

Briefing Note

To: Members of Tenant's Gateway

From: Pete Curry, Consumer Standards Lead Officer

Date: 16/11/2023

Subject: Housing Complaints Report 2023-24 – Quarters One and Two

1. Summary

This report sets out a summary of the complaints received by Ashfield District Council in relation to the delivery of its housing services up to the end of quarter two in 2023-24, which fall within the jurisdiction of the Housing Ombudsman Service.

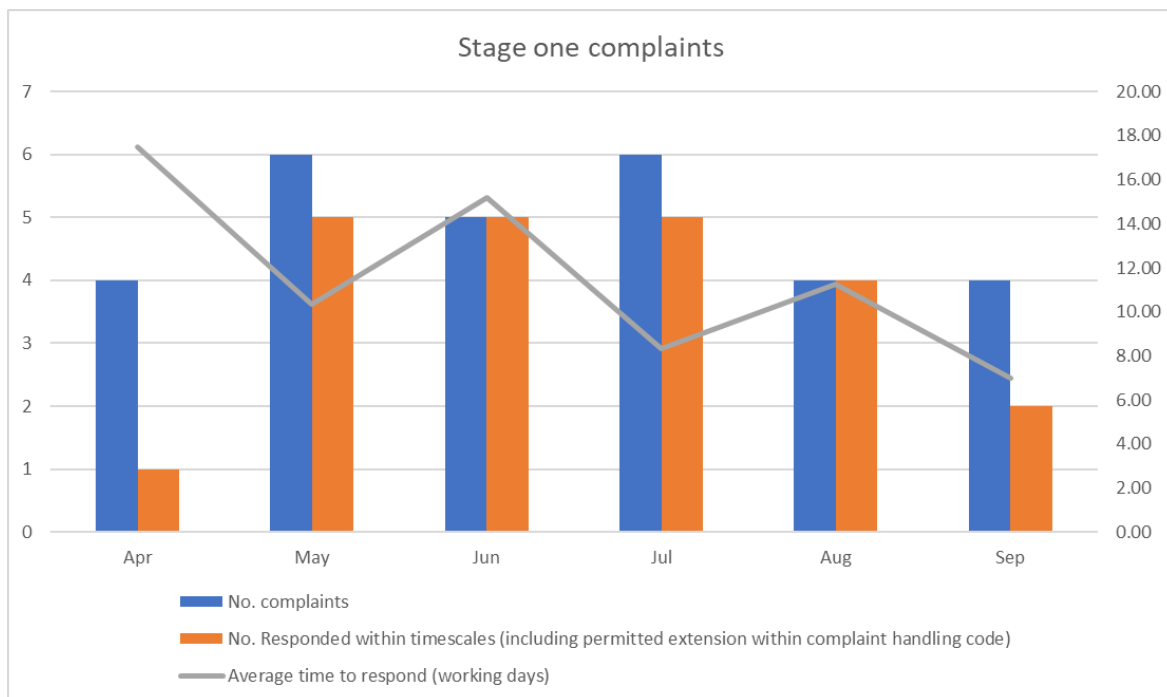
These are broken down and analysed by stage, service, complainant's ethnicity, compensation award, and whether it includes leak/flood/damp or mould type. Customer feedback is also set out alongside the learning from complaints, along with any changes we have made to services following complaints received during 2023-24.

