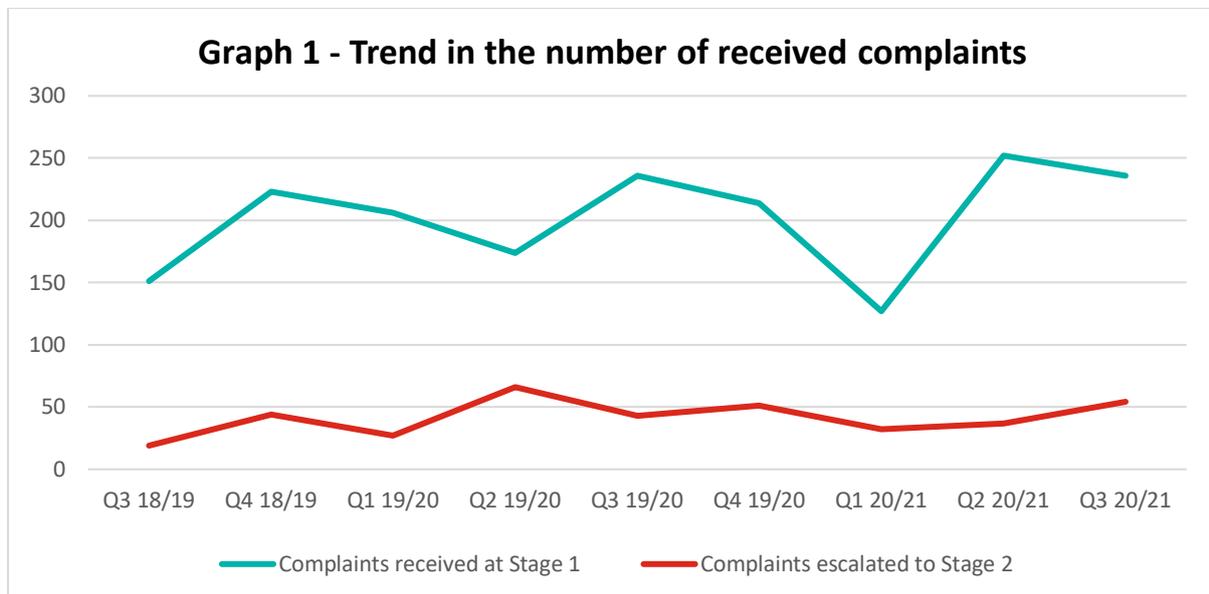


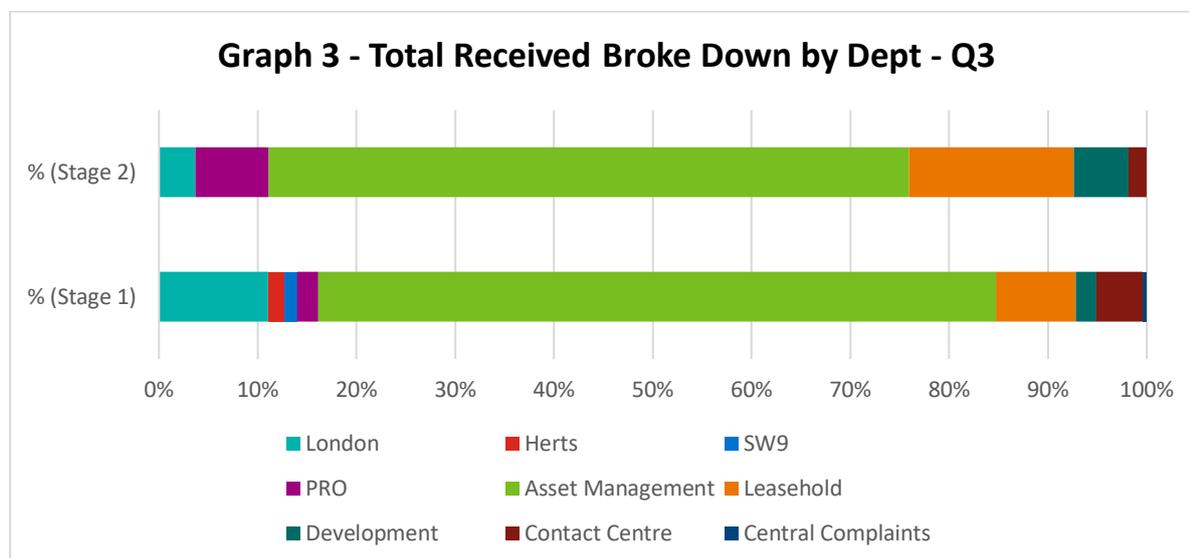
## Complaints report for Quarter 3, 2020 (1 October to 31 December 2020)



