



Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report

2025

Introduction

This paper is the Annual Performance and Service Improvement Report, outlining our performance against the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code and our own targets from April 2024 to March 2025. The report gives the Look Ahead Board an overview of the number of complaints received in this period, helping to identify trends and themes from the complaints received and providing insight into actions taken to help drive service improvements.

Look Ahead operates a group structure with several subsidiaries. In the reporting year 24/25 none of our subsidiaries are social housing providers and are therefore not included in the report.

Overview

The Housing Ombudsman's (HO) Complaint Handling Code was made statutory for Registered Providers in April 2024 and Look Ahead are obliged to comply with all provisions set out. The new Code has also empowered residents to make direct complaints to the HO with more openness and transparency with the process.

A complaint has been defined by the code as 'An expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions, or lack of action by an organisation, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf affecting an individual resident or group of residents.'

Look Ahead's Customer Services Manager (CSM) sits in the internal Customer Service team and this role was revamped last year, holding responsibility for centrally coordinating the complaint management handling process, aiming to keep to target response times and quality checking all Stage 1 and 2 complaint responses.

The CSM also works collaboratively with teams across the organisation to promote best practice in complaint handling and to champion a high quality of customer service. By offering guidance, support and training the roles of the Customer Service Manager and the Head of Customer Service ensure that staff are equipped to respond to customer complaints effectively and efficiently.

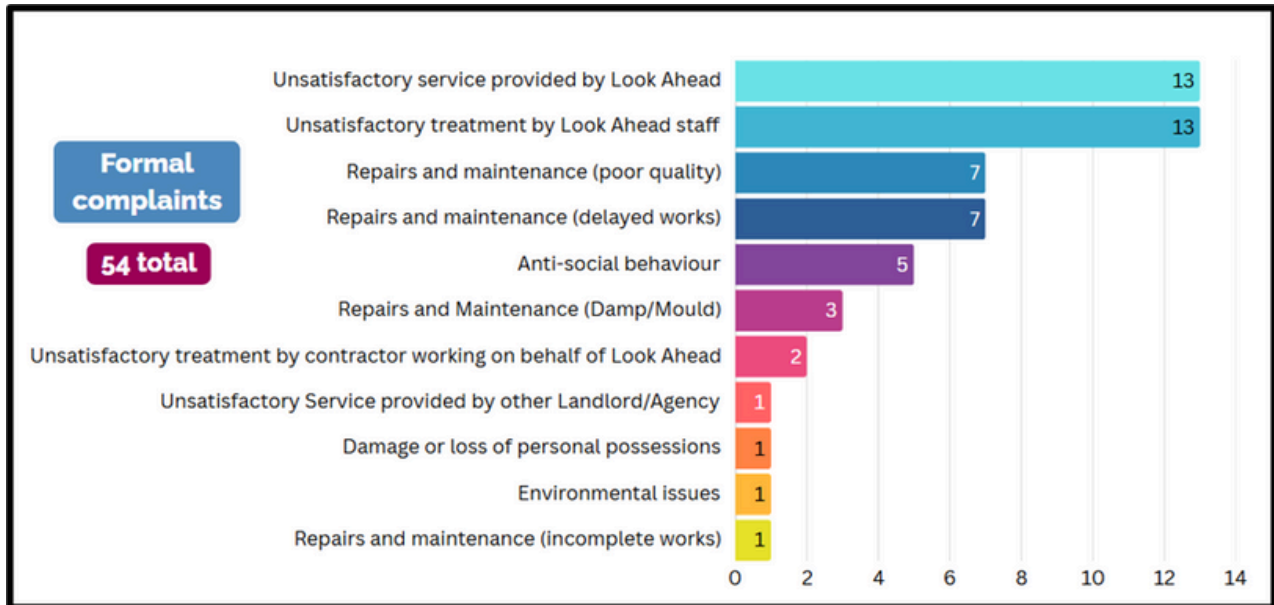
All staff are required to attend our two e-learning complaints courses:

- Managing and investigating complaints (Team Leaders, Service Managers, Heads of Services, Directors etc)
- Managing complaints and feedback (for everyone including for support workers)

The CSM monitors compliance with attendance to work towards our target of 100% compliance.

