

SUBJECT: ANNUAL COMPLAINTS PERFORMANCE AND SERVICE IMPROVEMENT REPORT 2025-2026

DIRECTORATE: CHIEF EXECUTIVE AND TOWN CLERK

REPORT AUTHOR: BUSINESS INTELLIGENCE OFFICER

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To present an annual complaints report including details from the Annual Review of Local Authority Complaints issued by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) and the decisions of the Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS).
- 1.2 To report on the overall number of complaints received by the Council on a Directorate basis for the full year 2025-2026, including performance against target response times and the percentage of complaints which were upheld.
- 1.3 To provide details of those complaints which were upheld and the lessons learnt from them.

2. Background

- 2.1 The council's complaints procedure includes two levels in response to formal complaints. Once the complaint has been considered and responded to by two separate officers the complainant is advised that if they are not satisfied with the final response, they can seek redress from the relevant Ombudsman service.
- 2.2 Complaints relating to the landlord function of the council, as a provider of social housing, can be escalated to the Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS). All other complaints, about any other service or aspect of council business fall under the jurisdiction of the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.
- 2.3 In April 2024, the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code (The Code), became statutory for all social housing providers. The Council's policy was updated to ensure compliance with the code and, as it represents best practice in dealing with customer complaints, the principles of the code were adopted as a corporate policy across all directorates.
- 2.4 In April 2025 the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) published its Complaint Handling Code. The Code is issued as advice and guidance for councils under section 23(12A) of the Local Government Act 1974. The principles, process and timescales in the LGSCO Code are aligned with the Complaint Handling Code issued by the Housing Ombudsman.
- 2.5 This report summarises the council performance in 2025-2026 and includes the annual self-assessment against the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code.

- 2.6 There are a number of elements in the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code (The Code) which are designed to ensure that our complaint handling performance is both effective and transparent. The Housing Ombudsman has a statutory duty to monitor compliance with the Code and has powers to issue Complaint Handling Failure Orders where performance is not conforming with the Code. The LGSCO Complaint Handling Code is issued as advice and guidance and will be used to inform the Ombudsman's view of good administrative practice in its casework.
- 2.7 From 1 May 2026, changes introduced by the Renters' Rights Act extended the LGSCO's jurisdiction to consider complaints from people who are not council tenants, for example, applicants, family members, advocates or other affected individuals, about how the Council manages its social housing functions, once the Council's own complaints process has been completed. Complaints from council tenants about landlord services remain within the jurisdiction of the Housing Ombudsman.
- 2.8 The Code requires an annual self-assessment where each of the 78 elements of the code is considered and certified as either "Complied with" or "Not Complied".
- 2.9 The self-assessment shows that there is a high level of compliance with The Code. The self-assessment is and must be available for inspection on the Council's website and is attached to this report as Appendix 1.
- 2.10 As set out in 8.2 of Appendix 1 Self-Assessment, the Code requires the governing body's response to the Annual Complaints and Service Improvement Report to be published alongside the annual report itself. The response is attached to this report in Appendix 2.
- 2.11 This annual report will be presented to Audit Committee and Executive in July 2026.

3. Complaints – Annual Performance (1 April 2025 – 31 March 2026)

- 3.1 Please see the comparison figures in the table below at 3.3. It is worth noting that there were some council services who had suspended their operations for several months in the year 2020-2021, due to Covid restrictions, and this will have reduced the potential for something to go wrong in that time and consequently kept complaints low.
- 3.2 In 2021, following the publication of the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code, the council's measure of response times was updated to reflect the expectation that all complaints should be responded to within the agreed target time of 10 working days for level one or 20 working days for level two. Prior to this development the council reported on the overall average response time across all complaints.

3.3

Year	Number of complaints	Response within target time
2020-2021	260	8.1 days
2021-2022	392	66% within target
2022-2023	459	70% within target
2023-2024	418	67% within target
2024-2025	562	93% within target
2025-2026	648	86.6% within target

3.4 The reduction in the proportion of complaints responded to within target times during 2025-2026 reflects an issue that had already been identified within complaint handling arrangements and became more significant as complaint volumes increased during the year. The higher number of complaints placed additional pressure on existing processes and capacity, affecting the timeliness of responses in some areas. In response to this, the council introduced a new complaints case management system during the year to improve oversight, strengthen monitoring of deadlines and support more timely and consistent complaint handling going forward.

