

Learning from complaints

We always want to make sure we provide the best service possible, but we know that sometimes things go wrong. When this happens, we will always put things right quickly and learn from what went wrong to improve our services.

This is our report on learnings and findings from complaints between 1st April 2022 and 31st March 2023.

Top three areas we received complaints about:

- Repairs.
- Damp and mould.
- Issues within the neighbourhood.

Top three themes of complaints:

- Wait times.
- Lack of response.
- Quality of work completed.

Complaints received				Complaint outcomes			
	Stage 1	Stage 2	Total		Upheld	Partially upheld	Not upheld
Q1	167	25	192				
Q2	174	34	208	Stage1	433	91	99
Q3	122	28	150	Stage 2	53	19	28
Q4	150	22	172	Total	486	110	127

The Housing Ombudsman

We always really encourage any resident to speak to us directly in the first instance if you have a complaint. We want to work with you to resolve any issues as quickly as possible. However, you can also contact the independent Housing Ombudsman for help and advice at any time.

The Housing Ombudsman is an independent watchdog that exists to resolve complaints between social housing tenants and landlords. If you've exhausted our complaints process and remain unhappy with the outcome, you can refer your complaint to the Ombudsman and they will consider investigating it for you.

Between April 2022 and March 2023, of cases reviewed by the Ombudsman linked to settle residents, we had 5 determinations. One of these five was noted by the Ombudsman to be outside of its jurisdiction.

Housing Ombudsman – determination outcomes		
2 cases	No action required of settle	
2 cases	Decisions were given, both with a decision of maladministration and service failure	One case - related to our estate management processes involving an unused piece of land backing on to settle properties.
		One case related to a new build property, where we didn't deal with defects in a timely way.

We have captured learnings from both of these cases, made sure they are shared with colleagues across settle and that we have improved our ways of working. We continue to take learnings from the Housing Ombudsman, through reports and feedback shared across the housing sector, and feedback specifically to settle.

Learning from complaints

Repairs, including wait times

What have we heard?

That it is taking too long for us to book in repairs, and complete follow on works where we haven't been able to complete a repair on our first visit to a property. Our target last year was to complete all routine repairs in an average of 15 days; we completed them within an average of 29 days.

We received the highest number of complaints in this area – 297 of 722 complaints. Whilst this links to only 1% of the overall number of repairs jobs we completed last year, we know that repairs are one of the most important services we provide, and this is an area we take extremely seriously.

What are we doing?

The repairs we were asked to complete during the year were larger in scope and required more resource to complete, mainly because they were linked to damp, mould and condensation.

During the year we made changes to the property team management and staff resources to ensure we can better respond to requests for support in this area. At the time of writing this report, we have a repairs recovery plan in place to ensure we reduce the waiting time for repairs during this year and make better use of systems and technology to book work more efficiently.

Condensation, damp and mould

What have we heard?

Throughout the year we proactively encouraged residents to report any instances of damp or mould to us. We saw a significant increase in requests for support in this area, and also a corresponding increase in the number of complaints.

What are we doing?

We saw demand for support around damp, mould and condensation rising rapidly in the winter of 2022/23 following widely reported tragic events, where two-year-old Awaab Ishak died from a respiratory condition caused by prolonged exposure to mould in a property owned by Rochdale Boroughwide Housing.

We are committed to making sure no resident lives with damp or mould in your home. We prioritised and responded to requests for support during the year.

We introduced a new damp and mould policy, to be clear to all residents on how we will respond to these cases. This was reviewed by the settle voice community and published in July 2022. We have increased the level of resource available to work on cases of damp and mould – both settle colleagues and having contractors available as needed.

Property condition

What have we heard?

Some of the complaints we received around repairs, damp and mould and the processes we follow around these types of contacts to us, will also be influenced by the age and condition of the homes and how comfortable they are to live in.

What are we doing?

We have significantly increased the investment we make in homes. We spent as planned £14 million updating homes in 2022/23, increased from £8.3 million in 2021/22 and £4 million in 2020/21. We expect to maintain the same higher levels of expenditure this year. This is invested in things like replacement windows, roofs, kitchens, bathrooms and boilers. At the end of March 2023 we also secured additional funding to invest in energy efficiency improvements to homes, which we will deliver through a two-year programme involving 677 homes. The combination of improvements delivered through these programmes will make homes more comfortable for residents to live in.

Issues within the neighbourhood

What have we heard?

We saw some complaints linked to areas such as the quality of our estate management, cleaning of communal areas, and wider issues in the neighbourhood such as how we deal with Anti-Social Behaviour.

What are we doing?

We launched our customer offer in September 2022 and began work to develop the more detailed settle standards, which we have since published in September 2023. These documents are all important to set out our aims for the services we provide, so that we are clear to residents on the standards we will work to and you can use these to hold us to account.

Lack of response – communications

What have we heard?

The importance of keeping residents updated in a timely way about work we are due to carry out in your home. We know it is really frustrating when we don't do this.

What are we doing?

We highlight regularly to all colleagues the importance of keeping residents updated on what we are doing and when. As part of this, we share examples at our monthly team brief, where updates are given to all colleagues working across the organisation, and make sure these are available at any time from our Intranet. During the year we launched an internal process called 'Raise, chase, escalate' – to proactively monitor when updates are due to residents and make sure these are provided in a timely way. We also developed new online forms to help residents provide information to us online, if this is the format you would like to use for sharing that information. This included forms to help you tell us which engagement activities you'd like to be involved in; to allow residents struggling with the cost of living to share information with us so we can better support them; and to allow customers to request permission for large or small alterations and improvements to their home.

Quality of work completed

What have we heard?

We received some complaints during the year about the quality of work completed, mainly linked to repairs, estate management and our planned investment programmes. Whilst these are a small percentage of the total work completed, for example satisfaction with repairs jobs was at over 95%, we do still take this very seriously.

What are we doing?

The customer offer we launched during the year and settle standards we have published since then mean that we are clearer on the quality of work we will deliver and support you to hold us to account to meet these standards. As part of our regular sharing of case studies through our monthly colleague briefing and Intranet, we share examples of where we can do better and what we can improve, so that we can all learn from this. Where quality issues are linked to an external contractor, we will follow up on this through our procurement process, by making sure any issues are fed back into contracts and improvements are made.