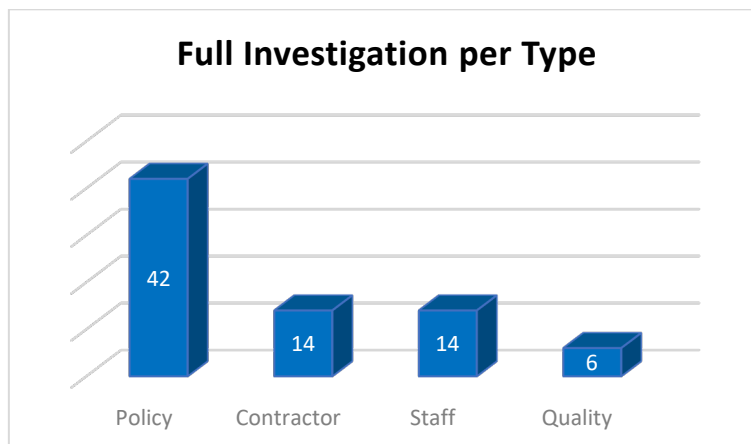
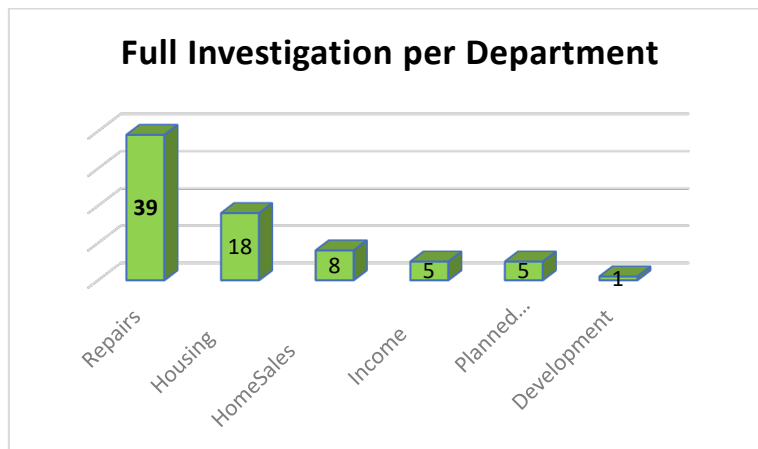
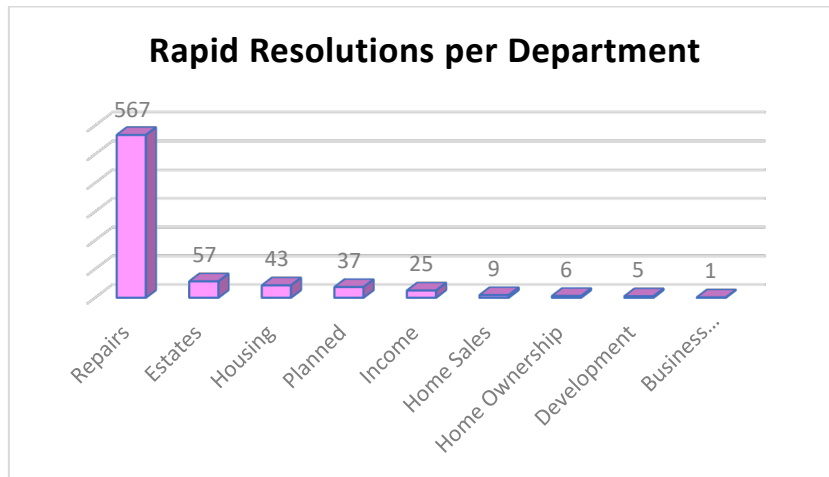
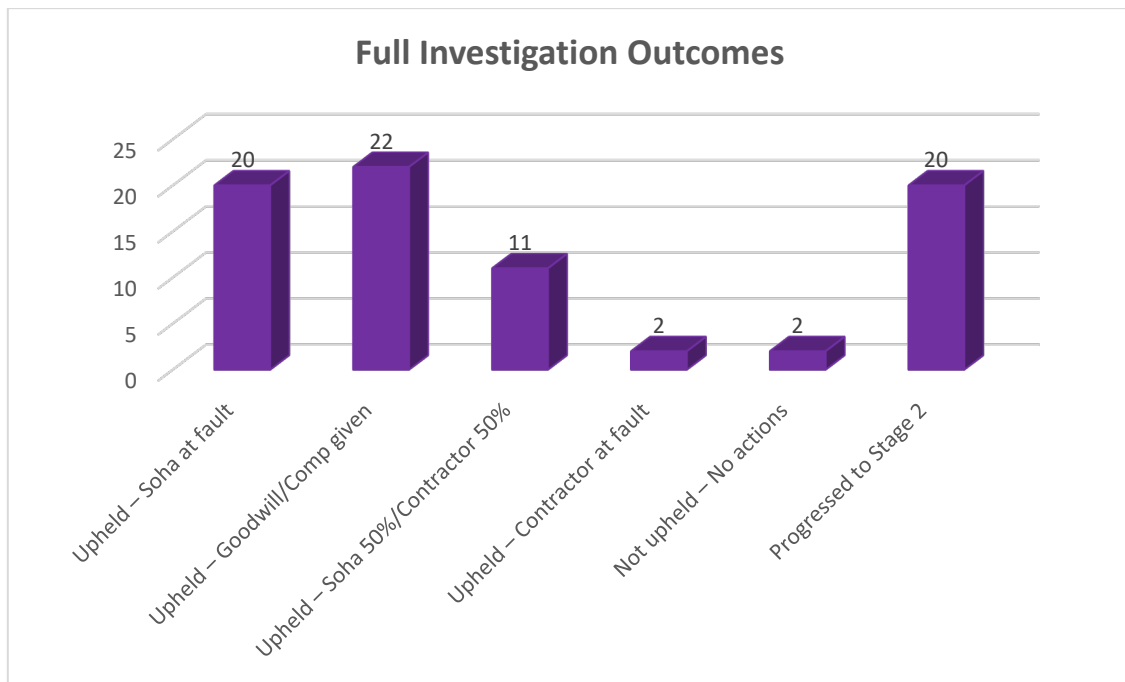


