

Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report 2023-24

Housing & Safer Communities

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Overview

This financial year has been a challenging one for complaints with volumes increasing over the year. We have been working hard to reduce the problems which lead to residents complaining and have made good progress in this, especially on repairs, but this has been countered by an increased awareness from our tenants of their routes to redress. We welcome this but it has inevitably led to an increased demand for staff time, which we have responded to by increasing the size of our central logging team and reviewing our complaints handling processes. As a result, turnaround times have improved even as volumes increase. This work will continue into the next financial year.

Increased demands on social landlords is an ongoing challenge while the financial resource to deliver upon these continues to reduce, especially as a local authority. Resourcing is something that we will continue to review and act upon from a strategic perspective.

We have also seen a significant uptick in Ombudsman determinations this year. Many of these relate to cases from during or before the pandemic which are being dealt with now as the Ombudsman increases its staff team in order to clear its backlog. Many of the learning points identified through these cases have already been addressed through our complaints and repairs improvement workstreams, but of course we continue to seek, and work with the Ombudsman on, new areas of learning.

During this year we have been planning for the first year of the Social Housing Regulator’s inspection scheme, and to the new joint complaints handling code from the Housing and Local Government Ombudsmen. We welcome these opportunities to assess the service which we are providing to our tenants.

Report Purpose

This report provides a comprehensive overview of the performance related to complaints and Ombudsman determinations handled in Housing and Safer Communities that are within the remit of the Housing Ombudsman (“landlord complaints”). This is defined as:

- Leasehold services
- Moving to a property
- Rent and service charges
- Occupancy rights
- Property condition (including repairs)
- Tenant behaviour
- Estate management (including caretaking)

This report shows additional detail of how complaints and Ombudsman determinations are split across the two divisions within the directorate: Repairs and Investment (R&I) and Housing Needs and Tenancy (HN&T).

NOTE

In line with the requirements of the Housing Ombudsman, this data is based on dates complaints were received.

All data used to produce this report was taken from our complaints management system as at 10 April 2024. Only performance information for complaints with due dates after this point have been updated.

Top Level Summary

Type	2023/24
Stage 1 Complaints	1,283
Stage 2 Complaints	203
Housing Ombudsman Determinations	32

- A total of **1,486** complaints were received across 2023/24. **1,283** Stage 1 complaints and **203** Stage 2 complaints.
- The Repairs & Investment division received a higher proportion of complaints both at Stage 1 and Stage 2 in comparison to the Housing Needs & Tenancy division.
- During 2023/24 there were **3** complaints excluded. There were **60** complaints that weren't progressed for other reasons, see Figure 5 for details.
- In the first six months of the year, the proportion of complaints responded to within target times were under 40% for Stage 1 complaints. Compliance with target times varied significant from month to month in Stage 2, because the volume of these is lower. Since December 2023 the compliance has increased.

- Improvements in compliance with target timescales are likely due to increasing our central complaints logging team, introduction of a new complaints procedure and a project to reconcile complaints ahead of our new complaints system coming in.
- Across both Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaints, holding responses¹ made a small but positive impact on compliance with target times. In some cases the compliance was the same, indicating we responded without the need to issue holding responses.
- There was a **73%** service failure rate against Stage 1 complaints closed and a **72%** service failure rate against Stage 2 complaints closed.
- A full list of **20** key lessons learnt from complaints can be found on pages 11 to 15. Some of the actions we have taken in response to these lessons include:
 - Increasing the size of our central complaints team and the complaints team in Repairs & Investment to respond to complaints within timescales.
 - Introduced a complaints procedure to ensure clarity and consistency in complaints handling across landlord complaints.
 - Brought in a new complaints management system to better analyse complaints data, this will be built on in 2024/25 to include demographic data.
 - Working on improving our Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) Policy & Procedures and information booklet to improve residents' understanding and expectations of what is achievable.
 - Forming a damp, mould and condensation specialist group to reduce the backlog of appointments and improve our approach to cases.
 - Improving Repairs & Investment staff focus on record keeping ensuring greater understanding of why notes are important for both complaints handling and general use.
 - Introduce a new 'Caretaking staff manual' so all caretakers are working to the same service standards which are aligned to our Caretaking Service Charter. This aims to improve cleaning standards and consistency across all estates.
- In 2023/24, there were a total of **32** Housing Ombudsman determinations. This resulted in **68** findings, a sizable increase from 15 in 2022/23. While this shows an increase in findings, these may not be a representation of current service provision owing to the Housing Ombudsman's backlog of investigations.
- Maladministration has been identified in **77%** of all findings across the year, an increase on 60% in 2022/23.
- There has been **£24,250** compensation ordered relating to maladministration findings across the year, an increase from £1,325 in 2022/23.

¹ Where it isn't possible to respond within target timescales, often due to the complexity of the complaint raised, we are able to extend the timescales by informing the resident. This is known as a 'holding response'.

Complaints

A total of **1,486** complaints were received across 2023/24. **1,283** Stage 1 complaints and **203** Stage 2 complaints. The following chart shows complaints received monthly for the last financial year:

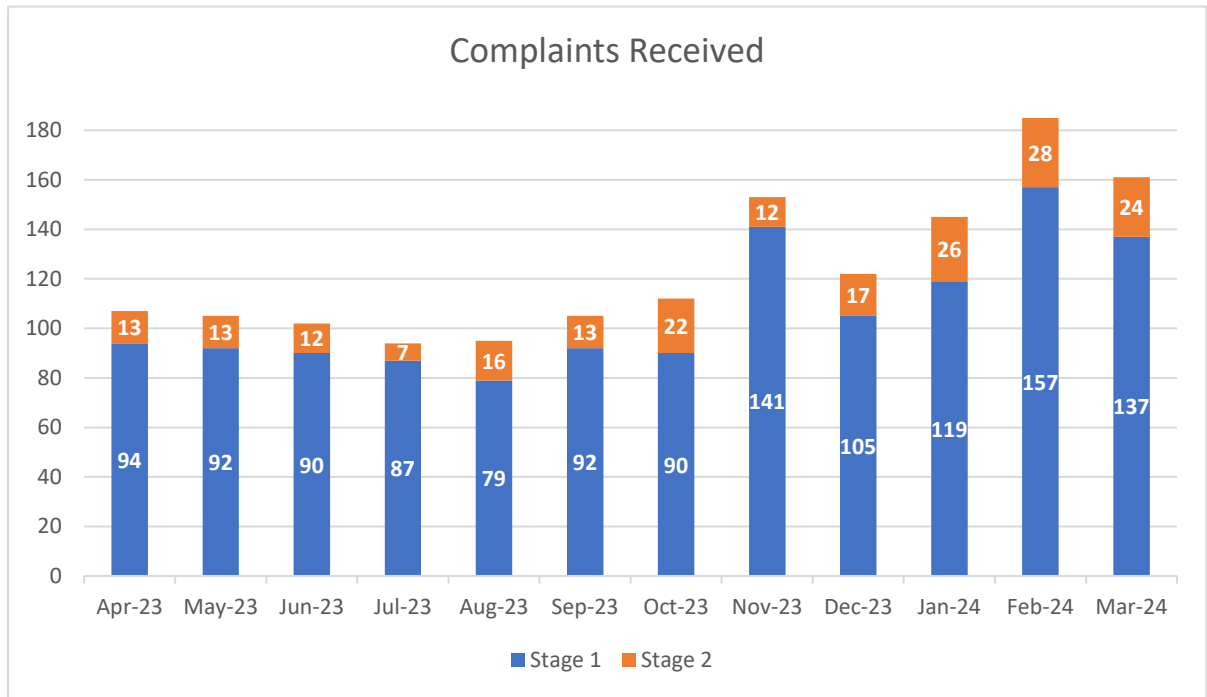


Figure 1 - Complaints received by month (Apr 23 to Mar 24)

The first six months of the year had an average of **101** complaints received per month, this has increased to an average of **146** complaints in the last six months. Reason for this may include the increased visibility of social housing in the media and ‘Make Things Right’ campaign² which launched in October 2023.

