



LONDON BOROUGH OF
HARROW

Housing Services Complaints Report
2022-2023

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1. Summary

This Annual Complaints report presents the second full year of complaint handling performance since we recently implemented it as one of the key improvements.

The approach to handling Complaints within the policy, embedded the underlying principles as set out within the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code around accessibility, transparency, and fairness for our customers.

Overall, this approach to Complaint Handling has resulted in a positive result regarding the level of formal complaints being logged. Within the new approach there is also an emphasis on early intervention and being proactive with the customer to ensure their issues and concerns wherever possible are resolved at the earliest opportunity.

While overall performance has improved significantly despite 30% growth in demand.

Member enquiries	2022/23
Received	627
Completed on time	567
% Completed on time	90.43%

Complaints (Stage 1 & 2)	2022/23
Received	431
Completed on time	389
% Completed on time	90.25%

2. Background

Customers are always provided with the opportunity to raise a formal complaint with us if they wish to or are dissatisfied at any time throughout the process.

Stages of complaint process

There are 2 stages to the Council's complaints process. Stage 1 and Stage 2. If the complainant remains dissatisfied, the residents have the option to seek further advice and assistance from the Housing Ombudsman or the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.

Timescales

Timescales have been reviewed to align with the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code which was first published in July 2020. From April 2023, the timescales for stage one complaints were revised from 15 working days to 10 working days.

The Council continued to provide complaint and enquiry services throughout the period with residents able to submit a complaint via the webform, email, telephone or letter.

Much of the work has centred around making sure a one point of contact is in place particularly through Access Harrow and Place Enquiries enabling customers to be provided with the information or advice they are seeking at first contact.

3. Introduction

This report provides an analysis of the complaints, compliments and comments received by the Council during 2022/23 under the Housing Complaints, Procedure.

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

This is our 2nd Complaints Report since we first began publishing our complaints performance. Therefore, this report includes the two full years of complaint handling performance from 2021 onwards.

The approach to handling complaints within the policy, embedded the underlying principles as set out within the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code around accessibility, transparency, and fairness for our customers.

Overall, this approach to complaint handling has resulted in a positive result regarding the level of formal complaints being logged. Within the new approach there is also an emphasis on early intervention and outcomes to make sure, wherever possible any issues and concerns are rectified and resolved at the earliest opportunity. This has provided colleagues the opportunity to take ownership, being accountable of issues and resolve them.

The main drivers for complaints are around communication and delays in processes in making sure works are underway. In relation to communication there has been improvements in the way we communicate with our customers throughout the organisation.

4. Achievements in 22/23

1. Despite 30% growth in demand, the housing service has continued to meet their targets (**see Appendix 1**)
2. Despite halving the timescales for responding to complaints and Member (ME) enquiries we have met the targets

3. Reviewed complaints policy in line with the requirements of the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code
4. Set up a resident panel early this year to review customer feedback and they have met 3 times this year.
5. Every Monday, weekly performance is published, and reminders are sent in advance to encourage colleagues to comply with timescales.
6. Set up an additional reasoning code to capture *Damp* and *Mould*
7. We continue to engage with HouseMark and submit monthly data to help benchmark with other social housing providers.
8. A Complaints satisfaction survey has been developed

