

Audit and Risk Committee

October 2026

Title: Annual Housing Complaint Report	
Report of the Chief Executive Officer	
Open Report	For Information
Wards Affected: None	Key Decision: No
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Summary This report provides an overview of housing-related complaints received by the Local Authority, identifying recurring issues and systemic learning to support service improvement. The analysis highlight's themes linked to repairs and maintenance, housing management, communication, many of which directly impact residents' safety, wellbeing, and trust in services. In the context of strengthened regulation and oversight, these findings are particularly relevant to the consumer standards set by the Regulator of Social Housing, which apply to Local Authorities as registered providers. The learning from complaints is therefore not only a mechanism for improving individual customer experience, but also a key assurance tool in demonstrating compliance, driving accountability, and delivering safer, higher-quality housing services for residents. As a Local Authority we produce a set of annual reports regarding complaints which cover performance of services housing will remain within the report for the balanced overview of performance across the board and this report will delve deeper into housing related themes.	
Recommendation(s) The Audit and Risk Committee is asked to note and comment on the contents of the report.	

1. Purpose and Context

- 1.1 This report has been produced to provide a clear overview of housing complaints received during the year and, critically, to set out the learning opportunities which can be gained from resident complaints, feedback and lived experience. The primary purpose is to demonstrate how complaints are used as a source of insight

to inform service improvements, strengthen accountability, and improve outcomes for residents.

- 1.2 Rather than viewing complaints solely as a measure of service failure, this report seeks to position them as a diagnostic tool that highlights pressure points within housing services, identifies recurring issues, and enables the organisation to understand where processes, communication, or delivery need to improve. Complaints are therefore treated as an opportunity for learning, reflection, and positive change.
- 1.3 The findings and learning outlined in this report are used to inform service improvement activity, support management oversight, and provide assurance to elected members and senior leadership alongside residents. They also contribute to meeting regulatory expectations, including the consumer standards set by the Regulator of Social Housing and the requirements of the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code, which place a strong emphasis on learning from complaints and using resident feedback to drive continuous improvement.
- 1.4 This approach reflects the expectation that social housing landlords use complaints intelligence to strengthen organisational learning and service delivery, rather than treating complaints as isolated or transactional issues, and supports the ongoing development of safer, more responsive, and resident focused housing services.

2. Regulatory and Assurance Framework

- 2.1 This report has been developed within the context of strengthening our internal processes and represents an early step in setting out a clear and transparent approach to learning from housing complaints. This information establishes how complaint learning will be used to support service improvement, governance and regulatory compliance.
- 2.2 As a registered provider of social housing, the Council is regulated by the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH), which provides landlord level oversight and sets consumer standards that define the outcomes residents should experience. These include standards relating to safety and quality, transparency and accountability, neighbourhood management, and tenancy. This report is intended to support assurance against those standards by identifying themes, risks, and areas for improvement emerging from housing complaints.
- 2.3 The Council is also a member of the Housing Ombudsman Service, which considers individual housing complaints and sets statutory requirements for complaint handling through the complaint handling code. The code places a strong emphasis not only on resolving complaints fairly and promptly, but on learning from outcomes to improve services. While individual complaints are resolved through the Council's complaints process, this report focuses on the wider learning that can be drawn from complaint patterns and themes.
- 2.4 A clear distinction is maintained between resolving individual complaints and learning from wider complaint trends. While individual resolution remains essential for residents, this report is concerned with identifying patterns, root causes, and systemic issues that can inform longer term service improvements.

3. Key Complaint Themes and Resident Experience

- 3.1 This section sets out the key themes identified through complaints received across housing services during the reporting period. It focuses on how residents experienced service failure, why issues escalated into formal complaints, and where services did not deliver intended outcomes.

While the themes are presented separately, complaints analysis shows that issues were often interconnected, with poor communication amplifying dissatisfaction even where action was underway. This understanding is critical to meeting expectations and evidences that as landlords we can demonstrate insight into both what went wrong and why.

