

The Guinness Partnership Management Review

Housing Ombudsman Complaint 202435422 July 2025

1. Introduction

Following the Housing Ombudsman's determination issued on 27 June 2025, a management review has been undertaken in response to findings of:

- Severe maladministration in handling reports of a mice infestation
- Service failure in complaint handling

This review has been conducted by a senior manager independent of the service area involved, with input from Regional Heads of Service across Repairs, Housing Management and Complaints.

The purpose of this report is to set out the learning from the case and the actions taken to improve service delivery.

2. Review Findings

2.1. Delays in Responding to the Mice Infestation and Current Practice

Summary: Communication between services required improvement. In particular, delays occurred because updates, including those relating to the appointment of pest control contractors, were not consistently shared between multiple teams involved. As the case progressed, it became more complex than a single-property pest issue, ultimately requiring a planned, block-wide response.

A number of changes have been introduced to strengthen the organisation's approach:

- A revised pest control procedure now provides clearer guidance on responsibility and handling of pest issues in properties within homes with communal areas, and within communal areas themselves.
- A Complex Repairs Team has been established, consisting of surveyors, trades people, and a dedicated manager, and they carry out weekly cross-functional case reviews
- A new contractor platform has been implemented to improve record keeping, visibility, and accountability for repair actions
- All pest reports, are now formally recorded within central systems alongside repairs and inspection reports
- Reports have been introduced to identify trends in pest activity across homes and communal spaces to enable trends and recurring issues to be identified so the need for additional action can be taken quickly and proactively.

These improvements align with the recommendations set out in the Ombudsman's Spotlight Report on Knowledge and Information Management, particularly in relation to record keeping, data visibility, and decision-making.

2.2. Engagement with the Local Authority

Summary: The review found that processes in relation to engagement with councillors, MPs, and local authority representatives had opportunity for strengthening. On occasion, contact from these stakeholders was not always linked to the complaint, which reduced oversight and consistency in responses.

Since this case:

- Refresher training has been provided to relevant colleagues
- Access to the organisation's CRM system has been expanded across services
- Stakeholder enquiries are now recorded centrally and linked to complaint cases to ensure full visibility and coordinated responses

2.3. Complaint Handling

Between 1 April 2023 and 27 June 2025, we investigated 45 complaints about our handling of pests. 62% were upheld and 13% were partially upheld. The most common reasons for upholding complaints about pests were unreasonable delays and communication failures. 40% of complaints were escalated to stage 2 with 67% upheld and 6% partially upheld. Failure themes were consistent across both stages.

The Ombudsman made eight findings following determinations of complaints about the handling of pests investigated during this period. Two of these findings were positive (no maladministration), one found service failure and three found maladministration. There were two findings which grouped repairs and pest issues together, one of which was a service failure, and the other was severe maladministration.

In response to these findings and learning from complaints, we created a new report to monitor reports of pests to identify schemes with frequent issues that may require further investigations, as well as updating our pest procedure following a change in roles and responsibilities regarding the oversight and monitoring of contractors.

The Ombudsman determination also identifies a service failure in the lack of consideration for awarding compensation in relation to damage to personal possessions. Of the 45 complaints received between 1 April 2023 and 27 June 2025, two reported concerns of damages to personal belongings caused by the pest issue (not including the case in question). In one instance, whilst compensation was offered for failures relating to communication and repair delays, but compensation was not offered for damage to personal belongings as the resident would not allow access initially to complete pest treatment.

In the other instance, compensation was offered towards the costs of damage to personal belongings. Whilst the resident was not able to provide proof of purchase, as we had failed to complete the actions recommended by the pest control contractor, we agreed a contribution towards these damages which the resident was comfortable with. There is evidence that the learnings from complaints and Ombudsman determinations have influenced the policy position in this regard, as this instance is similar to the subject of this case review.

The guidance to residents remains that we encourage them to have contents insurance, as shared within our complaints policy, and to seek redress through the insurers where possible. However where we identify our failure has led to, or contributed to damage, an appropriate compensation payment will be offered.

2.4. Policy and Procedure Changes

It is recognised that policies, systems and controls have evolved significantly since this case. Improvements include:

- Updates to the Pest Control Procedure to clarify landlord responsibility
- Ongoing review of the Responsive Repairs Policy, including response times for pest-related issues
- Strengthened complaint handling processes in line with the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code
- Expanded use of central systems (CRM) across Repairs and Housing Management
- Improved recording of inspections and post-inspections
- Implementation of a contractor platform to improve data capture and oversight

We have also self-assessed against all Ombudsman Spotlight Reports to further strengthen service delivery, complaint handling, and record keeping.

2.5. Staff Training and Learning

A range of training and learning activities have been implemented in response to this case:

- Refresher training on complaint handling and stakeholder engagement
- Training aligned to the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code
- Introduction of Toolbox Talks for Repairs teams, including clear guidance on appropriate pest-proofing methods and the avoidance of ineffective measures
- Improved cross-functional working through weekly complex case reviews
- Improved use of Equality Impact Assessments when determining need for temporary moves and ensuring this information is shared at Case Review meetings so appropriate support is provided.

These measures are intended to improve decision-making, communication, and consistency in handling complex cases.

3. Additional Considerations

The review also considered delays in arranging temporary accommodation. These were influenced by limited availability of suitable accommodation and specific requirements, including location and pets.

Current arrangements with a third-party provider are effective for emergency moves but present challenges for planned temporary relocations. This will be reviewed as part of a forthcoming procurement exercise.

4. Conclusion

This case highlighted opportunities to improve timeliness of response, record keeping, cross-service communication, and decision-making in relation to pest cases. However, it has also led to significant organisational learning. Changes to procedures, systems, and ways of working have strengthened the organisation's ability to respond more effectively to pest-related issues and to manage complex cases with improved coordination and oversight.

All Ombudsman orders associated with this case have been completed in full, with appropriate management oversight.