

## **Annual Complaints Report 2015 – 2016**

### **Appendix C – BHP Complaints**

**Resources and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee – 08 November 2016**

#### **Summary**

1. This report provides an overview of complaints activity across the Brent Housing Partnerships (BHP) service in 2015-16.

#### **Complaint Framework**

2. Departments/Service areas are responsible for the local management and resolution of all corporate stage 1 complaints. The corporate Complaints Service team manages final review/stage 2 corporate complaints on behalf of the Chief Executive. In addition, BHP operates a Pre-Stage 1 complaints process which they use to refer some enquiries to their contractors to respond to in the first instance.

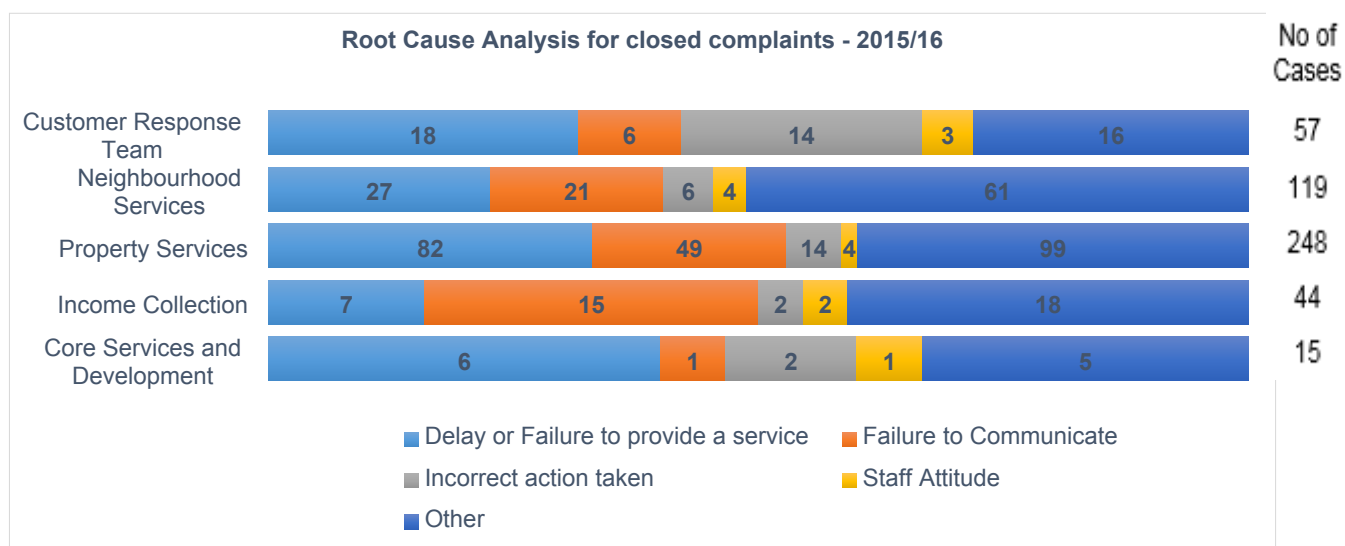
#### **Headlines**

3. The main headlines from BHP complaints performance are:
  - BHP received 452 Stage 1 complaints for 2015/16, compared with 377 cases in 2014/15 and 422 cases in 2013/14.
  - BHP also received 57 Stage 2 complaint cases in 2015/16, compared with 52 cases in 2014/15 and 52 cases in 2013/14.
  - BHP's complaint escalation rate of 13% for 2015/16, remains higher than the Council's average of 9% 2015/16.
  - Main reasons for complaints received in 2015/16 were mainly classed as "Other" followed by a failure to provide a service and Failure to communicate.
  - BHP responded to 80% of all first stage complaints within time in 2015/16. This is compared with 56% 2014/15.
  - BHP had 51% of 420 cases Upheld or Partly Upheld of Stage 1 complaints. They had 60% of all Stage 2 complaint investigations upheld / partly upheld.
  - BHP paid out £30,830 compensation in 2015/16 on 74 cases at an average of £416 per case.

