

## **Board Response to Annual Self-Assessment Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code March 17, 2025**

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The Board has reviewed the annual self-assessment prepared by the staff team and is mindful of the various reports received during the 2024 calendar year. These have included updates on complaints at each Board Meeting, a review of the complaints policy and handling procedure (June), a review of the Knowledge and Information Management report from the Housing Ombudsman (June) and a review of specific feedback from the Housing Ombudsman in relation to service failures and maladministration during the year under review.

We believe that our organisation takes complaints seriously as a tool to really hear from residents about things that can improve in the way we deliver services or provide homes. The changes made to align with the new Housing Ombudsman Code have improved our approach and included moving from a three to a two-stage process.

As a small, community-based housing association, we are often close to the issues that residents have caused them to complain about. We think it is helpful that we can often deal with issues face to face and quickly. Although we do not get lots of complaints, everyone in our team will be aware of new complaints and the circumstances which gave rise to them. Issues are often discussed in our weekly team huddles so that we get different perspectives and views before making a decision on how to respond – and again, we think that this helps to make sure our team is able to learn quickly and consistently.

Our Tenant Engagement Panel, which includes the Board Member Responsible for Complaints, works with us to improve how we give service to residents. We involved the panel in reviewing our policy, processes and looking at real (anonymous) responses to complaints. With the latter, the panel were able to give a fresh perspective on where we can improve and, indeed, where we have responded well. The Board Member responsible for complaints was also actively involved in advising on a particularly challenging case during the year.

We received 22 complaints during the year, with one resident raising 8 complaints. We were pleased that all complaints received during the year were responded to within the published timescales. Most complaints were resolved at Stage 1 with only 3 moved to Stage 2 and 1 of those to the Housing Ombudsman service. Of the 22 complaints received, 32% were upheld, 9% were partially upheld and 59% were not upheld. None of the escalated complaints were upheld.

We received two determinations from the Housing Ombudsman Service which found we had shortcomings in our management of repairs and complaints and in our record keeping. These have all been discussed at Board level with action agreed with the senior team for improvements.

The most common issues continued to be repairs with the main problems being delays in following up on repairs and contractor quality or behaviours. The next most common issue was ASB management. These themes arose in our tenant survey, and we have been actively seeking to improve our response in both areas with better training and support for staff. From 2025, we will have a second Housing Officer to give more capacity for personal support and response.

Our Learning from Complaints report identified a number of areas for improvement. We also learned from the comments made during our resident surveys. So far, the feedback has led the following improvements or plans for improvement:

- A new out-of-hour service which has improved resident experience
- A new process for managing repairs to speed up the completion of work
- Reduced repairs turnaround times (14d – 9.4d)
- Improved satisfaction with most recent repairs, now at 99.7% based on a 20% sample
- A training programme on ASB, Complaint Handling, Safeguarding and Neurodivergence for our staff team
- A 'big listen' programme to reach out to residents more effectively and give them the opportunity to tell us at an early stage about issues that cause dissatisfaction
- Improving the specific information, we provide to residents at sign up and during periods of disruption such as hardship or when ASB is experienced
- Introduction of the Noise App for all residents experiencing noise issues
- Working to make repairs more convenient for residents by offering more flexibility about times and grouping appointments together where possible

- Ringing more residents on completion of work to make sure they are satisfied
- The introduction of new housing management systems to manage our contact more effectively with residents, including complaints and repairs. This went live at the beginning of 2025 and will shortly include a tenant portal and automatic repairs surveys on completion of work so we can act fast when things go wrong.

The Board asked its independent internal auditor to carry out a review of culture within the team, following on from the Housing Ombudsman Spotlight report on attitudes, respect, and rights. This identified some impersonal and overly corporate responses in our day-to-day communication with residents including on repairs and complaints. This has been an area of work within the staff team, following on from our updated vision/mission and the report did identify recent improvements which we hope will continue. A further report will be undertaken in 2025.

Overall, the Board feels confident that the team are responding to complaints in line with the expectations of the code and in line with our business values. We know that this is not perfect and errors have been made. We remain vigilant and keen to support our team to do the best possible job for residents. We will continue to monitor the improvements that we have asked for as the year progresses.

Steve Dennis  
**Chair, PHA Homes**