Quarter	Complaints received at Stage 1	Complaints escalated to Stage 2	Proportion of escalated complaints	Target
Q4 18/19	223	44	19.73%	10%
Q1 19/20	206	27	13.11%	10%
Q2 19/20	174	66	37.93%	10%
Q3 19/20	236	43	18.22%	10%
Q4 19/20	214	51	23.83%	10%
Q1 20/21	127	32	25.20%	10%
Q2 20/21	252	37	14.68%	10%
Q3 20/21	236	54	22.88%	10%

Graph 1 and the accompanying table shows stage 1 and 2 complaints received covering the period 01 January 2019 to 31 December 2020. Between 01 January 2020 and 31 December 2020, a total of 829 stage 1 complaints were received, this compares with 839 received for the equivalent period 12 months earlier.

We received the same amount Stage One complaints in the most recent quarter compared to the equivalent quarter in the last calendar year. However, it is hard to compare the last few quarters Q1/Q2 20/21 against Q1/Q2 19/20 because of how our contractors operated and the restrictions in place due to the Covid-19 Pandemic, which has seen numbers differ considerably over the equivalent periods.



Total Received Broke Down by Dept - Q1	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 1 allocated by department	% escalated to Stage 2
London	26	2	11.02%	3.70%
Herts	4	0	1.69%	0.00%
SW9	3	0	1.27%	0.00%
PRO	5	4	2.12%	7.41%
Asset Management	162	35	68.64%	64.81%
Leasehold	19	9	8.05%	16.67%
Development	5	3	2.12%	5.56%
Contact Centre	11	1	4.66%	1.85%
Central Complaints	1	0	0.42%	0.00%

A departmental breakdown of complaints received in the quarter is set out in graph 2 together with the accompanying table.

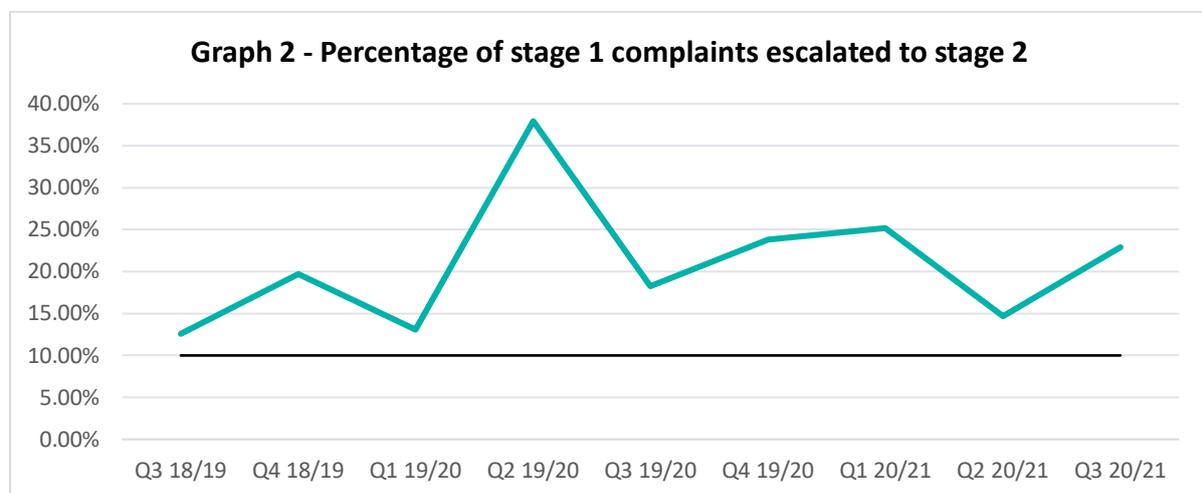
There were 11,462 repairs in the quarter, split between our main contractors. Because of the volume of transactions, they are involved in, Asset Management accounts for at 68% of the total complaints received. There were a total of 162 complaints received for Asset Management (or 1.4% of transactions completed). Of the 162 complaints, 96 complaints are in respect of Responsive Repairs, followed by 57 from Planned Works and M&E with the remainder from Estate Services and Voids and Lettings.

