

## Details of the workshop

- The complaints workshop was set up to engage and listen to resident's experiences of the complaints process at Lewisham Council (Housing services)
- All residents who have made a complaint since October 2023 (approximately 200 people) were invited via an email.
- 15 residents attended the session.
- The Resident Scrutiny Panel (Di Cox) summarised their recent investigation on repairs complaints, the recommendations they have made and the management feedback to these recommendations.
- SR presented the process as it stands to hear from attendees on their experiences and specific areas of the process that could be improved.
- Feedback was sought via email from residents who were unable to attend the session, this feedback has been incorporated in the summary below

## Notes from session

***This summary includes notes from all tables and feedback sent via email.***

### **This section includes the following headings:**

- 1- Initial thoughts on the complaints process (*page 1*)
- 2- How residents make complaints and their experience of the existing process (*page 2*)
- 3- How the experience making complaints could be improved (*page 2*)
- 4- Resident experience of complaint's acknowledgment, and feedback on new template (*page 3*)
- 5- How the complaints acknowledgement process could be improved (*page 3*)
- 6- Feedback on the complaint responses from Lewisham Council Housing services (*page 4*)
- 7- Suggested improvement to complaints responses (*page 4*)
- 8- Feedback/ experience on the response(s) to stage two complaints (*page 5*)
- 9- Wider feedback on Lewisham Council Housing services not directly related to complaints process (*page 6*)

## **1. Initial thoughts on the complaints process**

- The process takes too much time.
- Too many departments involved: Complaints should be seen and logged by one individual.
- It's hard making contact, and there's no response or desire to resolve once acknowledged.
- Chasing complaints takes a lot of time, often with no resolution at the end
- More information on leaseholder responsibility should be available for all residents.

- Leaflets explaining the process did exist, but don't seem to anymore.

**Resident experience:** *'I made the complaint online and it took a while to get response. When they team responded, they said they would do 'X' but nothing was done. This has been since 2021 (major works). The work required to my home hasn't been completed but the council has signed it off. I had to wait for up to 2 years for and Occupational Therapy assessment.'*

## 2. How residents make complaints, and their experience of the existing process

- Had to go through several avenues to try and get a response (phone, online, contact directly with officers)
- Complaints often made online.
- When received response said they would fix, but nothing has been done (major works)
- The process takes too much time and requires a lot of chasing from the resident.
- Complaint is not categorised appropriately (eg. not categorised as stage 2)
- Appears to be no record of complaints, or how long they have been outstanding. Longstanding complaints are often raised as a new case, with no reference to history.
- Going to the Chief Executive of the council gets it done.
- The process is 'dreadful, awful, a hassle, tiring so I go straight to the MP'
- Why do we ask for a mobile? When you already have this information, and don't call anyway, or get back to residents.
- On the phone but would prefer email, but emails don't always get a response.
- Housing officers are not assisting- they just direct you to the phone number and email address.

**Resident experience:** *'Roof repair was required to leaseholder (ground floor) and tenanted (1<sup>st</sup> floor)'s home. There were many complaints before the roof repair was agreed, contractors did not complete the job (roof repair) properly resulting in more complaints. It has now been sent to repairs to resolve.'*

## 3. How the experience making complaints could be improved

- Options to make complaints should include: door to door, email, calls, portal, and estate walkabouts
- An app would be useful, one that can be used to share photos and notes similar to the repair's portal.
- Walk in surgeries to capture repairs/ complaints on estates.
- More empathy from staff



- The hold music for Lewisham Housing is annoying and should be updated
- Clearer route through phone to make a complaint.
- Repair should be completed before letter arrives (or close to)
- Any resident vulnerabilities should be acknowledged, and understood (Safeguarding should be attended with repairs person when residents have known vulnerabilities)
- Accessibility to service needs to improve (particularly for residents with communication challenges (ESOL, or not computer literate))
- Listen to your tenants, go back to basics, and get back to people
- One named staff member should deal with it, residents should not be pushed from pillar to post. Staff should take responsibility and ownership.
- Put information on the website, and use the newsletter

**Resident experience:** *'I always make my complaints in writing and usually to the mayors office. This is because it is nigh on impossible to ever speak to a person and complaints very rarely are dealt with.'*

#### 4. Resident experience of complaints acknowledgement, and feedback on new template

- There's a lack on transparency on who is looking after my complaint.
- Dishonesty surrounding contact with resident, residents are being told one thing and Councillors are being told another.
- The letter template is very good as it sets out our understanding of the complaint and what we will do to respond. Good template
- Not clear why this stage something at the bottom of letter would help
- Appreciate resident's communication preferences.
- Letter or call depending on vulnerability.
- Complaints are not always acknowledged (resident often has to call and chase)
- Be clear about deadline a date not 10 days.
- Acknowledge every complaint.

