

<b>LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN</b>	<b>WARDS:</b> All
<b>REPORT TITLE</b> London Borough of Camden Annual Complaints Report 2023/2024 (CS/2025/01)	
<b>REPORT OF</b> Borough Solicitor	
<b>FOR SUBMISSION TO</b> Resources and Corporate Performance Scrutiny Committee  Cabinet	<b>DATE</b> 25 <sup>th</sup> February 2025  26 <sup>th</sup> February 2025
<b>STRATEGIC CONTEXT</b>  <p>We Make Camden is our joint vision for the borough, developed in partnership with our community. In the partner document The Way We Work which is how we will change as an organisation to deliver our shared priorities, we have said that we are committed to connecting to our communities and listening and responding to make change to what we hear.</p> <p>Camden Council is also committed to learning and reflecting on our delivery and our performance. Complaints and formal enquiries provide a regular and rich source of feedback from our citizens that inform us when things have gone wrong. Learning from these gives the Council the opportunity to improve services to support our citizens.</p> <p>Insight from complaints plays a key role in how we deliver the right outcomes to our citizens and in continually improving our service delivery to deliver our ambitions. In addition, it can indicate wider economic and social factors at play and help direct the Councils focus and resources accordingly.</p> <p>Councils are currently experiencing a range of service and budgetary pressures, Camden included. We use complaints to gain insight and information about where we should be targeting limited resources, and we outline in this report how we are responding across the organisation to resource challenges that impacting residents.</p> <p>We are committed to ensuring that residents experience a better and more consistent experience of contacting and engaging with our services. Improving our response to complaints and complex issues for residents is a key part of this work and this will remain a priority for the Council in the coming year.</p>	
<b>SUMMARY OF REPORT</b>	

This is the London Borough of Camden's annual complaints report for the period **1<sup>st</sup> April 2023 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024.**

It is a single report that includes information on complaints across all directorates and seeks to give a corporate overview while signposting the reader to the detailed results for individual services. The report also provides information for decisions issued by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) and the Housing Ombudsman (HO) in the same period.

The Council's Constitution states that the Ombudsman decisions on cases where there have been mistakes or failings (called "maladministration") should be presented to Cabinet on an annual basis for their information only. Therefore, the report provides the decisions issued by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) and the Housing Ombudsman (HO) in the same period and this report will be presented to Cabinet.

### **Local Government Act 1972 – Access to Information**

No documents that require listing were used in the preparation of this report.

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### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Resources and Corporate Performance Scrutiny Committee is asked to consider the report and make any recommendations to Cabinet.

Cabinet is asked to consider and note the contents of the report and in particular note the Ombudsman's findings of maladministration in Appendix 7 of the report

Signed: 

Andrew Maughan  
Borough Solicitor  
Corporate Services

Date: 12.02.2025

## CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

- 1.1 This is London Borough of Camden’s annual complaints report for the period **1<sup>st</sup> April 2023 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024**. This report therefore reflects both the complaints received during this period, and the reflection, learning and change that the Council has undertaken subsequently. The report seeks to update on the Council’s activity over the last year to improve services in response to complaints, feedback and our organisational ambitions and priorities. The report outlines patterns, change and trends compared with previous years and we seek to explain and update as far as possible.
- 1.2 The Council provides a wide range of services to our communities – ranging from relatively straightforward transactions to providing complex, multi-faceted and long-term support to people in need. Our The Way We Work Strategy sets out our plan for organisational change and capability-building, and how we will shape an organisational culture focused on learning, listening and improvement.

*“We want to continue to connect with our communities on a human level, listening deeply during every conversation and responding creatively to what we are seeing and hearing. We need to continue to support our workforce to ensure that everyone has the tools and permission they need to make this possible and that they feel empowered to do so”<sup>1</sup>*

The Way We Work
- 1.3 We recognise the importance of complaints, feedback and the insight they provide to achieving this goal. When citizens do complain, we seek to learn from those complaints and look for patterns of service failure. We continue to use the feedback we receive from our complaints to fuel ideas for service improvements both in the short and long terms – and there are notable examples of this detailed in the appendices. We also work to review complaints compared to other similar organisations. This report demonstrates this in particular with regard to housing and more significantly councils experiencing similar housing pressures across London.
- 1.4 There are a large number of residents who have a positive experience of engaging with the Council and receive services that are efficient and effective. However, the report shows that there has been a significant increase in complaints to the Council. This is similar to trends for other councils across London and nationally – however we know that there is work we can do in Camden across our services and with our communities and partners to improve our delivery and performance.
- 1.5 When we receive a complaint, we seek to resolve it quickly and effectively – whilst identifying opportunities for learning. Our focus as an organisation is building relational practice into all our work – developing a culture across services where honest and compassionate relationships are the first priority.

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<sup>1</sup> The Way We Work, 2022

We believe rebuilding trust through open communication and transparency is a critical part of our complaint's response process.

1.6 This is a single report on all Council services' complaints including the statutory Adult Social Care complaints. There are separate reports for the statutory Children's social care services complaints (presented to Children, Schools and Families' Scrutiny Committee on 11<sup>th</sup> November 2024), Housing Ombudsman Annual Complaint Handling and Service Improvement Report (presented to Resources and Corporate Performance Scrutiny Committee on 15<sup>th</sup> July 2024 and to Housing Scrutiny Committee on 16<sup>th</sup> July 2024) and a separate Social Housing Regulator Tenant Satisfaction Measures Annual Report that is submitted to the Regulator annually in July.

1.7 Aside from the Housing Ombudsman and the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman, there are a number of other external governing and inspection bodies that will include an interest in complaint handling across various services:

#### Children and Learning

- Inspection of Local Authority Children Services (ILACS) overseen by OFSTED
- His Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation (HMIP) for Youth Justice services
- OFSTED and Care Quality Commission (CQC) for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)

#### Adult Social Care and Health

- The Care Quality Commission (CQC) inspect both adult social care services and the regulated in-house provider services.

#### Housing and Property Services divisions

- Regulator of Social Housing
- Building Safety Regulator

#### Parking Operations

- Audited by the DVLA every 12 months.
- Follow the statute laid down and monitored by the Department for Transport.

### **1.8 Scope of the report**

1.9 The report outlines a summary of complaints across services and our organisational approach to complaints. It necessarily presents a high-level overview and corporate view and there may be more context and detail that Members wish to draw out directly with services. The report seeks to highlight and signpost to that additional detail. Performance in individual service areas is detailed within the marked appendices.

1.10 This report focuses not only on volumes and timeliness of responses but also aims, when it is possible, to identify themes and lessons learnt that result in service improvements.

1.11 In Camden, complaints are dealt with in two stages. Stage 1 complaints, while received centrally, are allocated to the relevant services and departments to be dealt with. Should an individual be unhappy with the decision at Stage 1 their appeal is dealt with by the central complaints team at Stage 2. Should they remain dissatisfied they may then take matters to the Ombudsman that covers that area. The main body of the report seeks to take a corporate view of Stages 1 and 2 and then describes the process of taking matters further to the Ombudsman. The detail of the results of our cases that went to the Ombudsman are contained in an appendix along with more detailed figures from the key operational areas.

## 2. THE OVERALL PICTURE

### 2.1 Number of Complaints – all stages

Level	2023/2024	2022/2023
Stage 1	3,242	2,431
Stage 2	741	420
Housing Ombudsman	120	106
Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman	137	96
<b>TOTAL Complaints</b>	<b>4,240</b>	<b>3,053</b>

### 2.2 Context – Service Provision and level of transactions

#### 2.3 Property Management

We handle over 250,000 customer contacts in Property Management and carry out over 125,000 repairs and servicing orders per year, in addition to a large-scale capital works programme. The repairs service has also had to adapt and take on fire safety works, a proactive approach to tackling damp and mould, and work to address disrepair claims promptly. This means that the waiting time for routine repairs is longer, as the service also works to keep within its budgets. A major focus is therefore communicating clearly with residents about their repairs work and how long it will take. The Council also sees complaints about its older communal heating systems and the new Housing Investment Strategy will be prioritising investment in those systems that need it most. Similarly, the strategy will see additional investment made in key components such as windows and roofs, this will also help to take pressure off the responsive repairs service.

#### 2.4 Housing Management (Neighbourhoods)

This service covers all tenancy and leasehold management across the Council's 33,000 homes, comprising a diverse range of estates and street properties. The service also covers estate management and caretaking services. Casework in this area can be complex, including anti-social behaviour and high volume services such as caretaking.

#### 2.5 Housing Support Services

The Council has 8,000 households on the waiting list for social housing and receives a large number of new applications each year that have to be assessed. The service has seen a 39% increase in approaches as well as an

increase in rough sleeping. On top of this the Council has a high demand for temporary accommodation, with approximately 1,000 households accommodated at any one time and a significant increase in families having to remain in hotel accommodation. However, the Temporary Accommodation taskforce is addressing this, and we are seeing a reduction in the number of families in such accommodation.

## **2.6 Parking Operations**

In 2024 Parking issued 338,507 Penalty Charge Notices (PCNs) and received over 105,000 customer contacts, in addition to the PCNs issued, Parking also carried out over 597,000 permit transactions.

## **2.7 Environment Services**

Around 23 million recycling and waste collections are undertaken borough wide each year, which is an average of 100,000 in each ward every month. The service also sweeps 1,379 streets (at least weekly) and empties 1,600 litter bins.

## **2.8 Adult Social Care (ASC) and Health**

ASC receives over 6000 referrals per year and will have contact with many thousands more Camden residents, family members and organisations throughout the year, with 3,500 drawing on care and over 1,000 carers supported.

## **2.9 Overarching nature of complaints**

2.10 There was a 39% increase in the total number of complaints from 2022/2023 with a 33% increase in Stage 1 complaints and a 76% increase in Stage 2 complaints.

2.11 This significant increase in complaints corresponds with a rise in complaints reported by most local authorities, particularly those in London. According to the Housing Ombudsman report from July 2024, 47% of the cases determined by them came from residents living in social housing in London postcodes. London is disproportionately represented in complaints to the Ombudsman where just one in six social homes nationally is located in London. No other region in England shows such a significant disparity between the proportion of social housing and the number of complaints. The reasons for this are complex however we believe it reflects challenges around the age of the stock, the density of accommodation and levels of overcrowding.

2.12 Our residents deserve high-quality, responsive, and compassionate services, and we have been committed to improving these services. As a council, we have faced many years of underinvestment, which has resulted in shortage of resources, particularly for affordable housing in London. For Camden, we have made significant investments in improving and increasing our social housing stock, but our income and resources are not sufficient to meet the challenges we experience across homelessness and housing quality. We are taking steps to address this resource gap – but this is a core and continuing challenge for all our services. Where complaints arise from issues of service, consistency and officer behaviour we are focusing our efforts to improve



performance and provide clarity for our staff of our expectations for communication and service quality and delivery.

