 Brent	Cabinet 8 September 2025
	Report from the Corporate Director of Finance and Resources
	Lead Member – Deputy Leader, Cabinet Member for Finance & Resources (Councillor Milli Patel)
Complaints Annual Report 2024 – 2025	

Wards Affected:	All
Key or Non-Key Decision:	Key
Open or Part/Fully Exempt: <small>(If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)</small>	Open
List of Appendices:	Four Appendix A: Adult Social Care Complaints Appendix B: Children's Social Care Complaints Appendix C: Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman performance comparison with other London boroughs Appendix D: HMS Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report
Background Papers:	None
Contact Officer(s): <small>(Name, Title, Contact Details)</small>	Amira Nassr Deputy Director Democratic & Corporate Governance 0208 937 5436 amira.nassr@brent.gov.uk

1.0 Executive Summary

- 1.1 This annual report sets out complaints performance at Brent Council for the period 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025 and focuses on the nature of complaints and the learning they provide to inform Brent's future approach to service improvement.
- 1.2 Complaints concerning Adult Social Care (ASC) and Children's Social Care are governed by separate statutory complaint procedures and individual summary reports have been provided for these services in **Appendices A and B** respectively.

- 1.3 A comparison of the Council's performance with other London boroughs provided by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman has been provided in **Appendix C**.
- 1.4 The report also contains in **Appendix D** the Council's Housing Management Service Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report for 2024/25 which is now a requirement of the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code.

Ombudsman assessment

- 1.5 Brent's complaint performance continues to be positively assessed by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO):

Independent, external assessment of the quality of Brent's complaint performance is provided by the relevant Ombudsman. Sections 4.21 to 4.57 of this report and Appendix C provide detailed information about this. Brent continues to perform well against some key measures. The LGSCO carried out 24 detailed investigations into Brent complaints in 2024/25, of which 21 were upheld. The figures are the same as last year and only 4% higher than similar authorities. When adjusting this metric to consider Brent's population, this is 6.1% upheld decisions per 100,000 residents. The average for authorities of this type is 9.1% upheld decisions per 100,000 residents. Significantly, in seven of these 21 upheld cases (33% of cases), the LGSCO concluded that Brent had already satisfactorily remedied the complaint within the Council's complaints procedure. This compared favourably with Brent's performance against this metric in 2023/24 and also compared favourably to a 12% rate for similar authorities in 2024/25.

The LGSCO also noted that Brent complied with 100% of the remedies proposed by their complaint investigations. This demonstrates that Brent is embedding learning identified by Ombudsman investigations.

Learning and improving from complaints

- 1.6 Individual complaint investigation and the reporting and analysis of wider trends all highlight key learning points. For example, the section of this report on service improvements (4.20) highlights two key learning points for improving the service offered to homeless applicants within the extremely challenging context of the ongoing housing crisis. One key learning point is the importance of ensuring that homeless applicants are informed of their right to request a suitability review at the appropriate time if they consider their accommodation to be unsuitable. A second key learning point is issuing licence agreements for emergency accommodation in a timely manner and providing information for working homeless applicants on how to pay rental charges at the earliest possible stage in the homelessness assessment process. This ensures that homeless applicants' expectations are properly managed. It also enables the Housing Needs Service to maximise income collection.

The Housing Management Service commenced a major review of its complaint handling during 2024/25. One initiative arising from this review is the promotion of learning reviews. The Housing Ombudsman, which decides complaints relating to

the Council's role as a landlord, sometimes orders the Housing Management Service to undertake a learning review as one of the outcomes of an upheld complaint investigation. The purpose of learning reviews are to fully embed learning from complaints within the service. The Housing Management Service is trialling a more proactive approach to learning reviews, starting by initiating one each time the Council is notified that the Ombudsman is investigating a complaint, rather than waiting to be ordered to undertake one. If this trial proves successful, it can be rolled out more widely across the Council.

Capturing compliments and positive feedback from residents and service users

- 1.7 The complaints data outlined in this report provides extensive information about residents' and customers' dissatisfaction with services and the Council's efforts to resolve this dissatisfaction. Section 4.58 of this report provides data about and some examples of compliments received. This is another, more positive side of the story, where residents and customers take the trouble to proactively praise and express gratitude for what the Council does, outside of the standard consultation and feedback processes. Efforts have been made to encourage all service areas within the Council to ensure that ad hoc compliments are recorded on the relevant database. There has been a slight increase in the number of recorded compliments in 2024/25 compared to the previous year. Changes will be made to the online forms through which residents interact with the Council to make it easier for them to log a compliment through this channel from 2025/26 onwards.

2 Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 Cabinet is asked to note Brent's performance in managing and resolving complaints.
- 2.2 Cabinet is asked to note and review Brent's self-assessment against the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint handling Code in Appendix D.
- 2.3 Cabinet is asked to approve to progress this report to the relevant Scrutiny committee.

3 Cabinet Member Foreword

- 3.1 Complaints provide important learning points for the Council and allow us to inform the Council's priorities and improve on service delivery. Complaints are wide ranging and dealt with across the Council, from assisting our looked after children to acting on environmental and social care concerns, right through to improving our Housing Needs service. Alongside adhering to a number of strategies, dealing with complaints touches upon all the priorities within the Borough Plan as detailed below:
- *The Best Start in Life* - Being able to deal with concerns at crucial stages of people's lives allows them to get the best start in life. Assisting our looked after children and children with special educational needs with issues that they may have, and providing advocacy to bring these issues forward to the Council will help to ensure that they are provided with the necessary support in life.

- *Thriving Communities* - Providing our residents with a route to complain and provide feedback not only encourages resident engagement but allows us to make improvements and inform change. By addressing their concerns and developing solutions that will benefit them, communities are given the opportunity to thrive.
- *A Cleaner, Greener Future* - The Council receives a number of complaints regarding environmental issues, which are reviewed and help us target specific areas of improvement. This also allows the Council to evaluate services to ensure they meet our aspirations for a cleaner, greener future.
- *Healthier Brent* – Complaints regarding leisure services and our parks allow the Council to resolve challenges and develop more initiatives to improve the health and wellbeing of our residents and those that visit Brent. During our complaints process we also signpost to relevant services that can assist our complainants, such as Mental Health services, where appropriate.
- *Prosperity and Stability in Brent* – Analysis of complaints received about the Housing Needs and Property and Assets Service, for example, helps to shape the tools and initiatives to support and empower residents, and contributes to long term stability.

