



## CAERPHILLY HOMES TASK GROUP – 10TH SEPTEMBER 2019

**SUBJECT: COMPLAINTS, REPRESENTATIONS AND COMPLIMENTS –  
CAERPHILLY HOMES**

**REPORT BY: CORPORATE DIRECTOR – SOCIAL SERVICES AND HOUSING**

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### **1. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 To provide information on contacts in relation to complaints and representations received by the Authority's Housing Customer Services Section, from 1st<sup>t</sup> April 2018 to 31st March 2019.

### **2. SUMMARY**

- 2.1 The monitoring of complaints and representations is carried out to provide information on the level of satisfaction with the service provided by Caerphilly Homes. The results enable Managers to focus on areas of concern and positive feedback, with the aim of improving services and monitoring performance and ensuring that where issues are identified similar problems are avoided in the future. The corporate complaints procedure places an emphasis on learning from complaints. There have been examples of complaints which have led to changes in policies and procedures and these are explained in the report.

### **3. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 3.1 This report is for information purposes only.

### **4. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 4.1 The monitoring of complaints forms part of the process to monitor performance and continuous improvement for Caerphilly Homes.

### **5. THE REPORT**

- 5.1 The annual report is based on information collected during the financial year 1st April 2018 to 31st March 2019. Complaints received about the Housing Service are recorded and responded to in accordance with the Council's two stage corporate complaints policy, which was implemented in April 2013. This was based on guidance issued by the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales. If, after following these two stages, the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of their complaint they can progress their complaint to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales.

#### **5.2 Overall Numbers**

- 5.2.1 In addition to recording Stage 1, Stage 2 and Ombudsman complaints, Caerphilly Homes Customer Services Section also records any service requests received directly by the

Customer Services Section and any housing related correspondence received by the Chief Executive. In general, contacts recorded as service requests relate to the first time the service area has been made aware that there has been an issue in dealing with the matter concerned. Reasonable judgement is used, based on the information available at the time and these cases are often deemed to be 'business as usual' situations. However, if enquiries identify previous dealings on the same issue then the matter can be escalated through the complaints procedure. It is not necessary for the contact to specifically state that they want the issue dealt with as a complaint as this would be determined from the detail of the contact and any previous dealings on the same subject.

5.2.2 Between 1<sup>st</sup> April 2018 and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2019 the Customer Services Section of Caerphilly Homes recorded a total of 639 contacts from the public and/or their representative. This is in comparison with 682 between 1<sup>st</sup> April 2017 and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2018.

5.2.3 The table below details contacts received by the Chief Executive and those recorded as service requests. Details of Stage 1 and Stage 2 cases are in 5.5 and 5.6. It is noted that the number of service requests relating to WHQS external works increased during 2018/19. This is thought to be due to the fact the external programme of works increased significantly during this period with more properties receiving such work. The service requests generally relate to quality, amount of work undertaken, communication, site conditions and timescales.

Function Area	Chief Exec		Service Request	
	2017/18	2018/19	2017/18	2018/19
Response Repairs	10	3	92	59
Housing Management	48	32	88	94
Antisocial Behaviour	3	10	51	33
Allocations	37	48	14	22
Homelessness	10	9	11	9
WHQS Internal	12	7	79	59
Heating	3	3	23	23
Sheltered Housing	2	4	7	4
Grants	8	2	4	1
WHQS External	16	11	76	118
Rents	3	1	3	5
Adaptations	3	2	4	1
Energy Works	0	0	0	0
Enforcement Action	0	1	1	0
Leaseholder	1	2	1	3
Other	0	0	0	0
Tenant Participation	0	0	1	2
Private Landlord	1	0	1	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>157</b>	<b>135</b>	<b>456</b>	<b>434</b>

5.2.4 The number of contacts received via an advocate was 184 compared with 224 in 2017/18. Examples of the types of advocate used include MP, AM, Councillors, other tenants and family members.

