

Complaints Taskforce Meeting

19th June 2024

Attendees: David White – Housing Transformation Manager
James Hart – Customer Liaison Officer
Rosi Howlett – Neighbourhoods Team Manager
Roan Morling – Housing and Engagement Team Manager
Kerry Lecomber – Tenant Engagement Co-ordinator
Andrew Wade – Voids Interim Team Manager
Nicola Anderson – Building Services Admin Team Manager
Cllr Jessie Carter – Housing Portfolio Holder
Karen Carter – CBL Team Manager
Liz Perryman – Tenant Board Member
Richard Spencer - Head of Asset Investment and Compliance
James Smith – Asset Team Manager

Meeting was postponed due to a variety of issues, including holding a Complaints training day and it has been decided to hold it face to face as often as possible.

We now have a complaints tile on Connect with template letter acknowledging, family tree, processes etc. compensation policy, HO centre for learning. JH advised that new complaints system launches next week with training planned so going forward one home for Complaints.

Quarter four figures

JH advised that complaints up 4.5% year-on-year with largest share going to BMBS/DLO. Not a surprising increase and it's Winter figures where we get more damp and mould complaints. BMBS responded to 58/87 on time which is 66%. Figure must be up to 80% on time to meet Ombudsman guidelines. DW advised that those figures only reflected those that were responded to.

Themes and trends continue from previously – long standing repairs, lack of comms, damp and mould, standard of work and boilers – not having them in stock. We have now resolved the latter.

DW enquired as to where damp and mould complaints were recorded. NA advised that long-standing would be compliance but remedial would be with her team. RS advised he's about to create a damp and mould manager in his team so in first instance all queries will go with them and they will deal with all repairs associated with it. Complaints for them will then sit within Compliance team.

AW advised that small percentage will be building defects. RS advised a lot of fans needed and temperature changes, guttering, minor roof leaks. Moving to a bespoke repairs contract for damp and mould. DW advised that we are therefore now putting in preventative measures to address damp and mould and the changes in the law.

DW and JH will speak with Kelly and Nigel about categorising complaints – Action.

New complaints system will hopefully help to refine categories of complaints.

Tenancy Services and Housing Solutions complaints are down slightly. ASB makes up a percentage of all of them along with rent increase complaints.

DW enquired as to detail which RM advised on and DW advised that a triage was built into new complaints system which should ensure complaints weren't the first way we were having issues reported to us. JH also advised that ASB complaints can be taken out of the new system separately which RM agreed would be a good.

LP enquired about reporting tenancy breaches reported by neighbours rather than ASB – such as untidy gardens etc. DW advised that often complaints were coming in about how ASB was dealt with rather than an actual complaint about a neighbour.

JH advised that the category on website would be ASB and Tenancy Management Services which is where those sort of complaints should be listed under.

AW advised meeting of new structure within his department. Feedback from complaints have been kept in mind along with the volume. There are plans in place for Customer Resolutions Officer dedicated to this. Job Management System will also prioritise and measure these. Structure and resource is part of transformation and job management system and direct customer focussed role will be key.

NA advised that better contract management will also help. In new structure will be senior surveyor and minor works contractors to manage more complex works. Have also stopped using DLO for complaints and using different contractors. DW advised that issues of customers not being able to book jobs in when they call but new job management system should be able to appoint jobs at first report. On new system repair will be appointed by scheduling team and text messages will be used to advise of changes so certainty and communications will be improved.

JH advised that outstanding actions can also be logged within new system so they remain on the dashboard even when job was allocated. Would be worth putting processes in place to manage this. NA advised that also tenants who can go online can schedule the repair themselves. AW advised that a lot of complaints are complex so can have multiple contractors so having a surveyor manage it will help.

JH advised of Ombudsman determination regarding Minden Block in Sudbury.

JH advised on annual figures and Year on year.

DW advised that we will be producing an annual report on complaints tying in with annual tenant report in September. In Terms of Reference for this group.

DW advised looking to recruit more tenants to be involved in this group. This group is way to monitor, identify trends, learn from each other and demonstrate where we're changing services on the back of this.

Also need to ensure accountability for complaints.

NA enquired as to Councillor enquiry / complaints and JH advised a separate bit being developed for Councillors and there's been a lot of engagement with them and will go live after new system. DW advised that anything coming in from a Councillor will be treated as a complaint as an 'expression of dissatisfaction' however received. Will always be registered as official complaint and treated as such and Cllr kept involved.

NA enquired if they can be sent to system. DW advised that need to be treated the same as tenants who complaint themselves. Can't just be dealt with amongst managers it has to be put on system.

LP advised disappointed that complaints via Cllrs get more priority. DW advised system now will ensure that doesn't happen so that will stop. Not something that happens regularly but there now won't be a difference in level of service received depending on who complaints are reported to.

Data reporting and tracker now will hopefully mean that complaints dealt with more easily and have more visibility.

Housing Ombudsman Determination Review

DW took meeting through process and outcome from recent review which found we hadn't acted in time – compensation, apology and sharing information. Had done first two but not third. Ombudsman has now asked us to issue further apology and provide information to them and the tenant. Details of this can now be published by the Ombudsman. RM enquired about fines but DW advised it's usually in form of compensation. If we have 6 or more in a year they can name and shame us in their annual report. They will also report it to the Regulator so could result in an inspection which could result in fines.

26% satisfaction reported annually, sector average is around 33-35% so it's never high. We also know that within TSMs there isn't the means to separate those who have actually reported a complaint.

Preventative Actions

RM advised that training and mutual exchange process review undergoing in his team.

JH advised that as long as people use the new system correctly that should help a huge amount and identify things more easily.

Kelly Davin recruited along with Nigel and have now closed over 70 cases in just over 4 weeks but still have a backlog of around 140 some of which going back to October last year. Currently working on older complaints to get them closed down. New system expected to go live next week and DW and team will be testing.

NA advised that tenants going through Solicitors only get a tiny proportion of money paid out, most goes to the solicitors. If they go through the Ombudsman then they get all of it. DW advised that as a Landlord can just provide clear information about the process and guidelines from the HO and their contact details and if we have really good data for complaint handling then that will be a clear message to tenants to come directly to us.

LP advised the Solicitors are also not experts whereas the Ombudsman and Council staff are experts and are free. AW advised that for £1,000 compensation got by Solicitors tenant only gets £600 and then we may have £10k in legal fees on top.

Meeting closed 12:16pm.