



Annual Complaints performance and service improvement report

2023/24

1 - Introduction

The following report sets out Look Ahead complaints' performance between 1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024, in relation to compliance with our organisational policy and code of practice. The Housing Ombudsman expects Boards to scrutinize performance, specifically volume of complaints, types of complaints, case closure times, outcomes, escalation and organisational learning.

The report also sets out the complaint service improvement actions and includes an overview of the self-assessment against the Housing Ombudsman's Regulatory Complaints Management Code (the Code).

2 - Background

At the end of 2020, we undertook a full-scale review of our complaints policy and introduced a complaints quality assurance framework, a complaints KPI and a suite of complaints E-learning training modules.

Annual Complaints Assessment against the Regulatory Complaints Code

Since January 2021 the Housing Ombudsman has required all registered providers to undertake an annual complaint self-assessment against the published regulatory code and publish this on their websites. Our annual self-assessment requires Board approval.

We are compliant with the Code and preparatory works towards the Code which took effect on the 1st of April 2024 were undertaken. Core changes included changing our complaint and feedback policy which now has included allowing five working days to acknowledge a complaint; ten working days from the date the complaint is logged to respond; and a further ten working day extension where required and agreed with the complainant. Look Ahead's previous policy under the previous code allowed the complaint to be logged and acknowledged within three working days and a total of 13 working days from receipt to respond. We allowed a further five working days extension where required in agreement with the complainant.

We reflected the timeframes in the new code and update our e-learning platforms and communication channels to align with the new code.

As the nature of our complaints tends to be more complex due to our customer groups, it is envisaged that the number of cases where we will need to apply reasonable extensions will increase as a result of these changes.

Under the previous code Look Ahead operated a three-stage complaints process, whilst the code recommended a two-stage process as best practice. In compliance with the new code, we have introduced a two-stage process and this provides consistency with the Housing Ombudsman Code.

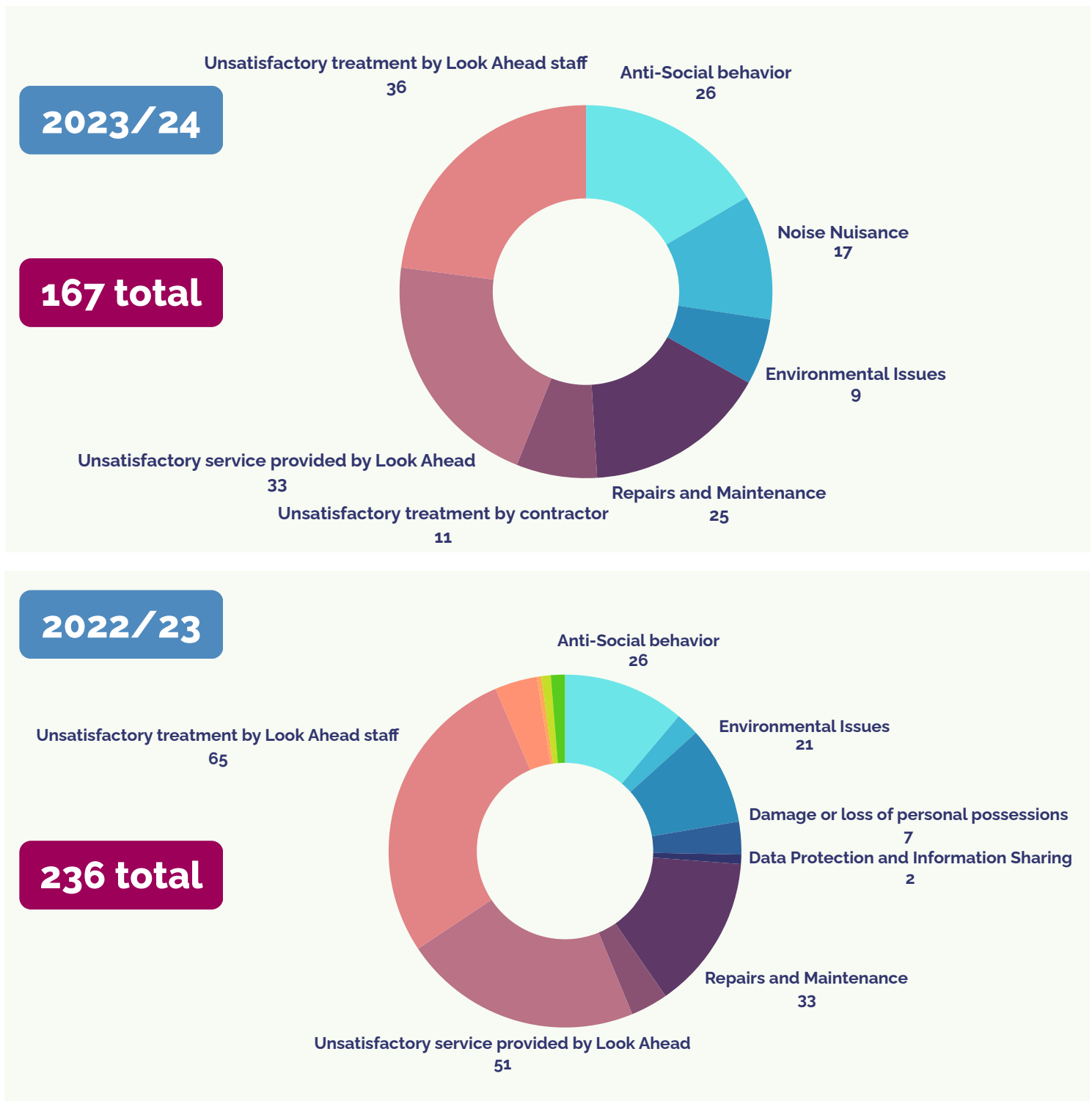
We also previously recorded informal concerns or where we put things right at first point of contact under our informal complaints category. This is not a stage zero, or pre-stage-one step, but under the code it can be interpreted as such. To this end we renamed "Informal Complaints" to record local "putting it right actions".

