

### Complaints and Compliments

Complaints and Compliments online reporting form

Forename

Surname

Email

Phone

Address

Street Address

Address Line 2

City

State / Province / Region

ZIP / Postal Code

Country

Preferred Contact Method

Please Select

Details of your compliment, complaint or comment:

What can we do?

If you have made this compliment, complaint or comment before please tell us: when, the reference number and which office dealt with it.

**\*Information submitted will be used for the intended purpose only**

\*Contact details may be collected for other purposes

Submit

**Save time, do it online...**

- Find a home
- View your account
- Make a payment
- Latest news
- Find your housing officer
- Report a repair
- Report anti-social behaviour
- Get online with Your Homes Newcastle
- Apply for a new job
- Apply for a job
- Envirocall
- Alterations and Adaptations

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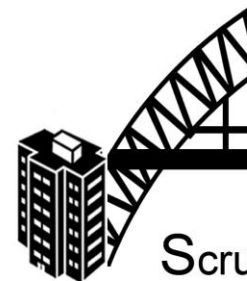
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No

Submit

Newcastle  
City Council



**Has the review of the Complaints Procedure improved the complaints service for customers?**

July 2018

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Gwen Smith

Gary Murphy

... and ...

**All tenants who participated in contributing their views**

**Jargon Buster**

NCC

Newcastle City Council

RSH

Regulator of Social Housing

YHN

Your Homes Newcastle

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## **Summary**

Members of Scrutiny, Involvement For Tenants (SIFT) carried out a scrutiny exercise to assess if the review of the Complaints Procedure has improved the complaints service for customers.

SIFT used a number of scrutiny tools to gather evidence for the scrutiny exercise, for example surveys and Mystery Shopping, and followed key lines of enquiry.

### **The main findings include:**

- The new policy empowers frontline staff to take early action to resolve complaints and cuts out unnecessary red tape.
- YHN do not routinely monitor service failure, but do monitor the level of formal complaints.
- YHN offer financial and other remedies, for example a bunch of flowers to say 'sorry' to customers who have not received a good service, however it does not monitor spending on remedies.
- The main differences between the old policy and the new one are who is able to investigate, an additional step when an Assistant Director looks at it, and how a service user finds out how to make a complaint and then makes it.
- The online complaints form is not fit for purpose in that it is a generic form, perhaps originating in the USA and may alienate some service users in Newcastle.
- The Mystery Shopping exercise demonstrated that on the whole most staff wanted to help customers and looked for an early resolution to any issues. A few members of staff appeared to be unclear about how service users needed to complain and gave incorrect information to the Shopper.
- The new policy in action saw a drop of approximately 91 percent of formal complaints received and recognised.

### **SIFT's main recommendations are:**

- The amount of spend on remedies should be monitored and reported to the Customer Services Committee.
- An advice leaflet should be issued describing how to make a complaint, including the contact address and telephone number.
- The online complaints form should be reviewed and updated
- The flowchart illustrating the complaints process on the YHN website should be made mobile friendly.
- The complainant should be sent (emailed when appropriate) a copy of their complaint so that they can refer to it if they have to move to the next stage of the process.
- All staff should be reminded about how a service user can access the complaints system.

## **1. Introduction**

This first scrutiny report of the Financial Year 2018-19 was produced by the Tenant-led Scrutiny Pool supported by an Independent Tenant Advisor Service, Engage Associates. Engage Associates' role is to help deliver effective, practical support to tenants and leaseholders who are involved in scrutinising the performance of Council housing services in Newcastle.

The Scrutiny Pool's name is SIFT – Scrutiny, Involvement For Tenants – which accurately describes what they do, that is, sifting through information to look for evidence from which to analyse service provision and recommend change and improvement.

Before the commencement of this scrutiny exercise five new members were recruited to the group; the new members greatly enhanced the ability of SIFT to carry out an in-depth assessment of the scrutiny question.

## **2. Scope of the Scrutiny Exercise**

The scope of the scrutiny exercise is to investigate:

Has the review of the Complaints Procedure improved the complaints service for customers?

It has been observed that quite often service users do not understand that social landlords have a formal complaints policy. When they say 'I want to complain' sometimes what they really mean is 'I want to request service', staff can also interpret this statement as being about service delivery not a formal complaint. This scrutiny exercise considers that factor in exploring the operation of the old and new versions of the complaints policy.

