

# Arun District Council

<b>REPORT TO:</b>	<b>Housing and Wellbeing Committee – 10 September 2024</b>
<b>SUBJECT:</b>	<b>Housing services complaints performance and determinations Q1</b>
<b>LEAD OFFICER:</b>	<b>Sasha Hawkins – Business Improvement Manager</b>
<b>LEAD MEMBER:</b>	Councillor Carol Birch, Chair of Housing and Wellbeing Committee
<b>WARDS:</b>	<b>All</b>

## **CORPORATE PRIORITY / POLICY CONTEXT / CORPORATE VISION:**

The report supports the following areas in the corporate vision:

- Delivering the right homes in the right places
- Support those in our community that need help, providing a safety net where necessary and working with people and organisations to meet different needs.
- Ensure the existing housing stock in the district (private sector and council owned) is maintained to a high standard.
- Support households with complex needs to secure suitable accommodation.

This report provides members with details of any Housing Ombudsman determinations made against the council and our complaints performance for the first quarter of 2024/25 (April to June).

## **DIRECTORATE POLICY CONTEXT:**

The Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code sets out that landlords should provide their governing bodies with information on their performance on complaint handling, to include showing that we have complied with any orders made by the Ombudsman.

As a landlord we have to ensure compliance with the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code as failure to do so could result in a complaint being referred to an appropriate regulator.

## **FINANCIAL SUMMARY:**

In Q1 we offered £8590.92. compensation as part of our Stage 1 and Stage 2 responses.

Our compensation budget is monitored by the service managers, and compensation is paid in line with our compensation policy.

## **1 PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 To present to committee an overview of Housing services complaints performance for Q1 (April to June)

## **2 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Housing and Wellbeing Committee

- 2.1.1 Note the contents of the report.

### **3 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 3.1 This report provides members with an overview of our complaint handling performance in quarter 1 for the period 1 April 2024 to 30 June 2024.
- 3.2 We received no new determinations from the Housing Ombudsman in Quarter 1; however, determinations have been received during Quarter 2, the outcomes will be shared in next quarters performance report.
- 3.3 For the period 1 April 2024 to 30 June 2024, 81 formal complaints were received, the highest volume of complaints was seen in our repairs service which accounted for 47 of formal complaints received. We also received more compliments than complaints for the first time.
- 3.4 On average for quarter 1 we responded to 70% of Stage 1 complaints within agreed extended timescales this is a decline on our Q4 performance of 89%. For Stage 2 complaints we responded to 87% of complaints within agreed extended timescales, representing a decline on quarter 4's performance of 97%.
- 3.5 Although our performance has declined, we are still achieving our target of 69% for Stage 1's and 65% for Stage 2's. This target is the mean value of performance of similar sized local authorities.
- 3.6 Our response times to complaints have declined this quarter, with more complaints being responded to outside of deadline, this was largely seen in June however in May we responded to 98% of Stage 1's and 100% of Stage 2's.
- 3.7 The reason for the decline in response times in April and June was staff leave and sickness impacting our ability to respond to complaints.
- 3.8 Staff across housing have been advised that responding to complaints within the Ombudsman timescales is a top priority, and that where there is leave or sickness that complaints would need to be delegated out to other officers.
- 3.9 For quarter 1 we received 86 compliments which is an increase from 53 compliments last quarter, and across the quarter we received more compliments than complaints.

### **4 DETAIL**

#### **4.1 Complaint performance**

- 4.1.1 Appendix 1 sets out our performance for quarter 1 and reports on key measures such as response rate, volume of complaints, and root causes.
- 4.1.2 Compared to Q1 of 2023/24 the volume of complaints has decreased, with 81 complaints being received in Q1 of 2024/25 compared to 96 in Q1 last year. This is largely attributable to a significant decrease in repairs complaints which have decreased from 68 to 47 compared to last year.

- 4.1.3 The decrease in volume of repairs complaints is positive and is showing that the impact of the changes made to the repairs service is starting to be seen in our performance measures. We know there is still more to do to fully see the results of the changes, but we are tentatively reassured by these figures.
- 4.1.4 Members will also be able to see in the Performance Measures brought in another committee report this evening that overall satisfaction with our repairs service is high.
- 4.1.5 The response time set by the Housing Ombudsman for Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaints is 10 and 20 working days. Appendix 1 shows the percentage of complaints responded to within time has decreased this quarter.
- 4.1.6 For quarter 1 we responded to 70% of Stage 1's and 87% of Stage 2's within time. This is a decline on Q4's performance of 87% and 97%, however it is still a large improvement when compared to our position in Q1 of 2023/2024.
- 4.1.7 We do not want to see our response times continue to decline, and steps are being taken to ensure this does not happen.
- a) Weekly reminders are sent to all investigating officers of their current complaint deadlines
  - b) Complaint performance is discussed monthly at housing management team meetings
  - c) Where required escalation is made to the service manager where complaint deadlines are being missed in their departments
  - d) Mandatory complaints training for all staff has been arranged, which covers all areas of complaint investigations and the importance of responding within Ombudsman timescales. Appendix 1 sets out some further data on root causes and the complaint decisions made.
- 4.2 In Q1 staff complaints were the largest root cause of complaints, followed by service not provided.
- 4.3 We continue to see an increase in staff complaints this quarter, and our analysis has highlighted areas where training might be required.
- 4.4 Actions have been put in place to address the level of staff complaints
- a) Complaints training which covers the principles of dispute resolutions and early intervention
  - b) Further training for new staff on processes and policies in place
  - c) Telephony response times for group phone numbers are monitored by service managers

