

Complaints

Q1 Report

2026/27 | Apr – Jun



Introduction

Complaints provide an important source of insight, assurance and learning. Lancaster City Council Housing Services is committed to maintaining a complaint handling process that is accessible, effective and compliant with the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code.

In Q1 (Apr-Jun) of 2026/27 , we continued to strengthen our complaint handling arrangements through completion of our self-assessment, continued monitoring of performance and targeted service improvements.

This report highlights the progress made and demonstrates our commitment to learning from complaints, improving services and delivering better outcomes for residents.

Executive Summary: Performance

	Received	Accepted	Excluded	Acknowledged within SLA	Responded within SLA	Extended
Total	47	35	12	38 (81%)	29 (82%)	3
Stage 1	44	32	12	35 (80%)	27 (84%)	2
Stage 2	3	3	0	3 (100%)	2 (67%)	1



Complaint Handling: Case Volume

In Q1 of 2026/27 Council Housing (Housing Management, Repairs and Maintenance Service and Choice Based Lettings) received 47 expressions of dissatisfaction through both stages of the complaints process. (Stage 1: 44, Stage 2: 3)

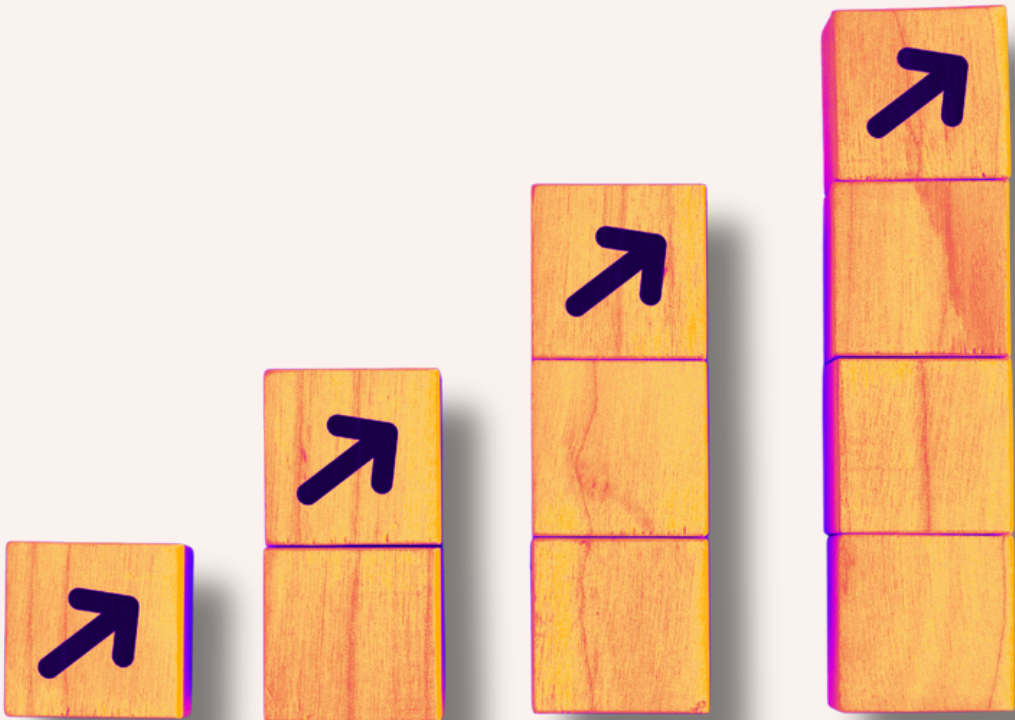
Of these, 32 Stage 1 complaints were accepted and acknowledged as complaints, whilst the remain 12 cases were excluded in line with out complaints policy. All 3 cases were accepted at Stage 2 of our complaints process.

A comparison to the traffic/volume of complaints in the same period from 2025/26 is outlined in the table below, this shows an apparent increase in the number of reports regarding dissatisfaction, but a decrease in the volume of accpeted complaints being logged onto our system.

This is due to the higher proportion of complaints being excluded in line with our policy; which in turn can be attributed to better understanding in the staff body regarding exclusion reasons resulting from regular training opportunities in complaint handling

In this reporting period 3 cases were escalated to Stage 2 of our complaints porcess, triggering an indepth review of our cases handling by the Chief Officer for Hosuing and Property. These 3 cases represent an escalation rate of ~9%

	2025/26 Q1	2026/27 Q1	Travel
Reports of Dissatisfaction	41	47	+14%
Complaints Accepted/Acknowledged	38	35	-8%
Exclusions	3	12	+300%
Escalations	4	3	-25%



Stage 1 | Performance

The Council’s Complaint Policy, in line with the Ombudsmans’ code, explicitly states that cases should be acknowledged or excluded within 5-working days of receipt, and responded to within 10-working days of the cases acknowledgement.

