

## **Annual Complaints Report 2022/2023 (published - subject to final sign off by the end April 2024)**

This report summarises the Council's performance and learning from resident complaints during the period 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023. It includes all complaints covering stage 1, 2, Ombudsman and statutory complaints. It is a statutory duty to publish this information.

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### **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 260,000 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, Childrens's Services and Corporate Complaints Dec 2022 \(lbhf.gov.uk\)](#)

- 1.6 The Audit Committee has recently noted the Council's self-assessment against the Housing Ombudsman (HO) Complaint Handling Code of practice. The Housing Ombudsman (HO) and Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) have recently consulted on a draft Joint Complaint Handling Code and the changes from that are due to be implemented in April

2024. This report and the performance data within it relates to the policies in place during the period April 2022 to March 2023.

- 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 Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman published its Annual review for LBHF last year and a report went to Audit Committee on 12 September 2023. ([Public Pack\) Agenda Document for Audit Committee, 12/09/2023 19:00 \(lbhf.gov.uk\)](#). This demonstrated that performance of the Council has improved when compared to 2021/2022 and our performance is better than the average for similar authorities and in the top four when compared to all London Boroughs.

## 2. THE OVERALL PICTURE

- 2.1 Summary of complaints closed during the period April 2022 to March 2023 at all stages. (Figures in brackets are the previous year)

Complaint stage	22/23 Complaints closed	22/23 Complaints closed within timescale	22/23 % completed within timescale	22/23 % upheld
Stage 1	3782 (3180)	3138 (2059)	83% (65%)	64% (58%)
Stage 2	547 (393)	269 (125)	49% (32%)	65% (51%)

- 2.2 As can be seen from the above figures, the Council closed 3,782 Stage 1 complaints during the 2022-2023 year, a 14% increase on the year before. 83% were completed within the policy complaint response timescales and 64% were upheld. 547 (14%) were escalated to stage 2, and 49% of these were completed within the timescale. The number of stage 2 complaints closed also increased from the previous year by 19%. There has been an improvement in 2022/2023 compared to 2021/2022 in the timelessness of responses at stage 1 and stage 2 complaints being closed within the corporate timescales. With an improvement of 14% on stage 1 timeliness and 11.5% on stage 2 complaint response timeliness.
- 2.3 The increase in the number of complaints reflects the fact that the previous year was still impacted by the covid pandemic with all services returning to normal levels of delivery, but many were still experiencing backlogs.
- 2.4 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 Economy in place for the last 12 months, 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 2022-2023

#### 3.1 Stage 1 complaints

Please note that these are broken down by the departmental structures at the time and therefore do not always mirror current responsibilities (e.g., Resident Services has since moved from Environment to Corporate Services). The Resident Experience Team is listed separately as it holds complex multi-service complaints that extend beyond one department.

Stage 1 complaints	22/23 Complaints received	22/23 Complaints closed	22/23 Complaints closed within timescale	22/23 % completed within timescale	22/23 % upheld
Adult Social Care	6	4	4	100%	25%
Children's Services	27	24	14*	58%	45%
Economy	2670	2478	1975	80%	73%
Environment	1204	1156	1060	92%	46%
Finance	65	60	48	80%	40%
Resident Experience Team	17	13	8	62%	46%
Resources	49	47	29	62%	53%
<b>Total</b>	<b>4038</b>	<b>3782</b>	<b>3138</b>	<b>83%</b>	<b>63%</b>

\*Closed within the 15-day timescale

3.1.1 Over 65% of stage 1 complaints related to the Economy department and 31% to Environment. The figures for Economy are broken down further below, with most of these stage 1 complaints relating to Housing, particularly Repairs. In 2022/23 the Repairs Service delivered 57,492 reactive repairs across our homes and received 2,321 stage 1 and 2 complaints equating to 4% service dissatisfaction. A further breakdown of the complaints is in the table below.

Stage 1 complaints	22/23 Complaints received	22/23 Complaints closed	22/23 Complaints closed within timescale	22/23 % completed within timescale	22/23 % upheld
All housing	2627	2420	1924	80%	73%

<i>Housing repairs</i>	1977	1816	1394	77%	83%
<i>Housing (non-repairs)</i>	650	599	525	88%	46%
Economy (other)	43	58	51	88%	40%
<b>Total Economy</b>	<b>2670</b>	<b>2478</b>	<b>1975</b>	<b>80%</b>	<b>73%</b>

3.1.2 The service improvement plans in Section 6 Organisational Learnings, demonstrates the work that we have underway to improve our Housing service and thereby reduce the number of complaints received.

