

Housing

Ombudsman Service

Richard Blakeway
22 September 2020

Who are we?

- ▶ **Our role improves lives and housing services** – providing redress to almost 5 million households across 2,300 landlords
- ▶ **Dispute support** – helpline handling c16,000 cases every year
- ▶ **Dispute resolution** – 2,138 formal decisions in 2019-20, issuing average of 10 orders/recommendations every day
- ▶ **Proactive Ombudsman** – promote learning and deeper investigation into systemic and thematic issues

Covid-19 – reflections so far

- ▶ Home has never mattered more – this reinforces importance of the sector and the Ombudsman's role
- ▶ Ombudsman has operated a full service throughout the pandemic
- ▶ Communication and engagement has been critical during this period – complaints have started to rise
- ▶ Regular guidance published by the Ombudsman during the strict lockdown – plans to provide insight from the first 50 Covid-related complaints as services re-mobilise

Beyond Covid – how we are changing

- ▶ Revised Scheme, revised budget, new operating model
- ▶ Performance has been strong – Annual Report & Accounts for 2019-20 reported all KPIs met including reducing average investigation time to 5.8 months for first time
- ▶ New operating model will see greater focus on mediation, faster redress and sharing of learning
- ▶ Dedicated team to exercise new systemic powers

Ombudsman's new powers

- ▶ New Scheme gives us extensive new powers:
 - improving access to redress for residents
 - promoting better complaint handling
 - further investigating specific issues
- ▶ We have a variety of new tools including:
 - setting a complaint handling code
 - conducting systemic investigations
 - publishing landlord reports and our decisions
 - strengthened relationship with the Regulator and new MoU

Complaint Handling Code

- ▶ Framework for promoting high-quality complaint handling, greater access and consistency
- ▶ Aims to set culture for positive complaint handling
- ▶ Key provisions include:
 - Universal definition of a complaint
 - Two-stage process and maximum timescales
 - Resident review
 - Demonstration of learning in Annual Reports
- ▶ Self-assessment by 31 December 2020 and Complaint Handling Failure Orders issued from 2021

Spotlight report on leaseholders

- ▶ Insight into almost 2,000 cases over two years and more than 800 investigations
- ▶ Poor complaint handling was a significant finding with 72% maladministration rate; report identified 12 landlords
- ▶ Almost 40 recommendations including:
 - improving leases to avoid misunderstandings
 - better communication within organisations and staff training in products
 - customer satisfaction ratings with repairs
 - more transparency when invoicing service charges

Water leak causes two years of disruption

- ▶ A water leak from an upstairs leasehold flat caused significant damage to Ms A's home
- ▶ Lease provisions meant the landlord should have conducted an inspection but it was slow to respond and take action to ensure the leak was remedied. As a result, Ms A's walls became mouldy, tiles fell from the wall and door frames warped. The leak was not fixed for nearly two years
- ▶ The Ombudsman found severe maladministration, ordered £3,850 compensation, action to resolve the problem and make good the damage

Keeping in touch



Follow us on Twitter @HousingOmbuds



Follow us on LinkedIn



Sign up to our newsletter www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/landlords/#newsletter



www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk