

**SOUTH
KESTEVEN
DISTRICT
COUNCIL**

**Annual Complaints
Performance and Service
Improvement Report**

2024/25

Executive Summary

South Kesteven District Council looks after nearly 6,000 homes, and we know how important it is to provide a housing service that is reliable, responsive, and of a high standard. Our commitment is to deliver a service that tenants can trust – and that trust comes from being open, honest, and willing to listen.

Complaints are one of the most important ways tenants tell us what's working and what isn't. We welcome this feedback. It helps us see where things need to be put right and where we can make improvements. We see complaints not as criticism to avoid, but as opportunities to learn and make our services better for everyone.

As the Member Responsible for Complaints I play a key role in ensuring members are provided with assurance regarding the Council's Housing Complaints process and ensures that we hold ourselves to account and focus on continuous improvement in the housing services we deliver.

Operationally, we have strengthened our approach to handling complaints across Housing and Technical Services. This has improved both the speed and consistency of our responses. I attend monthly meetings with senior managers meet to review complaints, identify lessons learned, and implement changes to enhance the tenant experience.

Tenant feedback has directly shaped updates to key policies, including our Repairs and Maintenance Policy, Tenancy Management Policy, Estate Management Policy, and Anti-Social Behaviour Policy. We have also set up a dedicated Damp and Mould Team so that we can respond more quickly and proactively when problems arise.

Looking ahead, we are strengthening how we engage with tenants through our new *Voice of the Tenant* policy, more tenant satisfaction surveys, and closer partnership working. This ensures tenant views remain at the heart of service design and delivery.

The Housing Strategy team brings together feedback from complaints, surveys, and tenant meetings with performance data, so that improvements are not one-off but part of a continuous cycle of learning and change.

Above all, we will continue to listen to tenants and use your feedback to build a better housing service – one that works for everyone.

Cllr Virginia Moran

Cabinet Member for Housing

Introduction

The purpose of this report is to provide information regarding how the Council responded to the Housing complaints received during 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025 and the actions we have taken in response to these complaints. During this period the Council received 233 complaints relating to Housing Services and Technical Services of which 18 (8%) were escalated to Stage 2.

Overview of complaints process

Council housing in South Kesteven is managed by the Housing and Projects Directorate. The directorate is divided into two Housing service areas who are responsible for service delivery:

- Housing Services - responsible for tenancy services, sheltered housing, estate management and lettings
- Technical Services - responsible for voids, repairs and improvements

Complaints about the Housing and Technical Services are addressed through the Housing Customer Feedback Policy. There are two main stages to this process:

- Stage 1 complaints – the Council will acknowledge a formal complaint within five working days and provide a full response within ten working days.
- Stage 2 complaints – If the complainant is not satisfied with the response, the complaint can be escalated with a request to review the Stage 1 response. The Council will acknowledge the request within five working days and provide a full response within twenty working days.
- If the complainant remains dissatisfied by the Stage 2 review, the matter can be escalated to the Housing Ombudsman, who will conduct an independent investigation into allegations of maladministration.

A copy of the Housing Customer Feedback Policy is available at the following link on the Council's website [https://www.southkesteven.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2024-06/Housing Customer Feedback Policy%202024.pdf](https://www.southkesteven.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2024-06/Housing%20Customer%20Feedback%20Policy%202024.pdf).

All social landlords are members of the Housing Ombudsman, who regulate how complaints relating to social housing are dealt with. To ensure this is consistent across social landlords, the Ombudsman produces a Housing Complaints Code setting out the standards expected. Landlords are required to conduct a self-assessment of how they meet this code and publish it on their website. A copy of SKDC's self-assessment for 2024/25 can also be found on our website at the following link. <https://www.southkesteven.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2025-06/SKDC%20Complaints%20Code%20Self-Assessment%202024%20amended.pdf>

Definition of a complaint

As defined by the Housing Ombudsman a complaint is:

“An expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the organisation, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting an individual resident or group of residents.”

