

The Governing Body's (Saffron Board) Response to the Housing Ombudsman Service Complaint Handling Code Self-Assessment

19th May 2025

Saffron Board

Members:

Kim Newman (KN) - Chair

Asha Cleavelly (AC)

Tom Fadden (TF)

James Francis (JF) – CEO

Tallia Langston (TL)- *Member Responsible for Complaints*

Neil Watts (NW)

Jayne Sharma (JS)

Jason Margetts (JM)

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- The Chief Tenant Officer presented the Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report to the Board covering the period 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025. The report also outlined Saffron's Self-Assessment to the Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS) Compliant Handling Code.
- The report was positively received, with Board members noting it was clear, honest, and showed progress, though further improvement was still needed.
- It was acknowledged that Saffron's higher-than-average number of complaints, compared to sector benchmarks, may indicate improved accessibility and transparency, rather than underperformance. The Chief Tenant Officer explained that Saffron is now capturing complaints more effectively, with clear root cause analysis in place—highlighting common themes such as repairs, ASB, tenancy issues, and communication.
- The Board discussed delays in resolving Stage 2 complaints. It was explained that a lack of a 360° customer view and limitations within current systems contributed to response delays, while 90% of complaint responses are compliant when extensions are formally agreed, work is ongoing to improve timeliness and tracking.
- It was confirmed that continued efforts are being made to drive down avoidable contact and complaint volumes by addressing root causes. It was outlined that the next quarter will focus on improving the quality and speed of complaint handling and reducing escalation rates.
- The Board raised the risk of complaint handling failure. It was confirmed that recent failings had been due to individual errors, not systemic issues, and current risk levels were considered very low.
- The Board discussed data and systems, with particular interest in progressing to more advanced analysis—such as repeat complaints by address or customer. It was noted this level of insight is not yet in place but forms part of future plans, subject to system capability improvements.
- It was confirmed that improvement projects follow the organisation's change programme, with larger projects being tracked, while operational changes are logged and addressed through ongoing service improvement activity. It was acknowledged that even small operational adjustments can significantly impact performance metrics.
- The Board discussed whether increased investment in technical resource would accelerate progress. It was noted that while additional resource could help in some areas, operational capacity to absorb and test changes is also a limiting factor. It was confirmed that the improvements are therefore being delivered incrementally to balance business-as-usual demands with service transformation.
- It was highlighted that work is also underway to commission a review of system functionality and data quality to support a single customer view and enable improved complaint handling. It was suggested that better alignment between digital programmes and service improvement plans could further support delivery.
- The Board acknowledged overall compliance to the Housing Ombudsman Service Complaint Handling Code Self-Assessment, which has also been reviewed by the Service Quality Committee. It was noted that there would be further development areas, such as consistency in how Saffron close complaints, delays in Stage 2 resolution, and historic issues with tracking completion of actions. A new mandatory tracking process and improved system oversight are being introduced, alongside weekly Ombudsman case reviews to prevent reoccurrence of failings.