

<b>Classification:</b> Open	<b>Decision Type:</b> Non-Key
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<b>Report to:</b>	Cabinet	<b>Date:</b> 10 September 2025
<b>Subject:</b>	Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report 2024/25 and Self Assessment	
<b>Report of</b>	Cabinet Member for Housing Services	

## Summary

1. Bury Council must comply with Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code and each year is required to self-assess against the complaint handling code and produce an annual report on its complaints' performance and service improvement.
2. It is a requirement of the complaint handling code that the self-assessment and the annual report is presented to the landlord's governing body for comment and approval. The report must then be submitted to the Housing Ombudsman by 30<sup>th</sup> September of each year along with the governing body's response to the report.
3. This report presents the self-assessment against the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code and the Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report for approval.

## Recommendation(s)

4. That cabinet discuss and approve the annual self assessment against the Complaint Handling Code.
5. Discuss and approve the Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report

## Reasons for recommendation(s)

6. It is a requirement of the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code that we carry out a self-assessment against the code and produce an annual report on our complaints' performance and service improvement. As part of the code it is a requirement that both are approved by the governing body of the landlord and then submitted to the Housing Ombudsman along with the governing body's response to the report.

## Alternative options considered and rejected

7. None

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## **Background**

8. It is a requirement of the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code that social landlords carry out an annual self-assessment against the code and that the self-assessment is reported to the landlord's governing body on at least an annual basis.
9. It is also a requirement of the code that landlords provide an annual complaints performance and service improvement report that must include;
  - The annual self-assessment against the code to ensure complaint handling policy remains within its requirements
  - A qualitative and quantitative analysis of the landlord's complaint handling performance – this must also include a summary of the type of complaints the landlord has refused to accept.
  - Any finding on non-compliance with the code by the Ombudsman
  - The service improvements made as a result of the learning from complaints
  - Any annual report about the landlord's performance from the ombudsman
  - Any other relevant reports or publications by the Ombudsman in relation to the work of the landlord
10. Once the governing body has approved the self-assessment and annual report they must be published on the landlord's website by 30<sup>th</sup> September 2025. The governing body's response to the self-assessment and report must also be published alongside the report.

## **Tenant Voice Forum Complaints review**

11. The Tenants Voice Forum have carried out a review of our approach to complaint handling. They provided an update to the Housing Advisory Board on 29<sup>th</sup> July on their findings and recommendations.
12. The review found a number of issues around inconsistencies in complaint handling and communication. It also found inconsistencies in follow up process following a stage one complaint response which can lead to tenant frustration with the process. They also identified the need to ensure transparency and clarity in complaint responses.
13. As a result of this review, they have made a number of recommendations for improvement. These are;

- Ensure there is clear, consistent and accessible information for tenants on how to make a complaint.
- A single point of contact for complainants to improve communication and accountability.
- Improve the timely completion of actions from stage one complaint response to ensure no issues carry on.

14. These recommendations have all been agreed and adopted and progress will be reported back to Housing Advisory Board on a quarterly basis.

### **Self-assessment against the Complaint Handling Code**

15. The self-assessment against the complaint handling code is attached at appendix one.

16. As part of the self-assessment we have undertaken a full review of our complaint handling policy and process to ensure compliance. This has identified that there is one area of the code where we need to make improvements.

17. Section 3 of the complaint handling code covers accessibility and awareness. 3.3 of the code states;

‘High volumes of complaints must not be seen as a negative, as they can be indicative of a well publicised and accessible complaints process. Low complaint volumes are potentially a sign that residents are unable to complain’.

18. Our Tenant Satisfaction measures results for complaints per 1000 properties shows that we have very low volumes of complaints at 8.21 per property compared to a median benchmark of 49 per 1000 properties. When this has been investigated further it has been identified that we have not been escalating complaints appropriately when tenants' complaint and trying to resolve the issue outside of the formal complaints process.

19. As a result we have identified a number of actions to improve our compliance with this area of the code. These are;

- Review our process of using management tasks and how they relate to complaints and service requests as this is unclear.
- Add in clear process for the contact centre to triage between service requests and complaints
- Remove triage by Complaints Manager as this is an unnecessary step and is causing confusion and delays in complaint handling.
- Recruit 2 complaint investigators to ensure we are able to manage the increase in complaints as a result of the above changes.

20. It is anticipated that these actions will all be complete by end of November once recruitment to the two complaint investigator posts is complete. We will reassess our performance against the code once we have delivered the actions.
21. The Member Responsible for Complaints – Cllr Cummins – has also assessed our performance against the code and has been provided with assurance that we are meeting the code in all areas except the code provision highlighted above.
22. The self-assessment against the code was also reported to Housing Advisory Board on 29<sup>th</sup> July 2025.

