

## **Complaints Scrutiny Output Report**

**July 2025**

**Prepared by Kerry Lecomber**

### **Introduction**

The Tenant Board are committed to lead on two scrutiny projects per fiscal year. In April 2024, the Board decided their scrutiny work plan and as well as their involvement in the Annual Report to Tenants and the Tenant Handbook, they also voted on Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) and Complaints to be scrutinised.

The Tenant Board made the decision to review Complaints after reviewing perception satisfaction scores on our service through our Tenant Satisfaction Survey (TSM). The Board were interested to understand why satisfaction scores were so low. In 2023/24 Tenants stating they were very or fairly dissatisfied with complaint handling was 63% and in 2024/25 that figure was 58%.

Previous research into these figures had indicated that many of those surveyed stating they had made a complaint had not actually been through our official complaints process.

According to the TSM data between Q2 2023/24 and Q1 2025/26 average satisfaction with complaint handling have changed but have an overall improving position. Between Q2 2023 and Q2 2024 satisfaction ranged between 18% and 30%. From Q3 2024/25 to Q1 2025/26 that has ranged between 34% and 51%. Sector averages for satisfaction with Complaints Handling is 30.4% so is generally one of the lower scores.

This report presents the findings and recommendations from a scrutiny project carried out by the Tenant Board to review the handling and resolution of tenant complaints. The project aimed to assess the effectiveness, transparency, and tenant satisfaction associated with the complaints process, and to identify areas for improvement.

A new council wide complaints system with better functionality and reporting capabilities was implemented in June 2024. This enables for automatic reminders to staff, better case management, extensions to be applied and improvements made to final responses. It also is able to track when tenants have been contacted as part of their complaint to ensure that the 5-day acknowledgment deadline is being met, track overdue complaints and record lessons learnt, all of which are key to us being able to evidence our compliance with the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code

Both councils receive a higher number of complaints than the sector average for landlords with a similar number of properties. This is not seen as problematic by the Regulator for Social Housing (RSH) as this could mean that our tenants feel comfortable to and are aware of how to make a complaint and also that we are recognising and recording complaints. Their focus is that complaints are responded to in time and resolved and that lessons are learnt.

## **Methodology**

### Desktop Review

To understand the background to complaints, identify themes, and determine the scope of their scrutiny activity, the tenant board undertook a desktop review of data from the Complaints system as well as results in the Tenant Satisfaction Measures survey. The data from the Complaints system could only be analysed since July 2024 when the system was introduced.

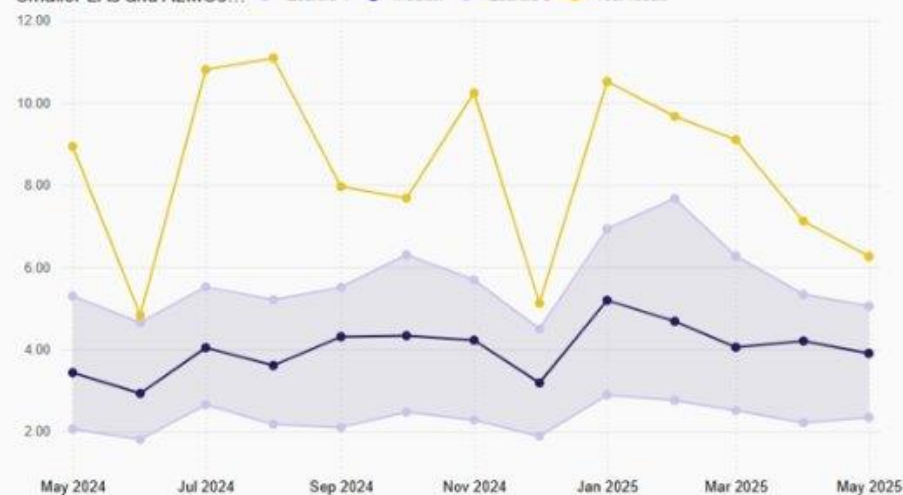
At a tenant board meeting James Hart, Complaints and Feedback Officer, attended and presented to the board. He took them through our policy and procedures, and through the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code. This gave them a thorough understanding of the subject matter.

