

Meeting: Board meeting July 03, 2024	Authors: Darren Bird - head of housing, customer support and repairs Alex Clark – senior customer complaints specialist
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Subject: Compliments and complaints annual summary report

Purpose

To **inform** the board of compliments and complaints received in the year and to **monitor** performance against management targets and the complaint handling code.

Background

This document provides data and analysis on how Selwood Housing managed complaints during the year 2023/24. It also includes information on disrepair claims, complaint learnings, compliments, and service improvements made to address identified shortcomings.

The Group Operations Director holds overall responsibility, while the Head of Housing & Customer Support ensures the management and internal assurance of these services. To support these responsibilities, the organisation has appointed a customer complaints team tasked with managing the procedure for handling and considering complaints in accordance with our rules. This document assures the board that we manage complaints in line with The Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code.

A copy of the Housing Ombudsman code can be found here: <https://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/landlords-info/complaint-handling-code/the-code-2024/>

Summary

Some of the highlights this year are:

- Overall, complaints increased by 21% year over year, reflecting a sector-wide trend. We welcome complaints as they enable us to improve and build stronger customer relationships.
- We expanded the complaints team during the year to better manage the increased demand.
- Acknowledgement rates maintained at 100% for third year running.
- Response rates within timescale increased from 86% to 92% overall.

Board to note report.

- Implemented 11 service improvements based on the outcomes of our learning process - (see appendix IV for further details).
- Customer complaints forum celebrating its first anniversary with six customers, continues to strengthen our complaint handling and standard improvements.
- Implemented and executed a service improvement plan in response to an Ombudsman's maladministration order. The Ombudsman service has reviewed eight complaints this year, all of which were found with no breaches. Currently, one case is pending determination.
- Proactive in addressing disrepair issues to mitigate legal escalations, despite an increased number of claims.

It has been a busy year, and we commend the efforts of the customer complaints team, case managers, and all staff members who contributed to our achievements. Despite increased sector demands and navigating stringent regulatory requirements, including those set by the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Code, we have upheld a proactive approach to addressing customer concerns. While recognising the need for ongoing improvements in our service delivery, we remain dedicated to meeting these challenges.

Recommendation

That the board note the report.

Appendix I – Number of complaints and compliments.

Appendix II – Housing ombudsman code and response rates.

Appendix III – Complaint reasons, well-founded, and policy complaints

Appendix IV – Learning outcomes & service improvements.

Appendix V – Housing ombudsman and compliance.

Appendix VI – Rant & Rave Customer Feedback Platform.

Appendix VII - Customer complaints forum.

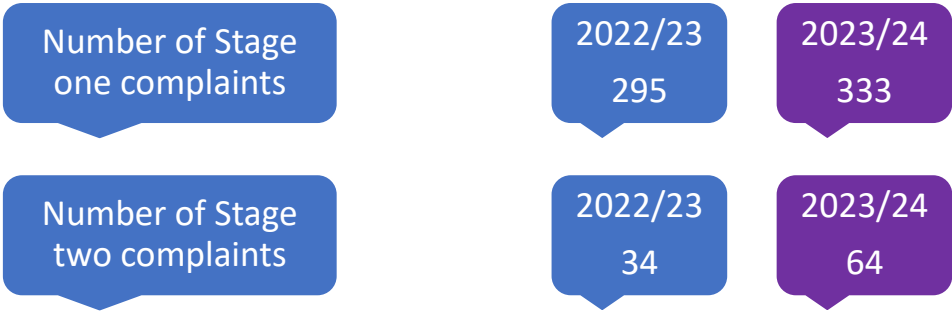
Appendix VIII – Disrepair.

Appendix IX – Board response.

Appendix I - Number of complaints and compliments



We offer multiple channels for customers to express their concerns, including our website, social media, email, written communication, phone calls, and in-person interactions with our staff. This year, we have noticed an increase (21%) in the number of complaints received compared to last year.



Complaints in the social rented sector have been rising year on year. This trend is driven by several factors, including increased awareness and promotion of complaint mechanisms, greater transparency requirements, and potential service delivery challenges within the sector. Enhanced visibility of the Housing Ombudsman and more proactive efforts to encourage tenants to report issues also contribute to the rise in complaints

We have made sure that information about how to file complaints is prominently featured in our customer newsletters, social media platforms, and website.

