



2024-2025



Annual Complaints Performance & Service Improvement Report

Board of Management:

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Chief Executive:

Paul Common

Director of Operations

John Hudson

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

The changes to the law and to the enhanced regulation of Housing Associations present a significant challenge to the whole of the sector.

Here at Arches we continue to evolve to meet this challenge. As we reflect on the 2024–25 reporting year, it is clear that complaints and service feedback have been a vital source of insight into our operational effectiveness, service quality, and resident expectations. This report demonstrates not only our continued compliance with the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code, but also a deepening commitment to transparency, learning, and continuous improvement.

We are especially pleased that as a small organisation; our staff responded proactively to the higher standards and demands of the regulation. We are also really pleased that we have engaged with a positive group of residents to help test our responses and performance, and their participation and constructive challenge has been invaluable.

We recognise that the increase in complaint volumes — a 92% rise — is testament to increased resident awareness and confidence in using the complaints process. This reflects well on the accessibility and visibility of our policy, which we will continue to promote, especially among under-represented resident groups.

The report shows high performance in timely responses, with 100% of complaints closed within statutory time frames, and 87.5% of Stage One complaints resolved within our own more stretching target of 10 days. This responsiveness, maintained during our busiest year for complaint handling, is noteworthy. The year has also been marked by deliberate, data-led improvements to how we manage complaints.

We have enhanced systems to better handle service-linked repairs, accelerated compensation payments, and refined contractor oversight processes — all in direct response to resident feedback.

Our learning culture is taking root, and our action plans demonstrate an increasing capacity to turn feedback into service redesign. We have even reorganised the business and how we operate in order to reflect this new emphasis on being focussed on resident experience and feedback

Looking ahead, our executive focus will centre on:

- **Equity in Service Access:** Closing the gap between our resident demographic and those accessing the complaints process, particularly across ethnic groups, by enhancing cultural awareness and communication strategies.
- **Service Request Intelligence:** Strengthening the analysis of service requests to capture early indicators of service dissatisfaction and opportunities
- **Contractor and Asset Management:** Embedding lessons from upheld complaints to refine the services we deliver and our contractors, ensuring timely and high-quality repairs, and holding partners accountable to our standards.
- **Resident-Centric Design:** Deepening resident involvement in capital programme communications and post-repair inspections to reduce repeat complaints and raise satisfaction.
- **Assurance through Governance:** Continuing robust oversight through regular reporting, case reviews, and independent scrutiny to ensure we remain focused on residents' experiences and maintain high-quality standards.

We are proud of the progress made, but we remain vigilant. The complaints we receive are an essential indicator of where we must continue to evolve. Our priority remains delivering services that are fair, responsive, and rooted in the voice of our residents.

Alan Long Board Chair

Terry Gallagher Member Responsible for Complaints,
on behalf of the Board of Management.

Annual Complaints Performance & Service Improvement Report 2024-25

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 2025.
- Assure members of compliance with the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code ('the code'), and the reporting requirements thereof.
- To facilitate a response from the Board regarding the organisation approach to, and learning from complaints, for completion and publication of this annual report onto our website for residents.
- To propose recommendations for concluding our duty regarding the expectations of the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code.

2. Background

2.1. The Housing Ombudsman Complaints Handling code requires that housing providers provide specific information in their annual report to their Board, together with their response to our findings and action taken, which is to be included within a report for residents.

- 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.

- 2.2. This is the second annual report produced since 'the code' became a statutory requirement in April 2024. Since then in 2024, the complaint handling policy and process has been subject to an external audit, which found substantial assurance for members in the execution of our duty regards the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code.
- 2.3. Our approach to complaints handling has also been the subject of a dedicated tenant scrutiny exercise which is currently being concluded.

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 with full compliance found. Commentary has been provided to confirm the level of compliance. The current Code self-assessment is provided [here](#).
- 3.2. There were four areas of weakness found in complaint operations over the year which all concerned performance in issuing investigation extension letters where a complaint had taken longer than our target time of 10 working days. We found that whilst all extensions had been agreed verbally, they were not always confirmed in writing at that moment in time but were later confirmed in the outcome letter.