## Stage 1 and 2 complaints per 1,000 homes

Formal Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaints received per 1,000 properties

May 2025

Smaller LAs and ALMOs... Quartile 1 Median Quartile 3 Your result



Babergh

Formal Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaints received per 1,000 properties

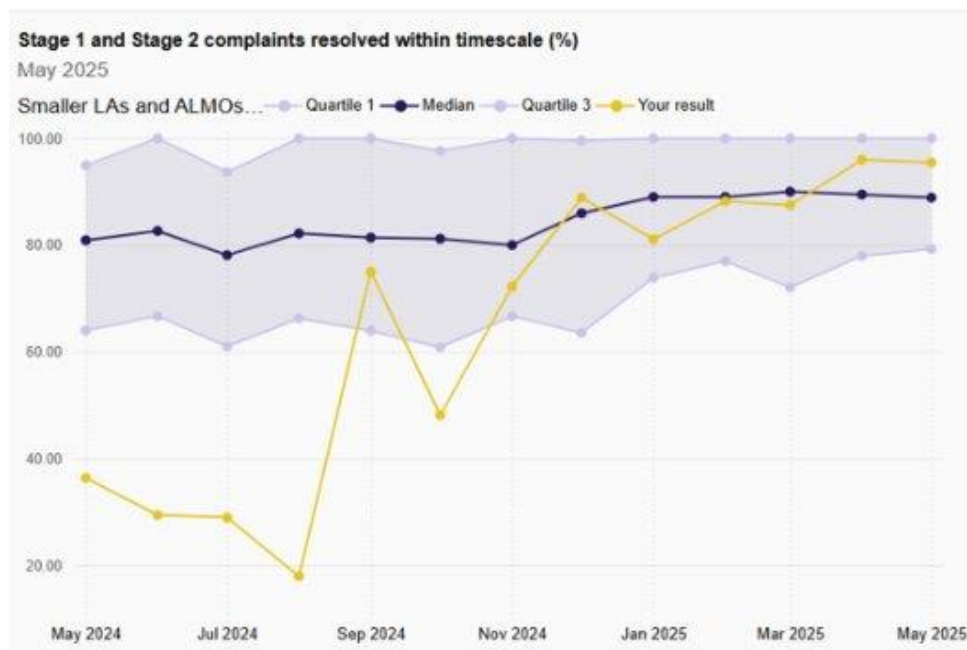
May 2025

Smaller LAs and ALMOs... Quartile 1 Median Quartile 3 Your result



Mid Suffolk

## Stage 1 and 2 complaints resolved within time



Babergh



Mid Suffolk

# Complaints data – Tenant Board scrutiny project

Stage 1 complaints received (July 2024 – 26 March 2025)

	July 2024	Aug 2024	Sept 2024	Oct 2024	Nov 2024	Dec 2024	Jan 2025	Feb 2025	Mar 2025	Total
ASB, Tenancy Services and Sheltered Housing (Babergh)	8	1	4	2	6	4	5	7	7	44
Responded in time	6	0	3	2	5	2	3	6	7	34(77%)
Breached	2	1	1	0	1	2	2	1	0	10(22%)
ASB, Tenancy Services and Sheltered Housing (Mid Suffolk)	4	4	4	4	2	2	6	3	1	30
Responded in time	3	1	2	2	2	2	4	2	1	19(63%)
Breached	1	3	2	2	0	0	2	1	0	11 36%)
Housing Repairs – Asbestos, Water Hygiene, and Fire Safety (Babergh)	_*	_*	_*	_*	1	0	0	1	0	2
Responded in time					1			1		2 (100%)
Breached					0			0		0
Housing Repairs – Asbestos, Water Hygiene, and Fire Safety (Mid Suffolk)	_*	_*	_*	_*	0	0	0	0	0	0
Responded in time					0					0
Breached					0					0
Housing Repairs – Damp and mould (Babergh)	4	10	1	6	3	1	2	3	1	31
Responded in time	0	0	1	2	2	1	1	3	1	11(35%)
Breached	4	10	0	4	1	0	1	0	0	20 65%)
Housing Repairs – Damp and mould (Mid Suffolk)	6	5	9	2	3	0	1	3	1	30

