



# Complaints performance and service improvement report 2023/24

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## Commentary from the Board

We recognise the importance of engaging effectively with the complaints raised by our residents. Recent discussions with the Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS) have further emphasised the significant value of adopting a learning mindset in dealing with complaints. By viewing complaints as opportunities for insight rather than mere transactions, we can better understand our organisation's culture, operating environment and how our values are reflected in our actions.

We carefully reviewed our complaints performance, guided by the HOS complaint handling code. Through this review and our self-assessment we identified some improvement areas, which we are addressing with a new centralised complaints function set to launch in July 2024. This new structure aims to improve response times, enhance the quality of work and ensure better communication throughout the complaint process and ensure learning are embedded in service delivery going forward – all of which the Board will actively monitor through 2024/25.

We are committed to fostering a culture that not only efficiently addresses complaints but also genuinely enables colleagues to excel in their roles. This commitment extends beyond resident facing colleagues to the entire organisation, with clear objectives and training on handling complaints effectively.

As we move forward, Notting Hill Genesis remains dedicated to using feedback to drive meaningful changes and enhance the overall customer experience. We believe that by listening to and learning from our residents, we can create a more responsive and supportive environment.



**Ian Ellis**  
Chair

## Executive summary

This report sets out our complaints performance for 2023 to 2024, key themes, learnings and service improvements and details of our mentions in Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS) publications, in compliance with the Housing Ombudsman Compliant Handling Code.

The report addresses the following areas and will be considered by the Operations Committee and Member Responsible for Complaints before being presented to the Group Board for scrutiny and comment:

1. What is NHG's self-assessment of its complaint handling under the new Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code?
2. What is our performance on complaints?
3. What are the key themes around complaints?
4. What are the service improvements made as a result of learnings from complaints?
5. What did the HOS publish about NHG's performance?
6. Were there any other reports or publications produced by the HOS in relation to the work of NHG?

## Key findings

- NHG is substantially compliant with the new HOS complaint handling code. NHG's self-assessment against the new complaint handling code is attached and will be published on the NHG website.
- NHG had a reduction of circa 30% in complaints for 2023 to 2024 year-on-year, however, the types of complaints coming through were more complex than previous. We also saw an increased numbers of cases with negative determinations from the Housing Ombudsman. This is common across the social housing sector with the additional scrutiny added to complaints from the ombudsman and the introduction of the complaint handling code.
- The key themes coming through from complaints are around the speed of response to either resident queries or repairs, the quality of work carried in some instances and the level of communication throughout the journey.
- Data shows delays in responding to complaints at both stage 1 and stage 2, an increase in stage 2 complaints and the continuation of increased negative findings from the Ombudsman for complaint handling.
- In 2024 we are creating a centralised complaints function. The centralisation of the complaints service is progressing well, with the goal of improving efficiency and consistency in how customer complaints are handled across NHG. We have made several additional service improvements, which are outlined in this report.
- The HOS published a Landlord Performance Report of NHG's performance for the year ending 31 March 2023 in May 2023. NHG was found to have performed "similarly" when compared to similar landlords by size and type.
- A finding of severe maladministration against NHG was published on the HOS website in April 2023.

## What is NHG's self-assessment of its complaint handling against the new HOS complaint handling code?

The HOS complaint handling code took effect 1 April 2024 on its new statutory footing. NHG has completed a self-assessment against this code and included it in appendix A

