



Customer Excellence Panel

2010/11 Complaints Review

June 11



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The review was facilitated by Nina Peters (Performance and Intelligence Manager) and Hannah Fitzhenry (Customer Insight Officer).

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Purpose

The purpose of this report is to summarise the findings of the Customer Excellence Panel (CEP) review of Helena Homes Complaints service.

The review was carried out between October 2010 and May 2011. The panel reviewed the performance of the Complaints service using twelve months performance information (2010/11).

Background

The Tenant Authority (TSA) expects housing associations to have a clear strategy for involving tenants and residents in influencing and monitoring service delivery.

Tenants should be clear on how they can be involved in managing their homes, and Helena must demonstrate how services have been modified in response to tenant views.

Over recent years there has been increased emphasis on tenant led regulation; ensuring housing associations are accountable to its customers.

“Making services and decisions accountable to, and contestable by, residents, and responding to the resident voice, are vital to achieving... excellence in housing.”
Chartered Institute of Housing, 2008

“We expect all housing associations to clearly show how their services have been commented on and influenced by the people living in their homes...We also expect housing associations to be able to show that responding to residents’ views is something that runs through all their activities as part of their culture and the way they deliver services.”
Housing Corporation, 2007

Helena has already made successful inroads to achieving this through its Customer Excellence and Resident Involvement Strategies, by providing greater opportunities for tenants to influence the decision-making process and shape the services that they receive. The Customer Excellence Panel is just one of a range of initiatives aimed at achieving this.

Introduction

Helena Homes wants to ensure that our customers are at the heart of everything that we do.

The Customer Excellence Strategy aims to ensure we deliver high quality services based on what matters most to tenants. We want to ensure that we continually improve and deliver customer led services.

The Customer Excellence Panel have a key role within the Customer Excellence Strategy in helping to improve customer satisfaction and raise the percentage of very satisfied tenants by 25% over the next 5 years. It will help ensure that tenants play an active role in shaping service delivery and identifying areas for improvement.

About the Customer Excellence Panel (CEP)

The Customer Excellence Panel (CEP) was established to provide an enhanced scrutiny role across the services Helena provides. Scrutiny is an important function, which helps to ensure that our customers receive high quality services that are relevant to their needs and demonstrate value for

money. It adds a new dimension to Helena's decision-making process by examining and questioning performance and decisions made by the organisation from a tenant's perspective.

Aims of the Panel

The aim of the panel is to help Helena deliver better services by ensuring tenants are able to influence service design and hold Helena to account for performance.

The panel's role is not as a consultation group to advise on policy and procedure, but as a scrutiny panel to challenge the way in which services are provided.

The panel aims to regularly review Helena's performance, actively challenging the way in which we deliver services to assist us in continuous improvement.

The panel will draw on wider sources of information to ensure that they represent the views of the majority of tenants (and residents where applicable). Such information includes customer satisfaction surveys and complaint feedback.

The panel enables tenants to have a greater role in:

- Defining what is important and expressing preference in shaping service delivery, including reviewing and setting service standards
- Monitoring performance and holding Helena to account

In doing this it is hoped that the role of the CEP will help us to increase customer satisfaction with the services Helena provides

Overall the approach will help to further embed a customer focus in the way that Helena behaves, which will lead to better services for customers.

Review Process

The panel has received independent training and support (from the Northern Housing Consortium) in order to build confidence and capacity in their role.

The review entails an overview of service delivery and performance, and questions whether the CEP can further develop a service to improve customer satisfaction and value for money.

To do this the panel is provided with a range of performance information and scrutiny activities to ensure they accurately reflect the customer's experience. The information provided includes:

- Performance data
 - against targets
 - over the past three years (trend analysis)
 - against similar organisations (benchmark information)
- Customer feedback to determine what matters most to tenants
- Complaints information
- Positive feedback and compliments
- Best practice information from other organisations
- Activity Based Costing (ABC) information
- Service Standards
- Findings from Customer Inspector reviews
- One Voice survey findings

- GIS maps to identify geographical trends (where applicable)
- Customer Insight information
- Other information as required

The panel use the stated information to gauge a view of how well a service is performing and ensure that we are working towards meeting tenant priorities and providing value for money. This then enables the panel to recommend service improvements.

If further information is required the panel can request questions to be put to the One Voice tenant panel, or they can request an inspection or a mystery shop by the Customer Inspectors.

As part of the review the panel are also given the opportunity to meet and discuss the service areas performance with the relevant service managers.

This approach helps to ensure that Helena keeps tenants are at the heart of service delivery and that tenant views and opinions are a key consideration in the decision-making process.

Complaints – Customer Excellence Panel Review

This is the eighth service review undertaken by the panel.

There is a requirement to ensure that all our customers are able to access the complaints service through a suitable method. Reporting a complaint can be done in writing, in person or over the phone. Helena's websites also offer an opportunity for a customer to view complaints information and also report a complaint via email. Helena's latest communication method 'Digi TV' also enables customers to access the complaints service.

Customer feedback has identified that effective complaint management is important to tenants, with this in mind the panel decided it would be beneficial to review complaints on a quarterly basis and carry out a regular quality audit on a random sample of complaints.

The schedule of reviews was agreed by the CEP based on the current corporate priorities and aspects that tenants have identified as key drivers of satisfaction. The review schedule for 2011/12 has been published on Helena Highway within the Customer Excellence Project section.

Aims of the Review

Specifically relating to Complaints service, the review aimed to :

- Review and scrutinise performance & customer feedback through complaints
- Agree Customer Excellence Performance Indicators
- Review current Service Standards
- Recommend areas of improvement and identify actions
- Consider whether the service is providing value for money and delivering excellent services to tenants and residents.

Approach to the Review

The Performance and Intelligence team presented an overview of performance to date drawing on the range of information outlined within the 'Review Process' section, this was carried out on a quarterly basis to give the panel an opportunity to continually monitor complaints performance, in conjunction and to compliment the two yearly complaints review.

For each quarter a number of breakout sessions were held during the presentations, giving the panel an opportunity to discuss their views and opinions, ask questions and challenge performance.

The breakout sessions were structured around:

- What matters most to Helena Tenants?
- Do our Service Standards reflect this?
- How are we performing? (considering cost and value for money)
- Are we monitoring the right things?
- What improvements do tenants want?

The Business Support Advisor was present during each quarter's meetings to respond to any questions the panel raised and explain any reasoning behind decisions made.

From the panel's recommendations over the full year an action plan was developed to identify what improvements the panel would like to make to the complaints service.

Findings

Overall the panel are impressed with the current improvements made to the complaints service and the impact on its performance.

