

## **Complaints Taskforce Meeting**

**24<sup>th</sup> April 2025**

**Attendees:** David White – Housing Transformation Manager  
James Hart – Customer Liaison Officer  
Justin King – Housing and Neighbourhoods Lead  
Victoria Bond – Assistant Manager, Housing Solutions  
Karen Carter – Choice Based Lettings Team Manager  
Kerry Lecomber – Tenant Engagement Co-ordinator  
Nicola Anderson – Building Services Admin Team Manager  
Cllr Jessie Carter – Portfolio Holder for Housing, Babergh  
Liz Perryman – Tenant Board Member  
Deborah Fenton – Director of Housing  
Rob Longfoot – Head of Housing Management  
Polly Bearman – Income Manager  
Keeley Whitlock – Customer Resolutions Officer  
Sarah Double – Asset Information Manager

David opened the meeting and advised that at the next meeting we will complete an end of year review.

### **Actions from the last meeting**

- Issue with contractors – Officers managing contracts have been tasked with liaising with them.
- DW has sent out link to Liz.

125 Stage 1 last year and this year 53, however we have changed how complaints are categorised which could explain part of it. JH advised that from next quarter figures will be comparable as from the same system.

25 were upheld, 16 not upheld, 5 not considered complaints, 1 was a comment and 6 are not yet determined. 3.5 days average to acknowledge and 9.5 to respond.

Assets and Compliance complaints are slightly increased. There is an issue with these service areas not acknowledging complaints correctly. 5.2 working days for Assets but no figures for Compliance as they are not recording acknowledgements – 33 or 56 were blank. However the team have now had training that should improve. 11 working days to respond so a little more work needed. Also need to ensure that if extensions are agreed with tenants that needs to be recorded so we are still meeting Ombudsman requirements.

Tenancy Services – 16 last year and 31 this year for same quarter. 10 upheld, 16 not upheld and 6 not considered to be complaints. Again no acknowledgements registered and 9.2 to respond.

Housing Solutions – increase from previous year's quarter 2 as they had 2 last year and 15 this year. 1 upheld, 3 not upheld and 8 not a complaint as about banding. 3 not yet determined. No acknowledgements registered and 7 days response.

## Stage Two

JH advised up from 19 to 25 but still a high percentage that are not a complaint - 8. 2.5 days to acknowledge and average response 14.1 so well within the guidelines.

Q1 this year still seeing high level of complaints about poor communications and appointments with gas contractor. Some issues they claim to be lack of access but the contractor can't evidence how the appointment was made or even if it was made. Some complaints are from work not being completed following a previous stage two complaint. Overall continue to see poor communication as a theme.

**Action: Fabio Dellabella to be instructed regarding Gascall and a clear and evidence based process needs to be put in place.**

Gascall are taking photos of cards on doors and using this to claim no access but tenants say they didn't knock or an appointment hasn't been made.

LP advised that most companies call the day before to reconfirm and all agreed that needs to be agreed with them.

JC echoed that often they don't call beforehand and sometimes they visit at times other than that agreed previously.

JK advised on Housing Ombudsman spotlight report on Communication which will be shared.

RL advised of situation recently at Sheltered Scheme where a contractor contacted Tenancy Management for contact data but they should already have that along with the CAL list etc.

SD advised that she found long term planned contractors had out of date tenant data so they have initiated monthly contact updates for contractors. **This obviously needs to be replicated on compliance side – Action.**

**Action. DF suggested RS, AG and FD meet with DW and JH separately to have a catch up and share actions.**

## Compliments

Shared a slide of compliments received from tenants.

TSM for this year have closed and we will be ready to submit data to RSH by end of June. Last year reported 26% satisfaction which has now increased to 31% (Babergh) and 35% (Mid) respectively. Will see when league tables come out in July / August where that places us.

DF advised a big thank you to everyone as this is an amazing improvement in a short length of time. Across whole sector complaints satisfaction is low so these are very good scores.

DW advised it's a reflection of performance across the board – which is still not on target – but really moving in the right direction.

## **Reminders**

Acknowledgement within 5 working days – instructions on Connect. Complete outcomes at the point the complaint is closed as that impacts the data. If unable to respond within 10 working days use the extension function so still compliant with code. Communicate with other teams and take ownership.

If a complaint is about you or you are mentioned you cannot respond to it. RL advised not to get caught up in who's team it sits in just get it done – it's all of our responsibility.

LP enquired about the extension function – if there is a criteria? DW advised not a criteria – you have to communicate with the tenant and explain the genuine reason why – could be because we're awaiting information beyond our control. Must be agreed with the tenant and if there's things we can do in between you have to do what you can. LP: Is it just the tenant who decides or is it approved by him? DW advised it's the complaint responder who decides – and they must be being properly extended and then responded to within that extended period.

