



Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report

2023-2024

Introduction statement from: Elizabeth Froude, Group Chief Executive and Helen Southwell, Board Member Responsible for Complaints

Here at Platform, we are committed to delivering a customer-first housing experience for a better future.

Our vision is to create homes everyone is proud of and places where people thrive.

However, we know that we do not always get this right and that is why it is important our customers tell us when we are not hitting the mark, so we can learn from our mistakes and do something about this.

We have a dedicated Customer Experience Team at Platform and part of their role is to manage our complaints handling process and to ensure that complaints are handled fairly, professionally and in a timely manner. They also help us identify lessons learned and service improvements.



Elizabeth Froude

At the senior level of the organisation, we also have clear visibility of all the complaints that we are handling, and we have recently appointed a Board Member who, on behalf of the wider Board, seeks assurance that we are proactively acting from the themes and lessons learned from our complaints.

As part of the new Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling code, we are pleased to share our complaints performance with customers for the 23/24 financial year and outline the actions we have taken because of this feedback.

We recognise that we still have some work to do in terms of response times and some service improvements, but we believe that being honest and transparent about our performance helps us to remain focused on these areas.



Helen Southwell



Overview

This report is to provide details on Platform Housing Groups Complaints performance over the last 12 months. This report will include:

- Complaint volumes, themes and learnings.
- Housing Ombudsman Service complaint volumes, themes and learnings.

Complaint Volumes

The graphic below shows Platform complaint volumes from 1 April 2023 – 31 March 2024:

Formal Complaints Received

2374

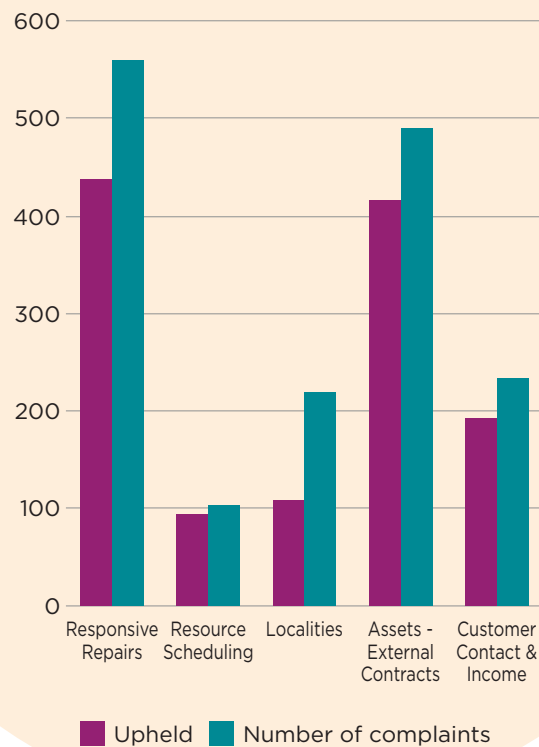
Formal Complaints Investigated at the formal stage

2217

Complaints completed at the final stage

473

Complaints Upheld by Department



Of the 2374 formal complaints that were investigated during the year, **77%** of the complaints were upheld and **79%** were responded to within 10 working days; where timescales were extended this was agreed with the customer.

21% of all complaints investigated were escalated to the final review stage of our complaint's procedure, this is a slight decrease on the 2022/2023 figure which was 24%. **67%** of final review complaints were responded to within 20 working days.

The graph above shows the departments that received over 100 complaints during the year and provides a count of the complaints that were upheld.

The **top five** root causes of complaints during 2023-2024 were:

- Not right first time
- Not communicating with the customer
- Contractor quality
- Time taken to complete repairs
- Follow on work not being logged

The highest category of complaint during the year related to some form of delay in the service provided by Platform.

Themes and Learning from Complaints



The Key themes that were prominent throughout 2023/2024 and the learnings from these were:

- **Damp and mould work not completed causing delays for the customer.**

The damp and mould process is currently being reviewed. Workshops have taken place with key stakeholders and a high-level customer journey has been proposed. Next steps on this are to engage customers in the process.

