



# Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report

**April 2023-March 2024**

# Introduction

Under the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code, Aspire is required to produce an annual complaints performance and service improvement report for scrutiny and challenge.

We know that things can go wrong and when they do we want you to tell us so that we can put things right. Complaints provide us with a firsthand account of your views and experiences and highlight problems we may otherwise be unaware of.

This report tells you about the complaints we received between the 1 April 2023 and 31 March 2024, how we have used what you told us to improve the way we do things and includes:

- Aspires annual self-assessment against this Code
- Our complaint handling performance
- Information about investigations by the Housing Ombudsman Service
- Actions we have taken to improve the way in which we deliver services and handle complaints

## Housing Ombudsman

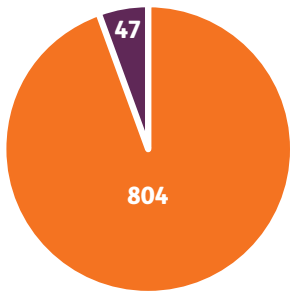
Our approach to handling complaints is regulated by the Housing Ombudsman Service and our annual assessment against their code of practice is published at the end of June each year. This assessment together with information about how to make a complaint can be found on our website [www.aspirehousing.co.uk](http://www.aspirehousing.co.uk)

The code sets out a two-stage process and expects Aspire to respond to complaints effectively and fairly.

We have 10 working days to investigate and respond at stage (1) and 20 working days at stage (2).

Sometimes we may need longer to look into things, and we may ask if you are agreeable to an extension of time beyond this period. If you are still unhappy with how your complaint has been handled at stage 2 you can ask the ombudsman to investigate [www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/residents/make-a-complaint](http://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/residents/make-a-complaint)

**The total number of complaints received**



- Complaints
- Appeals

**Complaints per 1,000 properties**

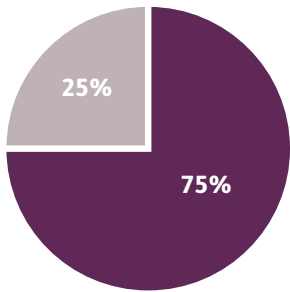


**Main complaint areas**

- General internal repairs
- General communication
- Work not complete
- Quality of work
- Time to complete
- Receipt of updates
- Staff attitude/conduct
- Plumbing

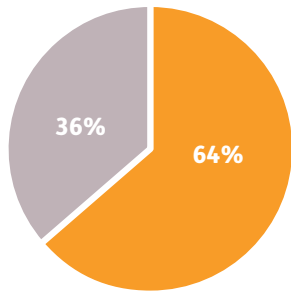
**The percentage of complaints at each stage which were closed in full within the set timescales of 10 and 20 working days:**

**Stage 1 complaints %**



- Complaints in time
- Complaints not in time

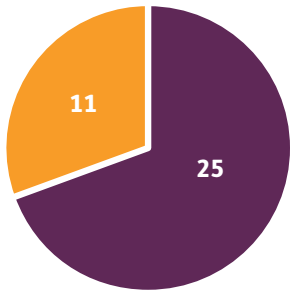
**Stage 2 complaints %**



- Complaints in time
- Complaints not in time

**There have been no complaints we have refused to accept.**

**Extensions agreed**



- Stage 1
- Stage 2

**The average time in working days for a full response to complaints at each stage**

Average days to close S1	7	Target: 10 working days
Average days to close S2	19	Target: 20 working days

**The outcome of complaints at each stage**

	S1 complaints partially upheld	S1 complaints not upheld	S1 complaints N/A
Stage 1 complaints upheld	12.14%	15.44%	13.19%
	59.23%		
	S2 complaints partially upheld	S2 complaints not upheld	S2 complaints N/A
Stage 2 complaints upheld	15.44%	12.77%	12.77%
	55.32%		

## Customer Satisfaction

Measurement of Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs) is a regulatory requirement and each month we survey some of our customers and ask their opinion about our services. A key section of the survey is about how satisfied customers are about the way their complaint had been handled. During the period April 23 - March 24 out of 622 customers who responded, 43% were satisfied with the way their complaint was handled (Sector Benchmark: 28% lower quartile, 42% upper quartile). The biggest issues being outstanding repairs and communication.

## Ombudsman investigations, key themes, and outcomes

During the reporting year three cases were investigated by the Housing Ombudsman Service, two judgements were made within this period, and determination about the other one is still to be made.

There are currently no findings of maladministration however service failure was identified. We have apologised to the customer and taken steps to compensate them for the distress and inconvenience caused.

We have identified key themes, and these include communication and time taken to complete repairs. Both issues are being addressed through our Home Transformation Project together with our cultural change and continuous professional development (CPD) programmes.

## We're listening and aiming to improve

When you make a complaint, we listen, and we work to resolve it. But that's not the end of it; we also look at why you've had to make a complaint, and what we can do to improve things so that it doesn't happen again. We also look at what else is happening in the social housing sector and combine this information with things like customer satisfaction surveys, rulings from the housing ombudsman, and our own research to help us get a clear view of what matters most to people.

## Board member responsible for complaints (MRC)

Aspire Housing Board monitor how we deliver against our strategic objectives set out in our Corporate Plan 2030 and has a member who is responsible for complaints (MRC). The MRC champions a positive complaint handling culture and provide assurance to the board that complaint handling within Aspire promotes service improvement for customers and learning and business improvement for the organisation.

## Customer Advocacy and Resolution Evaluation group (CARE)

All our customer panels work with us on key issues and the CARE group has specific focus on complaint handling. They monitor how well we are performing and make suggestions about how we can improve.

