

## Complaints report 2024

Section of the customer strategy update board paper May 2024

### 10. Complaints and compliments monitoring

The Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code became mandatory on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024, there is a legal duty for the Housing Ombudsman to monitor compliance with the code and Cornerstone completed the Housing Ombudsman Self Assessment in October 2023, reported to the board in November 2023 and subsequently published on the Cornerstone website. A copy of the most recently complete self assessment is attached as Appendix 1 – Complaint Code Self Assessment.

Analysis of complaints and compliments compared with the previous year shows that recording of all types of concerns and complaints has gone up and compliments have also gone up. The increase in complaints can be attributed to the focus on complaints, systemic changes in responds to the new code and related staff training. The new CRM system being implemented in April 2024 is designed to ensure both easy complaint handling and compliance with the code, training has been provided to the management team and further training for all staff is planned.

Table 5, below, shows the numbers received and the trend. The Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code states that there should be no additional complaint category, other than Stage 1 and Stage 2, as this causes “unnecessary confusion for residents”. Therefore, the new CRM system will not record “initial concerns” as these will be automatically raised as “service requests” (if not a complaint), logged and resolved at point of contact.

The Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code also removes the “partially upheld” category and complaints are either “upheld” or “not upheld”. If any part of a Stage 1 Complaint is not fully resolved then the guidance is to escalate to Stage 2, therefore whilst the new CRM system records “partially upheld” this terminology is not used in the complaint response as each point of a complaint is responded to.

Table 5 – Number of complaints and compliments recorded

Complaint level	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	Trend
Initial concerns	54	16	19	↑
Stage 1 complaints	39	33	57	↑
Stage 2 complaints	4	2	8	↑

Compliments	47	78	111	
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11. There has been an 18% increase in initial concerns being reported, initial concerns are issues raised by customers that are simple to resolve at the first point of contact. An example might be a customer calling to say an operative hasn't turned up for an appointment, we apologise, explain the reason and rebook an appointment for them. Simple to resolve but still worth recording in case there is a pattern of similar issues over time.

The reduction in initial concerns received is attributed to;

- Increased awareness of complaint handling across the organisation, achieved through complaints policy and process review
- Complaint handling training provided to all staff and the management team
- Resolution of issues at first point of contact

12. The recording of 42% more compliments indicates that the current recording system is not a barrier to logging customer feedback. The increase in number of stage 1 complaints doesn't indicate they are being logged incorrectly and reflects the training provided to all staff regarding complaint handling, thereby the increased awareness of complaints and how to support customers in raising complaints. We do know from the TSM survey that how we deal with complaints is the number one cause of overall dissatisfaction, so customers may have given up reporting issues unless they are more serious or complex and are then logged as a stage 1 complaint.

13. Table 6, below, shows the subject of initial concerns being raised by customers in 2023/24. Of those recorded, 3 relate to staff communication and analysis indicates that the concerns are related to the content of communication, although one related to "attitude of staff". There were 8 initial concerns related to staff communication in the previous year, so this isn't an increasing trend. Maintenance of home is the highest cause for initial concern and 4 of the concerns related to response to boiler problems and being left without heating in winter months.

Table 6 - Initial concerns reported in 2023/24

Subject of concern	No. recorded	%
Staff Communication	3	15.7%
Ground Maintenance	1	5.2%
Other (Parking, services, online reporting)	4	15.7%
Payments/rent	2	10.5%
Staff performance	2	10.5%

ASB Handling	1	5.2%
Maintenance Of Home	6	31.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>100%</b>

14. The number of stage 1 complaints has increased in 2023/24 by 72% from 33 to 57, this is the first stage of our formal complaints process. Table 6, below, shows the subject of the complaints received and whether they were fully or partially upheld.

15. Issues related to the maintenance of the home continue to be the top cause of stage 1 complaints, however it has reduced from 45% in 2021/22. Staff communication is also a key reason for stage 1 complaints, along with a variety of other, sometimes complex cases.

Table 7 – Stage 1 complaints reported

Subject of complaint	No. recorded	% of total recorded	No. partially or fully upheld
Maintenance Of Home	23	40.3%	7
Staff Communication	8	14%	5
Other*	6	10.5%	5
Property Condition	3	5.2%	2
Lettings	1	1.7%	1
ASB Handling	7	12.2%	6
Staff Performance	2	3.5%	1
Ground Maintenance	1	1.7%	1
Rent	1	1.7%	1
Communal area maintenance	5	8.7%	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>32</b>

\*Other- parking charges from PCN, multiple (comms, maintenance, repairs, OoH service), damp and mould, DHC, garden condition.

