Sandwell
Metropolitan Borough Council

Housing Complaints



Annual Report

April 2025 - March 2026

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1. Introduction

The Housing Resolutions Team has now been investigating and responding to Housing complaints for two years. This year, the team have begun investigating Local Office complaints along with Repairs and Maintenance complaints, with a view to eventually investigating and responding to all Housing complaints over the coming year. This will provide residents with continuity in our approach to investigating and responding to complaints, and allow us to focus on improving the services we provide to residents by continually learning from complaints.

This year we have set up the Housing Complaints Panel, which is a group of residents who provide us with feedback on our complaint responses and suggestions for improvements. This ensures we are listening to our residents and allows us to improve our approach. The group meet quarterly to discuss anonymised complaints, and the feedback is used for learning and improvement.

During this year we have improved our compliance with the Housing Ombudsman Complaints Handling Code, and our residents receive timely responses to the complaints they've made. We are responding to more complaints within our published timescales than other comparable Social Landlords, with 92% of complaints being handled within the Ombudsman timescales in the last quarter of the year.

We are embedding a culture of compensation being considered as part of redress for service failures, to recognise distress and inconvenience caused to residents when things do go wrong. We are focused on being accountable for our failures and committed to learning from them.

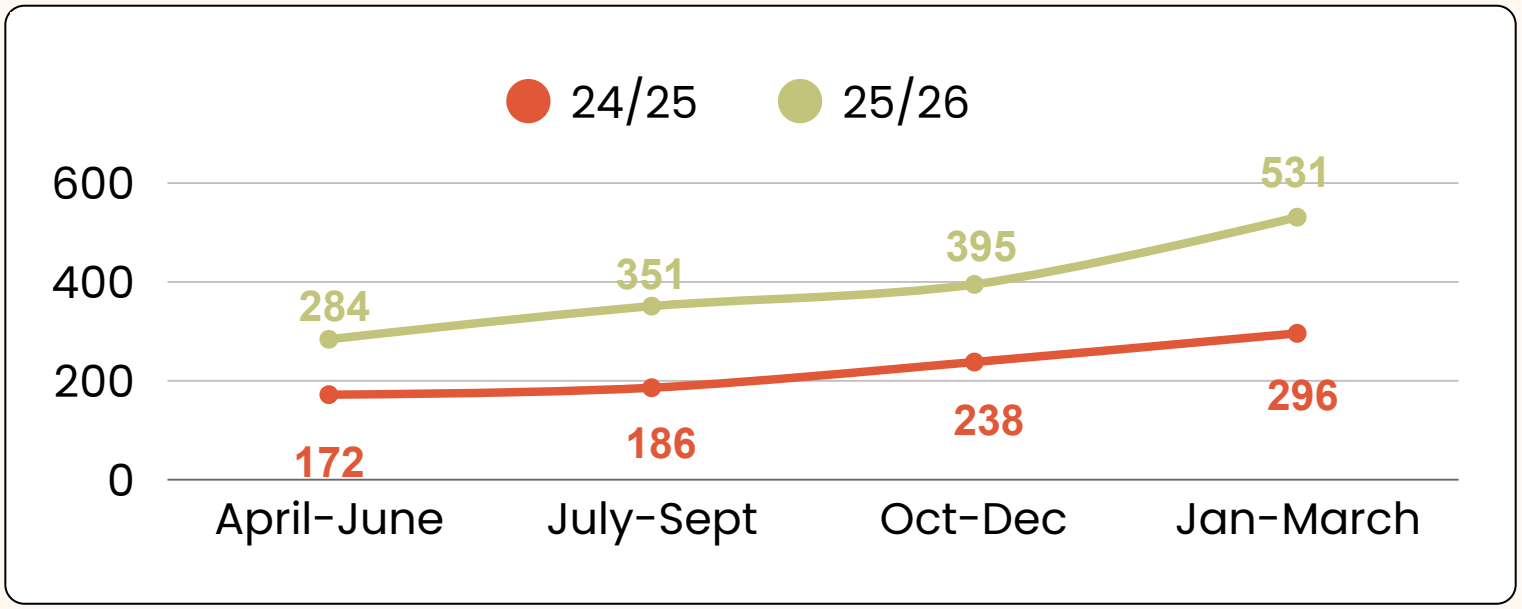
This approach will continue into next year, driving improvement and a healthy, positive, complaints culture.

2. Complaints performance

Stage 1 complaints

Stage 1 is the investigation stage. We will try to resolve your complaint straight away - when we can't, we will investigate and provide you with a formal response.

Stage 1 complaints received each quarter compared to last year



1561 Stage 1 complaints were received between April 25 and March 26

Since April 2024 there has been an increase in complaints received in most quarters, with only a slight reduction on the previous quarter in quarter 1 this year.

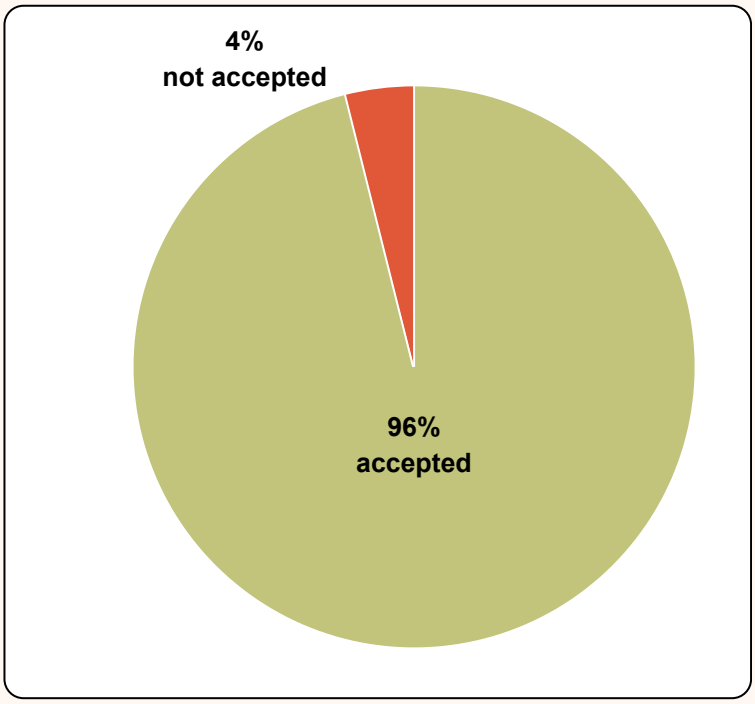
We received an average of **390** stage 1 complaints each quarter, compared to last years average of **223**.

**The following information relates to closed stage 1 complaints that were received.*
14 stage 1 complaints received between April 2025 and March 2026 are still open.

