

Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report

2024



Bromford.



Our purpose is to invest in homes and relationships so people can thrive, and we know that some of the issues customers raise can often be a barrier to achieving this. We know we don't always get things right, but when things go wrong we are committed to working with our customers to resolve them as quickly and efficiently as possible.

Our customers tell us that we get our services right a lot of the time. This is evidenced by our overall satisfaction rating of 85% (Tenant Satisfaction Measure). While this is very good performance when compared to others in the housing sector, we also know we get things wrong. Over the last year, we have seen an increase in complaints by 7% compared to the 2022 to 2023 financial year.

The majority of complaints relate to a small number of themes: communication with customers, keeping customers informed and completing work in a timely manner.

The two most complained about service areas are repairs and our management of condensation, damp and mould cases. We understand how important it is to get this right and are making improvements as a priority.

To do this, we want to understand why things go wrong. We want to learn from these lessons and improve our services so that more customers have a positive experience with us.

We are committed to improving our services with transparency and accountability. We're investing in how we work, so we can meet your expectations and achieve our goals. Your feedback helps us shape these improvements.

This report allows us to reflect on the past year's trends and improvement plans. It gives a clear view of complaint activity from 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024 and shows how we are working to serve our customers better.

Paul Coates
Chief Customer Officer

Dame Sandra Horley
Chair of Customer and Communities Influence Network



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Performance

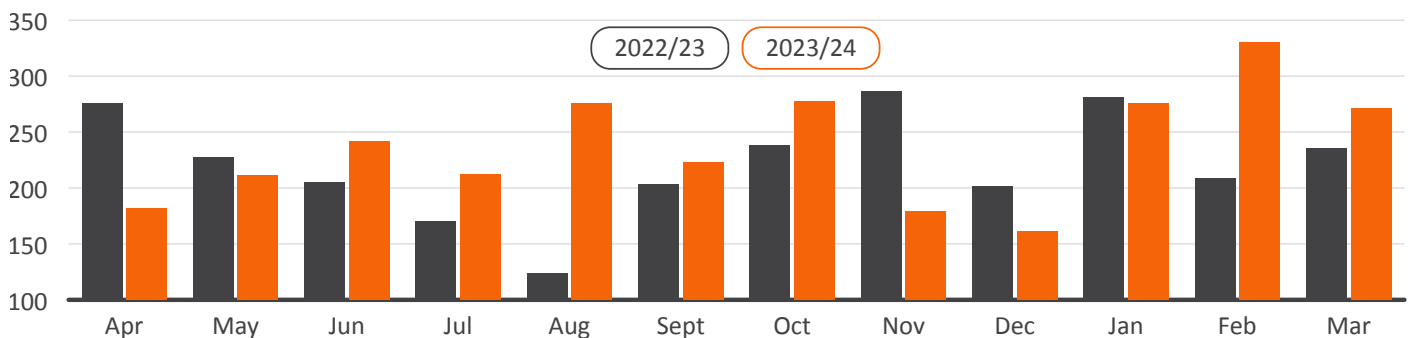
7% increase in complaints

2,840 total complaints

The number of complaints we received rose 7% to 2,840 in 2023 to 2024 compared to the 2,667 complaints we received in 2022 to 2023. We are responding to this by increasing investment in the complaints team, alongside learning from our mistakes. See page 10 for more detail.

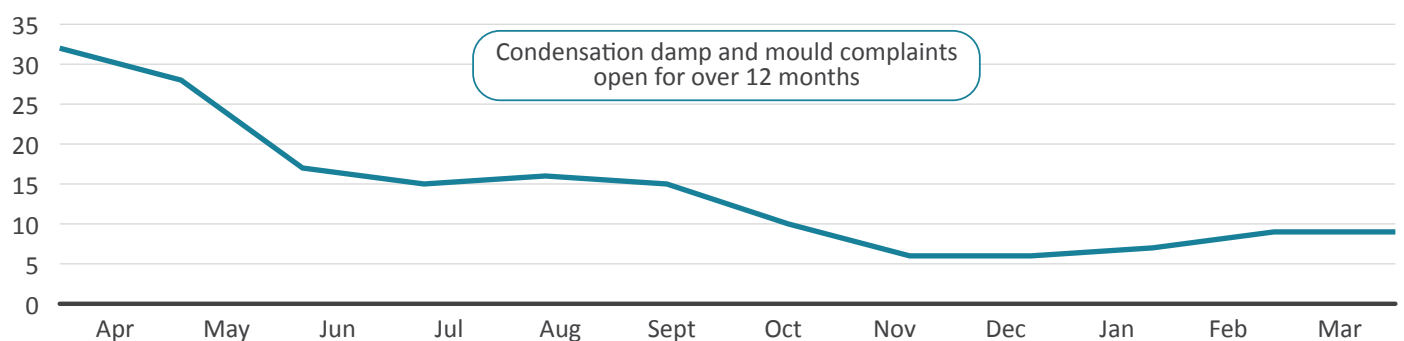
During the year, 478 cases that were reported as complaints were identified as service requests and resolved by the relevant team, such as our anti-social behaviour or repair teams. We are focused on ensuring our services are delivered right first time, to meet our customers' expectations.

