

wandle

Annual complaints performance and service improvement report

2023/24

Reviewed and approved by the
Board on: 19 June 2024



Published on: 24 June 2024

Introduction

At Wandle, our purpose is to support people across south London, who need a home; and our vision is to provide homes to be proud of and services you can trust.

We know that despite best efforts, mistakes can happen, and we don't always get things right, or meet the expectations of our customers. When something goes wrong, we need to find out why and put it right as quickly as possible. We aim to ensure that complaints are addressed fairly, effectively, and promptly.

We know that our residents deserve consistent, reliable services, and too often this isn't what they get.

At Wandle, we have a positive complaints culture – every complaint we receive is a chance to put things right, learn from what's happened, and make changes so that the same problems don't happen again.

This report has been produced to meet the requirements of the Complaint Handling Code, and for residents to be able to explore our service – and hold us accountable for promised improvements.

How we handle complaints

We have a two-stage complaint handling process, which is set out in detail in our complaints policy.

All new complaints received are reviewed at stage one of our process, and we aim to provide a response within ten working days.

If the customer is dissatisfied with our response at stage one or believes that we haven't done the things we said we would, they can escalate their complaint to stage two of our process. We aim to respond to stage two complaints within 20 working days.

Wandle and the Housing Ombudsman

We are a member of the Housing Ombudsman Service and residents can get in touch with them at any point during their complaint. The Ombudsman's role is to investigate complaints and resolve disputes involving the residents of social landlords. They make the final decision on any disputes and will issue 'determinations' on any cases that they are involved in.

Where there have been serious failings by the landlord, they will publish these on their website and issue orders to the landlord, for them to put things right with the resident.

In November 2023, the Ombudsman published two of our severe maladministration determinations, where we failed two of our customers in the handling of repairs and damp and mould in their homes. [The full reports can be found here, along with a summary of our learning and improvements.](#) Both residents were left for far too long with outstanding repairs to their homes. What's more disappointing is that while we did take some action, we didn't properly follow through on the work we said we would complete. This shows why it's so important that we track all our repairs through to completion and ensure that customers are satisfied with the work we do.

The Ombudsman also has the power to issue Complaint Handling Failure Orders. These are issued when a resident remains unable to progress a complaint, despite the involvement of the Ombudsman.

The Ombudsman publishes information about Complaint Handling Failure Orders on their website. We were extremely disappointed to be included in two of these reports in 2023. The first of these orders was highlighted in the July to September report, because there were unreasonable delays in how long it took to accept and progress a complaint our customer made about ground rent charges.

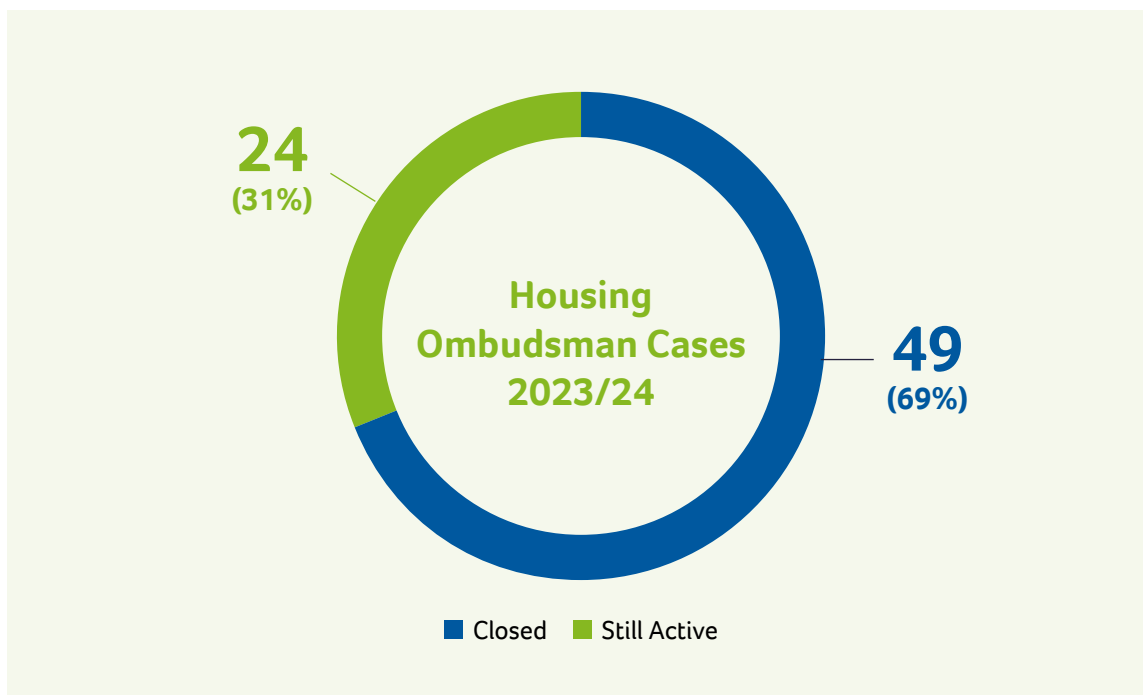
The second order, in the October to December report, was issued because we failed to provide the Ombudsman with evidence that we had implemented their decisions on a complaint regarding several repair issues that were causing damp and mould.

