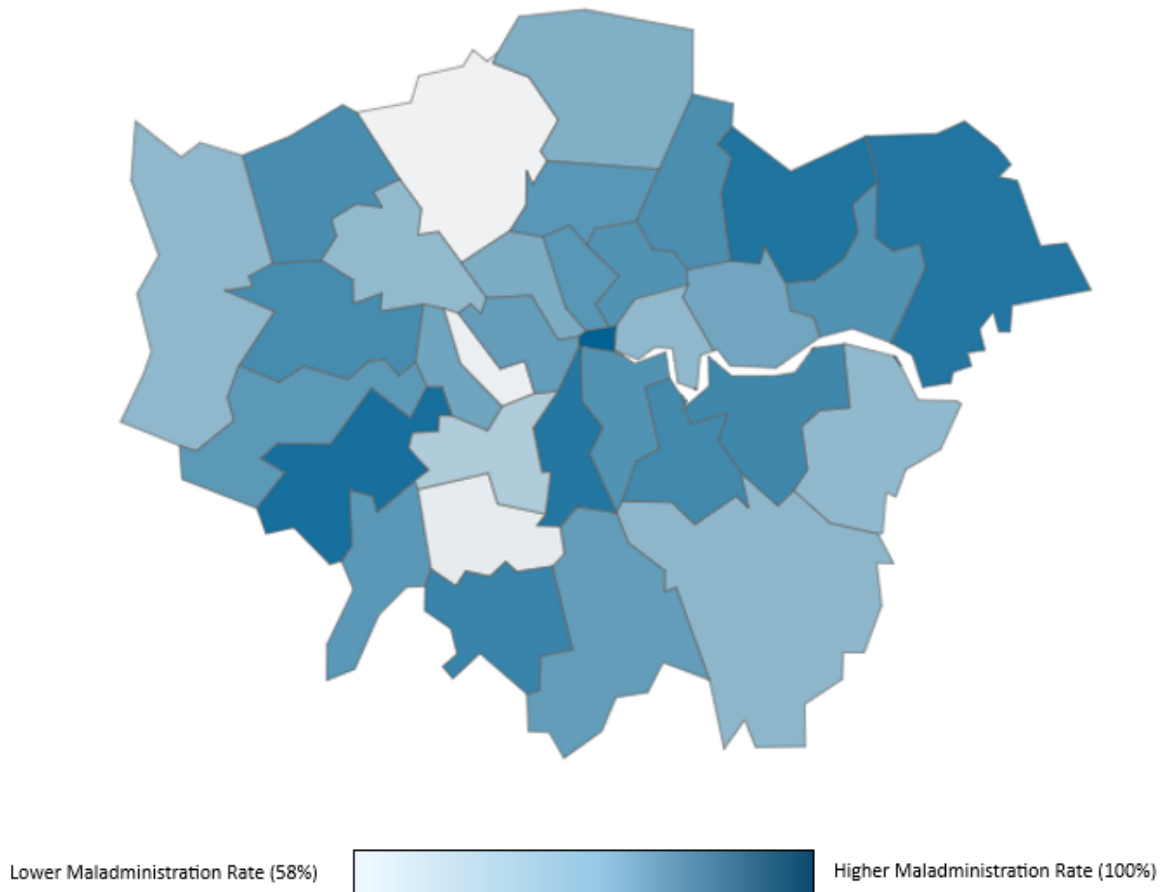


Insight report

Insight on data and individual cases relating to London



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Introduction

Welcome to our latest Insight report covering complaints data, individual cases, and wider learning points from our work within Greater London.

In 2023-24, 47%¹ of the cases we determined were from residents living in a London postcode.

This is not a recent phenomenon – about one in two² of the cases we determine have been referred by residents living in the capital for at least 3 years. This rate is disproportionate, given just under one in six homes³ in our membership are located within Greater London. No other region of England has such a wide gap between the proportion of social housing and complaints. This is despite the rate of non-decent homes being lower in the capital compared to the rest of the country.

This report asks: why?

Does it reflect the housing crisis, local landlord performance, or that residents living in the capital exercise their rights more than other parts of the country?