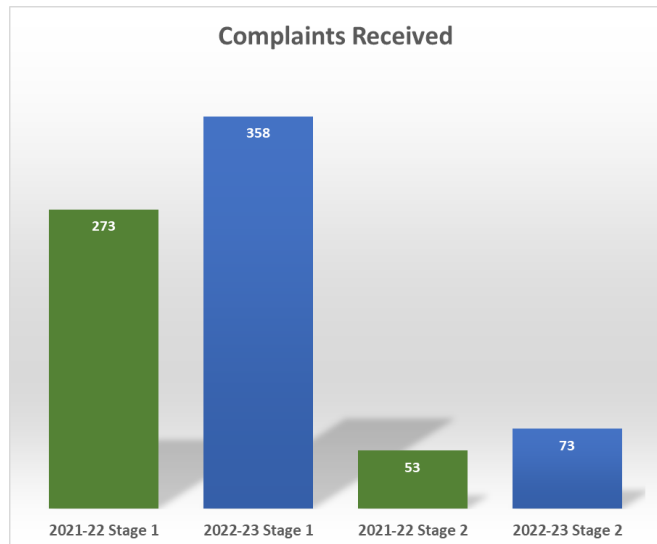
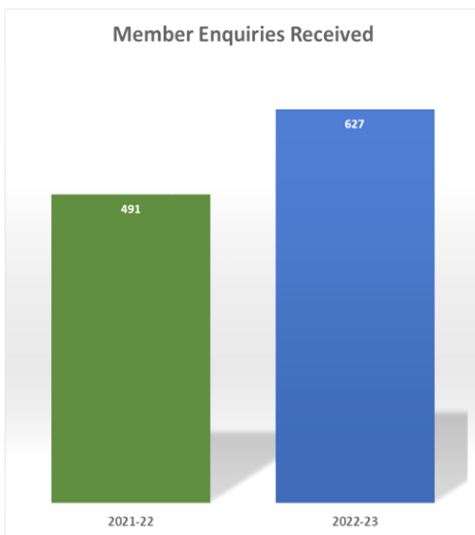
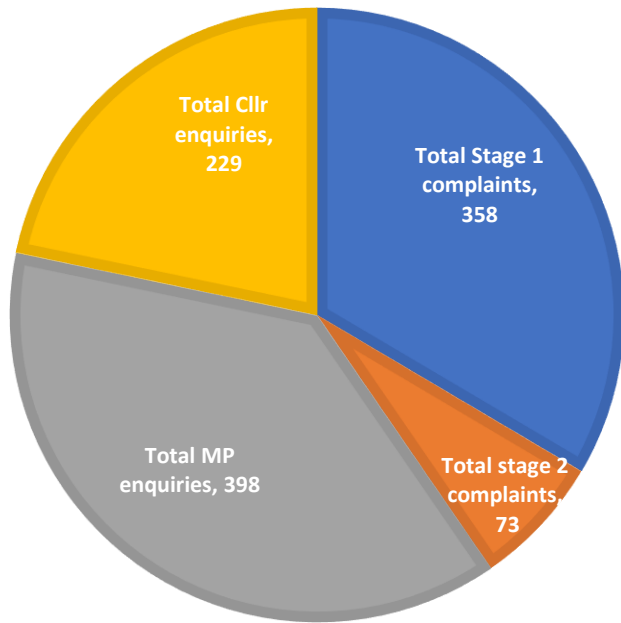
5. Summary of Complaints Analysis Data

This report details the complaints and member enquiries received centrally for Housing Services teams, for the financial year 2022-2023.

Housing Services have received 1,058 complaints and enquiries during 2022/23, an increase of 30% and 817 complaints and enquiries since the same period last year (2021-2022). Of the 1,058 complaints and enquiries received in 2022/23, 38% are MP enquiries, 33% are stage 1 complaints, 22% are councillor enquiries, and 7% are stage 2 complaints.

Complaints Received						
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Year End	Volume ↑↓
2021-22 Stage 1	61	61	86	65	273	
2022-23 Stage 1	99	77	94	88	358	31% ↑
2021-22 Stage 2	10	12	19	12	53	
2022-23 Stage 2	15	14	16	28	73	38% ↑

Member (MPs plus Cllrs) Enquiries Received						
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Year End	Volume ↑↓
2021-22	86	96	173	136	491	
2022-23	129	143	177	178	627	28% ↑



6. Stage 1 (S1) Complaints

Of the 358 complaints received, Asset Management (AM) received the most (43%), followed by Housing Needs (HN) (34%), and Resident Services (RS) (23%). RANS did not receive any complaints.

	AM	HN	RS
Total S1 complaints	152	124	82
S1 complaints upheld	9	8	3
S1 complaints not upheld	6	27	2
S1 complaints partially upheld	5	10	5
S1 complaints responded to on time	128	117	74
Upheld status unknown	108	72	64
% Responded to on time	84	98	90
Average time for complaint resolution (days)	17	11	17

On average, Housing Needs were the only team that managed to respond within the 15-day response deadline (11 days). Asset Management and Resident Services, on average, responded slightly over the deadline at 17 days.

Common themes for S1 complaints for each team:

Asset Management	Housing Needs	Resident Services
Fence repair	Accommodation	ASB
Mould / damp	Staff conduct	Parking
Leak	Homelessness	Staff conduct
Heating	Applications	Rehousing
Outstanding repair	Damp / mould	Service charges
Ceiling repair	Locata	Neighbour issues
Roof repair	Customer Service	Fly tipping
Electrics	Bidding	Pest control
Gas contractor	Banding	Rent arrears
Bathroom	Landlord rent issue	Gas checks

7. Stage 2 (S2) complaints

73 complaints escalated from stage 1 to stage 2 over the course of the year, a jump of 38%. Asset Management (AM) and Resident Services (RS) jointly received the most stage 2 escalations, with 25 requests each for a stage 2 complaint.

