

Lancaster City Council | Council Housing

Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report

2024-2025

Introduction

At Lancaster City Council, we value feedback from our residents as it helps us identify areas where our services or properties can be improved. Regardless of the complexity of the cases, residents can expect the Housing Team to address their concerns promptly.

While we strive to resolve issues on the spot, there are instances where further investigation is necessary. In such cases, the complaint will be handled according to Stage 1 of our Complaints Policy, ensuring transparency and accountability in our processes. Our Complaints Policy is readily available to view online, outlining what residents can expect when they make a complaint to us as their landlord.

We conduct an annual self-assessment of our complaints handling against the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Code to ensure compliance, and to drive continuous improvement. This self-assessment can be found as a separate document (Appendix A) to this report.

To make a complaint or share concerns, residents can reach us via email, online, phone, in person, or even through our social media channels, although complainants should note that social media inquiries may not be monitored daily.

1. Executive Summary

This report outlines the annual complaint performance for the financial year to date (April 2024 to March 2025) and the key learning and service improvements made following resolution of complaints.

Total complaints received ○ Stage 1 ○ Stage 2 ○ Excluded	Total: 100 ○ 86 ○ 10 ○ 4
% change in complaints received in the previous year.	+51.5% (66 cases to 100)
% of complaints progressed to Stage 2	8.6%
% of all complaints responded to within the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code timescales ○ Stage 1 ○ Stage 2 <i>Please note: 3 cases remain open post 31st March 2025.</i>	Total: 83.8% ○ S1: 83.7% (72 of 86) ○ S2: 85.7% (6 of 7)

Throughout this financial year, we have introduced several new approaches to learning from the feedback we receive through complaints. Our commitment to continuously improving the services we provide to our tenants remains steadfast. We not only learn from complaints but also from listening to our tenants across all areas of service, as well as insights from the Housing Ombudsman Service, the media, and best practices demonstrated throughout the industry.

We have continued to focus on ensuring that tenants are aware of the complaints process and feel confident in using our services to raise concerns, regardless of the issue. Our efforts have included promoting our complaints service and the Housing Ombudsman on social media, through our website, and in tenant newsletters.

In November 2024, we conducted refresher training for all staff involved in responding to complaints. We are committed to enhancing this training and making it more effective going forward.

2. Complaint Performance

Complaint Volume

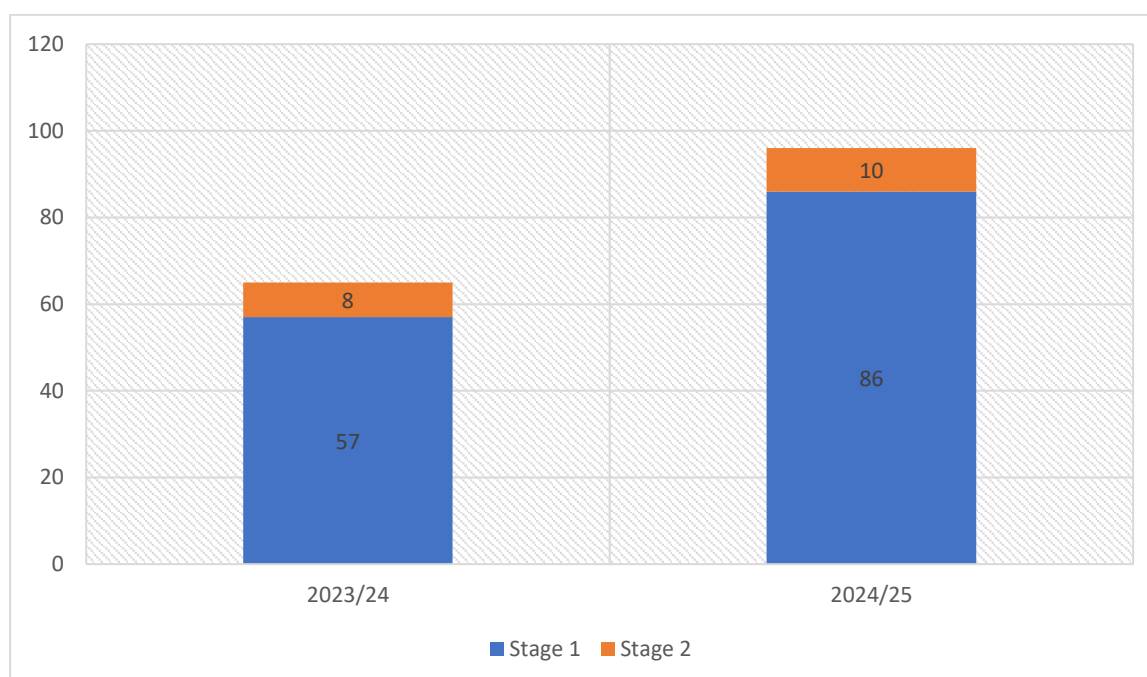
Overall, there has been a 51.5% increase in complaints received during in this financial year when compared the previous year. This figure is broken down as follows across our complaint stages:

Stage 1: 86

Stage 2: 10

Excluded: 4

We have had an escalation rate of 8.6% from Stage 1 to Stage 2 during the financial year to date. Which is a notable increase from 2023/24 Q4 escalation rate of 4.6%



The increase in complaint volume is taken very seriously by our service, however it was an expected reality due to the work undertaken to promote the complaints process. The Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code is clear that high volumes of complaints must not be seen as a negative, as they can be indicative of a well-publicised and accessible complaints process. As such, The Council Housing Service is committed to embody a positive complaints culture where complaints are welcomed and treated as valuable sources of data and feedback to aid service improvement.

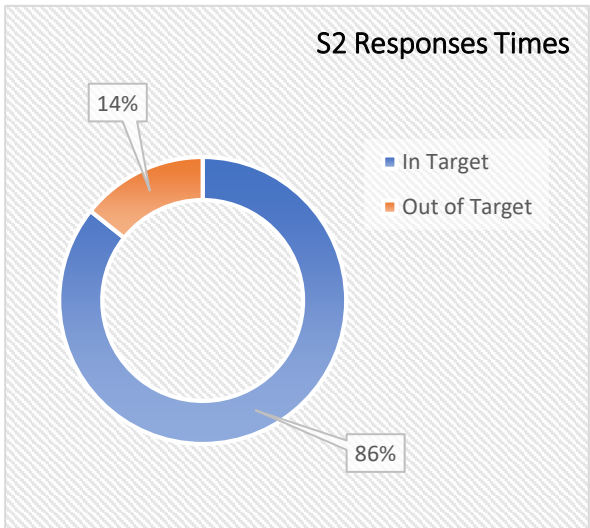
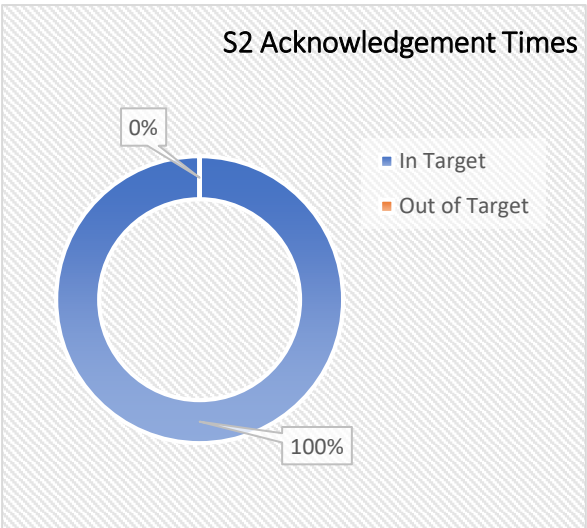
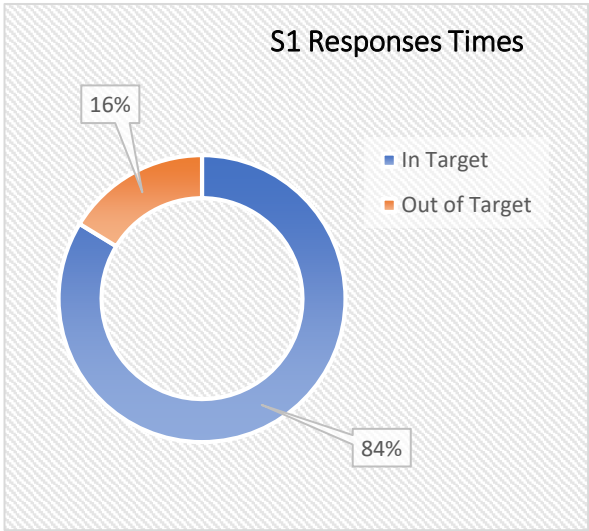
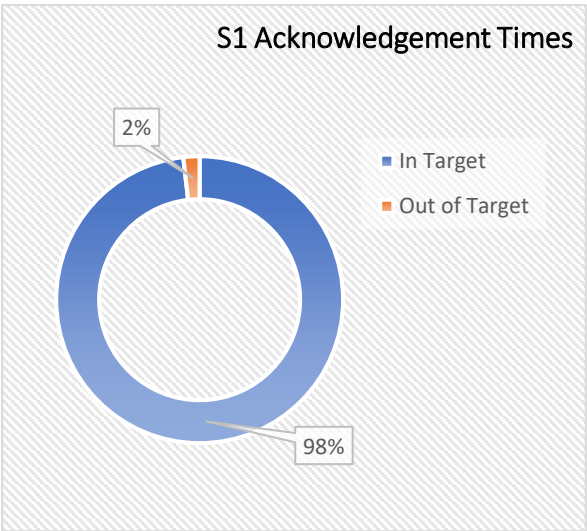
To ensure compliance with the Code, our complaint process has been made accessible on our website, social media, and will be featured in upcoming tenant newsletters.

