

<b>Report to:</b>	<b>Pioneer Group Board</b>	<b>Agenda Item:</b>	<b>17</b>
		<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	<b>22<sup>nd</sup> May 2024</b>
		<b>Report Purpose:</b>	<i>Assurance</i>
<b>Report from:</b>	David Bucknall, Insight & Engagement Manager Email: David.Bucknall@cvch.org.uk Tel: 07341 483679		

**1. Strategic Goal – this report relates to:-**

Strategic Goal 1 - Great safe homes  
Strategic Goal 2 - Strong vibrant communities  
Strategic Goal 3 - Business excellence

**2. Summary**

Each year, we publish information about the complaints and compliments we receive, including their number, nature and outcome. We review the outcomes of all complaints and use lessons learned to improve the quality and focus of our services moving forward. Our approach to complaints enables us to continually improve what we do, and the way we do things, enabling us to develop our organisational strength.

Complaints are a positive form of customer feedback, giving us an ideal opportunity to listen and act on what matters to our tenants and service users. This report provides information about our customer complaints for the period 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024 for The Pioneer Group.

We deliver our service within the framework of the Housing Ombudsman code, having two formal complaint stages. We aim to resolve service requests at first point of contact simply and quickly, and capture these so we can continue to learn.

Below is an outline of our complaint performance throughout 2023/24 and some examples of how we have learnt and implemented service improvements. From 1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024, we received a total of 218 formal complaints:

- 14 were escalated to Stage 2
- 1 complaint was heard before a panel at Stage 3 of our complaints process.
- 2 complaints were referred to the Housing Ombudsman for this financial year, we are awaiting determination for both. These related to Housing Management (ASB), Aids and Adaptions and Right To Buy.

**3. Recommendation**

This report is for discussion and should be noted for assurance.

## **4 Relevant issues and implications**

### **4.1 Tenant & Customer Voice**

Customers who have been through the complaints process in Quarter 1 will have been invited to take part in customer satisfaction research to monitor and improve how we handle complaints. Learning from complaints provides us the opportunity to influence changes to services to ensure the customer voice is heard and we are working proactively on feedback received. Staff teams across the Group receive feedback on a quarterly basis with the learnings identified from complaints raised.

### **4.2 Financial**

Compensation payments are now a common occurrence in outcomes from the housing ombudsman. Budgets are in place to continue to resource the management of complaints.

### **4.3 Value for Money**

Learning from complaints help to shape priorities and drive Value of Money.

### **4.4 Risk Assessment**

This report contributes to avoiding a finding of maladministration or the potential for the issue of a complaint failure notice by the Ombudsman Service, which could trigger a regulatory enquiry.

### **4.5 Health & Safety**

*Not applicable*

### **4.6 Policy implications**

*Complaints policies and procedures have recently been reviewed to follow the new ombudsman code implications.*

### **4.7 Equality and Inclusion Implications**

*We ensure that vulnerable customers are able to complain in a format that is correct for them and that we are happy to work with advocates to support those who need help to make a complaint.*

