

Annual Complaints Report

2010/11



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"Delivering Excellent Housing Services"

Background

This report is intended to provide a summary of Complaints raised by customers of the services Ashfield Homes provide during the last year. It will take into account formal complaints and queries raised by Councillors through the Members Enquiry process. It provides information to the reader on the complaint process in place at Ashfield Homes.

Purpose

The purpose of any complaint process is to identify and deliver improvements to the service and as such complaints from customers should be welcomed as an opportunity to deliver continued improvements in the long term.

The purpose of this report is to present facts regarding the complaints received and lessons learned from those complaints.

Summary of Key Issues

This report focuses on formal complaints which are recorded and monitored by the Performance & Business Improvement Team and provides details about the types of complaint, the action taken to resolve the complaint and whether they are justified. Members Enquiries are also monitored by the Performance & Business Improvement Team and details are contained within the report.

The total number of complaints

Total number of resolved complaints in the year	2008/9	2009/10	2010/11	Variance
Formal	70	83	70	-13

The Formal Complaint system is broken down into 2 stages, with stage two being an appeal to the Chief Executive. The following table shows the number of complaints escalated to Stage 2.

Total number of formal complaints escalated to Stage 2	2008/9	2009/10	2010/11	Variance
Formal	18 (26%)	27 (33%)	5 (7.1%)	-22

This figure has considerably decreased in the last year. This indicates that complaints are being better understood and addressed at the first stage.

Performance in responding to complaints is shown in the table below. Ashfield Homes monitors the average time taken to resolve complaints. However, for the purposes of this report we have also identified the percentage of complaints actioned within the 5 working day target.

Average Time to resolve complaints	2008/9	2009/10	2010/11
Average working days	1.95	5.37	4.48
Percentage in 5 working days	95.71%	71%	77%

It is not always possible to resolve a complaint within the timescale of 5 working days. This will normally be due to the complexity of the complaint, which may require an investigation involving a number of people including correspondence between ourselves and other partner organisations. Whilst the time taken to respond has increased since 2008/09, paired with the decrease in 2nd stage complaints this suggest time is being taken to effectively deal with a complaint and to get it right first time.

The table below details which sections the complaints received relate to:

Section	No of complaints		Percentage of complaints received
Finance	2	2 out of 70	2.86
HR	1	1 out of 70	1.43
Lettings	7	7 out of 70	10.00
Planned & Cyclical	4	4 out of 70	5.71
Procurement	13	13 out of 70	18.57
Repairs Call Handling Centre	1	1 out of 70	1.43
Responsive Repairs & Voids	23	23 out of 70	32.86
Supported Housing	1	1 out of 70	1.43
Tenancy Services	18	18 out of 70	25.71

Upheld Complaints

Complaints are monitored by the Performance Team and assessed as to whether they are justified or not by the Company Solicitor & Secretary. The following table shows the percentage of complaints that are deemed justified as a proportion of all complaints received, broken down by each area of the Company.

Percentage of complaints deemed Justified	2008/9 Percent Justified	Complaints as a proportion of all complaints received	2009/10 Percent Justified	Complaints as a proportion of all complaints received
Repairs	22.86%	51.43%	31%	49%
Lettings	1.43%	10%	26%	23%
Major Works	1.43%	10%	25%	5%
Housing Management/Tenancy Services	11.43%	21.43%	29%	21%
Supported Housing	1.43%	4.29%	0%	0%

HR	2.85%	2.85%	0%	0%
Finance	0	0	50%	2%

Complaints deemed Justified	2010/11 Percent Justified	Complaints as a proportion of all complaints received	Justified	No of complaints received
Finance	100%	3% 2/70*100	2	2
HR	100%	1%	1	1
Lettings	0%	10%	0	7
Planned & Cyclical	75%	6%	3	4
Procurement	31%	19%	4	13
Repairs Call Handling Centre	0%	1%	0	1
Responsive Repairs & Voids	30%	33%	7	23
Supported Housing	0%	1%	0	1
Tenancy Services	28%	26%	5	18
Total excluding 2nd stage serv req	31%		22	70

Complaint Categories

The chart below shows the types of formal complaints we have received, this includes both justified and unjustified complaints. The purpose for including unjustified complaints is that although as an organisation we may believe the process has been properly applied there may be a perception amongst customers, that the service has failed the customer. If we are to deliver improved satisfaction, we need to consider how we tackle customer perception issues. A complaint may raise more than one issue, the numbers in this chart will not correspond with the total number of complaints received. A more detailed analysis of complaints logged can be found later in the report.

