

HOUSING OMBUDSMAN

Complaint Handling Code

Annual Complaint Handling &
Service Improvement Report 2024-2025
LONDON BOROUGH OF HAVERING

INTRODUCTION

A Year of Progress and Positive Change

Following a demanding and transformative year in 2023/2024, Havering Council has made significant strides toward service improvement in line with the Housing Ombudsman's standards. While there are still areas for development—as highlighted in the 2023/2024 Landlord Report and subsequent case outcomes—this year's report outlines the key improvements we've made and our continued commitment to service excellence.

Restructuring and Policy Enhancements

In 2024/2025, post the centralisation reorganisation, the Complaints Service for Havering Council is better aligned with the Ombudsman's expectations. The structural changes introduced in 2023/2024 have been implemented and have increased performance, with the team now meeting performance targets more consistently. We undertook a comprehensive review of our complaints policies and processes that will see the new Complaints Policy and Procedure published by the 30th September 2025.

Service Improvements and Outcomes

Due to the refined structure and dedicated complaint-handling officers, we've seen a marked increase in timely responses and a reduction in the number of Stage 2 complaints. Our handling of Ombudsman investigations and orders has also improved. As part of the planned improvement across the services, as of this financial year 2025/2026 service improvement officers are now conducting regular case audits and analysing outcomes from Housing Ombudsman decisions to identify learning opportunities and drive continuous improvement. The Complaints service and Housing service has worked together to design a “deep dive” review of the customer end to end experience of the whole complaints handling process. This has identified improvements already and will further strengthened performance when undertaken.

