

Report to: Cabinet Meeting: 9 June 2026
 Portfolio Holder: Councillor Lee Brazier, Housing
 Director Lead: Suzanne Shead, Housing, Health & Wellbeing
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Report Summary	
Type of Report	Open Report / Key Decision
Report Title	Housing Complaints Coordinator and Complaints Update
Purpose of Report	To report on the impact of the Housing Complaints Coordinator role, the current challenges facing housing services in relation to complaints and a proposal for improving the complaints handling service.
Recommendations	That Cabinet: a) make the existing Housing Complaints Coordinator role permanent; b) approve the additional roles of a Complaints and Learning / Improvement Officer (1FTE) on a permanent basis and a Complaints Coordinator (1 FTE) for a fixed term period of 1 year, with a further review to consider if this second role needs to be permanent; c) approve the required budget for 2026/27 of £119,450 to be funded from the HRA Service Improvement reserve; d) note the annual budget required (c. £100k) for future years will be added into the base budget at budget setting for 2027/28 onwards; and e) note the recruitment of temporary support until the above roles are approved and recruited (for approx. 6 months from April 2026).
Alternative Options Considered	There has been close monitoring of complaints volumes and performance during the last 12 months, which is the basis of the recommendations and therefore no alternative options are being considered at this point.
Reason for Recommendations	To allow the Council to meet its obligations under the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code and provide an excellent complaint handling service for our customers.

1.0 Background

1.1 As part of housing regulation, the Council has a statutory obligation under its functions as a landlord, to meet the Regulator of Social Housing Consumer Standards and the

Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code.

- 1.2 The revised Complaint Handling Code came into effect on 1st April 2024, which saw changes to complaints timescales and the introduction of a more stringent acknowledgement stage. Since then, housing services has seen a continual increase in complaints, particularly in relation to time taken to complete repairs and together, these have impacted on the ability of officers to handle complaints in accordance with the Code.
- 1.3 During 2023/24 the Government launched a 'Make Things Right' Campaign to raise greater awareness amongst social housing tenants of how they could make a complaint and to ensure tenants would be listened to and taken seriously when they did complain. Within the service, we have also been promoting our complaints policy and process to tenants, including training for front line staff so they know how to recognise a complaint, make a complaint on a tenant's behalf and signpost tenants to complaints information on our website.
- 1.4 As a potential result of the campaign, the sector, including the Housing Ombudsman, has seen an increase in complaints and our own housing complaints in 2024/25 increased by; 144% compared with 2022/23 and by 79% compared with 2023/24

At the end of February 2026, housing services had received 99 more complaints than for the same period last year. Recent information from leading data insight company HouseMark states that complaints volumes show no signs of slowing down and we are yet to see a plateau.

- 1.5 We also recognise that the increase in complaints is also in response to an increase in dissatisfaction with our repairs service in particular, and an improvement plan is in place to rectify the root causes of this dissatisfaction. Additional resources have also been put into the repairs service during the last year to provide the capacity needed to meet repairs demand. It is worth noting that changes to process and service improvements can take 12-18 months to reflect positively in complaints and satisfaction data.
- 1.6 Housing services is also receiving more requests from the Housing Ombudsman and during 2024/25, of the cases referred to the Ombudsman, 4 were upheld. The previous 2 years, none had been upheld. This casework involves a huge amount of information collation for the services and managers involved.
- 1.7 Since the recruitment of the Housing Complaints Coordinator (HCC) in May 2025, housing services has seen a dramatic improvement in complaints performance, almost back to 2023/24 levels.

2024/25 – Stage 1 in time = 41%	2025/26 Q3 – Stage 1 in time = 99%
2024/25 – Stage 2 in time = 42%	2025/26 Q3 – Stage 2 in time – 83%

Satisfaction with handling complaints is also increasing each quarter, from 47% at the end of Q1, to 53% at the end of Q2 and to 60% at the end of Q3.

- 1.8 Heavily contributing to the above is that for the most part, Stage 1 complaints are dealt

with by the HCC and the advantages of having a centralised team / dedicated officer are that there is improved consistency and high-quality responses, improved timeliness, impartial and fair investigations and more organisational learning.

- 1.9 However, this is not without challenges and pressures. This level of performance is not being met purely within the remit of the HCC and the role is also unable to complete the wider functions of its current job description, such as reporting, monitoring complaints follow on actions (including evidencing these have been completed and processing compensation payments), learning follow up and assisting with Housing Ombudsman Complaints cases.
- 1.10 The Housing Regulation and Research Officer and the Housing Regulatory Compliance Manager assist often for up to 1-2 days a week with complaints handling and administration. Between them they have case managed approximately 25% of the Stage 1 complaints received during 2025/26. This does not include Stage 1 staff conduct complaints; of which there have been 38 to the end of February 2026, approximately 11% of Stage 1 complaints. These are case managed by the relevant manager in case there are sensitive matters or HR / disciplinary implications arising from the complaint. The Housing Complaints Coordinator still acknowledges the complaints before reallocating to the manager responsible. This impacts on the ability of the Housing Regulation and Research Officer to collate and interrogate our improving data sets to identify areas of focus or further investigation across housing services. This is currently a gap in our compliance with the Transparency, Influence and Accountability standard.
- 1.11 To the end of February 2026, there have also been 66 withdrawn complaints. Often these are duplicate complaints or service requests. Their withdrawn status does not reflect that there is still work required in making the call to the tenant, which would essentially be the acknowledgement stage, to establish this. There are also follow on actions, either to raise the service request or ensure any varying elements are combined with another existing 'duplicate' complaint.
- 1.12 A typical process for handling a complaint is reflected below, but would apply in almost all circumstances.
- Case received and logged; HCC reviews the details, makes background information checks on housing systems and makes preliminary fact finding / preparation information enquiries with officers.
 - HCC summarises the complaint issues from the initial complaint.
 - HCC calls the customer to acknowledge the complaint. Sometimes this will take 2-3 attempts before speaking to the customer, or opting to send the acknowledgement without speaking to them.
 - The length of the acknowledgement call cannot be pre-determined even though expectations are set at the outset with the customer of how long we expect the call to take, to give an indication of how much time we require to speak to them for and to ascertain any support they require throughout the complaint handling process.
 - The acknowledgement response is written and sent.
 - Further checks are made on systems and further emails sent to colleagues to gather information that is not held on systems.
 - Often follow up emails are sent to chase responses.
 - Depending on the complexity of the case and individual needs of the complainant,

calls will be made to them during this period to update and / or further correspondence from the customer will be reviewed, followed up and responded to.

- The final response is drafted, with a call to the customer prior, where time allows, and the response is written and sent.
- Where there is compensation awarded for complex cases, sometimes this will be calculated and discussed with colleagues for a second opinion and guidance.
- Often further correspondence is received in relation to a closed complaint, regarding the progress of outstanding actions.
- In relation to Stage 2 complaints, dealt with in the main by a Business Manager, all of the above will apply and with the addition of reviewing all of the Stage 1 case correspondence, acknowledgment and response information.

1.13 Stage 2 complaints are also increasing and whilst we have established contributing factors for this and recently put measures in place to prevent escalation, the management of Stage 2 complaints at current levels by five Business Managers is not sustainable. According to HouseMark, the national average for complaints escalating to Stage 2 is 18%, NSDC housing services is currently running at 35% (at February 2026).

1.14 Recent measures in place to support complaints handling and deliver service improvements;

- Ongoing actions in relation to repairs are being coordinated and monitored by senior officers within the repairs service, rather than regulation / complaints officers. This is in its infancy however and does still require support and follow up from regulation / complaints officers or Business Managers.
- The Customer Feedback and Complaints Policy has been amended to widen the requirement of a Business Manager to respond to Stage 2 complaints, to other senior officers as agreed by the Director.
- Temporary, part time support was provided from a member of the Customer Services team from 11th November 2025 until the end of the calendar year. However, as this role did not have access to key systems, whilst their responses were thorough and high quality, their ability to provide effective and efficient support was limited.

1.15 At a recent Housing Quality Network Complaints Hub, the following information was shared by other Local Authorities and housing providers who were in attendance.

Number of Complaints Per Month	Number of Complaints Handling Officers	Comments
10-15	1	
100	4	Also responsible for Housing Ombudsman Service complaints and performance reporting
20	2	Also responsible for performance reporting
50-60	3 FTE (4 persons)	
30	1	Officer only coordinates complaints and does acknowledgements, responses are allocated out to relevant managers

1.16 For context, NSDC housing services is averaging 32 Stage 1 complaints a month with 1 officer (excluding withdrawn complaints) or 42 a month across both Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaints. All other organisations in attendance agreed that NSDC is under-resourced

by at least one officer and this is not sustainable to provide cover for leave periods, nor peaks in demand.

- 1.17 There is potential for the recent introduction of Awaab's Law on 27th October 2025 to further impact the level of complaints, if timescales in relation to the new legislation are not met, for instance. A new damp and disrepair team has been recruited to manage both the current workload and potential increase in workload, but this is a current unknown in terms of additional complaints.

2.0 Proposal / Options Considered

- 2.1 As stated, complaints are increasing and whilst this is not necessarily viewed by the sector as a bad thing, it is having an impact on the services ability to deal with complaints effectively, within both timescales and existing resources. The service does however want to effectively reduce the number of repeat and 'avoidable' complaints, but with current resources, the level of learning and service improvement is limited.
- 2.2 The current Housing Complaints Coordinator post is on a temporary basis for 12 months to the end of May 2026, so this report recommends the following;
- Making the Housing Complaints Coordinator role permanent.
 - Creating and recruiting a new role of Complaints and Improvement Officer or Complaints and Learning Officer that would support the Housing Complaints Coordinator with Stage 1 complaints, take on some Stage 2 complaints / support Business Managers with Stage 2 complaints and follow up with and implement learning with the relevant service area.
 - Recruiting an additional Housing Complaints Coordinator on a full-time basis for 12 months.
 - Recruiting urgent temporary agency support for the HCC in the interim, while recruitment of the above takes place. SLT were supportive of the recommendations on 24 March 2026 and whilst Member approval is required for the increase in establishment, action to progress the temporary agency support commenced in April 2026.
- 2.3 Having dedicated officers for complaints improves the customer experience as they have fewer points of contact, and no need to repeat their issues multiple times. Handling of Stage 2 complaints does not have to be a more senior officer than it was at Stage 1, the HO Complaint Handling Code only specifies that 'the person considering the complaint at Stage 2 must not be the same person that considered the complaint at Stage 1'. With 2 x FTE permanent complaints roles and a temporary role, there is the potential to deal with the majority of Stage 1 and some Stage 2 complaints within the team, and if the number of complaints escalating to Stage 2 can be reduced, would further reduce the pressure on Business Managers and ensure quality and consistency of responses remains.
- 2.4 The proposals recommended at 2.2 would also reduce pressure on the service during periods of leave. There has been no sickness within the team due to the fact the role enables hybrid working, but at the current levels of pressure, this could be a real possibility in future.
- 2.5 Councillor Pringle who is the Member responsible for complaints has expressed that he would support the recruitment of an additional full-time role to handle complaints.

3.0 Implications

In writing this report and in putting forward recommendations, officers have considered the following implications: Data Protection; Digital & Cyber Security; Equality & Diversity; Financial; Human Resources; Human Rights; Legal; Safeguarding & Sustainability and where appropriate they have made reference to these implications and added suitable expert comment where appropriate.

Implications Considered Yes – relevant and included / NA – not applicable			
Financial	Yes	Equality & Diversity	Yes
Human Resources	Yes	Human Rights	N/A
Legal	N/A	Data Protection	N/A
Digital & Cyber Security	N/A	Safeguarding	N/A
Sustainability	N/A	Crime & Disorder	N/A
LGR	N/A	Tenant Consultation	N/A

3.1 Financial Implications – FIN25-26/3099

3.1.1 As stated in paragraph 2.2, it is proposed that the existing temporary Housing Complaints Coordinator be extended to a permanent position, this is currently budgeted up to May 2026. It is also proposed in paragraph 2.2 to recruit another 1-year fixed term Housing Complaints Coordinator as a full-time 1 FTE. In paragraph 2.2 it is also proposed to recruit a Complaints and Improvement / Learning Officer on a permanent basis. The costs for the additional roles are below:

Role	Grade	FTE	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30
Housing Complaints Coordinator	NS08	1	34,750	45,130	46,740	48,400
Housing Complaints Coordinator	NS08	1	34,750	-	-	-
Complaints and Improvement / Learning Officer	NS10	1	49,950	53,050	54,930	56,880
Total Required Budget			119,450	98,180	101,670	105,280

The required £119,450 in 2026/27 is proposed to be funded from the HRA Service Improvement reserve. The budget for future years (2027/28 onwards) would be added into the base budget at budget setting.

