



BERNICIA

**Annual Complaints
Performance and Service
Improvement Report**

April 2025 – March 2026

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Introduction

Listening to our tenants remains central to how we deliver and improve our services, which is why it is embedded throughout our new strategy.

Understanding experiences, expectations, and changing needs allows us to shape services that are accessible, responsive, and focused on what matters most to them.

Complaints play a vital role in this. They provide valuable insight into where we are performing well and where we need to do better. We see every complaint as an opportunity to learn, to put things right, and to improve outcomes for our tenants. By responding positively to feedback, we strengthen both our services and the trust tenants place in us.

We are committed to handling complaints in a fair, transparent, and accountable way, in line with the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code. This ensures tenants feel heard and confident that their concerns are taken seriously. The learning we gain from complaints not only helps us resolve individual issues but also informs wider service improvements and supports a culture of continuous development across our organisation. To reflect this, we have updated our Complaint and Compliment Policy so that it clearly sets out our commitment to learning and improving.

This report sets out our complaints performance over the past year, highlighting key themes, trends, and areas for improvement. It also outlines what we have learned and the actions we are taking to enhance service delivery and tenant experience.

Our annual self-assessment against the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code is included in Appendix 1 and published on our website. We have also included our Housing Ombudsman Landlord Performance Report in Appendix 2. This report, alongside the self-assessment, has been reviewed and approved by customers with lived experience of complaints, our Customer Services Committee, and Group Board, ensuring our approach remains transparent, accountable, and firmly focused on tenants.

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 Corporate Strategy - 2026-2031

The Bernicia Effect: Supporting Opportunity: 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, people and partnerships 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 tenant, customer and business requirements, in our people, and in the communities within which we operate.

We will invest in the North East and in doing so will help unlock the potential of our region.

Our Values



Customer Focused

We understand our customers and champion customer focus.



Trusted

We uphold the highest standards of integrity in all our actions, we are personally accountable and deliver what we say we will do.



Respect for People

We respect our tenants and customers and recognise them as individuals. We value our colleagues, encourage their development and reward their performance.



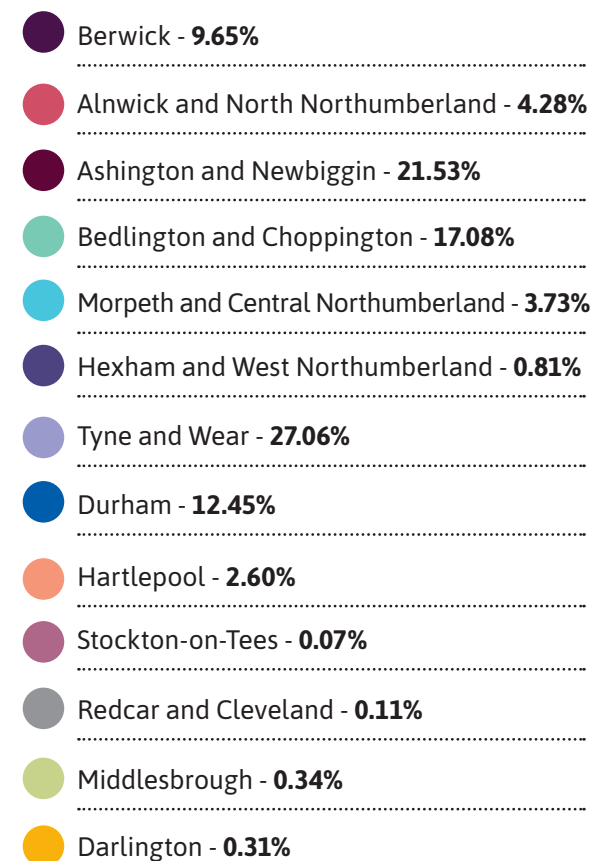
Leadership

We provide strong and transparent leadership, supported by clear decision-making which is evidence-based and outcomes-focused.



Collaborative

We collaborate to help meet the needs of tenants and customers, partners and the wider North East.



Complaints Performance

1st April 2025 to 31st March 2026



944
Complaints Received

We received 944 complaints during the year across our rented, supported, leasehold and shared ownership homes. This represents a 5% increase compared with last year (897 complaints).

While this continues the upward trend seen across the housing sector, the increase remains modest. We believe it reflects both the greater visibility of our complaints process and increased tenant confidence in raising concerns when things go wrong.



98.5%
Stage 1 Complaints responded to in time

We responded to 98.5% of Stage 1 complaints within the required timescales, a significant improvement from 83% last year. This improvement reflects our investment in strengthening complaint handling across the organisation, including:

- Enhanced training for staff involved in complaint resolution
- Increased support for complaint handlers
- Closer performance monitoring and management
- Regular reporting to senior leaders to improve oversight and accountability

These changes have helped us deliver more timely, consistent and high-quality responses for tenants.



