Annual Complaints Report 2026

1. Background

Social housing providers must follow the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code (The Code), ensuring customers receive an accessible, fair, and timely service. This annual report provides understanding of customer issues, service quality, and lessons learnt. The Board Member responsible for complaints (MRC) provides strategic oversight and works closely with the Head of Customer Experience and Customer Services Director to ensure the customer voice is heard. Complaints also impact key tenant satisfaction measures (TSMs), including how fairly and respectfully customers feel treated, and whether they feel listened to as well as complaints handling satisfaction.

2. Member Responsible for Complaints (MRC) Commentary

It is clear from the report that there are some good improvements across several areas of complaints performance and shows that there is collaborative working across the various teams to improve services for our customers, and a concerted effort to engage all staff in a culture shift. The satisfaction with overall services, repairs and complaint handling are all showing a step change from which we can take good assurance; and the report to Board reflects that.

CEC members can take assurance from the complaints audit that our processes are robust and compliant with the Ombudsman code.

There is good practice notably with dedicated point of contact for a complainant which I am sure makes a huge impact; as will ownership by senior managers of the responses. We are mindful that the TSM measures reports the proportion who say they have complained verses our actual records; and we again show good practice in the gap being measured and comparatively minimal.

The report contains excellent and honest detail of the types of complaints, what goes wrong, and what has been done to listen, learn and improve our services and prevent this dissatisfaction.

What the CEC and Board will want to monitor going forward is progress on repairs performance, particularly: record keeping, resolving issues promptly and customer communications. Damp and Mould is already a priority for CEC and Board and is clearly a driver of complaints, particularly where they are unresolved for some time, escalate to the HOS, and / or lead to compensation payments. The improvement that using salesforce will bring would be good for CEC to see going forward.

We will also want to see the outcome of EDI monitoring applied to complaints in future and reported to CEC.

Overall, some very encouraging results in this year's report!

3. Board & Customer Experience Committee (CEC) Comments

The contents of this report and the self-assessment against The Code were discussed and approved at the Customer Experience Committee (CEC) on 12 May 2026 and at Board on 21 May 2026.

The Board has approved the annual complaints report and self-assessment against the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code and confirms compliance with its requirements. We are satisfied that robust and accessible complaint handling arrangements are in place, supported by clear governance oversight and a strong commitment to learning and continuous improvement.

The annual report and self-assessment was also reviewed by the Customer Experience Committee (CEC) and included input from the MRC.

CEC members noted the work that has taken place around complaint handling and the service improvements that have been made as a result of listening to customers. The conversation also lead to suggestions around considering complaint themes and trends when carrying out procurement and developing specific action plans with every lessons learnt exercise and Ombudsman finding. The group also discussed the introduction of Salesforce and how this will improve the visibility of promises made to customers, which means that we can better identify if specific areas or individuals are at risk of failing to keep these.

Since the report was approved by CEC and The Board, the figures in it have been slightly amended to reflect the 14 complaints that have been closed since the report was initially written. In the original report, complaint ref 1872 was included in the figures for LCRA (Low Cost Rental Accommodation) Stage 1 complaints, however this complaint was made by a non-customer so has now been removed from that data set.

4. Main points for discussion

4.1. Introduction

This report provides the annual analysis of complaints during 25/26 and also provides confirmation and assurance that we meet the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code.

We have carried out a self-assessment against the Ombudsman Code, and produced this annual report that outlines our performance over the past 12 months. The report has been reviewed by the Executive Team, the Customer Experience Committee (CEC) and approved by the Board before being published on our website and shared with Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS).

The report explains our findings following the self-assessment; analysis of our complaints handling performance; details of the HOS determinations along with any other information published by them about Brighter Places; and the service improvements we have made as a result of the learning from complaints.

4.2. Self-Assessment

We have undertaken a self-assessment against The Code, which is included as an appendix. In January 2026 we received confirmation from the HOS that we have a Code-compliant policy based on our submission in 24/25 and the subsequent recommendations we implemented. During 25/26, we have continued to strengthen our complaints handling.

We have ensured that complaints are treated as priority across the business by delivering complaints awareness training to all colleagues, discussing complaint trends at colleague briefings and worked with frontline colleagues to ensure that all dissatisfaction, including those resolved at the first point of contact, are logged as complaints.

The Feedback team have taken on responsibility for co-ordinating disrepair claims and we have invested in the team itself. We increased the number of officers by one in August 2025 and added an additional officer in February 2026. The team is a high performing one comprising of a Customer Feedback Manager and 3.5FTE Customer Feedback Officers. These investigating officers manage the end-to-end process of stage 1 complaints, from the acknowledgement and investigation through to resolution and the tracking of agreed

actions. The team have administrative responsibility of stage 2 complaints, but the investigations, closure letters and any follow on actions are completed by senior managers.

During the year, there has been a focus on record-keeping, reporting and learning from complaints. In November 2024, we enhanced our IT software with Web360, which made it easier to log customer contact and flag negative interactives. During 25/26, we moved the logging and tracking of complaints and associated actions into Microsoft Lists to help make the make the management and reporting of these easier. We are categorising complaints based the cause, the impact, whether a lack of respect was shown and can report against all of this. In April 2026, we have taken the next step by implementing the world's leading CRM (Customer Relationship Management) system, Salesforce, which will give us the platform to improve communication further by having a case management solution and improved visibility of actions we promise to customers.

We identified and implemented a number of improvements as a result of learning from our complaints in 25/26, including: introducing a risk based estate inspection model; improving our approach for sub-standard homes; strengthening contractor management; launching Customer First training; and implementing Salesforce. This is discussed in more detail in the "Insights & Lessons Learnt" section.

Assurance achieved this year on our complaints service includes:

- 97% of all complaints (Stage 1 and Stage 2 combined) were acknowledged and closed in time.
- Satisfaction with complaints handling has increased by 14% in 25/26 to 45%. When compared with the 24/25 results for the sector, this is top quartile performance.
- The gap between customers saying they have made a complaint in the past 12 months (through Acuity surveys) and the volume of complaints being logged is narrowing. The current gap of 6.5% (around 200 customers per year) between customers perceiving that they have made a complaint and actual complaints being logged is far smaller than most landlords in the sector.
- A recent audit of Complaints Handling carried out by Menzies, formerly Beever Struthers, gave us the highest level of assurance with just two recommendations – a "Substantial" for design of controls and a " Substantial" for the operation of controls. This was approved by the Audit and Risk Committee on 13 May 2026.

