

## **Newark and Sherwood District Council**

### **Housing Services Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report 2024/25**

#### **Forward**

As a Council, complaints play a significant role in shaping and enhancing the services we deliver to our residents and tenants. Over the past few years, we have developed a positive culture towards encouraging complaints as this helps us target where we need to do better, improve our service and put things right. Our belief is that every tenant and resident should feel confident in approaching us with their concerns and have a simple and straight-forward way to do so. The complaints received are also viewed fairly and transparently. By assessing these complaints to understand where we went wrong, we have an opportunity to learn and make meaningful improvements.

The Housing Ombudsman is seeing a significant increase in the volume of complaints submitted to them from across the UK and this follows a very successful to encourage tenants to raise issues where services have fallen below standard and make a complaint.

We are committed to using all feedback to refine our approach and better serve our communities, we fully comply with the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code and are preparing for the introduction of the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Code in April 2026. These frameworks guide our practices and ensure we maintain the highest standards in handling complaints, they also provide spotlight reports and reviews to direct the Council to learning and best practice.

Working closely with our housing teams, we are actively putting measures in place to improve the services we provide. This includes the creation of a dedicated Housing Complaints Coordinator role to support our handling of complaints, and in response to complaints around repairs, additional resources in the Repairs Team and a tenant led review of our Repairs Policy.

With these in place, we hope to see improvements soon, and we encourage tenants to continue to let us know when they are not happy with our service. It's only through this feedback that we can deliver a better service for everyone.



**Councillor Lee Brazier, Portfolio Holder for Housing at Newark and Sherwood District Council**

**Councillor Mike Pringle, Chair of Policy and Performance Improvement Committee at Newark and Sherwood District Council**

## 1. Overview of Feedback

- 1.1 The table below illustrates the total number of Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaints received by Housing Services during 2024/25.

| Stage 1 Complaints | Stage 2 Complaints |
|--------------------|--------------------|
| 350                | 52                 |

- 1.2 All figures shown above exclude complaints that were withdrawn. These tend to be enquiries which are submitted as complaints, but upon investigation were found to be service requests or duplicate complaints. The customer is contacted and if they agree then the complaint is withdrawn and treated as a service request or combined into one complaint. The service has not refused to accept any complaints in 2024-25.

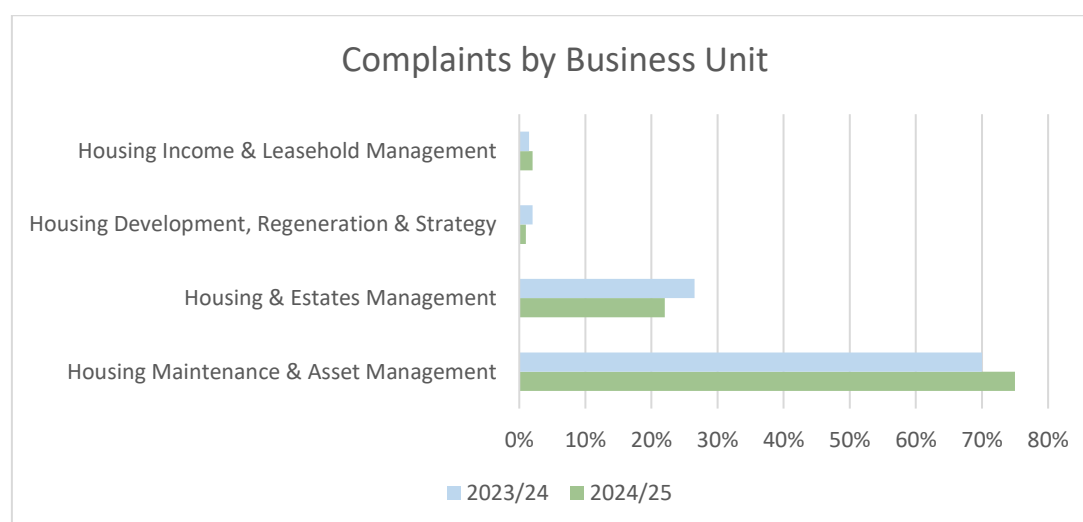
| Trend                                                                              | Comment                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  | Combined, this is a 79% increase in complaints compared with 2023/24 and 144% increase on complaints compared with 2022/23. The sector (including the Housing Ombudsman) has also seen a significant increase in complaints referred to their service. |