### **4.8 Environmental sustainability**

### **4.9 Reference to the RSH regulatory framework/Legislation**

Compliance with the consumer standards around listening to our customers

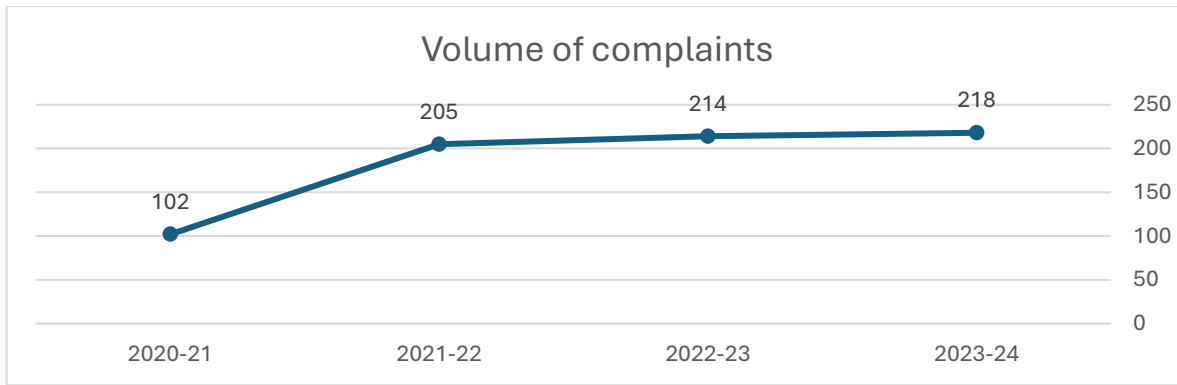
## **5. Report**

### **5.1 Stage 1 complaint performance**

218 complaints might appear a high number for an association of our size, we see this as a positive:

*“High volumes of complaints must not be seen as a negative, as they can be indicative of a well-publicised and accessible complaints process. Low complaint volumes are potentially a sign that residents are unable to complain.” (Housing Ombudsman, 2024)*

218 complaints continues the recent trend of increased complaints following the changes to the ombudsman code in April 2021.



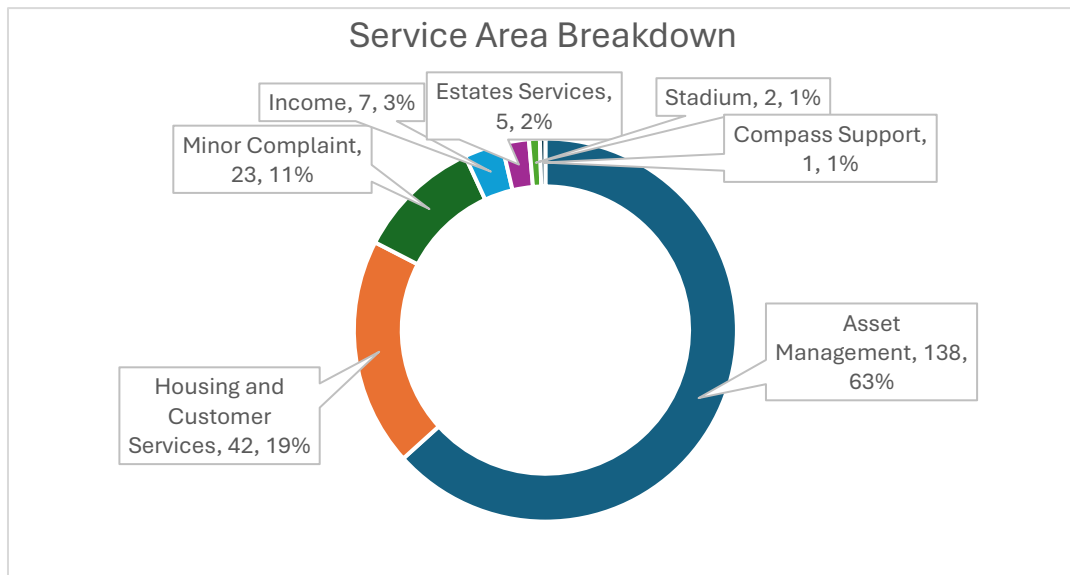
## 5.2

### Complaints by service area:

The chart below shows the split of complaints by directorate, including their % of overall complaints. Minor complaints, relates to those complaints dealt with by our customer first team without the need for escalating to a specific team. From all complaints received:

- 63% (138) related to Asset Management. 2 in 3 (90) complaints were about responsive repairs/void contractor\*
- 19% (42) related to Housing/Customer Service issues
- 11% of complaints were dealt with at the point of contact with Customer 1<sup>st</sup> Team.

\* on average over 100 responsive repairs were raised each week in the year 2023/24 and this remains our biggest touchpoint with customers.

