



SustainukLtd

Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report

2025/26

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1. Chief Executive Statement

Sustain is committed to treating complaints as an important source of learning, accountability and service improvement. Complaints provide an opportunity to listen to tenants, understand where services have not met expectations, put things right where appropriate and strengthen the way services are delivered.

During 2025/26, Sustain continued to develop complaint handling arrangements in line with the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code. Complaint volumes remained low when compared with wider tenant contact and service request activity, but the learning identified has been significant in shaping improvements to provider oversight, communication, record keeping and tenant support.

This report provides a transparent overview of complaint performance for the year, including complaint volumes, themes, outcomes, learning, service improvements and governance oversight. It has been prepared to support Board scrutiny, public accountability and annual submission requirements.

The Board and senior leadership team recognise that effective complaint handling is not only about meeting response times. It is also about listening carefully, investigating fairly, responding clearly, taking proportionate action and making sure learning is embedded across the organisation.

2. About Sustain

Sustain works across supported exempt accommodation, currently supporting 1,376 tenants across 334 properties, and maintains oversight of housing management, property compliance, tenant engagement, safeguarding escalation, complaint handling and provider assurance. Services are delivered through a mixed operating model involving Sustain staff and third-party Home Providers or managing agents.

This operating model means that a number of complaints relate to services delivered by providers acting on Sustain's behalf. Sustain remains responsible for ensuring that complaints are recognised, logged, investigated and responded to in line with the Complaint Handling Code where they fall within the formal complaint process.

- Sustain accepts complaints from tenants and those acting on their behalf.
- Complaints may be raised through different channels, including staff, inspection teams, Home Provider staff, email, telephone, post, website forms and survey feedback.
- Complaints involving Home Providers are investigated by Sustain, with input from relevant providers where needed.
- Learning from complaints is considered alongside service requests, safeguarding activity, inspections, ASB information, tenant feedback and provider performance data.

3. Executive Summary

During 2025/26, Sustain recorded 9 formal complaints within the annual assurance cycle. This included 9 complaints logged during the reporting year and none carried forward from the previous reporting period. Against a tenant base of 1,376, this equates to approximately 0.65% of tenants raising a formal complaint in the year. Complaint volumes remained low compared with approximately 251 service requests recorded during the same period, with the substantial majority of day-to-day issues and concerns resolved at the service request stage before they need to become a formal complaint.

Key annual measure	2025/26 position
Formal complaints recorded in annual assurance cycle	9
Complaints logged during reporting year	9
Complaints carried forward from prior period	0
Service requests recorded	251
Missed complaint deadlines	0
Extensions applied	5

The most frequent complaint themes were lack of support provision (9 cases) and staff or provider practice (6 cases), against a tenant base of 1,376. While limited in number, these themes were consistent with wider service request intelligence and indicate that, where tenant experience is affected, it is most often by consistency of support, provider communication and the quality of day-to-day service delivery.

Overall assurance is assessed as moderate to positive. Complaint handling processes operated effectively and no systemic complaint handling failure was identified in-year. However, complaints, service requests and wider assurance activity show that further work is required to strengthen consistency across providers and evidence the impact of improvement actions.

4. Complaint Volumes and Outcomes

The table below summarises formal complaint outcomes for the 2025/26 annual reporting cycle. The figures reflect complaints handled within the annual assurance period and are aligned to the annual complaints overview prepared for governance review.

Complaint outcome	Number	Commentary
Not upheld	5	The investigation did not identify service failure against the complaint points raised, although learning or clarification may still have been provided.
Partially upheld	1	The investigation identified some service failure or improvement required, but not all complaint points were upheld.
Withdrawn / retracted	2	The complainant withdrew the complaint or did not wish to progress following early resolution or clarification.
Ongoing at year end	1	The complaint remained open at the reporting year end and was subject to continued investigation or monitoring.
Total	9	Formal complaints recorded within the annual assurance cycle.

