

**Resources Department
Town Hall, Upper Street, London, N1 2UD**

AGENDA FOR THE HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Members of the Housing Scrutiny Committee are summoned to Council Chamber, Town Hall, Upper Street, N1 2UD on, **7 November 2023 at 7.30 pm.**

Enquiries to : Ola Adeoye
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Despatched : 30 October 2023

Membership

Councillor Jason Jackson (Chair)
Councillor Ilkay Cinko-Oner (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Phil Graham
Councillor Valerie Bossman-Quarshie
Councillor Michael O'Sullivan
Councillor Mick Gilgunn
Councillor Gulcin Ozdemir
Councillor Ernestas Jegorovas-Armstrong
Dean Donaghey (Resident Observer) (Co-Optee)
Rose Marie McDonald (Resident Observer) (Co-Optee)

Substitute Members

Councillor Jilani Chowdhury
Councillor Ben Mackmurdie
Councillor Heather Staff
Councillor Rosaline Ogunro
Councillor Caroline Russell
Councillor Marian Spall
Councillor Dave Poyser

Quorum is 4 Councillors



A. Formal Matters

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1. Apologies for Absence
2. Declaration of Substitute Members
3. Declarations of Interests

If you have a **Disclosable Pecuniary Interest*** in an item of business:

- if it is not yet on the council's register, you **must** declare both the existence and details of it at the start of the meeting or when it becomes apparent;
- you may **choose** to declare a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest that is already in the register in the interests of openness and transparency.

In both the above cases, you **must** leave the room without participating in discussion of the item.

If you have a **personal** interest in an item of business **and** you intend to speak or vote on the item you **must** declare both the existence and details of it at the start of the meeting or when it becomes apparent but you **may** participate in the discussion and vote on the item.

***(a) Employment, etc** - Any employment, office, trade, profession or vocation carried on for profit or gain.

(b) Sponsorship - Any payment or other financial benefit in respect of your expenses in carrying out duties as a member, or of your election; including from a trade union.

(c) Contracts - Any current contract for goods, services or works, between you or your partner (or a body in which one of you has a beneficial interest) and the council.

(d) Land - Any beneficial interest in land which is within the council's area.

(e) Licences - Any licence to occupy land in the council's area for a month or longer.

(f) Corporate tenancies - Any tenancy between the council and a body in which you or your partner have a beneficial interest.

(g) Securities - Any beneficial interest in securities of a body which has a place of business or land in the council's area, if the total nominal value of the securities exceeds £25,000 or one hundredth of the total issued share capital of that body or of any one class of its issued share capital.

This applies to **all** members present at the meeting.

4. Minutes of Previous Meeting
5. Chair's Report
6. External Attendees (if any)

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7. Order of Business
8. Public Questions

For members of the public to ask questions relating to any subject on the meeting agenda under Procedure Rule 70.5. Alternatively, the Chair may opt to accept questions from the public during the discussion on each agenda item.

B. Items for Decision/Discussion	Page
1. Housing Ombudsman Annual Complaints Review 2022/2023 Synopsis	13 - 26
2. Housing Ombudsman Special Report on Islington Council	27 - 112
3. Main Scrutiny Review 2023/24 -New Homes Build in Islington: - Witness evidence - To Follow	
4. Main Scrutiny Review 2022/23 - Overcrowding Strategy - Final Report and Draft Recommendations	113 - 144
5. Fibre Broadband -Update	145 - 154
6. Work Programme 2023/24	155 - 156

C. Urgent non-exempt items (if any)

Any non- exempt items which the Chair agrees should be considered urgent by reason of special circumstances. The reasons for urgency will be agreed by the Chair and recorded in the minutes.

D. Exclusion of press and public

To consider whether, in view of the nature of the remaining items on the agenda, any of them are likely to involve the disclosure of exempt or confidential information within the terms of the Access to Information Procedure Rules in the Constitution and, if so, whether to exclude the press and public during discussion thereof.

E. Confidential/exempt items **Page**

F. Urgent exempt items (if any)

Any exempt items which the Chair agrees should be considered urgently by reason of special circumstances. The reasons for urgency will be

agreed by the Chair and recorded in the minutes.

The next meeting of the Housing Scrutiny Committee will be on 8 January 2024

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London Borough of Islington

Housing Scrutiny Committee - 25 September 2023

Minutes of the meeting of the Housing Scrutiny Committee held at Council Chamber, Town Hall, Upper Street, N1 2UD on 25 September 2023 at 7.30 pm.

Present: **Councillors:** Jackson (Chair), Cinko-Oner (Vice-Chair),
Bossman-Quarshie, Ozdemir and Jegorovas-
Armstrong

Councillor Jason Jackson in the Chair

30 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Item 1)**

Apologies were received from Councillors Gilgunn, Graham and O'Sullivan. Also apologies from Rose Marie McDonald, Co-Optee.

31 **DECLARATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (Item 2)**

Councillor Mackmurdie substituted for Councillor Graham.

32 **DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS (Item 3)**

There were no declarations of interest.

33 **MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING (Item 4)**

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 17 July 2023 be confirmed as an accurate record of proceedings and the Chair be authorised to sign them.

34 **CHAIR'S REPORT (Item 5)**

The Chair informed meeting that since the last meeting he met Resident groups and representatives of Notting Hill Housing noting that there are areas for communication improvement. He also met Southern Housing leaseholders on the ongoing issues of cladding and its impact.

35 **EXTERNAL ATTENDEES (IF ANY) (Item 6)**

None

36 **ORDER OF BUSINESS (Item 7)**

The order of business would be B1,B3,B4,B2, B5 and B6.

37 **PUBLIC QUESTIONS (Item 8)**

None.

MAJOR SCRUTINY REVIEW 2023/24: NEW BUILD HOMES-OFFICER PRESENTATION AND WITNESS EVIDENCE (Item B1)

Committee received a presentation on New Build Homes from Stephen Nash and Alistair Gale, Head of Strategic Development & Delivery and Head of Programming Design & Customer Care. The following points were highlighted:

- There is a housing crisis with a desperate shortage of genuinely affordable homes with over 15,700 registered on Islington's housing waiting list.
- At present under 3,000 Islington households live in overcrowded accommodation of which over 500 are severely overcrowded households.
- Homelessness is on the rise and temporary accommodation availability is declining.
- Meeting was advised that 146 applicants on the housing register require wheelchair accessible accommodation.
- In 2008 Islington Council became one of the first local authorities to start building new council housing again for 25 years, following a period which it had been forced sell off housing stock through the Right To Buy scheme.
- Islington remains one of the smallest and most densely populated boroughs in London, that much of the borough is already built up, resulting in a scarcity of land for new housing.
- The lack of land supply and high property values in Islington has driven the council to look for opportunities to build new homes on land it already owns. Most of the completed and under construction new housing projects consist of building new homes alongside existing homes on council-owned estates.
- It was noted that 'infill' projects are often on constrained sites that require carefully considered design and well managed construction which tends to result in higher construction and development costs.
- Members were advised that with every project, the new build team aims to build as many new council homes as possible; improve communal areas, improve facilities and landscaping; making sure the new homes and any improvements made meet the residents' needs on the estate.
- In addition to the above, other aims of the new build team is to ensure that there will be minimal disruption to its residents; achieving the best value for money; that proposals prioritise a mix of homes more closely aligned with housing need, including larger family homes, accessible homes and specialist supported housing.
- Islington's local lettings policy gives local residents priority for the new council homes built, particularly those living in homes that don't meet their current needs which then provides another opportunity to release existing homes that are then re-let to meet the needs of other Islington residents.
- With regards to design and construction, meeting was advised that council's aspiration is to achieve higher standards for housing design and build quality homes.
- Council aims to be at the forefront of building safe, secure, high quality, maintainable, energy efficient new homes that residents would be proud to live in, that its approach is bespoke to each individual site but pinned to a

core set of principles to achieve a consistently high level of quality and performance.

- All new homes are designed to be tenure blind, with no visible difference in the appearance and common areas of buildings of different tenure.
- The Council has worked successfully with its contractors to maximise the training and employment opportunities for residents arising from our housing development projects.
- In terms of resident engagement, meeting was advised that its contractor framework provides the Council with access to the right contractors to deliver the quality homes and to manage the construction impacts on local residents. Officer advised that committee will be receiving a presentation on resident engagement at a future meeting.
- All schemes involve a significant amount of engagement with local residents, through a variety of different ways to ensure all residents have an opportunity to get involved and have their say.
- Council is committed to involving residents at its earliest stages, encouraging them to provide their lived experience about their home and estate. Feedback received helps the team to design schemes that can address housing need, tackle anti-social behaviour and upgrade or provide new facilities for the community.
- In terms of housing delivery, between 2009 and the end of August 2023, 580 new high quality, genuinely affordable council homes were built. Also new specialist supported accommodation was also provided, enabling Islington residents to live in their communities rather than outside the borough and to receive the best care and support possible.
- The Housing Director acknowledged that development has taken place at more than 40 locations in 17 wards with the result Council has been able to house over 2,500 Islington residents.
- Islington Council has built 28 shared ownership, and 102 outright sale homes in the period stated above, with receipts from the sale of these private homes helping to pay for the new affordable housing and other associated estate and social infrastructure improvements.
- In terms of funding for new homes, meeting was advised of rental income from the new council rent homes; prudential borrowing from the Public Works Loan Board; open market sales; Right to Buy (RTB) receipts and GLA grant funding.
- Islington has a target to build 750 new council homes between 2023-2027, noting the schemes at Finsbury Leisure Centre and Vorley Road. All will contribute to meeting the target with 200 new homes, 50% council rent which meets Passivhaus standards and includes new leisure and medical centres, new public realm, play and landscaping.
- In light of the current wider economic climate, the programme of new build homes presents significantly viability pressures and considerable risks such as high inflation, interest rate rises leading to higher borrowing rates for councils; construction costs at a 40-year high which is unlikely to fall; flatlining sales values and increased mortgage rates.
- Delivery of homes has become increasingly challenging and many public and private sector housing developers have either paused, slowed,

or radically altered their delivery programmes, resulting in fewer affordable homes being built, particularly in London, noting that work is underway to mitigate these challenges.

- Director informed the meeting that as part of the review exercise, topics for discussion at future meetings will include consultation and engagement methods and communications; partnership working activities and opportunities; measures in place to meet the current and potential future economic challenges; lobbying activities to increase financial support and access to potential sites for development; how other Local Authorities are meeting the current economic challenges; compare performance with other LA housebuilders to measure performance; innovative practices, including modular, build-overs, garage conversions; estate transformation opportunities to increase new housing supply and address issues in existing housing stock.
- In response to concerns about monitoring of works carried out by sub-contractors, Interim Director advised that a dedicated small After Care team has been in place in the last 18-24 months do carry out checks noting that lessons have been learnt and reassuring members that personnel involved have a construction background.
- Meeting was advised that car parks on existing council estates are possibilities however acquisition of private car parks is more challenging as Council has no control over such land and such land attract exorbitant land values which is unaffordable. Meeting was advised that committee will be receiving a presentation at a future meeting on council's partnership with land owners.
- A member request for a further breakdown of bedrooms sizes could be provided especially in light of Council's commitment to build more family homes was noted.
- On a suggestion that Council consider using one standard design similar to well-known national home builders instead of having multitude of designs, the Director advised that this could not be replicated as most of the new build homes are being built on existing estates and it is important to note that besides building affordable homes, it is important that such developments do not have an impact on the amenity of existing residents.
- On the number of homes being delivered, the Director clarified that the 28 shared ownership noted in the report is not included in the 580 homes built. The Chair requested that officers provide number of homes built year by year in the last 5 years so that members can have a full understanding of the trend.
- On the role of planning and council policies, Karen Sullivan reassured members that following a discussion on Tall Buildings in the context of addressing overcrowding issues at previous committee meeting, issues around density are being discussed at corporate level and that going forward schemes will be brought to planning committee in the near future.
- The Chair acknowledged the challenges in this area, noting that the Council will need to be both bold and innovative in order to address overcrowding and building affordable high quality homes stating that he welcomes the numerous awards that the council has received in terms of design but would

be more delighted if awards could be received for building more affordable homes.

RESOLVED:

That the presentation be noted.

39 **MAJOR SCRUTINY REVIEW 2022-23 , STRATEGIC REVIEW OF OVERCROWDING IN ISLINGTON - DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS , TO AGREE (Item B2)**

Member requested recommendation 4 be more robust, change the wording to read "Council build larger 4-5 bedroom accommodation.

Chair informed Members that at the next meeting in November final report on Overcrowding and draft recommendations is to be considered for approval after which it will be scheduled on the Executive's work programme.

RESOLVED:

- 1- Draft recommendations approved subject to amending the wording of recommendation 4 for it to be robust.
- 2- Final report and recommendations to be scheduled at the November

40 **DAMP AND CONDENSATION MOULD - OFFICER UPDATE (Item B3)**

Councillor O'Halloran the Executive Member of Housing and Needs gave a statement in response to a recent online coverage of damp and mould in one of Islington's Council homes originating on social media.

Executive Member stated that with regards to the case reported online, Council repeatedly tried to access the property so as to carry out the necessary works, offering the resident temporary accommodation on several occasions which he refused, and turning down all affairs of a temporary accommodation.

Executive Member informed Committee that following resident's request for a permanent new home and instructing solicitors to seek an outcome through disrepair, the Council has provided all parties its surveyors report on condition and the specification for works.

In light of the above, meeting was advised that Council has pursued an injunction to secure access so that urgent repairs could be carried out while continuing to engage with the resident in the hope of gaining entry.

Meeting was advised that Council has now gained access to the property on the 11th September 2023 so as to undertake the required works. Also Council will also consider the Council's injunction request to ensure the works can be completed.

Finally Executive Member informed the meeting that in light of the above and going forward, the Council has reviewed its approach to seeking injunctions especially when residents fail to provide access, that Council will automatically begin proceedings if no response is received after three letters from Council solicitors .

Executive Member reassured the council and its residents that despite this legal option being a last resort, the Council takes its safeguarding responsibilities serious to prevent cases of damp and mould and other disrepair escalating .

The Chair thanked the Executive Member for her statement clarifying the Council's position and thanked housing officers for their actions so far on addressing not only with this particular case but in general and that it is important that all cases of damp and mould are dealt with effectively and quickly.

Meeting received an update on the progress on how the Council addresses its damp and mould within its housing stock . The following issues were highlighted:

- Meeting was informed of the recently published Government new guidance on 7th September 2023: **Understanding and addressing the health risks of damp and mould in the home** for social and private sector landlords.
- Guidance sets out a clearly the health risks of damp and mould, regulation on damp and mould, what is damp and mould and root causes, how to respond to reports, taking a proactive approach to reduce the risks, collaborative working with other professionals and building relationships with tenants.
- The guidance states "This guidance is a direct response to the Coroner's report, and has been developed with a multidisciplinary group of experts in housing and health. Members of the government's expert **Committee on the Medical Effects of Air Pollutants** were also consulted. It makes sure that social and private sector landlords have a thorough understanding of their legal responsibilities, and of the serious health risks that damp and mould pose". Islington is assessing itself against this best practice guidance.
- Meeting was advised that Islington is assessing itself against this best practice guidance.
- In terms of reviewing all damp and mould cases from the last three years, meeting was advised that all tenants on this list have been contacted via multiple communication methods, that the remaining no access cases have been passed for priority tenancy audit. Members were informed that the dashboard created for this activity has been used to design an operational damp and mould dashboard for new and live cases.
- In terms of investment, Officer advised that although the Council has invested an extra £1million every year for a new damp and mould action team, including specialist surveyors and more funding for ventilation and insulation, Council has invested over £2 million this year on damp and mould activities. This includes additional works, additional surveying resources and increase number of administrators and operatives.

- Meeting was advised that the damp and mould Power BI dashboard will be available in Q2 2023, providing real-time updates on damp and mould performance, monitoring data over time, identify 'hotspots' and look at damp and mould through an equalities lens and that there is still ongoing work to quality assure the figures in the dashboard.
- In response to a question on the 3 reports produced by University College London for the Council, meeting was advised that this will include a report on the academic basis use and validity of methods to detect and quantify damp and mould; a report of the academic basis use and validity of remediation methods and a report cross referencing UCLs work on insulation and net zero carbo opportunities with damp and mould data.
- On the Paragraph 49 special investigation by the Housing Ombudsman, meeting was advised that this is still underway, that since the beginning of August 2022, the Housing Ombudsman has issued 23 determinations of Severe Maladministration, 15 cases relating to Islington Council, two of which are related to damp and mould.
- Meeting was reminded that some of the committee recommendations may have already been adopted or underway, noting that some of the actions as stated in the report have already been set in place but have been included in the report for completeness.
- In terms of accessing and the reporting of Damp and Mould, the Council has established a dedicated online and phone channel for residents to report damp and mould and receive support and advice.
- In response to a question on identifying root causes of damp, Director acknowledged that technical staff are trained and competent to identify and manage root cause of damp and that technical staff have sufficient equipment to conduct diagnosis.
- Meeting was reassured that Council continues to provide training to nontechnical staff to recognise and report damp and that all newly employed staff were provide details during their induction day.
- Communication with residents has been improving, setting out the reporting of damp and mould issues and explaining the process and the actions that the Service will undertake to address both the immediate and root cause.
- On the question of identifying the causes of damp and mould, officer acknowledged that they are many and varied, that some are easily addressed and rectified quickly, some are structural and complex and will be included in the council's capital programme, that funds have been allocated to address this issue.
- With regards to street properties brought back in house experiencing damp and mould, the Director acknowledged the difficulty of managing the properties because of how they were built, however a capital programme is in place for these properties and that all these properties have been surveyed.
- On the number of live cases, the Director acknowledged that final figures will be provided to clerk to share with members, however noting that presently the Service has 34 cases of high priority down from 67 last year.
- On whether a pattern had been identified on causes of damp and mould for example in a tower block maybe on particular side of the building, meeting

was advised that there were some estates where this has been observed, that more work analysis needs to be done in this area with some estates being piloted .

- Members were reminded that it is difficult to force entry into residents properties to address damp and mould however the legal route is only employed only after all attempts to access the property fails.
- On the cases highlighted by the Housing Ombudsman were recent the meeting was advised these were backlogs dating back a few years and that officers do not foresee any increase as in most cases reported by residents, things are quickly resolved.
- The Director noted that going forward if Committee is minded he would be putting together a list of recommendations and welcome members input.
- Members of the committee are invited to amend or add to the draft recommendations.

RESOLVED:

That the officer update be noted.

41 **HOUSING OMBUDSMAN SEVERE MALADMINISTRATION DETERMINATIONS AND REPORTS (Item B4)**

The Interim Director for New Builds, Jed Young updated the meeting about the Housing Ombudsman Severe Maladministration Determinations and the following issues were highlighted:

In the last 12 months (August 2022 – September 2023), the Homes and Neighbourhoods directorate has seen a significant increase in the number of Severe Maladministration determinations being issued by the Housing Ombudsman and particularly within the last six months.

- In December 2022, the Housing Ombudsman notified the council of its intention to launch a 'Paragraph 49 Investigation' into the council's handling of reports of damp and mould, and complaints submitted as a result of these issues.
- A strategic action plan will be presented to Committee at the November 2023 Housing Scrutiny Committee to ensure that the Homes and Neighbourhood address the areas identified by the Housing Ombudsman and continuous improvements around the delivery of services to our residents takes place.
- Meeting was advised that as part of the council's response to the 15 cases, a total of £46,744 has been paid in compensation to our residents.
- The earliest of these was issued in March 2023. Prior to this, the department had not been issued with a determination of Severe

Maladministration for over five years, which suggests that the criteria for this determination may have changed. It should be noted that the Housing Ombudsman has not published a definition or criteria for 'Maladministration' or 'Severe Maladministration' on its website or in other guidance.

- 67% of these determinations were issued in June 2023, bringing them within the scope of the P49 Investigation.
- This growing trend is not unique to Islington. Since 2019-20, the Ombudsman no longer reports annually on Severe Maladministration rulings but, instead, issues press releases on individual cases.
- Looking at the most up-to-date information published by the Housing Ombudsman 1284 determinations were made in the April 2023 to June period a 69-percentage increase on the January 2023 to March period when 759 determinations were made. Fifty-two percent of all determinations results in compensation being made to residents across England.
- Meeting was advised that when fully analysed of residents who have accessed Housing services in the period of the Housing Ombudsman investigation, evidence shows Council has provided services to 456788 individual requests for service provision. This, therefore, shows that severe maladministration has been identified in 0.003 percent of interactions for the areas within the determination framework of the Housing Ombudsman.
- Complaints handling accounted for 39% of the determinations of Severe Maladministration issued against Islington Council.
- Despite these determinations being issued between March and August 2023, due to a historical backlog of complaints at Stage 2 of the council's complaints procedure, as well as lengthy delays in the Ombudsman's own investigations, many of the cases being reviewed date back a number of months or even years.
- Meeting was advised that in November 2022, the council developed a corporate Complaints Improvement Board and council-wide Complaints Improvement Plan.
- At the time, the Stage 2 backlog, which accounts for the vast majority of the Severe Maladministration determinations in this area saw complaints being responded to at Stage 2 between eight and ten months outside of the timeframe set out by the Ombudsman's complaints handling code. This matter was also the subject of an investigation by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.
- In response to questions about the orders and calculations in the report, meeting was advised that final orders made by Housing

Ombudsman, an external body and is based on factors such as stress caused to residents over a long period of time and other external factors etc.

- Members were reminded that in all these cases in the report, the findings are made only after the Council's complaints procedure has been exhausted and that the council has failed to provide the service. In the case of the findings about replacement of fob key, meeting was advised that this was due to a technical breakdown for a long period as Council was unable to reprogram some of the key fobs.
- The Director acknowledged disappointment that the Council has to pay compensation, it should be noted that this represents a small proportion of the work that the council delivered and that in all cases, noting that council spends £100m and pays £45,000 in compensation and importantly it is important to note that the Council complies with the orders.
- On the definition of Severe Maladministration, the Director noted this is not Council's but that of the Housing Ombudsman, but can be this could be repairs not be resolved over a long period.
- On vulnerable people being sought by lawyers seeking to assist residents experiencing damp and mould and receiving incorrect advice, meeting was advised that it is important to note that communication with residents have been improved, that the Council has now made it easy to report, that the council should be the first point of contact.
- On the question of holding leaseholders to account especially after it is determined that works they have carried out in their properties has resulted into damage to properties below them, the meeting was advised that the Council has adopted a robust approach on claiming back damages caused by leaseholders.
- The Director of New Build advised that Housing Ombudsman's final report is to be published in October, that Council will be given a minimum of 7 days advance to fact check, after which council will be expected to respond.
- Director suggested an annual report on maladministration cases be brought to committee that members can monitor how the Council manages these cases. Committee welcomed the suggestion.
- Chair welcomed the good news that the backlog had been cleared up and thanking the good work carried out by officers

RESOLVED:

- That the report be noted

- That committee receive an annual update on issues of Maladministration Determinations for monitoring purpose

42 **QUARTERLY REVIEW OF HOUSING PERFORMANCE (Q1 2023/24) (Item B5)**

Councillor O'Halloran reported to Committee on quarter 1 2023/24 Housing Performance and the following points were highlighted:

- 71% of homeless decisions were made in the target timeframe in Q1. Performance is below the annual target of 80% (stretch target of 90%). The service has continued to experience a significant increase in demand as homelessness increases across the borough and London as a whole.
- 86.0% of repairs have been fixed first time this year. Performance is above the annual target of 85%. Although performance is below last year Q1 (88%), around 4,000 more repairs have been completed in Q1 this year compared to last year (13,326 in Q1 2022/23, 17,358 in Q1 2023/24). Some of this increase is due to the insourcing of PFI however the remainder is due to a range of factors the service is still exploring.
- On the issue of first time repairs , the Director acknowledged the slight drop in performance, that the volume of works has increased in comparison to the previous year.
- In terms of compliance checks and the difficulty of accessing properties, a suggestion to employ a trained person to carry out both gas and water safety checks at the same time, the Director welcomed the idea but reminded the meeting that regrettably water tanks are not in residential spaces but roofs and lofts which is difficult to access and some of these works require specialist. It was noted that although some boroughs do employ this approach, Council is keen on ensuring that experts are looking at each item separately.
- In response to a question, the Director acknowledged that checks are carried by a small in house team and external contractors.
- On some external contractors not carrying out their safety checks and claims that they are unable to access properties, the Director informed the meeting that in such instance the Service request for evidence on not being able to access, that generally most visits are carried out.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted

43 **WORK PROGRAMME 2023/24 (Item B6)**

Chair noted that in light of the packed agenda during the last few meetings due to legacy matters such as damp and mould, he would be liaising with the Vice Chair Councillor Cinko-Oner on the way forward with future agenda for the Committee.

Housing Scrutiny Committee - 25 September 2023

A suggestion on whether a report on scaffolding could be scheduled for a future meeting in light of its increasing cost and its impact on residents. Meeting was informed that this item was reviewed about four years ago.

Chair requested that item be brought back to Committee at a later meeting not the November meeting. Director requested that Member provide the specific area of interest so that officers could address it.

RESOLVED:

- That a report on scaffolding be scheduled at a later meeting.
- That the report be noted

The meeting ended at 9.55 pm

CHAIR

Homes and Neighbourhoods
Islington Town Hall

Report of: **Corporate Director of Homes and Neighbourhoods**
Cllr O'Halloran Executive Member for Homes and Communities

Meeting of: Housing Scrutiny Committee

Date: 7th November 2023

Ward(s): All Wards across Islington.

Subject: Housing Ombudsman Annual Complaints Review 2022/2023 Synopsis

- 1.1. The Housing Ombudsman's Annual Complaints Review has revealed a sharp increase of severe maladministration findings, as individual performance reports were published for 163 landlords where the Ombudsman made most findings.
- 1.2. Together, they paint a challenging picture of social housing complaints which has seen a huge spike due to poor property conditions, legislative changes, media attention and the inquest into the death of Awaab Ishak a child who sadly died in Rochdale due to Damp and Mould.
- 1.3. The review also reveals an increase in maladministration findings where service requests were not handled reasonably and a decrease in findings of no fault. Combined this means more than half of findings were upheld for the first time.
- 1.4. The Annual Complaints Review provides a unique and comprehensive assessment of complaints in social housing, including that the Ombudsman received over 5,000 complaints for the first-time last year, a 28% increase on the previous year.
- 1.5. The Ombudsman has again written to Chief Executives of landlords who have a maladministration rate of over 50% to bring urgent attention to the figures. There are 91 landlords with a maladministration rate above 50%, with 25 landlords being above 75%. Islington Council received this letter on the 11th October 2023.

- 1.6. The Review also looks at Complaint Handling Failure Orders (CHFOs) and key issues for the first time.
- 1.7. The Ombudsman issued 146 CHFOs last year, mostly for failing to progress complaints in line with its Complaint Handling Code, with 73% of those being for landlords with over 10,000 homes. Please note Islington Council received two Complaint Handling Failures.
- 1.8. Most worryingly for the Ombudsman is the overall trend in the sector, with a 323% increase in severe maladministration findings, a 40% increase in maladministration findings and 20% drop in no maladministration findings.
- 1.9. In terms of what residents were complaining about, property condition was once again the leading category, with the Ombudsman making almost 2,000 findings where the failure rate has increased dramatically from 39% to 54% this year.
- 1.10. The Ombudsman also found a 52% maladministration rate for health and safety complaints.
- 1.11. Another key element of the Annual Complaints Review is the regional data. This has shown the Southwest as having the lowest overall maladministration rate, as well as having a significantly lower maladministration rate on health and safety complaints.
- 1.12. The Northeast and Yorkshire has the lowest severe maladministration rate.
- 1.13. London continues to be where the Ombudsman makes most of its determinations, even accounting for the quantity of social homes in the region. It had the highest maladministration rate and accounted for 77 of the 130 severe maladministration findings last year.
- 1.14. The rate of maladministration for **local authorities was slightly higher than housing associations, 62% compared to 50%**. The Housing Ombudsman have found that due to less resource, it is harder for local authorities to offer reasonable redress to therefore ending up with more maladministration findings.
- 1.15. The Annual Complaints Review once again shows that London has the highest number of determinations, even accounting for quantity of housing stock in region.

1.16. The London region also has the **highest maladministration rate at 58%** and has the highest maladministration rate for property condition at 58%.

1.17. Out of the 131 severe maladministration findings we made last year, 77 of these were for London landlords.

1.18. It can be seen from the following table that Islington Council had a 56.8% of maladministration findings, with 74 landlords having a higher percentage maladministration finding compared to Islington.

1.19. Landlords with high maladministration rates 22-23, are as follows:

Landlord	% maladministration findings
2Dominion Housing Group	64.8%
Arun District Council	66.7%
Ashford Borough Council	72.7%
Basildon Borough Council	86.7%
Believe Housing	63.6%
Birmingham City Council	85.2%
BPHA	57.1%
Bristol City Council	53.3%
Broadland Housing Association	77.8%
Camden Council	65.5%
Cheshire Peaks & Plains Housing Trust	80.0%
Chisel Limited	70.0%
Clarion Housing Association	53.6%

Connect Housing Association	54.5%
Cross Keys Homes	54.5%
East Devon District Council	76.9%
East End Homes	60.0%
Epping Forest District Council	80.0%
Estuary Housing Association	66.7%
For Housing	80.0%
Gateshead Metropolitan Borough Council	50.0%
Gateway Housing Association	71.4%
Gentoo Group	69.2%
Great Places Housing Group	68.0%
GreenSquareAccord	76.3%
Hammersmith and Fulham Council	83.8%
Haringey London Borough Council	81.4%
Harlow District Council	64.3%
Havering Council	72.7%
Hightown Housing Association	80.0%
Homes Plus	54.5%
Housing For Women	80.0%
Hyde Housing Association	65.6%
Incommunities	61.1%
Inquilab Housing Association	83.3%
Islington and Shoreditch Housing Association	66.7%

Islington Council	56.8%
'Johnnie' Johnson Housing Trust	57.1%
Kingston upon Hull City Council	66.7%
Lambeth Council	79.7%
Leeds City Council	56.8%
Lewes District Council	80.0%
Lewisham Council	66.7%
Livv Housing Group	65.2%
London & Quadrant Housing Trust	62.3%
London Borough of Barking and Dagenham	88.2%
London Borough of Barnet	62.5%
London Borough of Brent	72.7%
London Borough of Croydon	66.7%
London Borough of Ealing	62.5%
London Borough of Enfield	90.0%
London Borough of Hackney	63.3%
London Borough of Hounslow	71.4%
Longhurst Group	63.6%
Manchester City Council	66.7%
Melton Borough Council	55.6%
Metropolitan Thames Valley Housing	54.7%
Network Homes	52.8%
Newcastle City Council	60.0%

North West Leicestershire District Council	50.0%
Norwich City Council	100.0%
Nottingham City Council	66.7%
Orbit Group	55.8%
Paragon Asra Housing Limited	68.1%
Peabody Trust	57.6%
Poplar HARCA	83.3%
RHP	83.3%
Rochdale Boroughwide Housing	52.6%
Royal Borough of Greenwich	69.2%
Salix Homes	60.0%
Sheffield City Council	62.5%
Shepherds Bush Housing Association	53.3%
Slough Borough Council	69.2%
Soho Housing Association	60.0%
Southend-on-Sea City Council	83.3%
Southern Housing Group	63.3%
Southwark Council	76.9%
Southway Housing Trust (Manchester)	60.0%
Sovereign Housing Association	69.4%
The Guinness Partnership	52.0%
Thrive Homes	85.7%
Thurrock Council	54.5%

Torus	58.8%
Tower Hamlets Council	60.0%
Walsall Housing Group	63.6%
Wandle Housing Association	67.3%
Weaver Vale Housing Trust	80.0%
Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council	88.9%
West Kent Housing Association	54.5%
Westminster City Council	62.7%
Wolverhampton City Council	55.6%

2. Recommendations

- 2.1. That Housing Scrutiny Committee note the report and the Housing Scrutiny Committee receives these annual reports in the future to hold the Homes and Neighbourhood service to account and to help drive service improvements for our residents. The Housing Scrutiny Committee also note the strategic action/improvement plan attached to the Paragraph 49 report also on this Committee agenda.

