Annual Complaints Report

2024-2025

ASTER

GROUP

Foreward

Response by Bjorn Howard, Chief Executive Officer for Aster Group and the Member Responsible for Complaints (MRC).

As a career housing, care and support professional, I have always tried to keep as close to our customers as possible and was honoured when my Board colleagues appointed me as Member Responsible for Complaints.

One of the markers of a great business is the way in which it welcomes, responds to and learns from customer feedback. As part of our commitment to delivering modern, reliable and quality services for our customers, we rightly take all feedback, and especially complaints, very seriously. This starts with making it as easy as possible for a customer to share their complaint, followed by us working in a joined-up way with them to put things right.

Naturally, while we hope our services are delivered to a high standard, we also recognise that we make mistakes. Every time a customer shares their concerns, it gives us an opportunity to both listen and learn, so that we can do things better in future.

We've improved our communications with customers throughout the complaints process and introduced an Insight and Learning Action Group to help us spot issues early and make improvements. This, along with introducing a new Customer Relationship Management system, has improved the experience for customers – from the moment they make the complaint through to its resolution. The progress of our new approach will be monitored through our Customer Voice Committee.

We know that it's not enough to make promises to our customers when we resolve their complaint. Being reliable and doing what we say we will do is vital to building and maintaining trust. This report is one way we can demonstrate that trust by being transparent about our complaints performance during the past financial year, and how we are going to improve.

Bjorn Howard, CEO and MRC

Complaints Performance

An overview of our complaints performance from 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025:

Complaint Type:

Compared to last year, the number of formal complaints recorded has increased by 933 (106%), with our overall demand (including service requests) increasing by 567 (28%). It should be noted that fast track complaints were no longer recognised after changes to the Housing Ombudsman code on the 1 April 2024.

The table also shows the number of complaints per 1000 homes. This is important as the number of properties owned by Aster has increased over the last few years. This figure allows for comparison between years on a pro rata basis.

	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Formal Complaints	374	614	769	878	**1810**
Fast Track Complaints	580	785	915	1,158	**792** (Service requests)
Total:	**954**	**1,399**	**1,684**	**2,036**	**2602**
Formal complaints per 1000 properties	11	19	21	24	48

Days taken to investigate:

Stage 1 — **8 days** — Target < 10 days

Stage 2 — **28 days** — Target < 20 days
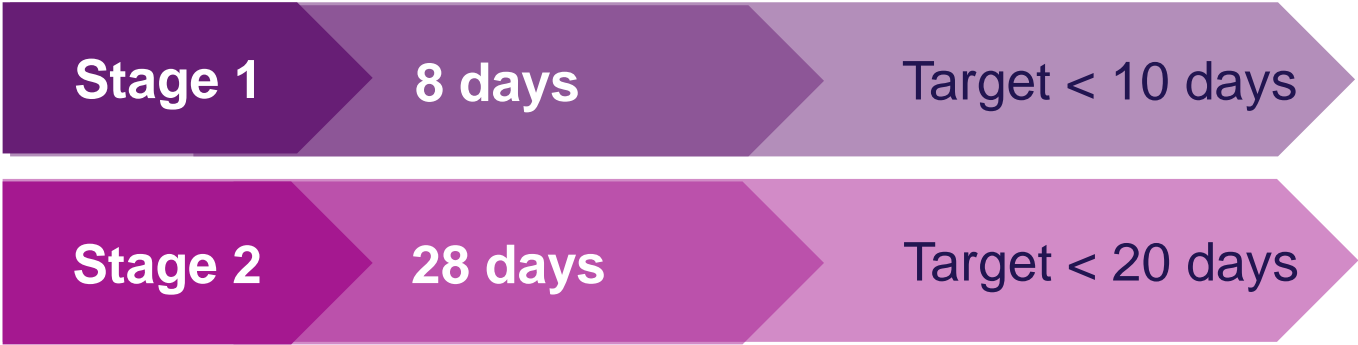
The Housing Ombudsman allows for Stage 1 investigations to be extended to 20 working days and for Stage 2 to be extended to 40 working days. This illustrates that Stage 1 complaints were completed over an average of 8 days with Stage 2 complaint investigations taking an average of 28.

Responses Sent in Time:

92.3%
Overall Compliance with target timescales for responding to complaint.

92.6%
Stage 1 responses sent in target

90.8%
Stage 2 responses sent in target

The Housing Ombudsman sets targets for us to respond to complaints. For all Stage 1 and 2 complaints responded to, 92.3% were responded to within the necessary timescales. This has improved when compared with 2023/24 (87.5% overall compliance).

