

Council Housing Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report for 2024/25

Statement from the Cabinet Member, Housing

This is the second 'Council Housing Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement report' produced by Gravesham Council and covers the period 1st April 2024 to 31st March 2025.

In my role as the Council's Cabinet Member responsible for Housing, I have worked with Housing Management to analysis complaints monthly which enables me to take a sample of stage 1 and stage 2 complaints and scrutinise and challenge. A monthly meeting takes place with the Assistant Director which provides a platform to engage and feedback whilst also ensuring that any risk is identified and mitigated, and any learning opportunities are identified. Overall, it is my view that complaints are dealt with fairly and rationally and in line with the Councils Complaints Procedure and Ombudsman Code.

I have assured myself that the self-assessment against the Code is an accurate reflection of the Council's position.

1. Introduction

Under the Social Housing Regulation Act 2023, the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code of Practice is now a statutory requirement and places a legal duty on the council as a landlord to comply with the Code, as well as a duty on the Ombudsman to monitor compliance with the Code. The Housing Ombudsman is the independent public body for complaints within the social housing sector. Gravesham Borough Council is a member of the Housing Ombudsman Service Scheme.

The council is required to carry out an annual self-assessment against the Housing Ombudsman Complaints Handling Code and publicise this to customers. Details of this assessment have been published on the council's website, Complaints Handling Code Self-Assessment).

The council has also updated its Complaints Policy to ensure complaints are handled within the framework of the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code. The Complaints Policy can be viewed on the Councils website.

The council is dedicated to using feedback to drive meaningful changes and enhance the overall customer experience. Complaints and lessons learned from complaints can improve the quality and focus of services provided to all customers.

2. Compliance with the Complaint Handling Code

In April 2025, officers used the Ombudsman's self-assessment template to review the council's compliance with the Complaint Handling Code. The self-assessment evidenced compliance, and Gravesham's self-assessment has been completed and can be found in Appendix 1. Officers will conduct a review of this annually to ensure compliance.

3. Lessons Learnt

3.1. Quality of responses

During the year 2024/25, through the complaint responses sent, we identified aspects of our responses that we could do differently to improve the quality of the response. This included the following:

- Training for all officers who handle complaints.
- Including an explanation that shows a full understanding of the complaint.
- Properly explaining our decisions.
- Apologising for mistakes and acknowledging when we can do better.
- Ensuring the tone is professional, factual, non-judgemental, and not defensive.
- For the respondent to take ownership of the issue.
- Not using jargon/acronyms
- Making sure each point of the complaint is responded to.
- Ensuring that we are sign posting effectively by including contact details for the organisation.

Within the acknowledgement letter that we send to the customer, we provide a summary of the complaint submitted and this has had the benefit of:

- Ensuring we understand the complaint and the desired outcome.
- Detailed the possible solution so that we can provide the best outcome.

3.2. Response process

In a number of instances within 2024/25, the service was requesting extensions to complaint deadlines or were late with their responses to customers. To make sure that we achieve the response timescale set by the Ombudsman we identified the following:

- If we cannot provide a full response within the timescale, ensuring that we are sending a holding response **before** the deadline.
- If we plan to meet the complainant as part of the complaint resolution, booking appointments with the resident **prior** to the response deadline to ensure the outcome can be included in the final response.

3.3. Policy/procedure

During 2024/25, we identified the need to ensure that we are consistent when applying policy to complaints. If there is an associated policy that supports our decision, this should be referred to in our response.

Through the lessons learnt process in 2023/24, the service outlined the policies that needed to be reviewed or developed:

- Rent Policy – This was reviewed and agreed within 2024/25.
- Tenancy Management Policy – This was reviewed and agreed within 2024/25.
- Leaseholder policies – This was reviewed and agreed within 2024/25. Consultation with leaseholders to follow.