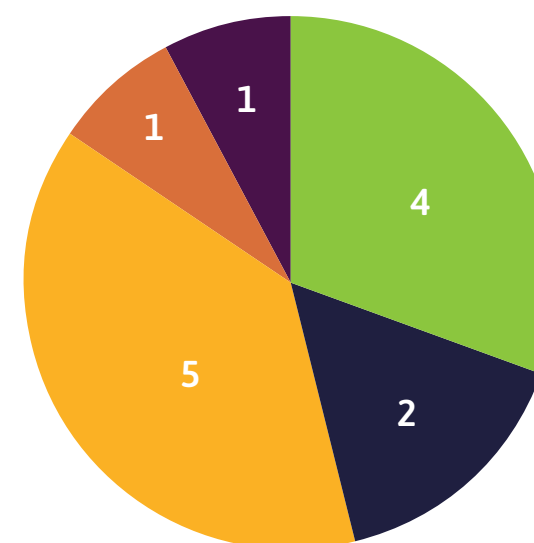
93%
Stage 2 Complaints responded to in time

We received 101 Stage 2 complaints, a 17% increase on the previous year. Despite this rise, 93% were responded to within the required timescales, demonstrating strong performance at the escalation stage.

Given the comparatively smaller volume of Stage 2 complaints, performance can be significantly affected by a small number of cases. During the year, seven complaints were recorded as outside the target timescale:

- Three cases were delayed at the tenant's request. Although these exceeded the Housing Ombudsman's timescales, agreeing to the delay was the right outcome for the individual tenants at that time
- Four cases exceeded the service level agreement by just one day

To further strengthen performance, we are introducing additional support and guidance for colleagues responsible for managing escalated complaints. This will help ensure continued improvements in timeliness, consistency and customer experience.

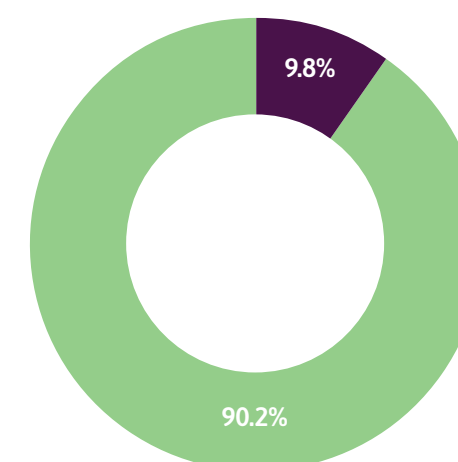


Complaints Refused



During the year, 13 complaints were not accepted into our formal complaints process. In each case, we explained clearly why the matter fell outside the scope of our complaints procedure and signposted the tenant to the most appropriate service or organisation for support.

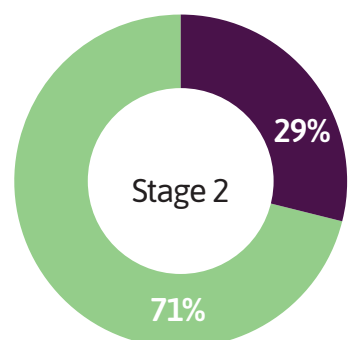
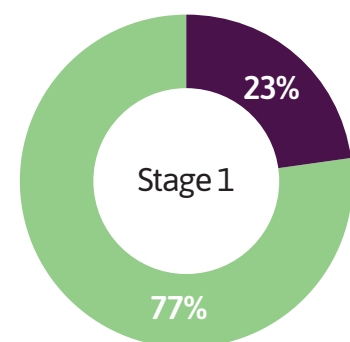
We review the reasons complaints are not accepted to help improve the clarity of our guidance and ensure tenants can access the right service first time. This reduces frustration, improves accessibility, and helps keep our complaints process focused on issues we can investigate and resolve.



Complaints Resolved at Stage 1

We resolved 90.2% of complaints at Stage 1, which is consistent with our performance last year and demonstrates a continued strong focus on early resolution. Despite seeing an increase in the number of Stage 2 complaints this year, our commitment to resolving issues at the first stage has remained firmly in place. This approach helps us address concerns quickly, reduce escalation, and improve outcomes for tenants.





We upheld 77% of Stage 1 complaints and 71% of Stage 2 complaints during the year. These figures demonstrate the important role complaints play in helping us identify service failings, understand customers' experiences and take action to put things right when standards have not been met.

While the number of Stage 2 complaints increased during the year, the proportion upheld at Stage 2 reduced by 8% compared with last year. This highlights the importance of ensuring our decisions are communicated clearly at Stage 1 and that expectations are well managed from the outset.

