



Housing Engagement Board

Quarterly Meeting

20 September 2022 – 13:00 to 15:00

Agenda Pack

Housing Engagement Board Agenda

Date: **Tuesday, 20 September 2022**

Time: **13:00 – 15:00**

Venue: **Zoom (Virtual Meeting)**

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1. Welcome and Apologies

The Chair will welcome all present and apologies will be noted.

2. Quorum

A quorum shall consist of 50% of members.

3. Minutes of Previous Meeting – 22 June 2022 and Matters Arising

The minutes of the meeting held on 22 June 2022 are included for approval.

Housing Engagement Board

Minutes of the Quarterly Meeting held on Wednesday, 22 June 2022 from 13:00 to 15:00 via Zoom

Attendees:	<p>Dave Kelleway – Vice Chair</p> <p>Peter Campbell (Head of Housing)</p> <p>John Taylor</p> <p>Les Rolfe</p> <p>Margaret Wilson</p> <p>Peter Tye</p> <p>Julie Fletcher (Services Manager – Housing Strategy)</p> <p>Geoff Clark (Services Manager – Tenancy and Estates)</p> <p>Eddie Spicer (Service Manager – Housing Assets)</p> <p>Bronwen Taylor (Resident Involvement Officer) – Minute taker</p> <p>Gina Manderson (Housing Communications Officer) – Admin Support</p>
Apologies:	<p>Cllr John Batchelor – Chair</p> <p>Cllr Jose Hales</p> <p>Cllr Mark Howell</p>

Item	Subject	Action
1.	<p>Welcome and Apologies</p> <p>Dave Kelleway advised that he would be chairing the meeting as Cllr Batchelor was on leave. He welcomed the members to the meeting at 13:00. He especially welcomed Jim Watson, the newly appointed tenant representative, to the board.</p> <p>Geoff Clark introduced Tara Nutbeam-King and advised that she would be giving a presentation on Key Amnesty in relation to Tenancy Fraud (item 5.2).</p> <p>Apologies were received from Cllr John Batchelor, Cllr Mark Howell and Cllr Jose Hales.</p>	-

Item	Subject	Action
2.	<p>Quorum</p> <p>The meeting was quorate.</p>	-
3.	<p>Minutes of previous meeting – 24 June 2022</p> <p>The Chair referred to the minutes of the previous meeting and asked for approval. They were proposed by Peter Tye and seconded by Les Rolfe.</p> <p>Matters Arising from previous meeting</p> <p>Item 4.5 – Complaints</p> <p>Bronwen Taylor confirmed that Democratic Services had included the Estate Inspection schedule in their weekly bulletin to members on 30 March 2022.</p> <p>Item 6.1 – Resignation of Wendy Head – Co-option process</p> <p>Bronwen Taylor advised that the issue with one of the applications had been clarified by the Monitoring Officer and that Jim Watson had been co-opted onto the board at a meeting held on 20 April 2022.</p> <p>Julie Fletcher said that there was a need to review the current policy and it would be added to the Forward Plan.</p> <p>Item 6.3 – Update on Doubling Nature Project</p> <p>Geoff Clark advised they were in the process of finalising the tree audit as they were adding some areas to the audit, and they have not yet shared the information with Parish Councils and the County Council.</p> <p>Dave Kelleway said that there were some trees in his village that had been planted by the Parish Council some years back and he asked that when the council chop them down, to please advise the parish, as residents were blaming each other for removing them.</p> <p>Peter Tye suggested copying the parish clerk in the email to SP Landscapes when work was scheduled on trees.</p>	J Fletcher

Item	Subject	Action
	<p>Eddie Spicer said it was 5 years with the option to extend based on a performance basis. He added that SCDC were in control of the contract.</p> <p>Margaret Wilson said that some tenants as well as some members on this board thought that it would be better to have this service in-house, and she asked if the council were still considering this. She added that tenants should be advised of the new contract and its advantages in their rent statements.</p> <p>Eddie Spicer said that a sub-group were looking at the communication for the contract.</p> <p>A discussion on the pros and cons of having an in-house service was held.</p> <p>Peter Campbell said that to bring it back in house would be a significant investment and a high risk investment.</p>	
4.2	<p>Asset Management Strategy Action Plan</p> <p>Julie Fletcher referred to the action plan included in the pack and said that this was being brought to the HEB to note the progress being made on the Asset Management Strategy Action Plan, and was approved earlier this year together with the Asset Management Strategy. She advised that it sets out the actions we plan to take to improve our landlord services in both the properties and the customer facing roles. She said that some items could not be started until others were completed.</p> <p>Jim Watson asked why sheltered estates were not included in formal estate inspections.</p> <p>Julie Fletcher explained that each sheltered estate had a dedicated estate officer who should be picking up any issues on the estate. She added that sheltered estate residents had the facility to report issues to</p>	-

Item	Subject	Action
	<p>their sheltered estate office where the general needs did not have dedicated officers.</p> <p>Jim Watson said that some sheltered residents had asked why their sheltered estates were not included in estate inspections as some sheltered officers was not doing her job in reporting back on issues raised.</p> <p>Bronwen Taylor added that sheltered tenants pay service charges which includes a charge for general maintenance.</p> <p>Les Rolfe said that sheltered estates were often not completely separate from a housing estate and that they should be included in the formal estate inspections.</p> <p>Julie Fletcher said that this should be reviewed and we would have a discussion with officers and tenant representatives outside of this meeting.</p> <p>Geoff Clark said that he saw no reason why sheltered estates should not be included with formal estate inspections, together with tenant representatives, Sheltered Estate Officers and Housing Service Officers.</p> <p>Margaret Wilson said the overwhelming number of complaints that she received were about the lack of response by sheltered estate officers and agreed that sheltered estates should be included in formal estate inspections.</p> <p>Dave Kelleway said that some items in the document were important and he wanted to make sure that they would be presented to the HEB before any decisions were made, as it was important that tenants were involved in the decision process.</p> <p>Peter Campbell said that this document was to ensure that a culture of working together with tenants was the norm rather than the exception.</p>	

Item	Subject	Action
4.3	<p>Service Plan</p> <p>Peter Campbell referred to the Service Plan included in the pack and said that this was an internal document. He said that the board would have already seen a lot of the items in more detail as part of the project documents, examples being the Repairs Contract and the Asset Management Strategy. He added that this is a standard template which is used by all the other departments in the council and went through each section. He said that as there would be budget training in the near future, he would not go through the finances.</p> <p>Dave Kelleway asked the following questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The reason for the increase in staffing costs? 2. Was inflation factored into the “Interest payment on the PWB Loan”? 3. How much was in reserves? Why a deficit and where was it shown? 4. Asked for an explanation of the third bullet point on page 36, “As the new Build service...”. 5. Asked about the funding for Northstowe? Was it from the HRA? 6. Asked about the preparation for digital change over on page 41? 7. Asked about promoting apartment living? <p>Peter Campbell responded as follows:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. This was due to a combination of an increase in staff and the increase in the cost of living. 2. It is a basket of loans with different maturity dates on each, and when the loans were taken out, there were better deals on shorter term loans than longer term loans. 3. The reserves were not shown, however, it was £17m for this year and was a general council reserve. 4. It was a mixture of affordable rent and shared ownership properties, and we have an agent who deals with these. 	-

Item	Subject	Action
	<p>5. This was delivered by SCDC with skills in the New Build team and was not from the HRA. He could not say too much about it as it was being presented for scrutiny at council the next day.</p> <p>6. Over recent years there had been a wider adoption of a standard of lifeline equipment provided by different companies, which brought the cost down.</p> <p>7. Given the demand for properties and the cost of land, more apartments were being built. As we are a rural community, when people applied for housing they expected houses and were disappointed when offered apartments, however, we were now managing peoples expectation and making it clear that they could get an apartment. If they did not want an apartment, then they could and bide their time and wait for a house.</p>	
4.4	<p>Forward Plan</p> <p>Julie Fletcher referred to the Forward Plan document included in the pack and said that this would be a standing item on the agenda. She went through the next items that were due, as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • STAR presentation – to confirm the 29 July 2022 with the consultant • Communal Areas review – September 2022 • Policy review – September 2022 – this may be delayed slightly as we do not have a policy officer, however, we are looking to employ a contractor • Empty Property Relets – September 2022 • Stigma project – September 2022 <p>Julie Fletcher said that the Co-option policy and the Equity Share policy would be added to the document, and that if the board wanted to add any issues in the future, to let us know so we would add it to the plan and provide the necessary documents for discussion.</p>	-

Item	Subject	Action
	<p>Dave Kelleway said the co-option policy needed to be done sooner rather than later. He added that anything that was sensitive and would affect tenants needed to be added.</p> <p>Julie Fletcher said the Garage & Land Review was scheduled for December 2022.</p> <p>Peter Campbell said that items that are brought to the HEB should be items that can influence tenants.</p> <p>Peter Tye asked if the Mutual Exchange policy had been included in the document.</p> <p>Julie Fletcher said that it was one of the first policies that she wanted the policy officer to look in order for it to be presented to the HEB in November 2022.</p>	
5.	New Matters	-
5.1	<p>Estate Inspection Policy</p> <p>Julie Fletcher said that the whole policy had not been looked at and only the wording in point 3.4, the number of estate inspections, had been amended as it was ambiguous. She added that we would look at including the sheltered estates in the policy.</p> <p>Les Rolfe said that he would like the proper definition of estate as the inspection carried out the day before in Silverdale Avenue, Coton was one long road but did not include Whitwall Road, which had about half a dozen council houses in it. He said it should have been included as one estate as we would not be going there again just for that road.</p> <p>Julie Fletcher asked what input they got in terms of which estate was being inspected or where they told before the inspection what would be looked at.</p>	

Item	Subject	Action
	<p>Dave Kelleway asked how the issues from informal inspections were reported and Les Rolfe asked where their notes are recorded.</p> <p>Geoff Clark said that they were part of their normal functions and they have spreadsheets where the issues and actions were recorded.</p> <p>Eddie Spicer said that they could look at a digital platform as an option to feedback to the tenant representatives.</p> <p>Julie Fletcher said there were a number of issues that she would refer to the Housing Management Team. She asked if the board were in agreement with the amendment to the policy.</p> <p>The board agreed that they were happy with the amendment.</p>	
5.2	<p>Key Amnesty in relation to Tenancy Fraud</p> <p>Geoff Clark said that was an initiative by Tara Nutbeam-King to combat fraud in our council homes and it was being presented today to talk about the concept and to give advanced warning of what our plans were.</p> <p>Tara Nutbeam-King advised that previously each type of fraud would be handled by the individual service department and now they were being consolidated into the Corporate Fraud Service team. She presented her slides and explained the process of the Key Amnesty, and said that tenancy fraud was estimated to be the second largest cause of local government fraud losses. She said during the amnesty, which would be for a set period of time, tenants who were committing tenancy fraud would have the option to surrender their keys without facing prosecution. She explained why we were offering an amnesty and asked the board for ideas on how to reach all residents of South Cambridgeshire, and how to best deliver this message to make this initiative a success.</p>	

Item	Subject	Action
	<p>Dave Kelleway asked if this had been successfully trialled by other councils.</p> <p>Tara Nutbeam-King said that in October 2020 Southampton had conducted a key amnesty and they had recovered four properties, and they estimated a savings of approximately £12 000. She added that Barnet was about to embark on another key amnesty and that in 2013 they ran a key amnesty where they recovered 17 properties. She said that in 2021 Hillingdon in London had recovered 3 properties with a saving of £54 000 and that Camden had recovered 13 properties. She provided the key contacts as well as the Fraud email address, which was Fraud@scambs.gov.uk.</p> <p>Margaret Wilson asked if tenants who rented their properties as Air B&Bs or let out spare rooms were covered in the tenancy agreement.</p> <p>Geoff Clark said that tenants were allowed to rent out a spare room as long as the council were advised of the extra income and as long as they were not overcrowding the property or receiving benefits. He added that they were not allowed to rent out the property when they were not living there.</p> <p>A discussion on empty properties and repairs was held.</p> <p>Geoff Clark said that he would arrange for Rebecca Gane to present on this topic at a future meeting.</p> <p>Tara Nutbeam-King said that Environmental Health was in the process of employing an officer who would be tasked with identifying empty properties across the district.</p> <p>Dave Kelleway thanked Tara Nutbeam-King for an informative presentation.</p>	<p>G Clark</p>

Item	Subject	Action
6.	Any Other Business	-
6.1	<p>Fencing on Council properties</p> <p>Peter Tye asked who was responsible for the fencing between two council properties and if the policy would be changed.</p> <p>Geoff Clark said that we are not responsible to repair or fence in gardens of council properties.</p> <p>Peter Tye said that one of his neighbours was having problems with his fence.</p> <p>Geoff Clark said we could check and remove the fencing, however, would not replace it.</p> <p>Peter Tye asked what was done for tenants who were unable to look after their gardens due to age or a disability.</p> <p>Geoff Clark said that we have a welfare fund to assist tenants who were unable to tend to their gardens.</p>	-
6.2	<p>Area Meetings</p> <p>Margaret Wilson asked if hedge trimmings and the instructions on the using the new heating system could be included in the agenda for Area Meetings. She said that there was a lack of communication and feedback from Sheltered Estate Officers and said that this needed to be addressed.</p> <p>Geoff Clark said that if they were having issues, to either raise it with the senior officers or himself.</p>	-

Item	Subject	Action
7.	<p>Meeting dates for 2022 / 2023</p> <p>The Chair referred to the following meeting dates for 2022 / 2023:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 21 September 2022 (Zoom / venue tbc) • 21 December 2022 (Zoom / venue tbc) • 23 March 2023 (Zoom / venue tbc) 	-
8.	<p>Closing</p> <p>Peter Campbell congratulated and thanked Dave Kelleway for successfully chairing the meeting in the absence of Cllr Batchelor.</p> <p>There being no further business to discuss, the Chair thanked everyone for their attendance and contribution. The meeting ended at 15:12.</p>	-

The items raised at the previous meeting have been actioned and are below for noting.

Item 3 – Minutes

6.1 – Resignation of Wendy Head – Co-option process

Action: Julie Fletcher said that there was a need to review the current policy and it would be added to the Forward Plan.

Report back: The Co-option Policy has been added to the Forward Plan.

6.3 – Update on Doubling Nature Project

Action: Peter Tye suggested copying the parish clerk in the email to SP Landscapes when work was scheduled on trees.

Report back: Geoff Clark confirmed that when major work to trees had been completed, the parish council for the ward where the tree was located was notified. They were also advised when new trees were planted.

7.1 – Audit Accounts

Action: Geoff Clark to contact Margaret Wilson to have a discussion with her about the Audit Accounts.

Report back: Geoff Clark has contacted Margaret Wilson.

Item 5.1 – Estate Inspection Policy

Actions:

1. Geoff Clark to advise the HSO team to include adjoining roads in estate inspections so that it was influenced in a positive way in future.
2. Geoff Clark to look into why there was a shipping container in the parking area of the flats in Fen Ditton.

Report back:

1. Geoff Clark requested the HSO team to include adjoining roads in future Estate Inspections if time permitted.
2. Victoria Laxton, the HSO, sent an email to Les Rolfe on 23 June 2022 explaining that the storage container belonged to the contractors who were carrying out refurbishment works at the block of flats and that it would be removed once they had finished the work.

Item 5.2 – Key Amnesty in relation to Tenancy Fraud

Action: Geoff Clark said that he would arrange for Rebecca Gane to present on empty properties and repairs at a future meeting.