Complaints Performance Report – 2023/24

A summary of all formal complaints received between 01/04/23 to 31/03/24 including figures from the previous year as a comparison.

Year	2023/24 (12 months)	2022/23 (12 months)
Number of complaints opened	826	501
Stage 1 – Rapid Responses	750	450
Stage 1 – Full Investigations	76	51





Overview of Stage 1 complaints

In 2023/24 we saw a significant increase in both categories of complaints, with Rapid Responses increasing by 325 from the previous year and Full Investigations increasing by 25 from 2022/23. This is due to both internal and external factors. Internal factors include greater awareness of complaint handling by staff and having workflows within the housing management system to enable easy logging of Rapid Resolutions. Within Soha we have clear guidance to our residents on how to make a complaint with many routes available to residents making it easier for them to make a complaint. External factors are being seen sector wide, with residents having a greater understanding of how to raise complaints. Since the pandemic, overall satisfaction has been falling in the sector along with an increase demand for services, in part due to our residents facing cost of living challenges and expectations changing due to government campaigns and press coverage on damp and mould. This has mainly resulted in pressures seen in delivering our repairs services, with the majority of the complaints falling in this area. As an organisation we welcome complaints and see this as an opportunity to communicate with our residents to address any concerns and also to identify themes where we could improve our services.

Below is a summary of themes per department.

Responsive Repairs

The largest number of complaints we receive are regarding repairs, which is comparable with last year's data. Repair complaints accounted for 76% of all complaints, with 44% of repair complaints concerning contractor performance. The main themes were quality of work, communication and missed appointments. Complaints regarding staff accounted for 8% of complaints and were mainly concerning lack of communication and progress of repairs. Under policy with 5% of cases, residents were dissatisfied with length of time to resolve damp and mould and DFG cases, along with dissatisfaction with decisions made by Soha on work to be carried out. Finally 19% of cases were classed under Rapid Resolutions and were a mixture of the above. Going forward improved classification in our workflow will allow us to drill down further on issues when reporting. The complaints team have been working closely with the Repairs Team and attending contractor meetings, so we can feedback issues directly.

