

Improving Complaints Handling: Lambeth Council's Progress Report on Housing Ombudsman Recommendations

Progress Against Housing Ombudsman Recommendations

HO Recommendation 1: Amend its complaint policy and processes to comply with the new statutory joint Complaint Handling Code from the Housing Ombudsman and Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman. This includes its handling of Member’s Enquiries alongside formal complaints.

Actions Taken:	Outcome Achieved:	Delivery Date:	Status:	Next Steps:
The complaints policy has been revised to align with the statutory joint Complaint Handling Code. Included the handling of Member’s Enquiries alongside complaints, ensuring a streamlined approach that treats expressions of dissatisfaction as complaints, irrespective of their origin.	Enhanced compliance with the Complaint Handling Code, leading to more coherent and efficient handling of complaints and Member's Enquiries, improving residents' experience.	April 2024	GREEN	Completion of internal governance to complete final sign off of the revised corporate complaints policy. Continuous monitoring and updating of the complaint policy to reflect any changes in the Code and resident feedback. The website will be updated to reflect updates to the policy

HO Recommendation 2: Carry out forecasting modelling to determine optimum complaint staffing levels to respond within the timescales and quality set out in the Code

Actions Taken:	Outcome Achieved:	Delivery Date:	Status:	Next Steps:
Forecasting modelling was undertaken to ascertain the optimal staffing levels required for managing complaints within the timescales and quality parameters set by the Code. Increases are being made to staffing based on the forecasting outcomes.	Granular understanding of staffing required to meet demand. The modelling has resulted in a recruitment campaign with new officers already onboarded and further additional appointments in progress. The increased staffing levels have already realised improvements to timescales and quality of responses	May 2024	AMBER	Completion of next tranche of recruitment and training to achieve optimal staffing levels. Regular review of forecasting and staffing levels to maintain efficiency and responsiveness in complaint handling.

HO Recommendation 3: Adapt its complaint closure processes to accurately reflect when a complaint is closed, and then track the subsequent remedy to completion.

Actions Taken:	Outcome Achieved:	Delivery Date:	Status:	Next Steps:
The closure process has been updated to ensure remedies are tracked, including procedure to ensure resolution of remedies can be monitored enabling improved management and transparency	Greater clarity and accountability in the complaint resolution process, ensuring all complaints are followed through to residents' satisfaction.	Nov 2023	GREEN	Further refinement of the tracking system to enhance transparency and communication with residents regarding the status of their complaints. Automation of the tracking of remedies to enable additional monitoring and controls

HO Recommendation 4: Formalise the role of the “high-risk” team within its complaints process.

Actions Taken:	Outcome Achieved:	Delivery Date:	Status:	Next Steps:
Clearly defined and formalised the role and operational procedures of the "high risk" team within the complaint handling process, ensuring their integration into regular operations with a clear escalation process to the team.	Specialised handling of complex and high-risk cases has led to improved resolution outcomes and enhanced resident satisfaction.	Mar 2024	AMBER	Further alignment of the High Risk Team by bringing the function under the management of the Housing Complaint Team.

HO Recommendation 5: Review its approach to root cause analysis of complaints to make this more robust and effective, ensuring it can identify the specific drivers behind complaints and has sufficient detail to take steps to address them.

Actions Taken:	Outcome Achieved:	Delivery Date:	Status:	Next Steps:
Updates to management information has enabled improved visibility of data enabling improved identification of root cause issues.	With improved data we have put in place mechanisms to address themes that are the primary causes driving demand	May 2024	AMBER	Integrate root cause analysis findings into continuous training and development programmes for staff to prevent recurrence of identified issues. Creation of a feedback loop to services to ensure they are aware and can address drivers of demand

HO Recommendation 6: Ensure this improved analysis is seen by the Housing Improvement Group and Board.

Actions Taken:	Outcome Achieved:	Delivery Date:	Status:	Next Steps:
Updated management information has enabled more clarity on drivers for demand and through presentation of this improvement data at Housing Improvement Group and Board work has started to set up managed projects that will address and mitigate key drivers of demand. These projects are reporting progress to the Boards.	Strategic service improvements informed by comprehensive complaint analysis, leading to a more proactive approach to service quality and resident satisfaction.	Feb 2024	GREEN	Further enhance the reporting mechanisms to ensure regular and insightful analysis is accessible for strategic planning and action.

HO Recommendation 7: Develop a mechanism to formally channel the learning from analysis and complaints into service improvements and be able to demonstrate the impact.

