

# annual complaints performance and service improvement report

2023-2024

## Introduction

This report provides an update on believe housing's complaint handling performance over the last financial year and highlights the changes we have made as a result of the learnings from complaints.

Our purpose is to improve the lives of our customers by providing healthy, affordable homes and enhancing our communities. Complaints help us do this by providing a way of learning and giving us an opportunity to put things right in a fair and reasonable way for our customers.

This report will cover:

- an update on the recent changes to the Housing Ombudsman (HO) Code
- our self-assessment against that code
- an overview of the complaints we have received
- a summary of the complaints we have not accepted and the reasons behind this
- an overview of the determinations we have received from the HO
- some of the changes we are implementing to improve our complaints process
- the learnings we have embedded from complaints over the past year.

## Complaint Handling Code 2024

The Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 (the Act) empowered the Housing Ombudsman to issue a code of practice about the procedures members of the scheme should have in place for considering complaints.

It also placed a duty on the Ombudsman to monitor compliance with a code of practice that it has issued.

The Code clarifies the definition of a complaint, how complaints can be made, the process that should be used and the governance structure around complaints. The code also directs believe housing to produce this report and demonstrate compliance with the code. The [Complaint Handling Code](#) became statutory on 1 April 2024.

## Self-assessment

A detailed self-assessment against the Complaint Handling Code can be found on [our website's complaints page](#). In summary, this shows that we are compliant with the Code. Some of the key changes made since our last published assessment in September 2023 are:

- the appointment of Monica Burns as the Member Responsible for Complaints to ensure a positive complaints-handling culture
- Louise Taylor confirmed as the Senior Person Responsible for Complaints to assess any themes or trends to identify potential issues, risks, or policies and procedures that require revision
- a training package being rolled out for all believe housing colleagues to recognise when a complaint is being made and how it should be handled.

Our Complaints Policy has also been revised to reflect these changes and the new Code.

## Complaints overview

Over the course of the last financial year, believe housing logged 255 complaints.

Of these, 225 were Stage 1 Complaints and 30 were Stage 2.

The table below breaks down complaints by area:

Stage 1 complaints logged 2023/24		
Responsive repairs	130	57.8%
Complaint handling	21	9.3%
Aids and adaptations	17	7.6%
Planned works	15	6.7%
Tenancy management	9	4.0%
Voids	9	4.0%
Asbestos	5	2.2%
Antisocial behaviour	5	2.2%
New build	4	1.8%
Rent	4	1.8%
Building safety	2	0.9%
Chimney	1	0.4%
Electrical service	1	0.4%
Gas service	1	0.4%
Estate management	1	0.4%

Stage 2 complaints logged 2023/24		
Responsive repairs	10	33.3%
Complaint handling	3	10.0%
Planned works	3	10.0%
Tenancy management	3	10.0%
Voids	3	10.0%
Aids and adaptations	2	6.7%
Asbestos	2	6.7%
New build	2	6.7%
Antisocial behaviour	1	3.3%
Rent	1	3.3%

Of the complaints closed, 68% of Stage 1 complaints were completed within 10 days, and 67% of Stage 2 complaints were completed in 20 days against a corporate target of 85%.

Timelines for completing complaints have varied significantly over the year, particularly early in the reporting year and over the winter due to staffing issues.

In total, we paid £51,919 in compensation over the course of the year.

According to our Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSM), an annual survey across our customers, 36% were satisfied with our approach to handling complaints.

However, some of those answering the TSM survey had not made a complaint that year, so we also specifically surveyed customers after they had made a complaint to fully understand their views of our complaint handling.

Of those surveyed after making a complaint, 58% were satisfied with our handling of Stage 1 complaints, and 73% were satisfied with our handling of Stage 2 complaints. Negative comments were predominantly focused on the time taken to respond to a complaint while positive comments highlighted the Insight Team's passion for listening to customers and attempting to resolve their issues.

We did note that in January 2024 in particular there were some complaints where we did not resolve these within the 20 or 40 working days and extended these without specifically agreeing this with the customer; and instances where we did not acknowledge within five working days.

This meant our overall performance was 85% for Stage 1s completed within the timelines set out in the Code. We recognised that this fell outside of the requirements and reported this through to our Board. We have since put systems in place to ensure that this does not happen again.

### **Summary of complaints believe housing has not accepted**

All complaints are acknowledged within five working days of them being raised. If a complaint is not accepted, the Insight Team provides an explanation to the customer setting out the reasons and what actions believe housing is taking to resolve the issues raised. Just because issues are not accepted as a complaint, does not mean they are ignored.

Last year, there were 683 issues raised that we did not accept as complaints. The vast majority of these were triaged as service requests due to being issues that had not previously been raised to believe housing. These were passed to the relevant service areas for resolution and so not dealt with under our complaints policy.

The remainder were issues that had already been raised and believe housing had exhausted the complaints process with no new information being provided. We recognise, however, that there may have been complaints we should have dealt with last year but refused on the grounds that we believed they were service requests.

We strengthened our processes for triaging complaints in March 2024 to include Team Leader oversight to ensure all issues raised to us that must be dealt with as a complaint are done so. This has contributed to an overall increase in complaint numbers.

In addition, 16 Stage 2 complaints were refused under our previous Complaints Policy. This was because there were no new grounds to escalate the complaint, or the customer couldn't tell us why they wanted to escalate the complaint to Stage 2 and/or they couldn't tell us the resolution they were seeking<sup>1</sup>.

