

Appendix A

South Cambridgeshire District Council

Housing Landlord Services

Complaint Handling and Service Improvement Report 2025 / 2026

1. Reporting Period

- 1.1 This report covers housing landlord complaints, in line with the Council's responsibilities as a landlord and the requirements of the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code. Complaints relating to other Council services are excluded and are managed through separate monitoring arrangements.
- 1.2 The report includes housing complaints received and responded to between 1 April 2025 and 31 March 2026, including complaints carried forward from the previous year where responses were issued during this reporting period.
- 1.3 It demonstrates a well-established and increasingly effective complaints framework, where rising engagement reflects resident confidence in the process and supports a strong focus on service improvement and transparency.

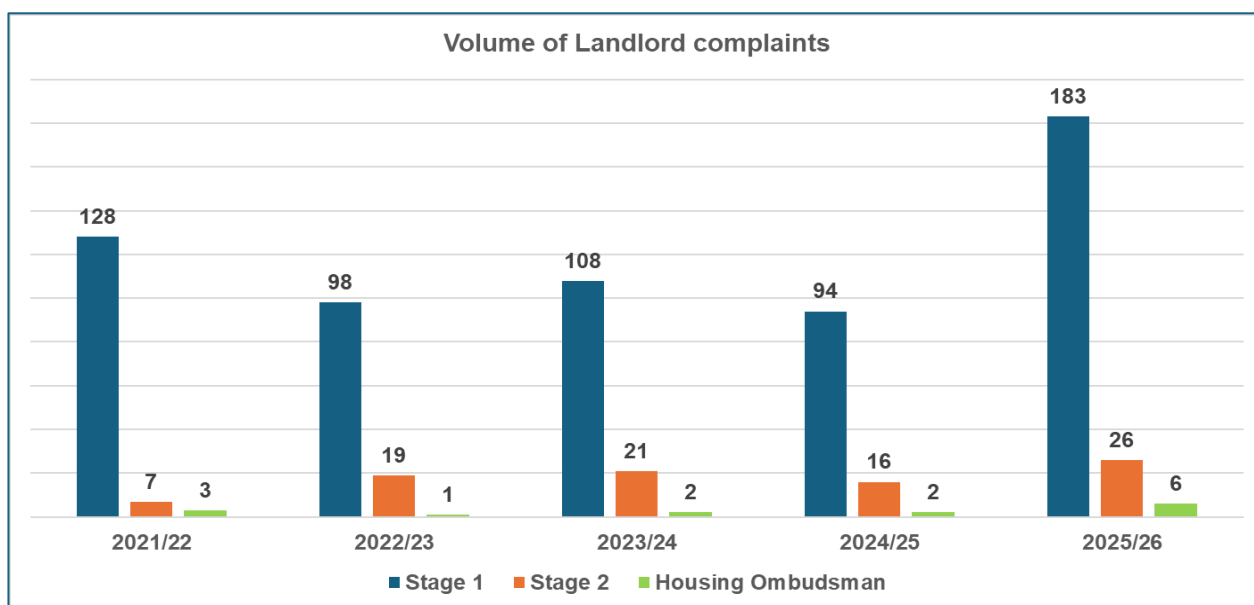
2. The Complaints Process

- 2.1 Complaints are defined as '*an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the organisation / landlord, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting an individual / resident or group of individuals / residents*'.
- 2.2 There are two stages to the complaints process:
 - Stage 1** – is the first step to make a complaint. At stage 1, a manager / team leader will review, investigate and respond to the complaint. We aim to reply within 10 working days of acknowledgement.
 - Stage 2** – Where the complainant is not happy with the outcome at stage 1, the complaint can be looked at again by the Head of Service or Service Manager. We aim to reply within 20 working days.
- 2.3 Where the complainant remains unhappy after the Stage 2 response, they may refer the complaint to the Housing Ombudsman for an independent and impartial investigation.

3. Complaint Volumes

Volumes Looking back at previous years

- 3.1 High complaint volumes should not be viewed in isolation as an indicator of poor performance, as they may also reflect residents' awareness of, and confidence in, a clear and accessible complaints process.



