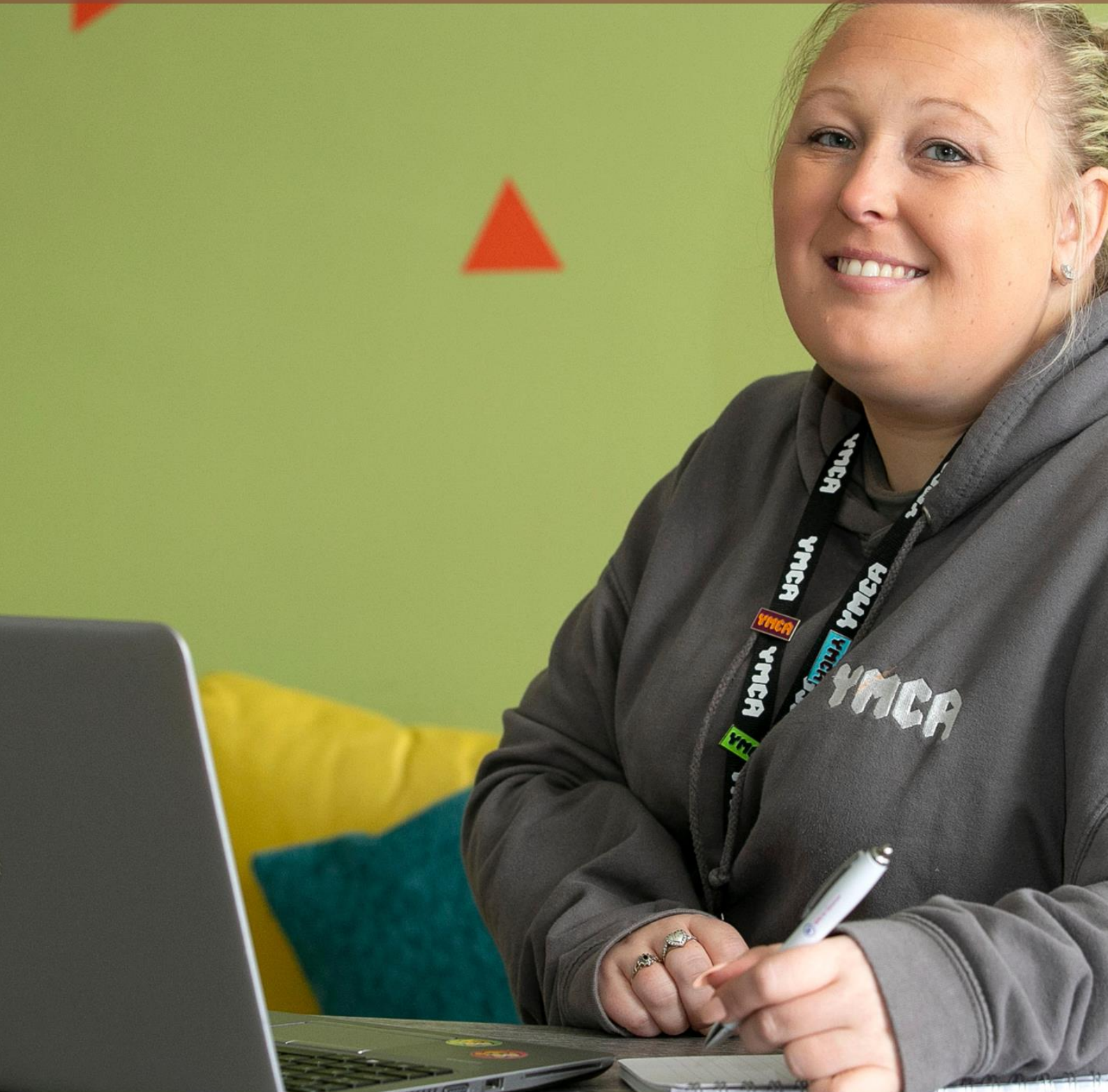


YMCA THAMES GATEWAY GROUP

SERVING COMMUNITIES IN ESSEX, KENT & LONDON

YMCA

Here for young people
Here for communities
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**Complaints performance and service
improvement report for landlord services**
Covering April 2023- March 2024

1.0 INTRODUCTION

YMCA Thames Gateway Group is committed to providing high quality, transparent and accessible services for all of our services users. We recognise that we can always do better, and encourage our residents or their advocates and family members to tell us when we have got this wrong, so we can identify issues and introduce positive changes to service delivery.

