

**Annual Complaints Performance and
Service Improvement Report 2023-2024**

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1. Introduction

1.1 Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code

Since 2020, the Housing Ombudsman Service has implemented new guidelines for Councils to improve complaint handling. These guidelines are detailed in the Complaint Handling Code, which aims to ensure efficient and fair resolution of residents' complaints. Additionally, the code encourages landlords to learn from complaints and enhance their services. The ultimate goal of the Complaint Handling Code is to establish best practices in complaint handling, provide better service to residents, and foster a positive complaint handling culture. From 1 April 2024, the Code became statutory meaning that landlords will be obliged by law to follow its requirements. The council must also report on performance to drive learning and continuous service improvements.

If the Ombudsman decides that the housing service has not handled a complaint in accordance with the code, and internal procedures, then the service risks the issue of a Complaint Handling Failure Order (CHFO) for maladministration, and the Ombudsman will order the Service to put things right and ensure compliance with the code. The Ombudsman publishes a report on CHFOs quarterly, and the Housing Service will be inspected by the Regulator every four years.

1.2 Complaint Handling at Tamworth Borough Council

Our Information Governance Team facilitate the council's corporate complaints process. Working closely with colleagues who deliver the services being complained about, to ensure we have a clear plan to resolve the immediate issues as well as working on what we can do differently in the future to prevent it happening again.

1.3 The Council's Comments, Compliments & Complaints Policy

The policy was extensively revised, and a new policy endorsed and implemented on 1 April 2023. The Housing Ombudsman has the power to review a social landlords' complaints policy to ensure it is compliant with their complaint handling code. In May 2023 such a review was undertaken on our newly implemented Comments, Compliments and Complaints Policy and clarifications were requested. The clarifications were centred around the customer experience and the phrasing of some paragraphs within the policy. The Housing Ombudsman subsequently reviewed the revised policy and confirmed that it was compliant with their code in August 2023.

1.4 Requirement for landlords to produce an annual complaint performance and service improvement report which is reported to its governing body (Cabinet) and must include:

- the annual self-assessment against the code to ensure the Council's complaint handling policy remains in line with its requirements.
- the governing body response to the self-assessment.
- a qualitative and quantitative analysis of the Council's complaint handling performance. This must also include a summary of the types of complaints the Council has refused to accept.
- any findings of non-compliance with the Code by the Ombudsman.
- the service improvements made as a result of the learning from complaints.
- any annual report about the Council's performance from the Ombudsman.
- any other relevant reports or publications produced by the Ombudsman in relation to the work of the Council.

This report is our first annual complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report covering the period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024.

2. Member responsible for complaints (MRC)

2.1 The Complaint Handling Code requires landlords to have a Member Responsible for Complaints (MRC) on their governing body to provide assurance on the effectiveness of its complaints system, including challenging the data and information provided.

2.2 The expectation is that the MRC is responsible for ensuring that complaint handling drives service improvement for residents and learning and business improvement for the organisation. The role of the MRC is to champion a positive complaint handling culture and build effective relationships with complaints teams, residents, its audit and risk committees as well wider teams and the Housing Ombudsman Service.

The MRC should be looking to seek assurances from the complaints team and where appropriate the operational teams that complaints are being managed, change is happening and that residents are being heard through the process. Tamworth Borough Council has two members responsible for complaints, the Leader of the Council is responsible for corporate complaints and the Portfolio Holder for Housing, Homelessness and Planning is responsible for Housing complaints.

2.3 During 2024/2025 the Leader and the Portfolio Holder for Housing, Homelessness & Planning will work with officers to fulfil their role as the Members Responsible for Complaints (MRC). This will include assessing themes and/or trends to identify potential systemic issues, serious risks, or policies and procedures that require revision as well as supporting a positive complaint handling culture.

3. Annual Self-Assessment

The council published its first Self-Assessment against the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code in 2023.

In line with the requirements of the Housing Ombudsman, a self-assessment has been undertaken to identify whether the organisation's current approach to complaints handling meets all the requirements of the 2024 Complaint Handling Code.