3.2 Points of note for the period 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025 include housing-related complaints constituting almost half of all Stage 1 cases, an improvement in the timeliness of complaint responses across all stages, and an increase in the number of compensation cases, which the Council plans to enhance its monitoring of to reduce unnecessary escalations.

3.3 As ever, the Annual Complaints Report acts as a crucial document for the Council to reflect on its duties to Brent's residents, identifying particular points of strain and where service areas may require further attention or resource.

4.0 Background

4.1 The Council has three different processes for managing complaints:

- a two stage corporate complaints process;
- a two part adult statutory complaints process; and
- a three stage children's statutory complaints process.

4.2 The complaints data and information provided in this report is based on information recorded on the Council's Resident Feedback and Complaints (RFC) system.

4.3 Brent Council has a clear, corporate commitment to a positive customer experience. The Council is committed to its Customer Access Strategy which sets out what Brent residents should expect from staff, including service standards in relation to complaints. The aim is for the organisation to be sensitive to customer needs, prioritise communication and provide clear, accurate and current information.

4.4 In this context, the Council prioritises customer complaints to ensure that these are dealt with appropriately and efficiently. The central Complaints Service monitors the numbers of complaints received and the quality and timeliness of responses. The Complaints Service works closely with service areas to ensure that corrective actions are put in place and learning from complaints is built into service

design. There is a strong commitment to improve responses and reduce the number of complaints.

4.5 The key statistical headlines from complaints performance in 2024/25 are as follows:

- Housing repairs, Council Tax and homeless applications are again the top three concerns for customers.
- The number of Brent Stage 1 complaints (corporate and statutory) has increased by 98 complaints (↑ red) compared to last year.
- The number of Brent Stage 2 complaints (corporate and statutory) has increased by 12% (up by 37 cases) (↑ red) compared to last year.
- There were 21 Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) cases upheld against Brent in 2024/25, which is the same as last year. (- amber).
- The Ombudsman's annual performance report for Brent for 2024/25 noted that 33% of Brent complaints that were upheld by the Ombudsman were found to have already been satisfactorily remedied within the Council's complaints procedure, compared to 12% for similar authorities. (↑ green)
- The total number of cases where compensation was offered or awarded has increased by 34% (up by 121 cases) compared to last year. The total amount of compensation has also increased to £277,814. Compared with the previous year, this is a significant increase of 56%. (↑ red)
- There have been increases in the timeliness of corporate and statutory complaint responses across the board when compared to 2023/24. (↑ green)
- The largest increase in timeliness was 10%, in relation to statutory first stage complaints. This increase was however from a lower base than the timeliness of other areas. (↑ green)

Volume of Complaints received

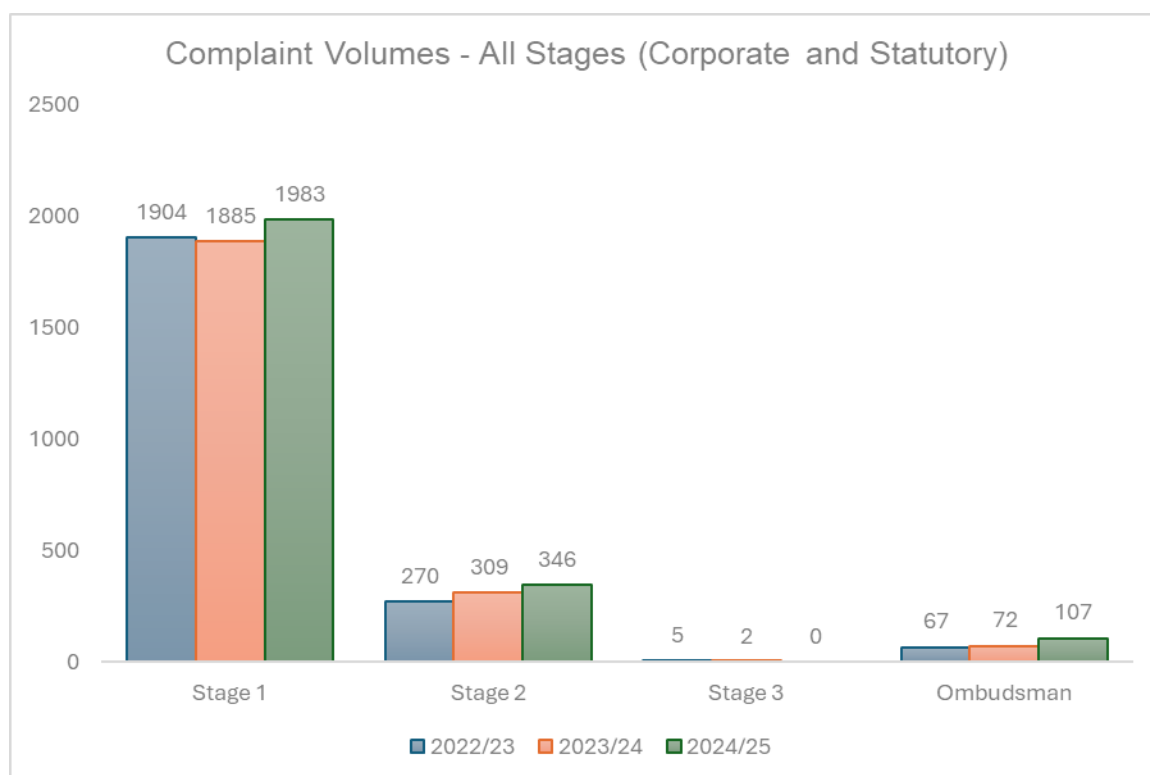
4.6 The chart below shows the volume of corporate and statutory complaints received at Stage 1, Stage 2 and Stage 3 over the past 3 years. The key points to note are:

- In 2024/25 Brent received 1,983 Stage 1 complaints (corporate and statutory). This is an increase of 98 complaints compared to the previous year.
- In 2024/25 Brent received 346 Stage 2 complaints (corporate & statutory). This is an increase of 37 complaints compared with last year.
- There were no Stage 3 Review Panels convened during 2024/25, compared to the two convened in 2023/24. This is partly due to efforts made by the Statutory Complaints Manager to mediate CYP complaints to prevent them escalating to this stage. Quite apart from any compensation awarded, the administrative cost of convening a Stage 3 Review Panel is several thousand pounds, so the fact that there were none in 2024/25 is in several respects a positive outcome for the Council.
- The number of Ombudsman decisions has risen in 2024/25. The number has increased from 72 in 2023/24 to 107 in 2024/25.

