



DARLINGTON

Borough Council

**Housing Complaints,
Compliments and Comments
Annual Report
2023/24**

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Introduction

1. While the Council has produced an annual report, relating to its function as a social landlord for over a decade, this is now a requirement of the Housing Ombudsman's [Complaint Handling Code](#) which became statutory on 1 April 2024. It is also a requirement to submit a self-assessment to the Housing Ombudsman and publish a copy publish the self-assessment as part of the annual complaints performance and service improvement report on our website. The governing body's response to the report must be published alongside this. A copy of the self-assessment is contained in the final section of this report.
2. This report provides an analysis of the complaints, compliments and comments received by the Council during 2023/24 under the Housing Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure (the procedure) / The Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code. The purpose of the report is to identify topics and trends in relation to complaints; identify areas of organisational learning that have taken place over the past year as a result of the complaints received and make further recommendations based on trend data to improve services. The report also seeks to highlight any areas of good practice and identify topics and trends in relation to comments made by members of the public so the Council can take action where appropriate to improve services.
3. In addition to the statistical information presented in this report it is important to recognise the work of the Complaints and Information Governance (CIG) Team that underpins this in terms of promoting an organisational culture in which complaints are recognised, accepted, owned and resolved as efficiently and as close to the point of service delivery as possible. This also enables the Council to collect accurate information on complaints in order to identify topics and trends and improve services accordingly.

Housing Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure

4. The procedure sets out how the Council will deal with complaints, compliments and comments received about the Council as a social landlord (as well as in respect of its ownership and management of leasehold housing).
5. The procedure has 2 stages. Stage 1 is a local resolution stage where we try to resolve those complaints that cannot be resolved immediately as part of our day to day business. Stage 1 complaints are dealt with locally, that is within the service being complained about. We aim to resolve the majority of complaints at Stage 1 of the procedure. Housing Services have employed a Housing Complaints Officer to assist with meeting the Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code timescales during 2023/24.
6. Stage 2 is a formal investigation stage where complaints will usually be investigated by the Complaints Investigator or Complaints and Information Governance Manager.

7. The Council has appointed the Complaints and Information Governance Manager in line with the Code to be accountable for complaint handling. The Complaints and Information Governance Manager will assess any themes or trends to identify potential systemic issues, serious risks, or policies and procedures that require revision.
8. In addition to this, as required by the Code, the Council has appointed the Assistant Director, Housing and Revenues as a member of the governing body (or equivalent) 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').

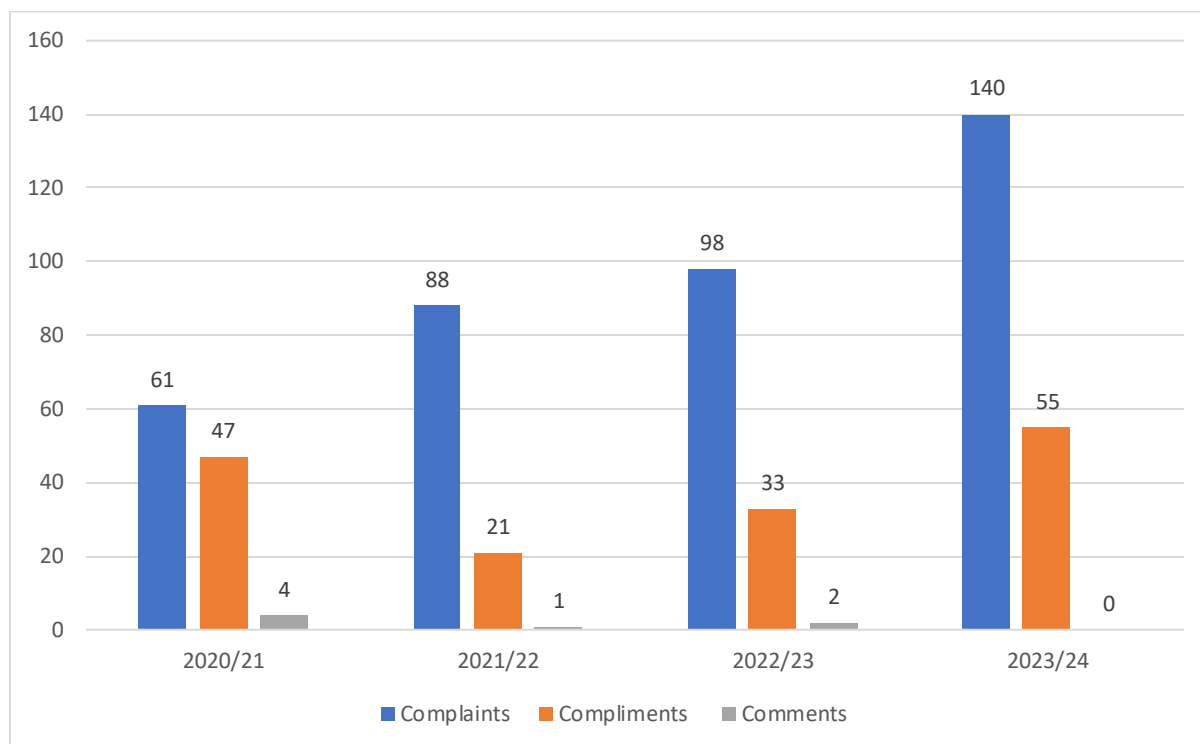
Public Information and Accessibility

9. We are committed to making sure that everyone has equal access to all our services. To help make sure the Council's complaints procedures are easily accessible we have produced two leaflets (one for children and young people and one for adults) covering all Council services to reflect the single point of access for complainants within the Council. The leaflets are available in all Council buildings. They have been written in line with the Plain English Campaign standards. The title is written in the most commonly used community languages and it contains details on how to access the information in other formats, for example, large print, audio and Braille.
10. Information is available on the Council's website which contains an electronic form people can use to make a complaint, pay someone a compliment or pass comment on Council services. People may make a complaint in any format they wish. This can be in writing, email, via the web, over the phone, in person or by any other reasonable means.
11. The Council can arrange advocates and interpreters (including British Sign Language interpreters) where appropriate.

