

HOUSING OMBUDSMAN

Complaint Handling Code



Annual Complaint Handling &
Service Improvement Report 2023-2024
LONDON BOROUGH OF HAVERING

INTRODUCTION

Having Council Housing Complaints Department: Annual Report Summary

Following a thorough review of the Housing Ombudsman Landlord report for 2022/2023 and the subsequent orders and recommendations from cases investigated in 2023/2024, we have identified several key improvements, detailed in this report.

Restructuring and Policy Updates

In 2023/2024, the Housing Complaints Department underwent significant restructuring. All complaints teams across the Council were consolidated into a single, central complaints team, effective from 1st September 2023. Additionally, a new Complaints Policy and corporate system were introduced on 1st December 2023, which streamlined the process by removing Stage Three from the previous policy.

Transition and Implementation

During the transition period from April to August 2023, complaints were managed by a different team and system. From September 2023 to March 2024, the new structure and central team took over complaint handling.

Improvements and Outcomes

With the introduction of new management and officers dedicated to handling housing complaints, we have observed a improvement in complaint handling, aligning with the Housing Ombudsman's code. Notable improvements include timely responses for Stage Two complaints and efficient handling of Ombudsman investigations and orders.

Report Highlights

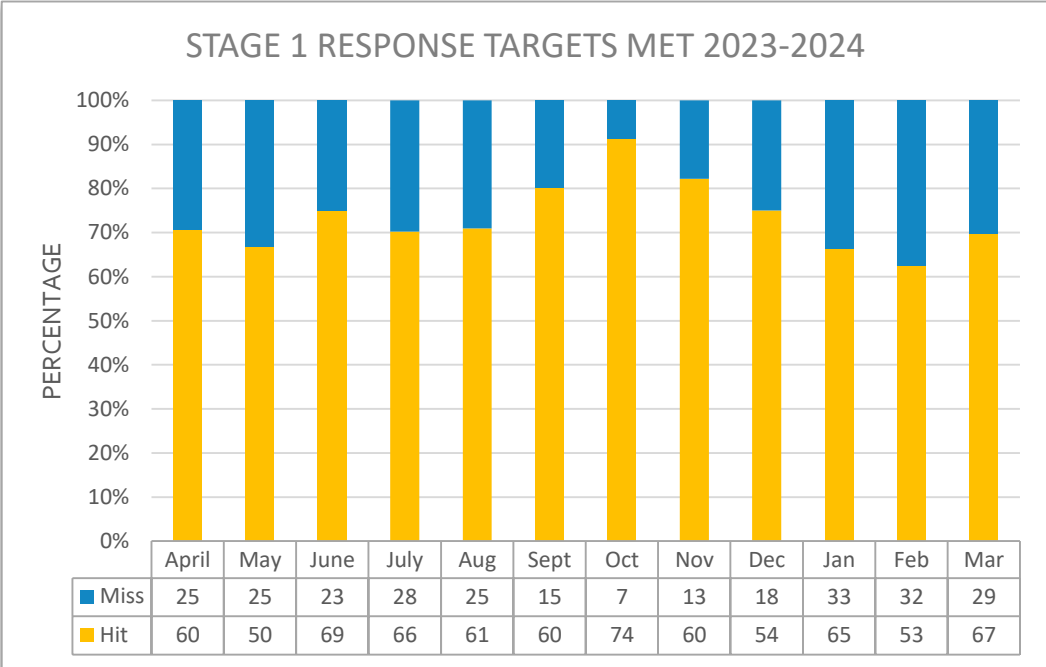
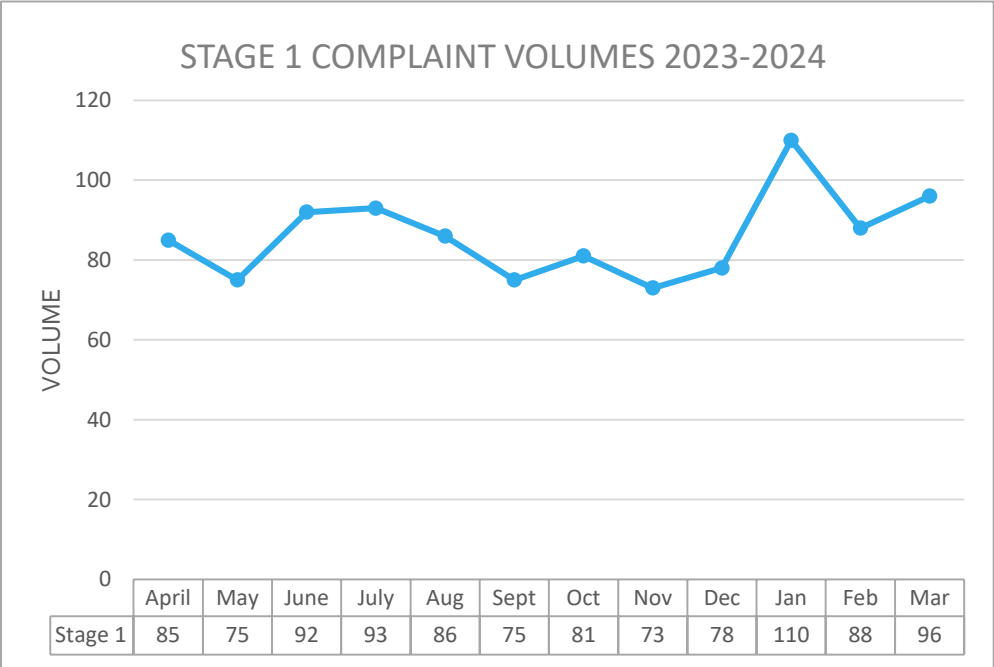
This report outlines our complaint volumes, response times, common themes, service improvements, and next steps planned for the next financial year.