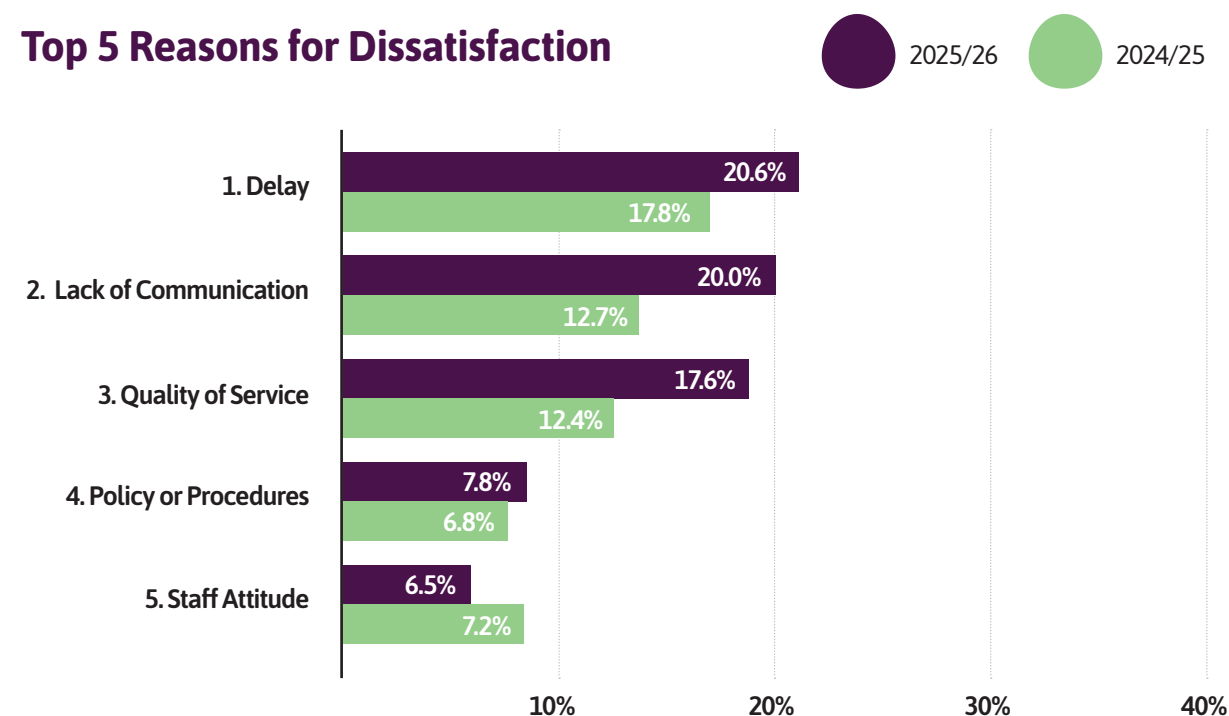
To support this, we are continuing to focus on helping tenants understand:

- What they can reasonably expect from our services
- The reasons behind our decisions
- How we have investigated their concerns and reached our conclusions

By improving the clarity and quality of our communication, we aim to build confidence in our complaint handling process, reduce unnecessary escalations and ensure tenants feel listened to and informed throughout their complaint journey. At the same time, we remain committed to learning from upheld complaints and using this feedback to drive continuous service improvement.

Looking beyond overall performance, analysis of complaint themes helps us understand the underlying causes of dissatisfaction and where improvement activity should be focused.

Top 5 Reasons for Dissatisfaction



Whilst complaints remain relatively low compared to the high volume of works completed, delays continue to be the most significant issue, with 90.7% of delay-related complaints being upheld. This has reinforced the need to improve service delivery and has informed investment in additional trade resources, enhanced scheduling tools, and better visibility of works in progress to reduce waiting times and keep tenants better informed. Investment in the Salesforce CRM system has significantly improved visibility of case management and enabled more effective performance monitoring of repair timescales.

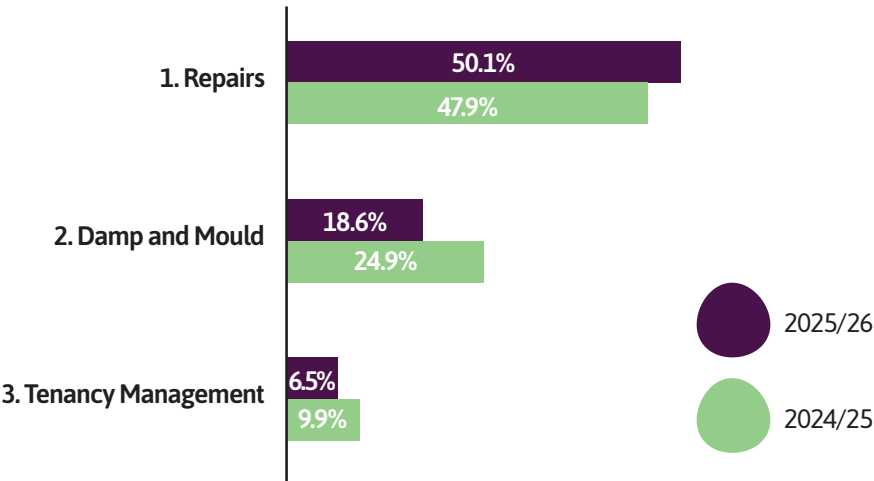
Communication was another key theme, with 85.2% of complaints upheld. In response, we have enhanced Salesforce to provide more updates throughout the repairs journey and improve oversight of customer cases, helping to deliver more timely and consistent communication.

We upheld 83.7% of complaints relating to the quality of service, highlighting opportunities to strengthen oversight of trades and contractors and ensure expectations are clear from the outset about the services being delivered.