3.2 Repairs and Maintenance

Repairs and maintenance continue to be a primary driver of complaints across services. Residents most frequently complained where repairs were delayed, repeatedly incomplete, or required multiple visits without permanent resolution. In many cases, the issue was not the initial fault but the length of time residents were left managing unsafe, uncomfortable or disrupted living conditions.

Common complaints included ongoing leaks, heating and hot water failures, electrical concerns, door entry systems and internal disrepair. Analysis shows that problems often escalated where responsibility for follow-on work was unclear, leading to repeat visits by different operatives without resolution. This created frustration and eroded confidence that issues would be properly addressed.

For residents with disabilities, health conditions or caring responsibilities, delays had a disproportionate impact, increasing anxiety and, in some cases, contributing to a perception that their safety was being overlooked.

Resident voice:

“Each person says someone else needs to fix it — I’ve been waiting months.”

This theme links directly to the Safety and Quality Consumer Standard, particularly the requirement to maintain homes in a safe, habitable condition and to address hazards in a timely and effective way. Complaints indicate that services did not always meet this expectation where co-ordination and follow-up were weak.

3.3 Damp and Mould

Damp and mould remained a recurring theme and frequently overlapped with wider structural or repair issues such as leaks, inadequate ventilation or insulation failures. Residents commonly reported that mould returned after treatment, sometimes within weeks, leading to repeat complaints and escalating concern about health impacts.

Analysis shows that while works were often completed, residents were not always given a clear explanation of why damp and mould had occurred, what action had been taken to address root causes, and how recurrence would be prevented. This

lack of clarity contributed to a perception that issues were being temporarily addressed rather than resolved.

Complaints in this area were particularly strong where children, older residents or those with respiratory conditions were affected, highlighting the importance of combining timely physical intervention with clear communication.

Resident voice:

“It keeps coming back — nobody explains why.”

This theme engages the Safety and Quality Standard, due to the health risks associated with damp and mould, and the Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard, where residents did not feel properly informed or reassured.

3.4 Communication, Delays and Service Follow-Up

Communication failures were the most consistent cross-cutting theme across all service areas. Residents frequently complained about not receiving updates, call-backs or responses, even after repeated chasers or escalation. In many cases, dissatisfaction stemmed less from the timescale itself and more from silence or uncertainty.

Complaints analysis shows that residents were more likely to escalate where:

expected timescales were missed without explanation,
it was unclear who owned the case, or
residents felt they were repeatedly chasing with no progress.

Where communication broke down, residents described feeling ignored or left “in limbo”, particularly where issues affected safety, daily living or household stability.

Resident voice:

“I don’t expect it instantly — I just need to know what’s happening.”

This theme clearly links to the Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard, reinforcing regulatory expectations that landlords keep residents informed, manage expectations and communicate honestly when delays occur. Complaints indicate that services fell short where communication was inconsistent or reactive rather than proactive.

3.5 Housing Management and Estate Issues

Complaints relating to housing management and estates covered a wide range of issues, including caretaking standards, fly-tipping, communal safety, boundary disputes and antisocial behaviour. Residents frequently raised concerns where estate conditions deteriorated over time or where issues were repeatedly reported without resolution.

A key driver of dissatisfaction was uncertainty about responsibility, with residents reporting being passed between teams or advised that an issue sat outside a particular service remit. This lack of clarity delayed resolution and increased frustration, particularly where issues affected communal spaces or personal safety.

Some complaints also reflected residents seeking management transfer or rehousing due to ongoing safety concerns, antisocial behaviour or serious environmental issues within their existing council home, rather than dissatisfaction with outcomes alone. These cases highlight the importance of addressing underlying service failures early, rather than relying on complaints as an escalation route.

Resident voice:

“Everyone says it’s not their job — but I’m still living with the problem.”

This theme reinforces the importance of effective housing management under both the Safety and Quality and Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standards, particularly where residents rely on clear ownership and timely intervention.