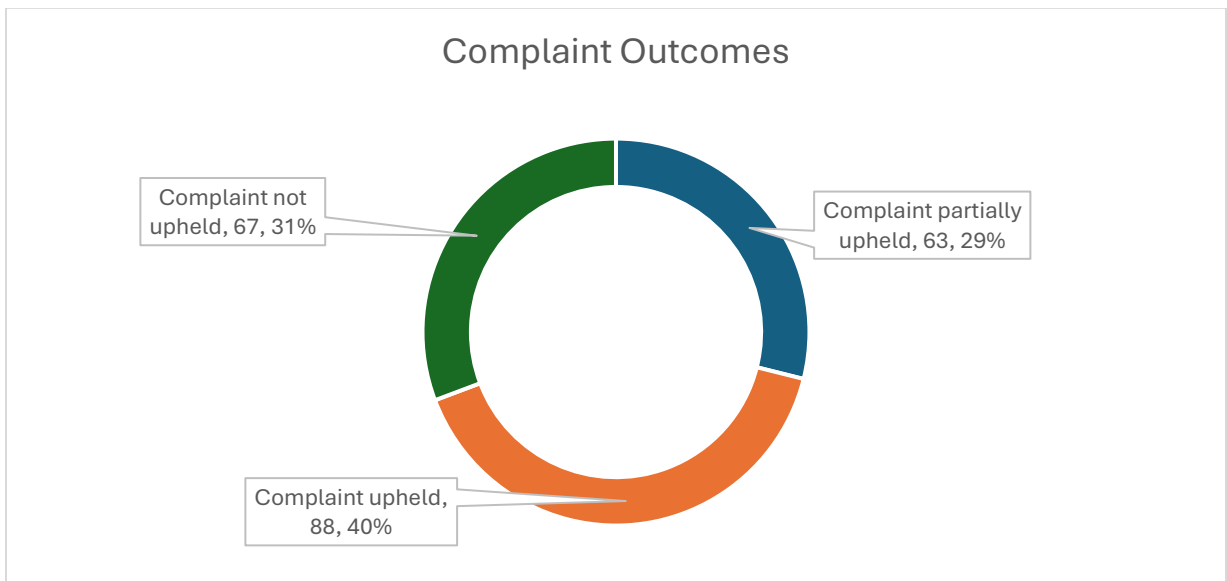


## 5.3

### Stage 1 complaint outcomes

Of the 218 complaints raised at Stage 1:

- 40% (88) upheld
- 31% (67) partially upheld
- 29% (63) not upheld.



## 5.4

### Learning Outcomes from stage 1 complaints

From the complaints that were upheld, different learning outcomes were identified. Where learning has been identified 40% (62) cite that better customer communication needed, of these 2/3 relate to Asset Management. When looking further in detail at the learnings for these complaints, the majority are breakdowns in communication, particularly where follow on works are required at properties. Customers feel frustrated at not knowing dates and times for these follow on works and there appears to be confusion over prioritisation of works.

These issues are raised at regular contractor meetings. One of the changes we have made is to establish a new email inbox, created specifically for Wrekin operatives to clearly identify follow on works required. This enables an email alert to the inbox at the point a follow on job is required, the message is received by Wrekin customer service team to follow through and arrange additional appointments and works. Issues still remain. These appear to be happening when follow on works are required by an alternative contractor and these are often the repairs that are becoming complaints. For example a leaking roof may be attended initially by Wrekin, but then handed over to a specialist contractor to complete additional works. This is something we will look at in more detail in the next quarter.

The following are examples of complaints which led to a process improvement:

- Out of Hours service response to a boiler repair. NPA used a previous and historic OOH pack, referring the customer to the wrong contractor. This has been addressed with our lead contact at NPA, we have been assured that previous packs have been destroyed and we will monitor this moving forward..
- A damp and mould complaint where our Customer 1<sup>st</sup> Team incorrectly escalated to the asset management team rather than to Wrekin. It transpired there was confusion about this which often caused delays. Communication about our damp and mould process has been highlighted with the team at one of their regular meetings. Damp and Mould must first be directed to our responsive repairs contractor, so that treatment can be completed before deciding whether a full damp survey is required.
- A complaint about the standard of a home after moving in, the customer raised a number of issues with faulty items such as kitchen fan, bathroom extractor fan, kitchen light, kitchen cupboards and nicotine / smoke stains on doors and vents.

The void letttable standard is currently being reviewed to identify changes that might assist in avoiding this for the future. Clear information is required to avoid vague or misleading expectations .