4 Breakdown of Complaints

4.1 Of the 648 complaints received for 2025-2026 the broad categories they relate to are set out in the table below. The figures for the previous 2 years are included for comparative purposes.

4.2

Service area or responsibility	2023-2024	2024-2025	2025-2026
Repairs/Maintenance/Adaptations/Voids	178	228	202
Tenancy issues/rents	29	97	123
Housing Investment/asset management	16	41	57

Housing Solutions/homelessness/ allocations	26	67		56
Community Services	36	38		41
Council Tax /NNDR/ Recovery/Revenues	18	15		31
Parking	33	32		29
Housing management/ Business support/Lincare	-	-		22
Multiple areas	-	-		21
Customer Services	3	9		11
PPASB service	15	12		8
Safety Assurance/Fire/ Asbestos	-	-		7
Planning and building control	17	5		6
Sport/Recreation/Leisure	7	4		6
Major developments	7	2		6
Benefits	3	3		5
Private Housing/empty homes	6	3		4
Property Services, facilities	0	0		4
Elections & Democratic Services	0	2		3
Events	13	1		3
Legal Services	1	1		2
Bereavement Services	5	0		1
Neighbourhood Working	0	1		0
Environmental Health	0	1		0
Financial Services	2	0		0
Licensing	2	0		0
I.T (website)	1	0		0
Total complaints	418	562		648

- 4.3 Upheld complaints: Of the 648 complaints responded to in 2025-2026, Just under 48% (311) were upheld. This is in line with the 50% upheld last year.
- 4.4 In instances where a complaint is upheld customers are offered an explanation and an apology. In certain circumstances they may also be offered some other form of redress. Additionally, the officer upholding the complaint completes a feedback form for the Directorate Complaints Officer outlining lessons learned, training needs and any recommended changes to procedures.
- 4.5 Of the 648 complaints received across the year, there was little difference from quarter to quarter so there is no particular period where there has been peak in complaints. The complaints numbers were as follows: Quarter 1 – 162, Quarter 2 – 160, Quarter 3 – 175 and Quarter 4 – 151.

- 4.6 566 complaints logged were level 1 and 497 or 88% of these were responded to within the target response time. The remaining 82 complaints were escalations to level 2 and 64 (78%) of these were investigated and answered within target. Managers have been reminded of the importance of the target response times and this will be closely monitored over the coming year.
- 4.7 The lessons learned are reported through each Directorate Management Team (DMT) by the Directorate Complaints Officer. DMTs are aware of the complaints received. Where any changes to procedure are required or potential policy developments are needed these are discussed and taken forward as appropriate. For 2026/2027, DMTs will be presented complaints information in a revised format to support service developments.

5. Lessons Learned from 2025-2026 Complaints

- 5.1 When an individual complaint is investigated and responded to, the responding manager or team-leader was required to complete a Complaint Outcome Report.
- 5.2 The Complaint Outcome Report asks for details about the response and the decision to uphold the complaint or otherwise. Where there is learning as a result of the complaint this is outlined on the report and details of changes to policies, processes, or information is described and recorded.
- 5.3 As part of the complaint process, as set out in our Corporate Complaints Policy a random sample of complaints are scrutinised to check the quality of the response and the outcome. Outcomes outlined in the response letters are examined to ensure that they were carried out and any promises complied with. Learning points are also recorded, and a sample are checked to ensure that lessons learned are acted upon to improve future performance.
- 5.4 In the CX directorate there were 14 upheld complaints this year. Learning points included refresher procedure training in Customer Services and recovery teams, and this was completed. One of the complaints highlighted that a document on the Councils website did not correctly index to the correct department and required review.
- 5.5 In the Directorate of Communities and the Environment there were 51 upheld complaints. These varied mainly between Parking Services, Community Services, Sports and Recreation and PPASB.
- 5.6 The largest single area of upheld issues at 21, was the Community Services Department where a number of complaints were about facilities related service failures, mainly for public conveniences and accessibility. In response, the service reviewed the issues raised and took forward corrective actions, including addressing specific facilities concerns and reinforcing the need for regular monitoring.
- 5.7 A number of complaints upheld were regarding waste collection services, while many of these relate to a service request, bin collections are completed

by a contractor and additional monitoring has been put in place to ensure effective service delivery.