4.3. Complaints Performance – 2025-26

The first table below shows all Stage 1 complaints received in 25/26. The second table shows Stage 1 complaints performance solely for LCRA (Low Cost Rental Accommodation) customers.

All Complaints	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
Complaints Received	105	134	156	181	576
Complaints Received (as a % of total stock)	3.2%	4.0%	4.7%	5.5%	17.4%
Number of these complaints that are closed	105	134	156	180	575
Complaints closed that were responded to within the timescales outlined in The Code	99	131	150	177	557
% of complaints closed within timescales	94%	98%	96%	98%	97%
Number of complaints resolved in time with an extension	11	19	24	24	78
% of compliant complaints with an extension	11%	15%	16%	14%	14%

LCRA Complaints Only	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
Complaints Received	96	125	147	170	538
Complaints Received (as a % of LCRA stock)	3.1%	4.0%	4.7%	5.5%	17.3%
Number of these complaints that are closed	96	125	147	169	537
Complaints closed that were responded to within the timescales outlined in The Code	91	122	142	166	521
% of complaints closed within timescales	95%	98%	97%	98%	97%
Number of complaints resolved in time with an extension	8	17	23	23	71
% of compliant complaints with an extension	9%	14%	16%	14%	14%

Of the Stage 1 complaints received in 25/26, one remains open and is still in time (Ref: 2426).

Of the 18 complaints that were non-compliant, 14 were because they were acknowledged late – eight by one day; two by two days; two by three days; one by a week; one by 13 working days; and one by a month. Delays were usually as a result of dissatisfaction not being shared with the Feedback team on the same day that it was received. Three were non-compliant because we extended the complaint after the deadline for closure and the final one was non-compliant because we failed to resolve the complaint in time due to an administration error. All failures were subject to a case review by the Customer Feedback Manager and learning shared with the Head of Customer Experience and Customer Director. There continues to be a focus on ensuring all colleagues understand their responsibilities in managing customer complaints so that going forward, we do not have any instances of non-compliance.

The first table below shows all Stage 2 complaints received in 25/26. The second table shows Stage 2 complaints performance solely for LCRA (Low Cost Rental Accommodation) customers.

All Complaints	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
Stage 2 escalations Received	25	17	18	36	**96**
Esclations Received (as a % of total stock)	0.8%	0.5%	0.5%	1.1%	**2.9%**
Number of these complaints that are closed	25	17	17	34	**93**
Complaints closed that were responded to within the timescales outlined in The Code	24	16	16	34	**90**
% of complaints closed within timescales	96%	94%	89%*	100%	**96%***
Number of complaints resolved in time with an extension	13	7	5	14	**39**
% of compliant complaints with an extension	54%	44%	31%	41%	**43%**

LCRA Complaints Only	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
Stage 2 escalations Received	23	16	16	33	**88**
Esclations Received (as a % of total stock)	0.7%	0.5%	0.5%	1.1%	**2.8%**
Number of these complaints that are closed	23	16	15	31	**85**
Complaints closed that were responded to within the timescales outlined in The Code	22	15	14	31	**82**
% of complaints closed within timescales	96%	94%	88%*	100%	**95%***
Number of complaints resolved in time with an extension	12	7	5	13	**37**
% of compliant complaints with an extension	55%	47%	36%	42%	**45%**

*There is one stage 2 escalation that was received in October 2025 that remains open, but it is already overdue as we missed the deadline to extend it. As it is already non-compliant, it has been included in the "% of complaints closed within timescales" calculation. In addition to this complaint, there are a further two stage 2 escalations that are open, but both of these remain in date.

Of the three other stage 2 complaints that were non-compliant: one was acknowledged a day late; we missed the deadline to extend one by a couple of days; and the other was closed four working days late.

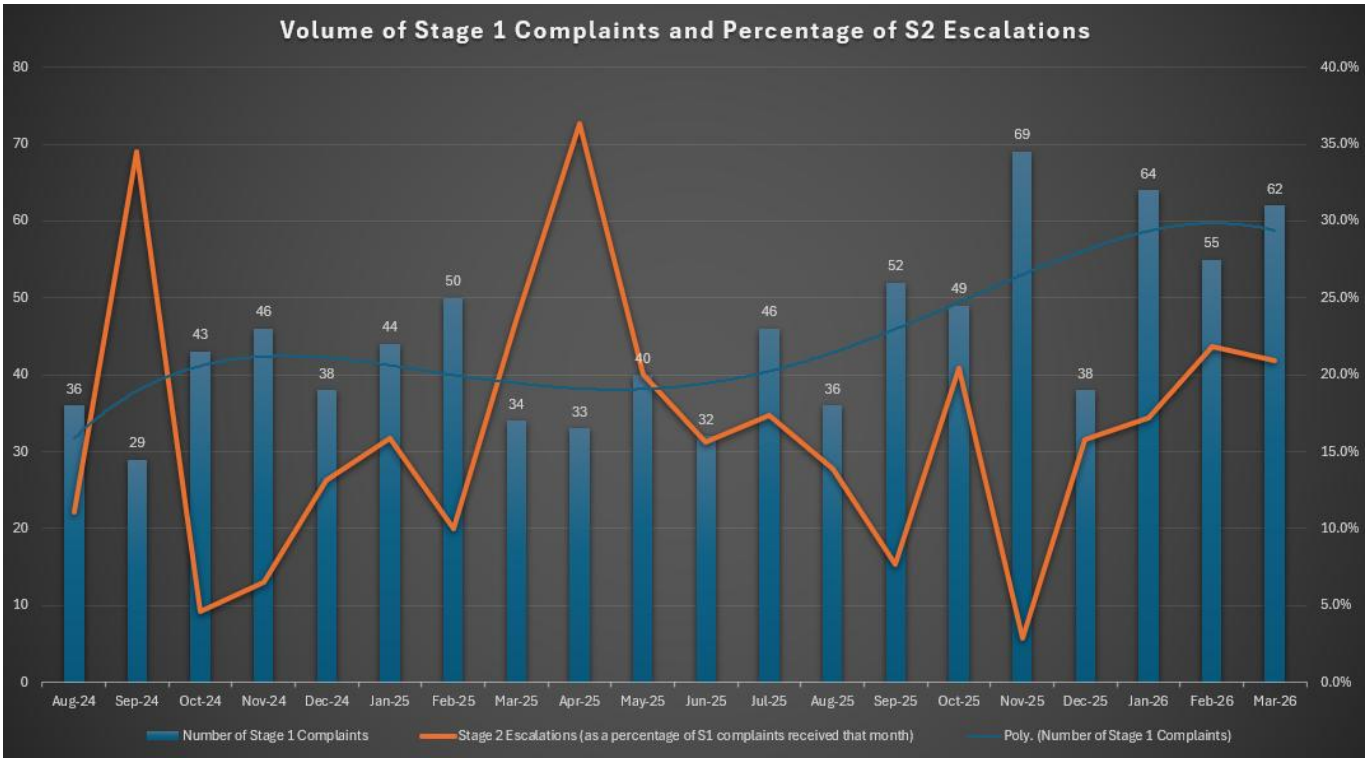
In 24/25, Shelter provided training to colleagues to improve skills when helping customers who are dissatisfied. In 25/26, we have built on this and delivered awareness training to colleagues across the business and discussed complaint trends during colleague briefings. In the second half of year, we worked with frontline teams and partners to focus on ensuring all dissatisfaction, including concerns resolved at the first point of contact, were reported to the Feedback team and logged as complaints. There has also been regular updates to all colleagues in Colleague Briefings to reinforce key messages and clarify roles and responsibilities. Additionally, case studies have been used in All Colleague Away Days so that colleagues can understand the failures, the impact on customers and develop their problem solving mindset to help us deliver a customer first culture. The Customer Director also covers this as part of their induction with all new starters, as well as the importance of hearing and addressing complaints.