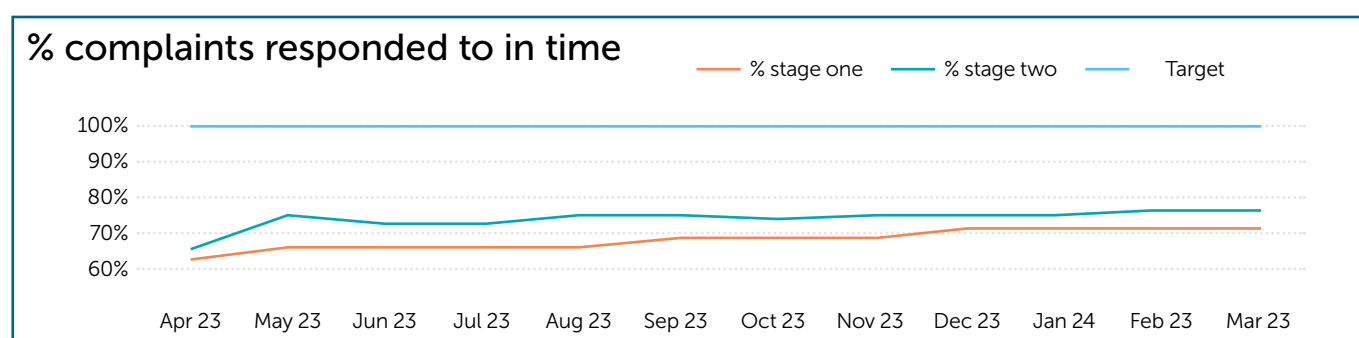
This self-assessment will be refreshed in July 2024 following the changes to the management of complaints in the centralised service in Customer Experience.

## What was NHG's performance on complaints during 2023/24?

During 2023 to 2024 we received 6,303 complaints (including quick fixes). This is a circa. 30% decrease in overall numbers compared to the previous year (9,185 in 2022 to 2023). However, within this there has been an increase in the proportion of complaints being dealt with at stage 1 rather than being quick fixed (40% last year compared to circa. 52% this year). This indicates that these issues where residents are contacting us as initial dissatisfaction are less easily resolved than previously.

48% of complaints (3,005) were resolved as a Quick Fix, meaning the issue was service recovered to the residents' satisfaction, with 83% of these resolved within 10 days, and a formal response was not requested. Of the 3,298 complaints that were logged at Stage 1, (555) 17.6% escalated to stage 2 as of 31st March 2024. This equates to 51 complaints per thousand properties.

The demand of more complex cases continues to put increased workload onto colleagues. As a result, only 58.3% of stage 1 complaints were responded to within our 10-day target (this increased to 71.5% when cases with an agreed extension with residents are included) and 42.6% of stage 2 complaints within our 20-day target (this increased to 76.8% when cases with an agreed extension with residents are included). Response rates as follows:

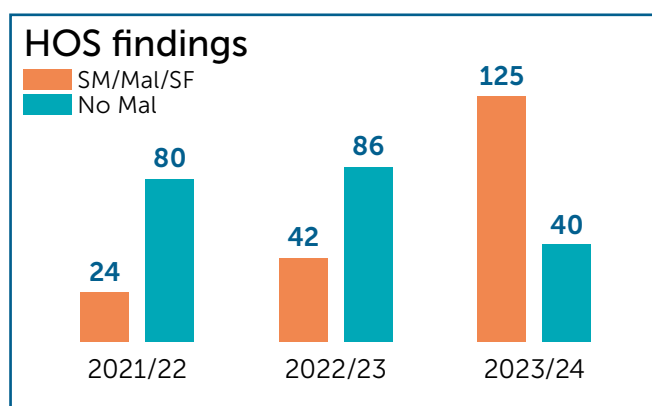
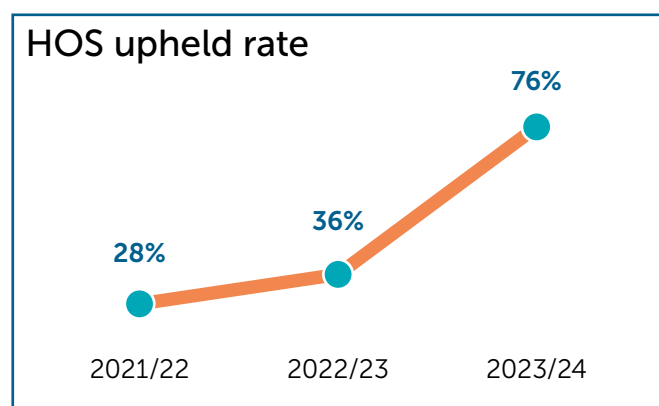


## Housing Ombudsman cases

We received 295 informal enquiries from the Ombudsman over 2023 to 2024 (these are cases where a resident has asked the Ombudsman to advocate on their behalf to progress their complaint through our process), this equates to 4.7% of the complaints that we received in the year receiving intervention from the Ombudsman. 74% were from general needs tenants, with 38% of cases relating to housing management and 32% were about repair issues.

Between 2023 to 2024 we had 102 cases awaiting determination with the Ombudsman, with 23 of these cases relating to pre-2023 duly made dates, as the Ombudsman has increased in size due to the statutory role it plays, allowing for more cases to be progressed.

The Ombudsman determined 165 NHG cases during the 2023 to 2024. The reported figures combine Severe Maladministration, Maladministration and Service Failure. The 125 cases with adverse findings split into 21 Severe Maladministration determinations, 75 Maladministration determinations and 29 Service Failure. By including Service Failure, the upheld rate is circa. 76%, by excluding, it is circa. 58%. We paid £179,664 compensation to residents relating to cases determined by the Ombudsman in 2023 to 2024, a significant increase from the £27,593 paid in 2022 to 2023.



## What are the key themes around complaints?

A substantial proportion of complaints received have been related to repairs, accounting for 29.6% of overall complaints across NHG in 2023 to 2024.

Top Complaint Themes	% of Overall Complaints across NHG
Repairs	29.6%
Housing Management	25.1%
Heating and Hot Water	12.7%
Service Charges	6.3%
ASB	4.9%
Other	21.4%

Upon analysis of both complaints and determinations from the Housing Ombudsman, some recurring themes and systemic issues have come to light, shedding crucial insight into areas needing attention:

- **Delays in Repair Completion:** A general issue identified is the duration taken to finalise repairs, often leaving residents inconvenienced and disheartened by the prolonged wait times.
- **Delayed Follow-Up Works:** Compounding the issue of delayed repairs is the slow progress in subsequent works required following initial appointments, exacerbating the frustration and inconvenience experienced by our residents.
- **Communication Breakdowns:** Instances of poor communication with our customers have been a recurring complaint, characterised by lapses in timely updates in rectifying service deficiencies.

- **Inconsistent Documentation and Handovers:** A notable observation has been the inconsistency in record-keeping practices and handover procedures among colleagues, resulting in disjointed interactions and an unsatisfactory customer journey.
- **Considering Individual Needs and Vulnerabilities:** Regrettably, there have been instances where our responsiveness failed to adequately accommodate the unique requirements and vulnerabilities of individual residents, underscoring a critical oversight in our approach to service provision and complaint resolution.

It is abundantly clear that the cumulative effect of poor communication protocols, prolonged response times and inadequate consideration of resident needs has significantly contributed to dissatisfaction and an overall poor customer experience in these cases.

In response to these pressing challenges, comprehensive enhancements to our complaints structure are being made in 2024. These strategic enhancements aim not only to rectify existing shortcomings but also to leverage insights from complaints to drive meaningful service improvements. We are fully dedicated to creating a culture of quick, transparent and resident-focused service. Our aim is to improve resident satisfaction and trust in our organisation by being responsive and delivering excellent service consistently.

The new complaints function will allow us to conduct detailed root cause analysis and deep dives, giving us further insights into how we improve customer experiences from the source. We also have a newly established customer journey team, who will take such insights and look at improving the repairs and service charge journeys to mitigate further occurrences of systemic issues.

Where a resident made a complaint but NHG did not handle it as a complaint, the complaint was typically recorded on our systems and responded to with an exclusion letter. The situations where this will occur include:

- A complaint relating to ongoing court proceedings
- A first request for service, information or an explanation of our policies and procedures
- Reported cases of neighbour disputes, anti-social behaviour, hate crime or domestic abuse, unless you are complaining about how we have handled your reports.
- A claim is being dealt with by our insurers.
- A complaint about a subject access request (SAR). This is dealt with under our SAR policy.
- We have already responded to the complaint.
- The complaint is being pursued in an unreasonable manner in line with our unacceptable behaviour policy.

# What are the service improvements made as a result of learnings from complaints?

**Case Study:** Addressing Failings in Damp and Mould Management (54f)

**Background:** We were tasked by the Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS) to conduct a comprehensive review of our policies and practices concerning damp and mould. This directive came in response to determinations by HOS highlighting instances of maladministration and severe maladministration in our handling of these cases.