Complaints Information and Organisational Learning

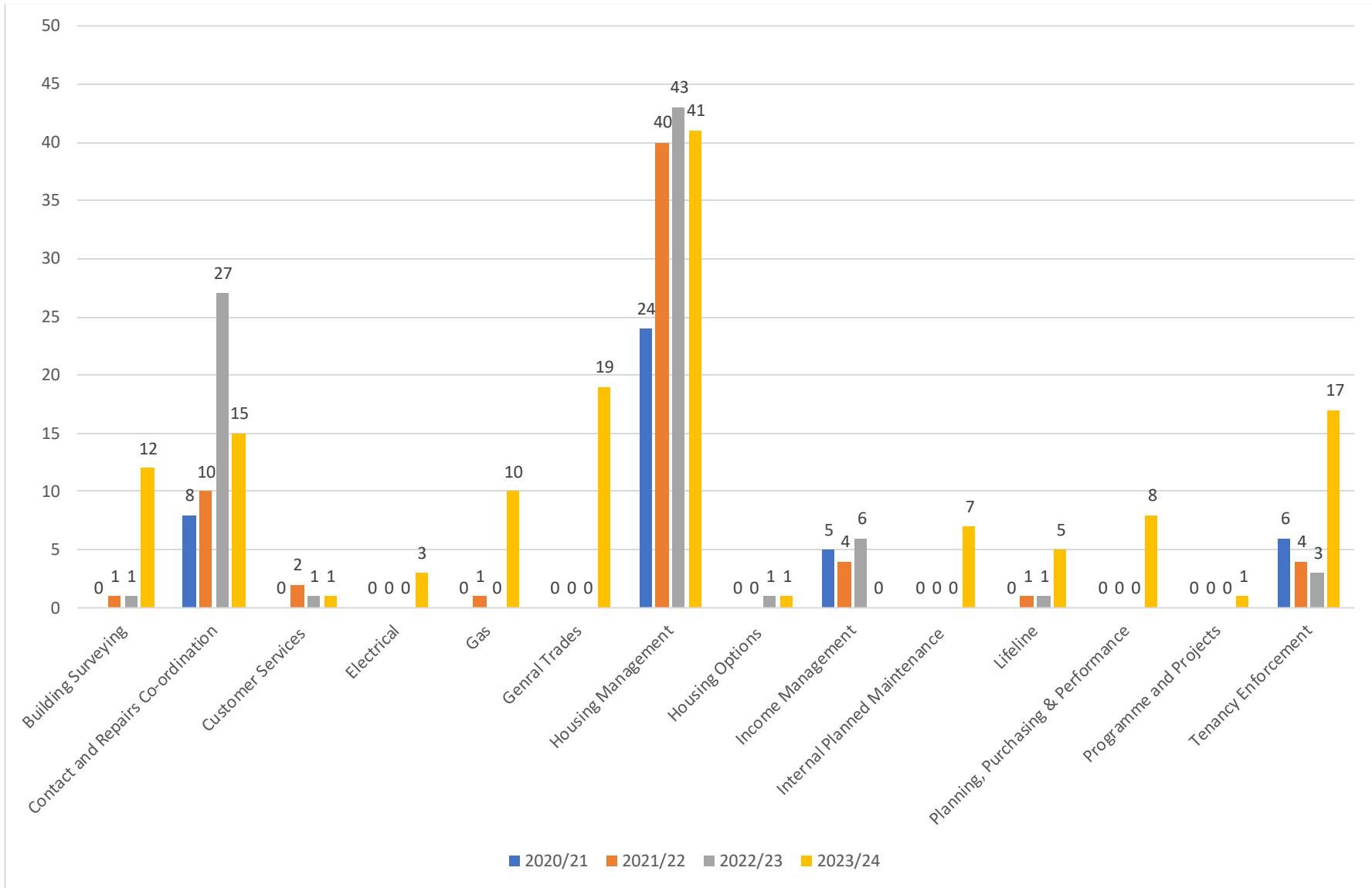
Overview of Complaints, Compliments and Comments

Total Complaints, Compliments and Comments



12. Between 1 April 2023 and 31 March 2024 the Council received a total of 140 complaints under the procedure, a significant increase from 98 in 2022/23, 88 in 2021/22 and 61 in 2020/21. This increase can in part be attributed to the additional promotional work undertaken by Housing Services to highlight the complaints procedure.
13. A total of 30 complaints were considered at Stage 2, which again was a significant increase from 17 in 2022/23, 16 in 2021/22 and 13 in 2020/21.
14. The Council received 55 compliments under the procedure, a significant increase an increase from 33 in 2022/23, 21 in 2021/22, and an increase from 47 in 2020/21.
15. The Council did not receive any comments under the procedure, a decrease from two in 2022/23, one in 2021/22 and four in 2020/21.
16. The Council did not receive any non-qualifying complaints during 2023/24.