In this quarter, 59% of Asset Management complaints came from Responsive Repairs compared to 47% recorded in the last quarter, which can be linked to Covid-19 restrictions and recovering from a backlog of repairs.

Each year that passes more newbuild properties pass over ownership for repairs from the building contractors to Network Homes. This means as responsibility changes over and the repairs increase, of the potential for repairs related complaints also increases.

In the London region of the 46 Stage One complaints received, 20 complaints were for Neighbourhood and the rest split between Income, Older Persons and Insurance, and Building Safety.

## Complaints that escalated from Stage 1 to stage 2



A total of 54 Stage 2 complaints were received in the quarter, 11 more than Q3 19/20. We have received a high amount of Antisocial behaviour and Estate Service complaints whereby residents are complaining we have taken no action, or have not taken enough timely action, we assess that these are increasing in part due to people spending more time at home due to the Covid-19 Pandemic.

The Housing Ombudsman Service have also issued a code of conduct (the Complaint Handling Code) and asked all Housing Associations to self-certify against this.

This has played a major role in our decision making with escalations to stage 2, so whereas in the past we may have refused a stage 2, now unless there are clear reasons set out in our complaints policy to refuse escalating, we will escalate to Stage 2. Although we would prefer the number to be as low as possible it is important that we take the opportunity to put things right at the final stage.

## Performance - complaints responded to on time

Performance in terms of responses made within target time increased by 8% for Stage One, but Stage Two dropped by 2%. For Stage One it is the first time we have hit the target

(which was also increased in April 2019) since October 2018 which is a great achievement and one that we have been getting close to in recent quarters. This means that despite the slight dip at Stage 2, the overall percentage figure on total responses being issued has increased in the most recent quarter to 95%, something we also have never reached before. This comfortably exceeds last year's targets of 90%.

On the previous quarterly report, we noted Asset Management's performance dropped by 10%, but this quarter they increased this to 94% which is a considerable increase on last quarter.

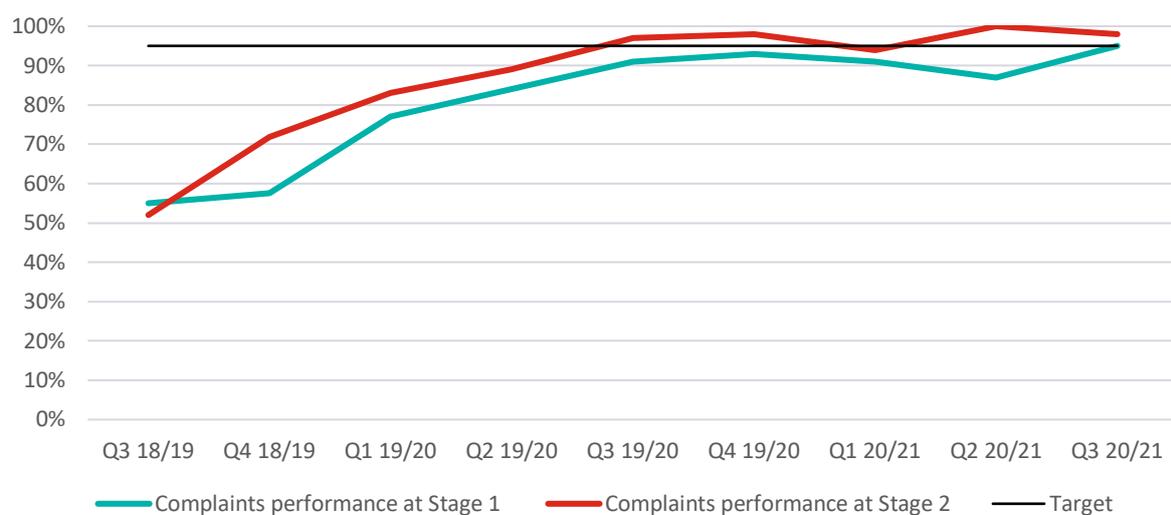
Responsive repairs, who deal with complaints about our two primary contractors Wates and MCP, resolved 108 stage 1 complaints and 98% of their responses were issued on time, this is a great achievement considering they resolved 42 more complaints this quarter than the last (Q2) quarter. Planned Works, Compliance and M&E resolved 60 of their 52 complaints (87%), which is an increase of 17% on last quarter.

