



North Yorkshire Council Tenant Scrutiny Panel – Complaints Report October 2025

Our Report

We chose complaints for this scrutiny as only 33% of tenants were satisfied with complaints handling in the Tenant Satisfaction Measures annual report 2024/25. The latest TSM survey results for quarter 2 of 2025/26 show that complaints remain the lowest scoring metric in the survey, at 37% with 54% dissatisfied.

We knew the Panel could add a tenant's perspective to the complaints process and with the wider complaints service.

Complaints is a subject which tenants feel strongly about, so if we can identify any strengths, highlight any improvements we can make together with NYC that should then benefit wider tenants and increase satisfaction.

Additionally, in light of the recent changes by government to regulate complaints by the Regulator of Social Housing and the Housing Ombudsman, the complaints service seemed the highest priority scrutiny area.

This report summarises our approach, what we found, our recommendations and what we would like to happen next to share this report with the Members Housing and Leisure Overview and Scrutiny Committee in December.

Our Scope

1. Background

1.1 NYC Scrutiny Panel decided to scrutinise the complaints journey and satisfaction for customers for the following reasons:

- In the recent Tenant Satisfaction Measures, Complaints had one of the lowest satisfaction outcomes.
- The panel acknowledges that the complaints process service is an integral service

for tenants and would like to know if there are any improvements/ recommendations that can be made.

- Look at the complaints process and see if they are still correct or if improvements can be made.
- To understand the customer experiences of the process.

1.2 This document sets out the proposed scope of the Customer Journey with complaints process.

1.3 This scope is to be agreed between the RSP and Service Improvement team.

2. Primary Objective

To improve the customer experience and therefore the level of customer satisfaction with the Complaints process.

3. Out of scope

The following areas are out of scope for this review:

- Recommendations that directly contradict the new Complaints Handling Code
- Service requests that aren't formal complaints
- Non housing related complaints
- Detail of individual complaints

4. Approach

The review will cover the following key elements:

- **Fact Finding:** reviewing service standards, policies, procedures and performance information, costs, quality, and customers' views relating to the service.
- **Challenge and Compare:** examining what other local authority and housing association do and try to identify good practice.
- **Recommendations:** analysing findings and making recommendations to NYC followed by asking officers to produce an action plan demonstrating how our recommendations will be addressed.
- **Monitor and evaluate:** once we have an action plan, the Panel will monitor progress and evaluate outcomes for customers.

5. The Review Stages

The stages of the review are set out below-

Stage 1: Planning and Preparation – May/June/July

- Document review exercise
- Development of an agreed scoping document between the scrutiny panel and the Engagement team.

Stage 2: Gathering the evidence and reality checks July/August

For this review the main scrutiny activities could include;

- Reviewing of documents and data
- Review of the policy and procedure
- Presentation & interview with the relevant Manager
- Interviews with relevant staff
- Benchmarking against similar sized LA's for fairness
- Personal experiences from panel on their journey when they made a complaint.

Stage 3: Review of evidence gathered - Sept

- Collation of all results and evidence gathered
- Draft report developed identifying positive practice and recommendations for the service

Stage 4: Final Report Drafted – October

- Final report drafted by the Panel
- Review of draft report with the relevant manager for comment and feedback
- Final report to the Members for comment and approval

6. The Key Questions for this review:

“Are we doing enough to engage with tenants on complaints? How could we do more?”

The Panel has considered the following areas to be important to tenants and have chosen to explore the following:

1. Is the Complaints process fit for purpose?

Questions to be explored:

- Does it meet the needs of NYC tenants?
- Are there missing parts that could enhance the service?
- Does it support customers in a way that most suits their needs?
- What are the outcomes for customers and how could they be improved?

Evidence gathering:

- ✓ Review of the current model
- ✓ Interviews with relevant officers

2. What could the NYC service offer look like?

Questions to be explored:

- Could there be a different service offer?
- Are customers aware of their rights when it comes to making a complaint?
- Is the process accessible for all NYC tenants?

Evidence gathering:

- ✓ Review of the current model and service offer
- ✓ Understanding who is using the current complaints process and who isn't.
- ✓ Interviews with staff
- ✓ Engagement with a wider group of customers to see if they are aware of how they can make a complaint?

3. What do tenants think of the service?

Questions to be explored:

- Do they know how to make a complaint?
- Are they happy with the process?
- Does the group make any recommendations in the complaints process?
- Does the complaints process look the same as other Councils?

Evidence gathering:

- ✓ Look at the new Complaints Handling Process
- ✓ Bench-mark against similar sized Local Authorities

The Panel decided that they wanted to review the following: -

- Complaints Policy
 - a. Does the policy meet the Housing Ombudsman's complaint handling code and The Regulator of Social Housing consumer standards requirements?
 - b. Does it clearly explain what is regarded as a complaint and how it will be dealt with?
 - c. Does the policy sufficiently ensure that no complaint is "ignored"?
 - d. Is there senior officer oversight/checking of responses?
 - e. Who investigates complaints and how?
 - f. How easy is the policy to access and understand?
 - g. Are there easy to understand guides/other documents on complaints?
 - h. Does the policy set out expectations?
 - i. How does the policy compare to other Housing providers?
- Look at best practice and visit others
- Review website content and clarity
- Communications
 - a. Tenants should have a speedy acknowledgement of the issue.
 - b. Ongoing communications updating the complainant throughout the investigation process.
 - c. Do tenants feel that Complaint handlers know and understand that building and gaining trust with the complainant is key to a good resolution?
 - d. Quality and clarity of complaint outcome letters clarifying closure and advising on next steps and any learning.
- Vulnerabilities – are individual needs considered and approached personalised e.g. languages, disabilities and vulnerabilities considered and addressed during communications between NYC and the complainant.

