



DARLINGTON

Borough Council

Housing Complaints, Compliments and Comments Annual Report 2024/25

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Introduction

1. While the Council has produced an annual report, relating to its function as a social landlord for over a decade, this is now a requirement of the Housing Ombudsman's [Complaint Handling Code](#) which became statutory on 1 April 2024. It is also a requirement to submit a self-assessment to the Housing Ombudsman and publish a copy of the self-assessment as part of the annual complaints' performance and service improvement report on our website. The governing body's response to the report must be published alongside this. A copy of the self-assessment is contained in the final section of this report.
2. This report provides an analysis of the complaints, compliments and comments received by the Council during 2024/25 under the Housing Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure (the procedure) / The Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code. The purpose of the report is to identify topics and trends in relation to complaints; identify areas of organisational learning that have taken place over the past year because of complaints received and make further recommendations based on trend data to improve services. The report also seeks to highlight any areas of good practice and identify topics and trends in relation to comments made by members of the public so the Council can take action where appropriate to improve services.
3. In addition to the statistical information presented in this report it is important to recognise the work of the Complaints and Information Governance (CIG) Team that underpins this in terms of promoting an organisational culture in which complaints are recognised, accepted, owned and resolved as efficiently and as close to the point of service delivery as possible. This also enables the Council to collect accurate information on complaints in order to identify topics and trends and improve services accordingly.

Housing Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure

4. The procedure sets out how the Council will deal with complaints, compliments and comments received about the Council as a social landlord (as well as in respect of its ownership and management of leasehold housing).
5. The procedure has 2 stages. Stage 1 is a local resolution stage where we try to resolve those complaints that cannot be resolved immediately as part of our day-to-day business. Stage 1 complaints are dealt with locally, that is within the service being complained about. We aim to resolve most complaints at Stage 1 of the procedure. Housing Services employs a Housing Complaints Officer to assist with delivery of the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code.
6. Stage 2 is a formal investigation stage where complaints will usually be investigated by the Complaints Investigator or Complaints and Information Governance Manager. We may also appoint an independent investigating officer.

7. The Council has appointed the Complaints and Information Governance Manager in line with the Code to be accountable for complaint handling. The Complaints and Information Governance Manager will assess any themes or trends to identify potential systemic issues, serious risks, or policies and procedures that require revision.
8. In addition to this, as required by the Code, the Council has appointed the Assistant Director, Housing and Revenues as a member of the governing body (or equivalent) to have lead responsibility for complaints to support a positive complaint handling culture. This person is referred to as the Member Responsible for Complaints ('the MRC').

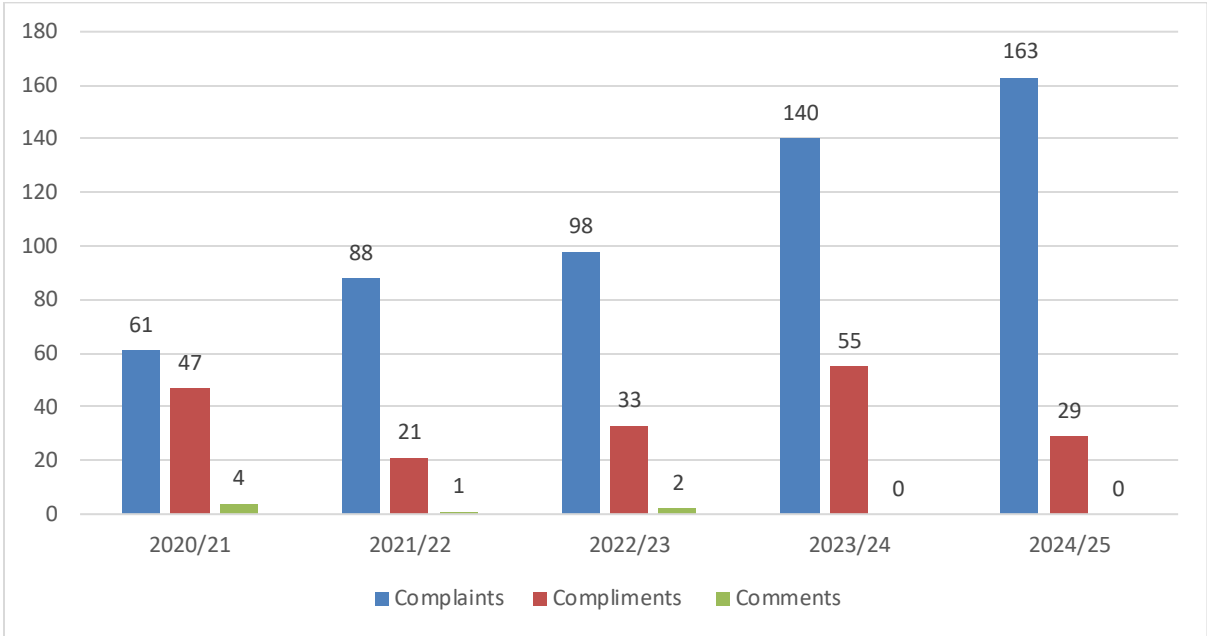
Public Information and Accessibility

9. We are committed to making sure that everyone has equal access to all our services. To help make sure the Council's complaints procedures are easily accessible we have produced two leaflets (one for children and young people and one for adults) covering all Council services to reflect the single point of access for complainants within the Council. The leaflets are available in all Council buildings. They have been written in line with the Plain English Campaign standards. The title is written in the most commonly used community languages, and it contains details on how to access the information in other formats, for example, large print, audio and Braille.
10. Information is available on the Council's website which contains an electronic form people can use to make a complaint, pay someone a compliment or pass comment on Council services. People may make a complaint in any format they wish. This can be in writing, email, via the web, over the phone, in person or by any other reasonable means.
11. The Council can arrange advocates and interpreters (including British Sign Language interpreters) where appropriate.

