

LONDON BOROUGH OF HAMMERSMITH & FULHAM

Report to: Audit Committee

Date: 6 November 2024

Subject: Annual Complaints Report 2023/2024

Report of: Councillor Ree, Cabinet Member for Finance and Reform

Report author: Ashley Bryant, Interim Director of Resident Services

Responsible Director: Sukvinder Kalsi, Executive Director Finance and Corporate Services

SUMMARY

This report summarises the Council's performance and learning from resident complaints during the period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024. It includes all complaints covering stage 1, 2, Ombudsman and statutory complaints. It is a statutory duty to publish this information.

Overall, this report shows a marked improvement in the council's management of complaints. Our performance in managing complaints has improved with an increase in the responses at stage 1 and stage 2 complaints being closed within the corporate timescales, with an uplift of 8% on stage 1 and 29% on stage 2 complaints compared to 2022/2023.

We have made it easier for our residents to complain when things go wrong and ensuring that we are learning from complaints is a priority for us. Good progress has been made this year and we will continue to focus on reducing causes for residents to complain as we strengthen our services to meet residents' needs.

As such, there has been an increase in stage 1 and stage 2 complaints during the year. The main increases are within Housing repairs with an 18% increase in stage 1 complaints received and a 43% increase under Housing Service that incorporates housing advice, estate services, tenancy management, housing allocations, homelessness, and temporary accommodation.

The Housing service is the area where we receive the highest number of complaints, and we are delivering an ambitious £729m investment programme to modernise our ageing housing stock. We are putting things right with our repairs service and have invested heavily in additional repairs contractor capacity. Our new management is ensuring that contractors complete quality work punctually and are more responsive to our residents, especially people with vulnerabilities or support needs.

We established a Housing Hub in June 2023 to improve our management of complaints and to increase focus and expertise in compassionate customer service and complaints handling.

In relation to Ombudsman complaints 8 cases of Local Government Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) decisions found fault out of the 38 cases closed in total. This is 4.3 per 100,000 residents compared to 8.2 for similar authorities. This means that our percentage of decisions upheld was 73% compared to an average of 85% for similar organisations. Our compliance was 100% compared to 99% in similar organisations.

We have the lowest number of upheld LGSCO decisions per 100,000 residents and are second lowest for the upheld % rate (excluding City of London).

92% of Housing Ombudsman (HO) decisions found fault across 53 cases. This includes 19 findings of severe maladministration on 13 cases and 58 findings of maladministration across 40 cases. Of the total 57 cases investigated and closed during the year only 6 cases did not find maladministration (10%). As a percentage of all findings of fault, 92% were maladministration.

The nature of the backlogs in the HO investigations during this time means that most cases that were investigated related to the prior year 22/23 with some cases going back much further. Nevertheless, the Council has recognised that many of its homes needed repair where there was significant backlog which has now been rectified.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Committee:

1. Note the Council's performance on complaints during the year 2023/24 and the organisational learning from them.

Wards Affected: All

Our Priorities

Our Priorities	Summary of how this report aligns to the H&F Priorities
Building shared prosperity	<i>Having effective systems in place to monitor feedback from residents enables opportunities to improve services for our residents' benefit.</i>
Creating a compassionate council	<i>Understanding difficulties our residents face in dealing with our services where residents are experiencing their most difficult circumstances or have complex needs</i>

Doing things with residents, not to them	<i>Learning from our residents' feedback enables us to ensure that we are delivering services that meet their needs.</i>
Being ruthlessly financially efficient	<i>Providing a service that meets residents needs provides value for money. Ensuring we learn from our mistakes and improve services accordingly is financially efficient.</i>
Taking pride in H&F	<i>Providing accessible and effective services to our residents and businesses makes Hammersmith and Fulham an attractive place to live work and do business in</i>
Rising to the challenge of the climate and ecological emergency	<i>A more efficient service increases the opportunity for digital delivery and better facilitates sustainable service delivery.</i>

Financial Implications

There are no direct financial implications from the recommendations in this report.

Implications by Alex Pygram, Head of Finance, Corporate Services, 26th July 2024

Legal Implications

There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

Implications completed by Angela Hogan, Chief Solicitor (Contracts and Procurement) 31st July 2024

Risk Management Implications

The report sets the Council's performance on complaints during the year 2023/24 and the organisational learning extracts from concluded complaints. Failure to handle complaints on a timely basis and resolving the substance of the complaint first time can lead to escalation of complaints, delays in resolution for residents, and investigations being conducted by the relevant Ombudsman, who can determine that the council was at fault or that a maladministration had occurred and recommend compensation to the complainant.

Implications completed by David Hughes, Director of Audit, Fraud, Risk and Insurance, 29 July 2024

Background Papers Used in Preparing This Report

None.

This report summarises the Council's performance and learning from resident complaints during the period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024. It includes all complaints covering stage 1, 2, Ombudsman and statutory complaints. It is a statutory duty to publish this information.