3.6 Summary of Resident Experience

Across service areas, complaints analysis highlights that residents most often escalated concerns where the overall customer experience broke down, rather than solely due to a single service failure. This mirrors learning from the council’s Customer Experience and Access Strategy, which recognises that resident dissatisfaction is frequently driven by the effort required to access services, obtain information, and secure resolution.

Complaints consistently show that residents expected services to be clear, coordinated and accessible, particularly where issues affected safety, daily living or wellbeing. Where these expectations were not met, residents described feeling required to repeatedly chase updates, navigate multiple teams, or restate their circumstances. This increased frustration and contributed to escalation into formal complaints.

Learning from complaints aligns with the strategic insight that:

- Lack of clarity creates avoidable contact, as residents seek reassurance or progress updates
- Inconsistent ownership leads to repeat contact, particularly where handovers between services are unclear
- Delays without explanation undermine trust even where work is progressing

These issues are consistent with wider insight raised through customer engagement and Customer Focus Board activity, which has highlighted that residents value timely updates, predictable processes and clear routes to resolution, especially where services are complex or span multiple teams. Complaints also demonstrate that residents are more likely to escalate where service responses do not adequately reflect their individual circumstances, particularly for those with health issues, disabilities or heightened vulnerability. This

mirrors identified barriers within the Access Strategy, where confidence, communication and perceived responsiveness influence how supported residents feel when engaging with council services.

Overall, the resident experience shown through complaints reinforces that improving outcomes requires more than resolving individual issues. It requires services to reduce avoidable effort, strengthen case ownership, and communicate clearly throughout the customer journey.

This learning directly supports compliance with the Transparency, Influence and Accountability Consumer Standard, and evidences a growing organisational understanding of why services do not always deliver intended outcomes, not solely where they fell short.

4. Learning from Complaints

- 4.1 This section sets out the key learning drawn from complaints across housing services. Rather than focusing on isolated service failures, the analysis identifies systemic issues that cut across multiple service areas, contributing to repeated dissatisfaction and escalation.

The learning demonstrates the organisation's understanding not only of what went wrong, but why services did not consistently deliver intended outcomes, in line with expectations.

4.2 Cross-Cutting Learning Themes

4.3 Poor Communication is a Primary Driver of Escalation

Learning statement:

Complaints show that escalation is more likely where communication is inconsistent, reactive or absent, even where action is underway.

Across all service areas, residents were more likely to complain when they were unclear about what was happening, who was responsible, or when progress could be expected. Delays without explanation and missed updates undermined confidence and led residents to repeatedly chase for information, increasing frustration and avoidable contact.

Systemic issue identified:

Communication practices have not always been embedded consistently across services, particularly during delays or where cases span multiple teams. This resulted in residents carrying the burden of follow-up rather than services proactively managing expectations.

4.4 Lack of Clear Case Ownership Leads to Repeat Failure

Learning statement:

Complaints highlight that unclear ownership across services contributes to repeated visits, delayed resolution and resident frustration.

In many cases, residents experienced multiple handovers between teams or contractors, with no single point of accountability for resolving the issue end-to-end. This was particularly evident in more complex cases involving repairs, housing management and antisocial behaviour.

Systemic issue identified:

Service structures and processes have not always supported clear responsibility for multi-service cases, leading to fragmentation and delays that were felt by residents as a lack of accountability.

4.5 Reactive Responses Allow Issues to Escalate

Learning statement:

Complaints indicate that issues were often addressed only after escalation rather than being identified and resolved early.

Recurring complaints, particularly relating to repairs and damp and mould, show that services sometimes responded to symptoms rather than root causes. Where follow-up was limited to individual actions, underlying problems continued, resulting in repeat reporting and formal complaints.

Systemic issue identified:

Early intervention and preventative oversight were not always applied consistently, reducing the organisation's ability to resolve issues before residents felt compelled to escalate.