While we have now complied with both the orders and the complaints have been addressed, we know that there is more to do. Our report goes on to show that we are not responding to enough

complaints on time and our engagement with the Ombudsman needs to improve. We've been restructuring our customer resolution team and our approach to managing complaints to do just that and expect to see a significant improvement next year.

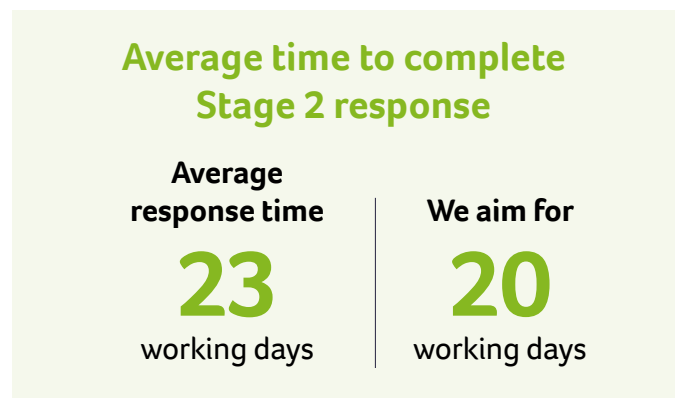
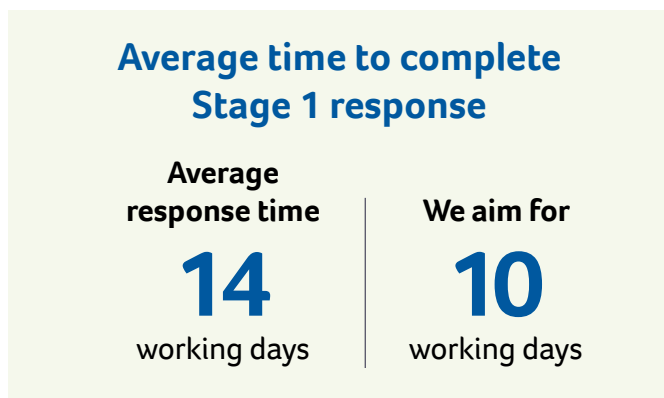
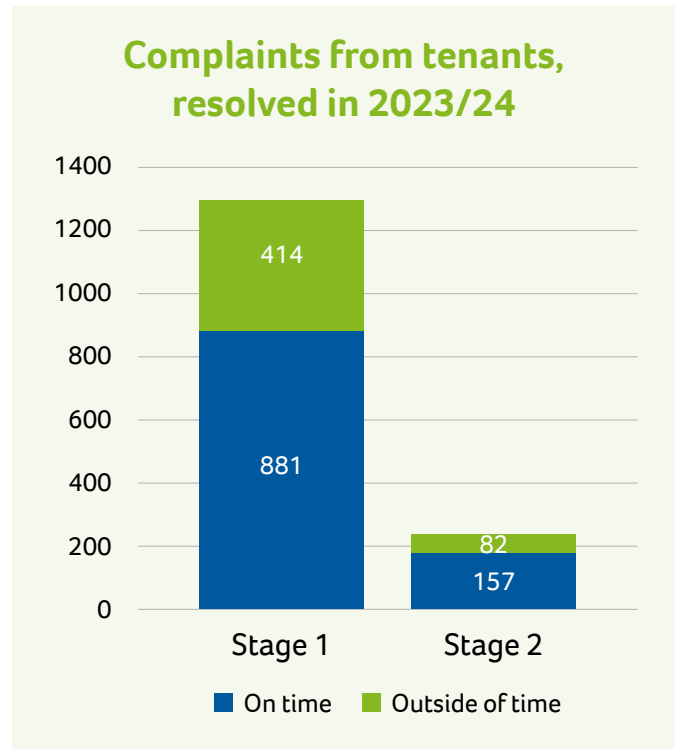
