



Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report

April 2023 to March 2024

1. Introduction

Most organisations aspire to provide services that meet the expectations and requirements of their customers and stakeholders. It is almost inevitable that on some occasions, any organisation may fail to meet the customer's expectations to such an extent that they make a formal complaint.

It is important to address any failures to perform according to standards but also to identify where current standards may need to be revised to meet the evolving requirements of customers. Complaints enable Homes Plus to understand customers' expectations and form a significant part of the Customer Engagement Strategy.

Homes Plus must comply with the Housing Ombudsman's (HO) Complaint Handling Code that was introduced in July 2020, updated in March 2022, and revised again, becoming a statutory code in April 2024.

The purpose of the Complaint Handling Code is to enable landlords to resolve complaints raised by their residents quickly and to use the learning from complaints to drive service improvements. In terms of handling complaints, the code sets expected timeframes for responses and requires an annual self-assessment against the code. The status of compliance with the self-assessment is to be provided to the HO annually, and by 30th June 2024.

At Homes Plus, we want to improve our customers experience and by learning from complaints, they provide us with invaluable information to help us improve.

This report details all findings for stage 1 and stage 2 of our complaints process, including analysis of this data and learnings that have been identified as a result. The report also includes findings by the Housing Ombudsman over the last 12 months.

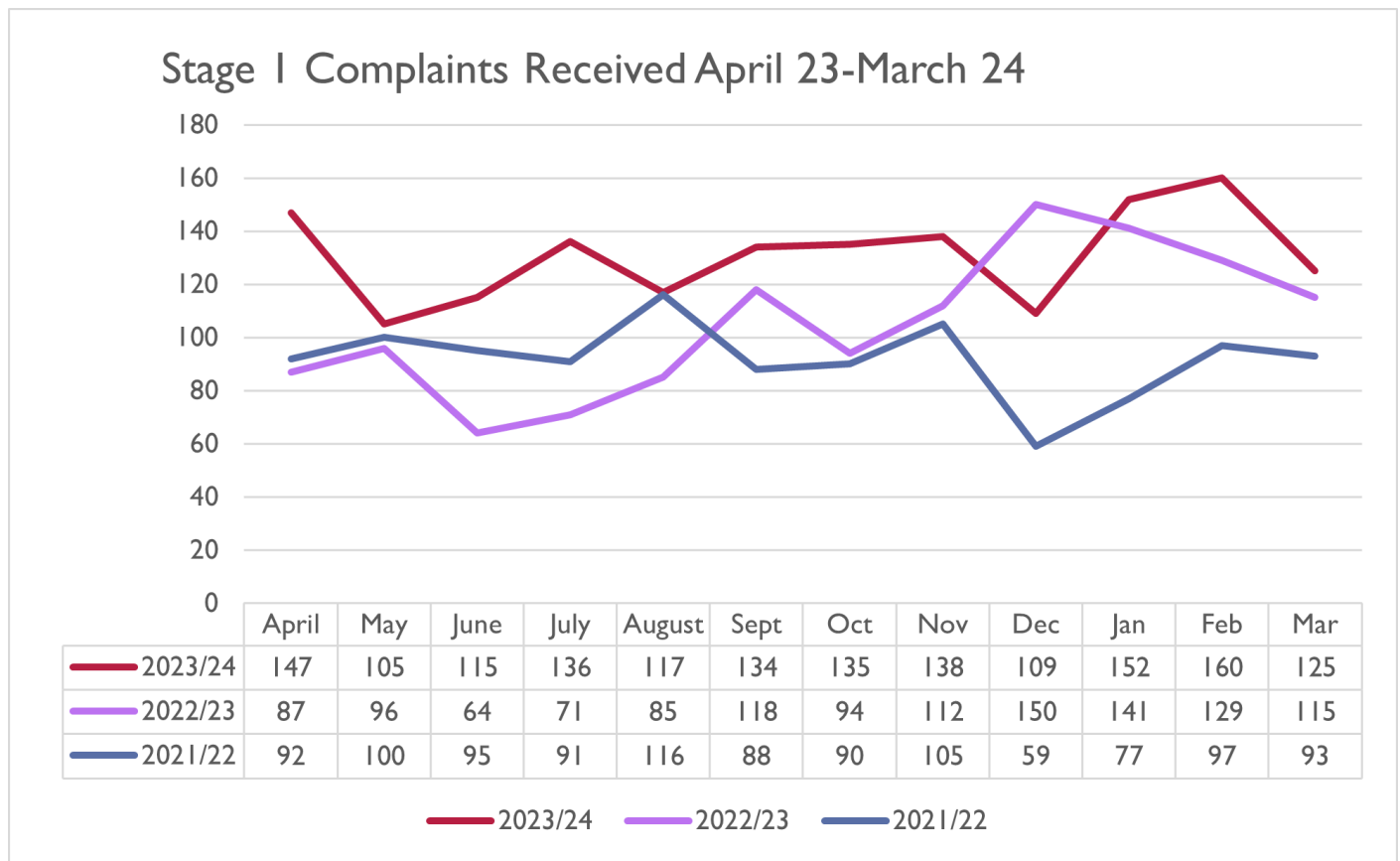
In addition, this report identifies, as a result of customer feedback, some of our service improvements that have taken place or are underway, to improve the customer experience and to highlight to customers the importance of providing feedback.

Customer involvement

Throughout the year, our **Customer Partnership Panel** have helped us shape our new complaints and feedback policy and fact sheet, reviewed Homes Plus self-assessment submission for the HO, reviewed and agreed our new customer advocacy approach for complaints and have spoken to our Boards about where Homes Plus can improve services.

