

Annual Complaints Performance & Service Improvement Report

2024/25

Building homes.
Supporting people.





“
**Ensuring that we are listening
 to our customers and that
 we are working together to
 provide the services and
 support that matters most is a
 key priority at Hightown.**
 ”



Introduction

As the Member Responsible for Complaints at Hightown, I am pleased to be able to share this annual complaints performance report and service improvement report for the 2024/25 financial year with our customers, colleagues and key partners.

Ensuring that we are listening to our customers and that we are working together to provide the services and support that matter most is a key priority at Hightown. I am confident that our complaint process is accessible to those that need it and am assured that our operational teams are focused on putting things right for our customers and improving customer experience across the organisation.

The Board recognises the need to provide a responsive and effective complaint handling service to customers and fully supports the newly created central complaints team structure, where we have already started to see an improvement in the handling of complaints. The focus on resolving complaints as early as possible to improve the experience of our customers and to put things right promptly is welcomed and the progress of this new approach will be monitored through the regular quarterly complaint reporting, which also continues to support the Hightown leadership team to identify areas of focus and improvement.

I am confident that Hightown will continue to work together with our customers to learn from each complaint and improve services to meet customers' expectations.

The Hightown complaints process complies with the Housing Ombudsman Service Complaint Handling Code which became a statutory requirement for all Housing Associations to adhere to from 1st April 2024. During the year we reviewed our complaints policy and updated our complaints leaflet and website as well as reviewing and updating the Ombudsman annual self-assessment against the code.

Yinka Bolaji

Member Responsible for Complaints



Statement from the Board

The Board is satisfied that Hightown's approach to complaint handling remains a high priority and that we are compliant with the Complaint Handling Code, evidenced in the self-assessment statement and the Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report.

We are assured there is a focus across Hightown to deal with customer complaints proactively, and over the coming 12 months expect to see an enhanced focus on service improvement and learning outcomes from complaints to ensure that Hightown continues to demonstrate its commitment to customers.

Qadeer Kiani

Chair of the Board

Please see links below to the Annual Self-Assessment:
<https://www.hightownha.org.uk/media/h3qbrxfd/complaints-handling-code-self-assessment-2024.pdf>



“I am assured that our operational teams are focused on putting things right for our customers and improving customer experience across the organisation.”

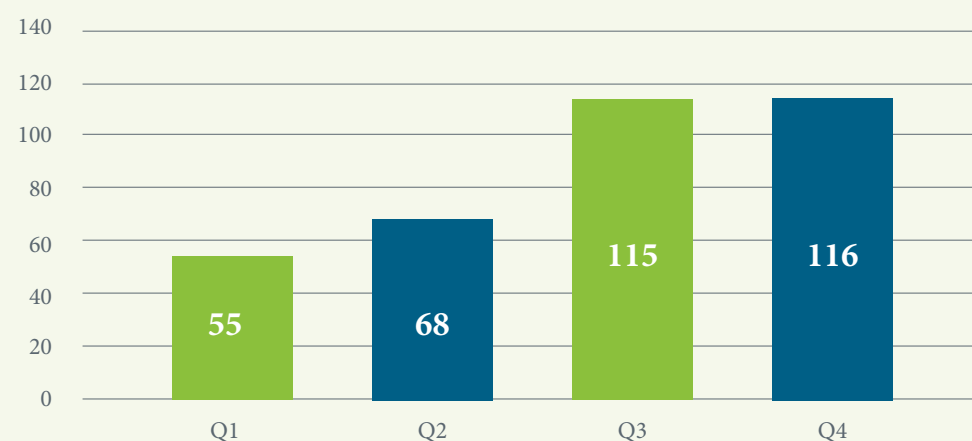


Complaint volumes and performance

Complaints at Stage One are logged on our complaints system within five working days and an acknowledgement sent to the complainant, as required by the Housing Ombudsman. We strive to respond within the 10-working day timeframe set by the Housing Ombudsman; where this isn't possible due to the complexity involved with some complaint investigations, an extension would be arranged and agreed with the customer, to enable a thorough investigation.

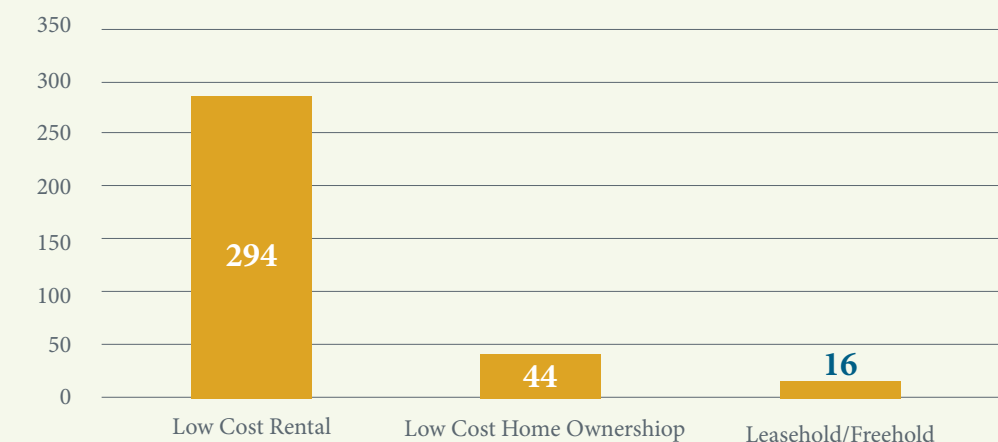
There was a total of 354 complaints raised in the year 2024/25, including complaints raised by customers who live in our care and supported housing and receive a landlord service. The graph below indicates the quantity received each quarter. Note that a higher number of complaints are received in the winter months due to an increased number of complaints related to damp and mould and heating systems during this season.

