



June 2024

# Complaints Performance & Annual Report 2023/24

Written by

Amanda Libecans, Customer Services Manager

The Trust's Governing Body statement about this report and the annual self assessment against the Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS) code:

*'We are pleased to present the Housing Trust's Annual Complaints Performance Report for the year 2023-2024. This past year has been particularly challenging, as we navigated a complex and evolving landscape. However, we have embraced these challenges as opportunities to grow, improve, and better serve our customers.'*

*Complaints are an important aspect of our commitment to 'be a great landlord'. They provide us with invaluable insights into the areas where we can enhance our services. Over the past year, we have carefully*

*reviewed each complaint received, taking the lessons learned to heart and implementing changes aimed at preventing recurrence and improving our service delivery.*

*In line with our dedication to continuous improvement, the Board has conducted a thorough review and approved the Trust's self-assessment against the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code of Practice, which came into effect on 1st April 2024. This self-assessment has reaffirmed our adherence to the highest standards of complaint handling, and we are confident that our practices are aligned with the best practices outlined in the Code.*

*As we move forward, we remain steadfast in our commitment to listening to our customers, learning from their feedback, and taking proactive steps to improve our services. We are grateful for the trust and support of our customers and stakeholders, and we will continue to work diligently to provide a housing service that meets their needs.*

*We thank our dedicated team for their hard work and resilience over the past year. Their commitment to excellence and their willingness to embrace change have been instrumental in driving our progress.*

*Together, we look forward to another year of learning, growth, and service improvement.'*

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# About our complaints service...

Being a great landlord | Being a resilient organisation



This report provides detail on activity relating to complaints and compliments that the Trust has dealt with in the financial year 2023/24.

It looks at the Trust's response and outcomes to these cases - including the cases that have been escalated to the Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS). The Housing Ombudsman investigates complaints and resolves disputes between customers and leaseholders of social landlords.

As a Trust, we have focused on strengthening the resilience within the Customer Experience Team to reduce single person dependencies and our Customer Experience Team take care of customer queries, questions and the logging of new complaints - ensuring that the correct process is followed and that we are complaint with the Complaint Handling Code.

We have a dedicated Customer Experience Manager and also a Complaints Coordinator who's full time role is to ensure the smooth running of all complaints cases, including liaising with staff, customers and quality checking all responses before they are sent to our customers. The Repairs Team also have a dedicated person that deals with repairs complaint responses.

The Customer Services Manager attends various training sessions held by the HOS and that experience is rolled out to the wider business as training. They are also a member of the 'Complaints Working Group' that is made up of a number of different landlords where best practice, knowledge and experience is shared.

## Annual self-assessment

The Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 empowered the Housing Ombudsman to issue a 'code of practice' about our procedure for considering complaints. It also means that the Ombudsman can monitor if we are following this.

Changes to the Complaint Handling Code were agreed and announced in February 2024 - stating that all landlords had to be following the new changes by 1st April 2024. Under the new Complaint Handling Code, the Trust are responsible for reporting performance data annually to the Housing Ombudsman service, along with the submission of an annual self-assessment.

We've also made sure to deliver effective training across the Trust to ensure that changes to the code are strictly followed. Staff continue receive regular training about best practice in dealing with complaints and their quality of responses are checked by our complaints team and feedback to make improvements if necessary.

## Customer involvement

In May 2024, we spoke to customers to get their feedback and views about how they believe the Trust is following the new code and used their opinions in how we have responded to the Ombudsman's self assessment. We have also made some improvements to our complaints service following this consultation such as including our complaints leaflet in all sign up packs for new customers so they are are of the process right from the start of their tenancy.

Our Customer Challenge group received quarterly reports about our performance and also every determination from the HOS is reported to them. We use feedback from the group to help improve

# Our performance

## A look at our complaint performance over the last year

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Over the last year, there has been a significant decrease in the number of complaints that we have received. Throughout 2023/24, **441** complaints were received, which is **96** fewer from the previous year.

Most of complaints were dealt with successfully as “quick fix” enquiries (**294**) and did not develop into ‘Investigation’ Stage complaints. Service managers responded to **105** Investigation Stage complaints, with Senior Managers dealing with **42** Review Stage complaints. The Trust no longer operate with a ‘quick fix’ stage in line with the changes to the HOS code in April 24. The Trust have only refused two complaints due to them being under the ‘exclusion’ list and were being dealt with as disrepair claims.

Complaints about repairs saw the greatest reduction in number from the previous year, as improvements in the repairs process became further embedded.

The Trust upheld **65%** of complaints during April 23-March 24. This was an increase of **8%** on the previous year. This is largely due to staff admitting fault where we have failed the customer and taking a less ‘defensive’ approach.

It is acknowledged that across the sector, repairs services receive the highest number of complaints compared to other teams. This is because of the high number of interactions between customers and the repairs’ function, as well as the intrusive nature of repairs works. It works out at 1.8% of repairs result in a complaint about the service. It is important to know that the team also receive the most compliments within the business!

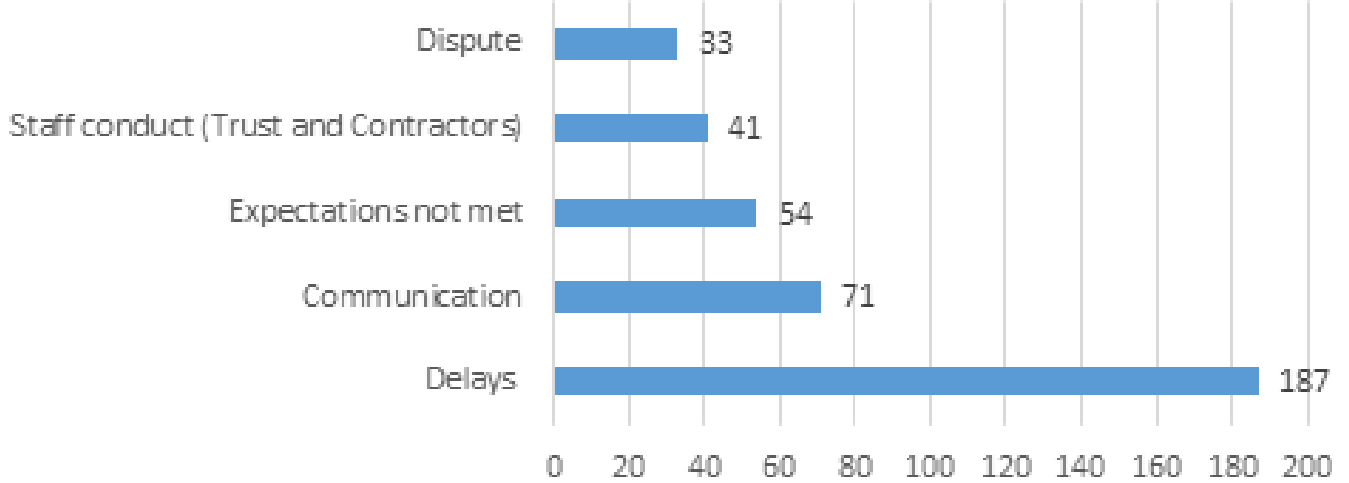
The Trust’s Estates Team were the second team to receive the most complaints due to grass cutting issues in the warmer months.

Complaints relating to the Asset function are also within the top five to receive complaints, as necessarily this work often involves disturbance to the household whilst works are completed.

Root causes of complaints include: disagreements about service charges, responsibilities of tenancy agreements, payments towards arrears agreed, information that the customer has said they have been given, which is then disputed when followed-up.