The result has been that the volume of stage 1 complaints we are logging has increased each quarter, culminating in an increase of 20.5% of stage 1 complaints when compared with 24/25. Despite this, the number of stage 1 complaints being resolved in time has increased by 6.5% since last year to 97%. We have also achieved this without using extensions excessively. It has been positive to see that the effort being put into resolving issues for customers at stage 1, has meant that percentage of complaints escalating to stage 2 of the process remains relatively low - at just 16.7%. We haven't refused to investigate any complaints during 25/26.

In 25/26, as part of our TSM submission, we have reported that the volume of stage 1 complaints received from LCRA customers equates to 17.3% of our stock. If we compare this figure with the Q4 TSM survey results, we can see that 24% of LCRA respondents said that they had made a complaint in the past 12 months. This gap of 6.7%, effectively means that around 200 customers each year believe that they have made a complaint, but this hasn't been logged as such. Our gap is far smaller than most landlords in the sector and has continued to narrow throughout the year. If we take the Q4 figures and assume these volumes for the year ahead then this would narrow the gap between customers saying that they have reported a complaint in the past 12 months and the volume of complaints logged to just 2%.

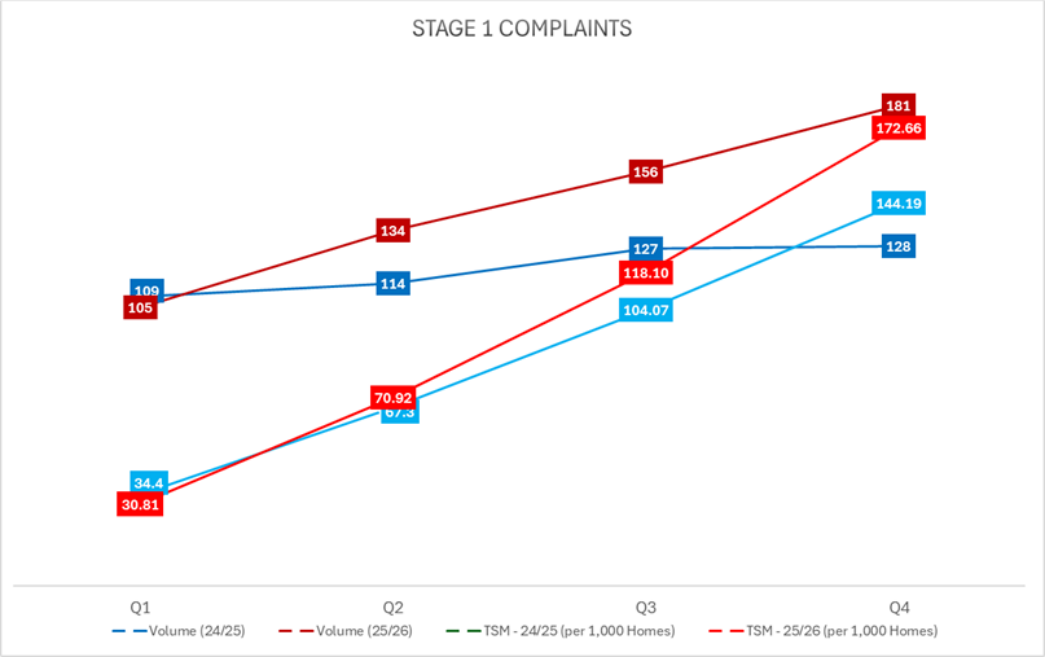
4.4. A Comparison Between 2024/25 and 2025/26

