Agenda Item 9
Housing Scrutiny Committee
17 September 2025

Title: Review of Complaints Regarding Housing 2024/25
Lead Officer: Graham Leach, Head of Governance & Monitoring Officer
Portfolio Holder: Councillor Melrose
Wards of the District directly affected: All

Approvals required	**Date**	**Name**
Portfolio Holder	3/9/2025	Councillor Melrose Councillor Davison
Finance		
Legal Services		
Chief Executive	3/9/2025	Chris Elliott
Strategic Director **Deputy Chief Executive**	3/9/2025	Darren Knight
Head of Service(s)	3/9/2025	Kristian Melgaard Graham Leach
Section 151 Officer		Andrew Rollins
Monitoring Officer	3/9/2025	Graham Leach
Leadership Co-ordination Group		N/A

Final decision by this Committee or rec to another Cttee / Council?	Yes
Contrary to Policy / Budget framework?	No
Does this report contain exempt info/Confidential? **If so, which paragraph(s)?**	No
Does this report relate to a key decision (referred to in the Cabinet Forward Plan)?	No
Accessibility Checked?	Yes

Summary

The report outlines the details of complaints made regarding the housing service in the financial year 2024/25 and learning from these, as required by the Housing Ombudsman.

Recommendation(s)

(1) That the Committee notes and comments on the report and learning from complaints in 2024/25.

(2) That the Committee endorses the annual self-assessment against, as set out at Appendix 2 to the report.

1 Reasons for the Recommendation

1.1 The Housing Ombudsman has adopted an enforceable Complaint Handling Code (the "Code"). This Council is required to make an annual submission on how it considers it is complying with the Code.

1.2 The submission will be made by Warwick District Council before the deadline on 30 September 2025. To satisfy point 8.2 of the Housing Ombudsman Self-Referral form the Council must carry out the following:

- Provide its annual complaints performance and service improvement report for 2024/25.
- Provide a response from the governing body to the annual complaints performance and service improvement report for 2024/25.
- Publish the annual complaints performance and service improvement report along with the governing body's response to the report on the landlord's website.

1.3 The complaints' performance and service improvement report must include the following:

- the annual self-assessment against this Code to ensure their complaint handling policy remains in line with its requirements, set out At Appendix 2 to the report,,
- a qualitative and quantitative analysis of the landlord's complaint handling performance. This must also include a summary of the types of complaints the landlord has refused to accept,
- any findings of non-compliance with this 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; and,
- any other relevant reports or publications produced by the Ombudsman in relation to the work of the landlord.

1.4 As Councillors are aware, as part of the independent assessment of the Council Housing Service by HQN a number of action points were identified in respect of complaint handling with specific actions being reported to this Committee as part of the regular update on the Consumer Standards action plan (set out elsewhere on the agenda for this meeting). In summary, the actions to be completed, which are all in progress, are:

- Housing / Assets staff to receive briefings on the new Code by managers.

- Relevant Housing / Assets team members to complete training (complaints).
- Set up and embed a 'specialist team' to handle and investigate complaints.
- Agreement that Stage One complaints are to be logged in ActiveH in addition to the corporate framework.
- Set up a process to review lessons learnt from complaints to ensure the necessary changes are made to the delivery of the service or policy and procedure, and involve tenants in that learning process

1.5 In addition to these the following actions were completed in November 2024:

- Finalise the current outstanding and overdue complaints as highlighted by HQN.
- Produce an up-to-date self-assessment form and publish online.
- Consistent with the self-assessment findings, complete and submit to the Housing Ombudsman the Code Annual Submissions form.
- Review complaint information on the website to ensure policy and processes are clear.

1.6 The introduction of the Customer Service Team Leader role, which was initially temporary from July 2024 but made permanent on 2 September 2024, in Housing ensures independent complaint handling within Housing Services. The Team Leader had sole responsibility for investigating and responding to all Housing related complaints until two additional roles were created in the Customer Service Team in March 2024.