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The Council provides a wide range of services to over 185,000 residents and thousands of businesses. It delivers them across various channels, including responding to over 1million telephone calls, online self-service, webchat, social media, email, in person and by post. The Council ensures that any complaints related to the services it delivers can be received via any channel. We seek to learn from them and look for patterns of service failure. We continue to use the feedback we receive from our complaints to identify areas for service improvements. This is detailed further in Section 6 Organisational Learnings.
- 1.2 The Council works hard to view the complaints we receive as a positive opportunity for learning and service improvement whilst remaining focussed on trying to resolve them to the satisfaction of our residents as quickly as we can.
- 1.3 This is a single report on all Council complaints covering stage 1, stage 2, and Ombudsman with summary information on statutory adults and children's social care complaints.
- 1.4 We aim to resolve concerns raised by residents as quickly as possible. However, where this is not possible, we have a complaints policy and process to ensure that all complaints are dealt with fairly, swiftly, and within statutory guidelines where relevant. Any issues raised that are not recorded as complaints are not formally logged or reported, although services are encouraged to record these informal enquiries in some way to inform the way they deliver and improve their services in the future. This report focuses not only on volumes and timeliness of complaint responses but also aims, when it is possible, to identify themes and lessons learnt that result in sustainable service improvements.
- 1.5 Our complaint procedure is designed to manage those complaints that require a formal documented response and therefore could not be satisfied earlier in the process. The complaints policy and procedure can be found here:

[H&F Corporate Complaints Policy for Adults' Services, Children's Services and Corporate Complaints May 2024 \(lbhf.gov.uk\)](#)

- 1.6 In April 2024 the Housing Ombudsman revised the code and the Housing Ombudsman Code became statutory code. At the same time the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) launched a new Complaint Handling Code and many elements of this align to the HO Code. The changes for the LGSCO Code went live from 1st April 2024, however the LGSCO will have a phased approach to this roll out and the code will not be formally

considered/referred to within the decision and determination stage at this time and this will be effective in 2025/2026. This allows Local Authorities time to embed the changes. This report and the performance data within it relates to the policies in place during the period April 2023 to March 2024 prior to the code changes.

- 1.7 We have a duty to report our performance on complaints through our governance arrangements and publish a copy of the annual complaints report on our website.
- 1.8 The LGSCO published its Annual review for LBHF last year and this demonstrated that performance of the Council has improved when compared to 2022/2023. Our performance is better than the average for similar authorities and we have the lowest number of upheld decisions per 100,000 residents and are in the top 2 for the upheld % rate when compared to all London Boroughs (excluding City of London).

2. THE OVERALL PICTURE

- 2.1 Summary of complaints received and closed during the period April 2023 to March 2024 at both stages. (Figures in brackets are the previous year)

Complaint stage	23/24 Complaints received	23/24 Complaints closed	23/24 Complaints closed within timescale	23/24 % completed within timescale	23/24 % upheld
Stage 1	5108 (4038)	5030 (3782)	4553 (3138)	91% (83%)	61% (64%)
Stage 2	799 (498)	785 (547)	615 (269)	78% (49%)	73% (65%)

- 2.2 As can be seen from the above figures, 2023-2024 saw an increase in stage 1 complaints received of 26% and 60% for stage 2. We closed 5,030 stage 1 complaints during the year, a 32% increase on the year before. 91% were completed within the complaint policy response timescales and 61% were upheld. 799 (15%) were escalated to stage 2, and 78% of these were completed within the timescale. The number of stage 2 complaints closed also increased from the previous year by 43%. There has been an improvement in 2023/2024 compared to 2022/2023 in the responses at stage 1 and stage 2 complaints being closed within the corporate timescales, with an improvement of 8% on stage 1 and 29% on stage 2 complaint.
- 2.3 In 2023/24 there were increases in complaints particularly across the Housing Service. Within Housing repairs there was a 18% increase in stage 1 complaints received and a 43% increase in stage 1 complaints received under Housing Service that incorporates housing advice, estate services, tenancy management, housing allocations, homelessness, and temporary accommodation. The Housing Services has seen demand increases across all service areas.

2.4 Since March 2023, there has been extensive staff training and a coaching programme commenced covering these key skills:

- communication
- identifying vulnerabilities
- record keeping
- call handling and repair diagnostics.

2.5 In addition, a new Housing Hub was created to act as a single point of contact incorporating improved communication and follow-up on repairs. Housing has undertaken to be fully compliant with the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code and introducing new LGSCO handling code ahead of the April 2025 deadline. Housing is now creating a positive complaint handling culture – learning from complaints and Ombudsman cases and enhancing our quality checking.

2.6 Improved access to our services has delivered:

- repairs contact centre answering 97% of calls in February 2024 compared to 66% in February 2023
- calls reducing by 2,500 per month
- average wait time approximately one minute
- proactive contact for repeat callers
- increased use of insight.

Housing has terminated a previous contractor, appointment new contractors and created a new culture of contract management within the repairs service to ensure a resident centric approach to delivery.

2.7 Significant improvements have been achieved with focus across the whole Council ensuring complaints are a priority for each Directorate. There is weekly reporting in place for open cases that are nearly due or overdue and a daily report for Housing to help improve performance. This ensures that Directors are aware of all open cases, ensuring targeted approaches to cases closed in time.

3. SERVICE BREAKDOWN OF COMPLAINTS DATA 2023-2024

3.1 Stage 1 complaints

Please note that these are broken down by the departmental structures at the time. The Resident Experience Team is listed separately as it holds complex multi-service complaints that extend beyond one department.

Stage 1 complaints	23/24 Complaints received	23/24 Complaints closed	23/24 Complaints closed within timescale	23/24 % completed within timescale	23/24 % upheld

People - Adult Social Care	9	9	9	100%	44%
People - Children's Services	39	37	28	76%	73%
Place - Economy	3287	3213	2894	90%	73%
Place - Environment	1330	1341	1235	92%	36%
Finance & Corporate Services - Finance	87	88	78	89%	36%
Finance & Corporate Services - Corporate Services	332	318	297	93%	51%
Finance & Corporate Services - Resident Experience Team	24	24	12	50%	63%
Total	5108	5030	4553	91%	61%

3.1.1 Over 64% of stage 1 complaints related to the Economy department and 26% to Environment. The figures for Economy are broken down further below, with most of these stage 1 complaints relating to Housing, particularly Repairs. In 2023/24 the Repairs Service delivered 58,310 reactive repairs, including mechanical and electric repairs and voids works across our homes and received 2,254 stage 1 complaints equating to 4% service dissatisfaction. A further breakdown of Housing complaints is in the table below.

