Slough Borough Council

Annual Housing Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report

2025–26

June 2026

Forward by the Lead Member for Housing, Homelessness and Communities

As the Council's designated Member Responsible for Complaints (MRC), I have a key role in providing oversight of housing complaints performance and ensuring that the Council complies with the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code. This includes reviewing complaint trends, scrutinising areas of underperformance, and ensuring that learning from complaints is used to improve services for residents.

This Annual Housing Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report and the accompanying self-assessment provide a transparent account of how the Council has managed housing complaints during 2025–26. The report clearly identifies areas where performance has fallen short of the standards required by the Complaint Handling Code, including response timescales and communication, and sets out the actions being taken to address these issues.

I welcome the scrutiny provided by the Resident Scrutiny Board and the openness reflected in this report. I am satisfied that the self-assessment is robust and that a clear improvement plan is in place. I will continue to oversee delivery of these actions and provide assurance to Cabinet, residents, and regulators that complaint handling is driving meaningful service improvement

Cllr Iftakhar Ahmed - Lead Member for Housing, Homelessness and Communities

1. Purpose of the Report

This report sets out Slough Borough Council's housing complaints performance for the period 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026. It is produced in accordance with the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code and provides assurance to residents, elected members and regulators on how housing complaints are handled, learned from, and used to drive service improvement.

The report:

- presents quantitative and qualitative complaints performance data
- summarises learning and service improvements arising from complaints
- reports on Housing Ombudsman determinations and compliance with orders
- demonstrates governance, scrutiny, and accountability arrangements

This report is published alongside:

- the Corporate Complaints Policy
- the Housing Ombudsman self assessment
- the governing body's response

2. Overview of Housing Complaints Received

2.1 Volume of Complaints

During 2025–26, the Council received 519 Stage 1 housing complaints, equating to a monthly average of 43 complaints, with the highest volume recorded in September (59 complaints).

Complaints related to the following housing service areas:

Service Area	Stage 1 Complaints
CARDO (repairs contractor)	277
Housing Allocations	128
Housing Management	111
Revenues & Benefits	3

The Council does not view higher complaint volumes negatively; rather, they are recognised as an indicator of an accessible and well publicised complaints process, consistent with the Housing Ombudsman's expectations.

2.2 Stage 2 Complaints

A total of 131 Stage 2 complaints were received during the year, averaging 11 per month, with the highest volume recorded in July (19 complaints).

Service Area	Stage 2 Complaints
CARDO	57
Housing Allocations	41
Housing Management	33

The most common drivers of escalation were:

- housing register decisions
- delays or dissatisfaction relating to outstanding repair works

3. Complaint Outcomes

3.1 Stage 1 Outcomes

- 562 Stage 1 responses were issued
- 257 complaints (46%) were fully or partially upheld

3.2 Stage 2 Outcomes

- 137 Stage 2 responses were issued
- 68 complaints (50%) were fully or partially upheld

Upheld complaints provide valuable insight into service failures and are used to inform service improvement activity.

4. Performance Against Complaint Handling Timescales

4.1 Stage 1 Performance

- 60% of Stage 1 responses were issued within the required 10 working days

4.2 Stage 2 Performance

- 39% of Stage 2 responses were issued within the required 20 working days

While the Corporate Complaints Policy is compliant with the Complaint Handling Code, response time performance during 2025–26 did not consistently meet the Code requirements. This position is transparently reflected in the Housing Ombudsman self assessment and has informed targeted improvement actions.

5. Key Complaint Themes and Root Causes

Analysis of complaint root causes identified communication failures as the most significant theme across housing services:

- 306 complaints related to communication issues
- 217 complaints (41.8%) related specifically to delays in, or lack of, response

Other recurring themes included:

- delays in completing repairs
- dissatisfaction with housing register decisions
- management of outstanding works following inspections

These themes demonstrate systemic issues rather than isolated incidents and have informed service improvement priorities.

