

Housing Annual Complaints Report 2023/2024.



May 2024
Version 1

Contents page

Section	Title	Page
	Welcome from the Housing Complaints Board	3
1.0	Introduction	4
2.0	Complaints Policy	5
3.0	Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code self-assessment results	9
4.0	Complaints Policy Reasonable adjustments and support	10
5.0	Reasonable adjustments and support	10
6.0	Summary data 2023/2024	10
7.0	Complaint numbers	10
8.0	Complaint themes	11
9.0	Housing Ombudsman 2023/2034 summary	11
10.0	Complaints made to the Housing Ombudsman	12
11.0	Customer data	14
12.0	What we have learnt from feedback	15

Welcome

We are happy to share our inaugural Housing Annual Complaints Report.

This report reviews feedback received by the Council in 2023/24 under the Housing Complaints Procedure. It tells you about the quantity of complaints we received as your landlord, identifies recurring themes, and highlights lessons learnt which are changing the ways that we build working relationships with our tenants and manage our properties.

We aim to get things right and make a difference in the lives of our residents and visitors. As recipients of our services, you are best placed to provide feedback and so we are encouraged by 15% increase in complaints across our Housing Services. This is reflective of our engagement work through [service charge consultation](#) process and [tenant perception surveys](#).

This increase in feedback has been invaluable in helping us identify and address areas for improvement. It also demonstrates your confidence in complaining and a raised awareness of the process.

Our [self-assessment](#) against the Housing Ombudsman Complaints handling code helps us to follow good practice and monitor progress. With the three-pronged approach we look forward to keeping things moving in the right direction.

This report sets the scene and in future publications, we hope to share what we have learnt over the coming year and how we have put these learnings into practice as a responsible Social Landlord.

Your views are crucial in helping us make sure we're getting things right and letting us know when we are not.

We will continually improve services. We hope you enjoy reading this report and please do contact with suggestions on how we can continue to improve.

Housing Complaints Board

1.0 Introduction

Effective complaint handling enables residents to be heard and understood. The starting point for this is a shared understanding of what constitutes a complaint.

A complaint is defined as ‘an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the landlord, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting a resident or group of residents.’

Milton Keynes City Council is committed to managing its complaints in line with the Housing Ombudsman’s complaint handling code 2024 and is working to adopt all recommendations including timescales for complaint responses and action tracking for complaint remedies.

This report provides an analysis of the complaints, compliments and comments received by the Council during 2023/24 under the Housing Complaints, Procedure. This report not only focuses on volume and timeliness of the responses but also aims, where it is possible, to identify themes and lessons learnt that result in service improvements. including the decisions made by the Housing Ombudsman (HO). More details of the HO cases can be found on their website [Housing Ombudsman Service website](#).

The main drivers for complaints are around communication and delays in processes in making sure works are underway. In relation to communication there has been improvements in the way we communicate with our customers throughout the organisation.

Our complaints policy reflects our commitment to an equitable process for all residents with:

- A universal definition of a complaint
- Providing easy access to the complaints procedure and ensuring residents are aware of it, including their right to access the Housing Ombudsman Service
- Standardising the structure of the complaint’s procedure – only 2 stages necessary and clear times set out for responses
- Ensuring fairness in complaint handling with a resident-focused process
- Taking action to put things right and appropriate remedies
- Creating a positive complaint handling culture through continuous learning and improvement
- Demonstrating learning in annual reports
- Including our annual self-assessment against the Code

2.0 Complaints Policy

Tell us about your complaint	
Visit our website	Complaints and Compliments webpage
Online form	Contact Us – MyCouncil
Email	complimentsandcomplaints@milton-keynes.gov.uk
Phone	01908 253817
Postal Address	Compliment and complaints, Milton Keynes City Council, Civic, Milton Keynes, MK9 3EJ

It's important that all members of the community have the right to equal access to our Customer Feedback Policy. If you do not have English as a first language or might need help with interpretation and translation services or sign language, braille, or large print. We can make this policy available to you in an accessible format. Contact our complaints team on the information above.