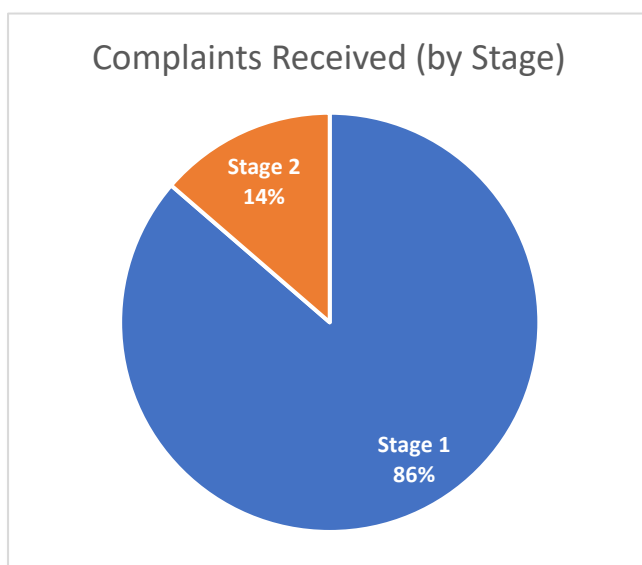


Figure 2 - Complaints received by stage (Apr 23 to Mar 24)

The majority complaints received are Stage 1 complaints (86%) with Stage 2 complaints (14%) representing a smaller proportion. This gives a positive indication that, within this period, complaints are resolved at Stage 1 and with around 15% escalating to Stage 2*.

Figure 4 shows further details on how this is split by the two divisions within the directorate.

*Some Stage 2 complaints received in April and May 2023 may have been escalated from Stage 1 complaints received in 2022/23.

² [Social housing tenants encouraged to 'Make Things Right' - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

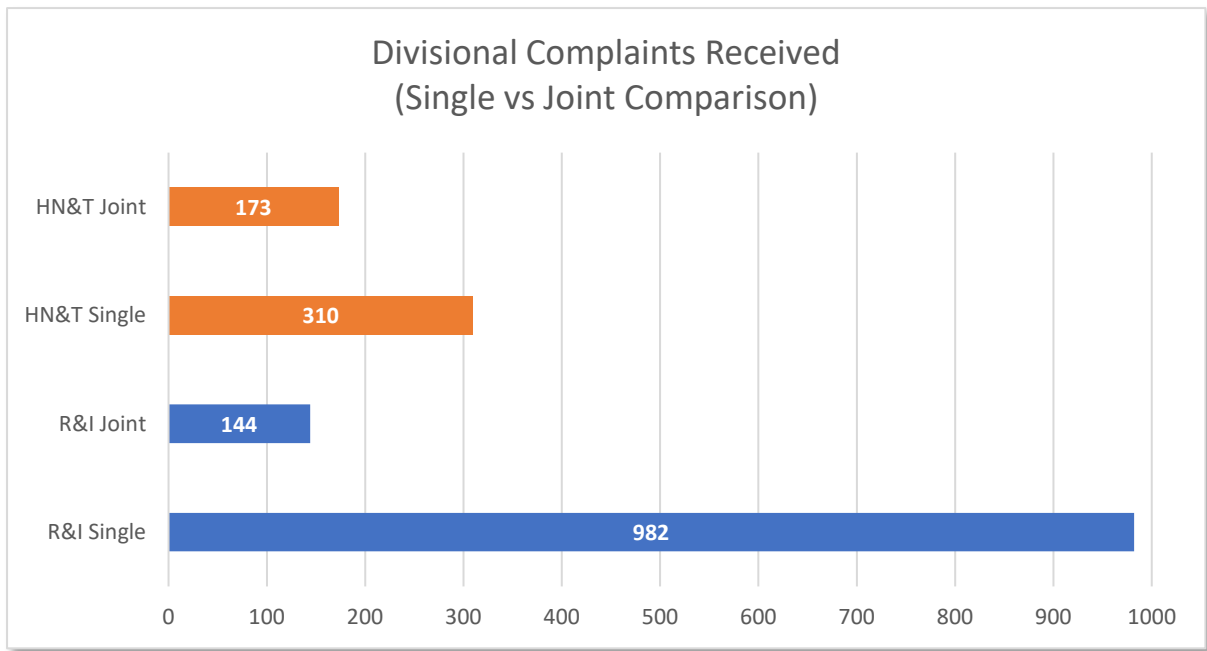


Figure 3 - Complaints received by single and joint per division (Apr 23 to Mar 24)

NOTE

Figures 3 & 4 shows the split of single and joint complaints across the two divisions. It is important to note that the total number of complaints is higher than the total in Figure 1. This is due to joint complaints which cover more than one division.

Of the complaints received by R&I, 87% were related solely to this division with the remaining 13% joint with other divisions and/or directorates. Of the complaints received by HN&T, 64% were related solely to this division with the remaining 36% joint with other divisions and/or directorates.

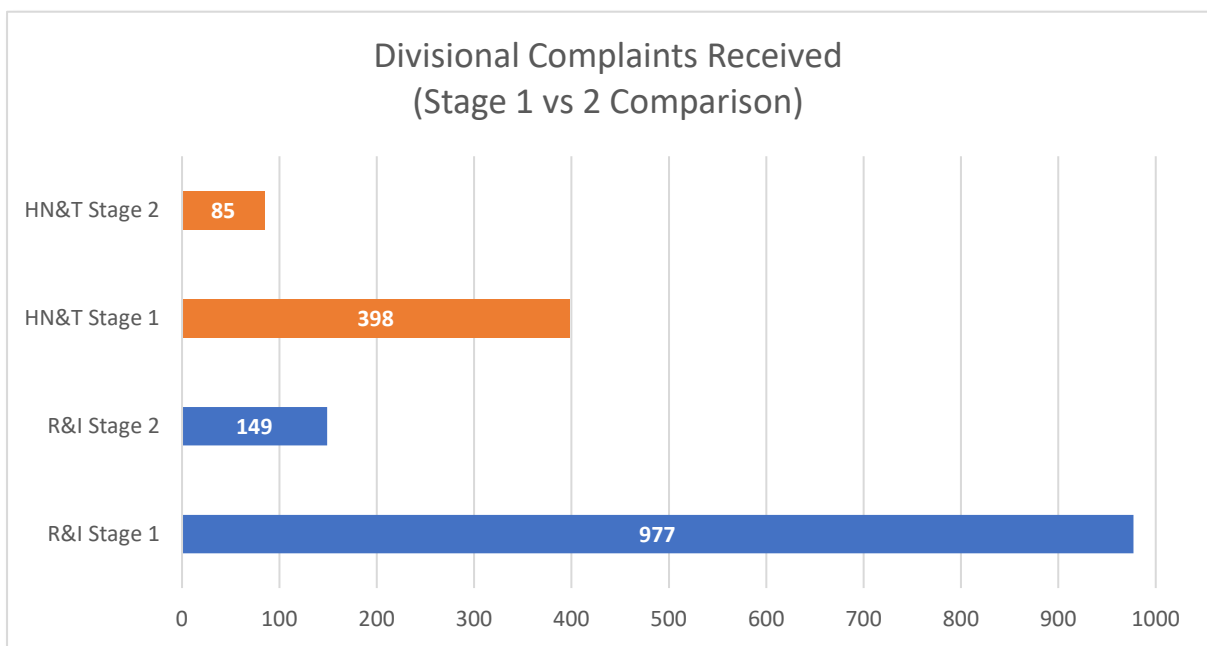


Figure 4 - Complaints received by Stage per division (Apr 23 to Mar 24)

R&I received a higher number of complaints both at Stage 1 and Stage 2 in comparison to HN&T.