Specifically performance relating to the satisfaction with case handling has risen from 56% in Quarter 1 to 67% in Quarter 4 (top quartile 72%) and satisfaction with outcome of a complaint has also risen from 39% in Quarter 1 to 66% by Quarter 4 (top quartile 67%).

Performance indicators relating to responding to complaints within target time of 5 working days for stage 1 (or 10 working days for stage 2) should demonstrate performance of 100%. Unfortunately throughout they year there were a number of occasions when complainants did not receive the response to their complaint within the set timescale. Initial complaints responded to within time scale did not hit the target of 100% at any point during the year, performance ranged from 82% to 94%.

The panel would like to see performance for complaints responded to within timescale at 100% for each stage in the complaints process.

The panel acknowledged that following the implementation of a new complaints system in April 2010 there has been some significant changes to the way the company manages complaints. It was therefore agreed that the impact of these changes may not yet be fully embedded, the panel were happy that these changes will ensure improvement to tenant satisfaction continues to increase.

The panel were happy with the current service standards and felt that it is important that are Helena are meeting what matters most to its tenants which is reflected in the agreed standards.

As with the previous service reviews the panel have agreed to continue to monitor a selection of Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) specifically relating to aspects of the Complaints service that are important to tenants. Details of the specific KPI's can be found in the 'Are we monitoring the right things?' section of this report.

The following sections outline the findings and actions that have been discussed and agreed as part of the review of the Complaints Review.

How are we performing?

The CEP considered the Complaints service to be performing well, however suggested that that there is always a need to continually improve performance.

The panel were pleased that satisfaction with the outcome of a complaint had risen from 56% in quarter 1 to 66% in quarter 4, however acknowledged that this was still below the target of 75% and also the top quartile benchmark figure of 72%.

Satisfaction with case handling also demonstrated an improvement in performance from 56% in quarter 1 to 67% in quarter 4, the panel were aware that the target of 95% had not been met and also the performance was lower than the top quartile benchmark of 75%. The panel felt the target may be too high although would like to wait for a full year's performance before deciding the target.

Each quarter's performance was discussed by the panel, details of this is provided below.

Quarter 1

The panel were aware that a new complaints system had been introduced during this quarter and suggested that until the system had an opportunity to embed the performance would be difficult to scrutinise.

They acknowledged that the number of initial complaints being responded to in target in this quarter required some improvement, a total of 85% were responded within the timescale. The target of 100% should always be met. Complaints performance is already monitored pro-actively on a case by case basis. Managers were contacted to ensure that complaints were responded to within target and where resolution depended on circumstances beyond their direct control, actions were recorded and customer kept up to date. The Panel position was clear in this respect, namely that we must make sure that we maintain contact with the person making the complaint.

The panel were pleased that no complaints reached stage three during the quarter.

Quarter 2

Although the number of initial complaints received during Quarter 2 rose from 74 to 109, the panel did not consider this to be a problem. This demonstrates that customers are more aware of the complaints process and how to gain access.

The number of initial complaints responded to in time rose to 93%, the panel were pleased that performance had improved by 8%. Although they continued to highlight that performance should be 100%, they felt that there is no reason why a complainant cannot receive a response within set service standard of five days.

67% of the complaints were responded to within target at stage 1 during this quarter, the panel felt that this should be considerably higher especially since it related to only 15 complaints.

In circumstances when a complaint is complex the panel were happy that a full response is not necessarily needed within five working days. The response should detail the progress to date and highlight when the complainant can expect to receive a full response.

The panel were happy that all stage 3 complaints during this quarter were responded to within target.

Further training and awareness sessions were arranged with 'complaint managers' and front line staff to address any issues following on from the implementation of Documotive and to ensure that everyone who was likely to come into contact with a customer wishing to make a complaint was aware of Helena's policy and procedures. In addition, external process and cultural training was provided for tenants involved in scrutiny (CEP and Customer Inspectors) and service managers.

Newsletter articles, also designed to raise awareness amongst staff and customers, were published and Propertycare staff engaged at their 'Breakfast Briefings'.

Quarter 3

The number of initial complaints responded to in target was 86%, the panel detailed that this should be higher and performance should be closer to the target of 100%. This was the same for the number of Stage 1 complaints as performance was only 89%.

The panel were particularly concerned with the percentage responded to within target at stage 2 complaints, performance of 40% is very poor when it relates to only 5 complaints.

In response to the Mystery Shop recommendations the complaints form was reviewed and re designed to make it more 'user friendly'. These were distributed to all public access areas together with new complaint posters and leaflet, updated to reflect our revised service standards. A series of Neighbourhood Office 'road shows' were scheduled to take place in quarter 4 to further raise awareness and maximise the impact of the new literature. The importance of effectively dealing with complaints at the first point of contact was emphasised, as it is recognised that this has a direct impact upon both performance and customer satisfaction.

Quarter 4

The panel were impressed that the number of initial complaints responded to within target had improved by 8% to 94%, although this is good performance the panel continued to agree that response to a complaint should always be done within target and therefore performance should rise to 100% in Quarter 1 2011/12 now that changes are embedded.

Performance for responding within the timescale was 83% for stage 1 complaints, this was considered poor by the panel and they highlighted that all complaints should be responded to within the set target of 5 working days.

The panel were happy that all stage 2 complaints received a response within five working days, however acknowledged that this only related to two complaints.

With clear evidence that our performance had improved the opportunity to scrutinise quality of response now presented itself. Panel members were clear that they wanted to receive qualitative, as well as quantitative, information. Manager's responses were audited and anonymised examples shared with the Panel. The complaint satisfaction survey was outsourced to independent researchers VOLUNTAS in order to maximise response rates and provide important insight into why are customers are expressing dissatisfaction with the complaints service.

Performance

The panel were pleased that all elements of the complaints satisfaction survey had demonstrated an improvement throughout 2010/11. The panel were particularly impressed that awareness (publicity) of the service had increased with satisfaction rising from 11% Quarter 1 to 63% in quarter 4.

The panel are keen that the survey continues to show improvements in performance. Similar to case handling the panel felt that the target was a little high.

Targets are reviews by the panel as part of their annual target setting exercise.

In August 2010 the Inspectors conducted a mystery shop of the service, the following areas were highlighted for improvements:

- The Initial Complaints Form
- Information available in Neighbourhood Offices
- Information available on Helena websites
- Staff level of knowledge

The panel are pleased that efforts have been made to rectify the areas highlighted during the mystery shop. The Initial Complaints Form was redesigned along with Complaints Leaflets and Posters. Information is now provided on all Helena websites and staff were given briefings to update their knowledge of the complaints service and process.

Although the panel were happy with the changes being made they are keen that this is having a positive impact on the level of service for customers, they therefore requested a follow up mystery shop to identify impact of the changes.