The purpose of this scrutiny exercise is to:

- To assess if the procedure is easier to use than the older version
- To evaluate if complaints are resolved to the customer's satisfaction more quickly
- To identify if complainants are signposted to 'Designated Persons' more frequently for effective local resolution
- To assess if 'sorry money' is used effectively
- To recommend procedural changes where necessary.

This report details the findings and recommendations of this scrutiny exercise, which took place during May, June and July 2018.

### **3. Methodology**

There are a variety of tools which can be used to scrutinise services, performance and governance. The tools selected on this scrutiny exercise included:

- A briefing on the National approach to complaint handling in social housing
- A service briefing by Linda Henderson-Gray of YHN
- Desktop review of the Regulatory Standard (Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard)
- Desktop review of the old Complaints Policy and the new Complaints Policy
- Mystery Shopping
- Desktop review of performance information
- A benchmarking exercise to review over 30 organisations' policies
- Review of related YHN advice leaflets and letters
- Assessment of the use of 'sorry money' and other remedies for resolution.

The Key Lines of Enquiry SIFT members pursued included:

- Regulator of Social Housing's Regulatory Standard on Tenant Involvement and Empowerment
- A description of the method YHN use to record and rectify service failure
- The old Complaints Procedure
- The new Complaints Procedure
- Information leaflets about complaining which are provided for tenants
- Standard letters sent to complainants at all stages in the process
- Levels of complaints at stage one for the last three months of the old Procedure and the first three months of the new Procedure
- The outcome of stage one complaints for the last three months of the old Procedure and the first three months of the new Procedure
- The number of complaints progressing to the Corporate stage for the last three months of the old Procedure and the first three months of the new Procedure
- The number of complainants signposted to Designated Persons for the last three months of the old Procedure and the first three months of the new Procedure.

### **3.1 Briefing on the national approach to complaint handling in social housing**

The briefing was given by the Independent Tenant Advisor (ITA). She explained that an Act of Parliament had influenced the way that complaints were handled by social landlords. The Localism Act 2011 introduced the idea of 'Designated Persons' into the complaints process. The role of a Designated Person is to try to resolve complaints locally without the need to involve the Housing Ombudsman. Designated Persons can be either a local councillor, any MP in England or a Tenants' Panel recognised by the landlord and the Housing Ombudsman.

Before approaching a Designated Person the complainant must first exhaust the landlord's internal complaints system, after which if they are still not satisfied with the landlord's response to their complaint, they have two choices: they can either ask the Designated Person to act on their behalf to forward their complaint directly to the Housing Ombudsman, or they must wait eight weeks before they can refer the complaint to the Ombudsman. The eight week wait is designed to be a 'cooling off' period when the complainant or the landlord can review their actions. If the complainant approaches the Housing Ombudsman before the eight week wait has elapsed the Ombudsman will simply tell the complainant to speak again to their landlord.

The ITA explained that the emphasis nationally was to resolve complaints locally.

### **3.2 Service Briefing by Linda Henderson-Gray of YHN**

Linda Henderson Gray, YHN Digital Project Manager explained to the group that she was the staff member who is the service head for complaints about service failure within the organisation. She went on to state that there is still some discussion taking place in YHN as to where complaints should be located, that is, in which division.

The scrutiny question relates to the review of the Complaints Procedure which was implemented in April 2017 and Linda's briefing focused on an explanation of how the old system worked, why it was changed, and how it now works.

Linda stated that there were three main reasons for the review:

- (a) To empower frontline staff to put things right when a problem came to their attention
- (b) To reduce the process of complaining for customers, that is to cut out red tape, and
- (c) To simplify the numbers of different policies involved.