Our customers are also looking forward to the next 12 months where they will be, through our new Customer Experience Committee, reviewing complaints performance, the improvements being made as a result of customer feedback and helping us develop this report further, for all of our customers, next year.

2. Stage 1 Complaints received April 2023 – March 2024

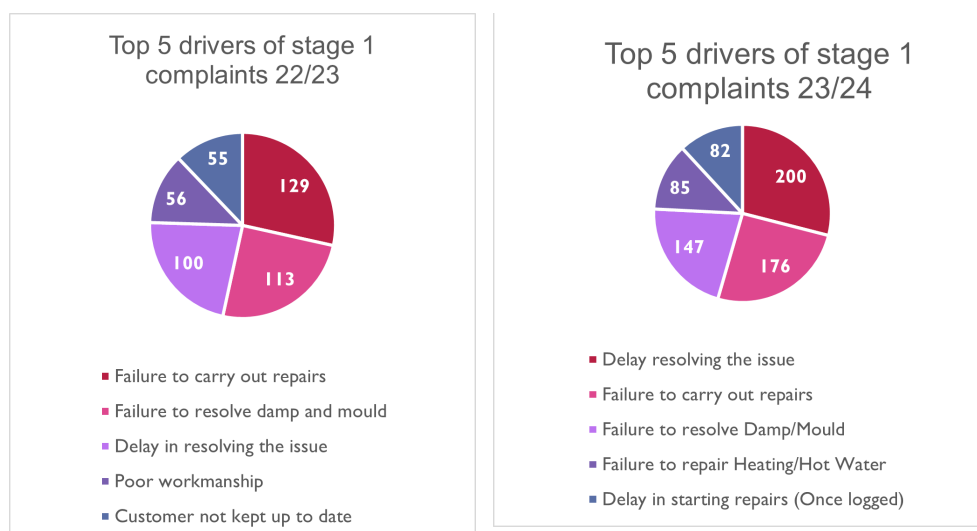


The chart above shows a trend analysis for stage 1 complaints received over the last three years.

Stage 1 complaints received during 2023/24 totalled 1573, which is a 25% increase from the year before (1262), and a 43% increase since 2021/22 (1103).

Analysis: Complaints have increased year-on-year into Homes Plus. This demonstrates customers can access this service and feel confident to let us know when things have gone wrong. This increase has also been seen across all housing associations and could be attributed, in part, to an increased profile of the Housing Ombudsman.

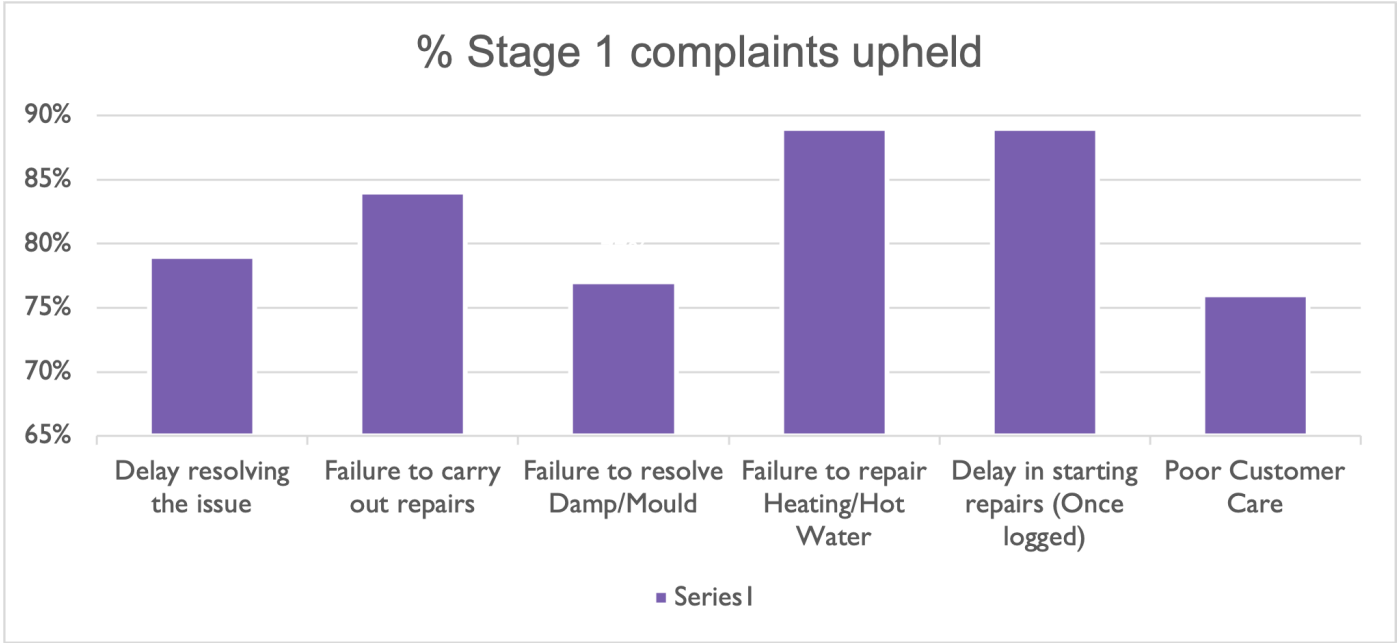
2.1 Top five reasons for complaints



Analysis: The top five reasons for stage 1 complaints have not significantly changed from last year although the numbers have increased, in line with an overall increase in stage 1 complaints during 2023/24. This is reflective of the resourcing and demand issues seen in 2023/24 because of increased damp and mould rectification works and in general, more repair works being reported.

