



Annual Complaints performance and service improvement report

December 2023

1 - Introduction

The following report sets out Look Ahead complaints' performance between October 2022 to October 2023, in relation to compliance with our organisational policy and code of practice. The Housing Ombudsman expects Boards to scrutinise performance, specifically volume of complaints, types of complaints, case closure times, outcomes, escalation and organisational learning.

The report also sets out the complaint service improvement actions and includes an overview of the self-assessment against the Housing Ombudsman's Regulatory Complaints Management Code (the Code).

2 - Background

At the end of 2020, we undertook a full-scale review of our complaints policy and introduced a complaints quality assurance framework, a complaints KPI and a suite of complaints E-learning training modules. We last reported on complaints performance in February 2023.

Annual Complaints Assessment against the Regulatory Complaints Code

Since January 2021 the Housing Ombudsman has required all registered providers to undertake an annual complaint self-assessment against the published regulatory code and publish this on their websites. Our annual self-assessment requires Board approval.

We are compliant with the code except for section 5.1. The code allows five working days to acknowledge a complaint; ten working days from the date the complaint is logged to respond; and a further ten working day extension where required and agreed with the complainant. Look Ahead's policy currently allows the complaint to be logged and acknowledged within three working days, and a total of 13 working days from receipt to respond. We allow a further five working days extension where required in agreement with the complainant.

We will amend our policy in December to reflect the timeframes in the new code and update our e-learning platforms and communication channels in January 2024.

As the nature of our complaints tend to be more complex due to our customer groups, it is envisaged that the number of cases where we will need to apply reasonable extensions will increase as a result of these changes.

Look Ahead operates a 3 stage complaints process, whilst the code recommends a 2-stage process as best practice (see section 5.17 of the self-assessment). We have kept our 3-stage process, as we deliver care and support services, and need to consider best practice in relation to Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) expectations. We are also committed to involving our customers (as appropriate) in this stage as part of the panel process and feel this is the best way to ensure our customers have the best possible experience and opportunities to resolve their complaints before having to navigate statutory processes. Under the new Social Housing Regulation Act 2023, the Housing Ombudsman and LGSCO have launched a consultation on a joint complaint handling code. We will review our stage three process again once the joint code is published in April 2024.

