

ANNUAL COMPLAINT HANDLING REPORT 2024-25

1.0 Introduction

1.1 This is the second stand-alone annual complaint handling report by CHS. It is linked to our annual self-assessment against the Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code.

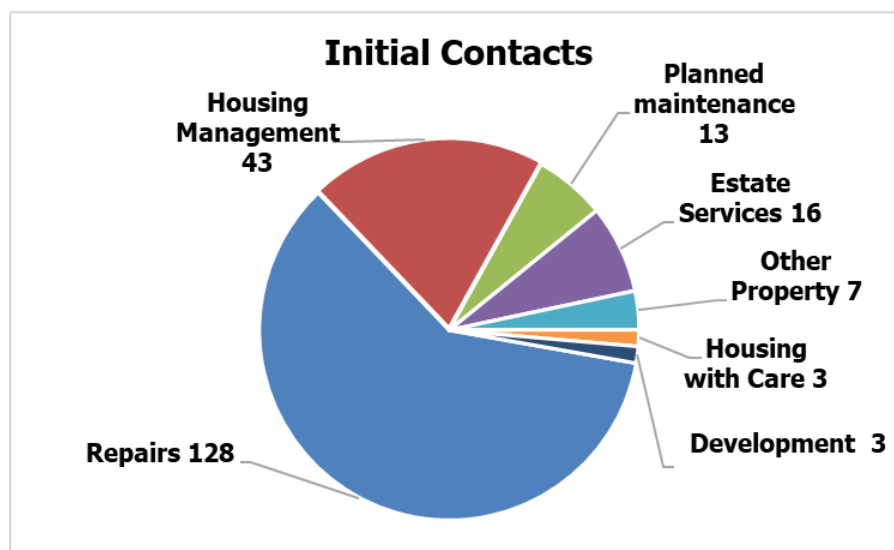
1.2 We aim to:

- Summarise the number and types of complaints we handle including the issues raised by customers which we have been able to resolve at the first point of contact;
- Note any complaints we have declined to consider and the reasons;
- Summarise the learning and service improvements resulting from complaints;
- Set out any findings from the Housing Ombudsman during the year;
- Note the data to be submitted with our annual Tenant Satisfaction Measures data to the Regulator on complaints (numbers of complaints per 1000 homes, responses made within target timescales, satisfaction with our approach to complaint handling.)

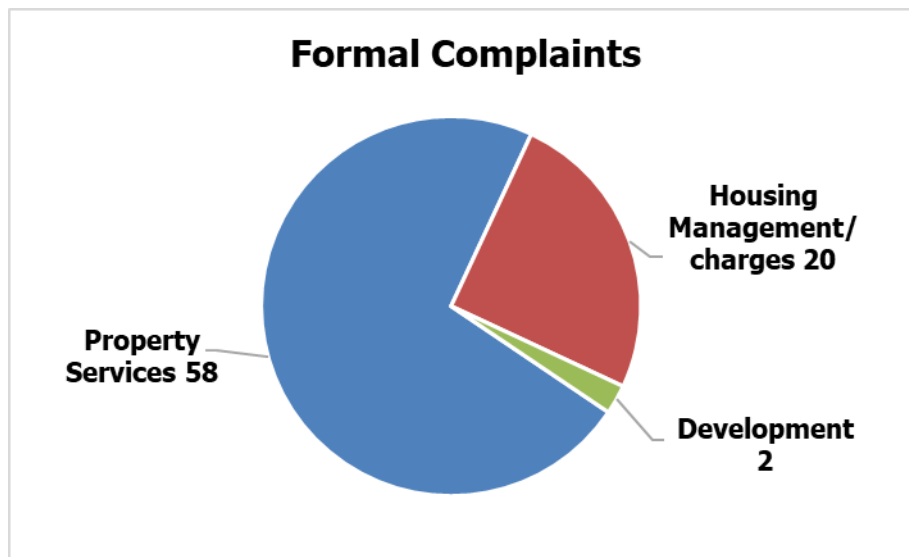
1.3 We work closely with the Customer Complaints Panel to review our performance in complaint handling, to learn from completed complaints and to review how well we communicate with all customers to encourage them to make complaints.