### 5.3 Praise and Thanks

5.3.1 Records are also kept of any praise or thanks received by Caerphilly Homes. In 2018/19 there were 65 recorded. This is in comparison with 78 for 2017/18. These covered a number of service areas, as detailed below :-

<b>Praise or Thanks</b>		
	<b>2017/18</b>	<b>2018/19</b>
Rents	7	4
Allocation	1	0
Leaseholder Services	3	2
Housing Management	8	6
Responsive Repairs	18	21
Tenancy Enforcement	4	4
Tenant Participation	1	0
Sheltered Housing	8	5
WHQS	20	18
Homelessness	1	0
Adaptations	1	2
Heating	2	1
Grants	4	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>65</b>

#### 5.4 Stage 1 and Stage 2 Complaints

5.4.1 Stage 1 of the complaints procedure offers the opportunity for the complaint to be resolved at the point of service delivery. These complaints are referred to the appropriate service manager for any necessary action and response. If the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome at Stage 1 they are advised how the complaint can be progressed to Stage 2. Alternatively, complainants can request their complaint is escalated straight to a Stage 2 investigation. In addition, where an appeals procedure is in place this must be exhausted before progressing to a Stage 2 complaint. Stage 2 complaints are investigated by the Customer Services Section, on behalf of the Head of Service or nominated Officer.

5.4.2 There were 44 Stage 1 complaints recorded for Caerphilly Homes in 2018/19 compared with 45 in 2017/18. There were 26 Stage 2 complaints in 2018/19 compared with 24 in 2017/18. Of the 26 Stage 2 complaints received in 2018/19, 14 had progressed from a Stage 1 complaint.

5.4.3 As detailed in the table below the largest number of Stage 1 complaints (11) related to housing management issues. An analysis of these complaints shows they were in relation to a variety of aspects of the service including a recharge to an owner/occupier for a shared fence repair, query over tenancy termination date, support issues, assistance with moving costs, decoration allowance, garden conditions and erection of CCTV signs. All but one of these complaints were resolved at Stage 1.

5.4.4 There were 8 WHQS (internal) Stage 1 complaints. The majority related to the quality of workmanship but they also included delays in providing works and requests to review decisions not to renew the kitchen. 6 of these cases were not resolved to the complainant's satisfaction and progressed to Stage 2 complaints.

5.4.5 There were 8 WHQS (external) Stage 1 complaints. These related to quality of workmanship and potential health and safety issues. 5 cases were resolved to the tenant's satisfaction and 3 cases progressed to Stage 2.

Function Area	Stage 1		Stage 2		Progressed	
	2017/18	2018/19	2017/18	2018/19	2017/18	2018/19
Housing Management	25	11	11	8	8	2
WHQS (Internal)	3	8	3	7	1	6
Response Repairs	3	4	1	1	1	1
Allocations	2	4	0	1	0	1
Leaseholders	1	1	2	2	1	0
Grants	1	3	1	0	0	0
Anti Social Behaviour	2	1	1	0	1	0
Rents	0	1	0	0	0	0
WHQS (External)	6	8	3	5	3	3
Private landlord	1	0	1	0	0	0
Homelessness	1	3	1	1	0	1
Heating	0	0	0	1	0	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>14</b>

5.4.6 The 8 housing management Stage 2 complaints related to various aspects of the service including recharge to owner/occupier for shared fence, height of dividing fence, costs incurred at end of tenancy, categorisation of a property and a succession to a tenancy query.

5.4.7 There were 7 WHQS (internal) Stage 2 complaints which related to either the quality of workmanship or a delay in providing the service.

5.4.8 There were 5 WHQS (external) Stage 2 complaints which related to the quality of workmanship, outstanding works and potential health and safety issues.

## 5.5 Outcome of Stage 1 and Stage 2 Complaints

5.5.1 The outcome of Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaints is recorded as not upheld, partially upheld or upheld. The table below shows the outcomes recorded for all Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaints recorded for 2018/19.

