

Complaints self-assessment: response from the Board

There is no denying there were challenges around complaints for believe housing last year. Too many complaints took too long to respond to and any maladministration findings from the Housing Ombudsman (HO) is deeply uncomfortable. However, there are also a lot of positives to take away from our Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report.

The Board recognises staffing over the last year has been difficult, with limited numbers of people dealing with complaints and a high turnover rate. The Board recognise that this can be a really challenging role for people to manage delivering a good service to our customers while there is so much spotlight on complaints.

Having now appointed our first Board Member Responsible for Complaints, Monica Burns will pay particular attention to overall complaint numbers, categories, timescales and lessons learned. As a Board, we will receive updates at least every six months, which will also include any determinations and a summary of cases referred to the HO.

Given the importance of complaints, the increase in staff numbers in the team and the elevation of the Resolution Officer roles were sensible steps. The process review of complaints under our business transformation programme 'Simple Done Right' and the implementation of a new IT system being developed in complaints will also deliver improved working practices and efficiencies to reduce complaint timescales and improve customer satisfaction. However, the capacity of the team to deal with complaints in a timely and effective way must be kept under review and the Board will continue to monitor complaint timescales through the Performance and Standards Committee.

It is also clear a lot of work has gone into ensuring the culture around the approach to complaints is customer-centred and focused on resolving issues fairly and quickly. This work is timely. Internally believe housing has launched a new behaviours model and, as part of this launch, people have been reviewing cases where things have gone wrong to learn how our behaviours are a key driver to effectively listening to and responding to our customers. The Board will be seeking updates on how this approach impacts customer satisfaction with complaints – both from the Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs) and transactional surveys – and would expect these to improve over the next year.

The areas of learning and the introduction of a 'lessons loop' highlighted in the report are also encouraging. As mentioned, ensuring complaints drive learning will be an area of scrutiny for the Board. Next year, the Board will expect to see further examples of where complaints have resulted in improvements to how we do things. This means we must accept where we have made mistakes, treat each customer fairly and be ready to quickly put things right.

Finally, we should be mindful of the context. Complaints are one of several sources of feedback from our customers that tell us how we are doing. Customer Focus Groups, external audits, Tenant Satisfaction Measures results, Customer Voice, surveys and colleague feedback all help us understand how our services impact our customers.

When we look at the whole picture, there is much to be proud about:

- 81% of our customers believe they live in a well-maintained home
- 82% believe we keep them informed about the things that matter to them
- 85% believe their home is safe
- 82% believe we keep communal areas well maintained
- 88% believe we treat them fairly and with respect.

But we cannot be complacent.

Complaints help us learn where we can improve as we strive for the best outcomes we can deliver for our customer, ensuring we are providing healthy, affordable homes and enhancing our communities.