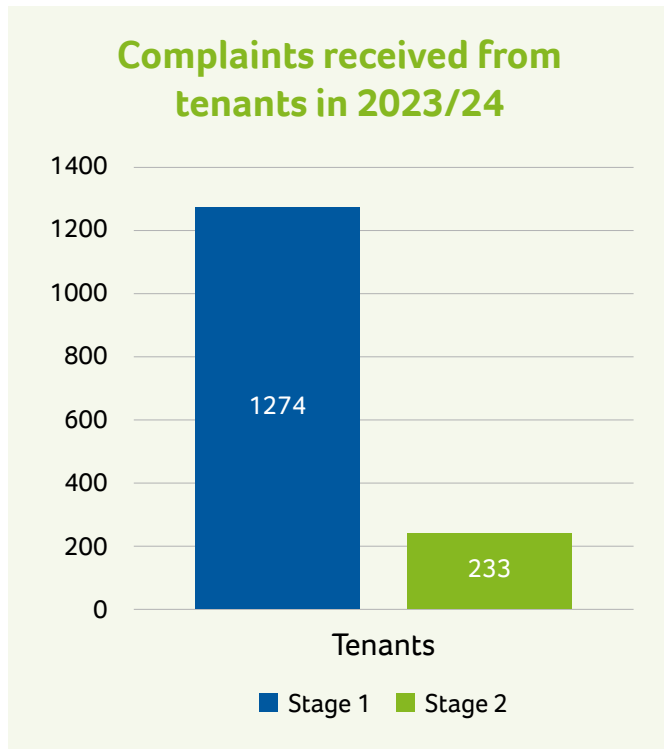
Each year, the Ombudsman also produces a brief annual report for each landlord registered with them. The annual report for Wandle provides a snapshot of our overall performance in the year, including the number of determinations the Ombudsman has made and how we compare with other housing providers. Again, the report shows that we're not delivering the level of service our customers expect and that we are not performing as well as other landlords of a similar size.

