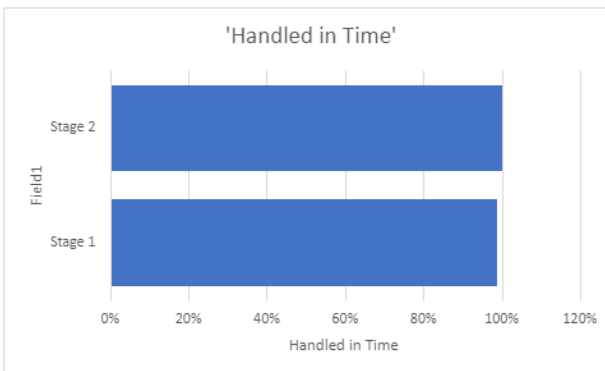
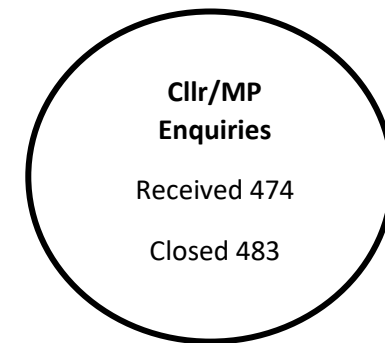
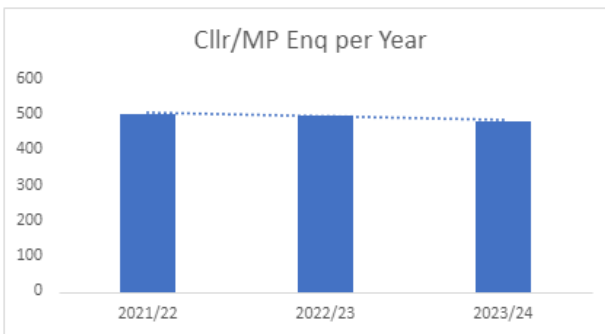
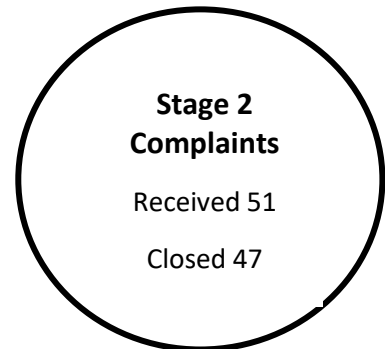
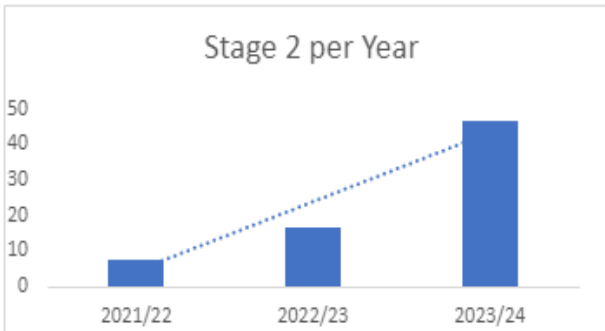
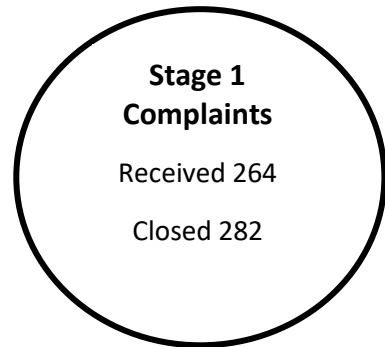
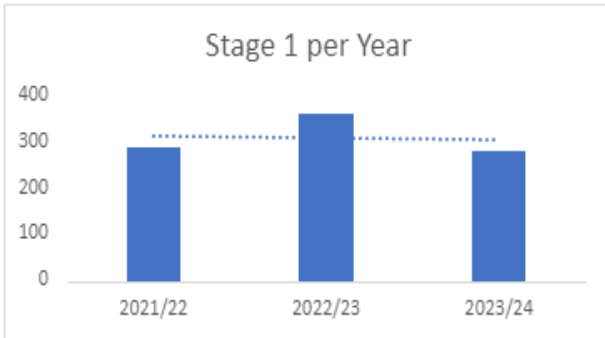




Report to:	STOCKPORT HOMES MEMBER COMMITTEE		
	<i>01 July 2024</i>		
Report of:	DIRECTOR OF HOUSING PLUS		
Contact Officer and contact details	Chris Czyzyk, Customer Experience Manager <i>07929829955 chris.czyzyk@stockporthomes.org</i>		
Type of Report	<i>Assurance</i>		
Title of Report:	YEAR END 2023/24 CUSTOMER FEEDBACK REPORT		
Purpose of Report:	This report provides the Members Committee with details of feedback received during 2023/24.		
Recommendation(s):	That Members Committee note and comment on the contents of this report.		
Confidentiality	Non Confidential		
Resource Implications	There are no financial or value for money implications arising directly from the recommendations of this report.		
Impact on Risk Appetite and Risk Register	SHG has a 'minimal' or 'averse' appetite for anything that might harm the organisation's reputation or relationships with its customers, or put their safety as risk, so this report gives assurance about how services are perceived by customers and for any areas of concern to be addressed.		
	Risk Number	Risk Description	Risk Mitigation
	Reputation, Key Relationships and Decision Making	Minimal	SHG do not wish to adversely affect its reputation within the sector and with stakeholders. SHG want to ensure there are robust and transparent

			processes in place to ensure effective decision making takes place.
	<i>n/a</i>	Customers are unable to raise issues in a timely and effective manner	SHG's customer feedback process is open and transparent and enables customers to raise any issue as a complaint. Details of complaints received and learning are included in the report.
Customer Voice	The report analyses customer feedback about Stockport Homes' services. Any areas for improvement are communicated to leaders to improve the service received by customers. The report demonstrates improvements and changes implemented in response to customers' concerns.		
Equality, Diversity & Inclusion implications	Diversity monitoring forms part of the data analysis for the report. It has not highlighted any significant issues faced by customers with protected characteristics, or other groups, when using the customer feedback service.		
Regulatory compliance	The Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard requires Providers to ensure that the views of tenants inform the setting of the strategic direction of the organisation and decisions about the management of housing services. This report provides information that will inform business planning and service improvement and gives insight into the lived experience of customers.		

VISUAL EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 01.04.23 to 31.03 24



COMPLAINT HANDLING BENCHMARKING OVERVIEW

The table below provides an overview of SHG’s relative complaint handling performance regionally through comparison with data provided by Greater Manchester Housing Providers (GMHP). Landlords are required to record this data and provide this to the Regulator for Social Housing on an annual basis.

Measure	SHG	GMHP	SHG performance
Stage 1 Complaints received (per 1,000 homes)	23.0	Average 60.3 Quartile 1 30.3 Quartile 3 80.5	Quartile 1
Stage 2 Complaints received (per 1,000 homes)	4.4	Average 5.8 Quartile 1 4.1 Quartile 3 6.1	Quartile 2
Stage 1 Complaints responded to in time¹	98.9%	Average 89.8% Quartile 1 100% Quartile 3 81.9%	Quartile 1
Stage 2 Complaints responded to in time²	100%	Average 93.7% Quartile 1 100% Quartile 3 90.7%	Quartile 1
TSM TP09 Satisfaction with Landlord’s Handling of Complaints	61.5%	Average 39% Quartile 1 42% Quartile 3 34%	Quartile 1

¹ In accordance with the HOS’ Complaint Handling Code, this includes Stage 1 complaints handled within 10 working days, or up to 20 working days where an extension has been agreed with the complainant.

² In accordance with the HOS’ Complaint Handling Code, this includes Stage 2 complaints handled within 20 working days, or up to 30 working days where an extension has been agreed with the complainant.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Customer feedback is analysed quarterly and presented to the Executive Leadership Team and the Customer Focus Committee (Board). This Year End report provides Members Committee with an update on customer feedback received in 2023/24.
- 1.2 Detailed analysis of formal complaints, service requests, MP and Councillor Enquires and Housing Ombudsman cases is provided. Limitations remain in relation to reporting on Compliments and work is ongoing to improve this.

2. CUSTOMER FEEDBACK OVERVIEW

- 2.1 There were 264 Stage 1 complaints received and 282 complaints closed during the first four quarters of the year. This indicates a significant decrease against the same period of 2023/24 (360 closed, decrease of 78,22%). 54 of these were closed in the fourth quarter, a notable decrease against the same quarter of 2022/23 (97 closed, decrease of 43, 44%). Analysis of this reduction is provided later in the report. There were 10 Stage 1 complaints at open status at the end of the fourth quarter. These were all handled within timescale.
- 2.2 In the fourth quarter, 20 (37%) complaints were upheld, 12 (22%) were partly upheld and 22 (41%) were not upheld. This means that of the 54 Stage 1 complaints which received an outcome in the quarter, evidence of service failure³ was found in 32 (59%) cases. This marks a significant increase against the third quarter (46%) and is more in-keeping with the second quarter (63%⁴), and the same period of last year (65%). This suggests that the reduction seen in the third quarter was likely an anomaly.
- 2.3 51 complaints were progressed to Stage 2 of the Customer Feedback Process during the year. 14 were received during the fourth quarter. 47 were closed during the year, of which 15 were during the fourth quarter. Of these, two were resolved with the resident without need for Stage 2 investigation. Of the other 13, two (15%) were upheld, three (23%) were partly upheld, and eight (62%) were not upheld. Four Stage 2 cases were at open status at the end of the year but are within timescale. This demonstrates a notable increase in the volume of complaints escalating to Stage 2, with 17 having been responded to in the entirety of 2022/23 (increase of 30, 276%), Further analysis of this trend is provided later in the report.
- 2.4 There were a total of 474 Councillor and MP Enquiries received and 483 closed during the year, which is broadly consistent with the number closed in the same period in the previous year (499, decrease of 16, 3%). Of these, 71 were closed in the fourth quarter, against 158 in same period last year (reduction of 87, 55%). This is analysed later in the report. Further detail on Councillor and MP Enquiries received in the fourth quarter is available in Table ii of Appendix One.

