



# Irwell Valley Homes Annual Report of Complaints Performance 2023/24



## Statement from the Board.

*"We aim to deliver a good customer experience, but we recognise that we don't always achieve this. If things go wrong, we want to put it right and learn from it to prevent it happening again."*

During the year Irwell Valley Homes responded to 767 complaints. This is 767 too many. We are deeply sorry and accept that for these customers we got it wrong. We are committed to improving and a priority for the organisation this year has been developing our approach to understanding the root cause of issues and taking action to improve things for customers.

The Board and I have supported the organisation's approach this year, which includes a new complaints team, and new process that is helping us not only to put things right quickly, but also uncover issues and embed learning to help us improve going forward. The complaints policy has been refreshed in line with the new HOS (Housing Ombudsman Service) code and colleagues have accessed the wide range of resources and support provided by the HOS to help us comply. We have appointed a Member Responsible for complaints on the Board and a Complaint Lead from the leadership team.

We see complaint investigations as crucial in uncovering the root cause of issues. During the year we provided training in-house and via the HOS Learning Hub for all complaint handlers, plus refreshed our process and templates to support good investigations and comprehensive responses. As part of the new process, from 2024/25 complaint learning and actions will be overseen by the Business Improvement Team with progress reported to board via the Audit and Risk Committee, alongside any HOS improvement plans and actions. This enhances the existing complaint performance reports the Board receive, ensuring themes, learning and actions from complaints are overseen at the highest level.

Whilst improving our colleague's ability to carry out thorough investigations has helped us to identify and make improvements for the future, we have also placed greater focus on customer's immediate concerns. Often when a customer is unhappy, there is an obvious solution that we can act on straight away. So, we have removed unnecessary limitations this year and given colleagues the tools and autonomy to act on issues at the earliest opportunity, and at any point in the complaint process. Simple things like a new e-voucher system to issue decorating vouchers or rebates for energy bills, is just one of the practical improvements that have helped us make things better for customers this year.

We know there is work to do to ensure that we are providing a consistently good service for customers, and we welcome working with the Housing Ombudsman Service in helping us to achieve this in the coming year.

*Niki Stockton (Chair of Irwell Valley Homes) and Adam Warburton (Board Member Responsible for Complaints).*



## Our approach to complaint handing.

We welcome complaints and aim to deal with them effectively, empathetically, and in-line with the HOS Complaints Handling Code and the regulatory requirements of the Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard.

We have a two-stage process for dealing with complaints that focuses on learning to drive improvement and prevent issues re-occurring.

When we receive a complaint, we acknowledge it within 5 working days. The Investigating Manager will contact the person to discuss the issue, carry out a thorough investigation and provide a response within 10 working days from the date of acknowledgement. If the customer is dissatisfied with this response, we will escalate the complaint to stage two.

At stage two, the Head of Service will contact the complainant within 5 working days of the stage two complaint being logged. They will contact the customer to discuss the complaint, carry out an investigation and provide a response within 20 working days of complaint escalation.

Customers do not have to provide us with their reasons for expressing dissatisfaction with their stage one complaint and we will not refuse an escalation based on the resident not providing their reasons. Within every acknowledgement and response, we make the customer aware of their right to escalate their complaint to the Housing Ombudsman and how to do this.

All complaints are recorded on our contact management system and a full record is kept of the complaint; including the original complaint details, date received, all correspondence, reports, and communication (including third parties), any review and the outcomes at each stage. Themes, learning and improvement actions are identified and managed by service managers. From 2024/25 this will be overseen by the business improvement team and reported to the Board.

Complaints in relation to Building Safety are only investigated at stage one of IVH's complaint process before being escalated directly to the Building Safety Regulator. During the year we did not get notified by the Building Safety Regulator of any complaints that had been referred onto them and we did not receive any orders from them.

We have a separate compensation policy which is used together with the complaints policy. In awarding compensation this year, we have considered whether any statutory payments are due, if any quantifiable losses have been incurred, and the impact on the customer and anyone else living in the property.

## Complaints performance 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023 – 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024.

