



# **Homes in Sedgemoor**

## **Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report 2023-2024**

# Homes in Sedgemoor

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## Forward

### Statement from Member Responsible for Complaints on behalf of Homes In Sedgemoor Board

The Homes in Sedgemoor Board reviewed and endorsed the submission of the Housing Ombudsman Self-Assessment and proposed revisions against the Complaints Handling Code (CHC) at their meeting of 26 March 2024.

The Board of Homes in Sedgemoor (HiS) acknowledge from 1st April 2024 all landlords are obliged by law to follow its requirements. The Board accept the provisions of the Code and note this is reflected in our revised Complaints and Customer Feedback Policy, associated documents, and relevant processes. As such the Board fully endorse our approach to handling complaints and support the learning outlined within this report.

We received reports on a 6monthly basis about complaints and customer service to understand the impact service delivery has on our customers. We also work closely with our customer-led Sedgemoor Tenants Assurance Committee (STAC) to gain on-the-ground assurance and insight to verify this.

The Code aims to achieve best practice in complaint handling and ultimately provide a better service to customers.

**Chris Fisher**  
**Customer Board Member Responsible for Complaints**

## Executive Summary

This report outlines the annual complaint performance for financial year 2023/24 and the key learning and service improvements made following the resolution of complaints. The report is a requirement of the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code (section 8.1).

On 9th February 2024 the Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS) published their new Complaint Handling Code. As a member of the Housing Ombudsman Scheme, HiS must comply with the Code.

Section 8 and 9 of the Code outline the reporting, scrutiny, and oversight requirements for scheme members to ensure compliance with the Code. Landlords are required to complete an annual complaints performance and service improvement report, to share this report with their Board, and to publish the report with a response from the Board on their website by no later than 30th June each year. This is the first year for submission.

This year we have maintained our focus to support customers expressing their dissatisfaction where they have had an issue with our services. Following a customer led scrutiny event we have adapted our process to seek clarification at the first point of contact about whether they are making a service request or making a complaint. We have also increased our support for customers expressing dissatisfaction, aiming to resolve all issues quickly where we can, as an integral part of our service delivery.

Staffing changes have seen us bolster our offer to customers and align this with our community enabling function so that we hear and understand “silent customer voices” and take a more proactive approach to understanding customers’ requirements.

In preparation for regulatory inspection, we have sought feedback from Housing Quality Network (HQN) about our complaint handling service so that we can learn and make improvements to improve the customer journey.

HiS have undertaken a review of the Complaints & Customer Feedback Policy to ensure it meets all aspects of the Complaint Handling Code. We have reviewed the policy to ensure all aspects are included where they were previously omitted. The amendments provided no material change to the Policy and were approved by HiS Board on 26<sup>th</sup> March following completion of the self-assessment. As part of our commitment to continuous learning a further review will be completed and signed off by the Board later in the year.

We are keen to learn from others and as part of our commitment to delivering a comprehensive and supportive complaint handling culture across the organisation, learning and service improvements identified from complaints received and information provided by the HOS. This has influenced changes in service delivery in the past year and will continue to do so in the coming year.

In line with the HOS Complaint Handling Code, a self-assessment against the requirements of the revised Code, which came into effect on 1st April this year, has been completed. The self-assessment has determined that our Complaint and Customer Feedback Policy and processes are fully compliant with the Code requirements.

**Complaint Performance 2023-24 (In Numbers)**

Proportion of respondents who report that they are satisfied with the overall service from their landlord 82%

Complaints relative to the size of the landlord (per 1000 homes) 35.8

**Total Complaints Received**

Stage 1 140

Stage 2 5

(note: 73 complaints overall were Upheld = 52%)

5 requests were made to move to Stage 2 however 3 were not progressed as an alternative resolution was agreed with the customer and therefore they did not go to the panel)

% Increase in complaints received compared with the previous year 7%

% of complaints progressed to Stage 2 and heard by the Panel (2/140) 1.5%

% of complaints responded to within Housing Ombudsman timescales 96%

**Housing Ombudsman Determinations 2023-2024**

Number of Cases Determined by the Housing Ombudsman 2

**Number of findings received**

(note, there can be multiple findings per case) 3

Number of cases determined as severe maladministration 0

Number of complaint handling failure orders received 1

**Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSM) for Complaints Handling 2023-24**

**TP09** Proportion of respondents who report making a complaint in the last 12 months who are satisfied with their landlord’s approach to complaints handling. 40%

## Background

Homes in Sedgemoor (HiS) is an Arms-Length Management Organisation (ALMO) established in April 2007 with the remit of managing and maintaining c.4000 homes on behalf of Sedgemoor District Council. Following the creation of a single unitary authority in April 2023, ownership of HiS transferred to the new Somerset Council. Somerset Council has two delivery models – Homes in Sedgemoor (managing 4000 homes) and an ‘in house’ team that manages c6000 homes.