We are committed to continuous improvement and ensuring that our complaint handling processes meet the highest standards of efficiency and effectiveness.



COMPLAINTS HANDLING & PERFORMANCE

Stage 1 - Volumes & Targets

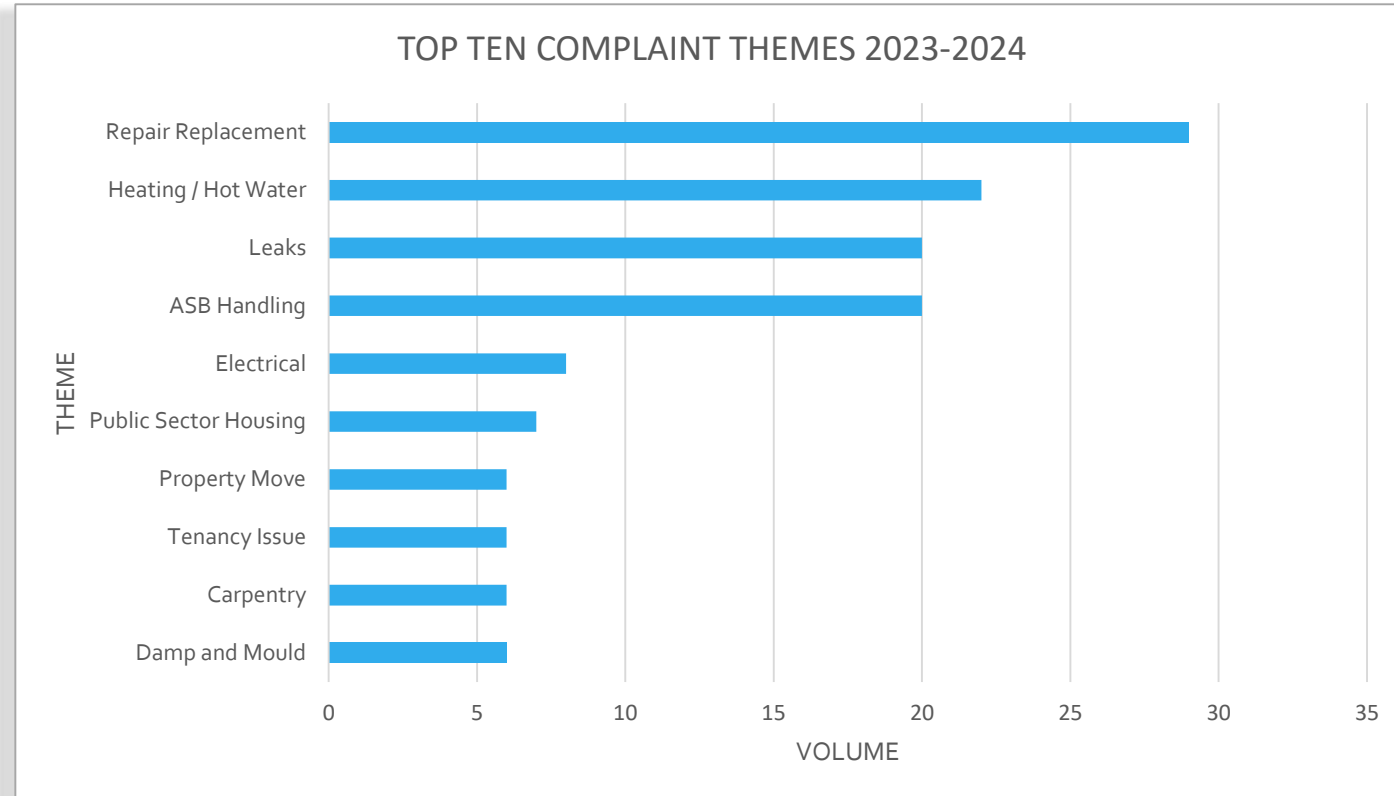


Volumes have remained consistent throughout 2023/ 2024 and have peaked in the winter months as expected due to the rise in requests to services such as repairs. We have historically seen a rise in complaints during this period as a result