

A man with a prosthetic leg is sitting in a wooden rocking chair with orange cushions. He is wearing a red t-shirt and grey trousers. A small brown dog is sitting on his lap, and he is holding its head with his right hand. He is looking out a window at a lush green landscape. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting daytime. The text "Magna Housing Limited Annual Complaints Handling and Service Improvement Report 2023/24" is overlaid on the bottom left of the image.

Magna Housing Limited Annual Complaints Handling and Service Improvement Report 2023/24

June 2024



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Comment from the Chair



Christine Turner
Chair

'Magna's Board always receive with great interest, reports and feedback giving information and insight about how our customers are experiencing our services in their homes and their communities.'

This year, at our May meeting, we thoroughly reviewed and discussed the latest Annual Complaints Handling and Service Improvement Report. Our deliberations were comprehensive, and we carefully considered the findings and recommendations outlined in the report.

As Chair of the Board, I want to emphasise our commitment to addressing issues raised, supporting transparency and early resolution in complaints handling. We also recognise the important learning opportunities that complaints offer Magna to improve our services.

We recognise the importance of an effective complaints process in maintaining trust and ensuring accountability within our organisation and we strongly support the implementation and regular oversight of the improvements identified in the report's insights.'



Introduction

This report builds on our last annual review of complaints and compliments and self-assessment against the Housing Ombudsman Service's (HOS) Complaints Handling Code, which was reported to Board in November 2023.

Since our last annual report, the HOS has consulted widely on changes to its Complaints Handling Code and has issued a new version effective from 1st April 2024.

In the past six months, there have been further improvements as our new ways of working embed and in response to increased regulatory focus and reporting requirements in readiness for Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSM) reporting.

In the past 12 months, our small team of complaints specialists has experienced high turnover, resulting in slower progress than expected in implementing improvements. However, we have now recruited two new members of the team to fill these roles. As part of our budget planning for 2024/25, we have increased resource in the team to ensure we have the capacity and capability not only to handle complaints effectively and resolve customer issues but also to continuously improve and learn from feedback.

In the last 12 months, we have improved the recording of complaints which in turn improves the reliability of the data we are reporting and using for accurate trend analysis and service improvement. We have been reporting these improvements to Board annually.



Customer complaints 1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024

Overall complaints and trends

During the 12 months covered by this report, we recorded informal complaints and formal complaints.

We compare well with other housing associations in this area, with 19.38 stage one complaints and 4.39 stage two complaints received per 1,000 homes. Upper quartile for this indicator is 29.04 per 1,000 homes for stage 1 for the full year and 7.32 for stage 2 (Housemark benchmarking March 2023).

8 in 10 complaints are about responsive repairs with wait times being the biggest cause of dissatisfaction. The next largest category of complaints is those about tenancy and anti-social behaviour (ASB) issues which account for nine percent of complaints received, followed by complaints about planned works. Complaints were highest in the spring and winter with 58% of complaints received in April to June 2023 and January to March 2024 and 42% between July and December 2023. Complaints about repairs are the main driver of this increase. These peak between April and June, which correlates with our data on demand for response jobs.

The numbers are generally much lower for tenancy and ASB complaints than for response repairs, but the opposite is true in terms of timing with the most complaints about these services received between July and December 2023.