Month	Number of stage one complaints made	% of Stage 1 complaints resolved within 10 days or within an extended timescale agreed with the customer	Number of stage two complaints made	% of Stage 2 complaints resolved within 20 days or within an extended timescale agreed with the customer	% of all complaints upheld	Amount of compensation paid*
April	183	94%	14	62%	35.50%	£8,229.72
May						
June						
July	182	89%	27	76%	47.06%	£24,346.11
August						
September						
October	172	93%	26	65%	32.31%	£9,594.92
November						
December						
January	139	94%	24	93%	42.86%	£18,098.28
February						
March						
<b>Annual</b>	<b>676</b>	<b>93%</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>71%</b>	<b>38.63%</b>	<b>£60,269.03</b>

\*This is the total paid over the quarter, including compensation paid as part of our complaints process and any ordered by HOS.

Tenant Satisfaction Measures	Annual performance
Number of stage 1 complaints per 1,000 homes.	72.6
Number of stage 2 complaints per 1,000 homes.	12
Proportion of stage 1 complaints responded to within Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code Time (10 days).	93%
Proportion of stage 2 complaints responded to within Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code Time (20 days).	71%
Customer satisfaction with the Landlord's approach to handling complaints	30%

## Housing Ombudsman Service – Requests and Determinations.

From 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023 – 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024 we received seven determinations from the Housing Ombudsman Service. We complied with all evidence requests and submitted relevant information to the HOS to help with their investigations. All orders and recommendations have been actioned. Details of the actions we have taken following the recommendations can be seen in the next section.

Date of	Reasons for complaint	Determination	Orders	Recommendations
May 2023	Reports that the customer did not receive services for which they were being charged, handling of works required in the kitchen, and complaints handling.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maladministration in response to residents reports of not receiving services she was charged for.</li> <li>Service failure in handling of work to the kitchen.</li> <li>Maladministration in complaint handling.</li> </ul>	£400 compensation. Complete outstanding kitchen repairs within 8 weeks.	Keep a record of visits and works carried out by contractors in relation to repairs and maintenance.
May 2023	Response to resident's report of odour. Response to resident's request to remove gravel from the front of their property and remove a vent from the living room. Repairs to the toilet flush. Response to the residents reports of a leak in the bathroom. Complaint handling.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Service failure for complaint handling.</li> </ul>	£250 compensation.	None.
August 2023	Water Ingress Damp and Mould and subsequent repairs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Severe maladministration in the handling of water ingress, damp and mould.</li> </ul>	£1000 compensation and a written apology.	Review the case and implement learnings. Review the repairs policy, with specific attention to when a survey should be completed and record keeping of repairs. Use the HOS spotlight report into Damp and Mould to support the review.
Date of	Reasons for complaint	Determination	Orders	Recommendations
October 2023	Response to damage to possessions following a leak. The handling of repairs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Service failure in handling of the leak.</li> </ul>	£450 compensation.	Review the case and implement learnings. Consider

	following leak and the handling of the associated complaint.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maladministration in complaint handling.</li> </ul>		policies are communicated and complaints managed. Review the repairs policy and consider if categorisation of repairs is adequate. Consider if the customer is in hardship and provide support if appropriate.
October 2023	Residents report of odour in the property, our response to residents reports of poor staff conduct and complaint handling.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maladministration in handling of resident's report of bad odour.</li> <li>Service failure in handling of the resident's report of poor staff conduct.</li> </ul>	£600 compensation.	Reiterate the offer of £25 in relation to complaints handling.
November 2023	Reports of ongoing leak and outstanding associated repairs and the handling of the resident's complaint about these issues.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maladministration in handling of residents reports of on-going leaks.</li> <li>Maladministration in repairs caused by leaks.</li> <li>Maladministration in complaint handling.</li> </ul>	£2150 compensation. £150 decorating voucher. Advise customer of dates for replacing the bathroom.	Review the number and nature of leaks in the property, the amount already spent on repairs and the likelihood of future expense occurring. Also to consider an earlier bathroom replacement.
Feb 2024	Fire safety works - time taken to complete, service charges, and time taken to resolve issues.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maladministration for delays to walkway remediation.</li> <li>Maladministration for handling of complaint.</li> <li>Service failure for handling of queries re service charges</li> </ul>	Complaint resolved with intervention. £300.00 refund for a survey.	Review guidance given on staircasing in respect of surveys.

### Breakdown of complaints.

- 66% of complaints related to repairs issues.
- 18% related to neighbourhood issues.

- 6% related to the ground's maintenance service.
- 3% related to value for money, disputes or communication regarding service charges.
- 2% related to leaseholder services.
- 2% related to issues regarding rent.
- 3% related to general customer service.