4.6 Resident Circumstances Are Not Always Reflected in Service Responses

Learning statement:

Complaints show that residents escalated concerns where service responses did not sufficiently reflect their personal circumstances or vulnerability.

Residents with health conditions, disabilities or safeguarding concerns reported feeling that standard processes did not adequately take account of the impact issues were having on their wellbeing. This contributed to perceptions that services were inflexible or unresponsive.

Systemic issue identified:

While individual teams recognise vulnerability, this is not always consistently embedded into decision-making or prioritisation across services, particularly where cases move between teams.

4.7 Access Barriers Increase Resident Effort and Dissatisfaction

Learning statement:

Complaints reinforce learning from wider customer insight that residents escalate when accessing services requires repeated effort or navigation of complex processes.

Where residents were required to chase updates, repeat information or engage with multiple contact routes, dissatisfaction increased. This aligns with corporate learning that reducing resident effort is fundamental to improving the overall customer experience.

Systemic issue identified:

Processes have not always been designed around the end-to-end resident journey, increasing avoidable contact and frustration rather than supporting first-time or timely resolution.

4.8 Overall Learning Impact

Taken together, complaints analysis shows that dissatisfaction rarely arises from a single service failure. Escalation is more often driven by compound effects, where delays, unclear ownership, poor communication and lack of early intervention combine to undermine trust.

This learning underscores the importance of:

strengthening cross-service coordination, embedding proactive communication as standard practice, and designing services around resident experience rather than organisational boundaries.

It is important that the council uses complaint insight alongside wider customer experience evidence to address these systemic issues and improve service delivery in line with the Safety and Quality and Transparency, Influence and Accountability Consumer Standards.

5. Service Improvement Recommendations

5.1 Communication and Managing Resident Expectations

A significant proportion of housing-related complaints reflected dissatisfaction not solely with the original issue raised, but with the lack of communication once a service request or complaint had been logged. Residents frequently reported that they did not receive updates on progress, particularly in cases where repairs were delayed, follow-on works were required, or responsibility passed between teams. This absence of communication often led residents to feel ignored, resulting in repeated contact and complaint escalation.

Analysis of these cases demonstrates that silence, or a lack of proactive updates, has a disproportionate negative impact on resident experience. Even where delays were unavoidable, residents expressed a clear preference for being kept informed and for receiving clarity on next steps, timescales, and ownership.

In response to this learning, the Council should consider ways to strengthen proactive communication standards, so residents receive regular updates while works remain outstanding or delayed. Clearer confirmation of next steps and responsibility, particularly for complex or multi-stage cases, alongside improvements to ensure consistency in how progress updates are communicated across housing services.

5.2 Repeat and Unresolved Repairs

Complaint analysis identified recurring issues across several core repair categories, including damp and mould, leaks, drainage, heating, and doors and windows. In a number of cases, residents reported that issues had been attended multiple times but not fully resolved, resulting in repeat complaints and ongoing disruption.

This pattern highlights that repeated reporting of the same issue is often indicative of underlying causes not being fully addressed. Temporary or partial fixes undermine resident confidence, contribute to frustration, and increase long-term demand on services through repeat attendance and escalation.

To address this, clearer escalation routes should be established for repeat repairs, ensuring enhanced oversight where issues recur within a short timeframe. Greater emphasis should be placed on identifying and recording root causes before repairs are considered complete, supported by strengthened quality assurance checks for high-impact repairs to reduce recurrence.

5.3 Appointments and Reliability of Service Delivery

Missed or rearranged appointments emerged as a recurrent source of dissatisfaction, particularly where residents had taken time off work or made other arrangements to be available. Such incidents were frequently cited as a key reason for formal complaints, even where the underlying repair was eventually completed.

The learning from these complaints demonstrates that missed appointments have a disproportionate impact on resident trust and satisfaction. Poor coordination between appointment-booking systems and service delivery can quickly escalate dissatisfaction and erode confidence in the service.

