



Complaints Annual Report 2025-2026

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Summary of Formal Complaints to Bassetlaw District Council – to year ended 31/3/26

1. Purpose of the Report

1.1 This report summarises the number and nature of formal complaints received by the Council between 1 April 2025 and 31 March 2026. It also reports on compliance with the Council's complaint-handling timescales and sets out the methods used by customers to submit complaints.

2. Information and background

2.1 The Council operates an internal two-stage complaints procedure:

- Stage 1: response by the relevant Head of Service or Service Manager.
- Stage 2: review by the Council's Chief Executive.
- The final stage: referral to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) or, for housing-related complaints, the Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS).

2.2 The Ombudsman Complaint Handling Codes require Stage 1 complaints to be responded to within 10 working days. This timescale is also measured through a Local Corporate Performance Indicator, with a 2025/26 target of 75%. The Council exceeded this target by responding to 86% of Stage 1 complaints within 10 working days.

3. Summary of complaints

3.1 Between 1 April 2025 and 31 March 2026, the Council received 361 formal complaints, compared with 306 in 2024/25. This represents an 18% increase and reflects the wider national trend of the continuing rise in complaints across local government.

Amerdeep Clarke, Chair of the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman and Commission for Local Administration in England, stated (20 May 2026):

"We recognise that local authorities continue to face significant pressures in delivering services to their communities."

And in July 2026, in her Annual Review, stated:

"The scale of demand on our service this year should give every local authority pause for thought. The number of complaints we received this year has risen significantly and more sharply than at any time over the past 10 years. Last year we saw a 16% increase in the number of complaints we received. This year that figure has more than doubled to 33%. That increase is not concentrated in one area; it is consistent across all services."

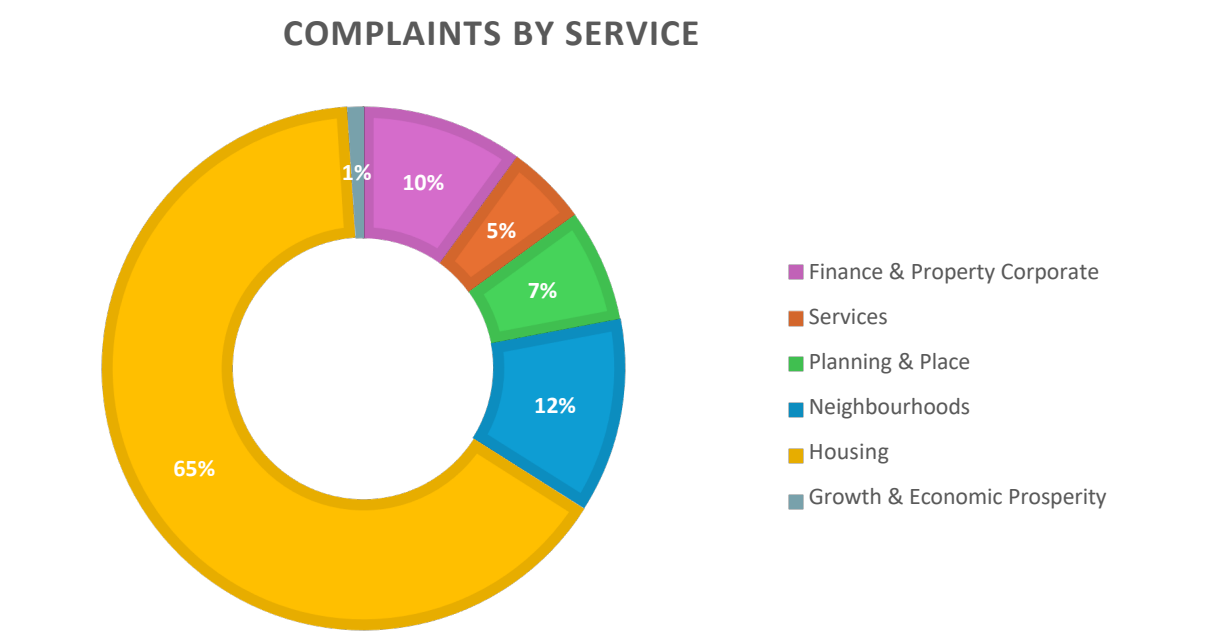
"When people cannot get the help they need, and feel they have no other recourse, they come to us. That so many are doing so tells us something important. It speaks not just about individual service failures, but about the gap between what residents expect and what they are receiving."

