

Review: Learning from and responding to complaints (2015)

The findings of this review were previously reported to the Housing Scrutiny Committee

Detailed recommendations

1.1 Ensure the experience of residents who use the complaints process is positive by adopting a more personal and empathetic approach to complaints handling

- a. Listen and be polite at all times.
- b. Arrange face to face interviews, where possible, when the resident requests this.
- c. Acknowledgements via mail or email should be sincere and empathetic.
- d. Letters should be written in a professional tone, sound sincere and be personal and empathetic.
- e. Acknowledgement and interim responses should start with the phrase "Sorry to hear about your complaint. We will do our best to resolve it"
- f. Apologise when the occasion demands, in an open manner, free from "ifs or buts".
- g. Be clear when asking residents for information to support their complaint.
- h. Help residents to "translate" their complaint by breaking it down in manageable portions; this will help those where English is not first language, where there are literacy issues or lack of IT skills.
- i. Consider introducing a payment of £10.00 for all missed appointments.

1.2 Produce a Complaints Customer Care Standard and consider including:

- a. Housing Needs, Housing Operations and Property Services divisions to implement section 9 of the Housing complaints procedure fully.
- b. On receipt of a complaint (via letter or email) staff should telephone the resident to confirm details of the complaint within the timescales set out in the complaints process.
- c. Offer face to face meetings to the resident to discuss the nature of the complaint.
- d. Log and respond to emails within timescales set out in the Customer Care Standard.
- e. Acknowledging complaints confirming the detail of the complaint within the timescales set out in the complaints process.
- f. Provide examples of good and bad responses for training purposes.
- g. Contact the resident on day 10 of the 21 day response cycle to confirm that complaint is being investigated.
- h. Provide a full response within 21 days as set out in the complaints process.
- i. If complaint cannot be responded to within 21 days then the resident should be advised when they can expect a response.
- j. If the complaint cuts across more than one area of the council; one officer to be a single point of contact for the resident.
- k. Avoiding using abbreviations and jargon.
- l. Request for information/copies of documents should be clearly set out using bullet points and plain English.
- m. If more than one issue is raised; each issue should be dealt with in turn.
- n. If the resident has a known carer/advocate then complaint responses should be sent to them if the council has appropriate consent from the resident.
- o. Check internal information systems to see if residents have specific needs (e.g. English as a second language, literacy, and mental health issues) and ensure response is tailored to the individual need.

1.3 Implement the Complaints Customer Care standard by:

• **Publicising the complaints process:**

- a. Tell residents that it does not cost them to make a complaint.
- b. Provide standard definition of a complaint and examples of what is/is not a complaint on the website, estate noticeboards, electronic noticeboards and Your Home magazine.
- c. Publicise the numbers of complaints and learning that has been achieved from resolved complaints on the website and in Your Home magazine.
- d. Publicise the difference between a repair service request and a complaint.

- **Making the complaints pages on the Council's website more accessible:**
 - a. Publicise the existing generic email address managed by the Directors Support Unit for the Housing Needs, Property Services and Housing Operations divisions.
 - b. Include a postal address and telephone number for the three divisions.
 - c. Increase the space on the online complaint form.
 - d. Consider updating web page with seasonal information advertising preventative measures, e.g. Top 10 tips for looking after your home.
 - e. Develop a template to enable a carer/advocate to complain on behalf of a resident.

- **Housing Needs, Housing Operations and Housing Repairs Divisions to adopt similar learning from complaints processes**
 - a. All three divisional reports to include trends and learning in their reports
 - b. Consider having named officers from the three divisions who will have responsibility for monitoring that learning outcomes have been implemented.
 - c. Officers from three divisions to regularly update Customer Relation Management database.

1.4 Monitor staff performance against set Complaints Customer Care standards

- a. All staff who deal with complaints to undergo the complaints customer care training.
- b. Introduce periodic refresher courses.
- c. Use the staff performance management system and ways of working to monitor performance against a set Complaints Customer Care standard.
- d. Managers should sample check complaints responses.

1.5 Continuously improve and develop complaints procedures through benchmarking and an annual check of a sample of responses by the SRG.

- a. Benchmark among other providers to identify good practice.
- b. Carry out a peer review of a % of complaints with other departments and other councils.
- c. A sample of complaints should be reviewed annually by members of the Service Review Group.
- d. Consider using a specialist officer(s) or team(s) to deal with all complaints.