

A close-up photograph showing two hands pointing at a small white and red model house. The hands are positioned over a set of blue architectural blueprints. The model house has a white body and a red roof. The background is slightly blurred, focusing attention on the hands and the model house.

# COMPLAINTS PERFORMANCE AND **SERVICE** **IMPROVEMENT** REPORT 2024/25

# INTRODUCTION

## Our Commitment to Excellent Service

Freebridge is dedicated to enhancing customer satisfaction by delivering high-quality services. We actively seek opportunities for improvement by reviewing customer complaints and monitoring positive feedback. Complaints and compliments provide valuable insights that help us refine our services and better meet customer needs.

The Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 introduced important changes to how social landlords, including Freebridge, handle complaints. This legislation strengthened the role of the Housing Ombudsman, implementing and overseeing a mandatory complaint-handling code of practice from 1 April 2024.

In line with this code, all social landlords must complete and publish an annual self-assessment to demonstrate compliance and identify areas for improvement. Additionally, we are required to produce an annual report outlining our complaint-handling performance and service enhancements. This report will be reviewed alongside the published self-assessment to ensure transparency and accountability.





# STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

2024/25 was the penultimate year of our current Corporate Strategy, 'Building Better Futures'.

The Strategy has 6 key objectives:

**Providing Excellent customer service:**

We are committed to transparency, engagement, and treating our tenants with dignity and respect. Our goal is to deliver exceptional customer service, ensuring that tenants feel heard and valued.

**Creating communities and local spaces to be proud of:**

We are deeply invested in our communities and in transforming lives. We believe that everyone deserves safe, high-quality, and affordable homes, but our role extends beyond just providing housing.

**Playing our part in creating a balanced local housing market:**

To help meet the growing demand for quality, affordable housing across West Norfolk, we are committed to investing millions of pounds in new homes, offering greater choice and security for our communities.

**A great place to work:** Our dedicated team is at the heart of Freebridge's success. Their passion and commitment to customer service set us apart. We recognise that

our employees are our greatest asset, and we are committed to supporting their development, fostering career growth, and attracting new talent to ensure we continue to provide the best possible service.

**Addressing Climate Change:** With housing accounting for approximately 14% of carbon emissions, we are committed to contributing to the Government's net-zero carbon agenda. While many environmental targets are set for the future, we are acting now to implement meaningful improvements that benefit our tenants and the wider community today.

**Strong sustainable and innovative business:** Our ambitious plans for the future are grounded in strong financial management, efficient processes, and a commitment to innovation. By maintaining a sound and sustainable business approach, we ensure that Freebridge continues to grow and deliver lasting benefits for our tenants and communities.

# LISTENING TO OUR TENANTS

**To provide excellent customer service, we must actively listen to our tenants. We are committed to continuously improving customer engagement and communication to better understand their needs and ensure we deliver the best possible services. We engage with our customers through various channels, including:**

## **MyFreebridge Platform – Community Voices**

The MyFreebridge engagement platform offers tenants a space to share ideas, discuss important topics, provide feedback on policies, and contribute to the future. Through polls, surveys, Customer Forums, and Idea Boards, tenants can stay informed and have their voices heard on key decisions.

## **Customer Ambassadors**

Customer Ambassadors are members of the Customer Voice Panel who provide assurance to the Freebridge Board that services meet the Regulator of Social Housing's Consumer Standards and deliver value for money. Their role is to represent a diverse range of tenants and influence strategic decisions to drive positive change.

## **Service Champions**

Service Champions are engaged and proactive tenants who contribute their experience and insight to help Freebridge improve service delivery. They work closely with us to review performance and make recommendations that enhance our landlord services.

## **Out & About**

We believe in making a difference in our local communities. Through our Out & About, we connect with tenants directly, listen to their needs, carry out repairs,

participate in community clean-ups, and offer hands-on support wherever possible.

## **Mystery Shopping**

Our Mystery Shopper initiative allows Community Voices members to assess six key Freebridge services: Telephone Calls, Home Visits, Neighbourhoods, Discovery Centre, Drop-Ins, and Reception. The pilot, conducted by Service Champions and Customer Ambassadors, provided valuable feedback, highlighting opportunities to improve data management and ensure a seamless customer experience.

By maintaining open communication and fostering meaningful engagement, we ensure that our services continue to evolve in response to our tenants' needs.

## **Complaint scrutiny**

As part of our ongoing commitment to improving customer experience, each quarter, our Customer Service Champions conduct a detailed review of a real complaint received. This initiative ensures a customer-focused evaluation process and helps identify key opportunities for service improvement.

The review process involves the following stages:

**Holistic Assessment:** The Service Champions assess to understand the complaint comprehensively from the customer's perspective, using the full set of information provided by Freebridge colleagues and the Complaints Team.