4.7 The majority of stage 1 complaints for 2024/25, 49% of the total, related to housing services. Of the 1,983 stage 1 complaints received in 2024/25, 968 related to the

Housing Management Service, Housing Needs Service and PHS. This is an increase from 2023/24 which saw 864 complaints related to housing services.

- 4.8 Stage 2 escalations increased by 37 complaints compared to the previous year. The increase was mainly in the Housing Needs Service with 20 additional escalations to stage 2 when compared to 2023/24.
- 4.9 More Ombudsman enquiries were received in 2024/25 compared to the previous year. The increase was mainly in Housing Ombudsman enquiries received. More detailed information relating to the increase can be found in Appendix D.



Timeliness of Complaints

- 4.10 The table below highlights the percentage of complaints closed on time. There have been increases in the percentage of complaints closed on time across the board. The timeliness of stage 1 corporate complaints closed on time has improved slightly, as has the timeliness of stage 2 corporate and stage 2 statutory complaints. There has been a significant increase in the timeliness of stage 1 statutory complaints, from 77% in 2023/24 to 87% in 2024/25, up by 10%. This is partly the result of some sustained work by the Complaints Service, such as training and targeted support to managers, to support ASC and CYP to improve performance in this area.

Year	Brent - % of Cases Closed on Time			
	Stage 1 - Corporate	Stage 1 - Statutory	Stage 2 - Corporate	Stage 2 - Statutory
2022-23	96%	85%	98%	72%
2023-24	95%	77%	96%	90%

2024-25	96%	87%	98%	91%
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Complaint Outcomes

- 4.11 The percentage of cases upheld or partly upheld for stage 1 corporate and statutory complaints as well as stage two corporate complaints has remained at broadly the same level as 2023/24. There was a 1% decrease in the percentage of stage 1 corporate complaints upheld this year, a 2% increase in the percentage of stage 1 statutory complaints, and a 3% increase in the percentage of stage 2 corporate complaints upheld this year. This suggests a longer-term consistency in decision-making in these three areas of the complaints procedure.

There has been a significant increase of 28% of stage 2 statutory complaints upheld or partly upheld, 84% compared to 56% in 2023/24. This is closer to the level of the previous year, 2022/23, which was 75%.

Year	Brent - % of Cases Upheld or Partly Upheld			
	Stage 1 - Corporate	Stage 1 - Statutory	Stage 2 - Corporate	Stage 2 - Statutory
2022-23	39%	61%	58%	75%
2023-24	47%	65%	60%	56%
2024-25	46%	67%	63%	84%

Complaints not accepted

- 4.12 The Council also records the types of complaints made that were not accepted. In 2024/25, 239 complaints were not accepted at stage 1 of the complaints process. This included 224 corporate complaints, 7 ASC statutory complaints and 8 CYP statutory complaints. Of the complaints not accepted, 98 complaints were withdrawn/not pursued and 141 were rejected. The types of complaints not accepted vary but the top three most common case types were related to homelessness applications, housing repairs and Council Tax. Homelessness applications and housing repairs are two of the top concerns raised by residents. The high number of complaints received regarding these issues is reflected in the number of cases not accepted. It is also relevant to note that homeless applications and some Council Tax complaints have their own appeal procedures so another reason why some of these complaints were rejected is because they were more appropriately dealt with through these alternative routes.
- 4.13 The most common reason recorded for complaints being rejected or withdrawn/not pursued was that the complaint had already been investigated or was a duplicate request. This applied to 94 stage 1 complaints. Other reasons for stage 1 complaints not being accepted were: the complaint was about a non-Council related service; that the customer has the right of appeal under a different process; the complaint was out of time; the complaint was about a Legal or HR issue; the complainant not having permission to act on behalf of the service user.

