



# Annual **complaints** and **service improvement** report 2024/2025

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Learning from complaints

# Introduction

Welcome to our annual report on our complaints performance for 2024-2025. This is the first time we have presented the report in this format and we hope that you find it a better read.

As part of complying with the Housing Ombudsman's code we are required to publish this report on an annual basis. It also needs to be reviewed by our Board and we have published their response. You can find this at [www.newlon.org.uk/residents/making-a-complaint](http://www.newlon.org.uk/residents/making-a-complaint), along with our self-assessment against the Ombudsman's code. The information provided in this report covers Newlon Housing Trust and Access Homes.

Overall, it has been a challenging year for complaints. We experienced a marked increase in complaint numbers over the summer and a sharp rise in September 2024, leading to the launch of our **Complaints Recovery Action Plan** in October 2024. The plan focused on three main actions:

- Achieving timescales in our complaints responses.
- Speeding up the delivery of actions promised in complaints.
- Tackling the root causes of issues to reduce the number of new complaints.

The action plan has resulted in significant improvement in our ability to deal with the increased demand. We are working more effectively and with better reporting and visibility of real time performance. We have also added three full time complaint handling posts and two posts in our Property Services department, working solely on delivering the promises we have made in our complaint responses. Our thanks go to our Member Responsible for Complaints (MRC) and the Board for recognising the level of challenge and agreeing additional resources.

We are disappointed that we haven't been able to significantly reduce the number of open complaints, particularly those that



**Blossom Shakespeare**

Member Responsible for Complaints (MRC)



**Sarah Shaw** Housing Services Director

have been open for more than six months. This is an area we are focussing on to ensure that complaint resolutions are delivered much quicker. The main barrier with being able to reduce overall caseload has been the significant increase in complaints received.

In the first six months of the year we received an average of 75 cases a month, while for the second half of the year this rose to an average of 114. The rate at which we resolved and closed complaints was an average of 56 cases per month in the first half of the year and has increased to 114 per month in the second half.

We have successfully raised the priority of complaint handling and achieved strong buy-in from our staff team. As a result we are much more aligned with the expectations of the Complaint Handling Code. We also remain committed to learning from complaints and continuing our root cause analysis to reduce the need for residents to complain.



\*Average numbers of cases



# Complaints performance

Recovering our complaints performance has been a high priority and each fortnight the Housing Services Director provides an update on the Complaints Recovery Plan to all Newlon staff and our Member Responsible for Complaints (MRC). This ensures that all service leads are clear on progress and priorities.

The table below shows how many complaints we received in 2024-2025 compared to previous recent years and how well we have performed in responding to them.

Complaints received	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Informal complaints	932	388	91	n/a	n/a
Stage 1	520	601	568	790	<b>839</b>
Performance/Stage 1s (responded to within target time)	98%	99%	98%	91%	<b>95%</b>
Target for Stage 1	90%	90%	95%	95%	<b>95%</b>
Stage 2	162	93	65	171	<b>257</b>
Performance/Stage 2s (responded to within target time)	99%	80%	88%	94%	<b>90%</b>
Target for Stage 2	90%	100%	100%	100%	<b>100%</b>
% escalated to Stage 2	31%	15%	17%	22%	<b>26%</b>
No. of determinations on cases	13	21	15	13	<b>20</b>