Issue	2009/10 All Complaints Occurrence	2009/10 Justified Complaints Occurrences	2010/11 All Complaints Occurrence	2010/11 Justified Complaints Occurrences
Avoidable Contact				
Accuracy of information	9	1	9	2
Attitude/Conduct of employee	12	1	11	1
Length of time taken	29	9	28	13
Poor Workmanship	1	0	4	2
Appointment not kept	3	3	4	4
Poor Communication	11	7	6	1
Documents lost/not processed	1	1	3	1
Not received requested improvement	5	1	2	0
Number of avoidable contact Instances	71 (68%)	23 (77%)	67 (82%)	24 (92%)

Non Avoidable Contact				
Conduct of Neighbours	2	0	0	0
State of Property (Internal/External)	21	5	7	1
Unhappy with decision	5	1	8	1
Number of non avoidable contact	33 (32%)	7 (23%)	15 (18%)	2 (8%)

Reducing avoidable contact has clear and obvious benefits in terms of improved customer satisfaction and corporate efficiency. The level of avoidable contact of all complaints occurrences has increased by 14% in 2010/2011 from the previous year.

Lessons Learnt

A key part of any complaint process is how the information is used to drive the improvement programme. The complaint process has an in built improvement programme whereby Managers are expected to identify lessons learnt and to enact them.

Below are some of the recommended actions from complaints identified by Managers;

Learning outcome	Learning outcome Comment/conclusion
Responding to enquiries within reasonable timescales	Re-emphasise service standards within team for all methods of communication and the need to keep customers informed of progress in regards to cases and any one off requests. This is to be discussed in everyone's next round of one to ones and at next Team
Officer spoken to about keeping customer informed	Re-emphasise service standards within team for all methods of communication and the need to keep customers informed of progress in regards to cases and any one off requests. This is to be discussed in everyone's next round of one to ones and at next Team
Unfortunately this appointment was missed due to severe weather conditions during the time. However, when the appointment was rearranged, the incorrect time was allocated and the Operative was unable to carry out the repair. AHL to remind Officers to en	Officers have been reminded that when appointments have been rearranged from a cancelled appointment, to ensure the correct quantity of schedule of rates task codes are inputted on work tickets.

Making a condition of issuing court proceedings that AHL have a signed paper from tenant to show aware of debt (esp joint tenant)	Tenancy Services Manager to investigate how this can be built into review of rents policy, with the recommendation to be that wherever possible we will ask the customer to sign to say aware of debt before court proceedings where a customer is engaging. Current proc
AHL to work with Tomlinsons to ensure that paperwork is delivered in line with current legislation	Issue raised and minuted at Core Group meeting and JTL written to. Complete.
Adhering to Service Standards on response times to e-mails	Re-emphasise service standards within team for all methods of communication and the need to keep customers informed of progress in regards to cases and any one off requests. This is to be discussed in everyone's next round of one to ones and at next Team
Ensure tenants are kept informed if appointments are not able to be kept	Reiterated to officers to keep appointments or cancel in advance
AHL to ensure Contractors are undertaking within an appropriate timescale	Officers have been reminded to ensure Contractors are undertaking all works within an appropriate timescale.
Addresses need to be checked more thoroughly before sending letters out	Addresses need to be checked more thoroughly before sending letters out
On this occasion there is nothing to learn from this complaint	on this occasion there is nothing to learn from this complaint
Be aware of ongoing and other complaints made by tenants	The term 'refusal' has been changed to 'declined works' to avoid the possible interpretation by tenants that they being obstructive.
N/A comments forwarded on to managing Director of Concept Painters to discuss with operative concerned	Contractors. Comments have been forwarded to the contractors concerned
Ensure all operatives have correct training and are aware of what process to follow if they cannot carry out an effective repair	The employee in question has been spoken to about his actions and is also being written to regarding his workmanship and attention to detail following receipt of the formal complaint
Need to ensure that when seeking information from another department in response to an enquiry from a customer that it is chased regularly to facilitate a speedy response	When seeking information from another department in response to an enquiry from a customer it will be chased regularly.
Use feedback to link into Mutual exchange review to ensure our documents and processes are customer friendly and to avoid any further confusion or complaints	Use feedback within the Mutual Exchange review within the new financial year.

