

## Annual Complaints Report 2024 - 2025

### Executive summary:

This report highlights the positive progress made in complaints performance and service improvements at Hastoe, in compliance with the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code 2024. Included is; analysis of complaints, service improvements, and compliance with regulatory requirements. Our self-assessment against the code is appended.

**Self-Assessment Findings:** The self-assessment demonstrates strong compliance with the Complaint Handling Code, with 513 complaints raised, of which 275 were not accepted for investigation due to various reasons set out in this report.

**Complaints Performance Overview:** A total of 238 complaints were accepted for investigation in 2024/25, showing a significant reduction in complaints compared to previous years, particularly in the repairs category.

**Complaint Handling Efficiency:** 98.7% of complaints were acknowledged within the required five working days, demonstrating improved efficiency in handling complaints compared to previous years with a target to achieve 100% compliance in 2025/26.

**Service Improvement Themes:** Key service improvements were identified, including enhanced communication, record keeping, better monitoring of contractor performance, and specific training for staff based on identified needs.

**Housing Ombudsman Investigations:** Six complaints were investigated by the Housing Ombudsman, resulting in various determinations including reasonable redress and service failures. All orders made during the year have been completed.

**Board Response and Oversight:** The Hastoe Board expressed satisfaction with the improvements in complaint management and emphasised the importance of learning from complaints to enhance service delivery.

**Financial Implications:** Compensation payments decreased significantly, indicating improved service management, with a total of £59,355 paid in compensation, down from previous years.

## 1 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To comply with the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling code 2024, we must produce an annual complaints performance and service improvement report for scrutiny and challenge.
- 1.2 This report includes:
  - The annual self-assessment against this Code to ensure our complaint handling policy remains in line with its requirements.

- A qualitative and quantitative analysis of Hastoe's complaint handling performance. This must also include a summary of the types of complaints that Hastoe has refused to accept;
  - Any findings of non-compliance with this Code by the Ombudsman;
  - The service improvements made as a result of the learning from complaints;
  - Any annual report about Hastoe's performance from the Ombudsman; and
  - Any other relevant reports or publications produced by the Ombudsman in relation to the work of Hastoe.
- 1.3 The annual complaints performance and service improvement report must be reported to Hastoe's Board and published on the section of our website relating to complaints. The Board's response to the report must be published alongside this.
- 1.4 To comply with the Code, we must also submit this report and our self-assessment by September 2025 to the Housing Ombudsman or we may be issued with a Complaint Handling Failure Order (CHFO).

## **2 BACKGROUND**

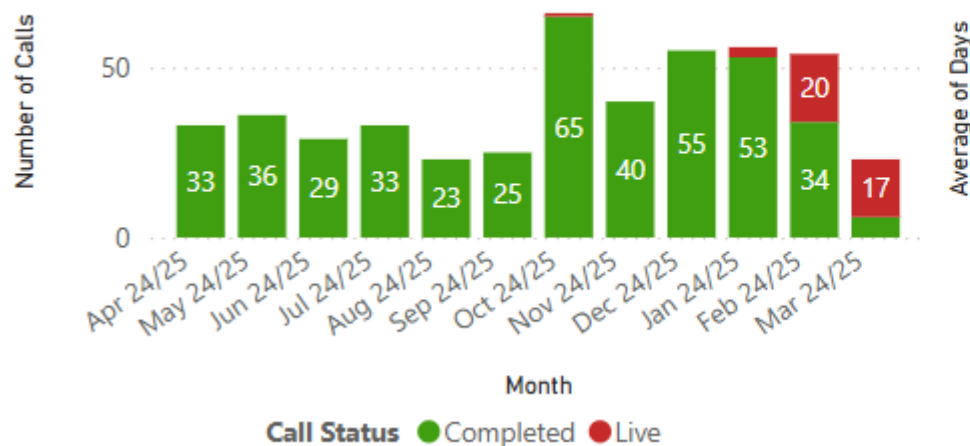
- 2.1 This annual report is a requirement following the publication of the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling code 2024.
- 2.2 The Hastoe Board receive regular performance information in relation to complaints performance throughout the year, and the Members Responsible for Complaints (MRCs) attend scrutiny sessions with residents twice per annum and receive monthly complaints data and narrative reports.

## **3 REPORT CONTEXT**

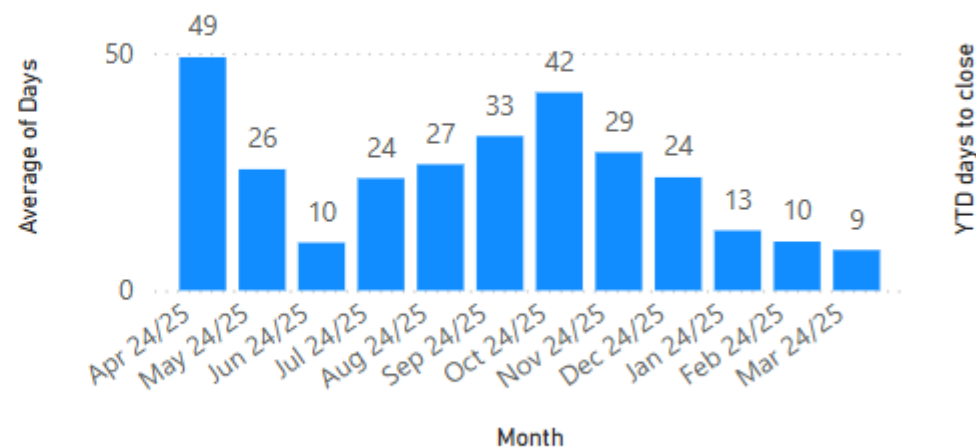
### **SELF-ASSESSMENT AGAINST THE COMPLAINT HANDLING CODE:**

- 3.1 The annual self-assessment against the Complaint Handling code is appended. We have assessed our policy as compliant in all areas.
- 3.2 Out of 513 complaints raised by residents in the year, 275 were not accepted for investigation. Complaints are excluded from formal investigation for a variety of reasons in line with Housing Ombudsman guidance, including; complaints made out of time, Hastoe not failing in their service, issues being tenant responsibilities, the issue being a complaint about antisocial behaviour from a neighbour (unless the complaint is about how we've dealt with the issue), or complaints not meeting criteria. Exclusion letters are issued to inform tenants of the decision and provide explanations. Residents are also provided with contact details for the Housing Ombudsman Service should they wish to challenge this decision.
- 3.3 Most issues raised as complaints and excluded from the complaints process are due to the issue being a first report of a problem. With these cases, they are raised as Service Requests.
- 3.4 Over the last year, we have improved the recording and monitoring of service requests and have seen improvement in the time to resolve these issues:

### Number of Services Requests by Month and Status

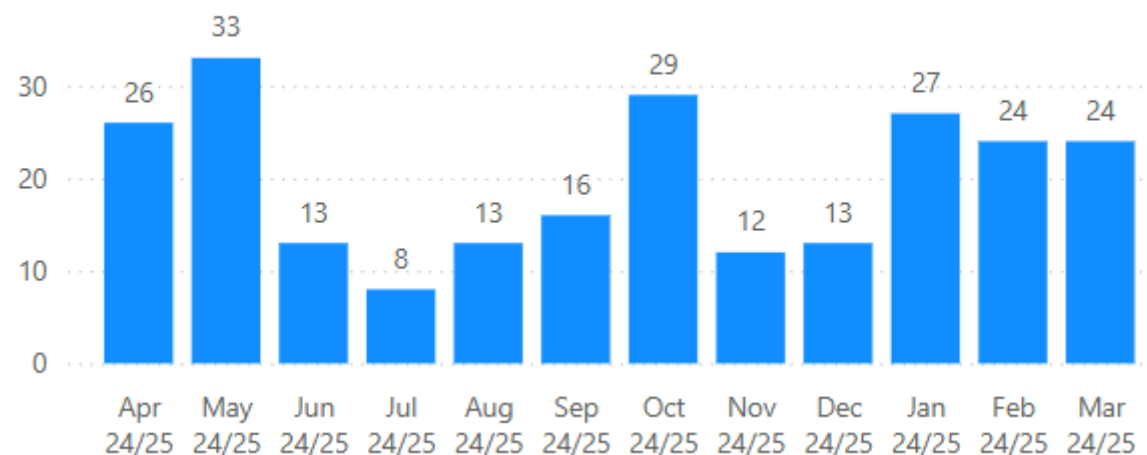


### Average Number of Working days to resolve



- 3.5 Service requests are where a resident raises an issue, which we try to resolve quickly for them to prevent escalation to a complaint. For example, if the contractor misses an appointment, we'll look to arrange a new appointment in the first instance. These remain open on our system until the issue is resolved, in cases where this is a missed appointment, we won't close the case until the appointment has been completed.
- 3.6 From March 2025, we have further improved how we record and monitor service requests on our systems to enable managers to have better visibility of issues that are not being resolved as quickly as they should be. This service request data is also shared with the Board.
- 3.7 A total of 238 complaints were accepted for investigation in 2024/25:

Complaints Received by Month



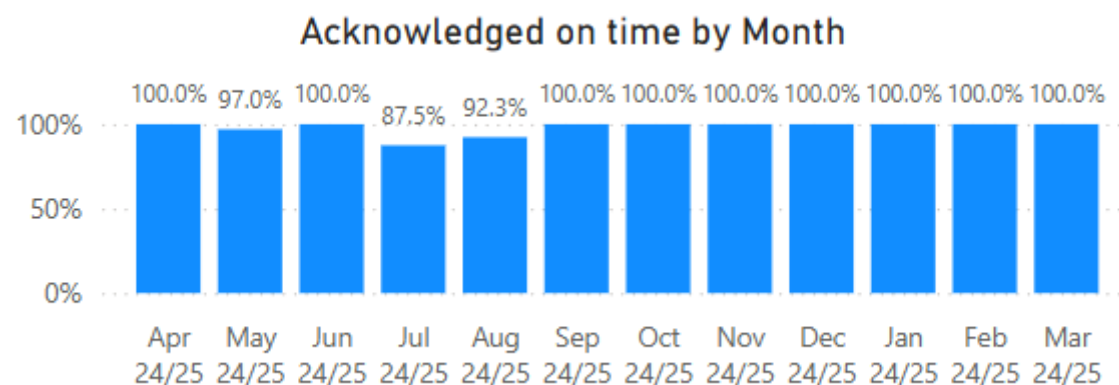
3.8 The categories of complaint are detailed in the table below:

Category of complaint	Number received 2022/23	Number received 2023/24	Number received in 2024/25
Repairs Delivery/Quality	4	205	140
Staff Behaviour	43	42	30
Damp and Mould	2	19	19
Time Delay	355	13	0
Estate Services	Category did not exist	10	10
Rent and Service Charges	Category did not exist	9	12
Antisocial Behaviour	Category did not exist	6	5
Request for a repair/renewal denied	Category did not exist	5	12
Allocations	Category did not exist	5	3
Application of policy	26	2	4
Valuation challenge	Category did not exist	2	0
Defects	4	1	3
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>434</b>	<b>319</b>	<b>238</b>