Stage 1 complaints logged 2024/25



The graph below further breaks down the number of complaints received by tenure.

Stage 1 complaints received 2024/25 - by tenure



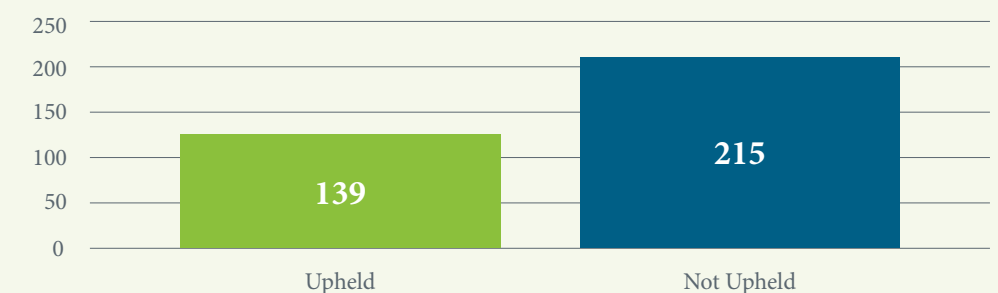
Hightown did not have a dedicated Complaints Resolution team for the first half of the year and complaints were dealt with by Service Managers. All complaints about Hightown Housing services are now managed by the central Complaints Resolution Team.

Complaints relating to Care and Supported Housing (C&SH) services are investigated and responded to by the Care and Supported Housing managers as their services vary. For those care and supported housing customers who also receive a landlord service from Hightown, the data is recorded in the same system as Hightown Housing complaints and monitored by the Complaints Resolution Team.

We are aware that some complaints may be made as our services have not met customer expectations. As part of the complaint investigation we also check if the services are meeting the requirements set out in our policies and procedures and where we do not consider there has been a service failure will not uphold the complaint.

The graph below indicates the outcomes of complaints received at Stage One of the Hightown complaints process.

