

Briefing Note

To: Members of Tenants Gateway

From: Pete Curry, Consumer Standards Lead Officer

Acknowledgements: Carla Palmer - Housing Performance and Insight Officer

Date: 08 January 2025

Subject: Housing Complaints Report 2024-25 Quarter two

1. Summary

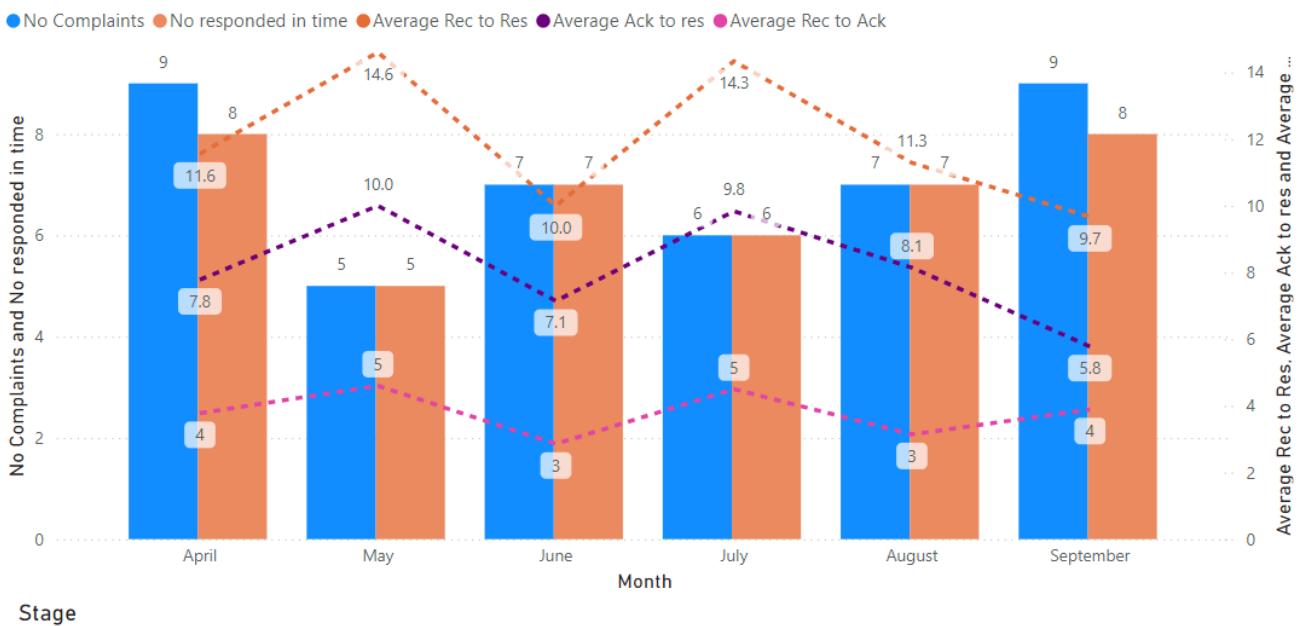
This report sets out a summary of the complaints received by Ashfield District Council in relation to the delivery of its housing services, which fall within the jurisdiction of the Housing Ombudsman Service during the first two quarters of 2024-25. These are broken down and analysed by stage, service, complainant's ethnicity, compensation award and type. Customer feedback is also set out alongside the learning from complaints, along with any changes to the process.