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 2025-26 year:

Stage/Service	Upheld	Not Upheld	Outstanding	Total
Stage 1	65	15	5	85
Asset	54	9	4	67
Housing	10	6	1	17
Development	1	0	0	1
Stage 2	9	0	2	11
Asset	4	0	2	6
Housing	4	0	0	4
Development	1	0	0	1
Housing Ombudsman	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, five 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.	2
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.	1
Raised in error/withdrawn	Complaints that could not proceed to investigation. Examples include where a next of kin had attempted to raise an issue on behalf of the tenant where consent could not be obtained, or where the tenant no-longer wished for their issue to be handled formally.	2

- 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 2025:

Measures	Stage 1 (20 days maximum)	Stage 2 (40 days maximum)
Cases closed	80	9
Average time	8.4 days	17.4 days
% closed within HO code timescales	100%	100%

Year and Month Comparisons

- 4.5. We have seen a significant increase in volume of complaints received which represents a 92% increase in cases. This is a positive indicator that resident awareness and use of Complaints to seek redress is increasing and is consistent with the experience of our peers in the sector. The following chart demonstrates the pattern of growth monthly, over the previous four years:

Monthly new complaints - Cumulative by month
(four year trends)



Escalation Comparison

- 4.6. Escalations are an indicator of customer satisfaction with stage 1 investigation quality and responses. Over a year where the highest number of complaints were received, due to the enhanced process and system used for investigations and for quality assuring outcomes, the rate of escalation has remained low.

Year	Stage 1 completed	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%
2024-25	80	11	13.75%

Sector Comparisons

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

January 2025 House Mark data				
Measure	Lower Quartile	Median	Upper Quartile	Arches
Complaints per 1,000 properties	39.48	660.12	78.6	60.39 (annualised)

Commentary:

We see that the number of complaints received is slightly above median, suggesting that our residents are actively using our Complaints policy as a way to seek redress when things go wrong. This means we have greater intelligence on where our services need to be improved, helping us to focus on changes that will have the greatest benefit to residents, and greatest impact on value for money.

Stage one and Stage two complaint response within time	69.97%	95.37%	100%	100%
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Commentary:

All complaints at both stage 1 (20 days) and stage 2 (40 days) received a response that was within the timescales required by the Housing Ombudsman, and our Policy.

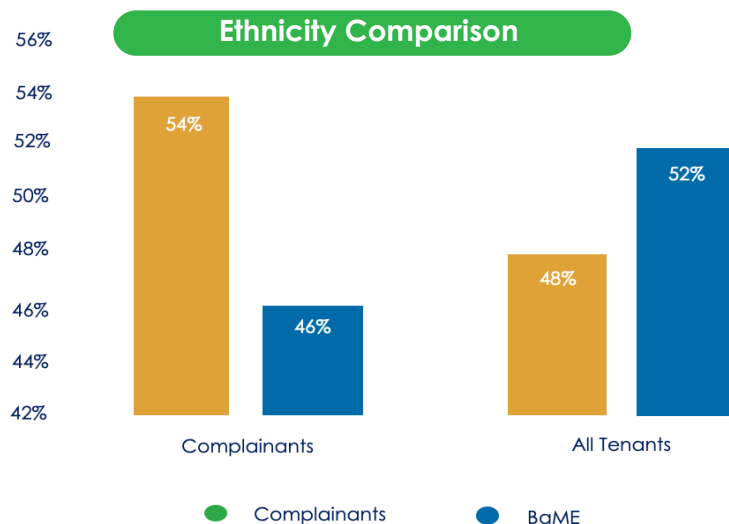
We also set more stretching performance targets which are half that required by the Housing Ombudsman of 10 days for stage 1, and 20 days for stage 2 to ensure complaints are prioritised. This year, investigators were able to deliver 87.5% of stage 1 complaints within 10 days, and 88% of stage 2 complaints within 20 days. This is all during our highest volume of complaints received per year.

Service Comparisons -Profile Comparisons

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

4.8.1. Ethnicity

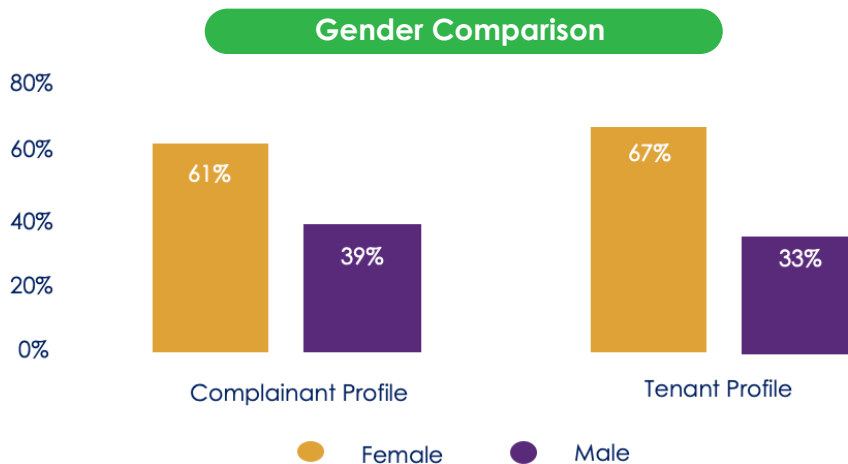
The following chart of comparison of complainant and all tenant diversity information reveals that we have received significantly more complaints from white British tenants than non-white tenants, which is also disproportionate to our tenant profile.



We recognise that this may suggest ethnicity is a barrier to customer access and that we need to understand this more, including whether this is associated with language, or other factors. To ensure awareness of all residents' right to complaint we will be promoting our Policy in the coming year using our data to target different diversity groups, and training colleagues on cultural and language barriers, to encourage non white British residents to access the complaints service to seek redress if things go wrong.

4.8.2. Gender

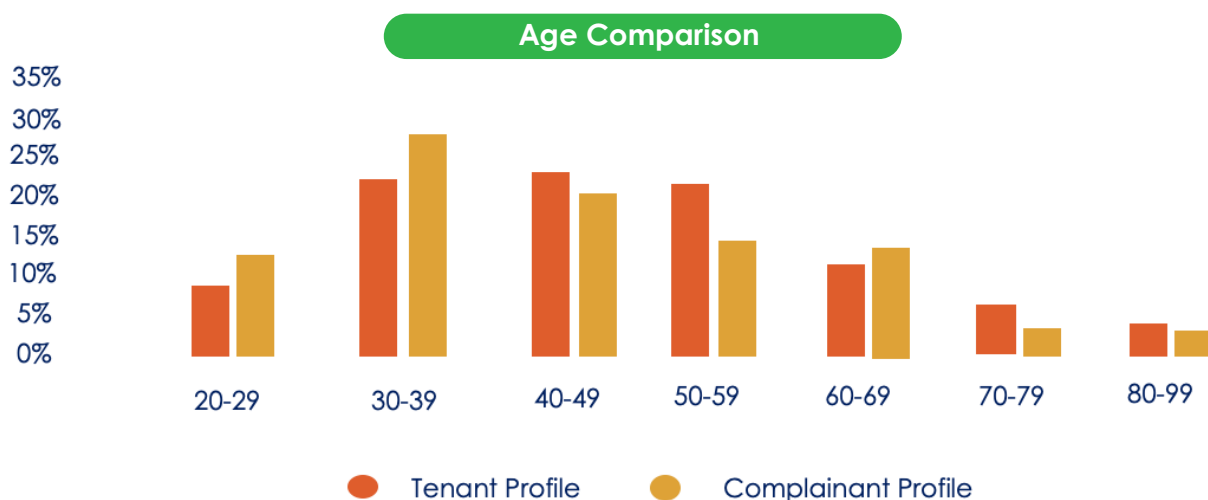
Regarding Gender, the following comparison chart reflects a more proportionate representation of our tenant profile within the profile of complainants:



4.8.3. Age

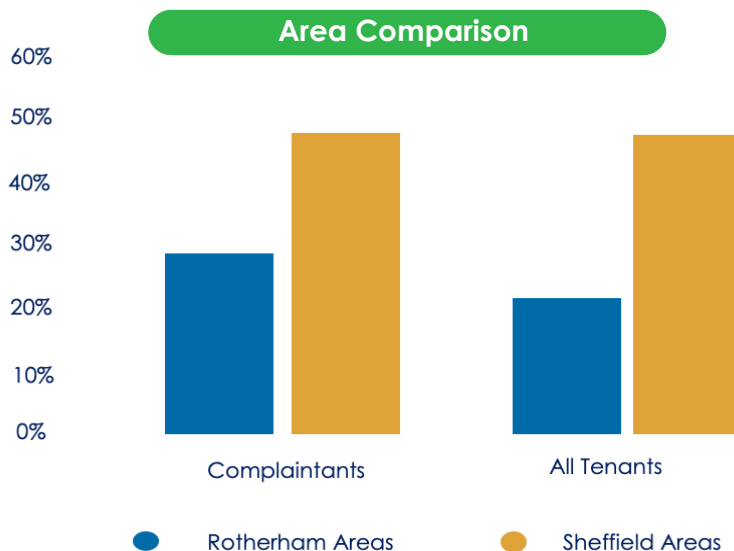
This year we have seen our highest level of complaints received from tenants within the 30-39 age group at 29%, resulting in a slight over-representation as they make up 23% of all tenants. This may be attributed to a higher level of engagement with digital platforms, higher expectations, and a lower threshold for tolerance with the impact of poor service delivery.

Mid-life tenants, or those aged 40 – 59, account for 45% of all tenants, yet represent just 36% of complainants. This could indicate greater satisfaction, higher tolerance for issues, or a lower propensity to report complaints. This is consistent with findings of the tenant satisfaction measures.



Locality and Property Type

Representing 49%, 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. Occupant of properties in Sheffield areas account for 48% of all tenants, and so the number of complaints received suggests that residents in these areas are fairly represented in the complaints that were received.



Satisfaction with Complaint Handling

- 4.10. Multiple attempts and methods of contact are 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. Of all satisfaction surveys attempted, a response rate of 67% was achieved, and of which 75% of respondents were fully satisfied with how their complaint was handled, reflecting a steady improvement over the year due to improvements made. Furthermore, 78% of respondents felt that communication throughout the process had met their needs, and that the outcome was fair and reasonable.

Where complainants were not fully satisfied, we found that this was due to how communication had been handled by the investigator, and also that repairs arising were not being completed in a timely manner, with some complainants having to chase for updates. Earlier in the year we also received feedback regarding delays in the payment of any compensation awarded.

Improvements to Complaint Handling

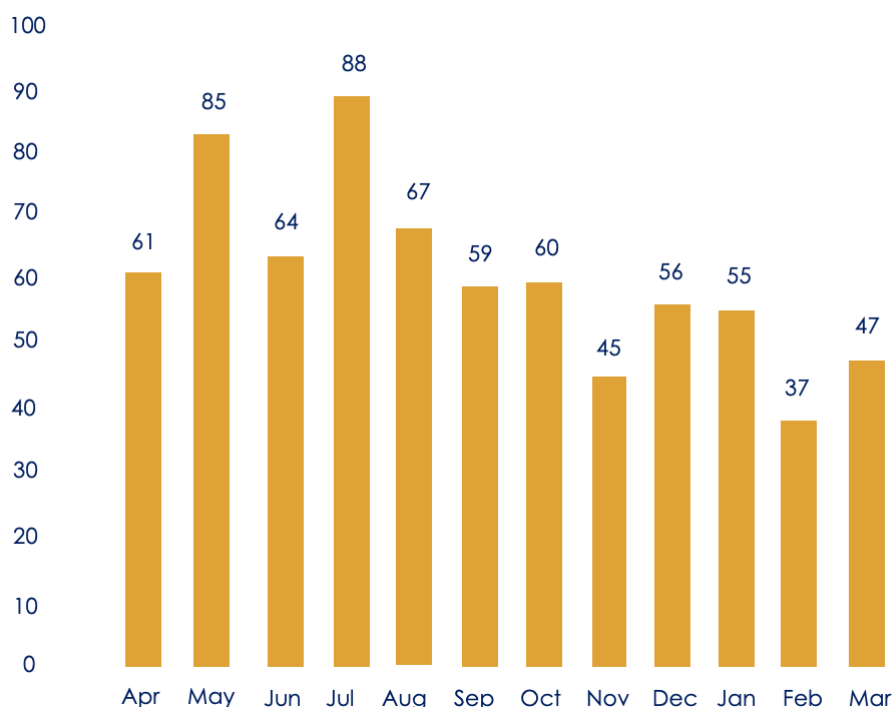
The feedback we have received from complainants include:

- Communication – we now arrange the outcome conversation with the complainant at the beginning of the investigation. Having an appointment pre-arranged means that the customer knows when to expect an outcome, and outcomes are not delayed by difficulties with customer availability.
- Compensation – we now take bank details during the outcome conversation so that payment can be paid more quickly, whereas we previously would ask the customer to contact us with their bank details which did not always happen.
- Repairs arising – we have created a new step in our complaint case management process whereby any case that has repairs associated, is referred to a repairs coordinator who will maintain oversight through to completion in a timely manner.

