

Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report 2025/2026

Service: Housing Landlord Service

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1 Introduction

1.1 Purpose of Report

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

This Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report provides an assessment of the Housing Landlord Service's complaint handling performance during 2025/2026 and demonstrates how complaints have been used as a valuable source of learning to drive service improvement.

The report fulfils the requirements of the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code and supports transparency and accountability by providing residents, elected members, senior leaders and regulators with an overview of:

- Complaint volumes and performance
- Compliance with complaint handling timescales
- Learning from complaints
- Service improvements implemented as a result of customer feedback
- Ongoing actions to improve services for tenants and residents

The Housing Ombudsman recognises complaints as an important source of insight and learning. Effective complaint handling enables landlords to identify service failures, improve customer experience and strengthen tenant confidence in housing services.

1.2 Legislative and Regulatory Context

This report has been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code, which became statutory from 1 April 2024 under powers granted through the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023.

The Complaint Handling Code establishes clear expectations for:

- Accessibility of complaint processes
- Timeliness of responses
- Fairness and transparency
- Learning from complaints
- Governance and oversight of complaint handling

The report also supports the wider consumer regulation framework overseen by the Regulator of Social Housing and contributes to the Council's approach to meeting the Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs).

TSMs include measures relating to complaints handling, tenant engagement and overall satisfaction and are intended to provide residents with greater transparency regarding landlord performance.

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

- 2.1 In accordance with the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code, the Housing Landlord Service has completed its annual self-assessment and this report forms part of that self-assessment process. The assessment reviewed policies, procedures, governance arrangements and operational complaint handling practices against all Code requirements.
- 2.2 Based on the findings of the Self-Assessment, the Council is satisfied that it remains compliant with the Code.
- 2.3 The self-assessment confirmed that policies, procedures and governance arrangements are in place to ensure complaints are accessible, handled fairly, investigated thoroughly and resolved within the prescribed timescales. The Council operates a two-stage complaints process supported by a dedicated corporate complaints team, clear escalation routes and robust quality assurance arrangements.
- 2.4 The assessment demonstrated a strong focus on accessibility and resident engagement. Residents can raise complaints through a range of channels, reasonable adjustments are considered throughout the complaints process, and information about the right to access the Housing Ombudsman Service is routinely provided. Staff receive training on complaint handling requirements, communication standards and identifying opportunities to resolve issues at the earliest stage. Throughout 2025/26 there were no complaint refusals or escalation refusals within the landlord service, reflecting a resident-focused approach to complaint handling.
- 2.5 Learning from complaints continues to be embedded within service delivery and governance arrangements. Complaint trends, themes, outcomes and performance are reviewed regularly by service managers, senior leaders, involved tenants and elected members. Section 4 provides further information on this. Complaint learning is used to identify service improvements, inform policy and procedural reviews, and drive continuous improvement across the landlord service. During the year, further enhancements were made to complaint handling processes following a compliance review, and plans are in place to strengthen resident involvement through the development of tenant scrutiny arrangements. Section 5 provides further information on this.
- 2.6 The self-assessment also confirmed that appropriate scrutiny and oversight arrangements are in place. Quarterly performance reporting is provided to the Member Responsible for Complaints, Cabinet, Senior Leadership Team and Tenants Forum, ensuring complaint handling performance, service improvements and emerging risks are subject to regular review and challenge. The Council remains committed to maintaining a positive complaint handling culture, using complaints as valuable feedback to improve services and outcomes for residents

- 2.7 The completed self-assessment has been approved through the Council's governance arrangements and is published alongside this report in accordance with the requirements of the Complaint Handling Code.