In addition to these, new policies were adopted which are outlined in Section 5. Gravesham's policies are published on our website [Search results – Gravesham Borough Council](#)

4. Complaint handling performance

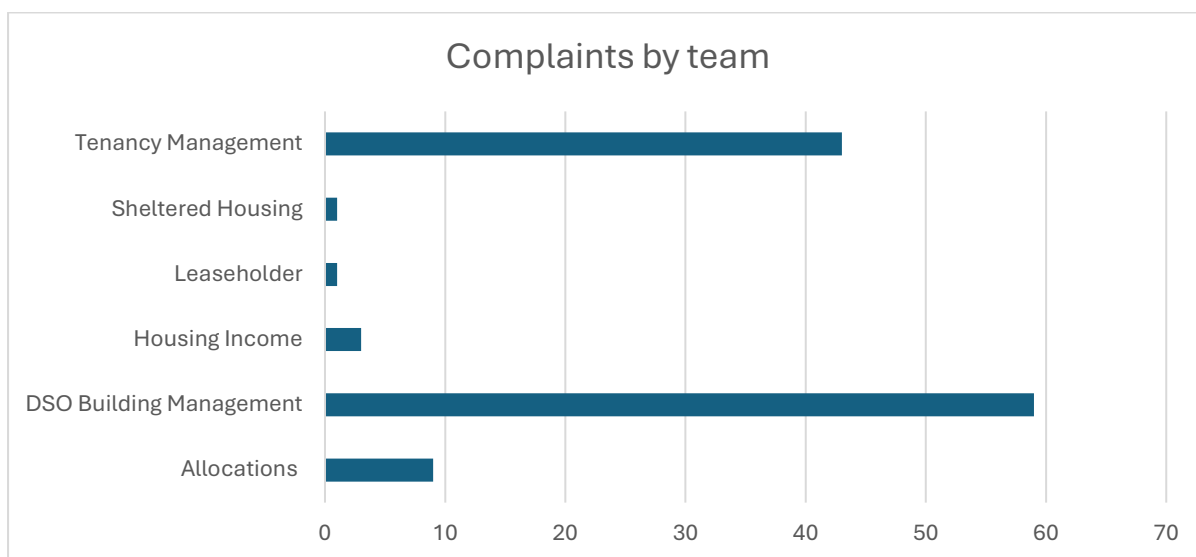
4.1. Stage one complaint performance

Total number of stage 1 complaints received	% of complaints upheld	% of complaints responded to within deadline
116	53.4%	91.3%

4.2. Stage two complaint performance

Total number of stage 2 complaints received	% of complaints upheld	% of complaints responded to within deadline
18	72.2%	88.8%

4.3. Number of stage 1 complaints by team



The number of complaints received by the housing management team and responsive repairs team is greater than in other areas. This is standard within the housing sector as these teams have the most interactions with our residents. For example, our responsive repairs team received 33,863 calls within 2024/25 and completed 24,887 repairs. From the completed repairs figure resulted in a formal complaint, this is 0.2%. Therefore, we can conclude that the higher number of complaints than other areas is due to the number of transactions, rather than systematically poor service.

The same is true of the Housing Management team, which provides support to approximately 5641 households in the borough. Over the 2024/25 period we have received complaints from 43 households, which is 0.7%.

The Allocations Service was moved in January 2025 however the complaints detailed above does reflect the whole year. It is common that repairs that are received into the Allocations Service are deemed as service requests as relate to banding or bedroom range which then has the review process to follow as all cases of this nature are presented at the Allocations Panel.

4.4. Number of stage 2 complaints by team

Of all stage 1 complaints, 16% escalated to stage 2. This can be broken down into the following per team:

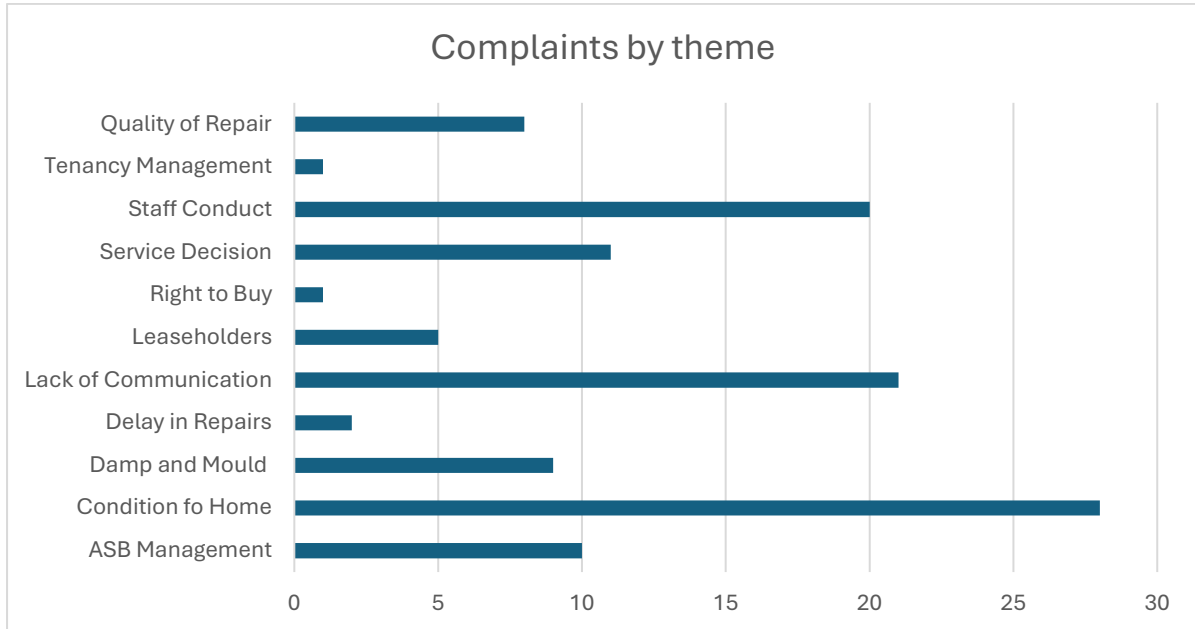
- Allocations – 11%
- Tenancy Management – 44%
- Income Team – 6%
- DSO Building Management - 39%

A deeper analysis shows:

- A larger proportion of tenancy management complaints escalated to stage 2 in comparison to the repairs service.
- Often in the repairs service it can be easier to resolve an issue compared to a more complex tenancy management case.

4.5. Complaints by themes

Complaints, while often seen negatively, can offer significant benefits when categorised by themes as this provides improvement opportunities and enables us to see trends. By understanding and addressing complaints, we can create professional, good quality services that can build stronger relationships with our tenant and leaseholders. Below provides an insight into the stage 1 themes for 2024/25.



The above themes demonstrate there is still work to be completed on staff conduct and communication to our tenants as these figures remain high. In February 2025, management arranged a Chartered Institute of Housing Customer Service Excellence training that all Tenancy Management staff attended. This was a two-day modular workshop that focussed on:

- Having a better appreciation of emerging customer trends and customer insight - taking into account the changes in regulatory and legal requirements and satisfaction trends.
- Better understanding the importance of emotional intelligence in professional, consistent, supportive service delivery as well as related competences.
- Build on people skills to interact, liaise and negotiate effectively with customers, technical staff and suppliers, thinking and working more creatively and collaboratively.
- Ability to deliver customer service excellence with appropriate tone, listening and ways to de-escalate challenging conversations.

4.6. Number of complaints escalated to the Housing Ombudsman

Total number of queries received	Total number of determinations received from	% outcomes no mal administration	% outcomes service failure	% outcomes mal administration	% outcomes severe mal-administration

from the ombudsman	the Ombudsman				
4	3	66.6%	33.3%	33.3%	33.3%

We received the outcome to three complaints that had been escalated to the Housing Ombudsman for review. One case is still being reviewed and investigated. Two of the three cases that concluded determined that there was either no further investigation or there had been no evidence of maladministration or failure by the Ombudsman.

5. What was achieved in 2024-25

5.1. Launch of Housing Hubs

As part of our efforts to improve tenant engagement, the council has created a Housing Hub that Senior Officers are going out to monthly. This is placed at various locations across our housing estates to meet with tenants and discuss their housing and deal with any concerns they may have about their home or estate. The service has engaged with around 170 tenants over 4 locations and each time we have obtained valuable learning about our services. We are lucky to be partnered with the police who also engage with the community during the hub days and from next month the NHS will also join us. This has proven to be really valuable for the housing service and tenants seem pleased that we are making efforts to bring the service to them.