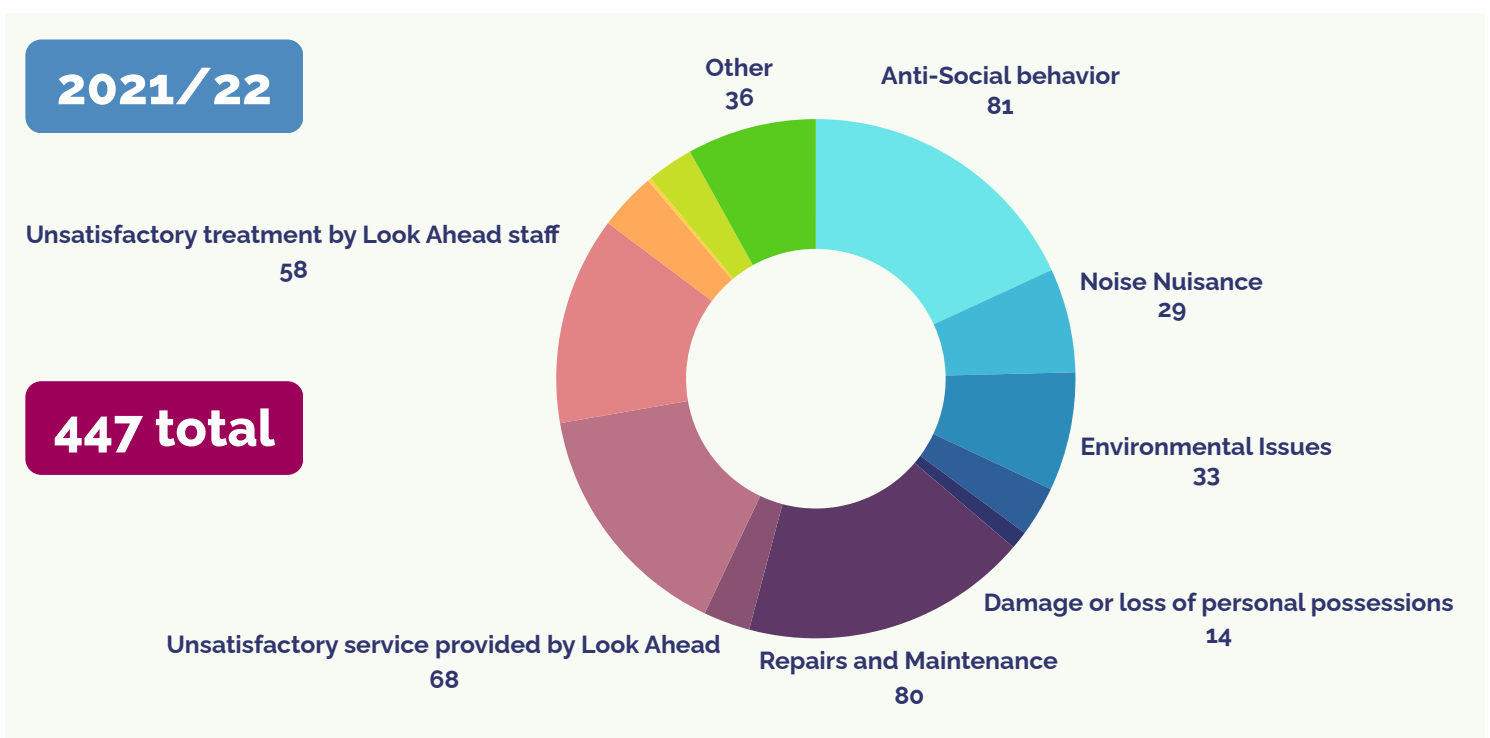
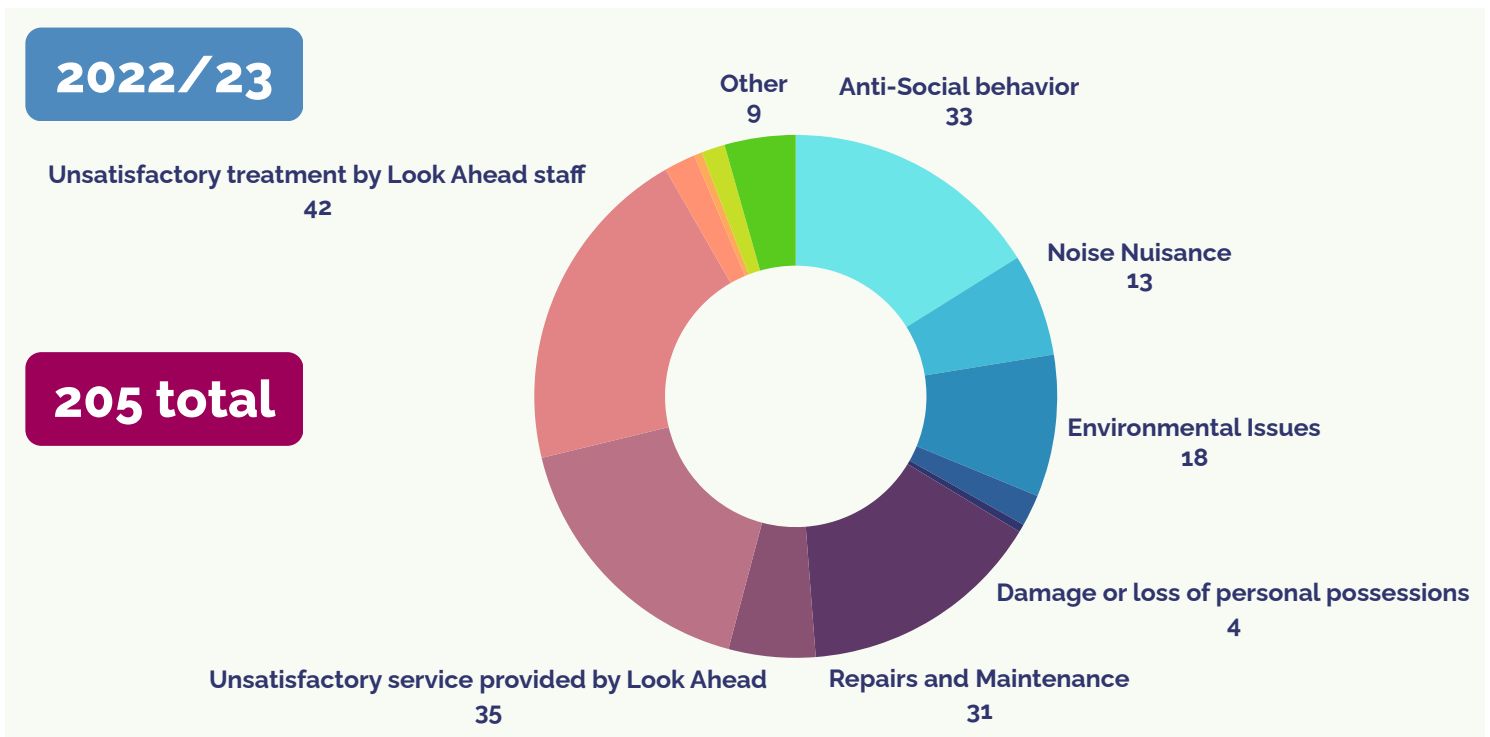
We currently record informal concerns or where we put things right at first point of contact under our informal complaints category. This is not a stage 0, or pre-stage 1 step, but under the code it can be interpreted as such. To this end under section 6.1 of the self-assessment we are committing to renaming "Informal Complaints" to record local "putting it right actions".