[You can read our report from May 2023 here: Wandle Landlord Performance Report 2022/2023](#)



Complaints we handled in 2023/24¹

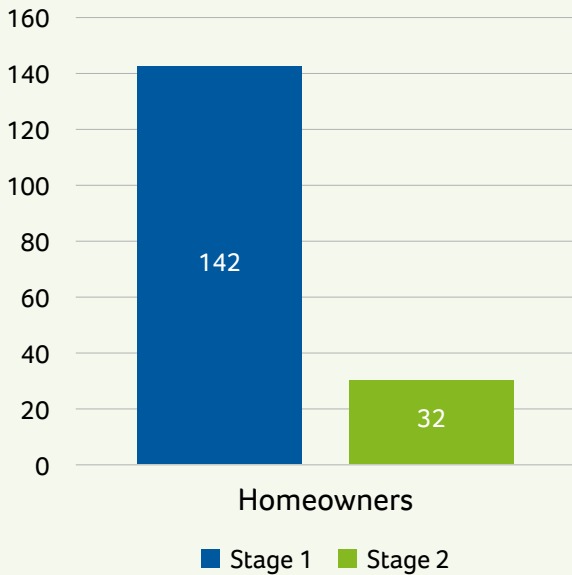
Tenants



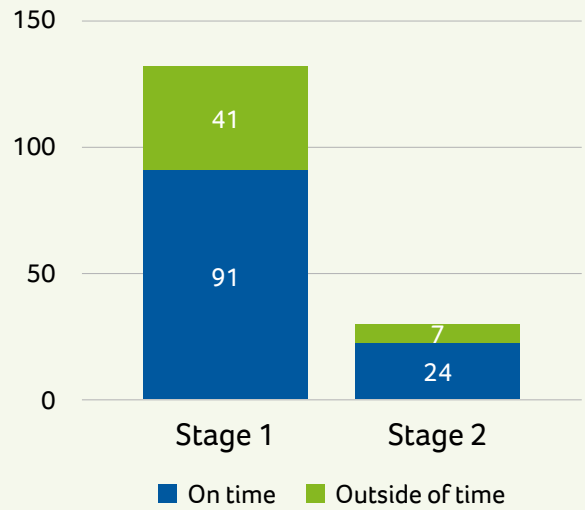
1. In this report, we are reflecting on complaints handled from 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024. Some complaints that were opened in this period were closed later; and some complaints that were raised before 1 April 2023 were closed during the year the report covers. This explains why there are differences between the numbers when we talk about complaints raised and complaints resolved – for example, in this year we completed 1485 responses to complaints, but we received 1466 complaints. We'll make it clear which data we're using to help you, but this is why you may see small differences.

Homeowners²

Complaints received from homeowners in 2023/24



Complaints from homeowners, resolved in 2023/24



Average time to complete Stage 1 response



Average time to complete Stage 2 response



Complaints per 1,000 homes

Stage 1

109.7

Stage 2

24.5

Our tenants tend to raise a stage one complaint around twice as often as our homeowners, but this reflects the different frequency of contacts each resident type usually has with us, with tenants more likely to contact us overall – for example, to request a repair inside their home. We are reasonably confident that our complaints process is

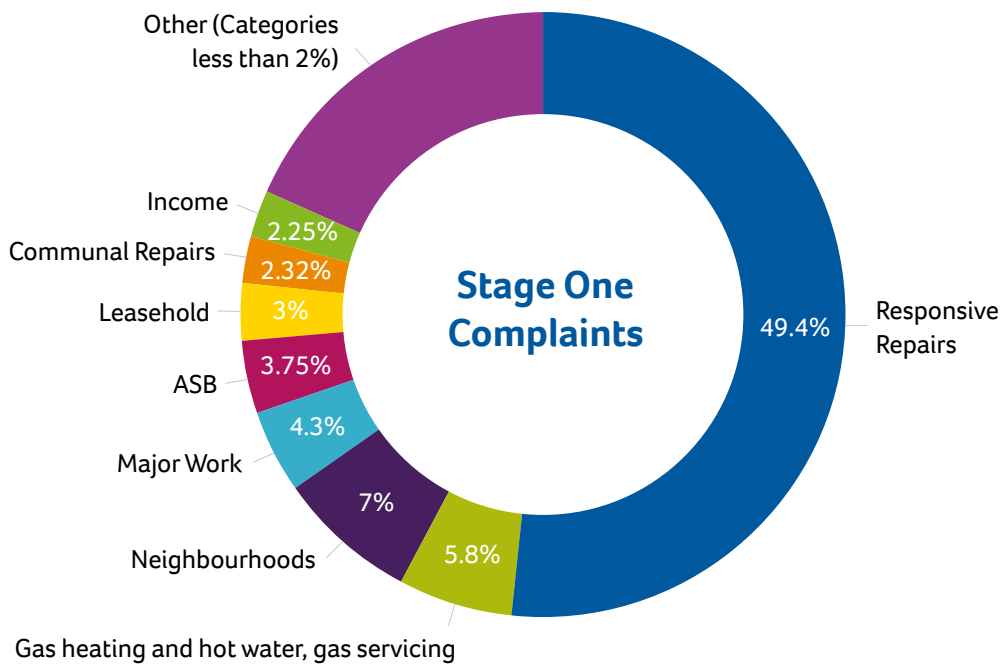
widely advertised, and that both groups have a comparable experience when engaged in our complaints process.

We will continue to keep this under review, to ensure that all residents are receiving a consistent, comparable, and improving service experience.