of the demand on the service. The on time target again shows a consistent approach with a pattern of around 70% to 80% on average. During this year resourcing was identified and the new structure was implemented. With the changes planned for the next financial year, this will allow us to analyse further and implement improvements to increase the on time target.



COMPLAINTS HANDLING & PERFORMANCE

Stage 1 - Themes

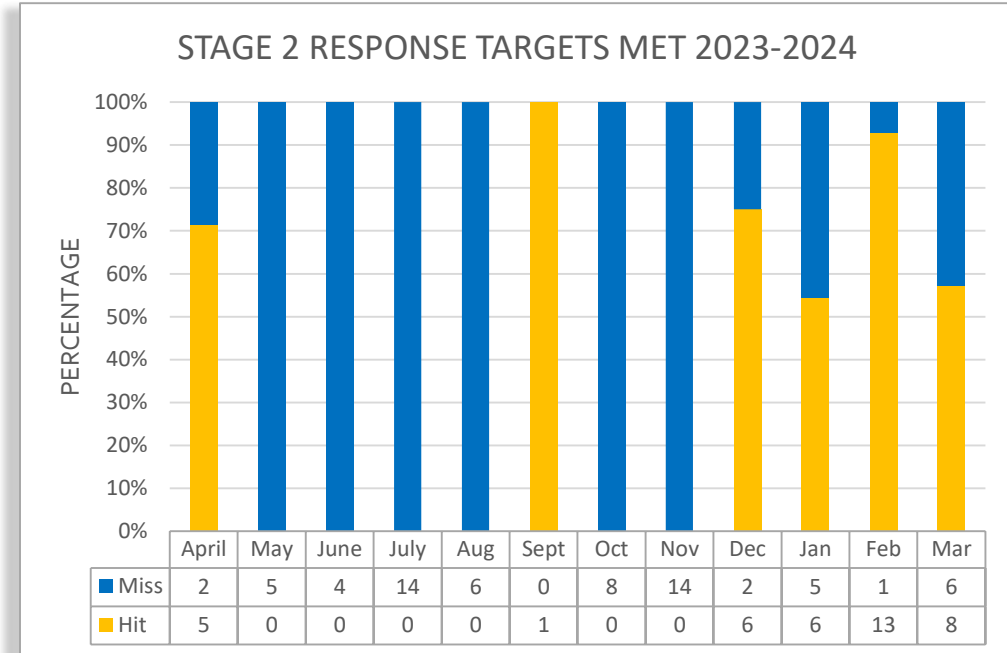
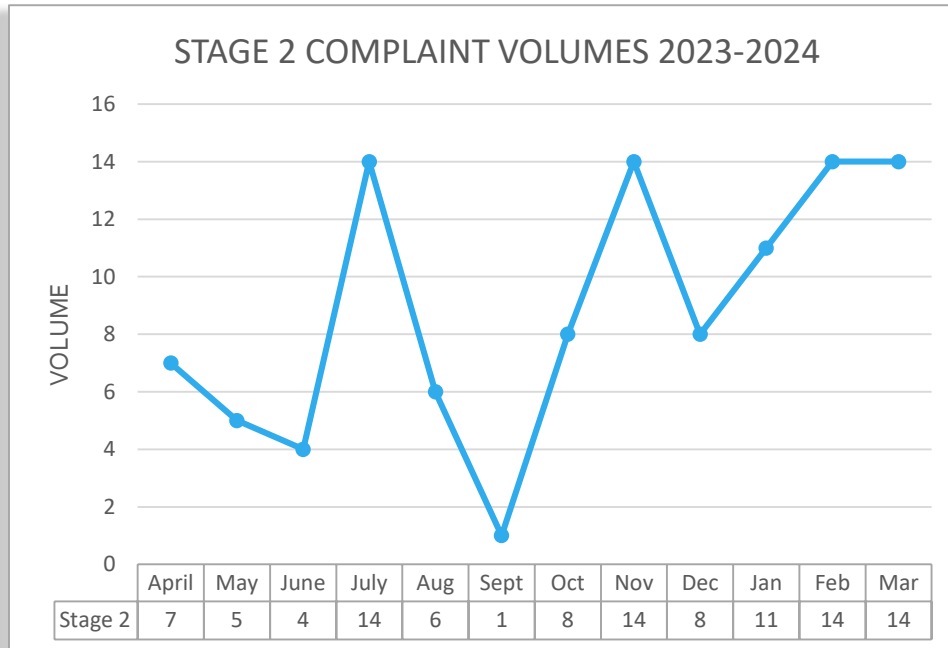


