

Name of meeting	Board		
Report title	Annual complaints report	Agenda item	15
Date of meeting	25 May 2023		
Author & job title	Kate Jungnitz, Director of Customer Service		
Report status	Assurance		
Confidentiality	Non-Confidential		
Appendices			

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1 This report provides Board with information relating to the complaints received during 2022/23 including volumes, comparison with last year and reasons for complaints. In addition, this report provides assurance to Board that Plus Dane is operating within the requirements of the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code and applying best practice in complaint handling.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 Board is asked to:
- a. Note the contents of this report.

3. Complaints 2022/23

- 3.1 During 2022/23 we received a total of 737 complaints, an increase of 124 or 20% on the number received in 2021/22. Of the 737 complaints received, 662 or 89.8% were resolved at stage 1 with the remaining 75 (10.2%) being escalated to stage 2. This is a slightly higher proportion of complaints being reviewed at stage 2 than last year where 8.9% escalated to the second stage of the complaints process.
- 3.2 At year end, there were five cases with the Independent Housing Ombudsman (IHO) where we were waiting for a determination. Two of the five complaints are from the same customer. This equates to 6.5% of those cases considered at stage two or 0.7% of complaints overall where there is an outstanding matter with IHO. Since the start of the new year we have received a determination on one of those complaints which will be reported in the performance for 2023/24.

- 3.3 Against the measure of complaints responded to within the timescales set out in the IHO Code, we set a target of 90% compliance. This year we responded to 92.8% of stage 1 complaints on time, therefore meeting the target for stage 1. At stage 2 we responded to 79.7% of complaints within specified timescales meaning that this is out of target by 10.3% or 14 complaints.
- 3.4 This year 79% of complaints were upheld against a target of 50%. This means that in over three quarters of complaints considered, we agreed with the customer that there had been a service failure. The main reasons for the service failure are:
- Not adhering to our repair timescales
 - Not keeping customers informed
 - Not keeping appointments

3.5 Table one below shows the number of complaints upheld or partially upheld by stage. Complaints are partially upheld where there is more than one element to the complaint and one or more are upheld but others are not.

Table one: Outcome of complaints

	Stage 1	Stage 2	Total
Not upheld	130	23	153
Partially upheld	136	24	160
Upheld	396	28	424
Total	662	75	737

- 3.6 There is an expectation from the IHO that we provide financial redress to customers where there has been a service failure. Our overall spend on compensation for this year is £38,153. This equates to £2.80 per property and in some recent benchmarking this level is in line with average spend, with some organisations reporting expenditure on compensation as high as £5 per property.
- 3.7 We know that the offers we make to customers are in line with best practice as the determinations that we have received from the ombudsman have not required us to make significant changes to the financial redress that has already been made at stage 2 of the complaints process.
- 3.8 This year 34% of customers were satisfied with the handling of their complaint against a target of 50%. We have continued to have very low response rates to this survey with only 20% of those customers who made a complaint sending us their views.
- 3.9 During the year we have made a change to the timeframe for when this survey is sent in order for any commitments made as part of the complaint, including the payment of compensation, to be realised.

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- 3.10 This change saw an increase in satisfaction for December and January (up to 83%) although this has now reverted to the position prior to making the changes.
- 3.11 Despite an ongoing focus on complaint handling, the implementation of the actions from the scrutiny review and also the customer experience task and finish group, we are still seeing high levels of complaints upheld and low satisfaction. We have, therefore, established a task force to focus attention on the drivers behind these indicators and to bring change to our complaint handling. The task force will be overseen by the Chief Executive and led by the Director of Communications and External Affairs.
- 3.12 In addition to formal complaints we received 135 MP enquiries this year, an increase of 36 on the 99 received last year. There were a total of 195 compliments recorded during the year, an increase of 12 from 2021/22. The
- 3.13 majority, 69% of compliments, were for colleagues across our repairs, trades and assets teams with the remaining being spread across other service areas.

4. Compliance with the IHO Code

- 4.1 This year we have received determinations on four cases from the Housing Ombudsman. For one case we initially received a count of maladministration, however this felt a very harsh outcome for the case concerned and we submitted a challenge to this. Following a review, IHO agreed with our challenge and reduced the outcome to one of service failure. We considered this to be a fair re-categorisation and accepted the findings in full.