2. Complaint Analysis

2.1 Number of complaints

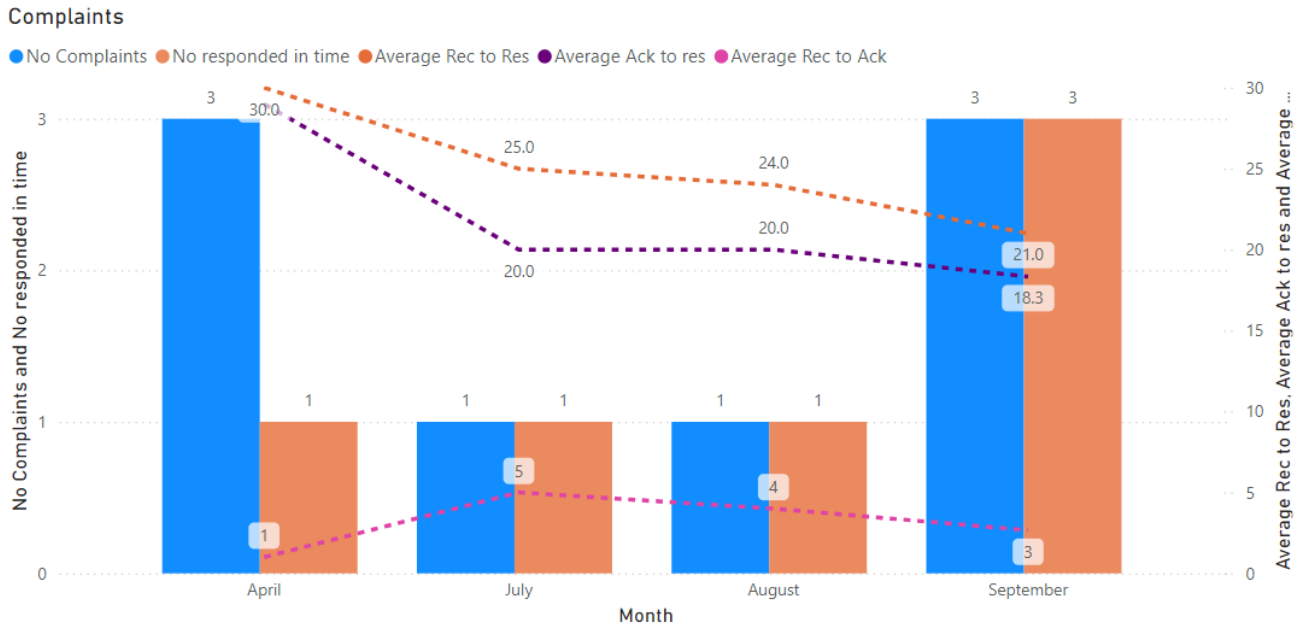
During the first two quarters of 2024-25, there have been 43 stage one complaints; the most complaints were in April/September (9) and the least in May (5).

Shown below is a breakdown of the stage one complaints received during the period, number responded to in time, along with the average times taken to acknowledge (purple dotted line) and respond (orange dotted line) to the complaint.



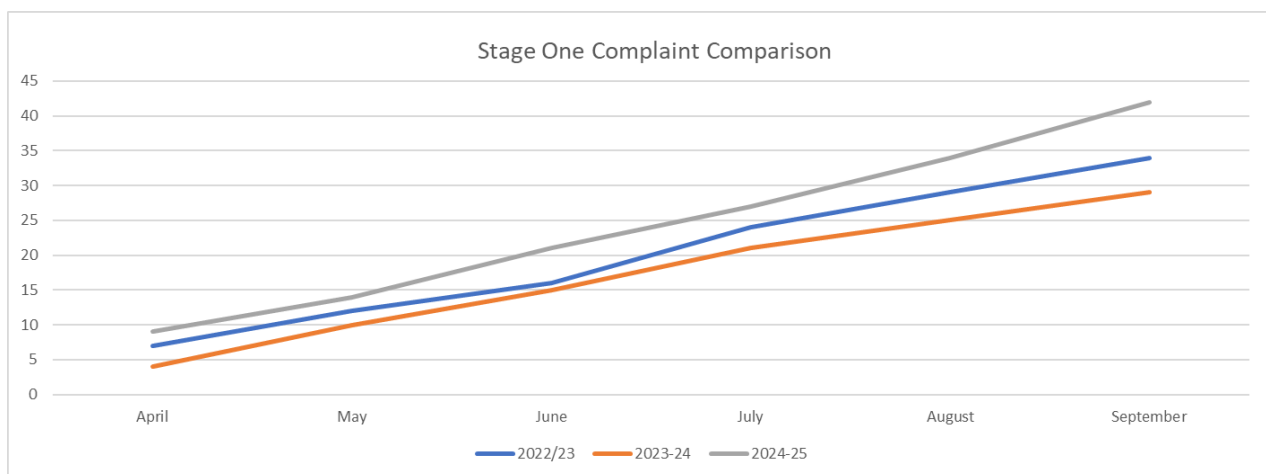
During the first two quarters of 2024-25, there have been 8 stage two complaints escalations. Whilst the number of stage two escalations has increased from the same period last financial year, the proportion of escalations (18%) has reduced slightly compared to last financial year (21%).