Stage 1 complaints	23/24 Complaints received	23/24 Complaints closed	23/24 Complaints closed within timescale	23/24 % completed within timescale	23/24 % upheld
All housing	3227	3157	2844	90%	73%
<i>Housing repairs</i>	2254	2200	2012	91%	82%
<i>Housing (non-repairs)</i>	973	957	832	90%	52%

Economy (other)	60	56	50	89%	52%
Total Economy	3287	3213	2894	90%	73%

3.1.2 The service improvement plans in Section 6 Organisational Learnings, demonstrates the work that has completed to improve our Housing service together with further planned improvements.

3.1.3 A review of Environment cases received show that the highest volumes of stage 1 complaints related to waste services at 36%, 18% for parking, and 15% for public realm.

3.1.4 We received a total of 483 complaints for the waste service which mainly relate to missed or incomplete refuse and recycling collections. During 23/24 we collected 3.4m bins which equates to a low dissatisfaction rate of 0.014%. We take a transparent, customer-centric approach to reviewing complaints aiming to prevent future issues - this includes helping crews understand the resident perspective, advising residents on how best to present their waste and recycling and work with them to achieve any changes. We also work with the contractor in identifying practical solutions to prevent recurring issues such as simplifying processes and communications for the crews.

3.1.5 We received a total of 250 complaints for the parking service which were related to penalty charge notices (PCN), policy, traffic orders, action taken by the blue badge fraud team, and information and advice about new parking schemes in the borough. The volume of complaints remains relatively low in comparison to the engagement activity with the service, with 39,389 telephone calls and more than 130,000 pieces of correspondence relating to PCN fines received during the period 23/24.

3.2 Stage 2 complaints

Stage 2 complaints	23/24 Complaints Received	23/24 Complaints closed	23/24 Complaints closed with timescale	23/24 % completed within timescale	23/4 % upheld
People - Adult Social Care	1	0	0	0%	0%
People - Children's Services	11	10	10	100%	50%
Place - Economy	658	655	501	76%	79%
Place - Environment	97	92	81	88%	48%
Finance & Corporate	20	17	14	82%	29%

Services - Finance					
Finance & Corporate Services - Corporate Services	11	10	9	90%	30%
Finance & Corporate Services - Resident Experience Team	1	1	0	0%	100%
Total	799	785	615	78%	73%

3.2.1 82% of stage 2 complaints related to the Economy department and 12% to Environment. The figures for Economy can be broken down further as below, with 99% of Economy's stage 2 complaints related to Housing, mostly repairs:

Stage 2 complaints	23/24 Complaints received	23/34 Complaints closed	23/24 Complaints closed within timescale	23/24 % completed within timescale	23/24 % upheld
All housing	649	646	494	76%	79%
<i>Housing repairs</i>	500	513	378	74%	86%
<i>Housing (non-repairs)</i>	149	133	116	89%	50%
Economy (other)	18	9	7	76%	33%
Total Economy	658	655	501	78%	79%

3.2.2 A review of Environment cases received show that most stage 2 complaint cases were for waste services at 30% and parking at 28%.

3.2.3 In some cases, a complaint maybe refused. This could be because the initial complaint is then identified as a first-time service request, should follow an appeal process or has been captured initially as a complaint via the self-service portal or through initial triaging and further investigation found the categorisation needs to change. A record of refusals is held. There were 157 refusals, the two highest categories, 75% of cases (117) cases within the Environment Directorate with 89% of those cases relating to waste service for rubbish or recycling collections. 18% of cases refused were within Economy and the rest across the other Directorates, for various reasons including service requests, planning appeals and benefit appeals.

3.3 Statutory complaints

3.3.1 Children Act complaints

Children Act complaints pertain to statutory social work support or intervention for children and families.

Complaint stage	23/24 completed Investigations	23/24 amount completed on time	23/24 % completed on time
Stage 1	33	22	67%
Stage 2	9	7	78%
Stage 3	4	4	100%

3.3.2 Adult Social Care complaints

Complaint stage	23/24 completed Investigations	23/24 amount completed on time	23/24 % completed on time
Stage 1	107	78	73%
Stage 2	17	14	82%
Stage 3	N/A	N/A	N/A

4 OMBUDSMAN COMPLAINTS

- 4.1 The Council is subject to two Ombudsman services – the Housing Ombudsman (for council housing landlord functions) and the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman for all other services. Complainants can take their complaints to the relevant Ombudsman if they remain dissatisfied after the Council’s two stage complaint process has been completed or (in the case of the Housing Ombudsman) if they believe the Council is not complying with the complaints code of practice.
- 4.2 Ombudsman complaints can take up to 12 months to investigate therefore complaints usually relate to the previous year (2022/23).
- 4.3 The final determinations received in 23/24 for the LGSCO and the Housing Ombudsman are detailed Section 4.6 and 4.7, separated into the individual business areas.
- 4.4 In 23/24 8 cases (21%) of Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman decisions found fault out of the 38 cases closed in total. 92% of Housing Ombudsman decisions found fault across 53 cases. This includes 19 findings of severe maladministration on 13 cases and 58 findings of maladministration across 40 cases. Of the total 57 cases investigated and closed during the year

only 6 cases did not find maladministration (10%). As a percentage of all findings of fault, 92% were maladministration.

4.5 We received one complaint handling failure order during the period. This was addressed and due to an error made after the timescale was given by the Housing Ombudsman, the stage 1 was incorrectly registered with the wrong timescale which applied 15 days instead of 10 days.

