



COMPLAINTS PERFORMANCE AND SERVICE IMPROVEMENTS

Housing and Neighbourhoods Service

Planning, Performance and Involvement Team

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Introduction

We aim to deliver high quality services, but we know that sometimes things go wrong and that you might not always be satisfied with our services. If that happens, you can make a complaint and we will deal with that complaint as fairly, effectively and promptly as we can.

When dealing with housing-related complaints from our tenants or leaseholders, we follow the Housing Ombudsman's Complaints Handling Code. This sets out how landlords are expected to deal with and learn from complaints, and it is now a statutory requirement for all social housing landlords to abide by the Code.

You can find out more about the Housing Ombudsman and the Code here: [Home | Housing Ombudsman Service \(housing-ombudsman.org.uk\)](https://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk)

Each year, we assess ourselves against the Code to ensure that we are compliant, and that we are handling complaints as fairly and as effectively as we can. You can see a copy of our latest self-assessment here: [Complain about the Council Housing Service | Sheffield City Council](#) (It is available on this webpage as a downloadable document).

This report accompanies the self-assessment and covers three main topics:

- How well we deal with complaints
- Any issues the Housing Ombudsman has found in how we deal with complaints
- What service improvements we have made by learning from complaints

If you have any questions about this report, or any comments on how we deal with complaints, please contact us at GetInvolved@sheffield.gov.uk

What were the most common complaints last year?

Between 1st April 2023 and 31st March 2024, we received a total of **3671** complaints from tenants and leaseholders. This was a slight increase from the previous year's total of 3213.

The service areas which most frequently received complaints were the Repairs Service (especially about working at heights, painting, gas servicing and responsive repairs), Neighbourhood Teams, Asset Management and Income Management.

The most common reasons for complaints were delays in service, poor quality of service, staff-related and policy-related.

The Housing Ombudsman says that "Receiving a high volume of complaints is not necessarily indicative of a failing. Rather it could indicate the complaints process is accessible, the organisation is open and transparent, and our citizens feel they can complain and believe there is value in doing so".

We treat all complaints as an opportunity to learn from feedback, and to improve the services we deliver to our tenants and leaseholders.

How quickly do we deal with complaints?

In 2023/24 the Housing Ombudsman expected us to respond to complaints within 10 working days (this target has been slightly revised from 1st April 2024). If a customer isn't happy with our initial response to their complaint, they can ask for it to be reviewed by a more senior manager. We have 20 working days to carry out the review and send a final response to the complaint.

Whilst we work hard to respond within these timescales, we don't always meet them. Between 1st April 2023 and 31st March 2024, we responded to **63% of complaints** within 10 working days. This is a slight improvement from 60% in the previous year but is still well below our target. Only **47% of complaint reviews** were carried out and completed within the required 20 working days.

We know that this is something we need to improve, and we have been working hard to improve our performance. Managers hold fortnightly meetings with their Heads of Service to discuss the complaints received by their teams, and to agree how they can be dealt with

most effectively. All staff involved in dealing with complaints are given training, and close monitoring is done of complaints handling in all of our service areas.

This work has started to have a positive impact. For the last 3 months of the year (January to March 2024), 66% of complaints were responded to within 10 days. And 55% of complaint reviews were completed within the 20-day target. There is still much improvement to be made, but it is encouraging that performance is getting better.

We will continue to focus on this, and in our annual complaints report in a year's time we are confident that we will be able to report further improved performance.

How satisfied are our tenants with how we have handled their complaints?

Every month, an external partner organisation called Viewpoint undertake telephone satisfaction surveys with a random sample of our tenants. **350 surveys** are done every month and as part of this, tenants are asked if they have made a complaint to us in the last 12 months. The percentage of those who told us they had raised a complaint is **26%**.

Those that say they have made a complaint are then asked how satisfied they are with how we handled that complaint: they are also invited to provide further comments if they respond that they are dissatisfied or very dissatisfied.

Between 1st April 2023 and 31st March 2024, only **25%** of respondents said they were satisfied with our complaint handling. This is really disappointing for us, and we are working hard to understand the reasons for this so that we can improve.

We have contacted several tenants to ask for more detail about why they were not happy with how we handled their complaint, and the vast majority said that it was because no one kept them informed about what was happening with their complaint, or because they never received a reply to it. We are currently taking part in a benchmarking project with Housemark that will enable us to compare our performance with other similar landlords.

From looking in more detail at our complaints reports, we know that many tenants surveyed by Viewpoint who say they have made a complaint don't have a complaint recorded on our system. So, the satisfaction figures are also highlighting differences between what we record as a complaint on our system and what tenants feel is a complaint.

To help address this, we have strengthened our complaints process to reinforce to managers handling complaints that they must keep the tenant informed. We have also made changes

to the complaints system so that this can be more closely monitored, and issues picked up more quickly.

The other work that we are doing on resolving complaints more quickly (as discussed above) should help to increase satisfaction levels. We will also be working with our new Communications and Tenant Satisfaction tenant panel to understand better the reasons behind the low satisfaction scores, and to plan for how we can improve.

Are there any complaints which we have rejected?