	AM	HN	RS
Total S2 complaints	25	23	25
S2 complaints upheld	1	2	0
S2 complaints not upheld	1	5	2
S2 complaints partially upheld	0	5	2
Upheld status unknown	23	11	21
S2 complaints responded to ontime	22	21	24
% Responded to on time	88	91	96
Average time for complaint resolution (days)	26	24	22

The average time that residents waited for a S2 response was 26 days (AM), 24 days (HN), and 22 days (RS).

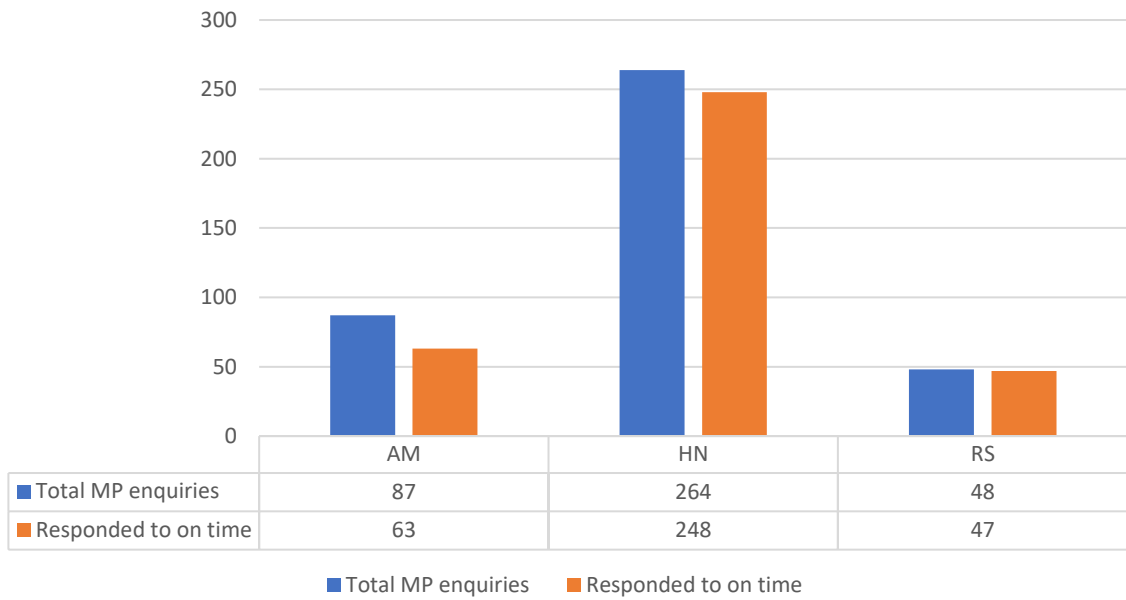
The most common reasons for complaint escalations to S2:

Asset Management	Housing Needs	Resident Services
Outstanding repairs	Accommodation	ASB
Communication	Customer Service	Tenancy
Electrics	Staff conduct	Communication
Disrepair		

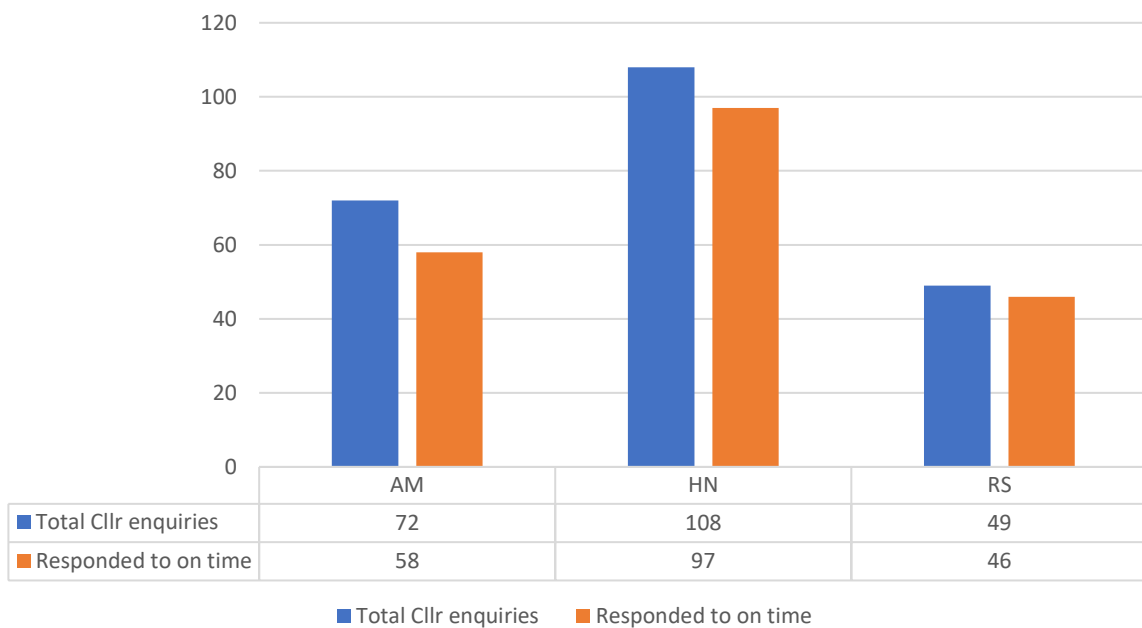
8. Member Enquiries (Member of Parliament (MPs) and Council Members (Cllrs))

