

Performance Advisory Group (PAG)

2 March 2020 Conference suite 1 1st floor Colindale

Main Meeting 6:30pm until 8:00pm

Present:		
John Davies	(JD)	Chair
Aruna Bhatt	(AB)	Vice Chair
Zac Gonis	(ZG)	Member
Linda Beard	(LB)	Member
Elizabeth Fitzgerald	(EF)	Member
Maxwell Doku	(MD)	Member
Angela Shine	(AS)	Member
Norah Fallon	(NF)	Member
Deborah Beckford Carly Williamson	(DB) (CW)	Customer Engagement Co-Ordinator Senior Complaints & Information Manager
Stuart Coleman	(SC)	Head of Housing Management

Item	Title	Action
1	Apologies and welcome	
	Apologies received from Aletah and Carol.	
2	Minute Approval	Minutes to be
	All agreed the minutes were a true reflection.	published on website
3	Matters Arising	
	No matters arising	

4 Barnet Homes Complaint Performance Q3.

4.1 **Executive Summary:**

The number of Stage 1 complaints has increased since the same period last year.

The most complained-about area was Repairs. The decline in complaints about the Gas service continues to decline.

Stage 1 performance in time is improved and above target; however, this is driven by excellent handling performance in Repairs and Gas, and teams in Housing Management are under-performing.

Proportion of Stage 1 complaints upheld remains high and has increased in all services except Gas and Property.

Proportion of Stage 2 escalations has improved compared to Q3 2018/19.

Stage 2 performance in time is very low, at only 77%, driven by performance in Housing Options, Housing Management, and Property.

Customer care is the biggest driver of complaints, and increased by 16% at Stage 1 compared to Q3 2018/19. It is also a secondary factor in many complaints.

General areas on which to focus:

Improve use of QL across all services, including recording of contacts;

Improve recording of lessons learnt for each complaint on QL;

Continue to embed approach to learning from complaints, including maintaining and monitoring service lessons logs; and

Consider service capacity issues and impact on complaints performance in time;

Address issues with customer care and poor communication across all services, as a driver for complaints.

4.2 Barnet Homes Stage 1 Complaints

In Q3 2019/20, 372 complaints were received; this was 38.8% higher than in Q3 2018/19. Despite this increase, Stage 1 performance in time remained above target at 95% and was improved by 2% compared to 2018/19. By the end of Q3 2019/20, Barnet Homes had received 86.2% of the total number of complaints received in 2018/29. 80% of complaints were upheld; above the informal target of no more than 60%.

In the year to date (YTD), Barnet Homes has received 871 complaints with 94% answered in time; an increase of 17.4% on the 2018/19 YTD number of complaints (although performance in time has improved by 2%), and a decrease in number of complaints by 3.4% compared to 2017/18.

Although complaints about Repairs and Gas constituted 73.4% of all Barnet Homes complaints in Q3 (reduced from 76% in Q3 2018/19), an increase in complaints compared to the same period last year has been seen across a number of services areas in Q3:

Repairs +34% (2018/19 Q3: 142 complaints, 2019/20 Q3: 190 complaints)

Gas +34% (2018/29 Q3: 62 complaints, 2019/20 Q3: 83 complaints)

Housing Options +68% (2018/29 Q3: 19 complaints, 2019/20 Q3: 32 complaints)

Property +214% (2018/29 Q3: 7 complaints, 2019/20 Q3: 22 complaints)

In-time performance was poor in several teams, with the majority in the Housing Management service. The target of 90% answered within 10 working days was not met by 6 teams: Caretaking (40%), Emergency Accommodation (83%), Rental Income (50%), Neighbourhood (60%), ASB (83%), and the Contact Centre (80%). By contrast, both Repairs and Gas achieved 99% performance in time despite the high volume of complaints, which is testament to the strong complaints-handling culture within these services despite staff turnover.

Generally, performance-in time may be addressed through managers being more proactive in reviewing their direct reports' QL work-trays to monitor performance and address any issues. Managers should also ensure that their complaints handlers are fully trained on QL. In additional to seeking advice from the Complaints and Information team for advice, managers can speak to their counterparts in the teams that are consistently performing well to gain insight into how they are managing performance so effectively.