The Housing Ombudsman has also highlighted the continued rise in housing-related complaints, noting that *"the cost-of-living crisis, increase in mental health difficulties and housing shortages have changed the landscape for landlords to an increasingly challenging and complex environment to navigate"*.

(Housing Ombudsman, Richard Blakeway, 2025)

3.2 Customers can make complaints through a range of channels ensuring the process remains accessible to all. In 2025/26, 67% of complaints were submitted digitally, mainly through the Council’s online form or by email. The remaining complaints were made by telephone, letter to the relevant service or Chief Executive’s Office, referral from the Ombudsman, or made in person. This included two Ombudsman referrals and six face-to-face complaints.

3.3 The breakdown figures for each service area for 2025-26 are detailed below (2024-25 figures are included for comparison).



Service Area		Service Area	2024-25
Finance & Property	35	<i>Finance & Property</i>	16
Services re-configured as Performance & Engagement, and Legal and Governance	18	<i>Corporate Services</i>	13
Planning & Place <i>(Service re-named)</i>	26	<i>Regeneration</i>	10
Neighbourhoods	45	<i>Neighbourhoods</i>	29
Housing	235	<i>Housing</i>	237

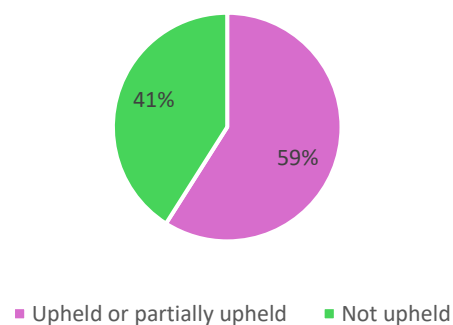
Service Area		Service Area	2024-25
Growth & Enterprise	2	-	1
TOTAL	361	TOTAL	306

3.4 The agreed timescales for responding to complaints for all stages of the complaints procedure is set out below with reference to days being “working” days.

3.5 **Stage 1 complaints** are responded to by the relevant Head of Service or Service Manager. In 2025/26, 312 of the 361 complaints received were responded to within 10 working days, representing 86%.

3.6 **Outcomes for stage 1 complaints** are as follows:

Stage 1 Complaint outcomes

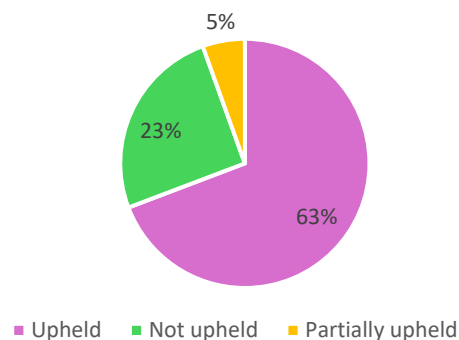


3.7 **Stage 2 complaints** are reviewed and responded to by the Council’s Chief Executive’s Office. During 2025/26, 91 complaints were asked to be progressed to Stage 2, compared with 55 in the previous year, representing a 65% increase in complaint escalations.

3.8 **Stage 2 complaint reviews** are required to be responded to within 20 working days in line with the Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code(s). 90 out of the 91 Stage 2 complaints were responded to within the 20-working day timescale. An additional 20 working days is permitted under the Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code(s) whereby cases are particularly complex.