We encourage a positive culture around complaint handling, and want to resolve disputes as quickly as possible.

If a formal complaint is made, it follows a two-stage process. Stage 1 is where the resident expresses their dissatisfaction. If we are unable to resolve at Stage 1, the resident may escalate the complaint to stage 2 for a review. If the complaint is unable able to be resolved at Stage 2, then the resident is able to escalate to the Housing Ombudsman.

Residents are also able to contact the Housing Ombudsman for advice at any time.

This document sets out YMCA Thames Gateway Group's annual complaints performance and service improvement report for 2023/2024 in accordance with the requirements set out in the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code.

2.0 COMPLAINT HANDLING CODE

The Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code became statutory from 1 April 2024. The Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 places a legal duty on the Ombudsman to monitor social housing landlord's compliance with the Code.

Key areas of the code include:

- Universal definition of a complaint
- Providing easy access to the complaints procedure and ensuring residents are aware of it, including their right to access the Housing Ombudsman Service
- Structure of the complaints procedure - only 2 stages necessary and clear times set out for responses
- Ensuring fairness in complaint handling with a resident-focused process
- Taking action to put things right and appropriate remedies
- Creating a positive complaint handling culture through continuous learning and improvement
- Demonstrating learning in annual reports
- Annual self-assessment against the Code

The Handling Code supports service improvement across all levels of the organisation.

Operational staff - the Code supports excellent complaint handling and engagement with the Ombudsman.

Senior managers – the Code supports learning from complaints and promotes the open and transparent use of information to assess performance and risks.

Board - the Code supports culture setting and intelligence for assurance exercises, using complaint data alongside other management information on stock, services and customer feedback to provide insight into their organisation. It is important for governance to understand the complaints their organisations are receiving and the impact of their complaint handling on residents.

Residents - the Code will act as a guide for residents setting out what they can and should expect from their landlord when they complain. The requirements in the Code also provide residents with information about how to make a complaint and how to progress it through the landlord's internal complaints procedure.

3.0 REPORTING

The code requires us to produce an annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement report for submission to the YMCA TGG's Board. The Board are also required to produce a response to this report. Both of these documents should be published on our website within 12 weeks of submitting our annual accounts.

The Operations and Programmes committee will start to receive detailed quarterly complaints reports from the Complaints Officer and will provide scrutiny and challenge on behalf of the Board. This committee will also produce the response to the annual Performance and Service improvement report.

The Board receive complaints monitoring data as part of the regular performance reporting information that they receive.

4.0 SELF-ASSESSMENT

There is a requirement that landlords self-assess against the Code. As YMCA TGG has less than 1,000 properties, we are required to submit our self-assessment to the Housing Ombudsman within 12 weeks of 30 March, which is our year end. This self-assessment forms part of this annual complaints performance and service improvement report. (Appendix 1) The report does not need to be submitted to the Ombudsman, however, a link to it on the website should be included in the self-assessment.

Non-compliance could result in the Ombudsman issuing complaint handling failure orders.

Compliance with the Code

The Annual self-assessment against the Housing Ombudsman’s Complaint Handling Code has been completed for 2023/24.

Three areas of non-compliance have been identified. Two of these are in Section 1 ‘Definition of a complaint’ and the other one is in Section 3 ‘Accessibility & Awareness’.

Where there is non-compliance with the Code, the Housing Ombudsman advises that there must be a detailed explanation provided in the self-assessment and the date by which compliance will be achieved.

These areas of non-compliance will be resolved by 30 September 24 with the introduction of a new and separate Housing Complaints Policy. Currently, there is one overarching policy across all YMCA TGG services.

The table below provides more detail on the areas of non-compliance:

Provision	Requirement	Explanation	Remedy
1.2	A complaint must be defined as: <i>'an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the landlord, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting a resident or group of residents.'</i>	The current Complaints Policy covers all YMCA TGG services and so a broader definition was used.	A specific Housing Complaints Policy is being developed and this will include the stated definition. <i>Target Date: 30 September 2024</i>
1.4	Landlords must recognise the difference between a service request and a complaint. This must be set out in their complaints policy.	Although staff do recognise the difference, this is not set out in the Policy	A specific Housing Complaints Policy is being developed and this will include recognition of the difference. <i>Target Date: 30 September 2024</i>
3.5	The policy must explain how the landlord will publicise details of the complaints policy, including information about the Ombudsman and this Code.	The Housing Ombudsman details are included in the policy; however, the Code is not referenced and no mention of how the policy will be publicised is made	A specific Housing Complaints Policy is being developed and this will detail of how the policy will be publicised. <i>Target Date: 30 September 2024</i>

There are several areas where the assessment has determined compliance, however, there is further opportunity for improvement. These are set out below.

Provision	Requirement	Remedy
1.3	A complaint that is submitted via a third party or representative must be handled in line with the landlord's complaints policy.	Third party reporting is stated in 6.1 of the policy. The new Housing Complaints Policy will make this clearer.
2.1	Landlords must accept a complaint unless there is a valid reason not to do so.	5.3 sets out what our complaints policy does not cover. However, this can be strengthened
2.2	A complaints policy must set out the circumstances in which a matter will not be considered as a complaint or escalated, and these circumstances must be fair and reasonable to residents.	5.3 sets out what our complaints policy does not cover. However, this can be strengthened
2.3	Landlords must accept complaints referred to them within 12 months of the issue occurring or the resident becoming aware of the issue, unless they are excluded on other grounds.	The Complaints Policy does not set a deadline for how far back complaints can go. This is an area of the Complaints Policy that will be strengthened in the new Housing Complaints Policy.
2.4	If a landlord decides not to accept a complaint, an explanation must be provided to the resident setting out the reasons why the matter is not suitable for the complaints process and the right to take that decision to the Ombudsman	This part of the Complaints Policy is to be strengthened and made clearer.
3.2	Residents must be able to raise their complaints in any way and with any member of staff.	Residents can and do raise complaints with any member of staff. The Policy will be updated to make this clearer.
3.4	Landlords must make their complaint policy available in a clear and accessible format for all residents	'Recite Me' (an accessibility software) being installed on website to improve access for residents
4.1	This Code will refer to that person or team as the 'complaints officer'	The Complaints Policy will be updated to include the named 'Complaints Officer'
5.11	Landlords must not refuse to escalate a complaint through all stages of the complaints procedure unless it has valid reasons to do so	This part of the Complaints Policy is to be strengthened and made clearer.

5.0 Complaint Handling Analysis

Appendix 2 sets out the areas of YMCA TGG activity that the Housing Ombudsman can investigate. If a complaint does not fall under the Housing Ombudsman jurisdiction, it could fall under the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.

During the year, there were some changes with the way that complaints were managed in TG. The Head of Customer Experience and Impact, who had overall responsibility for complaints management, left the organisation and the role was not replaced. The Head of Communities North, took on the responsibility for complaints oversight.

Number of landlord related complaints opened

	Stage 1	Within timescale	Stage 2	Within timescale	Housing Ombudsman
Total	19	53%	1	100%	0

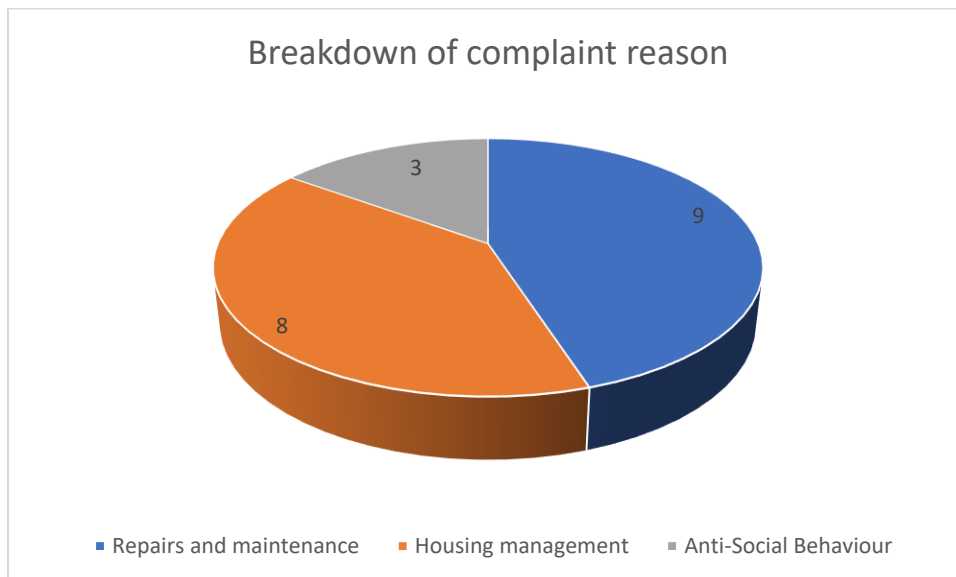
In total, 19 landlord related complaints were received throughout the year. This equates to 40.09 complaints per 1,000 units. The sector wide figures for this reporting period aren't currently available but for 22/23 Housemark found the average of English landlords to be 41.6 per 1,000 units.