Although the issues complained about are broadly the same as the rest of the country, the operating environment for landlords in the capital is vastly different from most other areas. This can present unique and acute challenges.

The housing crisis is intense in London – with under resourcing and pressures that are outside of landlords' control. These challenges and the impact it has on individuals is clear and evident in our casework.

¹ All data used within this report is for 2023-24 but is not yet verified and may be subject to change prior to official publication.

² 45% in 2021-22 and in 2022-23

³ 17.9% of rental and shared ownership homes are in London. Leasehold information by local authority is not reported.

However, there are still too many cases where residents have not been treated fairly, or basic obligations reasonably met. Our severe maladministration rate is 9.3% in London, compared with 7.4% for the rest of the country. The maladministration rate is 77% compared to 68.5% for the rest of the country and the failure rate on property condition, including repairs and health and safety, is the highest in the country.

This is despite a greater proportion of homes in the capital meeting the Decent Homes Standard and fewer hazards being reported. This raises questions about the robustness of the Decent Homes Standard, which is outdated and needs a comprehensive revision. But it also indicates how other factors in the built environment, such as higher densities and fragmented ownership (and therefore accountabilities), together with the operational complexity this can afford, can contribute to higher maladministration rates.

Regardless, landlords must ensure they are equipped to respond to these operational complexities and neither allow them to obscure poor performance nor be overwhelmed by them. Our casework reveals how poor communication and record management can compound existing challenges. It also indicates some poor resource planning, risk assessment and service oversight.

The Ombudsman meets regularly with landlords and policymakers in the capital to ensure it understands the operating environment but can also feedback on the trends from our casework. This includes a recent meeting of the All Party Parliamentary Group for London, including London Councils, the National Housing Federation and the G15, to discuss the challenges residents and landlords face, as well as the implementation of the Social Housing Regulation Act. Our findings shine a light on how housing management services should be provided in the capital to be successful. How London landlords rise to these challenges will affect the lives of millions of tenants, shared owners and leaseholders.

There is a role for the new national government as well and we have been clear that more resource is needed to tackle some of the reoccurring problems we are seeing in our casework. Levels of disrepair will be hard to tackle and reduce if there is not a long-term plan and more investment coming into landlords to deal with the issues.

The pressing need to maintain existing social homes has also to be balanced with the acute need to build more social homes.

And what more can landlords themselves do? Throughout this report, we will focus on some of the key themes and provide recommendations. Landlords will also be able to access free Centre for Learning resources based on that learning, including e-learning, podcasts, expectations and much more. Outside Greater London, other landlords should also take note of these recommendations and learning points, especially in other urban areas, as they provide vital indicators of where things go wrong and how to stop that from happening.

Promoting learning is a core part of the Ombudsman's mission but it also requires landlords to engage with that learning to drive better outcomes for residents. We hope you find this report useful and are able to share it with others to improve services and residents' lives.

Richard Blakeway
Housing Ombudsman

The London context

[English Housing Survey 2022 to 2023 Headline Report](#)

Published December 2023

When compared with the other English regions, London has a different tenure profile. Renting is more prevalent and outright ownership is less prevalent in London than in the rest of England. In 2022-23, 21% of London households were social renters, compared to 16% in the rest of England.

There are similar proportions of households renting from housing association in London (11%) compared to the rest of England (10%). However, the proportion of households in London (10%) renting from a local authority was much higher than the proportion in the rest of England (6%).

[Housing, England, and Wales: Census 2021](#)