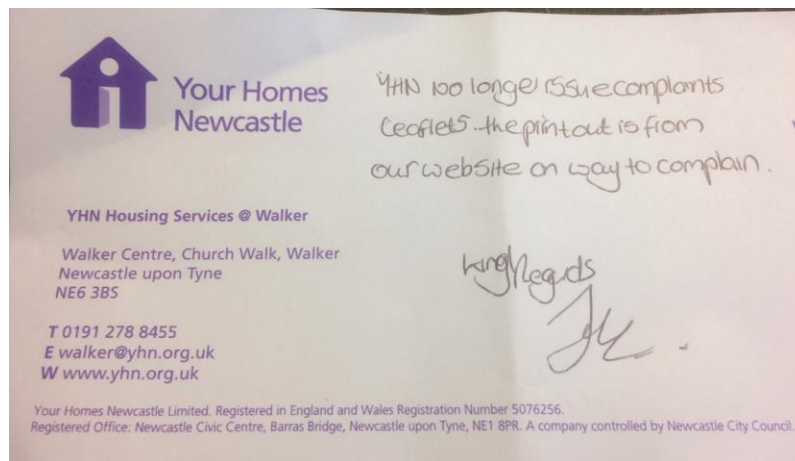
Linda was asked if every service failure was logged to help identify trends or patterns. She explained that approximately six or seven years ago YHN stopped logging service failures and suggested that as no trends or patterns could be identified, and stated that all customer complaints were unique to that person. The statistics from the 'sorry fund' indicate that complaints about repairs are a trend because expenditure in the fund is higher for that activity (see Section 4 of the report).

Before the new policy was framed extensive consultation took place with tenants, managers, frontline staff and with officers of NCC. Linda went on to explain that a benchmarking exercise with other organisations' policies had also taken place and that it became evident in the exercise that, although there were similarities in the

policies all organisations had adopted different systems – some having two stage policies whilst others had up to five or six stages.

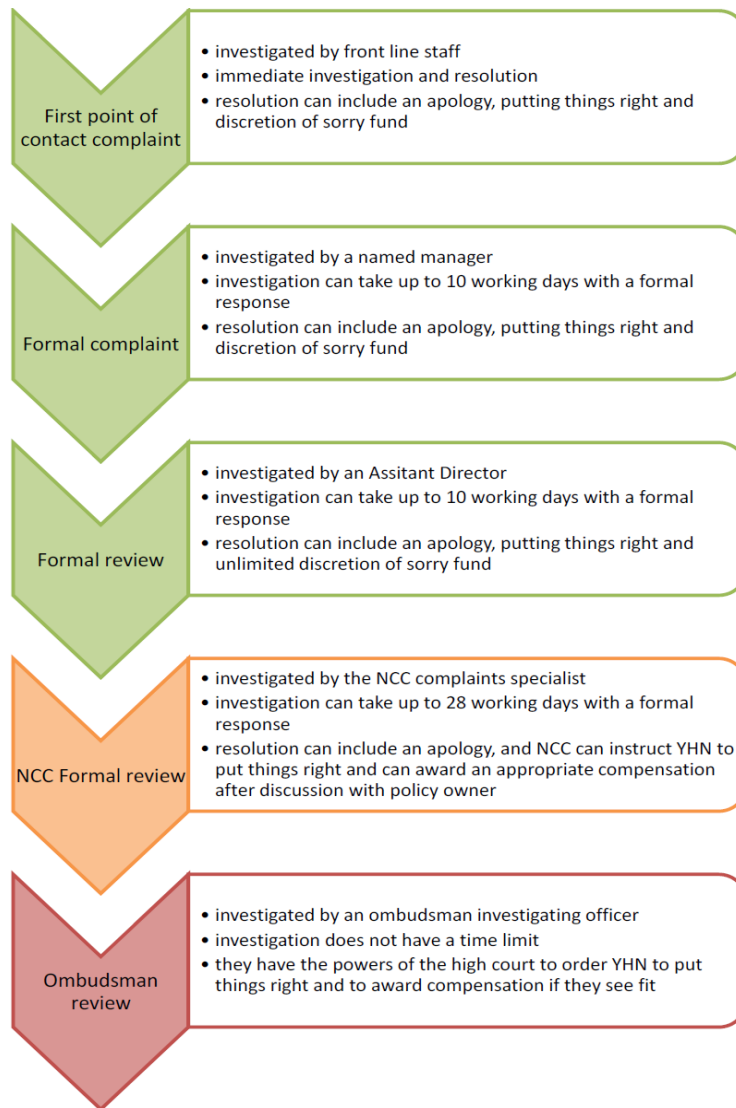
Linda then talked the group through the old and new policies. The old policy did not allow frontline staff to deal with issues: what they had to do was complete a form and send the details to Linda and her team. This was time consuming and disempowered staff from putting things right as soon as possible. The new system meant that frontline staff could try and put things right themselves and also offer a 'remedy' to resolve the matter, for example send the customer a bunch of flowers to say sorry, or up to £150 to repair damage or distress or loss of earnings. At the manager's discretion this amount could be increased to £500, or if a greater amount was needed then an Assistant Director had the authority to make a decision on what amount of money was appropriate.

