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| **Deep Dive – Complaints – Session 3**held on Thursday 30 May 2024in the Board Room, Emperor House, Sunderland SR3 3XR |
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| **PRESENT** | **IN ATTENDANCE** |
| Brenda **(BN)**David **(DB)**Michelle **(MW)**David **(DW)**John **(JM)**Angela **(AD)**Doreen **(DR)**John **(JD)**Phil **(PH)**Margaret **(MS)**Emma **(EN)**James **(JL)**Stephanie **(SC)**Evelyn **(EC)**Julia **(JW)**Brian **(BT)** | Lewis Walmsley **(LW)** – Customer Engagement LeadMichael McGuigan **(MM)** – Complaints Performance ManagerJosh Sutton **(JS)** – Customer Voice PartnerStephanie Robinson **(SR)** – Customer Voice LeadStacey Thwaites **(ST)** – Building Safety Officer |
| **APOLOGIES** |  |
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| **PARA** |  | **ACTION** |
|  | 1. **Introduction to Session**
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| 1 | LW completed colleague introductions and explained purpose of the session. LW advised the session would be split into two, with us starting off by reviewing the success of the complaint drop-in sessions which were held in Washington, before completing an activity surrounding tone of voice which was a wider piece of work being undertook by the group.  |  |
|  | 1. **Complaint Drop-in Sessions**
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| 2 | LW explained this session would be the last deep dive relating to complaints, as for the next quarter we would be reviewing our VOID process. LW reflected on the achievements so far which included:* Posters which will be posted in all high rise / low rise blocks explaining how customers can make a formal complaint.
* Self-assessment completed against the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code.
* Reviewed Genforce to understand how informal complaints are logged (own it fix its)
* Shadowing undertaken by Customer Committee to understand the different type of queries being received.
* Complaint Drop-in sessions created to ensure we hear from a wide range of customers.

LW explained how feedback from Housing Ombudsman event and Deep Dive told us we need to ensure accessibility out in the community, particularly when it comes to complaints. LW advised from reviewing the complaint data, Washington had the highest number of formal complaints, therefore it was agreed to target this area as a trail.LW advised hubs were used in two different local communities to host the sessions, therefore working collaboratively with external partners. LW explained afternoon (2-4pm) and evening (5-7pm) sessions were also advertised to ensure accessibility, as we wanted to ensure customers who work full time also had an opportunity to be heard. LW explained the sessions were heavily advertised online, and posts received over 11,000 views. To ensure the message was delivered to all customers, 5,827 emails / text messages were sent to those customers living in Washington, making them aware of the drop-ins. LW explained on the day of the sessions, colleagues from across the group came together, therefore there was a presence from different departments. This included Repairs & Maintenance, Housing Management and Asset Management. LW advised in total, 19 customers attended the sessions to report a wide range of concerns. LW showed the group an insight report which had been created, following the sessions. This showed the following* 73% of customers attended on an evening – This showed us that we must continue to offer evening sessions.
* 47% of customers attended from Concord – This showed us the area may require closer attention from local housing teams.
* We heard from all age demographics, this included 18-29, 30-49, 50-69 & 70+. 36% of the customers who came to see us where 30-49.
* 10% of customers informed us of a vulnerability which they advised we needed to be aware of.
* 84% of customers informed us their issue was not a formal complaint, however they just wanted their concerns actioning.
* 50% of queries were related to repairs & maintenance and 45% were related to Housing Management.
* An outstanding repair and anti-social behaviour were the 2 most common issues.

LW advised that following the drop in, it was imperative we actioned the queries received from customers. LW explained a tracking document was created and sent to all colleagues responsible for picking up the necessary actions. LW advised a survey will be sent to those customers who attended, as he wants to understand if they felt the sessions were beneficial. LW confirmed the sessions will be enrolled out across the city, to ensure we hear from our wider customer base. EC attended the evening session and was asked if she could provide feedback from a customers perspective. EC advised it was great to see the collaboration between colleagues and felt as though some good outcomes had come from the session. EC explained how one customer had come into the room advising all staff needed sacking, however after speaking to a member of staff he had calmed down and walked out the room thanking those who had listened to his concerns. EC advised those examples make a difference and felt the sessions were worthwhile. Members advised it was great to see the sessions well attended and all agreed, the number of attendees would have been higher if it were not for the weather on the day. Members advised it would be beneficial if money matters / local police / councillors could be invited to future drop-in sessions, therefore they can help answer any questions or queries which may not be within the groups jurisdiction. LW agreed and advised this feedback would be incorporated into future meetings [1]JW advised the drop in sessions allows those customers who may be from a minority background to come forward and speak to a colleague face to face, rather than over the phone.SC asked if several drop-in sessions can be completed at the same time, so some areas are not having to wait a significant period for the sessions to be advertised in their areas. LW advised he would investigate the possibility of this, however has aimed to have the sessions completed by the end of Summer. LW asked members if it would be an idea to create a survey for them to complete, in which they can list different community centres which the group can use for future sessions. LW re-iterated that all sessions must be out in the community rather than based within an area office. All members agreed. [2]  |  |
|  | 1. **Review Complaint Letters – Tone of Voice**
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|  | MM advised the group will be enrolling out a wider piece of complaint training to all customer facing colleagues within the group and as part of this, tone of voice will play an important role. LW explained while we have conversations with customers over the phone on a daily basis, we also communicate with customers via letters, and we need to ensure the tone of those letters are suitable and easy to understand. LW explained the Customer Voice Team provide a written response to all formal complaints, this includes an acknowledgement and outcome letter. LW wanted members to focus on a couple of real complaint letters as wanted to gain an understanding if they feel as though the tone of the letters reflect the outcome. Before starting activity, LW asked members how they would like letters to be outlined if they were to receive one. Members advised the following:* To evidence the customer has been listened too.
* To have empathy where necessary.
* To provide assurance where required.
* No jargon – letters need to be easy to understand.
* Short and to the point – customers do not want to read reams of pages.
* Ensure the letter are factual – do what you say you will.
* Provide wider support depending on the content of the letter.

LW showed members the CARE model which will be incorporated within the training. This included:C - ClearA - AssuredR - RespectfulE – EmpatheticLW asked members to review the Stage 1 acknowledgement and outcome letters which had been provided and discuss in groups, if they felt the tone of the letters were suitable. LW advised the facilitators to provide feedback in 20 minutes.Feedback from this included:**Acknowledgement:*** 50% of the acknowledgement is policy related – Can any of this be stripped back or will it have to be included to ensure compliance with the Complaint Handling Code [3]
* Can we mark the document as important, to ensure this does not get missed as a generic letter / email [4]
* Including a direct line / email address is positive, ensuring the customer can contact the complaint handler straightaway if they have questions / queries.
* Can we add the word ‘resolve’ into the acknowledgement letter? – Helps set the expectation [5]
* Letter is simple and to the point. Provides clarity when the complaint would be responded by and what aspect the partner would investigate.

**Stage One:*** The letters were empathetic and formatted correctly.
* Clear timescales are a positive.
* Information is clear and easy to understand.
* There were too many apologies – Because of this, it felt as though the apology was lost.
* Getting involved paragraph – More consideration should be provided as to when this is added within a letter.
* Inconsistency between ‘tenant’ and ‘customer’. Should be using the word ‘customer’ moving forward.
* There should be more of an emphasis on support services where relevant.
* We should not apologise if the group believe they have not done anything wrong.
* When referring to a contact, detail the communication type and the date this occurred.

 LW then provided a further 20 minutes to complete review of Stage 2 acknowledgement and outcome letter.Feedback from this included:**Stage Two:*** Letters were easy to understand and overall tone of the letter was suitable.
* Emphasis on apologising where the group may not be at fault. If we are doing this, it can be misinterpreted by customers
* Letter jumped between ‘I’ and ‘We’. It needs to be one or the other. [6]
* Standardised inputting needs to be considered depending on the circumstances of the complaint [7]

LW finished off the session by advising members the feedback would be collected and used to influence future outcome letters. LW explained he wants the group to continue to be held to account, therefore once changes have been implemented, he will provide all members a copy of a couple of further examples and request further feedback. LW asked all customers to keep hold of the outcome letters so they can compare changes going forward. LW advised an online copy would be provided to customers [8] |  |

**ACTION LOG**

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| **KEY** |  |  |
|  | Action completion overdue |  |
|  | Action ongoing and date not due |  |
|  | Action complete |  |

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| **ACTION REF** | **DETAILS** | **RESPONSIBILITY** | **TARGET COMPLETION** | **STATUS** |
| 30/05/24 – [1] | When arranging future complaint drop-in sessions, can we extend invite to SCC, Police, Money Matters and Local Cllrs  | Lewis Walmsley | No Date | Will ensure invites are sent out where possible. |
| 30/05/24 – [2] | Create survey in which all members can submit venues for future drop-in sessions.  | Lewis Walmsley | No Date | Survey created and sent to all members.  |
| 30/05/24 – [3] | Review acknowledgement letter. Can any of the policy paragraphs be stripped back? | Michael McGuigan | No Date | We have only kept information relevant where we have to comply with HO’s Code of Conduct.  |
| 30/05/24 – [4] | Can the acknowledgement / outcome letters be marked as important, ensuring customers receive them.  | Michael McGuigan | No Date | Where emailing customers outcome letters, they will be flagged as high importance. |
| 30/05/24 – [5] | Can we add the word ‘resolve’ into the acknowledgement. Will set expectation for customer.  | Michael McGuigan | No Date | We cannot always ‘resolve’ a complaint, therefore, do not want to set ourselves up to fail by adding this in.  |
| 30/05/24 – [6] | Ensure when using the first person, the CVP uses ‘I’ or ‘We’ when writing the letter. Do not use both.  | Michael McGuigan  | No Date | This to be reviewed with the team.  |
| 30/05/24 – [7] | Standardised inputting needs to be considered depending on the circumstances of the complaint (‘Get Involved’) | Customer Voice Team | No Date | Wider team to consider this on an individual basis.  |
| 30/05/24 – [8] | Provide copies of outcome letters with the minutes of the session | Lewis Walmsley | 04/06/24 | Outcome Letters have been provided as part of the minutes.  |