

# Southampton City Council Housing Complaints: 2021/22 End of Year Report

## Introduction

This report details Southampton City Council Housing Department's performance in complaint handling in 2021/22. This is line with the Housing Ombudsman's complaint handling code.

## Number of Complaints

The Southampton City Council Housing Department received 220 complaints in the financial year 2021/22.

This figure does not include complaints which were dealt with as service requests, withdrawn or were outside of our jurisdiction.

### Complaints by Department:

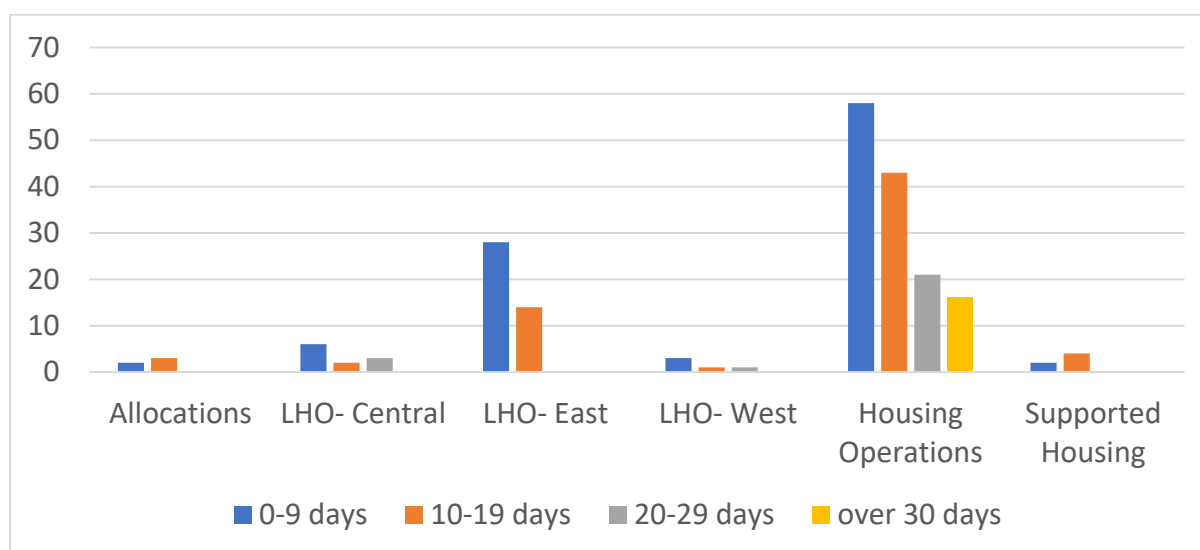
Department	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
Allocations	2	3	1		6
LHOS (all)	22	24	12	10	68
• Central	6	4	2	2	14
• East	12	18	7	6	43
• West	3	2	3	2	11
Housing Operations	27	45	32	37	141
• Area Estate Management		34	25	23	82
• Commercialisation		3			3
• Disabled Adaptations		1			1
• Electrical Services		3	1	4	8
• Gas Services		4	3	6	13
• Programme Support			3	1	4
• Voids				3	3
Supported Housing		2	1	3	6
Total	50	74	46	50	220

Complaints for the Housing Operations were not split between service areas in quarter one, following feedback from managers this has been implemented going forward.

## Timescales

Timescales for resolving stage one complaints:

Timescale (working days)	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
0-9	30	29	15	26	100
10-19	12	26	16	13	67
20-29	4	10	9	4	27
Over 30	4	7	4	6	21
Open complaints				3	3



Department	0-9 Days	10-19 Days	20-29 Days	Over 30 Days
Allocations	2	3		
LHO- Central	6	2	4	
LHO- East	28	14		1
LHO- West	3	1	4	
Housing Operations	58	43	21	16
Supported Housing	2	4		

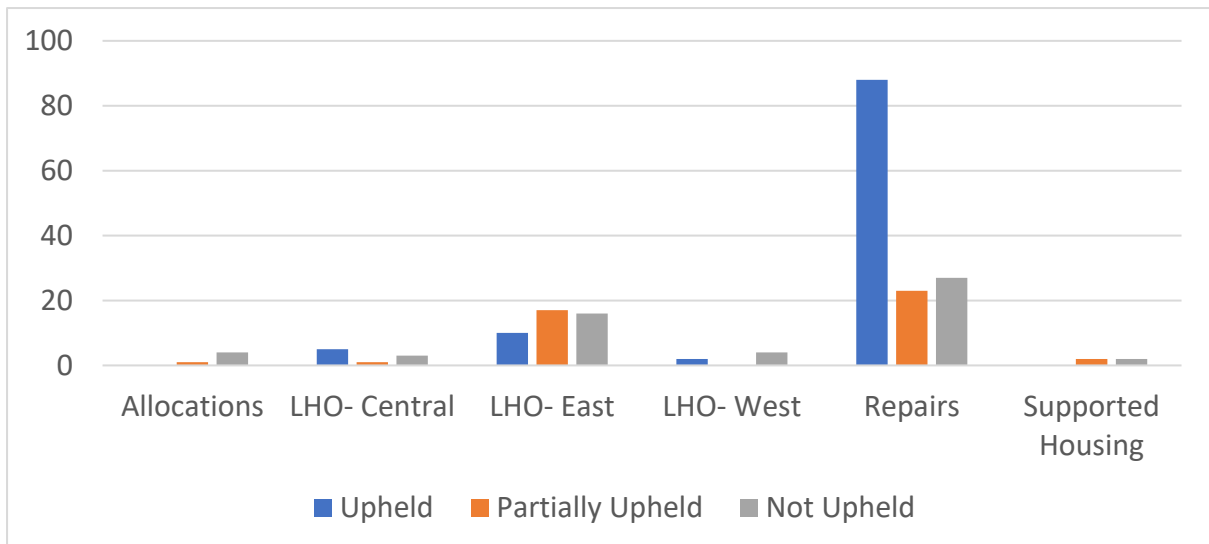
The Southampton City Council Complaints Policy states that complaints will be responded to within 20 working days. 75% of complaints in 2021/22 were responded to within this timeframe.

