

Title: Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report 2023-24	Date of Meeting: 17 th June 2024
Author: Carole Richardson	Email: carole.richardson@northstarhg.co.uk
Job Title: Executive Director of Customers	
Strategic Heading: Compliance	Status: Decision
Purpose: To update the Board on the changes made to the complaints handling self-assessment. To share annual performance, themes identified, and the service improvements implemented as a result.	
Recommendation: Board is recommended to approve the self-assessment and the actions contained in the report.	

1. Context

In March 2024, the Board was updated on North Star's compliance against the revised Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code. The code came into effect from the 1st April 2024. Sections 8.1 and 8.2 of the code state that: Landlords must produce an annual complaints performance and service improvement report for scrutiny and challenge, which must include:

- The annual self-assessment against this Code to ensure their complaint handling policy remains in line with its requirements.
- A qualitative and quantitative analysis of the landlord's complaint handling performance. This must also include a summary of the types of complaints the landlord has refused to accept.
- Any findings of non-compliance with this Code by the Ombudsman.
- The service improvements made because of the learning from complaints.
- Any annual report about the landlord's performance from the Ombudsman; and
- Any other relevant reports or publications produced by the Ombudsman in relation to the work of the landlord.

The annual complaints performance and service improvement report must be reported to the landlord's governing body (or equivalent) and published on the section of its website relating to complaints. The governing body's response to the report must be published alongside this.

2. Self-Assessment Against the Complaints Handling Code

The self-assessment, which is attached at Appendix One, has been updated. This now reflects the appointment of a Member Responsible for Complaints and the production of the annual complaints performance and service improvement report.

North Star is fully compliant with the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code and there are no areas of non-compliance.

3. Complaints Performance 2023-24

	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Number of formal complaints received during the year	120	186	143
Percentage of Stage 1 complaints responded to within target (The standard is 10 working days which can be increased to 20 with the agreement of the customer)	85.8%	82.3%	95.1%
Percentage of complaints upheld	77%	83.3%	90.3%
Number of complaints progressing to Stage 2	9	15	3
Percentage of Stage 2 complaints responded to within target – 10 working days	89%	100%	100%

Complaints have reduced during the year, largely because of a reduction in complaints relating to the repairs service (reduction of 22%). As previously reported to Board, the change to a new Contractor during 2022/2023 resulted in a dip in performance and an increase in complaints.

There were seven complaints (5%) that we failed to respond to within target. An extension for four of these was not agreed with the tenant. A further three had a negotiated extension to 20 days and we still did not hit the target response time. The reasons for this are:

- One was due to a tenant request not to close the complaint until works were completed.
- Two were due to failed attempts to contact the customer, messages left and the customer not responding.
- Three were due to the time taken to investigate the issues raised and arrange contractors.
- One was due to the time taken to investigate and resolve the complaint without negotiating an extension with the customer.

During the year there has been closer scrutiny of how we manage complaints and clarification of roles with Managers. Additionally, the new Housing management system (HMS) module for complaints handling enables easier oversight and alerts when timescales are close. This enables us to have more oversight and intervene where necessary.

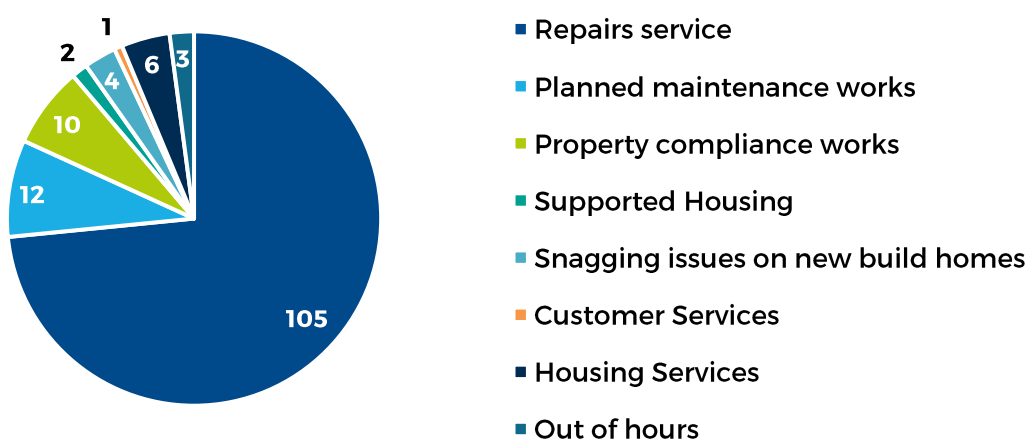
The complaints clinic (attended by key Managers and Executive Directors every six weeks) considers data on a range of issues, including response times, and there is healthy challenge about meeting targets. The group can also direct resources to ensure that there is an equal distribution of complaints amongst Managers.

