



**Date:** 17<sup>th</sup> July 2013

**Subject:** Complaints Recommendations

**Report Author:** R2R Resident Inspectors

**Purpose:** To provide findings and recommendations from residents scrutiny of the complaints process

## Introduction

The R2R panel decided on Complaints as the second topic to be scrutinised by the panel. This report outlines the key findings from the scrutiny panel and provides a number of recommendations where the R2R residents' inspectors feel that services could be improved.

## Methodology Used for the Scrutiny of Complaints

The R2R resident inspectors decided that a desktop review would be the best approach to reviewing SAHA's complaints process.

The panel decided that the best way to fully understand how the complaints process worked was for the panel members to meet as two individual groups (a northern group and a southern group) to conduct the review.

The scrutiny meetings took place at SAHA's Head Office in London and Regional Office in Bolton on 17<sup>th</sup> July 2013.

In order to gain a better understanding of the various elements involved in the complaints process the panel assessed and reviewed the following key documents:

The Association's:

- Complaints and Compliments Policy
- Complaints Procedure and Flowchart
- Agency Managed Complaints Procedure and Flowchart
- Complaints Service Delivery Log
- Case Studies of Complaints (at Stage 1, 2 and 3)
- Compensation Policy and Compensation Log
- Compliments Log
- Statistical KPI data (KPI spreadsheet and SAHA News for Complaints)
- Learning Outcome Report

*NB: All Case Studies and Service Delivery Logs were anonymised for confidentiality purposes.*

## Scrutiny findings

The R2R panel reviewed the following documents:

Complaints and Compliments Policy and Procedure Flowchart: The R2R panel reviewed the complaints and compliments policy and procedure flowcharts for both SAHA and Agency Managed services to get a better understanding of the different processes involved.

The general feedback from the panel was that policy and procedure flowcharts are easy to understand from a resident's point of view, however, a few amendments would make the documents more streamlined.

*Positives:*

- SAHA's procedure flowchart is easy to understand and the process is clearly outlined to residents on how to make a complaint
- The complaints process is easily accessible to residents through the various means of communications, e.g. residents handbook, through the Customer

Service Centre, in writing, text message, email and in person to a member of staff.

#### Negatives:

- A lot of the information in the policy is self explanatory and too long; it could be cut down to possibly one page
- There is too much “jargon” and “waffle” within the policy making it hard to read and understand
- The panel felt that within the agency managed procedure flowchart, at the Informal Stage asking residents to ‘talk gently’ with the other person was patronising
- Within stage 2A of the agency managed procedure flowchart, the panel felt that residents were being “moved from pillar to post” regarding their complaint, i.e. being directed to someone else and this meant that they were being passed to yet another person to investigate/deal with complaint.

#### Recommendations:

- A resident friendly version of the complaints policy should be created with less repetition, jargon and written in plain English
- Stage 1 response timescale to be reviewed to either 7 days or change wording to say your complaint can take “up to” 10 days to be dealt with
- To insert a paragraph in the complaints acknowledgement letter stating the date when the complaints response will be sent to residents by
- The complaints policy: could consideration be taken to remove the objectives and definition from the flowchart as the panel felt that this was self explanatory and that residents wouldn’t be interested in the objectives
- The panel felt that there were too many stages involved in the agency managed flowchart and that the information under the external stage was unnecessary; they felt that just referring them to CSC for information should be enough
- The agency managed flowchart is good; however most complaints could be dealt with via a mediator at the informal stage. For example, can a mediator attend the informal complaint stage with the project worker for minor complaints issues and then be escalated to centre manager if it’s more serious, i.e. Stage 1 (reducing complaints stages)
- That a one page policy and flowchart should be developed similar to the format used by SAHA for agency managed services
- Complaints and compliments to be separated into two distinct policies
- More promotion of compliments and encouraging residents to make compliments
- The panel would like to be involved as part of the Stage 3 panel hearing process for complaints.

Complaints Service Delivery Log: The R2R panel reviewed the service delivery log as part of the process, to get an idea of the number of complaints received by the Association and the reason for the complaints. Last year in total SAHA had received 83 complaints (77 - stage 1, 5 - stage 2 and 1 - stage 3).

The panel felt there were no negatives or recommendations on the service delivery log, however, some positive comments made by the panel were:

*“I’m impressed with the number of complaints received last year against the number of properties SAHA has”*

*“Over the last year 83 complaints didn’t seem like an excessive amount, working out at less than 2 complaints per week over the whole of the organisation”*

*“This is a good insight into the various complaints received by the Association and processes involve; I didn’t know how in-depth the process of dealing with complaints was, and the number of departments that are involved in some cases in resolving complaints. Not as straightforward as I thought it was”.*

Case Studies of Complaints (at Stage 1, 2 and 3): To fully understand the process involved with each complaint stage, the panel had the opportunity to review **9** case studies from last year (2012/13). These varied from stage 1, 2 and 3 complaints. The case studies were picked randomly from the complaints service delivery log by an impartial person.