<p>This is an isolated incident and would advise that the Officer in question is being dealt with internally</p>	<p>The Officer in question is being spoken to regarding this matter, and will be reminded of our Company's Service Standards.</p>
<p>To ensure that when mailing lists are run joint tenants details are included</p>	<p>Hummingbird report updated to include these fields</p>
<p>Unfortunately this appointment had to be cancelled a number of times due to illness of an Operative</p>	<p>Complaint fully investigated and discussed within core brief. All Officers have been reminded to ensure that they are more vigilant when rescheduling appointments due to unforeseen circumstances.</p>
<p>AHL to put in place another procedure when reporting drain repairs to ADC, to ensure the likelihood of an incident of this nature is further reduced</p>	<p>An email has been sent to all Duty Officers confirming another procedure has been put in place when reporting drain repairs to ADC, to ensure the likelihood of an incident of this nature is further reduced.</p>
<p>Confusion exists between some neighbours in regards to who is responsible for each of the boundaries and therefore the Project Officer is looking at this.</p>	<p>We need to ensure that ADC communicates any RTB applications to AHL where there could be boundary disputes. We now have a Project Officer looking at boundary issues, however this is mainly to shared areas, such as flats and not houses. Staff member remain</p>
<p>It is important to manage expectations of the complainant and keep them informed of AHL procedures and timescales involved</p>	<p>Our new Tiered Approach embraces this method of keeping customers informed, however on this case we have clearly followed all our policies and procedures as they were.</p>

Diversity Monitoring

Ashfield Homes monitors the profile of those persons making formal complaints in order to ensure that services are being offered fairly across the diversity strands.

We monitor by:-

- Age
- Ethnicity
- Disability
- Gender

The following table shows the number of complaints from these groups.

2007/8

Category	Number of complaints	Comments
Age		
Under 35	12	92% were from women, 8% from men
35-59	18	39% female, 56% male, 5% not specified
60-74	6	50% female, 50% male
Over 74	3	67% female, 33% male
Not specified	39	
Ethnicity		
White British	39	
Other White Background	1	
Indian	1	
Not specified	37	
Disability		
Yes	10	
No	26	
Not specified	42	
Gender		
Female	28	
Male	17	
Not specified	33	

2008/9

Category	Number of complaints	Comments	STATUS 2008
Age			
Under 35	11	Of which, 91% were from young women 9% men	Different age bands measured
35-59	22	Of which, 46% from women 64% men	
60-74	5	Of which, 40% women 60% men	

Over 75	6	Of which, 50% from women 33% from men and 17% not stated	
Not specified	26	37%	5.5%
Ethnicity			
British	41	59% of total complainants	94%
Other	2	3% of total complainants	0.7%
White & Black African	1	1% of total complainants	0%
Any other White background	1	1% of total complainants	0.9%
Not specified	25	36% of total complainants	2%
Disability			
Yes	19	27% of total complainants	62.8%
No	19	27% of total complainants	34.5%
Not specified	32	46% of total complainants	2.4%
Gender			
Female	30	43 % of total complainants	54.2%
Male	21	30% of total complainants	35.8%
Not specified	19	27% of total complainants	10%

2009/10

Category	Number of complaints	Comments
Age		
Under 35	18	
35-59	17	65 % Female, 35% Male
60-74	8	50% Female, 38% Male, 12% Not stated
Over 75	2	50% Female, 50% Not stated
Not specified	38	46% of complainants prefer not to state their age when complaining.
Ethnic Origin		
British	41	49% of complainants were British
Any other White background	1	1% complainants were any other white background
Not specified	41	49% of complainants not stated

Disability		
Yes	8	38% Female 38% Male, 24% Not stated
No	24	83% Female, 13% Male, 4% Not stated
Not specified	51	61% of complainants did not state if they had a disability.
Gender		
Female	37	45% female
Male	17	20% male
Not specified	29	35% not stated

2010/11 Stage 1 & 2

Category	Number of complaints	Comments
Age		
Under 35	6	66% female 34% male
35-59	17	65% female, 35% male
60-74	8	63% female, 37% male
Over 75	1	100% male
Not specified	42	
Ethnic Origin		
British	31	52% female, 48% male
Any other White background	2	100% female
Irish	1	100% female
Not specified	43	
Disability		
Yes	13	38% female, 62% male
No	21	71% female, 29% male
Not specified	43	
Gender		
Female	22	28%
Male	13	17%
Not specified	42	55%

Analysis suggests the method a complaints is made impacts the diversity percentage representation, as complaints were made via letter do not record diversity information. Customers are also not forced to complete the diversity section when making a complaint via the complaints booklet or via the website.

Accessing the Complaint Process

Customers can access the complaint process in a variety of ways. The table below shows how people access the system.

There are now a large number of people who are using the Ashfield Homes website to access the complaints scheme, demonstrating that use of the internet is becoming commonplace amongst Ashfield Tenants.

Summary of complaint contact methods by ethnicity

Format	White British	Any other white background	Irish	Total using a specified format not stating ethnicity Blank	Total using a specified format
E-mail	37%	3%	3%	53%	29
Form	85%	5%	0	10%	21
Letter	5%	0	0	95%	20
Phone call	0	0	0	0	0

Website

Age breakdown of those who used the web facility (excluding those who failed to specify their age).	2009/10	2010/11	Variance
up to 35	55%	27%	-28%
35 to 59	23%	47%	+24%
60 to 74	18%	26%	+8%
over 74 years old	4%	0%	-4%

The table above shows there has been an increase in the 35 -74 age group using the web to submit complaints.

Gender breakdown of those who used the Website (excluding those who failed to specify their gender).	2009/10	2010/11
Female	77%	69%
Male	23%	31%

Complaints Forms

The table below demonstrates that an increase has been seen in the number of younger people using complaints forms.

Age breakdown of those who used the Complaint Form (excluding those who failed to specify their age).	2009/10	2010/11	Variance
up to 35	24%	13%	-11%
35 to 59	52%	56%	+4%
60 to 74	19%	25%	+6%
over 74 years old	5%	6%	+1%

Gender breakdown of those who used the Complaint Form (excluding those who failed to specify their age).	2009/10	2010/11
Female	68%	56%
Male	32%	44%

Letters

Age breakdown of those who used a letter (excluding those who failed to specify their age).	2009/10	2011/12
up to 35	100%	100%
35 to 59	0%	0%
60 to 74	0%	0%
over 74 years old	0%	0%

It is clear from the above table that letters are not a preferred method for complaints for those over the age of 35.

Gender breakdown of those who used the Letter (excluding those who failed to specify their gender).	2009/10	2010/11
Female	67%	5%
Male	33%	0%

Member Enquiries

Ashfield Homes has a process whereby local Councillors can make an enquiry by completing an appropriate form which is then forwarded to the Performance and Business Improvement Team. A response is then made either directly to the customer or to the Councillor. These enquiries do not always constitute a complaint but are merely requests for information or requests for service.

The details of the types of query and the service area are contained in the table below:

	Performance & Business Improvement	Depot	Lettings	Procurement	Supported Housing	Tenancy Services
2007/08	0	21	2	0	0	3
2008/09	0	10	1	3	0	0
2009/10	0	3	1	2	0	2
2010/11	0	2	2	0	0	2

Member enquiries have decreased significantly in the last year.

Local Government Ombudsman

During 2010/11 there have been 5 cases referred to Ashfield Homes by the Local Government Ombudsman, 2 of these cases needed to go through the Ashfield Homes complaints process, 3 cases were at the final stage of Ashfield Homes' complaints process and were not upheld by the LGO.

Summary of Complaints

Below is a more detailed summary of the complaints received during the year.

Complaint Summary 2010/11
Unhappy with the length of time taken to conduct repair.
Request for compensation to front bedroom carpet following neglect of duties by Ashfield Homes as detailed in two previous letters.
Summary of complaint- unhappy with the length of time taken to get the appropriate size side windows fitted to front door.
I want to make a formal complaint about the Senior Housing Management Advisor and Housing Management Advisor for the way i have been treated.
Unhappy with the length of time taken respond to request for skip.
Appointment was not kept.
Summary of letter Unhappy with the amount of damp and condensation in rooms, son is constantly ill , continual problems with gas boiler.
Unhappy with the condition of the property.
Complainant is unhappy that she notified AHL of her change of address yet correspondence was sent to wrong address resulting in the complainant being removed from housing waiting list and losing waiting points.
Unhappy double glazing is not being fitted to home.
Unhappy that reported repair works were done but appeared to make problems worse within a few days. Also electric fire is noisy, AHL have been to look at the fire. The complainant was not satisfied with their response.
Unhappy that toilet bowl is not being replaced at the same time as the toilet cistern. Unhappy with the length of time taken to replace fence.
Summary of letter received- unhappy with the action taken to evict daughter Mixed message being received from HMA.
No support given regarding ASB complaint.