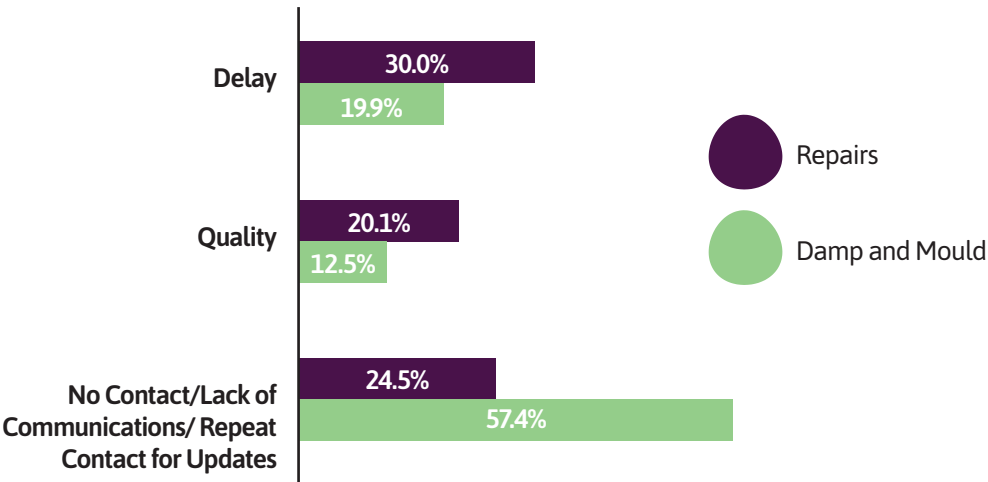
In contrast, only 32.4% of complaints relating to policy or procedure were upheld. This suggests our policies are generally being applied correctly, although there is an opportunity to improve how we explain decisions and help tenants understand how policies apply to their individual circumstances.

Staff attitude complaints were upheld, or partially upheld, in 47.5% of cases. While some concerns were justified, the majority reflected positive colleague behaviours. We continue to use feedback from these complaints to inform coaching, training and contractor engagement, supporting high standards of professionalism and customer care.

Complaints by Service Areas



Reasons for Dissatisfaction



Repairs continue to account for the largest proportion of complaints, which is to be expected given the scale and complexity of the service. The main drivers are delays, quality concerns and communication issues, reinforcing the importance of our ongoing investment in trade resources, repair management and customer communication.

Damp and mould complaints have reduced from 24.9% to 18.6%, reflecting improvements in trade capacity, case management and operational processes. The Damp, Mould and Condensation Policy and management plan were also informed by feedback from customers with lived experience of damp and mould issues to help strengthen our approach.

While this is encouraging, damp and mould remains a priority area due to its significant impact on tenants. Feedback indicates that communication continues to be the key area for improvement, and we remain focused on setting clear expectations, providing timely updates and improving coordination between teams.

These improvements are also reflected in overall repairs complaint performance. Of all emergency and routine repairs completed, 1.43% resulted in a complaint last year, compared with 1.37% this year. Given the significant volume of repairs carried out successfully each year, it is encouraging to see a reduction in complaints associated with repair services.



The themes identified through these complaints have informed a range of improvement activities, which will be incorporated into the Repairs Improvement Plan (R31). The implementation of Salesforce has strengthened case management arrangements, enhanced customer communications and improved performance reporting. These actions are designed not only to address the recurring causes of complaints but also to improve the overall customer experience and reduce future demand on the complaints service.

In April 2026, a dedicated Repairs Scrutiny Panel was also established, with an initial focus on customer communication throughout the repairs journey. The panel provides an important opportunity for customers to directly influence service improvements, and its recommendations will be considered as part of the ongoing R31 Improvement Plan, ensuring that future changes are informed by customer insight and lived experience.

Tenancy management complaints have decreased from 9.9% to 6.5%, suggesting improvements in the management of neighbourhood issues, anti-social behaviour and tenancy-related enquiries. This is supported by the relatively low upheld rate for policy and procedure complaints, indicating that decisions are generally being applied consistently and in line with our policies.

Operational Context

While complaint themes provide insight into service issues, it is important to consider them within the wider context of the overall level of activity across our services. While we received 944 complaints this year, this represents a small proportion of the interactions and services delivered to tenants during the same period.



Tenant Satisfaction Measures

Complaints per 1,000 Homes – 2025/26



67.7 Stage 1



7.2 Stage 2

Our Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs) show a small increase in the number of complaints received per 1,000 Low Cost Rental Accommodation (LCRA) homes compared with last year.

By way of comparison in 2024/25, we recorded:

- 63.3 Stage 1 complaints per 1,000 homes
- 6.0 Stage 2 complaints per 1,000 homes

Alongside our strong customer satisfaction results, the increase is likely to reflect the improvements we have made to the accessibility and visibility of our complaints process.

Tenant Perception Measure

Tenant Perception Measures – Satisfaction with...		2025/26 Results	Shift from 2024/25	Sector Median 2025
TP01	The overall service from Bernicia	80.8%	+0.3%	71.8%
TP02	The overall repairs service	77.9%	-0.3%	73.6%
TP03	The time taken to complete their most recent repair	69.8%	-1.8%	69.5%
TP04	The homes are well maintained	79.7%	+1%	71.9%
TP05	That homes are safe	85.1%	+0.1%	77.6%
TP06	Bernicia listens to tenant views and acts upon them	76.5%	+1.6%	61.6%
TP07	Bernicia keeps tenants informed about things that matter to them	80.5%	-0.5%	72%
TP08	Bernicia treats tenants fairly and with respect	87.6%	+1.3%	77.9%
TP09	Bernicia's approach to complaints handling	41.5%	-0.8%	35.5%
TP10	Communal areas are kept clean and well maintained	70.6%	+3.9%	66.7%
TP11	Making a positive contribution to the neighbourhood	74.7%	-1.3%	64.6%
TP12	Bernicia's approach to handling anti-social behaviour	71.5%	-4.1%	59.5%

Our Tenant Perception Measures show a consistently strong level of satisfaction across the services that matter most to tenants. Overall satisfaction remains high at 80.8%, well above the UK average, and tenants continue to feel safe in their homes and treated fairly and with respect.