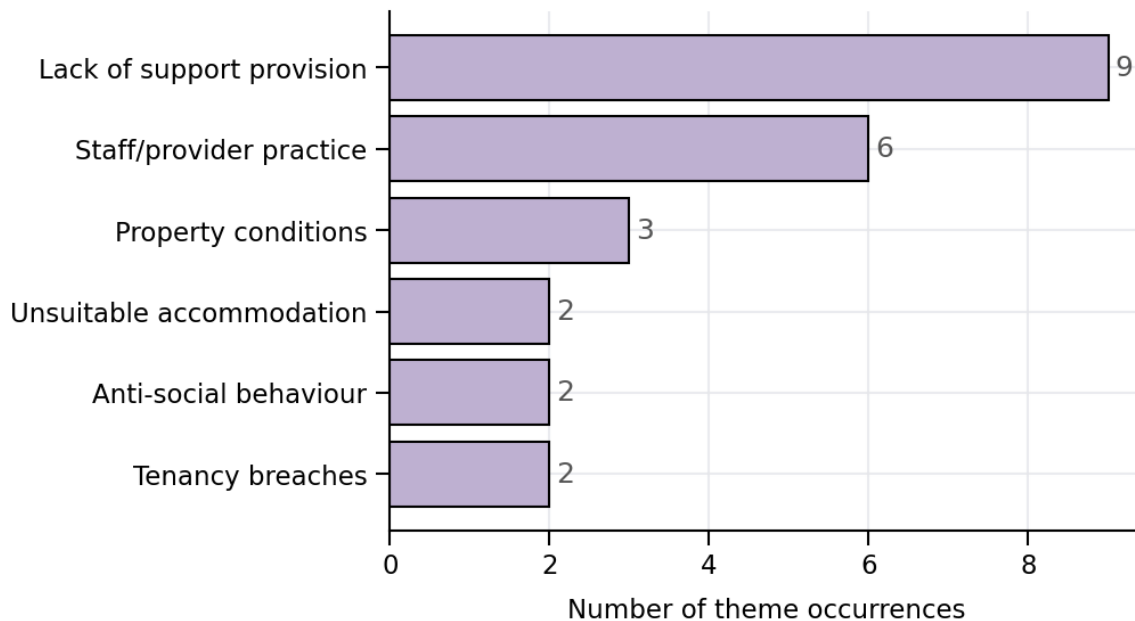
The data shows that most complaints were not upheld, but complaint investigations still generated useful learning about communication, audit trails, provider oversight and tenant expectations. A complaint does not need to be upheld in full for learning to be identified.

5. Complaint Themes and Trend Analysis

Complaints often contained more than one issue. For this reason, the total number of theme occurrences is higher than the total number of complaints received.

Complaint theme	Occurrences	What this indicates
Lack of support provision	9	Support delivery and consistency remain the most common source of dissatisfaction.
Staff/provider practice	6	Issues often relate to communication, conduct, records, escalation or perceived responsiveness by providers.
Property conditions	3	A smaller but important theme linked to repairs, standards and inspection follow-up.
Unsuitable accommodation	2	Concerns were linked to tenant needs, compatibility, risk or desire for alternative accommodation.
Anti-social behaviour	2	Complaints overlapped with ASB management and resident safety concerns.
Tenancy breaches	2	Issues related to tenancy obligations, notices, charges or behaviour management.

Complaint themes 2025/26



The strongest trend is that complaints are driven less by isolated administrative failures and more by the quality, consistency and communication of support and provider-led services. This has directly informed Sustain's focus on provider performance, standardisation, record keeping and tenant engagement.

6. Complaint Handling Performance

Sustain monitors complaint handling against the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code timescales. Stage 1 complaints must be acknowledged within five working days and responded to within ten working days of acknowledgement, unless an extension is needed. Stage 2 complaints must be acknowledged within five working days and responded to within twenty working days of acknowledgement, unless an extension is needed.

Performance measure	2025/26 position	Assessment
Stage 1 acknowledgements	Completed and recorded	Complaint files show formal acknowledgement and logging practice.
Stage 1 response performance	No missed deadlines reported	Responses were issued within required timescales or with recorded extensions.
Extensions applied	5	Extensions were used to support investigation quality where matters were complex.
Stage 2 reviews	Completed where requested	Stage 2 reviews were handled by a manager not previously involved in Stage 1 wherever applicable.
Housing Ombudsman escalation during reporting year	0	No cases were escalated to the Housing Ombudsman during the reporting period.

The use of extensions is not treated as a failure where extensions are justified, communicated and kept within Code requirements. In 2025/26, extensions were used to allow more robust investigation, particularly where complaints involved multiple providers, complex support arrangements or wider safeguarding/property issues.

7. Complaints Not Accepted or Withdrawn

The Complaint Handling Code requires landlords to report on the types of complaints they have refused to accept. Sustain's records show that some matters raised during the year were managed as service requests, ASB, safeguarding matters, enquiries or provider-level issues rather than formal complaints. These decisions

were made where the issue did not meet the formal complaint definition, where the complainant did not wish to pursue a formal complaint, or where immediate operational action was more appropriate.

