

Customer Panel Scrutiny Report Complaints

Report compiled by: Cairn Customer Panel
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Acknowledgment

The Customer Panel would like to record thanks to Lynda from the Tenants Information Service and all the Cairn staff involved in this scrutiny project for their assistance and cooperation.



1. Introduction

1.1 What are the benefits of scrutiny?

Tenant scrutiny gives the following benefits:

- Continuous monitoring of performance allows the customer and association to improve the services customers receive
- Customers have the opportunity to take part in monitoring the organisation and influencing how services are carried out
- Customers can offer a valuable perspective on the actual experience of customers which can help shape and improve Cairn's services

Tenant scrutiny can bring benefits for all, including:

- **Customers** – it improves services
- **Cairn** – it identifies underperforming areas
- **Regulator** – it demonstrates compliance with regulatory standards
- **Partners and stakeholders** – it illustrates the benefits of partnership working and continued improvement

1.2 Selecting a service for scrutiny

In identifying what service area would be the subject of scrutiny, the Executive Team gave presentations on how Cairn is performing in each area of the business. The Customer Panel reviewed the information and noted the areas where performance could be improved. Communications was identified as an area of concern but it was agreed that a realistic topic for the panel's first scrutiny project would be complaints.

The project commenced on 11 November 2013 and recommendations were agreed on 3 March 2014, with this final report issued to Cairn's Executive Team on 19 March 2014.

The Customer Panel members involved in this scrutiny project were:

Alison Harvey
John Hume
Morag Frame
Deborah Docherty
David Johnstone

Archie Caddis
Norman Vincent
Dawn Beaton
Frances McCallum

2. Scope of the Review

In selecting the areas for scrutiny the Customer Panel considered information presented by the Executive Team. It became evident that an area which needed to be looked at was complaints. Personal experiences and the low number of complaints that have been logged gave the Customer Panel cause for concern. The Customer Panel agreed a programme and what information was required to progress the project. When requesting information, timescales were set out and it was vital that those deadlines were met in order for the project to remain on schedule. A full summary of the information requested can be found in Appendix A.

3. Scrutiny Process

The scrutiny project followed a pre-agreed programme which consisted of three stages:

- Fact finding and research
- Cairn's corporate approach
- What actually happens

A report was agreed after each stage detailing what the Customer Panel did and what the findings were. These three reports can be found in Appendix B.

4. Customer Panel's Statement

When the Panel first started our first project on complaints we were very apprehensive about what it would entail and if our recommendations would be taken seriously by Cairn staff. However, as we got into it we realised how rewarding being involved with this project was and found that staff have, for the most part, responded positively to what we're doing. We've enjoyed getting to know each other and working as part of a team. We're already looking forward to getting involved in the next project.

Scrutinising Cairn's complaints process we discovered that it is not fit for purpose. Many staff are not logging complaints, there is inconsistencies among staff regarding understanding of the procedure and the computer system is very out of date. Cairn also don't appear to be learning positively from complaints. We have put together 25 recommendations, which were submitted to the Executive Team for their consideration. We hope that our recommendations will go some way to improving how Cairn deals with complaints. We will review complaints in March 2015 to ensure that all agreed recommendations have been put in place.

5. Findings, Recommendations and Actions

On the 3 March 2014 a meeting was held with the Communications and Engagement team to agree our findings and recommendations. We summarised our findings since the beginning of the project and discussed areas for improvements, whilst also acknowledging where there were good areas of practice. Cairn’s Executive Team responded with their actions.

Finding	No.	Customer Panel Recommendation	Priority	Executive Team Action	Implementation Date
Understanding of Procedure					
Inconsistencies from staff regarding basic procedural information (what is classed as a complaint, how they are accepted and who has ownership, etc)	1.	A guideline procedure to be made and given to all staff. Staff to sign it once they’ve read it. To be completed at 1-2-1s.	High	Our complaints procedure has been updated to reflect the Customer Panel’s recommendations. The updated procedure will be provided to all staff and they will sign a compliance sheet annually at one of their 121s to indicate that they have read and understood the procedure.	31.07.14
	2.	Service Manager (or that level of management) should be signing off and quality checking all responses. They are held accountable for all complaints going out.	High	The new complaints procedure incorporates the recommendation that Service Managers (or that level of management) sign off and quality check all responses to complaints.	30.05.14

Training					
The Quality & Performance Officer gives training to staff but has she had sufficient training to lead training sessions?	3.	The member of staff who carries out training on complaints is to be reviewed. Are internal members of staff capable of delivering it all? External trainers to be considered.	Medium	We have already met with SHARE (Training for Housing Providers) to discuss external complaints training for Cairn. As part of this approach we will also adopt a 'train the trainer' approach to ensure that future training can be conducted in-house. We will share with the Panel the draft training programme and who will receive the training before implementation	30.05.14
	4.	If staff are to provide training in-house they should be given adequate training and support to develop their skills and confidence in carrying out the training.	Medium	As above.	
Training given to staff is patchy. They are mostly trained on how to use the computer system and not on the procedure or the importance of customer care in dealing with a complaint.	5.	A formal training structure needs to be put in place for training to cover: Customer care Quality of response (letter writing) What the procedure entails How to use the computer system	Medium	As above.	