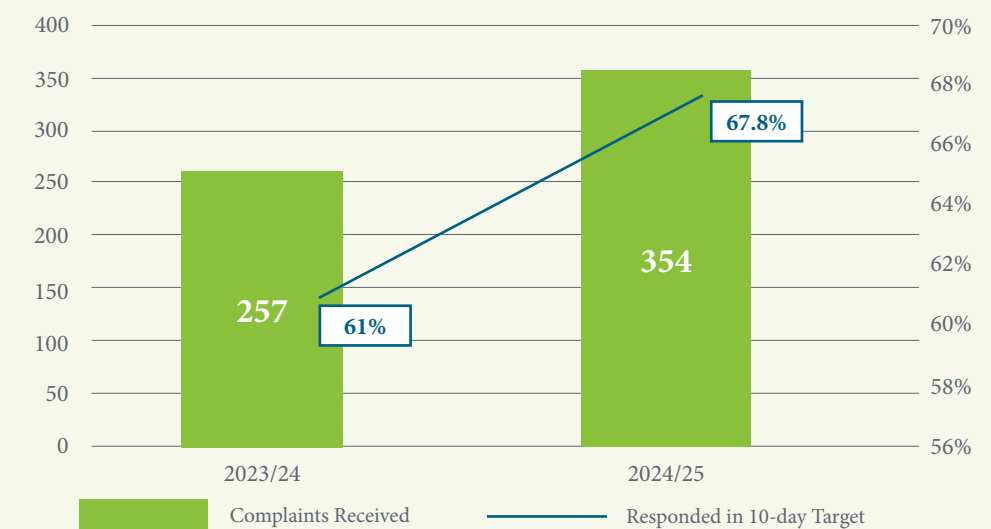
Stage 1 complaints upheld





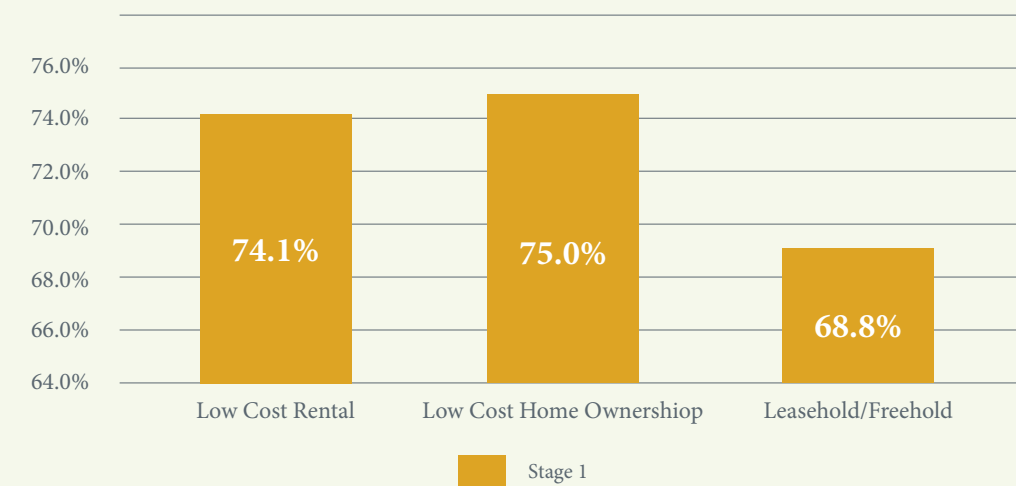
As can be seen in the graphs below, there has been an increase of over 35% in the number of complaints received in 2024/25, and the majority of the increase has taken place since the establishment of the new centralised Complaints Resolution Team. Whilst there has also been an increase in the number of complaints responded to in the 10-day target, we recognise that we need to continue to focus on improving this area of complaint handling performance.

Stage 1 complaints received & responded in target



The graph below shows our complaints handling performance for stage one complaints by tenure

Stage 1 complaints responded to in target by tenure 2024/25



“The Board recognises the need to provide a responsive and effective complaint handling service to customers and fully supports the newly created central complaints team structure, where we have already started to see an improvement in the handling of complaints.”

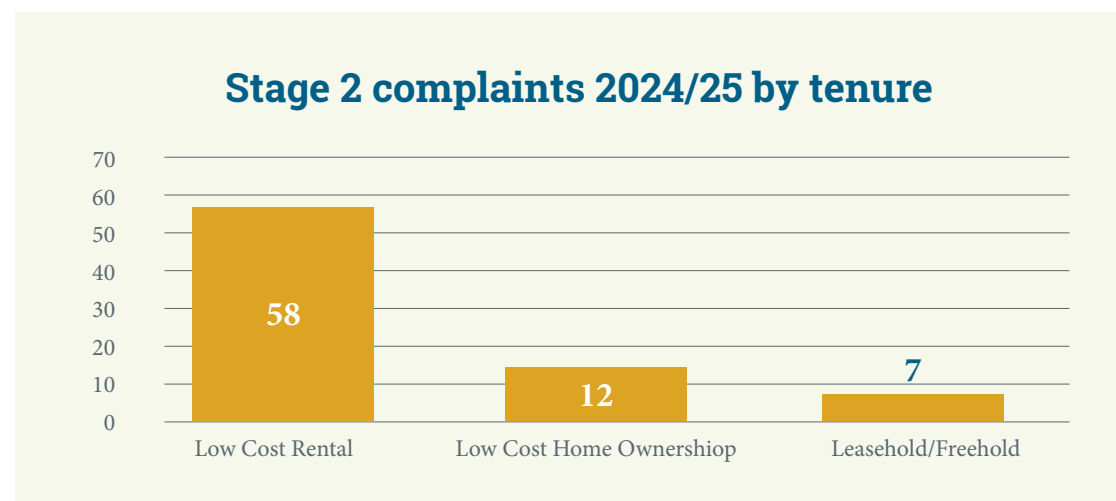
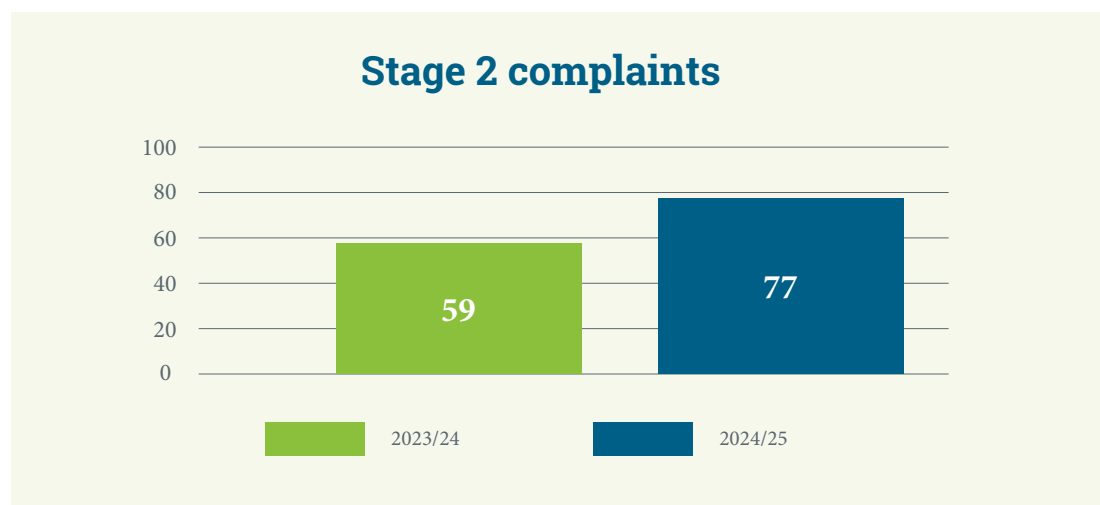




