

HOUSING AND PROPERTY SERVICES

Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report 2023/2024



Background

The Regulator of Social Housing, a public body sponsored by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, sets out how local authorities and housing providers, such as social housing landlords, are regulated.

The Consumer Standard – Transparency, Influence and Accountability – clearly sets out the Regulators expectations in terms of sharing accessible information to our tenants in a timely manner for information and scrutiny, enabling them to form a view on our performance as their landlord.

The Housing Ombudsman is appointed to ensure effective resolution of disputes between landlords and its tenants and to investigate complaints against landlords of poor management practices. This Council, as a social housing landlord, is required to comply with the Housing Ombudsman’s complaint handling code. This code was amended with effect from April 2024. In respect of complaints, the Housing Ombudsman (HO) requires us to:

- Assess and publish our compliance with the Housing Ombudsman’s “Complaint Handling Code”
- Detail where service improvements are needed and how these will be made
- Provide an analysis of our complaint handling performance
- Summarise the types of complaints we have refused to accept

Whilst for some time we have been sharing information on complaints with our tenants through our newsletter, At Home and Annual Report, and had tenant representatives involved in reviewing complaints received, this is the first full Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report.

OUR APPROACH

Our NK Values are intended to help achieve our corporate aims and objectives and underpin the way we operate as an organisation. Our values provide a structured way of highlighting the skills and behaviours colleagues need to demonstrate to deliver quality services.

People Focus is one of those values. We care about our customers experiences when using our services. We hope it is a positive experience and that is what we aim for. We do recognise though that we don't always get it right, and we have a clear and accessible feedback policy that sets out how we will respond to such feedback as formal complaints. Our Customer Feedback Policy can be found on our website [NKDC Website - Corporate Feedback Policy](#)



To ensure full oversight, accountability and to support a positive complaint handling culture, the Executive Board, at its meeting on 28/03/2024, appointed a lead member for complaints Councillor Mrs Tarry. Councillor Ian Carrington continues a lead member for Housing.

2023/2024 - COMPLAINTS IN NUMBERS

There are several different types of complaints made, and a variety of reasons why tenants sometimes feel that the service they have received falls below what they expect. Whilst complaints are dealt with on a “case by case” basis they often provide an insight to where things are not working as they might and where changes to service delivery might be needed or beneficial.

Team	Stage 1	% responded within HO target	% Upheld or Partially Upheld	Stage 2	% responded within HO target	% Upheld or Partially Upheld
Neighbourhoods & Repairs	4	75%	100%	1	100%	0%
Adaptions	2	50%	100%	0	-	-
Asset management	0	-	-	0	-	-
Planned Maintenance	6	83%	83%	4	100%	75%
Responsive Repairs	69	64%	86%	28	89%	89%
Repairs & Retrofit	1	100%	100%	0	-	-
Development & carbon zero	0	-	-	0	-	-
New Build	0	-	-	0	-	-
Retrofit	3	100%	67%	1	100%	0%
Neighbourhoods	22	91%	36%	3	100%	67%
Housing Options	1	0%	100%	1	100%	0%
Neighbourhoods & Options	1	0%	0%	1	100%	0%
Neighbourhoods & Customer Service	0	-	-	0	-	-
Neighbourhoods & - ASB	0	-	-	0	-	-

Findings:

You can see from this table that we received significantly more complaints in respect of our responsive repairs service than any other service. During 2023/2024 all tenants were informed of the difficulties being experienced in our former appointed responsive repairs contractor fulfilling their full contractual requirements. Tenants were written to in October 2023 and February 2024, to advise of the difficulties and the action the Council was taking to address and minimise the disruption and inconvenience to tenants.

At the end of 2023/2024 we were managing circa 2000 outstanding legacy repair jobs through a range of alternative contractors, that caused delays beyond that which we usually aim to undertake remedial works and have acknowledged the impact this has had on many of our customers.