2. Complaint Analysis

2.1 Number of complaints

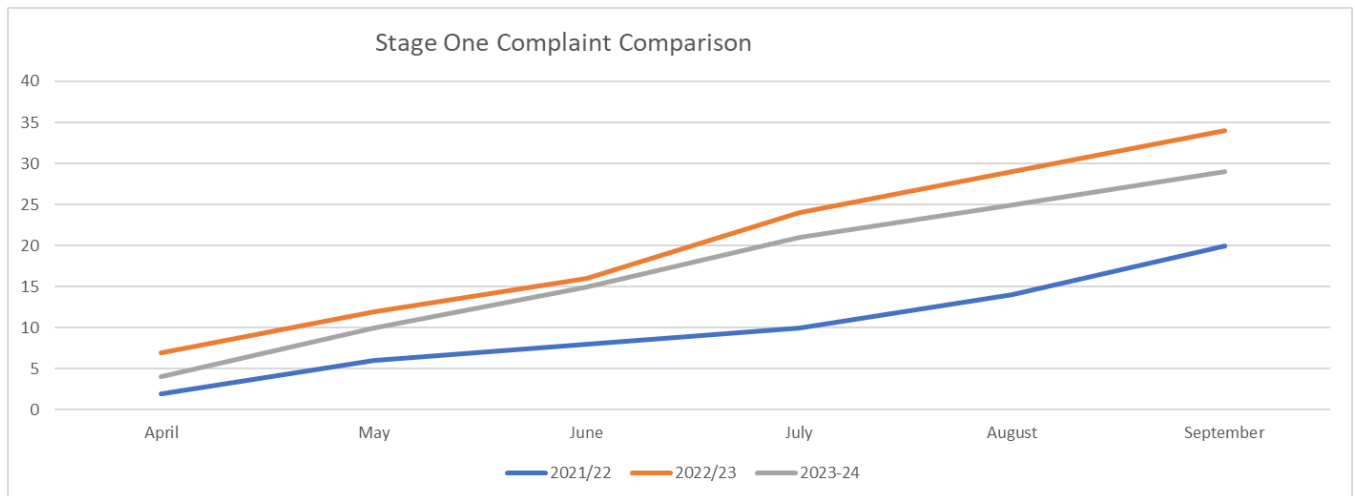
During 2023-24 quarters one and two, Housing Services received 29 stage one complaints (15 quarter one and 14 quarter two). We also receive 6 stage two complaints.

Shown below is a breakdown of the stage one complaints received during 2023-24 and the average time taken to respond.



2.2 Performance

There has been a 15.6% reduction in the number of stage one complaints received in 2023-24 at the end of quarter two compared to the same period 2022-23.



In 2023-24 to the end of quarter two, stage one complaints took an average of 11.41 days to respond to, which is 41.6% higher than the previous year's average of 8.06 days. Average stage two response times also increased by 332% (from 7.2 to 31.17 days), this primarily relates to one complaint taking a significant amount of time to investigate due to the availability of/requests to delay by the tenant.

Following a review of additional guidance from the Regulator of Social Housing regarding the definition of complaints handled within complaint handling timescales, the number of complaints handled within timescales has been review, currently 80% of stage one complaints and 83.33% of stage two complaints have been responded to within timescales. This is predominantly due to complaint acknowledgements not having been sent within the required timescales. Information previously submitted to Pentana and to Housemark for benchmarking is to be reviewed retrospectively.

17 or 62.96% of the stage one complaints received in 2023-24 were found to be upheld or partially upheld, which is slightly higher than the same period in the previous year 50.0%.

2.3 Breakdown of stage one complaints/service requests by service area

Service Area	Number received	Days taken	Average time to respond	% responded to within target	Justified/Part Justified complaints	Number of Service requests
Assets	4	37	9	50%	4	1
Housing Management and Tenancy Services	11	168	15.27	72.73%	5	4
Lettings	1	10	10	100%	0	1
Responsive Repairs	11	98	9	100%	6	11
Support Services	1	9	9	100%	1	0
Planned and cyclical	1	9	9	100%	1	1
Total	29	331	11.41	75.86%	17	18

2.4 Breakdown by stage of complaint

Stage one - target (10 working days)

2023-24	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Total
No. complaints	4	6	5	6	4	4	29
No. Responded within timescales (including permitted extension within complaint handling code)	1	5	5	5	4	2	75.86%
No. Service Requests	3	3	6	1	1	4	18
No. days	70	62	76	50	45	28	331
Average time to respond (working days)	17.50	10.33	15.20	8.33	11.25	7.00	11.41

Stage two – target (20 working days)

