

Meeting: Executive, July 26	Author: Alex Clark
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Subject: Customer complaints forum

Background

As part of our commitment to the Housing Ombudsman complaint code and improving our complaint handling, we advised the Board in July 22 that we would be creating a new Customer complaints forum. This paper gives an update on the progress of this group and the results on their recent findings.

Purpose of the group

The remit of the forum is to act as a critical friend, reviewing completed complaints to ensure they meet the expectations of the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code. The forum considers whether complaints have been handled fairly, sympathetically and consistently, whether outcomes and resolutions are proportionate and reasonable, and whether the customer experience has been appropriately considered throughout the process. The forum also seeks to identify learning opportunities and potential service improvements, helping to prevent similar issues from recurring and supporting continuous improvement across the organisation.

We continue to provide the forum with regular updates regarding The Housing Ombudsman, ensuring that members remain informed about any relevant developments, key decisions, and policy changes. These updates may include case determinations, best practice recommendations, emerging trends in complaints handling, and any new guidance issued by the Ombudsman. By keeping the forum engaged and up to date, we aim to support transparency, accountability, and continuous improvement in our approach to resolving customer concerns effectively.

At each session, we invite a member of staff to join as a 'guest speaker' and provide an overview of their area of the business. These sessions have been well-received, with staff fully engaging and their presentations often sparking valuable questions and discussions within the forum.

Scope

They meet every quarter.

They are provided with ten anonymised complaint cases that have gone through our complaints process and now closed. They receive the headline complaint reason and the complaint number.

The group will agree on five (of the ten) and receive fuller details, including all the notes, correspondence, outcomes, and learnings. They are then required to

individually score and assess the following areas of our handling of those complaints:

- Quality of the notes
- Correct correspondence
- Dealt with inside timescales
- Chronology of events
- The outcome
- Fairness in the handling of the complaint
- Putting things right

They also provide a written summary of the scores to give insight.

Results

The forum has reviewed and scored five complaints and gave their feedback – the table below shows the average score of the group in each area.

Area of review	April 2026 Score (out of 5)	July 2026 Score (out of 5)
Quality of notes	4.6	4.3
Correct correspondence	4.9	4.9
Timescales	4.6	4.9
Chronology of events	4.7	4.6
The Outcome	4.9	4.6
Fairness in the handling of complaint	4.9	4.6
Putting things right	4.9	4.6

Positive feedback

This round of complaint reviews highlighted a great deal of good practice. In each case there was a clear understanding of what the complaint was actually about, with complaint handling carried out respectfully and diligently and correspondence that was clear and easy to follow. Reviewers noted that several steps had been taken to try and resolve each complaint, including mediation offered to both tenants free of charge, a proactive and genuinely useful step. Overall, the cases were well handled and produced a strong learning outcome for the service.

Development feedback

The reviews also identified several areas for development. In a number of cases, it was unclear whose responsibility the issue actually was, the contractor's or Selwood's and reviewers questioned whether reasonable adjustments had been properly explored or clearly explained, including whether enough time was allowed given the customer's disability. There were also instances where concerns about staff conduct went unanswered, and where a complaint was recorded as upheld despite the decision remaining unchanged, alongside noticeable differences between what the customer was complaining about and what was actually responded to. To address this, case managers should be recording conversations in the notes as soon as possible to ensure the most accurate record of each case.

In response to the feedback received, a number of actions are now underway. Case managers have been reminded to record conversations in the case notes as soon as possible, ensuring that each case contains an accurate and complete record. This will be reinforced through quarterly team briefings and ongoing quality checks.

Complaint responses will also be reviewed to ensure that they address all the issues raised by customers, including any concerns relating to staff conduct. We will also ensure that reasonable adjustments are appropriately explored, recorded and given sufficient consideration and time, particularly where a customer has a disability. This work is supported by the EDI project, the introduction of a reasonable adjustments policy and appropriate staff training.