The Housing Complaints Policy allows for complaints to be excluded in certain circumstances. During 2023/24 3 complaints were excluded as follows:

- 1 already exhausted the complaints process
- 1 relating to issues that occurred over 6 months ago
- 1 declined-s47/police/concurrent investigation

There were also several complaints not progressed owing to other reasons as seen in Figure 5 below.

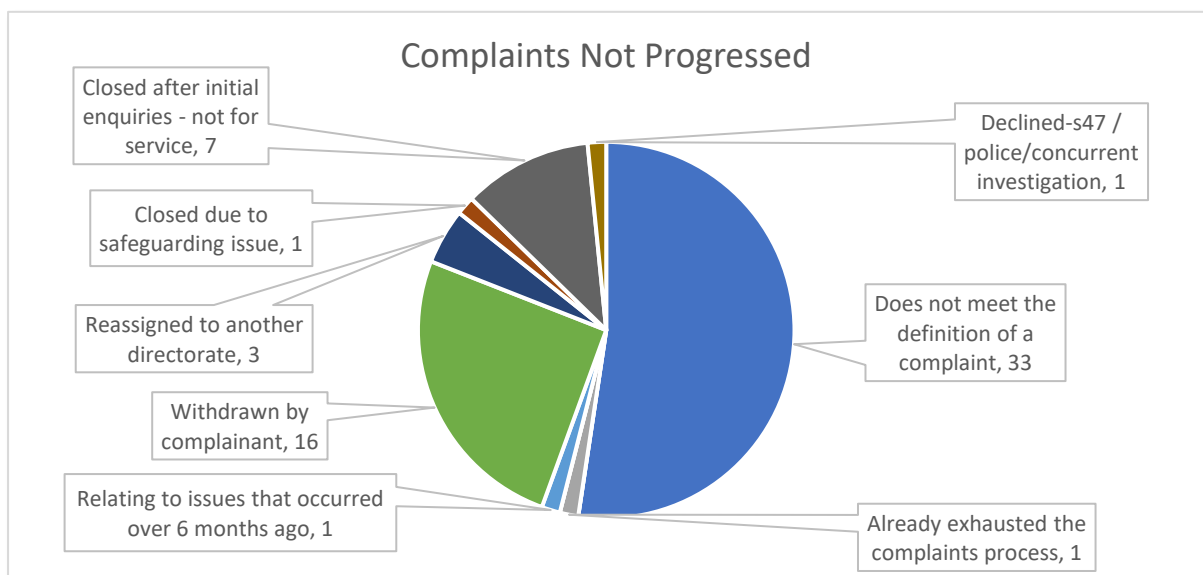


Figure 5 - Complaints not progressed by reason (Apr 23 to Mar 24)

NOTE

The above figures are not included in Figures 8 & 9 below however they are counted as part of the complaints received numbers in Figure 1.

The main reason for complaints not progressing in 2023/24 was not meeting the definition of a complaint (52%) and therefore many were dealt with as service requests. A sizable number of complaints were subsequently withdrawn by the complainant (25%).

Tenant Satisfaction Measures

The Regulator of Social Housing requires all registered providers of social housing to collect and report annually on their performance using a core set of defined measures. These measures are called the Tenant Satisfaction Measures³.

For transparency the CH02 Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs) are included within Figure 6 & 7 as well as being reported to the regulator alongside the other TSMs. The two measures:

³ [Transparency, Influence and Accountability \(including Tenant Satisfaction Measures\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/transparency)

- CH02a: Proportion of stage one complaints responded to within the Housing Ombudsman’s Complaint Handling Code timescales (2023/24)
- CH02b: Proportion of stage two complaints responded to within the Housing Ombudsman’s Complaint Handling Code timescales (2023/24)

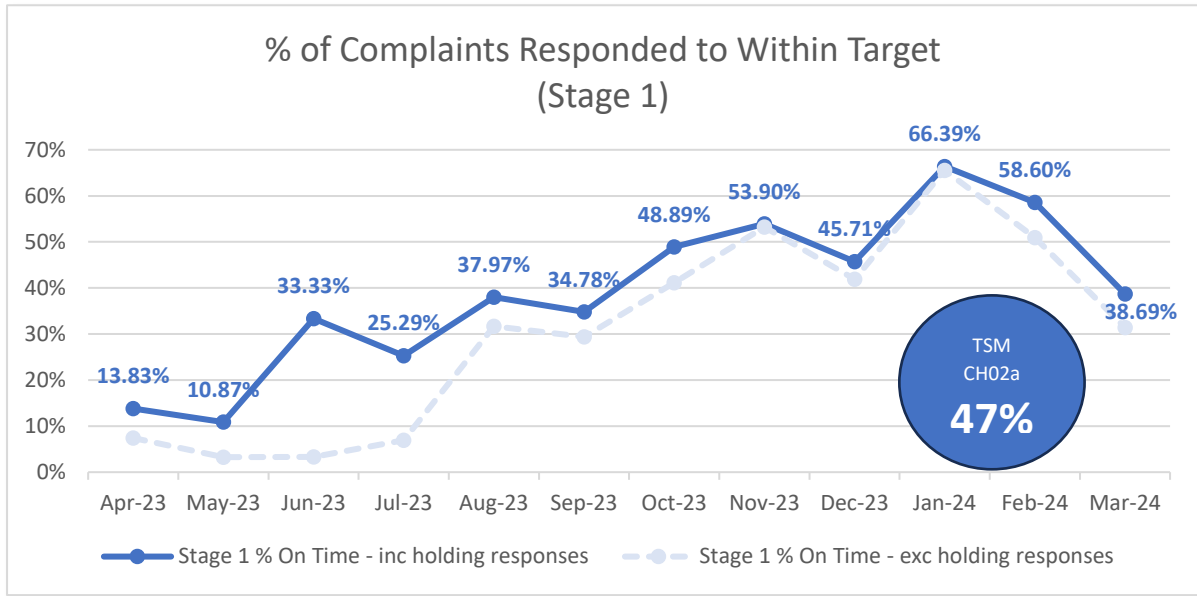


Figure 6 - Stage 1 Complaints responded to on time by month (Apr 23 to Mar 24)

The definition of "on time" in this context pertains to responses sent within the 10 working days from receipt for Stage I unless a holding response has been issued. In the first six months of the year, the responding within times was under 40% but started to improve in October reaching a high of 66% in January. The reasons for this increase are explained in the learning section of this report, this will continue to be monitored especially given the decrease in March 2024.

In the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code (April 2022), 5 working days are allowed to acknowledge and log complaints, with a further 10/20 working days to respond. This isn't accounted for in Figure 6 & 7 as our previous complaints management system did not that capacity and our policy based on date of receipt. This will be accounted for from 2024/25 onwards.

Figure 6 also shows the impact of what the performance would be if holding responses were included. While this shows a large difference in June and July 2023, the impact is less in the remainder of the year and in November 2023 and January 2024 it makes no difference.

