

<b>Title:</b>	<b>Annual Complaints Performance &amp; Service Improvement Report 2023/24</b>
<b>Service:</b>	<b>Housing Landlord</b>
<b>Date of Report:</b>	<b>30/07/2024</b>
<b>Report Author:</b>	<b>Rebecca Halton</b>
<b>Director:</b>	<b>Steph Cordon</b>
<b>Cabinet Member:</b>	<b>Judith Derbyshire</b>

## **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 There is currently a draft Complaints and Compliments Policy for Westmorland and Furness Council under development, which will be taken through Cabinet for approval before the end of 2024. Housing is considered a key service area in the development of this document and senior managers are part of the working group developing this policy to ensure it meets the requirements of the Code.
- 2.3 In the meantime, legacy complaints policies remain in operation as do the procedures and staff managing complaints within the locality areas. This ensures that effective complaint handling continues until one unified policy and process is in place with a dedicated team of officers to manage complaints.
- 2.4 Legacy policies are not being revised/amended as any such revisions/amendments will form part of the new unified Complaint and Compliments policy. Such revisions/amendments are instead captured via the website information and other documentation publicised to tenants and residents alongside staff training and procedural guidance.

## **3 Quantitative analysis of our complaint handling performance**

### **3.1 Summary of complaints 2023/24**



Table 1- Formal complaints logged April 2023 to March 2024

Formal complaints carried over from 2022/23	0
Complaints logged April 2023 to March 2024	19
Complaints closed	19
Complaints carried over into 2024/25	0
Formal complaints referred to the Housing Ombudsman	0
Formal complaints refused	0

Table 2- Stage 1 & Stage 2 complaints by Quarter

	Stage 1	Stage 2
Q1	4	
Q2	5	
Q3	5	1
Q4	4	
Total	18	1

Table 3- Complaints closed within target timescales April 2023 to March 2024

	Stage 1	Stage 2
Q1	4	
Q2	4	
Q3	5	1
Q4	3	
Total	16	1

Table 4- Complaints closed **and not responded to** within target timescales April 2023 to March 2024

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

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

	Complaints logged	Responded to within the Complaint Handling Code timescales
Stage 1	22*	20*
Stage 2	1	1

\*in carrying out the self-assessment and looking at the detail of the complaints, we established that 3 of the complaints recorded as stage 1 were actually not stock related.

Table 6- Reasons for complaints 2023/24

	Stage 1	Stage 2	Total
Repairs- Damp & Mould	3		3
Repairs- outstanding/incomplete repairs	8	1	9
Handling of an issue by Officers working for the Council	3		3
Repairs contractor	1		1
Neighbour issues	2		2
Adaptation decision	1		1

#### **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 centre 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 residents.
- 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
  - 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 development of a unified Complaints and Compliments policy will facilitate effective collaboration between internal teams, ensure consistency in the Councils approach to handling complaints, and ensure customers feel they are listened to and their views valued.
- 4.6 Senior officers and managers handling complaints have been provided with further guidance to ensure they comply with the requirements of the Code in responding to complaints. This was in response to some service improvements identified.
- 4.7 The way complaints are handled, recorded and monitored (including evaluated) is currently under review as part of the development of the new Complaints and Compliments policy and in line with the Councils plan to align service delivery and the customer offer across Westmorland and Furness.
- 4.8 Following this review and also the TSM data, we have put together a complaints action plan to ensure we improve the way we manage the complaints process for areas where we have identified the need for improvement. Some of these actions have been implemented and others will take longer to complete.
- 4.9 A common theme identified from the complaints analysis for 2023/24 was around the performance of contractors in carrying out works on time, the action plan we have in place following the TSM data being collated includes provision to better manage contractor performance to improve tenants overall satisfaction with this aspect of the service. This will be achieved by regular meetings with the contractor to review outstanding repairs and performance and increasing the reporting requirements on the contractor.
- 4.10 Crib sheets have been created for senior officers and managers handling complaints to provide further operational guidance and highlight their responsibilities.
- 4.11 As a service, we will look to develop our housing management system, Civica Cx, to record and manage complaints to ensure officers and managers are held accountable.

**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	To improve completion times for repairs to ensure they fall within pre-defined timeframes.	Completed June 2024 - - Contractors have been asked to bring data relating to outstanding repairs to meetings.



they provide data and explain delays	Early identification of trades where there may be resource issues so that the Council can assist in resolving this	- Surveyors leading meetings have been advised on questions to ask and expectations
Development of a new unified complaints and compliments policy	To ensure consistency across the Council's unitary footprint and to include the Code's requirements in their entirety within one document	In progress
Providing further guidance to senior officers and managers handling complaints	- To ensure staff know their responsibilities and the expectations of the Code around complaint handling - Consistency	Completed June 2024
Template letters to be produced for Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaint responses	To ensure consistency and communication with the tenant	In progress
New damp and mould standard introduced	Ensure damp and mould complaints are handled effectively and in line with regulatory requirements	Completed May 2023
Review of internal IT systems	To improve recording and monitoring of complaints and ensure this is consistent across Westmorland and Furness	In progress
Review complaints performance at quarterly management team meetings	To ensure regular performance monitoring and early identification of themes and issues	Complete, this will be a standing agenda item for 2023/24 meetings and minuted to report to Directors/Members
Incorporate the role of the MRC within the lead member who has oversight for housings role.	- Ensure full compliance with the Code - Champion positive complaint handling and embed this as a culture within the service	In progress

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



## **Westmorland & Furness Council**

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 2024, 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.