³ Where the customer has suffered detriment owing to the actions or lack of action by the organisation, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, and/or the service provided to a customer has fallen below standards as set out in Policy and Procedure or as determined by relevant legislation or law.

⁴ This was based on limited data

- 2.5 During the year 198 compliments were recorded by the Customer Feedback Team, a decrease against the same period of last year (258, decrease of 60, 23%). At this time, it is not possible to report against service area or the nature of compliments received to understand what may be behind this reduction.

3. CUSTOMER FEEDBACK PERFORMANCE

- 3.1 279 (99%) of the 282 Stage 1 complaints closed were completed within the timeframe set by the Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS) Complaint Handling Code⁵. Of those closed 'in-time', nine were subject to an agreed extension with the customer. These are considered as 'in-time' responses for the purposes of the Tenant Satisfaction Measure⁶. The HOS have recognised that complaints are increasingly complex and have guided that they expect landlords to reasonably utilise extensions more frequently. Three cases were responded to within 12 days, without an agreed extension, and so categorised as a complaint handling failure⁷. Accordingly, performance on 'Stage 1 complaints handled within time' finished on 99% for the year. This places SHG in the first quartile based upon year end GMHP benchmarking data.
- 3.2 All the 47 Stage 2 cases completed within the year were handled within timescales set by the HOS Complaint Handling Code⁸. In the third quarter, one case was subject to an agreed extension. Performance on 'Stage 2 complaints handled within time' is at 100%. This places SHG's performance in the first quartile.
- 3.3 The average number of days to handle Stage 1 complaints was ten working days in the fourth quarter, with the average over the year being nine days. Of the 54 complaints closed, 7 (13%) were done so within the first seven working days. While speediness of response and resolution can be critical with respect to reassuring customers and preventing escalation, timescales are also reflective of the need to take a thorough approach to complaint investigations, preventing the need for further escalation. Recent Ombudsman determinations, both with respect to SHG and other landlords, highlight an increasing approach and propensity to make judgements of maladministration where any instance of failure is identified, irrespective of a generally high standard of service having been provided throughout the totality of the complaint in question. As a result, Stage 1 investigations and responses are increasingly detailed, with this being particularly the case with respect to complaints relating to property maintenance, including damp, mould and condensation.
- 3.4 The revised Customer Feedback Procedure introduced at the start of 2024/25 creates places greater emphasis on timescales for different stages of complaint handling, aimed at ensuring speedier contact and resolution with

⁵ This stipulates 10 working days, plus an extension of 10 working days by agreement with the customer for Stage 1 complaints.

⁶ % of Stage 1 complaints handled within timescale

⁷ One case in Q2, owing to Assets Manager failure, two cases in Q3 – one owing to failure in handover of case between Safer Neighbourhoods Team Leaders, one owing to failure by Customer Feedback Team to track and respond within deadline.

⁸ This stipulates 20 working days, plus an extension of 10 working days by agreement with the customer for Stage 2 complaints.

the customer, and allowing the Customer Feedback Team sufficient time to ensure quality of response and customer engagement. It is expected that this will result in a reduction in the average complaint handling time, although it remains the case that complexity will likely drive several permitted case extensions.

- 3.5 Of the Councillor and MP Enquiries received in the quarter, all were responded to within 10 working days, with an average response time of five working days. For the whole year, two (<1%) were responded to beyond 10 days.
- 3.6 Undertaking customer surveys based upon the Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs) became a regulatory requirement at the start of the year. The TSMs include measures relating to 'effective management of complaints'.
- 3.7 The TSMs include a tenant perception question. (TP9 Satisfaction with the landlord's approach to handling of complaints): 'Have you made a complaint to your landlord in the last 12 months? If yes, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with your landlord's approach to complaints handling?'
- 3.8 During the year, 156 customers have responded 'yes' to having made a complaint within the last 12 months. It is important to note that only nine of these customers had raised a formal complaint through the Customer Feedback process prior to responding. A further one customer had been the subject of an MP or Councillor Enquiry, and seven had their query recorded as a Service Request, where the Customer Feedback Team had provided a quick resolution. 139 (89%) respondents had not had a case handled through the Customer Feedback Team in the 12 months previous. This indicates that customer perceptions of complaint handling are influenced by a wide range of factors, and that customers have a broad definition of 'complaint'. Further customer engagement is planned in 2024/25 to understand customer perceptions and identify what changes can be made to ensure that customers understand the various ways SHG deals with customer issues.
- 3.9 Of all respondents, 96 (62%) responded positively⁹, 31 (20%) as 'neither/nor', and 29 (19%) gave a negative¹⁰ response. This is strong performance based upon recent sector benchmarking as detailed in the table above, with top quartile GM performance being 42%. This is also apparent from a national perspective. While full data has not yet been provided, based on submissions from approximately 170 providers nationally to Housemark, top quartile performance is at 45%.
- 3.10 When analysing how customers responded to the question TP09, along with their response to the overall satisfaction question TP01 'Taking everything into account, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the service provided by [your landlord]?' it is evident that there is strong relationship between customers' overall satisfaction with SHG and their satisfaction with how SHG deals with complaints. Of all customers who responded to TP01, 91% responded positively. However, of the 156 who also responded to TP09, only

