

Taunton Deane Borough Council

Tenant Services Management Board – 27 June 2016

Housing and Communities Complaints

1. Summary

An analysis of complaints received to the Housing and Communities Directorate between April 2015 and March 2016 has been carried out, the findings of which are explained within this report.

2. Background

From 1 April 2015 all corporate complaints, compliments and suggestions were recorded on a central database instead of on a spreadsheet as it was previously. This has allowed for greater visibility of complaints received and provides better quality information as reason for complaint, service area, target date, and outcome amongst other information is now being recorded. The quality of data will continue to improve as the new process evolves. Some of this analysis has proved difficult as not all fields are mandatory and there are options for some entries to be created manually rather than being selected from a pre-defined list, therefore this is something to be suggested and discussed corporately to allow for better analysis in the future.

Corporately we have a two-stage internal complaints procedure. Before a complaint is received we should have had a chance to provide the service or put something right and we can only do this if we have received a request or been informed of a problem, which we would then aim to deal with as part of our normal day to day business. If there is an issue which we cannot resolve immediately as part of our day to day business, this is usually dealt with as a Stage 1 Complaint. We aim to resolve the majority of complaints within 20 working days at Stage 1. If the complainant is unhappy with the outcome at Stage 1, they can request that their complaint is moved to a Stage 2, which is then investigated by an Assistant Director or nominated senior officer. Again we aim to resolve these within 20 working days.

If the complainant is still not satisfied with the outcome at Stage 2, they can refer the matter to a 'Designated Person' or wait 8 weeks, after which the complainant can refer the matter directly to the Housing Ombudsman. The 'Designated Person' can be a local councillor or MP and can decide to help resolve the complaint or refer the complaint directly to the Housing Ombudsman before the 8 week time limit. These last steps (designated person and Ombudsman) are set out as a requirement of Housing Landlords by the Housing Ombudsman Service. www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk

3. Analysis of complaints

Between 1 April 2015 and 31 March 2016 a total of 120 complaints were logged as received within the Housing and Communities Directorate. This equates to around 10 a month. Of these, 106 were logged and then resolved at Stage 1; 12 were logged and then resolved at Stage 2; and 2 were referred on to the Housing Ombudsman.

Of the two complaints that went to the Housing Ombudsman, one was for alleged damage to a pool by the DLO, during a repair and was not upheld and the other was related to a decision on a housing allocation which was also not upheld.

Complaints were received through a variety of means with 43 complaints via the web, 29 via post and the remainder either made in person or over the telephone. We are not able to provide an absolute breakdown of complaints received per service area as some manual selections have been created inaccurately making the complaints hard to group together. However the broad reasons for complaints received and numbers in each category are shown in the table below.

Subject reason	Number of complaints
Breaking a promise	3
Damage	8
Decision made	10
Delay	3
Error	2
Standard of service	64
Attitude/behaviour of staff	8
Other (there are manual entries which include parking, house numbering and noisy tenants)	18
No reason entered	4

Of the complaints logged as 'damage', 2 of these were related to damage caused on public Council land as a result of anti-social behaviour, 4 were regarding damage caused to a tenant's possessions whilst works were carried out in their homes, 1 was regarding damage to a leasehold property following an issue with a tenanted property and 1 was regarding damage caused to a private property as a result of anti-social behaviour on public Council land.

With regards to 'decision made' there was no common denominator and complaints were received for a number of reasons including a mutual exchange refusal, the location of a scooter store, our bidding and allocation policy and decisions not to fit or replace kitchens, fences and solar panels.

The most common reason for complaints was regarding 'standard of service'. Of the 64 complaints logged as standard of service, the majority of these (51) are related to some sort of repair work (17 specifically about the standard of repair, 11 due to repair work being promised but not completed and 4 were regarding our capital programme of works). The remainder includes 6 complaints regarding estate management, specifically anti-social behaviour, parking and noise nuisance, 4 were

relating to voids and the standard of relets and 2 regarding fencing and gardens amongst others. From these 64 complaints 4 should have been categorised as 'attitude of staff', one was a complaint for Somerset County Council, one should have been treated as a service request and one should have been logged as an MP letter.

Of the 12 Stage 2 complaints, 3 were escalated due to there being no response to the Stage 1 complaint, 6 were due to the complainant being unhappy with the Stage 1 response and 1 was due to works being promised within the Stage 1 response which subsequently did not happen. Two of the Stage 2 complaints appear to have missed Stage 1 incorrectly. With regards to the 2 complaints received via the Housing Ombudsman, 1 was due to the complainant being unhappy with the Stage 2 response. It is believed the reason for the second referral was due to no response to any previous contact made to the Council.

Of all complaints received and responded to between 1 April 2015 and 31 March 2016, the average response time was 28 working days and response times ranged from 1 working day to 172 working days. Clearly complaints are not being prioritised as they should be. Response times have been impacted due to protracted hand-offs between Officers, as sometimes the complaint needs to be investigated by two different departments. This is primarily the case with complaints regarding repairs issues, as these usually require involvement from both Property Services and Building Services, however this should now be addressed due to the recent restructure and response times should improve. Some complaints that take a long time to resolve can be about very complex issues that cut across lots of different areas of the service and some complaints letters may include numerous issues that they want picked up in one letter.

4. Next steps

Complaints performance in relation to response times will continue to be monitored as this is an indicator on the Housing and Communities quarterly scorecard. In addition Martha Dudman is working on a project for Improving Tenant and Leaseholder satisfaction which will produce some further data analysis and recommendations. In order to make the data captured regarding complaints more robust it is an intention to run complaints workshops with staff to ensure they are fully aware of the complaints process and train them in using the Corporate Complaints database correctly.