

Title:	Annual Complaints Performance & Service Improvement Report 2024/25
Service:	Housing Landlord
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1 Introduction

- 1.1 This report sets out a review of the annual complaints performance and service improvement for Westmorland & Furness Council in relation to the management of its housing stock.

2 Annual self-assessment against the Code to ensure the complaint handling policy remains in line with its requirements

- 2.1 We have completed the Housing Ombudsman service (HOS) self-assessment against the Complaint Handling Code. In doing so we have reviewed the key policy and supporting documents to ensure they comply with the requirements of the new code.
- 2.2 Westmorland and Furness Council's 'Complaints and Compliments Policy' operates in line with the Code and officers within the complaint handling team work closely with those responsible for complaints with the Housing Landlord service to ensure compliance with the code.
- 2.3 There is a dedicated complaints team, who are responsible for logging, processing and allocating complaints as well as monitoring compliance with response time frames. Officers within the complaint handling team work closely with those responsible for complaints with the Housing Landlord service to ensure compliance with the code.

3 Quantitative analysis of our complaint handling performance

3.1 Summary of complaints 2024/25

Table 1- Formal complaints logged April 2024 to March 2025

Breakdown	No.
Formal complaints carried over from 2023/24	0
Complaints logged April 2024 to March 2025	21
Complaints closed	21
Complaints carried over into 2025/26	0
Formal complaints referred to the Housing Ombudsman	2
Formal complaints refused	0

Table 2- Stage 1 & Stage 2 complaints by Quarter

	Stage 1	Stage 2
Q1	5	1
Q2	5	n/a
Q3	4	1
Q4	4	1
Total	18	3

Table 3- Complaints closed within target timescales April 2024 to March 2025

	Stage 1	Stage 2
Q1	5	1
Q2	4	n/a
Q3	3	0
Q4	4	1
Total	16	2

Table 4- Complaints closed **and not responded to** within target timescales April 2024 to March 2025

	Stage 1	Stage 2
Q1	0	0
Q2	1	0
Q3	1	1
Q4	0	0
Total	2	1

Table 5- Complaints reported as per the Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSM) return

	Complaints logged	Responded to within the Complaint Handling Code timescales
Stage 1	18	16
Stage 2	3	2

Table 6- Reasons for complaints 2024/25

	Stage 1	Stage 2	Total
Repairs	7	0	7
Officer Conduct	5	1	6
Service Expectations not met	4	1	5
Policy and Procedure	2	1	3

4 Qualitative analysis of our complaint handling performance

- 4.1 Westmorland & Furness Council are committed to providing the best service possible for our residents, placing them at the heart of everything we do. Effective complaint handling is key to achieving this to monitor and improve the way we deliver our service to tenants and ensuring they feel as though their voices are heard and that we are acting on their views and feedback.
- 4.2 We recognise the need to comply with the HOS Complaints Handling Code and the benefits that engaging with our tenants and residents has in fostering positive relationships and allowing us to continuously evaluate and monitor our performance.
- 4.3 The Regulator of Social Housing's (RSH) Consumer Standard, 'Tenant Involvement and Empowerment' states that providers shall have an approach to complaints that is clear, simple and ensures that complaints are resolved promptly, politely and fairly.
- 4.4 We believe that we have a positive complaint handling approach as a landlord, this is evidenced by:
- Positive behaviours displayed by staff to place residents at the centre of what we do, taking a proactive approach to dealing with service requests to ensure they are dealt with effectively and leave the tenant satisfied with the outcome.
 - We do not expect a complaint to be made in order to resolve an issue, we will always try to deal with any request satisfactorily and get things right first time.
 - Where a tenant remains dissatisfied with the outcome or the way their request has been handled, staff ensure tenants and residents know how to make a complaint or do this on their behalf where necessary.
 - Our Council values promote us being responsible, outcome focused and inclusive alongside working collaboratively with partners and residents.
 - Compliance with the HOS Complaint Handling Code and the RSH's Consumer Standards alongside other relevant legislation.
 - A working environment that promotes staff being able to recognise mistakes, work through them and work together to resolve them, whilst taking steps to ensure they do not happen again by adapting working practices, processes and procedures.
- 4.5 The transition from legacy policies, processes and systems for managing complaints is now complete. The development of a unified Complaints and Compliments policy and a dedicated team handling complaints with an effective back office solution has facilitated more effective collaboration between internal teams, ensuring consistency in the Councils approach to handling complaints, and that customers feel they are listened to and their views valued.

- 4.6 Complaint performance is discussed quarterly at operational management team meetings to consider any trends in reporting or spikes in the volume of complaints to identify possible reasons for this. This also provides a valuable opportunity to consider service improvements on the back of complaints received.
- 4.7 We also report complaints to Tenants Forum quarterly to promote openness and transparency with tenants around complaints and our service responses to them. This also involves them in the issues tenants may be facing and what we are doing to proactively resolve these, as well as giving them the opportunity to make suggestions on how we could improve.
- 4.8 The Member Responsible for Complaints (MRC) oversees complaint handling performance and ensures accountability across the service to ensure complaints are handled effectively and fairly and that the service learns from complaints and makes improvements as necessary.
- 4.9 We are keen to continuously improve our approach to handling complaints and also how we respond to them. As such, we will be actioning some service improvements in 2025/26 to ensure we respond to areas of concern.
- 4.10 The primary reason for complaints relates to repairs and having analysed this further, this appears to be down to the time taken to complete repairs. In all but two cases, this was the result of secondary works being identified when initial works were carried out which could not have been foreseen. For the other two repairs, one was re-issued to our internal mobile caretaking unit due to resource issues for the original service provider and the other had been completed by the time the complaint was submitted. All repairs had been completed within the target time frames based on the initial repair.
- 4.11 There were also a number of complaints relating to staff conduct and the service not meeting expectations. On exploring these further it was apparent that negative decisions had been issued or advice given to the contrary of the tenant's expectations, but in line with policy and procedure. The original decisions/advice were upheld with some further explanation provided to reassure the tenants that the officers were acting appropriately. We have used the opportunity to remind officers of the need to clearly explain their decisions and advice in a non-technical way alongside the more formal explanations as this may prevent escalation.
- 4.12 The implementation of a new complaint management system, and complaints transferring from legacy council officers to a corporate team brought about some difficulties initially whilst the new process bedded in and relationships formed, which did lead to some slippage in response times with 3 of the complaints. We have addressed this by establishing key responsible people and escalation points and the new system now has prompts where complaints have not been opened by officers.

5 Any findings of non-compliance with this Code by the HOS

There are no findings of non-compliance with the code.

6 Service improvements made as a result of learning from complaints

Improvement	Aim	Notes
Ensure that contractors are held to account on their performance during scheduled review meetings by ensuring they provide data and explain delays.	<p>To ensure completion times for repairs fall within pre-defined timeframes.</p> <p>Early identification of trades where there may be resource issues so that the Council can assist in resolving this.</p>	<p>This has been a focus during the 2024/25 year and has proven successful in improving completion on-time performance. It is important this remains a focus for the coming year in light of the majority of complaints being repair related to provide assurance and confidence in dealing with complaints.</p> <p>Contractors are asked to bring data relating to outstanding repairs to meetings.</p> <p>Surveyors leading the meetings take the lead in addressing issues.</p>
To work with the corporate team to facilitate regular complaint reporting (quarterly), provided by the complaints team or via access to a portal, rather than this having to be requested each time.	To ensure timely and accurate reporting and monitoring of complaints.	<p>In progress.</p> <p>We now have this is the correct format when requested but formalising this would be more effective.</p>
Providing further guidance to officers around ways to mitigate the risk of complaints.	<p>To ensure staff know their responsibilities and the expectations of the Code around complaint handling</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Consistency- Reduced complaints	Individual officers have been given advice in relation to specific learning points from complaints but the longer term plan is to provide a 'crib sheet' with useful advice for reference.

Improvement	Aim	Notes
Continue to review complaints performance at quarterly management team meetings.	To ensure regular performance monitoring and early identification of themes and issues	This took place throughout 2024/25 and will continue.
Consider the design of the Housing Landlord web pages to make them accessible and clear and easy for tenants to report complaints.	To promote a positive complaint handling culture. To ensure information is accessible.	Started April 2025 and will continue.

7 Any annual reports about the landlord's performance from the HOS

The HOS are committed to openness and transparency and providing residents with information around landlords handling of complaints along with any improvements they could make. As such, the HOS will publish individual performance reports for landlords with 5 or more findings. As of July 2025, Westmorland and Furness Council has not had such a report published.

8 Any other relevant reports or publications produced by the HOS in relation to the work of the landlord

None to report.