

Complaints and Dispute Resolution Team

PAC Update – 14th November

Introduction

Issues and Complaint Escalation:

- Challenges in LBHF's repairs service; due to a number of issues, led to a surge in repair related complaints.
- Inadequate complaints handling escalated cases, ultimately leading to an increase in associated Housing Ombudsman cases.

Regulatory Scrutiny and Findings:

- In May 2023, a Paragraph 49 investigation by the Housing Ombudsman began, alongside inquiries by The Regulator for Social Housing regarding consumer standards breaches.
- Both organisations highlighted several instances where H&F failed in its duty to provide suitable accommodation to our tenants. It also highlighted issues regarding our contractors, which forms a part of a previous Repairs Improvement Plan presented at PAC.

Initiation of Change and Service Redesign:

- Changes to the Housing Service had started in February 2022, however these were increased in Autumn 2022 which eventually culminated in the introduction of the Housing Hub in June 2023. This aims to enhance repairs service and complaints handling efficiency.
- Both investigations have further highlighted the need for a **resident-centric** complaints handling.

The Housing Hub

Housing Hub Overview

Objective:

- Establishing a dedicated team to evaluate complaints and repair systems, with the aim of driving long-term enhancements.

Hub Services:

- Specialist teams converged in a single location to deliver comprehensive solutions for service improvement. Core areas of focus include complaint management, repair services enhancement, safeguarding, addressing overcrowding, and combating fuel poverty.

Unified Teams:

- Customer Contact Centre, Service Improvement and Business Development.

New Team:

- **Complaints and Disputes Resolution Team** (Stage 1, Members, MPs, FOI, SAR's, Stage 2 & Ombudsman cases).

Complaints & Disputes Resolution Team

Unified Complaints Unit:

- Consolidated all housing complaints all and all Housing Ombudsman cases within a single Team

Replicable Strategy:

- Applying a proactive approach uniformly across Stage 1 and 2 complaints to ensure consistency and efficiency.

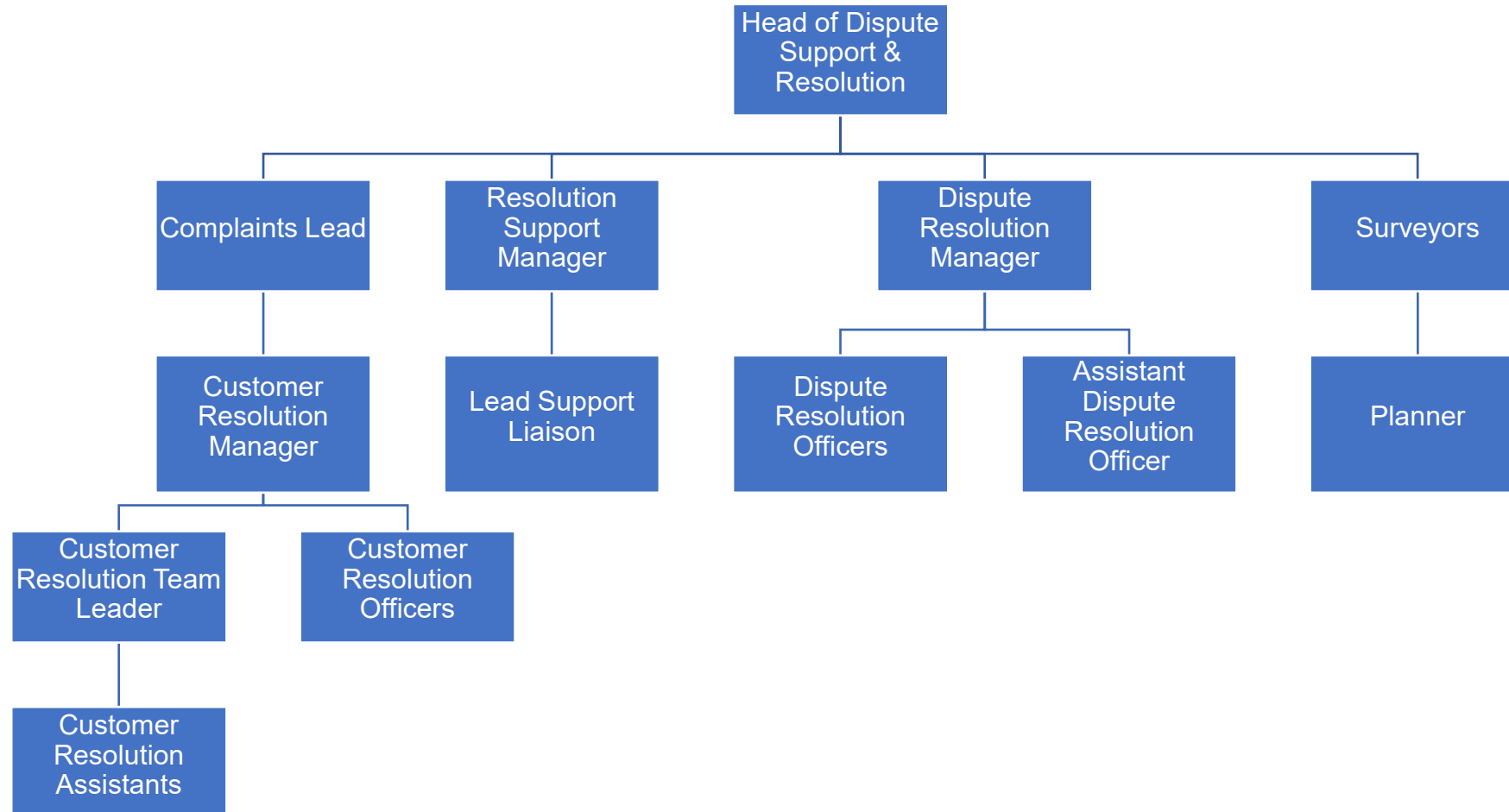
Cultivating Proactive Culture:

- Promoting a proactive complaint handling culture, bolstered by continuous training support to upskill the team.

Resident-Centric Approach:

- Concentrating on recognising vulnerabilities, enhancing communication among residents, and upgrading record keeping, all corroborated by regular in-service audits for continuous improvement.

Organisational Chart



Complaints Process & Performance

Complaints Performance

| Date | Stage | % overdue | Total open |
|------------|-------|-----------|------------|
| 3/11/2023 | 1 | 0% | 101 |
| 3/11/2023 | 2 | 0% | 33 |
| 29/09/2023 | 1 | 0% | 83 |
| 29/09/2023 | 2 | 0% | 39 |
| 31/08/2023 | 1 | 15% | 67 |
| 31/08/2023 | 2 | 25% | 40 |
| 13/06/2023 | 1 | 12% | 81 |
| 13/06/2023 | 2 | 67% | 85 |

Complaints Process

Stage 1:

- Residents initially report repairs to the Contact Centre.
- If dissatisfaction arises due to service quality or a delay in repair completion, a Stage 1 complaint can be lodged.
- H&F policy states that a response will be made to a Stage 1 complaint within 15 working days.

Stage 2:

- If residents believe the complaint remains unresolved at Stage 1, escalation to Stage 2 is warranted.
- A response for a stage 2 complaint is provided within 20 working days.

Ombudsman:

- In some circumstances, residents have the right to escalate their complaint to the Housing Ombudsman.
- Our complaints policy is also in line with the Ombudsman Complaint Handling Codebook.

Complaint Resolution & Compensation Protocol:

- Under the new process, upheld complaints trigger a thorough review or "MOT" to address and action the necessary repairs, aiming for a swift resolution.
- Occasionally, in alignment with our compensation policy (which is guided by the Housing Ombudsman's recommendations), compensation payments are made to ameliorate any inconvenience caused.

Complaint Performance (2)

Objective Achieved:

- Successfully cleared all overdue Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaints related to Housing Repairs by end of September 2023 as targeted in our Service Improvement Plan.

Evidence of Success:

- The zero overdue Stage 1 or Stage 2 complaints showcase our robust mechanisms in addressing all complaints effectively and punctually.
- Continual diligence in monitoring all tasks and related issues, ensuring they are completed and approved by residents, underpins our enduring commitment to service improvement and resident satisfaction.

Next Steps

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Continued Servicing of Ombudsman Cases:

- Prompt Response: Continue to prioritise timely responses to Ombudsman inquiries and recommendations to uphold the council's commitment to effective dispute resolution.
- Case Analysis: Continue to analyse each Ombudsman case to garner insights for preventing similar issues in future.
- Feedback Loop: Continue to operate a feedback loop to communicate Ombudsman findings to relevant teams, fostering continuous service improvement.

Enhanced Dispute Resolution:

- Capacity Building: Invest in training and resources to enhance the capacity and competency of the Disputes and Resolution Team.
- Process Optimisation: Review and refine the dispute resolution process to ensure it remains efficient, fair, and resident-centric.

Performance Monitoring:

- Metrics Tracking: Continue to monitor KPI's regarding complaint monitoring and compliance.