

 <b>Brent</b>	<b>Housing Scrutiny Committee</b> 6 February 2019
	<b>Report from the Director of          Performance, Policy &amp;          Partnerships</b>
<b>Complaints Annual Report 2017 – 2018</b>	

<b>Wards Affected:</b>	All
<b>Key or Non-Key Decision:</b>	Key
<b>Open or Part/Fully Exempt:</b> <small>(If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)</small>	Open
<b>No. of Appendices:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Appendix A – Overview of Complaints Performance in the Housing directorate</li> <li>Appendix B – 2017/18 Complaints Root Cause Summary &amp; Improvement Actions (Housing Directorate)</li> </ul>
<b>Background Papers:</b>	N/A
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## 1.0 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The 2017/18 Complaints Annual Report was presented to Cabinet on 10 December 2018 and will also be presented to the Community Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee in January 2019 and Resources & Public Realm Scrutiny Committee in February 2019.
- 1.2 This version of the 2017/18 Complaints Annual report focuses on complaints performance in the Housing directorate.

- 1.3 An overview report on complaints performance in the Housing directorate is provided in **Appendix A**. The supplement covers the period from April 2017 to March 2018 and comparative data going back to 2015/16 has been provided where available.
- 1.4 A summary of the root cause of complaints and improvement actions in the Housing Directorate in 2017/18 is provided in **Appendix B**.
- 1.5 Examples of compliments received for the Housing Directorate have been supplied in **Appendix A**.

## **2.0 Recommendation(s)**

- 2.1 Housing Scrutiny Committee is asked to note that Cabinet approved the 2017-18 Complaint Annual Report which included the progress update on the Improvement Action Plan. The Action Plan was developed from the eight recommendations in the 2016-17 Complaints Annual Report.
- 2.2 Housing Scrutiny Committee is asked to note and consider the Housing directorate performance in managing and resolving complaints and to advise Cabinet of any further remedial action required.

## **3.0 Detail**

### ***Council's Complaint Framework***

- 3.1 The Council operates a 2-stage corporate complaints process, 2-part Adult statutory complaints process and a 3-stage Children's statutory complaints process. The stages and timescales for handling both corporate and statutory complaints is set out in Appendix A.

### ***Complaint Performance – Key Headlines***

- 3.2 The Housing directorate comprises the following services: Housing Management Services (HMS) formerly known as Brent Housing Partnership (BHP); Housing Needs; Private Housing Services (PHS) and Housing Partnerships. The Housing Partnerships directorate only receives one or two complaints a year, so the key headlines from the rest of the directorate's complaints performance in 2017/18 are detailed below:

#### ***Brent Housing Partnership (BHP)/ Housing Management Service (HMS)***

- 3.3 The Housing Management Service is split over two core functions, Housing Management Customer Service and Housing Management Property Service. Both service areas manage high volumes of operational activities generated by customers and as part of the Council general landlord function. In particular, the responsive repairs service deals with over 30,000 repairs each year, which makes up approximately 70% of demands from our customers. The Council is dependent on a number of contractors to fulfil its landlord obligations and has established partnership arrangements in place to ensure core service standards are delivered. There are a number of improvement initiatives underway as part of the large-scale improvement programme across the service.

3.4 The key headlines from the BHP/HMS service' corporate complaints performance in 2017/18 were as follows:

- The volume of BHP/HMS Stage 1 and Stage 2 corporate cases has increased since 2015/16 (↑)
- 1 in 7 corporate cases was escalated to Stage 2 (↑)
- The top three complaint themes were Customer care/service delivery, repairs/building services and communication.
- The number of Housing Ombudsman cases received by the Council has been increasing but the percentage of cases upheld has decreased over the past 3 years. (↓)
- Stage 1 and Stage 2 upheld/partly upheld rate has increased over the past 3 years (↑)
- The number of cases awarded compensation has decreased over the past 3 years. (↓)
- The timeliness of Stage 1 corporate complaints has improved since 2015/16 (↑)

#### Housing Needs

3.5 The Housing Needs Service is responsible for securing suitable accommodation for homeless households. Due to the lack of supply of affordable accommodation, both social housing and in the private rented sector, the service is dependent on using "Temporary Accommodation", including emergency bed and breakfast properties to house homeless households. This type of accommodation generates a large proportion of complaints, often related to households having to live in properties with shared facilities. There was a significant increase in upheld/partly upheld complaints in 2017/18 at Stage 2, mainly caused by officers not dealing with all concerns raised at stage 1.

3.6 The key headlines from the Housing Needs service' corporate complaints performance in 2017/18 were as follows:

- The volume of Stage 1 complaints has decreased by 28% or 54 cases since 2015/16. This is also reflected in the decrease in escalation of Stage 2 complaints in 2017/18 (↓)
- 1 in 5 cases was escalated to Stage 2 in 2017/18 (↑)
- The top three complaint themes were communication, temporary accommodation/bed and breakfast and assessments
- One third of upheld decisions made by the LGO were from the Housing Needs service (↑)
- The rate of cases upheld/partly upheld has increased with 41% upheld/partly upheld in 2017/18 at Stage 2 (↑)
- The total amount of compensation awarded tripled from 2015/16 to 2017/18 (↑)
- Housing Needs have maintained a high standard of timeliness in completing casework with 98% of Stage 1 complaints completed on time in 2017/18 (↑)