3.9 **Outcomes for stage 2 complaints** are as follows:

Stage 2 Complaint Outcomes



4. Categories

4.1 Categories (reason) for complaint are shown below, with 2024-25 included for comparison:

Category	2025-26	2024-25
Communication (delays) or lack of communication	25	21
Lack of information	3	11
Officer (decision)	13	6
Advice (officer)	2	2
Service delivery (lack of action)	139	154
Service delivery (delay)	20	9
Conduct (officer)	18	13
Standard of work /quality (officer)	15	11
Standard of work (contractor)	7	2
Dissatisfied (general) <i>(can also mean there is more than one reason for complaint)</i>	81	40
Lack of response/response delay	22	28
Conduct/attitude (external agent/contractor)	6	2
Officer (attitude)	10	7

5. Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) and Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS)

5.1 Once the Council's 2-step internal process is complete, a complainant may exercise their right to seek further advice and refer the matter to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) or the Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS) for Council Housing related complaints.

5.2 On publication of the Annual Review Letter to the Council, it was shown that the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman's office had received 20 complaints about the Council during 2025-26.

5.2 There were 14 decisions made by the LGSCO during the financial year as follows: 8 cases were closed after initial enquiries by the Ombudsman, 5 cases were referred back for local resolution, 1 case was upheld requiring an apology to be made to the customer by the Council to remedy the complaint.

5.3 During 2025/26, the Housing Ombudsman Service requested information in relation to 10 cases, and outcomes are awaited. Two complaints, representing 0.3% of the housing stock, were determined by the Housing Ombudsman Service, and none were upheld.

5.4 As part of the Complaint Handling Code submission, the Housing Ombudsman Service also reviewed the Council's Complaints Policy and Procedure and made a number of recommendations. The policy and procedure have been updated to reflect those recommendations and provide greater clarity on the Council's compliance with the Code.

5.5 The Council continues to work positively with the Ombudsmen, utilising the best practice guidance, spotlight reports and case studies to improve our services and customer experience.

6. Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code(s) and Self Assessments

6.1 Following consultation in the Autumn of 2023, of which the Council were an active consultee, both the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) and Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS) launched new Complaint Handling Codes in February 2024, effective from 1 April 2024.

6.2 Historically, the Housing Ombudsman Service introduced a Complaint Handling Code in July 2020 and all Local Authorities were required to 'self-assess' against the code and publish the results of the self-assessment annually. The purpose of the Code is to enable the Council *'to resolve complaints raised by their residents quickly and to use the learning from complaints to drive service improvements. It will also help to create a positive complaint handling culture amongst staff and residents.'* It should be noted that the Housing Ombudsman Service *made* further changes to the Complaint Handling Code effective from 1st April 2022, and the Council responded positively regarding those requirements. The Council's completed self-assessment of the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code is now reported Annually by the Housing Service to the Audit & Governance Committee and further detailed information can be found here [Self Assessment Form 2025/26 | Bassetlaw District Council](#)

6.3 The Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) also introduced a Complaint Handling Code which was published in February 2024, effective from April 2024. This Code is separate from housing (for all other organisational services) but is aligned to the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code. The Council is required to self-assess against the LGSCO Code and the completed self-assessment can be found here: [Bassetlaw District Council Self Assessment](#)

6.4 Whilst the new Complaint Handling Code(s) are separate documents, they are aligned. *'This means that organisations that fall under the jurisdiction of both Ombudsman should be able to provide a co-ordinated complaint handling process across services covered by both Codes'*. The Housing Complaint Handling Code is a mandatory and legal requirement. The Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman Code *'constitutes important advice and guidance to councils, rather than instructions'*.

6.5 It should be noted however that the LGSCO *'expect local councils to carefully consider the Code when developing policies and procedures'*. Furthermore, they *'may make a finding of maladministration where a local council, without good reason, does not meet the standards in the Code when responding to an individual complaint'*.

6.6 The Complaints Policy and Procedure is updated as and when necessary to comply with the Codes and cross-referenced to the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code self-assessment. The policy and procedure remain under review to ensure they continue to be fit for purpose and compliant with the Codes. Following the Housing Ombudsman Service's review of the Council's policy and procedure, further updates have been made to address its recommendations and provide greater clarity on Code compliance.

7. Key points of change since implementing the Code(s)

7.1 Stage 1 complaints must now be responded to within 10 working days, reduced from the previous 15-working-day timescale. Extensions may be agreed in exceptional circumstances, provided there is a valid reason, that the complainant is duly notified, and the extension does not exceed a further 10 working days.

