. While it is impossible to state that there will never be an issue of non-compliance for Housing Services in future quarters, we remain confident that the work to return to compliance has been embedded well within the services which should minimise the risk of non-compliance.
- 9.8 Although not part of this reporting window, it is worth noting that performance remained at 100.00% during Quarter 1, 2026/27 supporting this statement.

¹ 10 working days or with an extension of time

Stage 2 response times

- 9.9 For Stage 2 complaint response times in 2025/26, these continue to remain in 100% compliance with the Ombudsmen target of 20 working days or with an extension. For 2025/26 all Stage 2 complaints were responded to within the target response time of 20 days or with an extension of time.

Stage 2 Response Timescales by Working Days 2025/26 (Housing Services)				
	Quarter 1	Quarter 2	Quarter 3	Quarter 4
Within Target*	7	8	10	14
Overdue	0	0	0	0
Total	7	8	10	14
PCT within Target	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%
No. of Extensions	1	0	4	4
Average Days	15.43	18.63	25.00	21.64

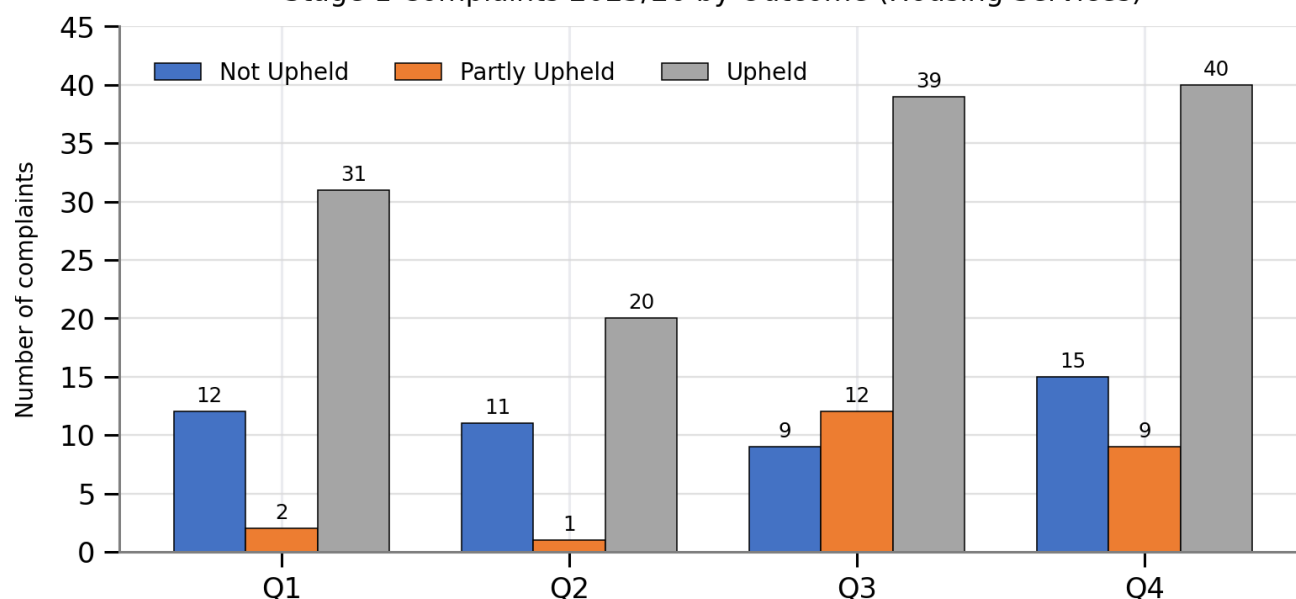
Complaint outcomes - Stage 1

- 9.10 Complaints received by the Council are resolved in one of three ways – the complaint is ‘Not Upheld’, the complaint is ‘Partly Upheld’, or the complaint is ‘Upheld’ in full.