The chart above highlights the top ten themes identified in Stage One complaints for 2023/2024. The leading three themes are repair replacements, heating and hot water issues, and leaks. These trends are consistent with the increased need for repairs during the winter months, including fencing, ground works, burst pipes, faulty boilers, and roof leaks.



COMPLAINTS HANDLING & PERFORMANCE

Stage 2 – Volumes & Targets



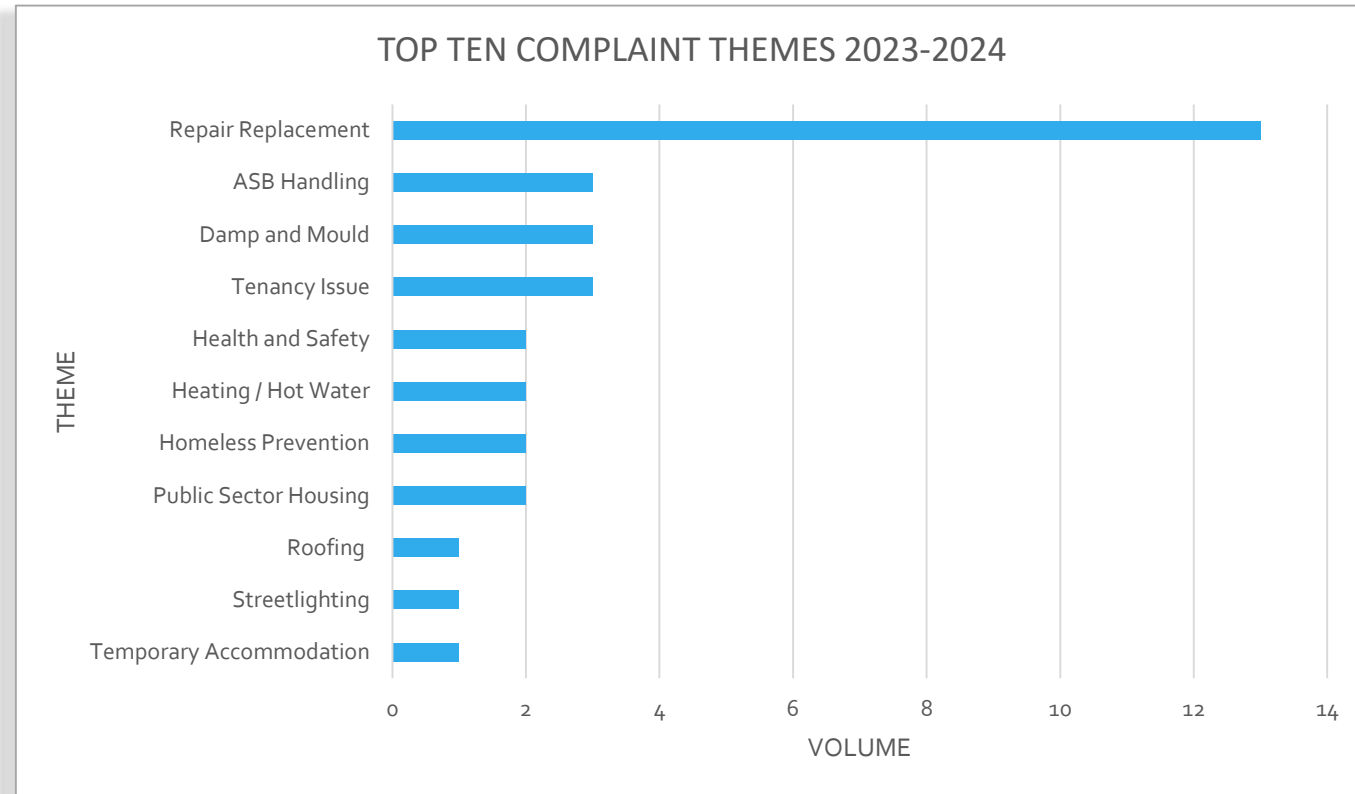
Complaint volumes have been sporadic throughout the year, with 10.3% of all Stage One complaints escalating to Stage Two. A notable drop in complaints occurred from June to September 2023, which aligns with a decrease in Stage One complaints. Conversely, there was a spike in Stage Two cases from September to November 2023, likely reflecting the increase in Stage One complaints from June to August 2023.

The on-time response rate for Stage Two complaints was notably low at the beginning of the year. However, following the consolidation of the Housing Complaints team and the Corporate Complaints team on 1st December 2023, there has been a significant improvement in on-time responses for Stage Two complaints throughout the last quarter, as illustrated in the chart.



COMPLAINTS HANDLING & PERFORMANCE

Stage 2 - Themes