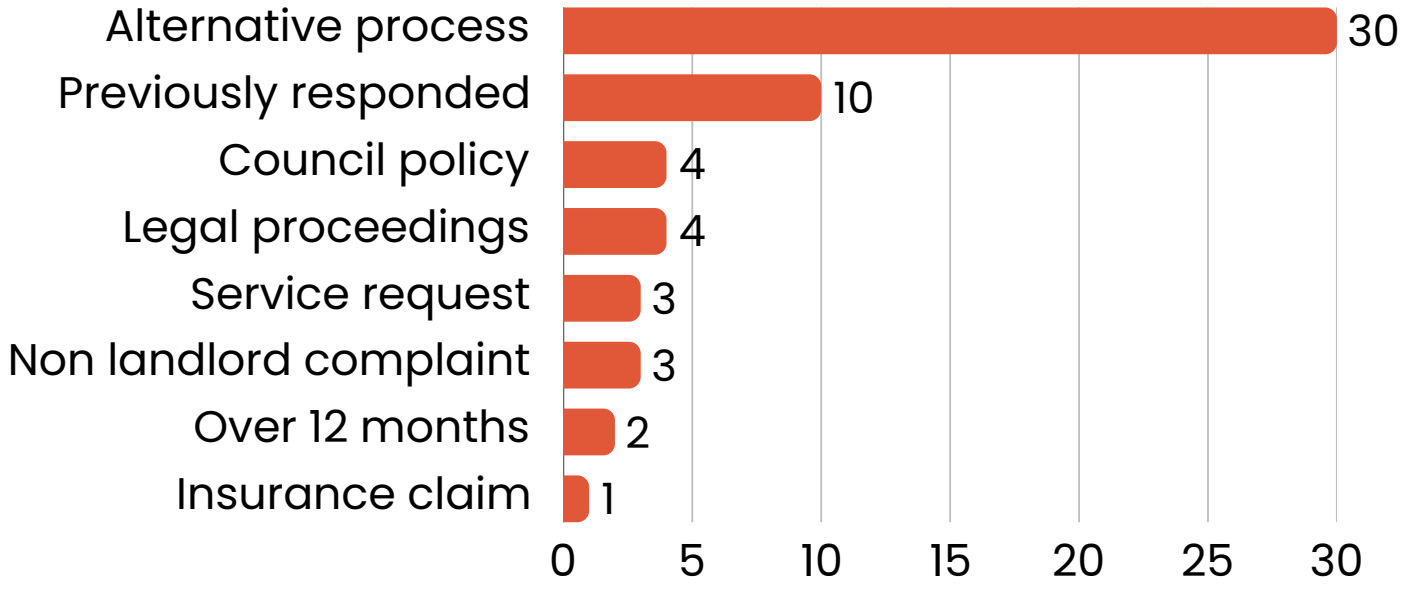
1547 Stage 1 complaints were closed

Accepted stage 1 complaints

There are some complaints that we do not investigate, these are set out in the Housing Ombudsman Service's Complaint Handling Code.

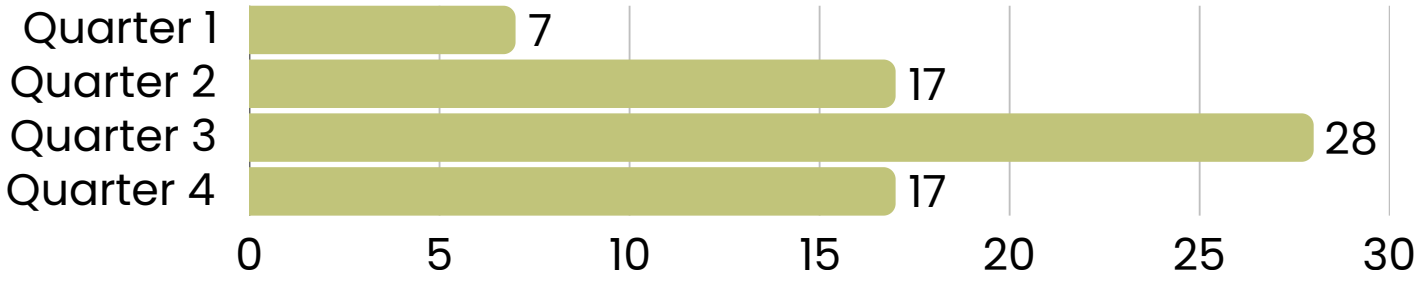


Reasons complaints were not accepted



Closed as fast fix

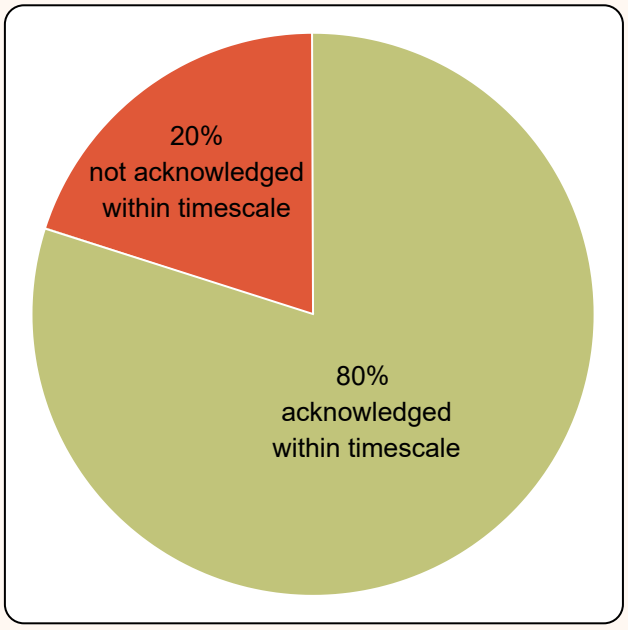
Where your complaint is resolved to your satisfaction and you do not wish to continue with the formal investigation, the complaint will be closed as a fast fix.

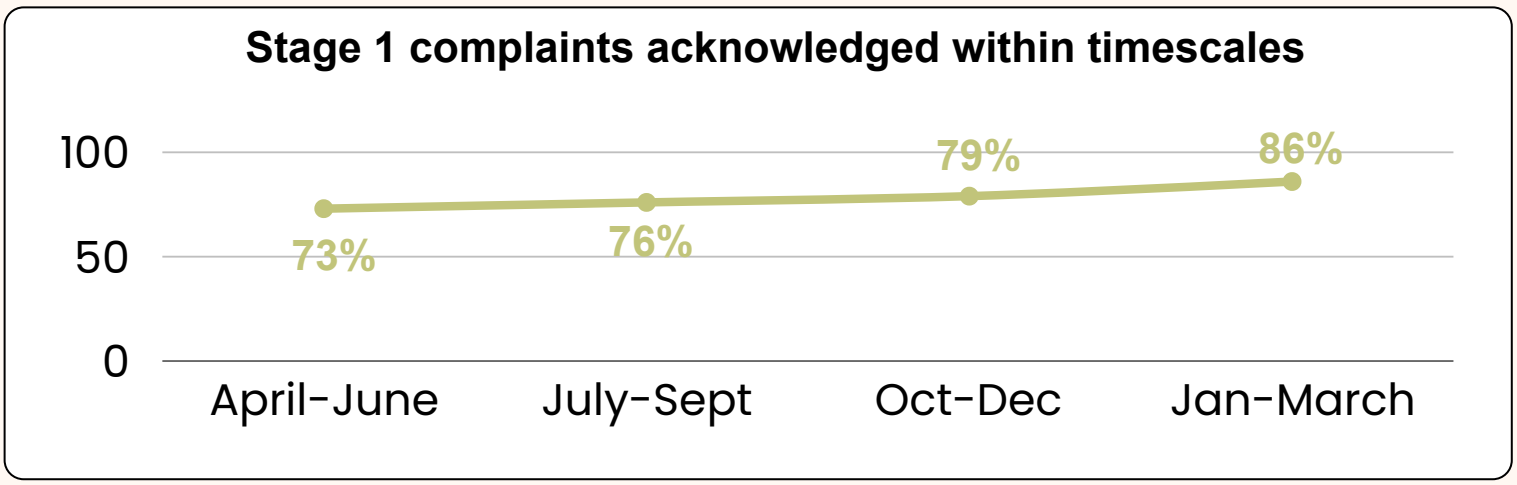


1421 stage 1 complaints were progressed for formal investigation

Acknowledged stage 1 complaints

Where your complaint progresses for formal investigation, the Housing Ombudsman Service's Complaint Handling Code allows 5 working days for a stage 1 complaint to be accepted and acknowledged.





