



# Annual Complaint Handling & Service Improvement Report

<b>Report author:</b>	Jonathan Earnshaw, Customer Quality Manager
<b>Reporting Period:</b>	1 <sup>st</sup> April 2023-31 <sup>st</sup> March 2024

As the Customer Operations Director and the Executive team member responsible for complaints in the organisation, I'm pleased to present our first annual complaint handling and service improvement report which looks at our complaint handling performance between 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023-31<sup>st</sup> March 2024.

I have lead responsibility for complaints and alongside my colleagues its vitally important to me that we continue to work hard to support a positive complaint handling culture.

This report confirms the number of complaints we have formally received in this period, helps identify trends and themes from the complaints received and importantly provides an opportunity to look ahead to the exciting work we have underway to help drive service improvements.

This report also includes details of the Housing Ombudsman determinations we have received in the period, and the action we have taken as a result. Helping us strengthen our approach to complaint handling further.

In addition, as you will see below, we have recently conducted a further self-assessment against the Housing Ombudsman's complaint handling code which officially came into operation on 1<sup>st</sup> April this year.

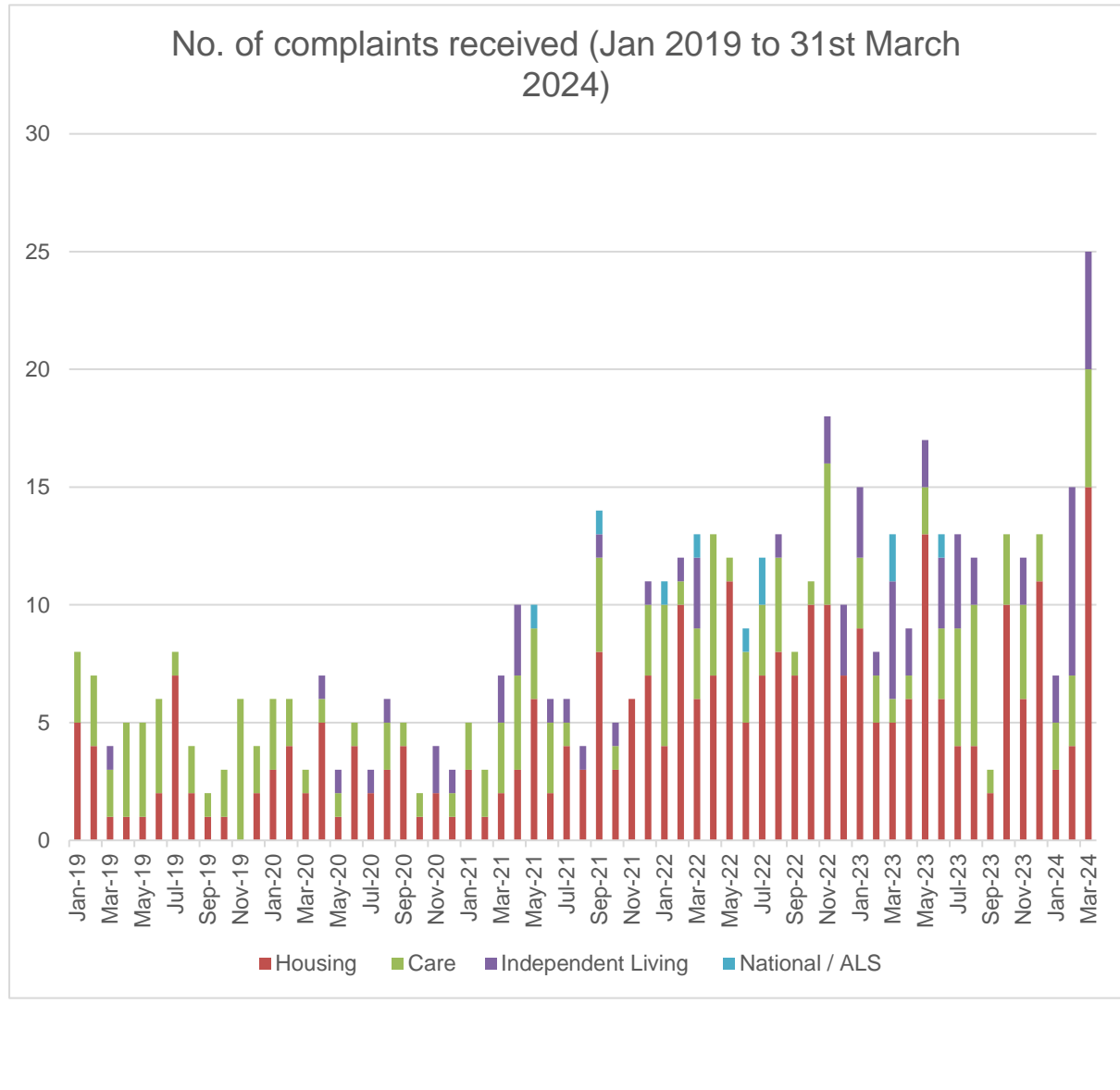
While it's positive to see the progress we have made over the last year, the Customer Committee and myself in my role as the member responsible for complaints (MRC) are fully committed of the steps we need to take including launching a brand new training and awareness package for all colleagues in the Autumn on effectively handling complaints, working collaboratively together and embracing a positive learning culture to ensure we always listen, learn and take action to help drive further service improvements.