### **2.13 Corporate Complaints Service Response.**

- 2.14 Over the last year we have continued to develop and transform the processes and resourcing within the Corporate Complaints team to respond to the significant increase in the number of complaints received by the Council. Considering complaints is a role that all departments are required to undertake - however the role of the central team is vital to the overall smooth running of the system. Aligned with the increase in complaints we have provided additional resources to the central complaints team as well as to individual services like Property Management (there is further detail in Appendix 1).
- 2.15 The Chief Executive and Executive Directors have agreed an escalation process to ensure that services are responding quickly and effectively to complaints. Stage 2 and Ombudsman cases are sent directly to Heads of Service and Directors when no response has been received from the services, and this has had a positive impact on response times. Senior officers and the Council have clearly communicated to services the importance of reflecting on complaints and insight from feedback. In Central Complaints this action has resulted in increased speed to responding to complaints and in addition reduced delays in processing complaints, such that all Stage 1 complaints and Stage 2 reviews are assigned within 48 hours of receipt. This has occurred in the context of a significant increase in volume of complaints across the organisation.
- 2.16 We have begun more regular meetings between the Corporate Complaints Team and Housing and Property managers to go through active Housing Ombudsman cases to ensure that Ombudsman decision orders are complied with within the required timescales and are closely monitored. This is being rolled out to all departments in 2025.
- 2.17 Further development of the new case management system has enabled swifter allocation of cases, improved monitoring of performance and outcomes, and an audit trail of who is handling the cases. Users are becoming more familiar with the functionality, which has improved case record keeping and accessibility to information. This is reflected in the decrease in the number of open cases showing in the 2023/2024 data compared to 2022/2023 data.

### **2.18 Stage 1 complaints 2023~2024**

- 2.19 We received a total of **3242** Stage 1 complaints which is a 33% increase to the previous year. A slightly higher proportion of Stage 1 complaints (44%) than last year (38%) were responded to within the recommended timescales. See the appendices for detailed service information.
- 2.20 A higher proportion of complaints were upheld/partly upheld (45%) to last year (27%). As per the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) and Housing Ombudsman Joint Complaint Handling Code the outcome of

“partly upheld” should no longer be used as a final outcome. All “partly upheld” outcomes are now included in the “upheld” category. The number of ‘Upheld’ cases will therefore be higher than previous years. For comparison purposes, the proportion of only “upheld” outcomes was 23% which is a decrease from 2022/2023, indicating that despite the increase in number of complaints a lower proportion were found to be unsatisfactory. The detailed figures for each department are examined in the appendices.

2.21 Our new case management system has made it easier to identify themes, recurrent issues and better resolutions that has enabled improved learning from complaints across the whole Council. Further details are available in the service specific appendices.

## **2.22 Analysis of Stage 1 complaints data**

### **2.23 Number of Complaints**

2.24 The net total number of complaints recorded at Stage 1 has increased by 33% since 2022/2023. This illustrates a continued increase in complaints received but with less of a steep increase in comparison to 2022/2023. We believe there will be a further slowing in 2024/25

2.25 The service areas showing a notable increase in complaints compared to the previous year are:

- Property Management - This covers areas such as responsive repairs and heating systems - an increase from 1,150 to 1,676 which is 526 complaints (46%) compared to a 58% increase in 2022/2023 so the rate of increase has slowed, however it continues to reflect the pressures on the repairs service.
- Housing Support Services which cover applications for housing and homelessness services - an increase from 253 to 344 which is 91 complaints (36%) compared to a 184% increase in 2022/2023 so the rate has slowed.
- Environment and Sustainability - an increase from 108 to 248 which is 140 complaints (130%).
- Adults and Health - an increase from 39 to 70 which is 31 complaints (79%)

2.26 A notable decrease in the number of complaints is:

- Housing Management has seen a decrease from 304 to 253 which is 51 complaints (16%) compared to a 118% increase in 2022/2023 so rate has slowed significantly in this area.

### **2.27 Performance – Time taken to respond within timescales**

2.28 It is acknowledged that target timescales are not an absolute marker of success nor of quality. The case management system has provided a better understanding and appreciation that the end-to-end time (i.e. the time from



receipt of the complaint to the full and satisfactory resolution) alongside qualitative measures are better markers of success.

2.29 Our timescales are informed by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's (LGSCO) and the Housing Ombudsman's (HO) Joint Complaints Handling Code. Compliance with the Code is mandatory as a Landlord. The proposed timescales to responding to a Stage 1 complaint remains at 10 working days and to a Stage 2 at 20 working days. These can be extended for complex cases by a further 10 working days (20 working days in total) for Stage 1 complaints and a further 20 working days (40 working days in total) for Stage 2 complaints. The reasons for the extension must be clearly explained to the citizen together with the expected timescale for response. Performance should therefore be considered with these permitted extensions in mind.

2.30 44% of stage 1 complaints were responded to within 10 working days. This is an improvement in performance compared to last year (38%). Notable divisions that have seen significant improvements in performance are:

- Customer Services – from 39% to 71%
- Housing Management – from 20% to 34%
- Environment and Sustainability – from 13% to 42%
- Economy, Regeneration and Investment – from 9% to 30%

2.31 The drivers of performance are likely to be a combination of:

- increase in the resources to respond to this.
- the nature of the complaints is complex, with residents requiring an approach which involves multiple services, most often Housing services and Adult Social Care and Children's Services.
- there has been a continued focus on the quality of response and appropriate resolution rather than the time taken to complete the response, ensuring that residents' issues are resolved properly.
- there is a continued focus on improving communication with residents to keep them informed.
- in areas with a low volume of complaints, those that are outside the timescales have a large impact on the overall Council performance.
- better use of the case management system has meant more accurate recording and tracking of complaints resulting in improved performance in meeting the timescales.

### **2.32 Outcomes (Upheld/Not Upheld)**

2.33 The number of upheld cases at the formal stage 1 remains stable at 23%. With the inclusion of partly upheld cases in this outcome category the proportion is 45%.

2.34 Property Management continues to see a rise in the upheld rate from 36% in 2021/2022 increasing in 2022/2023 to 43% and in 2023/2024 to 62% (includes partly upheld). This means that in a high proportion of Stage 1 complaints, the service agreed that there had been a service failure that needed to be put right. This can be seen as a positive with the service having

both greater empathy with the customer and a greater understanding of what good service should look like.

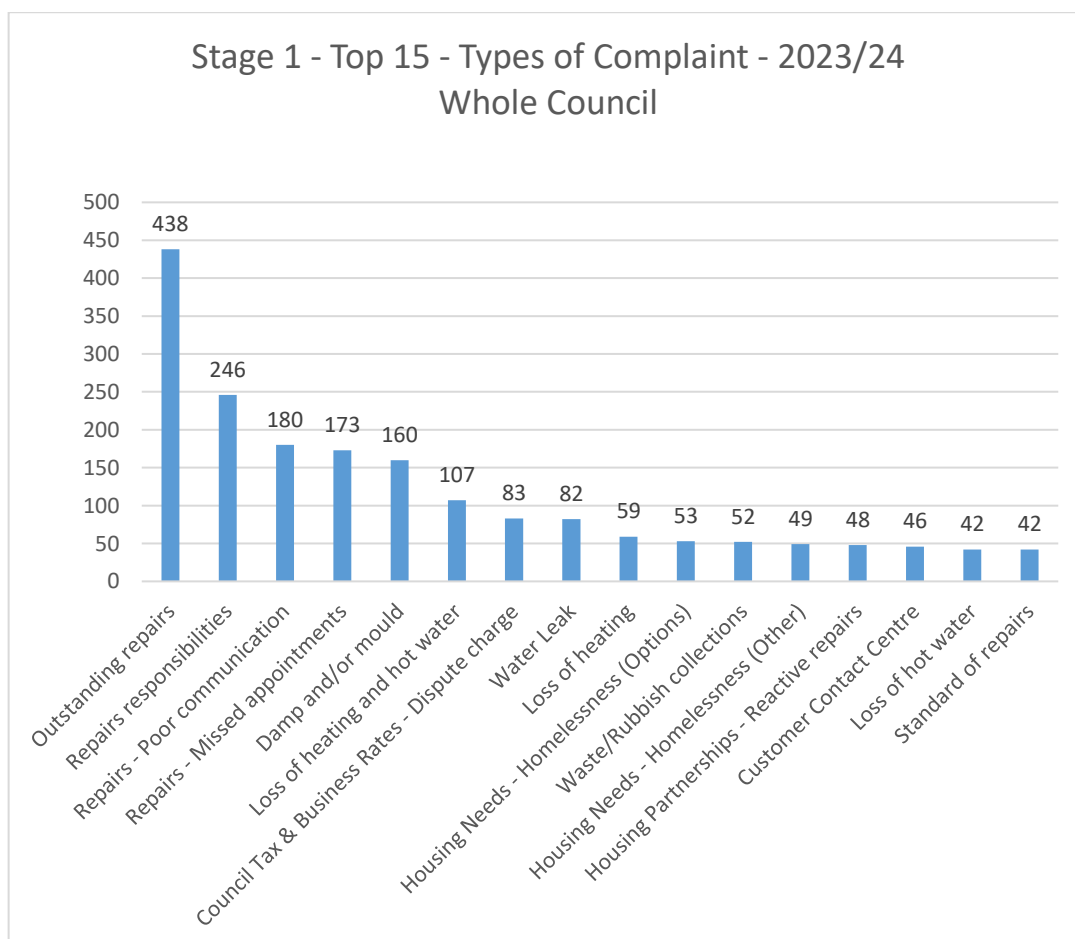
## 2.35 Types of Complaint

2.36 The high-level types of complaints set out in the complaints case management system are:

1. Delay in providing a service
2. Lack of communication
3. Staff behaviour/Poor customer service
4. Quality of service
5. Disagree with decision/action
6. Compensation request
7. Lack of information/advice/access to service

2.37 A number of these areas have been and continue to be addressed through better and more thorough training of staff. They are matters which can and are being addressed. Some matters are, when analysed, related to fundamental issues around infrastructure and resources which can only be addressed in the longer term.

2.38 The case management system is also able to report in more detail about the reason for complaints. These allow services to specifically identify the issues and themes and make targeted service improvements as a result.



2.39 The top 15 types of complaints represent 57% of all the complaints. 9 of the top 15 types relate to Property Management which is to be expected as this area receives the highest number of complaints. This generally reflects the additional investment that is required in the Council's homes and infrastructure. This was addressed in the new Housing Investment Strategy, approved by Cabinet in January 2025, which sets out plans to invest an additional £350m in the housing stock. There is also service improvement work already underway across the repairs service on communication with residents, tracking of cases and oversight of complex repairs.

