

Clive Betts, MP
House of Commons
London, SW1A 0AA

13 December 2021

Dear Clive

Annual Report and Accounts 2020-21

You may be aware that last month we laid our latest Annual Report and Accounts in Parliament.

During what was a challenging year for everyone, the Housing Ombudsman maintained strong performance against all our targets in 2020-21. The Report sets out how we not only continued to keep our service running at the height of the Covid pandemic but over the year improved our performance and developed a more proactive role promoting transparency, accountability and learning.

While complaint volumes initially reduced, they far exceeded previous levels by the end of the year, with enquiries and complaints in March increasing by 155% compared to March 2020 and cases for formal investigation up by 98%. This steep upward trend has continued into this financial year.

We formally investigated more cases, and did so quicker, and made 3,455 orders and recommendations to put things right for residents, more than a third higher than the previous year.

Key performance highlights from the report are:

- More cases determined than in the prior year with 63% of cases completed within six months (2019-20: 42%)
- A higher number of cases upheld from 41% in 2019-20 to 49% in 2020-21
- A total of 3,455 orders and recommendations issued following investigations, an increase from 2,617 in 2019-20
- 67% of orders and 22% of recommendations involved compensation which totalled £449,212.90 over the year
- New Complaint Handling Code published, providing a framework for high-quality, timely complaint handling and greater consistency across landlords' complaint procedures
- Issued the first complaint handling failure orders where complaints are not progressing through landlords' complaints procedures
- Recruited a 600 member Resident Panel to provide a resident voice to inform our service development and sector learning reports
- Launched quarterly Meet the Ombudsman events
- Increased transparency with the publication of landlord performance reports and started publishing our determinations every two weeks

- Published our framework for systemic investigations and undertook in-depth investigations into complaints from leaseholders and shared owners, and heating and hot water.

The Report shows we made important steps to transform our role as an Ombudsman, becoming more agile, proactive and relevant to the sector. Indeed, I am immensely proud of how colleagues responded during Covid-19, given all the disruptions and challenges, remote working and progressing investigations as landlords and residents experienced several national lockdowns.

Publication of the Report follows publication of our draft corporate plan, which reflects how our role is evolving and responding to the continued increase in complaints. The plan reinforces the changing role and importance of complaint handling, setting out ways we will work across the sector to strengthen complaint handling at a local level, sharing learning to improve services and residents' experiences. This is essential to demonstrate the issues raised by people through complaints are being taken seriously, and potentially prevent issues arising.

Yours

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'R. Blakeway', written in a cursive style.

Richard Blakeway
Housing Ombudsman