



Complaints Performance and Service Improvement 2023/24



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David Taylor
Executive Director of Tenancy Services

Introduction

We know that, across many landlords, complaints have been increasing over the last 18 months. We've seen a similar trend with higher number of complaints received during this period. Whilst we don't want to see things go wrong for our tenants, we're pleased to see that our tenants feel confident and safe to share their concerns with us and trust us to put things right.

This is the first time we've published our Complaints performance in so much detail and this gives us an excellent chance to reflect on how we have learned from our mistakes, and from those made by other landlords, to adapt and improve the way we deliver services for our tenants in future.

This year we've seen lots of work done around how we tackle repairs, in improving our communication to tenants and in making sure all frontline staff are able to support tenants to use our complaints process.

We know there is still more work to be done to make sure we put things right when they go wrong, and to ensure our tenants feel listened to and respected when they do raise concerns to us. We've invested significantly in the number of Complaints Officers we have to help build a positive culture around complaint handling and to show our tenants how seriously we take getting things right for them.

Over the next year we're looking forward to working more closely with our tenants through the new Complaints Learning Tenant Group that we are forming in Autumn 2024. This group will help hold us to account on delivering on the improvements we have set out for how we handle complaints.

David Taylor
Executive Director of Tenancy Services





Complaint Handling Code

The Complaint Handling Code was introduced in 2020 and is centred on creating a positive complaint handling culture, that allows landlords to listen, learn and act on the feedback it receives from tenants.

Although we have followed the requirements of the code since this time, the Complaint Handling Code became statutory on 1 April 2024. This means that it is against the law for us not to follow the Housing Ombudsman's requirements.

Key areas of the Code include:

- universal definition of a complaint
- providing easy access to the complaints procedure and ensuring residents are aware of it, including their right to access the Housing Ombudsman Service
- the structure of the complaints procedure - only 2 stages necessary and clear times set out for responses

- ensuring fairness in complaint handling with a tenant-focused process
- taking action to put things right and find appropriate solutions
- creating a positive complaint handling culture through continuous learning and improvement
- demonstrating learning around complaints in annual reports, and;
- an annual self-assessment against the Complaint Handling Code

The Ombudsman has a legal duty to ensure that we comply with the code. To do this every landlord, including ourselves, must complete a self-assessment against the code and publish it to both the Ombudsman, and to our tenants.

You can find the details of our self-assessment for 2023/24 here: <https://www.bit.ly/IHO2024>



Compliance with the code

	Requirements	
	Required outcomes	Compliant
Section 1 - Definition of a complaint	5	5 (100%)
Section 2 - Exclusions	5	5 (100%)
Section 3- Accessibility and awareness	7	7 (100%)
Section 4 - Complaint handling staff	3	3 (100%)
Section 5 - Complaint handling process	15	15 (100%)
Section 6 - Complaint stages	20	20 (100%)
Section 7 - Putting things right	4	4 (100%)
Section 8 - Self-assessment, reporting and compliance	5	5 (100%)
Section 8 - Scrutiny and oversight: continuous learning & improvement	8	8 (100%)
Total	72	72 (100%)

We think it's vital that our self-assessment is completed not just by us, but by our tenants. This gives us an extra level of assurance that our complaint handling matches up with the expectations of our tenants.

This year, during their review of our compliance with the code, tenants told us that they felt we complied with all elements of the code and were pleased to see improvements made to our policy to make our approach clearer to tenants.

It's been an open, honest and constructive response to directions from the Ombudsman. We don't complain just because we are unhappy. It's because we don't want to have the problem again and so it's been useful to look at the learning taken from this review.

**Camella, Operations Committee
Tenant Representative**

It has been a very interesting learning experience to be involved in the group, whilst being able to get answers on the way forward in a very understanding way.

April, Involved Tenant



Complaint Handling Performance

In 2023/24, we received 1,140 formal complaints, an increase of around one third compared to the previous year. Of these, 72.8% of related to Repairs and 27.2% related to our Housing Management services.