⁹ Very Satisfied 19 (12%), Satisfied 74 (47%), Fairly Satisfied 3 (2%)

¹⁰ Very Dissatisfied 15 (10%), Dissatisfied 7 (4%), Fairly Dissatisfied 7 (4%)

74% (113) gave a positive response showing significant less overall satisfaction amongst the customer base who also responded to TP09.

- 3.11 It is not possible to draw conclusions from the data in terms of causality, but it is likely that there is a two-way relationship in terms of customers having a negative overall perception of SHG being more likely to have a negative view of SHG's approach to complaint handling, and vice-versa.
- 3.12 It is also notable that survey methodology had a significant impact upon satisfaction rates. Of the 156 responses, 29 were received via a digital survey. None of the 29 resulted in positive responses. When looking into these in more detail, no respondents had made formal complaints, and only three had had any contact with the Customer Feedback Team by way of Service Requests. This reiterates that customer definitions of having made a complaint are broad, and do not always reconcile with the common understanding that the TSM is aimed at measuring performance relating to formal complaints.
- 3.13 In the limited instances where comments were provided by respondents, some of the themes were of general neighbour nuisance (where customers may consider a report of this to have been a 'complaint' about a neighbour) and very historic repairs issues. This is consistent across both surveying methodologies.
- 3.14 Housemark report that customer satisfaction throughout the sector is on a long-term downwards trend, and it is apparent that landlords are experiencing a similar challenge with respect to this measure. As per current benchmarking data provided by Housemark for 2023/24, the median score on this measure was 36% satisfaction. TSM data shared via the Greater Manchester Housing Partnership (GMHP) at year end gave a range between 24% and 62% satisfaction for providers in the area, with SHG therefore continuing to perform well within the wider context of the sector. More accurate benchmarking will be available once all landlords are required to publish their TSM data, in Quarter Two of 2024.
- 3.15 Given the need to ensure that customers have confidence in the Customer Feedback process, and the need for an effective complaint handling process as a means of minimising escalation and associated risk, a review of the approach to complaint handling was undertaken by the Customer Scrutiny Panel in the third quarter. Several recommendations were subsequently presented, which are aimed at improving the customer experience through the formal complaints process. This included a recommendation for a transactional satisfaction survey¹¹, which has also been subject to review and re-design. This has been implemented for 2024/25 and will provide a more detailed understanding of customers' experience, complementing the TSM data. Details of responses will be provided within this report going forwards. Additionally, training is being delivered to customer-facing teams in order to more effectively explain to residents if issues are being dealt with through the formal complaints process, or their option to do so, in order to minimise

¹¹ All customers who have made a formal complaint will receive a quick survey about their experience and satisfaction relating to the handling of the complaint. Customers who are not satisfied will be asked a range of further questions to detail what elements of the service is driving their dissatisfaction.

instances where customers believe they have raised a complaint and this is not the case, such as where they are making a request for a service.

4. CUSTOMER PROFILING

- 4.1 The profiles of customers who have made complaints is analysed to identify any potential inadvertent barriers to accessing the complaints process which may be faced by different customer groups, in particular relating to relevant protected characteristics as set out by the Equality Act¹². Understanding the profile of the customers who are complaining is also a requirement of the HOS Code and is important also to assist landlords with 'finding their silences'.
- 4.2 A detailed view of complainant profiles for the fourth quarter is provided in Appendix Three. Work is underway to provide richer analysis of customer profiles in future reports, with the intention to draw insights around the relationship between customer groups and dissatisfaction around specific issues or service areas. This will allow targeted intervention and improvements, demonstrating SHG are making steps to find its 'silences' and meet the needs of all customers, as per the requirement of Consumer Standards Regulations¹³
- 4.3 Analysis of the profile of customers who accessed the formal complaints process in the fourth quarter shows a high degree of correlation with the wider customer population and does not point to any evident barriers in customers being able to access the service. Detail is available in Appendix Three. A longer-term analysis will bring richer insights, which will continue through 2024/25.

5. HOUSING OMBUDSMAN SERVICE

- 5.1 Seven judgements have been received from the Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS) during the year. One further case was determined to be 'outside jurisdiction'. Further detail of these cases can be found in Appendix Two.
- 5.2 For 2023/24 SHG had a maladministration rate of 59%¹⁴. The HOS have reported that the maladministration rate for the sector as of Q3 2023/24 is 72% (up from 59% YoY), along with a 91% increase in cases reaching them. Landlord's with above average maladministration rate for the year have previously been highlighted in the HOS' Annual Report. The HOS are projecting a 50-80% increase in caseload again in the coming year. This gives context to SHG's performance and indicates that the volume of cases

¹² These are: age; disability; gender reassignment; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; sexual orientation.