2.0 Initial Contact (resolved at first point of contact) – 192

2.1 We try to resolve an issue when a customer first raises it with us, and we let them know that if they are still dissatisfied or wish to make to a formal complaint in any case, we will give a formal response. We logged 192 such instances during the year, an increase from 164 in the previous year. 123 customers contacted us about one issue, and 69 contacts were received from 31 customers about two or more different issues.



3.0 Total number of Formal Complaints – 80



3.1 Key points to note are:

- The number of formal complaints has more than doubled from 36 during 2023 – 2024.
- Of the 80 complaints, 70 were from tenants and 10 from shared owners.
- 5 customers made more than one complaint (between 2 and 3 complaints each)
- 21 formal complaints were escalated to the second stage, all of them property-related; an increase from 5 in the previous year.
- We did not refuse to accept any complaints.

3.2 We believe the overall increase in formal complaints is due at least in part to the awareness raising during 2023-24 with our customer facing teams of the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code to ensure that they offer to open a formal complaint; and the increased awareness among our customers about making complaints, through our own promotion (newsletters, the website) and the wider media. A recent training course delivered by a former Ombudsman case handler confirmed that for the sector as a whole complaint numbers have roughly doubled each year since the Ombudsman Code was introduced.

4.0 Tenant Satisfaction Measures

4.1 Our annual submission to the Regulator of Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs) for our rented homes includes:

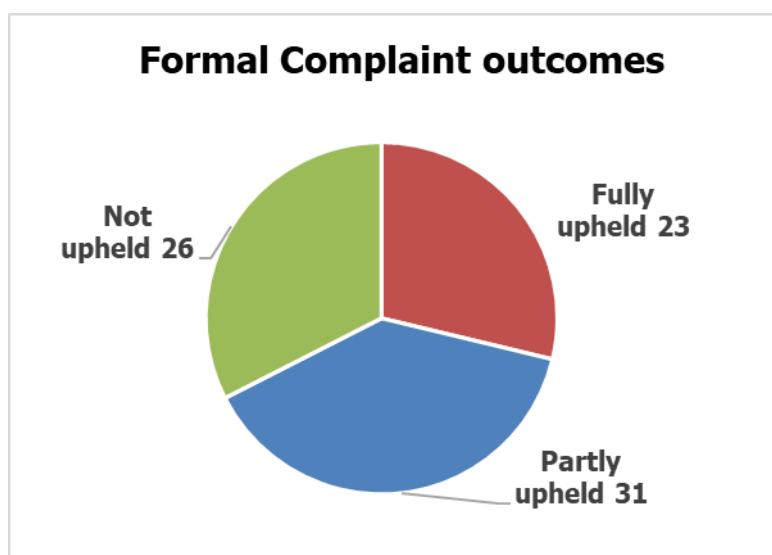
- The number of stage one complaints received per 1000 homes – 27.5
- The number of stage two complaints received per 1000 homes – 7.1
- The proportion of stage one complaints responded to within the Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code timescales – 74.3%*

- The proportion of stage two complaints responded to within the Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code timescales – 100%

*This figure represents 17 stage one complaints from tenants where the complaints was extended more than once due to information being required from a contractor. While we explained the reason for the extension to the customers within the Code's guidelines, a complaint is now considered by the Regulator to be outside the timescales if extended more than once. Two other stage one complaints (one tenant, one shared owner) received a response one day late.

A further 7 stage two complaints required one extension of the timescale for the same reason (information from a contractor) and each extension complied with the Housing Ombudsman Code in full.

5.0 Complaint outcomes



In some cases, compensation was paid under CHS's Compensation Policy. During the year a total amount of £8065 was paid in compensation for repair issues; and £300 for housing management or development issues.

Section 7.0 below sets out the learning from complaints and changes to prevent similar issues happening again.