3.1.3 A review of Environment cases received show that the highest volumes of stage 1 complaints related to waste services at 26%, 19% for parking, and 13% for revenues and benefits (now moved to corporate services).

3.1.4 We received a total of 321 complaints for the waste service which mainly relate to missed or incomplete refuse and recycling collections. During 22/23 we collected 3.4m bins which equates to a low dissatisfaction rate of 0.00009%. As detailed in Section 9 Organisational Learnings we made changes to our waste contract during quarter four and are already seeing significantly lower missed bin reports under the new arrangements.

3.1.5 We received a total of 232 complaints for the parking service which were related to penalty charge notices (PCN), resident visitor permits, 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 36,000 telephone calls and 100,000 pieces of correspondence relating to PCN fines received during the period 22/23.

3.1.6 The Council's revenues and benefits team received 166 complaints during the period 22/23. The team process over 1m transactions annually and receive a relatively low volume of complaints relating to the service which equates to a low dissatisfaction rate of 0.0001%.

### 3.2 Stage 2 complaints

<b>Stage 2 complaints</b>	<b>22/23 Complaints Received</b>	<b>22/23 Complaints closed</b>	<b>22/23 Complaints closed with timescale</b>	<b>22/23 % completed within timescale</b>	<b>22/23 % upheld</b>
Adult Social Care	2	2	2	100%	0%
Children's Services	10	10	6*	60%	70%

Economy	426	455	192	42%	81%
Environment	75	69	60	87%	29%
Finance	11	9	7	78%	33%
Resident Experience Team	2	3	1	33%	67%
Resources	1	1	1	100%	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>527</b>	<b>549</b>	<b>269</b>	<b>49%</b>	<b>78%</b>

\*Closed within the 20-day timescale

3.2.1 Over 80% of stage 2 complaints related to the Economy department and 14% to Environment. The figures for Economy can be broken down further as below, with 98% of Economy's stage 2 complaints related to Housing, mostly repairs:

Stage 2 complaints	22/23 Complaints received	22/23 Complaints closed	22/23 Complaints closed within timescale	22/23 % completed within timescale	22/23 % upheld
All housing	417	446	186	42%	82%
<i>Housing repairs</i>	344	372	150	40%	92%
<i>Housing (non-repairs)</i>	73	74	36	49%	47%
Economy (other)	9	9	6	67%	44%
<b>Total Economy</b>	<b>426</b>	<b>455</b>	<b>192</b>	<b>42%</b>	<b>81%</b>

3.2.2 A review of Environment cases received show that 24% of received stage 2 cases in Environment were for parking services, 18% for waste and 16% for revenues and benefits (since July 2023 moved to corporate services).

### 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	22/23 Completed Investigations	22/23 Amount completed on time	22/23 % completed on time
Stage 1	31	19	61%
Stage 2	14	11	79%

Stage 3	8	8	100%
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- 3.3.1.1 Key actions arising from learning from statutory and corporate complaints:
- Clearer case recording of parental consent needed, especially where lack of consent is overridden in the best interests of the child(ren).
  - Standards of Care procedure for foster carers to be revised with clearer timescales.
  - Foster Carer Handbook to be updated, especially with clear guidance on how foster carers may complain.
- 3.3.1.2 Children’s services received Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) decisions on nine complaints in 2022/23.
- 3.3.1.3 Three complaints were from the same parent, with the Ombudsman choosing to separate the issues into distinct areas. Although an historic complaint, substantial process and procedural change as a result of the learning has been put in place and shared across children’s services senior leadership team.
- 3.3.1.4 A final decision following investigation was made on a complaint about the delay in the annual review of a child’s Education Health Care Plan (EHCP) and consequent impact of delay to right of appeal to the Special Education Needs and Disability (SEND) Tribunal. The Ombudsman found no fault that not had already been identified by our internal investigations, agreeing that the apology and offer of £150 compensation was sufficient remedy. In this instance, our internal complaints process had worked in that fault had been discerned and satisfactory remedy offered before escalation to the Ombudsman.
- 3.3.1.5 Five further complaints escalated to the Ombudsman were not investigated, with the LGSCO agreeing with either our internal findings and remedy or our decision to not accept the issues raised as complaints.

