



COMPLAINTS ANNUAL REPORT 2021/22

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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 2021/22 (1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022). The Association's CHP is based on the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) Model Complaints Handling Procedure (MCHP).

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 2021/22;
- 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 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

During the course of 2021/22 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 201/22

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 184 complaints (Stages 1 & 2) were recorded through the CHP during the reporting year which is an increase of 36.3% in complaint numbers when compared to the previous reporting year which had 135 complaints recorded through the CHP. Complaints had reduced significantly in 2020/21, probably due to Covid-19, and this sees the level starting to move towards previous levels of around 200 per year.

- Housing Quality and Maintenance complaints still accounted for the highest number of complaints received during the reporting period with 72.8% (134 complaints) of total complaints being recorded in this category;
- 45.1% of total complaints (Stage 1 & 2) were upheld (58.4% in 2020/21);
- the Association upheld 45.7% of the Stage 1 complaints and 33.3% of the Stage 2 complaints resolved in 2021/22;
- the Association processed 97.7% of Stage 1 complaints within the stipulated SPSO timescales (5 days) (86.9% in 2021/22), and 88.8% of the Stage 2 complaints within the 20-day timescale (71.4% in 2021/22);
- Six Stage 1 complaints were escalated to Stage 2 during the reporting year compared to five in 2020/21;
- The average time for Stage 1 complaint resolution was 4.0 days, with 18.1 days being the average timescale for Stage 2 complaints (2020/21 figures were 7.8 days, and 39.1 days respectively); and
- Three Stage 1 and one Stage 2 complaints were carried forward into 2022/23 as they were received on or close to the 31 March 2022 or relate to ongoing issues.

1.3 Continuous Improvement Actions Undertaken

During 2021/22, 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 were reminded that any complaint which will not be resolved within the standard 5 or 20 working days should either have a time extension agreed by a Manager or be escalated to Stage 2.
- 2) Tenants need to be kept more up to date if contractors are having difficulties completing work as planned.

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 and 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 is to ensure all customer needs are at the heart of the process and that their complaints

are 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;
- through the portal (for tenants)
- 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;
- Managers receive more detailed information quarterly, which is discussed at Managers Meetings and fed back to their teams. Lessons learned are agreed; and
- The Board 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.

Three staff have completed 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 2021/22, the number of complaints responded to through the Association's CHP was 184 (2020/21 137):

- Stage One Complaints 175 (95.1%) (2020/21 130);
- Stage Two Complaints 9 (4.9%) (2020/21 7);
- Escalated to SPSO 0 (0.0%) (2020/21 0);
- Stage One complaints escalated to Stage Two 6 (2020/21 5);
- Four complaints were carried forward into 2022/23 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	36	6	0
Housing quality and maintenance	133	1	0
Neighbourhood and community	4	2	0
Access to housing and support	2	0	0
Getting good value from rent and service charges	0	0	0
Total	175	9	0

The above table highlights the spread of complaints across service areas with the majority of complaints being recorded against housing quality and maintenance (72.8%). 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 and contractors not attending appointments on time or as agreed. These have all been followed up with the relevant contractor

4. Complaints by Outcome

- 80 (45.7%) of Stage 1 complaints were upheld during the year (2020/21 78 (60.0%)).
- 3 (33.3%) Stage 2 complaint, was upheld during the year (2020/21 2 (28.6%)).

We continue to have a low number of complaints escalated from Stage 1 to Stage 2, with 6 being escalated (2020/21 5). However, this may increase in future with the requirement in the 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 179 (97.3%) complaints (2020/21 118 (86.1%)) within the specified timescales.
- For stage 1 complaints, the figures were 171 (97.7%) complaints (2019/20 113 (86.9%)).
- For Stage 2 complaints, the figures were 8 (88.8%) complaint (2019/20 5 (71.4%)).

An extension to the five days timescale was granted by Managers in agreement with the Complainant in five Stage 1 cases. This was largely due to annual leave commitments of employees or contractor staff who were the most appropriate people to answer the query.

Conversely, the Association took longer than the target of five days to respond to 4 Stage 1 complaints (2.3%) (2020/21 17 (13.1%)) and more than 20 days to respond to 1 Stage 2 complaint (11.1%) (2020/21 2 (28.6%)). Under the new CHP, the four Stage 1 complaints should have been escalated to Stage 2. However they were resolved by frontline staff without agreeing an extension or escalating the complaint. Staff have been reminded of the need to either resolve the complaint within five working days, agree an extension of up to a further five working days or escalate the complaint to Stage 2.

The average timescale to resolve Stage 1 complaints was 4.0 days (2020/21 7.8 days) and for Stage 2 complaints was 18.1 days (2020/21 39.1 days).

These figures were significantly impacted by two complaints carried forward from 2020/21, one Stage 1 and one Stage 2. These related to how repairs were dealt with in a property and took 177 days in total to resolve.

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.

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 2021/22:

Indicator	2021/22	2020/21
Total number of complaints received from social rented stock per thousand units	102.22	75.00
Total number of complaints received from factored properties per thousand units	0.91	3.19
Number of complaints responded to in full at stage 1 as a % of all complaints responded to in full	95.1%	94.9%
Number of complaints responded to in full at stage 2 as a % of all complaints responded to in full	4.9%	5.1%
Complaints escalated from stage 1 to stage 2 as a percentage of all complaints responded to in full at stage 1	3.4%	4.6%
Number of complaints not upheld at stage 1 as % of all complaints responded to in full at stage 1	54.3%	40.0%
Number of complaints not upheld at stage 2 as % of all complaints responded to in full at stage 2	66.7%	71.4%
Average time for a full response to stage 1 complaints	4.0 days	7.8 days
Average time for a full response to stage 2 complaints	18.1 days	39.1 days
Number of stage 1 complaints where an extension to the 5 working day timeline has been authorised	5	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	2.9%	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 2022/23

This report has provided a detailed review of how the Association has performed in 2021/22 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.