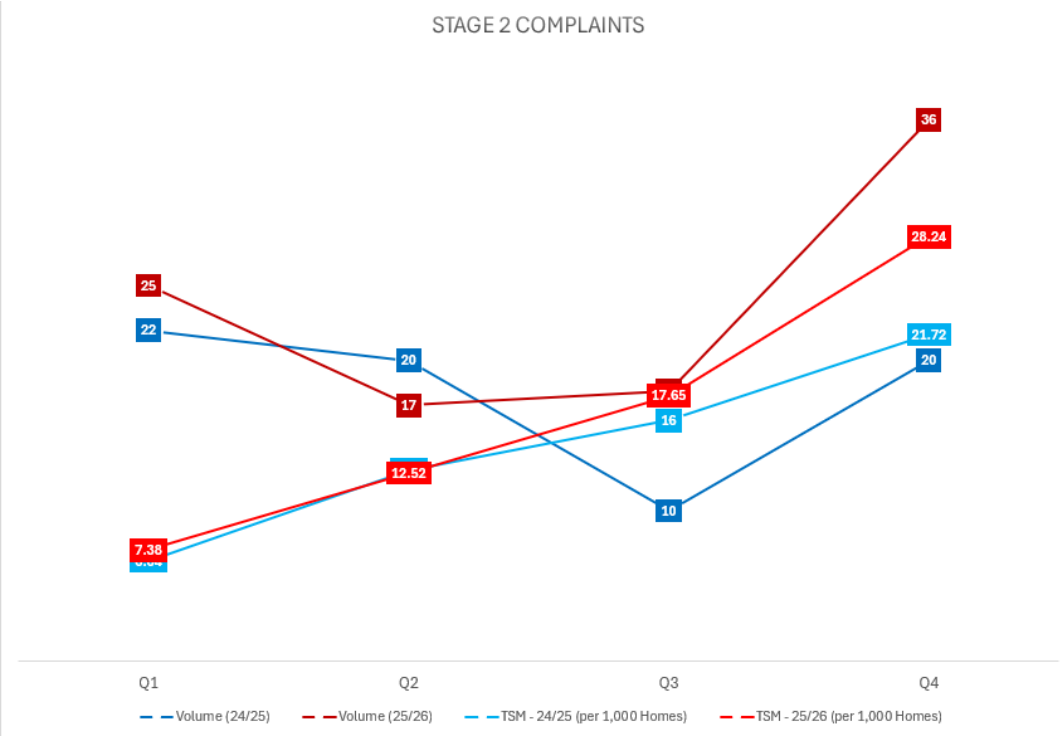
The graph below shows the volume of stage 1 complaints received over the last 20 months, which is the period when the Feedback team became responsible for the end-to-end management of these complaints. It also shows the percentage of stage 2 escalations. The trend is that whilst more stage 1 complaints are being logged, the percentage escalating to stage 2 is regularly below 20%.



The two graphs below show:

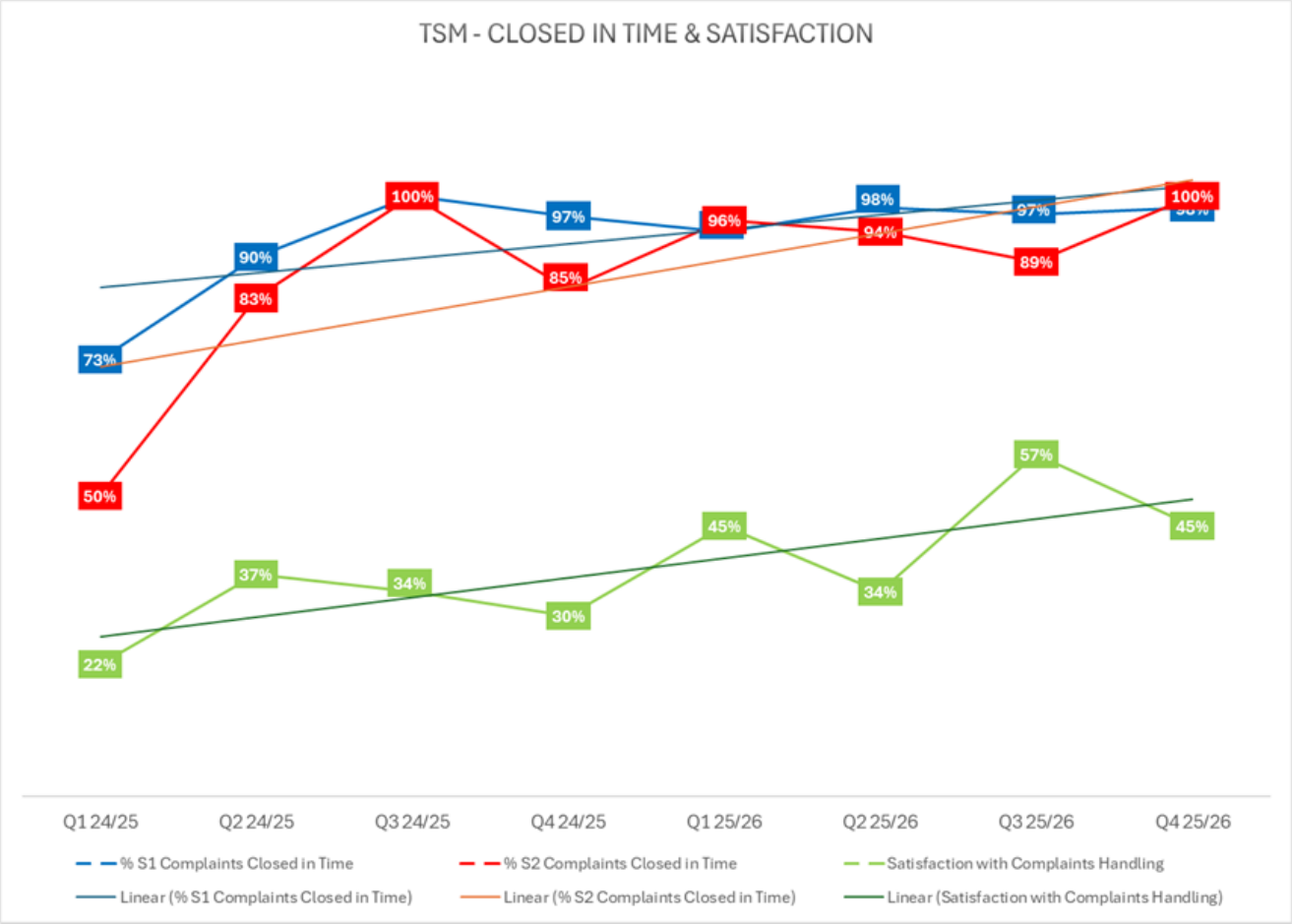
- The volume of complaints logged each quarter during 24/25 and 25/26. The first graph relates to stage 1 complaints, whilst the second refers to stage 2 complaints. There have been 98 more stage 1 complaints logged and six more stage 2 escalations logged during 25/26.
- The number of complaints we received from our LCRA customers per 1,000 homes. The first graph relates to stage 1 complaints, whilst the second refers to stage 2 complaints. This is a cumulative figure so over the course of the year we received 172.66 stage 1 complaints per 1,000 homes in 25/26 against a figure of 144.19 for 24/25. For stage 2 escalations, the figure is 28.24 complaints per 1,000 in 25/26 compared with 21.72 in 24/25.