The panel were happy with the current service standards although they were keen that they should be met. Response time performance should be 100% therefore all complainants should be in receipt of a response to their complaint within 5 working days (10 working days at Head of Service and Director stage). The panel were in agreement that as complaints go through the stages they are potentially more complex therefore more time is required to form a response. Going forward it was agreed Heads of Service will be given up to 10 working days to respond.

The key requirement is that there is evidence to demonstrate that we have contacted the customer either in writing or in person with an update of where the case is up to and when a full response can be expected.

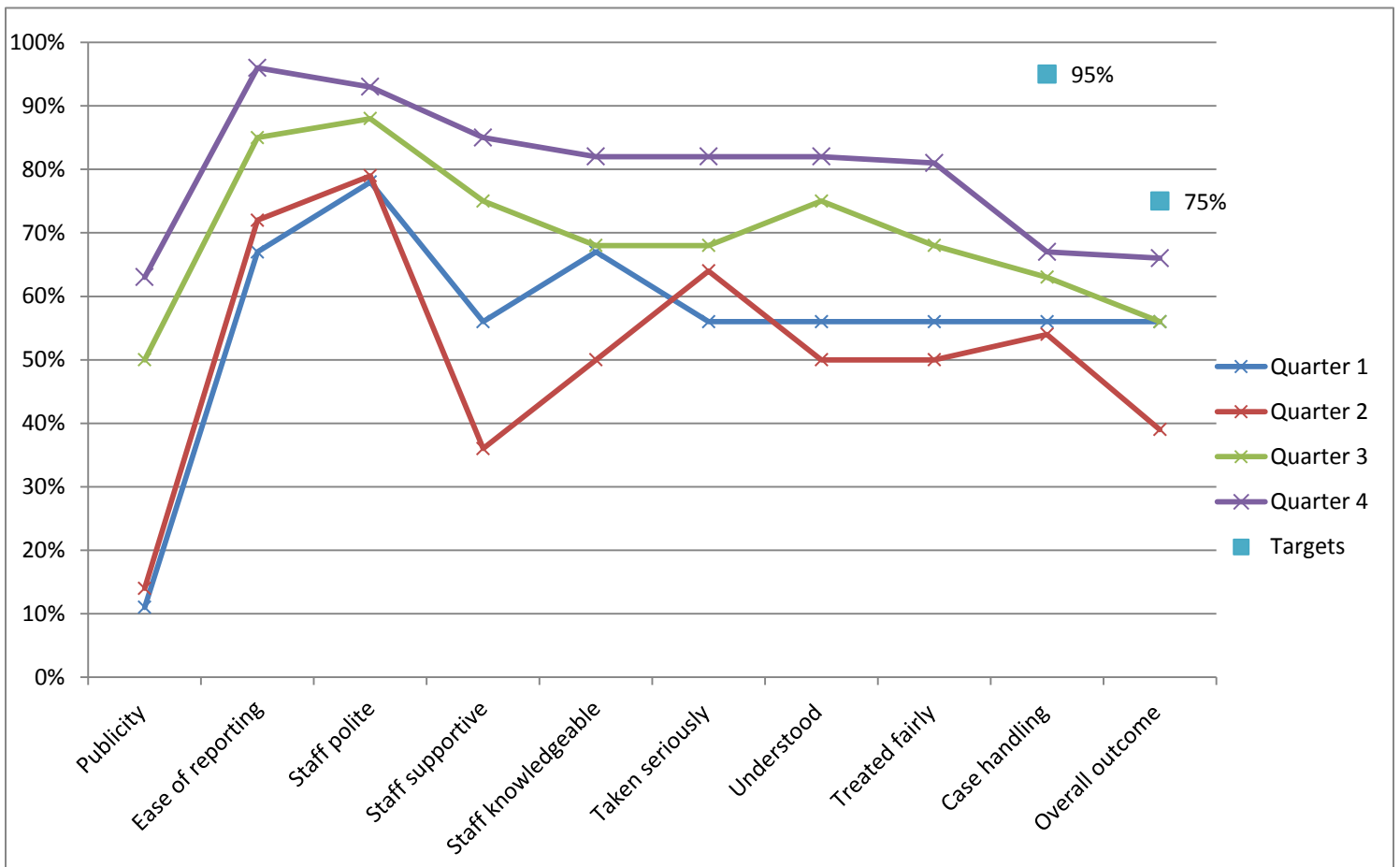
Overall the panel agree that the service is performing well with improvements already taking place, the panel are keen to see continuous improvement with this service and would like to see an improvement when benchmarked with other similar organisations. The panel would like to continue to monitor the service in their suite of performance indicators and continue to performance on a quarterly basis supported by a reality check conducted by the Inspectors.

What matters most to tenants?

The panel considered a wide range of performance measures during the review of the Complaints service. The evidence was used to identify what is important to Helena tenants.

The complaints satisfaction survey

Helena currently carries out a complaints satisfaction survey on a quarterly basis. The diagram below displays the results of the survey in terms of the customer's journey. Results from the four quarters in 2010/11 have been included.



- ✓ Publicity was considered poor at 11% in Quarter 1, significant improvements were made by Quarter 4 to 63%.
- ✓ Ease of reporting also increased through the year from 67% in Quarter 1 to a very high percentage of 96 by Quarter 4.
- ✓ Staff being 'polite' remain fairly high throughout the year however at its highest in Quarter 4 at 93%
- ✓ Staff being supportive was at its lowest (36%) in Quarter 2, although increased significantly to 75% in Quarter 3 and again increased to 85% in Quarter 4
- ✓ Staff's level of knowledge demonstrated an improvement throughout the year going from 67% in Quarter 1 to 82% in Quarter 4.
- ✓ Complaints being taken seriously once again demonstrated an improvement throughout the year ending on a high at 82%
- ✓ In Quarter 1 complaints being understood was at 56% this has increased over the year and is now at its highest in quarter 4 at 82%.
- ✓ 56% of complainants were happy that they were treated fairly in Quarter 1, this increased to 81% in Quarter 4.
- ✓ Case handling was at its highest by the end of the year at 67%, this has increased by 13% since its lowest of 54% in Quarter 2. However is still significantly below the target of 95%.

- ✓ Overall outcome ended the year at its highest at 66%, this has increased significantly since the lowest quarter which received 39% satisfaction. But still remains below the target of 75%.
- ✓ In Quarter 4 two thirds of respondents were satisfied with case handling and again with the overall outcome of their complaint.

Overall the diagram demonstrates an improvement in performance throughout 2010/11. The panel reviewed the survey performance on a quarterly basis and were pleased that performance has shown an improvement in all areas of the service, yet hope to see further improvement into 2011/12.

