

Housing Management Complaint Performance – Annual Report

Introduction

The Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code became statutory from 1 April 2024, which means that social housing landlords are now obliged by law to follow its requirements.

The Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 places a legal duty on the Ombudsman to monitor social housing landlord's compliance with the Code. Section 8 of the Housing Ombudsman's Service Complaint Handling Code requires that landlords must produce an Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report for scrutiny and challenge.

This annual report provides an analysis of the complaints received by the Council's Housing Management Team during 2024/25. This process and these complaints are different and separate from complaints received by other Council services, that are reported through a separate process.

This report seeks to provide information on the performance of the Council's complaint handling in terms of the volume and timeliness of the responses. In addition, the report seeks to identify themes, trends and lessons learnt to bring about service improvements.

The Housing Ombudsman Service has a two-stage complaint handling process which requires:

- All Complaint Acknowledgements responded within 5 working days.
- A first stage complaint must be responded to within 10 working days.
- A second stage complaint within 20 working days.

Cherwell District Council operates a 3 stage complaint process.

Stage 1 – Informal Complaint

Stage 1 complaints cover oversights or human error that can be quickly resolved by contacting the service rather than awaiting formal investigation.

Stage 2 – Formal Complaint

A formal complaint involves a senior officer within the service concerned investigating the matter. A stage 2 complaint will be acknowledged within 3 working days and a full response will be sent within 10 working days.

Stage 3 – Formal Review

Appendix 1

A Stage 3 formal review involves a member of the Extended Leadership Team within the Council (Assistant Director). It will also be someone who has not been involved in the matter before.

The acknowledgement for the Stage 3 request will be provided within 3 working days and a full response will be sent within 10 working days.

The Council's corporate policy for handling and managing complaints is not fully aligned with the Housing Ombudsman framework. Therefore, for the purpose of this report, Housing Ombudsman Stage One complaints consist of both Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaints made to the Council. The timescale compliance is also shown separately within tables. Taking this approach does not affect the outcomes within the report.

Scope of report

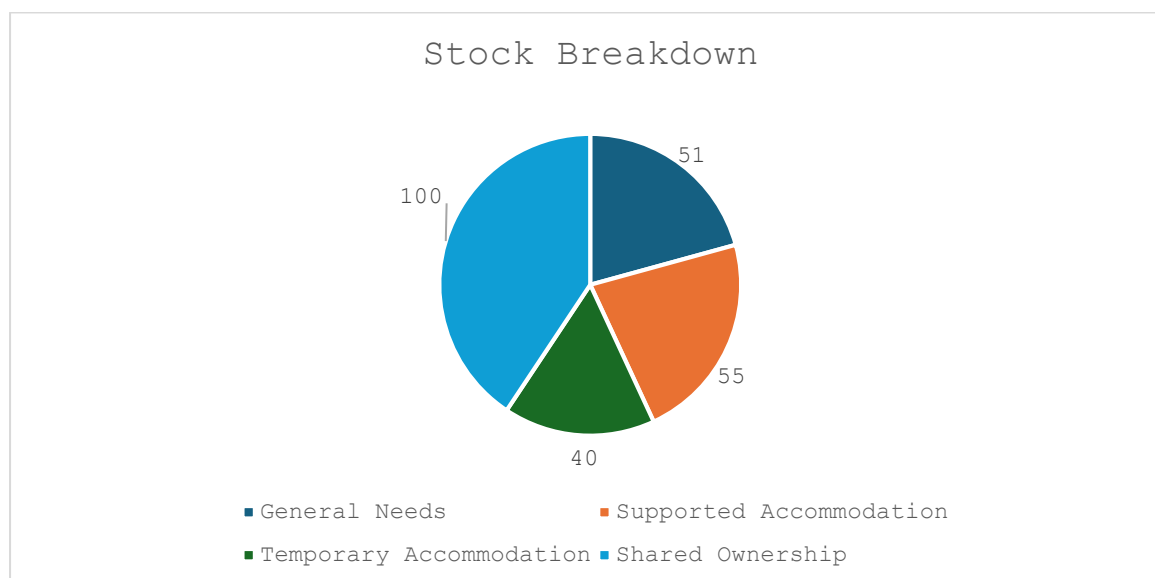
The Council has a small stock holding of 246 units. As 100 properties are Shared Ownership and the Council's share is less than 50%, the effective units that the Council owns and manages is under 200. This is made up of a mix of Supported Accommodation, Temporary Accommodation, General Needs Housing and Shared Ownership.

Throughout the period covered by the report, 24 units of temporary accommodation and 12 units of general needs accommodation were unoccupied as long term void due to renovation works taking place (36 total). Only becoming occupied in the final month of the report (March 25). Therefore, the number of rented properties that the Council is managing with tenants within was significantly reduced.

Complaints and other data presented as part of this report relate to the Council's stock holding and to the residents within.

The breakdown of the properties is shown in **Figure 1**

Figure 1 – Cherwell District Council Housing Stock Breakdown



Definition of a Complaint

In accordance with the Housing Ombudsman's Complaints Handling Code, a complaint 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 groups of residents”

The word complaint does not have to be used by the resident for it to be treated as such.

There is a difference between a complaint and a service request. This is outlined within the Council's complaints procedure.

Types of complaints within scope of this report

Within scope of the report are complaints that are raised by residents or raised by residents through an appropriate third party.