Learning: Resources have been increased in Property Plus to manage the demand of repair works to meet agreed timescales for completion. An increase in resources in the Damp and Mould service has also been approved for 2024/25 in acknowledgement of the increased demand for these services.

2.2 Stage 1 top six drivers for complaints Upheld



Stage 1	2023/24	%
Responses sent	1551	
Upheld/part upheld	1146	73.89%
Not upheld	329	21.21%
Withdrawn/cancelled	74	4.77%
Refused	2	0.13%

Analysis: Almost 75% of complaints made into Homes Plus are upheld, with less than 1% of complaints refused by Homes Plus in line with the complaints policy. This data is representative of similar results of 77% of complaints upheld in 2022/23.

Learning: Resources have been increased in Property Plus to manage the demand of repair works to meet agreed timescales for completion. An increase in resources in the Damp and Mould service has also been approved for 2024/25 in acknowledgement of the increased demand for these services.

2.3 Stage 1 response timescales

Complaint response timescales are driven by the HO complaint handling code. For stage 1, it states 5 working days to acknowledge the complaint and 10 working days from acknowledgement for a response to be sent to the customer.

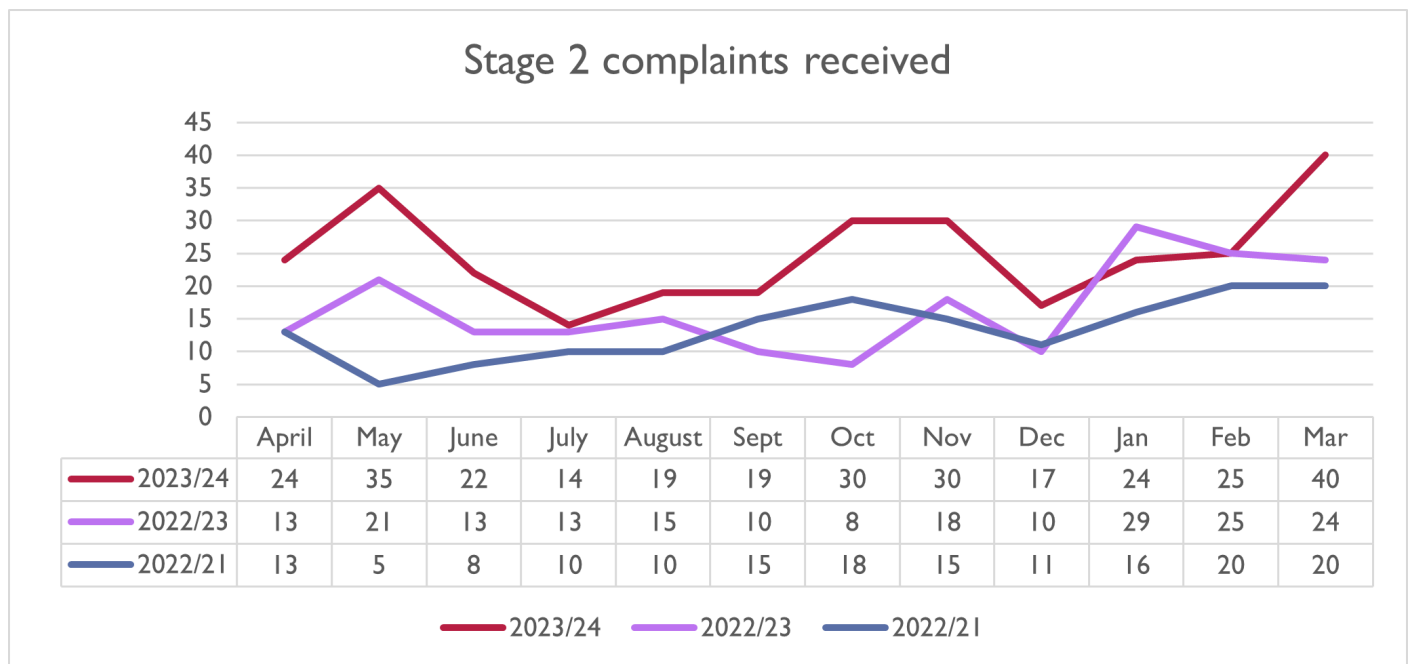
These timescales are reflected in HPG's complaint handling policy.

Stage 1	Total	%	Target
Responses due	1553		
Within target	1235	79.52%	85%
Within extension	131	8.44%	15%
Out of target	187	12.04%	0%

Analysis: Complaints have increased by 25% from last year which has impacted our ability to respond within published timeframes, achieving 80% against a target of 85%. This year has seen 12% of customers having to wait for their complaint response longer than normal, and this is due to the volume of complaints outstripping capacity of the teams.

Learning: A new approach to resolving customer complaints has been developed and a centralised Customer Advocacy Team has been created. Responses to all feedback received by Homes Plus will be delivered by dedicated Advocacy Officers. They will work with each customer to find a resolution to their concern which is both reasonable for the customer and Homes Plus. If feedback involves multiple service areas and will take longer to resolve, an extension to the Homes Plus published timeframe to respond to feedback may be agreed with the customer. Working to clearly identify all issues early in the process will help improve response times for our customers.