Our Methods

- We wanted to interview complainants that have had cause to complain over the past 12 months however this was not possible. The Panel would like to recommend that this is taken into account for the next scrutiny.
- Interview involved staff
- Review example response letters
- Review process of logging and monitoring complaints from point of raising through to close
- Mystery shop to test approach and establish if EDI / vulnerability is appropriately considered

Task distribution

The group agreed a range of actions and tasks and delegated to panel members in smaller task and finish groups given the size and scale of the scrutiny project. The groups are: -

1. Document review- Barbara, Teresa and Adrian
2. Best practice – Kim and Leonard
3. Website review – Andy and Leonard
4. Customer experience/mystery shopping – Kim and Leonard
5. Performance data review- Adrian and Andy

The table below sets out the individual tasks for each group: -

Task and Finish Group	Action	Tasks	Panel Members
Document Review	Check current Complaints policy / procedure is compliant against code and is easily understood from a tenant lens.	Read complaints handling code and policy and advise on compliance.	Teresa, Barbara and Adrian
	Review Annual Complaints Performance Reports	Read and ensure it meets the HOS requirements and is shared to wider tenants.	
	Review reports to Members Scrutiny Panel on complaints from last 2 meetings	Ensure actions are detailed and focus on learning,	
	Review newsletters content on complaints	Review content and ensure that sufficient transparency and honesty in terms of satisfaction, trends, learning	
Best Practice	Compare policy to best performing associations	Identify best performing associations Compare policies and advise as to possible areas of improvement	Kim and Leonard

	Compare complaints processes	Visit Bernaslai Homes with a set of questions	Kim
	Review HOS website and look at who is cited as best practice	Highlight strengths and how this could be applied at NYC	Kim and Leonard
Customer Experience	NYC website mystery shopping	Log a complaint via the website and advise on ease of use, accessibility issues and experience generally	Leonard and Kim
	Compare and contrast against complaints areas of other associations websites	Review a number of other housing association websites to identify areas of potential improvement in terms of customer interface, ease of use, accessibility, etc.	Leonard and Andy
Best Practice	Review RSH website and who has been awarded C1 in recent inspections.	What can be learnt in respect of complaints from C1 landlords.	
Performance Data	Performance Review	Review TSM's and wider performance statistics in respect of numbers of complaints acknowledged and responded to within agreed timescales.	Andy and Leonard
	Review Housemark year end results - TSM report 24/25	Identify where NYC sit in comparison and what needs to be improved.	
Customer Experience	Panel members to interview staff involved in	Draft set of questions and	Leonard and Kim

	receiving, processing, investigating and responding to complaints	circulate to team for agreement	
	Review sample of anonymised stage 1 and stage 2 responses from last 12 months.	Review through a tenant lens, are they clear, answer the complaint, provide sufficient redress, empathetic and learning.	

Meeting Schedules

The Panel were formed ahead of the April 2025 deadline and benefitted from some training from YDC on modern methods of scrutiny, the Regulatory environment and the role of the Panel. The Panel developed a Code of Conduct and terms of reference. The Panel also benefitted from an overview with Carl Doolan before we went live in April with our first project.

We agreed to continue to meet monthly (with the exception of August) to progress tasks and met in person alternating between Harrogate Civic Centre and Selby. The task and finish groups also met in between meetings and carried out visits in between the monthly meetings.

The Panel benefitted from some additional training from TPAS which will help the Panel's development ahead of the next project.

YDC support

The Panel have received independent support throughout the project from Yvonne Davies Consultancy.

NYC reached out to Yvonne Davies Consultancy (YDC) for some independent support for our Panel as there was a recognition that there was a need for some independent specialist support for this particular subject to ensure it was impartial.

YDC were chosen following their support provided to NYC with the development of the combined approach to tenant engagement, the development and implementation stage of the Tenant Engagement strategy and framework to ensure that the main tenant vehicle (scrutiny panel) was up and running ahead of the April 2025 deadline.

Findings

Desktop review including Website

1. Complaints Policy

The Panel found that the policy was of a good standard and mostly met the requirements of the Housing Ombudsman's (HOS) Complaint Handling Code,

however the Panel were made aware in October that there had been some correspondence from the HOS in relation to the policy.

There was a general view that whilst it was understood it needed to satisfy the HOS and the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH), it also needed to meet tenant's requirements in terms of straight forward language and could be supplemented with an easy to follow guide or a flow chart.

The website isn't easy to navigate however the Panel found that the policy is easily found on the NYC website if you use the search bar and it is very clear.

[Housing complaints policy | North Yorkshire Council](#)

The Panel recommend that a visual might be more effective to accompany the "wordy" documents for both staff and tenants so it's simple to follow at a glance. This would also meet the requirements of the Transparency, Influence and Accountability Consumer Standard in relation to making information about services accessible to tenants.

2. Self-Assessment against the HOS Complaints Handling Code and compliance with the Regulator of Social Housing's Consumer Standards on complaints.

It is acknowledged by the Scrutiny Panel that 2024/25 has been a year of significant change in Housing Services at NYC. Following a period of Local Government Reorganisation, service restructure and conducting a full gap analysis of compliance with the new Consumer Standards, there has been a focus into improving services to tenants.

