

Agenda Item No:



Report To: Cabinet

Date of Meeting: 11 June 2026

Report Title: Corporate Complaints 2025-2026

Report Author: Ellen Black

Job Title: Strategic Customer Services Manager
People, Communications and Technology

Portfolio Holder: Cllr Hayward

Portfolio Holder for: Portfolio Holder for Tourism, Culture, Policy and Performance

Summary: This is the annual report presented to Cabinet that outlines the complaints received corporately during the financial year from 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026.

The report details the number of complaints, the reasons for those complaints, the timescales for handling them and the associated staff and financial costs.

It is a requirement of our Complaints Policy that this information is reported to Cabinet annually and reported on the council's website.

The report seeks approval for recommendations around handling of AI generated complaints; and to publish the Complaints Self-Assessment to our website.

Key Decision: No

**Significantly
Affected Wards:** n/a

Recommendations: The Cabinet is recommended to:-

- I. Note the Corporate Complaints 2025/2026 report and approve it for publication on the Council's website.
- II. Approve the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGSO) Self-Assessment for publication.
- III. Note the performance measures highlighted in the report.
- IV. Agree to the amendments to the Complaints Handling Policy in response to growing volumes lengthy of AI generated complaints.

Policy Overview:	This report will be provided annually to ensure that there is oversight of the Councils complaint performance. It allows Cabinet to understand the performance and make comments on any improvements planned as a direct consequence of the complaints received. It is a requirement of the Complaint Handling Policy that the annual report along with the annual Self-Assessment, be published on the Council website before the end of September.
Financial Implications:	The cost of complaints for 2025/26 was £136,000. This is a combination of staff time, and remedy/compensation payments. A breakdown is detailed in the report. This underlines the importance of robust oversight and management of complaints, not just from a customer service perspective, but also a financial perspective too.
Legal Implications:	Not required as this is a monitoring report.
Equalities Impact Assessment:	Not required as this is a monitoring report.
Data Protection Impact Assessment:	Not necessary as no large scale data processing carried out in the development of this report.
Risk Assessment (Risk Appetite Statement):	The council has a low risk appetite to compliance risks. Ensuring complaints are effectively handled has many benefits to us as service providers. It saves time, money and improves the customer experience. It also ensures we are compliant with the Ombudsman's Code and associated guidance.
Sustainability Implications:	None.
Other Material Implications:	N/A
Exempt from Publication:	NO
Background Papers:	Annual Housing Complaints Performance Report The Housing Service reports on complaints performance in a separate report to ensure compliance with the Housing Ombudsman Handling Code.
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Report Title: Corporate Complaints 2025/2026

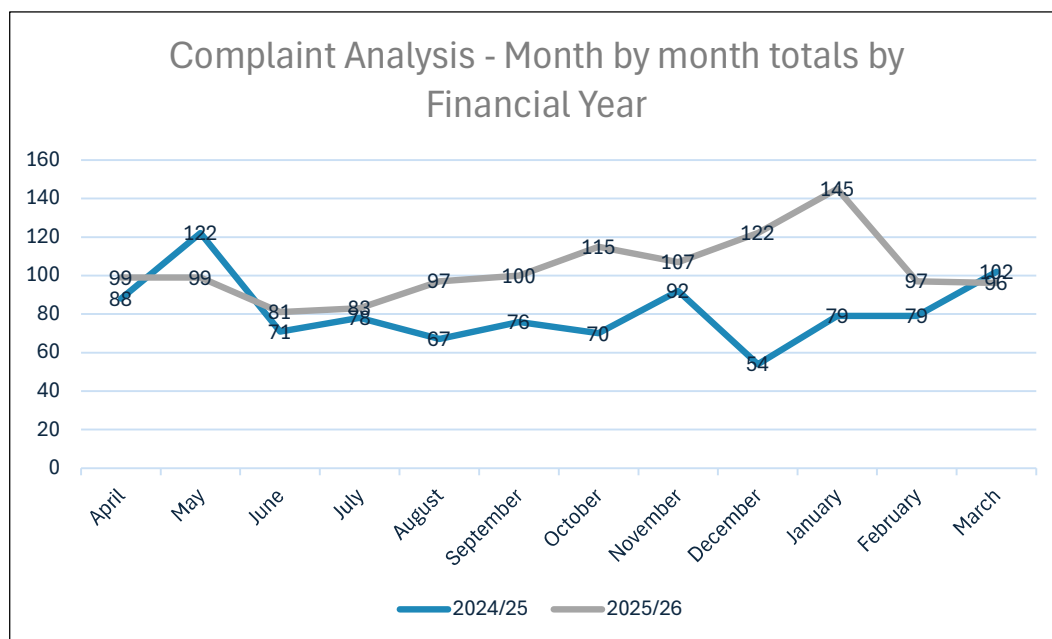
Introduction and Background

1. This is the annual corporate complaints report to Cabinet complying with the council's Complaints Handling Policy; the Cabinet are identified as the governing body with oversight of the Policy, and this requires performance for the previous financial year to be reported to Cabinet by the end of June each year.
2. The Housing Service reports on complaints performance in a separate report to ensure compliance with the Housing Ombudsman Handling Code, but this report includes data on all complaints to provide an overall picture of complaints received by Ashford Borough Council.
3. Performance of complaints will be reported on the council's website following cabinet consideration of this report.
4. As part of the Data (Use and Access) Act 2025 (DUAA), new legal requirements relating to the handling of data protection complaints come into force from 19 June 2026. These complaints will be managed outside the Council's corporate complaints process due to differing statutory timescales and the individual's right to escalate to the Information Commissioners Office (ICO). Information on these complaints will be included in future reports.