## 2. Complaints by Business Unit

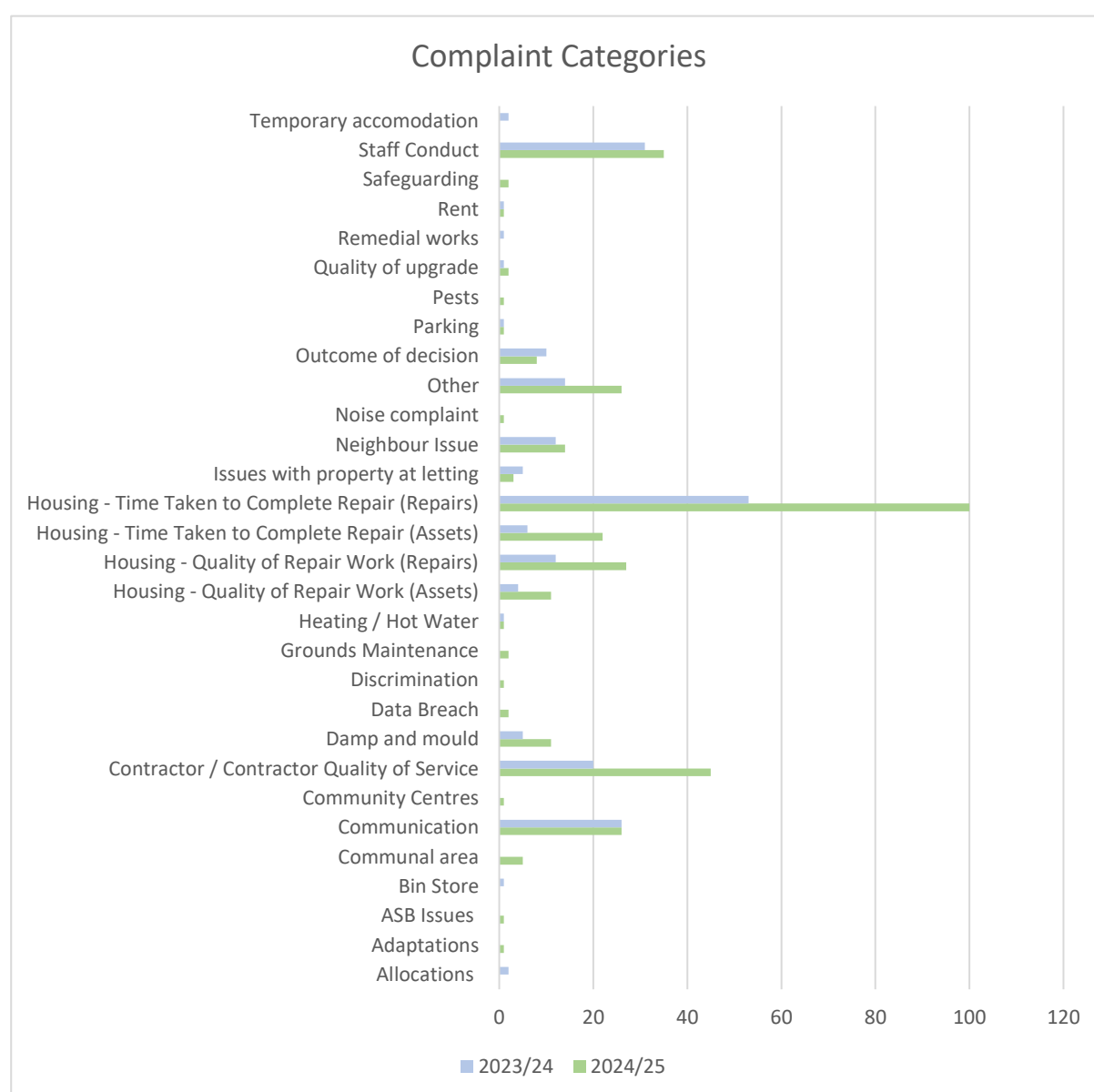
- 2.1 The largest proportion of complaints received were for Housing Maintenance and Asset Management. The service covers repairs, building safety and compliance (including gas) and major and cyclical works including new kitchens, bathrooms and heating upgrades and is very important service to tenants as most tenants will call upon repairs during their tenancy.

