

settle.

**Annual complaints
performance and service
improvement report**

2023/24

Introduction from our Chief Executive

At settle we're relentlessly resident focused and committed to providing the best service for residents. However, sometimes things go wrong and we want to hear from you when this happens so that we can put things right as quickly as possible.

Last year we received 622 complaints, to put that into context we received 273 complaints about repairs which is 1% of the total orders raised [27,000]. Whatever the number we take every complaint extremely seriously.

We make it simple for you to make a complaint to us in whatever way works best. That means we accept complaints by phone, by email, through our website and in person. You can also talk to anyone who works for settle; they will make sure the details are passed to our customer resolution team.

Everyone at settle is responsible for investigating complaints in line with the requirements of the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code and our policies and procedures.

You can contact the Housing Ombudsman Service for help and support at any time. If you've exhausted our complaints process and remain unhappy with the outcome, you can refer your complaint to the Housing Ombudsman and they will consider investigating it for you. We have included this information on page 6.

New Complaint Handling Code

A new Complaint Handling Code (the Code) to help empower residents who wish to make a complaint came into practice on 1 April 2024. The Code was issued following new powers given to the Housing Ombudsman under the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023. It sets out the statutory requirements for landlords like settle to respond to complaints effectively and fairly.

For residents the Code explains your rights and what can be expected when a complaint is made to a landlord. It also gives information on making and progressing a complaint. For a landlord like settle complying with the Code is a legal requirement and where a landlord does not comply with the Code, they could be issued with a complaint handling failure order.

Landlords are also required to complete an annual assessment against the Code as part of our annual complaints performance and service improvement report. A link to our self-assessment is provided at

www.settlegroup.org.uk/complaints-performance

How we have responded to the new Code

We want to ensure we are responding to complaints effectively and fairly to create a positive complaint handling culture at settle – this is the best way of improving our services and learning from those cases where we don't get it right. We have reviewed our performance against the Code taking the opportunity to work with residents who have raised a complaint with settle. This feedback is invaluable, providing insight into your expectations of how we handle complaints. Our Voice of the Resident panel have been invaluable in helping us complete the self-assessment and this complaints performance and service improvement report and I would like to take this opportunity to thank them for all their hard work.

We have made it simple for you to make a complaint when we don't get things right – our commitment is to continue to work with residents and colleagues to drive continuous improvement through our complaint handling.

Gavin Cansfield, settle Chief Executive, June 2024

Statement from our Board

As Chair of the Operations Committee of the settle Board and the member responsible for complaints I welcome the opportunity to write the introduction to this complaints report.

I know it is a priority for colleagues across settle that they ensure making complaints is simple and straightforward. I see colleagues focused on making clear to residents how to raise complaints and have their voices heard; working to put things right quickly when we don't get things right and learning from complaints to improve delivery of services.

Members of the settle Board and Committees of the Board regularly assess and review the handling of complaints at settle, to ensure as a landlord we comply with all requirements as set out in the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code. We are looking for assurance that we are putting residents first and delivering the best possible outcomes for them.

On behalf of the Board I confirm our approval of this report and the continuous improvement plans in place to learn from complaints and deliver improved outcomes for settle residents.

Hasani Jess, settle Board Member, June 2024

Statement from our Voice of the Resident Panel

We shared the draft report with all members of the settle Voice of the Resident Panel. We are grateful for their review and following feedback:

“The ability to discuss “real life” situations and experiences of settle residents has led to changes which we believe will have a positive impact. In particular, collaborating and suggesting ways to improve complaints handling and the repairs process will hopefully lead to an improved and enhanced experienced for residents thus boosting customer satisfaction. Challenging settle to prove that they have made promised changes is a valuable tool for the Voice of the Resident panel and one that will benefit all Residents in the future.”

Alison, Voice of the Resident Panel Member, June 2024

“Having reviewed the report, it appears to clearly demonstrate settle's performance in handling complaints, which is crucial for assessing performance and ensuring accountability. The highlighting of main reasons and themes provides deeper understanding of the complaint types and the chance to focus on these critical areas. The report offers detailed information on the themes and the steps taken to develop or improve outcomes. Additionally, the report is straightforward and reader-friendly, clearly indicating how to contact the Housing Ombudsman and outlining their role.”