2023/2024 - MANAGING COMPLAINTS

Year and Quarter	Number	Complaints per 1000 homes (target 6.75) at stage 1	Number	Complaints per 1000 homes (target 2.25) at stage 2	Number	Percentage of stage 1 complaints responded to in target time	Number	Percentage of stage 2 complaints responder to in target time
2023/2024 Q1	20	5.15	7	1.8	12 Out of 20	60	6 Out of 7	85.71
2023/2024 Q2	23	5.93	8	2.06	19 Out of 23	85	8 Out of 8	100
2023/2024 Q3	21	5.15	9	2.83	14 out of 21	66.67	9 out of 9	100
2023/2024 Q4	47	12.11	13	3.35	34 out of 47	91.89	12 out of 13	92.31
Total	111	28.6	37	9.53	79 Out of 111	75.89	35 Out of 37	94.5

Findings:

Whilst we have a clear policy setting out our aim to adhere to timescales for investigating, responding and resolving complaints, during 2023/2024 it became apparent, for a number of reasons that we were not responding in a timely manner, this identified the need to develop a procedure for all officers. This was completed in January 2024, setting out expectations on approach, process, record keeping and timescales for actions.

You can also see that our response times for dealing with complaints was lower for our repairs service than for other service areas. This was due the volume of complaints, the team not being fully resourced due to vacant posts, together with the demobilisation of our former appointed responsive repairs contractor.

in part to the numbers of complaints being received but also because of long standing staff vacancies in this area. We have since filled several vacant posts will we improve our ability to effectively handle complaints within target timescales.

We measure complaints across Housing and Property Services responded to within required timescales:

2023/2024 - HOW WE COMPARE

It is useful to compare performance to other local authorities to give some understanding and context to the information being shared. Below is a table to show other local authorities that you might be familiar with:

Social Housing provider	Stage 1 complaints per 1000 properties	Stage 1 complaints responded to within target time	Stage 2 complaints per 1000 properties	Stage 2 complaints responded to within target time
Ashfield District Council	8.1	85.2	1.5	100
City of Lincoln Council	46.5	38.7	5.8	55.6
Derby Homes	39.1	97.3	4.8	93.2
Newark & Sherwood District Council	37.5	94.7	3.2	100
Nottingham Community Housing	94.3	66.2	12.9	76.3
South Holland District Council	-	48.6	-	-
South Kesteven District Council	47.4	58.8	-	-

You can see when comparing the numbers of complaints we receive, and the numbers responded to within target timescales that typically have received lower numbers of complaints than other neighbouring local authorities and that we tend to meet target times broadly similar to others. We are however keen to improve our performance and provide the best service we can, and future reporting will be essential to determine effective service delivery and performance.

Our 2023 Tenant Satisfaction Measures survey, completed by Acuity on our behalf, showed that of those who responded (977 of 3806 tenants) 29% were happy with how their complaints was handled. Acuity noted that “while dissatisfaction with complaints handling ranks highest, tenants are also dissatisfied with the time taken to complete the last repair 29%. Dissatisfaction with complaints handling is likely to incorporate more than just how tenants’ complaints are handled – for example, tenants not getting the resolution they wanted or expected or not having yet received a final outcome”. If you would like to see the full survey results please visit <https://www.n-kesteven.gov.uk/homes-property/i-am-currently-council-tenant-north-kesteven/tenant-satisfaction-measures/tenant-satisfaction-measures-results-202324>

2023/2024 - KEY AREAS IDENTIFIED FOR ACTION

In addition to individual remedial actions on a case by case basis, some thematic learnings were identified through complaints received during 2023/2024, we have summarised these as:

- Management of Repairs Contract
- Improved information on website
- Timeliness of communication
- Record Keeping
- Improvement in the information held on our tenants and their households, and how we use that information
- Improvement in management of complaints – timescales
- Refreshed approach to performance management – ensuring meeting expectations of Housing Ombudsman and Regulator
- Full compliance with the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code