Responded in time	1	0	2	1	3		1	3	1	12 40%)
Breached	5	5	7	1	0		0	0	0	18(60%)
Housing Repairs – Gas and electric (Babergh)	_*	_*	1	4	8	5	11	9	5	43
Responded in time			1	4	3	4	5	9	3	29(67%)
Breached			0	0	5	1	6	0	2	14(33%)
Housing Repairs – Gas and electric (Mid Suffolk)	_*	_*	1	1	4	9	6	8	3	32
Responded in time			0	0	1	8	3	3	1	16(50%)
Breached			1	1	3	1	3	5	2	16(50%)
Housing Repairs – regarding outstanding repairs raised (Babergh)	25	13	19	10	10	6	16	5	5	109
Responded in time	4	3	16	9	5	6	12	4	5	64(58%)
Breached	21	10	3	1	5	0	4	1	0	45(41%)
Housing Repairs – regarding outstanding repairs raised (Mid Suffolk)	19	9	7	12	5	11	6	8	8	85
Responded in time	2	2	7	11	4	7	6	7	8	54(63%)
Breached	17	7	0	1	1	4	0	1	0	31(36%)
Planned Maintenance (Babergh)	2	5	0	2	2	0	3	5	7	26
Responded in time	0	1	0	2	2		1	5	7	18(69%)
Breached	2	4	0	0	0		2	0	0	8(30%)
Planned Maintenance (Mid Suffolk)	1	4	0	1	0	3	0	0	0	9
Responded in time	0	1		1		3				5(55%)
Breached	1	3		0		0				4(45%)

\*new category added later in time period. No data available.

## Stage 2 complaints (July 2024 – 26 March 2025)

	July 2024	Aug 2024	Sept 2024	Oct 2024	Nov 2024	Dec 2024	Jan 2025	Feb 2025	Mar 2025	Total
Tenancy Services (Babergh)	1	1	0	2	0	0	0	3	0	7
Responded in time	0	0		2				3		5(71%)
Breached	1	1		0				0		2(29%)
Tenancy Services (Mid Suffolk)	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	2	0	5
Responded in time	0	0		1			1	2		4(80%)
Breached	1	0		0			0	0		1(20%)
Housing – Asset Compliance (Babergh)	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	2	1	8
Responded in time	1		1	0	0		1	2	1	6(75%)
Breached	0		0	1	1		0	0	0	2(25%)
Housing – Asset Compliance (Mid Suffolk)	2	0	0	0	1	2	1	2	1	9
Responded in time	1				1	2	1	1	1	7(77%)
Breached	1				0	0	0	1	0	2(23%)
Housing – Asset Management (Babergh)	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	3
Responded in time		1	1		1					3
Breached		0	0		0					0
Housing – Asset Management (Mid Suffolk)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Responded in time								1		1
Breached								0		0
Housing – DLO/Repairs (Babergh)	0	6	3	3	5	2	1	0	0	20
Responded in time		4	2	2	4	2	1			15
Breached		2	1	1	1	0	0			5
Housing – DLO/Repairs (Mid Suffolk)	6	2	2	2	0	1	1	0	0	14
Responded in time	5	2	2	2		1	1			13
Breached	1	0	0	0		0	0			1



The Tenant Board were taken through data and themes from commentary collected about complaints via our Tenant Satisfaction Measure surveys and some follow up work we did with tenants who has previously told us they were dissatisfied with our complaint handling.

Their comments were captured via a virtual whiteboard and identified that communication was a key theme, and it was agreed that investigating how we communicate with tenants making a complaint must be included in the workshops.

The Tenant Board were keen to use Customer Journey Maps to bring the subject to life for workshop attendees as they provide a good talking point and are an effective method when looking for recommendations.