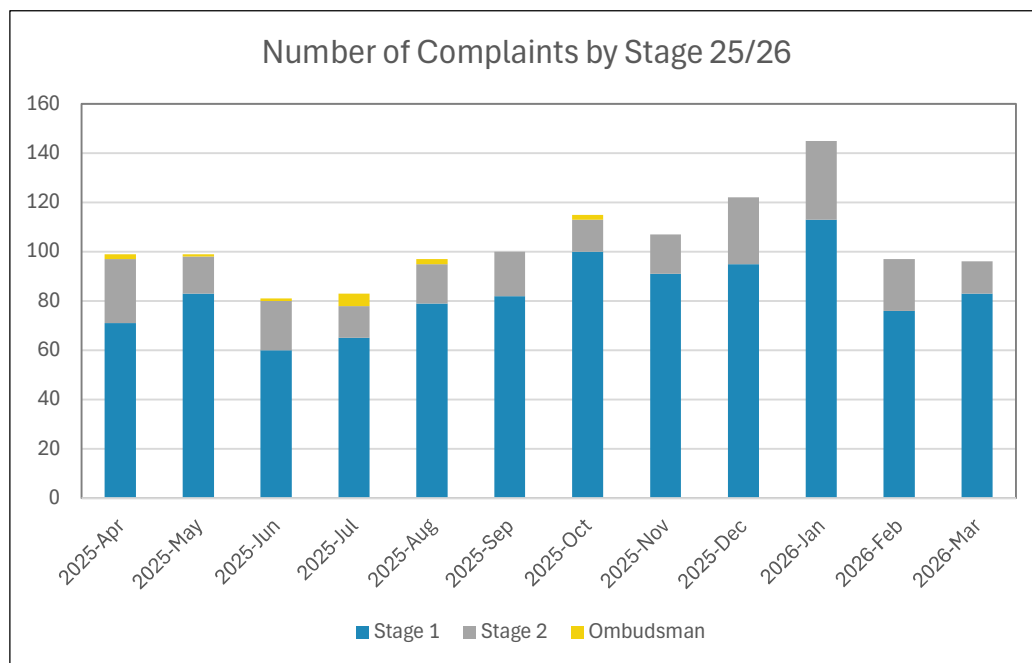
Complaints Handling Performance 2025/26

Complaints Received

5. Between 1 April 2025 and 31 March 2026, the Council received **a total of 1244 complaints**, 80.5% of these were resolved at stage one (998 complaints) with 18.5% (230) resolved at stage two. 16 Ombudsman complaints were closed during this period. 66% (1372) of complaints were considered justified or partially justified. The image beneath shows a month-by-month total of the complaints received for the prior financial years.



6. There has been a 27% increase in the number of complaints overall compared to the previous financial year (which saw a total of 978). This is following a national trend which has seen the awareness of making a complaint now widely advertised and supported by regulation.
7. The table below provides a breakdown of complaints received by stage for each month of 2025/26. A peak in complaints was seen in January, 104 of which relate to Housing's seasonal pressures (heating, hot water damp and mould).

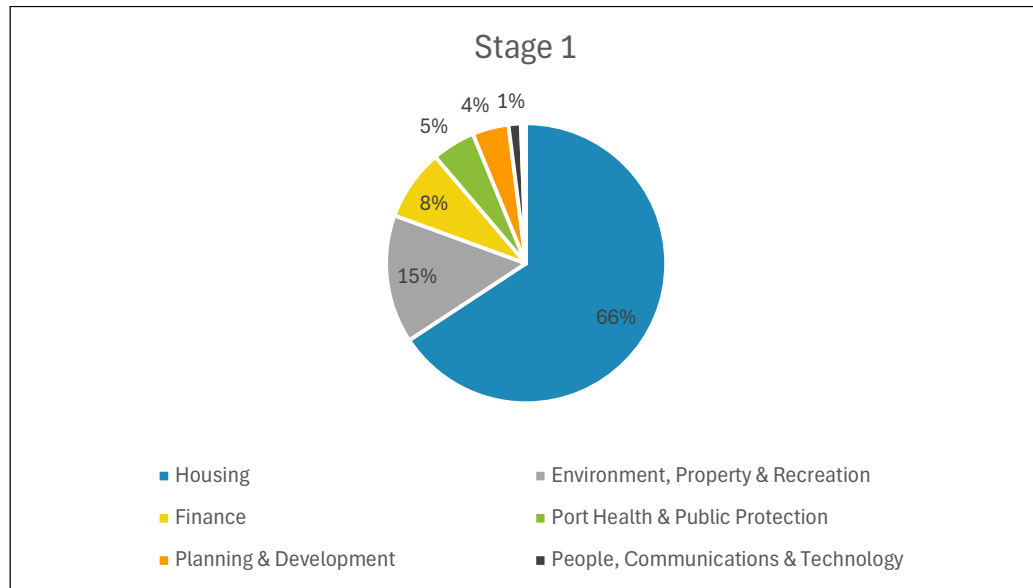


Complaints Profile

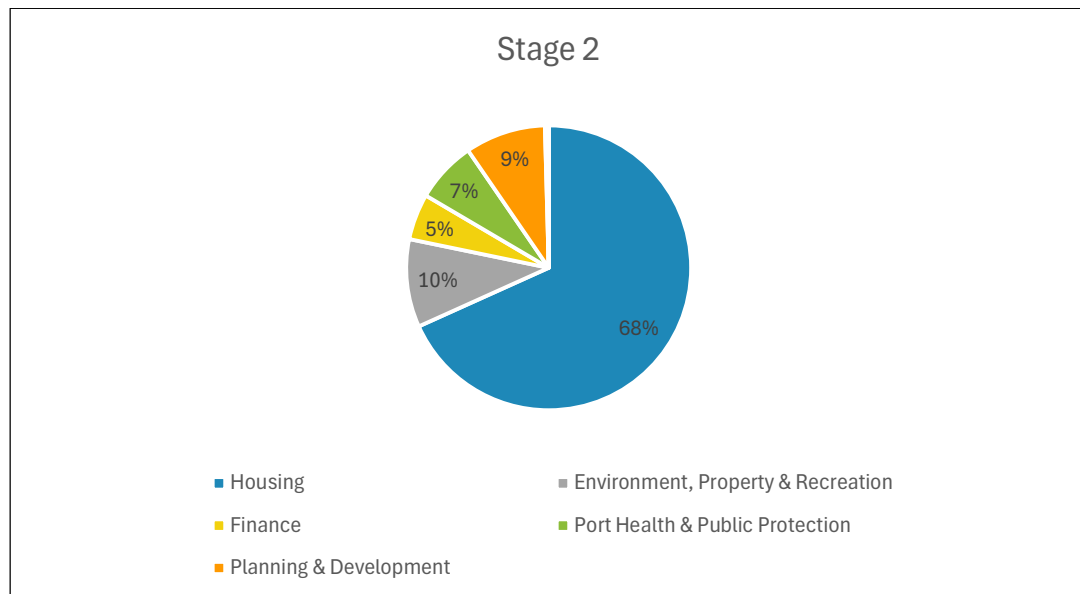
8. The table below shows the number and percentage of complaints by service, together with an indication of the service size as a percentage of headcount. This comparison is provided as context to the proportion of complaints to size of service area, but it should be noted that services like Housing with greater public-facing scope will attract a larger number of complaints. A detailed breakdown of each department's complaints contribution is available at **Appendix 1**.
9. This profile remains relatively steady over time with those in blue consistently higher ranked than those in white.

