

Complaints Taskforce Meeting Minutes

17th January 2024

Attendees

Housing Transformation Manager
Asset Team Manager
Choice Based Lettings Team Manager
Building Services Admin Team Manager
Housing Team Manager
Customer Liaison Officer
Tenant Engagement Co-ordinator

Apologies Received

Babergh Portfolio Holder for Housing

Corporate Manager for Customer Operations

Tenant Board Member

ACTION: The Housing Transformation Manager requests that the Corporate Manager for Customer Operations and Resolution Co-Ordinator are added to the attendees list for this meeting.

Actions from Previous Meeting

Come back to the group with data around average zap carbon times and how we are keeping tenants in the loop around their damp and mould case.

- *“At present, our referrals are as per the ‘Standard referral’s’ route. Any repairs noted are advised to the customer at the point of survey. Regarding the works arising from surveys, where works are issued to the DLO- yes, contact is then down to the DLO/ Scheduling team to arrange with the customer. With regards to works that require the quotation route, the customer is contacted by the contractor to arrange a visit to quote, and then the quote is passed to us. At present- we are having some delays due to the documentation supplied by contractors, but this should be resolved shortly. At present- we are having some delays due to the documentation supplied by contractors, but this should be resolved shortly. Call resident within 5 Working Days of receiving the job referral and book in job with the resident.”*
- Book in and complete the onsite HHPC assessment within 20 Working Days of receiving referral.
- Repairs to be uploaded to the ZapPortal within 7 working days of the visit.
- HHPC report to be sent to client within 28 Working Days of receiving the referral.

Find out and get back to group about how previous contractor communicated with tenants and where the problems were.

- *“The previous Contractor allegedly repeatedly failed to respond to contact from customers, however this was our fault as well as we never proactively managed communications as part of the contract management.”*

Discover if the new contractors do communicate to the tenants and what their process is?

- *“In relation to Signix and Baileys, when they receive jobs through our interface, they contact our residents directly to arrange appointments. If any follow-on works are required, they email our compliance mailbox, and we will raise additional work orders/purchase orders to ensure these works are undertaken. Signix and Baileys will contact the resident again directly to arrange any further appointments. If there are any issues with no access, this all gets logged and after 3 no access tries it is escalated back to our compliance team where legal procedures will start.”*

Housing Repair Q3 Complaints figures

The Customer Liaison Officer presented the statistics on Quarter 3 Housing Repair Complaint Figures

Response Times

- Building Services responded to 129 complaints in Q3, with 87 (67.4%) of these complaint responses breaching the 10-day deadline.
- Asset Management responded to 3 complaints in Q3, with 3 (100%) of these complaint responses breaching the 10-day deadline.
- Asset Compliance responded to 54 complaints in Q3, with 45 (83.3%) of these complaint responses breaching the 10-day deadline.

Themes & Trends

We are seeing a very high uphold rate of complaints, during Q3 the whole Housing Repair service upheld 168 (90.3%) complaints of the 186 complaints responded to.

We are continuing to uphold complaints for:

- A lack of communication
- Delays to repairs

Due to the time of year, we have also seen an increase of complaints regarding damp and mould, and a lack of preventative action. We have also had complaints regarding ZapCarbon which have been fed back to Richard Spencer and addressed in contractor meetings.

Tenancy Management and Housing Solutions

The Customer Liaison Officer presented the Q3 complaints figures for Tenancy Management and Housing Solutions

Response Times

- Tenancy Services responded to 19 complaints in Q3, with 2 of these complaint responses breaching the 10-day deadline.
- Housing Solutions responded to 4 complaints in Q3, with 0 of these complaint responses breaching the 10-day deadline.

Themes & Trends

Tenancy Services:

- Upheld 3 of the 19 complaints responded to.

There were complaints regarding:

- No scheme manager on site
- Anti-Social Behaviour
- Rent Arrears/Charges

Housing Solutions:

- Upheld one of the 4 complaints responded to in Q3, where we could have actioned a phone call in a more appropriate manner.

The current system makes it difficult to understand why we breached the response time; the new system will help monitor this and capture if an extension has been put in place.

Stage Two Complaints & Housing Ombudsman Cases

Between 1st October 2023 and the 31st of December 2023, the Councils' received 25 stage two complaints regarding Housing Repairs, Asset Management and Asset Compliance. This is up 108% from 12 in Q3 last year.

Themes for this quarter include:

- Delays to stage one responses
- Damp and Mould
- General delays to repairs at properties.

We are also not seeing enough firm details about appointments being booked for works required. This then can result in repeat contact or stage 2 complaints.

Additionally, due to the changes to joint handling code, we will be responsible for the complaints made against our contractors. When responding to this complaint we are still expected to receive that information in the 10 days. The Housing Transformation confirmed that this will improve with the new job management system.

Ombudsman Cases

The Councils are still waiting on the outcome of two investigations by the Housing Ombudsman.

The Housing Transformation Manager took the meeting through a complaint that underwent Ombudsman Determination. The complaint was regarding a tenant whose storage heaters were not heating the house sufficiently. After numerous reports of this problem, they put in a complaint. The findings and lessons learnt are presented below. BMSDC had to pay £300 in compensation for the tenant as well as instruct an independent surveyor to property and complete the works in 4 weeks.

The findings were:

- Due to complaint being about excess cold – falls under Housing health and safety rating system (HHSRS)
- Responses not fully recorded – no ‘whole property’ approach. This means that we did not check other elements such as insulation, windows to understand where else we could be improving heat retention in the property.
- We advised that a Heat pump was not as economical as storage heating, however our calculations were not accurate, based on incomplete data.
- The Ombudsman was concerned with our approach based on the language used in internal, the focus was on if the heating worked as opposed to if they were fit for purpose, again concerning. Wording such a “Open the flood gates” and “just get the surveys done and put this to bed.”
- Report was anecdotal and not backed up by accompanied evidence.
- Medical condition mentioned by tenant were not taken into consideration and there was no record of us resourcing an alternative heating solution.
- Finding of maladministration

Lessons Learnt:

- Record keeping and approach.
- Not considering tenants medical needs
- Sense check information before it being sent to the ombudsman – talked about how we calculate usage of heating and calculations.
- Evidence gathered needs to have a reference point.
- Internal communication and language used when dealing with customers – concerning approach from the landlord.
- Need to consider a whole house approach.

There was a discussion about how to manage tenants needs when it comes to Mutual exchanges. We can refuse a mutual exchange if we know the property is not suitable, but in this case, we would have assumed the house could be heated to at least 18 degrees. The Housing Team Manager added that the Housing Team only can make judgement based on the information their team receive about the needs of the tenant and the basic features of the property.

TSM Q3 Complaint Handling

Tenants who have had a complaint and who respond to the Tenant Satisfaction Measures will be asked the question “Satisfaction with the landlord’s approach to handling complaints”.

- Babergh scored 22% Satisfaction
- Mid Suffolk Scored 15% Satisfaction

Acuity who completes the survey and TSM report suggested that BMSDC understand the handling of their complaints so failures in service can be addressed, and lessons learnt for the benefit of tenants.

Up Next

- Complaint Handling Training- There will be training in February/ March. Staff who handle all complaints across the council will attend.
- New Complaints System- new complaint system to go into testing over the next couple weeks. The Housing Transformation Manager will also be reviewing this to ensure the system is suitable for managing and handling Housing Complaints.
- Meet the Ombudsman session- We will be attending Ipswich Borough Councils Meet the Ombudsman session. The event will be on the Friday 1st March 1-2pm and will be held in the Chamber at Endeavour house. Key members of staff will be invited as well as approximately 20-30 tenants. East Suffolk Council may also join this event.
- Complaints Improvement Day, 29th April 2024- This Housing Improvement Day will be focussed on Complaints, we will be looking at lessons learnt and our response to the self-assessment. There will also be tenants attending to talk about their recent experience with complaints.

Preventative Actions Identified this Quarter

The Portfolio Holder for Housing raised in an email to the Housing Transformation Manager that he was very concerned about the communication surrounding complaints, including the following:

- Communication to tenants generally
- Communication from subcontractors
- Complaints logging system and keeping all necessary staff informed
- General communication around complaints around Damp and Mould
- Priority flagging for tenants with vulnerabilities

In response to this, there will be regular compliance reporting to Cabinet around Complaints and Damp and Mould

It was noted by managers that there has been increase in complaints received by Councillors to the Housing Team.

There was a discussion about the correct template to use when responding to complaints. Staff should be using the template from the document rather than the one on the complaint system.

ACTION: Customer Liaison Officer to send template to Building Services Admin Team Manager and Housing Transformation Manager

Building Services Admin Team Manager suggested that when they receive a complaint with multiple repairs jobs that they will now send a surveyor to understand all of the repairs needed. The Customer Liaison Officer said that this is method preferable as it ensures we have a comprehensive work plan and are doing the right repairs needed. Additionally, we can also include this back to any response to the tenant and ombudsman if necessary.

The Choice Based Lettings Team Manager asked who is responsible for complaints when it overlaps multiple services. The Housing Transformation Manager confirmed that usually if it is between a housing service that is not building services that the team leaders can work together to send one response. If the response also requires input from building services, the Resolution co-ordinator will collect the responses from the different departments and send it.

-----Meeting End 15:08-----