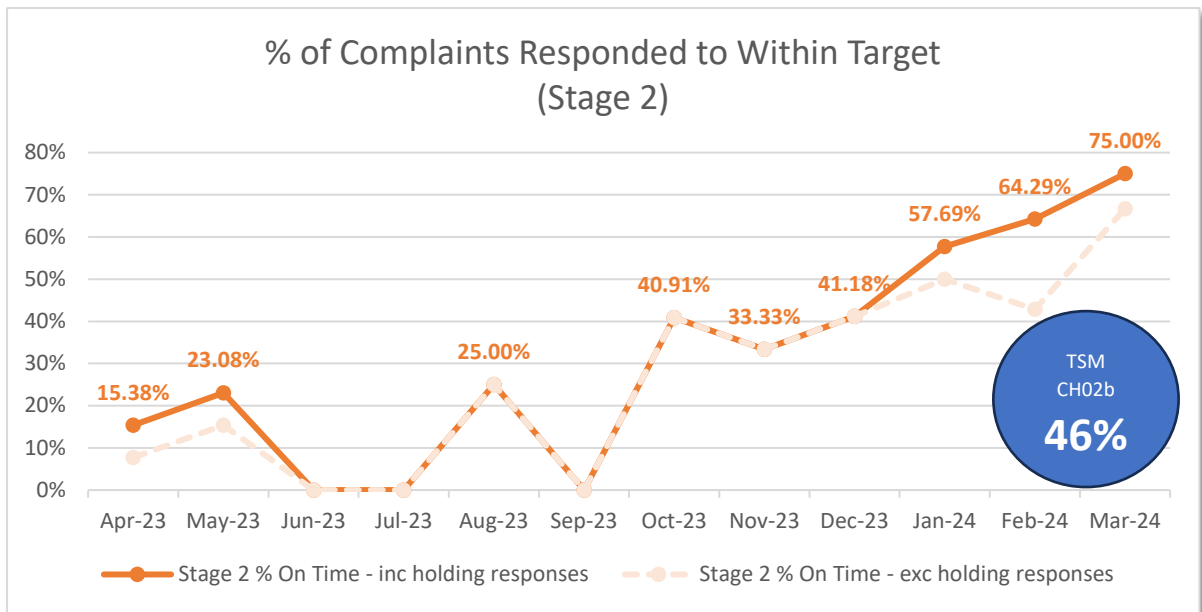


Figure 7 - Stage 2 Complaints responded to on time by month (Apr 23 to Mar 24)

The definition of "on time" in this context pertains to responses sent within the 20 working days from receipt for Stage 2 unless a holding response has been issued. Responding on time varies a lot with Stage 2 complaints, this is due to the relatively small number of Stage 2 complaints and therefore each complaint significantly impacting on the monthly percentage.

In the first six months of the year, the responding within times was under 25% but started to improve in October 2023 as has continue to improve reaching a high of 75% in January. Reasons for this increase are explained in the learning section of this report.

Figure 7 also shows the impact of what the performance would be if holding responses were included. While this shows a large difference in February 2024, the impact is less in the remainder of the year and it makes no difference in 7 months of the year.

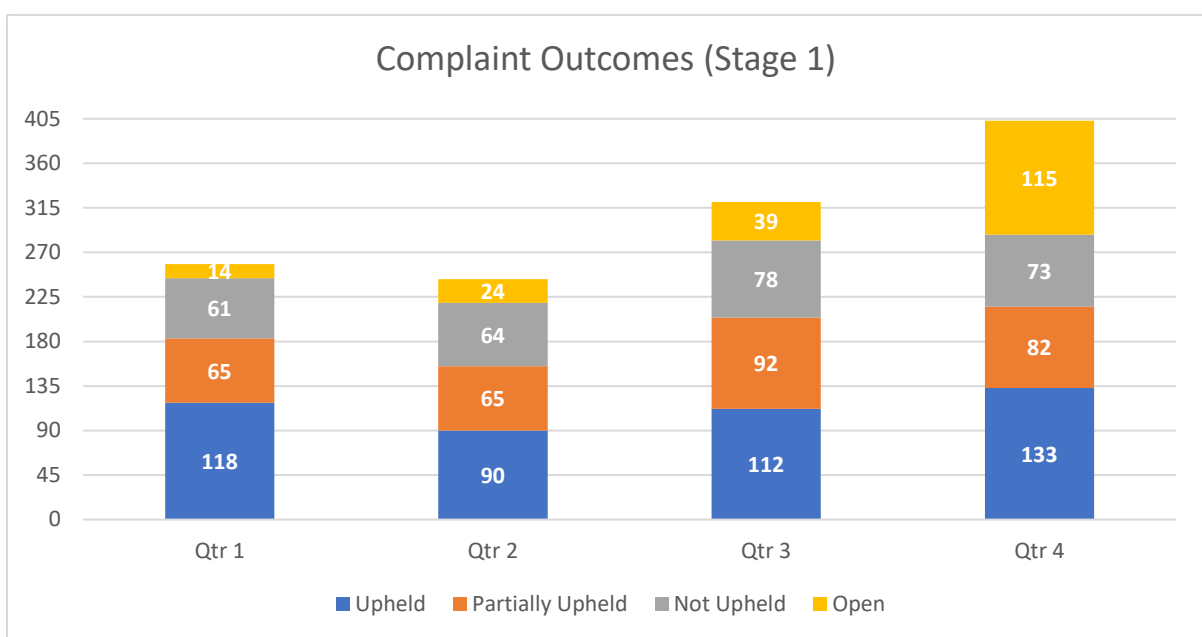


Figure 8 - Stage 1 complaint outcomes by month (Apr 23 to Mar 24)

In 2023/24, 1,033 outcomes were recorded against closed stage 1 complaints (including joint cases). 192 cases remain open at present.

Partially upheld complaints refer to complaints where several points of complaint were made and a least one of these was upheld. While these are included in calculating the service failure rate, these aren't equal in failure to upheld complaints. For example, 5 points could have been raised in a complaint and only 1 upheld, with the others not upheld.

There have been 757 stage 1 complaints either upheld or partially upheld across the year. This represents an 73% service failure rate against those complaints closed. The average monthly figure for upheld or partially upheld complaints this financial year is 63.

