

Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report

2023/24

Homelessness and Social Housing Allocations complaints
Covering the period 1 April 2023 – 31 March 2024

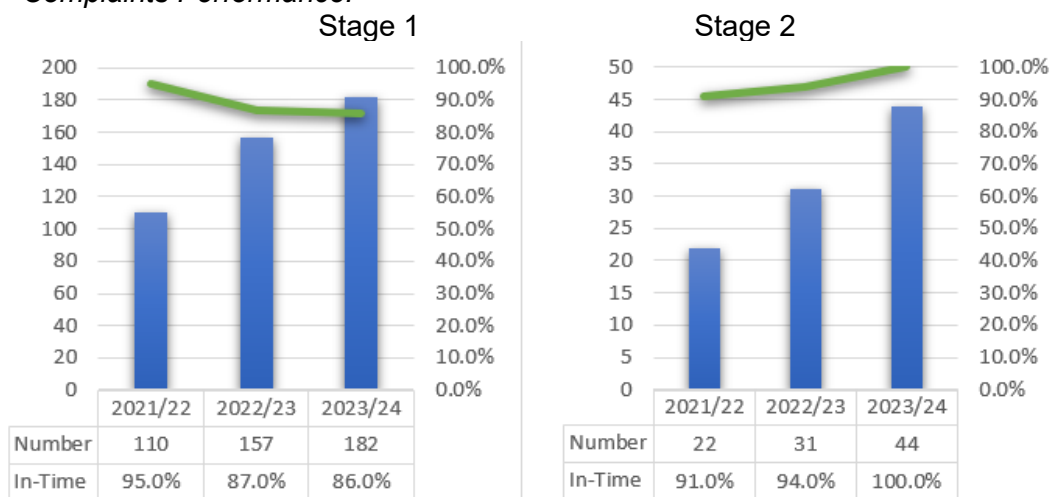
Note: this report covers complaints about homelessness services and housing allocations, which fall under the remit of the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman. Barnet Homes manages these services on the behalf of the London Borough of Barnet. Reporting on the 2023/24 year has been completed by Barnet Homes as an interim measure and will be managed by the London Borough of Barnet in future.

To read about complaints about landlord services that fall under the remit of the Housing Ombudsman Service, please see the Housing Ombudsman section on Barnet Homes' complaints page: www.barnethomes.org/contact-us/complaints

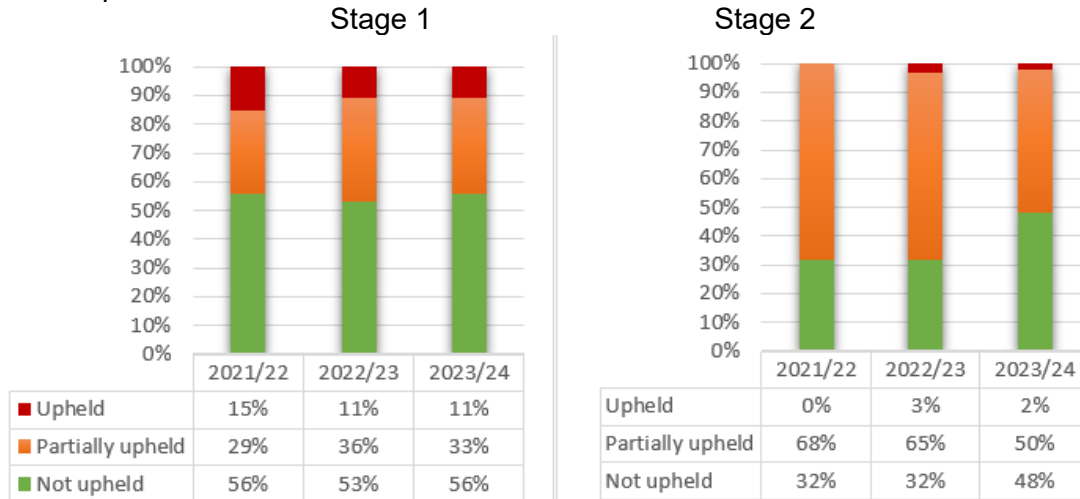
Complaints about homelessness and social housing allocations services

