



Housing Complaints

Quarter 1 Report

April 2025 - June 2025

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1 Introduction

Thank you to everyone who shared feedback with us between April and June 2025. Complaints help us to identify where we need to do better, and we are committed to making those improvements.

During this quarter we have updated how we record complaints and new guidance to support these changes has been shared with our complaint handling officers. These changes will help us get to a position where we are consistently working within housing ombudsman guidelines and be able to provide more accurate reporting about the complaints that we receive.

We know that some of you have been waiting longer than we would like for a response to your complaints and several of them have gone past guideline response times. During quarter 1 a backlog of your complaints started to build up. There are several reasons for this, the main ones being that the number of complaints that we receive has increased and there has been a

reduced number of staff handling complaints for a prolonged amount of time, meaning we were still working on investigations and responses to complaints received last financial year delaying responses to new complaints.

To clear the complaints backlog we have increased the number of Housing Resolution officers from five to ten. We have considered the options available to tackle the backlog and keep on top of the new complaints coming in and plan to divide the Housing Resolution Team into two temporary teams, one team to focus on the backlog and the other to focus on new complaints. We will provide you with further updates in the quarter 2 report.



2 Complaints performance

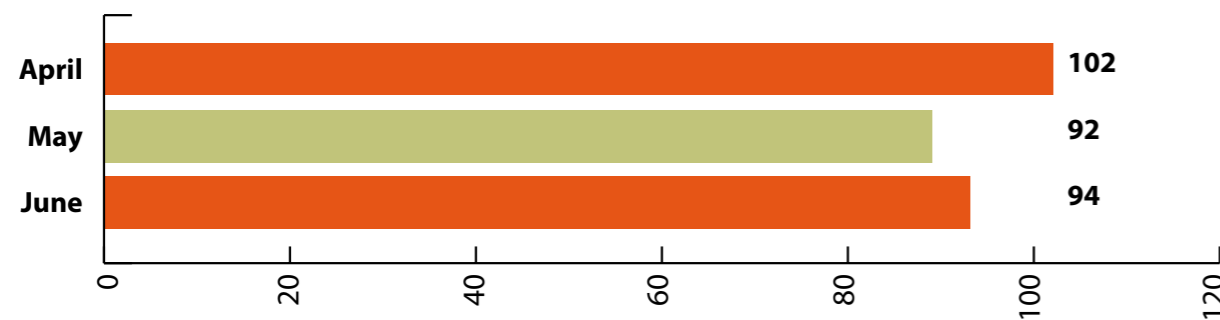
Stage 1 complaints

Stage 1 is the investigation stage. We will try to resolve your complaint straight away - when we can't, we will investigate and provide you with a formal response.

288

 STAGE 1 COMPLAINTS WERE RECEIVED IN QUARTER 1

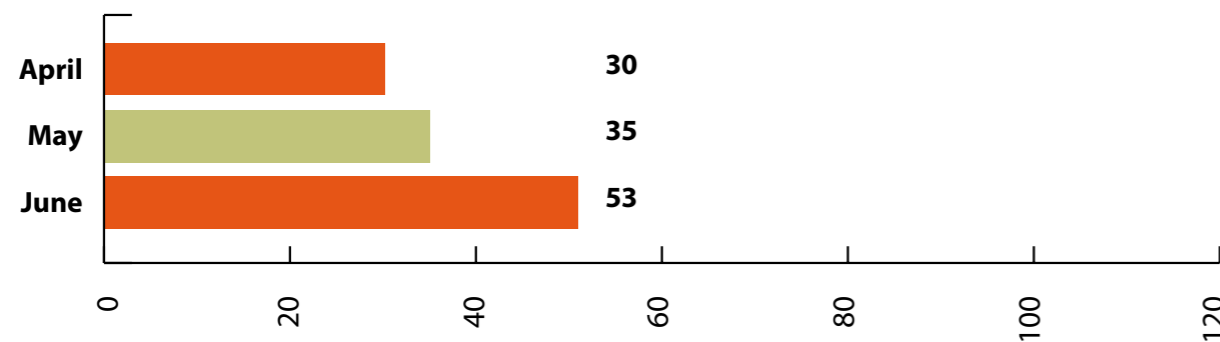
Stage 1 complaints received



118

 STAGE 1 COMPLAINTS HAVE BEEN CLOSED

Stage 1 complaints closed



170

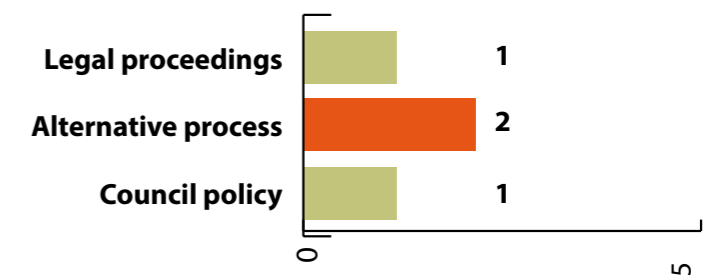
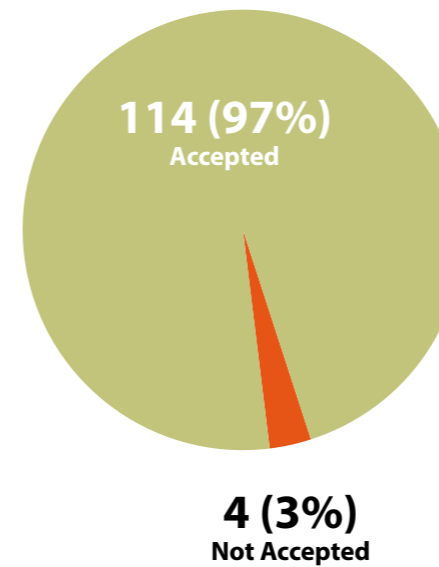
 STAGE 1 COMPLAINTS REMAIN OPEN

**The following information relates to closed complaints*

There are some complaints that we do not investigate, these are set out in the Housing Ombudsman Service's Complaint Handling Code.