Compensation

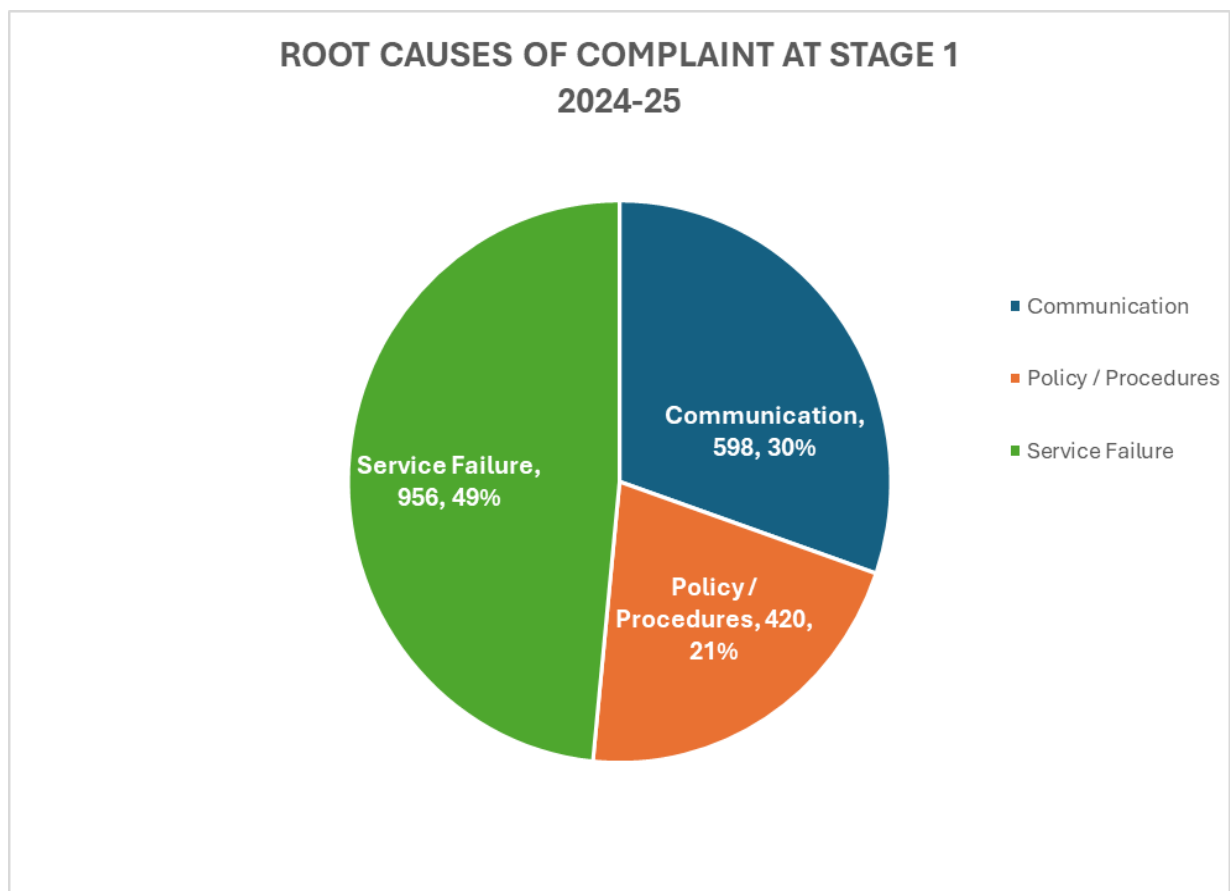
- 4.14 The table below shows the total amount of compensation paid in Brent at all stages of the corporate and statutory process, including Ombudsmen cases. Compensation can be offered at any stage of the complaints process. The total number of cases where compensation was awarded or offered has increased by 34% (an increase of 121 cases) compared to last year and the amount of compensation awarded for each case on average has increased by £82, which is a 16% increase.

Year	All Brent		
	Cases	Total Comp.	Avg / Case
2022-23	263	£165,827	£631
2023-24	353	£177,754	£504
2024-25	474	£277,814	£586

- 4.15 Compensation can be awarded for time and trouble, distress, as a goodwill gesture, or in the form of a refund, reimbursement, or the offset/waiving of arrears. The majority of compensation in 2024/25 was offered at stage 2 of the Council's complaints process with £164,302 being offered at this stage. At stage 1, £83,812 was offered, and £31,350 was awarded across the Council at the Ombudsman stage. Just under £70,000 of the compensation awarded involved credits to debts the complainants owed to the Council (e.g. Council Tax arrears, rent arrears, social care charges) rather than a direct payment. The highest amounts of compensation paid out in individual cases were both for Housing Needs complaints. One of the cases involved an award of £12,800. The second involved clearing just over £12,000 of emergency accommodation rent arrears.
- 4.16 Overall, the Housing directorate accounted for 81% of all the compensation awarded (£225,515). This was averaged at £500 per case and was disbursed in 451 cases. The most significant increase in compensation paid, which has had an impact upon the overall amount of compensation paid by the Council, was for the Housing Needs Service. The Housing Needs Service paid a total of £36,645 compensation at all stages of the complaints procedure in 2023/24. This increased by a factor of 2.7 to £99,498 in 2024/25. Six cases alone accounted for £54,000 of the compensation paid by the Housing Needs Service. The underlying reason for this is the ongoing housing crisis, with some families unavoidably staying for too long in unsuitable accommodation. This is therefore not primarily indicative of a failing on the part of the Council but rather a London-wide shortage of suitable and affordable accommodation. Nevertheless, for 2025/26 the Complaints Service will work closely with the Housing Needs Service to identify cases where more careful monitoring of actions promised at the first stage of the complaints procedure is needed, to ensure that they are promptly implemented, which may prevent some unnecessary escalation and therefore unnecessary compensation payments at the second stage.

Root Causes of Complaints

- 4.17 Root causes of complaints are categorised by the Council under the following types: Service failure; communication; policy/procedures. As shown in the pie chart below, 49% of complaints closed at stage 1 were categorised under service failure in 2024/25. Issues with communication constituted 30% of complaints whilst dissatisfaction with policy/procedure comprised 21% of all complaints closed.



- 4.18 Housing repairs, including surveyor inspections, Council Tax, and homelessness applications were the central issues that made up residents' concerns. The Housing Management Service carried out nearly 40,000 repairs in 2024/25. This means that there is likely to be a correlation between the large number of repairs carried out and the relatively high number of complaints received.
- 4.19 In 2024/25, a significant number of complaints were received relating to Council Tax. This is largely due to the rising pressures of the cost of living and some residents struggling to keep up with payments. Additionally, the Council received a significant number of complaints relating to homeless applications, especially at the second stage of the complaint procedure, up from 42 in 2023/24 to 58 in 2024/25, a 38% increase. This also stems from the increased cost of living, particularly rental costs, and the wider housing crisis.

Service Improvements implemented

- 4.20 Partly as a result of complaints received by Brent Council, many service improvements have been implemented. These improvements include:

- To prevent neighbour disputes, the Housing Management Service introduced a more robust process for checking that the status of gardens are clarified before new tenants sign their tenancy agreements to ensure that correct information is provided (e.g. whether the garden is for the tenant's sole use, shared with another tenant, communal, etc.).
- The Housing Needs Service reviewed its procedure for issuing licence agreements for emergency accommodation and providing information for working homeless applicants on how to pay rental charges for this type of accommodation to minimise any future uncertainty on what or how to pay.
- Several complaints highlighted the importance of the Housing Needs Service notifying homeless applicants, as soon as possible when appropriate, that after the main homeless duty is accepted they can request a formal review of the suitability of their bed and breakfast/hostel accommodation if they consider it unsuitable for any reason. The Housing Needs Service will of course seek to address and resolve any suitability issues that are raised in the first instance, but the review process is the correct route through which to address any fundamental dissatisfaction relating to suitability of accommodation, although this can create pressures for the reviews team in terms of increased caseloads.
- The Council Tax team reviewed its procedure to ensure that appropriate checks are undertaken to identify cases where there may be legitimate outstanding queries that need to be answered before a summons is issued.
- The Electoral Services team worked with Customer Services, and updated the website, to provide residents with more detailed information when they enquire about postal voting, to ensure they are entirely clear on the process.
- The Registration and Nationality Service further refined its approach to asking parents necessary but potentially sensitive questions when births are registered.
- Customer Service officers have been provided with an updated list of properties managed by Hyde Housing on behalf of the Council to ensure that these Council tenants are correctly advised when they call or email the Council with enquiries.

Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) Decisions and Learning Points

4.21 The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) provides an Annual Review report every year which focusses on the Council's performance in relation to complaints that have been referred to it. It also publishes data comparing Brent's complaint performance to that of other London boroughs.

4.22 In summary:

- The number of referrals made to the LGSCO for Brent was 154 in 2024/25, an increase of 13 compared to last year. The borough with the highest number of referrals in 2024/25 was Lambeth with 309 referrals, and the lowest was City of London with 7 referrals.
- The LGSCO decided the same number of detailed investigations into Brent complaints referred to them as last year when 24 detailed investigations were carried out.

- Brent's upheld rate out of the 24 investigations is 88% (21 out of 24), the same as last year. Brent was joint 11th highest with Newham, Lewisham, Bromley, Islington and Kingston Upon Thames out of all London boroughs on this performance indicator. Barking and Dagenham had the highest uphold rate with 95% of cases requiring a detailed investigation, upheld.
- Comparing the number of actual cases upheld by the Ombudsman, Brent were joint 16th lowest with Waltham Forest out of all London Councils. Lambeth had the highest number of cases with 58 upheld.
- To provide a better picture of performance compared to other London boroughs, the LGSCO have provided an adjusted metric to measure uphold rate by calculating the number of upheld cases per 100,00 residents. When reviewing this metric to consider Brent's population, Brent had 6.1% of upheld decisions per 100,000 residents which puts the Council in 9th lowest compared to other Councils. The average for authorities of this type is 9.1% upheld decisions per 100,000 residents. Greenwich had the lowest rate at 3.4 and Haringey had the highest rate at 20.2.
- Of the 24 investigations completed for Brent:
 - three complaints were not upheld;
 - of the remaining 21, fourteen complaints were upheld with further recommendations; and the remaining seven were upheld, but the Council had already implemented its own recommendations which had been accepted by the LGSCO as a suitable remedy, or there were no further recommendations made by the Ombudsman.
- The Ombudsman's annual performance report for Brent for 2024/25 noted, positively, that the 33% of Brent complaints that were upheld by the Ombudsman which were found to have already been satisfactorily remedied within the Council's complaints procedure (the seven out of 21 noted above), compared favourably to 12% for similar authorities.
- Compliance with the Ombudsman's recommendations remains at 100%.

LGSCO Volumes and Outcomes

- 4.23 There were 154 enquiries and complaints referred to the Ombudsman in 2024/25 which is 13 enquiries higher than the 141 enquiries made the previous year. In 2024/25 the LGSCO made decisions on 138 cases which is one less than the previous year. Of the 139 cases decided in 2024/25 only 24 cases required a detailed Ombudsman investigation. This is the same number of cases that required a detailed investigation in 2023/24. 21 of the cases investigated in 2024/25 were upheld and 3 were not upheld. This is again the same as in 2023/24.
- 4.24 LGSCO categories of cases not taken forward for investigation include: 'advice given'; 'referred back for local resolution'; 'incomplete or invalid'; and 'closed after initial enquiries'.

- 4.25 The statistics on LGSCO outcomes below show broad consistency, compared to last year, in the number of complaints which the Ombudsman referred back to the Council to consider within its complaints procedure or which they closed after initial enquiries. The table below shows a 4-year comparison of LGSCO outcomes of Brent Council cases:

Year	LGSCO Outcomes						
	Not upheld	Upheld	Advice given	Referred back for local resolution	Invalid or incomplete	Closed after initial enquiries	Total
2021-22	11	22	8	39	7	31	118
2022-23	7	22	6	25	5	29	94
2023-24	3	21	11	46	11	47	139
2024-25	3	21	13	46	7	48	138

LGSCO Upheld Cases

- 4.26 There were 21 cases upheld against Brent in 2024/25 in the following services:
- Housing – 9
 - Adult Social Care – 4
 - Education and Children Services – 3
 - Healthy Streets and Parking – 2
 - Council Tax – 2
 - Regulatory Services - 1
- 4.27 The Ombudsman was satisfied that the Council had successfully implemented its recommendations to remedy these complaints, achieving a 100% compliance rate.
- 4.28 This is an encouraging outcome and shows that the Council is complying with remedies set by the Ombudsman.
- 4.29 A summary of the 21 cases upheld by the LGSCO for each area is provided below.
- Housing
- 4.30 Complaints concerning the Housing Management Service are referred to the Housing Ombudsman and are not included in the summary in this section.
- 4.31 Nine complaints relating to other housing services were upheld after being submitted to the LGSCO, which is an increase of two complaints compared to last year. Eight of these complaints related to the Housing Needs Service. One related to Private Housing Services (the Ombudsman categorised the PHS complaint under Adult Care Services but we have included it under housing services to reflect the Council's structure).