The graph below shows:

- The upward trend we have seen with the number of complaints that were closed in time amongst LCRA customers. The percentage of stage 1 complaints closed in time increased from 90% in 24/25 to 97% in 25/26. The percentage of stage 2 complaints closed in time increased from 76% in 24/25 to 95% in 25/26.
- The satisfaction with complaints handling amongst our LCRA customers. This has increased from 31% in 24/25 to 45% in 25/26. If we compare this result with the scores published for the sector in 24/25, then this is top quartile performance. Top quartile is 42%.



4.5. Insights

A number of complaints featured more than one failing and sometimes these failings related to more than one service area or contractor. Around 1 in 5 complaints had already seen repeated failures to address the problem, which subsequently negatively impacted the customer further.

We have developed a definition to define a lack of respect as: dismissive / rude communication; unreturned calls or broken promises; failing to accommodate needs such as language or accessibility; and unfair or unequitable treatment. 43% of our complaints had an element of disrespect. This definition is broad but is rooted in customer feedback of when they have felt disrespected or treated unfairly. By having a wide

definition, we can keep focus on improving our services to design out service failures and improve the service our customers experience.

Three quarters of failings were related the following areas: Ian Williams (29%), Sure Serve (15%), Damp & Mould (8%), Planned Maintenance (6%), Housing (6%), Income (4%), BP Repairs (3%), AAFD (3%) and ASB (3%).

The key themes from complaints were:

Repair delays and communication failures

The repairs service has improved since moving to Ian Williams as our main repairs partner in March 2025. This change was influenced through the learning from complaints we had seen in the years leading up to the procurement of our new repairs provider and our customers are feeling the difference. TSM scores for the time taken to complete repairs and for the repairs received in the last 12 months have increased by 13% and 10% respectively compared with 24/25. In the majority of cases where a simple repair is needed, it can be easily reported, we attend quickly and the issue is fixed by friendly and professional operatives. Complaints tend to occur when a repair is more complex and follow-up visits are needed. Often, the repeated failures that sometimes occur at this point are as damaging as the original fault and account for the vast amount of complaints.

Common patterns include: missed or cancelled appointments with little or no notice; operatives attending without parts, inadequate time or the wrong scope of works; repairs stretching across several months after multiple visits; return visits as a result of poor workmanship; emails and calls going unanswered; promised callbacks not materialising; conflicting information between internal teams and contractors; and customers chasing multiple departments.

Damp and mould concerns

The themes mentioned above are also prevalent in repairs that result in damp and mould. These complaints aren't the highest in terms of volume, but can take more time, effort and money to resolve. They can be emotionally testing for customers and high risk, both in terms of health and our legal requirements through Awaab's Law. Common patterns include: long-standing issues, sometimes across several years; surface treatments without addressing root causes; poor follow-up after surveys; and inconsistencies between advice given by surveyors and the work carried out by contractors.

Boiler, heating and hot water repairs

Our main contractor for these repairs is Sureserve Compliance and again there is a pattern of delays and communication failures. These repairs are often high impact, time sensitive ones, where vulnerable households can be disproportionately affected. Common patterns amongst these complaints include: long periods without heating or hot water; missed or late appointments; and confusion around whether a repair or replacement is needed.

Housing-related complaints

These were far fewer than the complaints originating from the physical failures of a customer's home and the components within it. Towards the start of the financial year, we experienced complaints about overgrown communal areas and irregular cleaning visits but these have reduced in the second half of the year. This aligns with improved performance in the delivery of our cleaning and grounds maintenance service and the roll out of the new Estate Inspection Policy. Other complaints have included: service charge disputes; payment errors; fly-tipping; pests; and feeling unsafe due to ASB issues or unsecured communal doors.

Conduct and behaviour

During the year we had reports of poor treatment from customers that related to repairs contractors, grounds maintenance contractors and Brighter Places colleagues. This spanned from cold calling, a lack of ID and poor behaviour on site, such as smoking and littering through to rudeness, shouting, dismissiveness and the insensitivity when liaising with vulnerable customers.

4.6. Customer Feedback

Satisfaction with complaints handling increased by 14% during 25/26. The sentiment behind this score, based on the comments customers have given us, shows that while delays and follow-through issues remain a source of frustration, customers generally find the complaints process accessible and acknowledge prompt responses, clear explanations and empathetic staff interactions, with many highlighting positive experiences where individuals took ownership and resolved issues; this indicates a strong foundation of customer-focused behaviour that, when applied consistently, builds trust and delivers effective outcomes even in complex cases.

We have also received specific compliments from customers about how their complaints have been handled:

"Megan tried very hard to help me resolve a number of long standing issues. I found her to be professional and helpful. Even though I can be difficult to talk to. Thank you."

"Danielle is consistently great. Megan is also very helpful."

"Everything I was worried about was sorted out efficiently and with care."

"Mike, who has dealt with my complaints, has been extremely helpful with the outstanding repairs to the property."

Below are a few examples that bring to life how we have turned around dissatisfaction and made a real impact on customers' lives.

Customer A:

A customer moved into the scheme and was incorrectly advised by a Lettings Officer to apply for a parking permit through Bristol City Council (BCC). This was incorrect as the parking was managed by a private company. The customer applied to BCC and paid for a permit, however BCC did not provide a permit or clarify that they were not responsible for the parking scheme. The customer received notification and a fine from the parking company which caused worry to the customer and led to a formal complaint.

During the complaint investigation, it was established that a private company managed the parking, not BCC and we had given incorrect advice. As part of the complaint resolution, we liaised with the parking company and successfully had the parking charge cancelled.

Following this case, we worked with the Lettings Manager to identify gaps in the information provided to lettings staff regarding parking arrangements. In collaboration with lettings and housing teams, we updated internal systems to ensure all car parks managed or patrolled by external companies are clearly recorded, enabling lettings officers to provide accurate information to residents at the point of move-in.

