



ST LUKE'S HOUSING SOCIETY
MCMASTER HOUSE

Annual Complaints Performance & Service Improvement Report 2023-2024

Introduction

In June 2024, we conducted a comprehensive review of our complaints process and evaluated our handling of complaints for the year 2023-24. We completed the Housing Ombudsman Self-Assessment to ensure that our policies and procedures align with the requirements of the updated Housing Ombudsman Code 2024.

As a small housing association, our Governance structure is made up of several volunteer Board members and one executive board member. Together, they are responsible for effectively implementing and monitoring our complaints process.

Our Board and the Head of Operations have agreed that our review meets the requirements of the new Code. As part of compliance with the new Code, the Board is also expected to publish its response to this report.

About Us

We are a small, registered provider of social housing, currently governed by several Board Trustees and our Head of Operations who have held senior executive positions. Together, our team works strategically to accomplish the association's mission of providing safe and affordable housing for residents aged 55 and older. We have a total of thirty-eight flats, classifying us as a smaller provider.

Being a smaller provider comes with several advantages. Our team of operational staff are centrally located onsite, meaning residents do not have to go through a call centre. Staff members are available onsite most days, and residents have various ways to contact them, including phone, email, and in person. This accessibility allows for same-day appointments, making our staff more approachable than those at larger providers.

As a smaller provider, we believe we have a better understanding of our scheme and the needs of our residents. This allows our staff to be more intuitive about any issues that arise, enabling them to identify and resolve problems quickly.

In light of the various challenges faced over the past few years, including the COVID-19 pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis, we have shown our ability to adapt. When changes to our operations or service delivery have been necessary, we can implement those changes swiftly.

We also work with a dedicated group of smaller contractors to deliver our services to residents, which allows us to respond to repairs and emergencies promptly.

We recognize that being a smaller organization presents various challenges. Our team consists of two full-time and two part-time members. While roles are clearly defined, staff must be flexible and adaptable, handling multiple inquiries that larger providers typically manage through separate departments such as Finance, HR, and IT. In our case, many of these responsibilities fall within the daily duties of our small team.

We have adopted the Housing Ombudsman Complaints Handling Code and are committed to adhering to it. As a small housing association, we must carefully consider how to effectively implement this code, given our limited team size.

Although we are a small organization, we take pride in being a strong service provider and believe we make a positive impact. We recognize the need for continuous improvement, and we are committed to being open and transparent with our residents, stakeholders, and the agencies we collaborate with.

We understand that we won't always succeed, but when we fall short, we will work together to review the situation and learn from our mistakes.

Complaints Review 2023-24

As a small housing provider, we have not received any formal complaints for the 2023-24 period. In previous years, we also did not receive any formal complaints, even though we advised those who expressed dissatisfaction that they could submit a formal complaint if they remained unhappy with our response.

Overall, the volume of complaints and dissatisfaction has been kept to a minimum, as reflected in our residents' survey for 2023.

We believe this success is largely due to our size, our onsite presence, and the effective mechanisms and support systems we have established to address repairs and emergencies promptly. Additionally, we have an onsite Maintenance Officer and reliable contractors available to assist.

We understand that larger providers may face challenges, especially when services are outsourced, staff members are distributed over wide geographical areas, and there is limited time for them to familiarize themselves with residents and their schemes.

Our review of complaints policies and procedures, along with the completion of our self-assessment, has highlighted the need to identify potential barriers that may discourage people from filing complaints. We plan to explore this issue further in 2025 during our next residents' survey.

We have also reviewed the Housing Ombudsman Code and updated our policies accordingly. We acknowledge that the low number of formal complaints we receive may be due to various factors, and we remain open-minded as we reassess our complaints approach.

- The former Complaints policy being out of date and confusing.
- Complaints process containing more than two stages.
- The complaints policy was not accessible, for example, the residents do not have a resident's handbook to refer to and the information about making a complaint was not provided on our website.
- Cultural/Historical Complaints Handling – it could be possible previous experiences of how complaints have been handled over the years, have prevented residents from making complaints.

Again, as a smaller provider, with a small number of staff, realistically we appreciate that staff may work quickly to resolve matters where things have gone wrong, or residents are dissatisfied to prevent unhappiness from reaching a formal complaint.

On the following pages, we detail our strategies for managing and reducing complaints and outline our future goals for improvement.