[Graph 1: Complaint Volumes]

Complaint volumes for the current year, 2025 / 2026

Complaint stage	What this means	Number of complaints 2025 / 2026
Stage 1	Matters that could not be resolved straight away and required investigation by a manager / team leader	183 Of which 25 had an agreed *extension of time
Stage 2	Complaints escalated for further review by a Service Manager or Head of Housing	26 Of which three had an agreed *extension of time
Housing Ombudsman	Complaints referred to the Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS)	6
Total landlord complaints	Stage 1 + Stage 2 + HOS	215

[Table 1: Complaint Volumes]

- 3.2 *Extensions were used only for complex complaints. Residents were notified in advance, given reasons, and a revised date agreed. Extensions were limited to up to 10 working days at Stage 1 and 20 at Stage 2, in line with the Code and with resident agreement. Compared to the previous year, a higher number of extensions

were required reflecting the increasing complexity of cases and the service's commitment to thorough and high-quality investigations.

- 3.3 A further three cases were initially recorded as complaints but were subsequently withdrawn by the resident or closed due to an inability to progress them because of a lack of contact.
- 3.4 Complaints relating to landlord services represent approximately 4% of the total tenant population, demonstrating a proportionate level of formal dissatisfaction and supporting confidence in an accessible and trusted complaints process.
- 3.5 This data relates solely to cases received through the Council's formal complaints system and does not represent the total volume of feedback, enquiries, or service requests handled across the wider Housing service. No complaints were refused during the reporting period.
- 3.6 Feedback received through the complaints system was recorded and followed through; however, some matters were not treated as formal complaints where they did not relate to dissatisfaction with the Housing Service or its contractors' actions. These included:
 - **Service requests**, where the feedback related to the need for a service rather than dissatisfaction with how a service was delivered. All service requests were actioned appropriately. Where ongoing dissatisfaction with the actions of the Council or its contractors became evident, the matter was logged and progressed as a formal complaint in line with the Complaints Policy and the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code.
 - **Enquiries received in error**, which required redirection to another landlord or an appropriate support service.
 - **Reports of nuisance or anti-social behaviour** about another resident, where the complaint did not relate to the way the Council handled the case.
 - **MP and Councillor enquiries**,