We then recruited a group of tenants who were interested in joining us for either an online evening workshop or an in person daytime workshop to scrutinise our complaints.

## Customer Journey Mapping

We met with the Complaints and Feedback Officer to put together a list of tenants who had a complaint that would be suitable cases to interview and produce some customer journey maps. We sent an email to a group of them outlining what we were looking for.

We had 3 tenants who expressed an interest in being involved in the Customer Journey Mapping Activity, 1 with a stage 1 complaint, 1 with a stage 2 complaint and one that had been escalated to the Housing Ombudsman.

We conducted two interviews over the telephone and one face to face with the tenants and wanted to understand their experience of the whole case. We asked for the following information, with each section giving detail to their emotional experience throughout their complaints case.

- Reporting
- All communication touch points
- Risks
- Outcome

The interviews were detailed and lasted between 15 minutes to an hour depending on the complexity of the case.

We then designed the layout of the customer journey maps based on the tenant interviews. The maps were split in to three sections; 'reporting', 'throughout the case', 'final outcome' or 'risks'.

Using what the tenants had told us; we included a line graph to the map to show how tenants felt about their complaint handling experience as the complaint investigation proceeded.

The top section of the map showed key points throughout the case and the bottom section labelled "solutions" was left blank as this would be used as an activity in the workshops to understand what we could have done to improve each section on the case. Please find example on following page.



# Complaints Customer Journey Map- 2

## Customer Experience

- Found damp and mould in living room – first time in 7 years there.
- Reported to Council.

## Throughout the case

- They felt they weren't listened to at the start as we thought the damp was related to work to the facias and blocked guttering.
- Initial treatment seemed to work.
- 6 weeks later it was back and was worse.
- Reported again and offered same treatment which they refused.
- Surveyor visited and they stated again they thought it was the facias and guttering.
- Surveyor said it wasn't damp – even though there were drip marks down the walls.
- Offered extractor fitting even though that hadn't been surveyed which they refused.
- Mrs B now recovering from surgery and having to sleep in lounge with the damp and mould.
- Both now suffering with coughs and breathing problems.
- Still no report from original survey.
- Second external surveyor visit who found issue in loft with insulation not re-laid and blocked guttering – as they had always suspected.
- Long wait so they started official complaint.
- Went to Ombudsman who ruled in their favour.
- Now works finally done.

## Risk Awareness

- D&M appearing after 7 years without and coinciding with works done to property.
- Surveyor not trusting tenants' opinions when there was clear evidence.
- Tenants both suffering with coughs.
- Tenant recovering from surgery in an unsafe environment.

## Customer Emotional Experience

- Simple process to report.
- Told it would be an easy fix initially.

- Initial works seemed to fix it.

- Returned really quickly.
- Reported but felt we weren't being taken seriously

- Surveyor not listening to us.
- Findings against clear evidence.

- Surgery recovery and ill health now making experience really distressing.
- Both now suffering with health.

- Lack of communication and lack of any sense of urgency.

## Solutions

Tell us what you think could have improved the case

## The Complaints Case - Mr and Mrs B

On 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2023 we reported a patch of damp on our ceiling which was clear to see but not terrible. In the 7 years of living in our home we had not seen any damp. An inspection took place which said it was an easy fix. We were concerned as it was black mould. At the first visit it was sprayed and we were told that would resolve it but within a month it had spread again. Cleaning Shield came out and they just washed it and applied a chemical. Within 6 weeks the sweep marks on wall were covered in black mould and there were drip marks on top of walls above picture rail and it was spreading across the window, blinds and round the door.

We reported it again and said we were really worried as the room seemed generally damp now and metal items were starting to go rusty. We were offered Cleaning Shield again but we refused that as we believed it was a structural issue. We had a visit from a Surveyor and we told him it started just after they replaced the fascias. He thought next door might need their guttering cleared out. He said the wall wasn't really wet. We didn't understand why he was saying that when there were actual drip marks.

