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| **Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report** | |
| **To:** | **Public Document** |
| **Prepared by:** | **Corin Fletcher Head of Housing and Support** |
| **Department:** | **Housing and Support** |
| **Date:** | **April 2023-2024** |
| **Status:** | **For information, review and learning** |

**Introduction**

YMCA Worcestershire (YMCAW) is a small charity and registered provider offering 211 units of accommodation, supported by a small central services team. Of these, 85 units are designated as supported accommodation, while the remaining 126 serve as general needs units. The accommodation is spread across two locations: Worcester, with 47 units, and Redditch, which houses 164 units.

Our vision is to build an inclusive future where everyone can achieve their full potential and live in secure, supportive housing. We recognise that we do not always meet this standard, so it is crucial for our customers to tell us when we fall short, enabling us to learn and improve.

As a small housing association, we do not have a customer service or complaints team, but we do have a small, dedicated team who prioritise tenant welfare and are committed to continuous improvement. We handle all complaints fairly, professionally, and promptly, as they offer valuable insights for service enhancement.

In line with the new Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code, we are pleased to build this report and share our complaints performance for the 23/24 fiscal year and outline the actions taken. We acknowledge that the processes for storing complaints records and data was a priority change.

2023 -2024 highlighted the changed needed which over the course of the year we have implemented and believe our systems and processes are now well-refined. We are confident that next year’s report will clearly demonstrate the progress we have made. We expect to see substantial improvements in our data and record-keeping, and the transformations we have undergone make us optimistic that the upcoming report will highlight our advancements and reflect a strong culture of continuous improvement driven by feedback.

**Background**

YMCAW actively encourages feedback from tenants, whether it be a complaint, compliment, a report of anti-social behaviour (ASB), or a service user request. All feedback is handled in accordance with our recently updated Complaints Policy and is recorded in the new complaints spreadsheet.

The Housing Ombudsman released Complaint Handling Code in July 2020.

On 1st April 2024, the Government’s new Social Housing Regulation Act came into force, designed to deliver the aims of the 2021 Social Housing White Paper around strengthening consumer standards, improving resident involvement and tackling poorly performing landlords. The Act further strengthens the powers of the Regulator for Social Housing and the Housing Ombudsman; to provide more support to residents and ensure housing providers are managing feedback effectively.

On 1st April 2024, also, The Housing Ombudsman Complaint Code was altered to a two-stage process and became statutory.

YMCAW Complaints Policy was initially re-written in February 2024, and was reviewed, and updated in August 2024 following a restructuring within the organisation. The policy aligns with the Housing Ombudsman's Complaints Code and incorporates a two-stage complaints process. In the first stage, line managers and the operational team manage complaints to ensure prompt and effective resolution. If the issue remains unresolved, the second stage involves senior managers conducting a thorough investigation to address the complaint comprehensively.

If a complainant remains dissatisfied with the outcome after these two stages, our policy provides guidance on escalating the complaint to the independent Housing Ombudsman. The Ombudsman will assess whether there has been any maladministration or service failure and may issue a Complaint Handling Failure Order (CFHO) if necessary.

**Complaints for 2023-2024**

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| **Complaint Element** | **Number** | **Percentage** |
| **Total** Number of Complaints | 10 | 100 |
| Number of complaints from **supported** accommodation | 6 | 60 |
| Number of complaints from **General needs** accommodation | 4 | 40 |
| Types of complaints landlord has **refused** to accept | 0 | 0 |
| The service improvements made because of the **learning** from complaints | 3 | 30 |
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| Findings of **non-compliance** with the code by the Ombudsman | 0 | 0 |
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| Complaints **acknowledged** within 5 days | 10 | 100 |
| Complaints **responded** to within 10 days | 10 | 100 |
| Complaints resolved at **stage 1** | 10 | 100 |
| Complaints escalated to **stage 2** | 0 | 0 |
| Complaints Referred to **Ombudsman** | 0 | 0 |
| How many complaints have been identified as needing greater **scrutiny** at the time of investigation | 2 | 20 |
|  | | |
| Complaints about **maintenance** or cleaning quality | 3 | 30 |
| Complaints about **service**/process | 2 | 20 |
| Complaints about **staff** | 3 | 30 |
| Other with no category | 2 | 20 |
|  | | |
| Complaints by **department:**  Maintenance and cleaning  Support  Housing  Management  Contractors | 3  3  4  0  0 | 30  30  40  0  0 |

**Main Trends**

* The data set of complaints was too small to identify any significant trends or patterns.
* There was some overlap indicating that administration and investigative support for tenants could have been improved. The notes did not provide sufficient assurance that all actions had been widely considered. This suggests a potential need for enhancing the complaints handling.