6.0 Satisfaction with complaint handling

- 6.1 Each time we complete a formal complaint we request feedback in an automated phone survey, asking the complainant a simple question – were they satisfied or dissatisfied with the way their complaint was handled. In 2024-25 31% (10 out of 32) who replied were satisfied.
- 6.2 In our wider annual satisfaction survey which informs our Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs) we ask all tenants whether they have made a complaint in the last 12 months and if so, how satisfied they were with complaint handling. Between April 2024 & March 2025 **47.2%** of tenants who said they had made a complaint were satisfied with how it was

handled – an increase from 43.8% in 2023-24). In November 2024 the Regulator for Social Housing published the 2023-24 results for every social housing provider and also the average and highest rates of satisfaction. CHS's satisfaction with complaint handling in the last two years has been higher than the top 25% of results for the social housing sector which was 41.1%. It is of interest to note that of the 57 customers who expressed dissatisfaction with complaint handling in the TSM survey, we had logged a formal complaint or initial contact in only 31.5% of cases. This may indicate that they had approached a contractor directly about the issue.

- 6.3 Of those customers who were dissatisfied in the TSM survey, 29 gave the reason that the issue had not been resolved and 12 said they felt CHS did not take their complaint seriously enough. This shows that while general satisfaction with complaint handling has improved for the last two years and is high for the housing sector, there is still more to do to increase satisfaction and we will continue to work with customer facing teams and contractors to improve awareness of our expectation in complaint handling.

7.0 Learning from complaints

- 7.1 Towards the end of 2024-25 the CHS Customer Complaints Panel agreed a revised Terms of Reference and has re-launched with a number of new members. The Panel is focussing on the learning from completed complaints and the quality / timeliness of CHS responses, with actual complaints reviewed at each meeting.

- 7.2 Each time we complete a complaint we note the learning from it and any steps we need to take to improve services for customers. There are summarised here:

- When a customer expresses dissatisfaction, we should always log as an initial contact or a stage 1 complaint.
- When repair job escalates as this one did, Foster and CHS must be much more agile at identifying the need for "complicated job" oversight. Foster communications should have been better regarding follow on works.
- During kitchen refurbishment work the design plans did not match the work completed and led to a delay in completion.
- We need to record details of previous Aids & Adaptations, especially local authority funded ones.
- To understand customers vulnerabilities and medical needs more when reviewing requests for changes to elements (in this case there was a Thermostatic Radiator Valve which impacted the tenant's health).
- To ensure tenants are aware of multiple contractors' responsibilities; that they are supplied with relevant paperwork and reassurance prior to work commencing (in this case it was asbestos remedial work).
- When handling a request from a tenant for consent to make alterations to their home we should have explained clearly and more quickly the reason for not agreeing to their request.
- When handling an issue with a noisy extractor fan different contractors were involved which led to delay. Getting the right people on site to agree a plan at an earlier stage would have avoided delay.
- During a heating installation improved quality control measures were required to avoid the resident being left with no heating (now implemented by Aaron Services).

- During refurbishment work (in this case a wet room) the project should have been allocated an individual staff member to oversee progress. If work isn't being completed in a timely way, it should be escalated.
- Works in an empty home were incomplete when the tenant was asked to sign up for their tenancy and there were damp / mould concerns. We should have confirmed the house was ready to re-let or communicated clearly with the new tenant if some work was to be completed after the move in.
- We need to be certain of the date a home will be ready to move into before we arrange a tenancy sign-up date – in this case it was delayed due to utility meter issues and the new tenant had to re-arrange moving in.
- Garden work should have been completed as part of the other work between tenancies and when it was not, the new tenant needed to chase for a response.
- In a newbuild home we should be clear what to expect with regard to non-urgent defects being repaired at end of Defects Liability Period; and where there are problems, we should update the resident (in this case a shared owner) about the steps being taken to resolve defects issues with the developer.
- We should escalate cases of damp / mould quickly and use external consultancy whenever it's appropriate.
- We needed to clarify with Housing Officers that it is not appropriate for them to be expected to attend properties after a relationship breakdown to assist in removal of belongings.
- We were pursuing a rent debt with a former tenant, and we should have advised them before we referred the debt to a debt collection agency. This has been changed in the procedure.
- Requests made by tenants to the customer service team for lock changes (except in cases of domestic abuse) should be discussed first with the housing team. Some such requests can be declined straightaway as not eligible; in this case there was a delay in advising the tenant that they should carry out the lock change.
- Housing Officers should ensure they keep a tenant reporting anti-social behaviour updated, more often than the usual monthly timeframe if necessary.
- Improved communication for new shared owners about how service charges work would help understanding and reduce queries which cause frustration.
- Following a miscalculation of the service charge (measures are now in place to prevent this reoccurring), the letter sent to leaseholders to explain the correction could have offered more detail about the issue and the management company role.
- Plans should be checked carefully when calculating service charges (in this case car parking spaces were incorrectly charged).
- When changing service charges for shared owners as a result of the year-end reconciliation we should have a better system for checking the direct debit is correctly calculated (now in place)