## Our promise, 'you talk we listen'

Built around 5 People First principles:

- We will always treat you with respect, take time to understand your enquiry and be polite and courteous with our response.
- When you contact us, we will aim to deal with your enquiry quickly and effectively at the first point of contact. If we're unable to solve it right then, we will get back to you within one working day to keep you updated.
- If something goes wrong, we will resolve the issue in a timely manner, keeping you informed throughout in a way that suits you.
- If you make a complaint, we will acknowledge this within 48 hours and aim to resolve it within five working days.
- We will use your feedback to shape and improve the services we provide.

## Our response to complaints

Our training for all complaint handlers has been built around the Professional Standards for engaging with complaints as set by the Chartered Institute of Housing and is based upon on seven characteristics:



**Integrity**



**Inclusive**



**Ethical**



**Knowledgeable**



**Skilled**



**Advocate**



**Leadership**

As part of our **induction** process, all new staff are provided with guidance on how to record complaints. The induction process also provides the opportunity to explain to new members of the team why we value a complaint or expressions of dissatisfaction and how this feedback can be used to make improvements. This is reinforced through 1-2-1s and team meetings where required.

**Training** is also mandatory for all our complaint handlers and is supplemented with annual refresher and spotlights sessions to ensure that all handlers know what is expected of them and that they can respond efficiently and effectively to your concerns. All handlers are required to pledge their commitment to our **Complaints Charter** and our culture of **continuous professional development** (CPD) reinforces our **people first** approach by nurturing positive **attitudes and behaviours**.

When our customers already feel let down by part of our services, we didn't think it was right that we disappoint them again by failing to ensure their **compensation** was paid in a consistent and timely manner. We have strengthened our approach and now use guidance given by the Housing Ombudsman Service to inform our decision around this.

We identified that delays in our response are sometimes caused if your complaint is complex and involves several teams. We now have a multi-disciplinary team of High-level Oversight and Unresolved Situation Experts (**HOUSE**) that meets weekly to look at these cases and ensure that they are resolved as quickly as possible.

Here are some recent examples of changes we've made in response to **feedback from customers**:

You said	We did
<p>You told us that the language in our letters were unfriendly and confusing</p>	<p>We have worked with our involved customer group C.A.R.E (Customer Advocacy Resolution Evaluation) to develop new letter templates that are easy to understand and more consistent.</p>
<p>You have told us that the wait for repairs is too long</p>	<p>Our Home Transformation Project has been shaped by customer feedback and seeks to improve the way we deliver the repairs and maintenance service.</p> <p>We have also appointed an additional Contract Manager to oversee work that cannot be done by in-house colleagues to ensure efficient and effective delivery of repairs.</p> <p>The number of in-house trade operatives has been increased to enable more appointment times to be available to you.</p>
<p>You told us we need to get better at how we handle complaints</p>	<p>Complaint handling performance is now monitored and challenged by the Senior Management Team and the Complaints Panel</p>
<p>You told us that we need to improve the way and frequency of how we communicate with you</p>	<p>We have established a team of Customer Liaison Officers (CLO's) to support customers through the complaint process and ensure follow up work takes place.</p> <p>Our new Corporate Plan 2030 puts people first and introduced new values:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>We champion the customer</b></li> <li>• <b>We build togetherness</b></li> <li>• <b>We are professional</b></li> </ul> <p>We now publish newsletters for customers to let you know the things we are doing.</p> <p>We have Neighbourhood Plans to address things that matter to you and your community.</p> <p>We facilitate community events to discuss plans we may have to improve things in your local area.</p> <p>We text or call you to let you know when a trade operative is on his way to your job.</p> <p>We leave a calling card if you are not in when we visit.</p>

You said	We did
You said that you would like to see us out and about in your community	We have increased the number of Locality Coordinators on the front line. These colleagues are based in your neighbourhoods and able to support you on the ground in your local community
You told us that addressing damp and mould in your home should be given priority	<p>We have established a team with specific focus on this important matter who prioritise working with you to resolve your concerns.</p> <p>Additional damp and mould specialist contractors have been appointed to increase appointment availability and reduce waiting times</p> <p>Improved quality assurance processes including before and after photo's, taken to ensure quality of work</p> <p>Under performing contractors have been replaced.</p>
You told us that some of the contractors we used were not performing to a standard you would expect	We have introduced a new contractor code of conduct, reviewed who we work with, ended some contracts, and introduced new companies to our portfolio of partners
You expressed concern about the safety of your vulnerable neighbours	Our 'Staying Connected' initiative seeks to support the most vulnerable in your community
You told us that there were inconsistencies of approach in the way enquires were being handled by our Customer Excellence Team and Lifeline (out of hours service).	To ensure a consistent approach all call handlers have had refresher customer service training with expectations around attitude and behaviour established

## Looking forward

- This year we have put in place a strong framework to enable an efficient and effective response to complaints.
- Although the number of complaints has increased, the proportion of complaints resolved at the first stage in the process has improved.
- We need to improve our customer satisfaction with complaint handling, this will be a key focus for 2023/2024
- We also need to improve our complaint handing times to ensure we achieve our targets, this will be our other key focus for 2023/2024
- We are listening to our customers through complaints, feedback and customer groups and their voice is helping to change the way we deliver services.





## Talk to us



**Aspire Housing, Kingsley, The Brampton,  
Newcastle-under-Lyme, ST5 0QW**

01782 635 200 | [www.aspirehousing.co.uk](http://www.aspirehousing.co.uk)

A registered society with the Financial Conduct Authority, Registration Number  
31218R. Registered with the Regulator of Social Housing L4238