Top three complaints categories

**Responsive
Repairs**



ASB

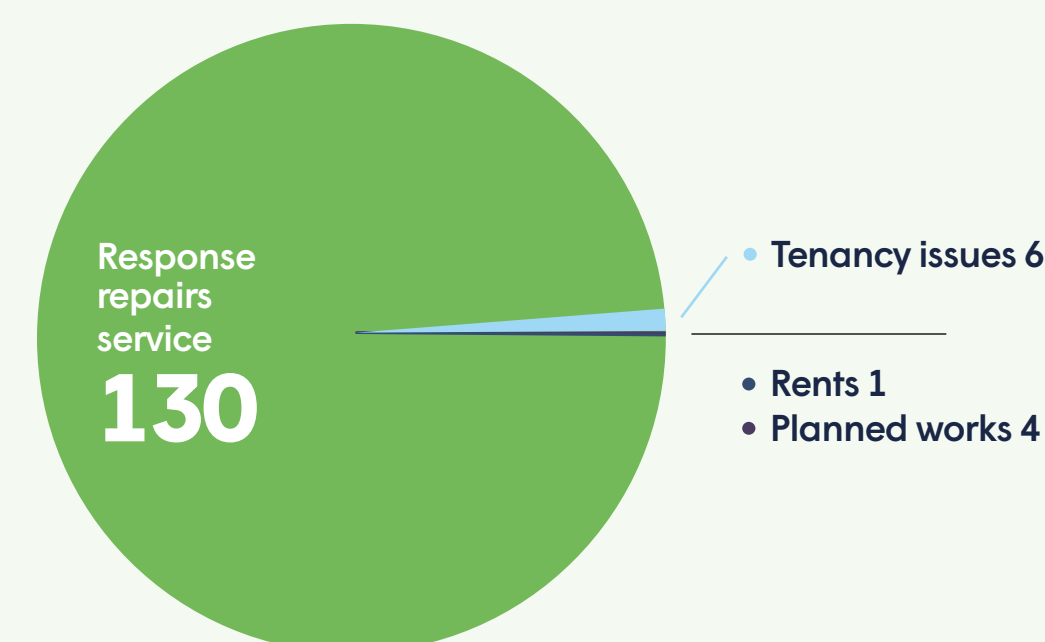


**Planned
Works**



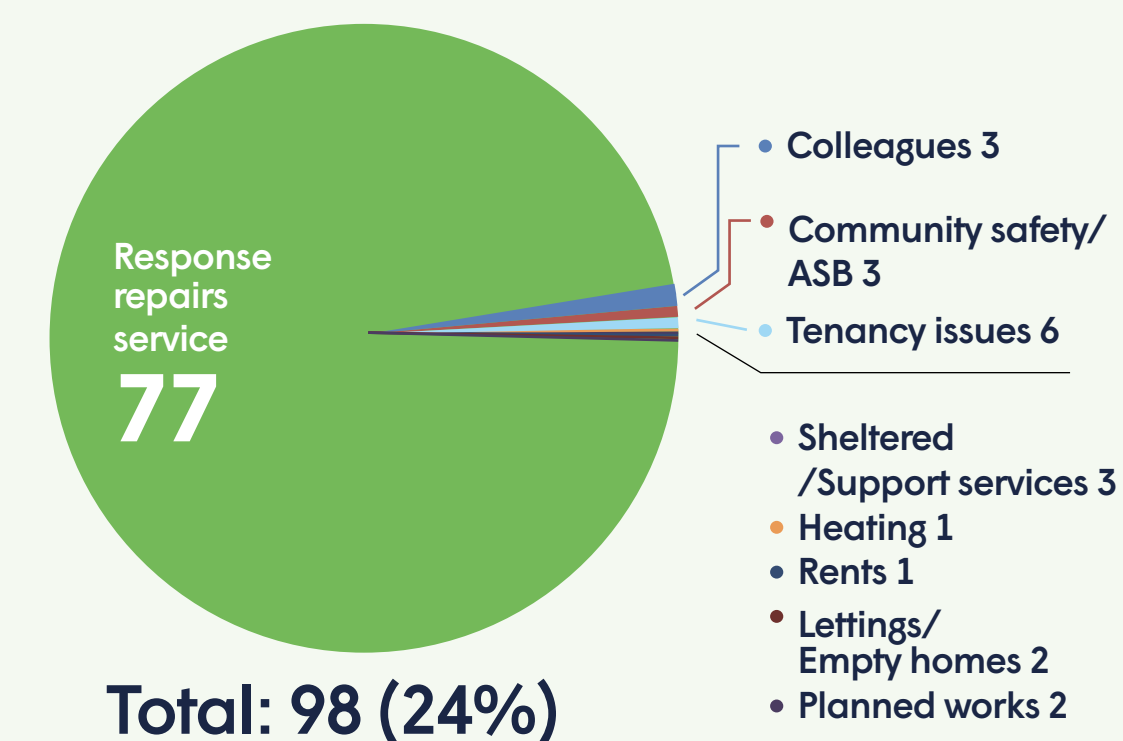