The chart above illustrates the top ten themes identified in Stage Two complaints for 2023/2024. The leading theme remains consistent with Stage One complaints. However, the second and third highest themes are Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) and Damp and Mould, respectively. This variation is due to the escalation of certain cases to Stage Two. While issues such as heating, hot water, and leaks were effectively resolved at Stage One, complaints related to ASB and Damp and Mould exhibited lower satisfaction rates, necessitating further escalation.



COMPLAINTS HANDLING & PERFORMANCE

Stage 3 – Volumes & Themes

Following the Policy changes implemented on 1st December 2023, Stage Three was removed from the complaints process. Prior to this change, we received four Stage Three complaints, representing 3.7% of the complaints that escalated to Stage Two. The outcomes of these Stage Three complaints are listed below:

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22nd JUNE 2023 – WITHDRAWN BY RESIDENT

Went to Stage 3 panel process but resident withdrew complaint.

19TH JULY 2023 – STAGE 3 REQUESTED BY RESIDENT

Form sent but resident failed to complete or return.

22ND OCTOBER 2023 – DECLINED BY CHAIR

Adjudication & Review Committee were satisfied with the actions taken and responses given by the Service during Stage 1 & 2 of the complaint process. The Chair felt the investigation had been thorough and complied with Councils Policy & Procedure.

