

## **Complaints Taskforce Meeting Wednesday 26th July 2023**

**Attendees:** Housing Transformation Manager (HTM)  
Customer Liaison Officer (CLO)  
Building Services Admin Team Manager (BSAM)  
Choice Based Lettings Team Manager (CBLM)  
Interim Asset Team Manager (ITM)  
Interim Compliance Manager (ICM)  
Income and Home Ownership Team Manager (IHM)  
Executive Support Officer (ESO)  
Tenant Engagement Co-ordinator (TCO1)  
Tenant Engagement Co-ordinator (TCO2)  
Tenant Board Chair (TB)  
Portfolio Holder for Housing Mid Suffolk (PHMS)

Everyone introduced themselves at the start of the meeting.

### **Complaint Figures Q1**

CLO took meeting through figures for Q1:

- All departments saw a complaint increase since Q4 except for Asset Management that saw a 72.7% decrease.

### **Housing Repair Complaints**

- The average complaint response time in Q1 was 16.9 working days. This was up from an average of 12.2 working days in Q4.
- We saw 45% of complaints responded to breach the 10-working day deadline, this down from 59% in Q4.
- Whilst more complaints are being responded to on time that in Q4, the ones that do breach are taking longer to resolve as demonstrated by the number of average working days.

### **Housing Repair Themes and Trends**

- Tenants were using the complaints system to chase up repairs or service requests that they had already reported
- Jobs surrounding leaks, roofing, damp/mould, and general repairs formed most of the complaints.
- There were also complaints where tenants were continuing to have problems with contractor and getting boilers fixed in a suitable timeframe

### **Tenancy Services & Housing Solutions Complaints**

- The average complaint response time in Q4 was 6.0 working days for Tenancy Services and 8.4 working days for Housing Solutions.
- Tenancy Services saw 25% of complaints breach their response deadline, whilst housing solutions breached on 1 of their 21 complaints received. This data is only for complaints responded to and not complaints that are still outstanding.

## **Tenancy Services and Housing Solutions Themes and Trends**

Tenancy Services saw complaints raised regarding the following:

- Car parking and on road parking.
- two reports of abandonment
- Rent payments
- 3 of the 14 complaints were upheld.

Housing Solutions saw complaints regarding:

- Disabled Facilities Grants
- Gateway to Homechoice
- Homelessness Applications
- Only 1 of the 18 complaints received was upheld.

## **Stage 2 Complaints**

- Between 1st April and the 30th June 2023 the Councils' received 23 stage two complaints regarding Housing Repairs, Asset Management and Asset Compliance. This is up 10 from 13 in Q1 last year.
- Themes for this quarter include; Tenants following up repairs reported and why they had not been scheduled, Escalation of complaints where no repairs had been undertaken that were detailed in stage one responses, Lack of communication regarding repairs

## **Housing Ombudsman**

- The Councils have provided information to the Housing Ombudsman for one investigation this previous quarter, no decision has been made by the ombudsman yet.

## **Housing Ombudsman Update – HTM**

We had a determination from the ombudsman on a previous case that they had investigated – due to delayed repairs that negatively impacted the family's day to day life.

The Housing Ombudsman have requested that the following actions take place, please can the following be arranged:

- The Ombudsman orders that the landlord write to the resident to apologise for the service failures identified in this report. This letter was written by Deborah Fenton
- The Ombudsman orders that the landlord pays the resident further compensation of £250 for the distress and time and trouble caused to her by the identified service failures in its complaint handling. The amount we had offered originally was found to be an acceptable amount, but was ordered to pay out more for distress, time taken and troubles due to failures in complaint handling
- The Ombudsman orders that the landlord review its record keeping processes with particular regard to telephone and in-person resident communications and provide an action plan of its intentions to make improvements within eight weeks of the date of this report. An Action Plan is in place to implement this

## **Housing Ombudsman statistics**

- The Ombudsman received 11,025 complaints and enquiries in the last quarter
- Property condition continues to be the most complained about category at 68% of all complaints

- In 64% of determinations, the Ombudsman found maladministration
- The Ombudsman made 1,527 orders in the quarter.

### **Lambeth Council**

The Housing Ombudsman has raised concerns with Lambeth Council after residents from a previously resolved case had the problems return, with the landlord once again not dealing with the issues satisfactorily and the Ombudsman finding maladministration.

This has led to the Ombudsman using paragraph 11 of the Housing Ombudsman Scheme to scrutinise evidence of complaints handling through an inspection of the landlord including through an in-person inspection of evidence. It is the first time these powers have been used.

The Ombudsman will evaluate evidence of the landlord's complaint handling, including compliance with recent orders and recommendations and previous decisions relating to service improvements. It has engaged with both residents and the landlord on these cases and will establish how the landlord allowed the issues to resurface.

The poor complaint handling in these subsequent cases included not following its policies, failing to fully investigate the issues nor offering appropriate remedies. The Ombudsman is also due to hold an open meeting with residents of Lambeth Council, hosted by the landlord, in September to hear about the issues facing them and the landlord.

### **Action Plan and Ombudsman Process**

An Action plan has been created to ensure we implement the Ombudsman requests. This Action Plan includes the following.

- Implement a CRM Module within our existing Housing Management System and provide access and training to all staff that interact with our customers
- Monitor usage of the new system and provide usage details to managers to ensure that all customer contact is being recorded and actioned.
- Implementation of a Council wide Data Programme Board with the workstreams of Data Culture, Data Governance, Data Centre of Excellence & Content Provision
- A Housing IT Strategic Review
- Building Services Transformation - Process and Systems Excellence
- Hold mandatory awareness sessions for all staff about the importance of recording and actioning customer communications.
- Data Quality and Management Review Audit

To ensure that we are meeting the Housing Ombudsman deadline for information, a new process has been created.

### **Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSM) Update**

- Satisfaction with complaint handling is around 27% satisfied - only those who made a complaint are asked (33 said yes out of 304 asked).
- Poor Satisfaction is due to; Response Times, Satisfaction with outcomes and promises not kept resulting in repeat call backs and stage 2s

TB asked if the score could improve as we have recruited new staff members. David White said he is hopeful; Across the services we have increased staff numbers, and this should provide a return in this investment in terms of complaints satisfaction.

TB commented that when tenants submit forms online, it takes a lot of time for a response, even an email to acknowledge the submission. people are tired of waiting and phoning up instead or to understand what is wrong with the website.

HTM replied that the system and process we currently have is quite slow and is reliant on the different teams to pick up online submissions. We are expecting this to improve when the new website, we should see a lot more requests being automated into the system.

### **New Consumer Standards - HTM**

New proposed consumer standards are out for consultation, these will replace the old consumer standards.

The Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard has a section which sets out the standards for complaints.

We will be encouraging tenants to respond to the consultation, the Council will also take part in the consultation.

PHMS asked when the council could expect an inspection form the regulator.

HTM - An inspection on the current standards could happen anytime from now. The new standards are due to actionable from April 2024. Every housing provider will have an inspection every 4 years. It is likely that local authorities will have inspections first, as housing associations have already had regular routine inspection.

### **Learning / Changes to processes**

BSAM - We have a slight change in process. We are keeping tenants informed as we now have dedicated person who handles complaints.

ITM - Minor works Surveyor and Senior Surveyor, are now in position so any work can go straight to them. A lot of the complaints with assets is lack of communication. Tenants have told us something previously and it has not been followed up. Surveyors will be able to identify trends in the complaints.

TB - Tenants spend a lot of time waiting to be called back of which they never do get the call back. Tenants will sit in and wait for the phone call. Tenants also are not kept informed on the complaint.

HTM - We know communication is where we need to improve, some of the actions we have taken around structures and resource, hoping to see that improvement.

IHM - We have started as part of our tenancy managers meeting; we are now regularly reviewing complaints. A couple of complaints we have had this quarter are about rents which we do not make the decision on. We could look to update the website with information on what the council does and does not control.

### **Next steps:**

- Complaint Handling training booked in for August 2023 – CLO & HTM
- Update on PlaceCube – new digital platform and more informative reporting
- Social Housing Stigma Awareness – comments coming through – Lunch and Learns for members and staff
- Final complaint response audits have started - HTM

### **Stigma**

TCO - We surveyed 28 tenants who told us they did not feel treated fairly or with respect in the TSM survey. We are using this information to train our staff on what classifies as stigma and the impact it has on the service. There will be information on stigma in the Complaint Handling Training. We will also be running lunch and learn sessions on the history of Social Housing, this will be available to all staff.

**ACTION: The tenant engagement team to speak with those who said they were not satisfied with complains handling and report back for next meeting.**

**ACTION: Delays of assessing housing applications, extra staff are being recruited to help combat that - this should reduce the wait times.**

**ACTION: HTM reminded ALL to record meeting minutes so the regulator can see them when needed.**