



# **COMPLAINTS ANNUAL REPORT 2020/21**

## CONTENTS

<b>SECTION TITLE</b>	<b>PAGE</b>
1 INTRODUCTION	3
1.1 KEY CHP ACHIEVEMENTS TO DATE	3
1.2 COMPLAINTS PERFORMANCE REVIEW 2020/21	4
1.3 CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT ACTIONS UNDERTAKEN	5
2 VALUING COMPLAINTS	5
2.1 COMPLAINTS HANDLING PROCEDURE	5
2.2 LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT	6
2.3 COMPLAINTS GOVERNANCE	6
3 COMPLAINTS ANALYSIS -2020/21 OVERVIEW	6
3.1 COMPLAINTS ANALYSIS BY SERVICE AREA	6
4 COMPLAINTS BY OUTCOME	7
5 COMPLAINTS RESOLUTION TIMESCALES	7
6 SPSO BENCHMARKING & SELF ASSESSMENT INDICATORS	7
11 FINAL OVERVIEW & GOING FORWARD IN 2021/22	8

## 1. Introduction

This is Abertay Housing Association's annual complaints handling report. This report provides detailed information regarding complaints recorded through the Association's Complaint Handling Procedure (CHP) during 2020/21 (1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021). The Association's CHP is based on the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) Model Complaints Handling Procedure (MCHP). A revised MCHP was issued by the SPSO in early 2020 and was fully implemented by the Association from 1 January 2021. This report therefore covers nine months where the Association was working under the old MCHP and three months working to the current version.

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 2020/21;
- 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 2021/22 that will further strengthen the key processes that underpin the CHP.

### 1.1 Key CHP Achievements to Date

Although a 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. A full review was carried out during 2020/21 to implement the revised MCHP which was issued by the SPSO in early 2020. The main changes implemented are:

#### General

- The complaints procedure is now required to be part of the induction process;
- There are additional provisions where the complainer is taking or threatening to take legal action over a complaint.

#### Stage 1

- If an extension of time is agreed, the complainer must be told the reason for the extension and when they can expect a response. As with the previous MCHP, extensions can be for a maximum of 5 working days, making the deadline for response a maximum of 10 working days, and should only be used in exceptional circumstances.
- If a complaint has not been closed within the deadline (including any extension), it should be escalated to Stage 2 for final response.
- If the Association is unable to resolve the complaint face to face or on the telephone, we need to write to the complainer to explain the outcome of the complaint and reasons for the decision and explain that they can escalate to stage 2 if they are not happy with the outcome, and how to do so. Previously we only had to make reasonable efforts to contact them by phone.

## Stage 2

- New requirement to clarify the points of complaint and outcome sought, or confirm them in the acknowledgement letter if already clear and ask them to get in touch if they disagree.
- If the complaint is not resolved within 20 working days, new requirement to contact the complainer at least once every 20 working days to update them on the progress of the investigation.

During the course of 2020/21 there were a number of CHP-related achievements such as:

- a number of improvements and 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 during the year.

### **1.2 Complaints Performance Review 2020/21**

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 the Association in terms of adhering to complaint resolution timescales.

The analysis also confirms the outcome of complaints in relation to whether the complaint was upheld, partially upheld or not 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 135 complaints (Stages 1 & 2) were recorded through the CHP during the reporting year which is a 38.1% decrease in complaint numbers when compared to the previous reporting year which had 218 complaints recorded through the CHP. This possibly indicates a reduced likelihood of making a complaint due to Covid-19.
- Housing Quality and Maintenance complaints still accounted for the highest number of complaints received during the reporting period with 80.7% (109 complaints) of total complaints being recorded in this category;
- 58.4% of total complaints (Stage 1 & 2) were upheld (70.8% in 2019/20);
- the Association upheld 60.0% of the Stage 1 complaints and 28.6% of the Stage 2 complaints resolved in 2020/21;
- the Association processed 86.9% of Stage 1 complaints within the stipulated SPSO timescales (5 days) (90.6% in 2019/20), and 71.4% of the Stage 2 complaints within the 20-day timescale (100% in 2019/20);
- Five Stage 1 complaints were escalated to Stage 2 during the reporting year compared to three in 2019/20. This is likely to increase in future with the requirement in the new MCHP for any complaint not resolved within timescale at Stage 1 to be escalated to Stage 1;
- The average time for Stage 1 complaint resolution was 7.8 days, with 39.1 days being the average timescale for Stage 2 complaints (2019/20 figures were 4.4 days, and 20.0 days respectively). These figures were significantly impacted by four complaints carried forward from 2019/20, three Stage 1 and one Stage 2. These related to how a new build contractor dealt with defects and took 700 days in total to resolve. In addition Covid-19 has impacted on the time taken to resolve complaints; and
- Three Stage 1 and one Stage 2 complaints were carried forward into 2021/22 as they were received on or close to the 31 March 2021 or relate to ongoing issues.