Stage 1 complaints accepted

Reasons complaints were not accepted



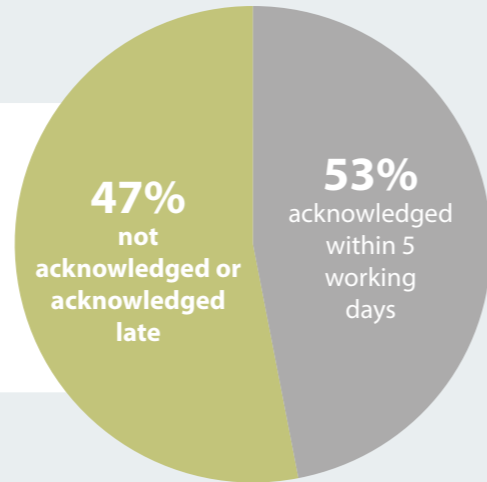
4

 STAGE 1 COMPLAINTS WERE CLOSED AS A FAST FIX

Where your complaint is resolved to your satisfaction and you do not wish to continue with the formal investigation, the complaint will be closed as a fast fix.

110 STAGE 1 COMPLAINTS WERE PROGRESSED FOR FORMAL INVESTIGATION

Where your complaint progresses for formal investigation, the Housing Ombudsman Service's Complaint Handling Code allows **5 working days** for a stage 1 complaint to be accepted and acknowledged.



We must then investigate and respond to your complaint within 10 working days from the date of acknowledgement. We can extend the response time to 20 working days if needed and with your agreement.

Where complaints were not formally acknowledged, the working days to complete have been counted from the date we accepted the complaint.

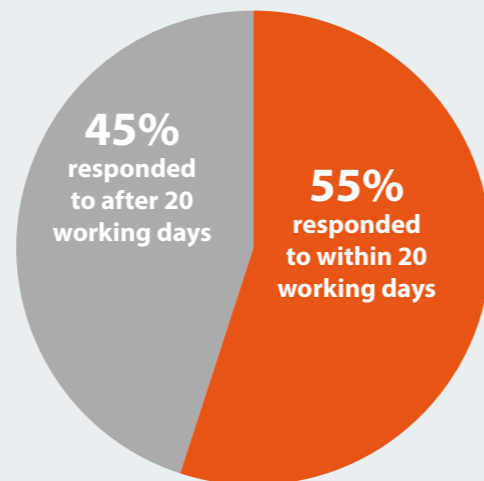
66 STAGE 1 COMPLAINTS WERE NOT EXTENDED

Not extended stage 1 response times



44 STAGE 1 COMPLAINTS WERE EXTENDED

Extended stage 1 response times



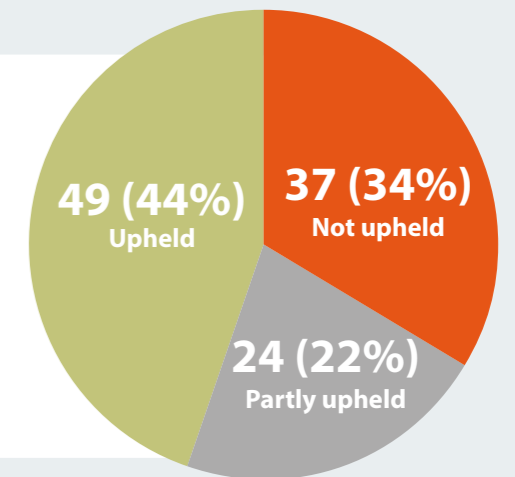
AVERAGE TIME TO RESPOND TO STAGE 1 COMPLAINT - 13 WORKING DAYS



Outcomes of accepted and closed stage 1 complaints

34% of stage 1 complaints that were received and closed in quarter 1 were not upheld, meaning that we did not find any evidence to support these complaints.

66% were either partly upheld or upheld, this is a high number which shows that the complaints process is identifying and addressing issues.



CASE STUDY

A customer reported damage to their fencing in January 2025, following stormy weather.

An appointment was made for March 2025 but was rearranged twice due to staff sickness. The customer was not advised of this until the expected appointments were missed and she called to find out why no one had attended. This caused frustration at the delay and the lack of communication.

We continue to work with our repairs team to ensure that good communication with residents is our top priority, and it is clear that when appointments are rearranged residents should be kept informed. We apologised to the resident for the frustration caused and committed to improving communication from our repairs team.

