



BERNIA

Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report

April 2024 – March 2025

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Introduction

Listening to our tenants is fundamental to the successful delivery of our services.

Our commitment to continuous improvement is reflected in our dedication to understanding the diverse needs and expectations of our tenants, to make sure that our services are accessible, responsive, and tailored to meet those needs.

Every complaint is an opportunity for us to learn. By taking complaints seriously and treating them as valuable sources of feedback, we gain important insights into how well we are meeting tenant expectations, and what we may need to do differently.

We are committed to providing a transparent and accountable service, so tenants feel confident in the way we respond to concerns. The feedback we receive not only guides us in resolving individual issues but also drives broader service improvements across our organisation.

This report, provides an overview of our complaints' performance, and offers insight into emerging trends and themes. It highlights what we've learnt from complaints and the changes we are implementing to ensure we continue to meet the high standards we've set.

Our annual self-assessment against the Complaint Handling Code is included in Appendix 1 and is available on our website. We have also included our Housing Ombudsman Landlord Performance Report in Appendix 2. The content of this improvement report, along with the self-assessment, has been considered and approved by our Tenant Voice Panel, Customer Services Committee, and Group Board, ensuring our approach remains tenant-focused.



About Bernicia

Bernicia owns and manages over **14,000** properties across **12** Local Authority Areas. We provide homes and services to around **60,000** residents across the region.

Our portfolio also includes over **3,000** homes for older people and over **650** homes for people with specific support needs.

Our Vision

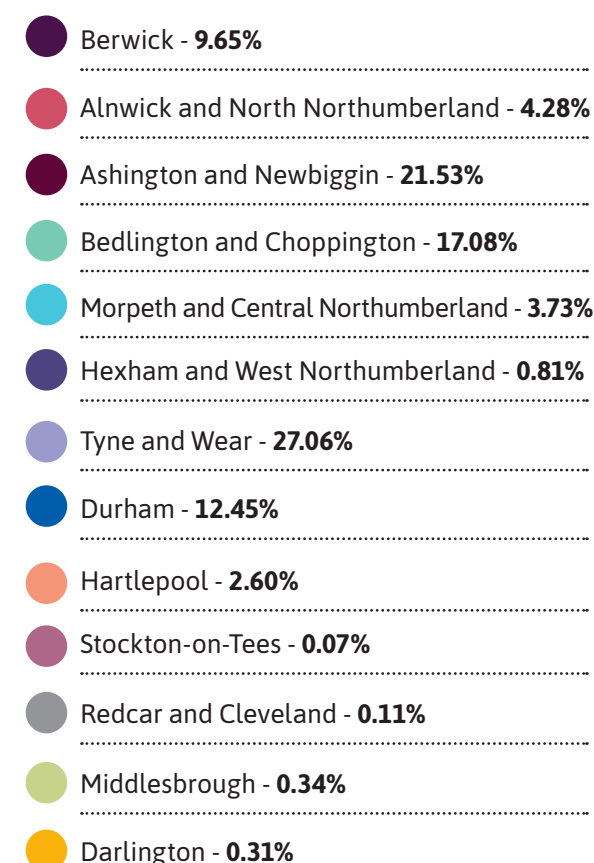
Housing People, Helping People: we believe a good home makes lots of other things possible, so we provide great homes and services that do just that. We are “housing people” – professional and passionate about what we do.

Our Mission

Investing in homes, services and people to make a positive impact on the communities of the North East: we will invest to provide quality new and existing homes, in the provision of services that respond to our tenants, customers and market place requirements, and in our people and in the communities within which we operate. We will invest in the North East.


Our Mission


The Bernicia Way: we value our tenants and customers, work together, respect each other and have the highest levels of accountability and integrity, we deliver what we say we will do, something our tenants, customers and partners can rely upon.




Our Tenants

It's important for us to understand the profile of our tenants, and their views of the services we deliver, to make sure we meet their diverse needs. Our 'Getting to Know You Campaign' helped us to better understand our tenants. Below you can see some trends in characteristics of our new tenancies throughout the last year, and how they compare to our existing tenant base.