I consider that it is due to hard work by both teams (who make up the majority of our stage 1 complaints) we hit our target for the quarter overall.

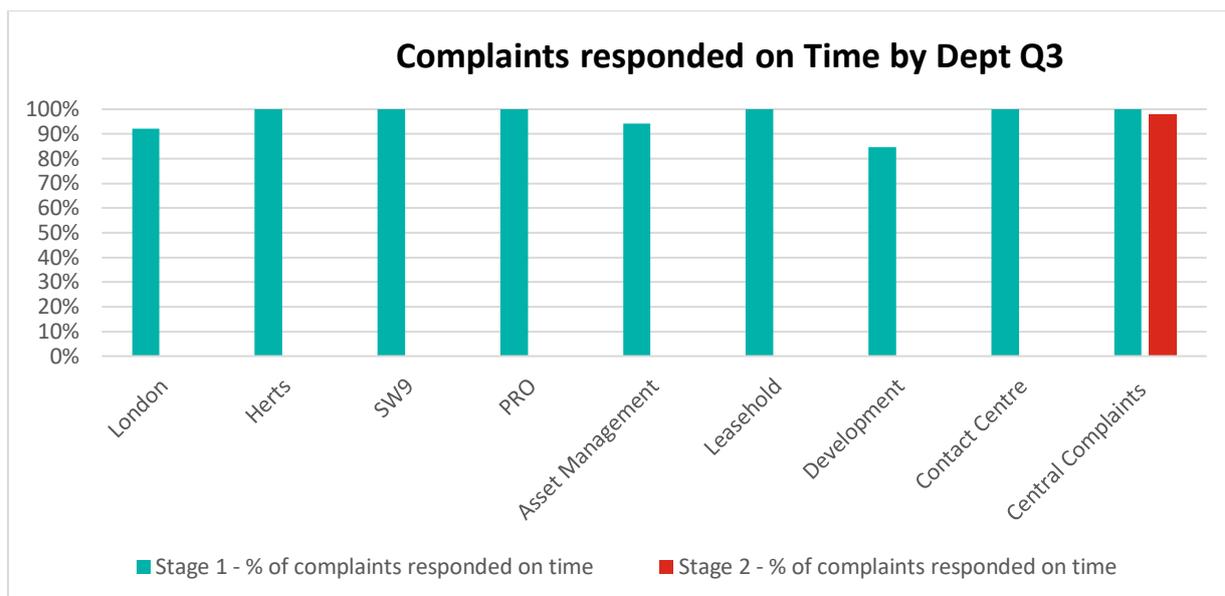
All Stage Two complaints are responded to by the Central Complaints team and of 52 complaints 51 were responded to on time. I feel it important to note that the Central Complaints team also went through a period of change with two team members departing and two joining the team. At one stage there were only two team members in the Central Complaints team for a period of three weeks and it was during this period that one Stage Two complaint was sent late – whilst legal advice was sought on a specific matter (and the delay in issuing the response was out of their control).