The council has identified many aspects of good practice and identified some areas of non-compliance. We have used the self-assessment findings, to put in place an action plan to support improvements in our complaint handling process and aim to achieve full compliance by 31 December 2024.

The 2024 self-assessment is found at appendix A1 with a detailed summary on the development areas found at appendix A2.

4. Governing Body Response to the report

Tamworth Borough Council are committed to providing the best service possible for our residents, placing them at the centre of everything we do as we look to deliver the best possible outcomes for residents.

Comments, compliments and complaints play a key role in enabling the housing landlord service to continuously improve its service delivery and identify what we are doing well and what we could be better at. The recent self-assessment against the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code shows that we are mostly compliant with the code with an action plan developed to address areas where we want to strengthen our services.

We have been working hard to reduce the problems which lead to residents complaining and have made good progress in this including the following key changes:

- **Revised complaints policy:** Implementation of an updated complaints policy.

- **Centralised complaint processing team:** By centralising the complaint processing team, we have streamlined our operations.
- **Improved customer communication:** All communication received through the central team is now acknowledged within 5 working days. In 2023/2024, we achieved this with 95.5% of complaints received.
- **Records management:** We have enhanced records management to support performance report requirements

As Cabinet members responsible for the way Tamworth Borough Council deals with comments, compliments, and complaints we want to emphasise the importance of transparency, responsiveness, and accountability in how we handle feedback from our community. Feedback from our residents is crucial for our continuous improvement. Engaging with our community helps us to align our services with the needs and expectations of our residents.

When complaints are received, our priority is to address them promptly and thoroughly. We have established clear procedures to ensure that each concern is investigated, and any necessary actions are taken to resolve those issues.

Similarly, we greatly appreciate compliments and positive feedback. Recognising the hard work of our staff and the effectiveness of our services is vital in maintaining morale and motivation. We ensure that positive feedback is shared with relevant teams and individuals, celebrating successes and encouraging excellence.

We are committed to maintaining a feedback process that is accessible, respectful and constructive. We encourage all residents to share their experiences, suggestions and comments.

*Councillor Carol Dean
Leader of Tamworth Borough Council*

*Councillor Ben Clarke
Portfolio Holder for Housing, Homelessness and Planning*

5. Analysis of our complaint handling performance for Housing Services

5.1 During the year 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024 the council received 483 housing related enquires through the council's comments, compliments, and complaints channel, and of these:

- 176 were identified as a complaint with 156 recorded as stage 1 and 20 at stage 2.

5.2 Tenant Satisfaction Measures TSM's

The Tenant Satisfaction Measures Standard requires all registered providers to generate and report tenant satisfaction measures (TSMs) as specified by the regulator. The central aims of the TSMs are to provide tenants with greater transparency about their landlord's performance and inform the regulator about how a landlord is complying with consumer standards.

5.3 Stage 1 complaints

Table 1 provides qualitative statistics around quantity of Stage 1 complaints received and the number per 1000 homes.

Table 1

Stage 1	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Total
No. of complaints received	17	7	20	17	11	9	17	14	7	8	12	17	156
No. per 1,000 housing stock	3.97	1.63	4.67	3.97	2.57	2.10	3.96	3.26	1.63	1.87	2.79	3.96	36.38

Table 2 provides qualitative statistics around the number of complaints and percentage of complaints responded to within 10 working days.

Table 2

Stage 1	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Total
Responded to within the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling timescales	9	7	10	8	5	7	4	6	6	7	10	7	86
Responded to within the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling timescales (%)	55	100	50	47	45	78	24	43	86	88	83	41	55

5.4 Stage 2 complaints

Table 3 provides qualitative statistics around quantity of Stage 2 complaints received and the number per 1000 homes.

Table 3

Stage 2	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Total
No. of complaints received	2	0	2	2	2	0	1	4	3	3	1	0	20
No. per 1,000 housing stock	0.47	0.00	0.47	0.47	0.47	0.00	0.23	0.93	0.70	0.70	0.23	0.00	4.66

Table 4 provides qualitative statistics around the number of complaints and percentage of complaints responded to within 20 working days.