Complaints Information and Organisational Learning

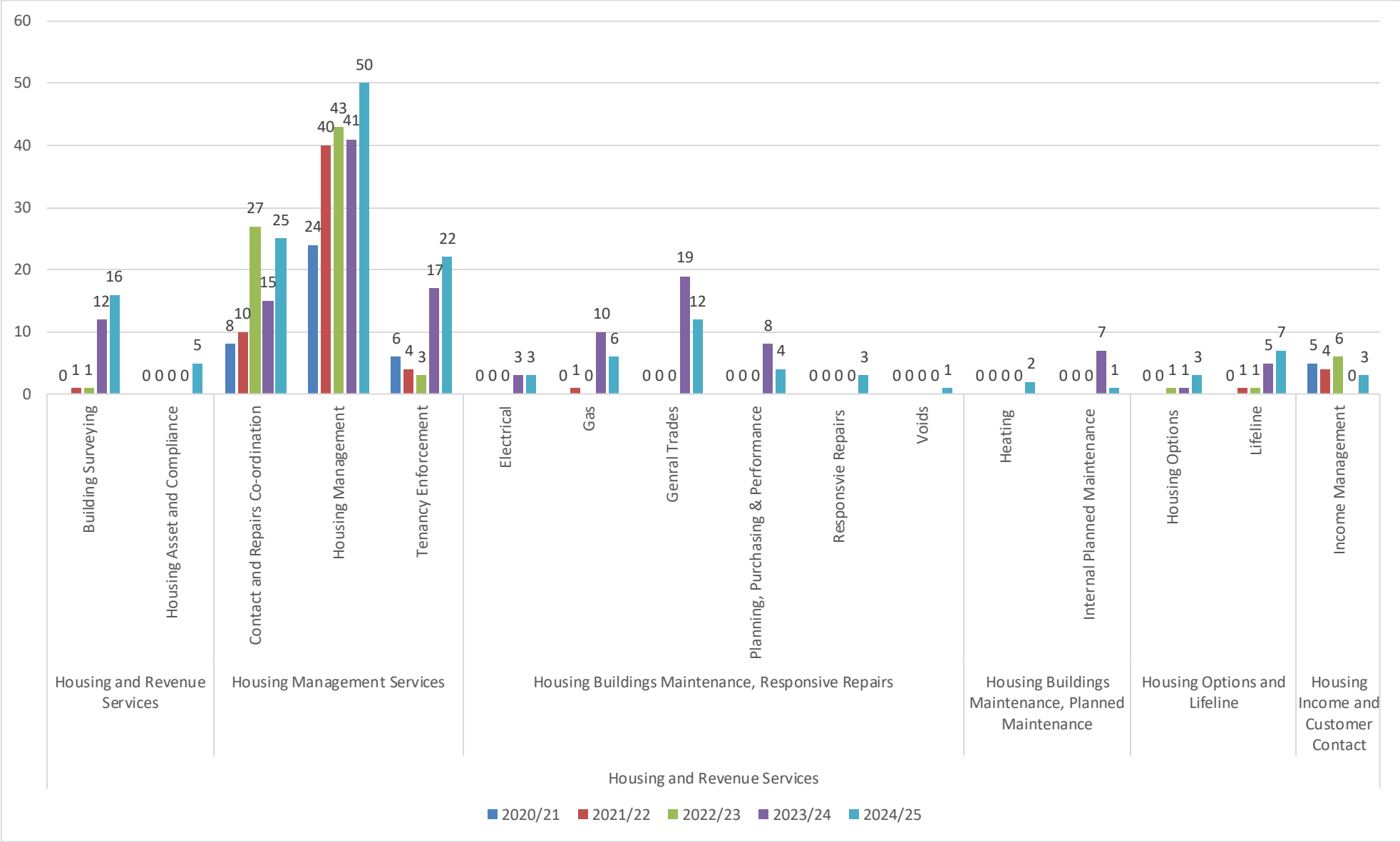
Overview of Complaints, Compliments and Comments

Total Complaints, Compliments and Comments



- 12. Between 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2025 the Council received a total of 163 complaints under the procedure, an increase from 140 in 2023/24. While this increase can in part be attributed to the additional promotional work undertaken by Housing Services to highlight the complaints procedure and the launch of the Housing Ombudsman’s Statutory Complaints Handling Code on 1 April 2024, it also reflects a national trend with the Housing Ombudsman reporting an unprecedented 474% increase in complaints between 2019/20 and 2024/25, with complaints about repairs accounting for 45%.
- 13. A total of 27 complaints were considered at Stage 2, a decrease from 30 in 2023/24.
- 14. The Council received 29 compliments under the procedure, a decrease from 55 in 2023/24.
- 15. The Council did not receive any comments under the procedure, as was the case in 2023/24.
- 16. The Council did not receive any non-qualifying complaints during 2024/25.

