



Housing Complaints 2023/24

Our Annual Report to Tenants

June 2024



Introduction

Whilst we try to make sure that we do things right first time, sometimes we get things wrong. If we do get it wrong, then a tenant may want to make a complaint. Although we try to make sure that tenants don't need to make a complaint, if they do complain, we welcome them as an opportunity to improve our services.

We want to tell you about how we have listened and acted on any opportunities to make improvements following investigation of individual complaints. We have also considered where there might be trends in the types of issues people are raising.

This report contains details of the complaints received in relation to our housing services during the period from 1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024. It covers:

1. Trends in the types of housing complaints we have received, outcomes, and our compliance with target response times,
2. Improvements we have put in place following tenant feedback, as well as some of the projects we have been undertaking in relation to improving customer care,
3. Tenant feedback on how we handle complaints, from satisfaction surveys and in-depth reviews carried out by a tenant focus group,
4. Actions taken in response to the findings of the Housing Ombudsman, where any complaints have been escalated, as well as details of how we are responding to recommendations within the Housing Ombudsman's recent spotlight reports,
5. Our latest self-assessment against the Housing Ombudsman's Complaints Code.

We are committed to being transparent in relation to the data and in what tenants are telling us. This gives us a strong baseline to measure the impact of the service improvements we are undertaking, and we will reflect this in future tenant reports.

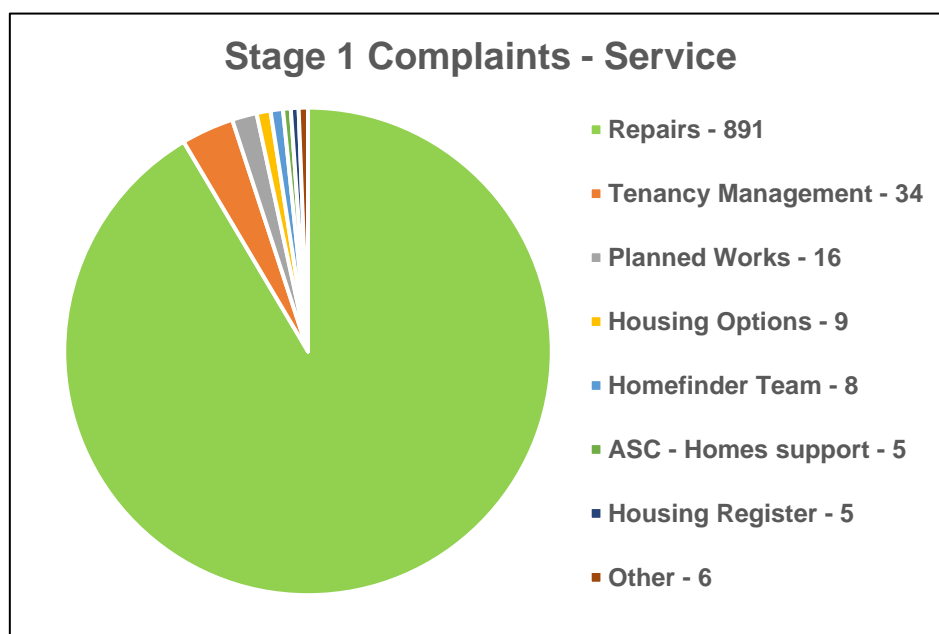
In 2023/24 we have made a number of significant changes and improvements to our policy and the way we handle complaints. We:

- Refreshed our complaints policy to clarify the stages and timescales in the procedure, as well as make it clear how we will make reasonable adjustments so people can make a complaint in the way that suits them.
- Developed and implemented a new complaints IT system that supports the management of a complaint from first receiving it, through to response. It also helps us track any trends so we can make improvements to services.
- Rolled out a training programme to all complaint handlers on the new complaints IT system and the refreshed policy.
- Introduced a new complaint handling satisfaction survey, to complement the many other ways that we ask for feedback from our tenants.

Throughout the report we have highlighted some further key actions that we will carry out this year to further improve our tenants' experience when they are unhappy with the service they receive, and to use that feedback to learn and make changes where needed.

1. Complaints trends

1,249 new housing complaints were received from April 01st 2023 – 31st March 2024. Out of these complaints, **974** complaints were stage 1 complaints, and 275 were reported issues which were quickly resolved on the spot. Additionally, 74 compliments were recorded.



Those relating to repairs cover the whole of the repairs process, from a repair being first reported by a tenant either online or to the contact centre, through to a possible inspection to assess the work needed, and then through to the completion of the required works.