3. Background

- 3.1. Attached to this report as Appendix 1 is the Annual Performance report for 2022/2023 relating to Islington Council.

6 Financial Implications

The maladministration compensation payments totalled £11.879k in 22-23 & were met from the HRA. The report however makes clear in the conclusion that there remains a risk that service failures and hence maladministration compensation payments could increase in future years. Effecting the improvement action plan will be carried out within existing staffing resources.

7 Legal Implications

- 7.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report and recommendations.

8 **Conclusion**

- 8.1 It is of the greatest importance the council implements service wide improvements to address the findings of the Housing Ombudsman's findings contained within this report to ensure the council provides the best possible services to our residents. However, we must also recognise until the housing crisis is addressed, we will continue to see rising casework. The new regulatory settlement will have a significant and positive impact. The root causes also need addressing, otherwise the risk of more service failure is acute. The council aims to provide the best housing services in the country and the Housing Ombudsman work will assist with these service improvements.

Report Author

Ian Swift Director of Housing Operations and Deputy Corporate Director of Homes and Neighbourhoods

Email address ian.swift@islington.gov.uk

Housing
Ombudsman Service

**LANDLORD
PERFORMANCE
REPORT**

2022/2023

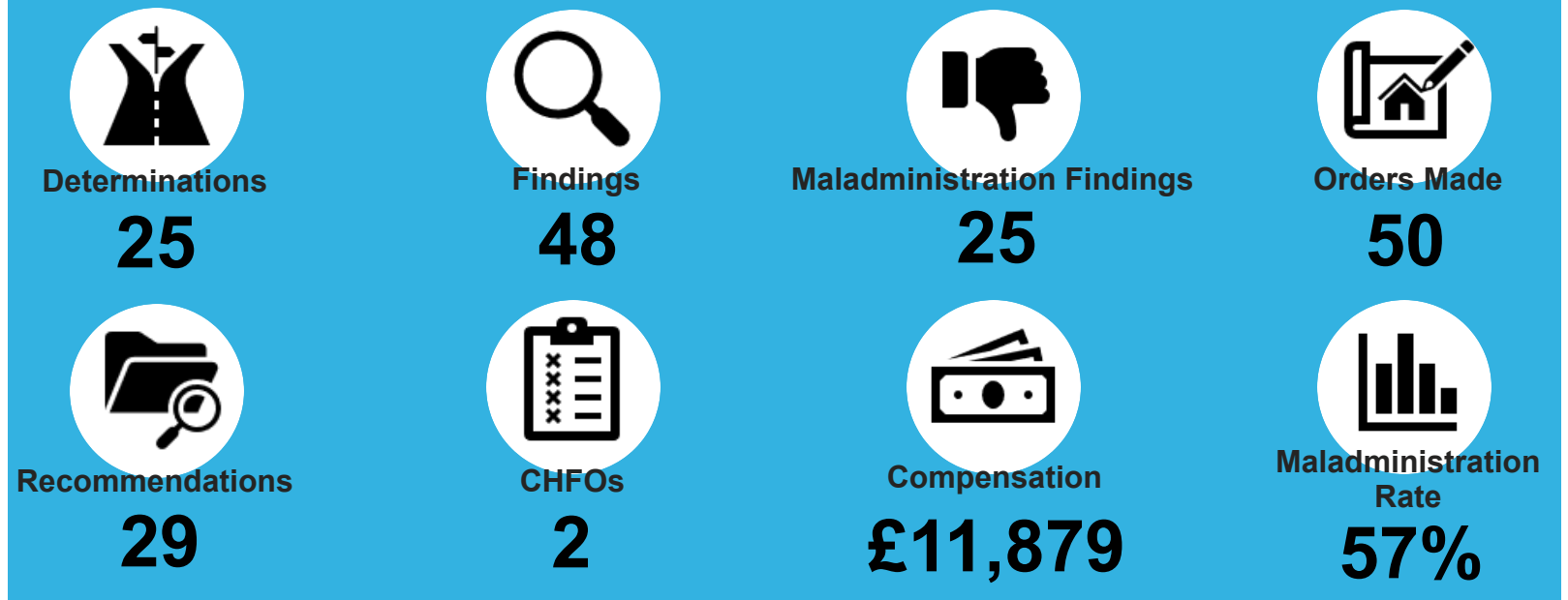
Islington Council

Landlord:

Landlord Homes: 34,594

Landlord Type: Local Authority / ALMO or TMO

PERFORMANCE AT A GLANCE



PERFORMANCE 2021-2022



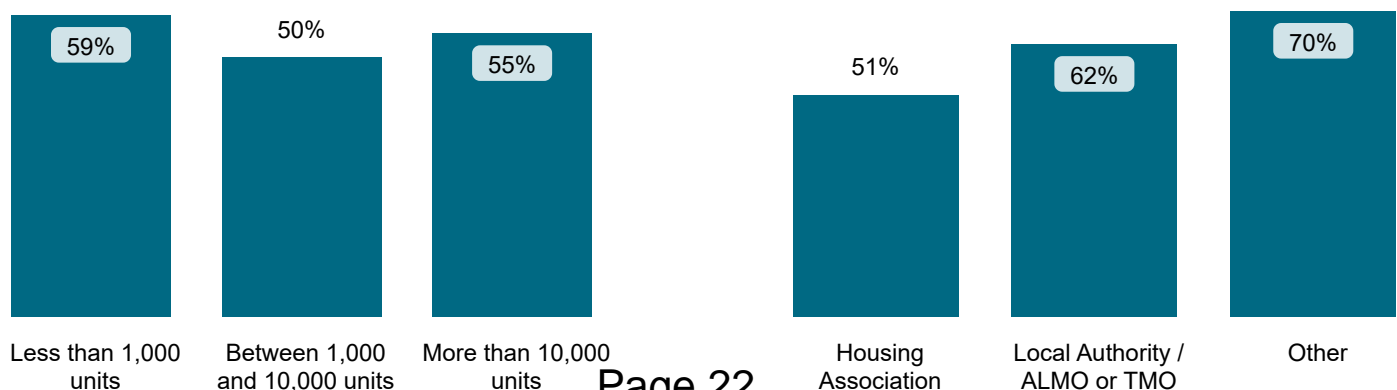
Maladministration Rate Comparison | Cases determined between April 2022 - March 2023

NATIONAL MALADMINISTRATION RATE: 55%

The landlord performed *similarly* when compared to similar landlords by size and type.

National Mal Rate by Landlord Size: [Table 1.1](#)

by Landlord Type: [Table 1.2](#)



Findings Comparison | Cases determined between April 2022 - March 2023

National Performance by Landlord Size: Table 2.1

Outcome	Less than 1,000 units	Between 1,000 and 10,000 units	More than 10,000 units	Total
Severe Maladministration	5%	2%	3%	3%
Maladministration	29%	21%	27%	26%
Service failure	19%	25%	22%	23%
Mediation	0%	1%	2%	2%
Redress	8%	12%	17%	16%
No maladministration	30%	34%	23%	25%
Outside Jurisdiction	9%	6%	5%	5%
Withdrawn	0%	0%	0%	0%

Islington Council	
Outcome	% Findings
Severe Maladministration	4%
Maladministration	33%
Service failure	15%
Mediation	0%
Redress	21%
No maladministration	19%
Outside Jurisdiction	8%
Withdrawn	0%

National Performance by Landlord Type: Table 2.2

Outcome	Housing Association	Local Authority / ALMO or TMO	Other	Total
Severe Maladministration	2%	4%	6%	3%
Maladministration	24%	30%	35%	26%
Service failure	22%	24%	26%	23%
Mediation	2%	1%	3%	2%
Redress	20%	9%	3%	16%
No maladministration	25%	26%	23%	25%
Outside Jurisdiction	5%	6%	3%	6%
Withdrawn	0%	0%	0%	0%

Outcome	% Findings
Severe Maladministration	4%
Maladministration	33%
Service failure	15%
Mediation	0%
Redress	21%
No maladministration	19%
Outside Jurisdiction	8%
Withdrawn	0%

Landlord Findings by Category | Cases determined between April 2022 - March 2023

Table 2.3

Category	Severe Maladministration	Maladministration	Service failure	Mediation	Redress	No maladministration	Outside Jurisdiction	Withdrawn	Total
Complaints Handling	1	7	6	0	3	1	0	0	18
Property Condition	0	5	1	0	6	2	0	0	14
Anti-Social Behaviour	1	4	0	0	0	4	0	0	9
Staff	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	0	3
Moving to a Property	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	2
Estate Management	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Information and data management	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Total	2	16	7	0	10	9	4	0	48

Findings by Category Comparison | Cases determined between April 2022 - March 2023

Top Categories for Islington Council Table 3.1

Category	# Landlord Findings	% Landlord Maladministration	% National Maladministration
Complaints Handling	18	78%	76%
Property Condition	14	43%	54%
Anti-Social Behaviour	9	56%	41%

National Maladministration Rate by Landlord Size: Table 3.2

Category	Less than 1,000 units	Between 1,000 and 10,000 units	More than 10,000 units	% Landlord Maladministration
Anti-Social Behaviour	33%	38%	41%	56%
Complaints Handling	96%	75%	76%	78%
Property Condition	48%	54%	54%	43%

National Maladministration Rate by Landlord Type: Table 3.3

Category	Housing Association	Local Authority / ALMO or TMO	Other	% Landlord Maladministration
Anti-Social Behaviour	39%	43%	0%	56%
Complaints Handling	71%	87%	100%	78%
Property Condition	50%	64%	63%	43%

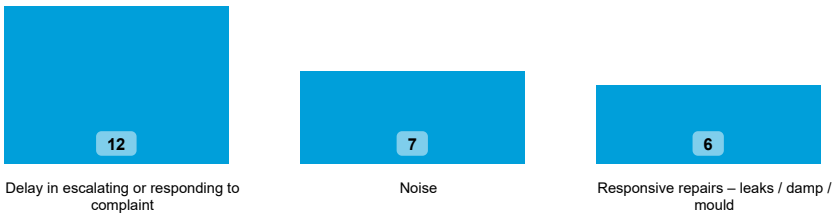
Findings by Sub-Category | Cases Determined between April 2022 - March 2023 Table 3.4

Highlighted Service Delivery Sub-Categories *only*:

Sub-Category	Severe Maladministration	Maladministration	Service failure	Mediation	Redress	No maladministration	Outside Jurisdiction	Withdrawn	Total
Noise	1	4	0	0	0	2	0	0	7
Responsive repairs – leaks / damp / mould	0	2	0	0	4	0	0	0	6
Responsive repairs - general	0	1	0	0	1	2	0	0	4
Responsive repairs – heating and hot water	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	3
Staff conduct	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	0	3
Pest control (within property)	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Total	1	9	1	0	7	4	2	0	24

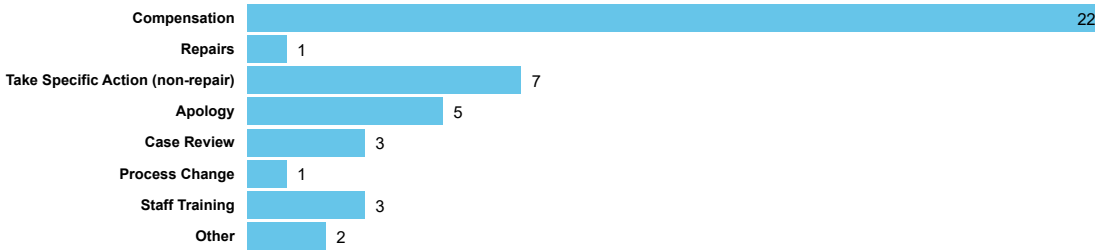
Top Sub-Categories | Cases determined between April 2022 - March 2023

Table 3.5



Orders Made by Type | Orders on cases determined between April 2022 - March 2023

Table 4.1



Order Compliance | Order target dates between April 2022 - March 2023

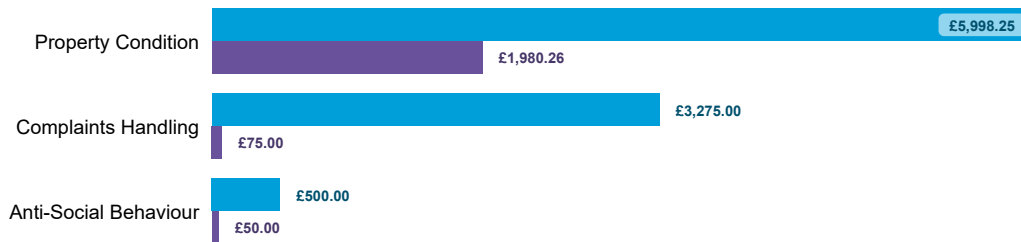
Table 4.2

Order Complete?	Within 3 Months	
	Count	%
Complied	41	100%
Total	41	100%

Compensation Ordered | Cases Determined between April 2022 - March 2023

Table 5.1

● Ordered ● Recommended



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Homes and Neighbourhoods
Islington Council
222 Upper Street N1 1XR

Report of: Ian Swift, Director of Housing Operations

Meeting of: Housing Scrutiny Committee meeting

Date: 7th November 2023

Housing Ombudsman Special Report on Islington Council

Summary:

The Housing Ombudsman makes the final decision on disputes between residents and Council and Housing Association landlords.

This special report attached as Appendix One to this report follows an investigation conducted under paragraph 49 of the Housing Ombudsman Scheme, which allows the Housing Ombudsman to conduct further investigations to establish whether any presenting evidence is indicative of a systemic failing.

The cases considered as part of this special investigation include complaints that were with the landlord between February 2019 and 24 November 2022. Therefore, the complaints cover a three year and nine-month period.

The investigation commenced in December 2022, and the special investigation report into Islington Council was published by the Housing Ombudsman on the 24th of October 2023.

The special investigation considered all housing services provided by Islington Council and the related complaints for all these services.

The special investigation report and work identified underlying causes which have led to failings in three principal areas of the landlord's service provision where the Housing Ombudsman see repeated failings. These are:

- Disrepair including Damp and Mould
- Anti-social behaviour
- Complaint handling.

The complaint handling by Islington Council has also been the subject of a Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman investigation with the LGSCO report produced and made available to the public on the 2nd of May 2023. This LGSCO

report was also referenced within the Housing Ombudsman report on pages 41 to 44 relating to complaint handling by the council.

Islington Council fully accept the Ombudsman's report and recommendations.

Islington Council want everyone in Islington to have a safe, decent, and genuinely affordable place to call home. Our tenants and leaseholders deserve a high-quality service, and we deeply regret that we have not always delivered this in the past.

Islington Council have been working to put things right and Islington Council believe this report further clarifies the actions and resources needed, building on the external critical appraisal we have sought from partners over the last two years.

Islington Council are committed to delivering a number of improvements in an extremely challenging environment of long-term underinvestment in social housing, the challenges our residents face with the cost-of-living crisis, and a severe shortage of affordable housing in one of London's densest Boroughs.

In June 2022 Islington Council set up a Housing Improvement Board to raise standards and respond to new regulatory requirements. We will build on this and deliver the Ombudsman's recommendations through an expanded Improvement Plan, including:

- Introducing a new, place-based approach to housing management. This will mean residents have a single point of contact and staff take ownership of their patch. Alongside our new resident empowerment framework, this will help us transform our housing services over the next two years, so they are of the highest standard. Islington Council will aim to deliver services as if they are being provided to an important member of our own family.
- Getting repairs right. Islington Council is focussed on improving communication and working more effectively. Islington Council is running additional training for all repairs staff on customer service and learning from mistakes and implementing new processes on missed appointments and cancellations. Islington Council have brought in more staff where needed and increased preventative investment around damp, mould, and leaks.
- Delivering our five-point-plan on damp and mould. While we are pleased the Ombudsman notes our progress, we are not complacent. We are using this report and new government guidance to strengthen our response, including trialling innovative approaches like remote monitoring sensors, and will apply learning across all housing services.
- Tackling anti-social behaviour (ASB). Islington Council have undertaken a council-wide review of our ASB services and are redesigning them to improve resident experience. We are making it easier to report ASB and will build on this through our innovative approach to housing management and better use of available enforcement options.
- Transforming our complaints service. Islington Council created a dedicated housing complaints service, invested in additional staff and training and are improving processes for quicker decision making. Islington Council are introducing a new digital complaints management system to improve

oversight and are committed to learning from complaints as part of a wider culture change programme. Islington Council will continue to report on progress and hold us accountable to this Housing Scrutiny Committee. Crucially, Islington Council are also establishing a Resident Service Improvement Group to make sure residents' voices are at the heart of this work. Islington Council welcome the Ombudsman's recent call for significant investment in the sector and the acknowledgement that, until the housing crisis is addressed, challenges will continue. We look forward to collaborating closely with the Ombudsman as we continue service improvements.

Attached as Appendix Two to this report is the draft Improvement/Action Plan to address the findings and recommendations contained and connected with the special investigation report produced by the Housing Ombudsman.

Recommendations:

- The Housing Scrutiny Committee is invited to comment on the attached draft Action/Improvement Plan and to critically challenge the service to ensure we meet the elected members ambition and aspiration to provide the best housing service in the country,
- The Housing Scrutiny Committee study the attached Housing Ombudsman report and comment on the contents of the special investigation report to enable the service to be held account in the future.
- The Housing Scrutiny Committee receives updates at each meeting over the next 24 months relating to the Action/Improvement Plan relating to the Housing Ombudsman's special investigation report to hold the Homes and Neighbourhood service to account for the required improvements.

1. Legal Implications

There are no known legal implications from this report.

2. Financial Implications

There are no known financial implications from this report.

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**Housing Ombudsman
Special Report on
Islington Council**

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Introduction

The Housing Ombudsman makes the final decision on disputes between residents and member landlords. Our decisions are independent, impartial and fair. We also support effective landlord-tenant dispute resolution by others, including landlords themselves, and promote positive change in the housing sector.

This special report follows an investigation carried out under paragraph 49 of the Housing Ombudsman Scheme, which allows the Ombudsman to conduct further investigations to establish whether any presenting evidence is indicative of a systemic failing. Where this is the case, it will be referred to the appropriate regulatory body, the Regulator for Social Housing.

The investigation commenced in December 2022. Factors that may be indicative of a wider service failure may include, but are not limited to the following:

- a policy weakness
- repeated or common points of service failure
- service failures across multiple service areas,
- service failures across multiple geographical locations,
- failure to learn from complaints, or
- lack of oversight and governance to identify and act on repeated issues.

The Ombudsman's wider investigation was prompted by analysis we carried out in December 2022 of cases relating to leaks, damp and mould. We found a high rate of maladministration for these cases. Also, the landlord did not respond to our request for information in August and September 2022, as we sought to evaluate the response to our report *Spotlight on: Damp and Mould* (October 2021) where the landlord had been identified for its above-average maladministration rate in this area.

This report provides insight to help the landlord strengthen its complaint handling and address the substantive issues giving rise to complaints, to help extend fairness to other residents and prevent complaints in future. The outcomes of investigations over the monitoring period are set out later in the report.

We also publish the report to help other landlords identify potential learning to improve their own services. This is part of our wider work to monitor landlord performance and promote learning from complaints.

The landlord engaged extensively with the Ombudsman as part of this investigation and proactively sought to implement improvements from the determinations prior to the publication of this report. The landlord responded promptly and fully to requests for information and also provided additional helpful information. It attended several meetings during the investigation.

The landlord is also to be commended for hosting a 'Meet the Ombudsman' event on 30 March 2023, which it promoted to all of its residents.

Scope and methodology

We looked at determinations we made in relation to complaints about the landlord between 12 December 2022 to 30 June 2023. The cases represent all the complaints about the landlord we determined during this period, not a selection. We assessed the findings from our investigations of these cases, and whether they highlighted any systemic issues that went beyond the circumstances of those individual cases. The cases considered as part of this investigation include complaints that were with the landlord between February 2019 and 24 November 2022.

When deciding if a failing is systemic, we look at whether the impact of maladministration and service failure is limited to a single area or cuts across different services and resident experiences. We look at the landlord's complaint handling culture, and its ability to learn from complaints to improve services. We consider the steps the landlord has since taken, and we recommend further action to ensure improvement.

We requested evidence from the landlord, including:

- its most recent Damp and Mould Procedure or standard operating protocol
- the most recent updated Damp and Mould Action Plan, or other single document that shows details and responsibilities for the specific actions taking place.
- the Repairs Policy and procedure
- the Voids policy/standards and procedure
- the Mutual Exchange policy
- the Tenant Handbook
- any structured self-assessment against all 26 recommendations made in our report *Spotlight on: Damp and Mould*, or against the Housing Quality Network toolkit
- training materials on damp and mould since January 2022
- specific examples of the landlord sharing learning from a damp and mould complaint, both internally and externally.
- additional details of a case described in the March Housing Scrutiny Committee meeting submission
- the most recent draft of the landlord's ASB policy/procedure
- the managers' monitoring report used in relation to ASB record-keeping
- the report on the review of complaint handling that was provided for the Corporate Management Board at the end of April 2023
- the most recent version of the guidance on compensation
- the analysis that has been done on missed or ineffective (repairs or survey) appointments
- an example of how the creative solutions multi-team process has worked for a specific case.

We also asked the landlord additional questions after reviewing the evidence provided. The landlord responded to all our questions.

We have also looked at the information available from complaints residents have recently brought to us during 2023 while still in the landlord's internal complaints procedure but which we have not determined. While we have not drawn any conclusions from these complaints, we have used them to ascertain if recent changes in the landlord's approach have already improved residents' experience.

About Islington Council

The landlord is a London local authority and a registered provider of social housing. It is currently responsible for just over 36,000 properties. As a local authority, it must engage with two ombudsman offices: us, and the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) for other services, including homelessness.

Since the start of the monitoring period the landlord has engaged constructively with the Ombudsman.

The landlord's intentions and ambitions are to improve. We met with senior staff during this investigation who were open about the challenges the landlord faces, and determined to improve the services by working strategically and creatively. The landlord has shown recognition of its own limitations and it proactively seeks advice from external organisations when it identifies that it has a performance issue. It has also engaged fully and positively with this investigation and undertaken to act on any recommendations made

Investigation Outcomes

Between 12 December 2022 and 30 June 2023 we issued 30 determinations, including 14 cases where we found severe maladministration on at least one of the issues raised by the resident. The landlord has a severe maladministration rate of 24.7% which is nearly four times the national average of 6.7%.

In all 30 cases we found either service failure, maladministration or severe maladministration for at least one aspect of the complaint. In complaints about the landlord’s complaint handling, every case had a failing – a 100% maladministration rate – while the landlord’s 83% maladministration rate for property condition was above the national average of 66% and the 94% for complaints about anti-social behaviour was far above the national average of 52%.

We ordered the landlord to apologise to residents in 17 instances and pay a total of £66,441, an average of over £2,000 per case. Over half of this (£33,792.49) was for complaints about property condition. We ordered the landlord to pay out £7,625 for the impact of poor complaint handling on residents. Overall, during the monitoring period we made 186 orders or recommendations to put things right.



Maladministration Rate

93%



Severe Maladministration

24.7%

Top 3 Categories for Islington Council			
Category	# Landlord Findings	% Landlord Maladministration	% National Maladministration
Property Condition	30	83%	66%
Complaints Handling	29	100%	81%
Anti-Social Behaviour	16	94%	52%

Please see [Annex A](#) for the full case list. This table does not include the findings of ‘outside jurisdiction’ or ‘withdrawn’.

Category	Severe Maladministration	Maladministration	Service failure	Redress	No maladministration	Total
Property Condition	5	15	5	1	4	30
Complaints Handling	12	15	2	0	0	29
Anti-Social Behaviour	3	9	3	0	1	16
Information and data management	0	4	0	0	0	4
Moving to a Property	0	3	0	0	0	3
Reimbursement and Payments	0	1	0	0	0	1
Buying or selling a property		1	0	0	0	1
Health and Safety (inc. building safety)	0	0	2	0	0	2
Staff	1	0	0	0	0	1
Estate Management	1	0	0	0	0	1
Occupancy Rights	0	1	0	0	0	1
Total	22	49	12	1	5	89

Themes Identified

Underlying causes

Having considered the evidence from our casework, and submitted by the landlord for this investigation, we have not only identified several areas of concern in the landlord's service provision, but also the underlying causes behind these areas of concern, that are hampering the landlord's housing service provision. These are:

Cross-cutting issues

Too often the landlord's approach tends to be reactive rather than proactive. This may be connected to a lack of resource, or time to think strategically at an early stage when an issue emerges, gather information, and plan actions.

There is a tendency towards a lack of clear ownership, which contributes to problems drifting and persisting. We see passive and vague language used internally and externally, making it unclear who is responsible for what, the action they will take, and by when. The approach to resolution can also be disjointed, with no team or individual taking responsibility for moving forward on a situation. Teams appear to work in silos, rather than effectively with each other to resolve competing priorities they may have. Our casework shows tension between objectives has caused inertia, with no overall 'owner' to make decisions. For example, in its anti-social behaviour work, one team may be focussed on supporting a resident to stay in their property by changing their behaviour, while another team focuses on resolving the behaviour's impact on the neighbour through eviction processes. The unclear ownership responsibilities are also illustrated by the landlord appearing to expect the resident to navigate the boundaries between different landlord departments or teams. Residents may be pushed between teams and misdirected, with no-one taking ownership or managing progress toward a resolution.

Poor record-keeping across the board is hampering an efficient and effective response both on the substantive issue, and reducing the landlord's ability to give high quality responses to complaints.

Learning from complaints where a resident has not complained to an Ombudsman appears to be limited. The landlord will act when an external organisation has advised or instructed it, but the landlord is missing opportunities before the issues get this far.

Inadequate handling of service requests

We are concerned that we saw insufficient structured information gathering and investigation or analysis when a resident reports an issue, causing missed opportunities to identify potential underlying factors relevant to deciding the most effective response.

Front-line officers appear to be consistently taking a short-term transactional path of least resistance to demonstrate they have done *something* quickly, when the situation warrants a proper examination and investigation. This focus on process rather than outcome causes a long-term problem when they fail to provide an effective and timely resolution.

We have seen insufficient consideration of a resident's vulnerability when dealing with their substantive report of an issue, or working with non-housing services (sharing information, working together, and making referrals for welfare or other support).

The landlord has been providing inadequate redress because information not uncovered or taken into account during the landlord's investigation has either not identified obvious failings, or not appreciated the full impact of them on the resident.

While we understand that using powerful enforcement mechanisms is not always appropriate or helpful overall, the landlord appears reluctant to use the full range of enforcement powers at its disposal, even where it appears appropriate to do so. It also appears that the landlord's officers are not using less severe enforcement options that are available, perhaps because they are not aware of when or how to use them.

We are also concerned by a consistent failure to communicate with residents promptly, appropriately and clearly.

These underlying causes have led to failings in three main areas of the landlord's service provision where we see repeated failings. These are:

- Disrepair
- Anti-social behaviour
- Complaint handling.

Disrepair

Disrepair complaints are the most common complaints residents bring to landlords and the Ombudsman. The severity of the detriment they experience, when they live with disrepair for an unreasonable length of time, is clear. Ineffective appointments and wasted materials result in financial detriment to the landlord.

In 2019 we published '[Room for Improvement: Spotlight on complaints about repairs](#)'. In this report we highlighted the need for landlords to:

- Ensure they have adequate oversight of their outsourced services;
- Clearly explain its priorities and timescales to residents and, if they can't be met, explain why more time is needed;
- Keep clear, accurate, and easily accessible records which should include comprehensive records of residents' reports of disrepair, and the response (including appointment details, pre- and post-inspections, surveyors' reports, work carried out, and completion dates);
- Provide sufficient notice of appointments to the resident, confirm appointments and send reminders by an agreed method of contact (if the resident consents), and updates if the appointment needs to be rescheduled;

What our casework tells us

Unreasonable delays

We recognise that resolving a report of disrepair can be difficult: identifying the underlying cause can be complex and time-consuming, requiring repeated visits. However, the cases we looked at in this investigation included those where there was no evident complexity and yet it still took too long to identify and resolve the problem. For example, the landlord took over three months to resolve a damaged front door, partly because it initially wanted to use its in-house contractor and when this was not possible (the contractor was unable to attend the repair appointment) the landlord delayed involving a specialist contractor. When they eventually attended, seven weeks later, they found that the entire door needed replacing and then there was a two-month wait time, which the landlord did not tell the resident about (202210715).

In another case, a resident requested a number of repairs, including moving an extractor fan to stop a curtain being sucked into it. The landlord took a year to acknowledge it had overlooked this part of the request. When it eventually sent an operative to move the fan, they found it could not be moved and a carpenter needed to move the curtain pole instead (202201578).

When the landlord's obligations are fulfilled by a third party, which may subcontract actions to yet another organisation, good administration and oversight is both more complicated and more important to avoid delays. The landlord should proactively monitor such jobs, and intervene when it becomes clear that issues among other organisations are preventing resolution of an issue for one of its residents.

Case Study - 202112423

Mrs A lived in a listed building managed on behalf of the landlord. The managing company used a separate surveyor company to deal with planning issues, including listed building consent.

Mrs A reported a bathtub leak in spring 2021. The leak had caused blown plaster and fallen tiles. The managing company believed listed building consent was required for the repairs, and instructed its surveyors. A temporary fix was done, but Mrs A could not re-tile until after the permanent repair. After delays and no updates, she complained. The managing company responded that a planning application had been made, but the response time was outside its control. In autumn, after the standard timeframe for planning decisions had passed and she had heard nothing, Mrs A escalated her complaint after discovering the planning team had no record of an application for her building.

