

Housing Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report April 2024 to March 2025

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/

Remarks by the governing body

As part of the Housing Ombudsman's annual requirement, the Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) and the Cabinet Members for Housing and Corporate Services have reviewed the self-assessment of complaint handling for the Housing Service for the period 2024/25. The assessment was carried out in line with the Complaint Handling Code, which sets out best practice for landlords in responding to complaints and learning from them.

CLT noted that the Housing Service has successfully met all but one of the requirements of the Complaint Handling Code. This reflects a strong commitment to transparency, accountability, and continuous improvement in how complaints are managed.

- **Met Requirements:** All Code standards relating to accessibility, responsiveness, fairness, and learning from complaints have been fully met.
- **Unmet Requirement:** The only area of non-compliance relates to the requirement under the Equality Act 2010: "*Landlords must make reasonable adjustments for residents where appropriate.*" While this requirement has not yet been fully met, CLT acknowledged that a clear and proactive plan is in place to address it. The Housing Service is working to enhance its data systems so that tenant information can be used more effectively to tailor services to specific cohorts, ensuring equitable access and support.

CLT welcomed the continued operation of the Complaints Working Group, which meets monthly to review cases, identify trends, and embed learning across the service. This forum has been instrumental in driving improvements and ensuring that feedback from residents leads to tangible service enhancements.

Over the past 12 months, CLT observed notable progress in the Housing Service's approach to complaint handling, including:

- Improved timeliness and clarity in responses
- Better communication with residents throughout the complaint journey

- A stronger culture of learning and accountability

CLT commended the team for their efforts and reaffirmed the importance of maintaining momentum in this area, particularly in delivering the planned improvements under the Equality Act.

Members also noted the significant improvement in compliance with the complaint handling code compared to the previous year and were satisfied that progress was being made to ensure that ESC is able to demonstrate full compliance, once the tenant census has been completed.

Complaint handling performance analysis

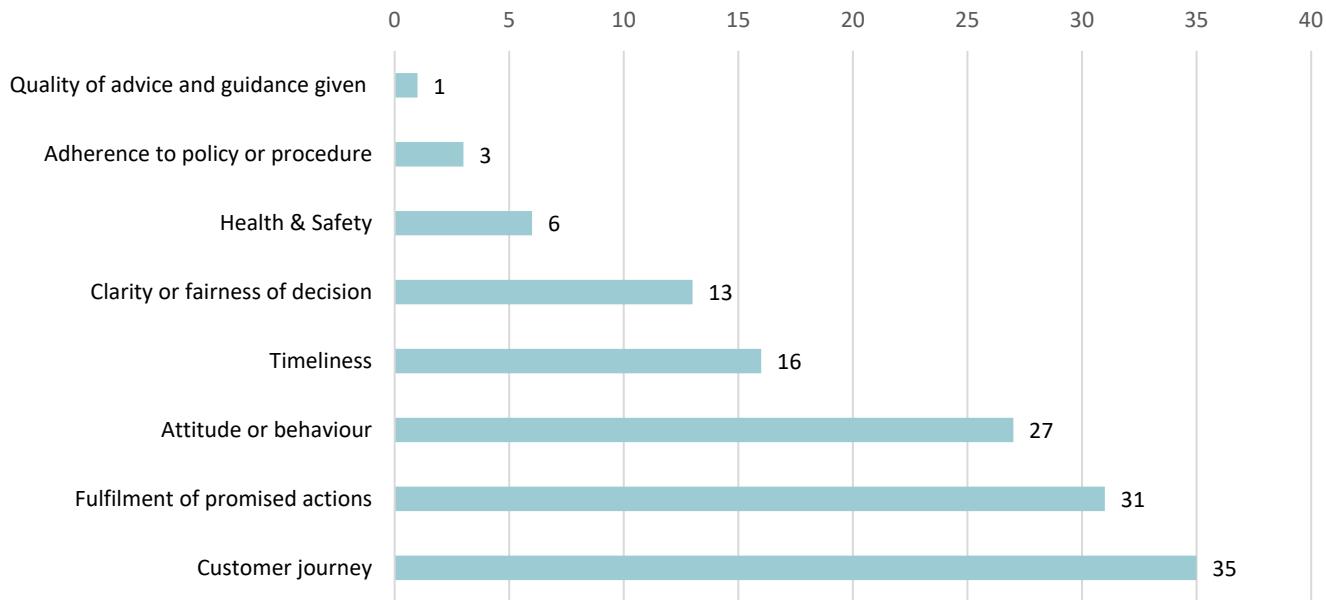
Between 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2025 (2024-25), East Suffolk Council logged 132 stage 1 complaints about its landlord service, as well as 24 stage 2 reviews. Of the stage 1 complaints, 28 were not investigated as these were service requests and could be dealt with as such. 80 complaints were upheld, and 24 were not upheld. At stage 2, eighteen reviews agreed with the original stage 1 decision, while six overturned it.

