

Annual review of customer feedback 2022/2023

1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 To share analysis and findings on end of year complaints and compliments.
- 1.2 To assure the Board that priority is given to the proactive management of complaints and compliments, supported by policy, procedures and behaviours.
- 1.3 To invite Board member views on the management of complaints and compliments.
- 1.4 This report is aligned with three of the Group's five Golden Threads, specifically:
 - Have residents at the heart of everything we do
 - Maintain strong and effective Governance
 - Provide good quality services, right first time

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 Board is **recommended** to note the findings of this annual review and welcome the continuous improvement in the management of tenant and other customer feedback.

3.0 Background

- 3.1 Ocean Housing Group has in place policy and procedures relating to the management of customer complaints, comments and compliments, to ensure consistent recording, investigation and timely response of all received.
- 3.2 As an official adopter of the National Housing Federation (NHF) Together With Tenants (TWT) charter, our aim is for tenants to find that Ocean Housing is an open and accessible organisation to make complaints to and that tenants and residents have simple and accessible routes for raising issues, making complaints and seeking redress.
- 3.3 The Ocean Housing Compliments and Complaints policy received an update in October 2022 to meet the requirements set out in the second iteration of the Housing Ombudsman Code, released in March 2022. Board can take assurance

that all of the 72 individual requirements, 39 of which were mandatory and 33 best practice, were completed and implemented before the October 2022 deadline.

- 3.4 As part of this update, the Democratic Filter, which mandated that tenants had to wait at least 8 weeks from the conclusion of their complaint, or contact a designated person, before they were able to escalate it to the Housing Ombudsman, was removed. Removal of the Democratic Filter was set out in the Social Housing White Paper (SHWP) as a way to speed up the complaints process with easier access for tenants to arbitration and resolution.
- 3.5 In addition, quarterly complaints reporting was introduced to the Board with nominated members meeting with the Head of Customer Experience and GDPR and Complaints Co-Ordinator each quarter to review trends and explore opportunities to improve.
- 3.6 Due to the growing expectations of pro-active complaint management set out in the SHWP, the existing Tenant Partnership Administrator role was reviewed and changed to that of a Complaints and GDPR Coordinator, with a job description aligned to anticipated regulatory expectations, in June 2022. The Complaints and GDPR Coordinator is responsible for overseeing compliance with the complaints process and help champion a positive complaints culture.
- 3.7 Training on the updated Compliments and Complaints Policy and Housing Ombudsman Complaint Code requirements was completed with Heads of Service, Managers, and responsible staff in quarter 4, 2022/23 by the Head of Customer Experience and Complaints and GDPR Coordinator.
- 3.8 At an operational level, the Ocean Housing Managing Director is aware of all complaints received, with oversight of the process from the Head of Customer Experience and administration by the Complaints and GDPR Coordinator. As part of the updated Compliments and Complaints policy, there is also capacity for the Group Chief Executive to assist in challenging or complex cases at stage two of the process, however this has not been required in the last 12 months.
- 3.9 Complaints and compliments are presented to Together With Ocean (TWO) on a monthly basis and reviewed quarterly by the Ocean Housing Management Team before being published on the Ocean Housing website. Any findings or learning is actioned and monitored to drive continuous improvement across the business.
- 3.10 All complaint responses are shared with staff to ensure that they are aware of what is being reported in terms of dissatisfaction and any actions we are taking to address it.

4.0 Feedback Findings – The National Picture

- 4.1 The social housing sector has been subject to increasing levels of scrutiny in the last 12 months at both a local and national level with a particular focus on damp, mould, and condensation. This follows the coroner ruling in 2022 that damp and mould was partly responsible for the death of Awaab Ishak in December 2020.

