June 2024

Complaints Handling:
Escalation to Final Review and Compensation Payments

Background

The Scrutiny Panel reviewed why complaints were escalating to final review and why compensation payments were increasing. The review began in August 2023 and concluded in June 2024.

The panel examined complaint data, six case studies, final review letters and staff interviews. Customer surveys were not used because of the sensitive subject matter.

Goals

To identify avoidable causes of escalation, improve complaint handling and communication, and reduce repeat service failures and unnecessary compensation costs.

Objective

To understand why complaints progressed to final review or resulted in compensation payments and to recommend practical improvements that resolve issues earlier and strengthen the customer experience.

Scope

The Panel reviewed information relating to:

Complaints escalated to final review and/or resulting in compensation.
A sample of complaints from July 2022 to June 2023.
Six complaint case studies and current final review letters.
Complaint handling, compensation decisions and escalation causes.
Communication, record keeping and delivery of agreed actions.
Internal service standards and external contractor performance.

They also carried out interviews with Customer Experience, Contact Centre, Planning and Repairs colleagues.

Conclusions

- Final review complaints often began with an unresolved service failure, particularly a delayed or repeat repair.
- Poor communication, missed commitments and inaccurate or incomplete information were common escalation factors.
- Stage 1 timescale failures and actions not completed as agreed could lead to stage 2 escalation and higher compensation.

- External contractors were not always working to equivalent service standards or providing timely job updates.
- Complaint handlers faced high workloads, while final reviewers sometimes had to chase information and rebuild case timelines.
- Repeat contacts and warning phrases were not always recognised early enough to trigger intervention.
- Earlier identification, stronger ownership and consistent follow-through should reduce avoidable escalation.
- Customers need easier ways to provide evidence and clearer information about who to contact.
- Management checks and consistent training are needed across all regions.

Recommendations & Response

Recommendation	Response
Review the amounts of compensation at stages 1 and 2, with a view to reducing the need for stage 2.	Complete. We have looked at this as part of our teams review and as part of the Quality Assurance Teams review of stage 1 responses. We have to adhere to the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code though and if a customer requests an escalation then we are not able to refuse this.
Recommendation	**Response**
Address issues raised by staff.	Complete. In the six months since the interviews took place we have discussed the team structure with the team and also made changes to how the team operates. We have created an additional sub team for After Care and also have some additional Advisors in the Quality Assurance side of the team. Our recent colleague engagement survey didn't highlight any issues in the team. We have also recently reviewed the staffing structure and put forward proposals for the establishment budget. I don't feel there is any further follow up needed.

Recommendation	Response
Recruitment of people with the necessary skill set.	Complete. Correct diagnosis at the first point of call will support a Right First Time repair. All teams are working to recruit the right trades operatives to deliver the required work to our customers homes. The current shortage of skilled trades is being supported by Platform Housing Group with an apprenticeship scheme. All teams work closely with material suppliers to ensure the correct materials are ready when needed. Operational meetings take place monthly to establish any failings and work on resolving trends in failed repairs.
Recommendation	**Response**
Review the workload of Complaint Handlers, to prevent burnout and need for out of hours working.	Complete. In the six months since the interviews took place we have discussed the team structure with the team and also made changes to how the team operates. We have created an additional sub team for After Care and also have some additional Advisors in the Quality Assurance side of the team. Our recent colleague engagement survey didn't highlight any issues in the team. We have also recently reviewed the staffing structure and put forward proposals for the establishment budget. I don't feel there is any further follow up needed
Recommendation	**Response**
Ensure that all internal departments comply with SLA’s relating to complaints.	Complete. We have clear SLA's (service level agreements) for complaints that are in line with the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code. In July 2024 we ran sessions across the group on the Complaint Handling Code requirements. The Customer Experience team continually monitor this through the use of BI dashboards and will continually feedback issues

	through Customer Experience Business partners to business areas.
Recommendation	**Response**
Make sure that staff record all information relative to the complaint.	Complete. In February 2024 we went live with dynamics. There is now a case management system to record all notes and actions relating to a case on the system. All of the Customer Experience Team were trained on the new system. Customer Experience Managers have trained managers, Heads of Service and Directors that complete complaints outside of the team so there should be no issues with system use. This will continue to be monitored by the Quality Assurance sub team in the CX Team.
Recommendation	**Response**
Use all PHG resources to collect and record customer relevant data.	Complete. New Customer Relationship Management system and increased training with the Hub should address issues with recording of data going forward.
Recommendation	**Response**
Review staff authority levels and ensure that these are adhered to.	Complete. Staff authority levels are set across the business and cannot be adjusted by one department. We have an internal Service Level Agreement that requests for information will be responded to within 3 working days. Our complaints dashboard highlights where targets are not being met and cases are escalated to line management where necessary.
Recommendation	**Response**
Make sure all staff are putting the customer first.	Complete. The Platform Experience training programme is being rolled out across the group.

Recommendation	Response
Issue relevant SLAs to external contractors operating on behalf of PHG with penalties if necessary.	Complete. All work issued to contractor is managed through the service managers, who currently also line manage direct trades operatives. Over the course of this financial year, Property Care have budget to recruit a designated contracts manager. This manager will have closer Contractor management responsibilities. PHG are currently within the scoping stage of a new project to develop or source a fully automated contractor portal.
Recommendation	**Response**
After considering the implementation of the any or all of the above carry out a review of the Compensation policy and amend as needed.	Complete. The Compensation Policy was reviewed in 2026 and is in line with the Housing Ombudsman Service guidance and will be reviewed in line with the cycle of policies.
Recommendation	**Response**
Implement changes, policy and procedures, to reduce the number of cases and reduce costs.	Complete. We have to act in line with the Housing Ombusman code and if a customer wants to log a complaint or escalate a complaint we can't stop this. We are going to be doing a pilot with Housing Operations in Quarter 3 around how information for the formal complaint investigation is provided in a bid to reduce escalations
Recommendation	**Response**
Introduce a year-on-year reduction percentage.	Complete. It is not possible to introduce year on year targets to reduce complaints as all complaints have to be handled in line with the Housing Ombudsman code.

Recommendation	Response
Make call operators aware of phrases that could lead to escalation, e.g. ‘this is my 6th call about this’ or ‘it’s been repaired 4 times’.	Complete. We talk about identifying complaints and identifying dissatisfaction in the Platform Experience training and put a lot of focus on active listening. There is also guidance on what a complaint is and what it is not. Our Customer Experience Business Partner has also done some complaints training for the Hub advisors.

Recommendation	Response
Consider accruing a cost for each Final review case.	Complete. We have introduced a final review team during 2026 bringing in colleagues with the right skills and expertise to complete reviews. As part of this we will be looking at a costing this area

Recommendation	Response
The email that is sent to the external contractor containing a link that the contractor should complete and submit to confirm the job is complete, should be mandatory for the contractor to complete, prior to payment for works.	Complete. The new contract manager will be ensuring contractors are updating the manual portal. PHG are currently within the scoping stage of a new project to develop or source a fully automated contractor portal.

Recommendation	Response
All colleagues should understand the maintenance policy.	Complete. Our maintenance policy is available to all colleagues on our staff intranet, it is also included as part of the reading for new colleague inductions. Updates and changes to the policy are circulated to colleagues via our internal news site (Viva Engage).