

Tenant Complaints Review 2022-23

To ensure we provide excellent housing and support it is important that we learn from the experiences of our tenants. As a learning organisation we believe in learning from the complaints we receive to help us improve the service we deliver to tenants.

This Tenant Complaints Review for 2022-23 provides a summary of the complaints we received from our tenants over the year as well as our plans to address them.

Overview

Over the past year, we continued to receive only a small number of complaints. Because of the small number we received it has been difficult to identify any strong themes.

Personalised support

One partial theme however is for staff to be more considerate and mindful of how best to help tenants fully resolve an issue for themselves once we had completed the aspects of a process we were more directly responsible for. On a couple of occasions, where there was a small hurdle for the tenant to overcome, we had left responsibility with the tenant rather than identifying the barriers and pro-actively helping them to overcome these. Future training for our housing and property team will stress that rather than accepting something is not possible more of an emphasis will be placed upon asking ourselves "what do I need to do now to make this possible?"

Financial inclusion

In one case, temporary IT problems for Southdown meant that a benefits claim we could have assisted with wasn't completed, and some important information failed to reach the tenant. We were unable to get information from the benefits office due to GDPR restrictions. Whilst the IT issues (caused by malicious attempts to hack our systems) were unanticipated, in this case we didn't explore ways we could satisfy their data protection policies and still assist the tenant.

In future, we will ensure that the tenant signs a tenant permission form we are working with - this will enable us to liaise directly with the benefits office on a tenant's behalf.

Our Financial Inclusion Manager has confirmed that she'll make it a standard part of the Financial Inclusion Officer's work to ensure that a permission form is signed for every tenant they work with. We'll improve our internal processes to make a clear case note to explain why each referral is being closed and ensure this is communicated to the tenant.

Our IT team has been asked to identify situations where there is a heightened risk that emails may be being blocked by the receiving parties' email provider so housing staff can find alternative methods of communicating. We have some tenants who choose to only receive contact by email and, as such, we will need to find a means of reaching these tenants if these circumstances arise again.

Compassion in sensitive circumstances

Succession is always a difficult issue for housing providers to respond to. We need to balance the moral duty to maximise the number of people housed (at a time of such acute housing need) with having respect for the feelings of a bereaved relative.

In certain circumstances we may have to look at how we apply our policies and whether we have any additional flexibility. Staff have been asked to acknowledge and sympathise if someone tells them that they are dealing with a difficult situation such as bereavement and see if there are other, more flexible, approaches that reach the same end whilst being mindful of the circumstances of the individuals affected.

When a tenant tells us they are very poorly or in hospital staff should ensure that any letters they need to send sensitively acknowledge their circumstances, even if, after consideration, we still need to deliver news the tenant does not necessarily want to hear.

Communication

Maintaining the upkeep and condition of communal areas is often an area where we are trying to balance the needs and wishes of all parties. In one case a tenant was unhappy that items appear to have been removed from the shared garden without contact or warning. Although we did not have knowledge of how these items disappeared, we made an initial assumption that our contractors wouldn't have thrown these items away instead of fully investigating (although we never did establish what happened to the items).

Housing Officers and Assistants have been reminded to ensure that we give tenants better warning about our intention to clear gardens and communal ways. They will

send letters to all residents giving fair warning that items will be removed on a certain date. They will make it clear in the letters that wanted items which aren't put away and 'appear to be rubbish' may also be taken.

Returning contact/ incorrect information

A tenant was unhappy that her Housing Assistant took three weeks to return a telephone call to her despite being told that they would hear from him the next day. The tenant was also wrongly informed that we'd mend her doorbell free of charge. In this instance the tenant's doorbell was their own responsibility.

Since this complaint, housing staff have been set a target of calling all tenants back within 24 hours. Where this isn't possible, due to either time sensitive work or visits, they've been asked to text a tenant to advise them of the delay and tell them when they can expect a call. The team have been advised that we don't carry out works for tenants outside of repairs and maintenance unless there are exceptional circumstances. They've been asked to discuss any future request with the Housing Services Manager. Costs should be collected from the tenant in advance in cases where we agree to carry out the works which are the tenant's responsibility to carry out.

Ombudsman and disrepair

A tenant raised his dissatisfaction that he was being charged for a window cleaning service which he only sporadically received. The windows are difficult to reach because of the building layout. We arranged a mini consultation with other residents to discuss options for cleaning windows going forward.

In this case the tenant alleged that we failed to respond to his original feedback as a formal complaint. On looking into this case, Property Services missed the opportunity to direct him to our complaints process when the tenant (over the phone) mentioned their desire to involve the Housing Ombudsman if the issue wasn't resolved to their satisfaction.

Repair timescales and access

We received a complaint about the amount of time taken for a replacement fire door installation following it being damaged beyond repair. Whilst we have seen long lead-in times for fire doors due to wider issues in the sector, delays in this case were partly caused by the complainant not allowing the necessary access. The learning for us from this experience was that our main repairs contractors are acting as our agents to ensure repairs are carried out. This situation demonstrated the need to keep better records of all their interactions with tenants, especially in cases where we are seeking to maintain the welfare of tenants but the necessary access to a tenant's flat has repeatedly been proven to be difficult to obtain.

