

EASTSUFFOLK
C O U N C I L

**Housing Complaints
Performance and Service
Improvement Report
April 2023 to March 2024**

Remarks by the governing body

East Suffolk Council's Corporate Leadership Team is pleased to see the creation of the first review of complaints within the housing service in response to feedback from the Housing Ombudsman. We look forward to developing and improving the organisation's approach to identifying lessons learnt over the coming months, ahead of next year's review and report. The Corporate Leadership Team has committed to revisiting the way the Council responds and learns from complaints to further improve the customer experience. As part of the development of this work, we want to consider how complaints are handled, what the customer journey is and mechanisms we can put in place to improve the service being received, particularly when dealing with complex complaints, which cut across multiple service areas.

The Cabinet Member for Housing and the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services welcome the opportunity to review the learning from complaints and for officers to develop this work further over the coming months, to ensure more learning can be identified to enable services to be improved for residents of East Suffolk.

Introduction

East Suffolk Council is a registered housing provider (registration number 5070). As such, under the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023, it must adhere to the Housing Ombudsman Service's complaint handling code, made statutory from 1 April 2024. Under section 8.1 of the code, each registered provider must publish an annual report on its complaints performance and resulting service improvement.

This document discharges that requirement.

The complaint handling code can be found at:

housing-ombudsman.org.uk/landlords-info/complaint-handling-code/

Complaint handling performance analysis

Between 1 April 2023 and 31 March 2024 (2023-24), East Suffolk Council logged 75 stage 1 complaints about its landlord service, as well as 21 stage 2 reviews. Of the stage 1 complaints, one logged via self-service was resolved immediately as a service request, 34 were not upheld, and 40 were upheld. At stage 2, eighteen agreed with the original stage 1 decision, while three overturned it.

Of the 74 stage 1 complaints, East Suffolk Council breached the response timescale of 10 working days on 12 occasions. Of these, one was paused for customer clarification, and another was extended with the customer due to its complexity and responded to inside the revised deadline.

Reasons for the remaining 10 breaches included six instances of late reply by the investigating officer, three occasions requiring the investigation to cut across different specialisms, and two requiring specialist knowledge to respond (these do not sum to 10 as multiple reasons can be assigned to cases).

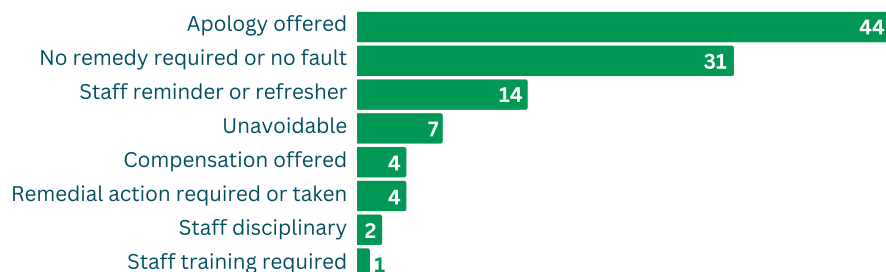
Housing complaint data

The following charts break down data for stage 1 and stage 2 housing complaints during 2023-24.

Causes of complaints at stage 1



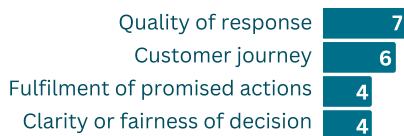
Outcomes from complaints at stage 1 (one or more per complaint)



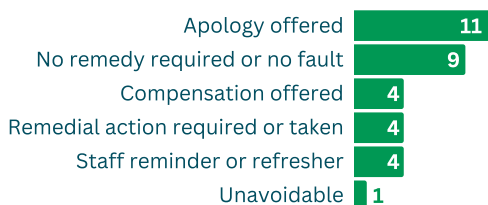
Lessons learned from complaints at stage 1 (one or more per complaint)



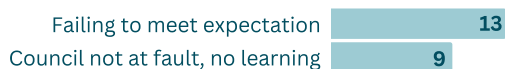
Causes of complaints at stage 2



Outcomes from complaints at stage 2 (one or more per complaint)



Lessons learned from complaints at stage 2 (one or more per complaint)



Six new affordable homes in Milton Road East, Lowestoft.

Summary of complaints refused

East Suffolk Council refused no housing-related complaints during 2023-24.

Findings of non-compliance with the complaint handling code by the Ombudsman

Three Housing Ombudsman cases were notified to East Suffolk Council or resolved during 2023-24. While these were not findings of non-compliance with the complaint handling code, details are included here for context and completeness.