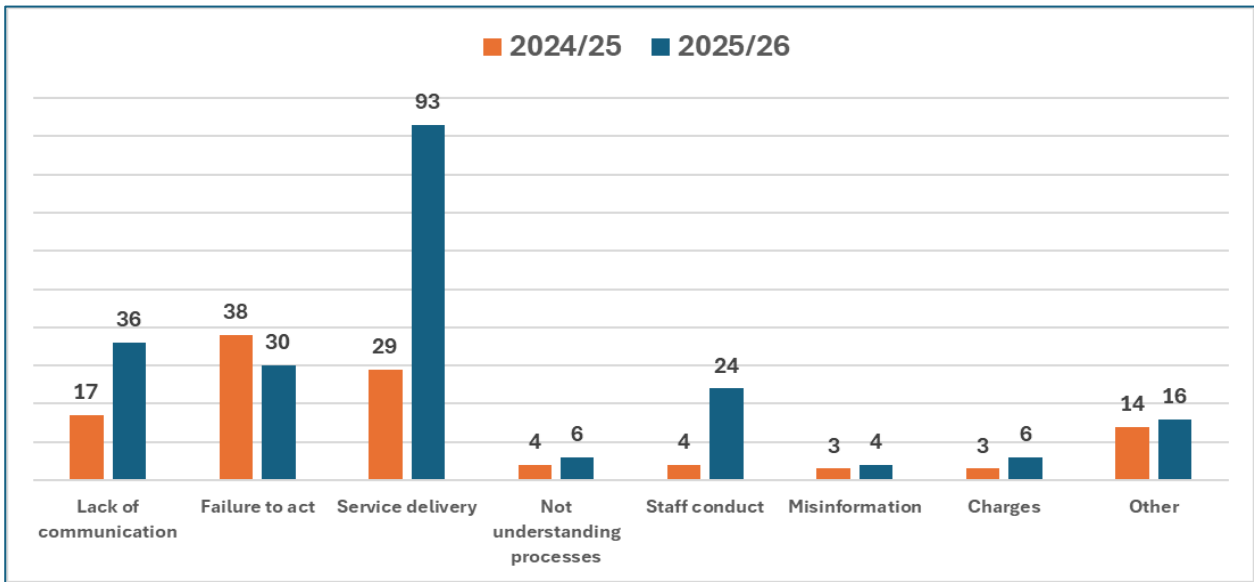
4. Complaint Themes

- 4.1 When a complaint is received, we record it in two different ways to help us understand what went wrong and how we can improve our services.
- 4.2 **Council (SCDC) themes** describe the nature of the matter, such as poor communication, delays, or service issues. This helps us identify recurring problems and areas where change is required.

4.3 **HouseMark themes** group complaints by housing service areas, such as repairs, tenancy management, or customer service. HouseMark is a national benchmarking system used by housing providers to compare performance and support regulatory reporting.

Council (SCDC) themes

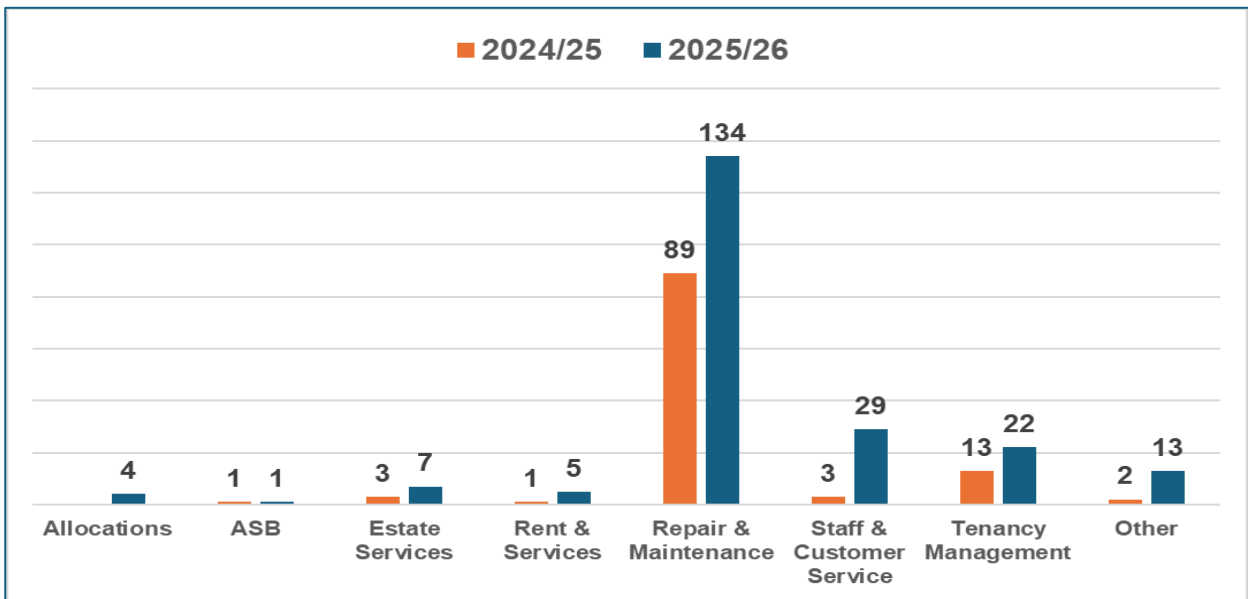
Note: Figures represent total complaints across all stages.



[Graph 2: Complaint themes (SCDC)]

HouseMark themes

Note: Figures represent total complaints across all stages.



