

THE ROYAL BOROUGH OF KENSINGTON AND CHELSEA
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 15 NOVEMBER 2023

DIRECTOR FOR CUSTOMER DELIVERY

ANNUAL COMPLAINTS REPORT 22-23

The annual complaints report provides an overview of the Council's performance on complaints as well as a summary of the findings from Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) and Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS) decisions.

Councils are encouraged to report complaints performance annually to the Committee; and to share the findings of complaints upheld by the Ombudsman.

1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The Annual Report reflects on the Council's overall performance in relation to complaints management; looking specifically at the volume and outcome of complaints, as well as how quickly complaints were answered and how many complaints were escalated to Stage Two.
- 1.2 The report provides a summary of the updates that have been made to the complaints process and the measures implemented to improve and strengthen complaint handling practices in light of the learning that has been identified.
- 1.3 The main body of the report contains an update on the priorities that were agreed for 22/23 and sets out the actions and recommendations that are being proposed for 23/24.
- 1.4 Appendix A reports on departmental performance, learning opportunities and service improvements. Appendix B shares findings of the Local Government and Social Care and Housing Ombudsman services. Appendix C contains a link to the Local Government and Social Care's Annual Review Letter 2023 and Appendix D contains a link to the Housing Ombudsman Service Landlord Report 2023.

2 RECOMMENDATION(S)

- 2.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee are asked to comment on:
 - 1) the Council's performance on complaint handling during 22/23;
 - 2) the actions proposed for 23/24 to improve complaint management across the Council.

3 INFORMATION ABOUT THIS REPORT

- 3.1 The intention of this report is to ensure the Committee has the opportunity to review and comment on the Council's performance and approach to complaints

handling. The Committee are also invited to comment on the planned actions and recommendations for the coming year.

3.2 As explained in the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's Annual Review Letter (Appendix C), information about investigations the Ombudsman has completed are shared directly with the Chair of the Scrutiny Committee.

3.3 The Annual Report will be taken as a Key Decision on 6 December 2023.

4 MAIN REPORT

4.1 The total number of accepted complaints in 22/23 was 1,671 compared with 1,674 the previous year. It should be noted that most departments have seen similar or fewer complaint volumes, except for Housing Needs that has seen a 63% increase. A considerable portion of these complaints predominantly revolved around concerns regarding either a lack of response or an insufficient response.

4.2 In 22/23 66% of stage one responses were issued on time compared with 63% in 21/22, which continues to fall below the target of 90%. Officers must prioritise dealing with complaints quickly and thoroughly; with the aim of answering 90% of all complaints on time.

4.3 During 22-23, the Corporate Complaints Team was audited, and it was concluded that Satisfactory Assurance could be given to residents, Senior Leaders, and Members that there are effective controls in place to review, investigate, respond to and recompense complainants. To ensure that the complaints process is followed more robustly, however, recommendations to improve practice were approved by the Executive Management Team on 11 October 2023.

4.4 Since its inception, the Corporate Complaints Team has used iCasework as the primary complaints management system. Housing Management used its own CRM system to manage complaints but moved over to using iCasework on 11 September 2023.

4.5 The LGSCO also receives complaints regarding the Council and considers them for investigation once the Council has issued a final response. In 22-23 it investigated 24 complaints and upheld 20 of them (83%). This is an increase of 16% on the previous year, when 21 complaints were investigated and 14 were upheld (67%). It is higher than the average in similar authorities, which was 77%.

4.6 Information about complaints must be analysed to ensure that the organisation deals with complaints promptly and effectively. It is, however, perhaps even more critical that the Council can demonstrate a learning culture, whereby complaint feedback drives service improvement. In 22-23, significant work has been done to improve information on the Council website, updating the approval process at Stages One and Two, amending the unreasonable and vexatious complainants' policy and delivering bespoke complaint handling training to Housing Needs. The Corporate Complaints team also completed mandatory training on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, including Unconscious Bias training.

4.7 The organisation strives to deliver a mature, effective, and efficient approach to complaints management, which serves to use positive and constructive feedback to improve service delivery for customers. In 2023/24, the organisation must:

- Answer 90% of all complaints within 10 working days at Stage One and 20 working days at Stage Two.
- Call customers immediately after receiving their complaint to ensure that we understand the issues and address all complaint points thoroughly.
- Answer the complaint right, first time so that complainants are not having to complain twice to get the issues resolved. This means Officers must quality check their responses before sending to ensure that they answer the totality of the complaint with compassion and where the desired outcomes cannot be met, provide a through explanation about why.
- The Council will improve awareness and accessibility to the complaints process for those who are digitally excluded, do not speak English as their first language or for some other reason may find it harder to raise a complaint.
- All stage two draft responses for non-statutory complaints (excluding, Children's and Housing who have their own Teams to manage this) must be quality assured by the Corporate Complaints Team before they are sent out to complainants.
- The Council must use complaint reporting data to regularly monitor and manage underperformance linked to complaints, corrective actions, and learning opportunities.
- Contract Managers must have routine discussions about complaints management, learning and service improvements with contractors and inform contractors that they are expected to provide evidence of progress in this area.
- Complete the recommendations and actions set out in the Audit Report 2022/23.

5 TIMESCALE FOR CONSIDERATION

- 5.1 The report is scheduled to be presented to Leadership Team on 6 December 2023.
- 5.2 The report is scheduled to be presented to Council on 31 January 2024.
- 5.3 Thereafter, once the report has been made accessible, it will be published on the Council website.

6 FURTHER INFORMATION

[Appendix C](#) – The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's Annual Review Letter

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