<b>Quarter</b>	<b>Complaints performance at Stage 1</b>	<b>Complaints performance at Stage 2</b>	<b>Target</b>
Q4 18/19	58%	72%	90.00%
Q1 19/20	77%	83%	90.00%
Q2 19/20	84%	89%	90.00%
Q3 19/20	91%	97%	90.00%
Q4 19/20	93%	98%	90.00%
Q1 20/21	91%	94%	95.00%
Q2 20/21	87%	100%	95.00%
Q3 20/21	95%	98%	95.00%

**Graph 4 - Percentage of complaints responded to on time**



Total Received Broke Down by Dept - Q1	Stage 1			Stage 2		
	No. on Time	No. Closed	Stage 1 - % of complaints responded on time	No. on Time	No. Closed	Stage 2 - % of complaints responded on time
London	23	25	92%			/
Herts	3	3	100%			/
SW9	4	4	100%			/
PRO	7	7	100%			/
Asset Management	165	175	94%			/
Leasehold	22	22	100%			/
Development	11	13	85%			/
Contact Centre	13	13	100%			/
Central Complaints	2	2	100%	51	52	98%



## Compensation

Compensation can be awarded where, following an investigation, it is identified that our actions or lack of action had an adverse effect on the resident. Compensation was awarded at Stage 1 in respect of 182 complaints at a total cost of £16,730 in Q3 2020/21.

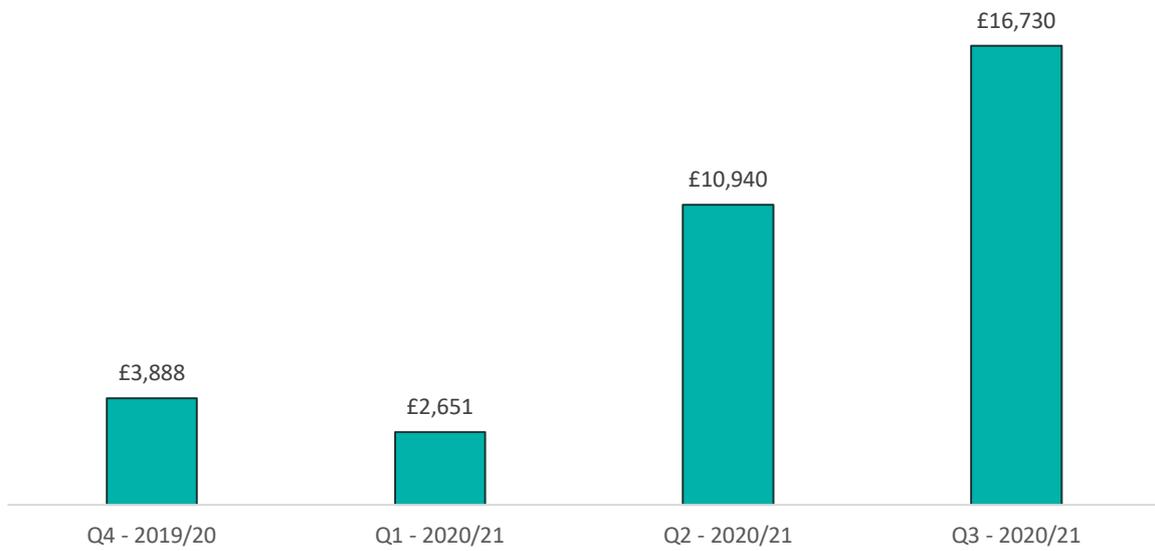
In Q3 2020/21, £9,378 compensation was paid out for delay issues and accounts for over half at 56% of the total figure awarded.

It is worth noting that at the end of each month our repairs team track the amount awarded for delays and request this money back from Wates and MCP, in this quarter (01 October – 31 December 2020) we are claiming back £ 7,575.91 worth of compensation.

This overall figure of £16,730 is considerably higher than last quarter (Q2 2020/21) even though less stage 1 complaints received in Q3 2020/21. This figure is inflated by three complaints that were awarded over £1,000 at £1,040, £1,090 and £2,600 respectively. Further detail on these three high compensation complaints is set out below:

- The £2600 award was made up of £2161 that should have been awarded in January 2020, however, was not completed. A complaint was logged in October 2020 to investigate this. We also identified that we should have logged a complaint back in January 2020, hence the increase in compensation awarded.
- The £1,090 award was due to not taking a more proactive approach in changing a tenants damaged flooring. This complaint was raised following feedback from the Housing Ombudsman Service - due to the suggested internal failings and the high amount of compensation requested by the resident.
- The £1,040 discretionary awarded was made due to the problems a resident faced over a 12-month+ period linked to water ingress and several failed attempts to resolve the issue.