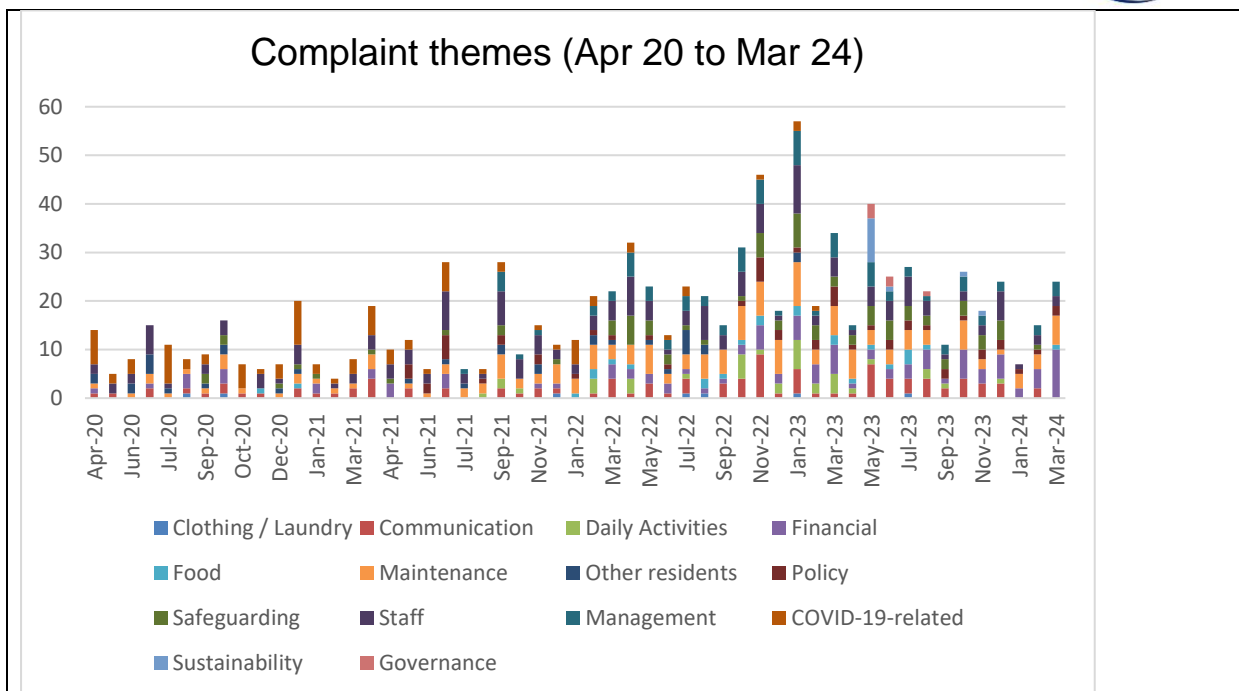
I'm particularly pleased that our Residents Panel will also be helping us scrutinise our approach to complaint handling in the months ahead, as they will tell us what we do well but also where we need to improve – they're valuable insight is welcome.

If you feel something isn't quite right, please let us know – chat to your local manager in the first instance or please reach out to us via email [complaints@abbeyfield.com](mailto:complaints@abbeyfield.com) or by calling us on 01727 857536.

Julie Freear  
Customer Operations Director, Customer Committee  
June 2024

The graph below highlights the volumes & themes of complaints we received since January 2019 (in terms of volumes) and April 2020 (on themes of complaints) There may be multiple themes from a single complaint due to the complaint being related to several items.





**Complaints data: for the period 1 Jan 2021 to 31 March 2024**

The data in the table below is based on complaints received relating to Abbeyfield Living Society properties from residents or their representatives – and complaints received about ALS as a corporate body.

The data is split between 1 January to 31 December 2021, 1 January to 30 September 2022, and from 1 October 2022 (when policy changes came into effect) to 31<sup>st</sup> December 2023 and finally 1<sup>st</sup> January 2024 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024 to provide a broad spread of data – future reports will consolidate the data for the year in question.

	2021	01/01/22 to 30/09/22	01/10/22 to 31/12/23	01/01/24 to 31/03/24	Trend (since last report)	T
No. of complaints received (average per month)	87 (7.3)	103 (11.4)	183 (13.1)	47 (15.6)	↑	
No. which relate to damp/mould or risk of damp/mould	6	10	29	6	↓	
<b>Acknowledgement</b>						
% acknowledged within target (2 working days)	87%	93%	90%	95%	↑	1
<b>Stage 1</b>						
% responded within target (10 working days)	73%	58%	74%	88%	↑	1

% responded within target (10 working days) or with agreed extension	83%	86%	95%	100%	↑	1
% of response letters which included details of how to escalate	79%	86%	99%	100%	↑	1
% of complaints fully upheld at Stage 1	47%	50%	33%	47%	↑	
% of complaints partially upheld at Stage 1	23%	32%	32%	26%	↓	
<b>Stage 2</b>						
% of complaints escalated to Stage 2	14%	17%	24%	11%	↓	
% responded within target (15 working days)	82%	61%	71%	60%	↑	1
% responded within target or with agreed extension	82%	94%	98%	98%	↔	1
% of complaints fully upheld at Stage 2	42%	28%	14%	20%	↑	
% of complaints partially upheld at Stage 2	25%	33%	26%	20%	↓	
<b>Ombudsman</b>						
No. of complaints escalated to Housing Ombudsman or Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman	1	1	3	0	↑	

## Housing Ombudsman Determinations – 2023/24

During 2023/24 we have received two Housing Ombudsman determinations regarding complaint cases which had been referred to the Housing Ombudsman

### 1. The complaint

- The resident's concerns about the fire safety issues related to a stairlift in the property and the external fire escape.
- The resident's concerns about the suitability of a neighbouring tenant in the building.
- The resident's concerns about the treatment of staff in relation to Covid vaccinations.

### Determination (decision)

In accordance with paragraph 52 of the Housing Ombudsman Scheme, there was *no maladministration* by the landlord in respect of its response to:

- The resident's concerns about the fire safety issues related to a stairlift in the property and

the external fire escape.

- The resident's concerns about the suitability of a neighbouring tenant in the building.
- The resident's concerns about the treatment of staff in relation to Covid vaccinations

**The full report can be read here:**

[The Abbeyfield Society \(202127722\) - Housing Ombudsman \(housing-ombudsman.org.uk\)](https://housing-ombudsman.org.uk)

## **2. The complaint**

The landlord's response to the resident's concerns about the use of a stair lift in the property.

The landlord's response to the resident's concerns about emergency fire escape lighting being left on permanently.

The landlord's response to the resident's reports that a member of staff had behaved in a discriminatory way.

The Ombudsman has considered the landlord's complaint handling.

### **Determination (decision)**

In accordance with Paragraph 52 of the Housing Ombudsman Scheme, there was no maladministration in relation to the landlord's response to the resident's concerns about the use of a stair lift in the property.

In accordance with Paragraph 52 of the Housing Ombudsman Scheme, there was no maladministration in relation to the landlord's response to the resident's concerns about emergency fire escape lighting being left on permanently.

In accordance with Paragraph 52 of the Housing Ombudsman Scheme, there was no maladministration in relation to the landlord's response to the resident's reports that a member of staff had behaved in a discriminatory way.

In accordance with Paragraph 52 of the Housing Ombudsman Scheme, there was no maladministration in relation to the landlord's complaint handling.

