

Brentwood Borough Council

Housing Formal Complaints

Report 2023/24

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Our Commitment to Openness and Transparency

As part of our dedication to openness and transparency, this report outlines how the Council has handled complaints from tenants regarding Housing Services for the year 2023/2024. It provides an overview of the number of complaints received and the actions taken to address them. The Council is committed to improving residents' experiences across all services by being transparent about how we handle both complaints and compliments.

Background

Complaint Process

The Council follows a two-stage handling process outlined in its Complaints Policy, which aligns with the Local Government Ombudsman and the Housing Ombudsman's joint Complaint Handling Code. This policy serves as a guide for individuals, explaining what they can expect when making a complaint.

Social Housing Regulator

The Social Housing Regulation Act 2023, introduced in April 2024, aims to balance the relationship between landlords and residents by adopting a proactive approach to regulating social housing landlords on consumer issues. This Act empowers the regulator with new enforcement powers to ensure landlords comply with consumer standards. The Social Housing Charter outlines what residents should expect from their landlords, including safety in their homes, transparency in landlord performance, and prompt handling of complaints. Below is a summary of how the Act aims to fulfil these commitments:

To know their landlord is performing

- The Act implements policy measures to ensure residents are informed about their landlord's performance and can hold them accountable.
- It introduces an access to information scheme, allowing tenants to obtain information about the management of their homes.
- Registered providers must collect and provide information related to the Regulator's Tenant Satisfaction Measures, enabling residents to assess their landlord's performance.
- Providers are required to inform the regulator of any significant issues related to non-compliance or potential non-compliance with consumer standards.

To have their complaints dealt with promptly

- The Act formalizes the relationship between the regulator and the housing ombudsman, enhancing cooperation and tenant protection.
- It empowers the Housing Ombudsman to issue a code of practice for handling complaints against social housing providers.
- The Ombudsman can issue guidance on good practices and require providers to annually self-assess their compliance with this guidance.
- The Act allows the regulator to inspect properties more quickly by reducing the notice period to 48 hours.

Housing Ombudsman Service – Complaint Handling Code

The Social Housing Regulation Act 2023 empowers the Housing Ombudsman to establish a code of practice for complaint procedures that social housing providers must follow. The Ombudsman is also tasked with monitoring compliance with this code.

A complaint is defined as: “An expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions, or lack of action by the landlord, its staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting a resident or group of residents.”

Residents do not need to use the word “complaint” for their concerns to be treated as such. Whenever a resident expresses dissatisfaction, the Council must offer them the option to file a complaint.

Self-Assessment

Landlords are required to complete the Housing Ombudsman’s self-assessment. The Council completed the self-assessment in August 2024 which can be viewed [here](#).

If the Housing Ombudsman finds any issues with a landlord’s adherence to the Code, they will work with the landlord to quickly restore compliance. Should there be continued non-compliance, the Ombudsman may use their broader authority, such as issuing Complaint Handling Failure Orders.

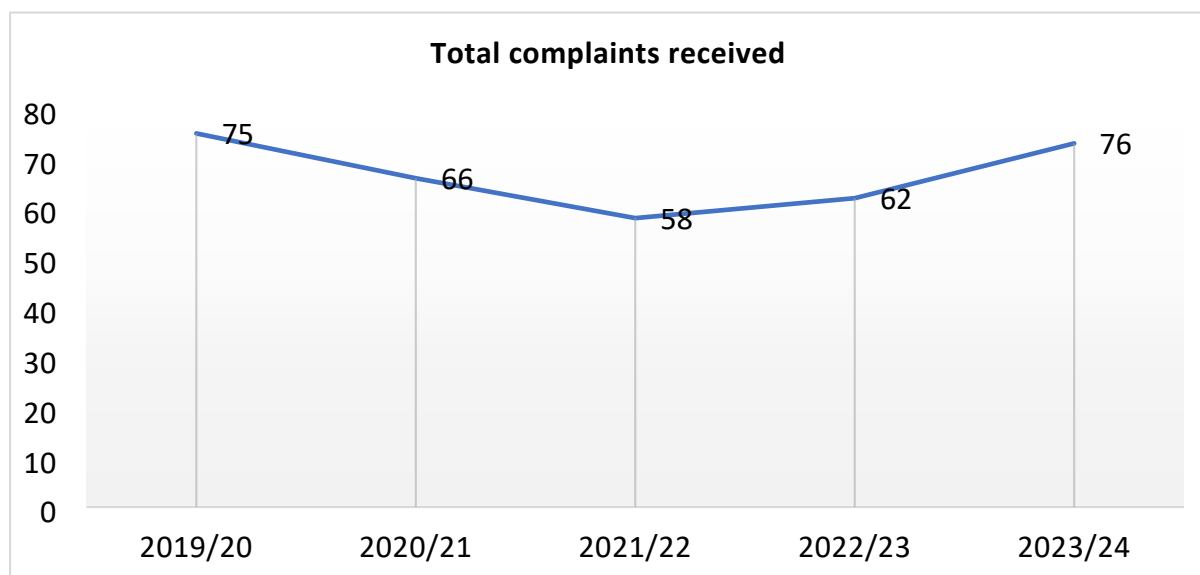
The following areas of noncompliance with the Code are listed below as of August 2024.