### 3.3.2 Adult Social Care complaints

- 3.3.2.1 Adult Social Care received 98 complaints under the Local Authority Social Services and National Health Service Complaints (England) Regulations 2009. 59% of complaints were upheld entirely or in part which is lower than the findings of the LGSCO of 75% (in relation to Adult Social Care) in their Annual Review of ASC decisions during 2022-23.
- 3.3.2.2 Key actions arising from learning from statutory and corporate complaints
- Staff have been reminded of processes in respect of assessment requests, Mental Capacity Assessment, Lasting Power of Attorney, and placement planning,

- Processes were reviewed and updated between hospital Social Work Teams and the Safeguarding Team and the Integrated Discharge Team to ensure that a more robust approach to discharging residents with complex care needs and safeguarding concerns is taken.
  - Home Care Providers have reminded staff to follow company policy on attendance at commissioned times / missed calls, keeping accurate logs of calls / visits, keeping the office updated on changes, and ensuring consistency of care through regular carers being attached to the package of care. Additionally, providers have considered their response to challenging customers and management of high volume of emails.
- 3.3.2.3 Adult Social care received Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) decisions on eight complaints in 2022/23. Two of which were upheld.
- 3.3.2.4 An upheld decision was found for a delay in reviewing a care plan, and for failing to properly co-ordinate during a home move. The Council apologised and made a payment of £400 for distress and uncertainty. Additionally, a new procedure has been put in place to ensure care plan review requests are monitored. Staff dealing with care plan review requests were reminded to properly communicate decisions in writing.
- 3.3.2.5 An upheld decision was found in relation to a Mental Health Provider. This decision was not made public by the LGSCO although they record no further action required as the Council had already remedied during our complaint processes.
- 3.3.2.6 Six further complaints escalated to the Ombudsman were not investigated, and the LGSCO either referred back to the Council, found the complaint to be incomplete or closed after initial enquiries.
- 3.3.2.7 235 compliments were received across all Adult Social Care.

## **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 Due to the Covid pandemic there were significant delays in both Ombudsman investigating complaints therefore complaints usually relate to the previous year (2021/22).

4.3 The final determinations received in 22/23 for the LGSCO and the Housing Ombudsman are detailed Section 4.4.10 and 4.5.9, separated into the individual business areas.

#### 4.4 Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO)

4.4.1 The LGSCO published its Annual review for LBHF last year and a report went to Audit Committee on 12 September 2023. ([Public Pack\)Agenda Document for Audit Committee, 12/09/2023 19:00 \(lbhf.gov.uk\)](#))

4.4.2 This demonstrated that performance of the Council has improved when compared to 2021/2022 and our performance is better than the average for similar authorities and in the top four when compared to all London Boroughs.

4.4.3 During the period (April 22 – Mar 23) the LGSCO received 88 cases (80 cases in 21/22). The table below sets out the overall summary by service and the outcomes:

<b>LGSCO cases received</b>	<b>During the period April 22 – March 23</b>
Adult Social Care	8
Benefits and Tax	2
Corporate & Other	3
Education and Children's	12
Environment and Public Protection	7
Highways and Transport	10
Housing	38
Other (LGSO category)	1
Planning and Development	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>88</b> <b>(80 cases in 21/22)</b>

During the period, the LGSCO concluded 88 cases but only 28 were investigated fully (17 in 21/22) 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.

4.4.5 LGSCO cases determined during the period April 2022 to March 2023

<b>Business Area</b>	<b>22/23 Number of final det. Q1</b>	<b>22/23 Number of final det. Q2</b>	<b>22/23 Number of final det. Q3</b>	<b>22/23 Number of final det. Q4</b>	<b>22/23 Total</b>
Adult Social Care	1	2		1	4
Children's Services	1	5	1	2	9
Economy - Development Management	5	1	1		7



Economy – Maintenance	1		1		2
Economy – Housing Advice & Assessment	1	1	2	2	6
Economy – Housing Strategy		1		1	2
Economy – Planning Policy		2	1		3
Economy – Planning and Regeneration		1			1
Economy – Temporary Accommodation		2	1	1	4
Economy – Tenancy Management North		1			1
Environment – Billing and Admin				1	1
Environment - Highways		1			1
Environment - Parking		4	2	3	9
Environment – Transportation Policy				2	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>52</b>

4.4.6 Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman cases where fault was found.