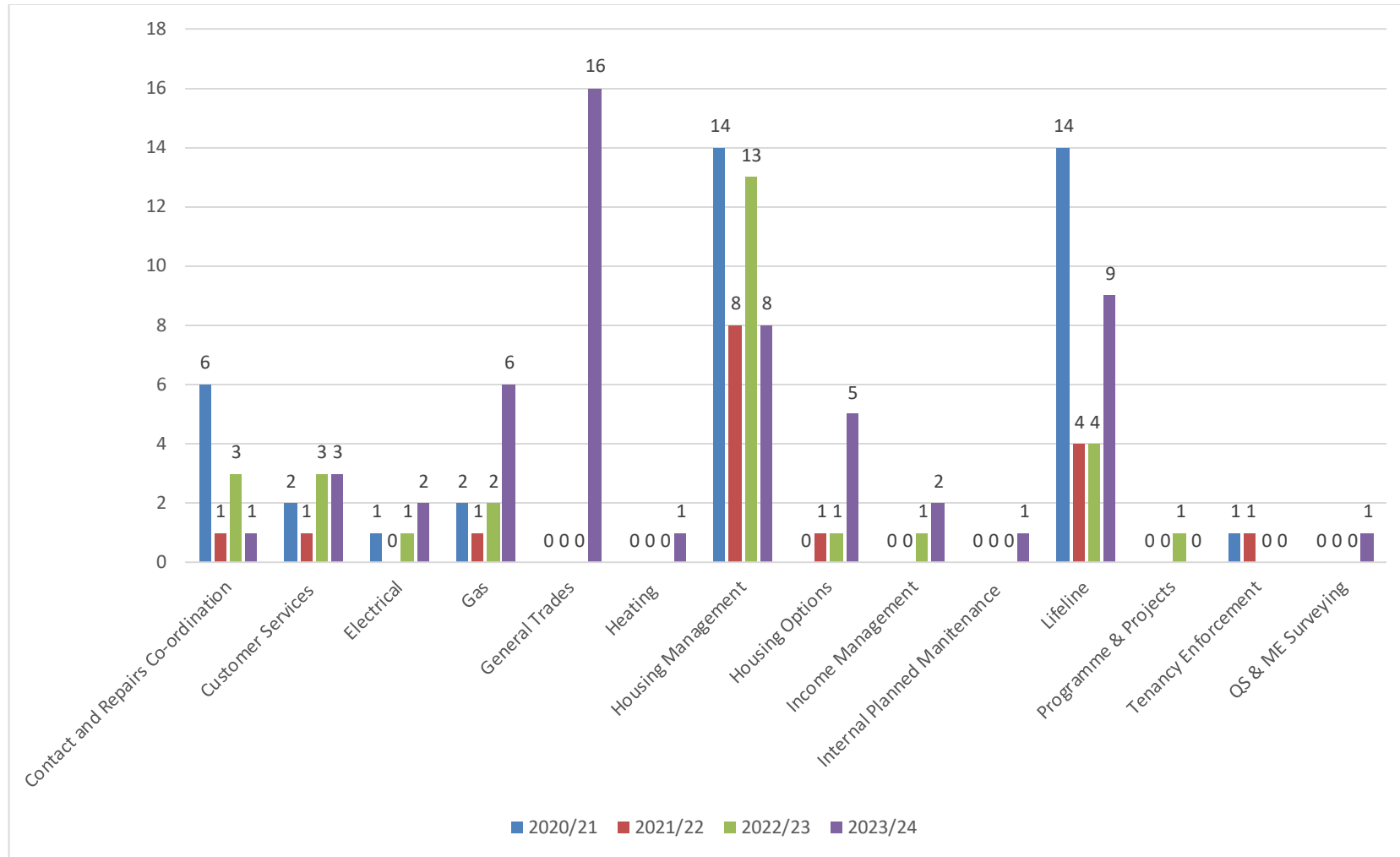
Complaints by Team – Housing Services



17. Building Surveying received 12 complaints, a significant increase from one in 2022/23 and 2021/22 and zero in 2020/21. Themes included people's dissatisfaction with delays in completing repairs and with the decision that they would not be getting new windows.
18. Contact & Repairs Co-ordination received 15 complaints, a significant decrease from 27 in 2022/23, although an increase from 10 in 2021/22 and eight in 2020/21. Complaints concerned communication, appointments not being kept and delays in undertaking repairs.
19. Customer Services received one complaint, the same as in 2022/23, a decrease from two in 2021/22 and an increase from zero in 2020/21.
20. Electrical Services received three complaints, an increase from zero in 2022/23, 2021/22 and 2020/21. There were no identifiable themes.
21. Gas received 10 complaints, an increase from zero in 2022/23, one in 2021/22 and zero in 2020/21. The most common cause of complaint was people's dissatisfaction with the time taken to repair boilers. Issues with appointment and the attitude/behaviour of the gas engineer were also matters of complaint.
22. General Trades received 19 complaints, an increase from zero in 2022/23, 2021/22 and 2020/21. The most common causes of complaint were dissatisfaction with quality of repairs, the time take to complete repairs.
23. Housing Management received 41 complaints in 2023/24, a decrease from 43 in 2022/23 and an increase from 40 in 2021/22 and 24 in 2020/21. Complaints concerned dissatisfaction with support in relation to neighbour nuisance issues and the attitude/behaviour and general level of support from Housing Management Officer(s) in relation to a variety of housing matters.
24. Housing Options received one complaint during 2023/24, the same number as in 2022/23, an increase from zero in 2021/22 and 2020/21.
25. Housing Income Management received zero complaints during 2023/24, a decrease from six in 2022/23, four in 2021/22 and five in 2020/21.
26. Internal Planned Maintenance received seven complaints, an increase from zero in 2022/23, 2021/22 and 2020/21. The most common causes of complaint were peoples dissatisfaction with the quality of the completed works and issues experienced while the works were being undertaken.
27. Lifeline received five complaints during 2023/24, an increase from one in 2022/23 and 2021/22, and zero in 2020/21. There were no identifiable themes.

28. Planning, Purchasing and Performance received eight complaints in 2023/24, an increase from zero in 2022/23, 2021/22 and 2020/21. Complaints concerned communication and delays in undertaking repairs.
29. Programme and Projects received one complaint in 2023/24, and increase from zero in 2022/23, 2021/22 and 2020/21.
30. Tenancy Enforcement received 17 complaints during 2023/24, a significant increase from three in 2022/23, four in 2021/22 and six in 2020/21. The majority of complaints concerned peoples dissatisfaction with the perceived lack of action in relation to reports of anti social behaviour.

Compliments by Team – Housing Services

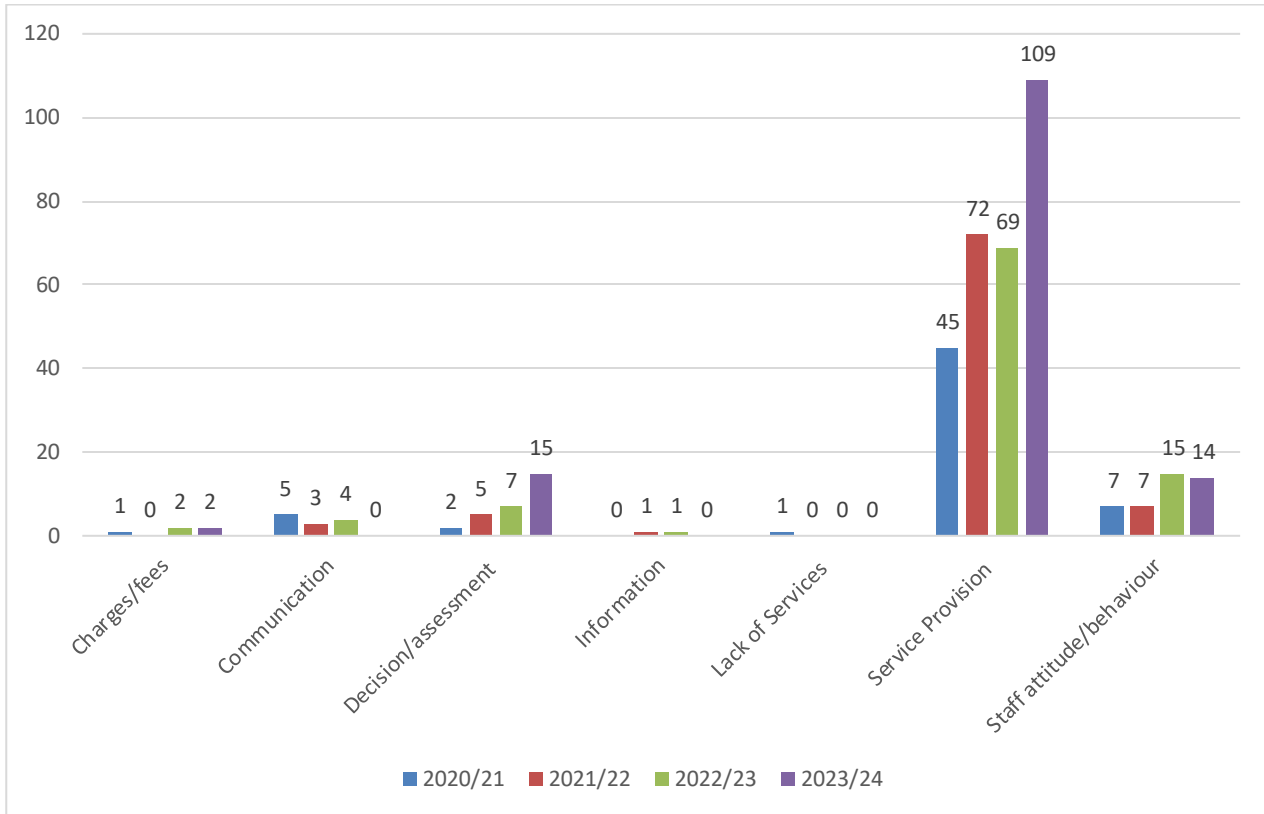


31. Housing Services received 55 compliments in 2023/24, a significant increase from 26 compliments in 2022/23, 16 in 2021/22 and 37 in 2020/21.