Targets for 2026/27

Acknowledged within Timescale: **100%**

Responded to within Timescale: **90%**

Acknowledgement/Exclusion

During the reporting period: 80% of all expressions/reports of dissatisfaction were either acknowledged or responded to within the target timescale of 5 working days (35 of 44).

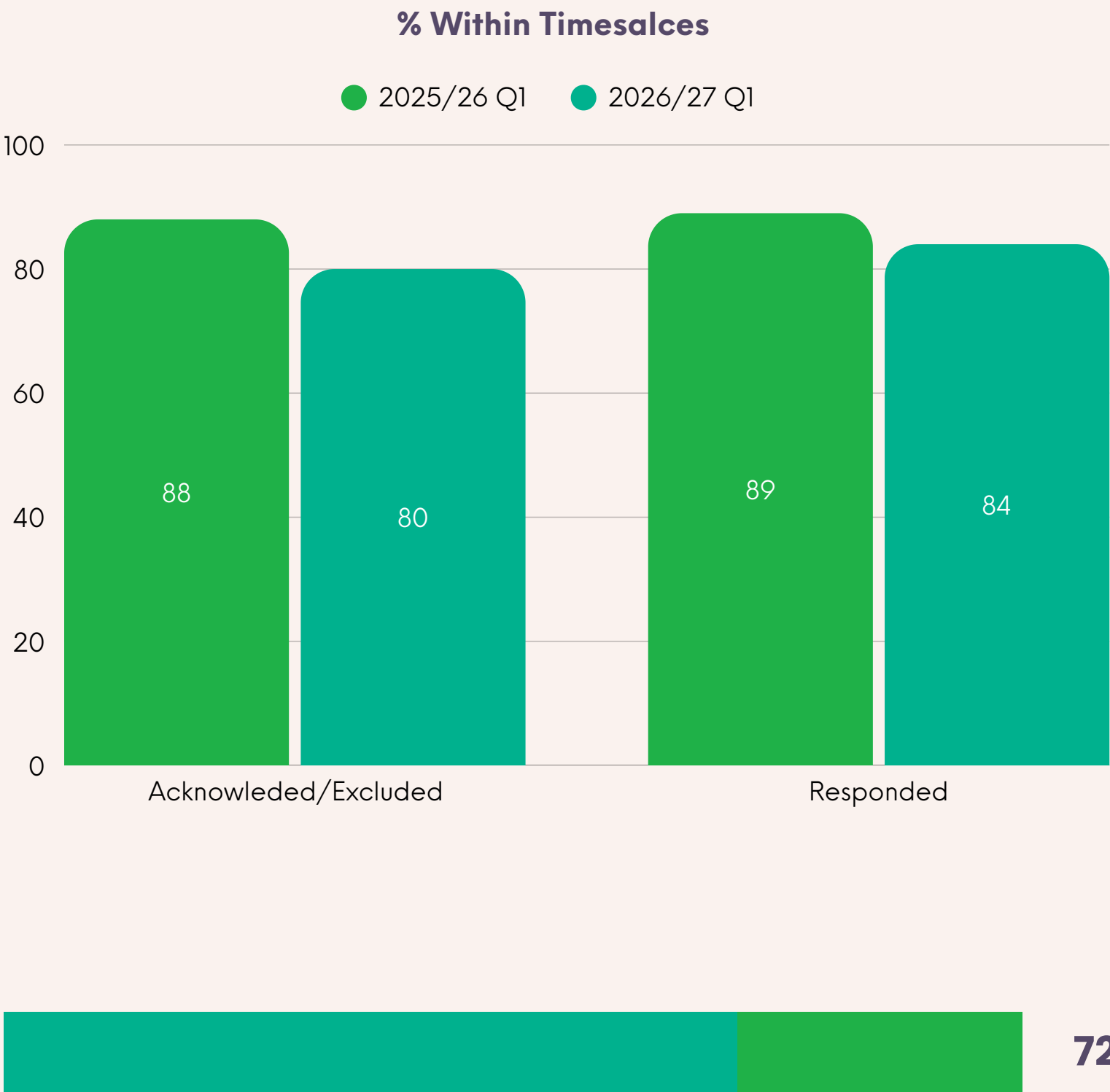
This can be further broken down into 91% of Excluded Cases (11 of 12) and 75% of Accepted/Acknowledged Cases (24 of 32)

Response & Extensions

During the reporting period: 84% of complaints investigated were responded to within the target timescale (27 of 32). Of the 5 cases that were responded to outside of the timescale, 2 of these cases (40%) had extensions arranged. Highlighting an area for training and improvement.