Published 5 January 2023

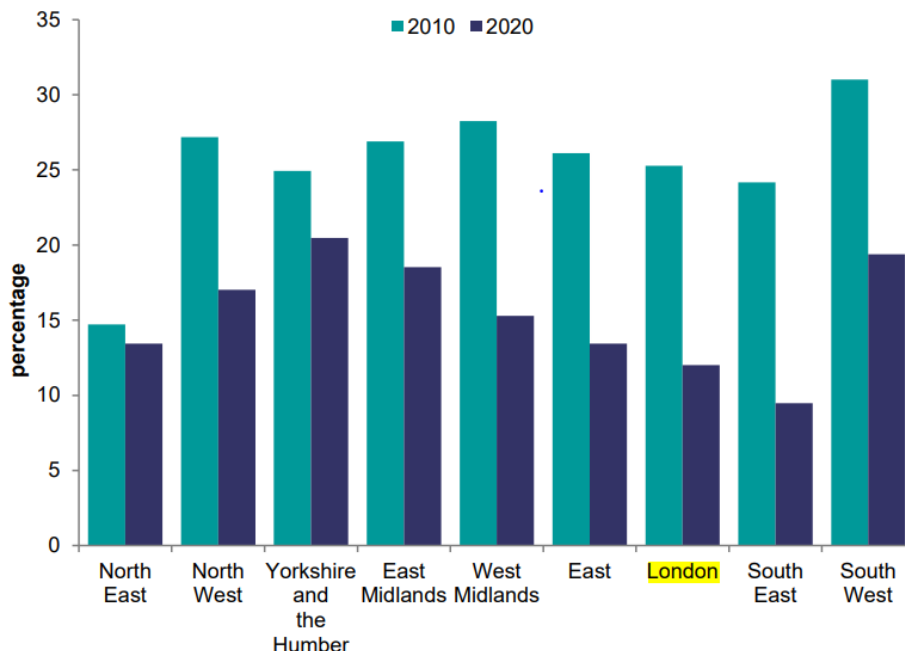
The proportion of different accommodation types is relatively similar across both England and Wales. The biggest exception is London; more than half of the households in London lived in a flat, maisonette or apartment (54.0%, 1.8 million).

This is considerably higher than all other English regions (varying from 21.6% in the South East to 11.4% in the East Midlands). This accommodation type makes up 74.3% of socially rented accommodation in London.

[English Housing Survey: Housing quality and condition 2020 \(PDF\)](#)

Published March 2024

Figure 1.1: Proportion of occupied non-decent homes, by region, 2010 and 2020



Base: all occupied dwellings

Note: underlying data are presented in Annex Table 1.1

Source: English Housing Survey, dwelling sample

The main regional variations by dwelling age relate to older homes built before 1945, and especially those built before 1919. In 2020, the proportion of non-decent pre 1919 built homes ranged from 17% in London to 44% in the East Midlands. Non-decency among pre 1919 built homes was generally lower in London and the South East. London also had a lower proportion of non-decent homes built between 1919 and 1944 dwellings than in most other regions (9% compared with 19% to 28% in the other regions).

Overall, despite having a high proportion of older homes, in 2020 non-decency was less prevalent in this region than in many regions.

London was generally less likely to have homes with Category 1 hazards than most other regions (except the South East and the North East).

Local authorities with higher proportions of dwellings built before 1919 tend to have higher proportions of occupied dwellings that fail the Decent Homes Standard.

[GLA Housing and Land: Housing Research Note 11 - The Cost of Poor Housing in London \(PDF\)](#)

Published November 2023

According to Council Tax data, 21% of homes in London were built before 1900, the highest proportion of any region and compared to 15% across England as a whole. London's social rented homes are more likely to contain hazards than the English average (6.2% compared to 5.5%).

Key data

In 2023-24, the maladministration rate across the capital varied significantly by postcode, ranging from a maladministration rate of 87.2%⁴ for people living in Richmond upon Thames to 58.5% in Barnet.

It is important to note that these statistics are by local authority area – the landlord may not have been the local authority, but one of the many housing associations and other social housing providers that operate in London.

⁴ There were only 2 findings made for City of London in 2023-24 – both were determined as maladministration.

