

2023/2024 Complaints Overview



Report to:	Cabinet
Date:	24 October 2024
Portfolio Holders:	Councillor Hannah Ellis, Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services and Transformation Councillor David Carter, Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Housing
Lead Officers:	Cara Stevens, Assistant Director – Housing People (01279) 446490 Rebecca Farrant, Assistant Director – Corporate Services (01279) 446811 Richard Oliver, Assistant Director – Housing Property (01279) 446422
Contributing Officers:	Simon Pipe, Customer and Business Insight Manager (01279) 446544 Jason Thorpe, Business Insight Officer (01279) 446942
Key Decision:	No
Forward Plan:	Forward Plan number I017574
Call In:	This item is subject to call in procedures.
Corporate Mission:	Deliver High-Performing Services
Wards Affected:	None Specifically

Executive Summary

- A** This report provides Cabinet with complaint performance for the council for Housing services, and all other services for period 2023/24 and details the process and policy changes that have been implemented following lessons learnt from responding to

complaints. The report also satisfies the Housing Ombudsman's statutory requirement to publish an annual complaint report.

Recommended that Cabinet:

- A** Notes the performance of complaints handling for the period 2023-24
- B** Notes the impact of lessons learnt from 2023/24 on the performance of complaint handling during Q1 and 2 of 2024/25
- C** Approves the changes to service delivery to bring complaints handling in line with ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code

Reason for decision

- A** To ensure the council scrutinises performance in areas of policy, performance and people highlighted through complaints process.
- B** To ensure the council is in line with the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code, which became statutory on 1 April 2024.
- C** To ensure the council is in line with the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code, which is advice and guidance for all local authorities.

Other Options

- A** No other options were considered, the noting of performance of any area of service delivery supports the Cabinet's role to review the use of assets and resources as contained within its terms of reference. Compliance with Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code is a statutory function

Background

1. The council expects our service to be timely, fair and consistent, and where residents, businesses and visitors feel this has not been the case, the council encourages complaints to be made aligned with the published complaints policy.
2. The council takes complaints seriously as they help Officers to learn and improve services. The complaints process is designed to understand the reasons an individual or group may be dissatisfied and how the council can put things right.

3. HTS (Property and Environment) Ltd use the same process as the council to provide parity between how the council and its wholly owned company address service issues and approach continuous improvement.
4. The Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code became statutory on 1 April 2024 and was updated following consultation with councils during early 2024. The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's complaint handling code was also updated at the same time so that the two codes align with each other. The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's code is advice and guidance only, but the council takes the approach of treating all complaints in the same way so compliance with both ombudsman's codes is built into our policy.
5. The Ombudsmen's codes include a requirement for an annual complaint report to be approved and published.
6. The first annual complaints report under the new complaint handling code is included at appendix A of this report.
7. Future reports will be published by the end of quarter 2 of each year and will include a comparison of previous years' performance.

Issues/Proposals

8. Following the introduction of the new ombudsman's complaint handling code the council's complaints policy was updated to align with this, these changes included amending the time periods for complaint response times at Stage 1 and Stage 2 of the process and submission of a self-assessment against the code.
9. A Member champion for complaints must also be appointed as part of the complaint handling code; complaint handling falls within the remit of the Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services and Transformation.
10. Publication of an annual complaints report is a new requirement under the complaints handling code. This report can be found at appendix 1 and details the types of complaints received during the year 2023/24, whether these were upheld, partially upheld or not upheld and what lessons were learnt from upheld complaints. Any non-compliance with self-assessment with the code must also be included in the report, but no non-compliance was found for the council when this assessment was submitted.
11. Service improvements have been put in place to improve response quality and timings, and service delivery. Changes to processes and systems have been embedded throughout 23/24, following a change in complaints policy to speed up complaint handling and enhance targeted service improvements. Actions identified for implementation in 24/25 include staff training, enhanced monitoring and a corporate approach to Stage 2

responses designed to objectively review additional complaint topics and ensure holistic approach to resolution.

Implications

Equalities and Diversity

The council's complaints policy is fair to all and includes for assistance with making complaints where required. Where changes to service provision are made following the upholding of a complaint an equalities impact screening is carried out.

Climate Change

This report has no direct impact on climate change, however when finding solutions to address lessons learnt these can impact any number of council activities which may have an impact on our wider environment; where changes to processes or services are out in place these should give regard to this and reduce carbon emitted by our activities.

Finance

There are no direct financial implications arising from the report.

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Governance

Other than the noting of recommendations, Councillors are asked to approve operational processes to align with recent statutory requirements.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Annual Complaints Report

Background Papers

None

Glossary of terms/abbreviations used

None