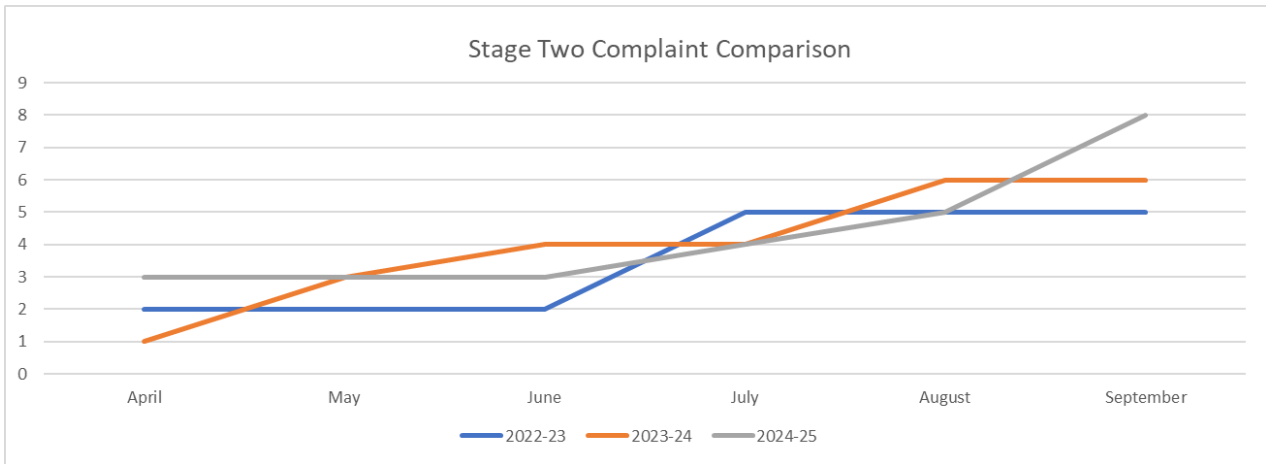
Shown below is a breakdown of the stage two complaints received during the first two quarters of 2024-25, number responded to in time, along with the average times taken to acknowledge (purple dotted line) and respond (orange dotted line) to the complaint.



2.2 Performance

There has been a 48% increase in the number of stage one complaints received year to date, compared to the previous year. This is the expected trend due to the new complaints handling code coming into effect on 01 April 2024, which removed the ability to resolve complaints informally, along with increased awareness of the complaint process within the sector. Stage two complaints have seen an increase of 33.3%, compared to the same period last financial year, which is in line with expectations, following increasing stage one complaints. However, the proportion of complaints escalating to stage two remains relatively low, which is positive.





In the first two quarters of 2024-25, stage one complaints took an average of 11.6 days, against a maximum target of 15 working days (up to 5 working days to acknowledge and up to 10 working days to respond from acknowledgement) from the date received to responded to. Stage two complaints took an average of 25.3 against a maximum target of 25 working days (up to 5 working days to acknowledge and up to 20 working days to respond from acknowledgement) the date received to responded to.

67.44% of the stage one complaints received in 2024-25 were found to be upheld or partially upheld, which is slightly higher than the previous year's 60.0%. 62.5% of stage two complaint found to be upheld or partially upheld.

2.3 Breakdown of stage one complaints/service requests by service area YTD

Section	Number of stage one complaints	Average days from receipt to Acknowledgement	Average days from Acknowledgement to response	Average Receipt to Response	Number responded to within target	% responded to within target	Number upheld/partially upheld	Number of Service Request through complaint channels
Assets	3	3	8.0	10.7	3	100.00%	3	1
Community Safety Team	1	9	9.0	18.0	0	0.00%	0	0
Housing Management	12	4	10.1	13.6	12	100.00%	10	8
Lettings	4	2	7.8	10.0	4	100.00%	3	2
Planned & Cyclical	1	2	10.0	12.0	1	100.00%	0	0
Responsive Repairs & Voids	18	4	6.9	11.3	17	94.44%	10	4
Support Services	4	3	4.8	7.8	4	100.00%	3	1
Total	43	4	7.9	11.6	41	95.35%	29	16

2.4 Breakdown by stage of complaint per month

Stage One Complaints 2024-25	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Total
No. complaints	9	5	7	6	7	9	43
No. Responded within timescales (including permitted extension within complaint handling code)	8	5	7	6	7	8	41
No. Service Requests	5	2	1	2	2	4	16
No. days (Rec to Responded)	104	73	70	86	79	87	499
Average time to respond (working days) from received to response phase	11.6	14.6	10.0	14.3	11.3	8.7	11.3

