

Southdown's Annual Review of Complaints 2023-24

Annual Complaints Report 2023-24

1. Introduction to the annual review of complaints 2023-24

This report summarises the client and tenant complaints received during 2023-24.

Southdown delivered services to over 11,000 people over the year 2023-24. Whilst delivering a quality service to our clients and tenants is one of our core strategic priorities, we recognise we don't always get it right.

Southdown is both a care and support provider and a Registered Provider of Social Housing to tenants and shared owners. Southdown's role as a landlord is overseen by the Board within the framework set for it by the Regulator of Social Housing.

Southdown is, however, committed to providing data to allow scrutiny of its performance across all of its operations – this review details complaints received across the whole of Southdown over the period from 1st April 2023 and 31st March 2024.

We provide people with a mechanism to feed back to us positive and negative experiences and encourage a culture of learning, where the focus is on resolution and continual improvement. Where possible, we take immediate action to put things right at the first point of contact, and where this is not possible, we operate a robust complaints procedure whilst continuing to seek a resolution of the client or tenants issues or address their concerns.

We have had a strong focus on improving client experience over many years, and this continues to develop and evolve. There are well established and newer mechanisms to capture the experience of clients and drive ongoing improvement. These are detailed in Section 7 below. Moving forward we will be seeking to further embed tenant and client involvement and scrutiny into the review of complaints. This is intended to ensure the insights of clients and tenants informs future reviews and the associated service improvement plans.

Although Board members receive appropriate levels of detail on complaints and complaint handling, some of the details of complaints in this report have been generalised to protect the anonymity of clients, tenants, colleagues or members of the public involved.

2. The Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code

Southdown's handling of complaints relating to its landlord functions is dictated by a framework set by the [Housing Ombudsman](#). The Ombudsman has continued to refine its [Complaint Handling Code](#) - a framework for the management of, and learning from, complaints - and requires landlords to self-assess against this on an annual basis.

Southdown has recognised the good practice as set out in the code and has adapted its policy and procedures to incorporate the changes.

See [here](#) for a link to Southdown's compliance with the Housing Ombudsman's Complaints Handling Code.

See [here](#) for further information on Southdowns' performance as a landlord – including an overview of its handling of the complaints received in relation to its housing functions.

To provide consistency and quality in complaint handling and service improvement across Southdown's diverse range of operations, Southdown has adopted the Ombudsman's code across all its operations.

3. Complaints Process

Southdown operate a two-stage complaints procedure in line with the Housing Ombudsman's code, although tenants have the right to approach the Ombudsman at any stage in the process:

Stage 1:

- On receipt of a complaint, an investigating manager is nominated who attempts to speak to the complainant, where appropriate for the client, and sends a complaint acknowledgement letter to them.
- The focus at this stage is on contact with the client to work towards a resolution.
- The investigating manager carries out the investigation and informs the complainant by telephone, where appropriate, and in writing within 10 working days of receiving the complaint.

Stage 2:

- The Director/Head of Service reviews the complaint escalation and allocates an investigating manager to investigate the complainant's reasons for escalation, if the Stage 1 complaint was investigated satisfactorily or if more could have been done.
- Lessons learnt should be discussed and recorded, and actions recommended to improve the service. These lessons are logged and tracked.
- If the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of Stage two, they can contact external agencies which fund and/or regulate Southdown (for tenants this is the Housing Ombudsman).

4. Complaints Activity and Performance 2023/24

A total of **21** complaints were received across all of our operations, with four escalated to Stage 2.

There were three complaints relating to our housing operations, one of which was escalated to Stage Two.

Overall, there is an increase in complaints this year (two more than 2022-23), but a 2% reduction in those that were escalated to Stage 2.

4.1 Complaints Overview

Functional Area	Total Clients 2023-24	Complaints Received	As a % of all Complaints Received	Comparison with 2022-23
Housing Management	540 ¹	3	14%	5
Learning Disabilities	169	9	43%	3
Mental Health and Housing Support	10849	9	43%	11

There continues to be a reduction in complaints from housing whilst this year there has been an increase in complaints received in the Learning Disability function. A third of the complaints from the Learning Disability function are focussed on communication and staff behaviour so we will be exploring with our colleagues in the service.