Complaints can relate to:

- The quality of service offered, or work carried out.
- The action or lack of action carried out while carrying out a service.
- The attitude or behaviour of those providing a service or completing work.
- Missed appointments.
- Failure to comply with policies, procedures, or service standards.
- Failure to provide information when requested that a complainant has a right to.
- A decision we have made or delayed in making.
- Failure to respond to a previous complaint.
- Feedback from a consultation or survey we have sent as part of a consultation or feedback.

The Council also receive ‘complaints’ which are identified as ‘service requests’ as they relate to an initial request for a service rather than a complaint regarding something the Council has already done. Service requests are not recorded as complaints but assigned to the relevant service area to address as a request for action.

An example of a service request would be where a tenant ‘complains’ their heating is not working but this has not previously reported to the Council as an issue. This would be recorded as a service request because it relates to a repair to their heating system.

An example of a complaint would be where a tenant complains about a repair we have carried out to their heating system which they are not satisfied with.

How we manage complaints

A centralised Feedback Team records Housing complaints on the Council’s Complaint Management System, Meritec, as either a Stage 1 or a Stage 2 complaint. Once recorded, the complaint is allocated to Housing Services or Technical Services. This ensures complaints are managed and monitored in a consistent manner across the Housing Service. Stage 1 complaints are allocated to a Service Manager, and Stage 2 complaints are allocated to a Head of Service to provide a respond.

Complaints Performance

Stage One Complaints

Customer feedback is initially recorded as a Stage 1 complaint. The following table details how the 233 complaints received by the Housing and Projects Directorate were allocated between Housing Services and Technical Services:

Service Area	Stage 1
Housing Services	99 (42%)
Technical Services	134 (58%)

Responding to Complaints

The Council aim to respond to all Stage 1 complaints within 10 working days of them being acknowledged. Where we are unable to respond within 10 working days, which will ordinarily relate to the complexity of the complaint, the lead officer will contact the complainant to explain why and provide a date by which a response will be given. This will ensure that a comprehensive response can be provided.

The complaint response provides details regarding the escalation process of complaints to Stage 2 if the complainant is not satisfied with the Stage 1 response provided.

The following table below provides details of how the Council performed in terms of closing stage 1 complaints within the expected 10-day period.

Response Time	Within 10 days	Over 10 days
Housing Services	90	9
Technical Services	105	29
Total	195 (84%)	38 (16%)

The Council responded to 84% of stage 1 complaints within 10 working days which is a significant improvement when compared with 2023/24 where only 39% of complaints were responded to on time. Since September 2024 100% of stage 1 complaints have been responded to on time.

Upholding Complaints

Complaints may be categorised after investigation as either being upheld or not upheld as defined below:

- Upholding the complaint – where the Council are found to be at fault
 - Partially upholding the complaint – where the Council are found to be partially at fault
- Not upheld – where the Council are found not to be at fault

The following table provides details of the outcome of Stage 1 complaints:

Complaint Outcome	Upheld	Partially Upheld	Not Upheld
Housing Services	18	16	65
Technical Services	30	10	94
Total	48 (21%)	26 (11%)	159 (68%)

Root Cause of Complaints

Root causes are classified into several categories of which the main ones are:

Service Delivery Failure – which include issues relating to taking too long to resolve an issue, not meeting the expected standard or not being kept informed of actions to the Council is intending to take.

Service Requests – relate to complaints where a request has been reported to the Council which has not been completed.

Other – includes issues relating to officer conduct or breach of policy.

Communication – includes poor communication between the Council and tenant, ability to contact the council, or unclear communication.

Understanding the 'root cause' for complaints is essential as this enables service improvements to be implemented, which supports preventing the same issue reoccurring.

The following table provides details of how the 233 stage 1 complaints received in 2024/25 were categorised.