In Q3 2019/20 we have seen an increase in the proportion of complaints upheld. Complaints upheld performance is significantly influenced by complaints handling in Repairs and Gas. The proportion of Gas complaints that are fully or partially upheld remains high, however has improved by 4% compared to the same period in 2018/19. In contrast, the Repairs performance in this area continues to decline, and is 6% higher than in 2018/19. There has also been an increase in complaints upheld across Housing Options (+19%) and Housing Management (+9%).

Themes are captured for each complaint; these reveal the key reasons for Stage 1 complaints continue to be customer care (making up nearly 50%), delay, and service failure – particularly in the Gas and Repairs services. It should be noted that customer care is often a secondary issue in other complaints. The proportion of Stage 1 complaints about customer care has increased by 16% compared to Q3 2018/19.

4.3 Barnet Homes Stage 2 Complaints

The number of Stage 2 complaints has increased by 3.4% compared to the same period last year. Due to the increase in Stage 1 complaints in Q3 2019/20, we have seen a decrease in the proportion of complaints escalated to Stage 2, from 11% in Q3 2018/19 to 8% in Q3 2019/20, which is still above our informal target of no more than 7% and is higher than Q2's 7.3%.

At 77%, in-time performance for Stage 2 complaints was well below target, and 16% lower than the same period in 2018/19. 100% of complaints were answered in time in October, however in November this dropped to 83% and in December to only 60% as the number of Stage 2 complaints rose by 150% compared to the previous month.

From October 2019, all Stage 2 complaints moved from being dealt with by email to being managed through QL, meaning less oversight and management from the Complaints and Information team, as is the case with Stage 1 complaints. It is likely that the change in process coupled with the rise in numbers has contributed to the poorer performance. To

address this the Complaints and Information team began to blind copy the complaints handler into the acknowledgement email so they knew to check their QL task tray. This appears to be working as performance in-time was back up to 100% in January 2020. However, managers need to ensure that they and their staff who deal with complaints are fully trained on QL, and should arrange sessions with their QL superuser to ensure this.

At 67%, the proportion of Stage 2 complaints that were fully or partially upheld has increased compared to the same period in 2018/19, and is above the informal target of 60%. The increase in escalations would suggest that complaints handling and quality of Stage 1 responses have declined. There also continues to be an issue with failing to deliver upon promises made at Stage 1, particularly in Housing Options; an improvement in this area continues to be noted in Neighbourhood, where actions to improve the service include QL training and the introduction of problem-solving reviews of complaints in team meetings.

Complaints about the Repairs and Gas services constituted 40% of all Stage 2 complaints in Q3 2019/20; this is significantly smaller than the proportion of Stage 1 complaints, which suggests strong complaints handling performance in the teams. By contrast, 33.3% of Stage 2 complaints were about Housing Options compared to 8.6% at Stage 1. Stage 2 complaints about Housing Options increased by 67% compared to the same period in 2018/19, and by 42.8% in Q2 2019/20, and 50% of them were fully upheld or partially upheld. 80% of the complaints upheld were related to customer care, and 20% related to delay, with issues regarding delays in progressing housing applications. lack of contract regarding the application/case, and general poor communication or lack of action. Themes are captured for each complaint; these reveal the key reasons for Stage 2 complaints to be customer care and delay.

4.4 High-Volume Complaints Areas Improvements

Across Barnet Homes, some complaints handlers continue not to record lessons learnt against each complaint on QL; this has been discussed in complaint liaison meetings. It is recommended that this becomes an area of focus for managers to ensure that action is being taken to improve services and potentially reduce the number of repeat complaints, and also to allow the implementation of improvements to be tracked by the Complaints and Information team and reported upon to customers. It is

currently being explored whether the QL field for learning outcome for complaints can be made mandatory.

4.5 **Gas**

We expect seasonal variations with an increase in complaints in the colder months, and we have seen an increase of 136% compared to Q2 and broadly consistent numbers with Q3 2018/19. Comparing year on year performance, we have seen improvement in the Gas complaints performance, with an average of 17 complaints per month in 2019/20 compared to 45 in 2017/18.

The two areas of most concern are customer care and delay. Customer care-related complaints have doubled since the same period last year. Missed appointments have also slightly increased when compared to the same period last year but are still very low when compared to two years ago.

