

Complaints performance and service improvement report

For the financial year 2023/24

June 2024



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Introduction

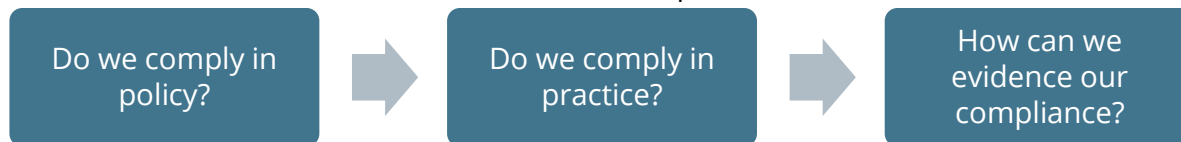
This report is produced in compliance with the Housing Ombudsman Complaints Handling Code 2024 (the Code), as part of our duties under section 8 'self-assessment, reporting and compliance'. It is also representative of our commitment to look beyond the circumstances of an individual complaint and look at what wider service improvements can be made as a result of learning from complaints. We are committed to fostering a culture of accountability and transparency, and a positive complaint handling culture.

2023/24 has been a year of ongoing challenge for us. Whilst we had been embarking on significant plans for service improvement, our regulatory downgrading in January 2024, has meant that we need to go further and quicker in our improvements, with the ultimate aim of improving outcomes for customers. This is important context to consider when reading this report. Within the self-assessment and the review of complaint handling performance, we recognise that our current approach is in many ways not good enough – it's not where we want to be, where we need to be, and where customers deserve us to be. Where this is the case, we make clear what steps we are taking to recover and be compliant with Code in policy and practice. Where we have identified areas where improvements are needed, these are also all included within our Voluntary Undertaking (VU) with the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH). This underpins our commitment to delivering better outcomes for customers as we embark on our journey to compliance with both the Code and RSH regulatory standards.

Section 1: self-assessment of compliance to the Code

We are required to complete a self-assessment of our compliance to the Code on at least an annual basis. This is to ensure that our complaint handling policy and practice remains in line with the Code.

The self-assessment was undertaken with three questions in mind:



Each provision of the Code has been rated based on our ability to evidence compliance.

- **Compliant with appropriate assurance** – we believe we have enough evidence to provide assurance of compliance in policy and/or practice.
- **Compliant but further assurance needed** – this may be, for instance, that we have only just started to collect data on something, but we nonetheless believe that we can evidence our compliance with the Code.
- **Not compliant and/or significant assurance gaps** – we are not compliance in policy and/or practice, and/or we have no evidence on how we can assure ourselves of compliance.

Where we are reporting non-compliance, or compliance but with some further assurance needed, we have provided an explanation as to what we intend to do and by when. Using these ratings, an action plan has been developed which will be monitored as part of our ongoing reporting to our Customer Service Committee (CSC) and Board.

Once those actions have been completed, and we believe that as a result we have returned to compliance, we will update the self-assessment, notify the Ombudsman and publish the revised self-assessment on our website.

The 2024 Self-Assessment is appended to this report at **Appendix 1**.