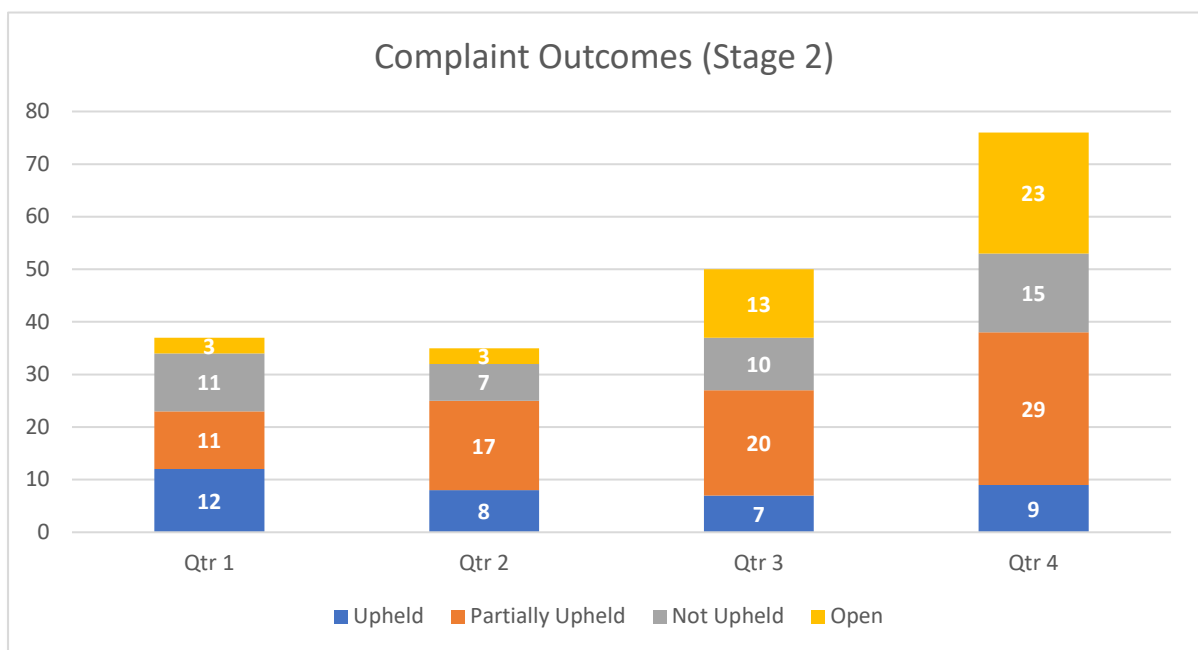


Figure 9 - Stage 2 complaint outcomes by month (Apr 23 to Mar 24)

In 2023/24, 156 outcomes were recorded against closed stage 2 complaints (including joint cases). 42 cases remain open at present.

There have been 113 stage 2 complaints either upheld or partially upheld across the year. This represents an 72% service failure rate against those complaints closed. The average monthly figure for upheld or partially upheld complaints this financial year is 9.

Learning From Complaints

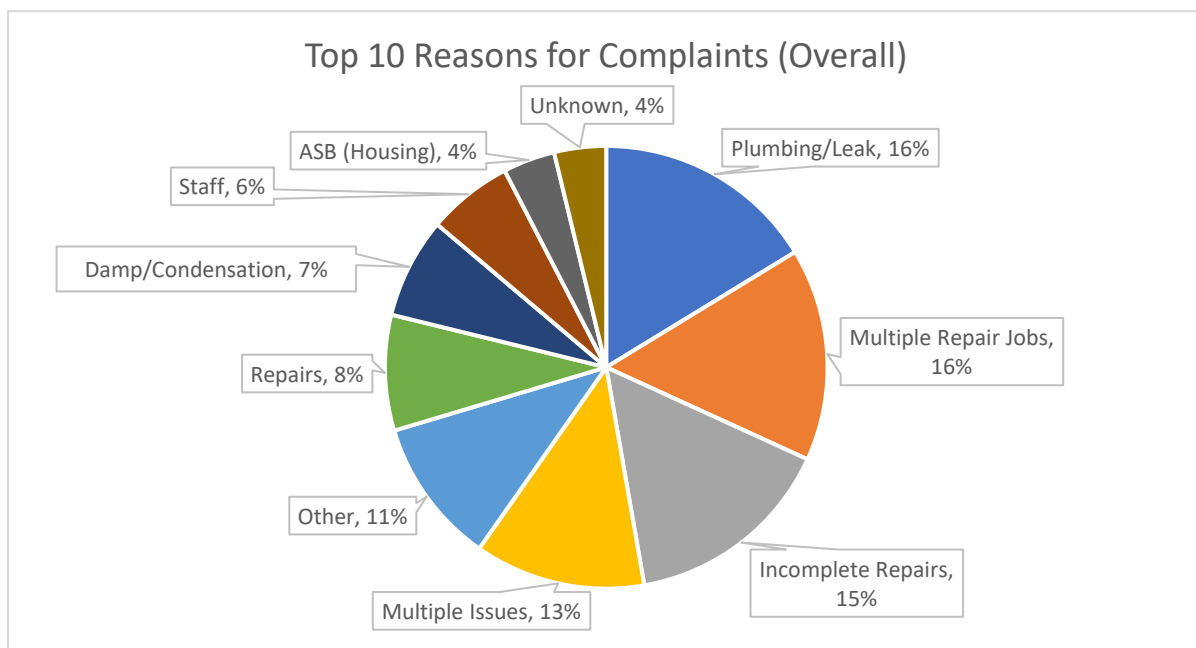


Figure 10 - Top 10 overall complaint reasons (Apr 23 to Mar 24)

The most common reason for complaints in 2023/24 was plumbing/leak (16%) and multiple repair jobs (16%), with incomplete repairs (15%) and multiple issues (13%) being common. Unknown (4%) refers to where the reason for complaint hasn't been recorded.

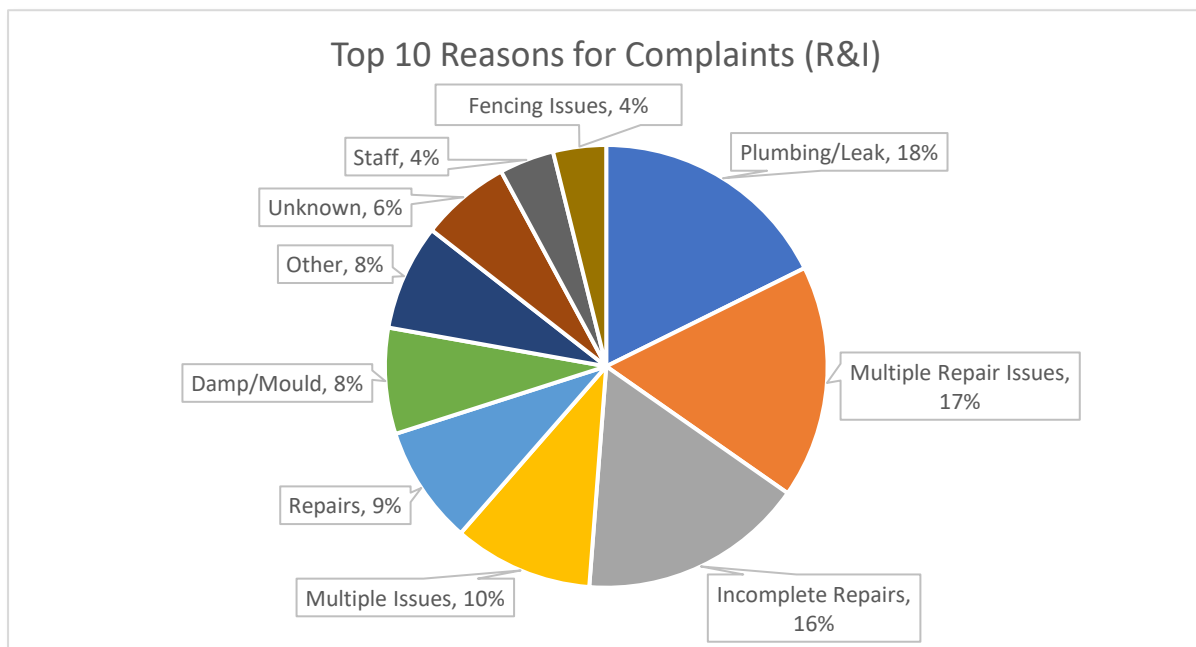


Figure 11 - Top 10 R&I complaint reasons (Apr 23 to Mar 24)

The most common reason for complaints in Repairs and Investments in 2023/24 was plumbing/leak (18%) with multiple repairs issues (17%), incomplete repairs (16%), multiple issues (10%) and repairs (9%) being common. We acknowledge that some reasons, such as

'repairs', aren't specific enough and we will work to better define reasons in 2024/25. Unknown (6%) refers to where the reason for complaints hasn't been recorded.

