



Sage
Homes

Annual Complaints Performance and Service

2023/24



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Commentary from the Board

The Sage Homes Boards have reviewed the Annual Complaints and Service Improvement Report for all three of the Sage Homes RPs (Sage Housing Limited (SHL), Sage Rented Limited (SRL) and Sage Homes RP Limited (SHRP)) as well as its self-assessment in relation to the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code 2024.

Managing complaints in a way that promotes resident service improvement is a priority for the Boards, and we acknowledge resident dissatisfaction with the complaint handling process and the complaints performance for 2023–2024. Customer satisfaction with the complaints handling process ranges from 43% for our affordable rental customers in Sage Homes Limited (SHL) to 31% for Sage Rented Limited (SRL) compared to a sector average of 34%. For our Shared Ownership customers, satisfaction levels were lower at 15% compared to a sector average of 25%.

We have taken steps to foster more effective communication and accountability throughout the organisation and maintain consistently good record-keeping to reduce complaints. We have also restructured our service delivery model to improve the quality of our repairs and defects services and improve communication, transparency, accountability, and resident satisfaction. In 2023/24, Sage Homes has invested in all teams to increase resources, technology and accountability to drive significant improvements in delivery for customers.

The Boards have strengthened governance arrangements to ensure effective oversight of complaints. Board level reporting considers the root causes of complaints and the actions being taken to address these. The Board takes its role in championing a positive complaint handling culture very seriously and is supported in this by the Customer and People Committee.

This statement has been agreed in conjunction with the Chair of Customer and People Committee, and the Sage Homes Chair on behalf of the Boards.

Executive summary

This report outlines the annual complaint performance for the financial year 2023/24 and details the key learnings and service improvements made following the resolution of complaints. The report fulfills a requirement of the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code (section 8.1) and aims to provide transparency on Sage Homes' complaints performance and the service improvements we have implemented.

Background

Sage Homes has grown and changed significantly over recent years and this has provided us with challenges that are different from many other Registered Providers. The country desperately needs investment into the affordable housing sector and Sage Homes has been the largest provider of new affordable homes in England over the last three consecutive years. While this is a huge achievement, it does mean that Sage is disproportionately exposed to the build quality of the new homes sector and the ability of our developer partners to respond to defects in a timely manner.

During 2023/24, we built a new complaints team and introduced changes to our processes and triaging methods to enhance efficiency and effectiveness in handling complaints. We also added a new management position, the Deputy Head of Customer Care, in February 2023. The centralised Complaints team manages the overall complaints process, including quality control and performance evaluation. The responsibility for resolving complaints lies with the teams within the business where the complaint originated, ensuring that appropriate resources are allocated to address customer concerns effectively.

Recognising the importance of maintaining an impartial and consistent approach, Sage Homes reinforced its centralised complaints service in 2023. This structure provides residents with an independent and standardised process for managing complaints. Our dedicated team collaborates closely across departments to comprehensively grasp issues and recommend appropriate resolutions. This collaborative effort ensures prompt and thorough attention to resident concerns, adhering closely to the principles outlined in the Complaint Handling Code. Customers benefit from this approach, ensuring their complaints are handled impartially, even if they prefer not to have their complaint managed by the same person or team who handled their original issue.

Sage Homes has been adhering to the previous Complaint Handling Code, and the main provisions of the new statutory Code remain consistent with our current practices. However, in April 2024 we revised our complaints policy to align with the new Code and our self-assessment, further enhancing our commitment to effective complaint resolution.

Complaint Handling Code 2024

The Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 empowered the Housing Ombudsman to issue a code of practice regarding the procedures members of the scheme should have for handling complaints. It also placed a duty on the Ombudsman to monitor compliance with this code of practice.

The Code clarifies the definition of a complaint, the methods by which complaints can be made, the process that should be followed, and the governance structure surrounding complaints. It also requires the RP to produce this report and demonstrate compliance with the Code. The Complaint Handling Code became statutory on 1 April 2024.

Annual Self-Assessment

We conduct an annual review of our performance against this Code to ensure compliance. Additionally, our Complaints Policy has been updated to incorporate these changes and adhere to the new Code.

You can find the code and evidence of our compliance at:
<https://www.sagehomes.co.uk/contactus/complaints/>

Service Improvements and Learning

We have implemented several service improvements based on customer feedback and insights from various sources, including the Housing Ombudsman Service. Here are the key changes implemented:

- One important decision made during the 2023/24 period was the transition of our management of tenanted properties back to Sage Homes from Places for People, effective from 15th January 2024. This significant move reflects our commitment to taking responsibility and enhancing customer service by increasing our oversight and responsiveness to issues and resident feedback obtained through satisfaction surveys. Taking direct control of management responsibilities is expected to improve our ability to deliver improved services and better meet the needs of our customers.
- We have consolidated our complaints handling processes to ensure that all complaints can now be raised directly with Sage Homes, eliminating the previous dual process involving both Sage Homes and Places for People. This streamlining has allowed us to introduce new triaging methods aimed at addressing complaints promptly and efficiently. These enhancements are designed to create a more responsive and supportive environment for customers, building stronger relationships and ultimately enhancing overall satisfaction.
- We take our landlord responsibilities very seriously, which is why we have established our own housing management and repairs teams. We have restructured the Aftercare team to improve defect resolution, dividing it into three regions, each overseen by a dedicated manager. This restructuring allows us to provide more localised and focused support to our customers.
- We have also enhanced our systems and operational processes to ensure that we deliver an improved quality of service as we expand our property portfolio. These improvements aim to streamline operations, enhance efficiency, and elevate the overall service experience for our residents. Sage aspires to high levels of customer satisfaction which requires us to get ahead of customer needs and stay ahead.