Local authority area	Number of findings	% Mal rate	#Determinations per 10,000
Barking and Dagenham	74	79.7%	13.3
Barnet	106	58.5%	21.6
Bexley	71	71.8%	20.5
Brent	201	71.6%	29.6
Bromley	166	72.3%	29.9
Camden	223	74.4%	24.5
City of London	2	100.0%	4.8
Croydon	165	77.6%	24.5
Ealing	170	81.2%	25.6
Enfield	111	73.9%	22.1
Greenwich	167	82.0%	19.3
Hackney	360	79.7%	31.0
Hammersmith and Fulham	279	76.0%	42.9
Haringey	231	78.8%	33.7
Harrow	42	81.0%	19.5
Havering	56	85.7%	14.5
Hillingdon	57	71.9%	14.4
Hounslow	79	78.5%	12.5
Islington	347	79.0%	29.9
Kensington and Chelsea	174	60.3%	36.3
Kingston upon Thames	28	78.6%	13.2
Lambeth	428	85.5%	36.2
Lewisham	236	81.8%	25.3
Merton	98	61.2%	30.1
Newham	189	75.7%	22.8
Redbridge	108	86.1%	38.4
Richmond upon Thames	86	87.2%	35.8
Southwark	320	79.7%	25.0
Sutton	64	82.8%	20.0
Tower Hamlets	292	71.9%	28.3
Waltham Forest	135	80.7%	22.8
Wandsworth	181	68.0%	24.0
Westminster	236	77.5%	38.5

When broken down by housing type, the London region has the highest maladministration rate for both housing associations (74%) and local authorities (82%).

If broken down by size, it is only landlords with fewer than 1,000 homes in the northwest that have a higher maladministration rate than London (83% compared to 75% for London) – landlords in London with 1,000 to 10,000 homes (79%) and more than 10,000 homes (77%) have the highest maladministration rate in the country.

Lessons from recent investigations

The overriding theme from our recent investigations of London cases is quality – but not just quality of homes, the quality of customer service when dealing with a quality issue with the home is also driving complaints.

Quality of the homes

The quality of homes in social housing has been in the spotlight for years, with property condition consistently being our most complained about issue. In 2023-24 we made over 2,000 findings for property condition issues in the London region, with a maladministration rate of 78%, the highest rate in the country. The maladministration rate for health and safety complaints, which include building safety, is similarly high at 74% and also the highest rate in the country.

While acknowledging that London homes do have a different profile to the rest of the country, the relative proportion that is classed as non-decent is lower than the rest of the country – therefore, it cannot be said that the quality issues we see are driven solely by the materials and age of the homes.

Building safety

The rate at which fire safety and structural safety complaints are made from London residents is high – 54 of the 101 fire safety complaints, and 12 of the 31 structural safety complaints we assessed in 2023-24 came from London. This is likely to be reflective of the number of taller buildings in London.

The Ombudsman understands the complex operating environment that landlords are working under within the building safety space, with new regulations coming in and guidance being developed while long-standing issues remain ongoing.

In case **202107310**, relating to a request for an External Wall Systems (EWS1) form on a shared ownership property, **Newlon Housing Trust** took reasonable steps to communicate its short-term plans to test the cladding, but it then failed to provide timely updates to the resident regarding the fire engineer's report, the timescale for producing the EWS1, and information about the future remedial works. We made a finding of maladministration by the landlord for its communication regarding the cladding on the building. There was no maladministration by the landlord in its response to the resident's request for an EWS1 form – the landlord's decision not to produce an EWS1 form was in line with the RICS (Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors) guidance and the instructions on the form itself. Following the change in the RICS guidance effective from 5 April 2021, the landlord reviewed its position and stated that it would produce an EWS1.

In case **202122079** there was service failure in the landlord's handling of the resident's concerns about fire safety, including how it processed the EWS1 form. **Tower Hamlets Council** failed to proactively communicate its long-term fire safety plans with the resident. Although the landlord was in regular communication with its fire safety consultants, it gave the resident an unrealistic timescale for when he could expect the EWS1, providing the form approximately 5 months later than it advised it would, and failed to communicate when, following remedial works, the resident could expect the revised version.

In our 2021 **Spotlight report on cladding**, poor communication was a key driver of dissatisfaction and often led to detriment for the resident.

Where landlords respond reasonably, we have found no maladministration, as in a case with **London & Quadrant** (202204339). The landlord was effective in its response to a fire door query, arranging for a fire safety manager to speak to the resident and for different contractors to assess the door on more than one occasion.

It was reasonable that the landlord relied on the advice of the contractors that the door met the required specification and that it subsequently took no action to change the door.

