

TRIATHLON HOMES ANNUAL COMPLAINTS PERFORMANCE AND SERVICE IMPROVEMENT REPORT APRIL 2023 TO MARCH 2024

INTRODUCTION

This report covers our compliance with the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code, and our complaints handling performance from April 2023 to March 2024. We've included in the report:

- Our statement about performance from the Board
- A summary of complaints including the number of complaints received and resolved, and the response times
- Compliance with the [Housing Ombudsman Complaints Handling Code](#)
- Confirmation of Housing Ombudsman cases and reports on our complaint handling
- Service improvements made following complaints.

Triathlon Homes delegates the provision of its services and the management of its complaints to Southern Housing under a Management Agreement. When we refer to the Complaints Team in this document, we refer to the Southern Housing team. Because of this, we have included in our self-assessment and performance report areas for improvement identified by Southern Housing and specific improvements related solely to the experiences of Triathlon Homes residents.

BOARD STATEMENT TO RESIDENTS

The Board of Triathlon Homes are committed to providing the best possible services to residents. Sometimes things go wrong and it's important we put things right for you as quickly as possible.

Delivering great services and handling complaints effectively is a high priority for Triathlon Homes. We're listening to feedback and using this to help us improve and deliver better services for residents.

We've carried out a self-assessment of our complaint handling service and are assured we're meeting the new Housing Ombudsman Code (April 2024). We have scrutinised and challenged the self-assessment to make sure it gives a true reflection of our complaint handling. While we comply with the Code in policy terms, further improvements can be made, these are highlighted in the report. We've addressed some of these and have plans in place to do more. The Board is satisfied that our provider, Southern Housing, is delivering the complaints handling service well and is committed to continuing improvement.

We'll communicate any changes resulting from the self-assessment across Triathlon Homes. We are embedding a more robust approach to complaint handling and learning from complaints and are working closely with our partner organisations, including Southern Housing and East Village Management Ltd. These actions will help us ensure we provide the best possible service to you.

COMPLAINTS PERFORMANCE APRIL 2023 TO MARCH 2024

We, under our arrangement with Southern Housing, recognised we needed to improve how we handled complaints and over the past year we've made many changes. The table below summarises our performance from April 2023 to March 2024. For residents, the improvements we've made has meant:

- **More consistency in acknowledging complaints on time** –Triathlon Homes acknowledged 93% of complaints on time. We recognise we can answer a higher percentage on time.
- **More consistent delivery of the complaints service for residents** – there are now better resources in the Complaints Team, this means we've changed the way we manage complaints; we've updated our systems so we can track progress effectively, and we've changed our policy and procedures. Again, there's still more we can do.
- **Improvements to keeping residents informed** throughout the complaints process by having allocated case handlers
- **More consistent compensation payments** in line with the Housing Ombudsman requirements
- **More effective learning from complaints** – so we avoid repeating the same mistakes
- **Improvements to service delivery where health conditions affect a residents' circumstances** – so the potential risks to residents are managed and reduced.

Summary of complaints April 2023 to March 2024

Information	Performance 2023-4
Number of complaints received at stage 1	49
Stage 1 acknowledged in line with Ombudsman code	93%
Number of complaints responded to	49
Stage 1 complaints responded to in line with Ombudsman code	77%
Number of complaints received at stage 2	10
Number of complaints responded to *	8
*Stage 2 responded to in line with Ombudsman code	100%