Stage 1 Complaints 2025/26 by Outcome (Housing Services)								
Outcome	Quarter 1		Quarter 2		Quarter 3		Quarter 4	
Not Upheld	12	49.60%	11	56.10%	9	15.00%	15	23.44%
Partly Upheld	2	5.30%	1	5.30%	12	20.00%	9	14.06%
Upheld	31	45.00%	20	38.60%	39	65.00%	40	62.50%
Total	45	99.90%	32	100.00%	60	100.00%	64	100.00%

- 9.11 Overall, there has been an increase in the number of complaints that were ‘Partly Upheld’. The number of complaints ‘Partly Upheld’ was expected to increase for the 2025/26 figures with the addition of ‘Partly Upheld’ in late 2024/25 as an option as opposed to Upheld/Not Upheld. Additionally, this was reinforced as part of the Stage 1 template response letter, which requires all services to make the determination as to whether the complaint is Upheld, Partly Upheld or Not Upheld.

Stage 1 Complaints 2025/26 by Outcome (Housing Services)



Stage 1 actions

9.12 All complaints are assigned one of five actions:

- Agreed Actions (where the Council agrees to undertake a course of action following a complaint – this could be putting something right or reviewing procedures or policies)
- Apology
- Compensation
- Outside Jurisdiction (matters not covered by the Complaints Policy such as complaints relating to Kent County Council or other authorities)
- No Further Action Required (either the complaint is not upheld or no actions are required as a result of the complaint)

9.13 The outcomes for 2025/26 at Stage 1 are set out below.

Stage 1 Complaints 2025/26 by Outcome (Housing)								
Outcome	Quarter 1		Quarter 2		Quarter 3		Quarter 4	
Agreed Actions	26	57.78%	16	50.00%	23	38.33%	25	39.06%
Apology	3	6.67%	1	3.13%	10	16.67%	7	10.94%
Compensation	3	6.67%	4	12.50%	18	30.00%	17	26.56%
Outside Jurisdiction	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
No Further Action Required	13	28.89%	11	34.38%	9	15.00%	15	23.44%
Total	45	100.00%	32	100.00%	60	100.00%	64	100.00%

9.14 Compensation was recorded in 42 Stage 1 housing complaints. Nine of the 17 Quarter 4 compensation outcomes related to heating and hot water. This was primarily compensation paid by the Council's heating / hot water contractor.

9.15 For Housing Services, between 23 – 34% of complaints required no further action across each quarter. There was no discernible trend in respect of apologies or no further actions across 2025/26. The number of agreed actions has decreased as an overall percentage of Housing Service complaints, although the Quarter 4 number was within 1 complaint of the Quarter 1 number. The biggest increase was in compensation, which increased from 6.67% of Stage 1s in Quarter 1 to 26.56% of Stage 1s in Quarter 4. However, it should be noted that the Quarter 4 figure is an improvement in both percentage and absolute numbers.

Complaint outcomes - Stage 2

- 9.16 As with Stage 1 complaints, Stage 2 complaints received by the Council are also resolved in one of three ways – the complaint is ‘Not Upheld’, the complaint is ‘Partly Upheld’, or the complaint is ‘Upheld’ in full.

Stage 2 Complaints 2025/26 by Outcome (Housing)								
Outcome	Quarter 1		Quarter 2		Quarter 3		Quarter 4	
Not Upheld	4	57.14%	3	37.50%	4	40.00%	4	28.57%
Partly Upheld	1	14.29%	2	25.00%	2	20.00%	3	21.43%
Upheld	2	28.57%	3	37.50%	4	40.00%	7	50.00%
Total	7	100.00%	8	100.00%	10	100.00%	14	100.00%

- 9.17 While the number of complaints either ‘Not Upheld’ or ‘Partly Upheld’ remained relatively static during 2025/26, there has been a steady increase in ‘Upheld’ complaints. The number of ‘Upheld’ complaints’ remains relatively low overall but the complaints team will continue to monitor upheld complaints with a view to identifying any emerging trends.