Customer B:

The customer raised concerns about sharply increased energy costs despite reduced usage and a stable EPC rating (C), alongside worries about a possible boiler fault causing the heating to run whilst switched off and safety alerts from their thermostat.

A gas engineer found no boiler fault so the Feedback Officer reviewed and helped to identify electricity billing issues, including estimated readings and high night-rate charges. Following challenge, the supplier confirmed overcharging and issued a £572 refund, with their current year's billing under review to ensure an accurate final balance.

The customer has been supported in understanding usage patterns and billing data, with comparisons made against national average consumption to provide context. They thanked the Feedback Officer, bought them a card and a plant and said "I wouldn't have been able to do this without you".

4.7. Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS)

In 25/26, the HOS has contacted us following a review of our Complaints & Compensation Policy, given determinations on four complaints that had been escalated to them and published their annual report for Brighter Places based on the determinations they made in 24/25. More information about all of this is detailed below. The HOS hasn't published any other information about Brighter Places.

In July 2025, the HOS commended our efforts to ensure that we had a Code compliant policy. As a result of the review, only seven recommendations were made. These were minor changes so we were able to implement them all in that same month by tweaking the wording on five bullet points within the policy. However, when make the changes we accidently deleted a sentence from the original policy. This was identified by the HOS in December 2025 and added back in during January 2026. The HOS has since confirmed that they are happy that all of their recommendations following our annual submission had been implemented.

In September 2025, the HOS published their annual report for Brighter Places, which is a performance report based on the determinations they made in 24/25. They exclude any determinations and findings from cases that were outside of their jurisdiction or withdrawn. This means that our performance was calculated based on nine findings from four determinations. Our maladministration rate was 67%, which is down from 91% in 23-24 and falls below the national average, which is 71%.

In 25/26, we have received four determinations from the HOS. Only one of these was related to a stage 2 complaint that was closed in 25/26, with the other three originating from complaints closed in 24/25. The details of these are outlined below.

Determination 1: A maladministration finding for our handling of a customer's reports of noise and a service failure finding for our handling of the complaint.

The complaint itself related to reports of her home being noisy due to its construction, which was affecting her mental health. The stage 2 investigation was completed in May 2024 and evidence was provided to the HOS in July 2025.

The HOS ordered us to pay compensation of £300, and gave the following reasons for their findings:

- The length of time between an inspection being requested and us outlining what works we would carry out was over seven months, whereas our repairs policy stated that we would carry out routine repairs within 28 days.
- The customer told us that she was having suicidal thoughts and we failed to act on this.
- Poor recording-keeping as our repair records didn't show when we completed the work.
- As part of our stage 2 response, we promised to contact the customer within a fortnight to discuss her housing options. However, despite the customer chasing us a month later, our records show that it was six months before we contacted her to discuss this.
- The customer told us that she remained dissatisfied in March 2024, but it took us three weeks to acknowledge that we would escalate her complaint to stage 2 of the process.

In terms of learning, the HOS suggested that we consider staff training to ensure that we appropriately respond to disclosures of suicide, raise awareness amongst colleagues about ensuring all expressions of dissatisfaction are raised as complaints and so that they have a better understanding of the timescales outlined in The Code and that we improve record-keeping. Over the past year, in the time since this complaint was received, we have already carried training in relation to suicide awareness and safeguarding as well as better awareness around complaints. We have also improved our IT software, initially with an upgrade to Web360 and more recently by implementing a full CRM (Customer Relationship Management) system in April 2026. This improved record-keeping and we expect Salesforce (our new CRM system) to strengthen this further.

Determination 2: No maladministration was found in our response to a customer's concerns about the renewal of boundary hedging, but a maladministration finding was given in relation to our handling of the complaint.

The complaint itself was about bushes that were removed from outside a customer's home. The stage 2 complaint was completed in October 2024 and evidence was provided to the HOS in February 2025.

The HOS ordered us to pay compensation of £100, and gave the following reasons for their findings:

- Brighter Places was not required to replace the hedge with mature hedging of the same size, nor was it required to replace the hedge with an alternative such as fencing. Our decision to replace the hedge which had died off with new hedging was reasonable and we made reasonable efforts to explain our position to the customer and to provide an alternative solution.
- Despite the customer advising us in August 2024 that they were unhappy with the stage 1 decision, this wasn't treated as a request to escalate to stage 2 of the process. It wasn't until the customer contacted us again in October 2024 and asked for her complaint to be escalated that it was acknowledged as a stage 2 complaint.

The HOS didn't recommend any other learning points. However, as part of the complaints training we have delivered internally, we have raised awareness of the need for prompt action if a customer says that they are unhappy with a complaint that has been investigated. In addition to this, Investigating Officers aim to contact complainants prior to resolution letters being sent to talk through the findings and ensure that we have made every effort to put things right where there has been a failing.

Determination 3: No maladministration was found in our decision to disconnect the gas supply at the customer's home, but a service failure finding was given for our handling of the complaint.

The complaint itself was about our decision to disconnect the customer's gas supply and the impact this had on them after we were unable to carry out an annual gas safety check prior to the previous one expiring. The stage 2 complaint was completed in August 2025.

The HOS didn't award any compensation, and gave the following reasons for their findings:

- Brighter Places followed our gas safety policy in attempting to arrange its legally required gas safety check and in making its decision to disconnect the gas supply at the property.
- We had due regard to the customer's circumstances and offered support in line with its safeguarding policy.
- The customer said they considered our actions to be in breach of The Equality Act 2010 as a disabled person. Allegations of discrimination are legal issues better suited to a court of law to decide. However, by not providing a response to this point, we failed to answer all aspects of the complaint.

In addition to the last bullet point mentioned above, the HOS suggested the following learning: that we save copies of safeguarding referrals that have been made online and legal notices that we have served.

Determination 4: A maladministration finding for our response to a customer's reports of leaks, internal temperature and damp and mould and a service failure for our handling of the complaint.

The complaint itself was about leaks affecting the property, the internal temperature, damp and mould and the impact that this was having on them and their family. The stage 2 complaint was completed in March 2025.

