

2023-2024

Annual Complaints Performance & Service Improvement Report



Board of Management:

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Ian Falconer (Vice Chair)
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Chief Executive:

Paul Common

Director of Operations

John Hudson



Alan Long
Chair of the Board



Terry Gallagher
Member responsible for Complaints

A message from the Chair of the Board and Member responsible for Complaints

We are pleased to share with you the Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report 2023-24 for Arches on behalf of the Board of Management. This is an important requirement of the statutory Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code.

We can see that Arches have made strides this year in reducing the time it takes for residents to see an outcome to their complaint. The low number of complaints progressing to Stage two tells us that officers are resolving complaints for residents at the earliest stage, and we want to continue to improve in how we handle complaints. We can also see that complaints are leading to real improvements to services, with new automated texting making sure residents are kept up to date on their repair appointments.

The Board has set a clear challenge to leaders at Arches. We expect to see that more residents receive an outcome to their stage one complaint within 10 days, and that more complaints are being resolved at the earliest point without the need to appeal at stage two. We also expect to see that service requests are recorded consistently, helping us to plan improvements to services.

Indications this year so far are that performance continues to improve with 76% of complaints closed in 10 days or less, compared to 69% over 2023-24. We have also seen a marked increase in the number service requests that are logged, confirming that we are getting better at recognising the early signs of dissatisfaction and dealing with it consistently as the resident prefers. This is promising, and we'll be watching this closely as the year progresses.

We recently asked for an external review of how Arches manage resident complaints, which was carried out by our auditors. They gave us a clean bill of health and found many areas of good practice. This means that everything is working within the requirements set out by the Housing Ombudsman, so we are confident that Arches are managing complaints well.

Complaints highlight where our services need to be improved, which is important for any business, and none more so than Arches Housing. It is our duty to make sure that your rent is spent wisely to deliver good quality services that look after you and your home. Making sure we get it right first time means that the team at Arches can focus more on doing a really good job and being there when you need us most. That's why we have put complaints firmly on the agenda and will be making sure that Arches delivers for you, our residents.

Best wishes

Alan Long

Chair of the Board

Terry Gallagher

Member responsible for Complaints

Annual Complaints Performance & Service Improvement Report 2023-24

1. Purpose of this report

1.1. The purpose of this report is to:

- Provide to members information concerning the performance of Complaints handling, including service improvements arising from Complaints, for the year ending 31st March 2024.



- Assure members of compliance with the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code ('the code'), and the reporting requirements thereof.
- Secure approval of the revised Governance Manual taking into account the role of Member Responsible for Complaints.
- To facilitate a response from the Board regarding the organisations approach to, and learning from complaints, for producing an annual report to residents.

2. Background

2.1. The Housing Ombudsman Complaints Handling code requires that housing providers provide specific information in their annual report to their Board, which includes:

- a. A self-assessment against the Code to ensure their complaint handling policy remains in line with its requirements.
- b. Qualitative and quantitative analysis of the landlord's complaint handling performance which must also include a summary of the types of complaints the landlord has refused to accept.
- c. Any findings of non-compliance with this Code by the Ombudsman.
- d. The service improvements made as a result of the learning from complaints.
- e. Any annual report about the landlord's performance from the Ombudsman; and,
- f. Any other relevant reports or publications produced by the Ombudsman in relation to the work of the landlord.



This report will therefore respond to each requirement in-turn.

3. Complaint Handling Code Self-Assessment (The Code) (a)

3.1. A self-assessment against each of the 72 requirements of The Code and our Complaints Policy has been completed and had identified 100% compliance. Commentary has been provided to confirm the level of compliance, and this will be subject to an internal audit taking place in May 2024. The current Code self-assessment is provided here in [Convene Meeting Supporting Documents](#).

3.2. The Code has required a change to the Governance Manual to clarify the role of the 'Member Responsible for Complaints'. The change is set out in the Governance Manual extract below, with the full version of the updated Governance Manual available here in [Convene Meeting Supporting Documents](#).

3.2.6 Member Responsible for Complaints

The purpose of the Member Responsible for Complaints ('MRC') is to:



- Promote a positive complaint handling culture with Arches Housing.
- Ensure the Board receives regular information on complaints that provides insight on the landlord's complaint handling performance.
- Have access to suitable information and staff to perform this role and report on their findings.
- Ensure compliance with statutory Complaint Handling Code insofar as the role of the Board pertains.