While we are satisfied that our complaint process is accessible and well publicised to residents, our overall aim is to ensure that resident concerns are resolved promptly and effectively, without the need to resort to the formal complaints process.

Acknowledgement and Response Rates

In the financial year to date (April 2024 to March 2025) the acknowledgement and response rate, in line with the Ombudsman Standards, are as follows:

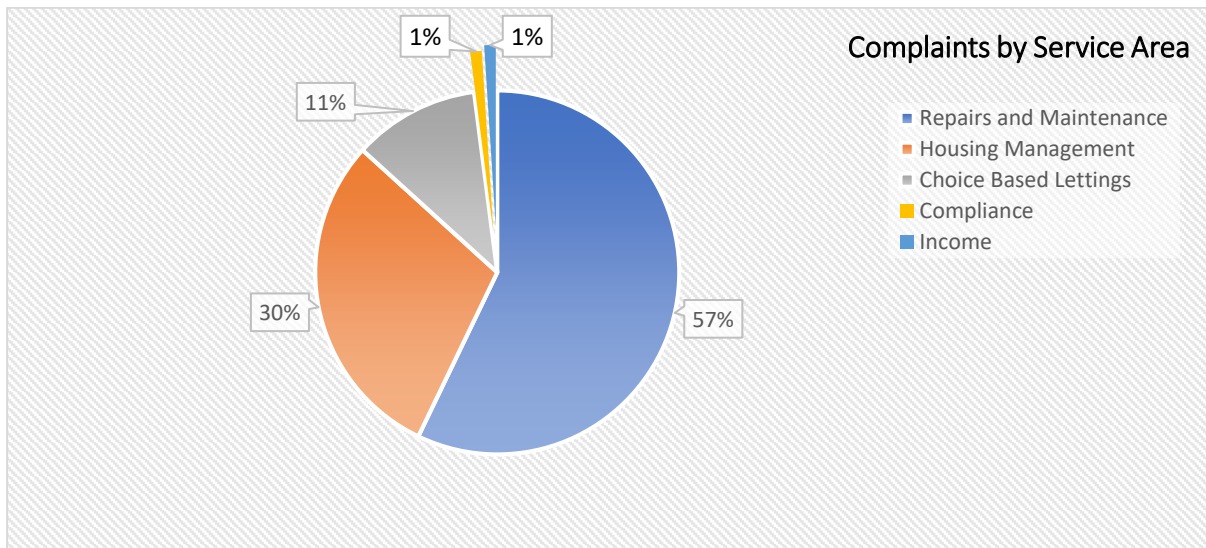
Stage	Acknowledgement (A)	Response (R)
1 (A) - 5 Working Days (R) - 10 Working Days	98% 84 of 86 Cases	84% 72 of 86 Cases
2 (A) - 5 Working Days (R) - 20 Working Days	100% 7 of 7 Cases	86% 6 of 7 Cases
Combined	98% 91 of 93 Cases	84% 78 of 93 Cases



This is seen as an improvement from 2023-24 where we acknowledged within timescales for Stage 1 at 95% and Stage 2 of our process at 89%. In 2023-24 we responded to complaints within timescale by the following: Stage 1 at 72% and Stage 2 at 89% therefore we can see improved timescales, even against increased complaint numbers.

