



# **Annual complaints performance and service improvement report**

**June 2024**

## **Cabinet's response to the report from Cllr Glancy – Member Responsible for Complaints (MRC)**

This Council is not afraid of feedback or complaints. We have a positive approach towards dealing with complaints and we strive to act effectively to resolve issues, learn from complaints and to prevent reoccurrences. When things go wrong, we want our tenants to tell us, and our teams to be confident to ask, "how can we put this right for you?" The increase in complaints being resolved at the earliest stage of our complaints process shows that this is embedded as an approach.

As member responsible for complaints, I ensure that Cabinet members receive and consider information on complaints as part of our quarterly performance management arrangements, providing opportunity to ask questions, seek assurance and to hold ourselves and our teams to account with a focus on continuous improvement.

Over the last 12 months we have refreshed our Customer Feedback and Complaints Policy and we have welcomed the recent opportunity to discuss our approach to complaints handling with the Regulator for Social Housing during our recent proactive inspection on consumer regulation.

Our annual report and self-assessment were considered by the Cabinet in June 2024, and our Scrutiny Committee have received reports in 23/24 on both complaints handling and tenant satisfaction, something I am pleased to have seen a focus on.

We have also established a Landlord Assurance Board to provide space for focused consideration of housing performance and delivery. Through this councillors, council officers and tenants can review and have opportunity to reflect and comment upon our complaints handling performance as part of their remit, culminating in an annual report to scrutiny, Cabinet and Full Council. We are open, transparent and accountable as a landlord, and look forward to recruiting tenants to join our Landlord Assurance Board in 2024.

As we look to the future, the customer experience is crucial for our tenants. We have committed to several things that will enhance our approach, for example, we are developing a refreshed customer journey framework, we have committed to a review of how we management customer journey for repairs calls and we are implementing new systems to modernise and improve how we categorise, monitor, track and report on complaints. Our corporate project to enhance our ability to analyse and use the data we hold on our tenants will further strengthen our response as a landlord, in all that we do.

We continue to take complaints and all customer feedback seriously – not because we must, but because it's the right thing to do.

**Cllr Margaret Glancy**

**Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Governance, Environment and Regulatory Services**

**Qualitative and quantitative analysis of our complaint handling performance - this must also include a summary of the types of complaints that we have refused to accept.**

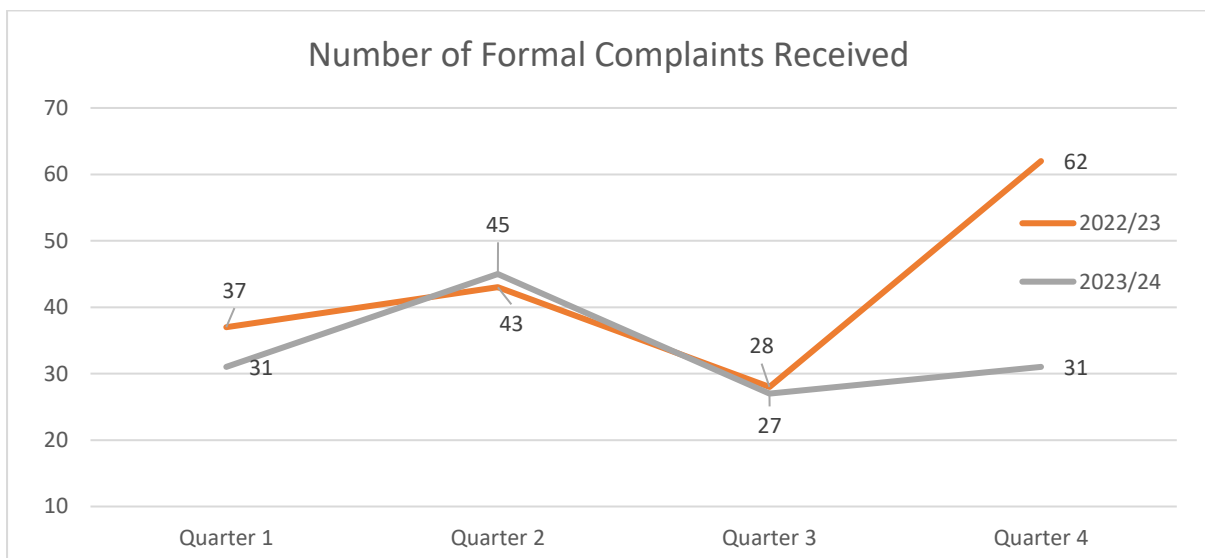
The Council recognises that complaints are a valuable opportunity to gain feedback, learn and improve services. The Council is committed to providing a positive and proactive response to complaints and encourages feedback so that positive action can be taken.

