



North Yorkshire Council Landlord Services Annual Complaints Handling and Service Improvement Report 2025/26

including Self-Assessment of Compliance with the
Complaint Handling Code

Statement from the Governing Body.

This report outlines our performance in the year April 2025 to March 2026 and self-assessment against the Housing Ombudsman Code. I, as the Member responsible for complaints, and the Tenant Voice Forum have ensured the self-assessment gives a true reflection of our complaint handling, the improvements we've made, and where we'll focus future improvement.

We welcome the progress made in strengthening complaints handling across Landlord Services during 2025/26 and recognise the critical role that effective complaint management plays in delivering a high-quality, accountable, and tenant-focused housing service.

We note the significant steps taken to align our processes with the statutory Housing Ombudsman Complaints Handling Code, including the reaffirmation of a clear two-stage process. We are encouraged that complaints performance and compliance are now subject to increased transparency and scrutiny by both elected members and tenants, reflecting our commitment to openness and accountability.

We are particularly supportive of the strengthened governance arrangements established over the past year. Regular reporting to scrutiny committees and tenant forums has ensured that complaints are no longer viewed in isolation, but as a vital source of insight to drive service improvement. We endorse the continued development of operational reporting and Complaints Clinics to ensure learning is embedded and outcomes are effectively tracked.

We also recognise the improvements made to systems and data. The implementation of a new complaints handling system represents a positive step towards achieving more accurate recording, better analysis, and stronger oversight of complaint trends and outcomes.

We are also reassured by the work undertaken to improve accessibility and ensure that complaints processes are clear and easy to navigate. Providing multiple reporting routes and clear information for tenants is essential to ensuring all residents can raise concerns with confidence. Further work to improve triage and promote the tenant complaints guide is supported.

Looking ahead, we fully endorse the planned actions for 2026/27. We expect to see continued strengthening of policy compliance, deeper insight from data, and a sustained focus on learning and service improvement. In particular, we emphasise the importance of evidencing how complaints lead to tangible changes and ensuring corrective actions are tracked.

Overall, we recognise that while progress has been made, continued improvement is essential. We remain committed to supporting the service in delivering a complaints handling function that is transparent, responsive, and centred on the needs of tenants, as part of our wider ambition to be a modern, accountable, and high-performing social landlord.

Cllr Myers – Member Responsible for Landlord Services Complaints

Executive Summary

During 2025/26, North Yorkshire Council has made meaningful progress in strengthening its approach to complaints handling within Landlord Services, recognising it as a key driver of service improvement and tenant satisfaction. This work has been undertaken in the context of increased regulatory expectations following the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 and the statutory Housing Ombudsman Complaints Handling Code.

Significant improvements have been achieved across six core areas. A clear two-stage complaints process has been reinforced, supported by defined response targets and improved alignment with the Housing Ombudsman Code. Governance and oversight arrangements have been strengthened, with regular reporting to elected members and tenant groups, ensuring greater transparency and accountability.

Investment in a new complaint handling system will enhance the quality and consistency of data, enabling better identification of service issues and supporting a more evidence-based approach to improvement. At the same time, there has been a notable cultural shift, with complaints increasingly viewed as an opportunity for learning rather than a measure of failure.

Accessibility has also improved, with clearer routes for tenants to raise complaints and better communication about the process. These changes are aligned with wider housing service reforms, ensuring complaints handling is fully integrated into broader organisational improvement efforts and a more tenant-centred approach.

While good progress has been made, the Council acknowledges that further improvement is required. Planned actions for 2026/27 focus on strengthening policy compliance, enhancing reporting and operational oversight, improving data insight, embedding learning, and refining the customer journey. This includes better tracking of corrective actions and continued development of a proactive, transparent complaints culture.

Overall, the direction of travel is positive, with clear evidence of increased maturity in complaints handling. Continued focus and delivery against planned actions will be essential to ensure sustained improvement and to fully realise the ambition of being a responsive, accountable, and tenant-focused social landlord.

Key Statistics:

- Total complaints received: 474
- Stage 1 complaints: 439
- Stage 2 complaints: 35
- Stage 1 Complaints upheld (partially or fully): 287

Overall, complaints have provided valuable insight into service performance, particularly in areas such as repairs and communication. Improvements have been implemented to address recurring issues and strengthen customer experience.