Housing/Lettings

Only 6% of all complaints are concerning issues related to Housing, with those regarding staff accounting for 49% of those complaints. Main themes include communication with residents, which is to be expected when discussing difficult areas such as ASB and allocations. Under Policy and decisions made regarding tenancies or resident's home and communities accounted for 40% of these complaints. The remaining complaints were classed under Rapid Resolution and represented a mixture of the complaints received. The overarching themes or sentiment tells us that there is an expectation from residents that we have powers to resolve ASB or housing allocations decisions, which unfortunately are not always available to us. Continued communication with our residents as to what we can and cannot do is ongoing.

Estates

Complaints concerning management of Estates accounted for 8% of all complaints with contractor performance making up 49% of these complaints. Main themes identified are resident's alleging that contractors are not performing duties that residents are paying for or they do not feel that the price they pay for services is representative of the service they receive. Under staff complaints, residents raise issues over communication and progress of complaints. Under other categories, issues mainly centre on contractor performance. We see a correlation in periods when service charges are increased and an increase in complaints regarding communal areas.

Income

Complaints have remained steady for rent increases and rent arrears at 3% of all complaints, which can be attributed to higher than before increases in rent and service charges due to external factors such as cost of living and inflation. The majority of the complaints centre of allegations made against staff communications. Due to the enforcement nature of the role, we understand that difficult conversations and communications are not often well received and we are continually improving the tone and approach of communications when concerning rent and arrears.

Planned Maintenance

Complaints under Planned have increased as a percentage from last year with it accounting for 5% of all complaints received with 40% of those concerning contractor performance with the quality of work and communication from contractors being the main themes. These issues are also representative of themes in other classifications. Most of these complaints have been resolved under our Rapid Resolutions.

Home Sales and Ownership

Shared ownership and leasehold residents make up 2% of our complaints and cover areas such as expectations on responsibility for repairs, service charges and unwanted behaviour.

Development

Complaints classified under Development are very low with less than 1% attributed to this area. Nearly all concern issues with developers and defects. Due to issues being raised in the defect period, we liaise with developers on behalf of our residents to reach a resolution for them.

Key Trends

- We are seeing an increase in damp and mould complaints with time taking to resolve the issues due to recording 755 cases. This is a sector wide trend with greater resident awareness due to Awaab's law. We are addressing this by recruiting a new Damp and Mould Technical Officer, having a clear process for dealing with cases and onboarding additional contractors to deal with volume of jobs.
- Time taken to carry out repairs and quality of work continue to a large percentage of our complaints. We have seen an increase in service requests for repairs and at some points of the year have had a significant backlog of jobs. We have addressed this by working closely with our contractors and devising work plans to reduce the backlog.
- We have seen complaints across most departments regarding communication with staff or communications sent by Soha. Due to the nature of the sector and the significant part housing plays in our resident's lives, there can be issues and difficult conversations to be had. We have a culture of respect towards our residents and continually embed this culture, however, we are currently reviewing our correspondence with residents to ensure the tone is supportive and clear.
- Due to inflation and increased costs for providing services, we have seen complaints regarding service charges increase, with many resident's seeing a significant rise in their service charges. Due to rules we have to pass on the exact costs to residents and cannot uphold these complaints regarding increases. However, we try and explain clearly the reasons for these costs and can signpost residents to our tenancy support or external organisations.
- We have had a number of complaints regarding our Housing Proactive service charges, that are applied to certain tenancies for supported living for older people. Some of our resident's have told us they do not use the service and do not wish to pay for it. We have not upheld these complaints as the service comes with the property and not the individual residents and this is made clear when they sign up. We have since obtained legal advice as a precaution and are confident in our position.

