WTHP Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report
1 April 2025 – 31 March 2026

Introduction

To ensure compliance against the Housing Ombudsman Complaints Handling Code, Willow Tree Housing Partnership Limited (WTHP) must produce an annual complaints performance and service improvement report for scrutiny and challenge, this year, the report includes:

1. The outcome of the Housing Ombudsman review of WTHP's Complaints Policy & Procedure received March 2026.
2. An annual self-assessment against the Code to ensure our complaint handling policy remains in line with the codes requirements.
3. A qualitative and quantitative analysis of WTHP's complaint handling performance. This will also include a summary of the types of complaints WTHP has refused to accept
4. Any findings of non-compliance by WTHP with this Code by the Ombudsman
5. The service improvements made by WTHP because of the learning from complaints
6. Any annual report about WTHP's performance from the Ombudsman
7. Any other relevant reports or publications produced by the Ombudsman in relation to the work of WTHP
8. Governing Body's response to the WTHP's Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report

WTHP's annual complaints performance and service improvement report is reported to WTHP's governing body and published on the section of its website relating to complaints. The MRC's response is included within the report and the Board will be asked for comments at the meeting on 30 July 2026 and these will be added to the report.

Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report

1. Outcome of Housing Ombudsman review of WTHP Complaints Policy & Procedure

Further to WTHP's annual submission in September 2025 of Willow Tree Housing Partnership's (WTHP) compliance with the Housing Ombudsman complaint handling code, the Ombudsman conducted a review of the WTHP Complaints Policy and Procedure. This review was received 26 March 2026. The Board of WTHP were advised on 30 April 2026 that a review that had been undertaken by the Housing Ombudsman, and that the recommendations received within the review report had been actioned and completed.

Key Improvements and Compliance

The complaints policy and procedure have been updated to reflect the Ombudsman's recommendations. This has clarified areas that were open to misunderstanding. The policy fully aligns with the Complaint Handling Code. Key areas addressed include:

- Complaint recognition: Confirmation that dissatisfaction with service requests is logged as a formal complaint and does not delay service delivery.

- Time limits and discretion: Clear acceptance of complaints within 12 months, with discretion applied outside this timeframe based on individual circumstances.
- Access and accessibility: Clear explanation of complaint channels, reasonable adjustments and accessible formats.
- Scope clarity: Explanation of how complaints involving data protection issues are handled alongside service complaints.
- Two-stage process: A single, two-stage complaints process only, with no informal or additional stages.
- Acknowledgements: Clear requirements for Stage 1 and Stage 2 acknowledgements, including the complaint definition, desired outcomes and responsibility boundaries.
- Response timescales: Explicit Stage 1 and Stage 2 response times, extension limits, reasons for delay and agreed update intervals.
- Outstanding actions: Confirmation that responses are issued when the answer is known, with actions tracked and residents updated.
- Escalation: Clear progression to Stage 2 where unresolved, confirmation that residents do not need to give reasons for escalation, and explicit discretion applied to escalation timescales.
- Independence: Assurance that Stage 2 complaints are considered by someone not involved at Stage 1.

2. Annual self-assessment against the Code

Attached as appendix A

3. Analysis of WTHP's complaint handling performance

Complaint Stage	**Number of Complaints**	**Summary of complaints**
Stage 1	TOTAL 87 • 60.5 complaints per 1,000 homes (rented homes) • 98.8% of complaints responded to within the complaints handling code timescales (rented homes) • Average response time 9 days (excluding extensions)	ASB Communal Services Communication Contractor Customer Service Outstanding Repairs Damp & Mould Rent Issues Repairs Communication Repairs delays Repairs quality WTHP Customer Service
Stage 2	TOTAL 25 • 17.5 complaints per 1,000 homes • 95.8% of complaints responded to within the complaints handling code timescales (rented homes) • Average response time 18 days (excluding extensions)	Compensation Contractor communication Rent issues Repairs & communication Repairs delays

Refused Complaints	Summary of complaints	Reason for refusal
2	Repairs to property	In both cases the tenant formally advised they did not want to proceed with the complaint

4. Findings of non-compliance against the code by the Ombudsman (if applicable) – N/A

5. Service Improvements made as a result of learning

Since 1 April 2025, the WTHP Chief Executive Officer and Member Responsible for Complaints (MRC) have met on three occasions to review a sample of Stage 2 complaint responses. As of 31 March 2026, six cases have been considered.