There is a high proportion of complaints that are upheld. There is no benchmarking data available on this. However, we are members of a complaints peer group, and other organisations report c 70/75% complaints being upheld. Within this context we appear to be an outlier. Work will be undertaken during 2024/25 to better understand this.

3.1. Stage One Complaints

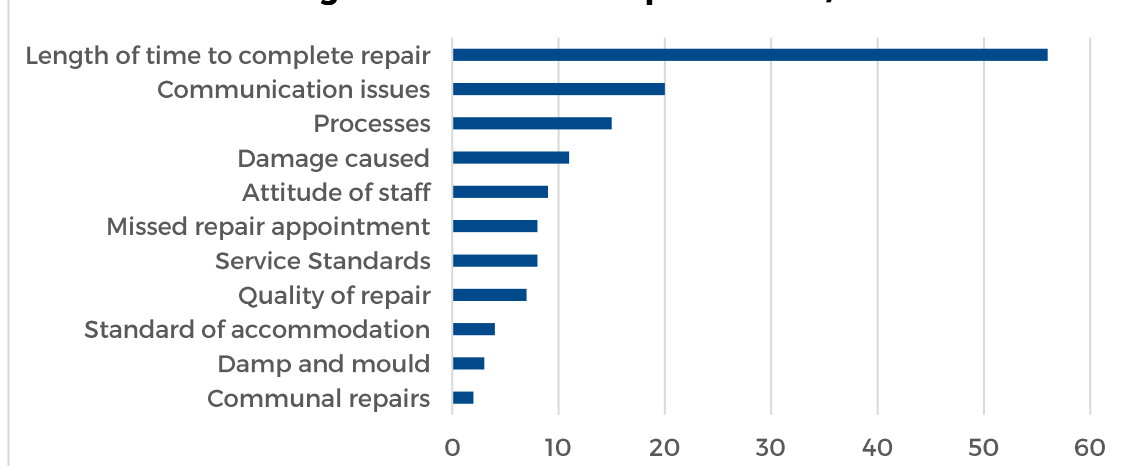
Stage One Complaints by service area	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Supported Housing	2	2	2
Customer Services	14	6	4
Development	1	4	4
Housing	13	11	6
Compliance	9	9	10
Asset Management	8	19	12
Maintenance	73	135	105
Total	120	186	143

Formal complaints 2023-24



The majority (73%) of complaints received were relating to the repairs service. During the year 17,000 repairs were carried out. Whilst numbers are relatively low, the issues driving complaints are also influencing the levels of customers satisfaction with the repairs service, and satisfaction with the overall service delivered by North Star. The issues identified across all methods of customer insight highlight that the time taken to complete works, missed appointments and communication are areas where we need to improve. More detail is set out below.

Stage 1 Reason for Complaint 2023/24



Service area	Themes arising from complaints and / or significant issues	Learning / Improvements implemented
Planned maintenance (12 complaints)	Poor communication relating to the proposed works and timescales	We introduced new processes to keep customers informed of upcoming works and expected start dates.
Development (4 complaints)	Lack of communication regarding a boundary fence renewal.	Reviewed and improved our communication processes with other residents when acquiring properties.
Property Compliance (10 complaints)	One complaint regarding delays in repairing a lift in an older person's service. Remaining complaints were due to missed appointments, time taken to complete works and boiler issues.	We have reviewed and changed our protocols to manage any future breakdown of lifts more effectively. No theme with remaining complaints but issues are discussed in contractor meetings.
Maintenance (105 complaints)	Delays with repairs being carried out. Repairs not being completed first time. Lack of communication with customers and keeping customers updated with the follow-on work for their repairs.	We appointed new sub-contractors within our repairs service to assist with the backlog of repairs. Onboarded new specialist contractors to deal with more complex works such as Damp works, locksmiths etc. Contractors have reviewed their approach to stock to ensure van stocks are available. Carried out a review of Property Services Team – to improve processes, communication, and workload within the team to allow time for more complex cases to be addressed. Introduced follow on works and major works cards to improve communication with customers. Reviewed the Void standard to ensure fit for purpose and meets customer satisfaction/ expectation.

