



**Bassetlaw**  
**DISTRICT COUNCIL**  
— North Nottinghamshire —

## **Complaints: Annual Report 2024-25**

Summary of Formal Complaints to  
Bassetlaw District Council – to year ended 31/3/25

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### **1. Purpose of the Report**

1.1 The purpose of the report is to present a summary of the number and nature of complaints made to the Council between 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2025. The report also details the level of adherence to the Council's timescales for dealing with complaints and shows the method in which complaints were made to the Council.

### **2. Information and background**

2.1 The Council has a 3-step procedure in place for complaint handling. Stage 1 of the procedure is for the appropriate Head of Service/Service Manager to respond to the complaint, escalating the complaint to stage 2 of the procedure ensures a review by the Council's Chief Executive is carried out and the final stage, is referral to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) or Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS).

2.2 Responding to stage 1 complaints within 10 working days is a requirement of the Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code(s) and is also measured as a Local Corporate Performance Indicator (PI) with a target for 2024-25 of 80% of all stage 1 complaints to be responded to within 10 working days. The PI was achieved

with 92% of all stage 1 complaints being responded to within 10 working days for the financial year.

### 3. Summary of complaints

3.1 During the period 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2025, there were 306 complaints received. This is a 45% increase from the 211 complaints received in the year 2023-24. The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman 'Unprecedented Pressure' Report states, "the COVID-19 pandemic has created unprecedented pressures for local authorities and care providers, requiring them to re-prioritise and re-design existing services whilst at the same time adopting new duties to support residents and local businesses through a time of national crisis" **(Former Ombudsman, Mick King, Feb 2021)**.

3.1.2 In respect of the national increase in local government complaints, the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman said in July 2025, "Our annual review of local government complaints was also published this month. This highlighted the increasing number of complaints coming to us, which have exceeded 20,000 for the first time. Complaints about education and children's services continue to dominate our casework and complaints about housing services are now the second largest category of complaints we deal with, overtaking complaints about adult social care.

"This demonstrates the enormous pressures local authorities are under but despite this I was pleased to note that compliance with our recommendations remains high. Local authorities complied with recommendations we made in 99.7% of cases. This demonstrates the sector's commitment to redress and improvement and the importance of good governance and leadership within complaint handling." **(Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman, Amerdeep Somal, July 2025)**

3.1.3 The Housing Ombudsman said concerning the continuing rise in respect of Housing related complaints; "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 Of the formal complaints received 2024-25, 78% were made digitally by on-line form submission or by e-mail.

3.3 The breakdown figures for each service area are detailed below (2023-24 figures are included for comparison).

<b>Service Area</b>	<b>2024-25</b>	<b>Service Area</b>	<b>2023-24</b>
Finance & Property	16	Finance & Property	24
Corporate Services	13	Corporate Services	4
Planning & Place	10	Regeneration	12
Neighbourhoods	29	Neighbourhoods	31
Housing	237	Housing	140
Growth & Enterprise	1	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>306</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>211</b>

3.4 Customers can complain in a variety of ways to enable accessibility of the process for all. The financial year analysis shows us that 89% of customers' preferred way of getting in touch to make a complaint is by utilising the digital approach, the vast majority using the Council's web-site on-line form submission or by e-mail.

3.5 The remainder chose to telephone us or write a letter to the service or Chief Executive's office. There were also 2 referrals from the Ombudsman and 2 complaints made face to face.

3.6 The agreed timescales for responding to complaints for all stages of the complaints procedure are set out below with reference to days being "working" days.

3.7 Stage 1 complaints: responded to by the Head of Service/Service Manager, during 2024-25, 282 out of the 306 complaints received were responded to within 10 working days, ie, 92%.

3.8 Stage 2 complaints: review and response by the Council's Chief Executive; there were 55 stage 2 complaints within the financial year, compared to 23 for the previous year, highlighting an increase of 139% in complaints being escalated to the next level. All 55 Stage 2 complaints reviewed, apart from 1, were responded to well within the 20 working days allowed. The outcome of the stage 2 complaints were: 23 not upheld, 1 partially upheld, with 31 upheld.