Note dropped through a tenant's letterbox.  
(Area Housing Hub address blocked out.)



The diagram overleaf shows the new policy in operation and is taken from YHN's website, however the flowchart is not mobile friendly, which it should be.





What is missing from the YHN diagram is the eight week wait a complainant has to make before the complaint can go to the Ombudsman or, alternatively asking a 'Designated Person' to seek local resolution on their behalf (SIFT have added the extra information to the diagram for the purposes of clarity).

YHN does not have a Designated Tenants' Panel, nor does it monitor how many people are signposted to an MP or councillor, hence YHN does not know how effective the signposting would be in speeding up local resolution.

SIFT members pointed out that the new process takes a maximum time of nine weeks before it reaches the Ombudsman stage, but then if you add in the eight week wait it could take up to 17 weeks to get there. However many complaints are resolved much quicker than this. Linda explained that service users were not routinely signposted to Designated Persons and that only two percent of complaints made to YHN currently went to the Ombudsman. The Ombudsman service has never upheld any complaint about YHN.

Linda then explained that that some policy decisions would not be dealt with in the first instance through the complaints policy, for example the housing applications policy has an appeals process. If an applicant for housing was unhappy with the banding the application fell into they would not use the Complaints Policy but their

case would be heard by an appeals process, so SIFT would not see any complaints relating to applications.

SIFT members asked Linda if it was possible to view the amount of money spent on Remedies in 2016/17, the last year the old policy was in operation and the money spent on Remedies in 2017/18 to compare spend. This was to help the group address the question Matthew Foreman, a YHN Director had asked the group to look at, that is, has spending been value for money? Linda stated that she would investigate this and get back to SIFT. She went on to explain that there is spend in the 'Inevitable Damage Scheme', this is where, for example rewiring takes place and one thin line of wallpaper is removed and the tenant cannot match it up so an amount of money in vouchers is given so that the tenant can redecorate. Linda highlighted the difference in levels of complaints between the old system and the new one, the numbers of tenants complaining under the new system had dropped from 77 in the last quarter of the old system to 7 in the new system. Linda stated that she believes that the statistics speak for themselves; that is, the new system is helping frontline staff resolve issues straight away, meaning that customers do not have to use the formal complaints system.

### **3.3 Desktop Review of the Regulatory Standard**

The Regulatory Standard which covers landlords' approach to complaints is the Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard. The Standard states that ... '[landlords] have an approach to complaints that is clear, simple and accessible that ensures that complaints are resolved promptly, politely and fairly.' YHN's approach is clear and simple however an explanation of how it works is only available online at YHN's website so its accessibility is questionable.

The Standard goes on to state ... '[landlords] demonstrate that they understand the different needs of their tenants, including in relation to the equality strands and tenants with additional support needs.' YHN have a range of support mechanisms in place, including community care alarms and a young people service. Other services include:

- Pathways – aims to give vulnerable people 'Pathways' into independent living and prevent homelessness
- Pre-Tenancy team – works with people to help them manage a tenancy prior to starting one to prevent problems before they occur
- Advice and Support Worker Outreach Team – will work with any current council tenant to help them manage a tenancy.

Further, the Standard states 'Providers shall offer a **range of ways** for service users to express a complaint' ... On YHN's website it states 'You can make a complaint by:

- Filling in our Online Form
- Emailing [YHNccc@yhn.org.uk](mailto:YHNccc@yhn.org.uk)
- Telephoning YHN on 0191 278 8600
- Visiting your local housing office.
- 
- This gives the complainant four choices of method, two of which require the individual to use the internet, the third by telephoning and the fourth by

visiting the Housing Hub. The details about how to locate any of the offices or their addresses are not shown on the website. The complainant can only find out about these methods by visiting the website or having a member of staff volunteer the information, so the range of ways to access the complaints system is limited. This is especially problematic when staff give tenants the wrong information about how to complain – please see section 3.5 Mystery Shopping.

