

Listening to you

Complaints Insight Report – April-September 2020

We are committed to delivering an excellent customer experience and listening to your feedback to improve our services. We believe in being open and honest, building trust through a transparent feedback process.

This is the first of our Complaints Insight Reports, which will be published twice a year and made available for our customers. We will highlight any trends, the lessons we have learnt and any changes we have made to our services to provide a clear view of the feedback we receive.

The new Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code

The Housing Ombudsman (HO) has recently released a new Complaint Handling Code, which comes into effect from 1st January 2021. As part of this new code, all housing associations and councils are expected to complete an assessment of their current complaints policy and procedure by the end of December 2020. We are making the findings of this assessment available publicly, as well as sharing them with our Board and the Gateway Membership Team, which represents residents.

Through a self-assessment carried out in September, we found that the way we currently handle complaints is in line with the new Complaint Handling Code guidelines. However, we have made further improvements in a few areas, mainly around the collation of data and reporting on our complaints. These are set out below.

Lessons learnt following the Housing Ombudsman assessment

- Although we already provide information about our complaints via various platforms, we will be providing more comprehensive detail on complaints we receive, which will be made available to our customers, Board and Executive Team. This is to include lessons learnt.
- We updated our systems on 1st November 2020 to enable us to monitor the reasons we give when we refuse to escalate complaints. This data will be included in our reports from 1st January 2020.

- We are altering our reporting to allow us to provide data in line with the Housing Ombudsman’s timescales for dealing with complaints, as well as our own timescales. This function will be available from 1st December 2020.
- Following the release of the Housing Ombudsman’s Complaint Handling Code we will be issuing new guidance to managers who deal with complaints. This, along with additional mandatory Housing Ombudsman complaint handling training, will see an improvement in the way we manage our complaints.
- We will be sending customer satisfaction surveys through the Feefo platform to customers who have made complaints, to ask them how they feel we handled their feedback. This comes into effect from 1st November 2020.
- We carried out a survey with our customers at the end of 2019 to find out how we could improve our complaints policy and made changes in line with our customers’ responses. As part of that change, we now have customer representatives who are trained to handle complaints and they work with our Heads of Service and Directors to respond to our stage 2 complaints. We held virtual meetings recently with the customer representatives, which was beneficial, and a good platform to discuss the process and how we can make improvements. We will continue to meet quarterly to provide updates and go through examples of complaints for training purposes.
- This report has been produced to provide a deeper insight into our complaints process. An updated report will be published twice a year and shared with our customers and Board. These reports will detail additional improvements we make as our complaints analysis is developed further and highlight any new figures as they are added.

Complaints Data: April – September 2020

Total number of complaints	187
% of complaints resolved at stage 1	84%
% of complaints resolved at stage 2	10.7%
Number of complaints escalated from stage 1 to stage 2	33

Main areas for complaints	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Data incident ➤ Repairs ➤ Grounds maintenance ➤ Poor communication
Number of complaints escalated to the Housing Ombudsman	1

We have seen an unusually high number of complaints this year following the data incident in March 2020.

The global pandemic has also impacted our customers, with national lockdowns and health and safety requirements affecting our ability to deliver our full range of services. Whilst we follow government guidelines and communicate any changes to our services, we have seen a higher number of complaints than we would normally receive, and some of these are also more complex than usual.

We have had one complaint referred to the Ombudsman between April and September 2020. The determination from the Housing Ombudsman advised that this complaint fell outside their jurisdiction and no further action was required.

As a result of the complaints, what are we doing to improve?

Data Incident

As a result of the data incident in March we have carried out extensive work to support customers who were affected and prevent any such incident from happening in the future:

- We carried out an internal investigation into the incident that encompassed a review of our operating procedures.
- We issued further mandatory training for all staff.
- We set up free identity and credit monitoring services for any individual affected by the incident.
- We set up FAQs on our website that provide a range of information and advice for customers affected by the data incident.

Repairs

We have made a number of changes following complaints and feedback from customer satisfaction surveys for repairs:

- We have introduced a system where our repairs operatives call in whilst on site to book follow-on works. This was put into place following complaints that follow-on works had not been booked.
- We have prioritised jobs where follow-on works are required, as these are usually the customers who have been waiting the longest, especially during the pandemic.
- We have extended our hours of work into evenings and weekends for our operatives to deal with the backlog of repairs following the first national lockdown.
- We have increased the number of trades our Customer Service centre were able to book, to provide a quicker response for our customers.

Grounds maintenance

We have made some improvements following complaints and feedback from customer satisfaction surveys for grounds maintenance services:

- We have addressed service failures with Accuro and compiled an improvement plan.
- We raised concerns over poor supervision of the work being carried out, resulting in the appointment of a new dedicated contracts manager and new supervisors for both grounds maintenance and communal cleaning.
- Changes have been made to the staff and teams. To increase the attention to detail for the new members of staff, new training has been set up, which includes giving them a better knowledge of our estates and the areas we cover.
- We have implemented more frequent joint estate walks between our Estates team and Accuro to identify and resolve issues more quickly.
- We are using Monday.com, which is a shared platform between Watford Community Housing and Accuro. This allows their operatives to provide 'before' and 'after' photos of their work.

Poor communication

We have made change to continue to improve our communication with customers:

- We are increasing our use of Frequently Asked Questions on our website to make sure customers have access to answers straight away – this has proved beneficial, especially with regard to the pandemic and the data incident.
- We are reviewing letter templates and letter-writing procedures within the Neighbourhood Services team to improve communication and we will look to roll this out to other teams.
- We are looking at further transactions that can be dealt with by our Customer Service team so we resolve more requests at the first point of contact when our customers call in, rather than them having to wait for a member of staff to call them back.
- We are currently looking at how our housing management system can be utilised to improve internal communications within teams, which will then provide better communication for our customers.
- Whilst speaking to customers on the phone in Customer Service, we continue to check we have their up-to-date contact details so we can ensure they receive updates and communications.
- We continue to review and improve our automated text messaging system which notifies our customers of new/changed and cancelled appointments for repairs. We are also reviewing new systems to improve our general communication.
- We have updated our website to give current waiting times for different types of repair.
- We added a *Coronavirus – Customer Information* section to the home page of our website which is constantly updated to keep our customers informed of changes to our services and where they can get additional help and support during the pandemic.

Housing ombudsman complaint

We have taken a number of actions as a result of a complaint about a move from one property to another and an issue with our recommended removal company:

- We have stopped using the company in question.
- We reviewed and updated our removal guidance notes to make it clear where the responsibility lies when using one of our contracted removal companies for specific moves.
- We ensure that we highlight to customers the necessity to have contents insurance to cover their items in transit.