Mears Gas has had staffing issues over the past few months, and complaints have been discussed in regular weekly meetings. New staff have recently been recruited, which it is hoped will have a positive impact on the number of complaints in Q4.

Recommended improvements for Mears Gas:

- Planners/Scheduling team to be given further Customer Service training, to improve their telephone manner, and service to residents.
- Improved communication with residents required to make them aware when an engineer is running late.
- Planners/Schedulers to pay more attention to detail, as engineers have been booked on a different time to the one given to tenant.
- Process for servicing appointments to be reviewed, to reduce the amount of missed appointments being logged.
- Review of engineers and levels required during servicing spike periods.

4.6 Repairs

Barnet Homes has given notice to Mears as the repairs service will come in-house from April 2020. A period of demobilisation has been entered, with weekly meetings held with Mears and key areas of performance being assessed. Mears' senior management team has committed to improving the service up to the point of contract termination, along with significant increases in overall operational resources to help manage overdue jobs, work in progress, complaint levels, and the general mishandling of appointments across the service.

Comparing year on year performance, we have seen a decline in the Repairs complaints performance, with an increase of 29.8% in the average number of complaints per month for the year to date of 2019/20 compared to 2018/19, and a 96.9% increase compared to the year to date of 2017/18.

Due to the demobilisation of the responsive repairs contract with Mears, no recommendations have been made for Q4. However, lessons are being identified so that a more efficient and streamlined service can be delivered from Q1 2020/21.

4.7 Housing Options

The number of complaints received about Housing Options steadily increased during 2018/19, continuing through Q2 2019/20. In Q3 the number of complaints has increased by 68.4% compared with Q3 2018/19.

To address complaints regarding temporary accommodation, the Contracts and Compliance team will continue to closely monitor property inspections to identify and prioritise repairs. The Accommodation Solutions Team will continue to support people to move alternative accommodation, and Housing Options will prioritise preventing placements in TA where possible through the TA Reduction Project working group. This has already led to several joint-working initiatives (such as the let2barnet duty rota) that has helped to reduce TA usage, which should continue to help reduce complaints relating to TA unsuitability.

Complaints regarding poor customer service continue to be an ongoing issue, with an increase of 125% when compared to Q3 18/19. The causes are believed to be a combination of high administrative pressures due to the Homelessness Reduction Act reducing officer capacity, and a high turnover of staff which leads to a loss of experience and reliance on agency staff who require extensive training. These issues are being addressed through increased training sessions for all front-line staff.

Managers are addressing poor customer service through 1:1s, and meetings are being held regularly to discuss overall service concerns and pressures on specific front-line teams.

Specific issues are also being addressed through targeted actions channelled through the 'Complaints Lessons Log' rolled out by the Complaints and Information team at the end of Q2. Moving forward, the new Housing Options Service Manager will sit more regularly with the HO Team and shadow staff members. This will enable senior management to understand the service pressures on the triage and contact centre, feedback to the Housing Options manager, and review overall performance.

Housing Options is also implementing a customer portal which will enable clients to upload their documents online with a view to reduce the number of appointments necessary to process a housing application, which should increase HNO capacity. A team dedicated specifically to single homeless applicants will also provide more efficient provision of housing assistance and tailored housing assessments, which may also contribute to a reduction in complaints relating to poor customer service. In addition, management is conducting a review of housing assessment and banding processes to more clearly instruct HNOs/HNMs and set timeframes on expected completion of key actions.

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4.9 **Neighbourhood and ASB**

The reduction in ASB complaints is partially attributable to the team being reminded of the importance of saving emails from residents on Swordfish and of providing responses within target dates. Managers run regular reports to show ASB triage actions to enable reassignment of cases in the event of staff absence; however, the team is reliant on other teams using QL in line with the ASB Policy to assign actions to colleagues.

Lessons learnt from Neighbourhood complaints include reviewing the succession procedure for a case with errors at multiple contact points across a number of teams. The team has also experienced issues with contacts not being logged on QL; it is essential that all teams make proper use of QL to avoid issues.

The Housing Management Project Manager role was expected to include a focus on ensuring that complaints, VIPs, and contacts are effectively managed on QL. The effect

of this was to be monitored for improved response in-time performance regarding complaints and VIPs, as well as a reduction in complaints relating to lack of contact. To date it is not clear if this role has yet focused on this, although the overall performance time for Neighbourhood and ASB has improved from Q3 2018/19 to Q3 2019/20 (85.7% to 90.9%).

