

Appendix C: Governing Body's response to Self-Assessment

Statement of the member responsible for complaints

In accordance with the Housing Ombudsman's requirement for a Member Responsible for Complaints (MRC), Councillor Gary Luff, Chair of Stroud District Council's Housing Committee, and Councillor Lucas Schoemaker, Vice Chair of the Housing Committee, have undertaken the role of scrutinising and providing constructive challenge to the Council's self-assessment of its social housing complaints handling arrangements.

The Members would like to place on record their appreciation for the work undertaken by the Housing Team in completing the self-assessment. They recognise the thorough and comprehensive review carried out to evaluate compliance with the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code and welcome the report being presented to the Housing Committee for consideration, scrutiny and approval. The assessment provides assurance that the Council has critically reviewed its complaints handling practices and is committed to continuous improvement in the service provided to tenants and residents.

Member Review of Complaint Self-Assessment

After careful review of the self-assessment and annual report, we, as the MRC and on behalf of the governing body, acknowledge the following key points:

Compliance and areas of strength

- The self-assessment demonstrates that the Council's Complaints and Feedback policy is robust and complies with the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code. The MRC acknowledge that this corporate policy has been updated in accordance with the revised handling code and gives consistency across the whole organisation of what a complaint is and how the Council will respond to the complaint.
- The process and procedures in housing for complaint handling remain strong and comply with the code.
- The MRC are pleased to see that 100% of complaints were acknowledged within three working days, meeting this target deadline gives the complainant certainty that their complaint has been successfully registered and gives them a time scale for when they will have a decision.
- The Housing Quality Assurance Team track complaints and provide a weekly reminder to complaint handlers of which complaints are open and the deadline for response to support complaints being completed within the required time scales.
- The MRC are pleased to see that templates are in place and regularly reviewed which gives consistency to the decision format conveyed to residents. The introduction of a Complaint Closing Statement allowing

complaint handlers to document information, learning outcomes and service improvements in a transparent way is very welcome.

- The MRC are also pleased to note that all complaint responses are reviewed by the Housing Quality Assurance Team prior to issuing the decision, which gives each complaint a review and quality check prior to issue. The MRC are also pleased that all complaint handlers have received ongoing internal training from the Housing Quality Assurance Team.
- The MRC are aware that complaint handling and the importance of making timely decisions has been raised regularly at senior level and operational team meetings during 2025-26 and a culture of positive complaint handling is being embedded across the service. The MRC are pleased to note a complaints monitoring log is routinely used to record learning outcomes, which are fed back to contractors during monthly contractors' meetings, and to operatives and relevant housing staff during toolbox talks and team meetings.
- The MRC recognise and appreciate the commitment of the service, through the work of the Complaints Review Panel, to continually improve in the area of complaint handling. The MRC welcome the Complaints Action Plan and service improvement log, and the commitment to continuously update these to reflect the work being carried out by the Panel and the improvements they are making and embedding across the housing service, a point of good practice also recently highlighted by Internal Audit.

Recommendations

- The MRC acknowledge that the council performed comparably with peers in terms of responding to complaints within complaint handling timeframes. The review of complaint performance showed that 92% of stage 1 complaints were dealt with within target. This is slightly above the sector average and a marginal improvement on the previous year, though fell short of the local target set by the MRC for 2025-26 of 99%. The MRC, whilst acknowledging the complexity of some complaints, recommend that the housing service continue to "aim high" in line with the Council's core values and recommend the target for 2026-27 should remain to meet the sector upper quartile of 99%.
- The MRC note the increase in the number of complaints at stage 1 as well as the number that escalated to stage 2 in 2025-26 compared to the previous year, which represents a continuing long-term trend. The MRC recommend this is given particular focus in the Complaints Action Plan to ensure sufficient rigour and learning across any recurring and emerging themes.
- The MRC notes the significant decrease in financial redress compared to the previous year and recommend the housing service takes this into consideration through the continuous learning and review of service delivery through the Complaints Action Plan.

Ongoing Monitoring

- The MRC, as members of the Housing Oversight Board, will continue to receive a copy of the quarterly complaint report and updates on areas of improvement or concern, in addition to the annual report and self-assessment. In addition, the MRC will receive a case summary for review on a quarterly basis.
- In the self-assessment two areas were described as partially met. The MRC wish to receive regular updates as to progress and full compliance against these areas.
- The MRC recommend that the Council's performance continues to be benchmarked against the sector and the appropriate Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs).
- The MRC acknowledge that complaint handling across the council is discussed and scrutinised at the Council's Corporate Governance Group and recommend that this continues so that there is scrutiny and consistency across the organisation.
- The MRC request timely notice of any compliance area if the rating is likely to change to partial or non-compliant.

The MRC have prepared this paper in good faith and recommend to Housing Committee that the report is approved as a true reflection of the position of the Council against the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code.

Cllr Gary Luff

Housing Committee Chair

Cllr Lucas Schoemaker

Housing Committee Vice
Chair