- 4.32 In four of the upheld Housing Needs Service cases, a remedy had already been provided during the Council's complaints process, therefore the LGSCO made no further recommendations. The five cases where an apology and additional actions and/or compensation were recommended are detailed below.
- 4.33 Case one - The Ombudsman concluded that PHS caused a complainant avoidable confusion and frustration because it did not include widening of his lounge and kitchen thresholds in his Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) specification, despite these works having been agreed. The Ombudsman recommended an apology for this.
- 4.34 Case two - The Ombudsman concluded in this case that the Council remedied the individual injustice to the complainant caused by delays in progressing his homeless application. However, the Ombudsman further recommended that Housing Needs Service officers should be reminded that the homeless prevention duty is automatically triggered when a homelessness applicant receives a section 21 notice.
- 4.35 Case three - The Ombudsman concluded that poor advice by a Housing Needs Service officer, in telling a family that if they moved to emergency bed and breakfast accommodation they could be sharing facilities indefinitely, resulted in the family declining to go to emergency accommodation and therefore staying much longer in their unsuitable accommodation than they otherwise would have done, until they were eventually rehoused in January 2024. The Ombudsman recommended £3,350 additional compensation and an apology.
- 4.36 Case four - The Ombudsman concluded that the Council had already addressed the issue of the complainant and her family staying too long in unsuitable bed and breakfast accommodation and had paid compensation that accorded with the Ombudsman's guidance. However, the Ombudsman also noted that the complainant had not been told of her right to request a review at every point where this was appropriate. The Ombudsman therefore awarded £200 additional compensation, recommended an apology, and asked the Housing Needs Service to remind officers to ensure that they inform homeless applicants when decisions can be reviewed.
- 4.37 Case five - The Housing Needs Service took longer than it should have done to complete a review of an applicant's Locata banding, although the eventual outcome was that her banding remained the same. The Ombudsman recommended an apology, £250 compensation and a reminder to officers of the importance of completing reviews within a reasonable timescale. At the same time, the Ombudsman accepted that the Housing Needs Service had recruited staff in order to improve its review response times.

Adult Social Care

- 4.38 The Ombudsman upheld four ASC complaints. In one upheld ASC case, the Ombudsman concluded that a reasonable remedy had already been provided by the Council, therefore the LGSCO made no further recommendations.
- 4.39 In the second upheld ASC complaint, a mother complained about various issues regarding her son's supported living placement. The Ombudsman found some fault

and recommended the following actions: apologies to both mother and son; £100 time and trouble compensation to the mother; completion of a financial mental capacity assessment and best interest decision for the son; a reminder to relevant officers of their duties in safeguarding adults; a reminder to relevant officers of the importance of effective complaint handling.

- 4.40 In the third upheld ASC complaint, the Ombudsman recommended additional compensation of £4,000 for injustice arising from the delays in setting up an increased personal budget for a young adult with significant care and support needs, and for failing to respond properly to the first stage complaint. The Ombudsman also decided in this instance that the compensation should not be offset against debt owed to the Council.
- 4.41 The fourth upheld ASC complaint related to issues with a care and support package. The Ombudsman recommended an apology to the complainant's family for the distress and uncertainty caused by the failure to share the outcome of the review of the complainant's care package and removing funds from his direct payment account without warning. The Ombudsman also recommended a reminder to all relevant officers about the importance of promptly sharing details of care package reviews with service users, their carers and their family, and ensuring that at least one week's notice is given prior to recouping funds from a direct payment account.

Education and Children Services

- 4.42 The Ombudsman upheld three CYP complaints. In the first, the Ombudsman accepted that the Council had offered a reasonable financial remedy for delay in securing a suitable college place for the parent of a young person with special educational needs. However, the Ombudsman recommended that the Council should apologise and pay an additional £300 to the parent for the lack of updates about consultations and progress in securing her son's college place.
- 4.43 The second upheld CYP complaint related to failure to provide interim education to a young person with special educational needs when they were out of school and poor handling of a request for school transport. The Ombudsman concluded that the Council had already made an appropriate compensation award but recommended a further apology for failing to send a decision letter regarding the school transport application and failing to make further enquiries to better inform this decision.
- 4.44 The third upheld CYP complaint related to services provided to a former looked after child. The Ombudsman found fault in delays in the administration of the children's statutory complaints procedure. The Ombudsman recommended £200 compensation for the frustration this caused, as well as a reminder to relevant officers of the need to complete the children's statutory complaints procedure within the statutory timescales. One issue the Council faces here is that the children's statutory complaints procedure requires the employment of independent investigators, who can be difficult to recruit.

Healthy Streets and Parking

- 4.45 The Ombudsman upheld two Healthy Streets and Parking complaints. In one of these, a remedy had already been provided by the Council, therefore the LGSCO made no further recommendations. In the other, the LGSCO recommended that the Council refund enforcement agent fees which the service had not yet done.

Council Tax

- 4.46 The Ombudsman upheld two Council Tax complaints. In one of these, a remedy had already been provided by the Council, therefore the LGSCO made no further recommendations. The second upheld complaint related to a credit incorrectly applied to the complainant's Council Tax account which was subsequently reversed, generating an unexpected bill some years later. The Ombudsman recommended an apology, contacting the complainant to make a payment of £120 compensation the Council had already offered, and the development of guidance or procedure for staff: a) to have some sort of requirement for them to check on inputted account numbers for credits and debits; and b) that when a debt is generated because of Council error, that it contacts the taxpayer before sending an unexpected bill.

Regulatory Services

- 4.47 The Ombudsman concluded that the Community Protection team had failed on some occasions to respond to reports of anti-social behaviour (ASB) in line with its ASB policy. The Ombudsman recommended £100 compensation, an apology, and a review of how to meet the timescales outlined in the policy.

LGSCO Compensation

- 4.48 In 2024/25, the LGSCO asked the Council to pay an additional £8,620 in compensation across nine cases. This is £455 less than the previous year, 2023/24, where £9,075 was paid in compensation over thirteen cases. This continued a trend whereby 2023/24 also saw a reduction in the total additional compensation awarded by the LGSCO compared to 2022/23.
- 4.49 As noted above, LGSCO payments over £1,000 in 2024/25 included £3,350 compensation awarded in one of the Housing Needs cases for the amount of time the complainant was in unsuitable accommodation, and an additional £4,000 compensation for injustice arising from the delays in setting up an increased personal budget for a young adult with significant care and support needs.