Compliments

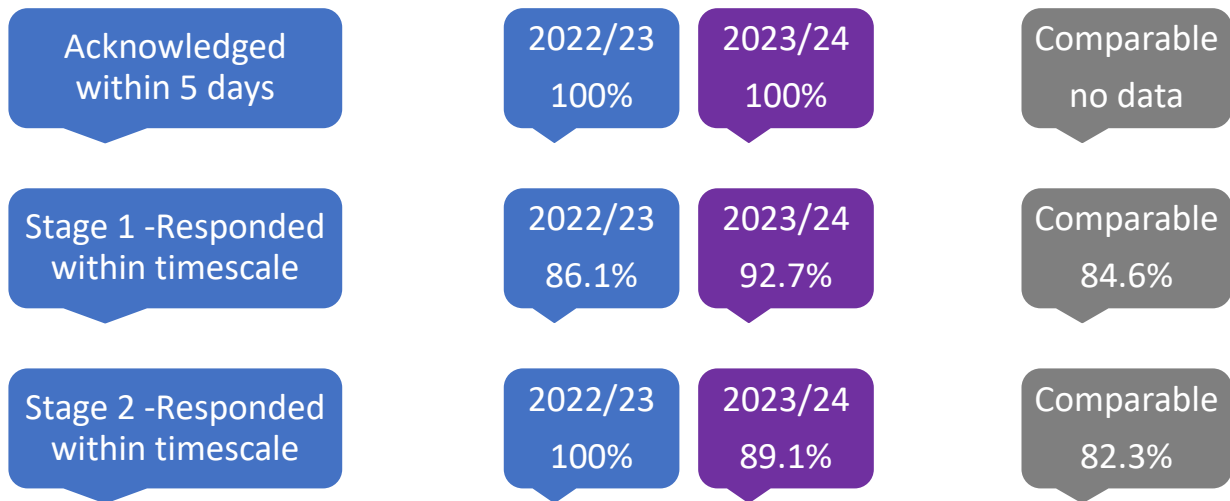
We highly value positive feedback from our customers as it reflects the quality of staff performance. Although we received fewer compliments this year, this may be due to the Rant & Rave system, which allows customers to share their service experiences via text messages or emails. Over the past year, we received 5,763 responses through Rant & Rave, with 88% of customers rating us 4 or 5. Previously, compliments were collected through calls, emails, and social media channels.



The feedback received from Rant & Rave is detailed in Appendix VI.

Appendix II – Housing ombudsman code and response rates

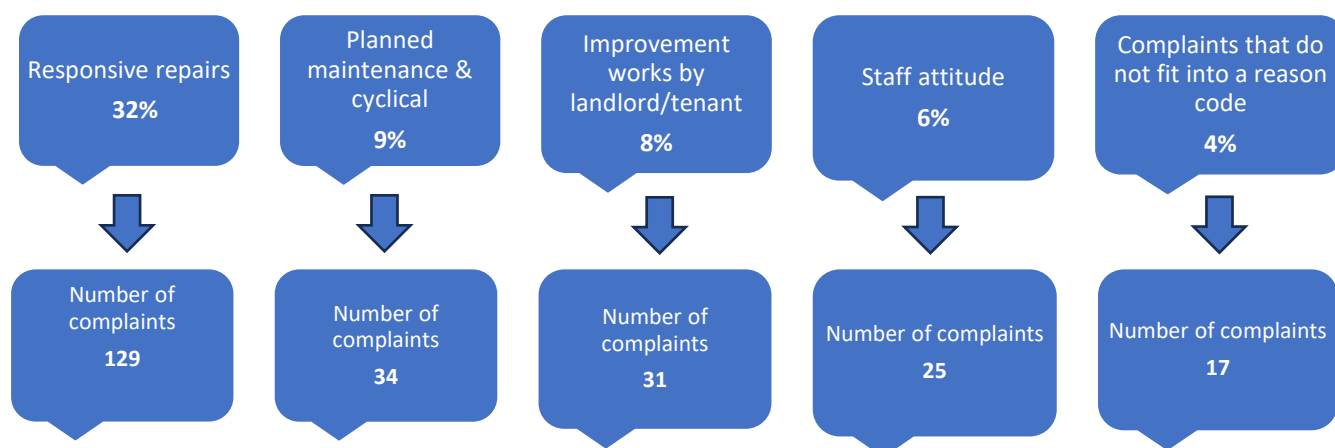
The Housing Ombudsman Complaint Code sets out clear guidelines and expectations for how housing providers should manage complaints. Introduced to ensure consistency and fairness, the code requires landlords to have an accessible, simple, and transparent complaints process. Key timescales include acknowledging a complaint within five working days and providing a formal response within ten working days. If a complaint is more complex, the provider must communicate any delays and set a new resolution date. This code aims to improve the overall complaint handling process, ensuring tenants receive timely and effective resolutions to their issues.