The 6 complaints that are categorised as 'other' are spread across several services:

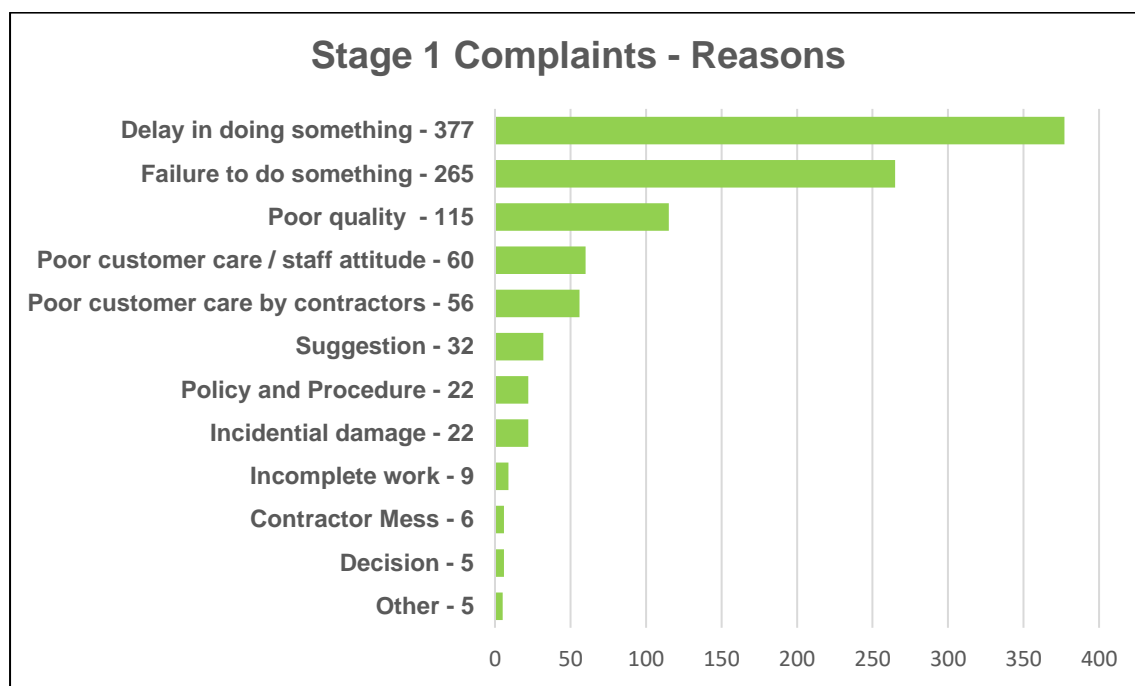
- New Build & Regeneration 2
- Neighbourhood 1
- Sheltered 1
- Ethical Lettings Agency 1
- Assets and Property 1

The highest number of complaints have been received by the services that have the most contacts with tenants across the year. Last year around 61,000 repairs were carried out to tenanted homes, with each of those repairs being made up of at least 2 or 3 contacts between the tenant and the council (reporting the complaint, inspection, contractor carrying out the repair).

Whilst we welcome complaints as an opportunity to put things right and make improvements, there are some circumstances that we set out in our policy when complaints are not accepted. These include, where it is a service request rather than a complaint about a service received, where legal proceedings have already started, and where the incident that the complaint relates to is more than 12 months

old. In future reports we will provide greater detail on the types of complaints that have not accepted.

Complaints can be nuanced, and each one is personal to the individual complainant, with some relating to a number of areas. However, we look for trends by analysing complaints by their main theme. The chart below shows the main themes.



Those reasons categorised as 'other' include appearance/mess (1 complaint), ASB/bonfires (1 complaint), private contractor attitude (1 complaint), faulty lift (1 complaint) and issues with insurance/storage (1 complaint).

Improvement actions in response to key trends:

- **Delay** – We can confirm that we have now completed the overdue repairs derived from both the re-prioritisation of non-emergency repairs during the pandemic, and some material shortages due to pressures within the supply chain. We continue to experience a rise in demand for the service and shortages of some types of materials but are monitoring this closely.
- **Failure to do something** - A new Service Improvement Plan has been devised which includes several reviews to improve performance and make services more efficient.
- **Poor quality** – The Housing Transformation Board has developed a comprehensive improvement programme and will strategically direct the overhaul of our full end to end housing systems and processes.
- **Customer care** - To ensure all tenants receive consistently good customer care, we are developing a 'See the Person, See the Home' training experience for housing officers and contractors, to promote fairness and respect.

In 2023/24 we completed the investigations and closed **272** Stage 1 complaints. This figure may seem low compared to the 974 complaints received, but it relates to all aspects of the complaint being closed off on the system, including the corrective

action. More complainants will have received the outcome to the issues they raised, it just needs a little longer to take any necessary action; for example, to carry out some additional works to the home. To keep things clearer, from April 2024 our new IT system will enable us to indicate on the system that a response has been provided to the complainant. It will then track the progress and the completion of any corrective action separately, to ensure any issues are rectified satisfactorily.

