



## Enquiry report

Date enquiry started	20.05.2015
Lead Member	Helena Taylor-Knox
Project Members	Jacqueline Anda Joan Rawle Marcia Davies Laura Hardin
Target date for completion	04.12.2015
Actual completion date & signed off by panel	01.12.2015
Enquiry title	<b>"I so want WPH to be a great housing association":</b> A WPH Scrutiny Panel_Review of WPH's complaint's policy and procedure : (complainant 2015)
Lead Officer (WPH)	Susan Bernard
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### 1. Introduction

This is the scrutiny panel's first enquiry since its formation in 2015. Following our training session with HQN on the role of scrutiny panels, we decided to look at complaints as one area that would give us a cross sectional view of performance based on customer feedback.

The panel set out with three key questions:

- I. How effective and fit for purpose is the policy, in comparison to other organisations in the sector?
- II. How is WPH's performance in dealing with complaints?
- III. What is the customer experience of going through the complaints processes like?



We had some useful information to scrutinise but it is worth noting at the outset that the lack of robust performance data and systematic data collection, this was a challenge. In addition we struggled to arrange to explore complaints files and so our experiential question, (number iii), we opted to have an action learning set where we heard of the complaints experience of two current complainants and heard anecdotal statements from all tenant members of the group. Whilst this could be seen as a bias, the Independent Chair facilitated the discussion and enabled the discussion to focus on the process and experience, as opposed to the rights and wrongs of individual complaint subject matters. In the absence of any additional complaints to scrutinise we felt this was a necessary step to obtain the customer view.

## 2. Findings in brief

In helping us understand what WPH should have in place we took our guidance from the regulator, the Homes and Communities Agency Tenant Involvement and Empowerment standards (2012) states that:

### ***“Customer service, choice and complaints***

*Registered providers shall:*

*(a) provide choices, information and communication that is appropriate to the diverse needs of their tenants in the delivery of all standards*

*(b) have an approach to complaints that is clear, simple and accessible that ensures that complaints are resolved promptly, politely and fairly.”*

And under 2.1.2

*“Providers shall offer a range of ways for tenants to express a complaint and set out clear service standards for responding to complaints, including complaints about performance against the standards, and details of what to do if they are unhappy with the outcome of a complaint. Providers shall inform tenants how they use complaints to improve their services. Registered providers shall publish information about complaints each year, including their number and nature, and the outcome of the complaints. Providers shall accept complaints made by advocates authorised to act on a tenant's/tenants' behalf.”*

- We found that WPH did have a complaints policy and procedure but that four stages was too many by comparison to others within the sector
- Although timelines existed for complaints, these were/are not adhered to
- There is a lack of robust monitoring and performance information to truly judge the actual performance on complaints and this is compounded by the lack of recording of outcomes for customers, (resolutions) or satisfaction data on the handling of complaints. We would like the Board to know that we have seen an excellent draft survey to capture satisfaction with complaints handling at the last meeting but this is still in draft (appendix 3)



- There were inconsistencies in the approach to recording complaints and our assumption is this indicates a lack of internal awareness between the difference of customer feedback and a complaint
- There are delays at almost every stage of the complaint process with stage four, the Board review, being the most severe. Whilst the panel accept diary clashes we believe the need for the Chair to be involved in every complaint to be onerous and an opposing view for this between it whether it provides consistency or inherent bias.
- That the final panel appears to consistently not have the right information to review the decisions taken at stage 1-3. This often means stage 4's are an additional investigation as opposed to reviewing the decisions made.
- Tenants are not involved in the complaints panels beyond the role of the Tenant Board members
- Tenant experience raised serious concerns about "staff attitude and behaviour". This is currently captured under the 'other' category for complaints and therefore does not stand out as a training and development need.
- Tenant experience evidenced multiple delays in complaints where there was no communication for the reason for delay or the revised target dates.
- Tenant experience evidenced that the process is stressful and feels one-sided