7.2 Stage 2 complaints must be responded to within 20 working days, increased from the previous 15-working-day timescale. A further extension of up to 20 working days is permitted for particularly complex complaints.

7.3 The Codes place greater emphasis on identifying learning from complaints and using that learning to drive service improvements.

7.4 Maintaining a positive complaints culture within the organisation is part of the Code(s); the standard objective in the complaints policy and in line with the Code(s) is relevant to all employees and third parties that reflects the need to:

“Have a collaborative and co-operative approach towards resolving complaints, working with colleagues across teams and departments;

- Take collective responsibility for any shortfalls identified through complaints, rather than blaming others; and*
- Act within the professional standards for engaging with complaints as set by any relevant professional body*

We will:

- Deal with complaints fairly, professionally and proportionately*
- Resolve matters satisfactorily at the earliest opportunity*
- Maintain a positive complaints culture and use complaints for learning and service improvements*
- Be guided by the best practice and guidance of the Ombudsmen”*

7.5 Member Responsible for Complaints (MRC): Under the Codes, the Cabinet Member for Corporate and Financial Services is responsible for oversight of organisational formal complaints and has oversight of complaint reports data since April 2024. The Cabinet Member for Housing remains to be the Member Responsible for Complaints for Housing-related formal complaints.

8. Learning from Complaints and Service Improvements

8.1 The Council’s recognised complaints procedure provides a structured way to identify learning and, where appropriate, implement service improvements. This ensures that complaints are viewed positively to support better outcomes for customers and to strengthen the organisation’s approach to service delivery.

8.2 Throughout 2025/26, some complaints received and reviewed identified a number of service improvements, including:

- reviewing how some service operations are delivered;
- revising and improving administrative procedures and processes;

- issuing staff reminders about the importance of good customer care and communication;
- introducing new training objectives and refresher training.

8.3 Service improvements are reported quarterly and at year end. These reports are submitted to the Corporate Management Team so that any further follow-up actions can be considered and addressed.

8.4 A stand-alone report “*Housing: Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvements Report*” is presented to the Audit & Governance Committee as part of the Council’s statutory compliance with the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code. The report is supported by detailed appendices and is considered alongside the Council’s completed Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code self-assessment.

8.5 At Stage 2 of the complaints procedure, the Chief Executive’s Office may identify cases where issues have contributed to service failure and where complaints are upheld. Any learning or service improvements identified for Housing are recommended for implementation and further discussion through the Housing Service Learning and Improvement Group, led by the Head of Service.

8.6 Examples of service improvement and learning identified in the *Housing Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement* report include:

- improving contractor care when working in tenants’ homes;
- Scaffolding checks
- improving communication with contractors installing solar panels by using their Tenant Liaison Officer;
- ensuring the Contact Centre has up-to-date contact details for project managers;
- improving communication between contractors through the project Contractor Portal, due to launch in 2026;
- reviewing repairs timescales as part of the new Repairs Policy;
- providing additional staff training on mutual exchange;
- revising procedures to include a Technical Officer at joint inspections;
- supporting continued learning and development through one-to-one discussions and appraisals.

9. Equality Opportunities and GDPR

9.1 The Council is committed to providing a good service to all sections of the community, regardless of gender, age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, marital status, pregnancy or disability.

9.2 No concerns have been identified in relation to service provision or complaint handling for any particular groups.

9.3 The Council will seek to make changes where appropriate such as making ‘Reasonable Adjustments’ ensuring that everyone has fair access to services and the complaints procedure.

9.4 Any personal details or information obtained to process formal complaints will be stored securely and used only for the purposes intended, in accordance with General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) principles.

10. Complaint handling and developments

10.1 As part of its commitment to good complaint handling, the Council will continue to ensure that its corporate formal complaints policy and procedure are fit for purpose, accessible to all and aligned with the Ombudsman Complaint Handling Codes. The Council will also continue to seek and listen to

customer feedback. The formal complaints process formed part of the *Digital by Default* Phase (I) Project, supporting improved accessibility and use of customer feedback. The policy also includes provision for making reasonable adjustments for customers where appropriate.