 Age: <small>*Data shows a younger profile of tenants joined us in 2024-2025.</small>	New Tenancies April 2024 – March 2025		Existing Tenancy Base April 2024 – March 2025	
	18-24	14%	18-24	3%
	25-39	34%	25-39	21%
	40-59	25%	40-59	33%
	60-74	18%	60-74	26%
	75+	9%	75+	16%

 Gender: <small>*Similar gender profile in new/existing tenants.</small>	New Tenancies April 2024 – March 2025		Existing Tenancy Base April 2024 – March 2025	
	Female	60%	Female	59.4%
	Male	39.7%	Male	40.2%
	Other	0.3%	Other	0.4%


 Ethnicity: <small>*Very similar profile of our new tenants.</small>	New Tenancies April 2024 – March 2025		Existing Tenancy Base	
	White	94%	White	94%
	Arab or other ethnic group	2%	Arab or other ethnic group	0%
	Asian or Asian British	1%	Asian or Asian British	1%
	Black, African, Caribbean or Black British	1%	Black, African, Caribbean or Black British	1%
	Mixed or Multiple Ethnic Groups	1%	Mixed or Multiple Ethnic Groups	1%
	Prefer not to say/unknown	1%	Prefer not to say/unknown	1%

We also capture additional information such as disability, communication needs, reasons for leaving and homelessness. All this information gives us insight as to what support may be needed by our tenants and how best we can accommodate those needs.



Complaints Performance

1st April 2024 to 31st March 2025



897
Complaints Received

This year 897 complaints were made regarding our services, this includes our rented, supported, leasehold and shared ownership residents.

This is a 5% reduction from last year (944). We have continued to invest in training our front-line colleagues, to focus on responding and resolving issues quickly and effectively.



83%
Stage 1 Complaints responded to in time

We responded to 83.4% of stage 1 complaints within timescales, which compares favorably to the sector median of 73.3% in 2024.

During the last 6 months of the year, we continued to upskill colleagues, alongside refining escalation and performance reporting to senior leaders. This resulted in 92% of stage 1 complaints responded to within timescale during the last 6 months of the year.



94%
Stage 2 Complaints responded to in time

We received 86 stage 2 complaints in 2024-2025, responding to 94% of these within timescale, this again compares favorably to the sector average of 67.3% in 2024.

Most of the complaints that failed to meet the timescales arose in the earlier part of the year, following which we updated our approach to senior leaders being responsible for their own stage 2 complaints. This led to a more accountable approach and allows for ownership of improvements. All complaints outside our service level agreement (SLA) are now also scrutinised to understand why, to focus on future prevention.



63.3

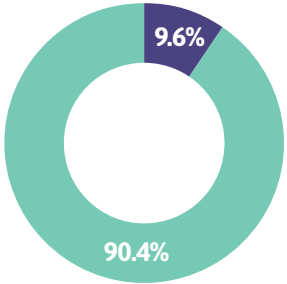
Stage One Complaints Per 1000 Homes



6.0

Stage Two Complaints Per 1000 Homes

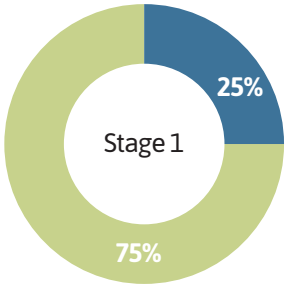
We have also seen the volume of complaints per 1000 properties for our Low Cost Rental Accommodation properties reduce from the previous year (as reported within our Tenant Satisfaction Measures, TSM, regulatory return). Whilst we recognise the volume of complaints we received are higher than our peers, given our positive customer satisfaction results, we consider this a reflection of a well publicized and accessible complaints service.



Stage 1 Stage 2

Complaints Resolved at Stage 1

We were able to resolve over 90% of complaints at stage 1 of our process, which continues to show a strong focus on early resolution.