Comments by Team - Housing

32. The Council received zero comments during 2023/24, a decrease from two in 2022/23, one in 2021/22 and four 2020/21.

Complaints by Issue

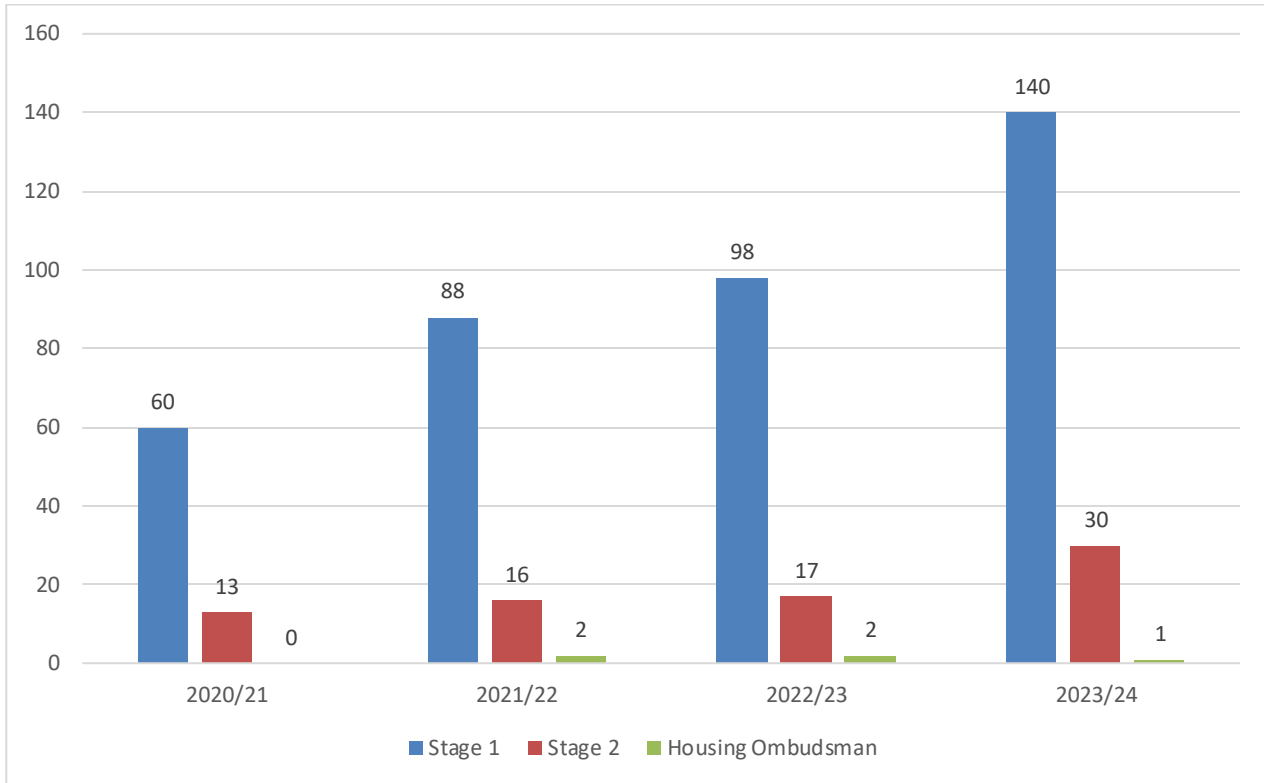


33. Two complaints related to charges/fees in 2023/24, the same as in 2022/23, an increase from zero in 2021/22 and one in 2020/21.
34. Zero complaints related to communication during 2023/24, a decrease from four in 2022/23, three in 2021/22 and five in 2020/21.
35. 15 complaints related to decision/assessment in 2023/24, an increase from seven in 2022/23, five in 2021/22 and two in 2020/21.
36. Zero complaints related to information in 2023/24, a decrease from one in 2022/23 and 2021/22 and the same number as in 2020/21.
37. There were no complaints about lack of services in 2023/24, 2022/23 or 2021/22, a decrease from one in 2020/21.
38. There were 109 complaints about service provision in 2023/24, a significant increase from 69 2022/23, 72 in 2021/22 and 45 in 2020/21.

- 39. 14 complaints related to staff attitude/behaviour in 2023/24, a decrease from 15 in 2022/23 and an increase from seven in 2021/22 and 2020/21.

Complaints by Stage

- 40. The below graph shows the number of complaints received at each stage of the procedure during.



- 41. The Council received 140 Stage 1 complaints in 2023/24, a significant increase from 98 in 2022/23, 88 in 2021/22 and 60 in 2020/21.
- 42. 30 were investigated at Stage 2, a significant increase from 17 in 2022/23, 16 in 2021/22 and 13 in 2020/21.
- 43. One complaint was escalated to the Housing Ombudsman in 2023/24, a decrease from two in 2022/23 and 2021/22 and an increase from zero in 2020/21.

Complaints Outcomes

44. The below tables show the decisions reached on complaints received during 2023/24.

Stage 1

Service Area/Team	Inconclusive	Not Upheld	Partially Upheld	Upheld	Withdrawn	Total
Customer Services	0	0	0	1	0	1
Housing Management	0	16	15	1	8	40
Tenancy Enforcement	0	12	4	0	1	17
Contact and Repairs Co-ordination	1	3	7	3	0	14
Housing Options	0	0	0	0	1	1
Lifeline	0	1	3	0	1	5
Programme and Projects	0	0	1	0	0	1
Gas	1	4	3	2	1	11
General trades	0	3	8	4	3	18
Electrical	0	0	0	0	3	3
Planning, Purchasing & Performance	0	1	2	1	1	5
Internal Planned Maintenance	0	2	5	0	0	7
Building Surveying	0	1	4	9	1	15
Building Cleaning and Compliance	0	0	1	0	0	1
Property Services	0	0	1	0	0	1
Totals	2	43	54	21	20	140
Percentage	1.4%	30.7%	38.6%	15%	14.3%	100%

Stage 2

Service Area/Team	Inconclusive	Not Upheld	Partially Upheld	Upheld	Withdrawn	Total
Housing Management	1	6	1	2	1	11
Tenancy Enforcement	0	5	2	0	1	8
Contact and Repairs Co-ordination	0	0	3	1	0	4
Gas	0	1	0	0	0	1
General trades	0	1	1	0	0	2
Internal Planned Maintenance	0	0	1	0	0	1
Totals	1	13	8	3	2	27
Percentage	3.7%	48.1%	29.6%	11.1%	7.4%	100%

N.B. Three stage 2 complaints remained open at the time of writing.

Housing Ombudsman

45. The Housing Ombudsman commenced one investigation during 2023/24.
46. The Housing Ombudsman has not determined the complaint investigation it commenced during 2023/24. Similarly the Housing Ombudsman did not determine any complaints during 2022/23, a decrease from two in 2021/22 and one in 2020/21 and 2019/20.
47. Full details of any complaints determined by the Housing Ombudsman are included in the Cabinet reports of 5 December 2023 and 10 September 2024 entitled [Review of Outcome of Complaints Made to Ombudsman](#).

Organisational Learning

48. All resolution and organisational learning actions identified as a result of complaints are assigned to a responsible manager and progress against those actions is monitored by the Complaints and Information Governance Manager. In addition to those actions taken to resolve individual complaints, a number of service improvements were made following complaint investigations during 2023/24, some of which are detailed below:

Building Surveying

49. It was agreed that responsive work lists would be checked weekly by the Building Surveying to ensure the contractor was initiating work within the 5 week timescale set.
50. Surveyors were reminded that when booking in plastering works to include in their report what items will need to be moved by workers/what will be left in the room e.g. sofas/TV stands, so the correct time can be booked in by the Planning Team.
51. Feedback was given to the contractor for improvements to be made going forward, such as ensuring notices are being left in the event a repair is being completed and ensuring they are calling tenants to provide an update if requested by Customer Services.
52. Staff were reminded of the need to comply with the timescales in the Councils Customer Service Standards.
53. All trades were reminded to offer to wear shoe coverings when going into tenants properties.

Contact and Repairs Co-ordination

54. It was agreed that an equality and diversity course would be arranged for all Tenancy Management staff.
55. An issue with the Council's IT system, that allowed appointments to be booked on bank holidays, was identified and fixed.
56. Staff were reminded to show their ID when attending a property to undertake repairs and the information on the Council's website regarding who to contact in relation to an Emergency Repair was updated.
57. There was a review of the escalation process for repairs, to ensure that any delays in follow on work are minimised. Staff were also provided training around the importance of updating notes and completing visit forms, so where a member of staff is absent other staff can continue the process.

Gas

58. The process for alternative heating sources when someone's heating is broken was reviewed.
59. The approach to take when a tenant reports a gas leak was discussed in a team meeting and staff were advised to give clear advice to the tenant on what will happen next.

General Trades

60. The team were reminded of the importance of contacting the tenant immediately if an appointment is unable to go ahead.
61. Trades were reminded to advise tenants when facilities would be available to be used and talk them through how to use the new shower facilities, etc.

Housing Management

62. Building Cleaning and Compliance staff were reminded to ensure they adhering to the Councils Customer Service Standards. They were also reminded to follow the follow liquid disposal guidance.
63. Housing Management Officers were reminded to ensure they upload emails received from tenants with regards to repair work into the Council's IT system, to ensure we have a record of any images sent of disrepair.
64. Officers were reminded of the importance of using the conversation cycle to avoid confrontational conversations and ensuring that following untidy garden appointments, appropriate records are made on the Council's IT system, including uploading any supporting images/action plan.
65. Consideration was given to amending warning letters which are sent to tenants who live in communal flats to reflect that we are contacting all residents who are affected by anti social behaviour (ASB) and to further encourage whistleblowing.