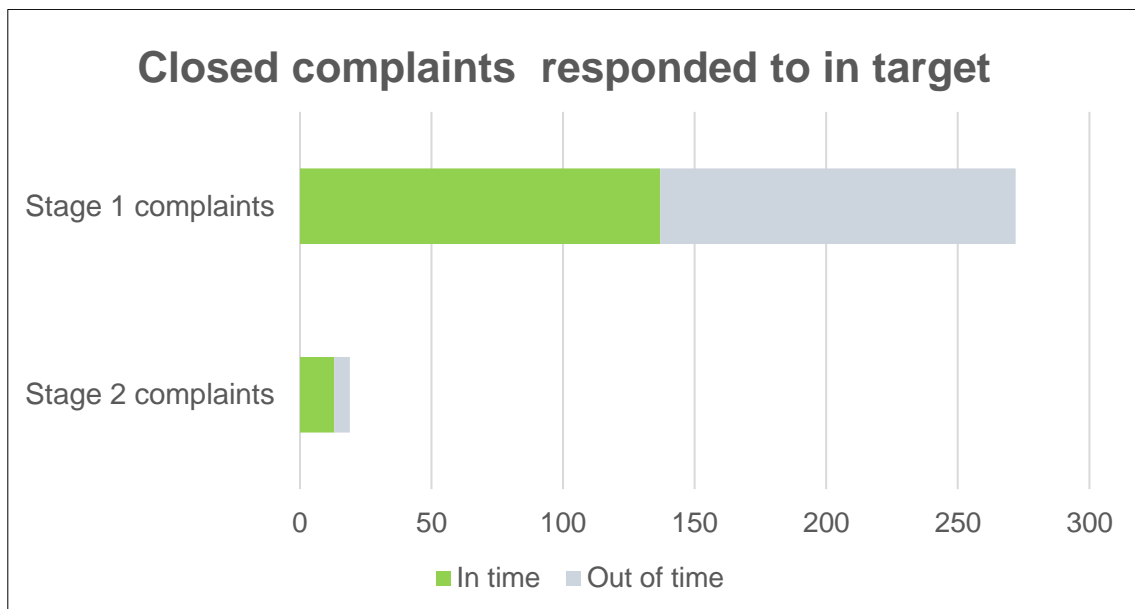
70% of these complaints were upheld or partially upheld.

Where someone is not satisfied with the response to their complaint at Stage 1, they can ask for this to be reviewed by an independent Senior Officer at Stage 2. In 2023/24 we received **19** Stage 2 complaints.

If someone is still not satisfied with our response to their complaint, following Stage 2, they can appeal through the Housing Ombudsman service, the Local Government Ombudsman, or their local MP. The Housing Ombudsman investigates complaints about housing organisations and is independent and impartial.

In 2023/34 we received **7** determinations from the Housing Ombudsman, in relation to complaints that had been made to them. You can read more about the findings from these complaints and the improvements we are making, in Section 5 of this report.

An important part of providing good customer care when handling complaints, is having clear timescales and meeting these targets. If timescales have to be changed due to the complexity of the complaint, then keeping complainants up to date with progress is key.



Improvement actions:

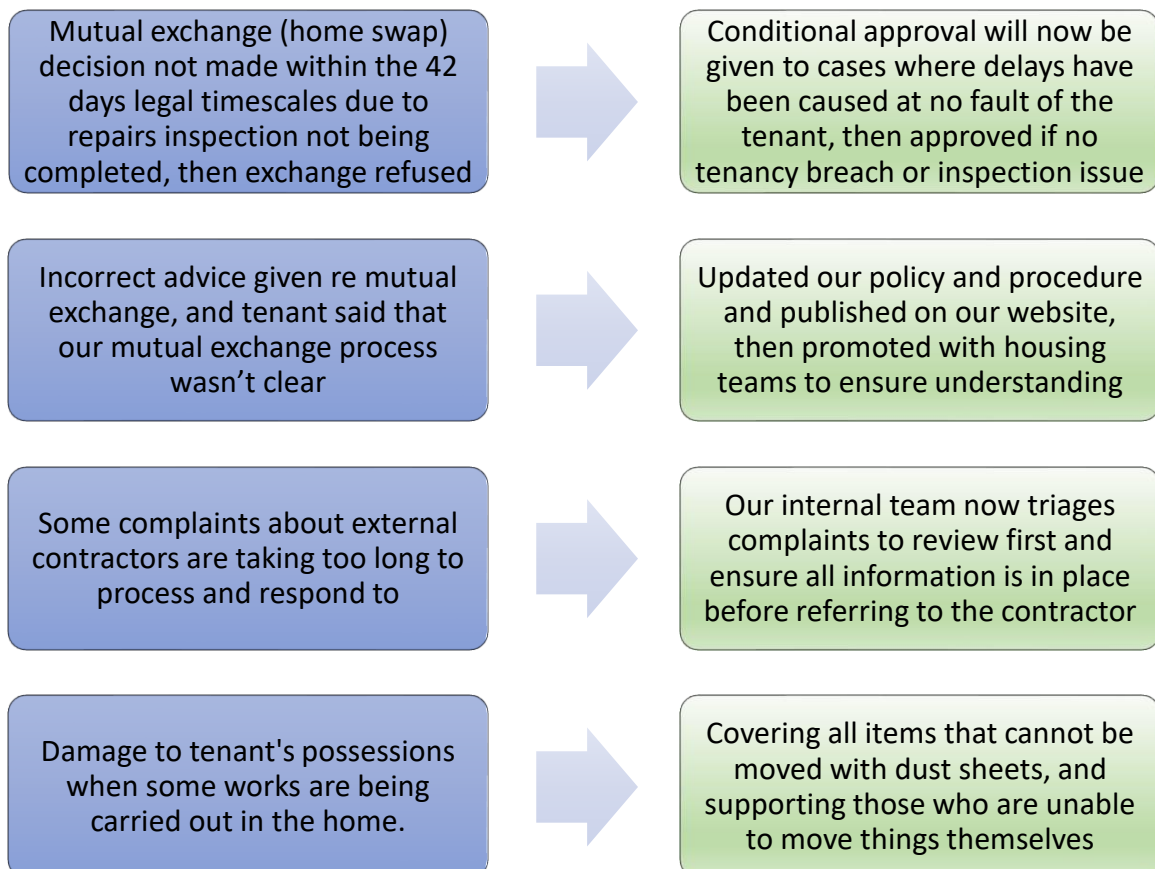
The new complaints IT system that we introduced from April 2024 will improve our performance in relation to response times and ensuring complainants are kept up to date with any progress, especially where complaints are more complex and may take longer to investigate. The system supports quick allocation of a complaint to the right people to investigate and then provides reminders when key dates are approaching, enabling us to track actions that are agreed in response to a complaint.