Service Areas

In all non-excluded complaint cases, the Repairs and Maintenance Service received the highest number of complaints (56 in total) in the year to date (representing 55% of all incoming complaints and increasing since the previous year). However, it should also be acknowledged that this service deals with around 12,000 responsive repairs each year.

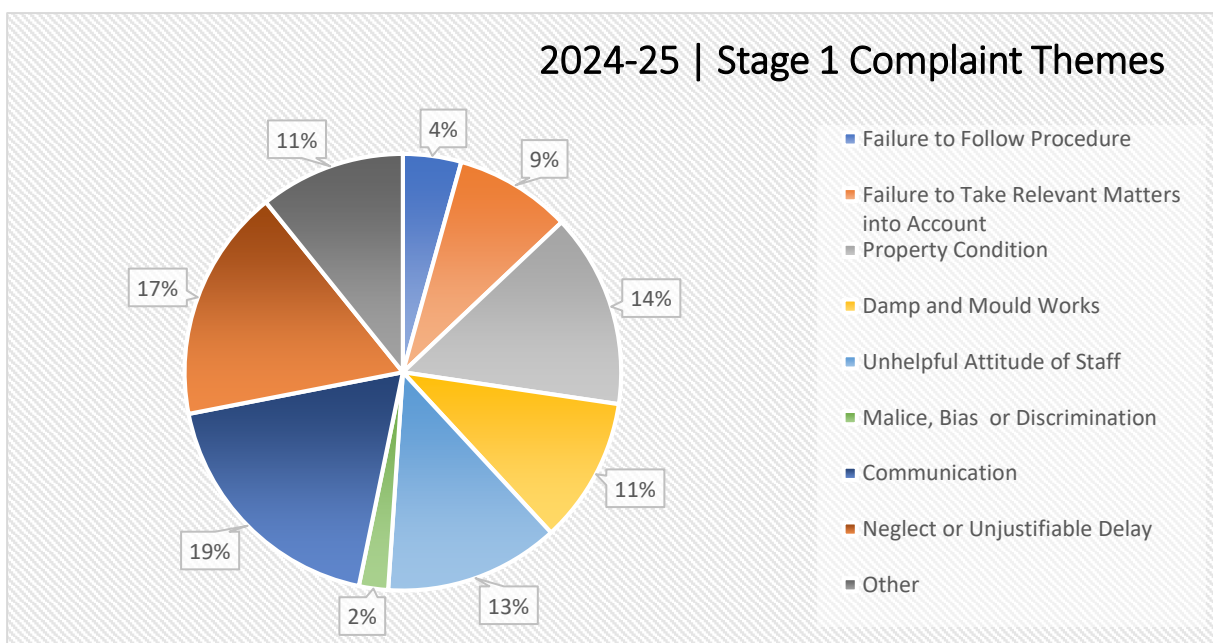


In 2023-24 53% of overall complaints received were linked to Housing Management, 44% were linked to our Repairs and Maintenance Service with the remaining 3% linked to Compliance activity. Therefore we have seen a slight increase in complaints related to repairs and maintenance, but a significant reduction in complaints related to Housing Management.

Complaint Themes

Following 2023-24's refocus on better categorisation of complaints, and recording the multiple themes that may be present in a single complaint, our service has been able to understand the diverse array of reasons why our tenants and residents may feel the need to express dissatisfaction.

A reasonable equal distribution of complaint themes has been recorded in the financial year. However there have been some common themes such as *Poor Communication* and



Neglect/Unjustifiable delays. These themes seemed to largely coincide with one another when the matter of the complaint relates to outstanding repairs and/or property condition.

Exclusions

The Council's complaints policy sets out the exclusion criteria for complaints which may be refused. In the event that a complaint is not accepted, the customer will be given an explanation setting out the reasons why.

There have been 4 excluded cases in the 2024-25 financial year. Of the 4 exclusions, two were due to the complaint having previously been investigated and responded to under the complaints policy. Another excluded complaint was classified as a service request. The final exclusion was due to no fault being found as the operative was following a rule of law (traffic).