Number of complaints



Our ambition to resolve complaints as fast as we can for customers is a high priority for us. However, we also want to be confident that issues have been fully resolved when we close a complaint. This means we will not close complaints until we are satisfied that the root cause has been addressed. The causes of some complaints are more complex than others. These complaints might remain open longer than expected, as more time is needed to fully resolve them to the satisfaction of the customer.

We believe it's right to keep cases open until we know the root cause issue is resolved, and this view is supported by our customers, however we believe it still takes too long. Over the course of the year, our teams have been focused on complex complaints that we know are a high priority for our customers, such as those related to condensation, damp and mould. We have made improvements in reducing the number of complaints that remain open for more than a year, but we recognise that further improvements are needed to reduce this even more and to communicate with customers more effectively.





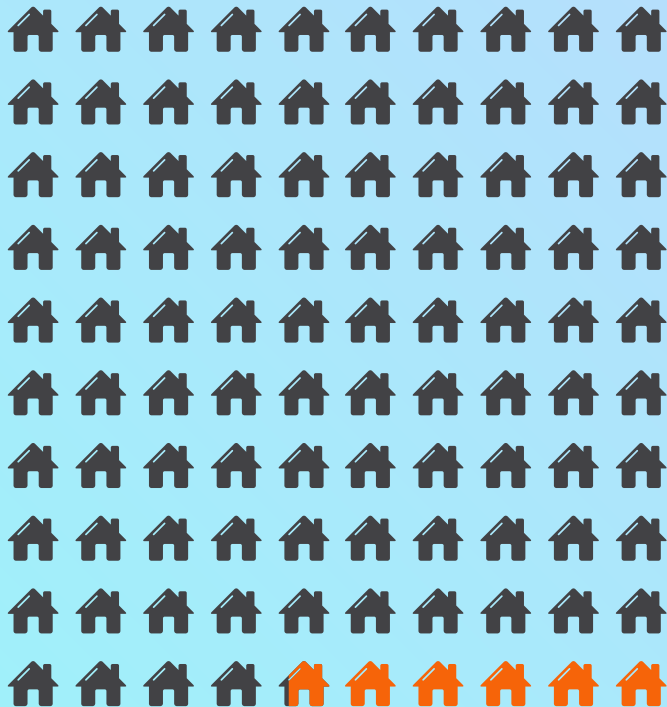
Performance

Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs) and Housing Ombudsman code

58 complaints per 1,000 rented homes

76% stage one complaints handled on time for rented homes

In the past year we have received an average of 58 complaints per 1,000 rented homes, and 35 complaints per 1,000 homeownership properties. We want to ensure reporting complaints is easy for customers, and we are committed to reducing complaints by using our customer feedback and data, to ensure we address the reasons complaints happen in the first place.



For every 1,000 rented homes, 58 had a complaint

Last year we received a 13% increase in repair requests and a 7% increase in complaints. While we are resolving 76% of stage one complaints from our rental customers and 73% from homeownership customers within the ombudsman's timescales, we have only managed to respond to 35% of stage two complaints within the required timescales, which we know is not good enough for our customers.