It is also requested that agency costs of £10,000 be made available in order to recruit to roles in the interim, also being funded from the HRA Service Improvement reserve, this would leave a balance of £1,721,098 in the reserve accounting for the above roles too.

The above assumes these roles would be recruited to in April 2026, but this will now take place in June / July 2026 and budgets will therefore be adjusted accordingly.

3.2 HR and Equalities Implications HR2425/8471 FK

As at the end of Q3, the establishment had increased in 25/26 by 21.49 FTE with 9.7FTE net being within the Housing, Health, and Wellbeing Directorate. None of these changes were within the Housing Income and Leaseholder Management Business Unit. The changes proposed above would impact the establishment by 3FTE which includes the

current temporary post being added to the establishment on a permanent basis, a new permanent, 1FTE post, and a 1FTE post on a temporary basis.

Temporary Housing Complaints Coordinator:

In relation to the new temporary post, if approved, if the successful post holder brought any continuous service, or if the post continued past 24 months on a temporary basis, meaning that the post holder had >2 years' service, they would be entitled to a payment equivalent to statutory redundancy to compensate them for loss of office if no alternative employment could be secured. The appropriate dismissal process would also be required to be carried out at the end of the contract by the business manager, and with support from HR.

Making the current temporary Housing Complaints Coordinator role permanent:

In relation to the existing temporary post, this was initially advertised on a temporary basis. To make it permanent, it will need to be advertised as such. This can be done as an internal advert only noting that there is already someone in the post on a temporary basis.

Engaging immediate support from an agency:

It is presumed that this will be on the current Housing Complaints Coordinator job description. This JDPS can be shared with an agency to support recruitment and, the agency worker should not be paid a higher rate than a directly employed member of staff. In order to be compliant with procurement rules, the cost of the contract will need to be estimated based on length of assignment and appropriate quote(s) should be sought (one for under £10k, 3 for under £75k) ensuring best value for money. An IR35 assessment must be completed with a member of HR and Training and the agency worker engaged must complete an appropriate induction.

Creation of a new Complaints and Improvement /Learning Officer post:

The grade above is an estimate. If approved, a job description must be created, reviewed and subject to job evaluation to ensure that an appropriate grade is attached to the role.

The addition of two new posts would take the Housing Regulatory Compliance Manager into the next band in terms of supervision and management as they will have 7 people to manage. This would not impact the outcome of the job evaluation now or post R and R.

The case outlined above does support the need for enhanced capacity to meet the requirements of the Regulator of Social Housing Consumer Standards and the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code and to deal with the number of complaints received.

Whilst there may be different needs in terms of statutory requirements, it should be noted that there is 0.5FTE focussed solely on complaints outside of Housing within NSDC which will compare to 3FTE to deal with Housing related complaints.

It is assumed that, over time, the triggers for the complaints will be addressed where possible with the aim of reducing the number of complaints so, if additional posts are approved, it is appropriate for some of this to be on a temporary basis as the aim should be to reduce complaints over time and therefore reduce the need for capacity in this area. Need can then be reviewed again at the point the temporary post is coming to an

end. Particularly with a role focused on embedding improvement – the aim of this must be to reduce overall numbers of complaints.

Where learning is identified as a result of complaints being investigated, some of this may be about improving processes and procedures but, where it links to formal training and development for staff (whether provided internally or externally), it is important that the Learning and Development team is involved ensuring that training is developed / delivered in a manner suitable for all, and recorded appropriately.

In terms of equalities, the new posts, if approved, will be advertised in line with the Council's recruitment and selection policy, and selection will ensure that no applicant is at a detriment due to holding a protected characteristic.

Background Papers and Published Documents

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

None