In-house RESEARCH

WHITE PAPER · REPAIRS & COMPLAINTS

The repairs & complaints trust gap

Why satisfaction falls when KPIs look fine

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It is a familiar board pack. Repairs completed on time: green. Complaints responded to within timescale: green. Tenant satisfaction with repairs: flat, or falling.

Both sets of numbers can be accurate. They are measuring different things. Operational KPIs measure what the landlord did, against the landlord's own targets. Satisfaction measures what the tenant experienced. When the two drift apart, that is the trust gap, and it is where many of the most serious failures in social housing begin.

This paper looks at the evidence for the gap, the five most common reasons it opens up, and how landlords can measure it and close it.

The gap in numbers

The national data shows the gap clearly.

79%
of non-emergency repairs completed within landlords' target timescales

73.6%
median tenant satisfaction with repairs

26% vs 7%
tenants who say they complained, against the rate landlords' records imply

35.5%
median satisfaction with complaint handling, the weakest result of all

- **Repairs are mostly on time, but tenants are less convinced.** In 2024/25, landlords reported 79% of non-emergency repairs and 91% of emergency repairs completed within their target timescales. More than 2.5 million repairs were closed without being completed.
- **Most complaints are never recorded as complaints.** About 26% of tenants told TSM surveys they had made a complaint in the past year. Landlords' own complaint records imply a figure nearer 7%.
- **Satisfaction with complaint handling is the weakest result of all.** The median is 35.5% among social rent tenants and 23.4% among shared owners.
- **When complaints escalate, repairs dominate.** The Housing Ombudsman reports that complaints about poor living conditions rose by 474% between 2019/20 and 2024/25, and that 72% stemmed from poor practice. Its maladministration rate across all cases was 71% in 2024/25.

As the Ombudsman put it: "Repairs are the single biggest driver of complaints and determining factor of resident trust."

None of this means landlords' KPIs are wrong. It means KPIs alone can't tell a board how tenants are experiencing the service.

Five reasons the gap opens

1

KPIs measure the landlord's clock, not the tenant's

A repair "on time" is measured against the landlord's own target, usually from when the job was raised. For the tenant, the clock started when they first noticed the problem and reported it, perhaps more than once. If a job is cancelled and re-raised, split into several orders or closed after a "no access" visit, each part can be on time while the overall problem drags on for months.

2

A job isn't the same as a problem fixed

Operational systems count jobs. Tenants care about whether the problem is solved. The Ombudsman's 2025 repairs report found recurring temporary fixes instead of permanent repairs, poor diagnosis and cases closed before hazards were resolved. A landlord can complete every job on time and still leave a tenant with a leak that keeps coming back.

3

How it felt matters as much as what was done

Tenants judge a repair on the whole experience: getting through to report it, being given an appointment that suits them, the operative turning up when promised, being treated with respect in their home, and being told what happens next. The Ombudsman's casework includes operatives arriving without notice and communication that fails to treat residents with respect. A repair can be technically complete and still damage trust.

4

Dissatisfaction doesn't always become a complaint

The Complaint Handling Code defines a complaint as an expression of dissatisfaction, however made. In practice, many tenants mention a problem to an operative, a call handler or a surveyor without ever saying the word "complaint", and it is never logged. Others don't complain because they don't expect anything to change. The gap between the 26% who say they complained and the roughly 7% recorded suggests a large volume of dissatisfaction landlords never see in their complaint figures.

5

Averages hide the people having the worst experience

A 90% on-time rate still leaves one repair in ten late. If those late repairs cluster in particular estates, property types or households, such as older or disabled tenants, families in homes with damp and mould, or tenants who struggle to get through on the phone, the average looks healthy while a minority have a very poor experience. Those are often the cases that reach the Ombudsman, the press and the regulator.

Measuring the trust gap

Closing the gap starts with measuring it. Six practical steps make the biggest difference.

1. Ask tenants shortly after the repair, not once a year

A short transactional survey within days of a repair captures the experience while it is fresh. Link each response to the job record so you can see results by trade, contractor, area and job type. Telephone works particularly well. Interviewers can probe for detail and reach tenants who don't respond online.

2. Ask about the problem, not just the job

Was it fixed first time? How many visits did it take? Were you kept informed? Was the appointment kept? How easy was it to get the repair done? These questions show where the experience breaks down, not just whether the tenant was satisfied.

3. Measure from the tenant's first report

Track end-to-end time from when the problem was first reported to when it was resolved, across cancelled, re-raised and follow-on jobs. Compare it with your standard on-time KPI. The difference is often revealing.

4. Find the complaints you are missing

Ask tenants whether they were unhappy enough to want to complain, and whether they did. Analyse open-text comments for dissatisfaction that never entered the complaints process. Review a sample of "no access" closures with tenants.

5. Read the comments and act on them quickly

Every survey comment is a tenant explaining what went wrong in their own words. AI-assisted text analytics makes it practical to theme thousands of comments, but the value comes from acting on them. Call back tenants who report a poor experience. That callback is often the moment trust is rebuilt.

6. Make sure risks reach the right people immediately

Conversations about repairs often uncover hazards and welfare concerns that have never been reported, including damp and mould, now covered by Awaab's Law. With VIRA, our Voice-Informed Risk Alerts service, every welfare concern and Awaab's Law hazard raised in our surveys reaches the responsible team in real time, with a full record of what happened next.

A trust gap view for the board

Boards don't need more data. They need operational and tenant measures side by side, so the gap is visible. A simple scorecard might look like this.

What the KPI says	What tenants say	The question for the board
Repairs completed within target	Repair satisfaction; fixed first time	**Are we fixing problems, or just closing jobs?**
Average days to complete	End-to-end time from first report; number of visits	**How long does the problem last for the tenant?**
Appointments made and kept	Appointment kept and convenient; kept informed	**Do tenants feel in control of the process?**
Complaints responded to on time	Satisfaction with complaint handling; would have complained but didn't	**Are we hearing about most dissatisfaction?**
Damp and mould cases closed	Tenant confirms the problem is resolved	**Are hazards really fixed?**

Where the left-hand column is green and the right-hand column is not, the board has found something worth asking about.

Questions every board should ask

1. Do we measure repairs from the tenant's first report, or only from when the job was raised?
2. How many repairs needed more than one visit, and how many were closed without being completed?
3. What do tenants say about their repair within days of it being done, and how quickly do we act on poor feedback?
4. How much dissatisfaction is reaching us outside the formal complaints process?
5. Which groups of tenants have the worst repairs experience, and what are we doing about it?
6. When a tenant raises a hazard or welfare concern during any contact, how quickly does it reach the right team, and how do we know?

Conclusion

Operational KPIs tell a board whether the organisation is doing what it said it would. Tenant feedback tells it whether that is what tenants needed. Landlords need both, side by side.

The trust gap won't be closed by faster processes alone. It closes when landlords listen to tenants after every repair and complaint, look for the dissatisfaction they aren't hearing, and act on it quickly enough for tenants to notice. That is how landlords rebuild trust, and how boards get assurance they can rely on.

Sources

- Regulator of Social Housing, Tenant Satisfaction Measures 2024/25 headline report
- Housing Ombudsman, Repairing trust: Spotlight report on repairs and maintenance (May 2025)
- Housing Ombudsman, Annual Complaints Review 2024-25
- Housing Ombudsman, Knowledge and information management: steps to improve

Measure your repairs experience

We'll show you how tenants really experience your repairs and complaints, and where the gap with your KPIs lies.

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