- 1.1 Barnet Homes provides homelessness and social housing allocations services on the behalf of the London Borough of Barnet. These fall under the remit of the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman. Reporting in line with the joint Complaint Handling Code on these complaints is not currently mandatory; however, as a point of good practice this report summarises Barnet Homes' performance and service improvement activities for 2023/24. The 2023/24 performance is intended to establish a baseline from which reporting will be further developed; this will be led by the London Borough of Barnet as the responsible organisation.
- 1.2 The Housing Options service is working in a particularly challenging environment, with high demand and a shortage in supply of both temporary accommodation and social housing in the borough. Between 2022/23 and 2023/24, the average number of approaches per month increased from 307 to 474 (+54%), the average number of households placed in nightly booked temporary accommodation increased from 262 to 421 (+61%), and the number of households placed in temporary accommodation outside the borough increased from 726 to 959 (+32%).
- 1.3 Acknowledging this context, there has been a steady increase in complaints at both Stage 1 and Stage 2 over the past three years as demand has risen, with a 15.9% increase in Stage 1 complaints between 2022/23 and 2023/24. The service maintained strong performance against the timescales in the Complaint Handling Code at Stage 2. At Stage 1 performance in 2023/24 was below the desired level; however, it is acknowledged that target timescales are not an absolute marker of success nor of quality. The drivers of performance are likely to be a combination of:
- increase in the number of complaints received impacting upon capacity;
 - the nature of the complaints is complex;
 - there has been a continued focus on the quality of response and appropriate resolution, rather than the time taken to complete the response.

Complaints Performance:



Complaints Outcomes:



1.4 The majority of Housing Options complaints had a primary theme of Customer Care, with Policy and Service Failure being the next most common primary themes. Most complaints highlighted dissatisfaction with communications (including a lack of communication or delay in communication), timeliness in progressing cases and issuing decisions, and policy decisions. There were also a number of complaints about the suitability of temporary accommodation.

1.5 No complaints were refused during 2023/24.

2. Lessons learned and service improvements

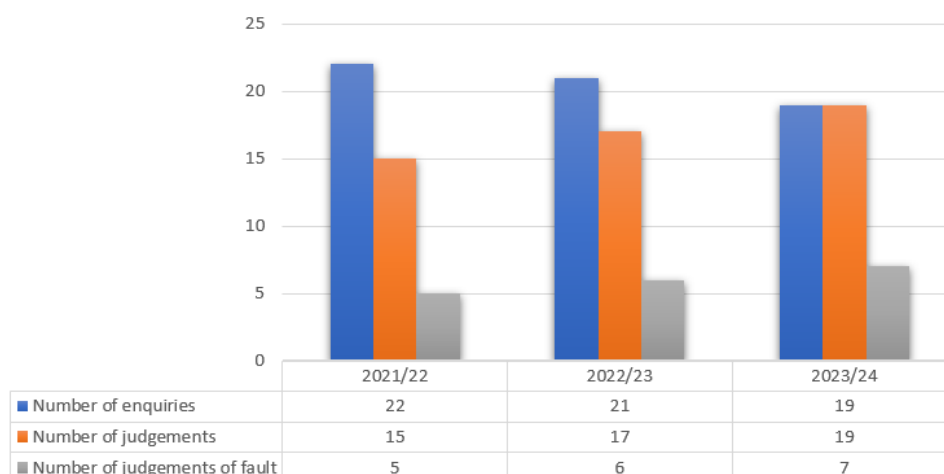
2.1 To improve communication and reduce delays in assessing cases and to improve communication regarding housing options and suitability of accommodation, actions taken by the service included the following:

1. Developed key messages to tell customers how we will work with them.
2. Improved online advice through the website where customers can find useful information on various housing aspects.
3. Reinstated the Homelessness Residents Forum where we meet with partner agencies. This is intended to improve joint working and increase awareness of partners regarding the challenges in homelessness services to help better manage expectations and to strengthen the approach to upstreaming prevention work.
4. Streamlined the application process by merging the Customer Ready and Triage teams to prevent hand-offs from customers and to reduce the waiting time for appointments.

3. Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman cases

3.1 The chart below summarises Local Government and Social Care (LGSCO) cases during 2023/24 based on internal data, in the absence of the LGSCO's performance reports for this period.

Barnet Homes LGSCO cases and determinations 2023/24:



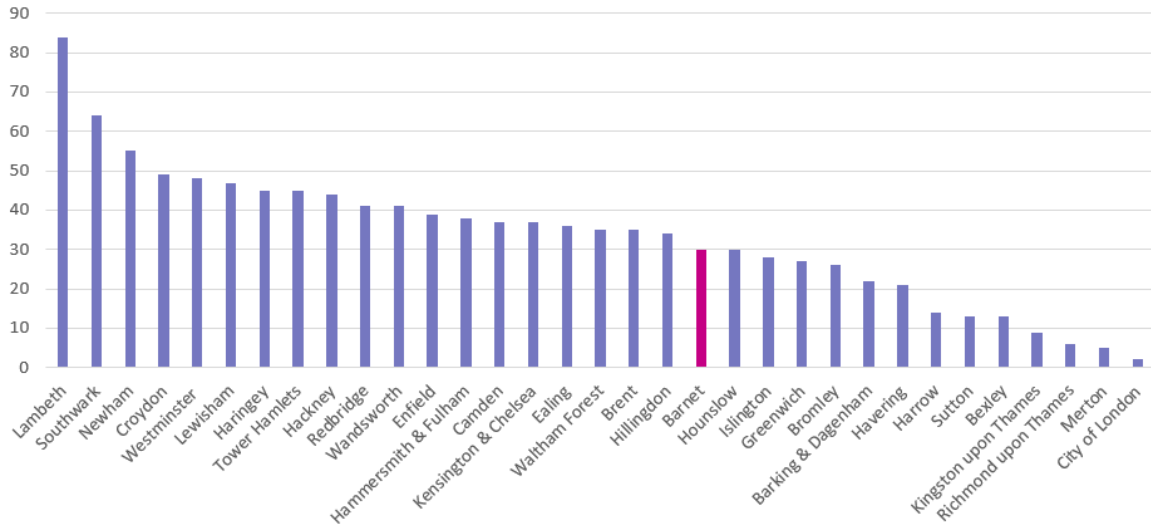
- 3.2 The number of complaints to the LGSCO about Barnet Homes (LBB) has been broadly consistent in recent years. Most cases where there was an element of fault identified concerned delays in progressing the homelessness application or residents found to be living in unsuitable accommodation for extended periods of time.
- 3.3 We expect to see the LGSCO's performance reports later in the year that will give an indication of how Barnet Homes' performance compares to that of other local authorities.

