

Report to: Cabinet



Date of Meeting 10 July 2024

Document classification: Part A Public Document

Exemption applied: None

Review date for release N/A

Annual complaint monitoring and service improvement report 2023/24

Report summary:

The council's annual complaint monitoring and service improvement report for 2023/24 is attached as Appendix A

Is the proposed decision in accordance with:

Budget Yes No

Policy Framework Yes No

Recommendation:

It is recommended that Cabinet note the numbers and trends in terms of formal complaints dealt with during the year; the learning points which have been identified; and actions taken to address these.

Reason for recommendation:

The council is required by the Housing Ombudsman to publish our self-assessment against their complaint handling code, on an annual basis, as part of the complaint performance and service improvement report. This should be accompanied by Cabinet's response to the report.

The purpose of publishing the governing body's response to the self-assessment and to the report is to provide assurance that it is a true reflection of the council's complaint handling.

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Portfolio(s) (check which apply):

- Climate Action and Emergency Response
- Coast, Country and Environment
- Council and Corporate Co-ordination
- Communications and Democracy
- Economy
- Finance and Assets
- Strategic Planning
- Sustainable Homes and Communities

Culture, Leisure, Sport and Tourism

Equalities impact Low Impact

Climate change Low Impact

Risk: Low Risk;

Links to background information [Governing-bodies-guidance-published-March-2022.pdf](https://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/governing-bodies-guidance-published-March-2022.pdf)
([housing-ombudsman.org.uk](https://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk))

Link to [Council Plan](#)

Priorities (check which apply)

- Better homes and communities for all
- A greener East Devon
- A resilient economy

Financial implications:

There are no direct financial implications from the recommendations in the report

Legal implications:

There are no substantive legal issues to be added to the report.

Appendix A

Annual complaint monitoring and service improvement report 2023/24

1. Complaints received

The council operates a two stage complaints process, with complaints initially being considered at stage 1 by the relevant Assistant Director (or equivalent post where there is no AD).

If a complainant is dissatisfied with the response they receive they are entitled to ask for the complaint to be considered at the second stage of the process and a response is sent out by the relevant Director.

During the year 2023/24

We received:

300 Stage 1 complaints

69 Stage 2 complaints

77% of complaints were resolved at the first stage with the remaining complainants exercising their right to progress to the second stage of the complaints procedure

Stage 1 complaint average response time 28 working days

Stage 2 complaint average response time 30 working days

86% of Housing Service complaints were upheld/partially upheld*

*The % upheld rate is currently monitored only for housing complaints and since November 2023. This is being extended to include all corporate complaints for the current year.

2. All corporate complaints Stage 1

Department	Oct 21 - Mar 22	Apr 22 - Sep 22	Oct 22 - Mar 23	Apr 23 - Sep 23	Oct 23 - Mar 24	Trend Line	Overall Complaints % Last 5 Periods	Complaints % Oct 23 - Mar 24
Housing	76	54	63	74	133		67%	72%
Planning	15	14	13	16	22		13%	12%
Revs & bens	8	9	6	6	9		6%	5%
Waste management	9	3	3	6	6		5%	3%
Env. Health (incl. Car parks PSH)	4	2	5	6	3		3%	2%
Streetscene	3	2	2	4	5		3%	3%
Building control	0	0	3	1	1		1%	1%
Licensing	1	0	2	0	2		1%	1%
Information & Complaints	1	0	0	1	0		0%	0%
Property	0	1	0	0	1		0%	1%
Trees	1	0	0	1	0		0%	0%
Countryside	0	0	0	0	1		0%	1%
Democratic services	0	0	0	1	0		0%	0%
Legal	0	0	0	0	1		0%	1%
Economic Dev	0	0	0	0	0		0%	0%
Electoral Services	0	0	0	0	0		0%	0%
Total	118	85	97	116	184		100%	100%

Housing Complaints Stage 1

Sub Department	Oct 23 - Mar 24	Complaints %
Repairs	99	74.44%
Estate Management	18	13.53%
ASB	7	5.26%
Housing Allocations	3	2.26%
Housing Options	3	2.26%
MSO/HSG	2	1.50%
Rental	1	0.75%
Total	133	100.00%