Definition of a complaint

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction about a Council service (whether that service is provided directly by the Council or by a contractor or partner) that requires a response. We will consider complaints from individuals affected and representatives/advocates when the individual is unable to make the complaint themselves.

We will deal with all complaints under our complaints policy unless they are excluded this is explained in Appendix A. This definition should be interpreted widely. If in doubt a matter should be recorded as a complaint. This doesn't include everything, but some common examples of service failure that could cause a complaint are: -

- Delay
- Poor record keeping
- Failure to take action
- Failure to follow procedures or the law
- Poor communication
- Giving out misleading information
- Failure to investigate
- The Council not doing what it said it would

We may not be able to deliver the outcomes that customers expect from complaints, many services we deliver are highly regulated so leave little room for exceptions to be made for individual circumstance. We will be clear with you about what we can and cannot deliver. If we have to say ‘No’ we will explain why we cannot deliver the type of service or the response that is being requested.

Complaints governance

Your complaint will be recorded on our complaints system, and you will be given a CU reference number.

When we receive your complaint our complaints team will review it and allocate it to the correct service for a response, our Head of Customer Data and Insight has corporate responsibility for overseeing the process and our portfolio Holder (Elected Councillor) has cabinet responsibility and oversight. Annually we review our complaints performance and report this to audit committee.

Time Scales

Stage	Working days
Acknowledgement/Triage	5 working days
Stage 1	20 working days plus 10 working days for complex cases
Stage 2 Corporate	20 working days plus 10 working days for complex cases
Stage 2 Stat children	25 working days plus a maximum of 65 for complex cases
Statutory stage 3 (children’s social care)	50 working days to complete the process

We are ambitious and working hard to reduce these timescales in line with the expectations of the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman and the Housing Ombudsman.

Complaint’s process

Acknowledgement

Once you have submitted your complaint, we will acknowledge your complaint within 5 working days sharing with you a CU reference number. This is a unique reference number that you can use when corresponding with us regarding your complaint.

Triage

Complaints will be assigned to the correct service areas to investigate at this time if the complaint looks to involve more than one service, covers a complex area of legislation, the root cause of the complaint happened longer than 12 months ago, or we need more specific information from you to understand your complaint (this is not an exhaustive list of reasons) we will write to you to explain that we will not be able to complete the

complaint investigation within 20 working days and will provide you with a date that you can expect your complaint to be responded to.

Stage one (Comply or Explain)

Complaints will be completed within a maximum of 20 working days from the date submitted unless we explain why we cannot complete the complaints investigation within that time frame. If the complaint is more complex, we will add an additional 10 days to the investigation. A serious complaint or a case where we have previously corresponded with you may go directly to Stage 2 depending on the nature of the complaint.

If you are not happy with the response you receive at Stage 1, you can contact us within a month and ask for a senior officer to complete a full and fair investigation at Stage 2.

Stage Two

Complaints will be completed within a total of 20 working days from the date submitted we will need to understand.

- What specifically you remain unhappy about with the stage one response,
- The impact of the concerns you have raised on you, and
- What you expect the Council to do to put things right.

Your feedback on these points will be considered. If we believe the stage one response answered all these points, there will be no further action and we will not progress your complaint to a stage two investigation.

Depending on the investigation's complexity, we may need to extend the timescales for stage two investigations by 10 more working days, but this will be communicated to the customer in good time. We will keep you up to date on progress.

Note – We would expect you to send us a Stage 2 request within a month of the date of our Stage 1 response. We will use our discretion when considering Stage 2 requests received after this period, but we would be looking for a compelling reason to do so.

Once we have accepted a Stage 2 complaint, a Stage 2 officer will be assigned to investigate and respond to it.

The Stage 2 officer will contact you to: -

- introduce themselves as the officer investigating the complaint,
- agree the scope of the complaint and your desired outcome(s), and
- advise the target date for completion of the investigation.