We recognise this is an area we need to improve and have taking the following steps:

- employed more colleagues across our repairs teams to meet the increased demand
- increased the flexibility of our repairs service to include evening and weekend appointments where this is convenient for customers
- employed more colleagues across our complaints service to ensure we improve performance around stage two complaints timescales
- carried out root cause analysis and process reviews, especially in our repairs service, where we receive higher volumes of complaints. This will enable us to make fundamental changes to improve our response times, reduce delays to customers and ensure we are meeting their expectations
- have held weekly 'task force' meetings with leaders and wider senior leaders to maintain a rhythm of improvement and quick decision making

These interventions are having a positive impact, repair numbers have started to reduce - they have reduced by 1,000 since April 2023, complaints volumes have also reduced by nearly 100 in the same period and 76% of stage one complaints are responded to in target. More to do, but good progress none the less.



Customer feedback

It isn't only feedback from customers who raise complaints that results in improvements to the way we deliver services. We take into account feedback from a range of sources, including:

- our ongoing customer satisfaction surveys
- from determinations issued by the Housing Ombudsman
- suggestions from our teams who are well placed to see where we can do things more effectively and deliver better customer service
- our involved customers who attend meetings to scrutinise performance, including complaints, and support our service improvement work

Advocacy

Almost 10,000 customers gave us their feedback about our services last year and overall, 91% told us that they would recommend Bromford to a friend, an improvement of 7% when compared to last year.

However, some customers indicated they had to make more effort than they'd like when accessing our services, particularly when reporting a repair.

In these instances, customers tell us about long wait times, delays in communication and concerns about the quality of work which in some cases has led to a lack of trust in our services.

Our insight also tells us 18% of customers' phone calls to our customer service centre could have been avoided if we'd resolved their enquiries in the right way, first time around. This would remove the need for customers to contact us again and chase their original enquiry.

While complaint satisfaction performance is at 45% for the year, which is better than upper quartile benchmarking performance of 40%, it remains below the high standards our customers expect from us and we are working hard to improve this. Our improvement plans are set out in this document.

Housing Ombudsman awareness

It's important that we support customers to understand the full complaints process as transparently as possible. This includes promoting our customers' right to escalate any ongoing concerns or lack of resolution to the Housing Ombudsman. We try to do this as widely as possible across our customer information and our complaints service.

Over the year we survey customers going through our complaints process to ask how many customers are aware of the Housing Ombudsman. While we have achieved 58%, across the year, with a high of 81% in October, we want to achieve a consistently high level of awareness for all customers whether they are making a complaint or not.

Additionally we are supporting the Government's '**make things right**' initiative, ensuring all service issues are promptly addressed. You can report, complain about, or escalate issues via our **contact webpage**.

10,000
customers gave their feedback

91%
would recommend
Bromford to a friend





Customer comments

I want to express my sincerest gratitude for the time and effort you have dedicated to reviewing my case. Your thoroughness and attention to detail have been invaluable.

It's not always easy to get in touch with someone and it takes a while over the phone too. The complaint has now been sorted.

I just don't know where it went wrong internally. Bromford have always been good to me, but this went badly and I'm back to square one. In my opinion, this complaint is still ongoing, please don't employ third parties.

I'm still waiting for my thermostat but the complaint went well.

It all got sorted very quickly and efficiently, so I can't really fault them, I'm very happy.



The new window was fitted and I'm happy about that, but in my opinion I don't think it's been sealed properly, so the rain may get in. Also, no one called me for an official resolution or to tell me about the appointment. The engineer just turned up one day and fitted the window. It would have been nice to have been made aware of things.



Complaint insight

It's really important that we know as much about our complaints as possible, so that we can put things right not just at the complaints stage, but to avoid the same issue in the future, so we categorise each complaint we receive.

This helps us to identify the areas of concern and take action to make improvements. The graph below shows the categories that we use, and the number of complaints we received in each category. While most complaints relate to repairs and condensation, damp and mould there are a number of other reasons for customer complaints and it is important these have a similar improvement focus. However, what links many of these complaint categories are four underlying themes: communication, keeping customers informed, speed of work and quality of work. We are focussed on improvements across these areas.