Report back: Rebecca Gane to present on Empty Properties and Repairs under item 5.3.

4. Standing Items

4.1 Update on Repairs Contract

An update on the Repairs Contract, including the communication letters sent to residents, members and staff, and a press release, are included for noting.



Repairs Contract Update – 19 August 2022

Since the last update the mobilisation of the contract has started. I am including communications which have been sent to Residents, Members and staff giving differing levels of detail regarding the contract for your information.

Things are gathering pace both on the back-office functions and the customer-facing activities currently in practice. There have been some delays on the IT side but that will not impact on the service delivery of the new contract from the Go Live date of 3rd October 2022.

We have agreed on an additional platform for reporting repairs in addition to the existing call centre, emails, etcetera. This is in the form of an online site that can be accessed by any connected device at any time of the day. Once you have chosen the address the system guides you through a diagnostic screen to identify the repair in a clear and intuitive way. This then leads you to a LIVE appointment booking area where you can choose the date and timeslot (am or pm) and provide any special details and photos. So, making it much easier and more convenient if residents should choose to use this method of booking, eventually, this will be integrated seamlessly within the My South Cambs portal. I feel this will be a huge change and improve e-service greatly.

Linked to this on the day of repair, is a live tracking system which also can be accessed on any connected device. A text message will be received with a link. From this link you can see the appointment details, who the operative is, including a picture and most importantly where they are, also giving the opportunity to message the operative if you need to pop out for 5 minutes, etcetera. This will allow the resident much more flexibility during an appointment slot and avoid missed visits.

A fundamental part of the new contract is involvement from residents. We currently have a few working on the mobilisation team, concentrating on communications and customer-facing activities like the complaints process, operative training and general resident contact behaviours.

I will soon be activating the Performance and Scrutiny Residents Team and they will initially be involved with the re-invention training provided by Mears and will help to formalise the performance criteria, in addition to standard benchmarking and business KPI's to help the operational performance of the contract.

The new branding for the contract has been agreed, as you can see from the header. It is fresh, clear and modern reflecting the new working partnership.

This will be adopted on all communications, vans and contract-specific uniforms.

I am happy with the progress so far and do not currently anticipate any issues with going live on 3rd October 2022.

Happy to answer any questions, if you would like to email me before the meeting, I will be happy to gather the responses for the meeting.

Eddie Spicer

Service Manager – Housing Assets

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Contact: Eddie Spicer
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17th August 2022

Dear Name

Launching your new and improved repairs and maintenance service

We know the repairs and maintenance service is one of the most important you receive from the Council and that we need to make sure we have arrangements in place that work for you and which you can rely on. That's why we're taking the opportunity of a brand new contract to reinvent how we go about planning and delivering this crucial service. The new contract arrangements will look and feel very different from the current service and are designed to focus on providing a great customer experience.

Following a rigorous selection process, supported throughout by the resident involvement panel members, Mears has successfully been awarded the new contract, winning against some tough competition due to the strength of their bid.

We'll be launching the new repairs service on **3 October**, which ties in with the start of the new partnership contract with Mears.

Our new partnership with Mears will be called "*working together to care for your home*" and will improve how the Council goes about planning, organising, and delivering the repairs service and programmes of investment work so we can improve the quality of homes.

Our new vision for a reinvented service

We will be working with Mears to deliver a reinvented service that matches the best practices of the leading social housing landlords. It will be centred around providing excellent customer service, as well as delivering the Council's wider business and social objectives around value for money, meeting the needs of residents and tackling the climate emergency.

On a day-to-day basis, you will benefit from new reporting and changes to how we check on the progress of repairs. These will introduce and embrace new technology to improve our service to you, including automated text confirmations and updates, as well as access to a live tracking system. This new service will be supported by Mears through the introduction of new IT systems and additional resources. We will

also retain some existing arrangements to ensure easy access for all, such as a telephone call centre and contact to Housing Officers and Property Services Officers.

In addition to the immediate customer service benefits, Mears has committed to helping the Council invest well in its housing properties, so all homes meet the future needs and expectations of tenants. Top of the list will be investing in energy efficiency measures that help protect the planet by reducing carbon emissions as well as minimising the amount of energy needed to heat your home. All this will help the Council meet its stretching targets for carbon reduction.

Mears will also bring wider benefits to the community including supporting local employment with apprenticeships and work experience programmes, schools' careers workshops and free training, as well as tackling social isolation through access to recycled IT equipment and a handyman service for sheltered schemes.

We hope you will like the new look service and will write to you again with more details.

Should you wish to get involved with the resident involvement groups please contact **Resident.Involvement@scamb.gov.uk**

Regards.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Eddie Spicer', with a long horizontal line extending from the end of the signature.

Eddie Spicer, Service Manager – Housing Assets



Dear Members,

16th August 2022

Reinventing our repairs service

As you will be aware, Cabinet recently signed a new contract with Mears Group for our repairs and maintenance contract with plans for a renewed and extended service, for the district's 5,200 council homes.

The contract, which begins from October, will see Mears carry out all responsive repairs work across the district's social housing properties, providing quick and effective repairs, including boiler servicing.

As a significant contract for the Council, we were clear during the tender process that the successful provider would support our vision of reinventing our repair service for the future. Our Resident involvement panel has helped us define this and taken part in the process from the start.

We wanted to share some of the benefits we have secured in negotiating the current contract which underlines many of the Council's key priorities:

Key Changes:

A better customer journey:

We will be working with tenants and residents as we transition to the new service to ensure that we action any feedback provided by our STAR surveys to ensure we can build a service which is responsive to complaints etc. We have been clear with Mears that the contract will be managed very closely based on this feedback and the contract is contingent on excellent performance.

A 'Right First Time' Service:

When residents report a repair, call handlers will be trained to understand the issue there and then. By understanding the problem before we get to a property, we can ensure that we send the right person, with the right skills and tools, to complete the job the first time we visit.

Booking to suit residents:

We understand that many of our residents will be concerned about new technology for booking repairs so we will maintain current ways to contact the service and extend hours when they can phone.

We will also be able to offer greater flexibility to residents when it comes to booking an appointment. Repairs will now take place between 8am and 8pm Monday to Friday, and 8am to 1pm on Saturdays. We hope this will enable residents to schedule repairs around working hours, school runs and other commitments.

Contacting us online:

For those who feel comfortable doing so, residents will now be able to book online so they can manage repairs with the ability to reschedule and view appointments. This will include a two-way messaging system allowing residents and operatives to speak directly about

property access (for example, if they need to leave unexpectedly shortly before an operative is due).

Residents waiting for a repair can, if they wish, be kept updated by automated text and have access to a live tracking system, giving details on their repair, as well as a picture of the operator who will be visiting, adding an extra level of security for vulnerable tenants. The system automatically sends a link to a customer survey following a visit, meaning we can act if residents have not experienced a good service.

Further benefits:

Once the new contract starts, we will be working with Mears to progressively bring in new opportunities for residents. These include:

Reducing Fuel Poverty and Net Zero: The Council has set an ambition to make all our properties Net Zero by 2050 and the length of the new contract reflects us choosing a partner who will help us deliver to this timescale. Mears has successfully aided three local authorities to access funding from the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund and will be providing us with the support to access further funding streams as they become available. This includes supporting assessment of our stock and helping prepare us for 'shovel ready' projects and facilitation of funding applications.

Alongside longer-term funding support, we also requested that Mears provides support to our residents to educate them on how to reduce energy bills:

- Through their 'Keep Warm Keep Well' toolkit, Mears will run a series of local awareness and support programmes on better energy management in residents' homes, reducing the effects of fuel poverty.
- Mears will hold a Big Energy Saving Week each autumn to create a focus on energy usage and efficiency awareness. Operatives will also signpost customers to energy savings ideas and tips.
- They will develop a road map to look at neutrality in delivering the repairs service
- Mears will support the Council in mapping our properties through surveying and identification, to help us understand where measures are needed for compliance with new legislation

Tackling Inequalities: Mears employs a tool which can map out our local areas based on demographic data, such as unemployment, age, crime and social deprivation. They will share the reporting data which will enable us to deliver social value initiatives that align to localised needs.

Mears employs a Housing Enforcement Officer - Paula Rae – who supports SCDC customers to maintain their tenancies and prevent homelessness. Paula works with residents facing eviction and contacts them to:

- Check they are claiming all the right benefits
- Provide support at court appearances
- Negotiate affordable repayment deals with creditors
- Liaise with other agencies on behalf of resident
- Offer ongoing support.

Local Employment and skills: 95% of the Mears team live in SCDC postcodes meaning that the contract will meaningfully support local employment. The new contract will see the workforce rise from 40 to 57 initially.

Apprenticeships: Mears will create a minimum of five apprenticeships during the contract term. Local candidates will be sourced from the National Apprenticeship Programme and our pre-recruitment/work experience programme for hard-to-reach groups. 90% of apprentices go on to be fully employed by Mears or a supplier.

Training linked to employment outcomes: Mears Pre-Recruitment & Trade Taster Programmes have been developed to actively target priority groups such as NEETs, long-term unemployed, single parents, all ethnic groups, those in care/care leavers and ex-military personnel, to help with the transition into employment and apprenticeships.

Engaging with Schools and Colleges: Mears has committed to two school /college engagement workshops per year, offering 1:1 mentoring, careers advice, introduction to work, CV writing, mock interview practice workshops etc.

Tradeswomen into Maintenance: The Mears Tradeswomen into Maintenance Project has produced resources that help encourage girls to think about non-traditional careers. We will work with Mears to use these resources to engage with primary school girls, highlighting the different career choices available to them at a very young age.

Skills Improvement: Mears Pathways will provide career, skills and employment opportunities to our residents free of charge. Courses cover subjects including Wellbeing, Health Awareness, Dementia Awareness, Mental Health, Diversity & Inclusion and Employability.

Customer Training: Mears will offer a minimum of two days trades training sessions for residents, covering:

- DIY: teaching customers skills such as painting & decorating, basic plumbing & tiling
- Energy efficiency: focussing on customers at risk from fuel poverty
- Damp & mould management.

Supplier Support: Mears will support local suppliers with the qualification process and any required accreditations. Subcontractor staff undertake the same training regime as their directly employed colleagues supporting them to get additional qualifications. MearsPayables is an electronic payment system providing payment within 10-working days of invoice authorisation, up to three times per month – helping suppliers improve cash flow.

Handyperson service: Mears handyman service has proved a popular service which aims to reduce the need for call outs by regularly addressing minor repairs. They will use sheltered schemes (such as Elm Court) and community centres to host tea/coffee mornings to engage with residents and advertise our handyperson service. Mears will also conduct cyclical visits to sheltered scheme properties ensuring regular visits to carry out minor repairs and preventative maintenance. Through dedicating this consistent resource, the Mears handyperson will be able to establish relationships with vulnerable customers.

Digital Inclusion: We recognise that limited access to technology and Wi-Fi creates deeper social isolation. Mears will hold a monthly digital workshop at a different sheltered scheme, supporting residents to engage and use online platforms and facilities. We recognise that many customers will not have access to IT equipment and will, in partnership with Mears, offer an IT equipment recycling scheme.

Community Centre Libraries: We propose to establish / enhance libraries within each community centre with books donated through a Mears and supply chain partners book recycling appeal. We can also apply for a grant to the Mears Foundation to buy a stock of

books. We will rotate the stock of books at each community centre every month to ensure new books are constantly available.

These are just some of the benefits we will see with the new contract. If members require any further information on any of the points in this briefing, please contact eddie.spicer@scambs.gov.uk or you can email Mears directly on elaine.phillips@mearsgroup.co.uk



Eddie Spicer
Service Manager – Housing Assets



Peter Baldwin
Managing Director - Mears



12th August 2022

Dear South Cambs Team,

We wanted to reach out to you all to tell you that Mears have been awarded a new contract with South Cambs District Council. So first, a big thank you to all those who have contributed to the process and worked hard to maintain the service during the transition period.

The Council has appointed Mears as its repairs and maintenance contractor with plans for a renewed and extended service, for the district's 5,200 council homes.

The contract, which begins in October, will see Mears carry out all responsive repair work across the district's social housing properties, providing quick and effective repairs, including boiler servicing for council tenants.. With over 95% of staff living locally, this is a win for all of us as we'll also get to deliver for our own communities.

This significant contract also coincides with the council's plans to make every social housing unit Net Zero by 2050. This means that our team has a good pipeline of work ahead of us, which not only provides extra job security but will also allow many of you to develop new lifelong skills for the green agenda in conjunction with Mears.

A better customer journey

We will be working with residents as we transition to the new service to ensure that we action any feedback provided by the recent STAR surveys to ensure we can build a service which is responsive to complaints. Mears will be managed very closely based on this feedback and the contract is contingent on an excellent performance.

A 'Right First Time' Service

When residents report a repair, call handlers will be trained to understand the issue there and then. By understanding the problem before we get to a property, we can ensure that we send the right person, with the right skills and tools, to complete the job the first time we visit.

Booking to suit residents

The service will offer greater flexibility for booking an appointment both online and by phone, with repairs taking place 8am-8pm Monday to Friday, and 8am-1pm on Saturdays, enabling residents to schedule repairs around working hours, school runs and other commitments. This is a moment to pause and reflect upon how we can truly reinvent the service as we support the Council's vision for repairs which are responsive to tenant feedback and improved service delivery. As it stands, the Council's own resident feedback shows dissatisfaction with the service so we must



take this opportunity to pause and think through how we can be a model for service excellence for the whole of the UK.

The new contract offers a better tenant service with more options for weekend and evening callouts and more options to book. So, we need to be clear that this is a new contract which will look and feel very different as of 3 October to how we have worked in the past.

Mears will be having retraining and awareness workshops to highlight and improve the customer experience in the run up to going live, we at SCDC should also be looking at any improvements we can make to the way we collectively deliver and manage the service to enable Mears to deliver to the residents the best possible service.

We are looking to deliver excellence from a one team approach and the experience received by the resident should be one of a seamless nature whether they are interacting with Mears or SCDC directly, a REAL partnership.

The feel of the contract will be different too, a new contract image and branding will be launched along with new technologies alongside new working methods.

I am excited for the future as I am sure you will be, as always change can be a concern even if it is designed to be an improvement, should you in any way feel concerned or just want to have a chat about things in confidence please contact either your line manager, Alex, Wayne or myself we will be able to reassure you or inform you of developments or concerns you have.

Thank you for your hard work and dedication every day, you all do an amazing job.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Eddie Spicer', with a long horizontal line extending from the end of the signature.

Eddie Spicer
Service Manager – Housing Assets

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Peter Baldwin', with a long horizontal line extending from the end of the signature.

Peter Baldwin
Managing Director - Mears



Press Release

15th August 2022

South Cambridgeshire District Council reinvents repairs and maintenance service

South Cambridgeshire District Council has appointed Mears as its repairs and maintenance contractor with plans for a renewed and extended service, for the district's 5,200 council homes.

The contract, which begins from October, will see Mears carry out all responsive repairs work across the district's social housing properties, providing quick and effective repairs, including boiler servicing for council tenants.

The contract is designed to significantly contribute to the target of decarbonising its housing stock by 2050, with Mears providing support for applications to decarbonisation funding.

The all-new repairs contract with Mears will provide an improved service which uses modern technology to offer convenient appointments with extended, more flexible hours. Repairs will now take place between 8am and 8pm Monday to Friday, and 8am to 1pm on Saturdays.

Customers waiting for a repair can, if they wish, be kept updated by automated text and have access to a live tracking system, giving details on their repair, as well as a picture of the operator who will be visiting, adding an extra level of security for vulnerable tenants.