Quarter 1

In Quarter 1 the panel were concerned that case handling was poor at only 56% satisfaction, it was acknowledged that this was significantly below the target of 95%. During this quarter they felt it was important to make some improvements and suggested aiming to achieve the top quartile benchmark of 75%

Also in Quarter 1 the outcome of a complaint was considered to demonstrate poor performance with a figure of only 56%, similar to case handling the target of 75% is high. The panel were happy that the satisfaction with the outcome of a complaint demonstrated some improvement towards the benchmark figure of 72%. However felt that the target of 95% was significantly higher than this and therefore required consideration for amending the target so it is more achievable.

To help improve satisfaction with the service and raise awareness amongst staff monthly performance updates were supplemented by a detailed quarterly report.

Publicity was considered an issue in quarter 1 with a rating of only 11% satisfaction, this was considered poor and the panel suggested that action should be taken to promote the service. The panel suggested that it may not always be clear who to complain to. To improve awareness of the service a number of actions were conducted:

- Article within Helena Headlines and the One Voice 'The Chorus' newsletter
- Briefings to all members of staff including the production of a staff guide and regular updates via Helena Highway
- Distribution of leaflets, posters and the Initial Complaints Form to the all Neighbourhood Office's
- Amendments Helena websites to ensure access could be gained throughout

As a result of this awareness with the service was highest at Quarter 4 with satisfaction with publicity being 63%.

Quarter 2

In Quarter 2 satisfaction with case handling demonstrated some decline from 56% in Quarter 1 to 54%. Although the panel were not impressed with performance it was considered that the implementation of the new system would have impacted on performance in Quarter 2. Whilst the panel were disappointed with performance of satisfaction they were impressed with the significant decrease in the number who were dissatisfied with a change from 44% in Quarter 1 to only 15% in Quarter 2.

Similar to case handling, overall satisfaction with the outcome of a complaint in Quarter 2 showed a decline of 17% to only 39%. The panel stressed that it should demonstrate some improvement although were aware that the new system was having an impact on the service. Again performance is significantly lower than the benchmark of 72%.

Also in Quarter 2 the panel discussed the importance of taking complaints seriously and ensure that Helena is listening to the feedback from customers. 64% were satisfied that their complaint was taken seriously, the panel felt that this should be higher.

The panel felt that performance during quarter 2 had demonstrated an overall decline although it was acknowledged that the implementation of a new complaints system may be having an impact on performance the panel were not impressed with this and were keen that efforts be made to improve satisfaction across all elements of the complaints service.

To gain more accurate feedback changes were made to the methodology of the survey. The survey during Quarter 1 and 2 was postal with response rates were fairly low. For Quarter 3 a follow up telephone survey was conducted which seemed to have a positive impact on performance along with improving response rate to gain a more accurate insight into how the service is performing.

An external training programme was delivered within the period to key managers responsible for handling complaints. Key messages included the need to ensure customers are always aware of where their complaint is up to, highlighting the need for personal contact and maintaining a high quality response.

Quarter 3

In Quarter 3 satisfaction with case handling increased to 63%, the panel were pleased with this increase and would like to see a continuous improvement.

Those satisfied with the outcome of their complaint increased to 55%, the panel are keen that this continues to demonstrate an improvement.

A review of the wording of complaints closure letters was carried out to ensure they provide clarity and are empathetic with the complainant. In addition the change in survey methodology (from postal to telephone) has led to an increased response rate improving the survey reliability.

Quarter 4

In Quarter 4 performance of satisfaction with case handling continued to demonstrate a steady improvement, the panel were happy that performance was 67% satisfaction and suggested the improvement should continue.

Similar to case handling, satisfaction with outcome of a complaint in Quarter 4 displayed some improvement with an increase to 67% satisfied. The panel are keen to see this further improvement.

In Quarter 4 the percentage of those who were dissatisfied with case handling and also the outcome of their complaint had never demonstrated such good performance with them both being at only 22%. The panel felt that this was a positive improvement in performance.

Plans to outsource the complaints satisfaction survey in 2011/12 should help to boost response rates. The survey is currently managed in-house incurring both printing and postage costs, in addition staff resources to carry out a high percentage of surveys over the phone. The costs of outsourcing this survey are therefore cost effective and will provide more valid and representative feedback.

Overall satisfaction

It was highlighted that satisfaction with the complaints service was never going to be 100%, this is due to the nature of the service, the panel recommended that a complainants expectations are managed to

ensure the outcome is considered realistic, again the panel felt that the targets need to be reviewed and will be done at the beginning of Quarter 1 2011/12.

The panel are keen to see a continuous improvement with satisfaction with case handling, they considered it important for the complainant to feel informed of the progress of their complaint.

The panel were keen to continue monitoring satisfaction of the complaints service and are keen to see it improve however the panel are particularly interested in investigating what makes tenants dissatisfied with the service. As a result the panel requested further details from customers with experience of the service, a focus group was held with One Voice members who had experience of the complaints service within the past 12 months. (*Please see the 'Other Consultation' section for further details*). The focus group also enabled Helena to consult with customers for the necessary Complaints Review.

The panel are happy with the current complaints survey, they acknowledged that the current survey is postal followed up with a phone survey to help boost response rate. The panel agreed that it would be a fairer representation of the service if the survey was carried out by an external company.

The complaints survey will therefore now be carried out by an external company, Voluntas, who specialise in this method of consultation. It is hoped that it will boost response rates providing a more valid and reliable result.

Mystery shop of complaints

The Customer Inspectors conducted a mystery shop of the Complaints service in August 2010. This was in light of recommendations and outcomes from the 2010 Customer Excellence Service Award. The mystery shop was a detailed investigation of all elements of the service including, information documents, complaints service in the Neighbourhood Offices, One Call and over the internet.

In summary the following was highlighted during the mystery shop.

Initial Complaint Form

- ✗ 50% were satisfied with the Initial Complaint Form
- ✓ The form was considered easy to complete and presented in a clear format (70%)
- ✗ The form does not provide details of what to do with the completed form (50%)

Helena websites

- ✓ Complaints information on the Helena Partnerships and Helena Homes websites was available and considered clear and easy to understand although it was suggested that it could be easier to find.
- ✗ There is no complaints information available on Helena Extra, Helena Living or Helena PropertyCare website

One Call

- ✓ All calls made to One Call were rated as 'satisfied'.
- ✓ One Call were rated highly in terms of how easy it was to make the complaint, the advisors level of knowledge and support.
- ✓ All calls made were ended with the Inspector having a good understanding of what happens after reporting their complaint.