Unhappy Ashfield Homes will not grant Succession of tenancy.
Unhappy that calls have not been returned regarding arranging a mediation session. Also unhappy no action has been taken against neighbour who persistently verbally abuses complainant and other neighbours.
Summary of letter received- Tenant unhappy that 3 appointments were not kept regarding the updating of TV aerials.
Summary of complaint - Unhappy and claiming reimbursement due to the poor state of the roof at the property and the length of time taken to make repairs
Been on hold to repair phone number for 55 minutes and still on hold this is disgusting customer service.
Summary of complaint - Unhappy another person got offered a property in the chosen area when they already had a council property.
Summary of complaint - unhappy with the attitude of employee.
Tenant unhappy they received a letter from AHL regarding the condition of their property.
Felt they were pressured into taking tenancy, unhappy with the service received when ASB was reported.
Unhappy been removed from housing waiting list, have not received any updates letters.
Unhappy Bed was broken whilst Major Works were being undertaken at the property.
Unhappy with the attitude and conduct of staff member in helping arrange a meeting to discuss a move to more appropriate accommodation.
Unhappy that neighbours have been allowed security gates whilst the complainant has been refused permission.
Unhappy that repair to next door house has not been undertaken resulting in damage to complainant's property.
Unhappy recruitment packs were requested and not received.
Unhappy that the digital upgrade scheme did not include boosters to improve the existing television signal (in advance of the switchover).
Summary of letter received - unhappy offers of property were made when not in financial position to clear rent arrears.

Letter sent to wrong address letter regarded Direct Debit.
Summary of e-mail received- unhappy with a telephone call received regarding the "refusal" of loft insulation.
Following painting work paint splattered over drive way and other outside areas.
Summary of letter received- Tenant felt pressured into having a wet room whilst undergoing modernisation work rather than a bath. A bath would have been preferable as the tenant has a disabled son.
Summary of letter received-unhappy with the length of time taken to repair heating, would like recompense for damaged flooring.
Unhappy requested hedge cutting has not taken place.
Unhappy with the quality of workmanship.
Summary of e-mail - Unhappy with the number of repairs requested from the Inspector when property was inspected for a swap. Further to this very unhappy with the state of the property they moved into.
Summary of letter - ongoing problem with the rendering - been waiting over 12 months for works to be completed.
Letter was not sent out in joint tenant's name, only referred to the male tenant.
Summary of form received - heating has broken down on numerous occasions over the last few years. Currently left without heating and hot water in below freezing temperatures, is effecting health. Told it will take 5 days to repair.
Summary of form- 2 inches of ice on the inside of windows. Ashfield repairs can do nothing until 3rd Jan 201. Have a one year old child suffering with a cold this time is not soon enough.
Advised not to provide Doctors letter, unhappy subsequently asked for information.
Summary of from received - mother died the wake was to be held at mothers home, there was no heating a repair request was placed advising of the circumstances and asking that the operative ring before going to property to ensure somebody would be there.
Unhappy they were told some one would be out to resolve problem with cooker switch only to be told when chasing repair up it would be Wednesday.
Unhappy with the length of time waiting for a flat to become available.

<p>Would like to know when radiator will be fixed and boiler changed as it is over 30 years old and is not economical.</p>
<p>Unhappy that not notified in advance a visit would be made to property in addition to this no ID was shown at the time of the visit.</p>
<p>Unhappy with the attitude of staff member.</p>
<p>Summary of form-Unhappy with the length of time taken to conduct follow up work to skirting boards.</p>
<p>Summary of form- unhappy with the number of repair issues at the property and length of time taken.</p>
<p>Summary of e-mail - experiencing problems with damp and mould unhappy with the quality of treatment works and the length of time taken to resolve the problem.</p>
<p>A number of items were lost when property was moved from home into storage by AHL.</p>
<p>Summary of letter received-unhappy with the extent of repairs required to undertake mutual exchange. Unhappy with the manner of staff members.</p>
<p>Unhappy with the condition of door and the repair date given.</p>
<p>Summary - unhappy with the length of time taken and the lack of communication regarding neighbour complaint.</p>
<p>Unhappy housing application was cancelled even though a new form has been submitted.</p>
<p>Summary- unhappy with the length of time taken to make repair to heating.</p>
<p>Unhappy with the customer service received when making appointment to have loft insulation fitted.</p>
<p>Summary of form-unhappy with the length of time taken to unblock drain. Tenant felt that this should have been completed at first visit rather than being left for the problem to occur again.</p>
<p>Summary of complaint by LGO-permission after asking him to put the request in writing. It also refused to speak to him because he is not the tenant and then unreasonably refused his request to become a joint tenant with his wife.</p>
<p>Summary of e-mail received - unhappy that the HMA has not been returning phone calls feel little interest has been taken in the ASB case.</p>
<p>Summary of form received - Items bought off previous tenant and stored in outside shed were no longer there when new tenant moved in.</p>

Summary of form received- outgoing tenant unhappy that they were asked and did replace back door of property due to its condition even though this had been reported to AHL on several occasions. AHL have now fitted new back door to property.

A summary of the complaint process