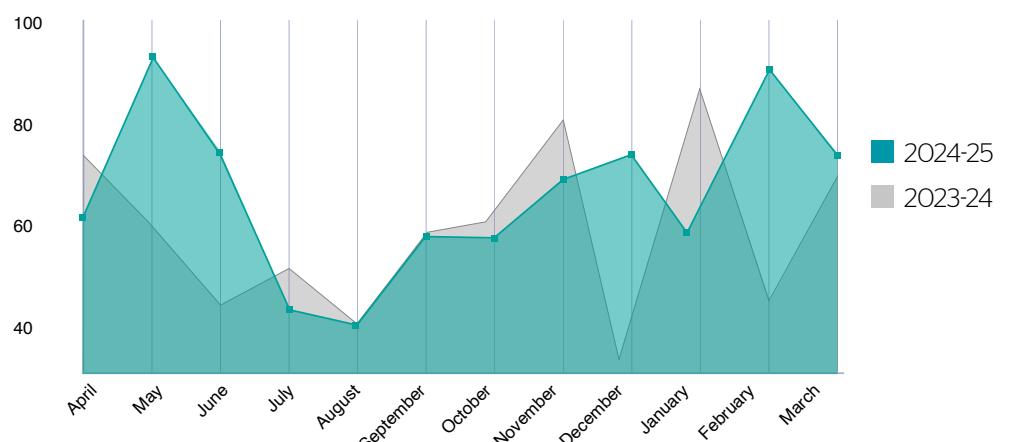
Our Service Resolution team has coped well considering the increase in complaint numbers.

It is disappointing that there has been an increase in the rate of escalations as this indicates that we have not been as effective at resolving complaints at the earliest stage. We know that the main reason for escalation is because we have

been too slow to deliver on our promises at Stage 1. We now have much better reporting in place that allows us to identify where there are delays and take action.

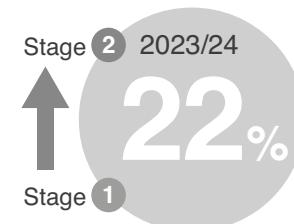
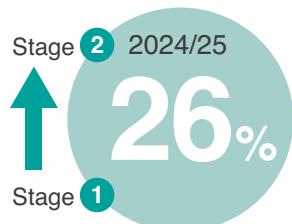
The graph below shows complaints received by month compared to the previous year. It should be noted that whilst we have documented in our procedure how in some circumstances complaints can be refused, we do not have any complaints that have been refused this year.

## Number of complaints per month 2024-25 compared to 2023-24



The overall rate at which complaints escalated in 2024-25 is 26% in comparison with 22% in 2023-24. We want to reduce escalations by dealing more effectively with Stage 1 complaints and delivering our complaint promises more promptly.

## Escalations 2024-25 per month compared to 2023-24 per month





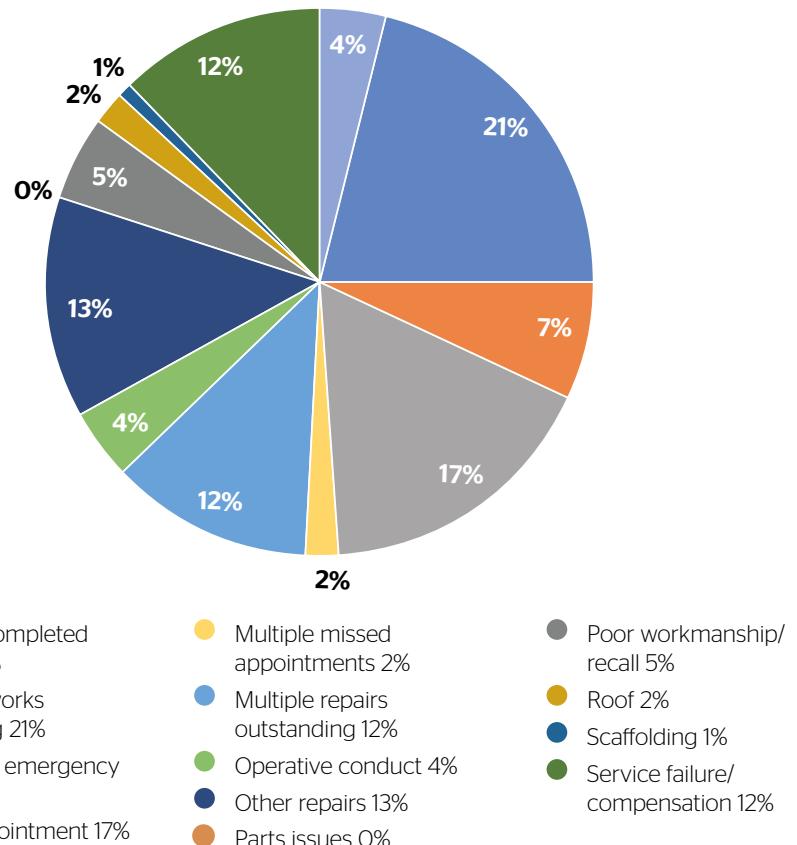
# Complaints insights

## Causes for complaints

The table on this page provides a breakdown by service area.