4.6 Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO)

4.6.1 The LGSCO published its Annual review for LBHF on 24th July 2024.

4.6.2 This demonstrated that performance of the Council has improved when compared to 2022/2023 with 8 decisions upheld (18 22/23), which is 4.3 per 100,000 residents compared to 8.2 for similar authorities.

4.6.3 During the period, the LGSCO concluded 38 cases (88 in 22/23) but only 11 were investigated fully (28 in 22/23) and a decision issued. Others were concluded for a variety of reasons including being closed after initial enquiries, giving advice to follow complaints process, closed as incomplete, invalid, or referred back for local resolution.

4.6.4 LGSCO cases concluded during the period April 2023 to March 2024 by service.

Business Area	Investigated no fault found	Investigated fault found	Decision by LGSCO not to investigate	Total
Adult Social Care		1	2	3
Children's Services		1	5	6
Corporate services – business rates			1	1
Economy – Allocations and Lettings		1		1
Economy H&F maintenance			1	1
Economy - Development Management			1	1
Economy – Housing Advice & Assessment	1		3	4
Economy – Planning and Regeneration			1	1
Economy – Temporary Accommodation	1	3		4
Economy – Tenancy Management South		1		1

Economy – Tenancy management North			1	1
Environment – Highways Co-ordination & Licensing			2	2
Environment – Noise and nuisance	1			1
Environment – Parking			7	7
Environment – Transportation Policy			1	1
Environment – Waste		1		1
Trading Standards			2	2
Total	3	8	27	38

4.6.5 The table below shows the number of cases closed in each quarter with a breakdown of the case volumes and the percentage of cases with a decision not to investigate by the LGSCO.

23/24 quarters	Total cases investigated and closed	Total cases investigated and closed no fault found	Total cases investigated and closed fault found	Volume and percentages cases closed with a decision by the LGSCO not investigate
Q1 April-June	11	2	4	5 (46%)
Q2 July-Sept	12	1	3	8 (67%)
Q3 Oct - Dec	10	0	1	9 (90%)
Q4 Jan-Mar	5	0	0	5 (100%)
Total	38	3	8	27 71%)

4.6.6 Of the 11 cases investigated during the period, 8 of those were upheld. This means our percentage of decisions upheld is 73% (64% in 23/24) . The LGSCO also reports on compliance with recommendations and orders, and we had 100% compliance compared to 99% in similar organisations. The link to the LGSCO annual report for 23/24 is detailed below.

[London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham - Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman](#)

4.6.7 The LGSCO also reports on cases where the authority has satisfactorily resolved the issue prior to the decision being issued. We had 13% resolved (28% in 22/23) and this compares to an average of 12% in similar organisations.

Whilst the percentage resolved is lower this is based on 1 case out of the 8 that were upheld, and we are performing better than similar authorities.

4.6.8 The LGSCO does not currently differentiate its upheld findings into severe or maladministration in the same way as the Housing Ombudsman.

4.6.9 There were no Public Interest Reports published involving Hammersmith and Fulham.

4.7 Housing Ombudsman Service (HO)

4.7.1 The Housing Ombudsman Service is set up by law to look at complaints about the housing organisations that are registered with them. They resolve disputes involving the tenants and leaseholders of social landlords (housing associations and local authorities) and voluntary members (private landlords and letting agents who are committed to good service for their tenants).

4.7.2 On 1st April 2024, the HO went live with its revised Complaint Handling Code. This sets out requirements for member landlords that will allow them to respond to complaints effectively and fairly. We undertook a review of our policies and processes against the changes and have update these accordingly to align with the go live date.

4.7.3 The Code ensures complaint handling data is being used consistently across landlord members, promotes engagement at various levels within a landlord and sets out expectations for boards or equivalent governance, senior executives, and frontline staff. Compliance with the Code forms part of the membership obligations.

4.7.4 Members are obliged to complete the self-assessment to measure the level of compliance. When carrying out a complaint investigation the HO will consider whether the landlord dealt with the complaint in accordance with the Code. Any failure identified could result in a finding of service failure, maladministration or severe maladministration for complaint handling and orders and recommendations will be made to put matters right and ensure compliance with the Code.

4.7.5 The HO's Complaint Handling Code and the Council's self-assessment can be found at: [H&F Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code Self Assessment \(lbhf.gov.uk\)](https://www.lbhf.gov.uk/housing-ombudsman-complaint-handling-code-self-assessment).

4.7.6 Housing Ombudsman cases determined during the period April 2023 to March 2024.

Business Area	23/24 Number of final det. Q1	23/24 Number of final det. Q2	23/24 Number of final det. Q3	23/24 Number of final det. Q4	23/24 Total

Economy- Allocations and Lettings	1				1
Economy – Maintenance	16	17	5	11	49
Economy – Sheltered Housing		1			1
Economy – Tenancy Management North	1		1		2
Economy – Tenancy Management South	2	1		1	4
Total	20	19	6	12	57
Overall fault rate	19/20 (95%)	18/19 (95%)	6/6 (100%)	10/12 (83%)	53/57 (92%)

4.7.7 The main categories of findings by the HO were 45% property condition, 33% complaint handling and 7% Temporary Decants.

4.7.8 The nature of the backlogs in HO investigations during this time means that most cases that were investigated related to the prior year 22/23 with some cases going back much further. Nevertheless, the Council has recognised that many of its homes needed repair where there was significant backlog which has now been rectified.

4.7.9 In May 2023 the HO commenced a Paragraph 49 investigation into the way that the council manages its complaints and repairs. The link to the report is below with a summary which details the issues that were identified together with the actions that we have taken to address these.

