

Annual complaints performance and service improvement report

2024/25 | hilldale.org.uk



At Hilldale we value our tenants feedback and the lessons we learn from complaints.

To do this we are committed to:

- Complying with the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code
- Ensuring tenants have access to and are aware of our complaints policy.
- Providing accessible and inclusive channels to make a complaint.
- Providing an honest, transparent and fair response to all complaints.
- Learning from our complaints and actioning service improvements.

To achieve this we have:

- A publicised complaints policy on our website with accompanying process flow chart
- Have a dedicated web page giving tenants information on how to raise complaints
- Created an involvement leaflet that is published on our website and is in all tenancy packs, signposting tenants to our complaints process
- Run a campaign called 'Talk to us' in October which is refreshed every 6 months, highlighting the complaints process and how to raise concerns.
- Strengthened our responses to complaints by reviewing our outcome letters.
- Assigned Hilldale staff training through the Housing Ombudsman Service Centre for Learning to strengthen their knowledge of complaint handling and principles.
- Continued with reviewing our complaints monthly at our 'lessons learnt meeting' and making action plans from complaint trends.
- Formed a new Customer Committee to scrutinise our complaints handling, performance and actions.
- Instructed a company to audit our complaints handling in April 2024 and in May 2024 we received substantial assurance that our complaint handling meets the requirements of the Housing Ombudsman's complaint handling code.

Our Performance

From April 24 to March 25

0 complaints that meet the code definition have been refused.

1 complaint has been referred to the Housing Ombudsman and is awaiting investigation by its team

36 stage 1 complaints were received.
2 of these were escalated to a stage 2.

32 stage 1 complaints were acknowledged on time, **4** complaints fell outside of the 5 working day acknowledgement target meaning **88.8%** were acknowledged in line with the code. The reason for this is the complaints were emailed to members of staff who were out of the office and unable to respond. Moving forward we look to make this part of our improvement plan for 25/26 to ensure all complaints are acknowledged on time.

35 stage 1 complaints were responded to in line with the code (10 working days or where extended by a further 20 working days from when acknowledged). There were **10** extended complaints. The reasons for extension varied from complex complaints that required partnership working, to awaiting responses from external contractors.

1 complaint fell outside of the timescale, meaning **97.2%** provided an outcome in line with the code. The reason for one complaint falling out by 1 day was due to the responding officer's absence.

21 complaints were upheld and **15** were not upheld meaning **58.3%** of our complaints identified a service failure.

Stage 2 data:

2 complaints were escalated to a stage 2.

2 complaints - **100%** were acknowledged and provided an outcome in line with the code. 1 of these was extended by a further 20 working days due to being a complex case that required partnership working with internal and external partners.

2 Complaints - **100%** were upheld.

The reason for escalation for complaints were:

- **Unhappy with amount of compensation**
- **Unhappy with response of works to be completed in the property.**

Service Area complaint relates to:

32
were repairs
complaints

4 were categorised as 'other'
They were categorised as other as raised several issues within the one complaint such as:

- planned works
- compliance
- soft services
- adaptions
- ASB handling

Lessons Learnt:

Each month Hilldale Leadership team meet to discuss complaints raised and identify themes from these complaints and how we can improve our service as a result of these learnings, this year we have identified the below and worked to make improvements to our service.