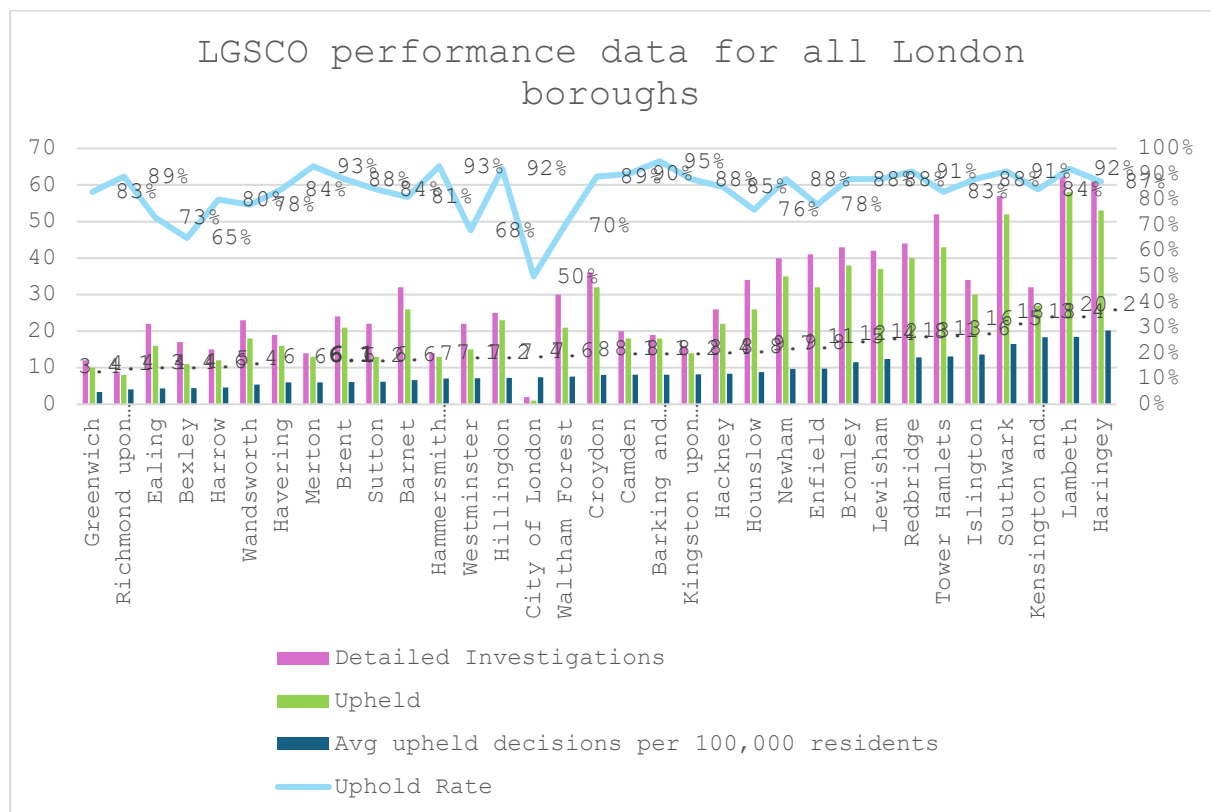
LGSCO performance compared to other London boroughs

- 4.50 Brent came 2nd highest of all London councils for upheld cases where a satisfactory remedy had already been provided before the complaint reached the Ombudsman. Of the 21 cases which were upheld during 2024/25, the Council had already offered a satisfactory resolution to the complaint before it reached the Ombudsman on seven occasions. This equates to 33% of our total upheld cases and is above the London average of 12%. For these seven cases, the Ombudsman confirmed no further action was required and just upheld the complaint because the Council had identified some fault and also upheld the complaint. There were also two cases where fault was found but only a further apology was required.

4.51 In comparison with all 32 London boroughs in 2024/25, Brent fares mid table on most of the criteria measured:

- 2nd highest at providing a satisfactory remedy before the complaint reached the Ombudsman, in 33% of cases (↑ green)
- 16th lowest in number of detailed investigations undertaken (- amber)
- 16th lowest in number of LGSCO upheld cases (- amber)
- 16th lowest in number of referrals to the LGSCO (- amber)
- Joint 11th highest LGSCO uphold rate (88%) in 2024/25 (↑ red)
- 9th lowest average upheld decisions per 100,000 residents (↓ green)

4.52 The table below shows the Ombudsman uphold rate, number of detailed investigations, cases upheld and uphold rate based on upheld decisions per 100,000 residents in 2024/25 compared with all London boroughs. Of the 24 detailed investigations undertaken by the LGSCO, 21 cases were upheld for Brent. This provides a uphold rate of 88% which is 11th highest out of all London Councils in percentage terms, however 16th lowest in the number of cases actually upheld and 9th lowest when comparing upheld decisions per 100,000 residents.



4.53 A performance comparison of all the LGSCO categories with other London boroughs has been provided in Appendix C.

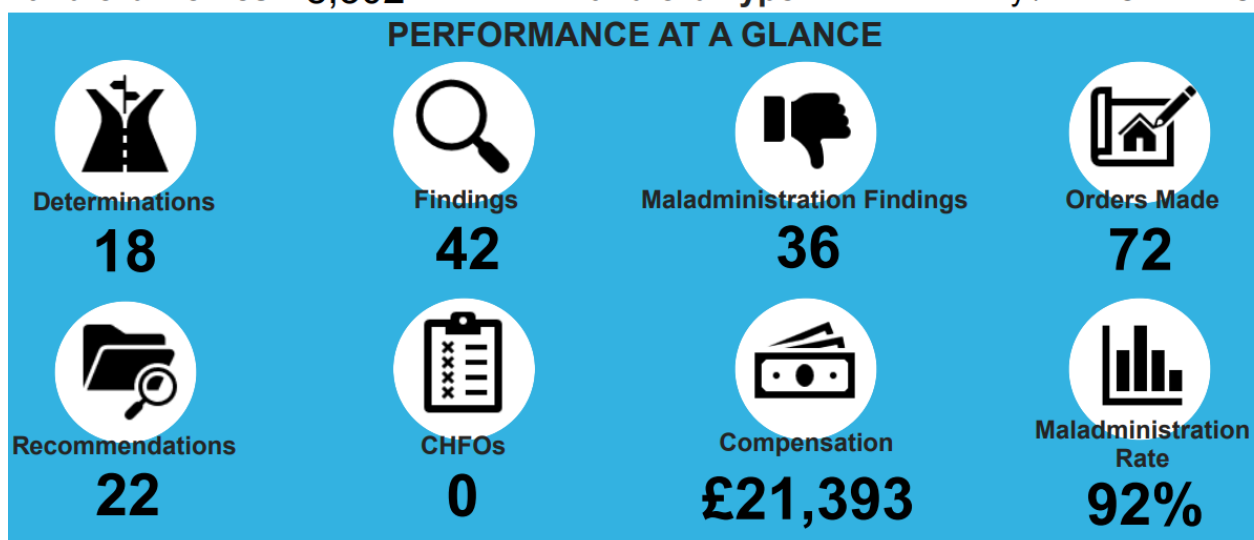
Housing Ombudsman (HO) Decisions and Learning Points

