Title:	Annual report on Complaints Service Improvement & Self-Assessment against HOS Complaints Code for the Access Board and the Newlon Housing Trust Board	Status:	●
Author:	Annette Morrison Head of Service Improvement	Corporate Objective:	Excellent Services
Purpose:	This annual update on Complaints is a statutory requirement outlined in the Ombudsman Complaints Code and covers the specific requirements for reporting outlined in the Code, as well as the Self-Assessment against the Ombudsman Code. As Newlon provides all services to Access residents, this report covers both Access and Newlon.		
Route to Board:	This report has been to RSC in June.		
Impact on Residents:	This report sets out our complaint's performance, highlights the services residents are complaining about and shows how we are using complaints to drive service improvement.		
Link to Risk Register:	Newlon does not meet resident expectations resulting in declining satisfaction, increased complaints and reputational damage. Insufficient or ineffective investment in existing properties results in poor resident experience, leading to complaints, disrepair cases and/or exposure to health and safety risks.		
Financial or Resource Impact:	Increase in resources required to manage increased numbers of complaints, as well as increased levels of compensation paid.		
Recommendations:	Board are asked to consider the report and provide its response which will then be published and submitted to the Ombudsman, as well as published on the Newlon website.		

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1. This year saw a significant increase in complaints, a rise driven mainly by our repairs service, placing additional pressure on the Service Resolution Team and the need for additional resource. Despite this increased demand, response performance remained strong overall, only slightly below target. The volume of new cases affected monthly resolution rates and our escalation percentage rose.

1.2. Our focus for the year ahead is to reduce our complaint caseload and escalations by delivering faster resolution. The appointment of a new Standards and Quality manager will support improved quality, faster resolutions and better complaints management.

1.3. The Ombudsman reviewed 27 cases during the year. While this was an increase on last year, the proportion of negative determinations improved to 58.6%.

1.4. We have strengthened cross-team collaboration and how we learn from complaints. Monthly meetings are more focused and effective, with greater emphasis on closed cases, root causes and recent Ombudsman findings to drive service improvement.

Contractors have become more involved in complaints management and root cause analysis.

1.5. This paper was presented to RSC, where discussion focused on the link between complaints and repairs contractors' performance. RSC sought and received assurance that Newlon and Access are compliant with the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code, based on the completed self-assessment. RSC also asked whether remedies should be included in the Annual Report; these are covered in regular reports to RSC but are not required under section 8.1 of the Ombudsman self-assessment criteria. RSC confirmed that the report provided a clear overview of complaints performance and raised no material concerns about the Ombudsman self-assessment.

2. PERFORMANCE

2.1. The table below shows complaint volumes and performance for 2025/26 for all tenures and residents. Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaints increased and reached their highest level in the last five years, with total formal complaints up 42% on 2024/25 and almost double the level seen in 2022/23. While complaint volumes were higher overall this year, the monthly pattern was broadly similar with the previous year.

2.2. Response targets were narrowly missed this year. Given the increase in complaint volumes, the team-maintained performance well overall, with relatively few residents receiving late responses.

2.3. Escalations to Stage 2 increased, showing that we were not as effective as we want to be in resolving complaints at Stage 1. Mobilising our two new repairs contractors last summer contributed significantly to this rise. Substantial work has since been undertaken to address root causes and now have a much more stable repairs service, which will reduce complaint volumes.