Of the 132 stage 1 complaints, East Suffolk Council's landlord service breached the response timescale on 5 occasions in quarter 1, with deadlines being met in all other quarters meaning a total of 96.2% of responses met the response deadline across whole year.

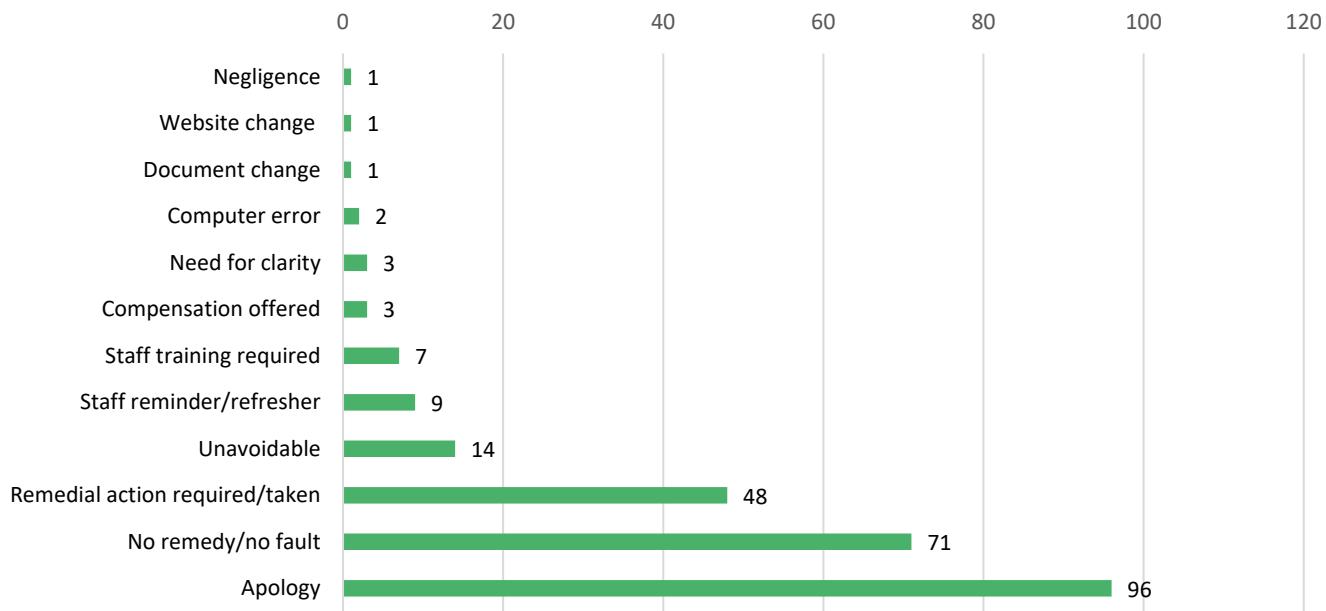
Housing complaint data

The following charts break down data for stage 1 and stage 2 housing complaints during 2024-25.