Stage 2 actions

- 9.18 All complaints are assigned one of five actions as shown in the Table below.

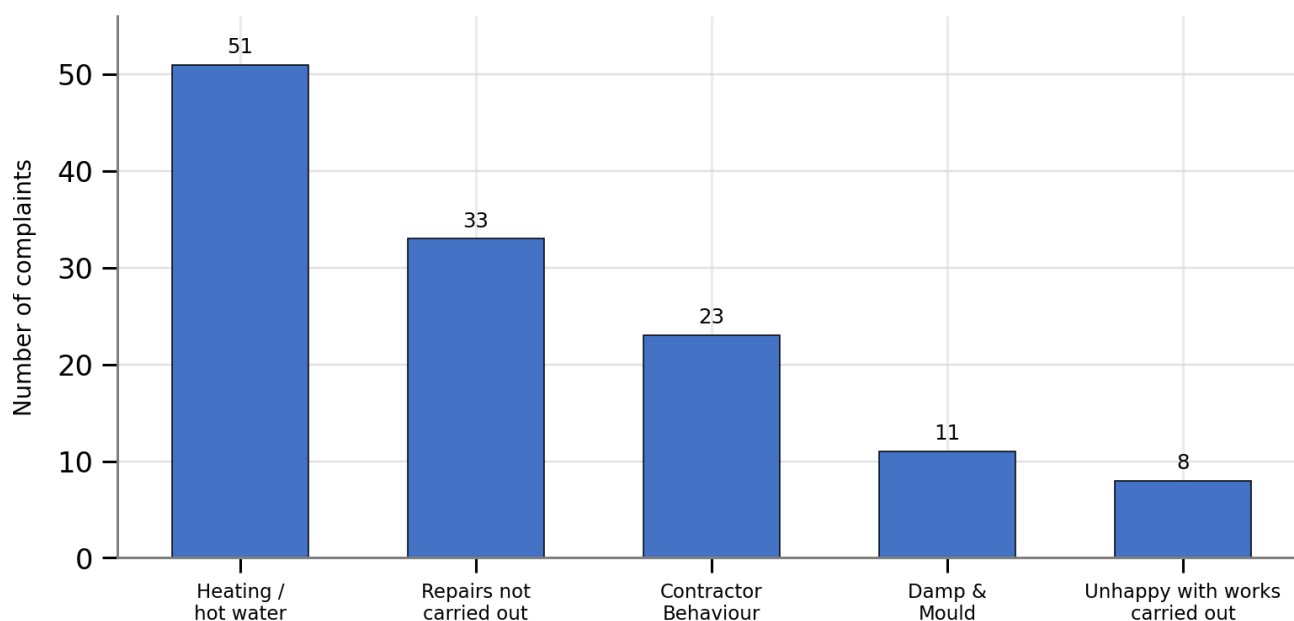
Stage 2 Complaints 2025/26 by Outcome (All Services Excluding Housing)								
Outcome	Quarter 1		Quarter 2		Quarter 3		Quarter 4	
Agreed Actions	1	5.26%	2	7.69%	0	0.00%	2	16.67%
Apology	3	15.79%	2	7.69%	3	16.67%	1	8.33%
Compensation	1	5.26%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	1	8.33%
Outside Jurisdiction	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
No Further Action Required	14	73.68%	22	84.62%	15	83.33%	8	66.67%
Total	19	100.00%	26	100.00%	18	100.00%	12	100.00%

- 9.19 For Housing Services, the proportion of complaints requiring no further action has decreased over the course of 2025/26 from 57.14% to 21.43%, despite the number of complaints with this outcome remaining the same for the previous two quarters underlining the point that Stage 2 complaints are based on relatively low numbers of complaints making the figures more volatile. Overall, it is difficult to point to any specific trend for 2025/26. The complaints team will continue to monitor upheld complaints with a view to identifying any emerging trends.