**Actions taken to improve:** Responding to the directive, we took proactive steps to rectify past failings and enhance our performance in damp and mould management:

- **Reviewing Our Damp and Mould Policy:** We conducted a thorough review of our policy, incorporating expected changes from Awaab's Law and aligning with sector best practices to ensure compliance with regulatory standards.
- **Setting Standards in Our Repairs Policy:** Clear standards are being established in our repairs policy for all repairs staff regarding resident communication, including guidelines for engagement with contractors or subcontractors, ensuring consistency and clarity in our approach.
- **Developing a Repairs Improvement Plan:** A comprehensive repairs improvement plan is being developed to closely monitor progress throughout the repairs customer journey and ensure timely resolution of issues, prioritising customer satisfaction.
- **Engaging Our Residents in Repairs Service Procurement:** We will continue to actively engage with our residents in the procurement of the repairs service to ensure new contracts meet their needs and preferences, fostering transparency and accountability.
- **Enhancing Data Visibility:** Efforts are being made to enhance the visibility of data related to our repairing obligations and repair job routing, ensuring all repair jobs are logged and monitored on our system, facilitating better decision-making and accountability.
- **Training and Development:** An appropriate training plan is being developed for the team responsible for responsive works, emphasising organisational expectations on communication, case progression, and customer care. Additionally, standards and expectations on record-keeping have been clarified, empowering managers to ensure compliance across the organisation.
- **Implementing Our Vulnerable Persons Policy:** We are implementing a new Vulnerable Persons Policy, ensuring its wide socialisation and training across our organisation to raise awareness among staff and fulfil our obligations under relevant legislation.
- **Enhancing Complaint Handling:** Our Complaints policy and procedures are being updated in consultation with residents to set clear standards and expectations for complaint investigations, ensuring compliance with the new HOS Complaint Handling Code. Additionally, our Compensation Policy was updated.

**Conclusion:** We embraced the opportunity presented by the directive from the Housing Ombudsman Service to conduct a comprehensive review of our damp and mould management practices. Our commitment to learning from past mistakes and implementing necessary reforms underscores our dedication to delivering quality service and fostering positive relationships with all stakeholders.



## Additional Service Improvements:

### *Centralisation of the complaints service*

Residents have expressed reluctance in making complaints directly to their local officer. Recognising the need for a more impartial and consistent approach, from July 2024 we are centralising our complaints service. This centralised model will offer residents an independent and standardised complaint handling service.

Our dedicated complaints team will collaborate closely with colleagues across the business to thoroughly understand the issues raised and present appropriate resolutions. This collaborative approach ensures that we listen to residents and address their complaints promptly, in accordance with the Complaint Handling Code. For more complex complaints, senior complaint investigators will provide additional support and expertise.

The key priorities for our complaints service include:

- Promoting a positive complaint culture among residents and staff, encouraging open communication and feedback.
- Enhancing reporting mechanisms and increasing the visibility of complaints to drive accountability and transparency.
- Improving the speed and effectiveness of resolution and response times, ensuring timely and satisfactory outcomes for residents.
- Identifying recurring complaint types and implementing proactive measures to address root causes, thus reducing the likelihood of future complaints.
- Amplifying customer-led service design and involvement, ensuring that resident feedback informs continuous improvement initiatives and service enhancements.

By prioritising these key areas, our centralised complaints service will be dedicated to delivering a seamless and responsive experience for residents, fostering trust, and ensuring that their concerns are addressed promptly and effectively.

### *Progression of repairs/ repeat repairs*

Findings from repair-related complaints revealed that repairs were marked as complete despite being partially complete or unsatisfactory to residents. In response, significant changes were made to our repairs department.

The new repairs hub centralises repair management, prioritising timely completion and resident satisfaction. Additionally, new repairs inspector roles ensure post-inspections, maintaining quality standards.

To address complex repair issues, a specialised surveying and technical service was established within the repairs department. System enhancements now flag properties with frequent repairs, allowing for early intervention to improve service quality and resident experience.