| Business Unit                                | 2024/25 | 2023/24 |
|----------------------------------------------|---------|---------|
| Housing Maintenance & Asset Management       | 75%     | 70%     |
| Housing & Estates Management                 | 22%     | 26.5%   |
| Housing Development, Regeneration & Strategy | 1%      | 2%      |
| Housing Income & Leasehold Management        | 2%      | 1.5%    |

- 2.2 For context, the whole Housing Maintenance and Asset Management service received 263 complaints. The repairs service alone delivered more than 19,000 repairs during 2024-25 which means 1.36% of service transactions resulted in a complaint. Working alongside involved tenants, the repairs service continues to be the focus for service improvement.
- 2.3 It is great to see a reduction in complaints relating to housing and estates management from the previous year.



### 3. Breakdown of Complaints by category



- 3.1 Similar to 2023/24, of the 350 stage 1 complaints received, the highest volumes of complaints related to:
- length of time taken to complete repairs
  - contractor / contractor quality of service
  - staff conduct
  - communication
- 3.2 During the complaint handling and investigation process, several staff conduct complaints were found to be in relation to policy or legislative decisions that the staff member communicated rather than their own conduct or attitude. To address this, following a review of complaint categories, there is a new category called 'disagreement with council policy / legislation / officer decision' implemented from April 2025 to ensure these are recorded separately to staff conduct complaints and reflect the root cause of a complaint more accurately. Whilst all complaints of staff conduct are investigated thoroughly, it is expected there will be a reduction in the number of staff conduct complaints in future years.
- 3.3 Of the 350 Stage 1 complaints, 52 (15%) escalated to Stage 2 of the complaints process and 31 of these (60%) related to repairs. 39 (75%) of the Stage 2 complaints had ongoing actions, which had not been completed within a reasonable time after the Stage 1 response. Most of the ongoing actions related to repair works to be completed or outstanding compensation awards. A number of complaints also escalated to Stage 2 because they had not received a Stage 1 response within Complaint Handling Code timescales.
- 3.4 During the year, the service had difficulty managing the increase in complaints at the same time as system changes being implemented to reflect the new Code. The good news is that during 2025/26, the recruitment of a Housing Complaints Coordinator, the creation of a designated housing complaints email inbox, together with improved monitoring of complaints and communications has significantly improved response times and as a result, there have been no cases of complaints escalating to Stage 2 due to either a delayed Stage 1 response or delayed payment of compensation.

#### 4. Complaint Response Performance

- 4.1 In line with the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code (CHC), our policy sets out specific timescales for responding to complaints. The amended Code came into effect on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024, at the start of the reporting year which introduced an acknowledgement to both stages to the process.
- **Stage 1** - acknowledge the complaint within 5 working days of the request being received and provide a full response within 10 working days of the complaint being acknowledged.
  - **Stage 2** - acknowledge the complaint within 5 working days of the escalation request being received and provide a full response within 20 working days of the complaint being acknowledged.
- 4.2 The table below details the percentage of complaints which have been responded to within the CHC timescales.

| Year    | Stage 1 in CHC Target | Stage 2 in CHC Target |
|---------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 2024/25 | 41%                   | 42%                   |
| 2023/24 | 99%                   | 100%                  |

4.3 There are several factors that contributed to the decline in complaint handling performance:

- Increased number of complaints but limited senior staff available to investigate and respond. In response to this increase, in May 2025, a Housing Complaints Coordinator was introduced to enable the service to better handle and respond to complaints within timescales. The Council's performance for the current year has significantly improved as a result with positive feedback from tenants as a result.
- The introduction of an additional step of a formal acknowledgment requiring contact with the customer, as required by the Complaint Handling Code.
- The complaints system requiring significant modifications and updates to meet the Complaint Handling Code, including system target date reminders, acknowledgement and response templates. The system has now been updated.

