



# HONEYCOMB GROUP

## Annual Report on Complaints

### Introduction

An annual report on complaints is a requirement of The Regulator's **Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard**. We are expected to have a complaints policy which provides a range of ways for tenants to express a complaint and sets out clear service standards for responding to complaints. We are also required to publish information about the number, nature, and outcome of complaints. We include this in the Annual Report to Tenants.

### **Housing Ombudsman: complaint handling code**

Honeycomb is a member of the Housing Ombudsman Service (the Ombudsman) which is the body which investigates social tenants' complaints when they are not resolved internally. The Housing Ombudsman published an updated complaint handling code in April 2022 which set out its expanded expectations of all landlords who are members of the Ombudsman's scheme.

This code was issued under the Ombudsman's new powers in the revised Housing Ombudsman Scheme. The code sets out required practice for the sector with the expectation that landlords respond to complaints effectively and fairly. One of the key expectations is that we demonstrate learning in our Annual Report.

### **National Housing Federation Together with Tenants Charter.**

The Charter, which we have adopted in our own **Customer Voice** document, makes a series of commitments which aim to strengthen our relationship with customers.

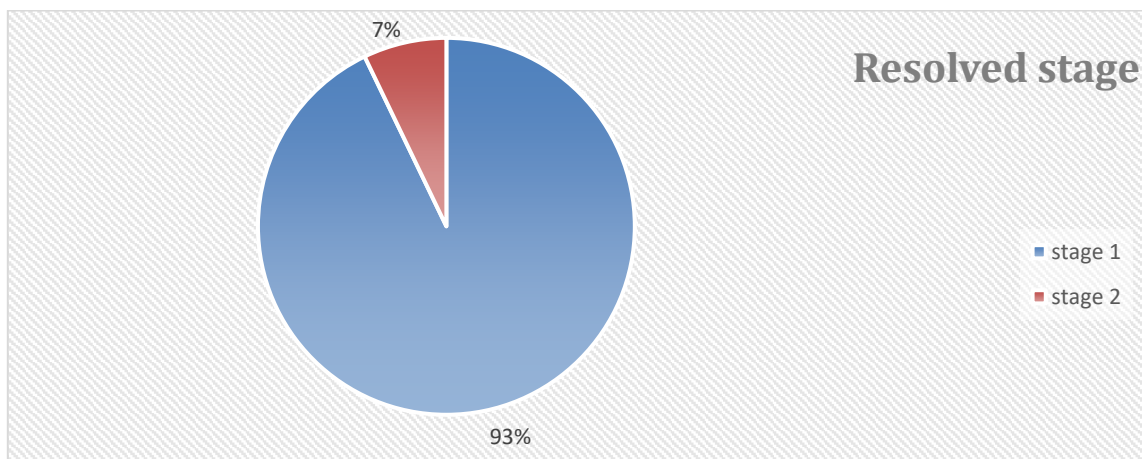
One of our commitments is:

*Communication – Customers will receive clear, accessible, and timely information on the issues that matter to you, including important information about your home and the local community, how we are working to address problems, how we run the organisation and information about performance on key issues.*

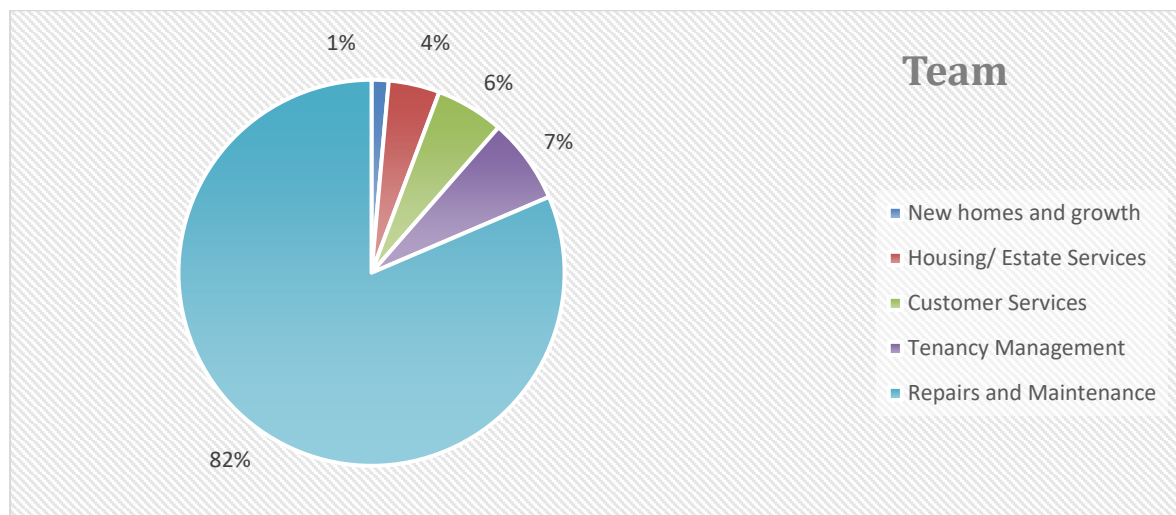
This report will look at our complaint's performance over the last 12 months, highlight key information and look at our aims for 2023 and beyond.