8.0 Themes identified in handling complaints

Some themes were present in several complaints during the year, including:

- The value of taking into account customers' needs especially where we need to make adjustments arose several times. We will agree a new policy on reasonable adjustments in service delivery by December 2025 (after consultation with customers), and our existing project to collect more information from customers about their relevant personal

circumstances is improving the quality of this data and will develop further through a large scale survey (autumn 2025).

- Follow-on works, and delays in repair times remain the most common causes of dissatisfaction for our residents. Our Property team discusses overdue orders during contractor meetings; under the new contract, key performance indicators (KPIs) for 'repairs completed on time' are now linked to performance-related profit.
- Stage 1 complaints have been extended more frequently due to waiting for more information from our contractors to support investigations. The Property team is closely monitoring the number of days complaints stay open to ensure information is shared promptly.
- Issues around service charges arose several times, whether through miscalculation or lack of clear information for customers. The shared ownership satisfaction working group has identified some changes in process and timing. Communication arose a number of times for example about newbuild defects, tenant alterations and work carried out in empty homes. We've provided additional training and guidance on Shared Ownership Alterations and Licence to Alter to ensure we respond appropriately to alteration requests. The Development team now has a more tightly managed process for communicating defects arrangements; and surveyors are currently post-inspecting every empty home before it is relet.

9.0 Actions taken to improve complaint handling during 2024-25

- We updated the CHS website with clearer guidance on how to make a complaint and the different stages of a complaint.
- We have continued to provide guidance to customer facing teams to ensure they know the requirements of the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code and the CHS Complaints policy.
- We have continued to train key staff in logging complaints accurately to help us to keep to timescales including responses times and to record the learning more fully from complaints.
- The Property Services team holds a weekly internal meeting to review and discuss current and potential complaints.
- A weekly meeting with our repairs and maintenance contractors focuses on open complaints and any emerging issues.
- Complaint handling training has been delivered to the Property Services team to better handle complaints.
- A leak tracker has been developed to help monitor and prevent recurring leak issues which would help reduce the number of complaints related to leaks.
- The Compliance Manager uses reporting software to track repairs at property level; any property with more than five orders raised is followed up to understand and address the root cause.
- Reports of no heating and hot water are sent to the repairs team to investigate follow on work and timescales.
- Our Performance and Quality team have taken on more responsibility for complaints investigations and communicating regularly with customers.
- Our Performance and Quality team attend monthly contractor meetings to present complaints trend data and areas for improvement.
- Names and faces of our contractors' complaints team has been shared through our tenant newsletter (including how to escalate contractor complaints with CHS).
- Long-term repairs are logged as complicated jobs on our housing management system and allocated to a surveyor to monitor progress.

- Repairs staff attended Housing Ombudsman complaints training.

10.0 Housing Ombudsman involvement

- 10.1 The Housing Ombudsman has not concluded any investigations into CHS complaints during 2024-25. During the year we received 2 requests to confirm we were handling complaints as the tenants had contacted the Ombudsman. In both cases we provided the complaint responses that had already been issued and there was no follow up by the Ombudsman.
- 10.2 We seek to learn from the Housing Ombudsman through its Spotlight Reports which highlight themes including repairs & maintenance, knowledge and information, damp & mould, noise complaints, leasehold issues. In July 2025 we shared the key points of the Spotlight Report on Repairs & Maintenance with the Tenant Committee.