Debates over how the plastering repair should be done, given the listed building status, lasted over nine months. The landlord tried to find a specialist to do the repair using a method which would meet anticipated (but not confirmed) planning requirements.

Mrs A's repair was completed in November 2022, 18 months after she reported the problem. Planning permission was not necessary for the works, and no application had ever been made.

We found maladministration because the repairs were significantly delayed. The managing company should have checked with the local planning authority initially to find out if listed building consent was required. There was a lack of oversight by both the landlord and the managing company, and the landlord lost control of the situation. The managing company also misinformed Mrs A, which caused her to lose trust in her landlord. We found severe maladministration in the handling of Mrs A's complaint because of delays, the need for our involvement to progress the complaint, and because several statements made in the complaint responses were unsupported by any evidence.

We ordered the landlord to pay Mrs A £1,100 compensation, review the learning from this complaint, improve its oversight processes where there are third party management agents, ensure it has specialist contractors available, and to improve its oversight and quality assurance of complaint investigations and findings.

We have also seen unreasonable delay because landlords did not consider workarounds while a longstanding problem was being resolved, even where it was clear the resident was vulnerable. We have seen the landlord adopt a blanket response which ignores the immediacy of the detriment to the resident. It is not always documenting its residents' vulnerabilities, even where they should be obvious, so the repairs response does not take them into account. This was the case even where it is clear from the available documents that the resident was vulnerable, putting them at increased risk of harm, or there were other safety issues, as seen in the case study below:

Case Study – 202006900

Ms O's disabilities mean she needs her property adapted to include a wet room and stairlift, and a representative to help her communicate with the landlord. The landlord had not registered her disabilities on its system, despite previously repairing her stairlift. Ms O complained about several issues impacting her health including damp and mould, garden water drainage, damaged windows, leaks to her house and shed, and kitchen disrepair. She had to go to hospital for several months, and explained this to the landlord. There is no evidence the landlord considered this when responding to her.

The landlord did some repairs, but there were delays because it could not access Ms O's property. The number of Ms O's possessions she was storing also meant the landlord could not access areas it needed to. However, it did not refer this situation to its hoarding team who might have helped, causing further delay. The landlord left calling cards to show it had been unable to access the property at times, but overall lacked proactivity in its approach. It knew work was needed at the property, but did not follow up and instead placed the onus on Ms O.

Despite the numerous issues, the landlord did not fully inspect until a year had passed. It did not take up the representative's offer to meet until six months after that. It did not demonstrate any understanding of the issues, or Ms O's experience, and did not use all its available services to help her further.

We found the landlord did not communicate key important information with Ms O and her representative. It did not tell her it had fully inspected her property. It gave her no information about its findings, what it had done, and what it would do next.

We found severe maladministration for the landlord's lack of consideration of Ms O's vulnerabilities and wellbeing, and also for its complaint handling. We also made six findings of maladministration for the way the landlord handled specific repairs. We ordered the landlord to apologise and pay Ms O £8,468.28 compensation.

We also ordered the landlord to confirm which repairs were outstanding, arrange for its Hoarding and Blitz Clean Team to attend, carry out all outstanding window and mould repairs, ensure there were no further leaks, inspect the kitchen and carry out any necessary repairs, and to correctly note Ms O's vulnerabilities on its systems. We ordered it to review its complaint handling failings and its processes.

The landlord's June 2023 analysis of its repairs service shows that demand has substantially increased. It also identified data quality issues (such as, counter-intuitively, cancelled jobs that should have been marked 'complete'). Its own analysis is clear it is not meeting its timeline targets, particularly on routine repairs. The landlord commissioned a study by an external organisation which found that the target for repairs to be completed on the first visit (85%) is not being met (actual performance is 75%). The same report shows residents only reported being kept informed of progress 57% of the time, when the target is 85%.

Case Study - 202215237

Miss B lives in a one bedroom flat. The landlord has documented her mental health vulnerabilities, and she relies on a representative to communicate with the landlord.

Miss B's key fob to access her building stopped working. She reported this to the landlord by telephone, through its website contact form, and later by email. She received no response, so she complained. She explained the fob had not been working for the last eight months, and she had to rely on neighbours' help to access her flat. She said the situation was distressing and impacting her already vulnerable mental state to the extent that she had to move in with relatives.

The landlord apologised for the delay responding to her enquiries and complaints. It said there was a technical glitch meaning call requests were not passed on or complaints logged. It said its complaint response was delayed by high volumes, and it had experienced a 'borough-wide' technical issue with its key fob systems. It said that as compensation, it would not charge her for the new fob. In total, it took the landlord ten months to order Miss B a new fob: something it should have done within 24 hours according to its repair policy. It offered her no reassurance about timescales, no plan for an alternative, and no acknowledgment of the impact this ongoing inability to access her property was having. It also took 14 months to respond to her Stage 2 complaint, where it outlined that it did have an emergency contingency plan for replacement fobs, but it was '*not cost effective*'.

The landlord failed to recognise the impact the situation and its responses had on Miss B's already vulnerable state. It did not have proper records of what had happened, which delayed it assisting Miss B, causing her distress and inconvenience.

We found that the landlord's delay enabling Miss B to access her property, and its poor complaint handling, were severe maladministration. We also found maladministration in its record-keeping. The landlord's offer to Miss B (£575) did not adequately recognise the detriment to Miss B. We ordered the landlord to apologise, pay her £4,394.04 compensation, take steps to reduce the risk of similar failings in the future and to train its staff on understanding impact on residents.

Ineffective Appointments

Ineffective appointments are a key factor which causes delay and inconvenience, and disrespects the value of residents' time. There is consistent evidence from our casework that the landlord and its residents experience problems caused by ineffective appointments. Examples included:

- the landlord has not told, or agreed, the appointment time with the resident who is then not in
- the operative arrives and finds that they are unable to complete the job because key information (such as the presence of asbestos, or the requirement for a specialist) was not communicated or documented
- the operative fails to bring the required materials or tools to the job, despite the landlord knowing what the job's objective was
- the operative arrives and the resident refuses them entry (which may be for a range of reasons, foreseeable or otherwise)
- the operative arrives at an agreed time and the resident is not available to let them in to the property
- where access is required to a neighbouring property, the relevant neighbour refuses access.

Many ineffective appointments are caused by the landlord, and yet we have not seen an analysis of the reasons why, so that the landlord can take informed steps to address the cause and reduce their incidence as far as possible. In cases where a neighbour refuses access, we have also seen that the landlord has not created or followed through with a plan to address this within a reasonable timescale.

The lack of structured analysis of the reasons for the ineffective appointments means the actions aimed at reducing them (agreed appointment times, calling cards, re-booking appointments more proactively) are therefore likely to be of only limited effect.

The landlord told us that 'missed' appointments are monitored in real-time day to day, and says it is now doing a detailed exploration of cancellations and the associated reasons.

Poor communication

Communication with residents is vital in providing confidence that the problem they have reported has been heard, fully considered, and acted upon appropriately. Clear communication enables the resident to participate in the resolution too (for example, by ensuring they are available to give an operative access, or by providing further information the landlord may need). Important communication points include:

- initial survey
- inspection
- assessment findings
- what the landlord proposes to do next

- managing expectations
- responding to follow-up queries.

The landlord carried out 'mystery shopping' evaluations which included Property Services in July 2022, November 2022, and May 2023. Residents were asked to use various scenarios to test the landlord's response, and to report back. These evaluations showed that, overall, residents were experiencing difficulty making contact with Property Services, and not getting a timely response. Emails did not respond to all the issues raised and there was no signposting with relevant alternative contact details. Residents could not reach staff by telephone. Enquiries were not passed on to the relevant team, and a resident who reported they were deaf was not offered any reasonable adjustment. Call-backs were not offered. One caller waited 35 minutes before hanging up.

At the Meet the Ombudsman event in 2023 residents raised issues with inaction and poor communication in relation to disrepair, describing how the landlord does not respond to calls and officers do not give out their last name or email address. One resident who had been living in temporary accommodation for four years expressed her frustration with poor communication:

'Communication is disgraceful. The communication is bad, and they turn it around you, make you the victim...they speak to you like you're nothing. You don't know who you're talking to. I don't even know my Housing Officer...I have gone to Upper Street ten times to know who my Housing Officer is, and when I finally got to know this lady, this lady spoke down to me.'

There has been a lack of clear policy and procedure on repairs, which is likely to be contributing to the issues described above. The landlord provides a 'guide for tenants', but this is not an internal policy or procedure and does not describe a standard operating protocol for the landlord's staff and contractors to follow. For example, it is unclear what, where, and how repairs records should be kept by operatives, or what information residents should be given and when. It includes a section on 'missed' appointments which says that the landlord will apologise and re-book the appointment if it fails to attend without any prior contact. In theory, then, the landlord could contact the resident 15 minutes before the appointment time, state it will not be attending, and owe the resident nothing. Yet if the resident 'misses' an appointment (which may be because the landlord did not notify the tenant they were coming) the landlord will not attempt further contact and will close the repair job unless very limited circumstances apply. The imbalance of power and penalty described in the policy is striking.

The guide does not comment on the wider reasons the landlord may be at fault for an ineffective appointment. It does not set out internal escalation triggers, pathway, or timescales when disrepair is not being resolved. The guide contains a section on damp and mould, but does not link to the specific damp and mould procedure, or make clear the priority attached to a report of damp or mould. It places the onus on residents to deal with condensation problems. An external review ordered by the landlord recommended a proper internally focussed repairs policy and procedure. The landlord is

currently acting on this recommendation, and has told us that a new policy and procedure will go to its Executive for approval in October 2023.

Leaks, damp and mould

Leaks, damp and mould are a significant subcategory of disrepair. The cause can be difficult to diagnose and there may be more than one. However, because of the impact on residents, it is key that the response to a report of damp and mould is efficient and effective.

The problems with damp and mould are longstanding and we have seen through our casework over many years that residents have been experiencing poor responses, not isolated to this landlord. In October 2021 we published [‘Spotlight on Damp and Mould: It’s Not Lifestyle’](#), which made 26 recommendations for landlords. A year later, in November 2022, the landlord’s Housing Management Team self-assessed as fully compliant with the recommendations. However, the assessment did not fully detail all 26 recommendations. The landlord’s subsequent actions – discussed below – demonstrate the limited nature of this self-assessment and undermine its conclusion that it was compliant with the recommendations.

Delay

We have seen instances where the landlord was too slow to consider the possibility of underlying issues. The landlord took a superficial look at the damp and mould, and its response did not address the underlying cause, leading to delay in resolving the issue . We saw a worrying absence of taking residents’ reports seriously and investigating when they explained their suspicions about the cause of a leak or damp, despite the fact that they later transpired to be correct. The landlord’s investigations of the cause of the mould, and the records it kept of the actions taken and the conclusions reached, have not always been comprehensive. The landlord was not taking a proactive approach , and worked in silos – not involving other relevant services within the council itself or other welfare agencies.

Case Study - 202012629

Miss H lives with her young child in a flat. She has a skin condition which is worsened by a cold damp environment. Her flat is positioned over a building utility area (there is no heating coming up from below). The landlord agreed to install two additional radiators in her flat to counteract the effect of the void below. Miss H questioned whether the radiators would have any impact on the cold, as there was no insulation under her floor at all. She expressed concern that the only impact would be to increase her heating bills.

Sewage then leaked into Miss H's flat, and despite the emergency situation requiring a response within two hours, the landlord's operative took six hours to arrive. In the meantime, Miss H bailed out sewage using a bucket. She received no updates from the landlord to demonstrate when an operative would arrive, which exacerbated her stress. Because of the smell and health hazard after this incident, Miss H had to remove her flooring which meant there was even less cold protection.

The landlord installed the radiators 14 months after agreeing to do so, but they did not work properly and she was repeatedly left without effective heating. Miss H complained about this, and again highlighted that she was losing heat due to the lack of under-floor insulation. The landlord told her it had no plans to fit insulation. However, following a further (risk-based) assessment the landlord agreed that the void area presented a condensation risk. It agreed to install insulation to the ceiling of the void area.

The landlord did not have an overall appreciation of Miss H's repair needs. It did not look at whether, under all the circumstances, to treat flooring insulation as a responsive repair based on her reports of the issue and the impact on her health. Instead, it initially flatly rejected the works she had requested. It failed to link the issues Miss H was raising between the lack of insulation, the removal of her flooring, and the cause of the cold. Each issue was seen in isolation, which meant her complaint was not given the overall response she deserved.

The landlord also wrongly recorded repairs that had not yet started as 'complete', which caused further delay.

The landlord's more recent action taking a risk-based approach (in agreeing to install insulation) is appropriate. However, we found maladministration in its handling of the repairs response, and severe maladministration in its complaint handling. We ordered the landlord to pay Miss H £2,720 compensation, and to look into underlying issues which caused the sewage leak and her repeated loss of heating, put her back into a position she was in prior to the leak, and review its own processes.

Ineffective damp and mould appointments

We found many examples of ineffective appointments during the landlord's responses, in particular to reports of leaks, damp, and mould. What we have seen from our casework is supported by survey results available in February 2023. The landlord commissioned research from an outside organisation to gather residents' experiences of the response to damp and mould. Numerous comments detail ineffective appointments. Some examples are:

'The initial surveyor said that one of the walls needs plastering so a plasterer came round to my property and said that it did not need plastering but it needed insulating as it is getting worse. I have not heard anything back from anyone about the issue being resolved.'

'The contractors keep trying to come to my home without booking any appointments or informing me of their coming. As a result, they kept arriving when I was at work, and so they have been unable thus far to enter my home and complete the treatment works.'

'I've had two appointments so far for the work to be completed, and each time they have cancelled on the day...both times I took time off work and only got a message on the day that it wouldn't be completed.'

Communication about leaks, damp and mould,

Where the resident has reported a leak, damp, or mould this is a health concern which causes worry and distress, potentially damaging their health and their property the longer the situation persists. Good communication from the landlord is imperative to provide reassurance that the issue is being taken seriously and treated with appropriate priority. We have found the landlord's communication with the resident about a damp and mould repair was consistently poor.

We found evidence from the cases of requiring the resident to be proactive and engage with multiple teams within the landlord, rather than creating a single 'lead' point of contact for the resident and then internally and 'behind the scenes' taking a multidisciplinary 'joined up' approach. We also found an isolated example of the landlord inappropriately blaming the resident for condensation issues. The case studies below provide examples of this playing out in practice.

Case Study – 202121287

Mrs C was pregnant and lived with her two young children in a one-bedroom basement flat. The other flats in the building were owned by leaseholders. Mrs C's family was sharing one damp bedroom, and there was damp and mould in the kitchen. Mrs C complained to the landlord that it had not done outstanding works that were needed to tackle the damp and mould. She told the landlord her flat was overcrowded, but she could not move because her kitchen was in such poor condition and her flat was damp.

After it assessed the property, the landlord blamed the condensation on Mrs C's lifestyle, such as placing her belongings near walls, closing internal doors, insufficient heating, and drying clothes in unventilated areas.

The landlord delayed two months before writing to the leaseholders explaining they were responsible for relevant repairs work. It did not tell the leaseholders what the cost of the work would be. Some of the work was internal and did not need to wait for the external work to be completed, but the landlord did not do the internal work that it could have done. It was reasonable for the landlord to delay cosmetic repairs, but it could have completed other works which would have helped to alleviate the impact of damp and mould. For example, it had identified the need for extractor fans but these were not being fitted, and nor did it clean off the mould.

Mrs C was been previously told by PFI (the organization managing the property on behalf of the landlord) that she would get a new kitchen, due to the extent of the repairs it needed. However, the landlord later told her it could not find a record of this commitment, and refused her a new kitchen. This lack of record-keeping and joined up working with PFI added to Mrs C's sense of frustration at the lack of clarity on what was happening and when. The landlord's refusal to replace her kitchen did not consider the hazard she had been reporting or the vulnerability of the people living in the property.

The landlord said it completed the works eight months after Mrs C complained, and some delay was because the leaseholders would not agree to pay for the necessary work, which it then began doing itself. However Mrs C says the landlord missed response dates, did not reply to most emails, did not respond to certain issues at all and did not give her dates for the works, and had not completed all the works. The landlord was unable to provide evidence all the work had been completed.

Case Study – 202201058

Ms D is a leaseholder of a three bedroom top-floor flat. The roof had been renewed in 2011. In 2021, Ms D reported that significant amounts of water were coming in to her flat when it rained. A month later, the landlord attended to try and find the cause of the leak. It confirmed that scaffolding would be needed.

There were delays erecting the scaffolding, which the landlord did not thoroughly investigate, and Ms D had to contact the landlord to ensure it was going ahead. We cannot tell why these delays happened, or when the scaffolding was fully installed, because the landlord's record-keeping was poor.

The landlord then confirmed that major roof works were needed. The roof had been constructed without sufficient overhang so that water could not flow into the gutter and away. At some point this has been worked around by laying roofing felt as a 'bridge' into the gutter, but it had now deteriorated and water was leaking into the building.

The landlord did not keep clear records of which part of the work was to be done, and when. Ms D was confused by what was happening, and did not know whether any given piece of work was a temporary fix, or a permanent repair. After three further winter months, Ms D was told at the last minute that work would start. This delay and lack of information caused Ms D distress and further damage to her property (as more rain leaked in).

The landlord was not proactive in updating Ms D on progress with the major works. It did not manage the agent effectively, even when it knew there were issues with the roof repairs. It only sent its own surveyor after 4 months and the involvement of a councillor. Eventually, the work was done and the surveyor signed off on its completion. However, after only a few months Ms D reported water again flowing into her property.

We found severe maladministration. The landlord had failed to do the scheduled cyclical review of the general condition of the building in 2019, which meant there was a missed opportunity to identify the roofing issues before they resulted in a leak. It delayed unreasonably, did not communicate with Ms D, and did not take ownership, properly investigate, or provide a lasting remedy to the roofing issues. It also failed to keep adequate records of the work needed and the ongoing repairs records.

We ordered the landlord to apologise and pay Ms D £2,300 in compensation, and to ensure the required works were completed with a permanent fix. We also made a number of orders designed to ensure similar failings did not happen again, including that it should review its processes for contract management and oversight.

Case Study - 202203097

Mr S lives with his child in a one bedroom flat, and water was leaking into his bathroom, hallway, and entrance. The landlord agreed to do repair work, and it would start this after it had found the cause of the water ingress. The landlord identified what it believed was the cause of the ingress the same week, and did repairs to that area. However, the leak continued and the next month the landlord did more work trying to target a different area (from the flat above).

The landlord was twice unable to gain entry to Mr S's flat, and says it told him it was waiting for him to arrange a third appointment. Mr S was unaware the appointments were scheduled, and no calling cards were left.

Nearly two years passed. Then, Mr S told the landlord about further damp. He reported mould within his property, that tiles had fallen off his walls, and that he and his child had persistent coughs, breathing, and skin difficulties. The landlord said it had not re-investigated the situation previously because it had been waiting for Mr S to contact it. Mr S did not know he was expected to do this.

Although there was a significant gap in contact from Mr S, the landlord knew the initial issue had not been resolved (as it had not gained access) and outstanding work was required. It was not taking the vital proactive approach to damp and mould reports.

The landlord then tried to find the cause of the leak. However, we found little evidence it kept Mr S updated about what it was doing, or explained the long delays he continued to experience. Repairs to the building's exterior were delayed, and so the landlord tried to do the internal repair before it had found where the water was coming from. There is no evidence of mitigation steps to reduce the impact on Mr S, given these delays. For example, it did not offer him a dehumidifier which would have helped dry the property.

We found severe maladministration in the landlord's response to Mr S's report of damp and mould. It unreasonably delayed finding the source of the ingress, because it failed to carry out actions it had identified years earlier. Even after Mr S reported health impacts caused by his living environment, there were unexplained and unreasonable delays. We ordered the landlord to pay Mr S £1,801 compensation, and review the condition of its similar housing stock.

The landlord's actions on damp and mould

Since these cases were raised with the landlord, it has done, and plans to do more, work to improve its response to reports of leaks, damp and mould. However, these actions were too slow in coming. We published *It's Not Lifestyle* in October 2021. It was over a year later, in November 2022, when the landlord produced an internal report with a broad assessment of its approach to damp and mould in light of *It's Not Lifestyle*. The landlord increased the urgency surrounding its damp and mould related activity in mid-November. It says this accelerated response was caused by the Coroner's report into Awaab Ishak's death (16 November 2022) and media reports (on 27 November 2022) of two serious cases of damp and mould in its properties. The landlord published its five point plan for tackling damp and mould in December 2022, shortly after this investigation was announced. The landlord should have acted on the recommendations made by the Ombudsman far earlier. There was only superficial belated consideration of the recommendations in *It's Not Lifestyle*.

The landlord's five point plan is to:

- Review all reports of damp and mould made over the previous three years, contacting residents and taking more action if needed
- Create a damp and mould action team, to include specialist surveyors, and has allocated more funding for ventilation and insulation
- Train non-specialist staff to identify damp and mould on home visits
- Set up a dedicated line for calls and emails from residents concerned about damp and mould so that a survey can be booked
- Create a clear referral pathway for professionals, and improved working with partners to offer joined-up help (for example with finance, housing, health, and repairs issues)

The landlord has provided evidence of good progress against this five point plan. It has done a structured analysis, and has an action plan for improvement. This includes developing a risk-based approach to reports of damp and mould based on new data-analysis capabilities. It seeks to proactively identify properties and residents being impacted by damp and mould both through more sophisticated data analysis and direct engagement. It has also asked external experts to advise it on its approach. It has recruited more surveyors and repairs staff. In relation to damp and mould, the June 2023 analysis shows a significant improvement with more contractor jobs being completed on time and while there is some way to go, the trajectory is positive. The landlord is to be commended on tracking the effectiveness of its actions with robust evidence and data, and using this to identify where it needs to do more.

The landlord has said that it has planned to invest more in its damp and mould response. It has budgeted to spend an extra £1m annually, towards various measures to improve its response. This will include funding a specialist damp and mould team, and proactive measures for identifying damp and mould risk and reducing it (for example, major works, and using new technology to monitor properties at high risk of damp and mould).

The landlord's '*Housing Procedure: Damp and Mould*' is dated 16 June 2017 and had been reviewed by November 2022 when the landlord concluded it was '*essentially compliant*' with the key recommendations in *It's Not Lifestyle*. However, the landlord has told us the procedure is currently being reviewed again. It has not said when this review will be completed and a new procedure in place. This review is welcome, if overdue, because the current procedure lacks proactive obligations for the landlord, and places the onus on the resident to follow up. It is difficult to understand, in light of *It's Not Lifestyle*, why this procedure was not updated some time ago.

The landlord is also reviewing some of the policies and procedures which are more broadly related to damp and mould. For example, it has made recent changes to the housing allocations policy which gives additional points to residents living with a significant damp and mould impact. It is also developing a new repairs policy and a specific damp and mould policy.

The landlord has set up a telephone menu option and a dedicated email inbox for reports of damp and mould. However, we are concerned at some reports we have seen that staff responding to those lines of communication are not offering suitable responses. The mystery shopping evaluation showed that one resident who called the damp and mould option was told that the line doesn't give out advice on getting rid of mould, could only arrange an inspection, could not do so at present as the 'system' was 'down' and asked the resident to call back in 15 to 20 minutes. Another caller waited 35 minutes before hanging up. Call-handlers do not always seem to be aware of a resident previously having reported the same issue, and the waiting time for a surveyor's appointment has been measured in several weeks even where a resident is vulnerable and officers have escalated the request.

The landlord has made efforts to improve the tone and manner of its communication with residents who report damp and mould. It is putting in place a Tenants Charter, and its senior Housing Operations staff send round open communication noting that improvement is required and asking staff to 'please ensure every day we treat our tenants like we would treat an important member of our own family.' It has also carried out multiple drop-in sessions and events designed to encourage residents to raise issues

The landlord has carried out a comprehensive training programme involving relevant staff and councillors. We have reviewed the training materials sent to us by the landlord and it has taken on board up to date approaches in responding to damp and mould. The landlord has now made clear this training is mandatory. In a November 2021 version of a document for managers and staff setting out training requirements, damp and mould was missing from the mandatory training checklist appendix. This risked managers overlooking it. The landlord updated this document in July 2023, removing this risk.

The landlord has done some work on how it will measure its performance and assess its progress on damp and mould. The Housing Scrutiny Committee has added a regular

item on damp and mould to its agenda, has been receiving progress updates, and has taken the opportunity to hold officials to account.

The landlord has commissioned independent academic expertise (from University College London) to assist its strategy on responding to damp and mould reports. This work will result in three separate papers, which the landlord will share with any other organisations which may find it useful. This is an excellent example of engaging expert advice, learning from it, and sharing that learning to ensure the widest possible impact.

Overall, the landlord's actions to improve its response to damp and mould should result in improvement in residents' experience, and some should also have wider impact, improving the response to repairs more generally. The landlord has understandably focussed its more recent actions on damp and mould, but we see many of the same failings in repairs issues that are not related to leaks, damp or mould. The landlord should be similarly motivated to improve its repairs service in general.

We have looked at whether our most recent casework information shows any indication of improvement in the time since the events which led to the complaints included in this investigation. We have not yet made findings on these cases, but based on a preliminary assessment we have seen recent damp and mould repairs that appear to still take a very long time to achieve with no plan explained to the resident., an apparent lack of contact with the resident leading them to complain in February 2023 about a persistent leak followed by ineffective appointments in June 2023. Even where the MP chases the landlord for a response to a resident's complaint about a significant leak, in July 2023 none appears to be forthcoming. We recognise that the cases we see are a sample of all the repairs instances that the landlord deals with. However, we have looked at 14 recent repairs cases (11 of which involve leaks, damp, and mould) and found that many of the problems we describe above appear to persist into 2023.

Antisocial Behaviour

Antisocial behaviour (ASB), and the landlord's response to residents' reports of noise emanating from their neighbours' properties, was another key theme that has emerged from our casework. Residents' lives can be severely negatively affected by ASB and by noise transference between properties.

In eight out of the ten ASB-related complaints we considered, the resident cited noise disturbance as their principal concern.

In October 2022 we published our report [Spotlight on Noise Complaints: Time to be Heard](#), highlighting that often we found landlords failed to follow their ASB policies. This included not using them when they should have, and not taking action required by the policy (such as risk assessment and action planning). We made 32 recommendations to strengthen ASB policy and neighbourhood management strategy, and published a [Self-Assessment Tool](#) for landlords to check their current situation against the

recommendations. There is no evidence that the landlord has carried out a self-assessment at the time of writing, eleven months after publication.

At the end of June 2023, we ordered the landlord to tell us to put in place a new good neighbourhood strategy and tell us how it meets the recommendations in *Time to be Heard* (202209316). The landlord initially requested an extension to the deadline until 13 September 2023, and we subsequently agreed a further extension until 9 October. On 2 October the landlord told us it would not be possible to put in place a Good Neighbourhood strategy by the revised deadline, which it must have known for some time. Nor did the landlord explain when it expected to have the new strategy in place. In response to a draft version of this report, the landlord has now explained that it will not finalise the Good Neighbourhood strategy before the new corporate ASB policy is in place. This is because the two are closely related. The landlord expects that the required public decision on the strategy will take place early in 2024. It is concerning that the landlord did not clearly communicate this explanation after we ordered the landlord to put the strategy in place. It indicates poor internal communication.

The casework considered in *Time to be Heard* covers the period 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022. The landlord features as one with three or more cases where noise formed part of the resident's complaint.

We have only looked at the landlord's response to reports of ASB or noise made by residents who are its tenants. If a report is made by someone who is not a tenant of the landlord, the landlord's wider activities fall under the remit of the LGSCO. However, we can look at whether the landlord has worked across all its functions effectively when it responds to a report one of its tenants has made.

What our casework tells us

In general, the landlord has approached its residents' reports of noise using its ASB policies and procedures, but cannot demonstrate it followed them. This has led to a high maladministration rate and ongoing detriment to its residents' quality of life. The issues are not limited to noise disturbance. We have seen serious long-term harassment where the landlord's response was lacking.

If the landlord has deemed (often after absent or insufficient investigative steps) that the noise or behaviour does not amount to ASB then it has not been, based on the cases we have seen, following up with other actions that might be available to it. Deciding that a report of noise disturbance does not reach the threshold of ASB should not be the end of the story. The landlord can take other steps to attempt to mitigate or resolve the impact on its residents, but in general this has not been happening.

Failure to follow policy and procedures

We have found that the landlord often does not recognise that opening an ASB case is warranted, meaning that the requirements within the policies and procedures are not

followed. Even where it does appropriately open an ASB case, the landlord has repeatedly been unable to show it followed its ASB policy and procedure.

Two of the key documents that ought to be completed at the start of an ASB case are a risk assessment and an action plan. This assists structured information gathering and analysis which takes into account the resident's individual circumstances, including any vulnerabilities, which may impact the action plan and the urgency of the response. The action plan then guides what happens next (and may change, with changing circumstances). However, we have found that the landlord repeatedly failed to risk assess or action plan, showing a lack of structured front-end information-gathering and analysis. This even happened where the landlord knew, or ought to have known, about a resident's vulnerability and taken it into account. We also saw failure to risk assess or action plan where the resident had reported a threat of violence or other very severe impact.

The next step is to investigate the report, by using all reasonable efforts to gather and analyse the evidence before reaching conclusions about the nature or cause of the behaviour or disturbance the resident has reported. However, we have found that the landlord has not always been doing this, and it is often unclear how it has reached its conclusions.

As one investigative tool, the landlord often asks the resident to use the Noise App, which makes use of the residents' mobile phone to provide evidence of the noise disturbance they have reported. The landlord's policies and procedures do not make reference to the Noise App, but its officers appear to rely heavily on it even in cases where the value of the evidence it could provide is doubtful. For example, because the Noise App has to be activated by the resident and only records for a short period of time, it would be difficult (if not impossible) for the resident to use it to evidence loud but infrequent bangs when they are sleeping at night. We have seen evidence of problems with the Noise App information not feeding through to relevant staff at the landlord for their review. In response to our findings, the landlord checked and found the Noise App working as expected. It notifies relevant staff when a report is made, staff know how to log and review the information provided, and how to manage a user's account

The emphasis on using the Noise App may be linked to a possible resource issue highlighted in one of our cases, where we saw a long waiting time for more sophisticated noise monitoring equipment to be installed in the resident's home (case 202209316).

Not working with others

It is often appropriate and necessary for the landlord to involve other relevant professionals (for example, the police or welfare agencies) when responding to a report of ASB. However, the landlord is not consistently taking this important step to provide a holistic and effective response.

We have seen many examples of the response to ASB being allowed to drift onwards without progressive actions to move the situation forward in some way. The landlord's procedure requires a monthly review of open ASB cases, yet we have seen that this is not always being done.