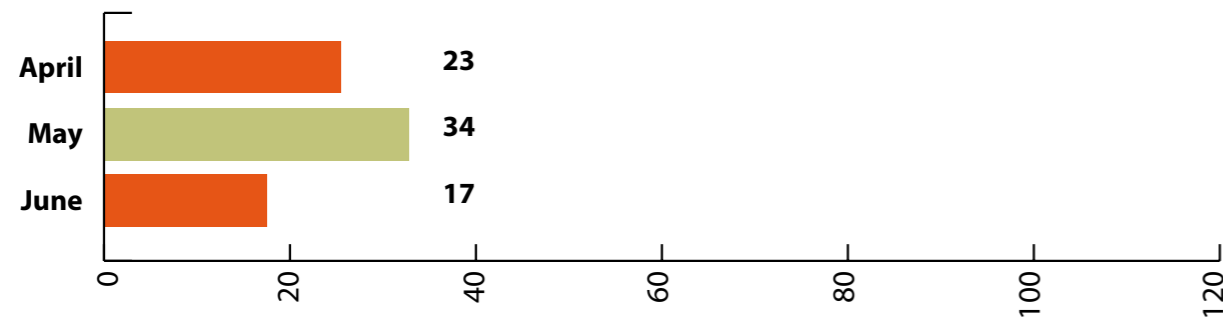


Stage 2 complaints

Stage 2 is the review stage - if you are not happy with the outcome of your stage 1 complaint, you can ask for the outcome to be reviewed. You will need to tell us why you were unhappy with the stage 1 response that you received, and a different officer will review your stage 2 complaint.

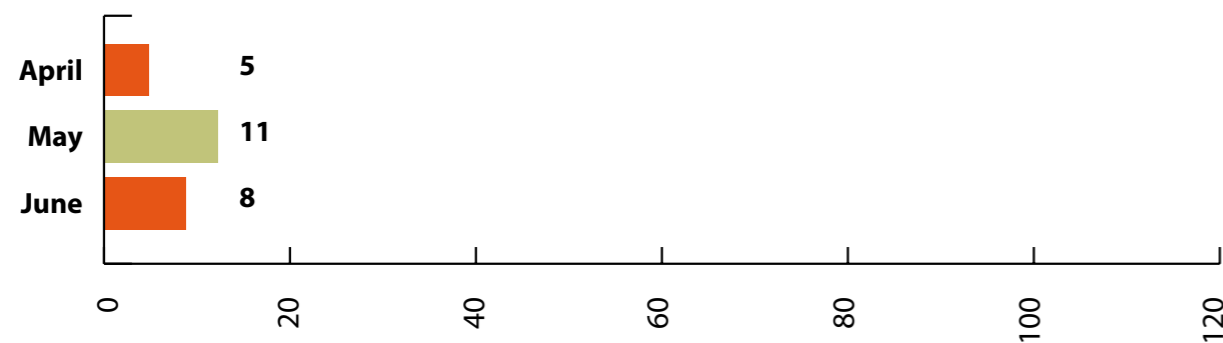
74 STAGE 2 COMPLAINTS WERE RECEIVED IN QUARTER 1

Stage 2 complaints received



24 STAGE 2 COMPLAINTS HAVE BEEN CLOSED

Stage 2 complaints closed

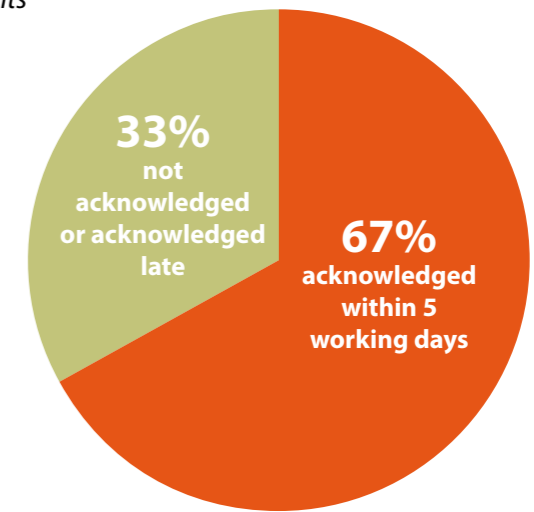


50 STAGE 2 COMPLAINTS REMAIN OPEN

**The following information relates to closed complaints*

All 24 stage 2 complaints closed were accepted.

Where your complaint progresses for formal investigation, the Housing Ombudsman Service's Complaint Handling Code allows **5 working days** for a stage 2 complaint to be accepted and acknowledged.



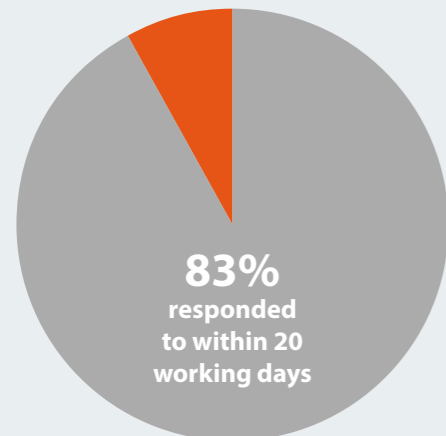
We must then investigate and respond to your complaint within **20 working days** from the date of acknowledgement. We can extend the response time to **40 working days** if needed and with your agreement.

Where complaints were not formally acknowledged, the working days to complete has been counted from the date we accepted the complaint.