The HOS didn't award any compensation, and gave the following reasons for their findings:

- Brighter Places was unable to locate any records showing what action, if any, we took in relation to the heating system. We were also unable to evidence what had caused the leak, nor what steps were taken to repair it.
- Neither the customer nor the Brighter Places were able to provide any records of leaks being reported in the 12 months prior to December 2024. However, evidence indicates that there was no dispute that leaks had been "ongoing".
- The offer of £2,500 in compensation that we made at the time was deemed fair and reasonable, but we missed an opportunity to explain the reasons why we felt that this figure was fair.
- The customer initially complained in October 2024. However, it wasn't until she complained again in December 2024 that it was acknowledged as a stage 1 complaint.
- Brighter Places failed to respond to all aspects of the customer's complaint, including: their concerns about heating and internal temperatures; what would happen if her neighbour had refused to report the leak; and her report that a mutual exchange had fallen through.

In terms of learning, the HOS suggested: that Investigating Officers are reminded of the need to respond to all aspects of a complaint; to review our record-keeping systems so we can better evidence what works have been carried out in customers' home and when; and to review processes to improve communication with our repairs contractor.

In response to this, the quality assurance of complaint responses that takes place prior to them being sent will have a focus on ensuring that all points have been responded to. Since this complaint was initially raised, we have a new repairs contractor and our IT systems have been updated to Web360 and even more recently to Salesforce to improve record-keeping and visibility of information.

We have provided evidence to the HOS on a further seven cases where we are awaiting their determination. These include:

- Ref 1434: This complaint relates to a customer's reports of an insecure communal front door, reports of bike thefts, assault and ASB in the block, their request for a refund in relation to maintenance and cleaning and their request for compensation following a radiator leak. The Stage 2 investigation was completed in August 2024 with evidence provided to the HOS in November 2025.
- Ref 1588: This complaint relates to Brighter Places' response to reports of antisocial behaviour and the our management of allegations of antisocial behaviour against the customer. The Stage 2 investigation was completed in November 2024 with evidence provided to the HOS in November 2025.
- Ref 1416: This complaint relates to dissatisfaction with advice given by Brighter Places about the type of treatment used to preserve a wooden fence that resulted in it becoming mouldy, which presented a health risk to the customer as well as our handling of a request for the wooden fence to be replaced with a metal one. The Stage 2 investigation was completed in February 2025 with evidence provided to the HOS in December 2025.
- Ref 1784: This complaint relates to the level of compensation offered following issues with the heating and hot water system when a customer moved into their new home. The Stage 2 investigation was completed in March 2025 with evidence provided to the HOS in December 2025.
- Ref 1665 and 1720: These complaints relate to damp and mould, windows, a leak from the bathroom coming through the kitchen ceiling, staff conduct and the level of compensation offered. The Stage 2 investigation was completed in March 2025 with evidence provided to the HOS in December 2025.
- Ref 1759: This complaint relates to heat retention issues, poor communication, complaint handling, and our response to the customer's request for compensation. The Stage 2 investigation was completed in April 2025 with evidence provided to the HOS in January 2026.
- Ref 2107: This complaint relates to an insect infestation, humidity in the property and a bathroom leak causing damp. The Stage 2 investigation was completed in November 2025 with evidence provided to the HOS in March 2026.

4.8. Service Improvements as a Result of Lessons Learnt

A risk-based approach to estate inspections

Towards the start of 25/26 we had a several complaints about communal cleaning and grounds maintenance. A proactive survey was carried out with customers who pay for these services to gather further insights and it was also the main topic raised at the Virtual Kitchen Table – a customer-led engagement event.

We have since changed our approach to estate inspections with those communities with the most issues being inspected by the Housing Officer every month, those ranked "amber" being inspected every two months and those areas with these least issues being inspected every quarterly. At these inspections, any issues are reported at the time and random door knocks are made to gather feedback from customers. The result has been that a follow-up transactional survey eight months after the initial one saw an increase in satisfaction with communal cleaning and grounds maintenance of 14% and 21% respectively, whilst the STAR survey results show that satisfaction with communal areas amongst LCRA customers has increased by 9% to 56% in 25/26, compared to 24/25. Stronger contract management and the nurturing of relationships with our contractor, aAFD, has also played a part in this. We also realise that to push satisfaction up further, this needs a joint approach with planned investment to upgrade communal areas along with timely, good quality responsive repairs.

Selling homes that are sub-standard and supporting those affected

On rare occasions, the level of investment needed to rectify large scale issues to property condition, often linked to damp and mould, isn't cost effective. We also understand that these attempts to fix underlying structural issues don't always work and can cause significant disruption over a long period of time. Similarly, there may be some homes where the type of property prevents us from ever achieving an EPC rating of C or above. We want our customers to live in secure, watertight homes that they can be proud of. We now have formal process to survey these homes, an Options Appraisal Panel that makes a decision on whether to invest in the home or whether to sell it and a Lettings Officer that is dedicated to working closely with the individuals affected by this decision to help them find a new home and support them to make the move as smooth as possible. Over the past year, we have successfully moved seven households out of poor quality homes and the money raised through selling these is being reinvested into building modern ones.

Regular meetings with our repairs contractor to find solutions

It has been just over a year since we moved our repairs service to Ian Williams and Sureserve. During that time relationships have been developed that help to address problems that occur. There are regular meetings between the Ian Williams Delivery Team and our Responsive Maintenance Manager; between the Ian Williams Complaints Team and our Customer Feedback Manager; between the Ian Williams Hub Team Leader and our Customer Services Manager; as well as having Ian Williams colleagues based at the Brighter Places offices at least one day per week. Similar relationships have been established with Sureserve. These have been useful for trying to resolve individual concerns, and have helped to identify and find solutions to problems that have affected a number of customers.

- **Staff conduct addressed**
  Issues associated to conduct have been raised with both Ian Williams and Sureserve, assurances have been provided that internal action has been taken and in a number of cases, those employees at fault no longer work for these companies.

- **Delays caused by chargeable repair assumptions resolved**
  Several complaints identified recurring delays where Ian Williams operatives initially assumed repairs might be rechargeable to customers. These assumptions led to jobs being referred back to Brighter Places for confirmation before works progressed, even when no customer liability was ultimately found. This caused avoidable delays, extended repair times and increased customer dissatisfaction.