REMEDIAL ACTIONS

As highlighted above many complaints require individual remedial action to resolve. Where common themes have been identified these become part of a wider piece of work with the service delivery team or across the division as a whole. Examples of action taken as a result of complaints received during 2023/2024 include:

- Procurement of new responsive and planned maintenance contractor
- Introduction of repairs module on Housing management system
- HPS complaints procedure – setting out expectations on managing complaints
- Customer Service and Communication Guidance – developed with our tenant representatives to improve communication
- Data Strategy – setting out what information we collect, how, why and what we will do with that information
- Customer facing documents – ongoing programme of review by tenant representatives
- Complaint “deep dive” – review by tenant representatives for any additional learning
- A new electric vehicle charging policy
- The production of an information leaflet on “succession of tenancy”
- Additional information on our website
- A new “Accountable to You” section on our website

2023/2024 - ARE WE COMPLIANT WITH COMPLAINT HANDLING CODE

Simply put, “not quite” is the answer. We are compliant with many of the requirements of the current 2024 Complaint Handling Code, but we recognise where we are not, and we have an action plan in place to ensure full compliance within 2024/2025. The section below sets out the action we have taken to date and our action plan with timescale to achieving compliance.

ACTION TO DATE

The Council, as a social housing landlord, has historically reported to our Executive Board and Tenant Liaison Panel, on complaints, performance and compliance with the Complaint Handling Code, including learnings and identified service improvements. We monitor our performance, identifying where service improvements are needed. Our Annual Report to Tenants has included such information. The most significant “visible change” is that we publish more information in respect of complaints than we did previously.

At its meeting on 28/03/2024, the Council's Executive Board considered a report on our compliance with the Housing Ombudsman complaint handling code, as at that date, a copy of that report and the minutes of the meetings can be accessed using the following link [NKDC Website - Executive Board 28/03/2024](#). A copy of our 2023 **self-assessment** can be found here [NKDC Website - HO CHC Self Assessment 2023](#)

This assessment was submitted to the Housing Ombudsman within the timescales identified. However, the Housing Ombudsman sought clarification and further action from a number of social landlords as this submission should have reflected our compliance with the Revised Complaint Handling Code that was effective from 01/04/2024. As a result, we have undertaken a **self-assessment** against the revised Complaint Handling Code implemented April 2024, and submitted this to the Housing Ombudsman as required. This assessment can be accessed using the following link [NKDC Website - Self Assessment - HO CHC 2024](#). We have formulated an action plan to address each part of the code that requires additional work. A copy of our complaint handling **action plan** can be accessed using the following link [NKDC Website - Action Plan - HO CHC 2024](#)

We also looked at our performance across all of the services provided by Housing and Property Services, a link to this report can be found here <https://www.n-kesteven.gov.uk/homes-property/information-about-housing-north-kesteven/accountable-you> and includes our Assurance Report, our Challenge Plan and our 2023/2024 Annual Report to Tenants that was distributed at the end September 2024. Following the Council's review of its corporate performance management framework in July 2024. Housing and Property Services worked with our Tenant Representatives and the Tenant Liaison Panel to refresh our approach to performance, to ensure timely sharing and consideration of performance related information. This was approved by the Council's Executive Board on 26/09/2024 the report and outcome of that meeting can be accessed using the following link [NKDC Website - Executive Board 26/09/2024](#)

2024/2025 PROGRESS SO FAR

As complaints have become more common place with tenants complaining more than they had previously the reasons for higher levels of complaint is open to debate. You might say that more people are aware of how to complain, and this drives numbers up, or you might say that service delivery may be lower than previous. To fully understand what the situation is, a deeper look is needed. We need to understand what the problem is and why a complaint has been made. Either way we recognise the importance of learning from complaints and managing them effectively. Below we demonstrate progress so far, although a full Complaint Performance and Service Improvement report will be prepared for 2024/2025 in due course.

