

Scrutiny Review of Handling of Noise Nuisance

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Date of Exercise: November 2023 to April 2024

Introduction

Scrutiny Partners were presented with the Housing Ombudsman spotlight report on noise nuisance as part of their suite of information. The Partners agreed that this would be a good time to complete an exercise against the recommendations made in the report.

Scope of the Exercise

The scope of the exercise was to:

- analyse reports of noise nuisance for the past 12 months
- audit a number of cases to ensure consistency and fairness of handling
- self-assess against the Housing Ombudsman's Spotlight Report on noise nuisance
- make recommendations for ForHousing's response to the Spotlight report
- make recommendations for actions to reduce incidence of neighbour nuisance

Methodology

Desktop work was carried out looking at the following information:

- Housing Ombudsman spotlight report on noise nuisance
- Policy and procedure on handling noise nuisance
- Tenancy Agreement
- Sound Monitoring Policy and information on costs and usage
- Pet Policy
- Void Policy on laminate flooring
- Good Neighbour Agreement
- Breakdown of noise nuisance cases for past 12 months
- Complaints information relating to noise nuisance for past 12 months
- Satisfaction information on handling noise nuisance for past 12 months
- Standard letters
- Mediation information
- Diary incident sheets
- Risk assessment document
- Website information
- Benchmarking from other organisations

Scrutiny carried out an audit of 6 cases of noise nuisance reported to ForHousing as well as 4 cases that had been determined by the Housing Ombudsman.

Scrutiny held focus groups with:

- Neighbourhood Officers
- Sheltered Scheme Managers
- Community Safety Advisors
- Community Safety Officers

Findings

Summary of Findings

Scrutiny were satisfied that ForHousing have a robust policy and process for dealing with noise nuisance which includes clear timelines and managing the expectation of complainants and there is no need to produce a separate good neighbourhood management agreement. They believe that separating the handling of noise nuisance cases from the ASB policy would lead to inconsistency in application and lead to complaints not being taken as seriously. They also noted that noise nuisance is mentioned specifically in the definition of ASB.

ForHousing have a diverse range of options for dealing with noise nuisance and staff are clear on the policy and process. In the focus groups they demonstrated that they explore all options in agreeing actions for dealing with noise nuisance.

Scrutiny were particularly impressed with the passion and enthusiasm shown by the staff interviewed as part of the exercise.

Complaints relating to noise nuisance are low with no appeals being made against the outcome of noise nuisance cases.

Scrutiny felt that there were some recommendations made by the Housing Ombudsman that should be considered by ForHousing.

Recommendations

1. ForHousing should take on Board the Ombudsman recommendation to consider net zero plans for insulation to include noise insulation specifications. Scrutiny to actively engage with the appropriate team to discuss this.
2. Scrutiny to actively engage with the appropriate team to discuss the recommendations made by the Housing Ombudsman in relation to the void standard. Scrutiny have recommended that the recommendation by the Ombudsman to leave carpets and remove wooden floors is an option, based on tenant need, rather than a standard approach.
3. ForHousing to give consideration to how they can improve the perception of visibility of the organisation in estates and areas and feed this back to Scrutiny.
4. ForHousing to address the issue of neighbourhood walkabouts with a view to introducing them in all areas to build up trust with ForHousing as an organisation and support tenants to informally raise issues.
5. ForHousing to include tenants in any future review of the ASB policy.
6. ForHousing to introduce a process in relation to hard floor coverings that gives flexibility to deal with it on a case-by-case basis in a way that is fair to all tenants, both existing and incoming.
7. ForHousing to consider re-introducing an information leaflet on 'how to be a good neighbour' to at least be included in the standard sign-up pack.
8. ForHousing to consider drafting a leaflet around how to minimise noise nuisance with particular reference to hard floor coverings and living in flats.
9. ForHousing to continue the delivery of staff training for those in customer facing roles with particular emphasis on having difficult conversations, managing expectations and delivering unwelcome news. ForHousing should ensure that training is recorded.

Scrutiny would like to thank all staff who took the time to support this exercise.

Scrutiny will engage with all relevant service to produce an action plan in response to the recommendations. The action plan will be presented to Customer Committee at their September meeting.

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