- **The completion of forms to replace components in a customer's home and the lack of customer communication around this.**

The completion of forms to replace components in customer's homes are currently a very manual process. To streamline and ensure effective communications back to the customer, the Assets Team will be working over the next 12 months to integrate this into microsoft dynamics to enable monitoring and tracking to take place.

- **Lack of management of sub-contractors.**

Management of sub-contractors is part of the Assets work taking place over the next 12 months, as part of this work a contractor portal is being developed to enable monitoring and tracking of work that has been issued to sub-contractors.

- **Follow on work not being logged correctly.**

The Responsive Repairs Team are currently trialling operatives logging follow on works from site, this is in specific pilot areas. The ambition is for the success of the trial to be evaluated and for this to be rolled out across all Platform areas by the end of June 2024.

Further Learning from Complaints

During the year, teams across Platform have worked hard to learn from customer feedback.

Our **You Said, We Did sheet** contains 20 key actions that have been implemented because of customer feedback.

24 Case studies were completed and shared with teams across Platform because of customer feedback.

Customer Involvement Complaint Reviewers

During the year our complaint reviewers looked at **473** final review complaints at the final stage of the procedure. Complaint reviewers read the final response letters from a customer's point of view, they also make sure the content of the letter is clear and the language used is easy to understand.

"My experience, as a reviewer of final stage complaints is that it's important to get a fully rounded outlook and where possible have a positive outcome for both the tenant and landlord."

Ian, Complaints Reviewer



“I have been a Complaints Reviewer since the role was created. It has given me a chance to put the customer perspective and enabled me to see problems and trends as they develop and to make recommendations if I think changes are necessary. It has also helped me in my roles on the Scrutiny Panel and as a Community Rep and given me the pleasure and privilege of working with various members of staff. I hope to be able to continue for as long as possible.”

John, Complaints Reviewer

Scrutiny Panel Review

Our Customer Scrutiny Panel have been reviewing ‘Complaints Handling – Escalation to Final Review & Compensation Payments’. They started to scope out this project in August 2023 and have completed most of their research. They are currently in the final stages of preparing their report and recommendations. We are excited to receive this and hope that any recommendations made can be implemented to further improve the process for customers.



Complaints Reporting and Monitoring

Over the last 12 months we have developed extensive reporting to monitor the complaints service. This included reporting of complaints at each stage of the process and when the responses are due.

There is a direct link into the case from the complaints dashboard, so managers can use this as a performance management tool with their teams. We have recognised there are still improvements to be made in responding within timescale particularly at the final review stage.

Complaints Aftercare Team

Over the last 12 months, we have identified that complaints are escalating due to commitments that have been made at the formal investigation stage not being adhered to. Actions are currently being monitored by our Quality Assurance side of the team and they are working closely with the Planning Support Team within Platform Property Care to have a more effective process in place for responsive repairs.

To further improve services to customers, we are currently setting up a dedicated Complaints After Care Team.

The Complaints Aftercare Team will ensure that all actions committed to as part of complaint resolution are chased through to completion with the relevant teams and that the customer is kept regularly updated on progress. We are hoping that this team will be in place by the end of July 2024.