The RAG rating compares how our 2025/26 results benchmark with sector quartiles based on 2024/25 results. Green shows where our 2025/26 results meet 2024/25 upper quartile and amber demonstrates 2024/25 sector median performance. These results reflect the strength of our culture, colleague behaviours and our commitment to delivering reliable housing services.

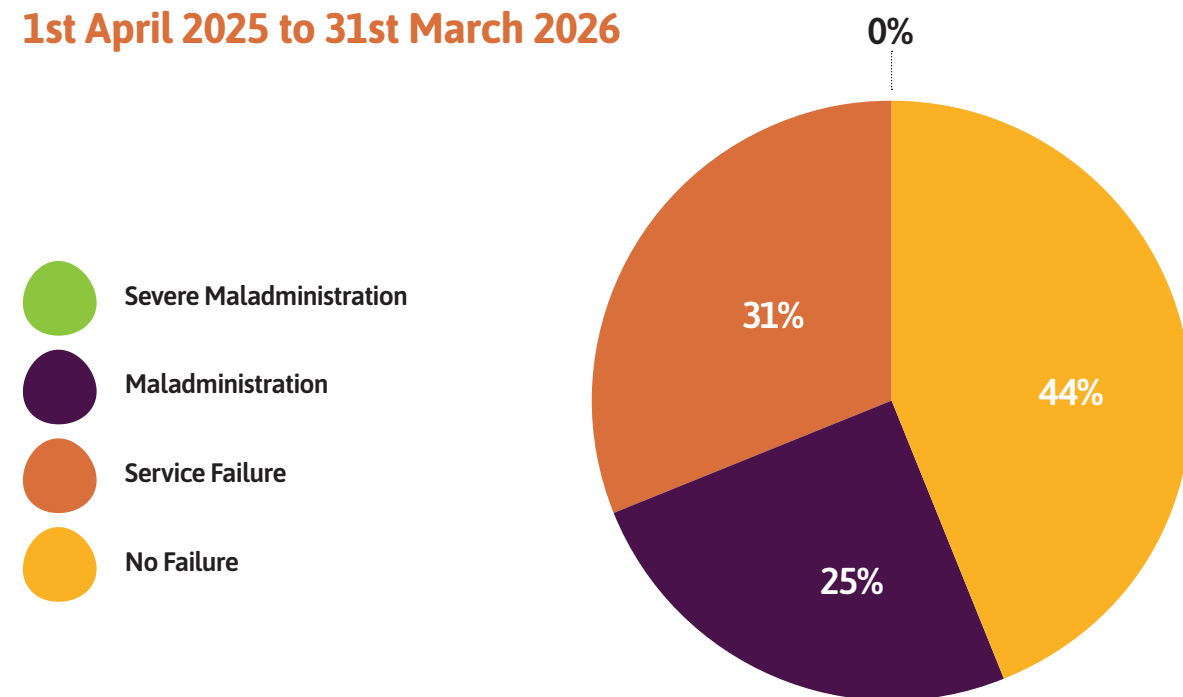
It is also encouraging to see improvements in areas such as listening and acting on tenant views and communal area maintenance, both of which have been a point of focus for us over the last year. Satisfaction with repairs and home maintenance remains strong, demonstrating the impact of our investment in trade capacity and asset management.

Overall, these results show that tenants have confidence in Bernicia’s core services and feel valued, respected and well supported, providing a strong foundation for the improvements we are continuing to make in communication, repairs timeliness and complaint handling.