- 5.8 The Directorate of Housing and Investments received 467 complaints in total, which reflects the nature of the services provided, and the awareness of residents on how to make complaints. In terms of upheld complaints, last year there were 244 DHI complaints where the complainant's case was upheld and in many of these there were lessons that led to corrective action on our part. The Lincoln Tenant's Panel also regularly review samples of how tenants' complaints are responded to.
- 5.9 The largest area of upheld issues at 136, was the Housing Maintenance and Repairs service, predominantly regarding outstanding repairs and the standard of repairs. Additionally, the services received an increased number of complaints related to Damp and Mould issues and repairs. Performance measures have been implemented by the service to measure outcomes related to Damp and Mould, in accordance with the statutory requirement to report specific outturns under Awaab's Law. At Quarter 4, the average time taken to complete damp and mould inspections was 5.89 working days, against a target of 10 working days. In addition, 77 Aico HomeLINK environmental sensors were fitted in Quarter 4, bringing the total installed during the year to 178. These sensors support earlier identification and monitoring of damp and mould conditions and provide additional evidence to inform case management and follow-up action.
- 5.10 Over the past year Housing Repairs Service has made a series of interim changes to improve tenants' experiences of the repairs process, including the launch of a separate team focused on delivery of HHSRS repairs, monitoring effective completion of repairs defined as priority, urgent, or linked to damp and mould, and a separate team focused on case management of damp and mould repairs and other hazards as part of wider roll-out of Awaab's Law.
- 5.11 As reported in the Tenant Satisfaction Measures Action Plan 2025/26, the HRS and Corporate Policy and Improvement Teams are commencing a full internal, end-to-end review of the responsive repairs service, which will focus on reviewing all available repairs data to determine root causes of dissatisfaction, and to evaluate policies and processes.
- 5.12 A comparatively high number of complaints upheld were regarding the Tenancy Services Department, where several complaints were about communication and delayed responses. In response, the service will continue to strengthen case ownership, follow-up arrangements and communication with tenants, supported by closer working between Tenancy Services, Housing Repairs, Homelessness and ASB teams where cases involve vulnerability, access issues, ASB or wider tenancy sustainment concerns.
- 5.13 In the Directorate of Major Developments there were 2 upheld complaints this year which received apologies for inconvenience caused.

6. Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Complaints

- 6.1 The LGSCO Advice team provides comprehensive information and advice to both the public and local authorities on complaints. It also produces an annual review of local government complaints which includes an overview of trends, followed by statistical tables detailing the numbers of complaints received from each local authority area broken down into general service areas. This data is published on their website. The LGSCO has also published a Complaint Handling Code (issued as advice and guidance) which sets out expectations for effective, fair and timely complaint handling and supports learning and service improvement.
- 6.2 From council records it can be reported that in the year to 31 March 2026 the LGSCO made decisions on 7 complaints about City of Lincoln Council services.
- 6.3 The general service areas of these were as follows:

Service Area	2023-2024	2024-2025	2025-2026
Environmental Services	0	1	1
Housing	6	1	2
Revenues and Benefits	1	1	2
Corporate Services	0	0	0
Highways and Transport	2	0	1
Planning and Development	4	1	0
Antisocial behaviour	0	0	1
Totals	13	4	7

- 6.4 6 complaints taken to the LGSCO were closed after initial enquiries: These complaints are where the Ombudsman has decided that it could not or should not investigate the complaint; this can be because the complaint is outside LGSCO's jurisdiction, and they cannot lawfully investigate it. The early assessment of a complaint may also show there was little injustice to a complainant that would need an LGSCO investigation of the matter, or that an investigation could not achieve anything, either because there was no fault, or the outcome a complainant wants is not one that the LGSCO could achieve, for example overturning a court order. 1 complaint was upheld without investigation as the LGSCO determined it would not add anything to the investigation and outcome already provided by the Council.