Customers (4 complaints)	Customer wanted an online service to report an emergency repair.	We introduced a new email address for customers report an emergency repair direct to the Out of Hours provider.
	Complaint about poor communication with customers	Customers Services Team (CST) received training to improve initial communication at first point of contact.
Housing (6 complaints) and Supported Housing (2)	Decision making about allocations and how ASB was handled.	No action required as relevant policies were followed
	Attitude of a staff member in a temporary accommodation service	No further follow up was required. Staff worked closely with relevant agencies and applied relevant policies and processes correctly.

3.2. Stage Two Complaints

Stage Two Complaints by service area	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Asset Management	1	1	0
Customer Services	1	0	0
Housing	2	2	0
Maintenance	5	11	2
Supported Housing	0	1	0
Development	0	0	1
Total	9	15	3

The reasons for the stage two complaints were:

- An owner occupier was dissatisfied with the outcome of a complaint regarding a boundary fence. The complaint was partially upheld as our communication lacked clarity. This has been discussed with relevant staff.
- One customer remained dissatisfied with the repairs service. The initial cause for complaint was a delay in attending to a repair. This was further compounded when the operative failed to attend an appointment that was made to remedy the issue. The stage two complaint was upheld with an apology given and compensation paid. The cost of this has been recharged back to the contractor.
- A customer remained dissatisfied about how we had dealt with drainage issues. Work and damp surveys were arranged during the stage one complaint. The complaint escalated to stage two because we failed to complete the work. The stage two complaint was upheld and compensation paid.

4. Satisfaction with complaints handling

We collect customer satisfaction using two methods. The first is a perception survey collected as part of the annual Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs), which are reported to the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) and the second is a survey completed by the complainant following the closure of their complaint.

Satisfaction Measure	2023/24
Satisfaction with North Star's approach to handling complaints – TSM TP09. Perception survey	51.8% (Top quartile)
Satisfaction following with complaint handling following a complaint. Transactional survey.	64.2%

Customer satisfaction with how we handle complaints is an area of ongoing scrutiny and focus. There is a direct correlation between satisfaction levels relating to the handling of complaints and satisfaction with the overall repair's service / time taken to complete work/ tenant communication. Customers comments support this. Of the total complaints made during the year, 73% are relating to the repairs service. Action being taken to improve customer satisfaction, and complaints handling is set out in section 3 and section 6.

5. Refused Complaints

During 2023/24 we refused to accept two complaints made by one customer. The reasons were as follows:

- The first complaint related to a door canopy in December 2023 – North Star as a gesture of goodwill agreed to carry out work on a canopy which was not our responsibility. The customer complained about the length of time this was taking.
- In January 2024 a further complaint was received as contractors attended the property on a day agreed by the customer. As there was no service failure, we refused to accept a complaint.

6. Service Improvements

In addition to the actions outlined in section 3.1 the following service improvements have been implemented during the last 12 months:

- As part of our ongoing compliance with the Housing Ombudsman Code and our commitment to resolving complaints and learning, we have appointed a Member Responsible for Complaints (MRC). They will have responsibility for supporting a positive complaints culture and ensuring Board receive regular informaton on our approach to complaints. A member of North Star's Senior Management Team (Executive Director of Customers) has also been appointed as a senior person. They are responsible for complaint handling, assessing any themes or trends to identify any potential systemic issues or risks.
- We commissioned an independent organisation, Customer Service Solutions (CSS) to review our approach to complaint handling to improve the customer experience and satisfaction levels. CSS met with staff, contractors and customers who had a complaint with North Star within the last 12 months. From the review, several actions for improvement were identified. These actions have been implemented.
- We reviewed our Compensation and Remedy Policy to include gestures of goodwill, and other remedies. This included delegating authority to staff to resolve issues and compensate where appropriate at first point of contact.