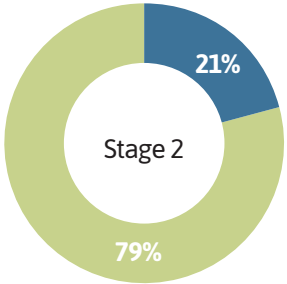


Upheld Not Upheld

Complaints Upheld

We upheld 75% of our stage 1 complaints and 79% of our stage 2 complaints, which emphasises the importance of complaints in identifying service improvements.

21% of stage 1 cases and 25% of stage 2 complaints were not upheld, which is a significant number of cases where we found no service failure in line with our policies, although there was still customer dissatisfaction. This indicates we may need to improve how we communicate service standards and expectations to tenants, or how we are communicating our decisions.



Complaint Handling Improvements

In October 2024, we further strengthened our internal team structures to better listen to our tenants, learn from their feedback, and improve our service for residents.

Since then, we've implemented several changes in our complaints handling process. These changes include providing additional support and training for our complaint handlers to help them meet deadlines and seek assistance when necessary.

We have also revised our approach to Stage 2 complaints. Now, the relevant Head of Service takes responsibility for any escalated cases within their department. This change ensures transparency and accountability, helping to prevent future complaints. It also empowers department heads to make improvements based on feedback directly from complaints.

Additionally, we updated our complaint letters in consultation with our engaged tenants. This ensures our communication is clear and keeps tenants informed about what to expect next.

1 Complaint was Refused



1 complaint was refused as the resident had already raised the issue, and it was being dealt with as a stage 1 complaint. We clarified this with the tenant and signposted them appropriately.



Complaints Analysis

1st April 2024 to 31st March 2025

The top five reasons for dissatisfaction this year mirror last years trends, however we have seen some positive changes in the number of cases that feature with a more even spread.

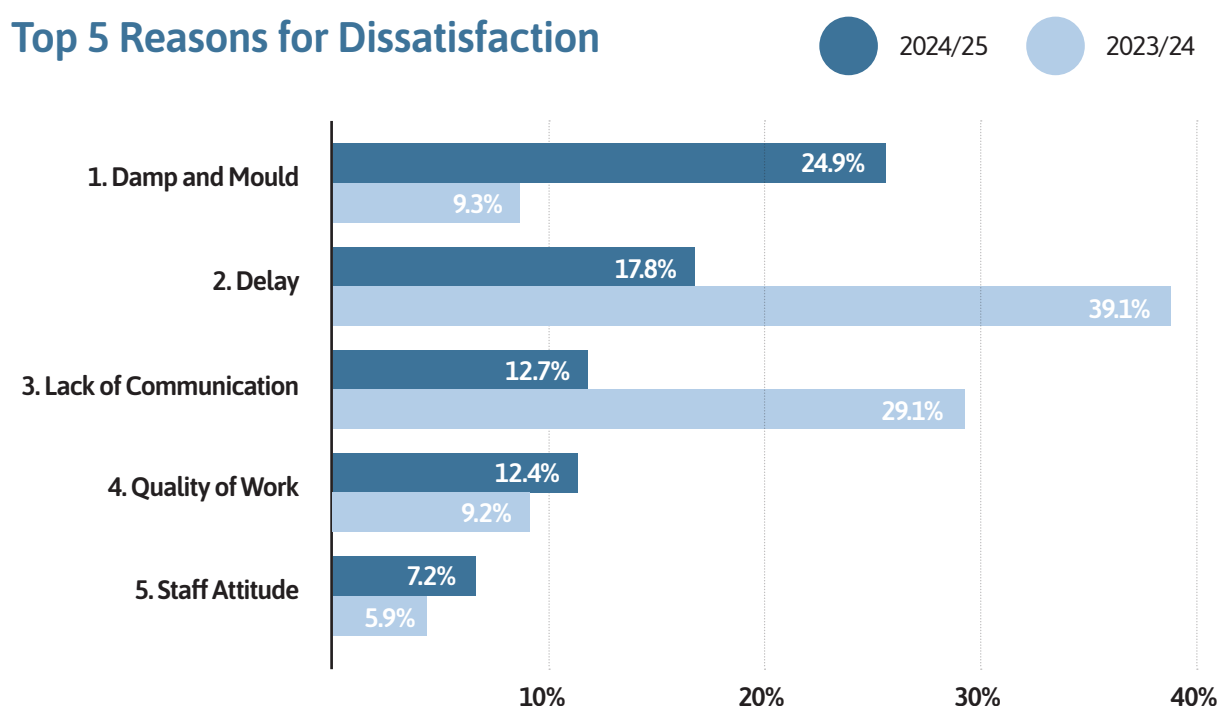
The biggest increase we have seen is dissatisfaction with handling damp and mould cases. The demand on this area has increased significantly which is common within the sector. We have increased our trade resources to support with this demand and have also improved our processes and management system to help us manage this increase in demand. We follow updates from the housing ombudsman closely in particular for this area to ensure we are proactive in improving the service.