[Graph 3: Complaint themes (HouseMark)]

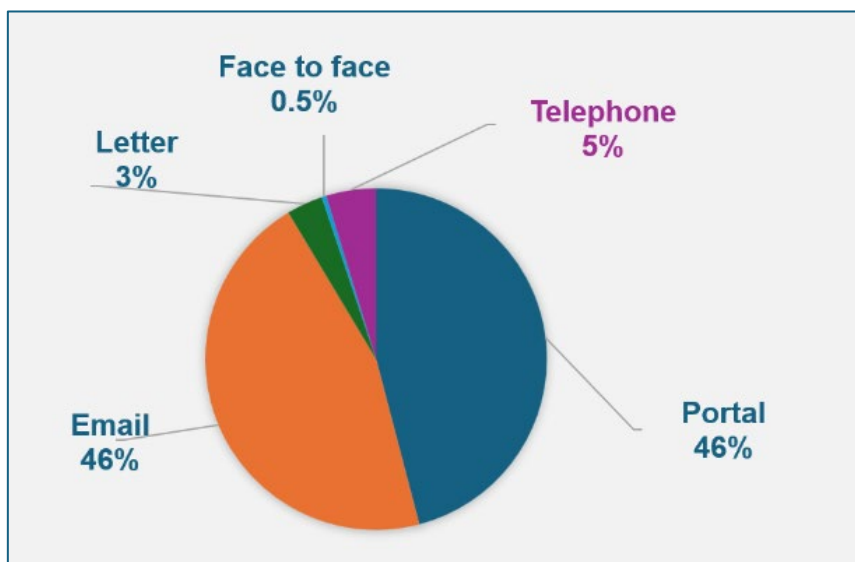
What the above themes show

4.4 The data shows an increase in recorded complaints, particularly in service delivery and communication, provides clearer insight into resident expectations and

highlights where improvements are being successfully identified and addressed.

- 4.5 It is important to consider this within the wider national context. Complaint volumes have increased across the social housing sector, with recent HouseMark data indicating a rise of around 50% between January 2024 and January 2026. This trend reflects a sector-wide shift towards greater transparency, improved access to complaints processes, and stronger compliance with the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code.
- 4.6 HouseMark also notes that organisations with stronger complaint handling and higher satisfaction levels often report higher complaint volumes, as residents have greater confidence that their concerns will be heard and addressed. This supports the Housing Ombudsman's position that complaint volumes should not be viewed in isolation as a measure of performance, but alongside outcomes, themes, and organisational learning.
- 4.7 Locally, while failure to act remains a significant complaint theme, volumes reduced from 38 to 30, indicating some improvement in this area. Complaints relating to understanding processes, misinformation, charges, and other issues remained relatively low and stable year on year.
- 4.8 Overall, the data demonstrates that service delivery, communication, and staff conduct were the primary drivers of complaints in 2025 / 2026. While this reflects wider sector trends linked to increased scrutiny and transparency, it also provides a strong evidence base for targeted service improvements, helping to prioritise resources and drive continuous improvement.

5. How complaints are made



[Graph 4: Method of complaints reported]

- 5.1 The pattern remains consistent with previous years, with email and the customer portal being the most commonly used methods for submitting complaints.

6. Complaints Responses and Timescales

Complaints Responses

Stage	2025 / 2026	2024 / 2025	Trend
Stage 1	179	99	▲ Increase
Stage 2	22	17	▲ Slight increase

[Table 2: Complaint Responses]

Note: Table 2 relates to complaints responded to during the reporting year and includes cases carried forward from the previous year where responses were issued during this period. As such, the figures are not directly comparable to the number of complaints received in 2025 / 2026.

Responding on Time

Measure	Corporate target	2025 / 2026	2024 / 2025	Status
Stage 1 – within 10 working days	80%	73%	67%	▲ Improved
Stage 2 – within 20 working days	80%	86%	88%	▼ Slight Decline