Not all staff have been given training. Complaints training is voluntary	6.	All staff are to have compulsory training on complaints. Heads of Service to be made accountable for staff in their area receiving training.	Medium	We are in the process of introducing compulsory online training for all staff on complaints. This will ensure that all staff have undergone complaints training. Customer facing staff will receive additional compulsory training provided by SHARE (as outlined under recommendation 3).	31.07.14
IT System					
The computer system is out of date and not fit for purpose	7.	The computer system needs to be updated. The majority of staff interviewed highlighted the system as being a barrier to logging complaints.		Cairn will introduce a new Customer Relationship Management system (CRM) for the contact centre which is planned to start in October 2014. The CRM will completely replace the current user interface and offer a much more user friendly and accountable system for managing complaints. There are no plans at this stage to replace our entire housing database (Open Housing) but we believe the introduction of the CRM system meets the panel's recommendation in full.	31.10.14
	8.	The Customer Panel are aware that a Contact Centre will be implemented towards the end of the year and they wish to be involved in setting it up and choosing the software.	High	A demonstration was given to the panel on Tuesday 15th April from Netcall who have been identified as the preferred provider at this stage. Feedback from the panel will be considered prior to formal appointment and the panel may choose to become more involved in the development of the contact centre when they meet on 26th May.	26.05.14

There is no way of 'flagging up' if a complaint has been allocated to a member of staff or as a reminder for complaints to be dealt with on time. Staff said they would like a 'workflow' which helps them through the process	9.	There is to be a 'flagging up' system to remind staff about complaints. There is also be a workflow to help guide staff through the process.	High	The CRM system includes a workflow capability which will ensure that all logged complaints are managed in accordance with the process and timescales within the procedures. Where complaints are not responded to on time they will be flagged automatically to the responsible manager.	31.10.14
There is no mobile working system for staff to log complaints when they are out of the office	10.	A mobile working system for staff who are out of the office to log complaints	Medium	Mobile working capability is part of the Netcall solution and will be a 2 nd phase of the contact centre solution to ensure that access to the CRM is available to staff out of the office.	To be confirmed
Team Meetings and Communication					
Most staff interviewed were only aware of what was happening at a very local level and were unaware of what service area was responsible for the highest amount of complaints. Lack of joined-up working between different teams.	11.	The Feedback Outcomes Group (with a new name) is to be reinstated. It's to include quality checking responses, trend analysis, diversity performance information and to check the numbers of complaints recorded. Findings of the group are to be circulated to relevant staff. This group is to be added to the Complaints Policy to ensure it continues to happen.	High	The Feedback Outcomes Group will be reinstated and renamed the 'Learning from Complaints Group'. The Learning from Complaints Group will meet quarterly and produce a summary report for Team Training Time and published in Team Talk, the bimonthly staff newsletter. A member of the Customer Panel will be invited to be part of the new Learning from complaints group.	29.08.14

<p>The West team were impressed with the weekly catch up meetings held in the Coatbridge office. Staff there had the most cohesive understanding of the complaints procedure</p>	12.	<p>All offices and teams should learn from what Coatbridge are doing and have weekly catch up meetings. Talking about complaints should be part of their weekly meetings.</p>	High	<p>Our proposed action partially meets the recommendation. There is an existing system for 'Team Training Time' where teams are given time to meet every second Wednesday morning. The outcomes and learning points from the new Learning from Complaints' Group will be shared with all staff and it will be managers responsibility to cascade outcomes of complaints and learning points to their teams at Team Training Time.</p>	31.10.14
<p>Communication to customers about Cairn's complaints process is lacking. Information on the website is very basic. It needs to have greater visibility. The Tenants Handbook is now out of date as it was issued before the complaints procedure changed. The only information is in the Complaints Procedure leaflet.</p>	13.	<p>The Tenants Handbook is to be updated with information on complaints.</p>	Low	<p>The Tenants Handbook will be updated.</p>	Sep 15
	14.	<p>The information on the website is to be reviewed to see if complaints information could be more visible. The ability for a customer to report a complaint via the website is to be looked into.</p>	Medium	<p>We will improve the content and information on complaints on our existing website. As part of a proposed new website we will ensure customers can submit complaints online.</p>	30.05.14 Sep 15
	15.	<p>Cairn's performance information on complaints to be published to customers.</p>	Low	<p>We will publish our performance on complaints on the website and in our tenants newsletters annually which will show the number of complaints made, the number upheld, partially upheld and dismissed and our learning from complaints.</p>	30.09.14