3. Stage 2 Complaints received April 2023 – March 2024



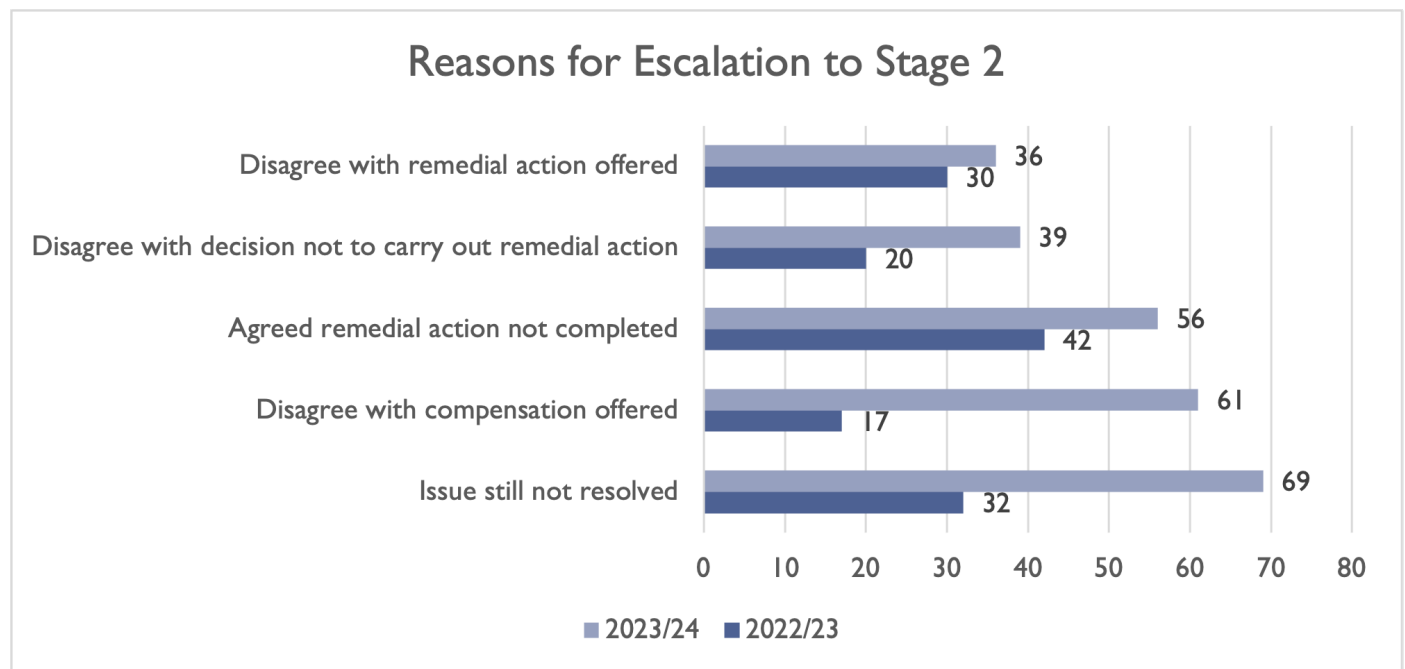
The chart above shows a trend analysis for stage 2 complaints received over the last three years.

Stage 2 complaints received during 2023/24 totalled 299, which is a 50% increase from the year before (199), and an 86% increase since 2021/22 (161).

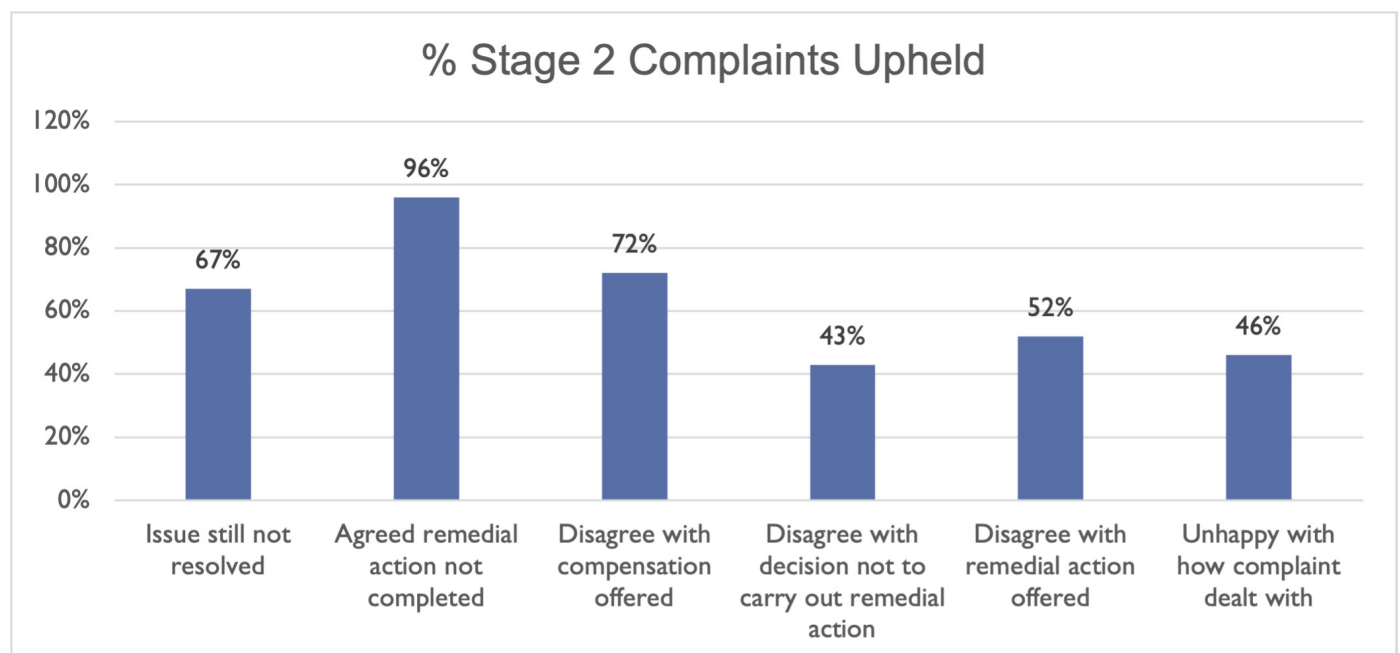
Analysis: There has been a significant increase in complaints at stage 1 not being resolved to the satisfaction of the customer, therefore the customer is escalating their complaint to stage 2 for resolution. Reasons for escalation are detailed in the tables below and show to varying degrees that the reasons have not changed from the previous year, but numbers have increased, which is reflected in the increased numbers escalating to stage 2 of the process.

