

Annual Housing (Landlord) Complaint Handling Performance & Activity Report

2024/25

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1.0 Summary

- 1.1 This annual report provides an overview of complaint handling activity relating to Bradford Council's housing stock for the period 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025.
- 1.2 From April 2024, all social housing landlords are required to comply with the Housing Ombudsman's Statutory Complaint Handling Code, including the submission of an annual performance report and self-assessment against prescribed indicators.
- 1.3 The report focuses on complaints overseen by the Housing Ombudsman, rather than those managed by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO). The purpose of the report is to review performance over the reporting year and subsequently inform monitoring of contracts with managing agents.

1.4 Key Highlights

- **Property Portfolio:** The Council owns 432 social housing properties, managed by Incommunities (84%) and Mears Living (16%).
- **Complaints Volume:** Stage One: 46 complaints received; Stage Two: 7 complaints received.
- **Timeliness:** 56% of Stage One complaints responded to within 10 working days; 85% responded to within 20 days.
- **Stage Two:** 57% responded to within 20 working days; 100% responded to within 40 days.
- **Themes:** Common issues include repairs not completed, communication, and delays.
- **Outcomes:** High upheld rates (Stage One: 91%, Stage Two: 85%) indicate valid customer concerns and the need for service improvements.
- **Housing Ombudsman:** No complaints were investigated or upheld against Bradford Council in 2024–25.
- **Improvement Actions for 2025–26:** Quarterly performance reporting, root cause analysis, enhanced staff training, and governance scrutiny.

- 1.5 Overall, while compliance with statutory requirements has been maintained, the high upheld rate and recurring complaint themes highlight areas for improvement in service delivery and contract management.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 Bradford Council transferred its existing housing stock to Bradford Community Housing Trust, now known as Incommunities, in 2003.
- 2.2 Recognising the need to continue to provide social housing as the demand increases, Bradford Council has built and retained a small number of properties for rent through social housing schemes. The current number of properties owned and identified as social housing is 432. Although there are currently less than 450 properties, they are sited throughout the district and include some properties providing supported living for adults in association with the Council's Adults Social Care department.
- 2.3 All properties are managed by dedicated property agents which are contracted to provide day to day services, manage rentals, undertake landlord duties and repairs and ensure complaints are handled appropriately and in line with the Housing Ombudsman's complaint's handling code.

- 2.4 The contracts currently in place are with Incommunities and Mears Living (Plexus). Incommunities manage 84% of the Council owned properties, whilst Mears Living manage 16%, which are predominantly based in the Keighley area.
- 2.5 The contracts are monitored and reviewed by a dedicated Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Contract Manager employed by Bradford Council to ensure they continue to meet the standards required by the Council.

3.0 The Council's Housing Complaints Handling Process

- 3.1 The contracted housing providers (Incommunities and Mears Living) manage and handle housing complaints related to landlord's responsibilities as part of the business contracts in place on behalf of Bradford Council under the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 and in line with the Housing Ombudsman's Statutory Complaint Handling Code (2024).
- 3.2 The complaints process provides a two-stage complaint handling process where complaints are escalated from informal resolution or service requests into a formal complaint handling process.

3.3 Stage 1 complaints

- 3.3.1 Stage 1 complaints are acknowledged within two working days and a response provided within working 10 days. If the complaint is complex or there are delays, the timescale may be extended by a further 10 working days with the complainant being updated with the reasons for the extension and the new revised timescale.
- 3.3.2 Stage 1 complaints are responded to within the team who has delivered the service on behalf of Bradford Council. This gives the team an opportunity to put things right and explain the rationale for any decision making which has been applied to the issue raised.

