

Governing Body Statement 2024 - 2025

Statement of Assurance to the Housing Ombudsman

Following thorough review and consideration of the complaints annual report, a discussion held at the Executive meeting on 9 July 2025, the Council confirms its assurance that the annual complaints performance and service improvement report presented is a true and accurate reflection of the landlord's complaint handling performance.

As part of our commitment to transparency and continuous improvement, the Council has undertaken a comprehensive review of the landlord's annual report against the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code.

The annual report was presented to the Cabinet. The process involved:

- **Scrutiny and Challenge:**

The annual report was subject to detailed assessment by Cabinet Members and other elected Members. Officers were present to provide clarification and respond to queries, ensuring that all aspects of the report were critically assessed. Key areas of performance and complaint trends were interrogated to validate the accuracy and completeness of the report.

- **Risk Identification and Response:**

During the review, several risks were identified and addressed:

- **Staffing and Capacity:** Concerns regarding the ability to deliver repairs and the improvement journey that the Council is currently on.
- **Complaint Escalation:** The rise in complaints, often linked to unresolved actions or disagreement with decisions, was recognised and the general picture nationally. In response, the housing team has strengthened their approach to complaints handling and processes through the creation of a Complaints Improvement Action Plan. It was outlined that this plan includes the introduction of a new Performance Manager within the housing service, review and changes to sign-off processes to reduce bottlenecks, the introduction of new internal forms that provide strengthened oversight and tracking of individual complaints cases and the investigation and decision making that sits behind each one, and the acknowledged need to better track commitments and learning from complaints to ensure robust follow-up and, therefore, reduction in Stage 2 escalation.

Governance Assurance:

- **Continuous Improvement:** The Cabinet welcomed the service's commitment to learning from upheld complaints (and using insights to improve processes).

The Cabinet was satisfied that the annual report was a true and accurate reflection of the landlord's complaint handling performance. The Council is confident that the risks identified are being appropriately addressed and that the service continues to evolve and improve in line with best practice.

The Housing Complaints Panel (our tenant led complaints scrutiny function) has also played a vital role in scrutinising our complaints performance against the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code, ensuring transparency, accountability, and continuous improvement in the complaint handling practices.

The following outlines the process and outcomes of this scrutiny panel:

1. Terms of Reference: During FY 2024/25, the Housing Complaints Panel reviewed their terms of reference to refresh and strengthen their purpose and impact on complaints. The group's purpose is set out to cover the following:
 - a. Quality checks on all aspects of complaint handling and performance, which includes reviewing redacted cases against our own internal policies and the Ombudsman's code.
 - b. Identifying common themes and making recommendations for areas of further scrutiny and/or focus for other scrutiny panels and informing the strategic focus of Officers working in the operational delivery of those services.
 - c. To hold the Council to account in meeting the Regulator for Social Housing's 'Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard', which states that providers should "have an approach to complaints that is clear, simple and accessible, that ensures complaints are resolved promptly, politely, and fairly."

As part of this commitment, the following summarises some of the challenge and clarification sought through the work of the panel throughout the year:

- Performance – Each quarter, the panel has reviewed our performance against the context of our own internal KPIs and targets, as well as to validate this against national statistics and our own self-assessment against the code. Their feedback, questions, and suggestions have fed into the creation of the Complaints Improvement Action Plan.
- Procedure – The panel have been instrumental in reviewing language, tone of voice, and communication as part of ongoing process review and update to ensure a customer-focussed (person centred) way of working.
- Wider Policy – The panel have reflected on complaint responses and given feedback based on their view of the fairness of our response and commitments. This has directly led to the review and change of wider policy.

- Officer Scrutiny – Relevant Officers at management levels attend the quarterly scrutiny meetings, which has given panel members the opportunity to question, clarify, and scrutinise the performance of individual teams referenced in complaints and performance data. This provides assurances around the validity of commitments and responses given in our complaints, and updates on the impact of feedback in policy, procedure, and service delivery.
- Holistic View – The above completes a 360 degree view whereby the panel are able to validate trends, changes, and improvements in performance correlated to the changes communicate to, and/or driven by the panel .

The ongoing work of the panel throughout the year provides additional clarity and assurance around our compliance with the code and the information set out in our self-assessment.

Cllr Dan Ledger

Portfolio Holder for Housing and Housing Complaints