This Annual Complaints Performance Report and self-assessment is provided by Homes in Sedgemoor as the ALMO for Somerset Council. The council will provide a separate report for the ‘in-house’ managed service.

## Our Corporate Strategy 2023-2026

Our Corporate Strategy sets out the long-term vision for Homes in Sedgemoor (HiS) and the primary objectives for the organisation for the period July 2023 – June 2026. The 5 strategic themes that guide the organisation are:

1. Healthy Homes
2. Customer Driven
3. Enriching Partnerships
4. Thoughtful Enterprise
5. Sustainability by Design

Core Theme 2: Customer Driven sets out how we will treat customers fairly and with respect and is firmly embedded within our ‘Customer First’ ethos. Equally important is our commitment to ensure that our customers are empowered and able to shape services, and their voice is continually heard. We are determined for our customers to be collaborative ‘drivers’ of our business and to trust us to be open and transparent.

Trust is also incorporated as one of our values underpinning our behaviours to achieve success. Our Values are:

1. We are Focussed (F)
2. We are Innovative (I)
3. We are a Trusted partner (T)

## Complaints and Customer Feedback Policy 2022-2025 (or The Policy)

Our Customer Complaints and Feedback Policy 2022-2025 is reviewed on an annual basis in accordance with the Code and this was last completed in March 2024.

The HiS Board reviewed and approved the revised Policy and a draft HO Self-Assessment on 26<sup>th</sup> March 2024. Following further guidance from the HO the self-assessment has been updated and approved by the Board.

As directed, the Policy includes the HO definition for complaints and notes a 2 stage process as indicated in the Code. The Stage 1 response is reviewed by the Customer Focus Manager (CFM) and additional information may be requested including further detail as to why the customer remains dissatisfied where this remains the case. Our Stage 2 process involves the coming together of a panel from our STAC Customer led committee, a member of the Executive Team and a manager not previously involved in the complaint. The customer and/or their representative are also invited to attend the meeting should they wish to do so.

Requests for complaints relating to the following issues are not usually progressed:

- Repeat officer contacts for rent arrears
- Reports of fly-tipping or anti-social behaviour (these are dealt with in accordance with our ASB policy)
- Repair requests
- Where the issue giving rise to the complaint occurred over 12 months ago
- Where legal proceedings have already been started (unless there is a Category 1 hazard or severe risk of harm / emergency)
- Matters contained within the complaint have already been considered and the internal complaints process exhausted, these complainants are advised of the Housing Ombudsman Service and details provided should they wish to progress their complaint further.

The Policy has been amended to reflect the most recent HO Guidance as follows:

1. All complaints or expressions of dissatisfaction will be progressed to the next stage where the customer remains dissatisfied.
2. We have updated the Policy to highlight how we will publicise the Policy to ensure all customers have access and are familiar with the process for making a complaint or expressing their views to further improve services.

These are not material changes and therefore Executive Team have approved them. They will be incorporated into a wider review and ratified by Board later in the year.

This policy is used in conjunction with other supporting policies and procedures for matters relating to safeguarding, health and safety incidents, anti-social behaviour and disrepair claims.

A copy of our Complaints & Customer Feedback Policy (March 2024) can be found on our website – Make a Complaint page - or can be emailed or posted upon request.

## Complaints Management Structure & Responsibility

To ensure responsibility for complaints and timely resolution our dedicated complaint handling structure is outlined in fig.1

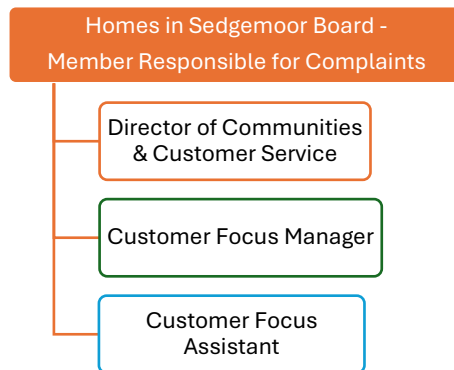


Fig1. Complaints Handling Structure

This structure provides a defined oversight of the process, with service leads receiving support to deliver services and respond to customers issues in a timely way.