4.10 **Property**

The main cause of complaints for the Property service in Q3 2019/20 was the commercial boiler at Grahame Park breaking down; this was caused by a leak due to the deteriorating pipework located below ground. The service wrote to all the residents affected, provided temporary heaters, knocked on the most vulnerable resident's doors to ensure they were alright, informed them that they would be compensated for not having heating and updated the Contact Centre on a regular basis. Despite this, many of the calls from residents to find out the latest with the heating were logged as Stage 1 complaints. Further work will be done with the teams involved to ensure that compensation is calculated and paid through rent accounts via the Finance team in a timely manner, and this should reduce the number of Stage 1 complaints we receive should a breakdown occur.

4.11 Ombudsman Enquiries

During Q3 2019/20, Barnet Homes was notified of 4 customer complaints that were referred to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman or the Housing Ombudsman: 2 of formal enquiries and 2 informal; a reduction of 9 compared to Q2, and the same as Q3 2018/19. We know from the ombudsmen's annual reports for 2018/19 and attendance at housing seminars that they are both experiencing a national increase in the number of complaints made to them and the number of investigations th

Recommendations arising from ombudsmen investigations are implemented upon receipt of the investigative report. We are awaiting the outcomes of a number of investigations, and more detailed analysis of Ombudsman enquiries will be included in the year-end Complaints report.

5 Housing Management Consultation

5.1 **Background**

The Customer Experience project ran a detailed discovery exercise between September '18 and April '19 to identify problem areas in the customer journey and experience.

The key findings from the discovery exercise were:

- Low right first time for majority of customer enquiries;
- Problematic customer journeys due to inefficient supporting process and systems

Following on from this, the project identified three priority themes to focus on in order to improve this:

Make it easy – have a central team (Customer Contact team) assist housing customers with majority of enquiries at first contact & if the enquiry is passed on it is still easy for the customer to get what they need.

Do best what matters most to customers – have specialist supporting teams and processes providing good value for our customers and the business.

Customer focus and continuous improvement – support all teams across The Group to continually improve how they meet customer needs

5.2 Housing Management Focus Areas Since Discovery

Since the discovery phase the following elements of the service, related to the above priority themes, were worked on:

- Simplifying access and improving right first time
- Handling of housing management enquiries
- Income collection
- Services provided by Leasehold Development (LD)

5.3 **Key Findings**

The discovery exercise also identified that some customer experiences are particularly problematic because teams are not effectively supported by processes, systems and training/guidance.

As well as being problematic for customers, these areas are problematic for the teams involved with high levels of wasted effort.

The key findings which emerged from the discovery phase were:

- High level of inefficiency in how we handle customer enquiries
- Customer queries are often misdirected and handled by multiple teams
- This has an adverse impact on customer experience leading to service failure, negative customer feedback & complaints
- This also reduces the capacity of specialist teams to focus on their specialist/ core functions to the detriment of customers and staff. e.g. LHT have insufficient time to focus on income collection, estimated 31% of time Vs ideal 70-80%.
- Inefficiencies in systems and processes coupled with little opportunity for teams to share best practice have exacerbated this problem
- Significant scope to increase right first time (RFT)
 experience for customers by equipping the Customer
 Contact (CC) team to do more, reducing the number of
 queries being handled by multiple teams

5.4 Key Recommendations

Following on from the findings several recommendations were made in order to facilitate the simplification and improvement of service delivery and customer journeys:

Expand the Customer Contact team remit

To assist all housing customers with the majority of their enquiries with a right first time focus

Create a Housing Management Service for all housing customers

Bring together housing management functions of Neighbourhood and Leasehold Services to provide assistance for specialist housing management enquiries/cases for all housing customers

Create an Income Collection Service to collect all income from all housing customers

Bring together the income collection functions of the Rental Income and Leasehold Services teams into one service with and early intervention prevention focus for all housing customers.

Transfer the Leasehold Development function to Property Services

Co-locate the LDOs and Major Works PMs to further strengthen partnership working and enable collaborative review and improvement of working practices.