3.3. There are no areas of non-compliance with The Code found by the Housing Ombudsman.

4. Complaints Handling Performance (b)



Complaints Handled

- 4.1. The following table expresses the outcome of complaints at each level, including the number of Refused complaints. Outstanding complaints are those which have rolled into the new 2024-25 year:

Stage/Service	Upheld	Partially Upheld	Not Upheld	Outstanding	TOTAL
Stage one	21	8	7	6	42
Asset	19	5	7	6	37
Housing	2	3	0	0	5
Stage two	2	4	0	0	6
Asset	1	3	0	0	4
Housing	1	0	0	0	1
Development	0	1	0	0	1

Refused Complaints

- 4.2. We occasionally must refuse to accept a complaint which is permitted for only a limited number of reasons. This year a total of 7 complaints were received and refused.

The reasons are as follows:

Reason for Refusal	Description	Total Refusals
Out of Scope/Repeat	Complaint is not concerning a service provided by Arches Housing or on behalf of Arches Housing. For example, complaints about benefit entitlement or Government Policy.	3
Lack of information	Complainants failing to respond to our contact for further information to clarify their complaint and where we have insufficient information to proceed without it.	4

- 4.3. Where a complaint is refused, we advise the customer of our reasons for refusal, and their rights to contact the Housing Ombudsman. Where the refusal was due to lack of information, we also advise the resident to contact us again should they become able to engage in the investigation by providing information necessary for it to proceed.

Turnaround Time

- 4.4. The following table shows the number of complaints closed, and the time taken to complete investigations at each stage, across the financial year ending 31st March 2024.

Stage	Cases	Average time taken	% 'in time'
Stage 1 (10 days)	34	9.86 days	69.7% (25 of 34)
Stage 2 (20 days)	6	23.5 days	66.6% (4 of 6)

- 4.5. Response delays are recorded to ensure learning from case handling such as by improvements to the identification of Complaints, allocation of investigations, and to letter templates which have all been put in place over the year. The following are examples of delays reasons on case investigations:

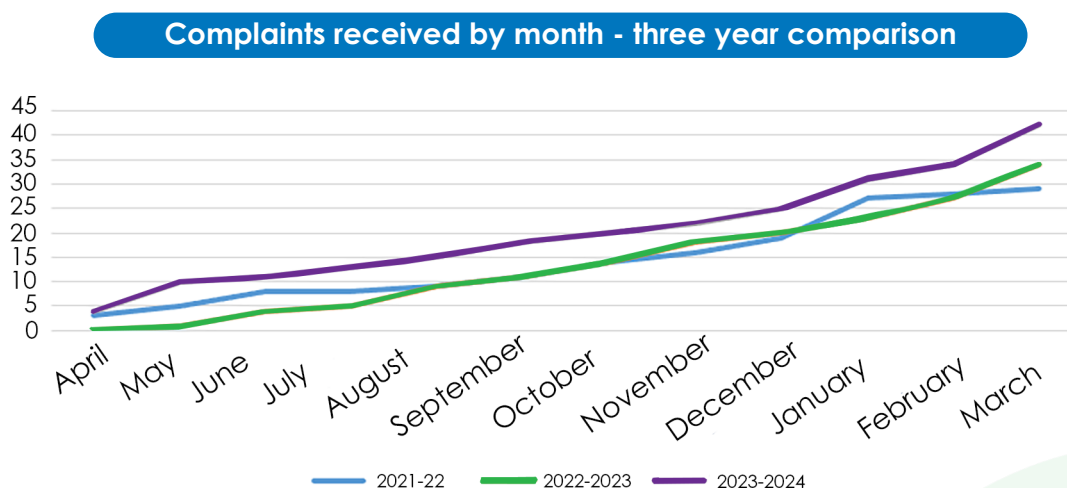


- Staff absence (holidays and sickness) – approx. 35 days lost / 3 cases.
- Workload/resourcing – approx. 18 days lost over 4 cases.
- Case administration triage error – approx. 5 days lost over 1 case.
- Lack of engagement from the customer – approx. 18 days lost over 3 cases.

Year and Month Comparisons

- 4.6. We have seen an increase rate of 16.6% of new complaints received over the year with the pattern of receipts being consistent with previous years. This is a positive indicator that resident awareness and use of Complaints to seek redress is increasing. The following chart demonstrates the pattern of growth monthly, over the previous three years:

Escalation Comparison



- 4.7. Escalations are an indicator of customer satisfaction and quality of stage 1 investigations and responses. We have seen an increase from just one escalation in 2022-23, which has returned performance to previous levels. This may be due to the increase in volume, and the result of a greater drive towards completing investigations in target times.

