

Watford Community Housing Group Board response to Annual Complaints Report 2023-24

The Board welcomed the Complaints self-assessment, revised Complaints policy and Complaints Insight Report which detail the progress Watford Community Housing is making to develop and improve complaints handling. While complaint handling has improved significantly, outcomes of complaints determined by the Housing Ombudsman Service, satisfaction with complaint handling and reducing cause for complaints are areas we would like to see improve.

Of note were:

- Complaints have increased by 5% between 2022/23 and 2023/24 with 50% of recent complaints about repairs
- All complaints have been responded to within target times with 90% justified (similar to 2022/23)
- Compliments have increased by 78% to 310 in 2023/24
- Dissatisfaction with repairs response times has increased and is the most significant driver of complaints
- There has been a significant increase with 6 determinations of Maladministration by the Housing Ombudsman and 1 of Severe Maladministration with 4 awaiting an outcome, compared to none in 2022-23
- Satisfaction with Complaints Handling and Knowing how to complain is lower than we would like to see albeit similar to others in the sector.

The Board is glad to see clear learning from complaints which is improving services by:

- Bringing a larger proportion of repairs in house to improve communication from contractors
- Increasing the size of the Gateway Repairs Team to respond to repairs
- Weekly review of repairs timescales and subsequent adapting communication to customers
- Decarbonisation works taking place to address concerns on heating homes
- Gateway Management Team scrutiny of the use of contractors and made recommendations
- Investment in communal areas in blocks increased.

The voice of the Gateway Membership Team is strong being involved in hearing stage 2 complaints, and this has a strong influence on how complaints are responded to and themes feeding into scrutiny and service improvements. The Customer Experience Committee noted the high level of upheld complaints which it believes bodes well for increasing customers' trust in complaints handling but expressed the desire to see fewer issues worthy of complaining about.

The role of Member Responsible for Complaints has good oversight regularly giving the Board assurance and is focusing with the team on how to improve outcomes when complaints go to the Housing Ombudsman.

The Board also notes the Housing Ombudsman's increased expectation of administration of complaints. While Watford Community Housing is managing this well, the Board would like to see fewer issues resulting in complaints due to improving quality of service. This would then allow Watford Community Housing to focus more on new initiatives and projects.