During this financial year, Housing have responded to 398 MP Enquiries and 229 Cllr enquiries. Housing Needs received the most Member Enquiries 372 accounting for 59% of all member enquiries logged.

Total MP enquiries



Total Cllr enquiries



9. Lessons learnt from complaints

The Council has a commitment to learning and improvement. Complaints and other formal enquiries are important information, providing an opportunity to understand where and why things sometimes go wrong and provide a basis for us to make positive changes, informed by data and the resident voice.

Complaints are a way in which we can gain insight into how we need to improve the experience that residents have with the Council.

19% of Stage 1 and 2 complaints were recorded as upheld or partially upheld. However, we know that this figure is not accurate because of inaccuracies in reporting the complaint outcome. This is being addressed as part of the implementation of the new CX system. In the interim, we encourage staff to complete all required information on the spreadsheet, and this is also being monitored by complaints staff.

Whilst all services endeavour to focus on providing a response that resolves all the issues raised and finding a suitable outcome in a timely way – We recognise that more work needs to be done to ensure that the complainant feels informed and is kept up to date with progress.

The complaints satisfaction survey has been developed as an aftercare survey for past complainants. Very few residents completed the survey, and those that did, submitted their (already closed) complaint in the survey response.

Since the last complaints report, the Council has procured a new consultation system called *Harrow Talk*. The survey is currently being re-created on the new *Harrow Talk* system.

Once we have sufficient information, the results will form part of this report.

Of the 66 complaints recorded as upheld, the main theme was the need to improve communication, and to keep the resident updated with actions taken, as well as the next steps. This helps to manage the resident expectation and can be used to keep the officer accountable for their response.

There have been a few changes in staff and as a result, some colleagues are unsure of who to liaise with on various issues. This has an impact on the more complex complaints that cut across housing teams.

Teams have begun to hold regular weekly meetings with complaints colleagues, to review such cases, and coordinate responses as and when required.

10. Compliments

In 22/23, we received 28 compliments. Please refer **Appendix 2**.

10 Complaints Panel

Early this year, we set up a complaints panel which is made up of tenants and leaseholders, and they have achieved the following so far:

- A review of the complaint handling procedure
- Review closed complaints, including:
 - o Review in line with Complaints Handling Code and complaints policy
 - o Feedback on how we dealt with the complaint
 - o Suggestions on how we can improve responses
- Designed new complaint templates which include top tips for a model response

11. Other changes to the Complaints Procedure

- Improvements we have made in the handling of the complaints process:
 - o Quick resolution to be widely publicised to staff
 - o Introduction of reminders before complaints and enquiries become overdue
- Improvements we will make in the handling of the complaints process:
 - o Provide templates to help capture / summarise complaints
 - o Conduct regular workshops
 - o Reviewing draft complaint responses for completeness and to ensure the original complaint was dealt with
 - o Greater coordination of complex / cross-team complaints
 - o Regular articles in the staff newsletter to communicate key messages around complaint handling
 - o Organise regular workshops for staff to:
 - Seek their feedback about any changes to the complaints process
 - Identify the areas that could be improve, seeking solutions
 - Share performance information and good practice
 - o Re-introduction of satisfaction survey for complainants, post-complaint

12. Future reports & recommendations

While we have adapted the way enquiries and investigations are logged and tracked, further work needs to be done; to ensure timescales are met; to ensure accuracy in reporting of concerns; and to fully incorporate the outcomes as part of lessons learnt.

Future reports will include a section on Housing Ombudsman / Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman enquiries.

Going forward the Complaints Officer will devote more time per week, to the handling of Ombudsman enquiries.