12 STAGE 2 COMPLAINTS WERE NOT EXTENDED

Not extended stage 2 response times

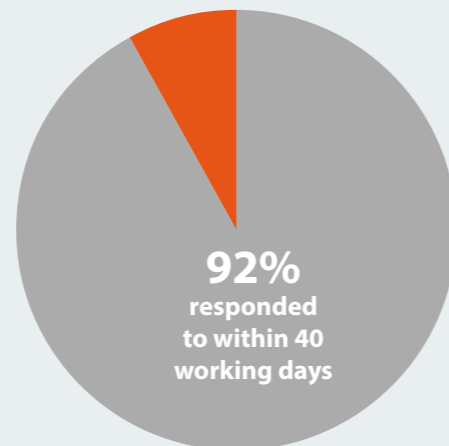
17%
responded to after 20 working days



12 STAGE 2 COMPLAINTS WERE EXTENDED

Extended stage 1 response times

8%
responded to after 40 working days



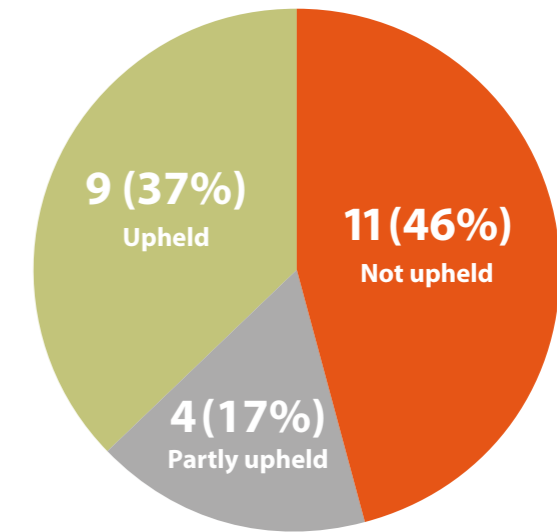
AVERAGE TIME TO RESPOND TO STAGE 2 COMPLAINT - 17 WORKING DAYS



Outcomes of accepted and closed stage 2 complaints

Over half of the **stage 2 complaints** were either upheld or partly upheld. This tells us that we still have some issues with communication or the resolution to stage 1 complaints. We have made it easier and clearer for complaints to be escalated and are carrying out more in-depth investigations.

As resolutions to **stage 1 complaints** are still being impacted by the repairs backlog, in a lot of cases it has been difficult to provide you with a resolution that you are happy with, or we have not fulfilled the commitments that we made at stage 1 to complete your repairs resulting your stage 1 complaint being escalate to a stage 2.



CASE STUDY

Due to a delay in a heating repair being completed, a resident was without heating or hot water during the winter months, and despite being told they would receive temporary heaters, the customer said they hadn't received them. When we investigated, we found there was no evidence that the heaters had been delivered.

The stage 1 complaint was not upheld as the delay in the repair being completed was outside of our control due to waiting for parts required from a third party.

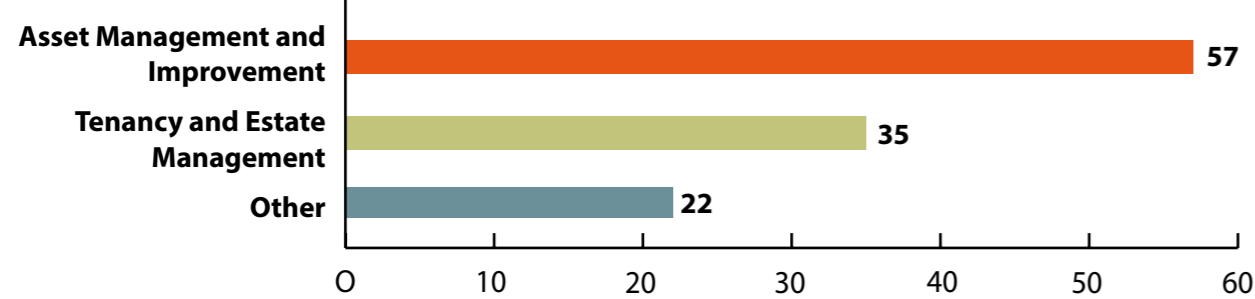
The customer was unhappy with this decision and submitted a stage 2 complaint, further investigations took place, and the stage 2 complaint was upheld. Although we cannot control the availability of parts being made available, we should have been able to provide the temporary heating that was offered and keep the customer updated on the progress of the repair. We apologised to the resident for the lack of communication and distress caused and £100 compensation was awarded in recognition of the inconvenience and frustration caused.

Our Gas Team have reviewed their procedures and are now required to record when suitable heaters are delivered to customers.

