

Report Title: Quarterly Complaints / Compliments Overview – 2020/21 Quarter 2

We hope that the services you receive from us are of the quality you would expect. However, we realise there will be times when you may want to complain, tell us how we can improve our services, or perhaps compliment us on something we have done well.

Your complaints, comments and compliments are important to us as they help us improve our services – this short report details the nature of the complaints and compliments we have received and the actions we are taking as a result of them.

1. Overview

During the second quarter of the 2020/2021 year we have logged 29 early stage resolutions, six complaints and 27 compliments, which compares with 33 complaints and 22 compliments in the second quarter of the 2019/2020 year.

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	YTD
Complaints	05	06			11
Early Stage Resolutions	14	29			43
Compliments	29	27			56

As of the 30th September, of the six complaints raised one had been closed (having been upheld), the remaining complaints were still ongoing at various stages of the process.

Of the 29 early stage resolutions received in the second quarter:

- 48% of the early stage resolutions were issued with a response within the three-day target, *and*
- one early stage resolution was escalated to a Stage 1 complaint.

Of the six complaints received in the second quarter:

- 100% of the complaints received were issued with a written confirmation of their complaint within the three-day target, *and*
- 50% of the complaints received were issued with a formal response to their complaint within the ten-day target.

2. Key Themes

	Staff Attitude	State of Property	Customer Service	Policy	Totals
Complaints	00	03	07	01	11
Early Stage Resolutions	07	14	19	03	43
Compliments	24	00	32	00	56

3. Learning Outcomes

Learning outcomes recorded in the last quarter include:

Although the Team Leader did make contact, the tenant reported that they had expected contact several days earlier. When a customer requests a call back, their expectations should be properly managed with a three working day timeframe for that call to be made. If any member of staff promises to make contact then this must happen, even if it is just to offer a progress report.

The issues highlighted in this complaint present a concerning lack of customer focus, a Freebridge value that should be at the core of our day-to-day operations. Customer communication was an issue in several areas of the complaint; with no progress reports being offered, not completing call back requests and operatives having inappropriate conversations during callouts. Internally, scaffolding should have been arranged promptly following the initial callout and operatives should have been prepared with all relevant equipment before attending.

Reiterate to all customer facing staff that they should wear the correct PPE for their own protection and that of our customers. Customer facing staff should also receive Mary Gober coaching to ensure they are offering a high standard of customer service and representing Freebridge to the expected standard at all times.

When offering a call back, it is important that customers expectations are managed and that colleagues are given a reasonable time to respond (eg three working days). When receiving a request to contact a tenant it is important that the requests are met. All Managers are customer facing and therefore have no excuse to ignore these requests. Operatives should not be moved onto other jobs without first making sure their current work is on hand so as to avoid future complaints.

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The tenants expectations have not been correctly managed which has led to her frustrations and may well lead to further complaints. It is important that work is assigned reasonable and achievable timeframes so that the tenants are not left waiting in limbo with no idea what, if anything, is happening.

Many of the jobs that the tenant had mentioned were postponed due to Covid-19, however they had been on the system for over a month before being postponed. Had they been completed within the 28 day timeframe allowed for routine repairs, they would not have been postponed. Works such as replacement wetroom flooring should be completed in good time to avoid more extensive damage being caused and further repairs being required.

The tenants expectations were not correctly handled. She was advised that fencing would be completed within nine months, only for it to become a 21 month timeframe with no further explanation. Tenants should be given reasonable and achievable timeframes for planned works.

Follow on work should be raised promptly to avoid causing undue frustration. In this instance, the investigation found that there had not been a significant delay however, due to the nature of the work needed; there was still a negative impact on the tenant.

All customer facing staff should ensure that they are clear and polite when talking with customers. The correct Mary Gober communication methods should be used to avoid any confusion or misinterpretation during conversations. Although policies are important and in place for a reason, it is also important to remember the human element when working with customers, especially during emotionally difficult times such as bereavements.

It is important that the correct operatives are sent to take specifications for repairs so that the right parts can be ordered promptly and repairs completed in good time. In this instance, the repair had been outstanding for five months but was then completed in less than three weeks after the right tradesperson attended to take specifications. Any uncertainty should be raised with the correct Team Leader immediately to avoid any delays in moving repairs forward.

Recommended works should be actioned as soon as possible, unless there is a justifiable reason not to do so. In this case, our failure to replace the outhouse roof, despite knowing it was damaged, led to its eventual collapse. Not only did we then have to replace the roof, but we then had to compensate the tenant.

Advisors should take into account the financial impact if repairs have to be delayed as doing so may cause financial hardship. If repairs cannot be completed in good time, then advisors should offer advice to minimise the impact, including financial loss, to the tenant.

Freebridge must be proactive in resolving issues such as damp and mould as they pose a risk to the tenants health, their belongings and the property itself. In this instance, the property had been empty several times and no significant work was completed to resolve the issues before the property was re-tenanted. Surveys such as that completed by Aqua-Dri must also be acted on promptly.

Operatives should ensure that all precautionary measures are taken to avoid damaging tenants belongings. In this instance, no plastic sheeting was used to cover the carpet.

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It is advisable to avoid promising or guaranteeing any compensation until a full investigation can be completed, remembering that Freebridge are only responsible for compensating for damage to property that is caused by the action or inaction of Freebridge staff. Tenants are advised to arrange contents insurance to cover the cost of any items that do not fall within our compensation policy.

The faults with the wetroom should have been found and resolved during the empty stage, prior to the tenant moving in. All requests for contact should be answered within a reasonable timeframe. Ignoring tenant's requests for contact only exacerbates their frustration.

These patio doors are not standard and as such should have been picked up during the mutual exchange inspection and noted as the incoming tenants responsibility. Because this did not happen, Freebridge are now responsible for the upkeep of the doors. Following the Team Leaders attendance, the decision to renew the patio doors should have been communicated to the Surveyor as the tenant was given the opposite decision during this appointment, this caused confusion and additional frustration to the tenant.

Contractor and specialist surveys should be reviewed and acted on in good time. In this instance, if the survey had not been received then the contractor should have been contacted rather than passing to another contractor, otherwise we would have paid for a survey for nothing. Surveys should also be uploaded onto Documotive as quickly as possible so that they are accessible by everyone rather than a single member of staff.

The complainant was happy that she had been contacted and just wanted reassurance that the case was being taken forward. It is important to ensure that the lines of communication are open for tenants and that progress reports are offered to reduce the levels of anxiety or stress that cases such as these can cause.

This issue took almost four months to resolve when it should have taken significantly less time. It is important that any service failings are reported to contractors swiftly and that steps are taken to resolve them as quickly as possible, remembering that they represent Freebridge when undertaking work on our behalf.

Contractors must be aware that they represent Freebridge when working in our properties, and therefore are subject to the same expectations for customer service as our own operatives. Any damage caused by a contractor should be reported back to Freebridge so that the relevant action can be taken.

All requests for contact should be answered in good time. Tenants should not need to call multiple times to chase a callback, as long as their expectations were correctly managed during the initial request.

It is essential that all requests for contact are answered in good time. Managers and Team Leaders are responsible for completing these requests and should do so to avoid further dissatisfaction.

All promises to contact tenants should be completed, even if it is just to offer a progress report in lieu of a full answer or update. It is likely this complaint would have been avoided had contact been made.

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<p>Additional care should be taken when working in empty properties to ensure no damage or inconvenience to the surrounding tenants.</p>
<p>Each job should be assessed before passing as planned work. Front and rear doors may need to be replaced sooner and so may need to be completed under the responsive repairs contract. Tenants should be contacted to inform them of any work that is passed to planned and the new timeframes involved to correctly manage their expectations.</p>
<p>Contractors must be aware that they represent Freebridge when working in our properties, and therefore are subject to the same expectations for customer service as our own operatives.</p>
<p>All appointments should be attended without fail, unless there are mitigating circumstances preventing an operative attending. In these circumstances, contact should be made with the tenant so that they are not left waiting unnecessarily. All follow on works should be reviewed and actioned as soon as possible. In this instance, the tenants had just suffered a break in and were feeling particularly vulnerable, so unduly delaying window and door repairs was unacceptable.</p>
<p>When raising complaints it is important that the issue is correctly identified. In this instance, it was an atheistic issue and not poor workmanship, and should not have been raised as a complaint.</p>
<p>Suggested follow on works should be actioned promptly to avoid any undue delays. This tenant had not had working heating since February and in August an operative reported that a hearing upgrade was needed, but the request was not passed to the relevant team to action.</p>
<p>Recommendations for work from specialist surveys should be reviewed, considered and actioned in good time to prevent further damage to properties and health implications to tenants. In this instance, the damp in the property had a serious impact on the health and wellbeing of the tenant and this would've have been lessened had we acted on the survey when it was received in January 2019.</p>
<p>When clearing properties, operatives must complete a full written inventory with pictures of each item. Operatives must also make judgements on whether a clearance is appropriate; in this case, the belongings had been boxed up ready to move rather than abandoned, suggesting the tenant was intent on clearing the property. Further efforts should have been made to contact the tenant, or the belongings should have been taken and stored at Hamlin Court for a short period. All clearance operatives must review the policies and procedures regarding clearing properties and items being removed from the property by anyone.</p>
<p>The events leading to the incident at this property were out of our hands; lockdown caused an immediate stop to all works which led to the roof being left exposed. However, the response after the incident (in terms of offering an unfinished property and failure to arrange full removals to move belongings from the affected property to the new property) was lacking and should be reviewed in the event of similar future incidents.</p>

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4. Our Complaints Process

Details of our Complaints process can be found within our leaflet called Compliments, Comments and Complaints which you can get a copy of from our office at Juniper House in King's Lynn or from our website at www.freebridge.org.uk/complaint.html

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