

Extract of minutes from Crawley Borough Council's Cabinet meeting – 4 September 2024

Item 6 Crawley Homes Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report and Statutory Complaints Handling Code

Housing Portfolio

To consider report CH/208 of the Head of Crawley Homes, which was referred to the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission on 2 September 2024.

Additional documents:

Appendix A - Crawley Homes Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report and Statutory Complaints Handling Code and Self Assessment , item 6.

Recommendations

That the Cabinet:

- a. approves the Crawley Homes Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report and Statutory Complaints Handling Code (appendix A) for adoption and subsequent publication, with subsequent complaint reports and complaints performance information being published in the Councillors' Information Bulletin (as agreed in 2015).
- b. delegates authority to the Head of Crawley Homes, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing and the Leader of the Council, to approve the response, submission and publication of the report online, alongside the report and compliance with statutory code. (*Generic Delegation 7 will be used to enact this recommendation*).
- c. delegates authority to the Head of Crawley Homes, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing, to make minor amendments to the Crawley Homes Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report and Statutory Complaints Handling Code as further changes are introduced, including as and when legislation and statutory guidance are forthcoming. (*Generic Delegation 7 will be used to enact this recommendation*).

Reasons for the Recommendations

To comply with the Housing Ombudsman's Statutory Complaints Handling Code, as set out in 4.1 of report CH/208.

Minutes:

The Cabinet Member for Housing presented report CH/208 and associated appendix of the Head of Crawley Homes. The report sought approval for the new Crawley Homes Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report along with the associated Statutory Complaints Handling Code. It was noted that it was a requirement by the Housing Ombudsman that those documents be produced, approved and then published on the Council's website. Councillor Irvine informed the Cabinet that part of the recommendation was to publish, via the Councillors' Information Bulletin, quarterly

Housing complaints data and he commented that he would be pushing officers to make this information more readily available, even potentially monthly in due course. Councillor Ayling presented the Overview and Scrutiny Commission's comments on the report to the Cabinet following consideration of the matter at its meeting on 2 September 2024, which included:

- It was noted that the Housing Ombudsman's Complaints Handling Code became mandatory from 1 April this year.
 - It was noted that there had been more complaints in different areas of the town. This was in the latter half of last year and as a result of staffing issues, together with publicity in the sector, especially around damp and mould.
 - It was noted that complaints can be an opportunity to highlight factors in order to provide a good service. Action plans and complaints were looked at monthly to ensure improvement.
 - The Tenants and Leaseholders Action Panel was thanked for the input and feedback, particularly into the Complaints Service Improvement Plan.
- Councillors Jones, Nawaz, C Mullins and S Mullins spoke as part of the discussion on the report.

RESOLVED

That the Cabinet:

a) approves the Crawley Homes Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report and Statutory Complaints Handling Code (appendix A) for adoption and subsequent publication, with subsequent complaint reports and complaints performance information being published in the Councillors' Information Bulletin (as agreed in 2015).

b) delegates authority to the Head of Crawley Homes, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing and the Leader of the Council, to approve the response, submission and publication of the report online, alongside the report and compliance with statutory code.

(Generic Delegation 7 will be used to enact this recommendation).

c) delegates authority to the Head of Crawley Homes, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing, to make minor amendments to the Crawley Homes Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report and Statutory Complaints Handling Code as further changes are introduced, including as and when legislation and statutory guidance are forthcoming.

(Generic Delegation 7 will be used to enact this recommendation).

Reasons for the Recommendations

To comply with the Housing Ombudsman's Statutory Complaints Handling Code, as set out in 4.1 of report [CH/208](#).

To consider report CH/208 of the Head of Crawley Homes.

Minutes:

The Commission considered report [CH/208](#) and associated [appendix](#) of the Head of Crawley Homes.

The Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 (the Act) empowered the Housing Ombudsman to issue a code of practice about the procedures members of the Scheme should have in place for considering complaints. The statutory Code took effect from 1 April 2024 and the Ombudsman believes all landlords must comply with all provisions in the Code as this represents best practice in complaint handling.

In accordance with the Code, providers must publish an annual complaints performance and service improvement report, including the completed self-assessment of compliance with the Code. The service improvement plan brought together a number of separate strands of work and plans, some of which had been in place and evolving since 2022, as well as newer actions arising from more recent complaints and reviews. Once approved, the report must be published on the landlord's website, along with the governing body's response to the report to be published alongside this.

During the discussion with the Cabinet Member for Housing, the Head of Crawley Homes and the Crawley Homes Policy and Engagement Manager, the following comments were expressed:

- It was noted that the Housing Ombudsman's Complaints Handling Code became statutory from 1 April 2024. It included additional requirements for scrutiny and oversight and detailed the effects and the ways in which Crawley Homes can liaise with tenants, together with the processes and mechanisms that the service had for addressing and monitoring complaints on a regular basis.
- It was acknowledged that there had been more complaints in the South in terms of repairs compared to the West of the town. Complaints handling performance had dipped last year and had resulted from staffing issues during that period, together with more publicity across the sector from the Housing Ombudsman, particularly around damp and mould, which had also impacted demand for inspections and surveying generally and leaving reduced capacity for complaint handling as a result. As part of the new restructure within the Responsive Repairs Service there would be a Complaints and Disrepair Manager that would primarily deal with stage 1 complaints, disrepair and assist with stage 2 complaints where appropriate. It was envisaged that the percentage of level one complaints completed within timescale would increase; the senior management team within Crawley Homes was proactively managing performance around this and ensuring that the correct culture was in place that placed compliant handling as a priority.
- Recognition that data was continually being analysed and systems issues were being addressed. This included enhanced training and a need around confidence with getting remedies right at stage 1 (as they underpin what happens with stage 2). It was noted that complaints can be an opportunity to highlight factors in order to provide a good service. Detailed service and action plans and complaints were analysed monthly to ensure continued improvement, along with quarterly reports.
- Clarification was sought and obtained on the unreasonable/vexatious complainers and potential trends.

- Confirmation was provided on the classification of formal complaints from the public, as opposed to those received as 'member enquiries'.
- Details provided on the offer of financial and non-financial compensation. In some cases compensation may be justified, however the evidence and merit of awarding compensation would always be evaluated. A new compensation policy was being drafted which would offer appropriate remedies and compensation in a fair and justified approach.
- The Tenants and Leaseholders Action Panel (TLAP) was commended for the scrutinising, input and continued feedback, particularly into the Complaints Service Improvement Plan.

RESOLVED

That the Commission noted the report and requested that the views expressed during the debate, were fed back to the Cabinet through the Commission's Comment sheet.