The Panel knew that the self-assessment against the new consumer standards for social housing resulted in a self-referral being made to the Regulator for Social Housing (RSH) in May 2024 and a C3 Regulatory Judgement was subsequently issued. The judgement referred to "limited and inconsistent meaningful opportunities for tenants to influence and scrutinise services."

The Panel however were pleased to read that NYC responded with a housing improvement plan and this included the development of new systems and processes have been created to improve complaint handling, including additional resource, new and improved complaints classifications for data collection, a new training package for staff and an updated Complaints Policy was introduced as a result of the 2023/24 Self-Assessment of Compliance with the Complaint Handling Code.

The self-assessment finds that NYC are compliant with the code in most respects but there are areas in which they need to improve processes, in terms of complaints about contractors and in reporting, providing information on the complaints which NYC reject. This, alongside feedback from the TSMs shows that there are improvements which could be made to the complaint handling processes, reporting and communication. The screenshots below are the areas the Panel have found that need improvements.

5.5	Landlords are responsible for ensuring that any third parties handle complaints in line with the Code.	No	When completing the self-assessment against the Code, landlords are required to set out how complaints made about services provided by third parties are handled in line with the Code. This will usually, but not always, be evidenced through: - referring to the relevant section(s) within the complaint handling policy - setting out how these complaints are monitored and acted on - detailing any training, monitoring or assurance activities undertaken Landlords can refer to the Ombudsman's Spotlight report on managing agents for more information about best practice in third party arrangements.	As legacy contracts come to an end, new contracts will include a requirement that complaints be handled in alignment with this code.
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Section 8: Putting things right

Code provision	Code requirement	Comply	Evidence	Commentary / explanation
8.1	Landlords must produce an annual complaints performance and service improvement report for scrutiny and challenge, which must include: - the annual self-assessment against this Code to ensure their complaint handling policy remains in line with its requirements. - a qualitative and quantitative analysis of the landlord's complaint handling performance. This must also include a summary of the types of complaints the landlord has refused to accept; - any findings of non-compliance with this Code by the Ombudsman;	No	The annual report for 2024/25 was considered by the Housing and Leisure Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 11 th June 2025 and the Executive on 16 th June 2025. (add link)	A single reporting system which will enable more detailed reporting, including what types of complaints were refused, was due to be implemented in late 2024. There have been some delays in procuring and developing the system to meet the Council's requirements, so this single source of data remains unavailable. However, an interim solution is in place until the system is installed

	- the service improvements made as a result of the learning from complaints; - any annual report about the landlord's performance from the Ombudsman; and - any other relevant reports or publications produced by the Ombudsman in relation to the work of the landlord.			and so we will be able to report on this from April 2025 onwards.
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The document is available on the website but it wasn't that easy to find and the Panel are unclear as to how tenants who are unable to / or choose not to use the website can access this information.

The Panel have some concerns in relation to learning from complaints as the letters reviewed and in conversation with wider tenants, nothing seems to be changing and the learning isn't very specific nor is it very visible. NYC state that learning from complaints is something they are building into the complaint handling process – both in terms of individual complaints and wider data and trends from our complaint monitoring.

We welcomed the two lessons learnt workshops that have been conducted with housing managers, using redacted scenarios based upon actual complaints received. The main lessons learned centred around the root cause 'service and care' as this was found to make up 70% of complaints received in the year 24/25. An emerging theme was communication which the Panel are aware of.

The Panel were pleased to read in the annual report that NYC can see the benefit of taking the time to phone the complainant once a complaint had been received as the

response can be personalised. The Panel welcome this personal touch but understand it is expected practice and not written in to the policy. The Panel would also recommend a home visit if appropriate as nothing works better than face to face contact.

There was a discussion around the value the introduction of twice weekly meetings has had in improving communication and ownership across teams. The Panel would like to hear an update on this discussion and if it has been implemented as the engagement team had no knowledge of this.

The Scrutiny Panel felt that rather than the self-assessment just being presented for information /assurance, it would be beneficial in future self-assessments to work together with tenants, particularly those who had recent experience of using the complaints service.

The Panel welcomed the next steps which include plans for a new complaints handling system to better enable the Council to collect and report on better quality data. A significant enhancement will be the equalities monitoring functionality and ability to cross tabulate complaints and trends with protected characteristics. The Panel welcome this enhancement as they have real concerns in relation to vulnerable tenants.

3. Annual Complaints report 24/25

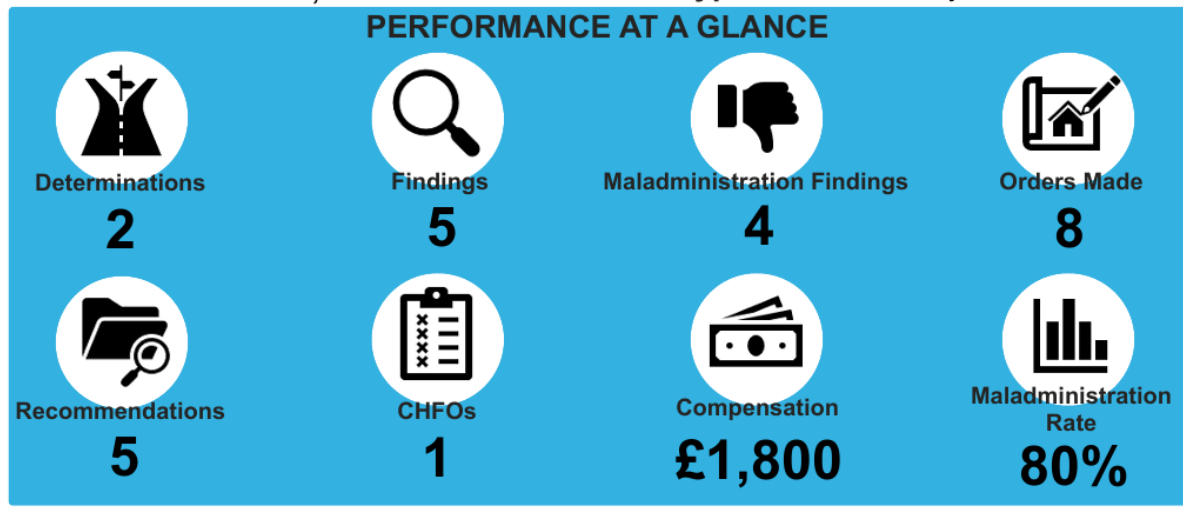
<https://edemocracy.northyorks.gov.uk/documents/s53623/Housing%20Annual%20Review%20-%20Exec%20Report%20170625.FINAL.pdf>