Complaint via Neighbourhood Office and Local Access Point

- ✓ Almost three quarters of shops were rated as 'satisfied', 14% were 'dissatisfied'.
- ✓ 72% found it easy to report a complaint
- ✓ All members of staff were 'polite and helpful' and all but one were 'supportive'
- ✗ The member of staff was knowledgeable on 18% (2) of visits
- ✗ Three Inspectors were aware of what would happen after the mystery shop, two disagreed.
- ✗ Overall, they rated eight of the twenty two mystery shops of the complaints information positively
- ✗ The Inspectors were dissatisfied on almost half of the visits to the offices,
- ✗ None of the offices that were visited had a complaints leaflets or posters on display
- ✗ Complaints information was easy to obtain from 36% of the visits
- ✗ 36% found the complaints information provided easy to understand
- ✗ 55% highlighted that they understood how to report a complaints after the visit
- ✗ After 50% of the visits the Inspectors felt they understood the complaints process.
- ✗ 64% of the mystery shops found there to be 'too little' information available

The panel were keen that the Initial Complaint Form be reviewed using the specific recommendations made by the Customer Inspectors, satisfaction with the form was only 50%. It was also acknowledged that this form needs to be easy to complete and also accessible to all customers.

The Customer Inspectors also highlighted that there was no complaints information available on Helena Extra, Helena PropertyCare and Helena Living websites, the panel were keen that this be reviewed to ensure access to the complaints service is as easy as possible through a range of methods.

The panel were happy that One Call had demonstrated a good knowledge of the complaints service however recommendations from the Inspectors suggested that this could be further improved by being more specific when dealing with complaints.

The panel were happy that all members of staff who took part in the mystery shop despite their level of knowledge around the service always remained polite and courteous. The panel agreed that this element should continue to demonstrate high performance.

The results of the mystery shop highlighted that on only five of the seven mystery shops the member of staff demonstrated a good knowledge of the complaints service and processes. The panel felt that this was particularly important and recommended that methods be implemented to improve this.

Different elements of the mystery shop of the complaints service suggested that staff awareness needed to be increased on a range of aspects. The panel were particularly keen that staff have a good knowledge of the following:

- How to make a complaint via email
- Use of the Initial Complaints Form
- Awareness of Complaints leaflet's
- The complaints process
- Terminology that should and shouldn't be used

The panel suggested that a set of guidance notes could be given to members of staff to help them help customers.

Considering the feedback from tenants, the panel are keen that the complaints service is publicised to all Helena tenants, they suggested that leaflets should be available to take away with posters to help promote the service in Neighbourhood Offices. The service should also be publicised in a future edition of Helena Headlines.

Other methods of consultation

The panel were keen to ascertain in detail what is making customers dissatisfied with the complaints service, a focus group was held in March 2011 with members of the One Voice panel, One Voice members who had experience of the complaints service were invited to attend the focus group and feedback their experience of the service.

The following feedback was gained from the focus group:

- ✗ More publicity about the complaints feedback forms and their availability
- ✓ The information on the website is good and useful
- ✗ All frontline staff should have a good knowledge and awareness of the complaints service.
- ✗ Care should be taken to record the initial complaint accurately
- ⓘ The process should be simple to ensure nothing is lost in the process
- ⓘ Communication to the customer is key
- ⓘ Complaints should be taken seriously and not dismissed.
- ⓘ Personal approach should be taken with face to face contact being considered as a good way of doing this
- ⓘ Sometimes complaints are misunderstood therefore the response does not always resolve the complaint therefore highlighting that personal contact is key
- ⓘ Promises should all be kept without customers 'chasing up'
- ✓ The time taken to deal with complaints is fine
- ⓘ It was suggested that 14 days for the customer to respond to the manager's findings should be extended to 28 days

The focus group highlighted that on occasion inaccurate recording of a complaint had led to an incorrect response. This led the panel to consider the impact of recording inaccurate information and suggested that this is important to ensure complainants are happy with the outcome of their complaint.

The panel are keen that where possible personal contact is made with the complainant, it is important that service managers are not "hiding behind the One Call service" and directly respond to complaints. The panel confirmed that telephone calls and personal visits are the most preferred method of contact when dealing with a complaint.

Initially the panel did consider that one member staff should be responsible for responding to all complaints, however they subsequently concluded that it would be more appropriate for the manager responsible for the service area to respond. This ensures the response is written by the person with the most appropriate knowledge and skillset.

The panel were in support of the amendment to the process and agreed customers should be given 28 days to consider a managers response.

Evidence for the review of complaints was supported by feedback from the representative consultation panel 'One Voice'. Survey questions around complaints were included within the December 2010 survey.

The following feedback was gathered from the One Voice survey

- Almost three quarters of respondents (61) were aware of Helena's complaints procedures. Just over a quarter were unaware.
- Fourteen respondents have reported a complaint to Helena Partnerships within the last twelve months.
- Four fifths of those who had reported a complaint found it easy to do so, 9 found it very easy
- The majority (68%) of respondents would most likely report a complaint via One Call, this was followed by Neighbourhood Office (25%). Only two respondents would use the Local Access Point and four Email.
- Just over half (56%) of respondents agreed that the complaints service is well publicised (36%, strongly agreed). Just over a fifth (17) of respondents disagreed that the complaints service is well publicised and almost a quarter of respondents chose 'neither'.
- To improve the way we communicate our complaints process the respondents mainly suggested 'Articles in Helena Headlines' or via leaflets and posters.

The panel felt that the survey supported the need to improve publicity of the complaints process and ensure the service is easily accessible. The panel were pleased that the survey confirmed that reporting a complaint was easy.

Changes to the complaints process

Every 2 years the Company is required to review its Service Failure and Recovery (Complaints) policy. The policy was up for review in Spring 2011. The CEP complaint service review was scheduled to coincide and therefore inform this policy review.

These two activities clearly complimented each other. Good practice research recommendations and performance were scrutinised by our Panel evidenced in turn by the complaints Mystery Shop, One Voice feedback and complainant focus group. Outcomes led to a series of process revisions, including:

- The ability to end a complaint prematurely, on Chief Executive Officer's discretion or upon his/her delegated authority, if it is considered to be vexatious or it is in conflict with a decision based on policy. However, all such cases are closely monitored to ensure that decisions are fair and reasonable. These cases are reported to Board and CEP on a quarterly basis to ensure openness and accountability. The complaints policy details the circumstances when cases may be closed in this way.
- Move from a four stage to a three stage complaints process. Current process is too long and it is unlikely that on review of the complaint a Director's decision is unlikely disagree with the decision put forward by the Head of Service. The service manager will offer a resolution based on operational and policy considerations whilst the Head of Service will be able to offer a more strategic point of view. Directors will sign off all Head of Service responses. To reflect the fact that cases escalated to the Head of Service are often more complex and less easy to resolve, we are to adopt a 10 working day response target.
- Implementation of a Democratic Filter. Tenant representatives from our Customer Excellence Panel will be invited to sit on the complaints panel that constitutes the final stage in our complaints process, where they will be actively engaged in determining the outcome of the complaint. This will increase tenant involvement in the management and is consistent with good practice. The success of this initiative will be monitored and reviewed.

