

# **Sutton Housing Society**

## **“Grumbles and Groans”**

### **Sutton Housing Society annual complaints summary**

**(April 2023 to March 2024)**

April 2024

## Introduction

As the Member Responsible for Complaints (MRC), it is my pleasure to introduce our first public report relating to the grumbles and groans (complaints) received by the team at Sutton Housing Society (SHS) between April 2023 and March 2024.

The new consumer standard, introduced by the Regulator for Social Housing, requires all social housing landlords to produce and publish an annual report detailing complaints received, outlining any issues of non-compliance with the Housing Ombudsman's complaints handling code, any service improvements introduced because of lessons learnt from the groans and grumbles received – and of course, a suitable improvement action plan, where necessary.

Overall, it is a positive picture; during this reporting period, we received 11 service requests and 5 complaints. There were no common themes, although all complaints were related to various property services. This is not unexpected, particularly as this is the one service that nearly all residents use.

At Sutton Housing Society, the Complaints Officer role is assigned to the Operations Director. This is because the Operations Director role has good oversight of the services provided to residents, understands the consumer regulations and what is required, can influence outcomes, and ensure that suitable remedies are in place where at all possible.

Whilst the ratio of complaints to compliments is low at 1:29 (for every one complaint received in 2023 / 2024, we received just over 29 compliments), receiving 5 complaints in one year is unusual for us and we explore the possible reasons for this in the report.

I was appointed as the MRC in February 2024, and I look forward to working closely with the wider team to ensure a positive culture relating to managing complaints and to learning from these, while improving services to all residents where we can.

Alistair Auty  
Board Chair & Member Responsible for Complaints

## Executive summary

The Regulator for Social Housing's Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard is clear that the management data tenant satisfaction measures relating to handling complaints (CH01 and CH02) must reflect the Housing Ombudsman Service's new 2024 Complaints Handling Code, introduced in April 2024. The code sets several expectations for managing and addressing complaints and we are confident that we comply with these requirements.

A complaint is defined as: *'an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the landlord, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting a resident or group of residents.'*

A service request is defined as: *a request from a resident to the landlord requiring action to be taken to put something right.*

In the 2023 / 2024 financial year, there were 11 service requests received. These service requests received relate to:

- a rent increase following a change in circumstances
- repairs (x2)
- service from a team member
- a communal lounge de-clutter
- delays with a shower installation
- resident App
- car parking
- tree contractor
- delay with scheme Wi-Fi upgrade
- housing application

Whilst all the service requests have been addressed. One of the repair service requests did escalate to a stage 1 complaint.

In the 2023 / 2024 financial year, 5 complaints were received. These complaints relate to:

- heating at Margaret House
- water pressure and heating at Old Brewery House
- clearance of the communal lounge at Griffiths Close
- cleaning at Cloverdale Court
- attitude of a Sutton Housing Society employee

All the complaints have been investigated and are now closed. One of the complaints was escalated to stage 2, despite being upheld. This was because the resident was not satisfied with the actions proposed to fully address their concerns. At Stage 2, the Chief Executive was involved and met with the resident to discuss and agree the resolution / way forward.

The main lesson learnt from these complaints and service requests relate to communications. We need to ensure that our team keep an open and positive communication channel with residents, providing information in a timely way. This will ensure that residents know we are working to address their issues and that we are open and transparent with whatever the situation is.

## Service requests in 2023 / 2024

The 11 service requests referred to in the executive summary, are outlined below:

Site	Issue	Contact method	Result	Time to resolve	Additional comments
Griffiths Close	Delays with shower installation	Telephone	Water pressure issues addressed	1-working day	
Griffiths Close	Communal lounge clearance	Telephone	No further action as residents involved & advised of clearance taking place	1-working day	
Norman House	Attitude of SHS employee	In person	No further action as resident wished to draw a line under the situation	5-working days	
Margaret House	Heating to be on for extra time	Telephone	Heating times were reviewed	3-working days	Heating improvement project is part of planned maintenance work for 2024 / 2025
Norman House	Outstanding repairs	In person	Additional communication with resident as the resident has delayed repair works	10-working days	
Tull Street	Rent increase due to tenancy change	Email	Additional detailed explanation provided	2-working days	
Dorothy Pettingell House	Delays with full repair being carried out	In person	Explanation and timescales provided	2 working days	Escalated to Stage 1 complaint
Norman House	Noisy notifications from App	Resident App	Explanation & support given to manage notifications	5-working days	
Housing applicant	Unhappy with request	Email	Appeal managed by	8 working days	

	for additional information to assess application		Operations Director. There are valid reasons for the request made to provide additional information		
Trickett House	Delay to scheme wi-fi upgrade	In person	Resolution being sought / additional technical information required		Initial response given and regular communication with resident to keep up to date with progress
Peppermint Court	Tree contractor not on site as expected	Resident App	Contractor was on site but unable to carry out work due to the very wet weather. He waited this out and completed the work	Same day	
Nairn Court	Non-residents using scheme car park	Resident App	Permits introduced		Parking issues are being monitored

Of the 11 service requests, six resulted in the need to provide additional information, two where no further action was needed once the service request was addressed, and three service requests resulted in positive actions to resolve the concerns.