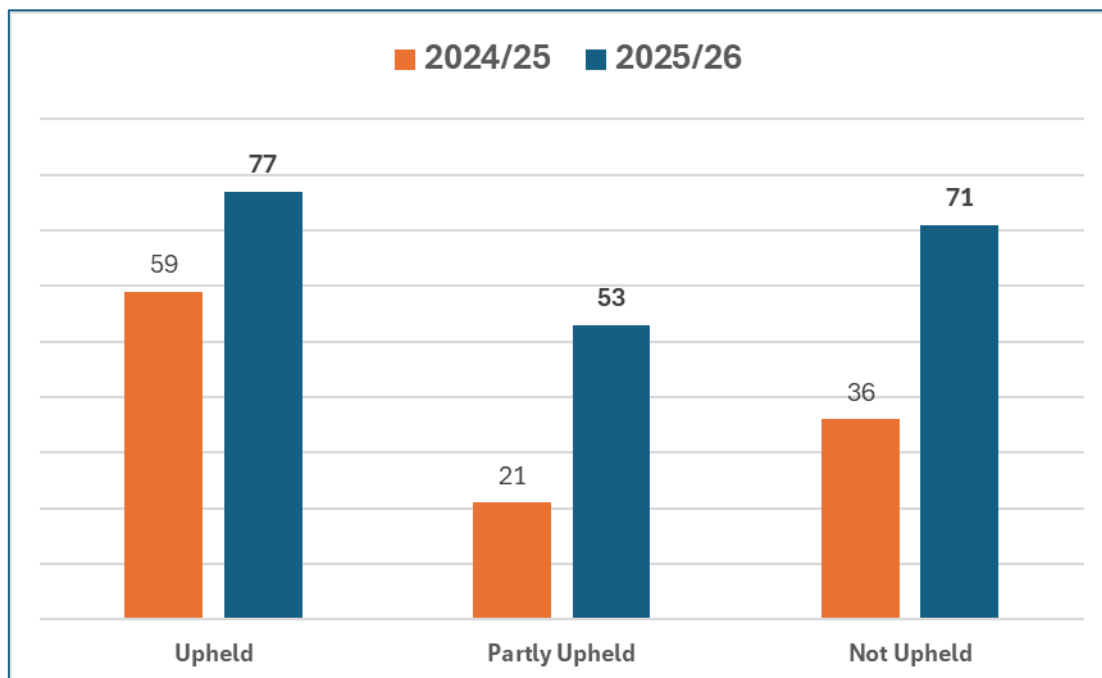
[Table 3: Response Times]

- 6.1 Performance against complaint response times has improved overall compared to last year. Stage 1 responses within timescales increased from 67% to 73%, demonstrating progress, representing continued progress towards the 80% target. Stage 2 performance in response times declined slightly from 88% to 86% but continues to exceed the target.
- 6.2 Where response times were not met, these have been reviewed to identify learning and inform targeted improvements. During 2025 / 2026, response times were occasionally impacted by increased case complexity and external dependencies; however, these have been proactively addressed through a range of improvement actions. These included: enhanced staff training, process reviews, strengthening early triage and case ownership, and the introduction of template responses to improve consistency and quality. The appointment of a dedicated Complaints and Case Officer in 2026 will further strengthen capacity and support ongoing improvements in both timeliness and the quality of responses.

- 6.3 These actions place the service in a strong position to continue improving both timeliness and consistency in 2026 / 2027.

7. Outcomes from Complaint Responses

Note: Figures represent total outcomes across all stages.



[Graph 5: Outcomes]

- 7.1 The chart illustrates the outcomes of complaints concluded in 2025 / 2026 compared with 2024 / 2025, broken down into upheld, partly upheld and not upheld decisions.
- 7.2 An upheld complaint is one where the investigation found that the Council or its contractors had failed to deliver a service in line with policy, procedure or expected standards. In 2025 / 2026, the increase in upheld complaints demonstrates a transparent and accountable approach to complaints handling, where service issues are openly recognised and addressed.
- 7.3 A partly upheld complaint is recorded where some elements of the complaint were substantiated, while others were not. This outcome often indicates that aspects of the service fell short, but not all concerns raised were supported by the evidence. The rise in partly upheld complaints reflects the increasing complexity of cases, with more nuanced investigations leading to balanced and evidence-based outcomes.
- 7.4 A not upheld decision is reached where the investigation concludes that services were delivered in accordance with relevant policies, procedures and timescales, or where no evidence of service failure is found. Not upheld complaints increased from

36 to 71, reflecting the overall rise in complaints and demonstrating that a proportion of concerns relate to matters where the Council's actions were appropriate.

