



London Borough of Enfield

Report Title	Annual Corporate Complaints Report 2022-2023
Report to:	General Purposes Committee
Date of Meeting:	25 th October 2023
Directors:	Simon Pollock – Executive Director of Environment & Communities Eleanor Brown – Director of Customer & Communications
Report Author:	Will Wraxall – Complaints, MEQs and Corporate Functions Manager Will.Wraxall@enfield.gov.uk
Ward(s) affected:	All wards
Key Decision Number	N/A
Implementation date, if not called in:	N/A
Classification:	Part 1 Public

Purpose of Report

1. This report presents the outcome of the annual review of the Council's corporate complaints received during 2022/23; learning from these and that of the Local Government Ombudsman and the Housing Ombudsman Service letters, and the improvement actions for implementation arising from both.

Recommendations

- I. To note the Annual Complaints Report 2022/23, the actions proposed for improvement, and the findings from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's and the Housing Ombudsman Service annual letter.

Background

2. This Corporate Complaints Annual Report covers the period of 1st April 2022 to 31st March 2023. It focuses on the nature of complaints received by the Council, handling performance and learning elicited to shape future service improvements. It also provides insight into compliments received during the same period.
3. The report content has changed compared to previous years to provide improved insight and learning such as additional year trend analysis, and upheld rates.
4. In addition, the Annual Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) Complaints Report and the Housing Ombudsman Service letter are now incorporated into the Annual Corporate Complaints Report to provide a holistic overview of complaints and learning.
5. The Annual Statutory Complaint reports for Adults and Children Social Care are produced separately to the Corporate Complaints report as these complaints are processed and monitored under a specific statutory framework. The Children's Social Care report has been produced and the Adults Social Care report is nearing completion. These will be presented to the relevant Scrutiny Panels by the end of November 2023.
6. Serving circa 330,000 residents (6th highest in London) Enfield Council's initial customer contact volumes alone are significant. During 2022/23, the organisation received nearly 530,000 calls, handled over 62,000 web chats and supported 41,000 customers face-to-face. Over 8.5 million webpages were viewed and over 169,000 online service request and payment forms submitted by customers.
7. Additionally, the Council collected approximately 840,000 bins per month (all waste types - refuse, recycling, food & garden); managed 10,044 social housing properties; processed 84,000 Housing Benefit changes and 196,000 Council Tax Support changes; supported 7,750 households regarding benefit and debt assistance; and processed 3,470 homelessness applications.

Corporate Complaints Performance Summary

8. During 2022/23, Enfield Council received 1,999 complaints, of which 153 progressed to final stage. Complaint volumes have marginally decreased from the previous year.
9. The average annual complaint response rate was 72% within 10 working days. As the Council's complaint response time performance target is 95% within 10 working days, this Key Performance Indicator (KPI) was not achieved.

10. Compared to the previous year, response performance time has decreased. However, this is in part due to an in-year halving of the Council's response targets from 20 to 10 working days. This marked the return to best practice following a temporary target time which had been enacted due to Covid-19. Therefore, KPI comparisons to the previous two years is difficult to achieve.
11. In terms of late responses, overall these were either 1-5 days late (34%), 6-10 days late (19%) or over 25 days late (22%). Compared to the previous year, there were fewer responses over 25 days late.
12. Due to technology improvements, the annual report also includes the number of complaints upheld, partially upheld and not upheld for the first time. This enhances the Council's ability to focus on targeted improvement actions regarding service faults. Of the first stage complaints received: 792 (43%) were upheld, 424 (23%) were partially upheld and 627 (34%) were not upheld.

Complaint Themes

13. The majority of complaints related to service quality and delays.
14. High volume service areas (100 complaints or more) were Waste Services, Council Housing Repairs and Council Tax. These service areas are mostly reflected in the high volumes from the previous year and represent high contact service areas as referenced in paragraph 7.
15. However, both Waste Services and Council Housing Repair complaint volumes have decreased compared to the previous year. Waste Services has reduced from 661 in 2021/22 to 132 in 2022/23; whilst Council Housing Repairs has decreased from 264 in 2021/22 to 199 in 2022/23.
16. These improvements can be apportioned to the implemented actions included in the previous annual report. This year's improvement actions will build on these successes.
17. In terms of complaints upheld, Council Tax, Waste Services and Council Housing Repairs are also the highest upheld complaint areas.
18. For Council Tax 25 complaints were upheld. These related to refund delays, charging/liability errors, errors updating account information and liabilities.
19. For Waste Services, 35 complaints were upheld. These related to missed bin collections (including both repeat and one-off missed bin collections), staff conduct, timing of collections and general service quality.
20. For Council Housing Repairs, 59 complaints were upheld. These related to repair delays, compensation delays, staff conduct, major works and unsatisfactory repairs.