Managing Complaints

QUARTER 1 Team	Stage 1	% within target	Without extension	Within target or revised time target	Stage 2	% within HO target	Without extension	Within target or revised target
Repairs & Neighbourhoods	5	60	60	60	0	-	-	-
Adaptions	0	-	-	-	0	-	-	-
Asset management	0	-	-	-	0	-	-	-
Planned Maintenance	10	0	0	0	1	100	-	100
Repairs	31	68	61	68	4	60	-	60
Repairs & retrofit	1	0	0	0	0	-	-	-
Development & carbon zero	1	100	100	100	0	-	-	-
New Build	1	0	0	0	0	-	-	-
Retrofit	1	0	0	0	0	-	-	-
Neighbourhoods	8	78	88	88	0	-	-	-
Housing Options	0	80	0	-	0	-	-	-
Neighbourhoods & Options	0	-	-	-	0	-	-	-
Neighbourhoods & Customer Services	1	0	0	100	0	-	-	-
Neighbourhoods & ASB	0	-	-	-	1	0	-	0
Resident Engagement	0	-	-	-	0	-	-	-
Systems	0	-	-	-	0	-	-	-

QUARTER 2	Stage 1	% within target	Without extension	Within target or revised target	Stage 2	% within HO target	Without extension	Within target or revised target
Team								
Development & Neighbourhoods	1	100	100	-				
Income & Benefits	1	100	100	-	0	-	-	-
Environmental & Housing options	1	0	0	0	0	-	-	-
Options & Customer Services	1	TBC	TBC	TBC	0	-	-	-
Neighbourhoods & Repairs	0	-	-	-	1	100	100	0
Repairs	0	-	-	-	1	0	0	100
Repairs & Housing Options	0	-	-	-	1	0	0	100
Neighbourhoods & ASB	2	TBC	TBC	TBC	1	0	0	100
Repairs	32	63	59	63	11	36	55	82
New Build	0		-	-	1	100	100	100
Neighbourhoods	8	88	88	88	1	100	100	100
Housing Options	6	67	67	67	0	-	-	-
Income	1	100	100	100	0	-	-	-
Neighbourhoods & Options	1	0	0	0	1	100	0	0

2024/2025	Number	Complaints per 100 homes at stage 1	Number	Complaints per 1000 homes at stage 2	Number	% Stage 1 responded to in target	Number	% Stage 2 responded to in target
Year and Quarter								
2024/2025 Q1	50	12.88	6	1.55	33 out of 50	66	4 out of 6	80

Complaints made but not accepted

Sometimes a formal complaint is made that is not actually a complaint but is a request for a service. An example might be “my garden fence is broken”. Although this might be made to our complaints team, it is a request for a repair rather than an expression of dissatisfaction with a service, it would only be managed as a complaint if the fault had previously been reported and the Council had not responded, or the tenant was not satisfied with the response. There are other occasions where a complaint may be made but not accepted, these related to where there is a formal process in place for “right to review” or “appeal”. We will ensure these routes are pursued before a complaint is recorded.

Previously, we have not reported such cases, but will going forward, as this would give us an indication as to whether we are communicating effectively in terms of how to contact our services and what is/is not a complaint. These will be included in our 2024/2025 complaint performance and service improvement report.

HOUSING OMBUDSMAN - LEARNING FROM SPOTLIGHT REPORT

As part of our learning from complaints we look at a variety of services and attitudes and a “spotlight check” has been completed by the Housing Ombudsman on:

- Communication
- Consideration of vulnerabilities
- Record keeping
- Appointments
- Good practice

The Housing Ombudsman studied a number of complaints looking at these points making recommendations for:

- A board level review to ensure a “person centric” approach
- Implementation of a vulnerability strategy
- Staff training requirements such as Dementia Friends, and training on customer care, mental health, learning disabilities, and sight and hearing loss
- Carry out own “Resident of the Future” forecast for the next 10 years

