

Grand Union Housing Group

**Annual Complaints Performance
and Service Improvement Report**

April 2023 to March 2024

Contents

| Section | Content | Page |
|---------|--|------|
| 1 | Introduction | 3 |
| 2 | Complaint Handling Performance | 4-6 |
| 3 | Customer Satisfaction | 6 |
| 4 | Refusal to accept a complaint | 7 |
| 5 | Learning from complaints, HOS determinations and HOS reports | 7-8 |
| 6 | Annual Self-assessment against the HOS Complaint Handling Code | 9-11 |

1. Introduction

With new legislation and regulations being introduced, there are challenging times ahead for housing providers.

From 1 April 2024, the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code (the Ombudsman Code) became statutory. We've reviewed ourselves against the Ombudsman Code and completed our self-assessment. As a result of the review, we've made some changes to our Complaint Policy and Procedure.

We're committed to a complaints culture which listens and takes on board our customers' views, identifies areas for improvement and implements positive change.

This report has been reviewed by our Board and we've appointed our Member Responsible for Complaints (MRC), who has made comment.



Ashleigh Webber, MRC, Group Board

We're committed to promote a culture which invites customers to tell us when things have gone wrong, so we can put matters right and learn from the insight complaints provide. I am pleased to see we've been honest and transparent in our assessment against the Ombudsman Code and that we've produced an action plan to work on any failings. As the governing body, Group Board will monitor progress on the action plan and lessons learned from complaints and insight from other sources.

2. Complaint Handling Performance

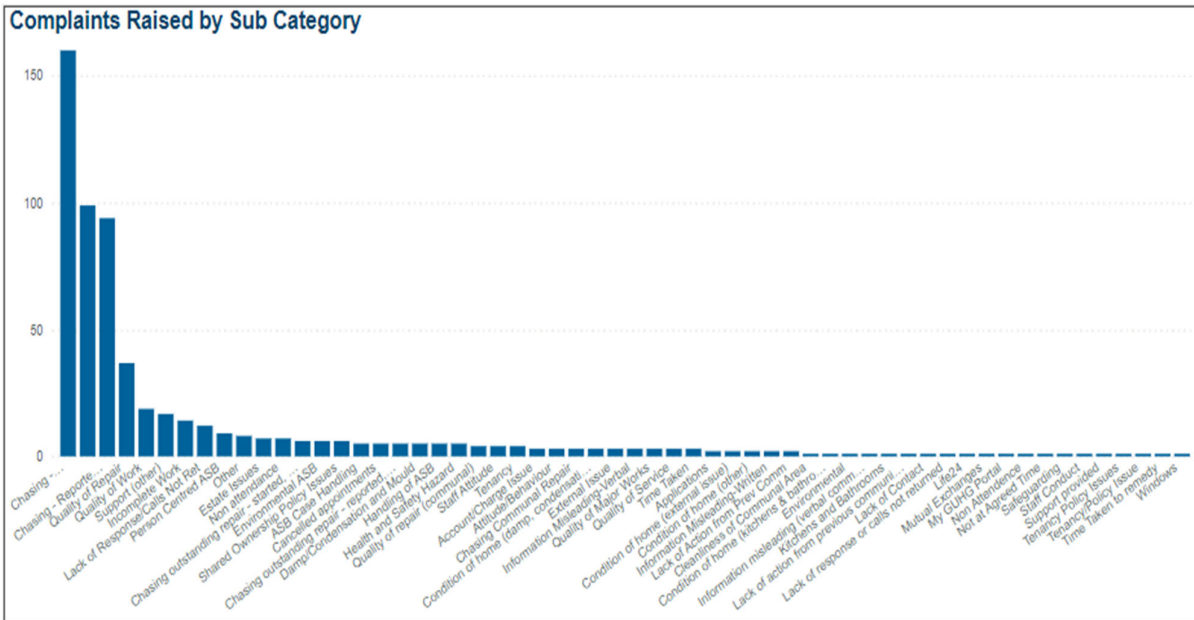
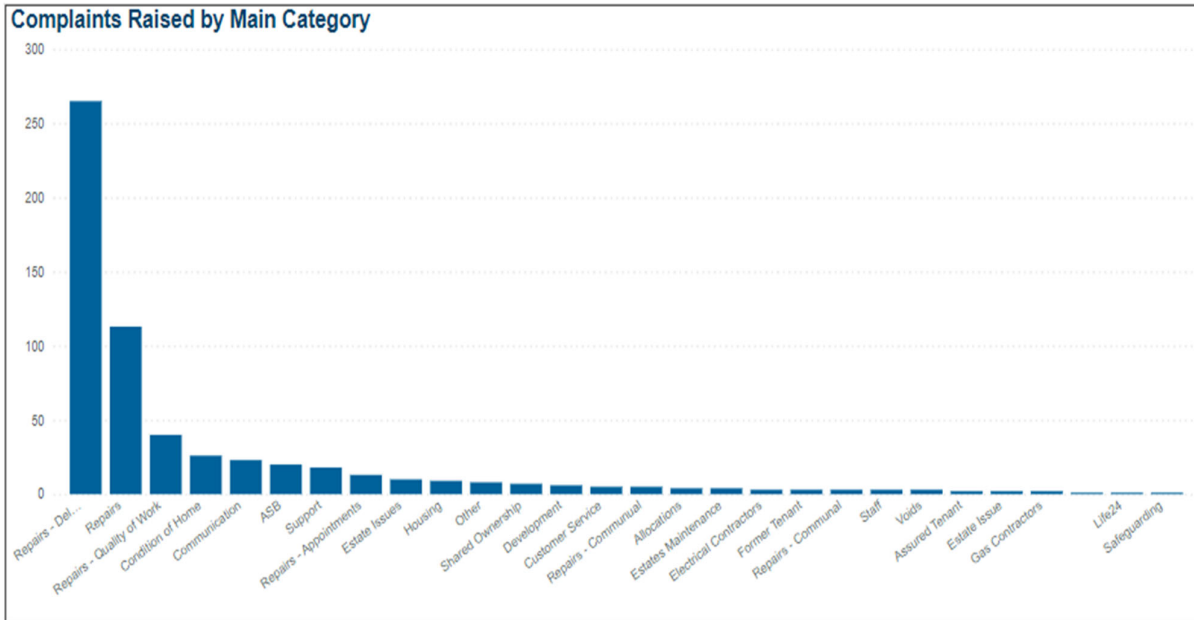
In the last financial year 2023/24, we raised 600 new complaints at Stage 1 and escalated 31 complaints to Stage 2. The volume of complaints in comparison to financial year 2022/23 is a 26.1% decrease.