Very occasionally, there may be a complaint made to us by a tenant which we are not able to deal with as a complaint or which falls outside the scope of the complaints policy. Examples include:

- First requests for a service (eg. first-time request for a repair)
- Issues which the Council is not responsible for (eg. buses running late)
- Where there is a formal appeals process to deal with the issue (eg. Housing Benefit claims)
- Situations where there are safeguarding issues (as there is a separate procedure which must be followed)
- Where we receive the same complaint from the same customer and have already fully investigated and responded to it

Between 1st April 2023 and 31st March 2024, we rejected just one complaint. This was due to there being a safeguarding issue and needing to deal with it through the separate safeguarding procedure.

Whenever we cannot accept a complaint we will always explain to the customer the reasons for this.

What does the Housing Ombudsman think of how we handle complaints?

If tenants are not happy with how we have handled their complaint, they can refer it to the Housing Ombudsman and ask for it to be reviewed by them. This can result in the Housing Ombudsman telling us that we have done something wrong in how we handled the tenant's

complaint or delivered a service, and giving us recommendations or instructions for how we should put things right. They may also review the case and decide that we dealt with the complaint satisfactorily and that there is no further action to be taken.

The Housing Ombudsman publishes annual performance reports about individual social landlords, and the latest reports can be viewed here: [Landlords Archive - Housing Ombudsman \(housing-ombudsman.org.uk\)](https://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/landlords-archive) To find their latest report about us, type “Sheffield City Council” into the ‘search by name’ box.

Between 1st April 2023 and 31st March 2024, the Housing Ombudsman determined **7 complaints** from our tenants, and issued **17 individual complaints findings** in respect of these complaints (a single complaint can result in a number of findings). These 17 findings are split across the different categories as follows:

Category of finding	Explanation (as provided by the Housing Ombudsman)	No. of these in 23/24
No maladministration	No failure by the Landlord was found	2
Service failure	A minor failure by the Landlord in the service it provided, which was not appropriately acknowledged or fully put right	1
Maladministration	A failure which adversely affected the resident and which the Landlord has failed to acknowledge or has made no attempt to properly put things right	13
Severe maladministration	A failure which had a significant impact on the resident. The circumstances for maladministration apply and the redress needed to put things right is substantial	1

Please note: This information is subject to change following the Housing Ombudsman Report for 23/24. This is due to be issued by them in August 2024.

In the above 17 findings, the most common areas in which the Housing Ombudsman found failures were complaint handling, record keeping and repairs-related.

What have we learned from complaints?

It is very important that we directly address a tenant's complaint and put things right for that tenant. It is also very important that we learn from that complaint on a wider basis and where necessary make changes to how we do things. This means that our services for all tenants improve as a result of individual complaints made to us.

Once a complaint has been fully investigated and a response sent to the tenant, the investigating manager then considers what we can learn from that complaint. Service improvements are then agreed and put into practice based on what we have learned.

Senior managers also look at the learning from complaints to identify any common themes or issues, so that service-wide improvements at a higher level can be made where necessary.

Examples of improvements made as a direct result of complaints are:

Improved signage at housing reception points

Customers told us that they sometimes get confused at our reception points over which staff are Housing staff and which staff work for other services. They told us that this is an issue at sites where housing share a reception point with other services (eg. a library). We have responded to this feedback and signs are now on display at shared reception points indicating which service the different staff belong to, reducing the number of complaints and helping our customers.

Older Persons Sheltered Scheme Security:

We received a complaint about an issue with one of our Sheltered Housing sites being insecure due to a damaged door. This was dealt with swiftly, and the door repaired. But there was wider learning to be gained from this complaint, around the issue of tenants feeling / not feeling safe in their homes. As a result, additional security measures – including fob locks and additional CCTV Cameras – were introduced to offer peace of mind for tenants living in this Sheltered Scheme.

Targeted Area Litter Picks and Fly Tipping Clearance:

Our South East area team received multiple complaints of litter and fly tipping, and so we contacted local litter-picking groups and worked together to have a 'spring clean' action day. This was an opportunity to not just clean up the area, but also to implement wider learning around educating residents about proper rubbish disposal and engaging with the community. A diverse range of groups and individuals contributed, including Housing officers, Local Area Committee members, Waste Support officers, Parks staff, Amey (our

waste collection contractor), the local Tenant and Residents Association, the local 'Keep it Clean' group, and local Elected Members. In total 51 tonnes of waste were removed from the area in what was a truly community-wide effort.

Pet Licensing:

We received a number of complaints from Leaseholders about a condition in their lease which prevents them from keeping a pet. This was contrary to the rules for tenants living in flats, who are able to keep a pet under the terms of their tenancy. Therefore, working with our legal team and other partners, we have now adapted our process to allow leaseholders to apply for a pet licence. This allows them to keep a pet without breaking any conditions of their lease and brings leaseholders in line with tenants. We have since received a lot of positive feedback from Leaseholders who have welcomed this service improvement.

Further information

If you have any questions, comments or suggestions about anything in this report, or would like further information about how we handle complaints, please contact us at

GetInvolved@sheffield.gov.uk or by calling us on 0114 2930000.

You can also find more information about our complaints policy by visiting our website:

[Complain about the Council Housing Service | Sheffield City Council](#)

Thank you for taking the time to read our report.