

Southdown's Annual Review of Complaints 2024-25

1. Introduction to the annual review of complaints 2024-25

This report summarises the client and tenant complaints received during 2024-25. It highlights numbers and types of complaints and gives an insight into emerging themes and issues.

We delivered services to nearly 12,000 people during the year 2024-25. Whilst delivering a quality service to our clients and tenants is at the heart of what we do, we recognise we don't always get it right. We welcome complaints and encourage clients and tenants to feedback. Our learning from complaints supports our ongoing review of service provision, and considerations of how we can improve our services to clients and tenants.

Southdown is both a care and support provider and a Registered Provider of Social Housing to tenants and shared owners. Our role as a landlord is overseen by the Board within the framework set for it by the Regulator of Social Housing.

We are, however, committed to providing data to allow scrutiny of our performance across all of our operations. This review therefore details complaints received across the whole of our organisation during the period 1st April 2024 to 31st March 2025.

We provide people with a mechanism to feed back to us positive and negative experiences. We encourage a culture of learning, where the focus is on resolution and continual improvement. Where possible, we take immediate action to put things right at the first point of contact, and where this is not possible, we operate a robust complaints procedure whilst continuing to seek a resolution of the client or tenants concerns.

In addition to our complaints process, we have a range of other mechanisms that enable us to capture the experience of clients and tenants in order to drive forward improvements. These are detailed in Section 8.

Although Board members receive appropriate levels of detail on complaints and complaint handling, some of the details of complaints in this report have been

generalised to protect the anonymity of clients, tenants, colleagues or members of the public involved.

2. The Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code

Our handling of complaints relating to our landlord functions is dictated by a framework set by the [Housing Ombudsman](#). The Ombudsman has continued to refine its [Complaint Handling Code](#) - a framework for the management of, and learning from, complaints - and requires landlords to self-assess against this on an annual basis.

We acknowledge the good practice outlined in the Code and have proactively adapted our policies and procedures to reflect its core principles.

Here's the link to [Southdown's compliance with the Housing Ombudsman's Complaints Handling Code](#).

For further information on our performance as a landlord – including an overview of our handling of the complaints received in relation to its housing functions, view our [Tenant Satisfaction Measures Report 2024-25](#).

To provide consistency and quality in complaint handling and service improvement across our diverse range of operations, we have adopted the Ombudsman's code across all our operations.

3. Complaints Process

We operate a two-stage complaints procedure in line with the Housing Ombudsman's code, although tenants have the right to approach the Ombudsman at any stage in the process:

Stage 1:

- On receipt of a complaint, an investigating manager is nominated who attempts to speak to the complainant, and sends a complaint acknowledgement letter to them.

- The focus at this stage is on contact with the client to work towards a resolution.
- The investigating manager carries out the investigation and informs the complainant by telephone, where appropriate, and in writing within 10 working days of receiving the complaint.

Stage 2:

- The Director/Head of Service reviews the complaint escalation and allocates an investigating manager to investigate the complainant's reasons for escalation, if the Stage 1 complaint was investigated satisfactorily or if more could have been done.
- Lessons learnt should be discussed and recorded, and actions recommended to improve the service. These lessons are logged and tracked.
- If the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of Stage two, they can contact external agencies which fund and/or regulate Southdown (for tenants this is the Housing Ombudsman).

4. Complaints Activity and Performance 2024/25

A total of 20 complaints were received across all of our operations, with seven escalated to Stage 2.

Area	Stage 1	Stage 2	2023 - 2024
Learning Disabilities	1	0	10
Housing Management	1	1	3
Mental Health and Housing Support	11	6	9

Complaints by area are more closely representative of their proportion of clients and tenants than that of last year. Total client and tenant numbers have increased by 1.4% in comparison to last year. At the same time there has been a decrease in complaints by 9.1% (two less than in 2023-24). This means that

overall there has been a decrease in complaints when taking into account the total client and tenant population.