Ian Williams have since reviewed and updated their approach to recharge assessments to reduce future delays.

- **Changes to scheduling**
  Ian Williams increased the standard appointment slot from 20 minutes to account for the additional travel in and around Bristol in an attempt to stop operatives diaries being overbooked and to reduce same day cancelations.

- **A move to text messaging**
  Through root cause analysis from a series of complaints, Sureserve identified that the reason why appointment letters were not being sent was an issue they had with their mail house. As result, they started to use more reliable text messaging.

However, there is still work to do to address underlying trends. In February 2026, an in depth lessons learnt was organised with colleagues from the Ian Williams, which explored several complaints in detail. This highlighted failures in scheduling, problems when parts needed to be ordered and inconsistencies between what the delivery team were telling their colleagues in the Hub versus the reality of the situation. All of this culminated in communication failures to customers and more visits than necessary to fix repairs. An action that was taken away from this was to change the 30 minute callback that is made after completion of repair to instead focus on contacting customers who have jobs with multiple visits prior to these being closed in an attempt to gather more insights on the root causes and to put things right more quickly. We are currently agreeing a set of questions and when this contact could be made before implementing this change. The second action was to hold another lessons learnt session with all areas – the Hub, delivery teams and the Brighter Places internal repairs team so that the root causes of repeat complaints could be addressed holistically as opposed to in silos. This is scheduled for 28th April.

Complaint themes and learning from complaints are raised at Core Group meetings with Sureserve, which is attended by their senior leadership. Sureserve have taken positive steps to tackle colleague conduct and under performance, which should reduce the number of complaints received in these areas. Further actions were agreed to jointly develop training for Sureserve colleagues which includes customer case studies, customer feedback and incorporates the training developed by the Resident Engagement Panel last year on customer service.

<u>Customer First training launch</u>

During 25/26, we have used all colleague meetings to look at complaints, helping colleagues to put themselves in the customer's shoes, considering their individual set of circumstances and to make everyone more conscious of their actions on a day-to-day basic. In April 2026, we officially launched our Customer First training programme that will build on this through a series of interactive learning that will help to reduce the number of complaints that relate to a lack of respect. The Customer First programme of works was approved by the Customer Experience Committee in 2025.

<u>Improved record-keeping with the roll out of Salesforce</u>

In November 2024, we upgraded our IT software to Web360, which led to an increase in the volume of customer interactions being logged correctly. However, we still found that this had limitations, some of the

features we had expected failed to materialise and reliance on a third party meant that the speed of development was slow. The result being: it was primarily telephone calls that were being logged; a number of emails continued to sit in individual inboxes, creating a lack of visibility; it didn't render very well to mobile phones, meaning that it wasn't used out in our communities; and was not being consistently used across the front line teams.

In April 2026, we have rolled out the world's leading CRM (Customer Relationship Management) system, Salesforce. This will improve record-keeping, automation and improve communication to customers. This scalable product will allow us to continue to develop our IT capability to support service delivery and allow us to better serve our customers.

4.9. Compensation

We have awarded £73.4K of compensation during 25/26. Our compensation spend is 38% lower than a year ago as we have seen a reduction of £44.5K paid out compared to 24-25. 42% (£30.6K) of the total compensation spend was as a result of 12 complaints where we paid compensation that was in excess of £1,000.

- £11,590 (Ref: 1688): This was due to significant failings and delays over several years to resolve issues resulting in damp and mould throughout the customer's home. This impacted the customer, their family and caused damage to a number of belongings.
- £4,540 (Ref: 1407): We failed to carry out works in this customer's home, which led to her living with significant damp and mould for well over a year, causing damage to belongings. The customer was also unhappy with the communication that she had had, particularly from her Housing Officer.
- £2,270 (Ref: 1485): A failure to address various works in this customer's home over several years, despite numerous surveyor visits, resulted in severe dampness and water penetration. This caused damage to belongings, including carpets.
- £2,118 (Ref: 2331): This complaint was about significant delays and numerous cancellations to complete plastering and painting works in all three bedrooms. These repeated failures reached the point where the customer requested permission to use their own contractor, which Brighter Places agreed to and then reimbursed the costs incurred.
- £1,780 (Ref: 2032): This Shared Ownership customer reported a variety of issues, from a lack of response to an email sent and an incorrect service charge letter being sent to poor estate maintenance and long-standing repairs that should've been resolved during the defects period. Compensation was largely paid due to the latter of these concerns as the customer had been forced to live with outstanding repairs needed to her floor, windows, bath and boiler for almost a year.
- £1,632.72 (Ref: 2123): This customer originally reported a leak to our previous repairs contractor. However, it was incorrectly diagnosed and it took them six months before they had finished carry out the initial and subsequent repairs. As a result of the significant delays in attending to stop the leak, the customer's flooring was damaged beyond repair.
- £1,500 (Ref: 1675): This complainant had been reporting issues with damp and mould since October 2023. Surveys weren't saved in the system and belongings were damaged as a result of the delays.
- £1,140 (Ref: 1499): This complaint was related to issues with water ingress, damp and mould not having been resolved in their home.

- £1,000 (Ref: 1486): This was a historic complaint received in June 2024. There were significant delays in getting quotes to remedy damp and mould in their home. In the end the works were passed to a different contractor, but items were damaged as a result of the delays.
- £1,000 (Ref: 1633): An infestation in the customer's home was as a result of failing to rectify ongoing damp issues that had been reported over a number of years.
- £1,000 (Ref: 2118): The cause of leaks weren't identified at this customer's home several years ago when a bathroom was fitted. This led to significant damage in her bathroom and kitchen, which also caused some of her appliances to be damaged.
- £1,000 (Ref: 1788): This customer was unhappy following a bathroom replacement and leaks caused by newly installed components.

In 26/27, we plan on carrying out a Lessons Learnt exercise on stage 2 complaints. This will help us to understand whether any more could've been done at stage 1 to prevent an escalation. It will allow us to check whether the assessment on the level of impact made at stage 1 was correct. Finally, it will also highlight if any decisions around the compensation awarded are inconsistent with other similar cases and our policy.

5. Next steps

The report and self-assessment will be published on our website and shared with the Housing Ombudsman Service.