Poor communication

Experiencing antisocial behaviour is highly distressing for residents, and only made more so when the organisation they have approached for a response and support in resolving the issue does not give them the information they need. Many of the cases we looked at showed that the landlord's communication with residents has been poor. Residents are not told what they need to do and why, and the landlord is not explaining accurately (or, in some cases, at all) what it can and cannot do and why. We have also seen residents left in the dark, leading them to feel abandoned as the landlord has not updated them on progress or relevant changing circumstances. We have also seen that the ASB case may be closed without informing the resident.

Lack of enforcement

The landlord has a number of enforcement tools available to address ASB, up to and including evicting a resident who is behaving in an antisocial way involving a serious impact on others. However, our casework has shown that it was not considering, or using, all of them. For example, we have not seen evidence that the landlord was routinely considering (or evidencing that it has considered) options such as swift and specific formal warnings, acceptable behaviour contracts, or seeking civil injunctions.

Poor documentation

As with repairs, we have found that the landlord has not been keeping accurate and complete records in relation to reports of ASB. This causes unreasonable delay as the resident is repeatedly asked to re-evidence the issue. If the landlord has already taken action, this may be unclear from the records and processes re-started. Evidence for the landlord's conclusions has been unavailable, and resident's vulnerabilities have not always been documented.

Case Study – 202217733

Ms W lives alone in a one bedroom flat. She told the landlord about her health issues. After making reports of ASB over several years she told the landlord she could “no longer take anymore”. Nightly noise from the flat above impacted her sleep and therefore her health. She reported this over the next three months. The landlord’s staff noted hearing noise during calls, and that Ms W seemed upset and tired.

Noise and water were entering her property because there were no floor coverings in the flat above. She was concerned about privacy because it was possible to see through gaps in the ceiling. Despite escalating her reports internally, with an urgent request for a response, the landlord did not respond to Ms W. She felt vulnerable and intimidated and began sitting and sleeping in her car to get away from the noise. Four months after her initial request for help, the landlord told her to download the Noise App to record the noise on her phone.

Ms W spoke to her neighbour about the noise but this did not help. She told the landlord rats from the flat above were entering her flat, and urine was dripping through from a leaking toilet above. After a year, the landlord said it would inspect. It found the flat needed carpet. The landlord had told the upstairs neighbour eight years previously that they were breaching the lease due to the lack of carpet, but had not followed up to ensure it had been fitted.

Ms W’s neighbour began sending her intimidating and threatening letters, and she told the landlord she felt she needed to move. The landlord did not respond.

Ms W contacted the landlord 25 times in 16 months. She continues to experience the same issues she raised years ago. The landlord has declined to provide adequate flooring in the property above, and the neighbour is unwilling to pay for it.

We found the landlord failed to take reasonable and proportionate action to resolve the noise nuisance which was causing Ms W extreme distress. The landlord knew about Ms W’s vulnerabilities, and the impact of ASB, but did not refer her for support, offer mediation, or describe or set expectations about what it could do to help Ms W. It did not give her timeframes, or follow through with enforcement action. This was severe maladministration, and we ordered the landlord to pay her £3,920 compensation, and an in-person apology from the Chief Executive. We ordered the landlord to ensure adequate flooring was now in place and take action if not, and review its policies and procedures.

Case Study - 202209316

Mr T lives in a one-bedroom flat in a block, and is supported by a representative because he has learning (limited ability to read or write), physical and mental health difficulties. He relies on support workers to help him speak to the landlord. He began reporting excessive noise happening between 4am and 6am from the flat above some years ago, which stopped him from sleeping and badly affected his conditions. For example, he had begun to have epileptic fits for the first time in over 15 years. The landlord's ASB policy says it will investigate noise reports that happen at unreasonable hours.

A month after Mr T's reports the landlord did a risk-assessment, but failed to complete the 'vulnerabilities scorecard' section. This meant Mr T was immediately disadvantaged in his ability to participate in the ASB process and the information the landlord requested. The landlord only took his vulnerabilities into account three years after his initial complaint.

The landlord focused on explaining to Mr T that the noise was 'normal living noises' so it could take no further action. It did not appreciate that there were now four people living in a one bedroom flat above Mr T, and he had been happy at the property for nearly 20 years before this. Rather than investigate and address the noise, the landlord tried to manage Mr T's complaint. It took no action to establish the nature of the noise, consider the impact, or look at reducing or eliminating it. It did not demonstrate adequate levels of fairness, empathy and respect, or show that it understood his particular needs.

The landlord initially said (without offering a reason) a noise recording machine was not required. It eventually installed a machine after a year, which showed substantial, incredibly intense and intrusive noise. The landlord falsely told Mr T it played the noise to the neighbour. The landlord continued to fail in its responsibilities to Mr T and in its record keeping. It waited years to establish what flooring was in place, or to look for solutions to reduce the noise.

Mr T felt the landlord had not investigated his complaints effectively, and was rude and dismissive. The way it handled his complaints exacerbated his feeling of being ignored. The landlord took six months to send some responses, did not follow its own process, did not investigate issues Mr T raised about staff or why it had acknowledged the evidenced noise was 'substantial' but then closed the complaint shortly afterward without taking any action. Instead, the landlord suggested Mr T seek alternative accommodation, making him (rather than the noise) the problem.

We found severe maladministration for both the way the landlord responded to Mr T's noise reports, and for its complaint handling. We ordered the landlord's Chief Executive to apologise to Mr T in person, pay £4,500 in compensation and carry out a review of its ASB record management and policies.

The landlord's actions to improve its response to ASB and noise reports

The landlord has already recognised it has a major issue in its handling of reports of ASB and noise. It commissioned an external review of its ASB processes which reported its findings in June 2022. These included that there was, in general, no case management approach being taken on ASB, a fragmented set of procedures, and no case management database or other fit-for-purpose case management system. There was no training plan, and a lack of performance management. The findings reflect many of the issues we have noted in the cases we have looked at: poor quality investigation, lack of communication and follow-up with residents, limited enforcement action, staff not having the time to make records, assess and document vulnerabilities, and create action plans. Residents said their options appeared to be to report the issue to the police, or to move house. They reported difficulty using the Noise App, and poor expectation management by the landlord. Indeed, false expectations had been created by a confusing website which indicated an officer would contact them following a report. The review found that the ASB action plan appeared aspirational; there were no milestones or timescales. It is clear from reading the review report that the landlord's systems for responding to reports of low-level ASB were inadequate and significant work would be required to improve them.

It appears the landlord began work on updating its ASB policies and procedures in October 2022, coinciding with the publication of *Time to be Heard*. This was a positive step. However, we have not seen evidence that the landlord self-assessed against the report's recommendations using the tool we published.

In November 2022, the landlord appointed an ASB Programme Manager, and put in place a project structure including a steering board chaired by the Chief Executive. The following month the landlord told us it was establishing a monitoring report for managers to have oversight of the quantity and the quality of records.

The landlord carried out a 'rapid review' of Community Safety, Housing & Adult Social Care between February and March 2023 (sent to us in September 2023), to try to ensure residents were receiving the right support according to their often complex needs. Staff highlighted the need for better clarity on roles and responsibilities across and between teams, clear boundaries to address potential conflicts between teams within the landlord who have competing constraints, improved communication, a more co-ordinated response with clear escalation points. The review also identified that there are a number of meetings and panels aimed at problem-solving but not necessarily a clear understanding of the function of them all or of the overlaps or gaps. The landlord acknowledged the need to reduce duplication, simplify and streamline these and to have better oversight of the meetings and panels, and stronger escalation and management of actions, and suitable enforcement action.

In April 2023 the landlord indicated to us it had established a broader ASB project group and the action plan for this work would include reviewing its approach to noise nuisance and self-assessing against the *Time to be Heard* recommendations.

The landlord told us that it had offered staff training on ASB over the previous year (so, going back to July 2022) and that 'most' staff had attended. It provided refresher training delivered by an outside organisation during July and August 2023. It sent us copies of the training materials (undated) which cover how to use the ASB policy and procedures. Its internal staff newsletter of July 2023 includes a section asking staff to improve record-keeping. The landlord has also (in line with an order we made following an investigation) trained staff on updating the resident on progress, a timely response, and record-keeping. The landlord told us it provided training on 12 July and 26 July, and further training would take place on 6 September 2023, and 4 October 2023. It sent us the training materials, which were the updated process documents, a leaflet for tenants who may need to move home because of violence or harassment, instructions on how to open an ASB case using the landlord's IT system, and an email to staff outlining expectations for when to open an ASB case.

The landlord updated its ASB procedure in July 2023 to include timescales for case reviews. In August it sent us what appears to be a draft (there are comments embedded in the document) of proposed ASB case management documents (for example, a risk assessment and action plan). The landlord told us it is working on a review of its service in line with *Time to be Heard*, and has begun designing and implementing a Good Neighbourhood Management Policy.

It is also reviewing its record-keeping and document retention policies. In August the landlord sent us its (undated) self-assessment against the recommendations in the *Spotlight on Knowledge and Information Management; On the Record*. This shows that the landlord has taken action on each of the recommendations, with further actions to come.

In early September, the landlord held a meeting of relevant senior staff to discuss rationalising and streamlining the problem-solving meetings and panels for complex cases. This is encouraging, but we note that even after some time the process appears to remain in the planning and development stage.

The landlord is yet to devise and publish a Good Neighbourhood Management Policy, or tell us how it meets the requirements of *Time to be Heard*, which we ordered it to do after one of our investigations. Action on this is overdue.

The landlord is currently working on the following additional steps:

- A new corporate ASB policy which will cover all areas of the local authority's response to ASB, to be in place by the end of 2023;
- A housing services policy and procedure that will fit with the corporate ASB policy but be tailored to the activities of the relevant housing staff.
- A Good Neighbourhood Policy to guide the response to reports of noise which are not deemed ASB.

The landlord's draft housing-related ASB policy gives guidance on risk assessment, a triage process, and timescales for a response. It is clearer on who is responsible for what, and by when. It includes information on when to consider particular response actions (such as mediation). It also includes more specific information on how managers should monitor and quality assure each case, to include looking at notes and records. An independent review process is triggered if a case is open for more than 6 months, and includes a panel aimed at early intervention to access support for vulnerable residents and provide an effective safety planning strategy.

However, the case management documents currently in use are unclear whether there is any managerial oversight of 'low risk' reports. This lack of oversight may result in 'low risk' developing into medium or high risk, with the resident suffering in the meantime.

Based on a preliminary assessment of our more recent casework information, we see evidence that residents' experience has not yet improved: three recent cases bring out the same themes as the older casework. Of particular concern, in one of the cases considered in this investigation where we found maladministration in the landlord's response to the report of noise and also record-keeping, the resident returned to us in early April 2023 to complain about the landlord's ongoing failure to address their reports of noise nuisance.

Complaint handling

The Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code, first published in July 2020, sets out our complaint-handling expectations. When a resident complains, a landlord's response can either repair relationships and drive service improvement, or it can erode trust and cause feelings of frustration, resentment, and powerlessness among residents. It is imperative that landlords provide high quality timely responses to complaints.

The landlord is not currently doing enough to promote its internal complaints process specifically to residents as a way of resolving disputes. This is a significant concern. Done well, the complaints process can bring individual residents resolution, and also flag up wider issues to senior management. Unfortunately, as we set out below, the landlord will need to improve its complaints process as well as properly promote it.

Nor is the landlord currently using the complaints process to its full potential in terms of learning where there are themes and trends to the issues residents are bringing through it. The landlord told us it is doing monthly reviews of complaints received which are linked to damp and mould but we have not seen any specific example of such a review despite asking for one. Similarly, we could not see specific evidence of learning from damp and mould complaints in the quarterly complaints report the landlord sent us. The landlord has complaints in its system that we are not aware of, and it should not limit its learning only to cases where we (or the LGSCO) have made a determination.

While we have not found a theme of failing to accept complaints, sometimes the landlord needs to take a more nuanced approach rather than a blanket response. For

example, where the resident is a leaseholder (someone who has bought a long lease) the landlord has not always recognised that it can (and should) consider part of the resident's complaint. Instead, it has simply referred the resident to the First Tier Property Tribunal.

What our casework tells us

Complaint handling was a factor we looked at in all but one of the cases we reviewed for this investigation, and we found failings in each of those cases.

Unreasonable delay

Until March 2022, the landlord operated an unnecessarily protracted complaint process which involved three distinct stages: Stage 1, Stage 1 Review, and the Chief Executive's Stage (stage 2). There was little value to the resident in the Stage 1 Review, and it caused unnecessary delay. In the most delayed case (caused by a number of failings combined) the complaint was with the landlord for over 3 years.

Additionally, the landlord was not meeting the timescales required by its own policy (or by the Complaint Handling Code) particularly at Stage 2, which the landlord called the Chief Executive's Stage. We saw delays measured not in days or weeks, but in months. In the worst example, the landlord took 14 months to issue a Stage 2 response. Although the landlord would respond to residents who escalated their complaint saying they could not begin investigation due to the high volume of complaints, they did not give an expected response time or even routinely update the resident during these delays.

Case Study 202120513

Miss R lives with her daughter in a flat, with neighbours in a flat upstairs. She asked the landlord for help after suffering from lack of sleep due to noises from the flat above. She reported feeling depressed, distressed and anxious, especially because her school-age daughter was unable to sleep.

Miss R used the landlord's noise app to record the sounds throughout the day and night. The landlord took some steps to try to assess the noise, but we found it had not listened to the reports Miss R was sending, took only basic steps in trying to review the problem, and told Miss R the noises could not have been that bad if other neighbours had not heard them when there was no evidence it had contacted any of her neighbours to ask.

Miss R experienced a number of issues with the landlord over the following three years, including an overly long and complicated complaint process, and poor handling of her noise issues.

Miss R was left feeling ignored because the landlord was not communicating with her. It cited telephone issues and lost emails factors in the delay. We found the landlord's lack of record keeping meant that it was often unable to locate Miss R's communication in its centralised system, and it did not Miss R's complaint correctly from the beginning. This meant staff could not see all the contact she had made, and did not prioritise her correspondence in line with its own policies.

The landlord made Miss R go through its complaint process three times before giving her a final outcome. Overall, this took three years. The landlord's failings included lack of information, unexplained delays, and a failure to recognise the impact of its own admitted failings.

We found severe maladministration because the landlord had significantly failed Miss R during its complaint process, and maladministration in both the handling of her noise report and the landlord's record-keeping.

We ordered the landlord to apologise to Miss R, and pay her £1,200 compensation. To improve its future complaint handling, we ordered it to provide refresher training for staff and review its failings to learn from them.

Case Study 202010660

Mr G is a leaseholder. He told the landlord that water was leaking into his property from the roof of the building. As freeholder, the landlord was responsible for completing any repairs to the structure of the building, including any roofing repairs.

The landlord took no action, so seven months later Mr G reported the issue again. The landlord did some work but did not record what it had done, or meet the repair timescale in its policies.

Mr G complained, questioning the repairs and the quality of the work. The landlord did not respond for a further five months, with no explanation for the delay. It did discuss a further contact Mr G made during this time, but its lack of record keeping meant it could not evidence this discussion.

Mr G escalated his complaint to stage two, but the landlord did not reply to his complaint for 123 days. Mr G had faced nearly a year's delay from sending his first complaint, to receiving the landlord's final response.

The landlord did not comply with the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code when responding to Mr G's complaint. In addition to the delayed responses, it failed to acknowledge Mr G's complaints, did not contact him to discuss the complaint, did not explain why it was not progressing parts of his complaint, and failed to give timescales. The result was a drawn out, difficult complaint process that disadvantaged Mr G. He was unable to give his full account of the complaint, which was not in line with a fair investigation. The landlord also failed to tell Mr G he had the right to contact us for help.

The landlord's repair records did not include all the visits, or details of what had been done. The landlord was unable to account for the delay to doing the work.

In its stage two complaint response, the landlord offered Mr G compensation, but the amount was below what its policies and process required, and so did not adequately compensate him.

We found severe maladministration in the landlord's complaint handling, and maladministration in its record keeping and handling of the roof repairs. We ordered the landlord to apologise to Mr G, pay him £1,025 compensation, and review its complaint handling and record keeping.

Poor quality investigation

When residents have eventually received the landlord's final complaint response, it has often been poor quality. This would have been particularly frustrating for residents who had been waiting many months for their final response letter. The landlord did not always respond to all the issues the resident had raised, which is a basic element of demonstrating that the complaint has been heard and taken seriously.

We have seen the landlord make statements it cannot support with evidence (likely linked to poor record-keeping), or provide responses which show little evidence of any meaningful or effective investigation of the resident's complaint. In some cases the landlord has altered its response on key points between Stage 1 and Stage 2, without explanation, which indicates flaws in the complaint investigation during at least one of the stages or poor record-keeping which was not acknowledged. Failings the Ombudsman investigation later identifies (even where it should have been clear that a relevant policy was not followed) have not been identified in the initial, or even the escalated, complaint investigations. These issues indicate a lack of empowerment, capacity or capability in terms of the landlord's officers' ability to investigate complaints.

Inadequate redress

The ripple effect of a substandard complaint investigation is clear. Our cases show that the landlord is not recognising when it has failed, and therefore not fully appreciating the impact of its failings on the resident. Part of a good complaint response is offering appropriate redress to the resident.

Residents often complain when there is an outstanding issue, and they are seeking its resolution. Yet in some cases we saw that the complaint response did not describe a plan or timescale to resolve the outstanding issues, and often placed the onus on the resident to contact different departments in the landlord to get it to act.

The landlord has not been offering adequate compensation for the detriment to the resident, and failed to consistently appreciate the impact on the resident of any failings it did identify. This was particularly the case where the impact on the resident was exacerbated by a vulnerability.

In one case (202210745*) a resident (with known mental health issues) agreed to a mutual exchange and moved out of her current property. The landlord subsequently discovered that in the new property a previous resident had removed a chimney breast, making the property structurally unsafe. There were multiple defects that the resident could not have been aware of, so their agreement to the mutual exchange was not a fully informed decision. She had unwittingly agreed to move to a property the landlord's own staff described as a 'dump' and which she could not live in for safety reasons. The resident spent several months living with her daughter in a studio flat. If the landlord had

*This case was determined shortly after the end of the monitoring period for this investigation but has been included because of the seriousness of its findings

done an adequate inspection, it would have noticed the alteration to the property and been able to advise the resident.

The landlord knew the resident had been receiving inpatient medical treatment which was having an impact on their mental health. It offered compensation for complaint handling delay, but failed to acknowledge any of the other failings we later identified, and did not offer any compensation for the substantial inconvenience and distress associated with a vulnerable resident having given up a habitable home to move to an uninhabitable one and then into temporary accommodation.

In another case (202119071), a resident with disabilities impacting her mobility was unable to use her ground floor wet-room for many weeks, because the landlord failed to carry out repairs and to properly consider her request to be decanted until they were done. We found that the landlord had not offered sufficient compensation for the impact of this on the resident.

The landlord's current compensation guidance appears to have been in place since May 2017. It outlines factors officers should take into account when deciding the appropriate level of compensation. It includes consideration of a resident's vulnerabilities in relation to distress caused by neighbour nuisance, on housing allocation or transfer, and adaptation issues, but not for repairs or for the time and trouble residents take to pursue a complaint. The landlord should ensure that all of the ways in which a resident's vulnerability may exacerbate the impact on them are considered. For example, the policy currently asks staff to consider whether the complainants own actions have contributed to the situation, but without prompting consideration of whether vulnerability underlies any such contribution.

The landlord has been failing to properly apply its compensation policy for complaint-handling delays. The relevant landlord policy requires compensation of £25 per month of complaint handling delay. However, our investigations repeatedly found that the landlord was not following this policy. For example, one resident was offered £75 for a delay of five months and another was offered the same amount for a delay of nine months. A resident who waited 14 months was offered £100 for their delay.

In sincere and inadequate apologies

The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman has published useful [guidance on how to make a good apology](#). Generally, we order apologies in writing. The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman says that when complaints escalate it may be appropriate for the apology to come from a person with overall responsibility for the issues being raised. In our view, where a complaint has been escalated to Stage 2 and an apology is warranted, or we have ordered an apology, it should be made on behalf of the organisation by a relevant and suitably senior member of staff. Where there has been significant detriment, the resident should be given the choice of whether the apology is in writing or in person.

Apologies should be personal, written for the specific occasion, and be sensitive to context. They should include an expression of empathy, acceptance of any failings and responsibility for them, acknowledgement of the impact on the resident, explanation of why the failing happened, and details about what remedy is offered to the resident and what the landlord has learned from the complaint.

We have seen evidence of apologies from the landlord which do not give an impression of sincerity, show only very limited understanding of the failings we have identified, offer no meaningful acknowledgment of the impact on the resident, or any evidence of learning. This is so even where we have investigated, identified failings, and ordered the landlord to apologise for the impact of those failings.

In one example (202206090) the landlord agreed to the resident being away from his property (abroad) for an extended period. Then the pandemic restricted his return and he struggled with his mental health due to his circumstances. When the situation persisted, the landlord asked him intrusive questions without explaining why or what the consequences of non-response might be. It served him with notice seeking possession just prior to Christmas and without giving him a reasonable time to answer. The landlord did not acknowledge the resident's statements about his mental health issues. The resident could not contact the landlord about the situation because the offices were closed during the Christmas period. We found that it was unreasonable of the landlord not to explain why it needed the information and what the consequences might be of failing to provide it, not to give the resident more time to answer, and to serve him with a notice just prior to Christmas when he could not follow up. The landlord failed to consider the impact on the resident, in terms of his mental health. It then took too long to investigate and withdraw the notice. During the (delayed) complaint process it shifted its position and ultimately gave him an inaccurate response. It offered an inappropriate amount of compensation. We ordered the landlord to apologise for these failings. The landlord's apology was sent as a brief email, from the Corporate Central Complaints Team email inbox. The entire text of the email reads:

Dear [Resident],

We write further to the Housing Ombudsman's determination and conclusion of your complaint.

On behalf of Islington Council, we apologise for the decision to issue a notice to quit and notice of seeking possession. We also apologise for the delay in providing a response to your complaint at CE stage.

As instructed by the Housing Ombudsman, we have issued a cheque to you for £475 for the distress and inconvenience caused.

Yours sincerely,

Corporate Central Complaints Team

This shows little evidence our report was fully read and understood. From a faceless “Corporate Central Complaints Team”, it appears insincere and offers no acknowledgment of the impact of its failings or evidence of learning. It does not take the opportunity to mend a damaged relationship.

In another case (202206179) we found the landlord took too long to respond to the resident’s report of noise nuisance, and failed to assess all the evidence, consider alternative ways to resolve the issue, manage expectations or advise the resident when their own behaviour was problematic. It did not speak with them, but repeatedly emailed the same advice when this was not helping, it didn’t involve the police when it should have, and then decided the noise was not statutory nuisance. We also found maladministration because the landlord responded separately (without explanation) to different aspects of the complaint and delayed doing so, and did not offer adequate compensation. The landlord also failed to assess the resident’s vulnerability or consider his welfare needs. Many of its repair records were missing, and it had not kept records of telephone conversations. We ordered the landlord to apologise. In July 2023, a team leader at the landlord wrote to the resident. The letter starts by simply repeating our findings and the amount of compensation we ordered. It then says ‘We apologise explicitly for our failings in the handling of your ASB reports and our complaints handling practices’, before it is signed off.

The resident wrote to us on receipt of the apology. Their understandable reaction was:

‘It would have been reassuring to install some confidence and support to ensure this would never happen again...I do feel this is disingenuous taking into account the scale of the ASB I had received and the ongoing neglect I had witnessed to allow it to continue...I felt the ASB manager’s apology of one and a half lines was embarrassing, but not surprising. I felt it was a gaslight apology from someone I wish to have no contact with.’

Some staff at the landlord do offer considered and sincere apologies, albeit after we have become involved. In one case (202120513) a team leader wrote an apology letter acknowledging in detail what went wrong, apologising for the failings and using specific words showing understanding of the impact on the resident. It describes changes that have been made to the complaint handling quality assurance process, and offers further contact if the resident wishes to discuss these in more detail. It ends *‘I sincerely hope that the above will go some way in restoring your faith in the service’* and it is signed by a relevant member of staff. Unfortunately, while the landlord sent us a copy of the apology letter, it failed to send it directly to the resident at the same time. This error came to light when the resident advised us they had not received the apology we had ordered.

In another case (202215237) a team leader wrote a fulsome and sincere apology following our investigation findings. It includes an explanation of what happened, and says *‘We are aware that this has caused you severe distress and has affected your*

mental health and I acknowledge that we were at fault. We understand that you depended on us...and deeply regret that we failed to deliver.' The letter explains in detail the actions taken to prevent recurrence of the issue. It closes by thanking the resident for the time they took to escalate their complaint because it has '*enabled our service to collectively pause and reflect on your concerns. Your complaint has become the basis of what we will use to strive to improve our service.'* This is an excellent example of a high quality complaint response.

These examples show a significant divergence in the quality of the apologies being received by the landlord's residents in the same few months. There appears to be no standardised process or protocol for how the landlord formulates its apologies and who is responsible for creating and sending them. The quality of the response the resident receives appears to be the luck of the draw, which is unacceptable.

In two cases (202217733 and 202209316) we ordered that the landlord's Chief Executive Officer apologise to the resident in person. Instead, the landlord's Corporate Central Complaints Team sent a written apology to the resident, stating this was done on behalf of the Chief Executive. Compliance with these orders is therefore now overdue. Our orders were specific about the way the apology should be made, and took into account the severity of the detriment the resident experienced in these individual cases. The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman guidance highlights that it is much easier to express and hear empathy and sincerity when it is spoken rather than written, and verbal apologies also provide opportunities to avoid misunderstanding. It is disappointing that the landlord does not appreciate the value of in-person apologies from a suitably senior member of staff in cases where things have gone badly wrong.

Learning from complaints

While there are some recent examples of good learning, overall we have not seen evidence that the landlord has had a sufficient formalised process to ensure it is learning from complaints in any meaningful way, with robust governance and leadership oversight. It appears that complaints are too often seen as a transactional process to be completed, rather than offering substantive value to the organisation. For example, we have seen an email by a senior member of staff which, while asking for improved record-keeping says, among other things, keeping good notes '*means we don't have so many of these annoying complaints upheld.'*

We have seen a failure to detail any learning points in the complaint response itself. Wherever failings are identified, learning points should be included in the complaint response.

When we ask the landlord to describe what action it has taken in response to our orders, we have seen vague language about what the lessons were and what changes have been made. For example, in two separate cases in March 2023 the landlord sent us the same written response which said it had reviewed the handling of the complaint to identify lessons, and that '*the outcomes will help us to improve our record keeping,*

complaint handling and outcomes for tenants/service users moving forward. It did not say what the lessons were, or how they would be used to drive improvement. It gives the impression of a cut and paste response to make the immediate issue go away with minimal consideration or accountability. It gives the impression of compliance with the letter, but not the spirit, of what we have asked it to do.

We see the same failings repeated time and again despite complaints, which indicates that the landlord is not effectively learning from what its residents are desperately trying to make it understand.

Insight from recent complaints to the Ombudsman gives little indication that action the landlord has taken so far has consistently improved the quality of complaint investigation and response. For example, in one case a stage 2 response shows little evidence of investigation even where the resident has raised serious concerns about structural safety. The landlord did not acknowledge a seven month period repairing large structural cracks or explain why this happened, offer any action plan, acknowledge and apologise for the impact on the resident, or offer assistance. In addition, the resident had reported mould in January 2023 and while the landlord treated it in late January the response simply says the resident has made no further reports of mould since then (rather than being proactive and following up or offering to do so in light of the complaint) and offers no other attempt at resolving the issue.

The landlord's actions on complaint handling

In March 2022 the landlord removed the Stage 1 Review part of its complaint handling process, and now operates a two-stage process with timescales that meet the requirements of the Code.

Following the announcement of our investigation, the LGSCO notified us that it had also begun investigating the landlord's complaint handling delays. It is clear from statements made at a public scrutiny meeting on 21 February 2023, where the landlord acknowledged that some of its senior officers had been aware of the backlog, that the LGSCO's investigation had prompted the action on complaint handling delays that the landlord is now taking. These statements indicate that despite knowledge of the problem, it again took intervention from an outside organisation to prompt comprehensive and effective action.

We told the landlord in January 2023 we could see it was frequently not meeting its complaint response timescales, or updating residents experiencing delays. We asked the landlord what it was doing about the delays that had built up, and for confirmation it had written to all residents experiencing delays to tell them about their right to contact us. Following our suggestion, the landlord wrote to all residents facing delays to apologise, and advise of their right to approach us.

The landlord told us a backlog had developed because of a dramatic increase in complaints (primarily about housing) and that the Corporate Complaints Team which managed all Stage 2 complaints has been significantly impacted by this. It told us how

many additional staff it had recruited to deal with the backlog, and that it had commissioned an independent review of complaints (beginning on 13 February 2023) to identify immediate actions to improve the management of complaints, to review and improve the procedures across the landlord, and to fully review the complaints operating model. It is notable that this was commissioned after two Ombudsman offices had expressed concerns.

We also told the landlord in January 2023 that its complaint policy was not compliant with our Complaint Handling Code in a number of ways, and asked it to review this and complete a new Self-Assessment. In March 2023 the landlord brought its complaint policy in line with the Complaint Handling Code.

The landlord has allocated an additional £350,000 towards complaint handling staff resources and used temporary measures (staff recruitment for additional resource) to clear the Stage 2 backlog (although we suggest below this may not have been wholly successful).

In early April 2023 the landlord told us that it had still to complete the review of its policies and procedures as part of a wider piece of work on the complaints function. It would be reporting on this to the Corporate Management Board by the end of April. We requested a copy of that report, and we received a copy of a report to the Council Executive (22 June 2023) on the LGSCO's investigation, and a June 2023 version of the Complaint Improvement Plan.

In May 2023, the LGSCO published its investigation report, finding that despite knowing it had a (growing) backlog the landlord had been too slow to act on recruitment, and had not updated complainants regularly during the delay. The LGSCO has confirmed that the landlord has complied with its recommendations:

- to explain what it has done or will do after having considered the LGSCO's report, and consider the report at its full Council, Cabinet or other appropriate delegated committee of elected members; and
- to write to complainants it has identified to apologise for its delay responding to their Stage 2 complaints, set out the steps it has taken to reduce the backlog, and advise that they have the right to complaint to the LGSCO if they remain dissatisfied with the response; and
- update the LGSCO on the backlog for its Stage 2 responses.

In May 2023 the landlord sent us a report it had commissioned which benchmarked its complaints performance against other comparable landlords, with particular emphasis on complaints relating to repairs. This report looked quantitatively at the landlord's complaint performance and concluded that it was not an outlier and was arguably performing 'better' than similar organisations which responded to the survey by the external organisation. It used data from the financial year 2022/23. However, it is not an indicator of success to merely avoid being an outlier in what might be a poor-quality

field. We have looked in more depth at both delays and at qualitative issues within the landlord's complaint responses and found much that concerns us.