## Complaints Received

4. BHP Property Services, Neighbourhood Services and Customer Services were the areas that received the most complaints. More than half of BHP complaints for 2015/16 were related to Property Services (53% or 239 complaints) and the key themes were delays/poor workmanship with repairs or major works and communication. Neighbourhood Services received 99 complaints (22%) primarily about cleaning of communal areas. 11% of complaints (50 cases) were received in the BHP Customer Services team mainly about inadequate communication. Overall BHP complaints increased by 75 cases (17%) from the previous year. There has been a trend in BHP of increasing stage 1 complaints with higher than average escalation rates to stage 2 and then upheld at the final review stage.
5. BHP's 57 escalated cases (31%) were predominately to do with Property Services.

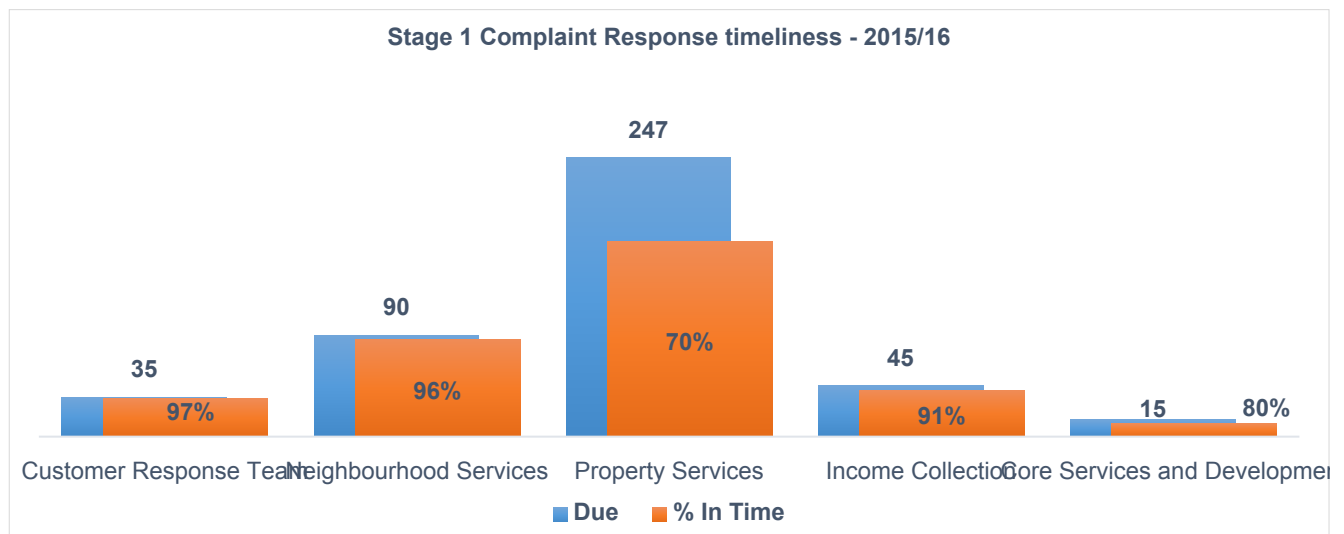
## Nature / Reasons for Complaints



6. The main reasons for complaints received in 2015/16 were classed as “other”, delays or failure to provide a service, followed by failure to communicate. Complaints about delays or a failure to provide the service the customer was expecting accounted for approximately a third of the complaints received with 29%. Failure to communicate accounted for 19% of complaints.
7. Examples of the types of issues that fall under each of the main reasons for a complaint are listed below:-
  - Alleged poor staff attitude – a particular complaint involved a third party contractor who was sent to carry out repairs on behalf of BHP. The customer was compelled to make the complaint due to poor service and attitude they received from the contractor. The complaint was upheld.
  - Delay in visiting resident – the resident had been trying to contact their housing officer on numerous occasions. When they did finally agree to meet, the resident was required to be present and therefore had to arrange time off work. On the day of the appointment, the housing officer called to cancel at the last minute. The complaint cited poor communication, failure to provide a service and hint of staff attitude. The complaint was upheld.
  - Poor communication - residents came home from holiday to find scaffolding erected to both their neighbours properties on either side. They were posted a poorly worded letter which asked them to sign a party wall agreement. However there was little or no explanation about the work or how long it would take. The residents refused to sign the agreement until such time further details were provided. They went on to complain which was investigated and upheld.
  - Incorrect action taken – resident was refused repairs to their property because they had indicated they were in the process of using the Right to Buy scheme to purchase the residence. However, the customer subsequently withdraw this request, however the flags/indicators that were on the system were not removed and therefore the customer was incorrectly advised that they were not entitled to have repairs carried out by BHP. This complaint was partly upheld.