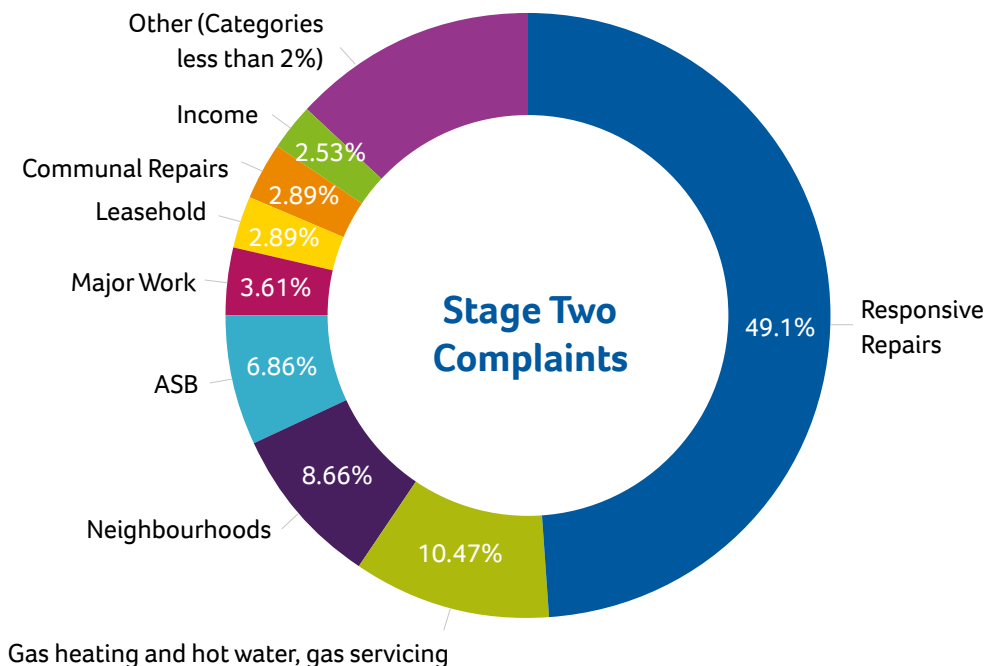
2. Homeowners includes leaseholders and shared owners.

What do residents complain about?

What complaints are about at Stage One (Raised in 2023/24)



What complaints are about at Stage Two (Raised in 2023/24)



Complaints at stage one appear proportional to the size of the service offered to our residents – for example, our repairs service interacts with our residents thousands of times throughout the year and can therefore be expected to receive a larger number of complaints than we get about our empty homes, as far fewer residents move into one of our homes each year.

Why are cases being escalated to stage two?

Very broadly, one in five complaints escalate to stage two. To understand why this is happening, we have reviewed the themes of escalated cases, and they are:

- Agreed resolutions are not yet complete when we issue our response
- Not addressing all complaint points at stage one
- Inconsistent response quality
- Unsatisfactory compensation or redress
- Lack of communication and follow up after our stage one response

Clearly, these are themes for improvement, and we have captured these in our service improvement plan.

Some complaint topics are far more likely to escalate to stage two – for example complaints about ASB make up under 4% of stage one cases, but nearly 7% at stage two – and this is something that our customer resolution team will be investigating further in 2024/25.

Refused complaints

We aim to address all expressions of dissatisfaction made by our customers. Where a complaint is best handled elsewhere or doesn't fall within our remit, the customer is informed in writing, and we explain why we have decided not to accept their complaint. Where possible, we signpost customers to where their concerns can be addressed.

We only refused to accept one complaint in 2023/24, as the case had already been investigated. However, following discussions with the Ombudsman, we reviewed our position and with further information from the resident, the case was put through our complaints process and resolved.