The new complaints process is displayed in the table below.

Complaint stage	Who will respond?	Response time
Stage 1	Service Manager	5 working days
Stage 2	Head of Service	10 working days
Stage 3	Complaints Review Panel <ul style="list-style-type: none">• To arrange meeting• To inform you of the decision	20 working days 2 working days

Additional Research

The panel are happy with the current consultation in place to gather what matters most to tenants about the complaints service. The panel agree that Helena are listening to customer feedback and making changes to improve the service. The quarterly survey enables the panel to assess the complainant's satisfaction with the service which they are keen to monitor on a quarterly basis.

Although no additional research is required as stated previously the panel requested that the Customer Inspectors conduct a reality check of the service in the near future to ensure recommendations and improvements have been implemented and are effective. The panel will consider the results of the Inspection during next year's review of the service. This will take place in early 2012.

To accompany the panel's continuous review of the complaints service the panel felt it would be beneficial to provide detailed examples of customer journeys. This would be a random quality audit of complaint correspondence including letters supported by additional notes added to the file. The panel have requested different types of cases to be included as part of the audit.

In summary, the panel concluded that the following elements of the complaints service are what matter most to tenants and therefore should be high in terms of their satisfaction:

- Being taken seriously and not being dismissed
- Staff having a good level of knowledge about the process and the complaint
- Ease of reporting a complaint
- Satisfactory outcome of a complaint and ensuring promises are kept
- Deal with complaints promptly and efficiently
- Record information accurately
- A personal approach is preferable (via telephone call or a personal visit)

Do our service standards reflect what matters most to tenants?

The panel considered the current service standards to meet their expectations and those of Helena tenants.

The panel recently reviewed all of Helena's service standards; the standards were published as the Customer Charter and distributed to all tenants. The panel were happy with the current standards and felt that it is important that Helena are meeting what matters most to its tenants which is reflected in the agreed standards.

The panel did highlight that the service standard around the response time of '5 working days' should

be achieved in all cases, a response should always be received even if the response is a progress update. However a full response would later need to be received detailed a full conclusion to the complaint. Officers are to avoid occasions when the customer is not clear where the case is up to.

The panel felt that complaints that are complex should be given additional time for a response to be received. As a result complaints that are at Head of Service have a ten day response target from April 11.

The Customer Inspectors found incidents where the service standard relating to the acknowledgement email being received within 4 working hours was not met. The panel supported the Inspectors suggestion that this should be met on every occasion. Panel members expect regular audits of emailed complaints to ensure service standards are being maintained, this will be checked as part of the next scheduled Customer Inspector mystery shop

The panel recommended that the time for a customer to reply to a complaint response should be 28 days rather than 14 days, this was through evidence via the One Voice Focus Group (March 2011)

Are we monitoring the right things?

The panel recognised the importance of measuring quantitative information to evidence compliance with Service Standards and Performance Indicators.

The panel has their own suite of Key Performance Indicators that they monitor on a quarterly basis. Whilst the panel recognise the need to monitor regulatory requirements and assess financial viability, they would also like to monitor issues that are important to tenants which will help us to ensure we are working towards improving services for tenants and in turn increase our percentage of very satisfied.

Performance Indicators

The panel considered what performance information they would like to monitor in relation to the Complaints service. The panel would like to continue looking at complaints performance on a quarterly basis.

The following Performance Indicators will be reported to the panel as part of the Customer Excellence suite of KPI's:

- Number of initial complaints received
- Initial complaints responded in target time (No/Percent)
- Complaints responded to in target (stage 1) (No/Percent)
- Complaints responded to in target (stage 2) (No/Percent)
- Complaints responded to in target (stage 3) (No/Percent)
- Satisfaction with case handling
- Dissatisfaction with case handling
- Satisfaction with outcome of complaint
- Dissatisfaction with outcome of complaint

To support the performance indicators the panel requested some contextual information to explain any trends and reasons for performance. In addition the panel will now monitor the quality of responses received by complainants by receiving a random sample of anonymous complaint response letters on a quarterly basis.

Targets

The Customer Excellence Service Award highlighted that targets for complaints satisfaction are considerably higher than performance, it was therefore suggested that targets need to be more achievable. The current targets for satisfaction are 95% for outcome and 75% for case handling. The panel will consider lowering the targets using benchmarking information during the first quarter from 2011/12, in light of the outcomes from the newly outsourced survey.

The panel also felt that as significant changes had been made to the service including a new IT system, to give the changes an opportunity to embed they would like to base it on a significant amount of performance information. As a result the panel will review the targets on receipt on Quarter 1's performance for 2011/12. The panel will then be able to base the target on the previous three quarter's information.

Compliments

The panel acknowledged that complaints are an effective method of identifying and implementing improvements not doing so would be a missed opportunity. However, it is also useful to consider what Helena is doing well. The panel suggested that Helena should consider monitoring compliments to highlight where a service is performing well.

Recommendations

In order to increase the percentage of tenants stating that they are satisfied with this service the panel recommends that Helena:

- 1.** Continue to improve the satisfaction with outcome of a complaint and satisfaction with case handling by ensuring more personal contact, efficient handling of complaints and a high quality response
- 2.** Dissatisfaction with outcome of a complaint and satisfaction with case handling should continue to demonstrate a decline
- 3.** Continue to improve awareness of the complaints by making use of Helena Headlines and the information available to members of the public in our Neighbourhood Office's
- 4.** Satisfaction that complaints are taken seriously should demonstrate an improvement
- 5.** Manage customer expectations to ensure a satisfied outcome with the complaint, done by ensuring customers are kept up to date with the progress of their complaint
- 6.** Continue to conduct the quarterly satisfaction survey
- 7.** All complaints received via email should receive an acknowledgement within four working hours and an audit of cases implemented and reported to CEP on a quarterly basis
- 8.** Review the Initial Complaint Form using the Customer Inspector recommendations
- 9.** Ensure complaints information is provided on all Helena websites
- 10.** Ensure all staff have a good level of knowledge of the complaint process including:
 - How to make a complaint via email
 - Use of the Initial Feedback Form
 - Complaints leaflets and posters
 - Terminology to use
- 11.** Continue to be polite and courteous when dealing with complaints, the panel will continue to monitor quality of response and satisfaction with case handling
- 12.** A set of guidance notes for Helena staff be produced for staff when dealing with complaints
- 13.** Ensure complaints details are recorded accurately

14. Where possible make personal contact either via phone call or personal visit
15. Meet response target for all complaint levels of 100%
16. A future spot check of the complaints service carried out by the Customer Inspectors
17. Continue to monitor complaints on a quarterly basis supported by details of customer journeys
18. Review complaints targets during the first quarter's performance from 2011/12
19. Consider the use of compliments to gather positive feedback about Helena services

Next steps

An action plan in response to the panel findings has been agreed.