The following table expresses the year-on-year comparison for numbers closed, and escalations:

Year	Stage 1 total	Stage 2 cases arising	Escalation rate
2020-21	13	3	23%
2021-22	30	7	23%
2022-23	37	1	3%
2023-24	36	6	16%

Sector Comparisons

- 4.8. Comparisons with sector performance helps to provide objective perspective on our approach to complaints handling.

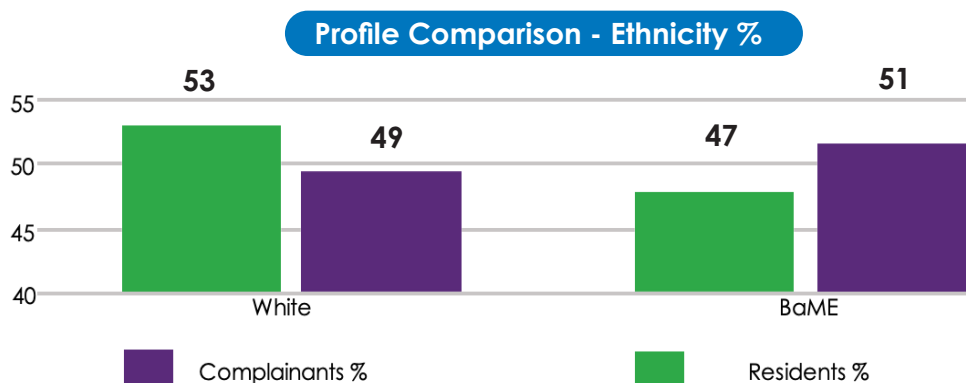
Measure	Lower Quartile	Median	Upper Quartile	Arches
Complaints per 1,000 properties	66	42	26	31.8
Commentary: We recognise that a high number of complaints is most helpful in aiding a continuous improvement culture, which is in-line with guidance from the Housing Ombudsman who consider numbers of complaints to be an indicator of policy accessibility. The number of complaints that we receive from residents suggests there is further work to do to be assured that the Policy is fully accessible. The Policy will be considered by customers in Scrutiny exercise, commencing Spring 2024.				
Ave Complaint Response within Time	63%	89%	100%	69.7%
Commentary: We have seen stronger performance in the final quarter of the year, resulting in an outturn which brings us within the quartile range.				

Profile Comparisons

4.9. The following graphs express the comparison of diversity profiles between complaints and the wider resident population within Arches Housing properties:

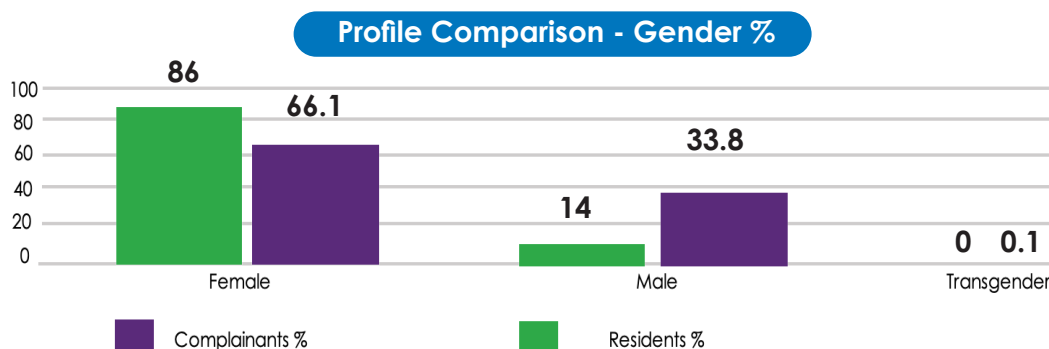
4.9.1. Ethnicity

Analysis of complainant diversity information reveals from which groups we have received complaints this year so far, and how this compares to our general tenant population. In terms of ethnicity, we can see that the greatest volume of complaints was received from customers who are white British:



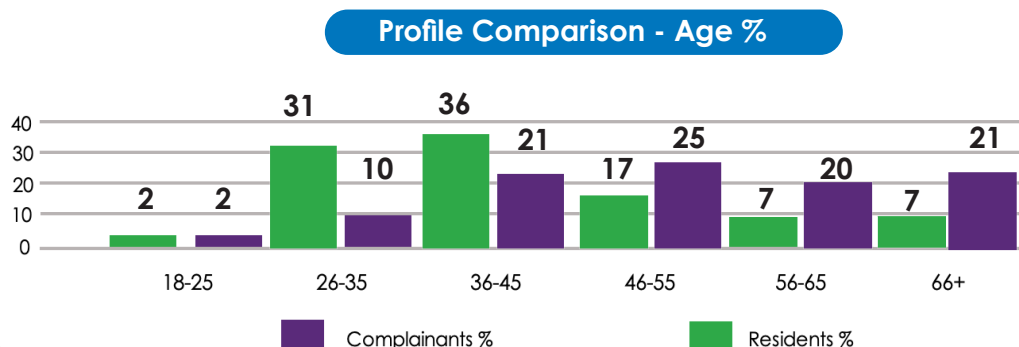
4.9.2. Gender

In terms of gender, we have seen the greatest volume of complaints from female residents. Male residents have made disproportionately fewer complaints based on their representation in the overall resident profile:



4.9.3. Age

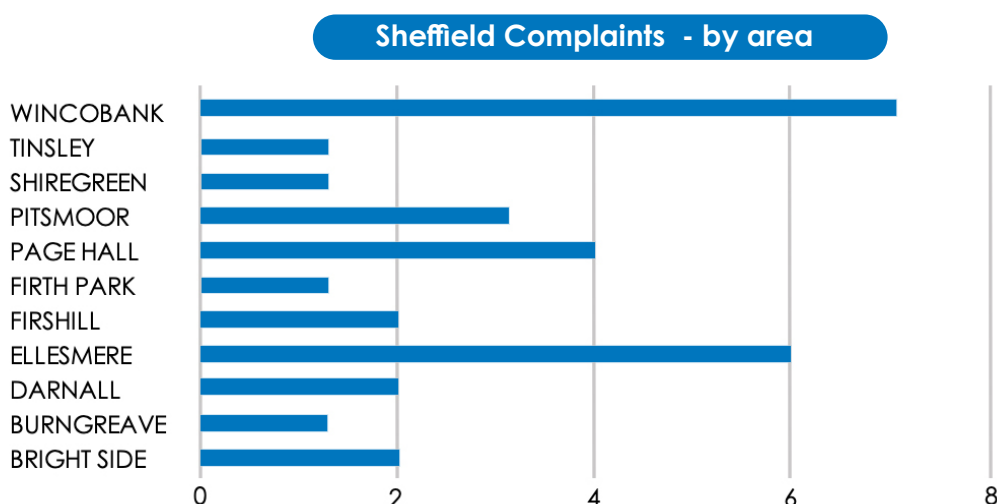
Finally, we have received a higher volume of complaints from residents up to age 46. This is consistent with the TSM findings regarding the age of complainants across the sector:



Locality and Property Type

Representing 71.4%, the greatest proportion of all complaints received originated from residents of our Sheffield properties. This is likely due to Sheffield having an older stock profile with properties more likely to require regular repair and maintenance, bringing more opportunities for things to go wrong.

Properties in Sheffield account for two thirds (68%) of all stock, and so we have received a slightly disproportionate number of complaints from this area, but this is not unexpected given the older average property age compared to Rotherham and Chesterfield where our newest properties are located. The following table expresses the complaint numbers from Sheffield localities:



Satisfaction with Complaint Handling

- 4.10. Multiple attempts and methods of contact were used to seek feedback from complainants regarding their experience of the complaints process. This helps us to monitor customer satisfaction, perception, and the quality and compliance of complaint handling.



This year, we have attempted to seek feedback on all closed complaints, achieving a response rate of 22% (eight responses). Of respondents, 75% expressed overall satisfaction with how their complaint was handled. One respondent who expressed dissatisfaction with their stage 1 investigation has since had their complaint reviewed at stage 2 and is now satisfied with our approach to their complaint.

Service Requests

- 4.11. Service Requests are early indications of dissatisfaction or service failure and are an important source of information regarding the performance of our services and their ability to provide positive outcomes for residents. The Housing Ombudsman clarifies that Service Requests are not complaints, but must be recorded, monitored, and reviewed regularly.
- 4.12. The themes which represent the service requests that we have received are consistent with those identified from Complaints. These were concerning dissatisfaction regarding poor communication, largely associated with ongoing complaints where the resident is having to contact us to find out what is happening next to resolve their repair or following the outcome of an inspection. In the period we were unable to resolve two service requests which went on to become Complaints. These were both concerning repairs.