¹³ Expectation 2.1 Diverse Needs: 2.1.1 Registered providers must use relevant information and data to:

- a) understand the diverse needs of tenants, including those arising from protected characteristics, language barriers, and additional support needs; and
- b) assess whether their housing and landlord services deliver fair and equitable outcomes for tenants.

¹⁴ This is calculated based on individual findings against substantive issues for each case, where one case can have multiple findings. SHG have received three (14%) findings of 'reasonable redress', seven (32%) of 'service failure', one (5%) of 'maladministration', two (9%) of 'severe maladministration' and nine (41%) findings of 'no maladministration'.

reaching the HOS and SHG's maladministration rate is expected to be lower than the sector as a whole, on average.

- 5.3 Five new investigations have been opened by the HOS in 2023/24, three of these during the fourth quarter. A further case was opened in the first quarter of 2024/25 and there are five cases awaiting determination from the HOS at time of reporting, with judgements expected during 2024/25. The HOS are currently quoting up to 12 months for determinations to be made. This is a relatively low number of cases within the context of ongoing elevated sector-wide HOS caseload. However, it is expected that this number will rise in accordance with sector-wide trends, and this poses an operational challenge. Capacity in the Customer Feedback Team is being increased to help meet this demand. Further detail of these is available in Appendix Two.

Revised Complaint Handling Code

- 5.4 The HOS revised Code became statutory on 1st April, with landlords having until 30th June to become compliant, through self-assessment. Revisions to the Code are minor following consultation with landlords and subsequent removal of the most significant and concerning proposed changes. Initial assessment determined that SHG was mostly compliant with the Code with further review is being undertaken along with implementation of minor actions to ensure compliance.
- 5.5 During the fourth quarter, SHG were registered onto the HOS' Case Management Portal. This is aimed at improving visibility of pending and historic cases and making sharing of information easier and timelier, without need to await email responses or call backs from HOS Case Officers. So far this has been found to be of some, but limited, use.

6. INSIGHTS, RISKS, AND IMPROVEMENTS

- 6.1 The data for the year indicates some trends with respect to volumes of complaints and enquiries received across service areas. As seen in Table i of Appendix One, there were small fluctuations across many service areas. Most notably, there was a significant reduction (from 167 to 111, decrease of 56, 34%) in complaints for Maintenance and Commercial Services when compared with the same period last year. This was trend was most apparent in the second half of the year, and this is the primary cause of the overall reduction in Stage 1 complaints handled by the organisation. There has also been a significant reduction in the volume of complaints received for Carecall and Concierge (from 22 to 12, decrease of 45%) following an increase which had been seen across the previous two years. This resulted in a service review, with various changes having been enacted in the last year as described in a previous report, which have had a positive effect with regards to minimising customer dissatisfaction.
- 6.2 There has been a notable increase in complaints for Assets and Development (from 13 to 22, increase of 9, 41%), with six of these having been received in the fourth quarter. Of these only one complaint was upheld, with five not upheld. Analysis of the complaints indicates that they were primarily driven by disagreement about the nature or scope of works required to the property,

where decisions on this were deemed to be fair and reasonable and in accordance with policy and landlord obligations.

- 6.3 Maintaining relatively low numbers of complaints within services such as Maintenance and Commercial Services, Housing Options, and Safer Neighbourhoods (formerly ASB) is positive given the challenges that each of these services are facing, linked to wider trends in the sector, such as increased demand for repairs and frequency of anti-social behaviour, and the acute shortage of affordable housing. While the challenge around these services continues, the drop in complaints against the same period last year indicates that these service areas have been effective in adjusting to meet these challenges and customer needs, while some customers may also have an increased appreciation of factors, such as which contribute to the wider 'Housing Crisis', which are outside of SHG's control, reducing the propensity to complain.
- 6.4 The reduction in complaints may also point to ongoing improved effectiveness of dealing with customer concerns prior to escalation to the formal complaints process. With respect to responsive repairs, this is linked in part to the continuation of improved communications and responsiveness between the One Number Team and Three Sixty managers as per an agreed process for triaging customer concerns introduced in the first quarter. As part of this approach, the Customer Feedback Team handled 54 service requests for Maintenance and Commercial Services in the fourth quarter, which were readily resolved to the customers' satisfaction. This reflects the nature of many customer contacts relating to Maintenance and Commercial Services, for instance, where making a new appointment or arranging provision of service is the customer's desired outcome and promptly resolves the issue.
- 6.5 As the ability to track service requests was new functionality introduced with Civica CX, there is currently limited comparative data to understand if there is a trend towards more effective early resolution as a factor in minimising complaint volumes for this service area specifically, though there is potential that this may offer an opportunity going forward. Continuation of this approach is subject to ensuring compliance with the HOS Code, the requirements of which the Customer Feedback Team are familiar with, and so continue to ensure that customers do not face any undue barriers in accessing the formal process. In the coming months the Customer Feedback Team will commence with transactional satisfaction surveys for customers whose issues have been dealt with as a Service Request. This is aimed at providing further assurance that customers are satisfied with their issues having been dealt with effectively through this process.
- 6.6 Of the 32 upheld/partly upheld complaints, 19 (59%) were relating to Maintenance and Commercial Services. This is in accordance with the overall rate of upheld/partly upheld cases (also 59%), although in previous quarters upheld rates for this service were higher than the rest of the organisation. Of all the complaints closed in the year, 40% (111 of 282) related to the delivery of responsive repairs. This is a decrease in terms of proportion of complaints handled overall when compared with last year 46%, although dissatisfaction with this service is still the predominant driver of complaints across the organisation.