Introduction

This report and self-assessment cover North Yorkshire Council compliance with the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code, and our complaints handling performance from April 2025 to March 2026.

The report is limited to complaints received to our Landlord Services teams, responsible for management of social housing tenancies, shared ownership and leaseholder agreements, and the maintenance of approximately 8500 homes.

Improving our complaints handling

Improving our complaints handling processes is critical to our success as a social landlord.

Throughout 2025/26 we have made significant improvements to our complaint handling and, whilst we acknowledge that there is still much we can do to improve, we are aware of the steps needed and have already begun to improve our compliance in the following areas:

1. Stronger alignment with the Housing Ombudsman Complaints Handling Code

North Yorkshire Council reaffirmed and embedded a two-stage complaints process that aligns with the statutory Housing Ombudsman Complaints Handling Code, including a commitment to achieve the following complaints handling targets:

- Acknowledgement within 5 working days
- Stage 1 responses within 10 working days
- Stage 2 responses within 20 working days

Complaint handling performance and compliance are now explicitly reported and scrutinised by elected members and tenants, reflecting the statutory status of the Code under the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023.

Action 1: In 2026/27 the Landlord Services Complaints Policy will be reviewed again to ensure continued compliance with the Housing Ombudsman's code and best practice.

2. Improved governance, oversight, and scrutiny

Complaint handling is recognised as a core component of service improvement rather than a standalone process.

Quarterly performance updates on complaint volumes, themes, and response times were reported to the Housing and Leisure Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Tenant Voice Forum during 2025/26.

Action 2: In 2026/27 complaint handling reporting will be further embedded through weekly and monthly reporting at an operational level, monthly Complaints Clinics will also continue to draw out learning from complaints and ensure outcomes are being tracked.

3. Better recording, transparency, and use of data

The Council implemented a new complaints handling system to improve the accuracy and consistency of complaints data recording and outcome tracking, reflecting regulatory expectations that complaint data should inform service improvement.

Complaints data is increasingly used to identify service weaknesses (for example repairs, damp and mould, and communication issues) and to provide improvement actions.

Action 3: In 2026/27 development of the new complaint handling system will lead to easier reporting and analysis of complaint data, allowing further insight on systemic service failures and opportunities for improvement, as well as complaint outcomes and tracking remedial actions.

4. Cultural shift towards learning from complaints

2025/26 saw a stronger emphasis on developing a positive complaint-handling culture, encouraging tenants to raise concerns and reinforcing that complaints are a tool for learning and improvement.

Action 4: in 2026/27 learning from complaints will be further promoted via weekly complaints updates, staff newsletter and quarterly reporting

5. Clearer customer routes and accessibility

Housing complaint reporting continued to be accessible online, by phone, and in writing, with information provided to tenants about what to expect at each stage of the process.

A new complaint handling system was introduced, ensuring all complaints are captured and handled appropriately. The online reporting form was also reviewed.

Action 5: further process review and improvement will take place to ensure that complaints are properly triaged and land with Landlord Services as soon as possible and a tenant guide to complaints will be promoted further.

6. Alignment with wider housing improvement work

Improvements to complaint handling in 2025/26 were linked to broader housing service reforms, including strengthened governance and service redesign following regulatory scrutiny. Additional resource has been dedicated to complaint handling and an improved, tenant-centred approach is being adopted.

Complaint handling is explicitly positioned as part of becoming a more transparent, accountable, and tenant-focused social landlord, rather than a reactive function.

Overall, in 2025/26, North Yorkshire Council moved towards a more transparent, and learning focused approach to housing complaints, improved tenant and member oversight, and stronger use of complaints data to drive service improvement.

Moving forward, we have plans to improve our complaint handling further, capturing and reporting on corrective actions and learning from complaints, holding regular complaints clinics to tackle systemic and complex issues and areas of complaint and, improving our customer journey further, providing easier access to our complaints process and a more tenant centred approach in our response to complaints.

