

Annual Complaints Performance & Service Improvement Report

2025/26





“
Complaints give customers a voice to tell us where expectations have not been met and when this happens, we aim to put things right as quickly as possible and to improve so that we avoid making the same mistakes.”



Foreword

We're committed to providing the best possible services to our customers. However, we know that sometimes things go wrong. Complaints give customers a voice to tell us where expectations have not been met and when this happens, we aim to put things right as quickly as possible and to improve so that we avoid making the same mistakes.

This report outlines our complaints performance and self-assessment against the Housing Ombudsman Code for the year April 2025 to March 2026.

As the Board Member Responsible for Complaints, I have ensured the self-assessment gives a true reflection of our complaint handling, the improvements we've made, and where we'll focus future improvement

Yinka Bolaji
Member Responsible for Complaints

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Over the past year Hightown has demonstrated an improvement to complaint handling timescales, along with an enhanced focus on service improvement and learning outcomes from complaints.

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Statement from the Board

The Board is satisfied that Hightown's approach to complaint handling remains a high priority and is compliant with the Complaint Handling Code, evidenced in the self-assessment statement and the Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report.

The Board is assured there is a focus across Hightown to deal customer complaints proactively. Over the past year Hightown has demonstrated an improvement to complaint handling timescales, along with an enhanced focus on service improvement and learning outcomes from complaints to ensure that Hightown continues to show its commitment to customers.

Qadeer Kiani
Chair of the Board

Introduction

It is a requirement of the Housing Ombudsman Service for social landlords to report on complaints received from Low-Cost Rental Agreement (LCRA) customers, living in properties owned by Hightown and rented out; Low-Cost Home Ownership (LCHO) customers, living in shared ownership homes; applicants for rented housing and Leaseholders.

These are indicated as falling within the Housing Ombudsman (HO) code in the report. In addition, Hightown received complaints from customers who receive only care services from our Care and Supported Housing (C&SH) services; members of the public; and freeholders. These complaints are noted in the report as other complaints.

During the year Hightown reviewed its complaints policy and updated its complaints leaflet and website as well as reviewing and updating the Ombudsman Annual Self-Assessment against the code. Following the 2025/26 annual submission, the Ombudsman carried out two reviews of Hightown's self-assessment and complaints policy, in July 2025 and January 2026. The Ombudsman provided recommendations to further strengthen Hightown's complaints policy. Both the complaints policy and self-assessment were updated to reflect the HO recommendations, reviewed and approved by the Operations Committee, chaired by the Member Responsible for Complaints.

The current Complaints policy, Complaints leaflet, Compensation Policy and Annual Self-Assessment are available on the Hightown website: www.hightownha.org.uk

Hightown has a broad range of customers and therefore for ease, this report is split into the following sections:

- Complaints falling within Housing Ombudsman's Code
- Other complaints, falling outside the Housing Ombudsman's Code
- Learning from complaints

“Hightown will continue to work together with our customers to learn from each complaint and improve services to meet customer expectations.”



Complaint volumes and performance

(Falling within the Housing Ombudsman Code)

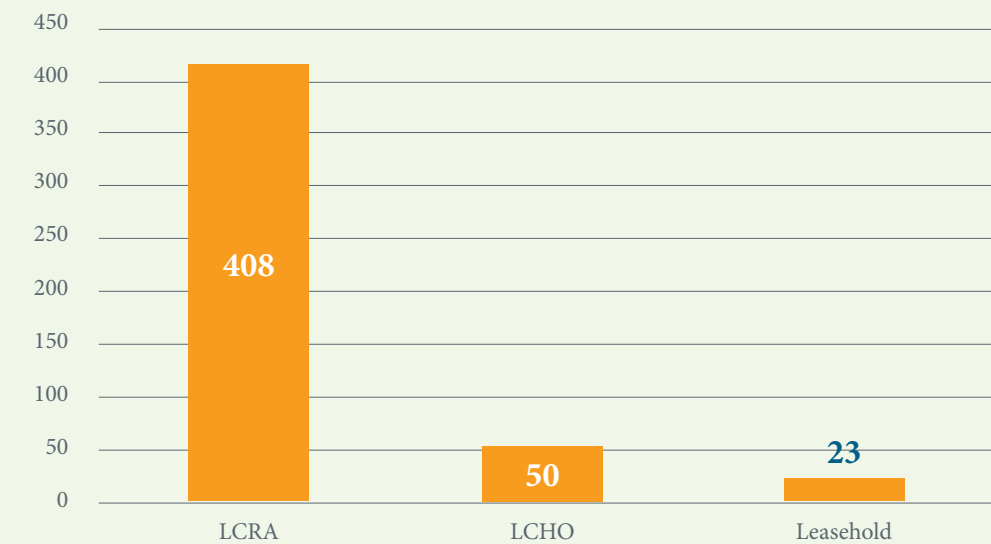
Stage One

Stage one complaints are recorded on Hightown's complaints system, and an acknowledgement is sent to the complainant within five working days of receipt. Hightown aims to respond within 10 working days. Where this is not possible due to the complexity of an investigation, an extension may be agreed to allow a thorough response to be provided.

A total of 481 Stage One complaints raised during 2025/2026 fell within the categories covered by the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code, 408 of which were from customers who rent a property from Hightown (LCRA), 50 from shared ownership customers (LCHO) and the remaining 23 from leaseholders, as shown in the table below.

Stage 1 complaints - by Tenure

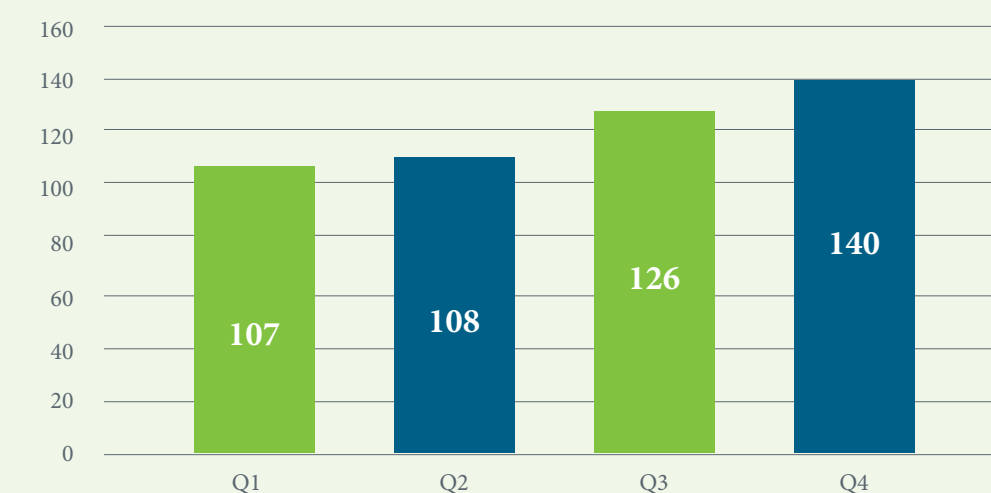
(within Housing Ombudsman code)



The graph below shows the number of Stage One complaints received each quarter. Our analysis shows that a higher number of complaints were received between October and March (quarters three and four), mainly relating to damp and mould, heating systems and hot water. This is a trend commonly seen during the winter period.