- 6.7 In keeping with historic and long-term trends, complaints upheld and partly upheld for this service area were found to be most often owing to 'repeated repairs/time taken', which is consistent across the year and in previous years. While the overall volume of complaints of this nature has reduced, this does suggest that extended timeframes for repairs and follow-on works continues to drive dissatisfaction, which efforts on reducing the volume of Work In Progress (WIP) has not fully resolved. The service review being carried out aims to reduce completion times for repairs and improve communications with customers with respect to timescales.
- 6.8 During the year, SHG commenced additional digital satisfaction surveys following completion of day-to-day repairs which has yielded a high volume of insightful data. Analysis of this data suggests that customers are generally satisfied with timescales to complete repairs where this occurs within 60 working days (with the target being 30 for most repairs), but satisfaction decreases significantly where repairs are completed beyond this timescale. This correlates with complaints and suggests that targeting and prioritising repairs for completion which are beyond the 30-day target time will be effective in improving satisfaction and reducing formal complaints. The target should remain to complete all repairs within timescale, with this also being measured by a TSM.
- 6.9 Monthly 'Repairs - Customer Voice' meetings have commenced which provides opportunity for the Assistant Director of Three Sixty, Assistant Director of Assets and Development, Head of Customer Service and Customer Experience Manager to review drivers of dissatisfaction, as well as evidence of good practice, relating to delivery of the repairs service. This is aimed at agreeing and implementing operational improvements based upon formal and informal customer feedback from complaints and satisfaction survey responses.
- 6.10 The fourth quarter saw a marked decrease in enquiries received from Councillors and MPs when compared against the same period of last year. This is especially notable, as this bucks the trend seen in the first two quarters of the year, which saw significantly elevated levels of Councillor and MP contact, albeit the third quarter also saw a significant reduction. This is somewhat unexpected owing to the Council elections in early 2024/25 which often causes an increase in the volume of contacts. Analysis suggests that this reduction continues to predominantly be seen relating to Housing Options and Allocations. While this remains the most common reason for contact (24 cases, 34%), the volume has seemingly begun to curtail over the second half of the year. This may reflect an increasing understanding amongst customers seeking rehousing of the external factors which are feeding into the 'Housing Crisis', reducing the frequency of contacts with elected members. This, along with the migration to the new IT system which provides more clarity to customers about their situation with respect to rehousing may mean that fewer queries are being made of this nature. Should this trend continue, it is highly positive as this release's capacity back into the service area to target support to customers where this is most effective.

Stage 2 Cases

- 6.11 The significant increase in Stage 2 cases in-part reflects the impact of the HOS' Code of Complaint Handling and raised profile of the HOS. This has had the effect of further raising awareness of the formal complaints process and option to escalate to the HOS. This approach is emphasised by the HOS revised Code which provides additional clarity around how landlords deal with escalation requests and removes any uncertainty relating to 'informal' actions between stages. Anecdotally, peers in the sector also report a significant increase in Stage 2 case volume. It is anticipated that the elevated number of Stage 2 cases will continue.
- 6.12 62% of Stage 2 cases during the fourth quarter were not upheld, and findings were predominantly in line with Stage 1 judgements. In some cases, additional awards of compensation, or gestures of goodwill were made, along with additional provision of service. For instance, in one case relating to damp, mould and condensation (DMC), the complaint was not upheld, but additional above and beyond improvement paving works were agreed by a Head of Service to alleviate the customers unsubstantiated concerns about penetrating dampness.
- 6.13 Of the cases heard, the most common substantive issue was relating to DMC, of which there were three (23%). Of these, one was upheld, and one partly upheld. The other case, as described above, was not upheld. The other Stage 2 cases covered a wide range of substantive issues. In total there were 10 (63%) which related to property maintenance and improvement, across Assets and Maintenance and Commercial services. This reflects the nature and volume of cases seen at Stage 1, but also suggests that concerns around property condition are often the most contentious and difficult to resolve. Although the standard of Stage 1 responses in relation to property maintenance issues is already high, the revised Customer Feedback Procedure aims to promote ownership of complaints amongst service area managers, and it is hoped that this will minimise instances of escalation to Stage 2. Work is ongoing with these service areas to reinforce this approach.
- 6.14 In accordance with the new Customer Feedback Procedure, all Stage 2 cases will be followed up with a learning meeting with relevant managers, with any actions being agreed and monitored for implementation. While this has happened in some cases previously, this will improve visibility of learning from Stage 2 cases going forwards.