In response, appointment scheduling and contractor coordination should be reviewed to reduce avoidable missed visits. Notification processes should be strengthened to ensure residents are informed promptly where appointments need to change and implement improved monitoring of missed appointments which can be used to identify patterns and target improvement activity.

5.4 Responding to Vulnerability and Individual Circumstances

Complaints received from residents with disabilities, serious health conditions, older residents, and households with young children raised concerns that individual circumstances were not always adequately reflected in service prioritisation or delivery. In such cases, standard service responses were often experienced as insufficient or inappropriate, leading to heightened distress and escalation.

The analysis reinforces that a standard response does not always result in an equitable outcome. Failure to recognise vulnerability at an early stage can exacerbate resident anxiety and significantly worsen the impact of service delays.

To address this, the Council should strengthen the identification and use of vulnerability indicators across housing systems. This will ensure that essential repairs and complaints involving vulnerable residents are appropriately prioritised. Staff should also be supported through clearer guidance on adapting communication styles and service responses to better reflect individual needs. All housing staff will refresh their Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (ED&I) learning to ensure a consistent understanding of their responsibilities and to support fair, inclusive service delivery across Housing Services.

5.5 Complaint Handling, Ownership and Cross-Service Working

Some complaints highlighted confusion around responsibility for resolution, with issues passing between teams or requiring residents to repeatedly chase for updates. This was particularly evident in cases involving multiple service areas, such as repairs linked to housing management or environmental issues.

Learning from these cases shows that a lack of clear ownership contributes to delays, repeat contact, and escalation. Residents reasonably expect a coordinated, joined-up response, regardless of internal service boundaries.

In response, end-to-end ownership for housing complaints should be reinforced, particularly where issues span multiple service areas. Internal coordination should be strengthened so residents receive a single, coherent response, supported by improved oversight of complex cases to ensure timely and effective resolution. Complaint systems have been refreshed to represent the correct housing structures.

5.6 Embedding Organisational Learning

The analysis confirms that recurring complaint themes provide valuable insight into systemic issues affecting resident experience and service performance. Complaints data is most effective when actively and consistently used to inform service improvement rather than solely to resolve individual cases.

Demonstrating learning from complaints is also central to building resident confidence and meeting regulatory expectations, including those set out by the Housing Ombudsman.

To embed this approach, regular cross-service reviews of upheld and high-impact complaints will be maintained to identify learning and track improvement actions. Insight and root cause analysis will be systematically escalated through the Customer Focus Board, ensuring council-wide visibility and driving consistent service improvement. Housing Spotlight sessions at the Customer Focus Board will further enable cross-organisational learning, bringing together voice of the customer insight, complaints data and service responses to identify system-wide issues and share best practice. Complaint insight will continue to inform staff training, contractor management, and policy review, while “You said, we did” feedback will

be strengthened to clearly demonstrate how resident feedback directly drives service change.

6. Expected Impact

- 6.1 The service improvements identified through complaint learning are expected to deliver measurable benefits for both residents and the organisation. By addressing the root causes of dissatisfaction rather than solely responding to individual complaints, these actions support improved outcomes, stronger trust, and more sustainable service delivery.

6.2 Impact on Residents

If implemented effectively, these improvements are expected to significantly enhance the overall experience of residents interacting with housing services. More consistent and proactive communication will reduce uncertainty and anxiety, particularly for residents waiting for repairs or follow-on works. Even where delays are unavoidable, clearer updates and explanations will help residents feel informed, reassured, and respected, reducing the frustration that often leads to repeat contact or escalation.

Improvements to repair processes, particularly the focus on resolving issues “right first time,” should reduce the recurrence of long-standing problems such as damp and mould, leaks, and heating failures. This will have a direct positive impact on residents’ quality of life, safety, and wellbeing, particularly for those living with unresolved disrepair over extended periods.

Greater reliability around appointments is also expected to rebuild resident confidence in service delivery. Reducing missed visits and improving notification where appointments change will minimise disruption to residents’ lives, including time taken off work or caring responsibilities.