**You said, we did!**

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| **Rent statements were not detailed enough** | Designed a new rent statement letter, with more information, more contact details to reach out to get support, designed a new housing management system to provide better and more regular statements. Roll out for this will be September 2025, the financial elements will roll out in April 2025. |
| **Rent to be explained in a more grown-up way** | A new role has been created of tenancy liaison, with the purpose of blending support skills and money management skills to ensure tenants are better supported. A rent surgery is now held weekly to promote conversations, build stronger tenant relationships and support with rent. |
| **We want more common room space** | For 4 of our 6 projects we have developed new or improved community space. In one project we had to re-purpose the community space as an office but have now used other storage space as community space. That is 5 of our 6 projects with community space upgrades since receiving this complaint! |
| **Maintenance staff leaves footprints** | PPE has been provided to prevent shoes marking floors. |
| **Not enough check ins (supported accommodation)** | Daily contact sheet recording vulnerable tenants, support plans on regular review, risk management plans on regular review and tracked by a new spreadsheet. A new housing management system has been designed, to roll out in September 2025 that tracks support, actions, logs and creates reports to identify any residents that may not have had recent support. More support workers available, support staff with specialisms so residents are more likely to have their needs met, less agency use, better rota planning. More planned than reactive support is happening. More community events and group sessions. |

**Learning for the service**

Over the past year, YMCAW has experienced a period of significant change and growth, setting the stage for an exciting future where these advancements will propel the organisation to new heights of performance and service. As a small charity, YMCAW has historically faced challenges due to limited resources, particularly within the housing and support team. However, the past 18 months have seen a focused effort to enhance the services offered to our tenants and to create a more efficient and effective workplace.

At the heart of these changes is our commitment to our tenants, who remain central to everything we do. Recognizing areas for improvement, YMCAW has undertaken several key initiatives that have had a direct impact on frontline operational services. These improvements include:

* **IT Enhancements**: In response to numerous service requests about Wi-Fi and staff access issues, we have implemented faster Wi-Fi connections, installed additional booster boxes, upgraded servers, and introduced Office 365 along with advanced security features like multi-factor authentication. These upgrades have significantly improved Wi-Fi access for tenants, particularly those who previously struggled with connectivity, and have also enhanced staff efficiency, speed, and reliability in accessing necessary resources.
* **Health and Safety**: With the addition of a full-time, qualified Health and Safety Manager and a new online platform supported by Peninsula Health and Safety, YMCAW is making great strides towards creating the safe and nurturing housing environment we envision for our tenants.
* **Support and Housing**: A major restructuring has increased management hours by 122%, ensuring that each location now has a dedicated manager. Additionally, we have expanded our support staff to include specialists in mental health, substance use, life skills, complex needs, and money management. This has allowed us to offer more tailored support to meet the diverse needs of our tenants. We have also extended our service offering to general needs tenants, aiming to foster a stronger sense of community and provide additional support to these tenants.
* **Community Voice**: Listening to feedback from our tenants, we learned that while specific complaints and dissatisfaction were not being voiced in our general needs units, there was low engagement and limited positivity. To address this, under the new structure, we have significantly increased our presence in these units. We are working to enhance resident panels, making ourselves more visible with more personnel visiting the sites, offering more drop-in sessions, and sharing our contact details more widely. By building stronger relationships with tenants, we aim to foster a more positive and engaged community.
* **Repairs and Maintenance**: Understanding that efficient communication and tracking of repairs are crucial to tenant satisfaction, we have redefined the Asset Manager role to be non-operational, allowing for more management support. A new Maintenance Administrator position has been created to provide tenants with a single point of contact, and we have introduced a new repairs spreadsheet to track job completion and collect tenant feedback. This system, supported by a new Repairs Policy, has given the team greater control and confidence in meeting repair timelines, and assuring tenant satisfaction.
* **Housing Management System**: A crucial upgrade, the new housing management system, which has been designed by the housing team over the past three months, is set to roll out in September 2024. This cloud-based system will centralise all information, improve communications, and enhance progress tracking for tenant support. Additionally, the rent modules of this system will be implemented in the fiscal year starting April 2025, further improving rent management, and ensuring that we can efficiently assess and meet the needs of all our tenants.