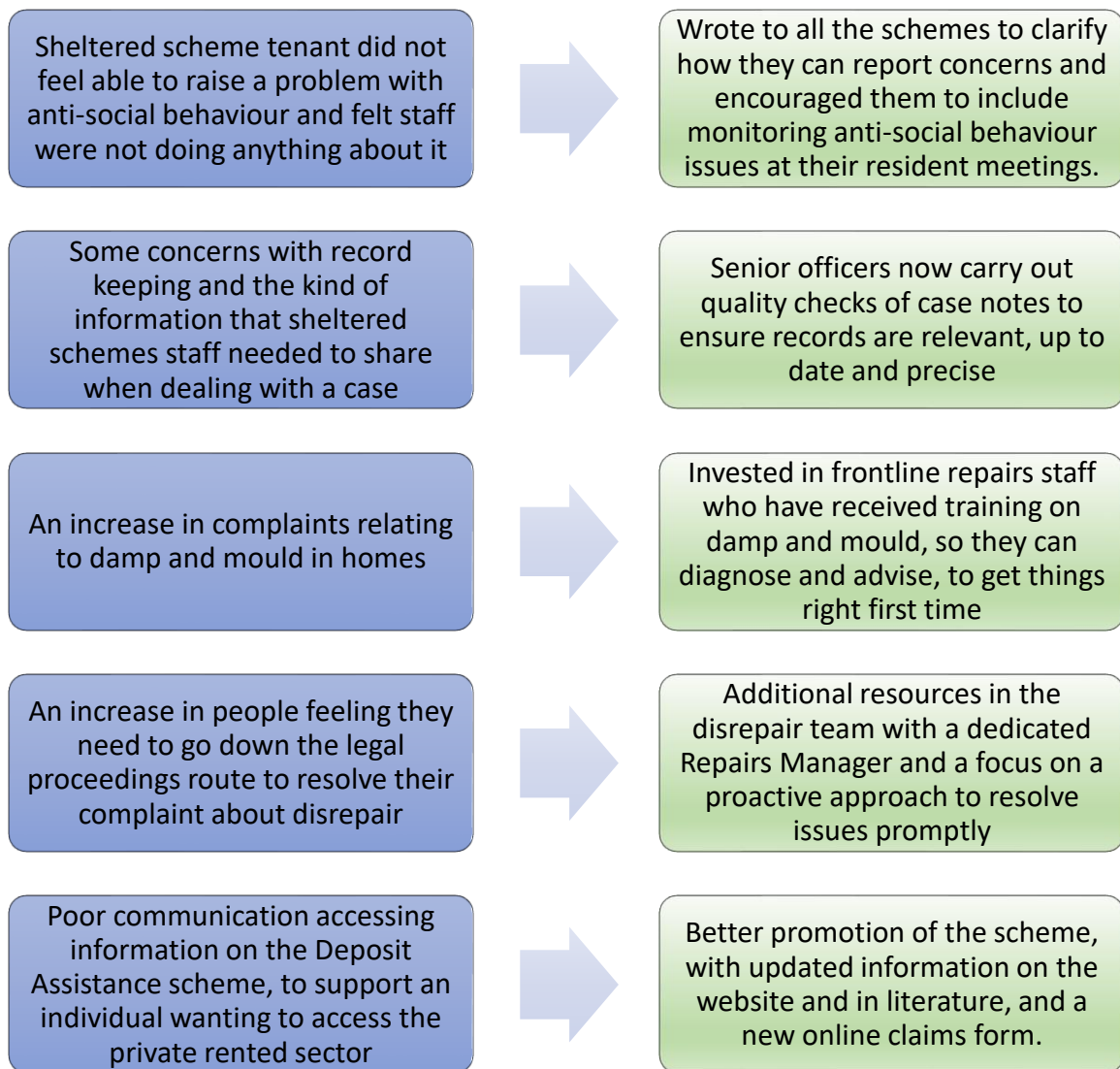
2. You said, we did.