## 2.40 Escalation from Stage 1 to Stage 2

2.41 The proportion of stage 1 complaints that progressed to stage 2 has increased to **23%** compared to 17% in 2022/2023. Whilst the rate of increase in the number of stage 1 and stage 2 complaints has slowed, the number of Stage 2 complaints have increased significantly by 76% compared to a 33% increase in the number of Stage 1 complaints received. This is partly due to previous years increases in Stage 1 complaints working through to Stage 2.

## 3 Stage 2 Reviews – 2023-2024

### 3.1 Stage 2 complaints recorded by directorate and division

[2022/2023 figures in brackets]

Service Area	Stage 2	Stage 2 Upheld/ Partly Upheld
<b>Corporate Services</b>	<b>30 (28)</b>	<b>20% (0%)</b>
Customer Services	30 (28)	20% (0%)
<b>Supporting Communities</b>	<b>669 (383)</b>	<b>49% (22%)</b>
Property Management	457 (223)	57% (32%)
Housing Management	89 (62)	33% (7%)
Housing Support Services	49 (54)	39% (18%)
Economy, Regeneration and Investment	21 (16)	14% (0%)
Community Services	26 (16)	31% (0%)
Environment and Sustainability	20 (12)	40% (0%)
Resident Safety	6 (0)	33% (0%)
Development	1 (0)	100% (0%)
<b>Supporting People – Adults &amp; Health</b>	<b>13 (0)</b>	<b>46% (0%)</b>

<b>Supporting People – Children &amp; Learning</b>	<b>29 (9)</b>	<b>24% (0%)</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>741 (420)</b>	<b>47% (20%)</b>

3.2 There were a total of **741** Stage 2 reviews of complaints which is a 76% increase to the previous year. This is nearly 2.5 times the increase that we saw in Stage 1 complaints in year. This increase is primarily in Property Management which saw a 104% increase with Housing Management seeing a 44% increase in Stage 2 reviews.

3.3 This increase is attributed to the following:

- Making it easier and more accessible for citizens to submit their Stage 2 via a form which goes straight into the case management system
- Increased profile of the Housing Ombudsman and Regulator Social Housing in the media increasing awareness of residents.
- Delays in responding to Stage 1 complaints resulting in requests for escalation to Stage 2 reviews.
- Intensive participation project
- Additional Stage 1 complaints.

3.4 Housing Support Services have seen a slight decrease in Stage 2s which is positive given the sharp rise between 2021/2022 and 2022/2023.

### 3.5 Stage 2 Performance

3.6 For a breakdown of performance by service please see the Appendices.

3.7 63% of stage 2 reviews were responded to within the required timescales (20 working days) compared to 27% in the previous year. This significant improvement in performance despite the high increase in the number of Stage 2s is due to:

- increased resourcing to respond to the uplift in complaints,
- improved ways of working with services who provide information in a more timely way,
- Any blockages in the process are escalated more quickly to Senior Management.

3.8 For complex cases it is permissible to extend the timescales for responding to a Stage 2 to 40 working days. A further 28% of Stage 2s were completed between 21-40 working days, meaning that **91%** of all Stage 2s were completed between 1 and 40 working days.

### 3.9 Stage 2 Reviews – Outcomes (Upheld/Not Upheld)

3.10 For a breakdown of outcomes by service see the appendices.

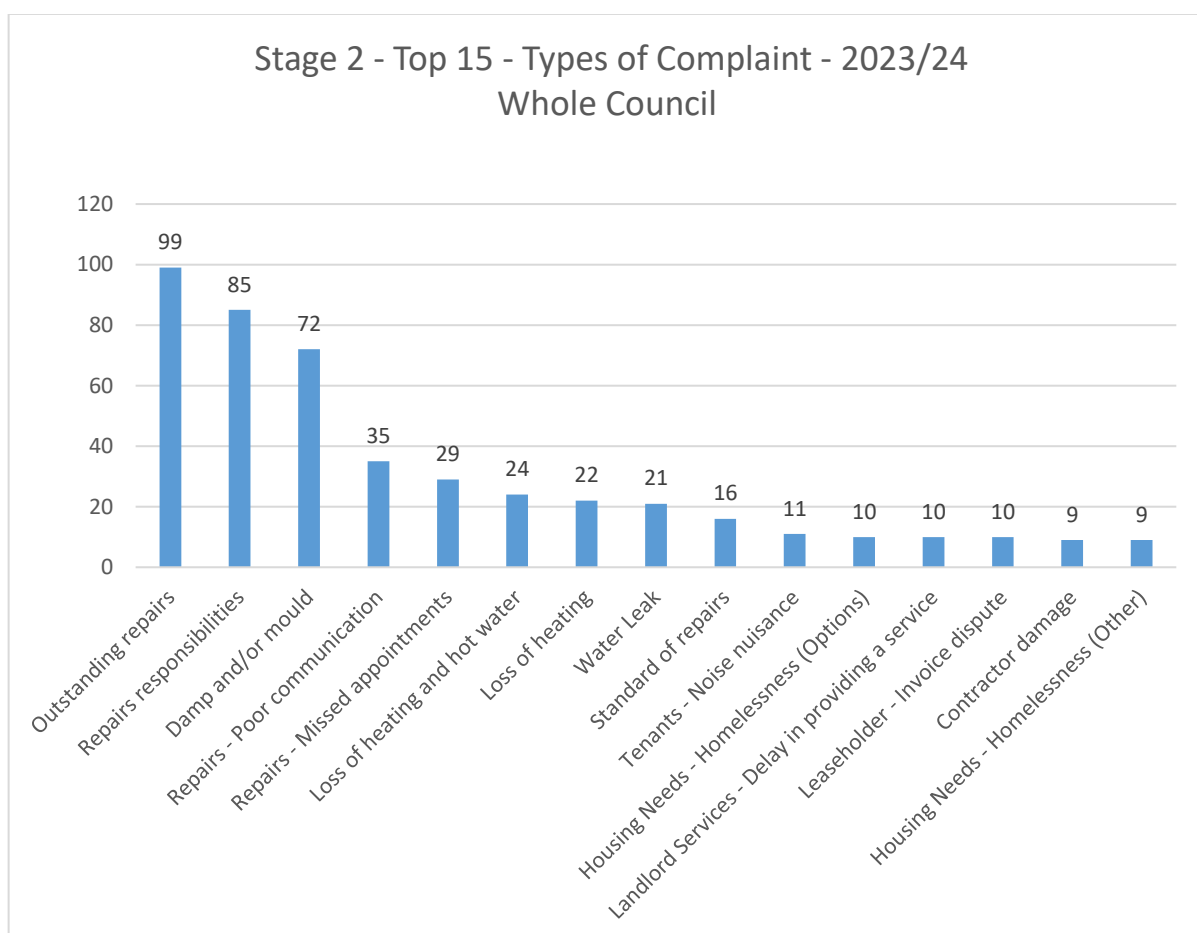
3.11 A higher proportion of complaints were upheld/partly upheld (48%) to last year (20%). 38% not upheld. This increase is due to the inclusion of “partly upheld” outcomes in the overall figure for “upheld”. For comparison purposes,

the proportion of only “upheld” outcomes was 25% which is an increase from 2022/2023.

3.12 The highest upheld or partly upheld rate is in Property Management where over half (59%) of Stage 2 reviews have found elements of stage 1 responses to be unsatisfactory. This will be an area of focus in the year ahead to make sure stage 1 responses are informed by trends in stage 2 findings.

3.13 The overall upward trend indicates that an increasingly higher proportion of responses at Stage 1 have been found to be unsatisfactory, when upheld and partially upheld have been combined. The increase in Stage 1 complaints has impacted on the ability of services to provide a satisfactory response at Stage 1 within the required timescales so more are escalated and upheld at stage 2.

### 3.14 Stage 2 - Types of complaint



3.15 In Property Management the main reason for a Stage 2 review is ongoing delays to outstanding repairs which were not resolved at Stage 1. In Housing Management, the main reasons are, noise nuisance, delays in providing a service and leaseholder invoice disputes.

### 3.16 From Stage 2 to an Ombudsman

- 3.17 Whilst a resident can approach the LGSCO or the Housing Ombudsman at any point, an Ombudsman will only formally investigate a complaint once it has been through our local procedures at Stages 1 and 2.
- 3.18 The proportion of stage 2 complaints (741) that were formally investigated by either the LGSCO (19 cases investigated) or the Housing Ombudsman (61 cases) is **11%** compared to 9% in the previous year. This slight increase is still very low considering the large increase in Stage 2 complaints. This indicates that the majority of complainants are satisfied with the outcomes at Stage 2 and where they are escalated to an Ombudsman only a small proportion are formally investigated by them.

#### **4. Legal Implications - Comments from the Borough Solicitor**

- 4.1 There is a statutory requirement for the Council to have a complaints process in relation to certain established services, for example, Children’s Services under the Children Act 1989 and Adult Social Care services under the Local Authority Social Services and National Health Service Complaints (England) Regulations 2009.
- 4.2 The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman, set up under the Local Government Act 1974; and the Housing Ombudsman, under the Housing Act 1996, are independent and responsible for dealing with complaints about local authorities where there has been maladministration causing injustice or a service failure.
- 4.3 Section 5A of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 requires the Monitoring Officer to report annually on any relevant Ombudsman complaint decisions against the Council. The October 2020 Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman guide says the Ombudsman will support a flexible approach to how the council will discharge this duty as long as the intent is fulfilled in some meaningful way, and a council’s performance in relation to Ombudsman investigations is properly communicated to elected members.

#### **5 Financial Remedies awarded**

<b>Stage</b>	<b>2023/2024 Financial remedy</b>	<b>2022/2023 Financial remedy</b>
Stage 1 (Local Resolution)	£23,553	£34,000
Stage 2 (Review/Investigation)	£25,543	£16,155
<b>Total</b>	<b>£49,096</b>	<b>£50,155</b>

#### **6 Resource Implications**

- 6.1 Funding for the complaints service is secured through revenue budget provision within Business Support Services. Financial remedies are paid from directorate services’ budgets. There are no specific financial implications arising from this report.