1.7 Similarly, the introduction of the Policy, Performance & Complaints Manager post in Governance Services on 22 April 2024 provided a resource to review the complaints service and bring complaint handling in line with the expectations of the Code. From 1 November 2024 the Policy, Performance & Complaints Manager took responsibility for oversight and handling of all Stage 2 complaints. This was previously shared by Officers reporting to Heads of Service and the Heads of Service across the Council.

1.8 With this context in mind, significant work has been undertaken by the Policy, Performance and Complaints Manager in partnership with the Customer Engagement and Business Support Manager and Customer Service Team Leader (within Housing Services) to design and deliver an improved complaints handling service for Housing Tenants.

1.9 The Council's complaints policy was updated in February 2024 to align more closely with the Code, including making changes to the timescales which the Council should respond to complaints following acknowledgement; 10 working days at Stage 1 and 20 working days at Stage 2. Process changes followed to ensure a more focussed approach to administration of complaints and provide further transparency, through weekly reporting of outstanding complaints to all managers.

1.10 The numbers below set out both 2023/24 and 2024/25 for comparison to show the increase in volume of housing-related complaints.

	Stage 1 complaints (including rejected)	Stage 1 on time	Stage 2 Complaints	Stage 2 on time
2023/24	29	7 (24%)	4	1 (25%)
2024/25	191	102 (53%)	22	3 (14%)

1.11 It is important to recognise that while the figures above show performance in reaching the 10 and 20 working day deadline, where the deadline was then agreed to be extended performance improves as follows:

	Total Stage 1 complaints	Stage 1 responses within 10 + 10 working days	Stage 2 Complaints	Stage 2 responses within 20 + 20 workings days
2024/25	191	120 (63%)	22	7 (32%)

1.12 Of the 191 Stage 1 housing complaints received:

- 24 (12%) were rejected
- 95 (50%) were not upheld
- 25 (13%) were partially upheld
- 47 (25%) were upheld

1.13 There were a variety of reasons for complaints being rejected, including:

- Matters to be handled as a Service Request
- Matters already being considered at Stage 2 of the complaints process (i.e. the complainant making a new complaint about a matter being investigated or statements)
- Cancelled by complainant
- Matters already considered by the Council's complaints process

1.14 Of the 22 Stage 2 Housing Complaints received:

- 6 (27%) were not upheld
- 8 (36%) were partially upheld
- 8 (37%) were upheld

1.15 Further analysis of this data has highlighted a need to improve the recording of the information which exists in complaint responses. Housing Services and the Policy, Performance and Complaints Manager will begin work to ensure that outcomes are logged, backdated to April 2024 and include more granularity in respect of the number of matters considered within each complaint.

1.16 Councillors will be mindful that the HQN report identified the Council was not recording sufficient number of cases which led to a deficit in understanding of wider issues and ensuring good robust procedures. With this in mind the Council began logging historic Service Requests in December 2024 to look at trends. 168 Housing related service requests were logged in 2024-25 and the following Tenant Satisfaction Measure Themes have been applied to categorise these:

- 1 (1%) – Asset Management
- 1 (1%) – Shared ownership
- 1 (1%) – Leaseholder
- 5 (3%) – Business Administration
- 5 (3%) – Gas, Heating, Electricity
- 9 (5%) – Contract Services
- 10 (6%) – Estates Management
- 25 (15%) – Landlord Operations
- 26 (15%) – Housing Advice & Allocations
- 85 (50%) - Repairs

1.17 This has helped to provide a greater understanding of both demand and challenges across the Housing Service as well as the potential impact if these were all logged as complaints. This has also increased the performance in respect of the Tenant Satisfaction Measures for CH01(1) & (2) for the ratio of Stage 1 and 2 complaints made by tenants in the relevant stock type during the reporting year per 1,000 homes.

1.18 Housing Services have identified several channels where complaints had not been filtering through to the Council and taken steps to address these. These include complaints being handled by contractors which are now directed to Housing Services. There were also revisions made to various web pages, by Governance Services, following feedback from Councillors to improve ease of access to making a complaint, specifically for the Housing area. 84 Housing complaints have been logged in the first Quarter of 2025/26, which is 44% of the total received in 2024/25.

