

Complaints & Service Improvement Report

2025/26



Introduction

I'm pleased to introduce Orwell Housing Association's Complaints and Service Improvement Report for 2025/2026. Over the past year, we have been reminded how vital it is to listen to our customers. Your feedback, whether praise, challenge, or concern, continues to shape how we work and ensures the customer voice remains central to our decisions.

During the year, we made significant changes to our repairs service and customer experience teams, driven directly by what you told us. We heard the need for more responsive repairs, clearer communication, and a more consistent experience when contacting us. I'm pleased that the steps we've taken are already making a positive difference, and we will continue to build on this progress.

We also recognise that we don't always get everything right. When things go wrong, we understand the frustration this can cause. Our commitment is to resolve issues quickly, learn from every complaint, and use those lessons to improve our services. This report sets out an overview of complaints and highlights the further improvements planned for the coming year.

Thank you to everyone who has shared their experiences with us. Your voice is driving real change, and we look forward to continuing this journey with you.



Tony Long

Director of Customer and Communities



Comments from the Board

Following the Customer Insight Committee's review on 6 May 2026, I confirm that all Committee Members were satisfied that the Complaints Handling Code is being fully adhered to and that Orwell continues to take constructive and proactive steps to learn from, and improve upon, its complaints processes. The completed Self-Assessment provides assurance regarding Orwell's compliance with the Code.

The Board continues to receive regular oversight of complaints performance and emerging themes. While complaints levels reflect ongoing pressures in services such as repairs and communication, we are encouraged by improvements in response performance and how complaints are being resolved. Learning from complaints is being more consistently used to inform service changes and strengthen accountability.

Customer feedback also shows positive progress. Satisfaction with complaints handling and repairs has improved through Tenant Satisfaction Measures and transactional surveys. The Board remains committed to fostering a positive complaints culture, where customers feel listened to and where feedback continues to drive meaningful improvements.



Tom Brown

Member Responsible for Complaints & Customer Insight Chair

What is a complaint?

Orwell defines a complaint as an expression of dissatisfaction about the standard of service, actions, or lack of action by the organisation, its staff, or those acting on our behalf, affecting an individual or group of residents.

A customer does not need to use the word “complaint” for it to be treated as such, and complaints made by a representative will be handled in line with the Complaints Policy.

Each complaint is considered on a case-by-case basis. However, we will not normally accept a complaint or escalate it to the next stage where the issue has already been resolved, the complainant is not engaging or providing necessary information, legal proceedings are ongoing, or the complainant’s behaviour is unreasonable.

If we decide not to accept a complaint, we will explain our reasons clearly. Customers have the right to challenge this decision by referring the matter to the appropriate Ombudsman.

You can find out more about our complaints policy, including how to make a complaint, by scanning the QR code.



Our complaints process

Complaints can be made to any employee within Orwell who will refer the complaint to a Customer Resolutions Officer who will then decide who is the best person to handle the complaint. Complaints can be sent by email, in writing, by telephone, in person, through Orwell's website, portal, app or social media.



If a customer is unhappy, we record this as initial dissatisfaction and ask if they want to make a formal complaint. If they do, the complaints process starts.



Requests to fix an issue are not complaints and should be logged as service requests, but any service failures must still be recorded as initial dissatisfaction. If the issue cannot be resolved and the customer remains unhappy, it should be recorded as a formal complaint.



Reports of anti-social behaviour are only treated as complaints if they relate to how Orwell handled the service.



If Orwell's normal response times for dealing with a complainant are likely to adversely affect the complainant due to their health or disability, then we will make reasonable endeavours to deal with and respond to the complaint more quickly.



Complaint performance

244

Stage 1
complaints

50

Stage 2
complaints

20%

of complaints
were escalated
to Stage 2

68%

of new complaints
were upheld

0

complaints were
refused

54

complaints
received per
1,000 properties

We responded to **99.3%** of complaints within timescales

The top themes were:

Long delays or
slow repairs



Missed or
unsuitable repair
appointments



Poor quality
of repairs



Lack of
communication



What customers told us and what we did about it

Long delays or slow repairs



- We reviewed and cleaned our repairs system, removing around 1,000–1,200 duplicate or unnecessary jobs. This has freed up appointment slots and helped reduce waiting times for repairs.
- We invested an additional £500,000 to bring in extra contractors to complete empty home (void) repairs. This has allowed our in-house operatives to spend more time on day-to-day repairs for customers, helping work get done more quickly.

Missed or unsuitable repair appointments



- We reviewed and restructured the service, bringing teams together to improve coordination. We aligned materials, van stock, and job information to support a “right first time” approach, ensuring the correct operative attends with the correct resources.
- We standardised processes across call handling and email teams, improved communication flows, and ensured clearer, more consistent updates are provided to customers.

Poor quality of repairs



- Customers are increasingly sending in clear photos and videos, helping us better understand repairs before attending. Our teams are being trained to ask for images that show the full context of the problem, not just close-ups, and we are using AI tools to improve repair descriptions so work can be completed more efficiently first time.
- We are strengthening quality checks by identifying incomplete jobs through performance monitoring and reviewing photos of completed repairs at post-inspection. This helps us make sure repairs are completed properly and meet the expected standard.

Lack of communication



- We introduced a dedicated team focussed on repairs, with the goal of making the customer experience smoother and more efficient. Each repair is now handled by a specialist team who oversees the process from start to finish, ensuring consistency and clear communication throughout. We’re already seeing positive results, with faster repair times and improved customer satisfaction - and we’re committed to continuing this progress.