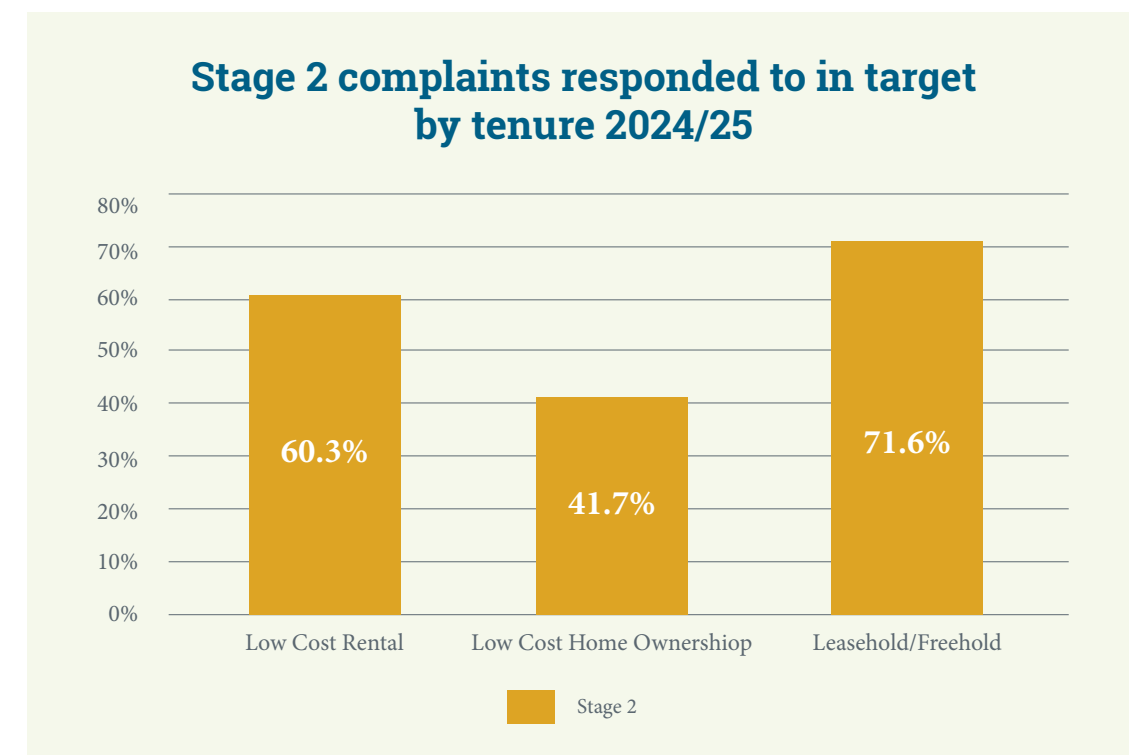
Where customers have been unhappy with the response provided at Stage 1 and have escalated their complaint to Stage 2 of our complaints process, these are investigated and responded to by the Complaints and Resolution Manager.

In 2024/25, 77 (21.7%) of complaints were escalated. These required acknowledgement within five working days and to be investigated and responded to within a further 20 working days.

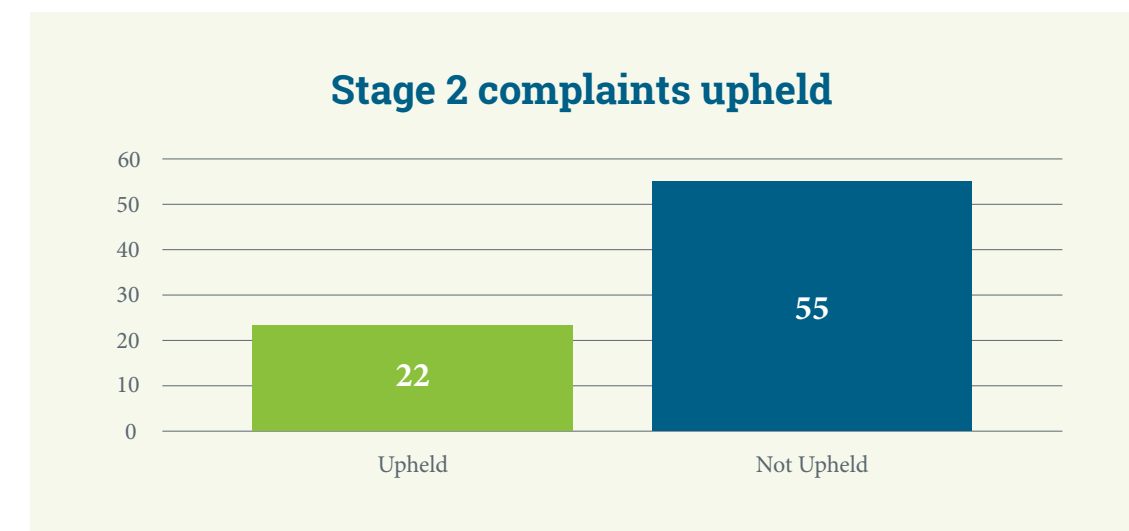
The graph below shows the number of complaints escalated to Stage 2 for this year and the previous year and by tenure. Although the number has increased, it remains at similar levels as a percentage of overall complaints received as last year, at 21.7% compared to 22.9%.