7. Housing Ombudsman Service Complaints

- 7.1 Tenancy related complaints i.e., those which are classed as a landlord function, are referred to The Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS), rather than being dealt with by the LGSCO.
- 7.2 The Housing Ombudsman publishes its decisions and a summary of landlord performance on its website. They create individual reports for landlords with 5 or more findings in the year. These findings are counted individually and there may be multiple findings from a single complaint.
- 7.3 All orders made by the Housing Ombudsman in relation to these cases have been actioned, and the findings have informed wider service improvement

activity in response to the recurring themes identified. It should be noted that, although the Ombudsman upheld these complaints during 2025/26, several relate to events and complaint handling that began in previous years, including some matters that were first raised before the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code became statutory in April 2024 and before Awaab's Law came into force in October 2025.

- 7.4 Since these complaints were originally raised, the Council has made significant changes to its complaint handling arrangements and wider ways of working, including reviewing and updating the corporate complaints policy in line with the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code, improving oversight, strengthening the monitoring of response times, providing clearer guidance for officers, and introducing a new complaints case management system. These changes are intended to support more consistent, timely and effective complaint handling across services.
- 7.5 Wider service improvements have also been progressed across housing services, including dedicated arrangements for HHSRS repairs, enhanced monitoring and case management for damp and mould and other hazards, an end-to-end review of the responsive repairs service. Within Tenancy Services, changes have included moving from a generic patch-based approach to more specialist teams covering rent collection, anti-social behaviour, and tenancy and estate management. This change is intended to provide clearer ownership of casework, improve consistency for tenants and enable more focused responses to complex tenancy-related issues.
- 7.6 In relation to ASB, the service has also strengthened recording, monitoring and case management arrangements, supported by staff training, improved use of tenant profile information and closer working between tenancy, homelessness and the specialist ASB team within Housing. Tenancy teams remain responsible for tenancy management and early case ownership, with cases referred to the specialist Housing ASB team where a more focused landlord ASB response is required. This specialist Housing ASB team is distinct from the Council's Public Protection and Anti-Social Behaviour team within the Directorate of Communities and Environment. Where cases become more serious or complex, or require wider enforcement or community safety input, the PPASB team may become involved to advise, assist or take appropriate action. Additional staffing resources have also been proposed to increase capacity and support the transfer of ASB and neighbour nuisance work into the specialist Housing ASB team, reducing confusion for tenants and supporting more proactive estate management and tenancy sustainment. Additional staffing resources have also been proposed to increase capacity, improve responsiveness, strengthen estate management and support clearer ownership of tenancy-related casework. The service has also taken steps to bring ASB and neighbour nuisance work into the specialist ASB team, supported by improved case management, tenant profiling activity, follow-up visits and additional staff training. Taken together, these changes are intended to strengthen accountability, improve the consistency and timeliness of responses, and ensure that learning from Ombudsman findings is translated into practical changes in service delivery, rather than being addressed only on a case-by-case basis.

- 7.7 Looking ahead, the Crime and Policing Bill, introduced to Parliament on 25 February 2025, is expected to strengthen the tools available to housing providers and partner agencies in responding to anti-social behaviour and serious criminal activity linked to housing management. The Council will need to keep relevant policies, procedures, staff training, case recording and governance arrangements under review as the Bill progresses.
- 7.8 These changes are intended to address many of the issues identified through the Ombudsman's findings and support more consistent, timely and effective complaint handling going forward. Relevant service managers have also been asked to review the individual findings and confirm any local learning, training or management action required.
- 7.9 In 2025-2026 The Housing Ombudsman upheld 7 complaints made to it by council tenants. These 7 complaints resulted in 14 separate maladministration findings, and the Council will receive an individual report to this effect. The details of the findings were as follows in para 7.4:
- 7.10 Upheld Housing Ombudsman Complaints:

- a) The original complaint was received by the Council in August 2024, and the Housing Ombudsman issued its determination in April 2025. The tenant complained about staff conduct during a visit to the property. The Ombudsman assessed the handling of the complaint. The service issued its stage 2 complaint response 40 working days after the resident had escalated his complaint. This was a significant deviation from policy timescales of 20 working days. The Ombudsman found that there was maladministration in the landlord's complaint handling.

For this complainant, the following remedies were ordered:

- Apologise to the resident for the complaint handling failures identified
- Payment of compensation for distress and inconvenience
- Consider the failings highlighted in the investigation when reviewing policies and practices against the statutory Code examined under the duty to monitor remit.