- d) Development will start this calendar year on a new housing induction process, to include key aspects of the Consumer Standards, Housing Complaint Handling Code, and the services expectations on communication and contact. This will be developed with staff and residents.
- 4.5 The housing management team will be monitoring the level of staff complaints and will be reviewing the actions in place, and we hope to see the levels of staff complaints reduce over the next quarter.
- 4.5.1 When we then look at our complaint decisions, we see that the largest proportion of complaints are being upheld, however the percentage of complaints that were not upheld has increased from 21% in Q4 to 32% in Q1.
- 4.5.2 There is still further work for us to do to improve our communication and the service we provide, so that we can continue to reduce the volume of complaints and the number of complaints upheld where we are at fault.
- 4.6 **Continued performance monitoring**
- 4.6.1 Our complaints co-ordinator monitors our performance on a weekly basis and works closely with Infomanagement to ensure complaints are dealt with in line with our policy.
- 4.6.2 Our housing management team receive performance updates every fortnight and monitor the progress of any actions committed to. They also receive regular information on trends, root causes and lessons learnt so they can take action to address any systemic issues.
- 4.6.3 We also invite residents who have been through the complaints process to carry out a survey to give us their views on our complaint handling, and any areas we can improve on. Our first quarter's performance shows that overall satisfaction with our complaint handling is 53% which is 18% above our target which is the mean value of similar sized local authorities.
- 4.7 **Compliments**
- 4.7.1 For quarter 1 we received 86 compliments, some of these compliments are set out below.
- 4.7.2 "Thank you again for your help and support you have been the most helpful and kindest person I have spoken to at the council you are a true credit to them."
- 4.7.3 "Please pass on my total gratitude to Sophie, she was so helpful last week in regard to support with my move. Not often you guys get compliments, but I have to share that she actually saved my life that day, I have been in such a bad place mentally and her kindness for 10 minutes helped me, and my family out more than she realises. I want her to know how grateful I am for her support"
- 4.7.4 "This is what has pleased or impressed me: Very happy with the repairs done on the guttering and how pleasant the contractors were when help fix the issue"

4.7.5 “I appreciate all the help and support from you and your team, you have really helped me deal with everything so much better, it’s been so scary and overwhelming and now there is a light at the end of the tunnel.”

4.7.6 “Credit were credits due. I had to report something to repairs during the week. Phone was answered inside two or three minutes. Extremely personable woman on the phone and everything sorted. I thought it was time you got a bouquet as well as brick.”

## **5 CONSULTATION**

5.1 None required

## **6 OPTIONS/ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERS**

6.1 This report is for noting only

## **7 COMMENTS BY THE GROUP HEAD OF FINANCE/SECTION 151 OFFICER**

7.1 The financial implications outlined in this report can be funded within the existing housing revenue budget

## **8 RISK ASSESSMENT CONSIDERATIONS**

8.1 Not applicable.

## **9 COMMENTS OF THE GROUP HEAD OF LAW AND GOVERNANCE & MONITORING OFFICER**

9.1 Compliance with the Complaint Handling Code is a requirement of the membership of the Housing Ombudsman Scheme and failure to comply with the Code entitles the Ombudsman to take action through its determinations and other avenues. There are no direct legal implications associated with this report, but the report forms part of the Council’s ongoing work to adhere to the Code and to improve its complaints performance.

## **10 HUMAN RESOURCES IMPACT**

10.1 No impact identified.

## **11 HEALTH & SAFETY IMPACT**

11.1 There are no direct health and safety impacts associated with this report. However, reporting on complaint performance and Ombudsman determinations helps to highlights improvements to service areas which include repairs and compliance, which will help support the effective management of health and safety risks.

## **12 PROPERTY & ESTATES IMPACT**

12.1 The recommendations of this report have no impact on the Councils General Fund Portfolio or the delivery of Property, Estates, and Facilities functions.

## **13 EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT (EIA) / SOCIAL VALUE**

13.1 Not required as this is a performance monitoring report.

## **14 CLIMATE CHANGE & ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT/SOCIAL VALUE**

14.1 No impact identified

## **15 CRIME AND DISORDER REDUCTION IMPACT**

15.1 No impact identified.

## **16 HUMAN RIGHTS IMPACT**

16.1 There are no implications identified.

## **17 FREEDOM OF INFORMATION / DATA PROTECTION CONSIDERATIONS**

17.1 There are no implications identified

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### **CONTACT OFFICER:**

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### **BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:**

None