## Quartely Compensation Comparison



## Q3 - Stage 1 Compensation



## MP and Cllr Enquiries

Total Received Broke Down by Dept - Q1	Enquiries Received	% (Enquiries)	No. on Time	No. Closed	% of enquiries responded on time
London	21	31.82%	17	21	81%
Herts	3	4.55%	3	3	100%
PRO + PSL	2	3.03%	1	2	50%
Development + Building Safety	3	4.55%	3	3	100%
Leasehold + Finance	5	7.58%	4	5	80%
Repairs, estates and fire safety	16	24.24%	16	16	100%
Planned + M&E	3	4.55%	2	3	67%
Voids and Lettings	12	18.18%	11	12	92%
SW9	1	1.52%	0	1	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>100.00%</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>86.36%</b>

66 MP and Councillor enquiries were received in this quarter, compared to 72 received in Q2 2020/21. Of the 66 cases closed, 57 were responded to on time meaning the percentage of enquiries being responded to on time was 3% higher than Q2 at 86%.

## Housing Ombudsman activity and Decisions

9 decisions were received in the quarter, a summary of each is below/overleaf.  
7 information requests for formal investigations were also received.

After the Housing Ombudsman investigates a complaint it provides us with a breakdown of their investigation findings and provides a determination on whether we have failed to keep to the law, follow proper procedure, follow good practice or behave in a reasonable and competent manner. The determination takes into consideration if there was any wrongdoing on Network Homes' part and if so, what the impact said failing had on a resident. The four determination categories as explained by the Ombudsman are:

- no maladministration
- service failure (this is a form of maladministration, but is a less severe finding)
- maladministration
- severe maladministration.

Alternatively, the Ombudsman Service may conclude that we have made redress to the complainant which, in the Ombudsman's opinion, resolves the complaint satisfactorily, or that the complainant has refused an offer which, in the Ombudsman's opinion, resolved the complaint satisfactorily.

Having considered the determinations received, we note that there were no formal Maladministration or Severe Maladministration determinations, but that there were four instances where the lesser issue of a Service Failure were identified so further improvements are required going forward.

### **Ombudsman Decision 1: Reasonable Redress**

This complaint was about our response to reports of damage caused to a resident's car as a result of leaf clearance/estate maintenance carried out by our contractor.

The Ombudsman decided we had provided the resident with reasonable redress, stating we acted promptly in response to the report of the cleaning issue with the car and the resident's contemporaneous complaint. We contacted our contractors to ascertain what had caused the reported issues with the car, conveyed to the resident the contractor's response and took the appropriate step of offering to reimburse the resident for the cost of cleaning their car.

We acted appropriately in our complaint responses with the resident, ultimately offering the resident an additional £20 for the time and trouble of organising the car wash and reimbursement. This was also a reasonable step in response to the minor delay of the contractor in organising the payment. We also committed to advising contractors to take as much care as possible in future regarding similar incidents while acknowledging that some of this risk was inevitable.

### **Ombudsman Decision 2: Reasonable Redress**

This complaint was about our response to problems with the administration of the complainant's service charge account.

The Ombudsman noted our compensation policy does not provide any guidance about levels of discretionary payments. However, an offer of £50 was within the range of amounts set out in the Ombudsman's guidance on remedies for instances of service failure resulting in some impact on a resident.

They further noted whilst the failure to amend the direct debit request caused inconvenience to the resident it did not significantly affect the overall outcome for the resident as they were still under an obligation to pay the full and correct rent and service charge. The £50 compensation offered by us was therefore proportionate to the impact of our failures on the resident and in line with the Ombudsman's guidance on remedies.

### **Ombudsman Decision 3: Service failure and Reasonable Redress**

This complaint was about how we dealt with repairs to the communal heating system from 2017, as well as how we dealt with the request for an explanation as to why the discounted rate the landlord obtained for the electricity was not passed onto residents.

The Ombudsman Service found a service failure in us not providing alternative heating to the resident (or considering whether we should have done so) and ordered us to pay the resident compensation in the sum of £150 for our service failure.