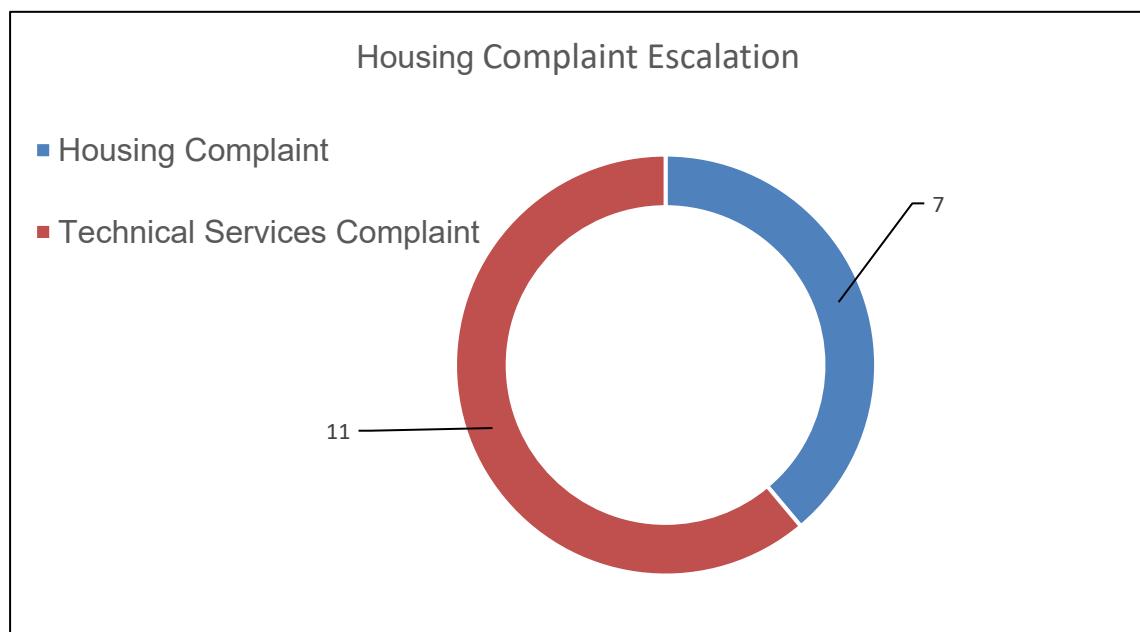
Root Cause	Service Delivery Failure	Service Requests	Officer Conduct	Communication	Other
Housing Services	28	38	11	18	4
Technical Services	57	51	8	12	6
Total	85 (37%)	89 (38%)	19 (8%)	30 (13%)	10 (4%)

Housing Complaint Escalation

If a complainant is not satisfied with a Stage 1 response, they can escalate the complaint to Stage 2. These complaints are allocated to a Head of Service who will review the Stage 1 response to check that it has been adequately investigated, and all available information has been considered.

A response is expected within 20 working days of the Stage 2 complaint being acknowledged. If escalated complaints include issues which cover both Housing and Technical Services they will be dealt with as a joint complaint coordinated by the lead officer.

As shown in the following chart 18 stage 1 complaints were escalated to stage 2:



Time taken to respond to Stage 2 Complaints

Time to respond	Within 20 days	Over 20 days
Housing Services	7	0
Technical Services	11	0
Joint complaint	0	0
Total	18(100%)	0

All Stage 2 complaints were responded to within 20 days

Stage 2 Complaints Upheld

The following table details whether the complaint was upheld, partially upheld or not upheld following the review at Stage 2 of the complaints process.

Complaint Outcome	Upheld/Partially Upheld	Not Upheld
Housing Services	1	6
Technical Services	3	8
Total	4 (22%)	14 (78%)

The Stage 2 complaint response provides details regarding complaint referrals to the Housing Ombudsman if the complainant is not satisfied with the final response.