10.2 Following the April 2016 Cabinet report, *Digital First - Customer Programme*, and its objective to “*facilitate as many customers as possible to access our services through digital channels*”, the Complaints Policy was refreshed to encourage and support digital complaint submission. While the procedure remained largely unchanged, the policy gave greater emphasis to the online process and the support available for customers who may need help to use it.

10.3 Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman guidance states that any complaint about a service provided by a third party on behalf of the Council will be treated as a complaint “*against the Council*”. The Council’s policy clearly defines a complaint as “*an expression of dissatisfaction about a council service, whether that service is provided by the council or by a contractor or partner on behalf of the Council, that requires a response*”.

10.4 The Council has produced a new overarching Corporate ‘Managing Unacceptable Behaviour Policy’, the elements of which align with the relevant section within the Complaints Policy ensuring consistency with the standards expected within the framework of complaints management, service delivery and beyond.

11. Integration of housing complaints:

The Council Housing Service, formerly delivered through the ALMO, (A1 Housing Bassetlaw Ltd), was brought back in-house in October 2018. From 1 April 2019, housing-related formal complaints have been handled under the Council’s formal complaints policy and procedure, consistent with the approach used for all other Council services. The policy and procedure was adapted at that time to include relevant information about the Housing Service and the Housing Ombudsman Service. This work has continued to be developed and to meet with the Council’s required compliance with the Complaint handling Code as highlighted above.

12. Additional measures effective from 1 April 2024

12.1 The Council continues to manage formal complaints effectively. The following developments, implemented across the Council since 1 April 2024, will further strengthen complaint handling and the customer experience.

12.2 A new Customer Experience Group was established, with its first meeting held in July 2024. As part of the Council’s “*VISION 2040 BASSETLAW*”, the Group will support the implementation of a new Customer Experience Plan. The Plan will focus on ensuring that residents and customers receive a good-quality, efficient and accessible service when dealing with the Council, while also embedding a positive organisational culture.

12.3 The Housing Complaint Improvement Group, formerly known as the Tenant Panel, is chaired by the Cabinet Member for Housing. Tenant representatives routinely review a selection of anonymised formal complaints and assess how they have been handled. The Group has also contributed to wider developments, including awareness of the Complaint Handling Code self-assessment process and the development of a satisfaction survey on the complaint-handling experience.

12.4 Future annual reports will be strengthened by providing greater detail and focus on service improvements and learning.

12.5 Corporate Governance Working Group (CGWG) – Formal complaint information of significance is now reported to the Council’s CGWG by the Council’s Monitoring Officer.

12.6 Formal complaints data has been reported quarterly to Corporate Management Team (CMT) since August 2024 as part of cyclical monitoring. Reporting includes service area, complaint reason, outcomes and any identified learning or service improvements, enabling CMT to address themes or areas of concern within their respective services.

13. Corporate Values

13.1 The Council has adopted the following core values: Together We Can Do More, Everyone Counts, Open and Honest, Aspirational, and Service Excellence. These values are being embedded across the organisation to strengthen culture and support improved services for all.

14. Best practice Guidance

14.1 The Council continues to maintain a positive working relationship with the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) and the Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS). Through ongoing communication, effective engagement, reports and feedback, the Council will continue to use Ombudsman standards, spotlight reports and best practice guidance to improve the handling of complex and challenging complaints.

Background documents

Complaints Policy and Procedure:

[Formal complaints policy and procedure | Bassetlaw District Council](#)

Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code:

[Complaint Handling Code - Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman](#)

Housing Ombudsman Service Complaint Handling Code:

[The Complaint Handling Code | Housing Ombudsman Service \(housing-ombudsman.org.uk\)](#)

Local Government & Social Care Complaint Handling Code Self-Assessment:

[Bassetlaw District Council Self Assessment](#)

Housing Ombudsman Service Complaint Handling Code Self-Assessment:

[Self Assessment Form 2025/26 | Bassetlaw District Council](#)