

Complaints Taskforce

26th September 2024

Attendees:

Head of Housing Transformation	Business Services Manager
Complaints and Feedback Officer	Repairs and Maintenance Manager
Tenancy Services Heads of Service	Cabinet Member for Housing and Property
Neighbourhood Teams Manager	Deputy Cllr for the Cabinet Member for Housing
Customer Liaison Officer	Choice Based Lettings Team Manager
Tenant Engagement Co-ordinator	Tenant Board Member

Task Force Expectations

- Make sure we review complaints on a frequent basis. To identify lessons learnt and preventive actions.
- Accountability for what we are changing as a result- Noticing trends and issues within the service area.
- Evidence gathering around changes meeting minutes, TOR's- All minutes and presentations are uploaded on the website.

Actions From Last Meeting

Head of Housing Transformation to speak to Nigel and Kelly about categorising the Complaints- Complete and has coincided with the new system.

Q1 figures trends and Preventive Actions

Complaints and Feedback officer took the meeting through the Repairs Housing Complaints

- 8% total increase in complaints

Response Times

- Building Services responded to 62 complaints in Q1, with 53 (85.5%) of these complaint responses breaching the 10-day deadline.
- Asset Compliance responded to 41 complaints in Q1, with 39 (85.3%) of these complaint responses breaching the 10-day deadline.
- Asset Management responded to 6 complaints in Q1, with 4 (66.7%) of these complaint responses breaching the 10-day deadline.

Whilst the annual data shows a big decrease in DLO complaints and a rise in Asset Compliance complaints, on reflection the likelihood is that not all complaints were being completed correctly during the stage one complaint process. The overall complaints for the three teams above have increased by 15.

- Work has been completed on the old system, so all of these complaints have been wiped off, so the increase could be due to the old system
- The ombudsman allows us to extend complaint response times when we need to, so this is something we will need to utilise if we just need an extra couple of days to respond.
- On the system we can report what's within code and what's without of code.

Mid Suffolk Cabinet member for housing asked what was expected in the 10 days and do officers know they are about to reach deadline on the system?

- Complaints are meant to be acknowledged and responded to within the 10 days and yes they know the system does notify then. Shortly there will be a power BI dashboard that will be used to identify the timescale of individual staff's complaints.

Themes and Trends

With the launch of the new complaints system in Q1, we are now able to have improved insight as to the learning outcomes of complaints. Whilst in this quarter this only relates to 4 working days, the following improvements have been made:

- Visiting operative was spoken to and advised how to handle similar situations in the future after a tenant complained that our member of staff was banging on the front door and garden gate aggressively as they had not been in a position to answer the door straight away.
- A tenant complained that their kitchen sink was leaking however, the learning outcome was that we needed to respond in a timelier manner and improve communication. In this comment there is no notes on how this was achieved.
- Another lesson learnt was that we were going to "try and improve contractor communication" but with no other information.

Discussion: How can we improve lessons learnt

Chair of the Tenant Board: The biggest problem is communication; tenants are left stranded

Repairs and Maintenance Manager: We are having problems to communicate these to tenants, job management system will make this easier.

Head of Housing Transformation: This will improve day to day repairs in DLO. From next week schedulers being able to text a tenant. We will be able to know how many text messages are sent.

Head of Tenancy Services: We need more information in lessons learnt, so document specific cases on what we learnt. What else do we need to know to understand what we need to improve.

Tenancy Repairs & Housing Solutions Complaints Q1

- 154% Increase in Tenancy Management Complaints
- 35% decrease in Housing Solutions

Response Times

- Tenancy Services responded to 25 complaints in Q1, with 3 (12%) of these complaint responses breaching the 10-day deadline.
- Housing Solutions responded to 12 complaints in Q1, with 2 (17%) of these complaint responses breaching the 10-day deadline.

Themes & Trends

We have seen a large increase in Tenancy Services complaints from 13 in Q1 last year to 33 in Q1 this year.

Complaints and feedback officer agreed with the Head of Tenancy Services that we are going to do some further analysis on these complaints to establish why there has been such a large increase in tenancy management complaints. For context 7 of these complaints were upheld and 16 of these complaints were not upheld. Rob added that this increase could be due to the Rent Increase and Service charges but will be able to understand this after further investigation. There is also opportunity to do a tenant engagement piece with this.

Housing Solution complaints have reduced as per above. Only one of these complaints were upheld. Complaints received were regarding Gateway to Homechoice, Homelessness and general dissatisfaction with bandings received.

Stage Two Complaints and Housing Ombudsman cases

During Q1 the Councils' received 17 stage two complaints regarding Housing Repairs, Asset Management and Asset Compliance.