The Corporate Complaints process comprises a two-stage internal process comprising stage one complaints which are dealt with by Service Managers and stage two complaints where a Director or Assistant Director reviews the stage one response. Where a complainant remains dissatisfied with the Council's response, they can refer the matter for independent review by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman or Housing Ombudsman.

**2023/24 performance**

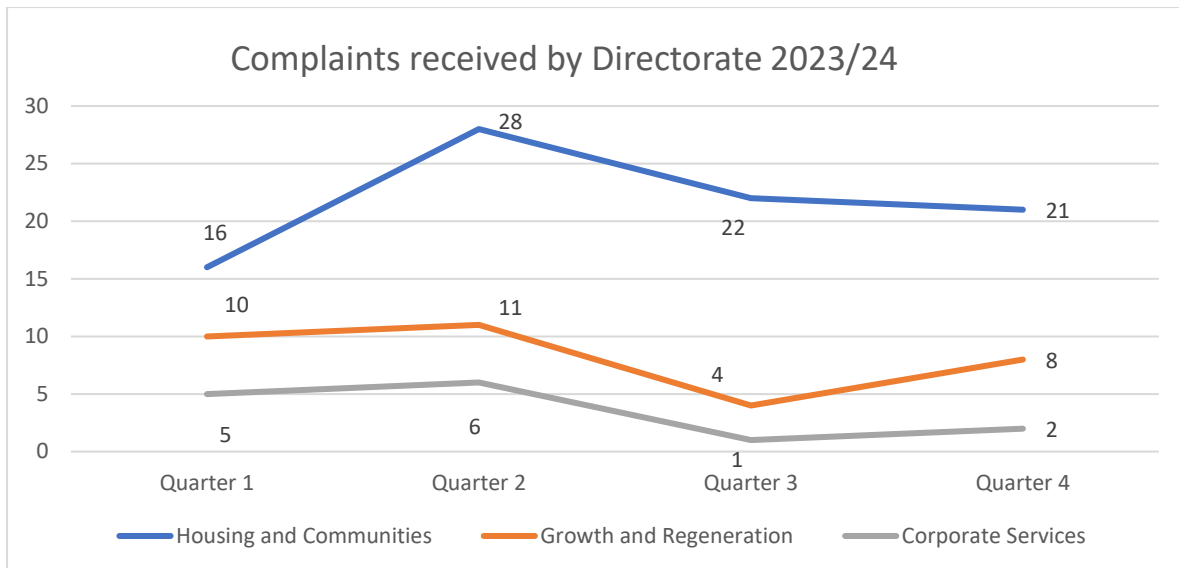
**Corporate**

In 2023/24, the Council received 134 formal complaints from customers. This is lower than the same period in 22/23.



**Complaints by Directorate**

Of the formal complaints received from customers in 2023/24, the vast majority relate to the more customer facing **Housing and Communities** directorate. Given the outward facing nature of this directorate this is not unexpected. The breakdown of these complaints by Directorate is shown below.



## Housing

In 2023/24, the Council as landlord received 76 formal complaints from tenants which is 57% of the total complaints received by the Council.

During 2023/24 the Council responded to 96.5% of stage 1 complaints and 100% of all stage 2 complaints in the timescales set out in our policy.

The biggest area for complaints were repairs with 57 complaints followed by tenancy services with 13. The other 6 complaints related to rents and supported housing. Complaints on repairs were 43% of the total number of complaints received by the Council.

## Complaints upheld or partially upheld

### Corporate (non-housing)

Of the 134 formal complaints so far received this year from customers, 73 of these have been upheld or partially upheld by the Council which is 54.48% and is a large increase on the 11.18% upheld last year. This increase shows that the Council looks at taking responsibility for addressing issues raised through formal complaints at the earliest opportunity.

### Housing

Of the 76 formal complaints received this year in Housing from tenants 59 of these have been upheld or partially upheld by the service. This equates to 78% (3 out of every 4) of all housing complaints being upheld. This is over 24% than the overall rate for the Council. During 2023/24 the Council's Housing Team did a lot of work promoting our complaints service to tenants and encouraging them to complain if they needed to. As a service we try to resolve any complaints at the earliest opportunity.

The most recent [Melton BC annual report to tenants 22/23](#), which was posted to all council tenants in October 2023 included a section on customer feedback and

complaints. Information about customer feedback and complaints was also included in the tenant's newsletter in Spring 2023

Information about the Council's Complaints Policy and process, and the ways in which complaints can be made is included on the Council's website. The Council has committed to ensuring its website is accessible and consistently has an accessibility score of 100%. In March 2024 [Silktide Index](#) confirmed Melton's position in joint 1<sup>st</sup> place in UK Councils.