Compensation

Compensation is a key part of how we make 'reasonable redress'. We offer compensation in line with our compensation policy.



£54,885

Issued to customers in direct relation to stage 1 or 2 complaints.

£186.68

is the average compensation award.

The most common reasons for award of compensation were:

- **Distress and inconvenience**
- **Failure in service**
- **Losses (personal belonging & income)**

You can find out more about our Compensation policy, by scanning the QR code.



Customer satisfaction

Customer satisfaction is an important measure of how well we are meeting the needs of our customers. We collect feedback through our Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs) and transactional surveys sent after key interactions.

Together, these insights help us understand what we are doing well and where further improvements are needed.

The chart below shows how satisfaction with complaints handling has improved since last year.



Housing Ombudsman cases & determinations

This section provides an overview of cases referred to the Housing Ombudsman during the year, including any investigations or determinations.

During the year, the Housing Ombudsman issued one determination relating to damp and mould, repairs, and complaint handling. This found maladministration, including delays in addressing mould, failure to meet repair timescales, and not fully meeting the Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code.

Since this complaint, we have strengthened our complaints management approach, including changes to team structure and oversight, and response times have improved significantly. We have also used the learning from this case to improve how we manage repairs and complaints, helping prevent similar issues in the future.

2 cases are currently under investigation, relating to complaints raised in Dec 2023 and Jan 2025.

7 complaints have been referred to the Housing Ombudsman and are at the assessment stage, where it has not yet been confirmed whether they will be accepted for full investigation.



Self-assessment against the Housing Ombudsman Code

We assess our complaint handling annually against the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code to ensure our approach is fair, transparent and customer-focused.

This self-assessment helps us identify areas where we are complying with the Code and where further improvements are needed. Any actions identified are used to strengthen our processes and improve outcomes for our customers.

The self-assessment was also reviewed by our residents' group at their monthly meeting on 18 May. Their feedback provided additional assurance and helped ensure the assessment reflects the customer perspective.

You can find the self-assessment report by scanning the QR code.



Governance, Oversight & Assurance

This section sets out how Orwell ensures robust governance, effective oversight, and assurance in our approach to complaints handling. It explains how performance is monitored, issues are challenged, and learning is embedded through leadership, Board scrutiny, and customer involvement.

Formal reporting

As set out in the introduction, complaints are a valuable source of information and details of these are reviewed and scrutinised at both our Board and Customer Insight Committee. They look at our performance, including numbers, themes and lessons learned and ensure our residents voices are heard throughout the business and that service improvements are made where needed.

Customer involvement

We also have a Complaints Handling Assessment Team (CHAT) made up of 5 customers. CHAT reviews 10% of complaints quarterly to ensure we are following our procedures, providing empathy and to gather feedback from customers about whether we could have done anything differently.

Find out more about CHAT by scanning the QR code.



Scrutiny

Our residents group carried out a scrutiny in July 2025 of the complaints handling process ahead of launching the new Customer Resolutions Team, aiming to identify issues and inefficiencies. The review used customer feedback and insights from colleagues and focused on four stages: triage, investigation, decision and response, and follow-up. It produced recommendations to improve efficiency, consistency, and outcomes. These have been incorporated into the team's workplan, with progress monitored quarterly by the Customer Insight Committee.

Internal audit

In March 2026, we received a Green rating (Substantial Assurance) from a complaints audit by TIAA. This confirms strong internal controls, with risks managed and objectives achieved. Complaints are handled promptly, responses are checked for quality, and compensation is awarded consistently in line with policy. While minor improvements were noted, the result reflects our commitment to a positive complaints handling culture.

Actions & strategic improvements planned for the coming year

During 2025, we carefully reviewed complaints alongside all other feedback we received, including surveys, phone calls, emails and conversations with customers. By bringing all this information together, we were able to look at patterns and shared experiences, rather than viewing issues in isolation. Using this combined feedback, we created five clear “insight into action” priorities that reflect what customers told us mattered most. These priorities are directly shaped by learning from complaints in 2025 and focus on the areas where change will make the greatest difference. Our five priority improvement areas are:



These priorities help us focus on fixing the underlying causes of dissatisfaction, not just responding to individual complaints. Our aim is to reduce repeat problems, improve consistency and ensure customers receive clearer updates and quicker resolution. We will keep listening to feedback throughout the year and use it to check whether improvements are making a positive difference. We will share progress on these priorities with customers through the Orwell Residents Group (ORG). ORG members will review updates, ask questions and challenge us where needed, helping to ensure we remain focused on what matters most to customers and are accountable for delivering improvement.

To support these priorities, we are improving how we understand and support customers by refreshing our Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system and rolling it out more widely across the organisation. Over the next year, this will give staff a clearer, joined-up view of each customer’s journey, helping us respond more quickly and more effectively.

The refreshed CRM will be supported by our new modernised call centre system. The new system securely records, transcribes and analyses all calls into the CRM system, helping us understand why customers contact us and what can cause frustration. Using this insight, we can improve services, support staff training and deliver a smoother, more responsive experience for customers.



Appendices/links

- [Complaints Policy](#)
- [Compensation Policy](#)
- [Housing Ombudsman self-assessment 2025-26](#)
- [Tenant Satisfaction Measures](#)

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