



Roundtable on 21st November 2022, with Richard Blakeway Housing Ombudsman

Introduction

Richard Blakeway spoke to industry leaders about housing standards and the role that the Ombudsman plays with regards to social housing. He also gave an in-depth insight on the complaints process and the manner in which the Housing Ombudsman Service is working to improve and streamline the services they provide.



Key takeaways

- In the last year the Housing Ombudsman Service has experienced a 78% increase in complaints for formal investigations.
- Surveys show 7 out of 10 social housing residents know about the Ombudsman but there is still a need to raise awareness and reach residents that need the service.
- The maladministration rate is roughly 48%, so in roughly half the cases handled the service doesn't find there is anything that has gone wrong. Whereas a few years ago the rate was about 25%.
- In roughly 2 out of 3 cases handling failings are found which is a reflection on service provision and not meeting expectations.
- The Social Housing Regulation Bill currently going through Parliament would put the service's complaint handling code onto a national footing and broaden the formal orders. The Ombudsman scheme would be able to refer more cases to the regulator and issue complaint handling orders against poorly performing landlords.
- One of the legislative changes in the Building Safety Act was to remove the democratic filter before accessing the Ombudsman service. 9 out of 10 complaints had to wait 8 weeks before going to the Ombudsman.

Issues raised

- The Ombudsman strongly encourages a positive learning culture around failures in the sector so others could learn from past mistakes. Currently there is a tendency to dismiss a failure as an isolated incident which can result in the same mistakes being repeated, sometimes with profound human consequences.
- It is taking too long to find a resolution from when the complaint is made leading to real consequences for residents. One of the causes for this is a lack of sufficient resources and staffing.
- It is vital that more residents are aware of the service and are informed about it through publications, advertising and referrals by elected representatives among others.
- There is a lack of clarity on what constitutes legal proceedings. Some landlords consider legal proceedings to have started at the beginning of the pre-action protocol on housing conditions rather than when the particulars are issued by the court. Landlords need to be clear on what their legal advice and approach should be.

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Ben Everitt MP is the Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Housing Market & Housing Delivery

To get involved, please contact

secretariat@appghousing.org.uk



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