

Arun District Council

REPORT TO:	Housing and Wellbeing Committee – 26 March 2024
SUBJECT:	Housing Services Complaints Performance and Determinations Q3
LEAD OFFICER:	Sasha Hawkins – Business Improvement Manager
LEAD MEMBER:	Councillor Carol Birch
WARDS:	All

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 third quarter of 2023/24 (October to December).

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 must 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:

In Q3 we paid £12,002 compensation as part of our Stage 1 and Stage 2 responses. This is an increase on Q2 and our average compensation payment as of December 2023 was £182.10.

Our compensation budget is monitored by the service managers, and compensation is paid in line with our compensation policy.

The main driver for compensation is the time taken for work to be completed, the quality of work and poor communication.

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To present to committee an overview of Housing services complaints performance for Q3 (October to December).

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 It is recommended that the Housing and Wellbeing Committee:

2.1.1 Note the contents of the report.

2.1.2 Note the improved performance in complaint response times for quarter 3.

3 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 3.1 This report provides members with an overview of our complaint handling performance in quarter 3 for the period 1 October 2023 to 31 December 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 October 2023 to 31 December 2023 130 formal complaints were received, the highest volume of complaints was seen in our repairs service which accounted for 79 of formal complaints received. In quarter 2 we received 105 formal complaints; this represents a 24% increase compared to quarter 2. The increase in complaints is attributed to all teams and not just repairs.
- 3.5 On average for quarter 3 we responded to 83% of Stage 1 complaints within agreed extended timescales this is a significant improvement on quarter 2's performance which was 63%. For Stage 2 complaints we responded to 60% of complaints within agreed extended timescales, again, representing a significant improvement on quarter 2's performance of 42%.
- 3.6 At the beginning of the year, we were in the bottom quartile for complaint response times when comparing our performance to other housing providers, based on December's performance we have now moved up to quartile 2.
- 3.7 Our response times to complaints have continued to improve each month which is reflected in these quarterly figures. This is a direct result of the changes implemented to our processes and the hard work carried out across the service to drive up complaints performance.
- 3.8 For quarter 3 we received 44 compliments which is an increase from 27 compliments last quarter.

4 DETAIL

4.1 Complaint performance

- 4.1.1 Appendix 1 sets out our performance for quarter 3 and reports on key measures such as response rate, volume of complaints, and root causes.
- 4.1.2 Compared to Q2 the volume of complaints has increased, with 130 complaints being received in Q3 compared to 105 in Q2, this equates to a 24% increase. Whilst repairs make up most complaints the increase in volume is attributable across all teams and not just repairs.
- 4.1.3 Our repairs service receiving the largest number of complaints is not a unique position compared to the rest of the sector as repairs are our most significant volume of service transactions and will naturally make up most of the complaints a landlord receives.
- 4.1.4 We will continue to monitor any trends with the volumes of complaints and analysing what might be causing a spike in complaints in certain months.
- 4.1.5 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 continued to increase.
- 4.1.6 When our complaint performance was first brought to this committee last year, we set out that for Q1 we were responding to 36% of Stage 1's and 24% of Stage 2's within target timescales. This placed us in the bottom quartile for performance and was not where we wanted our performance to be.
- 4.1.7 Our performance has continued to improve month on month, and for quarter 3 we are able to report that we responded to 83% of Stage 1's and 60% of Stage 2's within time. This is a significant improvement, and I am pleased to report that this trend is continuing into the 4th quarter.
- 4.1.8 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 provide on an annual basis.
- 4.1.9 Our performance for December has been benchmarked by Housemark and now places us in the 2nd quartile, which is an improvement from the bottom quartile where we placed at the beginning of 23/24.
- 4.1.10 The improvements we have made to our complaint handling are now fully embedded in the housing service, and this is seen in our continued performance in responding to complaints on time.
- 4.1.11 These improvements are:

- The implementation of our complaints and compliments tracker allowing us to have greater oversight of complaints, identify gaps in our performance and areas for improvement.
- 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.
- Weekly meetings with Infomanagement to keep track of any outstanding complaints.
- 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.
- We have created a process map for complaints, so all staff involved understand what actions they undertake when investigating complaints.
- Creation of standardised complaint templates.
- We share regular lessons learnt with the housing management team so we can create actions to resolve systemic issues.

4.1.12 The monitoring of complaint handling means that at the time of writing our performance continues to improve and despite increased levels of complaints for this quarter we have further improved the percentage of complaints responded to in time. We do anticipate that the ending of the repairs contract may result in additional complaints numbers and workflow which may create additional service pressures, so we will look to mitigate any impact on our response times as much as possible.

4.1.13 Appendix 1 sets out some further data on root causes and the complaint decisions made.

4.1.14 In Q3 service not provided and poor communication were the largest root causes of complaints, and this is a continued trend we are seeing each quarter. However, service not up to standard was only a root case of 10 complaints this quarter compared to 26 complaints last quarter.

4.1.15 When we then look at our complaint decisions, we see that a large proportion of complaints are being upheld and in Q3 92 complaints were upheld, with 27 not being upheld.

4.1.16 This tells us that there is further work for us to do to improve our communication and the service we provide, so that we can reduce the volume of complaints and the number of complaints upheld where we are at fault.

4.2 Further improvements

- 4.2.1 We recognise that responding to complaints in time is only one part of our performance, and that it is just as important for us to understand what is driving complaints so we can tackle the root cause by introducing improvements across our service.
- 4.2.1 We have used this data alongside our tenant satisfaction measures results to produce an action plan to improve those two areas, and the details of this are set out in a separate report being presented to committee this evening.
- 4.2.2 As a large number of our complaints have been due to the performance of our main repair's contractor, we are hopeful that the decision to end this contract will mean a positive impact on our complaint levels due to an increased level of service for our residents.
- 4.2.3 However, the true impact of this change will take time to reflect in these performance measures, but we will be working with any incoming contractors to set out the communication and performance standards we expect from then in delivering our repairs service.
- 4.2.4 We have also held focus groups with residents to understand how we can improve communication with them, and their feedback will help shape and inform how we develop and improve all our services in housing.
- 4.2.5 A training programme is being developed for all housing staff and will be periodically carried out when any new starters join the service to ensure everyone is working consistently and in line with our policies and procedures.

4.3 Continued performance monitoring

- 4.3.1 Our complaints co-ordinator monitors our performance on a weekly basis and works closely with Infomanagement to ensure complaints are dealt with in line with our policy.
- 4.3.2 Our housing management team receive performance updates every fortnight and monitor the progress of any actions committed to. They also receive regular information on trends, root causes and lessons learnt so they can take action to address any systemic issues.
- 4.3.3 We also invite residents who have been through the complaints process to carry out a survey to give us their views on our complaint handling, and any areas we can improve on.

4.4 Compliments

- 4.4.1 For quarter 3 we received 44 compliments; this is an increase from 27 in quarter 2. Some of these compliments are set out below.

- 4.4.2 “First of all, I can’t thank you enough for finding this property for my son & I. It’s been a very worrying & stressful time for us both so I can’t emphasise enough how much this means to us”.
- 4.4.3 “Thank you so much for your help though this difficult time. You went over and above to sort this matter and for that we will be for ever thankful.”
- 4.4.4 “I know this workload was a lot of pressure put on you, but I’d like to say a massive thank you for all your time and hard work spent on my stage 2 complaint. You have been excellent regarding listening to my concerns and communicating with me so efficiently by phone and email and I shall make sure you get excellent feedback for this.”
- 4.4.5 “Thank you! I want to call you tomorrow and personally say a massive thank you for everything that you have done for my family and would also like to wish you the best wishes for the forthcoming Christmas time. I will call after signing the agreement.”
- 4.4.6 “I wanted to thank you for everything, I couldn’t have done this without you. You are amazing in every way and if you ever have days where you think you hate your job, know that you're saving lives, and you don't even know it. Eternally grateful to have worked with you and for you to have been with me as my housing officer since day 1, to the day I got my door key. Thank you again.”
- 4.4.7 “Firstly, I would like to thank you and especially the Hexagon Team for doing an absolute cracking job on my house, they were very professional and made the whole process as stress free as possible for me, they took into consideration a lot of factors to make sure I was happy all the time. As you know I was quite concerned about all of it. However, I could not be any happier and more pleased on how Mick and his team completed the job within very quick time and with excellence. 5 Star Rated ”

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 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 Council's General Fund Portfolio or the delivery of Property, Estates, and Facilities functions.

13 EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT (EIA) / SOCIAL VALUE

13.1 Not required as this is a performance monitoring 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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BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:

Appendix 1 – Complaints performance figures