Jo, Voice of the Resident Panel Member, June 2024

“As a member of the panel, I feel settle has been proactive in responding to the regulations, which makes it feel like a good place to be for residents. It is good to see this included in this report.”

Penny, Voice of the Resident Panel Member, June 2024

Complaint handling performance

Summary: 1st April 2023 - 31st March 2024

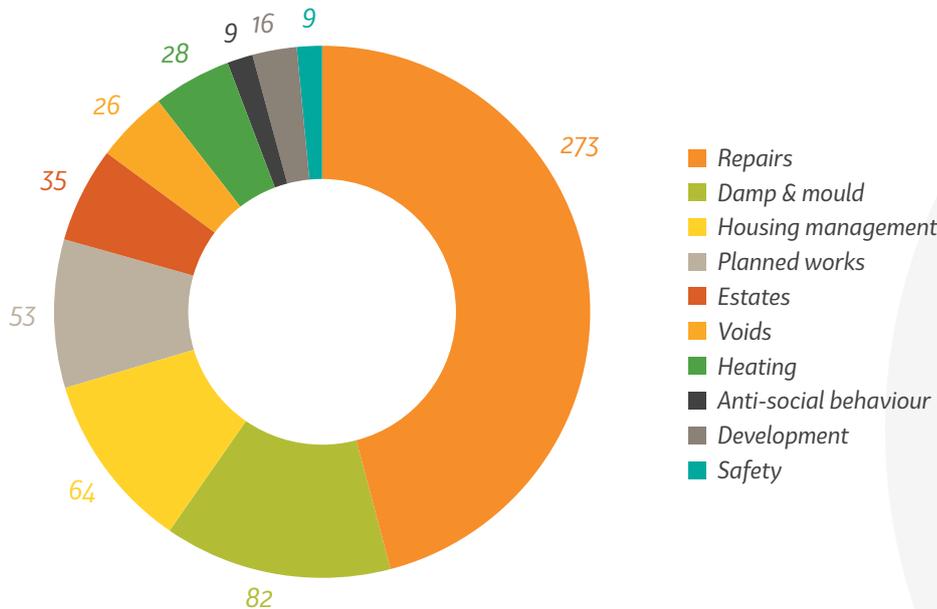
<p>622 complaints received in 2023/24</p>	<p>595 complaints investigated and responded to before 31 March, 2024</p>
<p>98.3% of complaints investigated and responded to within timeframe</p>	<p>1.7% (10) complaints responded to outside of the timeframe</p>
<p>514 complaints resolved at stage 1</p>	<p>4.1% (21) complaints at stage 1 that required an agreed extension to timeframe</p>
<p>81 complaints complaints received and investigated at stage 2</p>	<p>4.2% (34) complaints at stage 2 that required an agreed extension to timeframe</p>
<p>Complaints 91% upheld / 9% not upheld</p>	<p>9 Housing Ombudsman decisions came back</p>

The number of complaints we received during 2023/24 decreased slightly when measured against the same period across 2022/23. In 2023/24 we received 622 complaints [722 in 2022/23]. We investigated and responded to 514 complaints at stage 1 during 2023/24 [613 in 2022/23] and 81 complaints at stage 2 [109 in 2022/23]. We continue to take every opportunity to highlight to residents how to make a complaint to us, including on our website and through service updates, and to ensure instances of dissatisfaction are appropriately recorded as complaints.