3. Ombudsman: Annual Landlord Performance Report

The most recent Ombudsman landlord performance report is attached (Appendix B), this report from the Housing Ombudsman covers the period of April 2023 – March 2024.

Performance at a glance shows that the Ombudsman made determinations in two (2) cases during the reporting period of 2023-2024 with six (6) maladministration findings and one (1) complaint handling failure orders.

With a maladministration rate of 100% and the national maladministration rate recorded at 73% in 2023-24, the Ombudsman reported that Lancaster City Council performed poorly when compared to similar landlords by size and type.

Whilst we are disappointed to report these findings, we remain committed to providing residents with a fair, accessible and effective complaints handling service that is compliant with the ombudsman statutory code. Furthermore, we have taken all orders and recommendations on board and actioned them where required including paying £2,550 in compensation.

4. Ombudsman: Findings of Non-Compliance

In recent years the Housing Ombudsman Service has developed an increasingly proactive role in monitoring and intervening in housing service delivery through receipt of individual complaint cases and analysis of emerging themes and trends. Their 'spotlight' reports, for example, offer guidance and recommendations for effective service delivery in a range of areas and the Housing Service uses these to inform ongoing service review.

With regard to specific cases, Lancaster City Council was subject to 1 determination during 2024/25.

Case 1

For the council's handling of the residents reports of anti-social behaviour (ASB), there were two counts of maladministration found in the landlord's handling of the resident's reports of ASB and the associated complaint. As a result the council was ordered to:

1. Write to the resident with an apology for its failures in the handling of the residents reports of ASB, and its complaint handling failures
2. Pay directly to the tenant a total of £700 compensation
3. Review the complaint handling failures highlighted in the investigation alongside the provisions of the code
4. Provide evidence of compliance with these orders to the ombudsman within 4 weeks

5. Service Improvements and Learning

Our aim is to encourage a positive complaint handling culture, to ensure we actively utilise complaint learning and implement service improvements. We want to be accountable and transparent to our customers.

Each time a formal complaint is received and investigated, as part of the response we proactively look to identify lessons learned and service improvements to prevent similar complaints happening again. This information is shared at our Council Housing Advisory Group and we aim to publish more information linked to a 'You Said We Did' format more widely over the coming year. These are some real examples of service improvements identified in 2024–2025 as a direct result of complaints learning.

A. COMMUNICATIONS: REPAIRS AND MAINTENANCE SERVICES

Overview:

We know our repairs and property maintenance service is crucial to our tenants and residents, and good communication is central to this process- particularly when things don't always go to plan. In this financial year, many of the complaints we have investigated could have been avoided if our communication with our tenants had been clearer.

Learning:

Through clearer communication we could ensure our tenants are aware of; what jobs would be required, the timescales associated with those works, what happens when there is a delay. Stronger communications surrounding the repair process also keeps our tenants in the loop and feeling involved and in control of the work being carried out in their house across all RMS services such as:

- Damp and Mould Works
- Responsive repairs
- Capital Works (such as Roofing, Kitchen Replacements etc)
- And post-Void repairs that would be completed after the property has been let.

This is an area we continuously focus on reviewing and adapting the service accordingly.

Actions in 2024-25:

- **Toolbox Talks for RMS staff:**
Toolbox Talks undertaken with RMS – Held sessions with Repairs and Maintenance staff to reinforce the importance of tenant communication. These focused on explaining works clearly, setting realistic timescales, and keeping tenants updated on delays.

- **Repairs text message roll-out**
Introduced automated text messaging to confirm repair appointments. Tenants now receive a notification when a job is raised or changed.
- **Improved damp and mould reporting**
When tenants report damp or mould, staff complete a new form over the phone which records key household and vulnerability details. This triggers an automatic email or text to the tenant confirming their inspection appointment and explaining how to prepare
- **Better scheduling of electrical jobs**
We improved the availability of electricians and worked closely with schedulers to contact tenants directly to book appointments wherever possible to reduce any backlog of electrical work requests.

Planned Actions for 2025-26:

- **Exploring expanding scheduling improvements to other trades**
We will be exploring the feasibility of applying the same improved processes introduced in our electrical works, to our plumbing and joinery services to help resolve issues more quickly.
- **Wider use of Gov Notify service for tenant updates**
Both Housing Assistants and Works Schedulers will be given access to send one-off messages to tenants, providing quick updates on ongoing work, better keeping tenants informed and in the loop.
- **Introducing Granicus forms for inspections**
We will roll out new digital inspection forms that provide real-time information to planners, helping them book follow-up work more efficiently.

We are also exploring how these forms can generate tenant-friendly letters that clearly outline the work planned.

- **Reintroducing the Repairs Satisfaction Survey**
We will review and relaunch our transactional survey for repairs to capture real-time tenant feedback after a job has been completed. This will help us better understand tenant satisfaction, identify areas for improvement, and act quickly where service has fallen short. The survey will be simple, accessible, and focused on key aspects such as communication, quality of work, and overall experience.

B. STAFF CONDUCT AND CUSTOMER SERVICE

Overview:

We understand that every interaction between staff and tenants, shapes how our service is experienced and perceived. Professionalism, courtesy, and respect are essential — whether face-to-face, over the phone, or through contractors working on our behalf.

Learning:

Complaints and feedback this year have shown us that even when the right action is taken, the way it's delivered can affect how it's received.

A lack of empathy, dismissive tone, or inconsistent standards can damage relationships and reduce trust. We've learned that professionalism needs to be consistently demonstrated — across all services, by both

staff and contractors — and that clear expectations, training, and accountability all play a role in achieving this.

Actions in 2024-25:

- Monthly spot checks in Community Safety (ASB Case Management)**
 The service has introduced regular case audits and spot checks to ensure consistent, professional communication and decision-making in sensitive casework.
- Toolbox Talks with RMS staff**
 As part of the regular toolbox talks for RMS staff, topics such as professional behaviour, safe driving, and respectful engagement with tenants during repairs and maintenance visits has been included.
- Contractor reminders on expected behaviour**
 Contractors have been advised by the Capital Works Team, reinforcing the need for respectful conduct and the importance of representing the Council positively while working in tenant homes.
- Shadowing in Independent Living Officer Induction Plan**
 Following a number of complaints regarding newer members of the Independent Living team and their conduct/attitude. We have added structured shadowing to help new staff understand the expectations of tenant interaction, tone, and professionalism from day one.

Planned Actions for 2025-26:

- Customer service refresher training for all frontline staff**
 As part of Council Housings core training programme, all housing-facing staff will receive updated training on delivering excellent, respectful customer service.
- Continued investment in CIH training for managers**
 We will continue supporting managers to access Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) training, helping embed professional standards and improve leadership across the service.

C. KNOWLEDGE AND INFORMATION MANAGEMENT (KIM)

Overview:

Clear, accessible, and well-managed information underpins every part of a good housing service — especially when things go wrong. Several complaints this year could have been avoided or resolved more effectively if our records had been clearer, more consistent, or easier to access. Issues such as tenants being incorrectly charged rent after returning keys, or a lack of documented outcomes from repair appointments, highlight the risks of poor record-keeping.

Learning:

The Housing Ombudsman’s Spotlight on Knowledge and Information Management report has reinforced what we’ve seen in practice: poor information management can delay complaint resolution, undermine trust, and lead to unfair outcomes. We’ve recognised that staff need clearer guidance on what to record, where to record it, and how to keep information accurate and up to date. This includes everything from documenting property visits and repair outcomes, to recording tenant vulnerabilities in a consistent and

secure way. Having a clear KIM approach will also support better collaboration between teams and reduce duplication.

Actions in 2024-25:

- Developed a KIM Action Plan in response to Ombudsman guidance**
 The service has used the Ombudsman’s Spotlight report on Knowledge and Information Management to identify gaps in our KIM practices and created a targeted plan for housing services to improve consistency, quality, and accessibility of data.
- Initiated building the ‘Eyes and Ears’ concern raising process**
 The housing service began developing the Eyes and Ears concern raising process for staff – this process allows staff to raise a concern that they see or hear when carrying out their duties, providing relevant staff members with potentially crucial information relating to the tenant’s welfare. This work will evolve further through 2025-26 as we utilise Granicus to create the reporting form and will automatically allocate concerns to the relevant staff member or team.
- Contractor reminders on expected behaviour**
 Developed a consistent format for logging complaint actions and outcomes (via Granicus), making it easier to track service improvements.
- Drafted a Housing KIM Strategy**
 Built on the Action Plan with a longer-term strategy to guide future improvements and outline our approach to developing our management of data and information within the service.