Ombudsman cases

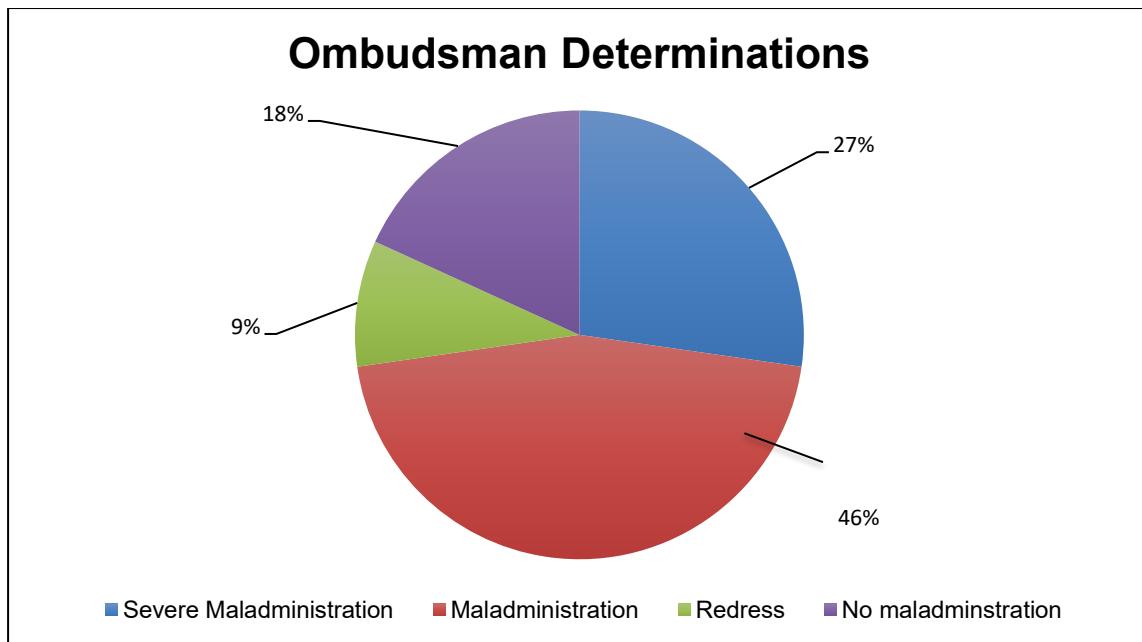
If a complainant is not satisfied with a Stage 2 response, they have the right to refer their complaint to the Housing Ombudsman. The Housing Ombudsman will review the complaint in terms of how it was handled by the landlord and if all the factors have been taken into account. The Housing Ombudsman has a range of options to address any issues it finds, from instructing the landlord to pay compensation, review or develop a policy, or reviewing how we currently do something and amending it.

The Housing Ombudsman publishes a 'Landlord Performance Report' each year detailing how a landlord has performed in complaints handling. The latest report can be found on the Council's website.

The Housing Ombudsman will inform the landlord of its determination of the complaint and their findings. The most frequent finding is 'Maladministration' which refers means the landlord has failed to do something, done something it should not have done or there has been unreasonable delay in completing an action.

The determinations contain recommendations outlining how the landlord should address any issues found as part of this case review. The Housing Ombudsman will usually instruct the landlord to explain how they will complete the identified recommendations. Recommendations can range from reviewing a policy to providing further training to staff.

During 2024/25 the Housing Ombudsman made determinations on 4 cases, resulting in 11 findings, 18 orders with just 2 recommendations across all cases. The following chart summarises the 11 findings:



- The 11 findings are categorised as follows:
 - Property condition - 4
 - Complaints handling – 3
 - Reimbursement and Payments – 2
 - Anti-Social Behaviour – 1
 - Information and data management – 1
- The 18 orders can be broken down as follows:
 - Compensation – 7
 - Apology – 4
 - Repairs – 2
 - Take Specific non-Repair Action – 2
 - Case Review – 1
 - Practice Review – 1
 - Other – 1
- The key issues related to property condition and handling of complaints.
- £5,150 was paid out in compensation.
- 2 recommendations to review succession planning and contact a tenant to offer the chance to raise a further complaint.

Learning from customer feedback

The Council reviews complaints to ensure that lessons are learnt, and service improvements are implemented. The following table details the recurring themes that have been identified and the actions the Council has taken.