District heating

District heating or heat network complaints are almost exclusively a London issue – 12 of the 17 complaints we handled in 2023-24 were from the London region. The cost-of-living crisis and the insecurity around energy prices have impacted this particular method of heating. These can be hard for landlords to manage, and the next 2 cases provide vital learning.

In a case involving **Southern Housing (202017061)**, we found severe maladministration after problems with the communal heating system left a resident without the use of his bedroom. The system was contracted to an external managing agent, but the landlord was not proactive enough on behalf of the resident to seek confirmation that the repairs were done, especially since it knew about the personal impact it was having.

In case **202015004** involving **Southwark Council** there were 14 separate contractor visits, over 2 years, to try and repair a broken heating system, which left a resident without any heating for all of that time. The resident had to chase for responses on multiple occasions and waited in several times for appointments that were subsequently missed. Temporary heating measures were also not put in place for too long after the initial reporting of the issue.

In case **202218055** involving **One Housing**, although the length of time taken to repair the communal heating system was distressing to the resident, the landlord's communication was frequent and demonstrated that it was treating the issue as a priority. It outlined anticipated dates of repair, accurately reflected the situation, and invited residents to get in touch if they required assistance. The landlord made an offer of compensation prior to the Ombudsman's involvement. The Ombudsman considered the landlord's response as reasonable redress.

In case **202006629** involving **Ekarro Housing Co-operative Limited**, the resident complained about service charges relating to the district heating system. The landlord is a very small landlord formed by members who are its residents, with a Management Committee (MC), and a Sub-Committee (SC) for financial and maintenance matters. The landlord responded to the resident’s concerns and allowed them to provide reports and suggestions to the SC, which was the correct process to follow. The SC considered the matter and voted to retain its current method for calculating the charges, which it was entitled to do. As the landlord followed its governance process, the Ombudsman found there was no maladministration in the landlord’s handling of this part of the resident’s complaint.

Given the growing focus on carbon reduction, it is vital landlords consider the sustainability of new energy infrastructure, given that district heating was once a groundbreaking method to provide energy. This is an area we have explored more in our **Spotlight report on heating, hot water and energy**.

Shared owners and leaseholders

Although this a nationwide issue, leasehold and shared ownership complaints are particularly acute in the capital, where we have handled significantly more cases in London.

Region	Tenure	
	Leaseholder	Shared Ownership
London	369	171
South East	58	87
East of England	52	28
Midlands	44	43
North West	30	13
South West	28	21
North East and Yorkshire	15	13

During our Meet the Ombudsman sessions, we regularly hear from London residents that they are struggling with leasehold issues.

In a case involving **Notting Hill Genesis** (202119328), the resident reported sewage gases affecting the property which the landlord incorrectly attributed to the resident's internal plumbing. This was despite the issue being identified in the roof space, which was not part of the resident's property under the lease. In its final response, the landlord acknowledged its approach and actions caused delay in diagnosing and fixing the issue, 7 months from the time the resident first notified the landlord. It apologised and accepted the matter had put a strain on the landlord/resident relationship. There was maladministration in the landlord's handling of the resident's reports of sewage gases affecting their property. Landlords need to be clear on the interpretation of details in its lease, so they can provide residents with the right information first time around.

Anti-social behaviour and noise

Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) is consistently in our top 3 most complained about issues. London has the highest maladministration rate for ASB complaints at 73%. Where we have found service failure, it is often around communication and a lack of perceived action.

Although it is not always possible to progress cases swiftly, nevertheless we found maladministration for **Lewisham Council** (202128403) for leaving an ASB case open for over 18 months. Throughout that period, it did not communicate consistently or effectively with the resident. This included not acting on promises to update her, particularly after the stage 2 complaint response. This led to her becoming frustrated and uncertain about what would happen next, with still no conclusion to the case after the final stage response. The landlord also did not take into account the vulnerabilities present within the household and did not carry out any risk assessment to provide it with intelligence about how to mitigate any specific risks.