Planned Actions for 2025-26:

- Implement and embed the Housing KIM Strategy**
 We plan to finalise and roll out the strategy in the new financial year, ensuring each service area understands its role in improving knowledge and information management.
- Deliver training and guidance on good data practice**
 We will continue supporting managers to access Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) training, helping embed professional standards and improve leadership across the service.
- Deliver the Eyes and Ears process for reporting concerns within housing management**
 We aim to roll out a digital tool to help staff log concerns and vulnerabilities in a consistent way, improving internal referrals and support. Ensuring that staff have relevant information available to aid their case work
- Prepare for Housing Management System Replacement**
 We will begin aligning our data structures and processes with the upcoming MRI system, ensuring smoother migration and better long-term integration of housing information.

D. PROCEDURE, PROCESS AND DOCUMENTS

Overview:

Clear procedures and consistent documentation are key to delivering fair and reliable services. When processes are unclear or not followed consistently, this can lead to confusion for both tenants and staff — and result in poor outcomes, particularly when dealing with sensitive or complex cases.

Learning:

Some complaints this year have shown that while our frontline staff are committed to helping tenants, we don't always have clear written guidance in place to support them. Where procedures or template letters haven't been updated or don't reflect current best practice, it can lead to inconsistency in how we deliver services — especially when managing debt, anti-social behaviour (ASB) or repairs processes and standards.

We've learned that keeping our procedures, processes and letters under regular review — and making sure they reflect how we expect staff to work — is essential to ensure consistency, fairness, and better tenant outcomes.

Actions in 2024-25:

- **Updated Notices Procedure**

We reviewed and updated our Notices Procedure to ensure it reflects current legislation and best practice. This helps staff issue legal notices clearly and consistently, reducing the risk of delays or errors.

- **Debt Management Policy Drafted**

A new draft Debt Management Policy was developed to support a more consistent, fair, and supportive approach when tenants fall into arrears. This aligns with our commitment to early engagement and prevention. This policy is still under review and will be finalised in the 2025-26 financial year.

- **Rent Arrears Handbook Updated**

We updated our Rent Arrears Handbook to provide clearer guidance for residents on how we can provide support. The new version includes step-by-step advice, links to support services, and a focus on early intervention, as well as a transparent outline of our approach to managing arrears.

- **Review of ASB Case Management Process initiated.**

Following the Resolve ASB consultation we have begun the review of anti-social behaviour (ASB) case management to ensure our process is reflective of our practice, and remains robust, victim-focused, and consistently applied. This includes reviewing case workflows, and will extend to documentation, and communication templates in the new year.

Planned Actions for 2025-26:

- **Embed Debt Management Policy and Publish on our Webpage**

We will roll out the new Debt Management Policy, ensuring staff are trained and confident in applying it. The policy will also be made publicly available, so tenants understand our approach and what support is available.

- **Review and Refresh Lettable Standard**

We will revisit and refresh our lettable standard to ensure it meets tenant expectations and reflects our current practice. This will help make void turnaround processes more consistent and transparent.

- **Review Damp and Mould Processes**

We will continue reviewing our damp and mould procedures, with a focus on improving communication with tenants, updating them on delays, and taking greater care with their personal belongings during works.

- **Introduce plastering standards for relevant staff and contractors**

We will develop and introduce clear plastering standards to guide both staff and contractors. This will help ensure a consistent quality of finish and reduce repeat visits.

E. INTERCOMS AND COMMUNAL DOORWAYS

Overview:

Secure and functioning intercom systems are vital for residents' safety, independence, and peace of mind—particularly in blocks with vulnerable tenants. In 2024–25, we received complaints where broken or removed intercom systems had not been repaired or replaced in a timely manner. One case highlighted a failure to track a long-standing fault, which led to the removal of the system without a clear plan for reinstatement. This happened due to a gap in reporting and monitoring repairs, which we have since addressed.