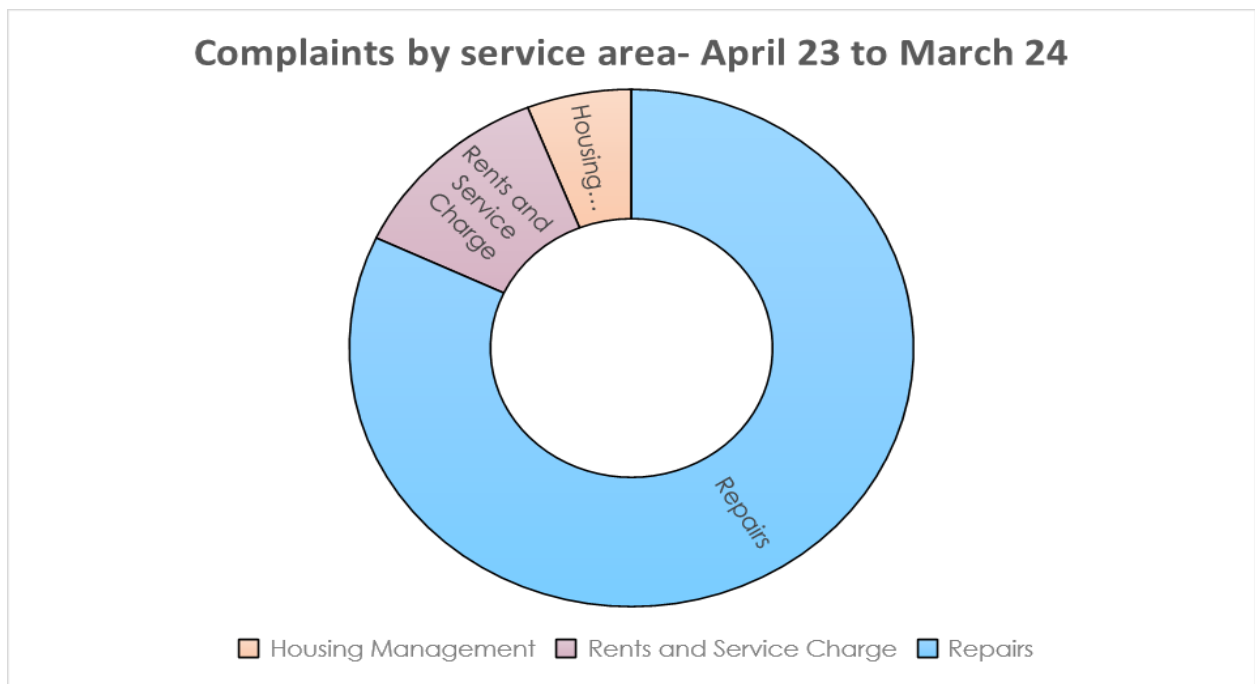
*2 Responses due after 31 March 2024

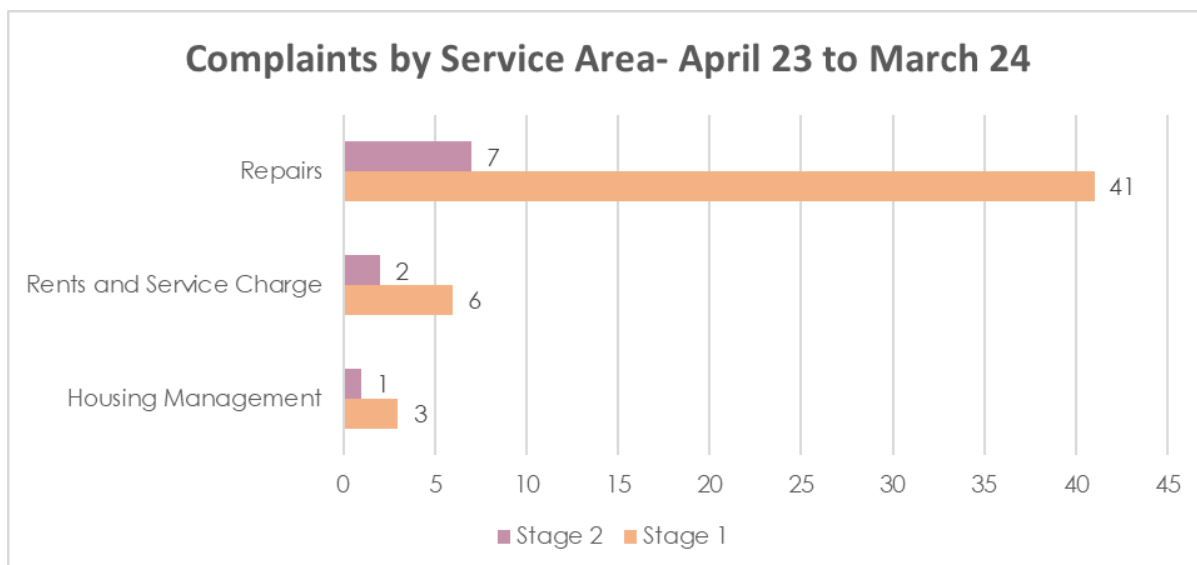
We're not aware of any complaints being refused during the year. On occasions, residents resolve matters outside of the complaints process. This includes legal proceedings, service charge disputes, and disrepair claims. We've changed the way we record refusals to better understand the reasons for refusing a complaint.