Information about making a complaint is on the Council's [main website](#) and also linked through to the newly formed [Tenants' Corner](#) area of the website. The webpages include information on:

- Complaints policy and process including how to make complaint
- Requesting a review
- Referring to Ombudsman Services
- How to raise regulatory concerns (housing) and designated officers for health and safety, and consumer standards (and their deputies).
- Make It Right Campaign

## **Analysis of Complaints Upheld**

We have undertaken analysis of all complaints upheld this year and these are set out below. These cover all services but given the high proportion of the Council's complaints are Housing, there are specific ones that relate to our landlord function.

### **Corporate:**

- **Improve Communication:** Many of the upheld complaints cite lack of communication as a reason for dissatisfaction. Implementing better communication protocols between staff and residents/customers as well as contractors can help manage expectations and keep both parties informed throughout the process. This may include regular updates on repair status, clear explanations of procedures, and providing avenues for clients to easily reach out with concerns or inquiries.
- **Training and Development:** Addressing issues related to lack of responsiveness and communication may require additional training for staff. Providing training sessions on effective communication strategies, customer service skills, and conflict resolution techniques can empower staff to better address client concerns and minimise complaints.
- **Regular Monitoring and Feedback:** Establishing regular monitoring mechanisms to track repair progress and client satisfaction can help identify issues early on and proactively address them. Additionally, seeking feedback from clients about their experiences with repairs and communication can provide valuable insights for continuous improvements.

### **Housing:**

- **Enhanced Contractor Management:** Several complaints mention delays due to issues with contractors, such as cancellations or lack of commitment.

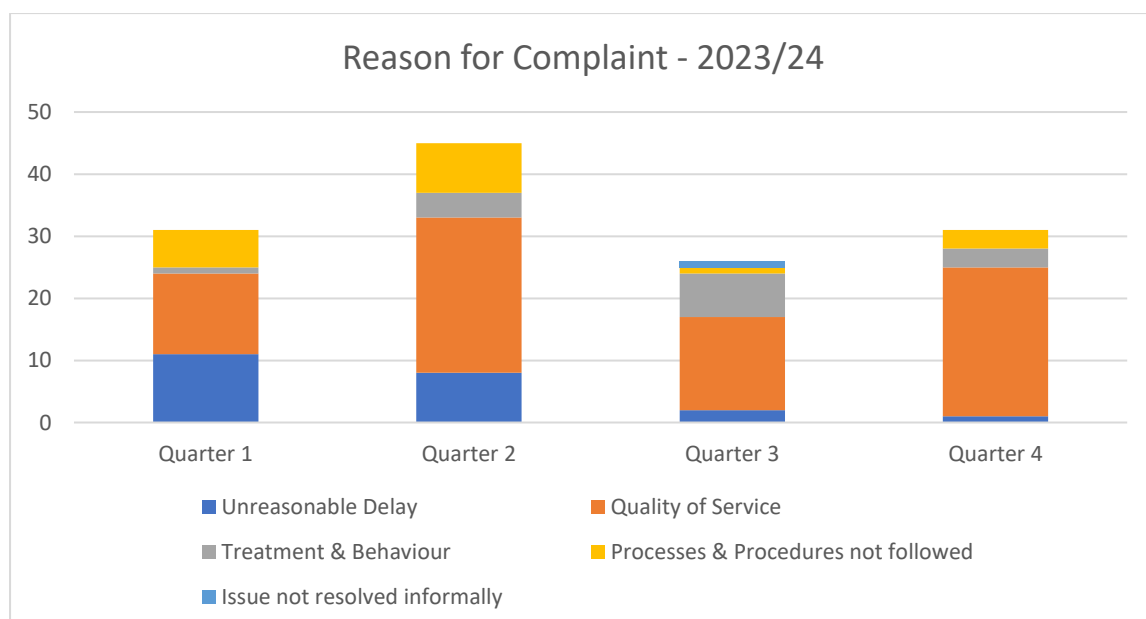
Strengthening contractor management processes, including rigorous vetting of contractors, ensuring they have necessary parts before appointments, and holding them accountable for delays, can help mitigate these issues. It is important to note that where complaints relate to housing contractors, the council as landlord is still expected to investigate and put things right. To do so, the Council works closely with its contractors to ensure appropriate investigate, remedy, resolution and learning.

- **Streamline Repair Processes:** Complaints about delays in repairs highlight potential inefficiencies in repair processes. Conducting a thorough review of repair workflows, identifying bottlenecks, and implementing measures to streamline processes can help expedite repairs and reduce client dissatisfaction. We will look at the repairs customer journey with the team as part of the ongoing corporate customer journey review.

We also use customer feedback and complaints as an opportunity to learn and / or improve our services, processes or systems and to prevent the same thing happening again. For example, including changing or improving our policies, changing or improving information on our website and improving the way we respond to and record concerns. Our Service Plan shows how the council will further strengthen its learning and service improvement opportunities through review and self-assessment against Housing Ombudsman spotlight reports.