In case 202007679 involving **Tower Hamlets Homes**, we ordered over £4,000 in compensation to a resident for a prolonged noise transference case. The landlord initially worked proactively to make sure that any disruption, caused by ongoing works in a neighbouring home, was reduced, but it did not consult her to get an idea

of the specific potential impact for her. It continued to receive reports about noise transference after the building works were finished, but provided no evidence that it conducted further investigations.

In contrast, the Ombudsman found no maladministration by the **London Borough of Barking and Dagenham** in its handling of the resident's reports of noise nuisance from a neighbour. In case **202208581**, the landlord had conducted a thorough investigation which was in line with its ASB policy. The landlord took numerous steps when investigating the reports which included; discussing the reported noise nuisance with the resident, a joint visit with the ASB team and environmental enforcement team, conducting a risk assessment and ASB action plan with the resident, completing enquiries with the police, advising the resident to contact her GP and offered a referral for her escalating anxiety, as well as installing noise monitoring equipment in the resident's property.

Decanting

With social housing being a finite resource across the country, decanting or moving residents successfully can be a huge challenge. With the acute housing shortage that London faces, this can sometimes be even harder and means families moving away from schools or nurseries, or households being moved away from work or support networks.

However, there are aspects of a decant that the Ombudsman would expect landlords to be more effective, including responding and communicating. In a case involving **Clarion (202110733)**, the landlord only responded to the request for a decant after 10 months. It would have been appropriate for the landlord to have responded much sooner to explain the decant policy and whether this was an option.

In a **Southern Housing** case (**202116184**) we found maladministration after the landlord failed to follow the correct policies following reports of overcrowding. There was no evidence that it carried out an inspection to assess the issue and when it received the resident's application form for a move, it rejected it instantly on incorrect

grounds. This left the resident and family in unsuitable housing, with the landlord taking a dismissive attitude.

In case **202215195**, the **Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea** handled the resident's decant well and no maladministration was found. The landlord took into consideration the resident's primary concern – that access to the property needed to be sufficient for her husband's medical condition – and went beyond what could reasonably be expected by offering the resident 7 different properties. Its communication with the resident about the pending decant was consistent and clear. The landlord acted with empathy and understanding throughout its handling of the decant and demonstrated a willingness to put matters right.

In case **202116245**, **Tower Hamlets Community Housing** acknowledged it could have improved the communication at the end of the decant to a hotel in order to complete repairs. The landlord accepted it could have shown greater flexibility around the resident returning to their property in light of his child's health. It offered £700 compensation for these failings which, in the Ombudsman's opinion, reasonably resolved the complaint about its handling of decanting the resident's family during works.

Quality of the customer service

While accepting that London has particular complications when it comes to the nature and age of its housing, that is only a part of the picture that we see in complaints – if the subsequent customer service when complaints were raised were reasonable, the Ombudsman would uphold fewer cases. This section will look at determinations and recommendations that we have made around reasonable adjustments, vulnerabilities policies, knowledge and information management, and communication. With social landlords providing homes for more people with vulnerabilities than ever before, it is imperative that they get to grips with these issues.

The Ombudsman's **Complaint Handling Code** is now statutory and compliance will be proactively monitored. Throughout its cases and special investigation reports, the Ombudsman sees a wide range of issues with the handling of complaints and how often these only further damage the resident and landlord relationship.

In 2023-24, over 66% of the Complaint Handling Failure Orders, which are made for non-compliance with the Code, were issued for complaints raised by residents living in London.

In case **202106332**, we found maladministration for **Sanctuary Housing** after it failed to implement the necessary reasonable adjustments for a resident. The resident had asked not to be called without prior warning and it took the landlord 2 years to put an alert on its system to stop that from happening. Even after the alert was put onto the system, the resident still experienced a call without being emailed first.

In a case involving **Notting Hill Genesis (202200857)** we found maladministration for the landlord's knowledge and information management after its record keeping impacted the quality of the service the resident received and the landlord subsequently failed to provide the Ombudsman with information such as call logs, visit notes, and the resident's original complaint. The Ombudsman recommended a central housing data system to achieve efficient record keeping and ensure that staff absence did not impact the landlord's knowledge.