Importantly, strengthened recognition of vulnerability will support more equitable outcomes. Residents with disabilities, health conditions, or other additional needs should experience services that are more responsive to their circumstances, reducing distress and the likelihood of complaints escalating due to a perceived lack of understanding or support.

Finally, clearer complaint ownership and coordinated responses should reduce the need for residents to repeatedly chase services. This will help residents feel that their concerns are taken seriously and resolved efficiently, improving confidence in the complaints process itself.

6.3 Impact on Services

From a service perspective, these improvements are expected to reduce avoidable demand and improve operational efficiency. Better communication and clearer ownership should lead to fewer repeat contacts, complaints, and escalations, allowing staff time and resources to be focused on resolution rather than reactive case management.

Addressing repeat repairs through improved root-cause analysis is likely to reduce the volume of repeated work orders and follow-on complaints. Over time, this should lead to more effective use of contractor and officer capacity, improved value for money, and a reduction in complaints driven by unresolved issues.

Improved monitoring of appointments and service delivery reliability will provide clearer oversight of performance, supporting earlier intervention where services are under strain and enabling more informed contract and service management.

Embedding learning from complaints into routine service review and staff training will strengthen organisational learning and foster a more consistent, resident-focused culture across housing services. This supports continuous improvement rather than isolated corrective action and aligns services more closely with regulatory expectations, including the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code.

Overall, implementing these improvements should lead to a more resilient complaints system, improved service quality, reduced escalation to Stage 2 and external bodies, and stronger evidence of learning and accountability.

Appendix A - Resident Feedback on the Annual Housing Complaints report

The Housing Strategy approved in March 2026 highlighted the establishment of a Housing Complaints Panel. Work has now begun on this and a group of Tenants and Residents with lived experience of the complaints process were invited to join inaugural meetings of the panel in September. As part of the agenda the Annual Housing Complaints Report was reviewed, along with key elements of the Complaint Handling Code self-assessment. This appendix summarises the views of attendees.

Residents welcomed the opportunity to be heard and were clear that they want the Council to learn from complaints. Their strongest message was that they do not expect every problem to be solved immediately. They do expect someone to take responsibility for their complaint, keep them updated and explain honestly what is happening. The comment from the report at 3.4 was highlighted as being reflective of how attendees felt towards the Complaint process, and more broadly in accessing services.

Several residents described feeling frustrated, exhausted and let down after repeatedly chasing for updates, being passed between teams or receiving little explanation. While residents generally felt they had received a formal response to their complaint, some felt that follow up actions and ownership of issues were not always clear. Some felt their complaint had disappeared into a "black hole".

One of the strongest themes discussed was how responses made residents feel. They described that responses came across as defensive, deflective or dismissive. Some felt that too much attention was being given to explaining processes and decisions and not enough to understanding the impact the issue was having on them. This lack of empathy left them feeling unheard, frustrated and that their concerns were not being taken seriously.

They felt the report represented a positive step forward in the acknowledgement of themes and that Housing Complaints Panel would be an opportunity to support learning through the inclusion of lived experience. It was requested that the first areas the panel reviews are the themes around poor communication and lack of ownership (4.3 and 4.4 of the report). In the review of key elements of the Complaint Handling Code self-assessment, it was identified that some residents who had attended had not, been able to raise their complaint in a way that was easy for them and they felt the policy was not immediately accessible to help them understand the process (3.1 and 3.4 of the Complaint Handling Code self-assessment). Residents also reviewed the complaint response letter templates and advised there was an opportunity to make these clearer and easier to understand, particularly around outcomes, next steps and outstanding actions. They requested that both areas be future agenda items for the Housing Complaints Panel to allow for a more detailed review.

The panel also considered targets for improvement, and it was agreed that a reasonable target would be that the two thematic areas identified for deeper review (communication and ownership) were not the top 2 learning themes across complaints in 12 month's time. It was felt that this would demonstrate progress but remain realistic given we are now 6 months into the 2026/27 year.