We are continuing to see complaints escalated at stage two for the following reasons:

- Delays to part of our complaints process at stage one, usually an untimely stage one response
- Lack of communication prior to a complaint coming in and being dissatisfied with the outcome
- Stage one complaint response not considering the whole complaint. Some stage one complaint responses have not considered the whole history of the complaint.

Ombudsman Cases

No decisions were made against either Council in Q1.

During Q2 we have provided information relating to a complaint and expect a determination in the next 3 – 6 months.

Babergh received a report from the Housing Ombudsman because they had 5 determinations in a year.

Mid Suffolk cabinet member for housing- What's the strategy to ensure stage 2 aren't going to the ombudsman?

Head of Housing Transformation: Ultimately, it's to resolve them at stage 1. The majority of complaints are because they have been significantly impacted and tenants don't feel like they have been taken seriously enough. We need to address complaints with empathy and use compensation when its due and align with our policy.

Complaints and Feedback Officer: Get it right first time will lead to a reduction in complaints.

Annual Complaints Report 23/24

- Annual report has been presented to SLT and is due to go to Overview and Scrutiny in January 2025 – in line with ombudsman requirements.
- Cabinet to see the report ahead of O&S.
- All ombudsman determinations to be shared with SLT moving forwards.
- Link between complaints and reputational risk. Complaints to be in the risk register and as a reputational risk.

Housing Ombudsman Latest

The Head of Housing Transformation took the meeting through the Housing Ombudsman determination on Sanctuary Housing and their independent review. The review carried out, focussed on repairs, record keeping and tenant vulnerabilities following 2 severe maladministration determinations for repairs relating to leaks and damp and mould. Full Report can be found here [Wider orders issued for Sanctuary | Housing Ombudsman \(housing-ombudsman.org.uk\)](https://housing-ombudsman.org.uk)

Mid Suffolk Cabinet member for housing: Is it fair to say that generally we are below in peers in regards to complaints. Why are we below our peers?

Head of Housing Transformation: Putting the new system in place will help with this. The transformation piece in Building Services will help, but it will take a while to see that. It can take 18 months to see satisfaction levels rise after a change after a service change. Also, engagement with those who made a complaint to understand why they were dissatisfied.

Chair of the Tenant Board: When you apply originally for a property for a tenant, it says on it clearly, why are you looking for housing. Does nobody look at that or look at it when it comes to vulnerability?

Head of Housing Transformation: it's looked at in terms of your assessment. I don't think we take enough information from that system to our Housing Management system, so we can understand who our tenants are.

It's also our short term vulnerabilities e.g bereavement- putting on all of our forms that requests a service.

Chair of the Tenant Board: How do we manage repairs for those with Domestic Violence situations. E.g. men visiting their home.

Head of Housing Transformation: Reasonable adjustments. E.g send a female housing officer with a male plumber. But understanding what their long term and short terms needs are before we go ahead with the repair.

Head of Tenancy Services: We are very a reactive service; we try to have a sensitive approach, and we do get involved in personal lives and will understand our tenants' vulnerabilities. Previously, this hasn't been recorded in the right place or at all. The problem

with this is that it's not provided to other teams if they need it. Housing officers having smaller patches will help this.

There was a group discussion on the importance of communication preference, so we are not offering a blanket service. Understanding our tenant's communication preference ensures we know how and when we can communicate residents when we need to.

Lessons Learnt

Head of Tenancy Services: One of the challenges is on the old system, in our team meeting we go through lessons learnt and one of the challenges is recording lessons learnt itself.

Complaints about making an error in service charge setting in sheltered housing and on how we adjusted the correct amount. The process of correcting them was longer than we originally thought, and we weren't keeping the tenants updated on specifics on when we would be able to make the change and refund any overpayments. The complaint was primarily about communicating, and perhaps oversharing on what we were doing. We learnt lessons in importance of getting service charges right to begin with. When it comes to tenants charges, we will have a communication methodology on how we are communication with tenants with target dates.

Repairs and Maintenance Manager: We had complaints about gutter clearances. We had 400 historic clearances and some rescheduled from previously. So, we have put 2 people on it at a time. We have about 40 left, so we have targeted the problem so we should receive less complaints.

Customer Liaison Officer: We did not get the repairs jobs done within the time scale. the schedulers get a sheet but didn't have dates on when they are coming in, so they didn't know when they were out of time scale. So now the planners have a sheet with the date so they can prioritise the ones that will become overdue first.

Up Next

- Changes in team so staff will own their complaints and will be offered training
- New complaints system reporting update
- Complaints Scrutiny Activity by the Tenant Board
- Work to be started with tenants on dissatisfaction with ASB

ACTION: Move December meeting to January

ACTION: Include compliments with the next meeting