<b>Business Area</b>	<b>22/23 Number of final det. Q1</b>	<b>22/23 Number of final det. Q2</b>	<b>22/23 Number of final det. Q3</b>	<b>22/23 Number of final det. Q4</b>	<b>22/23 Total</b>
Adult Social Care	1				1
Children’s Services				2	2
Economy – Development Management	1				1
Economy – Maintenance	1				1
Economy – Housing Advice & Assessment			1		1
Economy – Planning Policy			1		1
Economy – Temporary Accommodation				1	1
Environment -Parking				1	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>9</b>
Overall fault rate	3/7 (43%)	0/4 (0%)	2/4 (50%)	4/7 (57%)	9/22 (41%)

4.4.7 Of the 28 decisions made in the period, 18 of those were upheld. This means our percentage of decisions upheld is 64% (76% in 21/22). The average for

similar authorities is 77%. We have improved since last year and are better than similar authorities.

- 4.4.8 The LGSCO also reports on compliance with recommendations and orders, and we had 100% compliance compared to an average in similar authorities of 99%. We have maintained our 100% performance and are performing better than similar authorities.
- 4.4.9 The LGSCO reports on cases where the authority has satisfactorily resolved the issue prior to the decision being issued. We had 28% resolved (8% in 21/22) and this compares to an average of 15%. We have improved since last year and are performing better than similar authorities.
- 4.4.10 The LGSCO does not currently differentiate its upheld findings into severe or maladministration etc.
- 4.4.11 There were no Public Interest Reports published involving Hammersmith and Fulham.

## **4.5 Housing Ombudsman (HO)**

- 4.5.1 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).
- 4.5.2 In March 2022, the HO published its revised Complaint Handling Code which was first introduced in June 2020. This sets out requirements for member landlords that will allow them to respond to complaints effectively and fairly.
- 4.5.3 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.
- 4.5.4 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.
- 4.5.5 The HO's Complaint Handling Code and the Council's self-assessment can be found at: [Complaints and compliments | London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham \(lbhf.gov.uk\)](https://www.lbhf.gov.uk/complaints-and-compliments)

4.5.6 Housing Ombudsman cases determined during the period April 2022 to March 2023

<b>Business Area</b>	<b>22/23 Number of final det. Q1</b>	<b>22/23 Number of final det. Q2</b>	<b>22/23 Number of final det. Q3</b>	<b>22/23 Number of final det. Q4</b>	<b>22/23 Total</b>
Economy- Allocations and Lettings		1			<b>1</b>
Economy – Maintenance	5	10	6	8	<b>29</b>
Economy – Planned Maintenance				1	<b>1</b>
Economy – Tenancy Management North	1			1	<b>2</b>
Economy – Tenancy Management South	3	1	1		<b>5</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>38</b>
Overall fault rate	7/9 (78%)	10/12 (83%)	7/7 (100%)	9/10 (90%)	33/38 (86%)

*\* Total cases determined differs by 4 cases from the HO Landlord Performance Report due to reporting monitoring periods*

4.5.7 The HO Landlord Performance Report for Hammersmith & Fulham notes that they closed 47 cases, of which 42 cases were investigated (the remaining 5 were outside their jurisdiction). Of the 42 cases investigated, there were 74 individual findings – 12 severe maladministration, 33 maladministration, 17 service failure, 2 redress, 2 mediation and 8 found no maladministration. The HO considers everything at service failure or above as maladministration, so this reflects a maladministration rate of 84% (62 out of 74 findings). This is above the national average of 55% and an increase on the previous year of 54%. They awarded £41,190 in compensation. There were no Complaint Handling Failure Orders issued by the HO during the year and 100% compliance with orders.

4.5.8 The main categories of findings by the HO were 50% property condition, 31% complaint handling and 7% anti-social behaviour.

