

Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report 2023/24

The purpose of this report is to provide the Board and residents information in relation to our complaints performance and service improvements for the year 2023/24. This report includes:

- The annual self-assessment against the Housing Ombudsman’s Complaint Handling code 2024 to ensure our complaint handling policy remains in line with its requirements.
- A qualitative and quantitative analysis of Hastoe’s complaint handling performance. This includes a summary of the types of complaints that Hastoe has refused to accept.
- Any findings of non-compliance with this Code by the Ombudsman.
- The service improvements made as a result of the learning from complaints.
- Any annual report about Hastoe’s performance from the Ombudsman.
- Relevant reports or publications produced by the Ombudsman in relation to the work of Hastoe.

Background

This annual report is a new requirement following the publication of the Housing Ombudsman’s Complaint Handling code 2024. The Hastoe Board receive regular performance information in relation to complaints performance throughout the year, and in the last financial year undertook a more thorough investigation of complaints performance using a complaints task and finish group. The recommendations from this group have been incorporated into Hastoe’s Business Strategy.

Self-Assessment against the Complaint Handling code

The annual self-assessment against the Complaints Handling code is appended. We have assessed our policy as compliant in all areas. A total of 319 complaints were accepted for investigation in 2023/24, which is a signification reduction on the previous year when 434 complaints were received. The reasons for the complaints are detailed below, but it should be noted that we changed the categories we used between these two years:

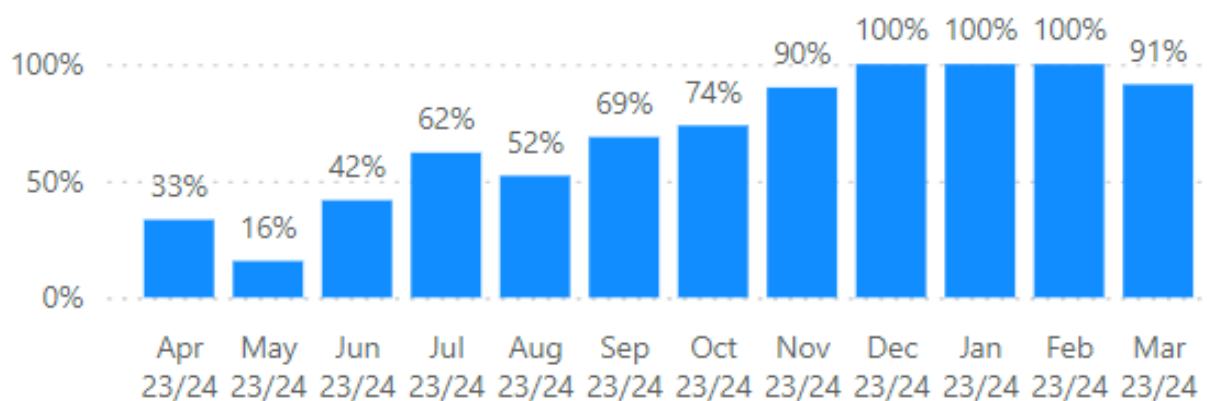
Category of complaint	Number received 2022/23	Number received 2023/24
Repairs Delivery/Quality	4	205
Staff Behaviour	43	42
Damp and Mould	2	19
Time Delay	355	13
Estate Services	Category did not exist	10
Rent and Service Charges	Category did not exist	9
Antisocial Behaviour	Category did not exist	6
Request for a repair/renewal denied	Category did not exist	5
Allocations	Category did not exist	5
Application of policy	26	2
Valuation challenge	Category did not exist	2
Defects	4	1
TOTAL	434	319

Complaint Handling Performance

A total of 319 complaints were received in 2023/24. Of these, 97% or 310 were acknowledged within our policy timescale of two working days. Nine complaints were logged and acknowledged outside of this time. In the coming year we are extending our timescales to log and acknowledge complaints to five working days. This will be in line with the Housing Ombudsman’s complaint handling code timescales and will give the Customer Services team additional time to discuss the complaint with the resident and better understand what they would like as an outcome from their complaint.