Stage Two Complaints 2024-25	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Total
No. complaints	3	0	0	1	1	3	8
No. Responded within timescales (including permitted extension within complaint handling code)	1	1	0	0	2	1	5
No. days (Rec to Res)	90			25	24	47	186
Average time to respond (working days) from received to response	30.0	0	0	25.0	24.0	15.7	23.3

Of the eight stage two complaints received during the period 3 complaints were found to be partially upheld and 2 were upheld, these 5 complaints are broken down as follows:

- Poor Workmanship – 2
- Unhappy with decision – 1
- Attitude or conduct of employee – 2

2.5 Non-compliance with complaint handling code timescales – year to date 2024/25

Stage One Complaints (target 5 working days for acknowledgement and 10 working days after acknowledgement for response)

1 - Responsive Repairs and Voids

Sutton Tenant – damp and mould – acknowledged outside of timescales (May 2024)

1 – Community Safety Team

Sutton Tenant – Decision to install noise monitoring in neighbouring property – acknowledged outside of timescales (September 2024)

Stage two – (target 5 working days to acknowledge and 20 working days to respond from acknowledgement)

2 - Responsive Repairs and Voids

Hucknall Tenant – Dissatisfied with the response at stage one – response outside of timescale (April 2024)

Selston Tenant - Unhappy with stage one poor workmanship – response outside of timescale (April 2024)

2.6 Proportion of complaints received that relate to leaks, floors or damp and mould

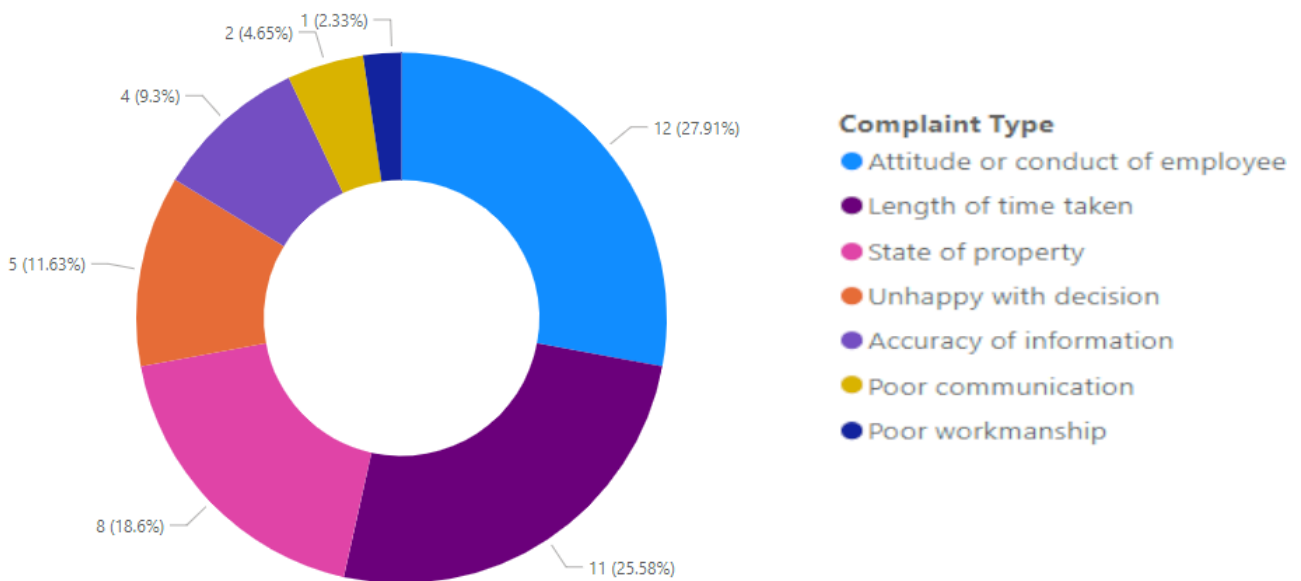
The Council’s handling of damp and mould cases within our housing stock presents a serious risk to both the Council and our tenants. As a result, we monitor the number of complaints received which relate to this subject area, in order to assist with identifying and systemic issues.

	One	Two	Service request
Number of complaints with damp & mould	19	3	1
Percentage of all complaints/Service requests:	44.19%	37.5%	6.7%
Upheld	4	1	
Upheld partial:	9	1	
Not upheld	6	1	

Nearly half of all Stage one complaints and one third of stage two involved elements linked to damp, mould, leaks or floods.