What we currently have in place to help manage our complaints
Complaints Policy and Procedure 2024 – In accordance with the Housing Ombudsman Code 2024, we have reviewed and updated our complaints policy and procedures to align with the new requirements.
Housing Ombudsman Self-Assessment 2024 – We have completed our self-assessment and evaluated our approach, resulting in the implementation of various measures to ensure compliance.
Two-Stage Approach – Following the review, we have adopted a two-stage approach to simplify the handling of complaints. We recognized that our previous policy was outdated and had too many stages.
Timescales – We have revised the timescales for each stage to make them clearer and more understandable.
Website – We have added more information about complaints and our services on our website. We aim to improve this over the next 12 months.
Quarterly Board Meetings – The Board and Executive team meet every quarter to discuss scheme and tenancy issues. This helps us identify service failures or areas where complaints may arise.

Weekly Catch-Ups – The Chair of Trustees visits the site weekly to meet with the Head of Operations and discuss operational issues.

Repairs – We have updated our repair service standards and expanded the ways for residents to report repairs. Additionally, we implemented new housing management software to enhance our repair and maintenance service. This system enables us to track and report on repairs, ensuring that they are completed within target times.

Annual Support Plans – We offer all our residents an annual support plan, which most residents engage with. This is a 1–2-hour appointment that covers various topics, including positive aspects of the scheme and areas residents would like to improve. It provides an opportunity for residents to voice any concerns they may have.

Staff – We are a unique provider because our staff are on-site most days during the week. This allows residents to visit the office and speak directly with staff. Our team is also available via email and telephone, responding promptly to any issues. The presence of staff allows residents to report concerns face-to-face and have them addressed quickly.

Staff Culture – We believe we are fortunate to have a dedicated team, albeit small, that is committed to helping our residents and providing excellent service. Our staff genuinely care about the individual needs of each resident and have a solid understanding of those needs.

Staff Training – All staff members receive customer service training as part of their mandatory training and are kept up to date on the new Complaints Policy.

Plans to help us improve further

Although we have not received any formal complaints, we have identified key areas where complaints may arise. This proactive approach allows us to strengthen our policies and improve service delivery in these areas:

Repairs – Effective management of our repair process is essential. We will focus on how quickly we respond to repair requests, how swiftly we resolve them, the quality of the work completed, and our adherence to agreed-upon timelines.

Anti-Social Behaviour and Nuisance – We receive very few nuisance complaints, and when we do, they are typically related to lower-level disturbances from day-to-day living. However, we are currently reviewing our policies to ensure we provide reliable service to our residents. This review includes the introduction of risk assessments for all complainants, the issuance of nuisance diary sheets, template letters, and proportionality assessments for all cases.

Rents and Service Charges – We are committed to the effective management of rents and service charges. To assist our residents with any queries, we provide an annual booklet detailing our services. Before implementing any rent increases, we plan to hold a rent surgery in collaboration with an external advisory service, allowing residents to drop in and discuss their concerns.

Staff – We recognize that there have been complaints regarding staff and service failures. We acknowledge our responsibility in cases where we have not met expectations or failed to deliver our services effectively.

2025 – Resident Satisfaction Survey – Our next resident satisfaction survey is scheduled for early 2025. We are considering including additional information in the survey to help residents understand how to make complaints if they are dissatisfied.

Resident Feedback – We are exploring ways to collect resident feedback by sending out surveys between the two-year surveys. Additionally, we plan to distribute newsletters before future board meetings, providing residents the opportunity to express their concerns or dissatisfaction during these meetings.

Residents meeting - We will hold a meeting to discuss the results of the recent survey. This will provide an opportunity to explore any emerging themes and allow residents to ask questions to the Board.

Residents Handbook – We plan to create a resident handbook that will include important information, including details about our complaints process.

Digital Options – We are exploring how to enhance our technological offerings for residents. This may involve providing tablets or kiosks in communal areas where residents can report repairs, antisocial behaviour (ASB), tenancy issues, and complaints.

Flat Inspections – In accordance with the Housing Ombudsman Code and consumer regulations, SLHS has arranged for flat inspections to be conducted by an external preventive maintenance engineering company.

This company operates independently of SLHS and will help identify and address repairs and maintenance needs while creating property profiles for all our homes. This initiative will enable us to respond more quickly to repairs and gain better insights into our properties.

All inspections include a section about damp and mould, and we will provide residents with helpful information about looking after their homes. This will be taking place in Spring 2025.

Business Plan – We are developing our business plan for the next five years to establish a clear vision and action plan to help us achieve our goal of becoming an excellent provider of housing.