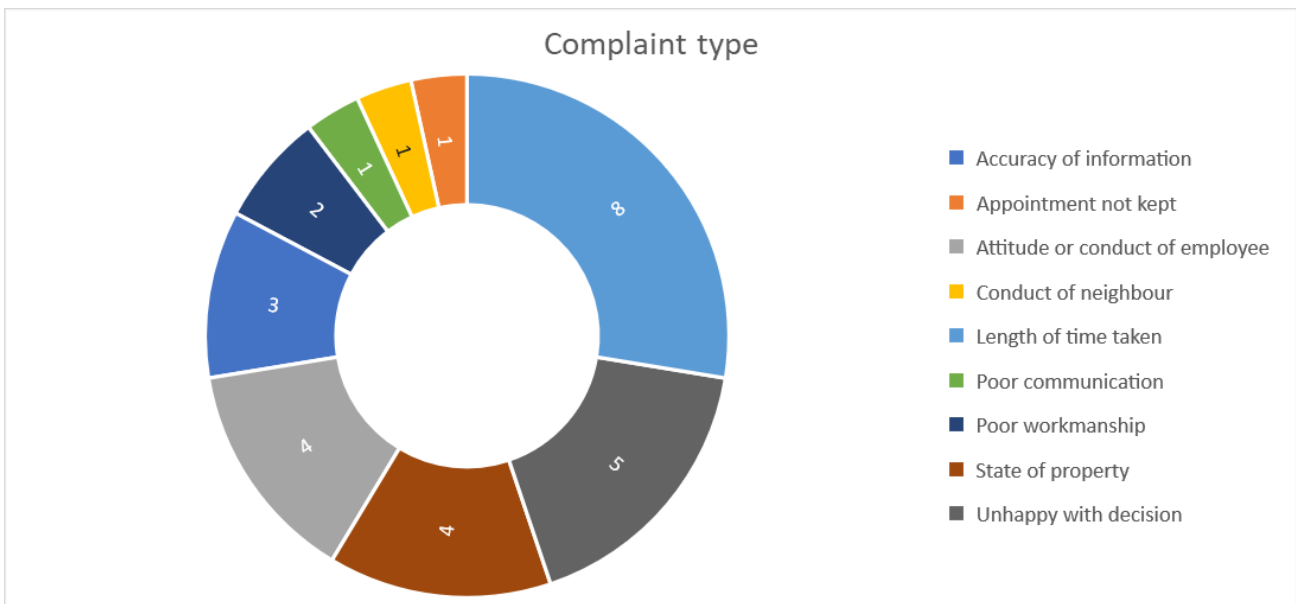
We received 6 stage two complaints during 2023-24, of which 2 complaints was found to be upheld and one partially upheld, three not upheld.

- Sutton Tenant – State of property brickwork windows and mould.
- Sutton Tenant – unhappy with decision and way complaint dealt with
- Sutton Tenant – dispute over use of a drive
- Sutton Tenant – length of time to complete repairs
- Sutton Tenant – Heating issue never rectified but carried on charging
- Kirkby Tenant – Took several weeks to bring void property up to habitable standard.

2023-24	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Total
No complaints	1	2	1	0	2	0	6
No. Responded within timescales (including permitted extension within complaint handling code)	1	1	1	0	2	0	100%
No. days	16	124	15	0	32	0	187
Average time to respond (working days)	16.00	124.00	15.00	0.00	16.00	0.00	31.17