A summary of complaints including the numbers of complaints received and resolved, and the response times

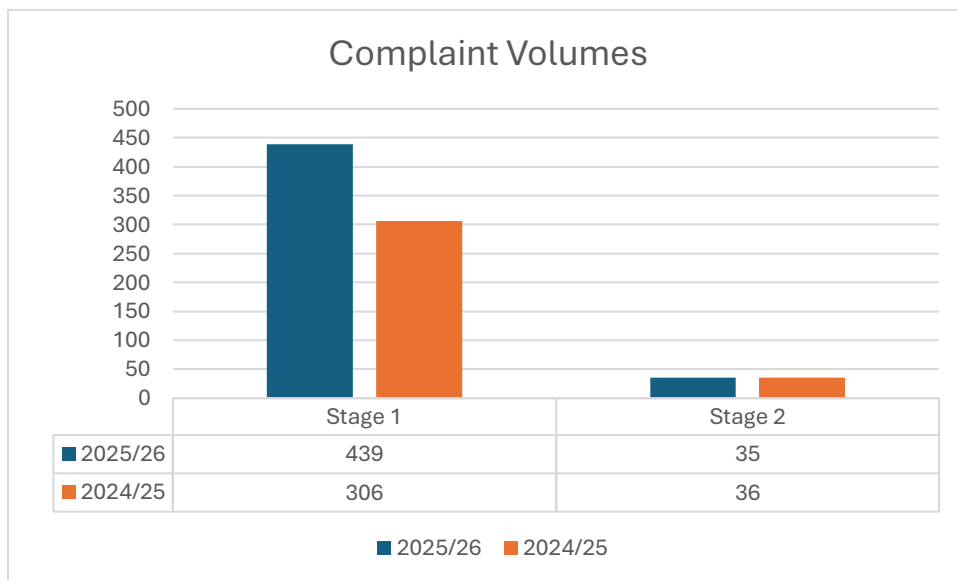
Volumes

During 2025/26 Landlord Services received 474 complaints, this is a 39% increase on complaints received in 2024/25 and represents an average of 39 complaints received per month.

Stage 1 complaints have increased sharply from 306 to 439 – an increase of 43%. This is the main driver of the overall rise.

Stage 2 complaint volumes remained stable at 35 in total.

Volume distribution remains consistent: Stage 1 complaints are still the vast majority in both years, with only a small proportion progressing to Stage 2. The low proportion of complaints progressing to Stage 2 signifies effective resolution at Stage 1, or issues with the escalation process.



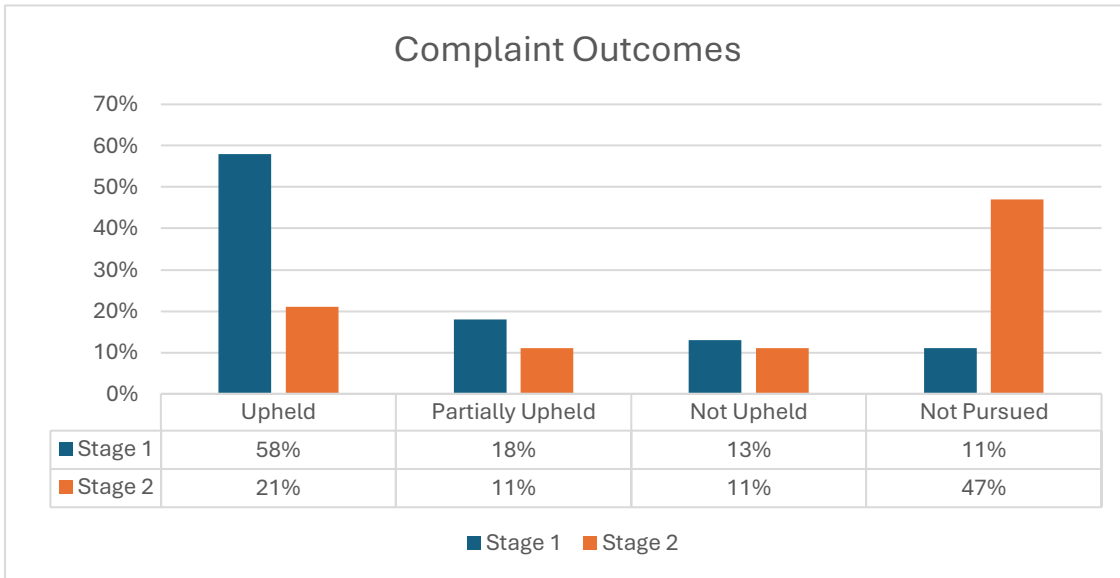
There is a clear upward trend in complaint volumes, especially at Stage 1, suggesting:

- Increased demand or reporting of complaints, and/or
- Potential decline in service performance

An increase in complaint numbers is not necessarily a negative outcome, it demonstrates an accessible complaints process, that tenants feel able to complain and that they are engaged with North Yorkshire Council as their landlord.