Repairs

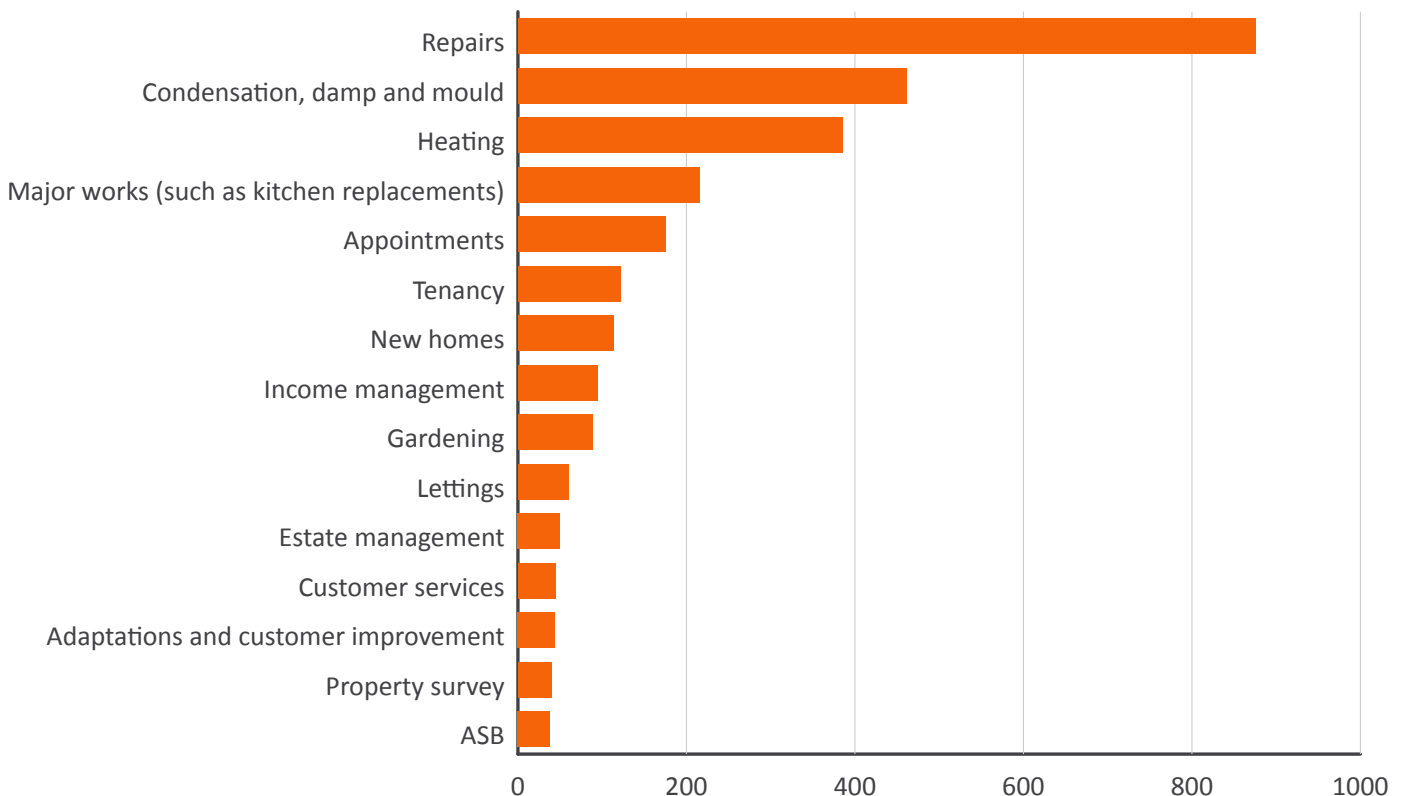
Although repairs and condensation, damp and mould complaints make up almost half of all the complaints we received last year, this represents just 2.6% of the 108,933 repairs we completed over the last 12 months.

Service failures

We have acknowledged when our services have failed, and over the year we have paid compensation to our customers at an average of £224 per complaint. This is in line with the Housing Ombudsman's guidance around recognising the impact this has on our customers.

Service charges

Customers involved in our Locality Influence Networks have told us that our service charge information is difficult to understand and that when they have a query about charges, they struggle to find clear and timely answers.





Housing Ombudsman

We value the involvement of and guidance provided by the Housing Ombudsman and the support given to customers when they don't feel satisfied with our resolution of a complaint. During the past 12 months we received 36 determinations from the Housing Ombudsman.