Complaint handling performance at stage one of our process was poor at the start of the year and in response the Board ran a task and finish group to analyse issues with complaint handling. Additional resourcing in managing complaints in our Property Services team alongside other actions recommended by the task and finish group has led to significantly improved performance:

Complaints Responded to on Time



Quarter	Number of complaints responded to*	Number of late responses	Explanation
1	92	65	Late responses were as a result of a combination of individual employee performance issues and vacancies within the Property Services team that resulted in complaints being managed in other parts of the organisation.
2	68	27	Late responses were as a result of a combination of individual employee performance issues and vacancies within the Property Services team that resulted in complaints being managed in other parts of the organisation.
3	97	9	Additional resourcing within the Property Services team resulted in significantly improved performance.
4	96	2	<p>One response was sent 21 days after acknowledgement and the other 22 days. One was in relation to repairs management and the other in relation to the management of antisocial behaviour.</p> <p>The repairs complaint was responded to one day late due to case handler error.</p> <p>The ASB complaint delay at stage one was acknowledged by the stage two complaint handler and the complainant was given compensation for poor complaint handling. The stage one complaint handler has been retrained in complaint handling to prevent this from happening again.</p>

*There are a different number of complaints responded to than received, as some complaints received in the year 2022/23 were responded to in 2023/24 and some complaints received in 2023/24 will be responded to in 2024/25.

60 stage one complaints escalated to stage two during the year. In total, three stage two complaints were sent late in the year. The reasons are detailed below:

Quarter	Number of complaints responded to at stage 2*	Number of late responses	Explanation
1	14	2	Prior to reversion to Directors dealing with stage two complaints. Late responses addressed with complaint handlers.
2	13	0	n/a
3	11	0	n/a
4	20	1	Response sent one day late due to complaint handler error and complex nature of complaint.

*There are a different number of complaints responded to than escalated, as some complaints escalated in the year 2022/23 were responded to in 2023/24 and some complaints received in 2023/24 will be responded to in 2024/25.

During the year 2023/24, we investigated and closed a total of 374 complaints. 321 complaints were either fully or partially upheld. During the year, the following service improvements were identified directly as a result of complaints:

- We reviewed our Lettings policy and developed a new procedure and criteria for agreeing to direct allocation of properties for existing Hastoe tenants following a complaint about how we managed an internal transfer.
- We stopped using WhatsApp as a communication method with residents as this prevented effective record keeping. To improve our record keeping, we developed a system whereby all resident email communication is automatically recorded on our systems. This was in response to complaint handlers finding instances of inconsistent record keeping by staff and issues raised by the Housing Ombudsman in two case determinations.
- We have introduced a lead manager for antisocial behaviour to provide more frequent and thorough reviews of cases. This was following issues identified with compliance to our antisocial behaviour policy and procedure from the resident complaints about the management of these cases.
- We no longer let new rental properties on the same day that they are handed over from the developer following complaints raised by residents when the properties were not ready on the handover day.
- We will update our voids procedure to ensure that all mutual exchange property inspections are completed by Repairs Officers.
- We have introduced more proactive management of outstanding repair orders, and have increased resourcing in this area, including outsourcing of contract management, following complaints relating to delayed repairs.

- We have re-procured responsive repairs contracts in some areas of operation, following poor performance of contractors and complaints about their services. Where this has happened we have moved to smaller, more locally based contractors.
- In 2024/25, we will consult homeowners on creating a dedicated team that can be a single point to co-ordinate and respond to their enquiries and stop them being passed around.
- We are reducing the number of grounds maintenance and cleaning contracts to provide more manageable numbers of contracts and provide a more consistent service to residents.
- In 2024/25, we will be increasing the number of directly employed estate staff to provide better estate services to residents, focussing on areas where a more visible service will benefit residents.
- We have introduced a dedicated complaints handler to manage repairs complaints, which has improved the speed in responding to these complaints.
- Where complaints have been upheld in relation to mistakes made by individual members of staff, further training has been provided to prevent errors from being made in future.

There were two complaints that we refused to accept in the year. The first was because the complaint had already been investigated at stages one and two of our complaints process in 2020 and was also investigated by the Housing Ombudsman's service in 2021. The complainant was advised of the reasons why we refused to accept the complaint and given the contact details for the Housing Ombudsman Service.

The second was in relation to rent setting. This wasn't accepted as a complaint last year as the rent had been set in accordance with our policy on rent setting. Decisions made in line with policy were a reason for exclusion in the previous complaint policy. This exclusion has been removed from the new policy which was implemented 1 April 2024.

Housing Ombudsman

Two determinations were made by the Housing Ombudsman in 2023/24. In both cases there were findings of severe maladministration.

The first case was in relation to a resident's request for a management move. The Housing Ombudsman determined that there was severe maladministration in our handling of the management move and maladministration in our handling of reports of unsatisfactory staff conduct, complaint handling and record keeping.

The second case was in relation to our management of repairs following reports of water ingress into a property. The Housing Ombudsman determined there was severe maladministration in our response to reports of water ingress at the property, there was maladministration with our complaint handling and our record keeping.

Lessons were learned from both of these cases and service improvements have been implemented, as detailed earlier in this report. Both of these cases were reported to the Board during the year and the orders made by the Housing Ombudsman service were monitored by the Board until they were completed. The allocations case was also featured in a Housing Ombudsman learning from severe maladministration report, published in April 2024: <https://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Severe-maladministration-publication-April-2024-1.pdf>

There is no individual landlord performance report published by the Housing Ombudsman for Hastoe as they only publish reports for landlords with five or more cases determined during the year. This is because no meaningful performance interpretation is possible where there are fewer than five determinations.

Compensation Payments

There were 286 compensation payments made during the year, totalling £169,543. The average amount paid in compensation was £593. The highest amount of compensation paid was £14,770 for a leaseholder who had significant issues with damp and mould due to structural issues in the property resulting in a delay in us dealing with the repairs that caused this. Part of the compensation was to pay for the financial loss to the leaseholder in relation to their tenant.

Customer Consultation

Residents were asked to assist us in scrutinising this self-assessment at a session in April 2024. The outcomes from this session are:

- Adding a link to our complaints policy to our resident portal, as well as accessing this via the website.
- Ensuring that resident disabilities are recorded, but this information is only accessible by those members of staff who need it, and to use details of service changes required, rather than details of the disabilities or ill health in order to protect this data.
- Ensure that when we are recording information about disabilities and other vulnerabilities, we are clear with residents why we are recording this data and what we are going to use it for.
- When requesting resident data, we should write to residents with this request and have a multimedia approach to recording the data.
- Make sure that resident contact preferences are recorded but have a default contact method if residents don't respond to this request.
- We discussed how to better encourage residents to engage with us in complaint scrutiny and the residents suggested:
 - Better promotion of how being engaged with Hastoe has improved services, perhaps by using a 'you said, we did' type of format.
 - Better incentivise people to engage with us and consider entering people into a prize draw.
 - Follow up with people who have been engaged with the complaints process.
 - Consider using engaged residents as 'mystery shoppers' for services.
 - Residents to discuss services with other residents, as they may be more willing to discuss issues honestly.

Residents were also given the opportunity to comment on this report prior to Board review and publication. Responses received resulted in some rewording in the report to provide greater clarity for the reader. We have continued our recruitment drive for further residents to join us in complaints scrutiny and we now have enough interest from residents to take this forward.

Appendix 1

The Board's response to this report

“The Board welcomes the report in the context of the appointment of two of our Board members who will jointly fulfill the role of Member Responsible for Complaints. We understand the importance of effective complaints handling and want to see continuous improvements fostered by a culture of learning. The Annual Complaints and Improvement Report is comprehensive, and we look forward to it being shared with our residents.”