In November 2023, HiS increased resource to support the Customer Focus Manager by creating a Customer Focus Assistant (CFA) role. This role is responsible for responding to expressions of dissatisfaction gained through the TSM survey responses and attempts contact with all customers who have expressed dissatisfaction with the service. This role supports an early resolution to their issue where possible.

To maintain a focus on complaints at the very highest level within the organisation, the Director of Communities and Customer Service meets with the Customer Focus Manager on a weekly basis to review the complaints into the organisation and actions to address are discussed.

Complaints and Customer Service reports are provided to Sedgemoor Tenants Assurance Committee (STAC) and the Board on a six-monthly basis to ensure oversight and learning is part of our on-going Customer First approach to supporting customers.

Our STAC committee use the information provided to highlight key themes and commission future customer-led scrutiny events.



## Complaints Performance 2023-2024

### Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs)

In response to the TSM question “Proportion of respondents who report making a complaint in the last 12 months who are satisfied with their landlord’s approach to complaints handling” the main themes where customers have reported dissatisfaction over the year are indicated in the graph (fig2). below. Anti-social behaviour is the main theme reported.

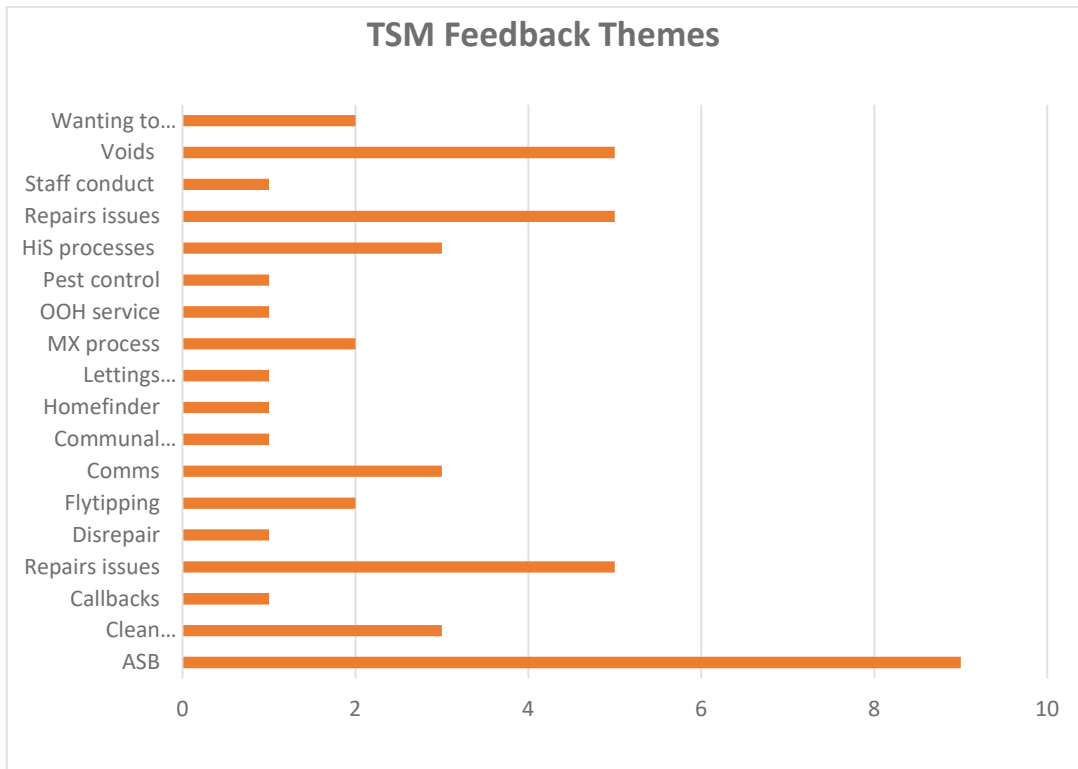


Fig 2.TSM Themes (MEL Research)

We have achieved upper quartile results as outlined below when benchmarked against other housing providers.