The conclusion of the Housing Ombudsman's report was:

- *Police use THRIVE (threat, harm, risk, investigation, vulnerability, engagement) approach to vulnerability*
- *Identify an individual's vulnerability or vulnerabilities*
- *Understand how these vulnerabilities interact with the situation to create harm or risk of harm*
- *Assess the level of harm or risk of harm*
- *Take appropriate and proportionate action if required, involving partners where they have relevant skills or resources*

This was considered when we reviewed our Customer Feedback policy. Training to staff has been provided across several themes, including those suggested and a programme of ongoing training is in place to ensure the best level of service possible to our tenants.

There has also been a Housing Ombudsman spotlight report in respect of damp and mould. Its recommendations included:

- Zero tolerance approach
- Data-driven, risk-based approach
- Ensure residents do not receive a poorer standard of service or lower living conditions if living in a property marked for regeneration

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- Avoid blaming residents
 - Timely and urgent response
 - Review missed appointments re damp and mould
 - Ensure staff can identify and report early signs of damp/mould
 - Continue with complaints procedures when pre-action protocol commenced until legal proceedings issued to maximise opportunities to resolve outside of court
 - Analyse complaints data effectively to identify themes, trends and learning opportunities

The above was mainly covered within our Damp and Mould Policy that was approved by the Councils Executive Board in March 2023, and can be accessed using the following link [NKDC Website - Executive Board 30/03/2023](#) but is currently subject to review in light of the recent fundings due for consideration March 2025.

Respect and empathy

We are currently reviewing our damp and mould policy and developing customer facing documents. Previously reports concerning damp and mould were made directly to our repair's contractor, we have changed this to ensure greater oversight and a timely response, and now take reports of damp and mould from tenants directly.

Governance and Scrutiny

We have several methods of ensuring full oversight and scrutiny by tenant representatives, Officers and through to Executive Board who regularly review service delivery in respect performance and complaints. We report to our Executive Board on a number of performance matters, including complaints, and the schedule of meetings can be found on our website <https://democracy.n-kesteven.gov.uk/ieDocHome.aspx?bcr=1> Complaints were previously reported corporately, and we now report to our Tenant Liaison Panel all Housing and Property services complaint related information on a quarterly basis. This has been further strengthened – see section above [Action Taken to Date](#), including our evolving HPS Assurance Report

Our Tenant Representatives have taken part in working groups to feedback on how we are performing and inform on possible changes to service delivery policy and process. The Tenant Panel formal meetings are planned in advance, include an agenda and minutes and are used to discuss a variety of matters including policies, aspirations and future plans.

The Housing Ombudsman's Annual Report

If you would like to read the latest Housing Ombudsman annual report, you can access it here https://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/E03040626-HC-627-Housing-Ombudsman-ARA-22-23_Accessible.pdf

OUR REPORTING TIMELINE

Housing Ombudsman Service Complaint Handling Code Self Assessment 2023 was considered at our Tenants Liaison Panel on 30/01/2024, at our Corporate Management Team 28/02/2024 and at our Executive Board on 28/03/2024.

This year we have made changes to our reporting and the Tenants Liaison Panel will have our complaints information on 30/10/2024 and 15/01/2025, quarterly thereafter. Our CMT will be advised of complaints performance on 05/11/2024. The Council's Executive Board will be advised of complaints reporting in May 2025, as part of our evolving Assurance Report.

Our 2024/2025 Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report will be published no later than 30/06/2025, following consideration and appropriate approval by our Tenant Liaison Panel and the Council's Executive Board.

OUR COMMITMENT

We know that we still have work to do to ensure that we provide the best possible service to our tenants, and we are fully compliant with the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code. We trust that this summary report provides you with relevant information and demonstrates our commitment to continuous learning and improvement.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

If you would like more information on our management and performance of complaints, please do contact us.

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