Learning:

These complaints demonstrated the need for a more proactive approach to intercom maintenance. We learned that better oversight and coordination between contractors and our internal teams is essential to avoid missed jobs and ensure accountability. It also made clear that reactive-only maintenance is not enough—we need to plan ahead to prevent system failures before they happen.

Actions in 2024-25:

- **Weekly Review of Reported Intercom Jobs**

In May 2024 we introduced a process where reported intercom faults are now reviewed weekly by our repairs team to ensure no jobs are missed or left unresolved. Our appointed contractor now inspects sites for a condition survey on a quarterly basis.

- **Weekly Contractor Updates**

Contractors now confirm all outstanding intercom jobs on a weekly basis, providing an additional layer of accountability and helping us track progress.

Planned Actions for 2025-26:

- **Retender Intercom Service**

We will retender our intercom maintenance and installation contract to ensure we have a provider that meets our expectations around response times, service standards, and communication. This will support a more reliable and accountable service.

- **Explore developing a Planned Intercom Replacement Schedule**

We will create a planned programme for replacing intercom systems across our properties, based on system age, condition, and reliability. This proactive approach aims to replace systems before they fail, reducing tenant disruption and improving security.

Service Improvement Table

Priority Area	Action(s)	Target Completion
A. COMMUNICATIONS: REPAIRS AND MAINTENANCE SERVICES	i. Exploring expanding scheduling improvements to other trades	i. Q1 2025-26
	ii. Wider use of Gov Notify service for tenant updates	ii. Ongoing
	iii. Introducing Granicus forms for inspections	iii. Q2 2025-26
	iv. Reintroducing the Repairs Satisfaction Survey	iv. Q2 2025-26
B. STAFF CONDUCT AND CUSTOMER SERVICE	i. Customer service refresher training for all frontline staff	i. Q1 2025-26
	ii. Continued investment in CIH training for managers	ii. Q1 2025-26 Onwards
C. KNOWLEDGE AND INFORMATION MANAGEMENT (KIM)	i. Implement and embed the Housing KIM Strategy	i. Q1 2025-26
	ii. Deliver training and guidance on good data practice	ii. Q1 2025-26 Onwards
	iii. Deliver the Eyes and Ears process for reporting concerns within housing management	iii. Ongoing
	iv. Prepare for Housing Management system replacement	iv. Ongoing
D. PROCEDURE, PROCESS AND DOCUMENTS	i. Embed Debt Management Policy and Publish on our Webpage	i. Q1 2025-26
	ii. Review and Refresh Lettable Standard	ii. Q1 2025-26
	iii. Review Damp and Mould Processes	iii. Ongoing
	iv. Introduce plastering standards for relevant staff and contractors	iv. Q2 2025-26
E. INTERCOMS AND COMMUNAL DOORWAYS	i. Retender Intercom Service	i. Q3 2025-26
	ii. Explore developing a Planned Intercom Replacement Schedule	ii. Budget Dependent

Complaint Handling Quality

Throughout 2024-25 we have continued to embed complaint quality reviews to provide assurance that individual complaint cases are being managed consistently and in line with complaint code requirements. Moving into 2025-26 this work is being embedded into our complaint handling system. Learning and good practice from complaint reviews has been shared regularly at quarterly cross-Council meetings, with staff guidance documents regularly shared for those involved in complaint handling.

The Council Housing Service also has well embedded internal processes for managers to get together on a weekly and monthly basis to review complaints, share information and seek to develop holistic and joint responses. We are starting to explore how tenants can get involved in complaint reviews over the coming twelve months.

Tenant Satisfaction

In 2023 the Housing Service carried out the first set of annual Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSM). These include satisfaction questions and performance data across the whole service, which are standardised across the whole social housing sector, and are reported in to the Regulator of Social Housing to form part of our annual data submissions.

There is a specific question relating to complaint handling: “how satisfied are you with Lancaster City Council’s Housing Service’s complaints handling?” in 2023, satisfaction came in at 36%, this increased slightly to 37% in 2024. For context from benchmarking undertaken by our TSM provider this places our performance in the top quartile when benchmarked across other local authorities, however we acknowledge that this still does not place us where we would like to be performance wise.

Unfortunately changes to how complaints were recorded throughout the last year has meant that compliments have not been formally recorded and therefore we are unable to provide comparison in this area. We are looking to review capturing and recording these again over the next 12 months.