3.4 Stage 2 complaints

- 3.4.1 Where a complainant remains dissatisfied following the stage 1 response, they have the option to escalate their complaint to stage two. Stage 2 complaints are responded to within 20 working days of the acknowledgement for escalation. Extensions can again be provided but will not exceed a further 20 working days. Where extensions are required, complainants will be informed in writing.
- 3.4.2 Stage 2 complaints are reviewed independently by dedicated complaints officers within the contracted agent's organisation.
- 3.4.3 Following the stage 2 review, if the complainant remains dissatisfied, they have the right to raise their complaint with the Housing Ombudsman Service, the regulator for landlord and social housing organisations.

4.0 Complaints Performance by Contracted Property Agents

- 4.1 The contracted property agents publish their own complaint handling performance annual reports which include complaints handled on behalf of Bradford Council where tenants of the Council's housing stock properties have raised a complaint within the formal housing complaint handling process.
- 4.2 Where the property agents have addressed complaints on behalf of the Council, complaints performance and outcomes are reviewed on a regular basis as part of the Council's contract management and monitoring.

4.3 Total number of complaints

Table 1 below represents the total number of complaints received by the Contracted Agents on behalf of Bradford Council.

<u>Table 1 – Total number of Housing Complaints received</u>	Incommunities	Mears Living	Total
Total number stage 1 complaints responded to for Bradford Council properties	45	1	46
Total number stage 2 complaints responded to for Bradford Council properties	7	0	7

4.4 Timeliness of Responses

4.4.1 The Housing Ombudsman's statutory complaints code sets out the timescales in which to respond to both stage 1 and stage 2 complaints. Where the initial timescale is not achievable due to the complexity of the complaint or other factors, such as the need to make arrangements for a site visit, extensions are allowed. The complainant must be informed of the extensions and the reasons why.

Table 2 below represents the number of Housing Complaints responded to within timescale.

<u>Table 2 – Number of Housing Complaints responded to within timescale</u>	Incommunities	Mears Living	Total
Stage 1 complaints resolved within 10 working days	24 (53%)	1 (100%)	25 (56%)
Stage 1 Complaints resolved within 20 working days	39 (87%)	NA	39 (87%)
Stage 2 complaints resolved within 20 working days	4 (57%)	NA	4 (57%)
Stage 2 complaints resolved within 40 working days	7 (100%)	NA	7 (100%)

4.4.2 Current performance on resolving complaints within the agreed timescales is significantly below the Council's key performance indicator of 90%. This shortfall presents a risk to customer satisfaction and contractual compliance. To address this, it is recommended that the Council's Contract Manager works with Incommunities to:

- Undertake a root cause analysis to identify barriers to timely resolution.

- Develop and present a recovery plan with clear actions and timelines.
- Report progress and improvement measures at the next HRA contract management review meeting.

Failure to improve performance may require escalation through contractual governance processes.

4.4.3 Incommunities have made reducing the number of extended complaints a key priority for 2025-26 to ensure more complaints are responded to within the initial timescale. They have implemented an extension approval process from April 2025 to apply greater control over extensions being applied and the HRA Contract Manager has been asked to ensure this is similarly applied to Council owned property complaints.

4.5 Categories / themes of complaints

4.5.1 An analysis of themes of complaints can provide information related to service user priorities and the level of service that is provided by the contracted agents across their own organisation's departments.

Chart 1 below represents the categories of stage 1 complaints responded to by the Contracted Property Agents