- 7.5 Taken together, the data demonstrates a mature and robust complaints process, where concerns are thoroughly investigated, outcomes are evidence-based and learning is actively captured to drive service improvement.
- 7.6 This analysis supports a learning-focused approach to complaints handling, using outcomes to inform service improvements, strengthen communication, and ensure accountability, in line with the Complaints Policy and the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code.

8. Housing Ombudsman Cases and Outcomes

- 8.1 The outcomes of Ombudsman cases during the year reflect both effective handling in complex cases and a strong commitment to learning where improvements are identified. During the reporting period, two complaints were determined by the Housing Ombudsman Service, as set out below, while a further four cases remained under investigation and were awaiting a decision.

Ombudsman determinations

8.2 Case One – No maladministration

The complaint related to how the Council handled the resident's queries concerning the accuracy of an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) assessment carried out to the property.

The Ombudsman confirmed that the Council took appropriate action, acting fairly and appropriately throughout the process, and took appropriate steps to ensure an up-to-date EPC assessment was completed in a timely manner by instructing professional, qualified experts. No further action was required.

8.3 Case Two – Maladministration and service failure

The complaint concerned delays in addressing a damp and mould issue, alongside a poor experience in how the resident's complaint was handled.

The Ombudsman found maladministration in the handling of damp and mould reports and service failure in complaint handling. Orders and a recommendation were issued.

Orders and compliance

All required actions were implemented promptly and in full, demonstrating commitment to accountability and continuous improvement, including:

- A written apology that was meaningful and in line with Ombudsman guidance
- Payment of £680 compensation, comprising:
 - £600 for distress and inconvenience relating to damp and mould
 - £80 for complaint handling failures
- A qualified surveyor inspection, with a written report and photographic evidence provided to the resident

9. Compliments and Positive Feedback

9.1 The number of compliments received by the Housing Service remains consistent year on year, demonstrating sustained positive resident experiences alongside increased engagement through the complaints process., with 34 compliments recorded in both 2024 / 2025 and 2025 / 2026. This stability indicates that, alongside an increase in complaint volumes, residents continued to take the time to provide positive feedback where services met or exceeded expectations. Compliments most commonly reflect appreciation for staff professionalism, support and responsiveness, and provide important balance to complaint data by highlighting areas of good practice. All compliments are shared with relevant teams and used to recognise staff efforts and reinforce positive service behaviours.

9.2 Below are some of the compliments received during 2025 – 2026: -

- *“Thank you so much for all the efforts you have made, also to make time to come and visit us”*
- *“Thank you for all that you do, your support has been invaluable!”*
- *“Thanks very much. This will be life changing for me, Thank you.”*
- *“I would like to send you another Thank you. I know you may feel this is not necessary, but it has been a pleasure working with you and has made a real difference to my quality of life, so I think it's really important to recognize how helpful you have been from day one.”*
- *“I can't thank you enough for your hard work and effort to help me”*
- *“Thank you for coming round to give me the support, May God bless you abundantly that was very nice of you”*
- *“You do an amazing job supporting people in South Cambs”*

- *“A quick note to say thank you very very much for this morning. You’re an absolute godsend to me and other people you help thank you thank you”.*
- *“Just want to say how pleased we are for the refitted kitchen, the men who worked on our kitchen have done a great job”*
- *“It’s probably not often you get a thank you, but I feel I must say a big thank you”*

10. Learning and Service Improvement

10.1 Learning from complaints continues to inform service delivery, with a clear focus on strengthening performance, transparency and the overall resident experience. During 2025 / 2026, this has led to improved oversight and resourcing of complaints handling, more consistent communication with residents, and stronger coordination with contractors to support timely and effective service delivery.