Complaint themes

- 9.20 The principal housing-related themes during 2025/26 were: failure to provide an acceptable service, heating and hot water, repairs not carried out, lack of communication, contractor behaviour, damp and mould, tenancy issues and dissatisfaction with works carried out.

Reason for Complaint - Stage 1 Complaints (Selected Housing-Related Themes)



Housing-related theme	Evidence from 2025/26
Heating / hot water	51 Stage 1 complaints; Six escalated to Stage 2 during the year.
Repairs not carried out	33 Stage 1 complaints. All eight Quarter 4 complaints were upheld, leading to agreed actions or compensation.
Contractor behaviour	23 Stage 1 complaints across Housing Repairs and Waste Services (relating to tenant waste services). All seven Quarter 4 complaints were upheld.
Damp and mould	11 Stage 1 complaints recorded across the year.
Unhappy with works carried out	8 Stage 1 complaints recorded across the year.

- 9.11 The Council experienced an increase in complaints relating to heating/hot water during 2025/26. This service was provided under contract to the Council and for the Quarter 3, 2025/26 report to the Cabinet, the Head of Property Assets advised the following:

“DDC remain in regular dialogue with Sureserve Compliance South (SCS). Average call wait time has reduced from 12-15 minutes in December and January to: 3 mins 51 secs w/c 16th February and 56 secs w/c 23rd February. This improvement is due to the DDC contract now having 3 new call handlers (taking the total number to 10) who monitor the calls alongside other local contracts that SCS have.

SCS remain committed to delivering a high standard of service across both servicing and breakdowns. As expected, breakdown volumes increase during the winter months, which can lead to a corresponding rise in complaints. Despite this seasonal pressure, SCS have continued to maintain strong performance levels.

The Complaints Manager at SCS is consistently responsive and works collaboratively with the Compliance Team to resolve issues promptly and effectively. The working relationship between DDC and SCS has strengthened significantly, supported by

regular Toolbox Talks now held at the Council offices. These sessions have helped engineers to build direct relationships with members of the Compliance Team, enabling them to seek immediate guidance where needed. This direct communication route has contributed to quicker resolution of complex or problematic repairs, reducing delays that might otherwise occur through email-based approval processes.”

- 9.12 The figures for heating/hot water complaints have returned to expected levels by Quarter 1, 2026/27, validating the work undertaken by the Housing Repairs team and SCS in resolving the underlying reasons for these complaints.

10. Housing Ombudsman activity

- 10.1 At the end of Quarter 4, five Housing Ombudsman cases opened since 1 April 2025 remained open. Two Housing Ombudsman cases were determined during Quarter 4, both relating to Housing Repairs and both upheld against the Council.

Case	Service	Decision	Findings / remedy
C2025-304	Housing Repairs	Upheld, 16 March 2026	2 maladministration determinations; 1 service failure; 3 orders; £775 compensation
C2023-249	Housing Repairs	Upheld, 26 March 2026	No maladministration determinations, orders or service-failure findings recorded; £100 compensation

- 10.1 There was 1 Housing Ombudsman case opened in Quarter 4 relating to Housing Repairs that remained open at the end of the 2025/26 reporting period. The outcome of this case will be reported in the 2026/27 reporting period.
- 10.2 The Council’s landlord performance report headlines were as follows:

Housing
Ombudsman Service

LANDLORD PERFORMANCE

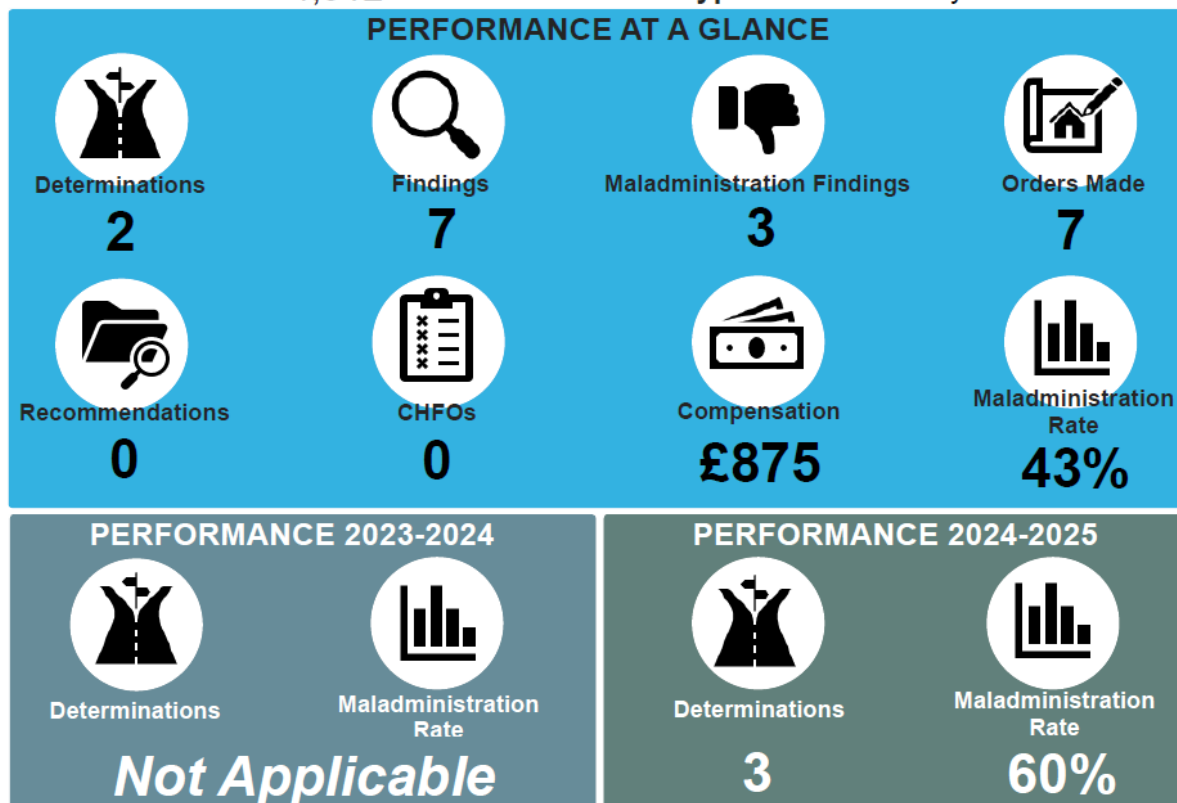
April 2025 - March 2026

DATA REFRESHED:
May 2026

Landlord: Dover District Council

Landlord Homes: 4,912

Landlord Type: Local Authority / ALMO or TMO



- 10.3 The findings of Maladministration for 2025/26 at 43% is down from 60% in 2024/25, and the number of maladministration findings is down from 9 to 3 year-on-year. The level of compensation is also down from £2,250 in 2024/25 to £875 in 2025/26. Additionally, the number of findings and orders made has roughly halved since 2024/25.
- 10.4 The complaints team continue to work with services to ensure the full implementation of any Ombudsman decisions.

11. Learning and service improvement

- 11.1 The Council's approach is to record learning systematically and use it to prevent recurrence. The following actions and improvements were either implemented during 2025/26 or identified from Quarter 4 complaints and are in the process of being implemented:
- Refreshing staff training and procedures, with further complaints training planned to be delivered by the complaints team during 2026.
 - Following up issues with contractors to prevent repeat complaints.
 - Producing information for residents where contractors undertake large-scale disruptive works.
 - Ensuring the relevant checks are completed before works are undertaken.

- Increasing service capacity through recruitment.
- Implementing a Stage 2 response template in 2025/26 that complemented the Stage 1 response template in order to deliver consistency in responses.
- Improving the complaints database and Power BI dashboards to strengthen tracking, escalation data, compensation records and Ombudsman monitoring.
- Maintaining automated Stage 1 reminders on day eight and the complaints team following it up with the service at the response deadline.