Remedies

Providing a remedy is about putting right what has gone wrong and learning from it. We will aim to remedy any personal injustice to you or the person you are complaining on behalf of where an investigation into a complaint has identified fault on the part of the Council. There must be a clear link between the fault and the personal injustice.

The remedies we may offer are not necessarily about money. We would look to put you back into the position you would have been in if nothing had gone wrong. We would also look at the root cause of the complaint and aim to make sure that the fault does not happen again. We may issue a financial payment to reimburse you if you have suffered a quantifiable financial loss, or it might be more of a symbolic payment. This serves as an acknowledgement of the distress or difficulties you have experienced.

We do not offer compensation in the way a court would. In some cases, an appropriate remedy may be for us to apologise to you for the fault that caused the injustice. We may look at making a change to a practice, policy, or procedure if we think it is likely that further mistakes may affect other people in the future. When considering an appropriate remedy to a complaint, we will use the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman’s Guidance on Remedies. You can find this document on the Ombudsman’s website at www.lgo.org.uk

Next Steps

If you remain unhappy it is your right to contact either the **Local Government and Social Care** or If you are a tenant of the Council, you can contact the **Housing Ombudsman**.

The Ombudsman’s role is to investigate complaints of maladministration by Local Authorities.

Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman	
Website	www.lgo.org.uk
Postal Address	Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman PO Box 4771 Coventry CV4 0EH
Telephone number	0300 061 0614

Housing Ombudsman	
Website	https://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk
Postal Address	Housing Ombudsman Service, PO Box 1484, Unit D, Preston PR2 0ET
Telephone number	0300 111 3000

3.0 Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code self-assessment results

The Complaint Handling Code sets out good practice for landlords to respond to complaints. You can find it online on [Housing Ombudsman website](#). Each year we assess ourselves against the code. This year, we successfully complied with 67 measures. We were non-compliant with 5 measures and have outlined the work we are doing to work toward compliance actions will be carried out throughout the financial year 2024/2025 to meet these five measures in the code:

Measures	Our steps towards compliance
<p>5.10. Landlords must make reasonable adjustments for residents where appropriate under the Equality Act 2010. Landlords must keep a record of any reasonable adjustments agreed, as well as a record of any disabilities a resident has disclosed. Any agreed reasonable adjustments must be kept under active review.</p>	<p>Our Corporate complaints policy reflects the need to consider the use of reasonable adjustment and its associated record keeping requirements on landlord back-office systems – practice will be implemented in the current financial year 2024-2025.</p>
<p>6.3. Landlords must issue a full response to stage 1 complaints within 10 working days of the complaint being acknowledged.</p>	<p>We are ambitious and working hard to reduce our timescales in line with these expectations and will be closely monitoring our performance. Our current timescales are below, and these will be kept under review for the next 12 months.</p>
<p>6.5. Stage 1 complaint: When an organisation informs a resident about an extension to these timescales, they must be provided with the contact details of the Ombudsman.</p>	<p>Our Complaints policy has been updated to reflect the required standard and our practices are evolving to do the same.</p>
<p>6.16. Stage 2 complaint: When an organisation informs a resident about an extension to these timescales, they must be provided with the contact details of the Ombudsman.</p>	<p>Our Complaints policy has been updated to reflect the required standard and our practices are evolving to do the same.</p>
<p>6.17. Stage 2: A complaint response must be provided to the resident when the answer to the complaint is known, not when the outstanding actions required to address the issue are completed. Outstanding actions must still be tracked and actioned promptly with appropriate updates provided to the resident.</p>	<p>Our Complaints policy has been updated to reflect the required standard and our practices are evolving to do the same.</p>

You can read our completed assessment in detail by visiting [Complaints Handling Code webpage](#).

4.0 Reasonable adjustments and support

It is important that all members of the community have equal access to our Complaints Policy and process - there is no wrong route for customers to raise a complaint with us. If you need additional support to make your complaint, would like to be accompanied by a representative formally or informally, if English is not your first language or you might need help with interpretation and translation services or sign language, braille or large print for example, any requests for reasonable adjustments will be recorded with our complaints team and the service's you are accessing this will be logged on our systems and kept up to date. We can make this policy available to you in an accessible format. Contact our complaints team on the information above.