#### **7 Environmental Implications**



7.1 The Information and data presented in this report have no environmental implications.

## **8 Appendices**

- Appendix 1 - Property Management Services
- Appendix 2 - Housing Management (Neighbourhoods)
- Appendix 3 - Housing Support Services
- Appendix 4 - Parking Operations
- Appendix 5 - Environment Services
- Appendix 6 - Adult Social Care and Health
- Appendix 7 - Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO)  
- Housing Ombudsman (HO)
- Appendix 8 -Housing Ombudsman - Section 49 Special Investigation

## Appendix 1

### 1 **Property Management Services (Repairs (leasehold and tenanted properties), planned works and facilities management)**

- 1.1 As explained in the main body of the report the statistics show clearly that there has been a significant increase in complaints relating to the repairs service and the condition of the housing stock. While substantial changes have been made to customer service, complaints management, our speed of response and management control, officers face fundamental challenges related to a net reduction in resources, unfunded regulatory burdens and the nature of the housing stock which has a high proportion of older, single glazed, solid wall properties that are more prone to issues such as structural movement, damp and mould. Significant issues are also encountered with older communal heating systems that require replacement, this was considered by Cabinet in January 2025 as part of the new Housing Investment Strategy. In parallel, there has been a massive increase in legal challenges across London promoted by no win no fee Solicitor Firms, who solicit complaints and focus resources not always to those residents most in need.
- 1.2 In November 2024, the Housing Ombudsman released its “Paragraph 49” investigation report regarding Camden Council, which identified 14 required actions. The report primarily addressed cases prior to 2022, and it is important to note that significant progress has been achieved since then. Of the 14 actions, 11 are related to the handling of complaints, encompassing the initial recording of a complaint through to the final response. Additionally, 2 actions pertain to issues of disrepair and repair, while 1 action relates to Camden’s vulnerability policy. We have submitted our action plan to the Ombudsman which was well received by them, and we look forward to collaborating with the Ombudsman to ensure its successful implementation.
- 1.3 With regards addressing the underlying issues, the Housing Investment Strategy will see investment of £670m and proactive asset management to address property condition issues and secure better quality housing for residents. The Housing and Repairs Transformation programme will see updated policies, procedures and systems introduced. Including a Customer Relationship Management system (CRM) which will make it easier for staff to manage and track complaints outcomes through to completion.
- 1.4 The repairs service has also put in place an outreach campaign to encourage tenants and leaseholders to report any concerns they may have. We want our residents to reach out to us rather than to third parties. Our targeted damp and mould campaign has been notably successful, leading to a significant increase in reports. Since December 2022, we have addressed 13,000 reports of damp and mould alone. This is a very clear example of where a higher volume of casework is not necessarily a sign of failure.
- 1.5 We carry out over 125,000 repairs and scheduled servicing appointments each financial year. This overall figure assists in putting the number of complaints into proper context. We also continue to assess customer satisfaction through outbound calls and SMS text messaging.

- 1.6 In these challenging times, we are dedicated to enhancing tenant satisfaction and understanding the significance of providing reliable and responsive service. We are committed to addressing needs promptly and ensuring that the living experience is as smooth and comfortable as possible. Over the past 12 months, we have focused on delivering services far more from the tenants' perspective than we have every done in the past.
- 1.7 The Housing and Property Customer Experience Oversight Panel was established in January 2024 and currently consists of six resident members. The panel meets with us every two months. The purpose of the group is to provide residents with an opportunity to offer feedback and suggestions on how to improve services in a genuinely resident-led manner. Additionally, it allows residents to invite senior managers from various teams and major contractors to discuss their efforts in addressing and preventing recurring complaints. Since the panel's inception, its members have participated in workshops and visited the contact centre twice to observe the complaints team in action. The various resident panels we have in place ensure that resident voices are heard in service improvements and that the Council is held accountable for its actions.
- 1.8 The Housing and Property Residents' Panel is actively driving change to enhance overall customer satisfaction. We have conducted over 12 sessions with a dedicated group of tenants, leaseholders, and District Management Committee (DMC) members. As a result of this collaborative effort, we have produced "How to" repair videos and implemented proactive text messaging during times of disruption.

<b>Service Area</b>	<b>Number of complaints</b>	<b>percentage upheld/partly upheld</b>	<b>percentage within 10 w/days</b>	<b>percentage within 20 w/days</b>	<b>Average w/days</b>
<b>Repairs &amp; Operations</b>	<b>1,656</b> (1,136)	<b>62%</b> (44%)	<b>51%</b> (55%)	<b>76%</b> (84%)	18 (15)

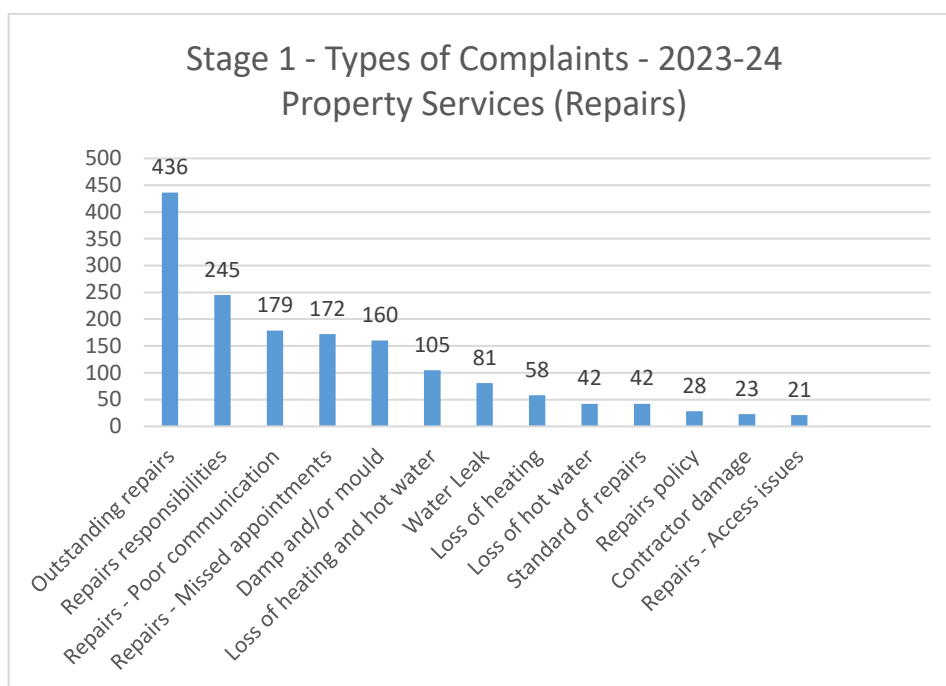
[2022/2023 figures in brackets]

- 1.9 Although any increase in complaints is of concern, this increase was expected. We carried out over 125,000 repairs and scheduled servicing appointments during this period which was up from 119,000 the year before. During 2022 and in line with the Ombudsman's expectations, we have proactively encouraged customers across various mediums to get in touch. Whilst all months were higher than in the previous year there is a similar pattern in the number of complaints per month. There was an increase from November 2023 onwards which corresponds to winter pressures and the associated issues such as hot water, heating, leaks and damp and mould. The number of complaints remained high for all subsequent months until March 2024.
- 1.10 Performance on response times has dropped slightly due to the increase in the number of complaints. Responding within 10 working days has remained similar to last year at 51%. This is good performance especially given a continued increase in the number of complaints. Performance on responding

within 20 working days has dropped from 83% last year to 76% this year. Again, a reflection of the increased volume.

1.11 Upheld and Partly Upheld represent 62% of Stage 1 complaints. This means that in two thirds of Stage 1 complaints, the service agreed that there was at least one element where the service had failed and that needed to be put right. These failures were in both the way the repair was handled (e.g. delays, missed appointments) and in the way the complaint was handled (e.g. delay in responding). 29% were not upheld with 7% remaining open.

### 1.12 Types of complaint



1.13 A quarter of complaints relate to outstanding repairs which are about delays in providing a service or the quality of service provided.

1.14 As set out in 1.4, we have proactively encouraged customers to reach out and express any dissatisfaction as soon as possible. We have implemented a variety of customer satisfaction measures to engage with our residents effectively. Currently, we communicate with and receive SMS feedback from over 1,000 customers each month. Overall, our transactional feedback regarding the service yields an approximate 85% positive score. Camden has appointed a Lessons Learned Lead in the Repairs Team. This new role works closely with front line teams, stakeholders, and subject matter experts to identify key lessons, best practice, and opportunities for improvement. Additionally, this role will closely review the recommendations provided by the Housing Ombudsman regarding individual resident cases, focusing on areas such as improving record-keeping and how to document vulnerabilities in our system.

1.15 The service has introduced several **new ways for residents to request repairs**. At present, 81% of our residents report repairs using our online reporting tools, with over 50% using WhatsApp. By offering more options for

residents to report repairs online, we can prioritise our resources to support those who only have access to telephone reporting.

- 1.16 Additionally, in December 2024, we launched a new ICT system called ROCC Core. This system will enhance our communication with residents by allowing us to attach photographs to individual repair requests, improving the triage process for repairs, speeding up the scheduling of follow-up work, and transitioning away from locally stored information and shared mailboxes.
- 1.17 Also in December, designed with Resident panel members, we launched our new online Repairs Portal. Previously, we received feedback that the old tool for submitting repair requests was difficult to log into, confusing to navigate, and didn't accommodate many types of repairs. With the new Repairs Portal, residents can easily submit various repair requests, schedule appointments. We have worked closely with residents over the past year to ensure that the new Repairs Portal is simple and user-friendly for everyone.
- 1.18 We have also upgraded our telephony system, and our back-office repairs system to make it easier for residents to contact us, and easier for us to help them. These new systems improve the way residents and the council communicate with each other, but they also support better communication and information transfer between teams within the Council. Things like Chat AI to triage resident interactions and collect basic initial information mean our contact centre colleagues can help more residents more efficiently, and better automatic scheduling of repairs appointments means our operatives can help more residents more efficiently too. All this is backed up by much stronger collection, recording, and reporting of service data, which will allow to make even better improvements as time goes on.
- 1.19 Monthly independent satisfaction surveys are conducted with residents who have completed the first stage of the complaints process. These surveys ask questions about their experience with the complaints process, including how easy it was to navigate, the quality and frequency of communication with the complaints team, and their overall satisfaction with how their issue was addressed.
- 1.20 We recently launched a proactive communications campaign to reassure our tenants that we are committed to ensuring they have a safe and warm home. This campaign includes reminders on how to report repair issues and an offer for a repairs supervisor to visit and assess any serious or ongoing repair concerns they may have. We will roll this out to all our residents in phases.
- 1.21 Finally, Council-wide understanding of damp and mould, and the challenges related to property condition is a high corporate priority. Members of the Corporate Management Team (CMT), including the Chief Executive and Executive Directors have each attended damp and mould visits with the Council's Mould Marshalls during 2024/2025. These visits included both inspections and follow-up appointments, giving the CMT member an opportunity to see firsthand the issues residents are experiencing within their homes. We have also offered out this opportunity to all Councillors.

