

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 2025/26. 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 sent 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 2-stage complaint process.

Stage 1 – Formal Complaint

A Stage 1 Formal Complaint involves a senior officer within the service investigating the matter for the complainant. A stage 1 complaint will be acknowledged within 5 working days, and a full response will be sent within 10 working days.

Stage 2 – Formal Review

A Stage 2 formal review involves a member of the Extended Leadership Team reviewing the Stage 1 Formal Complaint investigation. It will also be someone who has not been involved in the matter before.

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The acknowledgement for the Stage 2 request will be provided within 5 working days, and a full response will be sent within 20 working days.

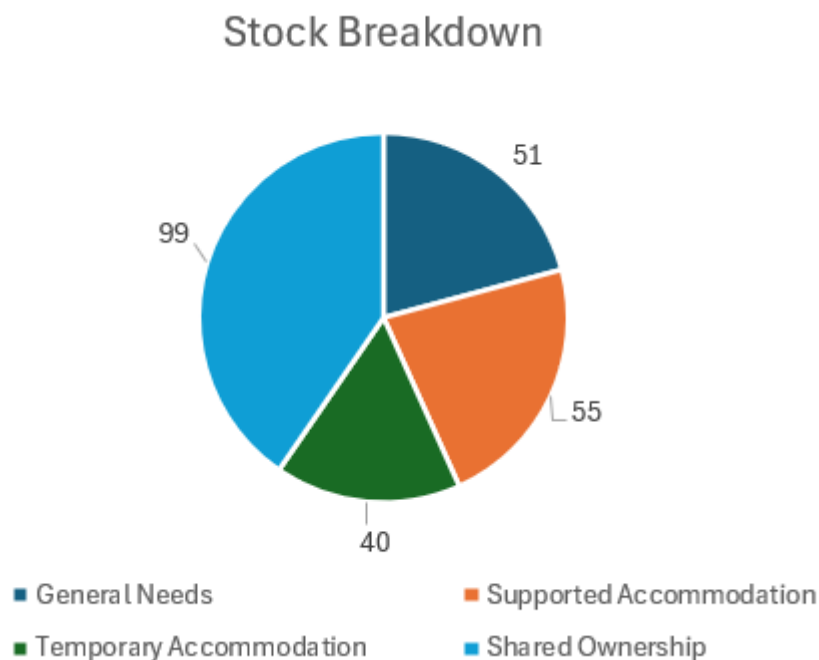
Scope of report

The Council has a small stock holding of 245 units. As 99 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.

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.

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There is a different 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.

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
Formal Stage 1 (Housing Ombudsman Stage 1)	4	4 (100%)
Stage 2 Formal Review (Housing Ombudsman Stage 2)	3	3 (100%)
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	Number Received	Response within Housing Ombudsman Timescales
Formal Stage 1 (Housing Ombudsman Stage 1)	4	4 (100%)
Stage 2 Formal Review (Housing Ombudsman Stage 2)	3	2 (66%)

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	0
Staff attitude/behaviour	0
Failure to attend appointment	0
Condition of property	3 (75%)
Poor workmanship	0
Relating to performance of a contractor	0
Other	1 (25%)

*As 3 complaints progressed to stage 2, the tenure figures don't count complaints twice.

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 (75%)
Supported Accommodation	0
General Needs Housing	1 (25%)
Temporary Accommodation	0

*As 3 complaints progressed to stage 2, the tenure figures don't count complaints twice.

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	7 (100%)	7 (100%)	0	0	0

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Ombudsman Code					
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 2025-26.

Figure 6a - Number of stage 1 complaints that were upheld by the Council

Number of complaints	Reason for complaint	Percentage upheld
3	Condition of property	33%
1	Other	0%

Figure 6b – Number of stage 2 complaints that were upheld by the Council

Number of complaints	Reason for complaint	Percentage upheld
3	Condition of property	33%

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

There was a single instance of failure to comply with the code. This was due to one Stage 2 complaint being sent late. All acknowledgements and Stage 1 complaints were sent within the timescales provided by the Housing Ombudsman, within the code.

Performance Commentary and Service Improvements

There has been a rise in complaints to this area of service within the past year. This is the highest level in the 3 years of reporting. Complaints about the service should not always be seen as negative, in accordance with Ombudsman guidance.

It is worthy of note that two of the stage 1 complaints, that became stage 2 complaints, were about the same issue from two separate neighbours. Both these complaints were not upheld.

There is a trend this year of more complaints coming from shared owners. However, the sample size remains too small to draw conclusions and learning. Particularly, as

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outlined above, that two complaints related to the same problem, which was not upheld.

As outlined in last year's return, the stock make up has shifted to more temporary accommodation provision. As residents are moving in and out of accommodation more regularly than they would be in permanent accommodation, there is arguably less likelihood of complaints against the landlord being received, as the contact time period is reduced. No complaints have been received from temporary accommodation residents, which is a positive. One complaint has been received from a general housing resident, but this was not upheld.

Process Clarity

The changes initiated by the code and the subsequent change to the complaints policy has meant a clearer distinction between complaints and service requests. There have been no instances of service requests being logged as complaints, to be later closed because they are not complaints. Further changes are currently being made to strengthen alignment with the code, these will be in place by September 2026.

Complaints by Tenure

This year has again shown a trend that all the complaints are received by tenants that hold their properties within shared ownership. Previous satisfaction surveys undertaken have also shown that this client group is less satisfied with Cherwell as a landlord.

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 customers and monitor any concerns raised more closely and implement learning appropriately and accordingly. It should however be noted that the number of complaints remains small.

Progression to Stage 2 – Formal Review

Within the monitoring year 25/26, 3 out of the 4 complaints received at stage 1 have progressed to the formal review stage, stage 2. This is a trend that has not previously been seen.

It should be noted that 2 of the complaints are about the same issue and were not upheld at either stage. The other complaint was upheld at stage 1, and findings replicated at stage 2.

The sample size is too small to ascertain any underlying service practices that may be leading to case progression.

Response Timescale Missed

In one instance, a Stage 2 Formal Review timescale was missed. The response was sent on the 21st day, and therefore outside the 20 working days. The Council's monitoring processes aim to ensure timely responses are sent, and the central monitoring team engage with services, sending reminders, when responses are due.

Property Condition

Within the monitoring year 25/26, 3 out of the 4 complaints received at stage 1 have related to property condition.

It should be noted that these complaints are all from shared owners, where our contractual responsibilities are different to those in other types of accommodation in which we are the landlord. In two of these complaints, which were about the same issue, the complaint was not upheld and stage 1 or 2. However, there is learning to be taken from one of the complaints, particularly around poor communication of timescales and progress, which has been acknowledged and improvements implemented.