These changes demonstrate our commitment to efficient, quality repair services, prioritising resident satisfaction and effective problem resolution.



## *Service Charges*

Service charges were a key theme for many complaints from our shared owners and leaseholders. In response to this, we have reviewed the resource and skills around service charges and have implemented a centralised team within Operations to support local staff and ultimately deliver a better service to residents. This team will ensure compliance with the service charge cycle, getting timely budgets and costs to resident, support customer facing colleagues with complex queries and in delivering transparent information to residents.

## *Decants*

In response to the challenges faced by residents displaced from their homes due to emergency or prolonged works, we undertook a rigorous review of our decant policy and revised our procedures to ensure a significantly enhanced experience for affected residents. Recognising the considerable disruption and stress such situations can cause, our updated policy prioritises resident well-being and clarity in communication.

Our revised decant policy incorporates several key improvements. Firstly, we have implemented enhanced visibility and case management protocols to ensure that residents are kept informed and supported throughout the decant process. This includes assigning case management to displaced residents, improving our communication of the arrangements surrounding rent on the unoccupied property, which offers residents peace of mind and transparency regarding financial matters during their displacement. Additionally, clear guidelines for the storage of personal items have been established, alleviating concerns about the safety and accessibility of belongings during the relocation process.

Our updated procedure includes clarity on the return to the original property, ensuring that residents have a clear understanding of when they can expect to resume normalcy in their living arrangements. This proactive approach not only minimizes uncertainty but also allows residents to plan accordingly and reduces the potential for prolonged disruption.

## *Repairs to heat networks with external ownership/management*

A resident complaint regarding prolonged intermittent loss of heating and hot water, underscored deficiencies in information management and escalation procedures to relevant third parties. Furthermore, it shed light on a broader issue, a general lack of understanding regarding the complexity of our heating systems.

To address these concerns effectively, it became evident that we required additional specialists within NHG with expertise in heat networks. This recognition prompted us to prioritise the recruitment of specialists who can provide the necessary knowledge and skills to enhance our management of heat network systems.

By bolstering our team with specialists in heat networks, we aim to improve our capacity to address complex heating issues promptly and effectively, ensuring a higher standard of service delivery and resident satisfaction.

## *Formalising learning from complaints*

With the establishment of the new complaints service, we are enhancing our commitment to thorough root cause analysis and proactive learning. This renewed focus aims to identify underlying issues and share insights across our organisation to prevent the recurrence of past failures.

The complaints service is integrated into our broader Customer Experience department, which encompasses dedicated teams for customer journey mapping and insight gathering. This comprehensive approach will allow us to identify pain points and areas for improvement throughout the customer journey, ensuring that our service delivery continually evolves to meet and exceed customer expectations.

## **What did the HOS publish about NHG's performance?**

The HOS published a Landlord Performance Report of NHG's performance for the year ending 31 March 2023 in May 2023. NHG was found to have performed "similarly" when compared to similar landlords by size and type. The report is included in appendix B.

The publication of the Landlord Performance report for the year 2023-24 is imminent. This report shows our performance and adverse determination rate, but we await details of the placement with similar organisations.

## **Were there any other reports or publications produced by the HOS in relation to the work of NHG?**

The HOS published its findings of severe maladministration in relation to NHG's handling of a window repair on its website in April 2023. The NHG response was also published which included the following learning:

- Treating all faulty window, and balcony door, mechanisms where the window won't lock or shut properly as an urgent emergency repair
- Instructing contractors that if a faulty window mechanism cannot be fixed, the window should be left so it cannot be opened (including tilting) until the full repair is carried out. To enable this all operatives should be trained to leave the mechanism in a condition that prevents opening until a full repair is carried out.
- Updating our resident welcome packs and handbooks to ensure residents are aware of the risks of faulty mechanisms and how to report them, as well as the importance of windows being lubricated.
- Producing staff guidance to discuss window safety at annual visits.
- Updating our management reporting so we can better identify repairs where no follow-up visits have been arranged following an initial call-out.

NHG did not feature in any special investigation reports published by the HOS.

NHG did not feature in any of the Complaint Handling Failure Order (CHFO) quarterly reports published by the HOS.