

Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report

Contents

1. Introduction
2. Compliance with the Complaint Handling Code
3. Complaints received
4. Escalation to the Housing Ombudsman
5. Lessons learned
6. Changes following complaints
7. Feedback from residents
8. Feedback from our Governing Board
9. Conclusion

1. Introduction

This report reviews RMHS complaint handling against the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling code, considers learning, changes made and looks ahead to the continued improvements we have committed to.

Definitions used in the report

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the RMHS' standard of service, actions, or lack of action by the RMHS, its staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting a resident or group of residents.

A resident does not have to use the word 'complaint' for it to be treated as such. Whenever a resident expresses dissatisfaction landlords must give them the choice to make a complaint.

Complaints can be made in writing, by email, verbally or in person. On receipt the complaint is acknowledged, recorded and investigated. The complaint response aims to be timely and offer a fair and balanced resolution at Stage 1.

The process for responding to, and managing complaints in our in our Comments, Complaints and Compliments Policy.

During the complaints process a resident can escalate their complaint to the Housing Ombudsman at any point. The Housing Ombudsman is an independent body reviewing complaints about the housing organisations.

This document looks at complaints received during the period 1 January 2024 to 31 December 2024 and review our handling of these.

2. Compliance with the Complaint Handling Code

RMHS aims to deliver an excellent standard when handling complaints, as set out in the [The Complaint Handling Code | Housing Ombudsman Service](#). The code sets out the framework for handling complaints in a manner which is equitable, transparent, and delivers complaint resolutions which address the residents' concerns.

RMHS have been working towards compliance with the Complaint Handling Code, ahead of adherence to this becoming statutory on 1 April 2024. During preparation for the Annual self-assessment for 2024, we identified the need to further develop our Complaints Policy, and this work has now been completed.

The self-assessment process looks in detail at key areas of the code, including:

- Definition of a complaint
- Exclusions
- Accessibility and awareness
- Complaint handling staff
- The Complaint Handling Process

- Putting things right
- Scrutiny and oversight.

Following a detailed and robust review of our Complaint Handling Code we identified improvements to our policy. During 2024, RMHS prepared and approved a new Complaints Policy and communicated this to all tenants. This increased the visibility of the Complaints Policy and provided staff with a greater understanding of best practice when handling complaints to achieve good outcomes for residents. This was further revised in 2024 and a new Complaints Policy was adopted by Board on 30 January 2025.

3. Complaints received

Following the introduction of the 2024 Complaints Policy, RMHS focused on giving tenants the choice of raising a complaint and clearly communicating this right to tenants. This pro-active approach increased the number of complaints we received in 2024, as tenants experienced a positive and solution focused response to their complaints. In the spring of 2024, we wrote to all residents, to encourage feedback and elicit insights into resident’s experiences of our services. This resulted in a higher rate of complaints in January to April 2024.

During 2024, we received complaints as follows:

	January to April	May to July	August to December
Stage 1	22	10	6
Stage 2	0	1	0
Housing Ombudsman	0	0	0

The themes emerging from the complaints are:

Out of hours provision	Communication	Repairs and maintenance	Customer care	Rehousing
1	13	29	7	2

Please note that some complaints may involve more than one theme. Repairs and Maintenance was the highest source of complaints, followed by Communication. The importance of our repairs and maintenance provision to tenants is clear, as is the vital role of effective communication with tenants about all matters relating to their home.

The complaints about re-housing provided a valuable insight into how our residents experience the rehousing process, the stress points they experienced and where residents felt changes are needed to provide more detailed information.

Response times, in days, for complaints is noted below:

	January to April	May to July	August to December	Within time frame?
Stage 1	70	9	12	Not during all periods
Stage 2	0	10	0	Yes

A higher volume of complaints was received during January to April 2024 following a letter to all tenants regarding repairs and maintenance. The higher volume of complaints, coupled with changes to the staff team negatively impacted the time frames for resolution. Significant work was undertaken to address this and improve complaint response times. Average time taken to respond to complaints was 70 days.

During May to July, we responded to all complaints within the prescribed timeframe. Average time taken to respond to complaints was nine days.

For the period August to December one complaint was complex and an extension to the timeframe was agreed with the tenant, which resulted in the average time being over ten days. Average time taken to respond to complaints was 12 days, including this complex complaint. Excluding this complaint was nine days.

Overall, our average time taken to respond to complaints for 2024 was 19 days.

We recognise the value of prompt communication to acknowledge and resolve complaints, and this will be addressed more fully in the Lessons Learned section.

All complaints at Stage 1 and Stage 2 were upheld. We made the decision to allow complaints about issues which were over 12 months old to ensure we listened to all our tenants, and had access to the valuable feedback from tenants and the necessary learning could happen and feed into organisational developments.

4. Escalation to the Housing Ombudsman

We are pleased to report that no complaints were escalated to the Housing Ombudsman for 2024.