Where a complaint was withdrawn or retracted, Sustain still considered whether learning or follow-up action was required. A small number of complaints were recorded as withdrawn or retracted

Approach to exclusions

Sustain accepts complaints unless there is a valid reason not to do so. Where a matter is not accepted as a formal complaint, the issue should still be logged, reviewed and directed to the appropriate route, such as a service request, safeguarding process, ASB process or provider assurance action.

8. Learning from Complaints

Learning from complaints is considered at case level and through aggregated reporting. Complaint records and investigation forms are used to identify whether action is required to put things right, improve communication, amend records, strengthen processes or escalate provider performance concerns.

8.1 Provider Oversight

Several complaints highlighted the need for stronger and more consistent provider oversight. Learning focused on ensuring providers escalate tenant concerns promptly, maintain adequate support records, communicate clearly with tenants and respond to reasonable requests in a timely way.

- Strengthened expectations around provider escalation of formal complaints and service concerns.
- Increased challenge where provider records did not evidence the support or actions described.
- Greater focus on provider accountability through reviews, inspections and management follow-up.

8.2 Communication with Tenants

Complaints showed that unclear communication can contribute to dissatisfaction, even where the underlying decision or action is appropriate. This was particularly relevant where tenants were seeking alternative accommodation, querying charges, reporting ASB, or raising concerns about staff/provider actions.

- Greater emphasis on clear written communication following key decisions.
- Improved explanation of complaint outcomes and available escalation routes.
- Continued focus on accessible language and reasonable adjustments where required.

8.3 Record Keeping and Evidence

Complaint and Ombudsman learning reinforced that good records are essential. Where services are delivered through providers, Sustain needs reliable evidence of support, actions taken, communication with tenants and escalation decisions.

- Improved complaint investigation forms and internal audit trails.
- Greater scrutiny of provider records and support notes.
- Improved recording of learning, remedies, redress and follow-up actions.

8.4 Support Delivery and Tenant Needs

Support provision was the most frequent complaint theme, featuring in some form in all 9 formal complaints recorded during the year, against a tenant base of 1,376. Learning showed that tenants may experience

inconsistency where multiple providers, staff teams or external agencies are involved. The annual learning therefore supports continued work to define clearer expectations of support delivery and escalation.

- Increased focus on consistency of support delivery across providers.
- Use of tenant visits and engagement meetings to understand issues at an earlier stage.
- Better coordination between complaint handling, safeguarding and service request processes.

9. Service Requests and Wider Tenant Insight

Sustain recorded approximately 251 service requests during the reporting period. These included routine tenant contact, requests for assistance, property matters, provider liaison and safeguarding-related contact recorded outside the formal complaints process.

Measure	2025/26 position
Service requests recorded	251
Formal complaints recorded	9
Complaint to service request ratio	Approximately 1 complaint for every 28 service requests

Service request activity indicates that tenants and stakeholders are actively engaging with Sustain and that many issues are resolved at an early stage. Low complaint volumes should not be viewed in isolation. Sustain therefore analyses complaints alongside service requests, safeguarding activity, inspections, ASB reports and wider tenant feedback to understand the full picture of tenant experience.

The themes in service requests broadly aligned with complaint themes, particularly support provision, property issues, provider performance and accommodation suitability. This provides confidence that the complaint themes identified are not isolated events, but part of a wider picture of service demand and tenant experience.

10. Housing Ombudsman Findings and External Learning

No new complaints were escalated to the Housing Ombudsman during the 2025/26 reporting year. However, prior to publication of this report, Sustain received a Housing Ombudsman determination relating to a historic complaint. The determination related to a historical period and identified maladministration in relation to service charges, service failure in relation to service provision and evidence of support, and maladministration in complaint handling.

Ombudsman / external learning area	Learning response
Service charge oversight	Strengthen documentation of decision making, calculations, oversight and communication.
Service provision and support evidence	Ensure provider records evidence what support was offered, delivered and escalated.
Complaint handling	Ensure complaint responses address all complaint points, record evidence reviewed and explain findings clearly.
Orders and redress	Historic case orders included apology, case review and compensation; learning to be reported through governance routes.

The determination reinforced the importance of robust audit trails and clear evidence, particularly where services are delivered through third parties and where tenants have vulnerabilities or complex support needs. The learning aligns with Sustain's existing improvement focus on record keeping, provider oversight and complaint investigation quality.

Sustain will continue to review Housing Ombudsman publications, Spotlight reports, determinations and sector guidance to inform complaint handling practice and service improvement.