3. All corporate complaints Stage 2

Department	Oct 21 - Mar 22	Apr 22 - Sep 22	Oct 22 - Mar 23	Apr 23 - Sep 23	Oct 23 - Mar 24	Trend Line	Overall Complaints % Last 5 Periods	Complaints % Oct 23 - Mar 24
Housing	18	19	16	11	29		61%	62%
Planning	6	1	8	5	13		22%	28%
Env. Health (incl. Car parks & PSH)	1	1	1	1	2		4%	4%
Building Control	0	0	0	1	1		1%	2%
Revs & Bens	1	3	1	0	1		4%	2%
Waste management	1	0	1	2	1		3%	2%
Democratic Services	1	0	2	0	0		2%	0%
Legal	0	0	0	0	0		0%	0%
Licensing	0	0	1	0	0		1%	0%
Property	0	0	0	0	0		0%	0%
Streetscene	0	0	1	2	0		2%	0%
Total	28	24	31	22	47		100%	100%

Housing Complaints Stage 2

Attribute	Oct 23 - Mar 24	Complaints %
Repairs	17	58.62%
Estate Management	5	17.24%
Housing Allocations	3	10.34%
ASB	2	6.90%
Housing Options	1	3.45%
MSO/HSG	1	3.45%
Total	29	100.00%

4. Learning Points

The Planning Service has seen an increase in the number of service failure complaints which have been driven by delays in determining planning applications. This has been attributed on the whole to an issue with staffing levels and volume of work being processed.

New planning officers have been recruited and this should reduce the number of these types of complaints in the long term.

As can be seen from the information, there is a significant increase in housing complaints. We can see trends in what is driving these complaints and these are generally related to the condition of properties; delays in carrying out repairs; quality of repairs; and communication challenges around appointments that ensures we are communicating efficiently and promptly with tenants.

Following our review of the senior management team across housing, we are now placing a much greater emphasis on complaints, both to ensure they are dealt with in a timely manner and that we are taking a “lessons learnt” approach to how we deal with them. We have revised our approach to how we respond to complaints in order to demonstrate an open, honest approach to where things have gone wrong. We are providing customers with more information in relation to what learnings we have taken from the complaint they have raised and this is positively raising the profile of changes we are making across the service.

We therefore consider this focus on resolution is driving a renewed energy for customers to access the complaints system with a confidence that they are being heard. This is likely in the short term to continue to drive higher numbers of complaints coming through but in the longer term we would hope to start to see complaint numbers in each category coming down.

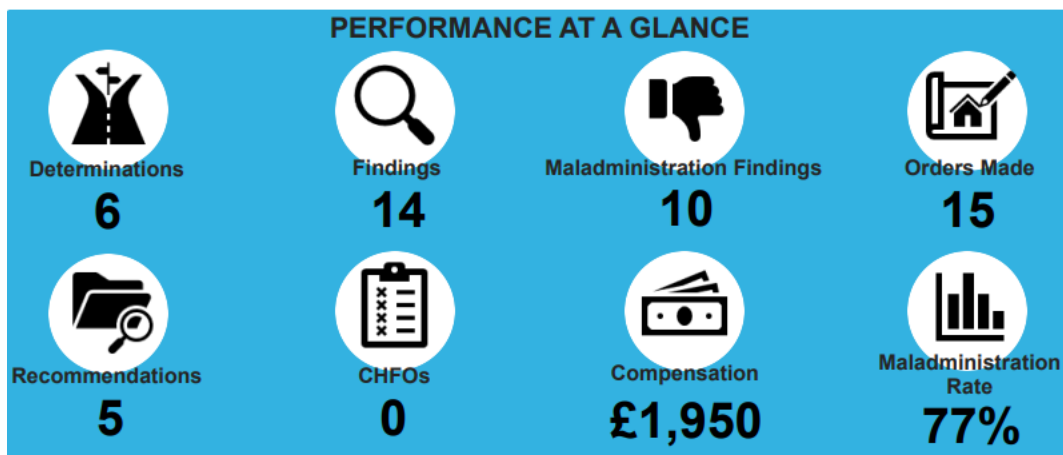
Key actions:

- Weekly meetings with contractor to discuss high profile cases and complaints and ensure complex repairs are on track.
- Staff training to improve communication both internally and externally with customers.
- Improvements in the sharing of information between teams relating to void properties
- Review of team set-up to ensure we have the right resources available to deal with demand coming into the service.
- Expanding the sub-contractor network to ensure no unnecessary delay in completing works
- Updating the asset management strategy with a focus on the planned and cyclical maintenance programme
- Working more closely and frequently with our contractors to learn from poor customer experiences
- Newly created Performance Team will oversee the details of complaints and will be highlighting the learning and improvements required. The Housing Performance Lead will work closely with service managers to ensure accountability and that key learning is implemented.