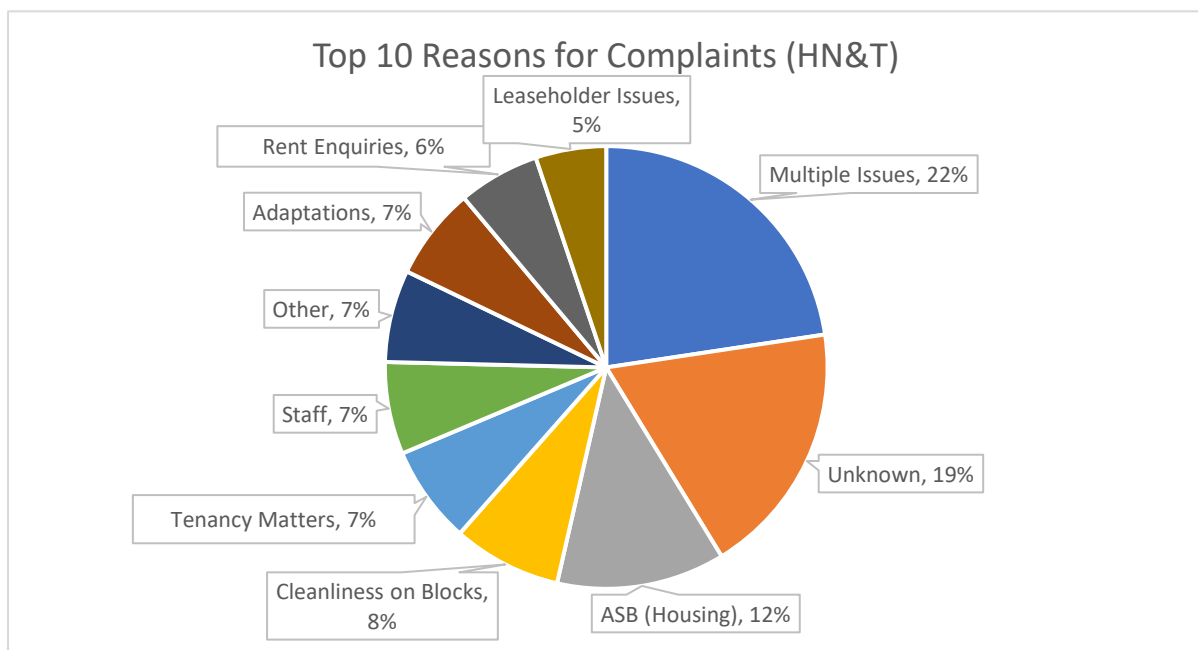


Figure 12 - Top 10 HN&T complaint reasons (Apr 23 to Mar 24)

The most common reason for complaints in 2023/24 in Housing Needs and Tenancy was multiple issues (22%) with anti-social behaviour (ASB) housing (12%) and cleanliness on blocks (8%) being common. Unknown (19%) refers to where the reason for complaints hasn't been recorded⁴.

Lessons Learnt

We know we don't always get things right first time, and residents' feedback provides valuable information into how we can improve our services. We also use our own data to inform the areas we need to improve. The following table shows where we have identified areas to improve and what we have done or plan to do to improve.

We've identified opportunities for learning in the following categories, the numbers represent the number of associated lessons learnt: Complaint Handling (4), Systems and Processes (10) and Service Delivery (6).

Lesson Learnt	Action(s) Taken	Impact
Complaint Handling		
We weren't responding to complaints within our target response times.	We have increased our central complaints logging team in November 2023.	Logging and response times have reduced as a result.
Some complaints could be responded to sooner	We put in place a complaints procedure in September 2023 that	We have used this process successfully where appropriate for the complaint raised.

⁴ This is due to Royal Greenwich staff not recording the complaint reason on our complaint management system

and didn't require a full investigation process.	encouraged an initial contact with the complainant to understand their issue(s) and offer quick solution(s) where possible.	
The complaints process wasn't always followed consistently.	We put in place a complaints procedure in September 2023 that aimed to make complaint handling consistent across the directorate.	Complaint handling has improved in consistency across the directorate.
We weren't responding to complaints within our target response times in R&I.	R&I have increased their Complaints Officer capacity and send weekly reports to management on performance. Daily reports are sent out to managers advising of complaints due within the next couple of days to aid with time management.	There has been an increase in complaints being responded to on time. Fewer complaints are being escalated to Stage 2 due to lack of response at Stage 1. There has been more positive feedback from residents. Teams are aware of forthcoming complaints, allowing them to review and where necessary organise completion of outstanding repairs.
Systems and Processes		
Our complaints management system couldn't provide insights into complaints such as demographics and geographic areas.	We introduced a new complaints management system in December 2023.	We are now able to better understand reasons for complaints and track lessons learnt. We will continue to build on harnessing the benefits of the new system in 2024/25, including demographic data.
We don't always consistently record lessons learnt from complaints on our complaints management system.	We will undertake a programme of training to ensure lessons learnt are captured consistently on our complaints management system.	We anticipate this will increase our intelligence and analysis ability on lessons learnt and actions taken.
We are aware of an increase in complaints regarding missed appointments. We have agreed that greater transparency is needed to confirm whether the appointment was missed by the service or the resident themselves.	The process has been revised to ensure that missed appointments will be recorded correctly including who it has been missed by. An initial trial has been successful with a reduction in appointments been missed. A whole service approach will commence in May 2024.	This aims to increase customer/resident satisfaction, complete more repairs first time, and have fewer missed appointments.

<p>We have identified the need to improve the information available to residents and the need to update the policy and procedures for Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB).</p>	<p>An ASB Policy & Procedures working group has been set up to review the policy and procedures and to improve the information available to residents.</p>	<p>We anticipate this will give residents a greater understanding of our practices the reasons for these and improve expectations of what is achievable.</p>
<p>We have received several complaints in relation to residents experiencing prolonged waiting times for calls to be answered by the Repairs Resolution Team and Contact Centre.</p>	<p>We have developed a system where residents are advised an approximate wait time to be answered by a technical administrator. This gives an indication to residents of how long they will be waiting for their call to be answered and signposted to online reporting forms. In addition, messaging has been provided on the system to indicate less busy times.</p>	<p>This has reduced the number of abandoned calls.</p>
<p>Residents were unaware of when outstanding repairs (post Covid) were going to be completed as they hadn't been booked.</p>	<p>Staff have worked on the backlog of repairs to ensure that residents are aware of the appointments. A letter was sent from October 2023 to all residents with outstanding repairs asking them to contact us so that a repair could be booked.</p>	<p>There has been a reduction in complaints regarding outstanding repairs.</p>
<p>Case conferences weren't being consistently held on complex complaints (R&I).</p>	<p>Case conferences are held when orders have been made by the Housing Ombudsman to ensure that orders are complied with and that any learning is identified with Officers involved in the case.</p>	<p>Conducting case conferences allows for the service to review its policy or procedures for example damp and mould and the handling of building safety complaints.</p>
<p>We receive complaints about wait times for adaptations and lack of communication.</p>	<p>We are developing a series of information letters/guides to be sent out when referrals for adaptations are made at different stages of the process to keep clients better informed and aware of timescales.</p>	<p>We aim for this to improve client communication.</p>
<p>Our repairs records aren't always up to date.</p>	<p>We have communicated with staff to remind staff of</p>	<p>Greater understanding of why notes are important for both</p>

