Report To:	Cabinet
Date:	Tuesday 12th November 2024
Subject:	Housing Landlord Services Complaint Handling – Q1-Q2 2024/25 update
Purpose:	To provide Cabinet with an update on progress made towards delivering the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code 2024.
Key Decision:	No
Portfolio Holder:	Portfolio Holder for Strategic and Operational Housing
Report Of:	Jason King, Assistant Director - Housing
Report Author:	Sam Dicker, Business Support Manager
Ward(s) Affected:	All Wards
Exempt Report:	No

Summary

In order to comply with the Housing Ombudsman's complaint handling code, it is important that performance on housing complaints is reported to the governing body . The governing body has been determined as Cabinet following advice from the Monitoring Officer. This report sets out the complaint handling performance for the Housing Landlord Service during quarter 1 and 2 of 2024/25.

Recommendations

That Cabinet notes the Housing Landlord Service's complaint handling performance during quarter 1 and 2 of 2024/25.

Reasons for Recommendations

To provide assurance to Cabinet on the Council's compliance with the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code and provide updated information on ongoing work towards delivering a positive complaint-handling culture, ensuring residents' concerns are addressed promptly and appropriately.

Other Options Considered

Do nothing – to retain progress updates through operational arrangements with the Portfolio Holder for Strategic and Operational Housing. This option is not considered to be appropriate as the Housing Ombudsman is clear that governing bodies are responsible for ensuring that the Council, in its role as a social landlord is meeting the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code.

1. Background

1.1 The Social Housing Regulation Act (2023) sets out that the Ombudsman's Code provides a single, robust set of standards for complaints procedures to be accessible, fair, and efficient. The Act placed a legal duty on the Ombudsman to monitor a member's compliance with the Code – regardless of whether a resident brings a complaint to the service .

1.2 The Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code 2024 was introduced as a statutory requirement on April 1, 2024. The code aims to provide a clear, accessible, and resident-focused framework for handling complaints. By defining what constitutes a complaint, streamlining the complaint procedure, and emphasizing fairness and accountability, the code seeks to foster a positive complaint-handling culture among landlords. This ensures that residents' concerns are addressed promptly and appropriately, promoting continuous improvement in housing services.

1.3 The purpose of the Code sets out how landlords should handle complaints from residents effectively and fairly to improve its services. The Code is designed as a guide for residents to provide an understanding of what they will expect from their landlord if they were to make a complaint.

1.4 The Code sets out when the Ombudsman could intervene in a landlord's handling of a complaint and provides a clear process for how and when it could instruct a landlord to take on a complaint, provide a response or review its processes or issue an order where there is evidence of complaint handling failure.

2. Report

2.1 The Complaint Handling Code expects the governing body to receive regular information on complaints that provide insight and learning on Housing Landlord Services complaint handling performance. Following discussions with the Monitoring Officer, it has been determined that the governing body for the South Holland District Council is considered to be Cabinet.

2.2 The appointed body should receive:

- Updates on the volume, categories, and outcome of complaints, alongside complaint handling performance including compliance with the Ombudsman's orders.

- Reviews of issues and trends arising from complaint handling.
- The annual performance report produced by the Ombudsman, where applicable.
- Individual complaint outcomes where necessary, including where the Ombudsman made findings of severe maladministration or referrals to regulatory bodies. The implementation of management responses should be tracked to ensure they are delivered to agreed timescales.
- The annual self-assessment against the Complaint Handling Code for scrutiny and challenge.

2.3 Cabinet adopted the SHDC Housing Comments, Compliments, Complaints and Compensation Policy in 2023. The latest version of the policy is attached as Appendix 1.

2.4 The Self-Assessment against the Housing Ombudsman Code has been completed for 24/25 and published on The Councils website (Appendix 2). This has also been submitted to the Housing Ombudsman.

2.5 The Portfolio Holder for Strategic and Operational Housing is the Member Responsible for Complaints. The Member Responsible for Complaints (MRC) is a key role within an organisation's governing body. The main responsibilities are championing a positive complaint handling culture: The MRC promotes a culture where complaints are seen as opportunities for improvement rather than just issues to be resolved.

•Providing Assurance: They ensure that the governing body receives regular updates on complaint handling performance, offering insights into how effectively complaints are managed.
•Challenging Data and Information: The MRC critically evaluates the data and information provided to the Board to ensure transparency and accountability.
•Building Relationships: They work closely with complaints teams, residents, audit and risk committees, and other relevant parties to foster effective communication and resolution processes and drive service improvement:

By overseeing the complaints system, the MRC helps drive continuous service improvement based on feedback from complaints.