Each year the council produces an annual report reviewing the Housing Service, which includes information on complaints and the council's self-assessment against the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code. It also includes the HOS Annual landlord performance report 23/24. A screenshot below shows that for 23/24 NYC were 7% above the national maladministration rate but compared similarly to similar landlords by size and type.

Landlord: North Yorkshire Council

Landlord Homes: 8,850

Landlord Type: Local Authority / ALMO or TMO



HOS have said in their report on “Attitude, Respect and Rights” that effective communication is critical in maintaining positive relationships between landlord and tenants and unfortunately poor communication is often the root cause of complaints and further escalation of complaints. The HOS have demonstrated that 68% of cases reviewed over 15 months last year showed poor communication was an issue which tallies with the key issues identified above and means NYC need to have a clear plan to improve communication.

During the Panel’s research, we found the training the HOS offer via their centre for learning is really useful [Centre for Learning | Housing Ombudsman Service](#) and the Panel particularly liked this webinar link and they recommend all staff that respond to complaints watch.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hl7KYb2Hlk4&t=1722s>

The Website

Complaints performance sits under tenant involvement, link - [Tenant involvement | North Yorkshire Council](#) which isn’t the most obvious place. It is recommended that it’s easier to access for tenants.

There is information here on performance that is in addition to the TSM’s. The website states that the Regulator for Social Housing requires NYC to publicise additional management information including complaints. The Panel felt that the Council should want to share this information and should make it more visibly appealing using charts, graphs and some colour.

Measure	Outcomes 2023 to 2024	Outcomes 2024 to 2025
Number of stage one complaints received per 1,000 properties	12.03	36.5
Number of stage two complaints received per 1,000 properties	0.59	3.7
Proportion of stage one complaints responded to within the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code timescales	68.3%	69%
Proportion of stage two complaints responded to within the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code timescales	0%	48.4%

We have seen a number of organisations do this well but particularly liked Irwell Valley Homes who link the consumer standards and TSM's.

[Tenant satisfaction and performance against the standards - Irwell Valley Homes](#)

Muir Group also do this really well with a quarterly video:

<https://www.muir.org.uk/download/how-were-doing-julysep-2024pdf.pdf?ver=8084&doc=docm93ijm4n6017.pdf>

One of the task and finish groups took some time to research other housing providers' websites and looked at the following:

Poplar Harca share case studies on their complaints pages and these could be used at NYC. [Case Studies | Poplar HARCA](#) . Their satisfaction is really high too so we could learn from them.

Black Country Housing Group [Comments or Complaints | Black Country Housing Group](#)

The complaints pages are really clear and the first bullet point takes you to the "you said we did" where the actions Black Country have taken from the complaints they have received are detailed.

Yorkshire Housing – the Panel really liked how tenant friendly and local the language was on this website. [Customer Complaints and Feedback | Yorkshire Housing](#)

One of the Panel members, Kim went to talk to Complaints colleagues at Bernaslai Homes to learn about their complaint handling and performance. He asked the following questions and his key take aways are detailed below.

1. Do you have a dedicated officer and how many other staff do you have handling complaints.
2. Does your policy work well and do you monitor and make revisions to

It?

3. Do you have a tenant scrutiny panel and would they be willing to share their reports with us. Have they done a scrutiny project regarding your complaints procedure also did they have any input into your policy?

4. Do you monitor your customer experiences and TSMs.

5. What works well for you?

6. Do you ever get overwhelmed?

7. How would you resolve a complaint?

8. How do you deal with repeated complaints?

9. Do local councillors have any input into your complaints procedure.

10. Would you be willing to co-operate with us on future scrutiny projects and could we speak to your scrutiny panel and attend one of their meetings?

11. Would you be willing to share examples of stage 1 and 2 complaints with us and how they were resolved?

Key take aways

Whilst the Panel appreciate that Bernaslai is an Arm's Length Management Organisation and has access to different funding, the key difference was how well resourced the complaints team were.

They manage 18,000 homes (compared to 8,500 at NYC) on behalf of Barnsley Council and have a customer services manager who oversees a team who handle complaints. The team comprises of 4 assistants who answer phones and deal with incoming contact like emails, e-forms etc. They have 2 support officers who acknowledge all stage 1 complaints and respond to some stage 2 complaints. 4 officers who investigate stage 2 complaints. There are 10 posts in total. This signifies how seriously complaints are taken at Bernaslai and how it speaks volumes with only 1 dedicated complaints officer for NYC. The Panel are concerned that NYC can never really improve satisfaction with complaints and drive service improvements with such scarce resource.