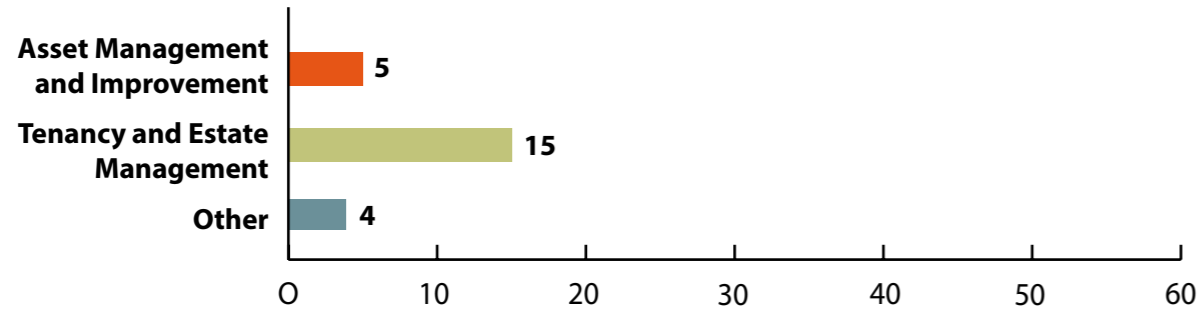
3 Complaints by service area

Breakdown of complaints accepted and closed in quarter 1

Stage 1 complaints



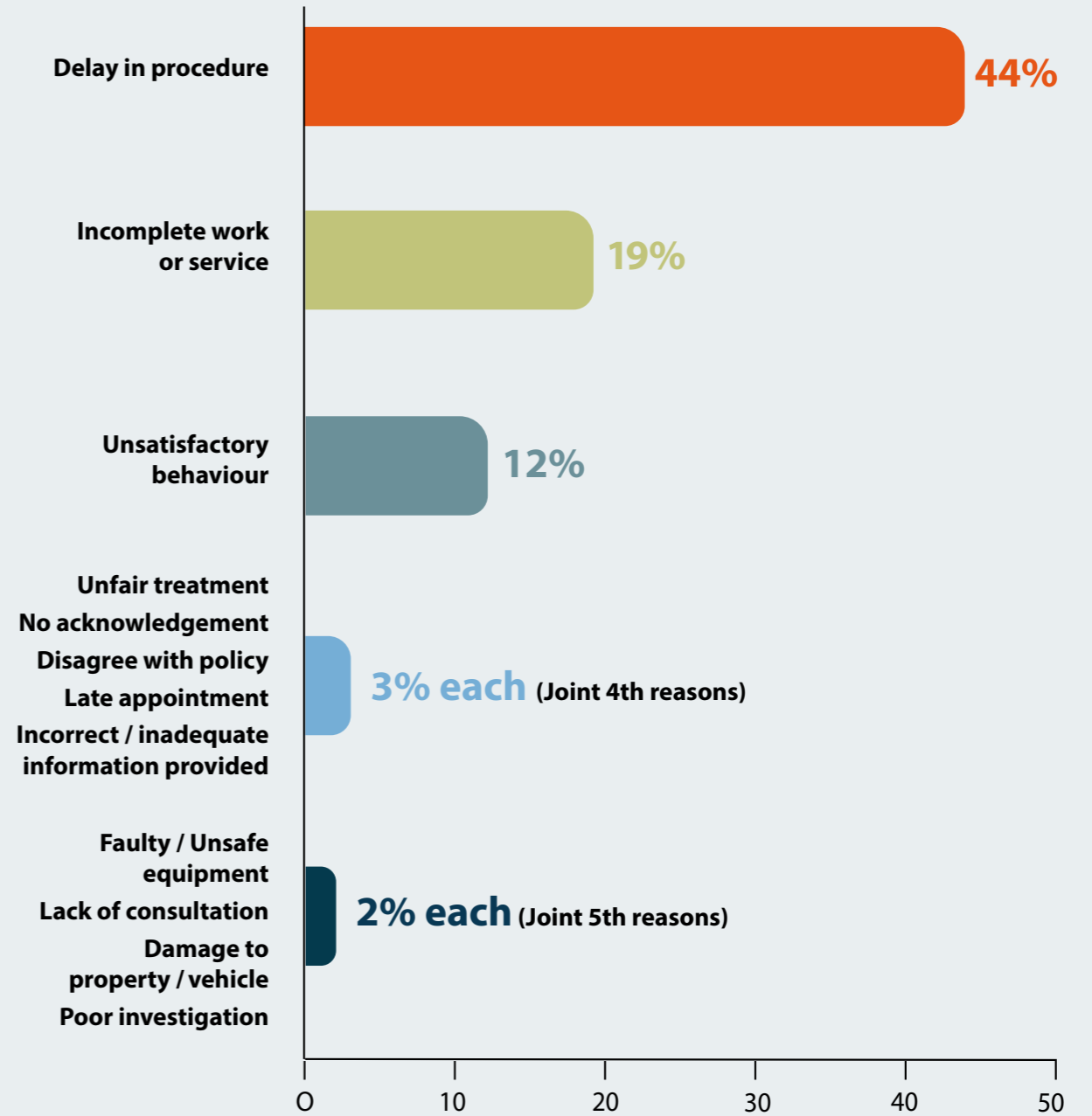
Stage 2 complaints



Stage 1 complaints - Top 5 reasons - Asset Management and Improvement

Repairs and maintenance are carried out by our Asset Management and Improvement service. They ensure your safety, security and comfort by providing well-maintained and high-quality homes and communal areas.