You Said	We Did
<p>Gas repairs were not completed right first time, causing a delay in getting the issue resolved.</p>	<p>We have increased our team’s resource and the addition of 4 x domestic gas quality control auditors. The internal auditors will provide insight and coaching to our teams, improving our engineers’ technical abilities. We’ve also appointed an additional service manager, to reduce patch sizes. Again, with a view to improving the service provided to our customers.</p>
<p>I want to know what’s happening to remove damp and mould.</p>	<p>We have listened to your feedback and the damp and mould process is currently being reviewed. Workshops have taken place with key stakeholders and a high-level customer journey has been proposed. Next steps on this are to engage customers in the process.</p>
<p>There was a lack of consistency in approach to noise complaints and how they are dealt with.</p>	<p>We completed a self-assessment in line with the Housing Ombudsman’s Spotlight on Noise complaints to ensure we have clear support and direction for how we will deal with noise complaints.</p>
<p>There are still areas we need to improve our grounds maintenance service.</p>	<p>We updated the information provided to our Hub team to ensure customer calls could be dealt with right first time. From April 2023 all our grounds maintenance services were brought in house to enhance the customer experience which has reduced the number of complaints we have received.</p>
<p>Service Charge letters were confusing, and you did not understand which elements were relevant to you.</p>	<p>Following your feedback collated in 2023, we reviewed it and agreed going forward to insert a table at the start of the letter which will clearly outline what charges are applicable to you.</p>
<p>You were experiencing difficulties getting through to the Hub on the phone.</p>	<p>We brought the out of hours service in house at the end of 2023 to prioritise emergency repairs more accurately.</p> <p>We have also introduced a secondary call centre to take overflow calls (March 2024). Mango were brought in as they really reflect and mirror our culture and values.</p>

<p>You told us that you had issues with the state of your garden in your new build home such as your garden has a slope or is uneven or your turf died.</p>	<p>In response to your feedback, we worked with our Development team to produce a garden leaflet where we provided comprehensive advice on the first months of your newly established lawn and developed a monthly lawn care calendar. We provided guidance on watering, mowing and feeding your lawn and also created FAQs based on complaints and feedback recorded.</p> <p>Involved customers were engaged in the design of this leaflet.</p>
<p>You told us about your complaint and shared details, but this was not visible on our system.</p>	<p>We launched one system for all our teams called dynamics during early 2024 so when you call us and report issues these are saved and visible to all departments.</p>
<p>When we spoke to you as a part of a formal complaint investigation you raised that you had suffered damages and were not clear on what you had to do.</p>	<p>In line with Housing Ombudsman advice, we have worked with our Insurance team to provide clear guidance on how to start an insurance claim or personal injury claim which is now included in our complaint response letters.</p>
<p>You told us that you had to wait a long time for your leaks to be resolved.</p>	<p>We have started looking at the process we follow when a leak happens in our customers' homes. This has included drafting a leaflet which sets out what we expect customers to do and what we will do to help you.</p>
<p>I have pest infestation in my home, it wasn't clear how Platform would help to deal with the infestation.</p>	<p>We have continued to work through this process internally, providing clear internal guidance to ensure the approach is adopted consistently. We have also drafted and received great feedback from customers about the customer communication leaflet and look forward to launching this later in 2024.</p>
<p>A customer had felt that we had not taken their autism into account when providing services to them.</p>	<p>We produced a case study which highlighted the challenges this customer faced, and signposted teams to the relevant training literature to be able to increase their knowledge of this vulnerability and tailor their services accordingly.</p>
<p>You told us that there were delays in referrals to our Successful Tenancies Team which impacted Universal Credit claims.</p>	<p>The correct information to contain in a referral was shared with the appropriate teams to ensure referrals were completed right first time to prevent delays.</p>

<p>It was unclear what items could be left and gifted to the incoming customer when you left one of our properties.</p>	<p>An internal review of our Gifting Process was completed, and a revised process was published and communicated to internal teams and the customer website.</p>
<p>You found the wording contained on the Gas Safety Information leaflet upsetting if it was in relation to a property where your relative had passed away.</p>	<p>We re-worded the leaflet to include more generic advice to overcome this.</p>
<p>You were unhappy with the way PPC/contractors or other PHG colleagues were parking in your area.</p>	<p>A reminder to all colleagues was sent to remind them about careful and considerate parking whilst undertaking visits to your homes.</p>
<p>The account information on the Portal was not clear and inaccurate.</p>	<p>We decided to remove this function from the Portal to ensure we could provide a fix and provide you with accurate information.</p>
<p>You were not provided with a copy of your Tenancy Agreement at sign up.</p>	<p>A case study was shared with teams, highlighting the importance of providing a Tenancy Agreement at the time of the sign up appointment.</p>
<p>I need to know when my follow-on appointment will take place.</p>	<p>Our PPC team have launched a new Trial whereby new jobs are to be booked in with you before the operative leaves your home. PPC have been rolling this out across the localities which means a suitable time and date is agreed with customers for follow on work.</p>
<p>I made a complaint; a repair commitment was made but then the appointment did not go ahead or was moved so I am still waiting.</p>	<p>We have strengthened our internal communication to create a Planning Support team which monitors these repairs and ensures where possible they do not change and the customer is kept informed.</p>