There were two complaints relating to our housing operations, one of which was escalated to Stage 2. One complaint from 2023-2024 remains with the Housing Ombudsman.

4.1 Complaints Overview

Functional Area	Total Clients 2024-25	% of clients per function	No. of Complaints Received	As a % of all Complaints Received	Comparison with No. of Complaints 2023-24
Housing Management	516	4.5%	2	10%	3
Learning Disabilities	166	1.5%	1	5%	10
Mental Health and Housing Support	11,043	94%	17	85%	9
TOTAL	11,725	-	20	-	22

There continues to be a reduction in complaints from housing, and this year there has also been a decrease in complaints received in the Learning Disability function. However, there has been a significant increase in the number of complaints from our Mental Health and Housing Support function.

4.2 Complaints Categories

(Note: More than one category can be assigned to a complaint)

Category	No. of Complaints with Category Selected	As a % of all Complaints Received	Comparison with 2023-24
Staff behaviour	12	60 %	7
Communication	7	35 %	6

Poor service	7	35 %	8
Maintenance / Repairs	2	10 %	2
Other	2	10 %	4
Neighbour	1	5 %	2
Nuisance	1	5 %	2
Confidentiality	0	0 %	1
Discrimination	0	0 %	5
Tenancy Issues	0	0 %	0

The most notable changes in categories of complaints are an increase in complaints about staff behaviour. There were no complaints about discrimination, compared to 5 complaints last year.

4.3 Outcomes and findings

Outcome at Stage 1	No. of Complaints	As a % of all Complaints Received	Comparison with 2023-24
Upheld	4	20%	9
Partially Upheld	8	40%	7
Not Upheld	7	35%	6
Complaint Withdrawn	0	0%	0
Complaint still open	1	5%	0
Total No. Complaints Received	20	-	22

Outcome at Stage 2	No. of Complaints	As a % of all Stage 2 Complaints	Comparison with 2023-24
Upheld	1	14%	2
Partially Upheld	2	29%	0
Not Upheld	3	43%	3

Complaint Withdrawn	1	14%	0
Complaint still open	0	0%	0
Total No. Stage 2 Complaints	7	-	5

Fewer complaints were upheld at both Stage 1 and 2, compared to the previous year. However, the number of complaints not upheld or only partially upheld remains broadly the same.

4.4 Response Timescales

Stage 1

Response Timescale	No. of Complaints	As % of All Complaints
Stage 1		
0 – 10 days	7	35%
10 days+	12	60%
Complaint still open	1	5%
Total No. Complaints Received	20	-

The required timescale to respond to a complaint is 10 working days at Stage 1.

The above table shows that 13 responses (65%) were outside the 10-day timescale. Most common reasons cited for delay were client not able to be contacted, complexity of complaint and management delay due to annual leave.

Stage 2

Response Timescale	No. of Complaints	As % of Complaints
Stage 2		
0 – 20 days	6	86%
20 days+	1	14%
Total No. Stage 2 Complaints	7	-

The required timescale to respond to a complaint that has been escalated to Stage 2 is 20 working days.

The above table shows that 1 response (14%) was outside the 20-day timescale.

Unavailability of client was the reason cited for the delay.

4.5 Complainants' Satisfaction with Complaint Handling

Complainants are asked the following questions two weeks following closure of the complaint, using the communication method they have expressed a preference for, e.g. email or telephone:

- Did you feel there were any barriers to making the complaint?
- Did the person dealing with the complaint understand?
- Do you feel the complaint was dealt with respectfully?
- Were the letters and communications clear?
- Were you satisfied with Southdown's response?
- Have you got anything else you would like to add?

Response Outcomes

Outcome	2024-25		Comparison with 2023-24	
	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 1	Stage 2
Resolved	5	1	2	0
Not resolved	10	3	0	0
No further contact	4	2	13	2
Withdrawn	0	1	0	0
Blank	0	0	7	3
Complaint still open	1	0	0	0
Total No. Complaints	20	7	22	5

No further contact has significantly decreased from 2024-2025 indicating a higher response to follow-up contact. Blank responses have also significantly decreased.