## 5. Outcome of Complaints

5.1 The officer responsible for investigating and responding to a complaint will determine if the complaint is upheld, partially upheld or not upheld. The issues of the complaint and resolutions sought are established with the customer at the acknowledgement stage. The response clearly states the outcome and addresses each element recorded in the acknowledgement. Often complaints are regarding several issues, some of which may be upheld and some may not and in this instance, partially upheld will be determined.

5.2 The majority of complaints are either upheld or partially upheld, which gives assurance to customers that there is value in making a complaint and draws the complaint handler to areas of service delivery that need addressing.

| Stage        | Number Upheld | Number Partially Upheld | Number Not Upheld |
|--------------|---------------|-------------------------|-------------------|
| Stage 1      | 213           | 87                      | 50                |
| Stage 2      | 34            | 8                       | 10                |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>247</b>    | <b>95</b>               | <b>60</b>         |

## 6. Learning from Complaints

6.1 Analysis of customer feedback and complaints enables us to identify specific issues and address them. Whilst complaints are encouraged, the service aims to avoid repeat complaints about the same or similar issues.

6.2 In addition to specific actions, the Council is investing in a new Housing Management System which will improve the accessibility to data and information we hold on tenants which we can use to adjust our services to meet the tenants needs.

6.3 The tables below show a selection of improvements the service has made as a direct result of a complaint.

| Housing Maintenance & Asset Management            |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|---------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Area of concern                                   | Action taken to improve                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| Communication                                     | Discussions took place between the Business Manager and the Contractor Manager to improve administration and customer service actions. The contractor appointed an additional manager to oversee day-to-day operations and changes were made to the automated letter service.          |
| Housing - Time Taken to Complete Repair (Repairs) | The repairs process was amended to include adding a 'flag' to the housing management system when structural monitoring / works are in progress, which prompts a discussion with the asset surveyor before raising a repair.                                                            |
| Unhappy with Standard of Property                 | Changes have been made to the empty homes specification to ensure that all repair works are identified and carried out when properties are empty, not just repairs need to meet the Fit to Let / Empty Homes Standard.                                                                 |
| Repairs - Time Taken (heating / hot water)        | Changes made to processes for updating contractors of newly acquired properties and additional improvements have been made to the gas contract.                                                                                                                                        |
| Housing - Time Taken to Complete Repair (Repairs) | Reminders issued to the team regarding the importance of communicating with tenants in relation to appointments. Supervisors have been instructed to ensure operatives notify when tasks are incomplete, preventing tenants being unaware of cancellations or changes to appointments. |

| Housing & Estate Management |                                                                                                                                                  |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Area of concern             | Action taken to improve                                                                                                                          |
| Use of Community Centre     | Process changed to ensure all new groups using the centre receive a briefing on terms of use and expectations of the Council when using centres. |

| General                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Area of concern                                                                                       | Action taken to improve                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| Complaints response timescales missing target and poor satisfaction with handling and overall service | Created a role for a full time Housing Complaints Coordinator. This was successfully recruited to and the post commenced at the end of May 2025. The service is already seeing significant improvements in complaint handling timescales and there has also been positive feedback from officers and tenants regarding their professional, supportive and empathetic approach. |

## 7. Ombudsman Complaints

- 7.1 The Housing Ombudsman Service outcomes, called ‘determinations’ for the past 5 years are shown in the table below.

| Year                    | Decided by the HO | Number Upheld |
|-------------------------|-------------------|---------------|
| April 2024 – March 2025 | 4                 | 4             |
| April 2023 – March 2024 | 1                 | 0             |
| April 2022 – March 2023 | 1                 | 0             |
| April 2021 – March 2022 | 1                 | 0             |
| April 2020 - March 2021 | 1                 | 0             |

- 7.2 Tenant complaints to the Housing Ombudsman have increased and for the first time the Council has seen these complaints upheld. All orders made have been met and are published by the Housing Ombudsman as part of the Council’s Landlord Performance Report 2024/25.
- 7.3 The Housing Ombudsman has already published anonymised details of two the four complaints relating to the Council. These are shown below with links where applicable.