Compliance by Service Area:

Service	Stage 1 In Target	Total Stage 1 sent	Stage 2 In Target	Total Stage 2 sent	Compliance
Maintenance	1072	1149	167	187	**92.7%**
Housing	307	340	85	91	**90.9%**
Development	60	64	3	5	**91.3%**
Group Services	5	5	2	2	**100%**
PFI	5	5	1	1	**100%**
Others	38	42	10	10	**92.3%**
Total	**1487**	**1605**	**268**	**296**	**92.3%**

# Escalation of Complaints (Stage 1 to Stage 2):

24% of the complaints Aster responded to were escalated from Stage 1 to Stage 2 in 2024/25. This is the same % as in 2023/24.

Complaints about our new homes and development activity saw 23% of complaints escalated to Stage 2. This is far lower than the 35% recorded in 2023/24. Although the relatively low volume of complaints means they only account for a small percentage of overall escalations.

% Escalation Stage 1 to Stage 2
● Maintenance ● Housing ● Development ● Governance
12 (2.34%)
177 (34.57%)
319 (62.3%)

The maintenance team continue have the highest escalation at 62%, which is the same as 2023/24.
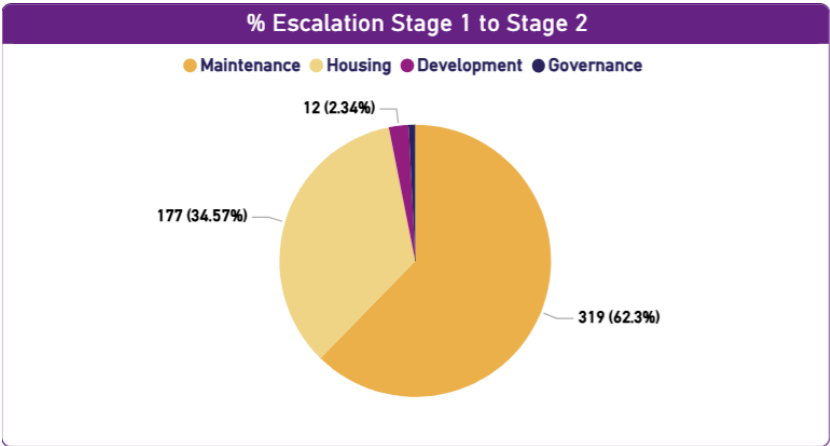
Compensation
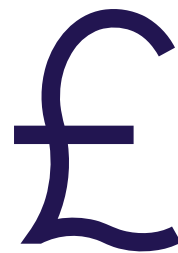
We know that we don't always get it right, and awarding compensation is an integral part of the complaint handling code as a means of offering suitable redress following a service failure.

In total, we awarded **£352,146** in compensation for service failures in 2024 / 25. A reduction of £63,582 from 2023/24.

£264,436 compensated our customers for service failures in relation to repairs and maintenance. This equates to 76% of all compensation due to customers.

£38,016 compensated to our customers for service failures in relation to Housing and Tenancy Management complaints.

The total figure equates to **£9,179** compensation paid per 1000 properties or **£9.17** per property across the reporting year.

Commitment to put things right

Aster made 1858 commitments to put things right for customers following a complaint during 2024 / 25. 1634 of those commitments had been completed at the time of preparing this report with the remainder all logged and at various stages of delivery.

Learning from our complaints

We use all insight available to drive a strong learning culture that enables us to improve our services. We use complaints learning, internal insight and feedback alongside external insight to inform any changes we make to our services and processes.

We are embedding that learning in our Modernisation Programme. Through this work we are improving our customer services using all insight available to us to modernise our services and ensure that meaningful improvements are made in a way that benefits customers now and into the future.

Our operating model principles inform the way we work and our improvement activities:

Operating Model Principles:
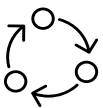
Connected Customers

Reliable and consistent service

Decisions closer to our customers

Proactive Customer Services

Adaptive and improving

Customer Focussed Culture

We'll explore how we have used our complaints learning in relation to these principles over the next few pages.

Our complaints learning has been included in these principles in the following ways:

Connected Customers

Our customers can self-serve in a way that is right for them.

We know from our complaints learning that customers can get frustrated if they are waiting for responses to carry out simple transactions. We implemented a digital consultation group for our customers to get their feedback on the channels that they would prefer to use and are currently working on a project to implement new technology into our Customer Service Hub which will enhance the digital offering to customers, allowing customers to move between channels when they contact us.

It's also important to give customers the choice of their preferred channel, and voice calls will always remain an option for our customers.

Giving customers the choice to self-serve transactions will allow our colleagues to spend more time on supporting our customers through more complex issues to improve customer satisfaction and gain insightful learning to improve services.