### 3. Recommendations

- I. That the current policy and procedure is reviewed against the Housing Ombudsman's Dispute Resolution Principles (appendix 6) and to:
  - a. Reduce the stages to a maximum of 3, preferably two stages in line with good practice elsewhere in the sector, with the final stage having tenants involved in the panel. Scrutiny members happy to be trained in this role.
  - b. Ensure that there is a revolving Chair of the final in-house review stage
  - c. Ensure that the final stage panel are given a comprehensive complaints pack and time to prepare, so that the need for additional investigation is limited
  - d. Ensure that the system for collecting complaints data is improved to ensure all complaints are accurately captured, tracked, satisfaction on completion obtained, lessons learned detailed and the performance regularly reported to the Board.
  - e. Ensure that prior to complaints reaching the final stage; a comprehensive information pack is provided to panel members, which avoids the need of the panel to investigate.
  - f. Ensure that there is clarity around the support of advocates for vulnerable tenants
  - g. Ensure that once a new policy has been drafted this is subject to an equality impact assessment to ensure no tenant who is covered by a



protected characteristic of the Single Equality Act, is directly or indirectly discriminated against.

- h. Encourage all staff and tenants involved in the complaint process are encouraged to complete the free housing Ombudsman e-learning training package *“all member landlords have access to the free DR Principles e-learning. This e-learning comprises of three modules - Culture, Behaviour and Process and it takes just 45 minutes to complete all three”* <http://housing-ombudsman.org.uk/learning-faqs/dispute-resolution-e-learning/>
- II. That staff are trained in complaints to ensure that they take ownership for both responding and recording the work completed on them. The panel strongly feel this should be tied into a wider customer care training following on from serious issues about some staff members attitudes, comments and responses evidenced both in personal testimony and written letters.
- III. That complaint responses at all levels should answer the exact questions which tenants raise.
- IV. That time scales are adhered to rigorously and where there are genuine delays, these are communicated to complaints in real time.

#### **4. Methodology**

Our approach to this enquiry started with a review to the existing policy and procedure. This took place at a full scrutiny meeting of the group. From this we composed a series of questions to present to the lead on complaints, Susan Bernard. These can be found under item 5 of this report.

In between the responses being collated the group had examples of complaints procedures and reviews including one from Green Square Housing Group, a two stage process. And a scrutiny review completed by Cottsway Housing on their complaints policy and procedure. Our Independent Chair was able to talk at length on her experience of other complaints panels, having worked with over 60 registered providers in the sector.

At our November meeting we then heard directly from Susan Bernard in response to our questions raised. This hour long discussion was informative and helped set the context for both the current practice and areas for improvement.

Following this session we then had a closed action learn session facilitated by the non-tenant Chair. Here we heard testimony of two complainants (currently live



complaints) and anecdotal evidence from other members on their experiences. The themes for this were collated by the Chair and included in section 2 above.

Following this our collective comments and findings were then drafted into a report and circulated to all members on 18/11/2015. This report subsequently received the approval for the scrutiny panel for presentation to WPH's Senior Management Team and the Board on 01/12/2015.

## 5. Findings in Detail

### ***Desk top/document review:***

1. Homes and Communities Agency Tenant Involvement and Empowerment standards (2012)
2. Cottsway Housing Complaints review
3. Draft complaints feedback form
4. KPI Board report – May 2015
5. Green Square Group Complaints procedure
6. Housing Ombudsman

### ***Questions and discussion at November Scrutiny meeting:***

#### **What are we monitoring & how are these areas selected for monitoring?**

Principally monitoring was designed for reporting to Housemark. Housemark are a benchmarking group; data collected to enable reporting. Questions derived specifically from the data we are required to provide. That then grew when the current Chair asked for a report on performance, each year, the reports have been tailored to specific requests from the Chair.

#### **When complaints are logged as resolved, what are the outcome and learning from these. How can complainants be sure lessons have been learned?**

Complaints are logged to the point they have progressed not specifically as resolved. Complaints come in various ways; our belief is that many are not captured as a result we believe those that are resolved are unrecorded so statistically the data we have is misleading.

#### **What is the process for passing on complaints and how is this monitored to make sure target response times are met?**

Process is to log with Corporate Services who acknowledge receipt, explain who complaint is passed to and advise of response times. Our failing is that this happens when the complaint comes in writing, or via our website through info@. If complaint comes in any other form, it is possible and even likely that the relevant acknowledgements are not sent as that is dependent on the individual taking steps to do this themselves.