Although it was evident, we failed to apply our three-stage complaint procedure (at the time) correctly, including the lack of acknowledgement on a number of occasions or responding to the resident within the timeframes as set out in our complaints policy.

They said, we appropriately acknowledged the complaint had not been handled well at all three stages including that there were overdue responses, the affect this had on the resident and causing a delay to the repairs being remedied. The Ombudsman Service said that the compensation amount offered reflected the poor complaint handling. The Ombudsman said compensation awarded was reasonable as it showed insight and offered financial compensation for a service failure recognised.

#### **Ombudsman Decision 4: Outside Jurisdiction**

This complaint was about our response to the resident's reports concerning the overall handling of a lease extension, the length of time taken to deal with the lease extension, and the handling of their complaint.

This was outside of jurisdiction as The Housing Ombudsman Scheme states 'The Ombudsman will not investigate complaints which, in the Ombudsman's opinion were not brought to the attention of the member as a formal complaint within a reasonable period which would normally be within 6 months of the matters arising. The complainant began the process of seeking to extend the lease term in 2016, and discussions continued into 2017. The complainant then contacted the landlord in July 2019 – approximately two years later - to query why matters had not been concluded.

#### **Ombudsman Decision 5: Service Failure**

This complaint was about our decision not to offer an allocated space, whereby the parking is managed by managing agent and not Network Homes. It was claimed our decision was discriminatory, based on the residents age, disability and race, with the overriding conclusion that the decision to not offer a parking space to the resident was unfair.

The Ombudsman Service decided there was a service failure because of how we allocated parking spaces next to the block containing the property the resident resided in. They also highlighted that overall, we handled the request to be allocated a designated disabled parking space poorly.

Although it was noted by the Ombudsman Service that we acted appropriately by considering the request for a designated space and providing reasons as to why it could not do so at that time, we failed to keep adequate records in relation to the previous allocation of disabled spaces leading to difficulties in it addressing parts of the complaint. We also did not complete a review of parking that we agreed to do. This meant the ombudsman ordered us to pay £275 to the resident.

### **Ombudsman Decision 6: No Maladministration**

This complaint was about a pest infestation which was having an impact on the residents health and caused them anxiety. The resident asked us to make good disrepair in the property, such as sealing holes which allowed pests to access the property - the complainant stated this had not occurred. They wanted one month's rent as compensation for the distress and inconvenience caused.

The Ombudsman was satisfied that the works we carried out in the block demonstrated that we were taking steps in a timely manner to resolve the rodent issue, in line with our pest control policy. The Ombudsman Service saw no indication of a failing on the part of the landlord in addressing these matters during the period in question. Stating the additional discretionary £100 that we offered in our final complaint response was a fair recognition of the distress the resident was experiencing due to the issue, despite there being no failing on the part of the landlord overall.

### **Ombudsman Decision 7: No Maladministration**

This complaint was about a report of our handling of the complainant's reports of anti-social Behaviour (ASB) and our failure to act, our lack of response to the complainant's concerns regarding pest control and health and safety, their security, and how we handled the residents complaint.

The Ombudsman Service determined there was no maladministration on all parts of the complaint. In respect of the security the stated we took reasonable steps to investigate the bin storeroom shutter and made appropriate repairs. In appropriately advising the resident of the steps we had taken in its formal responses; this was in line with our complaints policy.

Regarding the pests they said we acted reasonably to address the issue following each report, in line with our pests policy, and appropriately took steps to address the issue reoccurring in future.

Regarding the ASB we made reasonable investigations into the resident's reports of ASB and took appropriate steps to address the issue in line with its ASB policy, which, where possible, we conveyed to the resident in our responses.

Regarding the complaint handling they were satisfied we had followed our procedure and was correct not to raise any new complaints regarding the same issue, and to refer them to the Ombudsman, and believed we acted reasonably in restricting contact.

### **Ombudsman Decision 8: Reasonable Redress and Service Failure**

This complaint was about the condition of the property when resident moved in, particularly the loft space, plastering and a pest infestation.