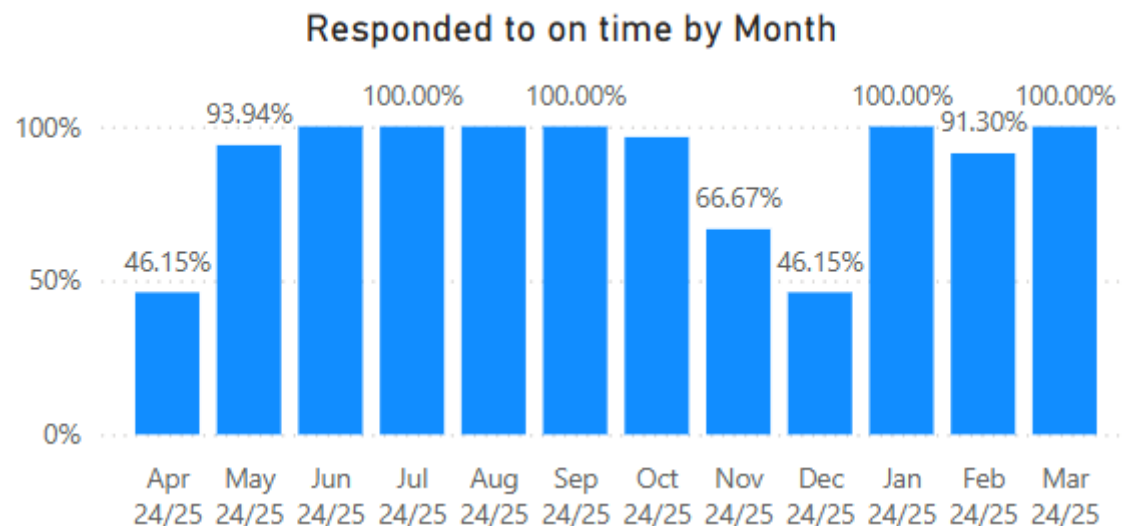
- 3.9 For the second year running, we have seen a reduction in the number of complaints. It is unlikely that this is due to residents not knowing how to raise a complaint, as we communicate this extensively and regularly with residents. In addition, staff have been trained to recognise that the word 'complaint' does not need to be used in order for a complaint to be recognised as such.
- 3.10 The more likely reasons for the reduction in the overall number are for two reasons. Firstly, the reduction in complaints concerning our responsive repairs service (in 2022/23, most repair complaints were categorised as 'time delay'). Over the last two years, our strategy of moving to smaller, more locally based contractors has seen improvements in our repairs delivery. In addition, introducing a dedicated team and phone line to follow up on outstanding repairs has also seen an improvement in services. Secondly, we are recording and monitoring service requests more effectively, resulting in more issues resolved when the issue is first raised.
- 3.11 We have improved performance with repairs completed on time from 77% in March 2024 to 88% by March 2025. Satisfaction with our repairs service has improved in the year; rising from 58.5% in 2023 to 61.7% in 2024. Although we know we have more work to do and this is a focus of our Business Strategy. In addition, we are considering asking additional questions as part of our annual satisfaction survey to tailor our approach to improving our repairs service further.

### COMPLAINT HANDLING PERFORMANCE

- 3.12 98.7% of all complaints accepted were acknowledged within our policy timescale of five working days. Three out of the total of 233 complaints were logged and acknowledged outside of this time.



- 3.13 Complaint handling performance at stage one of our process has significantly improved over the last year. In 2023/24, 103 (32.29% complaints had late responses, compared to 30 (12.68%) complaints in 2024/25:



- 3.14 29 (12.18%) stage one complaints escalated to stage two during the year. This is a reduction of the previous year, where 60 (18.8%) stage one complaints were escalated to stage two during the year. All stage two complaints were responded to in time.
- 3.15 During the year, 206 complaints were either fully or partially upheld. The service improvement themes identified directly as a result of complaints include:
- **Improved communication** – many complaints highlighted the need to improve communication, particularly in relation to responsive repairs contractors. To address these issues, we put in place a specialist contract administrator and created a new role of Voids and Contract Assistant to ensure that administration of this area improves.
  - Leaseholder communication is another area that was highlighted as requiring improvement. During the year, a restructure of our Home Ownership team was approved to increase resources in this area and recruitment is underway. One of the tasks of the newly established team will be to train other teams on basic leaseholder and shared ownership queries, so that answers can be provided at the first point of contact, and to act as coordination and point of contact for more complex enquiries to ensure that home ownership residents are not 'bounced' around the business seeking answers.
  - **Better monitoring of contractor performance** – To address this issue we have created a role to undertake specialist contract administration, as detailed above. This is in addition to our strategy to move to smaller, more locally based contractors. This improved performance of responsive repair contractors more generally has allowed us to focus on the areas that still require improvement; specifically, heating system breakdowns.
  - **Heating contractors** – Improvements made as a result of complaints about heating contractors include:

- A change to the way in which we manage service requests. These are now managed as cases to provide better visibility of outstanding issues and enable managers to have more oversight and intervene more quickly when issues are unresolved.
  - We will be recording warranty details on our systems for newer heating systems, so that we can instruct the installer/manufacture to resolve this issue.
  - We are considering entering into servicing contracts with the manufacturers when we develop new homes.
  - We have re procured our heating contracts for servicing and breakdowns during the year.
- **Training** – most of the training needs identified related to individuals or specific teams, so training was undertaken quickly following the issue arising. These were as follows:
    - Management of Direct Debits.
    - Management of ASB cases relating to noise.
    - Correct method of processing mutual exchange applications.
    - Correct application of the management move procedure.
    - Issues in relation to gender identification were resolved by using a resident's name rather than referring to them as 'sir or madam' to prevent offence.

