

REPORT TO:	FINANCE AND MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE	AGENDA ITEM: 10
DATE OF MEETING:	19 JUNE 2025	CATEGORY: DELEGATED
REPORT FROM:	EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR – PLACE AND PROSPERITY	OPEN
MEMBERS' CONTACT POINT:	ALISON BENNETT 01283 535900 Alison.Bennett@Southderbyshire.gov.uk	DOC:
SUBJECT:	HOUSING OMBUDSMAN ANNUAL COMPLAINT HANDLING AND SERVICE IMPROVEMENT	
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	ALL WARDS	TERMS OF REFERENCE: FM04

1.0 Recommendations

- 1.1 That Members consider and approve the Complaint Handling Self Assessment 2025, for submission to the Housing Ombudsman attached to the report as **Appendix 1**.
- 1.2 That Members consider the summary of complaints received by the Council, during the financial year 2024/25, which will also form part of the annual return.

2.0 Purpose of the Report

- 2.1 Landlords are required to provide an annual submission to the Housing Ombudsman to demonstrate their compliance against its' Complaint Handling Code.
- 2.2 The annual submission covers the following areas
 - The self-assessment as published on the website
 - The annual complaints performance and service improvement report (covering information for 2024/2025)
 - The governing bodies response to the report
 - The complaints policy
- 2.3 The Council's self-assessment against the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code evidences the Council's compliance with their requirements, see Appendix 1.
- 2.4 This report provides Members with a summary of the complaints received by the Council and those made to the Housing Ombudsman about the Council, together with trends and suggested service improvements. This report evidences the learning and organisational changes which are informed by the complaints received.

3.0 Detail

- 3.1 The Housing Ombudsman launched its' Complaint Handling Code which became a statutory requirement for all social landlords from April 2024.
- 3.2 In February 2025 a revised version of the Council's Complaints and Feedback Policy was approved, and this defines the Council's approach to complaints and also ensures the Council's compliance with the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code.
- 3.3 The Housing Service has also established a separate Housing Complaints Monitoring system to ensure that it complied with the code.
- 3.4 The Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code covers the following areas

There are 9 sections of the Code:

- **Definition** – what is a complaint?
 - **Exclusions** – what will not be treated as a complaint
 - **Accessibility** – making it easy to make a complaint- meeting the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 and offering reasonable adjustments where appropriate
 - **Staff** – landlords should have a designated person or team to respond to complaints
 - **Process** – sets out a clear 2 stage complaints process
 - **Stages** – sets out the timescales to provide a response at both stages including the use of extensions
 - **Putting things right** – considering the impact on the resident and setting out what will be done to put things right
 - **Self-assessment** – landlords must complete an annual self-assessment of their compliance against the Code
 - **Scrutiny** – appointing a Member Responsible for Complaints to have responsibility and accountability for complaints
- 3.5 The Housing Ombudsman requires an annual submission, which needs to have been considered and approved by the organisations governing body, which in the Council's case is this Committee.
 - 3.6 During the financial year 2024/25 91 complaints were received about the Housing Department of which 17 progressed to a stage 2 complaint. Complaints were received under the following themes-
 - Delays (combined) general, processes, repairs, responses – 30
 - Damp & mould – 12
 - Delays in application process/issues with housing app – 4
 - Data Protection - 2
 - Repair issues – 23
 - Staff complaints – 4
 - Decisions – 2
 - Boundary issues – 2
 - Lack of communication – 1
 - Untidy site – 1
 - Neighbour issues – 1

- Other - 9

3.7 Analysis of the complaints shows the need to focus on delays and the repairs service. Responding to this, the Housing Service Transformation Plan and restructure will significantly increase the resources in both our admin and operational / responsive repairs team. The 30-year Housing Revenue Account business plan, and 5-year asset management plan – (both currently being produced in response to the findings of the stock condition survey), will enable the service to move from one which is response to one which is planned, and overall, this change should improve tenants' satisfaction levels with their homes.

3.8 During the financial year 2024/25 4 complaints were received by the Housing Ombudsman about the Housing Department

	Date complaint received	Date determination letter received	Outcome
	23/7/24	No determination yet received. Complaint relates to a dispute with a neighbour & anti-social behaviour.	-
	8/11/24	17/03/25	Maladministration in relation to handling of resident reports of damp and mould; and service failure in relation to landlord's record keeping.
	30/1/25	7/05/25	Maladministration in landlord's complaint handling; and damp and mould.
	21/3/25	No determination yet received. Complaint relates to repairs	-

3.9 Again, the grounds for those complaints mirrors those received by the Housing Department, and as the restructure is concluded and the Housing Service Transformation Action Plan implemented, the service will have additional capacity and a sharper focus on customer care.

3.10 The need to evidence learning from complaints is also a requirement of the Regulator for Social Housing, and so a tracker will be implemented to demonstrate organisational learning and change resulting from complaints.

4.0 Financial Implications

4.1 When the Housing Ombudsman is considering complaints which have been made against a social landlord, if they uphold the complaint, they can require the landlord to both undertake remedial work and also pay the tenant compensation.

- 4.2 To date the Council has been ordered to pay £900 in compensation as a result of two complaint determinations.

5.0 Corporate Implications

Employment Implications

- 5.1 None arising directly from this report

Legal Implications

- 5.2 The Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 placed a duty on the Housing Ombudsman to monitor compliance with the statutory Complaint Handling Code. This means the Housing Ombudsman is required to ensure all landlords meet the standards set out in the Code for complaint handling, regardless of their size and operating model.

Council Plan Implications

- 5.3 None arising directly from this report

Risk Impact

- 5.4 There are both operational risks in terms of remedial works and financial sanctions which can be applied by the Housing Ombudsman to social landlords, when a determination is made to uphold the complaint.
- 5.5 If a social landlord could not evidence compliance with their Complaint Handling Code, pecuniary and operational requirements could be placed on the organisation.

6.0 Community Impact

The role of the Housing Ombudsman is to investigate complaints about social landlords from tenants. Its' aim is to get social landlords to put things right if they have gone wrong and if this has affected tenants directly. There is also an expectation, echoed by the Regulatory for Social Housing, that social landlords will learn from complaints and seek to change how they deliver services etc. in response to those complaints.

Consultation

- 6.1 None

Equality and Diversity Impact

- 6.2 Equality and diversity implications are considered as part of the Housing Ombudsman's investigations.
- 6.3 The Council also completed an Equality and Diversity Impact Assessment as part of the review and implementation process for the new Complaints and Feedback Policy, 2025.

Social Value Impact

- 6.4 None

Environmental Sustainability

6.5 None

7.0 Conclusions

- 7.1 The annual submission ensures that the Council is complying with the expectations of the Housing Ombudsman.
- 7.2 The self assessment demonstrates that the Council is adhering to the requirements of the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code.
- 7.3 This should also be seen as an opportunity to continue to improve the service offered by the Council.
- 7.4 The Social Housing Regulator has a clear focus on how councils respond to and learn from complaints, and this return provides a further platform against which to assess the Council's performance.

8.0 Background Papers

None