12. Improvement priorities for 2026/27

Priority	Action	Measure of success
Sustain Stage 1 response times	Continue active monitoring, reminders and service-level follow-up	Maintain performance at 100% within 10 working days or an agreed extension
Improve acknowledgements	Ensure service requests and escalation requests that enter the Council outside of the complaints system are recognised promptly and notified to the complaints team	All Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaints acknowledged within five working days
Strengthen Contractor Performance	Continue working closely with contractors, analysis of repeat causes and monitor remedial actions	A sustained reduction in complaints involving contractors
Strengthen learning with contracted services	Delivery of new procedure for complaints involving contractors	Strengthening shared responsibility and accountability in respect of complaints resulting in fewer repeated complaints
Improve the evidence base	Complete database and dashboard enhancements	Reliable service-level reporting on timeliness, outcomes, redress and learning
Embed complaint learning	Record lessons and evidence completion of service improvements	Clear audit trail linking complaints to changes in service delivery
Improved tenant engagement	Regular meetings with tenant representatives, exploring with tenants the best means of promoting the complaints process and exploring the feasibility of introducing complaints satisfaction feedback	Regular scheduled meetings with tenant representatives, new ways of promoting the complaints process, the potential introduction of complaints satisfaction monitoring

13. Conclusion

- 13.1 Overall, complaints at the service level remain low, particularly when compared to the overall volume of interactions the Council has had with the public in the same period. This does not negate from the fact that the Council takes each complaint seriously when investigating and acts upon any learning that has been identified. The Council is not complacent about the matters raised in complaints and it is intended that lessons learnt are built into future service delivery to prevent repeated complaints on the same issue.
- 13.2 In this context it should also be noted that tenant satisfaction with the landlord's approach to complaints handling fell from 48.3% in 2024/25 to 35.3% in 2025/26. Over the same period, Stage

1 complaints increased from 34.7 to 45 per 1,000 homes and Stage 2 complaints increased from 4.7 to 8.7 per 1,000 homes.

- 13.3 Housing Repairs continues to account, not unexpectedly given the number of daily tenant contacts, for the majority of cases. At the same time, there was a strong improvement in Stage 1 response-time compliance, culminating in 100% compliance in Quarter 4, while Stage 2 responses remained fully compliant throughout the year.
- 13.4 The level of Ombudsman determinations against the Council continue to remain low, with resolving complaints at Stage 1 remaining the key focus of the Council's complaint handling. The two cases upheld against the Council are a reduction on the three cases in 2024/25.
- 13.5 The complaints process continues to work broadly effectively with the public able to make a complaint through a range of means. Complaints can be made by the webform (the preferred option), by email, letter, telephone or in person. The complaints team continue to review complaints to monitor for any issues in making a complaint under the Council's adopted Complaints Policy. The Council complies with its Public Sector Equality Duty in respect of complaints. The redesign of the Council's website pages for complaints should assist in this further.
- 13.6 However, it is recognised that the compliance targets in the complaints process are only part of the journey to improved complaint handling delivering measurable improved outcomes for tenants. For 2026/27, work will be undertaken by the complaints team to start improving the quality of data relating to remedy's, learning outcomes and implementation of lessons learnt, repeated complaint contacts and issues with the post-complaint experience (ensuring that agreed outcomes are delivered).
- 13.7 The principal priorities for 2026/27 are set out in section 12 above. These are in summary: to sustain timeliness, improve acknowledgement performance, reduce repeat issues involving heating, hot water and repairs, strengthen contractor accountability, and demonstrate that learning from complaints is translated into completed service improvements.
- 13.8 As during 2025/26 continued oversight by the Member Responsible for Complaints and the Council's governing body will support this work. This will be supported through continued quarterly reporting to Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny Committee and annual reporting to the Governance Committee.