

# Case studies - Improving communication

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Case  
studies

26 Feb 2020

Communication is key, Case studies

**Communication with complainants** should be open and accountable, subject to legal requirements. Failure to manage complainant's expectations may result in dissatisfaction with the complaints process, unrealistic expectations and complaint escalation. Following are some case studies relating to improving communication in the [2018-19 annual report](#) by the Queensland Ombudsman.

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## Managing tenancy issues

Jerry was a tenant of the Department of Housing and Public Works. His neighbour, Al, was also a tenant of the department and was subject to a Tenancy Management Plan (TMP). The department uses a TMP to support vulnerable tenants to sustain their tenancy. The plan outlines the ways the department will proactively work with a tenant to stop disruptive behaviours occurring and help the tenant to meet their tenancy obligations.

Jerry was assaulted by Al and suffered a minor head injury. As a result, the department relocated Jerry to another property. The department had previously failed to take any action in response to Jerry's complaints about Al, which were made on a regular basis prior to the assault.

This Office's investigation considered the *Residential Tenancies and Rooming Accommodation Act 2008* and the department's relevant policy and procedures, particularly focusing on tenancy management and responding to complaints about disruptive behaviour of its tenants.

## The result

Following recommendations made by the Office, the department apologised to Jerry, stating that it had not properly managed his complaints in accordance with its policy and procedures. The department amended its TMP document to include consequences and options to take if the plan is not followed by a tenant, and the department's written procedures were updated to incorporate the new plan.

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## **Prisoner transfer problems**

After a prisoner-on-prisoner assault, Tim was temporarily held in a correctional centre's detention unit on a safety order. He complained to this Office that he was being denied basic items, such as toiletries and underwear. He objected to the safety order conditions and said he had not been given timely advice about the reasons for the order. Tim also complained about being accommodated near the alleged perpetrator of the assault. When Tim contacted the Office, he told us he had complained to the centre's general manager but had not yet received a formal response.

Ombudsman officers contacted the centre and found there were other concerns that Tim had attempted to raise with centre management. It was unclear which issues had been submitted to the general manager using the centre's complaints management process.

## **The result**

With Tim's consent, this Office directly referred a summary of his complaint issues to the general manager for response. Following this referral, the general manager confirmed that Tim was transferred to a low security facility.

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## Water meter problems

Leonie contacted her water service provider as she was unable to read the water meter for her property. The provider replaced the meter the next day without advising her. Later, Leonie received a bill for high water consumption that she believed was due to the original meter being faulty. Leonie complained that the provider discarded the meter before she could request that it be tested for accuracy.

The Office's investigation found that the provider had not adequately communicated with Leonie about replacing the meter. It was also confirmed that the meter could not be tested as it had been disposed of within a couple of days of being replaced.

The *South-East Queensland Water (Distribution and Retail Restructuring) Act 2009* and Customer Water and Wastewater Code do not oblige providers to keep meters for any defined period.

## The result

This investigation led to the service provider agreeing to waive a component of the water charges on Leonie's account. It also highlighted improvements the provider could make to its procedures for other clients. The service provider agreed to extend the period of time that water meters are kept after removal. The provider improved communication strategies. This included agreeing to develop a new postcard to be left at customer properties after a meter is replaced, developing better scripting information for its call centres and putting information

on its website about its regular water meter replacement program.

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Last updated: 15 March 2024