		HiS
Size of relevant tenant population for the purposes of the tenant perception measures		3,836
		41.4%
<b>Responses from survey methods:</b>		
Telephone		1,200
Internet		
Sample size		1,200
Statistical accuracy achieved: +/- (margin of error @ confidence level of 65%)		2%

Tenant perception measures		HiS LCRA (B)
TP01	Proportion of respondents who report that they are satisfied with the overall service from their landlord.	81.6%

TP02	Proportion of respondents who have received a repair in the last 12 months who report that they are satisfied with the overall repairs service.	82.9%
TP03	Proportion of respondents who have received a repair in the last 12 months who report that they are satisfied with the time taken to complete their most recent repair	83.7%
TP04	Proportion of respondents who report that they are satisfied that their home is well maintained.	83.6%
TP05	Proportion of respondents who report that they are satisfied that their home is safe.	87.0%
TP06	Proportion of respondents who report that they are satisfied that their landlord listens to tenant views and acts upon them.	73.8%
TP07	Proportion of respondents who report that they are satisfied that their landlord keeps them informed about things that matter to them.	85.2%
TP08	Proportion of respondents who report that they agree their landlord treats them fairly and with respect.	86.8%
TP09	<b>Proportion of respondents who report making a complaint in the last 12 months who are satisfied with their landlord’s approach to complaints handling.</b>	40.2%
TP10	Proportion of respondents with communal areas who report that they are satisfied that their landlord keeps communal areas clean and well maintained.	73.8%
TP11	Proportion of respondents who report that they are satisfied that their landlord makes a positive contribution to the neighbourhood.	78.5%
TP12	Proportion of respondents who report that they are satisfied with their landlord’s approach to handling anti-social behaviour.	71.0%

Fig 3. TSM Results for 2023-24 (MEL Research)

This year is the first submission of information to the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) under the new Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs) standard. The measures outlined above are for HiS responses only. As the landlord, Somerset Council has submitted a combined TSM for both HiS and the ‘in house’ service return to the Regulator.

HiS uses an independent organisation, MEL Research, to undertake our TSM and transactional surveys. From April 2023 100% of surveys were completed over the telephone to ensure all customers could have their say.

We survey 100 customers each month, providing an annual response of 1,200 customers. This equates to 30% of all customers. Using our known customer data, we are able to ensure there is a diverse representation surveyed across all our customer base by way of age, ethnicity, disability, tenure and locality.

For 2023/24, we achieved overall satisfaction of 82% for the proportion of respondents who report that they are satisfied with the overall service from their landlord and puts us into the upper quartile when benchmarked against our peers as provided by Housemark.

Satisfaction with the “proportion of respondents who report making a complaint in the last 12 months who are satisfied with their landlord’s approach to complaints handling” is 40%. This is lower than our anticipated target but reflective of the wider sector experience.

Analysis of those respondents who have stated they have made a complaint via the TSMs, has indicated customers who state they are unhappy with our complaint handling, have not made a complaint with HiS . Invariably reports have been linked to a responsive repair, or an anti-

social behaviour incident. As outlined in our Complaints & Customer Feedback Policy, these are responded as requests for service in the first instance unless there has been a service failure.

To better understand our service delivery, we carry out transactional surveys for key service areas including.

- Satisfaction with time taken to complete most recent repair;
- Satisfaction with support received (ASB)

In 2023-24 we did not collect transactional complaint satisfaction in favour of the TSMs. Going forward into 2024-25 we are restarting this process and will be surveying all customers whose complaint has been managed through our complaints policy, so that we are doing all we can to ensure a satisfactory resolution for the customer.

To support early resolution, we respond to all expressions of dissatisfaction recorded through TP09. Following analysis we have found:

- 85% dissatisfied respondents have not made a complaint.
- We note many had not been in contact with HiS in the previous 12 months prior to their survey response.
- 11% of customers who have expressed dissatisfaction have not responded to follow-up calls despite giving us their contact details for a follow-up call.
- 11% of customers also chose not to provide their contact details following a response to the TSM survey.

To maintain performance we have:

- Increased resource (Customer Focus Assistant (CFA)) to support complaint handling;
- Ensured the CFA responds to all expressions of dissatisfaction reported through the TSM TP09 survey process where the customer has agreed and provided their details.
- Amended what we do and how we do it:
  - To record complaint themes and sub-categories
  - To resolve any outstanding issues at first contact where we can
  - To provide correlation into learning and process changes informed from complaints

### Complaint Handling Process

All complaints are recorded, and managed by the Customer Focus Manager who reports these complaints through our published process.

