

Sanctuary's complaint performance 2023/24

Foreword by Trudi Elliott, Vice Chair – Sanctuary Group Board and member of the Board responsible for complaints

2023/24 saw significant change in how Sanctuary manages its customer complaints. This change for the better was driven by several factors including:

- ▶ A more customer-focused and resident-friendly regulatory environment.
- ▶ More awareness among our customers about the level of service they have the right to expect, and the route to making a formal complaint if they feel the need.
- ▶ A surge in the number of complaints we receive, making change necessary to effectively manage the volume.
- ▶ A desire for us to do the right thing for Sanctuary residents and give them the best service we can.



Sanctuary is always looking to work more effectively to provide a better service for our customers. As the member of Sanctuary's Group Board responsible for complaints, I see first-hand how important it is for the organisation to manage customer complaints effectively and make our whole complaint process more robust. We are committed to putting our customers first and I'm glad to see Sanctuary residents already benefiting from the changes we've made. Our complaint service will continue to improve throughout 2024 and beyond.

2023/24 Complaint Overview

Sanctuary want to provide a safe, well maintained home for our customers but sometimes we get things wrong. When we are wrong we learn from those mistakes. Analysing complaints helps us learn from our mistakes.

The number of complaints against Sanctuary's housing operations increased during 2023/24. The most significant increase was in England, in line with the rest of the sector. The Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS) reported a 91 percent increase in cases across the sector in the first nine months of 2023/24 compared to 2022/23. We also saw a relative increase in complaints from our residents in Scotland and from those living in our Supported Living homes.

From 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024, Sanctuary learned the outcome of 75 HOS investigations. In 13 of the cases, severe maladministration was found. Another 50 of the cases had maladministration findings.

The Housing Ombudsman requires Sanctuary to publish information on our complaint performance each year. This report covers 2023/24. As HOS require, we report our complaint performance and service improvement to Sanctuary's Group Board each year and publish this information with our self-assessment against the HOS Complaint Handling Code on our website.

Annual self-assessment

Our Group Board approved our self-assessment against the HOS Complaint Handling Code at its meeting on 22 May 2024. Prior to this, our self-assessment was reviewed by some of our Resident Scrutiny Panel. [Read our self-assessment.](#)

Why Sanctuary customers complain

The five main reasons we receive a complaint are:

- ▶ responsive repairs
- ▶ damp and mould
- ▶ gas repairs and servicing
- ▶ housing management
- ▶ estate services

We have introduced a new Root Cause Analysis framework to help us find process and system failures that contribute to a complaint. We use customer and colleague insight to find the problem, then take steps to stop the issue repeating. Corrective action is widely communicated so this learning is useful to our colleagues and customers across the UK.

Our 2023/24 complaint performance

As was the case across the wider social housing sector, we received significantly more complaints in England during 2023/24, recording a total of 7,828 stage one complaints and 1,317 complaints escalating to stage two.

‘Stage one’ is where we have investigated a complaint and given our first response to the resident who complained.

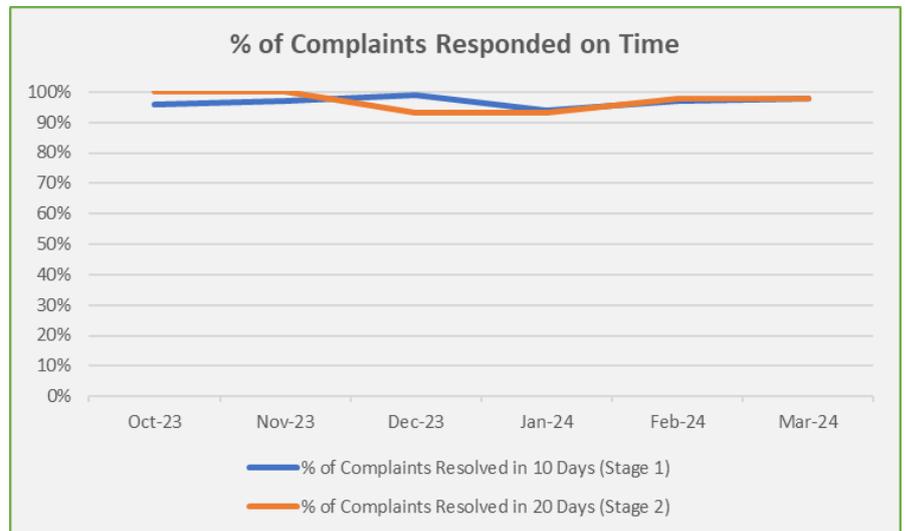
‘Stage two’ is our final response, when the customer is unhappy with the outcome at stage one.

2023/24	Renters	Owners	Renter and owner combined
Number of stage one complaints received per 1,000 homes	94.1	67.0	92.6
Number of stage two complaints received per 1,000 homes	15.6	14.7	15.5

You’ll see from the table above that most of the complaints we receive are resolved at stage one. Fewer than one in every six housing complaints in England progresses to stage two.

2023/24	Renters	Owners	Renter and owner combined
Percentage of stage one complaints responded to within the Housing Ombudsman’s Complaint Handling Code timescales	76.1	80.0	76.3
Percentage of stage two complaints responded to within the Housing Ombudsman’s Complaint Handling Code timescales	64.2	85.7	65.2

The recent changes to our complaint handling process have given us greater capacity, enabling us to respond to complaints more quickly. This graph shows the percentage of stage one and stage two complaints we acknowledged and responded to within the Ombudsman's timescales from October 2023 to April 2024.



Housing Ombudsman Service complaints

Customers can take their complaint to HOS when they are unhappy with our response at stage one and stage two. In 2023/24, we learned the outcome of 75 HOS investigations.

The 75 investigations sparked:

- 19 severe maladministration findings
- 68 maladministration findings

Sanctuary received 13 cases where the Housing Ombudsman found severe maladministration, across those cases there were 19 findings of severe maladministration.

By 31 March 2024, the Ombudsman had 43 open investigations into the complaints of Sanctuary residents awaiting determination. At that time HOS requested information from us on another 10 cases before it opened an investigation.

For comparison, in 2022/23, HOS investigated 36 Sanctuary cases. HOS's findings included:

- one severe maladministration
- eight maladministration
- 11 service failures

- › Five 'no fault' cases

2023/24 complaint handling improvements

We made big improvements in complaint handling in 2023/24. The complaints team completely changed how they handle complaints in 2023/24 to create more efficient and effective complaints process. The significant improvement we have made is evidenced by our key performance indicators, the [independent Altair review](#) and our positive HOS feedback.

We've:

- › More than doubled the number of people on our complaint-handling team and invested in more training to improve our customer service, so we respond to complaints more quickly.
- › Put new processes in place to give our teams a much more detailed understanding of our open complaints, enabling us to resolve customer issues more effectively.
- › Created a new Works Co-ordination team to manage issues until they're resolved and we know the customer's happy.
- › Started a new approach to root cause analysis, to prevent complaints rather than just respond to them effectively when they occur.
- › We now publish complaint handling information every three months. [View this on our website](#).
- › At the request of the Housing Ombudsman, we had an independent review carried out which focused on our repair service, record keeping and response to customers with vulnerabilities. Housing Ombudsman Richard Blakeway described our approach to the review, and our desire to use the process to learn and improve, as "commendable". [Read our independent review on HOS's website](#).
- › Made two members of our Group Board responsible for complaints: Trudi Elliott, our Vice Chair, and Nicole Seymour, our Group Director – Corporate Services, continually peer review our complaint handling service.