The other key take away relates to learning from complaints. Each quarter, Bernaslai produce survey summaries on their website so they can close the loop and feed this back to tenants: -

www.berneslaiholmes.co.uk/about-us/how-were-performing/how-customers-think-were-performing/

The Panel would like to recommend that NYC learn from this best practice and also call all closed complaints to measure satisfaction with complaint handling and outcome.

Other documents reviewed: -

Reports to Housing and Leisure Scrutiny and Overview Committee

The Scrutiny Panel reviewed the last reports to the Committee and noted item 75 from September 2025 meeting where the Committee considered a report of the Corporate Director for Community Development providing an update on progress made toward compliance with the requirements of the Social Housing (Regulation Act), and oversight of the Councils Housing Improvement Strategy and Performance Framework.

The committee also had a presentation under item 76 on complaints performance From Victoria Young, Housing Service Improvement Manager and confirmed the position was improving.

Members were pleased to note the ongoing overall improvement in complaints handling since the revised policy had been introduced, and that the council's response and resolution of complaints was being done satisfactorily. They also noted that the majority of complaints were related to landlord services, and the improving picture in relation to the time taken to resolve repairs.

The position was noted.

The Panel are pleased to see that complaints are visible at the Committee and performance is shared. The Panel would want to see the delivery of the recommendations from this scrutiny report shared here in the forthcoming months evidencing that the work of the tenant scrutiny panel is taken seriously and valued.

Complaint response letter template

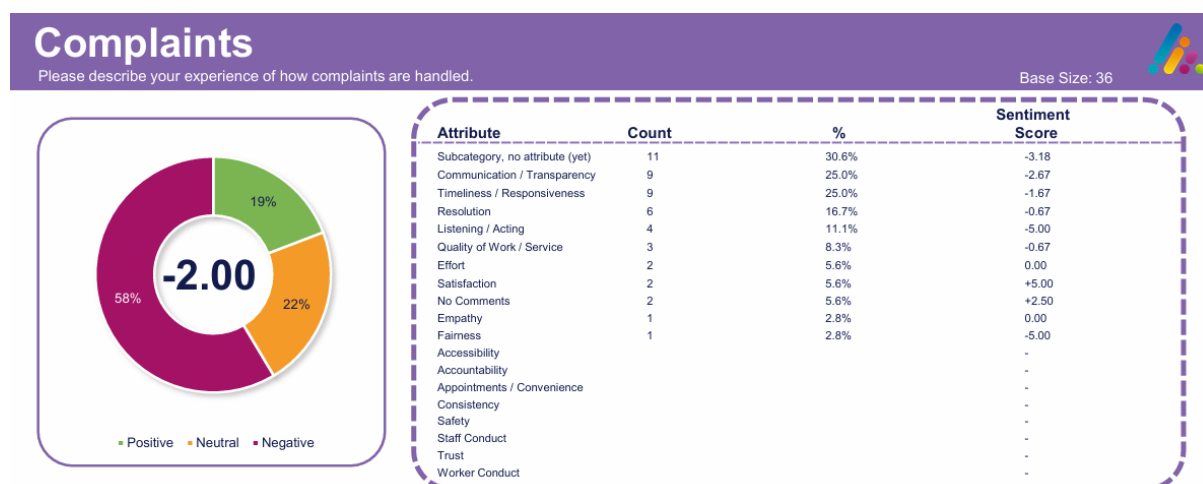
There was a task set for the Customer Experience task and finish group to review the response letter sent to complainants to close both stage 1 and stage 2 complaints.

Four of the letters reviewed (one to a Panel member) all relate to repairs. They all fail to adhere to the Complaints policy as they do not provide sufficient details of the escalation to stage 2, one stating "please don't hesitate to reach out if you have any further questions or concerns". There is no learning to avoid any repeat complaints detailed and 3 out of the 4 fail to provide specific dates to restore trust and confidence in NYC.

We have looked at best practice from other providers and one use a template that is provided to the complaint handler at allocation of a complaint. It provides them with

The Council used this latest TSM survey to find out about the type of complaint and the Panel can see from the Acuity report that just under two-fifths of complaints are about the ASB (36%), with 25% concerning repairs, 3% relating to communal areas and 3% regarding staff attitude.

We had a look at how this compares nationally and the proportion of respondents reporting a complaint is at its highest level at 37% while satisfaction with how Has handle complaints is at its lowest at just 23% satisfied (no change from Q4 2024/25).



Tenants who responded that they had made a complaint in the last 12 months were asked to describe their experience of how they were handled. Many respondents noted that while initial contact, particularly via phone, was positive and prompt, follow-up actions often fell short.

Complaints frequently went unanswered, with several individuals expressing frustration over a lack of communication and resolution. Some reported long wait times for issues to be addressed, with instances of unresolved problems lingering for years, such as double glazing repairs and overgrown trees.

There were also accounts of rude or unhelpful interactions with staff, leading to feelings of being dismissed or ignored. Specific complaints about neighbour disputes and anti-social behaviour were often met with inadequate responses, leaving tenants feeling unsupported.

A few respondents highlighted instances where complaints were effectively resolved, indicating that some staff members were proactive and communicative.

Overall, the feedback suggests a need for improved follow-up processes, better communication, and a more consistent approach to handling complaints to enhance tenant satisfaction and trust in the service. This fits with the Panel's findings.

The Council state that "As a Housing Service we now have increased confidence in the way in which our complaints are handled and the data surrounding complaints handling can be used to inform our learning and service improvements".

