

Report to: Audit & Governance Committee Meeting
11 December 2024

Director or Business Manager Lead: Suzanne Shead, Director of Housing, Health and Wellbeing

Lead Officer: Jill Baker, Business Manager Customer Services ext. 5810

Report Summary	
Report Title	Outcome of Housing Ombudsman Investigation
Purpose of Report	To inform Members of the outcome of an investigation where the Ombudsman found fault with the Council
Recommendations	That Members note the report and the lessons learnt.
Reason for Recommendation	Ombudsman investigations which result in the Council being found to be at fault are required to be reported to this committee.

1.0 Background Information

1.1 A resident complained to the Housing Ombudsman regarding various issues relating to the Council's handling of repairs and requests for adaptations to their property.

1.2 When reviewing cases, where fault is found, the Housing Ombudsman has three levels of maladministration:

- Service Failure – this is the lowest level of maladministration and is reserved for minor failings where action is still needed to put things right.
- Maladministration – where there is a failure which has adversely affected the resident.
- Severe Maladministration – this is reserved for the most severe failings.

1.3 Findings of maladministration are published regularly on the Housing Ombudsman Service website along with spotlight reports which focus on specific issues or service areas to raise awareness and help landlords improve.

2.0 Ombudsman Findings and Final Decision

2.1 The Housing Ombudsman determined there to be maladministration in one area and service failure in three:

- Handling of septic tank repairs – maladministration
- Handling of repairs to the roof and guttering – service failure
- Handling of repairs to the stairlift – service failure
- Handling of repairs to the wet room – service failure.

3.0 Orders and Recommendations

3.1 In its final decision, Appendix 1, the Housing Ombudsman ordered the Council to carry out the following:

- Pay the resident £1,400.
- Provide a schedule of works and complete these works
- Review the handling of the septic tank repairs.

3.2 The Housing Ombudsman made several recommendations:

- That the Council remedies the damp and mould on the bedroom ceilings and undertakes any works required in the loft to prevent this from reoccurring.
- That the Council arranges an inspection of the stairlift to identify any faults, which should then be repaired within a reasonable timeframe.
- The Council contacts the resident to ask whether they wish to pursue the following issues as complaints:
 - The way the loft insulation was removed
 - The conduct of the operatives who had entered their garden to install scaffolding
 - Wires left exposed following the removal of the stairlift.

3.3 The orders and recommendations have been accepted and implemented.

4.0 Lessons learnt

4.1 When a complaint is upheld, it important the Council learns from it and considers changes to processes, policies etc.

4.2 In this case, a review of how the Council manages septic tank repairs has taken place, which has resulted in the following changes to the Council's processes:

- When a repair is reported, specialist contractors will be commissioned at the earliest opportunity to diagnose and resolve the issue as quickly as possible and in line with the Council's repairs policy.
- All complaint cases involving septic tank issues will be referred to the senior oversight group for monitoring. This group oversees complex cases and consists of senior managers across all housing management functions and is chaired by the Director for Housing Health and Wellbeing.

- All complex repair cases, including septic tank cases, will be managed by one member of staff to ensure effective project management to improve oversight and accountability and improve the customer experience.
- The process for managing septic tank cases now been amended to include consideration of the need to move tenants temporarily if the tank fails and the production of an action plan for dealing with out of hours incidents relating to septic tank faults.

4.3 New guidance, along with improved monitoring arrangements, have been issued to all housing teams around record keeping on the Council's Housing Management System. This has (and continues to be) an area of focus and is a key element of our project to implement a new housing management system which is due to complete in 2025

Background Papers and Published Documents

Nil.