Housing Ombudsman Service Findings

In 2023/24, Platform received **27** Determinations from the Housing Ombudsman Service, with a total of **63** findings.

The findings made by the Housing Ombudsman Service can be seen in the table below.

Ombudsman Determination	Number of findings
Outside jurisdiction: This means the issue will not or cannot be investigated by the Housing Ombudsman Service	5
No maladministration: This is where we acted in accordance with the obligations in the tenancy agreement and relevant policies and procedures. Minor failings may have been found but these have caused no detriment to the customer.	12
Reasonable redress: There is evidence of maladministration, but we have identified and acknowledged this prior to the Ombudsman's investigation and has, on our own initiative, taken steps that puts things right.	9
Service failure: Where there is evidence of a minor failing, but action is still needed to put things right. Service failure is a form of maladministration.	11
Maladministration: Where there was a failure which has adversely affected the customer.	21
Severe maladministration: This is the most serious failure, where there is evidence of serious detrimental impact to the customer.	5
Complaint Handling Failure Order: This is where the Ombudsman can intervene when a landlord acts outside of the Complaint Handling Code.	0

We take compliance with the Complaint Handling Code very seriously.

We did not receive any Complaint Handling Failure Orders during 2023 - 2024, and we haven't received any Complaint Handling Failure Orders since they were introduced.

Following a full review of the cases that the Ombudsman looked at, it is evident and acknowledged that we have not always delivered the level of service that we aspire to for our customers.

Although several of the cases reviewed by the Housing Ombudsman Service were historical, they have provided us with many lessons on how to ensure that the service failures are not repeated. We are being proactive, positive and robust in our response and the changes we need to make.

Themes and Learnings from Housing Ombudsman Service Determinations

There are several learnings that we have taken from feedback received from the Housing Ombudsman Service during 2023 – 2024, as follows:

Damp and Mould

Since the initial gap analysis against the Housing Ombudsman Service spotlight report on damp and mould, a significant amount of work has been undertaken on the handling of damp and mould cases at Platform. A new corporate risk relating to damp and mould has also been identified and is on the Corporate Risk Assurance Framework, which is reviewed monthly by the Leadership Team.

A damp and mould tracker has been created which is visible to all customer facing teams. The data on the tracker is driven and updated through referrals being made from colleagues, this can include calls (phone and video) into the Hub, visits by Neighbourhood Officers/PPC Operatives, Tenancy Health Checks and web forms completed by customers. Although they are expected to make Platform aware of any damp and mould cases, external contractors cannot currently log these directly onto the tracker, as part of the improvements to our systems this will be available to Contractors by the end of August 2024.

Platform have started to add identifiers to repair jobs that indicate if they are connected to damp, mould or condensation, an ongoing complaint or disrepair case, leaks, loss of heating or other health and



safety related priorities. This ensures that they are correctly prioritised, dealt with in reasonable timeframes and never cancelled due to no-access.

The process takes a risk-based approach and will categorise the level of damp (small, medium, large). Where a customer is happy to do a video call then advice will be given to the customer immediately on this issue. Where a property has damp and there is a vulnerable customer, then we will ensure that these cases are prioritised. As is the case across the entire Housing sector, Platform is managing a high volume of damp and mould cases, our ability to sufficiently resource and complete this area of work (both internally and externally) to our preferred timescales has proven to be extremely challenging.

Trade Operatives carry sprays on their vans for any basic washing of mould that they can do when out on an unrelated job, they then log this so it will be on the damp and mould tracker and so that any further work can be carried out as necessary.

Damp and mould is covered regularly at Toolbox Talks and the Responsive Repairs Team were given specific training on damp and mould in early 2023. It is also covered with any new starters as part of their induction process.

Platform have also used information to identify 'silent customers' and whilst this is not specifically for the purpose of identifying damp and mould, this has helped us to identify some more vulnerable customers who may be less likely to report issues of damp and mould in their homes, along with any other repairs that have not been reported.

All front-line colleagues have been trained in identifying and managing damp and condensation mould and we have expanded our video calling capability to include suspected damp cases.

Colleagues are trained to identify if there are any damp and mould issues as part of any empty properties or mutual exchange process – this would be recorded on the tracker as outlined above.

Information on damp and mould is available to all customers on our website, including how to report cases.

In order to further improve our work around damp and mould the process is currently being reviewed. Workshops have taken place with key stakeholders and a high-level customer journey has been proposed. Next steps on this are to engage customers in the process.

Communication Improvements

Following a huge internal project, we have now (from February 2024) gone live with a new customer relationship management (CRM) system for all customer facing teams. This has been part of a wider 'Core Change Programme' and in May 2024 all teams will work from one Open Housing system with all our data in one place removing the risks of errors and duplication of jobs. This should make a significant improvement to the way information is recorded and stored on all interactions with our customers and works being undertaken on our properties.

Up to the end of September 2023, Platform outsourced the Out of Hours (OOH) service to a third-party company. The company did not have access to Platform systems, and this caused delays in the recording of any works that had been reported and carried out during OOH. This has impacted on the accuracy of some of the records that have been logged on the housing system.

There has also been a reduction in the number of emergency jobs raised by the OOH team due to the training of the team identifying real emergencies and non-emergency repairs, resulting in fewer operatives needing to attend emergency repairs OOH's. This is reducing the frequency of Platform needing to reschedule other repair appointments and ensures we can keep and maintain more promises to customers via other planned repairs. We have already seen improvements in customer satisfaction with the OOH's service and reduction in waiting times overall for our customers as well as responses to digital enquiries and social media.



Platform Property Care (PPC) use Voicescape to ensure that customers are now kept better informed in terms of when their repairs will take place. A text message/outbound call is sent to the customer on the day a repair is booked, the day before the repair is due to take place and when the operative is on their way to carry out the repair.

In the past 12 months, PPC have also introduced a Planning Support team who have been specifically employed to focus on following up works that are linked to complaints and improving communications with the customer on these.

PPC have introduced a new piece of software which goes live at the end of May 2024 and allows greater analysis of the jobs they complete. This will include the ability to measure the volume/nature of follow-on work, including the specific trades required and time allocated for the job. This will support the team to better plan in terms of future resource needs. We do already have reports for follow on works, but this will enhance as it will measure ones that have not rebooked with customer if we cannot appoint on site to ensure follow up works do not get missed.

Where work is being undertaken by an external contractor, there is no visibility of this to internal colleagues. A priority for this year is the development of a contractor portal linked to the housing system and it is intended that this will be implemented to allow better visibility for colleagues leading to a better service for our customers. Our Assets team are also working to establish a more robust supply chain, with more stronger contract management processes in place.

Complaint Handling

As part of the core change programme since our new CRM system was introduced in February 2024 there is a specific contact type for complaints. This means that the case is managed end to end through one system. This has increased the accountability of complaint owners in terms of meeting timescales. Final review complaints are completed by Heads of Service/Directors from across the organisation.

We recognise from the statistics for 2023/2024 there is still work to do around meeting the 20-working day timescale at the final stage of the procedure. Complaint Handling workshops will be taking place in June and July 2024 which will reinforce this message.

There have been several changes to how Platform manage complaints to continuously improve the complaint journey for customers. In July 2023 the operating model of the Customer Experience Team



was changed. This involved the introduction of team leaders to support the team with the increasing number of complaints and the creation of additional sub teams to allow the team to work more effectively and distribute the work across the sub teams.