3 Complaint Handling Performance Analysis 2025/2026

3.1 Quantitative Analysis

3.1.1 Summary of complaints logged April 2025 to March 2026

Measure	Number
Complaints carried over from 2024/2025	0
Complaints logged (Stage 1 and Stage 2 combined)	24
Complaints closed	24
Complaints carried over into 2026/2027	0
Formal complaints refused	0
Housing Ombudsman Referrals (not all of these were from the same reporting period due to allocation delays on the part of the Ombudsman)	4

3.1.2 Summary of complaints by quarter 2025/2026

Quarter	Stage 1	Stage 2
Quarter 1	4	3
Quarter 2	4	2
Quarter 3	6	0
Quarter 4	4	1
Total	18	6

3.1.3 Complaints closed within target timescales April 2025 to March 2026

Quarter	Stage 1	Stage 2
Q1	4	2
Q2	4	2
Q3	6	Not applicable
Q4	4	1
Total	18	5

3.1.4 Reasons for complaints 2025/26

Category	Stage 1	Stage 2	Total
Repairs	6	3	9

Officer Conduct	4	1	5
Service Expectations not met	3	0	3
Policy and Procedure	3	0	3
ASB/Neighbourhood	2	2	4

3.2 Qualitative Analysis

3.2.1 Key findings

- A total of 24 formal complaints were received during 2025/2026, compared with 23 complaints during the previous year. All complaints received during the year were concluded within the reporting period, resulting in no cases being carried forward into 2026/2027.
- Four complaints were escalated to the Housing Ombudsman compared with two during the previous reporting year but not all of these were from the same reporting period due to allocation delays on the part of the Ombudsman. All four Housing Ombudsman referrals received during the reporting period were investigated and responded to within the required timescales. Following review, the Housing Ombudsman was satisfied that the Council had acted appropriately and in accordance with its obligations, and the Codes requirements, in each case.
- The distribution of complaints remained broadly consistent with the previous year. Most complaints were resolved at Stage 1, demonstrating that issues are generally being addressed effectively at the earliest opportunity.
- Overall, 91.7 per cent of complaints were responded to within the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code timescales. This represents an improvement on the previous year's performance of 85.7 per cent.
- Only one complaint was responded to outside the prescribed timescales. This was a Stage 2 complaint where the complexity of the case resulted in additional investigation requirements.

The improvement demonstrates a continued focus on effective complaint management and monitoring.

3.2.2 Summary

- Overall complaint themes remain consistent with those reported during the previous year.
- Repairs remained the main cause of complaints, accounting for 37.5 per cent of all complaints received. This reflects the continuing importance of responsive repairs and contractor performance in influencing customer satisfaction.
- Officer conduct was the second most common complaint category (20.8 per cent). Although relatively low in volume, complaints relating to staff interactions can impact customer confidence and therefore continue to be monitored closely. On review of these complaints, the issue was unclear

communication with tenants on the outcome of planned visits. This highlights the importance of consistent communication practices.

- Complaints relating to service expectations and policies and procedures indicate the importance of managing expectations, ensuring tenants have a clear understanding of service standards and responsibilities, along with expected timescales.
- Anti-social behaviour and neighbourhood management complaints represented a smaller proportion of overall complaints but showed a higher propensity to progress to Stage 2, suggesting that these cases can involve greater complexity and differing expectations regarding outcomes. These were complaints that sat outside of the Anti-Social Behaviour Policy and Case Review process.
- Complaint investigations continue to provide valuable learning opportunities which have informed improvements in policies, procedures and service delivery.

3.2.3 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.

3.2.4 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.

3.2.5 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.

3.2.6 Complaint performance is also reported to Senior Leadership and Members quarterly and includes analysis of complaints and also improvements being made in response to this.

3.3 Complaint Refusals

3.3.1 The Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code requires landlords to provide transparency regarding complaints that have not been accepted.

The Housing Landlord Service did not refuse any complaints during 2025/26.

Measure	Number
Complaints Refused	0

This demonstrates compliance with the principle of accessibility and the Council's commitment to ensuring residents can raise concerns through the complaints process.

4. Non-Compliance

- 4.1 There were no findings of non-compliance with the Complaint Handling Code identified by the Ombudsman during 2025/26.