Directorate/Service	Complaints 2025/2026	Percentage	Service Headcount
Housing	819	65.73%	23%
Environment Property and Recreation	173	13.91%	15%
Finance	96	7.72%	9%
Port Health and Public Protection	68	5.47%	24%
Planning and Development	66	5.31%	9%
People Communications and Technology	15	1.21%	10%
Legal and Democracy	4	0.32%	4%
Economic Development	2	0.16%	2%
Multiple or No Specific Service	1	0.08%	0%
Other (Development / Policy, Chief Exec))	0	0.00%	4%
Total	1244	100%	100%

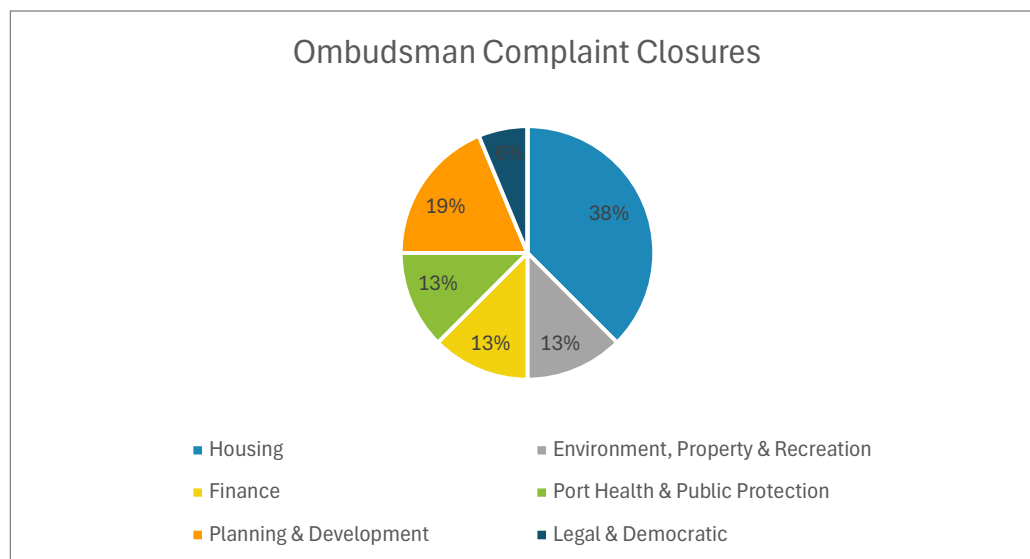
10. The charts below illustrate the distribution of complaints by service at Stage 1. A total of 998 Stage 1 complaints were received for this period and contributes 80.5% of complaints this period. This figure is 25% higher than the same period in 2024/25



11. The chart below illustrates the distribution of complaints by service at Stage 2. A total of 230 Stage 2 complaints were received for this period and contributes 18.5% of complaints this period. This figure is a 42% higher on same period in 2024/25.



12. The chart below illustrates the percentage distribution of complaints by service that were closed by the Ombudsman in this period (cases are often complex and remaining open for more than one year and so we report on closures rather than open cases). A total of 16 cases were closed within this period and contribute 1.3% of complaints this period. This figure is 28% lower than the same period in 2024/2025.



13. A further breakdown of Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGSO) and Housing Ombudsman complaints can be found at Section 42.
14. Other key take aways from the profile are:
- Housing maintains its position as the top contributor with 66% of all complaints for this period. It has seen an increase over time and a 28% increase against the same period last year (12% if discounting complaints closed as “Not a Complaint”). A significant proportion of its complaints are complex due its nature; having a large quantity of policies, procedures, legislation and work volume which is further complicated by the need to rely on 3rd parties. Complaints often span the various teams within the department and information is spread between systems. Housing is working hard to address areas of complaint and to learn from its stakeholders. The main contributors to complaints within Housing are Repairs (45%) and Neighbourhood Services (16%).
 - All departments with complaints remain either at a level comparable to the prior year or have seen an increase. There has been a notable increase in complaints being raised against Housing (28% rise), Port Health & Public Protection (66% rise) and Finance (140% rise) when compared against same period in 2024/25.
 - The exception is Environment, Property & Recreation which has seen a reduction (8% drop). This may be partly because Parking complaints are now reported under Port Health & Public Protection, see Section 14e.
 - Complaint volumes within the Housing Service have continued to increase during 2025/26, largely driven by repairs related issues,

particularly seasonal pressures linked to heating, damp and mould, and service delivery delays.

- e. Port Health & Public Protection have seen an increase which is predominantly linked to Parking moving into that service in both a physical and reporting sense and an increase in Port activity.
- f. Finance report that residents are finding Council Tax and second home premium charges unaffordable in the current economical climate and the removal of certain exceptions and discounts has also contributed.

Complaint Reasons

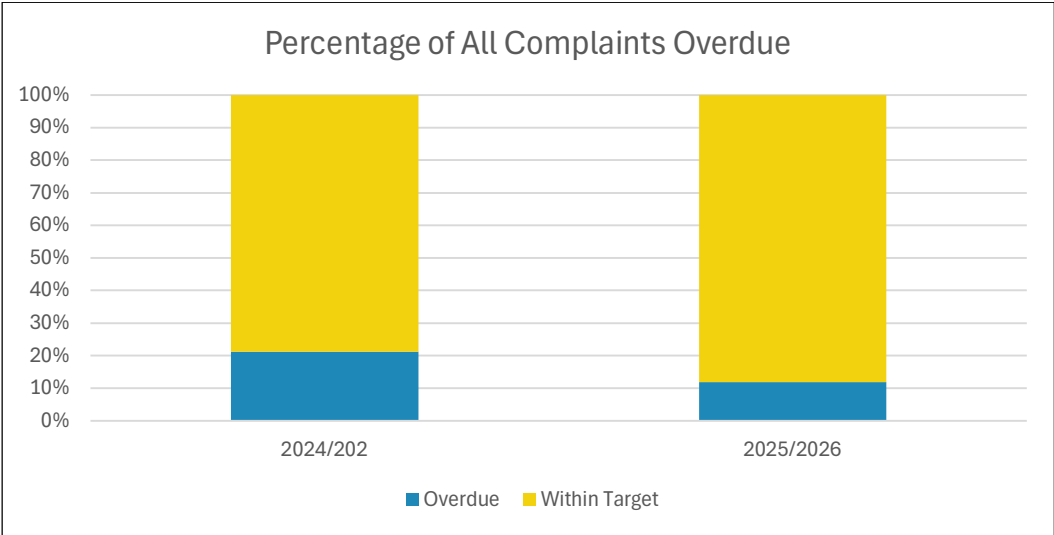
- 15. A complaint can be closed when completed with multiple reasons attached to it and so one complaint can fall into several categories. The table at **Appendix B** provides a breakdown of reasons by quarter and by department for the year 2025/2026.
- 16. A summary of the non-service specific complaint reasons (i.e. excluding reasons attributed only to specific departments) are listed below. A full breakdown is available at **Appendix B**.