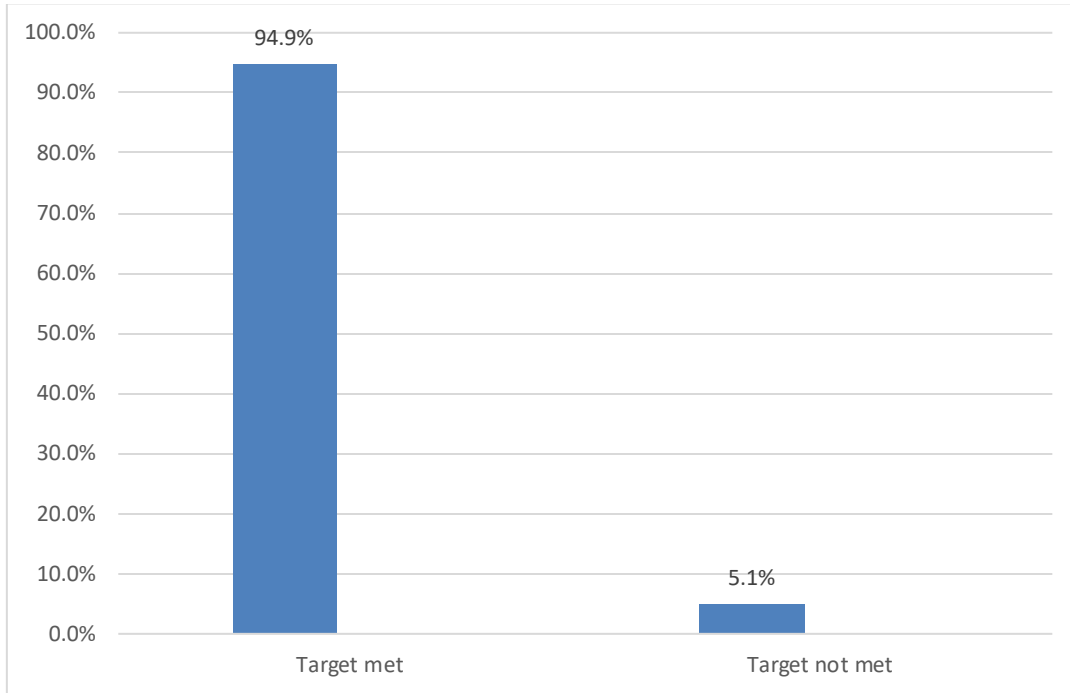
Internal Planned Maintenance

66. The IPM alterations letter was amended to advise that boilers will be left turned on following safety checks unless stated otherwise.

Performance against the Housing Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure

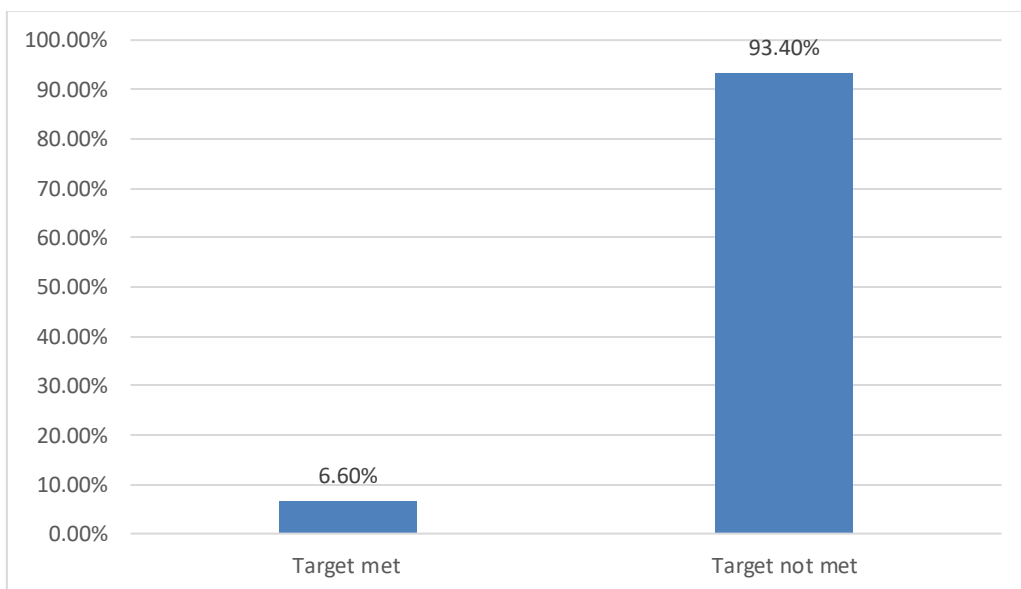
Stage 1

Proportion of stage one complaints responded to within the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code timescales.



Stage 2

Proportion of stage two complaints responded to within the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code timescales.



67. The Regulator of Social Housing has issued guidance on how to calculate the above, which means the methodology used now differs from that previously used and that currently used in relation to all other Council complaints. We have applied this same methodology to the reporting of Housing Ombudsman decisions in this report, however, we do not intend to adopt it elsewhere.
68. The methodology identifies the percentage of complaints ***made by tenants during the reporting*** year that were responded to within timescale, as opposed to the overall percentage of complaints responded to during the reporting year within timescale. Consequently, any complaints received in 2022/23 and responded to in 2023/24 are excluded from the calculation.

Further recommendations

69. Housing Servies/the Complaints & Information Governance Team should establish why there has be an increase in the number of complaints escalated to Stage 2 and work to reduce this in during 2024/25.
70. The Complaints & Information Governance Team experienced issues in terms of the resource available to investigate Stage 2 complaints during 2023/24. Housing Servies/the Complaints & Information Governance Team should continue working to improve performance against the Stage 2 response target during 2024/25.

Housing Ombudsman Code Self-Assessment

71. This self-assessment form should be completed by the complaints officer and it must be reviewed and approved by the landlord’s governing body at least annually.
72. Once approved, landlords must publish the self-assessment as part of the annual complaints performance and service improvement report on their website. The governing body’s response to the report must be published alongside this.
73. Landlords are required to complete the self-assessment in full and support all statements with evidence, with additional commentary as necessary.
74. We recognise that there may be a small number of circumstances where landlords are unable to meet the requirements, for example, if they do not have a website. In these circumstances, we expect landlords to deliver the intentions of the Code in an alternative way, for example by publishing information in a public area so that it is easily accessible.

Section 1: Definition of a complaint

Code provision	Code requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence	Commentary / explanation
1.2	A complaint must be defined as: <i>‘an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the landlord, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting a resident or group of residents.’</i>	Yes	Housing Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure; April 2024 (darlington.gov.uk)	See Section 3
1.3	A resident does not have to use the word ‘complaint’ for it to be treated as such. Whenever a resident expresses dissatisfaction landlords must give them the choice to make complaint. A complaint	Yes	Housing Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure; April 2024 (darlington.gov.uk)	The Council has adopted the definition in 1.2 which does not require a resident to use the complaint. Nor did our previous definition. This is

	that is submitted via a third party or representative must be handled in line with the landlord's complaints policy.			covered in our training.
1.4	Landlords must recognise the difference between a service request and a complaint. This must be set out in their complaints policy. A service request is a request from a resident to the landlord requiring action to be taken to put something right. Service requests are not complaints, but must be recorded, monitored and reviewed regularly.	Yes	Housing Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure; April 2024 (darlington.gov.uk)	The Council has separate and robust processes in place to consider requests for service and complaints.
1.5	A complaint must be raised when the resident expresses dissatisfaction with the response to their service request, even if the handling of the service request remains ongoing. Landlords must not stop their efforts to address the service request if the resident complains.	Yes	Housing Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure; April 2024 (darlington.gov.uk)	This happens as a result of the afore mentioned process and is covered in our training.
1.6	An expression of dissatisfaction with services made through a survey is not defined as a complaint, though wherever possible, the person completing the survey should be made aware of how they can pursue a complaint if they wish to. Where landlords	Yes		Details of how to complain are included in our Satisfaction Surveys.

	ask for wider feedback about their services, they also must provide details of how residents can complain.			
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Section 2: Exclusions