The landlord's report to its Executive (22 June 2023, sent to us 21 July) says the Stage 2 backlog was cleared on 16 May 2023. We have looked at more recent cases where residents have approached us, and there are examples which undermine this statement.

For example, a resident escalated their complaint to Stage 2 on 8 March 2023, and the landlord issued its Stage 2 response on 6 July 2023. . Another resident's escalated complaint was belatedly acknowledged on 3 May 2023, and the response issued 25 working days later. That resident clearly experienced a response time not in line with the Code, after mid-May 2023. We have also seen a resident clearly state they wished to escalate their complaint to Stage 2 on 23 September 2022 and only receive a response on 4 July 2023. The landlord incorrectly stated in its response that the complaint was escalated on 9 June 2023. One resident who was due a complaint response on 22 March 2023 has yet to receive one (though there has been other communication with the resident) despite having expressed further dissatisfaction at this lack of response. The landlord appears to have ongoing issues with its complaint response times which it must urgently resolve with a sustainable solution.

The landlord's mystery shopping evaluation report in November 2022 also looked at complaint responses. It found that a resident who telephoned stating they wished to complain about a service charge was directed to contact the Service Charge team themselves. Callers could not get through to the complaints team by telephone. The May 2023 evaluation found evidence that the complaints telephone line repeatedly goes to voicemail. Residents who were able to get through were given the email address to write with their complaint, rather than having their complaint taken verbally. These are all factors contributing to delay in a resident receiving a response when they want to complain, and evidence that the landlord has more work to do.

By June 2023, the landlord had designed an approach to monitoring and reporting on any complaints backlog, and determined what a new 'normal' demand on the complaints service will be. It has designed a 'Complaints Improvement Plan' which looks wider than just at delays. It includes using a complaints management system, training staff, achieving consistent reporting on complaints, quality assurance processes and improved oversight, presentations (rather than emails) to disseminate learning, putting Key Performance Indicators and performance reports in place, and a review of the compensation policy.

The landlord has put in place a new complaint progress tracking system, and created a system for updating complainants regularly while they await a response, and a new way to monitor performance. It has ensured actions are automatically assigned to staff, rather than relying on emails being sent and then read.

However, it remains unclear that the landlord has implemented a sustainable structural solution to producing high quality and timely responses to the growing number of complaints it receives.

Compliance and remedies

In the 30 cases determined, we ordered and recommended the landlord to pay £66,441 in compensation to residents. We also made 186 orders and recommendations to try and prevent the same problems happening again. The landlord has complied with its obligations in relation to our orders aimed at preventing recurrence of failings.

The individual orders and recommendations can be found in the investigation reports on our [website](#). Our decisions are published to our online casebook three months after determination. In some cases we may decide not to publish a decision if it is not in the resident's or landlord's interest or the resident's anonymity may be compromised. Full details of what and when we publish are set out in our [publication policy](#).

Key orders and recommendations made:

Between December 2022 and June 2023, we asked the landlord to take the following actions aimed at trying to prevent the problems happening again:

Disrepair

- Review specific cases for how it can reduce the risk of similar failings happening again, including where there was damp and mould looking at similarly constructed housing blocks to identify common issues
- Review its policy and procedure for dealing with vulnerable residents, and ensure it is considering and documenting residents' vulnerabilities
- Review how it notifies residents about communal works
- Train staff on understanding the impact of failings on the resident
- Review how it engages with support services when there are evident welfare needs
- Ensure a proper oversight process of third party management agents
- Ensure it has suitable contractors available for specialist works

Antisocial Behaviour

- Self-assess against the recommendations in *On the Record*, and review its ASB record-keeping practices to ensure all ASB case information is logged and accessible, and vulnerabilities are documented
- Train staff on the ASB procedures, keeping residents updated, and record-keeping
- Ensure the Noise App is working properly and staff know how to use it

- Ensure it completes the monthly managerial case reviews
- Ensure vulnerable residents can use the ASB process fully and that evidence-gathering is accessible and inclusive, and set out clearly what vulnerable residents can expect when reporting ASB
- Put in place a Good Neighbourhood Strategy to manage noise that is not ASB
- Review its approach to noise nuisance and tell us how it meets the recommendations in *Time to be Heard*

Complaint Handling

- Review its complaint handling to address failings and learn lessons from various individual cases, including its process for updating residents when the complaint response is delayed, how it decides what evidence is required to consider a complaint, and the application of its compensation policy
- Ensure additional oversight and quality assurance of its complaint investigations and findings
- Train staff that complaints can be made verbally, on understanding the impact of failings on the resident and on joint handling of the complaint where more than one department within the landlord is involved

Conclusions

Many of the underlying themes we have identified are present in multiple individual cases, each contributing to the resident's poor experience so that there is a compounded effect.

The landlord should be commended for its willingness to be open and transparent about the challenges it faces and its failings, and its positive engagement with outside agencies who aim to assist it to improve. It has shown awareness that it may lack the knowledge to address its own barriers to improvement, and readily involves external experts as 'critical friends' to assist it. The landlord has taken action in several areas, has sought to monitor the effectiveness of these additional measures and has been able to provide clear evidence of the impact these are having. The focus of the leadership on embedding change is evident and encouraging.

However, the landlord still has significant work to do to improve services, and we have identified factors that in our view indicate wider service failure. We have found evidence of policy weaknesses (the damp and mould policy not being updated, and the complaint handling policy not being in line with the Code until after this investigation had begun). We have also found evidence of repeated service failure (from our casework) which cuts across multiple service areas (disrepair, ASB, and complaint handling). The way in which the same issues recur indicates failure to learn from complaints. We have also identified a lack of managerial oversight to ensure that officers are appropriately capable and empowered to follow the policies, procedures and guidance that the landlord does have in place, and to work effectively with different teams and agencies.

The landlord needs in particular to improve its record-keeping practices. Knowledge and information management (including basic record-keeping) failings continue to hamper effective responses to residents reporting the need for repairs, and ASB. It will also impact the landlord's ability to give a high quality response to a complaint. Staff and contractors should routinely be making more comprehensive, clearer, notes. This is particularly important where information is passed on verbally. If a policy requires specific documents to be completed then they should be fully completed. The information should be stored in a case management system to which all appropriate staff have access and are required to use.

Crucially, managers should proactively monitor officers' capability to create accurate and complete records in a structured format and store them in the correct place. The landlord should implement a structured quality assurance process that guides managers on how to ensure good quality (clear, accurate, complete) records are created and stored in the correct place. The landlord's leadership should acknowledge that good record-keeping and case management, together with managerial monitoring and oversight, takes time at the front end (which will impact on resources). Otherwise, front-line record-keeping failings will continue to cause delay and frustration, not to mention extra expense.

Disrepair: damp and mould

Overall, the landlord's recent intensive approach to tackling damp and mould is welcome. The landlord should seek to replicate the comprehensive and zero-tolerance approach it is now taking on damp and mould so that it benefits the whole repairs service.

The landlord should add to its programme of improvement by amending the policies and procedures around void periods, as they currently contain unnecessary hand-offs between teams responsible for repairs. The landlord has told us that these hand-offs have been removed in practice, but the written procedures will need to reflect this change. While we acknowledge that there is pressure to make properties available as quickly as possible, the void period is an important opportunity to carry out works while minimising access issues and without impact on residents. Similarly, the mutual exchange policy and procedure should be reviewed and amended as part of a comprehensive approach. As part of this review, any references to the onus being placed, either directly or indirectly, on the resident as the responsible party should be purged.

The landlord will need to ensure that its forthcoming damp and mould policy includes ways to quickly identify and escalate complex cases for very senior oversight afforded the capacity and authority to make well-informed decisions on unusual solutions. It should seek to promote full information-gathering and assessment, a root cause approach, and action planning at an early stage, with a focus on mitigating the impact on the resident as soon as possible while longer-term measures are taken. The complexity of the case should not routinely be determined only after several appointments and assessments (when relevant information was clear from the start), months of delay, and a list of short-term single-issue responses which miss the underlying issues either in the repair itself or any factors relating to the resident's individualised needs.

The landlord has told us it has set up a Damp and Mould Casework Board for this purpose. However, after reviewing the documentation there is one officer attendee listed in the terms of reference, and the frequency of meetings is now unclear. Although the case example the landlord sent us includes a box for case-specific target dates and the name of the responsible officer, this information is not completed, which is a significant gap that does not give confidence in this Board as an effective escalation and oversight mechanism.

The landlord has improved its website content relating to damp and mould, but it still distances itself somewhat from a shared responsibility for addressing ongoing condensation issues, the causes of which may be overcrowding or structural issues which are not the resident's fault or responsibility. Conversely, the training materials we have reviewed are clear that it is everyone's responsibility and it should be reported if officers see it, and that the landlord has responsibility for responding to condensation. The landlord will need to continue to ensure that the training is provided to all incoming

relevant members of staff, is refreshed regularly, and communication about the landlord's responsibilities is consistent internally and externally.

The landlord should improve its communication with residents who have reported damp and mould. One recommendation in *It's Not Lifestyle* was to send the resident the damp survey report. We asked the landlord if it was doing so, and it confirmed it was not but would look at 'implementing a process' for doing so. It is unclear how much process is required to send a document to a resident and it remains unclear that this is now happening routinely. The landlord should also be able to tell the resident the next steps.

The landlord is experiencing challenges with residents not responding to written communications in its attempt to follow up on historic damp and mould reports and it should ensure it uses alternative measures as soon as possible to ensure it is doing all it can to engage with residents who have not yet responded, and who may be silently living with damp and mould. These residents may be vulnerable, or particularly hard to reach for other reasons, and it is important that the landlord 'finds its silence'.

Antisocial Behaviour

The landlord's actions to improve its response to ASB through full corporate review are a positive step. Our investigation has identified, though, that the landlord's officers have not been following the policies and procedures that are in place. We have not been able to identify why this is the case, based on the information available to us. However, we suggest officers may have lacked the time, or possibly training and expertise, to carefully apply the policies after gathering all relevant information. Revised policies and procedures will likely offer clarity and streamlined processes, but they will only result in improvement in residents' experiences if officers follow them. The key to change is ensuring officers involved in responding to a report of ASB or noise are capable and empowered to use the procedures to their full potential. Management and leadership oversight and attention to the case-specific details is crucial.

So, the landlord will need to take steps to ensure its officers do follow the policy (old, and new) and this may include measures to provide further training, time, and support to do so. The landlord will need to ensure that its managers monitor how all staff are applying any training, and working in line with the policies and procedures. It should also ensure effective managerial oversight and the empowerment to escalate cases which have reached inertia. Given the issues with poor record-keeping that we have found, managers should proactively monitor the existence and accuracy of records.

The landlord needs to ensure its staff properly investigate reports of ASB or noise. We have seen too many gaps in evidence-collection and analysis before conclusions are drawn. For example, the Noise App is commonly used but is not mandated by any policy, with any guidance on when and how residents should be expected to use it. The landlord should make its staff aware of the limitations of the Noise App, and the corresponding weight that should be attached to the evidence it can usefully provide depending on the circumstances of the case.

The landlord's updated webpage on Anti-Social Behaviour provides a definition. It directs residents who want to report a 'noise nuisance' to a separate page which says officers will not investigate 'everyday living noises'. The website content offers no guidance or support to residents whose quality of life is being severely impacted by noise disturbance or transference which is not resolvable through a conversation with their neighbour. Once the landlord's Good Neighbourhood Strategy is in place, the website should be updated to inform residents about actions the landlord can take where the noise transference is not deemed to amount to ASB but where the impact on the resident's quality of life is significant.

It is also vital that the interface between the forthcoming Good Neighbourhood Strategy and the ASB policies and procedures is smooth. The landlord should include mechanisms for determining at an early stage (to include proportionate preliminary investigation steps and evidence-based decisions) which of the policies it will use to respond to the residents' report. Changing circumstances should prompt reconsideration, and the triggers and pathway for moving from one policy to another should be clear. The landlord should ensure that no residents reporting noise or behaviour which concerns them fall through a gap between them and are not followed up.

The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman recently published its report '*Out of Order: learning lessons from complaints about antisocial behaviour*'. Many of the issues it highlights are reflected in our findings about the landlord's responses to reports of ASB and noise. The learning points within that report will be helpful to the landlord when it seeks to improve.

Complaint handling

The landlord's complaint handling is not meeting the expected quality standard, and the landlord has not fully appreciated the importance to residents of getting its complaint responses right and working in line with the Code, or the consequences when it fails to treat complaints with the respect and seriousness they deserve. It is missing the opportunity to fully embrace the complaints process as inherently valuable in highlighting where improvement is needed, and restoring trust with its residents.

Leadership on the importance of high quality complaint handling should come from the top. This will empower the landlord to use the complaint handling process to resolve immediate issues, drive improvement in the longer term (by leadership awareness of ways residents experience the services), and repair broken relationships with its residents. The landlord must establish full quality assurance of complaint investigation and responses, and procedures to ensure learning from complaints which (crucially) results in service improvement. The landlord's most senior executives should have sight or sign-off of the responses to escalated or complex complaints.

Without this sustained focus, the landlord risks residents being left feeling unheard and approaching us during the landlord's own internal complaints procedure for assistance.

The challenges facing London councils are significant. But it is essential that the central role of housing management is not lost amongst other competing pressures, not least because it is crucial to the success of wider statutory services provided by them. Complaints are a vital tool to help navigate and respond effectively to these pressures.

Recommendations

Within three months the landlord should publish and provide the Ombudsman with evidence of how it intends to:

Cross-cutting issues

1. Take a consistently SMART approach to improvement measures, using active language to plan and to drive accountability, with regular oversight from senior staff.
2. Enable and empower services to work together effectively, both internally and with external agencies. This should include allocating ownership of cross-departmental issues, to co-ordinate the investigation and analyse the issue before planning the most effective response.
3. Improve the quality of the investigations into service requests carried out by its staff or contractors to address the failings identified in this report.
4. Train its staff and its contractors on how to communicate clearly and appropriately with residents about who will do what, why, and when.
5. Put in place formal procedures for proactive managerial oversight of record-keeping designed to ensure records are complete and accurate, and stored in the correct place.
6. Ensure that its staff are properly considering any vulnerabilities of a resident and how that might impact the landlord's response.

Disrepair

7. Carry out comprehensive research into the reasons for ineffective appointments and create an action plan to reduce the number.
8. Improve oversight of repairs which involve third party contractors or managing agents.
9. Proactively consider what can be done to mitigate the impact of more complex repair situations on the resident as far, and as soon, as possible.
10. Include in its damp and mould procedure an early risk-assessment that specifically factors in any vulnerabilities, with corresponding timescales for a surveyor visit dependent on the preliminary risk assessment. The damp and

mould procedure should also clarify the escalation trigger points and be clear about ownership and accountability for ensuring a final resolution for the resident.

11. Create an action plan for additional steps designed to establish communication with the residents it has identified as having previously reported damp and mould.
12. Review its void process and procedure to remove unnecessary hand-over points and use the void period more effectively to address any disrepair.
13. Review its mutual exchange policy to ensure it does not place unreasonable onus on the resident to identify damp and mould or other disrepair.
14. The repairs policy should contain a clear escalation pathway if repairs are delayed beyond agreed or expected dates, ensure senior involvement and oversight, and processes to ensure all relevant teams within the landlord work together in a resolution-focussed way.

ASB and noise

15. Self-assess against the recommendations in *Time to be Heard* and use this insight in its policy development. In particular, the landlord should ensure its Good Neighbourhood policy and ASB policy work together coherently.
16. Ensure that relevant staff are fully empowered and supported in applying the procedures for responding to reports of ASB or noise.
17. Put in place structured proactive processes for monitoring officers' compliance with its policy and effectively addressing any failure to do so.

Complaint handling

18. Put in place more effective executive and board level oversight, including its member responsible for complaints, to ensure accountability, and effective and timely learning from complaints.
19. Provide mandatory complaint handling training to all staff, even those not directly involved in responding to complaints, to promote the benefits of complaints and ensure all staff appreciate the importance of complaints, as well as raising the standard of investigation and response.
20. Put in place a coherent complaints process and procedure with clear expectations of quality
21. Ensure that complaint response letters that are escalated to Stage 2, or apology letters in response to orders from an Ombudsman, are brought to the attention of the Chief Executive and are signed off by a suitably senior member of staff.

Statement by Islington Council

We fully accept the Ombudsman's report and recommendations.

We want everyone in Islington to have a safe, decent, and genuinely affordable place to call home. Our tenants and leaseholders deserve a high-quality service, and we deeply regret that we haven't always delivered this in the past.

We've been working to put things right and believe this report further clarifies the actions and resources needed, building on the external critical appraisal we've sought from partners over the last two years.

We've committed to delivering a number of improvements in an extremely challenging environment of long-term underinvestment in social housing, the challenges our residents face with the cost-of-living crisis, and a severe shortage of affordable housing in one of London's densest Boroughs.

In June 2022 we set up a Housing Improvement Board to raise standards and respond to new regulatory requirements. We will build on this and deliver the Ombudsman's recommendations through an expanded Improvement Plan, including:

- **Introducing a new, place-based approach to housing management.** This will mean residents have a single point of contact and staff take ownership of their patch. Alongside our new resident empowerment framework, this will help us transform our housing services over the next two years so they're of the highest standard. We will aim to deliver services as if they are being provided to an important member of our own family.
- **Getting repairs right.** We're focussed on improving communication and working more effectively. We're running additional training for all repairs staff on customer service and learning from mistakes, and implementing new processes on missed appointments and cancellations. We've brought in more staff where needed and have increased preventative investment around damp, mould and leaks.
- **Delivering our five-point-plan on damp and mould.** While we're pleased the Ombudsman notes our progress, we're not complacent. We're using this report and new government guidance to strengthen our response, including trialling new approaches like remote monitoring sensors, and will apply learning across all housing services.

- **Tackling anti-social behaviour (ASB).** We've undertaken a council-wide review of our ASB services and are redesigning them to improve resident experience. We are making it easier to report ASB and will build on this through our new approach to housing management and better use of available enforcement options.
- **Transforming our complaints service.** We've created a dedicated housing complaints service, invested in additional staff and training and are improving processes for quicker decision making. We're introducing a new digital complaints management system to improve oversight and are committed to learning from complaints as part of a wider culture change programme.

We'll continue to report on progress and hold ourselves accountable to our Housing Scrutiny Committee. Crucially, we are also establishing a Resident Service Improvement Group to make sure residents' voices are at the heart of this work. We welcome the Ombudsman's recent call for significant investment in the sector and the acknowledgement that, until the housing crisis is addressed, challenges will continue. We look forward to working closely with the Ombudsman as we continue service improvements.

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Annex A – List of cases

Our decisions are published to our [online casebook](#).

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	Severe maladministration	Maladministration	Service failure	No maladministration	Redress
202004255		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anti-Social Behaviour • Complaints handling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anti-Social Behaviour 		
202006900	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complaints handling • Property Condition • Staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Property Condition 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Property Condition 	
202010660	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complaints handling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information and data management • Property Condition 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Property Condition 	
202012629	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complaints handling • Property Condition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Property Condition • Reimbursement and payments 			
202014174		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anti-Social Behaviour • Complaints handling 			
202105172		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complaints handling • Property Condition 			

	Severe maladministration	Maladministration	Service failure	No maladministration	Redress
202109673	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Property Condition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complaints handling Information and data management 			
202112423	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complaints handling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Property Condition 			
202114943		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Buying or selling a property Complaints handling 			
202116228		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Anti-Social Behaviour Complaints handling 			
202116638		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Anti-Social Behaviour 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complaints handling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Anti-Social Behaviour 	
202116970	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Anti-Social Behaviour Complaints handling 				
202119071		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complaints handling Moving to a property 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Property Condition 	
202120513	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complaints handling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Anti-Social Behaviour 			

	Severe maladministration	Maladministration	Service failure	No maladministration	Redress
202121287		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complaints handling Property Condition 			
202126743		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complaints handling Property Condition 			
202200164			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complaints handling 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Property Condition
202201058	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complaints handling Property Condition 				
202201138	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complaints handling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Anti-Social Behaviour Information and data management 			
202201578	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complaints handling 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Health and Safety (inc. building safety) Property Condition 		
202203097	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Property Condition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complaints handling Moving to a property 			
202203216			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Health and Safety (inc. building safety) 		

	Severe maladministration	Maladministration	Service failure	No maladministration	Redress
202206090		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complaints handling Occupancy rights 			
202206179		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Anti-Social Behaviour Complaints handling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Anti-Social Behaviour 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Property Condition 	
202209316	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Anti-Social Behaviour Complaints handling 				
202210653		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complaints handling Moving to a property 			
202210715		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complaints handling Property Condition 			
202213028			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Property Condition 		
202215237	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Estate management Complaints handling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information and data management 			
202217733	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Anti-Social Behaviour Complaints handling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Property Condition 			

No.	Recommendation	Action	How we will measure completion	Lead owner	Timeframe
Cross cutting issues					
1	Take a consistently SMART approach to improvement measures, using active language to plan and to drive accountability, with regular oversight from senior staff.	<p>All action plans to be implemented using SMART methodology. Director led review.</p> <p>New consolidated Service Improvement Board Action Plan to be created using SMART methodology. Progress against plan to be monitored by Service Improvement Board and reports on progress to Housing Scrutiny Committee.</p>	<p>Confirmation that all live action plans have been updated.</p> <p>Action plan will be developed with this approach – amending any action points that are not SMART.</p>	<p>SRO - Hannah Bowman</p> <p>PMs Abul Hussain and Rebecca Nicholson</p>	Completed by December 2023
2	Enable and empower services to work together effectively, both internally and with external agencies. This should include allocating ownership of cross departmental issues, to co-ordinate the investigation and analyse the issue before planning the most effective response.	<p>Departmental practice of allocating a Senior Responsible Officer for all significant improvement project – who is responsible for strategic ownership and ensuring buy in from all services.</p> <p>To undertake a pulse survey in November 2023, for all officers across the Homes and Neighbourhoods service led by Human Resources to produce an</p>	<p>Work SRO identified on Departmental Improvement Plan</p> <p>Completion of the survey in November and publicising the finding of the pulse survey in December 2023, with an</p>	<p>SROs - Housing Management Team</p> <p>Director of Housing Operations</p>	<p>Completed by December 2023</p> <p>Completed by April 2024, and to be conducted</p>

No.	Recommendation	Action	How we will measure completion	Lead owner	Timeframe
		action plan to promote empowerment, autonomy and promoting a coaching environment.	action plan to promote the findings. To undertake a further pulse survey in March 2024 to monitor progress.		annually thereafter.
3	Improve the quality of the investigations into service requests carried out by its staff or contractors to address the failings identified in this report.	As per the action points throughout this action plan: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • implementation of formal procedures for proactive management oversight, • auditing and record-keeping, • staff to complete training related to knowledge and information highlighting the importance of taking ownership of a request through promptly querying the information held about the resident, • communication and learning from complaints; and 	Reduction in complaints escalating through the complaints process. Improved overall satisfaction and satisfaction with landlord's approach to complaint handling in TSM resident survey.	SRO – Ian Swift PM – Hannah Bowman	Timeframes included for specific actions throughout the plan Satisfaction improvements to be monitored with annually through TSM survey

No.	Recommendation	Action	How we will measure completion	Lead owner	Timeframe
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> contractors have correct access to systems and have recorded relevant information. 			
4	Train its staff and its contractors on how to communicate clearly and appropriately with residents about who will do what, why, and when.	<p>Develop a programme of communications training offer for Frontline staff and managers.</p> <p>Deliver a compulsory training programme with staff to attend identified by each service. Setting out clear standards for communicating, the need to adapt communication to the needs of the resident, agreeing a lead communicator and emphasising how important it is to keep residents informed.</p>	<p>Monitor all required staff have attended the training.</p> <p>See a downward trend in the number of complaints involving communication failure.</p> <p>Ensure all e-learning Housing Ombudsman training is undertaken by all front-line officers and the Leaders of each service area across the Homes and Neighbourhood service</p>	<p>SRO – Hannah Bowman</p> <p>PM – Maria Abbasi</p> <p>Maria Abbasi</p>	<p>December 2023</p> <p>Completed by July 2024</p> <p>August 2024.</p>
5	Put in place formal procedures for proactive managerial oversight of record keeping designed to ensure records are complete and accurate, and stored in the correct place.	<p>Develop a simple procedure for record keeping for all key areas of service – setting the standard for the department.</p> <p>Managers to audit notes taken by staff members and feedback on quality and quantity to staff</p>	<p>Procedure in place, which has been tested and reviewed by frontline managers.</p> <p>Evidence shared of audit activity with next line managers.</p>	<p>SRO – Ian Swift PM – TBC</p> <p>SROs – Ian Swift and Matt West PMs - All 3rd tier managers who</p>	<p>December 2023</p> <p>Arrangements in place from December</p>

No.	Recommendation	Action	How we will measure completion	Lead owner	Timeframe
		<p>as part of the monthly check-in process. Measuring staff against the procedure.</p> <p>Housing Ombudsman Knowledge and Information Management training made mandatory for all staff</p> <p>Include the importance of record keeping as part of the compulsory complaints training.</p> <p>Include record keeping failures in quarterly complaints reports and alert service managers where trend identified within a specific team.</p> <p>Ensure the new single view IT system for Homes and Neighbourhood addresses the findings of the Housing</p>	<p>Adit to be carried out by local service support team – to check impact of system and that information is reliably recorded.</p> <p>New IT system to enable analysis of complaints and show trends in this area.</p> <p>New IT system in place with the required functionality</p>	<p>will ensure arrangements in place to measure impact on quality.</p> <p>PM – Rebecca Nicholson/Maria Abbasi</p> <p>SRO – Hannah Bowman</p> <p>PM – Anna Turvey</p> <p>SRO – Ian Swift</p> <p>PM - Sinem Yanik/Rebecca Nicholson</p>	<p>Arrangements in place from January First audit to be carried out April 2023</p> <p>Complete by April 2024</p> <p>Awaiting confirmation of new IT system delivery</p> <p>December 2025</p>

No.	Recommendation	Action	How we will measure completion	Lead owner	Timeframe
		<p>Ombudsman for all management of records and data</p> <p>Undertake spot audits of our ASB and tenancy management records</p> <p>Action for repairs service</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - All orders are to be managed on OneServe and records are kept up to date on jobs. - All orders are closed following job completion. Works in progress team manage these jobs to completion and call over meeting in place weekly. - Additional works in progress call over tracker meetings in place weekly specifically for Legal, D&M and high risk cases including leaks. 	<p>Audit outcome show clear improvement of recording.</p> <p>Improvement in record keeping evidenced through audit process and overseen by the Group Leaders meetings.</p>	<p>PM - Rebecca Nicholson</p> <p>SRO - Mike Hall PM – Daniel Watkins</p>	<p>On-going</p> <p>In place</p>

No.	Recommendation	Action	How we will measure completion	Lead owner	Timeframe
		Carry out quarterly audits to ensure all actions are being implemented.			
6	Ensure that its staff are properly considering any vulnerabilities of a resident and how that might impact the landlord's response.	<p>Develop a vulnerability policy with colleagues across the council that reflects Islington's needs and levels of vulnerability and consolidate our vulnerability data.</p> <p>Promote the new policy with staff and embed with local training within team meetings.</p> <p>Review the implementation of the policy through complaints reviews and managerial audits. Ensuring all home visit audits record vulnerabilities and these are recorded onto core IT system.</p> <p>Undertake annual training for front line staff on empathy and trauma informed service provision for people with vulnerabilities</p>	<p>Review of implementation to demonstrate the policy is being used and benefitting residents.</p> <p>Reduction in the number of complaints and HO determinations (after full implementation) which include findings that vulnerabilities not properly responded to.</p>	<p>SRO – Ian Swift PM – Rebecca Nicholson</p> <p>PM - Sinem Yanik</p> <p>PM – Sinem Yanik</p> <p>PM - Maria Abbasi</p>	<p>December 2023</p> <p>January 2023</p> <p>June 2023</p> <p>Throughout 2024 and on-going</p>

No.	Recommendation	Action	How we will measure completion	Lead owner	Timeframe
Disrepair					
7	Carry out comprehensive research into the reasons for ineffective appointments and create an action plan to reduce the number.	<p>Complete a review of missed appointments across the repairs and surveying teams. Identifying the:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Main reasons for missed appointments • Timings of missed appointments • Areas of work for missed appointments • Any correlation on type of works were missed appointments that are common • Any correlation between missed appointments and resident vulnerabilities • % of rebooking of missed appointments <p>Back stop team in place that are working through live work orders. A new process that is ongoing with Housing Direct to ensure missed appointments are minimised.</p>	<p>Reduction in % of missed appointments, though service monitoring within the council and Partners.</p> <p>Downward trend in complaints referencing missed appointments.</p> <p>Downward trend in follow up calls.</p> <p>Increase in customer satisfaction.</p>	<p>SRO – Mike Hall PM – Daniel Watkins</p> <p>SRO – Mike Hall PM – Daniel Watkins</p>	<p>November 2023</p> <p>In place</p>

No.	Recommendation	Action	How we will measure completion	Lead owner	Timeframe
		<p>Check list has been provided to staff to ensure appointment issues such as sickness/timescales are signed off by supervisors – to reduced missed appointments.</p> <p>Through clienting arrangements, discuss with Partners a mirrored review of missed appointments within their repairs service. Seek best shared practise with directly managed service.</p> <p>Work with Partners to report through the clienting team, on missed appointments and measures and improvements they are implementing to reduce.</p>		<p>SRO – Mike Hall PM – Daniel Watkins</p> <p>SRO – Hannah Bowman PM - Stacey Payne</p> <p>SRO – Hannah Bowman PM - Stacey Payne</p>	<p>December 2023</p> <p>December 2023</p> <p>December 2023</p>
8	Improve oversight of repairs which involve third party contractors or managing agents.	Ensuring monthly operational meetings with contractors to go through and focus on Works in Progress and ensuring they update the systems. 100% of contractor repairs are post inspected. Reviewed through	Audit demonstrate that information in the system is of a consistent quality where third parties are delivering repairs.	SRO – Mike Hall PM – Daniel Watkins (for directly managed actions below)	In place

