

Appendix one

Habitare annual complaints report and compliance with the Complaint Handling Code

Introduction

This report summarises the complaints received during 2023 including the subject areas and changes made to our services. It is a requirement of the Regulator of Social Housing's Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard to publish information on the number, nature and outcome of complaints.

Habitare Homes is a member of the Housing Ombudsman Service and adheres to the Housing Ombudsman guidance. We publish our compliance with the Housing Ombudsman's Code annually and operate a two stage complaint process.

Stage one complaints are handled by our managing agents and their contact details are publicised on our website. Any complaints which are escalated to stage two are reviewed with Habitare Homes before the complaint is determined. The complaints process is also published on our website.

Our self- assessment against 2023 complaints handling code was reviewed by the Board in December 2023 and published on the website.

Annual Review 2023

Communication

Complaints are acknowledged within three days of receipt and logged by the managing agent responsible. Stage one complaints will be investigated, and a full response sent within 10 working days. If this does not resolve the complaint the complainant can request a stage two review where an independent review will take place involving the Habitare team. A written response will then be issued within 20 working days unless otherwise agreed with the complainant. Following this, the complaint can be referred to the Housing Ombudsman.

One case was escalated to the Housing Ombudsman in the year. This was responded to in 20 days. This is outside of the expected Housing Ombudsman 15-day target due to the complaint being received over the Christmas period (18 December 2023). The extended time was notified to the Housing Ombudsman and the case has not yet been determined.

Complaint summary

- **Total Complaints:** 15 (Note - Stage one and two complaints are treated as one complaint within the total)
- **Resolution Stages:**
 - Stage one: 7 complaints
 - Stage two: 8 complaints
- **Categories:**
 - New Build Defects: 13
 - Pest Control: 1
 - Estate Charges: 1
- **Key Locations:**
 - Lewes: 67%
 - Campbell Wharf: 27%

A total of 15 complaints were received during 2023. The majority of these complaints, 13 out of 15 (87%), were related to defects in new build properties and the time taken to address these issues. Additionally, there was one complaint (7%) regarding pest control and another complaint (7%) concerning estate charges.

67% of complaints originated from our Lewes scheme. This high number is notably linked to the insolvency of the contractor responsible for the project and the unfortunate delays experienced in appointing a new defects contractor. A further 27% of complaints originated at our Campbell Wharf scheme with 75% of these complaints relating to defects.

Seven complaints (47%) were successfully addressed at Stage one, while the remaining 8 complaints (53%) were escalated to Stage two for further investigation and resolution. This breakdown highlights the areas in need of attention and reflects the challenges faced in managing new build defects and maintaining service quality.

Fairness in complaint handling

We have not had to refuse escalation of any complaints this year.

Service Improvement

Where something has gone wrong, we take appropriate steps to put things right.

Key themes and service improvements are summarised below;

Issue	Service Improvement
Defects	Strengthen contract terms for new developments. Increased use of retention monies to improve speed of defect response times. Ensure Employers Agents operate robust process for sign off of completed plots.
Managing agents slow to resolve root cause of the complaint.	Strengthened asset management team to implement a robust contract management framework. This will ensure regular monthly meetings with managing agents are held and complaints are reviewed holistically to ensure the root cause is being addressed.
Developers resource is limited, delaying defects being completed.	Regular joint meetings with managing agent aftercare teams and developers are held to review outstanding defects. Managing agents lead on ensuring residents are contacted and available for proposed appointments from the developer. Time frames for completion are recorded so we can ensure we've done what we've said we would do.
Tracking defects	Strengthened the asset management team within Habitare. Tracking defects will be a monthly agenda item in contract management meetings with managing agents.

Learning from complaints

Beyond the time taken to complete the defects raised, communication was the overriding factor that contributed to our complaints. We have increased our resources available within the team to deal with complaints and have instigated regular meetings with our asset managers to monitor complaints and deal with these efficiently.

This ensures a more timely resolution to the issues raised and ensures that we are sighted on all complaints. During 2024 we will focus on reducing the number of stage two complaints and seek to increase those that provide a satisfactory outcome at stage one.

As part of our approach to reviewing stage two complaints we consider the issues raised and responses to determine whether the correct decision was reached. Of the eight stage two complaints received within the year we either changed our decision or amended the response to the

issues raised in 50% of the cases. This was primarily due to the complaint resolution proposed at stage one not being followed through. We are now reviewing these issues proactively with our property managers and developers / contractors.

Housing Ombudsman Spotlight report recommendations 2023

Spotlight reports concentrate on an area of service provision where the Housing Ombudsman sees a high amount of failure through its casework, often leading to significant complaints and identifying common areas of poor performance. The reports examine the issues within each theme and set out recommendations to encourage learning from complaints, by drilling down into the root causes and identifying systemic issues.

The Ombudsman does this by reviewing its own casework data, by calling for evidence, and by speaking to sector experts, landlords and residents to get a rounded picture. The Ombudsman reviews evidence and issues recommendations to landlords, government and relevant stakeholders to address the issues found. Once the spotlight report is published, the Ombudsman monitors progress and undertakes a follow up.

The following areas have been addressed in Spotlight reports during 2023;

- Follow up: Damp and Mould – it's not a lifestyle, February 2023

We have amended our KPIs to ensure that damp and mould cases are identified and tracked. Our approach to damp and mould will also be strengthened through our contract management framework. We have updated our service standards within the year to ensure that any case raised are dealt with as a priority, alongside the general monitoring through compliance with the Decent Homes Standard.

- Knowledge and Information Management, May 2023

The report illustrates the need to build a good understanding of knowledge management systems and practices in each provider, how they interface with Habitare and how assurance is obtained on the effectiveness of third-party knowledge and information management. We have developed our understanding of our customers, their needs and vulnerabilities, to ensure that we consider the whole picture when responding to complaints.

We will continue to review these reports to identify any learning and opportunities to improve services and update policy/ procedures. Any changes made following the spotlight reports will be reported to the board each quarter.