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. After changing how we recognise service requests in-line with the requirements of The Code from 1st April 2024, we saw a significant increase in average numbers per month from 5.4 throughout 2023-24, to 60.3 per month by the end of March 2025. The following chart expresses the actual number of service requests received by month:

Service requests received monthly 2024-25



We endeavour to resolve service requests within the initial call, or by no later than two working days from receipt where the issue needs the response of a different officer. Over the year we have resolved 45% of Service Request at first contact, with the remaining 55% being referred on for action within two days.

Similarly to Complaints, service requests relative to asset operations represent the majority of calls at 71%, with most of these being from residents requesting an update on their outstanding repair. An increase in requests related to issues with contractor appointment handling was noted in quarter two, arising from personnel changes with our primary contractors.

Housing operations service requests accounted for 29% of all requests, across tenancy management and anti-social behaviour, estate management, and Income management/rent collection. Grounds maintenance contractor issues were prominent for the first half of the year. However, following strengthening of contract management arrangements this is no longer a common theme.

The volume of service requests that are not resolved in the first call is split evenly over housing and asset at approximately 30% each, as much of the asset service requests are resolved on the first call.

Data Quality

There is evidence of general enquiries being incorrectly logged as service requests which is estimated to account for 10% of calls. Similarly, an internal assurance exercise found that we were not consistently recognising calls that were service requests, or service requests that should be escalated to a formal complaint. Staff have received training on correctly identifying calls and the impact will be measured over the first quarter of the new year to ensure data quality, and it is anticipated that this could lead to an increase in service requests and formal complaint numbers.