## Appendix 2

### 2 Housing Management (now known as Neighbourhoods) (Tenancy services, Housing and Neighbourhood officers and Leaseholder Services)

[2022/2023 figures in brackets]

Service Area	Number of complaints	percentage upheld/partly upheld	percentage within 10 w/days	percentage within 20 w/days	Average w/days
<b>Estate Management (Caretaking &amp; Estate Parking)</b>	<b>74 (86)</b>	<b>22% (15%)</b>	<b>35% (15%)</b>	<b>51% (35%)</b>	<b>61 (25)</b>
<b>Leaseholder Services</b>	<b>34 (53)</b>	<b>35% (21%)</b>	<b>65% (45%)</b>	<b>76% (53%)</b>	<b>22 (26)</b>
<b>Landlord Services</b>	<b>145 (146)</b>	<b>39% (14%)</b>	<b>27% (12%)</b>	<b>51% (23%)</b>	<b>30 (44)</b>

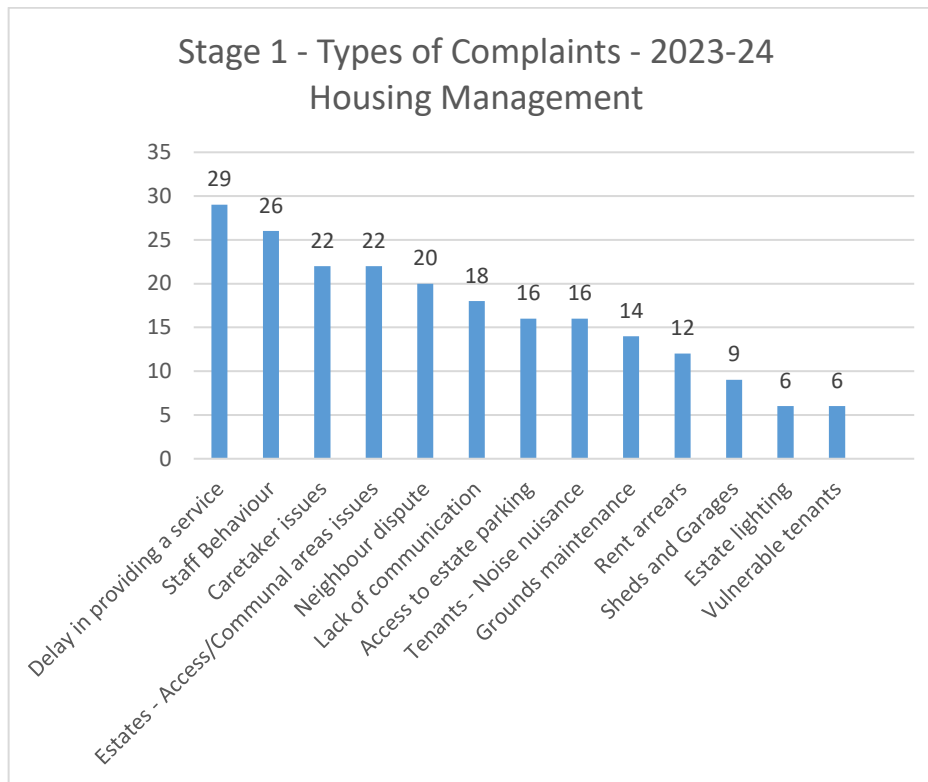
2.1 There were fewer complaints in Estate Management and Leaseholder services with the same number of complaints in Landlord Services compared to the previous year. Whilst there were fewer complaints there are clear spikes in July, November, January and March which is a similar pattern to the previous year.

2.2 Performance has improved compared to the previous year for example:

- responding within 10 working days from 12% last year to **34%** this year.
- responding within 20 working days from 23% last year to **55%** this year.
- 43% not upheld/34% partly or upheld/6% open/4% informally upheld.



## 2.3 Types of Complaint



2.4 The highest number of complaints to Housing Management services were about delays in providing a service and behaviour of staff. While the first to some extent related to resources the second is being actively addressed as explained below.

2.5 We are undergoing a significant transformation in our Housing directorate, moving towards a more seamless and joined up service. Housing Managers have taken up training offered by the Housing Ombudsman Service. We now review Housing Ombudsman findings and spotlight reports at our team meetings. We are in the process of undertaking a review of many of our policies and procedures using the learning from the Housing Ombudsman as one of the drivers to make changes to enable a more positive experience. We are in the process of centralising our complaint response to improve our response times and ensure that our residents receive a comprehensive and consistent approach when responding to the issues they raise.

2.6 Using our complaint data, we can identify areas that we need to strengthen. We know that our residents have raised Anti-Social Behaviour as a concern, and we have put together a task force to address this. We will use insight the Housing Ombudsman e.g., Spotlight on Noise Complaints as part of our review on dealing with these types of reports from our residents. We also note that communication is a common theme along with delay in providing services. We are looking at ways in which we can provide a more proactive approach to our customers, making sure they know what to expect and how we will communicate any further information to them.

- 2.7 Communication and delays in providing services are common themes in complaints. We are looking at ways in which we can provide a more proactive approach to our residents, making sure they know what to expect and how we will communicate any further information to them.
- 2.8 As part of our transformation in housing, we have set a new vision underpinned by 8 key principles that will inform how we deliver our services in future. The key outcomes we expect to achieve following our transformation are:
- A responsive and joined up service
  - Better access to housing and advice
  - Feedback driven improvement
  - Greater sense of community
  - Effective and efficient operations
- 2.9 The service is bringing together complaint handling for Housing Management complaints with Property services complaint handling teams to improve our response times and ensure that our residents receive a comprehensive, consistent and joined up approach when responding to the issues they raise.

## Appendix 3

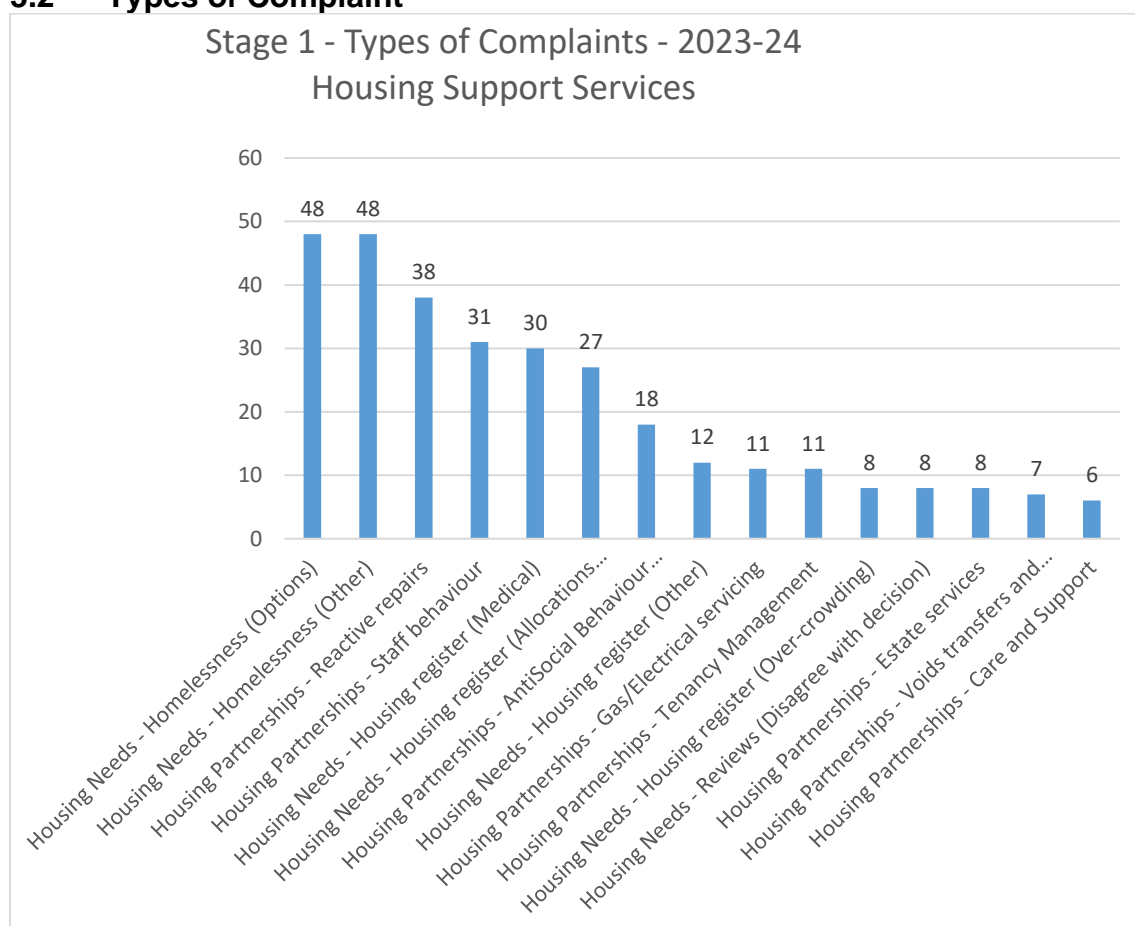
### 3 Housing Support Services (Housing needs, allocations and temporary accommodation)

[2022/2023 figures in brackets]

Service Area	Number of complaints	percentage upheld/partly upheld	percentage within 10 w/days	percentage within 20 w/days	Average w/days
<b>Housing Needs</b>	186 (168)	<b>26%</b> (19%)	<b>37%</b> (16%)	<b>69%</b> (30%)	<b>40</b> (35)
<b>Housing Commissioning &amp; Partnerships</b>	142 (71)	<b>27%</b> (18%)	<b>29%</b> (45%)	<b>47%</b> (63%)	<b>28</b> (13)
<b>Private Sector Housing</b>	8 (1)	<b>25%</b> (0%)	<b>50%</b> (100%)	<b>63%</b> (100%)	<b>26</b> (10)
<b>Temporary Accommodation</b>	8 (4)	<b>38%</b> (0%)	<b>13%</b> (0%)	<b>25%</b> (0%)	<b>40</b> (N/A)

3.1 With regard to performance. The upheld/partly upheld rate is relatively low indicating that in a quarter of cases, the service agreed that there was at least one element where the service had failed and that needed to be put right and in another quarter that there was no service failure. The service is committed to looking critically at how they consider complaints and through what lens they are assessing them having a more customer centred focus.

### 3.2 Types of Complaint



- 3.3 Reviewing complaints received across the service, we have identified the following areas and trends:
- 3.4 Complaints regarding location & type of accommodation, short placement and need to frequently move.**
- 3.5 The Council has continued to see a rise in the demand for temporary accommodation - an increase by almost 60% in the last 3 years. As a result, the service has been reliant on commercial hotels across London when placing households facing homelessness. We are actively growing the number of hotels which we work with, whilst securing agreements for longer term placement thus minimising the disruption caused by the need to frequently move.
- 3.6 The service is also developing several options to bolster the supply of self-contained temporary accommodation within and close to the borough. In 2023 we will deliver an increased supply of accommodation which will reduce the need for placements out of Camden/London and provide more stable tenure.
- 3.7 Complaints regarding delays to housing assessment and lack of information.**
- 3.8 The service has begun working with transformation and design colleagues with a view to improve the resident experience when undergoing the Council's housing allocation process. The first phase of work includes delivering changes to ensure clearer communication of key decisions to residents and access to better information about the process and housing options. Experimental changes to process are now underway in 2023, the changes have been developed with feedback secured from service users.
- 3.9 The second phase of the transformation programme will include a review of the housing policy, systems and IT platforms. The aim of this work is to simplify and speed up the process with use of smarter IT. This works will be designed and co-produced with residents. The delivery date is expected to be in the final quarter of 2024 and is expected to trigger significant changes to the allocations and lettings process, which will bring about wholesale improvements.
- 3.10 Complaints regarding lack of information or clarity of the process has featured within complaints regarding the service.**
- 3.11 Whilst we undergo transformational changes to the process, we also actively updating our website content and written communications to bring about greater clarity and improved information for residents and service users. All housing services are in the process of undertaking a review of policies and procedures which will be shaped using feedback from complaints and Ombudsman cases.

