Slough Borough Council

Report To:	**Cabinet**
Date:	20th July 2026
Subject:	Annual Housing Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report 2025–26 and Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code Self-Assessment
Lead Member:	Cllr I Ahmed - Lead Member for Housing, Homelessness and Communities
Chief Officer:	Will Tuckley, Chief Executive
Contact Officer:	Victoria Boateng, Director of Housing
Ward(s):	All
Key Decision:	YES
Exempt:	NO
Decision Subject To Call In:	YES
Appendices:	Appendix 1 – The Housing Ombudsman's assessment of the Council's Complaint Policy and the proposed changes to the Complaint Policy Appendix 2 – Housing Remedies and Compensation Policy Appendix 3 – Annual Housing Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report 2025–26 Appendix 4 – The Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code Self-Assessment

1. Summary and Recommendations

1.1 This report presents the Annual Housing Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report 2025/26 in relation to the Council's landlord function, and the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code Self- Assessment for Cabinet approval. These documents relate to the Council's housing management directorate and form part of the submission requirements by the Housing Ombudsman.

1.2 The documents provide a comprehensive overview of complaint handling performance, learning from complaints and Housing Ombudsman determinations, and service improvements delivered and planned.

1.3 The self-assessment confirms that while the Council's updated complaints policy is now compliant, there are areas where the Council has not always consistently met the requirements of the policy, indicating that this may not be consistently implemented in practice. These relate primarily to response timescales, recording of vulnerabilities, complaint record keeping and early resolution processes and have been marked as areas of focus in the self-assessment.

1.4 An improvement plan is in place to address these areas and achieve full compliance.

1.5 The documents have been scrutinised by the Resident Scrutiny Board. Their comments are included in this report.

1.6 Subject to Cabinet approval, the documents will be published on the Council's website and submitted to the Housing Ombudsman in line with statutory requirements.

1.7 This report also seeks approval of a new Housing Remedies and Compensation Policy, which supports effective complaint resolution and aligns with the findings of this report.

1.8 In a separate item on the agenda of this meeting, the LGSO Annual Review Report, a new Corporate Complaints Policy is being presented for approval. The assessment in this report was based on the new policy.

Recommendations:

Cabinet is recommended to:

a) Note the Housing Ombudsman's review of the Council's complaints policy and the proposed changes to the policy at Appendix 1
b) Approve the Housing Remedies and Compensation Policy at Appendix 2;
c) Approve the Annual Housing Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report 2025–26, including endorsing the forward by the Lead Member for Housing, Homelessness and Communities at Appendix 3;
d) Approve the Council's Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code Self-Assessment at Appendix 4.

Reason:

1.5 The Housing Ombudsman deals with complaints in relation to social housing. It has published a Complaint Handling Code, and this became a statutory code from 1 April 2024. This sets out the expectations for social landlords in how they deal with and manage complaints within their landlord service area.

1.6 The Council is required to complete a self-assessment of how well it conforms to the Code and this must be approved by the governing body, which for the Council is Cabinet.

1.7 The Housing Ombudsman has conducted its own assessment for 2024-25, which has identified 19 recommendations in relation to the Council's policy and 2 observations in relation to the Council's annual complaints and performance improvement report. This assessment does not cover all aspects of the Code and does not replace the need for the Council to conduct its own assessment.

1.8 The Council's senior leaders, including the Member Responsible for Complaints (the lead member for housing) should use the self-assessment to scrutinise the service effectively.

Commissioner Review

The importance of making improvements across the Housing Service remains of paramount importance to the Council's overall recovery journey. Therefore, the need to ensure not only consistent compliance with Codes and Polices in practice but also to be assured that that is being done, are important characteristics that need to be demonstrated by the service. The action plan needs to be regularly monitored and form part of the overall package of improvement for this service. Commissioners remain concerned about the speed of progress being made so are being kept informed, involved and engaged in the improvement work generally.

2. Report

Introduction

2.1 The Housing Ombudsman has identified several recommendations for improvement in relation to the Council's complaints policy. In addition, the Council's own self-assessment has highlighted further areas requiring enhancement. The Council operates a corporate complaints policy, and it is recommended that this be updated because of the improvements arising from both the self-assessment and the separate review against the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's Code.

The revised corporate complaints policy is presented separately on this agenda for approval. Appendix 1 sets out the proposed changes resulting from the self-assessment. It is also recommended that a separate remedies and compensation policy, specifically relating to landlord functions, be approved.

Options for Complaints Policy Structure and Remedies Framework

2.2 **Option 1 – Introduce a separate Housing Complaints Policy**
While there are some benefits to adopting a standalone housing complaints policy, this approach may create confusion for residents, who may not readily understand the distinction between the two Ombudsmen when submitting a complaint at Stage 1. However, it is recommended that a standalone remedies and compensation policy is developed for landlord functions. This reflects the specific considerations associated with housing-related remedies, which can be more clearly articulated within a dedicated policy. Incorporating these provisions within a broader, corporate remedies and compensation policy is likely to cause confusion for residents. Furthermore, the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman already provides comprehensive guidance covering remedies across the wider range of Council services.

This is not recommended.

2.3 Option 2 – Agree to revisions to the Corporate Complaints Policy and introduce a standalone *Remedies and Compensation Policy* for landlord functions
This option provides the greatest clarity for residents. The corporate complaints policy would continue to set out the stages of the complaints process and the

Council's overarching approach to complaint resolution, applicable across all service areas. The separate remedies and compensation policy would, in turn, set out the specific requirements and considerations relevant to landlord functions.