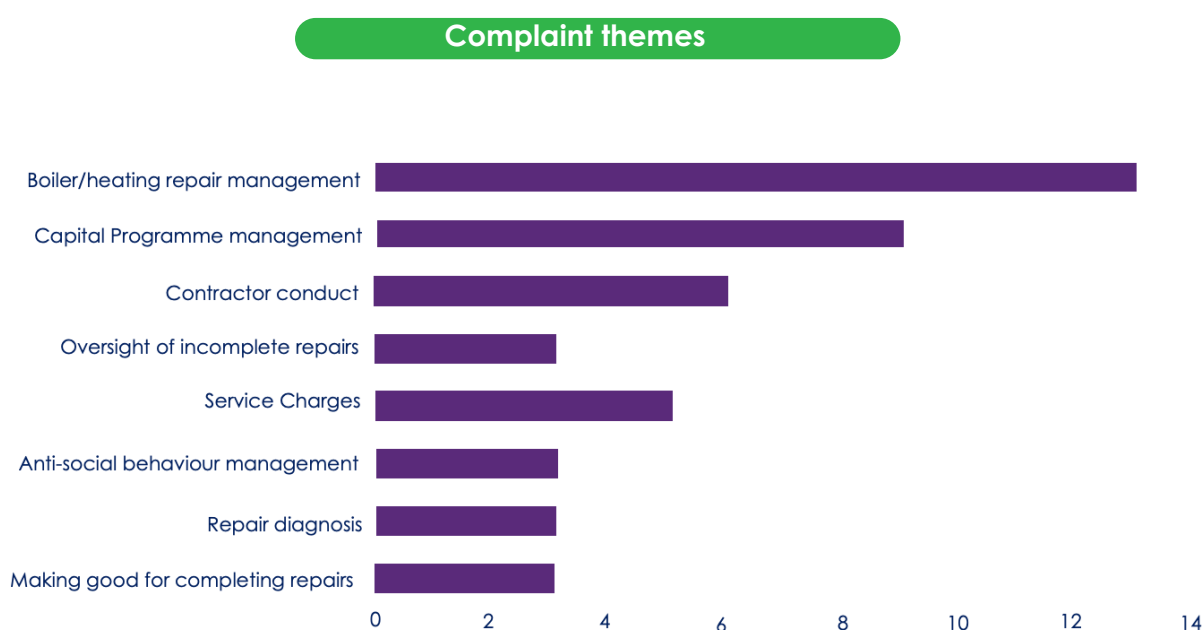
5. Learning from Customers

Upheld and Not Upheld

- 5.1. 18.7 % of complaints were not upheld this year, suggesting that there is a large degree of service failure revealed from complaints. A complaint is upheld if all or part of a complaint is proven to be justified as we had failed to deliver a service in-line with our published standards and policies, or staff had not acted appropriately. For example, where a complaint lists more than one issue, the complaint will be upheld overall if just one issue is upheld. Many of the complaints we receive refer to more than one issue which is why we have seen a large number of complaints upheld this year. Other factors affecting this is the general increase in awareness of the tenants right to complain due to our own communications, as well as national publicity campaigns led by the Housing Ombudsman.
- 5.2. When a complaint is Upheld we explore the root cause and take action to prevent a re-occurrence. Often it can take some time for actions to impact on service delivery, whilst we continue to receive complaints from those who have already experienced the issue prior to changes being made. However we have seen some themes of complaints consistently over the year where they concern contractors. Resolving these issues completely is part of a strategic approach including the reorganisation of asset operations, together with a re-procurement of contractors.

Themes

- 5.3. We review and analyse the dissatisfaction of our residents expressed as a formal complaint. A theme is revealed where three or more complaints on same issue are found. The following table show that there were nine themes identified, accounting for 45 complaints:



Further complaint areas which were not considered themes, having received less than three complaints, are as follows:

- Neighbourhood Management (1)
- Contractor - Appointment attendance(1)
- Tree management (1)
- New Home Defect Management (1)
- Arches - Appointment handling (1)
- New tenancy (1)
- Contractor on-boarding (1)
- Rent Account Management (1)
- Void property repairs (2)
- Quality of Repair (2)
- Contractor appointment attendance (2)
- Oversight of repeat repairs (2)
- Emergency repairs out of hours (2)

5.4. Stage 2 investigations completed (9) revealed causes of dissatisfaction in respect of complaint handling at stage 1, including:

- Adherence to requirements on communication with the complainant during investigations.
- Adherence to requirements for the involvement of the Complaints Officer.
- Ensuring repairs arising from stage one complaints are completed in a timely fashion and to the required standard.





5.5. Learning from Complaints

All upheld complaints reveal opportunities for improvement with individual actions arising from complaints being captured onto an action plan and tracked to completion. The table overleaf expresses service failures as experienced by the resident, and what we have done to improve:

Theme (Service Area)	Resident Sees	How we have learned
Boiler/ heating repair management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appointments keep getting changed or cancelled, delaying recovery of all boiler function. • Delays completing emergency boiler repairs. • Repeated breakdowns over a short period of time, including to newly installed boilers. • Struggling to get minor repairs completed, such as to thermostats. • Appointments are cancelled without a new appointment being made. • Delays to emergency boiler repairs due to warranty conditions. 	<p>Much of this was due to a lack of oversight in boiler repairs, and as a result we now maintain oversight of appointment changes and cancellation for assurance that changes are minimised and only take place in exceptional circumstances.</p> <p>We are reviewing breakdowns of newer boilers to identify whether there are patterns associated with installations to raise with contractors, faults to raise with the manufacturer, or whether this has arisen from moving to a new boiler manufacturer.</p>



Theme (Service Area)	Resident Sees	How we have learned
Capital Programme Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Poor communication and project management of works (ad-hoc capital works programme additions). Poor quality installation of replacements (bathrooms/ kitchens/ windows) Excessive delay in replacing a faulty door as an ad-hoc capital replacement. 	<p>We have improved tenant liaison arrangements for residents. This improved policy and process has included implementing a Resident Needs checklist.</p> <p>Together with customers we have mapped their journey when receiving major capital investment works in their home and have created new tools to ensure that communication meets their needs.</p> <p>As a result of persistent quality issues one contract has been drawn to an early end, ceasing their contribution to the delivery of the planned works programme.</p> <p>We have enhanced the specification for contractors to provide tenant liaison for all new contracts to be procured for delivering the new planned works programme.</p> <p>Contractors are now required to carry out more frequent reviews of stocks (in vans) to ensure they have more ready access to parts and supplies to be able to complete repairs within time, and with minimal appointment disruption for the customer.</p>
Oversight of repairs in progress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Repairs not being completed. Poor communication on status of repairs. 	<p>The review of our Operations teams has provided greater resource to improve consistency of management of works in progress (WIP). We are now more proactive in pursuing contractors for action, and communication with the customer.</p>