The Housing Ombudsman in 2021/22 stated complaints should be responded to within 10 working days. This was achieved in 45% of complaints.

Changes to the Housing Ombudsman Code from 1<sup>st</sup> October 2022 state that complaints must be responded to within 10 working days. This can be extended in exceptional circumstances but should not exceed 30 working days. Managers have asked for a weekly report of outstanding complaints. This will be implemented from quarter two of 2022/23.

## Outcome

Result	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
Upheld	25	33	21	26	105
Partially Upheld	10	19	7	10	46
Not Upheld	13	18	14	12	57
Unclear	2	3	2	1	8



Department	Upheld	Partially Upheld	Not Upheld	Unclear
Allocations		1	4	1
LHO- Central	5	1	3	4
LHO- East	10	17	16	
LHO- West	2		4	2
Housing Operations	88	23	27	1
Supported Housing		2	2	

48% of complaints were upheld, 21% partially upheld, and 26% upheld.

## **Common Themes**

For local housing offices, anti-social behaviour, and the standard of cleaning in communal blocks were common complaints.

Anti-social behaviour is also of particular concern to the Tenant Scrutiny Panel and they have asked that this is an area of focus for managers. Andy Wood is leading on a review of the policy which the panel will be consulted on.

For Housing Operations, timescales for repairs and the standard of repairs were common complaints. This included the waiting time for initial appointments, and delays in the repair being completed and multiple appointments being required to complete the repair to an adequate standard.

While Covid-19 continued to cause pressures on the service, it is recognised that improvements are required. There is work ongoing to improve the text service for tenants which will mean they do not unnecessarily wait in their properties for tradesmen.

It has been raised that it would be useful to know the number of complaints by issue, as well as by department. This will be implemented in the 2022/23 reports.

## **Stage Two Complaints**

36 stage two Complaints were received in 2021/22. Complaints relating to homelessness have been removed as they do not relate to our function as a landlord and would be considered by the Local Housing Ombudsman, rather than the Housing Ombudsman.

Some of these would be treated as a request for a revision of decision (particularly relating to allocations) rather than complaints. This shows a disconnect in how stage one and stage two complaints are treated.

Three stage two complaints were upheld, and two partially upheld. This shows that the stage one procedure is making the correct decision in the majority of cases.

## **Housing Ombudsman Complaints**

Twelve Housing Ombudsman complaints were received in 2021/22. No decisions have yet been received on these complaints.

Southampton City Council received one judgement of no maladministration on 28<sup>th</sup> February 2022, this related to a complaint received on 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2020.

## **Administration**

Complaints were acknowledged within three working days in the majority of complaints, however there were a number where the acknowledgement was not on Lagan.

The majority of complaints used the correct template when sent by letter. Where the response was sent by email, there were a number which did not include details of how complaints can be escalated if the tenant is not satisfied with the outcome.

Some complaints were responded to by telephone, however there is no way of confirming whether the information was given around escalation. Managers are reminded that where a complaint is responded to by telephone, a follow up email or letter should be sent confirming the details of discussion, the outcome of the complaint and the escalation routes.

There were a small number of complaints which did not make clear the outcome of complaints. Managers are reminded of the importance of this.

Managers are also reminded that complaint responses should be promptly sent to business support to be logged on Lagan.

Managers are also reminded to send any complaints received by their department to business support to be logged on Lagan. This includes complaints received from Members of Parliament and councillors.

## **Lessons Learned**

The lessons learned tracker has not been consistently filled in across departments.

The Local Housing Managers raised that filling in the lessons learned tracker is an administrative burden. They have proposed that complaints are added to their bi-monthly meetings and lessons learned will be discussed. Minutes from these will be shared as evidence of commitment to continued improvement.

## **Changes to the Housing Ombudsman Code**

The Housing Ombudsman has announced changes to the complaints handling code effective 1<sup>st</sup> October 2022.

It is now essential that Southampton City Council must use the Housing Ombudsman definition of a complaint. It will be discussed by senior management whether an amendment can be made to the corporate policy, or whether a housing specific policy is needed.

Acknowledgements of complaints should also include a summary of the complaint. Currently the acknowledgement is sent by business support and managers have expressed that they would like this to continue. Confirmation that they are able to do this is needed.