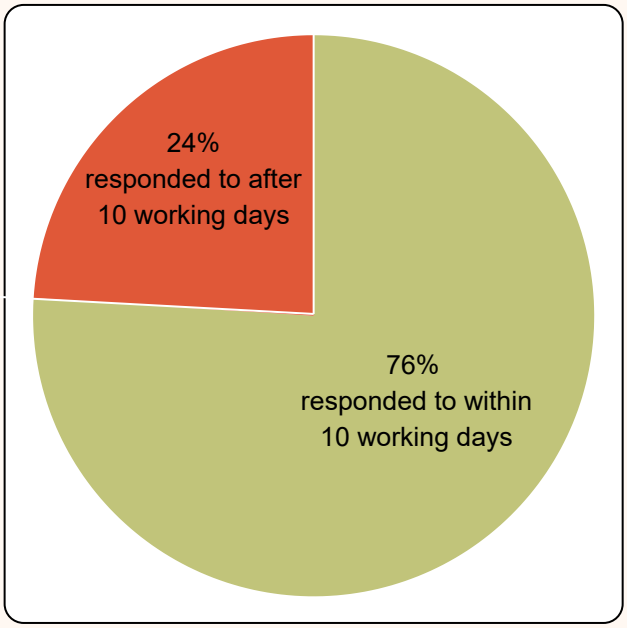
We must then investigate and respond to your complaint within 10 working days from the date of acknowledgement. We can extend the response time to 20 working days if needed and with your agreement.

Where complaints were not formally acknowledged, the working days to complete has been calculated from the date we accepted/received the complaint.

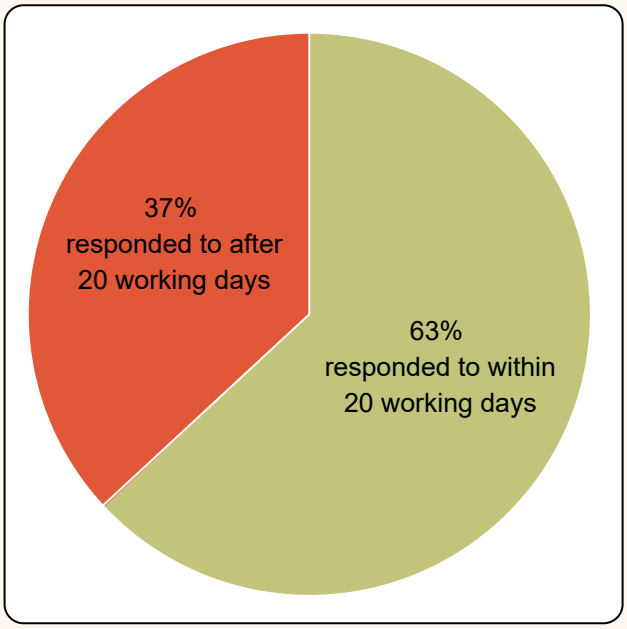
1004 stage 1 complaints were not extended

417 stage 1 complaints were extended

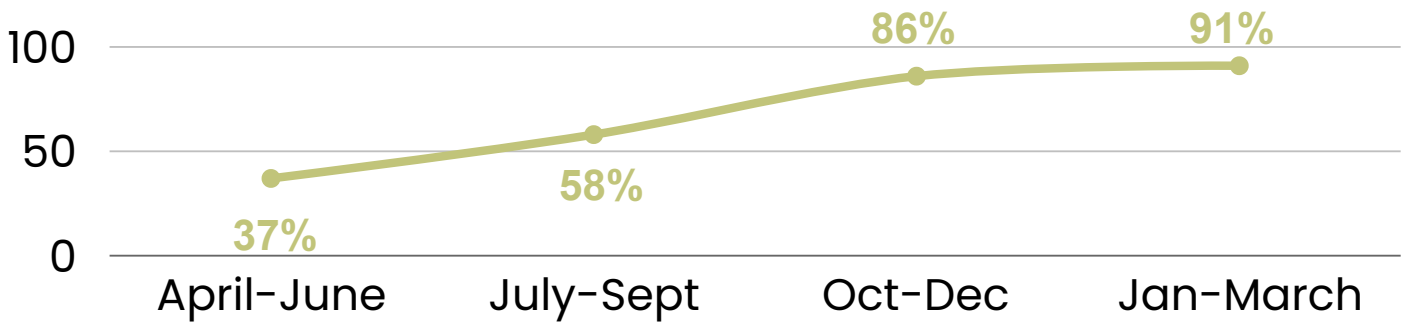
Not extended stage 1 response



Extended stage 1 response



Stage 1 complaints responded to within timescales

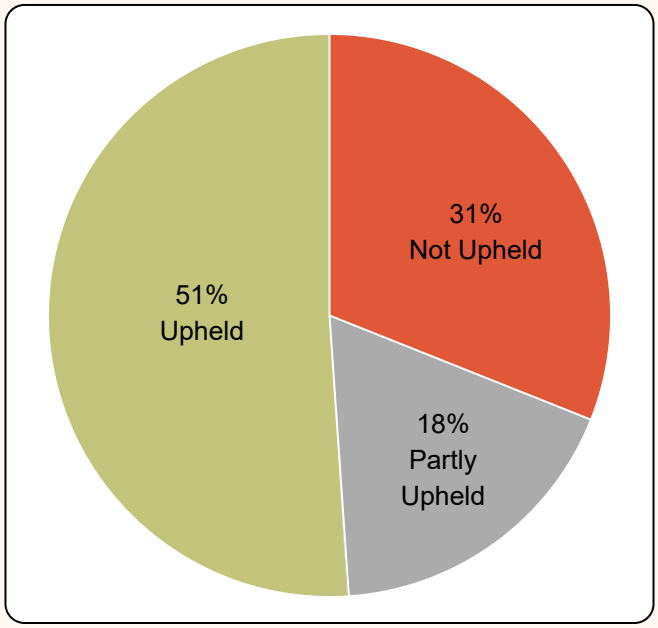


Average time to respond to stage 1 complaints

17 Working Days

724 (51%) stage 1 complaints were upheld

Outcomes of accepted and closed stage 1 complaints



69% of stage 1 complaints were either partly upheld or upheld which is a slight increase on **67%** in **2024-2025**.

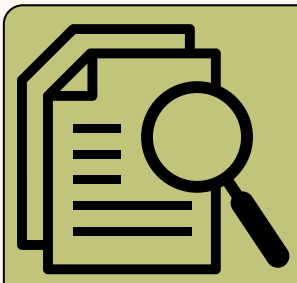
As part of our response to a complaint we may offer compensation, in the form of a compensation payment to recognise loss, suffering or inconvenience.

135

Stage 1 complaints were offered compensation

£17,488.36

Total compensation was awarded



Case Study

We received a complaint from a vulnerable resident with a heart condition, who was frequently stranded in their flat due to recurring lift breakdowns over the past year.