Code provision	Code requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence	Commentary / explanation
2.1	Landlords must accept a complaint unless there is a valid reason not to do so. If landlords decide not to accept a complaint they must be able to evidence their reasoning. Each complaint must be considered on its own merits	Yes	Housing Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure; April 2024 (darlington.gov.uk)	The Council's approach has always been based on best practice and we look for every reason to accept a complaint, before deciding it does not qualify for investigating. Where we decide a complaint is non-qualifying we explain our reasons and advised the individual of their right to refer the matter to the HOS.
2.2	A complaints policy must set out the circumstances in which a matter will not be considered as a complaint or escalated, and these circumstances must be fair and reasonable to residents. Acceptable exclusions include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The issue giving rise to the complaint 	Yes	Housing Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure; April 2024 (darlington.gov.uk)	See Section 7

	<p>occurred over twelve months ago.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal proceedings have started. This is defined as details of the claim, such as the Claim Form and Particulars of Claim, having been filed at court. • Matters that have previously been considered under the complaints policy. 			
2.3	<p>Landlords must accept complaints referred to them within 12 months of the issue occurring or the resident becoming aware of the issue, unless they are excluded on other grounds. Landlords must consider whether to apply discretion to accept complaints made outside this time limit where there are good reasons to do so.</p>		<p>Housing Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure; April 2024 (darlington.gov.uk)</p>	<p>See Section 7</p>
2.4	<p>If a landlord decides not to accept a complaint, an explanation must be provided to the resident setting out the reasons why the matter is not suitable for the complaints process and the right to take that decision to the Ombudsman. If the Ombudsman does not agree that the exclusion</p>	<p>Yes</p>	<p>Housing Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure; April 2024 (darlington.gov.uk)</p>	<p>Where we decide a complaint is non-qualifying we explain our reasons and advised the individual of their right to refer the matter to the HOS.</p>

	has been fairly applied, the Ombudsman may tell the landlord to take on the complaint.			
2.5	Landlords must not take a blanket approach to excluding complaints; they must consider the individual circumstances of each complaint.	Yes	Housing Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure; April 2024 (darlington.gov.uk)	See Section 7

Section 3: Accessibility and Awareness

Code provision	Code requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence	Commentary / explanation
3.1	Landlords must make it easy for residents to complain by providing different channels through which they can make a complaint. Landlords must consider their duties under the Equality Act 2010 and anticipate the needs and reasonable adjustments of residents who may need to access the complaints process.	Yes	Housing Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure; April 2024 (darlington.gov.uk) Darlington BC - Complaints compliments and comments	
3.2	Residents must be able to raise their complaints in any way and with any member of staff. All staff must be aware of the complaints process and be able to pass details of the complaint to the	Yes	Housing Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure; April 2024 (darlington.gov.uk)	Training provided to officers.

	appropriate person within the landlord.			
3.3	High volumes of complaints must not be seen as a negative, as they can be indicative of a well-publicised and accessible complaints process. Low complaint volumes are potentially a sign that residents are unable to complain.	Yes	Housing Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure; April 2024 (darlington.gov.uk)	
3.4	Landlords must make their complaint policy available in a clear and accessible format for all residents. This will detail the two stage process, what will happen at each stage, and the timeframes for responding. The policy must also be published on the landlord’s website.	Yes	Housing Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure; April 2024 (darlington.gov.uk)	
3.5	The policy must explain how the landlord will publicise details of the complaints policy, including information about the Ombudsman and this Code.	Yes	Housing Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure; April 2024 (darlington.gov.uk)	See Section 1
3.6	Landlords must give residents the opportunity to have a representative deal with their complaint on their behalf, and to	Yes	Housing Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure; April 2024 (darlington.gov.uk)	See Section 8

	be represented or accompanied at any meeting with the landlord.			
3.7	Landlords must provide residents with information on their right to access the Ombudsman service and how the individual can engage with the Ombudsman about their complaint.	Yes	Housing Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure; April 2024 (darlington.gov.uk) Darlington BC - Housing complaints	See Section 12. This is also included response and extension letters

Section 4: Complaint Handling Staff

Code provision	Code requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence	Commentary / explanation
4.1	Landlords must have a person or team assigned to take responsibility for complaint handling, including liaison with the Ombudsman and ensuring complaints are reported to the governing body (or equivalent). This Code will refer to that person or team as the 'complaints officer'. This role may be in addition to other duties.	Yes	Housing Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure; April 2024 (darlington.gov.uk)	See Section 2.
4.2	The complaints officer must have access to staff at all levels to facilitate the prompt resolution of complaints. They must also have the authority and autonomy to act	Yes		The Council's Complaints Manager, Complaints Investigator and the Housing Complaints Officer have access to

	to resolve disputes promptly and fairly.			staff at all levels to facilitate the prompt resolution of complaints and have the authority and autonomy to act to resolve disputes promptly and fairly.
4.3	Landlords are expected to prioritise complaint handling and a culture of learning from complaints. All relevant staff must be suitably trained in the importance of complaint handling. It is important that complaints are seen as a core service and must be resourced to handle complaints effectively	Yes	Housing Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure; April 2024 (darlington.gov.uk) Darlington BC - Annual reports	See Section 1 of the Complaints Procedure. The Council's culture in respect of complaints handling is detailed in its procedures, annual reports and its reports to its Scrutiny Committees and Cabinet . All staff are suitably trained. The sufficiency of resources is subject to the budget constraints of the Local Authority.

Section 5: The Complaint Handling Process

Code provision	Code requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence	Commentary / explanation
5.1	Landlords must have a single policy in place for dealing with complaints covered by this Code. Residents must not be treated differently if they complain.	Yes	Housing Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure; April 2024 (darlington.gov.uk) Darlington BC - Complaints compliments and comments	See Section 1.2

5.2	The early and local resolution of issues between landlords and residents is key to effective complaint handling. It is not appropriate to have extra named stages (such as 'stage 0' or 'informal complaint') as this causes unnecessary confusion.	Yes	Housing Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure; April 2024 (darlington.gov.uk)	
5.3	A process with more than two stages is not acceptable under any circumstances as this will make the complaint process unduly long and delay access to the Ombudsman.	Yes	Housing Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure; April 2024 (darlington.gov.uk)	
5.4	Where a landlord's complaint response is handled by a third party (e.g. a contractor or independent adjudicator) at any stage, it must form part of the two stage complaints process set out in this Code. Residents must not be expected to go through two complaints processes.	Yes	Housing Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure; April 2024 (darlington.gov.uk)	See Section 6.5
5.5	Landlords are responsible for ensuring that any third parties handle complaints in line with the Code.	Yes	Housing Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure; April 2024 (darlington.gov.uk)	See Section 6.5
5.6	When a complaint is logged at Stage 1 or	Yes	Housing Complaints, Compliments and Comments	See Section 11

	<p>escalated to Stage 2, landlords must set out their understanding of the complaint and the outcomes the resident is seeking. The Code will refer to this as “the complaint definition”. If any aspect of the complaint is unclear, the resident must be asked for clarification.</p>		<p>Procedure; April 2024 (darlington.gov.uk)</p>	
5.7	<p>When a complaint is acknowledged at either stage, landlords must be clear which aspects of the complaint they are, and are not, responsible for and clarify any areas where this is not clear.</p>	Yes	<p>Housing Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure; April 2024 (darlington.gov.uk)</p>	<p>We set this out in our acknowledgment letters</p>
5.8	<p>At each stage of the complaints process, complaint handlers must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. deal with complaints on their merits, act independently, and have an open mind; b. give the resident a fair chance to set out their position; c. take measures to address any actual or perceived conflict of interest; and d. consider all relevant information and evidence carefully. 	Yes	<p>Housing Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure; April 2024 (darlington.gov.uk)</p>	<p>All complaint handlers are appropriately trained to ensure complaints are handled in this manner.</p>

