

Sutton Housing Society

Grumbles and groans

Sutton Housing Society's annual complaints summary report
(April 2024 to March 2025)

April 2025

Introduction

As the Member Responsible for Complaints (MRC), I am pleased to introduce this second public report relating to the grumbles and groans (complaints) received by the team at Sutton Housing Society (SHS) between April 2024 and March 2025.

The consumer standard, introduced by the Regulator for Social Housing in 2024, requires all social housing landlords to produce and publish an annual report detailing:

- complaints received
- issues of non-compliance with the Housing Ombudsman's complaints handling code
- service improvements introduced because of lessons learnt from the groans and grumbles received
- a suitable improvement action plan, where necessary

For the period 2024 / 2025, we saw an increase in both service requests (18 in total, up from 11) and complaints (11 in total, up from 5 in the previous financial year).

There is a common theme - this relates to communications - particularly around property and repairs related matters. We know we can do better and this has been reflected in our improvement plan.

The Complaints Officer role is held by the Operations Director, as this role has good oversight of the services provided to residents. The role also understands the consumer regulations and what is required, can influence outcomes and ensure that suitable remedies are in place where at all possible.

I was appointed as the Member Responsible for Complaints in February 2024; I am aware that the employee team take their responsibilities towards addressing and learning from complaints seriously. The team wishes to address any dissatisfaction as efficiently and as quickly as possible, whilst ensuring good relationships with residents. A positive culture relating to managing complaints and to learning from these will continue to help us as we strive to improve services to all residents.

I hope you find the attached report interesting.

Alistair Auty

Board Chair and Member Responsible for Complaints

Executive summary

The Regulator for Social Housing's Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard is clear that the management data, tenant satisfaction measures, relating to handling complaints (CH01 and CH02), must reflect the Housing Ombudsman Service's 2024 Complaints Handling Code. The code sets several expectations for managing and addressing complaints and we are confident that we comply with these requirements.

A complaint is defined as: *an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the landlord, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting a resident or group of residents.*

A service request is defined as: *a request from a resident to the landlord requiring action to be taken to put something right.*

Detailed information relating to both service requests and complaints is covered in the following pages of this report.

The main lesson learnt from these complaints and service requests relates, once again, to communications. We need to ensure that our team keep an open and positive communication channel with residents, providing information in a timely way, particularly relating to property improvement works and to repairs. This will not only keep residents updated on their situations / concerns, but it will also support our aim of ensuring transparency and help to create trust.

Service requests in 2024 / 2025

In the 2024 / 2025 financial year, there were 18 service requests received. These service requests received relate to:

- attitude of employee x 2
- delay in amending a direct debit
- communal garden privacy concerns
- grounds maintenance x 2
- damp & mould
- contractor's employees x 2
- lack of communication
- cleaning
- defects in a new home
- lift out of service x 2
- abandoned car
- no hot water
- leak from flat above
- repairs service.

Whilst all the service requests have been addressed, two of these escalated to stage 1 complaints – these related to a lift being out of service at Norman House and issues with a lack of hot water at Old Brewery House.

The 18 service requests received are outlined below:

No.	Site	Issue	Contact method	Result	Time to resolve
1	Miller Close	Attitude of employee	Email	Resident's family member did not respond to enquiries to investigate further	*
2	Norman House	Delay with amending a direct debit	Email	Direct debit was amended & apology given	1 working day
3	Peppermint Court	Privacy concerns	Email	Agreed improvement work	**
4	Norman House	Part of the communal garden is neglected	Email	Included with improvement works	1 working day
5	Nairn Court	Damp and mould	Telephone call	Repair works carried out	10 working days
6	Old Brewery House	Cleaning contractor & their attitude	Email	Building was inspected; employee spoken with	3 working days

7	Kent Court	Lack of communication over repairs & employee's attitude	Telephone call	Update issued to all residents; employee spoken with	11 working days
8	Norman House	Cleaning contractor missed cleaning the salon	Phone call	Salon was in use when contractor was on site so could not clean the area	0 working days
9	Kent Court	Cleaning contractor employee's attitude	Phone call	Employee removed from site	2 working days
10	Norman House	Grounds maintenance materials used	Email	Suitable materials were used	2 working days
11	Norman House	Property defects outstanding	Email	Works completed / resident updated	4 working days
12	Norman House	Lift out of service	Email	Lift brought back into service	10 working days
13	Nairn Court	Abandoned car in communal carpark	Email	The car was not abandoned	4 working days
14	Old Brewery House	Lack of hot water	Phone call	Hot water was restored	0 working days
15	Trickett House	Leak from flat above	Resident App	Leak caused by resident above	14 working days
16	Norman House	Telecare service	Email	Issues with digital telecare addressed	7 working days
17	Old Brewery House	Lift out of service & lack of hot water	Phone call	Interim solution in place for hot water until part received. Lift part was ordered and installed at a later date	9 working days
18	Old Brewery House	Wi-Fi, lift out of service & lack of hot water	Email	Response issued, with holding reply for Wi-Fi	7 working days

Of the 18 service requests, 14 resulted in action being taken to resolve the issues. The remaining four service requests did not require further action as the information provided was not correct; we therefore discussed and advised the residents accordingly.

*As the family member did not respond to enquiries to discuss the concerns, an internal investigation was carried out, based on what information we had available. A letter detailing the findings was issued to the family member that raised the concern.

**It took a while to establish what was required with the resident as they were away from the property for some time.

Complaints in 2024 / 2025

In the 2024 / 2025 financial year, 10 stage 1 and one stage 2 complaints were received. These complaints relate to:

- location of gas meters at Peppermint Court
- heating at Peppermint Court
- lift out of service at Norman House and Old Brewery House
- heating and hot water issues at Old Brewery House x 2
- outstanding improvement works at Margaret House x 2
- lack of customer service at Old Brewery House (this escalated to stage 2)
- damp and mould issues at Furlong Close.