We responded to 55% of Stage 2 complaints within the Housing Ombudsman's 20 working days target. The graph below further breaks down Stage 2 complaint handling by tenure.



The graph below indicates the outcome of the stage 2 complaints during the year.



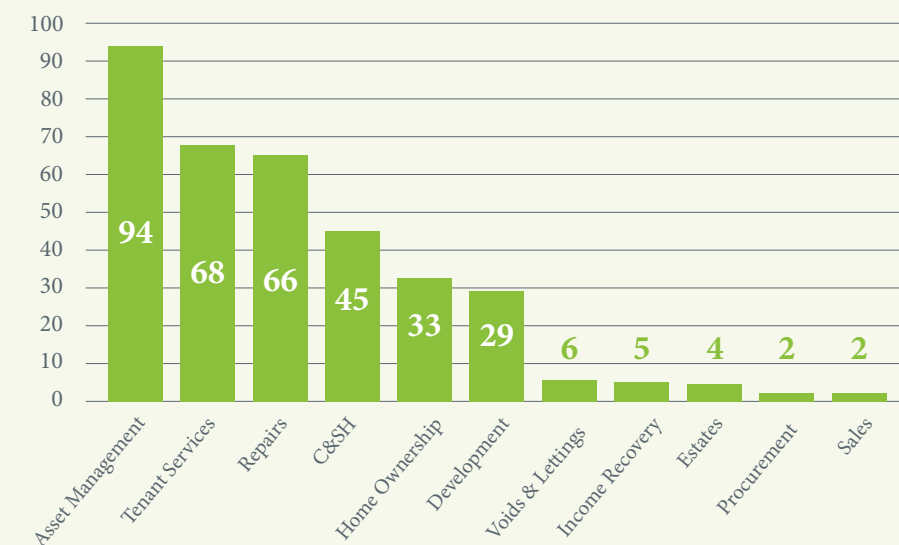
Complaints by service area

The graph below shows the volume of complaints received each month by service area.

Asset Management includes damp and mould, gardens and communal areas, of which a number of complaints refer to chasing up reported issues. Repairs are indicated separately.

Tenant Services also covers a broad range of complaint reasons such as anti-social behaviour and neighbour disputes, parking, mutual exchanges, service charges and rental costs.