We operate a two-stage complaint process and, from our review of our performance, we've seen that by delivering the correct actions, awarding appropriate compensation, and making sure we learn from our failings, most complaints are resolved satisfactorily at the first stage.

It's important that if tenants are unhappy with the service they've received from us, we're open to listening to their feedback, believing their stories and are honest about where we got it wrong. A large percentage of the complaints we receive are upheld, which we believe highlights our transparent and open approach to complaints handling.

At every stage of our complaints process we ensure our tenants are aware of their right to contact the Housing Ombudsman. A small proportion (34 cases) of the complaints we received last year did involve an investigation from the Independent Housing Ombudsman. In 46% of these cases, the Ombudsman found 36 findings of maladministration / service failure.

We want our complaints process to be accessible for all tenants, and so this year we reviewed the demographics of the tenants who accessed our complaints process. This gave us some reassurance that we do not have any barriers to particular tenant groups telling us when they aren't happy.



Complaints Performance



Management Information

Stage one complaints relative to the size of the landlord	32/1000
Stage two complaints relative to the size of the landlord	6/1000
Stage one complaints responded to within 10 day target timescale	95.2%
Stage two complaints responded to within 20 day target timescale	96.5%



Learning from when things go wrong

Our positive complaints culture means that when we do have a complaint, we make sure that we prioritise not only making it right for the tenant, but also put in place actions to prevent similar mistakes happening again to others. When looking at why tenants are unhappy with our services, it's usually because we haven't dealt with the issue in a reasonable timeframe and haven't always been flexible with our policies and procedures when recognising the tenant's needs and circumstances.

We therefore try to make sure we take learnings from our complaints; that we can implement appropriate improvements to put things right. This year we have focused our improvements on three key areas:

Tenant Communication

We know we can improve how we communicate with our tenants to keep them informed. This is often where we have complex cases. For example, managing issues with communal services where multiple agencies are involved, or working with sub-contractors to tackle larger structural repairs such as roof leaks.

Over the last 12 months, we've undertaken extensive work to review and improve our communication with tenants, including introducing communication at key points in a case to ensure we provide tenants the right information. We've also made a series of improvements to our tenant smartphone app and automated messaging which, amongst other benefits, now allows us to push notifications out to tenants to inform them about issues related to their block or scheme.

Complaint Handling

One of the things we always try to do is when the tenant contacts us is to put it right straight away where we can. However this has led to occasions when expressions of dissatisfaction have been dealt with outside the formal complaints policy.

We have undertaken training with colleagues and managers to raise awareness about how to tell the difference between a 'Service Request' and a complaint.

Communication and timeliness of repairs

Although we often attend repairs within our agreed timescales, we have learned from our tenants that when a follow on repair or multiple appointments are required that this often where things go wrong. We've recognised that our systems for booking, tracking and updating repairs could be improved so, in 2024, we'll be upgrading our core repair reporting system. This will give us the ability to book follow on appointments with tenants whilst in their home - to ensure our tenants immediately know the next steps in their repair and is immediately available for them to track in our repairs app.



Top 5 Root Causes

Root cause	Complaints	Percentage
Communication	286	24%
Repair delayed or not completed	196	23%
Dissatisfaction with Action Taken	193	16%
Service not delivered to expected standard	107	9%
Poor Workmanship / Damage Caused	74	9%

Case Study A: Where we got it wrong

We received a report of a damaged kitchen floor. A repair was raised but we then identified the kitchen was due for an upgrade replacement within the next 12 months. As there's no immediate safety risk, we decided it was better to complete the floor replacement and upgrade the kitchen at the same time. The reactive repair was cancelled, but no communication about this decision was sent to the tenant. We also failed to keep the customer informed while we're scheduling and contracting the work for the planned maintenance.

The tenant doesn't know our plans because we haven't told them. This makes them feel like they haven't been listened to and they are frustrated and dissatisfied.