- 4.2 The [Housing Ombudsman annual report for 2021-22](#), published in February 2023, shows that requests for formal investigation increased by 80% in 2021-22 when compared to the previous year. Likewise, the number of handled complaints and enquiries saw an increase of 61%, and an increase of 75% for the number of orders and recommendations made.
- 4.3 Complaints about property condition, including the responsive repairs required to rectify the situation, were consistently the highest category of complaint the Housing Ombudsman received and represented 44% of the total in 2021-22.
- 4.4 Complaints about complaint handling accounted for 17% followed by the handling of tenant behaviour reports (ASB), which represented 12% of all complaints received.
- 4.5 The key issues identified by the Housing Ombudsman in 2021-22, mirror those reported in the previous year and at a strategic level included:
- Cultural – not all landlords have a positive complaints culture. Since the Code launched complaints are more likely to be recognised and dealt with on a timely basis, but there are cultural challenges around putting things right and learning from outcomes.
 - Access – the perceived ease of use and access to the complaint process
 - Procedural - every complaint upheld represented at some level, a procedural failing whether that is in the systems, policies, procedures or training.
- 4.6 At an operational level the Housing Ombudsman found the key issues concerned:
- Inadequate record keeping.
 - Missed or unproductive appointments.
 - Poor communication and lack of follow up.
- 4.7 While the Housing Ombudsman expects the rate of growth in demand to stabilise over the coming year, they do expect growth to continue due to increased resident awareness and strategic challenges facing the sector, such as net zero and building safety; as well as the change to proactive consumer regulation.

5.0 Feedback Findings – Ocean Housing

- 5.1 In 2022/23 Ocean received and recorded a total of 115 complaints, 32 of which progressed to stage 2 of our internal process and 2 escalated to the Housing Ombudsman. This represents a 13% increase on the number of stage 1 complaints received, when compared to 2021/22.
- 5.2 The number of complaints upheld at Stage 1 has seen a small decrease from 37% in 2021/22 to 33% in 2022/23. The number upheld at Stage 2 however, has decreased from 33% to 19%.
- 5.3 The table below provides a full breakdown of complaints by stage and determination.

5.4

Complaint Stage	Total number	% not upheld	% partially upheld	% upheld	% withdrawn
Stage 1	115	23%	30%	33%	14%
Progressed to Stage 2	32	22%	56%	19%	3%
Progressed to Housing Ombudsman	2				

5.5 As the table shows, several complaints were withdrawn at stage 1 before a full response was provided. This is testament to the complaints procedure which requires managers to contact the tenant within 5 working days of complaint receipt to discuss the issues raised. In 14% of cases, this contributed to a resolution being found which met the expectations of the tenant with no further action required.

5.6 The table below gives a breakdown of Stage 1 complaint by service area.

Asset Management complaints increased considerably in 2021/22 when compared with 2020/21. This largely reflects the trend identified by the Housing Ombudsman in their analysis of data from across the sector.

5.7

Service Area	2021/22	2022/23	Change	Common complaint reasons
Total	102	115		
Day to Day Repairs	24	32	↑	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of contact to call requests. Repair appointments not attended. Length of time for repair appointments.
Neighbourhood Services	25	30	↑	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Perceived inaction to reports of Anti Social Behaviour. Lack of contact to call requests
Asset Management	33	26	↓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Damp, Mould, Condensation Lack of contact to call requests Efficiency of heating systems and quality of property fixtures
Planned Maintenance	3	7	↑	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Length of time for planned maintenance repairs. Dissatisfaction with compliance appointments
Grounds Maintenance	2	7	↑	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dissatisfaction with quality of grounds maintenance
Customer Accounts	4	5	↑	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rent arrears progression Void property recharges
Development	9	3	↓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Length of time for repairs in defect period
Lettings	1	3	↑	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Application of lettings procedure
Intensive Housing Management	NA	2	↑	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of contact from staff upon request Cost of Intensive Housing Management Service

Customer Experience	1	0	↓	
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- 5.8 All complaints are categorised using the same criteria as the Housing Ombudsman. Since December 2022 we have also introduced Damp, Mould, and Condensation to the 20 categories already in use. A breakdown of each is detailed in the table below.

Complaint Category	2022/23
ASB	8
Buying or selling a property	1
Charges	3
Compensation	2
Complaints Handling	7
Damp, Mould & Condensation	10
Estate Management	17
Governance	3
Health & Safety (inc . building safety)	1
Home Ownership Issues (not new build)	1
Landlord Advice	2
Moving to a property	3
New Builds	4
Property Condition	30
Reimbursement and Payments	2
Staff	21
Total	115

- 5.9 Analysis of complaint type compared to the previous year is not possible due to alignment to the Housing Ombudsman categorisation as explained above.

