

Group Advocacy Case Study

During an outreach event, The Advocacy Project was approached by four older people who live in the same block of housing. They were enquiring whether we would be able to do anything about issues they were having with their Housing Association, seemingly refusing to carry out repairs or upgrades to their properties.

After a short discussion it was clear that they all had similar problems in the houses, i.e. old, and in some cases rotting, and malfunctioning windows and doors.

I advised them at that point, that it seemed likely that The Advocacy Project could assist them to resolve the matter with the Housing Association.

After further consultation with the residents, it was agreed that everyone with similar problems should take their issues to the Housing Association as a group complaint.

A meeting was set up at one of the residents' flats so that we could go and meet them, see the problems for ourselves, and then outline a strategy for proceeding.

The residents had been told for a number of years that they were getting new windows and doors, but the date for this was never confirmed and frustratingly for the residents, there were newer buildings around them that were getting refurbished before theirs were.

Some of the residents complained of chronic health issues which are compounded by drafts and the loss of heat via the windows and doors.

They also explained that they struggled to make ends meet. Their incomes have remained virtually at a fixed level over the past few years, whilst fuel costs have risen dramatically.

The residents stated that, as part of the Housing Stock Transfer, they had been promised new windows and doors, as well as efficient heating systems within 3-5 years. However, the approach of members of Housing Association staff had been indifferent and unhelpful. This had left the residents feeling that they had been let down and with no ability to call the Housing Association to account over their promises.

We approached the Housing Association and advised that we had been in consultation with the residents of the flats over complaints that they had regarding the windows and doors and the apparent unwillingness to repair or upgrade them by the Housing Association.

We asked the Housing Association for their take on the situation and asked them what the time scale for the work on the flats was likely to be.

The Housing Association felt that in fact, there were no issues to address, as the residents were aware of the upgrade plans and were always informed of any changes to these plans, by letter, and in good time.

We met with the residents again and asked for any paperwork they had from the Housing Association describing or explaining exactly what was agreed when the housing stock was transferred to the local Housing Association.

We explained that we had asked the Housing Association to provide the information to us about the upgrades and repairs but were basically fobbed off, with excuses about lost files and staff that had left after the agreement had been passed.

The residents were adamant that they had been told they would get new windows and doors and that this would take around 10 years.

The Housing Association confirmed that they had agreed to replace the windows and doors but according to their schedule this would not be until the **financial year 2020/21**, and a replacement heating program for the **financial year 2025/25**.

There was a caveat at the end of the letter stating that since the original agreement had been drawn up, the Housing Association had reworked the program and was now intending to replace the heating in the **financial year 2010/11**.

I contacted the Housing Association and asked them for a copy of any agreements relating to the renewal program; however I was informed that because of the Data Protection Act they could not provide this information.

I explained that in fact this was not the case, and that they could provide the information without breaching any confidentiality only to be informed that there were no records from that time existing, for some reason they had been destroyed and the staff involved had all left.

Shortly afterwards the residents received a letter from an engineering contractor stating that they were coming out to measure the doors and windows with a view to replacing them.

We kept in touch with the Housing Association, asking for any updates to the situation but were repeatedly told we would have to wait on the new financial year (April 08) beginning before anything could be confirmed.

We called them in April and again in May and were told there was nothing yet confirmed, then we received a call from the residents saying they had been sent a letter confirming that they would indeed be getting the doors and windows replaced in May. This has benefited all seventy residents who rent from the Housing Association, not just the four individuals who attended the group.

It is not unreasonable to assume that the residents, by themselves, would not have achieved the above outcome. Therefore, the value of independent, professional advocacy support is clearly demonstrated.

Update: The Advocacy Project has recently been made aware that all the residents' door and windows have been replaced, as promised by the Housing Association.