



COMPLAINTS ANNUAL REPORT 2018/19

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1. Introduction

This is Abertay Association's annual complaints handling report. This report provides detailed information regarding complaints recorded through the association's Complaint Handling Procedure (CHP) during 2018/19 (1 April 2018 to 31 March 2019). The association's CHP is based on the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) Model Complaints Handling Procedure and was fully implemented by the association on 1 April 2013. Since its implementation, the association's CHP has been subject to regular reviews, and where necessary, key processes have been modified to ensure the CHP remains an effective tool for managing complaints.

Effective complaints handling is a key element of the Scottish Social Housing Charter with Outcome 2 (Communications) of the 'Charter' having a direct relationship with complaints handling.

The aim of this report is to provide the following:

- a wide range of facts and figures relating to complaints or statements of dissatisfaction recorded through the association's CHP during 2018/19;
- information regarding the outcome of complaints in terms of either being upheld, partially upheld or not upheld;
- an update on the SPSO position in relation to complaint handling in the social housing sector;
- an overview of how the association has used the CHP to bring about improvements in service provision by actively learning from complaints; and
- details relating to a number of improvement actions to be undertaken during 2019/20 that will further strengthen the key processes that underpin the CHP.

1.1 Key CHP Achievements to Date

Although the CHP has now been in place within the association since April 2013, each reporting year has seen improvements made to it so that it remains an effective tool for complaints management and resolution. During the course of 2018/19 there were a number of CHP-related achievements such as:

- a number of improvements and innovative solutions put in place by staff to address reported dissatisfaction with the services provided by the association during the reporting year; and
- there were no equalities-related complaints recorded through the association's CHP.

1.2 Complaints Performance Review 2018/19

In order to gain a detailed insight into the association's performance in regards to complaints handling over the past twelve months, detailed analysis of complaints has been undertaken. This analysis has involved quantifying the number of complaints against each area, categorising those complaints into specific complaint themes and measuring the effectiveness of CHA in terms of adhering to complaint resolution timescales.

The analysis also confirms the outcome of complaints in relation to whether the complaint was upheld, not upheld or partially upheld. Another aspect of the analysis focuses on the efficiency of complaints handling in regards to resolving both Stage 1 and 2 complaints within their respective statutory timescales. The analysis used in the production of this report highlighted the following findings:

- a total of 183 complaints (Stages 1 & 2) were recorded through the CHP during the reporting year which is a 15.1% increase in complaint numbers when compared to the previous reporting year which had 159 complaints recorded through the CHP.
- Housing Quality and Maintenance complaints accounted for the highest number of complaints received during the reporting period with 76% (139 complaints) of total complaints being recorded in this category;
- 56.0% of total complaints (Stage 1 & 2) were upheld (46.5% in 2017/18);
- the association upheld 58.1% of the Stage 1 complaints and 33.3% of the Stage 2 complaints received in 2018/19;
- the association processed 93.3% of Stage 1 complaints within the stipulated SPSO timescales (5 days) (87.7% in 2017/18), and 100% of the Stage 2 complaints within the 20-day timescale in both 2017/18 and 2018/19;
- Two Stage 1 complaints were escalated to Stage 2 during the reporting year compared to none in 2017/18; and
- The average time for Stage 1 complaint resolution was 4.8 days, with 9.0 days being the average timescale for Stage 2 complaints (2017/18 figures were 5.0 days, and 16.5 days) respectively.
- Two Stage 1 and one Stage 2 complaints were carried forward into 2019/20 as they were received received on or close to the 31 March 2019.

1.3 Continuous Improvement Actions Undertaken

During 2018/19, in order to maintain an effective and efficient complaints handling process, the association identified a number of areas which required further strengthening with improvements made in the following areas:

- 1) Staff receiving complaints were reminded to complete the Service Users Expectations section when the complaint is recorded;
- 2) Staff dealing with complaints were reminded to diarise follow up actions; and
- 3) Procedures around new build sign up and liaison with contractor were revised.

