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# Board

**Meeting date: 22 May 2025    Item: Complaints Report and Self-assessment**

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<b>Title of paper:</b>	Complaints report and Self-assessment
<b>Status:</b>	For Approval and Discussion
<b>Responsible Officer:</b>	Rebecca Pritchard, Director of Client Services
<b>Author:</b>	Rebecca Pritchard ( <a href="mailto:rpritchard@transformhousing.org.uk">rpritchard@transformhousing.org.uk</a> )
<b>Attachments:</b>	Appendix 1: Transform Housing & Support Complaints Self-Assessment

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## 1. Purpose of paper

- 1.1 Registered Providers are required to prepare and publish an annual self-assessment to evidence compliance with the Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS) complaints code. The self-assessment should also set out performance, learning and service improvements identified and implemented as a result of complaints received.
- 1.2 Transform's Board of Trustees is required to prepare and publish a response to the self-assessment.
- 1.3 The purpose of this report is to provide the Board with the information and assurance it needs to respond to the self-assessment (in Appendix 1) and approve its publication.

## 2. Recommendations

- 2.1 The Board is requested to:
  - 2.1.2 Note the report and identify any further questions
  - 2.1.2 Agree the Board response (section 5)
  - 2.1.3 Approve the self-assessment (Appendix 1) and response for publication

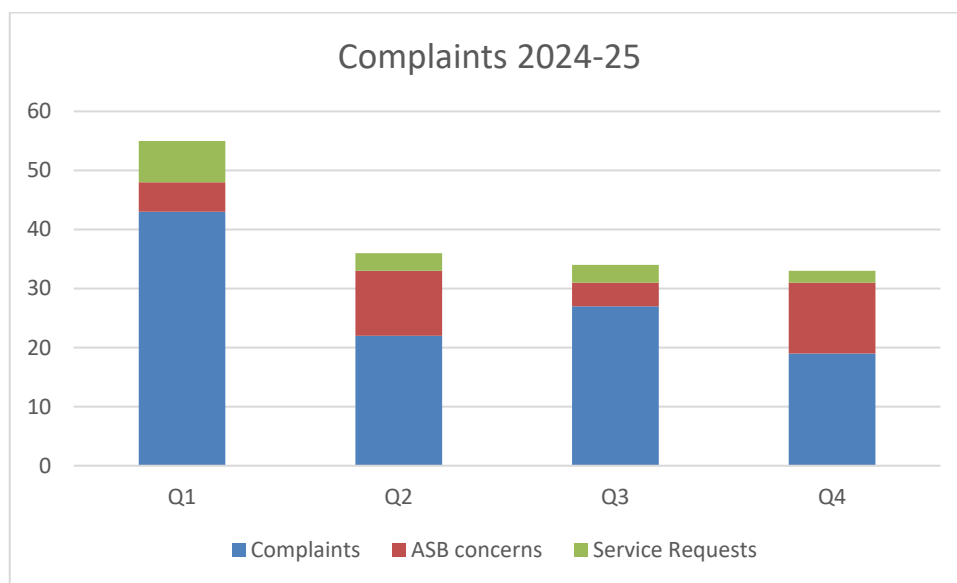
## 3. Complaints Performance 2024-25

- 3.1. The new Complaints Policy was launched on 1 April 2024. This is compliant with the updated HOS code and includes supporting policies and procedures:
  - Reasonable Adjustment Policy
  - Compensation Policy
  - Vulnerability Policy
  - Unreasonable Behaviour [when making a complaint] Policy
- 3.2. New complaints letter templates for all stages of a complaint were introduced from April 2024.
- 3.3. A new Complaints Case Management System was introduced to improve oversight and learning by the Complaints Team.
- 3.4. The new Complaint Policy and procedures were supported by a dedicated period of training and promotion for all staff. The training was informed by members of the Client Forum, so the "client voice" and the focus on their experience was integral to the new approach.