- **3.4 Desktop Review of the Old and New Complaints Policy**

- The main differences between the two versions of the policy are who is able to investigate and how a service user finds out how to make a complaint and then makes it. Under the old policy a specific individual and their team were responsible for investigating complaints. Under the new policy frontline staff are able to investigate, greatly enhancing the speed of resolution.
- In the two quarters analysed for this scrutiny, that is, the last quarter of the old policy and the first quarter of the new, one-eleventh the number of people complained in that first quarter of the new policy compared to the old one. What factors could contribute to the drop in numbers other than quicker resolution?
- The first contributing factor may be that the leaflet which advised service users how to access the complaints procedure was withdrawn at the point the new policy was introduced. The leaflet also described the role of 'Designated Persons' unlike the flowchart on the YHN website.
- Secondly, the Mystery Shopping exercise (see section 3.5) flagged up on three out of seven occasions staff did not explain the online access to the complaints system, indicating perhaps that the training staff received on the implementation of the new policy was not fully understood. It would assist service users to complain if the leaflet was revised and reinstated.
- Overleaf is a screenshot of the online complaints form. You will see that the complainant is asked which City, State and Country they live in. To many service users, who are already unhappy with the service they have received these questions may seem unnecessary and perhaps annoying.

- The form is located on YHN’s website and drops down from the statement ‘How to make a complaint.’

**Complaints and Compliments**

Complaints and Compliments online reporting form

Forename

Surname

Email

Phone

Address

Street Address

Address Line 2

City

State / Province / Region

ZIP / Postal Code

Country

Preferred Contact Method

Please Select

Details of your compliment, complaint or comment:

What can we do?

If you have made this compliment, complaint or comment before please tell us: when, the reference number and which office dealt with it.

**\*Information submitted will be used for the intended purpose only**

\*Contact details may be collected for other purposes

Submit

**Save time, do it online...**

- Find a home
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- Report a repair
- Report anti-social behaviour
- Get online with Your Homes Newcastle
- Apply for a new fob
- Apply for a job
- Envirocall
- Alterations and Adaptations

**Was this page useful?**

Yes

No

Submit

- The complainant should be sent (emailed when appropriate) a copy of their complaint so that they can refer to it if they have to move to the next stage of the process.
- The website does not have details of what you need to do at the next stage of the process – this should be updated.

- **3.5 Mystery Shopping**

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- **Mystery Shop 1**

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- I approached the council service desk in the Library and asked the staff member if she could print me a YHN complaints form. She telephoned the YHN outlet in the Library to ask where she could access one. The YHN staff member told her, who then told me, that all forms had been withdrawn and the housing hubs were not allowed to print them off and a complainant should access the form online. I then asked what if you have not got access to a computer and the YHN member responded that I should find someone who has.

- **Mystery Shop 2**

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- I went into a Housing Hub to lodge a complaint regarding the cleaners in my block making excessive noise which woke me up quite early in the morning. I asked at reception to speak to somebody. The staff member on the desk rang upstairs and informed me to take a seat and somebody would be with me shortly. The gentleman I discussed the issue with was very helpful. I played him an audio recording that I made that morning of the noise level and he was surprised at the level at such an early time of the day. I explained that I have a number of health issues and that I tend not to get to sleep until late at night and being woken up early has a big impact on my wellbeing.
- He asked how I would like to pursue my complaint. I asked what ways I could and he explained that I could speak to the cleaning team myself or he could speak to the team leader and raise the issue. I said I would speak to the cleaners myself. The member of staff informed me that if after speaking to them, the issue was not resolved he would then speak to them from his end. He was very helpful and the matter was resolved.

- **Mystery Shop 3**

- I telephoned my local Housing Office stating that my neighbour had told me that they wanted to make a formal complaint to YHN about an issue they were unhappy with, and had asked me for some advice on what to do, and how to go about it. I telephoned my local YHN office to ask for some guidance. The member of staff first asked me what the complaint was about, and when I replied that it was confidential, she then gave me two options. They were to tell my neighbour to either phone the office themselves, or to put their complaint in writing to the Housing Office.
- The member of staff did not inform me that there are complaint forms online that could be filled in by the customer and sent off, nor did she offer to post one out to me or tell me that I could go to a Housing Hub or the Central Library to use a computer to make the complaint.

- **Mystery Shop 4**

- I went to a Housing Hub to ask staff how I could make a complaint around the Repairs Service. The member of staff informed me to get in touch with the repairs centre. The staff member looked at the leaflet stand for information; however there was no relevant information displayed. I was advised that

complaints need to be made in writing, I asked who to send my letter to, and the member of staff informed me that they did not know.