5.5 Functional Changes, Benefits & Impact on Staff

The implementation of the recommendations from the Customer Experience Project are resulting in a number of functional changes within the Housing Mangement Department:

5.6 Functional Changes

Creation of a tenure-blind Income Collection Service

The income collection function of the Leasehold Housing Team will be combined with the Rental Income Team and the new service will consist of:

- 3 x Income Collection Teams (Rents)
- 1 x Income Collection Team (Leasehold)

Creation of a tenure-blind Housing Management Service

The housing management function of the Leasehold Housing Team will be combined with the Neighbourhood Team to create a new Housing Management Service

The service will manage all housing management functions for leaseholders and tenants

5.7 **Leasehold Development Team**

The Leasehold Development Team will transfer across to Property Services with the manager reporting directly to Head of Property Services in the new structure. The team moving across is comprised of:

- 1 FTE Leasehold Development Manager
- 4 x Leasehold Development Officers
- 1 x Leasehold Development Officer (Fire Safety)

Customer Contact team

The initial focus is housing management enquiries and enabling calls to duty phones in Leasehold Services and Neighbourhood to be redirected to the CC team by end of Q4 2019/20.

There will be an initial resourcing increase of 0.5 X Customer Service Officer to assist with increased volume of calls.

5.8 **Key Benefits**

Creation of a tenure-blind Income Collection Service:

Centralising income collection simplifies our offer to customers. The Income collection service will assist with complex and specialist enquiries, focussing on customers who need help the most- CC will take payments and nonspecialist enquiries

Creation of a tenure-blind Housing Management Service:

Customers requiring housing management advice and assistance will have an improved experience, with customer journeys simpler and shorter. Right first time advice from the CC team will better manage their expectations and ensure they are passed directly to the right team to assist them if the CC team is not equipped to

Transfer the Leasehold Development function to Property Services:

Staff will have greater technical knowledge and less reliance on others for information and so even more responsive to customer enquiries and closer to the customer

Expand the remit of the Customer Contact team:

The CC team will assist housing customers with the majority of enquiries and provide resolution at first contact wherever possible, making it easier for them to get what they need from us through the first point and place of contact

5.9 Impact on Staff

The proposed changes put the employees in the following roles at risk of redundancy:

Leasehold Services team:

- Leasehold Services Manager
- 8 x Leasehold Housing Officers (6 full time and 2 part time)
- 2 x Leasehold Housing Assistance

Rental Income team:

- Senior Rents Manager
- 2 x Senior Housing Officers

Neighbourhood Management team:

- 2 x Housing Administration Officer (1 full time; 1 part time)
- 1 x Housing Support Officer

All vacancies arising in TBG are being held as potential redeployment opportunities for staff at risk unless they are specialist roles, whilst those staff at risk will be advised of all relevant internal job vacancies on a weekly basis once the ringfence interviews are complete.

5.10 Consultation Process/Timeline

The 30 day consultation period starts 20 January and ends on 19 February 2020 and all at risk staff will be offered two separate 1:1 meetings during the consultation period, with Stuart Coleman and Cristina Silva (HR).

The first set of 1:1 meetings will be held w/c 27 January 2020, whilst the second set will be held w/c 3 February 2020.

A formal meeting will be held with staff and Union representatives who will be giving feedback on the consultation on 20 or 21 February 2020.

Expressions of interest from at risk staff will be due on 21 February 2020, whilst interviews for ringfenced posts will take place between 24 February and 4 March.

The go-live date for the implementation of the new department structure is 1 April 2020.

6 **Members Updates**

AB explained to members about the issue with the security door to her block and the ASB which occurred. She said she felt repairs to security doors should be classified as urgent. DB to discuss with Ryan Bolton and feed back to the group.

JD said that he felt moving forward as a group to become a resident board it would be useful for members to be issued with a tablet. This would make it easier for members to receive reports and not having to print them out. DB to pass request to her manager Tim Blanc

7 **AOB**

DB reminded members of the workshop on the 23 April, and said she would sent a lunch menu around shortly for members to place an order.

DB remined members that she was going on AL for 3 weeks and would return to work on the 1 April. Anything urgent should be passed to TB

Date of next meeting 20 April 2020 Conference room 1 1st floor Colindale 6.30-8.00pm