Learning: The new Customer Advocacy team will work with customers until a decision has been made at stage 1 and a plan detailing the remedial action required to ensure the customer is satisfied has been agreed. Once the complaint has been 'closed', aftercare with the customer will continue until the resolution has been concluded, to reduce complaints escalating to stage 2.

3.1 Stage 2 top 5 reasons for escalation



3.2 Stage 2 top six drivers for complaints Upheld.



Analysis: 68% of stage 2 complaints were upheld during 2023/24, which means the investigating officer agreed with the above reasons for escalation.

Learning: Stage 2 investigations focus on how the investigation at stage 1 was conducted, for example looking to see if all the points were addressed, that the repairs have been completed as agreed and the level of compensation was agreed with the customer prior to the complaint being resolved.

A new centralised Homes Plus Advocacy team will co-ordinate all communication with customers throughout the process of a complaint. Using feedback from our customers to understand why complaints escalate, Advocacy officers will work with all Homes Plus service areas to highlight areas for improvement.

Evidence gathered leading to the improvement work will be recorded, monitored, and published on our website on a regular basis.

3.3 Stage 2 response timescales

Complaint response timescales are driven by the HO complaint handling code which states that stage 2 complaints should be acknowledged within 5 working days and a response must be sent to the customer within 20 working days.

These timescales are reflected in HPG's complaint handling policy.

Stage 2	Total	%	Target
Responses due	280		
Within target	209	74.64%	85%
Within extension	30	10.71%	15%
Out of target	41	14.65%	0%

Analysis: Large numbers of complaints escalating to stage 2 has meant that at times, the business has not been able to respond within the set timeframe and extensions have been applied.

Learning: The new centralised Advocacy team will be responsible for reducing the number of complaints escalating to stage 2. Advocacy officers will communicate well and effectively with customers and oversee plans to resolve issues as agreed.

This will include reviewing and improving the process with the Priority Repairs team, thoroughly understanding why repairs are not being completed on time or understanding why other agreed remedies have not been completed.

4. Complaints by Directorate

	2022/23	2023/24
Care and Specialist Supported Housing	50	82
Central Services	4	12
Commercial	50	45
Neighbourhoods	244	329
Property Services	911	1105
Total	1259	1573

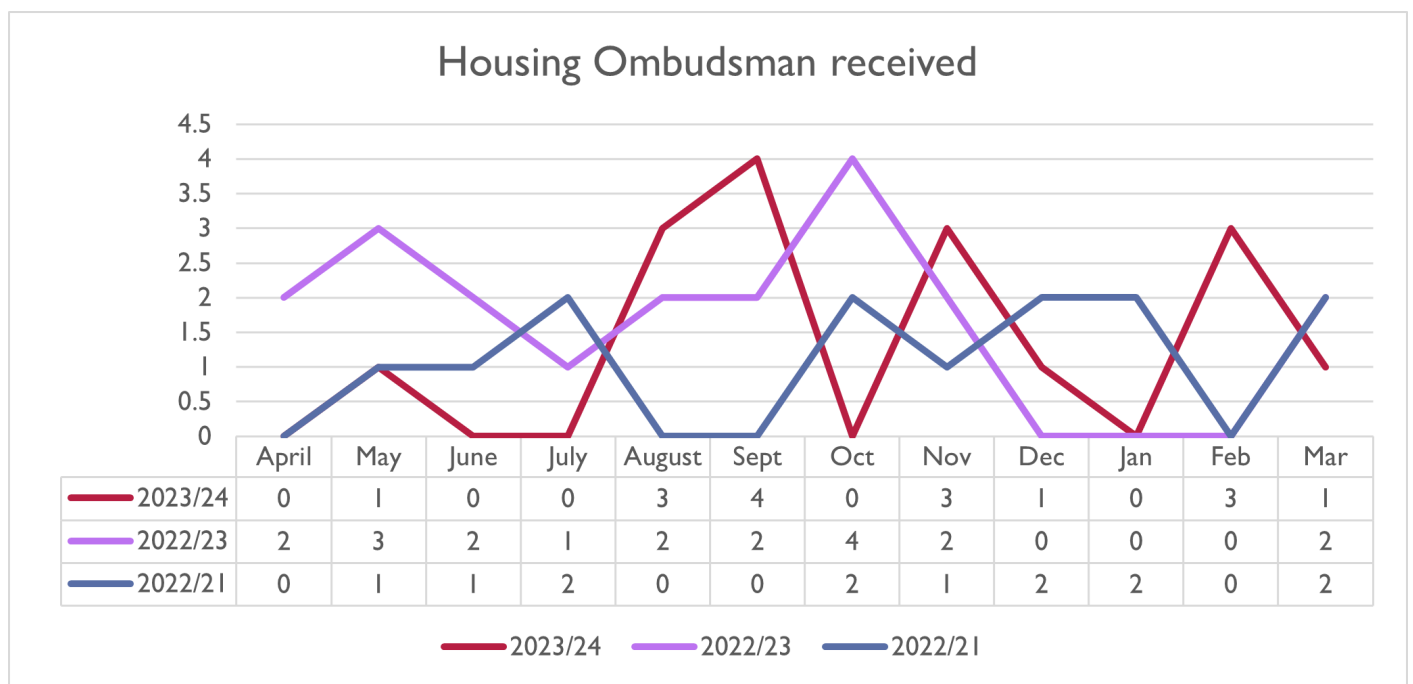
Analysis: All service areas, except for commercial services, have seen an increase in complaints received during 2023/24. This is reflected in the increase in volume received generally and is being seen across other housing associations.

Learning: Work to understand the root cause of the complaints we are receiving, in a holistic manner will be undertaken. This will enable the advocacy and customer experience teams to provide evidence to a service area where themes are being recognised and improvements need to be made. These improvements will be recorded and monitored via the Service Improvement Tracker and reported to the Customer Experience Sub-Committee and the Homes Board.

5. Housing Ombudsman

The Complaint Handling Code specifies that the Housing Ombudsman Service should be promoted on our website, posters, customer leaflets and is also included in the customer newsletters to ensure accessibility and visibility for customers and HPG are compliant with this.

The independent body recorded a 91% increase in cases in the first nine months of 2023-24, compared with the same period the previous year.

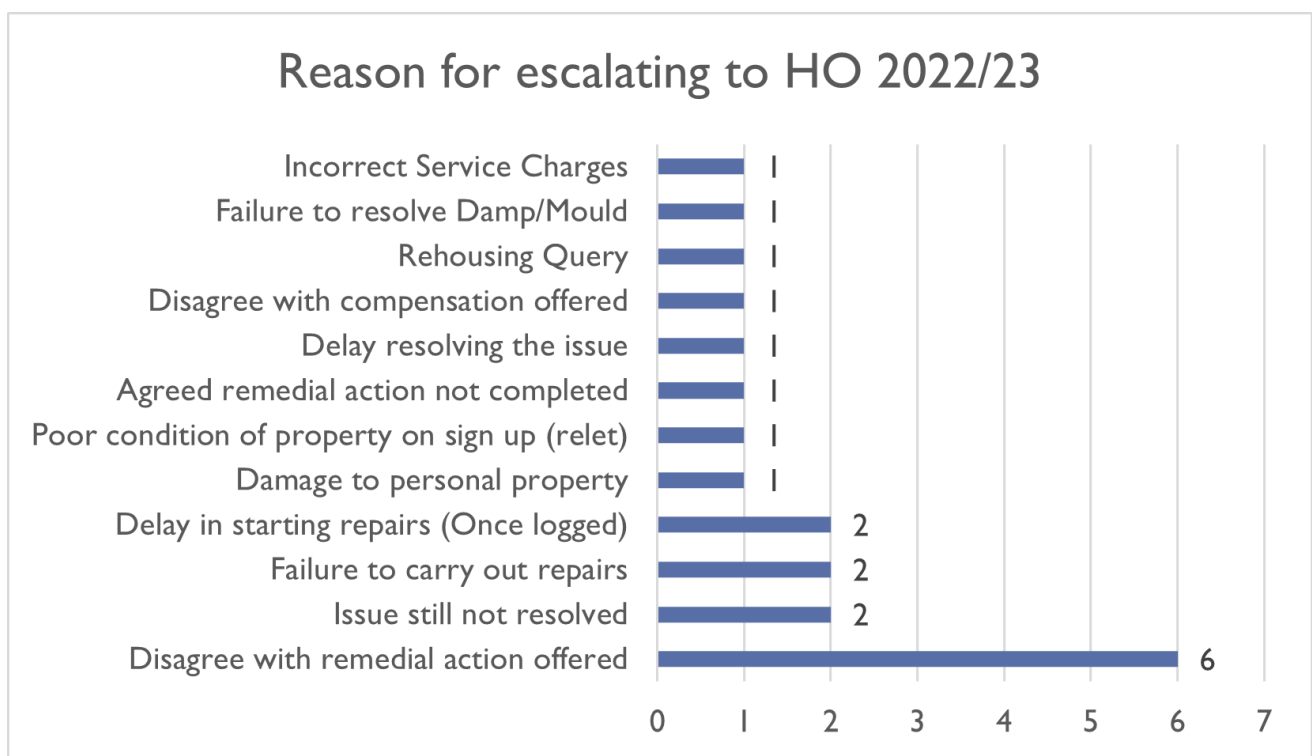
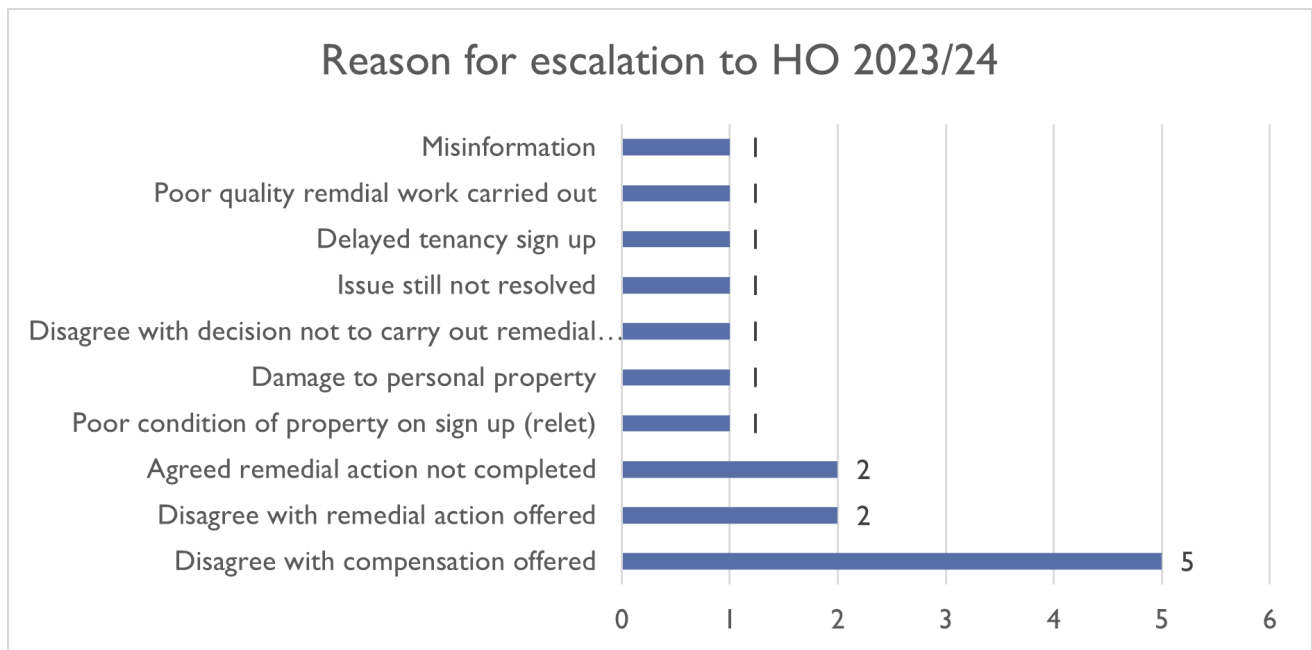