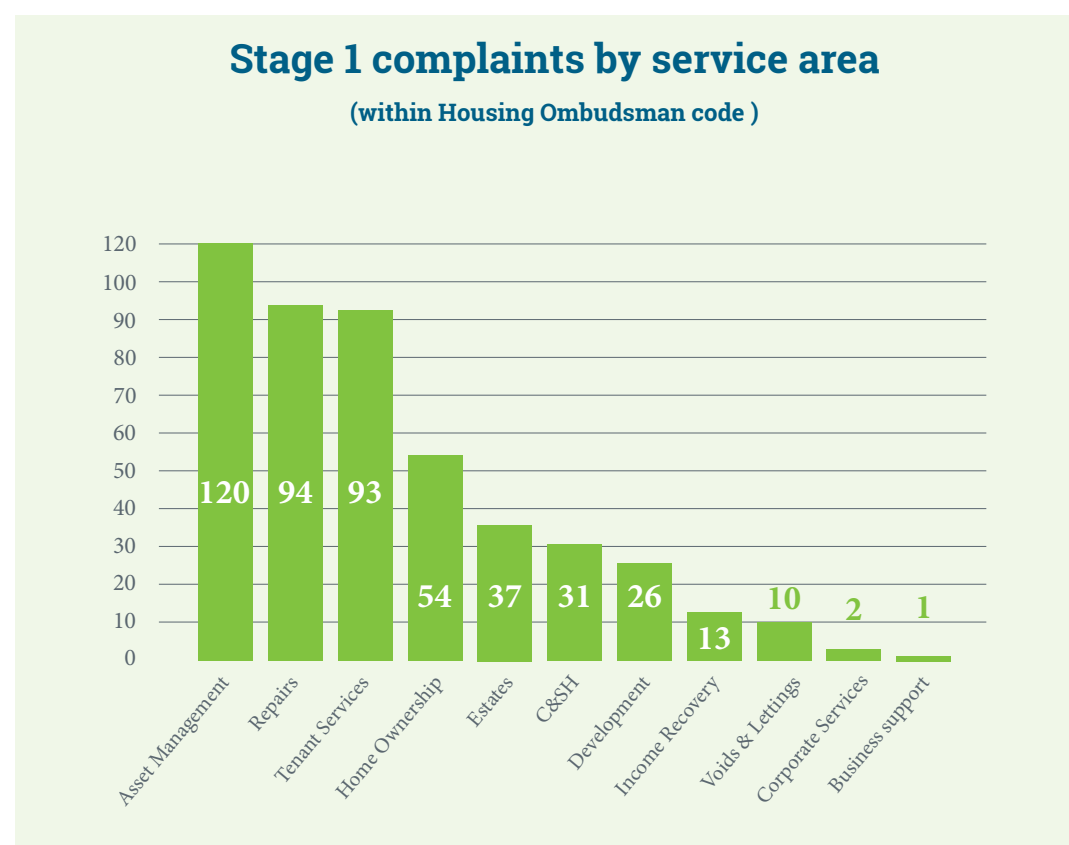
Stage 1 complaints - by quarter

(within Housing Ombudsman code)

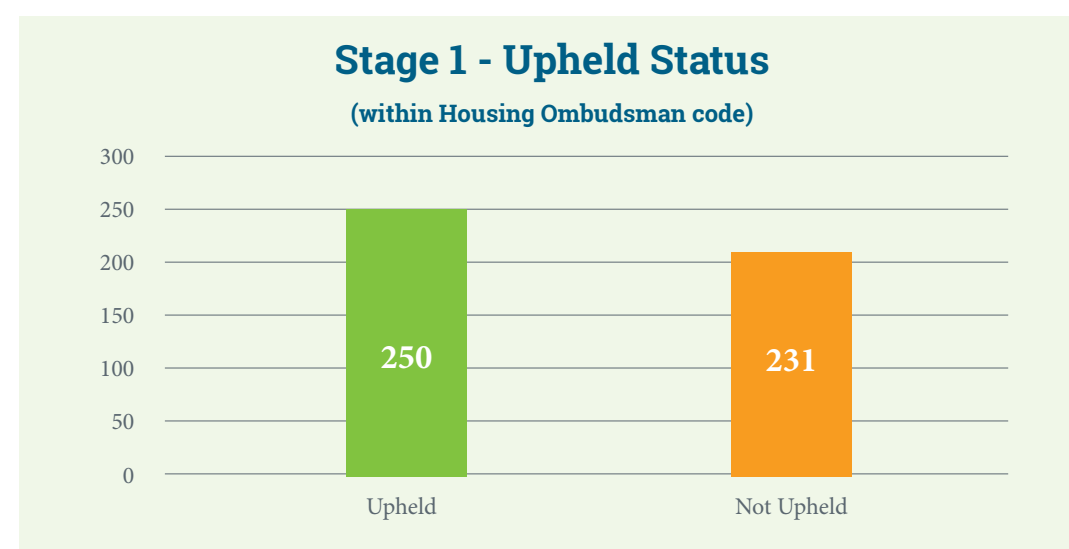




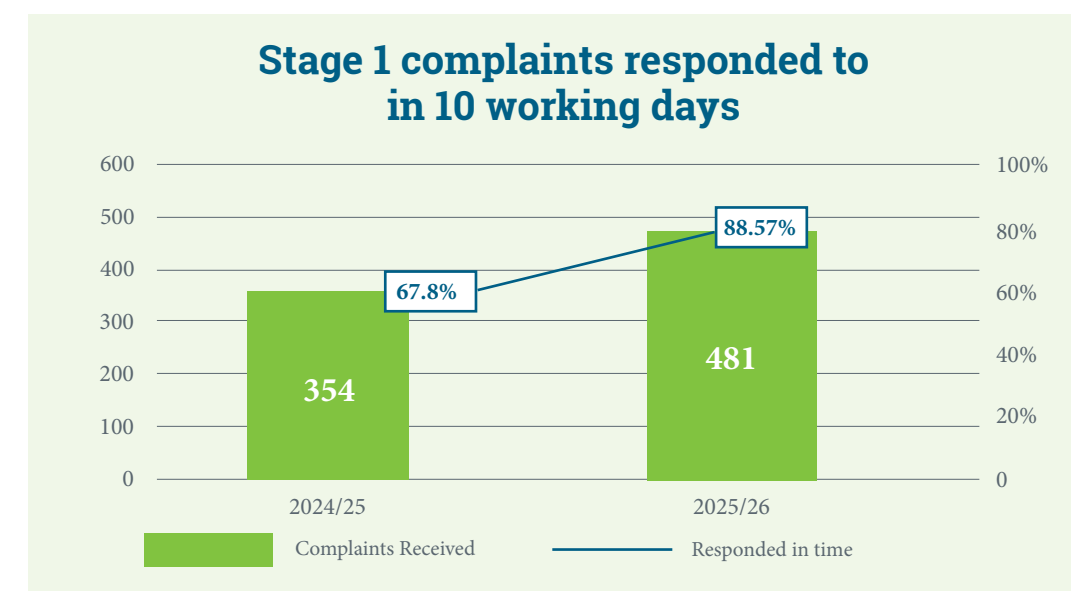
The graph below indicates the number of complaints received by each service area.