The software also provides the resident with an immediate satisfaction survey, letting the council and Mears know how they feel about the service they have received.

Aside from the immediate customer service benefits, Mears has committed to helping reduce fuel poverty and supporting the council to deliver Net Zero by 2050 by improving existing housing stock as well as preparing for future projects.

The organisation will also support local employment and apprenticeships with work experience programmes, schools' careers workshops and free training, as well as tackling social isolation through offering access to recycled IT equipment and a handyman service for sheltered schemes.



Councillor John Batchelor, South Cambridgeshire District Council’s Lead Cabinet Member for Housing, said: “This is a significant contract for the Council and during the tender process we were clear that the successful provider would have a focus on helping us to meet our ambitions to deliver greener, more energy efficient homes and to help those in our communities who are most in need.

This partnership forms part of our commitment to providing a safe and efficient service for our tenants, which goes much further than just repairs, while also ensuring we get the best value for our money.”

Peter Baldwin, Managing Director at Mears, added; “We’re pleased to have been appointed to serve social housing tenants in South Cambridgeshire and are committed to delivering an outstanding repairs service which is fit for the future.

Mears’ aim is to always be a safe pair of hands for residents and will bring a wealth of experience in repairs contract delivery. We recognise the value of our partnership with South Cambridgeshire Council will bring and are looking forward to supporting its vision to reinvent its repairs service for the future.”

4.2 Forward Plan

Julie Fletcher to provide an update on the Forward Plan which is included in the pack.

Housing Engagement Board – Forward Plan

Date of Meeting	Topic	Description	Lead Officer	Decision Route
24 March 2022	Project Initiation Document and Evaluation	Update on Project Initiation Document and Evaluation	Bronwen Taylor	For Information
24 March 2022	Tenancy Policy	Update on Tenancy Review / Policy	Geoff Clarke	Cabinet
24 March 2022	Doubling Nature Project	To update the HEB on the Doubling Nature Project	Geoff Clarke	For Information
24 March 2022	Tenant Satisfaction Survey	Update on project to undertake the Tenant Satisfaction Survey	Julie Fletcher	For Information
24 March 2022	Small Land Sales (HRA) Policy	To provide comments on the draft Small Land Sales Policy and procedures	Julie Fletcher	Cabinet – 22 March 2022 Final approval following HEB comments by Lead Member for Housing
Consultation in May 2022 Revised to June HEB	Service Plan	To provide comments on the Service Plan for the Housing Service for 2022 / 2023	Peter Campbell	Sign off by Lead Member for Housing
Special presentation by MEL May / June 2022 Revised to July 2022	Tenant Satisfaction Report	To note the findings of the Tenant Satisfaction Report and agree actions to take forward	Julie Fletcher	Housing Engagement Board
June 2022	Asset Management Strategy Action Plan	Prioritising the actions and monitoring progress in the Asset Management Strategy	Peter Campbell	For Information
June 2022	Estate Inspection Policy	To amend the number of inspections held per year.	Geoff Clark	Housing Engagement Board

Date of Meeting	Topic	Description	Lead Officer	Decision Route
June 2022	Contract for Repairs / Maintenance	To provide an update of the appointment of the new contractor, transitional arrangements including tenant working groups being established	Eddie Spicer	For Information
September 2022	Stigma Project	To note the findings of the Stigma survey	Julie Fletcher	For discussion
September 2022	Annual Report to Tenants	To endorse the Annual Report which details how the council performed over the last year.	Gina Manderson	Housing Engagement Board
September 2022	Buy back of equity share properties [New]	Report on the process relating to the buying back of equity share leasehold properties and selling the new leases on. Further information on this was requested at the last Housing Engagement Board meeting.	Becky Gane	For Information
September 2022	Endorsement of the Complaints Handling Self-assessment [New]	Landlords are required by the Housing Ombudsman to undertake a self-assessment against the Complaint Handling Code and publish the results	Grace Andrews	Housing Engagement Board
September 2022 Revised date December 2022 – Looking to appoint Agency Policy Officer in September to take this forward.	Co-option Policy	Review of current policy. Also need to combine this with review of the Code of Conduct and GDPR issues.	Julie Fletcher	Housing Engagement Board

Date of Meeting	Topic	Description	Lead Officer	Decision Route
September 2022 Revised date December 2022 – project delayed.	Communal Areas Review	To note findings from the Communal Areas Review and discuss actions for improvement	Debbie Barrett	Housing Engagement Board
September 2022 Revised date December 2022 – Agency Housing Policy Consultant to take this forward when in pose	Policy Review	To provide an overview of current policies – identify gaps and programme for reviews	Policy Officer	Housing Engagement Board
September 2022 Revised date December 2022 – The mobilisation of the Mears Contract has taken more time than expected. Project Group yet to convene.	Empty Property Relet Disposal and Standard	Consider findings and recommendations following the outcome of the project working group – Empty Property Relet disposal and Standards	Eddie Spicer	Housing Engagement Board
October 2022 (outside of HEB formal meeting)	Budget and Rent Setting [New]	Specific session on the process for Budget and Rent Setting for 2023 – 2024	Peter Campbell	Council to approve final budgets in February 2023
December 2022	Mutual Exchange Policy	Review of policy	Policy Officer	Housing Engagement Board

Date of Meeting	Topic	Description	Lead Officer	Decision Route
December 2022	New Repairs Contract Performance and Scrutiny Team	Update and feedback from the tenant working groups	Eddie Spicer	For Information
December 2022	Garage & Land Review	Update of findings of the Garage & Land Review and recommend actions	Kirstin Donaldson	Cabinet
December 2022	To approve the Housing Service Improvement Plan [New]	Following the tenant & leaseholder satisfaction survey, an improvement plan to be agreed to increase tenant & leaseholder satisfaction	Julie Fletcher	Housing Engagement Board
December 2022 Deleted, as an earlier session has been arranged to coincide with the budget setting process	Budget Update	Budget Update	Martin Lee	Council
March 2023	Review of Resident Engagement Framework	Review of chair, vice chair	Peter Campbell	Housing Engagement Board
TBC	Council Stock Condition Survey	Outcome of the Stock Condition Survey. Tenant Working Group set up.	Eddie Spicer	For Information
TBC	Together with Tenants Charter	Review what actions are required to achieve the Together with Tenants Charter	Julie Fletcher	Cabinet
TBC	Homelessness Review	Review of Homelessness & Homeless Strategy	Heather Wood / Sue Carter	Consultation

Date of Meeting	Topic	Description	Lead Officer	Decision Route
TBC	Greater Cambridge Housing Strategy [New]	Review of the Greater Cambridge Housing Strategy	Julie Fletcher	Consultation

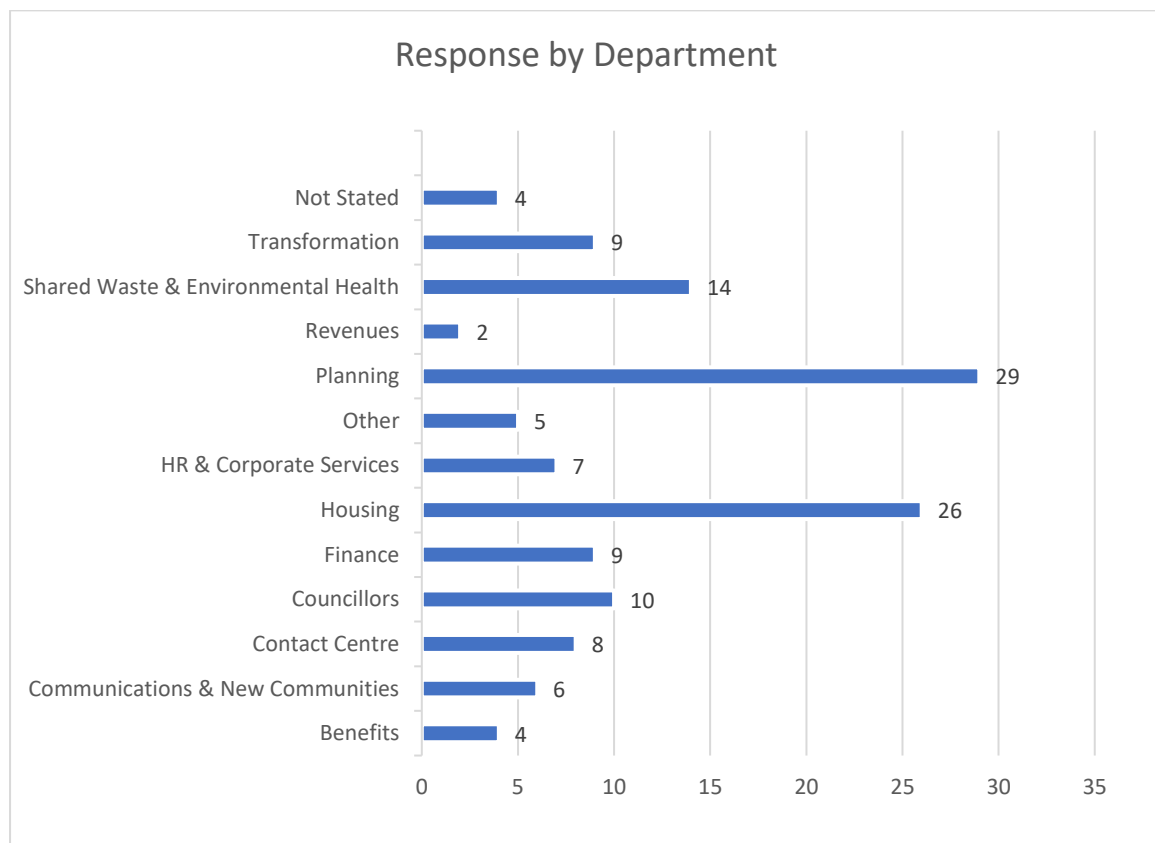
5. New Matters

5.1 Stigma Project Presentation

Julie Fletcher to present on the Findings of the Staff / Councillor Survey relating to the Stigma Project.

Findings from the Staff/Councillor Survey undertaken in September 2021 as part of the Stigmatisation Project

An online survey was made available to all staff and Councillors within the Council. There are currently 663 members of staff and 45 Councillors. In terms of response rates, overall we had 133 respondents representing a 19% response rate.

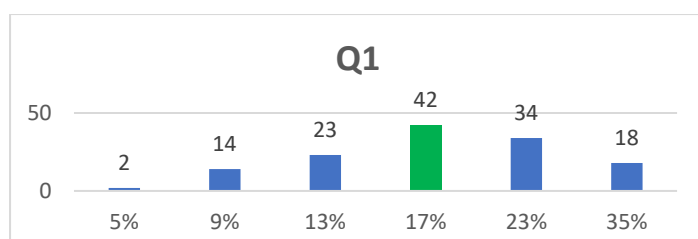


Set out below are the questions asked and their responses. Please bear in mind that stigmatisation is about attitude, rather than knowing factually correct statistics. However, the answers will help us to identify areas for training or the need for greater publicity.

Q1 – What percentage of UK households live in social housing?

Answer: 17%

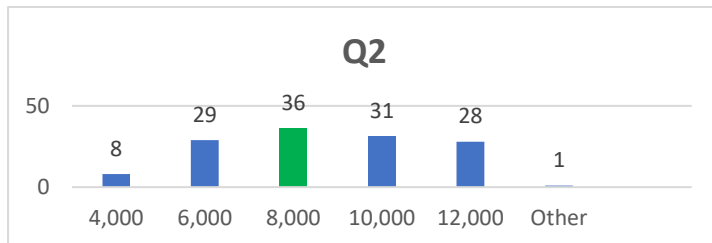
32% of respondents (42 of 133) answered this question correctly.



Q2 – How many council tenants do we have at SCDC?

Answer: 8,000

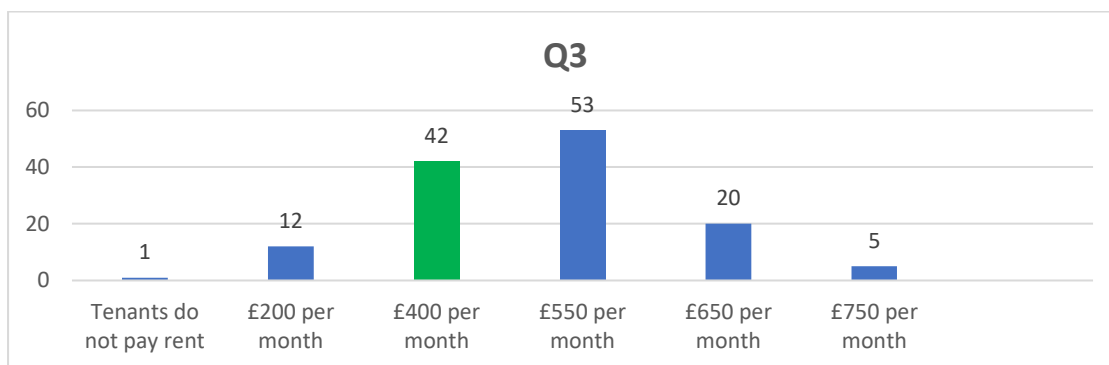
27% of respondents (36 of 133) answered this question correctly.



Q3 – What is the average rent our SCDC council tenants pay per month?

Answer: £400 per month

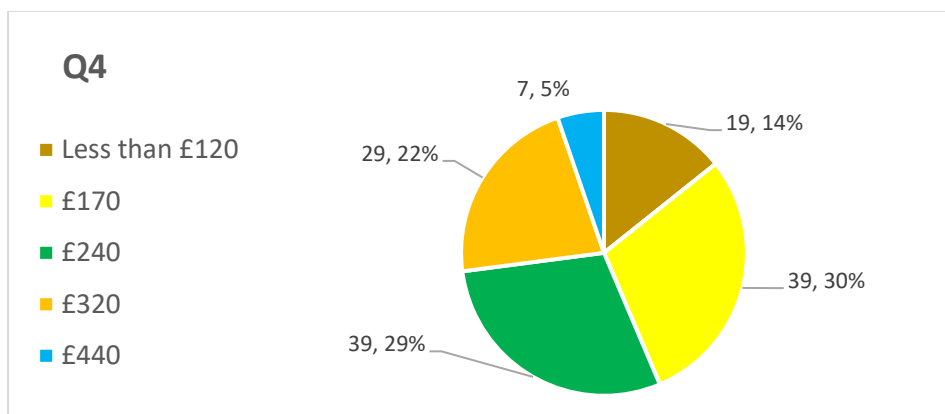
32% of respondents (42 of 133) answered this question correctly.



Q4 – What is the national average weekly income for social housing tenants?

Answer: £240 per week

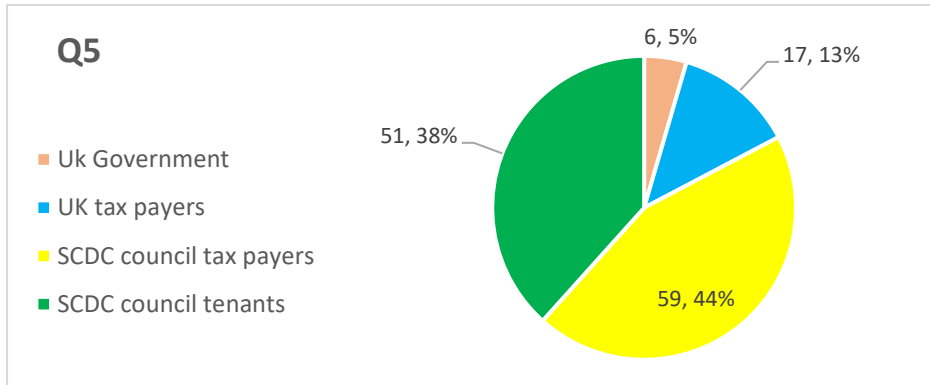
29% of respondents (39 of 133) answered the question correctly



Q5 – Who do you think pays for housing services such as repairing and maintaining council houses?