The chart above shows a trend analysis for HO referrals received over the last three years.

HO referrals received during 2023/24 totalled 16, which is a 20% decrease from the year before, and an 23% increase since 2021/22.

At the end of 2023/24, HPG are awaiting six Housing Ombudsman determinations, with the oldest referral request dating back to August 2023.

5.1 Reasons for complaints escalated to the Housing Ombudsman

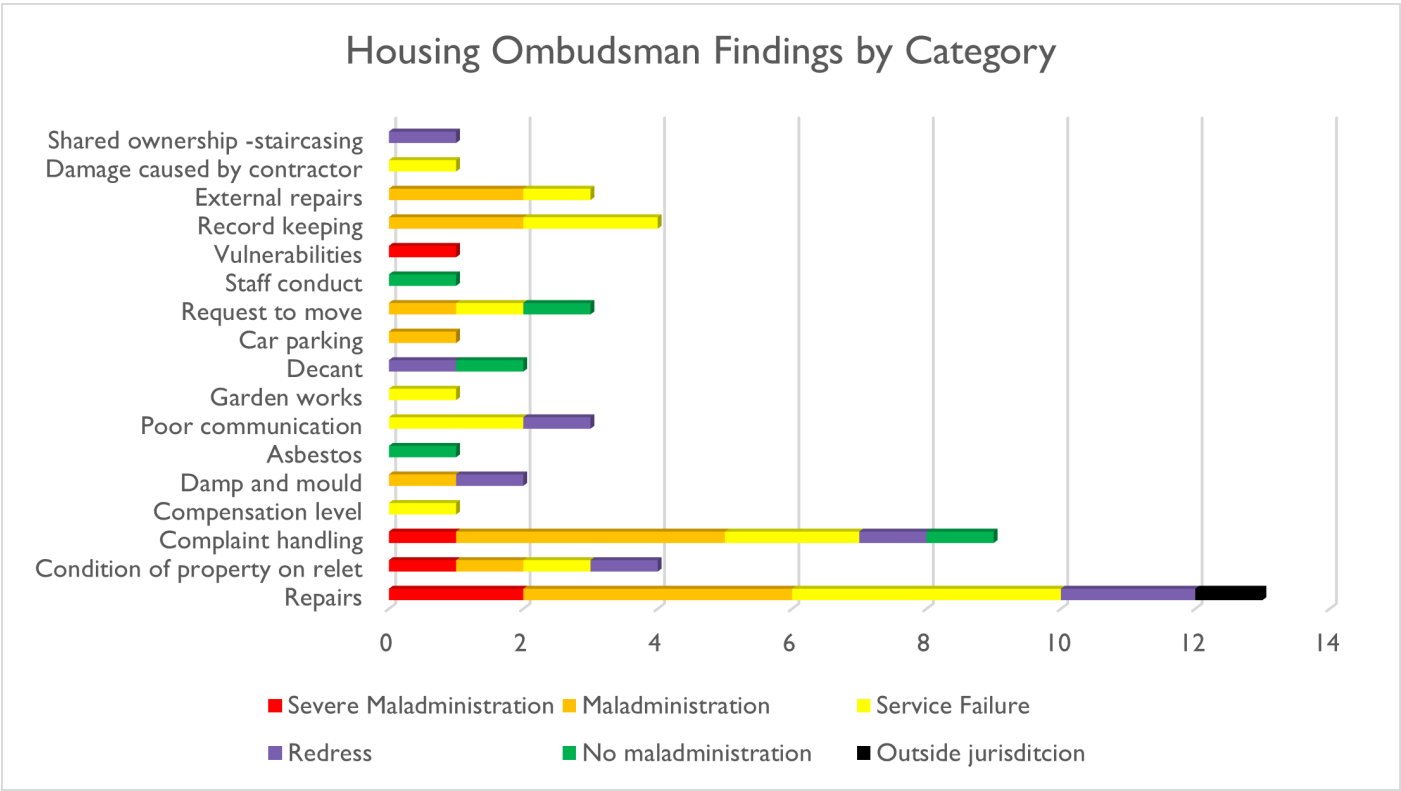


Analysis: During 2023/24, referrals of cases to the Housing Ombudsman had reduced from 20 last year to 16 cases this year.