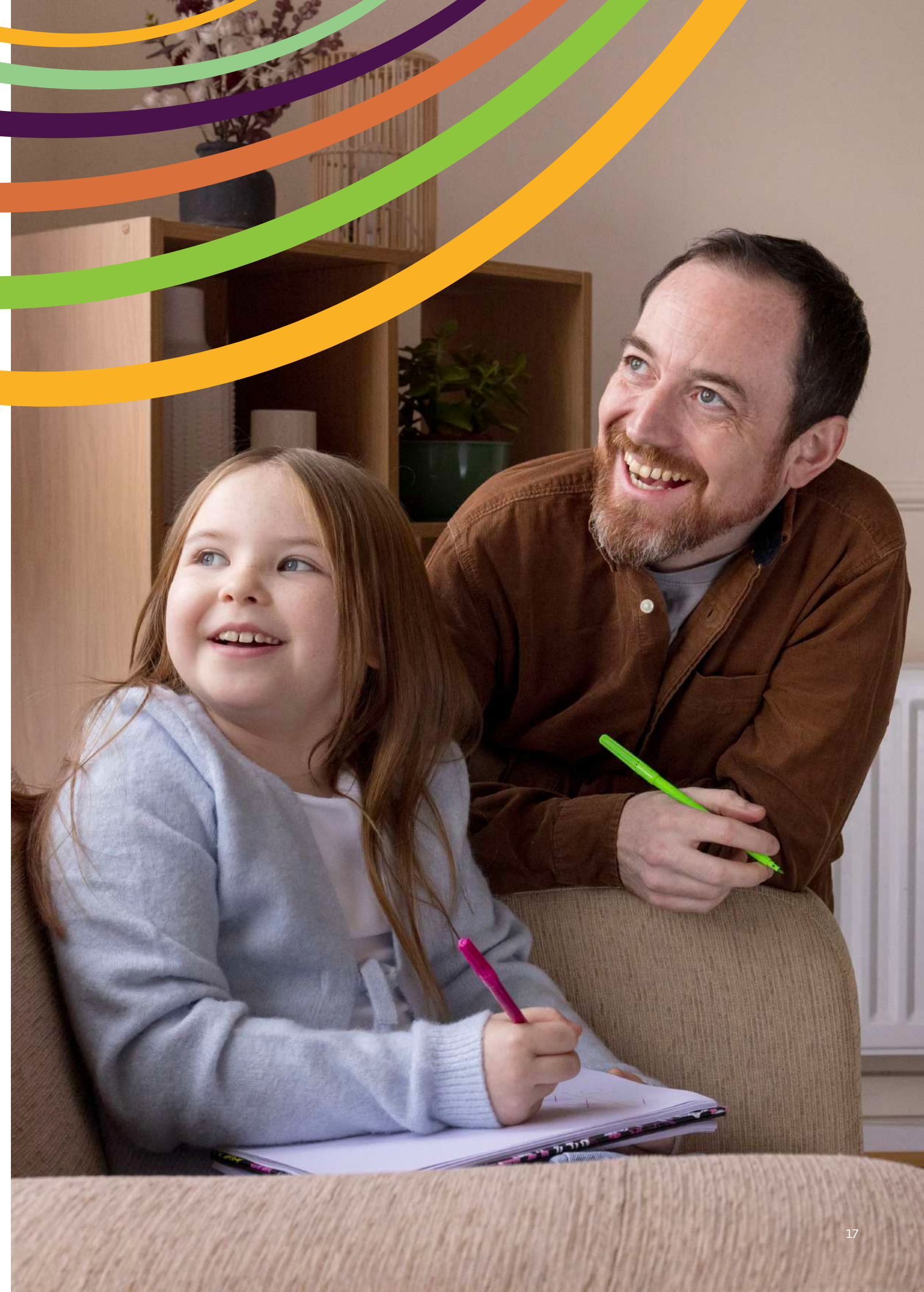
Housing Ombudsman Determinations and Learning

1st April 2025 to 31st March 2026



In 2025/26, six cases were adjudicated by the Housing Ombudsman. As individual cases can contain multiple complaint elements, the Ombudsman made 16 separate findings across the six cases. The chart above therefore shows the proportion of determination findings rather than the proportion of cases. These related mainly to repairs, leaks, damp and mould, with one case concerning occupancy agreement terms and another involving temporary accommodation and reimbursement of costs. All complaints had been concluded through our internal process between December 2023 and November 2024.

We review every Ombudsman determination to capture learning, identify opportunities for improvement and ensure that any required actions are embedded within our service improvement plans, where they have not already been addressed.



Key Themes Identified Across Determinations

Repair and maintenance performance

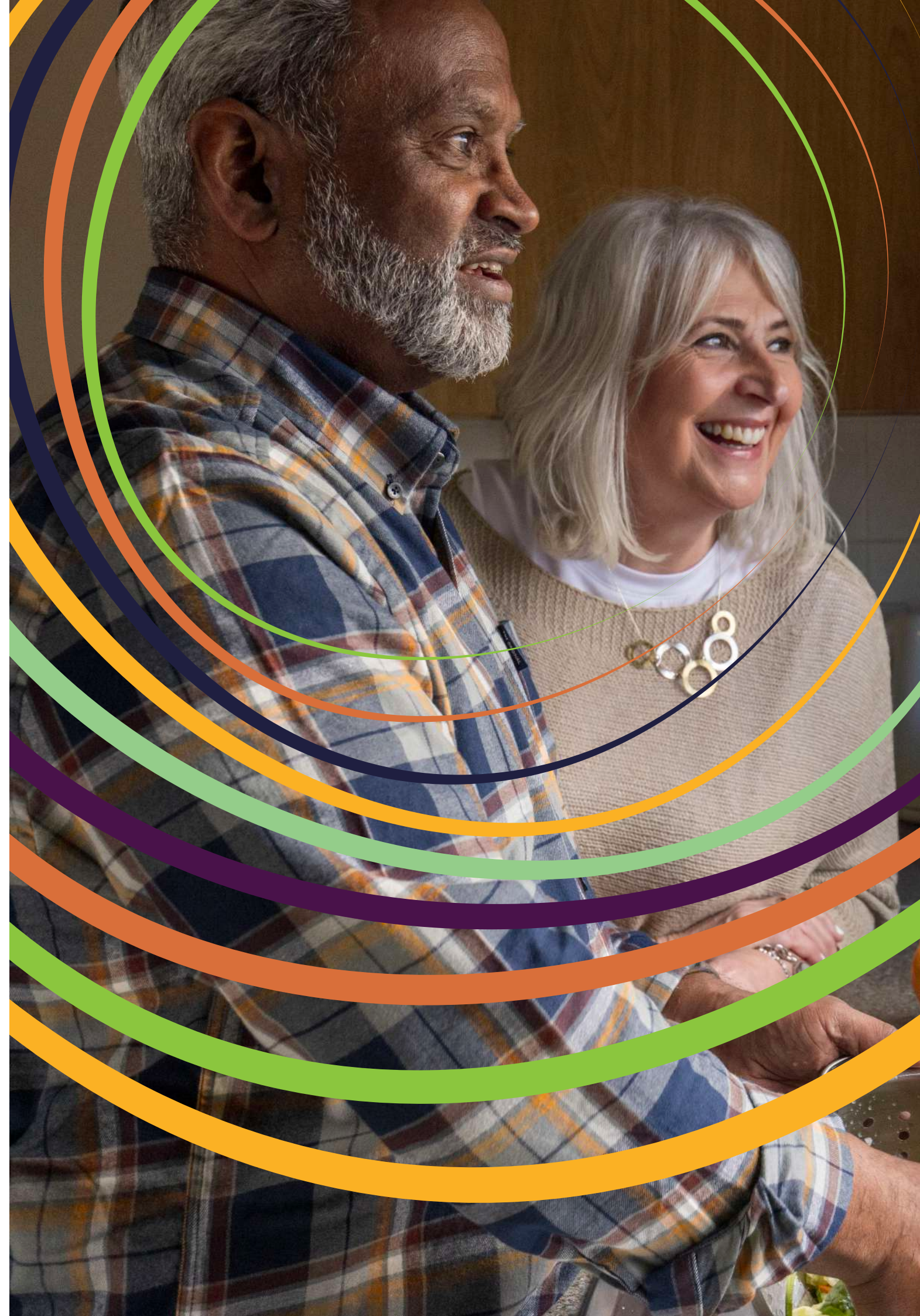
The Ombudsman identified delays in completing repairs and in recognising when additional support was required.