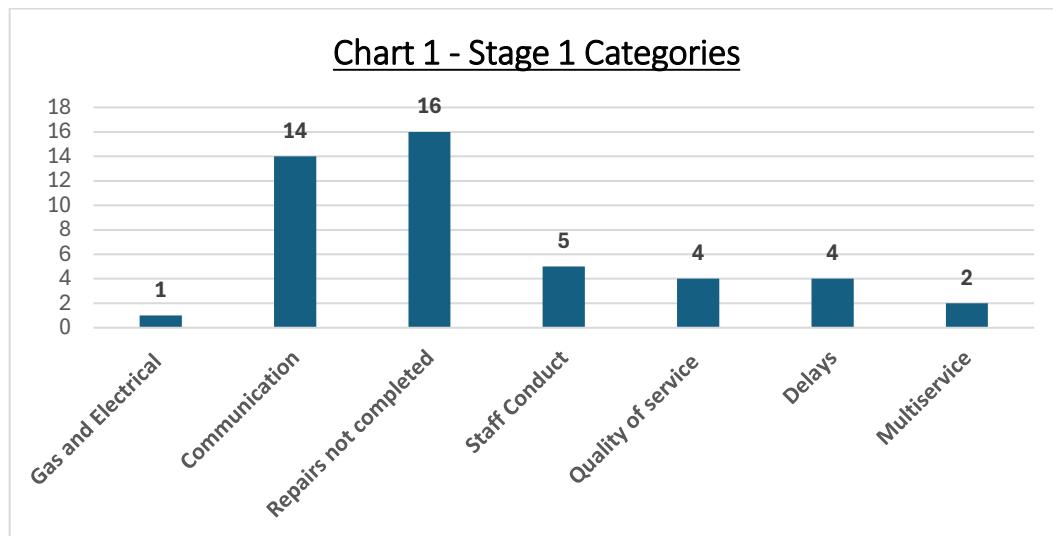
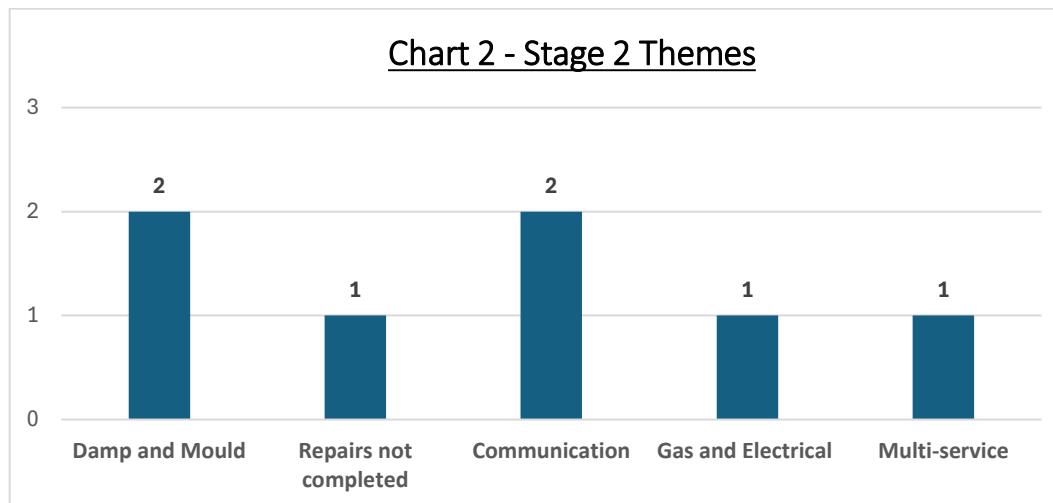


Chart 2 below represents the categories of stage 2 complaints responded to by the Contracted Property Agents



4.6 Complaint Outcomes

4.6.1 Whilst reporting on the volume of complaints received and closed provides a useful insight into the management of complaints by the contracted agents, it is equally important to assess this data against the number of complaints that have been upheld, where fault has been identified. This approach offers a clearer indication of where issues exist and should be used to inform remedial actions, lessons learned and service improvements as part of the contract monitoring responsibilities of the HRA Contract Manager.

Table 3 below represents the % of Stage 1 complaints UPHELD (either fully or partially) by Contracted Agents.

Table 3 - Complaint Upheld (Fully or Partially) Rates	Incommunities	Mears Living (Plexus)
Stage 1	91%	0%
Stage 2	85%	NA

4.6.2 The high upheld rate reflects complaints upheld across all themes of complaints received and it is important to examine why a significant number of complaints are being upheld. A high upheld rate often suggests that customers' concerns are valid and that expectations are not being consistently met. It is noted, however that only 7 out of 46 complaints were escalated to stage 2, indicating that the remedial actions put in place where complaints are upheld are effective and proportionate.