5. Landlord Performance Report from the Housing Ombudsman

A copy of the most recent landlord performance report is available here [Complaint outcomes - East Devon](#) This shows the council’s performance for the period 2022/23 as this is currently the most up to date performance data available. The Housing Ombudsman requires the council to make a copy of this report available with our annual self-assessment submission and they are therefore reviewing the timing of the publication of their performance reports, going forward.

In terms of our performance in 2022/23, this is summarised below:



Key to definitions:

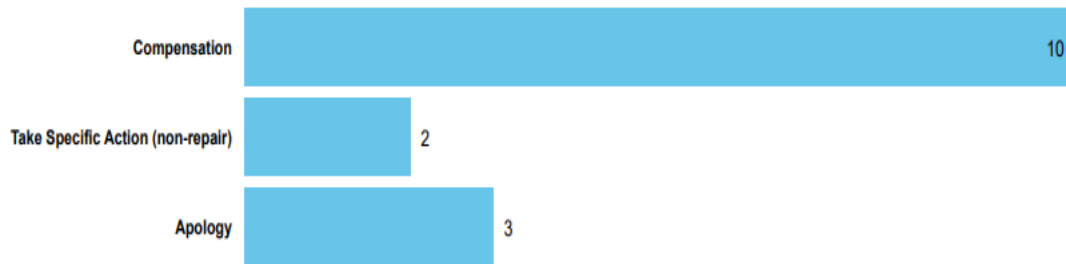
- Determinations: The number of cases decided upon during the year
- Findings: The number of findings on cases determined. Each category on a determined case has one finding
- Orders: Orders are made where the investigation has resulted in a finding on some level of maladministration. They are intended to put things right for the resident
- Recommendations: Can be made in any case as a way to improve service delivery and promote learning
- CHFO: Complaint handling failure order

Landlord Findings by Category | Cases determined between April 2022 - March 2023 Table 2.3

Category	Severe Maladministration	Maladministration	Service failure	Mediation	Redress	No maladministration	Outside Jurisdiction	Withdrawn	Total
Property Condition	0	3	2	0	0	1	1	0	7
Complaints Handling	0	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	4
Anti-Social Behaviour	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Estate Management	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Moving to a Property	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Total	0	5	5	0	0	3	1	0	14

Orders Made by Type | Orders on cases determined between April 2022 - March 2023

Table 4.1



Order Compliance | Order target dates between April 2022 - March 2023

Table 4.2


Order Complete?	Within 3 Months	
	Count	%
Complied	15	100%
Total	15	100%

6. Annual performance report from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman 2022/23

The summary statistics below show that there were 2 upheld decisions during the year. This equates to 1.3 upheld decisions per 100,000 residents compared with the average for similar authorities nationally which is 1.4 upheld decisions per 100,000 residents.

The decisions referred to below related to the work of the Monitoring Officer in dealing with a complaint from a parish councillor and a complaint about the council's decision in relation to a planning application.

Complaints upheld



100%

100% of complaints we investigated were upheld.

This compares to an average of **59%** in similar organisations.

2
upheld decisions

Statistics are based on a total of **2** investigations for the period between 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023

Compliance with Ombudsman recommendations



100%

In **100%** of cases we were satisfied the organisation had successfully implemented our recommendations.

This compares to an average of **100%** in similar organisations.

Statistics are based on a total of **1** compliance outcome for the period between 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023

- Failure to comply with our recommendations is rare. An organisation with a compliance rate below 100% should scrutinise those complaints where it failed to comply and identify any learning.

Satisfactory remedy provided by the organisation



50%

In **50%** of upheld cases we found the organisation had provided a satisfactory remedy before the complaint reached the Ombudsman.

This compares to an average of **15%** in similar organisations.

1
satisfactory remedy decision

Statistics are based on a total of **2** upheld decisions for the period between 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023

*In one case we were required to comply with Ombudsman recommendations but in the other case the ombudsman was satisfied with the remedy already provided by the council – hence there is only one compliance outcome above.