10.2 Key improvements include:

- Contractor management and service delivery
 - Strengthened coordination between internal teams and contractors to improve accountability and oversight
 - Enhancements to the repairs contractor contact centre, including targeted staff training to strengthen call handling.
 - Improved coordination of roof repairs involving third-party solar PV panels by sequencing of works more effectively, reducing scaffolding duration, minimising disruption to residents and lowering associated costs.
- Digital access and service visibility
 - Introduction of the M&Me App to improve real-time job management, communication and visibility of repair appointments and progress
 - Improvements to the housing portal to provide clearer, more accessible information for residents, supporting them to independently review and update their personal details.
 - Improving assurance and transparency for leaseholders through monthly internal checks on block repair charges, ensuring greater confidence in the information provided.

- Resident-focused communication
 - Strengthened approach to recognising and meeting individual communication needs, using data collected from the initial tenant census to inform service delivery.
 - More consistent use of clear, accessible language in correspondence
 - Implementation of a Compensation Policy aligned to updated guidance provided by the Housing Ombudsman
 - Review and publication of policies, improving transparency and accessibility, including housing safety policies and tenancy sustainment
 - Additional support through advice and signposting for tenants experiencing financial hardship

10.3 Learning from complaints is also considered alongside wider housing performance information, including relevant Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs), to provide a broader understanding of resident experience and inform service improvement priorities. The latest TSMs results identify resident satisfaction with complaint handling has significantly improved to 56%, representing a 7% increase from 2023 / 2024, while dissatisfaction has more than halved from 51% to 24%. This reflects the service changes and process improvements implemented over the last two years.

10.4 The full results of the Tenant Satisfaction Measures are reported separately and published on our website, where further information is available. Link to website: [Housing performance and tenant satisfaction measures - South Cambs District Council](#).

11. Accessibility and Reasonable Adjustments

11.1 The Council is committed to ensuring that the complaints process is accessible and fair to all residents. Where required, reasonable adjustments are made to support residents in making and pursuing a complaint, including residents with disabilities, health conditions, language needs, or other vulnerabilities.

11.2 Information about how to make a complaint, the support available, and the Council's approach to reasonable adjustments is set out in the Council's Complaints Policy, which is published on the Council's website and is available in alternative formats on request. Link to website page: [Complaints - South Cambs District Council](#). In addition, all reviewed housing-related policies include a clear statement explaining how tenants can make a complaint if they are dissatisfied with the service they have received, ensuring consistent signposting across Council documentation.

- 11.3 Complaints may be submitted through a range of channels to ensure that residents can access the complaints process in a way that meets their individual needs.

12. Resident and Governance Oversight

- 12.1 Complaint performance, compliance with the Complaints Policy, and learning from complaints are overseen through a structured governance framework that provides assurance at officer, tenant, and elected Member level, (see the Assurance Framework [\(insert link\)](#) for further information),
- 12.2 Actions arising from complaints and Housing Ombudsman determinations are monitored quarterly through internal Service Manager performance meetings and the KPI / TSM Tenant Performance Panel, prior to reporting to the Housing Engagement Board. Key performance indicators, including response times and the number of complaints relative to the size of the landlord, are reported quarterly as part of the wider suite of performance measures overseen by Cabinet.
- 12.3 From 2026, the Council will introduce a Complaints Quality and Assurance Tenant Panel to provide additional independent oversight of complaints handling. The panel will review the quality of complaint responses and contribute resident insight to identify opportunities for service improvement.

13. Compliance with the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code

- 13.1 The Council has undertaken its annual self-assessment against the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code, which sets out the standards landlords are required to meet when managing and handling complaints. This assessment confirms that the Council's complaints process is operating in accordance with the Code, including requirements relating to response timescales, escalation arrangements, learning from complaints, and effective engagement with the Housing Ombudsman Service.
- 13.2 The Council's Complaint Handling Code self-assessment is published on the Council's website and is available for residents to access. Link to website page: [Complaints - South Cambs District Council](#)

14. Looking Ahead

14.1 During the next reporting year, the Council will continue to focus on:

- Improving repair performance and contractor management
- Strengthening communication with residents
- Embedding learning from complaints consistently across services
- Maintaining compliance with the Complaint Handling Code

14.2 Complaints and resident feedback will continue to play a vital role in shaping service improvements.