In addition, 5 'service requests' were incorrectly logged as complaints. There were no complaints that were refused to be accepted

Performance in relation to handling complaints within Code timescales could be improved, where just over half of stage 1 complaints being handled within timescales. Where it becomes likely that the timescale will not be met, (for example, it is a complex complaint), the resident should be kept informed, and where there is a good reason, an extension agreed between both parties with a clear timeframe on when to expect a response in accordance to the Code extension timescales.

Subject of landlord related complaints

The subject of complaints is shown in the pie chart below:



One complaint was multi-faceted so the total in the chart above is greater than the number of complaints received.

The largest area of complaints was about repairs. This is consistent with the Social Housing sector in general and were predominantly about the length of time taken to complete a repair.

Escalations

There was 1 escalation to final stage of the complaint process. This related to the general service that a resident received and had overlapped into the support provided. This was resolved at the final stage.

No complaints were escalated to the Ombudsman.

There has been no annual report about YMCA TGG’s performance from the Ombudsman.

There have been no findings of non-compliance with the Code by the Ombudsman.

Service improvements as a result of learning from complaints

Learning from complaints is an important element of a positive complaint handling culture. It is important to understand where and why things have gone wrong and how to make sure the same thing does not happen again.

Service improvements have been identified both from data analysis and also from direct feedback from residents obtained during the complaint investigation and resolution process. is central to learning and improving services.

The table below sets out the service improvements identified.

<p>Although the principles of good complaint handling are consistent across TG, the regulatory requirements on landlord complaints are different to other parts of the organisation.</p>	<p>Introduce a specific Housing Complaints Policy. This will be in place by 30 September 2024.</p>
<p>Improve performance on handling complaints within timescales.</p> <p>Keep residents informed of the progress with their complaint whilst being resolved</p>	<p>Staff training programme has been developed around complaint handling. It includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring they are familiar with the Complaints Policy • The difference between a service request and a complaint • Understanding how to record complaints on the caseload management system, ensuring key dates are entered • Ensure that managers are aware of the Housing Ombudsman’s guidance on remedies
<p>Ensure that caseload management systems are kept upto date and quality of records is consistent across the Housing directorate</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Managers regularly review records to ensure the accuracy and quality of record keeping in relation to complaints.
<p>Involving complainant in complaint handling review</p>	<p>As part of one complaint resolution, it was offered that the resident and their family member come in and meet with the team and explain how the interaction that led to the complaint made them feel, and how our initial response to the complaint made them feel too.</p> <p>Positive feedback was received from the resident about having the opportunity to do this, and the team found it a helpful experience in making them better able to put ‘themselves in the residents’ shoes’ and understanding how our communication timing and style can impact residents.</p> <p>Due to its success, this is something that we offer as part of complaint resolution, if appropriate.</p>
<p>Compensation Policy</p>	<p>Staff use the Ombudsman’s remedy guidance, however, to ensure consistent application of this, YMCA TGG is developing its own ‘Compensation Policy’. This will be in place by the end of Q3.</p>

Resident Forums	<p>Regular resident forums are held across our sites. A wide range of issues are discussed at these and sometimes residents express dissatisfaction with service delivery. Often, we are able to resolve the issue with them there and then or with follow up information shortly after.</p> <p>Teams are reminded that we should be asking residents if they would like it to be treated as a formal complaint.</p>
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6.0 SUMMARY

This is the first Complaints Performance and Service Improvement review report that has been produced at YMCA TGG.

We are compliant with the majority of the Code and there are three areas of non-compliance which will be rectified by 30 September with the introduction of a specific Housing Complaints Policy. There are also 9 areas where, although we are compliant, could be made clearer for residents. This clarity will be provided with the new policy.

Key from lessons learned include; improving staff training on complaints and ensuring that records are accurate and kept up to date.

Several areas of service improvement have been identified with one already implemented and positive feedback received, with another piece of policy work to be completed.

Accessibility of the Complaints Policy will be enhanced through the introduction of 'Recite Me' software, which will enable translations as well as other accessibility tools through our website.