

Cabinet – 2 July 2025

Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report 2024/25

Purpose	For Decision
Classification	Public
Executive Summary	<p>The Council must comply with increased self-assessment, reporting and compliance and scrutiny requirements in relation to its complaints handling and performance as set out in the Housing Ombudsman’s statutory Complaint Handling Code and the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman’s non-statutory Complaint Handling Code.</p> <p>To meet these requirements, the Council produces an annual complaints performance and service improvement report for each financial year, which must be approved by Cabinet, as the Council’s governing body, and submitted to the Housing Ombudsman by 30 September each year.</p> <p>This report includes the Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report for the 2024/25 financial year, which has been scrutinised by the Housing and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel and the Resources and Transformation Overview and Scrutiny Panel, for approval.</p> <p>It also includes the self-assessments against the Complaint Handling Codes and the governing body’s response for approval.</p>
Recommendations	<p>That Cabinet:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Approves the Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report 2024/25.

	<p>2. Approves the self-assessments against the Complaint Handling Codes.</p> <p>3. Approves the governing body's response to the Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report 2024/25.</p>
Reasons for recommendation	The Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report 2024/25 and govern body's response are required to meet obligations set out in the Housing Ombudsman's statutory Complaint Handling Code and the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's non-statutory Complaint Handling Code.
Wards	All
Portfolio Holders	Councillor Jeremy Heron – Finance and Corporate Councillor Steve Davies - Housing and Homelessness
Strategic Directors	Alan Bethune – Strategic Director Corporate Resources & Transformation Richard Knott – Strategic Director Housing and Communities
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Introduction and background

1. The purpose of this report is to provide members with the Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report to cover the period 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025 (**Appendix 1**) and self-assessments against the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's and the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Codes (**Appendix 2**) and the governing body's response (**Appendix 3**) for approval.

2. This report also outlines some of the key changes to member scrutiny of complaints following the Complaint Handling Codes from both the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman and the Housing Ombudsman taking effect on 1 April 2024.

Complaint Handling Codes

3. There are two Ombudsmen with jurisdiction over the Council. The Housing Ombudsman for complaints from the Council's tenants relating to the Council in its capacity as their landlord and the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman with jurisdiction over all other complaints.
4. From 1 April 2024, both the statutory [Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code](#), issued in accordance with the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023, and the non-statutory [Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code](#) took effect.
5. The Council's [Corporate Complaints Procedure](#) was largely compliant with the Codes, However, some amendments to the procedure were required which took effect on 1 April 2024.
6. The new Complaint Handling Codes include a requirement to produce an Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report for scrutiny and challenge which must include:
 - (a) the annual self-assessment against the Code to ensure the Council's complaint handling policy remains in line with its requirements;
 - (b) a qualitative and quantitative analysis of the Council's complaint handling performance. This must also include a summary of the types of complaints the Council has refused to accept;
 - (c) any findings of non-compliance with the Code by the Ombudsman;
 - (d) the service improvements made as a result of the learning from complaints;
 - (e) any annual report about the Council's performance from the Ombudsman;
 - (f) any other relevant reports or publications produced by the Ombudsman in relation to the work of the Council.
7. The Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code states that *'The Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report must be reported to the landlord's governing body (or equivalent) and published on the section of its website relating to complaints. The governing body's response to the report must be*

published alongside this.' Guidance produced by the Housing Ombudsman provides that for a local authority, the governing Body is Cabinet.

8. In addition, the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code includes the following requirements:

'1.70 '...a member of the governing body (or equivalent) must be appointed to have lead responsibility for complaints to support a positive complaint handling culture. This person is referred to as the Member Responsible for Complaints ('the MRC').

1.71 The MRC will be responsible for ensuring the governing body receives regular information on complaints that provides insight on the landlord's complaint handling performance. This person must have access to suitable information and staff to perform this role and report on their findings.

1.72 As a minimum, the MRC, and the governing body (or equivalent) must receive:

- (a) regular updates on the volume, categories, and outcomes of complaints, alongside complaint handling performance*
- (b) regular reviews of issues and trends arising from complaint handling*
- (c) regular updates on the outcomes of the Ombudsman's investigations and progress made in complying with orders related to severe maladministration findings*
- (d) the annual complaints performance and service improvement report'*

9. The guidance produced by the Housing Ombudsman provides that for a local authority, the MRC will be the portfolio holder with responsibility for Housing.

10. In addition, the Housing Ombudsman's guidance published on its website states that the self-assessment form, the Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report and the governing body's response should be submitted to the Housing Ombudsman by 30 September each year* for the preceding financial year.