Code	Item	2023/24	2024/25	Trend
CH01 (1)	Number of stage one complaints received per 1,000 homes	12.03	36.88	↑
CH01 (2)	Number of stage two complaints received per 1,000 homes	0.59	4.32	↑
CH02 (1)	Proportion of stage one complaints responded to within the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code timescales	68.32%	69%	↑
CH02 (2)	Proportion of stage two complaints responded to within the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code timescales	0.00%	77%	↑

Within the 2024/25 financial year, 306 stage 1 and 36 stage 2 complaints were raised by tenants and leaseholders, totalling 342 complaints. In terms of Stage One complaints this represents a 203% increase on the previous year. As complaints are indicative of well engaged tenants, this increase is viewed positively by NYC as tenants are actively engaged with their services. They also suggest that it may reflect our improved complaints processes, the refresh of the Housing Complaints Policy, reviewed in June 2024 and the increased communications to tenants highlighting how to raise a complaint.



North Yorkshire Council's complaints handling performance is consistently ranked within the 3rd Quartile on HouseMark), with an average of 71% of complaints being resolved within timescales.

Complaint response performance has improved and this could be helped by the increase in resource to the complaints team and increased and coordinated resource within the housing service to ensure that complaints handling is carried out collectively.

The Housing Standards Team, responsible for reactive and planned repairs, as well as compliance and major works, receive the greatest number of complaints, with 59% of all complaints received by Housing being attributed to this Department. This is mainly due to a lack of investment by the former stock holding authorities resulting in NYC inheriting a number of poorly maintained homes. This reflects tenant's

concerns, with the most common complaints being around the time taken for repairs (20%) and building fabric concerns (18%)

Throughout 2024/25 304 Stage One complaints were closed. Of those 67% were upheld (55%) or partly upheld (12%). One area in which we need to improve our complaint handling is the analysis of those complaints which are rejected and reporting on this.

During 2024/25 NYC received three determinations from the Housing Ombudsman, one of which resulted in a finding of maladministration. The Panel felt that this was very low in comparison to other organisations.

The Housing Services Annual review report states that given that NYC is a council, it is appropriate to compare the results against other local authorities only, and the chart shows the differences against the quartile positions. NYC compares favourably against this group, with all measures above the Regulator median. There are two measures in the top quartile; providing a safe home and the cleanliness and maintenance of communal areas. The remaining ten measures are in the second quartile, including overall satisfaction.

The HOS published a spotlight report in 2023 on knowledge and information management and it shows that landlord's services can be held back by weaknesses in data and information which can then turn an ordinary service request into an extraordinarily protracted complaint that results in unnecessary extensions and unhappy tenants. This is what the Panel found during the calls to former complainants so a big door knocking exercise would help to avoid these issues like it states in the report. NYC could learn from this which helped to identify vulnerabilities, understand tenant concerns and build relationships, all of which we know needs to take place.

<https://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/centre-for-learning/key-topics/kim/>

The Tenants Scrutiny Panel had a presentation on complaints performance from Nathan in May and October and we learnt that was extremely open, honest and transparent.

The Panel reviewed the Housemark TSM exclusive report which published a first-look at 2024/25 results for regulatory Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs).

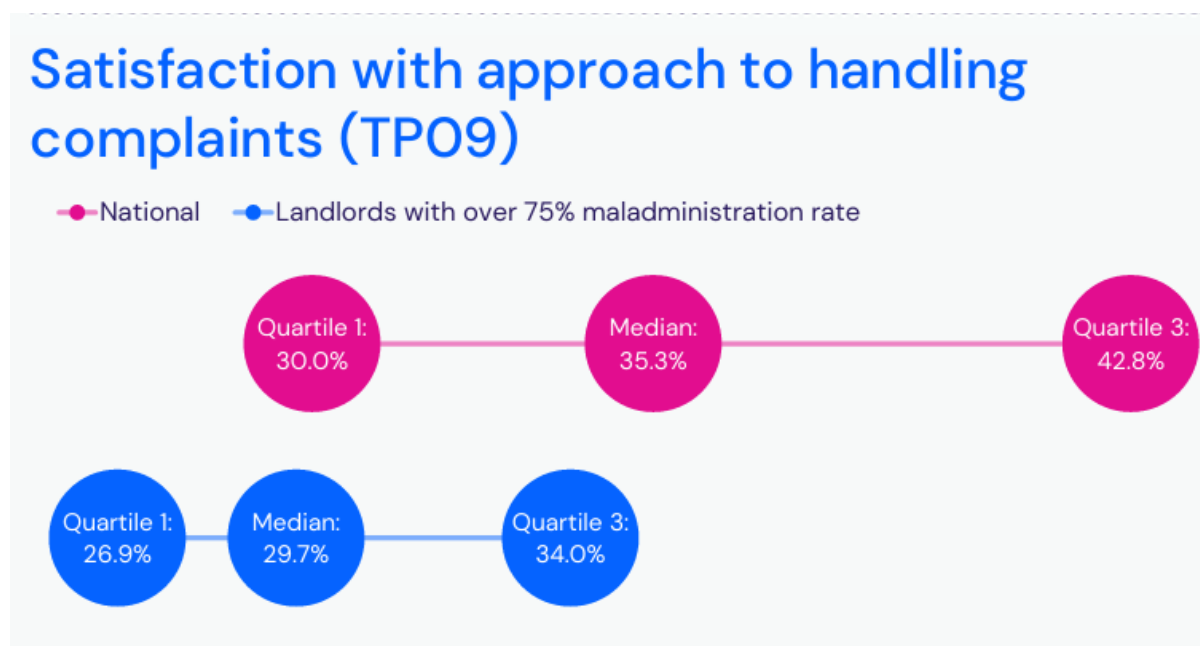
Housemark analysed data collected from individual landlords alongside results published by the regulator and Housing Ombudsman and found that:

Complaint satisfaction rates and volumes have risen as landlords improve services to meet the mandatory Ombudsman code.