These independent reviews provide useful insight into how complaints are handled. They help check that responses remain focused on residents, and that they are fair, clear, and empathetic. The reviews also identify examples of good practice as well as opportunities to improve.

It is particularly important for the CEO and MRC to review a sample of WTHP's Stage 2 complaints, they give the Exec Team and Board a direct view of where services may not be working as intended, especially in cases where normal processes have not delivered a satisfactory outcome. This helps highlight recurring themes, risks, and underlying issues that may not be obvious through routine reports. As a result, leaders can take early action to prevent further escalation, reputational damage, or regulatory concerns.

This level of oversight also strengthens accountability and supports continuous improvement. When senior leaders are involved, it encourages more thorough investigations and more consistent decision-making. It also helps identify root causes and drive meaningful changes to services, policies, or processes. In short, it ensures the organisation learns from more complex cases, improves its services, and shows residents and regulators that concerns are taken seriously at the highest level.

To provide additional challenge and perspective, the same complaints are also reviewed anonymously by the Resident Scrutiny Panel. Their feedback is considered alongside that of the CEO and MRC, supporting ongoing learning and development in how complaints are managed.

The table below summarises key themes identified through complaints and service review activity, alongside actions taken to drive service improvement and strengthen oversight.

Key Issues, Learning and Service improvements	How this was identified	Actions and Improvements
Inconsistency in complaint allocation, ownership and oversight	CEO / MRC Review	Improved organisation-wide awareness of complaints is strengthening cross-team collaboration. Complaints are discussed weekly at Team Talks and monthly at SLT, with increased focus on clear allocation and ownership of cases.

		A comprehensive monthly complaints report is provided to SLT, giving full oversight of performance, including volumes (monthly and year to date), complaint categories, outstanding and closed cases (including those with actions), and Housing Ombudsman investigations**.**
Need to enhance / improve content of complaint response	CEO / MRC Review	Corporate Services Manager (CSM) as Complaints Coordinator checks responses to ensure a consistent complaint response structure is followed, using standard templates where appropriate, while applying the Housing Ombudsman's 4 T's framework to ensure responses are tailored and resident-focused. • Timely – responses issued within required timescales • Transparent – decisions are clearly explained, including rationale • Tailored – responses reflect the individual circumstances of the complaint • Tone – communication is respectful, empathetic and resident focussed
Lack of consistent follow-through on agreed actions arising from complaints, particularly outstanding repairs	Stage 1 Complaint responses	Continued use of a designated named contact for complainants, alongside strengthened action tracking, clearer deadlines, and regular updates to residents to support improved completion of actions.
Repairs taking too long to complete, particularly following a complaint, leading to frustration and escalation	Stage 1 Complaint responses	A weekly review process is in place to monitor all outstanding repairs, with a particular focus on jobs approaching 28 days. This allows delays to be identified early and corrective action taken to reduce escalation and improve resident experience.
Complaints relating to clarity of information and progress across specific service areas (Wayleave Agreements, DFG Grants)	Stage 1 Complaint responses	Relevant procedures were developed and implemented in October 2025 to improve consistency, communication and management of these services.
Complaints linked to contractor performance and service delivery	Service review/ proactive service improvement	Complaints are now a standing agenda item at contractor meetings, with details shared on performance issues and service failures to drive accountability and improvement.

Knowledge Gaps	Stage 1 Complaint Response and CEO/MRC Review	Targeted training has been delivered on Right to Acquire to strengthen staff knowledge.
Capacity and resource to support effective complaint handling	Service review/proactive service improvement	A Complaints and Resolution Administrator role has been recruited to strengthen capacity, improve coordination of complaints, and support the timeliness and quality of responses.
Opportunity to enhance complaint categorisation to improve insight and reporting	Service review / data analysis	Additional complaint categories have been introduced for 2026/27 to enable more detailed reporting, strengthen trend analysis, and support targeted service improvements.
Opportunity to strengthen independent assurance and resident feedback on complaint handling	Service review / proactive service improvement	A third-party provider (Acuity) was introduced on 1 April 2025 to gather independent feedback on Stage 1 complaint responses, replacing the previous in-house approach and providing more objective insight to inform service improvement.
Poor record keeping, miscommunication and lack of follow up	Housing Ombudsman Determination	Strengthened complaint ownership, action tracking and management oversight have improved record keeping, communication and follow up. Named contacts, clearer deadlines and regular resident updates help ensure actions are monitored and completed.

