

Complaints Annual Report

2024-25

Housing



Summary

During 2024-25, for every 1000 homes we manage, we had 59.2 Stage One complaints and 2.6 Stage Two complaints.

We had **191** complaints about housing in total.



7 out of 10 (70.3%) stage one complaints were handled within our timescale.



10 out of 10 (100%) stage two complaints were handled within our timescale.



That's an improvement from last year, but we still need to get better.

Introduction

We welcome feedback from our customers about our services. Good or bad, your views help us to understand what we are doing well and how we need to improve.

We really hope that our services meet customers' needs and expectations. But when they go wrong or fall short, we want to know about it.

We want customers to know that it is OK to complain. When you do, we will take your complaint seriously, investigate it thoroughly and respond to you within the deadlines set by the Housing Ombudsman in their complaint handling code.

This report has been produced to let you know how we have been doing around managing complaints and what we have learned from them.

It tells you about the complaints we received between April 2024 and March 2025, including how many complaints we had, what they were about, how well we did in handling them, and what we are doing as a result of customer feedback.

In this report, we have provided performance information from previous years for the purpose of comparison. However, it is important to note that from 2024-25, we have started to analyse Housing complaints separately from Support complaints.

Support data has been removed from some of the tables, but not all, which affects the consistency of some of the totals and means that some of the data can not be exactly compared to previous years. However, as there are low numbers of support complaints, the data still provides a useful indication of trends and direction of travel.

Changes to our complaints policy and process

From 1st April 2024, the Housing Ombudsman revised its Complaint Handling Code, and complaints were put on a statutory footing as part of the Social Housing Regulation Act. This means the Regulator of Social Housing will check on Advance to make sure we are handling complaints properly.

Advance made the necessary changes to comply with the code in April 2024. This included:

- Changing the timescale for acknowledging complaints to five working days
- Changing the timescale for responding to Stage One complaints to 10 working days (with the option to extend for a further 10 working days if required.)
- Changing the timescale for responding to Stage Two complaints to 20 working days (with the option to extend for a further 20 working days if required)
- Removing the Appeal panels and Stage Three of the process.
- Removing the 'Partially Upheld' decision from the process. (Complaints are now either 'Upheld' or 'Not Upheld'.)

You can find out more about our complaints process and how to complain at www.advanceuk.org.

Monitoring complaints performance

The complaints panel meets every quarter to monitor Advance's performance on complaints. They look at what complaints have been made, whether Advance is responding to complaints within the timescales set out in the complaints policy, and what we can learn from the complaints made.

The panel has recently been refreshed to include more customers. This has strengthened the panel's role in scrutinising and challenging performance as well as enabling wider representation of customer views and experiences.

Complaints performance is also monitored as part of our Key Performance Indicators and reported to the Board, and is reported to the Regulator of Social Housing each year as part of our report against the Tenant Satisfaction Measures.

Report

How many complaints were made?

- We received **191** complaints in 2024-25, which is a 40% increase on last year when we received 136. There are several factors which we believe have contributed to this increase, including:
 - Customers having increased awareness about how to make a complaint
 - Staff taking a more proactive approach to ensuring dissatisfaction has been recorded formally
 - An increase in the number of repairs carried out this year (over 1000 more than in the previous year).
- An increase in complaints is not necessarily a bad thing and the increase in volume is in line with the Housing sector as a whole.
- There were no types of complaints that we refused to accept.
- 94% of complaints were resolved at Stage One of our complaints process.
- A small number went on to be reviewed at Stage Two which indicates complaints are usually handled effectively at stage one of the process.
- Two complainants contacted the Housing Ombudsman Service for assistance in 2024/25. One before raising a complaint with Advance, this complaint was acknowledged and responded to. The response and outcome were also shared with the Ombudsman. The other was contact relating to an historic complaint which had been responded to. All details were shared with the Ombudsman, and we await further contact. The customer has also been contacted again and progress made on the issues outstanding.
- 100 complaints at Stage One were made by Shared Owners (52%) and 91 by Tenants (48%).

What did people complain about?

Complaints by service area	2024/25	2023/24	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21
Property Services	66% (126)	55% (75)	58% (75)	69% (118)	60% (67)
Tenancy & Leasehold	20% (39)	22% (30)	22% (28)	15% (26)	23% (25)
Customer Services	10% (20)	17% (23)	20% (26)	15% (25)	12% (13)
Central services	0% (0)	4% (6)	0% (0)	0% (0)	2% (2)
Housing Development	3% (6)	1% (2)	0% (0)	1% (2)	3% (4)
Total*	100% (191)	100% (136)	100% (129)	100% (171)	100% (111)

**Support complaints are not included in this analysis.*

- The distribution of complaints across Advance departments is similar to 2021/22 when the total volume of complaints was also high in comparison to other years.
- The number of complaints about Property Services has increased although fluctuated throughout different quarters of the year. The spike in 2021/22 was primarily due to poor gas & heating contractors post-lockdown in the UK. This year, complaints about Property Services peaked in Q3 for Repairs and in Q4 for Compliance issues. The average for the second half of the year was 10 more (37) than the first half of the year (27) suggesting a continuing upward trend. Compared to last year, there have been over 1000 more completed jobs which is a contributing factor to the increase in complaint volumes.
- The number of complaints about Customer Services has reduced for the third consecutive year. The department is going through a transformation to maximise efficiency and improve the customer experience by answering calls and emails more promptly. However, it is important to note that the Customer Services group includes Cleaning and Grounds Maintenance.
- Tenancy and Leasehold complaints increased slightly in comparison to last year. Again, complaints in the second half of the year reduced as improvements were implemented throughout the year.