Not resolved was the most common response, representing 65% of all 2024-2025 complaint satisfaction responses. This was mostly due to dissatisfaction with the complaint outcome rather than the process itself.

4.6 Complaint themes and investigation outcomes

In 2025, the highest number of complaints received came from clients in our Mental Health and Housing Support Services, with staff communication cited as the most common reason. In addition, there was an overall increase of 27% across the whole organisation in complaints in this category, as well as an 87% rise in the 'Staff Behaviour' category.

Insights from complaints escalated to Stage 2 have also highlighted that several could have been resolved at Stage 1 had communication been clearer. In response, we are developing ways to improve how we communicate with clients and tenants across the organisation. This includes increasing opportunities for feedback and being more thoughtful and inclusive in our communication style.

We have also seen a significant increase in delayed responses compared to 2023–2024. When we looked more closely at the nature of these delays, we found that some complaints, particularly those involving Mental Health and Housing Support Services, include partner organisations, making them more complex and time-consuming to investigate and resolve. However, we currently lack robust data to identify which complaints are affected and whether they could have been resolved more quickly. Addressing this data gap is a priority.

While overall complaint numbers remain low at 0.17%, we acknowledge that some issues may be resolved quickly and informally, and therefore not recorded as formal complaints. To improve consistency in reporting, we are working to establish a clearer definition of what constitutes a complaint versus a service request. This will help ensure that all relevant feedback is captured appropriately and transparently.

We are pleased to report that there were no complaints under the category of 'Discrimination' this year. This marks a positive change from last year, when five such complaints were received, following which we made improvements to physical accessibility and took steps to ensure clients are better informed about the levels of service they can expect.

4.7 Housing Ombudsman Cases

We have one complaint waiting for a decision by the Ombudsman. The complaint was initially considered in February 2024 and was escalated to the Ombudsman the following month. We are currently waiting for the opportunity to engage with the Ombudsman on this matter.

5. Policy, Procedure and System Update

We have increased the timeframe within which to respond to a complaint from 10 working days from receipt of the complaint to 10 working days from acknowledgement. We have maintained our three day acknowledgement timeframe (compared to the Ombudsman's five day requirement), as we believe it critical that people feel heard as soon as possible following submission of their complaint.

6. Self-Assessment Against the Housing Ombudsman's Complaints Code

Our approach to managing complaints relating to our landlord functions is governed by the Housing Ombudsman's Complaints Handling Code. This provides a robust framework for effective complaint resolution and continuous learning, and as such, our complaints policy and procedure is fully aligned with this Code.

Our approach to managing complaints related to our landlord functions is guided by the Housing Ombudsman's Complaints Handling Code. This Code provides a robust framework for effective resolution and continuous learning, and our complaints policy and procedure are fully aligned with its principles.

As part of our annual compliance, we are required to carry out a self-assessment of our performance against the Code and identify areas for improvement. This year's assessment was conducted by the Director of Housing & Assets in June 2025, and highlighted several key developments:

Improvements Made:

- **Enhanced Communication:** We have improved how we keep clients and tenants informed about the progress of their complaints. This includes agreeing on appropriate intervals for updates throughout the investigation process.
- **Greater Discretion in Complaint Acceptance:** Managers now have some discretion to accept complaints that would typically fall under our (and the Ombudsman's) exclusion criteria, where there is a justified reason to do so.

Areas for Further Improvement:

- **Embedding Service Improvement Plans:** Progress in embedding Service Improvement Plans across all functions of the organisation has been slower than anticipated. This remains a priority area for development.

7. Complaints Redesign

In 2025, as part of our ongoing commitment to continuous improvement in complaint handling, we launched a dedicated Complaints Project to identify opportunities for improvement, and to make recommendations for change where needed. To oversee this work, a cross-functional working group has been established, which includes representation from one of our tenants to ensure client and tenant voices are embedded in the process.