It is pleasing to see that delays and lack of communication has reduced considerably since last year. This can be attributed to the additional resources to increase trade operatives to focus on delivering our

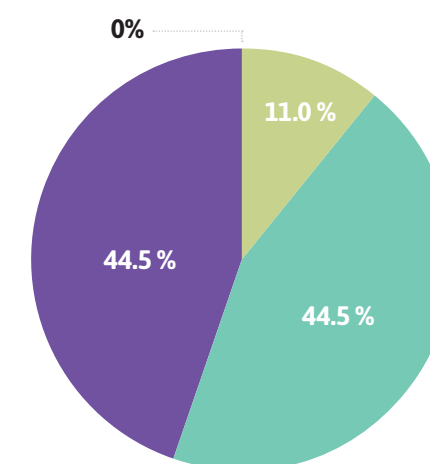
repairs service in a more timely manner. With regards to communication we have also invested heavily in a new Customer Relationship Management System which has created better visibility of tasks and queries, strengthened tenant communications and improved colleague collaboration across the business.

Quality of Work and Staff Attitude have increased slightly this year in comparison to last. We upheld 80% of complaints relating to the quality of work, which indicates we need to continue our focus in this area. Positively 48% of staff attitude complaints were not upheld which supports our Bernicia culture and behaviour expectations of colleagues and contractors.

Top 5 Reasons for Dissatisfaction



Housing Ombudsman Determinations



Key Findings

In 2024-25 we saw two cases reviewed by the Ombudsman.

The first case concluded our complaints process in April 2023 and was concerning heating in the property, conduct of staff, reports of pests and complaint handling. The second case concluded our complaints process in July 2023 and was concerning a fence, conduct of staff, their tenancy and complaint handling.

In the first case concerning heating in the property, the ombudsman found evidence of failure, stating we could have acted more promptly. This encouraged us to consult further with the legal team on how to reach a swift resolution to the problem. There were also service failures affecting communication in regard to pest control and the amount of compensation offered. There was no evidence of failure found regarding the conduct of Bernicia staff.

In the second case, there was service failure in the handling of the complaint in that it was escalated to stage two at the customers request before being formally responded to at stage one. There was no evidence of failure found regarding the actions taken around the fence or the conduct of staff.

All orders and recommendations were completed fully and on time. We have also implemented some further training and developed a compensation matrix to support complaint handlers in calculating compensation, following scrutiny from our involved tenants.