The Council receives enquiries from Members of Parliament and elected members, sometimes on behalf of customers or to enquire on their behalf. Where appropriate, the enquiry received may be escalated to a complaint and handled as such if it is clear that there is a service failing that needs to be investigated and addressed. Not all enquiries that are made by MP's or Councillors are treated as complaints. They are primarily dealt with as requests for information and through part of day to day communications.

Volume of Complaints

The data below summarises the Council's performance regarding complaints and the compliance with the Housing Ombudsman's Code regarding timescales and complaint handling.

This shows that of the complaints we have received regarding and relating to our stock holding have been compliant with internal processes and our Policy as well as the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code. It should be noted that the scope of the stock to which the Code relates is small, as outlined in previous sections.

Figure 2a - Number of Housing Management related complaints received and compliance with response times - acknowledgement

Complaint Stage	Number Received	Acknowledgment sent within 5 working days
Informal Stage 1 (Housing Ombudsman Stage 1)	3	3 (100%)

Appendix 1

Formal Stage 2 (Housing Ombudsman Stage 1)	0	N/A
Stage 3 Formal Review (Housing Ombudsman Stage 2)	0	N/A
Logged as complaint but closed as service request	0	N/A

Figure 2b - Number of Housing Management related complaints received and compliance with response times

Complaint Stage	Response within CDC timescales	Response within Housing Ombudsman Timescales
Informal Stage 1 (Housing Ombudsman Stage 1)	3	N/A
Formal Stage 2 (Housing Ombudsman Stage 1)	0	N/A
Stage 3 Formal Review (Housing Ombudsman Stage 2)	0	N/A

Complaints by Theme

When analysing the themes of the complaints received, **Figure 3** shows the nature of the complaints that were received in 2024/25.

Complaint Theme	Number of complaints
Poor handling or progression of housing case	3 (100%)
Staff attitude/behaviour	0
Failure to attend appointment	0
Condition of property	0
Poor workmanship	0
Relating to performance of a contractor	0
Other	0

Complaints by Tenure

The Council holds a small but varied stock holding, as outlined in previous sections. The breakdown of the complaints by tenure of property is shown below in **Figure 4**

Tenure	Number of complaints
Shared Ownership	3 (100%)
Supported Accommodation	0
General Needs Housing	0
Temporary Accommodation	0

Method in which a complaint is received

The below table shows the method in which complaints were received by the Council during 2024-25. It shows that the Council's digital channels are most prevalent when reporting complaints.

Figure 5 – Method in which complaints are received

Complaint Type	Number Received	Received by Email/Website Link	Received by phone	Received by letter	Received in person
Complaint logged as per Housing Ombudsman Code	3 (100%)	3 (100%)	0	0	0
Logged as complaint but closed as service request	0	0	0	0	0

Complaint Outcomes

As part of complaint handling, the Council wishes to learn lessons where possible from the feedback it receives from customers. The below table shows the number of complaints that the Council upheld in 2024-25.

Figure 6 - Number of complaints that were upheld by the Council

Number of complaints	Reason for complaint	Percentage upheld
3	Poor handling or progression of housing case	0%

Findings of non-compliance with the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code

There are no instances of non-compliance with the code. All complaints were acknowledged and handled within the timescales provided by the Housing Ombudsman within the code.

Service Improvements

Contact Management and Identification of Potential Complaints

Staff within the Housing Management Team are receiving annual briefings and training updates regarding identification and recording of complaints that come

Appendix 1

directly to the team, either in person, by phone, letter or e-mail. This is to ensure that there is minimised potential for any under reporting of complaints.

The customer services team, who handle all complaint communications and receive complaints when not received directly to staff, have refresher training as part of their roles.

In the 2023-24 return, there were instances of service requests being logged as complaints. This can lead to unnecessary administration for the Council and lead to potential confusion for customers. Customers could be advised that the matter they have reported is being dealt with as a complaint and then later find out that it isn't, because it isn't a complaint. There were no instances of this occurring this year, this is therefore positive.

It is noted that complaints have been resolved by customer services or the housing team and the customer responded to on the issue initially recorded as a complaint, without the need for further investigation. It is positive that potential issues raised have been quickly responded to. To ensure compliance with the code, complaints relating to housing management will be checked by a senior officer to check their correct handling. Due to the small number of complaints and small stock size, this is considered a feasible and proportionate step to ensure compliance with the code.

There is a culture within the Housing Management Team of resolving issues that customers raise as quickly as possible. It is positive that there is an approach and emphasis on early intervention and being proactive with the customer to ensure their issues and concerns are resolved at the earliest opportunity, it is important that the team retain this, and this continues to be encouraged.

It is positive for complaint control that customers are finding their way to the complaints section of the website to make their complaint and using the website links and forms. The Council's corporate management system for complaints assists in the automation of tasks and therefore ensures communications are sent and tracks responses.

Complaints by Tenure

This year has shown a trend that all the complaints are received by tenants that hold their properties within shared ownership. When satisfaction surveys have been undertaken by the Council, it has also shown that these tenants are generally less satisfied with the housing services provided by the Council.

Considering the large proportion of units held in shared ownership, larger than any other single type, the potential for complaints to be made are higher. The relationship between the Council and these tenants is different however, with less services being provided to them directly and, therefore, the less potential for there to be a complaint about services provided. The Council will continue to review its communications with these clients and monitor any concerns raised more closely and implement learning

Appendix 1

appropriately and accordingly. It should however be noted that the number of complaints remains small.