4.5.9 The nature of the backlogs in HO investigations during this time means that most cases that were investigated related to the pandemic period (21/22). Nevertheless, the Council has recognised that many of its homes need repair with a significant backlog caused by the restrictions during the pandemic period. This has been coupled with challenges around the availability of tradespeople and the performance of contractors. These are being addressed by the service as part of the service improvement plan. Furthermore, the Council has looked to strengthen its complaints handling processes with the creation of a dedicated dispute resolution team in Housing services. (See Section 6 for more information).

- 4.6 In 22/23 41% of Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman decisions found fault. 89% of Housing Ombudsman decisions found fault and 5 of those cases included severe maladministration findings.

## 5 COMPENSATION

- 5.1 There was a significant increase in compensation paid during the period April 2022 to March 2023 – up from £198,180.65 in 2021/2022 to £519,521.37 in 2022/2023. The tables below show the directorate breakdown by stage.

Directorate	Corporate stage 1 £	Corporate stage 2 £	Ombudsman £	Childrens - Childrens stage 1 £	Childrens - Childrens stage 2 £	Childrens - Childrens stage 3 £	Total £	%
Economy	287,352.72	168,066.62	28,005.00	-	-	-	<b>483,274.34</b>	93.02%
Resources	27.00	-	-	-	-	-	<b>27.00</b>	0.01%
Environment service	10.00	-	-	-	-	-	<b>10.00</b>	0.00%
Childrens Services	1,125.00	9,850.00	-	737.00	19,828.03	400.00	<b>31,940.03</b>	6.15%
Finance	-	20.00	250.00	-	-	-	<b>270.00</b>	0.05%
Adult social care	-	-	3,850.00	-	-	-	<b>3,850.00</b>	0.74%
<b>Total £</b>	<b>288,514.72</b>	<b>177,936.62</b>	<b>32,105.00</b>	<b>737.00</b>	<b>19,828.03</b>	<b>400.00</b>	<b>519,521.37</b>	
<b>%</b>	<b>55.53%</b>	<b>34.25%</b>	<b>6.18%</b>	<b>0.14%</b>	<b>3.82%</b>	<b>0.08%</b>		

- 5.2 The main increases in compensation across the directorates is within Economy. Compared to compensation paid in 2021/2022. There was an increase of 54% at stage 1, 73% at stage 2 and 55% at Ombudsman for Economy cases.
- 5.3 There has been improved adherence in 2022/2023 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. 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 and any other impacts or disruption due to delays or failures.
- 5.4 We have also been dealing with a significant volume of cases particularly at stage 2 since March 2022. With an average of 110 cases open at any one time this caused some delays in closing cases within the corporate timescales, which also meant increases in compensation when closed. The volume of stage 2 cases opened remained throughout the year with 99 cases being ringfenced in May 2023 and targeted resources and focus to close. All ringfenced cases were closed by the end September 2023.
- 5.5 We also recognise that we must have understanding and empathy for our residents and we must consider their wellbeing as part of the impacts of a poor complaint or service resolution. 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.

- 5.6 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 and we are identifying and prioritising the underlying causes for poor service delivery as part of our service improvement plans. Section 6 provides details on our service improvement initiatives.

## **6 ORGANISATIONAL LEARNING**

- 6.1 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) (52%)
- Failure to do something (14%)
- Lack of or poor communication (14%)
- Service quality (10%)
- Staff conduct and behaviour (3%)
- Disagree with charge or payment issue (3%)
- Disagree with council policy (3%)

- 6.2 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 services and initiatives that we have underway.

### **6.3 Repairs**

- 6.3.1 During 2022/23, complaints numbers were impacted by the withdrawal of one of our repairs contractors that covered circa 5,500 homes and a transfer of these homes to a different contractor.

- 6.3.2 The main cause of service failure during this period was challenges in working through our major contractors to consistently deliver a sufficient service to our residents within agreed timescales. This led to resident dissatisfaction.

- 6.3.3 Service improvements were undertaken in 2022/2023 with tighter operational management of contractors including H&F offering some new financial incentives, new additional specialist contractors for complex works, and creating a dedicated Damp and Mould team. Late in the financial year, H&F changed the senior management in repairs as part of major investment plans to evolve and drive higher performance from our repair's contracts, setting foundations for much improved repairs performance in 2023/24.