All complaints received 2023/24

Apr - June 2023



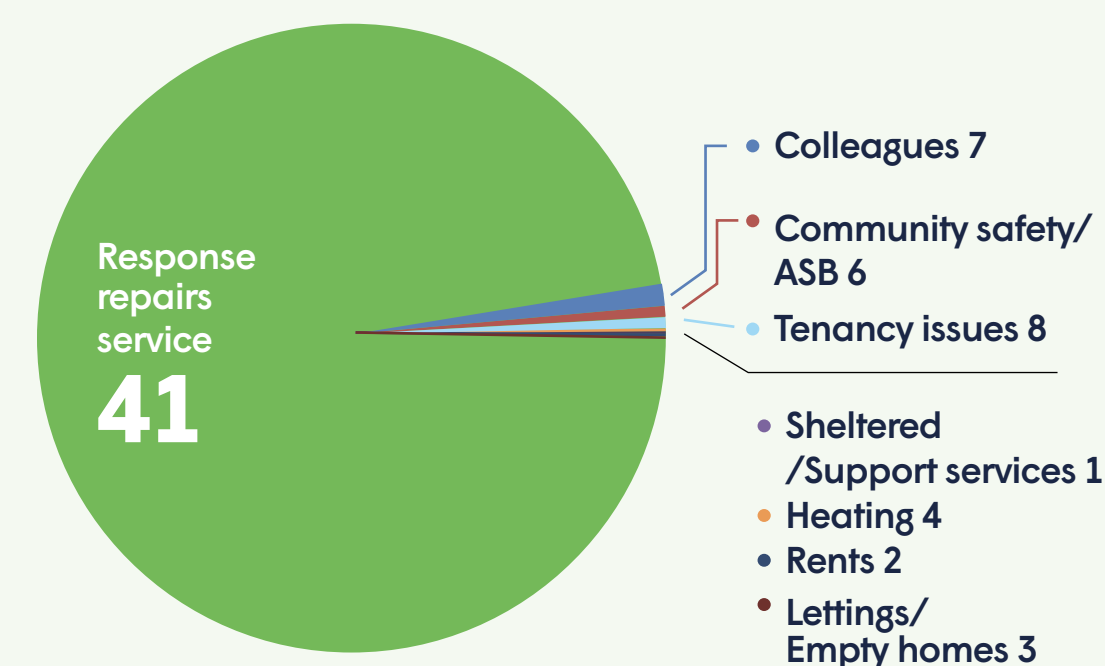
Total: 141 (34%)

July - Sept 2023



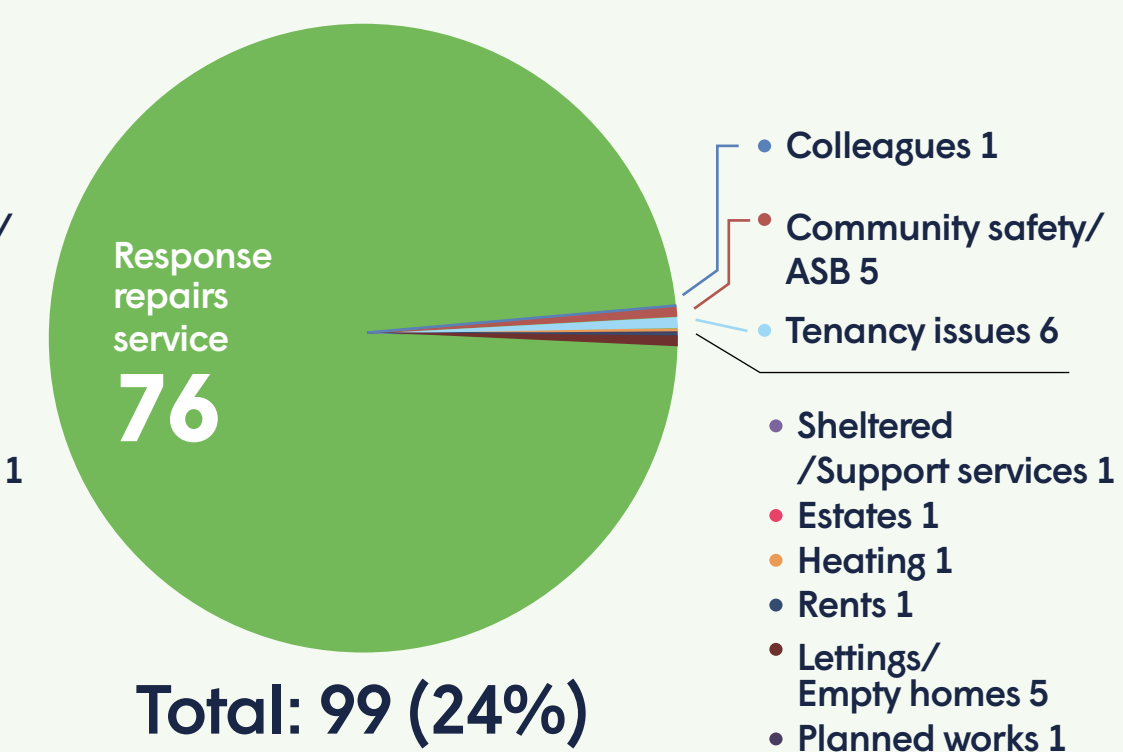
Total: 98 (24%)