We log complaints under four main categories: Behaviour/ Attitude of staff, Poor communication/ response, Quality of Work/ Service, Timeliness/ Service delivery. The table below shows how many complaints we received in each of these categories. (Please note, the totals differ slightly from the table above because they include support complaints, which before 2024-25 were analysed together with housing complaints. This does affect our ability to exactly compare performance year to year, but as there are only a small number of support complaints, it still provides useful insight.)

Complaint Types	2024/25	2023/24	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21
Behaviour/ Attitude of Staff	13% (24)	18% (28)	15% (24)	12% (23)	17% (21)
Poor Communication/ Response	25% (47)	23% (35)	28% (44)	29% (54)	34% (42)
Quality of Work/ Service	33% (63)	30% (46)	25% (40)	37% (69)	31% (38)
Timeliness/ Service Delivery	30% (57)	28% (44)	31% (49)	22% (41)	18% (22)
Total*	191	153	157	187	123

**includes a small number of support complaints for 2023/24 and before.*

- In 2024/25 there has been a reduction in the number of complaints related to the behaviour and attitude of staff. This was identified as an area for improvement last year and was addressed as part of the learning improvement plan for 2024-25.
- Each of the other types of complaints saw slight increases and will be focus points for improvements this year.

Examples of Complaints: upheld

- Contacting a customer's relative without the customer's consent
- Lack of response to a previous enquiry, resulting in a complaint due to the feeling of being ignored
- Lack of urgency in addressing gas and heating issues leaving vulnerable customers cold
- Contractor not taking disability into account when booking appointment/ not turning up to appointment.
- Failure to follow up on works or completing jobs to a poor standard resulting in more visits, chasing up and inconvenience to customers.

Examples of complaints: not upheld

- Lack of communication, where a tenant had failed to get back to us on key information relating to a complaint.
- Complaint about cleaners not attending at a specific time, however the contract does not stipulate a time for them to attend, just that it should be weekly.
- Complaints relating to anti social behaviour which are managed through a separate procedure.

Outcomes

Complaint outcomes	2024/25	2023/24	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21
Upheld	74% (142)	56% (87)	57% (89)	47% (88)	34% (42)
Partially upheld	N/A	17% (26)	16% (25)	21% (40)	26% (32)
Not upheld	22% (42)	8% (12)	7% (11)	15% (28)	15% (18)
Withdrawn	2% (4)	8% (12)	8% (12)	9% (16)	20% (25)
Resolved at First Contact	N/A	3% (5)	4% (7)	2% (3)	1%(1)
Superseded by another process	N/A	1% (2)	1% (2)	2% (4)	0
Appeal (stage 2)	N/A	5% (8)	7% (11)	4% (8)	2%(3)
Not recorded	2% (3)	2% (3)	0	0	2% (2)
Total*	100% (191)	100% (155)	100% (157)	100% (187)	100% (123)

**includes categories no longer applicable and support complaints for years 23-24 and earlier.*

- Nearly three quarters of all complaints were upheld. This demonstrates there are clear areas where we need to improve our services and lots of opportunities to demonstrate learning from complaints.
- From April 2024, in line with the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code, the 'partially upheld' option was removed. This helps provide greater clarity for customers.
- Three are shown as 'not recorded' – this is because they were not concluded at the time this report was prepared.

How well did we do in dealing with complaints?

The table below shows how well we performed against the timescales the Ombudsman has set for dealing with complaints.

	2024/25	2023/24	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21
Stage 1 Complaints	191	155	157	187	123
% acknowledged within 5 working days (one working day previously)	90%	78%	69%	71%	81%
% response completed within 10 working days from acknowledgement (15 days previously)	70.3%	65%	66%	73%	66%
Stage 2 Complaints	4	8	-	-	-
% acknowledged within 5 working days	100%	-	-	-	-
% response completed within 20 working days from acknowledgement	100%	50%	-	-	-
Customer Satisfaction with complaints	72%	62%	74%	67%	62%

- It is important to note that the revised Complaint Handling Code from the Ombudsman resulted in the time to acknowledge complaints going from 1 to 5 working days, and response time for stage one complaints going from 15 to 10 working days. Previous years have been kept in the table for comparative purposes.
- Both acknowledgement and responses at stage one saw significant improvements compared to last year. While this was expected for acknowledgements as the changes allowed more time, the improvement in response rate (where timescales reduced) is a positive and reflects the increased emphasis on complaints handling this year.
- Despite the improvement, 30% of complainants did not get their response within the allowed timescale. System changes have been introduced from April 1 2025, which will help deliver improvements to the way complaints are tracked against timescales. We know that for 2024-25, a large number of complaints were resolved between day 10-15 because the system was not calculating the target time correctly, resulting in complaints going overdue. This should not re-occur for 2025-26.
- Although the code allows us to extend the response times at stages one and two if needed (for example, if the complaint is more complicated and needs more time to investigate), this was very rarely used. Further training is planned with Complaints Leads to help use all available tools to manage complaints better and improve responsiveness.