2.7 Breakdown by type of complaint

The stage one complaints received within the financial year were broken down as follows:

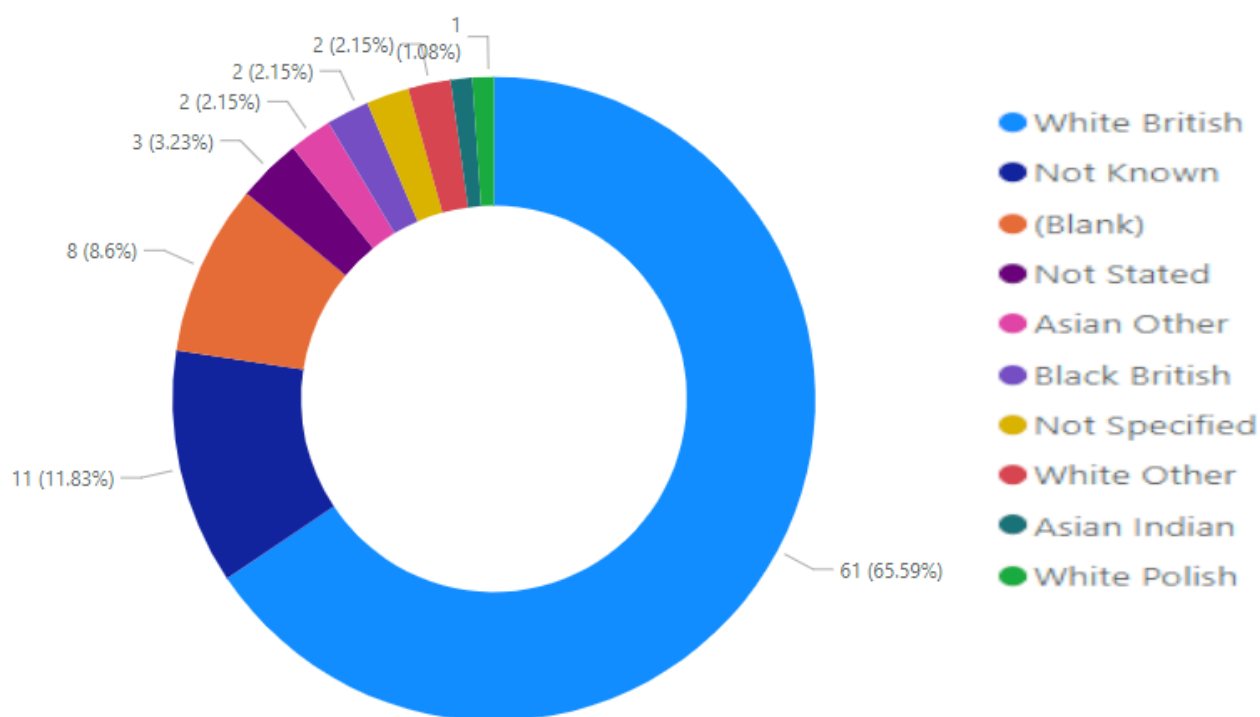


The percentage of complaints by type is shown below and is compared to the same period the previous financial year. Green colouring denotes this year’s proportion is lower than last year and red denotes a higher proportion this year. The “Length of time taken” is the highest complaint reason and equates to a third of all complaints and is higher than same period last financial year. Whereas we have seen a significant decrease in the number of complaints relating to “Poor workmanship” and “unhappy with decision” based on the proportions of the last financial year.

Complaint Type	% of complaints within financial year	
	2023-24	2024-25
Attitude or conduct of employee	14.29%	27.91%
Length of time taken	28.57%	25.58%
State of property	14.29%	18.6%
Poor workmanship	7.14%	2.33%
Poor communication	3.57%	4.65%
Accuracy of information	7.14%	9.3%
Unhappy with decision	17.86%	11.63%
Conduct of neighbour	3.57%	N/A
Appointment not kept	3.57%	N/A

2.8 Breakdown of complaints by complainant's ethnicity

The ethnicity of the complainant (including both stage one and two) is monitored based on the information held in the Capita OpenHousing system, at the time of making the complaint and is not collected as part of the complaints process/investigation by the complaint handler, to avoid any allegations of bias. The breakdown continues to be relatively consistent with the tenant base.



2.9 Compensation awards as part of complaint outcomes

A total of £742.72 from stage one and £1203.81 from stage two (£1,946.53 total) has been offered to tenants, in compensation or ex-gratia payments during the period, as a remedy for resolving the complaints, this incorporates complaints at all levels, including awards made by the Housing Ombudsman service.

2.10 Expressions of dissatisfaction not accepted as complaints

There have been one of dissatisfaction not accepted as a complaint, excluding those deemed to be a request for service:

Kirkby Tenant – Attitude or conduct of employee – it was deemed that due to the nature of the allegation, the matter was excluded from the complaints process, as it required investigation through the council’s Disciplinary Policy.

2.11 Housing Ombudsman Complaints

During Q2, there were no further cases referred to the Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS) for independent review.

There was one outstanding case with the HOS, which they have determined fell outside their jurisdiction, so will not take any further action in relation to this matter.

YTD there has been one case determined by the HOS which concluded with 3x maladministration findings and 1x no maladministration findings.

3. Customer Feedback

A complaints satisfaction survey is sent to all stage one complainants as part of the response documentation for their complaint. We also provide complainants with the option to complete the survey online.

During Q2 1 complainant returned a completed satisfaction survey, which is a response rate of 4.54%, which is lower than the overall response rate from the previous financial year of 9.26%.

Historically, response rates have been low, which, along with low rates of escalation to stage two and referrals to HOS, are considered as a positive. We have now commenced following up stage one complaint responses by text message (where the complainant has not returned their satisfaction survey independently after 1 week), with a reminder to complete the survey including a link to the survey on our website, to increase response rates (response rates remain low).

Below is a breakdown of the response submitted by the survey respondent in Q2. The response is relatively consistent with historical responses where the complainant is typically either very satisfied with the complaint handling and does not wish to escalate to the next stage or they are very dissatisfied with the complaint handling and wish to escalate to stage two.

Question	Respondent
Overall how satisfied are you with the handling of your complaint?	Very Dissatisfied
How satisfied are you that the staff who dealt with your complaint were helpful and polite?	Very Dissatisfied
How satisfied are you that the complaints process is easy to access and understand?	Very Dissatisfied
Overall how satisfied with the outcome of your complaint?	Very Dissatisfied
How Satisfied are you that all areas of your complaint were addressed?	Very Dissatisfied
How satisfied are you that the reasons for the outcome of your complaint were fully explained?	Very Dissatisfied

If you are not fully satisfied with the outcome of your complaint, do you accept that explanation that has been offered?	No
If you are not satisfied with the outcome of your complaint, will you be taking it to the next stage?	Yes

4. Learning

4.1 Actions from learning from complaints

Complaint handlers are encouraged to use complaints as a learning opportunity.

We record any learning outcomes from complaints and assign a colour coded risk rating for each of the action, based on the level of potential risk to the authority/tenant for a recurrence.

From the complaints responded to during Q2, 33 learning outcomes were identified, which is a 106% increase on the same period last financial year. 73% of the learning outcomes have been implemented to date.

A summary of the learning outcomes is as follows:

Risk Category	Number of Learning Outcomes	Number Implemented	Percentage Implemented
Red	8	6	75%
Amber	14	9	64%
Green	11	9	82%
Total	33	24	73%

A breakdown of the learning outcomes identified is as follows:

- Consent to discuss a tenancy on a tenant's behalf needs to be checked before speaking to next of kin/advocates.
- Records need to be added to CRM following all telephone contact and the information recorded on the CRM needs to include what action was taken etc
- Officers should not advise that a report was anonymous when an Officer has visited the property as this can create further issues e.g. neighbour disputes (when it may not be a neighbour)
- Officers should knock on the tenant's door to enquire about the position of the garden if they are visiting
- Letters sent out to tenants should be accurate in terms of tenancy breaches
- Officers to be reminded not to give their own personal opinions to customers about others
- Officers should not assess for the Good Will Tree and Hedge Cutting Service over the telephone or pre-determine the outcome of the assessment before visiting the tenant and assessing the works/checking for eligibility
- Repairs inspections should be carried out within 30 working days
- Out of hours repairs service provider to be contacted address OOH call where call handler failed to diagnose repair as priority 1 and provide tenant empathy on the situation there were facing.
- Officers to be reminded to read enquiries in full before responding

