

BOARD RESPONSE TO THE ANNUAL COMPLAINTS & SERVICE IMPROVEMENT REPORT 2025/26

Freebridge
COMMUNITY HOUSING



Jo Ward

Board Member, Chair of Operations Committee and Member Responsible for Complaints

The Board welcomes Freebridge Community Housing's Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report 2025/26 and the open and balanced account it provides of performance, customer experience, learning and the improvements still required.

Complaints are an essential source of customer insight. They help the Board understand where services have not met the standards customers should expect and, importantly, whether Freebridge is acting on that learning to improve services and prevent problems from happening again.

The Board was pleased to see the improvements made during the past 12 months. Despite a significant increase in Stage 1 complaints, 100% of Stage 1 responses and 99% of Stage 2 responses were issued within the Housing Ombudsman's timescales. The proportion of complaints escalating from Stage 1 to Stage 2 reduced from 29% to 21%, while customer satisfaction with complaint handling increased from 28.5% to 38.7%. These results provide encouraging evidence that complaints are increasingly being addressed promptly and resolved at an earlier stage.

The Board also noted the findings in Freebridge's Annual Landlord Performance Report. These show that the organisation's maladministration rate reduced from 73% in 2024/25 to 44% in 2025/26. This is a reduction of 29 percentage points, or approximately 40% relative to the previous year. Freebridge's rate of 44% also compares with 62% nationally and 54% among landlords of a similar size and type. While there is further progress to make, the Board considers this movement to be a positive indication that the action taken is beginning to have an impact.

The Board recognises that complaint handling is becoming more complex, including through the increasing use of artificial intelligence. AI can support greater access to information and help customers clearly explain their concerns, but it can also result in longer and more complex submissions. Freebridge must continue to respond fairly and consistently, ensuring that the substance of each customer's complaint is understood and that accessibility, individual circumstances and vulnerabilities remain central to the investigation.

The Board was particularly supportive of the Complaints and Maladministration Learning Framework and the establishment of the cross-service Lessons Learned Group. These arrangements provide a clearer route from customer feedback, through root cause analysis and action, to measurable service improvement and better customer outcomes. The Board sees embedding this approach as the next major priority. The organisation must move beyond responding well when something has gone wrong and make greater use of complaint insight to identify recurring causes, strengthen accountability and prevent avoidable service failures.

The independent review undertaken by Altair provides further assurance that complaint response performance is strong and that governance arrangements are generally effective. The Board also recognises the opportunities identified to strengthen investigation quality, consideration of vulnerability, customer scrutiny, complaint visibility and organisational learning. It will maintain oversight of the delivery and impact of these recommendations during 2026/27.

The Board remains mindful that every complaint represents a customer whose experience has not met expectations. In particular, the Housing Ombudsman's findings, including severe maladministration relating to damp and mould, demonstrate why continued focus and scrutiny are essential. Repairs and property condition remain the most significant drivers of complaints and must therefore stay at the centre of Freebridge's improvement activity.

During 2026/27, the Board will seek clear evidence that learning is being embedded across services and translated into tangible improvements for customers. This includes getting repairs right first time, improving communication, strengthening consideration of customer vulnerabilities, increasing the visibility of changes made in response to feedback and demonstrating that action is reducing repeat service failures. These priorities reflect the commitments set out in the annual report and will remain subject to regular oversight through Freebridge's governance arrangements.

On behalf of the Board, I would like to thank customers who have taken the time to share their experiences, as well as the colleagues and involved customers who have contributed to complaint scrutiny, service recovery and organisational learning. The Board is encouraged by the progress achieved, but we remain clear that the true measure of success will be whether customers experience more reliable services, fewer repeated problems and timely, fair resolution when things do go wrong.

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Member Responsible for Complaints

September 2026

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