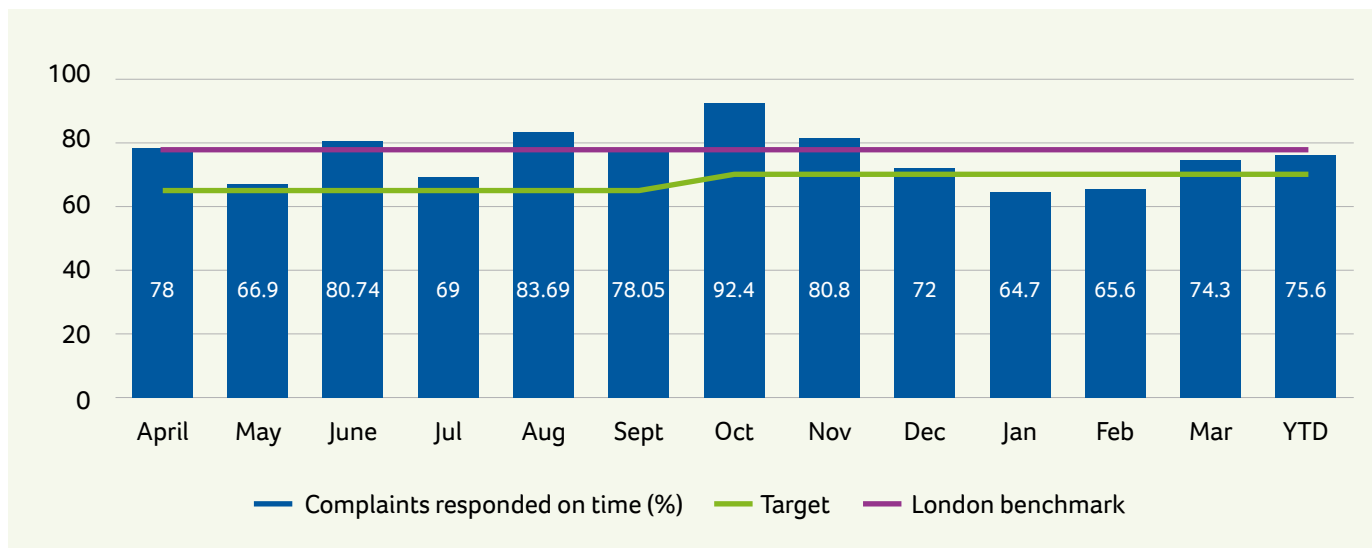


Are residents happy with our approach to complaint handling?

In 2023/24 we surveyed 937 customers as part of our Tenant Satisfaction Measure surveys. Of these, 428 told us they had made a complaint in the last 12 months. These customers were then asked how satisfied they were with our approach to complaints handling. 12.6% said they were satisfied with our approach. We are disappointed with this score and have set a target to meet the average score, 25%, of our London-based peer group next year.



Are we responding to complaints on time?



Sometimes, on more complex cases, we agree a longer timeframe to respond with our resident. These cases are captured here, as well as those we simply missed the deadline for.

The proportion of complaints receiving a response outside our timescales this year has been disappointing, and it is being monitored carefully. We know that this will help us to improve our overall complaint-handling satisfaction. We

closed the year with a deliberate effort to respond to complaints, meaning there were no overdue responses outstanding at the beginning of April 2024.

We have increased capacity in our customer resolution team to support our service areas in handling complaints, and clear expectations have been set by the Board and Executive team to improve.

We expect to see significant improvements throughout 2024/25 and have set a target for 90% of complaints to be responded to in line with our ten day and 20 day timescales for stages one and two.

How are we improving our complaint-handling performance?

We've changed the way we record improvements needed, and learnings from complaints and Ombudsman feedback. We now log and monitor these centrally, to make sure that nothing is missed.

We've built a dedicated learning log, and an associated service improvement plan, to make sure we're acting on the insight and information we get from complaints. The service improvement plan will be monitored by the Customer Resolutions Manager, overseen by the Resolutions Steering Group. The membership of our Resolutions Steering Group includes three customers and three Board members.

We have continuous monitoring of complaint-handling performance, and performance is shared with our senior management team for information and action monthly. We also circulate live information in a weekly update to senior management and managers with open complaints, to ensure that they are effectively managing responses.

We have continued to train all new staff in the Mary Gober (customer service mindset, language and action) principles, to ensure consistent customer service standards are applied across all areas of the business; and in response to staff demand and intelligence from our complaint-handling and customer satisfaction monitoring, designed, developed and delivered bespoke "Write for me" training for all office-based staff.