**Analysis and Insights:** The group evaluates the handling of the complaint, highlighting areas of success, identifying any gaps in information, and proposing actionable recommendations for improvement.

**Learnings and Improvements:** The insights and findings from the review are summarised into key learnings to inform service improvements, captured into a report which is passed to the heads of service within the business. The heads of service review the recommendations and agree actions to be taken. This action is then shared back to customer to see the outcomes of their recommendations and how this has influenced improvements within the business.

# COMPLAINTS OVERVIEW

## (APRIL 2024 - MARCH 2025)

During the 2024/25 period, a total of 349 Stage 1 complaints were recorded, averaging 50.44 complaints per 1,000 properties over the year. Complaints tracked at 29 per month on average, a slight decrease compared to 31 per month in 2023/24.

### Seasonality of Complaints

The highest volume of complaints occurred in Q1 (April – June 2024), with 117 complaints recorded, averaging 39 per month, marking the busiest period of the year.

### Response Performance

- In 2023/24, 66% of Stage 1 complaints were responded to within 10-working-days timeframe. In 2024/25, this improved significantly to 97% following internal procedural changes.
- The number of complaints escalating to Stage 2 was 102, reflecting an escalation rate of 29%.
- The response rate for Stage 2 complaints within 20 days improved from 70% in 2023/24 to 78% in 2024/25.

### Complaint Refusals:

Nine complaints were not accepted, with reasons including:

Duplicate complaints	2
Related to compensation requests	2
Categorised as support requests	4
Resolved within the 5-day complaint logging timeframe	1

### Reasons for Complaints (2024/25)

The most common reasons for complaints were:

Property Condition	45.65%
Repair Appointments (our operatives)	27.53%
Repair Appointments (external)	10.86%
Staff related issues	9.17%
Estate Management	6.76%

### Housing Ombudsman Findings

- Eight cases were reviewed by the Housing Ombudsman in 2024/25 with two being maladministration.
- Two cases were found to involve severe maladministration (Damp & Mould and Lack of Repairs).
- Four cases were determined as maladministration (Delays in Repairs, Missing Documentation in a Tenancy Noise Process, and Delays in Pest Control with Root Cause Not Addressed).

### Complaint Demographics

Age	Complaints by Age Group	Customer Base
18-29	7%	7%
30-39	29%	16%
40-49	18%	17%
50-59	17%	18%
60-69	12%	17%
70+	15%	21%

Analysis indicates an overrepresentation of complaints from individuals aged 30 to 39. In response, we have implemented changes to our repair service timeframes, extending appointment availability from 8:00 AM to 6:00 PM to allow for appointments around work commitments. Additionally, enhancements to our digital service offering are being developed to improve accessibility and convenience for this demographic. We are also reviewing our transactional surveying methods to better understand and address the issues impacting this age group, enabling us to learn and respond more effectively.

\*(Based on number of customers with a unique person reference, on tenancy with no tenancy end date before 01/04/2025, tenancy started on or before 30/03/2025 and not deceased – an additional 370 or 3.92% have age not recorded)

## Complaints by Gender (2024/25)

In 2024/25, 70% of complaints were received from women, compared to 30% from men. This trend aligns with Freebridge's customer demographics, where 61% of tenants are women and 38% are men.

*(Based on number of customers with a unique person reference, on tenancy with no tenancy end date before 10/01/2025 and not deceased – an additional 12 or 0.13% have gender listed as other and 38 or 0.4% have gender not recorded)*

## Vulnerabilities

In 2024/25, 47% of customers who made a complaint identified as having one or more vulnerabilities, including:

- Deafness or hearing impairment
- Blindness or partial sight
- Learning disabilities
- Memory problems
- Mental health conditions
- Limited mobility
- Problems with reading and writing
- Speech difficulties
- Use of a wheelchair or mobility scooter

Freebridge's customer segmentation data shows that 68% of tenants have a physical, mental, or cognitive condition that affects their daily life, with 16% using mobility aids.

Over the next year, we will focus on addressing customer vulnerabilities by collaborating with external specialists to develop a comprehensive strategy. Additionally, we will provide specialised training for our colleagues to empower them to adapt our approach and effectively support customers in all circumstances.

## First Language

- 92% of complaints in 2024/25 were received from customers whose first language is English.

We will review the website and communication materials regarding lodging complaints to ensure its readily accessible and designed to ensure ease of use, regardless of the user's primary language.

*\*(Based on number of customers with a unique person reference, on tenancy with no tenancy end date before 10/01/2025 and not deceased)*





# TENANT SATISFACTION MEASURE (TSM)

**Our latest Tenant Satisfaction Measure (TSM) report indicates that customer satisfaction with complaint handling stands at 28.5%. We recognise that other TSM results such as the overall repairs service at 72.4% and our handling of ASB (58%) correlates with our complaint feedback. Whilst improvements of 10.3% and 4.7% respectively has been seen in these areas over the last year, we will aim increase satisfaction over the next year with the actions outlined in our priorities and commitments below.**

## Ombudsman Determinations

In 2024/25, Freebridge Community Housing (FCH) received eight determinations from the Housing Ombudsman Service. These cases were reviewed and assessed as part of our commitment to improving complaint resolution and service standards.