Reasons and themes

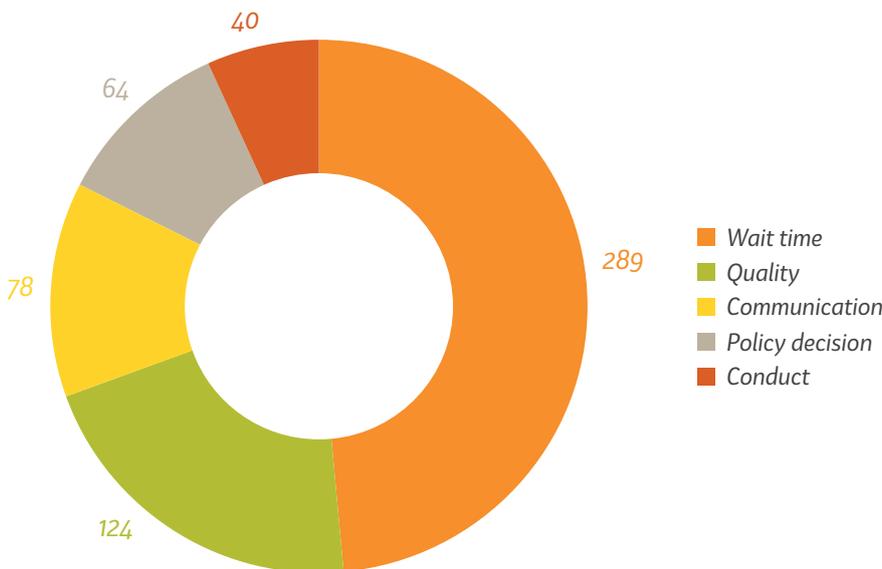
The chart below provides an overview of the reasons for complaints across the quarters of 2023/24

Reasons for complaints 23/24



This chart provides a summary of the themes across all investigated complaints.

Themes for complaints 23/24



Types of complaints we haven't investigated

We will always look at the individual circumstances of each complaint. However, in some circumstances it may not be appropriate to consider a complaint. During April 2023 to March 2024, we advised residents we could not investigate three complaints, due to the matters having already been investigated, or the complaint relating to a historical matter that took place over 12 months ago. In all instances, we provided the resident with their rights to escalate their complaint to the Housing Ombudsman.

The Housing Ombudsman Service

The best way of getting your complaint resolved is by speaking to us. We want to work with you to resolve any issues as quickly as possible. However, you can also contact the Housing Ombudsman for help and advice at any time. You can contact the Housing Ombudsman using the details below:

Complaint form: Fill in the online complaint form on the Housing Ombudsman website

Website: www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk

Phone: 0300 111 3000

Write to: Housing Ombudsman Service, PO Box 152, Liverpool, L33 7WQ

The Housing Ombudsman is an independent and impartial service that is funded by annual landlord subscription fees. Their services are free to all residents. You can contact the Housing Ombudsman for help and support at any time and if you've exhausted our complaints process and remain unhappy with the outcome, you can refer your complaint to the Housing Ombudsman, and they will consider investigating it for you.

Between April 2023 and March 2024, the Housing Ombudsman investigated and responded to nine residents that had escalated their complaint to them representing 1% of complaints handled by settle. The Housing Ombudsman provided settle with 21 determinations (decisions) across the 9 complaints. We have included a breakdown of these below: 10 maladministration, 8 no further action, 2 service failure and 1 outside of jurisdiction.



Every year the Housing Ombudsman publishes a Landlord report. The link to the 2022/23 report is available at www.settlegroup.org.uk/complaints-performance. We will provide an update linking to this report for 2023/24 when it has been published by the Housing Ombudsman.

What does it mean?

- **Determinations** – decision made by the Housing Ombudsman on the complaint put forward to them and contactors. Complaints may have multiple elements to them and the Housing Ombudsman will give determinations for each element of the complaint.
- **No further action** – we acted in accordance with our obligations in the tenancy agreement and relevant policies and procedures.
- **Service failure** – there is evidence of a minor failing and action is still needed by settle to put things right. Service failure is a form of maladministration.
- **Maladministration** – where there was a failure which has adversely affected the resident.
- **Severe maladministration** – the most serious failure, where there is evidence of serious detrimental impact to the resident.
- **Complaint Handling Failure Orders (CHFOs)** – a failure to comply with the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code.
- **Outside of jurisdiction** – means the issue is outside of the remit of the Housing Ombudsman Service.

Housing Ombudsman - Learning from determination outcomes

We take all Housing Ombudsman decisions seriously. We ensure that all learning and feedback is addressed promptly in cases where we haven't got things right.