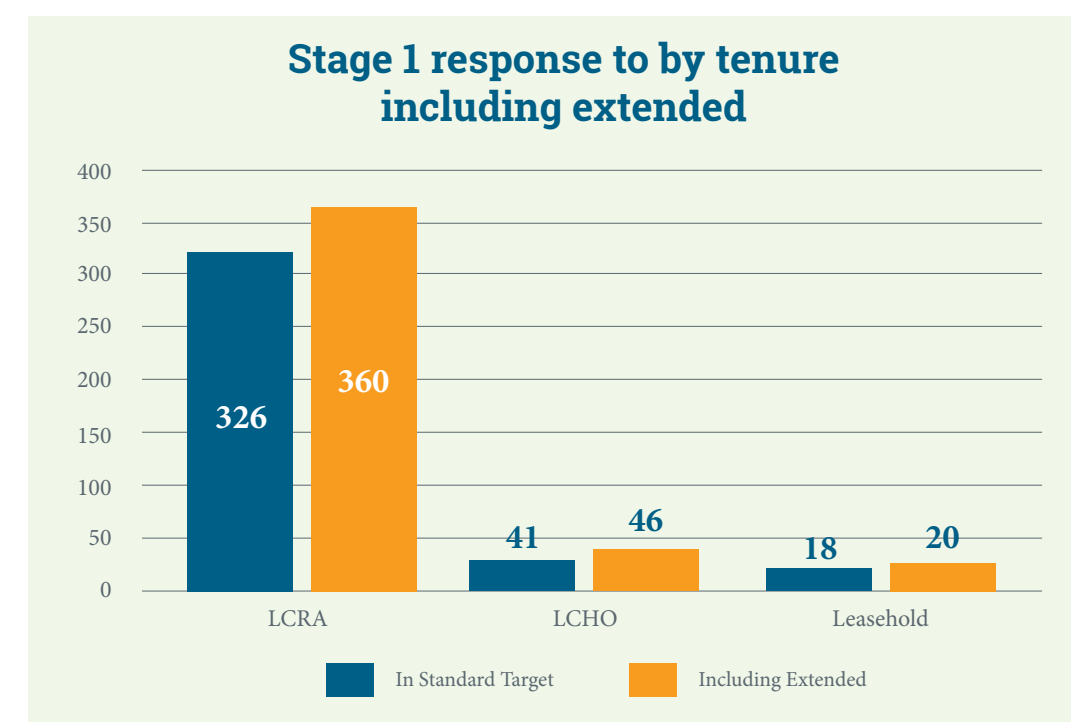
As part of each complaint investigation, Hightown checks whether services have met the requirements set out in our policies and procedures. Where no service failure is identified, the complaint is not upheld. The graph below shows the outcomes of complaints received at Stage One. Of the 481 complaints, 250 (51.97%) were upheld.



Stage One complaint responses should be provided within 10 working days of acknowledgement. Performance in this area improved significantly compared with the previous year, increasing from 67.8% to 88.57% and meeting the Hightown Board's agreed target of 88%.



Where complaints were complex, an extension was requested to allow a robust response to be provided. The graph below shows the number of Stage One responses that met the Housing Ombudsman 10-working-day response time (shown in blue), alongside the total number responded to within either the original or agreed extended timescale (shown in orange). There were 55 additional complaints where either the acknowledgement or response did not meet the agreed timescale.



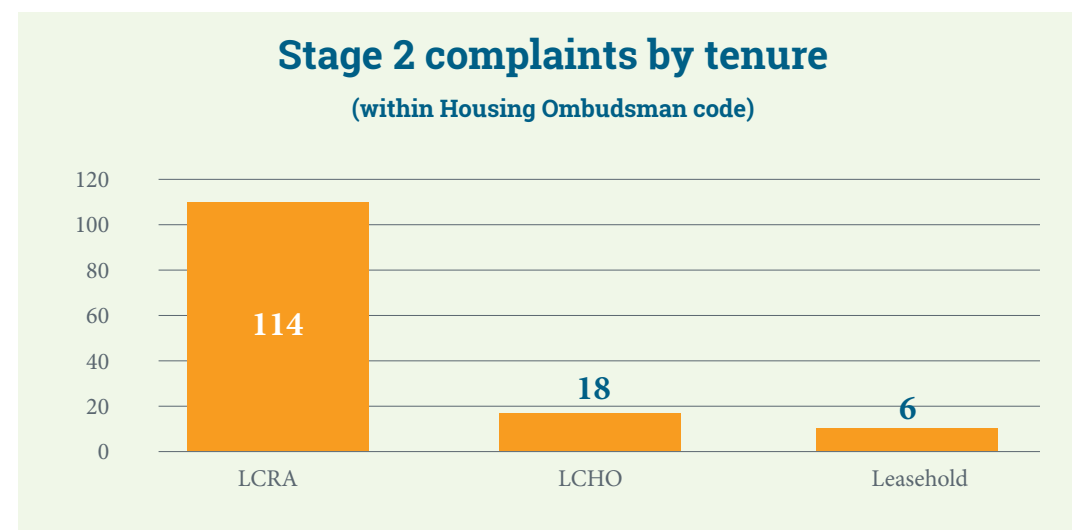


Stage Two

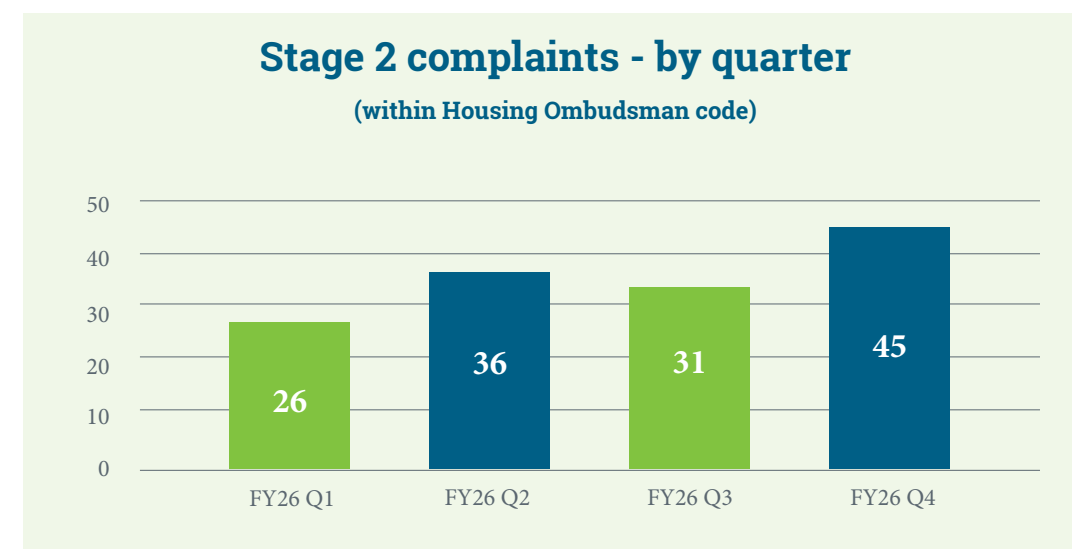
Where customers remain dissatisfied with the response provided at Stage One and ask for their complaint to be escalated, the complaint is reviewed at Stage Two by the Complaints and Resolution Manager.