The table below shows our performance against the national average and our quartile position. The national average is correct as at the 23 May 2024.

In accordance with the previous code which we worked to in financial year 2023/24, when we could not provide a response in timeframes set out, we aimed to agree extensions of time with our customer. However, we can't pull information from our system to demonstrate this took place. With the introduction of a new customer relationship management product (CRM) to record and manage complaints, we will look to provide this in future reports.

| Key performance indicator | Percentage | National average | Top quartile | Quartile position |
|---|------------|--|--------------|-------------------|
| Stage 1 complaints completed in target timescale | 54.25% | 86.52% | 96.18% | 4th |
| Stage 2 Complaints completed in target timescale. | 55.55% | 80.49% | 100% | 4th |
| All complaints completed in target timescale. | 54.33% | - | - | - |
| Satisfaction with complaints handling | 22.79% | 34% | 40% | 4th |
| Stage 1 complaints per 1,000 properties | 31.61 | No quartile data is provided by Housemark, as there isn't a high or low performance figure | | |
| Stage 2 complaints per 1,000 properties | 2.13 | | | |

When raising complaints, we categorise for recording purposes and to identify trends. We have a main category and a sub-category. A breakdown of categories that the 600 new Stage 1 complaints fall into is shown in the graphs on the next page.



Our main driver of complaints is responsive repairs delays which in the last financial year equated to 44.16%. The highest in this category at 60.4% is Repairs, Chasing Not Started.

In our new Corporate Plan, “Good to be home”, we commit to improving our responsive repairs service which, once achieved, should see levels of dissatisfaction reduce.

To reduce issues around quality of repair we trialled a Quality Assurance Technician role. This is now being reviewed to consider the positive impact which could be achieved by making these roles permanent in our structure.

We have identified that a significant root cause of a number of the delays in responding to complaints has been obtaining information from our Property Managers (surveyors), who are patch based accountable for resolving issues. We have instigated a review of this function, and in the interim have made a decision to target a specific resource at property related complaint resolution.

Our heating contract with PH Jones went live in April 22 after a procurement exercise and mobilisation. Our concerns were gathering pace and by October our expectations and compliance requirements were not being met, an additional resource was drafted into the team to help with the failure demand generated by the poor customer service. We also onboarded a compliance apprentice to help with the workload as well as back filling a vacancy. During early 2023 we worked with the contractor on two separate recovery plans, both of which failed, we procured a new contractor in July 2023. During this period, we self-reported to the Regulator of Social Housing, due to the volume of properties without an in date LGSR.