5.2. Launch of Digital Platforms / My Building Safety App

The Housing service is also pushing forward on digital platforms for our tenants. The digital platform enables tenants to sign up and report repairs directly as well as review their rent account and pay their rent. This is a convenient way to have all housing information in one place.

There has also been a promotion for Go Vocal which is has provided a central platform for tenants to have a voice, participate in local decision making, consult and provide valuable information on housing events we are holding. It has been used to promote the Housing Hub and Tenant Celebration Day.

The My Building Safety App was also launched, which allows the Council to share critical safety information and other building related content to residents in higher risk blocks, directly, quickly and effectively to the resident's mobile phone device. Take up has been good with over 200 hundred hits so far, nearly 50% of residents.

5.3. Increased resources within the Housing Management Team

Following a service review, we have also obtained investment for additional staff for the Neighbourhoods Team including 6 x Neighbourhood Officers, 4 x caretakers, 1 x Senior Allocations Officers, 1 x Tenant Engagement Manager. These roles are essential for fulfilling our regulatory obligations, enhancing tenant satisfaction, and supporting the delivery of high-quality services. This increased resource will help meet the demands of the Social Housing Regulations but will also position Gravesham for long-term success by ensuring stronger communities and better outcomes are delivered for our tenants.

5.4. Movement of Voids and Allocations Function

The council is responsible for letting homes in a fair, transparent, and efficient manner whilst also ensuring that homes are allocated to those in housing need. The consumer standards code of practice includes the 'Tenancy Standard' and therefore a decision was made to move

the Voids and Allocations Team from the Housing Options Service to the Tenancy Management Team. These services are a critical function within housing management, as it directly impacts tenancy sustainment, property turnaround times and the overall experience of tenants finding and moving into homes.

5.5. Introduction of a Tenant Involvement Panel

The Social Housing Regulations have placed a renewed focus on the importance of resident engagement, making it a crucial aspect of regulatory compliance, service improvement, and resident satisfaction. This area of work is a priority and is instrumental in embedding a culture of engagement and resident voice across the organisation. All relevant policies and frameworks have been set up and the service are progressing with recruitment of the roles for the Tenant Involvement panel.

5.6. Introduction of a Tenant and Leaseholder Vulnerability Policy

The decision of a Vulnerability Policy for tenants and leaseholders stemmed from the increasing recognition of the diverse challenges faced by individuals and households within our properties. As a responsible housing provider, we aim to ensure that all residents, regardless of their circumstances, can access the support they need to live safely, securely, and with dignity in their homes.

5.7. Introduction of a Tenant and Leaseholder Compensation Policy

The objective of this policy is to ensure a transparent, consistent and fair framework to remedy and/or compensate tenants and leaseholders when things do go wrong. This policy is designed to work alongside our Complaints Policy, aligning with the Social Housing Regulator's Transparency, Influence, and Accountability standard.

6. Conclusion

By analysing our complaints, we have found several operational improvements that can be made to improve the service. These include:

- Improved customer service to our tenants to ensure that we communicate effectively and positively with them.
- Improved communication between tenants and landlord – The Housing Management and Repairs & Asset Service have increased tenant engagement and communication platforms therefore there is scope to increase this further.
- Review the telephone system – Within the 2023/24 report it was reported that officers would consider capabilities of the Ring Central system, and this has been utilised throughout 2024-25 to listen, review and used for training and quality purposes. Officers will be considering phone call options moving forward to include the options of setting up a central place for all calls to be triaged to increase the level of service provided.
- Improved and user-friendly Tenant Handbooks to ensure the responsibility or landlord and tenant is clear.

Future monitoring of complaints performance and comparison with Tenant Satisfaction Measures will provide evidence of how our initiatives have improved the service. It will also help us see trends that are beyond what is written in the complaint itself. For example, the identification of areas or estates where complaints are high in comparison to the population. This could give us an indication of where our policies are working and how we need to change it to meet the needs of our residents.