Another case in which record keeping hampered an investigation was where **Origin Housing (202121339)** was unable to share copies of inspection reports, repairs records, or some of the landlord's responses to emails.

In contrast, **Richmond Housing Partnership Limited** went beyond what it was contractually obliged to do when responding to a resident's concerns about a lack of parking space in case **202126432**. There was no parking included in the resident's lease, but it was clear that this was important for the resident. The landlord continued to look at other options, including a temporary offer on other spaces held in nearby

properties, and seeing if it was able to purchase any more car parking spaces in the block from the freeholder.

It also contacted the borough council on behalf of the resident to try and obtain a parking space and/or permit as well as enquiring as to whether the resident could qualify for a blue badge. The Ombudsman found no maladministration in the landlord's handling of the lack of a designated parking space.

A closer look

The Ombudsman can investigate beyond individual complaints when there is an indication there may be underlying issues causing a pattern of service failure. Over the past 3 years, we have published 7 special investigations into landlords with housing in London. These investigations have also brought issues of quality of homes and quality of customer service to the fore. In every case, the landlord has engaged positively with the Ombudsman and been proactive in response to our recommendations. The individual reports provide more information about the actions each landlord is taking to improve services.

Handling repairs

In a recommendation in our **[special investigation into Haringey Council \(PDF\)](#)**, we said the landlord should establish a policy for leaseholder complaints that included a defined process for leaseholder repairs, information and advice about the landlord's responsibilities upon purchasing the property, and recognition that an insurance claim does not restrict a resident's ability to access a landlord's formal complaints procedure.

We recommended in **[Hammersmith and Fulham's report \(PDF\)](#)** the creation of a knowledge and information management framework for all stages of the repairs process, both for the landlord and contractors and to put in place formal procedures for proactive managerial oversight of record keeping. We also recommended they create a clear process within its repairs policy for how repair appointments will be managed.

Similarly, in our **special investigation report into Islington Council (PDF)**, we recommended the landlord improve its oversight of repairs which involve either third party contractors or managing agents as a way of improving services – enabling and empowering services to work together effectively, both internally and also with external agencies. This accountability would enable the landlord to probe the contractor on where things may not be going as well and how that can be improved.

When looking at the landlord's repairs policy itself, we were clear that it should contain a clear escalation pathway if repairs are delayed beyond agreed or expected dates – one of the drivers of complaints in repairs is delays. This can often be combatted with effective processes and clear communication with residents after this.

Another key area of complaint within repairs, and something we highlighted in our **Spotlight report on Knowledge and Information Management (KIM)**, was the huge amount of time wasted and resident frustration around missed appointments. Often financial detriment occurs when appointments are missed, with complaints coming to us of residents having to either miss multiple shifts or stay off work only for operatives to never arrive.

One of the recommendations we made to **Islington Council (PDF)** to help deal with this was to carry out comprehensive research into the reasons for futile appointments and create an action plan to reduce the number. Measuring this is often a robust way of ensuring that landlords can reduce this number and improve services for residents. In our **report into Clarion (PDF)**, we felt its policy and practice around when it was unable to gain access should be published.

In our **report into Islington Council (PDF)**, we recommended the landlord include in its damp and mould procedure an early risk-assessment that specifically factors in any vulnerabilities, as a way of combating some of the problems they were facing. We also recommended that the landlord trains its staff and contractors on how to

communicate clearly and appropriately with residents about who will do what, why, and when.

Responding to individual circumstances

This links with our **Spotlight report on attitudes, respect and rights** in which we found that landlords were not taking into account vulnerabilities and adjustments when key repairs or works were taking place. Our report found that 68% of residents say their landlord had not made any reasonable adjustments, despite being asked to. From this, we recommended that landlords implement a specific reasonable adjustments policy and test this against the '3Rs' on vulnerable residents:

- recognise
- respond
- record

For **Haringey Council (PDF)**, we recommended the landlord produce a vulnerability and safeguarding procedures for housing management and staff guidance, as well as training for those housing management staff to implement the policy successfully. We further recommended that it make adherence to the vulnerability and safeguarding policies, procedures, and standards part of the service level agreement with third parties and the landlord's housing management function.