3. Customer Satisfaction

We issue a satisfaction survey at the point the complaint is resolved, regardless of whether the complaint is upheld or not upheld.

These surveys ask for feedback on how our customer feels their complaint was handled. There are two questions:

- CSAT score out of 5, where 1 is low and 5 is high.
- The reason for the score.

In the last financial year, our CSAT score for complaint surveys was 2.19 out of 5 and our sentiment score was 2.39 out of 5. The sentiment score is based on the frequency of positive and negative language used by our customers where a reason for their score is given.

It is important to note that when a customer receives a transactional survey, the survey specifically asks about the handling of their complaint. However, the comments often refer to the experience with the original issue that caused them to raise a complaint, the root cause of the complaint. In comparison, when the customer leaves a positive comment, it normally refers to their positive experience with the way in which the complaint was handled and/or resolved.

The main theme relating to a negative experience was around incomplete work and the length of time it has taken to complete the original work, followed by the knowledge of the employees involved in the original work, including a lack of information being provided to the customer.

Regarding customers who spoke about a positive experience, the main theme related to the way in which the complaint had been resolved with comments referring to the fact that the complaint was dealt with promptly and efficiently.

Our contract with our current survey collection provider comes to an end in December 2024 and as part of the implementation of a new solution we are also reviewing our survey design. This will be tested with customers to ensure that we are maximising both the quantity of replies and the quality of actionable insight.

4. Refusal to accept a complaint

The reasons for not accepting a complaint are set out in our Complaint Policy. In the financial year 2023/24 we didn't refuse to accept any complaints.

5. Learning from Complaints, HOS determinations & reports

Learning from complaints is of paramount importance as complaints give us great insight to support identification of service improvements and implementation of change.

Earlier this year, we started to record all complaints on our new CRM, 'View 360'. Our Customer Resolution Advisors cannot close a complaint without capturing a potential service improvement opportunity.

Our Resolutions Team Leader meets with our Head of Business Transformation each week to discuss potential service improvements captured by the team.

Listed below are some specific changes made as a direct result of a complaint:

- Process changes to allow better tracking of urgent jobs from our Customer Contact team through to the Internal Repair Team Works Planners.
- Commissioning Aico alarms to produce a short video for our customers highlighting the difference between the sound of a low battery warning and an actual carbon monoxide (CO) warning.
- Ensuring that all CO detector related jobs are dealt with as urgent and are now routed to our specialist contractor.
- Our heating contractor, Aaron Services, have recruited engineering supervisors to support call handling staff to provide enhanced diagnosis of issues, improving our service to customers.
- Showers in Voids – a customer had moved into their property where we'd replaced the bathroom like-for-like with no shower. They had a big family and there was a significant cost and inconvenience impact, so not only did we fit a shower but incorporated it into our Void standard.
- Quality assurance – some complaints were coming from the quality of repairs work undertaken. We have trialled a team that specifically undertook physical checks on the work done and were able to identify skills gaps that could then form part of an operative's development.

A problem-solving session has also been undertaken looking at complaints, and a key finding has been 'inadequate communication both internally and with our customers.' This has led to the development of a key strategic objective that, at a transformational level, will look to reduce the avoidable demand generated such as unnecessary customer contact, providing our customers with the right information at a time and in a way that meets their needs.

Another key strategic objective will centre around improving our repairs service, focusing on the quicker matching of resource against demand, making our services more easily accessible to a wider range of customers and reducing the failure points that a customer will experience during their end-to-end repairs journey.

We review the Housing Ombudsman Service's (HOS) quarterly Insight reports and ask teams to review the findings and where applicable, consider changes we may need to make. A report, which documents the key findings and our business response, is provided to our Customer Experience Committee who meet quarterly.

We also review the HOS Spotlight reports and press releases. These are reviewed and shared with relevant teams to read and to identify if we need to review processes or policies.

A weakness that has been raised by our Customer Experience Committee is the consistency with which we follow-up on any changes made and ensure any changes have a positive impact for our customers. As part of wider discussions, we will be discussing this issue, and it forms part of our improvement plan.

In 2023/24, we received six determinations from the HOS, there are three still with the HOS for investigation. When we receive a HOS determination, our Resolutions Team Leader will ensure all orders and recommendations are completed as per the order. We've recently changed our approach when dealing with determinations, our Transformation team have co-ordinated an initial and a follow-up meeting to discuss. The meeting includes the relevant Director of Service.

There are key themes emerging from dealing with complaints and HOS determinations including record keeping, communication and ownership. Following an adjudication, we've reviewed the HOS report 'Knowledge and Information Management'. This has been shared with relevant teams and we will be following up responses and progressing actions identified.

