

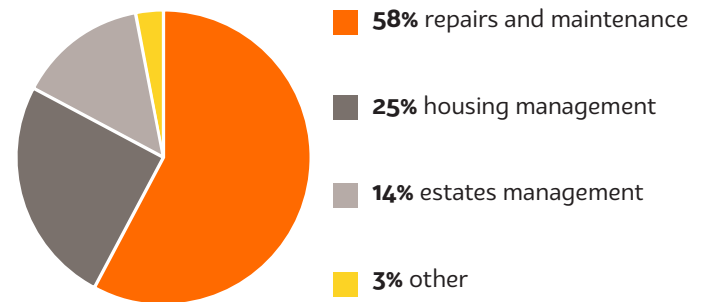
Customer complaints raised during 2020/2021 and the action we've taken

During 2020/21 we received 602 complaints. Of these 31% were resolved informally at the first point of contact and 69% were investigated under our complaint resolution procedure.

The three key service areas that residents were dissatisfied with were repairs and maintenance (58%), housing management (25%) and estates management (14%). These proportions remained consistent across the year with the exception of Q2 (July-Sept 2020) where we saw an increase in complaints about estates services and housing management. These coincided with a surge in seasonal demand for estates work and the issue of

rent and service charge statements, which generate a higher volume of contact, particularly from our leasehold customers.

Key areas of dissatisfaction



Complaints received during 2020/21

	Informal	Investigated	Total
Q1	25	71	96
Q2	52	166	218
Q3	56	99	155
Q4	53	80	133

Complaints closed during 2020/21

	Informally in target	Investigated in target	Investigated outside of target
Q1	25	52	7
Q2	52	156	7
Q3	56	89	6
Q4	53	77	3

Completed complaints escalated for review by management (included in completed figures above)

Q1	1
Q2	6
Q3	7
Q4	13
Total	27

Complaints escalated to the Housing Ombudsman (also included in completed figures above)

	Enquiry	Investigation	Total
Q1	1	0	1
Q2	2	0	2
Q3	1	0	1
Q4	5	0	5

What did our customers complain about?

The nature of our customer complaints were:

- service failure (repeat visits, missed appointments and poor communication)
- wait times (repair appointments and planned maintenance)
- quality of work undertaken.

Repairs

What we heard

Repair and maintenance complaints accounted for more than half of the complaints we received during 2020/21. This is consistent with previous years and reflects ongoing high demand for these services.

Of the complaints investigated, the majority related to our responsive repairs service which includes general property condition and concerns relating to damp and mould. We also received complaints about heating repairs, planned maintenance and inspection outcomes.

The nature of these complaints were the time it took us to arrange the repair, repeat visits to complete a repair and the quality of work carried out, and these themes were consistent across the year. During Q2 and Q3 (July-December 2020) we noted an increase in complaints about the behaviour of colleagues and contractors working in residents' homes. These focussed on Covid-safe working practices and reflected residents' concerns at the time.

During some parts of 2020/21 we offered a reduced responsive repairs service in line with government guidance responding to the coronavirus pandemic and the risk assessments we carried out.

Our reduced service offer led to some repairs taking longer to complete than we would have wanted. In some cases, residents shared dissatisfaction where they felt the Covid transmission risk associated with the required repair was low, and the delay felt unjustified.

What we've done

At all times, our priority has been to protect the safety and wellbeing of residents and colleagues, and we continued to offer emergency repairs throughout this period.

Throughout our response to the pandemic, we have provided regular updates on our website and directly to residents on the overall services and support we provide. We recognise the need to make sure we keep residents updated individually about the progress of repairs to their homes.

In response to feedback from customers, we have introduced the ability to book repair appointments through our website.

We also recognised the need to give customers easy routes to provide feedback about our responsive repair service and now send surveys following all appointments which immediately tells us about the customer experience. We continue to look for opportunities to improve our service offer.

Condensation, damp and mould

What we heard

Through complaints raised in 2020/21, residents told us that they were unclear about how we will help resolve damp and mould issues and were not sure what support we provided or what to expect next.

This left them feeling unsupported, particularly when we diagnosed 'lifestyle' issues.

What we've done

We do not want any settle resident to live with condensation, damp or mould in their property. During the past year we have reviewed our process for responding to and resolving issues around damp and mould, including learning that has been shared with the Executive team and all settle colleagues.

Where residents have already reported condensation and mould to us, we will make sure we don't repeat the same process, and that our response takes into account the things residents have already tried.

Where we have data that tells us particular solutions have worked in similar homes, we will try to use the solutions that we know have worked in other places. If the issue remains unresolved, we will appoint an external specialist to provide an extensive report which will help determine the actions required to support residents. Where we have advised or put solutions in place, we will check in with residents on an agreed basis to see if the solution is having the desired impact.