Table 4

Stage 2	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Total
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Responded to within the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling timescales	2	0	1	1	1	0	1	2	0	2	0	0	10
Responded to within the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling timescales (%)	100	0	50	50	50	0	100	50	0	67	0	0	50

The Housing Ombudsman target of 10 days for responding to stage 1 complaints and 20 working days for stage 2 complaints has proven to be very challenging, 55% for stage 1 and 50% for stage 2 were responded to within timescale during 2023/24. This recognised as an area for improvement and is a key objective on the action plan for 2024/2025

The below table provides a summary of the number of complaints at stage 1 and 2 per department. Housing Repairs received the highest number of complaints for both stage 1 (110) and stage 2 (14).

Team	Number of Stage 1 complaints received	Number of Stage 2 complaints received
ASB	2	
Housing Repairs	110	14
Housing Repairs Gas	3	
Housing Repairs Planned	11	3
Housing Solutions	13	3
Multiple Depts	2	
Rental Income	1	
Sheltered Housing	0	
Tenancy Management	14	
Tenancy Involvement Group	0	
Wardens	0	
Total	156	20
Overall Total	176	

5.5 Acknowledgment of complaints

The complaint handling code dictates complaints must be acknowledged, defined, and logged at stage 1 or stage 2 of the complaints procedure within 5 working days of the complaint being received.

Of the 176 complaints recorded 168 (95.5%) were recorded within 5 working days of receipt by the central complaints team.

5.5 Other contacts

277 contacts were determined to be an enquiry, service request or service request update and 29 compliments were received. A summary of these contacts is provided below.

Team	Service Requests / Updates or General Enquiries	Compliments Received
ASB	30	
Housing Repairs	140	9
Housing Repairs Gas	4	
Housing Repairs Planned	14	1
Housing Solutions	19	9
Multiple Depts	3	
Rental Income	2	
Sheltered Housing		
Tenancy Management	65	10
Tenancy Involvement Group		
Wardens		
Total	277	29
Overall Total		

5.6 Complaint Themes

In 2023/2024 the primary reasons for residents submitting a complaint were:

- Delay in a service being received or the service not being received
- Missed Appointments
- Poor customer service, lack of communication

In addition, the council has gathered some insight from the complaints received, these being:

- There were delays in responding to complaints due to staff capacity
- Multiple contacts being received from residents using various channels for communication for the same issue
- The requirement for closer working relationship with our contractors to improve service delivery

6. Learning from Complaints and Service Improvements

6.1 The council is dedicated to providing a broad range of services, striving to get things right the first time. We acknowledge that we don't always succeed, and when mistakes occur, it's crucial that we learn from them. Complaints give us valuable information, enabling us to improve our services and overall customer satisfaction.

We are committed to listening when we have not got it right, ensuring we are doing all we can to prevent it happening in the future. We will continue to use complaint feedback alongside the other feedback we get from customer satisfaction surveys to drive improvements this year.

6.2 Some of the improvements made in 2023/2024:

1. **Revised complaint policy;** We have updated the Comments, Compliments and Complaints policy to reflect the requirements of the Housing Ombudsman statutory code.
2. **Centralised complaint processing team;** By centralising the complaint processing team, we have streamlined our operations.
3. **Improved customer communication:** All communication received through the central team is now acknowledged within 5 working days. In 2023/2024, we achieved this with 95.5% of complaints received.
4. **Efficient process for contractor complaints:** We have established a process to reduce the time our repair contractors receive complaint information.
5. **Improved templates:** Templates for our letters have been reviewed and improved.
6. **Records management:** We have enhanced records management to support performance report requirements.
7. **Void:** Incorporate a damp and mould assessment into our void inspection process.
8. **Development of a Service Improvement Plan;** this in consultation with tenants through the complaint review panel will identify and analyse themes so targeted outcomes for service improvement can be made.
9. **Included complaint performance in quarterly performance reports;** this was introduced in from the quarter 1 2023-24 performance report.

6.3 Our priorities for 2024-25

To support the council's commitment to complaints, the table below provides some of the key focuses over the coming months.