<p>5.9</p>	<p>Where a response to a complaint will fall outside the timescales set out in this Code, the landlord must agree with the resident suitable intervals for keeping them informed about their complaint.</p>	<p>Yes</p>	<p>Housing Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure; April 2024 (darlington.gov.uk)</p>	<p>The Council informs the resident the date by which they can expect a response in the extension letter/email. Where the resident requires more frequent updates we agree this on an individual basis.</p>
<p>5.10</p>	<p>Landlords must make reasonable adjustments for residents where appropriate under the Equality Act 2010. Landlords must keep a record of any reasonable adjustments agreed, as well as a record of any disabilities a resident has disclosed. Any agreed reasonable adjustments must be kept under active review.</p>	<p>Yes</p>	<p>Housing Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure; April 2024 (darlington.gov.uk)</p>	<p>See Section 10</p>
<p>5.11</p>	<p>Landlords must not refuse to escalate a complaint through all stages of the complaints procedure unless it has valid reasons to do so. Landlords must clearly set out these reasons, and they must comply with the provisions set out in section 2 of this Code.</p>	<p>Yes</p>	<p>Housing Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure; April 2024 (darlington.gov.uk)</p>	<p>On the rare occasion we may refuse to escalate a complaint, for example where the resident or the Council has commenced legal proceedings in relation to the matter being complained about, we would explain this to the resident in writing and advise them of their right to refer</p>

				the matter to the HOS.
5.12	A full record must be kept of the complaint, and the outcomes at each stage. This must include the original complaint and the date received, all correspondence with the resident, correspondence with other parties, and any relevant supporting documentation such as reports or surveys.	Yes	Housing Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure; April 2024 (darlington.gov.uk)	See Section 17 of the Complaints Procedure. This information is held in the Council's Complaints Management Database. Some information is also held on the tenancy record.
5.13	Landlords must have processes in place to ensure a complaint can be remedied at any stage of its complaints process. Landlords must ensure appropriate remedies can be provided at any stage of the complaints process without the need for escalation.	Yes	Housing Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure; April 2024 (darlington.gov.uk)	See Section 13
5.14	Landlords must have policies and procedures in place for managing unacceptable behaviour from residents and/or their representatives. Landlords must be able to evidence reasons for putting any restrictions in place and must keep restrictions under regular review.	Yes	Housing Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure; April 2024 (darlington.gov.uk)	See Section 16 of the Complaints Procedure. The Council operates an Unreasonably Persistent Complainants Procedure and an Employee Protection Register to manage unacceptable behaviour from residents and/or their representatives.
5.15	Any restrictions placed on contact due to	Yes	Housing Complaints, Compliments and	

	unacceptable behaviour must be proportionate and demonstrate regard for the provisions of the Equality Act 2010.		Comments Procedure; April 2024 (darlington.gov.uk) Darlington BC - Equality information	
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Section 6: Complaints Stages

Stage 1

Code provision	Code requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence	Commentary / explanation
6.1	Landlords must have processes in place to consider which complaints can be responded to as early as possible, and which require further investigation. Landlords must consider factors such as the complexity of the complaint and whether the resident is vulnerable or at risk. Most stage 1 complaints can be resolved promptly, and an explanation, apology or resolution provided to the resident	Yes	Housing Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure; April 2024 (darlington.gov.uk)	See Section 11
6.2	Complaints must be acknowledged, defined and logged at stage 1 of the complaints procedure <u>within five working days of the complaint being received.</u>	Yes	Housing Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure; April 2024 (darlington.gov.uk) Darlington BC - Annual reports	
6.3	Landlords must issue a full response to stage 1 complaints <u>within 10 working days</u> of the	Yes	Housing Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure;	

	complaint being acknowledged.		April 2024 (darlington.gov.uk) Darlington BC - Annual reports	
6.4	Landlords must decide whether an extension to this timescale is needed when considering the complexity of the complaint and then inform the resident of the expected timescale for response. Any extension must be no more than 10 working days without good reason, and the reason(s) must be clearly explained to the resident.	Yes	Housing Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure; April 2024 (darlington.gov.uk)	
6.5	When an organisation informs a resident about an extension to these timescales, they must be provided with the contact details of the Ombudsman.	Yes	Housing Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure; April 2024 (darlington.gov.uk)	This is included in our extension letter/email.
6.6	A complaint response must be provided to the resident when the answer to the complaint is known, not when the outstanding actions required to address the issue are completed. Outstanding actions must still be tracked and actioned promptly with appropriate updates	Yes	Housing Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure; April 2024 (darlington.gov.uk)	Response are issued when the answer to the complaint is known. All actions are allocated to a responsible officer and tracked via the Council's complaint management system.

	provided to the resident.			
6.7	Landlords must address all points raised in the complaint definition and provide clear reasons for any decisions, referencing the relevant policy, law and good practice where appropriate.	Yes	Housing Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure; April 2024 (darlington.gov.uk)	We have template response letters and investigation reports which assist complaints officers in ensuring they address all points raised in the complaint definition.
6.8	Where residents raise additional complaints during the investigation, these must be incorporated into the stage 1 response if they are related and the stage 1 response has not been issued. Where the stage 1 response has been issued, the new issues are unrelated to the issues already being investigated or it would unreasonably delay the response, the new issues must be logged as a new complaint.	Yes	Housing Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure; April 2024 (darlington.gov.uk)	This is something we have always done and will continue to do.
6.9	Landlords must confirm the following in writing to the resident at the completion of stage 1 in clear, plain language: a. the complaint stage; b. the complaint definition; c. the decision on the complaint;	Yes	Housing Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure; April 2024 (darlington.gov.uk)	We have template response letters and investigation reports which ensure this information is provided in the response.

	<p>d. the reasons for any decisions made;</p> <p>e. the details of any remedy offered to put things right;</p> <p>f. details of any outstanding actions; and</p> <p>g. details of how to escalate the matter to stage 2 if the individual is not satisfied with the response.</p>			
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Stage 2

Code provision	Code requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence	Commentary / explanation
6.10	If all or part of the complaint is not resolved to the resident's satisfaction at stage 1, it must be progressed to stage 2 of the landlord's procedure. Stage 2 is the landlord's final response.	Yes	Housing Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure; April 2024 (darlington.gov.uk)	See Section 11
6.11	Requests for stage 2 must be acknowledged, defined and logged at stage 2 of the complaints procedure within five working days of the escalation request being received.	Yes	Housing Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure; April 2024 (darlington.gov.uk)	See Section 11
6.12	Residents must not be required to explain their reasons for requesting a stage 2 consideration. Landlords are expected to make reasonable efforts to understand	Yes	Housing Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure; April 2024 (darlington.gov.uk)	See Section 11

	why a resident remains unhappy as part of its stage 2 response.			
6.13	The person considering the complaint at stage 2 must not be the same person that considered the complaint at stage 1.	Yes	Housing Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure; April 2024 (darlington.gov.uk)	See Section 11
6.14	Landlords must issue a final response to the stage 2 within 20 working days of the complaint being acknowledged.	Yes	Housing Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure; April 2024 (darlington.gov.uk)	See Section 11
6.15	Landlords must decide whether an extension to this timescale is needed when considering the complexity of the complaint and then inform the resident of the expected timescale for response. Any extension must be no more than 20 working days without good reason, and the reason(s) must be clearly explained to the resident.	Yes	Housing Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure; April 2024 (darlington.gov.uk)	See Section 11
6.16	When an organisation informs a resident about an extension to these timescales, they must be provided with the contact details of the Ombudsman.	Yes	Housing Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure; April 2024 (darlington.gov.uk)	This is included in our extension letter/email.
6.17	A complaint response must be provided to the resident when the answer to the complaint is known, not when the outstanding actions required to address the	Yes	Housing Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure; April 2024 (darlington.gov.uk)	Complaint responses are issued when the answer to the complaint is known. All actions are allocated to a responsible officer

	issue are completed. Outstanding actions must still be tracked and actioned promptly with appropriate updates provided to the resident.			and tracked via the Council's complaint management system.
6.18	Landlords must address all points raised in the complaint definition and provide clear reasons for any decisions, referencing the relevant policy, law and good practice where appropriate.	Yes	Housing Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure; April 2024 (darlington.gov.uk)	This is standard investigative practice and something we do in all cases. We have template response letter and investigation report templates and good investigative practice guidance for complaints officers to ensure this happens. Complaints Officers also receive training on good investigative practice.
6.19	Landlords must confirm the following in writing to the resident at the completion of stage 2 in clear, plain language: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. the complaint stage; b. the complaint definition; c. the decision on the complaint; d. the reasons for any decisions made; e. the details of any remedy offered to put things right; 	Yes	Housing Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure; April 2024 (darlington.gov.uk)	We have template response letters and investigation reports which ensure this information is provided in the response.