**The full report can be read here:**

[The Abbeyfield Society \(202205203\) - Housing Ombudsman \(housing-ombudsman.org.uk\)](https://housing-ombudsman.org.uk)

## **Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman Determinations**

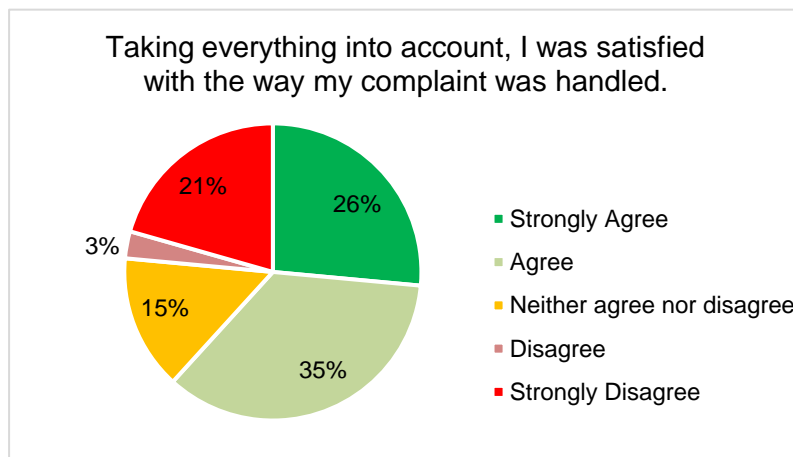
Whilst we are aware of at least two referrals to the LGSCO which we have fully cooperated with them enquiries, we have not yet received any determinations in this period from the LGSCO.

## Complaint Handling satisfaction

Since January 2021, all complainants have been sent a satisfaction survey after the final response letter (normally Stage 1, unless the complainant indicates their wish to escalate the complaint). These surveys are currently issued at six weeks after the stage 1 or stage 2 response has been provided.

56% of complainants were surveyed in 2023/24 and only 7 completed surveys were received back. We recognise this is a very low response rate and we are currently exploring ways to improve this, such as providing a link to the survey, so it can be provided at the time or shortly after the complaint response has been issued. We are also exploring the ability to complete the survey via an automated form to speed up the process for the complainant. We are also trialing completing the satisfaction survey by telephone, to see if that helps with the response rate and gradual detail to help drive service improvements.

In total since 2021, 36 surveys have been returned. The survey uses a five-point scale from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree with space for additional comments.



- **76%** answered 'Strongly Agree' or 'Agree' to 'My complaint was acknowledged in a timely way'.
- **70%** answered 'Strongly Agree' or 'Agree' to 'The time taken to investigate the complaint was reasonable'.
- **66%** answered 'Strongly Agree' or 'Agree' to 'I will use Abbeyfield's complaint process again if I has a similar concern in the future'
- **42%** answered 'Strongly Agree' or 'Agree' to 'From my perspective, the complaint is now closed' The surveys have enabled further action to be taken to rectify complainant dissatisfaction, where this was not known. One complaint was escalated to Stage 2 following the survey response this quarter.

## Complaint Handling Service Improvements in 2023/24

- Work has now been completed in developing an e-learning training module on complaint handling, this will be launched in Summer 2024.

- A complaints working group has been established and is already developing further customer service training for all resident facing staff focusing on working collaboratively to strengthen a positive complaint handling culture.
- A new 'complaint lessons learned' process has been developed to ensure lessons learned are captured at the completion of a complaint, with outputs shared with stakeholders to plug gaps and share best practice more widely across the organisation.
- We have formalised the process between property/maintenance requests and a complaint to provide a better service to residents.
- An updated version of our 'Making a complaint' guide was published in August 2023 with new House complaint posters for noticeboards to promote our complaint handling approach.

## Resident Panel Involvement

In summer 2024 our resident panel will support our work in extracting lessons learned from complaints to help drive service improvements, scrutinising how we handle complaints will offer valuable insight in helping to shape our service for the future and it will allow us to bring our complaint handling approach closer to the voice of our residents, helping us to share best practice and the value and importance of raising complaints when things go wrong.

The residents panel will also review quarterly our complaint handling performance and the results from our complaint handling satisfaction survey.

## Complaint Self-Assessment

We have recently completed a further complaints self-assessment and submitted our findings to the Housing Ombudsman, going forward along with this annual report, we will also publish our annual complaints self-assessment via our website.

You can view our latest complaint self-assessment here: [How to Complain | Complaints Process | Abbeyfield](#)

## What's next?

Along with the launch of the new complaint handling training and the collaborative scrutiny of our approach to handling complaints by the Residents Panel, in the weeks and months ahead, we will be completing further root cause analysis of our complaint handling performance – extracting not only learnings to help drive service improvements, but also to recognise where we have good practice, so this can be shared more widely across the organisation.

The complaints working group which includes colleagues from all services, will work in partnership to promote, encourage, and develop a positive complaint handling culture.

Jonathan Earnshaw  
Customer Quality Manager