Actions Taken:	Outcome Achieved:	Delivery Date:	Status:	Next Steps:
A review of data to enable improved reporting is in progress. This will enable greater visibility and identification of opportunities for improvement. A procedure has been drafted to capture service improvements and track remediation and benefits.	The measure detailed will create tangible improvements in service delivery and enable a culture of continual service improvement with tracked benefits	May 2024	AMBER	Complete data and reporting review. Roll out of continual service improvement procedure

HO Recommendation 8: Review its complaint response quality assurance and develop metrics for the Housing Improvement Group and Board to be able to track complaint response quality.

Actions Taken:	Outcome Achieved:	Delivery Date:	Status:	Next Steps:
A framework to enable robust quality assurance has been developed. The framework covers the life cycle of the complaint to ensure learnings are taken from the end-to-end process. Once fully implemented quality metrics will be shared with Housing Improvement Group and Board	Higher quality and consistency in complaint responses, contributing to increased resident satisfaction and fewer escalations	May 2024	AMBER	Continue roll out of framework to enable a cyclical review process which will identify training and improvement opportunities

HO Recommendation 9: Review its process for recording completed repairs to ensure it has a clear repair record which the resident agrees with. The landlord should ensure the solution accommodates vulnerable residents.

Actions Taken:	Outcome Achieved:	Delivery Date:	Status:	Next Steps:
Enhanced the process for recording completed repairs to ensure clarity and agreement with residents, with special consideration for the needs of vulnerable residents.	Improved transparency and trust in repair management, evidenced by reduced complaints related to repair disputes.	June 2024	AMBER	Explore and integrate technological solutions to streamline the recording process and enhance resident communication.

HO Recommendation 10: Include complaint handling performance in its contractor management arrangements, including as KPIs as contract renewal cycles allow.

Actions Taken:	Outcome Achieved:	Delivery Date:	Status:	Next Steps:
Integrated complaint handling performance metrics into contractor management arrangements, including as key performance indicators for contract renewals.	Improved contractor accountability and performance, leading to better service delivery and reduced complaints related to contractor services.	Sept 2024	AMBER	Review and adjust KPIs based on performance outcomes to continuously drive improvements in contractor services.

HO Recommendation 11: Develop a plan for the transition of complaint handling to business as usual, ensuring there is continued scrutiny of complaint handling performance at the highest level.

Actions Taken:	Outcome Achieved:	Delivery Date:	Status:	Next Steps:
Created a comprehensive plan for the transition of complaint handling to business as usual, ensuring sustained attention and strategic oversight at the highest level.	Established a robust framework for maintaining high standards in complaint handling, ensuring continuity in service quality and responsiveness.	Jun 2024	AMBER	Monitor and review the transition plan regularly to adapt to evolving needs and ensure ongoing effectiveness in complaint management.

HO Recommendation 12: Implement a communication programme with residents to ensure residents know about their rights to complain and can escalate cases to the Ombudsman, to help make sure that service failures can be recovered where they occur and avoid residents experiencing prolonged detriment.

Actions Taken:	Outcome Achieved:	Delivery Date:	Status:	Next Steps:
Launched a comprehensive communication programme to ensure residents are well-informed about their rights to complain and the escalation process, focusing on service recovery and prevention of detriment.	Increased resident awareness and engagement, leading to a more informed and empowered community with a reduction in service failures.	Dec 2023	GREEN	Continuously update and expand the communication programme to reach a broader audience and adapt to changing resident needs and feedback.

Conclusion

The journey towards fully realising the improvements outlined in response to the Housing Ombudsman's recommendations has been both challenging and rewarding. Lambeth Council's commitment to improving our housing services and complaint handling processes has led to significant strides in service quality, efficiency, and resident satisfaction. The actions taken in response to the Ombudsman's recommendations have not only addressed specific areas of concern but have also laid the groundwork for a more resilient, responsive, and resident-focused service delivery model. Lambeth Council remains dedicated to building on these improvements, continuously seeking ways to enhance our services and engage with our residents effectively. Our progress report demonstrates our ongoing commitment to transparency, improvement, and excellence in service delivery, ensuring that the voices of our residents are heard, valued, and acted upon. Lambeth Council is resolute in our pursuit of delivering high-quality housing services that meet the needs and expectations of our community, and we are confident that the steps we are taking will lead to lasting positive outcomes for our residents.