### From analysing the complaints, we have identified six themes.

1. Theme – Repairs waiting times – Repairs are taking too long or being rearranged too often.
2. Theme - Maintenance of communal areas - Cleaning and grounds maintenance services are not consistently good enough.
3. Theme - Communication – Customers need to be better kept informed of ongoing issues.
4. Theme - Handling of ASB – Customers aren't always happy with the outcome of a case and the time taken to resolve it.
5. Theme – We need to review our approach to damp, mould and condensation (specifically picked up via HOS complaints)
6. Theme – We need to review our approach record keeping (specifically picked up via HOS complaints)

## Action learning and improvement.

Over the year we have identified themes from complaints, implemented learning, and taken action to prevent issues re-occurring. Below are the key themes and the actions we have taken.

### *Theme – Repairs waiting times – Repairs are taking too long or being rearranged.*

- During the year we commenced our Repairs Service Improvement Programme, where we will increase our resource capacity, improve processes and increase customer satisfaction. £0.92m additional budget has been built into 2024/25 budgets to implement the improvements needed.
- We have increased our in-house repairs team and work planners and supply chain, with additional contractors to reduce waiting times.
- We continue to undertake a rolling programme of Stock Condition Surveys, focussing on improving our understanding of our property condition, identifying and removing hazards.
- We have prioritised and improved accountability of Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) cases under a dedicated Repairs Manager and post inspection regime and are maximising the potential of our housing management system in reporting on the progress of HHSRS cases. A new triage system has also been developed and is in place to support this.
- A new contractor portal has been developed and will be launching during 2024. This will help manage the quality and progress of work which is undertaken by contractors and help us provide better information to customers.

### *Theme - Maintenance of communal areas - Cleaning and grounds maintenance services are not consistently good enough.*

- A new cleaning contractor was appointed within the year. Customers fed into the tender and helped us to develop the specification and appoint a new contractor based on what is most important to them.
- An initial improvement plan was put in place with the ground's maintenance contractor. As this was not kept to, we ended the contract early and re-tendered for a new ground's maintenance provider. Customers were again involved in the tender process.
- A mobile app system is now in place to monitor the performance of cleaning and grounds maintenance contractors. All visits are recorded, and photo evidence submitted on every visit to help us manage the quality of the service provided.
- We launched a new Neighbourhood Champions scheme. This lets customers rate the cleaning and Grounds Maintenance services via an online form where photos and notes can be added. Where concerns are raised our Estates Team, and the responsible contractor are alerted so that issues can be addressed quickly. There is a quarterly free prize draw to incentivise engagement.



- There was one area where there were a significant number of complaints relating to standard of communal areas, so a local action plan was agreed and colleagues across the organisation were accountable for driving improvement. We continue to make progress against this, and customers and local councillors have fed back that there has been a marked improvement.

*Theme - Communication – Customers need to be better kept informed of ongoing issues.*

- We developed and launched a new Housing Management System that provides easier access to information and supports colleagues in providing better information to customers about reported issues.
- We developed and launched a new customer portal which provides live updates for customers on repairs, ASB cases and complaints.
- Automated communications have been built into our Repairs Booking system so that texts are sent to customers to keep them informed of the progress of their repair. We plan to roll this out to other service areas to help keep customer better informed.
- The new contractor portal will help us to provide better information to customers where work is being undertaken by contractors.
- Customer service training has been provided to colleagues to promote excellent customer service and improve communication with customers. Priority has been given to individual colleagues and teams where issues with communication were raised in complaints.
- A Customer Experience Transformation Programme has begun across all customers, tenancy and community services. Demand has been captured that has identified clear opportunities for improvement in communication, reducing hand offs, and delivering better service at each touch point. New models are currently being trialled with a view to roll out new ways of working within 2024/25.

*Theme - Handling of ASB – Customers aren't always happy with the outcome of a case and the time taken to resolve it.*

- Our Resident Scrutiny Panel carried out a thorough review into our ASB service. 10 recommendations and two commendations were made. A detailed action plan was signed off by Board and is underway. As part of this customer's helped to develop a new ASB Policy and Process which adopts best practice from the HOS spotlight of noise report and the Government ASB action plan.
- We joined *Resolve ASB*, which provides resources and training for ASB colleagues. This has helped us to tap into new tools that have helped them resolve issues earlier, and access best practice and expert advice for live cases.
- We appointed a new mediation service to improve the service offering. The new service works with customers even if one party refuses to engage, giving us more options to provide support to the engaging party.
- Where we received multiple complaints in a condensed area, we have implemented local action plans. For example, Community Coordinators went 'door knocking' in a neighbourhood alongside the local authority and councillors to reduce ASB and complaints in the neighbourhood. Rapport with customers has improved and we are now carrying out regular multi-agency meetings.