When we look at repairs complaints we see the impact that uncompleted works have on residents. This shows the importance of managing open jobs and keeping residents properly updated. Improved communication is a major focus of our new responsive repairs contract and we know that our new contractors are much more aligned with our expectations on this, both with their technology and culture.

## Time taken to fully deal with complaints by category



Category	Stage 1		Stage 2		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
ASB issues	17	2%	6	2%	23	2%
Building safety	10	1%	2	1%	12	1%
Customer care	10	1%	2	1%	12	1%
Neighbourhoods	53	6%	21	8%	74	7%
Rent collection	4	0%*	1	0.5%	5	0%*
Lettings	23	3%	1	0.5%	24	2%
Local issues	1	0%*	1	0.5%	2	0%*
Other (Complaint)	5	1%	1	0.5%	6	1%
Outward (Complaint)	5	1%	1	0.5%	6	1%
Repairs and maintenance	637	76%	195	75%	832	76%
Royal Free Hospital accommodation	7	1%	3	1%	10	1%
Sales of new homes	13	2%	8	3%	21	2%
Service charges	20	2%	6	2%	26	2%
Special Projects	8	1%	8	3%	16	1%
Staff complaint	26	3%	3	1%	29	3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>839</b>		<b>259</b>		<b>1098</b>	

\*These numbers are less than 0.5% of total cases so have been rounded down to 0%.



The table below shows all open complaints as of May 2025. There has been an increase in the number of complaints open in comparison with this time last year when we had 259 Stage 1 complaints open and 84 Stage 2 complaints open.

Length of time open	Stage 1	Stage 2
Less than 1 month	94	2
Less than 3 months	110	39
3-6 months	33	24
6-12 months	46	33
Over 1 year	30	31
<b>Total</b>	<b>313</b>	<b>129</b>

This increase is largely due to the rise in new complaints in the second half of the year. In 2024-25 we resolved 1,020 complaints, compared with 700 in the previous year.

We keep complaints open until the promises we make in our complaint responses are fully delivered. Complaints can be complex and cover multiple issues and therefore it can take some time to deliver on our promises. However we are working hard to speed this up.

#### Number of complaints resolved in 2024-25 compared to 2023-24



#### Resolution

The time taken to fully resolve a complaint<sup>2</sup> is an average 70 days for Stage 1 complaints and 140 days for Stage 2 complaints. Last year it was 70 days for Stage 1's and 99 for Stage 2s.

We narrowly missed the target for response times but we always update the resident when an extension is needed, as required by the Ombudsman's Complaints Handling Code.

#### Average response times<sup>1</sup> 2024-25



#### Average resolution times<sup>2</sup> 2024-25



<sup>1</sup> Response times for the Service Resolution Team to investigate and send a written response to the resident.

<sup>2</sup> Resolution times means Newlon fully delivering on all commitments made in a complaint response.

#### Resolution times<sup>2</sup> 2023-24





# Ombudsman's determinations

The Ombudsman has issued slightly more determinations for Newlon than the previous year, but with a lower rate of maladministration. In 2024-2025 we had a maladministration rate of 68%, compared with 74% last year.

We have ensured that the Residents' Services Committee, Residents' Forum and the Newlon Board are fully aware of this.