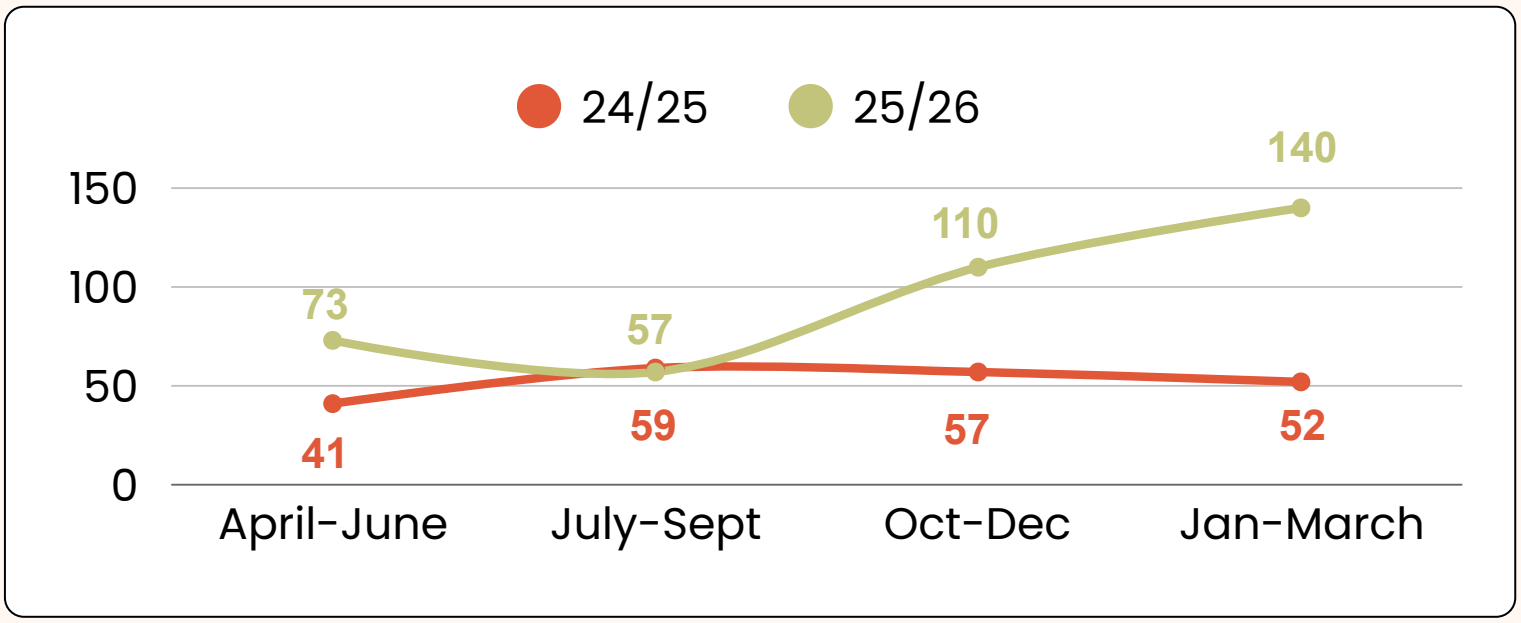
Whilst the investigation confirmed that we met all our legal and maintenance obligations meaning we could not uphold the technical aspect of the complaint, we did uncover a service failure regarding our communication. The local housing office failed to follow our Standard Operating Procedure to proactively contact and support them during these outages. To resolve the matter, we offered an apology and £150 in compensation to acknowledge the distress caused by this communication failure. We fed these findings back to the local team as a lessons-learned action to ensure we do not let our vulnerable residents down in the future.

Stage 2 complaints

Stage 2 is the review stage - if you are not happy with the outcome of your stage 1complaint, you can ask for the outcome to be reviewed.

You will need to tell us why you were unhappy with the stage 1 response that you received - a different officer will review your stage 2 complaint.

Stage 2 complaints received so far this year compared to last year



380 Stage 2 complaints were received between April 25 and March 26

**The following information relates to closed stage 2 complaints that were received.*
13 stage 2 complaints received between April 2025 and March 2026 are still open.

2 stage 2 complaints were closed as fast fix

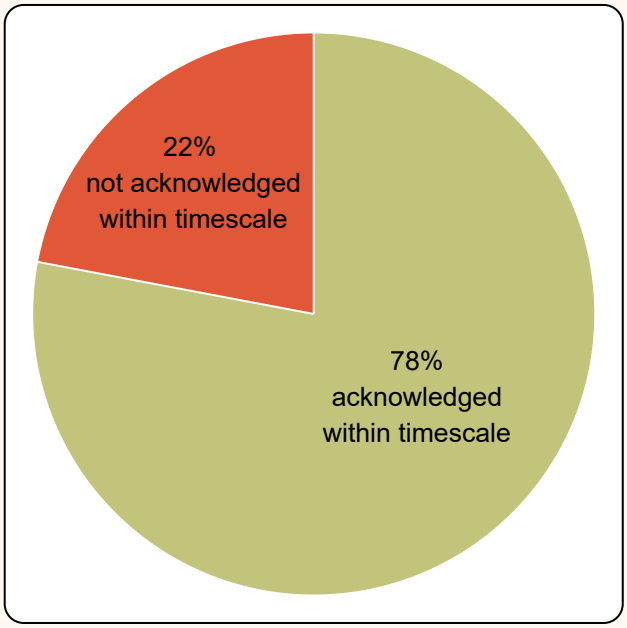
4 stage 2 complaints were not accepted



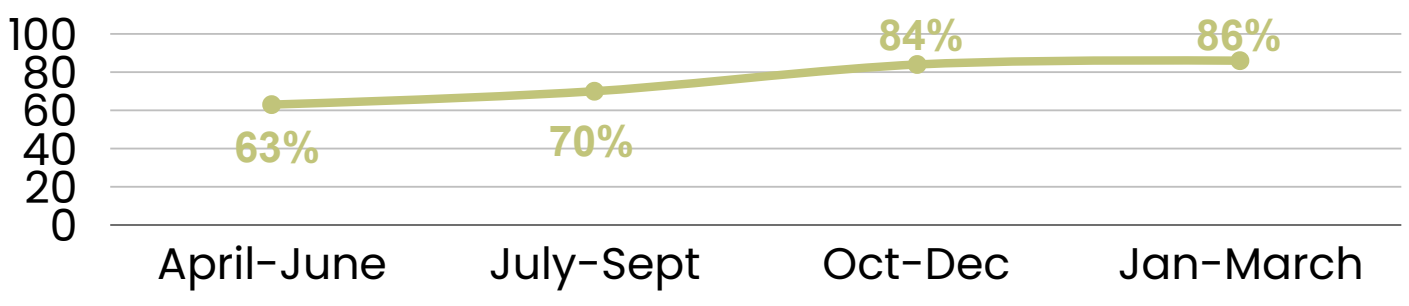
361 Stage 2 complaints progressed for formal investigation

Acknowledged stage 2 complaints

Where your complaint progresses for formal investigation, the Housing Ombudsman Service's Complaint Handling Code allows 5 working days for a stage 2 complaint to be accepted and acknowledged.



Stage 2 complaints acknowledged within timescales



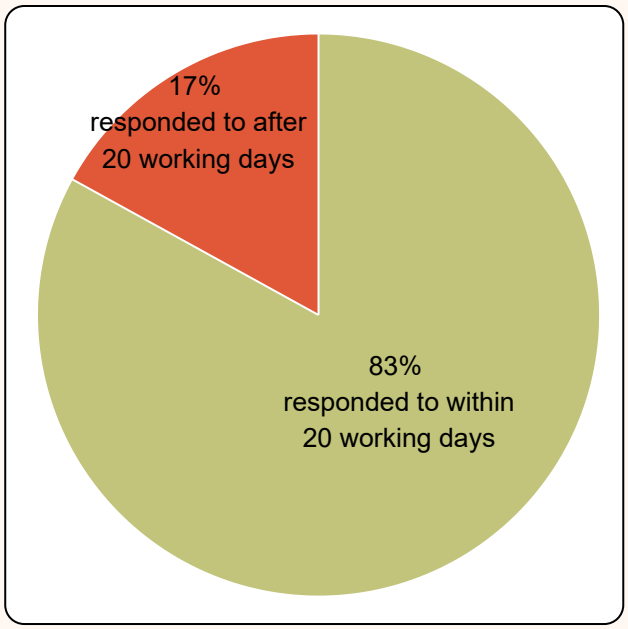
We must then investigate and respond to your complaint within **20 working days** from the date of acknowledgement. We can extend the response time to **40 working days** if needed and with your agreement.

Where complaints were not formally acknowledged, the working days to complete has been calculated from the date we accepted/received the complaint.