## 4. Outcomes

4.1 Overall out of the 306 stage 1 complaints received, 55% were either upheld or partially upheld, with 45% not upheld.

## 5. Categories

5.1 Categories of complaints for 2024-25 are shown below, with 2023-24 included for comparison:

Category	2024-25	2023-24
Communication (delays) or lack of communication	21	6
Lack of information	11	5
Officer (decision)	6	7
Advice (officer)	2	-
Service delivery (lack of action)	154	80
Service delivery (delay)	9	5
Conduct (officer)	13	8
Standard of work /quality (officer)	11	18
Standard of work (contractor)	2	-
Dissatisfied (general) (This is used where there is more than one reason for complaint)	40	55
Lack of response/response delay	28	10
Conduct/attitude (external agent/contractor)	2	3
Officer (attitude)	7	14

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

6.1 Once the Council's 2-step internal process is exhausted, 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. On publication of the Annual Review Letter to the Council, it was shown that the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman's office had received 10 complaints about the Council during 2024-25.

6.2 There were 10 decisions made by the LGSCO during the financial year as follows: 4 cases were closed after initial enquiries by the Ombudsman, 4 cases were referred back for local resolution, 1 case advice was given, and 1 case was incomplete/invalid. There were no cases formally investigated by the Ombudsman and therefore no findings by the Ombudsman that the Council had made any fault.

6.3 There was 1 Housing Ombudsman case referred to the Council to consider in line with the Council's Complaints Procedure, and 1 case investigated with the recommendation found to be in line with the Council's Stage 2 complaint response and remedy.

6.4 The Council continues to work and engage positively with the Ombudsmen, utilising the best practice guidance and case studies to improve our services to the public.

## **7. Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code(s) and Self Assessments**

7.1 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.

7.2 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 2024/25 | Bassetlaw District Council](#)

7.3 The Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman also introduced a Complaint Handling Code which was published in February 2024, effective from April 2024. This Code is separate but aligned to the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code. The Council is required to self-assess against the Code and the completed self-assessment can be found here:

[Bassetlaw District Council Self Assessment](#)

7.4 Whilst the new Complaint Handling Code(s) are separate documents, they are aligned. 'This means that organisations that fall under the jurisdiction of both Ombudsmen 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'.

7.5 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'.

7.6 The Complaints Policy and Procedure has been updated to comply with the Code(s) and with cross referencing to the self-assessment completed and published in June 2024 in respect of the HOS Complaint Handling Code. The Complaints Policy and Procedure will remain under review to ensure it continues to be fit for purpose, and compliant with the Code(s).

## **8. Key points of change to note are:**

8.1 Ten working days for responding to formal complaints at stage 1 as opposed to 15 working days previously. Extensions are permitted providing there is valid reason, the complainant is duly notified, and the overall time frame does not exceed a further 10 days.

8.2 Twenty working days is permitted for responding to stage 2 complaints as opposed to 15 working days previously. With a further extension of 20 days permitted for particularly complex complaints.

8.3 Much more emphasis now is placed on service improvements identified and learning as a result of complaints made.

8.4 Maintaining a positive complaints culture; the standard objective in the 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”

8.5 Member Responsible for Complaints (‘MRC’): A new requirement under the Code is the Cabinet Member for all organisational formal complaints will be the Cabinet Member for Corporate & Financial Services who has oversight of the complaints data since April 2024. The Cabinet Member for Housing continues to be the Member responsible for Housing formal complaints (MRC).

## 9. Learning from Complaints and Service Improvements

9.1 One of the benefits of having a recognised Complaints Procedure in place is to identify service improvements and learning where appropriate to do so as a result of complaints being made that can bring benefits to customers and to the organisation going forward.

9.2 Throughout 2024/25 a number of improvements were identified by Service Managers as a result of complaints made, which included consideration of how we deliver some service operations, revised administrative/processes being implemented, staff reminders being issued about the importance of good customer care and communication, new training and refresher training. All service improvements identified are reported each quarter and again at year end and sent to the Heads of Service for any further follow up actions required as appropriate.

9.3 A stand-alone detailed report to the Audit & Governance (A & G) Committee for the ‘Housing Service Complaints and Service Improvements’ is a requirement of the Council’s statutory compliance with the Housing Ombudsman Complaint

Handling Code. A detailed report along with associated appendices is put before the A & G Committee in conjunction with the Council's completion of the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code self-assessment.

