

**Operations Committee**

**Meeting Date: 26 June 2024**

**Agenda Item: 11**

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**Title of Paper:** Annual Complaints and Service Improvement Report  
**Status:** For discussion and approval  
**Confidentiality:** Non-confidential  
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**Attachments:** Appendix 1 – Ombudsman Investigation Report(1)  
Appendix 2 – Ombudsman Investigation Report(2)  
Appendix 3 – June 2024 Housing Ombudsman Self-Assessment

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**1. Purpose of paper**

1.1 The report provides an overview of complaints received and managed in 2023/24 with reference to lessons learnt, service improvements as a result, and an update cases with the Housing Ombudsman. The report also provides our latest Housing Ombudsman self-assessment.

**2. Recommendation**

2.1 The Committee is asked to **NOTE** the complaints management performance and self-assessment.

**3. Annual Overview**

3.1 In 2023-24 there were a total of 68 complaints received. This represents an increase in complaints logged from 46 in 2021/22 and 63 in 2022/23.

3.2 Of these, five were escalated to the second stage of our complaints process.

3.3 *Complaint categories / service area*

Department	Number of complaints	Upheld at stage one
Housing	9	4
Repairs	36	34
Compliance	8	8
Estates Services	3	1
Cross department	12	9

### 3.4 *Response times*

In accordance with the Ombudsman’s complaint handling code, stage one complaints have a ten working day timeframe for a written response and stage two have a 20 working day period. In previous years we have reported on overall response times across both stages.

In 2021/22 just 50% of complaints were responded to on time, and in 2022/23 57% responded to on time. This was identified as a key area for improvement to prevent unnecessary escalations to stage two. With better organisation and monitoring this has been improved on and, this year, 100% of stage one complaints and 80% of stage two complaints have been responded to on time. The one stage two complaint responded to out of target was due to human error with the complaint acknowledged out of working hours and not logged on the system accordingly.

### 3.5 *Service Improvements*

Listening and acting on customer feedback is a key priority. The following actions have been identified to improve our service delivery to residents as a direct result of customer complaints, recognising the importance of the resident voice.

Theme	Service improvements
Staff training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Introduced the roll out of regular training to resident facing staff. We have utilised the modules on the Housing Ombudsman’s website to ensure the culture and awareness of complaint handling is recognised by all and an understanding of the importance that every interaction matters.</li> </ul>
Improved processes and procedures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identified where we haven’t used the data we know about our residents to better their experience. Placed flags on our gas compliance contractor’s portals before sending out generic appointment letters to the residents we know struggle with allowing access into their homes and unexpected letters.</li> <li>We have identified from complaints that we need better management of the managing agents responsible for carrying out communal repairs and communications on some of our estates. We are in the process of setting up regular meetings with our Estate Managers and Managing Agents to ensure a smooth communication line for both staff and residents. This will enable better oversight of the services provided and service charge breakdown costs and managing any communal issues.</li> <li>Introduced a more robust tracking system for monitoring complaints which have been responded to but require additional works/actions to encourage more cross team working and awareness.</li> </ul>
Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We know that a key area residents get frustrated and have reason to complain is when they are not notified of upcoming disruption. We have increased our use of CxFeedback on an estate focussed basis to ensure residents are up to date with upcoming repairs which may cause some disruption and notifications of scaffold or</li> </ul>

	<p>cherry pickers being on site with the intended length of time.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developed and promoted take up of the Resident Portal to enable more opportunities two-way communication and ease for residents to report or escalate queries they have.</li> </ul>
Damp and mould	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We have actively encouraged resident reporting of any damp and mould instances or concerns which saw an increase in demand of inspections and plans. We have increased resources for inspections and ensured contractors are skilled up to carry out in depth and effective treatment.</li> <li>• Introduced a six monthly check up for all properties who have had damp and mould works completed to ensure they stay free of damp and mould.</li> <li>• Introduced a new damp and mould policy to be clear to residents on how we will respond to these cases.</li> </ul>
Repairs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In the process of introducing a new repairs policy designed to give clarity on our maintenance services to all stakeholders, particularly residents.</li> <li>• Procured two new contractors to carry out day to day repairs following negative feedback and interaction with our residents by our main contractor.</li> <li>• Improving our triage service to minimise delays once repairs are raised to our contractors.</li> <li>• An issue in terms of waiting for appointments when raising a repair request had been raised. One of the new contractors technologies enables the resident to book and track their own appointments at the point of raising their repair.</li> <li>• Alongside this, better management of our main contractor by introducing joint contractor meetings and an IDS staff member spending a day a week in our contractor offices.</li> <li>• With the introduction of Estate Managers, we have been monitoring the quality of work carried out by our contractors by completing post inspections of work on all repairs completions. This will be done by a desk top review or personal inspection depending on the value of the work.</li> </ul>

#### 4. Ombudsman updates

4.1 At the March Operations Committee, it was advised we had two cases with the Housing Ombudsman for which we were awaiting determinations.