## HOUSING OMBUDSMAN

- 3.16 There were six complaint cases investigated by the Housing Ombudsman Service during the year, of which we have received the final determinations for five of the cases. Each complaint may include a number of different determinations from the Ombudsman as they considered specific aspects of each case and Hastoe's response to each of them. These cases resulted in three determinations of reasonable redress, three determinations of service failure, three determinations of maladministration and one determination of the issue being outside of the ombudsman's jurisdiction. As a result of delays in the Ombudsman investigating cases, service improvements have normally been identified and implemented prior to the determination being received.
- 3.17 All orders made during the year as part of these determinations have been completed.
- 3.18 The performance report for Hastoe by the Housing Ombudsman is appended. It should be noted that any service failures found in determinations have been included as maladministration findings by the Ombudsman in their report. In addition, any determinations that were subsequently reviewed by the Housing Ombudsman after the 31 March 2024 are not included in their performance report, only the original determination. The table below is a further breakdown of the findings from the Ombudsman's performance report that details cases that have determinations of maladministration only and where the original determination was subsequently amended by the Housing Ombudsman:

Determination Date	Findings	Maladministration findings	Orders Made	Recommendations	Complaint Handling Failure Orders	Compensation
11/04/2024	3	1	1	0	0	£50
26/02/2025	1	0	0	1	0	£0
11/12/2024	5	2	3	2	0	£800
09/01/2025	1	0	0	2	0	£400
21/10/2024	2	1	7	0	0	£0
31/01/2025	3	0	2	2	0	£1,250
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>£2,500</b>

#### 4 RESPONSE FROM THE HASTOE BOARD

- 4.1 The Board is pleased to see the improved focus on complaints management over the last 12 months has led to significant improvements in performance with complaint handling. This has allowed both the Executive team and the Board focus on service improvements that need to be made over and above the focus on complaint handling.
- 4.2 The Board has set 100% compliance targets for complaints handling timescales in line with Housing Ombudsman guidelines and are pleased that performance is generally in line with that.
- 4.3 The introduction of the Members Responsible for Complaints (MRCs) has helped the Board have better oversight of complaints and enabled residents to speak directly to Board members at the Complaints Scrutiny Group.
- 4.4 The Board continues to prioritise complaints and learning from complaints, using this information in the review of the Business Strategy.

#### 5 FINANCIAL & VfM IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There were 161 compensation payments made during the year, this is a reduction of 125 cases from the previous year. The total amount of compensation paid was £59,355, a reduction of £110,000 from the previous year. The average amount paid in compensation was £367, a reduction of £226 from the previous year. The highest amount of compensation awarded was £5,750 in two separate, unconnected cases.
- 5.2 Although we have reviewed our Compensation policy and put in place tighter controls, the biggest reason for a decline in both the cases and payments, is the improvement in our services and better management of complaints and service requests. The Board are assured that any compensation payments are in line with Housing Ombudsman guidance and with Hastoe's policies.

#### 6 LEGAL & REGULATORY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 We must comply with the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling in order to comply with the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 from 1 April 2024.



- 6.2 The Regulator of Social Housing's Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard requires us to ensure that complaints are addressed fairly, effectively and promptly.

## **7 CUSTOMER CONSULTATION**

- 7.1 We meet with residents twice per annum to review complaints performance and scrutinise improvements to services made following complaints. Our focus over the last year has been to increase the number of residents attending this scrutiny group.
- 7.2 We have put in place Terms of Reference for this group so that it's clearer what the remit of the group is, and we have published these TORs and minutes from our meetings on our website.
- 7.3 The meeting of the Complaints Scrutiny Group on 22 April reviewed this report and the appended self-assessment, and approved them subject to Board approval. Actions from this meeting include:
- Adding an additional question to the TSM survey to check that residents know how to make a complaint. This is in response to the falling complaint numbers, to check that this isn't as a result of residents not knowing how to raise a complaint.
  - Removing the ability for residents to email Housing Officers directly and to channel all customer contact via the Customer Services team to speed up resolutions to enquiries.
  - Review the functionality of the residents' portal, specifically in relation to formatting and readability.
  - Focus on residents who have made a complaint over the last 12 months to invite to future sessions, as despite interest from more residents in attending the group, numbers remain very low.