5.0 Summary data 2023/2024

As a Social Landlord, MKCC owns and manages over 12000 tenanted properties, which are a mixture of:

- Low-cost home ownership properties
- Low-cost rental properties
- Leasehold properties

6.0 Complaint numbers

- **671** complaints were raised about the Housing Service in 2023/24
- **87%** of complaints investigated at Stage one were resolved at this stage
- **13%** of complaints were escalated to Stage two

A number of cases have been escalated by residents to the Housing Ombudsman during this financial year for dispute resolution which is the initial step which assesses whether the case will be referred for investigation by the HO. There is a time differential on this process due to the volume of complaints received by the HO.

7.0 Complaint decisions

Of the 671 complaints that were opened, 579 were given a decision in the 23/24 period; the other cases have been closed in triage (triage is where we close cases as they do not meet the definition of a complaint aligned with our policy.)

Complaint upheld decision	96
Complaint partially upheld	188
Complaint not upheld	295

8.0 Complaint themes

Professional decision making	329
Service failure	249
Contractor related	21
Staff conduct	14

9.0 Housing Ombudsman 2023/2034 summary

It can take some time for cases to complete the Housing Ombudsman assessment stage - this means that some cases that were decided in 2023-2024, were first raised with us in previous financial years.

35 contacts were received from the Housing Ombudsman during this financial year - these include:

- i) evidence request – providing evidence to support the landlord’s reply to a complaint
- ii) information requests – providing specific details on a case
- iii) premature status checks – confirming where the resident’s complaint is in our Corporate process

A significant number of these contacts received from the HO in 2023/2024 have been classified as ‘premature’ – these means that the landlord’s complaints process has not been completed and the HO will monitor this, giving the resident the opportunity to further escalate their case if they remain unhappy with the landlord’s reply once completed.

31 of those cases have been identified as premature by the Housing Ombudsman and had either:

- a) not completed the MKCC complaints process or
- b) are still at the HO’s assessment stage following information submission by MKCC.

7 decisions have been issued to MKCC by the Housing Ombudsman during this financial year. - these decisions have several components which are categorised with any or all of the conditions below across the order as these are the HO’s determinations and judgements of the landlord’s performance.

Maladministration is defined as a formal decision by the Ombudsman that a landlord has failed to do something, done something it shouldn’t have or, in the Ombudsman’s opinion has delayed unreasonably.

7 decisions had an adjudication of maladministration for one or more parts of the original complaint.

4 decisions had an adjudication of severe maladministration for one or more parts of the original complaint.

10.0 Complaints made to the Housing Ombudsman

A number of outcomes have been identified by MKCC in relation to paragraph 52 of the ombudsman code which looks at the below issues.

- A) failed to comply with any relevant legal obligations
- B) failed to comply with any relevant codes of practice
- C) failed to apply its own policies and/or procedures
- D) delayed unreasonably in dealing with the matter
- E) behaved unfairly, unreasonably, or incompetently treated the complainant personally in a heavy-handed, unsympathetic, or inappropriate manner

We have reflected this in a complaints policy and other policies relevant to tenants and leaseholders we are also working with our contractors to ensure that we are aligned in our approach to customer experience.

202107671

The complaint

- a. The landlord's handling of repair issues
- b. Response to the resident's concerns about the condition of the property when it was let
- c. Handling and management of the resident's complaint.

The decision

- a. Landlord ordered to make a formal apology and pay the resident £1250 in compensation
- b. Landlord ordered to inspect the property, identify required repairs and complete any outstanding works

202108160

The complaint

The landlord's handling of:

- a. the resident's housing application.
- b. The landlord's handling of decorative works following damp and mould
- c. c. The landlord's handling of the resident's complaint.