Section 2: review of complaint handling performance 2023/24

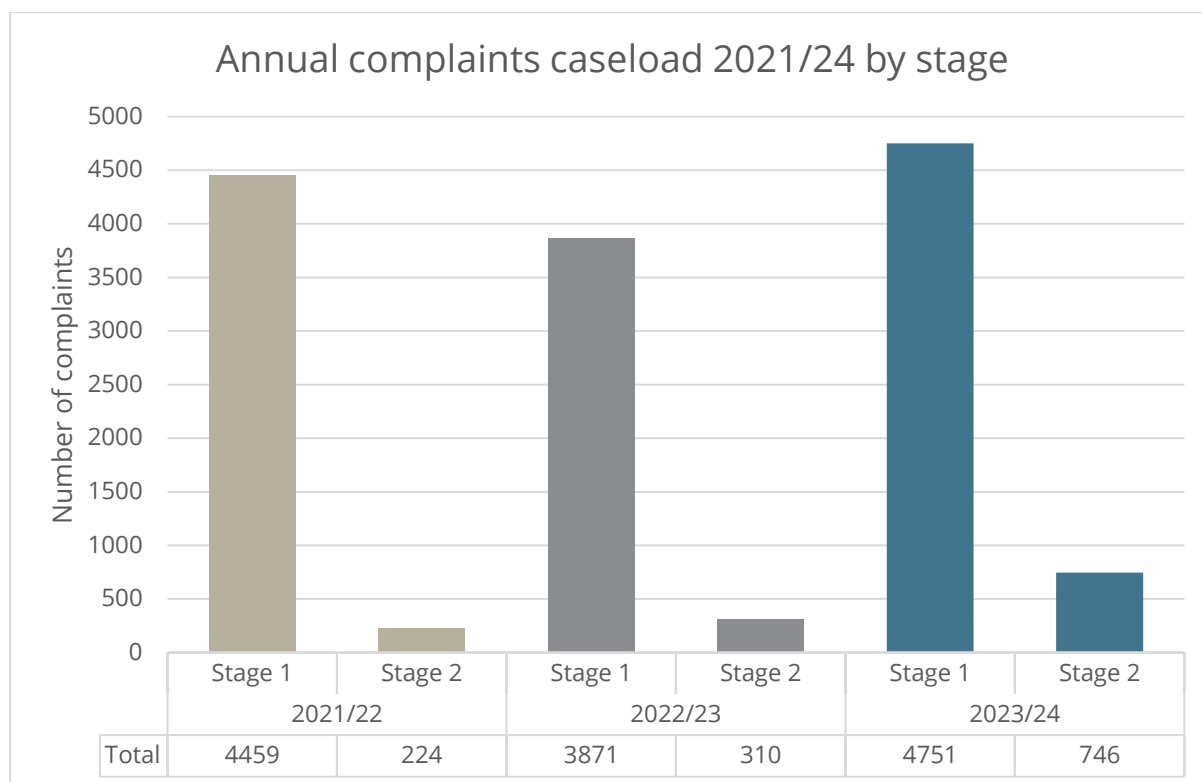
This section of the report uses data based on complaints received between 1 April 2023 and 31 March 2024 inclusive. It also refers to data relating to Housing Ombudsman casework, orders and determinations. The data is a snapshot in time and includes cases which have not yet fully entered or exited our complaints process.

We have included how we are seeking to address key areas of poor performance outlined in this section in Section 3 and 4 of this report.

Complaints caseload

During this 2023/24 financial year, we received a total of 5,497 complaints.

This is a significant increase in complaints received in 2023/24 with a 22% increase from 2022/23 at Stage 1, and a 140% increase from 2022/23 at Stage 2.



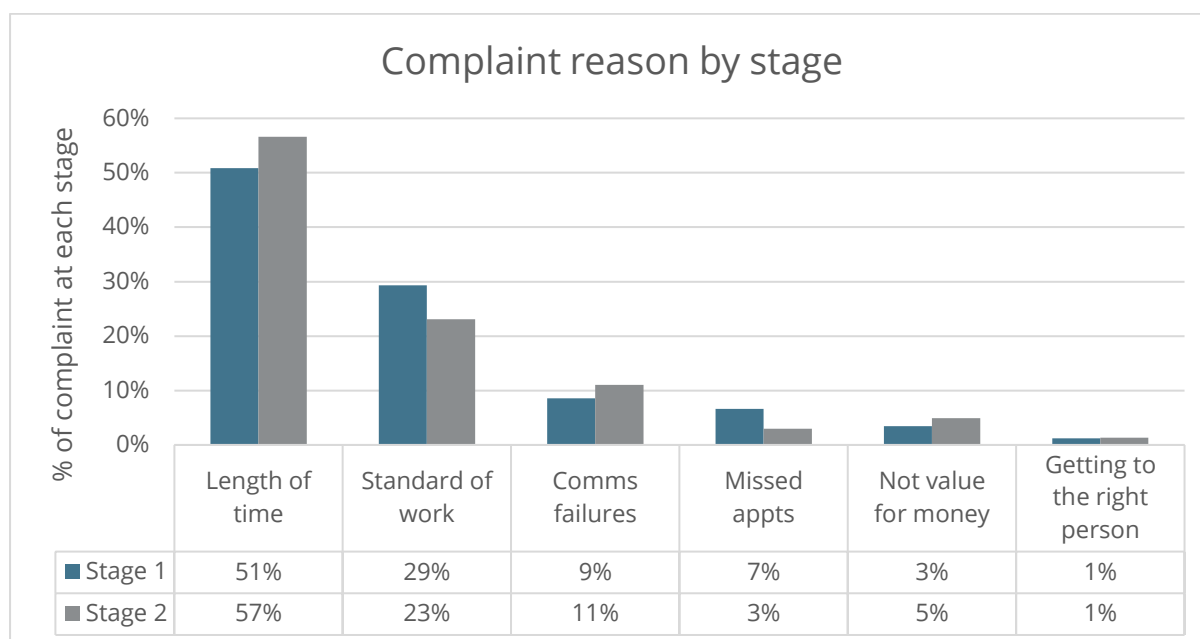
Around two thirds of all complaints received over the course of the year related to our Responsive Repairs service, Estate Management, Gas and Mechanical and Electrical services. The remaining complaints were in relation to our high-rise block maintenance, service charges and housing management services.