Board is asked to approve the actions above and approve the self-assessment.

3 - Complaints Performance - Trends

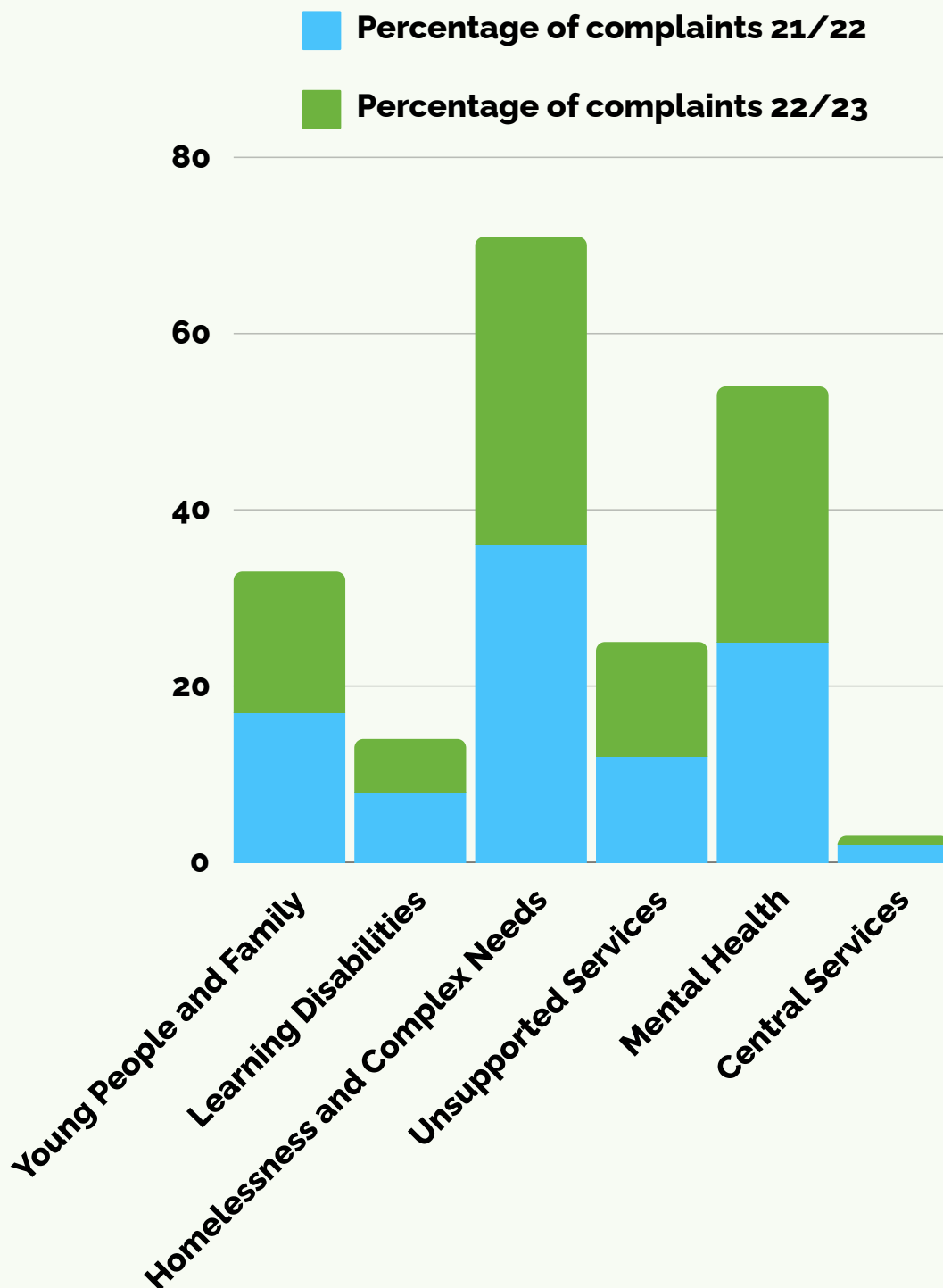
Between December 2021 to September 2022 Look Ahead logged **205** complaints in total. **48%** were categorised as formal and **51%** informal. **98%** of all complaints were resolved at Stage One, against a target of **95%**.