The decision

- a. Landlord ordered to make a formal apology and pay the resident £600 in compensation
- b. Landlord ordered to carry out a vulnerability review of the tenant

202229797

The complaint

The landlord's handling of the resident's:

- a. Reports of leaks in their property
- b. Request for remedial works and damages
- c. Formal complaint

The decision

- Landlord ordered to make a formal apology and pay the resident £1050 in compensation
- Landlord ordered to inspect the property, identify required repairs and complete any outstanding works
- Landlord ordered to introduce a process to review the quality of workmanship delivered by its contractors if the resident raised evident concerns about the works

202102710**The complaint**

The landlord's handling of:

- a. The resident's reports of alleged antisocial behaviour (ASB) from their neighbour
- b. The resident's concerns about the condition of their property
- c. The landlord's complaint handling has also been investigated.

The decision

- Landlord ordered to pay the resident £600 in compensation

201902957**The complaint**

The landlord's:

- a. Response to the resident's reports of multiple repairs required at the property.
- b. Complaint handling.
- c. Record keeping.

The decision

- a. Landlord ordered to make a formal apology and pay the resident £5490 in compensation.
- b. Landlord ordered carry out a management review of this case to identify learning alongside the steps it will be taking to ensure that the failures are not repeated.
- c. Landlord ordered to inspect the property, complete a damp and mould report on the property identifying all outstanding repairs, share it with the HO, schedule works and provide evidence of compliance.

202107671**The complaint**

The landlord's:

- a. handling of repair issues;
- b. response to the resident's concerns about the condition of the property when it was let;
- c. handling and management of the resident's complaint.

The decision

- Landlord ordered to make a formal apology and pay the resident £1250 in compensation.

- Landlord ordered to instruct a Senior Officer to inspect the property with the resident to agree and schedule the outstanding works referenced in the complaint and ensure completion.
- Landlord ordered to complete a 'lessons learnt' reflection on this case, share this with the HO and evidence its compliance.

202202550

The complaint

the landlord's handling of:

- a. The leaseholder's request for an EWS1 form
- b. The landlord's complaint handling.

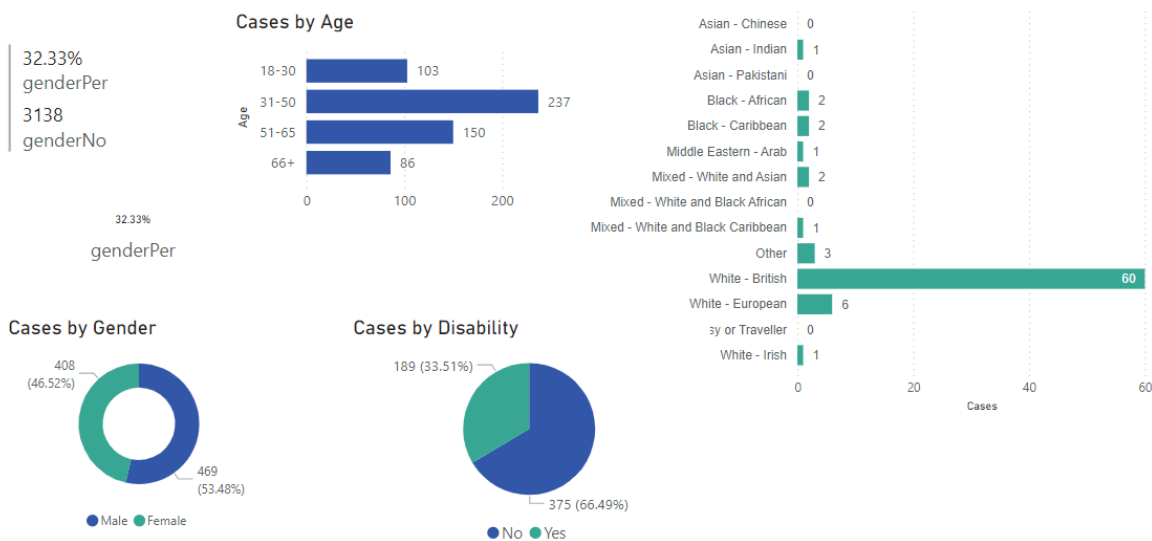
The decision

- Landlord ordered to make a formal apology and pay the resident £800 in compensation.
- Landlord ordered to consider its position on the leaseholders claim for financial losses against its compensation policy.
- Landlord should publish a set of customer service standards for the housing department on its website so that customers know what service standards and response times it can expect from the landlord.