Operational Context

We are committed to delivering quality services and wanted to share our wider operational performance to put into context our complaint volumes



Tenant Satisfaction – Perception Measures

Tenant Perception Measures – Satisfaction with...		24/25 Results	Shift from 23/24	Sector Median 2024
P01	The overall service from Bernicia	80.5%	-	71%
TP02	The overall repairs service	78.2%	+2%	72%
TP03	The time taken to complete their most recent repair.	71.6%	+3%	67%
TP04	The homes are well maintained.	78.7%	-2%	71%
TP05	That homes are safe	85.0%	-	77%
TP06	Bernicia listens to tenant views and acts upon them.	74.9%	-2%	60%
TP07	Bernicia keeps tenants informed about things that matter to them	81.0%	-2%	70%
TP08	Bernicia treats tenants fairly and with respect	86.3%	-1%	77%
TP09	Bernicia's approach to complaints handling.	42.3%	+4%	34%
TP10	Communal areas are kept clean and well maintained.	66.7%	-5%	65%
TP11	Making a positive contribution to the neighbourhood.	76.0%	-2%	63%
TP12	Bernicia's approach to handling anti-social behaviour.	75.6%	-2%	58%

The green shaded measures indicate where we were performing in the top quartile of landlords nationally in 2023/24. We accept we are likely to see marginal shifts in these indicators year to year, when operating at such a high level.

The indicators highlighted amber represent our median to upper performance in 2023/24. We are pleased to see the positive progress we have made in these areas as this has aligned to our areas of focus over the past year.

We note that satisfaction with communal areas has seen the biggest decrease in the past year, although still above the sector average. We have therefore included a focus on this year's priorities.

Last Years Focus

Our priorities for the past year reflected the learning generated from complaints and performance information, and set out to strengthen some processes and procedures. Here's an overview as to what we promised and what we've done.

1. Improve our repairs customer experience through design and implementation of our repair's module within Salesforce

We continued our investment and refinement of a new Customer Relationship Management System, Salesforce, to manage our housing and repairs services and improve the customer experience.

We launched our Damp and Mould module, which has helped us improve case visibility and record keeping. Learnings from this have helped further development of our full repair's modules, focusing on right first time practices and better communication with residents.

Earlier this year we progressed to release electrical repairs within the system, with all repairs transitioning by the end of 2025. We have improved our communication through increased points across the repairs journey and engineers booking follow-up appointments on site. Other features will include:

- Self-service options for residents
- Progress tracking
- On-the-day reminders and en-route updates

These improvements are already refining the experience of our residents and helping address key complaint areas in the process.

2. Enhance our complaints performance dashboard and share this widely through our communication channels.

Complaint cases are now managed through Salesforce enabling real time access and information. The complaints performance dashboard now focuses on presenting continuous visibility of performance. Key features of the dashboard include:

- Performance against the TSM's
- Monitoring of stage 1 resolutions and stage 2 escalations
- Monitoring of complaint timescales

This is currently shared with our Customer Service Committee on a quarterly basis to ensure there's continued scrutiny and plans in place throughout the year.

The complaints dashboard has been developed further, so each Head of can view their own data, to identify areas of improvement. We will be sharing performance on our website on a regular basis throughout 2025-2026.

3. Review, design and deliver our Customer excellence and complaints training to colleagues.

This is a key focus for us, ensuring colleagues have the tools and support in place to ensure they deliver on our commitment to responding effectively and efficiently to complaints. Our complaints training was updated during the year and focused on colleagues understanding their role within complaints and why it is vital they are accountable, and act swiftly when a complaint is raised, as well as understanding the complaint handling code.

We understand we may not always get it right but how we identify that and put it right is extremely important. This training was mandatory for all colleagues within Bernicia and completion is monitored to ensure compliance. We will continually review this to ensure it remains up to date with regulatory changes as well as any lessons we learn from complaints.

4. Strengthen our complaints analysis and segmentation, including our approach to vulnerability.

As an organisation, we've been working to improve how we collect and use data about our residents. As part of this, we created a new role focused on strengthening our Knowledge and Information Management principles. This will help us better understand the data we capture, particularly around diverse needs, and use it to deliver services in a more 'personalised way'.

We have also developed a new policy called 'Identifying Diverse Needs Customer Policy' which outlines our commitment to supporting customers with a range of diverse needs. Our next step is to ensure our systems accurately reflect information about residents' vulnerabilities. This will help us provide appropriate support and ensure our staff are equipped to respond effectively.