LGSCO performance 2022/23

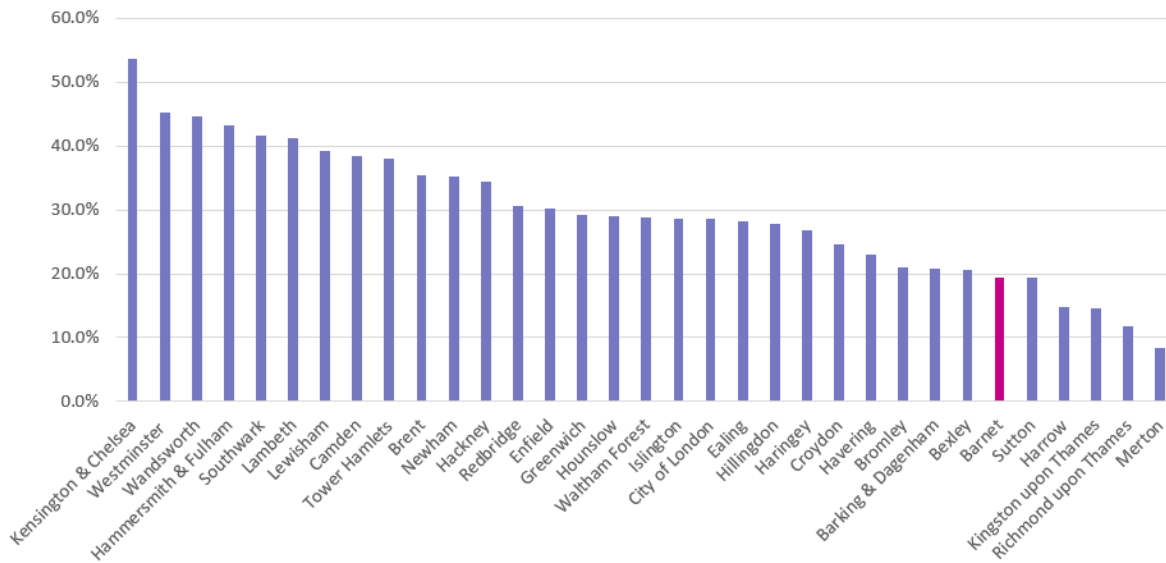
- 3.4 The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's (LGSCO) performance reports for 2023/24 are not available at the time of writing this report. This section of the report therefore covers the year 2022/23 (1 April 2022 – 31 March 2023). This information is taken from the LGSCO's performance reports (www.lgo.org.uk/your-councils-performance and www.lgo.org.uk/information-centre/reports/annual-review-reports/local-government-complaint-reviews). The number of complaints and enquiries received that the LGSCO publishes is different to the internal data held by Barnet Homes as the LGSCO does not investigate all complaints / enquiries that it receives.
- 3.5 The LGSCO received fewer complaints nationally in 2022/23 (15,488 compared to 15,826 in the previous year), and it upheld a higher proportion of complaints than in previous years. 78% of housing complaints were upheld nationally, second only to Education and Children's Services and Benefits and Tax. Housing became the third most complained about service nationally, up from fourth in 2021/22.
- 3.6 Barnet Council received 13 fewer complaints than the previous year but received two more housing complaints. With 30 complaints received, housing remained the second most complained about council service in Barnet (19.5% of all complaints about Barnet Council), behind Benefits and Tax (49 complaints).
- 3.7 The comparison to other local authorities on complaints and enquiries received is favourable. Despite Barnet receiving the sixth highest total number of complaints in London, Barnet received fewer housing complaints than 19 other boroughs (one more than in 2021/22), and housing represented a lower percentage of Barnet's complaints than 27 other boroughs (one more than in 2021/22). No public reports

were issued about Barnet housing complaints, and the LGSCO was satisfied that its recommendations were successfully implemented in 100% of cases.

Number of LGSCO housing complaints received:

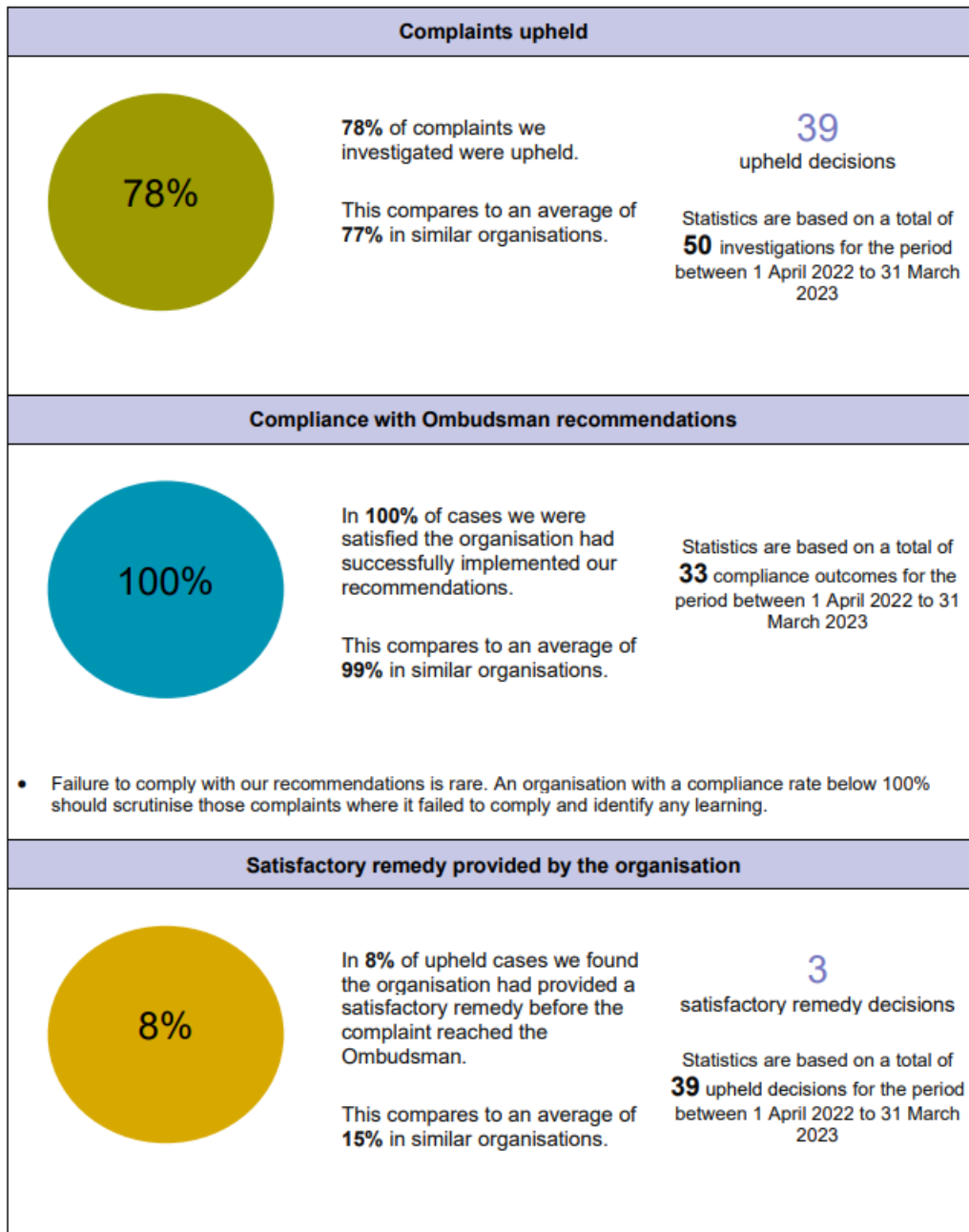


% of local authority complaints received about housing services:



3.8 The LGSCO’s annual letter about the organisation’s performance for 2022/23 covers all complaints made to the LGSCO about the London Borough of Barnet, including those concerning the relevant services managed by Barnet Homes. It is not possible to identify only the Barnet Homes complaints from the information in the letter. Key performance information is provided below:

London Borough of Barnet
For the period ending: 31/03/23



4. Complaint Handling Code

4.1 For the purposes of the LGSCO, the Complaint Handling Code provides good administrative practice guidance. The London Borough of Barnet is presently reviewing its corporate approach to complaint handling in line with the Code. In future, Barnet Homes will engage with the council to support its reporting on complaints that are in scope of the LGSCO. In the meantime, Barnet Homes is

independently following the requirements of the Code and has completed a self-assessment against the LGSCO's Complaint Handling Code. It is reviewed by the Barnet Homes Board.

- 4.2 The self-assessment is included on the complaints page of our website at www.barnethomes.org/complaints. Full compliance with the Code has not been identified with respect to requirement 9.5 regarding the Member Responsible for Complaints (MRC), as this role will need to be managed by the council. This affects compliance with requirements 9.6 and 9.7 on reporting to the MRC; however, Barnet Homes has taken the view that these requirements are being fulfilled by its board in the absence of a confirmed approach within the council.