Report Highlights

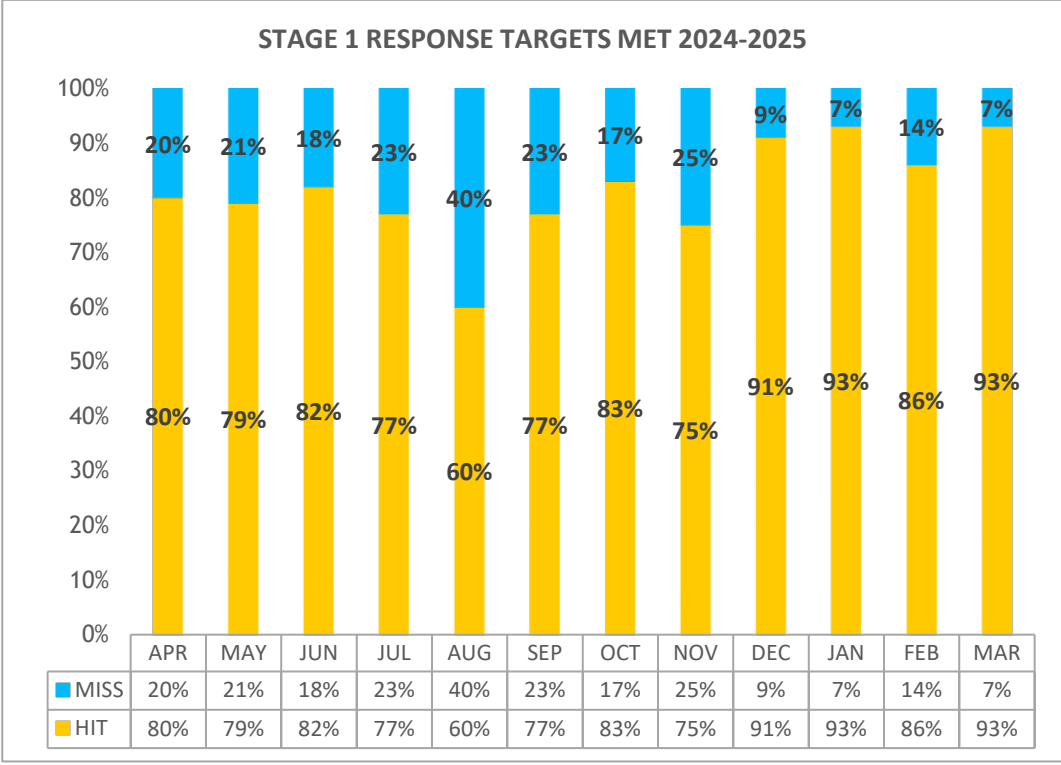
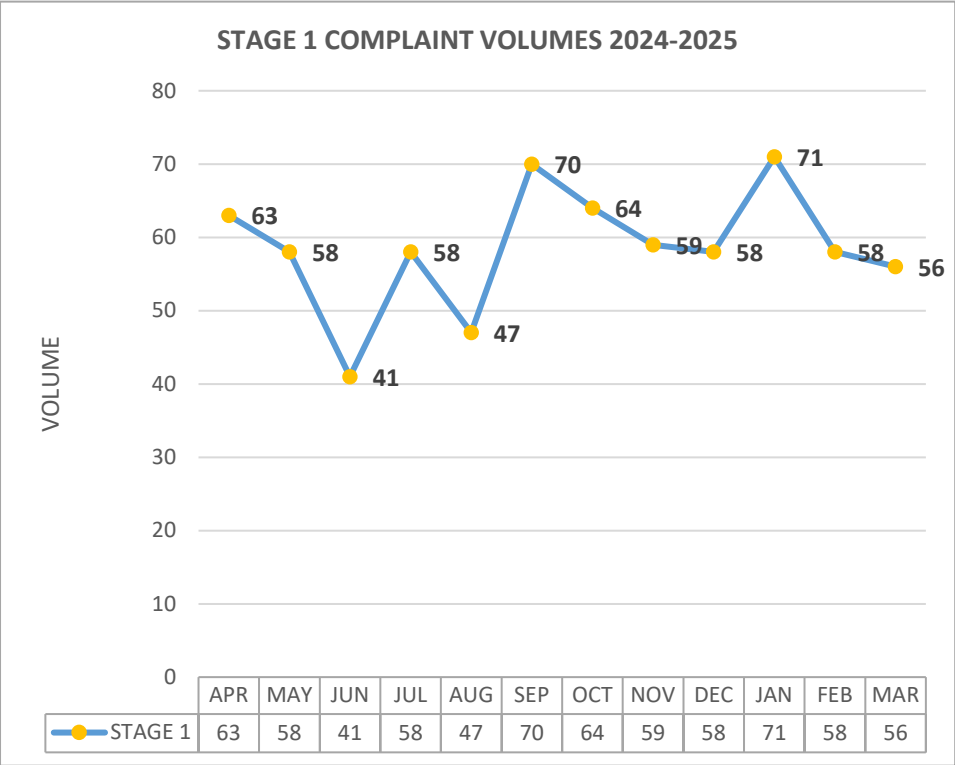
This year's report provides a detailed overview of:

- Complaint volumes and response times
- Common themes and trends
- Service improvements achieved
- Planned next steps for 2025/2026

Havering Council currently manages 9364 properties and 8778 tenants and completed 31,918 responsive repairs during 2024-2025. We remain committed to continuous improvement and to ensuring that our complaint-handling processes are efficient, transparent, and responsive to residents' needs.