- We have invested significantly in our repairs service and continue to focus on reducing delays and improving performance through our longer-term repairs improvement programme.
- Following a review of the Ombudsman's Repairing Trust Spotlight Report, findings have informed improvements to repairs coordination, communication and case management.
- We have introduced strengthened policies and procedures for temporary accommodation and supporting diverse needs, creating a more robust and inclusive approach that helps ensure everyone receives the support they need.

Communication and record keeping

Some cases highlighted communication and record-keeping gaps, including missing updates, incomplete contact records and limited evidence of follow-up. This had already been identified through our own complaint analysis and was a key tenant priority.

- Salesforce has improved our ability to record customer interactions, decisions and key stages of the customer journey.
- New customer letters help keep tenants informed throughout the housing allocation processes.
- A key requirement of our updated telephony system will be to enhance record-keeping through the creation of clear end-to-end records of customer interactions and agreed actions.
- We have recently launched a comprehensive end-to-end review of the repairs communication customer journey, led by tenants. They have undertaken extensive reviews and interviewed colleagues across the organisation and will present their recommendations in 2026/27. These insights will help us further shape and improve our services and the customer experience.



Complaint handling

Findings included insufficiently detailed complaint responses, particularly at Stage 2, and delays in progressing complaints.

- A full review of complaint handling was completed early last year to ensure compliance with the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code and changes were implemented as a result.
- We updated our complaints experience survey to better identify improvement opportunities. Feedback highlighted the need to strengthen understanding of the complaint journey, leading to Housing Ombudsman communication training that has improved response quality and customer feedback.

Positive outcomes

In four of the six cases, the Ombudsman found either elements of no maladministration or that we had provided reasonable redress, particularly in relation to compensation, temporary accommodation decisions and aspects of housing service delivery.

Last Year's Focus

Last year, we committed to four specific tenant focused priorities. Over the past 12 months, we have strengthened our services, continue to improve customer experience, and embed learning from complaints and Ombudsman guidance.

Top Four Tenant Priorities

1

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

This year, we reviewed the Housing Ombudsman's Learning from Severe Maladministration report to inform service improvements and prioritised the move of the aids and adaptations process into Salesforce. This will provide better visibility of the customer experience, improve data quality, and reduce reliance on manual reporting.

To improve the speed and accessibility of services, we trained colleagues as Trusted Assessors, enabling them to complete assessments for minor adaptations, such as handrails, without tenants needing to wait for Occupational Therapist referrals. This will help reduce waiting times for customers while easing pressure on NHS and Local Authority services. We also updated our aids and adaptations policy and customer information, increasing funding for minor adaptations to better reflect rising costs and meet customers' needs. These improvements are the first step in enhancing the adaptations journey, helping ensure tenants receive timely, safe and coordinated support.

2

Drive a reduction in repairs complaints through the enhancement of design and implementation of our repairs module within Salesforce.

We have improved repairs visibility and communication by fully integrating responsive repair trades into Salesforce, introducing customer self-service through our portal, providing automated updates and appointment reminders, and enabling engineers to book follow-on visits while on site.

We also co-designed our damp and mould process with tenants, who highlighted the need for clearer reporting routes, better communication, greater understanding of the process and reassurance around safety and timescales. In response, we developed a new policy and management plan with tenants, enhanced customer communications, trained colleagues on the revised process, delivered accessible engagement sessions, and continuously refined the approach based on feedback. This work received national recognition, with Tpas featuring our approach to tenant involvement in shaping our response to Awaab's Law.