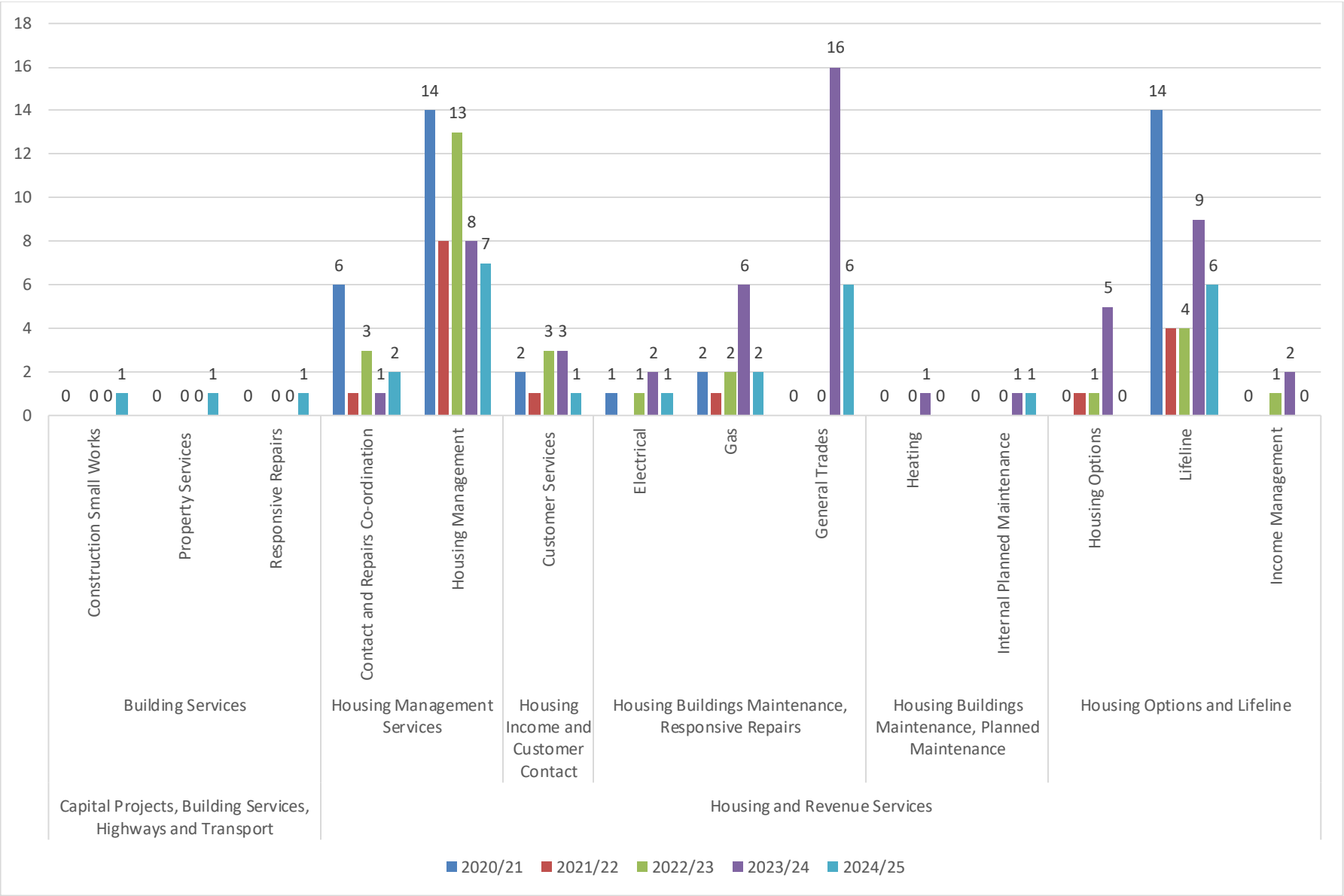
Complaints by Team



17. Building Surveying received 16 complaints, an increase from 12 in 2023/24. The identifiable themes were dissatisfaction with delays in completing repairs and poor communication.
18. Housing Asset and Compliance received five complaints, an increase from zero in 2023/24. There were no identifiable themes.
19. Contact & Repairs Co-ordination received 25 complaints, a significant increase from 15 in 2023/24. Again, the identifiable themes were dissatisfaction with delays in completing repairs and poor communication.
20. Housing Management received 50 complaints, an increase from 41 in 2023/24. Complaints concerned dissatisfaction with communication and the support from Housing Management Officers in relation to neighbour nuisance issues and a variety of other housing matters including the timeliness and quality of repairs.
21. Tenancy Enforcement received 22 complaints, an increase from 17 in 2023/24. The identifiable themes were dissatisfaction with the perceived lack of action in relation to reports of anti-social behaviour and the attitude/behaviour of Officers towards complainants.
22. Electrical Services received three complaints, the same number as in 2023/24. There were no identifiable themes.
23. Gas repairs received six complaints, a decrease from 10 in 2023/24. The most common causes of complaint was people's dissatisfaction with the timeliness and quality of repairs.
24. General Trades received 12 complaints, a decrease from 19 complaints in 2023/24. Again, the most common causes of complaint was people's dissatisfaction with the timeliness and quality of repairs.
25. Planning, Purchasing and Performance received four complaints, a decrease from eight in 2023/24. Complaints mainly concerned issues with booking appointments.
26. Responsive Repairs received three complaints, an increase from zero in 2023/24.
27. Voids received one complaint, an increase from zero in 2023/24.
28. Heating received two complaints, an increase from zero in 2023/24.
29. Internal Planned Maintenance received one complaint, a decrease from seven in 2022/23.
30. Housing Options received three complaints, an increase from one in 2023/24.
31. Lifeline received seven complaints, an increase from five in 2023/24. There were no identifiable themes.