Complaint 1 (Housing Ombudsman reference 202221434) related to a faulty cooker socket. The Housing Ombudsman determination was: In accordance with paragraph 53(b) of the Housing Ombudsman Scheme, the landlord made an offer of redress to the resident which, in the Ombudsman's opinion satisfactorily resolves the complaint about its handling of a repair to a cooker socket.

Complaint 2 (Housing Ombudsman reference 202203024) related to subsidence, which the tenant felt had not been sufficiently investigated. The Housing Ombudsman determination was: In accordance with paragraph 52 of the Housing Ombudsman Scheme, there was maladministration in the landlord's response to the resident's reports of subsidence affecting their home. In accordance with paragraph 52 of the Housing Ombudsman Scheme, there was maladministration in the landlord's complaint handling. As a result of this several orders and recommendations were made.

Complaint 3 (Housing Ombudsman reference 202339995) related to the failure to complete a request for a Disabled Adaptation. The Housing Ombudsman determination was: In accordance with paragraph 52 of the Housing Ombudsman Scheme, there was maladministration by the landlord in its response to the resident's request for a stairlift at their property. As a result of this there were several orders and recommendations made.

At the time of producing this report, complaints 2 and 3 had not been published on the Housing Ombudsman website. This report will be updated with links, once published.

Service improvements made from learning

East Suffolk Council appointed a new, additional Strategic Director with responsibility for Corporate Services (including Customer Relations/complaint administration) in February 2023. This brought new capacity and focus to efficient, effective handling of complaints by the organisation generally, including a review and update of the Council's Customer Feedback Policy (receiving approval in 2024/25) and day-to-day processes.

During 2023-24, the Customer Relations team continued to improve the detail and quality of complaint information provided to East Suffolk's Head of Housing and the Housing Services team. This fed into improvement work, for example the continued development of the team's new software for repairs workload handling.

In January 2024, Customer Services was moved into the Digital & Programme Management Service area and during Q4 a review of the complaints function within the council was undertaken alongside other corporate services sitting in the team. The review resulted in a plan to form a more robust Policy, Performance and Risk (PPR) team, including the corporate complaints function, to give it more status and to provide focus on elements of the complaints process such as root cause analysis and lessons learned. The plan to implement these changes falls in 2024-25.

During Q4 of 2023-24, Customer Relations began the root cause analysis of complaints across the Council's complete service portfolio, including the landlord service. No conclusions have been reached at the time of writing as this is an evolving piece of work to better understand complaints received and how we can learn from the underlying reasons we receive them – this will be a focus of the new Policy, Performance and Risk team.

East Suffolk's Housing Service has been reviewing its capability to meet the requirements set out in the Social Housing Regulation Act. Additional capacity has been created and several new roles have been recruited to. The role of Tenant Engagement has been strengthened with the appointment of a new Tenant Engagement Officer, with a second role appointed in 2024-25.

A new Tenant Engagement Strategy has been developed, which will be consulted on during 2024-25. This is published on our website:

eastsuffolk.gov.uk/housing/council-housing/tenant-engagement-strategy/

The Tenant Engagement Officers will be commencing Estate Action Days during 2024-25, to focus on engaging with tenants, understanding more about the issues affecting them and looking at how we can improve our services to ensure we meet customers' needs. We've appointed a monitoring officer to support the Housing Leadership Team with the review, analysis and evaluation of data to drive forward service improvements.

East Suffolk Council has ensured compliance with the new Tenant Satisfaction Measures. Our performance against these is published on our website:

eastsuffolk.gov.uk/housing/council-housing/tenant-satisfaction/

Also in 2024-25, we'll appoint a new Strategic Lead for Regulatory Governance, whose responsibilities will include the Council's compliance with requirements in the Social Housing Regulation Act 2023 and the Housing Ombudsman Code of Practice. We'll recruit a new Policy and Regulation Officer to support

this, working closely with the Policy, Performance and Risk team to ensure we identify effective learning from complaints, make service changes, and improve quality of service to our tenants.

The Policy, Performance and Risk team will also be working to further improve accuracy in complaints administration, for example around distinctions between legitimate extensions of time and genuine breaches of the complaint handling code.

Relevant ombudsman reports

There were no specific Ombudsman reports regarding East Suffolk Council during 2023-24.

East Suffolk Council is aware of the reports being published by the Housing Ombudsman Service. Its Housing Leadership Team reviews these regularly and considers how services can be adjusted to reflect the learning highlighted in these.