Outcomes

Throughout 2025/26 there has been a clear shift in complaint outcomes between Stage 1 and Stage 2. At Stage 1, most complaints were upheld (58%), indicating strong early resolution. However, at Stage 2, upheld outcomes drop significantly to 21%, while “Not Pursued” cases rise sharply to 47%.

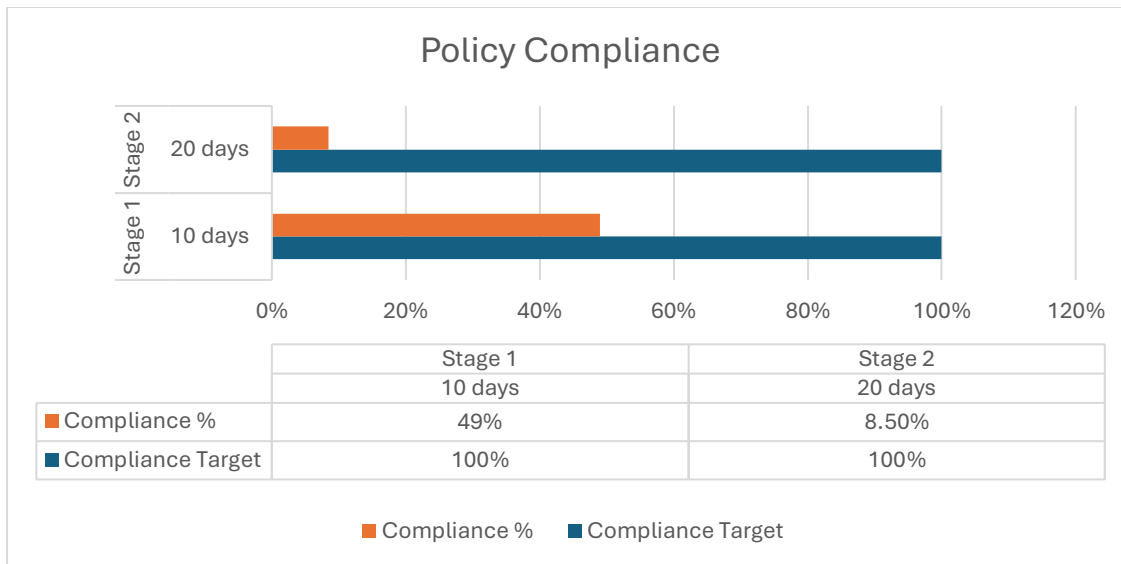


This suggests that fewer complaints were successfully upheld at later stages, with many cases not progressing or being withdrawn. Other categories show only minor variation, with “Not Upheld” remaining broadly stable.

Overall, the data indicates that resolution is front loaded at Stage 1, while Stage 2 experiences higher attrition and fewer positive outcomes, highlighting a need to review escalation pathways and understand why cases are not pursued further. Work has commenced to address this; the Housing Complaints Policy was reviewed in line with recommendations from the Housing Ombudsman and a programme of work has commenced to review complaints which may have been handled incorrectly.

Timeliness

During 2025/26 compliance with policy regarding timescales varied month on month and has shown some intermittent signs of improvement. However, with the review of complaint handling mentioned above, we have had to take a conservative approach to reporting and where any complaint has been closed as not pursued, this has been reported as non-compliant, leading to a dip in year-end performance figures. While performance for the year was below expected standards, the data provides clear insight into where improvements are required, offering a strong foundation for targeted recovery and service enhancement.



Key issues affecting timeliness

Through root cause analysis of non-compliance throughout the year, some consistent themes have arisen:

- High workloads in repairs and housing management teams have meant operational managers having to balance complaint handling with other service needs.
- Complexity of complaints requiring multi-service responses has, in some cases, led to a lack of ownership of complaints and difficulty in assigning complaints to the right officer first time.
- Resource pressures and organisational change had led to the Community Development Complaints Team being under resourced to deal with the increasing number of complaints for Landlord Services.