### **Housing Ombudsman determinations**

We received a Landlord Performance Report from the Housing Ombudsman for 2022/23 due to receiving five determinations that year.

This showed that our rate of maladministration was higher than average, at 64%, compared to the average of 55%.

We have used each investigation report to reflect and make sure that we are learning from these cases to inform future complaints investigations.

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<sup>1</sup> From the 1 April 2024, believe housing will accept all Stage 2 requests, regardless of whether reasons are given or not, in line with the new Code.

believe housing received the following Housing Ombudsman determinations in 2023/24. Four determinations found shortfalls in our actions:

- One found maladministration in our handling of an antisocial behaviour case and service failures in how we dealt with reports of littering and our complaint handling.
- One found maladministration in our handling of repairs and service failure in respect of the condition of the property at the start of the customers tenancy.
- One found maladministration for our handling of major works in a customer's home and service failure in our response to reports of damage to their property.
- One found maladministration for our complaint handling but was satisfied with the handling of the customer's request for a reimbursement.
- Two other determinations found no failures with our approach or actions.
- In addition, 10 cases were referred to the Housing Ombudsman over the course of last year and remain under assessment.

All recommendations made by the HO in these cases were fully implemented.

### **Service improvements**

A significant number of improvements have been initiated or are being implemented to improve our complaints handling over the past year.

To improve our response time to complaints and bring it into line with the HO Code, believe housing has recruited an additional Senior Complaint Resolution Officer and two additional Admin Assistants.

To reduce staff turnover and increase corporate knowledge, we have elevated the roles of the Resolution Officers to better reflect the level of responsibility and complexity they deal with.

We also worked very hard in the last quarter to fully embed a resolution approach to complaints, which focused on putting things right for the customer and providing organisational learnings in line with the HO principles of acting fairly, putting things right and learning from outcomes.

In preparation for the new statutory Complaint Handling Code, the Complaints Team has also conducted training with sector specialists to ensure the Code is fully understood.

We have introduced a 'Lessons Loop' process where the Senior Leadership Team is briefed in detail on complaint trends and areas of focus for believe housing are identified.

This ensures lessons are not simply identified but learnt, acted upon and measures are put in place to drive improvement.

Over the coming year, the Complaints Team is also undergoing a business transformation programme called 'Simple Done Right', and implementing a new case management system to ensure they have the best tools, training, and procedures possible. **Learnings from complaints**

As a result of complaints that we have received, and using the Spotlight reports produced by the HO, we have conducted a number of reviews into our policies and procedures to improve our service to our customers.

These include:

- **Damp and mould.** Using feedback from complaints, alongside government guidance and HO Spotlight reports, we have continued to develop our approach to damp and mould. Most recently, this has seen our policy updated to reflect how we capture vulnerability information when a customer first reports potential damp and prioritise their survey on this basis.
- **Antisocial behaviour (ASB) training.** As a result of the maladministration in our handling of an ASB case, all colleagues involved with dealing with ASB were provided with additional training in conducting ASB case reviews, risk assessments and action planning. All Complaints Team members also conducted training in ASB case reviews to ensure they properly understood the policies in this area.
- **Major works.** As a result of the maladministration in our handling of major works at a customer's home, believe housing is developing a Major Works Policy.
- **Asbestos.** We take the safety of our customers very seriously and have measures in place to make sure that people are protected from the risks around asbestos in their homes. However, in the last year we received a small number of complaints that demonstrated we could have communicated more effectively about our policy and procedures to give customers more reassurance. As a result, we are reviewing our Asbestos Policy, developing additional training for frontline colleagues to better communicate with customers about asbestos, and developing a communications pack on asbestos to include frequently asked questions and points of contact.
- **Record management.** As highlighted by a recent HO Spotlight report, Record Management across the sector needs improving. We are conducting a series of training sessions across the organisation, and particularly with frontline colleagues to address this. Our business transformation programme and the adoption of new IT software will also improve our record-keeping.
- **Compensation Policy.** The HO has provided guidance on expectations around what compensation is to be paid for and the levels at which it should be set. We have updated our Compensation Policy to reflect this direction.
- **Unreasonable Behaviour Policy.** Over the course of last year, a small minority of people were unreasonable in their use of the complaints system; either through being aggressive and abusive, or through unreasonable and persistent levels of contact. A new policy has been written to support the Complaints Team to deal with this rare behaviour, while also ensuring it cannot be used to ignore customers with genuine grievances. This will replace the use of our Person of Interest Policy in these cases.

## **Service Improvement Plan 2024-2025**

This year we will focus on enhancing the improvements we started last year, to help us deliver healthy homes and enhanced communities.

In particular, we will focus on:

- improving the timescales for complaint resolution, aiming to have over 85% of Stage 1 responses within 10 days and Stage 2 responses within 20 days
- increasing customer satisfaction with our complaint handling by focusing on resolution
- embedding a robust 'lessons loop' process, to drive organisational learning using accurate data and customer insight
- embedding our new governance structure for complaints to ensure the customer, frontline colleagues, senior leadership and Board are all able to scrutinise our complaints and our complaint handling culture.

We are also developing a Customer Strategy for believe housing, which will incorporate a number of key areas of learning that we have gained through feedback from complaints and engagement activities more widely, alongside a focus on understanding more about our customers and those people living in their homes.

This will address some of the key themes from the HO Spotlight reports, in particular Attitudes, Respect and Rights – Relationship of Equals.

We will start to publish information about complaints and our wider engagement more regularly during the year to show how we are performing against the timescales set and, importantly, how we are listening to and learning from the complaints we receive.