## Timeliness of Responses

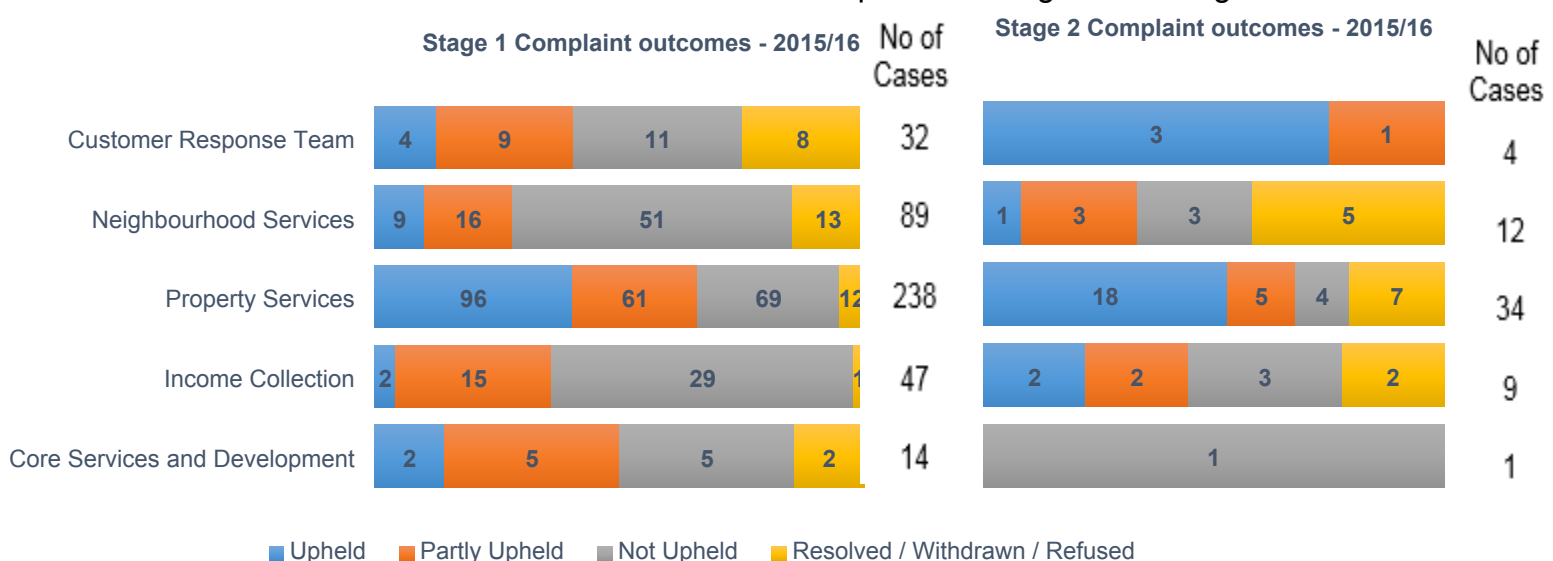
8. BHP's performance in responding to first stage complaints has dramatically improved, especially towards Q4 of 2015/16. It's helped to pick up the overall performance within most services achieving over 90% of first stage complaint responses answered in time.



- Core Services and Development achieved 80% of first stage responses in time, despite volumes being quite low.
- The bulk of complaint responses came from BHP's Property Services with 247 responses, accounting for 57% of all first stage complaints.
- The bulk of cases for Property Services related to repairs. Property Services achieved 70% of complaint responses in time, however part of the reason behind this was down to the service having a backlog of complaints to investigate which affected their ability to carry out investigations in a timely manner.