### **1.3 Continuous Improvement Actions Undertaken**

During 2020/21, 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) Procedures for passing on information were tightened; and
- 2) Training was provided to staff on the nature of emergency repairs.

## **2. Valuing Complaints**

The ability to effectively manage and learn from customer complaints provides an important contribution to the strategic aims of the Association. The Association recognises the importance of being a learning organisation, and actively promotes the exchange of information and best practice internally between departments. The Association 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 the Association 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 CHP was updated during 2020/21 with the revised version being implemented by the Association on 1 January 2021. It 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.

The Association has produced detailed guidance on the CHP for customers 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 receive 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.

As an updated CHP was introduced in January 2021, all staff received training in December 2020 which provided a refresher on the CHP and highlighted changes from the previous version.

Three staff have completed, or are in the process of completing Stage 2 complaint training from the SPSO.

## 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 2020/21, the number of complaints responded to through the Association’s CHP was 137 (2019/20 213)

- Stage One Complaints 130 (94.9%) (2019/20 212);
- Stage Two Complaints 7 (5.1%) (2019/20 1);
- Escalated to SPSO 0 (0.0%) (2019/20 0);
- Stage One complaints escalated to Stage Two 5 (2019/20 3);
- Four complaints were carried forward into 2021/22 as they were received on or close to the 31 March 2021 or related to an ongoing issue.

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	17	4	0
Housing quality and maintenance	109	2	0
Neighbourhood and community	3	0	0
Access to housing and support	0	0	0
Getting good value from rent and service charges	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>129</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>0</b>

The above table highlights the spread of complaints across service areas with the majority of complaints being recorded against housing quality and maintenance (80.7%). This is similar to 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 close cleaning services, contractors not attending appointments on time and the follow up service of a new build contractor. These have all been followed up with the relevant contractor

#### **4. Complaints by Outcome**

- 78 (60.0%) of Stage 1 complaints were upheld during the year (2019/20 150 (70.8%)).
- 2 (28.6%) Stage 2 complaint, was upheld during the year (2019/20 1 (100.0%)).

We continue to have a low number of complaints escalated from Stage 1 to Stage 2, with 5 being escalated (2019/20 3). However, this is likely to increase in future with the requirement in the new CHP for any complaint not resolved within timescale at Stage 1 to be escalated to Stage 2.

#### **5. Complaints Resolution Timescales**

- In total, the Association responded to 118 (86.1%) complaints (2019/20 193 (90.6%)) within the specified timescales.
- For stage 1 complaints, the figures were 113 (86.9%) complaints (2019/20 192 (90.6%)).
- For Stage 2 complaints, the figures were 5 (71.4%) complaint (2019/20 1 (100%)).

Conversely, the Association took longer than the target of five days to respond to 17 Stage 1 complaints (13.1%) (2019/20 20 (9.4%)) and more than 20 days to respond to 2 Stage 2 complaints (28.6%) (2019/20 0 (0.0%))

The average timescale to resolve Stage 1 complaints was 7.8 days (2019/20 4.4 days) and for Stage 2 complaints was 39.1 days (2019/20 20.0 days).

These figures were significantly impacted by four complaints carried forward from 2019/20, three Stage 1 and one Stage 2. These related to how a new build contractor dealt with defects and took 700 days in total to resolve. In addition Covid-19 has impacted on the time taken to resolve complaints

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, waiting for information from contractors, or due to the complex nature of the complaint. There has been an increase in the time taken to resolve complaints 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.

The Association used the following SPSO benchmarking / KPIs for 2020/21:

Indicator	2020/21	2019/20
Total number of complaints received from social rented stock per thousand units	75.00	121.11
Total number of complaints received from factored properties per thousand units	3.19	0.14
Number of complaints responded to in full at stage 1 as a % of all complaints responded to in full	94.9%	99.5%
Number of complaints responded to in full at stage 2 as a % of all complaints responded to in full	5.1%	0.5%
Complaints escalated from stage 1 to stage 2 as a percentage of all complaints responded to in full at stage 1	4.6%	1.9%
Number of complaints not upheld at stage 1 as % of all complaints responded to in full at stage 1	40.0%	29.2%
Number of complaints not upheld at stage 2 as % of all complaints responded to in full at stage 2	71.4%	0.0%
Average time for a full response to stage 1 complaints	7.8 days	4.38 days
Average time for a full response to stage 2 complaints	39.1 days	20.00 days
Number of stage 1 complaints where an extension to the 5 working day timeline has been authorised	0	0
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	0.0%	0.0%
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 2021/22

This report has provided a detailed review of how the Association has performed in 2020/21 in relation to complaints handling. The CHP continues to be a key part of the Association'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.