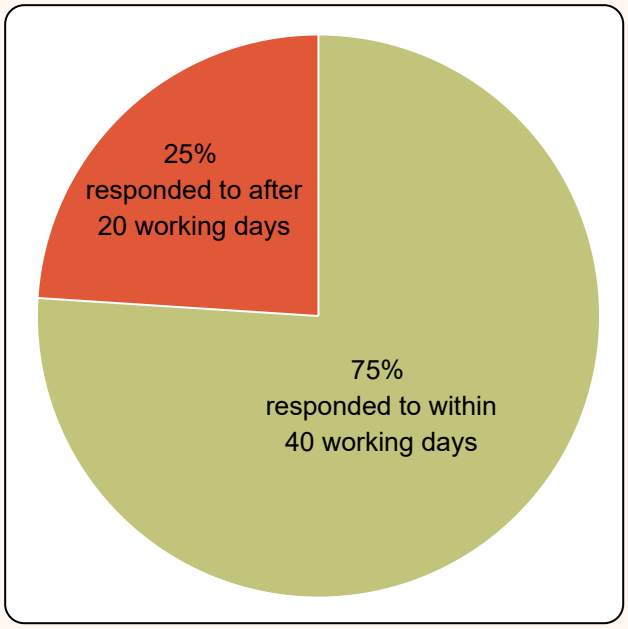
232 stage 2 complaints were not extended

129 stage 2 complaints were extended

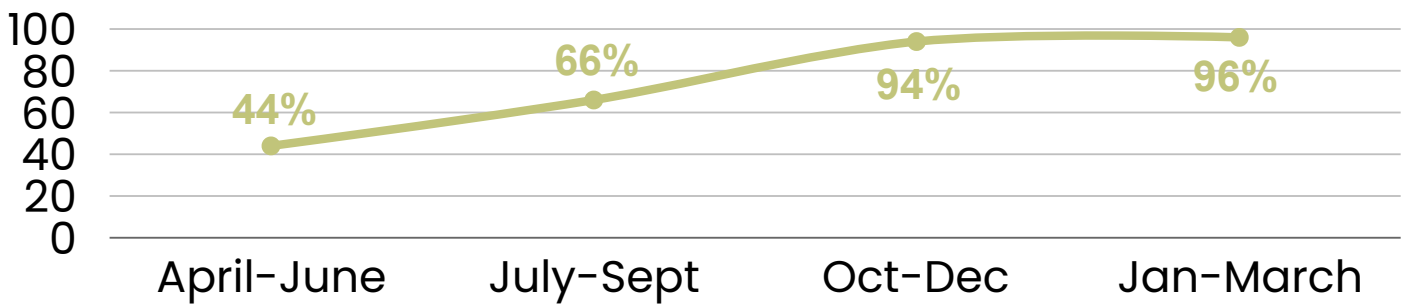
Not extended stage 2 response



Extended stage 2 response



Stage 2 complaints responded to within timescales

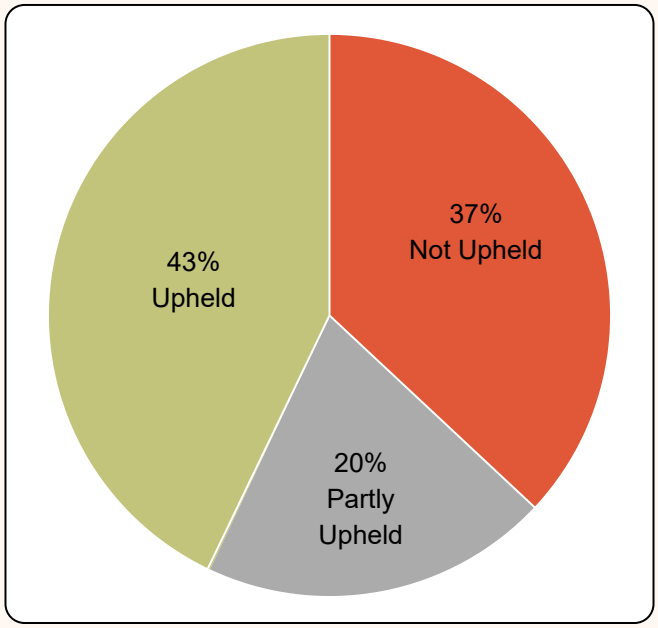


Average time to respond to stage 2 complaints

22 Working Days

156 (43%) stage 2 complaints were upheld

Outcomes of accepted and closed stage 2 complaints



63% of stage 2 complaints were partly upheld or upheld which is similar to the **62%** in 2024-2025.

As part of our response to a complaint we may offer compensation, in the form of a compensation payment to recognise loss, suffering or inconvenience.

89

Stage 2 complaints were offered compensation

£14,010.50

Total compensation was awarded

Case Study

The tenant was in a new tenancy and initially reported multiple repair issues, some of which were causing significant distress due to a lack of resolution and inconsistent communication.

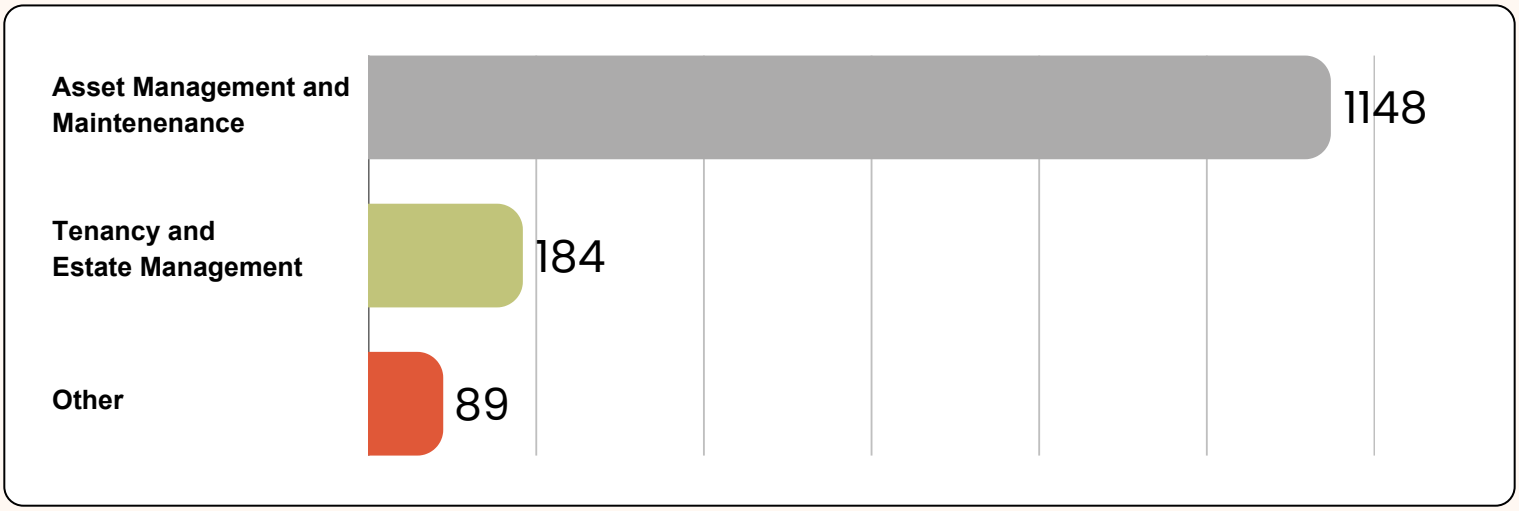
Time was taken to engage directly with the tenant to fully understand the impact of the outstanding works on their daily living, including the anxiety caused by repeated follow-ups and the need to explain issues to multiple officers. A review of the case identified where processes had broken down, and liaison was undertaken with relevant teams to coordinate a clear resolution plan. Ongoing monitoring was maintained to ensure works were completed to a satisfactory standard, and where concerns remained, further action was taken to address these promptly.

Regular updates were provided, and a single point of contact approach was established to improve communication and enable swift resolution of any additional issues raised. The tenant reported that they felt heard, valued, and supported throughout the process. They have since expressed confidence in their tenancy and are now looking forward to settling into their home. The tenant also acknowledged and credited the perseverance, professionalism, and support of the officer and supporting operatives involved.