Then we got a call about some electrical works, the company said they were coming to fit extractor fans. We advised that we hadn't had the surveyors report so didn't want the extractor fitted. They were stood down and they came out to do a quote which they agreed to. It was very distressing as Mrs B had had surgery and had to sleep downstairs. Had a second operation and again had to sleep in the lounge for 2 or 3 nights. Horrible having health issues and having to deal with it. Also both Mr and Mrs B were finding they had constant coughs.

A report from the previous surveyor never materialised and then another surveyor came out from Arron Services, he drilled through an airbrick to check the insulation but he said it wasn't that. Again we suspected the guttering so he got up in the loft and found that insulation had been moved away from the edge of the exterior wall when the work was being done on the fascias and there was a 5m stretch that hadn't been put back. Added to that was the blocked guttering next door making it worse. We then waited and waited and waited so we started going through the complaints procedure formally and the Complaints Officer who dealt with it was very helpful.

Eventually, however, we went to the Ombudsman and told them we would like the works to be approved and carried out. A few weeks later we had a call to say the works were approved.

Works started with electricians and plumbers removed radiators. The communication wasn't great as we were told originally it would take 3 days but ended up being the whole week. They finished on the Friday and said they'd come back to do carpentry, sockets etc. but the next morning a plumber and electrician turned up. They were all really lovely and very engaging but nothing was properly booked in and the communication wasn't great.

## Recruitment for Focus Groups

The focus groups were advertised in My Home Bulletin with an incentive of a £20 shopping voucher for taking part in the in-person workshop and £10 voucher for taking part in the online workshop.

## Online Focus Group

On Monday 14<sup>th</sup> July we met with 7 tenants and 7 staff members for our online workshop. The groups were provided with copies of our Complaints Policy, the Ombudsman's Complaints Handling Code as well a leaflet from the Chartered Institute of Housing on handling complaints effectively ahead of the session.

In terms of the tenants' demographics the breakdown was as follows:

Babergh tenants            5

Mid Suffolk tenants       2

### **Age:**

40s	2 tenants
50s	1 tenant
60s	1 tenant
70s	3 tenants

### **Gender:**

Male	4 tenants
Female	4 tenants

All tenants were White British and had English as their first language and all but one had a health vulnerability.

For the evening workshop we started by giving the background to the workshop, clearly outlined what a complaint was – and what isn't considered a complaint, in line with the Housing Ombudsman's complaint definition. We also gave a brief outline of our complaints policy going through stage 1, stage 2 and the Housing Ombudsman service.

We then took them through three different Customer Journey Maps outlining real cases and real lived experience.

Comments were drawn out from the group and recorded in the minutes.

## In Person Focus Group

On Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> July we held our in-person workshop at Copdock Village Hall. We have 8 tenants, 9 staff members, the two Tenant Engagement Officers from East Suffolk District Council and our Housing Portfolio Holder for Babergh.

In terms of the tenants the breakdown was as follows:

Babergh tenants            5

Mid Suffolk tenants 3

## Age:

40s	1 tenants
50s	2 tenant
60s	1 tenant
70s	4 tenants

## Gender:

Male	3 tenants
51Female	5 tenants

All tenants were White British and had English as their first language and all but two had a health vulnerability.

At the in-person workshop the group was divided into smaller groups, so each group contained a mix of tenants, tenant board members and officers.

We then had a outline information session on complaints similar to what was presented to the on-line group. We also summarised our Complaints Policy and our Compensation Policy.

Complaints and Feedback Officer, James Hart, took the room through the data we have on complaints, and he covered the national picture.

He started with data from stage one complaints showing regionality, complaints by service area, information on percentages upheld and response times.

He then went on to present figures for stage two complaints and compared figures with data we have from Tenant Satisfaction Measures.

He then covered key themes we find coming out from complaints at various stages and the root causes of these. Finally, he took the group through improvements our new complaints system had driven already.

Our Tenant Insight and Improvement Manager, Vicky Freer, then took the room through some commentary that had come out of the satisfaction data on complaints. This broke the data down to help the attendees understand where there was dissatisfaction, what it was about and key themes.