There are some themes that run across many of the cases investigated by the Housing Ombudsman. We will continue to work with residents, colleagues and the Housing Ombudsman to put things right when they have gone wrong. The learning and a summary of the actions taken are detailed below and on the following pages:

- We have made it clearer in our policy and procedure that we are responsible for investigating and responding to any complaints relating to contractors who are working on our behalf. We have also set clear expectations of what is expected from any contractor working in residents' homes.
- We have introduced a property pack for all residents who are exchanging properties. This includes a more detailed inspection and information on the repairs history, any alterations that have been made as well as the dates when components such as windows, kitchens and bathrooms are due for assessment.
- We have introduced an empty home standard and are working to ensure that all homes are inspected before they are let. We communicate any repairs we plan to complete once a resident moves in.
- We ensure that every complaint is reviewed impartially and that colleagues from across teams work collectively to resolve the issue promptly and deliver on agreed actions.
- We have a dedicated complex case panel involving colleagues from different areas of operations. The meetings are designed to find solutions to complex challenges which includes vulnerability.

Service improvements as a result of the learning from complaints

There are some themes that run across many of the cases investigated by settle and the Housing Ombudsman. As a result of these themes, we have focused on improving communication, record keeping and support for vulnerable residents across all areas of service delivery, along with improving our ways of working so that colleagues work collaboratively to resolve complaints quickly and learn from things that have gone wrong.

We have included below more details on the learning and actions taken from the complaints raised with us.

Repairs - what we've heard

Most frequently, the complaints we receive about repairs relate to the timescales to complete a repair, especially when it takes multiple visits for a repair to be sorted, or in examples where the repair has not progressed as planned.

We've heard that residents want better communication from us around repair appointments, so they don't have to chase for an update.

What we're doing

We have a repairs improvement plan in place.

- ✓ We know repairs are one of the most important services we provide and we are committed to delivering the progress we know is needed.

We are providing monthly updates on our website until we have the timescales for completing repairs where we want them to be.

- ✓

We are improving the ways we work, to reduce the number of open repairs we have in our systems at any one time. With fewer open jobs, we can complete repairs more quickly.

- ✓

We are introducing a diagnostic tool for reporting new repairs, this will give us a more accurate diagnosis at first report and increase first time fix, reducing the number of follow on appointments for residents.

- ✓

We have increased our use of text messages, as one of the ways we improve updates to residents on when their repair will take place.

- ✓

Damp and Mould – what we've heard

As part of our repairs service, work on damp and mould continues to be an important area of focus for us. We received 82 complaints on this, out of the 595 complaints we received and investigated during the past year.

We heard that when you report a problem with damp and mould in your home, you need us to act quickly to investigate the cause of the problem and take appropriate action.

Understanding your living conditions, providing appropriate support and good communication on the steps we are taking is important to resolving the issue.

What we're doing

- ✓ We continue to proactively support residents to raise any requests for support with damp and mould. We are clear that no settle resident has to live with damp or mould in their home.
- ✓ We have introduced a dedicated team and new ways of working to improve how we handle requests for support with damp and mould.
- ✓ Our approach is to remain in touch with residents throughout the resolution process, until we are confident we have addressed the root cause of each issue. This enables us to provide support and practical assistance when needed.

Communication – what we've heard

We recognise the importance of keeping residents updated in a timely way.

You have told us that you often didn't know what was happening regarding a request you had made and that you felt that the issue was being passed on to different teams without clear ownership.

We know we need to make it easy for you to get in touch and follow up with us and that we need to always be clear on any next steps we are taking so you're understand what's happening.

What we're doing

- ✓ We frequently emphasise to colleagues across settle the importance of keeping residents updated, including at our monthly all colleague briefing and in regular team meetings. As part of this we remind colleagues of the importance of good record keeping, so that all colleagues are better able to respond to queries from residents at the point of contact.
- ✓ We reduced the number of days it takes to respond to residents who contact us through our website to five working days.

We are making better use of technology to improve the services we offer:

- ✓ Residents can now request a guaranteed call back rather than waiting in call queues during busy times.
- ✓ Our phone system will recognise the resident's account from their phone number which is automatically brought up on screen.
- ✓ We have relaunched Live Chat which you can now access across our website.
- ✓ We recently began trialling video calling. Our colleagues in the Hub will offer a video call to help with diagnosing a repair.

Quality

We have heard that the quality of some work is not always up to the standard you would like to see, particularly linked to repairs along with the standard of neighbourhood maintenance, with issues around the cleaning of flat blocks, and the upkeep of communal spaces.