2.6 An Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report has been completed for 23/24. This report sets out performance, areas for improvements, including feedback from the Member Responsible for Complaints. A copy is included at Appendix 3.

2.7 The Policy, Self-Assessment and Performance and Service Improvement Report have been submitted to the Housing Ombudsman as part of the annual return.

2.8 An Officer Complaints Working Group meet every 6 weeks to review the trends and themes of compliments and complaints whilst considering service improvements made in relation to them. Their findings feed into the Member Responsible for Complaints Report. An example of the report is shown in Appendix 4.

2.9 Performance indicators for Complaints are presented and discussed at the Housing Landlord Board, Governance and Compliance Clinics. Reporting on the compliance with the Housing Ombudsman timescales, themes, trends & numbers of complaints

and compliments. Attendees of these include the Portfolio Holder for Strategic and Operational Housing, Deputy Chief Executive (Corporate Development) and S151, Assistant Director - Housing, Business Support Manager, Housing Services Manager & Property & Repairs Manager.

2.10 SHDC Housing have seen an increase in complaints & compliments for 2024-2025 compared to 2023-2024, this is seen as a positive in response to our ambitions to drive service improvement and ensure learning can be taken from both complaints and compliments. Current years statistics for April 2024-September 2024 are;

- 97 Complaints – 86 Stage 1 & 11 Stage 2
- 97.93% compliant with Housing Ombudsman Timescales.
- 59 Compliments received.

3. Conclusion

3.1 Progress has been made over the last six months strengthening the Council's approach to responding to complaints about the Housing Landlord Service and meeting the requirements of the Housing Complaint Handling Code 2024 including submitting a self-assessment and Annual Complaints Performance & Service Improvement Report to the Ombudsman.

3.2 The handling of complaints continues to be reported to the Member Responsible for Complaints monthly and six-monthly updates will be reported to Cabinet in its role as governing body.

3.3 Officers continue to use tenant feedback to drive service improvement as part of the Complaints Working Group. We are reviewing trends and themes of complaints and compliments.

3.4 Service Improvements continue to be tracked and monitored through the Member Responsible for Complaints Report (Appendix 4) and the Annual Complaints Performance & Service Improvement Report (Appendix 3) to ensure continued learning and improvement of the Housing Service.

Implications

South and East Lincolnshire Councils Partnership

None

Corporate Priorities

None

Staffing

None

Workforce Capacity Implications

None

Constitutional and Legal Implications

None

Data Protection

All data relating to complaints is protected under data protection laws. The Council has suitable technical and organisational measures in place to protect such data. Privacy notices are published on our website.

Financial

None

Risk Management

The Policies and Framework reduce the risk of sanctions Housing Ombudsman.

Stakeholder / Consultation / Timescales

Portfolio Holder for Strategic and Operational Housing as Member Responsible for Complaints.

Reputation

Remaining compliant with the Housing Ombudsman Code reduces the risk of reputational damage caused by enforcement from the Social Housing Regulator and/or the Housing Ombudsman (of which is published on the Ombudsman's website and social media channels).

a. The increased public focus on social housing issues could increase the risk of reputational damage to the Council if "Complaint Handling Failure Order" findings were issued by the Housing Ombudsman. A **Complaint Handling Failure Order (CHFO)** is issued by the Housing Ombudsman to ensure that a landlord's complaint handling process is accessible, consistent, and enables timely progression of complaints for residents.

Contracts

None

Crime and Disorder

None

Equality and Diversity / Human Rights / Safeguarding

Equality Diversity Impact Assessment Completed (Appendix 5)

Health and Wellbeing

None

Climate Change and Environmental Implications

None

Acronyms

MRC – Member Responsible for Complaints

Appendices

Appendices are listed below and attached to the back of the report:

Appendix 1 Comments, Compliments, Complaints and Compensation policy
Appendix 2 Housing Ombudsman Self-Assessment 2024
Appendix 3 Annual Complaints Performance & Service Improvement Report
Appendix 4 Member Responsible for Complaints Report
Appendix 5 Equality Impact Assessment

Background Papers

Document title	**Where the document can be viewed**
The Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code	The Complaint Handling Code | Housing Ombudsman Service (housing-ombudsman.org.uk)

Chronological History of this Report

A report on this item has not been previously considered by a Council body.

Report Approval

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