Reasons for complaints April 2023 to March 2024

The chart below shows the service areas where we get complaints. Repairs is one of our largest services and one that residents care about the most. We get most complaints about repairs and the condition of residents' homes. We've outlined the issues, what we've learnt, and the action we're taking in the 'lessons learnt from complaints' section later in this report.

While we received 49 Stage 1 complaints in the year, the tables below highlight the different areas residents have asked us to address in their complaints, therefore the number is higher. Our data also includes complaints about the service provided by East Village Management Ltd (EVML). EVML is responsible for the condition of the buildings at East Village. We've chosen to respond to these complaints because the service EVML provides is so critical to our ability to provide residents with a good service.





We must meet the [Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code](#) and have completed our self-assessment against the code. The code changed in April 2024, some of the requirements are new and we've made changes to ensure we meet the new code. Areas where we can make further improvement against the Housing Ombudsman code include:

- **Acknowledging and responding to more complaints on time, and keeping residents informed during the complaints process** - we increased the size of the team and changed the way we work, and this has already led to improvement
- **Reporting complaints through our website** - we're integrating our technology systems from September 2024
- **Producing and publicising a Triathlon Homes complaints information leaflet 'Putting it Right'** by July 2024
- **Recording the reasons for refusing complaints** – we now have a new way of recording and monitoring refusals
- **Continuously embedding our approach to complaint handling** across our business and with our contractors through training and communication throughout 2024-25
- **Making sure all members of staff have a complaints performance objective for 2024-25**
- **Integrating and changing our technology systems** from September 2024
- **Appointing a Triathlon board member responsible for complaints by July 2024**

Southern Housing have made significant changes to complaint handling over the year to improve resident experiences. Triathlon residents will benefit from these improvements which include:

- **Increasing resources and reorganising the Complaints Team**
- **Changes to the way we work and handle complaints**, so we're delivering a consistent service to all residents

- **Reviewing the processes** where complaints are managed on behalf of a third party such as Triathlon Homes
- **Carrying out training** to help ensure the effective ownership of complaints, and the continuation of a culture of **complaint handling** and learning from complaints. Training staff in the contact centre to effectively recognise complaints in line with the Housing Ombudsman code and making sure they're sent to the Complaints Team Training complaints handlers to specifically manage the complaints reviewed on behalf of Triathlon Homes.
- **Making sure we understand all the circumstances** surrounding a resident complaint, and acting on that information – for instance, whether there are health conditions that we need to consider
- **Recruiting a Complaints Panel** of residents who challenge performance and help drive improvement
- **Recruiting a Board member responsible for complaints** to challenge our performance at the highest level
- **Improving complaint handling technology systems** – we've more work to do in 2024 and this will help to drive better resident experiences
- **Improving how we track and monitor complaints** - meaning we can report on the time taken to acknowledge complaints and our stage 1 and 2 responses more effectively
- **Changing to how we record refusals** – from April 2024
- **Changing the way we track and monitor actions** arising from complaints
- **Improved the way we learn from and act upon lessons from complaints** – please see the learning from complaints section in this report.

HOUSING OMBUDSMAN SCHEME

Triathlon Homes is a voluntary member of the Housing Ombudsman Scheme. The Housing Ombudsman is a free (to residents), independent, and impartial service. Its work is funded through landlord subscription fees. It investigates complaints and resolves disputes involving the tenants and leaseholders of social landlords, (housing associations and local authorities) like Southern Housing. Residents can take a complaint to the Housing Ombudsman Service for investigation after going through the landlord's complaint process, if the issues have not been resolved. The service also helps where the landlord is not responding to a complaint they've received.

Members of the Housing Ombudsman Scheme must comply with the Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code. The code aims to achieve best practice in complaint handling. The Ombudsman has the power to make orders to landlords, this might mean ordering the landlord to apologise, carry out works or pay compensation. Please see the Housing Ombudsman [website](#) for more information.

Housing Ombudsman determinations 2023-24

Triathlon Homes has had no maladministration determinations, or any other determinations, from April 2023 to March 2024. There are no Ombudsman reports related specifically to Triathlon Homes.