Learning from Complaints

For every complaint, Advance records 'Organisational Learning/ Service Improvements.' Learning from each complaint is applied immediately at an individual level. This might include things like addressing poor performance with staff members or contractors, reviewing or reinforcing processes. On a wider level, complaints are reviewed monthly by the Customer Experience Manager, and quarterly with the complaints panel to identify trends and areas where Advance needs to implement wider organisational improvements.

Key learnings and actions taken during 2024-25 are summarised in the table below.

Learning	Action taken
Communication is key to avoiding issues leading to complaints	While communications training has been delivered to staff, we should not assume this work is complete. This needs ongoing attention and continuous improvement – both in terms of individuals communicating, but also the way systems and processes support good communication.
Complaints relating to gas/ heating contractor	Enhanced contract management, resulting in: new contracts manager; improved processes for appointment changes; introduction of 'bots' for better live information flows; flagging system for complex cases; improved escalations process; 'get ready for winter' communication campaign.
Delays to repairs for shared owners, caused by s20 consultation process	Legal advice sought; consultation process undertaken with all shared owners; s20 process simplified from two stages to one for most responsive repairs
Complaint Handling delays	Introduced a new case management procedure within Housing and Property Services to ensure ownership and accountability, resulting in a prompter service for customers and consistency in response.
Quality of workmanship, communications from contractors and timeliness of service.	We have not extended the contract with the main contractor for the SW. New contractor appointed. We have also changed the cleaning contractor as of April 2025.
Complaints system changes	Significant changes to the complaints system have been introduced as of April 2025. The main change is the rectification of 'target dates' which now align with the Complaints Handling Code. This should help complaints handlers better manage to the timescales required and improve our responsiveness.
Complaints letter standardisation	To ensure compliance with the Complaint Handling Code, and to simplify letters for our customers, complaints letter templates have been amended. This helps ensure all mandatory aspects are included and letters broken down into easier to read sections for our customers.

Key areas for Advance to address in 2025-26

Area	Action
Learning	Development of a customer-led service improvement approach based on insight from complaints, surveys and informal feedback. Priorities will be identified by the Customer Partnership and a new service improvement group will develop and deliver an improvement action plan.
Reporting	Enhanced reporting to allow for greater scrutiny of complaints. This will help the Customer Experience manager, the complaints panel and Advance Board members to identify opportunities for improvement and will also allow for self-service so managers across Advance can more easily review the complaints for their area. Changes include looking at geographical trends, customer demographics and compensation spend.
Training	Further training required for all staff in relation to recording complaints, complaint handling and recording learning effectively. This includes work with the Customer Services team on asking specific questions when logging complaints, and reminding complaints leads about the importance of keeping a clear audit trail and how to capture learning points from all complaints, even if they are not upheld.
Promotion	Although the complaints volumes increased, anecdotal feedback from customers is that they are unclear on how to complain. There are opportunities to further promote the process through our website and in 'welcome packs' for our new customers.
Property Services Collaboration	With two thirds of our complaints about Property Services, there is an opportunity to conduct further analysis on the complaints and repairs data. This will help provide context in terms of geography, contractor performance and types of jobs which are resulting in complaints.
Complainant Analysis	Through enhanced reporting, we will be able to better track who is complaining, whether it be customers themselves or advocates on their behalf. We will also have a clearer view on repeat complainants and can adapt our approach to managing their complaints accordingly. This may include arranging visits or meetings to address underlying issues which are resulting in frequent complaints.

Self-assessment against the Ombudsman's Code

We have carried out a self-assessment against the Ombudsman's Code for 2024-25.

Advance is compliant with the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code with most code requirements being covered by our complaints policy and procedure.

We have used the self-assessment as an opportunity to carry out a detailed review of complaints handling and have identified areas where we can strengthen compliance.

While policies and procedures are in place, we found that the way these are applied in practice has varied depending on the team or individual managing the complaint. To ensure our customers receive a fair and consistent approach to the way their complaint is dealt with, regardless of who handles it, further training and ongoing support is needed and this will be delivered in the coming year.

This will include specialist training delivered externally for Complaint handlers, as well as in-house training delivered by the Customer Experience Manager.

We will also strengthen our approach to tracking follow-up actions from complaints to ensure these are delivered within appropriate timescales.

Statement from the Board of Advance

"The Board welcomes the progress made this year in relation to complaints handling. We are particularly pleased to see improvements in the response timescales. This means we are providing a better service to customers by offering quicker redress when things go wrong. Strengthening our processes and systems also means we have better insight into why customers complain and what we can do to prevent this in the future.

"There is still more to be done and we look forward to seeing further improvements implemented over the coming year. We want to continue to improve performance against the complaint handling timescales and to drive a culture of continuous learning across the organisation."