Our first group activity was to start by thinking and talking about times they had made a complaint – about anything from food in a restaurant to customer service when online shopping. We asked them to consider situations that were both positive and negative about those experiences.

The second activity involved the groups reviewing some real life, redacted response examples to read through and asked them to highlight what they thought was important from a customer's point of view, when a complaint is being dealt with and responded to.

They were then asked to prioritise what they felt was most important. Following the activity, we spoke to each group taking us through their findings and captured these.

The Tenant Engagement Co-ordinator then took the room through an example of a stage 1 Customer Journey Map to familiarise them with the concept.

They then were asked to review a further two examples in their groups to complete an exercise assessing these, identifying pinch points, good and bad practise and come up with recommendations for actions would have improved the overall experience for the tenant.

Findings were then presented from each table and recorded.

In total we had a longlist of 43 recommendations which were easily divisible into these themes:

- Communication
- Professionalism
- Empathy
- Integrity

## **Recommendations**

After removing the duplicates, we combined the recommendations with similar themes and messages which resulted in 29 original recommendations remaining.

This was then taken to the Tenant Board at their August meeting for discussion and they approved the recommendations. Only one was found to be impossible to action which was to use the tenant portal as it currently doesn't have that functionality.

## **Complaints Scrutiny Recommendation List**

<b>Recommendation</b>
<b>Integrity:</b>
Clear understanding of complaint and what outcome the customer is looking for
Timely response and evidence of actions
Manage and meet expectations
Single point of contact so take responsibility
Learning from complaints is embedded
First time resolution- enabling the teams to deal with customers at Customer Services
Providing reasonable adjustments for vulnerability and escalating works if it becomes more urgent
Pay compensation first - argue later
Think outside the box and consider alternatives
More consistent approach to handling complaints
Ask the right questions
<b>Internal Comms:</b>
Improving communication internally
Better use of CRM

## External Comms:

- Clearly state what is being investigated and how using clear and simple language
- Explore suitable methods of communication based on Tenant data
- Keeping tenants up to date on their complaint and actions associated
- Making tenants aware of our service standards when they report works. E.g this job should be done within 24 hours
- Tenant portal could be used to show your communication and journey

## Empathy:

- Personal touch - empathy not corporate – apologise firstly for having to complain
- Tone of voice
- Use senses when apologising - I'm can see / smell etc.
- Meaningful response - genuine and human - person not process - understand the stress
- Trust and listen to make sure we're treating the cause not the symptoms

## Professionalism:

- Contract management
- Having policies in place to manage expectations – agreed timescales for appointments
- Checklist for when we are speaking to a tenant on what information we need to be collecting- training for new staff and re occurring training on what we need to collect and why
- Appointments at suitable times
- More inspections of work carried out including when void and hold contractors / DLO to account
- Recharge for contractor incompetency

## **From Insight to Action**

An action plan has now been developed to take the recommendations from insight to action.

Many of the recommendations were related and could be grouped and resolved by a single action point. Some were now already in hand and one was already in place. Some of them will be taken to the Quarterly Complaints Taskforce for them to take on and monitor.

This has been discussed in a meeting with the Corporate Manager for Customer Operations, Sam Lake and James Hart who is the Complaints and Feedback Officer. A large proportion of the action plan fits within their work and the actions plan was informed by their feedback.

It was then discussed in a meeting with Jane Branch; the Head of Housing Repairs and Maintenance and Richard Spencer; the Head of Asset Investment and Compliance. A number of the actions relate to repairs, contractors and contract management.

## **Progress Monitoring**

Officers responsible for these will manage and monitor their progress. It will be tracked via an Action Plan in Pentana, which will record progress to be reported back to both the Tenant Board quarterly and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee twice a year.