After we have investigated a complaint, there may be some action that we need to carry out to put things right for the individual who raised the concern.

However, some complaints have wider learning for us, either because they highlight a trend or because they highlight the need to change a procedure, so the issue does not happen again for any other tenants.

Below are just a few examples of wider learning:





3. Compliments

Compliments help us to understand what we are doing well and when you have had a good experience of using our housing services. We appreciate your feedback, as this highlights the things that you like about how a service has been delivered or how an officer has helped you. Our managers will review this positive feedback in the same way that they look at complaints, so they can learn from this good practice and embed this.

We have some further work to do to promote how you can give a compliment about your housing services but have recently refreshed the information on the website to make this clearer.

In 2023/24 **74** compliments were raised through this formal process, with most relating to the repairs and sheltered housing teams. Some of the things our tenants told us, are below:

"The plumber who has attended my property is always very polite and professional"

"I had the boiler replaced, the guy was brilliant cleaning up at the end"

"Thank you for today with my mum, she is going to take the flat, you made her feel very welcome and she can't wait to move in"

"The workers went above and beyond trying to repair and secure my window. It was not a straightforward repair but they tried and tried until it was fixed"

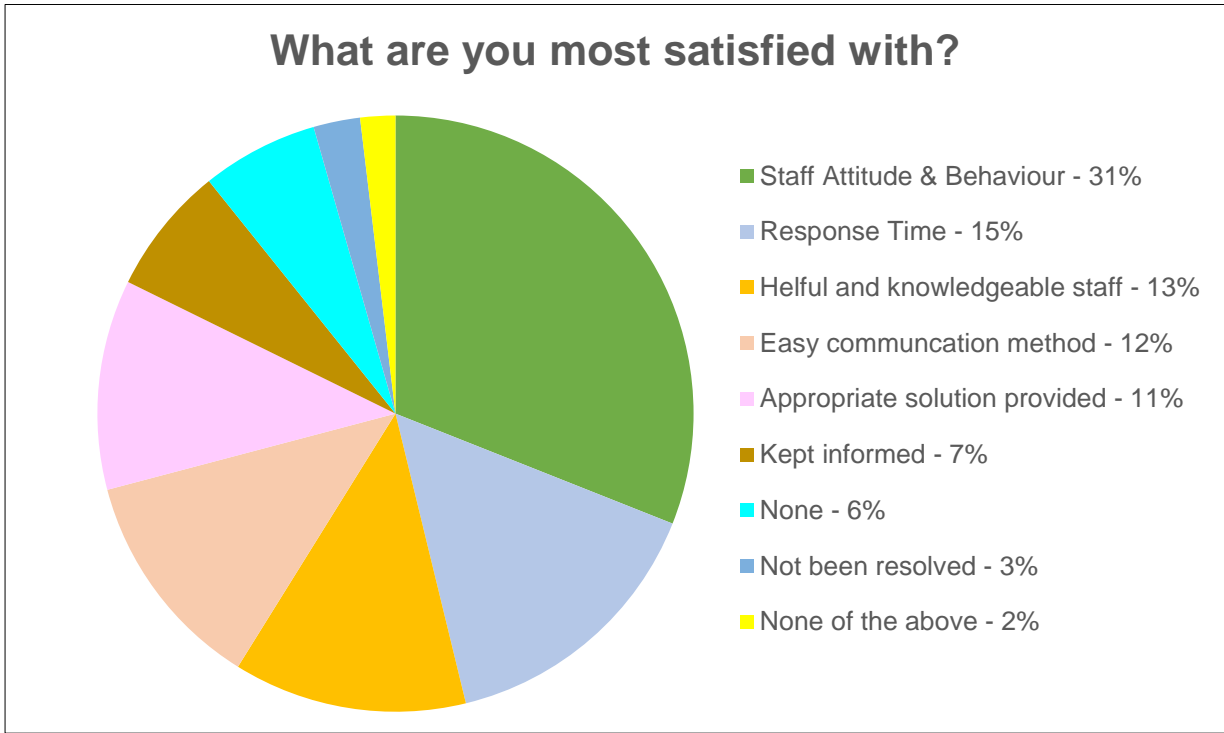
"I would like to thank (scheme manager) for all the help you have given, I'm sure this is above and beyond your remit"

"Joiner came to fix up bathroom - done a lovely job, made bathroom look really good"