Reason for Complaint	No of Complaints	Percentage
Service Failure	184	20%
Policy & Procedure	161	18%
Timescales to deal with issue	116	12%
Service Standards	111	12%
Staff Attitude	72	8%
Miscellaneous	62	7%
Inaccurate Information	60	7%
Staff Error	54	6%
Length of time waited	45	5%
Loss of service	23	3%
Inconsistent Advice	15	2%

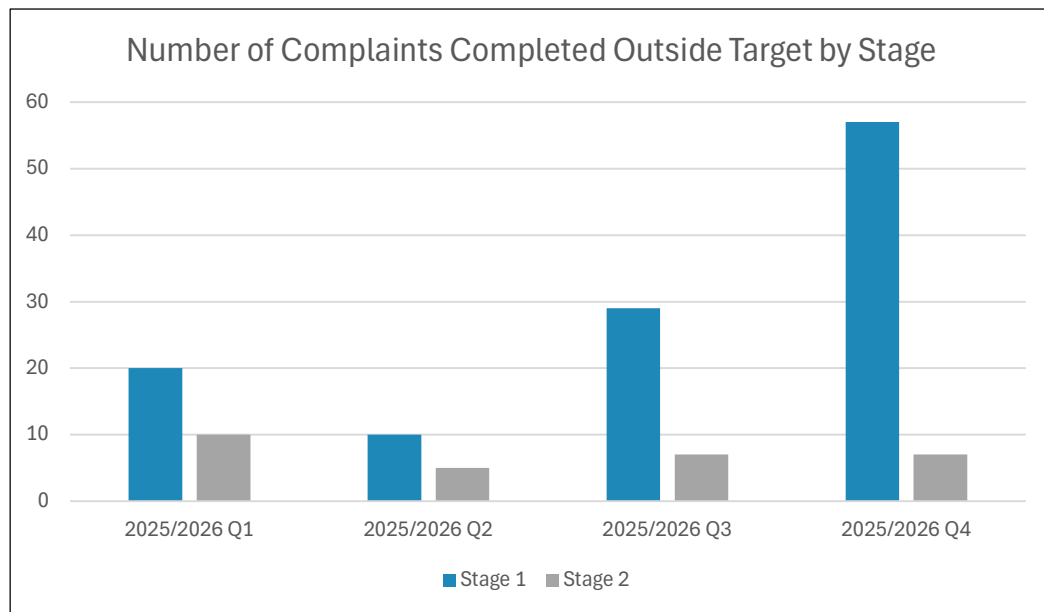
- 17. Housing has a high number of complaint reasons listed in the full breakdown at **Appendix B** but its top three are 3rd Party Contractor, Heating / Hot Water and Service Standards. This reflects the operations of the department.
- 18. Management Team received 6 monthly updates with Directors being updated each month on complaints. As a result, managers are considering their own service specific KPIs to ensure goals are set for improvements to complaint numbers and timescales.
- 19. It is important to remember that not all complaints or their root cause are avoidable. The focus should be a commitment to listening, learning and responding in the correct way.

Timescale Adherence

- 20. The complaints policy requires us to respond to all Stage One complaints within 10 days, and Stage Two complaints within 20 days of receipt. Extensions to time are permitted for limited reasons (e.g. the need to obtain information from third parties, complexity of the issues involved or the scale of complaint necessitating additional time). Where an extension of time is approved it is recorded as completed on time.
- 21. The table below shows the number of complaints responded to within the period, that were overdue vs in target. For 2025/26 83% of all complaints were responded to “within target” compared to 68% in the prior year. This is a significant improvement and can be attributed improvement activities with Housing



- 22. The table below shows a breakdown of complaints that were overdue by stage per month for the 2025/26 reporting period. Overdue means closed outside of target without extension.
 - a. Of the 998 Stage 1 Complaints, 115 (12%) were overdue.
 - b. Of the 230 Stage 2 Complaints, 29 (13%) were overdue.



23. Housing is responsible for the increase in overdue complaints in Q3 and Q4 and this correlates with the volume of complaints that came in during the winter months in relation to Repairs (heating and hot water).
24. The table below shows the distribution of overdue complaints by service. Housing is predominantly responsible for overdue complaints due to the complexity of the complaints received which spread across multiple teams and contractors. The department has reduced its contribution to the overdue complaint total for this period by 4% on last year.

Service	Overdue
Housing	92%
Planning and Development	3%
Port Health and Public Protection	2%
Finance	1%
Multiple or No Specific Service	1%

25. Planning and Development, Port Health and Finance have highlighted delays caused by staffing issues, the need to obtain legal advice and the complexity of the complaints.
26. The tables below show the average number of days to completion for Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaints by department and quarter with those outside of the target in red.

Stage 1 Average Days to Complete (Target 10 days)					
Service	2025/26 Q1	2025/26 Q2	2025/26 Q3	2025/26 Q4	Average
Environment Property and Recreation	10	5	5	3	5

Port Health and Public Protection	6	6	8	8	6
Finance	6	7	9	9	7
People Communications and Technology	8	6	7	7	7
Legal and Democracy	9		5		8
Planning and Development	10	10	14	11	10
Economic Development	14	8			11
Housing	10	11	13	12	12
Stage 2 Average Days to Complete (Target 20 days)					
Service	2025/26 Q1	2025/26 Q2	2025/26 Q3	2025/26 Q4	Average
Environment Property and Recreation	14	20	17	20	19
Finance	20	10	17	19	14
Housing	22	21	22	22	22
People Communications and Technology		8			8
Planning and Development	13	22	19	19	19
Port Health and Public Protection	18	23	17	20	20

27. Key take aways from this data are as follows:

- a. The average days to completion recorded does not indicate any concern in this area at 8 days for Stage 1 and 17 for Stage 2.
- b. Overdue completions are heavily concentrated in Q4, especially January, and are overwhelmingly Stage 1 driven. These are directly attributed to Housing.
- c. Housing consistently has the longest times overall due to the demand created by the volume and complexity of the complaints received.
- d. Environment Property and Recreation is consistently the quickest at Stage 1 (and improves notably in Q4). The reason for this is likely to be the clear-cut nature of the service and that it is now resourced adequately so the Senior Officer can focus and lead on complaint responses.

Deadline Extensions

28. As highlighted above, there are circumstances where a timescale can be extended. It is important to review the level of these extensions otherwise the set timescale becomes meaningless if all complaints are extended.
29. 2025/26 saw 34% of complaints (427) having their timescales for response extended, the table below shows which service areas had permitted time extensions and 90% of these extension requests were requested by Housing.

Service	Contribution
Housing	90%
Planning and Development	5%
Finance	2%
Port Health and Public Protection	2%
Environment, Property and Recreation	1%

Justified Complaints

30. Over the period 40% complaints were marked as justified by officers (a 13% improvement on last increase), 36% not justified and 24% partially justified.
31. Housing contributes 86% of all justified complaints and 53% of their own complaints are justified (a 5% increase on last year). Housing is working intensively to make improvements such as the creation of a new team to support complaint handling and amendments to the Housing Complaint Policy and the creation of a new Compensation Policy. For further information please see Section 38 of this report and refer to the Housing report Section 36 to 37.