We have seen a very slight increase in complaints through the formal complaints process from 131 in 2022-23, to 140 complaints (7%) in the reporting year 2023-24. 73 complaints were upheld or partially upheld.

- The main service areas where complaints have been upheld were due to delays with repairs or planned works within customers’ homes, and poor communication from us or our contractors.
- Most complaints received about Housing / Lettings service were not upheld, as they related to reports of anti-social behaviour which are then dealt with via a separate process.

A breakdown of complaints by service area and theme is outlined below. As part of our analysis we can identify specific service area complaints, reasons for the complaint, the number of complaints upheld as well as the agreed course for resolution with the customer. This has supported a revision to our processes to improve the overall customer experience as well as identifying service failure or poor practice.

Themes	Total	Upheld/ Partially Upheld	Complaint Reason	Resolution
Compliance	8	2	Service Management Issues	Process changes
		1	Communication with Customer	Information provided
Housing	25	2	Communications with Customer	Referred to Housing Officer
		2	ASB	Referred to case officer
		2	SLA Grounds / Cleaning	Inspected & agreed for works
Independent Living Service	6	4	Service Issue	Issues addressed
		2	Staff Complaint	Service changes made
Repairs Contractor	60	9	Service Issue	Compensation (3) / Standard & scope of works(6)-Resolved
		14	Service Delay	Compensation (9) / Apology
		8	Communications with Customer	Compensation (3) / Apology (5)
		1	Disregard for Customer Property	Compensation (1)
		1	Health & Safety	Process change (ongoing claim)
		4	Missed / No Appointment	Compensation (2) / Apology & Revised appt / Contractor Mgt
Lettings	1	0	Communication with Customer	
Income	1	0	Income Recovery Process	Policy and Process for income recovery in place
Neighbourhoods	11	1	Service Delay	Issue Resolved
		1	Service Issue	Deep Clean Completed

		1	Disregard for Customer Property	Apology & Compensation Paid (1)
Planned Works	24	10	Service issue	Compensation (1) / Issue Rectified / Apology
		2	Service Delay	Compensation (2) / Awaiting Resolution
		2	Comms with Customer	Compensation (1) / System Updated
		1	Disregard for Customer Property	Referred to Contractor
		1	Health & Safety	Compensation (1) / Rectified
		1	Missed Appt	Appt Rearranged
Non HIS	2	0	Somerset Council Service Issue	Referred to Somerset Council Departments
Community Enabling	1	1	Comms with Customer	Gift Offered and accepted
Service Charges	1	0	Service Charge Increase	Response provided
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>140</b>	<b>73</b>		

Fig.4. Analysis of Complaints manage through the Policy (OPEN Housing)

Overall, 52% of complaints have been upheld with compensation paid in 24 cases amounting to £4,739. Most complaints relate to:

- 1 – Service Issue (27 cases )
- 2- Service Delay (17 cases )
- 3- Communications with Customer (12 cases )

### Housing Ombudsman Findings

In 2023-24 HiS received 3 enquiries from the Housing Ombudsman (HO) during 2023-24. Findings in 2 cases were as follows:

1. **Mar 2023** – Within their determination, the HO found there was no maladministration by Homes in Sedgemoor, and we had acted in a fair and reasonable way.

Within the report it was acknowledged HiS had responded in a positive way in that we had a plan for replacing capital items and recognised that we are not obliged to replace items if they are in good working order or able to be repaired.

It was also recognised that a mutual exchange inspection is not the same as a void inspection, and the incoming tenant accepts the property in its current condition. If the customer was not happy with this, then she should not have accepted the exchange.

2. **Nov 23** - There were no findings of maladministration. However, the determination outlined a number of key areas for attention.

**Determination** - In accordance with paragraph 52 of the Scheme, there was service failure by the landlord in respect of its:

- a. response to the resident’s reports about various repair issues with her property.

b. complaints handling.

An order was made for the landlord to pay compensation of £500,

3. **Jan 2024** – Awaiting further information in respect of this enquiry.

All enquiries and outcomes from the HO are reported to the HiS Board at their next meeting. For all reports that go to the Board oversight is provided to the relevant Board Champion in advance. In respect of complaints this will be the Member Responsible for Complaints (MRC) going forward. The MRC at HiS is a Customer Board Member.