	the importance of record keeping and updating of the systems. We have delivered refresher training with trade staff to remind them of the importance of recording repairs undertaken. We have reviewed current IT systems with a view to making record keeping mandatory in any upgrade that may occur.	complaints handling and general use.
Some complaints are due to misunderstandings in information provided by staff to residents and vice versa.	We aim to implement a call recording process for calls into the directorate section.	This aims to resolve numerous complaints directly, help monitor and drive-up performance and standards across the directorate.
Service Delivery		
Several complaints were received in relation to the capital program and when works will be undertaken to estates and individual homes.	We regularly hold monthly meetings with key colleagues in numerous teams related to capital works. We also hold residents housing panels to discuss repairs or capital works.	This provides greater transparency on the capital programme by ensuring staff have the right information to provide to residents.
In relation to internal cleaning customer expectations are higher than resources can provide. Additionally standards across the caretaking service are inconsistent, leading to complaints regarding internal cleaning.	We refer customers to and increase the awareness of the Caretaking Service Charter ⁵ on the Council's website that outlines service standards. We are introducing a new 'Caretaking staff manual' so all caretakers are working to the same service standards which are aligned to the Charter. We are reviewing all cleaning schedules, exploring resource allocation borough wide. We are increasing targets for completing Supervisor inspections.	Better manage expectations and provide greater clarity of our caretaking service standards, leading to a reduction of complaints. Frequency of cleaning and resources are appropriate for each block, resulting in a consistent standard across all estates. Supervisor inspections will evidence standards within blocks, and compliance with our Caretaking Service Charter.

⁵ [How we keep estates clean and tidy | What service you can expect from us | Royal Borough of Greenwich \(royalgreenwich.gov.uk\)](https://www.royalgreenwich.gov.uk)

<p>We were not treating weeds on estate pathways and hard surfaces within a timely manner, leading to excessive weed growth and increased complaints.</p>	<p>We reviewed the number of trained/qualified weed sprayers within the Caretaking Service and increase if required. We developed processes that ensure ease of movement of trained staff between Estate service areas.</p>	<p>Improved management of weed growth on RBG Estates leading to a reduction in weed related complaints.</p>
<p>We are not managing fly-tipping in a way that stops repeat offending, and timely removal of fly-tipping on some estates is outside of our service standard timeframes.</p>	<p>A fly-tipping project has begun (due for completion January 2025). The project will include development of a strategy for each type of fly-tipper, resident engagement, improved signage, enforcement action and use of new technology. We will also review our bulky waste collection & fly-tipping removal resource allocation across estates and areas.</p>	<p>Greater clarity of methods to assist Council staff in tackling fly-tipping on RBG Housing Estates, leading to a reduction of repeat offenders. Improved resident awareness on the correct methods of disposing of bulky items, reducing the amount of dumped waste on RBG Estates. Improve efficiency of the fly-tipping removal service.</p>
<p>Difficulties by residents in reaching the service by phone including reports of being unable to get through to the Disability and Home Improvement Team.</p>	<p>We have increased call answering capacity to enable a fully resourced phone duty rota. We have introduced a new call management system where real time monitoring of calls is possible and extra resource can be deployed when needed at busy times.</p>	<p>This aims to improve call response time and information given to residents waiting for their call to be answered.</p>
<p>We identified areas of improvement following the Ombudsman spotlight report on damp and mould, and the increase in complaints received.</p>	<p>We formed a damp, mould and condensation specialist team who review complaints and held regular damp and mould assurance meetings chaired by the Director of Housing & Safer Communities.</p>	<p>There has been a reduced backlog of appointments to attend damp/mould reports. A systematic approach has been put in place to damp and mould cases with appointment being attended quickly.</p>

In December 2023, we changed our complaints management system. This has allowed for lessons learnt, learning actions and the progress to be added directly onto the complaint. There is a training need, as detailed in the lessons learnt table, to ensure this is used effectively but the following is a summary of the themes and number of times they have been recorded as lessons learnt so far:

- Improve communication with residents x 17
- Ensure regular updates are provided to residents on the progress of their issues/repairs progress x 26
- Ensure complaints are responded to within timescales x 3
- Ensure repairs timescales are met x 6
- Ensure follow on jobs are raised and on time x 6
- Contractors need to ensure consent is sought from the resident x 1
- Carry out consultation with the resident x 1
- Contact residents prior to appointment cancellation x 2
- Ensure thorough record keeping x 2
- Undertake repairs x 3

Ombudsman Determinations

Type	2023/24	2022/23	
Determinations	32	11	↑
Findings	68	15	↑
Maladministration Findings	52	9	↑
Maladministration Rate	76%	60%	↑
Complaint Handling Failure Orders	0	0	↔
Compensation Ordered	£24,250	£1,325	↑

A 'determination' a term used by the Ombudsman as their decision following investigation of each case. Within each determination there may be numerous 'findings' to represent each issue identified as part of the investigation. The maladministration rate above is calculated based on the number of maladministration findings as a percentage of total findings.

In 2023/24, there were a total of 32 Housing Ombudsman determinations. This resulted in 68 findings which are detailed in the Figure 15 below.

While this shows an increase in findings, these may not be a representation of current service provision owing to the Housing Ombudsman's backlog of investigations. Despite determinations being made by the Housing Ombudsman in 2023/24, the date of the issues occurring range from 2018 up to August 2023 with very few determinations related to issues occurring in 2023/24.

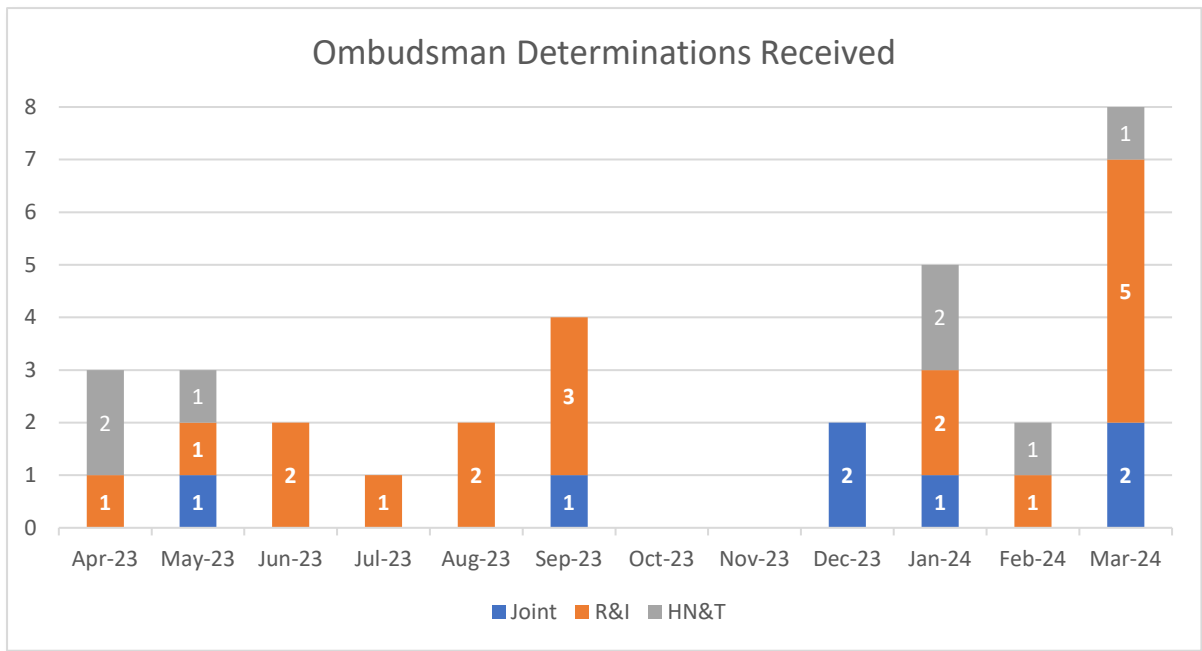


Figure 13 - Ombudsman determinations received by month (Apr 23 to Mar 24)