- Surveys were carried out with customers in nine key neighbourhoods to understand the main issues and challenges in those areas. Community plans have been developed that set out how IVH will work with partners to tackle issues. These are published on our website so that customer can hold us to account in delivering them.
- In the back of some specific ASB issues, we worked with customers to develop a new Digital Recordings Policy that covers the rights of customers and colleagues in relation to being filmed and the use of digital recording software such as ring doorbells and CCTV.
- Our Customer Experience Improvement Programme will also address these issues with a focus on resolution at first point of contact, increasing community presence and influence, improving community impact.
- In-line with HOS best practice, disciplinary action was taken against one colleague during the year where their actions fell significantly short of our service standard in relation to ASB.

*Theme - Approach to damp, mould and condensation (specifically picked up via HOS complaints)*

- We engaged our Resident Scrutiny Panel in a thorough review of our approach to Damp and Mould and implemented an action plan, which was monitored by our Board. All actions resulting from this have now been completed.
- A triage system has been introduced for Damp and Mould cases that is managed by our Customer Service Team with training provided for colleagues on how to triage reports.
- A new Damp and Mould Policy has been launched to help investigate and remediate complex cases more effectively.
- Property Inspectors have been equipped with enhanced technology and training to help them diagnose causes of damp and mould quickly and more effectively.

*Theme - Approach record keeping (specifically picked up via HOS complaints)*

- We developed and launched our new Housing Management System, Rubixx and provided training for all colleagues. The new system has adopted best practice and significantly improved our processes and data management. Whilst the new customer portal that is part of the system, gives customers direct access to information we hold about them and allows them to update their own records.
- As per point 1 – we've developed a Contractor Portal to improve record keeping for and work carried out by contractors.
- As per point 1 - we have improved accountability of Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) cases under a dedicated Repairs Manager and post inspection regime and our housing management system in reporting on the progress of HHSRS cases.

*Overall improvements to complaint handling and learning.*

- We appointed a new complaints team to improve our approach, deal with issues at the earliest point and provide support with investigation resolutions to improve quality and consistency.
- A new process will commence in 2024/25 to embed complaint learning and manage the implementation of actions. This will be managed by the Business Improvement Team with progress reported to the board alongside HOS performance, improvement plans and actions.
- The complaints policy has been refreshed in-line with the new HOS Handling Code and colleagues have accessed training and support from HOS to help us comply. A Member Responsible for complaints and Complaint Lead were appointed.
- We provided training in-house and via the HOS Learning Hub for all complaint handlers and refreshed our processes and templates to support good investigations and comprehensive responses for customers.
- Colleagues have been given the tools and autonomy to act upon issues at the earliest opportunity, and at any point in the complaint process. Access to a new e-voucher system has been given to all customers involved to issue financial support and within our new CRM system colleagues are able to prioritise repairs and work on the back of complaints.
- Our Customer Standards Group helped develop our transactional surveys to bring them in line with the new Consumer Standards. The surveys are sent to customers after they receive a service to help us continually monitor satisfaction. Where any dissatisfaction is raised, an alert is sent to colleagues responsible so that they can contact the customer and put things right. The Group have also monitored complaints performance and their feedback has been reported to Board quarterly.
- Our Resident Scrutiny Panel have begun reviewing Customer Service (contact and access) and how we respond to customers' needs – recommendations are expected within Q3 2024/25.

## Conclusion.

We are deeply sorry for the times we have failed our customers this year. We would like to thank customers who have made complaints this year for sharing their experiences, along with every customer who has taken part in surveys, or formal customer groups. The learning we have taken has been invaluable in helping us to understand the issues and the root causes and take action to improve things going forward.

As we go into the new year, we are committed to embedding the changes we have made this year and remain hopeful that customers will start to see the difference in the services we provide. We look forward to fully implementing our new process with complaint learning and actions being overseen by the Business Improvement Team in the coming year to drive improvement and increase accountability. We will continue to work with the HOS and welcome their recommendations as part of our improvement journey.