**Resident experience:** *'I made 3 complaints but only got a response to 1, sometimes they're not consistent, and not respecting communication preferences.'*

#### 5. How the complaints acknowledgement process could be improved

- More trained telephony staff to deal with complaints properly and ensure proper responses are made following the complaint.
- Provision of a complaints number.

## **6. Feedback on the complaint's responses from Lewisham Council housing services**

- Lack of sufficient responses
- Complaints have been passed to repairs service.
- Residents are turning to solicitors for assistance
- Responses come through people on the phone and not on email. This means there is no paper trail, and a lack of accountability
- Elements of stigma against council tenants comes from inspections, operatives, housing officers.
- Complaint responses can be rude (on phone and in writing)
- We never have a satisfactory response.
- Should be output focused
- Should be a wellbeing check/ phone call at the beginning.
- If complaint can't be resolved, there should still be a wellbeing check carried out, as opposed to a letter closing it.
- Responses don't cover all the points raised.
- The response is very robotic.
- Response sometimes twists your words.
- Responses are inconsistent.
- Residents keep having to repeat issues.
- We're being told to call back after 5.30pm for an emergency.
- People don't talk to each other, there's no handover of information.
- Letters feel threatening, and residents can feel harassed.
- A verbal apology is not confirmation that complaints are dealt with.
- There is no investigation as the response does not address the question asked/ complaint made.
- There is never a proper response or acknowledgement of complaints.
- There is a feeling that Lewisham Council Housing Services are trying to make things right, there appears to be a step change.

## **7. Suggested improvements to complaints responses**

- We should ask for feedback at the end of each complaint response.
- The emails now look good, and the response is clear.
- More recently there has been an improvement in responses, but there is no interaction.
- Read the original complaint, make sure it is attached to all correspondence.
- Ask for clarification if needed.
- Listen to tenants.



- Staff should be aware and acknowledge that they don't know more about resident's homes than the residents do.
- Residents should be told if a resolution is put in place.
- There should be trained professional complaints staff who know how to deal and speak with people who are complaining and who have waited far too long to do so.
- There is always the need to repeat the complaint if calling back, where a valid complaint reference would or rather should make things easier to track.
- Waiting times for call answering should never be longer than 2 minutes.

**Resident experience:** *'I have waited 30 mins plus to get through, this is a disgraceful amount of time, everyone's time is precious and if you truly value input you would do something about the waiting times as a priority'*

## 8. Feedback/ experience on the response(s) to stage two complaints

- Stage two was a 'whatever' response.
- The response disregarded what was happening.
- No action was taken initially promised.
- Loss of time- reporting and going through the process
- Stage two not responded to, only responded when disrepair action threatened.
- Took lots of chasing to get a response.
- Had to go to the ombudsman which adds more delays.
- Actions promised, compensation paid but issue not dealt with
- Complaints not resolved at stage one, should be escalated to a manager.
- Actions not completed should be updated.
- Text messaging should be encouraged to keep residents informed and provide evidence.
- Residents are forced into to decide on compensation, etc. too quickly
- The portal should show the status of the complaint in real time.
- Aftercare could avoid need for escalation to stage two.
- The appointment date depends on what is deemed appropriate for the repair requirement, this can lead to escalating to stage two.

**Resident experience:** *'What really matters regarding complaints is why you are getting them in the first place- what you learn from complaints should be used to help prevent further complaints.'*

## 9. Wider feedback on Lewisham Council Housing services not directly related to complaints process.



- Contractors often do not do the job properly but sign it off as complete.
- Major works are not following up from inspections.
- No improvement following stock evaluation.
- When a complaint is sent to the teams that team should take ownership- if it is major works there needs to be a site visit from a proper professional so they can scope exactly what needs to be done to satisfy complaint.
- There should be someone to visit at the end of the repair before they sign off the work so we know the work has been done. Jobs are signed off without visits.
- Scaffolding is a waste of money and often up for longer than needed.
- Lift emergency repairs should be dealt with within 4 hours.
- Operatives (contractors) attitude needs to improve.
- Housing officers often change and residents are not informed.
- Contractors are very impersonal and don't clean up after themselves.
- Needless repairs/ works carried out (eg. Door being changed again just two years after it was updated).

### **Next steps and feedback on session**

- Residents stated they found the session useful.
- Residents who attended were keen to engage again in the future to understand the progress of the complaints process and understand how their feedback has helped shaped this to improve the service.

### **Actions**

- Brandon Warren and Community Relations team to respond to individual queries raised.
- Follow up email(s) to be sent to all attendees of how the complaints process is developing.
- Community Relations team to set up a second workshop and invite all resident attendees. UPDATE: This has been arranged for 12 September- all attendees will be informed and invited.