9.4 A summary of just some of the examples of the more detailed service improvements identified from the complaints raised in the Housing Service are:

- Additional staffing in the Customer Experience Team
- Improvements made to correspondence to better serve tenants
- Updates to systems to now include an automated reminders regarding outstanding works to ensure timely completion
- Review of Compensation and Remedies Policies
- A new supplier identified for Air Source Heating to reduce the wait for units in the winter

## **10. Equality Opportunities Monitoring and GDPR**

10.1 The Council is committed in ensuring we provide a good service to all parts of the community, regardless of gender, age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, marital status, pregnancy or disability.

10.2 There are no concerns known relating to service provision or complaint handling with regard to particular groups, ethical or other.

10.3 General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR): any personal details or information obtained in order to appropriately process formal complaints in line with the procedure will be stored securely and will only be used for the purposes as intended, in conjunction with the GDPR principles.

## **11. Complaint handling and developments**

11.1 As part of the Council's continued commitment to good complaint handling, we will continue to ensure that the Council's corporate formal complaints policy and procedure is fit for purpose and accessible to all in line with the Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code(s). The Council will also seek and listen to customer feedback. The formal complaints process formed part of the 'Digital by Default' Phase (I) Project, enabling optimum usage and accessibility in terms of customer feedback. In addition, making 'reasonable adjustments' for customers where appropriate to do so is included within the policy.

11.2 Following on from a report to the Council's Cabinet in April 2016: 'Digital First - Customer Programme', and the objective to 'facilitate as many customers as

possible to access our services through digital channels’, the Complaints Policy was refreshed at that time to both encourage and support the drive towards digital for those customers wishing to complain using that route. Whilst the procedure itself remained largely unchanged, more emphasis was given within the Policy to encourage the digital process together with the offer of help and guidance that is available for those that may require extra support in order to drive forward optimum use of the on-line facility.

11.3 Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman guidance states that they will treat any complaint about a service provided by a third party on behalf of the Council as being ‘against the Council’. The Council’s policy is explicitly clear about the definition of 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’.

11.4 The ‘ALMO’, (Formerly, ‘A1 Housing Bassetlaw Ltd’) Council Housing Service was brought back ‘in-house’ in October 2018. As part of the process, Formal Complaints for the Housing Service have been considered in line with all other Council Services, ie in conjunction with the Council’s formal complaints policy and procedure with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2019. As a result of this, the Council’s formal complaints policy and procedure was adapted at that time to incorporate appropriate any relevant information relative to the Housing Service and the Housing Ombudsman Service, effective from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2019.

## **12. Additional measures effective from 1 April 2024**

12.1 Whilst the Council continues to manage its formal complaints effectively, new developments implemented across the Council both directly and indirectly in respect of this work will continue to strengthen its approach to complaint handling and the customer experience as follows:

12.2 A new ‘Customer Experience Group’ has been created, the first meeting convened in July 2024, and as part of the Council’s “VISION 2040 BASSETLAW” we will be implementing a new ‘Customer Experience Plan’, “ensuring that our residents and customers receive a good-quality, efficient and accessible service when dealing with the Council”. And; “Embedding a positive organisational culture across the Council”.

12.3 The ‘Complaint Improvement Group’ for Housing complaints (formerly known as the Tenant panel) Chaired by the Cabinet Member for Housing, whereby the tenant representatives will routinely consider a selection of anonymised formal complaints and assess how they have been handled. The Group have also

been involved in a number of future developments including awareness of the work involved in the complaint handling code self -assessment, and supporting the creation of a satisfaction survey on the complaint handling experience.

12.4 Future Annual Reports will be strengthened going forward in terms of detail and focus around 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 is now reported to Corporate Management Team (CMT) quarterly, commencing from August 2024 (Cyclical Monitoring), which will include service area, reason, outcomes and any learning /service improvements identified enabling Heads of Service to address any thematic issues or areas of concern.

### **13. Corporate Values**

13.1 The Council has adopted core values; Together we can do more. Everyone Counts. Open and Honest, Aspirational, and Service Excellence. The values will be embedded within the organisational culture driving forward better services for all.

### **14. Best practice Guidance**

14.1 The sound working relationship with the Council’s key point of contact and the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) and the Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS) continues to be positive. Through the ongoing Ombudsman liaison and feedback, we will continue to learn how best to handle complex and challenging complaints in the most effective way possible utilising the Ombudsman standards, special spotlight reports, and best practice guidance.

### **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 \(housing-ombudsman.org.uk\)](https://www.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 - June 2024 | Bassetlaw District Council](#)