Upheld Cases

Of the 32 cases that were investigated and responded to in Q1. 23 cases were ‘Upheld’ - representing 72% of cases.



Stage 1 | Exclusions

All complaints will be accepted by us unless there is a valid reason not to do so.

The Council’ Complaint Policy provides a comprehensive list of reasons why a complaint may not be investigated via the Stage 1 process.

12 cases presented to Council Housing services were excluded., representing 27% of all incoming cases.

The most common reason we have used to exclude something from our Stage 1 complaints process is to classify a resident’s comments as a ‘day to day service request’.

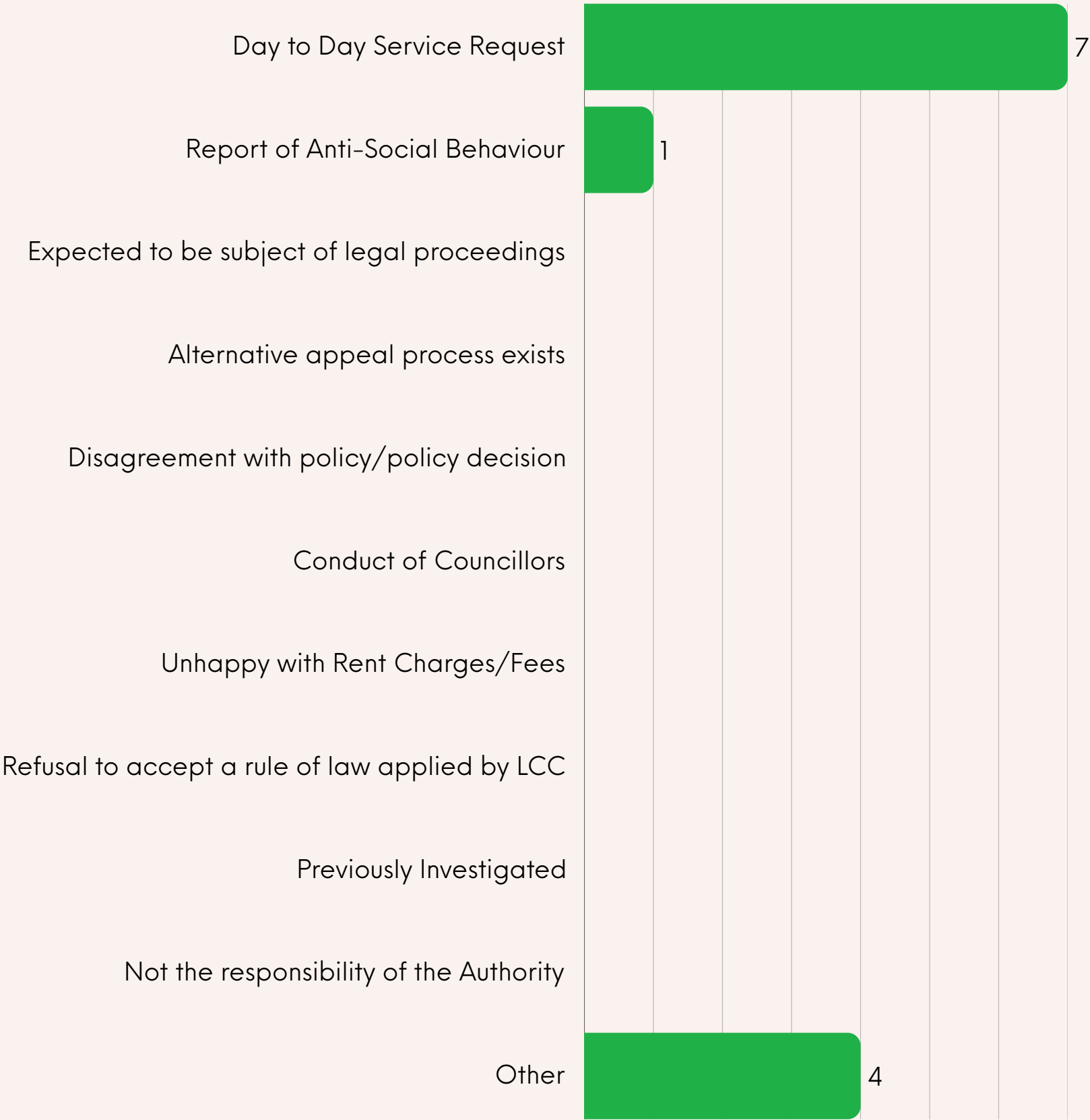
As outlined in our policy and self assessment documents, we recognise that there is difference between a complaint and a service request - a first time request by a resident requiring action to be taken to put something right.