Oct - Dec 2023



Total: 72 (18%)

Jan - March 2024



Total: 99 (24%)

Formal complaints

There have been 159 stage one complaints opened this year. The majority are property rather than tenancy related and most are about the repairs service with the main themes being: outstanding repairs, time taken to complete repairs, and requests for compensation for extra heating costs linked to draughty/faulty windows and damp and mould.

36 complaints have been escalated to stage two in total this year compared with 159 opened at stage one, giving a resolution rate at stage one of 77%. Analysis of themes and lessons learnt are reported below.

78.62% of stage one complaints were answered within the Housing Ombudsman's timescales this year. There has been high turnover and absence in a small complaints team this year and the team have had to be incredibly resourceful to achieve this result, involving other teams and managers for support and maintaining good communication with complainants throughout.

66.67% of stage two complaints were responded to within the timescales set out in the Complaints Handling Code. Any which weren't, were due to resourcing in this small team which has seen high turnover and absence rates since August 2023.

The main drivers of formal complaints in 2023/24 is time taken to complete repairs. Our recent development of a new process for damp, condensation, and mould management, along with triage, productivity enhancements, demand analysis, and resource planning, is helping to reduce wait times and should reduce the need for customers to complain. In the previous period, 2022/23, the other significant driver was response times for, and failure to deal with reports of ASB. The planned improvements in this service area, which we have been reporting to the Magna Board over the past 24 months are beginning to show in the numbers and further changes are in progress as part of our Brilliant Basics strategy and new ways of working.



The Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS)

We received five investigation outcomes from the HOS, some of which had more than one area under investigation, for example, ASB and complaints handling. All investigation outcomes and updates on compliance with orders are reported to the Chief Executive - the Board has received updates from the Chief Executive on all of the outcomes to date. At the time of writing the report, we had a further seven cases either awaiting determination or in the evidence gathering stage ready for submission to the HOS. The areas under investigation are similar to those in 2023/24: ASB, repairs and maintenance, damp and mould and rodents. Complaints handling is always investigated as part of the main investigation.

Summary of investigation outcomes

Number of final determinations received

12

Maladministration

Anti-social behaviour

4

Complaints handling

5

Repairs /maintenance

2

Equipment checks in sheltered housing

1

Severe Maladministration

0

Service improvements made as a result of lessons learnt



ASB

Recognising that service failures and complaints about ASB handling were of concern, we joined RESOLVE ASB and commissioned a full review of its Community Safety Service in January 2021. The review included case reviews, interviews with housing and community safety colleagues and a review of our operating policies and procedures in June 2021.

The review identified some areas of good practice, with some colleagues adopting a strong casework focus on the recommended key principles of ASB practice with clear aspirations to deliver excellent quality services to customers. It also highlighted areas where improvements could be made

to service delivery, and customer experience, within the ASB casework process. Particularly in the early stages of an ASB report being made. The report and progress against the recommendations have been reported to the Magna Board and its Risk and Audit Committee in the intervening period.