No.	Recommendation	Action	How we will measure completion	Lead owner	Timeframe
		<p>Property Service Management Team meetings.</p> <p>Moving forward, looking at ways where contractors can access Oneserve remotely so the council can have live updates on work orders.</p> <p>Increased oversight and quality assurance of the repairs process.</p> <p>Ensure record keeping is maintained to a consistent standard to in-house delivery. Include in audits of jobs to check this is happening.</p> <p>SPV and Clienting monthly audits of repairs delivery.</p> <p>Annual report to HMT/Housing Scrutiny as part of Partners clienting arrangements and performance Report. Last report submitted in July '23.</p> <p>Rydon's repairs supervisors carry out 10% technical sample checks</p>		<p>SRO – Hannah Bowman for all Partners points</p> <p>PM – Stacey Payne</p>	<p>In line with contractor procurement</p> <p>In place, with greater focus</p> <p>In place but expectations of staff being reiterated</p> <p>In place</p> <p>Next report July 2024</p> <p>In place</p>

No.	Recommendation	Action	How we will measure completion	Lead owner	Timeframe
		<p>of responsive repairs and 100% of major repairs. The SPV carries out a 10% sample check of repairs data to analyse for repeat repairs to identify failures. The SPV post inspect 5% of responsive and 50% of major works to communal areas.</p> <p>The clienting team will carry out a monthly sample audit using Rydons repairs system Planet to validate and check their data and that repairs are carried out within the contract target timescales. The sample audit will include: Emergency (24-hour), 3-day, 7-day, 28-day and Communal repairs</p> <p>The Clienting team will also carry out a 50% sample check of cases deemed as Major Works within the PFI contract.</p> <p>The clienting team will implement a process to seek an expert technical opinion on the quality or standard of a repair or</p>		<p>PM – John Venning – SPV</p> <p>PM – Stacey Payne</p> <p>PM – Stacey Payne</p> <p>PM – Stacey Payne</p>	<p>In place but will extend audit to carry out a wider range of sampled repairs</p> <p>November 2023</p> <p>December 2023</p>

No.	Recommendation	Action	How we will measure completion	Lead owner	Timeframe
		<p>Support this work with culture change – include process flexibility as part of the roll out and training for the vulnerability policy see recommendation 6.</p> <p>Communication training – including within this the need to adapt how we communicate with people and finding out their needs – see recommendation 4.</p>		<p>SRO – Ian Swift PM – Rebecca Nicholson/Sinem Yanik</p> <p>SRO – Hannah Bowman PM – Maria Abbasi</p>	
10	<p>Include in its damp and mould procedure an early risk-assessment that specifically factors in any vulnerabilities, with corresponding timescales for a surveyor visit dependent on the preliminary risk assessment. The damp and mould procedure should also clarify the escalation trigger points and be clear about ownership and accountability for ensuring a final resolution for the resident.</p>	<p>Develop a short risk assessment for use in Housing Direct to identify and record risk factors and share with Partners. The Damp and Mould Team Manager to use this to prioritise property visits.</p> <p>Update the damp and mould procedure to include trigger points.</p> <p>Flags currently on system ensure HD prioritise property visits.</p> <p>Further work with Colleagues in Public Health to identify</p>	<p>Monitor the use of the risk assessment to ensure it is being used by the call centre. DAM24 work orders are raised when applicable or from site following diagnostic inspection.</p> <p>Further work with Colleagues in Public Health to identify residents that are vulnerable to add to the system.</p>	<p>SRO – Mike Hall PM - Daniel Watkins</p>	<p>December 2023</p> <p>In place</p> <p>In place</p> <p>In place</p>

No.	Recommendation	Action	How we will measure completion	Lead owner	Timeframe
		<p>residents that are vulnerable to add to the system.</p> <p>Stand alone damp and mould team, that carry works out two types of priority. DAM20 & DAM24. If members are contacting us with regards to vulnerabilities DAM24s are raised which means we will be attending that property within 24 hours.</p> <p>Produce a revised repairs policy including a damp and mould Section for agreement by Executive.</p> <p>Partners have implemented Damp and Mould processes in line with the required framework. The Clienting Team to carry out a comparison exercise with the councils processes to ensure that there are no gaps.</p>	<p>Monitor the success of the use of trigger points through a damp and mould case review.</p>	<p>SRO – Hannah Bowman PM – Stacey Payne</p>	<p>In place</p> <p>February 2024</p> <p>Exercise to be completed by December 2023</p> <p>To be shared once repairs</p>

No.	Recommendation	Action	How we will measure completion	Lead owner	Timeframe
		<p>The team to share the councils short term risk assessment with Partners to adopt.</p> <p>The team to work closely with the repairs service to understand updates and improvements made to the Damp and Mould process and ensure Partners capture these within their service.</p> <p>Link Partners with colleagues in Public Health to identify and improve their data on vulnerable residents.</p> <p>Ensure Partners adopt the same attendance targets where cases of damp are reported, for residents with vulnerabilities.</p> <p>Share councils revised repairs policies with Tenant Management Organisations. Organise briefings through Managers Forum and other joint TMO platforms.</p>			<p>policy has been signed off</p> <p>Joint shared practise meetings in place by November '23</p> <p>December '23</p> <p>January '24</p> <p>With immediate effect upon policies being signed off</p>

No.	Recommendation	Action	How we will measure completion	Lead owner	Timeframe
		<p>A recent audit of Partners voids service carried out by the Clienting team included recommendations to make the process for signing off significant costs, more efficient. Report back on delays to the Clienting team. Commission stand-by contractors to deliver swifter specialised works such as asbestos removal. To identify complex or lengthy works to the property such as damp and mould early on in the voids servicing to avoid delays where structural works are required.</p> <p>Share council's revised voids policies with Tenant Management Organisations. Organise briefings through Managers Forum and other joint TMO platforms.</p>			<p>Final audit report to be agreed by December 2023</p> <p>With immediate effect upon revised policies being signed off (December 2023)</p>
12	Review its mutual exchange policy to ensure it does not place unreasonable onus on the	Review the council's policy and procedure, which is used by the council and Partners.	Policy updates complete and changes promoted with tenancy officers in	SRO – Hannah Bowman	December 2023

No.	Recommendation	Action	How we will measure completion	Lead owner	Timeframe
		approach. Partners to report cases back to Clienting team through CRM reporting.			
ASB and noise					
14	Self-assess against the recommendations in <i>Time to be Heard</i> and use this insight in its policy development. In particular, the landlord should ensure its Good Neighbourhood policy and ASB policy work together coherently.	<p>Self-assessment against these recommendations began in August 2023 and is due to be finalised by the end of October 2023.</p> <p>The report outlines that the Noise App does not feature in policies or procedures – we will have an action when this work is complete which is likely to include promotion it on our Noise and neighbour nuisance webpage as proactive action for tenants to use as part of their report of noise to us.</p> <p>Conduct monthly audits to ensure best practice is taking place.</p> <p>Attend the Policy and Performance Scrutiny committee in November 2023, to provide a transparent</p>	<p>Assessment will be completed and shared with senior leaders of the Council and the Housing Ombudsman. Actions that arise from the self-assessment will be tracked via a departmental action plan and will pass through the governance structure of Housing Management Team, Political Leadership Meeting.</p> <p>Present to policy and Performance Scrutiny Committee 2nd November 2023 and</p>	<p>SRO – Ian Swift</p> <p>PM - Rebecca Nicholson</p> <p>SRO/PM – Ian Swift</p>	<p>Aug 2023 – October 2023</p> <p>From January 2024</p> <p>November 2023</p>

No.	Recommendation	Action	How we will measure completion	Lead owner	Timeframe
		presentation on ASB within Housing Management services considering the Housing Ombudsman report.	incorporate their feedback.		
15	Ensure that relevant staff are fully empowered and supported in applying the procedures for responding to reports of ASB or noise.	<p>Develop staff and frontline manager training programme on the ASB and Noise policy and applying this –using case study examples.</p> <p>Ensure all staff are trained and follow up on cases in check-in meetings.</p> <p>Audit cases across the team to ensure that processes are being correctly followed and follow up through staff check ins.</p> <p>Complaints team to identify with Service Head any failures to adhere to the ASB and related policies identified through complaints investigation.</p> <p>Conduct annual staff opinion surveys to monitor empowerment, satisfaction etc.</p>	<p>All relevant staff are trained across the council and Partners.</p> <p>Audits show that staff are implementing the procedure consistently.</p> <p>Staff survey shows staff feel empowered in their roles and are supported</p>	<p>SRO – Ian Swift PM – Sinem Yanik</p> <p>SRO – Ian Swift PM - TBC</p>	<p>November 2023</p> <p>February 2024</p> <p>May 2024</p> <p>Immediate effect</p> <p>Annually in Autumn/Winter</p>

No.	Recommendation	Action	How we will measure completion	Lead owner	Timeframe
			by their managers in this.		
16	Put in place structured proactive processes for monitoring officers' compliance with its policy and effectively addressing any failure to do so.	See action 15 above plans for audit of cases and address issues of non-adherence through one to ones.		SRO – Ian Swift PM – Sinem Yanik	May 2024
Complaint handling					
17	Put in place more effective executive and board level oversight, including its member responsible for complaints, to ensure accountability, and effective and timely learning from complaints.	<p>Housing Management Team quarterly complaints report – consistent approach to learning from complaints to be implemented – moving away from case studies towards trends across the board.</p> <p>Reports to be shared with Executive Member through Political Leadership Meeting – Quarterly.</p> <p>Significant actions from complaints learning to be incorporated into Divisional Action Plan. Outcomes of actions to be measured through the</p>	<p>Reports in updated format.</p> <p>Learning from complaints incorporated into departmental action plan and measurements of success included in objectives.</p>	SRO – Jed Young PM – Anna Turvey	Immediate implementation from Q2 report.

No.	Recommendation	Action	How we will measure completion	Lead owner	Timeframe
		<p>SMART approach to action planning.</p> <p>Produce an annual report to the Housing Scrutiny covering all Housing Ombudsman outcomes, complaints and compliments. Ensure this report is transparent on areas of underperformance and failure and also allows the council to learn from this work.</p>	<p>Reports in place and on forward plan</p>	<p>SRO Jed Young PM – Anna Turvey</p>	<p>November 2023</p>
18	<p>Provide mandatory complaint handling training to all staff, even those not directly involved in responding to complaints, to promote the benefits of complaints and ensure all staff appreciate the importance of complaints, as well as raising the standard of investigation and response.</p>	<p>Develop a programme of complaints handling training over the next year.</p> <p>Train staff in priority order and include training as mandatory for new starters.</p> <p>Maintain records of staff who have had the training.</p> <p>Undertake benchmarking against best in class in England for the management of complaints</p>	<p>Ensure that all staff have been trained in complaints handling and the importance of complaints.</p> <p>Monitor impacts on quality and timeliness of responses within the complaints process to ensure improvement.</p> <p>Assess the benchmark results annually going forward</p>	<p>SRO – Jed Young</p> <p>PM – Anna Turvey/Maria Abassi</p> <p>PM - Stacey Payne/Anna Turvey</p>	<p>November 2023</p> <p>November 2024</p> <p>On-going</p>

No.	Recommendation	Action	How we will measure completion	Lead owner	Timeframe
		Undertake independent and external facilitated annual mystery shopping exercises across all Homes and Neighbourhood services	To further improve the quality of our services	SRO/PM - Ian Swift	On-going.
19	Put in place a coherent complaints process and procedure with clear expectations of quality.	<p>Review complaints procedure and enhance quality requirements.</p> <p>Restructure complaints team to include two team leaders to review quality of complaints and identify staff who need to improve the quality of responses.</p> <p>Work with service teams to improve the quality of information provided to complaints investigators.</p> <p>Carry out quality audits of complaints responses at all levels, feed findings into team and departmental improvement plans.</p>	<p>Quality audits see an improvement in responses.</p> <p>Lower levels of escalation through the complaints process.</p>	<p>SRO – Jed Young</p> <p>PM – Anna Turvey</p>	<p>December 2023</p> <p>January 2024</p> <p>On-going</p> <p>February 2024</p>

No.	Recommendation	Action	How we will measure completion	Lead owner	Timeframe
20	Ensure that complaint response letters that are escalated to Stage 2, or apology letters in response to orders from an Ombudsman, are brought to the attention of the Chief Executive and are signed off by a suitably senior member of staff.	Council's Corporate Complaints Unit to lead on implement. A member of HMT to sign-off all stage 2 responses.	That CCU can demonstrate these have been shared with the CE Housing complaints team to maintain records to show HMT sign-off of stage 2 responses.	SRO – Corporate Director, Fairer Together PM – Manny Lewis SRO – Ian Swift PM – Anna Turvey	Immediately Immediately



STRATEGIC REVIEW OF OVERCROWDING IN ISLINGTON

DRAFT REPORT OF THE HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE



London Borough of Islington
7 November 2023

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. Introduction

The Committee commenced the review in July 2022 with the following aims:

- To establish the extent of overcrowding in homes in Islington in the public and private sector
- To understand the consequences and impacts of overcrowding
- To be informed about best practice and innovative approaches to tackling overcrowding and its impacts
- To produce a strategic review on the overcrowding issues affecting households in Islington
- To assess the impact in the provision of new Islington Council and Housing Association rented accommodation in alleviating overcrowding in Islington

2.A decision was taken at the committee meeting on 9 May 2023 for the review to continue into the 2023/24 municipal year as committee had been unable to take crucial evidence from registered social landlords and receive resident feedback.

The review ran from July 2022 until November 2023. Evidence was received from a variety of sources:

Presentations from council officers

- Ian Swift, Islington's Director Housing Needs and Strategy
- Ramesh Logeswaren - Head of Housing Needs
- Helena Stephenson Islington's Head of Housing Partnership
- Alistair Gale, Islington's Assistant Director of Housing, Programming, Design and Customer Care
- Karen Sullivan, Director of Planning and Development.

Documentary evidence

Islington Council and the University College London Overcrowding survey
Partners overcrowding survey questionnaire

Information from witnesses:

Tracy Packer, Managing Director for North East London, Peabody Housing Association
Catherine Kyne, Regional Director , Clarion Housing Association
Ruth Davison, Chief Executive, Islington and Shoreditch Housing Association (ISHA)
Fiona Mogre and Serdar Celebi , Islington Law Centre

Documentary Evidence

Comparable data from local authorities

Scrutiny visit

Visit to Council owned void properties

3. The Committee made a number of recommendations which in the interim will ensure tenants on the Council's housing register are able to move into suitable high quality accommodation and in the long run address the supply of social housing for its residents . These include:

4. **Recommendations:**

- 4.1 - Housing Services should undertake a comprehensive tenancy and welfare audit of all its housing stock with a view of identifying overcrowding, under occupiers, and if additional housing support is needed for those in certain circumstances, such as people who have experienced domestic violence etc. This is currently being trialled in Halton Mansions
- 4.2 Committee recommend that Housing Services rigorously promote issues around existing incentives for under occupiers such as mutual exchanges, that financial incentives be reviewed, - The downsizing scheme to receive a comprehensive review and the outcome of this review to be reported to the September 2023, Housing Scrutiny Committee. The council will also conduct regular sessions/ briefings/community drop in sessions to promote downsizing and mutual exchanges to address overcrowding.
- 4.3 The council should review the housing allocation scheme to make sure we are addressing local housing needs as it is clear that there are thousands of people who are living in overcrowded accommodation but not on the housing register.
- 4.4 The Council should consider building larger 4-5 bedroom accommodation through its new build scheme.
- 4.5 The Council should work with the GLA to try and develop /design a scheme that allows local authorities to access funds to purchase large properties to address overcrowding issues. At the moment, there are Government and GLA schemes that supports purchasing properties to accommodate refugees from Afghanistan and Ukraine, but there is no grant available that helps to address overcrowding and rehousing residents.
- 4.6 The council should adopt an overcrowding communication plan across the council that could be used by all departments when working with families experiencing overcrowding. This could include tips and ideas for addressing overcrowding and related issues.
- 4.7 The council should consider reviewing its tall building planning policy, and the circumstances that would allow taller residential buildings to be acceptable, as in the long term there may be a need for these types of property. This would apply to new developments, not just building on existing top of roof tops.
- 4.8 The Council should increase supply of 4 and 5 bedroom properties for families in need of larger homes using all means possible
- 4.9 The Committee welcomes the council's work with the community and voluntary sector in supporting residents in need. The Council should explore opportunities for collaborating more with community groups to promote advocacy services within all communities, to enable all sections of society to benefit from the positive work in this area.

- 4.10 The council should work with the GLA and other partner organisations to explore alternative schemes to incentivise downsizing. For example, expanding the GLA Seaside and Country Homes scheme for those aged over 55.
- 4.11 The Council should work in partnership with RSL's and others to assist in identifying more voids /abandoned homes that could be used to rehouse larger families.
- 4.12 As statutory overcrowding is difficult to address, the Council should lobby government for meaningful action to address overcrowding, and liaise with the GLA on lobbying for redefining the Overcrowding Standards as they are long overdue for a change.
- 4.13 Council should consider how language barriers may hinder under-occupiers from downsizing and engaging in mutual swaps, and consider what support can be made available to address this.
- 4.14 In response to evidence from Islington Law Centre, that many Islington residents experiencing overcrowding do not meet the council's threshold to bid for larger properties, the council should conduct detailed annual analysis for those accommodated through the Choice Based Lettings scheme and then consider amending policies accordingly, to ensure overcrowded households are able to be rehoused through the housing register.
- 4.15 When a void property is a 3, 4 or 5 bedroom property, these properties should be fast tracked through the voids process to ensure they can be re-let as soon as possible.
- 4.16 The council should consider how it can further facilitate "right size" moves on our estates to promote a series of chain lettings, allocating appropriately sized homes to local families in order to increase lettings locally and reduce overcrowding.
- 4.17 During community drop-in sessions the council should regularly seek the views of residents on how to improve services to people who are overcrowded or under-occupying properties. The council should then review policies and procedures in light of this feedback.
- 4.18 The Committee welcomes the council's work to empower residents through the resident empowerment framework. The Council should ask residents for their ideas to help the council to develop new ways of working to address overcrowding. It is important that these resident engagement forums include the views of a diverse range of residents that reflect our local communities.
- 4.19 It is important for the council and key partner organisations design a seamless service offer between Health, Adult Social Care, Housing, and Children's Services to ensure we address overcrowding, damp and mould, education attainment and health improvements holistically. The Council should consider how to further develop joint working between local services to best address these issues.
- 4.20 The council should develop and share data across the council to ensure a holistic approach to supporting residents who are overcrowded. This will help ensure that services are developed using this data and residents are empowered to influence the way we work.

5. Evidence Received

- 5.1 Committee received a presentation from Ramesh Logeswaran, Head of Housing Needs on 18 July 2022:**
- 5.2** Overcrowding is categorised as a household needing one additional bedroom and severe overcrowding is when a household requires two or more additional bedrooms.
- 5.3** Overcrowding needs to be tackled as it is associated with increased physical and mental health problems, poorer educational achievement by children, increased risk of infectious or respiratory diseases, increased risk of accidents and fires, reduced stature in children. It is also evident that poor diet and nutrition is higher in people living in overcrowded conditions which can have an impact on family life and relationships which in some instances lead to family breakdown and increased social tensions with neighbours.
- 5.4** Overcrowding may be caused as a result of family size growth with additional children, other wider family members joining the existing household, guardianship orders and foster arrangements etc.
- 5.5** Housing Needs supports families in overcrowded households, providing advice on mutual exchanges as one of the best ways for tenants to alleviate their overcrowding irrespective of housing points awarded. Advice is provided on how to prevent damp and mould formation as well as support to rent storage space from the council and to manage energy costs.
- 5.6** For severely overcrowded tenants, the service can arrange for the provision of space saving furniture to alleviate the effects of severe overcrowding, undertake home visits with tenants to signpost tenants to other services e.g. Social Care, Bright Spark, SHINE, Property Services (re repairs).
- 5.7** Advice is also provided on bidding, local letting schemes and mutual exchanges.
- 5.8** The Service supports downsizers to move to create voids, in particular offer personalised service to support tenants who are typically vulnerable through the process of downsizing. This generally comprises advanced identification of properties and joint viewings with tenants.
- 5.9** To promote downsizing, there is also support with financial incentives for each room 'released', support to access a decoration allowance, moving support, utilities re-connections etc.
- 5.10** Mutual exchanges is a great way for residents to downsize, thereby releasing their larger home for a larger household. Housing Needs support tenants who wish to exchange properties with another social housing tenant and this is a joint exercise between Housing Needs and Homes and Communities.
- 5.11** Within Housing Needs, officers advise residents on how to register online for the service and explain how tenants can entice others registered looking to move. There are also incentive provisions around decorative/white goods, what is referred to as 'works in occupation'.
- 5.12** In terms of performance, the meeting was advised that the Service was unable to meet its target of assisting both overcrowded families and underoccupiers move into appropriate or suitable housing, however it met its target for moving households into appropriate housing via mutual exchange.

- 5.13** The demand for social housing is on the rise due to high rents in the private sector, 2922 households approached the council for advice during 2021/22 financial year.
- 5.14** In June 2022, 907 households live in temporary accommodation, of which 472 households are living in private sector accommodation. As of April 2022, 15,402 households are on the housing register.
- 5.15** In 2021/22 financial year, the council let 829 LBI (Islington Council) properties and 193 Housing Association properties totalling 1022 properties.
- 5.16** Meeting was advised that in 2021/22, 30% of lettings were social housing tenants moving home, 36% to homeless households and 34% are to households on the Council waiting list.
- 5.17** Members were informed of the budgetary pressures on the Housing General Fund with the result that the Service will need to significantly reduce the number of households in private sector temporary accommodation to below 300.
- 5.18** With regards to the 39 Islington Council New builds in 2021/22, meeting was advised that 9(23%) allocated to downsizers, 8(21%) to tenants seeking a transfer from their existing homes, 11(28%) were for like for like transfers and not regarded as overcrowded and 11(28%) were let to applicants on the housing register.
- 5.19** With the 28 Social housing transfers, multiple chain of moves were progressed leading to households in housing need being placed in suitable homes and this comprises of both overcrowded and severely overcrowded families, homeless families, downsizers, tenants with significant health and welfare issues, domestic abuse survivors, new generation scheme and care leavers.
- 5.20** In the case of the 16 Housing Association new builds, 5 were let to waiting list cases, 8 were for overcrowded of which 2 were severely overcrowded, 1 for welfare/medical, 1 for medical/wheelchair need and 1 for downsizer.

6.0 Helena Stephenson, Islington's Head of Housing Partnership highlighted a number of issues of overcrowding from the tenants perspective and they include-

- 6.1 1396 LBI Overcrowded tenants are registered for rehousing due to fire safety concerns, noise and anti-social behaviour complaints and other wellbeing and safeguarding issues. Another reason for seeking to move is related to damp and mould and additional 'wear and tear' repairs.
- 6.2 A Fire Risk Assessment programme is undertaken to address items left in communal areas and associated fire safety advice which promotes storage solutions is provided.
- 6.3 A suggestion to include as part of the review exercise community groups such as the Somali Welfare Centre was noted. Officers were advised to contact GLA about the Seaside and Community Homes Schemes which provides social housing for over 55's.
- 6.4 The Director acknowledged that overcrowding is a national crisis and as the private sector is unable to meet high demand for housing there will always be instances of overcrowding in households and only building more homes will address this issue.

- 6.5 On the issue of living rooms being designated as a bedroom, the Director noted that legislation dates back to 1950's and successive governments have not passed a new legislation.
- 6.6 With regards to abandoned properties, meeting was advised that the Council will have to investigate the circumstances first as in some cases tenants may be admitted to hospital temporarily or Nursing homes, after which the property can then be placed into void status.
- 6.7 On the issue of language being a barrier for tenants interested in mutual swaps, the meeting was advised that the Council has a team in place and information is available online.
- 6.8 Meeting was informed that the Service works with its housing partners to address overcrowding and especially in identifying voids.

7.0 On 20th November 2022 Fiona Mogre and Serdar Celebi of the Islington Law Centre highlighted a number of case studies to demonstrate the severity and complexity of overcrowding which comes to attention of the Centre and they include:

- 7.1 Islington Law Centre provides a range of advice and assistance to Islington residents regarding their housing needs and runs two outreach projects in partnership with Islington Council to provide accessible housing advice to residents.
- 7.2 A significant number of enquiries relate to residents seeking to be moved to more appropriate accommodation due to overcrowding.
- 7.3 Islington Council uses a choice based letting scheme, with points awarded to residents based upon their circumstances which is in line with the Council's Housing Allocation Scheme.
- 7.4 Most Islington residents do not meet the average threshold of points to successfully bid for a larger property and experience shows that residents living in severely overcrowded conditions are highly unlikely to successfully bid for size appropriate accommodation.
- 7.5 Allocation schemes are required under the Housing Act 1996 to be framed to secure that reasonable preference is given to overcrowded households.
- 7.6 It was noted that households with opposite sex type of overcrowding only acquire 10points.
- 7.7 Overcrowding alone is unlikely to result in the tenant having sufficient points to be able to bid for and move to larger accommodation.
- 7.8 Presently Council literature states that to bid for 2 bedroom a tenant will require 226 points, 252 points for a 3 bedroom and 289 points for a 4 bedroom.
- 7.9 In the 2 typical overcrowding cases shared with Committee, it was noted the difficulty for tenants bidding for a suitably sized property, given that more points were required, for instance in the case of a secure tenant living with his wife and 3 children in a 1 bedroom property with 190 points, they would require 252 points.
- 7.10 Additional points would be required to improve the chances of bidding by tenants like medical problem, a welfare/social issue/a disrepair /decant issues, harassment/ASB from a neighbour.

- 7.11 In most cases seen by the Law centre, tenants rarely have additional issues that will attract additional points besides overcrowding concerns, so little prospect of them moving on to bigger and suitable accommodation.
- 7.12 It was noted that lack of available larger properties especially 4 plus bedrooms remains a big issue, that there is a recognition the need for more joined up working between Housing Options, Social services and the Disrepair team. Members were advised that even if medical and welfare points are awarded, larger households with disabled members seeking to move to more size appropriate accommodation it is virtually impossible to obtain rehousing through the Housing Allocation Scheme.
- 7.13 The availability of larger properties is very much limited and highly sought after leaving families stuck in unsuitable and severally overcrowded conditions indefinitely.
- 7.14 Condensation in severally overcrowded accommodation is common, however recognised with an award of welfare points only after the Centre intervenes on behalf of their clients as most times when tenants complain about condensation they are sometimes wrongly informed that this is not something for which rehousing points could be awarded but a disrepair issue.

8.0 In terms of overcrowding enforcement in the private rented sector, Godwin Omogbehin, Islington's Environmental Health Manager stated the following points :

- 8.1 Relatively few households are assessed as statutorily overcrowded as the legislation in existence does not meet the criteria for overcrowding as standards are very low and prescriptive, outdated and does not reflect modern day standards, that space and room standards are not used by Residential Teams to enforce overcrowding.
- 8.2 Local Authority's regulatory teams have been advised to use their powers under Part 1 of the Housing Act 2004 and follow the Enforcement Guidance rather than Part 10 of Housing Act 1985.
- 8.3 Meeting was advised of local authority's need to consider meeting its statutory duties versus it's duty to rehouse occupiers, an understanding of homelessness implications and compensation, clarifying enforcement options under Housing Act via the Most Appropriate Course of Action (MACA).
- 8.4 It was noted that due to lack of housing stock, it is difficult to serve notices as reasons would need to be provided.
- 8.5 Powers available under Part 1 Housing Act 2004 and notices served include issuing landlords Hazard Awareness Notice, Improvement Notice, Prohibition Orders, Suspension of Prohibition Order's which is most commonly used power for crowding and space hazard), Emergency Action.
- 8.6 It was noted that although HHSRS can be used, there are more specific regulations under HMO Licence conditions which limits occupation levels, the HMO standards which regulates HMO space standards.
- 8.7 In addition to the above, specific powers exist for overcrowding in non-licensable HMO's, that notices can be issued where a non-licensable HMO is likely to be overcrowded and that maximum levels of occupancy can be set

- for overcrowding and authorities can impose a civil penalty as an alternative to prosecution for offences (in both dwellings and HMO's).
- 8.8 Failure to comply with HMO licence conditions (over occupation for example), offences can attract an unlimited fine or penalty of up to £30k.
 - 8.9 Meeting was informed that 5 x overcrowding notices (non-licensable HMO's), 5x PO's for overcrowding in SFO's, 2x Hazard Awareness Notices in SFO's have been issued and in terms Selective Licensing Schemes (SFO's), 952 applications were received while 2647 applications have been received for HMO Licensing.
 - 8.10 Meeting was advised that serving of a SPO will not entitle the tenants to any additional points under the council's system and is not likely to speed up any re-housing claim.
 - 8.11 The Housing Department assess applications according to their housing allocation policy.
 - 8.12 On the issue of extending the Licensing scheme beyond the Finsbury ward into other wards, meeting was advised that although public consultation closed in March 2022, the second phase which is the designation stage is yet to be finalised.
 - 8.13 On whether the Council's Planning Department has powers in addressing the increasing demand for 3/4/5 bedroom, meeting was advised that this is being handled via the Council's new build programme. In addition to above, Council officers continue to liaise with GLA to access funds to purchase 3 and 4 bedroom dwellings.
 - 8.14 On the role of planning department in terms of addressing overcrowding in the borough, Committee requested an invitation be extended to an officer in the department to give evidence to committee.
 - 8.15 With regards to the Council's Allocation Scheme, meeting was advised that the item will be scheduled for members input at the November meeting
 - 8.16 Concerns that tinkering with the Allocation scheme will not address the overcrowding, that the main issue lies with the lack of suitable type of housing, that the Council should be looking at other solutions was noted.
 - 8.17 In response to a suggestion by a member, that issues of overcrowding should be considered in parallel with residents that want to downsize, the Director informed the meeting that in the last 12 months over 200 households have downsized, noting its success. Issues around downsizing will be considered at a future meeting.
 - 8.18 On the suggestion of finding suitable accommodation for overcrowded households outside the borough, meeting was advised that most are secure tenants and have the right to remain due to family ties, schools and medical reasons, that the refreshing of the Allocation Scheme aims to address this issue.
 - 8.19 In response to a question raised by the Community Plan for Holloway, the Director advised that in terms of the local letting scheme for the Holloway site, organisations will be involved reminding the meeting of Councillor Ward's commitment.
 - 8.20 The Director acknowledged that the Council builds the right type of housing noting that Islington is a dense urban area with limited land that makes it difficult. In addition, issues of the funding mechanism from central

government worsens the housing crisis, that Islington Council like other authorities are awaiting an autumn announcement which may address the funding gap.

- 8.21 A suggestion that Council should not be averse to building more tower blocks instead of its preference of demolishing estates and building on such sites single dwellings, town houses and apartments was noted.
- 8.22 Islington's initiative in addressing the issue of under occupiers is a lot more successful in comparison to the neighbouring authority of Hackney.
- 8.23 The housing crisis is not unique to Islington but a national one and factors such as lack of funding from both central and local government over many years have worsened the housing crisis.