- Introduced a new digital system that enables staff to arrange gestures of goodwill whilst the customer is still on the phone.
- Developed and implemented a digital complaints case management system to improve record keeping, monitoring of targets and the identification of themes.
- Delivered training and awareness raising to staff relating to our approach, standards and expectations. This was also delivered to contractors of the repairs service.
- We have strengthened our communication to raise customer awareness of making a complaint. This includes regular social media posts, articles in our newsletters and further information on our website in addition to developing an easy read leaflet on how to make a complaint.
- We are routinely contacting customers who have had a complaint with North Star to capture further insight and identify any learning as well as best practice. Customers are being contacted by a member of staff who is independent of the complaint.
- To reduce call waiting times we implemented an automated service for customers who want to pay their rent electronically.
- The policy and process for tracking works associated with Damp has been reviewed. Performance against target is reported into SMT and quarterly to Board.

6.1. Planned improvements for 2024/25

Service improvement	Lead
Evaluate the effectiveness of the complaints module to ensure it is meeting our requirements re reporting, monitoring and identification of themes	Director of Customers
Carry out a review of Customer Services Team – Using customer insight to build on excellent customer satisfaction levels to improve communication, deal with issues right first time and avoid customers having the inconvenience to contact us again	Director of Insight and Transformation
Implementation of HMS Endeavour within the Property Services Team. This will transform the oversight of the services delivered enabling improved communication and monitoring	Head of Property and Compliance
Carry out analysis on complaints upheld to understand why we are an outlier compared to others	Director of Customers
Regularly connect with customers who have made complaints to discuss their experience and enable us to learn and improve	Director of Customers
Develop systems and approaches to enable further analysis by geography and demography	Director of Customers

7. Housing Ombudsman Determinations and reports

As previously reported to Board in March 2024, we received a Housing Ombudsman determination. This related to the handling of a complaint in June 2023 regarding our failure to address repairs and damp and mould issues in a bungalow in Butterknowle, Teesdale. The Housing Ombudsman found that there had been maladministration in our handling of the issue and we were ordered to pay the resident £150 in compensation.

Other recommendations were to:

- Develop a vulnerability policy. The policy is with North Star's customer Policy Review Group for consideration and approval. Staff and contractor training will be carried out in 2024/25.
- Install a new ventilation unit and extractor fan at relet of the property. This has been completed.

There was a detailed review of the case and the following took place:

- A learning session was held with Managers to share the findings of the complaint
- A number of service improvements to the policy and process were recommended. These have been included in Section 6 of this report.

The Housing Ombudsman issues an annual Landlord Performance Report when a landlord has five or more cases determined by them in a financial year. This is the first case for North Star since 2020.

8. Next Steps

We will be publishing the latest self-assessment alongside a copy of this report with a statement from the MRC on our website and providing an update to all customers in our next newsletter.

We will share the report with our Involved Tenants Groups and seek feedback on areas for further improvement.

We will host staff sessions to share the report, our learning and future priorities.

As part of the Code, we are required to make an annual submission to enable the Ombudsman to monitor landlords' compliance with the Code.

Board will receive a quarterly performance update on complaints and an annual report on how we are performing against the Code.

The MRC will meet with the Executive Director of Customers and Executive Director of Technical Services every six months. The purpose is to share patterns, learning and improvements. The MRC will update Board the following meeting.

9. Recommendations

Board is recommended to **approve** the self-assessment against the Complaint Handling Code and the actions outlined in this report.

Board is requested to provide a response to the report that we will publish on the website.

10. Strategic Risk & Risk Appetite

[SRR6 Not meeting regulatory requirements](#)

[SRR8 Failure to deliver high levels of customer satisfaction](#)

Risk Appetite

There is a very low-risk appetite for not meeting regulatory compliance and expectations.

There is a low-risk appetite for failure to deliver high levels of customer satisfaction.