2.5 Breakdown by type of complaint

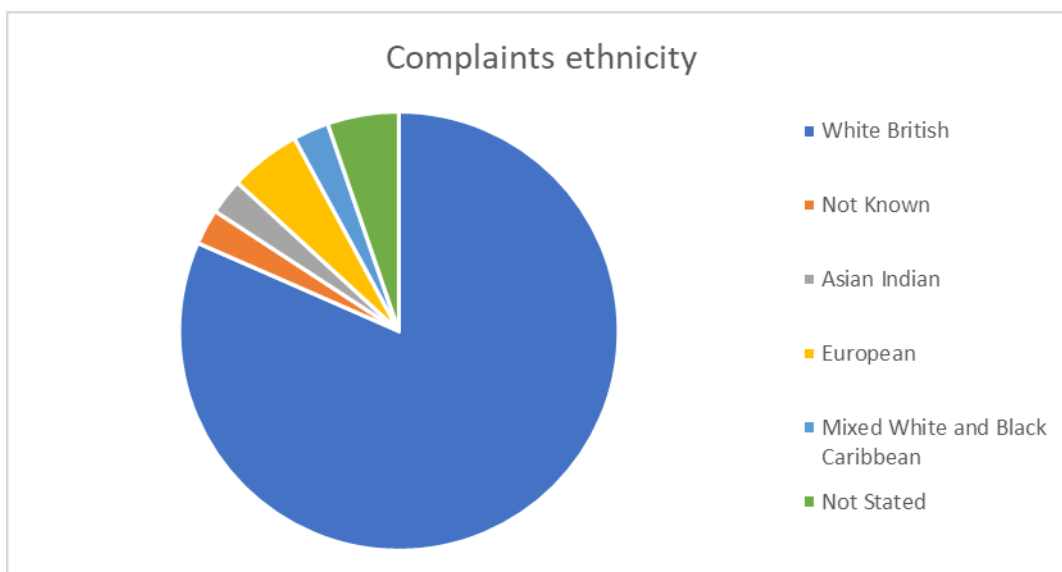
The stage one complaints received within the financial year were broken down as follows:



The percentage of complaints by type remain relatively consistent with the previous financial year. The top three complaint types were 'length of time taken', 'Unhappy with decision', and 'state of property'. A comparison against the last financial year can be found below.

2.6 Breakdown of complaints by complainant's ethnicity

The ethnicity of the complainant is monitored based on the information held in the Capita OpenHousing system, at the time of making the complaint and is not collected as part of the complaints process. The breakdown is relatively consistent with the tenant base.



2.7 Leak/Flood/Damp or Mould

The table below shows cases that involve the above and the percentage of cases this makes up for Stage one, two and service requests.

Month	Stage one	%	Stage two	%	Service requests	%
April			1	33.3%		
May	1	25.00%	1	33.3%	2	66.7%
June	1	25.00%	1	33.3%		
July						
August	1	25.00%				
September	1	25.00%			1	33.3%
Total	4		3		3	

2.8 Compensation awards as part of complaint outcomes

A total of £1564.48 has been offered to tenants, in compensation or ex-gratia payments, as a remedy for resolving the complaints, this incorporates complaints at all levels.

3. Customer Feedback

A complaints satisfaction survey is sent to all stage one complainants as part of the resolution documentation for their complaint. We also provide complainants with the option to complete an online survey, where they can send feedback online about the process and learning from the complaints process.

Only 3 complainants returned a completed satisfaction survey of their own accord, which is a response rate of 10%, this is relatively consistent with the response rate from the same period in the last financial year, which was 19%. Low response rates and low rates of escalation to stage two are seen as a positive.

Historically, independent completion of the satisfaction surveys has been low. We are currently reviewing options to adopt a more proactive approaches towards conducting surveys with complainants to seek to improve response rates.

Below is a breakdown of the responses submitted by the three survey respondents.

Question	Respondent 1	Respondent 2	Respondent 3
Overall how satisfied are you with the handling of your complaint?	Fairly Satisfied	Very Satisfied	Very Dissatisfied
How satisfied are you that the staff who dealt with your complaint were helpful and polite?	Very Satisfied	Very Satisfied	Very Dissatisfied
How satisfied are you that the complaints process is easy to access and understand?	Very Satisfied	Fairly Satisfied	Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied
Overall how satisfied with the outcome of your complaint?	Very Satisfied	Very Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
How Satisfied are you that all areas of your complaint were addressed?	Very Satisfied	Very Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
How satisfied are you that the reasons for the outcome of your complaint were fully explained?	Very Satisfied	Neutral	Very Dissatisfied
If you are not fully satisfied with the outcome of your complaint, do you accept that explanation that has been offered?	Yes	No	No
If you are not satisfied with the outcome of your complaint, will you be taking it to the next stage?	No	Yes	Yes

4. Learning

4.1 Actions from learning from complaints

We record any learning outcomes from complaints that require further action or changes to policy, process, or procedure.