### Complaints in 2023 / 2024 – Stage 1

The five complaints received are outlined below, with a summary of their resolution. From these complaints, two were upheld. All but one of the complaints were immediately recorded as complaints and were not service requests in 2023 / 2024:

Site	Issue	Contact method	Result	Time to resolve	Complaint outcome
Old Brewery House	Intermittent issues with water pressure & heating	Email	Temporary repairs /actions carried out. Heating is part of planned maintenance work in 2024 / 2025	4-working days	Upheld
Margaret House	Heating survey is unnecessary	Telephone	Survey went ahead; heating times changed. Heating is part of planned maintenance work in 2024 / 2025	3-working day	Not upheld
Cloverdale Court	Cleaning concerns in communal areas	Email	Cleaning is as per contract. Increase to specification is required	8- working days	Not upheld
Dorothy Pettingell House	Delays with full repair being carried out	Phone call	Work took place whilst complaint was investigated. Redecoration carried out as requested by resident. Cost of dehumidifiers & loss of facilities compensated	2-working days	Upheld
Old Brewery House	Attitude of SHS employee	Email	Resident was “assertive” employee said “aggressive”; agreed there are different perspectives. Apology given by Operations Director for upset caused to resident	13-working days (additional time agreed with resident due to annual leave)	Not upheld

All five of the complaints relate to property related services and all could have been resolved with better communications, whether the complaint was upheld or not.

## Complaints in 2023 / 2024 – Stage 2

The complaint below was escalated from a stage 1 complaint to a stage 2 complaint as the resident was not satisfied with the actions proposed to remedy the heating issue and with the timescale.

Site	Issue	Contact method	Result	Time to resolve	Complaint outcome
Old Brewery House	History of intermittent issues with water pressure & heating	Email	Met with resident and shared all information relating to reports of issues at this property. Agreed actions to support the heating project as part of planned maintenance work in 2024 / 2025	11-working days (appointment was on day 11 due to the festive period)	Upheld (at stage 1)

In the response letter and at the meeting with the resident to discuss their stage 2 complaint, details and reports of incidents relating to the water pressure and heating at the property were shared with the resident. More detailed actions were agreed, such as sharing the consultant's findings of issues relating to the communal heating system.

## Compliance with the Housing Ombudsman's Complaints Handling Code 2024

A self-assessment has been carried out during April 2024, of our compliance with the new complaints handling code, which is now a regulatory requirement and part of the new consumer standards with the Regulator for Social Housing.

The self-assessment shows compliance across all areas of the complaints handling code, which covers:

- Definition of a complaint
- Exclusions
- Accessibility and awareness
- Complaint handling staff
- Complaint handling process
- Complaint stages (1 and 2)
- Putting things right
- Self-assessment, reporting and compliance

The self-assessment and a copy of this report was issued to the Housing Ombudsman at the end of May 2024, following approval from the Board and in compliance with the requirement to do so within 12-weeks of our financial year end.

## Tenant Satisfaction Measures

There are three key measures relating to complaints that we monitor and report on:

- TSM09: Proportion of respondents who report making a complaint in the last 12 months who are satisfied with their landlord's approach to complaints handling
- CH01: Number of stage 1 complaints per 1,000 homes and  
Number of stage 2 complaints per 1,00 homes
- CH02: Stage 1 complaints response time (as per complaints handling code) and Stage 2 complaints response time (as per complaints handling code).

These measures are calculated based on the number of occupied homes (480), rather than our total number of homes (502) as we have a number of homes (deliberately) left vacant, mainly due to our active development programme.

Our results are:

	Result
TSM09 (perception survey)	72%
CH01 – stage 1	1%
CH01 – stage 2	0.2%
CH02 - stage 1	100%
CH02 – stage 2	100%

## Lessons learned

Our independent heating surveys undertaken as part of our 100% stock condition survey, indicates that some of our communal heating systems are due for replacement in several years. However, two of our eight communal heating systems experienced some issues during 2023 / 2024, which resulted in two stage 1 complaints and one of these escalating to stage 2.

The lesson learned is to ensure that we review our day-to-day repairs and maintenance issues for any reoccurring matters such as an increase in the number of communal boiler breakdowns and to ensure a plan is in place to address concerns before they escalate further.

Our property team were without a key team member due to illness from May 2023 to November 2023. This person spent 90% of their working time at the schemes and they managed queries from residents on site, instigated additional repairs etc. Following their (planned) retirement in December 2023, having recruited a replacement, this person decided the role was not for them and left the organisation in early January 2024.

This meant that from January 2024 until into the new financial year 2024 / 2025, there continued to be a key vacancy. Whilst the role has been recruited to once more, the new person will not be in post until mid-June 2024.

Whilst there were interim arrangements in place (an external company covered the statutory compliance work and the Asset Manager took on all other aspects of day-to-day repairs and voids), as the months went on, we can see some issues with our service and communications with residents appearing.

The lesson learned is that whilst it is challenging to recruit, further consideration should have been given to employing an interim member of the team directly to manage day to day issues



and void works. The team, and the service, suffered because of the staff absence (and the subsequent vacancy).

The key lesson learned relates to communications. All of the complaints and most of the service requests could have been avoided, or managed more positively, with more timely communications.

Another lesson learnt is that complaints made are not personal. The team takes pride in the service to our residents. As a small team, when complaints are received, it can feel more personal, although it is about resolving a particular issue.

Ensuring the wider team understands the new consumer standards relating to complaints and how their work can influence and impact this area of our service is essential.

### **Grumbles and Groans improvement action plan 2024 / 2025**

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Improvement required</b>	<b>Timescale</b>	<b>Lead</b>
Review our day-to-day repairs and maintenance issues for common themes/ areas of concern	Carry out this exercise at least annually, in October, to pick up any issues for inclusion in the following year's budgets	31.10.24	Asset Manager
Key vacancies that impact frontline resident services	Consideration should be given to the impact of the vacancy on frontline service delivery	As vacancies arise	All line managers
Communications with residents	It is essential that residents are kept updated and informed about any issues outstanding such as repairs, improvements etc.	30.04.24	Operations Director
Taking complaints personally	This is about how people feel when complaints are made about an individual and or their service	30.04.24	Operations Director
Understanding the consumer standards	The wider team need to understand the new standards and expectations	31.05.24	Operations Director