Theme (Service Area)	Resident Sees	How we have learned
Contractor Conduct	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contractors failing to respect residents by keeping gardens secure for use of children. Contractor damaging residents property/home. Misinformation from the contractor regarding appointments. Rude and aggressive behaviour by engineer. 	<p>When accidents happen, when compensation for damage is required we pay this direct and recover from the contractor so as to avoid delays. All instances where damage is caused are reviewed in-line with the contractor code of conduct.</p> <p>We require that contractors improve new employee inductions and training so that all of their colleagues provide correct advice consistently before being able to take calls from our customers.</p> <p>As a result of our concerns and feedback one engineer was dismissed. We have also formally requested and received assurance that our larger contractors have suitable anti-bullying and harassment policies in place to protect our customers from aggressive and intimidating behaviour, and that staff are trained in their policy. Similarly we have required all contractors to update their staff on the contractor code of conduct.</p>
Service Charges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Service charging errors. Service charge statements are not clear. 	<p>Relevant staff have been retrained on posting charges and processes for charging have been strengthened to ensure roles are clear.</p> <p>During this year we will be reviewing annual service charge letters and statements together with customers to ensure they are clear and easy to understand.</p>



Theme (Service Area)	Resident Sees	How we have learned
Anti-social Behaviour Case Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of consistent management and progression of cases through the ASB process. • Application of Policy on fences as ASB interventions. 	<p>There have been positive improvements to how anti-social behaviour cases are managed following a full process re-engineering exercise which saw the systems-led case process enhanced significantly, greatly replacing manual elements with automated tasking.</p> <p>This has provided greater oversight for how cases are managed from start to end.</p>
Repair Diagnosis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Failing to recognise issues that worsened, causing significant disturbance. • Failing to modify repair diagnosis affecting the commencement of major planned damp works. • Failing to note action required on all matters raised by the resident during an inspection. 	<p>Our new operating model has increased the capacity and is building the knowledge of our repairs team so that fewer repairs need a pre-inspection by a surveyor, and repairs can be completed in less time overall.</p> <p>Surveyors will have more time during inspections to focus on fewer issues, ensuring all matters that could not be diagnosed sooner by repairs coordinators, are addressed.</p>
'Making good' to ensure repairs are fully completed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Repairs are not being completed fully by including returning the area to the correct state. 	<p>We are training colleagues on technical knowledge of repairs so that all contractor feedback and making good needed to complete the repair in full in as few appointments is dealt with at diagnosis.</p> <p>We are working with contractors to improve their quality of feedback to ensure we are able to progress works to completion promptly.</p> <p>From 1st April 2025 a new Maintenance Officer role has been created to provide a dedicated resource for more consistent post-works inspections to ensure contractor quality.</p>

5.6. **Complaints which are not upheld**

6. **Remaining Compliance Areas (Items e and f)**

- 6.1. The Housing Ombudsman provide an annual report for registered providers where they have considered five or more complaints by residents of that Landlord. There has been just one decision made by the Housing Ombudsman concerning one complaint brought by a former Arches Housing resident in the period 1st April 2024 to 31st March 2025. Therefore, no annual report has been produced.

7. **Oversight and Accountability**

Our plans for the coming year will build on the strong governance arrangements already in place which ensures 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.
- Continuing to embed a continuous improvement culture with greater involvement of staff in problem solving through case reviews, and with regular performance reporting.
- Improving analysis of Service Requests to make best use of the greatest source of intelligence on dissatisfaction, providing opportunities for service improvements and value for money gains by delivering services better first time.

8. **Recommendations**

8.1. The Code requires that an Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement report is provided to the Board for comment, and that this is then reported to residents via our website. In preparation it is proposed:

1. Members confirm that they are reasonably assured of compliance with the Code;
2. Members discuss and provide comment to support the preparation of a Board response foreword, to be approved separately by the Board Chair and Member Responsible for Complaints (MRC) ready for publication in June;
3. Officers will then ensure a customer friendly document is produced and published via our website for residents, to form part of the Resident Complaints and Service Improvement Summary Report.



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