The outcomes will be presented to the Customer Excellence Strategy Group and Board.

The Service Standards and Customer Excellence KPI's identified as part of this review will be publicised to tenants via headlines and leaflets and other literature amended accordingly.

The panel confirmed that although they are happy with the improvements made during the past year they were keen to continue monitoring complaints on a quarterly basis. Monitoring complaints enables the panel to monitor performance of the different service areas. The panel will therefore continue to consider complaints performance on a quarterly basis for 2011/12.

Action Plan

	Recommendation	Action(s)	Reason	Manager Response	Who	When
1	Continue improve the satisfaction with outcome of a complaint and satisfaction with case handling	Source and employ the most effective and accurate methodology for returning satisfaction information by outsourcing the complaints satisfactions survey.	Although satisfaction has demonstrated a significant improvement over 2010/11 the panel are keen that this continues. The panel are keen that when benchmarked satisfaction is within the top quartile of organisations.	Complaint survey will be outsourced from quarter 1 2011/12, this is in order to gather more valid and representative information about the satisfaction with the overall service.	Graham Jones	Complete
2	Dissatisfaction with outcome of a complaint and satisfaction with case handling should continue to demonstrate a decline	Improve the overall customer experience.	Similar to satisfaction, dissatisfaction had demonstrated a significant decrease; the panel are keen to see this decrease.	To ensure staff are aware of the importance of personal contact and minimising 'white space'		
3	Continue to improve awareness of the complaints amongst customers	The complaints service should be promoted to ensure all customers are aware how to report a complaint. Making use of Helena Headlines and other appropriate customer literature including posters and leaflets.	Publicity was considered poor at 11% in Quarter 1, significant improvements were made by Quarter 4 to 63%. The panel would like this performance to continue. In addition the One Voice survey results rated the awareness of the complaints service as only 36%.	An article was included in the Spring 2011 edition of Helena Headlines. The complaints service was also highlighted in other documents including the Customer Charter. Staff briefings took place to ensure staff were fully aware of the service along with their responsibilities. Leaflets, posters and Feedback Forms have also been revised and distributed.	Graham Jones	Complete
4	Satisfaction that complaints are taken seriously should demonstrate an improvement	Members of staff should be briefed on performance, process, policy and customer feedback to ensure they deal with complaints seriously and that satisfaction with this element continues to improve within the satisfaction survey.	The complaints survey demonstrated an improvement in relation to this throughout the year to 82% by quarter 4, in addition during the focus group held with One Voice members it was highlighted that it was an important aspect when dealing with a complaint.			
5	Manage customer expectations to ensure a satisfied outcome with the complaint	Manage the customers expectation in regards to the outcome of their complaint to ensure they are happy with the overall outcome by keeping them well informed of the progress of their complaint and evidencing this on the complaints system. If a customer's expectations cannot be met a full explanation will be given.	It was highlighted that satisfaction with the complaints service was never going to be 100%, this is due to the nature of the service, the panel recommended that a complainants expectations are managed to ensure the outcome is considered realistic and as a consequence are happy with the service and the outcome they have received	All responses are monitored to ensure that where we are not able to meet a customer's expectations a full explanation is given. 'White space' is kept to a minimum.	Graham Jones	Complete

	Recommendation	Action(s)	Reason	Manager Response	Who	When
6	Ensure customers are kept to up to date with the progress of their complaint	Managers maintain regular contact with customers to ensure that all customers are aware of the progress of their complaint. Where possible customers should be contacted using more personal methods such as a personal visit or a telephone call.	Feedback during the One Voice Focus Group in March 2011 highlighted that it is important that complainants are kept informed of the progress of their complaint. It was also highlighted that contact and communication is key when resolving a complaint. The panel are keen to see a continuous improvement with satisfaction with case handling, they considered it important for the complainant to feel informed of the progress of their complaint.	Cases are monitored to show targets are achieved. Where it isn't possible to issue a full response in target managers are required to evidence where a case is up to detailing customer contact. An external training programme was delivered to key managers responsible for handling complaints. Key messages included the need to ensure customers are always aware of where their complaint is up to, highlighting the need for personal contact and maintaining a high quality response.	Graham Jones	On-going/ Complete
7	Continue to conduct the quarterly satisfaction survey	Review and continue to conduct the complaints satisfaction survey on a quarterly basis	The panel are keen to continue monitoring the complaints service, they felt that the complaints survey offered a good source of evidence when ascertaining what matters most to tenants and their current satisfaction with the service. The survey also allows the panel to compare satisfaction results with other similar organisations.	The complaints satisfaction survey will continue to be carried out on a quarterly basis, results will presented to the panel during their quarterly review of the service. In addition to ensure survey results are valid and reliable an external company will carry out the survey from April 2011.	PIT team	To continue quarterly
8	All complaints received via email should receive an acknowledgement within four working hours	Audits of emailed complaints to take place quarterly to ensure service standards are being met, this will be checked as part of the next scheduled Customer Inspector mystery shop	During the mystery shop the Customer Inspectors conducted a check on reporting a complaint via email, on some occasions an acknowledgement email was not receiving within four working hours.	This will be monitored on a case by case basis. In addition members of staff have been briefed. Investigations will take place to establish a monitoring mechanism for tracking acknowledgement emails.	Graham Jones	October 2011
9	Review the Initial Complaint Form using the Customer Inspector recommendations	The Initial Complaint Form should be reviewed inline with the Customer Inspector recommendations.	The Customer Inspectors made suggestions to improve the Initial Complaint Form to ensure it is customer friendly and requested the necessary information required when reporting a complaint.	The Initial Complaint Form was redesigned in line with the comments from the Inspectors and was available in Neighbourhood Offices from February 2011.	Graham Jones	Complete