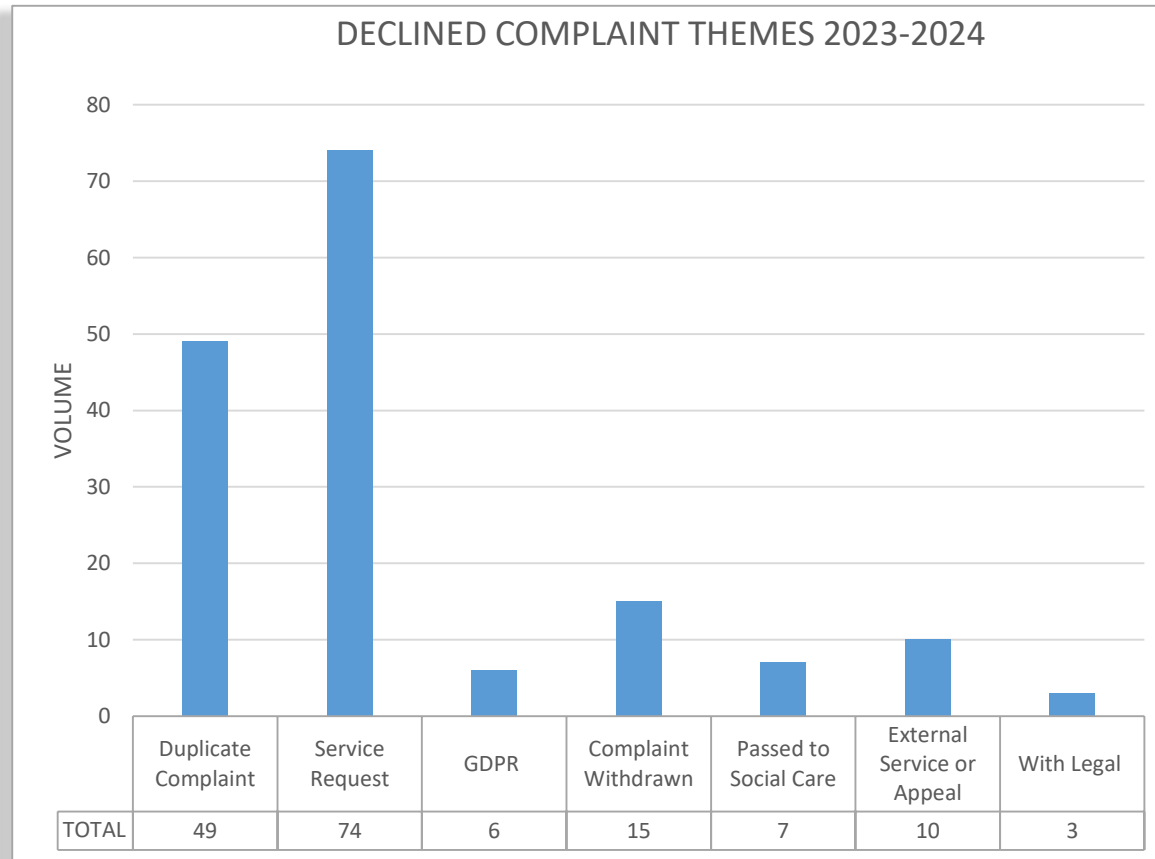
14th JANUARY 2024 – ESCALATION TIMESCALE EXPIRED

Resident requested Stage 3 but escalation timeline had expired.



COMPLAINTS HANDLING & PERFORMANCE

Declined Complaints



In 2023/2024, a total of 164 complaints were declined. The reasons for these declines are as follows:

- 45%** were considered requests for service rather than service failures.
- 29%** were due to duplicate complaints already logged.
- 9%** were withdrawn by the complainant.
- 6%** were declined because the complaints pertained to services outside the Council's jurisdiction or had an existing appeals process.

The remaining declined complaints, each constituting less than 5%, were due to various reasons including the need for third-party consent to investigate, being redirected to Social Care as they were not housing issues, and being addressed through legal channels.