6. Ombudsman's Annual Report on WTHP (if applicable) – Not Applicable

7. Reports or publications produced by the Ombudsman in relation to the work of WTHP (if applicable)

Number	Detail
202316394 Received 26/11/2025	Maladministration – Resident's reports of various repair issues Maladministration – Complaint Handling Service Failure – Response to resident's concerns about historical repair issues

8. WTHP's governing body's response to the WTHP's Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report

Governing Body / MRC's comments response
As the designated Member Responsible for Complaints (MRC) for Willow Tree Housing Partnership (WTHP), I have met with our Chief Executive, Donna Johnson, on two occasions during the year to review a sample of Stage 2 complaint responses. In total, four Stage 2 complaints (25% of the total) have been reviewed for the period ending 31 March 2026. My role as MRC is to provide assurance to the Board that WTHP promotes a positive complaint handling culture, manages complaints effectively and fairly, and uses learning from complaints

to drive service improvement. Based on the reviews undertaken, I can confirm that complaints are being handled in line with the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code.

A consistent observation, both this year and last, is that where staff knowledge gaps or training needs are identified, these are addressed promptly. This proactive approach supports continuous improvement and reduces the likelihood of repeat issues. I can also confirm that complaint trends and themes are being effectively identified, acted upon, and used to inform both service improvements and wider organisational learning.

The total number of complaints received increased from 102 in 2024/25 to 112 in 2025/26, representing a 9.8% increase. Stage 1 complaints remained unchanged at 87 in both years, while Stage 2 complaints increased from 15 to 25, a rise of 66.7%. While this is a notable increase, it reflects a pattern of rising complaints and escalation seen across the sector. The increase in escalations is largely linked to tenants being dissatisfied with the Stage 1 response, rather than a failure to take action.

Complaint Stage	Total 2023/24	Total 2024/25	Total 2026/27
Stage 1:	**64**	**87**	**87**
Stage 2:	**23**	**15**	**25**
TOTAL	**87**	**102**	**112**

Considerable progress continues to be made across the organisation to improve complaint handling, and complaints continue to be prioritised. As part of the reviews, the associated Stage 1 responses are also considered. Although the number of Stage 2 complaints has increased, Stage 2 responses continue to be of an excellent quality, and there is clear evidence this year of improved Stage 1 responses in terms of quality and consistency.

While it is disappointing to see an increase in Stage 2 complaints, this is consistent with sector trends. At WTHP, the majority of escalations are due to dissatisfaction with the response provided at Stage 1, rather than a failure to carry out agreed actions or service delivery failures.

Three new Housing Ombudsman investigations were received during the year and the determinations are outstanding. One Housing Ombudsman determination was received during the year ended 31 March 2026. The case related to a complex complaint originally raised in 2023. While the outcome was disappointing, WTHP has continued to work closely with the resident to address and resolve the outstanding issues and to ensure lessons learned are reflected in service improvements.

The Housing Ombudsman promotes four key principles for complaint handling: Timely, Transparent, Tailored and Tone. I can confirm that WTHP seeks to handle complaints in a timely manner and in accordance with the timescales set out in the Complaint Policy. Responses are transparent, clearly outlining actions, the reasons behind decisions, timescales and the status of ongoing matters. They are increasingly tailored to individual circumstances and demonstrate an appropriate tone, combining professionalism with greater empathy.

While complaints can be challenging, they are an important way for residents to have their voices heard. How we respond to them defines our culture, and by continuing to use complaints as opportunities for learning, WTHP can further improve the services provided to residents.

Board Meeting Minute: 30 July 2026

The Board **approved** the self-assessment, Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report.