Stage 1				
Function Area	Not Upheld	Partially Upheld	Upheld	On Hold
Housing Management	7	0	4	
Response repairs	2	2	0	
WHQS (internal)	5	2	1	
WHQS (external)	2	3	3	
Allocations	3	1	0	
Leaseholders	0	1	0	
Homelessness	2	1	0	
Grants	2	0	1	
Anti Social Behaviour	1	0	0	
Rents	1	0	0	
<b>Total</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>9</b>	

<b>Stage 2</b>				
<b>Function Area</b>	<b>Not Upheld</b>	<b>Partially Upheld</b>	<b>Upheld</b>	<b>On Hold</b>
Housing Management	5	1	2	
WHQS (internal)	3	2	2	
WHQS (external)	3	2	0	
Leaseholder	2	0	0	
Response repairs	1	0	0	
Homelessness	1	0	0	
Heating	1	0	0	
Allocations	1	0	0	
<b>Total</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	

## 5.6 Stage 1's Upheld

- 5.6.1 There were 9 Stage 1 complaints upheld in 2018/19 compared with 1 in 2017/18. 4 of these cases related to housing management issues. In one case a tenant was recharged for a repair to a damaged section of fence. However, on review it was realised he had not been given the opportunity to consider arranging the repair himself. An apology was provided and the charge was cancelled. The second complaint related to a joint tenant with a hearing impairment who applied for housing in his sole name but communication was sent in joint names and his request for an interpreter was missed. The investigation highlighted that the automatic system in place for arranging tenancy reference appointments failed to recognise any change in circumstances or tenants with special requirements. A meeting was arranged with the tenant and his interpreter to apologise and explain that the process has now been amended. In the third case a former tenant's son handed in the keys to his mother's property but appealed the fact that rent was charged until a copy of the death certificate was received 2 weeks later. An apology was provided and the rent charge withdrawn. The remaining case was in relation to tenants requiring damp works at their property. They were originally moving out on a temporary basis but due to the extent of problems it was later agreed they could move on a permanent basis. The tenants asked for assistance with the move but this was initially refused as it is usually only available for temporary moves. The circumstances were reviewed and assistance with the move was provided.
- 5.6.2 There were 3 WHQS (external) Stage 1 complaints upheld. In the first case tenants complained that the contractor had left drains uncovered for several hours. An apology was provided and the contractor returned that day to rectify. In the second case the tenant had reported an issue with his front and back doors leaking but no action had been taken. There had been a delay in the contractor measuring and ordering the doors. An apology was given and the order arranged. In the remaining case an owner/occupier complained his roof had sustained damage while contractors were carrying out work on the council property next door. An apology was provided and the contractor returned to rectify the works.
- 5.6.3 The 1 WHQS (internal) Stage 1 complaint upheld related to the quality of work as a whole provided by the contractor and sub contractors involved. The contractor concerned is no longer being used by Caerphilly Homes. A full apology was provided and the works were completed by the in house team. This case progressed to a Stage 2
- 5.6.4 There was 1 Stage 1 complaint upheld for the Private Sector in relation to a property appreciation loan. There had been an error made in the way the redemption figure was calculated. An apology was provided and arrangements made to refund the difference..

## 5.7 Stage 2's Upheld

- 5.7.1 There were 4 Stage 2 complaints upheld in 2018/19 compared with 3 in 2017/18. There were 2 cases relating to WHQS internal works. The first case related to the time taken to complete the internal works and the standard of works undertaken by the contractor. An apology was provided and arrangements made for all issues to be rectified. The second case progressed from Stage 1 and related to the quality of work as a whole provided by the contractor and sub contractors involved. A full apology was provided and the works were completed by the in house team.
- 5.7.2 There were two Stage 2 cases upheld relating to housing management issues. In the first case a former tenant appealed against the decision to recharge her for the removal of laminate flooring when her tenancy ended as she had previously received retrospective landlords consent to fit the flooring. On investigation it was accepted the wording implied the laminate flooring could remain in situ so the recharge was withdrawn and the wording in the letter reviewed. The second case escalated from a Stage 1 in 2017/18. This related to a tenant who complained about the condition of the top level of her garden and fire damaged patio slabs which were not replaced before the start of her tenancy. On review it was noted a large number of garden works had been carried out during the end of tenancy period but at that time the green area concerned was not overgrown so not identified as a potential problem. It was agreed this should be reassessed and any appropriate remedial works carried out. It was also agreed that as the patio slabs could not be cleaned the damaged slabs would be replaced.