Reliable, Consistent Service

We are simplifying our internal processes, improving our systems and increasing transparency for our customers and colleagues. During 2024/25 we engaged with over 300 colleagues and 1,500 customer to understand how well our services are working and how we can enhance our service delivery. From this feedback we will be reviewing our repairs service, Anti-Social Behaviour and Neighbourhood services in 2025/26

The self-service offering available to customers in MyAster has been enhanced to include access to Gas Servicing information and appointments, communal repairs, detailed information on Grounds Maintenance services and access to Tenancy Agreements.

In 2025/26 we will be building a new MyAster platform which will offer even more choice to customers.

Decisions Closer to our Customers

We are working to increase the number of contacts we resolve when our customers first contact us.

Through our complaints learning, we know that service failures often happen when our Customer Service Hub are unable to provide a resolution (for example, where they do not have the right knowledge or information available). We are therefore evolving the skillset within our Customer Service Hub, and we are continually enhancing our systems and processes to enable access to information to resolve issues quickly and further improve the service to our customers

Customer Focussed Culture

We will listen to our customers, providing our services is an empathetic and human way.

We have new customer voice governance in place, with the launch of the Customer Voice Committee in 2025/26 who will have more oversight of our involvement. Customer codesign groups have been set up for our service reviews including repairs. Quarterly customer insight reports to include complaints learnings which will include an action plan to check how we are listening and acting on what our customers are telling us.

We have refreshed our tone of voice learning for our colleagues. This has been rolled out as mandatory learning. We have also introduced new learning and development training sessions to include complaint resolution and supporting customers with additional needs.

We publish complaint learning to our customers each quarter through our customer E-Shot and via our website.

Proactive Customer Services

We use our insight and learning effectively to design and improve our services and predict where our services are needed most.

Service-related issues dominate complaints relating to housing issues, and it is important to us that we are predicting where our services are needed most through our data, automation, technology and insight. We are prioritising AI (Artificial Intelligence) usage in complaints to help us predict where complaints are most likely to happen. This will allow us to prioritise our service improvements in those areas so that we can prevent complaints happening.

We are using our customer feedback to create an action plan for modernisation. As an example, through our complaint learning we want to utilise AI in more complex cases such as damp, condensation and mould to identify where a customer may need additional support or proactive contact.

Adaptive and Improving
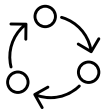
We are creating a culture of continuous improvement. We are using complaints and performance information to drive continual service improvements and measure those changes to make sure they meet the outcomes we need them to. For every complaint investigation, a learning log has to be completed so we can learn from every complaint.

Examples of how we are embedding this culture in relation to complaints include:

- Our complaints performance and information is scrutinised throughout our governance structure. Our Overlap Boards, Executive Board and Customer Voice Committee scrutinise our complaints performance and the learning from individual complaint cases where appropriate. Our Executive Board and Senior Leadership Team have also received deep dives on our complaint performance and resetting our complaint culture. Detailed scrutiny is also provided within our wider customer voice groups, operational panels and leadership teams.

Examples of how we are embedding an adaptive and improving culture include:

- We have reviewed our contractual arrangements with key contractors that are involved in damp and mould work. We have introduced compliance measures relating to timescales for the completion of works and for responses when there is a complaint about the quality of a contractor's work. This has improved the customer experience when Aster is not using its own Direct Labour Organisation (DLO) to carry out works.

- We have introduced AI technology through Microsoft Co-Pilot to enhance access to customer information for colleagues. This improves the transparency of Aster's work and allows for informed discussions with customers.

- There is now a clearer procedure of resourcing two person visits to a customer's address (only when that is necessary). This does not impact on the timescales and targets for completing repairs. This enables those customers with different needs to still receive a high level of service.

- Aster's response to reports of anti-social behaviour has been refreshed with a clear and transparent escalation process for colleagues. This is reflective of the circumstance and gravity of the incident. It does not force colleagues to escalate through a set of tactical options but allows them to select the most appropriate action for addressing the issues that have been reported.

- Our Designated Complaints Panel have been involved in a complaints learning circle, with further sessions planned in 2025/26. This allows us to learn from individual complaints using Restorative Practice principles, ensuring that complaints are considered in an open way that does not attribute blame and focuses on driving improvements

Examples of specific improvements that have been made in response to complaints learning include:

- We have reviewed and amended the communication we use for planned programmes (such as replacement windows, kitchens and bathrooms). This has provided clarity for customers and colleagues in terms of when works are likely to take place.

- We have trialled and are about to implement a compensation calculator that will provide case managers with guidance and support to ensure all elements of a complaint are considered when a service failure has taken place. It does not remove professional judgement, but it is reflective of the Housing Ombudsman offer of reasonable redress where there has been a service failure.

- We have also improved the clarity of responsibility relating to garden drainage, so that customers are clear on their responsibility, the responsibility of a developer (if it is a new build) and the responsibility of Aster.

