



Northumberland
County Council

Housing Services Annual Complaints Report 2023 – 2024

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1. Introduction:

The Housing Ombudsman has published a complaint handling code for all social landlords which tell us how we should deal your complaints. The code also tells tenants and residents what they should expect from us when they make a complaint to us. It gives tenants information on how to make a complaint, and how to progress it through our own complaints procedure which we call the Corporate Feedback Policy. Under the parameters of Local Authority working arrangements, we meet the code's requirements. We have produced a complaints action plan which encompasses key points from the code. Please see attached Appendix for full action plan.

So that we can prove to you that we are keeping to the Ombudsman's code, we produce a self-assessment document annually and have done so since 2021. You can find this on the Northumberland County Council web site. This demonstrates how the Council's Housing Service has met the code. We use the self-assessment to deliver improvements to our complaints service.

The Housing Ombudsman has produced a new Complaint Handling Code which became statutory on 1 April 2024, meaning that landlords are obliged by law to follow its requirements and are regulated by the Ombudsman. This annual housing complaints performance report is part of our obligations as a landlord.

We use the Housing Ombudsman's definition of a complaint which is:

'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.'

Every new complaint will be investigated by the relevant service manager or team leader, who will liaise with the officers and contractors for the service. This is called a

Stage 1 complaint. We aim to acknowledge a Stage 1 complaint within 5 working days of receipt and to provide a written response within 10 working days.

If the complainant is unhappy with the way that we handled their complaint at Stage 1, then it can be escalated for an independent review. This is called Stage 2. The Stage 2 review will be carried out by a senior manager who has not been involved with the Stage 1 complaint.

Northumberland County Council has 8251 properties with some 9,580 tenants within the county. As a landlord we received 302 new Stage 1 complaints and 22 new Stage 2 complaints between 1st April 2023 & 31st March 2024. There were no refusals to take a complaint in during this year.

Below is a breakdown of our Stage 1 & Stage 2 complaints by service. We have provided figures for the Upheld, Partly Upheld & Not Upheld complaints.

- **Upheld** - the complaint made by the customer was valid due to a poor service or mistake. An apology and outcome should be provided in the response along with any service improvements and learning as a result of the complaint.
- **Not upheld** - the complaint made by the customer was not valid as the service met the relevant standards that a person could reasonably expect to receive.
- **Partially upheld** - a number of individual aspects of a complaint have been investigated, and one or some of these were upheld.

2. Repairs & Maintenance:

The Repairs & Maintenance team provide a reactive property repair service for our homes and communal areas.

Over the year the service received 127 stage 1 complaints. The table below shows how many of the complaints received were resolved during the year and what their outcomes were. The number of complaints resolved is lower than the total number of complaints received because their resolution date fell after this reporting period.

Received Stage 1 Cases	Total number resolved	Resolved within 10 days	Not resolved within 10 days	Upheld	Partly upheld	Not upheld
127	122	82	40	12	65	45

Over the year the service received 5 stage 2 complaints. The table below shows how many of the complaints received were resolved during the year.

Received Stage 2 Cases	Total number resolved	Resolved within 20 days	Not resolved within 20 days
5	5	4	1

3. Voids & Homefinder:

These services came under one manager at the start of the financial year, so the complaints were responsible by one combined teams' manager.

The 'Voids' element entails undertaking any necessary empty property repairs.

The 'Homefinder' element entails supporting residents to find suitable and affordable accommodation.

Over the year the services received 36 stage 1 complaints. The table below shows how many of the complaints received were resolved during the year and what their outcomes were. The number of complaints resolved is lower than the total number of complaints received because their resolution date fell after this reporting period.

Received Stage 1 Cases	Total number resolved	Resolved within 10 days	Not resolved within 10 days	Upheld	Partly upheld	Not upheld
36	32	19	13	7	4	21

Over the year these services received 1 stage 2 complaint. The table below shows how many of the complaints received were resolved during the year.

Received Stage 2 Cases	Total number resolved	Resolved within 20 days	Not resolved within 20 days
1	1	1	0

4. Capital Works (major planned investment programmes):

The planned investment programme is designed to ensure your home is kept up to date and represents a major capital investment in our homes.

Over the year the service received 46 stage 1 complaints. The table below shows how many of the complaints received were resolved during the year and what their outcomes were. The number of complaints resolved is lower than the total number of complaints received because their resolution date fell after this reporting period.

Received Stage 1 Cases	Total number resolved	Resolved within 10 days	Not resolved within 10 days	Upheld	Partly upheld	Not upheld
46	36	19	17	6	25	5

Over the year the service received 2 stage 2 complaints. The table below shows how many of the complaints received were resolved during the year.

Received Stage 2 Cases	Total number resolved	Resolved within 20 days	Not resolved within 20 days
2	2	1	1

5. Estates:

The Estates team provide a wide range of support and services to tenants on our estates and in our sheltered schemes.

Over the year the service received 63 stage 1 complaints. The table below shows how many of the complaints received were resolved during the year and what their outcomes were.

Received Stage 1 Cases	Total number resolved	Resolved within 10 days	Not resolved within 10 days	Upheld	Partly upheld	Not upheld
63	63	40	23	6	17	40

Over the year the service received 11 stage 2 complaints. The table below shows how many of the complaints received were resolved during the year and within the timeframe.

Received Stage 2 Cases	Total number resolved	Resolved within 20 days	Not resolved within 20 days
11	11	10	1

6. Strategic Housing Team:

The strategic housing services consists of homelessness & temporary accommodation services along with private sector housing and refugee & asylum seekers teams.