9.0 **On 3rd November 2022, Tracy Packer, Managing Director for North East London, Peabody Housing Association provided evidence on its management of overcrowding issues. The following points were highlighted:**

- 9.1 Peabody has 5500 homes across the borough with the majority being let at social rent, that currently 382 Peabody households in Islington have applied to move because of overcrowding and this would include households who have a need to move for other reasons such as medical/health needs, welfare and those fleeing domestic violence.
- 9.2 Peabody provides support to residents throughout the move process however, the number of empty homes available is limited and the wait can be lengthy.
- 9.3 In the year 2021/22 only 14 x larger homes became available in the borough (3/4 bed).
- 9.4 The number of lettings completed is driven by the availability of homes, that Peabody completed 115 lettings in 2021/22, however majority of these lettings were for 1 and 2 bed homes and that empty homes are let through working in partnership with LBI via nomination's agreement.
- 9.5 LBI receives 100% nomination rights of all 1st lets (new homes), 50% of studio/1bedroom relets and 75% of 2 bedroom or larger relets and that Peabody residents who have requested a move are considered when a relet becomes available and a priority move list for those in most need.
- 9.6 Move applicants are assessed based on need and are prioritised, that those overcrowded by 2 or more bedrooms are in the B4 priority band, those in an under-occupying household who wish to move are given a C1 priority band enabling Peabody's larger homes to be allocated to more suitably sized households.
- 9.7 Presently of the current households requesting to move because of overcrowding, 32% are in the B4 priority band needing 2 or more further bedrooms with 68% in need of 1 further bedroom.
- 9.8 Peabody offers a number of solutions and mitigations to address overcrowding for households requesting a move, whether in a priority band or not, and are supported through the bidding process however where there is long waiting times further support is provided.
- 9.9 Peabody promotes mutual exchange for its tenants, provide advice and guidance on the opportunities that a mutual exchange can bring and make it

- easier to engage with the process. This includes providing information in multiple languages.
- 9.10 1-2-1 advice sessions is also available where in-house experts in rehousing offer support in finding alternative accommodation through other tenures such as shared ownership, market rent and potential moves to areas with lower housing demand. Members were reminded that this option is customer led and possible options will depend on customer requirements.
 - 9.11 Home visits to residents is undertaken and provides support such as offering possible space saving furniture to alleviate some shared sleeping arrangements. Also in light of the ongoing living costs concerns Peabody officers offer advice to help manage energy costs and other costs of living.
 - 9.12 Peabody takes a broad view on other actions to help alleviate overcrowding, by offering incentives such as financial incentives in the form of providing decoration allowance for residents who want to move and assist with moving for those willing or wanting to downsize. Peabody is interested in the support and promotions for downsizers being led by LBI.
 - 9.13 Peabody also takes a flexible approach, for example in a case of 2 residents, mother and daughter both living in different 3-bed homes on the same street and elderly mother requiring care, a request received from her adult daughter for them to move in together as joint tenants, clearly created a vacancy of a 3 bed home.
 - 9.14 Residents in need of a home with 3+ bedrooms are able to bid for a home with one fewer bedroom even if this results in a low level of overcrowding.
 - 9.15 Peabody's 'Next Steps' scheme, offers households overcrowded by 2 or more bedrooms with household members who are 21+ having grown up there as their principal home, will be considered for moving to a 1 bed accommodation.
 - 9.16 Peabody aims to use its housing stock in the most effective way to meet housing need, actively support tenants requesting a move to assist in finding the option that will work best for them. The lack of larger homes means waiting times for a move can be lengthy.
 - 9.17 With regards to nomination rights for the Holloway Prison site which recently was granted planning permission for social housing, meeting was advised that Islington Council has 50% for 1 bedroom and 75% for 2 bed while the rest is for Peabody residents.
 - 9.18 Any decision to sell or dispose of any property within Peabody's portfolio is not taken lightly and each case is assessed in terms of its cost in restoring the property to a decent standard, cost of maintenance over a long period and the condition of the property. The Managing Director assured the meeting that selling of properties only occurs in very small instances, noting that over the next few years Peabody will be building new social housing on the Holloway site.
 - 9.19 On the fire safety concerns which resulted in residents of Merry Mews being moved into temporary accommodation while being resolved, the Managing Director acknowledged that lessons had been taken on board going forward by both Peabody and the builders/developers.

- 9.20 There is a recognition that the offer of shared ownership to social housing tenants and its affordability as a means of addressing overcrowding was not ideal but was an option for those interested.
- 9.21 On the financial incentives for those willing to downsize, the meeting was advised that besides the decoration allowance and assistance with moving, Peabody are having ongoing conversation on what more can be done on this issue.
- 9.22 On the question of compensation for affected tenants being moved into temporary accommodation, meeting was advised that tenants receive subsistence allowance which is paid in advance and also cover taxi fares, noting that figures can be provided. Peabody engages in individual arrangements with tenants and not necessarily offer a standard amount.

10.0 On 1st December 2022, Committee received a presentation from Alistair Gale, Islington’s Assistant Director of Housing, Programming, Design and Customer Care on how its programme of building new homes help alleviate the shortage of housing especially in the context of overcrowding concerns. The following points were highlighted:

- 10.1 There is a desperate shortage of genuinely affordable homes, to which the Council has embarked on its biggest council-house building programme in the borough for a generation, which aims to meet the needs of residents.
- 10.2 Local council tenants have priority for new council homes through the Council’s Local Lettings Policy and that New council homes are under construction at 12 different locations across the borough, that presently 750 new council homes have either been completed or under construction for the period 2023-27.
- 10.3 The new homes could be used to move a growing family into a larger home or downsizing an older person into ground floor, accessible housing.
- 10.4 371 council tenants are currently registered for a housing transfer who are under-occupying their current home and it is estimated that there could be 3000 tenants who under-occupy their current home who are not registered for a housing transfer.
- 10.5 In terms of New build delivery, meeting was advised that of the New council homes completed, 77% are 2+ bedrooms, 27% 3+ bedrooms and the rest one bedrooms.
- 10.6 Meeting was informed that presently 257 new council homes are under construction.
- 10.7 In tracking housing needs trends, it was acknowledged that these change over time e.g. wheelchair accessible housing need is now for 3 and 4 bed properties, which the Council tries to accommodate in its pipeline programme.
- 10.8 Residents feedback is important and taken on board. Meeting was advised that although residents may not be on the transfer list waiting to downsize, they might be encouraged if there is an opportunity to move into a smaller, attractive, energy efficient and high quality new build home
- 10.9 Islington is a dense urban borough, any infill housing on existing estates requires carefully considered design to optimise the available land without

- over-densification and some sites are not suitable/appropriate for houses such as undercroft garages/roof top developments.
- 10.10 Dover Court was highlighted as an example of a typical large infill project which delivered 57 new council homes for 197 local people, 16 of which were 3 bedroom houses, 2 x 5 bedroom houses and 1 ground floor wheelchair accessible 5 bedroom home. The scheme has been built across under-used parts of the estate, including replacing derelict garages and a block of old bedsits.
 - 10.11 Members were advised that 8 new homes were allocated to local residents downsizing, 18 new homes were allocated to families from overcrowded accommodation, an example of replacing low quality existing accommodation and optimising the available land for family-sized homes and that occupants from the bedsit block were rehoused into a new over-55s block, which also encouraged others to downsize.
 - 10.12 Households who meet the bidding threshold will be able to bid for the new homes before anyone else in the borough.
 - 10.13 The applicant bidding with the highest number of points, subject to matching the size and any other characteristics of the property in question, will be offered the property first.
 - 10.14 Wheelchair adapted properties will be restricted to applicants who require such properties.
 - 10.15 Ground floor properties will be restricted to applicants with an assessed need for ground floor accommodation.
 - 10.16 Brownfield sites for the council to acquire to build social housing in the borough is extremely scarce. In the case of Parkhurst Road site, meeting was advised that freehold is not owned by council, has been recently challenged in the courts, noting that the council has been able to ensure that going forward if developers were to build homes on the site they would have to meet the councils criteria on provision of social housing.
 - 10.17 Although Council is considering other options beyond building new homes on garages, however due to affordability of land, the council is reliant on building social housing on its own land.
 - 10.18 With regards to downsizing, meeting was advised that the process is customer led, that the council does not force any of its residents to move into smaller homes.
 - 10.19 On whether council is building the right type of properties and in the right location and if data used to ascertain housing needs is up to date, the manager advised that at the early stage of feasibility, the new build team considers existing data from colleagues in the housing needs team who have information on live transfer request, the ages of children across the estate etc, essential information which helps to determine what type of housing is needed , it's mix and in what location. Also council's regular engagement with resident is valuable in assessing housing requirements.
 - 10.20 The Director acknowledged the difficulty of building social homes in the borough, that it is difficult to get a perfect fit in terms of housing mix, which is not the case with outer London boroughs where land is not an issue, as Islington is constrained and is a dense urban environment, factors which determines the type of mix of housing being built on individual schemes.

- 10.21 On the 188 void properties in the borough and why it has not brought back to use, meeting was advised that officers will provide and circulate reasons to committee on why it has not put back onto the housing stock, noting that some of the properties are likely to be properties that were brought back in house following the end of PFI 2.
- 10.22 On a suggestion that cases such as Parkview Estate which received planning permission for 2 x 2 bedrooms and 38 x 1 bedroom, and then subsequently received funds from GLA should have been revisited by the Planning Committee, the officer advised that S73 is not applicable to minor amendments as this would be a change in the description of the scheme, that it could not be used to change the number of dwellings of the scheme.
- 10.23 Cllr Ward acknowledged that going forward the council would look to revisit schemes like the Parkview Estate in terms of housing mix however in this instance there was a GLA funding deadline that required planning permission.

11.0 Karen Sullivan, Director of Planning and Development on 13 March 2023 gave evidence on overcrowding and planning policy. The following points were highlighted:

- 11.1 Planning permission has been secured for 1,112 genuinely affordable homes across four sites i.e. Holloway Prison, Barnsbury Estate, Vorley Road and Mount Pleasant. This includes 896 homes for social rent (including 60 extra care homes) and 216 homes for shared ownership.
- 11.2 291 new homes for social rent will replace homes demolished on the Barnsbury Estate and provide better quality homes for the local residents and address overcrowding across the Estate.
- 11.3 Following conversations with developers, 55 homes for social rent will now be delivered on the Mount Pleasant site considering that the previous planning permission did not secure any homes for social rent (all consented at 'affordable rent').
- 11.4 The Director acknowledged that construction on the Parkhurst Road site (TRA site) is also underway, delivering 50% affordable housing including 41 homes for social rent, noting that the former landowners originally proposed zero affordable housing, that this in general is viewed as a landmark legal case setting national policy.
- 11.5 In addition to CIL and s106 payments, meeting was advised of the significance of small Sites Contributions, that the Council has received over £50m, £40m which has now been allocated to the New Builds team to build affordable homes. Members were reminded that small site contributions are not subject to the same restrictions that apply when Council receives grant to build homes, which is to be welcomed.
- 11.6 In terms of annual targets, meeting was advised that 775 new homes is to be built in the borough, which is based on very detailed and rigorous analysis of site availability and when sites are likely to come forward.
- 11.7 Aim of the Council is to ensure that at least 50% of new homes is to be genuinely affordable (70% social rent and 30% intermediate i.e. London Living Rent or shared ownership).

- 11.8 The Director acknowledged that concerns exist on the affordability of intermediate tenure, noting that no intermediate housing is planned for the Barnsbury Estate.
- 11.9 Islington's Local Plan and policies on affordable housing exceeds London Plan policies with regards to provision of affordable, that a balancing act is required between providing good quality homes versus quantity of homes.
- 11.10 Council planning policies provide guidance on space standards and the size of new homes (number of bedrooms). Members were advised that the Planning department are regularly involved in detailed negotiations with colleagues in Housing Needs on each site to ensure that the size of the new homes reflects ward level demand.
- 11.11 The Director stated that the borough is already densely developed with low levels of developable land and that any developable sites tend to be constrained.
- 11.12 The Council considers the quality of life (amenity) for future residents vital, for example on issues such as space standards; sunlight and daylight in homes and open spaces; aspect, ventilation and overheating; privacy and overlooking; outdoor space; and play space, that these factors often compete with one another.
- 11.13 On providing affordable homes in Tall Buildings, the meeting was reminded that although Islington Planning policies as set out in the Local Plan and London Plan do restrict tall buildings (above 30 metres) some sites that are allocated for tall buildings.
- 11.14 A number of considerations regarding tall buildings, that Planning policies require exceptional design, to ensure that these buildings have an acceptable impact on the local microclimate (e.g. wind and overshadowing of surrounding buildings and open spaces); bio-diversity; streetscape; townscape; heritage; and views.
- 11.15 The Director informed the Committee of exceptions to Islington Tall Buildings policy, that recently the Planning Committee granted planning consent on housing sites which were not allocated for tall buildings for example the Holloway Prison site and the Barnsbury Estate, that in both cases, the harm caused by the tall building (s) was considered to be outweighed by public benefits including the delivery of genuinely affordable housing. Vorley Road site has also allocated been allocated for a tall building.
- 11.16 It was noted that construction costs and viability have been a factor in not providing affordable homes in tall buildings as there is the view that costs tend to increase for buildings over 18m tall.
- 11.17 Another factor has been resident's attitudes to tall buildings and the difficulty of letting them out especially as not all parts of tall buildings may be suitable , for example families and disabled and older people.
- 11.18 A number of challenges regarding delivery of affordable homes which are not unique to Islington but nationally recognised include the adoption of Local Plan and First Homes policy and the government's ongoing review of its policies on the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) which will introduce an entirely different approach to securing affordable housing on sites that are not owned by the council.

- 11.19 Land in Islington is mostly public owned with very limited private owned land. In addition to the above challenges, the emerging GLA and Government approach to the fire safety of tall residential buildings is creating uncertainty and in general the prevailing uncertainty within the wider housing market.
- 11.20 In terms of opportunities, the Director informed the meeting that Planning Officers are in continuous discussions with the New Build Team so as to bring forward affordable housing on council owned sites such as the Finsbury Leisure Centre.
- 11.21 Officers are also in regular discussions with external landowners to bring forward development on sites that are not owned by the council for example Archway Campus site with potentially up to 100 new genuinely affordable homes being built.
- 11.22 The Council is in proactive discussions with owners of residential sites in the Borough encouraging them to come forward with schemes (including private landowners, RPs and the Corporation of the City of London).
- 11.23 Planning Officers are also encouraging the use of new architectural practices to test innovative approaches to address density.
- 11.24 Council will be reviewing the restrictive approach on roof extensions in conservation areas as part of planning powers, the Director acknowledged the ongoing communication with the resident on this issue, that his representation will be taken on board when the Local Plan is adopted and the supplementary planning documents have been reviewed. In addition to the above the Director acknowledged that presently there is no policy from the government regarding mansard extension, that this is presently out for public consultation.
- 11.25 In response to a question about the high maintenance cost of tall buildings in order to bring it to decent homes standard, the meeting was advised that tall buildings come with a range of challenges, some as a result of its initial design which is historical, however this will not be the case with the newly designed tall buildings.
- 11.26 On the request for average service charges on the different buildings, the Director indicated that this information could be made available.
- 11.27 Clarifying the issues of social housing and affordable homes, the Director acknowledged that the different tenures can be challenging, that anyone in council owned properties is in affordable housing and paying rent that is set according to the National formula. In the case of intermediate, housing is targeted at those not eligible for council housing and unable to meet the market rent, primarily for those with household income of up to £90,000.
- 11.28 Meeting was advised that the Council recognises tenures like shared ownership and London Living rent (a bit complicated as it is targeted on those with middle incomes which is based on a ward by ward basis, a formula defined by a formula on income of people living in the ward). The Director noted that the London Affordable rent is not acceptable by Islington Council as it is a form of rent of up to 80% of market rent as it is exceedingly high.
- 11.29 The priority for the planning team is social rent housing which is reflected in the recently consented schemes, that there is no intermediate tenure provided in the Barnsbury scheme.

- 11.30 With regards to the Council's target of 775 homes, the Director acknowledged that sites have been identified, that the plan is going through a rigorous assessment with an independent expert.
- 11.31 A member welcomed the suggestion that architectural design of council homes will be community led but had concerns with tall buildings as the way forward in light of the Grenfell incident some years ago.
- 11.32 A member welcomed tall buildings in so far as the design is of high quality and safe guards relating to fire safety are taken into consideration. The Executive Member advised that presently to the south of the borough, there are a number of high rise buildings, that the overriding factor at the moment is how to address the increasing number of people on the housing register which needs to be reduced.
- 11.33 On the issue of fire safety, meeting was advised that although all local authorities are awaiting the outcome of the governments consultation on building regulation, the GLA in the interim has now introduced in its planning process a stage 2 level which states that any building above 30m will require a second stair case to address safety concerns.
- 11.34 Director reiterated that Islington is not against tall buildings being built as long as they are sited in the right place and meet the tall building policies.
- 11.35 Meeting was advised that as at February 2023, the Council has 11 projects on site being constructed with 3 due to be completed in the next 3 weeks delivering 75 new council homes. A further 83 new homes are planned to be completed during the end of 2023/24 year.
- 11.36 In terms of monitoring of council homes and benchmarking with other neighbouring authorities, the Director advised that some data will be put together and brought to committee at a later date, that nothing exists nationally.
- 11.37 GLA, the Mayor of London and the Department of Local Government and Communities all have separate registers which is primarily to track funding and not pertaining to the actual delivery of social housing, that officers will provide the Committee with some inhouse work carried out by Islington officers and some comparison data from other london borough at a future meeting which will enable members the opportunity to scrutinise the Council's delivery of social housing.
- 11.38 The Chair reiterated that Committee is looking at overcrowding and how to address it, that it is important for members to narrow down the exact number of homes being built specifically council social rented homes and not housing association dwellings.
- 11.39 In response the Director stated that the Council target of direct delivery of 550 new homes by 2023 has been substantially met, that a further target of 750 homes is being proposed for 2026-2027 financial year which fits into the earlier projections stated by the Director of Planning in her presentation.
- 12.0 Committee considered the Draft Allocation Scheme Policy, that a report on the draft allocation scheme is to be considered at the Executive meeting on 12 January 2022 and was out for public consultation till 17 March.

- 12.1 76% of residents in the Council housing stock and 86% in Partners managed properties are in favour of the changes to the scheme.
- 12.2 On the question regarding the new generation scheme and whether anyone whose parents own properties would be part of the scheme, the Director advised that nothing has been agreed and welcome all feedback.
- 12.3 On the household total income figures provided in the proposed scheme, meeting was advised that figures are from the GLA threshold used for low cost home ownership and intermediate rental scheme.
- 12.4 Online consultation exercise is an opportunity for all to participate, that all feedback is welcomed, it is not guaranteed that all suggestions will be incorporated in the scheme, that it will be an open and transparent process.

13.0 Findings -

Ian Swift, Director of Housing Needs summarised the findings from the review as -

- 13.1 Islington has significant levels of housing need in the borough.
- 13.2 Committee agreed that a tenancy audit to be undertaken as a first step by the Council in its resolve to address overcrowding.
- 13.3 Incentives offered to residents especially for under occupiers would need to be more attractive so as to release accommodation for large households
- 13.4 The draft housing allocation scheme is being considered by Executive and its role in addressing the requirements of households living in overcrowded social housing is essential.
- 13.5 The definition of statutory overcrowding needs to be revisited as it is not fit for purpose.
- 13.6 There is a shortage of 4 and 5 bedroom properties for larger families in the borough
- 13.7 Supply of land is an issue and its acquisition is expensive, so council should consider options such as building homes outside the borough.
- 13.8 The Council's planning policy regarding tall buildings needs to be reviewed in the long term as this will address shortage of social housing and overcrowding.
- 13.9 The demand for social housing from private renters is high, caused by increasing cost of living, interest rate hikes and welfare reforms introduced by the government etc.
- 13.10 That benchmarking data with other neighbouring authorities is challenging, as there is no single source which provides accurate comparison and the two sources provided to committee were from GLA Housing Starts and Completions and DLUHC.
- 13.11 Households from minority ethnic backgrounds are three times likely to be affected by overcrowding than white households.
- 13.12 In terms of performances against the target of 550 over the 2018-2022 period, Council delivered a total of 527 new council homes (combined starts and completions).

14. Conclusions

Committee commended the ongoing work of the Council in addressing overcrowding in its housing stock, acknowledging the shortage of 3- 5 bedroom properties to rehouse larger households. Member noted that some of the recommendations as a result of the review will address overcrowding in the short term however the Council will need to consider innovative ways and working in partnership with other stakeholders to build new social housing

APPENDIX A

MEMBERSHIP OF THE HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 2022/23

Councillors:

Jason Jackson
Marian Spall
Valerie Bossman-Quarshie
Ilkay Cinko-Oner
Mick Gilgunn
Benali Hamdache
Michael O'Sullivan
Rosaline Ogunro
Rose Marie McDonald – PFI Managed Tenants
Dean Donaghy – Directly Managed Tenants

Substitute Councillors:

Jilani Chowdhury
Phil Graham
Ernestas Jegorovas-Armstrong
Ben Mackmurdie

MEMBERSHIP OF THE HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 2023/24

Councillors:

Jason Jackson
Ilkay Cinko-Oner
Valerie Bossman-Quarshie
Gulcin Ozdemir
Mick Gilgunn
Ernestas Jegorovas-Armstrong
Michael O'Sullivan
Phil Graham
Rose Marie McDonald – PFI Managed Tenants
Dean Donaghy – Directly Managed Tenants

Substitute Councillors:

Jilani Chowdhury
Ben Mackmurdie
Heather Staff
Rosaline Ogunro

Acknowledgements:

The Committee would like to thank all the witnesses who gave evidence to the review.
p

Officer Support:

*Ian Swift, Ramesh Logeswaran, Helena Stephenson, Goodwin Omogbehin, Alistair Gale,
Karen Sullivan – LBI
Ola Adeoye – Democratic Services*

APPENDIX B

SCRUTINY REVIEW INITIATION DOCUMENT (SID)
Review: Strategic Review of Overcrowding in Islington
Scrutiny Review Committee: Housing Scrutiny Committee
Director leading the review: Ian Swift – Director of Housing Needs and Strategy
Lead Officers: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ramesh Logeswaran Housing Needs and Strategy• Ian Swift Housing Needs and Strategy• Goodwin Omogbehin Environmental Health• Helena Stephenson Homes and Community Safety
Overall aim: To establish the extent of overcrowding in homes in Islington in the public and private sector To understand the consequences and impacts of overcrowding To be informed about best practice and innovative approaches to tackling overcrowding and its impacts To produce a strategic review on the overcrowding issues affecting households in Islington To assess the impact in the provision of new Islington Council and Housing Association rented accommodation in alleviating overcrowding in Islington
Objectives of the review: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• To highlight the impact of overcrowding on Islington’s residents• To ensure Islington Council follows or establishes national best practice to improve the life chances of our residents living in overcrowded circumstances• To ensure that homes are safe and healthy• To place residents at the centre of this strategic review• To understand and develop levers to reduce overcrowding in Islington• To liaise with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities to modernise the legislative approach towards overcrowding following the outcome of this strategic review
How is the review to be carried out: <u>Scope of the review</u> The review will be conducted in writing reports, taking evidence from external organisations, and analysing data to focus on: Understanding the scale of overcrowding and the impacts of overcrowding on residents’ health, education attainment, well-being, housing conditions, safety, and the wider impact on the community Making recommendations to ensure Islington adopts best practice approaches following the

data analytics, benchmarking, evidence from partners and engagement with residents
 Assessing the type of new build rented accommodation locally and the subsequent lettings of these new build properties and subsequent re-letting of council and housing association homes

Liaising with statutory agencies Children’s Services, Adult Services, Health Agencies, Police Probation, Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance etc on the impact of overcrowding on their work.
 To review the housing allocations scheme relating to overcrowding and under-occupation

Types of evidence:

Written evidence from officers and partners

- Data analytics
- Assessment of the overcrowding across all tenures
- Witness evidence from another borough operating a similar service.
- Witness evidence from Shelter, the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health, Chartered Institute of Housing, TRA’s, Islington Law Centre, Private Rented Tenants organisation, Help On Our Doorstep
- Witness evidence from resident groups
- Benchmarking with other council’s
- Questionnaires to residents impacted by overcrowding and under-occupation
- Questionnaires to partners including housing associations
- Census data

Additional Information:

- To consider any useful comparators as part of a 12 month review if required.
- In carrying out the review the committee will consider equalities implications and resident impacts identified by witnesses. The Executive is required to have due regard to these, and any other relevant implications, when responding to the review recommendations.
- The Housing Scrutiny Committee will also seek witness evidence from the following officers at the Housing Scrutiny meetings: Islington Council’s head of housing needs, Islington Council’s residential environmental health and HMO licensing lead Islington Council’s Property services, Islington Council’s Homes and Community Safety service Islington Council’s Safeguarding Lead Officer, Another London Borough, Shelter Islington VCS organisation working with residents experiencing overcrowding

Programme	
Key output:	To be submitted to Committee on:
1. Scrutiny Initiation Document	18th July 2022
2. Draft Recommendations	17th July 2023
3. Final Report	25th September 2023

Report of: Corporate Director of Homes and Neighbourhoods
Cllr O'Halloran Executive Member for Homes and Communities

Meeting of: Housing Scrutiny Committee

Date: 7th November 2023

Report to Housing Scrutiny Committee

Portfolio Holder: Councillor O'Halloran

Officer Contact: Ian Swift Director of Housing Operations

Date: 7th November 2023

Subject: Under-Occupation scheme

Executive Summary

Review of Islington's downsizer scheme

Overview

The lack of housing supply, particularly in London, is a systemic issue facing local authorities. Like other metropolitan authorities, Islington Council is facing challenges in supporting residents to reside in sustainable, long-term accommodation. Housing stock within the borough is limited when contrasted with the size of the Housing Register, but there is a recognition that there is also an under use of existing housing stock. There are currently over 600 social housing tenants who have registered for a housing transfer because their home is too large in Islington. In addition, it is estimated that there may be more than 4000 social housing tenancies in the borough which are under occupied but whose tenants have not registered for a housing transfer.

Downsizer's typically have low housing need to move. As secure tenants they cannot be required to move by their landlord unless they are inherited tenants in very large properties. Demographically, downsizers tend to be older tenants who can be easily put off if they perceive difficulty in managing the moving process. Understandably, most people are also unwilling to move unless they can see clear long-term benefits for themselves in moving.

Recommendations

1. Recruit 1 additional officers in the mobility team so that every downsizer can have a named, dedicated officer to help them to move home and to work to engage people in the community by conducting community events on a regular basis to promote and

increase knowledge about downsizing and the benefits of moving as well as how the council can assist.

2. Relaunch the Downsizer scheme with a comprehensive advertising campaign.
3. Prioritise downsizers for a greater pool of lettings so that they are incentivized to move more quickly by including downsizers in council local lettings new build schemes, particularly for downsizers releasing more than 2 bedrooms.
4. Raise the financial incentive from £500 per bedroom given up to £2,000 in certain circumstances e.g., where all household members are aged over 65; where a property with 3 bedrooms or more are given up. All 2-bedroom households moving into a 1-bedroom property will be offered £1,000. Where the older adult in 3-bedroom properties has social care needs, promote downsize to 2 bed properties as part of the Homeshare offer (conditional to implications of recommendation 10)
5. Increase the removal expenses payment from £500 to £750 for all downsizers.
6. Raise awareness among other teams and departments and external partners about the Downsizer scheme so that timely referrals can be made to the mobility team.
7. Crossmatch the under-occupier register with Adult Social Care records to.
 - o Identify residents for targeted promotion of the benefits of downsizing via Care Act assessment and review process.
 - o Identify under-occupiers with care needs whose informal carers live in council housing to provide incentives to merge households and release a property.
8. Review the council's web pages related to the Downsizer Scheme to ensure residents can locate them and are provided clear information about the council's offer.
9. Create a dedicated phone line and mailbox for the mobility team to be able to field calls about downsizing, thereby enabling immediate action to be taken when a resident expresses an interest in moving.
10. The downsizing payments are restricted to Islington Council tenants and Housing Associations are encouraged to pay for downsizing moves from the budgets controlled by each landlord.
11. Explore the implications of promotion of Shared Lives and Homeshare schemes to under-occupiers. Crossmatching the under-occupier register with Adult Social Care records will identify potential appetite. Consideration must be given to the impact on Housing Benefits and inherited tenancy rights of homesharers.

What is a downsizer?

A downsizer is a social housing tenant living in either a council or housing association home who have spare bedrooms over and above the number required for their current household. This is because household members of the original tenancy have left the home usually because older children have moved out to live independently or there has been a relationship breakdown and a partner and some or all the children have moved away.

On occasion, a household may request a split move where the tenant and one or more adult children wish to move to a few smaller properties. If more bedrooms are given up by the tenant than are being offered to the family as a whole this can also be treated as a downsizer move for example if a tenant and adult child are in a three-bedroom property and require two, one-bedroom properties the tenant is a downsizer. However, if the same household lives in a two-

bedroom property and are requesting two, one-bedroom properties there is no downsizing, and the tenant is not eligible for the incentives and priority of a downsizer. In effect, there must be a net gain in rooms released for a move to be categorised as a downsizing move.

Inherited tenancies are where the original tenant has died leaving a family member in the tenancy who has succession rights to the tenancy but where the property has at least two bedrooms more than is required to house the remaining household. In these circumstances the landlord can refuse the succession but still has a duty to house the household into a suitable sized property. Islington has approximately 20 inherited tenants waiting to move.

The benefits of downsizers moving

When downsizers move this can create a “chain” of moves by existing council tenants, typically enabling three or four other households, who may be overcrowded, to move to more suitable accommodation. Alternatively, the move will provide an opportunity for a homeless household to obtain a secure and affordable tenancy, avoiding the need for, and costs of, providing temporary accommodation. There would also be indirect benefits by increasing the supply of stable housing for residents. These include increased access to employment, increased health and wellbeing outcomes, and for children, improved attendance and educational attainment at school.

If the moving downsizer is an older person, it means that they are living in more suitable accommodation which in time may reduce demand for other council services, particularly high-cost services needed to support complex needs such as domiciliary care packages or the need to make costly adaptations. On the other hand, recognising that moving to one bed properties may reduce the opportunities for other solutions that help to prevent, delay and reduce the need for care services.

Downsizer moves are very cost effective when compared to the cost of providing additional social housing through new build or buy back schemes where it can typically cost more than £150k for each additional bedroom provided.

The Islington Offer

Islington currently have two dedicated under occupation officers within our Mobility team. They work closely with our overcrowding advisor and our mutual exchange officers to try and assist downsizers via direct transfer, mutual exchange, and other options such as Seaside and Country Homes scheme or sheltered housing.

Islington offer £500 per bedroom released and up to £500 towards removal costs which is available to both Islington Council and Islington housing association tenants. The removal incentive can even be taken as a payment, or we can arrange removals through our contracted supplier.