Mental Health and Housing Support Services consistently receive a larger number of complaints, but perhaps this is to be expected as they have the largest client group.

4.2 Complaints Category (Note: More than one category can be assigned to a complaint)

Category	No. of Complaints with Category Selected	As a % of all Complaints Received	Comparison with 2022-23
Poor service	8	38%	5
Staff behaviour	7	33%	5
Communication	6	28%	5
Discrimination	5	24%	2
Other	4	19%	1
Maintenance / Repairs	2	9%	2
Neighbour	2	9%	2
Nuisance	2	9%	1
Confidentiality	1	4%	2
Tenancy Issues	0	0%	4

¹ Southdown had 469 tenants at end March 2024.

4.3 Outcomes and findings

Outcome	No. of Complaints	As a % of all Complaints Received	Comparison with 2022-23
Upheld	9	43%	4
Partially Upheld	4	19%	2
Not Upheld	5	24%	13
Complaint still open	3	14%	0

4.4 Response Timescales

Stage 1 (3 complaints remain 'open' at time of this report)

Response Timescale Stage 1	No. of Complaints	As % of All Complaints	Comparison with 2022-23
0 – 10 days (within target)	9	50%	13 (68%)
11 – 20 days	7	38.9%	5 (26%)
21 – 30 days	-	-	1 (5%)
30+ days	2	11.1%	0

The required timescale to respond to a complaint is 10 working days at Stage 1.

The above table shows that 9 responses (50%) were outside the 10-day timescale, compared to 32% in 2022-23.

We record the reasons given for the delay in responding:

- 1 was recorded as 'complexity of complaint'
- 1 was recorded as 'management delay'
- 3 were recorded as 'other'

Five late responses were provided but no reason for this was recorded- a slight increase on last year. This is thought to highlight a gap in our recording process which we will be seeking to monitor more proactively in the coming year.

Stage 2

Response Timescale Stage 2	No. of Complaints	As % of Complaints
0 – 20 days (within target)	4	100%

All stage 2 complaints were responded to on time.

4.5. Complainants' Satisfaction with Complaint Handling

Complainants are asked the following questions following closure of the complaint, either on the telephone, or by email where they have requested no telephone contact:

- Did you experience any barriers to making a complaint?
- Do you feel the person dealing with your complaint understood the issue?
- Do you feel your complaint was dealt with respectfully and empathically?
- Were Southdown's letters and any other communications clear for you to understand?
- Were you satisfied with Southdown's response to your complaint?

Only two complainants provided answers to these questions. Both were fully satisfied.

4.6. Themes from complaints

Although there is a wide range of issues, amongst the very low number complaints overall, there were isolated cases relating to staff behaviour and poor service within Mental Health and Learning Disability Services.

Five staff behaviour complaints were upheld or partially upheld and three 'poor service from Southdown' complaints were upheld or partially upheld. We recognise that we have had some challenges in recruiting and training staff and as an organisation are prioritising the development of our recruitment processes, induction training, and performance management processes to ensure we have the right people in the right roles.

Three of the complaints received related to the behaviour of our clients within our supported living services. These complaints relate to specific one-off incidents and whilst, in the main, upheld, were not found to relate to shortcomings on Southdown's part but primarily served to shape the ongoing support clients receive and the review of individual support plans.

Southdown has prided itself in its responsiveness and ability to quickly mobilise new service models in response to commissioner demand. A potential side-effect of these rapid mobilisations – particularly for clients in crisis or in support of the broader mental health system - is perhaps there is then limited opportunity to engage with clients as to the level of service they can expect from Southdown.

Across all functions, two complaints which included the category of 'discrimination' were upheld and further one instance partially upheld. Discrimination was not the only category selected on these complaints but there were lessons for us in proactively working with clients to address issues of the physical accessibility of services and clarifying levels of service clients could expect, particularly for clients experiencing mental health crisis.

4.7 Ethnicity, gender and age of complainants

As is the usual trend, very few complaints are received compared to the number of clients we support, meaning a statistical diversity comparison is limited in use. That

said, considerations regarding diversity and protected characteristics are made at review and lessons learnt stages.

4.8 Housing Ombudsman Cases

We have been made aware of one complaint being raised with the Housing Ombudsman. We currently waiting for the opportunity to engage with the Ombudsman on this matter.