| HO Reference (link where published)                                                  | HO Category    | Summary of Complaint                                                                                                        |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <a href="#">Newark and Sherwood District Council (202324726) - Housing Ombudsman</a> | ASB            | The landlord’s response to the resident’s reports of antisocial behaviour and complaint handling.                           |
| <a href="#">Newark and Sherwood District Council (202404742) - Housing Ombudsman</a> | Damp and mould | The landlord’s handling and response to the resident’s reports of damp and mould and complaint handling.                    |
| 202221884                                                                            | Repairs        | The landlord’s handling of reports of damp and mould, repairs, remedial works, damage, complaint handling and compensation. |
| 202333701                                                                            | ASB            | The landlord’s response to the resident’s reports of antisocial behaviour.                                                  |

- 7.4 The Housing Ombudsman Landlord Performance Report which is attached as an appendix to this report, highlights that of the 4 determinations above, there were;
- 15 findings
  - 13 maladministration findings
  - 22 orders made
  - 2 recommendations made
  - 0 complaint handling failure orders
  - £3,900 compensation awards
- 7.5 Of the orders that were made, all 22 were complied with, within timescales. It is also worth noting that the recruitment of a Housing Complaints Coordinator is expected to address issues around the complaint handling findings.
- 7.6 Complaints made to the Housing Ombudsman may refer to complaints made in a previous calendar year as complaints have a window to escalate their complaints before the request is rejected because of time passed.

- 7.7 Cases investigated by the Housing Ombudsman Service have a time lag, often resulting in improvements to services being made before the matter has been determined by the Ombudsman and the complaint could relate to a previous year. The Housing Ombudsman Service is making improvements to speed up their case work and triaging complaints to address their backlog whilst achieving an acceptable turnaround time on new complaints they receive.

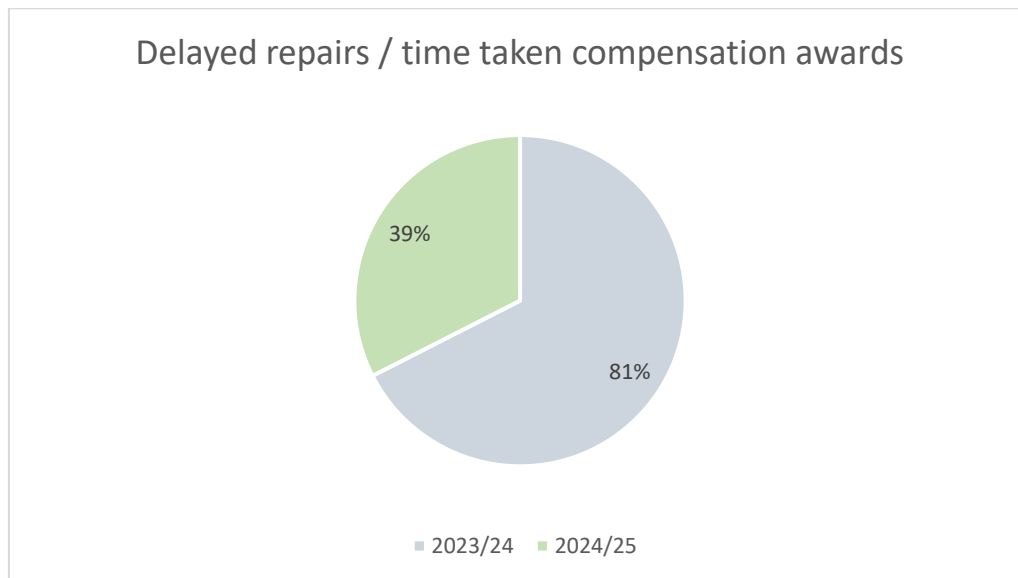
## 8. Making Things Right

- 8.1 Compensation is one of the remedies the Council considers for a housing service failure and complaints compensation is assessed on a case-by-case basis. The amount of compensation awarded reflects the level of inconvenience, disturbance and distress caused by not getting things right sooner and the extent to which the Council is solely responsible. The Council also considers whether the time taken to resolve the issue was excessive and any existing tenant / household vulnerabilities.