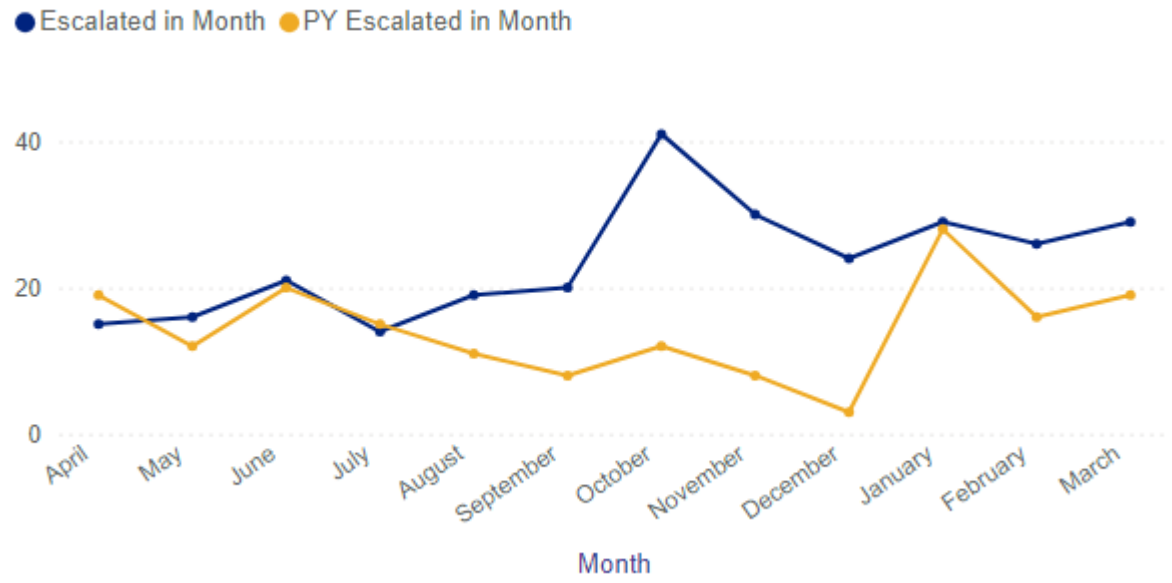
2.4. Complaints management remains a high organisational priority and is regularly reinforced through All In Days and internal communication, helping staff understand its importance and the role they play in good complaint handling.

COMPLAINTS RECEIVED AT EACH STAGE	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
Informal Complaints	**388**	**91**	**n/a**	**n/a**	**n/a**
Stage 1	**601**	**568**	**790**	**839**	**1050**
Performance Stage 1s	**98.67%**	**98.06%**	**90.89%**	**94.04%**	**96.59%**
Target for Stage 1	**90%**	**95%**	**95%**	**95%**	**98.8%**
Stage 2	**93**	**65**	**171**	**257**	**503**
Performance Stage 2s	**79.57%**	**87.69%**	**93.57%**	**89.6%**	**97.08%**
Target for Stage 2	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**99.8%**
Percentage of escalations to Stage 2	**15%**	**17%**	**22%**	**26%**	**34.4%**
No of Ombudsman case where Determinations have been issued.	**21**	**15**	**13**	**19**	**28**

2.5. During 2025/26, we refused 19 requests to log a formal complaint. These were recorded and declined in line with our complaint's procedure, mainly because the issues had already been considered or related to matters more than 12 months old.

2.6. Fifteen per cent of Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaint response deadlines were extended. This is monitored closely to ensure they are only used where there is a valid reason.

2.7. The graph below shows monthly escalation levels. Overall, 34.4% of complaints escalated to Stage 2 this year, compared with 26% last year. More than half of these escalations related to repairs, with Neighbourhoods, Asset Management, Building Services and Special Projects accounting for a further 30%. Understanding the drivers for escalation to reduce the need for residents to escalate their complaint will be a key area of focus in the year ahead. We know that as complaint numbers increased, our ability to deliver speedy resolutions decreased as resources were stretched. We have added additional staff to the SRT team and as our repairs service stabilises and complaints reduce, we will be in a better position to manage demand more effectively.



