ANNUAL COMPLAINTS REPORT & GOVERNING BODY'S RESPONSE

1. Introduction

The purpose of this report is to provide the Quality and Development Committee with information relating to the number of complaints that have been received, their nature and our responses. Field Lane makes every effort to address each complaint and meet the expectations of our tenants but recognise that there can be occasional failures. We will use any learning outcomes to improve the complaints process and the service that tenants receive.

2. Complaints Code

The Social Housing Act 2023 empowered the Housing Ombudsman to issue a code of practice about the procedure that should be followed. A duty has been placed on the Ombudsman to monitor compliance of the code. Each organisation must complete a yearly self-assessment against the code.

The statutory code took effect on 1st April 2024. It is a requirement to identify a "complaint handler" to manage and oversee all complaints for the organisation. I have taken that responsibility for Field Lane.

This report covers complaints from April 2024 to March 2025. Going forward, the annual report will be presented each year to the Quality and Development Committee at this time i.e. the scheduled June meeting.

There are several procedures that must be included within our complaints policy which are:

- A complaints process that has no more than two stages
- Who to complain to – contact details for each stage
- Timescales for acknowledgement of each complaint (both stages)
- Time bound response for submitting full response (both stages)
- The Housing Ombudsman details must be provided in the response at stage two

3. What is a complaint

The code details what is classed as a complaint and what is classed as a service request. Not every issue that is raised is a complaint and not every complaint is raised clearly as a complaint. It is expected that Field Lane ensures that it understands what a complaint is and what a service request is and responds appropriately and in line with the code.

Field Lane has always responded to all complaints regardless of their nature due the vulnerable people it supports. Although there is a separation between housing and care, Field Lane provides both to all tenants. This results in strong collaboration and better understanding to ensure that all complaints are addressed and taken seriously. The new code allows a more formal approach with effective analysis that will provide learning outcomes to improve its service to the people it supports.

A Complaint is – *an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the lack of service, actions, or lack of action by the landlords, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting a resident or group of residents.*

A Service Request is – *a request from a resident to the landlords requiring action to be taken to put something right.*

4. Reporting and Recording

All complaints and service requests must be logged and recorded along with any related evidence and supporting documentation.

Landlords are required to produce an annual report which must include the annual self-assessment against the code. This must be reported to the governing body and published on the landlord's website along with the governing bodies response to the report.

5. Complaints volume and performance

During this period there were seven complaints. No complaints went to stage two during this period. Field Lane's properties are staffed 24 hours a day except for Ashdown Close. We operate a 24-hour on call service to all our tenants as well as having immediate access to staff support. This allows us to understand issues quickly and ensure that they are addressed.

Number of complaints	Number of Complaints		Number of Complaints Escalated to Stage 2	
Received	7	100%	0	N/A
Upheld	6	85.7%	0	N/A
Partially Upheld	0	0.0%	0	N/A
Not Upheld	1	14.3%	0	N/A
Resolved within HOC timescales	6	85.7%	0	N/A

HOC stands for the Housing Ombudsman's Code

85.7% of complaints were resolved within 10 days. The complaint unresolved within 10 days was resolved to the tenant's satisfaction.

Nature of complaint

As part of the complaint analysis, each complaint has been categorised to better understand the nature of the complaints being received and the volume in each area.

Nature of Complaint	Property	Number	Percentage %
Neighbour disputes	Hollyhocks	1	14.3%
Hot water issues	APH	1	14.3%
Heating issues and damage regarding a leak	APH	2	28.5%
Pest control issues	APH	2	28.5%
Tenancy issues	Ashdown	1	14.3%

Key Themes with the complaints

Identifying key themes along with the nature of the complaints allows Field Lane to understand the data that can then be used to make improvements in services and strengthen relationships.

Nature of Complaint	Property	Number	Percentage %
Health & Safety	Hollyhocks	1	14.3%
Chasing outstanding repairs	APH	3	42.9%
Housing related issues	Ashdown	1	14.3%
External contractor – poor service	APH	2	28.3%

6. Learning Outcomes and Improving our Services

Although the key themes above have been separated into different areas for better transparency, two of the complaints were from the same tenant about the same pest control issue which was believed to be resolved by our external contractor. The second complaint was addressed promptly with agreed actions in place and was addressed within the 10-day timescale with positive feedback from the tenant.

The most complaints were from Andrew Provan House (APH), two were from other properties (Ashdown and Hollyhocks), located in Surrey. There is a definite improvement in the way complaints are being handled and responded to. However, contractor issues have impacted upon some tenants and these contracts are being reviewed. Most of the complaints were upheld with positive responses received from the tenants that included:

"Thank you for acknowledging this and for the outcome, much appreciated."

"Thank you for putting a plan in place. I understand that these things can happen and appreciate that something long term is being put in place to prevent this from happening any longer."

No stage two complaint appeals were received in the last 12-month period. Below is a summary of identified actions as a result of this report.

- <u>Andrew Provan House (APH)</u>
  The Facilities Manager is now in place and has introduced a new system for recording and reporting repairs to evidence when repair issues have been received and addressed. This includes work being signed off by a tenant when an issue has been addressed to ensure satisfaction. While the system is in its early stages it appears to be having a positive impact and avoiding repeat service requests that then become a complaint.

  Monthly maintenance surgeries and house meetings are now taking place at APH to improve communication and provide the tenants with an opportunity to raise concerns directly. Attendance is lower than anticipated; going forward we will look at ways of improving tenant engagement at the meetings.

- <u>Cherry Blossom</u>
  We received a complaint from the neighbour regarding an incident that took place, parking spaces and noise. Much of this was around the lack of communication with the local community and not understanding the situation. Communication has now been improved with the local neighbours with a direct line of contact established for the local community to make contact.

- <u>All Services</u>
  Field Lane's Complaints Policy was updated in March 2025 to include exclusions for complaints. This details specific circumstances and timescales that complaints will

not be considered under Field Lane's Complaints Policy and is in line with the Ombudsman's complaint code.

7. Summary

As a charity that supports adults at risk, Field Lane takes a considered view of all complaints on a case-by-case basis, taking into account the updated complaints policy that details the exclusions of what will and will not be considered. Field Lane continues to promote a positive approach to complaints and strongly believes that everyone should have a voice and feel listened too.

There has been an improvement in responding to complaints, with agreed outcomes for those that have made a complaint. Positive feedback around Field Lane's response has been received. There is always work to do and a continuous improvement approach is key to ensure that complaints are addressed to the satisfaction of our tenants as and when they are raised.

The Quality & Development Committee approve this paper and agree with the recommendations. It agrees to the publication of the report on Field Lane's website and submission to the Housing Ombudsman along with its self-assessment return and Complaints Policy.