Over the past three years, we have seen a **54%** decrease in complaints received. This is mainly due to the significant drop in anti-social behaviour (ASB), repairs and maintenance complaints which reflects the significant amount of work completed as part of our complaints service improvement plan, procurement of the repairs and maintenance contract, improved customer services and repairs administration in our customer contact centre. This trend is highlighted in the table below.



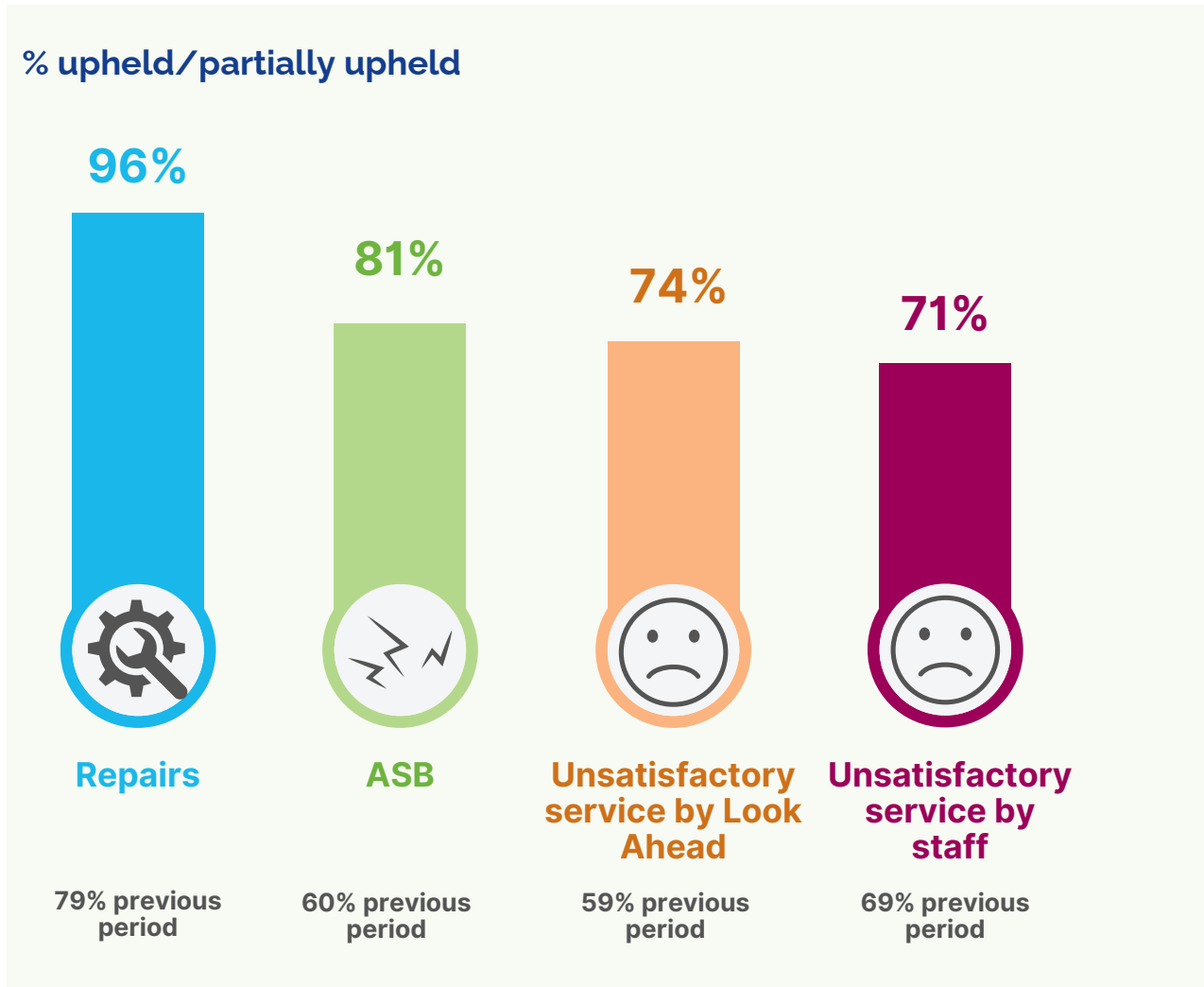
4 - Complaint Themes by Specialism

The table below sets out the percentage of complaints by specialism. Our unsupported tenants are more impacted by ASB and environmental and repair issues. Homelessness customers are more likely to have complaints regarding ASB and service quality. Whilst our customers in our mental health services are also impacted by ASB, as well as by treatment by staff. Young people have lower levels of complaint regarding ASB and are more likely to complain about service quality and staff related issues.