Complaint reasons

We record summary reasons within our system for each complaint received.

Over the course of the year, the majority of complaints related to the length of time we have taken to respond to a problem or service request. The second highest reason related to the standard or quality of work, with communication failures and broken

commitments third. We recognise we need to significantly improve these areas and ensure we learn the lessons from any complaints made. We have outlined our improvement activity in Section 3 and 4 of this report.



Compliance

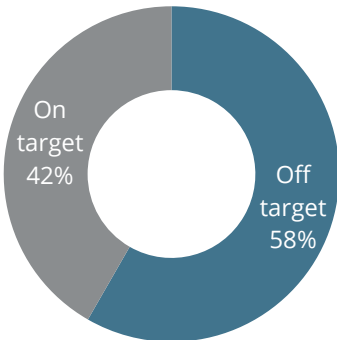
We measure and record compliance based on the methodology for reporting Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs) to the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH). The TSM rationale is that for a complaint to be recorded as being compliant with the Code requirements, we must have been compliant with both a) the acknowledgement within five working days, and b) response to the complainant within ten working days (Stage 1) and twenty working days (Stage 2). This is illustrated below.

Compliance at a)		Compliance at b)		Recorded compliance
Compliant	+	Non-compliant	=	Non-compliant
Non-compliant	+	Non-compliant	=	Non-compliant
Non-compliant	+	Compliant	=	Non-compliant
Compliant	+	Compliant	=	Compliant

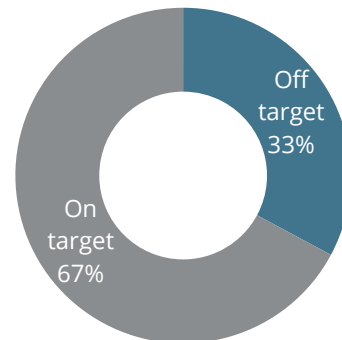
Across the organisation, the target for responses within compliance is 100%.

As at 31 March 2023, we were not compliant with responding within our policy response times in 58% of Stage 1 and 33% of Stage 2 complaints.

Compliance rates 2023/24
(Stage 1)



Compliance rates 2023/
(Stage 2)



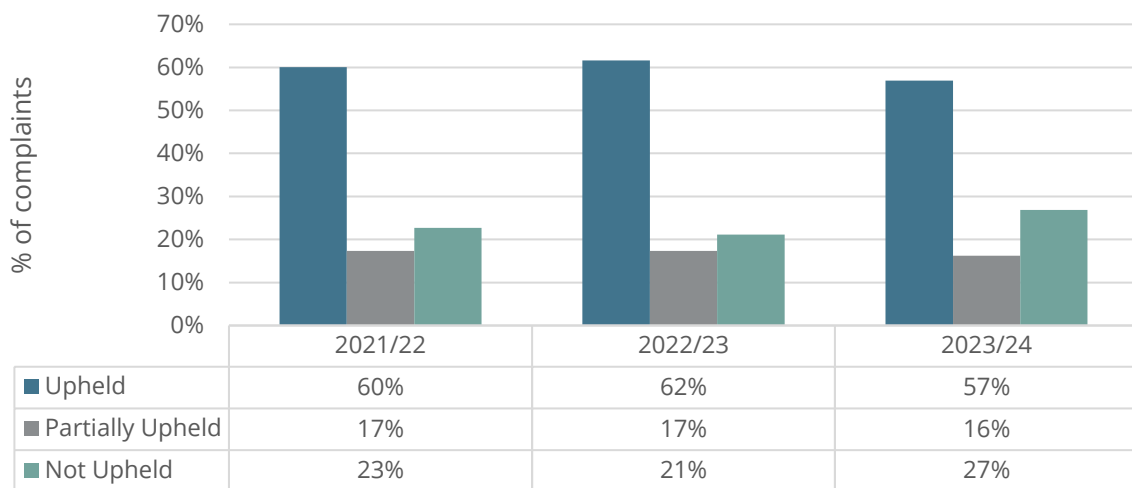
The data suggests a blend of reasons for these delays with the main issue being service areas not responding back or resolving queries quickly enough and delays in the administration of our complaints process also being a problem.