Trend identified	Improvement made
Our handling of anti-social behaviour cases needed to be strengthened with new processes and policy. This was identified from a complaint that was raised through all stages and then referred to the Ombudsman.	Implemented a new ASB policy and processes and trained staff on this, focusing on a new victim centred approach and partnership working. When cases are closed where applicable we send a satisfaction survey to understand how happy the tenant is with our handling of the case.
When raising repairs the tenants' needs are not always considered. This has been identified from several complaints that the repairs team do not know the needs of the tenant to consider any adjustments to how the repair is raised.	Developed our Housing Management system to allow for tenants needs to be pulled through to repairs orders so this can be considered at time of raising repair. For example where a tenant requires a hoist for a shower and their hot water is not working they may not be able to use the alternative facilities meaning we would need to consider time scales when raising this repair.
We identified from several of our complaints that repairs are delayed due to our external contractors not providing job reports efficiently allowing for next steps.	To improve the timeliness of our repairs service, we met with our contractors to reinforce expected response times and ensure adherence to our agreed SLAs. This is closely monitored through KPI reports weekly, any outstanding jobs are chased with the contractor and updates communicated with the customer.
Communication and receiving updates on repairs raised is not as frequent as customers would like, customers report they have to chase us for an update.	Reports are now run twice a week for outstanding jobs to allow the repairs team to follow up actions and update customers. At the time a repair is raised customers are advised of the lead time of the repair and asked for contact information to keep them updated.

25/26 action plan:

Over the next 12 months we will continue to learn from our complaints, and this will be driven by our Customer Engagement Manager with oversight from our newly appointed Customer Committee ensuring compliance with the Consumer Standards and the Housing Ombudsman's Complaints Handling Code.

We will....

Continue to highlight our 'talk to us campaign' every 6 months

Have the Customer Committee review complaints performance and scrutinise our handling of complaints

Include in each tenancy pack details about how to access our complaints service

Incentivise our complaints handling reactive survey to gather more responses

Develop our complaints system to include more information about the type of complaint

Develop a way to ensure those complaints emailed to staff members on leave are directed to another channel to raise concern.

Board Response to report:

During 24/25 at Hilldale we have continued to embed how we handle complaints against the Housing Ombudsman's complaint handling code.

This includes ensuring tenants are aware of how they can make a complaint, by publicising our complaints process, through our website and in sign up packs and running 'talk to us' campaigns.

We have given particular attention to ensuring tenants, most of whom have support needs, have access to easy read information about how we manage complaints, co-created with tenants involved in our Tenant Voice Panel.

This year we have taken time to focus on the quality of our complaint responses, and are assured that this is having an impact with most complaints resolved at stage 1, as only 2 out of 36 were escalated by the tenant to stage 2. We are also assured by the low level of investigations by the Housing Ombudsman Service, where 1 complaint is waiting review.

The Board commissioned a third party to challenge us around complaint handling, through internal audit, and we are pleased that Hilldale received a positive substantial assurance rating. This confirmed Hilldale's complaint handling meets the requirements of the code.

However, our priority remains to learn from complaints, and we continue to run monthly 'lessons learnt' meetings and making action plans informed by complaint trends. We are confident that this is evident within this year's annual complaint handling performance and service improvement report.

As part of our annual complaint handling performance and service improvement report the new Member Responsible for Complaints (MRC) has considered Hilldale's self-assessment against the code, and was assured at the full compliance reported. This took into account the recent improvement to strengthen how we track resolutions agreed with tenants to resolve complaints. This is important to manage the risk that we may not otherwise deliver on the promises made to tenants on how we will resolve their complaint.

Overall Hilldale has performed well over the year, with 97.2% of complaints handled on time for stage 1 and 100% for stage 2. This year we have also reported on how many complaints were extended, 29% (11 out of 38). The Board is satisfied this is explained, as these were complex cases that needed more time to investigate and resolve.

In 25/26 we have already started to make significant changes to how the Board has oversight of complaint handling. Our new Customer Committee will review how we perform against complaint handling targets and discuss trends in complaints to inform possible areas for service improvements. As the Board we will continue to receive updates from the Committee at each meeting.

Hilldale will also continue to ensure that staff and the MRC access training and seminars available through the Housing Ombudsman Service Centre for Learning, to strengthen their knowledge of complaint handling and principles. We will also take into account sector learning from complaints identified by the HOS through its investigations, as these provides best practice for us to adopt.

Hilldale Board

High quality homes for people who need additional support.

If you'd like more information about anything in this report, or you'd like to get involved with Hilldale, please get in touch.

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