- b) The original complaint was received by the Council in July 2025, and the Housing Ombudsman issued its determination in December 2025. The tenant complained about the landlord's handling of repairs, adaptations, and about the landlord's approach to asbestos testing. The Ombudsman assessed the handling of the complaint. The Ombudsman determined there was maladministration in the handling of repairs due to unreasonable delay in completing repairs, and service failure in the handling of adaptations, due to unreasonable delay between agreeing the new proposal and progressing with the adaptations.

For this complainant, the following remedies were ordered:

- Apologise to the resident for the failures identified

- Payment of compensation for distress and inconvenience caused by errors in handling of repairs
 - Payment of further compensation for inconvenience caused by errors in handling of adaptations
 - write to the resident setting out what adaptations it has agreed with the OT, setting out when it plans to complete them by.
- c) The original complaint was received by the Council in March 2024, and the Housing Ombudsman issued its determination in February 2026. The tenant complained about the landlord's handling of reports of ASB from a neighbour and the associated complaint. The Ombudsman determined there was maladministration in the handling of ASB reports and service failure in the handling of the complaint. The Ombudsman found that despite an appropriate initial response and the later approval of a management transfer, the landlord did not maintain effective case management during the intervening period, and that the service did not respond to the stage 2 complaint within timescales set out on the Code, the stage 2 response was issued 40 working days after notification, and the response failed to acknowledge the delay, or offer redress for the inconvenience caused.

For this complainant, the following remedies were ordered:

- Apology to be provided by a senior staff member to the resident for the failures identified
 - Pay compensation for the distress, frustration and uncertainty caused by service failures in handling of ABS reports
 - Payment of further compensation for inconvenience caused by the delay responding to the stage 2 complaint
- d) The original complaint was received by the Council in July 2023, and the Housing Ombudsman issued its determination in January 2026. The tenant complained about boundary issues and reports of ASB. The Ombudsman assessed the handling of the complaint. The Ombudsman determined there was maladministration in the handling of boundary issues and reports of ASB, failing to take adequate actions in response to the reported issues, and service failure in the handling of the complaint, there was a small delay in providing the stage 1 response which was not acknowledged.

For this complainant, the following remedies were ordered:

- Apologise to the resident for the delay in providing a stage 1 response.
 - Pay compensation for the distress and inconvenience caused by errors in handling of boundary issues and reports of ASB
 - Seek legal advice on the options to resolve the boundary issues
 - Contact the residents neighbour about the reported issues
- e) The original complaint was received by the Council in October 2024, and the Housing Ombudsman issued its determination in February 2026. The tenant complained about reports of ASB and staff conduct, the Ombudsman assessed the handling of the complaint. The Ombudsman determined there was maladministration in the response to the reports of ASB, due to not following key elements of the ASB process or considering

the full range of measures available for dealing with ASB, and in complaint handling due to failing to acknowledge the complaint and unreasonably delaying a response. The Ombudsman determined service failure in the response to staff conduct due to failing to demonstrate communication with the resident about the full investigation into the concerns.

For this complainant, the following remedies were ordered:

- Apology to be provided by a senior staff member of the ASB department
- Conduct a case review related to record keeping of ASB, staff conduct and complaint handling, setting out minimum standards that should have been recorded and reasons for failures, wider learning identified to prevent reoccurrence and actions to take to prevent future reoccurrence
- Pay compensation for the distress and inconvenience caused by response to ASB
- Pay further compensation for the distress and inconvenience caused by response to staff conduct
- Pay further compensation for the distress and inconvenience caused by complaint handling failings
- Specific action order to assess whether it would be reasonable to reimburse the resident for incurred costs of installing CCTV
- Specific action order to write to the resident to confirm if an ASB case was open relating to the recent reports, if so, ensure risk assessment and action plan in place, if not, explain the reason with reference to the current ASB policy.

- f) The original complaint was received by the Council in September 2024, and the Housing Ombudsman issued its determination in January 2026. The tenant complained about the landlords response to reports about neighbours having dogs in their block of flats, the ombudsman investigated the response to the complaint. The Ombudsman determined there was maladministration in the response to the reports about neighbours having dogs as communication in relation to nuisance was poor. The ombudsman determined there was service failure in the response to the complaint, as a new complaint was not logged when new concerns about dog nuisance were raised.