Answer: SCDC council tenants

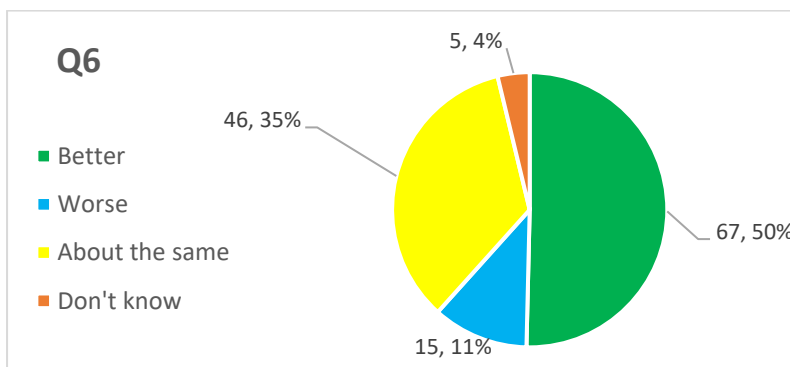
38% of respondents (51 of 133) answered this question correctly.



Q6 – Do you think the condition of social housing properties are better or worse than private rented properties?

Answer: Better

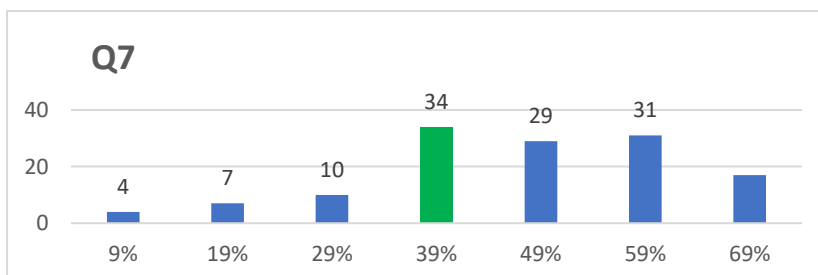
50% of respondents (67 of 133) answered this question correctly.



Q7 – What percentage of social housing tenants nationally are employed?

Answer: 39%

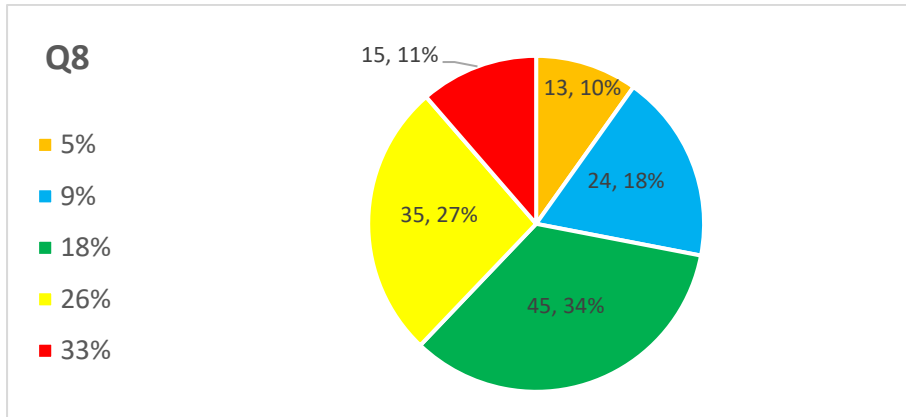
26% of respondents (34 of 132) answered this question correctly



Q8 – What percentage of social housing tenants are unable to work nationally due to illness or disability?

Answer: 18%

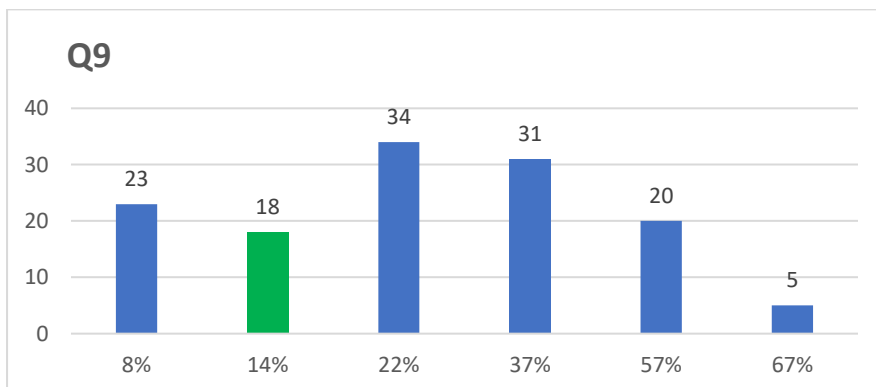
34% of respondents (45 of 132) answered this question correctly



Q9 – What percentage of council tenants are unemployed nationally?

Answer: 14%

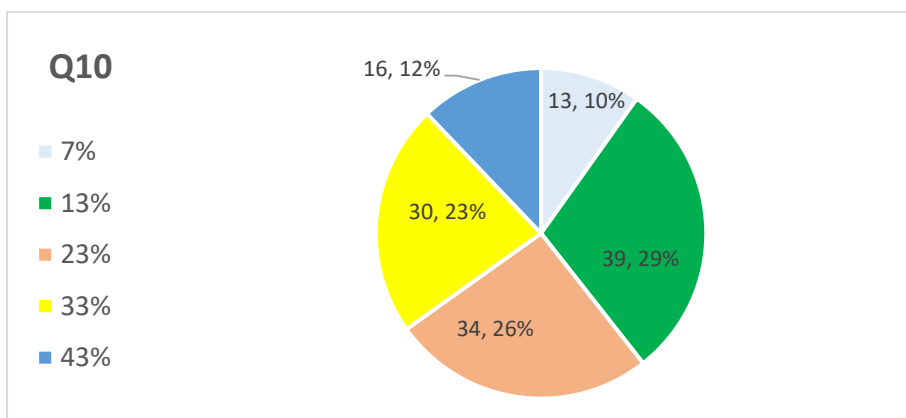
14% of respondents (18 of 131) answered this question correctly



Q10 – What percentage of social housing tenants are retired nationally?

Answer: 13%

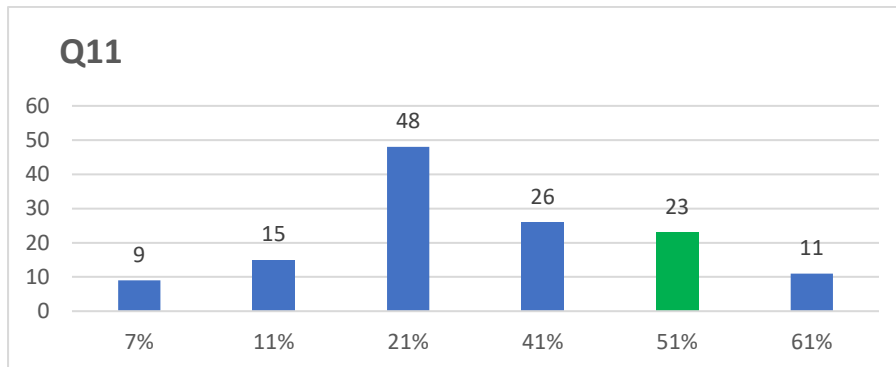
29% of respondents (39 of 132) answered the question correctly



Q11 – What percentage of tenants rely solely on pension or benefits for income?

Answer: 51%

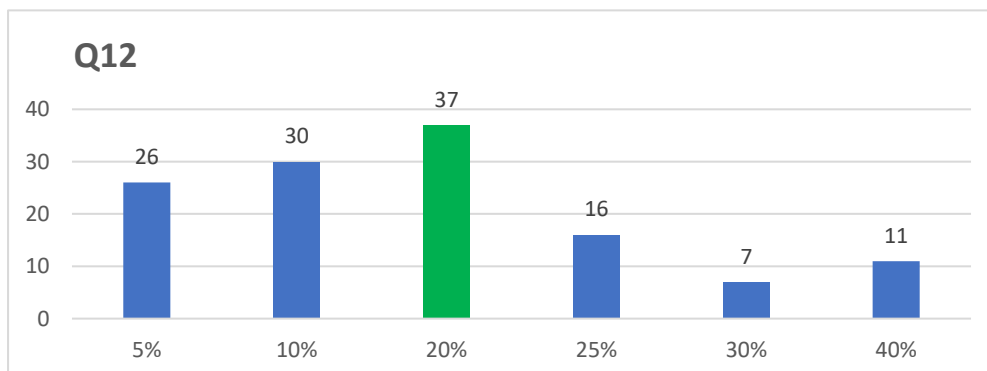
17% of respondents (23 of 132) answered this question correctly.



Q12 – What percentage of social housing tenants nationally are not seeking work?

Answer: 20%

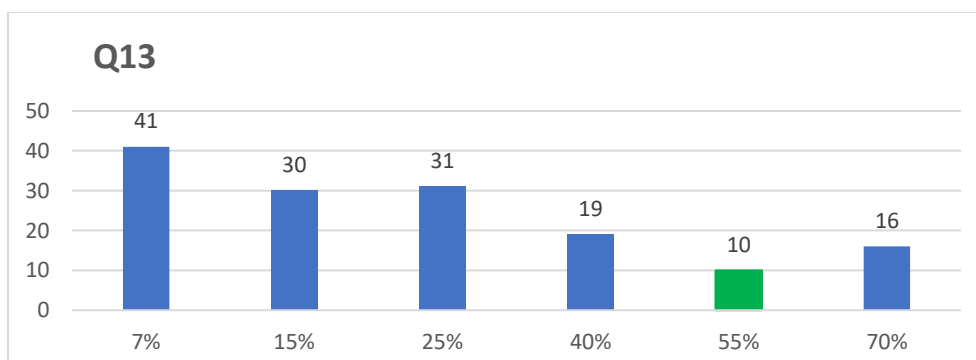
28% of respondents (37 of 132) answered this question correctly



Q13 – What percentage of single people make up new social housing lettings nationally?

Answer: 55%

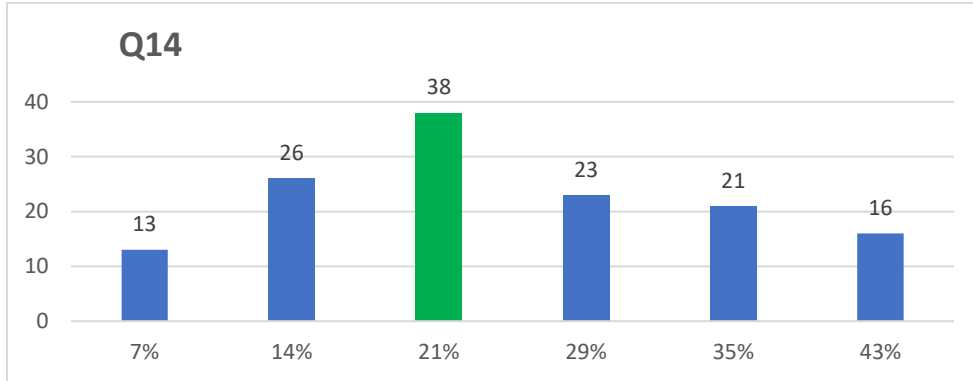
8% of respondents (10 of 131) answered this question correctly



Q14 – What percentage of national new social housing lettings are by single parent households?

Answer: 21%

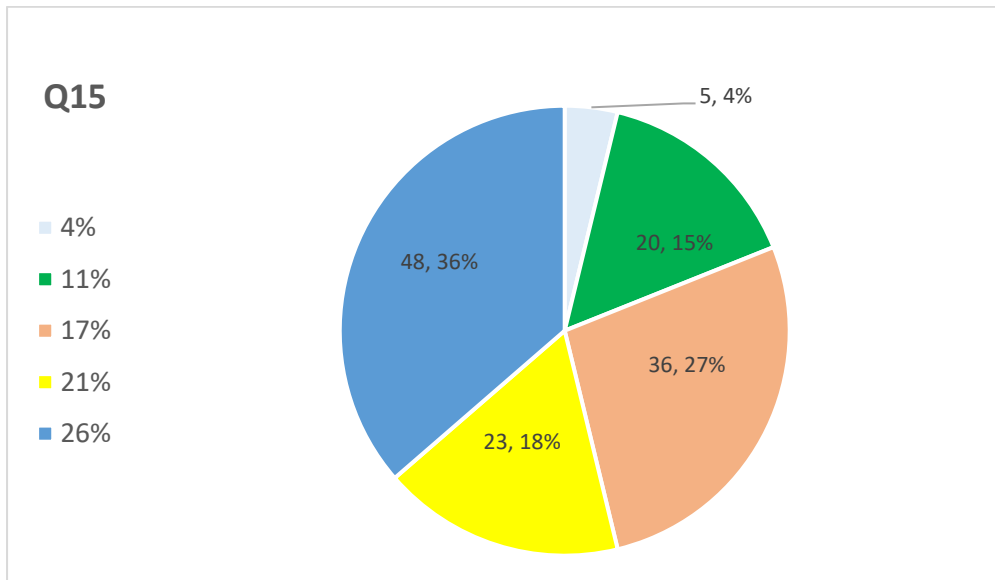
29% of respondents (38 of 132) answered this question correctly



Q15 – What is the national percentage of new social housing lettings to couples with children?

Answer: 11%

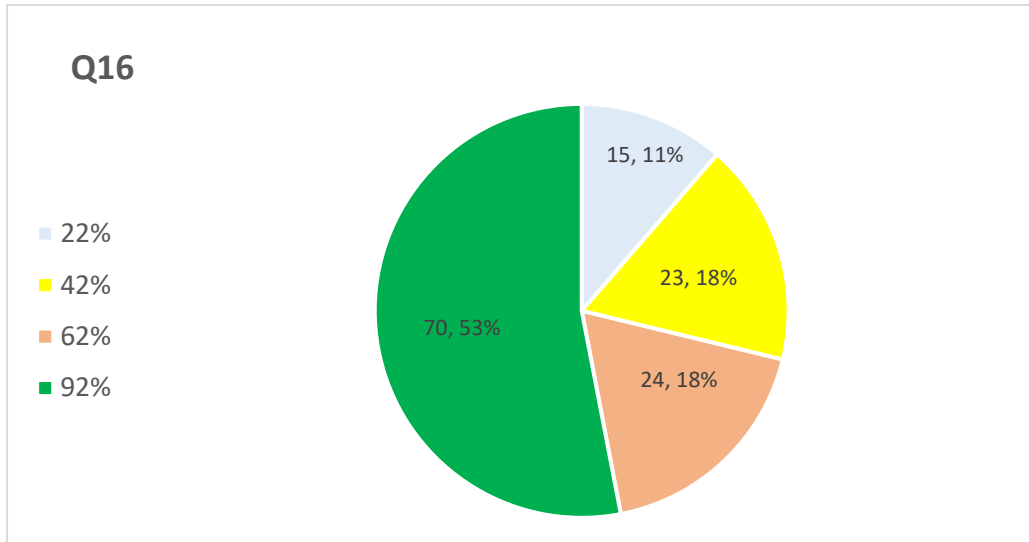
15% of respondents (20 of 132) answered this question correctly



Q16 – What percentage of new tenants are UK nationals (vs foreign nationals)?