The Board is asked to approve the actions above and approve the self-assessment.

3 - Complaints Performance - Trends

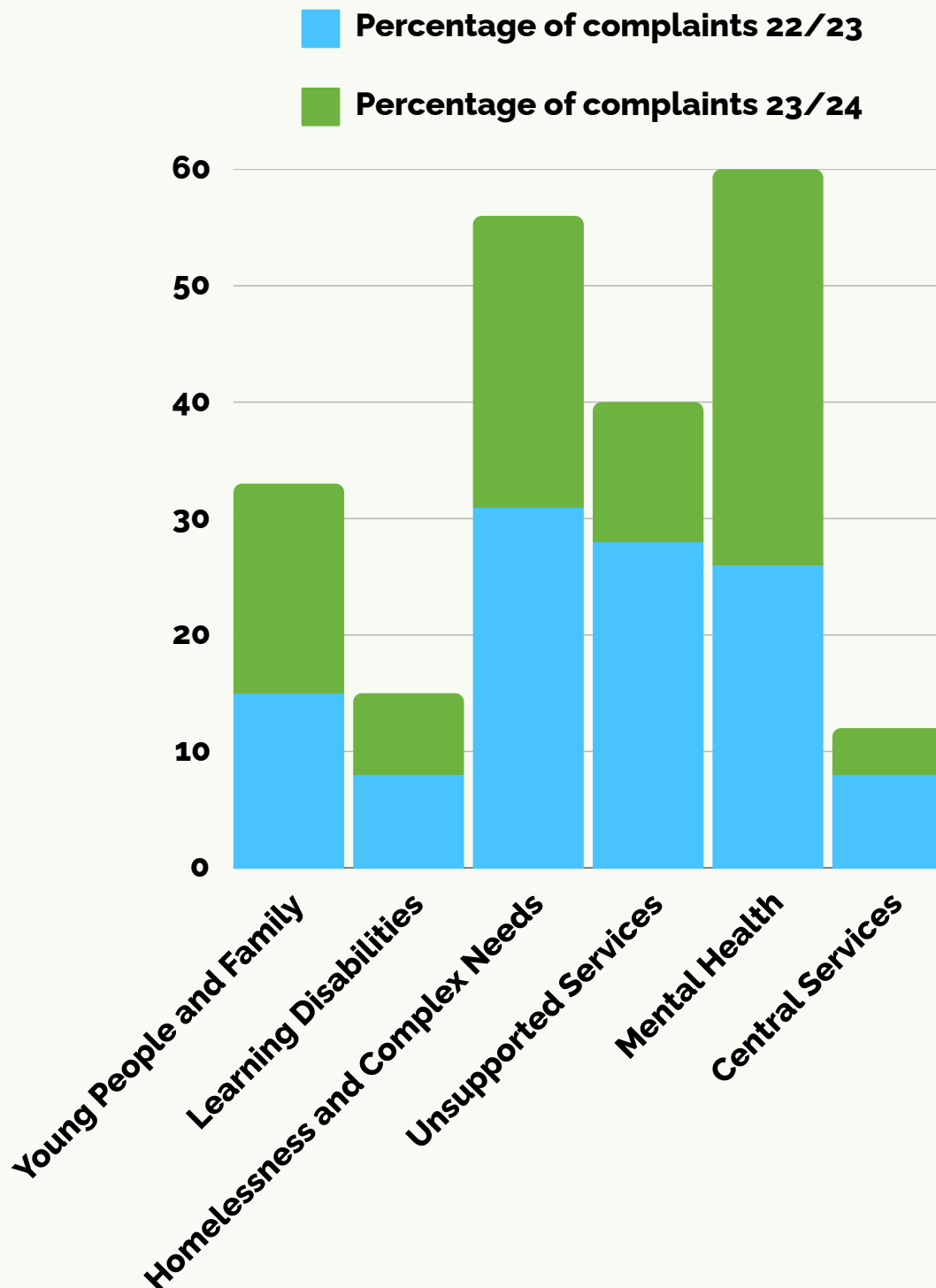
Between 1st April 2022 and 31st March 2024, Look Ahead logged **167** complaints in total. **48%** were categorized as formal and **52%** informal. **97%** of all complaints were resolved at Stage One, against a target of **95%**.