11. *This submission date was previously 30 June for the first year's submission of the Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report 2023/24. The Housing Ombudsman confirmed that they have extended the submission deadline to 30 September as a result of feedback from landlords. This extension is helpful to the Council as it enables scrutiny of the Annual Complaints

Performance and Service Improvement Report by both the Housing and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel and the Resources and Transformation Overview and Scrutiny Panel prior to consideration by Cabinet. This is detailed further below at paragraph 13.

12. The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code, includes mostly equivalent provisions to those set out above. However, the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman is less prescriptive on who should hold the role of MRC. There is also no requirement for the self-assessment against the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's code nor the annual complaint performance and service improvement report to be submitted to them.

The Council's Arrangements for Scrutiny of Complaints

13. To meet the new member scrutiny requirements, and the new 30 September submission date, the following arrangements have now been put in place:
 - There are two MRCs:
 - Housing and Homelessness Portfolio Holder – MRC - complaints under the jurisdiction of the Housing Ombudsman (and other Housing complaints).
 - Finance and Corporate Portfolio Holder – MRC - all other corporate complaints.
 - The MRCs will be given regular updates on complaint handling through their Portfolio Holder Briefings.
 - Cabinet, as the governing body, will also receive two reports per year on complaint handling to meet the obligations under the codes:
 - July - The Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report will be considered and the self-assessments and the governing body's formal response will be approved, prior to being published and then submitted to the Housing Ombudsman by 30 September each year.
 - December – The half yearly update report.
 - Overview and Scrutiny Panels:

It remains important that there is still general scrutiny of the Council's complaints handling process. The panels will receive two updates per year:

- June –The Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report will be considered by the Housing and Communities Panel and Resources and Transformation Overview and Scrutiny Panel
- November - The Resources and Transformation Panel (with Housing and Communities Panel members invited) will consider the half yearly update report.

Annual Complaints Performance And Service Improvement Report For 2024/25

14. The Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report 2024/25 is included at **Appendix 1**.
15. The aim of this report is to meet the requirements of the Codes as set out at paragraph 6.
16. Whilst there is no requirement to submit information to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman, it is recognised that there is a benefit in the Council producing a single report which covers all of our complaint handling and all services of the Council. The Housing Ombudsman has confirmed that this approach is acceptable for the submission to them provided it is clear which parts of the report relate to tenant complaints.
17. There is a requirement within both the [Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code](#) and [Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code](#) for the Council to carry out annual self-assessments to ensure the complaints procedure complies with the codes.
18. There is a further requirement in the Housing Ombudsman's code that this self-assessment is reported to and approved by the governing body, at least annually.
19. The updated annual self-assessments for approval are included as **Appendix 2**.
20. The draft governing body's response to the report is included at **Appendix 3**.
21. When the report, self-assessments and governing body's response have been approved by Cabinet, they will be published on the

Council's webpage [Feedback, comments and complaints - New Forest District Council](#), and submitted to the Housing Ombudsman in accordance with the new 30 September submission date.

Corporate plan priorities

22. Our approach to complaint handling is in line with the Council's [Corporate Plan 2024 to 2028 for people, place and prosperity](#) and our values: LEAF:
- Learning: we use complaints as an opportunity to learn from our mistakes.
 - Empathy: we show empathy to complainants.
 - Ambition: we have ambition to improve our services where it is identified that someone has not received the standard of service that they should have.
 - Fairness: we are fair to complainants and residents in our complaint handling.

Options appraisal

23. An alternative option would be for the Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report to only be considered by the Resources and Transformation Overview and Scrutiny Panel, as has been the case previously with the annual complaints report. However, it is recognised that the Housing and Communities Panel has an interest in the scrutiny of the Housing elements of the report, particularly those under the remit of the Housing Ombudsman where they relate to complaints made to the Council in its capacity as a landlord. In addition, there is now a statutory requirement for Cabinet as the governing body to approve the report and issue the response, so it is appropriate that the new scrutiny processes are in place.

Consultation undertaken

24. EMT has been consulted on this report.
25. The MRCs have also received an update on the information included within the report through their portfolio holder briefings.
26. Both the Housing and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel and the Resources and Transformation Overview and Scrutiny Panel have been consulted on this report.

Financial and resource implications

27. There are none arising directly from this report.

Legal implications

28. The Council is subject to a legal requirement to comply with the Housing Ombudsman's statutory Complaint Handling Code.
29. The Council should also be complying with the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's non-statutory Complaint Handling Code.

Risk assessment

30. A formal risk assessment is not deemed to be required.

Environmental / Climate and nature implications

31. There are none arising directly from this report.

Equalities implications

32. There are none arising directly from this report.

Crime and disorder implications

33. There are none arising directly from this report.

Data protection / Information governance / ICT implications

34. There are none arising directly from this report.

Appendices:

Appendix 1 – Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report
Appendix 2 – Draft self-assessments
Appendix 3 – Draft governing body's response

Background Papers:

Published documents as referred to within report