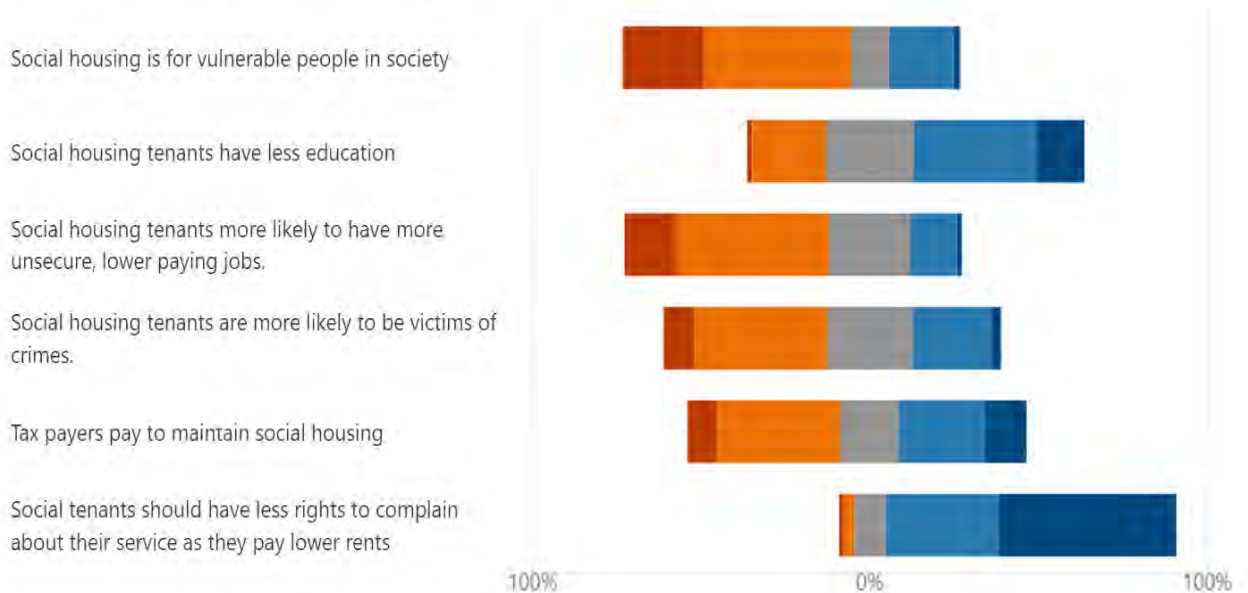
Answer: 92%

53% of respondents (70 of 132) answered this question correctly

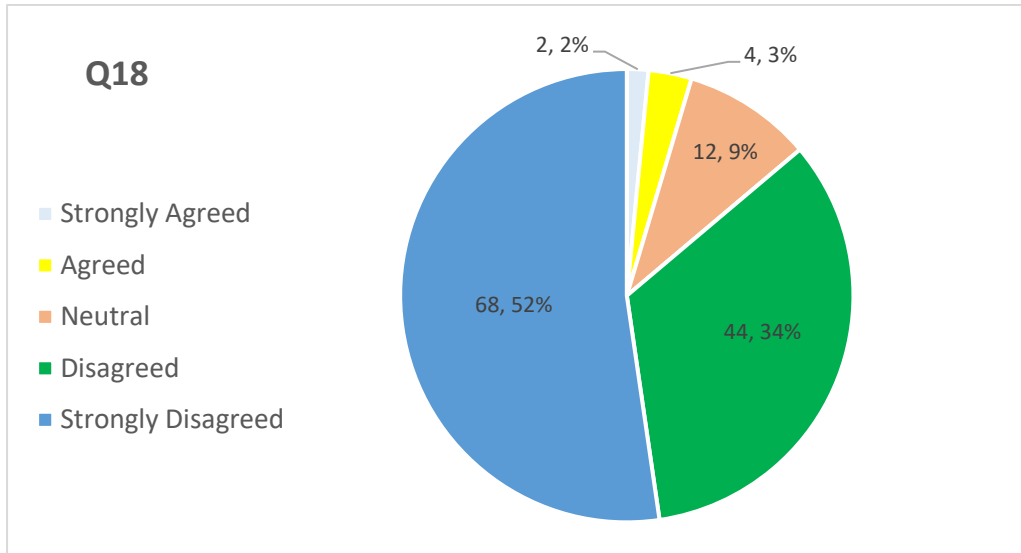


Q17 – Do you agree with the perceptions of social housing tenants and social housing estates?

Strongly agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree

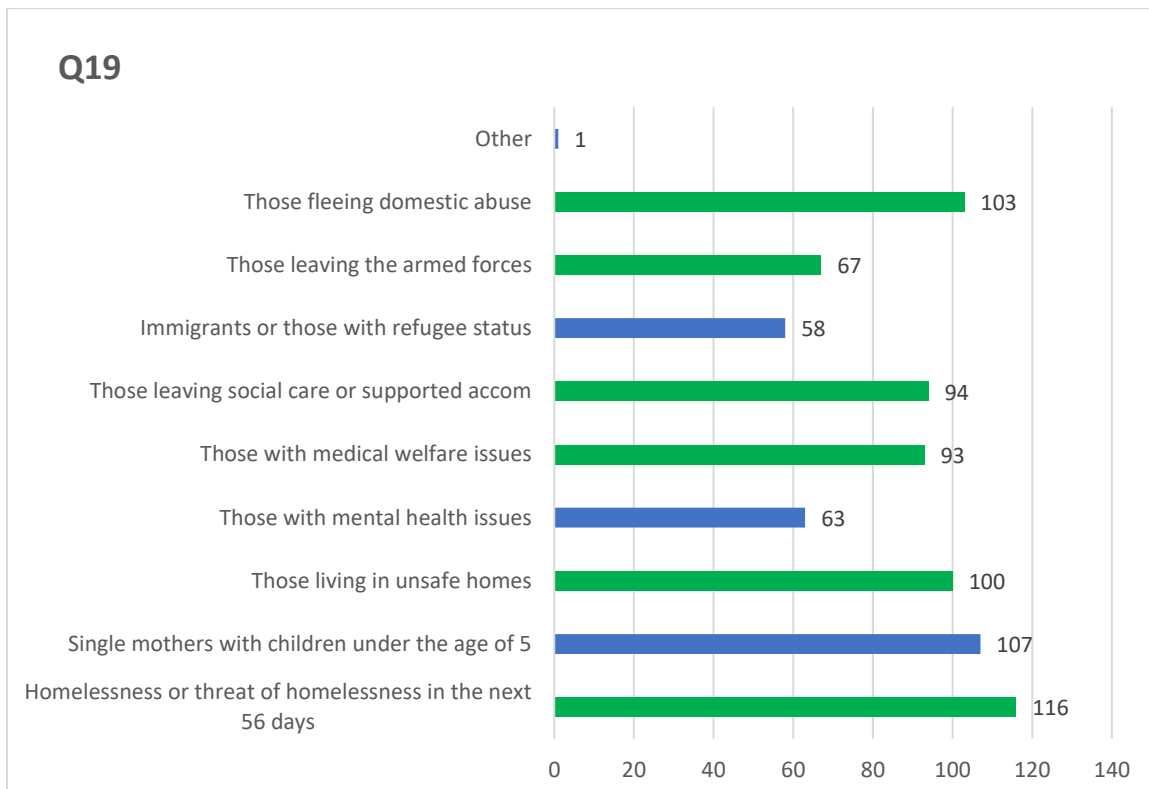


Q18 – Social tenants should have less rights to complain about their service as they pay lower rents?

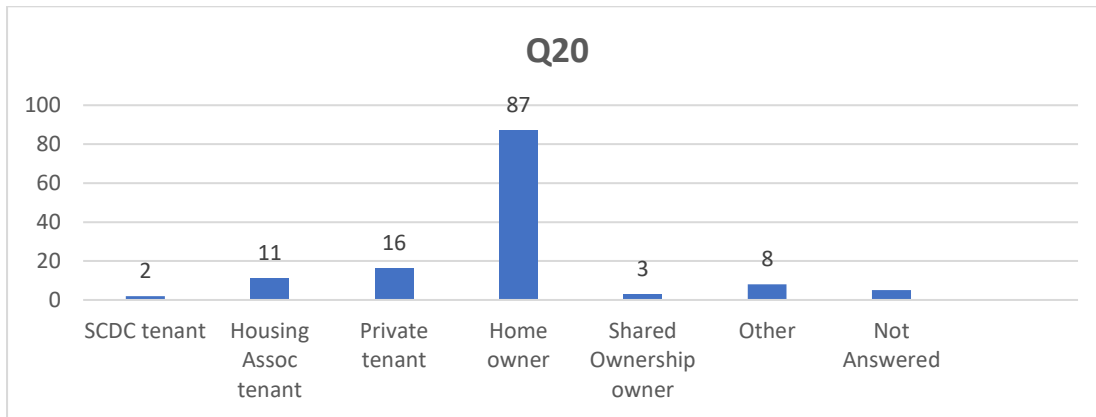


Q19 – Which categories are given priorities for social housing?

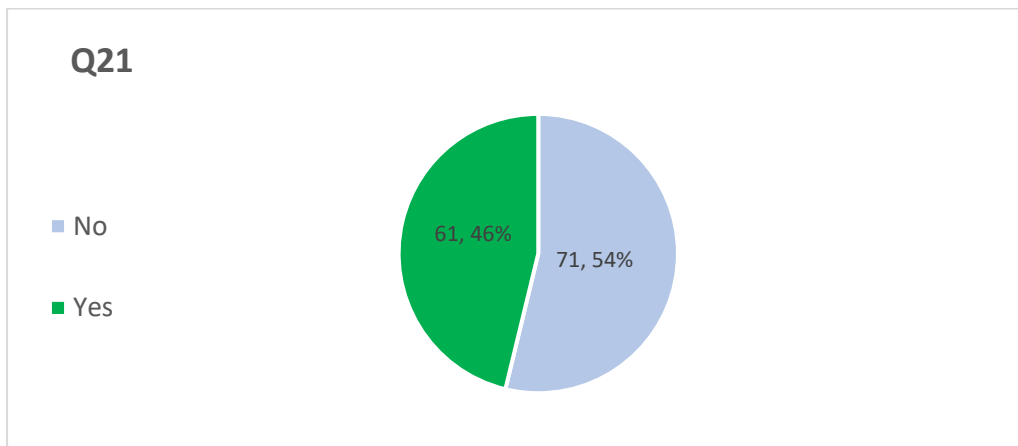
3% of respondents (4 of 133) answered the question correctly (correct answers highlighted in green)



Q20 – What housing tenure do you currently live in?



Q21 – Have you, or a member of your family, ever lived in social housing? (Council or housing association)



5.2 Complaints Toolkit

Julie Fletcher to lead a discussion on the Complaints Toolkit.

Included in the pack are the following documents:

- Complaints Handling Code – Self-Assessment
- Appendix A – Complaints Self-Assessment Form

Report to:	Housing Engagement Board (HEB) 20 September 2022
Lead Officer:	Julie Fletcher – Service Manager – Housing Strategy

Complaint Handling Code – Self Assessment

Recommendations

1. That the Housing Engagement Board (HEB) endorse the self-assessment relating to the Complaint Handling Code, as set out at Appendix A. This will be published on our website by October 2022.

Reasons for Recommendations

2. As part of the Complaint Handling Code introduced by the Housing Ombudsman, landlords must carry out an annual assessment to ensure they are compliant with the Code. The results of which should be published. Non-compliance could result in the Ombudsman issuing complaint handling failure orders.

Details

3. The code contains 8 sections of 72 questions that the Council need to comply with. Of the 72 questions, 39 are 'Must' comply with and 33 are 'Should' comply with.
4. The full Code has been completed, which means each section / question has a comment and / or evidence (most evidence are links to our policy and reference to page numbers etcetera).
5. The Council complies with 69 out of the 72 requirements, meaning there are 3 which we are currently not complying with, or only partially comply.
6. Point 1.2 of the assessment requires landlords to have a standardised definition as set out by the Housing Ombudsman. However, as our complaints policy is part of the Council's corporate policy the definition used is that provided by the Local Ombudsman rather than the Housing Ombudsman. We have received advice from the Housing Ombudsman that this is still acceptable and therefore compliant.
7. Point 1.5 refers to a 'should' comply and relates to making sure that where a survey is completed that the person completing the survey should be made aware of how they can pursue their dissatisfaction as a complaint if they wish to. As part of the new

Mears contract, we will ensure that where surveys are undertaken that reference to our complaints process is included. As part of the Service Improvement Plan following the overall tenant & leaseholder satisfaction survey, there is also an action to review all surveys currently undertaken.

8. Point 7.2 states that landlords must report back on wider learning and improvements from complaints in their annual report and more frequently to their residents, staff and scrutiny panels. Whilst we do elements of this already, we are looking to improve the quality of information provided through the establishment of a Service Manager working group that will have a wider overview of its complaints monitoring function and promoting lessons learnt. We will also look to provide information on complaints to the Housing Engagement Board, alongside the Housing Performance Panel as part of the Resident Involvement Framework review.

Background Papers

Appendices

Appendix A: Self-Assessment Form

Link to the [South Cambridgeshire District Council Feedback and Complaints Policy](#)

Report Author:

Grace Andrews – Data Quality and Improvement Team Leader

Telephone: (01954) 713317

Appendix A – Complaints Self-Assessment Form

This self-assessment form should be completed by the complaints officer and discussed at the landlord’s governing body annually.

Evidence should be included to support all statements with additional commentary, as necessary.

Explanations must also be provided where a mandatory ‘must’ requirement is not met to set out the rationale for the alternative approach adopted and why this delivers a better outcome.

Section 1 – Definition of a Complaint

Mandatory ‘must’ requirements

Code Section	Code Requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence, Commentary and Any Explanations
1.2	<p>A complaint must be defined as:</p> <p><i>‘an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the organisation, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting an individual resident or group of residents.</i></p>	No	<p>On review and update of the council complaint policy (September / October 2021 and more recently in May 2022), it has been decided to integrate the Housing Complaints policy in to the one corporate document, and to use just one complaint definition which is the one recommended by the Local Ombudsman as this also covers everything that is included in the Housing Ombudsman complaint definition:</p> <p>Local Ombudsman definition of a complaint</p> <p>“An expression of dissatisfaction about a council service (whether that service is provided directly by the council or by a contractor or partner) that requires a response.”</p> <p><u>Advice received from the Housing Ombudsman has confirmed that this is acceptable</u></p>

Code Section	Code Requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence, Commentary and Any Explanations
1.3	The resident does not have to use the word 'complaint' for it to be treated as such. A complaint that is submitted via a third party or representative must still be handled in line with the landlord's complaints policy.	Yes	See our complaint policy page 4 – 'Feedback' See our complaint policy page 11 – 'Third Parties' https://www.scambs.gov.uk/your-council-and-democracy/feedback-and-complaints/complaints/
1.6	... if further enquiries are needed to resolve the matter, or if the resident requests it, the issue must be logged as a complaint.	Yes	As above – See our complaint policy page 4 – 'Feedback'
1.7	A landlord must accept a complaint unless there is a valid reason not to do so.	Yes	Covered within our complaint policy under 'Other Exceptions' pages 5 & 6
1.8	A complaints policy must clearly set out the circumstances in which a matter will not be considered, and these circumstances should be fair and reasonable to residents.	Yes	Circumstances not dealt with under the complaints handling processes are detailed within our complaint policy under 'Other Exceptions' pages 5 & 6
1.9	If a landlord decides not to accept a complaint, a detailed explanation must be provided to the resident setting out the reasons why the matter is not suitable for the complaints process and the right to take that decision to the Ombudsman.	Yes	We will contact the customer and provide an explanation. See pages 5 & 6 of our complaint policy

Best practice 'should' requirements

Code Section	Code Requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence, Commentary and Any Explanations
1.4	Landlords should recognise the difference between a service request , where a resident may be unhappy with a situation that they wish to have rectified, and a complaint about the service they have / have not received.	Yes	See our complaint policy pages 3 – 5
1.5	Survey feedback may not necessarily need to be treated as a complaint, though, where possible, the person completing the survey should be made aware of how they can pursue their dissatisfaction as a complaint if they wish to.	No	Over the coming year we will be reviewing our survey process to ensure we are capturing satisfaction levels on key transactions. As part of this review we will look to add a link / information of our complaint policy on all relevant surveys.