1.19 The Council received its Landlord Performance Report from the Housing Ombudsman which contains information about the 4 determinations made on cases by the Housing Ombudsman in the financial year 2024/25. There were 16 Maladministration findings across the 4 determinations and 27 orders made, for which the Council complied with 100% within 3 months of receipt. 4 CHFOs (Complaint Handling Failure Orders) were received due to the failure to respond to requests for information from the Housing Ombudsman in a timely manner.

1.20 The concern about overall response times for requests for information from the Housing Ombudsman has been addressed by the Policy, Performance & Complaints Manager acting as the Housing Ombudsman's liaison officer. This involves utilising the Housing Ombudsman's online portal to respond to all messages and requests for information in a timely manner. Cover is provided by the Head of Governance Services. No complaint handling failure orders have been received by the Council since Summer 2024.

1.21 Another concern related to the monitoring the implementation of any remedies and learning points from complaints. Therefore, the Policy, Performance & Complaints manager created a Complaint Recommendation list in SharePoint Online. With effect from 1 September 2024 this provided a way to capture the outcomes of complaints including remedies, learning points, recommendations and orders from complaint reports at Stage 1 and Stage 2 of the Council's Complaints Process and complaint reports from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman and Housing Ombudsman. The list captures the detail of the complaint outcomes and assigns these to the relevant Head of Service, the officer responsible for completing the item and a date by which the item should be completed.

1.22 161 items related to outcomes from the Council's Stage 1 and Stage 2 responses for Housing complaints and orders from the Housing Ombudsman's determinations have been added to the list. As of the date of this report, 32 of those have been completed. These outcomes include:

- Compensation payments
- Formal apologies
- Follow up repairs/property improvements
- Policy and process reviews
- Staff training

1.23 Quarterly complaint reporting has been introduced for Overview & Scrutiny Committee and the Quarter 1 Housing complaints analysis is included as an appendix to this report. Further work on themes and actions as a result of these themes will be presented to the Committee as part of the half year report.

1.24 This said work is progressing by officers to make a positive difference examples of this include completing the feedback loop to contractors recommendations are allocated as learning points to discuss as part of contract management meetings. There have also been some areas of administration which have identified weaknesses which are being addressed by officers to further improve service delivery.

2 Alternative Options

2.1 There are no alternative options available based on the required deadline for reporting to the Housing Ombudsman.

3 Legal Implications

The only legal implication from this report is the need for reporting to the Committee and publishing the assurance around this to meet requirements from the Housing Ombudsman.

4 Financial Implications

4.1 There are no direct financial implications of this report. However, where complaints are upheld, there will normally be a financial remedy for the complainant which will have budgetary impact. The Committee will note for example the significant number of complaints that relate to repairs and they will be aware through the Action Plan of steps being taken to mitigate this both now and into the future. There is also investment within the service to further mitigate this.

5 Corporate Strategy

5.1 Warwick District Council has adopted a Corporate Strategy which sets three strategic aims for the organisation. This report contributes to the Delivering valued, sustainable services in respect of understanding demand and seeing the revisions to processes to provide improved governance.

6 Environmental/Climate Change Implications

6.1 There are no direct implications in relation to the Council's policies and Climate Emergency Action Plan.

7 Analysis of the effects on Equality

7.1 There are no direct implications in respect of equality from this report.

8 Data Protection

8.1 There are no data protection implications of the proposal.

9 Health and Wellbeing

9.1 There are no health and wellbeing implications of the proposal.

10 Risk Assessment

10.1 The significant risk from this report are around the non-reporting of this information and the Housing Ombudsman then finding against the Council as a result.

10.2 There is also the risk of the significant increase in complaint numbers at both Stage 1, within Housing, and Stage 2 across the Council which have an impact on both service delivery and staff wellbeing. The resources required to respond to these at Stage 2 are significantly beyond capacity. While there is a medium term mitigation in improving service, for example new contracts and resources in housing service as well as further training on complaint handling, in the short to medium term there are significant pressures in Stage 2 complaint numbers. Options on how to handle these are being considered by the Chief Executive, Head of Governance and Head of People & Communications as a priority.

Background papers: None

Supporting documents: None