4.54 The Housing Ombudsman has not yet provided its annual report for 2024/25 and therefore we are unable to report on cases that have been referred to it for this financial year. The Housing Ombudsman has however asked that the comments

from their 2023/24 report are included in the Council's annual report for 2024/25. The table below has therefore been extracted from the Housing Ombudsman's 2023/24 report on the Housing Management Service's performance.

Landlord Homes: 8,302

Landlord Type: Local Authority / ALMO or TMO



- 4.55 The Housing Ombudsman decided eighteen Housing Management Service complaints in 2023/24, with forty-two findings and thirty-six maladministration findings arising from these decisions. These resulted in seventy-two orders and twenty-two recommendations. There were no complaint handling failure orders (CHFOs) and no severe maladministration findings issued, both of which are positive outcomes.
- 4.56 A total of £21,393 compensation was recorded as having been ordered by the Housing Ombudsman during 2023/24. Only £13,503 of this was additional compensation awarded by the Housing Ombudsman further to their investigations and decisions. £7,890 of the total compensation included in the total Housing Ombudsman figure of £21,393 had already been offered to complainants within the Council's complaints procedure.
- 4.57 A separate report providing more detailed analysis of Housing Management complaints, including Housing Ombudsman complaints, is included in **Appendix D**.

Compliments

- 4.58 In 2024/25 121 compliments were logged on the system for the Council, an increase of 5 from the previous year where 116 compliments were logged. Customers can send feedback to the Complaints Service or to service areas directly, who then forward it to the Complaints Service for logging. Example of some of the compliments have been provided below:

Housing Management

"Over all XXX was a unique housing officer...she was very good listener...she was not argumentative and judgmental."

Libraries

"I have noticed that the number of electronically equipped tables has increased significantly. As a dedicated library member, I would like to express my gratitude to all the staff and management for their efforts in providing a comfortable and well-equipped environment for those who love studying and conducting research."

CYP - SEND

"I hope you are well. Happy new year."

"I just wanted to say how grateful I am for your help a year ago - with [my daughter] and her EHCP - the support/conversations re planning and schools. [My daughter] is 1 term in and loving her time at [her new school] - having met wonderful friends and thriving in lessons and classes. Thank you sincerely and so far, I could not have wished for a better school, more support or kinder teachers for [my daughter]."

Complaints Service

"I am writing to inform you that I received the stage 2 complaint outcome today. I would like to take a moment to express my sincere gratitude for the support you have provided. Your assistance has been invaluable to me during this time."

ASC - Commissioning Contracting & Market Management

"XXX visited dad and I at dad's care home on Wednesday and was absolutely wonderful and so supportive. I wanted to write and tell you about the absolutely positive experience that we had with XXX. She is very talented and very good at her job."

5.0 Stakeholder and ward member consultation and engagement

- 5.1 This report is due to be considered at Cabinet and the relevant scrutiny committee.

6.0 Financial Considerations

- 6.1 The details provided on compensation payments in sections 4.14 – 4.16 and throughout this report, reflect the monetary impact of not getting things right the first time as an organisation, and the need to improve the customer experience, thus minimising the financial penalties incurred by the Council.
- 6.2 The total number of cases where compensation was awarded has increased by 34% when compared to 2023/24. The amount of compensation awarded for each case on average has increased by £82.
- 6.3 The total compensation awarded/offered and paid in 2024/25 was £277,814 (474 cases), which is a 56% increase to the previous year. This was primarily driven by Housing Needs Service complaints, especially at the second stage of the complaint procedure. The costs implications and budgetary impacts to the Council are being continuously monitored. At the same time, payment of the appropriate level of compensation is necessary not only to remedy individual injustice but also to protect

the Council from reputational risk, specifically an increase in adverse Ombudsman decisions.

7.0 Legal Considerations

- 7.1 Complaints concerning Adult Social Care and Children's Social Care fall under separate statutory complaint procedures. It is a legal requirement to produce annual reports for these areas and these are included in appendices A and B with reference to the statutory frameworks for the management of these statutory complaints.
- 7.2 The LGSCO is the final stage in the complaints process, where an individual has complained to the council and remains dissatisfied with the outcome. The LGSCO can investigate allegations of maladministration in connection with the exercise of a local authorities' administrative function, allegations regarding a failure in a service which it is the local authorities function to provide, an allegation or an apparent failure to provide such a service pursuant to the Local Government Act 1974 as amended.
- 7.3 The Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code became statutory on 1 April 2024, meaning that the Council is obliged by law to follow the requirements set out in the Code. The Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 places a duty on the Housing Ombudsman to monitor compliance with the statutory Complaint Handling Code. The Council's procedures and policies have been updated to take account of these changes.

8.0 Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Considerations

- 8.1 Under Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the Council has a duty when exercising their functions to have 'due regard' to the need:
- (a) to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited under the Act;
 - (b) advance equality of opportunity; and
 - (c) foster good relations between those who share a "protected characteristic" and those who do not.
- 8.2 This is the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED). The 'protected characteristics' are: age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, marriage and civil partnership, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation.
- 8.3 Although there have been no equality implications identified as a result of this report, the Council is improving data that is collected on the complaints system so that data analysis can be used to identify issues that may disproportionately affect different equality groups.

9.0 Climate Change and Environmental Considerations

- 9.1 Not applicable

10.0 Human Resources/Property Considerations (if appropriate)

10.1 Not applicable

11.0 Communication Considerations

11.1 Not applicable

Report sign off:

Minesh Patel

Corporate Director Finance and Resources