- 6.3.4 Against this backdrop of challenges with contractors, in 2022/23, several exercises were conducted in Housing and Corporate Complaints to improve complaint handling at all stages, reflecting the relative responsibilities of each

team. Work was undertaken to improve complaint handling and timeliness, including improving communication and information exchange between teams, and better policy adherence, but further improvements were required to be made 2023/24 as reflected in feedback from the Housing Ombudsman Service during 2022/23.

## **6.4 Housing Advice**

- 6.4.1 Over the past year, demand for Homeless Prevention and Temporary Accommodation Services has increased significantly because of higher private landlord rents, the cost-of-living crisis, landlord evictions, and fleeing from domestic violence which are national trends. Of the total homelessness cases we are presented with, we have been able to sustain approximately half of those tenancies.
- 6.4.2 The demand for accommodation is still outstripping supply due to prevailing market conditions not only in our borough but across pan London.
- 6.4.3 There is need to transform the Homelessness Prevention Service Complaints Service so that we can increase early intervention and prevention, improve the quality of homelessness assessments, and reduce the numbers going into temporary accommodation.
- 6.4.4 We will be reviewing and developing a homelessness prevention toolkit and redesign and empower front line officers to increase homelessness prevention outcomes.

## **6.5 Wider Economy services**

- 6.5.1 Most complaints in Economy were in Housing. All other services received a relatively low number of complaints, though, as expected, these were typically higher in more resident-facing services like development management, which oversees planning applications on which there are sometimes a mix of resident views. Figures reported to government show that H&F's Planning Service is high performing in terms of managing its workload. Also, in 2022/23 the Strategic Director's office undertook additional roles in helping to organise and move forward complaint responses in Economy teams, which helped improve timeliness, along with additional internal communication within Economy on the importance of complaint handling.

## **6.6 Environment – Waste**

- 6.6.1 We estimate that we carry out 11,000,000 individual collections of waste and recycling per annum across both kerbside and communal properties, and the services provided are one of the few universal services that all residents receive. In this context, the number of issues in waste that are reported as a stage 1 level complaint are low, however our focus is on reducing these wherever possible.

6.6.2 Most complaints received for the waste service relate to missed or incomplete refuse and recycling collections. To improve our services, we thoroughly investigate each complaint and where they are upheld institute a monitoring period of 3-4 weeks post-remedy by both council officers and supervisors from our contractor to ensure that remedial action has been effective.

6.6.3 With regard to street cleansing complaints we map all complaints relating to weeding and leaf fall to assist with our seasonal cleansing plans for future years. Where we receive complaints about fly-tipped waste we share the information with enforcement colleagues to help inform their tasking processes.

6.6.4 General trends and isolated incidents are regularly analysed to ensure that service improvement is ongoing. Our new contract, which began at the end of January 2023, reflects the importance of this and the benefits are already being realised, for example complaints relating to weeding have halved in the first year of the new contract and missed collections have been significantly lower under the new arrangements.

## 6.7 Environment – Parking

6.7.1 Complaints received by Parking Services are highly varied. They range from queries about Penalty Charge Notices, resident visitor permits, action taken by the Blue Badge Fraud Team, to information and advice about new parking schemes in the borough.

6.7.2 As a service that deals with a lot of contentious issues, Parking Services have focused on improving customer service and working with individuals rather than merely stating the law and applying it. We have implemented staff training and guidance focused on the Council’s core values which has resulted in an agile, adaptive, and compassionate service.

## 6.8 Children’s Corporate Complaints (not including statutory complaints)

6.8.1 Corporate complaints cover those aspects of Children’s Services work that are not statutory, with the most common area being provision for children and young people with special educational needs (SEN).

Complaint stage	22/23 Completed Investigations	22/23 Amount completed on time	22/23 % completed on time
Stage 1	24	14	58%
Stage 2	10	6	60%

6.8.2 Key actions arising from learning from statutory and corporate complaints

- Where a parent raises challenge over provision, the Education, Health and Care (EHC) Co-ordinator needs to support discussions to agree next steps rather than ‘accept’ non-engagement. This echoes more general learning from complaints where practitioners need to be conscious of the limits of

being overly parent focussed and set out a clear way forward for families where there is not a shared understanding of support needs.