Compared to the previous year, we have seen a **29%** decrease in complaints received. This is mainly due to the drop in unsatisfactory treatment by Look ahead staff and unsatisfactory service provided by Look Ahead, which reflects the significant amount of work completed as part of our complaints service improvement plan, quality audit checks and staff training. This trend is highlighted in the table below.



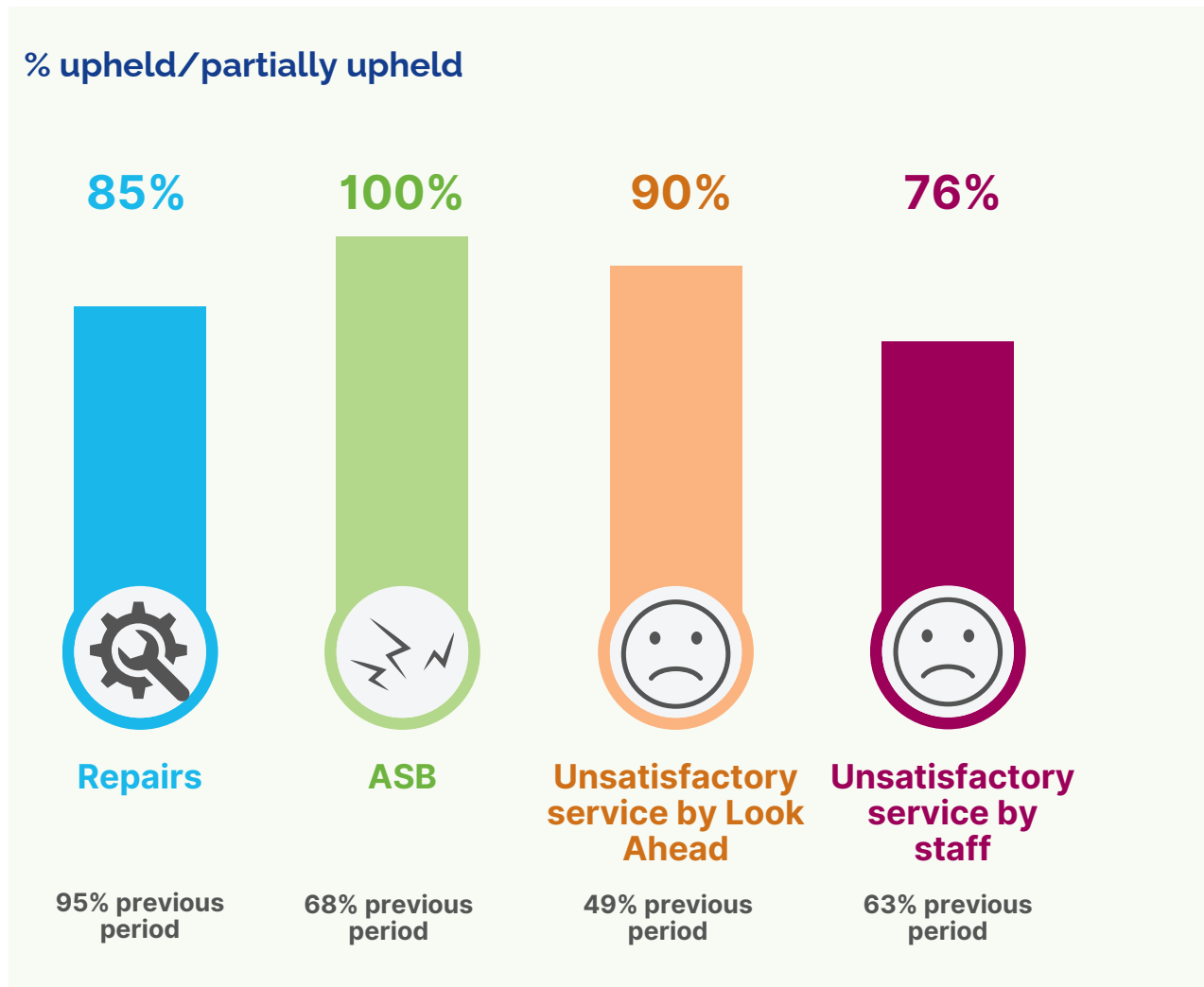
4 - Complaint Themes by Specialism

The table below sets out the percentage of complaints by specialism. Our unsupported tenants are more impacted by ASB and environmental and repair issues. Homelessness customers are more likely to have complaints regarding ASB and service quality. Whilst our customers in our mental health services are also impacted by ASB, as well as by treatment by staff. Young people have lower levels of complaint regarding ASB and are more likely to complain about service quality and staff related issues.