Directorate/Service	Justified
Housing	53%
Environment Property and Recreation	28%
People Communications and Technology	43%
Finance	3%
Planning and Development	3%
Economic Development	SAMPLE TOO SMALL
Port Health and Public Protection	3%

Costs

32. In most instances when something has gone wrong there will be a range of remedies available, from written apologies to changing decisions, revising policies and other corrective or remedial actions.
33. There are occasions where a financial remedy is necessary. It is important that we have oversight of the level and frequency of financial remedy to ensure that payments are justified and not being made in lieu of corrective action for other customers.
34. The tables below show the total costs with a breakdown of officer time and payments. For the period, total costs (payments offered and time) of £136,000 are estimated below based on Stage 1 cost of £16 per hour and Stage 2 cost of £44 per hour. Please note that the amount recorded as offered may differ from payments made. See the Housing report for the most accurate Housing costs and payments.

Service	Costs (Payments + Time)
Housing	£113,762
Planning & Development	£6,216
Environmental Protection & Recreation	£6,031
Finance	£5,028
Port Health & Public Protection	£3,762
People, Communication & Technology	£338
Multiple or No Specific Service	£156
Economic Development	£48
Legal & Democratic	£12
Total (Rounded to nearest £)	£136,000

35. The table below shows the that costs have increased by 64% on the last year: This is mainly attributed to an overall increase in complaint numbers impacting officer time and an expectation by the Housing Ombudsman that organisations should offer adequate compensation payments.

2024/2025	2025/2026
£82,567	£136,000

Payments

36. For the period, payments of £69,096 have been offered with the average payment value of £251. As stated above, the amount recorded as offered may differ from payments made. See the Housing report for the most accurate Housing costs and payments.

Service	Payments
Housing	£68,289
Finance	£500
Environment, Property & Recreation	£224
Planning & Development	£60
Port Health & Public Protection	£23
Total	£69,096

37. The table below shows the payments awarded to remedy complaints. There has been an increase on last year of 104%.

2024/2025	2025/2026
£33,788	£69,096

38. The increase relates predominantly to Housing. Section 31 of the Housing report details a change in their approach to improve performance which has been summarised below:

- a. The new Complaint & Resolution Team will provide a consistent and resident focused service for Housing and will take the lead on Stage 1

and 2 complaints for the department. This team will analyse themes in complaints to identify systemic issues and provide feedback to inform decision making and learning.

- b. The current Complaint Policy will be updated to incorporate the responsibilities of the new team
- c. A new Compensation Policy will be developed to comply with the Housing Ombudsman's vision of a fair compensation system across the sector.

Time Spent

39. In this period, 3049 hours have been spent dealing with complaints.

Service	Hours
Housing	2,097
Environmental Protection & Recreation	245
Planning & Development	294
Finance	221
Port Health & Public Protection	149
People, Communication & Technology	27
Multiple or No Specific Service	12
Economic Development	3
Legal & Democratic	1.75
Total	3,049.75

40. The table below shows the hours spent:

2024/2025	2025/2026
2310	3049

41. Time spent has increased by 32% compared to the same period in 2024/25. This is due to the increasing number of complaints and the increasing complexity, partly due to an increasing trend of lengthy AI generated requests.

Ombudsman Complaints

42. Ombudsman complaints are the final stage of our complaints process, where the complainant remains dissatisfied with our stage 2 response. Cases referred to the Ombudsman vary in nature with some being determined quickly, whilst others are more complex investigations and can remain open for more than one year.
43. There were 16 cases formally closed in this period on the tracker. The table below shows a breakdown by service.

Department	Total
Housing	6
Planning	3
Environment, Property & Recreation	2
Finance	2
Port Health & Public Protection	2
Legal	1
Total	16

44. A breakdown of all the outcomes is shown in the table below:

Closure Reason	Total
Insufficient evidence of fault by ABC	5
Premature (at Stage 1 in the complaints procedure)	2
Not investigated as can be appealed to Planning Inspectorate	1
Not investigated as can be appealed to Information Commissioners Office	1
Cannot be investigated as relate to court proceedings	1
Insignificant reason to justify Ombudsman involvement	1
Fault / Maladministration	5
Total	16

45. Fault was found by the LGSO in relation to one case regarding an unreasonable offer of temporary accommodation which caused injustice. The council was ordered to apologise, pay £1,800 and to remind staff about appeal rights when offering temporary accommodation.
46. Of the Housing departments Ombudsman cases that were closed the Ombudsman found x 4 Maladministration:
- Maladministration in the way the council as a landlord handled a resident's concerns about the condition of a property they moved into. It concluded that the landlord had made a reasonable offer of redress in its

- response to concerns about their rent account and there was no maladministration in the handling of the complaint.
- b. One case of Severe Maladministration in the handling of a leak, damp and mould. Also, maladministration of handling of concerns about condition of the property, record keeping and the complaint. The council was ordered to apologise in writing, pay £1,150 in compensation and provide evidence of having carried out an independent review within 12 weeks of the decision letter.
 - c. One case Maladministration on handling of a resident's report of a strong odour. The council was ordered to apologise and pay £300 in compensation.
 - d. One case Maladministration of handling of resident's repair request. The council was ordered to apologise and pay £300 in compensation.
47. The Ombudsman's orders and recommendations to improve service were implemented in full.

Performance Improvement Measures

48. Management team receive six monthly updates on complaint performance. Processes have been found to be co-ordinated, consistent and controlled, enabling complaint acknowledgement and assignment to occur within target timescales. The systems in place developed by IT and used to track complaints have greatly supported this function. However, recommendations were made with the aim of raising the profile of correct complaint handling and monitoring amongst managers:
- a. Refining how we categorise complaints to make the reporting data more accurate and tell more of a story at a glance. ***These tracker changes have been completed.***
 - b. Creating new training modules to be rolled out across the authority to officer and managers highlighting the need for correct handling and regular monitoring. ***This is in development for role out later this year.***
 - c. Rolling out a complaint dashboard to all managers and promoting its use in regular deep dives of the data which will inform updates in future reports. ***Access to the reporting dashboard has been granted to all responding managers with guidance.***
 - d. Managers are considering their service specific KPIs and working with their teams to learn and make changes as necessary. ***Advice has been issued to Managers about use of the tracker to support their activities.***
49. It is hoped that these recommendations will contribute towards improvements in handling timescales, an increase in learning and a reduction in the need for payments.
50. Services also review the outcomes of complaints investigated by the ombudsman to identify systemic issues and to implement corrective action to prevent similar incidents in the future. Lessons from complaints are recorded on the tracker and reported to Directors. Sharing these lessons allows processes to be reviewed and amended.

51. Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) on complaints are reported through the Corporate Performance Report to the Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny Committee quarterly. The KPIs keep a regular check on how well the council is doing in terms of numbers and in meeting its targets.
52. The Housing department reports its own complaint performance and is subject to scrutiny by both internal committee (O&S) and external organisation (The Housing Ombudsman and the Regulator of Social Housing). A new Complaints and Resolution Team has been set up to handle all complaints that relate to Housing with the purpose of supporting improved customer experience, reducing escalation, and promoting stronger organisational learning from complaints. Housing will also update their Housing Complaint Policy and create a new Compensation Policy.

AI in Complaint Handling

53. It has been noticed by all services that AI is increasingly used by customers to form their complaints, and this can lead to excessively complex and lengthy submissions. Whilst we do not discourage its use and acknowledge that it is an important communication tool, these submissions detract from the core matters and add time, cost and effort to the complaint response. This is a matter that is affecting all authorities and the Ombudsman themselves. Whilst not issued by the LGSO and Housing Ombudsman's yet, other Ombudsman's, such as the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman and the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales, have issued guidance to their customers around how to effectively use AI to make a complaint and what can be expected from the organisation in response.
54. It is felt appropriate to align ourselves with this approach and to issue guidance to our customers through our policy and through our web communications about how to effectively use AI and how we will handle any responses that are overly complex or lengthy.
55. To support the customer directly, it is suggested that we should publish two web pages around the use of AI to form a complaint titled "How to make a good complaint" and "Using AI to make a complaint" so that they understand that a complaint does not need to be lengthy in order to make an impact.
56. To support our responders, we intend to issue training that informs them of how to spot and handle an AI generated complaint; requesting clarification and simplification where required before proceeding, and also showing them how our own secure Co-Pilot can be used to enhance our own responses in a responsible, "human in the loop" and secure manner.
57. There will be cases where some customers submit complaints in a way that would be deemed unreasonable due to volume and/or repetition. It is necessary that we use our Unreasonable Behaviour Policy where appropriate to monitor complaints made by a specific individual to identify at a glance the complaints that may need to be formally deemed "unreasonable" so that responders can be fully informed of that customers full complaint profile before taking action.

Self Assessment

58. A self-assessment is recommended by the LGSO Complaint Handling Code for annual publication. See **Appendix C**.
59. Our response is robust and we can answer positively to all questions and are confident that our approach to complaint handling is fully compliant.
60. The Cabinet are asked to review the document and confirm acceptance so that it can be publicised with this report.

Conclusion

61. The Cabinet is the designated governing body responsible for oversight of the Council's Complaints Handling Policy. This annual report provides assurance on the Council's corporate complaint performance during 2025/2026 and demonstrates how complaints data is being used to understand pressure points, improve services and maintain compliance with the Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Codes.
62. Complaint volumes have increased during the year, reflecting greater public awareness of complaint routes, increasing service demand and operational pressures; most notably within Housing. The report highlights that the majority of complaints continue to be resolved at Stage One, escalation to the Ombudsman remains low, and overall average response times remain within policy targets, despite periods of significant pressure.
63. Housing-related complaints account for the highest proportion of overall volumes, costs and complexity, particularly in relation to repairs, damp and mould, and contractor performance. Targeted action is already underway, including the establishment of a dedicated Housing Complaints and Resolution Team, revisions to Housing complaint and compensation arrangements, and strengthened learning arrangements, as detailed in the separate Housing Complaints Performance Report.
64. Across the wider organisation, improvements continue to be driven through strengthened management oversight, improved reporting tools, clearer categorisation of complaint themes, enhanced training for officers and managers, and more consistent use of data to identify trends and systemic issues. These measures support a culture of learning, early resolution and continuous improvement.
65. The report also recognises emerging pressures, including the increasing use of AI-generated complaints, and sets out a proportionate and consistent approach to managing this trend while maintaining fairness, accessibility and compliance.
66. Overall, this report aims to provide Cabinet with assurance that complaint handling arrangements are robust, transparent and evolving, and that appropriate action is being taken to manage demand, improve customer experience and reduce avoidable escalation and cost in future years.

Portfolio Holder's Views

67. Cllr Heather Hayward- Cabinet Member for Tourism, Culture, Policy and Performance:

I welcome this annual complaint report and the strong focus on learning from customer feedback to improve services. It is particularly encouraging to see the new Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Complaint Handling Guidance already being embedded across the organisation. Although corporate complaints represent a relatively small proportion of overall activity, they provide an important opportunity to identify issues, strengthen accountability and improve the customer experience. The improvements in response performance during 2025/26, alongside the positive work underway within Housing, demonstrate the Council's commitment to continuous improvement.

I am also pleased to see continued investment in staff training, stronger management oversight and improved complaint monitoring tools. It is reassuring that lessons learned from complaints are being actively used to make positive changes across services. The development of enhanced reporting and a greater focus on organisational learning will help ensure residents continue to receive fair, timely and transparent responses, while supporting ongoing compliance with Ombudsman expectations.

Contact and Email

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Appendix A – Complaint Profile (Service)

Directorate/Service	Service	Complaints (S1, S2, O)	%	Stage 1	Stage 2	Total 1 & 2	Justified / Partially	Not Justified	Ombudsman Closures 25/26	Fault (LGSO) / Maladministration (Housing) Decision 25/26
Housing	Total	819	0.66	656	157	813	641	172	6	5
Housing	Housing Repairs	559	0.45	447	108	555	500	55	4	3
Housing	Housing: Neighbourhood	134	0.11	111	22	133	81	52	1	1
Housing	Housing: Lettings	67	0.05	47	20	67	26	41	0	0
Housing	Housing Options	46	0.04	39	6	45	25	20	1	1
Housing	Housing	13	0.01	12	1	13	9	4	0	0
Environment Property and Recreation	Total	173	0.14	148	23	171	90	81	2	0
Environment Property and Recreation	Environmental Contracts	151	0.12	129	20	149	76	73	2	0
Environment Property and Recreation	Aspire Landscape Management	14	0.01	13	1	14	10	4	0	0
Environment Property and Recreation	Property Services (Commercial)	3	0.00	3	0	3	3	0	0	0

Environment Property and Recreation	Property Services (Garages)	3	0.00	1	2	3	1	2	0	0
Environment Property and Recreation	Ground Maintenance	2	0.00	2	0	2	0	2	0	0
Finance	Total	96	0.08	82	12	94	28	66	2	0
Finance	Council Tax, Business Rates and Recovery	91	0.07	79	10	89	27	62	2	0
Finance	Housing Benefit, Fraud and Visiting	5	0.00	3	2	5	1	4	0	0
Port Health and Public Protection	Total	68	0.05	50	16	66	17	49	2	0
Port Health and Public Protection	Parking Services	37	0.03	29	7	36	12	24	1	0
Port Health and Public Protection	Port Health and Public Protection	15	0.01	10	5	15	2	13	0	0
Port Health and Public Protection	Environmental Health	10	0.01	6	3	9	2	7	1	0
Port Health and Public Protection	Licensing	5	0.00	4	1	5	1	4	0	0
Port Health and Public Protection	Safety Advisory Group	1	0.00	1	0	1	0	1	0	
Planning and Development	Total	66	0.05	42	21	63	15	48	3	0
Planning and Development	Development Control/Planning Policy/Strategic sites and design	63	0.05	40	20	60	15	45	3	0
Planning and Development	Building Control	3	0.00	2	1	3	0	3	0	0