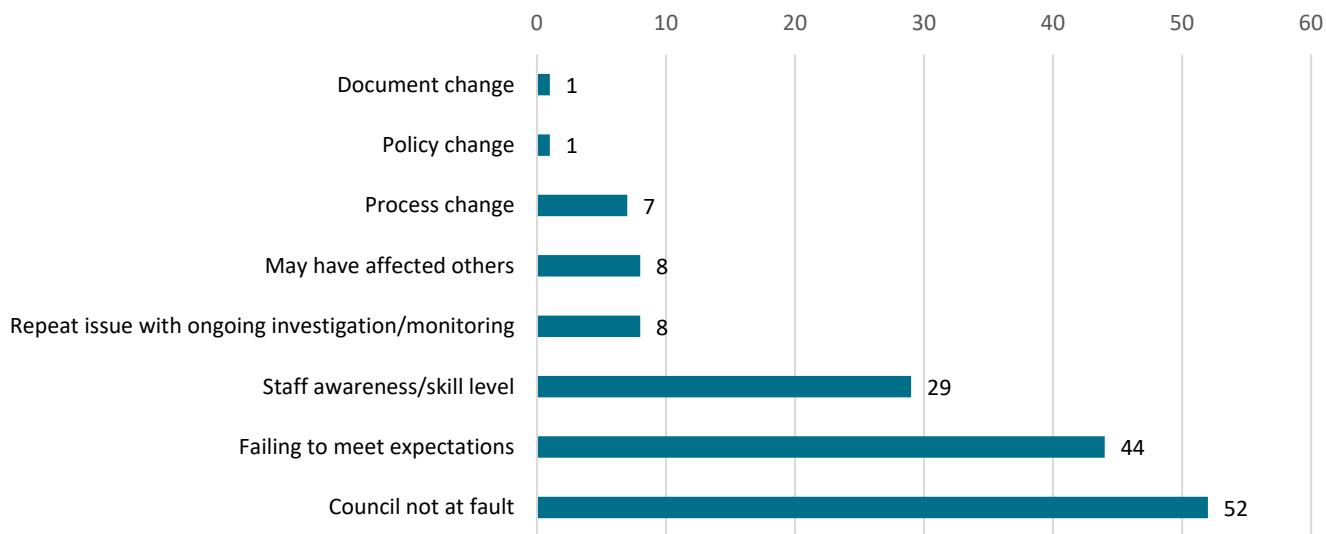
Causes of complaints at Stage 1



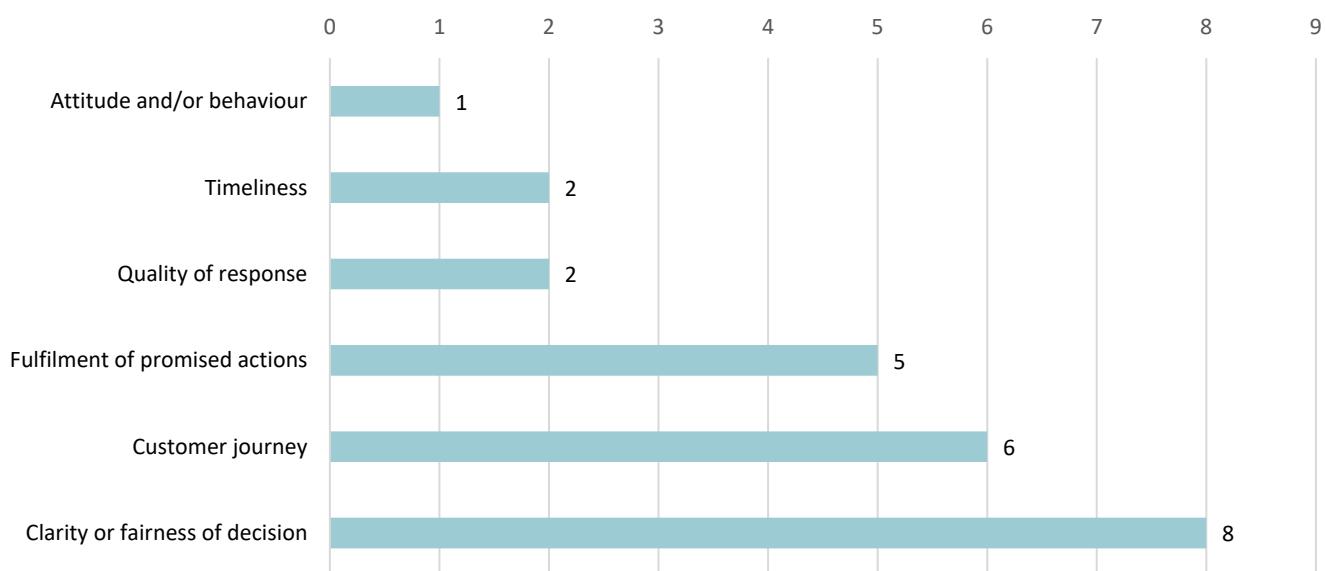
Outcomes from complaints at Stage 1 (one or more per complaint)