### Who has responsibility under stage 1?

The person who made the original decision e.g. if the complaint is about a decision not to carry out a repair that falls under tenants responsibility; the staff member who advised on this will deal with the complaint at stage 2

### What comes under the heading quality of service?

Anything to do with how we delivered the service e.g. contractors attendance, staff members attitude, quality of work.

### Why is there no data on Board's performance?

For this report, genuine omission. What we do know is that the target times at stage 4 for the 2 complaints at the end of the process (to date) final conclusions were outside of target. Delays invariably are around gathering suitable dates for the panel to meet, gathering additional information subsequent to the meeting, then the panel's final response. Collectively this is disjointed, due to Board members time, availability and having to correspond on the subject through email.

### Satisfaction with complaints handling. How can this be improved?

See attached. [draft complaints feedback form] Useful document to record how we dealt with the process. Currently on the agenda with our Board is the number of recent stage 4 complaints largely as they have occurred in the last few months. Keen to see a resolution where possible much earlier and provide feedback to staff on panels conclusion to all staff (use of intranet) currently isolated to EMT.

1. Ensure that the complaints procedure is properly co-ordinated.
2. Ensure all complaints are identified; however we receive them so they are recorded and documented.
3. Ensure that the stages are followed and timescales are met.
4. Staff are chased when responses or timescales are not met.
5. Issues are addressed and promised action is taken.
6. The procedure is, monitored and analysed for trends, frequency and recurrence. As well as surveying the quality of our responses and the residents' satisfaction of our handling of the complaint.
7. The process for staff is clear, includes guidelines, checklists and clearly expresses expectations and targets.
8. Performance is shared and published.
9. We consider the complaints procedure as a useful tool for influencing customer service and is used as an opportunity to identify areas requiring change or improvement.
10. Encourage use of the website and e-mail for downloading complaint forms or submitting complaints.



### Recording complaints – how efficient and effective is the current system for doing this?

A large number of contacts that might be categorised as complaints do not find their way to onto a central register as there is no established process for capturing all complaints due to the various ways they are raised. Our contact management system allows us to define a contact as a complaint, but there is no escalation process to enable us to systematically track progress. Problematic as this spills into many areas of our work, discussion this morning.....

### Can tenants become part of complaint panel hearing? If so can we look at training for this as part of the groups development plans for 2016?

Would actively encourage this. Some tenant representation from tenant Board members, of the 3 stage 4 complaints this year, tenant Board member sat on 2.

## 6. Conclusion

Our overall conclusion is that whilst we can see renewed efforts from Officers such as Matthew Wicks and Susan Bernard to improve learning from customer feedback, which we warmly welcome, the current complaint policy and procedure is not fit for purpose.

The group feels that a timely review of the policy and procedure could lead, not only to improved customer satisfaction, but also to ensure that lessons learned from the complaints can result into service improvements which avoid the same complaints arises again and again.

The group appreciated that Board Members are, like scrutiny group members, volunteers with busy lives and careers. As such we appreciate the difficulty in convening panels. We hope that our offer of being trained to conduct complaints panels and our suggestion of a revolving Chair will support the more efficient hearing of complaints as and when they arise.

## 7. Acknowledgements and thanks

The panel would like to express our deepest thanks to Matthew Wicks and Susan Bernard for their information and support in completing this enquiry. We would also like to thank our colleagues at Cottsway and Green Square for sharing their own learning experiences.

Finally the sub group of the Scrutiny Panel would like to thank the complainants who shared their experiences in the most candid way to help us learn about the process in order to complete the enquiry. We appreciate that this was not an easy task and we respect both your candour and objectivity in helping us answer some of our key questions.



## 8. Panel Members

Jacqueline Anda  
Joan Rawle  
Marcia Davies  
Laura Hardin  
Helena Taylor-Knox – Independent Chair

## 9. Appendices

1. Homes and Communities Agency Tenant Involvement and Empowerment standards (2012)
2. Cottsway Housing Complaints review
3. Draft complaints feedback form
4. KPI Board report – May 2015
5. Green Square Group Complaints procedure
6. Housing Ombudsman Dispute Resolution Principles

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