- 8.2 A total of 111 compensation awards were made, compared to 39 during the previous year. The table below shows the values and associated increases.

| Year    | Complaints Compensation Awards | Increase in Number of Awards | Complaints Compensation Value | Increase in Compensation Value |
|---------|--------------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 2024/25 | 111                            | 185%                         | £30,094.11                    | 189%                           |
| 2023/24 | 39                             | -                            | £10,416.64                    | -                              |

- 8.3 The majority of compensation awards are made at the point a complaint is closed, but some are agreed later once works have been completed, so that time and inconvenience can be fully considered. Any compensation to be paid and any ongoing actions resulting from complaints, such as visits, repairs and inspections are monitored internally once complaints have been closed, to ensure they are successfully completed within appropriate timescales.
- 8.4 The highest complaints category for compensation was delayed repairs / time taken, which was the same for the previous year. This is unsurprising as this is the category which receives the highest volume of complaints. In 2024/25, 39% of complaints compensation was regarding this (value £16,333) compared with 81% in 2023/24 (value £8,380.75).

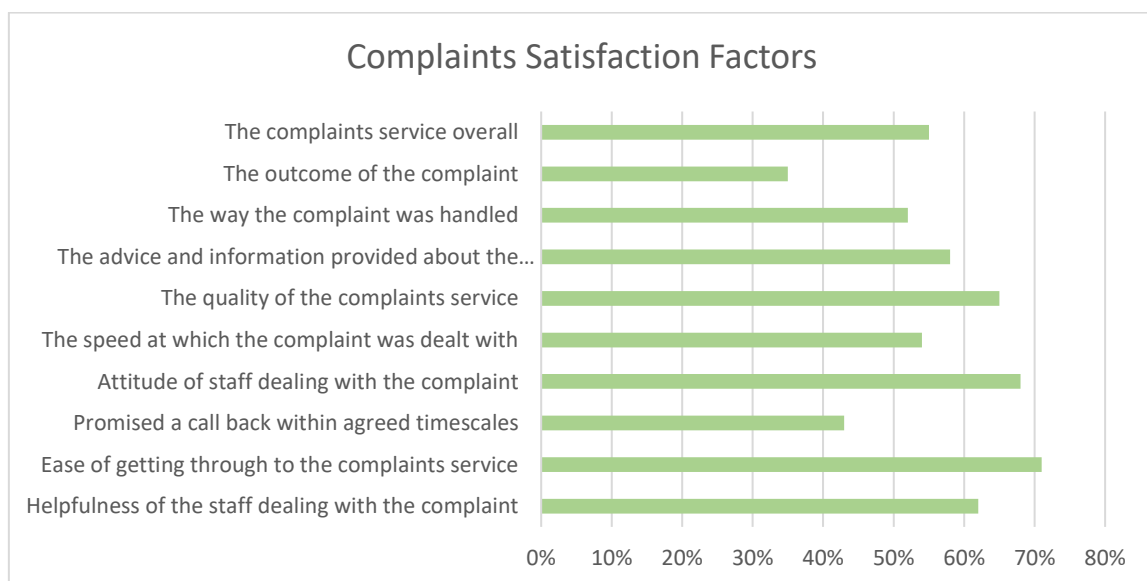


8.5 During 2024/25 a review of the repairs policy and service commenced. Performance and customer feedback is being considered when considering how the policy can be improved to address current issues.

## 9. Complaints Satisfaction

9.1 During 2024/25, 57% of customers were satisfied with the complaints handling process, compared with 55% in 2023/24. From the qualitative feedback, it is evident that many customers are dissatisfied with the whole process, from the root cause of their reason for making a complaint, rather than just the complaints process itself. This is unsurprising considering that the majority of complaints are regarding delayed repairs / time taken and by the time the customer has made a complaint, issues have often already been going on for an unacceptable period of time.

9.2 The chart below shows the key elements contributing to satisfaction with complaints overall. The outcome of the complaint and call backs within timescales had the least satisfaction.



- 9.3 Towards the end of 2024/25, complaints volumes, complaints customer feedback and complaints performance highlighted there was a need for a dedicated full-time officer to coordinate housing complaints. This role commenced in May 2025 and building on initial positive feedback, it is hoped that this will deliver an improvement in many of the above areas when this is reported in 2025/26.