In order to successfully implement the findings, and on the recommendation of the reviewer, we created a new role in September 2021 – ASB Lead – to lead the implementation, manage the team and oversee service improvement. Following significant operating model changes to housing and customer services during 2023, we are now working on embedding the changes and re-training.

Our new operating procedures contain specific sections on victim support and additional support for older customers. Central to our approach to case management is that we take a harm centred approach, supported by a risk assessment at the start and ongoing throughout the case. In addition, we have updated our operating procedures and guidance for colleagues to take account of the HOS's recent publication – Learning From: Severe Maladministration In Relation To ASB. Separately, we have updated our operating procedures as a direct result of an order of maladministration for ASB handling, to include an additional section about awareness of additional vulnerabilities when dealing with nuisance and ASB from customers living in sheltered or supported housing.





Repairs

Identification of themes such as wait times for repairs as a major cause of complaints has led to a focussed effort via a year long project in which we will be reviewing how we deal with inspections and repairs to streamline this and reduce wait times for customers.

Heating

In January 2024, we became aware of a number of heating failures with some of our older air source heat pump systems. Once the issues were remedied and we had apologised and compensated for our failures, a full review of the circumstances which led to the failures was carried out. The following actions were or are in the process of being implemented:

- An annual air source heat pump servicing programme was put in place which will complete by the end of 2024. Our in-house repairs team will be trained to deliver both repairs and servicing, reducing the need to use contractors.

- A full review on customer communications will be taking place as part of a new programme of works, focusing on our repairs service. This includes where we use our customer facing teams such as Sheltered Housing Advisors to offer appropriate support and escalation for customers.
- Additional support provided to our operational repairs teams, so they are aware of when to escalate delayed repairs.

Complaints Handling

A complaints handling failure order in 2022/23 prompted a review of systems, process and our capacity. As a result we introduced new technology to support improved complaints handling and customer contact. Using Fresh Desk instead of Microsoft Outlook enables us to keep track of customer communication much better and ensures we don't miss important communication from a complainant.

Better reporting and our review of our compliance against the 2022 Complaints Handling Code led to a review of our Customer Complaints Policy with clear time frames set out aligned with the code. These are reflected in our housing management case management systems so that we can track timescales against our policy.

In the last 12 months, all team members have undertaken complaints handling refresher training and completed the HOS Dispute Resolution module.

A review of capacity in the team highlighted that we needed additional resource, to meet customer demand and to meet the timescales set out in the HOS Complaints Handling Code for responding to complaints. Over the past two years, our team has expanded from a single

full-time Complaints Officer to the current team, which includes one Complaints Resolution Lead, two Complaints Advisors, and part time Senior Complaints Advisor. While not all positions are currently filled due to their recent creation and team turnover, we have secured the necessary budget and are actively recruiting.

Vulnerability

The HOS produced a Spotlight report towards the end of last year on attitudes, respect and rights called 'Relationship of Equals'. Central to this report is what it means to be vulnerable in social housing today, but also most importantly, how landlords can respond effectively and how to do so without stigma or marginalisation. As a response to learning from complaints and orders from the HOS we have also considered practical ways in which we can put measures in place to protect some of our more vulnerable customers.

To date, we have:

- Provided refresher training for ASB case managers on case management principles, vulnerability and support.
- Included specific reference to support for sheltered housing customers and vulnerable customers generally in our ASB procedures.
- Started training for sheltered housing teams on viewing scheduled repairs and real time appointment data.
- Ensured sheltered housing teams have easy access to the customer care team so that they can chase up repairs for their customers while they are working in the community.

Compliance with the HOS Complaints Handling Code

The current complaints handling code was introduced as part of the HOS's new powers under the Social Housing Regulation Act 2023. The updated code took effect from 1st April 2024, and we have carried out a new self-assessment against this code. Following the last major update to our Customer Complaints Policy in 2023, only minor changes were needed to the Policy to align it fully to the new Code and these are summarised in the table on page 12.

Our assessment shows that we are compliant through our Customer Complaints Policy, our operating procedures, working practices, published information and service standards. Our current assessment is published on our website. Our latest assessment is available on the link below:

<https://www.magna.org.uk/contact-us/complaints>

At an operational level, due to the resourcing and capacity issues described in this report, there have been delays in acknowledging all complaints within five working days. Our policy and procedures are compliant with the Code, this area of practice was not 100% compliant last year. This is reflected in the fact that we have reported five maladministration findings for complaints handling. We recognise the impact delays in our handling of complaints can have on customers and have addressed the challenges that resulted in the above maladministration findings to ensure that when we handle complaints, we do so in line with our policy and the Housing Ombudsman complaint handling code.