- **Stage 1 Complaints – 6 case studies** (*the northern group reviewed 3 and the southern group reviewed the remaining 3 case studies*)
- **Stage 2 Complaints – 2 case studies** (*both groups reviewed these*)
- **Stage 3 Complaints – 1 case studies** (*both groups reviewed these*)

#### Positives:

- Quick response from SAHA on dealing with Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaints
- Correspondence to complainants is clearly written and it is easy to understand the outcome
- The right amount of communication in the case studies was sent, informing the complainants of the progress being made by SAHA on their complaint
- The complaints process and investigation involved in resolving complaints cases is very in-depth
- Information provided to the complainant is straightforward and a very effective measure especially on the case studies we reviewed
- Follow up email messages sent by Stephen [Head of Customer Services] to staff chasing up responses for complaints, though the panel felt that this shouldn’t be required
- The panel felt that the complaints case studies reviewed had been handled in the best way possible and within the timescales
- The panel felt that on a few of the case studies reviewed, whilst SAHA had handled the process and outcome well; they felt that the cases should never have been escalated to stage 2 or 3.

#### Negatives:

- Terminology used in satisfaction surveys – we think that residents don’t understand the language used on satisfaction surveys; that’s possibly why the Association is not getting “1s” when conducting surveys on the complaints process and outcome
- The panel members would like to have spoken to a few of the complainants to gauge feedback on the satisfaction levels of their complaints and why (if the score was low). (*The reason why this wasn’t possible was because SAHA didn’t have written consent from the complainants for the R2R panel to carry this out*)
- The panel felt that email messages reminding staff that a response is required shouldn’t be needed.

#### Recommendations:

- Can the satisfaction survey sent to complainants be amended to include a question asking the complainant if it's ok for the R2R panel members to contact complainants in the future to conduct telephone surveys?
- The panel felt that having the complaints flowchart included within the acknowledgement letter was a good idea; however can SAHA consider removing 'Our Commitment to Customer Care' because it's not really relevant
- The panel felt that where possible SAHA should use email to communicate.

Compensation Policy and Compensation Log: The R2R panel reviewed both the compensation policy and compensation log for the last financial year (2012-13).

Within the last year SAHA spent **£2,985** paying out compensation to residents. The main reasons for why the Association paid compensation were:

- Relating to repairs and maintenance
- Service from contractors
- Damages to belongings
- Standard of service

#### Positives:

- The policy is easy to understand
- That the Association has a compensation policy and residents can claim compensation if required
- The panel were generally happy with the amount of compensation paid out to residents last year (which was £2,985), apart from 1 case (see below).
- Offering compensation is worthwhile and helps to improve satisfaction levels.

#### Negatives:

- The panel felt that the amount paid out to a complainant (in the example case study) of £15 for lack of water facilities in their flat was unacceptable and discourteous
- Not all panel members were aware that compensation was available
- The policy was too long and contained unnecessary information.

#### Recommendations:

- If complainants are given compensation and they have outstanding rent arrears the compensation amount should be deducted from their rent arrears rather than giving the complainant the money or high street vouchers
- For SAHA to review the amounts of compensation issued to complainants especially where it relates to basic amenities and damages to personal belongings as the panel felt this was often too low
- The compensation policy would benefit from being reviewed to remove unnecessary information and jargon and be publicised to all residents.

Complaints and Compliments Policy and Compliments Log: The R2R panel reviewed the policy and the compliments log for the last financial year. They felt that the Association should have received more compliments from residents rather than only **28 compliments**.

#### Positives:

- The panel felt it was worthwhile keeping this information; it was good to see that residents felt strongly enough to compliment the service.

#### Negatives:

- SAHA doesn't publicise enough to residents how they can make compliments about SAHA services/staff/contractors, as this is just as important as complaints
- It is not clear from the policy or in practice how compliments are reported back to staff or contractors.

#### Recommendations:

- For SAHA to regularly publicise to all residents how to make compliments, e.g. leaflets, website, repairs orders and articles in the SAHA newsletter to include how compliments are reported back to staff or contractors (as this improves staff morale)
- To introduce a compliment form which is linked to SAHA's website
- Panel members felt it was beneficial for staff to be complimented on their work.

Statistical KPI data (KPI spreadsheet and SAHA News for Complaints): The R2R panel reviewed the statistical data that the Association collects in regards to complaints.

The panel looked at both SAHA's internal KPI data on complaints, i.e. the number received in the year and satisfaction levels with the process and outcome of complaints. They also looked at the statistical data provided in SAHA News.

#### Positives:

- The internal KPI data on complaints and the statistical data in SAHA News is easy to understand and is useful information
- The internal KPI data on complaints (table) is very useful as it gives a more realistic view of the number of complaints received in the month/end of financial year. Can this be available to all residents at the end of each financial year as it will be an eye opener for some residents?