COMPLAINTS HANDLING & PERFORMANCE

Compliance and Service Improvement

Delays in Handling Damp and Mould The Repairs Service has introduced a new system and process for handling damp and mould issues. We have streamlined our processes to ensure that residents can quickly and easily report damp and mould concerns. All reports will receive a surveyor's inspection within a target time of three weeks. We recognize that damp can result from various building defects, such as leaking gutters, burst pipes, leaking roofs, and rising damp, not just condensation. Our surveyors will conduct detailed property inspections to identify and address any building defects. Additionally, we have implemented a damp and mould MOT approach to support residents during the peak period from November to April. Damp and mould can be reported via the Call Centre on 01708 434000 or via the My Havering portal. Further details around handling damp and mould can be found at <https://democracy.havering.gov.uk/mgAi.aspx?ID=33834>

Record Keeping Non-compliance was identified in record keeping within Services and the Complaints team. A self-assessment was completed in line with the KIM Spotlight review for 2024/2025, and an action plan has been established to address these issues. Furthermore, a new Corporate Complaints system was implemented on 1st December 2023 to centralize all complaint records.

Complaints Handling Delays The restructuring process revealed delays in handling Stage One and Stage Two complaints. Since merging the Housing Complaints team with the Corporate Complaints team and implementing the new system, on-time responses have improved. The new system also tracks whether officers are keeping customers informed.

Remedies and Redress The Housing Services' Goodwill Gesture Policy, implemented in 2021, remains in force. However, it has been noted that the offers of redress have not always aligned with the current Housing Ombudsman Remedies policy. Until the Goodwill Gesture Policy can be reviewed and updated, we will seek guidance from the Ombudsman Remedies Policy when offering redress and remedy.

Training for Complaints Officers Following the restructure in December 2023, there has been a decline in some cases due to gaps in knowledge and skills among new officers in Housing Services. This issue is being addressed through a training plan for 2024/2025, as well as targeted recruitment of officers with required experience. This is aimed at bringing officers up to standard in complaints handling and compliance with the code.



COMPLAINTS HANDLING & PERFORMANCE

Actions Following Ombudsman Landlord Report 2022-2023

The Housing Ombudsman landlord report for 2022-2023 found that Havering Council had a 78% maladministration rate, which is higher than the national average of 73%. The report also found Havering Council is comparable to other local authorities with similar volumes of housing stock. When compared to the national average for authorities of a similar size and type, Havering Council's maladministration rate was 22% higher for service failures and 16% lower for no maladministration findings. The report categorizes complaints, with the highest category being complaints handling at 80%, which is 4% higher than the national average. As part of our improvement plan, we will also be benchmarking against other organizations.

Compliance and Financial Remedies

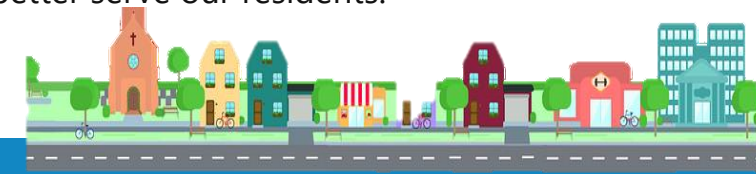
Havering Council demonstrated a 93% compliance rate with the Ombudsman's recommendations and orders within three months, and paid out £1,025.00 in remedy payments. Full details of the report can be found in the document [Landlord-Report-Havering-Council.pdf](#)

Havering Council's Findings and Actions

While the findings are within the range of similar organizations, Havering Council is committed to reducing these rates by improving complaints handling processes. The largest area of failure identified was in complaints handling and delays. As detailed in this report, we have already implemented a new structure and system, and recognized the need for additional training.

We also identified delays in responding to Stage One and Stage Two complaints, and noted that residents were not consistently informed of these delays. Improvements have been observed in 2023/2024, with Stage One response times ranging from 67% to 91% on time, and Stage Two response times improving significantly towards the end of the financial year, from 0% to 93% on time.

Havering Council remains dedicated to enhancing our complaints handling processes to better serve our residents.



COMPLAINTS HANDLING & PERFORMANCE

Relevant Reports & Knowledge Information Management

The Knowledge and Information Management (KIM) spotlight report, produced by the Housing Ombudsman in May 2023, has been thoroughly reviewed by Havering Council. Based on this review, Housing Services have developed an Action Plan to address areas for improvement in relation to Knowledge and Information management. The plan will focus on the following key areas:

- **Governance and Culture**
- **Key Recording Standards**
- **Ensuring Appropriate Systems are in Place**
- **Mergers and Other Structural Changes**
- **Repairs**

These actions are designed to enhance our management practices and improve service delivery for our residents.