There are times when a formal complaint request isn't accepted for reasons set out in our complaints policy. For 2023/24, we have no complaints recorded as 'not accepted'. For 2024/25, we will be recording any complaints not accepted and will include these figures and the reasons why in future annual reports for transparency.

Key changes to the code

In comparison with the previous Code, which contained mandatory and 'best practice' elements and in the interests of consistency and fairness, all of the new Code is mandatory.

Self-assessment

From 1st April, there is a legal duty placed on the HOS to monitor compliance with the Code, regardless of whether it receives individual complaints from customers about a landlord. For the first time, this means that we need to submit our self-assessment annually to the HOS. The timing of the annual submission to the Ombudsman has been aligned with the Regulator of Social Housing's requirements for the publication and submission of Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSM) outcomes. For us, this will be 30th June 2024. The self-assessment must also be published on our website so that customers are able to easily access it.





Role of the Member with Responsibility for Complaints (MRC)

The Code requires that a member of the governing body must be appointed to have lead responsibility for complaints to support a positive complaint handling culture. This person needs the capacity to be able to perform the responsibilities below and have the required level of oversight on complaints. Our Chief Executive, Selina White, has been appointed to fulfil this role.

The MRC is responsible for ensuring the Magna Board receives regular information on complaints that provides insight on our complaint handling performance. The MRC must have access to suitable information and colleagues to perform this role and report on their findings. As a minimum, they should receive:

- a. regular updates on the volume, categories and outcomes of complaints, alongside complaint handling performance;
- b. regular reviews of issues and trends arising from complaint handling;
- c. regular updates on the outcomes of the Ombudsman's investigations and progress made in complying with orders related to severe maladministration findings; and
- d. annual complaints performance and service improvement report.

Duty to Monitor

The Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 places a duty on the Housing Ombudsman to monitor compliance with the statutory Complaint Handling Code. This means that the Housing Ombudsman is required to ensure that all landlords meet the standards set out in the Code for complaint handling, regardless of their size and operating model.

Where concerns with a landlord's compliance with the Code are found, it will engage with them to bring them back into compliance. If there is evidence of ongoing failures in compliance, it will consider using its wider powers including Complaint Handling Failure Orders. The HOS will also use its work to monitor compliance with the Code to identify and share examples of good practice in complaints handling.

Customer complaints policy

Our current Customer Complaints policy was approved by Strategic Board in 2023 following our assessment against the previous CHC.

The policy has been updated to reflect changes in the CHC and following consultation with internal stakeholders. A summary of changes are shown opposite.

Key changes to customer complaints policy	
1	Content from paragraph 2.3 moved to section 3, 'Definition of a Complaint'
2	Sentence added at new paragraph 2.3 - 'However, we will also give customers the choice to make a complaint if they are expressing dissatisfaction'
3	Content from 3.5.1 and 3.5.2 included in paragraph 3.3
4	Paragraphs 3.7 to 3.9 added to include requirements in the Building Safety Act about complaints in high-risk buildings
5	Paragraph 4.2 added to include reference to Unacceptable Customer Behaviour policy and procedure
6	Minor changes made to paragraph 5.4 and 5.5 to clarify points to make them easier to read
7	Reference to Complaints Resolution Lead added at paragraph 5.7
8	Paragraph 5.9 changed to say relevant head of service investigating rather than Head of Service and Head of Customer and Community Support and extension time amended from 10 to 20 working days as per code
9	Minor change to paragraph 6.3 to refer to Risk Management Policy rather than insurance policy
10	Paragraph 6.6 changed to clarify repairs and condition claims
11	Paragraph 6.7 removed
12	Paragraph 8.1 added to explain the Chief Executive is the Member Responsible for Complaints (MRC)
13	Paragraph 8.4 amended to complaints resolution lead rather than Complaints Manager
14	Reference to the MRC added at paragraph 9.



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