## Root causes of complaints



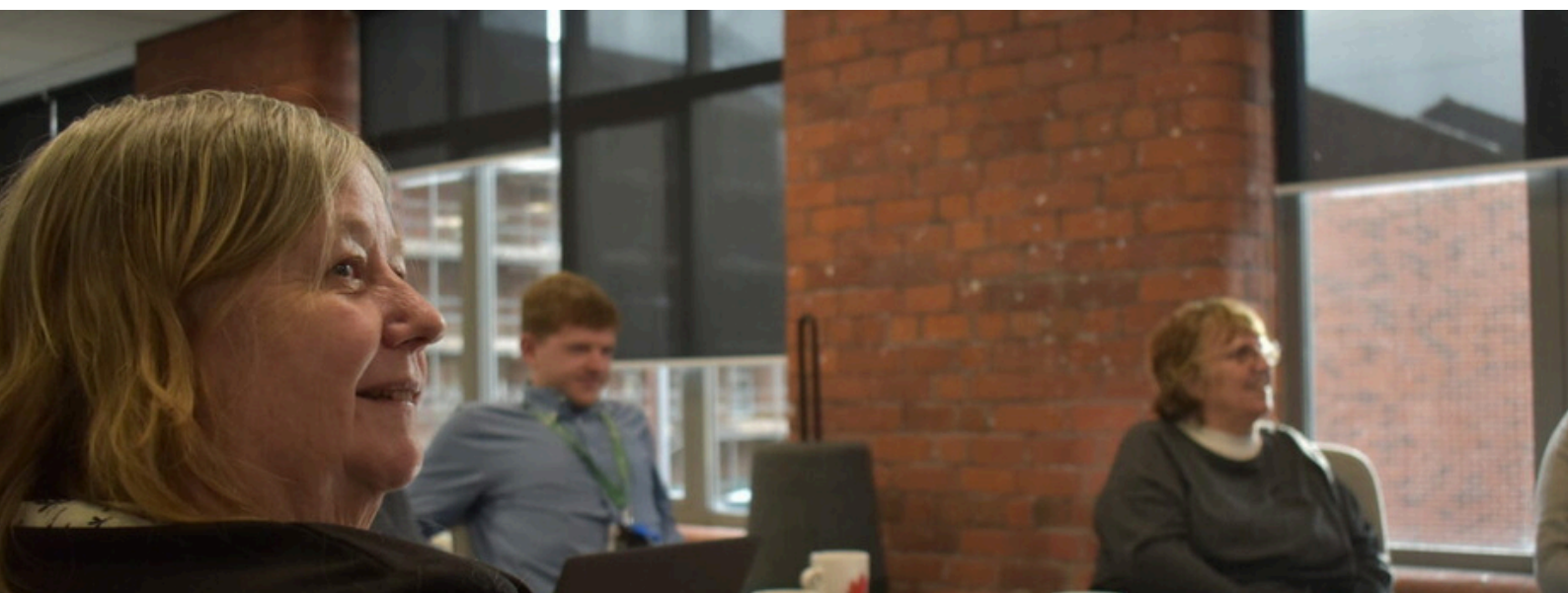
20/41 complaints about staff or contractor conduct were upheld and dealt with accordingly.

## Remedies

The Trust received **26** compensation claims, which was five more than the previous year - paying a total of **£38,843.22** compared to **£25,419.49** in 2022/23.

## Compliments

The Trust received **573** compliments in 2023-24. The total is a combination received from both staff and customers.



# What we've learnt

Complaint handlers are required to provide lessons learned outcomes for each upheld complaint - we recorded 100% of upheld complaints with lessons learned to identify repeat issues and make service improvements as a result.

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The most common theme of complaints was about communications across various teams, interactions and circumstances. The feedback highlights the critical role communication plays in shaping our customers experiences.

Whether it's about delays in maintenance responses, misunderstandings regarding tenancy agreements, or lack of clarity in communication channels, it's evident that improving our communication practices is very important to our ability in reducing complaints and increasing satisfaction. We are undertaking customer service training as a business in October 24 which will focus on the importance of issues such as communication to further strengthen our services.

Lessons learned are publicised quarterly to customers on the Trust's website

- [Head over to our 'lessons learnt' webpage.](#)

## Some of our service Improvements....

- The Trust's Estates Team were the second team to receive the most complaints. These were largely based upon the issues with the contractor we used during the grass cutting season. The Trust has now appointed a new contractor who commenced work in May 2024.
- The Contact Centre received a number of complaints about the number of options that were on our customer telephone line. As a result of this, we reviewed the Options and reduced them to 3 - we have received excellent feedback from customers That it is much more user friendly and quicker to use.