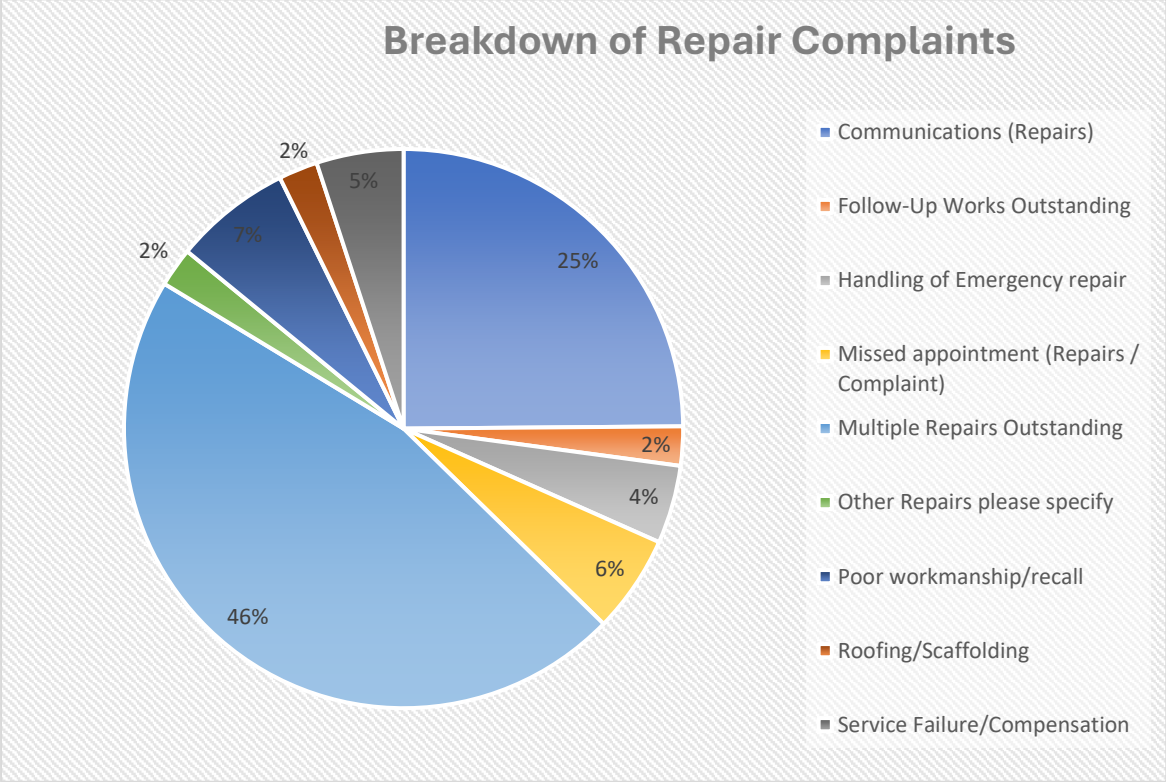
3. What are our complaints about?

	Stage 1		Stage 2		Total	
Category	**No**	**%**	**No**	**%**	**No**	**%**
ASB Team	14	1%	19	4%	**33**	**2%**
Asset Management (Complaint)	81	8%	40	8%	**121**	**8%**
Building Safety Works	12	1%	9	2%	**21**	**1%**
Building Services	121	11%	32	6%	**153**	**10%**
Customer Care	29	3%	9	2%	**38**	**2%**
Income & Recovery	4	0.03%	3	1%	**7**	**0.04%**
Neighbourhoods (Complaint)	77	7%	46	9%	**122**	**8%**
Lettings	19	2%	13	3	**32**	**2%**
Outward (Complaint)	2	0%	2	0%	**4**	**0%**
Repairs	625	59%	271	54%	**895**	**57%**
Sales & Development	8	1%	7	1%	**15**	**1%**
Service Charges	7	1%	7	1%	**14**	**1%**
Special Projects	7	1%	33	7%	**40**	**3%**
Staff Complaint	47	4%	11	2%	**58**	**4%**
STIR Team	3	0%			**3**	**0%**
Total	**1055**		**503**		**1558**	

3.1. The table above breaks complaints down by service area. As expected, the services residents most closely associate with repairs (Repairs, Building Services, Building Safety and Asset Management) account for most complaints: 80% of all Stage 1 complaints and 77% of all Stage 2 complaints.