A colour coded risk rating for each of the actions coming out of complaints is assigned to each action. This is based on the level of potential risk to the Authority for not addressing the action and a future complaint relating to these actions occurring, which may result in a service failure or maladministration finding from the Housing Ombudsman.

From the complaints investigated Q1 & Q2 2023-24, 24 learning outcomes were identified, service areas 74% of the learning outcomes have been implemented. However, there have been some delays in receiving updates, so officers have been reminded to track progress and notifying when learning outcomes have been completed.

A summary of the learning outcomes is as follows:

Response date	Action	Owner	Target Date	Progress - is it complete?
19/05/2023	Ensure formal warnings are served in line with investigation processes and procedures – technical learning points addressed with relevant officer. Documents contained incorrect information and contained technical errors	LL	31 May 2023	Complete
30/05/2023	voids team are reminded to inspect all lofts when the property is void and ensure that the previous tenants items are cleared during the void period	CB	30 June 2023	Complete
01/06/2023	Leaseholder permissions process to be streamlined	CB	31 July 2023	Ongoing
01/06/2023	Officers to be aware of process for leaseholder permissions	CB	31 July 2023	Ongoing
24/05/2023	Complete joint contractor and council visits at future at this address	MM/KY	01/01/2024 (target date amended to allow time for new contractor to be secured)	Deadline not yet due
30/06/2023	Refresh the call centre team with the process relating to reports of drainage from tenants	LT	31 July 2023	Complete
30/06/2023	Refresh the call centre team with clarity on what information can be passed on to the tenant when wanting to complain	LT	31 July 2023	Complete
30/06/2023	Remind the call centre team on listening to all of the tenants query to help with better understanding and response	LT	31 July 2023	Complete

05/07/2023	Discuss this issue that has risen with the contractor to help with improving their service when working on behalf of Ashfield District Council	CurtC	31 August 2023	Complete
05/07/2023	Refresh the members of staff involved on improving communication to provide clear understanding to tenants so they have understanding how we are dealing with their concerns	CurtC	31 August 2023	Complete
18/07/2023	Assets to liaise with lettings when major works being undertaken in a void property to identify how quickly the property will be let	KY	31 August 2023	Complete
14/07/2023	Call recordings to be shared with the Housing Officer so that they can reflect on their tone and some of the comments made. Housing Officer to be reminded to remain courteous and professional during telephone calls.	CM	31/08/2023	Complete
14/07/2023	Housing Officer to be reminded to re-direct ASB related calls to the case officer when we have an open case, and the investigation is ongoing	CM	31/08/2023	Complete
14/07/2023	Feedback/guidance to be shared with the Housing Officer on how to manage these types of calls more effectively	CM	31/08/2023	Complete
04/07/2023	Housing Officer to be reminded to review tenancy records prior to visit, consider vulnerabilities and involve support agencies when attempting to resolve tenancy issues.	CM	31/08/2023	Complete
04/07/2023	Housing officer to be reminded to fully investigate an issue before reaching a conclusion. And to remain impartial throughout the investigation	CM	31/08/2023	Complete
04/07/2023	Housing Officer (and the wider team) to be provided with refresher training on how to deal with vulnerable tenants	CM	31/08/2023	Ongoing
07/08/2023	Officer to determine which jobs will be allocated a specific appointment and confirmation text message sent to tenant to prevent future occurrences	MP	31 August 2023	Awaiting Update
07/08/2023	Ensure that materials are ordered and are ready in time for the work order to be completed. If not, ensure that the tenant is kept fully informed.	KM	31 August 2023	Complete