In our **special investigation report into Clarion (PDF)**, we recommended the landlord ensures it has effective systems for identifying and recording residents' vulnerabilities and making any reasonable adjustments to meet their needs. If there was, we recommended staff training in this area to help deliver this in practice and for residents to benefit from these systems.

We made several recommendations around quality of customer service during our **special investigation report into London & Quadrant (PDF)**. We recommended reviewing its recruitment process and job descriptions for all front-facing staff to assure itself that customer focus and the landlord's stated values form the backbone.

From here, we recommended training on empathetic resident communication to all staff that deal with residents and to evaluate that training thereafter.

We also recommended the landlord implemented feedback mechanisms for possible disciplinary action where courtesy and respect is found to be at fault. These measures look at how a landlord can ensure it gets this right all the way from recruitment through to practice, holding itself and staff to account.

Resourcing complaints

In our **inspection report into Lambeth Council (PDF)**, which focused on complaint handling, frontline staff we interviewed told us about the resourcing issues they faced and we recommended the landlord carry out forecasting modelling to determine optimum complaint staffing levels to respond within the timescales and quality set out in the Code. We know this is a similar picture across the sector.

We also recommended that Lambeth Council include complaint handling performance in its contractor management arrangements, including as KPIs as contract renewal cycles allow. This would allow the landlord to hold its contractors to account, as well as tracking how the contract was working for residents.

In **Islington Council's report (PDF)**, we recommended the landlord 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.

This was followed up in our **Hammersmith and Fulham Council report (PDF)** in which we recommended that the landlord's terms of reference for complaint handlers be shared with the entire staff to ensure access to appropriate and relevant records when responding to complaints.

Knowledge and information management

Knowledge and information management is so pivotal to delivering good landlord services that the Housing Ombudsman described it as ‘the closest thing the sector could get to a silver bullet’ in our **Spotlight report on Knowledge and Information Management (KIM)**.

We also found several areas of learning around information analysis for the landlords involved in our special investigation reports. For **Lambeth’s inspection report (PDF)**, **Hammersmith and Fulham Council’s special investigation report (PDF)** and **Catalyst Housing’s (now Peabody) special investigation report (PDF)** we made recommendations around how the landlord learns from complaints, analyses what is coming into them and ensures improvements to services are made.

In **Islington Council’s special investigation report (PDF)**, we recommended they take a SMART approach to improvement measures, with regular oversight from senior staff. This was coupled with a recommendation we made in the **London & Quadrant special investigation report (PDF)**, in which we said the landlord should review the assurance section of policies to ensure the assurances can be measured and reported.

Key learning for the sector

- A positive complaints culture starts from the top – it is crucial that leadership and governance are seen to support the complaints’ function, including promoting internal cooperation and engagement with the complaints process.
- We acknowledge that some issues for landlords can be outside its control to fully rectify, but there are always steps that a landlord can take to ameliorate the impact on the resident. It is important a landlord does not lose sight of the person at the centre of a protracted issue, does not blame them for the situation, and there is a continuous assessment of whether the remedial actions taken remain appropriate or whether a decant is now necessary. We expect a landlord to act on behalf of its residents when dealing with a quality

issue requiring response from other organisations and agencies. Landlords need to be clear on their role and responsibilities and proactive working with third parties, with robust service agreements in place.

- Good customer service is founded on demonstrating that the resident's experience is important to a landlord –that includes ensuring that details are taken and recorded appropriately so that resident feels listened to, the right solution is found to resolve the issue swiftly and the communication to the resident is courteous and accurate.
- Complaint handling is a landlord's opportunity to regain a resident's trust after they have had a bad experience. It is far more than just ascertaining what the service failure is and rectifying that situation. It is vital complaint handling also focuses on rebuilding relationships between resident and landlord.
- Insight and intelligence from complaints should be used strategically by landlords. This ranges from effective root cause analysis of casework through to identifying risks and horizon scanning.

Further reading

- **Spotlight report on attitudes, respect, and rights**
- **Spotlight report on knowledge and information management**
- **Spotlight report on damp and mould**

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