

Taunton Deane Borough Council

Tenant Services Management Board

Housing Service Complaints Summary

Report of the Assistant Director Housing & Communities

1. Executive Summary

This report provides TSMB with an overview of Housing and Communities complaints received by the Council between 1st April 2016 and 31st March 2017, when the data within this report was compiled.

The report seeks to highlight:

- The total number of complaints recorded during the period;
- The split of complaints across the services managed by the two Assistant Director areas;
- The main reasons for complaints;
- Complaints analysis by each quarter

Although there is still further work to do to reduce our number of complaints and improve our response (and response times), it is encouraging to see a marked improvement in some areas, with complaints appearing to be reducing and response times improving

2. Background

- 2.1 On 1st April 2015 the Council introduced a single database for recording complaints (as well as compliments and suggestions) as it was recognised that prior to this a variety of different methods existed within services making both consistency of response and obtaining a true record of complaints difficult to achieve.
- 2.2 This continued from 1st April 2016. In October 2016 a series of Complaints Workshops were held and attended by representatives from each service area as well as their Business Support teams. These workshops gave refresher training in the complaint procedure including a reminder of the timescales within which complaints should be handled and the expected standard of response. Additional workshops were held for Housing Managers and officers to embed the complaints process across the service.

3. The Corporate Complaints process

- 3.1 Before going into detail regarding the complaints recorded it seems a sensible point to clarify the agreed corporate complaints process.

- 3.2 Firstly we describe a complaint as “**When someone tells us they are not happy about a service or something we have or have not done that has had an impact upon them.**” This is different from an initial ‘request for service’.
- 3.3 As an example, if a Council tenant wrote to the Council about a dripping tap this would be treated as a request for service (e.g. ‘fix the tap’) and not a complaint. However, if the person fitting the tap was rude or did a poor job then that would be treated as a complaint.
- 3.4 The Council has a two-stage internal complaints procedure. Stage 1 is normally handled within the service to which the complaint relates. We have a target to respond to stage 1 complaints within 20 working days. Where the customer remains unhappy with the outcome of their complaint it can be escalated to stage 2. At stage 2 the complaint will be handled by the Assistant Director for the service concerned (or their nominee). This stage has an identical target response time.
- 3.5 Where a customer remains unhappy they can take the matter further through the Housing Ombudsman, once they have tried to resolve this through an advocate (normally a councillor).

4. **Complaints Received**

- 4.1 Between the 1st April 2016 and 31st March 2017 there were 141 complaints received across Housing and Communities. 60 from within Housing and Community Development and 81 from Property and Development.
- 4.2 The service areas we received most complaints about (across the whole of Housing and Communities) were:
- Repairs and Maintenance (48)
 - Housing Estates (41)
- Unsurprisingly, these are service areas with a high degree of customer interaction.

Analysis of Housing and Community Development Assistant Directorate area

- 4.3 The greatest number of complaints in the Housing and Community Development area were Housing Estates issues. The reasons for the **41** complaints were varied and included **17** for the standard of service received, **5** concerning the attitude and behaviour of staff and **5** disagreeing with a particular decision that had been made.
- 4.4 These 41 complaints account for 68% of all the complaints (60) received in the Housing and Community Development part of the service (the others being related to Homelessness, Lettings and Private Sector Housing) and therefore a further more detailed analysis has been undertaken of these, including those resolved within the response target times:

| Quarter | Complaints | On time | Percent |
|--------------|------------|-----------|------------|
| 1 | 16 | 8 | 50% |
| 2 | 10 | 4 | 40% |
| 3 | 9 | 8 | 89% |
| 4 | 6 | 6 | 100% |
| Total | 41 | 26 | 63% |

- 4.5 It is very encouraging to see that following the investment in customer service training and additional complaints training for Housing staff in 2016, there is a clear downward trend in complaints received and an improvement in response times to complaints being handled on time. This is particularly noticeable in Quarters 3 and 4 which follows when the training took place.
- 4.6 In total across the year, of the 60 complaints received in the Housing and Community Development area, 22 (37%) were responded to late (outside of the 20 day target time). The analysis table above shows that the category 'Housing Estates' complaints accounts for 15 of these late response complaints.
- 4.7 Further analysis was done to understand the reasons for these 41 Housing Estates complaints. The table below shows the categorisation for these complaint reasons.

| Complaint Reason | Percent |
|-------------------------------|----------------|
| Standard of Service | 41% |
| Neighbour issue | 20% |
| Attitude / Behaviour of staff | 12% |
| Decision Made / Policy | 12% |
| Other | 15% |

- 4.8 Standard of Service is the most common reason for complaints in Housing Estates and analysis of this shows that there is no real pattern to the reason for complaints, ranging from incorrect use of communal bins; sheltered housing support over repair; response to ASB; no key for lock; boundary issues with neighbours; dog faeces on estate; poor grounds maintenance; parking provision etc. However the most common issue in this category was around lack of response from officers which was identified in 5 of the cases. This will be an area that we will continue to encourage improvement on through managers and services.

Analysis of Property and Development Assistant Directorate area

- 4.9 The 81 complaints received within Property and Development are broken down into the following service areas:

| Service Area | Number | Percent |
|---------------------------------------|---------------|----------------|
| Asset Management (General Fund stock) | 7 | 9% |
| Repairs and Maintenance (HRA stock) | 48 | 59% |
| Property Investment (HRA stock) | 26 | 32% |

It is not surprising that a large majority of these complaints are regarding our HRA stock, as we have a much higher number of HRA tenants compared to General Fund.

4.10 A quarterly breakdown of the complaints received within Property and Development is shown below:

| Quarter | Complaints | On time | Percent |
|--------------|------------|-----------|------------|
| 1 | 19 | 7 | 37% |
| 2 | 22 | 13 | 59% |
| 3 | 17 | 11 | 65% |
| 4 | 23 | 12 | 52% |
| Total | 81 | 43 | 53% |

4.11 Like the performance shown within Housing and Community Development, there has been an improvement in the number of complaints responded to within time throughout 2016/17, albeit with a dip in performance at Q4, however this is still much better than it was at the beginning of the year.

4.12 Further analysis has been done to understand the reasons for the 81 Property and Development complaints. The table below shows the categorisation for these complaint reasons:

| Complaint Reason | Percent |
|-------------------------------|---------|
| Standard of Service | 65% |
| Attitude / Behaviour of staff | 5% |
| Decision Made / Policy | 3% |
| Damage | 5% |
| Delay | 16% |
| Other | 6% |

4.13 Like Housing and Community Development, Standard of Service is the most common reason for complaints. Further analysis shows that of the complaints received regarding Standard of Service, 7% were for Asset Management, 57% were for Repairs and Maintenance and 36% were for Property Investment.

4.14 A piece of work that will help address this is the updating of the Housing Maintenance Standard which we are currently consulting the Tenants Forum on. Once this has been finalised and approved through TSMB, we will be better able to ensure that tenants expectations match the service standards we will be working to. Hopefully this will help reduce the number of complaints. We also continue to work hard with our work force, systems and IT to continue to improve systems, skills and equipment needed to undertake quality repairs and maintenance in an efficient manner.

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