21. There was some correlation with Member Enquiries (MEQs) raised during 2022/23. Notably, Council Housing Repairs received the second highest volume of MEQs (311). High volume MEQs relating to Waste Services, included street cleansing which received the highest volume of MEQs (329) and fly-tipping which received the sixth highest volume (221).

Ombudsman Complaints

22. The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) received 129 complaints relating to Enfield Council and investigated 28 of these. Both decreased in volume compared to the previous year. The Ombudsman upheld 22 complaints, a slight increase in upheld rate from the previous year. However, this is due in part to the LGSCO targeting investigation work more narrowly as highlighted in their annual letter:

“Over the past two years, we have reviewed our processes to ensure we do the most we can with the resources we have. One outcome is that we are more selective about the complaints we look at in detail, prioritising where it is in the public interest to investigate. While providing a more sustainable way for us to work, it has meant that changes in uphold rates this year are not solely down to the nature of the cases coming to us. We are less likely to carry out investigations on ‘borderline’ issues, so we are naturally finding a higher proportion of fault overall.”

23. The LGSCO acknowledged an improvement in Enfield Council’s response times. However, a number of responses required extensions of time agreed with the Ombudsman. These extensions have decreased compared to the previous year, and work is ongoing to continue to reduce these extensions over the coming year.
24. Of the 22 upheld complaints, LGSCO recommended improvement actions centred on reviewing policies and procedures as well as providing further training and guidance to staff. The LGSCO annual performance letter noted 100% satisfaction that Enfield Council had implemented these recommendations accordingly.
25. Although Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS) has issued a draft annual performance letter, the final version will be issued on 17th October 2023. This is after this report is published in advance of the Committee meeting. Therefore, summary findings are based on the current draft letter for the purposes of this report. Any changes will be discussed at the Committee meeting and minuted accordingly.
26. During 22/23, there was an increase in complainants escalating requests to the Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS) compared to the previous year. Of the 37 complaints received, HOS chose to investigate 11 of these regarding Council Housing Repairs, anti-social behaviour and tenancy issues. 4 were upheld.
27. Additionally, Enfield Council has improved its response time performance compared to the previous year. There were fewer time extension requests made and agreed with HOS.

Complaints Learning & Improvement Actions

28. Complaints learning from 2022/23 has informed a series of specific service level action plans to improve response times, quality and service delivery, linked to the three areas referred to above. These include enhanced staff training and induction programmes, service redesigns, recruitment drives and improved customer communication processes to enhance service delivery and reduce the initial complaints received.
29. This year's improvement actions again also build on actions that were implemented from the previous report, during 21/22.
30. For Council Housing Repairs, the service is implementing a number of actions to improve their handling of complaints, response times and ensuring a holistic approach to resolving problems and complex cases. Customer communication templates have been revised and additional staff training is underway to improve customer experience. The service have also strengthened processes to review complaints learning and enhance targeted improvement actions.
31. For Council Tax, communicating to customers how complex processes such as recovering arrears and raising awareness on new financial support schemes is a key priority. In addition to regular updates online (website and social media), the service is improving their customer correspondence to ensure clarity of messaging and processes. Comprehensive training for new officers is ongoing and refresher training is now available as required. Additionally, future technology improvements currently planned will provide customers with greater ability to self-serve at their own convenience.
32. For Waste Services, a customer experience transformation project has delivered a number of improvements, particularly in relation to repeat missed bin collections. These include embedding technology to ensure real-time reporting from crews to customers and the Contact Centre regarding individual collections and reasons as to why some bins are not collected. Better access to information has highlighted where there are issues preventing collections on a frequent basis and informed actions by the service to address these. Residents can now report their bin as missed at any point on their collection day, rather than waiting until 4pm to do so, improving the customer experience and reducing avoidable contact. Bulky waste missed collections have also reduced due to improved IT system integrations.
33. At an organisational level, changes to staff structures, processes and systems have been made over the year 2022-23. These changes were designed to improve resilience and ownership of service development and increase performance through further targeted improvements in specific service areas and the Complaints team will continue to have oversight of these.

Relevance to Council Plans and Strategies

24. Complaints incoming to the Council indicate where the Council is not achieving its plan and vision, or where its strategy has not had the desired effect on the resident experience. The analysis within the annual report has enabled the Council to present action plans for improvement in areas where residents are not receiving the level of quality service the Council aspires to.

Financial Implications

25. There are no specific financial implications.

Legal Implications

26. The Government Ombudsman 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. However, it would usually be involved after an individual has complained to the council and remains dissatisfied with the outcome.

27. 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 understand that the Council will produce a separate report for these specific complaints.

Equalities Implications

28. Addressing complaints can ensure fair and inclusive services for everyone in Enfield.

29. System developments to enhance equalities monitoring for complaints is expected to be made available during 23/24.

Report Author: Will Wraxall
Complaints, MEQ and Corporate Functions Manager
Will.wraxall@enfield.gov.uk

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Annual Corporate Complaints Report 2022-23

Appendix 2 – LGSCO Annual Letter