People Communications and Technology	Total	15	0.01	14	1	15	12	3	0	0
People Communications and Technology	Customer Service	14	0.01	13	1	14	11	3	0	0
People Communications and Technology	Web and Design	1	0.00	1	0	1	1	0	0	0
People Communications and Technology	Personnel & HR	0	0.00	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
People Communications and Technology	IT	0	0.00	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Legal and Democracy	Total	4	0.00	3	0	3	2	1	1	0
Legal and Democracy	Legal and Democratic	4	0.00	3	0	3	2	1	1	0
Economic Development	Total	2	0.00	2	0	2	1	1	0	0
Economic Development	Cultural Projects	2	0.00	2	0	2	1	1	0	0
Multiple or No Specific Service	Total	1	0.00	1	0	1	1	0	0	0
Multiple or No Specific Service	Non Council	1	0.00	1	0	1	1	0	0	0
Multiple or No Specific Service	Multiple	0	0.00	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Development	Total	0	0.00	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Development	Development	0	0.00	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Total		1244	1	998	230	1228	807	421	16	4
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Appendix B – Complaint Profile (Reasons)

Complaint Reason	Complaints Q1 25/26	Complaints Q2 25/26	Complaints Q3 25/26	Complaints Q4 25/26	Total No. Complaints	Economic Development	Environment, Property & Recreation	Finance	Housing	Legal & Democratic	Multiple / Non-Council	People, Communication & Technology	Planning & Development	Port Health & Public Protection
Service failure	36	43	41	64	184	0	99	1	44	1	0	3	18	9
3rd party contractor	38	27	66	44	175	0	21	0	149	0	0	0	1	3
Policy/procedures	46	40	47	28	161	0	11	21	15	2	0	5	2	15
Heating/Hot Water	27	14	51	38	130	0	0	0	130	0	0	0	0	0
Timescales to deal with issues	32	22	30	32	116	0	1	1	98	0	0	2	2	3
Service Standards	23	35	23	30	111	0	0	0	111	0	0	0	0	0
Windows/Doors	13	24	39	30	106	0	0	0	106	0	0	0	0	0
Damp/Mould	12	11	23	34	80	0	0	0	80	0	0	0	0	0
Staff attitude	25	11	13	23	72	0	7	3	31	0	1	8	3	19
Anti-social Behaviour	16	27	13	10	66	0	0	0	65	0	0	0	0	1

Miscellaneous	23	16	13	10	62	0	9	1 0	35	0	0	0	3	5
Inaccurate information	19	10	12	19	60	1	5	2 7	15	0	0	3	5	4
Staff error	14	14	16	10	54	1	5	2 6	9	0	0	4	3	6
Plumbing	4	11	17	14	46	0	0	0	46	0	0	0	0	0
Length of time waited	19	5	10	11	45	0	12	1	23	0	0	1	8	0
Roofing	11	7	12	11	41	0	0	0	41	0	0	0	0	0
Request to move	5	20	7	5	37	0	0	0	37	0	0	0	0	0
Electrical	8	6	8	6	28	0	0	0	28	0	0	0	0	0
Kitchens	3	11	6	5	25	0	0	0	25	0	0	0	0	0
Drainage	4	9	9	2	24	0	0	0	24	0	0	0	0	0
Groundworks	4	15	3	2	24	0	1	0	22	0	0	0	1	0
Operatives	5	5	8	6	24	0	0	0	24	0	0	0	0	0
Loss of service	9	5	5	4	23	0	0	2	16	0	0	4	0	1
Bathroom	7	7	3	5	22	0	0	0	22	0	0	0	0	0
Planning decision	2	3	5	12	22	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2 2	0
Structural	5	7	8		20	0	0	0	20	0	0	0	0	0
Adaptations	8	5	4	2	19	0	0	0	19	0	0	0	0	0
Fencing	9	6	3	1	19	0	0	0	19	0	0	0	0	0
Officer	6	4	8	1	19	0	0	0	19	0	0	0	0	0
Void Works	3	3	11	2	19	0	0	0	19	0	0	0	0	0
Workmanship	4	1	1	13	19	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Flooring	4	4	6	1	15	0	0	0	15	0	0	0	0	0
Inconsistant Advice	5	4	3	3	15	0	0	1	9	0	0	3	0	2

Infestation	5	5	2	3	15	0	0	0	15	0	0	0	0	0
Rent	3	3	5	2	13	0	0	0	13	0	0	0	0	0
Environment	2	3		6	11	0	0	0	11	0	0	0	0	0
Plastering	3	4	2	2	11	0	0	0	11	0	0	0	0	0
CEO's	4		6		10	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	10
Incurred charges-payment errors	5	4		1	10	0	2	4	1	0	0	0	2	1
Finishing works		4	1	4	9	0	0	0	9	0	0	0	0	0
Permits	1		7		8	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	8
Guttering	1	2	1	2	6	0	0	0	6	0	0	0	0	0
Timescale		2		4	6	0	0	0	6	0	0	0	0	0
Disabled Parking	2		1	1	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
Highway		1	1	2	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
Decision				3	3	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0
Staffing levels		2	1		3	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	1
Back Office	2				2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Rep's & Appeals			2		2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Car parks	1				1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Enforcement Agents			1		1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Total	478	462	554	508	2002	2	173	9 9	1391	3	1	33	7 0	102

Appendix C - Self-assessment against the requirements of the Ombudsman Code

Code section	Action	Do we follow the Code: Yes/No	Explanations and Commentary
1: Definition of a service request and complaint	We recognise the difference between a service request and a complaint, and these are defined in our policies and procedures.	Yes	In Section 5 – Definitions, the policy defines a complaint (in line with the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman guidance) as: “An expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the council, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting an individual or group.” The definition is supported by several important points elsewhere in the policy and accompanying guidance: • A person does not need to use the word “complaint” for it to be treated as one. • Complaints can be made in any format (written, verbal, email, phone, in person). • The policy clearly distinguishes a complaint from a service request:

Code section	Action	Do we follow the Code: Yes/No	Explanations and Commentary
			Expressions of dissatisfaction captured purely through surveys or feedback are not automatically treated as complaints, but customers should be signposted to the complaints process if they wish to pursue on
2: Exclusions	Our complaints policy sets out circumstances where we would not consider a complaint. These are reasonable and do not deny individuals access to redress.	Yes	In the Corporate Complaints Handling Policy (March 2025), the council includes a dedicated section titled “Exclusions and Exceptions” (Section 8), which clearly identifies matters that fall <i>outside</i> the corporate complaints process. While the policy defines a complaint broadly as an <i>expression of dissatisfaction</i>, it makes clear that certain issues are excluded or handled under different statutory or specialist procedures, including: - Service requests - Matters with separate appeal or statutory processes