In 2025/2026, 142 complaints were escalated to Stage Two, representing 28.2% of all complaints received. These complaints required acknowledgement within five working days and a response within 20 working days of acknowledgement.

Of these, 138 Stage Two complaints fell within the categories covered by the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code, as shown in the table below.

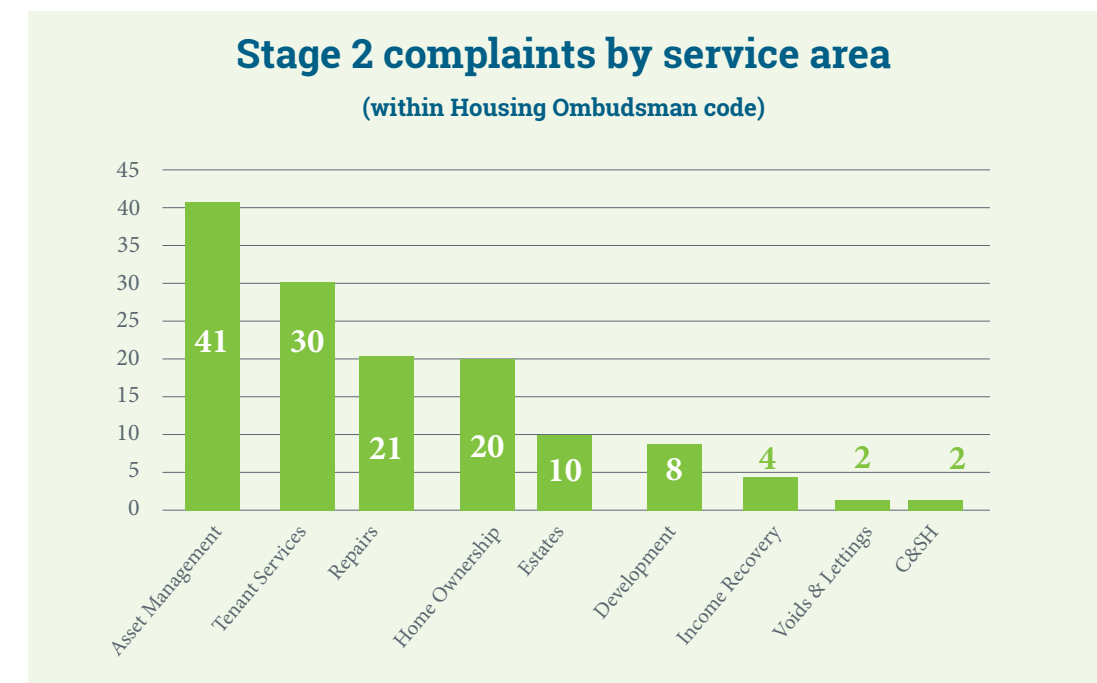


The number of complaints escalated to Stage Two each quarter is shown in the table below.

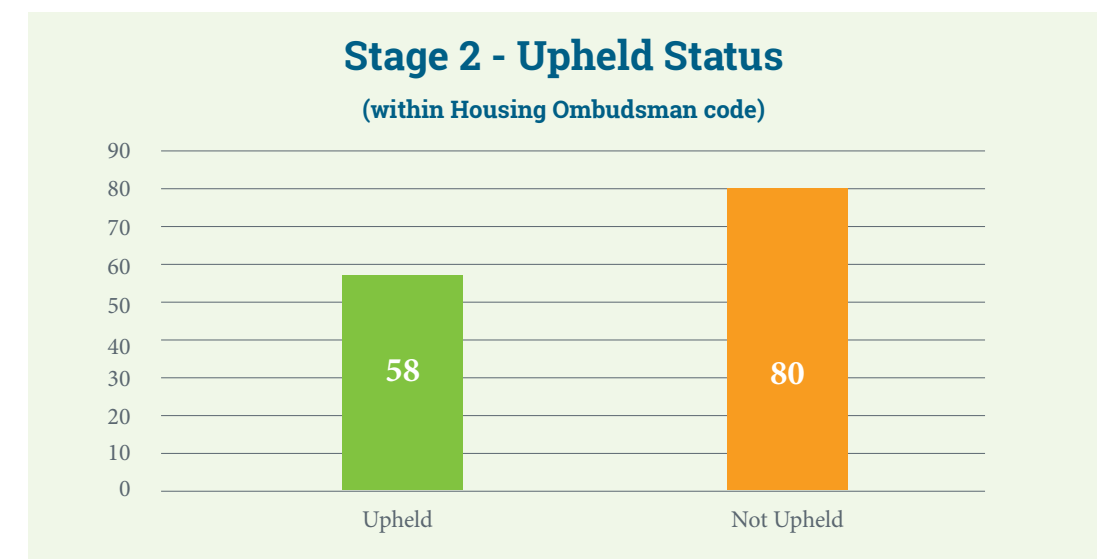


The graph below shows Stage Two complaints by service area. The services with the highest proportion of Stage One complaints escalated to Stage Two were:

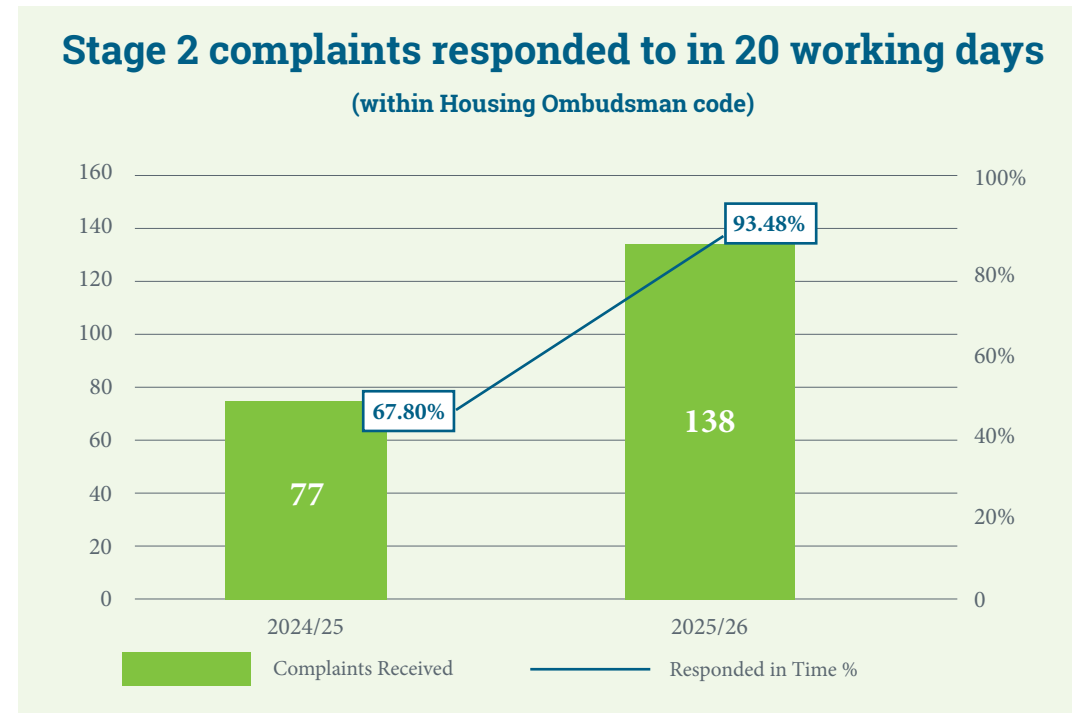
- Home Ownership (37%): complaints related to a range of issues, with no specific trend identified.
- Asset Management (34%): the main issues related to damp and mould and lift outages.
- Tenant Services (32%): complaints mainly related to handling of anti-social behaviour reports and neighbour disputes.



The graph below shows the outcomes of complaints reviewed at Stage Two. Of the 138 complaints 58 (42%) were upheld.

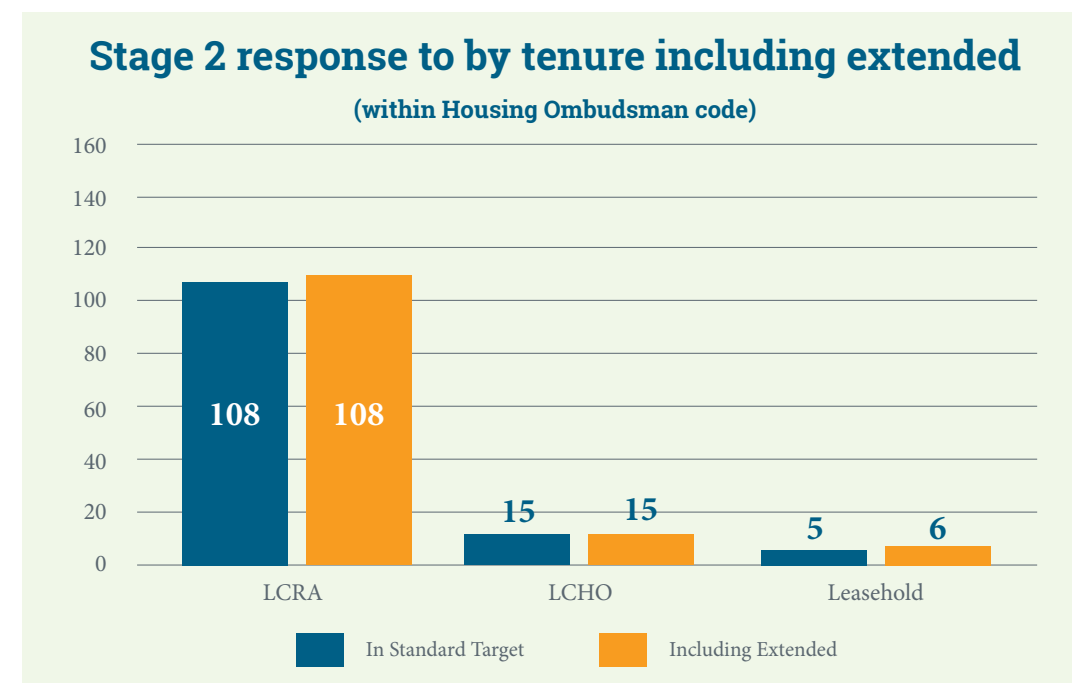


The proportion of Stage Two complaint responses provided within the required 20 working days following acknowledgement improved significantly compared with the previous year, increasing from 67.8% to 93.48% and exceeding Hightown's Board agreed target of 82%.



One Stage Two complaint had an agreed extension to the response timescale. Five complaints took more than five working days to acknowledge, and four responses were delayed by a short period.

Hightown is aware that customers may need to escalate their complaint to Stage Two of the complaints process after 20 working days of the Stage One complaint response and remains flexible with this regard, with 36 (25.3%) of the total 142 Stage Two complaints accepted beyond 20 working days.



Refused complaints

Hightown refused three complaints during the year, of which there are two related to active disrepair claims and one related to an insurance process. In addition, there were three complaints related to service charge increases that do not fall under the complaints process.

In addition, Hightown considered three complaints that had initially been refused where the customer sought advice from the Ombudsman, and it was recommended a complaint be considered.

Housing Ombudsman

The Housing Ombudsman is a free (to customers), independent, and impartial service. Customers can find out more about the Housing Ombudsman service by visiting their website [Housing Ombudsman Service](#).

The Ombudsman investigates complaints and resolves disputes involving the tenants and leaseholders of social landlords, such as Hightown Housing Association. Customers can take a complaint to the Housing Ombudsman for investigation after going through Hightown's complaint process, if the issues have not been resolved to the customer's satisfaction. The Ombudsman also helps where the landlord is not responding to a customer's complaint.

Members of the Housing Ombudsman Scheme must comply with the Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code. The Ombudsman has the power to make orders to landlords; this might include ordering the landlord to apologise, carry out works or pay compensation. The Housing Ombudsman's work is funded through compulsory landlord subscription fees, which for Hightown were £70,158 in 2025-26, rising from £64,834 in 2024-25.

Housing Ombudsman Determinations

The Housing Ombudsman will make recommendations and a determination when they review a complaint. There are several types of determination including:

- **Maladministration:** where the landlord has failed to comply with its legal obligations, its policies and procedures, or unreasonably delayed dealing with the matter. This could be a finding of service failure, maladministration or severe maladministration, depending on the seriousness of the failure and the impact on the customer. Service failure is the lowest level of maladministration and is reserved for minor failings where action is still needed to put things right.
- **Partial Maladministration:** where there are multiple findings following investigation within one determination and at least one, but not all, of these is maladministration.
- **No maladministration:** where the landlord is found to have acted appropriately.
- **Redress:** where the landlord resolved the complaint satisfactorily.
- **Resolved with intervention:** where the complaint was resolved with Ombudsman help.
- **Outside jurisdiction (OSJ):** where the Ombudsman didn't have the authority to investigate. This could be for a variety of reasons including: the complaint had not been made within a reasonable timescale; the complaint did not meet the conditions of the scheme; or the matter was more appropriately dealt with by the courts, a tribunal, another complaint handling body or regulator.