### **Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement report**

23. The Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement report is attached at appendix 2. A summary of the main findings of the report are provided below.
24. The report provides performance information on complaints and compliments received between 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2025. The report highlights trends and themes and how we have learnt from complaints.
25. In summary during 2024/25 we received;
  - 62 stage one complaints (compared to 70 in 23/24)
  - 31 stage two complaints (compared to 22 in 23/24)
  - 6 Housing Ombudsman Service determinations (we also received 5 in 23/25)
  - 2 Local Government Ombudsman determinations
26. The Housing Ombudsman sets performance targets for acknowledging and responding to complaints. Our performance against these targets is set out in in the table below;

<b>Stage</b>	<b>Housing ombudsman target</b>	<b>Performance</b>
Acknowledgement	5 working days	100%
Stage one	10 working days	100%
Stage two	20 working days	83.78%

27. The repairs service received the most complaints at 17.7%. This was followed by our damp and Mould team and Neighbourhoods specifically complaints about Anti Social Behaviour.
28. 100% of damp and mould complaints were upheld and 81% of complaints about responsive repairs. Only 33% of ASB complaints were upheld.
29. The top three complaints themes in 2024/25 were;

- Time taken to resolve a tenant's issue (29%)
  - Unresolved property issues including incomplete repairs (27%)
  - Tenant unhappy with outcome (18%)
30. Only **18%** of complaints relating to unhappy with outcome were upheld whereas **87%** of unresolved Property issues and **100%** of time taken to resolve complaints were upheld.
31. 61.13% of stage one complaints were upheld or partially upheld. 50% of complaints escalated to stage 2. Of the complaints that escalated to stage two the main reasons for the escalation were either delays in the actions agreed at stage 1 or disagreement with decision at stage 1. 54.8% of stage 2 complaints were upheld or partially upheld.
32. To address the issue of delays to actions being agreed at stage one, an action tracker has been introduced to improve oversight and ensure timely and satisfactory completion of actions by service areas.
33. We received 6 Housing Ombudsman determinations during 2024/25 which contained 11 findings. Of these there were;
- 2 findings of maladministration
  - 3 service failures
  - 2 findings of reasonable redress
  - 4 findings of no maladministration
34. The two findings of maladministration are provided below;
- Right to Buy – Maladministration was found in relation to completing repairs in a timely way.
  - Complaint handling – maladministration found as a complaint should have been logged earlier
35. The three service failures two were in relation to either not escalating a complaint or a case early enough and the third was in relation to how we handled the complaint.
36. The housing ombudsman found we had provided reasonable redress in two cases one in relation to how we handled in an appointment in relation to a disabled adaptation and one in relation to how we managed a repair and staff conduct the same case.
37. The Ombudsman found no maladministration in relation to three anti social behaviour cases and in relation to kitchen and bathroom works.

38. The Housing Ombudsman awarded £550 in compensation as a result of the maladministration and service failure findings.
39. The table below provides information on the tenant satisfaction measures in relation to complaints.

<b>Tenant Satisfaction Measures</b>	<b>2023/24 Value</b>	<b>2024/25 Value</b>
Number of stage 1 complaints received per 1,000 homes	1.35	8.21
Number of stage 2 complaints received per 1,000 homes	0.21	0.34
Stage 1 complaints responded to within Complaint Handling Code timescales	100%	100%
Stage 2 complaints responded to within Complaint Handling Code timescales	100%	83.78%
Satisfaction with the landlord's approach to handling complaints	38.38%	37.6%

40. Satisfaction with our approach to complaint handling remains low and below the average benchmark score of 41%. Overall complaint volumes also remain low. We are carrying out an end to end review of our approach to complaints handling to partnership with Tenants Voice Forum to identify areas for improvement.
41. We have introduced the following changes and training as a result of learning from complaints during 2024/2025
- In response to issues around communication we delivered training to staff in how to use text messages and email to support timely communication.
  - Improved early communication to tenants on cancelled repairs ensuring messages go out early in the morning with clear support to book new appointments.
  - Training provided to the Asset Management team to understand tenant profiles for contractors – vulnerabilities and warning, tailored services, reasonable adjustments.
42. A number of long term improvements have also been identified which are included in the report.
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### **Links with the Corporate Priorities:**

43. The report links to the Let's Do It Strategy through the Delivering Together principle. A positive complaint handling culture ensure we can hear the tenant voice in our service delivery and that we are accountable to our tenants and service users. It also ensures that we use learning from complaints to drive service improvements.
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### **Equality Impact and Considerations:**

44. The report is for information purposes only therefore a full EIA is not required. Future actions arising from recommendations and/or decisions taken as a result of this report may require an EIA.
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### **Environmental Impact and Considerations:**

45. There are no environmental impacts as a result of this report.
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### **Assessment and Mitigation of Risk:**

<b>Risk / opportunity</b>	<b>Mitigation</b>
Failure to comply with the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code or to carry out a self assessment means the Housing Ombudsman make take action to intervene to ensure we comply.	Annual self assessment against the complaint handling code including a review of policy, procedure and process with an action plan for improvement where we need to improve compliance
Failure to report the annual complaints performance and service improvement report to the landlords' governing body means we are not compliant with the code.	Annual report to cabinet
Failure to publish a complete self-assessment and provide evidence of this through the annual submission may result in the Ombudsman finding failure to comply with the Code and a decision of Complaint Handling Failure Notice being issued.	Annual report and self assessment published on the Bury Council website by 30 <sup>th</sup> September 2025

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### **Legal Implications:**

46. The Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code is made under Section 51ZA 9f the Housing Act 1996.
47. Compliance with the code is compulsory.

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**Financial Implications:**

48. There are no financial implications arising directly from this report.

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**Appendices:**

*Appendix one – Self assessment against the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code*

*Appendix 2 – Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report 2024/25*

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**Background papers:**

*Please list any background documents to this report and include a hyperlink where possible.*

**Please include a glossary of terms, abbreviations and acronyms used in this report.**

Term	Meaning
HOS	Housing Ombudsman Service