For this complainant, the following remedies were ordered:

- A letter of apology by a senior manager for the failures identified
- Pay compensation for the distress and inconvenience it caused by refusing to log a new complaint
- Pay further compensation to recognise the distress and inconvenience it caused by its poor communication and delays in responding to the nuisance reports
- Complete a risk assessment with the resident and provide an action plan for resolving reports of dog nuisance, how the resident can report and actions that can be taken.

- g) The original complaint was received by the Council in March 2025, and the Housing Ombudsman issued its determination in February 2026. The

tenant complained about the landlord's response to reports of damp and mould and related repairs, and complaint handling.

The Ombudsman determined there was severe maladministration in the response to the residents reports of damp and mould and the related repairs, failing to carry out repairs for several months after identifying them, delayed unnecessarily in investigating a leak from the flat above, did not keep accurate repair records to show what work had been completed and did not take into account the residents health vulnerabilities. The ombudsman determined there was maladministration in the landlord's complaint handling, did not offer sufficient redress in complaint responses and issued the stage 2 response 7 days late.

For this complainant, the following remedies were ordered:

- A letter of apology by the Chief Executive for the failures identified
- Pay compensation to recognise the loss of enjoyment of the kitchen
- Pay further compensation for the time, distress and inconvenience caused by the delays to the effective repairs
- Pay further compensation for the complaint handling failure
- Inspection order of the property, to include timescales to repair or resolve any issues, assess likely cause of damage, damp and mould and any hazards in line with HHSRS guidance, and whether temporary alternative accommodation was required.

8 Complaint Trends

- 8.1 In the full year to 31 March 2025 there has been an increase in the overall number of complaints received compared to the previous year, from 562 to 648. This increase has been reflected across all directorates, although complaint volumes and trends differ between individual service areas, which highlights a combination of service-specific issues and improved complaint recording arrangements. This increase may reflect both higher demand and improved complaint recording arrangements following implementation of the updated complaint handling approach.
- 8.2 As previously reported, an increase was anticipated due to changes made following the introduction of the Housing Ombudsman Service Complaint Handling Code. The Housing Ombudsman views a high number of complaints as an indication that a landlord's complaints process is transparent and accessible. The work of the Housing Ombudsman Service and the introduction of the Regulator of Social Housing encourages tenants to raise complaints and to be confident that these will be addressed. The introduction of the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code, which aligns with the principles and expectations already set out in the Housing Ombudsman Code, may also contribute to a further increase in formal complaints by supporting greater awareness, accessibility and consistency in complaint handling across all council services.
- 8.3 This has been the second year of reporting on a full year of complaints following our introduction of the statutory Housing Ombudsman Service Complaint Handling Code. The council made changes to our complaint policy and, significantly, trained front-line staff to recognise and record

expressions of dissatisfaction as formal complaints in line with the best practice outlined in the Code. Where the council might have previously received an “informal complaint” and dealt with it to the customers satisfaction without recording it as such, this is no longer how these issues are dealt with.

8.4

In 2025/26 across the Housing directorate complaints have risen from a total of 433 to 467 which represents an increase of 7.9% on the previous year. While complaints from tenants about repairs to their homes, continue to be the most common complaint, other areas which have seen increases in complaints are Tenancy, Housing Solutions and investment.

8.5 The Council provides nearly 8,000 homes and undertakes in excess of 30,000 repairs a year which provides context and service volume. The total number of complaints is relatively low and most complaints to DHI are concluded at Level 1. Only 11% of DHI complaints escalate to Level 2 for further review and resolution.

8.6 Within the CX directorate, complaints in 2025/26 increased from a total of 30 to 59, which represents an increase of 97% on the previous year. Complaint areas in CX continue to be mainly related to Council Tax, Customer Services, Revenues and Benefits, which account for over 70% of all CX complaints recorded in the year, these areas will continue to be monitored through the council's complaints oversight arrangements.

8.7 Within the Directorate for Communities and Environment, complaints in 2025/26 increased from a total of 97 to 116, which represents an increase of 19% on the previous year. Complaint areas in DCE continue to be mainly related to Community services, Parking services and PPASB, which account for over 65% of all DCE complaints recorded in the year, these areas will continue to be monitored through the council's complaints oversight arrangements.