4.6.3 It is recommended that further analysis is required by the Council's Contract Manager, in conjunction with the contracting Agents, to identify patterns in upheld complaints, determine root causes, and ensure that corrective actions taken by property agents are reviewed and discussed during contract monitoring meetings.

4.6.4 Additional work is required by both parties to undertake a detailed analysis of upheld complaints to identify recurring patterns and underlying causes. This insight should inform discussions on corrective actions being implemented by Contracted Agents. These actions must be reviewed and monitored as part of the regular contract management review meetings to ensure continuous improvement and compliance.

5.0 The Housing Ombudsman Service

5.1 The Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS) is an independent, impartial service for social housing residents, overseeing landlord services and related housing complaints.

5.2 All local authorities and registered social housing providers must be members of the Housing Ombudsman Scheme. The Housing Ombudsman Scheme is approved by the Secretary of State under section 51 of, and Schedule 2 to, the Housing Act 1996 as amended by the Localism Act 2011, the Building Safety Act 2022 and the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 (the Act). The Act requires social landlords, as defined by section 51(2) of the Act, to be members of an approved scheme.

5.3 The role of the Housing Ombudsman is to resolve disputes involving members of the scheme, including making awards of compensation or other remedies when appropriate, as well as to support effective landlord and tenant dispute resolution by others.

5.4 The Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 empowered the Housing Ombudsman to issue a code of practice about the procedures members of the scheme should have in place for considering complaints. It also placed a duty on the Housing Ombudsman to monitor compliance with a code of practice that it has issued. The Housing Ombudsman's complaint handling code was therefore introduced and became statutory in April 2024.

5.5 The Housing Ombudsman regulates compliance with the HOS complaint handling code and where it finds an organisation has deviated from the Code in policy or practice, it may use its powers to put matters right and ensure compliance with the Code.

5.6 Annual Self-Assessment

5.6.1 As part of compliance with the HOS complaint handling code, landlords must undertake and publish an annual self-assessment to measure their performance against the requirements of the code. Bradford Council's 2024-25 self-assessment is published on the Council's website: [Annual Self-Assessment Form 2024-25](#)

5.7 Housing Ombudsman Complaints

5.7.1 In 2024-25 Bradford Council received no investigations or upheld complaints from the Housing Ombudsman in relation to the Council's social housing property stock.

6.0 Learning from Complaints

6.1 Whilst the HRA Contract Manager reviews individual complaints outcomes with the property agents as part of the monitoring duties, the Council's own self-assessment provides further opportunities to identify learnings and where service improvements can be made to ensure the Council remains complaint with the Housing Ombudsman's complaint handling code.

6.2 Key improvement actions for 2025-26

Improved complaints performance shared throughout 2025-26	Contracted Agents to provide quarterly reports during 2025-26 on complaint handling performance with the Council's corporate complaints team by end of December 2025, including details of lessons learned and remedies provided
Analysis of upheld complaints to identify root cause and where contractual service improvement needs to be implemented	Discussion of upheld rates where fault is found added as an agenda item to contract monitoring meetings between HRA Contract Manager and Incommunities by March 2026
Customer feedback and compliments	Information to be collated from 2025-26 data for compliments in relation to Bradford Council properties to provide a balanced overview in report covering next reporting period
Staff awareness and customer service training	Information to improve the understanding of housing complaints will be provided in the forthcoming issue of the Complaint's newsletter before March 2026 to ensure frontline staff are aware of process and how to correctly signpost complainants
Improved governance scrutiny introduced to ensure HOS statutory compliance	To add the Housing Complaints report to the annual Governance and Audit Committee reports timetabled for 2025-26 onwards