- **Mystery Shop 5**

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- I accessed the YHN website for the telephone numbers of four YHN Housing Hubs and then called them, explaining that I was telephoning on behalf of my elderly neighbour who had been in a confrontation where the other person living on the floor of the flats had lost his temper, losing control and scaring her.
- The incident had happened three days ago and she was unaware of what action to take and I was telephoning on her behalf explaining that I had only her version of events; also she wanted to remain anonymous until she had decided what to do about the situation.
- Three of the phoned members of staff who responded to the calls were helpful and polite, listened and gave me plenty of time. They sounded genuinely concerned, gave relevant information about how to tackle the issue and said to call back if any additional help was needed.
- The fourth member of staff also seemed to want to help but said it would be pointless until my neighbour contacted the office in person.

- **Mystery Shop 6**

- I asked a YHN staff member to contact my neighbour about his inappropriate behaviour near our properties. After a period of time when nothing changed I asked about making a complaint and was told that the Estates Officer would speak to me about it. I telephoned and was told that she was too busy to speak to me but would call me back. She did not call, so later I called into the office and asked for a complaints form. The Officer replied that they did not have complaints forms, other than submitting it online and that they were removing the leaflets describing how to complain from the office and that I had to write to the Housing Officer to complain.

- **Mystery Shop 7**

- I telephoned the number advertised as one method of making a complaint and was put through to the Enquiry Centre. I stated that I wanted to make a complaint and the call handler asked what it was about.
- I said it was about noise in my block of flats. She asked which block it was and then put me through to the relevant Housing Hub. Again I explained what the issue was and that I wanted to make a complaint. The Housing Officer treated this as a 'request for service' and immediately told me of ways they could resolve the matter, they did not treat it as a formal complaint, which interprets the policy correctly – the staff member was attempting to resolve the issue at the first point of contact.

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- **Mystery Shopping Summary**

- On the whole staff wanted to help and looked for an early resolution to the issues. A few members of staff appeared to be unclear about how service users needed to complain and gave incorrect information to the Mystery Shopper.

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- **3.6 Review of Performance Information**

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- SIFT reviewed the performance information from the last quarter of the old policy in action and the first quarter of the new policy's implementation. In both systems no complaints reached the Housing Ombudsman stage.
- There was a huge difference between the numbers of complaints in the two quarters. The new policy in action saw a drop of approximately 91 percent of formal complaints received. If there were no discernible difference within service provision between the two quarters other factors must have been in play.
- In YHN's view the new policy was empowering staff so that they could deal with the complaint at the earliest opportunity, which meant that the service user did not have to complete a formal complaint. There were however a number of differences between the implementation of the old policy and the new policy, for example during the time the old policy was in action there were advice leaflets displayed in the Housing Hubs for service users to find out about the system. The leaflets stated that service users could 'contact us in person, by phone, by letter or online on our website' and gave the contact details. The leaflet was detailed, clear and presented well, but has now been withdrawn from use, meaning that tenants have less access to the information and thereby less knowledge about how to complain.
- Overleaf is the performance information SIFT requested.

	Quarter 4 2016/17			Quarter 1 2017/18	
	Number of Complaints	Outcome		Number of Complaints	Outcome
Stage of Complaint		Upheld	Not upheld		
1 <sup>st</sup> stage Formal (use of form or in writing)	77	38	34	7	3
2 <sup>nd</sup> stage Escalated to YHN Assistant Director	n/a	n/a	n/a	3	3
3 <sup>rd</sup> stage Escalated to NCC	2	0	1	1	1
Ombudsman	0	0	0	0	0

- The table indicates that under the old system 77 complaints had been received in the last quarter, however the ‘upheld’ and ‘not upheld’ columns add to only 72 because five complaints were either withdrawn or resolved, the same is true in the first quarter of the new policy.
- Under the old system complaints were not escalated to the attention of the relevant Assistant Director. The new system saw nearly 50 percent had been escalated. The Assistant Director upheld all of the cases that went to them.
- Under both systems almost half the total numbers of complaints were upheld, meaning that there is not a great difference between how the two systems treat service users’ complaints in terms of fairness.
- The evidence from the Mystery Shop does indicate that a number of staff do not give the correct information to tenants about how to complain; for example the member of staff who told the Mystery Shopper to write to YHN but did not know who to address the letter to. Is this lack of information a factor in the reduction in the number of complaints? SIFT cannot reliably answer this question unless the new policy was in operation with a new, revised information leaflet available and the performance was re-evaluated.



