

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: 7<sup>th</sup> 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 24<sup>th</sup> 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 2<sup>nd</sup> 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.