The largest complaint categories for 2022/23 are:

- 30 – Property Condition
- 21 – Staff
- 17 – Estate Management
- 10 – Damp, Mould & Condensation
- 8 - ASB

- 5.10 Property Condition is a wide-ranging category that covers most issues relating to property repairs. Before the introduction of a separate category for Damp, Mould and Condensation in December 2022, this was also categorised under Property Condition.

- 5.11 The main trend under Property Condition is a perceived lack of action following a reported repair. Generally, this would be a repair that falls into the non-standard category set out in the Day-to-Day Repairs Policy. The tenant would generally escalate the complaint after requests for updates or call-backs were not complete.
- 5.12 9 of the 30 Property Condition complaints were withdrawn by the tenant after contact was made and arrangements agreed.
- 5.13 Staff was the next highest complaint category. These complaints are generally because of a tenant's dissatisfaction with a conversation with a member of staff. Either they were unhappy with advice given, or the perceived tone of the conversation. Some of these complaints were due specifically to a lack of promised communication.
- 5.14 The next category, Estate Management, generally concerned the Grounds Maintenance service, or estate issues such as parking.
- 5.15 Damp, Mould and Condensation represents a large portion of complaints received, since its inception. Following increased public focus on the issue, the majority of contacts expressing dissatisfaction about damp and mould issues have been accepted as formal complaints.
- 5.16 The category for ASB is entirely about tenants who believe we are not doing enough to settle an alleged, or ongoing ASB case.

5.17 Complaint Learning

- 5.18 The template used to capture complaint learning has been streamlined and replaced with a digital form for managers to complete at the conclusion of each complaint. For 2022/23 there was a 100% return rate for complaints learning forms.
- 5.19 Any promised action listed to resolve the complaint are logged by the Complaints and GDPR Coordinator and monitored to ensure that they are completed.
- 5.20 Additionally, the Complaints and GDPR Coordinator has worked with Heads of Service to provide bespoke analysis of complaints in key areas to better understand why issues are happening and what we can do to stop them in the future.
- 5.21 We are continually working to improve learning from complaints and how we can best use feedback to inform decision making. There have been some tangible improvements realised as a result of customer feedback in the last 12 months which includes:
- Introduction of the Damp, Mould & Condensation service. There is now a clear and defined process and path to resolution to take when tenants raise issues of damp and mould.

- Closer service standards monitoring with a dedicated member of staff ensuring that published response times are met.

5.22 Timeliness

5.23 Analysis of the data shows that 94% of complaints were responded to within our published service standard of 10 working days. This is above our target of 90% and a marked improvement the previous year of 89%.

5.24 Stage 2

5.25 A breakdown of complaints escalated to stage 2 of the process is contained in the table below.

Service Area	2022/23	Common complaint reasons
Neighbourhood Services	13	4 x Parking issues 1 x Garage clearance 4 x Handling of ASB
Day to Day Repairs	10	5 x Length of time for repair 2 x Contractor complaint 1 x Leaseholder affected by leak 1 x Missed appointment 1 x Request for communication
Asset Management	3	1 x Contact and communication 1 x Air Quality within home 1 x Damp and Mould
Intensive Housing Management Service	2	1 x Charges for new service 1 x Contact from staff
Commissioning	1	1 x Property build quality and latent defect
Customer Account	1	1 x void recharges

Grounds Maintenance and Cleaning	1	1 x Cut grass on car
Lettings	1	1 x Property offer rescinded
Planned Maintenance	1	1 x Bathroom upgrade

5.26 Complaints escalated to stage 2 of the process are vigorously investigated to mitigate further escalation to the Housing Ombudsman. Review meetings are completed with relevant staff, managers and heads of service to understand what the underlying issues are and how we might resolve them.