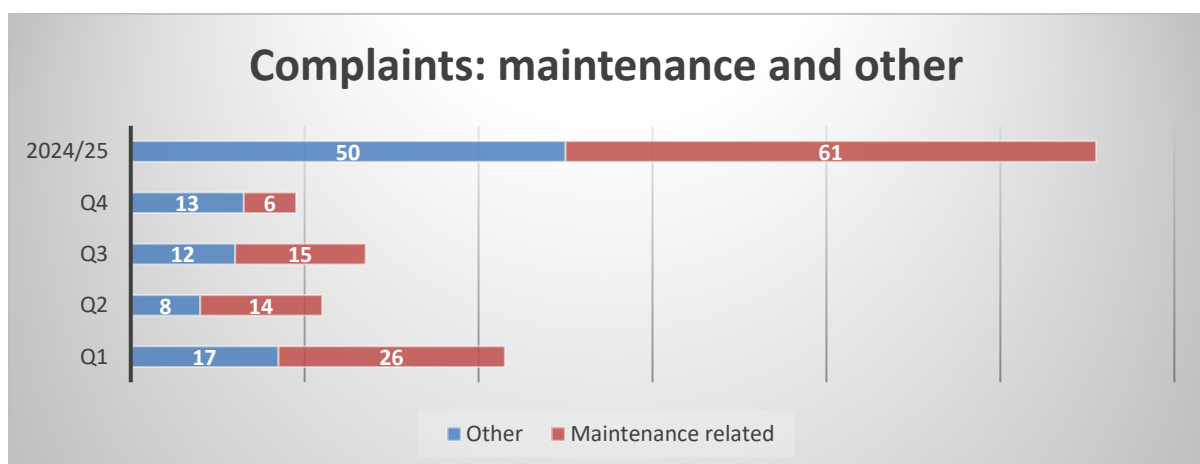
- 3.5. As a result, a significantly higher number of complaints has been received during 2024-25 compared to 2023-24 and previous years. This is a positive development as complaints enable us to learn and improve services.
- 3.6. The increase in client satisfaction with complaints handling in the Client Survey 2024 is an endorsement of the new approach.

**Number and type of complaints**

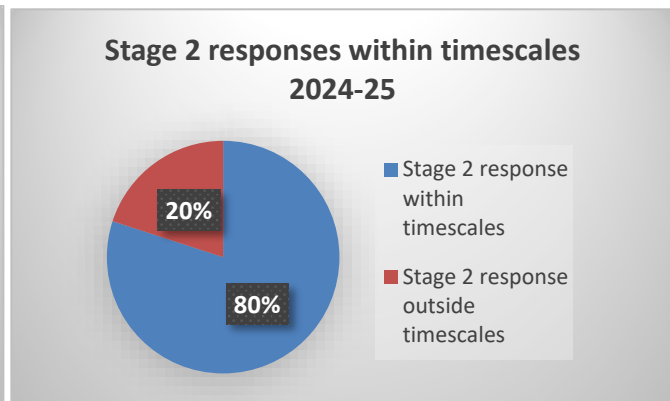
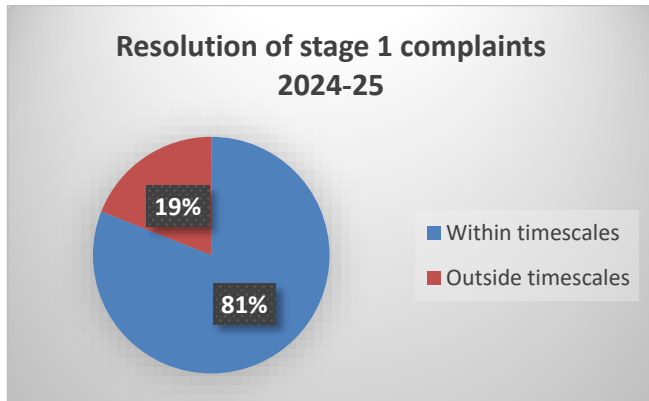
- 3.7. We received a total of 158 complaints during 2024-25. One of these (received during Q4) was not dealt with under the complaints procedure but was treated as a serious incident and reported to the Charity Commission. In 2023-24, only 19 complaints were formally recognised. This was a significant under-recording, as highlighted by the large volume of complaints raised in Q1 when we introduced the new complaints policy and procedure and trained all staff. The number of complaints and concerns over the last nine months has been relatively stable quarter on quarter.
- 3.8. Complaints are further subdivided into complaints, ASB concerns and service requests. Service requests and ASB concerns reported through the complaints form were responded to formally using the timescales in the complaints policy to ensure accountability and create a clear audit trail.



- 3.9. The largest category of complaints throughout the year were about maintenance and repairs. Work by maintenance colleagues – improving the out of hours offer, introducing geographical patches for maintenance operatives, earlier identification of the cause of complaints about damp, mould and condensation and the kitchen and bathroom replacement program have contributed to the reduction in maintenance related complaints.



- 3.10. The majority of complaints (over 80%) were responded to within target timescales.