Special investigation into Southern Housing by the Housing Ombudsman – June 2023 to September 2023

In May 2024, the Housing Ombudsman published a report following its investigation of complaint handling at Southern Housing. The report covers the period between October 2018 and September 2023. The Ombudsman issued determinations on 77 cases, making 184 findings with a maladministration rate of 79%. Regarding complaint handling, the maladministration rate was 92%. 76 of the 77 determinations reviewed in this investigation started before Southern Housing was formed in a merger in December 2022. None of the 77 cases related to Triathlon Homes.

Throughout this investigation, Southern Housing worked collaboratively with the Ombudsman and its team and welcomed the learning from the report. You can find the full report [here](#).

The report identified seven key themes and made recommendations to improve in those areas:

- **Complaint handling:** Improving ownership and access to complaints
- **Reasonable adjustments:** Making sure we recognise, respond and record when dealing with vulnerabilities
- **Unreasonable behaviour and contact restrictions:** Making sure we consistently apply our unacceptable behaviour policy
- **Risk management:** Identifying resident vulnerabilities and acting on the outcome of risk assessments
- **Repairs:** Revise the repair policy and improve record keeping
- **Managing agents and third parties:** Being clear about responsibilities with residents when estate managing agents, such as EVM, are in place.
- **Knowledge and information management:** Improve record keeping to help to deliver a better service to residents.

Southern Housing have taken, and continue to take, action to address the recommendations of the report and will continue to make improvements. Please see the next section 'learning from complaints' for more information. Triathlon Homes residents will benefit from these service improvements.

LEARNING FROM COMPLAINTS

In this section, we focus on what we've learnt from complaints. We've reviewed the complaints we've received, the Southern Housing Ombudsman determinations and the Southern Housing special investigation by the Housing Ombudsman. We've looked at the root causes of problems, and the action we're taking to improve services for residents. We've also included learning from the Housing Ombudsman [Spotlight reports](#) (best practice guidance).

Below we've outlined the action we've taken to learn lessons and improve services.

Complaints handling service: We've covered complaint handling performance in the section above, 'summary of complaints April 2023 to March 2024'

Unreasonable behaviour and contact restrictions: We've changed our approach and policy to align with the new Code and address the issues highlighted in the Housing Ombudsman special investigation.

Risk management, reasonable adjustments and reducing resident vulnerability related risks: Our Reasonable Adjustments and Vulnerable Needs Policy has been updated, guidance developed, and training for frontline colleagues is being rolled out. This will mean we can take more effective action to tailor services and reduce risks for residents. There is more we can do to improve. We'll be addressing the recommendations in the Housing Ombudsman spotlight reports on [Attitudes, Rights and Respect](#) and [Knowledge and information management](#).

Repairs services: Delivering an effective repairs service is important to us and to residents. In the year we completed almost 5000 repairs in residents' homes. In less than 0.7% of cases we received complaints about the repair or a service failure.

Residents said we're missing appointments, taking too long to complete repairs, not keeping residents up to date, and not following up actions after a surveyor visits. Approximately a third of our repair complaints are due to delays when the responsibilities for the buildings sit with EVML. These relate to leaks, roof leaks, problems with the communal stacks and faulty windows or balcony doors. Leaks and stack problems are some of the most distressing events residents have to face. It's critical we work closely with EVML to manage some repairs in residents' homes promptly. We share these complaints with EVML to understand what goes wrong and to improve our joint service delivery to residents. In very few cases, residents have made complaints about staff or contractors being rude. We always address this quickly with the individuals involved.

We have:

- put in place more staff to take repair calls, schedule repairs and keep residents updated
- changed the structure of our repairs team to ensure there is leadership responsibility for repairs at East Village. This has improved our diagnostic and problem solving for the more complex repair problems and improved the processes for escalation internally and with EVML
- implemented new systems and processes to make sure we deliver the quality service our residents deserve
- reminded contractors and staff about the expected code of conduct when working in residents' homes

The expectation is this will result in more repairs being completed on time, more appointments kept, and improved quality. We're already seeing positive feedback from residents about the repairs service.

We're planning to make further improvements:

- The Board will monitor, a new performance indicator 'complaints per repair' to make sure repair related complaints reduce.
- We're going to develop a joint protocol with EVML to ensure we have a joined-up response to emergency situations where residents may need to move out because of the problem with a stack or a significant leak. This includes working more closely with EVML on quicker diagnosis of repair issues that impact residents' homes. Residents will be at the heart of our joint responses to these.
- We're also reviewing our repairs policy, to be clearer about timescales for repairs. We want residents to have homes that are in good repair, and to receive a great service.