4.7.10 Key issues identified in the investigation were:

- Failure to consider the impact of extensive delays on vulnerable residents
- Complaint handling delay.
- Repeated broken promises at both repairs and complaint stage
- Inadequate complaint responses and inconsistent compensation offers.

4.7.11 The council has responded to the Paragraph 49 special investigation report and made improvements across the repairs service and complaint handling. A summary of improvements and actions taken for each of these points is detailed below. Further improvements we have made are detailed in Section 5 – Organisational Learning.

4.7.12 The link to the full report can be found here [24-02-14-Hammersmith-and-Fulham-P49-Final.pdf \(housing-ombudsman.org.uk\)](#)

4.7.13 We are working through the recommendations with the Housing Ombudsman, who has commended our leadership for its positive approach to learning from

this investigation and are encouraged that we had already made significant changes in the themes identified in the report.

4.7.14 Repairs

- **Integrated contractor system:** The service has developed a system to oversee all individual repairs and track escalated cases, damp, mould, and disrepair cases.
- **Clear communication processes and training:** The service has established procedural guidelines for repairs under the disrepair procedure and trained staff to better communicate with residents.
- **Proactive measures to inform residents of contractor changes:** The service has used text messages and confirmation letters to inform residents of contractor changes and the reasons behind them. All transferred work undergoes review and inspection.
- **Supporting our resident's initiative:** The service is overseeing the maintenance of accurate records for support needs and mapping the customer journey across services to identify gaps.
- **Comprehensive process maps, procedures, and training:** The service has rolled out process maps, procedures, and training across the repairs service, enabling a more accessible arrangement that aids audits and inspections.
- **New repairs contractor procurement:** The service is in the process of procuring a new repairs contractor, with input from the residents working group.

4.7.15 Complaints

- **Quality assurance module for complaint handling:** The service has integrated a quality assurance module into its casework system, with regular quality assessment of complaint responses and plans to implement it more widely.
- **Overhaul of complaint handling and Housing Ombudsman casework system:** The service is undergoing an overhaul of its complaint handling and Housing Ombudsman casework system and processes, with improved recording, monitoring, and follow-up of actions across services.
- **Review of legal compliance for complaint handling:** The service is devising a review and approach with legal colleagues to ensure that complaints are handled appropriately in instances where a legal claim has not yet been filed in court, and to assess procedural and staff training needs for compliance.
- **Update of corporate complaints policy:** The service has updated its corporate complaints policy to ensure compliance with the new statutory Complaint Handling Code from the Housing Ombudsman and has published it on the website.
- **Publication of annual report:** The service has published its annual report on the complaints received, overall performance, lessons learned, and improvements made on the website.

- **Tracking and escalation of actions promised in complaint responses:**
The service has updated its policy to explicitly state that all actions promised in complaint responses will be diligently tracked to completion and has established a clear escalation pathway to address any delays in repairs.

5. ORGANISATIONAL LEARNING

5.1 Complaints are classified against a series of categories within the system so that we can understand root causes and organisational learning. Not all complaints were classified, and some had more than one category assigned to them, but the main causes are set out below:

- Delays in service delivery – including contractor failures (44%)
- Service quality (19%)
- Failure to do something (14%)
- Disagree with council decision/outcome, cancellation, or withdrawal (9%)
- Disagree with charge or payment issue (7%)
- Lack of or poor communication (4%)
- Staff conduct and behaviour (3%)

5.2 We are a learning organisation and the analysis completed on complaints has identified several key areas where we need to improve our services. Detailed below are the learnings from the complaints received by the Council and those investigated by the Ombudsmen to improve future service provision. Focusing on the highest complaint volume service areas, it details further context and ongoing improvement actions.

5.3 Housing Repairs

Housing Repairs is consistently the area of service delivery where the Council receives most complaints and a proportionately higher number escalate to the Housing Ombudsman

The reasons for complaints are consistent and cover:

- Historical failures to complete works on time and poor management of WIP (live repairs) in the system.
- Delays and poor communications in progressing complex repairs or component replacements in homes (kitchens, bathrooms, windows etc)
- Missed appointments
- Complaints responded to at earlier stages with agreed remedial actions not monitored and delivered within agreed time scales.

To help bring about speedier resolution for the resident the following service improvements have been made:

- We invested in a new Housing repairs leadership team and new repair's structure that focused on contract management and improved services for residents
- The management of Ombudsman cases within Repairs has changed significantly because of the learning from these cases. Each case has been reviewed and is managed and monitored with a single point of contact; dedicated lead surveyor responsible for all home visits and resident engagement for pre and post inspections managing and signing off all repairs with our residents in a timelier fashion. All Ombudsman cases have dedicated contractors for completion of works which are monitored on a case-by-case basis.
- Proactive work on open and closed stage 1 and 2 complaints has taken place. A new internal housing repairs team of 8 operatives has been mobilised and targets all existing and new stage 1 complaints, tracked and monitored to completion. This includes resident sign off for each stage of works.
- A new process with closer working with between the complaints and repairs team with daily escalations issued to the team for local resolutions.
- Daily and weekly reviews of all stage 1, 2 and Ombudsman cases in place with live reporting on outstanding repairs.
- Historical cases continue to be reviewed with follow up MOT style inspections taking place across the service.
- New repairs contractors have been mobilised and completing new resident repairs in target.
- Proactive calls to homes with existing repairs on the day.
- Dedicated internal housing repairs operatives in sheltered homes across the city, prioritising vulnerable residents' repairs.

5.4 Housing Non-Repairs

- We have reviewed our estates provision and agreed that compliance officers will move into the estates team so that we have better compliance outcomes for our residents.
- We started to improve our working relationships with colleagues in the LET and ASB teams so that we have unified enforcement approach to deal with non-compliance noise
- We returned our south housing management service from an external contractor our housing management south so that we have a unified approach in delivery of housing management across the borough to ensure consistency of service delivery to our residents.
- We have a strategic programme to focus on reducing our empty properties.
- We have had an external auditor to review our top 6 compliance areas and over the last 12mths our compliance has been between 98%-100%.