5. Tenant and Client Perception on Complaint Handling: Annual Tenant Survey 2023

In previous annual client surveys we asked:

"I know how to make a complaint or how to find the information about making a complaint".

Due to the changes in Tenant Perception Measure questions and the introduction of the Beacon Framework, the complaint related question was changed and sent to tenants only:

"I am happy with how my landlord handles complaints".

Due to this we are unable to directly compare 2023 responses to previous survey responses.

Of the 94 tenants that responded (17% response rate), 56% responded positively to the question, 14% of tenants responded negatively and 30% gave a 'neutral' response.

It should be noted that while 13 tenants responded negatively we received only 6 tenant complaints in the year prior to the survey – there is therefore the possibility either that tenants feel that they have raised complaints that have not been managed through the complaints process (a common example of which might be where a tenant is not indicating a service failure on the part of Southdown but has, for example, had cause to raise a complaint about noise, or the behaviour of a neighbour – something managed through our anti-social behaviour procedure). Alternatively, tenants may have not raised a complaint but have the perception that we would not be fair in the way we handled complaints if they had.

6. Policy, Procedure and System Update

There have made a number of changes to our complaints policy and procedure since the last annual reports following the current Housing Ombudsman Self-Assessment.

Whilst we have a centralised place in our client CRM for holding complaints information, the review of complaints – as well as reporting against the Regulator's Tenant Satisfaction Measures - has identified that systems and processes need to be further developed and missing data, particularly around slippages in response times and the resolution of remedial actions, needs to be more proactively followed up.

5. Self-Assessment Against the Housing Ombudsman's Complaints Code

Our annual self-assessment against the Housing Ombudsman's Complaints Code proved very useful once again in developing our approach.

6. Other Methods of Feedback Collection

Over the course of 2023 – 2024, in addition to the lessons learnt from formal complaints, we had a range of methods and initiatives to collect client feedback, requests and suggestions. These range in focus from service, function to whole organisation, and in style from informal to formal. All feedback is reviewed by management and forms parts of the development of services and our communication with clients.

These include:

- Client and Tenant involvement email address – Set up for clients and tenants to be able to send feedback
- Tenants invited to contribute to the quarterly newsletter
- Tenant Involvement Group review procedure changes
- Annual Tenant Visits
- Tenant involvement meetings
- Client Participation Groups - Clients receiving support from the same service meet regularly and discuss what is important as a Southdown client, and what can be done to improve support
- Client Focus Groups and workshops - arranged locally within services and across a number of services
- Roadshows, open days and events - arranged locally by services
- Client 'House' meetings (LD Services, some Supported Housing Schemes)
- Feedback from CQC inspections
- Feedback directly to front-line workers or managers
- Feedback Form - Comments, compliments or complaints – on our website, available from staff, and locally within services
- Annual Client Satisfaction Survey – all divisions, responses are anonymous
- Exit Questionnaire - Clients are asked to complete an exit questionnaire at point of departure from a service. This is by email, instigated locally by operational teams
- Commissioner led service reviews and surveys
- Site visits, observations, feedback from staff, families and other stakeholders
- Feedback channel from peer led reflective practice

7. Conclusion and Areas for Improvement

Overall, the total number of complaints received remains very low at 21, 0.19% of total clients supported over the year. Despite the low number, we continue to view complaints positively as constructive feedback and an opportunity for learning, using the review process to reflect on underlying issues and how each complaint has been handled.

Due to the low number of complaints received, it is difficult to recognise significant trends across the organisation, but the summary of complaint issues has been shared with service leads to identify where service improvements can be made.

One area identified for improvement within this report is the administration of the complaints process. For example, where there are reasons missing for late responses to complaints. Monitoring of data received from investigating managers will be heightened to ensure we are able to report more effectively and make any necessary internal improvements.

Another area for improvement is in bringing greater visibility and oversight to the implementation of service-improvement steps identified as a result of complaints.

Formal complaints form an important aspect of our learning, but is only one aspect of how we seek and respond to feedback. Although we have a number of existing mechanisms in place, monitoring the effectiveness and accessibility of these to the people and communities we serve of these will continue to be a strategic focus.