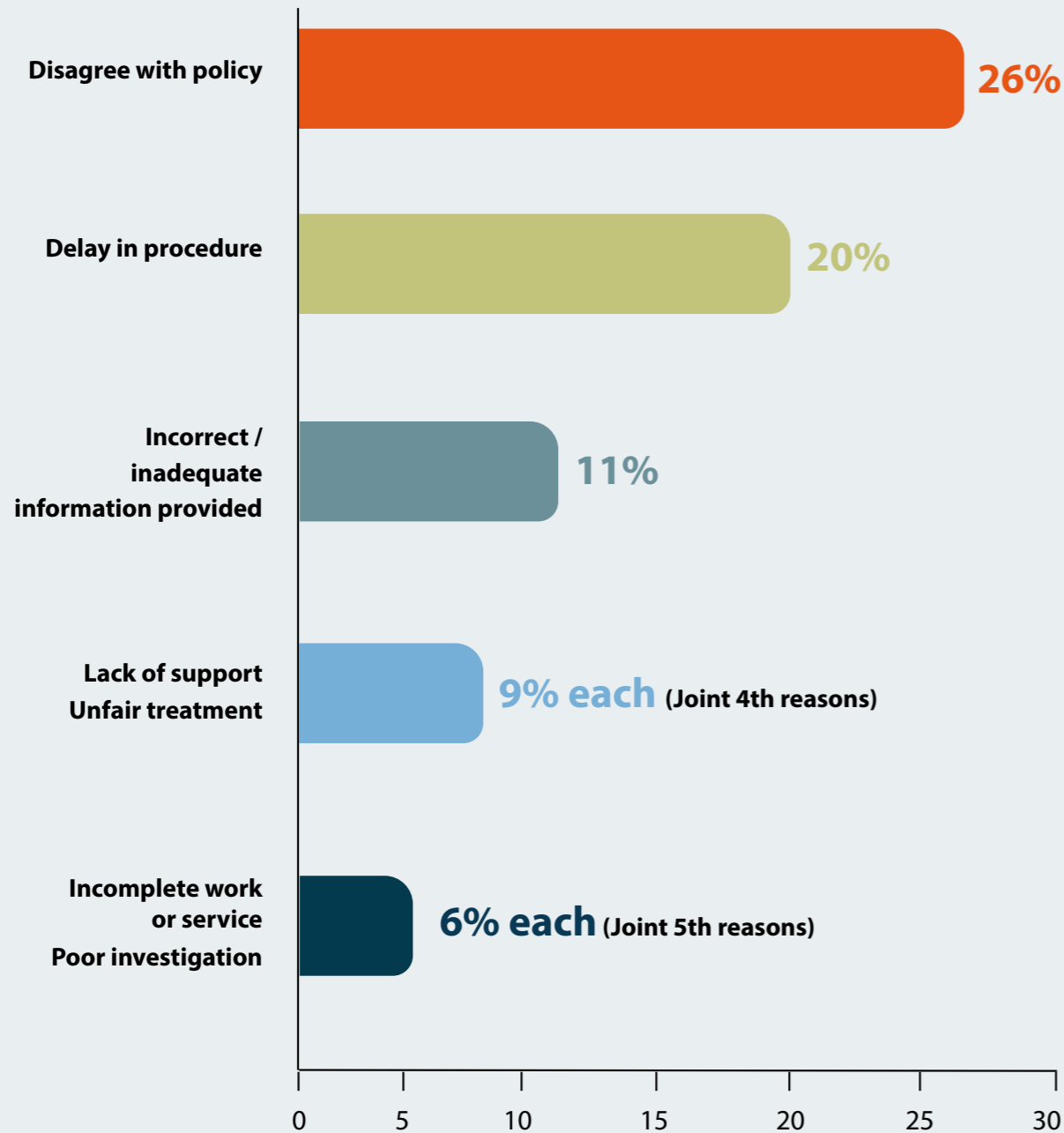
Top 5 complaint reasons for Asset Management and Improvements



Stage 1 complaints - Top 5 reasons - Tenancy and Estate Management

Tenancy and Estate Management services help you live in your home and community and manage surrounding housing areas. This service includes housing officers, caretakers and cleaners.

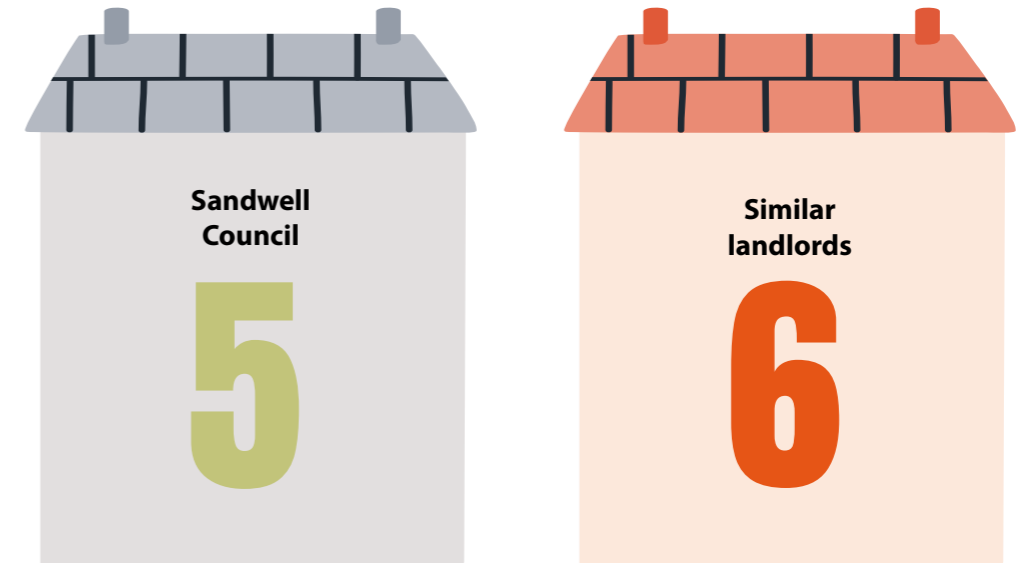
Top 5 complaint reasons for Tenancy and Estate Management



4 How are we doing?

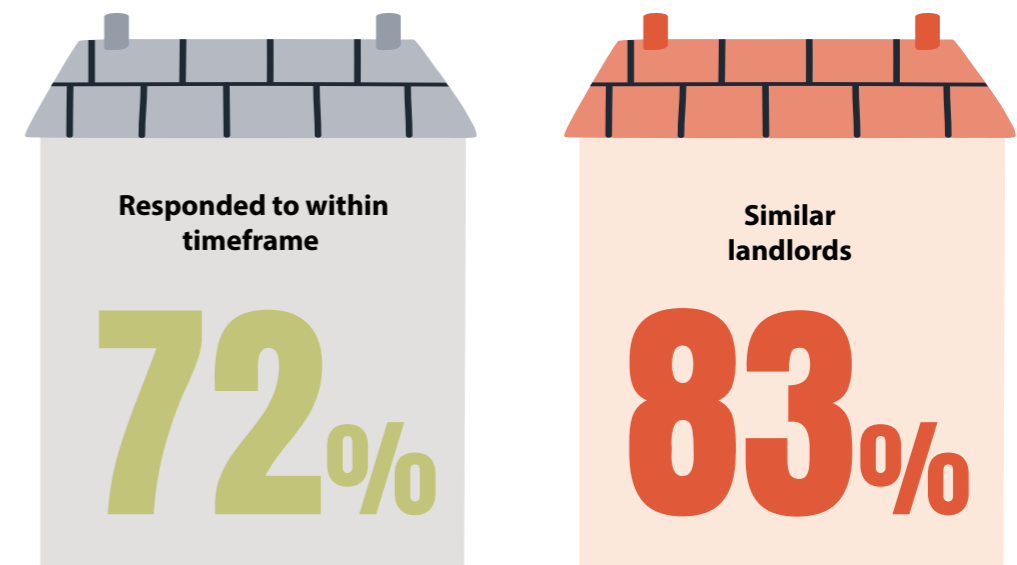
It's helpful for us to see how we are doing compared with similar organisations.