11.0 Customer data

It is optional for customers to share personal data with us, and some choose not to. The below data provides an indication of the demographic profile of the tenants and leaseholders who are raising complaints with us we have over 12,000 properties we are responsible for this date is only a small proportion of our tenants and far fewer than the 671 who raised a complaint with us.

Demography Data (where provided)



Ethnic background

Ethnic background is self-identification by those raising complaints. Below is a summary of those who self- identified when raising a complaint.

Ethnic Background category	No of people who provided this information
Asian, Indian	1
Black African	2
Black Caribbean	2
Arab	1
Mixed- White and Asian	2
Mixed white and Black Caribbean	1
Other	3
White British	60
White Irish	1

Disability

33.5% of residents who had raised a complaint with us identified as having a disability.
66.4% identified as not having a disability.

Gender

Of those residents who had raised a complaint 46.5% of residents self-identified as female and 53.4% of residents identified as male.

Age group

Age range	No of people who provided this information
18-30	103
31-50	237
51-65	150
66+	86

12.0 What we have learnt from feedback

We will take the opportunity to embed the lessons learnt over the past year into our policies and practices driving continual improvements in our role as a Social Landlord. Our tenants are unhappy with our performance, and they have told us about this through their complaints, consultations and through our tenant satisfaction surveys.

As the landlord, we are adopting a three-pronged approach – strategic, holistic and operational – to reviewing and resolving critical cases that have been escalated by the tenant through our formal Complaints process and/or to external statutory bodies, such as the Housing Ombudsman and The Housing Regulator.

What MKCC is doing holistically

Introduction and implementation of the Landlord Directors Board to drive accountability and awareness of our responsibilities as a Housing Landlord and provide assurance to the Corporate Leadership Team of the Council.

- Serves as the embodiment of the Landlord function and populated by Senior Directors empowered to make decisions and drive the consistent achievement of Corporate Landlord responsibilities across the authority
- Escalation and decision-making Board focused on studying, challenging and directing the outputs of the service areas based on the Housing management information

Introduction and implementation of Housing Complaints Board to improve visibility of critical cases, using the review process to highlight specifics and/or commonalities and provide an opportunity to reflect on lessons learnt and inform the Landlords' Board.

What MKCC is doing strategically

Bringing our service areas together to complete a critical case review for those cases already investigated by our Corporate complaints process as well as those submitted to the Housing Ombudsman.

Using our management information, gathered through processes i.e., Complaints, Tenants Satisfaction Surveys, Contractor repair reports, Housing Business Systems [NEC] data to review our relationships with our tenants and listen to what they are saying to us. We are using it to manage expectations and improve our service delivery by doing what we have said we are going to do, when we have said so and communicating with them if anything changes. Outcomes and action tracking owned by the specific services with corporate oversight.

What MKCC is doing operationally

Adopting a customer focussed approach to re-establishing the landlord and tenant relationship by making contact in an accessible way and communicating our understanding of their needs alongside our responsibilities as a Social Landlord.

We are taking ownership of the relationship with the tenant through our Neighbourhoods team who are responsible for managing the people-side of our landlord responsibilities.

This includes:

- Initiating contact with the tenant through the Housing Officer in a way that they accepts i.e., via email
- Confirm a visit date at the property with the tenant and to establish the Housing Officer as their point of contact at MKCC
- Using the tenancy audit as an opportunity to agree contractor visit dates and establish the working relationship
- Resetting the contact points for the tenant i.e., talk to your Housing Officer for support in the first instance; call Mears to report repairs
- Clarifying the escalation process for the tenant and for the contractor through the landlord