5.5 Waste Services

There have been significant changes to the waste services in the past year, with a new contract being mobilised from January 2023 and several new services (such as wheeled bin collections and food waste recycling services)

and service delivery methods (such as collections of waste and recycling being delivered separately rather than co-collected) being introduced.

With any significant changes to the way our services are delivered there will always be a period during which new services will take time to become operationally embedded, during which time the crews become used to the new requirements and residents adapt to those changes.

We continuously review the reasons for complaints we receive and use these to drive service improvement. Preventative measures taken include:

- a transparent, customer-centric approach which includes helping crews understand the resident perspective.
- advising residents on how best to present their waste and recycling; and
- working with residents to smoothly embed change.

We also work with the contractor in identifying practical solutions to prevent recurring issues, such as simplifying processes and communications for the crews.

5.6 Parking

The complaints the Parking Service receives are rooted in three key areas:

- Issues around Penalty Charge Notices (PCNs)
- Issues around bay signage and markings
- Parking policy

In the past 12 months, the Parking Service has taken several steps to reduce the number of complaints in those areas by doing the following:

- Increasing resources to deal with PCN challenges, ensuring that backlogs and waiting times for responses are reduced significantly
- Undertake a comprehensive on-street parking asset audit, ensuring that parking signage and lines are fit for purpose, are clear and easy to understand, and meet the needs of the parking stress in the area
- Commenced a borough-wide parking consultation with residents, regarding the potential change to parking controls in their zone

5.7 Comprehensive Complaints Handling Across the Organisation

5.7.1 Enhanced Complaints and Compensation Procedures

The Council has significantly improved its complaints and compensation handling procedures. We have made notable advancements in improving timelessness, quality, and following protocols with an emphasis on quality and tracking through to completion of actions. Our dedication to accessibility is evident through the variety of available complaint submission methods, including self-service, email, telephone, and in-person interactions, supported by an assisted service feature. Information about how to complain is displayed

throughout the Council's housing estates to ensure transparency. With a customer centric ethos being driven across the Council at every level and within every service.

5.7.2 Integration of Complaints Policies and Training

The Council has effectively incorporated its complaints policies and the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code into the training programs for complaint investigators. We are committed to enhancing quality and resolution processes by ensuring we drive culture change in effective complaint handling to have a key focus within every service, allocating additional resources where necessary and executing service improvement strategies.

5.7.3 Strategic Improvements in Housing Service

The Housing Service, which receives the highest volume of complaints, has seen strategic enhancements. The establishment of a new Complaint, Dispute and Resolution team in May 2023 has been pivotal in bolstering resources and concentrating efforts on resolving housing-related issues and complaints.

We have improved our contact services so that our contact centre triages repairs requests with contractors so that they get the right person to attend at the first appointment to improve first time fix.

5.7.4 Feedback and Continuous Improvement

Highlighting the value of feedback and ongoing improvement, in December 2023 we implemented contact centre customer satisfaction surveys within Housing Repairs and plan to roll out council wide in June 2024. These surveys will yield insights into organisational challenges and shortcomings, directing our focus on enhancing service delivery and achieving early resident satisfaction.

5.7.5 Resource Allocation in Repair Services

During 23/24, the Council increased resources within the repair services, especially at the senior management level. We have prioritised improving the initial service experience to proactively resolve issues faced by residents and tenants, thereby reducing the incidence of complaints. We have increased our contractor resource where gaps were identified to drive repair improvements and resolve repairs effectively at the first point of contact.

5.7.6 Complaints Training

Training in Line with the Housing Ombudsman Code is ongoing, the Complaint, Dispute and Resolution Team, the Resident Experience Team continue to develop through training that aligns with the revisions to the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code, policies, and procedures.

5.7.7 Monitoring and Timely Response to Complaints

Complaints are meticulously monitored and tracked to guarantee timely responses. Good communication is in place and provided to residents when investigations continue beyond the expected timeframe.

5.7.8 Monitoring Processes in Housing Repairs

In April 2023 we introduced additional monitoring procedures in Housing repairs, focusing particularly on closed stage two complaints, and introduced this for stage 1 complaints in Q2 23/24. We are tracking and monitoring all outstanding actions after closure of a complaint to ensure resolution. This is actioned by the investigating officer at stage 1 and a dedicated resource at stage 2 who work closely with the Housing Teams. We are currently working towards the new LGSCO code requirements around tracking actions after resolution for all other service areas.

5.7.9 Investments and Business System Changes

Throughout 23/24 we have made changes to our complaint management systems to ensure comprehensive reporting is in place for all service areas. More recently developing a live data complaints dashboard which started in early 2024. This is currently in use as a pilot dashboard to prepare for council wide roll out in Q2 24/25. This is a highly beneficial dashboard for senior level oversight of complaints performance against targets, complaints received, trends and themes.

6. TENANT SATISFACTION MEASURES STANDARD

The Tenant Satisfaction Measures Standards (TSMS) requires the council, a registered provider of social housing, to report tenant satisfaction measures compliant with the housing regulator's requirements.

The TSMS for the reporting year 2023-24 are made up of:

- 12 Measures collected from tenant perception surveys
- 10 measures generated from management information

The TSMS return must be submitted by the 30 June 2024. The standard also requires providers to publish their performance against the TSMs to residents.

There are two measures that relate to complaints and below is our performance against these measures.