Complaints escalated to the Housing Ombudsman Service

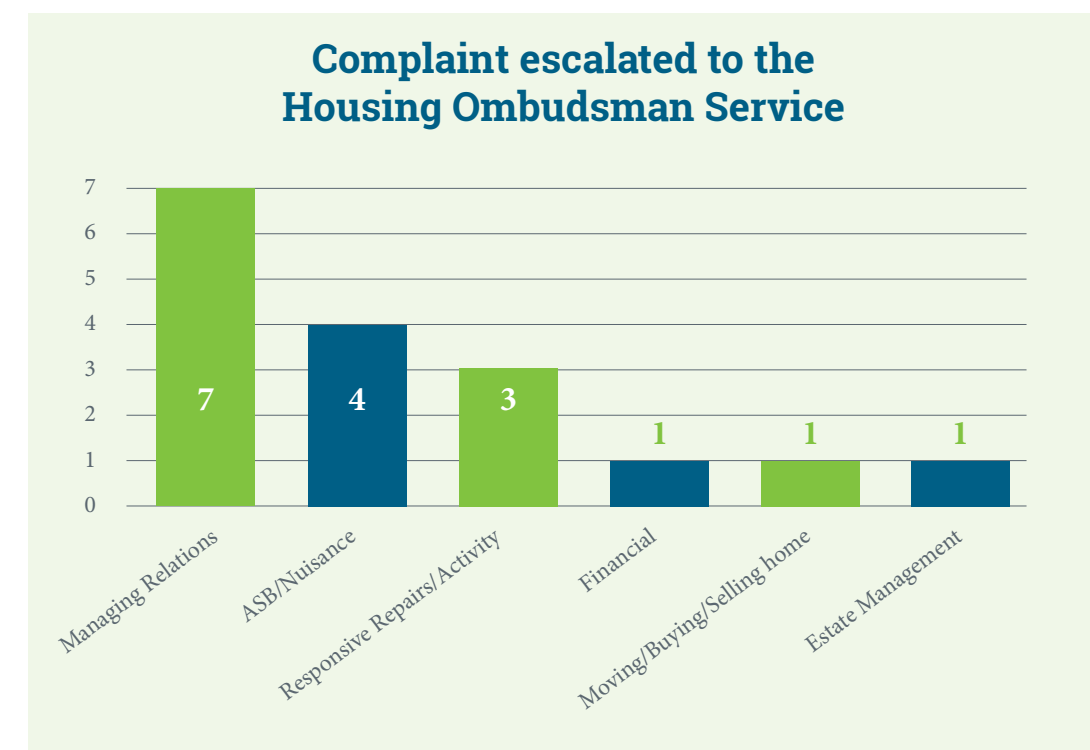
The Housing Ombudsman Service is able to provide customers with support to make a complaint at any stage. However, in the event of remaining dissatisfied once a complainant has received a final response from Hightown's Complaints Resolution team, customers are able to escalate to the Housing Ombudsman's service where it will be further investigated.

Care and Supported Housing services are overseen by different regulators, dependent on their services. These include the Care Quality Commission, the relevant Local Authority or the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman. There were no complaints escalated to these governing agencies.

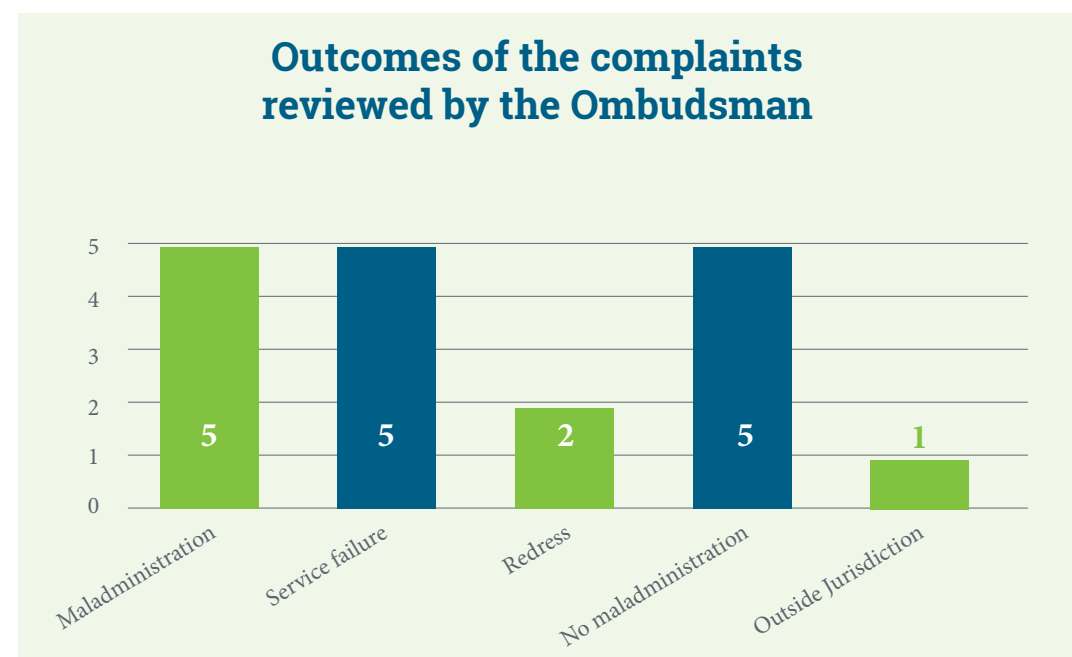
During 2025/2026 the Housing Ombudsman reviewed 10 complaints of which nine were within their jurisdiction. Note that some of these were for complaints raised in previous years.

Several of the complaints related to more than one area; the nine complaints therefore equate to 18 categories as indicated below.