Complaint outcomes

As the complaint case concludes, the outcome can be to uphold, partially uphold or not uphold.

Over the course of the year, we fully upheld 57% of complaints. By comparison, we upheld 62% of complaints in 2022/23 and 60% in 2021/22.

Complaint outcomes as % of all complaints 2021/24



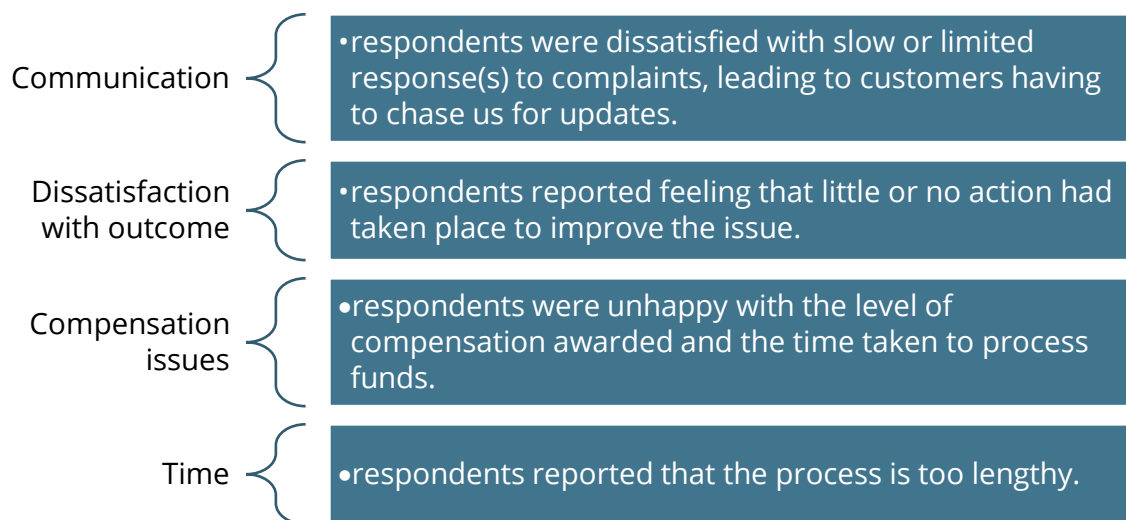
In 2023/24 complaints relating to repair or property related issues were more frequently upheld when compared to other service areas.

Customer insights

Upon completion of a complaints process, we invite customers to complete a satisfaction survey. Over the course of 2023/24, 434 customers took up the opportunity to provide feedback.

- 74% of respondents were either satisfied or very satisfied with the way in which we handled their complaint.
- 43% of respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with the outcome of their complaint, with 34% dissatisfied.
- 60% felt that they were satisfied or very satisfied with how easy we made it for them to complain.
- Only half of respondents completed the Net Promoter Score (NPS) question, how likely is it that you would recommend this company to a friend or colleague? The NPS was -20.

These results clearly show that we have a long way to go in improving customer satisfaction with complaint handling. The main dissatisfaction drivers were:



Compensation

Over the course of the 2022/23 financial year, we reached agreement with customers to pay £212,004 in compensation. The vast majority was paid in respect of Property and Repair complaints (84%), with Customer complaints making up 16%.

Housing Ombudsman determinations

75 cases were determined by the Ombudsman during 2023/24, which represents a 127% increase on the 33 cases determined during 2022/23.

In summary, when reviewing a case, the Ombudsman may make one or more of the following main determinations:

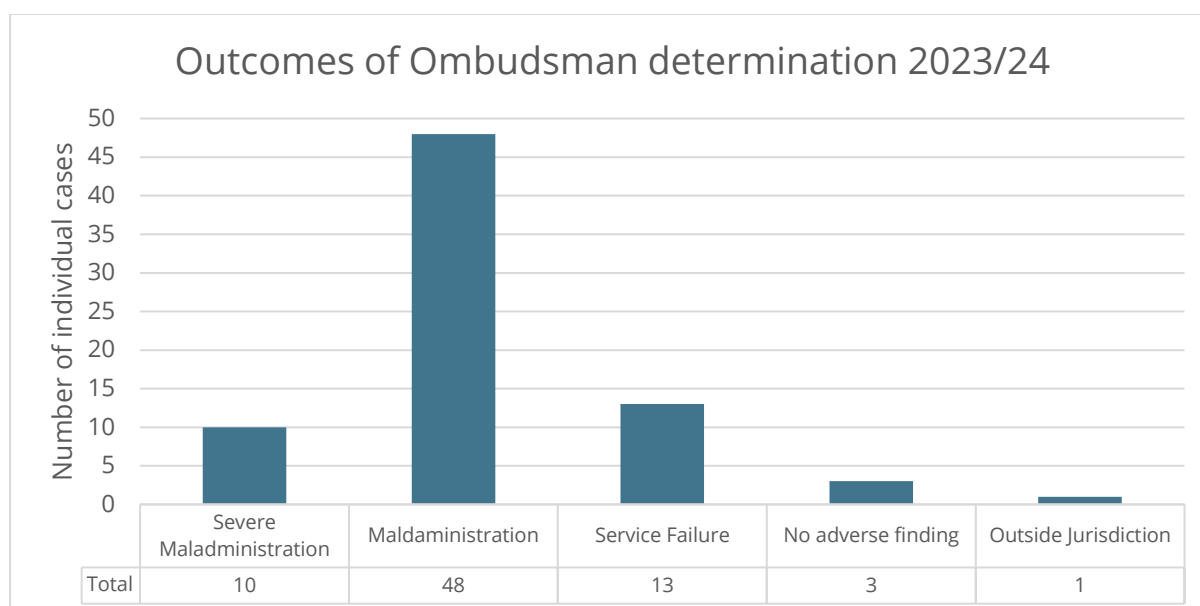
- **Maladministration** – where we, for example, have failed to comply with our legal obligations, our policies and procedures or unreasonably delayed in dealing with the matter. This could be a finding of **service failure, maladministration**

or **severe maladministration**, depending on the seriousness of the failure and the impact on the resident.

- **No Maladministration** – where the landlord is found to have acted appropriately.
- **Outside Jurisdiction** – where the Ombudsman did not have the authority to investigate. This could be for a variety of reasons including: the complaint had not been made within a reasonable timescale; the complaint did not meet the conditions of the Housing Ombudsman Scheme; or the matter was more appropriately dealt with by the courts, a tribunal, another complaint handling body or regulator.

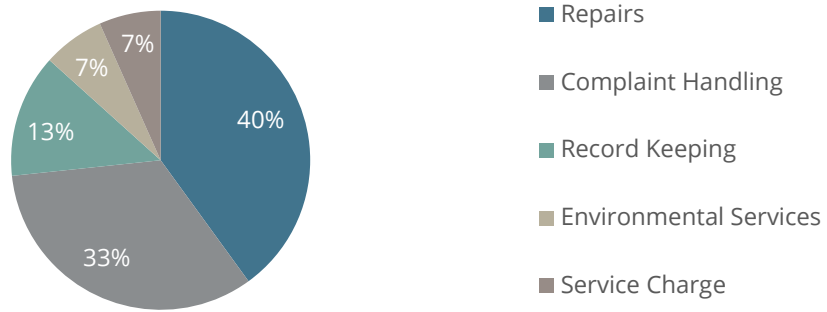
A single case can receive multiple determinations, so the total number of determinations is not always equal to the number of cases determined.

In 2023/24, adverse case determinations were: 10 severe maladministration, 48 maladministration, and 13 service failure. We had 4 cases with no adverse findings, and one case which was determined to be outside of the Ombudsman’s jurisdiction.



Focusing on the 10 cases where the Ombudsman found severe maladministration, there were 15 individual determinations of severe maladministration. Serious failings with how we managed repairs, and how we handled the complaints process accounted for over two thirds of the determinations with a small number on record keeping, Environmental Services and Service Charges.

Reason for severe maladministration determinations 2023/24



Section 3: findings of non-compliance with the Code by the Ombudsman

Complaint Handling Failure Orders (CHFOs)

We were originally issued with eight CHFOs in 2023/24, however the Ombudsman overturned / rescinded four of these following our request for a review of the decision to issue the CHFO. We complied with the remaining four CHFOs issued:

- One related to Gas and was as a result of delays in receiving the relevant information from the function.
- One related to Responsive Repairs (London) and was as a result of delays in sending the Stage 2 response when requested by the Ombudsman.
- One related to Leasehold and our delay in providing information which confirmed compliance with orders from the Ombudsman. This was found to have been caused by staff absence over the summer holidays.
- One related to Complaint Handling, and delays with our issuing of a complaint response within a reasonable timeframe.