We work with Vantage, an organisation that benchmarks and collaborates with social landlords to improve service delivery and performance. They offer insights and strategies based on data and best practices within the sector. The benchmark data above is from 29 other landlords who they work with.

Appendix III - Complaint reasons, well-founded, and policy complaints

Complaints are categorised to reflect the most common causes of dissatisfaction. The top five categories account for 59% of all complaints received. Responsive repairs have generated the most complaints, which is typical in the sector due to the high volume of repairs conducted annually (approximately 26,000). Despite this, responsive repairs also receive high satisfaction ratings through Rant & Rave feedback.



Areas that feature within these complaints include:

Responsive repairs

Key concerns raised include follow-up appointments, repair quality, unresolved issues, and dissatisfaction with service handling. Several tenants expressed frustration over repairs needing multiple visits, especially concerning contractors and heat pump installations.

Planned maintenance and cyclical

The primary themes in these complaints include the need to take time off work for boiler upgrades, incidents of broken items during maintenance, and inadequate communication from contractors. Tenants also expressed concerns about issues such as incomplete grass cutting, unfinished kitchen refits, post-refurbishment boiler problems, and eligibility for heating programs.

Staff Attitude:

Most complaints are directed towards our neighbourhood and income teams, who frequently handle challenging communications regarding rent arrears, anti-social behaviour, and policy enforcement, including the clear corridor policy.

Well-founded complaints

A complaint is deemed justified if it is upheld, indicating that the complaint holds merit and validity. This year, the percentage of justified complaints stood at 73%, up from 69% the previous year.



Policy complaints

The number of policy complaints decreased from last year, with only 6 received this year. These complaints are referred to the policy owner for review, who then decides if the policy needs any changes or amendments.



No changes were made to existing policies as a result of these complaints. The primary reasons for the complaints were related to health and safety and the clear corridor policy, which is a fire risk requirement.

Appendix IV - Learning outcomes and service improvements

Following complaints, case managers must log learning outcomes to gain insights and make recommendations for improving service and enhancing customer experience. This practice ensures that issues are addressed effectively while contributing to continuous improvement in service delivery and customer satisfaction.

Because of learning outcomes, the following changes have been put into effect:

- Enhanced resources and support are in place to manage emergency calls and assist operatives during severe weather conditions.
- As part of the materials procurement, we made sure the new arrangements would improve van stock efficiency to improve repairs completion at first visit.
- Established working groups involving the programme improvement surveyor, sheltered housing team, and compliance team to foster effective communication throughout the refurbishment project for sheltered housing.
- We have updated our ASB procedure to provide better support options for customers, introducing a new Good Neighbour Agreement. Partnering with Victim Support, we have integrated their services into our procedures and made information accessible on our website, including a recent briefing on Hate Crime.
- We have reviewed our processes and assigned income managers as additional resources to support our finance team in managing direct debits effectively.
- We have revised our website and customer support information to clearly communicate our grounds maintenance service offerings.
- Developed a clear repair offer to ensure customers have clear expectations.
- We have trained plasterers and tilers as multis, and plumbers in plastering, tiling, and carpentry to reduce follow-up works and enable more repairs completed in one visit.
- Implemented a post-completion visit by the kitchen team to address any immediate concerns promptly.
- Revised our website to include clearer information and disclaimers for cooker installations by external contractors.
- With the support of our procurement team, we have implemented a more rigorous approach with our third-party contractors. This initiative ensures strict adherence to our policies and procedures.

Appendix V – Housing ombudsman and compliance

Throughout the year, the Ombudsman conducted six enquiries and reviews of complaints we had managed. In one instance, they issued a maladministration order.

In response to this, we have devised an improvement plan to tackle the findings outlined in the Ombudsman report. The plan's execution is supervised by the Group Audit Development Committee (GADC). The plan has been effectively implemented and noted in the June 24 GADC meeting.

As part of our review and efforts to enhance our complaints management capabilities, we have expanded our team to include the role of a Senior Customer Complaints Specialist.

The Ombudsman investigates complaints lodged against housing providers regarding their conduct and decision-making processes. Through their investigations that may include interviews, document reviews, and data requests, the Ombudsman assesses whether maladministration has occurred.

