

Housing Division – Complaint Handling – 1st April 2023 – 31 March 2024 Annual Report

1 Introduction

- 1.1 Our policy and procedure for handling complaints is published on the Council's website. The Chief Executive's Service receives complaints, acknowledges them, tracks them and provides summary reports.
- 1.2 The published information tells customers that the Council is committed to providing positive housing services that meet our published standards and deliver good customer care. It encourages them to give feedback so that we know what is working well and what we need to do to improve.
- 1.3 The service is acting to encourage feedback and complaints to promote learning.

2 Quantity

- 1.4 During 2023/2024 the Housing Division responded to 37 complaints at Stage 1 of its complaints procedure. 3 complaints were made at Stage 2. Two complaints were referred to Ombudsman services. During the same period the Housing Division received 90 compliments. 36 were for Housing Management and 53 were for Housing Maintenance.
- 1.5 22 of the Stage 1 complaints were about the maintenance service.
14 of the Stage 1 complaints were about the management service.
1 of the Stage 2 complaints was about the maintenance service
2 of the Stage 2 complaints were about the management service – 1 was withdrawn before a response was given.
1 complaint was considered by the Housing Ombudsman Service.
1 complaint was considered by the Ombudsman for Social Care.

3 Content of Complaints

- 3.1 There were some commonalities in the complaints that were received about the maintenance service. Nine were concerned with the time it took for a requested to repair to be completed. Three were about the customer care offered at the time the service was being delivered. One was about the level of service we offered out of normal working hours. One was about the condition of the property when it was re-let. One tenant objected to a request for compliance with housekeeping linked to fire safety.

- 3.2 The complaints received about the management service were more individual. One was about the time taken to respond to a Right to Buy. One was about the lack of consistency in requiring residents to have a dropped kerb – this was directed to Warwickshire County Council. One was about the recharge that was raised because of the condition of the property at the end of the tenancy. One was from an owner occupier who complained about where our tenant positioned their bins. One was about fly tipping on a neighbouring garage site. One was from a tenant who objected to how we had challenged them to observe their tenancy conditions. Two were about how their housing register application was considered. Two were about parking facilities. Two were concerned with how the Division addressed neighbour disputes.
- 3.3 In both of the Stage 2 complaints that required a response the reviewer upheld the findings of the officer responding at Stage 1. One was about our response to repair a garage door out of working hours. One was about the condition of the property when the tenant moved out – photographs were used to confirm matters.
- 3.4 The Housing Ombudsman service upheld the complaint referred to them. It was concerned with how the Housing Management Service had handled complaints of anti-social behaviour. They found maladministration in how we had responded to the complaint in accordance with our complaints policy because they said we had not responded at stage 2 within published timescales. They also found maladministration in how we had responded to the complaint of antisocial behaviour in accordance with our Anti Social Behaviour Policy and Procedure.
- 3.5 The Social Care Ombudsman did not uphold the complaint referred to them about how the Housing Management Service had assessed an application to join the housing register. They found that the Housing Options Service had assessed the application in accordance with the Lettings Scheme.

4 Learning from Complaints

- 4.1 Whilst we can acknowledge and respond to complaints in a positive manner it is important that we learn from them so that we can improve our services. We can consider whether there are systemic issues in the way we deliver our services and also whether we can change our approach to service delivery.
- 4.2 There are some specific considerations in our learning and some which are more general.
- 4.3 There are some key areas of consideration for 2024-2025 based on complaints received:
- We must actively seek feedback from tenants and respond positively to what they tell us about our service.
 - All services should be delivered with good customer care.
 - We should have clear policies and procedures and ensure we act in accordance with what we have stated.

- If a customer raises a concern with the service we should act promptly to address it and provide clear timescales for responding
- We need to deliver reported repairs in the timescales agreed and when we cannot do so keep the tenant informed.
- We send a survey to all complainants following our reply to find out if they are satisfied with our response

4.4 Our learning actions will include:

4.4.1 We seek feedback for improvement works. We will extend this during 2024-2025 and re-instate routine transactional surveys, including telephone surveys, to actively seek out the views of tenants who have received a service.

4.4.2 The Council expects the Housing Division to provide good customer service. In doing so we want to be consistent in our approach. To support staff with this requirement. training has been delivered about how we respond to customer dissatisfaction and complaints and will be provided about equalities, diversity and inclusion. A policy statement about how we meet tenants needs and tailor our services will be developed. This will be informed by the training received about the Housing Ombudsman's call to social housing landlords to consider the issue of 'silent voices' amongst their tenants, to find out why some do not feedback or complain when they have a concern and to seek ways of addressing this.

4.4.3 The Council has agreed to change the structure of the Maintenance Service so that it has better capacity to meet the needs of both the stock and its tenants. When the changes are embedded there is an expectation that tenants will have less cause to 'chase' the repairs they have requested because of delays. The Borough Wide Tenants Forum have agreed to undertake a scrutiny exercise about how easy it is to report a repair. This will help inform the service about improvements we can make.

4.4.4 The Housing Services Manager is reviewing the anti social behaviour policy and procedure. This is aimed at improving how we communicate with tenants when they have a neighbour complaint and be clear about what actions can and will be taken. In addition training is being offered to relevant staff about dealing with reports to neighbour disputes and anti social behaviour in a positive manner. The Borough Wide Tenants Forum have agreed to undertake a scrutiny exercise about tenants' experience of our service to resolve complaints of nuisance. This will help inform the service about improvements we can make.

4.4.5 We will act to learn from complaints individually and also address commonalities in complaints that indicate a system or policy needs to be improved.