Performance Information				
<p>No one was able to answer the question about how Cairn as an organisation learns from complaints. Any learning that is done seems to be very local. No one is aware of learning trends. There seems to be a lot of loose ends that aren't being monitored.</p>	16.	<p>See above recommendation about Feedback Outcomes Group. It is important that any learning is communicated from the group to staff.</p>		<p>Refer to actions 11 and 12.</p>
<p>Service Managers get a monthly report sent to them from the Quality & Performance department. Why are they the only ones receiving this? Officers, Assistants and other departments are also logging complaints</p>	17.	<p>Service Managers (and managers on the same level) should receive this report, circulate it to staff and act on any actions from the report. It is important that managers communicate with staff they manage.</p> <p>The Panel would anticipate that increased communication comes as a result of 1-2-1s.</p>	High	<p>All staff will receive the monthly report on complaints. Performance is to be discussed during Team Training Time and 121s as per actions 1 and 11.</p>
				29.08.14

<p>The diversity report was provided to the Panel after a lot of manual input from Nicola (Quality & Performance Officer). This gave a lot of interesting information which highlighted that all reports aren't getting logged. Why are Cairn not currently monitoring this information for each area and department?</p>	18.	<p>The renewed Feedback Outcomes Group is to monitor this information.</p>		<p>The Learning from Complaints Group will monitor diversity data which will be more readily available when complaints are logged in the CRM system for the contact centre.</p>	19.12.14
<p>Not everyone is logging complaints, which some staff admitted to. After investigation the group still don't fully understand why this is</p>				<p>It is felt that one of the key barriers to this is the complicated IT system. We will ensure that the revised system makes it easier to log complaints and that when mobile working is introduced officers have the ability to log complaints on the move.</p>	31.10.14
Staff Attitude and Accountability					
<p>For the most part staff were open, honest and welcoming. However, there was a small minority where the Panel found that customer service was lacking.</p>	19.	<p>To link up with other recommendations such as mandatory training and 1-2-1s</p>		<p>Customer Service has been added to the appraisal process as part of the Customer Excellence Strategy and staff have to demonstrate how they have met required standards.</p>	30.05.14

<p>There are inconsistencies in the level of customer service provided by staff due to varying attitudes. It seems to be left up to the individual member of staff to do what they want. The process doesn't seem to be managed and there is no quality control in place to check for consistency and quality of responses.</p>	20.	<p>Responses to complaints seen by the panel offer evidence of different attitudes and skills in customer care across Cairn. The panel recommend that an approach to challenging poor performance and recognising good performance is developed</p>	High	<p>There is an increased focus on managing performance in the organisation and the importance of regular 121's has been raised over recent months. Service specific customer satisfaction surveys will be introduced which focus on both customer care and quality of service provision. The contact centre will have call recording capability which will be used to carry out quality checks on customer care and the Customer Excellence Strategy also includes an action to develop a system of customer care monitoring for face to face interactions.</p>	31.10.14
<p>Customers currently don't have a route to go down if their complaint isn't acknowledged or has been ignored. Who do they report it to? Who will follow it up?</p>	21.	<p>All enquiries and communication from tenants is to be logged. Customers should be given the reference number when they make a complaint so they know it has been logged.</p>	High	<p>The introduction of the contact centre and CRM system will ensure that the vast majority of complaints made are automatically logged. All complaints will be given a reference number which will be given to the customer.</p>	31.10.14

Complaints about staff aren't being logged	22.	All complaints about staff are to be logged on the system and dealt with the same as a normal complaint by their line manager	High	We will log complaints about staff in the same manner as general complaints	30.04.14
Complaints Letters					
The language used in the standardised letters is insufficient (including those used for antisocial behaviour). They are too formal and the wording of 'dismissed' and 'upheld' is negative and full of jargon.	23.	The language used (dismissed and upheld) is to be reviewed.	High	The Learning from Complaints Group will review and develop the content of new standard complaints letters. Draft letters will be sent to the Communications Group for their feedback and reviewed by the Plain English Campaign. As above.	31.10.14
	24.	The standardised letters are to be reviewed, including the wording in antisocial behaviour letters)	High	We will include letter writing as part of the SHARE training and the sign-off by managers will also address this.	
	25.	Good letter writing is to be dealt with as part of the training programme	Low		30.05.14