32. Housing Income Management received three complaints, an increase from zero in 2023/24.

Compliments by Team

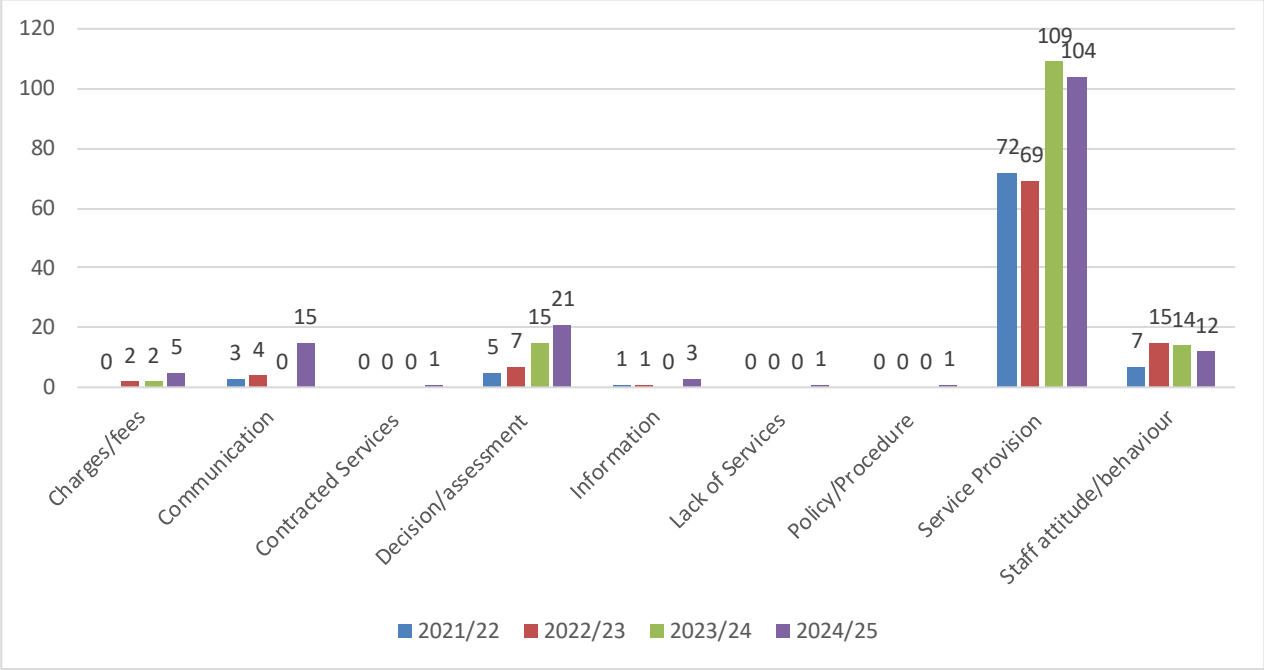


33. Housing Services received 29 compliments, a significant decrease from 55 in 2023/24.

Comments by Team

34. The Council received zero comments during 2024/25, the same number as in 2023/24.

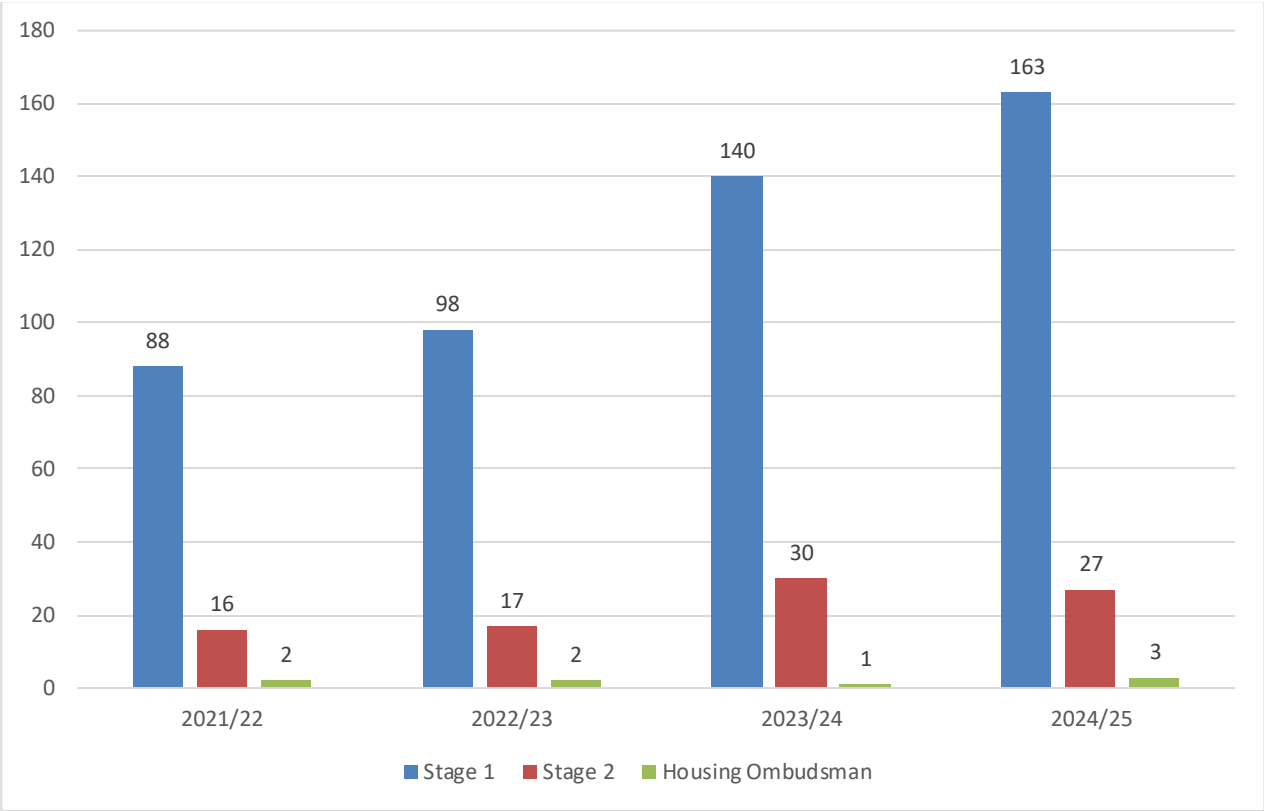
Complaints by Issue



- 35. Five complaints related to charges/fees, an increase from two in 2023/24.
- 36. 15 complaints related to communication, a significant increase from zero in 2023/24.
- 37. One complaint related to Contracted Services, an increase from zero in 2023/24.
- 38. 21 complaints related to decision/assessment, an increase from 15 in 2023/24.
- 39. Three complaints related to information, an increase from zero in 2023/24.
- 40. One complaint related to lack of services, an increase from zero in 2023/24.
- 41. One complaint related to policy/procedure, an increase from zero in 2023/24.
- 42. There were 104 complaints about service provision, a decrease from 109 in 2023/24.
- 43. 12 complaints related to staff attitude/behaviour, a decrease from 14 in 2023/24.

Complaints by Stage

44. The below graph shows the number of complaints received at each stage of the procedure during.



45. The Council received 163 Stage 1 complaints in 2024/25, a significant increase from 140 in 2023/24.

46. 27 were investigated at Stage 2, a decrease from 30 in 2023/24.

47. Three complaints were escalated to the Housing Ombudsman in 2024/25, an increase from one in 2023/24.

Complaints Outcomes

48. The below tables show the decisions reached on complaints received during 2024/25.

Stage 1

Service Area/Team	Inconclusive	Not Upheld	Partially Upheld	Upheld	Withdrawn	Total
Income Management	0	1	2	0	0	3
Housing Management Services	0	2	0	1	0	3
Housing Management	0	19	8	4	9	40
Tenancy Enforcement	1	13	1	1	6	22
Contact and Repairs Co-ordination	0	6	3	4	7	20
Housing Options	0	1	2	0	0	3
Lifeline	0	1	1	1	4	7
Gas	0	1	2	1	1	5
General trades	1	3	1	3	2	10
Voids	0	1	0	0	0	1
Electrical	0	1	1	1	0	3
Planning, Purchasing & Performance	0	2	1	1	0	4
Internal Planned Maintenance	0	0	1	0	0	1
Heating (IPMteam)	0	0	0	0	2	2
Building Surveying	1	3	7	5	0	16
Housing Asset and Compliance	0	3	2	0	0	5
Building Cleaning and Compliance	0	1	0	0	0	1
Totals	3	58	32	22	31	146
Percentage	2.05%	39.72%	21.91%	15.06%	21.23%	100%

N.B. 18 stage 1 complaints remained open at the time of writing.

Stage 2

Service Area/Team	Inconclusive	Not Upheld	Partially Upheld	Upheld	Withdrawn	Total
Housing Management	0	2	2	1	0	5
Tenancy Enforcement	0	4	0	0	0	4
General trades	0	0	1	0	0	1
Building Surveying	0	0	3	1	0	4
Housing Asset and Compliance	0	1	0	0	1	2
Totals	0	7	6	2	1	16
Percentage	0%	43.75%	37.5%	12.5%	6.25%	100%

N.B. 11 stage 2 complaints remained open at the time of writing.

Housing Ombudsman

49. The Housing Ombudsman commenced three investigations during 2024/25.
50. The Housing Ombudsman made a decision in relation to one of those complaint investigations it commenced during 2024/25.
51. Full details of any complaints determined by the Housing Ombudsman are included in the Cabinet reports of 9 September 2025 entitled [Review of Outcome of Complaints Made to Ombudsman](#).

Organisational Learning

52. All resolution and organisational learning actions identified as a result of complaints are assigned to a responsible manager and progress against those actions is monitored by the Complaints and Information Governance Manager. In addition to those actions taken to resolve individual complaints, a number of service improvements were made following complaint investigations during 2024/25, some of which are detailed below:

Building Surveying

53. Following a complaint about the gas servicing process it was agreed the process and letters would be reviewed with a view to improving communication between teams and tenants and ultimately the timeliness in which repairs are completed. It was also agreed to discuss the gas servicing process with the Tenant's Panel and seek their views on what we could have done differently.
54. After receiving a complaint about contractors not being aware of tenant vulnerabilities, staff were reminded to ensure they are updating the Vulnerability User defined Characteristic (UDC) on the internal ICT system so that all staff are aware and to include this information on all orders for contractors where appropriate.
55. Following a complaint about staff conduct, a staff member was briefed on the appropriate way to handle conflict and the need to always remain professional.
56. Housing Services would implement improvements for the roofer's record keeping via Accuserv (repairs appointment ICT system).
57. Following a complaint about a lack of information being provided to a tenant after a fire, it was agreed a post-fire procedure would be written.

Contact and Repairs Co-ordination

58. Following a complaint about missed issues, staff were reminded of the need to ensure they read and address all aspects of service requests from tenants to ensure they feel listened to fully.
59. Staff were reminded to ensure they are listing all issues mentioned by the tenant when an inspection is raised. In this instance the tenant had mentioned their floor tiles had lifted, the rubber door threshold had perished and that they had damp and mould, however, only a damp and mould inspection ticket was raised.
60. Following a complaint about delays in a tenant receiving additional keys, the key-cutting process was reviewed to ensure tenants are aware of the duration to obtain keys and deliver them.

61. After a complaint was received about delays in responding to tenants' queries, staff were reminded to return phone calls within the 7 working days outlined in the Customer Standards.

Gas

62. From a complaint about a delay to gas appliances being safety checked in a new tenancy, a new void process was agreed where the electrical check is completed a week prior to the gas check & key exchange.

General Trades

63. Following a complaint about not responding to a tenant's queries in a timely manner, the team were reminded to check voicemails/ messages and ensure they return any missed messages following leave/absence.
64. After a complaint about delays to emergency repairs, staff were reminded that urgent works need to be rang through to the Planners for an urgent appointment to prevent further damage occurring.

Housing Management

65. Following a complaint about a letter received by a tenant, Housing Officers were asked to make sure they knock on doors when hand delivering letters and ensure the letters are signed.
66. Following a complaint about the repairs process, the team were reminded to ensure they are manually completing any jobs that require follow-on work to prevent any subsequent reminder letters being sent in error.
67. Building Surveyors were reminded that they should be liaising with tenants regarding the outcome of inspections/works involving contractors to ensure a transparent service to tenants, this was following a complaint about lack of communication after an inspection.
68. After a complaint about fly-tipping, staff were reminded to ensure that when items are reported to be fly tipped in communal spaces they arrange for disposal in the first instance to ensure we are working in line with the fire and fire door safety guidelines.

Income Management

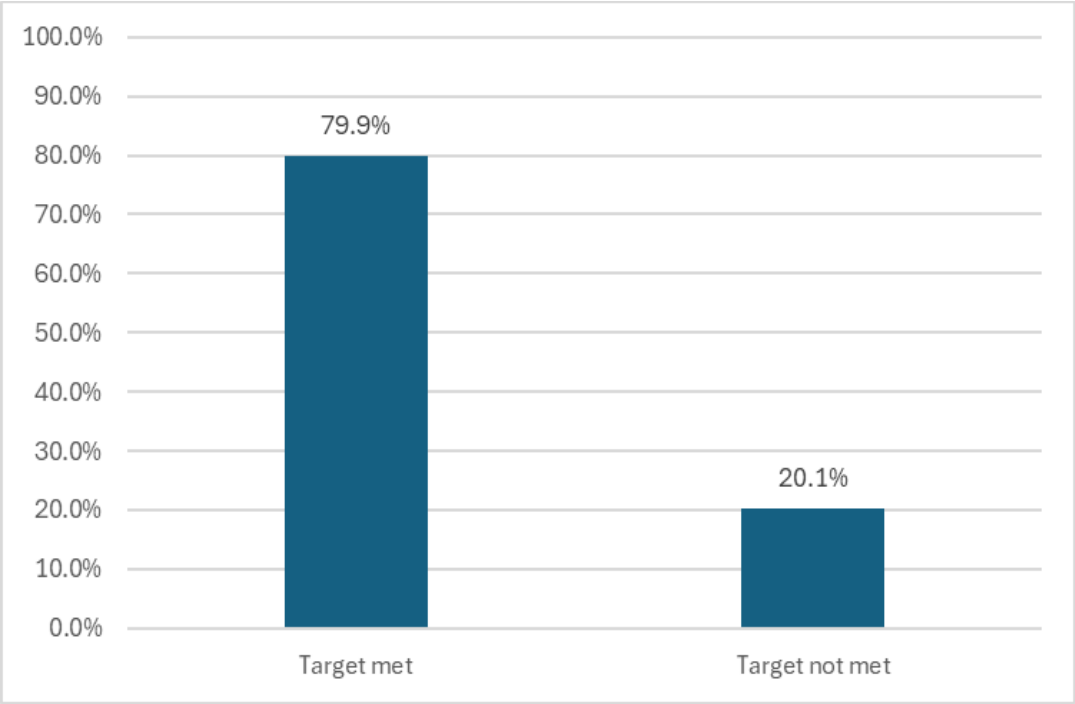
69. Following a complaint about delays to a complaint being logged and subsequently responded to, Housing Income Management were made aware that the Complaints Team need consent from a tenant in order to accept a complaint from a third party. They were reminded that the Housing Services Access to Personal Information form should be completed, but also that the form required updating to ensure it reflected the more

stringent consent requirements introduced by UK GDPR and those detailed in our Housing Complaints Procedure.

Performance against the Housing Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure

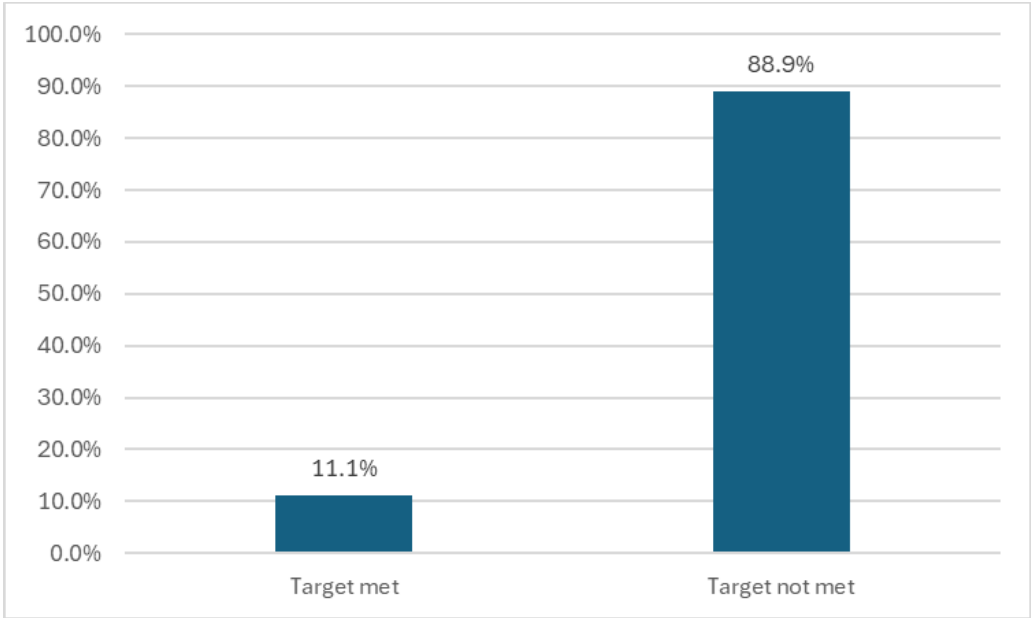
Stage 1

Proportion of stage one complaints responded to within the Housing Ombudsman’s Complaint Handling Code timescales



Stage 2

Proportion of stage two complaints responded to within the Housing Ombudsman’s Complaint Handling Code timescales



70. The Regulator of Social Housing has issued guidance on how to calculate the above, which means the methodology used now differs from that previously used, and that currently used in relation to all other Council complaints. We have applied this same methodology to the reporting of Housing Ombudsman decisions in this report; however, we do not intend to adopt it elsewhere.
71. The methodology identifies the percentage of complaints ***made by tenants during the reporting*** year that were responded to in timescale during the reporting year, as opposed to the overall percentage of complaints responded to in timescale during the reporting year. Consequently, any complaints received in 2023/24 and responded to in 2024/25 are excluded from the calculation. As are any complaints received in 2024/25 that remained open after the 31 March 2025.

Further recommendations

72. Housing Services should consider what can be done to reduce complaints about the timeliness and quality of repairs and poor communication and to improve relationships between officers and tenants.
73. Housing Services should consider reviewing resources to ensure all stage 1 complaints are responded to within Housing Ombudsman’s Complaint Handling Code timescales.
74. The Complaints & Information Governance Team should consider reviewing resources to ensure all stage 2 complaints are responded to within Housing Ombudsman’s Complaint Handling Code timescales.