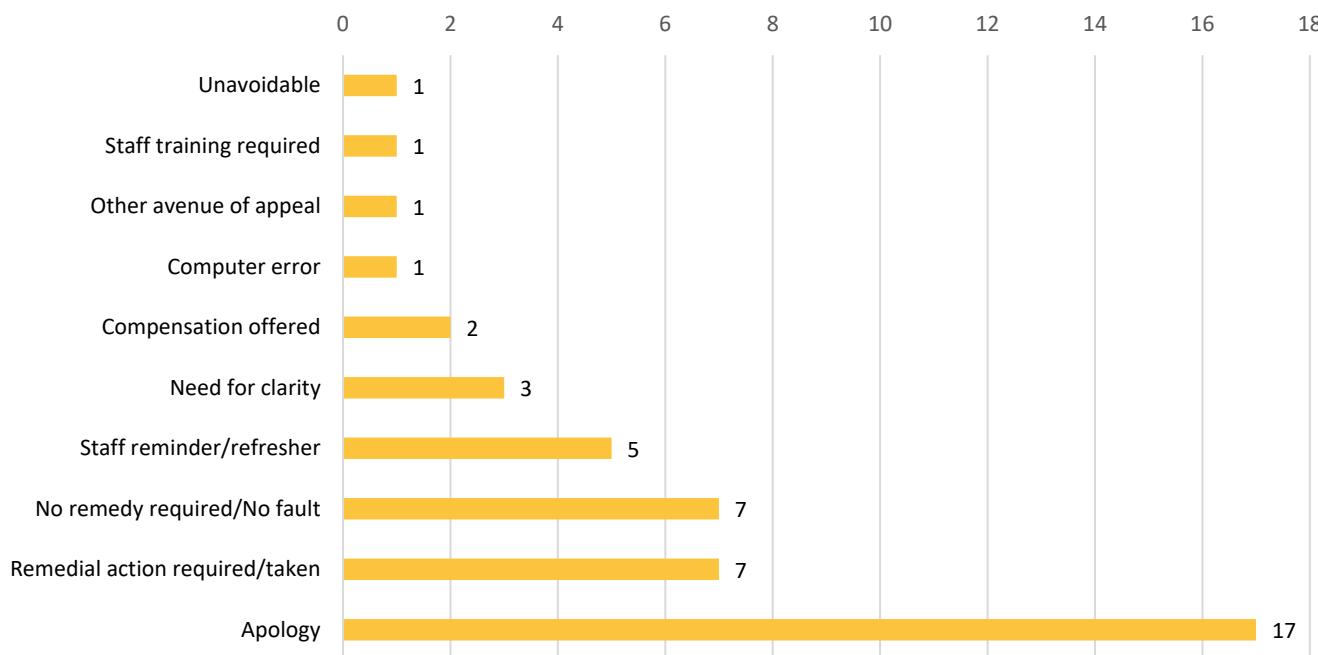
Lessons learned from complaints at Stage 1 (one or more per complaint)



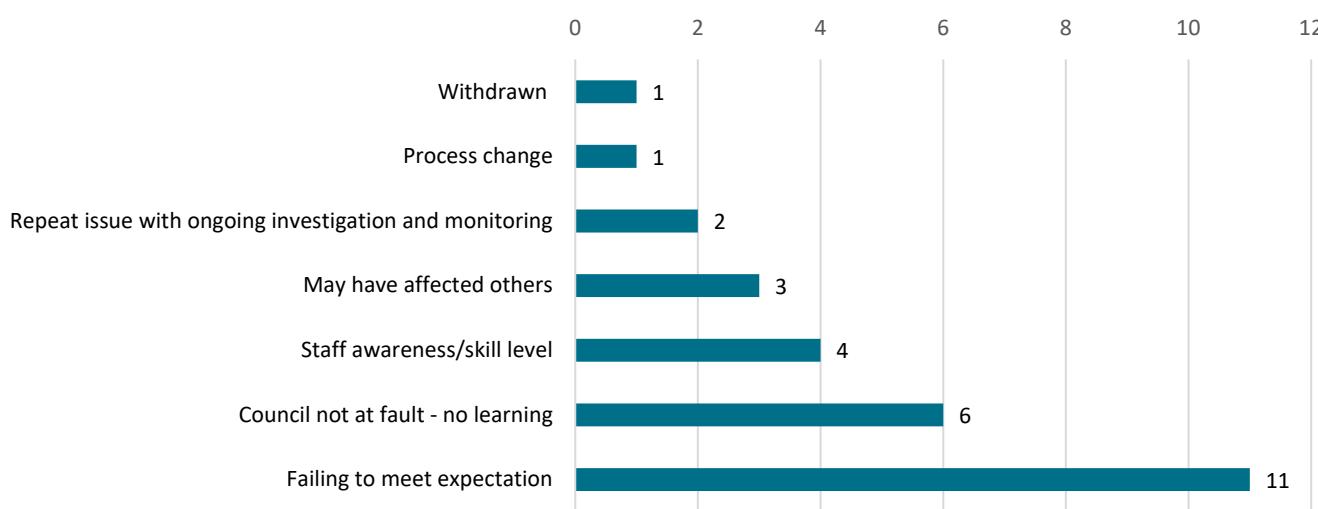
Causes of complaints at Stage 2



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



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



Summary of complaints refused

East Suffolk Council refused no housing-related complaints during 2024-25.

Year on year performance comparison

Year	New Stage 1 Complaints	New Stage 2 Complaints	Stage 1 Upheld	Stage 2 Upheld	% complaints responded to within timescale
2023/2024	96	21	34	3	92
2024/2025	132	24	80	6	96
Change from 2023/24 to 2024/25	 38%	 15%	 136%	 100%	 4%

Whilst initially it may look disappointing to see an increase in both complaint volumes and subsequent upheld complaints, this reflects the amount of time and effort that has gone into making it as easy as possible for our tenants to complain and the detailed investigations carried out when a complaint is received.

These figures are indicative of our openness, transparency and desire to put things right for our tenants when things have gone wrong.

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

Two Housing Ombudsman cases were notified to East Suffolk Council during 2024-25. 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 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.

Complaint 2 (Housing Ombudsman reference 202432138) relates to the failure of the landlord to maintain the communal area of a block of flats to an acceptable level. The stage 2 response issued by the landlord has already acknowledged this and apologised for the failure of service. The Ombudsman investigation is still ongoing, and this report will be updated once a response has been received.

Service improvements made from learning

Throughout 2024-25, the Customer Experience Team continued to improve the detail and quality of complaint information provided to East Suffolk's Head of Housing and the Housing Leadership Team. This has resulted in revised complaint handling groups being set up to improve the efficiency of response times.

In late 2023/24, a review of the complaints function was undertaken. This resulted in a plan to form a more robust Policy, Performance and Risk (PPR) team, including the corporate complaint's function. During 2024/25 the Corporate Complaints team began a project to identify and analyse the root causes 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 Corporate Complaints team. A report will be produced each quarter and passed to the landlord team identifying trends and commonalities in complaint root causes to enable these to be reviewed and actions taken to reduce these issues in future.

East Suffolk Council's Housing Service has continued to review its capability to meet the requirements set out in the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2003. As a result, we embarked on a programme of 'building capacity' across our service, recruiting to several additional roles to ensure capacity to provide an adequate service and manage tenant expectations.

Our Tenant Engagement Strategy has been finalised, and because of consultation and feedback, we have also created a shorter, customer friendly version. Both documents have been published on our website: eastsuffolk.gov.uk/housing/council-housing/tenant-engagement-strategy/. We have further enhanced our offer of tenant engagement by recruiting a second Tenant Engagement Officer and commenced Estate Action Days during 2024-25. These have focussed 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.

Furthermore, East Suffolk Council has ensured compliance with Tenant Satisfaction Measures. Our performance against these is published on our website: eastsuffolk.gov.uk/housing/council-housing/tenant-satisfaction/

In October 2024, we appointed a new Strategic Lead for Regulatory Compliance, whose responsibilities include the Council's compliance with requirements in the Social Housing Regulation Act 2023 and the Housing Ombudsman Code of Practice. We have also recruited 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 are also working to further improve accuracy in complaints administration, by for example, creating different reporting groups and subgroups to allow for better

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management information, reporting and monitoring. This will help distinguish complaints regarding repairs and maintenance from tenancy issues for example.

Relevant ombudsman reports

There were no specific Ombudsman reports regarding East Suffolk Council during 2024-25.

East Suffolk Council is aware of the reports being published by the Housing Ombudsman Service. Both the Housing Leadership Team and the Corporate Complaints Team review these regularly and consider how services can be adjusted to reflect the learning highlighted in these.