6. Next Steps

Executive Team to issue draft response/action plan including resource implications	Draft to be issued to panel for comment	10 April
Customer Panel representatives to meet with Executive Team to discuss response/action plan	Panel representatives invited to discuss specific actions or responses to recommendations before final version is issued	23 April
Final response/action plan issued		24 April
Project report and action plan issued to Board for information only		1 May
Next meeting of the Customer Panel: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review ARC Prepare Statement for ARC Elect Chair and Vice-Chair Update on complaints project Selection of next scrutiny project 		26 May
Communication with wider tenant movement	Cairn Focus, annual report and customers' conference	
Evaluation exercise to look at the process and recommendations for the future development of the panel	To be carried out by TIS and published as a separate report	TBC

Appendix A: Three Stage Scrutiny Project Plan

	Task	How to do it	Outcome required	Time (mins)	Deadline	Lead group
Stage 1: Fact Finding and Research Legislation, Cairn policies and background information						
1.1	What does the Scottish Social Housing Charter say about complaints?	Read: Scottish Social Housing Charter	Information only	15	11/11/13 to 22/11/13	North Team
1.2	What does the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman say about complaints?	Read: SPSO's Implementation Guidelines	Information only	30	11/11/13 to 22/11/13	North Team
1.3	Cairn's Customer Feedback Policy and Complaint Handling Procedure	Read: Cairn's Customer Feedback Policy Read: Cairn's Complaint Handling Procedure and Employee Guide	Information only	10 30	11/11/13 to 22/11/13	North Team
1.4	Performance info on complaints for last 5 years <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of complaints Number of complaints upheld, partially upheld, dismissed Number of complaints to Ombudsman Topic of complaints in categories 	Report request to Amy Read report	Identify any themes or common complaints	30	11/11/13 to 22/11/13	East Team
1.5	Information on complaints by age, gender, geographical area, type of accommodation, etc	Report request to Amy Read report	Identify any themes	30	11/11/13 to 22/11/13	East Team
1.6	Customer Satisfaction Survey <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tenants survey Property management survey 	Report request to Amy Read report	Identify any themes or common complaints	60	11/11/13 to 22/11/13	East Team

Stage 2: Cairn's Corporate Approach The systems Cairn has to manage complaints						
2.1	How does Cairn learn from complaints?	Interview: Nicola Crossan, Quality & Performance Officer Read: Minutes from meetings about complaints	What process Cairn uses to learn from complaints and how it is applied to improving services	60 30	02/12/13 to 13/12/13	West Team
2.2	Three case studies from real complaints (eg, the process, the timescales and review letters sent to tenants)	Report request to Amy (How do we decide which cases to pick?)	To measure the effectiveness of our systems	30	02/12/13 to 13/12/13	West Team
2.3	Review publications and other information available to tenants: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How is the complaints procedure communicated to tenants? • How can complaints be made (ie, in person, on website, etc)? 	Read: leaflets, newsletter, tenant handbook and website	Are these measures sufficient?	30	02/12/13 to 13/12/13	North Team
2.4	Does Cairn know how much it costs to administer a complaint?	Report request to Amy	Are systems and approach efficient?	15	02/12/13 to 13/12/13	North Team

Stage 3: What actually happens What's happening on the ground and customer experiences						
3.1	Speak to Managers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When is a complaint a complaint? • How do you manage complaints? • Who has ownership & accountability? • How do you accept complaints? • Are making complaints accessible to all customers? • Who records complaints, and when? • Who is authorised to make decisions? • Any suggestions for improvements? • What staff training is provided? 	Interview: TBC	To check that what's happening at a local level matches what's supposed to be happening on a corporate level. To check that managers and officers information matches up	60 each	13/01/14 to 31/01/14	North, West and East Teams
3.2	Speak to Officers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When is a complaint a complaint? • How do you manage complaints? • Who has ownership & accountability? • How do you accept complaints? • Are making complaints accessible to all customers? • Who records complaints, and when? • Who is authorised to make decisions? • Any suggestions for improvements? • What staff training is provided? 	Interview: TBC	To check that what's happening at a local level matches what's supposed to be happening on a corporate level. To check that managers and officers information matches up	60 each	13/01/14 to 31/01/14	North, West and East Teams
3.3	Speak to customers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Their experience • Satisfaction with outcome and timescale • Level of satisfaction with the process • Staff's knowledge of complaints system • Are complaints taken seriously • Any recommendations for improvements 	Interview: Individuals from case studies (2.2) South Area Focus Group Telephone interviews with last 10 complainees	To check satisfaction of customers and identify potential areas for improvement	30 each 60 15 each	13/01/14 to 31/01/14	North, West and East Teams



Appendix B: Stage 1 – 3 Reports

Stage 1 Report

1.1 Scottish Social Housing Charter

Introduction

The Scottish Social Housing Charter is a document which sets the standard that all social landlords (like Cairn) should follow.