3.2. A closer look at repairs complaints shows the impact of unfinished works on residents with around 46% of repairs complaints driven by this issue. In January we introduced a new team with a focus on more closely managing works in progress and they have

already greatly reduced the number of residents waiting for repairs. We expect this to translate to reduce complaints and the early signs on this are positive.



4. How long is it taking us to fully deal with complaints?

The table below shows open complaints by stage as of 3rd July 2026. It includes complaints awaiting a response and those where a response has been issued but the agreed resolution is still being delivered. This snapshot shows open cases have increased since the same point last year. We are working to reduce them, supported by lower complaint volumes in the first quarter of 2026/27 and an additional leadership role in the SRT

Length of time Open	Stage 1	Stage 2
Less than 1 month	153	5
Less than 3 months	79	62
3-6 months	83	83
6-12 months	65	85
Over 1 year	19	50
Total	**399**	**285**

4.1. Complaints stay open until the actions promised in our responses have been delivered, and complex cases can take longer to close. Even so, average closure times improved this year: Stage 1 fell from 77 to 60 days and Stage 2 from 140 to 112 days. This is a significant improvement given the level of demand, though we want to reduce closure times further. We will be driving improvement on this through our Learning from Complaint meetings and with clear reporting to TET and RSC on progress made. The length of time that complaints are open is under review, focusing on identifying any blockages.

5. Ombudsman Determinations

5.1. The table below shows Ombudsman determinations by service area. For this calculation, the Ombudsman excludes cases that were withdrawn or found to be outside jurisdiction. The Ombudsman issued seven more determinations for Newlon than in the previous year. Our maladministration rate improved from 68.3% in 2024/25 to 58.6% in 2025/26, which is a positive shift. The Ombudsman has not yet published Newlon's landlord report, but has shared the data they have used to calculate our Maladministration rate, a national benchmark is not currently available.

5.2. We have ensured that the Resident Services Committee, Resident Forum and Board all have clear visibility of this performance.

Category	Mal-administration	Severe Maladministration	Service failure	Redress	No mal-administration	Outside Jurisdiction	Total
ASB	1			1	1		3
Sales					1		1
Service Charges	1					1	1
Complaint Handling	4		11	3	1		19
Compen-sation			1	1	1		3
Record Keeping		1					1
Estate Mgmt			1	1			2
H&S		1		2			3
Moving to a Property	1			1			2
Occupancy Rights			1		1		2
Repairs/ Property Condition	4	1	4	4	3	1	17
Total	11	3	18	13	8	2	54
Negative & Positive	61%			39%			

6. Ombudsman Cases

6.1. Appendix 1 shows a summary of all Ombudsman determinations during 2025-26, (including three findings of severe maladministration). There have been 27 Complaints determined by the Ombudsman during this time. 23 of these have been closed as all orders have been complied with. The remaining 4 are being monitored by the Service Improvement team and reviewed at the monthly Case Escalation meetings. This is for Board information, and it isn't intended to include this in our published Annual Complaint and Service Improvement report.

6.2. When we receive a determination from the Ombudsman this is shared with Service Leads and the Executive member. A meeting with service leads involved is quickly held

and concerns, actions and lessons learned are identified. These are added to the overall Learning from Complaints plan and are reviewed monthly with senior managers.

7. Ombudsman Spotlight Reports

7.1. The Ombudsman has produced reports on several areas, setting out learning from cases and best practice. We have carried out self-assessments against these and produced action plans which are signed off by the Executive team who receive regular updates on progress.

7.2. Reports are provided to Executive team on their progress. Below is a summary of progress against each self-assessment.