HiS have ensured compliance with findings through comprehensive action planning and monitoring by the Director of Communities and Customer Services in addition to our Customer Focus Manager and senior leadership team service leads responsible for a defined service area. We ensure our approach is collaborative and embedded across the organisation.

The primary learning from the HO complaints during 2023/24 was:

- to ensure we log all customer complaints when a customer expresses dissatisfaction with our service. For the relevant case, whilst we had tried to resolve the issues, we hadn't logged the complaint.
- A breakdown in communication between ourselves and our customer, supports that we must adopt different approaches to booking in works identified, addressing each on a case by case basis.

We now have access to the Housing Ombudsman portal so all communication and evidence submitted is via this forum, and we can also view any cases for Somerset Council and vice versa.

The HOS has published several spotlight reports sharing best practice with member organisations. Following a review of spotlight on Knowledge and Information Management (May 2023), we have implemented some of the recommendations outlined and are working with colleagues to implement others.

We will be undertaking a self-assessment of the recommendations on Attitudes, respect and rights (Jan 2024) in the coming months.

Support provided through the HO Learning Hub and Spotlights in particular will be a key activity in how we share and improve best practice.

## Service Improvement & Learning

### Customer Led Scrutiny – Satisfaction with Complaint Handling TSM

Reduced satisfaction in relation to our complaints handling TSM was highlighted through our suite of reports. Our Customer Led sub-Committee of the Board, Sedgemoor Tenants Assurance Committee (STAC) commissioned a customer led scrutiny activity to better understand the reasons for this. Two members of the STAC Committee, attended to ensure the correct protocols were being followed for scrutiny. They had attended the TPAS Scrutiny Conference and were able to bring their learning and experience to the wider group on this subject.

Eleven customers attended and worked together with colleagues to consider regulation and current practice surrounding complaints handling with a view to recommending service improvements to improve customer satisfaction.

The review considered relevant documents issued by Homes in Sedgemoor and the Housing Ombudsman and were shared with the participants on the day. These included:

- The Customer Complaints and Feedback Policy
- Summary of the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code
- Overview of the Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs) performance against Key Performance Indicators for the organisation and specifically Complaints Handling
- A review of the HiS Website illustrating performance reporting
- Case Studies for consideration and review
- Learning from Good Practice elsewhere? Housing Ombudsman Service Insight Report Issue 12 highlighting good practice in complaints handling

The Panel made 10 recommendations linked to the policy, providing greater clarity and understanding around request for Service v Complaint and Communication. All recommendations have been taken forward as part of an action plan and implementation is monitored by STAC at their meetings.

The full report and recommendations can be found on our website – Make a Complaint page – or can be emailed or posted upon request.

### HQN Independent Review

As part of HiS preparations for regulatory inspection, the Housing Quality Network reviewed our approach to complaints as part of a broader service review in April 2024. The inspector stated:

- “Your responses are generally well-crafted, demonstrate a very good level of empathy and set out the enquiries and response very well.”

- “I understand why all responses are pretty much drafted by you (CFM) (and I have of course seen similar elsewhere). It provides for consistency in responses and you can ensure that responses cover everything they should. It is clear that you are also passionate about ensuring the process is comprehensive, fair and transparent and you seek resolution where you can. The (potential) downsides are
  - (1) around ownership within the services subject to complaint and
  - (2) your capacity, especially as providers are seeing a significant increase in complaints and Ombudsman enquiries.

Taking forward the learning, we are ensuring all managers and team leaders are invested in effective feedback and learning culture through training to empower colleagues to respond to and resolve complaints effectively.

We are also developing the CFM role to analyse complaints and drive improvements in complaints management throughout the service.

### **Self Assessment against the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code**

The Housing Ombudsman Service Complaint Handling Code requires all scheme members to self assess their complaint policy and processes against the requirements of the Code. The self assessment must be reviewed and approved by the Board at least annually. Once approved, the self-assessment is published on our website along with this annual complaint performance and service improvement report. This year’s self-assessment can be viewed on our website and outlines our full compliance with the revised Code which came into effect from 1st April.

To ensure compliance, the Customer Complaints & Feedback Policy was updated in March 2024 and approved by the Board. A copy of the Customer Complaint & Feedback Policy can also be found on our website.

A copy of the self-assessment is available on our website – Make a Complaint page – or can be emailed or posted upon request.