

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 over see all complaints for the organisation. I have taken that responsibility for Field Lane.

This report covers complaints from April 2023 to March 2024. A similar report for the period April 2024 to March 2025 will be presented at the next meeting of the Quality and Development Committee to ensure that we are up to date with our compliance requirements.

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 is 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 tenants 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 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. This is Field Lane first annual report. Therefore there will be a disparity between the report and self-assessment.

5. Complaints volume and performance

During this period there were eight 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. 83.3% of complaints were resolved within 10 days.

Number of complaints	Number of Complaints	Percentage of Complaints	Number of Complaints Escalated to Stage 2	
Received	6		0	
Upheld	3	50%	0	N/A
Partially Upheld	1	16.6%	0	N/A
Not Upheld	2	33.3%	0	N/A
Resolved within HOC timescales	5	83.3%	0	N/A

HOC stands for the Housing Ombudsman's Code

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	Number of Complaints	Percentage of Complaints
Neighbour disputes	1	16.6%
Complaints relating to staff member behaviour	2	33.3%
Concerns around furniture and safety	1	16.6%
Permitting unsafe visitors	2	33.3%

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	Number of Complaints	Percentage of Complaints
Health & Safety	1	16.6%
Chasing outstanding repairs	1	16.6%
Lack of communication around housing support management	4	66.6%

6. Learning Outcomes and Improving our Services

Although the key themes above have been separated into different areas for better transparency, they are all linked in some way to poor communication with the tenants. All but one complaint came from the same service, and most of the complaints received were due to the lack of information being provided by the housing or staff team and that better communication and updates around their concerns may not have led to a complaint.

While Field Lane takes all complaints seriously and addressed each one in turn, we did not always communicate effective updates regarding agreed actions or relevant information. We are improving our services by:

- Field Lane has recruited a Facilities Manger to improve the capacity for managing maintenance, repairs and health and safety across all its properties. This will increase site visits to the properties where tenants and staff teams are able to meet face to face on a regular basis.
- Tenants at APH said that communication around housing management and the progress of outstanding maintenance issues needed to improve. We will hold monthly maintenance surgeries and house meetings to improve communication and provide the tenants an opportunity to raise concerns directly and provide regular feedback about our service.
- Some tenants were unhappy regarding visitors being refused entry. A review of the Visitor Policy resulting in a Designated Safe Person scheme being implemented. Meetings with tenants' representatives will support and influence policy changes.
- A review of the tenants' welcome packs has taken place to ensure that policy and procedures are clearer and provide more extensive information, including tenant fire advice and visitors.
- A safety concern was raised regarding fire evacuation for tenants. The evacuation procedures were reissued to all tenants and additional notices and signs installed.

7. Governing Body's Response

As a charity that supports adults at risk, all complaints were listened too and addressed regardless of their content. Field Lane has a positive approach to complaints and feels that everyone should have a voice and feel listened too.

However, while we communicated a response for each complaint, there was a lack of communication in updating how we managed the agreed actions. As a result, some tenants felt that nothing was being actioned when it had either taken place or was scheduled to take place. Field Lane recognise that it could have done better at communicating these issues.

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.