Number of stage 1 and 2 complaints per 1000 properties



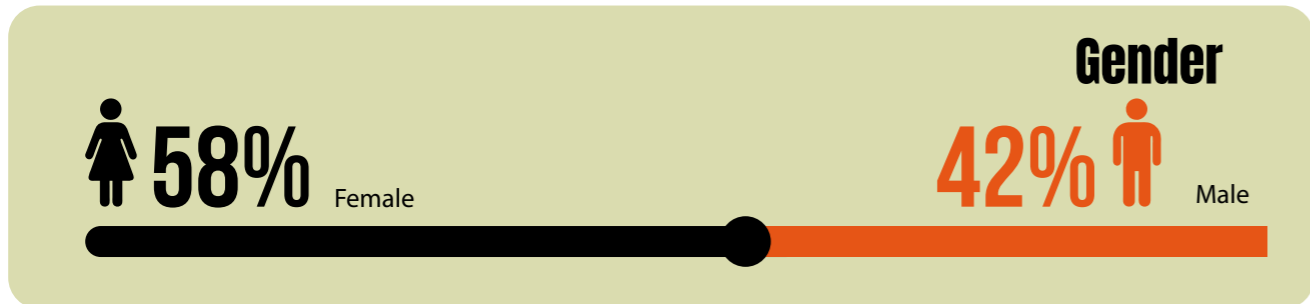
Based on accepted complaints closed in quarter 1, we have received a similar number of stage 1 complaints per 1000 properties to landlords who manage a similar number of tenancies.

Stage 1 and 2 complaints responded to within Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code timeframes



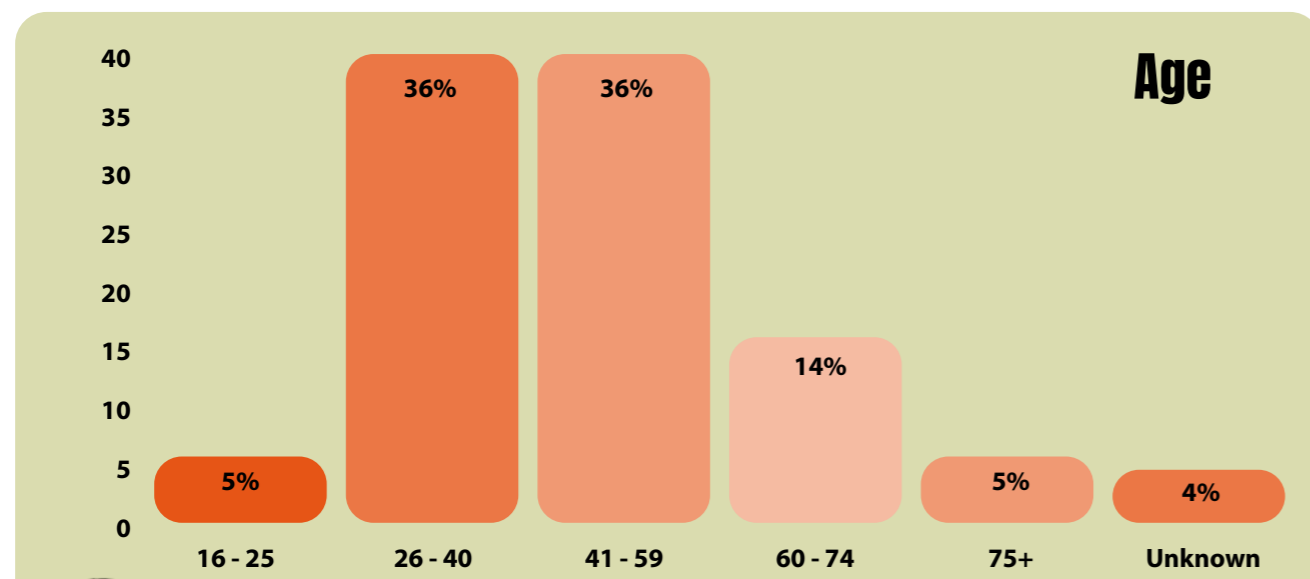
Our performance for quarter 1 has improved from our overall performance for the last financial year. This is likely mostly due to us not being able to report accurately before the system changes were made. We will now have a better understanding of how we are performing compared to similar authorities and be able to identify where improvements are needed.