They Ombudsman Service determined there was reasonable redress applied in both the lettable standard of the property and the pest infestation but found a service failure in how we handled the residents complaint.

In the lettable standard, the Ombudsman Service said we accepted that it was the case that the property was below our lettable standard, apologised and offered compensation in recognition of this, which was in accordance with the Ombudsman's compensation guidance.

Regarding the delays in repairs they said we had accepted that works had taken too long to complete, apologised for this and offered compensation in recognition of this, in accordance with the Ombudsman's compensation guidance.

The Ombudsman Service ordered we paid £75 for our failure in our complaint handling, they said the complaint was not fully answered at stage 1, that we delayed their escalation to stage 2, and finally they said we did not do enough to investigate the complaint, to find out precisely what had gone wrong and why, in order for us to learn lessons and help prevent a recurrence.

### **Ombudsman Decision 9: Service Failure**

This complaint was about our response to the reports the complainant made about their neighbour's behaviour.

The Ombudsman Service determined there was a service failure regarding our communication with resident (A) concerning neighbour (B) vacating and then returning to the property.. In this instance an injunction had been issued against neighbour (B) due to ASB and instructed to leave the property. However, neighbour (B) had to return to the property and collect personal items. We did not appropriately inform resident (A) of this.

We sent an email notifying resident (A) that neighbour (B) was returning to the property only seven minutes prior to the visitation timeslot, which did not provide resident (A) with any opportunity to make alternative arrangements if they were at home and wanted to vacate whilst neighbour (B) returned to collect their personal items. The Ombudsman Service ordered us to pay £200 in compensation in recognition of these facts.

## **Examples of Service Improvements arising from complaints**

As agreed at residents' panel it was decided meaningful service improvement and/or lessons learned will be gathered throughout the year and discussed every 6 months, and the next one due landed in the quarter being reported.

### **Housing Ombudsman Service feedback**

We have sought to explain failings, considered lessons that need to be learnt and looked to implement changes in process and culture at Network Homes following feedback from the Ombudsman Service. When required we have provided evidence that the Ombudsman's

feedback has been passed on to the relevant teams following a determination. We have also sought to seek advice on matters when subjects could be considered borderline to ensure we are considering all options available to us. This has been extremely helpful for all involved.

### **Compensation payments**

We have found that residents were chasing for their compensation payments as they had yet to be paid, our current system is manual and time consuming. We then moved to working from home during the Covid-19 Pandemic which slowed things further. We have since been working on an automated online system where we can move processing compensation easier and quicker. It also allows us to easily track progress should anyone enquire about their compensation payment. This is in the final testing stage and will be rolled out shortly.

### **Data integrity and system improvements**

We have undertaken several discussions with our IT team to ensure that the data being used to produce reports is not only accurate, but also takes advantage of what the system capabilities are. We have also agreed additional improvements to the existing complaints management systems so that we can provide more meaningful data and feedback across Network Homes. This will invariably lead to process improvements in due course.

### **Repair Complaint Trends**

Our Responsive Repairs team are proactively tracking trends to push through process changes that impact all aspects of completing repairs through to logging and investigating a complaint. Whilst the work undertaken is responsive, it has led to several process changes and improvements.

### **Follow up repairs**

Our Repairs Team found that when a follow up to a repair was needed for a different trade, they would request a new repair to be raised. This meant it was hard to track/follow a re-attend repair or track potentially systemic issues. To help identify problems at an early stage and allow easy access to prior job notes (for an earlier repair) contractors now book in follow on works on the same order regardless of the trade or priority, although there are some exceptions, this has helped complete repairs in a timelier manner and allowed transparency, letting us complete RCA work to further implement change to improve the service provided.

### **Contractor accountability**

Our Responsive Repairs team (led by Kirstie Aulton) has set up a new process that when a complaint is logged repeat issues are identified and fed back to contractors. Management for each contractor will then investigate the repeat issues and put in place an action plan to remedy the problem areas. Kirstie's team will diarise and complete random checks/follow ups on the contractors to ensure the action plan in place is followed. This has meant the number of repeat issues has dropped.

### **Report completed by**

James Mahaffy, Complaints Manager and Adam Tolhurst, Complaints Officer.