6.1 Complaint 1

Measure	Description	Calculation	Number of Complaints (A)	Relevant stock (B)	2023- 2024 Performance
CH01(a)	Complaints relative to landlord size (stage 1)	A/B x 1000	2,635	11,971	220.1

CH02(b)	Complaints relative to the landlord size (stage 2)	A/B x 1000	573	11,971	47.9
---------	--	------------	-----	--------	------

6.2 Complaint 2

Measure	Description	Calculation	Complaints Closed (A)	Responded on time (B)	2023-2024 Performance
CH02 (a)	Complaints responded to on time (stage 1)	B/A x 100	2,644	2,476	93.6%
CH02 (b)	Complaints responded to on time (stage 2)	B/A x 100	564	491	87.1%

7. COMPENSATION

7.1 There was a significant increase in compensation paid during the period April 2023 to March 2024 – up from £519,521.37 in 2022/2023 to £792,007.18. The tables below show the directorate breakdown by stage.

Directorate 01/04/23-31/03/24	Immediate resolution	Corporate stage 1	Corporate stage 2	Ombudsman	Childrens - Childrens stage 1	Childrens - Childrens stage 2	Childrens - Ombudsman	Total	%
Economy	£25.00	£451,156.62	£222,451.93	£78,005.43	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£751,638.98	94.90%
Environment services	£0.00	£303.20	£1,650.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£1,953.20	0.25%
Childrens services	£0.00	£8,305.00	£0.00	£3,100.00	£12,828.00	£2,576.00	£10,000.00	£36,809.00	4.65%
Corporate services	£0.00	£31.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£31.00	0.00%
Resident experience	£0.00	£250.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£250.00	0.03%
Finance	£0.00	£0.00	£175.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£175.00	0.02%
Resources	£0.00	£0.00	£250.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£250.00	0.03%
Adult social care	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£900.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£900.00	0.11%
Total	£25.00	£460,045.82	£224,526.93	£82,005.43	£12,828.00	£2,576.00	£10,000.00	£792,007.18	
%	0.00%	58.09%	28.35%	10.35%	1.62%	0.33%	1.26%		

7.2 The main increases in compensation across the council is within Economy. Compared to compensation paid in 2022/2023, there was an increase of 57% at stage 1, 32% at stage 2 and 178% at Ombudsman for Economy cases.

7.3 There has been improved adherence in 2023/2024 when investigating and referring to the internal Housing Compensation policy. This is referred to for each case at stage 1 and stage 2. Compensation is also considered and offered on cases going further back than the initial 6 months prior to a complaint, and complaint investigators can use discretion when evaluating compensation and the length of time if necessary. The investigator now takes into consideration the entire length of time the issue has been ongoing. As a Council we ensure we take into consideration the impact on the complainant's wellbeing, distress and any other impacts or disruption due to delays or failures. There is a clear internal compensation process in place.

7.4 In March 2024 we published three new compensation policies for corporate complaints, housing repairs and housing management. These policies are in place to ensure consistent adherence when calculating compensation and

transparency for our residents and customers. The link to the website page where all three compensation policies are published is detailed below.

[Complaints and compliments | London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham \(lbhf.gov.uk\)](https://www.lbhf.gov.uk/complaints-and-compliments)

- 7.5 The Complaints, Dispute and Resolution Team for Housing Services has made significant improvements to ensure excellent complaint handling across these service areas in 23/24 and continues to focus on this. Responding to complaints on time saw a marked improvement in the last quarter of the year after a ringfence of cases was cleared in August 2023. The performance has stabilised since whilst ensuring quality and adherence to process and policies is in place and being monitored. We have developed a new reporting suite with a live complaints dashboard which ensure wide access for all managers and relevant officers to have daily assurance of performance and see trends and themes on complaints being received.
- 7.6 We also recognise that we must have understanding and empathy for our residents and we must consider their wellbeing as part of the impact of a poor complaint or service resolution. The implementation of new compensation policies provides greater assurance to consistency and fairness when investigating complaints. Although compensation cannot change the past, we need to consider the impact that delays in resolution may have caused. We recognise the crucial link between stable housing, a comfortable home environment and general wellbeing. We encourage our residents to actively engage with us and many residents and customer are open about the impacts poor service and the need to complain has had on them. We have also implemented a customer satisfaction feedback survey across the Housing Repairs call centre to gather insight and ensure improvements continue to be made. This data helps us learn where we have gone wrong and what has gone well and build on great service delivery. General improvements around managing targets and performance in the Housing Repairs contact centre has driven an ethos for right first time and resolving where possible before any need to make a complaint.
- 7.7 Our focus is on ensuring that complaints receive a timely and complete resolution and that learning from complaints is embedded into our continuous service improvement. Prevention is key but also with a right first-time approach, updates on delays and managing customer expectations effectively throughout the whole end to end service journey, ensures a significant improved customer experience.

LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix A - Lead member's response to annual complaints report

Appendix B - Access to complaints

Appendix C - Annual self-assessment 2023/24

Appendix D - Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Annual Review Letter 2023/24

Appendix A – Lead members response to the 2023-2024 Annual Complaints Report

Our Corporate Plan contains our strategy to deliver the ambitions of the H&F Vision up to 2026. It sets out what we want to achieve for our residents and reaffirms the six values of the organisation that influences everything that we do. It provides a comprehensive and cross-cutting set of ambitions for the organisation. It explains how we will transform our services and invest money to help protect high quality essential services for our residents.

In all the services we provide, we are looking to advance our values and support those residents who need it most. We want our services to be of the highest standard and inclusive and accessible to all, whilst ensuring that our resources are used effectively, compliantly with our responsibilities, and are supported by good governance.