Learning from Complaints

Policy Change to Home Sales

We received a complaint in February 2024 from a shared owner who was unhappy that we had introduced a resale service. She felt that it would reduce the chance of her selling her shared ownership property if she had to market it through us, rather than go direct to an estate agent. Our initial Stage 1 response set out the reasons why we felt it was a benefit, rather than a disadvantage but the resident replied with additional concerns, most particularly that we did not advertise on Rightmove (the primary property marketing website) and neither did we use For Sale boards, which she felt helped greatly when trying to sell.

We had only recently set up the service and had considered but held off from using these marketing tools. Our complainant's feedback, in addition to other information, led us to alter our process to include both Rightmove and For Sale boards in our marketing strategy. We were able to make these changes promptly and therefore this resident was able to benefit from them. She was delighted with this and successfully sold her property through us.

Compensation Guidance

Through monitoring of stage 1 cases escalating to a stage 2 reviews we identified 5 cases where complainants were offered increase compensation levels or goodwill gestures by the stage 2 panel therefore not upholding the original response. This caused concern from staff that they were not supported in their decision making. In addition this was sending inconsistent messages to our residents. We brought this issue to the Complaint Working Group and asked them to review two of the cases. Recommendations from the group were a revision of our current compensation policy to align with the Housing Ombudsman matrix. In addition staff would be given clear guidance on what compensation can be offered and for different scenarios. This work is ongoing.

Ways of working changes to contractor management

In the winter of 22/23 we noted a rise in complaints with our heating contractors, with issues taking too long to resolve. We met with our contractors and agreed that if a resident raised issues regarding their heating repairs 3 times in a 6 month period, this job would be escalated to a Lead Engineer to resolve. This has proved effective and we have seen a decline in complaints for this contractor this winter. In addition the Complaints Officer attends contractor meetings to build relationships and highlight any issues.

Voids Guidance

We have a case where a resident expressed an urgent request to move into a void property due to personal circumstances, despite being advised that the property was not ready. To accommodate the applicant we agreed to the move, despite there being outstanding repairs to be done and did not adhere to our Void Policy. This then resulted in a complaint from the resident as to the safety and quality of the property and work not being completed. The case was progressed to stage 2 of our complaints process with a large compensation amount being awarded and it then proceeded to the Housing Ombudsman, with decision pending. It was agreed following this complaint to not deviate from the Void Policy and to not allow residents to move into properties until they reach the voids standard.

Exclusions

- In April 2023 we advised a resident that we would not be escalating their stage 1 complaint regarding housing charges to a stage 2 as the stage 1 response was based on signed agreements within their tenancy. The resident was informed that a stage 2 review would not overturn this decision and the next route available to them would be to contact the Housing Ombudsman.

With the introduction of the new complaint handling code from the Housing Ombudsman and our revised policy, we would not make this decision again and would give the resident the option to escalate to a stage 2 review.

- In August 2023 a resident complained regarding an estate and access issue. The stage 1 decision was based on legal advice. The resident expressed a wish to escalate this complaint to a stage 2 review, however, on advice from the Housing Ombudsman we had the option of bypassing our stage 2 review if we did not believe the panel would deviate from legal advice. We advised the resident that there would be no benefit in escalating to stage 2 following legal advice and the next route available to them would be to contact the Housing Ombudsman. We have since submitted an information request to the Housing Ombudsman and awaiting their decision.

Timescales

During 2023/24 we responded to 96% of stage 1 complaints within timescales outlined in our policy. Under stage 2 we responded to 100% of stage 2 timescales. Going forward we have improved workflows and systems in place to ensure we are always meeting timescales and are compliant with the code.