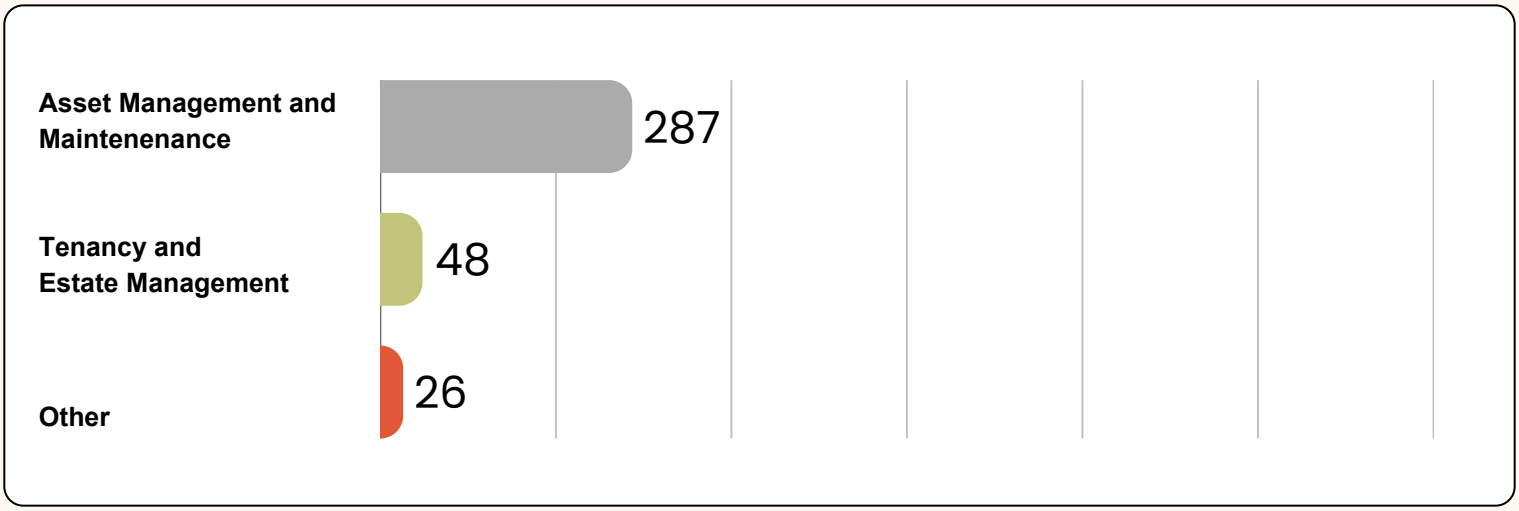
3. Complaints by service area

Breakdown of complaints progressed for formal investigation and closed.

Stage 1 complaints



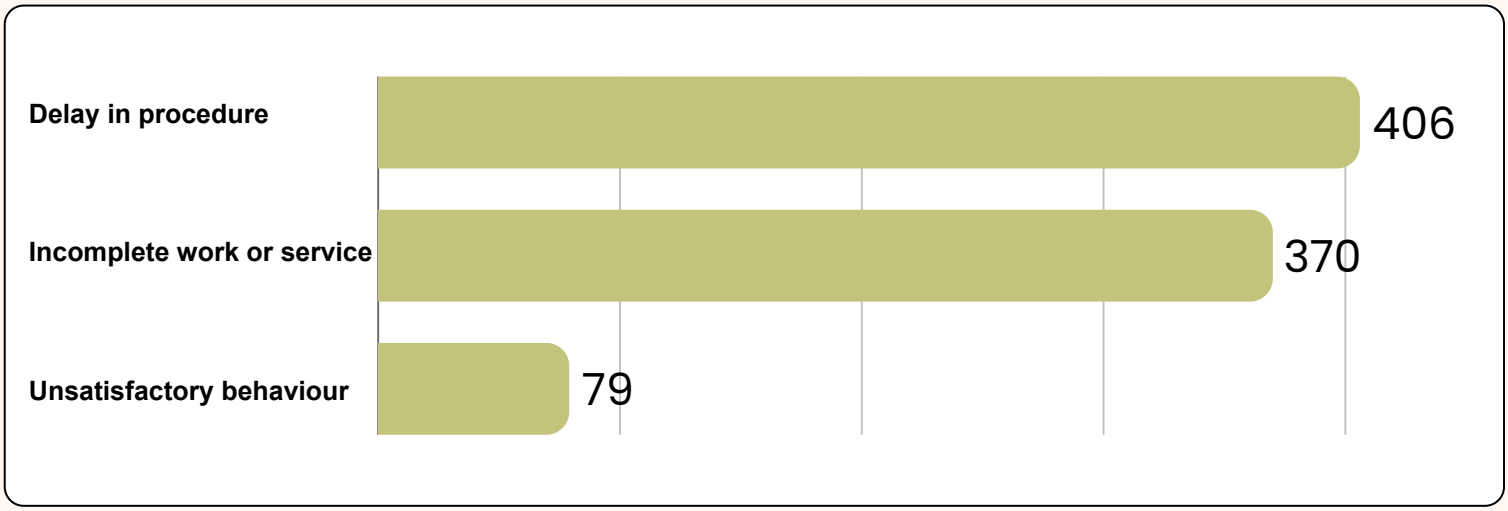
Stage 2 complaints



Asset Management and Improvement

Repairs and maintenance are carried out by our Asset Management and Improvement service. They ensure your safety, security and comfort by providing well-maintained and high-quality homes and communal areas.

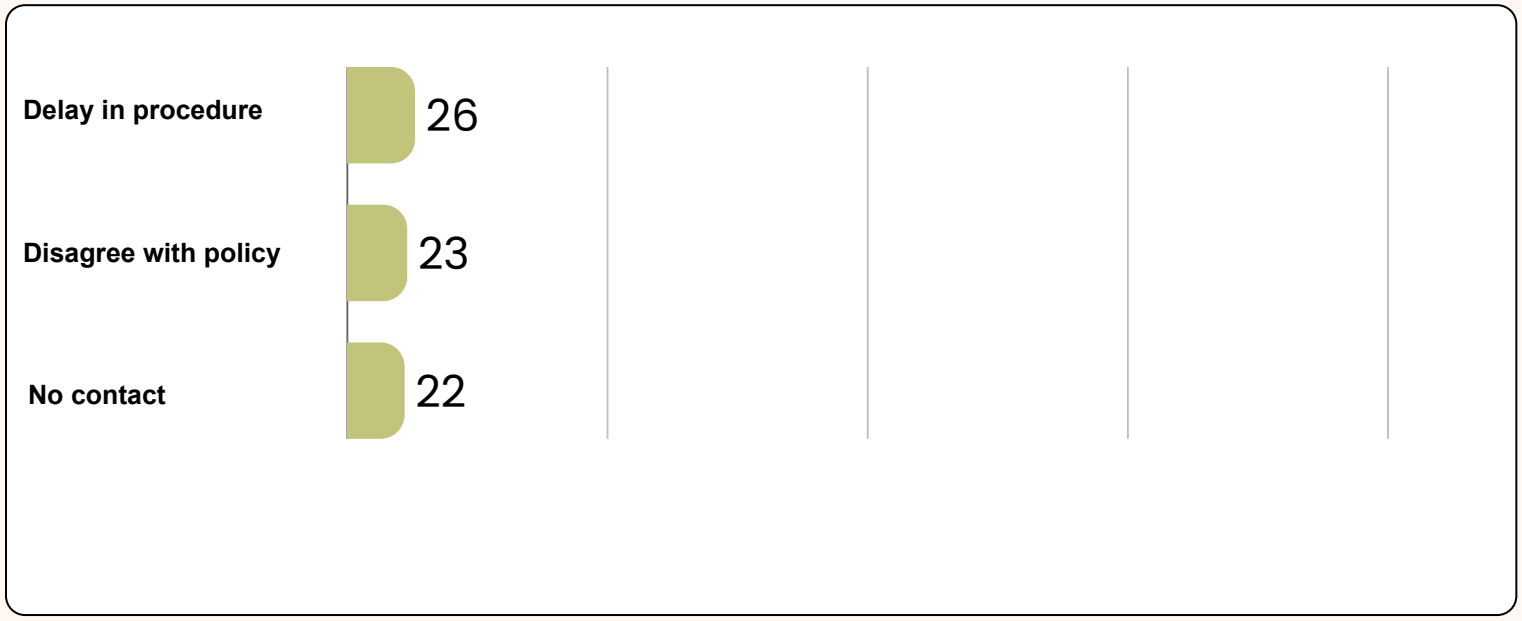
Top 3 Reasons for stage 1 complaints



Tenancy and Estate Management

Tenancy and Estate Management services help you live in your home and community and manage surrounding housing areas. This service includes housing officers, caretakers and cleaners.