In order to address these issues, we have trialled several different approaches to complaint management and introduced additional complaints resource, dedicated to Landlord Services. We have also:

- Introduced weekly meetings between the Complaints Officer and Housing Standards Managers to track progress on complaints.
- Strengthened oversight and performance monitoring, with weekly monitoring now in place, alongside monthly complaint clinics.
- Provided additional training and support for complaint handlers

Moving forward, the further implementation of our new complaint handling system will enhance the service, allowing proper workflows and assignation of complaints, tracking of complaint response timescales and remedial actions. With the right interventions, there is a strong opportunity to stabilise performance and improve overall customer experience in the short to medium term.

Complaint Themes

During 2025/26 monthly reports have been presented to the Extended Housing Management Team detailing complaint classifications. Throughout that time the most common areas for complaint and reasons have been:

Outstanding / Delayed Repairs

“outstanding repairs”

“delays with repairs”

“awaiting repairs”

“work still outstanding”

Poor Communication

“lack of communication”

“delays in communication”

“non response”

Contractor Issues

Missed

appointments Poor

workmanship

Threatening or inappropriate communication

General dissatisfaction with service

Sureserve specifically mentioned many times

Damp, Mould, and Water Ingress

Damp and mould

Ongoing unresolved moisture issues

Leaks (radiators, roofs, chimneys, wet rooms)

Heating / Boiler / Hot Water Failures

No heating or hot

Long repair times

water Boiler

Heating systems not working properly

breakdowns

Property Condition & Safety Concerns

Unsafe doors/windows

Falling radiators

Dangerous roofs

Asbestos reports

Fire safety concerns

General “unsafe property”
complaints

Poor Quality or Damage from Repairs

Damage caused during work

Repairs creating additional problems

Poor workmanship (plastering,
decoration, guttering, baths,)

Neighbour / Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) Issues

Noise complaints

Feeling unsupported in resolving

Disputes with
neighbours

ASB Requests to move property

Specific Structural / External Property Issues

Roofing, gutters, fences, drains

Often tied to delays and
unresolved repair requests

Windows and doors

replacements Garages and

communal areas

Analysis of the complaint classifications and reasons shows us that the complaints are heavily concentrated around service delivery failures, with three dominant drivers:

1. Repairs not completed or delayed
2. Poor communication
3. Contractor performance

These three combined underpin most of the dissatisfaction across all other categories and that focussed improvement to our repairs service, our communication surrounding repairs and delays alongside strong performance management of contracts would significantly reduce complaint volumes.



Learning and Service Improvements

Complaints are a key driver for improvement within Landlord Services. Key actions taken this year as a result of complaints data include:

- Strengthened contractor performance monitoring
- Improved customer communication post stock condition surveys
- Increased use of digital communication channels, allowing customers to report repairs and damp and mould online.
- Review of the Compensation Policy, introducing a harmonised policy and suggested compensation amounts.
- Review of the Right to Buy Policy, harmonising the policy for North Yorkshire Council, incorporating clarification on key points which had been the subject of recent complaints.

Housing Ombudsman cases and reports on our complaint handling

During the 2025/26 reporting period:

- **17 cases were accepted by the Housing Ombudsman**
- **2 determinations were issued**
- **1 finding of maladministration with remedial actions**

Resident Feedback and Engagement

The Tenant Scrutiny Panel undertook a structured review of the end-to-end complaints process. The scope included:

- The current complaints procedure and policy framework
- Tenant experiences of submitting and progressing complaints
- Feedback from housing staff involved in complaint handling
- Performance data and satisfaction measures

The panel used a range of scrutiny methods, including evidence review, discussion, and analysis of feedback, to identify strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities for improvement.

The overarching aim was to identify practical improvements that would enhance tenant experience and confidence in how complaints are managed.

While the detailed findings are captured within the panel's full report, several overarching themes emerged:

Low Tenant Confidence

The consistently low satisfaction score demonstrated that tenants lacked confidence in the complaints process, suggesting concerns around fairness, responsiveness, or outcomes.

Inconsistency in Handling

Feedback indicated that complaints were not always handled consistently, with variability in response quality, communication, and timeliness.

Communication Gaps

Tenants reported that communication during the complaints process could be unclear or insufficient, particularly regarding:

- Progress updates
- Expected timescales
- Outcomes and reasoning

Learning and Feedback Loops

The review identified opportunities to strengthen how learning from complaints is captured and used to inform wider service improvements.