Section 2 – Accessibility and Awareness

Mandatory ‘must’ requirements

Code Section	Code Requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence, Commentary and Any Explanations
2.1	Landlords must make it easy for residents to complain by providing different channels through which residents can make a complaint such as in person, over the telephone, in writing, by email and digitally. While the Ombudsman recognises that it may not be feasible for a landlord to use all of the potential channels, there must be more than one route of access into the complaints system.	Yes	See our complaint policy pages 6 – 10 https://www.scambs.gov.uk/your-council-and-democracy/feedback-and-complaints/complaints/ We have published in Tenant & Leaseholder newsletters https://www.scambs.gov.uk/media/18925/in-south-cambs-tenant-information-autumn-2021.pdf
2.3	Landlords must make their complaint policy available in a clear and accessible format for all residents. This will detail the number of stages involved, what will happen at each stage and the timeframes for responding.	Yes	See link to our complaint web page and policy: https://www.scambs.gov.uk/your-council-and-democracy/feedback-and-complaints/complaints/
2.4	Landlord websites, if they exist, must include information on how to raise a complaint. The complaints policy and process must be easy to find on the website.	Yes	As above see link to our complaint web page and policy: https://www.scambs.gov.uk/your-council-and-democracy/feedback-and-complaints/complaints/
2.5	Landlords must comply with the Equality Act 2010 and may need to adapt normal policies, procedures, or processes to accommodate an individual’s needs. Landlords must satisfy themselves that their policy sets out how they will respond to reasonable adjustments requests in line with the Equality Act and that complaints handlers have had appropriate training to deal with such requests.	Yes	See page 15 of our complaint policy and our Equalities Scheme webpage https://www.scambs.gov.uk/your-council-and-democracy/equality-and-diversity/equality-scheme/

Code Section	Code Requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence, Commentary and Any Explanations
2.6	Landlords must publicise the complaints policy and process, the Complaint Handling Code and the Housing Ombudsman Scheme in leaflets, posters, newsletters, online and as part of regular correspondence with residents.	Yes	<p>Our complaints policy is published on our website – link below which includes the Housing Ombudsman Scheme: https://www.scambs.gov.uk/your-council-and-democracy/feedback-and-complaints/complaints/</p> <p>Complaint Handling Code is published on our website – link below: https://www.scambs.gov.uk/housing/council-tenants/housing-complaints-and-compliments/</p> <p>Published in Tenant and Leaseholder newsletters https://www.scambs.gov.uk/housing/tenant-news-involvement/tenant-and-leaseholder-news/</p>
2.7	Landlords must provide residents with contact information for the Ombudsman as part of its regular correspondence with residents.	Yes	<p>Details are on our webpage, within our complaint policy and response letter templates: https://www.scambs.gov.uk/housing/council-tenants/housing-complaints-and-compliments/</p>
2.8	Landlords must provide early advice to residents regarding their right to access the Housing Ombudsman Service throughout their complaint, not only when the landlord’s complaints process is exhausted.	Yes	<p>See our complaints policy page 11: https://www.scambs.gov.uk/housing/council-tenants/housing-complaints-and-compliments/</p>

Best practice 'should' requirements

Code Section	Code Requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence, Commentary and Any Explanations
2.2	Where a landlord has set up channels to communicate with its residents via social media, then it should expect 2.2 to receive complaints via those channels. Policies should contain details of the steps that will be taken when a complaint is received via social media and how confidentiality and privacy will be maintained.	Yes	Complaints received via Social Media will be re-directed to our complaint policy / procedures

Section 3 – Complaint Handling Personnel

Mandatory ‘must’ requirements

Code Section	Code Requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence, Commentary and Any Explanations
3.1	Landlords must have a person or team assigned to take responsibility for complaint handling to ensure complaints receive the necessary attention, and that these are reported to the governing body. This Code will refer to that person or team as the “complaints officer”.	Yes	See our complaint policy pages 6-8 complaint stages and Appendix C – ‘responsibilities’ page 19 & 20 For our organisation, a ‘Complaints Officer’ will be referred to as ‘Responding Officer’ these officers job roles are not dedicated to just complaint handling, they will be Service Manager (Stage 1) and Head of Service (Stage 2)
3.2	...the complaint handler appointed must have appropriate complaint handling skills and no conflicts of interest.	Yes	As above see our complaint policy pages 6 – 8 complaint stages and Appendix C – ‘responsibilities’ page 19 & 20 If any conflict of interest a nominated alternative officer will be appointed

Best practice ‘should’ requirements

Code Section	Code Requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence, Commentary and Any Explanations
3.3	Complaint handlers should: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • be able to act sensitively and fairly • be trained to handle complaints and deal with distressed and upset residents • have access to staff at all levels to facilitate quick resolution of complaints • have the authority and autonomy to act to resolve disputes quickly and fairly. 	Yes	See our complaint policy https://www.scambs.gov.uk/housing/council-tenants/housing-complaints-and-compliments/ ‘Appendix A – Council Values and the Complaints Handling Process’ page 17 and ‘Appendix C – ‘responsibilities’ page 19 & 20

Section 4 – Complaint Handling Principles

Mandatory ‘must’ requirements

Code Section	Code Requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence, Commentary and Any Explanations
4.1	Any decision to try and resolve a concern must be taken in agreement with the resident and a landlord’s audit trail / records should be able to demonstrate this. Landlords must ensure that efforts to resolve a resident’s concerns do not obstruct access to the complaints procedure or result in any unreasonable delay. It is not appropriate to have extra named stages (such as ‘stage 0’ or ‘pre-complaint stage’) as this causes unnecessary confusion for residents. When a complaint is made, it must be acknowledged and logged at stage one of the complaints procedure within five days of receipt .	Yes	See our complaint policy https://www.scambs.gov.uk/housing/council-tenants/housing-complaints-and-compliments/ ‘The Three Stages of the Complaints Process’ page 6 – 10 and ‘Council Values and the Complaints Handling Process’ page 17 We aim to acknowledged and log at stage1 of the complaint’s procedure within 3 working days of receipt
4.2	Within the complaint acknowledgement, landlords must set out their understanding of the complaint and the outcomes the resident is seeking. If any aspect of the complaint is unclear, the resident must be asked for clarification and the full definition agreed between both parties.	Yes	At the point of acknowledgment If any aspect of the complaint is unclear, we will seek clarification from the customer and request further information if required

Code Section	Code Requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence, Commentary and Any Explanations
4.6	A complaint investigation must be conducted in an impartial manner.	Yes	See our complaint policy https://www.scambs.gov.uk/housing/council-tenants/housing-complaints-and-compliments/ 'Our Commitments' page 14 'Council Values and the Complaints Handling Process' page 17 'Appendix C – Responsibilities' pages 19 & 20
4.7	The complaint handler must: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • deal with complaints on their merits • act independently and have an open mind • take measures to address any actual or perceived conflict of interest • consider all information and evidence carefully • keep the complaint confidential as far as possible, with information only disclosed if necessary, to properly investigate the matter. 	Yes	See our complaint policy – https://www.scambs.gov.uk/housing/council-tenants/housing-complaints-and-compliments/ 'Council Values and the Complaints Handling Process' page 17 'Appendix C – Responsibilities' pages 19 & 20
4.11	Landlords must adhere to any reasonable arrangements agreed with residents in terms of frequency and method of communication	Yes	See our complaint policy – 'Reasonable Adjustments' page 15

Code Section	Code Requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence, Commentary and Any Explanations
4.12	<p>The resident, and if applicable any staff member who is the subject of the complaint, must also be given a fair chance to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • set out their position • comment on any adverse findings before a final decision is made. 	Yes	<p>See our complaint policy – https://www.scambs.gov.uk/housing/council-tenants/housing-complaints-and-compliments/</p> <p>‘Our Commitments’ page 14</p> <p>‘Council Values and the Complaints Handling Process’ page 17</p> <p>‘Appendix C – Responsibilities’ pages 19 & 20</p>
4.13	<p>A landlord must include in its complaints policy its timescales for a resident to request escalation of a complaint</p>	Yes	<p>See our complaint policy –</p> <p>‘The Three Stages of the Complaints Process’ pages 6 – 10</p>
4.14	<p>A landlord must not unreasonably refuse to escalate a complaint through all stages of the complaints procedure and must have clear and valid reasons for taking that course of action. Reasons for declining to escalate a complaint must be clearly set out in a landlord’s complaints policy and must be the same as the reasons for not accepting a complaint</p>	Yes	<p>See our complaint policy pages 5 & 6 ‘Other Exceptions’</p> <p>https://www.scambs.gov.uk/housing/council-tenants/housing-complaints-and-compliments/</p>
4.15	<p>A full record must be kept of the complaint, any review and the outcomes at each stage. This must include the original complaint and the date received, all correspondence with the resident, correspondence with other parties and any reports or surveys prepared.</p>	Yes	<p>See our complaint policy –</p> <p>‘Appendix C – Responsibilities’ page 19 & 20</p> <p>https://www.scambs.gov.uk/housing/council-tenants/housing-complaints-and-compliments/</p>

Code Section	Code Requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence, Commentary and Any Explanations
4.18	Landlords must have policies and procedures in place for managing unacceptable behaviour from residents and / or their representatives when pursuing a complaint.	Yes	See our complaint policy – 'Vexatious or Unreasonably Persistent Complaints' pages 12 – 14 'Appendix B – Examples of Unreasonable Actions and Behaviours' page 1

Best practice 'should' requirements

Code Section	Code Requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence, Commentary and Any Explanations
4.3	Landlords should manage residents' expectations from the outset, being clear where a desired outcome is unreasonable or unrealistic	Yes	Our complaint policy confirms expectations and timeframes, which are followed through in our communication via our website, newsletters and response letters / emails / portal
4.4	A complaint should be resolved at the earliest possible opportunity, having assessed what evidence is needed to fully consider the issues, what outcome would resolve the matter for the resident and whether there are any urgent actions required.	Yes	See our complaints policy – 'The Three Stages of the Complaints Process' pages 6 – 10 We aim to resolve at the earliest opportunity and within our timeframes
4.5	Landlords should give residents the opportunity to have a representative deal with their complaint on their behalf, and to be represented or accompanied at any meeting with the landlord where this is reasonable.	Yes	See our complaints policy – Page 10 – 11 covering designated person process and 'Third Parties'
4.8	Where a key issue of a complaint relates to the parties' legal obligations landlords should clearly set out their understanding of the obligations of both parties.	Yes	Where a key issue of a complaint relates to legal obligations, we will clearly set out our understanding of the obligations of both parties and seek clarification before doing so where this is not initially clear
4.9	Communication with the resident should not generally identify individual members of staff or contractors.	Yes	Unless named by the complainant we will not disclose

Code Section	Code Requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence, Commentary and Any Explanations
4.10	Landlords should keep residents regularly updated about the progress of the investigation.	Yes	See our complaints policy: The Three Stages of the Complaints Process' pages 6 – 10 'Our Commitments' page 14 'Council Values and the Complaints Handling Process' page 17 'Appendix C – Responsibilities' pages 19 & 20
4.16	Landlords should seek feedback from residents in relation to the landlord's complaint handling as part of the drive to encourage a positive complaint and learning culture.	Yes	We have recently commissioned M·E·L Research to undertake a satisfaction survey to all our tenants and leaseholders which included seeking feedback on our handling of complaints https://www.scambs.gov.uk/housing/satisfaction-survey-spring-2022/ Results / findings from the satisfaction survey are currently being discussed with staff and our tenant working groups and an Improvement plan is in place https://www.scambs.gov.uk/housing/tenant-news-involvement/tenant-working-groups/
4.17	Landlords should recognise the impact that being complained about can have on future service delivery. Landlords should ensure that staff are supported and engaged in the complaints process, including the learning that can be gained	Yes	As above we are working to introduce a more robust learning from complaints process and how best to communicate with our tenants through the improvement plan and with the help from our Tenant working groups
4.19	Any restrictions placed on a resident's contact due to unacceptable behaviour should be appropriate to their needs and should demonstrate regard for the provisions of the Equality Act 2010.	Yes	See our complaint policy: 'Designating a Complaint as Vexatious or Unreasonably Persistent' pages 12 – 14

Section 5 – Complaint Stages

Mandatory ‘must’ requirements

Stage 1

Code Section	Code Requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence, Commentary and Any Explanations
5.1	Landlords must respond to the complaint <u>within 10 working days</u> of the complaint being logged. Exceptionally, landlords may provide an explanation to the resident containing a clear timeframe for when the response will be received. This should not exceed a further 10 days without good reason.	Yes	See our complaints policy – The Three Stages of the Complaints Process’ pages 6 – 10 We aim to resolve stage 1 complaints within 10 working days but if not possible to meet this target, we will inform the customer of a revised and realistic target timescale at the earliest opportunity, exceeding no more than a further 10 days
5.5	A complaint response must be sent to the resident when the answer to the complaint is known, not when the outstanding actions required to address the issue, are completed. Outstanding actions must still be tracked and actioned expeditiously with regular updates provided to the resident.	Yes	This is an area we have been working on particularly with regards to repair and maintenance repairs, ensuring a response is sent once an action plan is in-place, instead of when work has been completed
5.6	Landlords must address all points raised in the complaint and provide clear reasons for any decisions, referencing the relevant policy, law and good practice where appropriate.	Yes	We have template letters to help staff ensure all relevant wording and points are covered

Code Section	Code Requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence, Commentary and Any Explanations
5.8	<p>Landlords must confirm the following in writing to the resident at the completion of stage one in clear, plain language:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the complaint stage • the decision on the complaint • the reasons for any decisions made • the details of any remedy offered to put things right • details of any outstanding actions • details of how to escalate the matter to stage two if the resident is not satisfied with the answer 	Yes	As above we have template letters to help staff ensure all relevant wording and points are covered

Stage 2

Code Section	Code Requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence, Commentary and Any Explanations
5.9	If all or part of the complaint is not resolved to the resident's satisfaction at stage one it must be progressed to stage two of the landlord's procedure unless an exclusion ground now applies. In instances where a landlord declines to escalate a complaint it must clearly communicate in writing its reasons for not escalating as well as the resident's right to approach the Ombudsman about its decision.	Yes	If we have not fully answered or the complainant is not fully satisfied with our stage 1 response the complaint will be escalated to stage 2. If there are any instances where this is declined, we will always communicate in writing the reasons and their right to approach the Ombudsman about our decision.
5.10	On receipt of the escalation request, landlords must set out their understanding of issues outstanding and the outcomes the resident is seeking. If any aspect of the complaint is unclear, the resident must be asked for clarification and the full definition agreed between both parties.	Yes	We will always ask for further clarification and / or information to ensure we are clear on the escalation request
5.11	Landlords must only escalate a complaint to stage two once it has completed stage one and at the request of the resident.	Yes	See our complaints policy – 'The Three Stages of the Complaints Process' pages 6 – 10 https://www.scambs.gov.uk/housing/council-tenants/housing-complaints-and-compliments/
5.12	The person considering the complaint at stage two, must not be the same person that considered the complaint at stage one.	Yes	See our complaints policy – 'The Three Stages of the Complaints Process' pages 6 – 10 Stage 1 is a Service Manger Stage 2 Head of Service