We also offer £750 per bedroom to Islington Council tenants who exchange with an Islington Council overcrowded tenant This scheme is called Smartmove. This is a way of managing our housing stock effectively – helping both downsizing and overcrowded Council tenants.

This type of move is particularly cost effective for the Council as void costs are saved on both properties involved and there is no period of rent loss in addition to both parties being able to enjoy a home more suitable for their housing needs.

For Islington Council tenants downsizing into another Islington Council tenancy, we offer a rent guarantee, so the moving tenant will not pay a higher net rent in their new home than they are paying in their current home. This is important for downsizers who are moving to Council newbuild properties where the rent can on occasion be more than they had been paying in their original tenancy.

We have a flexible fund where we can utilise at our discretion cover for example:

- lumber clearance charge to Council tenants
- an extra 2 weeks overlap in rent allowing additional time to move for Council and HA tenants.
- pay for decorations to be done.
- pay for carpets, white goods or furniture for those in hardship.
- reconnection of white goods
- reassembling furniture
- packing service
- small carpentry jobs

We give a high priority for housing including help to bid for housing or making direct offers for those with specific needs or vulnerabilities.

Behavioural science approach findings

Islington recently commissioned a project with EY- a company who specialise in behavioural science and the Warwick Business school to carry out workshops with Islington downsizers to discover what motivates them to move and what put them off pursuing a housing transfer. They found that downsizers rarely moved just to move to a smaller home and were often motivated by other reasons including moving closer to relatives, moving to a better property, moving to a property which better suited their current or future medical needs. They also found that downsizers were easily put off pursuing a transfer if they were not given help to navigating the application, allocation and moving process.

They found that the most important time for the council to engage with downsizers is when they first applied. This is when they were most receptive to moving. This may be because they may have experienced a significant life event like a bereavement, having difficulties with a neighbour or have spotted a property which they would like to move to.

Critically, it was deemed that officers needed to engage at this time before the opportunity was lost. The research found that although the cash incentive was welcome to cover moving costs, the most important factor that encouraged people to move was to have a dedicated officer who could offer a hand holding approach to support downsizers through the moving process. The recommendations from that project have been incorporated into this report.

Benchmarking with other local authorities

Islington's approach to downsizing has consistently been recognised as an example of best practice that has been successful in facilitating a large number of moves over several years.

A recent benchmarking exercise with comparable local authorities noted most had a downsizer service and dedicated officers providing the service. Incentives ranged from £500 per bedroom given up to £5000 per room given up. However, it should be noted that those giving large incentives were no more successful in yielding greater numbers of downsizer moves than those providing smaller incentives. In fact, the authority providing the largest incentive achieved the smallest number of moves per 1000 units of stock.

Borough	Stock size	Moves	Years	Average moves per year	Moves per 1,000 units/year	Incentive per room given up
Encompass (Sutton)	6000	152	3	51	8.4	500
Islington	24000	676	5	135	5.6	500-750
Hillingdon	10000	149	3	50	5.0	2,000
Barnet	10000	207	5	41	4.1	1,000
Enfield	10000	166	5	33	3.3	500-1250
Camden	23000	228	3	76	3.3	1,500-3000
Hammersmith & Fulham	11500	172	5	34	3.0	2,000
Haringey	15000	218	5	44	2.9	1,000
Kingston	5000	62	5	12	2.5	750
Wandsworth	17000	202	5	40	2.4	2,000
Westminster	11000	89	5	18	1.6	1,000-3,000
Richmond	10000	63	5	13	1.3	2,500
Hackney	22000	136	5	27	1.2	750
Waltham Forest	10000	34	3	11	1.1	500-1000
Brent	8000	36	4	9	1.1	5000

Benchmarking with Registered Providers

A survey was circulated to the largest 7 registered providers (RPs) in Islington to ask what their approach to downsizers was and whether they were interested in aligning their approach with ours. Four responses were received with the replies summarised below:

- One RP has a dedicated Downsizer team.
- Two RPs offer financial incentives to downsizers.
- Only one RP was able to share data on successful moves (ISHA had four downsizer moves in the last two years)
- Mutual Exchange is encouraged by all RPs that responded.
- Two RPs are willing to align their approach to ours
- Two RPs were not willing to align their approach to downsizers to ours; one said that this was because they were already offering higher incentives than ours and the other said that they were undergoing a restructure following a merger and were unable to make any commitments at this time.

Alternative uses for underoccupied properties.

Aligned with the Islington Together 2030 Plan, Adult Social Care's vision is for Islington to be a place made up of strong, inclusive and connected communities, where regardless of background, people have fair and equal access to adult social care support that enabled residents to live healthy, fulfilling and independent lives.

There may be some circumstances where underoccupied properties can represent a resource which helps to meet council and Adult Social Care priorities to tackle inequality through prevention and early intervention.

Home Share - Some under-occupiers, in particular older people, will have support needs that can be met by a homesharer, who is an individual looking for affordable accommodation and is willing to provide companionship and practical support around the home. The relationship helps to improve the quality of life and wellbeing of the householder while providing a source of much needed affordable accommodation to the homesharer. It provides low level and preventative support at very low cost and reduces the use of care services, reduces the risk of falls, promotes safety, health and wellbeing for older people. It reduces the burden of high housing costs for younger people helping to recruit to lower paid roles or making higher education more affordable.

Novus Homeshare, the London broker, estimates that one match can prevent costs of around £4,800 per annum on average on social care and overall could represent an average of £20,000 savings to health and social care.

Shared Lives - Islington's inhouse Shared Lives scheme supports adults with learning disabilities, mental health problems or other needs that make it challenging to live on their own. Service users are matched with Shared Lives carers, who are ordinary people from within the community who open their own family home to the person needing support. The service is typically lower cost than alternative care services.

Both Homeshare¹ and Shared Lives² schemes have documented positive outcomes around community cohesion and social connectedness. Social isolation is known to negatively affect mental health and physical wellbeing and is a risk factor for early mortality.³

Only a small number of under-occupiers will meet the criteria for the Homeshare and Shared Lives schemes. It is anticipated that uptake will be relatively very small compared to the overall number of under-occupiers. The current caseload for Shared Lives is 30 matches. There is, therefore, scope to explore the feasibility of promoting these schemes including understanding implications for Housing Benefit and inherited tenancies without a significant impact on the impact on general needs housing availability.

Findings and recommendations

It is clear from both the Behavioural Science research and the benchmarking with other social housing landlords that the most important factor in achieving downsizer moves is having a

sufficiently resourced team available to provide a named dedicated officer for each downsizer to help them through the moving process.

There are two officers currently dedicated to downsizers, with a current caseload of 600 downsizers who have registered for a housing transfer. They are therefore only able to provide a hand holding service for the most vulnerable applicants. It is proposed therefore to increase the team by one officer at an additional cost of £58,835,000.

It is also important that the downsizer offer is advertised and promoted as widely as possible both within the council across departments as well as externally in the wider community so that tenants are aware that if they are considering downsizing, they know how to get in contact with the council and are put in touch with the Mobility team as seamlessly as possible. With additional staff, the mobility team will be able to hold regular training events with colleagues in the housing department who come into regular contact with tenants as part of their work such as caretakers, repair operatives, tenancy officers who carry out tenancy audits as well as raising awareness among other teams and departments within the council such as Adult Social Care, occupational therapy and other Access teams. They can also raise awareness with our external partners such as GPs and other health professionals, Housing Associations etc. so that timely referrals may be made to the Mobility team.

Although it is the council's aim to get customers to self-serve digitally where possible it is recognised that this cohort of residents tend to be older and have generally indicated that their preferred method of contact is to be able to speak directly with someone. It is therefore proposed to that a dedicated telephone line and mailbox for the Mobility team is implemented so that downsizers can be directed to the team without having to navigate the various council call centres.

Before Covid, the Mobility Team held regular events throughout the borough where the scheme could be promoted, and tenants could find out what was on offer. These events obviously had to be suspended during the various lockdowns, but it is now a good opportunity to refresh the offer, generate an extensive advertising campaign, re-introduce these events and hold them regularly throughout the borough.

The allowance to help pay for the costs of moving home such as furniture removals, disconnection and reconnection of white goods redirecting mail etc has remain at £500 for several years. While this amount used to be ample to cover moving costs, the mobility team have found that downsizers are struggling to find removal companies who will move them within this limit. It is proposed therefore to increase the allowance for removals to £750.

Increasing the per bedroom released incentive across all moves would obviously be popular, however there is no indication from the research that was carried out or the benchmarking with other local authorities that this would greatly increase moves and would be very expensive for the council as this would increase costs even if no additional moves were achieved.

However, some local authorities do have a higher rate for pensioner households as it is recognised that poorer pensioners on fixed incomes may be encouraged to move if they could see a clear financial benefit to themselves. It is also noted that the council receives the most benefit from stock churn and chain moves when properties with four bedrooms or more become available. There is also an extreme shortage of large family sized properties required for

families living in overcrowded conditions or waiting in temporary accommodation for a move, therefore, sadly, families waiting for properties with four or more bedrooms often must wait the longest. It is proposed therefore to increase the incentive for each bedroom given up from £500-£2000 for all pensioner households and for households giving up properties larger than two bedrooms and releasing a property which is a 2-bedroom property will receive a £1,000 incentive payment.

The service recognises that a moderate increase to the financial incentive may not necessarily lead to greater downsizing moves. Instead, unintentionally it could lead to greater financial pressure on the Housing Revenue Account (HRA). It is for this reason that the recommendation to increase the incentive is a nuanced proposal that specifically targets those who are able to release more than 2 bedrooms. All other households would be offered £1,000 per bedroom released again a modest increase.

Downsizers will only move if they can see an improvement in their housing situation. The most desirable type of accommodation is new build. Downsizers are given a high priority for a move reflected in the number of points they are awarded under the Housing Allocation Scheme; however, all new build property is let under the local lettings scheme where priority is given to housing applicants living on the estate or ward. This often means that downsizers miss out on properties they would have successfully bid for and have often expressed an interest in. It is proposed to treat downsizers releasing more than two bedrooms the same as housing applicants living on the estate or ward for new build properties. The council has recently approved a new Housing Allocation scheme which will be implemented shortly. The new scheme will enable the council to devise a Lettings Plan for each new build scheme which will provide a greater scope to consider downsizers for new properties that hasn't previously been possible.

In view of the benefits of Homeshare and Shared Lives for residents with care and support needs balanced against the relatively small impact on the reduction of under-occupiers, there is scope to explore the implications and feasibility of promoting these schemes to council tenants.

Cost of options

Recruit one additional Mobility officer at SO2 which will cost £50,835,000. All mutual exchange officers are currently 95% funded by the HRA.

Cost of Furniture removals increase to £750. This would equate to an additional £250 per move. With the average number of moves per year of 135, this would be an average increase of £33,750 per year.

The cost of the incentive per bedroom given up will vary from year to year depending on take up. In 2022/23, 114 bedrooms were given up by applicants who transferred to an empty property and 25 bedrooms were given up by downsizers exchanging with an overcrowded household. This cost £75,750 last year. If the incentive per bedroom given up were to increase across all downsizers moves to £2000 for transfer cases and £2500 for exchangers this would have cost £303,000 last year.

The cost of increasing the incentive payment for pensioner households where all residents are aged 65 or over to £1000 would have cost an additional £34,450 in 2022/23 for the 41

households applicable in incentive payments. To increase the incentive for the same group to £2,000 would have cost an additional £68,900.

Conclusion

Recruit 1 additional officer, increase the removal payment and increase the incentive payment for all downsizers to £2000 for transferers and £2500 for exchangers will cost an additional £348,000.

Some of the proposed additional costs on incentives will be absorbed by not making payments from our flexible fund, however there is a risk when increasing the incentive per bedroom given up that the marginal gains are very expensive and can be counterproductive. If the raising of the incentives do not result in substantial increases in take up, then they are very expensive. If there is an increase in take up which results in all of the budget being used before the end of the year, then the team may have to close the scheme. Adopting a phased increase in the incentive will allow us to evaluate the benefits of the increased incentive payment and to keep the flexibility in the scheme. We can then make a decision to increase the incentive at a later date if successful in increasing downsizer moves.

Explore the feasibility of targeted promotion of the Shared Lives and Homeshare schemes to under-occupiers to meet the council's prevention and early intervention priorities.

Comments from the Finance Team

The current total expenditure budget for Mutual Exchange is £730,800. The majority of this budget is funded by the HRA – 95% for salaries and over 90% in most years for grant payments (95% at budget setting) (actual % dependent on if tenants exchange are in HRA properties). Currently, the budget provides £351,900 for staff and £378,900 for grants (payments include incentive payments/removals/ and other discretionary costs to aid the process of movements – referred to collectively as grants in this FI). The budget for grants has not been utilised in full for some years, in FY22/23 £173,846 was spent, 46% of the available budget.

This proposal will seek to increase incentives and removal payments to increase property exchanges and hire an additional staff member to support the process. The staff member based on current S02 paygrades would cost £50,835 cost, 95% funded by the HRA. It is not possible to predict the additional utilisation resulting from increased incentives and removal costs but estimates based on existing exchange levels remaining the same suggest at a minimum grant cost will rise by £261,000. The total additional cost from the additional staff member and the minimum additional grant costs would be £311,835. Based on spend in FY22/23 this additional level of costs would create a budget pressure of £106,781.

If exchanges were to rise by 10% then costs would be £132,881 more than budgeted and similarly by 25%, they would be £158,981 more. 95% of the budgeted cost increase would be met from the HRA, being £126,236 and £151,032 respectively.

While other Councils do pay more in grants than Islington, it is not necessarily on a comparable scale of exchanges, meaning overall costs are not analogous. The department runs the risk that by increasing the grant payments there could only be a marginal increase in uptake, yet

resultant costs are 4x more than before. This would not be a good value for money for the Council. Moreover, if the Council were to limit the number of exchanges to the maximum of the existing budget level the proposal could be counterproductive, as the proposals exceed the budget based on the existing number of exchanges.

Cases are primarily between HRA tenants, but occasionally involve housing association tenants (<10%). Each year, the % of HRA tenants exchanging properties used to calculate the charge to the HRA has always been over 90% with minor variations each year. Agreement would need to be made with the HRA and HGF to ensure budgetary control each financial year.

There will be a pressure not to lower the grant payments once raised, but the department can take steps to reduce the flow and any discretionary payments to control budgets. This could result in idle periods for staff members involved or bottlenecks where funding shortfall results in the suspension in operation, resulting in complaints and reputational damage.

The consideration of Finance is that this runs financial and value for money risks to the Council which cannot readily be contained within existing budgets. Therefore, additional budgetary provision through the Housing Revenue Account will be required.

Report of: Corporate Director of Homes and Neighbourhoods
Cllr O'Halloran Executive Member for Homes and Communities

Meeting of: Housing Scrutiny Committee

Date: 7th November 2023

Report to Housing Scrutiny Committee

Portfolio Holder: Councillor O'Halloran

Officer Contact: Ian Swift Director of Housing Operations

Date: 7th November 2023

Subject: Fibre Broadband update

Executive Summary

Update on programme delivery.

Through the council's delivery team, the council continues to work with three providers to deliver the broadband programme roll out. The council now conducts weekly meetings with each provider and are constantly working to ensure that health and safety and design requirements are adhered to within the constraints of the wayleave agreement:

The council is also liaising with residents, TMO's and TRAs to ensure everyone receives regular updates.

The council have now developed guidance to help providers meet our requirements for listed buildings, considering the requirements for our street properties.

Cabling is now complete for 2379 properties or 7% of the council's properties. Appendix 1 provides further detail about the programme status by ward.

We continue to consult regularly with colleagues across the council to maximise on our partnership working with the providers, make introductions to colleagues where appropriate, provide input where useful and to extract community value from the programme.

The Community Centre at Peregrine House now has a live connection.

Any questions can be forwarded direct to the Islington Broadband email address (islingtonbrodband@islington.gov.uk). We continue to answer questions from residents and councillors.

G-Network

Weekly mobilisation meetings are now underway.

Community Fibre

We continue to work with Community Fibre and have approved over 168 survey packs to date.

Hyperoptic

We continue to work with Hyperoptic and have approved 106 survey packs to date.

BT Openreach

We received further communication from BT Openreach but there is no progress to report relating to BT Openreach adopting the council's Wayleave Agreement.

Financial Implications

There are no known new financial implications associated with this report.

Legal Implications

There are no known new legal implications associated with this report.

CARE Values

Developing this work for all 36,000 Islington Council properties promotes openness, responsibility, and accountability, whilst making Islington a more equal place to live.

Ward	Block	Postcode	ertic	Notes	Number of units	Provider
Arsenal	DEEPDALE	N4 2EH	Cabling complete	Waiting for network build	20	Hyperoptic
Arsenal	TAWNEY COURT	N5 1AS	Cabling complete	Waiting for network build	24	Hyperoptic
Arsenal	VAUDEVILLE COURT	N4 2QG	Survey pack approved	No installation timetable provided as yet	36	Hyperoptic
Arsenal	GILLESPIE ROAD ESTATE	N5 1LG	Survey pack approved	Awaiting installation dates	18	Community Fibre
Bunhill	CYRUS HOUSE	EC1V 0BU	Cabling complete	Waiting for network build	39	Hyperoptic
Bunhill	KESTREL HOUSE	EC1V 8EL	Live connections available		106	Community Fibre
Bunhill	LAGONIER HOUSE	EC1V 3TJ	Live connections available		24	Hyperoptic
Bunhill	PLEYDELL ESTATE	EC1V 3SN	Cabling complete	Waiting for network build	102	Hyperoptic
Bunhill	REDBRICK ESTATE	EC1V 3QL	Works on site	Amended survey pack received to include new build. Start date 16 November,	102	Hyperoptic
Bunhill	THE TRIANGLE	EC1V 0AR	Cabling completed except 94-130	Waiting for network build	130	Hyperoptic
Bunhill	WENLAKE ESTATE	EC1V 3PX	Live connections available		29	Hyperoptic
Bunhill	CHADWORTH HOUSE ESTATE	EC1V 3RQ	Survey pack approved	Works commencing in November	70	Hyperoptic
Bunhill	GAMBIER ESTATE	EC1V 8EH	Cabling complete	Waiting for network build	115	Community Fibre
Bunhill	ST LUKES ESTATE	EC1V 8EH	Works on site	Works commencing in November	128	G-Network
Bunhill	STAFFORD CRIPPS	EC1V 9ES	Cabling complete	Waiting for network build	60	Hyperoptic
Bunhill	WHITBREAD ESTATE	EC1Y 8TD	Cabling complete	Waiting for network build	60	Hyperoptic
Bunhill	COLTASH COURT	EC1V 8TD	Survey packs submitted	Technical considerations being considered by delivery team	65	Community Fibre
Bunhill	BANNER ESTATE	EC1Y 8NQ	Survey pack approved	Awaiting installation dates	15	Hyperoptic

Ward	Block	Postcode	ertic	Notes	Number of units	Provider
Bunhill	GEORGE GILLETT COURT	EC1Y 8QH	Survey pack approved	Awaiting installation dates	17	Hyperoptic / Community Fibre
Bunhill	PEREGRINE HOUSE	EC1V 7PR	Cabling complete	Waiting for network build	211	Community Fibre
Canonbury	HASLAM HOUSE	N1 2HT	Survey pack approved	Awaiting installation dates	12	Hyperoptic
Canonbury	CHANNEL ISLANDS ESTATE	N1 2PR	Cabling complete	Waiting for network build	190	Community Fibre
Canonbury	DOUGLAS ESTATE	N1 2PS	Cabling complete	Waiting for network build	27	Community Fibre
Finsbury Park	MEDINA COURT	N7 7PU	Survey pack approved	Works on site November	15	Hyperoptic
Finsbury Park	ANDOVER ESTATE - Docura, Didbin and Noll	N7 7RD	Cabling completed at Noll and Didbin	Docura due for installation when scaffold erected	102	Community Fibre
Finsbury Park	HOOD COURT	N7 6QS	Survey pack approved	Awaiting installation dates	24	Community Fibre
Finsbury Park	HADEN COURT	N4 3HR	Survey pack approved	Awaiting installation dates	112	Community Fibre
Finsbury Park	CLIFTON COURT	N4 3PH	Survey pack approved	Awaiting installation dates	87	Community Fibre
Hillrise	HILLRISE MANSIONS ESTATE	N19 3PU	Cabling complete	Waiting for network build	100	Community Fibre
Hillrise	HIGHCROFT ESTATE	N19 3AH	Survey approved (part estate)	Waltersville Road only has been approved and cabling in August. Further blocks to be submitted for survey	35	Community Fibre
Hillrise	HORNSEY RISE ESTATE	N19 3DU	Survey pack approved	Works on site late October	128	Community Fibre

Ward	Block	Postcode	ertic	Notes	Number of units	Provider
Hillrise	NEW ORLEANS ESTATE	N19 3UE	Survey pack approved	Awaiting installation dates	250	Community Fibre
Hillrise	REDWOOD COURT	N19 3SN	Survey pack approved	Works on site late October	40	Community Fibre
Hillrise	LEYDEN MANSIONS ESTATE	N19 3AW	Survey pack approved	Awaiting installation dates	56	Community Fibre
Hillrise	ELTHORNE ESTATE	N19 4AF	Awaiting amended survey	Awaiting installation for Beechcroft Way, St John's Way, Sanders Way, Partington Close, 100 Holland Walk, Mulkern Road	251	Community Fibre
Hillrise	HORNSEY LANE ESTATE	N19 3YJ	Survey pack approved	Works on site November	173	Community Fibre
Hillrise	HIGHLANDS ESTATE	N4 5SG	Survey pack approved	Awaiting installation dates	22	Community Fibre
Hillrise	HOLLY PARK new build	N4 4AT	Survey pack approved	Awaiting installation dates		Community Fibre
Hillrise	LOCHBIE MANSIONS ESTATE	N4 4SB	Survey pack approved	Awaiting installation dates	25	Community Fibre
Hillrise	HILLSIDE ESTATE	N19 3UY	Survey pack approved	Works on site November	81	Community Fibre
Hillrise	MANCHESTER MANSIONS ESTATE	N19 3NA	Cabling complete	Waiting for network build	35	Community Fibre
Hillrise	MIRANDA ESTATE	N19 3UH	Survey approved	Awaiting installation dates	148	Community Fibre
Hillrise	COLEMAN MANSIONS	N8 9EJ	Cabling complete	Waiting for network build	40	Community Fibre
Holloway	CAMDEN ESTATE	N7 9PZ	Survey approved	Awaiting installation dates	100	Community Fibre
Holloway	STOCK ORCHARD CRESCENT	9TD	Survey approved	Awaiting installation dates	153	Community Fibre

Ward	Block	Postcode	ertic	Notes	Number of units	Provider
Holloway	LORAINE MANSIONS	N7 8ST	Survey approved	Awaiting installation dates	148	Community Fibre
Holloway	POLLARD CLOSE	N7 8UD	Survey approved	Awaiting installation dates	88	Community Fibre
Junction	HARGRAVE MANSIONS ESTATE	N19 5XN	Survey approved for Community Fibre. Awaiting amended survey pack from Hyperoptic	Awaiting installation dates	149	Community Fibre / Hyperoptic
Junction	SYCAMORE COURT	N19 5RS	Surveys approved	Works on site October	24	Community Fibre / Hyperoptic
Junction	PEMBERTON GARDENS	N19 5RU	Surveys approved	Awaiting installation dates	6	Community Fibre / Hyperoptic
Junction	LONGLEY HOUSE	N19 5HB	Awaiting amended survey	Technical considerations being considered by delivery team	24	Hyperoptic
Junction	GIRDLESTONE ESTATE	N19 5DR	Survey pack approved	Works on site October	64	Community Fibre
Laycock	BARRATT HOUSE ESTATE	N1 2AH	Live connections available		22	Community Fibre
St Mary's and St James'	PLEASANT PLACE ESTATE - Tufnell, Tiverton, Brookfield, Fowler, Dawlish and Arundel, 9,10-11, 12-13 Pleasant Place	N1 2BS	Cabling complete	Waiting for network build		Community Fibre
St Mary's and St James'	DEVONSHIRE HOUSE	N1 2BE	Cabling complete	Waiting for network build	9	Community Fibre
St Mary's and St James'	BAMPTON HOUSE	N1 2BP	Cabling complete	Waiting for network build	10	Community Fibre

Ward	Block	Postcode	ertic	Notes	Number of units	Provider
St Mary's and St James'	CARLETON HOUSE	N1 2BQ	Cabling complete	Waiting for network build	6	Community Fibre
St Mary's and St James'	SPRIGGS HOUSE ESTATE	N1 2AJ	Live connections available		38	Community Fibre
St Mary's and St James'	TYNDALE MANSIONS ESTATE	N1 2XG	Cabling complete	Waiting for network build	25	Community Fibre
St Mary's and St James'	HIGHBURY MANSIONS ESTATE	N1 2XF	Survey approved	Waiting for installation date	12	Community Fibre
St Mary's and St James'	HAWES STREET	N1 2UU	Survey approved	Waiting for installation date	49	Community Fibre
St Mary's and St James'	273 UPPER STREET	N1 2UA	Cabling complete	Waiting for network build	3	Community Fibre
St Mary's and St James'	WAKELIN HOUSE ESTATE	N1 2EF	Cabling complete	Waiting for network build	66	Community Fibre
St Mary's and St James'	SEBBON STREET	N1 2EH	Survey approved	Waiting for installation date	26	Community Fibre
St Mary's and St James'	HALTON ROAD	N1 2EN	Survey approved	Waiting for installation date		Community Fibre
St Mary's and St James'	HALTON MANSIONS	N1 2BX	Cabling complete	Waiting for network build	152	Community Fibre
St Mary's and St James'	HUME COURT	N1 2EQ	Survey approved	Waiting for installation date	36	Hyperoptic
St Mary's and St James'	BARING COURT	N1 3DR	Cabling complete	Waiting for network build	30	Hyperoptic
St Mary's and St James'	CUMMING ESTATE	N1 8QA	Live connections available		25	Hyperoptic
St Mary's and St James'	SHEPPERTON ROAD	N1 3DH	Amended survey pack approved	The proposal includes listed buildings		Hyperoptic
St Mary's and St James'	ARBON COURT	N1 7AP	Live connections available		22	Hyperoptic

Ward	Block	Postcode	ertic	Notes	Number of units	Provider
St Mary's and	RICHMOND GROVE	N1 2DL	Cabling complete	Waiting for network build	25	Hyperoptic
St Peter's and Canalside	FALCON COURT	N1 8EY	Live connections available		22	Hyperoptic
St Peter's and Canalside	LANGDON COURT	EC1V 1LH	Live connections available		36	Hyperoptic
St Peter's and Canalside	KINGS SQUARE	EC1V 8BA	Survey approved	Works due on site	372	Community Fibre
St Peter's and Canalside	JESSOP COURT	N1 8LG	Survey pack under review			Hyperoptic / Community Fibre
St Peter's and Canalside	BOREAS WALK	N1 8DX	Works on site	Waiting for installation date	6	Hyperoptic
St Peter's and Canalside	CLUSE COURT	EC1V 3RB	Survey approved	Waiting for installation date	212	Hyperoptic
St Peter's and Canalside	COLINSDALE	N1 8DZ	Survey approved	Works on site November	50	Hyperoptic
Tollington	ALBERMARLE MANSIONS	N7 6JA	Survey approved	Waiting for installation date	16	Hyperoptic
Tollington	HOLLY PARK ESTATE	N4 4BW	Awaiting survey	No installation date available	121	Community Fibre
Tollington	BENNETT COURT ESTATE	N7 6BN	Survey approved	Works on site November	112	Hyperoptic
Tollington	CROUCH HILL COURT	N19 4EN	Survey approved	Works on site November	140	Hyperoptic
Tufnell Park	HOLBROOKE COURT ESTATE	N7 0BF	Survey approved	Works on site November	80	Hyperoptic
Tufnell Park	TUFNELL PARK ESTATE	N7 0PG	Cabling complete	Waiting for network build	141	Community Fibre

Ward	Block	Postcode	ertic	Notes	Number of units	Provider
Tufnell Park	TANSLEY CLOSE ESTATE	N7 0HP	Survey approved	Works on site November	37	Community Fibre
Tufnell Park	BRECKNOCK ROAD ESTATE	N19 5AS	Cabling complete	Waiting for network build	158	Community Fibre
Tufnell Park	WILFRED FIENBURGH COURT	N7 0EX	Cabling complete	Waiting for network build	33	Community Fibre
Tufnell Park	DAREN COURT	N7 0EN	Cabling complete	Waiting for network build	90	Community Fibre
Tufnell Park	HILLDROP ESTATE	N7 0QT	Survey pack approved	Waiting installation date	75	Community Fibre
Tufnell Park	2 and 4 DALMENEY AVENUE	N7 0FN	Survey pack approved	Waiting installation date	16	Community Fibre
Tufnell Park	275 CAMDEN ROAD	N7 0JN	Survey pack approved	Waiting installation date	18	Community Fibre
Tufnell Park	MARGARET BONDFIELD	N7 0JB	Cabling complete	Waiting for network build	10	Community Fibre
Tufnell Park	MOELWYN HUGHES COURT	N7 0HU	Cabling complete	Waiting for network build	42	Community Fibre
Junction	BOWERMAN COURT	N19 3RP	Survey approved	Works on site November	32	Hyperoptic
					6455	

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HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2023/24

7 NOVEMBER 2023

- 1) Housing Ombudsman Annual Complaints Review 2022/23 Synopsis
- 2) Housing Ombudsman Special Report on Islington Council
- 3) Main Scrutiny Review 2023/24 -New Homes Build in Islington: – Witness
- 4) Main Scrutiny Review 2022/23 – Overcrowding Strategy – Final Report and Draft Recommendations
- 5) Fibre Broadband update
- 6) Work Programme 2023/24

8 JANUARY 2024

- 1) Main Scrutiny Review 2023/24 -New Homes Build in Islington: – witness evidence
- 2) Damp and Mould – officer update
- 3) Quarterly Review of Housing Performance (Q2 2023/24)
- 4) Work Programme 2023/24

6 FEBRUARY 2024

- 1) Main Scrutiny Review 2023/24 -New Homes Build in Islington: – Draft Recommendations
- 2) Housing Performance Annual Report from Executive Member
- 3) Work Programme 2023/24

18 APRIL 2024

- 1) Main Scrutiny Review 2023/24 -New Homes Build in Islington: – Witness evidence
- 2) Quarterly Review of Housing Performance (Q3 2023/24)
- 3) Work Programme 2023/24

13 MAY 2024

- 1) Membership, Terms of Reference and Dates of Meetings
- 2) Draft Work Programme 2023/24 and Potential Scrutiny Topics

20 JUNE 2024 provisional date subject to Annual Council in May 2024)

- 1) Draft Work Programme 2024/25

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