All the complaints have been investigated and all are now closed.

The complaint relating to a lack of customer service was escalated to stage 2. The complaint was not upheld.

Stage 1 complaints

The ten stage 1 complaints received are outlined below, with a summary of their resolution. From these complaints, six were upheld and 4 were not upheld:

Site	Issue	Contact method	Complaint outcome	Time to resolve
Peppermint Court	Location of gas meter	Email	Not upheld	7 working days
Peppermint Court	Heating system	Email	Not upheld	6 working days
Norman House	Delays with lift repairs	Email	Upheld	10 working days
Old Brewery House	Heating and hot water issues to individual home	Email	Upheld	7 working days
Margaret House	Time taken to complete refurbishment work	Telephone	Upheld	5 working days
Margaret House	Time taken to complete refurbishment work	Telephone	Upheld	5 working days
Old Brewery House	Customer service from Sutton Housing Society	Email	Not upheld	7 working days
Furlong Close	Outstanding repairs	Telephone	Upheld	10 working days
Old Brewery House	Issues with the lift and hot water	Email	Upheld	10 working days
Old Brewery House	Customer service from Sutton Housing Society	Email	Not upheld	7 working days

All six of the upheld complaints relate to property repairs or property improvements and all could have been resolved with better communications, as well as a more pro-active approach to keeping residents advised of progress / delays with the work.

Stage 2 complaints

One stage 2 complaint was received. This was escalated from stage 1 because the resident was unhappy that the investigating manager did not speak with the resident when dealing with the stage 1 complaint, the resident did not want to deal with the employee when they continued to be unhappy with their service and the resident felt the employee preferred one resident over another in respect of a tenancy matter.

Site	Issue	Contact method	Complaint outcome	Time to resolve
Old Brewery House	Customer service from Sutton Housing Society	Email	Not upheld	10 working days

The stage 2 response letter fully addressed the issues raised regarding why the resident felt that a Sutton Housing Society employee had not provided them with the level of customer service expected. However, following an investigation, there was no evidence to support that there was any bias towards them or that they were treated unfairly.

The resident was advised of how to escalate their complaint to the Housing Ombudsman Service should they remain dissatisfied.

Compliance with the Housing Ombudsman's Complaints Handling Code 2024

A self-assessment was carried out during November 2024, of our compliance with the complaints handling code, which is a regulatory requirement and part of the consumer standards with the Regulator for Social Housing.

The self-assessment highlighted two areas where wording within our complaints policy needed to be amended to reflect the new code (code action points 3.5 and 6.12). This was actioned immediately.

Sutton Housing Society shows compliance across all areas of the complaints handling code. The code covers:

- Definition of a complaint
- Exclusions
- Accessibility and awareness
- Complaint handling staff
- Complaint handling process
- Complaint stages (1 and 2)
- Putting things right
- Self-assessment, reporting and compliance

The self-assessment and a copy of this report will be issued to the Housing Ombudsman by the end of September 2025, following approval from the Board. Note: last year the requirement was to submit the report within 12-weeks of our financial year end, however, this has now been amended to within six months of our financial year end.

Tenant Satisfaction Measures

There are three key measures relating to complaints that we monitor and report on:

- TSM09: Proportion of respondents who report making a complaint in the last 12 months who are satisfied with their landlord's approach to complaints handling
- CH01: Number of stage 1 complaints per 1,000 homes, and
Number of stage 2 complaints per 1,000 homes
- CH02: Stage 1 complaints response time (as per complaints handling code) and
Stage 2 complaints response time (as per complaints handling code).

These measures were calculated based on the number of occupied homes (480) when the TSM survey was carried out during 2023, rather than the (then) total number of homes, 502. We had a number of homes (deliberately left) vacant, mainly due to our active development programme.

Our TSM results have not changed since our reported figures in March 2024. This is because we are not required to carry out an annual TSM survey. As the next survey will be carried out during 2025, the results therefore remain as:

	Result
TSM09 (perception survey)	72%
CH01 – stage 1	1%
CH01 – stage 2	0.2%
CH02 - stage 1	100%
CH02 – stage 2	100%

Lessons learned

The key lesson learnt relates to communications. All the property related complaints and most of the service requests could have been avoided, or managed more pro-actively and positively, with more thought and consideration given to appropriate and timely communications.

Another lesson learnt and one to discuss with the team, is that complaints are not personal. Our wider team takes pride in the service to our residents and as a small team, when complaints are received, it can feel personal, although it is about resolving a particular issue.

Continuing to ensure that the wider team understands the new consumer standards relating to complaints and how their work can influence and impact this area of our service is essential.

Grumbles and Groans improvement action plan 2025 / 2026

Issue	Improvement required	Timescale	Lead
Review our day-to-day repairs and maintenance issues for common themes/ areas of concern	Carry out this exercise at least annually, in October, to pick up any issues for inclusion in the following year's budgets	31.10.25	Property Services Manager
Review communications with residents relating to property matters	It is essential that residents are kept updated and informed about improvement works and repairs, particularly when contractors are on site and delays occur	30.06.25	Operations Director
	There should not be an over-reliance on digital methods of communications with residents	31.05.25	Management team
	Communications must be clear and in plain English and in the residents' preferred communication style e.g. letter, email, large print	30.06.25	Management team
Taking complaints personally	Reminder employees that complaints are a useful tool to highlight issues and concerns to be addressed	31.05.25	Operations Director
Understanding the consumer standards	Reinforce with employees the need to understand the RSH's Standards	30.06.25	Operations Director