Communal repairs: We received just three complaints about communal repairs however other feedback from residents confirms that we have work to do to improve service delivery of communal repairs. EVML carry out repairs to external and communal areas. Failure to do communal repairs on time and to a good quality can affect many people at East Village. In particular, residents are frustrated about poor communication about repairs in the communal areas of their buildings. To help keep residents informed proactively, and so they do not have to chase, we're piloting an automated messaging solution that informs all residents in the building of the progress with communal repairs. If successful, we're hoping to roll this out in the year ahead.

Improving damp and mould services: Living in a home with damp and mould can cause health and wellbeing issues for residents. We reviewed damp and mould complaints. This led to increased resources into fixing damp and mould in residents' homes. We created an expert, dedicated Damp and Mould Team – this means better diagnosis of damp and mould in residents' homes, getting repairs done quicker, and improved communication so residents are kept up to date. We also recognise damp and mould can affect residents' health, and when residents report damp, we assess the impact on health, prioritising residents who have ongoing health conditions. In addition, we're implementing recommendations from the Housing Ombudsman Spotlight report on [damp and mould](#).

Anti-social behaviour (ASB): ASB is a key concern for residents, leading to complaints including inconsistency of advice, not showing empathy, and not being kept up to date. We've got a revised policy, good neighbour procedure and toolkit. We're changing how we manage ASB when residents first contact us, to make sure we get residents to the right person for the right advice quicker. We're also making sure we assess residents' needs when we're contacted about ASB, and using this information to tailor services, for health conditions, and potential risks. We're planning to implement changes in the Autumn. In addition, we're implementing recommendations from the Housing Ombudsman Spotlight report on [noise nuisance](#).

Rent and service charge enquiries: Residents are naturally concerned about value for money, and this can lead to complaints about rents and service charges. In most cases the complaints we received related our processes and communication. We've increased the size of the Service Charge Team and have made improvements to processes; we hope this will lead to better communication and information for

residents over the coming months. We're making more improvements over the next 12-18 months, which will mean further improvements including:

- Better estimates provided with the rent change letters with more transparency about costs
- Improvements in our direct debit arrangements
- Working with EVML to ensure the provision of supporting documentation in a timely manner
- Better information and communication.

East Village Management Ltd: We don't own the freehold for any of the buildings at East Village. Our leases are solely for the internal apartments and townhouses. This means we're not responsible for services in the common parts, the courtyards or the public areas across East Village. Such services include the cleaning in communal areas, grounds maintenance, repairs to the common areas, keeping the lifts in service etc. These services and many more are the responsibility of EVML, which, is also our superior landlord.

Triathlon Homes has an overall responsibility to make sure we're working together collaboratively, for the benefit of residents living at East Village. This includes:

- Liaising with EVML to make sure we're both clear about our respective obligations and how we work together quickly to solve problems
- providing a better service and reduce complaints

The Housing Ombudsman has an increased focus on how housing providers manage their homes where the buildings are managed and maintained by other organisations. In 2024, we will develop an action plan to ensure we are able to meet all the recommendations in the Housing Ombudsman's [spotlight report on managing agents](#).

Building Safety

We received just one complaint about the cladding remediation at East Village although we are aware the issue of fire safety in the external walls is having a significant impact on residents, and on leaseholders in particular. The issue has been long-standing and is a source of frustration to many. Working with EVML to resolve these issues is Triathlon's highest priority.

We have:

- Worked with EVML to develop remediation plans for each building
- Ensured EVML is resourced to keep residents updated and informed about the programmes of work
- Worked with EVML to develop a remediation website
- Taken legal action to determine who pays for the remediation of defects

There is more work to do on building safety and we are currently working with EVML to:

- Launch a building safety website detailing each building
- Ensure all residents are aware who's responsible for Building Safety Measures and who they can contact
- Improve communication with residents about the issues that matter to them

CONCLUSION

We've made significant changes to improve complaint handling and our repair service. We are continuing to review resident feedback to drive better experiences across all services. Importantly, we're learning from complaints and other feedback to focus improvements on the areas that matter most to residents, in particular building safety, repairs and communication.