- **3.7 Benchmarking**

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- SIFT reviewed 30 policies from a range of Housing Associations and councils to benchmark YHN's policy against them. They also assessed the positive and negative elements of each organisation's policy. The table at Appendix A lists some of the findings from the benchmarking exercise.
- In comparing YHN's policy with the benchmarked set the major difference was that several of those landlords still provide advice leaflets on how to access the complaints policy.

- **3.8 Review of Leaflets and Letters**

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- As already stated within the report the leaflet which described how to make a complaint was withdrawn at the point the new policy was implemented. Many social landlords however do produce explanatory leaflets which improves accessibility and inclusivity to the system and helps service users to understand the complaints system. Having a leaflet would benefit both service users and new staff as everyone would be able to access the relevant information easily.
- There are four standard letters to respond to the initial complaint and to inform service users as a complaint progresses through the policy stages. The initial letter acknowledging the complaint is polite and informative, as is the second letter which informs the service user of the outcome of the complaint, it does, however have a typographical error in the second paragraph. The letter which would be sent by the Assistant Director is appropriate and informative for the complainant. The final letter which would be sent by NCC has a paragraph which states that the complaint is **Not Upheld**, in bold type with initial capitals. SIFT question why the letter has been framed in this way, is it to encourage that finding to be made?

- **4. Use of 'Sorry Money' or Remedies for Resolution**

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- SIFT were asked by Matthew Foreman, Director of Customer Service to investigate if money used to recompense service users for failures in service was used effectively.
- YHN consider the first remedy should always put the customer back into the position they would have been had it not given a poor level of service. The range of remedies include an apology, vouchers, direct payment to a service user's bank account, payment onto their rent account, cash payment through paypoint, and flowers. Appropriate options are at the discretion of the officer as long as it remains within the cost for a remedy and is also in line with an appropriate remedy, for example if YHN need to replace some cleaning products that staff have used when making good a repair.
- Front line staff are authorised to use their discretion with remedies up to the sum of £150. Specific managers are authorised to use their discretion with remedies up to the sum of £500.
- 
- The amount of times a remedy was awarded under the two policies rose ten-fold, which is only to be expected given that frontline staff under the new

policy had the authority to put things right as soon as they became aware of service failure. The spend rose from £7,448 in 2016/17 to £19,070 in the first year of the new policy's operation.

- **Totals**

	• 2016/17	• 2017/18
• Flowers	• 5	• £ 125
• debt account	• 5	• £ 887
• vouchers	• 0	• £ -
• paypoint	• 1	• £ 100
• bank account	• 7	• £ 6,336
•	• 18	• £ 7,448
		• 193

- 
- From the information supplied it cannot be determined whether or not the policy is value for money. What can be determined is that YHN acknowledge service failure more frequently under the new policy than it did under the old one. There is, however no evidence that the service user is satisfied with the apology.

- **5. Findings**

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- The Localism Act 2011 introduced the use of Designated Persons to resolve complaints locally. However if a service user did not want to approach a Designated Person then they had to wait eight weeks before approaching the Housing Ombudsman. This waiting time, can in theory prolong the access to the Ombudsman Service. However the Designated Person has the ability to shorten this time by referring the complainant to the Housing Ombudsman directly.
- The new policy empowers frontline staff to take early action to resolve complaints and cuts out unnecessary red tape.
- YHN do not routinely monitor service failure, but do monitor the level of formal complaints.
- YHN offer financial and other remedies, for example a bunch of flowers to say 'sorry' to customers who have not received a good service.
- A complainant can find out about the four methods of making a complaint from YHN's website or from a staff member. Two of the methods require the individual to use the internet. The fourth method, a visit to the Housing Hub requires the service user to locate the relevant Hub, however the details about how to locate any of the offices or their address is not given in the 'How to make a complaint' section of the website.