5 - Complaint Redress - Outcomes

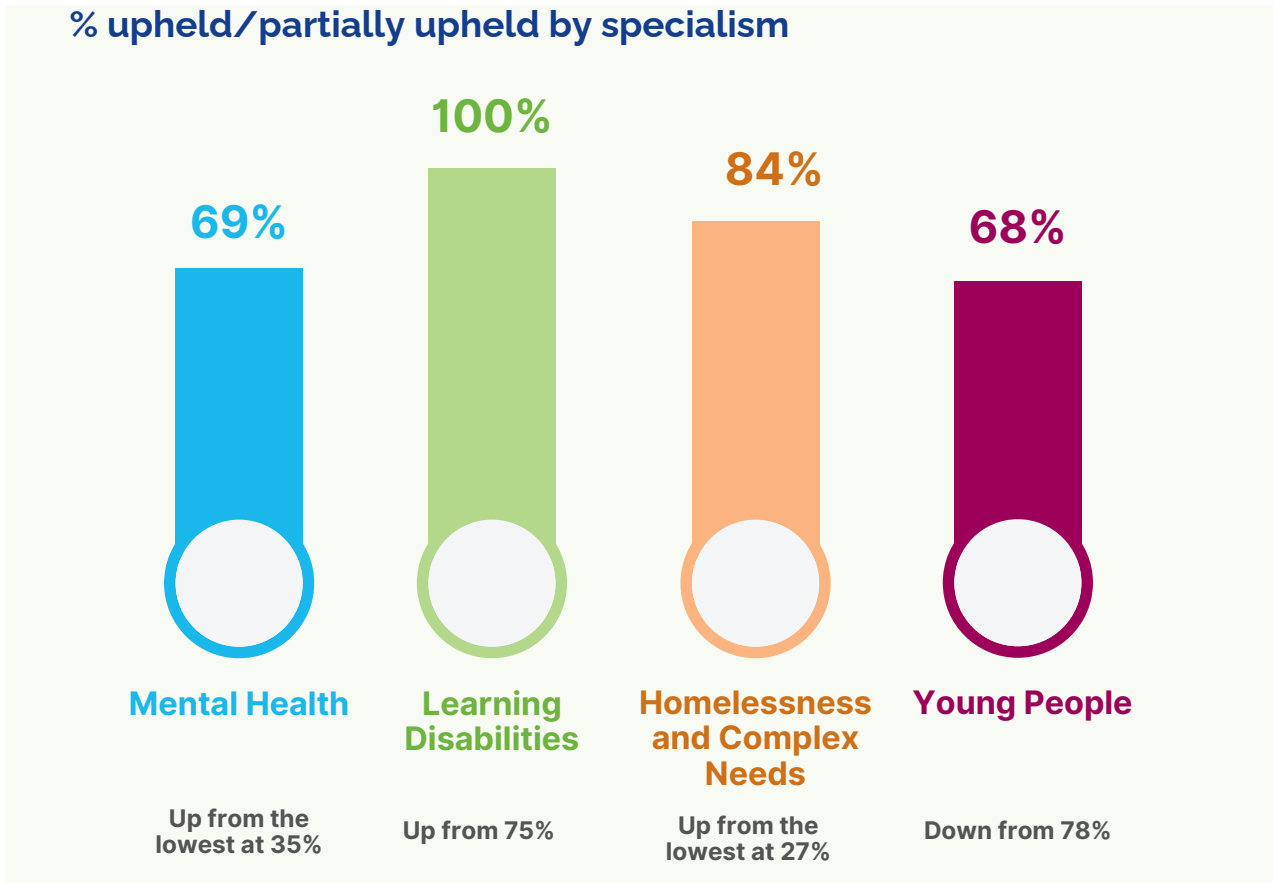
During the reporting period **79%** of stage one complaints were upheld or partially upheld – this included any approved extensions. The tables below provide a breakdown of the most prevalent complaint categories.



Back in 2020 we were concerned by the low level of complaints upheld related to service delivery and staff complaints. Consequently, we increased quality assurance dip sampling and oversight of local case manager assignment to ensure transparency in the complaints handling process. We also rolled out complaints management and investigation training. As a result, the number of complaints upheld relating to unsatisfactory service by LACS staff has increased in all customer specialisms, apart from Young People, as shown in the table on the next page.

We dip-quality sample **10%** of closed complaint cases, and in the current year **81%** of complaints assessed met the complaints standard. **77%** of managers have completed the managing and investigating complaints training and **64%** of non-managers had completed the complaints-eLearning.