2. Valuing Complaints

The ability to effectively manage and learn from customer complaints provides an important contribution to the strategic aims of Abertay. Abertay recognises the importance of being a learning organisation, and actively promotes the exchange of information and best practice internally between departments. Abertay shares best practice with other organisations through its membership of and participation in Scotland's Housing Network and the Housing Sector Complaints Handling Network.

2.1 Complaints Handling Procedure

The association is committed to providing quality services that meet the individual needs of all who seek our assistance, support or advice. We set high standards and strive for excellence in all that we do. We recognise the high expectations that our current and future customers have and the importance in understanding how Abertay can meet and, where possible, exceed those expectations.

We know there can be occasions where we fall short of our standards or do not fully meet these expectations. The association's CHP is designed to help us resolve any customer dissatisfaction quickly and as close to the point of service delivery as possible. It is underpinned by our commitment to valuing and learning from complaints.

The Complaints Handling Procedure implemented by the association on 1 April 2013 is based on the SPSO's model CHP. The development of the model CHP included input from other Scottish social housing providers, to ensure a standardised approach to handling complaints across the sector. One of the key objectives of the model CHP was to ensure all customer needs were at the heart of the process and that their complaints were handled effectively and in a consistent manner through impartial and fair investigations. Customers have a number of options in how they can record a complaint or statement of dissatisfaction through Abertay's CHP. These options include:

- making the complaint in person at our office or to one of our staff;
- over the telephone;
- in writing;
- on our website;
- using email;
- via facebook; or
- through your retirement housing co-ordinator.

Abertay has produced detailed guidance on the CHP for customer to use which is available from our office or on our website. Each edition of Abertay's newsletter, Abertalk, contains updates on complaint performance as well as providing examples of how we are using complaints to improve service performance.

In terms of reporting our complaints performance internally:

- Staff receive monthly e mails setting out performance;
- These are discussed at monthly staff meetings;
- Managers received more detailed information quarterly, which is discussed at Managers Meetings and lessons learned are agreed; and
- Management Committee receives information on key performance indicators quarterly.

2.2 Learning and Development

As part of Abertay's induction process, all new staff are provided with guidance on how to record complaints through the CHP. The induction process also provides the opportunity to explain to newly appointed staff why the association values complaint or expressions of dissatisfaction and how this feedback can be used to make improvements.

This is reinforced through 1-2-1s and team meetings where required.

2.3 Complaints Governance

The governance of the association's CHP is delegated to the Management Team. They review complaint performance at corporate and functional level in relation to the suite of key performance indicators that relate to complaints handling, assess the effectiveness of complaint resolution solutions put in place and, where appropriate, recommend actions, identify any trends and take steps to deal with them and discuss lessons learned and implement agreed actions.

3. Complaints Analysis

During 2018/19, the number of complaints responded to through the association's CHP was 183 (2017/18 159)

- Stage One Complaints 180 (98.4%) (2017/18 1);
- Stage Two Complaints 3 (1.6%) (2017/18 1);

- Escalated to SPSO 2 (1.1%) (2017/18 none);
- Stage One complaints escalated to Stage Two Total 2 (2017/18 none);
- Two complaints were carried forward into the 2019/20 reporting year as they were received on or close to the 31 March 2019.

In 2018/19, there were two customer complaints investigated by the Scottish Public Sector Ombudsman (SPSO). This was the first time Abertay had complaints referred to the SPSO. In both cases, the SPSO was happy with how Abertay had handled the complaint. It should also be noted that no equality-related complaints were recorded through the association's CHP.

3.1 Complaints Analysis by Service Area

Area	Stage 1	Stage 2	SPSO
The customer / landlord relationship	34	0	0
Housing quality and maintenance	136	2	1
Neighbourhood and community	2	1	1
Access to housing and support	7	0	0
Getting good value from rent and service charges	1	0	0
Total	180	3	2

The above table highlights the spread of complaints across service areas with the majority of complaints being recorded against housing quality and maintenance (75.4%). This is consistent with previous years. Given the high levels of interaction with customers as a result of the services provided in this area, it is understandable that this will generate the highest number of complaints. This situation is common with most other social landlord organisations across Scotland.