- Publishing the self-assessment along with the annual complaint performance and service improvement report.
- Publishing the governing body’s response to the report.

The Council must publish the self-assessment along with the annual complaint performance and service improvement report on our website. The governing body’s response to the report must be published alongside this. This report is to be brought before the Housing, Health and Community Committee on 25th November 2024.

Complaints overview

The below graph shows the total number of complaints received in the last 5 years.



Between 1st April 2023 and 30th March 2024, Housing services received 76 complaints in total, 28 (38%) were escalated to stage 2.

Complaints relative to the size of the landlord

76 stage 1 complaints/circa 3000 properties x 1000

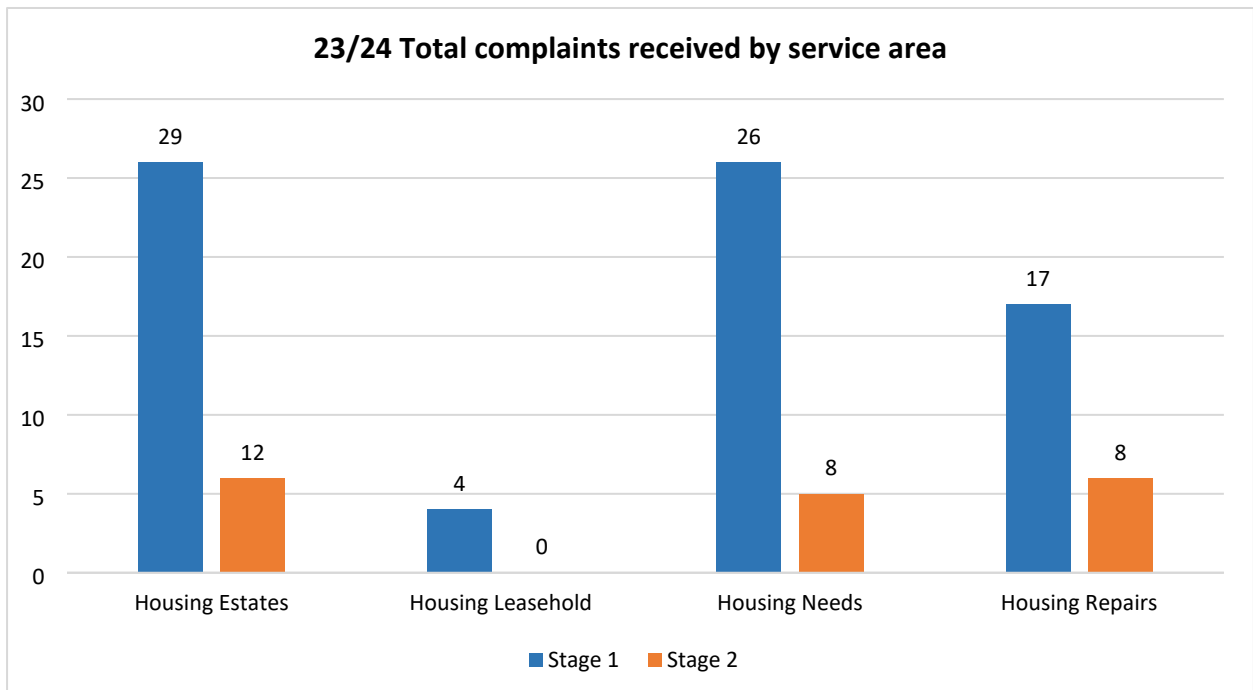
30.7 complaints per 1000 units

28 stage 2 complaints/3000 properties x 1000

11.3 stage 2 complaints per 1000 units

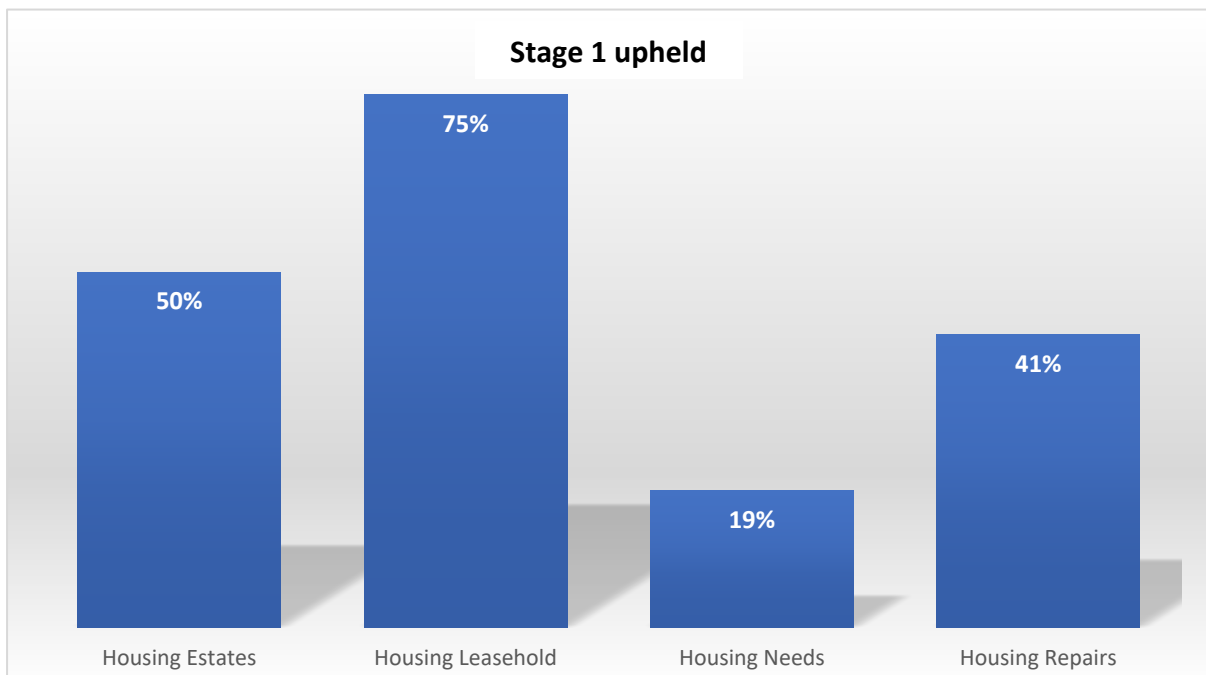
Complaints by service area

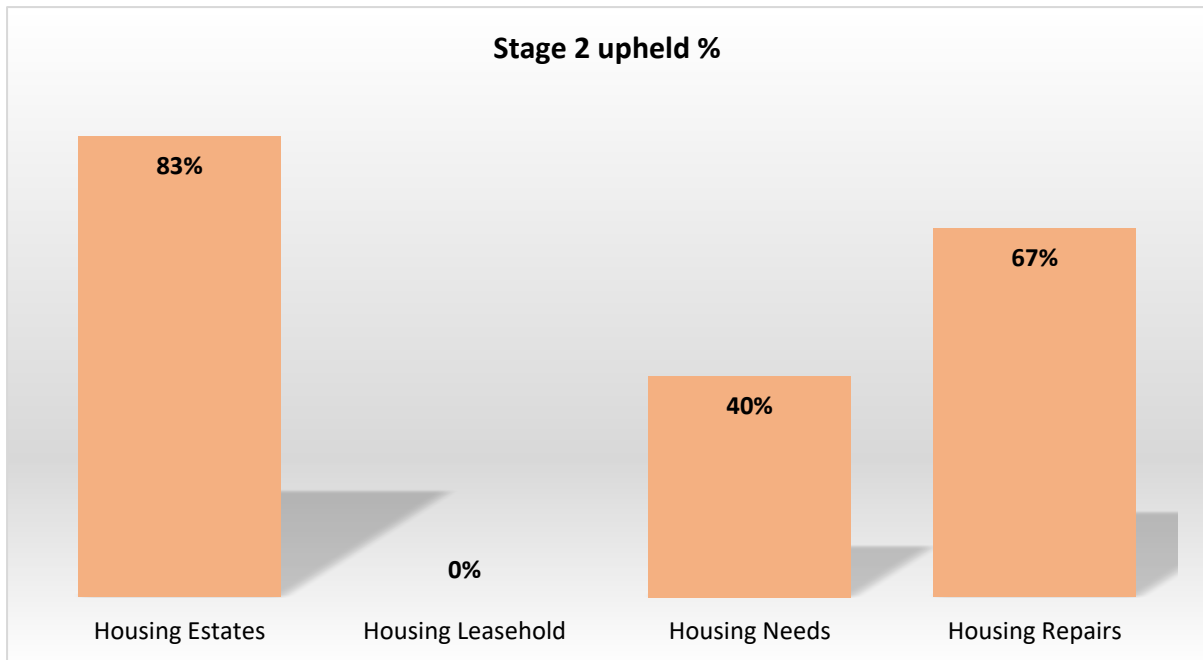