Common examples are the first time report of fly-tipping or a request/report of a repair.

On review, some cases were excluded under the category of ‘other’ rather than as any other category that may have been a appropriate categorisation.

The judgement to accept or exclude a case, and the reasons as to why will be a focal point of all officer training throughout the year.

Most importantly, in all excluded cases, the resident receives a clear response explaining what alternative process or support is available.



Stage 1 | Service Areas and Themes

Service Areas:

During Q1, the majority of complaints received related to perceived service failures by the Repairs and Maintenance Service (RMS) - 26 cases.

Housing Management cases made up the bulk of remaining cases with 4 cases and Choice Based Lettings (CBL) received just 2 complaints in the first quarter.

Please note that complaints around safety concerns and compliance issues are logged on the Granicus System as a Asset and Compliance Case not a Repairs and Maintenance case.

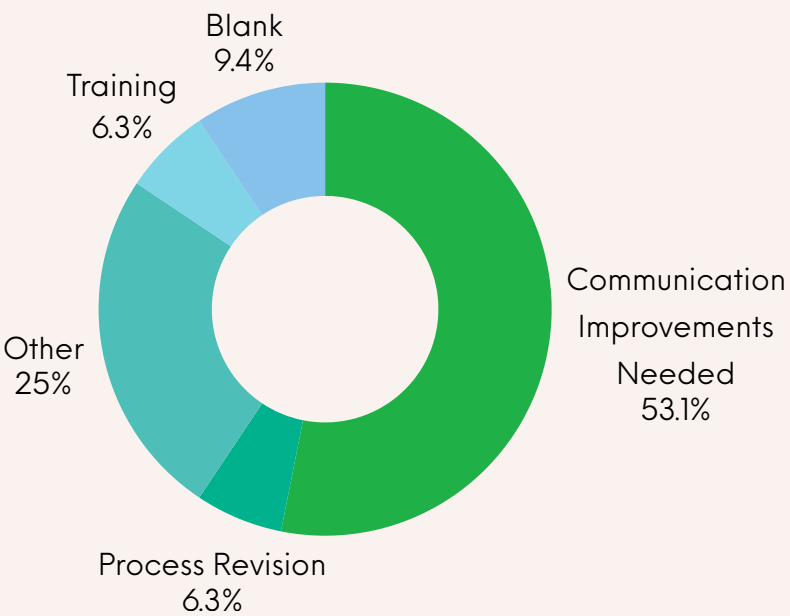
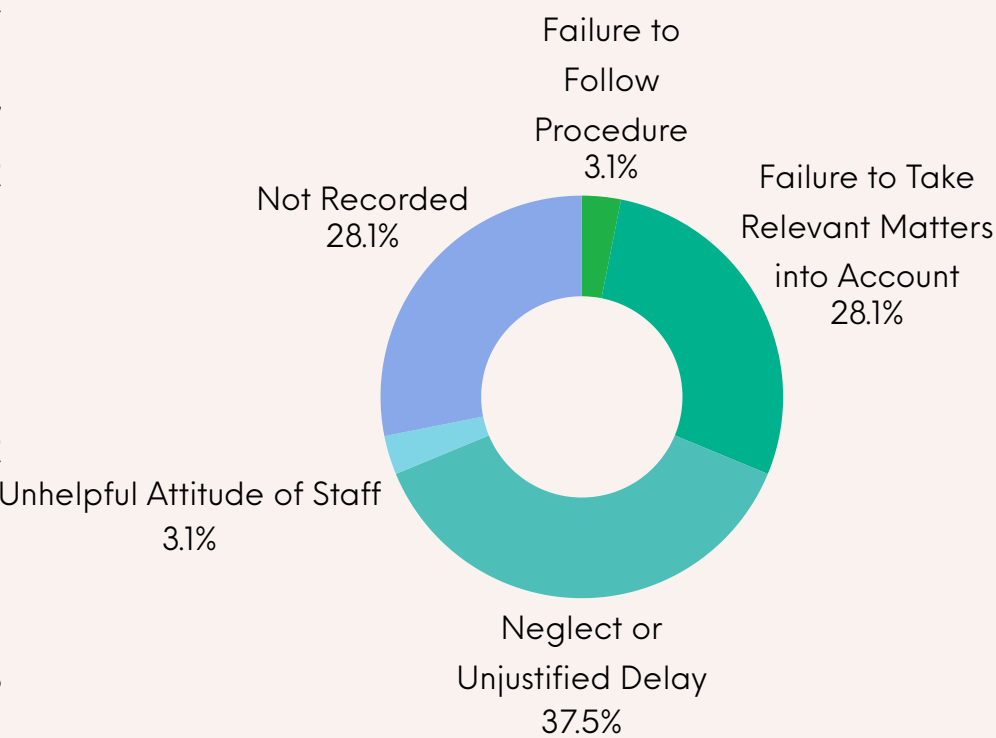
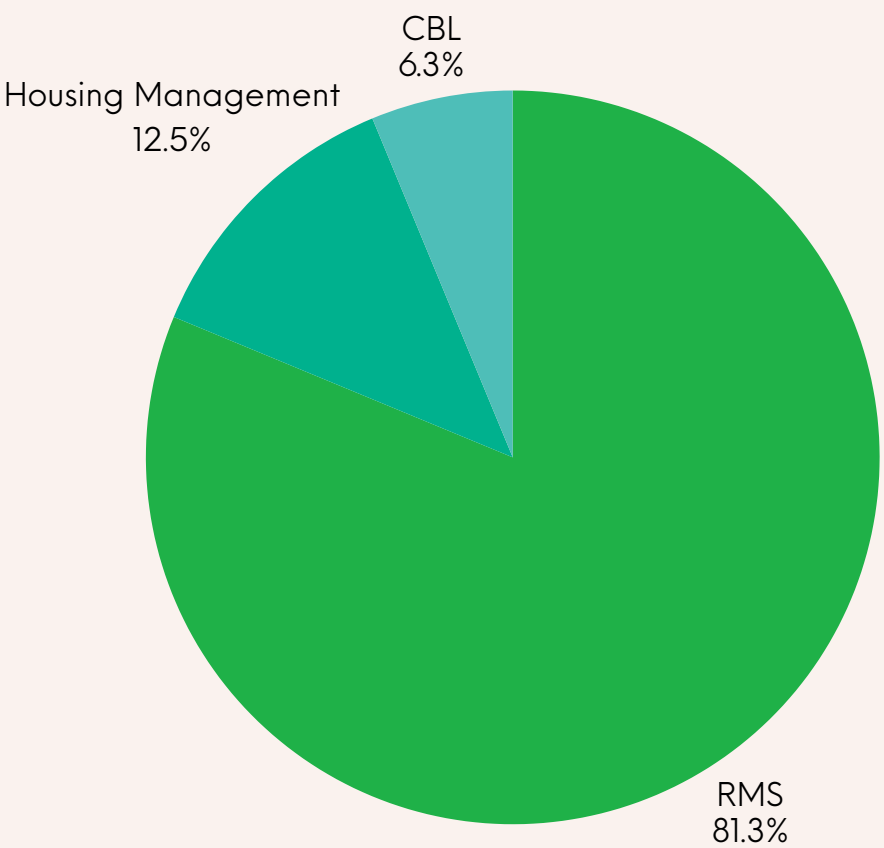
Themes:

Of the 32 Stage 1 complaints accepted during Q1, 72% were upheld.

All upheld complaints are categorised against the Council's five complaint categories, shown in the accompanying diagram. This enables us to identify recurring themes, target improvement activity and monitor trends over time. When compared to the same period last year, neglect and delay continue to be a leading cause of tenant dissatisfaction, often linked to outstanding repairs and damp/mould works.

We are pleased to report that there were no cases recorded under the category of Malice, Bias or Discrimination during the quarter. And that uncategorised cases are in decline.

For every upheld complaint, responding managers are required to record the learning identified and any action taken. A summary of the learning themes arising from upheld complaints during the quarter is provided in the accompanying diagram



Stage 2 | Performance

At the request of the complainant, 3 cases were escalated to Stage 2 for an independent review of the Stage 1 process, representing a 9% escalation rate.

Two proceeded to a final Stage 2 decision, while one was withdrawn following local resolution.

100% of cases were acknowledged within the service level agreement (SLA) of 5 working days where as 67% of cases were responded to within the SLA of 20 working days *This is inclusive of the withdrawn case.

No cases raised for escalation were excluded from the complaints process

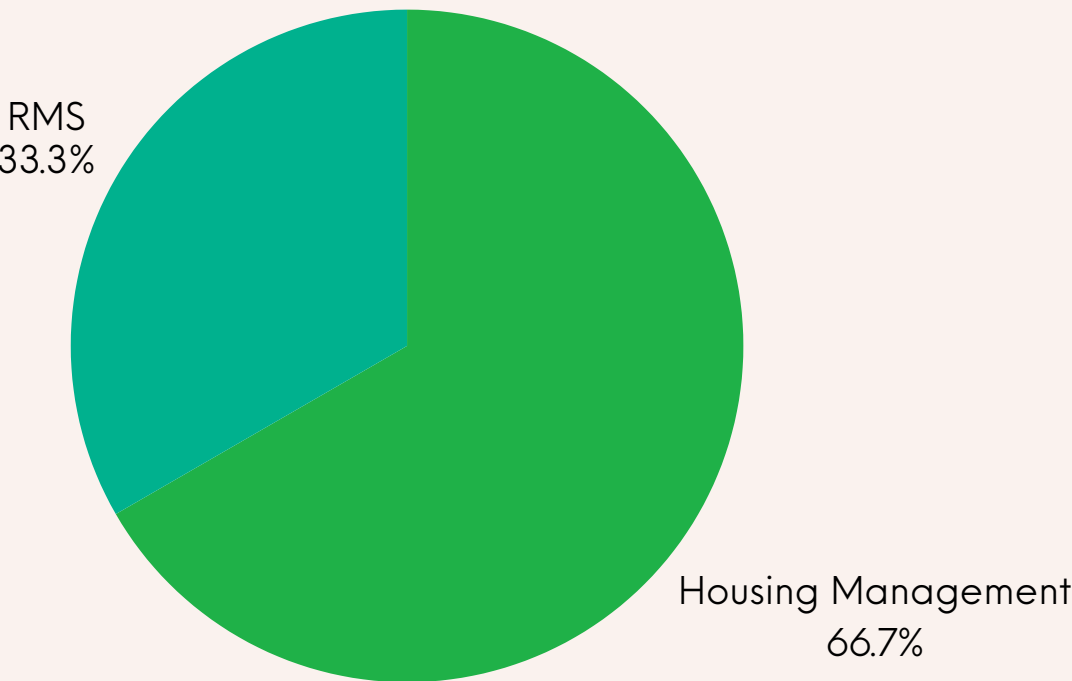
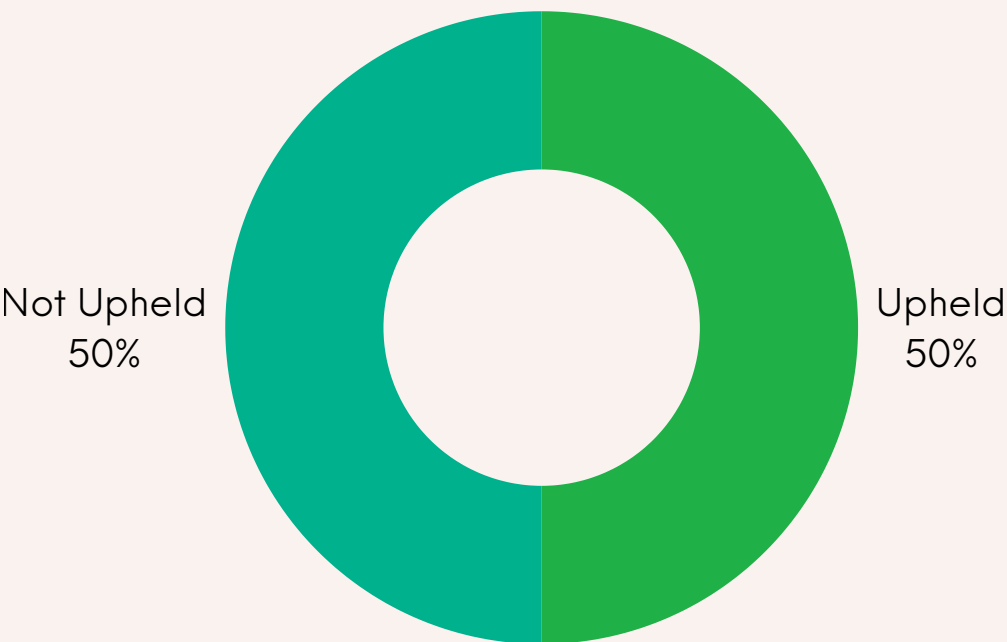
Of the two Stage 2 cases that received a formal determination, one was upheld and one was not upheld, giving a 50% upheld rate for determined Stage 2 complaints. Of these 2 cases, both stage 1 determinations where supported by the stage 2 investigation.

Two cases involved financial or practical redress: including a £50 goodwill gesture to offset recharges linked to fly-tipping and additional waste collections, And another case provided with a £500 agreed resolution in the form of new bunk beds as full and final settlement.

The three Stage 2 complaints considered during Q1 2026/27 related primarily to Housing Management and Repairs & Maintenance Service functions.

Two complaints (67%) concerned Housing Management activities, including estate management and anti-social behaviour case management.

One complaint (33%) related to property condition and associated remedial works and has therefore been categorised under Repairs & Maintenance Services. No Stage 2 complaints during the quarter related to the Choice Based Lettings service.



Equality Diversity and Inclusion

As part of our complaints monitoring arrangements, complainants are invited to provide equality and diversity information to help us understand whether there are any differences in access to, or outcomes from, the complaints process for different groups of residents.