Termination Surveys

- 6.15 This survey is completed by tenants on ending a tenancy, whether they are moving to another Stockport Homes property or elsewhere. While there are multiple reasons why a resident terminates their tenancy, survey responses can provide further insight into customer dissatisfaction. In 2023/24 there were 556 terminations, and a total of 136 tenants completed the survey (response rate of 24%).
- 6.16 The survey asks residents to express their satisfaction in relation to 'Your Home', 'Your Area' and 'SHG as a Landlord', with overall levels of satisfaction being 60%, 52% and 68% respectively. While it is expected that terminating tenants are likely to have lower levels of satisfaction, where respondents

provided further explanation of their dissatisfaction this has been analysed to understand how this relates to insights drawn from formal complaints.

- 6.17 Of the 36 respondents who provided further detail, where multiple reasons may be cited, there were 24 references to anti-social behaviour, and nine references to disrepair. Where anti-social behaviour was cited, this related a trend seen across formal complaints whereby customer expectations with respect to possible outcomes (for instance, rehousing and eviction) are not always achievable based upon the evidence of the case. Further work is planned to better set customer expectations at the beginning of ASB cases. With regards to repairs, this continues to be a predominant driver of customer dissatisfaction, but as set out above, volumes of complaints relating to this service are falling, and overall satisfaction with the service remains high.

'Complex' Repairs; Damp, Mould, and Condensation

- 6.18 As indicated in previous reports, failure to effectively handle repairs, (particularly where customer vulnerabilities or behaviours and the nature of a property defect create a high level of complexity and/or impact upon the customer) poses a high-level risk in terms of the potential to drive complaints, adverse HOS judgements, and reputational damage. The HOS state the following requirement within their 'Spotlight on Damp and Mould':

'Landlords need to ensure they can identify complex cases at an early stage and have a strategy for keeping residents informed and effective resolution.'

- 6.19 Several concerning cases have been raised over the last year which indicate that the effective handling of complex cases must be an area of ongoing focus and improvement. This requirement is being fed into ongoing and continuous review of the repairs service. Improvements will aim to improve the ability to manage and respond flexibly to high-priority cases, particularly where customers are being significantly impacted, as failure in such cases leaves SHG exposed to severe maladministration rulings from the HOS. Such an approach would also minimise exposure to Legal Disrepair claims. While review of this is ongoing, as detailed in section 7, it is apparent that a very large proportion of claims involve reports of DMC and can be driven by inadequate timescales in resolving issues and poor communication with customers around pending works. These are themes common to formal complaints relating to DMC.

- 6.20 There were 33 complaints handled pertaining to 'damp, mould and condensation' (DMC) during the year, with five (15%) handled in the fourth quarter. There were also 8 Councillor and MP contacts on this issue in the quarter. The reduction in complaints in the fourth quarter is promising, but this may be indicative of seasonal weather changes. Of the five complaints received, three (60%) were either upheld or partly upheld. This is an increase against previous quarters, but it is difficult to draw firm conclusions from a small data set. DMC remains a high profile and emotive issue, with continuing focus from the HOS and the proposed Awaab's Law. It is expected that this focus will continue to inform customer concerns and drive complaints.

Customer Vulnerability and Reasonable Adjustment

- 6.21 In the fourth quarter, the HOS published 'Spotlight on attitudes, respect and rights – relationship of equals'. This document makes a wide range of

recommendations, for both Government and social housing providers, taking a broad focus. The report highlights the increasing level of customer vulnerability and complex needs within social housing, with this creating acute strain upon the sector. Nevertheless, there is a clear increased focus upon landlords' processes for identifying customer needs and making reasonable adjustment for them. Where this is not evident, the HOS are likely to find maladministration against landlords. Along with the Regulator's Consumer Standards, this creates a challenge to ensure that service delivery and decisions taken have sufficient flex to allow colleagues to make reasonable adjustments.

- 6.22 A judgement was received from the HOS in the first quarter of 2024/25 based on a case submitted in 2023/24, within which the customer had stated that SHG failed to make reasonable adjustment based upon their mental health needs. The HOS found no maladministration with respect to SHG's handling of their housing situation, including having made reasonable adjustments which recognised the customer's complex needs. However, through SHG's own review of the case, it was found that while the matter was handled effectively, clearer guidance through Policy and Procedure would have been beneficial. The Vulnerable Customer Policy has recently been completed and will support the organisation to meet this challenge and provide additional assurance, as it is rolled out across the organisation, including via training for all colleagues via the Litmos IT platform.
- 6.23 The Customer Feedback Team have received training to help identify where vulnerability exists and where there is a need to make reasonable adjustment for it. Officers are supporting service areas to ensure this is reflected in complaint responses.