## Appendix 4

### 4 Parking Operations

Service Area	Stage 1	% Upheld/ Partly Upheld	Stage 1 responded to within 10 w/days	Stage 1 responded to within 20 w/days	Outside Timescales Or Open	Average Time to respond w/days*
Customer Services	232 (262)	33% (18%)	71% (39%)	87% (45%)	13% (55%)	14 (19)

4.1 Parking Operations is a high performing service in this regard.

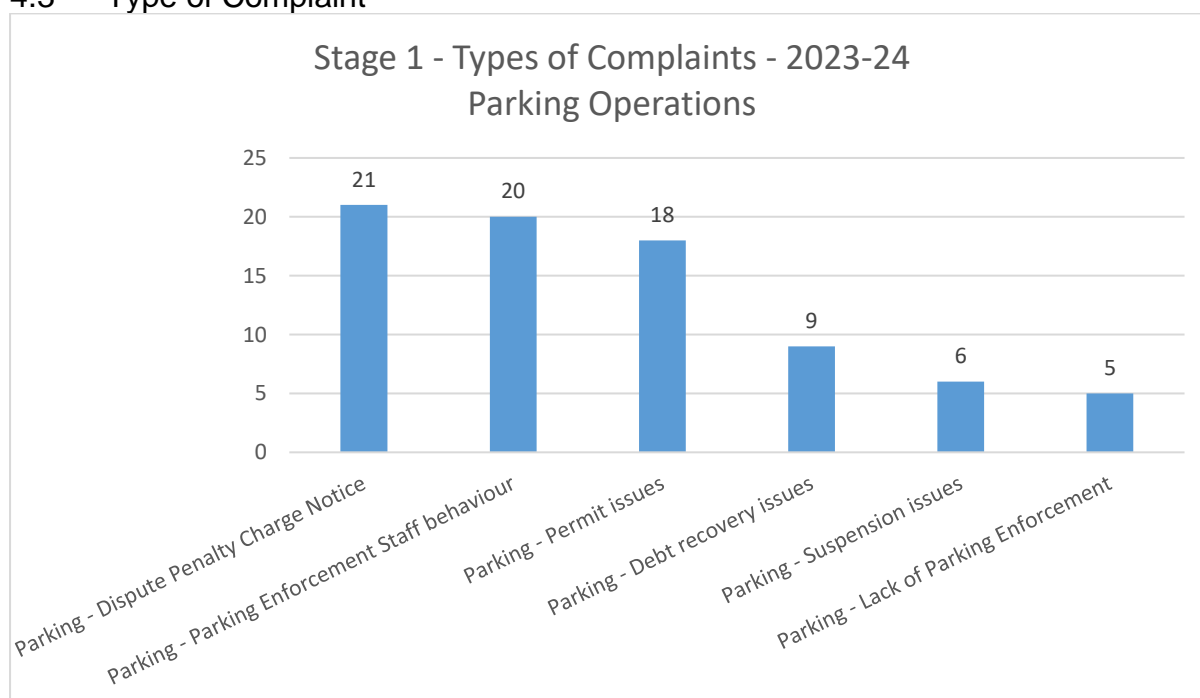
Responding within 10 working days **78%** (36% last year)

Responding within 20 working days **98%** (40% last year)

4.2 Improvements in performance are attributable to:

- being proactive, especially where a complaint requires input from other services. It is forwarded to on to the relevant service for comments with a deadline. If comments are not received, it is chased up. The manager keeps an eye on all deadlines for cases and reminds the team of deadlines and see if there are any issues that need escalation by a
- a dedicated team to respond to training and complaints
- a team chat application to ask any questions and to share information and knowledge
- better and more appropriate use of the 'extend deadline' for complex cases where additional information is required from other service areas. Complainants' expectations are managed better.

4.3 Type of Complaint



- 4.4 Dispute a Penalty Charge Notice (PCN) – PCNs must follow a statutory process so the complaints process should not be used for this purpose. In regard to these complaints we inform customers of the correct process to follow and provide a review of their PCN if they have already made payment. To try and discourage customers using the complaints process we have worked with Contact Camden as a service to improve the IVR (interactive voice response) menu, so it clearly asks customers to write in when challenging a PCN using the information provided on the PCN.
- 4.5 Parking enforcement staff behaviour – We work closely with NSL on these complaints and have improved the witness statements we receive from NSL that help us with our investigations. The majority of these complaints are not upheld, but when we do uphold a complaint and believe a Civil Enforcement Officer has behaved inappropriately, we ask for the CEO to be removed from our contract or undertake further customer service training.
- 4.6 Permit issues / system issues – These tend to be complaints where customers have been refused a refund or had their permit terminated due to a breach of our terms and conditions. There is no real improvement in regards to this as a breach is a breach. Any permit system issues we do find are reported to our colleagues to resolve and if a customer has lost out on visitor permits or incurred a cost, we will reimburse them.
- 4.7 Debt recovery – We investigate behaviour of our debt recovery agents and provide feedback to our Debt Recovery team on any issues we find. These are then raised with the agents to ensure improvements are made / action taken based on our findings.
- 4.8 Suspension issues – These complaints tend to be request for refunds as vehicles are parked in spaces that have been suspended. It is hard for us to 'improve' on this as the terms and conditions are clear on what we can and cannot do.
- 4.9 Lack of parking enforcement – We have updated our '[report a parking problem](#)' form to enable residents to report issues to us, this then forms part of our enforcement plan and how we use our resources. We also provide enhanced enforcement for a two week period if a customer complaint has raised an issue, we were previously unaware of.
- 4.10 Learning Outcomes

There have been several learning outcomes identified as part of our work in responding to complaints. This has led to us being able to:

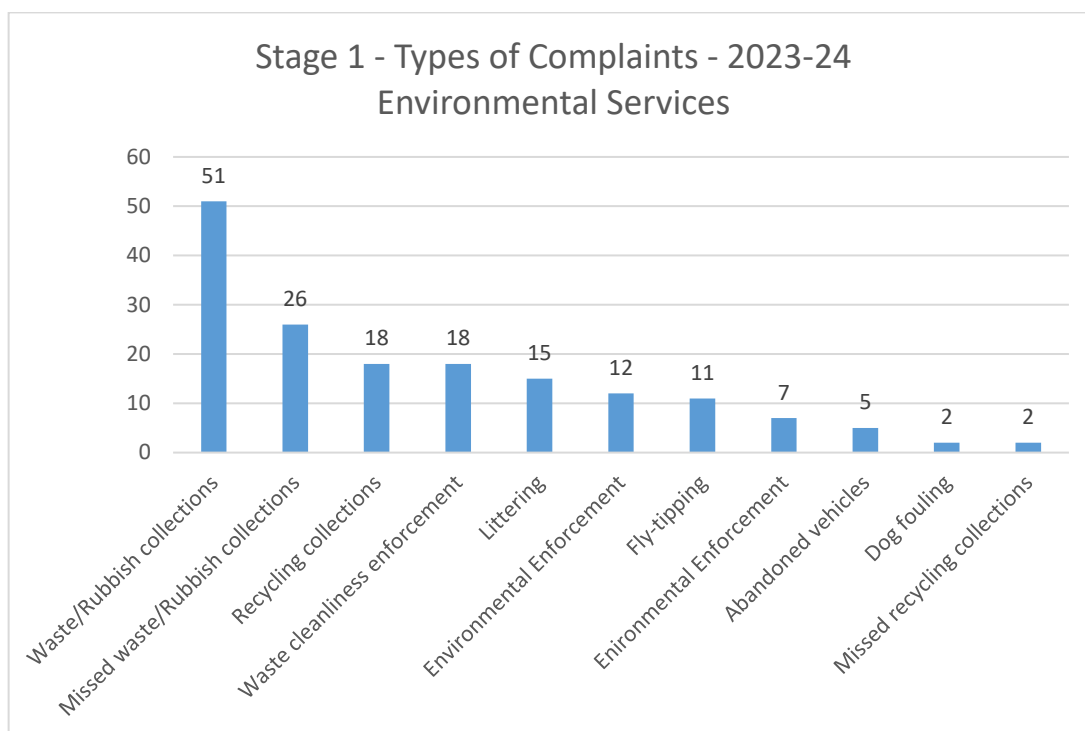
- Improve the knowledge of Contact Camden staff around the correct processes to follow in relation to the suspension process, to ensure correct advice is provided to customers
- Work closely with colleagues in the Parking Investigation team in relation to complaints about the behaviour of our Enforcement Agents and their interactions with customers



- Improve witness statements we receive from our contractor NSL that has helped us investigate cases more thoroughly and respond better to complainants
- Complaint officers feeding into the services policy decisions (new terms and conditions for permits for example) based on their learning from issues raised around permits and the permit system.
- Development of our training programme and quality checking processes that allows us to train on policy and feed back to officers the outcomes (good and bad) of their decision making.
- Officers within the service also develop a monthly report on their work, this report allows officers to take ownership of the work they do and informs the service of any key cases that have been highlighted by independent adjudicators and any changes in service instruction / policies that would impact on decision making.

## Appendix 5

### 5 Environmental Services



#### 5.1 Environment Services has shown the most improvement in performance:

Responding within 10 working days **55%** (14% last year)  
Responding within 20 working days **72%** (21% last year)

5.2 Officers and managers have been reviewing and monitoring complaints to improve the quality and response rate, which is reflected in the improved figures.

5.3 The number of complaints overall are higher than other services, but this reflects the number and frequency of services residents receive from this service area. Around 23 million recycling and waste collections are undertaken borough wide each year, which is an average of 100,000 in each ward every month. The service also sweeps 1,379 streets (at least weekly) and empties 1,600 litter bins.

5.4 Additional training is required to improve the quality of the learning outcomes, and analysis the existing outcomes will be undertaken to identify themes and appropriate actions to improve services.