Complaints Scrutiny Action Plan				
Theme: Integrity				Started
No.	Insight	Reccomendation/Action	Current progress	Who
1	Clear understanding of complaint and what outcome the customer is looking for	Recruit to Tenant Complaint Experts involvement role and implement regular complaint response audits to be carried out by Tenant Complaint Experts	Role description in development.	KL
2	Timely response and evidence of actions			
3	Manage and meet expectations			
9	Think outside the box and consider alternatives			
10	More consistent approach to handling complaints			
11	Ask the right questions			
4	Single point of contact so take responsibility	Ensure when a complaint requires actions across teams we have a dedicated officer to take responsibility of these actions.	In revised policy and new system auto-generates names and contact details.	
5	Learning from complaints is embedded	Implement lessons learnt from complaints template being implemented at complaints task force.	About to be started.	Complaints Taskforce
7	Providing reasonable adjustments for vulnerability and escalating works if it becomes more urgent	Ensure staff are aware of and using the vulnerability toolkit, launch the toolkit at complaints task force and ensure tenants are aware of it. Wording on website under complaint pages about us needing to consider vulnerabilities etc.. Add a checklist to the toolkit.	Part of the complaint form now. Raise issue at next Complaints Taskforce.	
8	Pay compensation first - argue later	Review compensation policy to make it clear that we follow up with third parties about claiming compensation back if we have found cause to pay it out through our investigations but it isn't necessarily our fault.	DW to add amendment to policy.	DW
Theme: Internal Comms				
12	Improving communication internally	Monitor / Track and report on CRM response times by teams to help drive up performance.	To be linked to the Comms scrutiny.	All
13	Better use of CRM			
Theme: External Comms				
14	Clearly state what is being investigated and how using clear and simple language	Implement regular complaint response audits activity to be carried out by Tenant Complaint Experts (see 1)		KL / GM
15	Explore suitable methods of communication based on Tenant data			
16	Keeping tenants up to date on their complaint and actions associated			
17	Making tenants aware of our service standards when they report works. E.g this job should be done within 24 hours	As part of the customer service call and response audits already carried out by CAP ensure they are tracking response times were given and made clear to tenant.	Completed - Added to Golden call template.	SL
18	Tenant portal could be used to show your communication and journey	Not possible with current system.		



Theme - Empathy				
19	Personal touch - empathy not corporate – apologise firstly for having to complain	Implement regular complaint response audits activity to be carried out by Tenant Complaint Experts Role.		
20	Tone of voice			
21	Use senses when apologising - I'm can see / hear etc.			
22	Meaningful response - genuine and human - person not process - understand the stress			
23	Trust and listen to make sure we're treating the cause not the symptoms	Implement lessons learnt from complaints template being implemented at complaints task force.	About to be implemented.	
Theme - Professionalism				
24	Contract management	Ensure all contract management meetings have an agenda item of complaints.	Request evidence from recent contract meeting. Add to lessons learnt from Complaints Taskforce.	
29	Recharge for contractor incompetency			
25	Having policies in place to manage expectations – agreed timescales for appointments	Create a list of Service standards to ensure tenants are aware of the minum service they can expect to receive.		
26	Checklist for when we are speaking to a tenant on what information we need to be collecting- training for new staff and re occurring training on what we need to collect and why	Should already be happening (could link to vulnerability toolkit action.)		
27	Appointments at suitable times	As part of the new job management system all tenants are now offered appontment slots for most day to day repairs. (am, pm, all day, avoid school runs Monday to Friday)	Completed	
28	More inspections of work carried out including when void and hold contractors / DLO to account	Voids currently inspected on 100% basis by Surveyors as new contract. Before and after photos are also supplied. Repairs will be inspecting 10% going forwards and SRO's will carry out.	Photos are sent over via TCW against the job and the SROs should be approving the jobs for payment over the agreed variations amounts for each contract (i.e. £500 on general repairs/£1500 for roofing etc). So 100% of these jobs should have at least a desktop post inspection. Amounts under this are approved and processed by BSO's. This will be a lot easier to manage on the TMC portal. We are not doing any proactive physical post inspections at present; we do physically inspect if complaint raised etc though. We don't have the capacity to do anywhere near 10% physical post inspections on all contractors, but I would expect inspections on the high value jobs.	