8.8 Within the Directorate of Major Developments, complaints in 2025/26 increased from a total of 2 to 6. Complaint areas in DMD continue to be mainly related to development works taking place to deliver projects, rather than the projects themselves.

9 Housing Tenant Satisfaction Measures

9.1 The annual Housing Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSM) report 2025/26 and action plan include findings relevant to complaint handling and the wider tenant experience of how issues are resolved. Although overall satisfaction with council housing services improved during the year, satisfaction with complaint handling remained the lowest performing perception measure.

9.2 It should be noted that only 20% of tenants who completed the TSM survey reported that they had made a complaint in the last 12 months. Of those tenants, 34% were satisfied with the way their complaint had been handled. This was the only TSM perception measure to decline during the year, decreasing by 10 percentage points compared with 2024/25, and 50% of

respondents to this question were dissatisfied. While the annual outturn was lower than in 2024/25, this was influenced significantly by the Quarter 1 result, where satisfaction with complaint handling was 17%. Satisfaction in the remaining three quarters was notably higher, and therefore the very low Quarter 1 position had a substantial impact on the annual figure.

- 9.3 Further review work has been undertaken in relation to the TSM results. Of the tenants who completed the TSM survey, 123 reported that they had made a complaint in the previous 12 months. When these responses were cross-checked, where possible, against the council's records of formal complaints for 2025/26, only 23 matching formal complaints were identified. It is likely that some of the remaining responses cannot be verified because the respondent did not provide their name and therefore could not be matched to the council's complaint records. The difference between the survey responses and the council's formal complaint records suggests that some tenants may not clearly distinguish between making a formal complaint and raising dissatisfaction or service requests through other routes, for example during service contact or while an operative is attending their home. This highlights the need to continue work to raise awareness of how to make a formal complaint and what will be recorded and managed through the formal complaints process.
- 9.4 The TSM findings also indicate that complaint handling cannot be considered in isolation. Measures relating to whether the council listens and acts, keeps tenants informed, and resolves repairs in a timely way continue to shape overall satisfaction and are closely linked to how tenants experience the complaints process when things go wrong.
- 9.5 The TSM action plan therefore identifies the need to strengthen learning from complaints, improve communication and demonstrate more clearly how tenant feedback is used to inform service improvement. These findings support the wider service improvement activity set out in the following section of this report.

10 Service Improvements

- 10.1 During 2025/26, the council identified a number of issues within its existing complaint handling arrangements, including inconsistencies in data, delays in complaint handling, duplication of work and reduced efficiency. As a result, outcomes for customers and complainants were not always as effective or timely as they should have been. In response, a new complaints case management system was developed to strengthen the recording, monitoring and oversight of complaints across the council.
- 10.2 The new complaints case management system went live in May 2026 and is now in use to support complaint handling and monitoring. It is intended to deliver more consistent recording, clearer visibility of deadlines and improved reporting, and is expected to contribute to further service improvements during the coming year.

- 10.3 Alongside the introduction of the new system, the corporate complaints monitoring officers meet regularly to review cases for common themes or emerging trends, consider complaint handling processes and identify areas where arrangements may be strengthened or improved.
- 10.4 A further area of improvement has focused on strengthening the information and guidance available to both tenants and staff. Improvements have been made to the council's website to support complainants in accessing information and making complaints, with further enhancements planned during the year.
- 10.5 In addition, the internal staff hub complaints page has been comprehensively refreshed to provide a single source of information for officers. This now brings together complaint handling codes, policies, guidance and training materials to support good practice and more consistent complaint handling across services.
- 10.6 During 2026/27, this work will continue with a particular focus on improving awareness of how tenants can make a formal complaint and what will be managed through the formal complaints process. This is intended to help ensure that tenants are clear about the difference between a formal complaint and other expressions of dissatisfaction or service requests, and to support more accurate recording and reporting of complaints.
- 10.7 The improved quality and consistency of data available through the new complaints case management system is expected to support more detailed analysis of complaints information. This will help the council to better understand the experiences of tenants and customers, identify trends and patterns, and explore issues such as customer characteristics and complaint outcomes. In time, this should support a more proactive approach to service improvement by identifying emerging issues earlier and helping to prevent problems that may otherwise lead to complaints.
- 10.8 During 2026/27, the Council will review its customer care guidance and standards, taking account of learning from complaints and Ombudsman findings to support consistent communication, conduct and follow-up across services.
- 10.9 During 2026/27, further work will also be undertaken to improve how customer vulnerabilities are identified, recorded and considered when responding to complaints and delivering services, including where vulnerability, communication needs or practical barriers may affect a resident's ability to provide access for inspections, repairs or other appointments so that communication and support can be better tailored to individual circumstances.
- 10.10 This annual report, self-assessment and the governing body's response form part of the council's wider governance arrangements for complaints. Progress against complaint handling improvements will continue to be reviewed through relevant management and committee reporting arrangements to ensure that learning is acted upon and that complaint