Following a series of Discovery Workshops involving staff, clients, and tenants, we identified several key areas for improvement:

- Stronger focus on resolution
- Use of more inclusive and client/tenant-friendly language
- Shift from process-driven to people-centred
- Improved review and oversight mechanisms

As a result of the insights gained from these workshops, we are implementing a number of targeted changes to our complaints process, including adopting a resolution-first approach, simplifying language, and enhancing stakeholder oversight, with the aim of launching the redesigned approach in October 2025.

8. Other methods for collecting feedback

During 2024/25, in addition to insights gained from formal complaints, we used a range of methods and initiatives to gather client feedback, requests, and suggestions. These approaches varied in focus and style, ranging from informal conversations to structured, formal mechanisms. All feedback was reviewed by management and played a key role in shaping service development and improving our communication with clients.

- Client and tenant involvement mobile email address – set up for clients and tenants to be able to send feedback
- Tenants invited to contribute to the quarterly newsletter
- Tenant Involvement Group review procedure changes
- Annual Tenant Visits
- Tenant involvement meetings
- Client Participation Groups - clients receiving support from the same service meet regularly and discuss what is important as a Southdown client, and what can be done to improve support
- Client Focus Groups and workshops
- Open days and events - arranged locally by services
- Client 'House' meetings (LD Services, some Supported Housing Schemes)
- Feedback from CQC inspections
- Feedback directly to front-line workers or managers
- Feedback Form - comments, compliments or complaints – on our website, available from staff, and locally within services
- Annual Client Satisfaction Survey
- Exit Questionnaire - clients are asked to complete an exit questionnaire at point of departure from a service. This is by email, instigated locally by operational teams
- Commissioner led service reviews and surveys
- Site visits, observations, feedback from staff, families and other stakeholders

- Scrutiny exercises – clients and tenants contribute to various reviews on Southdown's performance.

9. Board summary response

"As the Board Chair of Southdown's Service Quality Committee and member responsible for overseeing complaints, I was pleased to receive our annual review of complaints and review Southdown's compliance with the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code. This annual review of complaints provides a comprehensive overview of the complaints we received over the past year, the trends we've identified, and the actions we've taken to address them.

Having read this report and self-assessment and reviewed the complaints, and Southdown's responses to these, I'm confident that Southdown is compliant with the Ombudsman's Code both in spirit and in practice. This report both highlights those areas where Southdown excel and, crucially, shines a light on areas where we need to improve. These improvements are being implemented as part of our complaints process review." – Jo Ellis, Member Responsible for Complaints (MRC)

[Read the Board's full response here.](#)

10. Conclusion and Areas for Improvement

While the overall number of complaints remains consistent with the previous year, there has been a notable shift in focus. Complaints related to Learning Disability services have declined, whereas those concerning Mental Health and Housing Support have increased significantly, as have delays in response times compared to 2023–2024. A key factor contributing to these delays is the involvement of partner organisations, which adds complexity and extends resolution timelines. Housing Management complaints have met response deadlines in line with the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code.

Insights from Discovery Workshops and Stage 2 escalations have highlighted opportunities to improve early resolution. In some cases, clearer communication could have prevented escalation. To address this, we are

enhancing how we engage with clients and tenants—focusing on inclusive language, increasing feedback opportunities, and simplifying our communication style.

We've already made progress this year, including giving managers more discretion in accepting complaints and refining our approach to client communication. Further improvements are underway, such as adopting a resolution-first strategy and establishing a stakeholder review group. However, embedding Service Improvement Plans across the organisation has been slower than anticipated and remains a priority.

Although formal complaints remain relatively low, we recognise that many concerns are resolved informally and may not be captured in official records. Through the Complaints Redesign Project, we are clarifying the distinction between complaints and service requests to improve consistency in reporting. Complaints continue to be a vital source of learning, and we remain committed to ensuring all feedback channels are effective, accessible, and used to drive meaningful change.