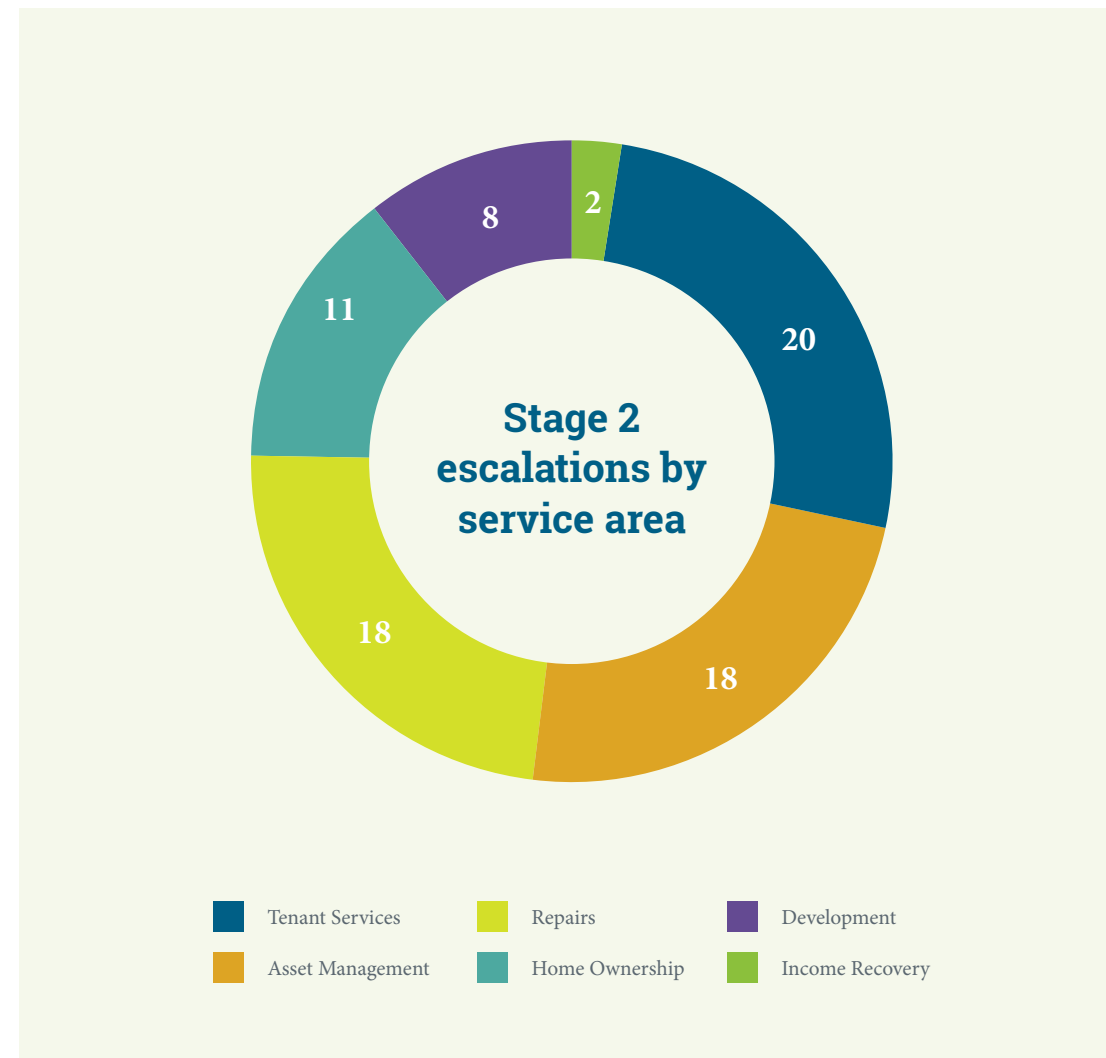
Stage 1 complaints by service area



“Hightown will continue to work together with our customers to learn from each complaint and improve services to meet customer expectations.”



The graph below indicates the complaints that have escalated to Stage 2 by service area.



Key themes

Key themes from complaints are lack of communication, chasing outstanding repairs or defects, reports of damp and mould and the handling of anti-social behaviour reports.

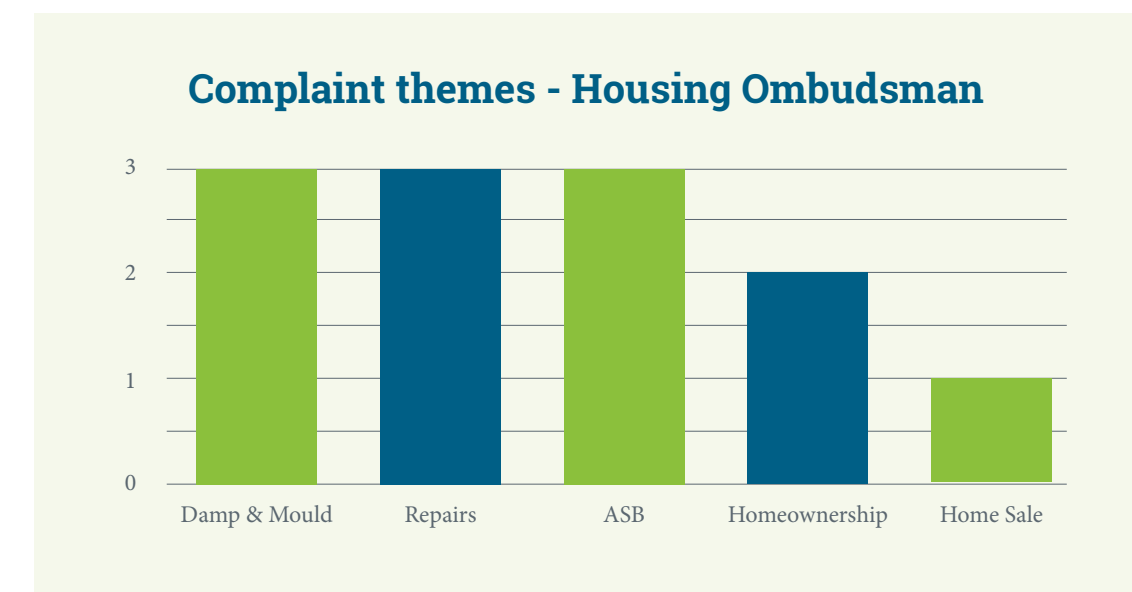
In order to enable improved review and learning from complaints in the future, the system where complaints are recorded is currently undergoing improvement to facilitate more detailed complaints analysis.