They have the power to issue a maladministration order which indicate instances where a housing provider has not acted in accordance with expected standards of fairness, transparency, or efficiency.

For the most serious breaches and failing it can issue a severe maladministration order, where significant failings or injustices are identified, the Ombudsman's recommendations may reflect the seriousness of the findings.

Landlord's performance report from the Ombudsman

The Ombudsman produces an individual Landlord report when it has ruled on five or more cases. Selwood does not have an individual report because it does not meet this threshold.

Complaint handling code – self assessment

It is a requirement to undertake a self-assessment against the complaint handling code, at least annually. This has been completed, against the new statutory code in March 2024, and updated in June 2024 to reflect the provision of our new unacceptable behaviour policy.

The self-assessment is published on our website:

<https://www.selwoodhousing.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Complaint-handling-code-self-assessment-June-2024.pdf>

Complaints refused to accept

There are no complaints recorded where we have refused to accept them in the financial year.

Appendix VI – Rant & Rave Customer Feedback Platform

Rant & Rave is a real-time feedback solution that captures customer sentiments through SMS and emails. It instantly categorises feedback as "rants" (negative) or "raves" (positive), enabling us to pinpoint areas for improvement and recognise successes. By continuously collecting and analysing feedback, Rant & Rave helps us improve service standards, respond promptly to customer needs, and support our commitment to transparency and continuous service improvement.

Customers receive a text or email asking them to rate our service on a scale of 1 to 5. Over the past year, we received 5,763 responses, with 88% of customers rating us 4 or 5. We proactively contact those who rate us 1 or 2 to understand their feedback and address any unresolved issues.

Score	1	2	3	4	5	Grand total
Number of scores 2022/23	315	173	291	453	4783	6015
% of total 2022/23	5%	3%	5%	8%	80%	100%
Number of scores 2023/24	276	158	259	399	4671	5763
% of total 2023/24	5%	3%	4%	7%	81%	100%

* ASB, Caretaking, Complaints, Electrical testing, Gas service, Grounds maintenance, Lettings, Planned, Repairs, Voids, Customer service

Appendix VII - Customer complaints forum

As part of our commitment to the Housing Ombudsman complaint code and improving our complaint handling, we established a new customer complaints forum in 2023. The forum remains active and currently includes six customers.

The forum's purpose is to review closed complaint cases quarterly, ensuring compliance with the Housing Ombudsman complaint code and providing fair, empathetic resolutions. Each quarter, the forum is provided with ten anonymised complaint cases that have completed our complaints process.

From these, the group selects five cases for in-depth review, receiving all relevant notes, correspondence, outcomes, and learnings. Members individually score and assess our handling of these complaints. Based on their feedback, we create a log of agreed actions, which is reviewed in the next quarterly forum.

Once the group is satisfied that an action has been completed, they approve its sign-off. This process maintains our accountability and ensures we continuously learn from feedback, making necessary adjustments.

Area of review	April 23 Score (out of 5)	June 24 Score (out of 5)
Quality of notes	3.3	3.9
Correct correspondence	3.5	4.8
Timescales	3.7	4.5
Chronology of events	3.8	4.1
The Outcome	3.8	4.0
Fairness in the handling of complaint	3.6	4.3
Putting things right	3.7	4.1

Additionally, a manager from a different team attends each meeting to present an overview of their work and their team's initiatives. To date, we have hosted managers from Sheltered Housing, Response Repairs, and Income and Lettings.

The group has also completed our online complaints training and recently received our new training video on The Equality Act 2010.

Details of our work with the forum and their results and findings are published on our website. The link is here: <https://www.selwoodhousing.com/get-involved/our-customer-complaints-forum>.

Appendix VIII – Disrepair

Disrepair cases in the social rented sector are rising due to several factors: aging housing stock, underfunding, increased tenant awareness and better legal support, all contributing to an increase in claims.

We received 11 claims this year, primarily due to persistent damp and mould issues, which we have been diligently working to address and prevent. While none of the claims have proceeded to court this year, two are scheduled for hearings in late 2024.

The table below details the trends per year:

Year	Number of Cases	Liability Accepted	Liability Denied	Compensation paid
2021/22	7	1	6	£28,000
2022/23	6	0	6	£1,000
2023/24	11	0	11	£0
Total	30	1	29	£46,384

Legal fees to defend the 11 cases this year amounted to £32k.

Appendix IX – Board response

1. The board noted the annual compliments and complaints report.