- There have been reviews and changes made to several of our policies in 2024/25 to include ASB, Insurance and Liability, Pest infestations and Repairs.

- To improve accessibility to our complaints service we have introduced Recite Me onto the Aster website. This can translate, transcribe, increase font size, and play audio to support customers in accessing information online.

Housing Ombudsman

Annual Self-Assessments and Code Compliance

Our self-assessments against the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code can be found on our websites: (Aster-Housing-Ombudsman-Self-Assessment-June-24.pdf) (This years will need to be embedded once approved)

Ombudsman Annual Report for Aster Group

The Housing Ombudsman's performance report for Aster Group for 2023-24 can be found here: landlord performance report. This year's report is likely to be published in Autumn 2025.

Our Maladministration Rate was 61%, which was higher than in 2022-23 but still lower than the national maladministration rate of 73%. The Ombudsman identified that we performed favourably when compared to similar landlords by size and type.

Ombudsman Publications for Aster Group

The ombudsman published details of an Aster Complaint that led to an independent review during the year. The link is here. Aster independent review | Housing Ombudsman Service

The Ombudsman also published a further 15 adverse determinations during the course of 2024/25. The links to them are listed below.

(202421702) - 1 finding of severe maladministration and 1 of maladministration
(202312581) - 3 findings of reasonable redress, 1 of no maladministration & 1 of maladministrat.
(202324151) - 1 finding of no maladministration, 1 of service failure and 1 of maladministration
(202404076) - 2 findings of no maladministration, 2 of service failure and 1 of maladministration
(202229055) - 3 findings of no maladministration and 1 of service failure
(202233480) - 2 findings of no maladministration, 1 of service failure and 1 of maladministration
(202300109) - 1 finding of maladministration
(202327751) - 1 finding of maladministration and 1 of service failure
(202224551) - 1 finding of no maladministration and 1 of service failure
(202233003) - 1 finding of maladministration
(202306225) - 2 findings of maladministration and 1 of reasonable redress
(202310554) - 1 finding of reasonable redress
(202226132) - 2 findings of no maladministration, 2 of reasonable redress and 1 of service failure
(202230053) - 1 finding of no maladministration
(202122022) - 1 finding of service failure and 1 of maladministration

Housing Ombudsman Determinations

Aster Group

There are currently 28 Aster complaint cases under investigation by the Housing Ombudsman, with another 4 in the process of being prepared. 1 case is currently the subject of an Ombudsman's review at Aster's request.

In 2024/25 a total of 36 investigations were completed by the Housing Ombudsman. This is 5 more than in 2023 / 24. The figures in brackets relate to 2023/24.

Findings

- No Maladministration 25 (15)
- Reasonable redress 13 (7)
- Service Failure 19 (9)
- Maladministration 18 (24)
- Severe maladministration 2 (3)
- Outside of Jurisdiction 6 (5)

Predicted 51% Maladministration Rate

- We therefore had 39 Adverse findings and 38 with No Adverse findings, forecasting a Maladministration rate of 51%. This will not be confirmed until the Housing Ombudsman Service has considered all relevant reviews.

Orders and Recommendations relating to non-compliance

The Housing Ombudsman issued 78 (47) orders and 32 (22) recommendations to Aster in 2023/24. The themes from these orders and recommendations were:

- Payment of additional compensation
- A personal or written apology to the customer
- Case reviews orders & recommendations
- Policy Review orders & recommendations
- Process Change orders & recommendations
- Orders & recommendations to complete further repairs for customers
- Staff training orders & recommendations
- Orders & recommendations to take specific action (not repairs)

All orders and recommendations have been complied with and Aster have had no Complaint Handling Failure Orders issued by the Housing Ombudsman.

Customer Compliments

We use all insight available to drive a strong learning culture that enables us to improve our services, and this includes compliments relating to complaint handling as this helps us to share best practice to drive service improvement

Customer Feedback:

Aster Group received 42 compliments during 2024 / 25 linked to complaint handling. This is a snapshot of a few of them:

- *"Thanks for the response to our complaint and for how well it has been handled."*

- *"Thank you for your support and the expertise of the engineer team."*

- *"I would like to pass on my thanks to Tracey for her efforts in investigating the complaint and the progress that has been achieved since her intervention."*

- *"I appreciate his thorough investigation of my complaint and sincerely thank him for his very human response."*

- *"Thank you so much for all your help and support. And going the extra miles."*

- *"Proper job we say down here. Really appreciate your kindness. You gave outstanding service."*

- *"Thank you for your empathy and human approach which was so badly lacking from the start. It is very much appreciated. It is reassuring to know that my thoughts have been taken on board and that prevention of similar cases will be considered - even discussed."*