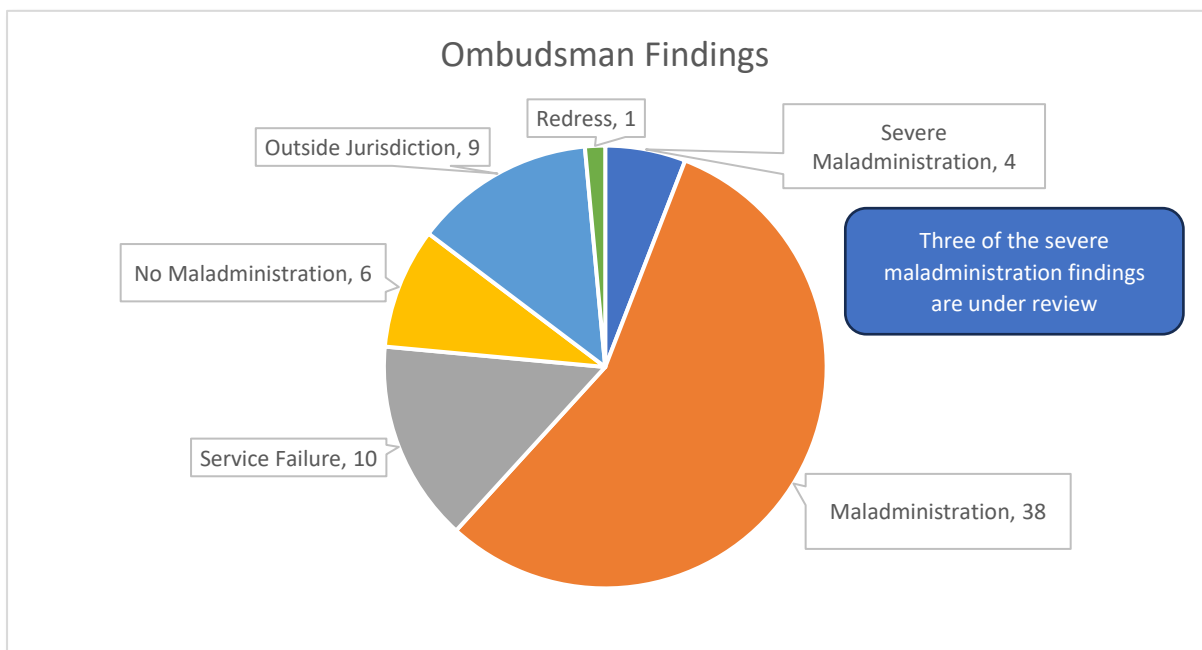


Figure 14 - Ombudsman findings (Apr 23 to Mar 24)

The Housing Ombudsman can make a number of different decisions on their findings with service failure, maladministration and severe maladministration categorised as ‘maladministration’⁶. There have been 76% maladministration findings across the financial year. The average monthly figure for maladministration findings this financial year is 4.

⁶ [What findings can the Housing Ombudsman make? \(housing-ombudsman.org.uk\)](https://housing-ombudsman.org.uk)

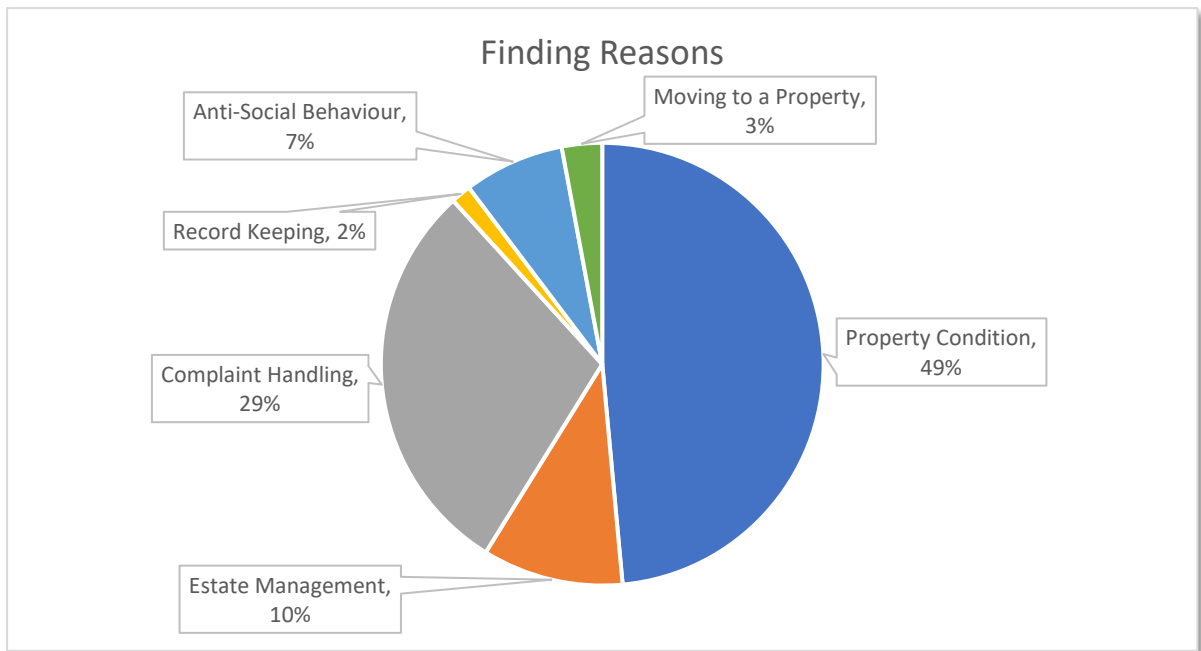


Figure 15 - Ombudsman reasons for findings (Apr 23 to Mar 24)

The most common reason for findings in 2023/24 was property condition (49%) with complaint handling (29%) and estate management (10%) also ranking highly. Anti-social behaviour (7%), moving to a property (3%) and record keeping (2%) are reasons that occur less but are still important.

Lessons learnt from determinations have been included in the lessons learnt section on pages 11 to 15.

Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code Self-Assessment

- As part of the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code we have to produce and publish a self-assessment based on the requirements of the code.
- This is the third time we have produced a self-assessment based on the code, the first being October 2022 and the second being October 2023.
- Based on the April 2024 code, we comply with 55 of the 72 recommendations. This is connected to our current corporate Complaints Policy (dated November 2023), Housing Complaints Policy (dated November 2022) and Housing and Safer Communities Complaints Procedure (dated September 2023).
 - All but two recommendations that we don't meet now will be met as part of the new Complaints Policy once signed off.
- We intend to review our self-assessment with residents to ensure they are informed and can provide feedback on the document. Owing to timings this hasn't been possible ahead of this report being put through governance.
- Our new Complaints Policy (April 2024) which covers the whole council, is intended to be signed off after this report is published. Following sign-off a new self-assessment will be completed and published, this will increase our compliance to 70 out of 72 recommendations.

Additional Ombudsman Reports

- Reports or publications produced by the Ombudsman
 - The Housing Ombudsman landlord performance report for the period 2022-23. It is important to note that this doesn't relate to the same period as the Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report 2023-24, however this has been included as per guidance from the Housing Ombudsman.
 - We have produced self-assessments on the following Spotlight reports from the Housing Ombudsman:
 - Damp and Mould (June 2023)
 - Noise Complaints (February 2024)
 - We intend to produce self-assessments on the following spotlight reports in 2024/25:
 - Knowledge and Information Management
 - Attitudes, Respect and Rights