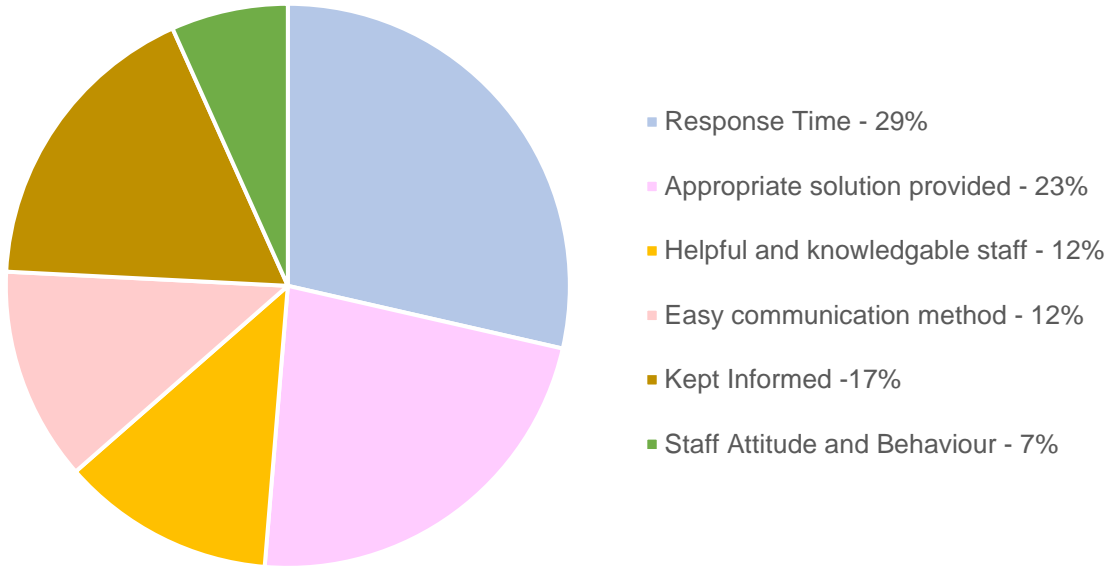
4. Your experience of how we handled your complaint.

We send out a satisfaction survey to those who have made a complaint and received a response from us, which is sent out once the complaint has been closed.

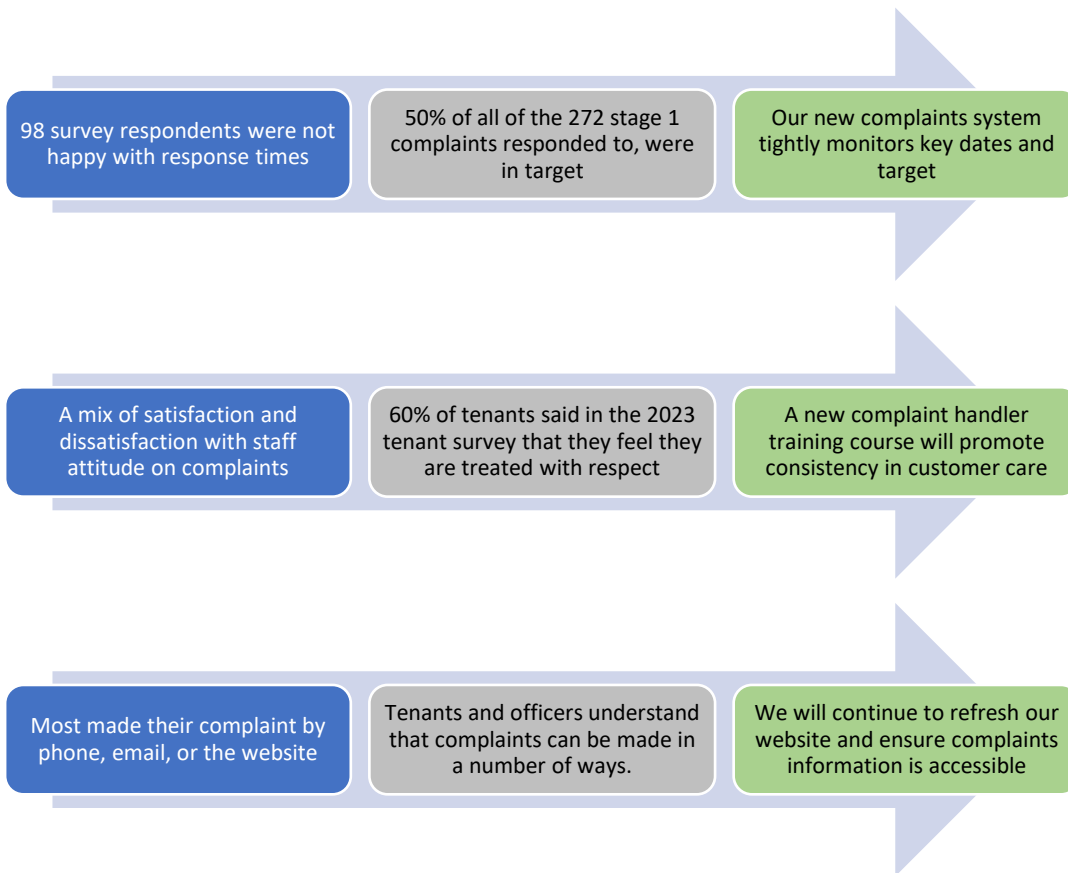
The survey asks for feedback on people's experience of using our complaint handling process and of the people they deal with. It is not about the result of the complaint investigation.