We recognise that things will go wrong, and we welcome the opportunity to learn from complaints to support improvements in our services. As is recognised in our annual report, our housing repairs service is the service that receives the highest number of complaints and we have made considerable changes and improvements to our housing services over the last year. We strive for consistently high quality, fair, and compassionate services. We want everyone to have a safe, decent warm home in a diverse and thriving community.

We are delivering an ambitious £729m investment programme to modernise our ageing housing stock. We are putting things right with our repairs and have invested heavily in additional repairs contractor capacity. Our new management is ensuring that contractors complete quality work punctually and are more responsive to our residents, especially people with vulnerabilities or support needs.

We established a Housing Hub in June 2023 to increase focus and expertise in compassionate customer service and complaints handling. Since September, all repair complaints have been responded to in time and we continue to incorporate residents' feedback into our practice. This initiative is a crucial component of our broader efforts to foster cultural change within the Housing service, rebuilding trust with residents affected by previous poor performance.

Ensuring we are learning from complaints is a priority for us and whilst good progress has been made this year, we will continue to focus on reducing causes for residents to complain about our services.

While we have improved, our journey of change still has far to go. We will continue to listen to residents to guide our long-term plans. We will report progress to council scrutiny committees, ensure compliance with national legislation, and seek best practice from external bodies, as we strengthen our services to meet residents' needs.

Appendix B - Access to Complaints April 2023 to March 2024

1. Contact Channels

1.1 The Council enables residents to make complaints through a variety of channels - 62% came through the Council's self-service form and 32% via email – email includes updates and follow ups. The Council's main contact centre uses the self-service form to log complaints received over the phone.

Contact method	Adult Social Care complaint	Children Act complaint	Comment	Complaint	Compliment	Enquiry	Total
Email	5	33	10	1,673	246	501	2,468
Facebook	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Form	0	0	0	1	1	0	2
In person	0	0	4	5	0	1	10
Letter	0	0	0	11	0	5	16
Other	0	0	0	1	2	0	3
Phone	1	4	1	296	44	82	428
Self service	2	6	345	3,983	106	315	4,757
Total	8	43	360	5,971	399	904	7,685

2. Equalities data

2.1 The Council's online self-service form asks residents to provide demographic data about themselves so that we can ensure equitable access to complaints. It is not mandatory to complete these questions and complaints received through other channels will not have captured this information. Nevertheless, the data we do hold shows:

- 58% female, 38% male with the remaining preferring not to say or other gender identity/transgender
- 70% were heterosexual, 4% gay, lesbian or bisexual with 26% preferring not to say their sexual orientation
- Only 5 complaints registered that they had a disability, so this is an area to explore access and awareness
- The breakdown for complaints made by ethnicity is detailed in the table below.

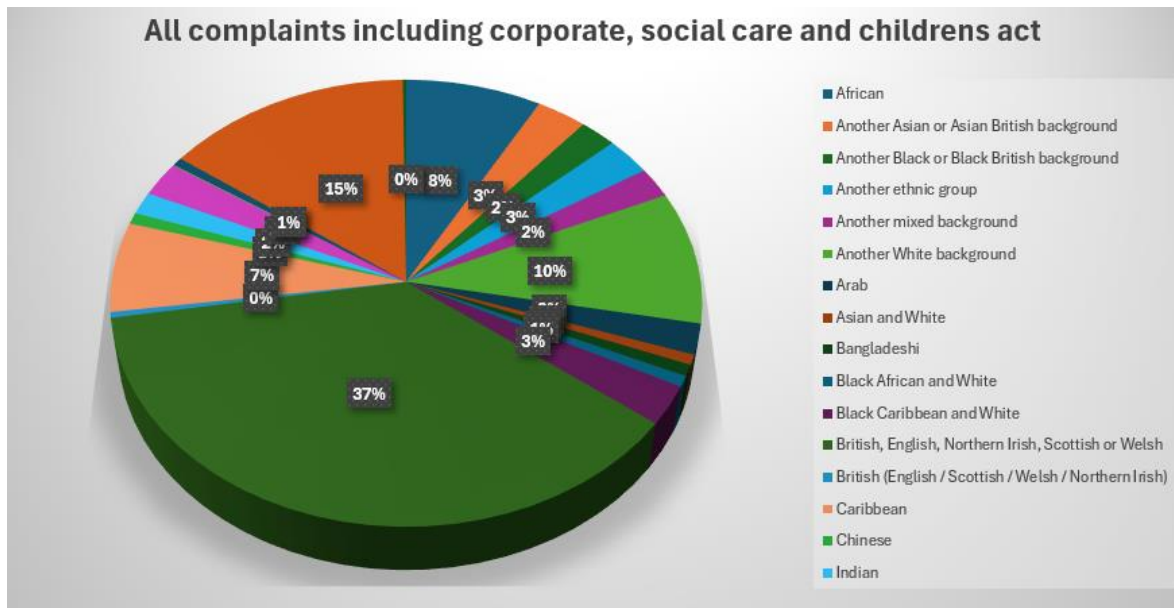


Figure 1- Equalities data 2023-2024

2.2 It is important that the Council ensures equity of access to our complaints and dispute resolution processes and that people are not disproportionately impacted by our decisions. The equalities analysis of complaints data for the year 2023/24 suggests that there is good access by a range of ethnicities and genders but there is a need to continue to ensure that disabled people are aware of and can access the complaints process.

3. Compliments

3.1 The Council endeavours to deliver good quality services and excellent customer care. The table below shows the number of compliments received over the year with over 500 received through the formal channels. 43% of compliments were for a high-quality service being delivered and 40% for good customer care.

Compliments	Total received 23/24
Adult Social Care	197
Children's services	48
Corporate Services	79
Economy	120
Environment	100
Finance	32
Resident Experience Team	3
Total	579