Code section	Action	Do we follow the Code: Yes/No	Explanations and Commentary
			• Freedom of Information (FOI) or Environmental Information Regulations (EIR) issues • Complaints about councillors, • Housing service complaints, which are covered by a separate Housing Complaints Policy • Matters that are subject to ongoing or completed legal proceedings • General feedback
3: Accessibility and awareness	We provide different channels through which individuals can make complaints. These are accessible and we can make reasonable adjustments where necessary	Yes	The Corporate Complaints Handling Policy makes clear that complaints can be raised “however made”, and that customers do not need to use a specific form or the word “complaint” for the issue to be treated as one. The policy and supporting complaints pages confirm that complaints may be made via:

Code section	Action	Do we follow the Code: Yes/No	Explanations and Commentary
			• Online – through the council's formal complaints form • Email – sent to the council's complaints inbox • In writing – by post • Telephone – by calling the council • In person – to any member of staff • Via a representative or third party, with the complainant's consent The policy also confirms that: • Reasonable adjustments will be made under the Equality Act 2010 • Alternative formats and support are available to help customers access the complaints process
4: Complaint handling resources	We have designated, sufficient resource assigned to take responsibility for complaint handling. Complaints are viewed	Yes	Ashford Borough Council's complaints policy does assign clear responsibility and governance for complaint handling, and treats complaints as a corporate function,

Code section	Action	Do we follow the Code: Yes/No	Explanations and Commentary
	as a core service and resourced accordingly.		but it does not explicitly state that “sufficient resources” are allocated or that complaints are formally defined as a “core service” in resourcing terms. However, the Corporate Complaints Handling Policy (March 2025) clearly assigns responsibility for complaint handling at a corporate level. The policy includes a dedicated Responsibilities section which sets out that: • Senior officers are responsible for ensuring complaints are handled appropriately • Managers are accountable for responding to complaints within their service areas • There is a central corporate oversight function responsible for coordination, monitoring, reporting, and learning from complaints.

Code section	Action	Do we follow the Code: Yes/No	Explanations and Commentary
			All non-Housing complaints are handled by the Customer Services managers who assign complaints through the tracker to key contacts within the organisation. The system tracks progress and prompts for responses within timescales. Housing has a Housing Performance & Improvement Manager who is responsible for the Complaints & Resolution Officer. This officer processes the Housing complaints which are directed to a dedicated email inbox for processing and tracking. The Housing Department also have a new team in creation that will strengthen complaint handling, improve consistency, and support earlier and more effective resolution of complaints across the service. This represents a significant change for the department and will bring a clearer focus on oversight, learning, and accountability. This demonstrates that complaint handling is not ad-hoc or informal but allocated to named roles and structures within the organisation.

Code section	Action	Do we follow the Code: Yes/No	Explanations and Commentary
			In addition, the Cabinet report adopting the policy confirms that: • The Complaints Handling Policy forms part of the council's governance and performance framework • Complaints are reviewed and monitored corporately to drive service improvement
5: The complaint handling process	We have a single policy for dealing with complaints covered by the Code and individuals are given the option of raising a complaint where they express dissatisfaction that meets the definition of the complaint in our policy.	Yes	Ashford Borough Council has a single Corporate Complaints Handling Policy that applies to all non-housing council services and is explicitly aligned with the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) Complaint Handling Code. The policy: Applies across the whole organisation (services, staff, contractors, and agents) Sets out one corporate process for handling complaints that fall under the LGSCO's jurisdiction Is supported by oversight, monitoring, and corporate reporting mechanisms

Code section	Action	Do we follow the Code: Yes/No	Explanations and Commentary
			This is confirmed in both the policy itself and the Cabinet report adopting it, which states that the policy was introduced to ensure consistency and alignment with the LGSCO Complaint Handling Code. Housing complaints are appropriately excluded from this policy and dealt with under a separate Housing Complaints Policy, as required by the Housing Ombudsman Code. This is correct and compliant practice, not fragmentation
6: Complaints stages (Stage 1)	We process stage 1 complaints in line with timescales and processes set out in the Code.	Yes	Average Days to resolve at Stage 1 is 8 days Of the 998, 115 Stage 1 Complaints (12%) were completed outside target. 95 are attributed to Housing Further work required to increase number of complaints answered within timescale.
6: Complaints stages (Stage 2)	We process stage 2 complaints in line with timescales and processes set out in the Code.	Yes	Average days to resolve at Stage 2 is 17 days Of the 230, 29 Stage 2 Complaints (13%) were completed outside target. 17 are attributed to Housing.

Code section	Action	Do we follow the Code: Yes/No	Explanations and Commentary
			Further work required to increase number of complaints answered within timescale.
7: Putting things right	When something has gone wrong we take action to put things right.	Yes	The policy makes clear that remedies should be appropriate, proportionate, and focused on resolving the injustice caused. Typical actions include: Apologising A clear, sincere apology acknowledging what went wrong and the impact on the individual. Providing an explanation Giving a full explanation of what happened, why it happened, and what should have happened instead, where this has not already been made clear. Taking corrective action Completing or re-doing an action that should have been carried out correctly in the first place (for example, delivering a missed service or correcting an error). Putting things back into the position they should have been

Code section	Action	Do we follow the Code: Yes/No	Explanations and Commentary
			Where possible, taking steps to restore the individual to the position they would have been in had the fault not occurred (for example, reconsidering a decision or reassessing a case). Financial remedies or compensation In some cases, considering a financial payment to acknowledge distress, inconvenience, time and trouble, or quantifiable loss, in line with Ombudsman guidance. Service improvement and learning Identifying learning from the complaint and making changes to procedures, training, or systems to reduce the risk of the same problem happening again. Review or escalation Where the customer remains dissatisfied, the council explains how the complaint can be escalated to Stage 2, or ultimately referred to the LGSCO for independent review
8: Performance reporting and self-assessment	We produce an annual complaints performance and service improvement report for	Yes	We will provide this self-assessment for 2026 and annually thereafter.

Code section	Action	Do we follow the Code: Yes/No	Explanations and Commentary
	scrutiny and challenge which includes a self-assessment against the Code.		
9: Scrutiny & Oversight	We have appropriate senior leadership and governance oversight of the complaints process and performance.	Yes	Complaints performance is monitored and reported to Management Team 6 monthly. Ombudsman Complaints are monitored and reported to Directors monthly. The annual Cabinet Report is also seen by Overview & Scrutiny. Senior Management support a proactive approach to complaint handling and have endorsed recommendations that service leads place further focus on monitoring and learning.

