

# Arun District Council

<b>REPORT TO:</b>	<b>Housing and Wellbeing Committee – 23 November 2023</b>
<b>SUBJECT:</b>	<b>Housing services complaints performance and determinations Q2</b>
<b>LEAD OFFICER:</b>	<b>Sasha Hawkins – Interim Business Improvement Manager</b>
<b>LEAD MEMBER:</b>	Councillor Carol Birch – Chair of Housing and Wellbeing Committee
<b>WARDS:</b>	<b>All</b>

## **CORPORATE PRIORITY / POLICY CONTEXT / CORPORATE VISION:**

The report supports the following areas in the corporate vision:

- Delivering the right homes in the right places
- Support those in our community that need help, providing a safety net where necessary and working with people and organisations to meet different needs.
- Ensure the existing housing stock in the district (private sector and council owned) is maintained to a high standard.
- Support households with complex needs to secure suitable accommodation.

This report provides members with details of Housing Ombudsman determinations made against the council and our complaints performance for the second quarter of 2023/24 (July to September).

## **DIRECTORATE POLICY CONTEXT:**

The Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code sets out that landlords should provide their governing bodies with information on their performance on complaint handling, to include showing that we have complied with any orders made by the Ombudsman.

As a landlord we have to ensure compliance with the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code as failure to do so could result in a complaint being referred to an appropriate regulator.

## **FINANCIAL SUMMARY:**

The average amount of compensation paid as part of our Stage 1 and Stage 2 responses for Q2 was £68.20, this is down from an average of £187.00 in Q1. The main driver for compensation is work being carried out late by our contractors and poor communication.

## **1 PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 To present to committee an overview of Housing services complaints performance for Q2 (July to September)

## **2 RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that the Housing and Wellbeing Committee

- 2.1 Note the contents of the report
- 2.2 Note the improved performance in complaint response times for quarter 2

## **3 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 3.1 This report provides members with an overview of our complaint handling performance in quarter 2 for the period 1 July 2023 to 30 September 2023.
- 3.2 There are no new determinations made by the Housing Ombudsman to report on to committee.
- 3.3 The Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code sets out that landlords should report to their members regular updates on their complaint handling performance and their compliance with Ombudsman orders.
- 3.4 For the period 1 July 2023 to 30 September 2023 105 formal complaints were received, the highest volume of complaints was seen in our repairs service which accounted for 71 of formal complaints received. In quarter 1 we received 97 formal complaints.
- 3.5 On average for quarter 2 we responded to 63% of Stage 1 complaints within agreed extended timescales this is an improvement on quarter 1's performance which was 50%. For Stage 2 complaints we responded to 42% of complaints within agreed extended timescales this is an improvement on quarter 1's performance which was 31%.
- 3.6 When benchmarking our performance against other housing providers we remain in quartile 4 for complaint response times but based on quarter 2's performance we are close to moving into quartile 3 if the upward trend continues.
- 3.7 Whilst performance still falls below our targets for response times it has improved compared to Quarter 1 and the improvements are as a direct result of the changes implemented to our processes, of which more detail is set out in the main body of the report.

3.8 For quarter 2 we received 27 compliments which are set out below, this is an increase on 5 for quarter 1.

#### 4 **DETAIL**

##### 4.1 **Complaint performance**

4.2 Appendix 1 sets out our performance for quarter 2 and reports on key measures such as response rate, volume of complaints, and root causes.

4.3 Compared to Q1 the volume of complaints has increased, with 105 complaints being received in Q2 compared to 97 in Q1, this is only a slight increase and is due to an increase in stage 1's for the month of August where we received 14 stage 1 complaints which was higher than the months of July and September. We will be monitoring any trends with the volumes of complaints and analysing what might be causing a spike in complaints in certain months.

4.4 The response time set by the Housing Ombudsman for Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaints is 10 and 20 working days. Appendix 1 shows the percentage of complaints responded to within time has increased compared to Q1.

4.5 As a service our target percentage for complaint response times is 94% for Stage 1's and 96% for Stage 2's. This target is driven by the top performing providers in the sector and is provided by Housemark as part of the benchmarking data we give them.

4.6 Performance is improving at a gradual rate, and we anticipate this upward trend will continue, and we can move into the next performance quartile when our performance is benchmarked against other housing providers in the sector.

4.7 Over the last four months we have implemented and continued to embed the following changes to improve our complaint handling.

4.8 Our complaints and compliments tracker is now fully embedded within the service, and has allowed us to have greater oversight of complaints, identify gaps in our performance and areas for improvement.

4.9 The complaints co-ordinator holds weekly meetings with service managers and team leaders to keep oversight on the level of complaints, communication with residents and to ensure we respond within time.

4.10 Weekly meetings with Infomanagement to keep track of any outstanding complaints

- 4.11 The central mailbox for housing complaints is improving the speed in which we allocate complaints out which is giving officers more time to investigate and respond to complaints.
- 4.12 The Interim Head of Housing has weekly meetings with the Repairs and Maintenance Manager to keep track of repairs complaints.
- 4.13 Regular meetings are held with Osborne Property Services Ltd to resolve repairs complaints.
- 4.14 All of these changes have resulted in improved performance for quarter 2.
- 4.15 Appendix 1 shows that our repairs service has received the largest number of complaints in Q2 which continues the same trend as the previous quarter
- 4.16 This is still due to the performance of our main repairs contractor which is being addressed by the implementation of a Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS), and improved performance monitoring.
- 4.17 We will be placing a tender for repairs orders over £500 onto the DPS, this is due to the poor performance to date on these orders. By tendering this piece of work, we hope to see improved repairs times for our residents, increasing their satisfaction with the service and reducing the level of complaints.
- 4.18 We have awarded the voids contract to Westons which will result in improved quality, and improved re-let times, again increasing satisfaction when new residents move into their homes.
- 4.19 We have recently recruited new technical officers who will be visiting residents to inspect repairs and check the quality of the work done, which should reflect into improved satisfaction with our service.
- 4.20 Further steps are being taken to ensure performance continues to improve each quarter which are set out below.
- 4.21 Over the next quarter several actions will also be taken to improve communication with our residents as this is one of the top root causes for complaints.
- 4.22 This includes call response time monitoring, updating our website, reviewing the repairs handbook and focus groups with residents to understand how we can improve communication.
- 4.23 We have introduced a monitoring phase to our complaints tracker to ensure that any actions committed to in complaint responses are monitored through to completion, and that regular updates are provided to residents.

4.24 We have also used the root causes data to produce information for the housing management team on the lessons that be learnt from complaints, this is then used to put in place actions to resolve any systemic issues that are contributing to complaints.

4.25 The housing management team also meet every week and will be reviewing all actions committed to, and ensuring they are monitored through to completion.

4.26 Continue to monitor the performance of our main repairs contractor, and explore further options through the DPS for are responsive repairs service.

#### 4.27 **Compliments**

4.28 For quarter 2 we received 27 compliments, this is an increase on 5 for quarter 1. Some of these compliments are set out below.

4.29 “Time keeping, cleared up well. Police and done a great job”

4.30 “I just wanted to say thank you again for all your help and making sure that me and X stayed together, means so much to me. I can’t thank you enough for all your support over the last year”

4.31 “Thank you so much for your help in getting this done”

4.32 “Thank you for the work you have done to help, a chance of a decent life for the first time thanks to you”

4.33 “I can’t thank you enough for your prompt input into supporting us as a family with the repairs of our wet room, your actions and understanding and I honestly feel that my voice has been heard”

4.34 “I would like to thank you and your team for helping me in such a difficult situation, I’ll always remember it and I wish you all the best.”

4.35 “Many thanks for all you have done for us we can’t thank you enough. We both want to thank you for all the work and time you have put in to help us get the issues sorted and that it was so nice to be able to communicate and talk with a caring person”

## 5 **CONSULTATION**

5.1 None required

## **6 OPTIONS/ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERS**

6.1 This report is for noting only

## **7 COMMENTS BY THE GROUP HEAD OF FINANCE/SECTION 151 OFFICER**

7.1 The financial implications outlined in this report are comparatively minor and can be funded within the existing housing revenue budget.

## **8 RISK ASSESSMENT CONSIDERATIONS**

8.1 Not applicable.

## **9 COMMENTS OF THE GROUP HEAD OF LAW AND GOVERNANCE & MONITORING OFFICER**

9.1 Compliance with the Complaint Handling Code is a requirement of the membership of the Housing Ombudsman Scheme and failure to comply with the Code entitles the Ombudsman to take action through its determinations and other avenues. There are no direct legal implications associated with this report, but the report forms part of the Council's ongoing work to adhere to the Code and to improve its complaints performance.

## **10 HUMAN RESOURCES IMPACT**

10.1 No impact identified.

## **11 HEALTH & SAFETY IMPACT**

11.1 There are no direct health and safety impacts associated with this report. However, reporting on complaint performance and Ombudsman determinations helps to highlight improvements to service areas which include repairs and compliance, which will help support the effective management of health and safety risks.

## **12 PROPERTY & ESTATES IMPACT**

12.1 The recommendations of this report have no impact on the Councils General Fund Portfolio or the delivery of Property, Estates, and Facilities functions.

## **13 EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT (EIA) / SOCIAL VALUE**

13.1 Not required for this report

**14 CLIMATE CHANGE & ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT/SOCIAL VALUE**

14.1 No impact identified

**15 CRIME AND DISORDER REDUCTION IMPACT**

15.1 No impact identified

**16 HUMAN RIGHTS IMPACT**

16.1 There are no implications identified.

**17 FREEDOM OF INFORMATION / DATA PROTECTION CONSIDERATIONS**

17.1 There are no implications identified

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**CONTACT OFFICER:**

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**BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:**

Appendix 1 – Complaints performance figures