What are you least satisfied with?



Below are some important messages from this survey feedback, with some wider performance information, and actions that will support us to improve this year.



We received over 150 responses to the survey, which is sent out by SMS on mobile phones. This year, we are building an automated survey into the new complaints handling system that we launched in April 2024.

Tenant focus group:

We regularly review how we handle complaints, to see if there are lessons to be learned and if we can make any improvements.

This year, we wanted to include tenant voices into that reflection and held a workshop to discuss people's experience of using the complaints service.

We had some really interesting and helpful discussions around why people feel they need to make a complaint and what their experience is when they do this.



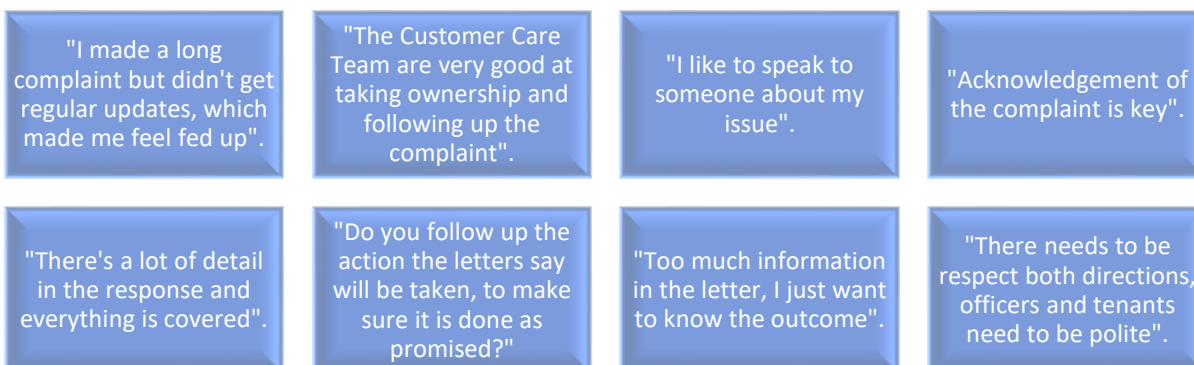
The group did not see an issue with the number of complaints raised, as it meant people knew how to raise concerns, but the key thing for them was that the Council acted promptly, communicated throughout the process, and then put things right. A couple mentioned that they prefer to raise concerns with an officer as part of a service request, rather than go down the formal complaint route, but understood that sometimes that a formal complaint might be necessary.

We asked the group how they had found their experience when they had made a complaint. There was a mix of preferred methods to make a complaint, including speaking directly to a person and using the internet. This tells us that we are offering different ways for people to raise their issues and that people know that these are available.

We have recently made some slight changes to our complaints policy, which is published on our website. However, from what people said about liking different communication methods, we need to think about other ways to communicate our policy and we will involve tenants in developing these.

The focus group also reviewed some examples of our responses to complaints. Any names and addresses had been removed so they were completely confidential, and the group focused on the way we responded, rather than the detail of the complaint itself.

The group gave us feedback on the response letters but also provided us with some key messages about our complaint handling processes, that we will be taking on board. We will also feed this in the complaint handling training that we are developing. Below are some of the things that they told us:



Improvement actions for 2024/25

- Hold more tenant focus groups throughout the year to deep dive into how we respond to complaints.
- Have the Readers Panel review our template documents and letters.
- Provide tenants with more regular performance information in relation to the complaints that we receive and their outcomes.
- Embed tenant feedback into our new complaint handling training programme.
- Support our Tenant Scrutiny Panel to revisit our complaints policy, our compliance with the code, and how accessible we are.

5. Housing Ombudsman – Complaints and Spotlight Reports

Complaints investigated by the Housing Ombudsman:

The Housing Ombudsman has made determinations in 7 cases in 2023/24.

These were:

- 3 Maladministration (repairs service – damp and mould)
- 1 Severe Maladministration (repairs service – damp and mould)
- 3 Service Failure (2 relate to the anti-social behaviour service, and 1 relates to damage by a contractor)

The Ombudsman published an annual report on a landlord's performance, based on the complaints that are investigated by them. In their last report (2022/23) they found that Wigan performed 'very well' when compared to other landlords of similar type and size.

Whilst we aim to take prompt actions to put things right for the individual impacted by these cases, it is important that lessons are learned.

As a management team, we evaluate each one and look for opportunities for wider learning and where we can make improvements to service delivery.