What we're doing

- ✓ We introduced the settle standards in September 2023 to support residents to hold us to account for the quality of work we provide. These provide details of standards we will work to for homes, empty homes, repairs and neighbourhoods. We will review these regularly to ensure we are meeting them.
- ✓ Each month our tenant and resident assurance panel, attended by members of the executive and leadership teams and colleagues working across service areas, reviews trends and themes in the feedback we are receiving, including from complaints raised, and ensures teams across settle respond appropriately.
- ✓ The listen and act group of colleagues working in operational service delivery roles, supports the work of the tenant and resident assurance panel by meeting monthly to review resident feedback and ensure tangible actions are in place to improve the services we deliver.

Quality improvements we have put in place include:

- ✓ Contractor onboarding - any new contractors working for settle are expected to work to the same standards, values and behaviours as our in-house teams.
- ✓ Any complaints related to contractors are shared in review meetings with the contractors, with a focus initially on contractors delivering planned investment in homes.
- ✓ We have a neighbourhood management improvement plan in place to improve standards in communal areas. As part of this, we are procuring a new window cleaning contract.
- ✓ Post-inspection processes across repairs, neighbourhoods and empty properties – we have put in place clear guidelines and increased our resources to help manage inspections to quality check when work has been completed and improve future work.

Complaint handling

Throughout the year, we have engaged with you to understand how you feel about our complaint handling services, and make all possible improvements

Complaint handling – what we've heard

You have told us that communication was an issue and that it took too long to resolve problems. We also heard that you did not always feel like we understood your complaint and did not respond appropriately.

What we're doing

We have improved our complaint handling process ensuring that you know your rights and what to expect from us when things go wrong. We have also taken steps to:

- ✓ Improve communication, ensuring we talk to you to fully understand your complaint and any support you may need while we investigate matters for you.
- ✓ Provide a point of contact when you raise a complaint and agree how we'll keep in touch throughout the complaints process, clearly explaining what will happen next so you know what to expect from us.
- ✓ We have also taken steps to address the need for timely actions following a complaint and have improved our monitoring of complaints to ensure any actions, such as agreed repairs are delivered promptly.

Annual self-assessment report

As part of the Complaint Handling Code, we have also completed a self-assessment to ensure it met all the requirements of the Code. You can have a look to see how our complaint handling procedure compares to the Code at www.settlegroup.org.uk/complaints-performance

Housing Ombudsman ‘Spotlight on’ report

Every year, the Housing Ombudsman Service publishes reports on areas of service provision that they see a high amount of failure through their casework across all landlords. They examine the issues and set out recommendations for landlords like settle. This is a great opportunity for us to reflect on the learnings from across the sector and make improvements to the services we deliver for residents. Below is a summary of the reports and the actions we have taken as a result:

Noise complaints – time to be heard

The focus of this report was noise that does not constitute anti-social behaviour, such as internal noise transference that may have a significant impact on a resident’s ability to live comfortably in their home.

Since the report was published, we have introduced a noise Policy and Procedure to help create holistic solutions to noise nuisance. We will complete a full property assessment where noise is deemed to be a transference issue.

Damp and mould – it’s not lifestyle

The spotlight on damp and mould highlighted the need for landlords to take responsibility and be more proactive when it comes to handling reports of damp and mould. We conducted a self-assessment against the recommendations made by the Housing Ombudsman, we highlighted five key areas for improvement, including data, inspections, communication, aftercare and training, with action plans in place completed to note improvement needed.

We have introduced a dedicated damp and mould team to ensure we can monitor any reports and work closely with residents until the issue is fully resolved.

Knowledge and Information Management

In May 2023 the Housing Ombudsman published their spotlight on Knowledge and Information Management referred to as KIM. This report focuses on how information is created, stored, used and shared. If information is not consistently recorded and available, it creates issues for internal and external communication, which can result in a simple problem being difficult to resolve and result in a complaint.

As a result of this report, we have taken action to ensure that all colleagues understand the importance of good record keeping. We’re also taking action to review the quality of the information we hold, ensuring we have a good understanding of our homes and the residents who live in them.

Attitudes, respect and rights – relationship of equals

This is the latest report the Housing Ombudsman published earlier in 2024 and emphasises the importance for landlords to have resident focused policies, adapted to meet the needs of all residents and ensure the most vulnerable residents are not left behind. We are focussed on reviewing the recommendations made in this report, working with our Voice of the Resident panel to continue to improve the services we deliver to all residents.

settle.

Get in touch

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