Category



The outcomes of the complaints reviewed by the Ombudsman were as follows:

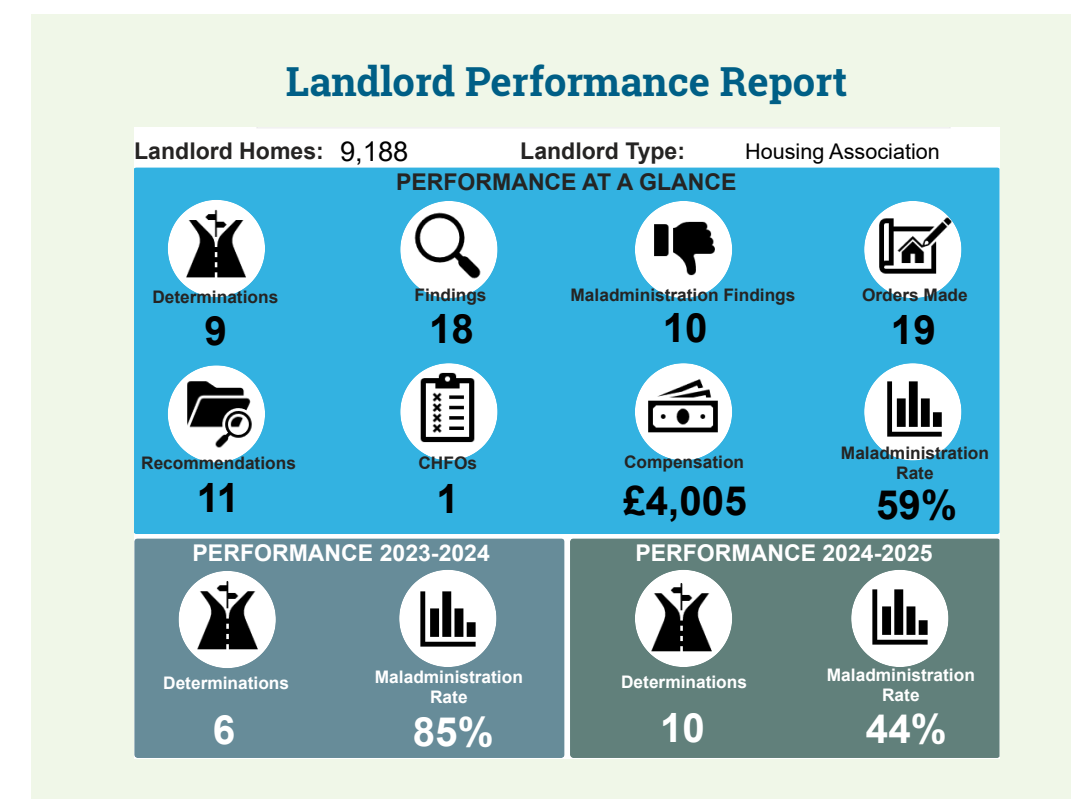


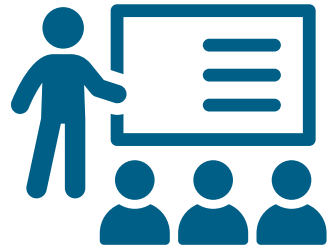
Service failure is considered a form of maladministration so there was a total of 10 maladministration findings from the overall 18 findings within jurisdiction. This equates to a 58.8% maladministration rate for the complaints reviewed by the Ombudsman within the year.

The Housing Ombudsman annual report about Hightown: 2025-26

Housing Ombudsman Landlord Performance Report

Landlords receive individual performance reports from the Housing Ombudsman. A summary table of the most recent report for Hightown, for 2025/26, is included below, or for more detail, a full copy of the report is available [here](#)





Lessons learnt from Ombudsman cases included the following:

- Staff training to assure tenancy breaches and unauthorised pet issues are dealt with more effectively.
- Improvement of ASB record keeping; Hightown is currently planning the implementation of a new electronic ASB record system (REACT) which will also include training for all relevant staff to assure an improvement in record keeping, alongside a more consistent approach to recording of ASB reports and investigations.
- Review of specialisms not currently covered by Hightown contractors so that suitable contractors can be sourced and future delays where a specialist contractor is required can be avoided.
- Contractors reminded to report to Hightown if they visit a property and notice another issue which will require a repair or servicing.
- Staff who deal with complaints and support investigations have received further training on investigations and letter writing.
- Where a single point of contact has been agreed for a customer we will ensure there is cover when that person is on leave or unavailable for a period of time.
- Where several customers in the same block of flats or estate are impacted due to a long-term issue (e.g. lift outage/ building issue) to improve communications by setting up a designated web page that can be updated regularly for customers.

Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code Self-Assessment 2026

Each year, landlords are required to complete a self-assessment against the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code and explain any areas where they do not comply. Hightown's 2026 self-assessment was reviewed by the Operations Committee before being submitted to the Board in September 2026. It shows that Hightown has continued to strengthen its approach to complaint handling and is compliant with the Code requirements. The self-assessment is available to view [here](#).

Other Complaint Volumes and Performance

Hightown also receives complaints from customers who do not fall within the Housing Ombudsman Service's code. These are summarised below for information and are considered by Hightown in line with its overarching Complaints Policy and Procedure.

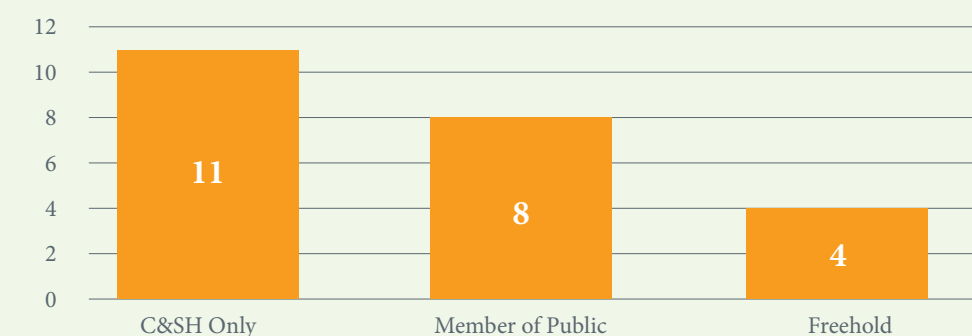
Stage One

There were 23 complaints recorded. Of these, 11 related to customers supported by Hightown's Care and Supported Housing services who lived in properties that Hightown does not manage or own. Eight complaints were from members of the public and four were from freeholders. Complaints from members of the public are not generally eligible to be dealt with under our internal complaints process, unless these arise from the high-rise buildings complaints process (none arose under this). The eight referred to above would not be recorded as complaints but dealt with in some other way going forwards.

Fourteen of these complaints (60%) were upheld.

The two tables below show the number of complaints and the service areas they related to.

Stage 1 - other complaints by tenure

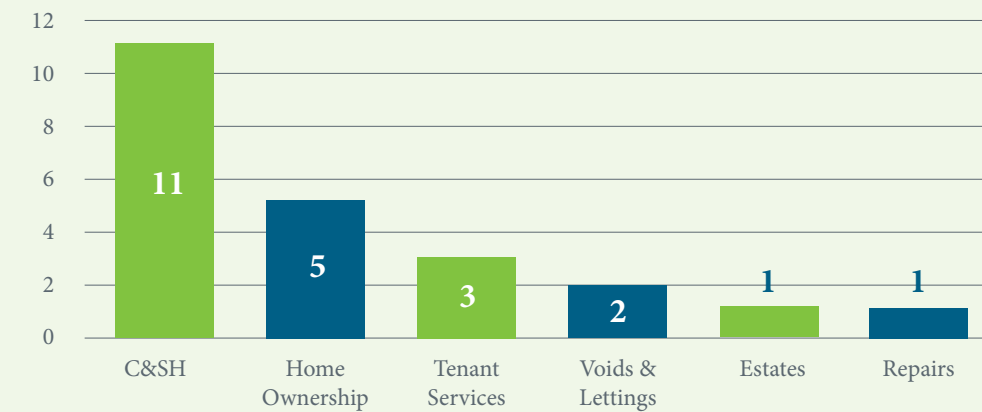




“To support improved review and learning from complaints in future, Hightown’s complaints recording system will be replaced in 2026/2027. This will enable more detailed analysis of complaint trends and outcomes.”