Complaint handling maladministration

In addition to CHFOs, we were also issued with adverse determinations relating to our complaint handling.

As explained in Section 2, in 2023/24, we received 75 case determinations from the Ombudsman. Of these, 38 (51%) included an element of complaint handling maladministration. Of these, 5 cases were determined as severe maladministration which represents half of all severe maladministration determinations received all year.

A summary of the findings of the selection of determinations is included below, together with some context of the steps we have taken and continue to take to improve our service to customers.

Findings of the Ombudsman	Steps we have taken
Issues with the timescale of response.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have made changes to the way in which we administer our complaints and manage complaint cases with everything now being managed by one system, removing the need for colleagues to rely on emails to resolve issues. • We have also introduced further training across our organisation so that more Senior Managers can support in Stage 2 complaints.
Not recognising correspondence with a resident as a formal complaint.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training materials for our contact centre and complaints handling staff has been updated and improved. • We have updated our policy and procedure to emphasise the importance of keeping the

	<p>definition of a complaint at the forefront of minds.</p>
<p>Lack of evidence within the complaint response which evidences the conclusions reached.</p> <p>Complaint responses not fully responding to all points raised.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have updated our template letters to provide more guidance to handlers. • We have updated training materials as well as making the policy and procedure more clear about what a complaint response should include. • We have set up a Resident Complaint Quality Assurance group – whose role is to scrutinise anonymised complaint letters. Their feedback drives changes to templates and training.
<p>Failure to respond fully or at all to Ombudsman requests for information and documentation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have set up a dedicated email inbox for all Ombudsman casework to avoid requests going to individual caseworkers leading to delays in responses. • The Complaints & Resolution team has been restructured to divide responsibilities more clearly between the complaint handling stages, and to reduce the risk of single points of failure. • We have launched a “Making Every Contact Count” campaign which will focus on improvements to how and when colleagues update systems following all contact with customers. • All documentation relating to the complaint is now held in one place within our system as a result of new workflows.
<p>Failure to monitor complaint response to resolution.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Now that the entire complaints workflow is on our system, we have introduced dashboards to allow the caseworkers, their managers, and complaints champions visibility of their caseload to monitor to resolution.
<p>Failure to adequately compensate the complainant.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Compensation Policy has been updated and is published on our website. We have simplified some aspects of how we decide compensation amounts and clarified a number of areas to reduce confusion and aid understanding.

Section 4: service improvements made as a result of learning from complaints

This section includes the action we have taken following the Ombudsman’s annual report, and the actions we have taken following any other relevant reports or publications produced by the Ombudsman in relation to our work.

At the time of completing this report, the Ombudsman has not yet published their 2023/24 annual report on our performance. Based on the [2022/23 report](#), our identification as a [landlord with a high maladministration rate in 2022/23](#), and our own ongoing review of our complaint handling performance, we have a number of initiatives underway to improve customer outcomes.

Complaint reason	Service improvement actioned
Length of time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We have redesigned our senior staffing structure to drive improvements within Property and Customer. We have recruited an additional two complaints caseworkers and implemented a new complaint handling system and process which has reduced reliance on email correspondence between systems.
Communication failures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We have launched a campaign internally to emphasise the importance of recording all contact with customers, so that they only need to tell us their story once and enable us to improve resolution of customer queries at first point of contact. Phase 1 has launched and future phases have been incorporated into our Voluntary Undertaking with the Regulator of Social Housing.
Standard of work / Missed appointments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We have piloted a Service Recovery service within responsive repairs to proactively identify customers where their has been an issue and seek to rectify it as quickly as possible. In the first three months of the pilot, the team successfully resolved 169 of 175 issues for customers. Due the success of the pilot, we have taken the decision to make this service a permanent part of our service offer.
Not value for money	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In response to customer feedback, as well as being part of our Voluntary Undertaking with the Regulator of Social Housing, we have started a comprehensive review of how we set and reconcile service charges, and also how we communicate that to customers.
Getting to right person	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We are in the process of upgrading our telephone system, so that it is easier to get in touch with the right person. We have also expanded our capacity to support customers contacting us through online chat.