Code Section	Code Requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence, Commentary and Any Explanations
5.13	Landlords must respond to the stage two complaint <u>within 20 working days</u> of the complaint being escalated. Exceptionally, landlords may provide an explanation to the resident containing a clear timeframe for when the response will be received. This should not exceed a further 10 days without good reason.	Yes	See our complaints policy – The Three Stages of the Complaints Process’ pages 6 – 10 We aim to resolve stage 2 complaints within 20 working days but if not possible to meet this target, we will inform the customer of a revised and realistic target timescale at the earliest opportunity and aim to extend by no more than 10 days
5.16	Landlords must confirm the following in writing to the resident at the completion of stage two in clear, plain language: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the complaint stage • the complaint definition • the decision on the complaint • the reasons for any decisions made • the details of any remedy offered to put things right • details of any outstanding actions and • if the landlord has a third stage, details of how to escalate the matter to stage three • if this was the final stage, details of how to escalate the matter to the Housing Ombudsman Service if the resident remains dissatisfied. 	Yes	We have template letters to help staff ensure all relevant wording and points are covered

Stage 3

Code Section	Code Requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence, Commentary and Any Explanations
5.17	Two stage landlord complaint procedures are ideal. This ensures that the complaint process is not unduly long. If landlords strongly believe a third stage is necessary, they must set out their reasons for this as part of their self-assessment. A process with more than three stages is not acceptable under any circumstances.	Yes	Our policy quotes 3 stages however the 3 rd stage is escalation to the relevant Ombudsman (Housing or Local Government)
5.20	<p>Landlords must confirm the following in writing to the resident at the completion of stage three in clear, plain language:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the complaint stage • the complaint definition • the decision on the complaint • the reasons for any decisions made • the details of any remedy offered to put things right • details of any outstanding actions • details of how to escalate the matter to the Housing Ombudsman Service if the resident remains dissatisfied 	Yes	Our policy quotes 3 stages however the 3 rd stage is escalation to the relevant Ombudsman (Housing or Local Government)

Best practice 'should' requirements

Stage 1

Code Section	Code Requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence, Commentary and Any Explanations
5.2	If an extension beyond 20 working days is required to enable the landlord to respond to the complaint fully, this should be agreed by both parties.	Yes	See our complaints policy – The Three Stages of the Complaints Process' pages 6 – 10 We aim to resolve stage 2 complaints within 20 working days but if not possible to meet this target, we will inform the customer of a revised and realistic target timescale at the earliest opportunity and aim to extend by no more than 10 days
5.3	Where agreement over an extension period cannot be reached, landlords should provide the Housing Ombudsman's contact details so the resident can challenge the landlord's plan for responding and / or the proposed timeliness of a landlord's response.	Yes	See our complaints policy page 11 https://www.scambs.gov.uk/housing/council-tenants/housing-complaints-and-compliments/
5.4	Where the problem is a recurring issue, the landlord should consider any older reports as part of the background to the complaint if this will help to resolve the issue for the resident.	Yes	We have systems in place that look back at works / complaints etcetera
5.7	Where residents raise additional complaints during the investigation, these should be incorporated into the stage one response if they are relevant and the stage one response has not been issued. Where the stage one response has been issued, or it would unreasonably delay the response, the complaint should be logged as a new complaint.	Yes	See our complaints policy page 5 If additional complaints are relevant, they will be added, but if not, they will be investigated as a separate matter / complaint

Stage 2

Code Section	Code Requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence, Commentary and Any Explanations
5.14	If an extension beyond 10 working days is required to enable the landlord to respond to the complaint fully, this should be agreed by both parties.	Yes	See our complaints policy – The Three Stages of the Complaints Process’ pages 6 – 10 We aim to resolve within our timeframes but if not possible to meet this target, we will inform the customer of a revised and realistic target timescale at the earliest opportunity aim to extend by no more than 10 day
5.15	Where agreement over an extension period cannot be reached, landlords should provide the Housing Ombudsman’s contact details so the resident can challenge the landlord’s plan for responding and / or the proposed timeliness of a landlord’s response	Yes	As above 5.3 See our complaints policy page 11 https://www.scambs.gov.uk/housing/council-tenants/housing-complaints-and-compliments/

Stage 3

Code Section	Code Requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence, Commentary and Any Explanations
5.18	Complaints should only go to a third stage if the resident has actively requested a third stage review of their complaint. Where a third stage is in place and has been requested, landlords must respond to the stage three complaint <u>within 20 working days</u> of the complaint being escalated. Additional time will only be justified if related to convening a panel. An explanation and a date for when the stage three response will be received should be provided to the resident.	Yes	Our stage 3 is referral to the Ombudsman
5.19	Where agreement over an extension period cannot be reached, landlords should provide the Housing Ombudsman's contact details so the resident can challenge the landlord's plan for responding and / or the proposed timeliness of a landlord's response.	Yes	See our complaints policy page 11 https://www.scambs.gov.uk/housing/council-tenants/housing-complaints-and-compliments/

Section 6 – Putting Things Right

Mandatory ‘must’ requirements

Code Section	Code Requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence, Commentary and Any Explanations
6.1	Effective dispute resolution requires a process designed to resolve complaints. Where something has gone wrong a landlord must acknowledge this and set out the actions it has already taken, or intends to take, to put things right.	Yes	We have template letters to help staff ensure all relevant wording and points are covered ‘Our Commitments’ page 14 ‘Council Values and the Complaints Handling Process’ page 17 ‘Appendix C – Responsibilities’ pages 19 & 20 We provide staff training and updates in team meeting
6.2	Any remedy offered must reflect the extent of any service failures and the level of detriment caused to the resident as a result. A landlord must carefully manage the expectations of residents and not promise anything that cannot be delivered or would cause unfairness to other residents.	Yes	Our policy clearing sets out our timeframes, commitments and reasonable adjustments As well as our Council Values and Responsibilities
6.5	The remedy offer must clearly set out what will happen and by when, in agreement with the resident where appropriate. Any remedy proposed must be followed through to completion.	Yes	We will always look to work with the tenant / resident to ensure we come to a mutual agreement to the proposed remedy
6.6	In awarding compensation, a landlord must consider whether any statutory payments are due, if any quantifiable losses have been incurred, the time and trouble a resident has been put to as well as any distress and inconvenience caused.	Yes	We would also look towards the Housing Ombudsman guidance for compensation as an additional means to ensure any compensation is fairly awarded

Best practice 'should' requirements

Code section	Code requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence, commentary and any explanations
6.3	Landlords should look beyond the circumstances of the individual complaint and consider whether anything needs to be 'put right' in terms of process or systems to the benefit of all residents	Yes	We are working to introduce a survey for obtaining seeking feedback and a more robust learning from complaints process looking at how best to communicate with our tenants with the help from our resident involvement groups
6.7	In some cases, a resident may have a legal entitlement to redress. The landlord should still offer a resolution where possible, obtaining legal advice as to how any offer of resolution should be worded.	Yes	We would seek advice from our Internal legal department

Section 7 – Continuous Learning and Improvement

Mandatory ‘must’ requirements

Code section	Code requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence, commentary and any explanations
7.2	Accountability and transparency are integral to a positive complaint handling culture. Landlords must report back on wider learning and improvements from complaints in their annual report and more frequently to their residents, staff and scrutiny panels.	Yes & No	Although we do elements of this already, we are looking to improving the quality of information provided, and are working to introduce a more robust learning from complaints process and how best to communicate this with our tenants

Best practice ‘should’ requirements

Code section	Code requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence, commentary and any explanations
7.3	A member of the governing body should be appointed to have lead responsibility for complaints to support a positive complaint handling culture. This role will be responsible for ensuring the governing body receives regular information on complaints that provides insight to the governing body on the landlord’s complaint handling performance.	Yes	Head of Transformation has been appointed lead for the council

Code section	Code requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence, commentary and any explanations
7.4	<p>As a minimum, governing bodies should receive:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular updates on the volume, categories and outcome of complaints, alongside complaint handling performance including compliance with the Ombudsman’s orders • Regular reviews of issues and trends arising from complaint handling, • The annual performance report produced by the Ombudsman, where applicable • Individual complaint outcomes where necessary, including where the Ombudsman made findings of severe maladministration or referrals to regulatory bodies. The implementation of management responses should be tracked to ensure they are delivered to agreed timescales. The annual self-assessment against the Complaint Handling Code for scrutiny and challenge. 	Yes	<p>Our performance in relation to complaints handling is monitored through key performance indicators reported quarterly to senior management and Councillor committees. Regular reviews of data and feedback allow the management of complaints handling processes on a day-to-day basis, with learning shared across our services. Reviews also take place in relation to any Stage 3 decision notices that are received, as well as Ombudsman annual review letters.</p>
7.5	<p>Any themes or trends should be assessed by senior management to identify potential systemic issues, serious risks or policies and procedures that require revision. They should also be used to inform staff and contractor training.</p>	Yes	<p>As above</p> <p>Our performance in relation to complaints handling is monitored through key performance indicators reported quarterly to senior management and Councillor committees. Regular reviews of data and feedback allow the management of complaints handling processes on a day-to-day basis, with learning shared across our services. Reviews also take place in relation to any Stage 3 decision notices that are received, as well as Ombudsman annual review letters</p>

Code section	Code requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence, commentary and any explanations
7.6	<p>Landlords should have a standard objective in relation to complaint handling for all employees that reflects the need to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • have a collaborative and co-operative approach towards resolving complaints, working with colleagues across teams and departments • take collective responsibility for any shortfalls identified through complaints rather than blaming others • act within the Professional Standards for engaging with complaints as set by the Chartered Institute of Housing. 	Yes	<p>See our policy ‘Appendix C – Responsibilities’ pages 19 & 20 https://www.scambs.gov.uk/housing/council-tenants/housing-complaints-and-compliments/</p>

Section 8 – Self-assessment and Compliance

Mandatory ‘must’ requirements

Code section	Code requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence, commentary and any explanations
8.1	Landlords must carry out an annual self-assessment against the Code to ensure their complaint handling remains in line with its requirements.	Yes	The first code was reviewed, completed and published on our website in January 2021
8.2	Landlords must also carry out a self-assessment following a significant restructure and / or change in procedures.	Yes	On review and update of the council’s complaint policy (September / October 2021), it was decided to integrate the Housing Complaints policy in to the one corporate document, the Code was updated in December 2021 to confirm the changes
8.3	<p>Following each self-assessment, a landlord must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • report the outcome of their self-assessment to their governing body. In the case of local authorities, self-assessment outcomes should be reported to elected members • publish the outcome of their assessment on their website if they have one, or otherwise make accessible to residents • include the self-assessment in their annual report section on complaints handling performance 	Yes	<p>Following each self-assessment, we will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Report the outcome to the council lead Head of Transformation; our Head of Housing; Housing Service Managers; Housing Performance Panel and Housing Executive Board • Publish outcomes on our website • Include in our Annual Report / Tenant and Leaseholder Newsletters

5.3 Buy back of Equity Share Properties

A document on Empty Equity Share Properties Information is included in the pack.

Rebecca Gane to present.

Empty Equity Share Properties Information

Equity Share for the Elderly Leases

This is a scheme for the 60 plus age group who own their own home or have enough money to buy a share in a sheltered bungalow or flat.

There are differences in the equity share lease depending on when the leaseholder bought their property. For leaseholders who moved in before 1 January 2006, the property will automatically be sold back to the Council. For any leases purchased after this date, the lease must be assigned. This means that a suitable buyer must be found to buy the lease from the existing leaseholder. If there is no one suitable on the Housing Register then it must be sold, by the existing leaseholder or their executor, on the open market.

Empty Properties

We currently have 19 empty properties. 4 of these are the old style lease, of which 3 have been surrendered back to the council and 1 is currently awaiting probate, therefore the surrender cannot complete until this is obtained. Of the 3 that have been surrendered back to the council, 1 is sold and the other 2 are undergoing void works in readiness to go onto the market.

The remaining 15 empty properties are the newer lease and are therefore at different stages of the assignment process. 6 have been sold, 4 are on the open market, 4 we are awaiting instructions from the executors and 1 is with the Allocations Team.

It is not unusual for an equity share property to remain empty for an extended period of time. Much of this is down to legalities and, for those sold on the open market, it is a case of waiting for a suitable buyer, although we do find that these properties are sought after and tend to sell quickly. Having said that, even when they sell quickly, it takes several weeks to go through the conveyancing process.

The turnaround on these properties is not straightforward, they are very different to tenanted properties and, with the best will in the world, the usual minimum turnaround time is approximately 12 weeks, but often runs to longer. As anyone who has sold a property on the open market themselves will know, there are so many things that need to be factored in that can delay the process and the council has no control over this.

Since the pandemic, there has been a backlog in obtaining probate on properties where the leaseholder has passed away so this is another factor that needs to be taken into account.

Generally, the turnaround time for leasehold equity share bungalows is not a cause for concern once it is understood that time constraints are most often out of the Council's control. They still generate an income for the Council as, whilst empty, those on the newer style of lease are still being paid for by the leaseholder or their executor as a condition of the lease. Those on the older style of lease usually bring in a return once they are re-sold following their surrender back to the Council.

5.4 Annual Report to Tenants

Gina Manderson to lead a discussion on the contents of the Annual Report to Tenants.

5.5 Tpas National Tenant Conference – Feedback Reports

The Tpas National Tenant Conference held at the beginning of July 2022 was attended by Margaret Wilson, Jim Watson and Paul Bowman (HPP).

Feedback reports from the tenant volunteers, are included in the pack for noting.

Margaret Wilson to report.

Tpas National Tenant Conference – July 2022

Feedback Report – Margaret Wilson

Day 1, Opening Speaker – Tpas CEO

As a person new to Tpas and national tenancy matters it struck me that Tpas's expertise was largely based on experience with Housing Associations. I may be wrong but reference was frequently made to 'the board' and similar non-Local Government (LA) acronyms. Whilst this should not be problematic it did strike me that Las can be seen as rather different organisations overall. For example, Las have to deal with elections, changing political ideology, planning and legal matters as well as housing and all that that entails. Nevertheless, being social landlords remains a common theme and the type of organisation should not make a difference to tenants.