- The main differences between the old policy and the new one are who is able to investigate and how a service user finds out how to make a complaint and then makes it.
- The leaflet which advised service users how to access the complaints procedure was withdrawn at the point the new policy was introduced.
- The Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard is largely complied with, however the range of ways to complain is not extensive.
- The online complaints form is not fit for purpose in that it is a generic form, perhaps originating in the USA and may alienate some service users in Newcastle.
- The Mystery Shopping exercise demonstrated that on the whole most staff wanted to help customers and looked for an early resolution to any issues. A few members of staff appeared to be unclear about how service users needed to complain and gave incorrect information to the Shopper.
- The new policy in action saw a drop of approximately 91 percent of formal complaints received.
- 
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- 6. Recommendations – Action Plan

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recommendation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Management Response</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Proposed Actions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Timescale</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Responsibility</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The signposting to Designated Persons when appropriate should be encouraged</li> </ul>				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. The amount of spend on remedies should continue to be monitored and reported to the Customer Services Committee</li> </ul>				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. An advice leaflet should be issued on how to make a complaint, including the contact address and telephone number</li> </ul>				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. The online complaints form should be reviewed and updated</li> </ul>				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5. The flowchart describing the complaints process on the website should be made mobile friendly</li> </ul>				

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• • 6. All staff should be reminded about how a service user can access the complaints system •	•	•	•	•

- Some of the findings from the benchmarking exercise

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Positive Practice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Negative Practice</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mentions mediation as an option</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Uses a lot of jargon</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can report significant performance failures to the Scottish Housing Regulator</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does not provide any useful information on how to make a complaint and does not provide any contact information</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Customers will be contacted within 1 working day to acknowledge the receipt of a complaint</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not enough information</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quite short waiting times for complaints to be acknowledged and investigated</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 10 pages long, far too much information for tenants/customers/leaseholders</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In depth explanation of stage 1 and 2 complaints procedure</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bad page layout, far too cluttered</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clear diagram of the complaints procedure</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 16 pages long and it seems geared towards staff</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Very clear layout, colourful, attractive and easy to read</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No information for Ombudsman or their contact details</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They explain they monitor satisfaction on a quarterly basis</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A lot of irrelevant information for tenants/customers/leaseholders</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explains the function of Designated Persons and Housing Ombudsman</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does not provide any contact information</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They have a number you can text to make a complainant, a freephone number and an address for their Complaints Oversight Team</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A lot of information to read through</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides contact info for themselves and the Housing Ombudsman</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Claims normally have to be made in writing</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides a table of key definitions which is useful for</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A lot of irrelevant information such as going into notional life of</li> </ul>

those attempting to ready the document	installations within the home
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•</li><li>• They monitor complaints handling performance to recognise any trends or recurring problems</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•</li></ul>

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• Extract from spending on Remedies

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	• 16/17	• 16/17	• 17/18	• 17/18
	• number	• £	• number	• £
• Total for the year				
• Paypoint by area of YHN				
• Advice and Support	• 0	• £ -	• 2	• £ 90
• Assets	• 0	• £ -	• 10	• £ 860
• Care Alarms	• 0	• £ -	• 4	• £ 275
• Furniture Service	• 0	• £ -	• 1	• £ 150
• Garden Care	• 0	• £ -	• 3	• £ 185
• Housing Options	• 0	• £ -	• 1	• £ 10
• Income	• 0	• £ -	• 3	• £ 270
• Repairs	• 1	• £ 100	• 42	• £ 3,846
• Right to buy	• 0	• £ -	• 2	• £ 125
• Tenancy & Estates	• 0	• £ -	• 9	• £ 417
• Voids	• 0	• £ -	• 3	• £ 200
•	• 1	• £ 100	• 80	• £ 6,428
• Bank account by area of YHN				
• Advice and Support	• 0	•	• 1	• £ 30



				0
• Assets	• 0	•	• 2	• £ 25 0
• Care Alarms	• 0	•	• 1	• £ 23 4
• Furniture Service	• 0	•	• 3	• £ 64 0
• Housing Options	• 0	•	• 3	• £ 21 5
• Income	• 0	•	• 3	• £ 85
• Repairs	• 6	• £ 6,1 64	• 26	• £ 3,9 63
• Right to buy	• 0	•	• 1	• £ 10 0
• Tenancy & Estates	• 1	• £ 172	• 4	• £ 69 0
• Voids	• 0	•	• 5	• £ 80 6
•	• 7	• £ 6,3 36	• 49	• £ 7,2 83
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