5. Lessons learned

- Out of hours provision – understanding that our residents need a responsive and understanding repairs provider, we ceased use of an insurance-based out of hours provider for repairs and moved to a mainstream repairs contractor, due to the poor response our residents had previously received. Complaints showed us that residents had to spend a long time on the phone, in some cases asked questions they could not answer, and in too many cases had repair requests turned down.

- Communication – residents place a high value on communication, in their preferred communication style, and at times of the day which meet with their needs. Residents need regular routine updates about their situation, and this affects their levels of satisfaction. We are reviewing the level of administrative support for our repairs and maintenance team to assess whether it is sufficient to ensure we are keeping residents up to date in ways which work for them (our average age of our lead tenant is 79 and most prefer phone calls to emails or letters).
- Repairs and maintenance – this continues to be a high priority for tenants and delays or changes of plan is disruptive and disappointing for tenants.
- Customer care – residents place a high value on RMHS doing what we say, when we say we will do it as well. When our communication doesn't meet the high standards we set ourselves, our tenants experience this as a lack of customer care.
- Effective complaint handling – our analysis identified we needed to further revise our Complaint handling policy, and this has been completed and approved by Board.
- Resident involvement – the feedback we gained in the complaints our tenants raised has highlighted the need to engage residents throughout all stages of our contact with them, and work with them to achieve a fair resolution for all parties. Three members of our 12-person Board are current RMHS residents which helps give valuable insight into the resident experience. We also communicate very regularly with Moderators (ministers with significant leadership responsibilities in their particular region of the UK and denominationally) who lead local Synods that provide pastoral care and support to residents at a local level. This is an invaluable feedback link. This has recently been further strengthened by the Board Member for Complaints having a role as the Secretary for Ministries, where many resident dissatisfaction experiences have in the past been communicated when RMHS's initial response was not satisfactory. We aim to improve transparency over communications through these enhanced links.

6. Changes following complaints

- Asset management – our approach is being fully overhauled, reviewed and refreshed
- Repairs and maintenance – additional staff have been recruited to increase capacity within the team.
- Out of hours and emergency repairs provision – we reviewed the provision and awarded the current year's contract to an alternative, national contractor
- Strategic plan – an organisation wide review has been carried out with clear objectives and regular reporting to Board

- Customer service ethos being embedded from pre-tenancy to end of tenancy and the recruitment of a full time, permanent housing officer role working to the Tenancy Manager.
- Whole team learning – feedback from complaints is included in Team Meetings and Board reporting.
- Rehousing – our current approach is being reviewed and refreshed.
- Staff development and training – a programme of training and staff development is being implemented.
- Vision and values – being reviewed with the staff team and Board in May 2025 through an away day and follow on action plan to be incorporated into the Strategic Development Plan.
- Rehousing – review of policy, provision, approach our information sharing process is underway.
- Policy and processes – our processes are being reviewed internally in both a planned and organic manner which gives greater ability to adapt and change as well as plan for the future.
- Governance – we have recruited new Board members and a Chair of the Board with specific housing expertise.

The feedback we have received from complaints has been integral in the programme of change and development included in the Strategic Development Plan. All aspects of service delivery have been reviewed to further develop our provision to tenants. While work is underway, and significant improvements are in the planning process, we are pleased to see changes being recognised by residents and positive feedback being received.

7. Feedback from residents

RMHS is currently working on developing our Asset Management approach to learn from the feedback our residents have provided in 2024. We are reviewing our options for gathering resident feedback more widely. As a member of Acuity, a benchmarking club with a focus on smaller and specialist associations, one option is to work with them to gain unbiased feedback on a range of questions which can then be benchmarked against similar organisations to identify the areas where progress has been made, and areas for improvement.

8. Feedback from our Governing Board

The feedback and oversight our Board provide is essential to our continued improvement and provides important transparency and accountability. Our Board is engaged with overseeing the complaint handling process and in January 2025 we appointed a Member Responsible for Complaints to the Board.

Board is updated three times per year, when it meets for RMHS Board meetings. A detailed report is provided to Board including the number and percentage of complaints as well as the themes and any trends identified.

The active engagement of Board provides robust and rigorous review of complaint handling, along with questions and challenges about our approach to complaints ensures we continue to improve and develop our response to complaints.

Our Board's feedback on our complaints handling is published on our website. The feedback includes their comments on this report, which provides residents with a clear insight into how our complaints process is reviewed and monitored at Board level.

9. Conclusion

RMHS has at its heart a desire to provide excellent customer service and a responsive complaints process, should things go wrong. Listening to our residents, and valuing their feedback underpins our approach to complaint handling and we are committed to ongoing improvement and learning from the feedback.

Through increased staff awareness, and visibility and access to our Complaints Policy, we encourage residents to share their concerns with us. The feedback from 2024 has informed policy and procedures and informed our Strategic Development Plan which will refresh our services, approach and service delivery.