In addition, we've improved how we record the details of initial complaints to include any known vulnerabilities. This has already helped us manage cases involving vulnerable residents more effectively, allowing complaint handlers to prioritise and make informed decisions from the start. This change was informed by learning from Ombudsman cases where residents had disclosed vulnerabilities.

We're also reviewing our complaint categories to better identify service failings and analyse trends. This includes exploring whether low complaint volumes in certain areas may be linked to underreporting by vulnerable residents.

5. Review how we deliver our quick response to Damp, Mould & Condensation.

Following the increase in volume of Damp and Mould reports, we improved our services in the following ways:

- Recruited 7 additional trade staff to carry out remedial work.
- Supplementary support from 2 Team Leaders, 2 Surveyors, 2 admin staff, and external subcontractors.
- Moved the damp and mould process into Salesforce to manage cases from first contact to completion which enables full case tracking at every stage.
- All teams trained to industry-recognised standards as well as additional damp and mould awareness training provided to front-line colleagues and contractors. This has enabled early identification of issues during home visits.
- Introduced Visual Remote Assist (VRA) in October 2024 to enhance aftercare. Residents can share real-time video for quicker assessment and resolution.
- Plans to trial VRA for electrical repairs and expand its use further.

The above processes and management systems meant we secured 'substantial assurance' in March 2025 by internal auditors RSM. This is the highest level of assurance that an audit can achieve.

6. Review our approach to noise complaints learning from the Ombudsman guidance on this topic.

Last year we committed to specifically reviewing our approach to noise complaints alongside the guidance provided by the Ombudsman on the topic.

We researched approaches to noise management across other housing organisations to determine best practice and create consistency. We also worked with 'Resolve' who are community safety experts in the UK to get feedback on what good practice in this area looks like. Here's just some of the improvements we made to our approach as a result:

- We promoted the noise app and educated residents on how to report noise nuisance. This was a key topic for ASB awareness week 2025.
- We gathered a directory of external signposting agencies for noise complaints and enforcement powers.
- All colleagues who manage noise complaints have been upskilled with knowledge of informal and formal tools to get the best support for residents, including residents with diverse needs.
- We moved low level noise complaints to our Safer Communities team to be managed through the tenancy process rather than ASB, to ensure the right level of action was taken for residents.

7. Review and redirect resources to better align with our customer excellence approach.

We've carried out several initiatives to ensure our resources are aligned with our objectives and customer excellence approach over the last year.

Property Maintenance

Across our repairs and maintenance service, an additional 9 trade colleagues were recruited, which has improved the wait times for repair appointments. Further resources are being trained in our apprenticeship programme, to support existing and emerging workstreams. Through continual learning from complaints and analysis to help us understand service gaps, we directed further resources to our repairs department towards the end of the quarter.

Technology

Technology is playing an integral part in helping us better align with our objectives and customer excellence approach. It is improving the repairs service for customers, giving greater clarity of operations and driving efficiencies in the customer journey. We've also invested in technology to allow greater visibility and analysis of other work streams. We've recently onboarded our Disrepair Management Process into Salesforce and already seen efficiencies in handling these cases. The focus we've made in dedicated resource to support these cases, has allowed for improvements in communication between teams and increased visibility of these cases.

Collaborative Working

We've made several changes via our complaints team to ensure we are delivering for customers. One of the biggest benefits generated has been driven by a more collaborative way in managing cross departmental cases. Previously this was done in separate teams which created delays in responding, duplication and, at times, miscommunication. If we identify a complaint that needs multiple department involvement, we now coordinate in a much more collaborative way, which has not only been beneficial to our residents but to us as colleagues too.



Service

Improvement & Learnings

In addition to the priorities we set last year, we have also been learning from and listening to our residents and their complaints during 2024-2025. We have also been learning from the Housing Ombudsman through their regular updates, resources and Spotlight reports. We are pleased to share some of the improvements made below.