## Appendix 6

### 6 Adults Social Care and Health

2022/2023 figures in brackets

Service Area	Number of complaints	percentage upheld/ partly upheld	percentage within 10 w/days	percentage within 20 w/days	Average w/days
<b>Support &amp; Safeguarding Adults</b>	<b>52 (30)</b>	<b>13% (0%)</b>	<b>10% (7%)</b>	<b>23% (10%)</b>	<b>86 (27)</b>
<b>Integrated Learning Disabilities</b>	<b>4 (1)</b>	<b>75% (0%)</b>	<b>0% (0%)</b>	<b>0% (0%)</b>	<b>50 (9)</b>
<b>Camden &amp; Islington Trust (incl. R&amp;R, SAMH)</b>	<b>1 (0)</b>	<b>0% (0%)</b>	<b>0% (0%)</b>	<b>0% (0%)</b>	<b>169 (N/A)</b>
<b>Transformation, Performance, Insight, Quality &amp; Financial Services</b>	<b>3 (0)</b>	<b>0% (0%)</b>	<b>33% (0%)</b>	<b>33% (0%)</b>	<b>5 (N/A)</b>
<b>Mental Health Social Work</b>	<b>1 (1)</b>	<b>0% (0%)</b>	<b>0% (0%)</b>	<b>0% (0%)</b>	<b>N/A (N/A)</b>
<b>Provider Services</b>	<b>7 (7)</b>	<b>29% (0%)</b>	<b>0% (0%)</b>	<b>43% (0%)</b>	<b>48 (8)</b>

- 6.1 Adult Social Care and Health (ASCH) received 70 complaints which is a 79% increase compared to 2022/23. It is notable that 17% (12 complaints) received were resolved informally which indicates early engagement with the complainant during the complaint handling process to get an early resolution.
- 6.2 Support and Safeguarding received the largest number of complaints (52). The service is by far the largest in ASC, and many of these complaints contain multiple elements including those of other services such as financial assessments and direct payments. The Support and Safeguarding service are currently experiencing extreme service pressures and, in some situations, people have had to wait longer to access support, which is likely to be a factor in the increase in complaints. During 2023/2024 the service was redesigned and in June 2024 transformed into the ASC Neighbourhood service. Complaints raised were considered in the learning and redesign process.
- 6.3 Only 9% of complaints were responded to within 10 working days which is an improvement on 5% in 2022/23 but still low. Statutory timescales state that Adult Social Care (ASC) complaints should be responded to within 20 working days. The service responded to 23% within that timescale; this is a proportional increase from 8% in 2022/23 so there has been improvements in performance throughout the year. The service responded to 39% within 40 days and to 58% within 100 days and ASC accepts that the current times to

respond are unacceptable, and we need to improve performance relating to complaint response timescales.

6.4 The Complaints and Compliments working group will take a systemic approach to understanding and driving improvement with response times and taking learning into our Quality Action Plan. This group will also take a 'live' role in tracking complaints as they come in and ensuring they are responded to in a timely way.

6.5 12 complaints were upheld or partly upheld compared to 2 upheld or partly upheld last year. In the early part of 2024, Adult Social Care Neighbourhoods introduced new arrangements for reporting and investigating complaints with robust Senior Management oversight. All recent complaints were reviewed to ensure that they had been responded to appropriately and as a result, we observed some improvements in our performance. However, we recognise that there are still improvements needed.

6.6 Adult Social Care has established a Complaints and Compliments Working Group. This group takes a systemic approach to understanding and driving improvement with response times and taking learning into our Quality Action Plan. This group will also take a 'live' role in tracking complaints as they come in and ensuring they are responded to in a timely way.

#### 6.7 Type of complaint

Service/Type	Poor communication/ Lack of communication	Disagree with decision/ action	Lack of information/ advice/ access to service	Delay in providing a service	Quality of Service	Lack of customer care/ Staff behaviour	Total
ASC	31	11	9	9	6	4	70

6.8 When considering the complaints by type, the majority relate to either the level of communication, or disagreements with a decision or action taken. This is likely to have been exacerbated by the current service pressures. The complaints and compliments working group will analyse these complaints to ensure themes are identified and addressed.

6.9 Adult Social Care (ASC) cases can be escalated to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO). 14 ASC complaints were escalated to the LGSCO in 2022/23. Only 2 of these went through full investigation leading to a formal decision.

6.10 The Ombudsman issued the following outcomes.

- 6 were closed after an initial enquiry
- 4 were premature referred back for local resolution (premature)
- 2 were incomplete or not valid
- 1 was not upheld
- 1 was upheld (fault and injustice)

6.11 The orders made on the single case where fault and injustice were found were:

- Apology
- Financial redress: Avoidable distress/time and trouble
- Provide training and/or guidance:
  - Remind its Adult Social Care staff and managers to only issue warning letters about a person's or their representative's behaviour, or obstructions, if there is evidence and this is justified in the circumstances.
  - Remind its Adult Social Care staff and Complaints Team to respond to stage two complaint requests within the timescales set out in the Council's Complaints Policy. This includes sharing, without delay, its decisions not to investigate complaints under stage two.

## **Appendix 7 - Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) - Housing Ombudsman (HO)**

- 7.1 This section of the report provides information on cases that the Ombudsman has made decisions on in the period.
- 7.2 The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman deals with enquiries and complaints that are related to all council services. This includes non-landlord housing issues such as housing allocation, homelessness and temporary accommodation which is categorised in LGSCO reports as “Housing.” The Housing Ombudsman deals with enquiries and complaints that are related to services provided by the Council as a social landlord e.g. repairs to properties.
- 7.3 The LGSCO and HO produce annual performance reports and the data, feedback, recommendations, and remedies made in these are reviewed by the Central Complaints team who ensure the relevant service areas act on them in a timely manner.
- 7.4 Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO)**
- 7.5 The LGSCO publishes an annual review of Local Government Complaints. The 2023/2024 report shows rising numbers of complaints received, an increase in the number of complaints LGSCO uphold, and it has highlighted ongoing issues within SEN, housing and adult social care services. The highest proportion of fault in complaints are related to Education and Children’s Services. The themes of these reports are failure to properly provide for Special Educational Needs and Education, Health and Care plans.
- 7.6 The LGSCO issued overall 27 public interest reports about local authorities, the majority of which were about Education and Children’s Services and Adult Care Services. There were no public reports issued to us in 2023/24.



## 7.7 Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) Data 2023/2024

From LGSCO Annual Review Letter 2023~2024

Click on link: [London Borough of Camden - Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman](#)

Service	Total	Formal investigation		Do not go to formal investigation			
		Upheld	Not Upheld	Advice given	Closed after initial enquiries	Referred back for local resolution (premature)	Incomplete or Invalid
Adult Social Care	14	1	1		6	4	2
Benefits & Tax	5	1			3		1
Corporate & other services	7	1			4	2	
Education & Children's Services	10	1			2	7	
Environment, Public Protection & Regulation	14	3			6	5	
Highways & Transport	14	1			10	2	1
Housing	60	8	2	20	13	16	1
Planning & Development	8				3	5	
Other	3			3			
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>135</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>5</b>
		<b>14%</b>		<b>86%</b>			

## 7.8 LGSCO Outcome decisions

7.9 Where the ombudsman finds fault the outcome decision can be (in order of seriousness):

- Maladministration with injustice
- Maladministration without injustice
- Upheld (No Further Action required/ Remedy Actions complete)
- Service Failure

7.10 There were 16 cases upheld and all of these had an outcome decision of maladministration with injustice.

Service area	Maladministration with Injustice	Maladministration without injustice	Injustice remedied during LGO consideration
Adult Social Care	1		
Benefits & Council Tax	1		
Corporate & other services	1		
Education & Children's services	1		
Environment, Public Protection & Regulation	3		
Highways & Transport	1		
Housing	8		
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>

### 7.11 LGSCO Data for Camden Council

[Data from the LGSCO Annual Review Letter 2023/2024]

Description	2023/2024	2022/2023
Complaints Investigated	19	20
Complaints Upheld	84% (16 cases)	70% (14)
Upheld - average similar orgs	85%	77%
Compliance with recommendations	100% (14 cases)	100% (13 cases)
Compliance – average similar orgs	99%	99%
Satisfactory remedy provided by authority	0% (0/16 cases)	0% (0/14)
Satisfactory remedy – average similar orgs	12%	15%
Enquiries received	137	96
Decided	135	93
Compliance with remedies	14	13
Late completion of remedies	6	2
Public Reports	0	0

### 7.12 Complaints Upheld

7.13 The LGSCO selects the complaints it looks at in detail by prioritising them where it is in the public interest to investigate and are less likely to carry out investigations on 'borderline' issues. It is therefore much more likely that those they do investigate, they will find fault. Therefore average uphold rate for all investigations has increased this year and the same trend is seen in the uphold rate for similar organisations.

7.14 The LGSCO chose 14% of the cases received to go to full investigation compared to 21% the previous year - which indicates that we had fewer cases that looked like there was fault during the application of their selection criteria. Our proportion of complaints upheld is similar to last year and lower than the average which indicates that the LGSCO changes above have not significantly impacted on our uphold rate.

### 7.15 Compliance with recommendations

7.16 We continue to be fully compliant with LGSCO recommendations in all cases but there were 6 cases where remedies were completed late compared to 2 cases in 2022/2023.

7.17 The LGSCO defines this measure as when “we found the organisation had provided a satisfactory remedy **before** the complaint reached the Ombudsman.” This will always be a relatively small proportion as cases that are escalated to the LGSCO are nearly always those where the complainant considers the remedy offered at local stages to be unsatisfactory. The LGSCO’s process of only investigating cases likely to find fault means that this figure will be low as they will look at the organisation’s remedies to decide whether to investigate or not. Therefore, it is not surprising that we had 0% as this means the LGSCO had selected the 19 cases to be investigated having looked at the remedies offered and considered them unsatisfactory.

7.18 The number of complaints to the LGSCO has increased by 45% and this is attributable to a rise in Housing Allocations complaints.

Decision	2023/2024	2022/2023
<b>Not investigated</b>		
Advice given	23	16
Closed after initial enquiries	47	26
Incomplete/Invalid	5	3
Referred back for local resolution	41	28
<b>Investigated</b>		
Not Upheld	3	6
Upheld	16	14
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>135</b>	<b>93</b>

7.19 There were 16 cases upheld and all of these had an outcome decision of maladministration with injustice. Again, this reflects the LGSCO policy of prioritising cases where it is in the public interest to investigate.

Service area	Maladministration with Injustice	Maladministration without injustice	Injustice remedied during LGO consideration
Adult Social Care	1		
Benefits & Council Tax	1		

Corporate & other services	1		
Education & Children's services	1		
Environment, Public Protection & Regulation	3		
Highways & Transport	1		
Housing	8		
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>

## 7.20 Areas for improvement

7.21 The LGSCO has highlighted the timeliness of responding to LGSCO requests for information as an area for improvement. This remains an area where we can be better and an email has been sent to all relevant heads of service and managers reminding them of the importance of responding to requests in a timely way from LGSCO and the Housing Ombudsman. Further communications to relevant staff will be sent on the need to prioritise Ombudsman cases and reviewing processes to make them as effective as possible.

7.22 LGSCO Annual Review Letter and Performance available here: [London Borough of Camden - Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman](#)

## 7.23 Housing Ombudsman

7.24 The Ombudsman's role has been expanded under the new Social Housing Regulation Act (SHRA), with new expectations to issue guidance and measure landlords against it, alongside powers to order landlords to review their policies and practices.