What it Says

The Charter states that Cairn is required to make sure it's easy for tenants to communicate with Cairn on complaints and that tenants will receive an appropriate response.

Areas to Follow Up

The Charter makes no specific reference to the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman's (SPSO) complaints procedure and is not required reading for the Panel.

1.2 SPSO Guide to Implementation

Introduction

The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) provided all social landlords with a complaints policy and procedure which every Registered Social Landlord must follow. This document is a guide for Cairn on how they should put the complaints procedure into practice.

What it Says

It gives information on how Cairn should implement the complaints procedure, what performance information we should record, how to train staff, etc. The complaints procedure was implemented by Cairn in October 2012.

Areas to Follow Up

The complaints procedure is based on complex rules and procedures. Frontline staff are largely responsible for the use of the procedure. Are they being supported?

Questions for the Panel to ask:

- Do frontline staff receive appropriate training?
- Do frontline staff have adequate support to follow the complex procedure?
- What is staff's view of the complaints procedure?
- Do staff understand all the rules and documents?
- Do ALL staff know how to deal with a complaint?

Possible reading for Panel:

- Recommended reading from the document: page 7 (compliance), page 8 (performance), page 10 (staff training)

- The document refers to an employees guide to complaints handling
- The document also refers to the SPSO Statement of Complaints Handling Principles

1.3.1 Cairn's Complaints Policy

Introduction

As mentioned above the SPSO provided all social landlords with a standard complaints policy and procedure. Our policy is therefore the same as every other social landlord in Scotland.

What it Says

The policy covers all aspects of the feedback policy and encourages tenants (customers) to leave feedback in order to improve services. It also says Cairn should analyse customer feedback and provide staff training and support.

The document is not clear on the follow up action. There is little detail as to how the policy will be carried out.

Note: a quick read of the policy will assist the Panel in stage 3 of the action plan (have uploaded this to Dropbox).

Areas to Follow Up

How is customer feedback reported to frontline staff and tenants?

Question for the Panel – do we need more information on the current service improvement plan?

The feedback on compliments and suggestions is not addressed. Emphasis is stressed on complaints. Is there not merit in giving more attention to suggestions and move away from the culture and preoccupation on complaints to the exclusion of other things?

1.3.2 Cairn's Complaints Handling Procedure

Introduction

As mentioned above the SPSO provided all social landlords with a standard complaints policy and procedure. Cairn's procedure is therefore the same as every other social landlord in Scotland.

What it Says

The document explains in detail how staff must handle complaints: the role of staff at various levels and stages, timescales to follow, the role of the SPSO, what is a complaint and what is not a complaint, who has responsibility and accountability. There is a commitment from Cairn to keep the tenant at the heart of the complaints process.

Areas to Follow Up

Cairn cannot make changes to the layout and content of the procedure. However, the procedure is recommended as a must-read document by Panel members (it is in Dropbox).

1.4 Performance Information

Introduction

This report provides information on the number of complaints logged by Cairn and if they were responded to on time. It also provides information on what the complaint was about and whether the complaint was upheld, partially upheld or dismissed.

What it Says

In the last year there was 104 complaints logged on Cairn's complaints system. The most common complaint was about the level of service received (28 complaints).

We found that the level of detail was not sufficient to make a full analysis. For example, level of service: total of 28 (13 dismissed, 9 upheld, 6 partially upheld). Why were they put into each category?

Areas to Follow Up

Complaints should be given a reference number when logged and given to the customer. There should be a prompt on Cairn's system for staff if not dealt with in 5 working days (at stage 2).

Tenants' handbook could be updated to include new complaints procedure with complaints form included and sent to tenants at stage 1.

What type of form is there for tenants to leave feedback, other than the annual satisfaction survey?

How many staff are trained on the complaints procedure?

How did Cairn manage complaints prior to the new complaints handling policy and procedure?

1.5 Diversity Information

Introduction

This document gives information on the age, sex, location and housing type of people who have made complaints. This report was given to the East group later than anticipated as this is not information that Cairn currently monitors.

What it Says

The average age of people who have made complaints is 59.

60% of Cairn properties are in the north of Scotland but they only make up 12% of complaints recorded. 38% of Cairn customers receive a property management (factoring) service but they only make up 7% of complaints recorded.

Areas to Follow Up

Why does the maths not add up? Are tenants in the north or in factored properties happier than the average tenant or are complaints not always being logged in these areas?

Why does Cairn not currently monitor this information? Can the Panel log fake complaints to check to see if they are being logged by staff?