We have now removed early resolutions from the complaints process following feedback from the Housing Ombudsman Service around these adding delays for customers.

In addition, there is also now a dedicated resource to focus on Quality Assurance so that all complaint responses at the formal investigation stage will be reviewed centrally before being issued to customers, this will help ensure a consistent tone and ensure that compensation is fair and proportionate to the case. The Quality Assurance role was also ensuring the follow up of commitments made, as already detailed in this report due to the volumes of follow up activities we are creating a specific Complaints After Care Team that will be in place by the end of July.

Annual Self-Assessment Against the Housing Ombudsman Code.

As part of the new statutory Complaint Handling Code Platform have completed a self-assessment against the code.

In relation to section 9.8: Landlords must have a standard objective in relation to complaint handling for all relevant colleagues, we are partially compliant with this item. There is a commitment around complaints handling in our Corporate Strategy and measures on this are linked to our action plan. In 2024, there will be a standard objective for all relevant people around complaint handling.

Learning from Housing Ombudsman Service Spotlight Reports

Damp and mould

Following the release of the spotlight report, Platform completed a gap analysis against the recommendations in the report.

A new corporate risk relating to damp and mould has also been identified and is on the Corporate Risk Assurance Framework, which is reviewed monthly by the Leadership Team.

A damp and mould tracker has been created which is visible to all customer facing teams. The data on the tracker is driven and updated through referrals being made from colleagues which then populate the data - this can include calls (phone and video) into the Hub, visits by Neighbourhood Officers/PPC Operatives, Tenancy Health Checks and web forms completed by customers. The Damp, Mould and Condensation Policy was reviewed and revised to take account of the spotlight report recommendations. The policy makes a commitment that the Group will not walk away from a case until all reasonable measure have been completed. The new process takes a risk-based approach and will categorise the level of damp (small, medium, large).

Even though we have made improvements to our approach to damp and mould since the spotlight report was published, feedback from our customers has shown us that our process continues to be an area for improvement, and we are currently reviewing our process for our customers.

Noise Complaints – time to be heard

This spotlight report was released in October 2022.

A self-assessment was completed against the recommendations in the report. There are two key pieces of work that are in progress:

- We have commissioned a Good Neighbour Policy with a sector leading consultant. Workshops are being planned for this and will include customer consultation.
- We have commissioned our legal advisors to complete a review of the tenancy agreement to see what else can be incorporated in regards to being a responsible neighbour.



Knowledge and Information Management

Following the release of the spotlight report in May 2023, Platform completed a gap analysis against the recommendations in the report.

Platform's commitment to how we store, manage and use our knowledge and information is illustrated in a corporate goal specific to knowledge and information management - 'utilise insights through accurate, robust and secure data.'

There is a dedicated Data and Information Team in place at Platform. They are responsible for all General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) related matters, subject access requests and have set up an Information Asset Register. The team report quarterly to the Executive team on data and information performance and annually to the Group Audit and Risk Committee. Platform set up a Data and Analytics Governance Board in early 2023, which is attended by representatives from the Senior Leadership Team. This group manages data quality and there are two insight groups aligned to this - Customer Insight Group and Assets Insight Group.

Attitudes, Respects and Rights - Relationship of equals

This spotlight report was released by the Housing Ombudsman Service in January 2024. We are currently working through a self-assessment against this spotlight report and how we can further strengthen and improve our work in this key area for customers.

How to contact the Housing Ombudsman Service

The best way to get complaints resolved is to speak to us directly. We have a procedure in place to ensure that your complaint is dealt with effectively.

However, you are able to contact the Housing Ombudsman Service at any point for independent help and advice.

If you have exhausted our Complaint Procedure and you remain dissatisfied, you are able to refer your complaint to the Housing Ombudsman Service.

The details for the Housing Ombudsman Service are as follows:

You can call the Housing Ombudsman Service on: **0300 1113000**

You can email the Housing Ombudsman Service:

info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk