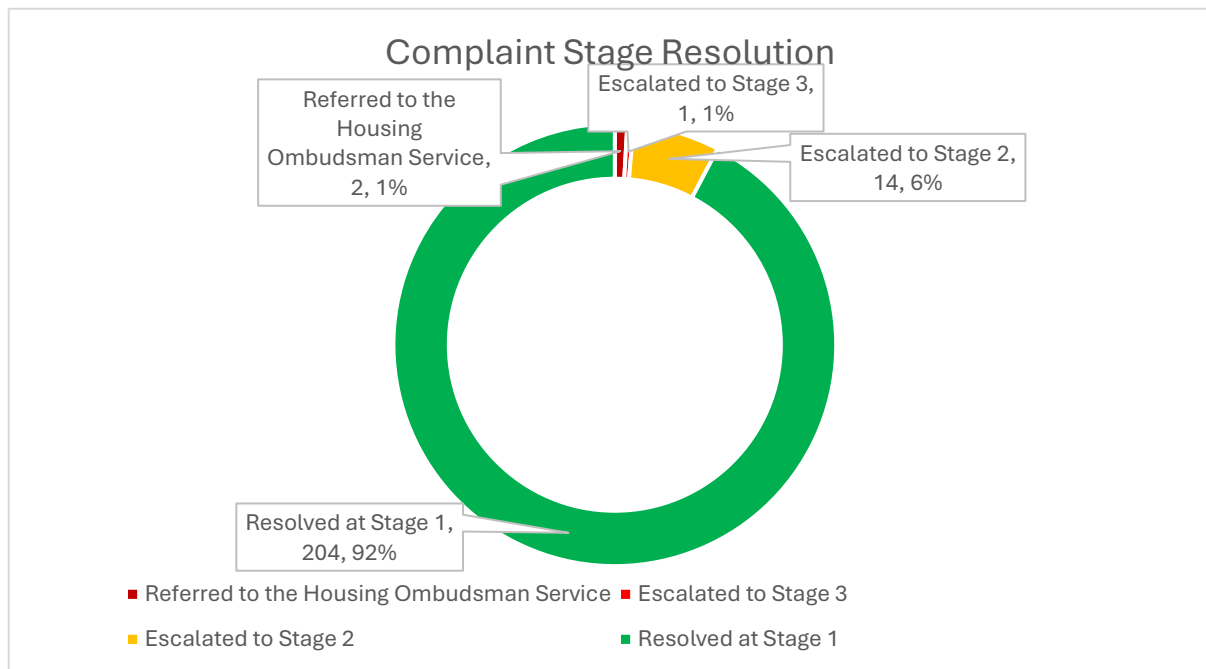
- A case was escalated to the ombudsman regarding our handling of a right to buy application. There are data errors which have led to this case escalating to the Ombudsman. Our IT team have been working hard to resolve the data issues around the Preserved Right To Buy status on MRI (our housing management software) and they are confident that this will eliminate any discrepancies and will avoid any further errors. In addition to the above, we have arranged for Right To Buy/Right To Acquire training to take place on Thursday 25th April 2024. This is being delivered by Capsticks Solicitors and all members of staff who deal with the Right To Buy/Right To Acquire process have been invited to receive this training.
- We received two complaints in the year regarding the cleaning standards from our cleaning contractor. As an outcome we have recruited the complainants to become block champions, who assess the quality of the cleaning on a weekly basis and send their feedback via an online feedback.

## 5.5

### Stage 2 Complaints

Of the 218 Stage 1 complaints that were raised, 14 complaints were then escalated to Stage 2. These complaints related to:

- 9 Asset Management
- 4 Housing and Customer Services
- 1 Asset management and Housing & Customer services



With the latest changes from The Housing Ombudsman, from April 2024 we can no longer offer an optional 3<sup>rd</sup> stage to our complaints process. Therefore, it is with greater scrutiny that our Stage 2 complaints should be monitored. While these complaints will still go to Heads of Service for resolution, it is planned that from 2024/25 ELT have more visibility of these complaints. This action has been taken following feedback from our Group Board complaints lead Rose Klemperer.

## 5.6

### **Current Ombudsman Complaints**

Our experience is that the numbers of cases where the ombudsman has become involved has increased over the last year across the sector. The ombudsman is extremely proactive and has been marketing their service robustly. The detail of the complaints that have been escalated to the ombudsman are as follows:

5.7

#### **(2023/24) Complaint: 202313020**

The complaint is about:

- The landlord's handling of reports of anti-social behaviour.
- The landlord's handling of window and door replacement works.
- The landlord's handling of reports of damp and mould.
- The landlord's handling of a request for rehousing

The outstanding issues

The resident reports ongoing ASB, a delay in delivering window and door renewal work, damp and mould in the property since 2018/19, and the need for rehousing given she applied when pregnant in 2021.

5.8

#### **(2023/24) Complaint: 202341087**

The complaint is about:

5.9

- The handling of the right to buy application.

#### **(2022/23) Complaint: 202301207**

The complaint is about the landlord's handling of:

- The resident's request for a wet room to be installed.
- The resident's reports of antisocial behaviour issues.
- The resident's request to be re-accommodated.

The outstanding issues:

- The resident has explained that they have since moved to alternative accommodation but remains dissatisfied with the landlord's handling of the issues reported.

A copy of the Stage 1 and 2 responses for these complaints can be made available for Board should they be required.

5.10

### **Satisfaction with complaints handling**

Overall satisfaction with complaint handling is at 67.5% for the year 2023/24, these numbers are from a sample of 45 completed surveys in the year. 70% of customers asked were satisfied with the outcome of the complaint. Our Target for satisfaction is 80%. To improve this figure moving forward. There are a number of actions we will take that we believe should make an impact on the levels of satisfaction. These include ensuring the communication with customers is increased by further training for staff and an increase in more 'active' communication such as letter writing. We are also reviewing the complaints handling software to see how transactional improvements can be made to support the process.

It is important to note that these figures will vary from the figures that are being captured as part of the Tenant Satisfaction Measures. The figure that is captured here is from our transactional complaints satisfaction survey, a customer will have received their complaint response and is asked to provide feedback within 4 weeks of the

complaint being closed. This allows for feedback to be captured while the experience is still fresh in the memory of the customer.

The TSM question regarding complaint handling is more of a perception question, it is a follow-on question for customers who answer that they have submitted a complaint in the last 12 months.

Where comments have been left by customers, the reasons for dissatisfaction in complaint handling is often that they do not receive much contact with the investigating officer, in some instances just receiving an outcome letter. In the coming year Investigating Officers will be required to complete mandatory letter writing and complaint handling workshops. It is often frontline managers who are investigating, handling and resolving complaints alongside their day to day work schedule.

We are currently reviewing the complaint handling software capabilities within MRI and are hopeful that some tweaks can be made to develop action plans in the system. This will prompt contact from the investigating officers at an earlier stage in the process. In the interim we will also be implementing a courtesy call from the Customer 1<sup>st</sup> Advisors within the first 5 days of the complaint to ensure customers have received some contact from us, as part of the complaint.

## 5.11

### **Searchlight Review on Complaints**

In Quarter 1 2024/25 our Resident Scrutiny Panel (Searchlight) will be working on a comprehensive review of our complaints process, looking at each stage of the process from the acknowledgement and understanding of the complaints, through to the resolution and follow through of complaints.

## **6.GOVERNING BODY RESPONSE TO ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT**

This report was taken to our Resident Led Committee panel on May 15<sup>th</sup> 2024 and to our Governing Body, Pioneer Group Board on May 22<sup>nd</sup> 2024. The report was scrutinised and challenged by board members. Board members considered the themes and trends from complaints received and are confident that the learning that is in place or in development will support continuous improvement in the association's handling of complaints.

Our annual self-assessment was also taken to our Governing Body, Pioneer Group Board and approved on June 17<sup>th</sup> 2024 as an accurate reflection of the association's position. Pioneer Group Board and the Resident Led Committee will continue to receive regular performance updates to ensure the improvements are delivered and the tenant's experience remains paramount. As required in Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code, this annual report will be published on The Pioneer Group's website.