1.6 Satisfaction Survey

Introduction

A satisfaction survey was issued to all tenants in September 2013. This report provided a summary of the results to each and included comments given by tenants, which were sorted into different categories by Amy Sutherland.

What it Says

Breakdown of survey comments:

Antisocial behaviour – 20

Sheltered housing – 70

Repairs & maintenance – 79

General complaints – 96

Compliments – 72

Estate management – 19

Staff – 7

Rent – 7

Parking – 5

Total – **375**

The comments show that there are lots of complaints around Planned Maintenance and repairs. Lots of comments relating to sheltered housing where proposals have been made to change that service.

Areas to Follow Up

The survey shows that less than 50% of tenants are 'very satisfied' with Cairn. Is this adequate and if not, are Cairn going to look into why more tenants aren't more satisfied?

The complaints policy is good but who is overseeing this?

Stage 2 Report

2.1 Interview with Nicola Crossan

Introduction

Nicola Crossan was interviewed by Deborah and Alison. Nicola is a Quality & Performance Officer, who is responsible for overseeing the complaints process and provides performance information to management.

What Happened

Nicola summarised the complaints process, gave information on how Cairn ensures complaints are handled appropriately, her thoughts on whether all staff have been trained sufficiently and whether she thought the current system is working. The interview has been typed up and added to Dropbox for anyone who wants to read it.

Areas to Follow Up

The interview with Nicola was really useful and many recommendations for what could be improved were thought up as a result:

- Better training for ALL staff
- There is a lack of good communication – it would be helpful if a short guide was written up as a starting point instead of staff having to read the lengthy policy and procedure
- Need a better computer system – it's not fit for purpose. It looks clunky and hard to use and it might be responsible for putting staff off logging complaints
- There is definitely an issue with staff not logging complaints
- All negative contact should be logged, even if it's not an actual complaint. This will allow staff to monitor what tenants are unhappy about, even if it's not a formal complaint
- Staff need to be held accountable for lack of action, for instance, if they don't log a complaint or ignore a complaint from a customer
- Tenants need a route to go down if complaints aren't being acknowledged. For instance, there could be a few members of staff at Head Office who tenants can go to if their complaint is being ignored, and this new procedure should be communicated with tenants
- There should be a 'complaints expert' in each office so that staff have someone to go to if they need help or advice

As a side note from the complaints project, it should be noted that the fortnightly staff training hour needs structure so that there is consistency across Cairn.

2.2 Case Studies

Introduction

Ten real customer complaints were chosen at random and looked at.

What it Says

Some of the complaints included level of service, estate management, repairs, factoring and Planned Maintenance. It gave the date the complaint

was logged and the date it was closed, and whether it was upheld, partially upheld or dismissed. It included the customer complaint and the response from staff.

Areas to Follow Up

Complaint number 6 included 9 emails from a customer complaining about Factoring and asking why she hadn't even received an acknowledgement to any of her emails. Six months later came a very insufficient response from a member of staff. Where is the management of this system? Who is monitoring the system so that this kind of thing isn't happening?

There should be certain members of staff who are responsible for ensuring the responses sent to customers are appropriate. Complaint number 6 highlights that there is a definite need for this.

2.3 Cairn Publications

Introduction

This is how we communicate our complaints process with customers and included articles from our newsletter, the page on our website, the Tenants Handbook and our Complaints Procedure booklet.

What it Says

The newsletter article gives information on the new complaints procedure, which was implemented towards the end of 2012. The Complaints Procedure is the most comprehensive, covering how Cairn accepts complaints, what customers can and can't complain about, what the process is and how complaints can be made to the ombudsman.

Areas to Follow Up

The information on the website is woefully basic. It says:

"We welcome feedback - we want to know what you think of the job that we are doing. Your suggestions, compliments or complaints assist us in monitoring the quality of service we provide, and as we seek continuous improvement. If you would like to provide feedback via this website, just use our [contact form](#)."

It says nothing of how a complaint can be made, where to make it, what the process is, what customers can expect from the process, etc. There needs to be a lot more information on the website.

The information in the Tenants Handbook is now out of date as it was issued before the new complaints procedure was implemented. It is also lacking in very basic information. It needs to be updated. The HomeOwners Handbook gives more comprehensive information on complaints.

The newsletter articles gives information to tenants about the new two stage complaints process but doesn't go include any other information. There seems to be no where, except from the Complaints Procedure booklet, where tenants have

information on how to go about making a complaint and what kind of service they should expect.

Cairn could provide more information regarding their performance on complaints. For instance, what they get complaints on and what the outcomes are.