As this is the first quarter of reporting and the collection of equality data remains voluntary, completion rates are currently low across all demographic categories. The majority of complainants did not provide demographic information, meaning the available dataset is too limited to identify any statistically meaningful trends or disparities in complaint outcomes, response times, or customer experience.

Where information was provided, the largest recorded groups were residents identifying as White British, heterosexual/straight and, where religion was stated, Christian. However, the number of responses received from other demographic groups was too small to support robust comparison or analysis.

Based on the information available for Q1, there is no evidence to suggest that complaint handling performance, complaint outcomes, or the application of the Complaints Policy varied significantly between demographic groups. The Council will continue to encourage residents to provide equality information where they feel comfortable doing so, enabling more meaningful analysis and assurance as the dataset grows over time.

Risk Analysis and Learning

Council Housing Service has continued to develop its approach to learning from complaints by adopting a risk-based and assurance-focused framework. Rather than learning from complaints case by case which often resulted in lengthy action plans containing multiple overlapping actions aimed at addressing the same underlying issues. This revised approach focuses on identifying the key risks most frequently associated with complaint escalation and service failure, with targeted actions developed to mitigate those risks.

Complaint learning is now assessed against an established complaints risk profile to determine whether complaints reinforce known risks, identify weaknesses in existing controls, or reveal genuinely new and unmanaged risks. Providing a clearer link between complaint learning, risk management and service improvement.

In Q1, learning continues to align strongly with existing risk areas, including repairs quality, communication, outstanding repairs, case ownership and service expectation management. The identified learning provides assurance that the risks previously identified remain relevant and that the actions already in place continue to represent the appropriate response to those risks.

Consequently, no new improvement actions have been proposed following the Quarter 1 review.

Focus remains on delivering and embedding the existing action plan, with future complaint learning used to monitor the effectiveness of current controls and identify any emerging risks requiring additional intervention.



Learning from our Risk Assurance

Repairs Quality and Repeat Failure (Right First Time)

Learning Point/Risk	Repeat complaints arise where repairs or inspections fail to identify all defects at the first visit, leading to avoidable follow-on work and loss of tenant confidence.
Position in Q1	This remains a known and ongoing risk. Q1 complaints identified occasions where the full scope of repairs was not initially apparent, resulting in additional investigations, follow-on works or delays in progressing solutions.
Control and Assurance	• Use of structured inspection tools (DASH) in damp and mould cases. • Management spot-checks and review of repeat complaints. • Ongoing Action B1 to extend structured inspection principles to other trades. • Ongoing Action B8 to improve use of stock condition and survey intelligence.
Q1 Impact	Stage 1 complaint learning reinforced the importance of identifying the full extent of repair needs at the earliest opportunity. The nature of the risk remains unchanged and no additional actions are proposed.

Communication During Delays and Missed Appointments

Learning Point/Risk	Where delays, missed inspections or follow-on works are not clearly communicated, dissatisfaction escalates even when the underlying technical response is appropriate.
Position in Q1	This remains one of the most consistently evidenced complaint risks. Learning from both Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaints identified communication issues relating to repairs delays, contractor availability, case updates, service disruption and ongoing investigations.
Control and Assurance	• Automated appointment confirmations and reminders (embedded). • Development and implementation of a formal communication standard (B3). • Contractor communication expectations reinforced (B4). • Customer Liaison Officer role being introduced to improve customer communication.
Q1 Impact	Communication remained the most common theme arising from complaint learning. Q1 reinforces the need to embed existing actions but does not indicate a new or escalating risk.

Learning from our Risk Assurance

Outstanding Repairs, Follow-on Works and Handovers

Learning Point/Risk	Repairs and follow-on works raised after inspection can remain unallocated or delayed due to handover gaps between inspectors, scheduling and contractors.
Position in Q1	This remains a persistent operational risk. Complaint learning identified cases involving delayed progression of repairs, unclear ownership and follow-on work not progressing as expected.
Control and Assurance	- Increased management oversight of overdue, unallocated and stalled jobs. - Exception reporting and scheduling review processes. - Action B2 continues through 2026/27.
Q1 Impact	Q1 complaints continue to provide evidence of this risk. Learning supports the continuation of existing controls and actions rather than the introduction of new measures.

Complaint Intake, Triage and Ownership

Learning Point/Risk	Complaints can be delayed at intake stage where cases are transferred between teams without early ownership or clarification, affecting response times and customer confidence.
Position in Q1	This remains a known risk area following its identification during Q4. Stage 2 complaints highlighted occasions where responsibilities between services were unclear, contributing to delays and uncertainty around complaint ownership.
Control and Assurance	- Ongoing Action B5 to reinforce early triage, ownership and escalation arrangements. - Clarified internal handling expectations for cross-service complaints. - Management oversight of complaint allocation where multiple services are involved.
Q1 Impact	Stage 2 complaint investigations reinforced this risk and confirmed the continued relevance of the existing action. No further risks or control gaps were identified.