Theme	What did we learn	What did we change
Recognition that the time taken to resolve reported issues was too long, which risked problems escalating and causing greater impact for tenants.	To address this, timelines for reactive repairs have been amended and a dedicated repairs scheduler has been implemented to improve efficiency and job planning.	We now ensure initial contact is made with the reporting tenant to gather more details, so that a clear and effective response plan can be developed promptly.
Improving response times and efficiency to protect tenants and deliver better outcomes.”	Recognition that the time taken to respond to reports of damp and mould was too long and needed improvement. Delays risked worsening the problem and impacting tenants' wellbeing.	In response, the Council established a dedicated Damp and Mould Team to provide quicker, more effective action in line with proposed legislative timelines. This change resulted in reduced turnaround times and more positive outcomes for tenants.
Better communication and keeping tenants informed.	Recognition that tenants felt frustrated when reported issues took too long to resolve and when they were not kept informed about progress. Clear and consistent communication was missing.	We have improved how tenants are notified about their repairs appointments, ensuring they are updated throughout the process. For tenancy management issues, we now arrange regular contact with tenants so they feel informed and supported while their case is being addressed.
Professionalism and Empathy in Communication	Recognition that officer conduct, particularly the tone of language used in both verbal and written communication, can significantly affect how tenants feel and how our service is perceived.	All staff have been reminded of the importance of customer care and showing empathy in every interaction with tenants. Where concerns about officer conduct are raised, senior management review telephone calls, customer interactions and take appropriate action to ensure standards are upheld.

Complaints and Service Improvements

A review of complaints and comments made as part of the Tenant Satisfaction Measures Survey has led to improvements in both the complaints process and service delivery.

Improved complaints handling

The Council has a centralised approach to handling complaints. Three officers in the Housing and Projects Directorate are responsible for logging and assigning complaints in the Meritec system to officers for investigation and response. This has led to better response times and consistent responses being produced.

Regular meetings are held with the complaint handlers and management, to monitor progress and performance on complaints. This enables recurring issues to be identified, actions to be determined and improvements to be implemented.

Monthly meetings are held between the Member Responsible for Complaints, the Director of Housing and Projects, the Head of Housing Services, the Head of Technical Services, the Tenancy Services Manager and the Repairs Manager and the Service Managers. These meetings review complaints and identify the lessons that can be learnt and service improvements to address the complaints.

All Housing and Technical Services staff are aware of the complaints process and their role in responding to complaints. Training has been provided for all officers who deal with complaints to ensure a consistent approach, and a more comprehensive response is provided. All Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaints are now reviewed prior to being sent to ensure they fully respond to the issues that have been raised.

Improved service delivery

The Council has reviewed its key housing policies in response to feedback from complaints and surveys such as the Tenant Satisfaction Measures. This has included changes to the Repairs and Maintenance Policy, the Tenancy Management Policy and Estate Management Policy.

Tenants were asked to review the amended policies in terms of how they met their expectations and made changes based on their feedback. Feedback was also reviewed from surveys, complaints and resident meetings to identify recurring issues that could lead to improvements.

An example of this has been the creation of a damp and mould team within the repairs service which supports the Council with meeting the proposed legislative timelines relating to reports of damp and mould. The team will also provide advice on how to prevent and manage damp and mould issues within the home.

Our Housing Officers have also established strong working partnerships with the police and other agencies to enable a partnership approach to addressing tenancy management issues and wider community issues that affect our neighbourhoods.

Improved communication with tenants

Following feedback from tenants, the Council has made it easier for issues to be reported online, an automatic response is sent to acknowledge the online form has been received.

Target times have been set for responding to tenants regarding the issue they have raised. Responses are recorded on the tenancy management system and our complaints management system. The team ensure their responses are comprehensive and easy to understand.

What we will do to improve further

Tenant engagement is being increased so that the Council has a greater understanding of the improvements that could be implemented from a customer perspective, for example:

- Tenants involvement in reviewing and challenging how we deliver the housing service will be increased
- A Housing Strategy Team has been established which will ensure feedback from complaints, surveys and tenant engagement is collated along with performance information. This will ensure that a continuous cycle of review and improvement becomes embedded into the Housing service.