Average satisfaction with complaint handling remains the lowest median result across TSM perception measures, with a modest increase to 35.3% in the same period. The qualitative research with landlords shows that the increase in volumes is

more due to better recording methods, in line with the Ombudsman's code, than a deterioration in service quality. Between individual organisations, they have recorded considerable variation.

Landlords recording the smallest complaint volumes in 2023/24, on average doubled volumes into 2024/25.



Where landlords are not addressing complaints effectively, perception of the whole organisation suffers.

1st April – 31st December 2024 where they saw that 35% (42) increase in the number of complaints responded to by end of Q3 (121) compared to previous year Q3 (79).

The Panel really thought that the complaints satisfaction survey was critically important to ensure that any trends are identified and poor satisfaction actioned. Overall satisfaction isn't great and the Panel want to see an action plan on how NYC intend to improve.

We found some learning identified in the Housing Annual report, but it wasn't very easy to find and it is recommended that it is more visible on the website, in letters and in the newsletters.

Meetings with Staff: -

Members of the Panel have met with the following staff and Members:

Carl Doolan, Nathan Oxnard and Councillor Myers, Executive Member for Culture, Arts and Housing as part of the project.

The conversations were very interesting and insightful. Some of the key messages and take aways so far include: -

It was clear there is a genuine passion to improve and deliver a great complaints handling service. Councillor Myers gave the Panel reassurance that complaints were taken seriously and that the tenants scrutiny panel were carrying out important work.

There was a real honesty from the staff spoken with about the strengths and weaknesses.

Strengths include:

- Dedicated staff resource on complaints who is knowledgeable and passionate about making improvements

Weaknesses include:

- Sharing complaints across the organisation results in lots of chasing up, varied responses from different areas of the business and lack of consistency in standards
- Inconsistency in level of compensation offered, lack of care, no personalised remedies, resulting in responses being sent back by the Complaints team
- Lack of confidence in procedures being followed consistently for example, complainants should be contacted within 2 working days but there is a concern that doesn't always happen
- Identifying and tackling root causes of complaints isn't brilliant
- Not acting on complaint findings
- No control over follow up/lessons learnt and the lessons learnt tracker isn't up to date
- Staff training = big concern – clearly not taken seriously by all. Induction for new starters needs reviewing and e-learning to be a consideration
- Call centre staff not always really listening and resulting in escalation
- Successes aren't celebrated
- HOS not filtered through the organisation so little awareness of the wider themes/risks with complaints in the sector
- Lack of care and empathy shown
- No follow up

The Panel have heard about the E-learning package which has been rolled out to housing staff responsible for complaint handling, the next step will be to roll this out further within the housing service and to the wider organization to all staff who may interact with our tenants.

However, concerns were shared with some much wider organisational / culture issues relating to keeping promises to customers, keeping in contact, genuine care

and empathy, attitude and respect, seeing things through and learning from complaints.

The Panel talked with YDC about the importance of having a positive complaint handling culture and ensuring that works in practice and is embedded which should result in happier tenants.

The Panel felt unanimously that some consequences for failing to keep promises to customers and greater monitoring of delivering stage 1 promises.

The group want to make a recommendation in relation to mandatory training for all staff using a different approach than the current one possibly using previous complaints in a case study approach to bring to life for staff using best practice from other providers that have learned from determinations in addition to using resources from the HOS centre for learning etc.

Questions posed to Nathan, plus some supplementary questions:

1) How do you respond to a complaint being made? - (when a tenant contacts to report a complaint by phone, in person and on line, how/where do you begin. Talk us through the process and timescales.)

(notes - staff should answer call giving their names and showing empathy, apologising, really listening and showing they care, giving confidence to customer, clear on timescales and what will happen next)

2) What details do you take down from a tenant/leaseholder? Does this differ depending on the method chosen to report the complaint? Do call handlers have a script they follow?

3) How do most complainants raise their dissatisfaction? (phone, in person or on line?)

4) Is it routinely asked how the situation has/ or is impacting the complainant?

5) What are the steps taken to resolve a complaint and do you make sure that tenant is aware of the steps/what they can expect?

6) Do you get back in touch with the tenants regarding the complaint throughout their complaint? Is there any face to face contact?

7) What is the % of complaints responded to in time for stage 1 and stage 2? (how long on average does it take to get back to the tenant? Was a preferred method of contact agreed?)

8) Do you ask the complainants what they are looking for in terms of a resolution?

9) What training do you have / is in place to equip staff who receive complaints, manage complaints and respond to complaints?

10) What would you like to change in the complaints service?

11) What are you proud of?

12) Is there anything else you would like to make the Scrutiny Panel aware of? Or is there anyone else you think we should meet with?

The Panel members found that their conversations helped them form a good understanding of how complaints were handled with lots being managed via email and that the complaints team were in control of the process but it was an impossible task for one person.

From their conversations, the members wanted to suggest some recommendations in relation to the need for greater compassion and empathy with complainants and try and walk in their shoes and consider how they would feel if it was their mum complaining for example.

The Panel also found that there were opportunities for training but that because it wasn't mandatory, some staff just didn't want to take part despite the fact that it would help them when managing complaints in their specialist areas. This would help to embed a culture where complaints were taken more seriously by all and ensure that tenants really are listened to and that NYC care. The Panel think that having training delivered in person in the NYC offices in a different style such as role play/use of anonymised case studies would help with attendance and commitment.