- Surveyor reminded to contact line manager if they have queries in relation to scheduled appointments
- Lettings to notify Housing Management of any new lets during periods of formal consultation so a cross check can be made against data sources/letters before they are sent out
- Spreadsheets to be re-run so that data is as up to date as can be, where multiple consultation letters are being sent. Additional data checks need to be made on spreadsheets
- Community Safety Manager to be reminded to refer on complaints to the relevant department to deal with
- Officers in the Housing Management Department to be reminded that changes to the tenancy commencement date for new sign ups cannot be amended by the Tenancy Services Manager or AD - Housing Management. The AD - Strategic Housing whose team signed up tenancies is the responsible officer who can make the decision to change a start date
- A point of contact needs to be agreed in the Repairs Department so that repairs complaints can be dealt with by one officer and tenants can have one point of contact.
- Officers in the Housing Management Department should advise tenants of the council's complaints procedure, if issues are repeatedly being reported/have been forwarded over a period of time to another Department (and the tenant states they have not received a response)
- Officers in the Housing Management Team should be reminded to return calls if they promise to do so
- Officers in the Housing Management Team should not commit to Managers within their own departments resolving issues (which are not within their remit or responsibility) when they are not able to do so.
- Team Leader (Tenancy/Estates) to be reminded to follow up on issues that Officers have raised
- Officers to be reminded to change the effective date of a housing app when the banding changes.
- Officers to be reminded to fully read evidence submitted in support of re-housing, interpret and apply it correctly to the situation.
- Urgent parts to be ordered with fast-track delivery and the estimated time of arrival to be shared with the tenant
- Conduct of officer during specific telephone conversation to be discussed with them, to identify service improvement to tenants
- Lettings Officers to ensure they have an understanding of homeless applicants' personal circumstances and make a reasonable and informed decision when deciding on suitability of a property
- Where untidy gardens are reported or discovered during visits/inspections, initial contact should be made with the tenant to ascertain what their intentions are with regard to the garden before commencing formal action
- Before contacting a tenant, Capita should be checked to ascertain whether there is any information recorded to suggest that the tenant or any members of the household are vulnerable

- Where available photographs of the condition of gardens when the property was let should be checked to ascertain whether the garden condition has improved since this time
- The Untidy Garden Procedure and the examples within it should be referred to, to make an assessment as to whether the garden should be dealt with as being “untidy”
- Notes of visits or inspections, including annual estate inspections, should be made in sufficient detail to support the need for formal action
- Where possible photographs should be taken of gardens where formal action may need to be taken
- Officers to be reminded to respond to tenants within the timescales set in the Untidy Gardens Procedure
- Officers should refrain from offering personal opinions or assumptions to tenants

4.2 Changes to complaints process

No changes were made during Q2 2024/25.

4.3 Emerging themes from complaints

Analysis has taken place across the themes/types of complaints we have received. The main areas and lessons emerging for services are:

- **Stage one complaints increasing** – The first half of the financial year saw a 48% increase in stage one complaints compared to the same period last year. Whilst this is anticipated following the changes to HOS’ complaint handling code, we have also seen a slight increase in uphold rates (12%) compared to the same period last financial year, which could be indicative of increased service failure. It is important that learning from service failure is identified and implemented to prevent recurrence. Whilst complaints are valuable and a positive influence on change, increasing complaint volumes will place an additional burden on existing resources and service areas will need to consider if current or increasing complaint volumes can be handled in line with HOS’ Complaint Handling Code, which is a statutory requirement, with existing resources.
- **Increasing learning outcomes** – The volume of learning outcomes identified has increased considerably compared to the same period last financial year, however, it was noted that learning outcomes had decreased during 2023/24, compared to 2022/23. Learning outcomes are positive, but it is essential that services implement learning outcomes as quickly as possible to prevent recurrence and monitor their success.
- **Responses outside of complaint handling timescales** – Whilst there has only been one complaint not responded to in line with the requirements of the complaint handling code/complaints policy in Q2 (plus further complaints in Q3), compliance with the Code is a statutory requirement. Service areas have been reminded of the requirements, where issues are identified, and corporate training is being scheduled for complaint handlers during Q4. The Housing Complaints Procedure has been recently re-circulated to all housing complaint handlers, with a reminder of the requirements to comply with the Procedure, to ensure compliance with the Complaint Handling Code. Assistant Directors/Service Managers should be assured that their teams are complying with the requirements of the Code and that their service areas have sufficient resources/delegations in place to do so.