## Private Housing Services (PHS)

- 3.7 PHS predominantly has two key functions, one being regulating and enforcing standards within the private rented sector (PRS) and the other assisting disabled and vulnerable residents by facilitating and providing aids, adaptations and repairs in their homes. In the past year PHS has received in the region of 4,500 PRS property licence applications, over 800 request for service from PRS tenants who believe they need repairs to their homes and in the region of 1,000 referrals or requests for service for aids, adaptations and/or repairs. In many cases, and in particular with regards to aids and adaptations, the issues that customers have are of a very complex nature and these are very often borne out in their complaints.
- 3.8 The key headlines from the PHS service' complaints performance in 2017/18 are as follows:
- The overall number of Stage 1 complaints is very low (less than 2% of all Brent cases in 2017/18) (✓)
  - The escalation rate to Stage 2 is high with 1 in 3 cases escalated in 2017/18 (↑)
  - The top two complaint themes were PHS Grants (50%) and PHS Enforcement (50%)
  - There were 21 LGO cases upheld in 2017/18, only 2 of these were from PHS (↓)
  - The rate of Stage 2 cases upheld/partly upheld within PHS were minimal in 2017/18 with only 14% upheld/partly upheld (↓)
  - The total amount of compensation for 2017/18 amounted to £1,020 for 3 cases. This equals to an average of £340 per case, which compared to the previous year (2016/17) is a decrease of £582 per case (↓)
  - The performance figures for PHS in 2017/18 have improved from the previous year by 16% points with 92% of cases in Stage 1 completed on time (↑)

### ***Improvements Resulting from Complaint Investigations***

- 3.9 Service-specific improvements resulting from the learning from complaints for Housing directorate have been highlighted in Appendix B.
- 3.10 Cabinet agreed 8 recommendations in the 2016/17 Annual Complaints report which was developed into an action plan by the Complaints Service team. A progress update is provided below on the 8 recommendations

<b>Recommendation/Action</b>	<b>Progress</b>
1. Work with Service area and departmental management teams to review key service delay/failure hotspots and develop improvement plans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Quarterly hotspots report introduced and discussed with the Corporate Management Team (CMT), departmental management teams (DMTs) and shared with senior managers</li><li>• The Complaints Service team have focussed on supporting HMS with improving service delivery based on identified complaints hotspots.</li></ul>

Recommendation/Action	Progress
<p>2. Develop a tailored training plan on communication and staff behaviours to be implemented for priority service areas across the Council.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hotspots analysis showed that HMS had received a significant amount of complaints regarding communication and staff behaviours. Other areas across the Council had low levels of this type of complaints.</li> <li>HMS have introduced a number of measures to address staff and communication issues including: further analysis of customer care complaints to identify and address patterns; the rollout of Mary Guber customer service and feedback on learning points given to individuals and teams.</li> <li>Other service areas have discussed the learning points from complaints with staff members and team meetings.</li> </ul>
<p>3. Support new Housing Management Service during the redesign of the repairs process in order to feed in the lessons learned from complaints.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Redesign of repairs process was part of the wider Housing Transformation Programme.</li> <li>The Complaints Service team have also provided training and guidance to HMS staff and managers on effective complaints handling.</li> <li><b>Action closed</b></li> </ul>
<p>4. Review LGO referrals and identify any future opportunities for early resolution and to help minimise premature LGO referrals.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Complaints Service team proactively works with complainants to minimise complaints being escalated to the Council's final review stage and to the Ombudsman stage. However, there are cases where the complainant chooses to bypass the Council's complaints process and lodges a complaint directly with the Ombudsman.</li> </ul>
<p>5. Review our internal approach to complaint decisions, corrective actions and compensation in light of LGO outcomes in 2016/17</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All LGO upheld cases were reviewed by the Complaints Service team to identify learning points and service areas put in place the appropriate remedial actions.</li> </ul>
<p>6. Continue to improve internal processes and working arrangements with service managers to increase the timeliness of Stage 2 responses</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Weekly open case tracker sent to staff and managers and reminders sent by the Chief Executive and Complaints Service team to maintain the focus on timescales.</li> </ul>
<p>7. Work closely with the Housing Management Service management team to establish a new and effective complaints process and implement improved working arrangements to manage Stage 2 complaints.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Complaints Service team has been working closely with the HMS senior management team and staff to introduce improved complaints handling processes within the directorate. Regular feedback is provided on live issues and practical solutions agreed.</li> </ul>

Recommendation/Action	Progress
<p>8. Implement a weekly Corrective Actions Tracker for all departments to monitor the timely completion of agreed remedial actions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Corrective Actions Tracker sent to relevant staff twice a month. Although completion of corrective actions has improved to some extent, this still needs ongoing attention to ensure that we can keep our promises as a council and follow through on remedial actions completely and in a timely manner.</li> </ul>

#### 4.0 Financial Implications

4.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. Instead, the details provided on compensation payments reflect the monetary impact of not getting things right first time as an organisation and the need to improve the customer experience and therefore minimise the financial penalties incurred by the Council.

#### 5.0 Legal Implications

5.1 Complaints concerning the Adult Social Care and Children and Young People departments come under separate statutory complaint procedures. It is a legal requirement to produce annual reports for these areas and these documents were included in the appendices to the main Cabinet Report.

#### 6.0 Equality Implications

6.1 None

#### 7.0 Consultation with Ward Members and Stakeholders

7.1 None

#### 8.0 Human Resources/Property Implications (if appropriate)

8.1 None

**Report sign off:**

**PETER GADSDON**

Director of Performance, Policy & Partnerships