## Learnings from 2024/25

Over the past year, our performance has not met our own and customer charter expectations as well as those of the Housing Ombudsman's. Following a thorough analysis, we have identified key areas for improvement to enhance our complaint handling and overall service delivery in the coming year.

### 1. Response Times

While we achieved 100% on-time responses on occasions in the past year, maintaining this standard is crucial. We have reviewed our internal structure, resource allocation, and monitoring framework to ensure we continue meeting the Housing Ombudsman's response targets consistently.

### 2. Root Cause Analysis & Learning from Complaints

Strengthening our ability to identify and address root causes will help us prevent recurring issues. We will provide specialist training for our complaints team and embed root cause analysis into a broader learning framework to drive service improvements.

### 3. Strengthening Governance & Oversight

We will work closely with the Board member responsible for complaints to develop their role, influence and impact further to improve scrutiny and accountability. A newly formed Customer Operations Committee will also oversee complaint handling and ensure performance improvements are actioned.

### 4. Repairs & Maintenance

Repairs and maintenance remain top priorities for our customers. We have planned a significant investment programme to improve the quality and condition of homes, addressing tenant concerns directly. This will see approx. £21.5m invested into customers' homes over 2025/26. Additional capacity within our internal repairs team has also been added to deliver work quicker to our customers.

### 5. Damp & Mould Compliance

We will continue to prioritise the treatment and prevention of damp and mould, taking specialist action to ensure full compliance with Awaab's Law. We have developed strong working relationships with specialist partners, and a recent audit of our practise found that the service had greatly improved in 2024/25.

### 6. Supporting Vulnerable Customers

A comprehensive review of customer vulnerability will be conducted. We will work with external expert consultants to refine our processes, ensuring we embed a culture that prioritises and responds effectively to customer vulnerabilities.

By implementing these targeted actions, we aim to enhance customer satisfaction, improve regulatory compliance, and provide a more effective complaints resolution process.

# ACTIONS FROM 2024/25

Theme	Service Improvement
Review of Complaints Policy and procedures	We have completed a review of our complaints policy and procedures in line with the ombudsman code. We have provided more clarity on the definition of a complaint and service failure and clarified our commitment to response times.
Review of Compensation Policy	A review of our compensation policy has been completed to ensure a wider range of items are considered and that consistency is applied within our compensation awards.
Internal Audit of complaint handling	In June 2024 a full internal audit was completed with regards to complaint handling to provide assurance on the adherence to our policy and procedures. This was passed with reasonable assurance, and all resulting actions have been completed.
Response to Damp and Mould	We have made significant improvements to our damp and mould handling over the past 12 months. We have onboarded a specialist contractor to support diagnosis of issues as well as improving our risk assessment at initial point of contact to ensure correct escalation of issues. An internal audit in November 2024 concluded with reasonable assurance in this area, a significant improvement from the previous audit findings.
Review of Repairs Policy	We completed a review of the policy through customer consultation and strengthened our commitment to tailoring our service offer to meet the individual needs of each customer.
Contract Management	We have reviewed contract management documentation and provided staff with training and clear expectations on the robust management of contracts. We have reviewed our procurement process to ensure we are selecting the best supplier for our customers.



# PRIORITIES AND COMMITMENTS FOR COMPLAINTS (2025/26)

Theme	Action	Timeframe	Expected outcome
Understanding our customers	Maintain high-quality, up-to-date customer data	Ongoing	To support informed decision-making based on accurate customer profile.
Understanding our customers	Launch a customer data collection survey in April and an internal campaign	December 2025	To refresh customer records, including vulnerabilities, ensuring tailored support.
Understanding our customers	Develop and implement a Customer Vulnerabilities Strategy	April 2026	To enhance services for vulnerable customers, providing personalised support and excellent customer care.
Enhancing Customer Service	Introduce a new bespoke customer service training programme for all colleagues	April 2026	Improved interactions and service delivery.
Proactive Issue Prevention	Strengthen efforts to detect and prevent damp and mould issues, including the piloting of smart technology.	April 2025	Ensuring compliance with Awaab's Law.
Performance Commitments	100% of Stage 1 complaints will be responded to within the Housing Ombudsman's timescales.	Monthly	To ensure a consistent and timely approach to complaint resolution for customers.
Performance Commitments	100% of Stage 2 complaints will be responded to within the Housing Ombudsman's timescales.	Monthly	To ensure a consistent and timely approach to complaint resolution for customers.

These priorities aim to enhance service quality, improve customer engagement, and ensure a proactive approach to complaint resolution.