11. Service Improvements Delivered in 2025/26

During 2025/26, learning from complaints and wider service activity informed a number of improvement actions. These actions are linked to Sustain's wider Improvement Action Plan and Consumer Standards assurance work.

Improvement area	Actions delivered or progressed	Intended impact
Policy and procedure	Review and redraft of Complaints, Compliments and Comments Policy to align with the Complaint Handling Code.	Clearer, more accessible and Code-compliant complaint framework.
Complaint templates	redevelopment of Stage 1 acknowledgement, Stage 1 response, Stage 2 acknowledgement, Stage 2 response and unaccepted complaint templates.	Greater consistency in complaint handling and response quality.
Investigation records	Updated complaint investigation form capturing complaint definition, outcomes sought, evidence, adjustments, findings, remedies and learning.	Improved audit trails and evidence of fair investigation.
Provider assurance	Increased focus on provider accountability, record keeping, escalation and communication.	Stronger oversight of services delivered on Sustain's behalf.
Data and reporting	Complaints considered alongside service requests, inspections, safeguarding, ASB and tenant feedback.	More rounded understanding of tenant experience and risk.
Governance reporting	Annual complaints overview and regular operational reporting to senior management and committees.	Improved scrutiny, challenge and service improvement oversight.

12. Priorities for 2026/27

Sustain will continue to strengthen complaint handling and learning arrangements in 2026/27. The priorities below reflect the main improvement themes from complaints, service requests, Ombudsman learning and wider assurance activity.

- Complete implementation of the updated Complaints, Compliments and Comments Policy and ensure all templates reflect the revised escalation timescales.
- Continue annual Complaint Handling Code self-assessment and publish the self-assessment alongside this report and the governing body response.
- Increase tenant awareness of the complaints process and the right to contact the Housing Ombudsman.
- Strengthen trend analysis by combining complaints, service requests, safeguarding, ASB, inspections and tenant feedback data.
- Further develop provider training and briefing arrangements, including annual complaints policy refresher briefings.
- Improve evidence of complaint learning being embedded into provider reviews, inspections and service standards.
- Continue improving record keeping, audit trails and evidence quality in complaint investigations.
- Review compensation and remedies practice to ensure consistency with Housing Ombudsman remedies guidance.

13. Governance, Scrutiny and Assurance

Complaint performance and learning are subject to internal governance and assurance. Oversight routes include operational review, senior management review, committee scrutiny and Board assurance.

Governance route	Role in complaint assurance
Operational review	Reviews individual complaints, service requests, provider responses and immediate learning actions.
Senior Management Team	Considers trends, risks, systemic issues and progress against improvement actions.

Tenant Engagement and Empowerment Committee	Provides scrutiny of tenant experience, complaint themes and learning.
Board / Governing body	Receives annual complaint performance and service improvement report and provides formal response.
Member Responsible for Complaints	Supports positive complaint handling culture and provides assurance that complaint learning is understood by the governing body.

This report is intended to support Board scrutiny, challenge and approval before publication. The Board response should be published alongside this report and the annual self-assessment.

14. Complaint Handling Code Compliance Statement

Sustain has reviewed complaint handling arrangements against the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code. The annual self-assessment considers complaint definition, exclusions, accessibility, complaint handling staff, complaint process, complaint stages, remedies, reporting, scrutiny and learning.

Sustain confirms full compliance with the Complaint Handling Code for the reporting period. The self-assessment has been completed against every provision across all nine sections of the Code, with no non-compliant provisions identified. Sustain will continue to strengthen consistency and evidence quality beyond the Code's minimum requirements through policy updates, template alignment, provider assurance, training, record keeping improvements and governance reporting.

The organisation will continue to monitor compliance during 2026/27 and will update the self-assessment if there is a significant change in procedure, structure, Ombudsman recommendation or other material issue affecting complaint handling.

15. Conclusion

Complaints remain a valuable source of tenant insight and organisational learning. During 2025/26, complaint volumes remained low relative to a tenant base of 1,376 (approximately 0.65% of tenants raised a formal complaint), and complaint handling performance was strong. The themes identified were limited in number and are considered alongside the much larger volume of service requests, most of which are resolved early; however, complaints and service requests showed recurring themes around support provision, provider practice, communication, property issues and record keeping.

The learning identified during the year has informed improvements to policy, templates, provider oversight, recording and governance reporting. Sustain will continue to promote a positive complaint handling culture, ensure tenants can raise complaints easily, respond fairly and transparently, and use learning to improve services.