## 5.8 Ombudsman Complaints

- 5.8.1 There were 9 cases, in total, referred to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales compared with 6 cases in 2017/18. 6 of the cases were referred after they had followed the Council's corporate complaints procedure and none of these cases was investigated. The remaining 3 cases were referred prematurely before following the corporate complaints procedure. In 2 of these cases the Ombudsman decided not to investigate but in the remaining case a 'Quick Fix' solution was agreed. The complainant had completed an online complaint form to report repairs and had assumed this would be dealt with as a corporate complaint. However, as this was the first notification of these repairs the contact was dealt with as a service request. We failed to advise the complainant of this course of action so agreed with the Ombudsman that we would send a letter of apology to the complainant and an explanation of our actions in relation to the reported issues.

## 5.9 Response Target Times

- 5.9.1 The Customer Service Section monitors the performance in responding to all contacts recorded by the section, within the corporate timescales. 93% of complaints and representations were responded to within the agreed timescales compared with 94% in 2017/18.

## 5.10 Learning from Complaints

- 5.10.1 Complaints are used as a means of analysing the service provided by Caerphilly Homes and highlighting any areas for improvement or any necessary changes in existing policies and procedures. The following are some examples of 'lessons learned' and the associated changes that have been made:
- 5.10.2 An elderly tenant's daughter appealed against a recharge her mother received for an alarm call out, stating the alarm had been tampered with. The appeal letter advised that she was present when her mother signed for the tenancy and when they were advised there was an alarm present they explained they would not require an alarm and made an immediate request for the alarm to be removed. They explained that they would need to be in and out of

the property to decorate etc so could the alarm be removed as soon as possible. They were advised at that time that 24hrs notice was required to remove the alarm but it would be disarmed with immediate effect. On completing the sign up the tenant and her family went to the new property. At that time the alarm went off. On checking with the housing office there was no apparent reason why the alarm had not been disarmed and the housing officer agreed to contact the alarm company again. A couple of days later the alarm had not been removed, however it was placed in an area they wanted to decorate so the tenant's son in law unscrewed the alarm believing it to have been disarmed. A short time later an engineer arrived at the property explaining he had received a call out as the alarm had been 'tampered' with. Subsequently the tenant received a recharge for the call out. While considering this appeal it was accepted that the information provided at sign up was not clear enough that even when the alarm has been disarmed is still remains active and should not be tampered with in any way. As a result the recharge was withdrawn and the wording on the alarm instruction sheet has been amended to try to prevent any future misunderstanding.

5.10.3 An owner occupier contacted the building maintenance team to question why the renewed fence between them and their neighbour is only 900mm high when another neighbour has recently had a new fence and theirs is 1200mm high. The owner occupier is unhappy as they have to contribute £500 towards the replacement fence and due to its height, it is failing to keep the neighbours dog out of their garden. The Area Housing Manager explained their fence was renewed by the Housing Repairs Operations team some time ago and they replaced the fence on a 'like for like' basis. The neighbouring fence was renewed under the Welsh Housing Quality Standards programme at 1200mm in height. In this circumstance, even though the divisional fence between the owner occupier and council property was appropriate, the Chief Housing Officer has recommended that where defective fencing is required to be completely renewed, it is replaced with 1200mm fencing in the future

5.10.4 A leaseholder received an invoice for £85.00 as a contribution payment under the terms of their lease agreement. The invoice related to the repair/renewal of a balcony door within the block of flats. The leaseholder felt it unfair to have to make a contribution towards these costs for the following reasons:

- The leaseholder makes reference to an officer calling approx. 30 years ago to advise their front doors are standard and are not a structural part of the building. The leaseholder believes the same principle would apply to the balcony doors and therefore should not be requested to contribute to this cost.
- The leaseholder does not have access to these doors as they are accessed privately from the individual tenants flat.
- The leaseholder advised repairs had been carried out on balcony doors previously and they had not received an invoice for this in the past.