6. Housing Ombudsman Cases, Determinations and Learning

During 2025–26, 16 housing-related cases were recorded with the Housing **Ombudsman**, primarily relating to responsive repairs, outstanding works, damp and mould, and complaint handling.

6.1 Ombudsman Determinations

During the year, the Housing Ombudsman made three determinations of maladministration against the Council (cases 2024429376, 202217555 and 202305272), relating to damp and mould, service charges and repairs associated with an electronic door and mould. These resulted in compensation payments of £6,093.62, £300, and £2,350, respectively. In addition to the financial remedies, the Ombudsman's findings highlighted service failures in communication, timeliness, and case management, and required the Council to take action to address these issues and prevent recurrence.

6.2 Ombudsman Orders and Compliance

For case 202305272 The Ombudsman issued binding orders, including:

- a written apology to be issued by the Chief Executive
- payment of financial compensation, including compensation linked to rent
- completion of inspections and remedial repair actions
- a senior management case review to identify root causes and prevent recurrence

All Housing Ombudsman orders arising during 2025–26 have been complied with within the specified timescales, and evidence of compliance has been provided to the Ombudsman.

7. Learning from Ombudsman Investigations and Complaints

Learning from Housing Ombudsman determinations and internal complaints analysis during the year has reinforced the importance of:

- timely and proactive communication with residents
- robust record keeping and information management
- adherence to published repairs and complaint handling timescales
- understanding and responding appropriately to the impact of service failures on vulnerable residents, including those reliant on adaptations

These findings have directly informed service improvement activity across housing services.

8. Service Improvements Delivered

During 2025–26, learning from complaints and Ombudsman investigations has led to the following improvements:

8.1 Repairs and Contractor Oversight

- strengthened monitoring of CARDO performance
- improved tracking and management of outstanding works
- clearer communication standards for residents

8.2 Complaints Handling

- revision and approval of the Corporate Complaints Policy (July 2026)
- clearer escalation routes and response templates
- weekly Housing Complaints Task Force meetings to monitor performance and identify key areas of improvement in complaints handling.

8.3 Vulnerability and Reasonable Adjustments

Learning from Ombudsman findings has reinforced the need to better identify, record and respond to vulnerability and disability related needs. Work is underway to strengthen the recording of vulnerabilities and reasonable adjustments, ensuring that the impact of service failures on residents who rely on adaptations is fully understood and addressed.

9. Complaints Refused or Not Accepted

Complaints were only refused where they fell outside the scope of the complaints policy, such as where a statutory appeal route applied or the matter was outside the Council's remit. Each decision was made on a case-by-case basis, with residents provided with a clear explanation and advised of their right to refer the matter to the Housing Ombudsman.

10. Governance, Scrutiny and Accountability

Complaints handling is subject to robust governance and scrutiny arrangements, including:

- regular performance reporting to senior officers
- oversight by the Member Responsible for Complaints (MRC)
- monthly officer meetings reviewing trends, risks, and Ombudsman outcomes
- resident scrutiny through the Resident Complaints Scrutiny Panel

The Resident Complaints Scrutiny Panel and the weekly complaints task force have identified similar areas of improvement to the findings of the Housing Ombudsman.

These include; higher levels of accountability in responses and providing explanations of service failures, logging vulnerabilities of complainants and considering them in adjustments to service delivery and the need to strengthen cross service working within housing.

This report, alongside the Housing Ombudsman self assessment, has been reviewed by senior officers and the Member Responsible for Complaints and reported to Cabinet, providing assurance on complaint handling performance and improvement activity.

11. Priorities for 2026–27

Key priorities for the coming year include:

- improving compliance with complaint response timescales
- embedding early resolution and triage processes
- strengthening recording of vulnerabilities and reasonable adjustments
- improving communication standards across housing services

12. Conclusion

This report demonstrates the Council’s commitment to transparency, accountability and learning from complaints. While performance challenges were identified during 2025–26, particularly in relation to response times, the Council has been open about these issues and has put in place clear actions to strengthen complaint handling and service delivery in line with the Housing Ombudsman’s expectations and the RSH consumer standards.