

## **Complaints Performance 2023/24**

### **Introduction**

Welcome to our first published Complaints Performance Report, this outlines our performance dealing with complaints under the Complaints Ombudsman - Complaints Handling Code 2024 as adopted by our Board.

The report reflects the excellent performance between April 2023 and April 2024 in delivering to our tenants our Issues Raised to Complaints process.

At Sustain, we take issues and complaints raised by tenants as a key performance matter, this is reported to our Board and its Tenant Engagement and Empowerment Committee on a quarterly basis. Not only are matters dealt with efficiently and in a sympathetic fashion, but we also take the learnings from each case to inform and improve our service delivery and processes. The lessons and learning are also incorporated in our Tenant Engagement Strategy to ensure dealing with complaints is fully resourced and reported upon.

I am pleased to report that Sustain has bucked the national complaints trend in 2023/24 with the number of formal complaints much reduced from 2022/23. This being down to our tenant centric approach and dealing with all issues raised with the same level of care as if they are formal complaints. This allows for a faster resolution of matters before they turn into formal complaints. Although we deal with a specialised tenant population, with a wide variety of complex needs, our support and property inspections process allow us to contact and engage with our tenants to ensure they have a voice and can raise issues before they escalate.

### **Performance**

We at Sustain operate under the Complaints Handling Code, which was introduced by the Complaint Ombudsman in 2020 and updated in 2024. This is centred upon giving tenants a formal process to lodge complaints and have issues dealt with in an open and transparent fashion. We operate and comply with this code in all matters including; clarity, the two stage rule, and publishing of our self assessment against the Code in our tenant sections of our website.

Compliance with the code Requirements Required outcomes are as follows;

Section 1 - Definition of a complaint 5 5 (100%)

Section 2 - Exclusions 5 5 (100%)

Section 3- Accessibility and awareness 7 7 (100%)

Section 4 - Complaint handling staff 3 3 (100%)

Section 5 - Complaint handling process 15 15 (100%)

Section 6 - Complaint stages 18 20 (90%)

Section 7 - Putting things right 4 4 (100%)

Section 8 - Self-assessment, reporting and compliance 5 5 (100%)

Section 8 - Scrutiny and oversight: continuous learning & improvement 8 8 (100%)

Total 70 72 (97%)

As a Registered Provider of Social Housing, we are also governed by the Consumer Standards – which also ensure that tenants have recourse to complain and have a voice. These standards also ensure that we maintain standards in terms of Health & Safety Compliance, Damp and Mould Prevention, and all our homes meet the Decent Homes Standard. The standard also has clear expectations that we listen and are engaged with our tenants. This also requires that we survey tenants at least once a year on key issues including complaints and satisfaction. As a consequence of compliance with this standard, many issues that might lead to a complaint are mitigated and controlled, so helping to reduce our complaints levels.

In 2023/24, we received 4 Stage One Complaints leading to 2 Stage Complaints, a reduction compared to the previous year. We dealt with all stage one complaints within agreed timeframes, stage two complaints were resolved outside of set code timeframes due to the complex issues in each case.

These Complaints relate 100% to the root cause - support provision issues. We have learnt from these complaints – developing new reporting software which develops, and in real time monitors support plans and support activities given to Tenants.

It should be noted that 89.2% of tenants who brought up issues and complaints were satisfied with the process.

We operate a two-stage complaint process and, from our review of our performance, we've seen that by listening and understanding issues raised by tenants, delivering the correct actions, and making sure we learn from our failings, most complaints are resolved satisfactorily at the first stage. It's important that if tenants are unhappy with the service they've received from us, we're open to listening to their feedback, believing their stories and are honest about where we got it wrong.

All complaints made have been listened to and acted upon, none of the complaints we received were upheld, which we believe highlights our transparent and open approach to complaints handling.

At every stage of our complaints process we ensure our tenants are aware of their right to contact the Housing Ombudsman. We co-operate with the Housing Ombudsman in any reviews or enquiries they have had. For the year 2023 -24 they reviewed our processes and found them to be robust, and they are at present reviewing a stage two complaint. We have no cases of maladministration to report.

A key focus for the Housing Ombudsman is to identify key issues that impact tenants, and share the learning to promote good practice. We take every opportunity to review this learning and see how we can use it to adapt our own approach to complaint handling and improve our tenants experiences. To further this, we have a Tenant Engagement Strategy which outlines activities, the resources required, and outcomes expected. Data on and learning from complaints is fed

into the Tenant Engagement and Empowerment Committee, the Tenant Forum and the Board. These three bodies, monitor performance and direct actions to improve delivery, this includes

- engagement with the Birmingham City Exempt Accommodation Quality Scheme and Charter Mark, under which we have been graded Silver.
- the development of our unique Issues to complaint system, which tracks and deals with issues as they are raised mitigating these developing into full complaint. This being operated by a dedicated Complaint Officer,
- the roll out of full tenant surveys and engagement activities to all tenants to allow them an independent voice.

It should be noted that the complaints system operates side by side with our safeguarding systems given the complex support needs of our tenants.

*Shane Egan*

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**Transformation Director**