#### Negative

- Whilst looking at the internal KPI data on complaints the panel queried why the satisfaction levels for March 2013 had decreased to 83% for process and outcome. The decrease in the satisfaction level was down to:
  - 1) a smaller number of complaints being closed in the month.
  - 2) If there was resident dissatisfaction on either the process or outcomes then this would bring the figure down. I.e. with 4 complaints closed and 1 dissatisfaction received, this would drop the monthly figure to 75%

#### Recommendation:

- KPI data on the number of complaints received and satisfaction levels: can a table and graph be published to all residents at the end of each financial year, so residents can see the effectiveness of the complaints process and outcomes by SAHA
- KPI data: can this be broken down by individual providers rather than one group, as this will help SAHA identify poor performing organisations
- Can an article be featured in SAHA News showing the number of compliments received by SAHA from residents who had an excellent service from either a member of staff, staffing team or contractor(s)
- The panel would like to be involved in reviewing statistical information presented to residents in the SAHA news

R2R members' comments on the SAHA News statistical data: *"I've been here for over 5 years now and I feel that SAHA's KPIs have improved over the years"*.

Learning Outcome Report: The R2R panel reviewed the learning outcome report which used to be presented to the Monitoring Committee on a quarterly basis.

**Positives:**

- The learning outcomes report is very good and detailed
- The panel would like to see key information in the report succinctly presented to residents via the quarterly SAHA News and annual report to residents.

**Negatives:**

- On the learning outcomes section of the report it doesn't say if the actions from senior managers have been achieved/implemented
- Some of the learning outcomes information provided in the report could be shortened by putting this into a table format, showing main trends.

**Recommendations:**

- The panel would like to see an overview of the learning outcomes report to be published in the SAHA news and a more detailed report in the annual report

**Recommendations**

R2R inspectors recommend the following actions:

<u>Complaints and Compliments Policy and Procedure Flowchart</u>	
1	A resident friendly version of the complaints policy should be created with less repetition, jargon and written in plain English
2	Stage 1 response timescale to be reviewed to either 7days or change wording to say your complaint can take "up to" 10 days to be dealt with
3	The complaints policy: could consideration be given to removing the objectives and definition from the flowchart as the panel felt that this was self explanatory and that residents wouldn't be interested in the objectives
4	The panel felt that there were too many stages involved in the agency managed flowchart and that the information under the external stage was unnecessary; they felt that just referring them to CSC for information should be enough
5	The agency managed flowchart is good; however most complaints could be dealt with via a mediator at the informal stage. For example, can a mediator attend the informal complaint stage with the project worker for minor complaints issues and then be escalated to centre manager if it's more serious, i.e. Stage 1 (reducing complaints stages)
6	That a one page policy and flowchart should be developed similar to the format used by SAHA for agency managed services
7	The panel would like to be involved as part of the Stage 3 panel hearing process for complaints
8	To insert a paragraph in the complaints acknowledgement letter stating the date when the complaints response will be sent to residents by
9	Complaints and compliments to be separated into two distinct policies
10	More promotion of compliments and encouraging residents to make compliments
<u>Case Studies of Complaints (at Stage 1, 2 and 3)</u>	

1	Can the satisfaction survey sent to complainants be amended to include a question asking the complainant if it's ok for the R2R panel members to contact complainants in the future to conduct telephone surveys?
2	The panel felt that having the complaints flowchart included within the acknowledgement letter was a good idea; however can SAHA consider removing 'Our Commitment to Customer Care' because it's not really relevant
3	The panel felt that where possible SAHA should use email to communicate
<a href="#">Compensation Policy and Compensation Log</a>	
1	If complainants are given compensation and they have outstanding rent arrears the compensation amount should be deducted from their rent arrears rather than giving the complainant the money or high street vouchers
2	For SAHA to review the amounts of compensation issued to complainants especially where it relates to basic amenities and damages to personal belongings as the panel felt this was often too low
3	The compensation policy would benefit from being reviewed to remove unnecessary information and jargon and be publicised to all residents
<a href="#">Compliments Policy and Compliments Log</a>	
1	For SAHA to regularly publicise to all residents how to make compliments, e.g. leaflets, website, repairs orders and articles in the SAHA newsletter to include how compliments are reported back to staff or contractors (as this improves staff morale)
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<a href="#">Statistical KPI data (KPI spreadsheet and SAHA News for Complaints)</a>	
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3	Can an article be featured in SAHA News showing the number of compliments received by SAHA from residents who had an excellent service from either a member of staff, staffing team or contractor(s)
4	The panel would like to be involved in reviewing statistical information presented to residents in SAHA News
<a href="#">Learning Outcome Report</a>	
1	The panel would like to see an overview of the learning outcomes report to be published in the SAHA news and a more detailed report in the annual report