Numbers reported

Between 1st April 2024 and 31st March 2025, Look Ahead logged 54 customer complaints as defined by the HO code. A chart showing the reasons for these complaints is provided below:



Performance against target

The HO code instructs that once a complaint is made it must be acknowledged within 5 working days and from this date we are expected to provide a written response at Stage 1 within 10 days and a written response at Stage 2 within 20 days.

Should an extension be required this must be no more than 10 working days at Stage 1 and 20 working days at Stage 2.

Look Ahead has a performance target of response times which do not include extensions. Performance against all targets is set out on the following page.

	HO compliance code timeframe for Landlords to acknowledge complaint / provide an outcome	Look Ahead's performance against target	Extension timeframe	Look Ahead's performance against HO code - % of complaints resolved within timeframe including those with approved extensions	Did Look Ahead meet the HO compliance code?
Days taken to acknowledge Stage 1 complaint	5 working days	n/a	n/a	87%	No
Stage 1 complaint response	10 working days	72% (excluding extensions)	10 working days	98%	No
Days taken to acknowledge Stage 2 complaint	5 working days	n/a	n/a	89%	No
Stage 2 complaint response	20 working days	78% (excluding extensions)	20 working days	100%	Yes

The 5 working day acknowledgement period involves reviewing the concerns raised in detail and identifying an appropriate staff member to investigate the complaint and respond. There can be delays in finding a Manager who has undergone the Complaints Investigation Training and has the capacity to do this.

We responded to one complaint in 13 days without an approved extension. The investigating Manager was unable to contact the complainant within the 10-day period and did not inform the CSM of this delay.

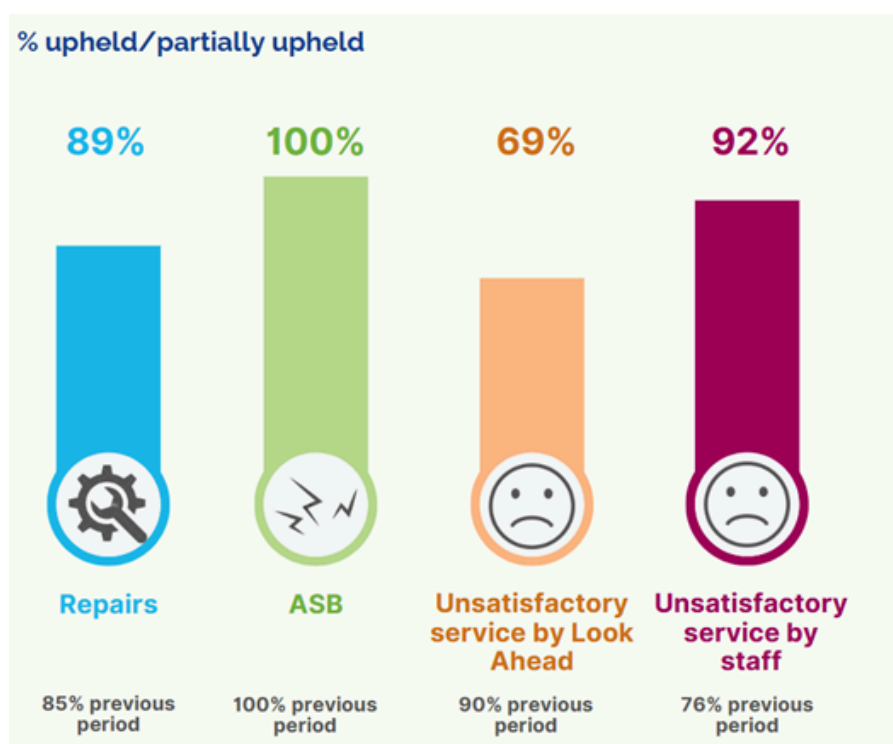
Complaint themes by Customer Group

We received the most complaints from our Young People's services, which is not proportionate to the total number of customers within these services, when compared to other specialisms. Our Young People customers were more likely to raise concerns related to repairs and staff issues. Customers within our Homelessness and Complex Needs services predominantly complained about Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) and service quality. In contrast, general needs tenants were primarily affected by repair related issues.