Customer Journey	Continue to improve the customer journey with: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• regular meetings with service areas, working collaboratively to support the commitment of resolving issues first time and increase response times to complaints• development and implementation of the Council's Compensation Policy• an enhanced/documented set of customer care standards
Review of Process	A review of internal complaint handling processes is underway to support the implementation of the updated policy and to assist in improving our complaint handling timescales.
Training/ Guidance	Develop a programme of training for staff to include customer service training and complaint handling training for officers investigating complaints, supporting the council's commitment to ensure customers receive the best possible

	<p>service when making a complaint.</p> <p>Implement and embed the revised Compliments, Comments and Complaints policy.</p>
Communication	<p>The need for better communication in our complaints handling process is a key focus for 2024/2025.</p> <p>The introduction of improved monitoring processes will ensure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • we keep residents updated when we are working to resolve their issues and • increased management oversight at all stages of the process.
Recording of information	<p>Throughout 2023/2024 we have been monitoring and reviewing the data we collect when recording complaints received, this is helping the council to identify basic themes and categories to complaints, which is providing a more robust insight into the reasons why complaints are being made. In 2024/2025 this will be further developed to provide more robust management information to drive service improvement.</p>
Case Management System	<p>To improve customer service and support data driven decisions for the complaint handling, a review of the ICT case management system will be undertaken.</p>
Customer Satisfaction	<p>With the introduction of the council's Damp & Mould Policy and learning from complaints, a customer survey is undertaken to establish customer satisfaction on the handling of all reported cases of damp and mould.</p> <p>A complaint handling survey will be undertaken to further understand our customer satisfaction and how we can learn from complaints.</p>
Resource Capacity	<p>A review of resource capacity within the centralised team to ensure customers receive the best possible service when making a complaint.</p>
Learning from Complaints	<p>Continued learning from complaints through performance management and improved reporting, aligned to meet the Regulator of Social Housing's Tenant Satisfaction Measure standard.</p>

7. Housing Ombudsman Performance Report

7.1 The Housing Ombudsman publishes, on their website, individual landlord performance reports for landlords with 5 or more findings for a particular financial year. The Housing Ombudsman has not yet published its reports for 2023/24, so the information available on its website relates to 2022/23. As we had no determinations made by the Housing Ombudsman in the period 2022/23 there is no report relating to the Council currently published on the Housing Ombudsman's website.

7.2 Where a complaint is accepted for investigation the Ombudsman seeks to establish whether the member has been responsible for maladministration (which includes findings of service failure, maladministration and severe maladministration). This may be that the council:

- a. failed to comply with any relevant legal obligations
- b. failed to comply with any relevant codes of practice
- c. failed to apply its own policies and/or procedures
- d. delayed unreasonably in dealing with the matter
- e. behaved unfairly, unreasonably or incompetently; or
- f. treated the complainant personally in a heavy-handed, unsympathetic, or inappropriate manner

7.3 The Housing Ombudsman made two determinations for complaints considered in the year 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024.

7.3.1 Case 1 was determined on 30 April 2024 in respect to the council's handling of damp and mould and repairs at a property. It was determined that there was severe maladministration in our handling of damp and mould at the property. It was also determined that there was maladministration in our handling of repairs. The council was ordered to:

- apologise to the resident
- to collaborate with the resident to produce an action plan
- to support the resident in making an insurance claim
- pay the resident £3250 compensation
- share the Ombudsman's report with the Executive Team and Cabinet member for housing
- update the Ombudsman service on progress of the damp and mould policy
- incorporate a damp and mould assessment into the void inspection process and
- inspect a broken fence in line with policy and explain the obligations of the council to the resident

All orders and recommendations were adhered to and on 12 June 2024 the Ombudsman confirmed the case had been closed satisfactorily.

7.2.2 Case 2 was determined on 29 July 2024 was in respect of the resident not being giving adequate notice of additional work needed to the property or the impact of the work and that the resident's property and possessions were damaged. The Ombudsman determined that there was a service failure by the council for both matters. The council was ordered to

- apologise for the failings identified in the report
- pay the resident £150 compensation

This has been actioned and the Ombudsman informed the formal closing of the case is yet to be received.