COMPLAINTS HANDLING & PERFORMANCE

Stage 1 -Volumes & Targets

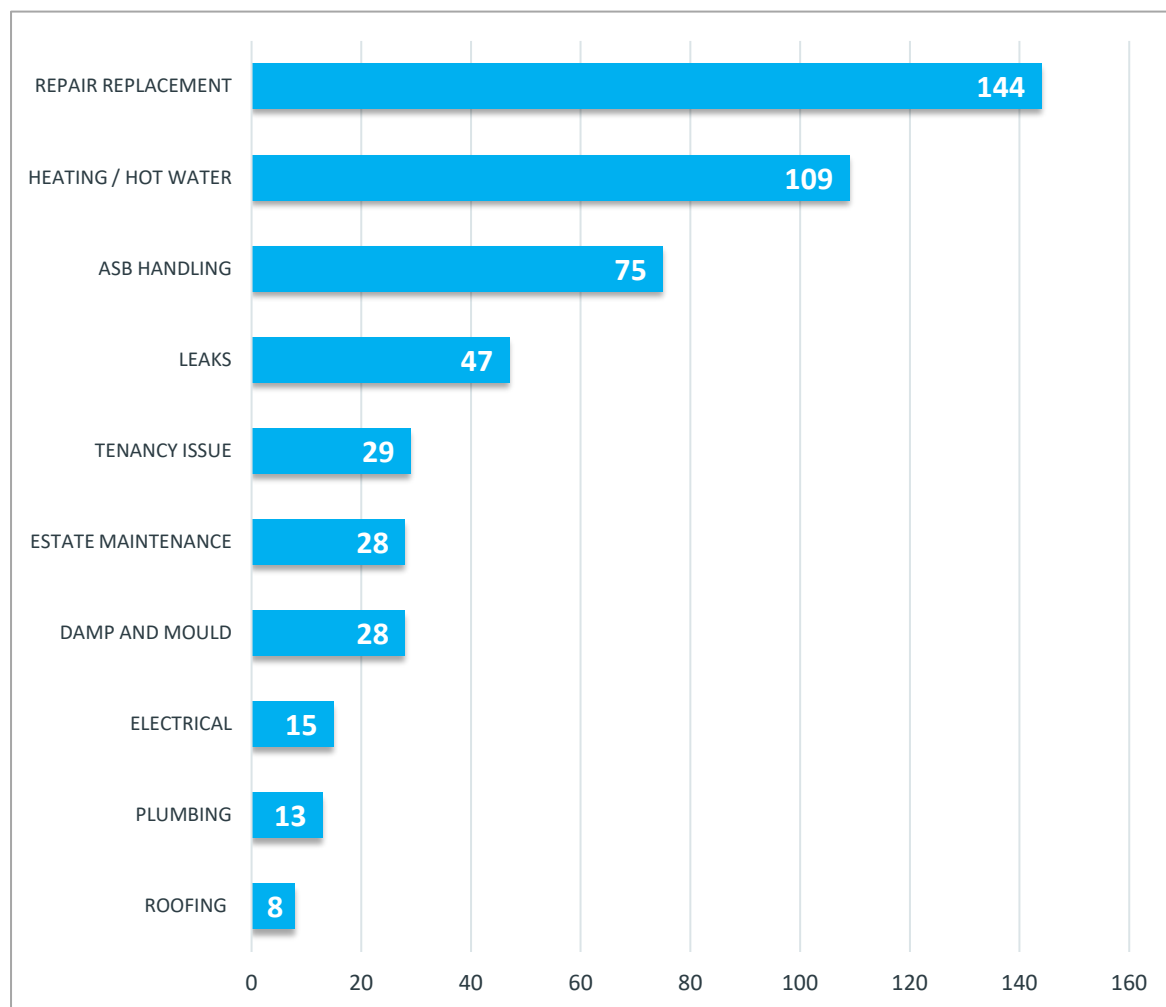


Stage 1 complaints have shown a notable 31% decrease in volume compared to the previous year (2023–2024), reflecting a positive trend in early resolution and service delivery. While there were identifiable peaks in July, September, and January, monthly complaint volumes remained below 71 cases throughout the year. The average number of complaints per month was 59.

In addition to the reduction in volume, response times have improved significantly. Despite some being impacted by resourcing challenges, e.g. attracting suitably experienced staff in a competitive market, the remaining months consistently met or exceeded the 80% target, with several months achieving over 90% compliance. This demonstrates a strong overall performance in complaint handling and a continued commitment to timely responses.

COMPLAINTS HANDLING & PERFORMANCE

Stage 1 – Top Ten Leading Themes



The chart opposite presents the ten most common themes among complaints in the Social Housing sector for the 2024–2025 reporting period.