## **Housing Ombudsman**

Babergh Damp and Mould case – ordered to pay £1550 compensation as part of stage two response, we had already offered £875. We now factor high impact payments process with that in mind to ensure we get a fairer offer out to the tenant at the point of response.

Babergh service failure in response to request for extension. Order advised to give options to tenant and ordered to pay £200.

**Action: DW advised that the compensation policy is due for review to ensure amounts are in keeping – DW/JH.**

If we get more than 5 outcomes in one district we are mentioned in an Ombudsman report – and it could just be five outcomes from one complaint.

Also an outcome that was a positive determination regarding a succession case where no maladministration was found and we were advised it had been well handled.

## **Ombudsman Learning – severe maladministration big 6.**

Full report will be shared on big six with learning. Today HO has released a report around communication on complaints and how important tone is. DW took meeting through topline information on findings and advised all to read the report.

## **Lessons learnt in last quarter and changes made**

VB and PB advised they thought acknowledgement was automatic. JH advised that was an automatic response to say it's been received. There is a link to template you use to copy and paste and fill in bullet points. JH took them through the process.

DF: Specific case of a tenant that asked for an extension as they have a large family and there was a great deal of member pressure and we investigated it first and told them they may be able to, but actually found that we don't have a policy and budget for those with large families. First lesson learnt is to look at the policy and if you can't find it speak to a senior manager for a steer. Second lesson learnt was not keeping proper records of what had been said and done results in inconsistencies and mixed messages. Lots of correspondence with AC and Members so very messy. Therefore precise notes on system were vital. Also important to get right people together to discuss. She and RS are still to meet with tenant to discuss findings.

DW advised that we appealed one part of the response which wasn't upheld.

LP: Communication issue with everything – is there a way you can keep communication preferences up to date? DW advised that's all about knowing our tenants and what we need to consider when delivering services to them. A big part of the Housing Management restructure was increasing the number of Housing Officers so they had smaller patch sizes and can therefore be more connected to our tenants. Gaps will be prioritised and all tenants will have a visit from their Housing Officer within a two year period.

RL advised that they are looking at the outcomes case by case. Issue with window cleaning service – contractor passed away and we didn't know. Picked up and put in quarterly meetings with contractors and contract management pushed. Carpet in Sheltered Schemes being soiled and resulted in buying carpet cleaners to keep clean in future. Also a case of a right to buy and as a result have put some additional checks and balances to ensure that information given is properly recorded. Also added a line to a letter advising not to make alterations until RTB process was completed.

KW had Appello not record an out of hours as an emergency as they didn't take vulnerabilities into account – which would have turned a regular repair into an emergency one. Now wording added to system to ensure they must ask. We also have a list of people who haven't reported a repair and we will be contacting them to see if there's anything they need.

SD advised when the Stock Control Surveyors go out can they also link up with that list of people as they're probably ones we haven't been able to access.

KW advised at monthly meetings she pulls off information where notes haven't been put on jobs properly. Often it's just due to human error.

JK – acknowledgement process – is there an opportunity to automate? DW advised the one we must send has to include how we've understood their complaint and what's in it so it can't be automated. **KW has a procedure which she will share with everyone.**

LP: Housing Officers coming out to visit tenants – has the new system come into place yet – the buddy system? DW advised that recruitment now finished but working on transition and implementation plans and hoping to get new structure up and running by July.

## New Complaint system reporting

Added new KPIs onto Pentana which measures complaint handling. Split by service and will be splitting out by acknowledgement and response times and will be used for performance management purposes. Will also help with governance.

Currently working with Heads of Service, Claire Read and Henriette on a quarterly Council Housing Assurance report which will include all key data for Housing that Cabinet and SLT need to be aware of. Currently in with everything else which won't be good enough for the Regulator and will go to SLT, Tenant Board and Cabinet on quarterly basis. Will go live at end of Quarter One. Will see a lot more Housing performance measures on Pentana.

Tenant Board next scrutiny project is Complaints. Board have had a lot of information shared with them already to review and will be deciding specifically what they want to scrutinise about Complaints. Aiming to be on a similar basis as ASB scrutiny with workshops with tenants who have experienced complaints and some actions coming out of that.

RL enquired about performance dashboard report which DW has been working with IT to resolve. RL would like to capture outcome actions from complaints so he can monitor it when managing his staff. JH also looking at continuous improvement on complaints and possibly having all complaints actions on Pentana so they are actions that can be measured.

LP: Can we look next time at the out of hours service as sometimes you'll ring on say, a Saturday morning with an issue and they advise they'll visit that day as it's an emergency but then don't come out for a day or two? DW advised that out of hours contract is managed by customer operations team and should have some measures in the contract. Need to see if it's an issue with the contractor or our on-call service. **Action: investigate.**

NA advised that the out of hours service really is for emergency repairs only. Also only have one out of hours Plumber and one Carpenter on call who could already be dealing with another emergency. Also both have to work across both Districts. Comes down to communication however.