### Why were these formal complaints made?

In terms of the 134 complaints received in 2023/24, there are five main themes as to why our customers were not satisfied with the service we provided and made a complaint to the Council. These are shown below with the quality of service being the main reason cited followed by an unreasonable delay in responding to the complaint.



## **Summary of the types of complaints that we have refused to accept.**

The complaints that we refused to accept that related to our role as landlord were for the following reasons in 2023/24 were in line with those set out in our Customer Feedback and Complaints Policy. They were:

- Considered to be a request for service and not a complaint.
- The complaint referred to an ongoing matter that subject to current legal process.

## **Service Improvements**

### **Looking to the future – changes to better manage the complaints process**

There are a number of actions planned to improve how we manage complaints at Melton, these include:

1. Implementing a new Complaint Management System (IT System) and data oversight arrangements:

A crucial step is the implementation of a new complaint management system that not only streamlines the complaint-handling process but also supports robust and effective data management. Following approval in the 2024/25 budget, this system will be procured in 2024/25 and will also address Freedom of Information, system access to enhance transparency and compliance. It will mean that the Council no longer relies on an excel document and file-based recording system.

2. Advancing complaint categories (Improving data quality, relevance and alignment with Council priorities):

As part of the new Complaints Management System, the Council will review the categorisation of complaints to ensure they reflect the range of complaints received and to improve data insight and learning. Some complaints may also be more intricate, and this initiative aligns with ongoing improvements and modernisation. This also responds directly to member feedback on having greater analytical capabilities to support learning and service improvement.

3. Regular monitoring and reporting:

We already have established reporting arrangements both to the senior leadership team and to Cabinet members. The frequency of performance and complaints reporting to Cabinet members has been changed in 24/25 from six monthly to quarterly, ensuring that trends and patterns are identified promptly. Alongside this we will incorporate data-driven insights into our decision-making processes, enabling the organisation to adapt and improve services based on evolving needs. The Council has recently introduced a Landlord Assurance Board which will receive updates on complaints as part of its remit. The terms of reference can be found here: [Landlord Assurance Board \(melton.gov.uk\)](https://www.melton.gov.uk/landlord-assurance-board). Our draft Housing Service Plan is currently being reviewed with our engaged tenants. It includes a commitment to further strengthen learning and service improvement opportunities through review and self-assessment

against Housing Ombudsman spotlight reports. Information on complaints handling will also be added to eth council's tenant focused webpages, as part of our commitment to increased transparency, accountability and influence: [Council tenants – Melton Borough Council](#).

## **Looking to the future – service improvements following complaints**

### **4. Enhancing learning capture processes:**

To help us embed learning we have introduced a complaints tracker alongside a more comprehensive review of how the organisation captures learning from actions following complaints is vital for sustained improvements. This involves tracking the actions taken and their impact on enhancing services across the Council. To facilitate quick changes in the short term, addressing specific findings mentioned in the report is imperative. This may involve targeted interventions and adjustments based on immediate needs for particular services. An annual report on complaints trends and analysis is already underway for the Housing and Communities directorate to support continuous improvement.

### **5. Learning from issue related complaints:**

We need to take learning from where particular issues in services cause a rise in the number of complaints. Where this is the case, we need to look at the root cause of this and tackle the issue rather than the symptoms. Some examples are:

- There were a number of complaints in housing repairs around damp and mould. To mitigate this, we are ensuring effective treatment of damp and mould in housing and monitoring the success and impact on this. If we do not get this right this may impact on the number of complaints and on tenant experience.
- Following a complaint about the installation of windows, we have looked at providing different designs and options to meet the requirements of the tenant and the property.
- Following a complaint on issues with a tenants rent account, we will now send out copies of statements with all arrears letters.
- We have also worked with our teams and our members and updated our communication to tenants to encourage complaints rather than tenants using disrepair claims companies. There is more information about this on our website: [Housing disrepair claims – Melton Borough Council](#)

### **6. Corporate Strategy**

Our new Corporate Vision 36 and Corporate Delivery Plan includes a commitment to review the housing repairs customer journey and make improvements to improve the experience for our tenants when making and following up on repairs. This links in with feedback from our tenants on improving communication and feedback processes.

### **7. Customer Care training has been arranged for housing employees**



To address the issues around communication and better engagement following feedback on complaints we are introducing customer care training so that our employees are better equipped to deliver a customer centric approach and keep tenants informed across the range of services we provide along with any complaints.

#### 8. Housing service plan 2024/25

This includes a commitment to a programme of self-assessment against the spotlight reports published by the Housing Ombudsman so that we continue to improve our processes and procedures across our range of services.

### **Housing Ombudsman**

#### **Any findings of non-compliance with the Code by the HO.**

None.

#### **Actions following any annual report about our performance from the HO.**

Not applicable.

#### **Actions following any other relevant reports or publications produced by the HO in relation to our work.**

None received.