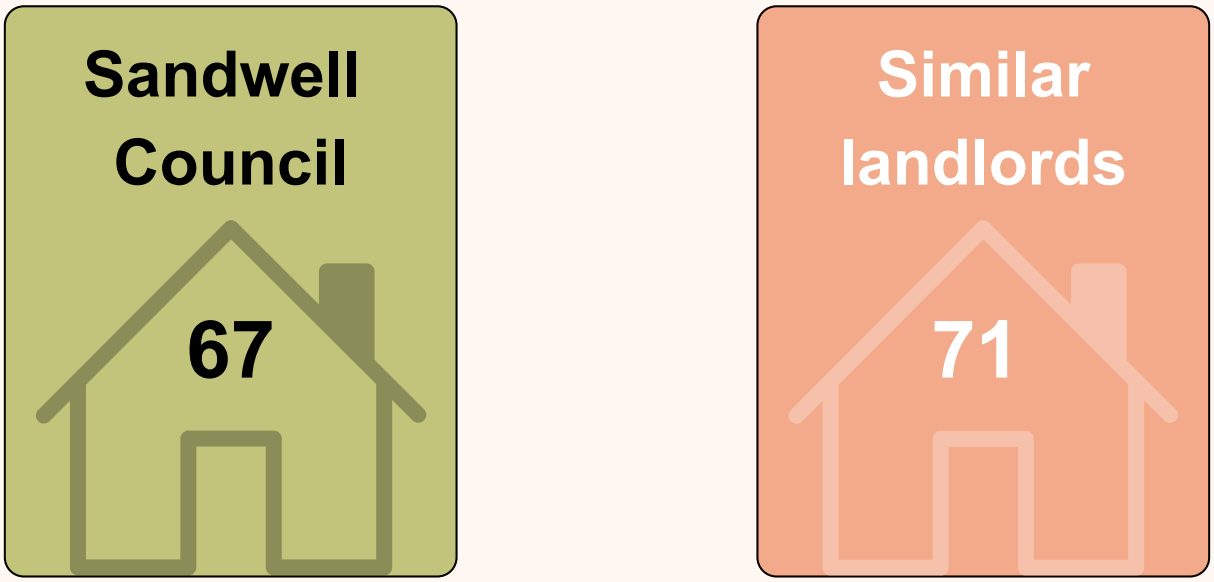
Top 3 reasons for stage 1 complaints



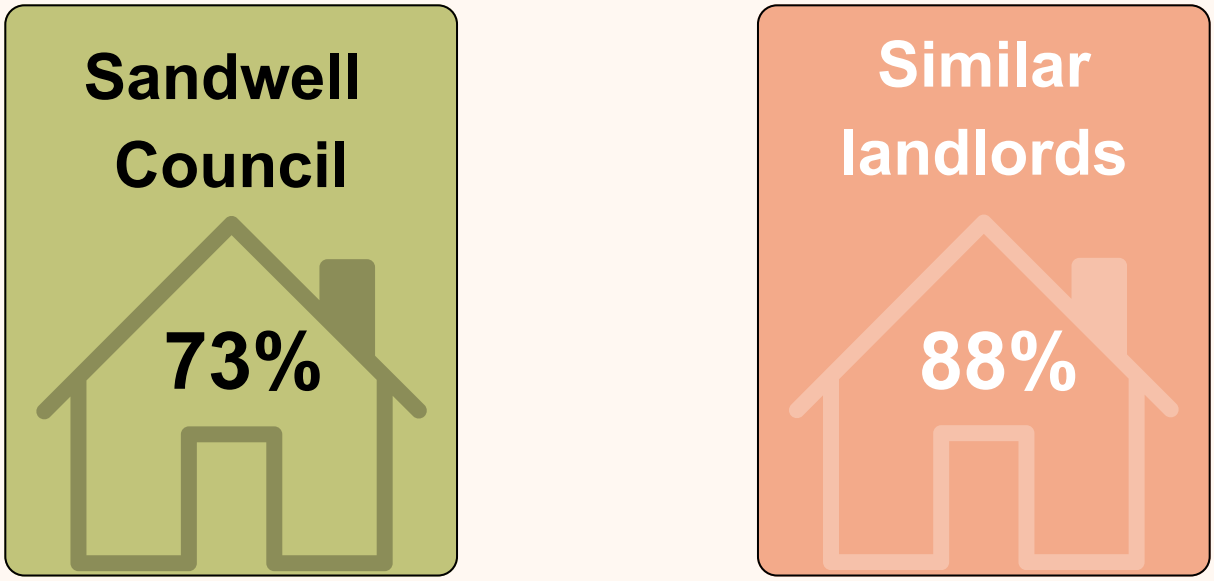
4. How are we doing?

It's helpful for us to see how we are doing compared to similar landlords.

Number of stage 1 and 2 complaints per 1000 properties



Stage 1 and 2 complaints responded to within Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code timeframes



5. Stage 1 demographics

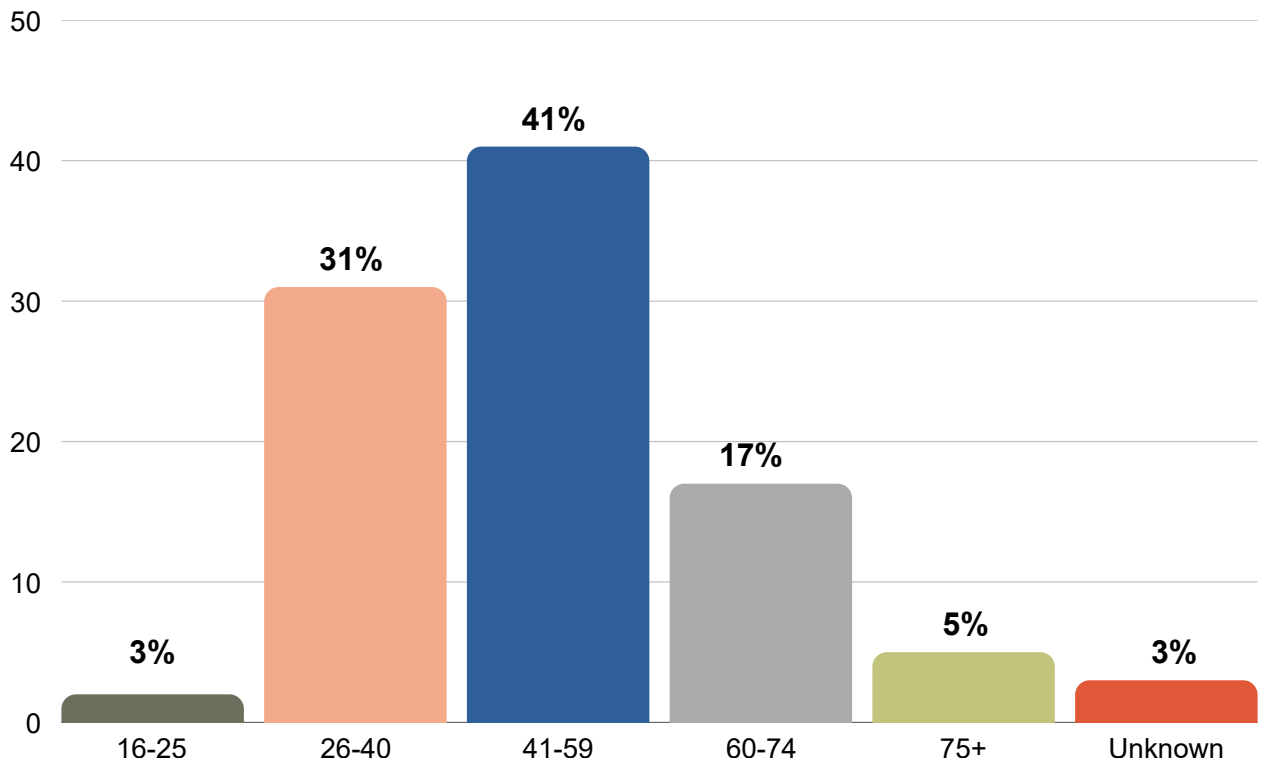
Gender



Ethnicity

White British	56%	Asian British Pakistani	1%
Refused	13%	Mixed White and Asian	1%
Black or Black British Caribbean	10%	White Irish	1%
Asian or Asian British Indian	4%	Mixed Other	1%
Black or Black British African	4%	Black or Black British other	1%
White Other	3%	Chinese or Ethnic Group Other	1%
Mixed White and Black Caribbean	2%	Gypsy	1%
Asian or Asian British Bangladeshi	1%	Mixed White and Black Affrican	1%
Asian or Asian British Other	1%		