- **Damp and Mould** - Spotlight report on Damp and Mould – 'It's not lifestyle', was initially published in October 2021 and then followed up in February 2023. All actions have been completed in respect of this.
- **Noise - The Spotlight report on noise was published in October 2022.** Excellent progress has been made on this. All actions have been completed in respect of this.
- **Knowledge and information management (KIM)** - This was published in May 23 and has 21 recommendations. This is an area that needs improvement and an action plan is in place to achieve full compliance.
- **Attitudes, Respect & Rights** – A self-assessment has been completed, and an action plan has been developed with 71% of this having been implemented. This impacts on how we deliver services to vulnerable residents.
- **Engagement with private freeholders and managing agents** – a self-assessment has been completed and an action plan developed which has largely been implemented.
- **Dealing with cladding complaints** — This was published in 2021, but a self-assessment was only carried out this year, a quality Audit was carried out to check on compliance and recommendations were made to cover any gaps. This will be followed up to provide assurance on compliance.
- **Complaints About Repairs –** This was published in 2025, a self-assessment has been completed, a report on this will be presented to Strategy TET.

8. The Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code

8.1. The Complaint Handling Code became statutory on 1 April 2024, which means landlords are legally required to comply with its requirements. The Code is designed to promote best practice in complaint handling and, ultimately, better outcomes for residents. Appendix 2 contains our self-assessment against the Code, which is for Board review. Newlon and Access are fully compliant with the Code.

8.2. We report complaints performance to each Resident Services Committee, provide performance information to each Board as well as an annual report and report twice a year to the Resident Forum. This supports transparency and helps inform the Forum's agenda planning.

9. Learning from complaints

9.1. Learning from complaints remains a key priority for Newlon. We have created a page on our website to share this work with residents and much of the learning is also reflected in the appendix on Ombudsman cases. The main areas where specific improvements have been made are set out below.

- Vulnerability and Reasonable Adjustments – We have updated our policy in this area and reinforced it through All in Days. Further work is still needed to improve data quality and staff training so that we can consistently deliver the right support to residents.
- Communication around Repairs – Our complaint analysis shows that a significant proportion of complaints relate to poor communication about repair appointments. We have introduced a code of practice for contractors and shared this across most of or contractors. Our repairs team focussing on outstanding repairs has delivered substantial improvement to this area through closer management. This remains an area requiring further development and embedding.
- Complaint Handling – We have introduced additional checks on complaint responses to improve quality and ensure they are consistent with the complaint's procedure.
- Management of complaints relating to cladding remediation – Following a negative Ombudsman determination, service leads developed more detailed guidance for responses on this scheme to improve quality and consistency.
- Improved Data – We recognise that system information can become outdated when changes are not reported or records are not updated consistently. Work is under way to improve data quality so that we can provide the most appropriate service to residents and this is part of our Corporate Plan.
- Escalation Complaints Case Review – Regular meetings are held to review complaints where the resolution has not been put in place, these are held with Service Leads to ensure that there is clear ownership. These are documented and enable clearer escalation where there are further delays in the complaints being resolved.
- Decant Management – We have set up a new Case Management system on Dynamics which allows clearer record keeping and more effective case management. A training session has been held with staff to ensure that they are clear on their roles and responsibilities, particularly around communication.

10. CONCLUSION

We have a good level of assurance over our complaints handling service and are compliant with the Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code. The service is accessible and most complaints continue to receive a timely response. Our key challenge now is to deliver complaint remedies more quickly and close cases sooner. We can clearly demonstrate that complaints are driving service improvement and we want to build further on this in the year ahead.

Our priorities for the coming year will be:

- Reduce the number of open complaints.
- Reduce escalation rates and resolve more complaints at Stage 1.
- Speed up delivery of complaint remedies.
- Reduce negative determinations relating to complaint handling.
- Progress actions arising from spotlight reports.
- Continue to progress actions arising from learning from complaints.
- Continue to publicise to staff and residents where we have learned from complaints, to strengthen confidence that we listen and act.

11. RECOMMENDATION

- The Board is asked to consider the report and provide their response to it.

- This response, along with the Board reflections on our self-assessment against code will be written up and published on our website in advance of September (the submission due date) and submitted to the Ombudsman.