Our Learning and Development team are working on a new training course for all colleagues at Grand Union. This focusses on the delivery of great customer service and has an emphasis on the importance of keeping accurate notes, keeping customers informed and owning a situation.

We've also developed mandatory e-learning for complaints which will be rolled out to all operational colleagues.

6. Annual Self-assessment against the HOS Complaint Handling Code

We've completed and published on our website our annual self-assessment against the code since the original code was introduced in 2020.

A new requirement of the Ombudsman Code is to provide the self-assessment to the HOS. We've completed our self-assessment; this can be viewed by clicking [here](#).

When completing the self-assessment, this was shared with our Customer Experience Committee for their feedback and with our Group Board.

As part of the review, we've made some changes to our Complaint Policy and Procedure. These are both published on our website and can be viewed by clicking [here](#) and [here](#).

If customers require or request a printed copy of our Complaint Policy, Procedure, or our self-assessment, we will provide this to them.

When reviewing ourselves against the Code, we've identified areas for improvement and produced an action plan which we will progress and monitor. Our action plan is shown in the table below:

| Code | Code Requirement | Evidence | Commentary & explanation | Actions to be taken |
|------|--|--|--------------------------|--|
| 6.2 | Complaints must be acknowledged, defined, and logged at stage 1 of the complaints procedure <u>within five working days of the complaint being received</u> . | Whilst our policy is explicit, and in most cases, we acknowledge complaints within the timescales set out in the HOS Code we accept that there have been instances where this has not been the case. | | We are recruiting an additional Customer Resolution Advisor and will be developing new reporting indicators to monitor the impact. |
| 6.3 | Landlords must issue a full response to stage 1 complaints <u>within 10 working days</u> of the complaint being acknowledged. | Our policy is explicit in its aim is to always resolve complaints within 10 working days of the acknowledgement. If due to the complexity of the complaint we need an extension of time, we will | | Through our new CRM system we are developing new reporting indicators that will be reported to management. We are recruiting an additional Customer Resolution Advisor and will monitor impact. |

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| | | <p>advise the customer at the earliest opportunity.</p> <p>There is evidence that some cases have not been dealt with within 10 days in the previous 12 months.</p> | | |
| 6.14 | <p>Landlords must issue a final response to the stage 2 <u>within 20 working days</u> of the complaint being acknowledged.</p> | <p>Our policy is explicit in its aim to always resolve complaints within 20 working days of the escalation acknowledgement. If due to the complexity of the complaint we need an extension of time, we will advise the customer at the earliest opportunity.</p> <p>Our historical IT system does not enable us to evidence full compliance, however case reviews suggest customers have been kept informed.</p> | | <p>Our new CRM system enables us to record and track complaints and will help with this and the recording of agreements to extend when necessary.</p> |
| 7.3 | <p>The remedy offer must clearly set out what will happen and by when, in agreement with the resident where appropriate. Any remedy proposed must be followed through to completion.</p> | <p>All our responses include next steps and timeframes for next steps. Our complaint handlers monitor through to completion any promised actions. They must contact the customer to ensure matters are resolved to the</p> | | <p>We are recruiting an additional Customer Resolution Advisor and will be developing new reporting indicators to monitor the impact.</p> |

| | | | | |
|-----|--|--|--|--|
| | | customer's satisfaction. | | |
| 9.1 | Landlords must look beyond the circumstances of the individual complaint and consider whether service improvements can be made as a result of any learning from the complaint. | Upon closure of every complaint, we capture on our CRM 'lessons learnt'. These are reviewed weekly by our Resolution Team Leader and our Head of Business Transformation with a view to address any service improvements identified. | | Whilst we review complaints for 'lessons learnt' to identify potential service improvements, review HOS Spotlight/Insight reports, and HOS determinations, we will develop a robust process to ensure these are progressed and monitored to ensure they deliver positive outcomes for our customers. |
| 9.2 | A positive complaint handling culture is integral to the effectiveness with which landlords resolve disputes. Landlords must use complaints as a source of intelligence to identify issues and introduce positive changes in service delivery. | Upon closure of every complaint, we capture on our CRM 'lessons learnt'. These are reviewed weekly by our Resolution Team Leader and our Head of Business Transformation with a view to address any service improvements identified. | | Whilst we review complaints for 'lessons learnt' to identify potential service improvements, review HOS Spotlight/Insight reports, and HOS determinations, we will develop a robust process to ensure these are progressed and monitored to ensure they deliver positive outcomes for our customers. |