

# FAREHAM

## BOROUGH COUNCIL

### Report to Audit and Governance Committee

**Date:** 23 September 2024

**Report of:** Director of Housing

**Subject:** HOUSING ANNUAL COMPLAINTS PERFORMANCE & SERVICE IMPROVEMENT 2023/24

#### SUMMARY

Following the implementation of the Social Housing Regulation Act 2023, the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code (2024) became statutory for Registered Providers of Social Housing from 01 April 2024.

As part of fulfilling the requirements of the Code, Fareham Housing are required to produce a 'Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report' for the preceding (i.e. 2023/24) year. This report must be reported to the Council's governing body, with their response subsequently published.

This report is intended to fulfil those requirements, and to provide the Audit and Governance Committee with insight and some analysis on Fareham Housing Complaints, and assurance that learnings from complaints are being taken forward.

#### RECOMMENDATION

It is RECOMMENDED that the Audit and Governance Committee: -

- (a) note the content of the 2023/24 Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report (at Appendix 1), which relates to Fareham Housing; and
- (b) provide a response to the report that can be published on the Council's website and made available to the Housing Ombudsman.

## **INTRODUCTION**

1. During the last 12-18 months there have been some significant changes in the regulatory requirements that impact Fareham Housing. This has been predominately driven by the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023.
2. As a result of the Act, the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code became mandatory for all Registered Providers of Social Housing. This requirement also interlinks with specific expectations introduced by the Regulator of Social Housing through new Consumer Standards (which began on 01 April 2024).
3. One mandatory requirement is annual submissions to the Housing Ombudsman. This must include an annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report, which looks back at the previous years' complaints and meets certain analysis requirements as stipulated by the Ombudsman. This report must be reported to the Council's governing body, and the governing body's response to the report must also be published.

## **CORPORATE COMPLAINT HANDLING**

4. The Council adopted a new Corporate Complaints Policy earlier this year. This ensured the Council's approach to complaints complied with the Housing Ombudsman's new Complaint Handling Code (2024). The new corporate approach to complaint handling commenced on 01 April 2024.
5. Key changes from the 01 April 2024 included the Council's complaint process moving to two stages instead of the previous three, that all Council complaints (not just housing related) are now administered and recorded centrally, and that all expressions of dissatisfaction are now taken through the formal complaint process (providing they are not service requests).

## **2023/24 FAREHAM HOUSING COMPLAINTS**

6. Although the updated Housing Ombudsman Code and the new Consumer Standards from the Regulator of Social Housing only applied from 01 April 2024, Officers have recently had confirmation that a 'Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report' must be completed relating to housing complaints for 2023/24 (i.e. the year prior to the new requirements becoming mandatory).
7. Appendix 1 includes a 'Fareham Housing Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report' for 2023/24. This should be considered by the Audit and Governance Committee who should provide a response that can be published on the Council's website and made available to the Housing Ombudsman. This will be part of the Council demonstrating compliance with the Code, and must be completed by 30 September 2024.
8. To meet the Housing Ombudsman Code requirements, the report at Appendix 1 includes a qualitative and quantitative analysis of the landlord's (i.e. Fareham Housing's) complaint handling, a summary of complaints the landlord has refused to accept (none), any findings on non-compliance by the Ombudsman

(none), any Ombudsman reports about the landlord's performance or work (none).

9. It should be noted (as referred to above) that the approach to complaint handling changed from 01 April 2024. Significant improvement in both monitoring and performance are anticipated for 2024/25.
10. In addition to the report at Appendix 1, a completed self-assessment against the Housing Ombudsman Code is included at Appendix 2. This uses a specific template provided by the Ombudsman and forms part of the mandatory requirements.
11. As detailed in Appendix 1, 36 complaints were received by Fareham Housing in 2023/24. 11% (4No.) of those complaints were fully upheld, 42% (15No.) were partially upheld, and 39% (14No.) were not upheld (3No. were N/A). Of note is that many expressions of dissatisfaction during 2023/24 would have been responded to by Officers, and not necessarily have been taken through a formal complaint process. It is therefore anticipated that the complaint levels will increase in 2024/25 due to the change in how complaints/dissatisfaction are recorded and addressed since 01 April 2024, and the increased signposting for reporting complaints and the channels available for doing so.
12. The report at Appendix 1 also explains where learning and/or service improvements have been identified. It is important that there is a positive culture around complaint handling. Effective complaint handling will include providing an apology and remedies when relevant, and it can help to identify issues, risks, or the need for policy or procedures to be updated.
13. All the data provided at Appendix 1 relates to the entire Fareham Housing service. This therefore includes complaints that fall outside of the Council's responsibility as landlord (such as homelessness, emergency accommodation, or waiting list issues). In subsequent reporting years Officers anticipate further breakdown of the data and information as part of reporting, enabling improved analysis and understanding.

## **RISK ASSESSMENT**

14. If the Council were unable to satisfactorily demonstrate compliance with the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code, then this may result in the Ombudsman issuing a Complaint Handling Failure Order. Any Complaint Handling Failure Order would be published on the Ombudsman's website and shared with the Regulator of Social Housing.

## **CONCLUSION**

15. The Council's complaint handling approach changed significantly from 01 April 2024. The Housing Ombudsman require analysis and reporting on complaints for the preceding year (2023/24).
16. The 'Fareham Housing Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report' for 2023/24 provides detail about the amount and type of complaints,

including identifying service improvement opportunities.

17. Work is underway across the Housing service to continually embed a positive culture around complaints, and to ensure complaints are dealt with thoroughly, fairly, whilst within timescales wherever possible.

**Appendices:**

Appendix 1: Fareham Housing Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report 2023/24

Appendix 2: Housing Ombudsman Self-Assessment Checklist for Fareham Housing 2024

**Background Papers:**

None

**Reference Papers:**

Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code [The Complaint Handling Code | Housing Ombudsman Service \(housing-ombudsman.org.uk\)](https://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk)

Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 [Social Housing \(Regulation\) Act 2023 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk)

**Enquiries:**

For further information on this report please contact Robyn Lyons (Director of Housing) (Tel: 01329 824305)