The below chart shows the total number of stage 1 and stage 2 complaints received by service area.



Upheld complaints

The below charts show the percentage of stage 1 and stage 2 complaints upheld.

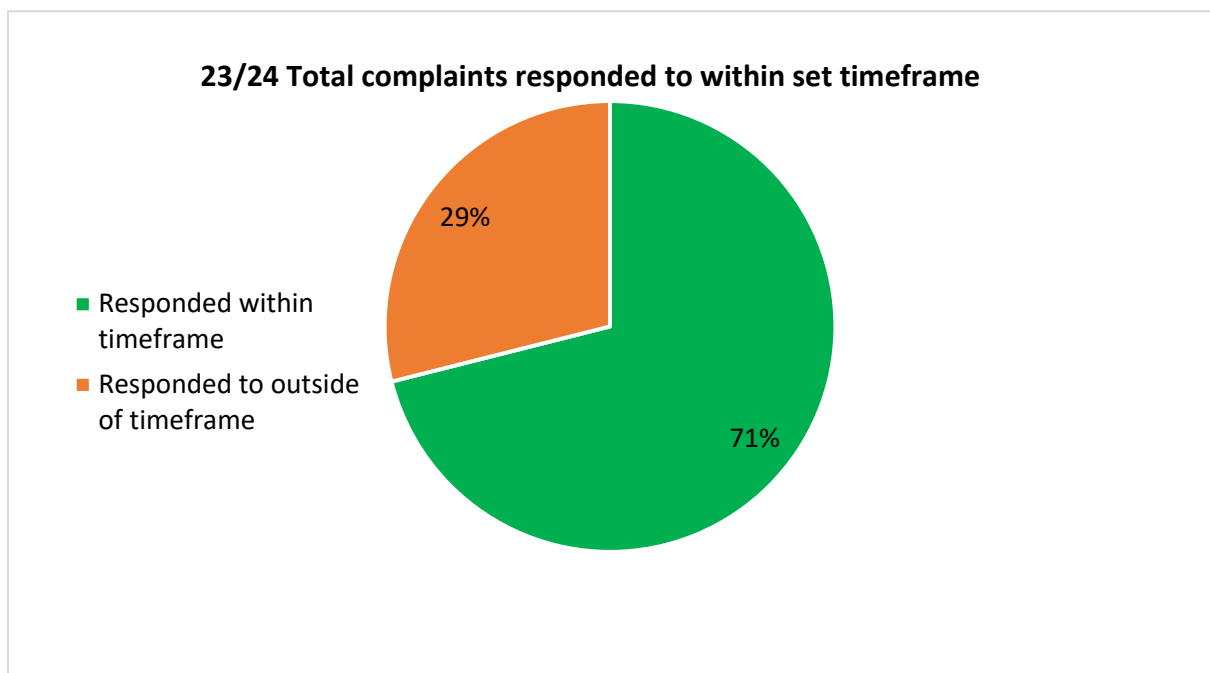




Timely responses

The Council are committed to providing timely responses to complainants in line with the policy and timeframes set out in the Ombudsman’s guidance. Stage 1 complaints are to be responded to within 10 working days and stage 2 complaints are to be responded to within 15 working days. 100% of complaints were acknowledged within 5 working days.