## Unacceptable behaviour

In line with the Trust's Unacceptable Behaviour Policy, the Trust have a small number of customers that are sanctioned, with restrictions on how they may communicate with the Trust because of their behaviour.



# Our work with the Housing Ombudsman

A summary of our cases with the Housing Ombudsman

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The Trust received four determinations from the Housing Ombudsman Service in 2023-24.

Of the four closed Housing Ombudsman cases, maladministration or service failure was found in two cases.





## Case one

### Complaint details

The complaint was about the Trust's handling of the resident's reports of issues with a number of services.

### Determination

No maladministration was found; however, a number of recommendations were made which have since been implemented.

The HOS noted the Trust's methodical approach to the complaint handling.

### Lessons learned

The HOS recognised that the Trust always used complaint definitions and references and that the course of each complaint was clear and simple to track. This made sure we did not lose track of the complaints and that we responded in order. The HOS stated that it was reasonable that the complaint was upheld but that it was not clear which aspect of the complaint it was upholding or why.

Training was provided to all complaint handling staff in May 2023. As part of that training, it was discussed the need to be clear about which aspects of the response are upheld.

## Case two

### Complaint details

The complaint was about the Trust's handling of the resident's reports of antisocial behaviour.

### **Determination**

There was an offer of redress made by the Trust in respect of the way it handled the case during an original response. The Ombudsman found this to be acceptable. They also found that there was a service failure by the landlord in its handling of the resident's complaint.

### **Lessons learned**

Discussions with staff about the importance of checking the facts given that the determination is around the complaint response giving incorrect details. The issue was raised at the December complaints meeting and a business wide message was sent.

## **Case three**

### **Complaint details**

The complaint was about the handling of a number of issues across the Trust.

### **Determination**

Two out of the five issues raised within the complaint case were determined to have one count of maladministration and one service failure.

### **Lessons learned**

Discussions with relevant staff about communicating regularly with customers to keep them updated in crisis situations and to be thorough with checking we have carried out all of our promises.

New processes have been created and rolled out to staff to avoid the issue repeating.

## **Case four**

### **Complaint details**

The complaint was about the handling of a customer's application.

### **Determination**

The decision of the Housing Ombudsman was that there was maladministration by the Trust in the handling of the complaint.

### **Lessons learned**

at the time of the complaint, the Trust employed a single Officer who was responsible for the administration of applications, and as such a point of single person dependency presented existed.

The permanent restructuring of the team has removed the single person dependency.

# Your voice

## Customer voice & feedback

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A satisfaction survey is issued with every complaint, to get feedback about how their complaint was handled.

The Trust has a low response rate for these, receiving **15** in 2023/24.

To promote this and encourage customers to complete the survey we have introduced a monthly prize draw. Customers that complete a survey are now eligible for the £20 prize draw.

### Survey results, April 2023 - March 2024:

- **80%** Were either very satisfied or satisfied with how we listened to the issue.
- **60%** Were either very satisfied or satisfied with how we understood the issue.
- **60%** Were either very satisfied or satisfied with the information and advice provided.
- **73%** Were either very satisfied or satisfied with how well you were kept informed about the progress.
- **67%** Were either very satisfied or satisfied with the way your complaint was handled overall.
- **60%** Were either very satisfied or satisfied with the final outcome of their complaint.

### Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSM's)

Based on the annual results from the Tenant Satisfaction Measures, **246 out of 1,010** customers told us that they raised a complaint in the last 12 months and **40% were satisfied**. However, after further analysis, **only 63 of those customers (26%) had been through the Trust's formal complaint process**.

Work has been done around this to increase awareness about how to make a complaint, including posts in Plain Speaking and the updated Infographic leaflet on the Trust's website, located here: - [Send us a complaint \(peaksplains.org\)](https://www.peaksplains.org).

## Have a complaint?

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complaints@peaksplains.org

[peaksplains/complaints](https://www.peaksplains.org/complaints)

**PEAKS & PLAINS**  
Housing Trust