Complaints escalated to the Housing Ombudsman Service

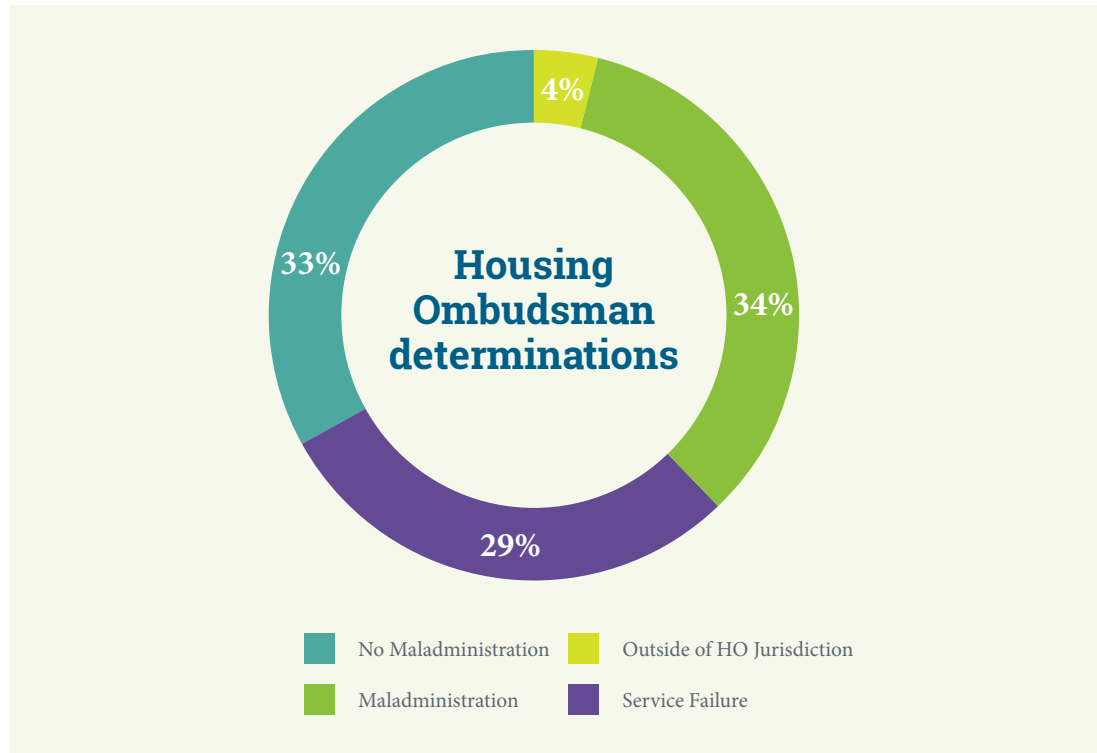
The Housing Ombudsman Service is able to provide customers with support to make a complaint at any stage. However, in the event of remaining dissatisfied once a complainant has received a final response from Hightown's Complaints Resolution team, customers are able to escalate to the Housing Ombudsman's service where it will be further investigated.

Care and Supported Housing services are overseen by different regulators, dependent on their services. These include the Care Quality Commission, the relevant Local Authority or the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman. There were no complaints escalated to these governing agencies.

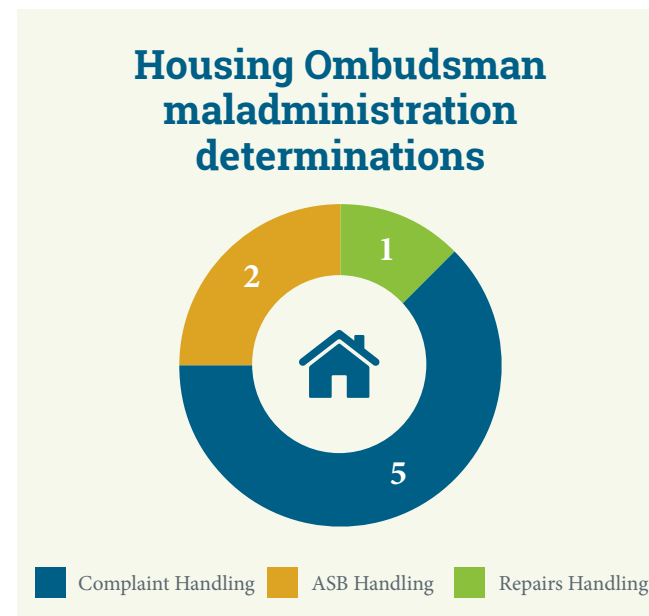
During 2024/25 the Ombudsman issued determinations for 12 complaints for Hightown Housing Association from customers, some of which were for complaints raised in the previous year. The graph below shows the main complaint theme for those cases determined by the Ombudsman.



Across the 12 complaints, the Ombudsman made 24 findings, as shown below.




Looking more closely at the maladministration findings we are able to identify key areas for improvement.



Lessons learnt from Ombudsman cases included a need to improve complaint handling. Hightown now has a centralised dedicated Complaints Resolution Team which provides improved consistency and a non-biased approach to complaints handling.

In addition, due to complaints regarding our anti-social behaviour processes not being followed thoroughly there has been additional training provided to staff.


In preparation for the implementation of Awaab's Law, there has also been a focus on damp and mould training for non-technical staff which will support staff visiting properties to identify if there may be a damp and mould issue and to be able to offer practical advice.

Lessons learnt from complaints

We consider that by listening to complaints and feedback from our customers there are areas where we can make improvements by learning from these experiences, understanding the root causes of complaints, and improving our services.

During the year our customer Complaints Scrutiny Group have helped us to improve our customer information on how to make a complaint, scrutinised our performance, and also reviewed and input into our work on lessons learnt from complaints.