handling remains aligned with the expectations of the Ombudsman Complaint Handling Codes.

11 Compliments

11.1 Despite the current challenges and pressures, the council continues to receive regular compliments from the public. These tend to acknowledge the professionalism of staff and occur across all service areas. Residents often take the time to appreciate the care and consideration demonstrated by council officers.

11.2 Examples of positive feedback are as follows:

Community Services – *“My wife and I recently paid a visit to the custom event at the Lincoln Showground as I was judging one of the categories in the event. Being a custom bike builder I travel around the UK to various shows and conventions. Having attended the event on Friday we decided to have a walk round the city for the remainder of the day and both me and my wife felt compelled to write this email to congratulate you not only on a beautiful city but a friendly and extremely clean and tidy place to spend time in. Unfortunately, at this present moment in our history, I cannot say that about many of the cities we visit. So we offer our heartfelt congratulations on what you are doing and long may it continue”.*

Yarborough leisure centre - *“I have not swam at Yarborough since you have taken over the contract but did this morning. I would just like to say how impressed I was with the whole experience. Although it's an old facility especially the changing rooms the reception areas and other public areas look so much cleaner and tidier. When you get up early to swim in the morning (and often don't like it when its dark, wet and cold) it makes all the difference in the world to be greeted in this way. Most impressed”.*

Parking Services - *“Well done on the new payment machines in the Central Car Park, much more efficient than the previous disc system”.*

Customer Service– *When a member of your staff first called it was inconvenient as we were away in Scotland. However, she arranged a mutually convenient time for a callback which she adhered to. During the conversation she was friendly and helpful but remaining professional throughout. For over an hour she remained patient and showed constant empathy. In my opinion she is a credit to the council and her general attitude should be used as an example to others”.*

Housing Repairs Service

“Simply writing to say how lovely and wonderful the two operatives were when they attended my property, I was very pleased with their work”.

“Just wanted to let you know, your electrician replaced my bathroom light and was very helpful, professional, and kind”.

Directorate of Major Developments - *"I just wanted to say how incredibly grateful and chuffed I am about receiving the grants. They will allow me and my team to continue working on the projects at this crucial stage. I'm hoping something really good will come out of all of this hard work and support at the end. I hope to make you all proud! Speak soon and thank you again".*

12. Organisational Impacts

Strategic Priority: High Performing Services

Finance – There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

Legal – There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

Equality and diversity –The Public Sector Equality Duty means that the Council must consider all individuals when carrying out their day-to-day work, in shaping policy, delivering services and in relation to their own employees. To ensure that we deliver our Equality Duty we accept complaints from customers via all communication channels. Customers can complain in person, verbally, in writing or via our online complaints template. Customers who need assistance to log a complaint can get help from Customer Services to ensure that they are heard. All complaints received are dealt with equally regardless of how they are made.

Community engagement and communications. The council encourages customer feedback and clearly promotes the Complaints procedure on our website and in public buildings, offering different ways for customers to raise complaints and supporting them to do so if they need assistance.

13 Recommendations

- 13.1 Executive to consider and agree publication of the complaints report for 2025-2026

Is this a key decision?	No
Do the exempt information categories apply?	No
Does Rule 15 of the Scrutiny Procedure Rules (call-in and urgency) apply?	No
How many appendices does the report contain?	2
List of Background Papers:	None
Lead Officer:	Business Intelligence Officer