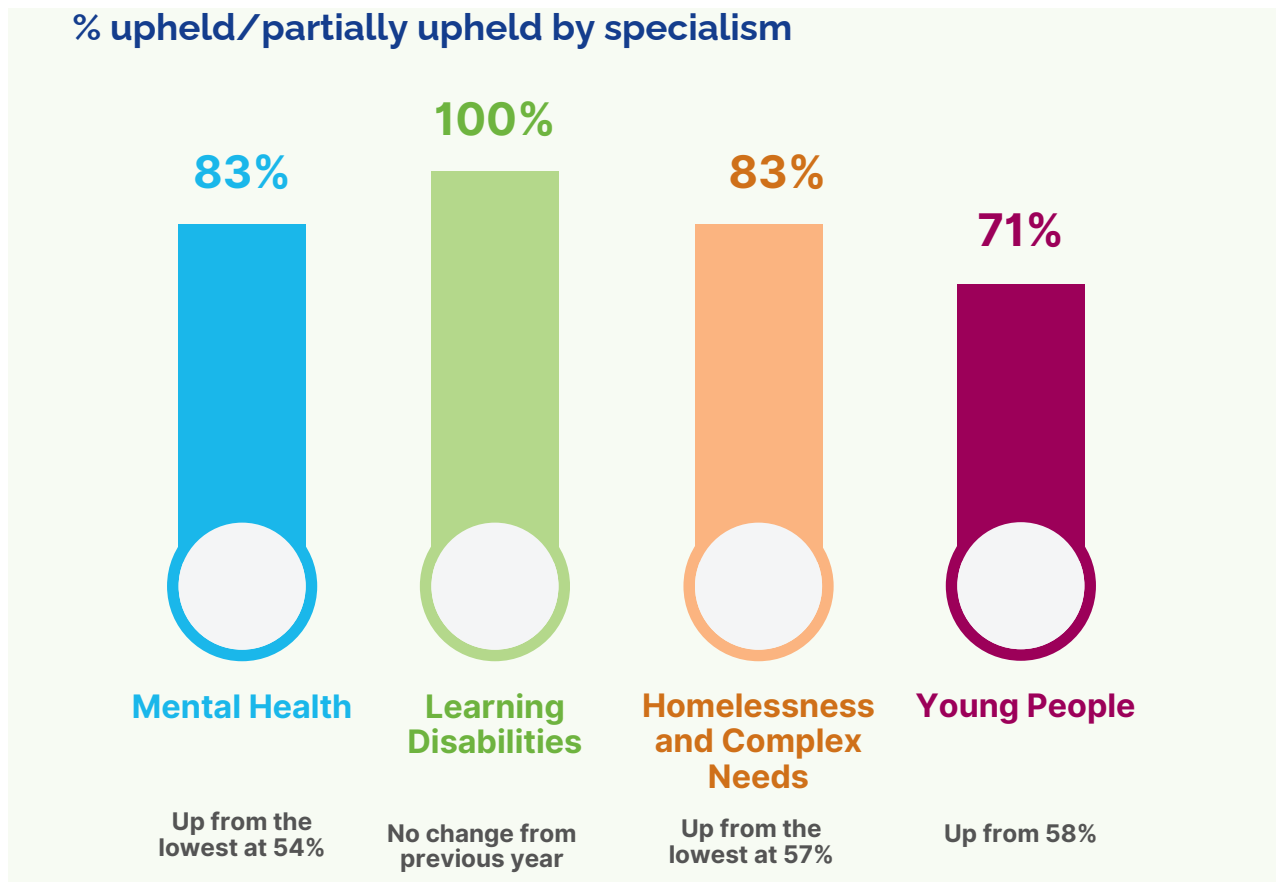
5 - Complaint Redress - Outcomes

During the reporting period **85%** of stage-one complaints were upheld or partially upheld – this included any approved extensions. The bar chart below provides a breakdown of the most prevalent complaint categories.



Back in 2020 we were concerned by the low level of complaints upheld related to service delivery and staff complaints. Consequently, we increased quality assurance, dip sampling and oversight of local case manager assignment to ensure transparency in the complaints handling process. We also rolled out complaints management and investigation training. As a result, the number of complaints upheld relating to unsatisfactory service by Look Ahead and unsatisfactory service by Look Ahead has increased and regular feedback are shared with respective services to improve service performance.

We dip-quality sample **10%** of closed complaint cases in the current year with the intention to increase this to **100%** in the next reporting year. **70%** of managers have completed the managing and investigating complaints training and **66%** of non-managers had completed the complaints eLearning.



With the exception of Learning Disabilities with no change, all three other specialisms have increased and has reflected the actions we have taken to ensure compliance with our complaint and feedback policy is adhered too and quality checks are carried out on complaint responses to ensure accuracy and consistency before they are sent to the customer.

6 - Performance

Case closure and delays

The Housing Ombudsman's complaint handling code requires Boards to have oversight of delays and extensions.

Over the past three years we have successfully reduced the average case closure days from 52 to 17 days, against the current target of 13 days.

Out of 87 formal complaints for 2023-2024, 34 were outside of the 13-day target. Of the 34, four were given approved extensions. As such, the cumulative performance at the end of the reporting periods at at **62.2%** against a target of **75%**.

Escalation

97% of all complaints were resolved at stage one against a target of **95%**. In this period, three cases escalated to stage two and all were partially upheld or upheld. No complaints were held at stage three.

Stage Two cases - partially upheld	
Summary	Actions
A review was requested by a customer who was unhappy with the state of the voided property and sought compensation costs.	The cost of the cleaning of the property was reimbursed and the Head of Service agreed additional changes to the customer's property.
The tenant had planned to transition to a housing association, but this process was delayed. The housing association informed the tenant that the delay was due to a meeting with the Look Ahead Service Manager. In response, the tenant submitted a formal complaint to address the matter as they felt the service manager had a personal vendetta against them to stop the move on.	Although no evidence was found to indicate discrimination or a vendetta, the customer was assured that Look Ahead would coordinate with the Housing Association to review their application and facilitate the moving process. Since the customer was staying at a hotel, Look Ahead offered compensation to cover food expenses during this period.

Stage Two cases - upheld	
Summary	Actions
The review was upheld where the parking process for a new resident had not been complied with - resulting in two parking tickets.	The parking tickets were reimbursed. Local staff were reminded to follow the moving in protocol and not to use copied/defaced parking permits.

Compensation Payments

Over this period, a total of **£2815** in compensation across stage one and stage two complaints was paid. The breakdown of the compensation with comments are as below

Stage One		Stage Two	
£50	Repairs and maintenance (incomplete works) - Mental Health customer	£150	Unsatisfactory service by Look Ahead – Homelessness and complex needs customer
£50	Repairs and maintenance (delayed works) - Young People customer	£200	Unsatisfactory treatment by Look Ahead staff – Unsupported customer
£200	Repairs and maintenance (delayed works) - Learning Disabilities customer	£75	Repairs and maintenance (Poor quality) - Mental Health customer
£200	Repairs and maintenance (delayed works) – Learning Disabilities customer	£1,000	Unsatisfactory level of service leading to ex-gratia settlement (unsupported customer)
£159	Repairs and maintenance (delayed works) - Unsupported customer	£1390 - Total Stage One compensation £1425 - Total Stage Two compensation £2815 - Compensation payments	
£150	Repairs and maintenance (delayed works) - Unsupported customer		
£110	Damage or loss of possessions - Young People customer		
£471	Unsatisfactory service provided by Look Ahead - Young people customer		

During the reporting period, no complaints were investigated or subject to judgement by the Housing Ombudsman or the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman.

7 - Service Improvement and Risk

- We will reduce our complaint case closure timeframe from 13 days to 10 working days to meet the revised complaint handling code.
- We are in the process of adding a "Damp and Mould" category to our complaints management system.
- We will rename "informal complaints" to ensure this is not misinterpreted as a pre-stage 1 process.
- We are updating the compensation and complaints policy to ensure all disrepair claims are managed through the complaints policy.
- We continue to work with the quality audit team to identify poor complaints practice in local services.
- We continue to monitor services where the prevalence of complaints activity is significantly higher or lower compared to similar services.
- We added the "Unsatisfactory treatment by other landlords or third parties" category back in 2020. We want to work with services to ensure they are effectively advocating for customers where Landlords are not fulfilling their repair and maintenance responsibilities.
- We aim to increase the number of colleagues who have completed our complaints e-learning.
- We will review the self – assessment between February and April 2024, to review feedback from the 2023 Tenants Satisfaction measure survey (The new regulatory survey includes a complaint handling satisfaction question), and against the joint ombudsman complaint code.

Board's response to Annual Report on Complaints and Feedback Performance

As the board, we acknowledge and support a positive corporate complaint handling culture. This reflects our values and behaviours and is essential for maintaining customer trust and loyalty. Feedback is valued, issues are addressed and continuous improvement is key.

At the end of March, we had responded to 62% of complaints within 13 working days, an increase from 59% in Q3 but still below that yearly target of 75%. The in-month performance in February and March 2024 was 85% (100% including approve extensions) and the team worked hard close all complaints within target moving into the new financial year. As such, we are confident that we will meet the target in Q1 of 2024/25.

As of end Q4 we have met the target of formal complaints resolved at stage one (95%) with 96% of complaints resolved without need for escalation.

The Housing Ombudsman's Joint Complaint Handling code took effect on 1st April 2024 and there is a conscious effort to raise the awareness and educate staff at all levels the importance and relevance of good complaint handling management. We have published our new Complaint and Feedback policy, published refreshed customer leaflets and posters and refreshed our e-learning training.

A Customer Service Manager role, which has complaint handling management as a primary function and has been vacant for many months has recently been filled. This resource will be utilised to closely monitor and support performance in the next reporting year.

Look Ahead's Board



*Look Ahead complies with the Housing Ombudsman's Code of Conduct.
Customers and tenants have the right to contact the Housing Ombudsman
at any point in the complaints process to seek advice and guidance.
The Housing Ombudsman can be contacted via their website:
www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/contact-us/*

lookahead.org.uk