Activity:

- enquiries from the Housing Ombudsman at stage one have decreased compared to the previous year, with stage two remaining consistent
- we have seen a significant increase in the number of full investigations requested – rising to 32, up from nine the previous year
- of the 36 determinations received, five were severe maladministration, 16 were maladministration, five were service failures and 10 were no redress/mediation. We are waiting for four determinations

Key themes:

- improving customer communication was highlighted by customers and is also a theme in our advocacy reporting
- ensuring accurate record keeping. We need to understand the circumstances of our customers and their homes to deliver the right services. We have invested in new systems to help us do this.
- acting quickly to resolve repairs or property condition issues is a high priority for customers and we need to make improvements here
- understanding some customers' vulnerabilities and meeting their needs. While our neighbourhood coaches offer a bespoke approach, we need to build more flexibility into our repairs service

To contact the
Housing Ombudsman



0300 111 3000



info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk

36 determinations

(Awaiting determinations of four investigations)

5

severe maladministration

16

maladministration

5

service failures

10

no redress/mediation



Lessons learnt

Our repairs service

A high percentage of our repair complaints relate to condensation, damp and mould. We are implementing a new way of working to respond to these calls when they come into us, which will improve the way we diagnose issues. We will employ specialist contractors to complete work where needed, provide clearer explanations to customers and ensure the whole process is quicker and more effective.

Customer communication

We know we need to improve customer communication. This year we will be making significant improvements to our contact centre, offering more ways to contact us, such as improved two-way text messaging to ensure customers know exactly what's happening with their repair.

Colleagues in our complaints team have received further training to help them effectively listen to dissatisfied customers and understand their expectations for resolving issues, specifically in relation to vulnerability. Our lessons learned from customer insight and feedback from the Housing Ombudsman, have led to the ongoing development of a vulnerable customer policy.

Things we're exploring with our involved customers

Working with our involved customers, we're considering trialing a priority service register to better serve our customers' needs. We are also working with leaders to further define their service offers which will set out the quality of work and delivery timeframes that customers should expect from us.

Many of our policies have been revisited and assessed for inclusivity to ensure fairness for all.

Additionally, customers are working with us to improve our service charge processes. The work is focused on clearer information, greater transparency and improved information on what customers are paying for and the frequency and quality of service that you can expect.

Customer website

Customers have told us they would like to see improvements to our website. We're working closely with our groups of involved customers to create a brand new website. The site will serve our customers better and provide a user-friendly experience, allowing customers to find information or complete tasks more easily.

Garages

Feedback from customers in our West of England communities highlighted a lack of investment in garages. This issue couldn't be resolved through our Localities Influence Networks (LIN) and was escalated to our Customer and Communities Influence Network (CCIN), eventually reaching the board. This process shows the strong link between our involved customers and our board.

As a result, we have invested more money in the team, reviewed and improved our garage policy, and neighbourhood coaches have worked in communities to identify an additional 294 garages to be re-let, that had been empty for many years.

Older persons review of sheltered schemes

We received complaints from some customers living at our supported housing schemes. The feedback from these customers has led to a review of our older person's services. We continue to involve customers in reviewing and approving our supported housing service offer.

Consistent landscaping service standard

Throughout the year customers have given us feedback on our landscaping service standards. Their feedback helped shape a new landscaping proposal, which our executive team approved. Customers continue to be involved in monitoring the new standard to ensure it meets their needs going forward.

Watch a video to find out how our landscaping team made change happen



Homeownership

Customers raised concerns around a lack of voices that shared owners have within Bromford. This led to the co-creation of the Homeownership Virtual Panel which now meets quarterly and has direct feedback into our Customer and Communities Influence Network and Customer Forum.

Empty homes standard

Customers told us that we had an inconsistent standard of the homes they were moving into, with properties not always meeting our lettable standard. We took a group of Local Influence Network members to see some homes which were ready to let and sought their feedback around what met the standard, what didn't, what was important to them. One customer commented that as the previous customer's paint had been left on the walls, which is against our standard, it meant that a customer would be moving into the property and "finding the previous customer's personality" rather than a consistent home from Bromford.

This led to the creation of the updated Empty Homes Standard and the creation of a new sign off checklist of items that were important to customers which is left for the incoming customer to review. Our involved customers signed off on the detail in the new checklist and we've committed to three monthly ready to let property checks with involved customers moving forward.

Multiple repairs booked

Customers fed back that when they raise multiple repairs, the text messages they received around bookings didn't give any indication which repair the appointment related to.

Information on the customer portal didn't make it easy to understand and follow which appointment related to which repair. This led to a change where a customer receives a text message, it gives a brief description of the repair as well as the job reference number.