5 Stage 1 demographics



Ethnicity

White British	54%	Asian or Asian British Bangladeshi	2%
Black or Black British Caribbean	12%	Asian or Asian British Indian	2%
Refused	11%	Mixed White and Asian	2%
Black or Black British African	5%	Mixed White and Black Caribbean	2%
Asian or Asian British Pakistani	4%	Asian or Asian British Other	1%
White Other	4%	White Irish	1%



6 Housing Ombudsman cases

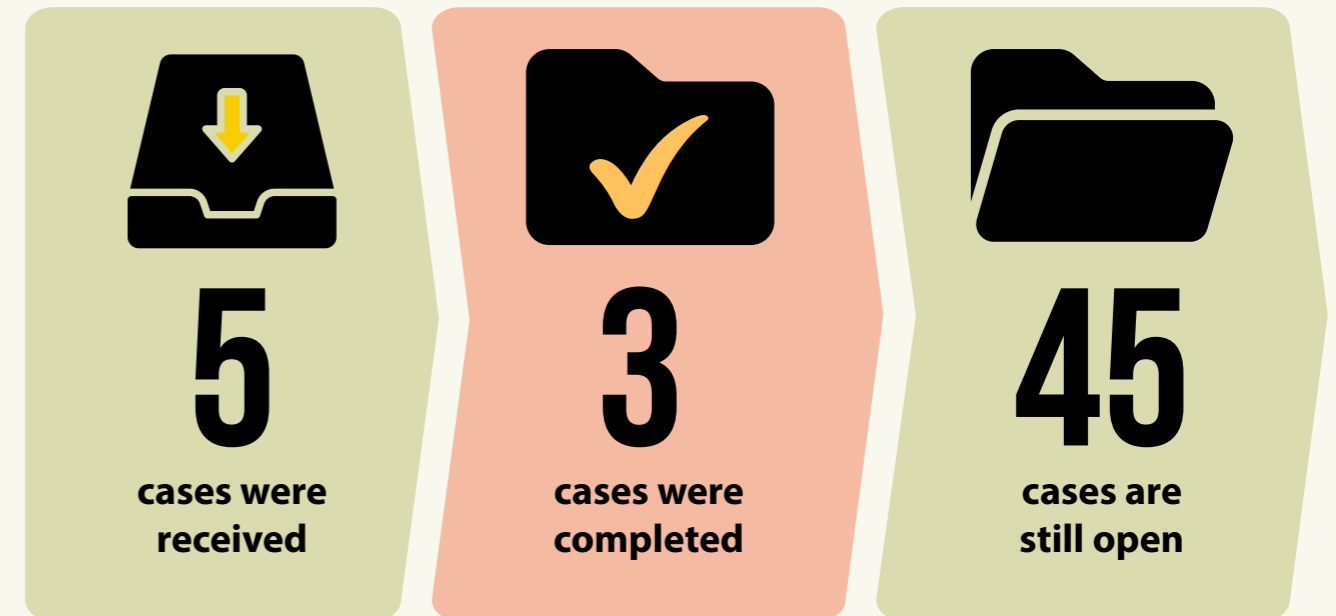
The Housing Ombudsman Service is an independent, impartial, and free service for social housing residents.

They make the final decision on disputes between residents and landlords that are registered members of its scheme - including tenants and leaseholders of social landlords.

The Ombudsman can only consider a complaint for investigation where they are satisfied that the complaint issues have been raised and investigated

by a landlord through its dedicated complaint procedure and provided a final response.

They will also consider a complaint where they are satisfied that the resident has raised the issues and there has been failure by the landlord in its complaint handling.



*The length of time it takes the Ombudsman to investigate cases means they may not always be received and closed within the same financial year.



Outcomes

The Ombudsman can issue determinations and / or actions following their investigations.

Determinations

Following investigations, the Ombudsman can find that there has been **maladministration**. This means the landlord has failed to do something, done something it shouldn't have or has delayed unreasonably.

A total of **4** maladministration determinations were received for closed cases.

2	Maladministration for complaint handling
1	Maladministration – handling of report of noisy floorboards
1	Maladministration – handling of report of lift breakdown

Service failure

There was no service failure determinations received for closed cases.

Reasonable redress

A total of **1** reasonable redress determination was received for closed cases.

1	Reasonable redress – handling of request for emergency lift procedure
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Actions

The Ombudsman can also issue actions that the landlord must complete to prevent similar future failings.

A total of **9** actions were given, including **2** compensation awards for closed cases.

1	Inspection/survey
1	Review of complaint handling
2	Staff training
2	Apology
1	Review approach to compensation
Total compensation - £850	



7 Improvements

We see complaints as an opportunity to learn lessons and drive continuous improvement. We will acknowledge faults when they occur and take responsibility for putting things right and avoiding recurrence.

Improvement	Benefit
We will record the issuing of temporary heaters to ensure they are delivered, and that the heating source provided is adequate.	This will improve customer service during heating failures and will provide accountability.
All new contracts with external repairs contractors will have an agreed process for when they are unable to gain access to your property to carry out repairs	This will hold contractors accountable for missed appointments and allow us to provide better information to customers following 'no access' outcomes.
Our repairs teams will ensure that all agreed repairs jobs are logged on the repairs system.	This will ensure that the work has been agreed and allow you to chase the progress of your repairs.
Gas team to ensure that there is a process in place for reporting gas leaks and providing the correct information to affected residents.	This will ensure the safety of residents and their homes.

To keep a track of our progress on the improvements that have been identified visit www.sandwell.gov.uk/housing-complaints-improvements

8 Get involved

As a council tenant, or leaseholder, you have the right to be consulted on matters affecting your tenancy and the housing services you receive.

There are a number of methods available for you to have your say.

- Volunteer as part of a regularly meeting group
- Get involved with specific subjects and tasks for a short term
- Attend work shops for group discussions
- Complete surveys and feedback requests

If you would like to get involved and would like more information on what is available, please call us on 0121 569 2537.

You can also complete a short survey to express your interest.

www.sandwell.gov.uk/housingsurvey