## Maladministrations 2024-2025 compared to 2023-2024

2024-2025	2023-2024
<b>68%</b> Newlon maladministrations	<b>74%</b> Newlon maladministrations
<b>70%</b> National average maladministrations	<b>79%</b> National average maladministrations

## Breakdown of Housing Ombudsman Services (HOS) determinations 2024-2025

Category	Maladministration	Severe maladministration	Service failure	Redress	No maladministration	Outside jurisdiction	Total
Antisocial behaviour (ASB)	1		1	1	1		4
Sales							0
Service charges	2						2
Complaint handling	10	1		3		2	14
Compensation				1	3		4
Record keeping	1						1
Neighbourhoods	1		1				2
Health and safety							0
Moving to a property					1		1
Occupancy rights							0
Repairs/property condition	5	2	3	1	1	1	12
<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>40</b>
(Negative) positive	(28) 68%			(12) 30%			



# Learning from complaints

We are committed to learning from complaints to improve services to residents.

## Nurturing a positive complaint handling culture

Learning from complaints has become part of our culture. All Ombudsman determinations are reviewed for lessons learned. We check learning has been embedded in our monthly learning from complaints meetings and through quality audits.

We have a 'Learning from complaints' web page – [www.newlon.org.uk/learning-from-complaints/](http://www.newlon.org.uk/learning-from-complaints/) and we regularly signpost it in our newsletters. In addition, reports are regularly presented to the Executive team, Residents' Forum and Board.

## Accountability and transparency

Our Housing Services Director has been identified as the lead person responsible for complaints.

Our resident Board member, Blossom Shakespeare, has been appointed as Member Responsible for Complaints (MRC).

Blossom has experience of complaints and regularly attends training around this role. She meets regularly with the Housing Services Director, the Heads of Customer Services and Service Improvement as well as attending All Staff Days. The meetings focus on key trends in complaints as well as looking at any concerns around performance.

Blossom was also involved in a residents' scrutiny piece of work which reviewed Newlon's approach to learning from complaints.

## Board oversight

Complaints reports go to the Residents' Services Committee (RSC) on a quarterly basis, bi-annually to the Residents' Forum and annually to the Board. The MRC was involved in the completion of the self-assessment against the Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code.

## Learning from complaints changes

- **ASB**

Improved clarity on risk assessments and signposting to support.

- **Communication around repairs**

In our new repairs contract we have built in improved communication at all stages of the repair.

- **Code of practice for contractors**

We have agreed a new code of conduct for communicating with residents, with clear expectations for making appointments, cancelling and re-arranging them, arranging follow on works and timeliness of processing variation orders.

- **Better information for staff on repairs responsibilities**

- **Improving post-inspections/follow up calls** where there are leaks.

- **Complaint handling**

We have made several changes including:

- New complaint management templates and staff training.
- Real time monitoring on complaint promises.
- Additional staff to speed up complaint handling.
- All staff briefing session on recognising when to escalate issues.
- A new scoring system to monitor the quality of complaint handling.

- **Vulnerability and reasonable adjustments**

- We have carried out staff briefings to raise awareness about the importance of recording vulnerability information.
- We have updated and merged our Vulnerability and Reasonable Adjustments policies.



## What we have achieved this year

- We have a good level of assurance on our complaints handling service.
- We have promoted our complaints service and believe it is accessible.
- We can evidence that we respond to the majority of complaints in a timely manner.
- Our real time performance monitoring system ensures good visibility of performance and helps us quickly identify when action is required.
- Leaders and staff recognise the high priority of this work and we can demonstrate a real change in our complaint handling culture.
- A more empathetic approach to complaints handling.

## Still working on ...

- We need to speed up the delivery of complaint promises so that residents are not left waiting.
- Evidencing how complaints have changed and services improved.
- Reduce the need for residents to escalate their complaints to get matters resolved.

## Our priorities for the coming year

- Reduce the time that residents are waiting for complaints to be fully resolved.
- Resolve more complaints at the earliest stage.
- Speed up the delivery of our complaint promises
- Progress action plans from Housing Ombudsman 'spotlight' reports.
- Continue to embed our 'learning from complaints' actions.
- Do more to publicise to staff and residents where we have learned from complaints to increase residents' confidence that we are listening and acting.

## Newlon Housing Trust is a charitable housing association

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HMRC charities reference no. EW91301, VAT registration no. GB778532683.

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