Learning from our Risk Assurance

Use of Stock Condition and Survey Intelligence

Learning Point/Risk	Where existing stock condition or survey information is not actively used or communicated during inspections, issues may be missed and later escalated, including through complaints or external agencies.
Position in Q1	This remains a recognised intelligence-use risk. Complaint investigations continued to demonstrate the importance of effectively using existing survey findings, property intelligence and inspection information when planning works and communicating with residents.
Control and Assurance	• Ongoing Action B8 to strengthen use and communication of existing property intelligence. • Improved integration of survey findings within repair planning and inspections. • Linked to, but distinct from, Right First Time repair actions.
Q1 Impact	Q1 learning supports the continuation of this action and provides assurance that the risk remains relevant. No additional actions are required.

Service Standards, Expectations and Programme Communications

Learning Point/Risk	Complaints arise where service standards, responsibilities, evidential requirements or programme-based activity are not clearly understood, leading to dissatisfaction driven by misunderstanding rather than service failure.
Position in Q1	This remains a recognised risk area. Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaints identified learning relating to ASB thresholds, safeguarding responsibilities, pest control, grassland management, rent arrears, lettable standards and environmental services.
Control and Assurance	• Ongoing Action B7 to improve communication regarding service standards, responsibilities and programme activity. • Review of customer-facing guidance and standard correspondence. • Improved communication regarding service limitations and expectations.
Q1 Impact	Q1 complaints reinforced the importance of clear service standards and expectation management. The learning aligns directly with the risk identified at year end and does not represent a new category of risk.

Complaints Action Plan

A. Completed Actions

Action Reference	Learning Theme	Action Completed	Service	Outcome
A6	Understanding Complainants	Introduced equality, diversity and inclusion questions into the complaints process to improve understanding of complainants and support equitable service delivery.	Social Housing Governance	Completed. EDI questions embedded within the complaints process and data collection commenced.

B. Ongoing Actions

Action Reference	Learning Theme	Action Agreed	Service	Target Completion
B1	Right First Time (Repairs)	Build on the existing Damp & Mould DASH inspection approach by extending structured inspection principles to other repair inspections.	RMS	Rolled out by end of 2026/27
B2	Outstanding Repairs Oversight	Improve management oversight of raised but unallocated and overdue repairs, including follow-on works after inspection.	RMS	Overdue WIP regular reporting in place. Further embedding throughout 2026/27
B3	Repair and Works Communication	Embed a repairs communication standard covering delays, missed appointments, follow-on works and programme-based activity (e.g. scaffolding).	RMS	Q2 2026/27
B4	Contractor Communication	Introduce a Contractor Code of Conduct to strengthen contractor expectations on access attempts, failed contact reporting and feedback to scheduling teams.	RMS	Q2 2026/27
B5	Tenant Accessibility	Improve consideration of tenant availability and preferred contact methods (e.g. shift workers) in repairs and complaints processes.	All Teams & Complaints	Q2 2026/27

Complaints Action Plan

B. Ongoing Actions Continued

Action Reference	Learning Theme	Action Agreed	Service	Target Completion
B7	Complaint Triage & Ownership	Reinforce early complaint triage and clearer ownership where cases are returned or reassigned between teams, to avoid intake delays and uncertainty over responsibility.	Complaints	Q3 2026/27
B8	Grassland Management & Estate Programmes	Develop clear, proactive tenant communications explaining grassland management programmes and what residents should expect from estate-based services.	Housing	Q3 2026/27
B9	Use of Stock Condition & Survey Intelligence	Ensure existing stock condition and survey information is actively used during inspections and that relevant findings (or limitations) are clearly shared with tenants to avoid missed issues and escalation.	RMS & Property	Q3 2026/27
B10	Recharge and Voids	Improve clarity and consistency of recharge explanations, appeal routes and evidence use within responses and decision-making.	Housing (Recharges)	Q3 2026/27

C. New Actions Identified at Period End

No new actions identified:

Learning from both Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaints during Quarter 1 continues to reinforce the risks identified within the existing Complaints Learning and Improvement Framework. The review did not identify any significant new or unmanaged risks requiring additional actions. Instead, complaint learning provides assurance that the current action plan remains focused on the key drivers of complaint escalation and service failure, namely repairs quality, communication, outstanding repairs, complaint ownership, effective use of housing intelligence and management of resident expectations.