08/08/2023	Contingency plan to be put in place during long term sickness for inspectors to reduce rescheduling appointments	CB	31 August 2023	Complete
11/08/2023	Ensure contractors highlight addresses where tenants are unable to remove flooring, and do not commence works until issue resolved.	MM/KY	01 January 2024	Deadline not yet due
04/09/2023	Allowing a postponement for meetings where tenants wish to seek legal advice and in consideration of any other circumstances around impact of service such as mental health. This discussion has taken place verbally with the officer on 31/08/2023 but will be followed up via email.	LL	30 September 2023	Complete
04/09/2023	For complaints investigation officer, check that relevant GDPR forms are completed at the beginning of the complaints process to avoid unnecessary delays in sending the response. Although extension was mutually agreed and explained, this delay was avoidable if these forms were completed earlier in the process. This is an ongoing action and will be shared with the wider management team as part of complaints learning	LL	30 September 2023	Complete
14/09/2023	Housing Officer to be reminded of the process that they should follow when receiving these types of requests and to remind them of the customer service standards that we expect.	CM	31 October 2023	Deadline not yet due
26/10/2023	Discussions have taken place with contractor on how to improve their service and expectations when working on the Councils behalf	CurtC	31 October 2023	Complete
26/10/2023	Call centre has received training refresher on consistency when dealing with calls.	CurtC	31 October 2023	Complete
02/10/2023	Timescales to be put in place for Welfare Reform Apprentice to process internal checks required for rent refund applications within 5 working days of receipt, to ensure that target overall response time of 28 working days is met.	CM	31/10/2023	Complete

4.2 Changes to complaints process

There have been no changes to the complaint handling process during this period.

4.3 Emerging themes from complaints

Analysis has taken place across the themes/types of complaints we have received. The main areas and lessons emerging for services are:

- **Response times to stage one complaints** – Average stage one response times are currently higher than the target. Average response times have reduced from Q1 to Q2, following guidance being provided to complaint handlers in relation to the use of extensions permitted within the complaint handling code. Response times and the use of extensions should continue to be monitored moving forward.
- **Increasing complaints not responded to within timescales** – The Regulator of Social Housing has recently published an FAQ on the Tenant Satisfaction Measures, which provided further clarification on the definition the measures relating to complaints responded to within the Housing Ombudsman’s Complaint Handling Code timescales. The guidance stated that time taken to acknowledge the complaint, as well as to respond to the complaint should be taken into consideration. On a number of occasions acknowledgements have been sent outside of the 5 working days’ time frame. Complaint handlers should be mindful of the importance of acknowledging complaints within the required timescales, in addition to the timescales for providing a response to the complaint, particularly as compliance with the Complaint Handling Code is a regulatory requirement.
- **Proportion of complaints escalating to stage two** – The percentage of complaints escalating to stage two of the process has increased to 20% for the first two quarters of the financial year, from 15% for the same period of the last financial year. Performance in this area should be monitored closely to ensure that investigations at stage one are addressing areas of satisfaction and offering appropriate redress, where possible, to minimise the number of escalations to further stages.

5 Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code

The Authority’s Complaints and Compliments Policy and Housing Complaints Procedure is currently in line with the Housing Ombudsman’s Complaint Handling Code. This follows the revision of the Complaint Policy and the implementation of the Housing Complaints Procedure in September 2022.

Our previous self-assessment against the Complaint Handling Code was reviewed by members of the Tenant’s Gateway group on 31 May 2023 and was subsequently approved by Cabinet on 31 July 2023. The updated assessment has been published on the Authority’s website.

Following the Social Housing (Regulation) Act receiving Royal Assent on 20 July 2023, membership to the Housing Ombudsman scheme and compliance with their Complaint Handling Code has become a regulatory requirement.

On 28 September 2023 the Housing Ombudsman Service and the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman launched their consultation on a proposed joint complainant handling code. Consultation is open until 23 November 2023. Once the combined Complaint

Handling Code has been implemented, all of the Council's complaints will need to be handled in the same way.