

Meeting: Executive, October 25	Author: Alex Clark
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Subject: Customer complaints forum

Background

As part of our commitment to the Housing Ombudsman complaint code and improving our complaint handling, we advised the Board in July 22 that we would be creating a new Customer complaints forum. This paper gives an update on the progress of this group and the results on their recent findings.

Purpose of the group

The remit of the forum is to be a critical friend, reviewing completed complaints to ensure that we follow the expectations of the Housing ombudsman complaint code, they are dealt with in a sympathetic manner with fair resolutions.

The forum currently consists of five customer members, and we have recently welcomed a new member. Their induction took place at Bryer Ash, where they were highly engaged throughout. The new member works for Wiltshire Pensions, and their role involves handling customer complaints. We believe their background and experience will be a valuable addition to the forum. Recruitment for a sixth member is ongoing, with support from the Involvement Team and the Communications Team.

We continue to provide the forum with regular updates regarding The Housing Ombudsman, ensuring that members remain informed about any relevant developments, key decisions, and policy changes. These updates may include case determinations, best practice recommendations, emerging trends in complaints handling, and any new guidance issued by the Ombudsman. By keeping the forum engaged and up to date, we aim to support transparency, accountability, and continuous improvement in our approach to resolving customer concerns effectively.

At each session, we invite a member of staff to join as a 'guest speaker' and provide an overview of their area of the business. These sessions have been well-received, with staff fully engaging and their presentations often sparking valuable questions and discussions within the forum.

A budget has been approved to support forum members in accessing training opportunities and to fund one member's attendance at a fully expensed annual conference. Members have also been encouraged to sign up to Tpas, the tenant engagement experts. The budget includes provision for a social get-together, which was introduced at the last meeting and received positive feedback.

Scope

They meet every quarter.

They are provided with ten anonymised complaint cases that have gone through

our complaints process and now closed. They receive the headline complaint reason and the complaint number.

The group will agree on five (of the ten) and receive fuller details, including all the notes, correspondence, outcomes, and learnings. They are then required to individually score and assess the following areas of our handling of those complaints:

- Quality of the notes
- Correct correspondence
- Dealt with inside timescales
- Chronology of events
- The outcome
- Fairness in the handling of the complaint
- Putting things right

They also provide a written summary of the scores to give insight.

Results

The forum has reviewed and scored five complaints and gave their feedback – the table below shows the average score of the group in each area.

Area of review	July 2025 Score (out of 5)	October 2025 Score (out of 5)
Quality of notes	4.8	4.7
Correct correspondence	5.0	4.8
Timescales	4.9	4.7
Chronology of events	4.8	4.7
The Outcome	4.7	4.6
Fairness in the handling of complaint	4.7	4.7
Putting things right	4.1	4.6

Positive feedback

The forum noted that the notes recorded by Jason Humphries were particularly comprehensive and offered a clear picture of events. They also commended the sensitive and appropriate handling of an extremely vulnerable customer. Overall, the complaint records enabled them to understand cases at every stage of the process. In addition, they highlighted that the notes produced by Customer Support were professional and that calls were handled well.

Development feedback

The forum expressed ongoing concerns about the way some complaints are resolved, noting that closure letters and case notes do not always demonstrate that agreed actions have been fully followed up. To improve clarity and accountability, they recommended that any agreements made, such as arranging appointments or confirming next steps, should be clearly documented in writing and consistently adhered to. This would reassure customers, strengthen trust in the process, and help ensure that commitments are delivered.

In response to the forum's feedback, we have revised the order of our complaint actions to ensure a more robust follow-up. The Complaints Team will now issue the closure letter and work closely with the case manager to ensure that all agreed actions with customers are fully completed and "squared off" before a case is closed.

The results continue to offer valuable insights, helping us better understand how our case management is experienced from the customer's perspective. This feedback is a vital tool for learning and improvement and will be shared with both case managers and their line managers to inform practice.

We remain committed to supporting staff in delivering high-quality responses and will continue to offer one-to-one support and small group face to face training especially designed for new staff and staff dealing with low numbers of complaints. This tailored support ensures that learning is embedded and that we are continually improving the way we communicate with and respond to our customers.

The highest-scoring complaint achieved 134 out of a possible 140 points, this positive approach to complaints has been shared with their manager.

The feedback has been shared with case managers and their managers to highlight areas of strong performance and identify where improvements can be made. Areas for improvement have also been discussed during weekly group managers meeting to ensure that all case managers are reminded of the importance of good record keeping and providing a complete and full resolution for our customers.

Summary of meeting

During our October sessions, we focused on customer feedback and the lessons learned from complaints, sharing practical examples of how this learning has led to service improvements. These included updates to call scripting to support better triaging of tree-related issues in line with our policy, revising the sequence of complaint actions so that the closure letter is issued as the final step, and reinforcing the importance of maintaining high standards of care in customers' homes. This final improvement involved reminding operatives of the conduct expected when working in customers' properties.

Options and recommendations

Note this report and agree that quarterly updates will come to the Exec team.

Appendix

Appendix A – Complaints reviewed and scoring criteria

Complaints reviewed

Complaint number	Nature of complaint
2238x	Antisocial behaviour lack of response
2240x	Operative driving
2254x	Tunstall out of hours service
2252x	Damaged plant pot
2238x	Customer feels harassed by neighbourhood manager

Complaints are assessed using these criteria:

Quality of notes.

- are they clear/could they be misinterpreted.
- contain enough detail
- would you have expected more information
- notes should be factual not an opinion

Correct correspondence sent

- acknowledgement
- response letter
- closure letter
- did we promote the Housing Ombudsman service

Correspondence sent within agreed timescales

- acknowledgement sent within **5** working days
- response letter sent within **10** working days
- extra time agreed is required

Could the complaint be followed from start to finish

- Chronological order

Complaint outcome

- Does the outcome look and feel right
- Would you have done anything differently

Was the complaint dealt with Fairly

- Have we been impartial
- Did we compromise and show flexibility
- Was the complaint dealt with in a way the customer could understand
- Was the language clear and concise

Did we Put Things Right

- Have all points raised been addressed
- Was the customer compensated correctly

Each of these elements is evaluated by forum members according to the scoring matrix.

Score	Definition – could include these elements
1	Timescales not maintained, letters not sent, limited notes, no learning outcome recorded.
2	Most parts could have been improved on, lacking information or not clear with our approach.
3	Some information missing, the case has been fairly dealt with and things have been put right.
4	Most elements were adhered to but there was room for improvement in some parts.
5	All letters and timescales have been adhered to, clear and detailed notes, case has been dealt with fairly and things have been put right, we have apologised.