

NOTTINGHAM CITY HOMES

HOUSING MANAGEMENT
SERVICES COMMITTEE
21 JUNE 2010

REPORT OF DIRECTOR OF HOUSING OPERATIONS

REVIEW OF MANAGEMENT OF GARAGE COMPLAINT

1 SUMMARY

This report outlines the circumstances surrounding two official complaints relating to a garage managed by the Bestwood Housing Office.

- 1.1 The report outlines the time line involved, the actions taken, the lessons learned and the management controls now in place

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Housing Management Services Committee note the content of the report and the actions taken as a result of this matter.

3 REPORT

- 3.1 The complainant has been renting a garage since 1999.
- 3.2 In June 2006 a query was initially raised by the complainant as another customer claimed to have been renting the same garage since October 2005. At this point the management of garages was split between a centralised team and the local housing offices. Records suggest that the issue was the fact that the tenancy agreement stated garage 15, however the IT system stated garage 14. The site in question is unique, with unusual numbering – ie there is no number 1 and 2, number 3-10 are in a compound and a number of garages outside the compound have been sold as part of right to buy sales. It is apparent that the issues were not resolved at this time.
- 3.3 In June 2008 an official complaint was made (39718). A site visit was carried out to attempt to resolve the matter however the date of this visit is not known. In July 2008 the complaint was responded to, a lock change and rent refund was arranged. Records suggest that the rent refund was requested, however this was not actioned. The lock change was completed, however it appears that the complainant was not issued with the keys. It is apparent that the issues were not resolved at this time.

3.4 In January 2010 a further complaint (55632) was made. A further lock change was requested and carried out with the keys collected (and signed for) by the tenant. A rent refund for the period 19.06.06 – 31.01.10 amounting to £1,333.38 was requested, approved and actioned. The complainant was also asked to provide more information relating to a new allegation that some of his items had been removed from his garage. The complainant has not provided information on any items missing and no further action is needed
The matter is now fully resolved.

3.5 It is apparent that the office had a number of opportunities to resolve the matter and failed to do so until January 2010. The Housing Office is committed to learning from mistakes and regularly reviews complaints handling during Team Meetings. A number of lessons have been learned and the management of garages is now carried out in a professional manner.

The following actions have now been fully implemented:

- Within the office all complainants are now contacted by telephone to ensure issues are resolved fully and speedily. All information is retained to enable further queries to be addressed.
- Record keeping within the office is much improved, with the use of the Notepad facility widely used by staff members.
- The Housing Office have rearranged responsibilities to ensure that the management of garage sites is dealt with in a professional manner. This involves one dedicated member of staff being responsible for the allocation of garages and other staff taking responsibility for day to day management of the sites. When keys are provided signatures are now obtained.
- The focus upon garage management has seen some 151 garage offers made and some 87 garages let since 4 January 2010 at the Bestwood Housing Office.
- Site visits to the 1,090 garages managed have been undertaken by the Area Housing Manager in 2010 to ensure there is thorough knowledge of the garage stock.
- Vision Management Surveys are now carried out on garage sites to enable customer concerns and suggestions for service improvements to be speedily dealt with.

4 OTHER OPTIONS

4.1 Not Applicable

5 FINANCIAL AND RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 A sum of £1,333.38 has been credited to the garage rent account to rectify this matter.
- 5.2 The steps taken since this event had resulted in any risks being mitigated to substantially reduce the likelihood of a repeat of this situation.

6 IMPLICATIONS FOR NOTTINGHAM CITY HOMES OBJECTIVES

- 6.1 The failure to resolve this matter has lead to reduced levels of customer satisfaction.

7 VALUE FOR MONEY AND EFFICIENCY ISSUES

- 7.1 The failure to resolve this issue at the first point of contact has lead to wasted resources including staff time and the refund to the customer.

8 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 Not applicable

9 BACKGROUND MATERIAL AND PUBLISHED DOCUMENTS REFERRED TO IN COMPILING THIS REPORT

- 9.1 Briefing note prepared by Lynn Standen (Housing Manager)

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Date: 10 June 2010



**Briefing on Complaint reference number 55632 dated 11th January 2010
in relation to original complaint 39718 dated 24th June 2008**

Lynn Standen (Housing Manager)

Actions to be completed.

1. On completion of rent adjustment Lynn Standen has agreed to confirm amount in writing to the customer and arrange repayment by cheque.
2. Lynn Standen has requested a list and receipts for the items removed from the garage in 2006 by Nottingham City Homes. Customer confirms he has provided this in the past but nothing located on file and original response to complaint reference 39718 dated 24th June 2008 also requests the same information. Customer confirms that M McCabe from the St Anns Legal Aid Project will have the information and intends to contact her when she returns from her holiday week ending 7th February 2010.

Areas of concern from investigation

1. Customer's initial contact in June 2006 was not responded to and although a number of responses were sent out to his problem in relation to the lock change and no access to the garage, nothing actually happened to resolve the problem.
2. None of the original staff who were involved in the 1st complaint or the dealing of the case prior to the case work within the Bestwood team currently which makes the investigation of the case very difficult as a number of staff were involved albeit in some cases a very small part of the process. Staff who I have spoken to unfortunately are not able to recall the incident.
3. Complaint was eventually raised in June 2008 in response to the poor service received.
4. A number of letters were sent out in relation to the complaint but none were completed within the target dates that we had advised the customer they would be in receipt of a full response.

5. Customer advised of action to be taken when confirmation that justified complaint reference number 39718 dated 24 June 2008 however no record of ever handing over the keys to the garage was kept or a copy of the information in relation to the rent refund can be found. Customer advises in receipt of neither and we have no evidence to say otherwise.
6. Customer intends to pursue compensation (his words) for his poor treatment and loss of items from his garage. I have again today (2 February 2010) asked for information to be sent to me in relation to items removed by the company as I do not have any information to assist me or as yet I am unaware of what was disposed of and although he will obtain a copy of a list originally submitted in 2006 he advises he will no longer have access to receipts but he feels he may seek legal advice about the matter.
7. I feel the customer's aim based on what he has said is that he wants the company to 'give' him the garage number 14 which he now has the keys to and that will compensate him for his poor service. He has made reference to this twice now and I have informed him that this is not an option available to me. I have reiterated my commitment to resolving the key access (now completed), rent credit (in process of being completed) and if information and receipts are provided to confirm items removed by the company then I am more than happy to look into this matter further. Although without any information I cannot proceed with the matter. I did remind him that he needs to refer to the terms of his garage tenancy agreement to confirm what items could be stored in a garage as the customer was mentioning some items in relation to an old vintage vehicle and items from his house due to the fact he was decorating at the time of the lock change.

Learning Log

The 3C's process and procedure has greatly improved the response to the customer's complaint and clear improvements in the procedure can be demonstrated between the handling of the 1st complaint received in June 2008 and the 2nd complaint received on the 11 January 2010.

One of the lessons learned is to ensure if keys are issued to a customer then a signature of receipt is required in case of future query.

Copies of all information in relation to a complaint must be retained in the eventuality of the customer escalating the matter further.