5. Learning from Complaints



Themes

5.1. Where a Stage 1 complaint has been Upheld, investigations identified the following areas and causes of resident dissatisfaction, as expressed below:

How did it fail?	Contractor	Personnel Error	Process	Total
Appointment handling	6			6
Contractor failed to pass information	2			2
Failed to follow Customer Care service standards/principles	1		1	2
Damp, mould and condensation management			1	1
Inadequate resourcing			1	1
Personnel error	1			1
Process not followed		14		14
Programme management			2	2
Total	10	14	6	29

5.2. Stage 2 investigations (6) found further causes of dissatisfaction in respect of complaint handling specifically. These include:

- Adherence to timescales for responses.
- Ensuring all letters make clear how the outcome of the investigation has been reached, and that it is clear, fair and reasonable, and language is fact-based and professional.
- Ensuring investigations are robust and conducted objectively with due diligence to all the matters presented.



5.3. Learning from Complaints Action Tracker

All upheld complaints reveal opportunities for improvement which are captured onto an action plan and tracked to completion. Examples of changes and improvements made include:

1. A number of improvements to contractor management, including:

- Enhanced requirements regarding handling of appointments, specifically the circumstances under which an appointment can be changed, and then requirements for communication. This is together with more stringent reporting requirements for monitoring and to give assurance that appointments made are kept.
- Improved reporting requirements where a repair is done out of hours to ensure we are in all cases aware of what follow-on works are required.



2. Improvements to ensure that resident vulnerability and need data is captured at the earliest point, using it to best inform decisions on raising and completing repairs. This is in addition to the tenancy audit of homes project, where household data for 900 properties has so far been captured.
3. Increased the resourcing of the Development team, creating new processes for the correct processing of the different types of home purchase applications.
4. A number of improvements to Complaints administration and handling, including:



- Improvements to tools for complaints investigators, such as a checklist for investigation steps, and complaint response templates. As a result, average complaint investigation times reduced over the last quarter of the year with 83% complaints completed in time, compared to 50% in the first three quarters.
- Improved use of the acknowledgement period for setting up appointments for investigators to establish an early understanding of the complaint, maximising the use of each of the 10 days available.
- A review of the Customer Complaints and Feedback Policy, with refresher training to colleagues on the correct triage of dissatisfaction to either service requests or Complaints, in-line with the customer's expectations.

5. Developed auto-notification texts to confirm the outcome of repairs inspections to ensure residents are aware the status of their repair promptly.
6. Personnel Management actions including:



- Performance conversations in one to ones to clarify expectations and role requirements, and identify training needs.
- Delivery of Master-classes on Tenancy Types, Data protection and GDPR.
- Review of workloads, contributing to the review of the operating model to ensure work is distributed equitably, and managers have more capacity for day-to-day line management and support.

7. Development of a new damp, mould and condensation management process, ensuring all cases are recognised at the earliest point, and are actioned to completion promptly.

6. Remaining Compliance Areas (Items e and f)

- 6.1. The Housing Ombudsman provide an annual report for registered providers where they have considered complaints by that Landlord as a result of residents' complaints being considered by them.

There have been no complaint decisions made by the Housing Ombudsman concerning complaints brought by Arches Housing residents in the period 1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024. Therefore, no annual report has been produced, nor have we received any publications produced by the Ombudsman in relation to the work of the landlord.

- 6.2. It should be noted that the Housing Ombudsman are currently considering a case brought forward by resident that is in the process of purchasing their home from us and having some urgency due to the medical circumstances of the resident. When known, the determination of the Housing Ombudsman will be shared with Members and included in the 2024-25 annual report.

7. Oversight and Accountability

Our plans for the coming year focus on bolstering accountability and oversight of complaints handling, performance, and learning. This includes:



- Continuing to hold the executive to account on performance of complaint response timescales and escalations to ensure residents are receiving a quality response to their complaint promptly.
- Reviewing our governance structures to ensure the profile of complaints and a continuous improvement culture is prioritised. This will be done through the re-design of what is currently the HR and Governance Committee and their terms of reference, and also the work of the Neighbourhood Network and how they ensure the customer perspective is reflected in our plans for improvement
- Continuing to build on capturing and monitoring Service Requests as this represents the greatest opportunity for service improvements and value for money gains, helping us to identify ways to deliver services right first time.



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