Finally, we are reviewing how upheld and not upheld decisions are applied and explained, to ensure that the outcome recorded accurately reflects the findings of the investigation

We remain committed to supporting staff in delivering high-quality complaint responses and will continue to provide one-to-one support where required. The Complaints, Claims, Goodwill and Compensation policies are now mandatory annual reads, ensuring they are regularly reviewed and understood by all relevant staff. This is particularly important for managers who may not regularly handle complaints, helping to ensure the guidance remains accessible and is applied consistently across the organisation.

In addition, our complaint response letters have been updated to ensure that any compensation offered is clearly broken down into the appropriate categories required by the Housing Ombudsman. This will provide greater transparency around the basis for compensation and ensure that payments are appropriately linked to the findings of the investigation.

A dedicated budget code has also been created specifically for compensation paid because of a complaint. This will enable us to accurately identify and monitor complaint-related compensation payments and support greater oversight of how compensation is awarded across the organisation.

The highest-scoring complaint achieved 137 out of a possible 140 points.

The feedback has been shared with case managers and their managers to highlight areas of strong performance and identify where improvements can be made.

Summary of meeting

A presentation was provided by Midge Chamberlain on the Customer Support Team, covering the team's structure, key responsibilities, customer contact volumes and the range of enquiries received, including repairs, anti-social behaviour (ASB), rent and tenancy-related matters.

The forum also agreed to move towards a thematic review approach, with ASB complaints selected as the first area of focus. Five complaint cases have been identified for detailed review to help understand common themes, customer experiences and opportunities for learning and service improvement.

To support this discussion, a member of the Neighbourhoods Team has been invited to provide an overview of Selwood Housing's approach to managing ASB cases. The forum session has also been extended to allow additional time for discussion, reflection and the identification of potential improvements in service delivery and complaint handling.

Following the meeting, an email was circulated to forum members inviting suggestions on how the complaints process could be better promoted to customers. This was prompted by feedback received from customers and insights from the Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSM) survey, which highlighted that some customers may not be fully aware of how to raise a complaint or the support available to them throughout the process. The aim is to identify opportunities to improve awareness, accessibility and customer confidence in Selwood Housing's complaints process.

Housing Ombudsman News

The forum received an update on key sector developments, including:

- The appointment of Andrea Keenoy as Interim Housing Ombudsman from 1 August 2026.
- Continued Ombudsman focus on roof leak cases, delays in repairs, communication failures and learning from severe maladministration findings.
- Ongoing emphasis on Awaab's Law, housing safety, transparency and rising complaint volumes across the sector.

Options and recommendations

Note this report and agree that quarterly updates will come to the Exec team.

Appendix

Appendix A – Complaints reviewed and scoring criteria

Complaints reviewed

Complaint number	Nature of complaint
23677	Housing application failure due to not providing documents on time
23748	Damage to roof when carrying out repairs to adjoining property
23749	Customer felt not sufficient storage heaters in communal areas
23846	Persistent barking dog
23882	Request to remove fence by surveyor

Complaints are assessed using these criteria:

Quality of notes.

- are they clear/could they be misinterpreted.
- contain enough detail
- would you have expected more information
- notes should be factual not an opinion

Correct correspondence sent

- acknowledgement
- response letter
- closure letter
- did we promote the Housing Ombudsman service

Correspondence sent within agreed timescales

- acknowledgement sent within **5** working days
- response letter sent within **10** working days
- extra time agreed is required

Could the complaint be followed from start to finish

- Chronological order

Complaint outcome

- Does the outcome look and feel right
- Would you have done anything differently

Was the complaint dealt with Fairly

- Have we been impartial
- Did we compromise and show flexibility
- Was the complaint dealt with in a way the customer could understand
- Was the language clear and concise

Did we Put Things Right

- Have all points raised been addressed
- Was the customer compensated correctly

Each of these elements is evaluated by forum members according to the scoring matrix.

Score	Definition – could include these elements
1	Timescales not maintained, letters not sent, limited notes, no learning outcome recorded.
2	Most parts could have been improved on, lacking information or not clear with our approach.
3	Some information missing, the case has been fairly dealt with and things have been put right.
4	Most elements were adhered to but there was room for improvement in some parts.
5	All letters and timescales have been adhered to, clear and detailed notes, case has been dealt with fairly and things have been put right, we have apologised.