Learning: HPG's Service Improvement Committee, held fortnightly, has been a key management tool for the business, used to understand complex stage 2 cases. It continues to help the business understand and take responsibility for service areas not meeting customers expectations and to consider resolutions that are centric to the customers individual circumstances.

Improvement has been made to the way HPG manages referrals when received from the Housing Ombudsman, ensuring that our responses are robust and presented in a manner that is logical and appropriate.

5.2 Housing Ombudsman Determination Findings by category 2023/24



Analysis: 2023/24 has seen HPG receive five Severe Maladministration determinations found in two cases from the Housing Ombudsman, amongst other findings, including service failure and redress. The above table shows the findings against category.

Learning: HPG take the findings from the Housing Ombudsman extremely seriously and have worked hard with the body, and customers, to ensure we have learned from the mistakes made in these cases. This has involved Lessons Learnt plans, which are monitored through to completion and the compliance of orders provided to us by the Housing Ombudsman. We have also commissioned an independent review of the complaints process. This review has led to a centralised customer advocacy team with increased resource, focus and accountability for the service and our customers.

6. Complaint Handling – Customer Satisfaction



Overall satisfaction with complaint handling target is 75%. 60% satisfaction was achieved in 2023/24 and 65% was achieved in 2022/23 which means satisfaction has decreased by 5% in comparison.

Reasons for dissatisfaction (detailed in free text box data) with the complaint handling service are:



Analysis: More customers are dissatisfied with the service, and this links to the number of complaints being escalated to stage 2 of the process. Whilst the number of customers who are satisfied with complaints being easy to report is positive, poor communication and dissatisfaction with the outcome, along with overall satisfaction with complaint handling needs to be improved.

Learning: Whilst not all customers are going to be satisfied with the outcome following a complaint they have made; they should be kept informed throughout the complaint handling process and felt listened to. This is something the Customer Advocacy team will be committed to, alongside ensuring that the outcome of the investigation is discussed with them including what happens next.

7. Service Improvement

In common with other Housing Associations and in response to the Homes Plus See It-Report it campaign, an increased number of customers have reported instances of damp and mould in their home.

Reviewing and improving our Damp and Mould process has ensured that we are offering the right support to our customers when treating damp and mould, supporting them in prevention where possible.

Customers told us that sometimes our operatives were damaging their belongings when works were being completed in their homes.

As a result of this feedback, new guidance was provided to operatives via internal meetings called Toolbox talks, to reduce the impact on our customers and reduce complaints in this area.

Analysis shows that the time taken to complete repairs has been a huge driver in terms of complaints received, as well as complaints escalating to stage 2.

Property Plus have implemented the following to manage customers' expectations.

Messaging on all platforms has been kept up to date, asking customers to 'bear with us' during this unprecedented time of demand.

Increased resource to manage the demand has been authorised and the teams are currently recruiting for these positions. Whilst the impact of additional operatives will not be felt straight away, it will improve response times by July 2024.

Time taken to complete damp and mould works as also been a huge complaint driver this year, this is due to the high demand on this service and the level of works required in some cases. Additional resource has been allocated to this team this year. To ensure the business can meet the specific service standards requirements, these repairs will be managed by a dedicated team.

An independent review was completed last year to help Homes Plus improve their complaints handling service. Recommendations made have resulted in the development of a new Customer Advocacy Team, working with customers and Homes Plus to find the right solution, where possible, to resolve complaints as quickly as possible.

Development of a new Customer Experience Sub-Committee of the Homes Board, to help Homes Plus review complaints performance, understand root cause and develop service improvements that will positively impact customers and improve their experience.

8. Homes Plus Annual Self-Assessment

The Housing Ombudsman expects landlords to self-assess their compliance against the Complaint Handling Code. This is to be completed annually and submitted to the Housing Ombudsman in June.

Once this assessment has been completed, customers are asked to review and provide comment, prior to publication on our website and submission.

This can be found here www.housingplusgroup.co.uk/complaints-and-feedback.

9. Housing Ombudsman Landlord Performance Report

The Ombudsman's landlord reports are published annually for landlords with five or more cases determined between April and March each year.

Homes Plus report for 2022/23 can be found here www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/landlords/south-staffordshire-housing-association-limited/landlord-report-homes-plus-limited

10. Homes Board's comments

"I think this report is a useful summary of the lessons that Homes Plus has learned from tenants' complaints. There is clearly more work to be done to address the main causes of complaints and it is a positive step forward to see that Homes Plus is being more transparent about the complaints and the planned improvements and those it has made so far."

Dr Sarah Watson, Customer Board Co-optee

"On behalf of the board and as HPG's 'member responsible for complaints', I welcome this report and the work being done to address complaints and improve future performance by learning from past failings. The closer involvement of customers in reviewing complaints and driving improvement through the work of the new Customer Experience Committee is a big step forward, as is the creation of the new Customer Advocacy team to help resolve customer complaints as quickly and fairly as possible. The report demonstrates Homes Plus commitment to do its best for all its customers, and I hope they will find the report helpful and informative."

Jason Burt, Member Responsible for Complaints and Chair of the Homes Board