This chart below shows the percentage of complaints responded to within the set timeframes. Improvements were noted in response times in quarter 3 and 4.



Learning from Complaints

We welcome and recognise the importance of complaints and all customer feedback. We will continue to monitor lessons learned from complaints and take appropriate actions to prevent similar issues occurring in the future.

When a fault is identified, we consider remedies such as apologies, corrective actions, service improvements, and financial redress.

Complaints are reviewed by the Director of Housing and relevant Corporate Managers each quarter. These are then reviewed by a Performance, Complaints & FOI member working party before being brought before the Scrutiny, Performance and Standards Committee.

23/24 Upheld complaints

Most complaints upheld were due to delays or failure in communication. This table shows a summary of upheld complaints and the action taken.

Upheld complaints	Actions/service improvements
Delays in communication Handling of communication	Review of communication processes with officers Training with officers Review of engagement with tenants
Rent payment lost	Issue rectified by Finance team
Error in process to recategorize property after wet room installation	Implementation of downsizing policy
Incorrect reason for unsuitability in letter	Review of complaint handling

Local Government Ombudsman & Housing Ombudsman Complaints

The Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) deals with council housing services other than social housing. This includes homelessness, housing allocations, housing benefit and improvement services.

The Housing Ombudsman (HO) addresses complaints concerning registered social housing providers including councils' role as social landlords.

The Council recorded 2 cases, whereby investigations were undertaken by the LGO and HO between 1st April 2024 and 30th March 2024.

Local Government Ombudsman Case 1

Complaint related to how the Council dealt with housing and homelessness application. Fault was found regarding the Council's failure to make inquiries and decide what, if any, homelessness duty was owed. The Council were also found at fault for delay accepting a duty to a review of its decisions that there was no eligibility to join the housing register. The

Council were ordered to apologise to the resident and pay £750 compensation in recognition of the avoidable uncertainty, distress and missed review rights. The Council were ordered to make service improvements.

Housing Ombudsman Case 2

Complaint relating to the landlords handling of allegations of anti-social behaviour. Maladministration was found regarding the landlords handling of the resident's reports of harassment by his neighbours and the landlords' staff. There was service failure by the landlord in the way it handled the associated complaint. The Council were ordered to pay the resident £250 compensation for its failings in its handling of the reports of harassment by his neighbours and the landlord's staff and £100 in compensation for its failings in its handling of the associated complaint. The Council were also ordered to carry out staff training to ensure that when it does not have enough information about an issue raised as part of a complaint, that it contacts residents to seek clarification.

Improvement Plan

Priority	Actions	Target date	Completed date
Process changes to homelessness service	Changes implemented and new template letters provided as per LGO recommendation	Apr 24	April 24
Officer training	Training relating to anti-social behaviour cases as per HO recommendation	Aug 23	Aug 23
	Housing/Customer Services training to review customer journey/ communication updates/recognising service request escalation to complaint	Sept 24	Sept 24/ ongoing
	Complaints handling training via LGO including suitable remedies	Sept 24	Sept 24
	Internal complaints procedure training	Dec 24	
	Dementia, mental health and vulnerabilities training	Mar 25	
Planned works resource	Recruitment of a Resident Liaison Officer	Aug 23	Aug 23

Improving complaints data by adding additional measures	Overtuned complaints at stage 2 to review handling of stage 1 complaints Complaints by category to provide trends on common complaints	April 24 Apr 24	April 24 Apr 24
Internal performance/governance reporting	Introduction of Corporate Governance Framework including relevant boards to drive forward delivery	Jan 24	
Complaints customer satisfaction survey	Survey added to final responses for customer feedback on the complaints process	Oct 24	Oct 24
MRI system upgrade	Development of tenant self-service portal	Sept	Mar 25
Timely responses	Reduce time taken to respond to complaint via complaint monitoring Implementation of new customer service standards via our Customer Promise	Ongoing Jan 25	Ongoing