Points taken from Tpas goals:

- ⇒ Landlords need to know their tenants (example, Vulnerable people) as ignorance often leads to material deterioration of property
- ⇒ Provides a national voice for tenants but not as a pressure group
- ⇒ 'consumer issues' are the main priority- defined as making a meaningful difference for tenants or that changes must be possible for all landlords
- ⇒ Tenant satisfaction (example, Surveys leading to KPIs)
- ⇒ Improving consumer standards (using revised and extended consultation)
- ⇒ Change of culture (top down changes, repairs, ASBOs, new-build)
- ⇒ Improve communication
- ⇒ Ageing stock (refurbish vs retrofit vs rebuild)

Day 1, Session 1 – Learning from Grenfell

- ⇒ Aesthetics / need (of tenants) vs budget
- ⇒ Aluminium cladding
- ⇒ Make sure involved tenants are sceptical about products and construction methods
- ⇒ Contractors vs Landlords – v. difficult to get anyone to take on job / responsibility (MEMOLI Report)
- ⇒ Multiple occupation – Personal Evacuation Plans. Fire risk assessor must be independent

Day 1, Session 2 – Stop Social Housing Stigma

This is mainly a new(ish) tenant-led enterprise

- ⇒ Raising awareness that Social Housing tenants are ordinary, hard-working people who love their homes
- ⇒ Social housing is for *homes*; they are not units / assets
- ⇒ Promotion of home ownership is very unhelpful in improving societal attitudes and culture
- ⇒ What should the people that occupy these homes be called? that is, Tenants / residents / customers
- ⇒ Working with developers/landlords to stop / prevent the obvious differences between private and social housing within new developments
- ⇒ Improve the response to and involvement of engaged tenants

Day 2, Keynote Speaker – Housing Ombudsman

- ⇒ Opening video – "things haven't changed for 40years"
- ⇒ Landlords should drive contractors
- ⇒ Not just about complaints and complaint systems
- ⇒ Ombudsman's powers:
 - ❖ **Order** this is statutory ~ can be used in court proceedings
 - ❖ **Recommendation** this is not enforceable
- ⇒ There are multiple routes into the complaints system

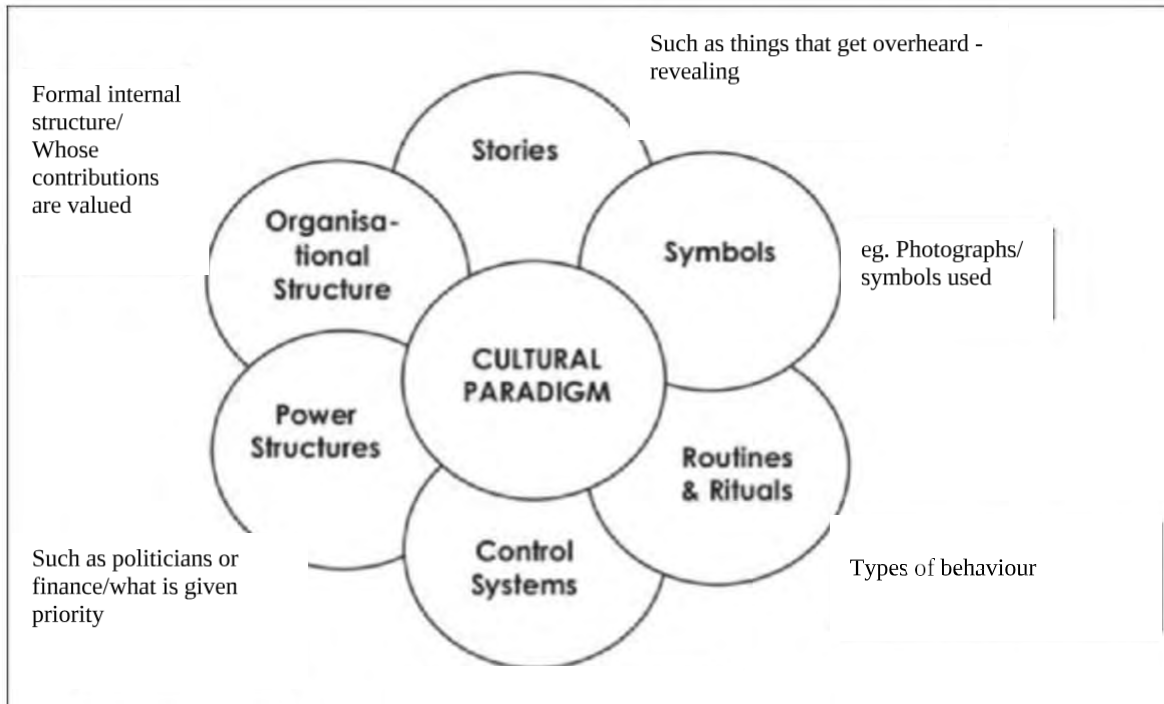
Day 2, Session 3 – Community Resilience

- ⇒ Introducing new model for social housing (Liverpool Project)
- ⇒ Community Land Trusts
- ⇒ Tenants investing in jointly owned land for building/renovation
- ⇒ Potentially working with developers
- ⇒ Works in rural areas
- ⇒ All property is for rent
- ⇒ Changing ideology and attitudes
- ⇒ Make Wi-Fi available in all Council estates – councils trying to get people to use internet



Day 2, Session 4 – Making tenants' voices heard

- ⇒ Session run by Tpas
- ⇒ Resident involvement culture
- ⇒ Culture central to all activities; succeed / fail
- ⇒ Cultural Web (Scholes & Johnson, 1992)



How does the web apply to SCDC resident engagement?

- ⇒ Ensure HEB (or other involved tenants) are involved in induction of new employees
- ⇒ No tenant voice = no approval
- ⇒ Staff and leaders meet tenants
- ⇒ Include tenants in all staff appraisals
- ⇒ Recruitment – involved tenant included in job interviews
 - two way feedback
- ⇒ Don't pass the buck – how to get things done:
 - ❖ Initial approach ~ go to department
 - ❖ No result ~ go to councillor
 - ❖ Not satisfied~ go to **M.P.**

MY REPORT

I think Tpas is largely used to dealing with Housing Associations; I may be wrong but I think the recent White Paper is what has incorporated all Social Housing landlords into one paradigm. Prior to that Local Authorities and Housing Associations seem to have been separately regulated.

Basically, my overall take-away from this conference is that there is a growing sense that enough is enough. Tenants in Social Housing (itself a terminology that many don't like) are ordinary people without a voice or power. The Grenfell Tower Inquiry has exposed the culture of treating anybody who 'rocks the boat' as a trouble-maker. Tenants should be involved in the whole infrastructure of Social landlords' culture; from recruiting and training staff to being 'on the board'. ("on the board" or "at board level" were frequent expressions which is why I think Tpas was largely concerned with HSAs).

Developers and planners have responsibility from the outset (so LAs can have influence at a very early stage) for what, how, and where they build. Too many SH estates are tucked away 'out of sight' and materials used in construction are obviously different from other housing. (For me an example is Cambourne).

I think the conference exposed the fact that too many decisions are made by people with absolutely no experience of the effect that their lack of / action will have upon people's lives. This, of course, stems from the highest, government, level. Little or no attention is given to unintended consequences – such as ghettos.

Tpas National Tenant Conference – July 2022

Feedback Report – Jim Watson

Day 1

The talk that Jenny Osbourne, Chief Executive – Tpas, was interesting and she did say it was mostly about social housing not district council there is a difference I believe from housing associations and the way things are done.

Keynote Speaker was Kate Dodsworth, Director of Consumer Regulation – Regulator of Social Housing (RSH), who also gave a good speech who talked about the update of the white paper will require social housing landlords to understand culture change and co-operation and to engage tenants on building safety disrepair and more.

Well on arriving at the conference, 2 of my choices were changed because of covid of two speakers. Not a good start, but I still attended:

- A5 – How can we be sure our voice is having any impact at all? – Emma Gilpin – Tpas

AND

- B1 – Building Safety: the sector's big agenda – Andy McGrory & Michael Hill – Building safety Regulator: Health & Safety Executive

on the first day although the theme did appear to be about Housing Associations mostly and not really about local councils like South Cambs District however I think there may have been something South Cambs could take from them.

Day 2

The second day was started off by Richard Blakeway, Housing Ombudsman Service , Keynote Speaker. He was appointed as Housing Ombudsman on 1st September 2019. He explained it's been a hectic few years for the housing ombudsman with increased visibility expectations and new guidance for the sector.

More needs to change in complaint handling in the sector ?

The second day I attended:

- C2 – Mergers – what's the best practice for resident involvement? – Dave Smethurst – Tpas,

as this I thought might be of more information as I sat on the shadow board when South Cambs were doing a resident run to change to a new housing, but that did not happen at that time but it was interesting maybe for the future ?

Most of the other delegates had already been through that and have grown in size was my feeling.

Also attended:

- D3 – Ready to Regulate? – Caritas Charles – Tpas

it's a new world of regulation is on its way.

The housing regulation is going to parliament now and is set to bring some of the biggest changes in the housing sector for years with the potential to really empower tenant voices.

On the whole it was well worth attending looking forward to next year's one now.

A Short Report by Paul Bowman

on the Tpas

National Tenant Conference 6th & 7th July 2022

Voco St John's, Solihull

With six workshops to choose from, twice a day for each day, we each attended different sessions in order to cover the wide range of subject matter relating to Tenants of both Local Authorities and Housing Associations. We did not all attend our first choices due to COVID affecting some speakers.

Note: Mears was one of the Conference Sponsors, so we might assume that they could or should be aware of much of what was being discussed and explored. (Alison Wilkinson, Lead Customer Success Manager from Mears was also present and was receptive to our input)

Both the Opening and Keynote Speakers referred to the upcoming challenges Social Housing Landlords face in the light of new Government Legislation brought about by (in particular) Grenfell:

- Measureable and meaningful improvement needed in performance levels, service standards and attitudes towards Tenants
- Requires a change of culture
- Data collection to be robust
- KPI's to be relevant
- Need to act *ahead* of the White Paper
- Consumer Regulation Review (August) underlines the above
- Communication with Tenants is vital. Multiple platforms required
- Accurate self-assessment and the will to act on the findings is imperative

Note: In retrospect, the latest SCDC Tenant and Leaseholder Survey confirm these challenges – in particular the need for a change of culture to reduce stigma, effective communication and management of service expectations.

The Housing Ombudsman, Richard Blakeway, in particular called for landlords to focus on:

- Strong Data Collection
- Being Pro-active, not reactive

- When communicating, look for silences!
- Remember that a failure in service can lead to a failure of Governance
- Complaints handlers are NOT ‘defenders of the organisation’

Note: All of the above are relevant to both the Performance Management of Mears and the recent Tenant and Leaseholder Satisfaction Survey.

Session A

Scrutiny – Gathering the Evidence

Useful reading: Evidence for Accountability (The Nuffield Foundation)

Wilful Blindness (Margaret Heffernan)

“You are responsible if you could have known, and should have known, something which instead you strove not to see”

A thought provoking session underlining the need for accurate and meaningful data collection.

Only good quality evidence gathering will produce good quality research and respected conclusions. It can and does:

- Help to identify good practice – as well as bad
- Add credibility to specific concerns
- Help shape recommendations

But:

- Evidence informs, it does not rule
- It may be weak or conflicting, so it needs quality assessment
- Evidence from different perspectives should always be sought.

So:

- Embed the User Perspective
- Get others involved
- Use both Qualitative (interviews) and Quantitative (Paper and Online tick box) techniques
- Chatham House Rules for Focus Groups
- Advertise Successes!

Note 1: Bullet point 6 is relevant to the somewhat skewed input from the older SCDC tenants in the recent survey.

Note 2: The relevance of this session to past practices regarding management of the Mears contract is obvious. The need to apply better processes to allow accurate scrutiny of, for instance, Mears' performance in their new and improved offering is clear. For example, accurate data collection (on which Mears KPIs rely) must be monitored by the SCDC Call Centre if the quality of data produced (re: complaints) is to be respected.

Session B

Governance: The role and the models to deliver effective engagement

‘.....to develop the customer voice as part of governance’

Memorable quotes: ...“to ensure that tenants of social housing have the opportunity to be involved in its management and to hold their landlords to account” ...“Tenants should have opportunities to shape service delivery and to hold the responsible board to account”

This session acted as confirmation that SCDC has a structure and processes in place to effectively engage with Tenants.

Note: This is not the same as being fully engaged, as the latest satisfaction survey confirms - Councillors and Officers now recognise that this aspect requires attention.

Session C

Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) in social housing - what more needs to be done?

An informative session that explored current issues. Asking what more should be done by Landlords and how Tenants themselves have a role to play influencing this agenda.

Memorable quote: "If I'm having problems at work, I can get another job. If it's on the street, I can take an alternative route home. But it's a bigger issue if it's happening at my home because it's where I'm supposed to feel safe..."

Food for thought:

- English Housing Survey 2019-20 found 18% of all ethnic minority households in social housing were living in overcrowded homes (7% for white households).

- 11% of statutory homelessness applications come from Black people.
- Over the 20 years pre-pandemic, fuel poverty rates in England rose 22% for non-white households (fell 19% for white households).
- Almost half of social housing tenants are assessed as living in poverty.
- 58% of social housing tenant households are headed by a woman (37% O/O, 42% PRS).
- Half of social housing tenants have a household member with a disability or LLTI (29% O/O, 23% PRS).
- Greater proportion of social housing tenants are carers than in the general population

Social housing by its very nature should be designed with rebalancing inequalities in mind – the principles of EDI should really be embedded in the core of what our organisations do. Housing people from the protected characteristic groups and others with vulnerabilities or experience systemic disadvantage is a big element of the social purpose of social housing organisations.

The regulator of social housing should ensure that landlords:

- Provide choices, information and communication that is appropriate to the diverse needs of their tenants in the delivery of all standards
- Treat all tenants with fairness and respect.
- Demonstrate that they understand the different needs of their tenants, including in relation to the equality strands and tenants with additional support needs.
- Demonstrate how they respond to tenants' needs in the way they provide services and communicate with tenants.

In conclusion:

Organisations need to prioritise listening to the voices of all their tenants and ensure they are removing as many barriers as possible to tenant engagement and involvement.

Ensure 'diverse' voices are not only heard but listened to and involved in co-creation and decision-making where appropriate.

Resolve discriminatory recruitment practices, including those that use only traditional interview techniques that may disadvantage neuro-diverse candidates, for instance.

Achieve meaningful representation across all levels of the organisation.

Note: As this unit was presented by the Housing Diversity Network, they focused on both the needs of the Tenants and the structure of the housing organisation.

Session D

Learning from Complaints

Memorable quote: 'Your most unhappy customers are your greatest source of learning'

As this session was presented by the Housing Ombudsman Service, the Complaint Handling Code (which was published in 2020 following on from the lessons learned from Grenfell) was discussed in some depth.

Revised Code from April 2022:

- Review based on FAQs, sector engagement, casework, landlord and **tenant surveys**

'An effective complaints process enables a landlord to learn from the issues that arise for residents and to take steps to improve the services it provides'.... Intro to Complaint Handling Code

Note: With the new Mears Contract about to go live shortly, much discussion about the complaints handling process is ongoing.

Importance of learning from complaints

Compliance with the Regulator:

- ▶ 'Tenant Involvement & Empowerment Standard'
 - ▶ Use complaints to improve services and publish information annually

Compliance with the Housing Ombudsman:

- ▶ Complaint Handling Code requirements:
 - ▶ Promotes: 'Continuous learning and improvement' (Section 7)
 - ▶ Promotes a positive complaints and learning culture
 - ▶ Landlords should seek feedback from residents to drive learning
 - ▶ Governing body should receive feedback and insights from complaints
 - ▶ Report on learning and improvements in annual report to tenants and elsewhere
- ▶ Learning - to prevent repeat findings of maladministration!

Housing
Ombudsman Service

Memorable Quote: 'A wise man can learn more from a foolish question than a fool can learn from a wise answer'

6. Any other Business (AOB)

Any additional issues to be raised.

7. Meeting dates for 2022 / 2023

- 15 December 2022 (Zoom / venue tbc)
- 23 March 2023 (Zoom / venue tbc)

8. Closing