% upheld/partially upheld by specialism



6 - Performance

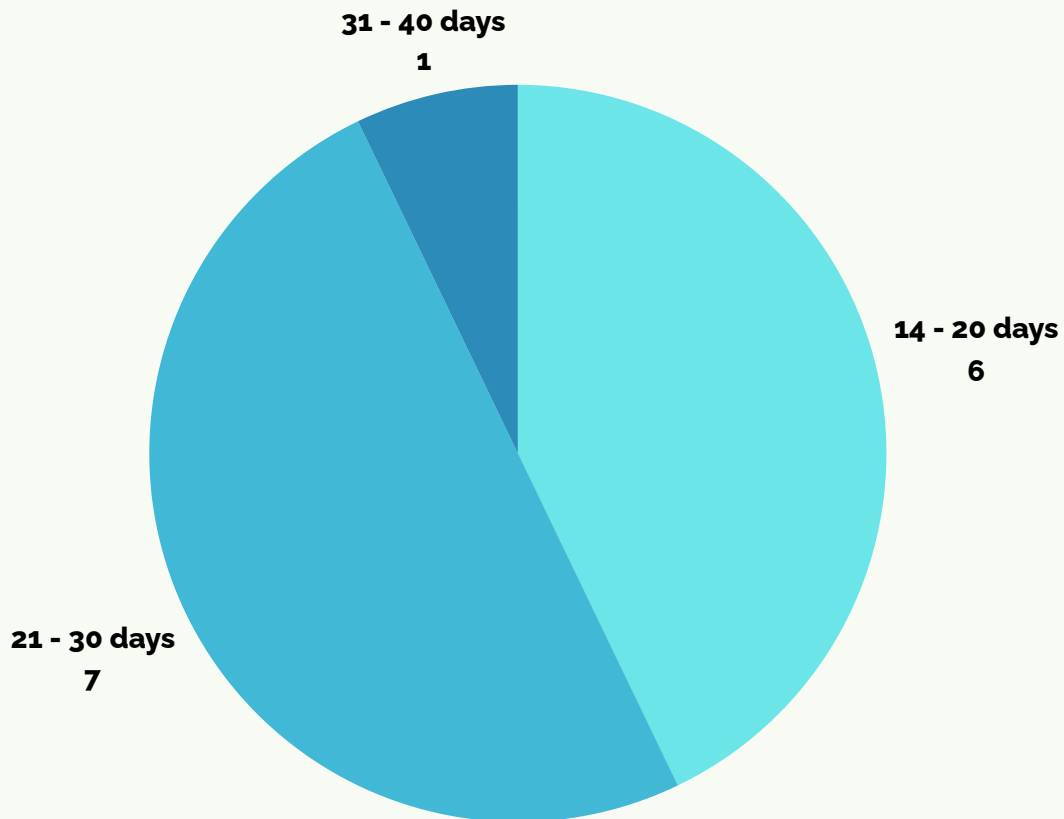
Case closure and delays

The Housing Ombudsman’s complaint handling code requires Boards to have oversight of delays and extensions.

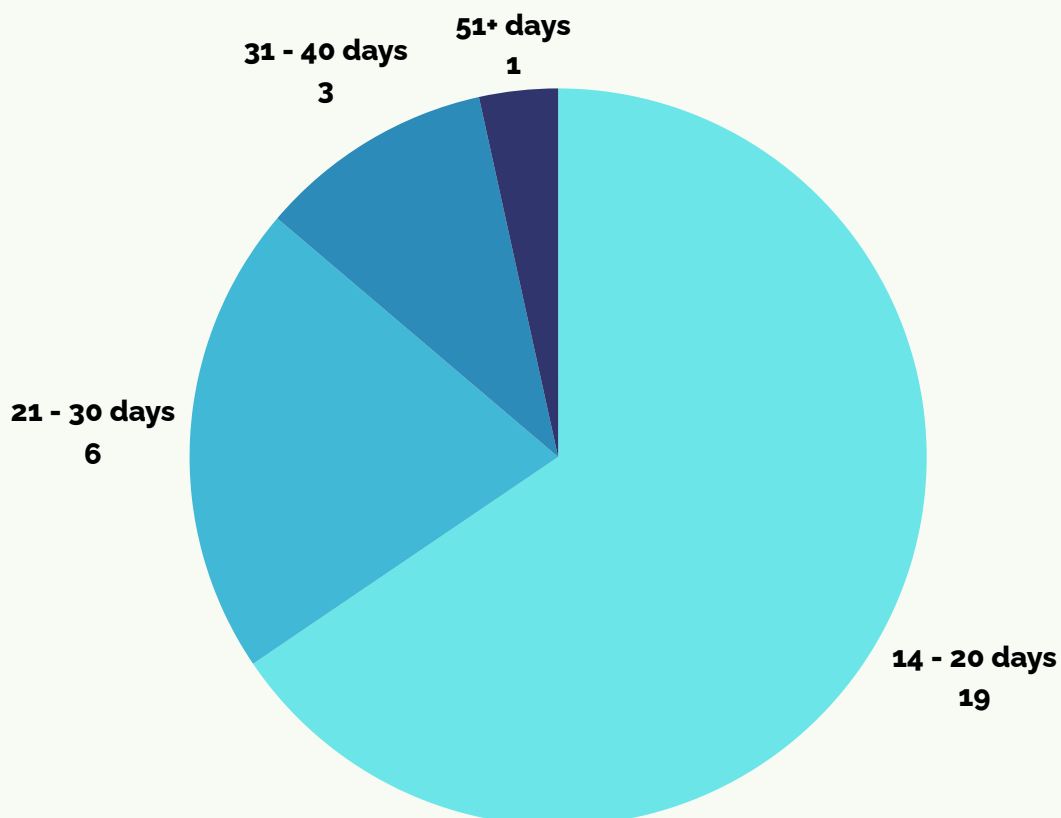
Over the past three years we have successfully reduced the average case closure days from 52 to 17 days, against the current target of 13 days. 44 of the total formal complaints received were closed outside of the 13-day target, of these 44, 15 were subject to formal extensions. As such, the cumulative performance at the end of the reporting period sat at 73% against a target of 75%.