Some of these lessons learnt are internally focused as well as external, however all are expected to contribute to an improved experience for our customers.



YOU SAID


There is conflicting information to residents / homeowners regarding doorbell cameras & whether permitted or not.

There was some confusion regarding the process for the end of defects for new homeowners.

It is not clearly stated at all communal storage areas that residents' property left there is not insured against theft or damage by Hightown.

A number of complainants advise they do not know who to speak to get an update following a complaint resolution.

In addition, we are planning to introduce a short complaint handling survey to ask customers / residents to advise us how satisfied they were with the way their complaint was handled, to help us to understand what we can improve on.



WE ARE DOING

The use and installation of doorbell cameras is being reviewed and once agreed the policy and guidance will be made available on the Hightown website.

The Homeowner User guide has been updated to make sure the requirement to report defects throughout the year is clearer. This will now be a generic guide and not bespoke to any particular property. Plus, there will be a one-page information schedule document which gives specific information about the development / property.

Hightown's Estate standard will be updated to specify signage to be installed to clearly set out to residents that items stored in communal storage areas are left at the owner's own risk.

Along with complaint responses, the relevant service email contact is added into the response, as well as the complaint details being sent to that person/ department.



Compliments

We can also learn from things we are doing well and compliments received. Where our teams have given great service, it really helps us to understand what customers value.

Hightown Housing compliments

(excluding Care & Supported Housing services)

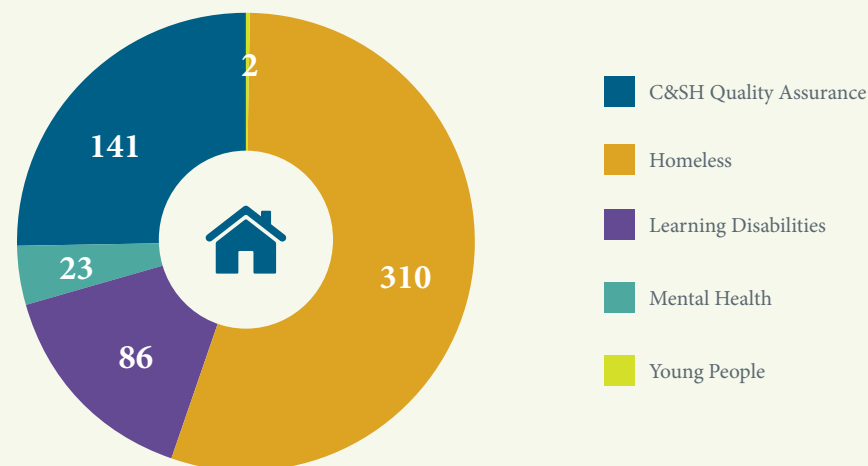
Department	Number of Compliments
Income Recovery	42
Repairs	30
Housing	16
Home ownership	10
Estates	4
Lettings	2
Communications	1
Sales	1

“ Mr H called in to thank the repairs team (GC) for arranging a repair so quickly and for the contractor attending within an hour. Mr H advised they were helpful and resolved the issues for him. ”

“ Tenant texted that she has moved into her property along with her assistance dog Marmalade and thanks us for all our help and for keeping her sane through the process. Tenant was previously in Hightown temporary homeless accommodation. ”

“ ASB case investigated, tenant supported, and case now satisfactorily closed. Tenant responded to the case closure email, thanking me for all my help. ”

Hightown Care & Supported Housing compliments



Hightown Care & Supported Housing Compliments

“ I've left the hostel and I wanna say a massive thank you for helping me get to where I am today, thank you for all the support and thank you for letting me open up to you on the days I felt bad. ”

“ The people we support complimented staff on organising and supporting them with their cooking group. ”

“ Blue Cedar Lodge - thanks to all of the teams support over the years. ”

Our focus for the year ahead



The feedback from our customers is very helpful to assist Hightown in its understanding of the key areas to focus on and to support service improvement. From reviewing complaints and the annual Tenant Satisfaction Measures survey responses we have identified the following areas for focus in the coming year:

- Review the process for customer callbacks to identify and address patterns or themes in repeat service requests/chasing for updates across different service areas.
- Develop a communications plan to encourage residents to report damp and mould, including enhanced damp and mould information on our website.
- Develop an ASB awareness animation for the Hightown website and deliver an ASB awareness week to customers.
- Publicise/invite applications for resident bids for estate improvements in the regular customer newsletter and at summer events.
- Continue to focus on improving our handling of complaints within the Housing Ombudsman timeframes.

About Hightown

Hightown is a charitable housing association, operating in Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Berkshire, aiming to help people who need support and care or who cannot afford to buy or rent a home at market values. We do this by building hundreds of much needed new homes and providing care and supported housing services for a wide range of people.

**Hightown House, Maylands Avenue,
Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire, HP2 4XH**



Hightown is a charitable housing association registered under the Housing Act 1996 (No. L2179) and as a registered society under the Co-operative and Community Benefit Societies Act (No. 18077R). 6074/0718