Table two: HOS determinations

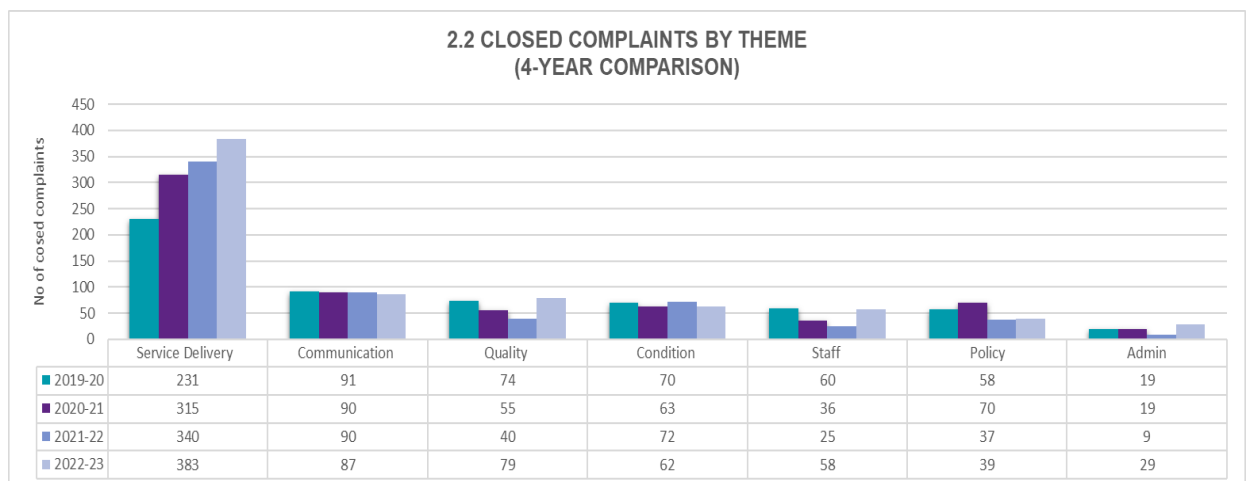
Case	Issue	Outcome	Action to address order
1	Component replacement/repeated boiler breakdown	1 x no maladministration 1 x service failure	£150 compensation paid. Monthly review of repeat boiler breakdowns in place to proactively identify issues. Post inspection of work to window and kitchen.
2	Bathroom replacement	1 x no maladministration	£240 compensation paid
3	Pest infestation / boiler repairs	1 x no maladministration	
4	ASB	1 x service failure reduced from maladministration on appeal	£200 compensation paid Traffic light triage process introduced

4.2 Closed complaints grouped by theme

4.2.1 The themes around closed complaints have not changed over the last four years that we have been monitoring this information. The top three areas are service delivery, communication and the quality of repair.

4.2.2 Graph one below shows the four-year comparison across each category. There are several pieces of work ongoing at the moment to address these themes including the customer journey mapping of the repairs service, the revision of the asset management strategy, the customer experience strategy development, training for colleagues and the complaints task force. These form part of a transformation programme intended to improve the experience our customers have in doing business with Plus Dane and improve customer satisfaction.

Graph one: closed complaint by theme



4.3 Closed complaints grouped by service area

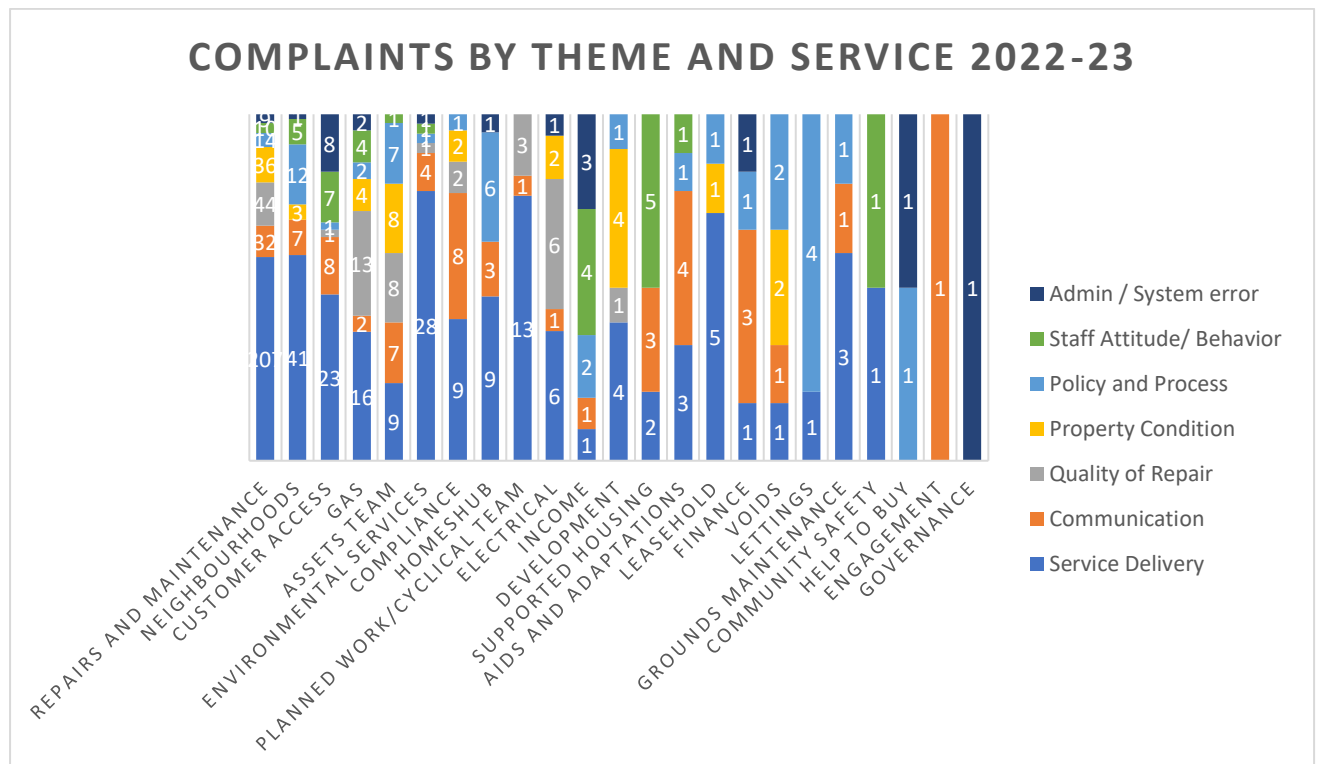
4.3.1 Table three below show complaints closed by service area with the repairs service (including gas, electrical and scheduling) accounting for 411, or 55.8% of complaints. When considered against the number of responsive, gas and electrical repairs completed this accounts for 0.6% of repairs arising in a complaint.

4.3.2 Table three below shows the distribution of the remaining 44.2% of complaints against the other service areas and shows the comparison over four years. For 2022/23 it shows that the other service areas accounting for over 5% of complaints are neighbourhoods (9.4%), customer service (6.5%) grounds maintenance (5.6%) and asset management (5.4%).

Table three: closed complaints by service area

3.1 Complaints by Service	2019-20		2020-21		2021-22		2022-23		% Change
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	
Repairs (gas, electrical, scheduling)	295	48.9	257	39.7	324	52.9	411	55.8	+2.9
Compliance	51	8.5	65	10.0	35	5.7	22	3.0	-2.7
Neighbourhoods	41	6.8	54	8.3	57	9.3	69	9.4	+0.1
Scheduling	39	6.5	39	6.0	-	-	-	-	-
Grounds Maintenance	36	6	53	8.2	26	4.2	41	5.6	+1.4
Customer Services	28	4.6	31	4.8	30	4.9	48	6.5	+1.6
Income	24	4	35	5.4	14	2.3	11	1.5	-0.8
HomesHub	21	3.5	37	5.7	31	5.1	26	3.5	-1.6
Planned Work	17	2.8	3	0.5	13	2.1	17	2.3	+0.2
Lettings	14	2.3	7	1.1	7	1.1	5	0.7	-0.4
Asset Team	9	1.5	28	4.3	49	8.0	40	5.4	-2.6
Community Safety	7	1.2	14	2.2	4	0.7	2	0.3	-0.4
Empty Property Team	7	1.2	8	1.2	4	0.7	6	0.8	+0.1
Development	4	0.7	7	1.1	7	1.1	10	1.4	+0.3
Finance	3	0.5	-	-	-	-	6	0.8	+0.8
Governance	3	0.5	-	-	-	-	1	0.1	+0.1
Adaptations	2	0.3	1	0.2	3	0.5	9	1.2	+0.7
Supported Housing	2	0.3	2	0.3	7	1.1	10	1.4	+0.3
Disrepair	-	-	1	0.2	-	-	-	-	-
Help to Buy	-	-	5	0.8	2	0.3	2	0.3	-
Communications	-	-	1	0.2	-	-	-	-	-
Engagement	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	0.1	+1.0
Total	603		648		613		737		

4.3.3 When the two strands of data are laid on top of one another as demonstrated in graph three below, service delivery and communication are the main causes of complaints across the majority of service areas.