	Number of complaints	Number of customers
Young People	21	236
Unsupported	10	300
Homelessness and complex needs	9	542
Mental health	9	845
Learning disabilities	3	91
Central services	2	n/a
Grand total	54	2014

Complaints redress outcomes

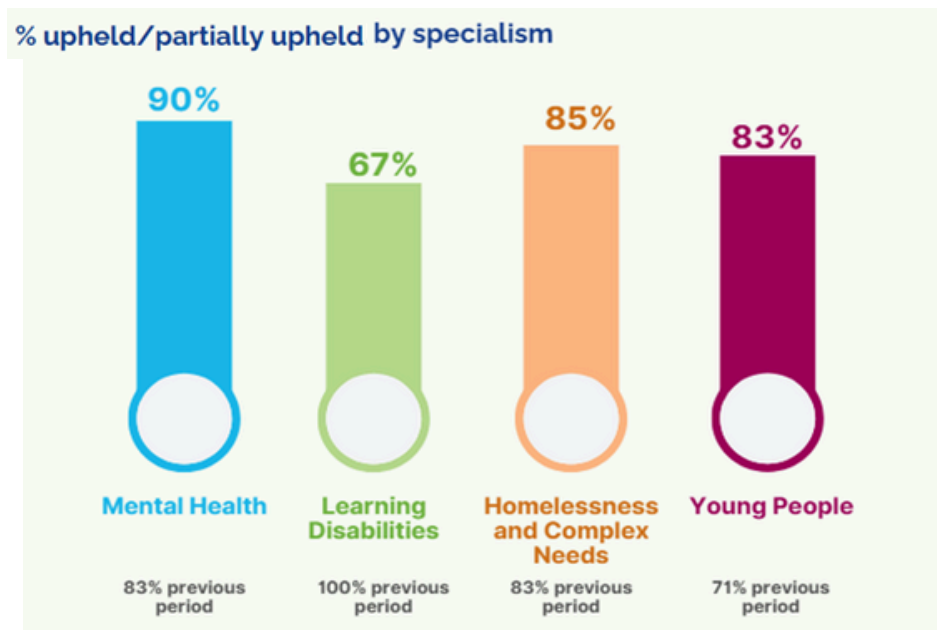
During the reporting period, **80%** of stage-one complaints were upheld or partially upheld – this included any approved extensions. The chart provides a breakdown from the most prevalent complaint categories.



Mental Health, Homelessness and Young People's services have all seen an increase in the number of complaints upheld. This is reflective of the actions we have taken to ensure compliance with the Ombudsman code and our complaints policy.

We conduct quality checks on all responses to ensure they are fair, accurate and reflect where we accept that there has been a failing in our customer service and an apology/redress is needed.

Complaints management and investigation training has supported investigating managers to make good decisions, supported by attendance by the Customer Service team at Head of Service patch meetings where complaints and service failings are openly discussed with managers.



Escalations from stage 1 to stage 2

KPI metric	Look Ahead target	2024/2025 outcome
Total stage 1 complaints	0	54
Complaints resolved at stage 1	95%	87% (45 complaints)
Complaints escalated to stage 2	Max 5%	13% (9 complaints)

9 cases were escalated to Stage 2 in which **3** were 'not upheld', **5** were 'partially upheld' and **1** was 'upheld'.

2 out of the **9** cases were Stage 1 complaints that stemmed from the previous financial year of 2023/2024; therefore they are being included.

Compensation

In line with the Housing Ombudsman's guidance on financial remedies, and in accordance with our Complaints and Feedback Policy, which is supported by our

Compensation Payment Framework, we acknowledge that financial compensation can, in some cases, be an appropriate form of redress. Where applicable, we will assess the circumstances to determine whether a goodwill gesture or a formal compensation award is warranted.

Over the 2024/2025 period, a total of £2289 in compensation across stage one and stage two complaints were paid in line with our Compensation Policy.

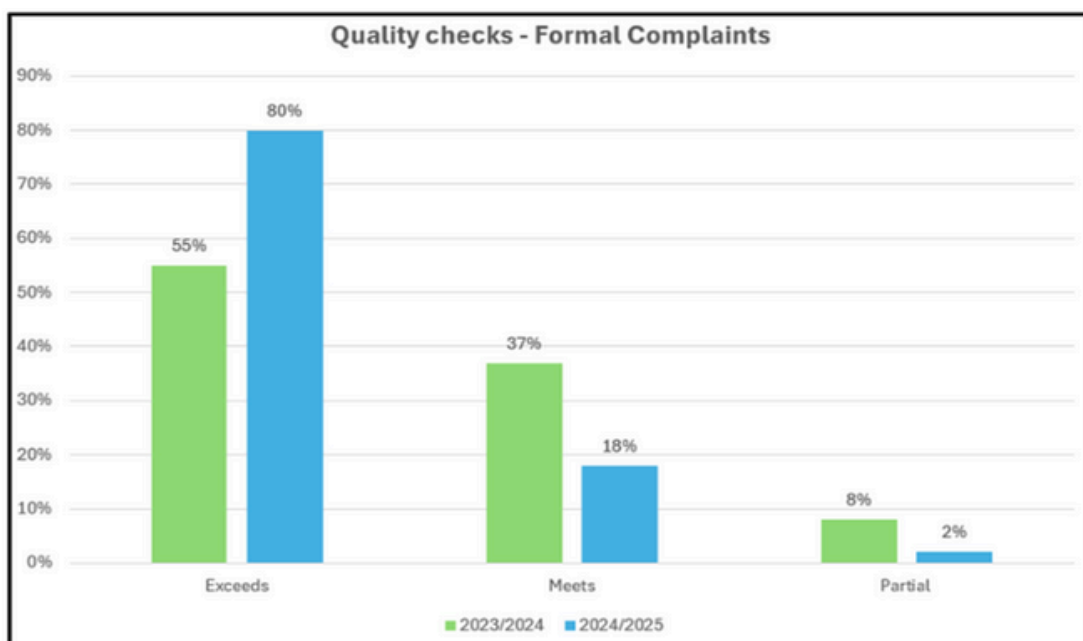
Most of these payments were made as compensation for delays in completing repairs or for repairs that did not meet the expected standard.

Additionally, following a stage 3 complaint, we were directed by the Ombudsman to award £500 to a customer in recognition of findings of maladministration and service failure, the reasoning behind this is set out below.

Quality assurance

An external audit was undertaken by Beever and Struthers issues in December 2024 on Complaint Management. The management response is pending as some findings have been challenged by us based on the interpretation data provided. A meeting with the auditors has been scheduled to review their findings and then a formal management response will be submitted/acceptance of revised findings.

All formal complaints now undergo a full quality review, as such we have observed a significant increase in the number of formal complaints that have undergone quality assessment and received an 'Exceeds' rating. Correspondingly, there has been a notable decrease in complaints rated as 'Meets' and 'Partial'.



We attribute this improvement to several key factors, including, proactive follow up with staff to complete their complaint handling e-learning modules, consistent feedback provided to investigation managers upon completion of investigations; greater adherence to the full investigation process and thorough review of outcome letters prior to being sent to the complainant.

Housing Ombudsman's determination

In December we received a determination from the Housing Ombudsman (HO) in regard to a complaint a tenant had made to them. The complaint was about the tenants:

- a) Request to move.
- b) Report on damp and mould at the property
- c) Concerns in relation to her tenancy agreement.

The Ombudsman determined.

- There was no maladministration in our handling of her request to move.
- There was maladministration in our handling of damp and mould in the property.
- There was maladministration in our complaints handling.
- There was service relation in relation to her tenancy agreement.

The Ombudsman instructed that Look Ahead apologise to the tenant for the inconvenience caused and pay her a total of £500 in compensation. We have complied with this and carried out a lesson learned exercise. This highlighted some of the changes already made within Look Ahead to improve our response (e.g. the introduction of a damp and mould policy which includes reporting and monitoring, the introduction of a CSM to oversee all complaints and ensure they are responded to within statutory timelines), and other actions have been included in our service improvement plan.

We received 2 other HO enquiries in this reporting year:

One case has been assigned to a case investigation manager for review.

One case was an enquiry we replied to, no further correspondence has been received.

Service improvement actions

- We are currently in the process of reviewing and updating our Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) policy and procedures. As part of this initiative, we are actively seeking customer feedback to enhance our approach, and our draft procedure will be discussed at the customer led Incident Panel in June 25. Our focus includes improving how we support individuals when reporting or addressing ASB and noise nuisance incidents. We are inviting input on the types of ASB related data customers would like to see published, including their preferred formats, to ensure transparency and better communication.
- Furthermore, we will be introducing mandatory ASB training for staff and implementing a new toolkit to enhance our response to these issues.
- All services are obliged to display our updated Feedback and Complaint posters and leaflets, and these are also distributed as easy-to-read documents. When attending service patch meetings, the CSM engages with service managers to reinforce the importance of visibility and to confirm that these materials are accessible to customers. In addition, our e-learning courses provide staff with practical guidance on how to support customers through the feedback and complaints process.
- There has been no change in the volume of complaints relating to Unsatisfactory Service provided by Look Ahead staff, with figures for 2024/2025 remaining consistent with those recorded in 2023/2024. However, a significant proportion of these complaints originated from our Young People services, with Bracknell services accounting for the majority.
- This ongoing trend is largely attributed to persistent staffing challenges within the Bracknell team over the past year. Following a "service of concern" joint meeting with key stakeholders for the Bracknell service, the feedback team arranged bespoke training for operational staff to support locally. Efforts to address these staffing issues are ongoing and remain a key focus to improving service quality and reducing complaint volumes moving forward.
- An unsatisfactory service from our maintenance contractor significantly affected delivery last year (and led to a number of complaints) and we served notice on the contractor in 2024.
- Complaints training is mandatory for Look Ahead staff. The following attendance rates were achieved:
 1. Managing Complaints and Feedback: 88%
 2. Managing and investigating complaints: 86%.
- In April 2024, we appointed a Customer Service Manager (CSM) to further strengthen our complaints process. This role involves close oversight of all complaints to ensure that investigation managers are thoroughly addressing the issues raised and that outcomes are aligned with both the HO Code and Look Ahead's internal policies.

- The CSM closely monitors complaints throughout the investigation process. They regularly check in with the investigation manager, ideally at the halfway point of the investigation to ensure they have engaged with the complainant, clarified their desired outcome, and gathered all relevant information. These initiative-taking steps help to prevent potential escalations or extensions.
- All Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaints that are closed undergo a quality assurance check. Investigation managers receive tailored feedback highlighting both areas for improvement and effective practices. As a result, we have observed a notable improvement in the overall quality of complaint investigations compared to the previous reporting year.
- Additionally, the CSM and Head of Customer Service attended all service meetings organised by Heads of Service and attended by Contract Managers. As part of this engagement, the Customer Service Manager also offers bespoke complaints handling training and supporting continuous improvement across our teams with service visits.
- Numerous bespoke service visits have been undertaken for training and monitoring purposes to ensure compliance, consistency and share good practice.
- Regional Director reports have been introduced which provide a regular oversight and drill down on performance in their respective areas. These are produced and shared quarterly.

Action	By who	By when
In the upcoming reporting year, our focus will be on addressing underreporting across services. We plan to conduct a dip-dive review of services identified as under-reporting, with the aim of understanding the underlying causes and areas for improvement. We received only three complaints from our Learning Disability services in 24/25, and we will be visiting services to talk to customers and staff, promoting complaints as a valued form of customer feedback.	Head of Customer Service	Report back with recommendations – October 25
We will also be focusing more on our Young Peoples services, given the high numbers of complaints from this customer group. We intend to hold focus groups with customers across the specialism to better understand the high levels of dissatisfaction and to agree what we can do to improve this.	Head of Customer Service	Report back with action plan – January 26

<p>We received 62 customer contacts this year which were dealt with as 'Local Resolutions' – issues where service requests/customer issues should be dealt with by the service and resolved within 3 days. This year we will analyse a sample of these to ensure they were dealt with appropriately and as per policy to assure ourselves they did not meet the criteria for formal complaints. We will carry out this exercise twice in 25/26.</p>	<p>Head of Customer Service</p>	<p>Exercise to be carried out in August 25 and January 26.</p> <p>Report back with findings and recommendations each time.</p>
<p>Did not meet 100% compliance with 5-day acknowledgement target – increase monitoring and escalation process.</p>	<p>Head of Customer Service</p>	<p>Process to be implemented with rapid escalation to Head of Service/Ops Director.</p> <p>In July 25.</p> <p>Consider if Team Leaders can be appointed as Investigation Managers.</p>
<p>We will carry out a review of the wording in our Tenancy Agreements to ensure that the content is reflective of our obligations and services provided.</p>	<p>Head of Housing</p>	<p>Dec 2025</p>
<p>The updated ASB Policy and Procedure, toolkit and training will be implemented across the business.</p>	<p>Head of Housing and Operational Leads</p>	<p>Implemented in July 25</p>
<p>Given the high percentage of complaints upheld about 'Unsatisfactory service by staff' (92% from 76% in 23/24) we intend to carry out more analysis into this. Our Head of Customer Service will lead a group of cross-organisational colleagues and customers to better understand the issues raised, agree what lessons can be learned and put together an action plan to reflect on any improvements we need to make.</p>	<p>Head of Customer Service</p>	<p>Report back with recommendations in October.</p> <p>Action plan in place by November 25</p>
<p>We did not meet 100% attendance at our mandatory training courses. We will continue to follow up with individual staff (and their Managers) who do not attend</p>	<p>Customer Services Manager</p>	<p>On-going.</p>
<p>Unsupported customers do not have the benefit of dedicated support staff to support them to raise complaints. Over the coming year, we will work closely with the Housing team to ensure that unsupported customers have improved access to the complaints process, are able to provide feedback effectively, and are clear on who to contact for support when needed.</p>	<p>Head of Housing.</p>	<p>On-going.</p>
<p>The Compensation policy, framework and procedure will be reviewed to ensure consistency and in line with the Ombudsman code and industry standards</p>	<p>Head of Customer Service</p>	<p>Jul 2025</p>
<p>Updated and aligned processes will be put in place to ensure any vulnerable tenants within our unsupported stock are identified and risk assessed with mitigations put in place that are clear and timelined.</p>	<p>Head of Housing and Head of Customer Service.</p>	<p>September 25.</p>
<p>We will be participating in monthly meetings organised by our Regional Directors to present complaints data to Heads of Services. These sessions are designed to provide greater insight into our performance in complaint handling. They also offer an opportunity for Heads of Services to ask questions and raise any concerns that require attention.</p>	<p>Head of Customer Service</p>	<p>On-going.</p>

Conclusion

This report has set out a review of Complaints Performance in 24/25, detailing numbers of complaints, types, and our performance against the HO code and Look Ahead's targets. The report sets out the role of the Customer Service Team in terms of support, compliance and quality assurance. It also highlights service improvement actions throughout the year and details of work being planned for 25/26.

Recommendations:

The Governing Board are asked to approve the report for Board submission.

Lindsay Ryder
Interim Director of Housing and Customer Service