Housing Ombudsman Code Self-Assessment

75. This self-assessment form should be completed by the complaints officer and it must be reviewed and approved by the landlord's governing body at least annually.
76. Once approved, landlords must publish the self-assessment as part of the annual complaints performance and service improvement report on their website. The governing body's response to the report must be published alongside this.
77. Landlords are required to complete the self-assessment in full and support all statements with evidence, with additional commentary as necessary.
78. We recognise that there may be a small number of circumstances where landlords are unable to meet the requirements, for example, if they do not have a website. In these circumstances, we expect landlords to deliver the intentions of the Code in an alternative way, for example by publishing information in a public area so that it is easily accessible.

Section 1: Definition of a complaint

Code provision	Code requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence	Commentary / explanation
1.2	A complaint must be defined as: <i>'an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the landlord, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting a resident or group of residents.'</i>	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	See Section 3
1.3	A resident does not have to use the word 'complaint' for it to be treated as such. Whenever a resident expresses dissatisfaction landlords must give them the choice to make complaint. A complaint that is submitted via a third party or representative must be handled in line with	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	The Council has adopted the definition in 1.2 which does not require a resident to use the complaint. Nor did our previous definition. This is covered in our training.

	the landlord's complaints policy.			
1.4	Landlords must recognise the difference between a service request and a complaint. This must be set out in their complaints policy. A service request is a request from a resident to the landlord requiring action to be taken to put something right. Service requests are not complaints, but must be recorded, monitored and reviewed regularly.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	The Council has separate and robust processes in place to consider requests for service and complaints.
1.5	A complaint must be raised when the resident expresses dissatisfaction with the response to their service request, even if the handling of the service request remains ongoing. Landlords must not stop their efforts to address the service request if the resident complains.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	This happens as a result of the aforementioned process and is covered in our training.
1.6	An expression of dissatisfaction with services made through a survey is not defined as a complaint, though wherever possible, the person completing the survey should be made aware of how they can pursue a complaint if they wish to. Where landlords ask for wider feedback about their services, they also must provide details of how residents can complain.	Yes		Details of how to complain are included in our Satisfaction Surveys.

Section 2: Exclusions

Code provision	Code requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence	Commentary / explanation
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2.1	Landlords must accept a complaint unless there is a valid reason not to do so. If landlords decide not to accept a complaint they must be able to evidence their reasoning. Each complaint must be considered on its own merits	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	The Council's approach has always been based on best practice and we look for every reason to accept a complaint, before deciding it does not qualify for investigating. Where we decide a complaint is non-qualifying we explain our reasons and advised the individual of their right to refer the matter to the HOS.
2.2	<p>A complaints policy must set out the circumstances in which a matter will not be considered as a complaint or escalated, and these circumstances must be fair and reasonable to residents. Acceptable exclusions include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The issue giving rise to the complaint occurred over twelve months ago. • Legal proceedings have started. This is defined as details of the claim, such as the Claim Form and Particulars of Claim, having been filed at court. • Matters that have previously been considered under the complaints policy. 	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	See Section 7
2.3	Landlords must accept complaints referred to them within 12 months of the issue occurring or the resident becoming aware of		Darlington BC - Housing complaints	See Section 7

	the issue, unless they are excluded on other grounds. Landlords must consider whether to apply discretion to accept complaints made outside this time limit where there are good reasons to do so.			
2.4	If a landlord decides not to accept a complaint, an explanation must be provided to the resident setting out the reasons why the matter is not suitable for the complaints process and the right to take that decision to the Ombudsman. If the Ombudsman does not agree that the exclusion has been fairly applied, the Ombudsman may tell the landlord to take on the complaint.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	Where we decide a complaint is non-qualifying we explain our reasons and advised the individual of their right to refer the matter to the HOS.
2.5	Landlords must not take a blanket approach to excluding complaints; they must consider the individual circumstances of each complaint.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	See Section 7

Section 3: Accessibility and Awareness

Code provision	Code requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence	Commentary / explanation
3.1	Landlords must make it easy for residents to complain by providing different channels through which they can make a complaint. Landlords must consider their duties under the Equality Act 2010 and anticipate the needs and reasonable adjustments	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints Darlington BC - Complaints compliments and comments	

	of residents who may need to access the complaints process.			
3.2	Residents must be able to raise their complaints in any way and with any member of staff. All staff must be aware of the complaints process and be able to pass details of the complaint to the appropriate person within the landlord.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	Training provided to officers.
3.3	High volumes of complaints must not be seen as a negative, as they can be indicative of a well-publicised and accessible complaints process. Low complaint volumes are potentially a sign that residents are unable to complain.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	
3.4	Landlords must make their complaint policy available in a clear and accessible format for all residents. This will detail the two stage process, what will happen at each stage, and the timeframes for responding. The policy must also be published on the landlord's website.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	
3.5	The policy must explain how the landlord will publicise details of the complaints policy, including information about the Ombudsman and this Code.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	See Section 1
3.6	Landlords must give residents the opportunity to have a representative deal with their complaint	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	See Section 8

	on their behalf, and to be represented or accompanied at any meeting with the landlord.			
3.7	Landlords must provide residents with information on their right to access the Ombudsman service and how the individual can engage with the Ombudsman about their complaint.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	See Section 12. This is also included response and extension letters

Section 4: Complaint Handling Staff

Code provision	Code requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence	Commentary / explanation
4.1	Landlords must have a person or team assigned to take responsibility for complaint handling, including liaison with the Ombudsman and ensuring complaints are reported to the governing body (or equivalent). This Code will refer to that person or team as the 'complaints officer'. This role may be in addition to other duties.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	See Section 2.
4.2	The complaints officer must have access to staff at all levels to facilitate the prompt resolution of complaints. They must also have the authority and autonomy to act to resolve disputes promptly and fairly.	Yes		The Council's Complaints Manager, Complaints Investigator and the Housing Complaints Officer have access to staff at all levels to facilitate the prompt resolution of complaints and have the authority and autonomy to act to resolve disputes promptly and fairly.

4.3	Landlords are expected to prioritise complaint handling and a culture of learning from complaints. All relevant staff must be suitably trained in the importance of complaint handling. It is important that complaints are seen as a core service and must be resourced to handle complaints effectively	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints Darlington BC - Annual reports	<p>See Section 1 of the Complaints Procedure.</p> <p>The Council's culture in respect of complaints handling is detailed in its procedures, annual reports and its reports to its Scrutiny Committees and Cabinet. All staff are suitably trained. The sufficiency of resources is subject to the budget constraints of the Local Authority.</p>
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Section 5: The Complaint Handling Process

Code provision	Code requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence	Commentary / explanation
5.1	Landlords must have a single policy in place for dealing with complaints covered by this Code. Residents must not be treated differently if they complain.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	See Section 1.2
5.2	The early and local resolution of issues between landlords and residents is key to effective complaint handling. It is not appropriate to have extra named stages (such as 'stage 0' or 'informal complaint') as this causes unnecessary confusion.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	
5.3	A process with more than two stages is not acceptable under any circumstances as this will make the complaint process unduly long and delay access to the Ombudsman.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	

5.4	Where a landlord's complaint response is handled by a third party (e.g. a contractor or independent adjudicator) at any stage, it must form part of the two stage complaints process set out in this Code. Residents must not be expected to go through two complaints processes.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	See Section 6.5
5.5	Landlords are responsible for ensuring that any third parties handle complaints in line with the Code.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	See Section 6.5
5.6	When a complaint is logged at Stage 1 or escalated to Stage 2, landlords must set out their understanding of the complaint and the outcomes the resident is seeking. The Code will refer to this as "the complaint definition". If any aspect of the complaint is unclear, the resident must be asked for clarification.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	See Section 11
5.7	When a complaint is acknowledged at either stage, landlords must be clear which aspects of the complaint they are, and are not, responsible for and clarify any areas where this is not clear.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	We set this out in our acknowledgment letters
5.8	At each stage of the complaints process, complaint handlers must: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. deal with complaints on their merits, act independently, and have an open mind; b. give the resident a fair chance to set out their position; 	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	All complaint handlers are appropriately trained to ensure complaints are handled in this manner.

	<p>c. take measures to address any actual or perceived conflict of interest; and</p> <p>d. consider all relevant information and evidence carefully.</p>			
5.9	Where a response to a complaint will fall outside the timescales set out in this Code, the landlord must agree with the resident suitable intervals for keeping them informed about their complaint.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	The Council informs the resident the date by which they can expect a response in the extension letter/email. Where the resident requires more frequent updates we agree this on an individual basis.
5.10	Landlords must make reasonable adjustments for residents where appropriate under the Equality Act 2010. Landlords must keep a record of any reasonable adjustments agreed, as well as a record of any disabilities a resident has disclosed. Any agreed reasonable adjustments must be kept under active review.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	See Section 10
5.11	Landlords must not refuse to escalate a complaint through all stages of the complaints procedure unless it has valid reasons to do so. Landlords must clearly set out these reasons, and they must comply with the provisions set out in section 2 of this Code.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	On the rare occasion we may refuse to escalate a complaint, for example where the resident or the Council has commenced legal proceedings in relation to the matter being complained about, we would explain this to the resident in writing and advise them of their right

				to refer the matter to the HOS.
5.12	A full record must be kept of the complaint, and the outcomes at each stage. This must include the original complaint and the date received, all correspondence with the resident, correspondence with other parties, and any relevant supporting documentation such as reports or surveys.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	See Section 17 of the Complaints Procedure. This information is held in the Council's Complaints Management Database. Some information is also held on the tenancy record.
5.13	Landlords must have processes in place to ensure a complaint can be remedied at any stage of its complaints process. Landlords must ensure appropriate remedies can be provided at any stage of the complaints process without the need for escalation.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints)	See Section 13
5.14	Landlords must have policies and procedures in place for managing unacceptable behaviour from residents and/or their representatives. Landlords must be able to evidence reasons for putting any restrictions in place and must keep restrictions under regular review.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	See Section 16 of the Complaints Procedure. The Council operates an Unreasonably Persistent Complainants Procedure and an Employee Protection Register to manage unacceptable behaviour from residents and/or their representatives.
5.15	Any restrictions placed on contact due to unacceptable behaviour must be proportionate and demonstrate regard for the provisions of the Equality Act 2010.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints Darlington BC - Equality information	

Section 6: Complaints Stages

Stage 1

Code provision	Code requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence	Commentary / explanation
6.1	Landlords must have processes in place to consider which complaints can be responded to as early as possible, and which require further investigation. Landlords must consider factors such as the complexity of the complaint and whether the resident is vulnerable or at risk. Most stage 1 complaints can be resolved promptly, and an explanation, apology or resolution provided to the resident	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	See Section 11
6.2	Complaints must be acknowledged, defined and logged at stage 1 of the complaints procedure <u>within five working days of the complaint being received.</u>	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints Darlington BC - Annual reports	
6.3	Landlords must issue a full response to stage 1 complaints <u>within 10 working days</u> of the complaint being acknowledged.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints Darlington BC - Annual reports	
6.4	Landlords must decide whether an extension to this timescale is needed when considering the complexity of the complaint and then inform the resident of the expected timescale for response. Any extension must be no more than 10 working days without good reason, and the reason(s)	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	

	must be clearly explained to the resident.			
6.5	When an organisation informs a resident about an extension to these timescales, they must be provided with the contact details of the Ombudsman.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	This is included in our extension letter/email.
6.6	A complaint response must be provided to the resident when the answer to the complaint is known, not when the outstanding actions required to address the issue are completed. Outstanding actions must still be tracked and actioned promptly with appropriate updates provided to the resident.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	Response are issued when the answer to the complaint is known. All actions are allocated to a responsible officer and tracked via the Council's complaint management system.
6.7	Landlords must address all points raised in the complaint definition and provide clear reasons for any decisions, referencing the relevant policy, law and good practice where appropriate.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	We have template response letters and investigation reports which assist complaints officers in ensuring they address all points raised in the complaint definition.
6.8	Where residents raise additional complaints during the investigation, these must be incorporated into the stage 1 response if they are related and the stage 1 response has not been issued. Where the stage 1 response has been issued, the new issues are unrelated to the issues already being investigated or it would unreasonably delay the response, the new issues must be logged as a new complaint.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	This is something we have always done and will continue to do.

6.9	<p>Landlords must confirm the following in writing to the resident at the completion of stage 1 in clear, plain language:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. the complaint stage; b. the complaint definition; c. the decision on the complaint; d. the reasons for any decisions made; e. the details of any remedy offered to put things right; f. details of any outstanding actions; and g. details of how to escalate the matter to stage 2 if the individual is not satisfied with the response. 	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	We have template response letters and investigation reports which ensure this information is provided in the response.
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Stage 2

Code provision	Code requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence	Commentary / explanation
6.10	If all or part of the complaint is not resolved to the resident's satisfaction at stage 1, it must be progressed to stage 2 of the landlord's procedure. Stage 2 is the landlord's final response.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	See Section 11
6.11	Requests for stage 2 must be acknowledged, defined and logged at stage 2 of the complaints procedure within five working days of the escalation request being received.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	See Section 11
6.12	Residents must not be required to explain their reasons for requesting a stage 2 consideration.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	See Section 11

	Landlords are expected to make reasonable efforts to understand why a resident remains unhappy as part of its stage 2 response.			
6.13	The person considering the complaint at stage 2 must not be the same person that considered the complaint at stage 1.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	See Section 11
6.14	Landlords must issue a final response to the stage 2 within 20 working days of the complaint being acknowledged.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	See Section 11
6.15	Landlords must decide whether an extension to this timescale is needed when considering the complexity of the complaint and then inform the resident of the expected timescale for response. Any extension must be no more than 20 working days without good reason, and the reason(s) must be clearly explained to the resident.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	See Section 11
6.16	When an organisation informs a resident about an extension to these timescales, they must be provided with the contact details of the Ombudsman.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	This is included in our extension letter/email.
6.17	A complaint response must be provided to the resident when the answer to the complaint is known, not when the outstanding actions required to address the issue are completed.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	Complaint responses are issued when the answer to the complaint is known. All actions are allocated to a responsible officer and tracked via the

	Outstanding actions must still be tracked and actioned promptly with appropriate updates provided to the resident.			Council's complaint management system.
6.18	Landlords must address all points raised in the complaint definition and provide clear reasons for any decisions, referencing the relevant policy, law and good practice where appropriate.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	This is standard investigative practice and something we do in all cases. We have template response letter and investigation report templates and good investigative practice guidance for complaints officers to ensure this happens. Complaints Officers also receive training on good investigative practice.
6.19	Landlords must confirm the following in writing to the resident at the completion of stage 2 in clear, plain language: a. the complaint stage; b. the complaint definition; c. the decision on the complaint; d. the reasons for any decisions made; e. the details of any remedy offered to put things right; f. details of any outstanding actions; and g. details of how to escalate the matter to the Ombudsman Service if the individual remains dissatisfied.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	We have template response letters and investigation reports which ensure this information is provided in the response.
6.20	Stage 2 is the landlord's final response and must involve all suitable staff	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	All officers involved are consulted and the Assistant Director are

	members needed to issue such a response.			given the opportunity to comment on the response/provide any further evidence that may lead the complaints office to a different conclusion prior to the response being sent.
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Section 7: Putting things right

Code provision	Code requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence	Commentary / explanation
7.1	Where something has gone wrong a landlord must acknowledge this and set out the actions it has already taken, or intends to take, to put things right. These can include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apologising; • Acknowledging where things have gone wrong; • Providing an explanation, assistance or reasons; • Taking action if there has been delay; • Reconsidering or changing a decision; • Amending a record or adding a correction or addendum; • Providing a financial remedy; • Changing policies, procedures or practices. 	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	See Section 13
7.2	Any remedy offered must reflect the impact on the resident as a result of any fault identified.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	See Section 13
7.3	The remedy offer must clearly set out what will happen and by when, in agreement with the resident where appropriate. Any remedy proposed must be	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	See Section 13 of the complaints procedure. All remedy actions are allocated to a responsible officer and tracked via the Council's complaint

	followed through to completion.			management system.
7.4	Landlords must take account of the guidance issued by the Ombudsman when deciding on appropriate remedies.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	Complaints officers use the HOS Guidance on Remedies.

Section 8: Self-assessment, reporting and compliance

Code provision	Code requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence	Commentary / explanation
8.1	Landlords must produce an annual complaints performance and service improvement report for scrutiny and challenge, which must include: a. the annual self-assessment against this Code to ensure their complaint handling policy remains in line with its requirements. b. a qualitative and quantitative analysis of the landlord's complaint handling performance. This must also include a summary of the types of complaints the landlord has refused to accept; c. any findings of non-compliance with this Code by the Ombudsman; d. the service improvements made as a result of the learning from complaints; e. any annual report about the landlord's performance from the Ombudsman; and f. any other relevant reports or publications produced by the Ombudsman in relation to the work of the landlord.	Yes	Darlington BC - Annual reports Agenda for Cabinet on Tuesday, 9th September, 2025, 5.00 pm Darlington Borough Council	
8.2	The annual complaints performance and service improvement report must be reported to the landlord's governing body (or equivalent) and published on the on the section of its website relating to complaints. The governing body's		Darlington BC - Annual reports Agenda for Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee on Thursday, 4th September, 2025	The annual report is also considered by Council Officers at the Chief Officers Board.

	response to the report must be published alongside this.		Agenda for Cabinet on Tuesday, 9th September, 2025, 5.00 pm Darlington Borough Council	
8.3	Landlords must also carry out a self-assessment following a significant restructure, merger and/or change in procedures.	Yes	See this document	This is our annual return and is being completed shortly after the recent restructure of Housing Services
8.4	Landlords may be asked to review and update the self-assessment following an Ombudsman investigation.	Yes		
8.5	If a landlord is unable to comply with the Code due to exceptional circumstances, such as a cyber incident, they must inform the Ombudsman, provide information to residents who may be affected, and publish this on their website Landlords must provide a timescale for returning to compliance with the Code.	Yes		

Section 9: Scrutiny & oversight: continuous learning and improvement

Code provision	Code requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence	Commentary / explanation
9.1	Landlords must look beyond the circumstances of the individual complaint and consider whether service improvements can be made as a result of any learning from the complaint.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	See Section 13 of the complaints procedure. Regular reports to the MRC and the annual report enable the Council to ensure this happens.
9.2	A positive complaint handling culture is integral	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	See Section 13 of the complaints

	to the effectiveness with which landlords resolve disputes. Landlords must use complaints as a source of intelligence to identify issues and introduce positive changes in service delivery.			procedure. Regular reports to the MRC and the annual report enable the Council to ensure this happens.
9.3	Accountability and transparency are also integral to a positive complaint handling culture. Landlords must report back on wider learning and improvements from complaints to stakeholders, such as residents' panels, staff and relevant committees.	Yes	Darlington BC - Annual reports Agenda for Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee on Thursday, 4th September, 2025 Agenda for Cabinet on Tuesday, 9th September, 2025, 5.00 pm Darlington Borough Council	See Section 14 of the complaints procedure. The report is also considered by the Chief Officer's Board and the Tenant's panel.
9.4	Landlords must appoint a suitably senior lead person as accountable for their complaint handling. This person must assess any themes or trends to identify potential systemic issues, serious risks, or policies and procedures that require revision.	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	See Section 1. This is the Complaints and Information Governance Manager
9.5	In addition to this a member of the governing body (or equivalent) must be appointed to have lead responsibility for complaints to support a positive complaint handling culture. This person is referred to as the Member Responsible for Complaints ('the MRC').	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	See Section 1. This is the Assistant Director, Housing and Revenues Services

9.6	The MRC will be responsible for ensuring the governing body receives regular information on complaints that provides insight on the landlord's complaint handling performance. This person must have access to suitable information and staff to perform this role and report on their findings.	Yes	Darlington BC - Annual reports Agenda for Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee on Thursday, 4th September, 2025 Agenda for Cabinet on Tuesday, 9th September, 2025, 5.00 pm Darlington Borough Council	Regular information is also provided to the MRC and they have regular contact with the Complaints and Information Governance Manager.
9.7	As a minimum, the MRC and the governing body (or equivalent) must receive: a. regular updates on the volume, categories and outcomes of complaints, alongside complaint handling performance; b. regular reviews of issues and trends arising from complaint handling; c. regular updates on the outcomes of the Ombudsman's investigations and progress made in complying with orders related to severe maladministration findings; and d. annual complaints performance and service improvement report.	Yes	Darlington BC - Annual reports Agenda for Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee on Thursday, 4th September, 2025 Agenda for Cabinet on Tuesday, 9th September, 2025, 5.00 pm Darlington Borough Council	The MRC receives all of the items listed and has direct access to all officers as the relevant Assistant Director.
9.8	Landlords must have a standard objective in relation to complaint handling for all relevant employees or third parties that reflects the need to: a. have a collaborative and co-operative approach towards resolving complaints, working with colleagues across teams and departments; b. take collective responsibility for any	Yes	Darlington BC - Housing complaints	

	shortfalls identified through complaints, rather than blaming others; and c. act within the professional standards for engaging with complaints as set by any relevant professional body.			
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