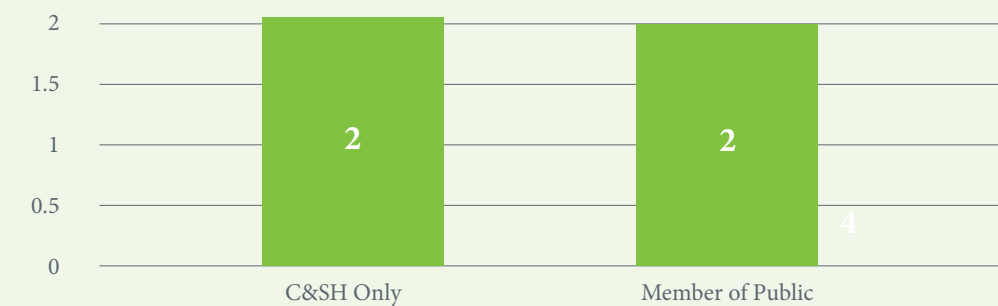
Stage 1 - other complaints by service area



Stage Two

Four of the 23 complaints (17.4%) were escalated to Stage Two. Of these, two were upheld and two were not upheld.

Stage 2 - other complaints by tenure



Key Themes of all Complaints Received

Analysis of complaint themes shows that the most common issues related to poor or limited communication; unresolved or delayed repairs; damp and mould; heating and hot water failures; lift breakdowns; ongoing anti-social behaviour; neighbour disputes; and customers’ personal use of CCTV and doorbell cameras.

To support improved review and learning from complaints in future, Hightown’s complaints recording system will be replaced in 2026/2027. This will enable more detailed analysis of complaint trends and outcomes.



Lessons learnt from complaints

Hightown recognises that complaints and customer feedback help identify where improvements can be made, allowing us to learn from customers' experiences and improve services for others.

Some lessons are internally focused, while others have a more direct impact on customers. All are expected to contribute to an improved customer experience.



Customers said

Contractors do not always keep customers informed when appointment times change.

There is sometimes a lack of updates or delay to updates after an issue has been reported.

Outstanding or delayed repairs are not always followed up.

There is confusion about the permitted use of ring doorbells and domestic CCTV

It would be helpful to have clear information on preventing damp and mould and Hightown's responsibilities when cases are reported.



What Hightown has done differently

Contractors have been advised to keep customers updated if they cannot attend an arranged appointment.

Hightown is considering payment to customers for missed appointments, where we or our contractor are responsible for the missed appointment, details of which will be included within its updated Compensation Policy.

The Customer Resolution team is now sharing complaint responses with the relevant operational managers to support better understanding of the need for timely communications.

Frontline teams have been asked to review their processes to ensure that out of hours contractors effectively hand over outstanding or delayed repairs so that further delays can be avoided.

Hightown has taken customer feedback from complaints and home visits and created a **Domestic CCTV policy** to provide clarity on the use of ring doorbells and domestic CCTV.

Hightown created a comprehensive **Healthy Homes Handbook** which is available digitally and in print. As well as being available for customers, the handbook is referred to in relevant complaint responses and when a report of damp or mould is made to the Healthy Homes team.



Customers said

There is concern and dissatisfaction relating to lift outages.

A review of customer engagement and involvement was implemented, as a number of customer panels were not well attended.

Hightown introduced a short complaint handling survey to ask customers to advise how satisfied they were with the way their complaint was handled. Feedback indicated that some customers misunderstood the complaint timescales.



What Hightown has done differently

Hightown has developed clear internal guidelines on keeping customers informed when lifts are not working and created microsites for individual blocks so that customers can easily access up-to-date information about lift repairs.

Hightown is also publishing a new lift policy, so customers know what to expect.

Following feedback from members, Hightown rebranded and relaunched both the Residents Voice & Complaints Scrutiny Panels as the Customer Experience Panel. This is enabling improved focus on service and performance scrutiny.

The complaints leaflet has been updated to provide clarity.

Compliments

In addition to complaints, Hightown also learns from compliments and positive feedback from customers.

Understanding where teams have provided excellent service helps us recognise what customers value and share good practice across the organisation.

Hightown Housing compliments

Department	Number of Compliments
Income Recovery	5
Repairs	31
Housing	18
Estates	8
Lettings	5
Communications	1
Sales	1
Development	1
Care and Supported Housing	619

Our focus for the year ahead



Customer feedback is valuable in helping Hightown understand the key areas to focus on and where further service improvements are needed. Following a review of complaints and the annual Tenant Satisfaction Measures survey, the following priorities have been identified:

- Develop Customer Strategy setting out Hightown's offer to customers – Feb 2027
- Improve communication by upgrading the current Correspondence Log to a Contact Log that will incorporate telephone messages left with Reception and auto-alerts for staff when a contact is allocated to them – December 2026
- Continue enhancing contact management systems to ensure clear records are accessible to staff in delivering customer services – March 2027
- Implement a new case management system (REACT) for ASB and Complaints – October 2026
- Strengthen and improve the ways we report learning from complaints back to customers, ensuring that any necessary service changes are made to prevent recurring issues, supported by an annual root cause analysis of complaints – February 2027
- Work more closely with local partners (police, councils, community groups) to strengthen joint presence and coordinated neighbourhood events - Quarterly/Ongoing
- Increase visibility of staff in neighbourhoods through regular walkabouts, surgeries and meet the teams via newsletter - Quarterly/Ongoing
- Improve communication of ASB Door knocks activity, including clear "You Said, We Did" quarterly updates – Quarterly/Ongoing
- Publish communal cleaning, grounds maintenance, decorations and major works programmes – July 2026
- Introduce a Staircasing/Major Works/Resales Feedback Form to be sent out to residents involved in any of these processes – July 2026

“
Some lessons are internally focused, while others have a more direct impact on customers. All are expected to contribute to an improved customer experience.”

At Hightown, we want to make it as easy as possible for you to access information about how we work. We can provide this report in large print or Braille if needed. If English isn't your first language, we can also arrange translations of this report. Just let us know what format or language you need and we'll do our best to make it happen - email: communications@hightownha.org.uk or call: 01442 292300.

**Hightown House, Maylands Avenue,
Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire, HP2 4XH**



Hightown is a charitable housing association registered under the Housing Act 1996 (No. L2179) and as a registered society under the Co-operative and Community Benefit Societies Act (No. 18077R). 6074/0718