## Performance Summary

The most serious complaints are managed through the formal complaints process. In 2022/23 we closed 70 formal complaints, 65 at Stage 1 and 5 at Stage 2. This compares to 100 in 2021/22. We had one complaint reviewed externally by the Housing Ombudsman who found poor administration in one area of one complaint and required us to pay compensation to the customer.



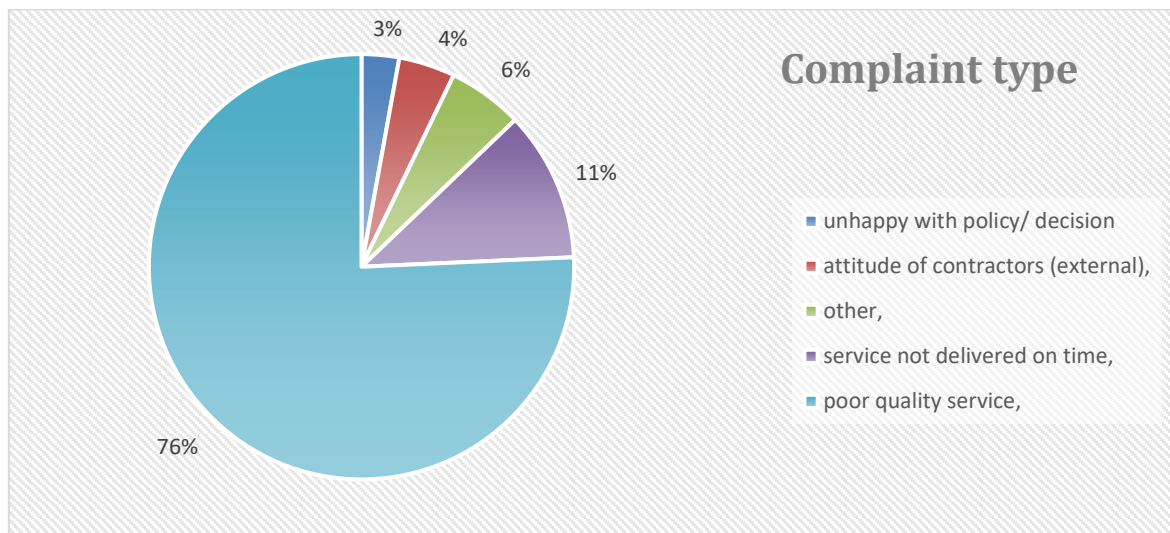
The highest proportion, 81% of complaints made, were about the repairs service. An increase from 2021/22 (74%).



Of the 57 maintenance complaints, 56 were about the responsive repairs service. Most were resolved at the first stage but 3 went to Stage 2. There were several recurring themes which stood out and often formed part of the same complaint:

- Poor communication from the contractor about obtaining parts and, delayed or cancelled visits
- Poor quality of some repairs resulting in repeat calls from customers and return visits
- Time taken to resolve some repairs, particularly issues with leaks, boilers and hot water issues

One complaint was about the gardening service, the complainant was objecting to decisions we had made in line with our service standards/planned maintenance programme. In this case we declined to carry out improvement work in the timeframe they had requested it and the complaint was not upheld.



The other formal complaints covered a range of issues, but one theme could be pulled from them about poor quality communication.

In addition to the formal complaints, we also capture feedback and informal complaints made through the 'Make a Complaint' forms on the websites. Complaints made in this way are reviewed by the Complaints team, who decide how they are to be managed.

Some issues can be resolved with an immediate response back to the customer. Some are referred to other teams to be dealt with outside the complaints process, such as anti-social behaviour (ASB), estate management issues, or gardening. In other cases, the team will confirm a formal complaint with the customer and record it in the formal complaints process.

There were 274 complaints made through the websites (compared to 154 in 2021/22).

Of those, 188 related to dissatisfaction with the repairs service, 62 were referred onto the housing team as ASB or other housing issues including estate management/ allocations and rents.

36 of the website complaints were agreed with customers as formal complaints, 32 of them were repairs related. All the repair's issues raised though the 'Make a Complaint' process reflected similar issues of poor performance by the contractor and frustration with the lack of communication and poor quality of work. Many of these cases were resolved by direct contact and resolution with the customer without the need for the issue to be escalated to a formal complaint.

From a customer perspective, the advantage of this way of registering a complaint on the website is that it is available at any time. As in 2021/22, a third of the website contacts were made outside office hours, in the evenings or at weekends.