The review resulted in 22 recommendations aimed at strengthening the effectiveness, transparency, and consistency of the complaints process.

While the full detail sits within the panel's report, the recommendations collectively focus on:

- Improving communication and customer experience
- Strengthening consistency and accountability in complaint handling
- Enhancing staff guidance, training, and clarity of roles
- Ensuring learning from complaints is embedded into service improvement
- Increasing visibility and accessibility of the complaints process

These recommendations were designed to be practical and actionable, ensuring measurable improvements in tenant satisfaction over time.

A key strength of the approach is the continued involvement of tenants beyond the review itself. The Tenant Scrutiny Panel will:

- Monitor progress against the agreed action plan
- Provide ongoing challenge and assurance
- Help ensure that improvements translate into tangible benefits for tenants

This creates a continuous improvement cycle, where tenants remain actively involved in shaping service delivery.

Compliance with the Housing Ombudsman Complaints Handling Code

During the financial year 2025/26 the Housing Ombudsman conducted a review of North Yorkshire Council's Housing Complaints Policy and provided a number of recommendations for areas for review within the policy. North Yorkshire Council accepted those recommendations and made the necessary amendments to its Housing Complaints Policy.

A further self-assessment against the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code has been completed with the following findings.

Areas of full compliance:

- Two-stage complaints process
- Accessibility of complaints
- Escalation rights clearly defined

Areas for improvement:

- Further clarification in policy of exclusion where a complaint has already been subject to investigation, timescales for submitting escalation requests and complaints made about our contractors.
- Consistency in response times

- Recording of learning outcomes
- Recording of remedial actions completed

North Yorkshire Council is committed to developing on these areas identified for improvement.

Priorities for the Coming Year

Moving into 2026/27 we intend to build upon the improvements made to the Complaints function and use the knowledge gained through the self-assessment process to focus our efforts in five key areas:

1. Improving response times and consistency
2. Embedding a customer-first culture
3. Strengthening data and insight from complaints
4. Enhancing tenant engagement in service improvement
5. Continued alignment with Housing Ombudsman expectations

We will report progress on complaint handling compliance monthly to the Housing Management Team and via the Complaint Clinics. We will also formally report on Complaint Handling performance to elected members and involved tenants via the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Tenant Voice Panel.

Conclusion

This report demonstrates that, during 2025/26, North Yorkshire Council's Landlord Services made clear and measurable progress in strengthening its approach to complaint handling, with improvements in governance, transparency, accessibility, and alignment with the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code. Complaints are now more firmly embedded as a strategic tool for service improvement, rather than a reactive process, and there is growing evidence of a shift towards a more open, accountable, and learning-focused culture

However, the report also highlights that this progress has taken place alongside rising complaint volumes, inconsistent performance in terms of compliance with response timescales and ongoing challenges in key service areas such as repairs, communication, and contractor management. These issues continue to significantly shape tenant experience and remain the primary drivers of dissatisfaction.

Importantly, the increase in complaint numbers should be viewed in context. It reflects not only service pressures but also improved accessibility and greater tenant confidence in raising concerns. This provides the Council with richer and more meaningful insight into systemic issues, enabling targeted and evidence-based service improvements.

Looking ahead, the focus must shift from establishing frameworks and processes to consistently delivering high-quality outcomes. This will require:

- Improved compliance with response times and clearer ownership of complaints
- Stronger operational grip on high-volume service areas, particularly repairs
- Continued investment in data quality, analysis, and the tracking of corrective actions
- Embedding learning across teams so that complaints lead to measurable, sustained change
- Strengthening communication with tenants throughout the complaint journey to rebuild trust and confidence

The priorities identified for 2026/27 provide a clear and appropriate roadmap. Successful delivery against these priorities, alongside continued scrutiny from members and tenants, will be essential in demonstrating that learning from complaints is translating into tangible service improvements.

In conclusion, North Yorkshire Council's Landlord Services is moving in a positive direction, with increasing maturity in its complaint handling approach. While challenges remain, there is a strong foundation in place to deliver a more consistent, responsive, and tenant-centred service. Maintaining momentum, strengthening accountability, and evidencing the impact of improvements will be critical to achieving the Council's ambition of becoming a high-performing, transparent, and trusted social landlord.

Appendices:

A – DRAFT Self Assessment of Compliance with the Housing Ombudsman's complaint handling code