- Instances of provision specified in EHC plans not being delivered, especially occupational therapy and speech & language therapy. Recruitment issues were either resolved or parents reimbursed where they had funded support themselves, but key learning shared among the EHC Casework Team was that while recruitment of school staff delivering SEN support is the responsibility of the school, the Council has a responsibility to ensure delivery of provision within EHCPs.

6.8.3 Complaints were made by various service users including family members, foster carers and young people, but the majority of completed complaints across Corporate and the Children Act at all stages were from parents or carers (85%). All young people that complained had advocacy support.

6.8.4 Complainants usually makes several complaints in one 'complaint' and reporting practice in 2022/23 was to determine whether the more substantive issue was *upheld*, *partially upheld* or *not upheld*. As CHS complainants are increasingly asked to agree a statement of complaint, it is not for the Complaints Team to determine which complaint is of most importance to the complainant and we have moved in 2023/24 to the below categorisation to better understand the proportion of complaints that are upheld (i.e. where we have found fault):

- Upheld (100%)
- Majority upheld (more than 75%)
- Partially upheld (25 – 75%)
- Minority upheld (less than 25%)
- Not upheld (0%)
- No findings
- Rejected
- Withdrawn

As such, significant fault found in complaint outcomes in 2022/23 is reflected in the key actions arising from learning above.

6.8.5 The timeliness of complaint investigations, especially at Stage 1, is below the standard we expect, and we will be addressing this further throughout 2023/24 by providing training and guidance to managers so they can support Heads of Service or equivalent in investigating complaints. However, improved monitoring and management of complaints over the year is reflected in all Stage 2 Children Act complaint responses being in time in quarters 3 and 4, as were all Stage 2 Corporate responses in quarter 3 (with none due for completion in quarter 4).



## **6.9 Adults (not covered by statutory complaints)**

- 6.9.1 Adult Social Care have provided refresher training/guidance in relation to mental health support, importance of up-to-date next of kin details, Mental Health Capacity, Lasting Power of Attorney, placement planning and charging.
- 6.9.2 Procedures and staff guidance has been updated in relation to the transfer of cases, joint working in safeguarding and how to manage resident's consent. Many reminders of procedure have taken place in Home Care and in one case an action plan was used to monitor improvements in the quality of recording.

## **6.10 Resources Directorate (since renamed 'Corporate Services')**

- 6.10.1 In 2022/2023 the Directorate of Resources included support services across the Council, this included Digital Services, Communication and People and Talent (HR). Although volumes of complaints for these services at the time were low, there was a need to improve the response times to meet the corporate timescales at stage 1. The responses were comprehensive, resulting with only one case at stage 2 for the whole year and no Ombudsman cases.
- 6.10.2 The whole Council has focussed on timelessness to complaints over the last few years. Corporate Services now includes the Resident Experience Team who provide regular weekly reporting on case volumes and drive improvement across all directorates, this included Resources at this time. The age profile of case data was shared weekly and department managers were instrumental in improving the culture around complaint handling and responsiveness. With a clear steer and focus from the Strategic Leadership Team that all services should take ownership and drive improvements for residents and customers. Further training and guidance are available from Managers directly or through the Learning and Development Teams linked to the Resident Experience Teams, with bespoke training sessions available for teams to attend. A focus on continued improvements and the delivery of targets to meet the KPIs continues.

## **6.11 Finance**

- 6.11.1 There are a limited number of customer facing functions within Finance and as such the number of complaints tend to be small. In 2022/23 there were 64 complaints at stage 1 for Finance, of which 81% were for housing rental income related issues, 17% for leaseholder income and charges, and the remainder split across insurance and pension funds.
- 6.11.2 For the housing rental income complaints, responses are issued in a timely manner and moving forward managers will be able to drill down on causes of complaints to monitor and address any common trends and learning. The implementation of rents online in February 2024 will support residents (who are able) to self-serve and access a range of rent and housing services online.