Overview of Stage 2 complaints

Year	2023/24 (12 months)	2022/23 (12 months)
Stage 2 Reviews heard	20	2
Stage 1 Response upheld	12	Information not available
Stage 1 Response not upheld	2	Information not available
Stage 1 Response partially upheld	4	Information not available
Decision Pending	2	Information not available

Key trends – stage 2

- We are seeing a large increase in resident's escalating to stage 2 when they remain dissatisfied with our stage 1 response and levels of compensation. This is in part due to residents being aware of our complaint process and being able to escalate to a stage 2 review easily.
- We have had two stage 2 reviews concerning the housing service charges, with residents stating that they do not use the service and unhappy they are being charged. We advised residents that this service is part of their tenancy and comes with their type of property and this was made clear in their tenancy agreement and at sign up. These stage 1 responses were upheld by the stage 2 panel due to the tenancy agreement being a legal document. We have since obtained additional legal advice, which has confirmed our decision was correct.
- In 5 stage 2 reviews, compensation was awarded or the levels increased, or remedies were offered to the resident not previously offered.
- The majority of stage 1 responses were upheld by the stage 2 review panel, with us being able to evidence our following of policies and procedures.

Compensation

A total of **£16,646** compensation has been awarded to our residents over the last year. This has covered a variety of complaints. Below are some examples of where compensation has been awarded:

- Following a stage 2 panel hearing, the panel awarded a resident 2 months' rent of £1361 for delays in completing repairs.
- Following leaks at an Extra Care Scheme each resident was awarded between £50 and £125 totalling £2025.
- At the same scheme £2378 was awarded to a resident for leaks to their property for damage to items and inconvenience.
- 22 payments of £40 were paid to residents for missed appointments, which is reimbursed by contractors.
- £731 was awarded to a resident following a stage 2 review following delays in repairs.

Housing Ombudsman Referrals

We have 5 pending cases with the Housing Ombudsman with information requests submitted in 3 of the cases awaiting outcomes.

Further Updates from 2023/24

- This year saw us get ready for the new Complaint Handling Code from the Housing Ombudsman, revising and aligning our Complaint Policy to ensure that we are compliant.
- Our team expanded from one Complaint Officer to two Complaints Officers with new management of the team.
- The Complaints Team have attended external training sessions to expand knowledge and skills.
- The Complaints Team have become more visible within the organisation and attended board and resident events to raise awareness of the team and how we can assist residents and staff.
- We created new workflows within our housing management system to ensure we are compliant with the code and meet the timescales for responses.
- We created templates for complaint handling communications to ensure we are compliant and adopt the correct tone.
- We have published the complaint form on our website to make complaint reporting more accessible for our residents.
- We focused on changes within the Complaint Working Group to adopt a lessons learnt approach.
- Staff training took place for all front line teams and case managers on complaint handling and the new workflows. Further online training was made available for staff with guides and videos produced on complaint handling.
- We recruited a board member to act as Member Responsible for Complaints.
- We changed the stage 2 review panel make up to accommodate the increase in stage 2s and to ensure we are using operational knowledge.
- We created a process whereby the Complaint Manager checks all stage 1 and 2 responses to ensure they are compliant, prior to being sent.
- Where there is a disparity between the stage 1 response and stage 2 review decision, this is reviewed by a member of the SLT team to see what lessons we can learn.
- We have updated the Unreasonable Behaviour Policy to better support staff in managing complaints and challenging situations and to set out expectations of behaviour from residents.

Plans for 2024/25

- Compensation policy to be revised to align with Housing Ombudsman's matrix and to offer better guidance to staff.
- Review of stage 2 panel make up to accommodate the increase in volume of stage 2's and to ensure the remit of the panel is not overreached.
- External training sessions provided for stage 1 case managers and stage 2 review panel members, to cover effective stage 1 investigations and stage 2 panel reviews. This is scheduled to take place in July 2024.
- Production of an updated Complaint Leaflet for residents in regular and Easy Read format.
- Redesign workflows for stage 2 within our housing management system.
- Targets set to improve quality of decision making and responses in stage 1, with 90% of responses upheld in stage 2 reviews.
- Introduce a panel to arbitrate on compensation decisions, when a stage 2 review is not appropriate or requested.

Jo Worth, Complaints Manager
May 2024

Board Meeting 23rd May 2024

The board discussed the annual self-assessment and complaints report for 23/24, noting the contents and welcoming the learning and progress made in complaints. The meeting approved the report and self-assessment.