7.25 The SHRA sets out an expanded role for the Housing Ombudsman, widening its powers and encouraging further action from the Ombudsman in the following areas.

- It encourages the Ombudsman and the Regulator of Social Housing RSH to take steps as they see fit to work together to carry out their respective functions.
- The Act expands the Ombudsman's power to issue guidance which it is able to measure landlords against, including a code of practice for procedures relevant to complaints handling. This Complaints Handling Code which was introduced in 2020 and became statutory in 2024, with landlords expected to comply with the provisions of the Code. The Ombudsman will be assessing this as part of its mandated duty to monitor.
- It gives new powers to order landlords to review their policies and practices where they are continuously leading to complaints arising against the landlord.

## 7.26 Key areas in the Code

- Universal definition of a complaint
- Providing easy access to the complaints procedure and ensuring residents are aware of it, including their right to access the Housing Ombudsman Service
- The structure of the complaint procedure - only two stages necessary and clear timeframes set out for responses
- Ensuring fairness in complaint handling with a resident-focused process
- Taking action to put things right and appropriate remedies
- Creating a positive complaint handling culture through continuous learning and improvement
- Demonstrating learning in annual reports
- Annual self-assessment against the Code.
- Annual Complaint Handling & Service Improvement Report

7.27 The HO's Complaint Handling Code and the Council's self-assessment for 2023/2024 together with the Annual Complaint Handling & Service Improvement Report 2023~2024 can be found at: [Complaints - Camden Council](#)

7.28 Where a landlord does not comply with the Code, the Ombudsman may issue a Complaint Handling Failure Order (CHFO). In 2023/2024 Camden was issued with 4 CHFO compared to 1 in 2022/2023.

## 7.29 Local Data – general housing – Housing Ombudsman

7.30 In 2023/2024 we received 120 enquiries from the Housing Ombudsman

Division	Service	Nos of enquiries
Housing Management	Estate Management	3
	Leaseholder Services	6
	Landlord Services	28
	<b>TOTAL HM</b>	<b>37</b>
Property Management	Repairs & Operations	85
	<b>TOTAL PM</b>	<b>83</b>

Enquiry Type	Housing Mgt	Property Mgt
Awaiting decision/next steps	27	63
Premature (complaint has not gone through local procedures. Usually comes with request to go through local procedures – Stage 1, Stage 2)	1	
Information Request (to decide whether to proceed to investigation)		
Decision – Severe Maladministration	1	7
Decision - Maladministration	4	10

Decision – Service Failure	2	2
Outside Jurisdiction	2	
No Maladministration		
Case closed after initial investigation		1
Resolved satisfactorily		
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>83</b>

7.31 The performance review data can be found here:  
[Landlord-Report-Camden- Council.pdf \(housing-ombudsman.org.uk\)](https://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/Landlord-Report-Camden-Council.pdf)

### 7.32 Decisions

7.33 The Housing Ombudsman made a decision on 61 cases compared to 19 in 2022/2023. This is not the number of cases they received in 23/24 but the number they made a decision on in year. Some will have been received in 2022/23 (or earlier) and taken time to investigate.

7.34 Across those 61 cases, HOS made 171 findings compared to 33 findings in 2022/2023. Those findings have gone up a level of severity with a 37% increase in severe maladministration and maladministration with a 21% decrease in service failure findings.

Finding	2023/2024 Number	2023/2024 %	2022/2023 %
Severe Maladministration	20	12%	0%
Maladministration	73	43%	18%
Service Failure	31	18%	39%
No Maladministration	20	12%	24%
Redress	6	4%	6%
Mediation	0	0%	0%
Outside Jurisdiction	21	12%	12%
Withdrawn	0	0%	0%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>171</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

Service	Housing Management	Property Management	Complaint Handling	Info & Data Mgt
Severe Maladministration	2	13	5	
Maladministration	11	26	34	2
Service Failure	8	13	9	1
No Maladministration	14	4	2	
Outside jurisdiction	12	8	0	1
Redress	3	1	2	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>4</b>

7.35 45 findings were related to Repairs and Operations:

Type	2023/2024 number	2022/2023 number
leaks, damp and mould	24	4
general repair issues	10	3
Heating and hot water	6	1
Gas inspections and safety	2	0
Structural safety	2	0
Fire safety	1	0

7.36 23 findings were related to Housing Management:

Type	2023/2024 number	2022/2023 number
Noise	8	2
Leaseholder Service Charges	6	2
Pest Control	4	0
Staff conduct	4	0
Decants (permanent or temporary)	1	0

### 7.37 Maladministration Rate

7.38 The maladministration rate is the number of findings of severe maladministration, maladministration and service failure, expressed as a percentage of the total number of findings (excluding findings of Outside Jurisdiction and Withdrawn).

7.39 Camden Mal Rate =  $124 / 150 = 83\%$   
The average for Local Authorities of a similar size is 75%.

### 7.40 Orders (Remedies)

7.41 Orders are made where the investigation has resulted in a finding of some level of maladministration. They are intended to put things right for the resident. Of the 124 maladministration findings, 247 orders were made compared to 28 orders in 2022/2023.

### 7.42 Ombudsman-awarded financial remedies

	2023/2024	2022/2023
Housing Ombudsman orders	<b>£77,928</b>	£3,205
LGSCO orders	<b>£5,430</b>	£1,500
<b>Total</b>	<b>£83,358</b>	£4,705

7.43 This is the total amount ordered by the Ombudsman to be paid as redress for delays and service failures. It does not include the amounts paid as refunds for amounts complainants have paid out due to the service failure (e.g. in rents, service charges, replacement items).



## Appendix 8

### 8 Housing Ombudsman - Section 49 Special Investigation

#### 8.1 Summary

- The Housing Ombudsman Service (HoS) published a report into complaint handling in the Council's housing service on the 28th November 2024.
- The report praises the Council's engagement with the investigation and efforts to improve the service, and the tone is notably more positive than other similar recent reports about local authority landlords. However, in the cases the report covers, it is clear the Council has fallen short of the level of service it wants to provide.
- Fourteen areas are identified for further improvement, of which nine are already part of the Housing Transformation Programme.
- The HoS sole power, other than reputational, following a s49 investigation is to make a referral to the Regulator for Social Housing, which they have not done in this case.

#### 8.2 Background and context:

- On 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2023 the HoS announced a special investigation into complaints handling at LB Camden. This follows other section 49 investigations at other landlords. Other councils where special investigations have taken place include Islington, Lewisham, Birmingham, Hackney, Haringey, Hammersmith & Fulham. All the landlords subject to this have been large complex landlords in urban areas, overwhelmingly London.
- Earlier this year the Housing Ombudsman noted that 47% of the cases they determined in 2023-24 were from residents living in a London postcode, this reflecting challenges around the age of the stock, the density of accommodation, levels of overcrowding and the associated challenges this brings.
- It must be noted that the operating environment for all social housing landlords is very far from optimal. The impact of the four-year rent reduction and various rent caps, have cost Camden £167m by 2024/25 and meaning our budget is £32m lower than it otherwise would be. This is combined with inflation following the invasion of Ukraine, hikes in interest rates caused by the mini-budget, personnel shortages exacerbated by Brexit and a swell of demand that followed the pandemic (repairs increased 43% in 2021/22).

#### 8.3 The Investigation and Recommendations

- This investigation involved looking in detail at a number of complaints where the ombudsman had involvement. These complaints are primarily historic:
  - 2018 - 1 case
  - 2020 - 4 cases
  - 2021 - 15 cases
  - 2022 - 27 cases

- 2023 - 2 cases
- Improvements have been made since the majority of these cases occurred, however we are still keen to ensure that we take the lessons learned to ensure that future complaints are handled better and are aware of key improvement areas.
- One central reflection from the report is that LBC has had a ‘defensive’ complaints culture, where officers attempt to minimise complaints by logging some contacts as service requests instead, HoS also specifically pointed to the wording of some letters (see recommendation 4).
- These process and culture changes are underway, both as result of the work with the ombudsman and the internal audit investigation of complaints handling. This work is largely included in the overall Housing Transformation Programme.

#### 8.4 Complaint Handling recommendations

1	Work with the Housing Ombudsman to ensure its complaints policy and related documentation is compliant with the Code, to help embed a positive complaint handling culture.	We welcome this engagement with HoS and will work positively to achieve this
2	Review its complaint handling processes and complaint handling training to ensure compliance with the Complaint Handling Code including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identifying and acknowledging a complaint</li> <li>• Identifying and acknowledging escalation requests</li> <li>• Ensuring appropriately thorough investigations</li> <li>• Quality, timeliness and tone of responses</li> <li>• Resident communication when complaint response and/or resolution is delayed</li> </ul>	In progress
3	Review its approach to ‘Business as Usual’ enquiries to distinguish those that are service enquiries from those that are complaints. Make it a requirement that a rationale must be recorded as to why the complaint was closed as ‘not a complaint’ to provide the resident with a reason, to monitor these enquiries for themes, and to ensure this approach is not a barrier for residents making complaints	In progress
4	Review the standard template letters to ensure they are compliant with the Code and remove the ‘ <i>Sorry you felt the need to complain</i> ’ standard wording from all templates.	Completed

5	Create and embed a process to ensure any actions promised in complaint responses will be tracked through to completion, including clear guidance on closing the case on its case management when there are outstanding actions.	Need to start
6	Create a clear escalation pathway for residents for when actions proposed in complaint responses are delayed beyond agreed or expected dates.	Need to start
7	Create clear guidance for staff on compensation and a process to monitor compensation payments to ensure consistency, accuracy, and transparency in amounts offered.	In progress
8	Review recording of complaint cases, to ensure data captured and performance reporting is transparent and accurate.	In progress
9	Provide the Ombudsman and the governing body with an update on the quality assurance process which forms part of the landlord's wider review into its complaint handling.	Need to start
10	Provide the Ombudsman and the governing body with the key findings of the internal audit into complaint handling, including any risk related management plans.	In progress

### **Disrepair recommendations**

12	Create a process to monitor outstanding repairs through to conclusion, ensuring residents are kept updated on the progress of their repairs and informed of repairs that are delayed beyond agreed or expected dates. Ensure there is a process for contacting and updating residents that are digitally excluded.	In progress
13	Create a Knowledge and Information Management framework for all stages of the repairs process, including how it reviews previous disrepair cases to identify any links between issues, how it records repair visit outcomes and to ensure teams have access to information when needed.	Need to start – this is a long term journey involving a new IT platform, 12-18mths

### Vulnerable residents' recommendations

14	Provide the Ombudsman and the governing body with an update on its review of its approach to vulnerability. To include updates on its proposed Vulnerability Policy including reasonable adjustments, how the landlord will use its vulnerability information to improve its ' <i>enhanced</i> ' service to residents with additional needs, and its strategy for longer-term system and data improvements.	In progress
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**REPORT END**