At times the Panel gleaned that some staff just got a response letter out to tick a box but there was no care applied and no effort to resolve at the root cause. It looks to the panel that quite a high number of stage 2 complaints are as a result of failing to meet the stage 1 promises. The Panel therefore recommend that some further analysis is carried out and action taken to address this failing so that there are no stage 2 escalations for this reason.

The Panel members learnt from YDC how Thirteen Group, a housing association in the North East approach empathy. They call it the "Mam and Gran" approach as this hit home with their trades teams trying to get them to consider if they'd be happy if it was their mum or Grandma receiving the service/complaint response etc.

Conversations with Tenants on the Panel

Scrutiny Panel members shared their concerns in relation to complaints from their experiences and from insight gathered from their locality. Three out of the six members had recent complaints with NYC with one Panel member having to escalate his complaint to stage 2 but struggling to do so as the e-form didn't allow enough characters.

These include:

1. Communication is terrible. Complaints are often the only touchpoint so vitally important to get it right.
2. Feel that the personalised approach is missing - Plea for more face to face interaction with complainants as this is very effective in demonstrating a personal approach, really listening and resolving to the tenant satisfaction. Consider home visits and FaceTime or at very least a telephone call. Given the annual report has confirmed that most complaints are linked to poor communication this is key to breaking down barriers and building trust and confidence. Nine times out of ten, there's more going on than meets the eye and you can only really get to the root of the problem by sitting down with someone and having a good natter, preferably over a cuppa.
3. Need to find a way to address vulnerabilities and other problems.
4. Pre-emptive approach – shift to dealing with issues before they happen. We often don't know there's a problem until it's too late to prevent something happening. This problem is made even worse when you realise that landlords rely on their customers to tell them there's a problem. great data and knowledge about homes and customers to predict future events. And this will enable us to intervene before something happens.

The Panel really liked the approach they saw on Yorkshire Housing's website when it came to a pre-emptive approach and recommend that NYC consider this good practice.

5. Reference to tenant inspectors, recommend NYC re-introduce in the form of mystery shoppers and recruit a pool of volunteers who can follow an annual programme to complement scrutiny work.
6. General view that NYC don't always keep their promises and lots of complaints are escalated because the commitments in stage 1 aren't delivered, particularly with repairs. Tenants felt that there were no consequences for staff in these cases as it keeps reoccurring. Staff also felt that commitments made in complaint responses were not delivered which resulted in a lot of complaint escalations.
7. Biggest issue is that actions aren't monitored and ensured that they are followed up.
8. Questions over capacity to respond and meet performance targets.
9. Query over quality of customer data and how this is used.
10. Concerns raised over how much NYC really care and how the complaints culture isn't constructive as suggested by the HOS as essential where complaints are welcomed. There was a sense amongst the Panel that complaints were low as NYC were trying to resolve informally.

The Panel recommend it would be good to see how data is used and then share with tenants as the feedback from complainants was consistently negative in relation to meeting the needs of vulnerable tenants.

In relation to information management, the HOS published a follow up report on Knowledge and Information Management in January 2025 and YDC recommend NYC re-test themselves against the 21 recommendations in this report as good practice and identify any gaps that need to be plugged.

Mystery Shopping

The Panel tested a number of websites in addition to the NYC website as part of the fact finding and best practice research with the objective of establishing how accessible information was in relation to making a complaint for tenants. They found the following: -

NYC – The Panel found that generally the website is “soulless” and whilst its appreciated the housing department are part of a wider local authority, the colours and visuals aren’t appealing and fail to engage the viewer. The search option is the easiest option to try and find how to complain.

The Panel were positive about the amount of supporting information on complaints.

The on-line form only allows a limited number of characters and limits the number of photos that can be uploaded to accompany the complaint. The Panel advised that photos from a smart phone are 5MB (which most tenants use) and therefore only 1 photo could be uploaded. If the complaint was complex, the on-line form would not work.

Leeds City Council – A more appealing website from a customer lens and a welcome moving graphic of Leeds. Similarly to NYC, using the search option to make a complaint was the easiest option.

Hull Council – A much easier contact us page with links to make a complaint. This was easy to follow and also they have an on-line chat option.

Berneslai Homes - A very warm and welcoming feel to this website, with a contact us box on the first page. The Panel felt that this organisation’s website was best practice as it not only had really accessible information, it was a really fun website to navigate.

The Panel feel strongly after reviewing letters, the on-line form for complaints and mystery shopping feedback that some serious changes are needed and the senior managers need to start to review complaint responses and actions and ensure that promises are kept and lessons are learnt. The Panel felt that it was remarkable how only a few complainants have escalated their complaint to the HOS.

The door knocking exercise referred to above is clearly needed to engage and develop relationships, trust and accountability. This type of activity also will help take into account vulnerabilities.

Recommendations

The Panel have created a table (appendix 1) to clearly set out their recommendations captured during this scrutiny project and look forward to NYC's response.

Next steps

The Panel would like to thank all the team involved with supporting this scrutiny project and would welcome the opportunity to present our report and recommendations to the next Housing Improvement Board, December 2025 and also the Housing and Leisure Scrutiny and Oversight Committee.

We would also like to monitor progress with the recommendations and have an update every 6-8 weeks from the staff.

We would like to report to be shared on the NYC website and headlines in the newsletter so that all tenants can see our work and the changes we would like to see to ensure that wider tenants can see how we are working together to make improvements to services.