7. LEGAL DISREPAIR

- 7.1 Social Housing residents have the right to take legal action against landlords where they believe there has been a failure to meet repairing and maintenance obligations. During the year, SHG received 81 new legal disrepair claims from its customers. This is a reduction of 29 (26%), although there is still a significant upwards trend in volume across the last five years, with 39 claims having been received in 2018/19.
- 7.2 While Legal Disrepair claims are not formal complaints per se and may be driven by several factors, such as extensive and concerted 'claims farming' by claims companies, they may indicate a high degree of customer dissatisfaction, and often result in long, drawn-out contention with customers which negatively effects the customer-landlord relationship. Claims can also indicate where failure has occurred and provide insights into areas for improvement.
- 7.3 SHG will do more to draw learning from Legal Disrepair cases, with more meaningful insights being drawn from cases, such as drivers of the claims and causes of any failure where liability has been accepted and/or claims settled. In addition, there is currently a limited view of wider costs associated with claims and the relationship between the nature of the claim (for instance, DMC/water ingress, property typology) meaning that it is not possible to fully understand the level of exposure from the current 284 active claims, or what

would constitute value for money by way of resolution via settlement or an Alternate Dispute Resolution mechanism, such as the Customer Feedback process and Compensation Policy.

- 7.4 SHG is reviewing its approach in terms of effective and early intervention with a view to minimising exposure to claims, and how it can maximise learning from claims to improve services and retain positive relationships with customers through the process, including more effective signposting to the Customer Feedback process. It is expected that this will create a basis for improved reporting on themes and trends relating to Legal Disrepair in the future.

8. LEARNING AND IMPROVEMENTS

- 8.1 All complaints and enquiries from MPs and councillors are reviewed to identify trends and learning opportunities. Additionally, sometimes ad-hoc learning points and improvements are determined and implemented following individual cases. Examples from the year include:

- Following a complaint relating to handling of reports of a leak in a high-rise building, a review led to an improved process for identifying leaks and gaining access where needed, to ensure timelier resolutions and minimising impact on customers.
- It was agreed that mould washes would be considered as separate works orders to associated plastering and decorating works, to ensure that mould washes can proceed irrespective of customers refusing associated works, minimising risk related to managing DMC reports.
- Three Sixty procured a new sub-contractor for installation of uPVC doors given performance issues with the existing supplier as identified through formal complaints.
- Protocol was changed within the Carecall service to notify next of kin contacts when non-urgent medical assistance has been requested, as they may be able to visit the service user and provide assistance and reassurance while awaiting an ambulance.

- 8.2 The Compensation Policy and Customer Feedback Procedure have been reviewed and rolled out across the organisation. These have been revised based upon learning from customer feedback, and reflect best practice drawn from this and HOS guidance and judgements, whilst being proactive in resolving issues and building relationships with customers.

Customer Experience Team

- 8.3 During the year SHG introduced the Customer Experience Team, giving additional focus to implementing learning from customer feedback, including formal complaints, at a high level. Work by the team has included:
- Review of the day-to-day repairs 'work in progress' (WIP) and informed decision to introduce additional resource to target the WIP and reduce the impact upon customers and risk to the organisation of very long-overdue repairs.

- Changes to how repairs appointments are communicated with customers, aimed at reducing the volume of ‘no access’ and improving the customer experience. Recommendations continue to be implemented, including utilising software to improve the frequency and detail of automated communications sent to customers about upcoming appointments, expected to be rolled-out in early 2024/25.
- Input provided to the wider review of the Repairs service based upon what drives customer dissatisfaction in relation to the service and promoting a customer-focussed approach within proposed changes.

9. CONCLUSION

- 9.1 Comparatively, the volume of formal Stage 1 complaints remains consistently lower through the full year. It is notable that volumes of service requests have risen, and this may be offering customers speedy resolution to a relatively low-level issue without needing to use the formal complaints process. It is positive that the HOS retained the opportunity for quick and effective resolution within their Code. The volume of Councillor and MP Enquiries remains high against previous years. .
- 9.2 The number of customers seeking to escalate their complaints to Stage 2 has increased nearly three-fold against the previous year. This creates an operational challenge, and higher risk of exposure to the Ombudsman. This increase is not unexpected within the context of the reduction in the number of void properties and extreme pressures placed on rehousing in Stockport at present. There are also increasing challenges in some areas with the increase of families having to remain in blocks. It also reflects the increased level of complexity of many of the complaints being handled. The Housing Ombudsman describes parts of the sector as being “at breaking point” in recent comments in support of the recent Spotlight Report. Clearly, SHG are better positioned than many providers in the sector but there is evident risk by way of exposure to what is perceived as an increasingly ‘harsh’ Housing Ombudsman that is more often making judgements of ‘maladministration’ and ‘severe maladministration’ in its investigations, where previously it did not. This places additional emphasis on effective resolution to customer’s concerns both prior to the formal process, and at Stage 1.
- 9.3 Plans for limited increase to capacity within the Customer Feedback Team with an additional officer, along with the new Customer Feedback Procedure and revised Compensation Policy provides a strong basis for meeting this increasing challenge, but it is important also that senior managers across the organisation support and promote timely and effective handling of complaints and implement learning from these.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 10.1 That Member’s Committee notes and comments on the contents of this report.