In summary, some of the key areas are:

Complaint policy timescales exceeded	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• We reviewed the policy and made the timescales clearer• The new complaints IT system introduced in April 2024 monitors timescales and triggers actions to be taken• All complaints staff have received refresher training
Damp and mould (historic cases)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A Damp & Mould Taskforce is in place to drive forward an action plan• A new Damp & Mould Policy has been developed and is due to go to Cabinet in the summer• Our 'every visit counts' campaign ensures any officers visiting homes can report damp and mould
Record keeping	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Our Joint Intelligence Unit are working on connecting the information from different information systems• New mandatory training is to be developed on record keeping• A Vulnerability Strategy will be developed, to ensure we make reasonable adjustments where we know a tenant has a specific need

Housing Ombudsman's Spotlight Reports:

The Housing Ombudsman also publishes Spotlight Reports on specific topics that are coming up in the complaints they receive nationally.

These are:

- ❖ Repairs
- ❖ Damp and mould
- ❖ Noise nuisance
- ❖ Knowledge and information management
- ❖ Attitude, relationships, and respect

Reviewing the Spotlight Reports enables landlords to identify opportunities for improving the tenants' experience of their housing services.

In response to these reports, we set up focus groups to review the requirements and carry out an assessment of the recommendations made by the Housing Ombudsman. We identified the things that we already have in place, where we can improve, and new actions that we plan to take forward. These new actions will feed into our Housing Transformation Programme.

Improvement actions for 2024/25

- With our tenants, develop a new Vulnerability Strategy to ensure we know our tenants' needs and make reasonable adjustments, where required.
- Review the information we have about our current tenants and our tenants of the future, ensuring this is relevant, accurate, and up to date.
- Roll out our new 'See the Person, See the Home' training experience for staff and contractors, focusing on fairness and respect, and addressing any stigma.
- Adding the Housing Ombudsman's recommended topics into our housing officer training plan, to support officers to understand specific needs and to make reasonable adjustments, including Dementia Friends, customer care, mental health, learning disabilities, and sight and hearing loss.

6. Housing Ombudsman's Complaints Code

The Housing Ombudsman introduced a Complaints Code with the aim of achieving best practice in complaint handling and ultimately to provide a better service to residents. The new Code became statutory on 1st April 2024, meaning that landlords are obliged by law to follow its requirements. These requirements cover:

1. Definition of a complaint
2. Exclusions
3. Accessibility and awareness
4. Complaint handling staff
5. The complaint handling process
6. Complaint stages
7. Putting things right
8. Self-assessment, reporting, and compliance
9. Scrutiny and oversight: continuous learning and improvement

On an annual basis we are required to self-assess our complaints policy and procedures against this code. This exercise is carried out by managers within housing and corporate customer services. The self-assessment is then independently reviewed by our Internal Audit Team, who verify that the process is robust, and all criteria have been considered appropriately.

The document is then reported to the Housing Advisory Panel, with tenant and elected member representatives, so that they can scrutinise our compliance with the Complaints Code. It is also published on our website so that it is made available to our tenants and to the Housing Ombudsman.

Wigan's self-assessment 2024:

Internal Audit have confirmed that they are satisfied that the Council's self-assessment against the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code is accurate and appropriate improvement actions have been identified when required.

Our only area of non-compliance is that we need to communicate more clearly that an expression of dissatisfaction with services made through a survey is not defined as a complaint and make those completing the survey aware of how they can pursue a complaint if they wish to. We will take this on board for the annual tenant satisfaction survey that we will be running in the autumn and in guidance for any surveys developed by services themselves.

Improvement actions for 2024/25:

- Develop complaints monitoring reports on the new complaints IT system, to support management of performance monitoring, identification of trends, and recording of learning.
- Report a summary of the types of complaints that we have not accepted and review this regularly.
- Introduce new reporting arrangements to Officers, tenants, and Housing Advisory Panel on complaints, including a half-year report.
- Build tenant voices into our quality assurance processes, including making changes to surveys to ensure dissatisfaction is clearly identified and acted on.
- Incorporate clear communication within all tenant surveys on how a complaint can be made if this is what the individual wishes to do.
- Work with our Member for Complaints and the tenant lead on our Housing Advisory Panel, to improve scrutiny of housing complaints, to ensure we are accountable.
- New complaint handling training for our officers, to promote a positive learning culture and consistently high standards of customer care.
- Finalise a suite of process documents to ensure the complaints policy is followed consistently and we are transparent about the procedures we follow.

You can read the full self-assessment on our website at [Performance \(wigan.gov.uk\)](https://www.wigan.gov.uk/performance)

Being accountable

As part of our commitment to being transparent and ensuring we are accountable to our tenants, the annual complaints report has been scrutinised by tenants and our governing body. It has been reported to:

Housing Transformation Board	30 th May 2024
Internal Audit Team	June 2024
Tenant Readers Panel	June 2024
Housing Advisory Panel Tenant Representatives	June 2024
Strategic Management Team	9 th July 2024
Housing Advisory Panel (pending)	16 th July 2024
Cabinet (pending)	August 2024

The response to the report from Housing Advisory Panel and Cabinet will be published on our external website at [democracy.wigan.gov.uk/committee meetings](https://democracy.wigan.gov.uk/committee-meetings)