- 3.11. Thirty of the 157 complaints were not responded to within timescale. This includes complaints without a clear audit trail of target response times of 10 working days being met. . A small number of complaints outside the stage 1 timescale were missed by just one day.
- 3.12. Performance has improved during Q4 with the recruitment of the Client Services Team Administrator who provides additional capacity to proactively manage the complaints process.
- 3.13. Ten stage 1 complaints were escalated to stage 2 with 80% responded to within timescale. One stage 2 complaint is not due a response until 28 April but has been included as “within timescale” following assurances from the complaints handler.
- 3.14. Our insights and learning from complaints (and the information from the Client Survey 2024) fall into two categories:
- Complaints handling
  - Client experience
- 3.15. Good complaints handling – with timely acknowledgement and responses - contributes to clients feeling heard, respected and empowered.

### **Complaints handling**

- 3.16. The complaints management system is well structured and logical but relies on manual processing and co-ordination to set-up complaints on the central spreadsheet, co-ordinate and chase progress to maintain timescales and maintenance to collate correspondence and update the central log. We have therefore invested in a Client Services Team Administrator to provide the additional resource required to proactively manage the complaints procedure.
- 3.17. A Complaints Handlers’ Forum has been established to bring complaint handlers together and is a forum for them to share experience and learning.
- 3.18. Where complaints involve more than one department, inter-departmental reviews of complaints are important so that learning can be captured and disseminated across the organisation.
- 3.19. More use of extensions to enable fuller investigations of complex complaints is now being made as the Client Services Team Administrator has been able to manage the complaints process and identify approaching deadlines at risk of slipping. This improves the client experience, as they are aware we are actively looking into their complaints and understand the reasons for extensions.

### **Client Experience**

- 3.20. Complaints handling has improved with a focus on the client experience. This includes
- Speaking with clients during any investigation, keeping them informed of progress, managing expectations and offering options where appropriate.
  - Having a designated person handling the complaint to improve communication for the client and co-ordinate responses where different directorates are involved.
  - Staff being more confident in offering compensation at an earlier stage in the complaints process, where appropriate.
  - Proactive management of the complaints procedure to improve response times.

- 3.21. This ensures clients feel heard, taken seriously and valued. The improved client experience was reflected in the improvement in satisfaction levels with complaints handling in the Client Survey 2024.
- 3.22. Recent positive feedback from a client, who had raised complaints to stage 2 and gone to the Housing Ombudsman Service, shows that good handling of complaints can rebuild trust and confidence.

#### 4. Transform Board's Response to Complaints Review and Self-Assessment 2024-25

*"Transform introduced a comprehensive suite of policies to comply with the Housing Ombudsman Service's Code for Complaints from 1 April 2024. The introduction of the new Complaints policies and procedures was supported by a comprehensive training program for all staff. This was shaped by Transform's Client Forum and the "voice of the client" was integral to the training provided.*

*The new policy and procedures have resulted in a significant increase in the number of complaints. We welcome these as an opportunity to learn and continuously improve our services. We recognise complaints as an opportunity to maintain, or where necessary, rebuild trust and confidence with clients.*

*Transform's Client Survey (2024) showed the proportion of clients who are satisfied with Transform's complaints handling increased by 13.9% - from 48.6% in 2023-24 to 62.5% in 2024-25. This has shown the importance of robust procedures to ensure we are accountable to our clients and support us being a learning organisation.*

*We are pleased to confirm compliance with the HOS code and are committed to working towards continuous improvement of our reporting and learning through complaints.*

*Our Complaints Policy implicitly states that:*

*Our guiding values are Respect, Empowerment, Responsibility and Excellence. Having a clear and accessible complaints policy helps us uphold those values in these ways.*

- We **respect** your views and want you to feel heard and know that we will take your concerns seriously. Being able to raise complaints helps **empower** you. Making a complaint can help you take control of a difficult situation and gives you a voice. We will take **responsibility** for what may have gone wrong and let you know in a timely manner what we can and can't do to put things right. Complaints help us learn and improve what we do and how we do it, which supports us in our aim of achieving **excellence** in our services.*
- How we respond to complaints is important as it can impact on your experience of our services and how you feel about us and yourself.*
- A complaint is an opportunity for us to learn and improve. It is important we listen carefully to you and understand what outcomes you would prefer through your complaint. Colleagues should take ownership of a complaint rather than think of it as a series of processes or tasks to be managed.*
- Complaints do not need to be negative experiences, but can be a positive way of building, improving and maintaining positive relationships with our clients, and putting our values into action."*

**Katie Wadey, Chair of Client Experience & Impact Committee Member Responsible for Complaints on behalf of the Board**

**25 May 2025**