Enquiries were made into the leaseholders concerns however it was deemed the doors were part of the structure of the building and therefore the contribution request was correct. Further investigation into how the damage was caused to the balcony doors led to the decision not to recharge the leaseholder. This was not due to the reasons the leaseholder provided but due to Orbis damaging the balcony door whilst screening therefore it would not be appropriate to recharge leaseholders - moving forward it has been agreed for the doors to be photographed before Orbis screens to check for damage

5.10.5 In relation to the increase in complaints for WHQS, following consultation with the Repairs and Improvement (R&I) Group changes have been made to the communication process and letters that are sent to tenants. The way in which customer satisfaction surveys are conducted has also changed by now undertaking these via telephone in the first instance, rather than by post, to allow more relevant data to be gathered from the tenant. Changes have also been made to the way contract meetings are structured with increased emphasis on the Charter for Trust and ensuring that the requirements are communicated to all the workforce including sub-contractors

## 5.11 Recharge Cases

5.11.1 A report was approved by Cabinet in March 2018 that the Rechargeable Repairs and Appeals Panel be discontinued and all second stage formal reviews be investigated using a process that mirrors the second stage of the Corporate Complaints Procedure. Between the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2018 and the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2019 there were 9 second stage formal reviews investigated compared with 5 cases considered by the Recharge Review Panel in 2017/18.

5.11.2 In 5 cases it was determined the recharge(s) should remain, in 3 cases the recharge(s) was withdrawn and in 2 cases it was determined part of the recharge should remain and part of the charge be withdrawn.

## 5.12 Conclusion

5.12.1 Whilst the number of formal complaints has remained relatively constant compared with last year it is noted that some areas, such as housing management, have decreased in number whilst other areas, such as WHQS have increased which is considered to be due to the increased volume of these works. It should also be noted that the majority of these complaints relate to external contractors and not the in-house workforce. The outcome of many complaints dealt with enable us to implement changes and improve on the service provided. An important part of dealing with complaints are the lessons learned and any actions agreed as a result of recognising when we need to put things right for the customer and the service area as a whole.

## 6. ASSUMPTIONS

6.1 The information contained in this report is based on data collected over the year and therefore it has not been necessary to make assumptions.

## 7. LINKS TO RELEVANT COUNCIL POLICIES

7.1 Monitoring of the Council's corporate complaints and successful resolution of those complaints contributes to the following Well-Being goals within the Well-being of Future Generations Act (Wales) 2015 as it supports the provision of higher quality and more effective services to the public across all service areas.

- A prosperous Wales
- A resilient Wales
- A healthier Wales
- A more equal Wales
- A Wales of cohesive communities and thriving Welsh language
- A globally responsible Wales

In addition monitoring provides information on the level of satisfaction of the services provided. The result of monitoring enables us to focus on areas of concern, improve services, ensure any trends or issues raised are identified and dealt with to avoid them in the future and to ensure complaints are dealt with consistently and fairly across the housing service.

## 8. WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS

8.1 This report contributes to the Well-being Goals as set out in Links to policies above. It is



consistent with the five ways of working as defined within the sustainable development principle in the Act in that the monitoring of the Council's corporate complaints handling across all service areas and enables departments to focus on areas of concern, to improve services and to monitor performance to ensure that any issues raised are identified and dealt with so as to be avoided in future.

## **9. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 Any complaints received by Caerphilly Homes that contain alleged discriminatory aspects to them are dealt with jointly by Caerphilly Homes and the Equalities, Welsh Language and Consultation Team to ensure that the allegations are investigated thoroughly and appropriately, in line with both the complaints process and the requirements of the Strategic Equality Plan and Welsh Language Standards.

## **10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 10.1 There are no direct financial implications associated with this report.

## **11. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS**

- 11.1 There are no direct personnel implications associated with this report.

## **12. CONSULTATIONS**

- 12.1 The views of the consultees have been incorporated into this report.

## **13. STATUTORY POWER**

- 13.1 Local Government and Housing Acts.

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Consultees: Dave Street, Corporate Director Social Services and Housing  
Cllr Lisa Phipps, Cabinet Member for Homes and Places  
Cllr John Ridgewell, Chair Housing & Regeneration Scrutiny Committee  
Cllr Mrs Christine Forehead, Vice Chair Housing & Regeneration Scrutiny Committee  
Shaun Couzens, Chief Housing Officer  
Fiona Wilkins, Housing Services Manager  
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