16. Analysis of the stage 1 complaints either partially or fully upheld shows:

[Complaints additional info.docx](#)

Table 7 – Stage 2 complaints received

Subject of complaint	No. recorded	% of total recorded	No. partially or fully upheld
Ground maintenance	1	12.5%	1

Communal Area Maintenance	1	12.5%	0
Staff Performance	1	12.5%	1
Service Charge	1	12.5%	1
Other (Parking, Tenancy, Complaint handling)	4	50%	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>6</b>

17. Learning and actions from initial concerns and complaints has included:

- Training for staff around recording complaints is required
- In person visits can be most effective in understanding how to resolve complaints
- There is a need for consistent and quick responses to heating issues in winter
- ASB handling to be strengthened and for customers to be regularly updated regarding action plans and outcomes
- Appointments and scheduling need to be consistent with effective notice periods adhered to and cancellations being given with sufficient notice
- Responses to damp and mould need to be undertaken quickly, collaboratively amongst departments and consistently
- Service charge consultation required to ensure value for money and effective communal services are provided
- Neighbourhood management needs to be consistent, quick responses and visible improvements in neighbourhoods
- The Out of Hour service needs to be communicated more effectively

18. We have also completed training for all staff on the complaints process, why customer feedback can be a good way to improve services, the importance of swift resolution and showing empathy throughout.

19. Some areas for improvement remain in formal complaint handling processes and we are trialling the Housing Ombudsman training for this with a view to rolling this out to our complaint handlers, making effective use of the CRM system in 2024/25.

20. Our process for gathering customer feedback on complaint handling also needs improvement to increase the amount of feedback we receive and to support our other learning from complaints.

21. The number of complaints for our size and complaints handled within Housing Ombudsman (HO) code timeframes are now monitored and reported to the Board in the regular KPI reports. These will also be reported to the RSH in 2024 as part of the new Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs). Table 8, below summarises how we have been performing, we don't yet have benchmark data for comparison.

Table 8 – Complaint code monitoring

TSM Measure	Stage 1	Stage 2
No. of complaints received	57	8
Average no. of working days to respond	12.5	13.06
Target no. of working days to respond	10	20
No. responded to within HO code	46	6
% responded to within HO code	80.7%	80%
No. of complaints received per 1000 homes	5.7	0.8

22. We have completed the HO Code Self-Assessment, to submit as required by the end of June 2024. The self-assessment identifies 5 areas of non-compliance with the code;

- 6.2 acknowledge Stage 1 complaints **within 5 working days** – records show 39% acknowledged within 5 working days. This is attributed to the early part of the reporting year working towards 10 working days acknowledgement. The new CRM system automatically acknowledges complaints.
- 6.3 landlords must issue a full response to stage 1 complaints **within 10 working days** of the complaint being acknowledged. - records show 80.7% complaints were responded to within 10 working days. The new CRM system, appointed compliance officer and complaints training addresses this.
- 6.4 agreed extension to response time, must be clearly explained to resident – the existing system did not allow for clearly recording extension time (there was only one instance of an extension). New CRM system makes this reporting requirement clearer.
- 6.11 requests for Stage 2 escalation must be acknowledged and logged **within 5 working days** – 62.5% were acknowledged within this time frame.
- 6.14 Landlords must issue a final response to the stage 2 **within 20 working days** of the complaint being acknowledged – 80% of Stage 2 complaints received a final response within 20 working days.

23. Further communication has taken place with customers in our monthly newsletters, in our annual report and on our website. This has included details of the new TSM survey, complaints process and information about what we have learned from complaints and how we have improved, examples are shown below.

Complaints Compliance note for board as at 22/05 2024

Although our policy is compliant with the Housing Ombudsman code our performance against this is poor in some areas. The self-assessment form has to be submitted by 30<sup>th</sup> June 2024 and within this we are asked to include our Board response to our

performance. We will submit and offer a clear explanation as to why we aren't compliant plus our plans to achieve compliance with the code.

5 areas of complaints noncompliance have been identified with an action agreed for each that will resolve or has resolved the root cause for noncompliance.