In addition to these methods of capturing complaints, all staff are encouraged to use case notes on Journey, our contact management system, to capture all contacts concerning complaints. During 2022/23, 245 contacts were recorded about complaints (compared to 238 in 2021/22), 80 related to formal complaints as recorded above. As we would expect, most customer contact about complaints is by phone and email.

## **Observations**

Although complaints reflect weaker performance in some service areas, there are some important positives to take from the complaints review:

- It is easy for customers to complain when they need to. We do not discourage complaints, and we may encourage them, as a way of capturing the issue to ensure we understand and correct the problem. Consistent reporting of complaints using the website indicates that the method works and is a useful tool for some customers.
- Customers are making more complaints – although they may be dissatisfied at the point of recording the complaint, they also have an expectation that the organisation will respond and deal with these issues. This suggests that they are generally confident that problems will be addressed and sorted out.
- The Journey CRM system is a good tool for recording and monitoring informal complaints so that we are now able to provide reliable statistics on these as well as formal complaints.
- The proportion of complaints resolved at the first stage in the process remained constant at 93%. This suggests Managers were able to resolve complaints effectively without appeals and further reviews being required.

- Our Customer Voice commitment is:  
*We will give you advice and support when things go wrong and a simple route to raise an issue or to make a complaint. We will give you clear timescales setting out when you can expect a response. If you are not satisfied there is a simple appeal process and then an opportunity to appeal to the Housing Ombudsman if you are still unhappy.*

We assess we have made good progress on meeting this commitment.

## **Lessons Learned/ Changes Made**

Once we have captured and dealt with complaints, it is important that we review them to make sure we are learning from them and not repeating our mistakes. We also monitor to identify any trends. This applies whether we uphold the complaint or not.

### **Maintenance Complaints**

One of the main areas of complaint for the service continued to be poor information flows between the Ian Williams hub (control centre) and the Customer Services team leading to delays in providing up to date information to residents. This then resulted in more follow up calls, increasing call waiting times.

Throughout 2022/23 the problems with the maintenance contract continued despite efforts to work with the contractor to put solutions in place. After careful consideration and listening to our residents we agreed with Ian Williams that the current repairs contract will end in August 2023. We will be working hard to secure a new contractor and minimise disruption during the change.

### **Other Complaints**

The following table identifies some of the other lessons learnt and changes made from complaints in the last 12 months.

<b>Lessons Learnt</b>	<b>Changes Made</b>
It is important that we always follow our agreed procedures and that we ensure our partner agencies do too.	We restructured our housing team to have specialised staff to deal with ASB and estate management issues
Importance of ongoing communication with customers to ensure they are kept informed about the issue and progress and what will happen next.	We have increased the amount of information we are sharing with customers about our actions, activities and new staff roles.
Staff need to be more proactive and respond to situations and issues before they escalate.	

## **Other Actions Taken in 2022/23**

We implemented all the actions from the 2021-22 action plan/ Scrutiny review which included:

- Improving the information about our complaints process on our websites
- Amending the 'make a complaint' form to make it more user friendly
- Reviewing the way customers use social media to make complaints to ensure complaints made in this way feed into our complaints process and are treated in the same way as any other complaint.
- Encouraging complaint leads to initiate more direct contact with the customers as early in the complaints process as possible to improve communication about the complaint.

### **Customer Groups**

We set up 2 new customer panels to work on key issues, many of which impact on complaints.

The '**Repairs Panel**' will work alongside key staff and the maintenance contractor to improve and develop the repairs service. The panel will monitor complaints and customer satisfaction. They will advise and support staff on any customer related subjects. They will monitor how well the maintenance contract is working and how it is being managed.

The '**My Home Group**' will review and support the work of the Housing Services Team to develop services for all customers. They will review and assist with the changing and updating of any housing related policies and procedures. The group will work closely with housing officers to improve estate management.

### **Customer Satisfaction Survey**

In September 2022, following consultation, a set of Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs) were issued by the Regulator of Social Housing (regulator), which from April 2023 became a regulatory requirement. In February 2023 we sent out 2553 surveys and had 503 responses

A key section of the survey asked how many people had made a complaint in the previous 12 months and how satisfied they were with the way the complaint was handled, of the 218 people who responded saying they had made a complaint, 47% were dissatisfied with the way their complaint was handled. The biggest issues being the time it took to resolve the complaint and the fact that customers felt they weren't listened to.

## **2023-24 – Next Steps**

- New Maintenance Contract will start in August 2023

- Tenant satisfaction measures – we will be sending our surveys out on a quarterly basis from July 2023; this means we will be able to pick up on issues raised more quickly and to monitor customer satisfaction with the complaints handling process more closely.
- The Repairs Panel will have a key role in overseeing the implementation of the new maintenance contract and ensuring an improved service to customers.