Over the year the service received 22 stage 1 complaints. The table below shows how many of the complaints received were resolved during the year and what their outcomes were. The number of complaints resolved is lower than the total number of complaints received because their resolution date fell after this reporting period.

Received Stage 1 Cases	Total number resolved	Resolved within 10 days	Not resolved within 10 days	Upheld	Partly upheld	Not upheld
22	21	18	3	1	10	10

Over the year the service received 2 stage 2 complaints. The table below shows how many of the complaints received were resolved during the year and within the timeframe.

Received Stage 2 Cases	Total number resolved	Resolved within 20 days	Not resolved within 20 days
2	2	1	1

7. Income:

The Income Team is responsible for collecting current rent and the recovery of former rent. The team also provides specialist welfare benefit advice and tenancy support to help tenants sustain their tenancies.

Over the year the service received 8 stage 1 complaints. The table below shows how many of the complaints received were resolved during the year and what their outcomes were. The number of complaints resolved is lower than the total number of complaints received because their resolution date fell after this reporting period.

Received Stage 1 Cases	Total number resolved	Resolved within 10 days	Not resolved within 10 days	Upheld	Partly upheld	Not upheld
8	6	4	2	0	2	4

Over the year the service received 1 stage 2 complaint. The table below shows how many of the complaints received were resolved during the year and within the timeframe.

Received Stage 2 Cases	Total number resolved	Resolved within 20 days	Not resolved within 20 days
1	1	1	0

8 – Housing Ombudsman cases:

We have received 2 Ombudsman's reports with recommendations following complaints made to the Housing Ombudsman's Service. They are as follows:

HOS complaint 202211307 (03 April 23)

The complaint was about the landlord's response to the resident's request for heating to be installed in the porch of their property.

Determination (decision):

- In accordance with paragraph 52 of the Housing Ombudsman Scheme, there was no maladministration by the landlord in respect of its response to the resident's request for it to install heating in the porch of their property.

HOS complaint 202108204 (25 April 23)

The complaint was about:

- a. the landlord's handling of flooding in the resident's property and the damage caused as a result;
- b. the landlord's handling of the resident's request for a new heating system.

Determination (decision):

In accordance with paragraph 52 of the Scheme, there was:

- a. service failure by the landlord in its handling of flooding in the resident's property and the damage caused as a result, specifically in relation to the level of reimbursement offered;
- b. no maladministration by the landlord in its handling of the resident's request for a new heating system.

Complaints Action Plan

	Action	Detail	How	By When	Lead/ Who
1	Review all letters	To review all complaints letters against the Complaint Handling Code and to include more information, such as the HOS contact details.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Develop new letter templates for when we do not accept a complaint and for service requests. Add additional information to letters <ul style="list-style-type: none"> providing the HOS details eg extension letters. Informing tenants that they can have a representative deal with their complaints for them. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. June 24 2. June 24 	<p>SB/KG/LRT</p> <p>SB/KG/LRT</p>
2	Publicity & leaflets	<p>Develop a leaflet on how tenants can make a complaint.</p> <p>Ensuring all correspondences with tenants have details on how to make a complaint.</p> <p>Make sure the Complaint Handling Code is made available on the NCC website.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Co-develop/design a leaflet on how to make a complaint. To include this leaflet with tenant's correspondences such as rent statements, any letters to tenants , ASB case letters etc. Include a line on every tenant correspondence on how to make a complaint to HOS. Complaints performance to be added to tenant's newsletters. Complaints performance to be added to Annual Tenants Reports. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. June 24 2. Oct 24 3. Oct 24 4. Oct 24 5. Aug 24 6. June 24 	<p>SB/KG</p> <p>AM/SB</p> <p>AM/SB</p> <p>SB/SK</p> <p>SB/KG</p> <p>SB</p>

			6. Complaints self assessment & Complaints Annual Report to be uploaded to the NCC website.		
3	Awareness/Staff trainings	To raise awareness to all Housing teams via workshops.	1. Develop and deliver complaints workshop to include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Procedures. • Processes. • Responses. • Impact of not responding. • Learning from mistakes. • Spotlight Reports. 2. To deliver workshops every 6 months.	1. Oct 24	AM/SB
4	Complaints Scrutiny	Create a tenants complaints scrutiny group.	1. Recruit a complaints scrutiny group from the Tenant Alliance Panel and officers. 2. The group to analyse complaints data to identify reasons, trends and process issues. 3. The group to feed back to Consumer Standard Board. 4. The group to feed back to tenants via the Annual Tenants Report.	1. May 24 2. Aug 24 & ongoing 3. Ongoing 4. Aug & ongoing	SB/KG SB/KG/LRT AM/SB SB/KG
5	Awareness training for tenants	To train tenants on complaints processes.	1. Train the new scrutiny group on the complaints process. 2. Develop workshops for tenants around complaints, HOS & Spotlight Reviews. 3. Identify webinars for tenants.	1. June 24 2. July 24 3. Ongoing	SB/KG/LRT SB/KG/LRT SB/KG/LRT

6	Analysis & Service Improvements	Develop ways to identify trends and issues.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop a complaints transactional survey and process. 2. Add information on every transactional survey on how to make a complaint and how to refer to the HOS. 3. Feed insight to Complaints Scrutiny Group. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. June 24 2. June 24 3. Ongoing 	SB/LRT SB/LRT SB/LRT
7	Policy & Evaluation	To work with tenant and officers to ensure policy is fit for purpose.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ensure the Corporate Feedback Policy is updated accordingly to the HOS Complaints Handling Code, National & legislative changes. 2. Monitor and assess against the HOS Spotlight Reports and feed into the Consumer Standard Board and Complaints Scrutiny Group. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. June 24 2. Ongoing 	AM/JD/SB SB/LRT