5. Learning from Complaints

- 5.1 The key lessons identified from complaint investigations during 2025/2026 include:

Repairs

- Need for improved communication regarding repair appointments
- Better management of customer expectations
- Stronger monitoring of contractor performance
- Earlier intervention where repairs become delayed to ensure transparency with tenants around contractor pressures

Customer Experience

- Consistent communication throughout the customer journey
- Clear explanations of service decisions
- Clear expectations around communication and service delivery

Policies and Procedures

- Increased visibility of policies and service standards
- Simplification of information available to tenants

6. Service Improvements Delivered During 2025/2026

6.1 Key improvements delivered during the year include:

- Completion of the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code self-assessment
- Review and successful revision of the Complaints Policy following the Housing Ombudsman compliance review
- Strengthened partnership working between Housing Services and the Corporate Complaints Team
- Improved monitoring of complaint performance and timescale compliance
- Increased focus on learning from complaints and capturing service improvements arising from customer feedback
- Improved transparency around complaint performance to tenants and Senior Leadership and Members

7. Any Annual Report or other Relevant Reports or Publications issued by the Ombudsman

- 7.1 The Housing Ombudsman requires landlords to report on any relevant publications issued by the Ombudsman concerning the landlord during the reporting period.
- 7.2 No Complaint Handling Failure Orders (now Notices) were issued against the Housing Landlord Service during the reporting period.
- 7.3 In April 2026, the Housing Ombudsman completed a compliance review of the Council's Complaints Policy against the Complaint Handling Code requirements. The review identified 21 recommendations.

The Housing Landlord Service worked collaboratively with the Corporate Complaints Team to undertake a comprehensive review of the policy and associated procedures.

All 21 recommendations were included within a revised draft policy prepared by the service, and approval was sought to make the necessary changes by the corporate complaints team, with oversight from the relevant cabinet member.

- 7.4 The Ombudsman confirmed successful implementation of all recommendations in August 2026 and concluded the compliance review confirming the council's complaint handling was now fully compliant with the Code.
- 7.5 The Council will continue to monitor Housing Ombudsman publications, special reports, learning reports and sector-wide guidance to ensure emerging good practice is incorporated into service delivery.

8. Service Improvement Action Plan 2026/27

Action	Outcome Sought	Lead	Target Completion	Status
Ensure housing policies and procedures are visible and accessible to tenants through Council webpages and reception points within Anchor Buildings.	Improved tenant awareness and accessibility of service information.	Performance and Engagement Team	December 2026	In progress
Ensure the Tenant Charter clearly sets out service standards and communication expectations and incorporates consultation feedback.	Shared understanding of service commitments and expectations.	Senior Manager and Service Manager	June 2027	In progress

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Action	Outcome Sought	Lead	Target Completion	Status
Introduce formal tenant scrutiny arrangements including annual review of complaints performance and learning.	Greater tenant involvement in accountability and service improvement.	Performance and Engagement Team	April 2027	On track
Introduce 'Outcome Cards' which will be provided to tenants at the end of planned property inspections setting clear expectations and providing a summary of the visit and next steps.	Shared understanding of service commitments and expectations.	Service Manager-Housing Maintenance	December 2026	On Track
Use complaint feedback and findings from the repairs consultation to inform the specification for the new repairs contract.	Improved service quality and customer experience within repairs delivery.	Service Manager-Housing Maintenance	December 2026	Complete
Use annual complaints performance and learning when preparing for implementation of the Competence and Conduct Standard, including introduction of a Housing Landlord Staff Code of Conduct.	Improved professional standards and customer experience.	Senior Manager	October 2026	On track
Improve transparency by routinely reporting complaint volumes, outcomes, learning and complaint handling performance to tenants.	Increased trust, accountability and tenant engagement.	Senior Manager	Quarterly from Q1 2026/27	Complete- this is reported twice a year to all tenants and quarterly to Tenants Forum, Senior Leaders and Members

9. Conclusion

The Housing Landlord Service handled 24 complaints during 2025/26 and achieved a complaint response compliance rate of 91.7 per cent, demonstrating continued improvement from the previous year.

Complaints continue to provide valuable insight into resident experience and have informed significant service improvements. The successful completion of the Housing Ombudsman compliance review and implementation of all 21 recommendations provides assurance that complaint handling arrangements are aligned with the requirements of the Complaint Handling Code and reflect what residents can reasonably expect from a modern and accessible complaints policy.

The service remains committed to maintaining high standards of complaint handling, learning from feedback and working with tenants to shape future service improvements.

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.

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.

Landlords are required to complete the self-assessment in full and support all statements with evidence, with additional commentary as necessary.

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.