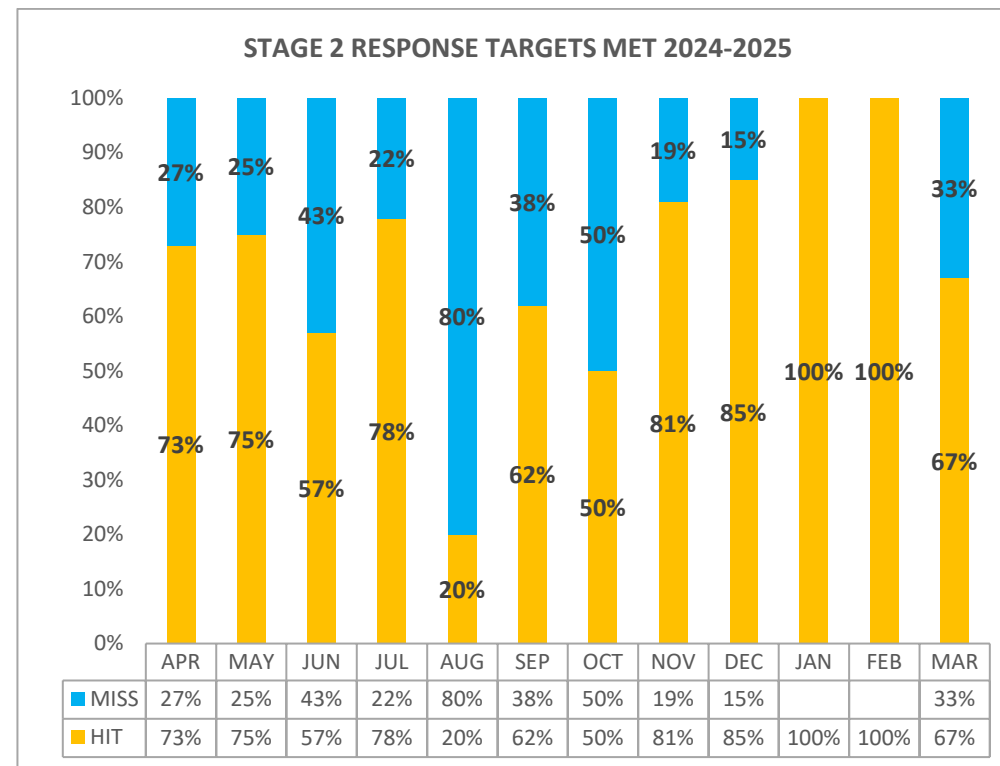
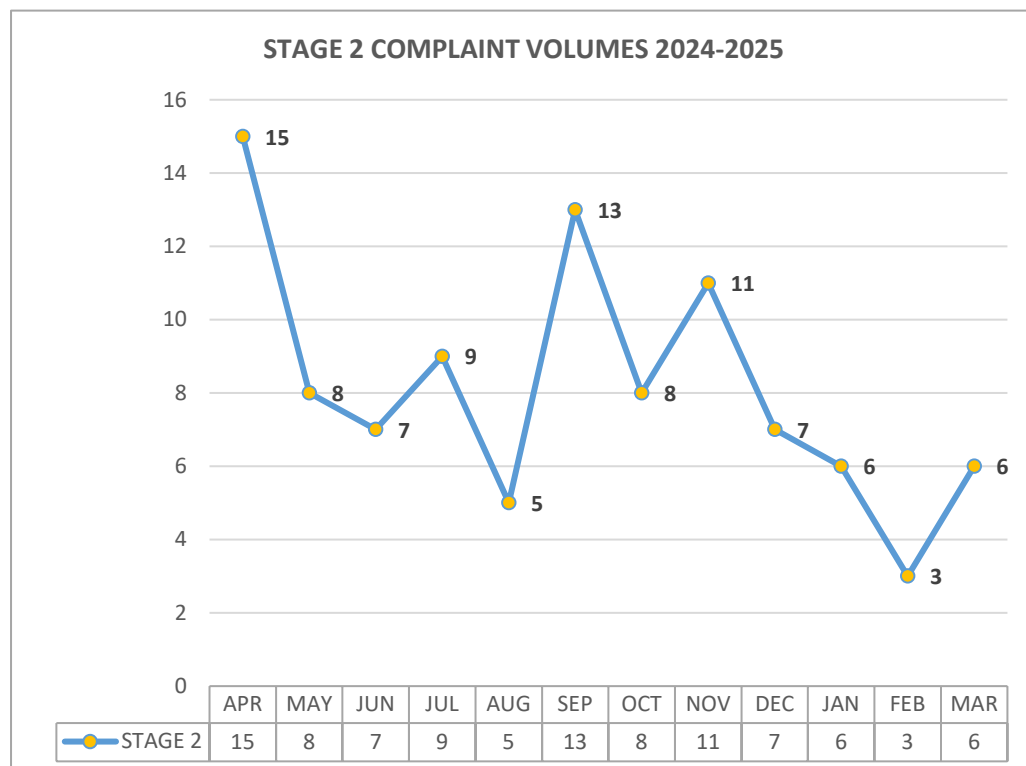
As in previous years, Repair Replacement remains the most frequently upheld issue, followed by complaints related to Heating and Hot Water. In efforts to reduce these, the Complaints and Housing services has worked together to design a “deep dive” review of the customer end to end experience of the whole complaints handling process and is already identifying improvements.