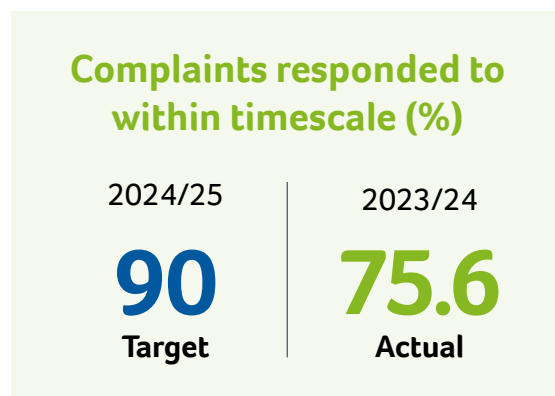
This training focused on writing clearly, concisely and with empathy. This standard is now well-defined and will address some of the feedback around inconsistent response quality and being sure to address all complaint points.

We expect to see this starting to make a difference in the proportion of cases escalating to stage two from early 2024/25.

At the end of 2023/24, we expanded the customer resolution team to provide more support to colleagues responding to complaints. Now that the team is fully resourced, all stage two responses, and targeted samples of stage one responses will be reviewed by these specialists. This review will make sure that responses are consistent and fair, and that any actions promised are followed up by our operational teams.

Performance targets for 2024/25

We will closely track our performance next year and have set ambitious targets for improvement.



3. This is the average for our peer group, the L12.

Improving our services using learnings from complaints

Our learning log and service improvement plan tracks learnings found through to implementation and monitoring.

Here are some of the changes we made in 2023/2024:

Repairs and Planned Works

Feedback in this area informed changes to our repairs and maintenance policy, as well as adjustments in the way we work:

- **Appointments**

Residents get frustrated when we miss appointments. Missed appointments fall into a couple of categories – those we miss on the day, and those we reschedule at short notice.

Our team scrutinise the diaries and plans to make sure that the appointments booked in will be attended; and communicate early if we need to change plans.

- **Delays in carrying out repairs**

While we're carrying out more repairs than in previous years, there's more to be done to make sure that we're delivering a service that meets our residents' expectations.

We've invested in our repairs team to increase capacity, and changed the way we track completion of works, to increase the number of repairs that are fixed in one appointment. We'll be monitoring this in 2024/25 to make sure it's making a difference.

- **Inconvenient appointment times**

We now offer flexible appointments for gas testing, electrical testing and fire safety checks – including evening and Saturday appointments.

- **Delays in completing Aids and Adaptations**

We are now working alongside a private occupational therapist to help us support vulnerable residents, and this has decreased the time residents need to wait to have suitable adaptations made in their homes.



Damp and Mould

We continue to periodically test our service against the Housing Ombudsman recommendations first published in their spotlight report in October 2021.

Our dedicated team have piloted installation of positive input ventilation (PIV) systems, and the success of this means we'll be adding this to our response options when residents report problems.

Communication

Communication is one of the most mentioned issues when residents complain to us.

We've trained all office-based staff on the best way to communicate through bespoke training and have continued to train new starters in the Mary Gobar method – our customer service and communication standard.

We have put in place a plan to open up more communication channels with residents through upgrades to our contact centre system, which means that next year residents will be able to get in touch with us through chat and WhatsApp, as well as our current channels.

Neighbourhoods and Anti-social behaviour

We know that sometimes only speaking to your housing officer will do.

That's why we've reviewed our team structure, and we're increasing the number of housing officers we have. Each housing officer will have a smaller patch size and be more visible to residents on their patch – including through tenancy visits we're introducing in summer 2024. We're aiming to visit all our tenants every two or three years – making sure that we have all the right information about you and your home (and can put things right if needed).

We have a Community Safety team who look after all reported cases of anti-social behaviour (ASB). This year, the team – and other relevant colleagues – have all received further training on how we can follow-up on ASB cases in the best possible way, using the legislation available to us.

Record-keeping

Too often, we haven't had records of key decisions or actions on our residents' case files.

To ensure the proper use of our Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system, Microsoft Dynamics, we have provided refresher training to all staff and created a trainer role to offer the right support and training to all colleagues.

There is a clear expectation for all colleagues that every interaction with customers must be recorded, and this focus will continue in 2024/2025.



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