In addition, we have strengthened our approach to damp and mould case management through improved frontline triaging and redesigned team structures. This has resulted in improved advice and guidance for customers on how to manage condensation and minor mould growth and ensuring resources for inspection and remedial works are directed appropriately and responded to more effectively based on severity and household vulnerability.

3

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

Over the past year, we have strengthened record keeping and data capture in response to learning from complaints. A key part of this has been expanding Salesforce across more service areas, creating a consistent approach to recording customer contact, case activity and decision-making. This has improved visibility across teams, reduced duplication and ensured information is captured and shared more effectively.

We have introduced dedicated workflows for repairs colleagues, ensuring key information such as access needs, follow-on work and tenant updates is recorded accurately and in real time. Prompts and information flags also help operatives prepare for appointments, improving service delivery.

We have also ensured robust record-keeping is a key requirement within our updated telephony system, including accurate note taking, consistent data capture and clear end-to-end contact records. This ensures customer interactions are recorded effectively, supporting better complaint handling, stronger service delivery and improved accountability.

4

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

This year we strengthened how we identify and support tenants with diverse needs, helping ensure our services are accessible, inclusive and responsive. We are improving the way customer information is captured and maintained, enabling us to tailor services more effectively and remove barriers for tenants. This work aligns with the development of our Priority Services Register for Heat Network customers.

We engaged directly with tenants, including those with additional needs, to better understand what information they are comfortable sharing, how vulnerability data should be used, and how it can inform service delivery. Their feedback has helped shape our systems and approach. We are updating our systems, so service adjustments are clearly recorded on customer accounts, enabling colleagues to respond consistently and reducing the need for tenants to repeat their circumstances.

Alongside these improvements, almost 350 customer-facing colleagues across housing and maintenance completed Dementia Friends training, increasing awareness, improving communication and helping us provide more personalised support to tenants and their families.

Further Learning and Improvements

Alongside our four core priorities, we committed to strengthening how we learn from compliments and complaints and improving estate services through greater accountability and visibility.



Strengthening How We Learn from Compliments and Complaints

We have strengthened how we capture, analyse and act on tenant feedback. Quarterly reflective reviews of all Stage 2 complaints and monthly trend analysis help identify emerging issues and improvement opportunities, enabling more timely action. Our focus is increasingly moving from resolving individual complaints to identifying organisational learning.

Compliments continue to play an important role in shaping our learning too. Positive feedback helps us understand what works well, highlight strong practice and reinforce behaviours and approaches that tenants value. This balanced approach ensures we learn from both what goes wrong and what goes right.

We continue to identify learning opportunities through complaint handling and regularly publish updates on service improvements and learning outcomes on our Complaints Updates webpages.



Improving Estate Services Through Accountability and Visibility

Our Estate Services team has made significant improvements focused on visibility, accountability and service consistency. Dedicated caretakers now manage defined patches, helping build stronger tenant relationships and greater ownership of estate standards, while new workwear has improved visibility and accessibility.

We have modernised service delivery by introducing handheld devices for caretaking and grounds maintenance activities, improving real-time visibility, reducing manual processes and supporting more effective workload management. We have also strengthened procurement and contract management arrangements to ensure external partners meet our standards and regulatory requirements.

A new grounds maintenance service standard has been introduced to set clearer expectations for tenants and colleagues, alongside revised specialist roles to improve coordination and deployment of resources. We have also continued to work closely with local authorities to improve the management of shared spaces.

These changes have contributed to a 4% increase in satisfaction with communal area maintenance, demonstrating the positive impact of clearer standards, greater visibility and more structured service delivery.



Looking Ahead

Our priorities for 2026/27 are shaped by tenant feedback, complaint learning, and our commitment to continuous improvement. Repairs and communication remain the issues that matter most to tenants and will continue to be key priorities. By listening, learning, and acting on feedback, we will deliver services that are responsive, reliable, and trusted.



Improve the Repairs Experience

Repairs continue to generate the highest number of complaints, particularly around delays, communication and quality. In 2026/27, we will continue to invest in our repairs service, improve oversight of repair completion, and use customer feedback and performance data to drive improvements. Our focus will be on reducing delays, improving quality, and delivering a more consistent customer experience.



Strengthen Communication and Customer Updates

Tenant feedback continues to highlight the importance of timely and clear communication. We will further improve updates throughout key customer journeys, including repairs, damp and mould, and planned investment works. A tenant-led review of the repairs communication journey is underway, with recommendations due in 2026/27. These insights will help us improve services and ensure tenants are better informed about what is happening, when it will happen, and why.



Embed Learning from Complaints Across the Organisation

Complaints provide valuable insight into where we can improve. We will continue to strengthen our use of complaint trends, customer feedback and Ombudsman learning to drive service improvements and ensure lessons learned are shared across the organisation.



Focus on Outcomes for Tenants

We will use complaints, satisfaction measures, compliments and tenant feedback to understand the impact of service changes and ensure that improvements deliver better outcomes in the areas that matter most to tenants. By continuing to involve tenants in reviewing our services and performance, we will use their insights and lived experiences to help shape future improvements and drive continuous service improvement. To learn more about the work we have been doing with tenants, visit: bernicia.com/working-with-tenants.

How to contact us

Online: www.bernicia.com

Email: contact@bernicia.com

Phone: 0344 800 3800

Letter: Bernicia Group, Oakwood Way, Ashwood Business Park, Ashington NE63 0XF



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