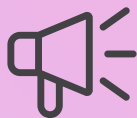
Early resolution

The ombudsman encourages early and local resolution of issues between landlords and customers within the Complaint Handling Code, particularly around how long it takes to resolve an issue and go through the complaints procedure. In November a small group of customer contact colleagues were trained in the Housing Ombudsman's complaint handling code in order to improve their knowledge and understanding of when a customer is making a formal complaint or when it is a service failure. The feedback from them and customers was really positive and as such we have continued to work in this area around the principles of a first contact resolution, while ensuring we raise complaints as set out within the code.

Gas repairs and servicing

During 2023, one of our externally delivered gas repair and servicing contracts was brought in house. We did this because customers were frustrated with poor communication of appointments and high levels of missed appointments. Feedback since we did this has been positive and satisfaction with the repairs service was 93% at March 2024.





What we've improved over the past 12 months

You said

What we did

1

"Understand my complaints history so I don't have to keep going over things again and again."

In 2022 we introduced a new single housing management system, from three separate systems previously. This ensures we have accurate records of our customers interactions with us. In January 2024 we upgraded the system so it now includes details of all repairs requests and comprehensive information about all our homes.

2

"I get lost in, or overlooked by your processes and at times feel forgotten."

We have worked closely with colleagues and our Local Influence Networks to make improvements to processes or ways of working, so that customers feel their views have been taken into account. This includes taking a more inclusive look at our complaint responses and decisions to be more flexible around customer needs.

3

"The quality of work from some of your contractors and engineers isn't always good enough."

We have introduced a new code of conduct for all our contractors ensuring they have the same principles and approach to working with our customers as we expect from our own colleagues, including safeguarding. This will ensure all our customers receive the same level of service whether it is provided by a Bromford engineer or a contractor.

4

"Only 59% of us are happy with your anti-social behaviour service."

Complaints and satisfaction across our anti-social behaviour (ASB) service were a key focus between September 2023 and March 2024. ASB complaints were starting to increase and satisfaction was low at 59%. Through analysis of all customer feedback and complaints, we introduced a service improvement plan, focusing upon improved communication to customers and increased interventions by specialist case handlers in the community safety team. This has led to an increase in satisfaction in the second half of the year to 75% and ASB complaints moving out of the top five complaints categories. We understand how important this service is to customers, and we will continue to closely monitor satisfaction in this area to ensure it meet their expectations.

5

"The standard of landscaping was not adequate."

Satisfaction and complaints across landscaping services were a key focus between September 2023 and March 2024; improvement action was required. We identified that we need to improve the capacity of the team and the quality of the equipment they used. We have employed more landscaping colleagues to complete the work and bought new equipment and we are already starting to see improvements in customer satisfaction of around 10%.

6

"Your communication and speed of response to repair requests wasn't always good enough."

Across the year we have received five severe maladministration from the Housing Ombudsman, which have had a theme of repairs, communication and speed of response. Each severe maladministration has a formal response process and teams are pulled together to complete a round table root cause analysis.



Our focus for the next 12 months

The findings from this complaints report show us what we must focus on. We will:

- undertake a significant and comprehensive review of our repairs service to ensure that we address repairs more quickly, uphold high standards, improve appointment processes for customers, and achieve a first-time fix rate of 85%
- ensure that customers who report condensation, damp and mould have an appropriate, tailored response to their concerns and a clear plan and timescales for the work to be completed
- continue to develop our technology as we move through final stages of our transformation project. Our focus will be on the quality of our record keeping
- from April, begin making more improvements to how we understand our customers' individual needs and offer inclusive services that better meet their circumstances. If we are unable to meet a specific need, we will communicate this clearly and explain why
- remain focused on anti-social behavior (ASB), working with community partners to resolve customer concerns as quickly as possible. We will continue to review our performance across ASB to have a deeper understanding of any areas where we may need to improve, aligned to the spotlight report published by the ombudsman. The self-assessment will be completed by the end of June and associated actions actioned in July across the business
- make our service standards accessible and clear to customers so they know what to expect from each of our service areas. Customers from our Customer and Community Influence Network are continuing to help us with this and we will publish them from July onwards
- from April, we employed more colleagues in our complaints team to ensure that our customers receive the right level of service in order to resolve their complaint within the timescales set out by the Housing Ombudsman

We will track progress against these commitments in a number of ways:

1. we will report progress to our involved customer group, CCIN and board every three months
2. publish these progress reports on our website
3. report progress every three months to customers via the customer email



Bromford.

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