12.1 Recommendations – learning

- A process needs to be put in place ensure that the complainant is provided with updates in respect of the progress and quality of the responses.
- Customer complaints training for all staff (members can attend if requested)
- Customer excellence training for all staff (members can attend if requested)
- Quarterly performance reports presented to HSMT & to RB
- Learning/improvements tracker which monitors identified improvements /learning actions ensuring implementation.
- Annual complaints analysis and learning to be published in Tenants annual Report.
- All Ombudsman cases to be reported to weekly and plans/timescales/actions to respond to be put in place.
- Complex Housing complaints/ombudsman complaints to be tracked and monitored by a dedicated officer.
- Report to HSMT on Ombudsman cases detailing learning and areas for Improvement, together with outstanding actions and compensation payments.
- Introduce approval level / quality checks
- Produce quarterly stats in infographic format.

13 Overview

This report has provided an overview of complaints based on the Complaints Key Performance Indicators required by the Council. In comparison to 21/22, 22/23 saw a significant increase in our complaint numbers and Member Enquiries.

We continue to report to the Corporate Performance Board and the Resident Board quarterly on the key performance indicators, and the report will soon be uploaded onto our website for our customers to see.

We strive to provide an excellent quality of service to all our customers but understand our service will sometimes fall short of a customers' expectations. We will continue to use our complaints to identify areas for improvement in our processes and procedures.

Appendix 1 – Performance

Complaints (Stage 1 & 2)	Apr-22	May-22	Jun-22	Q1 22-23	Jul-22	Aug-22	Sep-22	Q2 22-23	Oct-22	Nov-22	Dec-22	Q3 22-23	Jan-23	Feb-23	Mar-23	Q4 22-23	2022/23
Received	37	40	37	114	33	32	26	91	35	43	32	110	38	34	44	116	431
Completed on time	33	39	36	108	29	34	23	86	29	37	23	89	36	31	39	106	389
% Completed on time	87%	89%	90%	89%	91%	97%	96%	95%	85%	93%	92%	90%	90%	94%	81%	88%	90%

Member enquiries	Apr-22	May-22	Jun-22	Q1 22-23	Jul-22	Aug-22	Sep-22	Q2 22-23	Oct-22	Nov-22	Dec-22	Q3 22-23	Jan-23	Feb-23	Mar-23	Q4 22-23	2022/23
Received	48	46	35	129	52	34	57	143	55	67	55	177	45	65	68	178	627
Completed on time	51	40	40	131	39	36	53	128	50	57	54	161	31	56	60	147	567
% Completed on time	89%	89%	98%	92%	80%	95%	100%	91%	86%	97%	92%	91%	79%	80%	94%	85%	90%

Appendix 2 - Quotes of compliments received during 22/23

Asset Management	Resident Services	Housing Needs
<p><i>"Help with repairs, customer service"</i></p> <p><i>"Great Stock condition survey"</i></p> <p><i>"Quick doors exchange"</i></p> <p><i>"Lovely friendly man"</i></p> <p><i>"Impressed with work"</i></p> <p><i>"Happy with the service provided Explanation"</i></p> <p><i>"The surveyor who I had this morning was so kind, thorough and patient with me"</i></p> <p><i>"Happy tenant, great work with boiler"</i></p> <p><i>"Well done on the excellent service you give out tenants"</i></p> <p><i>"Great job done, thank you"</i></p>	<p><i>"Quick fly tipping removal"</i></p> <p><i>"Perfect advice from HO fast response and action clearing the bulk"</i></p> <p><i>"Happy with senior caretaker"</i></p> <p><i>"Compliment for the excellent work ethic and communication of my housing officer"</i></p> <p><i>"Great feedback regarding the food market/my yard and resident engagement team"</i></p> <p><i>"Amazing HO, great advice"</i></p> <p><i>"Great work team really well-done caretakers"</i></p> <p><i>"Thank you for your kindness and all help that you gave to mum in sheltered housing"</i></p> <p><i>"Thank you very much for your kindness in sending me a reply to my request so promptly."</i></p> <p><i>"I am most touched by your immense kindness and willingness to help me in my current situation."</i></p> <p><i>"Thank you for being excellent caretaker"</i></p> <p><i>"You have been an amazing asset to Harrow Council despite you being under the weather. Really appreciate your help"</i></p> <p><i>"expressed appreciation of the massive effort put in , to organise a marvellous event"</i></p>	<p><i>"Thank you all that you helped to find the family a place before becoming homeless"</i></p> <p><i>"Great support for family"</i></p> <p><i>"Thank you very much for your kindness in sending me a reply to my request so promptly."</i></p> <p><i>"I am most touched by your immense kindness and willingness to help me in my current situation."</i></p>