Complaint Handling Improvements

We've been working hard within our complaints team to provide the best service possible.

Here are some of the improvement activities we have made:

- **Weekly contact with Heads of Service across housing, asset and maintenance to keep them updated on complaints within their functions.**
- **Refreshed regular meetings with key colleagues in our maintenance teams to ensure earlier resolutions and escalation where required.**
- **Creation of an action plan to support resolution, focusing on investigating why the complaint arose, what actions are needed to resolve this, how we will communicate this with the resident and then learn from this. The action plan also supports to monitor any outstanding actions through to completion.**
- **Updated our letter templates, signed off by our involved residents, to ensure they were clear, understandable and provide clarity for residents.**
- **Held complaint support sessions with key areas of the business and shared guidance and best practice for their service areas.**
- **Updated compensation guidance with a framework and matrix to promote fairness and consistency.**

Meeting Complaint Timescales

At the end of quarter two we scrutinised our performance around timescales in line with the housing ombudsman's code. We made significant improvements in this area, supported by some of the above activities, particularly the weekly awareness for Heads of Service.

We introduced alerts before deadlines to support keeping us on track as well as introducing quality monitoring within complaint handling, which focused on accurate recording, use of extensions and contact with residents.

Further training was provided to colleagues to support getting this right, which resulted in notable improvements in performance during the year and saw us achieving 92% of complaints responded to in time in quarter three and 97% in quarter four.

Complaint Learning Examples

Storm Response and Learning

After Storm Arwen, we received more complaints due to delays in repairing fences and roof tiles. The high volume of damage put pressure on engineers and slowed our response. We reviewed what happened and identified ways to improve.

When Storm Éowyn hit, we used what we'd learned. Housing and maintenance teams worked closely together, and we gave front line staff up to date information to help them have proactive conversations with residents. We clearly explained likely timescales and who was responsible for repairs. We also committed to regular text updates for those facing delays.

Thanks to these changes, complaints during Storm Éowyn were low, and we were able to direct our resources more effectively.

Improving Communication with Residents

We have implemented a 'Communication Plan' which will be populated in consultation with the resident, providing a dedicated point of contact, along with agreed methods of communication suited to their needs.

This need was identified when we were handling a stage 2 complaint for a resident who found it difficult to engage through our existing channels, due to a neuro-diverse condition, they needed a more specific approach. This plan will support residents in communicating with us effectively and avoid potential obstacles or issues arising as a result.

Better allocation of complaints and diagnosis

We received feedback from residents and identified that some cases referred to the complaints team lacked the detail needed, resulting in delayed resolution. We also found some cases where the resident was raising a service request, not a complaint, which caused confusion when they were contacted by the complaints team.

To resolve this, we created a complaints template for colleagues to use when raising a complaint. The template encourages us to record the issue and the specific cause for dissatisfaction and what resolution the resident is looking for. It also ensures we capture any vulnerabilities which may affect how the case is handled.

This approach has significantly improved the quality of the cases coming through to the complaints team and allowed them to triage and respond more effectively. It has also improved conversations with residents, resulting in some cases where we've been able to resolve the issue there and then for the resident.



2025-2026 Key Focus

The priorities for the year ahead fully reflect the learning from our complaints. We also consulted with our Involved Customers to help identify the topics they considered a priority. While we'll continue to work on a range of initiatives, these key topics will be at the forefront of our Complaint Service Improvement Plan for 2025/26.

Tenant Priority Topics



Review our approach to aids and adaptations, learning from complaints and Ombudsman guidance.



Drive a reduction in repairs complaints through the design and implementation of our repair's module within Salesforce



Enhance record keeping and data capture processes in line with Ombudsman recommendations to improve complaint handling.



Develop our approach to services delivery for those customers with diverse needs.

Key Areas of Focus



Improve our delivery of estate services through increased accountability and visibility of colleagues.



Strengthen how we learn from compliments and complaints.

How to contact us

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