	Recommendation	Action(s)	Reason	Manager Response	Who	When
10	Ensure complaints information is provided on all Helena websites	Ensure complaints information is accessible through all Helena websites, includes Helena Partnerships, Homes, Extra, Living and Propertycare	The Customer Inspectors during the mystery shop highlighted that there is no complaints information on Helena Living, Helena Extra and Helena Propertycare.	The Helena Extra, Helena Living and Helena Propertycare have been amended to provide an easy link to the complaints information provide on the main Helena website.	Graham Jones	Complete
11	Ensure all staff have a good level of knowledge of the complaint process	<p>Improve staff's knowledge of the complaints process and overall service particularly members of staff who are at the front line</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Staff training - Staff user manuals and guides - Staff awareness briefings - Staff inductions 	The Customer Inspectors found a number of occasions when the member of staff level of knowledge was poor around the complaints service, in addition the complaints satisfaction survey demonstrated that this should be improved along with feedback from the One Voice Focus group who suggested sometimes staff level of knowledge on the service was poor.	To ensure all members of staff have a good level of knowledge on the complaints service and the process of reporting a complaint staff briefings were held with all front line staff and service managers who deal with complaints. This was supported by the development and distribution of a staff guide which can be referred to when dealing with a complaint. Complaints now also form part of the Corporate Induction for new members of staff. Knowledge maps were updated as part of the 2011 complaint policy review and staff were reminded during their briefing and training sessions.	Graham Jones	Complete
12	Continue to be polite and courteous when dealing with complaints		This related to a recently agreed service standard of responding to complaints within 5 days (or 10 days for a stage 2 complaint) The panel felt that there is no reason why a complainant does not receive a response within these timescales.	This was highlighted to members of staff as part of a wider briefing about the complaints service and process. The impact of this has led to a significant increase in those customers expressing satisfaction with the member of staff being polite and helpful with a high of 93% in Quarter 4.	Graham Jones	Complete
13	A set of guidance notes for Helena staff be produced for staff when dealing with complaints	Provide staff with some guidance notes to help them respond to complaints in the most appropriate way.	As suggested in action 4 the Customer Inspectors found staff knowledge to be poor along with feedback via the One Voice survey and focus group.	A staff guide has been produced to give guidance to service managers when dealing with a complaint (See appendix). Knowledge maps were updated as part of the 2011 complaint policy review and staff were reminded during their briefing and training sessions.	Graham Jones	Complete

	Recommendation	Action(s)	Reason	Manager Response	Who	When
14	Ensure complaints details are recorded accurately	Members of staff who initially log a complaint should be reminded of the importance of accurately logging a complaints, considering: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Staff training - Staff user manuals and guides - Staff awareness briefings - Shared examples of good/bad practise 	From the One Voice focus group (March 2011) it was highlighted that there had been incidents when inaccurately recording complaints has led to an incorrect response being received and therefore led to an unhappy customer.	This was highlighted to all members of staff as part of a wider briefing about the complaints service and process. Daily audits are carried out on any newly logged cases to ensure completeness. Service managers also encouraged to speak to with tenant by phone to ensure clarity of the response.	Graham Jones	Complete & On-going
16	Meet response target for all complaint levels of 100%	Efforts should be made to ensure that all complaints are responded to within the target of 5 or 10 days (depending on the stage of the process). Monthly and quarterly performance updates shared with complaint managers highlighting instances of poor performance.	The panel highlighted that the service standard around the response time of '5 working days' should be achieved in all cases, a response should be received even if the response is a progress update. However a full response would later need to be received detailed a full conclusion to the complaint.	Performance is monitored on a daily basis to ensure targets are achieved. Where a response is not possible within five working days managers are encouraged to discuss the case with the Business Support Advisor provided certain strict criteria are met and it is clear failure to hit target is not a result of poor service delivery it may be appropriate to consider the amending the response time to the complaint, this is done so with the customers permission. Criteria is as follows and on instruction from the CEP: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A case is particularly complex • It involves a third party who does not subscribe to our service standards, for example a contractor • Customer in question is unavailable or uncooperative • There is good evidence to demonstrate customer is updated at all stages in the process and has agreed a new date 	Graham Jones	On-going

	Recommendation	Action(s)	Reason	Manager Response	Who	When
17	A future spot check of complaints carried out by the Customer Inspectors	Carry out a mystery shop of the complaints service to identify improvements to the service since the previous inspection. This will support the panel's continuous review of the service.	The panel are keen to continue monitoring the complaints service and require evidence from customers to how the service is performing. A mystery shop will provide a good method of identifying how the service is performing.	A mystery shop will be carried out during 2011/12 (specific date to remain a secret) the mystery shop will cover all elements of the service from the website to the Neighbourhood Offices. On completion of the review the feedback will be presented to the Customer Excellence Panel to support their on-going review.	Hannah Fitzhenry	End of 2011/12
18	Continue to monitor complaints on a quarterly basis supported by details of customer journeys	The panel confirmed that although they are happy with the improvements made during the past year they were keen to continue monitoring complaints on a quarterly basis. The panel will therefore continue to consider complaints performance on a quarterly basis for 2011/12. Information will be provided quarterly and will focus around areas that matter most to Helena customers. Customer journeys will analysed to ensure quality of service is maintained.	Monitoring complaints enables the panel to monitor performance of the different service areas. In addition scrutinizing a customer journey will provide further details of how Helena deals with its complaint in mind of improving the overall level of satisfaction with the service. The panel are keen to see continuous improvement with the service.	Continue to receive timely and accurate information on performance. To accompany the panel's continuous review of the complaints service the panel felt it would be beneficial to provide detailed examples of customer journeys. This would be a random quality audit of complaint correspondence including letters supported by additional notes added to the file. The panel have requested different types of cases to be included as part of the audit. Specifically it will be before meetings in October 11, January 12, March 12 and May 12.	Graham Jones	In preparation for meetings relating to complaints performance
19	Review complaints targets during the first quarter's performance from 2011/12	The panel will consider changing the targets relating to the satisfaction with outcome of a complaint and satisfaction with how a complaint was dealt with.	The Customer Excellence Service Award highlighted that targets for complaints satisfaction are considerably higher than performance, it was therefore suggested that targets are more achievable. The current targets for satisfaction are 95% for outcome and 75% for case handling. The panel will consider lowering the targets using benchmarking information during the first quarter from 2011/12.	The panel will review the targets for satisfaction with outcome of a complaint and satisfaction with how it was dealt with during their review of quarter 1 performance, this will take place at the panel meeting in October 2011.	CEP	6/10/11

	Recommendation	Action(s)	Reason	Manager Response	Who	When
20	Consider the use of compliments to gather positive feedback about Helena services	Explore the setting up of a mechanism for feeding back compliments.	This related to a suggestion from the Customer Inspectors, the panel agreed that there is currently no mechanism for making compliments to Helena Homes.	Wider consultation will be conducted with customers about implementing a compliments scheme.	Graham Jones	06/10/11