It is also notable that Anti-Social Behaviour involving Housing Tenants is now recorded under the broader Housing category, accounting for 10% of all Stage 1 complaints.

Please note that of the 703 Stage 1 complaints received during this period, the chart reflects 497 cases. These represent the top ten complaint themes only and do not include cases where the theme fell outside the top ten categories.

COMPLAINTS HANDLING & PERFORMANCE

Stage 2 –Volumes & Targets



Stage 2 complaints have shown a modest decrease compared to 2023–2024, with 8% fewer cases being escalated to this stage.

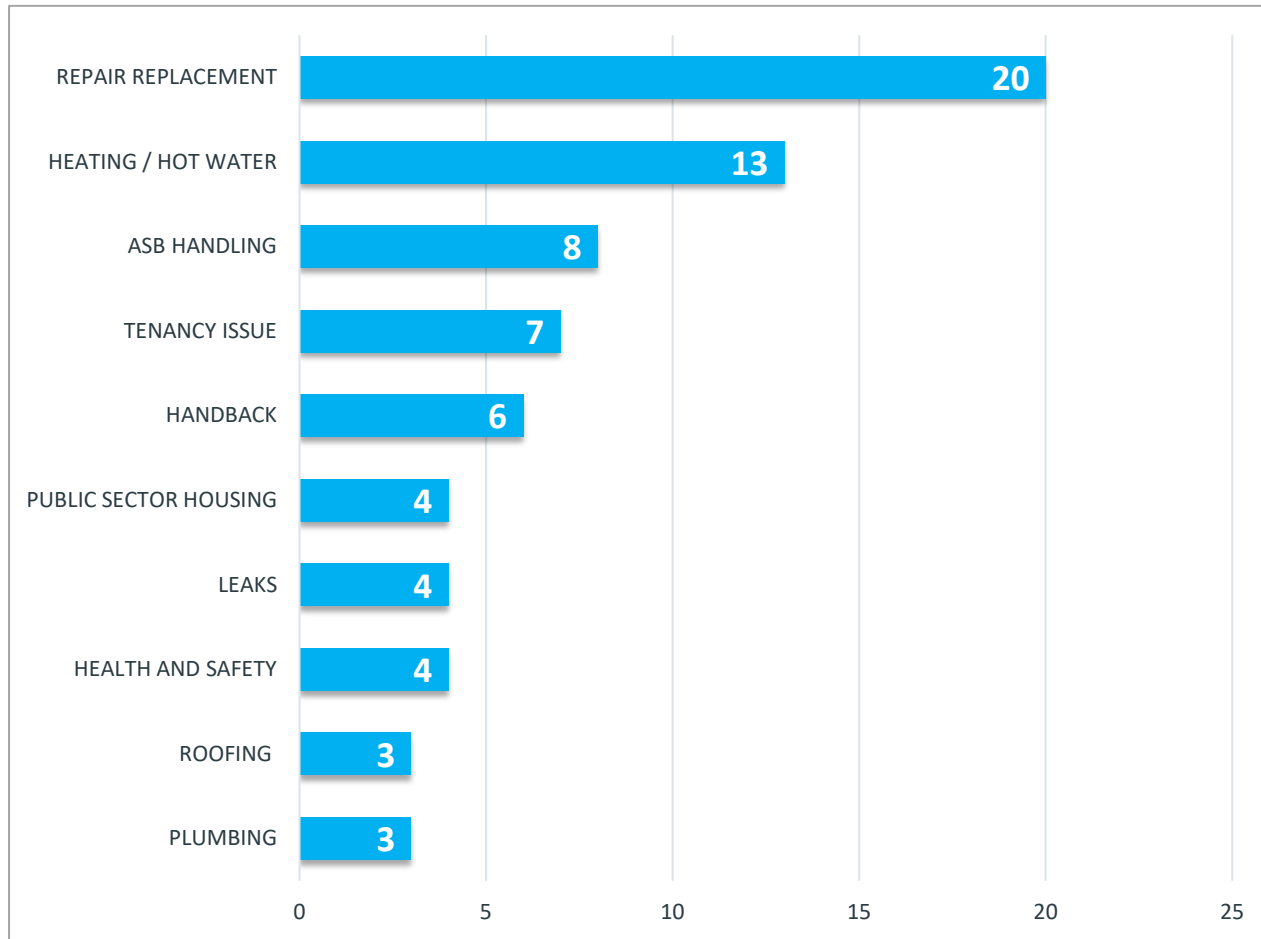
There were slight increases in volumes in July, September, and November, but the overall trend throughout the year indicates a gradual decline in Stage 2 complaint volumes.

Performance against response targets has also improved significantly. In seven months of the year, services achieved a success rate between 70% and 100%, marking a substantial improvement on 2023–2024, when six months recorded a 0% success rate for Stage 2 responses.

While there were some dips in performance during months affected by resourcing challenges, the overall trajectory reflects **stronger service delivery and more timely complaint handling**.

