



**SOUTH DEVON RURAL**  
HOUSING ASSOCIATION LIMITED



**Places  
for People**

**2023 - 2024**



**Annual Complaints  
Performance and  
Service Improvement  
Report**

# Reflect, Learn, Improve, Repeat.



We always strive to deliver outstanding customer service. We also understand that things can occasionally go wrong. If they do, we want to make things right as soon as possible, learn from what has happened, and do what we can to stop it from happening again.

Our aim is to ensure that our Customers understand their rights when it comes to making a complaint, that we make our processes easy and accessible and ensure our Customers can have their voice heard with an approach to complaint handling that is fair and transparent.

We embrace complaints and we are committed to resolving them quickly and efficiently. This report shows our commitment to a positive complaint handling culture at SDR and how our approach meets the requirements of the [Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code](#)



# Introduction by Peter Symons, Chair of South Devon Rural Housing Association



I'm pleased to present the Annual Complaint Performance and Service Improvement Report for South Devon Rural Housing Association for the period April 2023 to March 2024. This Report outlines our commitment to transparency, accountability, and continuous improvement in our service delivery.

Our [Self-Assessment](#) against the Housing Ombudsman's Complaints Handling Code reflects our commitment to maintaining high standards in complaint handling. The Self-Assessment indicated compliance with most provisions of the Code, demonstrating robust processes and a culture of learning from complaints. However, we noted that improvements were needed in some areas and so changes to our complaints processes have since been made.

As we move forward with the support of merger partners Places for People Group, we're confident that the changes and enhancements we're implementing will deliver a more efficient and responsive service. Our goal remains to address and resolve complaints swiftly, learn from these experiences, and prevent recurrence, ensuring a better experience for all our customers.



# Self-Assessment Against the Housing Ombudsman's Complaints Handling Code

SDR's Self-Assessment conducted in March 2024 confirmed that we were meeting the majority of the Code's requirements:

- SDR defines a complaint as any expression of dissatisfaction regarding the standard of service, actions, or lack of action by the landlord, in line with the Code's definition.
- We provide multiple channels for residents to lodge complaints and we ensure our complaints policy is accessible and easy to understand.
- Our process includes clear stages for complaint resolution, timely acknowledgements and responses. It involves senior staff in the final stage to ensure impartiality and thorough consideration of the issues raised.
- We use complaints as a valuable source of feedback to drive service improvements. Our annual reports and regular updates to the Board ensure accountability and transparency.



# Areas of Non-Compliance against the Ombudsman’s Complaints Handling Code

At the time the Self-Assessment was completed in March 2024, SDR identified two areas where it was not fully compliant with the Housing Ombudsman’s Complaints Handling Code. These required:

- a) The appointment of a Member Responsible for Complaints (MRC). An MRC was appointed at the SDR Board Meeting held on 22nd April 2024 and the appointed Board member has met with SDR’s Managing Director to review complaints.
- b) The production of an annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report for scrutiny and challenge. With the publication of this report, SDR is now fully compliant with the Housing Ombudsman’s Complaints Handling Code.



**In addition to these areas of non-compliance, the Self-Assessment also highlighted a need for staff training on complaints handling.**

**It was noted that not all staff were adequately trained in the updated complaints handling procedures, leading to variability in response quality and timeliness. This has now been fixed.**

# Complaints Performance Summary

**Formal complaints** (details below): **20**



## **Repairs and Maintenance: 8**

Issues included delays in addressing repairs, poor workmanship, and lack of communication regarding repair appointments.



## **Customer Service: 4**

Complaints focused on staff behaviour, unresponsiveness, and general dissatisfaction with the service provided.



## **Tenancy Issues: 5**

Issues included disputes over tenancy terms, handling of neighbour disputes, and allocation of properties.



## **Estate Management: 3**

Concerns were raised about the maintenance of communal areas, noise from neighbouring properties, and general estate upkeep.

# Trends and Themes in Complaints

The predominant theme in complaints was related to repairs and maintenance, highlighting a need for better communication and efficiency in our repair processes. Similar issues were also highlighted in our latest [Tenant Satisfaction Survey](#).



## Repairs

- Several complaints were about the poor quality of repair work, which at times required repeat visits, causing further inconvenience
- A recurring issue was a lack of timely updates and clear communication regarding the status of repairs or service requests. Tenants expressed frustration at not being informed about delays or changes in appointment times.



## Customer Service

- Tenants reported difficulties in reaching SDR on the phone and delays in receiving responses to their enquiries.
- Some complaints were about the perceived unprofessional or dismissive behaviour of staff members, which negatively impacted the customer experience.



# Trends and Themes in Complaints continued

## Tenancy Issues

- Tenants reported unresolved disputes with neighbours, impacting their quality of life.
- Some tenants felt that the terms of their tenancy agreements were not clearly explained or were unfairly enforced.



## Estate Management

- Tenants highlighted the need for better upkeep of shared communal areas in their neighbourhoods, including cleaning and repairs.
- Complaints were raised about noise disturbances from neighbouring properties, especially at night.





# Service Improvements

Based on feedback received through complaints, we have implemented several improvements to our services:

a) In April 2024, all of our staff received updated training in Complaints Handling to ensure a consistent and effective approach.

b) We have established new protocols, designed to improve communication and raise responsiveness, ensuring that residents are kept fully informed throughout the entire complaint process.

c) We have appointed a dedicated Member Responsible for Complaints to oversee the complaints process and ensure accountability at the highest level.

d) A new Complaints Coordinator role has been established to manage the day-to-day handling of complaints, ensuring timely responses and efficient resolution. This Coordinator is also responsible for monitoring trends and for implementing service improvements based on complaint feedback.



**SDR's Elmhurst Court resident Able Sharp cooking in his specially adapted kitchen.**



# Compliance and Accountability

- SDR has achieved compliance with the Housing Ombudsman's Code.
- No findings of non-compliance or maladministration by the Ombudsman in the past 12 months.
- The SDR Board receives regular updates on performance and trends.



## Conclusion

The year 2023-2024 has been one of continued learning for SDR.

We remain committed to providing excellent service to our Customers and using complaints as a tool for continuous improvement.

We welcome and appreciate the feedback from Customers.



**This report is published in accordance with statutory requirements and is available on our website. We welcome feedback from our customers and stakeholders to help us further improve our service delivery performance.**



**Celebrating over six  
decades of giving people  
a place to call home**



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