Knowledge and information management expectations for landlords

Good knowledge and information management (KIM) is crucial to any organisation's ability to provide effective and robust services for its residents. Without good KIM, a landlord will find it far more difficult to deliver its core social purpose efficiently and effectively, providing value for money as a modern, forward-looking organisation.

If the senior managers of an organisation do not value knowledge management or recognise how it benefits everyone, this will be reflected by a bad data culture, compounded by an absence of performance management measures. The human impact not doing this well can have on residents cannot be understated, with financial detriment seen in our casework, as well as severe stress and anxiety.

This document will help landlords understand what the Housing Ombudsman expects from them so they can deliver a better service to residents.

To help the different areas of the business, we have separated the expectations into different sections.

Senior leadership

Senior leaders should be clear about the importance of knowledge and information management, and their standards and expectations. This will in turn help foster a working environment where staff have direction, structure and guidance.

These standards need to be routinely monitored through quality assurance processes, both internally and with third parties.

Landlords are recommended to implement a knowledge and information management strategy, if one does not exist. Landlords should ensure it is shaped not only by fundamental requirements such as data protection and regulatory returns, but by their own vision and purpose too. This should include:

- Defining knowledge and information management
- Clear definitions of which data repository is to be used for which datasets

- The implementation of an Information Asset Register so you know what data you already have, what you don't have, and what you need
- Outcomes-focused data mining: what you are trying to achieve and what do you need the data for?
- How it aligns with the overall business strategy and the need for continuous service improvement
- What the expected standards are, how they will be monitored, and the consequences of failing to adhere to them

As part of its work on governance, senior leaders should seek assurance that the landlord knows its products, services and residents well, and that it uses this data to inform business and financial planning.

It should also use some of this strategy in its work with third parties, making adherence to the minimum standard for knowledge and information management part of the service level agreement with these third parties

Operational

Although much of the culture around good KIM is led by the senior leadership, there are changes and recommendations the Ombudsman has made for operational teams.

Landlords should set out clear requirements before an appointment can be recorded as missed or refused as well as a wastage analysis of missed appointments. To be proactive in this area, landlords should also consider implementing an automated appointment reminder system for residents.

As part of its obligations under the Equality Act, landlords should review information on safeguarding, including any policies and procedures it adheres to, and schedule appropriate sensitive information reviews.

On top of this, landlords should review internal guidance around recording vulnerabilities and subsequently make appropriate adaptations. You can learn more about this in our Spotlight report on attitudes, respect and rights.

Importantly, once this information has been created, it is vital that it is then stored and maintained appropriately, in accordance with data protection requirements.

To ensure that this work is carried out effectively, landlords should train staff on the requirements of the Equality Act.

Another key recommendation for operational teams is around the recording of complaints. The Ombudsman's casework shows that when a resident reports multiple issues, the sector can be guilty of only recording one, or missing some. It should make sure all are recorded and responded to effectively.

Any Frequently Asked Questions should be published on a landlord's website and kept up to date.

Data and systems

Landlords should ensure that any databases are easy to interrogate, and that the data can be extracted and used. This includes having information stored on a central database and not on individuals' computers.

There should be organisational key data recording standard requirements that get developed to ensure good records that support the business and demonstrate compliance with national standards are created. Staff should be trained to use these systems.

Once these have been created, the landlord should consider benchmarking itself against other organisations' good practice in knowledge and information management.

Additionally, when an organisation is going through a merger or an ALMO is coming back in house (or any other big system change), it should undertake a stress test of its systems and undertake a risk assessment. This should include proactively investigating incoming datasets during mergers as part of the due diligence process.