5. Lessons learnt

5.1 A key requirement of good complaint handling is to learn from the cause of complaints and to learn lessons to avoid the same issue from being raised again. The themes identified in 2022/23 were as below and will be picked up within the Taskforce:

- Communication
 - Policy and process
 - Admin and systems
 - Service delivery
 - Staff attitude and behaviour
 - Property Condition
 - Quality of repair
- Attached at appendix A is a summary of the lessons learnt identified during 2022/23 and the actions that have either been taken or are planned for this year to rectify the issues.

6. Housing Ombudsman Spotlight Reports

6.1 Since the refresh of the IHO service, they have carried out a series of deep dives of topics where they have identified trends amongst complaints. The spotlight reports contain a series of recommendations that they expect landlords to consider and put actions in place to address. With these spotlight reports, IHO has made it clear that landlords need to have a clearly articulated rationale if they choose not to adopt any of the recommendations.

6.2 We have taken the approach of convening a multi-disciplinary team who come together to work through the recommendations. This year we have worked through the spotlights on damp and mould, managing agents and noise complaints.

Damp and mould

6.3 This spotlight contains 26 recommendations with the majority of the work to adopt them complete. The Director of Customer Service has chaired a team from across the business which has delivered most of the recommendations including a comprehensive training programme to all colleagues. The outstanding actions are to complete a damp and mould policy and to refine our proactive approach to anticipating cases which is being considered as part of the whole building approach to asset management.

Managing agents

6.4 This spotlight contains 18 recommendations. This has helped us to focus on making sure that our data is up to date regarding managing agents and that we have up to date contract documentation readily accessible in our system. This work is still ongoing and has been aligned with the work of the service charge project.

Noise complaints

6.5 This spotlight contains 32 recommendations which are being considered by the interim Director of Housing and the Community Safety Manager in consultation with the Director of Customer Service. The ASB policy is due to be reviewed during 2023 and several of the actions will be included in the refreshed version of the policy.

7. Link to Corporate Objectives

7.1 Customer experience

7.1.1 The customer experience, in particular a poor customer experience, is at the heart of the drive for customers to complain. Our customer experience strategy is currently under development and will be the subject of a discussion with Board in July prior to being submitted for approval in September. Ongoing activity including customer journey mapping, the complaints task force and training delivered later this year as part of the roll out of the customer experience strategy will contribute to improving the overall experience for customers of Plus Dane.

7.2 Locality working

7.2.1 There is no direct link between this report and locality working. 60% of complaints are from Merseyside customers and 40% Cheshire which is broadly in line with Plus Dane's overall stock base showing no immediate concerns in a particular area.

7.3 Sustainable organisation

7.3.1 The amount of compensation that is paid relating to service failures has increased this year. The aim of the task force is to reduce waste through compensation payments.

7.4 Colleague experience

7.4.1 Dealing with complaints is part of the role of operational managers, heads of service and directors. Our dedicated Customer Relations Team provides support and guidance to those colleagues to assist them in the preparation of their responses.

8. Equality, diversity & inclusion

- 8.1 An exercise has been carried out to compare the characteristics of complainants against the general customer population to ensure that the profile of those who made a complaint does not highlight any significant concerns or discrepancies compared to the customer base.
- 8.2 This process has not highlighted any significant differences between the whole customer base and those who have made a complaint against religion, age, ethnicity, gender, disability, sexual orientation or nationality.

9. Risk appetite

- 9.1 The presentation of this report to Board mitigates the risk of a failure to maintain strategic and regulatory compliance. The self-assessment against the IHO should be presented to the Board annually and will be provided to Board in July 2023.

10. Legal and regulatory implications

- 10.1 There is a regulatory requirement for Plus Dane to operate within the requirements of the IHO complaint handling code. Board is required to nominate a member to have lead responsibility for complaint handling. The Chair of Purpose Committee fulfils that role and will play a part in the work of the task force.
- 10.2 Section 7.4 of the complaint handling codes requires Board to receive regular updates regarding complaints, to be sighted on the outcome of any determinations from the Housing Ombudsman. This report and appendix one satisfy these requirements.
- 10.3 The introduction of the Tenant Satisfaction Measures includes a requirement to ask customers about their satisfaction with their landlord's complaint handling. This has been built into our collection of the TSMs to ensure compliance with the regulatory requirements.

11. Conclusion

- 11.1 Board is asked to note the contents of this report in order to discharge their responsibility under section 7.4 of the IHO complaint handling code, as well as to remain informed of the operational reasons for dissatisfaction which cause customers to make a formal complaint.

Kate Jungnitz

Director of Customer Service