## Complaint Outcomes

9. The chart below shows the outcome of complaints at stage 1 and stage 2



10. The percentage of Upheld first stage complaints of 31%, was higher than any of the areas in the Council that receive comparable volumes of complaints.
- BHP Customer Service's related complaints centred on poor communication and thus resulted in 41% of first stage response being Upheld / Partly upheld.
  - BHP's previous poor performance in dealing with first stage complaints was felt throughout 2015/16 at Stage 2 (which involves reviewing complaints BHP initially dealt with up to a year ago) in terms of increased volumes of escalated complaints. Improvements at the initial stage of complaint handling will therefore take some time to be reflected at the second / final review stage.
  - The majority of decisions related to BHP Property Services (Repairs) complaints in which follow up actions / works orders were not completed or followed through.
  - BHP cases accounted for 32% of all stage 2 cases. Out of the 60 BHP cases investigated at final review, 42% (25 cases) were upheld. When combined with partly upheld decisions, 60% of all BHP stage 2 investigations were upheld in some form

### **Compensation**

11. There has been a significant increase in compensation paid on BHP cases at service specific level. Previously in 2014/15, BHP accounted for 56% of compensation (74 out of 132 cases) and 39% of all compensation paid (£30,830 out of £79,050). BHP paid out an average of £412 compensation per case.

### **Local Government Ombudsman**

12. The Housing Ombudsman (HO) deals with housing management/BHP issues and takes a mediation type approach to resolving referrals. There is a sizeable backlog of HO investigations of more than a year. The HO has been in contact with the Council regarding a small number of complaints but has not produced any recent performance reports.

### **Learning from Complaints**

13. Lessons learned from complaints can help shape and improve our services and the customer experience and there is a commitment in the department for managers and staff to use the learning to improve services.
14. A few examples of how the learning points from complaints helped to improve services are provided below:

<b>Customer Feedback – ‘You Said’</b>	<b>Service Area Changes – ‘We Did’</b>
You told us that following a surveyors inspection our contractors had not returned to complete the works	Working closely with our property services team we are piloting a programme of post inspections on all repair jobs occurring as a result of a complaint. We also carry out follow up calls to customers to test satisfaction with the outcome.
You told us that you found it difficult to contact your housing officer	In order to improve customer access we put in place a system to increase housing officer availability both in person and on the phone
Leaseholders told us that repair issues with roofs were taking too long to resolve	We adapted our Section 20 consultation process to ensure we can be compliant and expeditious in our response. This has seen roof leaks tackled more promptly to the customer’s satisfaction.
Customers expressed dissatisfaction	In order to avoid potential complaints those customers expressing dissatisfaction, when surveyed by BMG, are contacted by the BHP complaints team to see how we can enhance their opinion of the service by seeking to rectify any poor service provision and take this learning back in to the business.

### Improving Complaint Performance

15. BHP’s performance on complaints has been an area of particular concern and special focus for improving performance. The main concerns regarding performance were that:
  - BHP related complaints accounted for the highest percentage of cases upheld or partly upheld at both stages of the complaints process.
  - BHP also accounted for the highest amount of compensation paid.
16. Alongside the wider review of BHP performance, a number of other measures have been put in place to address specific concerns about complaint performance. These actions included:
  - BHP reviewing their complaints process which resulted in them forming a dedicated complaints team to act as a central hub for managing complaints.
    - Timeliness of stage 1 responses has improved from 56% on time in 2014/15 to 80% on time in 2015/16.
    - BHP accepted fault in more complaints at the first stage thus leading to an increase in complaints upheld and partly upheld. However, there continued to be a significant rise in the number of complaints escalated to stage 2, prompting questions over the quality of the investigations that were carried out at the first stage, therefore resulting in BHP paying out more compensation and being further monitored.
  - In addition, the Complaints Service Team took part in a BHP led review of their complaints function. The Council were able to provide feedback on areas of concern.

- The Complaints Service Team have started to provide BHP with additional support with systems training, as well as complaints investigation mentoring, in order to improve the quality of first stage complaint responses and improve efficiency. Whilst there were noticeable improvements towards the end of 2016, the Council will continue to work closely with BHP into 2016/17.