COMPLAINTS HANDLING & PERFORMANCE

Stage 2 – Top ten Leading Themes



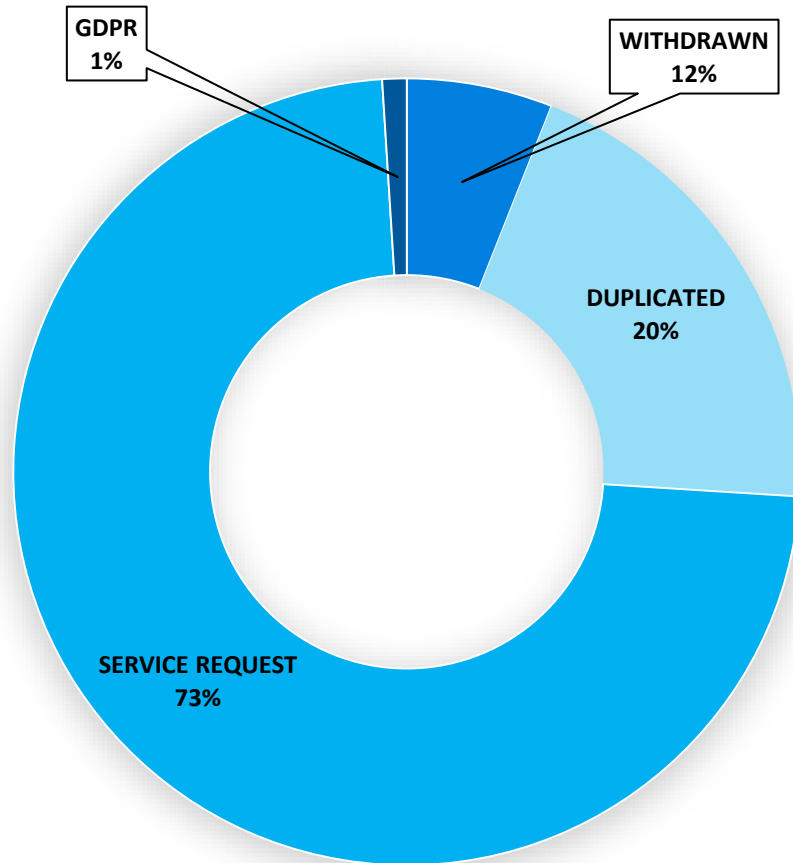
The chart opposite illustrates the ten most common themes for complaints escalated to Stage 2 within the Social Housing sector during the 2024–2025 reporting period.

As with Stage 1, Repair and Replacement remains the leading cause of complaints, followed by issues related to Heating and Hot Water and Anti-Social Behaviour.

Of the 98 Stage 2 complaints received during this period, the chart reflects 72 cases. These represent only the top ten complaint themes and do not include cases that fell outside these categories.

COMPLAINTS HANDLING & PERFORMANCE

Declined Complaints



The chart opposite shows that 185 complaints relating to Housing were declined during the 2024–2025 reporting period.

The majority of these were declined on the basis that they did not meet the definition of a complaint under the Complaints Policy.

Specifically:

73% were identified as Service Requests and were redirected to the appropriate service area. In efforts to reduce this percentage, we have rolled out a training programme for all Councillors and provided a definition of what a service request is.

20% were duplicate complaints.

6% were withdrawn by customers.

1% related to GDPR concerns, where consent was required but not received.

This breakdown helps to ensure transparency in how complaints are assessed and managed, and highlights the importance of accurate categorisation at the point of receipt.

COMPLAINTS HANDLING & PERFORMANCE

Service Improvements Achieved

Updated Complaints Policy and Procedure

Havering Council has completed a review of its Complaints Policy and Procedure (2023). The revised policy is scheduled for publication by the end of September 2025, reinforcing our commitment to transparency, fairness, and continuous improvement in complaint handling.

Ombudsman Code of Compliance

As part of our alignment with the Housing Ombudsman's Code, the Goodwill Gesture Policy has been temporarily withdrawn to allow for a comprehensive review, to address inconsistencies with other Havering policies and ensure a consistent, fair approach.

In the interim, the Complaints Policy clearly states: *"We look at the injustice that has occurred and then use the Housing Ombudsman to objectively decide what an appropriate remedy for that injustice is."*

To further align with the Ombudsman's Code, Havering is removing the term "vexatious" from all relevant Housing and Complaints policies. It will be replaced with "unacceptable behaviour", promoting a more constructive and inclusive approach to managing challenging interactions.

Enhanced Data and Insight Capabilities

The Complaints Service Improvement Team is now leveraging advanced reporting tools, including our complaints management system and Power BI, to collect and analyse and communicate a broader range of data. These enhanced capabilities enable us to identify emerging trends, monitor performance effectively and drive meaningful improvements in service delivery.

COMPLAINTS HANDLING & PERFORMANCE

Service Improvements Achieved

Resident Feedback and Engagement

To strengthen our commitment to resident voice, we are introducing a feedback survey for customers following the resolution of their complaint. The survey will be quick and easy to complete, include multiple-choice question and gather insight to inform service improvements and highlight areas of success.

Deep Dive into Complaints Handling

As part of our continuous improvement efforts, Havering Council is undertaking a Deep Dive review into the handling of Social Housing complaints during the second half of the 2025–2026 year. This initiative brings together a dedicated team of professionals and senior managers to assess:

- Current practices
- Identify areas for improvement
- Ensure the highest standards of service for our residents
- Learning from Complaints to Drive Service Improvement
- Improve feedback and communication for residents

Feedback from this working group will also be fed into the Complaints Board being set up for 2025/2026, with a clear set of agreed actions and ongoing reviews to support long-term improvements in how we manage and respond to complaints.

Havering Council is committed to using complaints as a valuable source of insight to inform and implement meaningful service improvements. By analysing complaint trends, identifying root causes, and listening to resident feedback, we aim to ensure that every complaint contributes to better outcomes and a more responsive, resident-focused service.

COMPLAINTS HANDLING AND PERFORMANCE

Housing Ombudsman Landlord Annual Report - 2023/2024

Housing Ombudsman Landlord Report for 2023-2024

The Housing Ombudsman's Landlord Report for 2023–2024 found that Havering Council had a maladministration rate of 78%, slightly above the national average of 73%.

This reporting year marked a significant period of transition for Havering Council, as all complaints handling functions were brought together into a single, centralised service in December 2023. Despite the scale of this change, early signs of improvement is already evident.

The report also noted that Havering Council is broadly comparable to other local authorities with similar volumes of housing stock. When benchmarked against councils of a similar size and type. Havering's maladministration rate was 6% lower for service failure cases and 3% lower for no maladministration findings

Compliance and Financial Remedies

Havering Council achieved a 100% compliance rate with the Ombudsman's recommendations and orders within the required three-month timeframe. A total of £5,815 was paid in remedy payments during the year. Full details can be found in the published report: [Landlord-Report-Havering-Council \(1\).pdf](#)

Havering Council's Findings and Actions

As part of our commitment to transparency and continuous improvement, Havering Council has reviewed its complaints performance for the 2023–2024 financial year. While our performance is broadly in line with similar organisations, we remain focused on:

- Reducing complaint volumes
- Improving outcomes for residents

Key actions taken include:

- Identifying areas where targeted training is needed to enhance service delivery
- Introducing new data points into our reporting systems to improve performance tracking and early issue detection

Since the start of 2025, we have already seen notable improvements in response times and complaint resolution. We are committed to maintaining this momentum and continuing to deliver a more responsive, resident-focused service.

COMPLAINTS HANDLING AND PERFORMANCE

Relevant Reports

Using Insight to Drive Improvement

With the Housing Complaints Service restructure now stabilised and staffing levels approaching full capacity, Havering Council is reinforcing its commitment to learning and continuous improvement. As part of the Council's 2025/26 Corporate Plan Theme of Enabling a resident-focussed and resilient Council, with the explicit aim to provide excellent customer service and engage effectively with our communities. The Council has committed to improve customer satisfaction levels by modernising the way we work. This includes an explicit commitment to increase the number of complaints responded to on time, escalated to Stage Two and Ombudsman enquiries and learning from complaints received by the council.

Training and Development

Training for the Housing Complaints Team is underway, with a programme planned for the second half of 2025/2026 focusing on:

- Service-specific knowledge
- Skills to manage and resolve complaints effectively
- Enhanced understanding of the Housing Ombudsman's Code for Complaint Handling

Housing Ombudsman Spotlight Reports scheduled for review include:

- Learning from Severe Maladministration Reports
- Repairing Trust
- Repairs and Maintenance
- Attitudes, Respect and Rights

By reflecting on the findings and recommendations within these reports, we aim to embed best practices across our services and ensure our approach to complaint handling is fair, empathetic, and effective.

Insight, Investigations and Information Team

The Insight, Investigations and Information Team continues to play a key role in driving service improvement. Over the past financial year, the team has implemented a range of changes and remains focused on further enhancing the service throughout the current year.