This is recommended.

Background

2.4 The Council is required to produce an annual housing complaints performance and service improvement report in accordance with the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code. This report must be presented to the Council's governing body and published for residents, alongside a formal response from the governing body. The report and accompanying response must also be submitted to the Housing Ombudsman.

2.5 The report must include:

- A qualitative and quantitative analysis of the landlord's complaint handling performance;
- A summary of complaints that the landlord has not accepted, including the reasons for refusal;
- Details of any findings of non-compliance with the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code;
- A summary of improvements made because of learning from complaints; and
- Actions taken in response to relevant reports or publications issued by the Housing Ombudsman in relation to the landlord's services.

2.6 **Summary of Annual Complaints Report**

The Annual Housing Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report highlights both areas of good performance and areas requiring improvement.

Areas of concern include:

- failure to consistently meet Stage 1 and Stage 2 response timescales
- high levels of complaints relating to communication failures
- ongoing backlogs in repairs and outstanding works
- increased escalation of complaints to the Housing Ombudsman

These issues demonstrate the need for continued focus on improving responsiveness, communication and operational performance.

2.7 Self-Assessment – Compliance Position

The self-assessment confirms that the Council's new policy is now fully compliant with all elements of the Complaint Handling Code, however there are areas where compliance has not been consistently achieved. These have been marked as areas of focus.

Key areas of focus include:

- inconsistent compliance with complaint response timescales
- lack of consistent recording of vulnerabilities and reasonable adjustments
- incomplete complaint record management

- absence of a formal early resolution and triage process
- inconsistencies in providing Ombudsman escalation information

2.8 Actions to Achieve Compliance

A structured improvement plan is in place to address the areas of non-compliance.

Key actions include:

Improving complaint handling performance
- strengthened monitoring and escalation arrangements
- regular performance reporting to senior management

Early resolution and triage
- introduction of a formal complaint triage process at first point of contact

Vulnerability and reasonable adjustments
- improved systems to record and monitor vulnerabilities
- integration with housing management data

Complaint record keeping
- policy amendments requiring full case records
- improved case management processes

Governance and oversight
- strengthened reporting to Members
- continued resident scrutiny through the Resident Scrutiny Board

2.9 Resident Scrutiny

The Annual Housing Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report and the Housing Ombudsman Self-Assessment have been reviewed by the Resident Scrutiny Board as part of pre-Cabinet scrutiny. The board agreed with the key points highlighted in the report and emphasised the significance of poor communication a key driver for complaints and a key issue with complaints handling. The Resident Board supported the prioritisation of ensuring timely and proactive communication, improving record keeping of complaints to improve future complaints handling, as this reflected their personal experience in raising complaints. Board members also highlighted the importance of considering and addressing the vulnerabilities of complainants, which was highlighted as a key priority for service improvement within the annual report. Overall, the board expressed confidence that the appointment of the lead member for housing as the new Member Responsible for Housing will strengthen oversight of complaints handling within the service and support compliance with the Housing Ombudsman Complaints Handling Code.

2.10 Member Responsible for Complaints (MRC) Assurance

The Member Responsible for Complaints (MRC) is a designated member of the Council’s governing body with responsibility for overseeing complaints handling performance and providing assurance on compliance with the Housing Ombudsman’s Complaint Handling Code.

The MRC, Councillor I Ahmed, has reviewed the annual self-assessment against the Housing Ombudsman’s Complaint Handling Code and the Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report. The MRC is satisfied that the assessment is robust and that the report provides an accurate reflection of the Council’s complaint handling performance, including areas for improvement. The

MRC will continue to oversee delivery of the identified actions and provide assurance to the governing body.

2.11 Housing Remedies and Compensation Policy

A new Housing Remedies and Compensation Policy is being presented for approval.

The policy is required to:

- provide a consistent and transparent approach to compensation
- align with Housing Ombudsman guidance on remedies
- support timely and fair resolution of complaints
- reduce the risk of adverse Ombudsman findings

The introduction of this policy strengthens the Council's approach to putting things right and supports the improvement actions identified through the self-assessment.

3. Implications of the Recommendation

3.1 Finance implications

3.1.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report, however any financial impact resulting from the implementation of the proposed Housing Remedies and Compensation policy will be contained within the annual HRA Revenue budgets.

3.2 Legal implications

3.2.1 Under the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023, housing landlords must comply with the requirements set out by the Social Housing Regulator and the Housing Ombudsman

3.3 Risk management implications

3.3.1 The key risks associated with this report include:

- non-compliance with statutory complaint handling requirements
- negative Housing Ombudsman findings

reputational damage

Mitigations include:

- a clear action plan arising from the self-assessment
- strengthened governance and oversight
- implementation of a new compensation policy

3.4 Environmental implications

3.4.1 No environmental implications have been identified as a direct result of this report.

3.5 Equality implications

3.5.1 The Council has considered its duties under the Equality Act 2010 in relation to the complaints process and associated reporting. An effective and accessible complaints framework is essential to ensuring that all residents, including those with protected characteristics, can raise concerns and have these addressed fairly and consistently. The Council will continue to monitor complaint data to identify any disproportionate impacts or barriers to access, and to use this insight to inform service improvements. This approach supports compliance with the Regulator of Social Housing's Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard by ensuring that diverse tenant voices are heard and acted upon, and that services remain responsive, inclusive, and accountable.

3.6 Procurement implications

3.6.1 There are no procurement implications.

3.7 Workforce implications

3.7.1 There are no direct workforce implications.

4. Background Papers

None