- Stage 1 acknowledgement in 5 days – we reported 53% at the end of last year
- Stage 1 completion in 10 days – 81%
- Agreed extension times – no more than 10 working days, we didn't previously have the ability to extend and record that on our systems. CRM process will resolve this.
- Stage 2 complaints logged within 5 working days of an escalation was 63%
- Stage 2 response issued as final response in 20 working days – 75%

The updated housing ombudsman code requires reporting against the updated guidance using the data from 2023/24. We previously reported days from receipt to response. This now states that response time is measured from the acknowledgement date.

As there were several complaints which did not have an acknowledgement date, this greatly reduces the figures. Using the updated guidance:

- 51% of stage one complaints were responded to within 10 days of acknowledgment.
- Including those that were acknowledged at the same time as response and within 5 days changes this to 70%
- 50% of complaints were responded to within 20 days of acknowledgement

### Commentary

Cornerstone is clearly falling short of the standard. This was identified in 2023 and the new CRM system was implemented in part to address this. Failure to meet this standard could lead to reputational damage, lower grading on the new consumer standard or investigation from the ombudsman.

Response times were achieved in around 80% of cases in 2023/24.(response within 10 days of receipt) However, in assessing against the new code this drops to around 50%. This is because the response time is taken from the acknowledgement date and not all complaints in 2023/24 had this recorded.

In some cases, there was no acknowledgement recorded as acknowledgement and response were at the same time.

Issues were raised during the year regarding the recording of complaints on pyramid. The system was clunky and difficult to use and report from. The system was not fit for purpose and so complaints were moved to the CRM system from April 2024.

Other issues addressed were:

- Letters were not being filed in SharePoint, the information was in pyramid and once identified was rectified.
- Pyramid did not allow for extensions to be easily identified and reported. Therefore at least some of the responses that were over time had extensions agreed. This is addressed in CRM.
- Training for the management team on the importance of complaints was undertaken.
- Response times were improved over the year as there was weekly monitoring of outstanding complaints by governance manager and executives.

CRM provides an easier interface for recording and reporting. Complaints are visible to the management team so progress can be monitored.

#### **Actions and timescales**

CRM complaints process to be written including responsibilities- requires sign off from Executive team	June 24
Complaints ownership and allocation to be specified and clarified – to be agreed by executive team	May 24
Monthly reporting to ET by complaints lead – CRM reporting issues to be worked out and dashboard to be agreed	June 24
Reporting to board quarterly related to KPIs – to include themes and learning	July 24
Self-assessment to be published with clarity on what we are doing to improve the resident experience around the areas we have fallen short of compliance.	June 24
Learning to be added to complaint form to allow reporting – requires input from Blacklight	June 24
Days calculation on CRM to be rectified as currently not showing – this is available via reporting but needs to show more clearly	June 24
Additional CRM training for teams. Management team booked for 10 <sup>th</sup> June.	June 24

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#### **Board minutes related to complaints**

##### **Annual Update of Customer Strategy**

The board received the report on customer strategy and complaints at their meeting on May 29<sup>th</sup> 2024.

Points arising in discussion:

- The new customer relationship management system was at an early stage. The focus was on processes training and testing and the key to this was engaging with staff. Call handling and complaints would be addressed first.
- The first quarterly KPI's for complaints would be available for the July board meeting and this was expected to show an improvement.
- Customer complaints were being resolved but the systems did not report appropriately.
- The board set out their expectations that acknowledgement of complaints should take place as soon as possible. Where a resolution would take longer than the standard timescale residents should be kept informed.
- The board would be monitoring KPI's on complaints to make sure that an improvement happened as this was a serious issue. If no improvement had been made the board would expect to see data explaining why this was an ongoing issue.
- In the previous year staff training had been good. However, the new code meant that further training was required.
- There would be further staff training on what is a complaint and the option for an expression of dissatisfaction would be removed to be less confusing.
- With better monitoring the number of complaints was likely to increase
- Actions and timescales were included within the report and the KPI's should show improvement within these. It was possible that the system may have to be rebuilt which would take longer, however, complaints were being monitored closely.
- Complaints were a challenge within the sector, but this would be addressed. There was a plan to deliver considerable improvement and evidence would be available to show the process was working.
- The ombudsman was likely to review the self-assessment and ask for evidence that an improvement had been made if this was not responded to an order could be issued.
- TSMs on consumer standards were positive

The board:

Approved the self-assessment with an expectation of an improvement in response times.