

Meeting notes Complaints Panel Meeting

Date: 11 March 2026

Time: 2:00pm – 3:30pm

Housing 21 Lead: Sarah Bliss - Complaints Lead Retirement Living

Housing 21 Representatives:

Vanessa Pritchard-Wilkes - Head of Research and Influence

Maddie Kelly-Morrow - Complaints Lead Extra Care

Jessica Thorley - Consultation and Complaints Partner

Shelley Nicholson - Complaints Support Officer Retirement Living

Amber Crick – Resident Engagement Coordinator

Housing 21 residents:

DL, MR, PS, TL and ID

Apologies: RD and JY

Date of next meeting: 8 April 2026 (annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement report and the accompanying self-assessment for the Housing Ombudsman)

Time of next meeting: 2pm

Title of agenda item	Summary of discussion
1. Welcome and Introductions	<p>Sarah welcomed everyone, noting all members were familiar and no formal introductions were required.</p>
2. Review of Previous Meeting Minutes	<p>Completed Actions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Additional meeting date confirmed for 8 April (Vanessa & Amber). • Housing Ombudsman webinar delivered by Maddie & Sarah with Richard's involvement. Residents praised the professionalism and clarity of the session. • Jess updated the Complaints Improvement Plan using feedback collected at the previous panel. • Maddie circulated the sector research paper on co production (was sent with last meeting minutes). • Ageism Training: Being co-developed with the EDI Lead and Learning & Development team. Opportunities for residents to review the materials prior to staff rollout are being explored. <p>Outstanding / Follow-up Actions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communal boilers (heat networks) guidance: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Work underway to ensure residents receive clear information at tenancy start and throughout. ○ Required ahead of full regulatory implementation (Jan 2027).

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Discussion raised around terminology — “heating systems” preferred over “heat networks” to avoid confusion. <p>Resident Feedback on Action Management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TL highlighted inconsistent communication between teams (Complaints vs. operational staff), emphasising the need for equal access to information for residents. • Panel raised concerns about whether managers are being asked to handle complex complaints beyond their expertise, especially those with care based professional backgrounds. ○ Vanessa to ensure these points feed into the organisational Devolved Model Review.
<p>3.</p>	<p>Resident Complaint Feedback</p>	<p>TL shared a detailed comparison of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A historical complaint (2022–23) — described as dismissive, defensive, lacking apology, and ultimately resulting in a £51,000 correction to service charges. • A current water billing complaint (2022–2026) — described as a “complete difference” with improved professionalism, transparency and communication from the Complaints Team. <p>Key Issues Raised</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of response from operational staff (example: unanswered email regarding £11k/£15k water charges).

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confusion around partially upheld findings where “what was upheld/non upheld” was not clearly explained. • Dissatisfaction with receiving compensation offers before problems are fully resolved. • Concern that updates are sent to managers but not directly to complainants. • Panel Reflections • Sarah noted that TL’s comments aligned directly with the improvement themes already being addressed: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ consistency ○ clarity ○ proactive communication ○ alignment between Complaints Team and operations • ID questioned whether managerial defensiveness stems from unrealistic expectations placed on them. • General agreement that training, clarity of processes and support systems for managers are essential.
4.	Complaints Project Update	Activity Since Last Meeting - Jessica Thorley <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service Request vs Complaint Clarification: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flow diagrams created to help staff differentiate categories. • To be visually improved by Comms and incorporated into resident facing materials. • Preparation for new regulatory areas:

- STAIRs (Social Tenants Access to Information Requirements).
- Heat network / heating system complaint requirements.
- Ensuring policies, processes, training and communication reflect new obligations.
- **Policy Reviews:**
 - Complaints Policy update underway.
 - Compensation Policy rewritten (covered in agenda item 5).
- **Complaint Survey Redesign:**
 - Language simplified; unnecessary or unclear questions removed.
- **System Improvements:**
 - Reviewing ERICA/DATIX complaint form fields and data capture.
 - Removal of redundant fields, adding missing fields, aligning with customer journey mapping.
 - IT is delivering system upgrades soon (not transformative yet, but foundational).

Next 4–6 Weeks

- Establish quality checks for complaint letters & data accuracy.
- Strengthen communication checkpoints in the complaint journey.
- Roll out colleague training on updated templates & processes.
- Build a bank of best practice letter examples.
- Improve learning framework and reporting to ensure actions are monitored and embedded.

<p>5. Compensation Policy Changes (Sarah Bliss)</p>	<p>Sarah Bliss gave an overview</p> <p>Policy updated to reflect:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Housing Ombudsman’s new Remedies Guidance• Future Energy Ombudsman expectations for heating systems• Clear ranges and thresholds• Detailed appendices covering service failure, loss of amenities, repairs, complaint handling, and heat network compensation structures <p>Panel Feedback</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Document length & complexity:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Residents found it long and technical; suggested a simplified summary or “Key Points” version for residents and managers.• Policy vs Guidance separation:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ TL recommended separating strict policy from guidance to avoid confusion.• Terminology:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Examples like “<i>without prejudice statements</i>” felt too legalistic.
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- **Consistency & fairness:**

- Concern that set compensation amounts could appear arbitrary.
- Residents suggested including explanation tools or calculators (noting Housing 21 is developing one).

- **Perception risk:**

- **ID** raised that compensation must never appear to replace problem resolution.
- **Sarah** confirmed letters now include explicit “actions to put things right” and “lessons learned.”

Heat Network Compensation Appendix

- Panel agreed most scenarios were covered.

- **Discussion raised on:**

- Parity between residents with communal heating and those with individual boilers
- Whether compensation should be proactively offered to all affected residents (**Maddie** supports this approach)
- How group vs individual complaints would be handled

<p>6. Complaints Survey Changes</p>	<p>Jessica Thorley</p> <p>Key Improvements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Survey shortened from 16 to 12 questions. • Simpler, clearer language (avoiding jargon such as “empathetic”). • New questions added on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ease of making a complaint ○ Whether staff understood the issue ○ Clarity of the decision ○ Timeliness • Table format improved (Jess to explore formatting consistency with survey software). <p>Panel Feedback</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Phone surveys may introduce positivity bias; self-completion can introduce negativity bias—both acknowledged. • Debate around keeping “Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied”: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Some feel residents should choose a side ○ Others note many residents genuinely feel neutral or unsure ○ Category retained for balance • Overall, residents agreed the survey questions were appropriate.
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<p>7.</p>	<p>AOB</p>	<p>Resident Case Reviews</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DL requested reinstating the review of 3–4 real complaint cases each meeting. • Agreed: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Not feasible for April’s self-assessment meeting, ○ But will return for the next full panel meeting (including examples using the <i>new letter templates</i>). <p>Structure of Future Meetings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Panel suggested a poll to prioritise what they want more/less of (e.g., policy vs. practical complaints review). <p>Devolved Model</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TL raised whether complaints should be fully centralised. • Sarah confirmed Complaints is part of the wider Devolved Model Review. <p>STAIRs Consultation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jessica summarised key questions for the Housing Ombudsman consultation. • Residents encouraged to submit individual responses. • Amber to circulate the consultation link.
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<p>8. Follow-up tasks:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sarah: Explore simplified compensation policy version and proactive compensation.• Jess:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Check survey formatting consistency○ Create poll for meeting-agenda preferences• Amber: Circulate STAIRs consultation link.• Complaints Team: Prepare complaint case examples for next full panel meeting.• Complaints Team: Review how complaints information appears on the Housing 21 website
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