Age



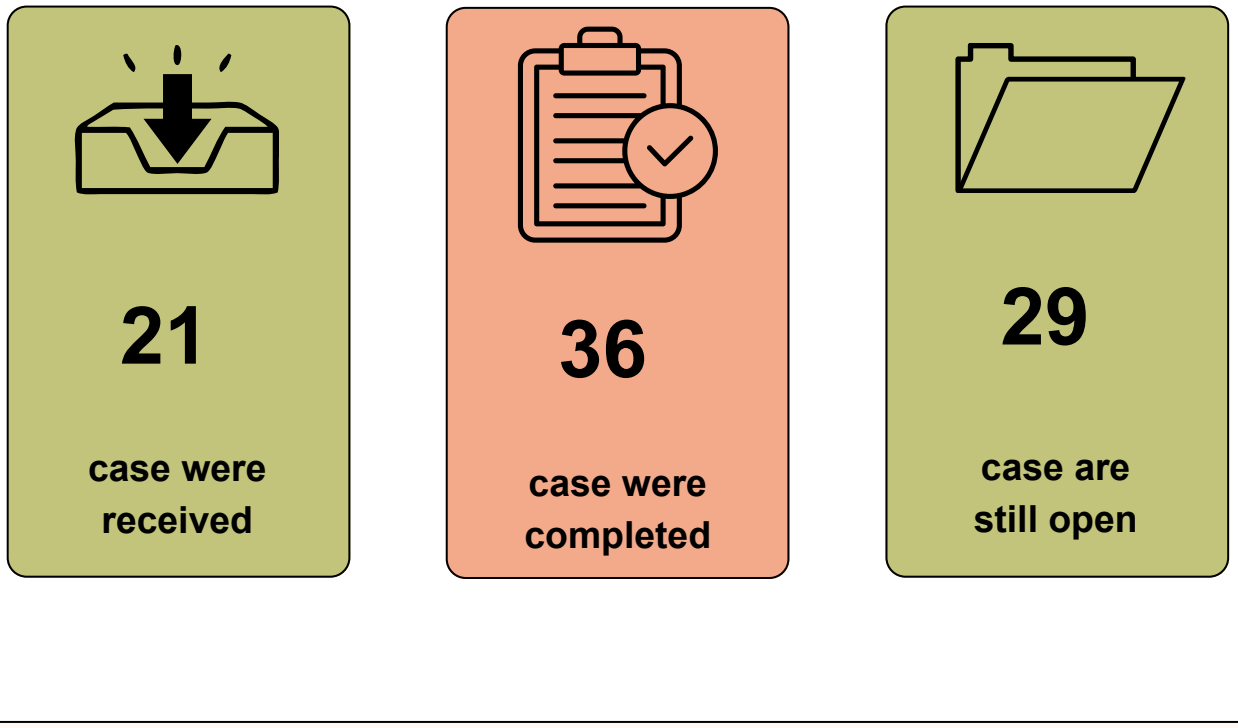
6. Housing Ombudsman cases

The Housing Ombudsman Service is an independent, impartial, and free service for social housing residents.

They make the final decision on disputes between residents and landlords that are registered members of its scheme - including tenants and leaseholders of social landlords.

The Ombudsman can only consider a complaint for investigation where they are satisfied that the complaint issues have been raised and investigated by a landlord through its dedicated complaint procedure and provided a final response.

They will also consider a complaint where they are satisfied that the resident has raised the issues and there has been failure by the landlord in its complaint handling.



**The length of time it takes the Ombudsman to investigate cases means they may not always be received and closed within the same financial year.*

Outcomes

The Ombudsman can issue determinations and / or actions following their investigations.

Determinations

Following investigations, the Ombudsman can find that there has been maladministration. This means the landlord has failed to do something, done something it shouldn't have or has delayed unreasonably.

A total of **26 maladministration determinations** were received for closed cases.

8	**Maladministration for complaint handling**
5	**Maladministration for handling of reports of damp and mould**
3	**Maladministration for handling of report of a leak**
1	**Maladministration for handling of report of noisy floorboards**
1	**Maladministration for handling of report of lift breakdown**
4	**Maladministration for handling of reports of repairs**
1	**Maladministration for handling of request for new garden gate**
1	**Maladministration for handling of pest control**
2	**Maladministration for handling of report of anti-social behaviour**

Complaint handling failure order

There was **1 complaint handling faliure order** received for closed cases.

1	Failing to respond to a request to escalate a stage 1 complaint

Reasonable redress

There were **2 reasonable redress determinations** received for closed cases.

1	Reasonable redress for handling of request for emergency lift procedure
1	Reasonable redress for handling of concerns raised by the resident about staff conduct during and after a homevisit

Service Failure

A total of **13 service failure determination** received for closed cases.

1	Service failure for staff conduct
2	Service failure for handling of anti-social behaviour
2	Service failure for handling of garden clearance
1	Service failure for handling of repairs
5	Service failure for handling of complaint
1	Service failure for handling of report of damp and mould
1	Service failure for response to power outage

Actions

The Ombudsman can also issue actions that the landlord must complete to prevent similar future failings.

A total of **85 actions** were given, including **36 compensation awards** for closed cases.

23	Apologies
5	Damp and mould inspections
3	Provide schedule of works
3	Provide staff training
4	Carry out inspection / survey
2	Carry out agreed repairs
2	Fit extractor / air vent
1	Review handling of complaint
1	Review approach to compensation
1	Confirm oustanding repairs

1	Agree mutually convenient appointments
1	Complete risk assessment
1	Consider temporary move
1	Obtain up to date medical information

Total Compensation £12,420

7. Improvements

We see complaints as an opportunity to learn lessons and drive continuous improvement. We will acknowledge faults when they occur and take responsibility for putting things right and avoiding recurrence.

Improvement	Benefit	How we will record/measure completion
Leaseholder policy updated to include 125 year leases for all future right to buy sales of flats	Policy is now in line with best practices across other authorities	Right to buy sales records
We will ensure 100% of staff visiting properties are trained to identify damp and mould.	This will help ensure a proactive response to damp and mould issues.	Staff training records
Text messages will not be sent to you in error for appointments with contractors.	You will not be given incorrect information and will not lose time waiting for appointments.	Details of the complaints and a reduction in failed appointments.
We will let you know if we cancel a repairs appointment.	This will prevent you waiting in for cancelled appointments.	Quality checks of completed repairs.
We will work with all teams across the council to ensure compliance with Ombudsman Guidance.	This will ensure quality and compliant responses as standard accross all teams.	Ombudsman determinations, complaints reports.

To keep a track of our progress on the improvements that have been identified visit https://www.sandwell.gov.uk/housing/housing-complaints-improvements

8. Get involved

As a council tenant, or leaseholder, you have the right to be consulted on matters affecting your tenancy and the housing services you receive.

There are a number of methods available for you to have your say.

- Volunteer as part of a regularly meeting group
- Get involved with specific subjects and tasks for a short term
- Attend work shops for group discussions
- Complete surveys and feedback requests

If you would like to get involved or would like more information on what is available, please call us on 0121 569 2537.

You can also complete a short survey to express your interest.
www.sandwell.gov.uk/housingsurvey