These changes reflect YMCAW’s commitment to continuous improvement and our dedication to serving our tenants to the best of our abilities. A long distance has been travelled but we identify this is merely the start of the journey, the year ahead promises to bring these developments to full fruition, driving YMCAW forward to be an even better landlord. We have learnt so much from conversations with our tenants and aim to remain open and reflective so we can continue to make changes to best meet the needs of the tenants.

**Learning for complaint handling**

Over the past year, YMCAW has taken significant steps to learn from and grow because of the complaints received, or rather, the lack thereof. One of the most striking observations since improving our complaints handling process is that there simply have not been enough complaints to effectively identify trends. With only ten complaints recorded across 211 units, it became evident that this low volume of feedback was insufficient to provide the insights necessary for continuous improvement. The complaints code encourages a culture that celebrates complaints, seeing them as opportunities to learn and improve. However, it became clear that more needed to be done to foster this culture within YMCAW.

To address this, we made several critical changes throughout the year aimed at enhancing our service offerings, improving our complaints handling processes, and increasing the volume of feedback. Initially, training on complaints handling was delivered to all staff, and a new complaints spreadsheet was introduced. We hoped these measures would be sufficient, but by Q2 it was apparent that the anticipated increase in feedback had not materialised, indicating deeper issues were at play.

Consultations with staff, observations, and conversations with tenants, particularly in general needs units, revealed that the low presence of staff, tenant disengagement, and tenants feeling unheard were significant factors affecting the complaints process. In response, we implemented a restructuring that increased management hours by 122%, with the goal of improving administrative delegation and capturing more complaints.

Another challenge was the accessibility and effectiveness of our complaints tracking system. Initially, only management had access to the tracking spreadsheet, which led to issues such as duplicate records on local PCs, loss of central oversight, and complications when staff members were absent or left the organisation. To address these IT limitations, we made several key upgrades, most notably the introduction of a new housing management system with improved access and features. This system is expected to significantly enhance our ability to track and manage complaints more effectively.

To tackle tenant disengagement, we implemented several initiatives, including rent surgeries, drop-in sessions, a resident newsletter, and the encouragement of resident representative panels. These efforts aimed to build stronger relationships with tenants and create more opportunities for them to voice their concerns and share dissatisfaction.

Recognising that relying solely on designated complaint officers was insufficient, we also shifted responsibility for complaint tracking to all team members. Under the new handover template, every staff member is tasked with handing over all compliments and complaints, ensuring no feedback is lost. This change has already led to a significant increase in the number of complaints received, and staff have reported a greater sense of engagement and more meaningful conversations with tenants.

In retrospect, the systems we had in place, while capable of capturing direct complaints, were not effectively encouraging feedback. This resulted in a smaller number of recorded complaints than needed to drive meaningful improvement. However, YMCAW has made substantial changes over the past year to address these issues and ensure that we do better moving forward. Although there were delays in rolling out the restructured processes, which limited their impact on the 2023-2024 complaints, we are already seeing significant improvements in 2024-2025.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, the experience of 2023-2024 has highlighted that our complaints culture was not a priority, our processes needed development, and broader issues such as tenant engagement required targeted efforts. Despite the lack of significant complaints during this period, which ordinarily is a positive, it was clear that a healthier complaints culture was needed among both tenants and staff. YMCAW has endeavoured over the past year to make significant changes, and it is anticipated that these efforts will make a substantial positive difference in enhancing complaints handling for 2024-2025.

**Actions for 2024-2025**

* Housing management system roll out, planned for September 2025
* The new data collection is more efficient, for 2024-2025 more information can be discussed at Board level, complaints will have a larger part of Board reports, board meetings and Housing Committee meetings

**Board Comment**

*“The Board of YMCA Worcestershire is committed to ensuring that our procedure for dealing with complaints is clear, accessible and easily understood and that all complaints are followed up empathetically, promptly and fairly.  If we have got something wrong, then we want to make it right to the best of our ability.*

*The Board regularly reviews any complaints data and asks questions of the Executive team”.*