## **6.12 Whole organisational complaints handling**

- 6.12.1 Over the past two years, the Council has dedicated substantial efforts to enhance its complaints handling procedures. Significant progress has been achieved in reviewing the initial contact procedures and timelessness of recording complaints. A comprehensive review of the LBHF website's complaints information has been conducted. Our commitment to accessibility is reflected in the diverse channels available for submitting complaints, encompassing self-service, email, telephone, and face-to-face interactions, complemented by an assisted service option. Clear communication on how to raise complaints is prominently displayed across Council's housing estates, ensuring transparency.
- 6.12.2 The council has seamlessly integrated its complaints policies and the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code into the training and guidance provided to complaint investigators. Our ongoing commitment to quality and resolution improvement involves fostering cultural changes, allocating additional resources, and implementing service improvement plans.
- 6.12.3 Within the Housing Service, where most complaints are received, strategic changes and improvements have been implemented. The introduction of a new Dispute and Resolution team in May 2023 has been instrumental in reinforcing resources and ensuring a targeted focus on addressing housing-related concerns and complaints.
- 6.12.4 Emphasising the importance of feedback and continuous learning, the third quarter of 22/23 saw the introduction of satisfaction surveys specific to complaints. This initiative will provide valuable insights into organisations pinch points and failures, guiding our efforts towards delivering improved services and resident satisfaction from the outset.
- 6.12.5 Throughout 22/23, the Council has increased resources across the repair services, particularly at the senior management level. A key focus has been placed on enhancing services during the initial contact to proactively address resident and tenant issues, minimising the need for complaints.
- 6.12.6 In May 2022, officers in the Resident Experience Team and other stage 1 investigating officers received training aligned with the new changes to the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code introduced in April 2022.
- 6.12.7 Complaints are vigilantly monitored and tracked to ensure timely responses, with holding responses issued to residents when investigations are ongoing, and resolutions extend beyond the designated timescale.
- 6.12.8 September 2022 witnessed a concentrated effort to enhance communication with complainants, including the introduction of personal contact by the investigating officer at stage 2, introducing this approach at stage 1 in late 2023.
- 6.12.9 April 2023 marked the implementation of additional monitoring processes in Housing repairs, specifically targeting closed stage two complaints where

repairs remain outstanding. These measures further reinforce our commitment to comprehensive complaint resolution.

6.12.10 We continue to work widely across the Council to improvement complaint handling and collaborate within all the Directorates to drive change and learn from feedback. With the introduction of an aligned Ombudsman Handling Code in 2024 this will ensure the Council are on a continuous journey to improve outcomes at any stage in the complaint process.

## **LIST OF APPENDICES**

Appendix A – Access to Complaints

Appendix B – Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman annual review letter 2022/23

## Appendix A – Access to Complaints April 2022 to March 2023

### 1. Contact Channels

1.1 The Council enables residents to make complaints through a variety of channels - 70% came through the Council's self-service form and 28% via email. However, it should be noted that the Council's main contact centre uses the self-service form to log complaints received over the phone.

Contact method	Corporate Complaint	Adult Social Care complaint	Children Act complaint	Comment	Compliment
Email	1,304	3	34	16	183
Facebook	1	0	1	0	1
Form	1	0	0	0	0
In person	2	0	0	0	2
Letter	22	0	1	0	3
Other	0	0	0	0	2
Phone	93	0	2	0	18
Self service	3,253	0	0	176	55
Twitter	1	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,677</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>192</b>	<b>264</b>

### 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:

- 55% female, 38% male with the remaining preferring not to say or other gender identity/transgender
- 52% were White British or other white ethnic group, 17% were Black or Black British, 6% Asian or Asian British, 6% mixed ethnicity and 15% preferred not to say. There was no statistical difference in complaint outcome for different ethnicities.
- 70% were heterosexual, 4% gay, lesbian or bisexual with 26% preferring not to say their sexual orientation
- Only 4 complaints registered that they had a disability, so this is an area to explore access and awareness

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 2022/23 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. 56% of compliments were for a high-quality service being delivered and 28% for good customer care.

<b>Compliments 22/23</b>	<b>Q1</b>	<b>Q2</b>	<b>Q3</b>	<b>Q4</b>	<b>Total</b>
Adult Social Care	73	63	64	34	234
Children's Services	10	23	13	10	56
Economy	15	9	17	20	61
Environment	25	20	31	20	96
Finance	6	1	7	6	20
Resident Experience Team	15	0	1	1	17
Resources	2	4	10	6	22
<b>Total</b>	<b>146</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>143</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>506</b>