The common causes of dissatisfaction in relation to customers being unhappy with services provided related to the quality of the open space maintenance service, quality of the close cleaning services and issues in relation to the external works planned maintenance project. These have all been followed up with the relevant contractor

4. Complaints by Outcome

104 Stage 1 complaints were upheld during the year (58.1%) (2017/18 74 (47.7%)). For Stage 2 complaints, 1 was upheld (33.3%) (2017/18 1 (20%)). We continue to have a low number of complaints escalated from Stage 1 to Stage 2, with 2 being escalated (2017/18 none).

This year for the first time, we had two complaints referred to the SPSO. In both cases, the SPSO was happy with how Abertay had handled the complaint.

5. Complaints Resolution Timescales

In total, Abertay responded to 168 complaints (93.4%) (2017/18 138 (86.8%)) within the specified timescales. For stage 1 complaints, the figures were 165 complaints (93.3%) (2017/18 136 (87.7%)) and for Stage 2 complaints 3 complaints (100.0%) (2017/18 2 (100%)).

Conversely, Abertay took longer than the target of five days to respond to 14 Stage 1 complaints (6.6%) (2017/18 19 (13.2%)). All Stage 2 complaints were responded to within the 20 day target in both years.

The average timescale to resolve Stage 1 complaints was 4.8 days (2017/18 5.01 days) and for Stage 2 complaints was 9.0 days (2017/18 16.5 days).

The main reason for the majority of Stage 1 complaints not being resolved within the 5 day timescale was due to issues such as non availability of key staff involved in resolving the complaint due to annual leave or sickness absence, waiting for information from contractors, or due to the complex nature of the complaint. There has been a significant decrease in the time taken to resolve complaints and the percentage of Stage 1 complaints missing the target between the two years.

6. SPSO Benchmarking & Self-Assessment Indicators

The SPSO in conjunction with CIH, HouseMark, and Scotland's Housing Network has developed a range of complaints handling-related key performance indicators (KPIs). These KPIs provide the basis for carrying out self-assessment and / or benchmarking exercises with other registered social landlords (RSLs). A number of the SPSO benchmarking & self-assessment KPIs are reported annually to the Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) as part of the Annual Return on the Charter (ARC) which all RSLs complete and submit to the SHR every May.

For this annual complaints report, Abertay used the following SPSO benchmarking / KPIs for 2018/19:

Indicator	2018/19	2017/18
Total number of complaints received from social rented stock per thousand units	104.11	91.59
Total number of complaints received from factored properties per thousand units	0.18	0.19
Number of complaints responded to in full at stage 1 as a % of all complaints responded to in full	98.4%	98.7%
Number of complaints responded to in full at stage 2 as a % of all complaints responded to in full	1.6%	1.3%
Complaints escalated from stage 1 to stage 2 as a percentage of all complaints responded to in full at stage 1	1.7%	1.3%
Number of complaints not upheld at stage 1 as % of all complaints responded to in full at stage 1	42.5%	52.9%
Number of complaints not upheld at stage 2 as % of all complaints responded to in full at stage 2	66.7%	50.0%
Average time for a full response to stage 1 complaints	4.75 days	5.01 days
Average time for a full response to stage 2 complaints	9.00 days	16.50 days
Number of stage 1 complaints where an extension to the 5 working day timeline has been authorised	2	2
Number of stage 2 complaints where an extension to the 20 working day timeline has been authorised	0	0
Number of stage 1 complaints where an extension to the 5 working day timeline has been authorised as a % of all stage 1 complaints responded to in full	1.1%	1.3%
Number of stage 2 complaints where an extension to the 20 working day timeline has been authorised as a % of all stage 2 complaints responded to in full	0%	0%

7. Final Overview & Going Forward in 2019/20

This report has provided a detailed review of how the association has performed in 2018/19 in relation to complaints handling. The CHP continues to be a key part of Abertay's overall performance management framework with improvements being put in place as a direct result of using the learning from the complaints process to develop and improve the quality of services provided to customers.