We will continue to review and respond to feedback we receive on this, and report this to our customer assurance panel which is attended by senior colleagues working across settle and chaired by our Executive Director of Customer Services.

Housing Management

Service charges: what we heard

A quarter of the complaints received were about housing management. Just over half related to our handling of rent and service charges and the majority were received in response to the charges included in the annual rent and service charge communication sent to all customers.

What we've done

We have reviewed the way estimated service charges are set and have made changes when setting the 2020-2021 service charge estimates. These are now set in line with the previous years' actual costs, making them more accurate and removing the high variances leaseholders have faced in the past.

Anti-social behaviour: what we heard

We also noted an increase in complaints about how we respond to reports of anti-social behaviour, in line with an overall increase in anti-social behaviour reported to our teams. Through our investigation of these complaints, we highlighted cases where extra support was needed for vulnerable residents.

What we've done

Following the increase in anti-social behaviour experienced in our neighbourhoods, we have reviewed our anti-social behaviour policy. We are working with residents to agree what is defined as anti-social behaviour and what is within our remit to manage in line with legislation.

We have created a dedicated team to further support residents who are impacted by anti-social behaviour. We are also committed to refreshing the information on our website and putting in place additional training for housing colleagues who work with vulnerable residents, which expect to be completed by October 2021.

Throughout the year we have been working with the Housing Associations Charitable Trust (HACT) to develop a framework against which we can further develop our ability to support customers. In the short term, we engaged with colleagues and customers to understand how our customers want us to talk to them about vulnerability. This will enable us to better report on trends and cases where we can provide more help to support customers. Alongside this, we are strengthening our partnerships with other agencies and stakeholder relationships on an ongoing basis to ensure we are better placed to support residents who need extra help.

Estates Services

What we heard

Complaints about the cleaning and grounds maintenance of communal areas peaked during Q2 (July–Sept 2020). This trend reflected both seasonality and an increased focus on home by residents during the first lockdown. The number of complaints about estates reduced steadily throughout Q2 and had reduced by two thirds at the close of Q3 (Oct–Dec 2020). The two most significant subjects were the quality of grounds maintenance and frequency of cleaning in communal blocks. A common theme of estates complaints was around timely query handling.

What we've done

We have added resource to our estates team to help improve the way we deliver services. We are also undertaking a consultation with our customers to help us better understand the services they want to receive and will use feedback from this to shape our future service.

Housing Ombudsman Enquiries and complaints review

Over the course of the year, we received 9 enquiries on behalf of residents from the Housing Ombudsman Service. Most of these were new complaint requests and one was a request to escalate an issue which had already been investigated under our complaints procedure. This provided a clear indication that residents were unsure how to raise and progress complaints with us.

During the second half of the year, we undertook a full complaints review and self-assessment against the Housing Ombudsman complaint handling code which launched in July 2020. As a result of this we:

- Revised our complaint resolution policy and procedure and introduced a new reasonable adjustments policy.
- Provided complaints training for all colleagues, workshops for customer facing teams and external training for complaint handling managers.
- Engaged with our contractors to ensure that complaint handling expectations are clear and regularly communicated.
- Created an information hub and toolkit, available to all colleagues, to empower effective and compliant complaint handling.
- Introduced a quality assurance check for all completed complaints.
- Added a complaint satisfaction survey into our process, enabling residents to provide feedback on complaint responses and an additional channel to escalate the issue.

- Increased resource for complaints handling to ensure that we deliver a positive experience and learn when things go wrong.
- Appointed a new complaints panel, this is a forum to escalate complex cases, discuss themes and ensure that teams are empowered to make changes based on feedback.
- Developed a new root cause analysis procedure to help us better identify and track themes and promote continuous improvement in the required areas.
- We continue to embed a positive complaint handling culture with sponsorship from the most senior level, improved compliance and regular publication and sharing of complaint case studies to ensure learnings are shared throughout the organisation.

We welcomed both the new Complaint Handling Code from the Housing Ombudsman Service and the Make it Right Campaign later published and shared by settle in March 2021 as positive steps forward in complaint handling and ensuring that our residents have a voice and can hold us to account when things go wrong.

We upheld or partially upheld 83% of complaints during 2020/21 demonstrating the three key principles of complaint handling: fairness, putting things right when they go wrong and learning from the outcome of complaints.

We continue to encourage any settle resident to get in touch where they think we could have done better. Our commitment is that we will always listen and learn from what we hear to make sure we do all we can to support residents to live comfortably in their homes.