Case Study B: Making things right:

Mr M contacted us after moving into one of our new homes. He was unhappy that we had not responded to his concerns over cracks in his windows. We recognised that he had expressed dissatisfaction and offered him the chance to raise a complaint which he accepted.

During the investigation Mr M told us that there were other repairs that had not been resolved. We added these to our response and arranged for all of the outstanding repairs to be fixed. We checked in with Mr M after the repairs were completed to check he was happy.

Keeping Mr M updated with the actions we were taking and checking in with him before his complaint was closed, meant he felt valued and listened to.

"I have never received such great customer service from any company especially not from my landlord. We as a family are super happy with our property and the amazing service."

During our investigation learnings from Mr M's complaint were shared with our defects team. We identified that we needed more support for tenants who move into a new home so introduced a new defects process which included a new specialised after care team.



Best Practice

A key focus for the Housing Ombudsman is to identify key issues that impact tenants, and share the learning to promote good practice. We take every opportunity to review this learning and see how we can use it to adapt our own approach to complaint handling and improve our tenants experiences. Some examples of how we have done this include:

The Housing Ombudsman's Annual Complaints Review revealed more than half of the complaints were upheld for the first time, with property condition being a big area of concern. This was echoed in our own **annual report of our performance**, published by the Ombudsman, that highlighted complaints handling or property condition as a root cause in all failures.

We've used this as a learning opportunity and have heavily invested in new processes and resource for our In-House Maintenance Team. This includes a new dedicated team to tackle damp and mould cases quickly, reviewing the systems we have in place to track and log repairs and introducing our new repairs app to allow tenants to track their repair in more detail.

We have recognised that our ability to investigate and respond effectively to complaints has, at times, been slowed by the lack of easily accessible information. This can make it difficult to bring together related information, and often leads to delays for our tenants.

During 2023/24 we introduced a focus on effective record keeping across all of our teams. We're also investigating how we can make case notes more accessible to everyone, and have a centralised place within our core housing management system for those to be stored. We have also significantly invested in our own Complaints team to ensure that we have the right resource to prioritise resolving complaints quickly, effectively and to our tenants' satisfaction.

We also took learnings from where our orders issued by the Ombudsman related to increased compensation. We reviewed our own compensation calculations to make sure that they took into consideration the guidance set out by the Ombudsman. This has led to more appropriate compensation offers leading to fewer orders from the Ombudsman.



Spotlight Reports

We have continued to learn and review our own services following the publication of the Housing Ombudsman's Spotlight reports.

This year, our attention has focused on the following key reports:

- Attitudes, Respect and Rights, Knowledge and Information Management, Damp and Mould, and Noise Complaints.

For each report we have undertaken an analysis of our own performance against the best practice set out and developed a service improvement plan to address any gaps.



Damp and mould

We felt that it was important to involve tenants who had experienced damp and mould in our homes in an in-depth review of how well we met the recommendations from this Spotlight report.

Our tenants felt there was a positive change in the experiences of tenants who had experienced damp and mould following the introduction of our specialist damp and mould team, and also highlighted areas where our approach could be further improved.

We're now working with them on an action plan to tackle challenges with consistent communication, our use of the No Access Policy and oversight of moved, or missed, appointments.

To make a complaint:

Contact our Hub on
0345 60 20 540

Visit:
**[www.midlandheart.org.uk/
complaints](http://www.midlandheart.org.uk/complaints)**

Complaints - Midland Heart

Write to:
Midland Heart
20 Bath Row
Birmingham
B15 1LZ

To contact the Housing Ombudsman

Fill in the online complaint form
**[www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/residents/
make-a-complaint/](http://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/residents/make-a-complaint/)**

Email: **info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk**
Phone: **0300 111 3000**

Write to:

Housing Ombudsman Service
PO Box 1484, Unit D, Preston PR2 0ET

Fax:
020 7831 1942