4.2 At the end of March we received a determination from the Housing Ombudsman which investigated both the response of IDS to the repairs being requested and that of complaint handling. The Ombudsman found no maladministration in relation to the handling of the repairs. Whilst there were delays, the Ombudsman concluded that 'the landlord has made redress to the resident which, in this Service's opinion, resolves the complaint satisfactorily. The measures taken by the landlord to redress what went wrong were proportionate to the impact that its failures had on the resident.' It did, however, find maladministration in relation to the complaint handling as 'the landlord failed to appropriately identify, acknowledge, and escalate the complaint through its complaint's procedure' without the intervention of the Ombudsman.

The order for maladministration was to pay compensation of £300 to the resident for time, trouble and inconvenience caused by the failures identified in its complaint handling and review the case to identify learnings. We have also enrolled all the housing team in the Ombudsman online training focusing on 'Dispute Resolution' with all 12 housing staff having completed the certified training. The full investigation report can be found in **Appendix 1**.

- 4.3 The second determination was also provided at the end of March. In this case the Ombudsman investigated the handling of the resident's reports of a leak. The Ombudsman found maladministration as it felt the compensation of £150 offered for the delay in completing the final repair, was not proportionate to the delay. It ordered a further £450 to the £150 totalling £600 and that outstanding decoration costs would be covered by IDS. The full investigation report is attached to this report as **Appendix 2**.
- 4.4 In February 2024, the Housing Ombudsman issued IDS with a Compliant Handling Failure Order (CHFO) for not providing a response to a complaint. We appealed but this was rejected because, whilst the information requested was provided, it was outside of the deadline. To prevent this happening again, we have amended our complaints tracker process to set an automated deadline to aid monitoring of responses.

## **5. Self-Assessment**

- 5.1 The Complaint Handling Code became statutory on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024, meaning that landlords are obliged by law to follow its requirements. There is a legal duty placed on the Ombudsman to monitor compliance and landlords must submit their self-assessment annually along with this report by 30<sup>th</sup> June 2024.
- 5.2 The Code consists of nine sections covering 68 different provisions. We are fully compliant with 65 of these provisions as outlined within our policies, procedures and guidelines. Three provisions where we are not fully compliant involve an update to a new or existing policy which are currently under review or due within the next three months in and this is explained in the commentary of the Code.
- 5.3 The self-assessment completed in June 2024 is attached and exhibited as **Appendix 3**. This will be uploaded to the website to replace the 2023 following being shared at this committee.

## **6. Complaint action plan**

- 6.1 Following the TPAS review of complaints which was discussed by the Operations Committee in March, an action plan was created with ten recommendations.
- 6.2 Three of these actions have now been fully completed, with one in continual progress in relation to promoting the complaints service to customers. This is being achieved by text in estate-based newsletters.
- 6.3 A further recommendation was around updating the self-assessment mentioned in this paper, this will be complete following publication.
- 6.4 The five remaining actions all relate updating policies and procedures. These are all in progress and these actions will all complete by the end of September.

## **7. Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB)**

- 7.1 Over the last year we have recorded 34 cases of ASB, with one relating to hate crime. The most common category of ASB recorded is noise nuisance. We have served two Notice of Seeking Possessions based on ASB breaches of tenancy, only one of which is likely to be moved to legal action to seek eviction. This is in relation to aggressive and abusive behaviour within a sheltered scheme. The perpetrator has some known vulnerabilities, so we are ensuring proportionality and that the perpetrator in this case is being supported prior to any legal action being commenced.

## **8. Risk Management and Governance Implications**

- 8.1 Maladministration findings from the Housing Ombudsman have a reputational and financial impact on the association.

## **9. Legal/regulatory associations**

- 9.1 The Complaint Handling Code became statutory on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024, meaning that landlords are obliged by law to follow its requirements.

## **10. Resident Voice**

- 10.1 The residents are at the core of our complaints. The lessons learned and service improvements implemented over the course of the last year have all been led by residents' feedback.
- 10.2 Over the coming months, we will be publishing feedback to residents on the improvements we have made to our services based on feedback from complaints.