2.4 Does Cairn know how much it costs to administer a complaint?

Cairn do not know how much it costs to administer a complaint at present.

Stage 3 Report

3.1 Interviews with Staff

Thirteen staff were interviewed across three different Cairn offices.

East (27 January)

- Judith Crombie – Housing Services Assistant
- Jacqueline Davidson – Finance Officer
- Heather Drummond – Property Investment Officer
- Rory Gaffney – Director of Business Services

West (3 February)

- Ryan Morgan – Housing Officer
- Chris Tinto – Maintenance Officer
- Anne Murphy – Service Manager
- Hugh Collins – Head of Service (South)

North (10 February)

- Donna Bain – Housing Officer (conference call)
- David Cargill – HomeWorks Manager
- Val Lawrence – Housing Officer
- Donnett Calder – Service Manager
- Caroline MacAskill – Head of Service (North)

Staff Understanding of Procedure

Findings

We discovered inconsistencies in responses about what is a complaint, how complaints are accepted, who has ownership and who makes the final decision.

Cairn need to get rid of ambiguity. Some staff think that they only have to log the complaint if they're unable to deal with it on the spot. Some think the only way a customer can complain is by letter (and not by email or phone call) or if they specifically say "I'm complaining about..." Some staff seem to run everything past their line manager but others have ownership to make decisions. This needs to be standardised so everyone is following the same procedure.

There should have been a standardised answer to these questions but there was too much variation; too many people gave different answers.

Possible Recommendations

Guidelines could maybe be produced where this information is simplified and clarified and ALL staff need to read it. Perhaps go over it at 1-2-1s and sign it so that there's a record of who's read it?

One member of staff said that if they were unsure whether the customer was making a complaint they asked the customer: "are

you making a complaint?" That way there is no ambiguity. Simple piece of information that all staff could use.

Perhaps a checklist to be made for staff when logging, dealing and responding to complaints to ensure they haven't forgotten to do anything?

Training

Findings

The training given to staff seems to be very patchy. Not all staff have had up to date training. The training that staff have had doesn't seem to be sufficient as so many have different opinions on the complaints procedure. Training is generally only given on the IT side of complaints – how to log a complaint on the computer system. Insufficient training is being given on the policy and procedure and there doesn't appear to be any on the role of complaints handling in good customer service.

Complaints training isn't compulsory and staff only go on it if they express an interest in attending. All staff, but especially frontline staff, should be well trained in the procedure and how to use the computer system.

It was also noted that the Quality & Performance Officer, Nicola Crossan, gives training but she has not been trained to lead training sessions.

Possible Recommendations

Cairn should consider an external training provider. Staff providing training in-house should be given adequate training and support to develop their skills and confidence.

All staff are to be trained on how to deal with complaints, including managers. This should include policy, procedure and how to use the computer system, as well as the softer side of complaints (what constitutes a good apology, for example). It should be completely standardised so that every member of staff has exactly the same information.

New employees are to be given information on Cairn's complaints procedure as part of their induction. They should be aware of what is a complaint, how to accept a complaint, what the procedure and timescale is for logging and dealing with complaints and should be taught how to use the computer system properly. They should be given suitable training.

IT System

Findings

The majority of complaints from staff was about the computer system. It was almost unanimous that the computer system is terribly out of date and not fit for purpose. Most staff believe the system is the biggest reason why not everyone is logging complaints as it is time consuming and complicated. If they are able to deal with a complaint on the spot and resolve it then they are reluctant to go back and log it as it is such a complicated process.

Staff who work out of the office also expressed the desire to have a mobile device where they can log complaints when they're out and about. They felt this would encourage them to log more complaints.

Possible Recommendations

The system should be reviewed. It is putting staff off logging complaints so another option needs to be found. Staff felt that a system which flags up to them when a complaint has been allocated to them and reminds them to complete it on time would be really beneficial. They would also like a system with a better workflow as they find the current system too disjointed and 'bitty'.

A mobile system for staff who are out of the office.

Team Meetings and Communication

Findings

The West team were impressed with the weekly meetings the Coatbridge team have. Every Monday morning the Manager meets with her staff to discuss what's happening and this is also where they talk about outstanding complaints. As a result this team's answers were the most cohesive out of all the staff interviewed. They had the greatest understanding on the procedure. A lot of the other staff interviewed admitted to not discussing complaints regularly or meeting with their teams to discuss what has been happening. There seemed to be a real lack of communication within some teams.

The Panel learnt that the process recently has changed so that line managers now sign off on all complaints before a response is sent out. Not all staff were aware of this though as it hasn't been communicated effectively. One manager found out about this change after one of her staff attended training on complaints. Communication needs to improve.