Of the complaints formally extended, 5 were deemed complex cases, 4 were subject to delays by the complainant, and 6 required third party involvement or CCTV imaging. If we agree to an extension, we will initially extend by a further five working days in consultation with the customer.

Response times - Approved Extensions



Response times - Out of target (days)



Escalation

98% of all complaints are resolved at stage one against a target of 95%. In the period three cases escalated to stage two and all were upheld. No complaints were held at stage three.

Stage Two cases - upheld	
Summary	Actions
The review was upheld where the parking process for a new resident had not been complied with - resulting in two parking tickets.	The parking tickets were reimbursed. Local staff were reminded to follow the moving in protocol and not to use copied/defaced parking permits.
A review was requested by a customer who was unhappy with the state of the voided property and sought compensation costs.	The cost of the cleaning of the property was reimbursed and the Head of Service agreed additional changes to the customer's property.
A customer raised complaints over a five-year period that were resolved at stages one and two. Subsequent complaints were raised outside of the complaints timeframe and did not take up invites to resolution meetings.	A meeting with the customer and their local councillor was held. There was an acknowledgement of failure to provide good quality of service from the contractor. The customer received an ex gratia settlement of £1,000 and stated they were very happy with their flat.

Over this period, a total of **£1,520** in compensation was paid to five customers, this included £270 paid by repairs and maintenance contractors to two of the customers.

Stage One		Stage Two	
£250	Compensation paid for unsatisfactory level of service (Unsupported Customer)	£1000	Unsatisfactory level of service leading to ex gratia settlement (Unsupported Customer)
£50	Compensation paid for unsatisfactory level of service (Mental Health Customer)	£200	Poor application of process resulting in parking tickets being issued (Unsupported Customer)
£20	Compensation paid for unsatisfactory level of service by sub-contractor (Young People Customer)		

During the reporting period, no complaints were investigated or subject to judgement by the Housing Ombudsman or the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman.

7 - Service Improvement and Risk

- We will reduce our complaint case closure timeframe from 13 days to 10 working days to meet the revised complaint handling code.
- We are in the process of adding a "Damp and Mould" category to our complaints management system.
- We will rename "informal complaints" to ensure this is not misinterpreted as a pre-stage 1 process.
- We are updating the compensation and complaints policy to ensure all disrepair claims are managed through the complaints policy.
- We continue to work with the quality audit team to identify poor complaints practice in local services.
- We continue to monitor services where the prevalence of complaints activity is significantly higher or lower compared to similar services.
- We added the "Unsatisfactory treatment by other landlords or third parties" category back in 2020. We want to work with services to ensure they are effectively advocating for customers where Landlords are not fulfilling their repair and maintenance responsibilities.
- We aim to increase the number of colleagues who have completed our complaints e-learning.
- We will review the self – assessment between February and April 2024, to review feedback from the 2023 Tenants Satisfaction measure survey (The new regulatory survey includes a complaint handling satisfaction question), and against the joint ombudsman complaint code.