	<p>f. details of any outstanding actions; and</p> <p>g. details of how to escalate the matter to the Ombudsman Service if the individual remains dissatisfied.</p>			
6.20	<p>Stage 2 is the landlord's final response and must involve all suitable staff members needed to issue such a response.</p>	Yes	<p>Housing Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure; April 2024 (darlington.gov.uk)</p>	<p>All officers involved are consulted and the Assistant Director are given the opportunity to comment on the response/provide any further evidence that may lead the complaints office to a different conclusion prior to the response being sent.</p>

Section 7: Putting things right

Code provision	Code requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence	Commentary / explanation
7.1	<p>Where something has gone wrong a landlord must acknowledge this and set out the actions it has already taken, or intends to take, to put things right. These can include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apologising; • Acknowledging where things have gone wrong; • Providing an explanation, assistance or reasons; • Taking action if there has been delay; 	Yes	<p>Housing Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure; April 2024 (darlington.gov.uk)</p>	See Section 13

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reconsidering or changing a decision; • Amending a record or adding a correction or addendum; • Providing a financial remedy; • Changing policies, procedures or practices. 			
7.2	Any remedy offered must reflect the impact on the resident as a result of any fault identified.	Yes	Housing Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure; April 2024 (darlington.gov.uk)	See Section 13
7.3	The remedy offer must clearly set out what will happen and by when, in agreement with the resident where appropriate. Any remedy proposed must be followed through to completion.	Yes	Housing Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure; April 2024 (darlington.gov.uk)	See Section 13 of the complaints procedure. All remedy actions are allocated to a responsible officer and tracked via the Council's complaint management system.
7.4	Landlords must take account of the guidance issued by the Ombudsman when deciding on appropriate remedies.	Yes	Housing Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure; April 2024 (darlington.gov.uk)	Complaints officers use the HOS Guidance on Remedies.

Section 8: Self-assessment, reporting and compliance

Code provision	Code requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence	Commentary / explanation
8.1	<p>Landlords must produce an annual complaints performance and service improvement report for scrutiny and challenge, which must include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. the annual self-assessment against this Code to ensure their complaint handling policy remains in line with its requirements. b. 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; c. any findings of non-compliance with this Code by the Ombudsman; d. the service improvements made as a result of the learning from complaints; e. any annual report about the landlord’s performance from the Ombudsman; and f. any other relevant reports or publications produced by the Ombudsman in relation to the work of the landlord. 	Yes	<p>Darlington BC - Annual reports</p> <p>Agenda for Cabinet on Tuesday, 10th September, 2024, 5.00 pm Darlington Borough Council</p>	
8.2	<p>The annual complaints performance and service improvement report must be reported to the</p>		<p>Darlington BC - Annual reports</p>	<p>The annual report is also considered by Council Officers</p>

	landlord's governing body (or equivalent) and published on the on the section of its website relating to complaints. The governing body's response to the report must be published alongside this.		Agenda for Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee on Thursday, 5th September, 2024, 10.00 am Darlington Borough Council Agenda for Cabinet on Tuesday, 10th September, 2024, 5.00 pm Darlington Borough Council	at the Chief Officers Board.
8.3	Landlords must also carry out a self-assessment following a significant restructure, merger and/or change in procedures.	Yes	See this document	This is our annual return and is being completed shortly after the recently restructure of Housing Services
8.4	Landlords may be asked to review and update the self-assessment following an Ombudsman investigation.	Yes		
8.5	If a landlord is unable to comply with the Code due to exceptional circumstances, such as a cyber incident, they must inform the Ombudsman, provide information to residents who may be affected, and publish this on their website Landlords must provide a timescale for returning to compliance with the Code.	Yes		

Section 9: Scrutiny & oversight: continuous learning and improvement

Code provision	Code requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence	Commentary / explanation
9.1	Landlords must look beyond the circumstances of the	Yes	Housing Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure;	See Section 13 of the complaints procedure.

	individual complaint and consider whether service improvements can be made as a result of any learning from the complaint.		April 2024 (darlington.gov.uk)	Regular reports to the MRC and the annual report enable the Council to ensure this happens.
9.2	A positive complaint handling culture is integral to the effectiveness with which landlords resolve disputes. Landlords must use complaints as a source of intelligence to identify issues and introduce positive changes in service delivery.	Yes	Housing Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure; April 2024 (darlington.gov.uk)	See Section 13 of the complaints procedure. Regular reports to the MRC and the annual report enable the Council to ensure this happens.
9.3	Accountability and transparency are also integral to a positive complaint handling culture. Landlords must report back on wider learning and improvements from complaints to stakeholders, such as residents' panels, staff and relevant committees.	Yes	Darlington BC - Annual reports Agenda for Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee on Thursday, 5th September, 2024, 10.00 am Darlington Borough Council Agenda for Cabinet on Tuesday, 10th September, 2024, 5.00 pm Darlington Borough Council	See Section 14 of the complaints procedure. The report is also considered by the Chief Officer's Board and the Tenant's panel.
9.4	Landlords must appoint a suitably senior lead person as accountable for their complaint handling. This person must assess any themes or trends to identify potential systemic issues, serious risks, or policies and procedures that require revision.	Yes	Housing Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure; April 2024 (darlington.gov.uk)	See Section 1. This is the Complaints and Information Governance Manager

<p>9.5</p>	<p>In addition to this 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').</p>	<p>Yes</p>	<p>Housing Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure; April 2024 (darlington.gov.uk)</p>	<p>See Section 1. This is the Assistant Director, Housing and Revenues Services</p>
<p>9.6</p>	<p>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.</p>	<p>Yes</p>	<p>Darlington BC - Annual reports Agenda for Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee on Thursday, 5th September, 2024, 10.00 am Darlington Borough Council Agenda for Cabinet on Tuesday, 10th September, 2024, 5.00 pm Darlington Borough Council</p>	<p>Regular information is also provided to the MRC and they have regular contact with the Complaints and Information Governance Manager.</p>
<p>9.7</p>	<p>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</p>	<p>Yes</p>	<p>Darlington BC - Annual reports Agenda for Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee on Thursday, 5th September, 2024, 10.00 am Darlington Borough Council Agenda for Cabinet on Tuesday, 10th September, 2024, 5.00 pm Darlington Borough Council</p>	<p>The MRC receives all of the items listed and has direct access to all officers as the relevant Assistant Director.</p>

	<p>progress made in complying with orders related to severe maladministration findings; and</p> <p>d. annual complaints performance and service improvement report.</p>			
9.8	<p>Landlords must have a standard objective in relation to complaint handling for all relevant employees or third parties that reflects the need to:</p> <p>a. have a collaborative and co-operative approach towards resolving complaints, working with colleagues across teams and departments;</p> <p>b. take collective responsibility for any shortfalls identified through complaints, rather than blaming others; and</p> <p>c. act within the professional standards for engaging with complaints as set by any relevant professional body.</p>	Yes	<p>Housing Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure; April 2024 (darlington.gov.uk)</p>	