Further to this, there is a concern that the staff structure doesn't lend itself very well to communication between different teams. For instance, Investment and HomeWorks are in completely different directorates so there is no joined up working between these departments. This is mentioned as a slight aside from the complaints project but something that is worth noting.

This lack of joined-up working was demonstrated during the course of the interviews: most of the staff interviewed only knew about what sort of complaints are received at a very local level. No one knew which area was responsible for the highest number of complaints throughout the whole of Cairn and the majority of staff thought another area was responsible for the most complaints, never their own department. A little bit of passing the buck going on?

Possible Recommendations

Perhaps each team should be encouraged to have regular team meetings to discuss what complaints have come up recently, how they were dealt with and if there was anything they can learn from it?

Any changes in procedure are to be communicated properly and to everyone affected.

A few members of staff spoke about a Feedback Outcomes Group that used to meet quarterly but no longer exists. They would look at what complaints had been received and the quality of responses that had gone out to customers. Perhaps something similar to this should be set back up again? It's important that some sort of system is in place to check the quality of responses.

Performance Information

Findings

No one gave the same answer about how Cairn learns from complaints. Staff are aware that information on complaints is given out but no one could answer how the organisation as a whole is doing anything to learn from complaints. Any learning that's done seems to be very local.

Is too much done at a local level and not being pulled up the chain to be monitored? No one seems to be aware of learning and trends. The loose ends need to be tied up by someone who is monitoring the process. As communication between different teams doesn't appear to be happening no one will be aware if a similar problem is happening elsewhere in the organisation.

Service Managers get a monthly report from the Quality and Performance department. Why are they the only ones getting this report sent to them? Officers, Assistants and other departments in the organisation are also logging complaints and expressed an interest in having this information sent to them.

Staff admitted that not everyone is logging complaints. This was raised as a concern, particularly in the Inverness office where they have 60% of the housing stock but only 12% of all complaints. The Panel still don't fully understand why this is but suspect that a culture has prevailed for some time where logging complaints wasn't encouraged.

Possible Recommendations

Cairn need to demonstrate to staff and customers that they are learning from complaints. It needs to be communicated to all staff and not just to managers. Cairn are to provide quality performance information on complaints and communicate this to all staff. Staff should be encouraged to look at this information and discuss it. As was noted in the Stage 1 report the level of performance information currently provided isn't sufficient.

The way that complaints is communicated is to be looked at and improved.

Information isn't to be hidden on the intranet for staff to seek out themselves and isn't just to be sent to managers.

Staff are to be encouraged to log complaints. Maybe make complaints part of 1-2-1s and appraisals where individual and/or team performance can be properly monitored? Poor performance, not logging complaints or not investigating complaints thoroughly enough is to be challenged.

Staff Attitude and Accountability

Findings

For the most part the Customer Panel found staff to be open, honest and welcoming. However, there were a few instances where the Panel found some staff's level of customer service to be very poor. A few people showed very little enthusiasm or motivation. The Panel would like this to be noted as we will be monitoring this on an ongoing basis in further scrutiny projects.

The Panel are concerned about inconsistencies in the level of customer service provided by staff due to varying attitudes. A lot of the time it seems to be left up to the individual member of staff whether they deal with a complaint, whether they deal with it but don't log it or whether they don't even deal with it at all. The process doesn't seem to be managed and there is currently no quality control in place to check the consistency and quality of responses to customers.

Possible Recommendations

The Panel would like poor customer service to be investigated. Some thought is needed into how best to improve the culture of staff.

The Panel feel strongly that one person or team should be dealing with complaints to ensure a high level of consistency and quality of responses to customers. The Contact Centre will perhaps help with consistency and quality but all staff who are working in this team must be suitably trained and managed. There needs to be a system in place for tenants where if a complaint hasn't been dealt with they have appropriate channels to follow it up.

Complaint Letters

Findings

A few members of the Panel were shown some of the standard letters that Cairn sends to customers in response to complaints. The Panel didn't feel that the language in the letters was sufficient. One member of staff also told the Panel that the language used in the standard letters for responding to Antisocial Behaviour is quite inflammatory and she has to change it every time as she worries it will anger customers.

Possible Recommendations

The language used in the letters is to be revised and updated. They are to use Plain English when telling customers about the complaints process and what is a stage 1 and 2 complaint.

The Antisocial Behaviour letters are to be updated to soften the language used.

The wording 'dismissed' (too negative) and 'upheld' (jargon) to be reviewed.

Staff involved in writing responses to complaints could maybe be sent on letter writing training, which includes information on what constitutes a good apology and how to draft an appropriate response. This will insure that all responses sent out are of a high quality. If the Contact Centre Manager or another named member of staff is given overall responsibility for complaints they would also check the quality of responses.