5.27 In each case, once the response is complete, actions and outcomes are captured and shared. Examples of tangible improvements realised as a result of customer feedback in the last 12 months includes:

- Clarification of our voids recharge process to ensure that tenants incurring recharges are invoiced promptly for the works.
- System reports being actively monitored weekly to remind staff about expiring contact tasks, to reduce recurring complaints where a lack of communication is the key element.
- Clarification on our communication with lettings applications from existing tenants to ensure that they are aware that property recharges may impact their offer.

5.28 Of the 33 complaints escalated to stage 2, eight were not upheld, 19 were partially upheld and six were upheld.

6.0 Housing Ombudsman

6.1 Three complaints were escalated to the Housing Ombudsman in 2022/23, which is a reduction when compared to five recorded in 2021/22. A breakdown of each and the status of the complaint is listed in the table below:

6.2

Case ID	Complaint Category	Determination	Action
XXXXX	Damp/Mould	Maladministration in record keeping of inspection.	Changes implemented to log and record

		No maladministration in not offering managed move. Compensation	damp/mould related inspections. Compensation paid.
XXXXX	Repairs	NA	NA
XXXXX	ASB	NA	NA

- 6.3 Although two complaints are currently outstanding with the Ombudsman, the one completed determination recorded a maladministration order for record keeping in respect of an inspection where the results were not documented. The main point of the complaint – declining to offer the tenant alternative accommodation – was not upheld by the Ombudsman. This is a positive reflection of the work undertaken at each level of the complaints process, to work with the complainant to resolve issues raised at an early stage.
- 6.4 In the last 12 months we have also received 6 Housing Ombudsman information requests. These are usually from tenants and residents who have approached the Housing Ombudsman direct, without first exhausting our internal complaints process. In each case, we have reviewed the points raised and registered the complaint in accordance with our procedure. In several other cases the tenant has contacted the Ombudsman and us at the same time and are already in the complaints process by the time the Ombudsman contacts us.
- 6.5 The Housing Ombudsman is experiencing an unprecedented demand on their service with lengthy delays between escalation, request for information and determination. To a large extent the Ombudsman is feeling the effects of their very successful complaints handling campaign which saw social media, radio and news coverage encouraging tenants to contact the service if they were dissatisfied. Whilst they are undertaking a recruitment drive, it may be some time before determination timeframes match the accelerated demand they have generated.

7.0 Compliments

- 7.1 As part of our feedback policy, we also collect and analyse all compliments received. In the same period in 2022/23, we received 183 compliments regarding our staff and service which is an increase on the 151 recorded in the previous year.
- 7.2 A breakdown of compliment by service area is contained in the table below together with data from 2020/21.

Service Area	2021/22	2022/23	Change	Common compliment reasons
Asset Management	6	12	↑	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff going above and beyond • Politeness of staff
Day to Day Repairs	54	64	↑	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Politeness of staff • Skill and quality of work • Happy with void property
Neighbourhood Services	10	20	↑	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speed at solving issues. • How friendly the staff have been
Customer Accounts	25	28	↑	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thanking staff for helping • Knowledge of staff
Development	4	4	→	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality of the properties and presentation. • Outstanding effort and communication
Planned Maintenance	13	9	↓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality of planned refurbishments • Manner of staff
Grounds Maintenance	12	22	↑	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good manners of staff • Cleanliness of the communal areas
Lettings	6	9	↑	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How helpful the staff have been • Happy with condition of the property
Customer Experience	14	11	↑	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge of the staff • How quick they can talk to somebody
Ocean Extra	2	1	↑	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How helpful the staff are
Tenant Partnership	3	1	↓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff support for TWO group
Total	151	183		

- 7.3 Staff are made aware and given praise when compliments are received. The Complaints and GDPR Coordinator sends all compliments received by tenants by email to all staff in a monthly update.
- 7.4 2022/3 saw the implementation of the Ocean Rewards scheme, where staff can log their thanks for colleagues. These are recorded separately by the Complaints and GDPR Coordinator and shared monthly business wide. In 2022/23 we logged 30 Ocean Rewards thanks.
- 7.5 The large increase in compliments this year is due to increased visibility of internal compliment sharing. There is now greater focus on logging staff compliments due to the Ocean Rewards scheme, and staff are now more forthcoming with sharing positive feedback.

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