Key Learnings and Actions

- The leadership and senior management team receive a weekly customer report that includes statistics on open complaints, service requests, defects, repairs, and phone call levels. This ensures trends are identified, acted upon, and measures are put in place to drive improvement.
- The Leadership Team is briefed in detail on complaint trends and insights from the Housing Ombudsman. The Boards, Customer and People Committee and the Customer Scrutiny Panel are also kept informed about complaint handling and Housing Ombudsman findings.
- We have conducted numerous reviews of our policies and procedures in response to complaints with customers, co-designing improvements.
- We regularly use the Spotlight reports produced by the Housing Ombudsman to learn and improve our service to customers.
- We have implemented a new Remedies policy to ensure consistency in how we offer compensation.
- We have changed our process for handling damp and mould and introduced a new policy to address these issues more effectively.
- We have created a new policy for vulnerable customers to ensure they receive the necessary support.
- All staff members have received training on case management in our single housing management system (CRM) and record-keeping in light of the Knowledge Information Management (KIM) spotlight.

Summary of Complaints: 2023/24

During the year ending March 2024, Sage Homes received a total of 1,376 complaints/ service requests. Of these, 478 were logged as formal complaints, with 365 processed as Stage 1 and 113 (24%) escalating to Stage 2. Additionally, 898 were logged as service requests, requiring prompt resolution to prevent escalation to a formal complaint.

The number of Stage 1 complaints received per 1,000 homes was 23 which is lower than the sector average of 36, whilst the number of Stage 2 complaints received per 1,000 homes was 7 which is above the sector average of 4.

63% of Stage 1 and 75% of Stage 2 complaints were responded to within the complaint handling code timescales. Response times to complaints in the first half of the reporting period were lower than the second half, where they continued to improve, reaching 100% on-target responses since November 2023 and up to the end of the reporting year.

During the reporting year ending March 2024, Sage Homes were comprised of 3 RPs, and as such is required to report performance for each one:

Reporting year: 01 April 2023 - 31 March 2024	SHL		SRL		SHRP		Total Sage Homes
	LCHO	LCRA	LCHO	LCRA	LCHO	LCRA	
Stage 1 complaints received	115	159	69	22			365
Stage 2 complaints received	53	43	13	4			113
Total formal complaints received							478
CH01 - Stage 1 complaints received per 1,000 homes	32.7	23.3	23.3	8.7			23.0
CH01 - Stage 2 complaints received per 1,000 homes	15.0	6.3	4.4	1.6			7.1
CH02 - Stage 1 complaints responded to within timescales	54.8%	63.5%	68.1%	86.4%			63%
CH02 - Stage 2 complaints responded to within timescales	73.6%	69.8%	92.3%	100.0%			75%

CH01 is the number of complaints received per 1,000 homes, with SHL Low-Cost Home Ownership (LCHO) receiving the highest number and Sage Homes RP (SHRP) Low-Cost Rental Accommodation (LCRA) the lowest number of Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaints relative to size of the registered provider.

There is a material difference in the Sage RP scores for rental customers. SHRP has a lower level of complaints and a better response rate than SRL:

- SHRP has lower levels of complaints due to the customers being newer to Sage compared to SRL and these customers managed directly by Sage Homes housing management. SRL customers in 2023/24 had their housing management services (including complaints handling), provided by Places for

People.

- For SRL, the data looks different as the customers have a longer tenure, therefore have had a higher transaction volume resulting in more complaints.

For SHL, complaint volumes were impacted by the fact that homes were new when customers moved in and required settling in time (endeavouring to resolve defects via the developers and community issues).

Complaints Policy Exclusions

As part of our complaints policy, certain requests were typically not progressed, though each was reviewed on a case-by-case basis:

- Complaints regarding incidents that occurred more than 6 months ago.
- First-time requests for service.
- Issues that had already been fully addressed under our complaints policy.
- Reports of anti-social behaviour, unless the complaint pertains to our handling of these reports (handled under our ASB policy).
- Cases where court proceedings have already been initiated.
- Complaints related to subject access requests (SAR), which are managed under our SAR policy.

Analysis of Complaints and Housing Ombudsman Determinations

A review of complaints and Housing Ombudsman determinations has revealed several recurring themes that need our attention. These insights highlight key areas for improvement that have been agreed between Sage management and the Boards:

- **Delayed Defect Resolution:** Defects reported within the warranty period often experience delays in resolution, primarily due to the developer's slow response in addressing these issues.
- **Communication Breakdowns:** Poor communication and delays in providing timely updates to customers have been common complaints. Effective communication is crucial in addressing service deficiencies promptly.
- **Estate Management Issues:** Concerns about the cleanliness of communal areas, missed cleaning visits, fly-tipping, and vandalism have been frequently raised by customers.
- **Antisocial Behaviour:** Issues related to handling antisocial behaviour (ASB) and maintaining proper records have been identified as areas needing improvement.
- **Delays in Repair Completion:** Prolonged wait times for repairs have been a

general issue, causing inconvenience and dissatisfaction among residents.

Housing Ombudsman Findings

We received 46 informal pre-actions from the Ombudsman during April 2023 to March 2024. These are instances where a resident asked the Ombudsman to intervene and help progress their complaint through our process.

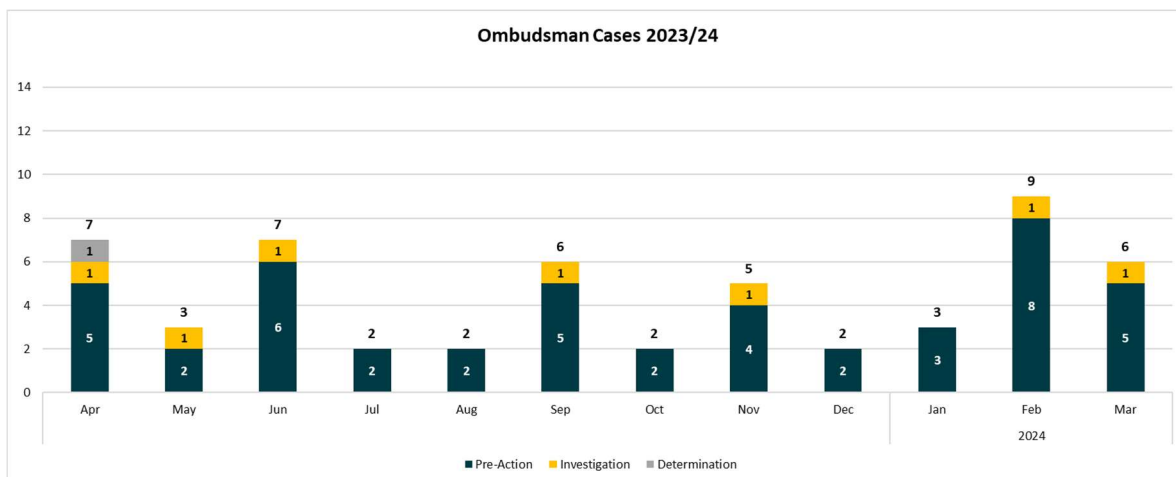
Between 2023/24, we had 8 cases pending determination with the Ombudsman, and one complaint was withdrawn by the customer. The Ombudsman has expanded its capacity, enabling more cases to proceed to investigation.

In the past year (2023/24), the Housing Ombudsman Service made determinations on 11 cases involving Sage Homes and our former managing agent, Places for People. Sage received 7 determinations, while Places for People received 4. This represents 2.3% of the total complaints logged last year.

From these 11 cases, there were 27 findings, detailed as follows: 17 findings of maladministration, 2 of reasonable redress and 8 of service failure.

The breakdown is as follows:

Housing Ombudsman Ruling	Sage Homes	Places for People	Total
Maladministration	10	7	17
Reasonable Redress	2	0	2
Service Failure	7	1	8
Total	19	8	27



Sage Homes takes all decisions from the Housing Ombudsman Service very seriously. We acknowledge and are disappointed by determinations highlighting maladministration and service failures. We are committed to continually improving the services we provide to our residents, viewing complaints not just as challenges but as opportunities to enhance our operations. Beyond addressing specific complaints, we

actively listen to feedback from residents across all service interactions, leveraging insights from the Housing Ombudsman Service, our Customer Scrutiny Panel, research groups with customers, direct customer feedback and findings for other housing providers. These inputs are invaluable in identifying areas for enhancement and implementing proactive measures to prevent issues from escalating into formal complaints.

Our overarching goal is to cultivate an environment where resident feedback is not only valued but also promptly acted upon to ensure the highest quality of service delivery. Through embracing these challenges and learning opportunities, we are dedicated to strengthening our relationships with customers and community stakeholders. This commitment underscores our ongoing efforts towards transparency and accountability in all facets of our operations.

It's important to note that many of the determinations received were related to complaints predating 2023, during early years of high growth at Sage. In 2021 we added 3,287 new homes which grew by a further 3,477 in 2022 and over 4,000 in 2023, making Sage the largest provider of new build homes in England across those three years. Since then, our organisation has undergone substantial evolution to manage this growth. The challenges faced during this initial phase have been pivotal in shaping our understanding of customers' needs, and we have made significant strides in improving our policies, systems, processes, and training based on the valuable feedback from Ombudsman reports.

Sage Homes is committed to using feedback to drive meaningful changes and improve the overall customer experience. By actively listening to and learning from our customers, we aim to create a more responsive and supportive environment.