

Report for: Cabinet – 16th July 2024

Title: Haringey Feedback Policy

Report authorised by : Jess Crowe, Director of Culture, Strategy and Engagement

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Ward(s) affected: All

**Report for Key/
Non Key Decision:** Key

1. Describe the issue under consideration.

1.1 This report introduces the revised Haringey Feedback Policy, that replaces both the previous Corporate Feedback Policy and the Homes for Haringey (HfH) Complaints Policy.

1.2 The previous policies have been combined to provide the residents, users of services and businesses in Haringey with a single feedback policy, that outlines how complaints will be handled by the Council, in addition to compliments and suggestions.

1.3 The revised policy has been written to ensure that the Council's approach to complaints complies with the advisory complaints handling guidance of the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman, and the statutory Housing Ombudsman complaints handling code, both of which became effective from 1st April 2024.

1.4 Appendix one provides the revised policy in full.

2. Cabinet Member Introduction

2.1 This report introduces the Council's new approach to feedback and complaints and seeks to update our policy to align with national guidance.

2.2 We recognise the need to improve and strengthen our complaints handling process and want to make it easier for residents to give us their feedback. This is part of our Haringey Deal pledge to improve resident participation in the Council's decision-making.

2.3 The insourcing of Homes for Haringey highlighted a need for a consistent approach, and we are adopting this policy to bring our processes into line with the latest Ombudsman Complaint Handling Codes, introduced in April 2024.

2.4 This report sets out the improvements which are already in train, including the introduction of new systems to streamline processes whilst improving their quality and effectiveness.

2.5 Implementing a robust feedback policy is a crucial part of our resident experience programme. The measures outlined here will ensure we are accountable, transparent, and continuously improving our services, with our residents' voices and experiences at the heart of what we do.

3. Recommendations

3.1 That Cabinet approves the revised Haringey Feedback Policy at Appendix 1 to apply to all complaints received by the Council.

4. Reasons for decision

4.1 To clarify the Council's approach to complaints by adopting a single complaints policy following insourcing of HfH functions and to ensure compliance with the respective new Ombudsman Complaint Handling Codes.

5. Alternative options considered

5.1 No alternative options were considered. It was considered important for consistency to combine the two previous complaints policies following the return of Housing Service to Council control, and we were additionally obliged to ensure compliance with the Ombudsman Complaint Handling Codes.

6. Background information

6.1 When Homes for Haringey (HfH) was brought back into the Council, there was a need to review the Corporate Feedback Policy and the Homes for Haringey Complaints Policy, as these each both applied to complaints, however each took slightly differing approaches to the handling of complaints.

6.2 A short time after the Housing Service returned to the Council, the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman, and the Housing Ombudsman announced they would be developing refreshed complaint handling codes, that would be aligned to each other's code, to bring about a more standardised approach to complaint handling across all councils in England.

6.3 With these drivers, the policies were combined and reviewed, to develop the Haringey Feedback Policy, which applies to all complaints, suggestions and compliments received by the council - with the exception of any statutory complaints or those complaints that are dealt with under a separate court or tribunal appeals process.

6.4 As a council we have recognised that we need to improve our complaints handling performance and made commitments to do so as part of the Haringey Deal. This includes ensuring the swiftest possible resolution to complaints and to learning from the complaints that we receive. We have developed a series of actions to achieve this improvement which are underway. These take learning from councils with a strong track record based on Oflog metrics.

6.5 Our improvement plans include the development of a new case management system which will reduce manual processing of complaints and streamline data collection. Implementation of the new system will enable us to focus our resources on the quality and effectiveness of our complaints handling; and the completion of all follow up actions; rather than simply on the processing of complaints. In addition, we are working to build an organisational culture that welcomes feedback and is genuinely responsive to it as part of our wider organisational development.

6.6 Updates on this improvement programme will be provided to Cabinet and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee as part of the Annual Feedback Report due to be presented before the end of 2024.

7. Contribution to the Corporate Delivery Plan 2022-2024 High level Strategic outcomes?

7.1 Theme 1: Resident experience, collaboration and participation – Improved complaints handling processes.

8. Carbon and Climate Change

8.1 N/A

9. Statutory Officers comments (Director of Finance (procurement), Head of Legal and Governance, Equalities)

10. Finance

10.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. The Haringey Feedback Policy is managed by the Feedback and Resolutions 9.2 10.2 Team whose costs are funded by budgets sitting within both the General Fund and HRA. The costs of the new case management system are being funded as part of the Digital Change programme.

11. Procurement

11.1 There are no procurement implications arising from this report.

12. Assistant Director Legal & Governance

12.1 The Assistant Director Legal & Governance has been consulted in the drafting of this report and comments as follows.

12.2 The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman in February 2024 issued advisory guidance pursuant to s23(12A) of the Local Government Act 1974 for complaint handling in areas covered by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.

12.3 The Housing Ombudsman issued statutory guidance effective 1 April 2024 pursuant to s51ZA of the Housing Act 1996¹ for complaint handling by landlords in the social housing sector.

12.4 Both regulators intended their respective guidance to align.

12.5 The Feedback Policy at Appendix 1 complies with both sets of guidance.

12.6 There is no legal reason why Cabinet should not adopt the recommendations in this report.

13. Equality

13.1 The council has a Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) under the Equality Act (2010) to have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct prohibited under the Act
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share protected characteristics and people who do not

¹ Inserted by s41(3) of the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023

- Foster good relations between people who share those characteristics and people who do not

13.2 The three parts of the duty apply to the following protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy/maternity, race, religion/faith, sex and sexual orientation. Marriage and civil partnership status applies to the first part of the duty.

13.3 Although it is not enforced in legislation as a protected characteristic, Haringey Council treats socioeconomic status as a local protected characteristic.

13.4 This decision is to approve the revised Haringey Feedback Policy. This new policy combines the Corporate Feedback Policy and the Homes for Haringey Complaints Policy, as these each took slightly differing approaches to the handling of complaints. Further, it is now aligned with the complaints handling codes issued by the Housing Ombudsman and the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.

13.5 By combining the two policies, we can provide equity of complaint handling for all of our residents regardless of tenure. No contact channels have been removed, and the policy has been strengthened in relation to reasonable adjustments for complaint handling, therefore there is no adverse impacts on any protected groups. The decision is therefore anticipated to have a neutral impact those with protected characteristics.

14. Use of Appendices

14.1 Appendix 1: DRAFT Haringey Council Feedback Policy

14.2 Appendix 2

Appendix 1

Haringey Council Feedback Policy

July 2024

1. Introduction

- 1.1. Haringey Council is committed to providing excellent services to our residents, business owners and visitors. We understand that sometimes things can go wrong, and we welcome feedback to rectify mistakes, learn from them and improve our services.
- 1.2. This policy outlines our commitment to effectively handle complaints in line with the current Ombudsman guidance:
- 1.3. Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman complaints handling code.
- 1.4. Housing Ombudsman complaints handling code.
- 1.5. Additionally, this policy addresses how we will handle compliments and suggestions.

2. Scope

- 2.1. We encourage anyone that uses or is affected by our services to give us feedback. We also accept feedback from people acting on behalf of someone else with their consent, such as friends, representatives, or advocacy workers.

3. Definition of a service request

- 3.1. Haringey Council has adopted the Ombudsman's definition of a service request which is:

"a request that the organisation provides or improves a service, fixes a problem or reconsiders a decision".

4. Definition of complaint

- 4.1. Haringey Council has adopted the Ombudsman's definition of a complaint which is:

"An expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the organisation, its staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting an individual or group of individuals."

- 4.2. In this policy the term 'resident' denotes an individual or organisation resident or working in the borough or using services provided by the Council including council tenants, council leaseholders and council licensees.

5. Principles

- 5.1. Our complaints handling process adheres to the following principles:

- **Early resolution:** We will aim to resolve complaints as swiftly as possible. Where we have got things wrong we will apologise at the earliest opportunity.
- **Fairness:** We will treat all complainants with fairness, impartiality, and respect, regardless of their background or circumstances and deal with their complaints on their merits.
- **Transparency:** We will be transparent in our communication and provide clear information about the complaint process.
- **Accountability:** We will take responsibility for addressing complaints promptly and effectively.
- **Accessibility:** We will ensure that our complaints procedure is accessible to all residents, including those with disabilities or language barriers.
- **Learning and Improvement:** We view complaints as opportunities for learning and improving our services.

6. Making a Complaint

6.1. A simple enquiry, request or report of a single service failure will not be recorded as a complaint (e.g. a report of a missed bin collection, streetlight not working, or repair being needed). This is because such issues can usually be put right reasonably quickly and without detailed investigation.

6.2. Matters excluded from our complaints policy are set out in section 7 below.

6.3. Complaints relating to Adult Social Care and/or Children and Young Peoples' Social Care are dealt with under different regulations and are set out in Appendix One and Two.

6.4. Residents can make complaints through various channels including:

Online: Via our official website.

Email: feedback@haringey.gov.uk

Phone: 0208 489 3424

In Person at one of our Customer Service Centres based in two locations:

Marcus Garvey Library & Customer Service Centre,
Tottenham Green Pools and Fitness,
1 Philip Lane,
Tottenham, N15 4JA

Wood Green Customer Service Centre,
Wood Green Library,
187-197A High Road,
Wood Green, N22 6XD

In Writing:

Feedback and Resolutions Team,
Alexandra House, 10 Station Road,
Wood Green, N22 7TR.

7. Complaints must include:

- The resident's name and contact details.
- A clear description of the issue.
- Any supporting evidence if available.

7.1 We recognise some residents may need additional support with submitting complaints, and in those circumstances, we will make reasonable adjustments to simplify the process.

8. Matters not addressed under this policy.

- The commencement or conduct of legal proceedings.
- Matters of law or central government policy.
- Personnel matters, including an employee appointments, removals, pay, discipline, or pension.
- Where there is an alternative appeal process before a court or tribunal, e.g. about the refusal of planning permission, school admissions or exclusions, housing benefit, penalty charge notices (eg parking fines), contractors or suppliers disputing invoices, terms of contracts or alleging a breach of contract.
- Matters best dealt with by an insurer (e.g., insurance claims).
- Matters already decided by a court, tribunal or ombudsman ruling.
- Data protection breaches.
- Freedom of information / environmental information requests.
- Complaints relating to Child Protection Conferences, which are referred to the Haringey Safeguarding Children Partnership. Such complaints may be about:
 - the process of the conference.
 - the outcome; and/or
 - a decision about a child protection plan.
- Complaints about Children and Young People's Social Care which are dealt with under a separate statutory procedure.
- Adult Social Care complaints that are dealt with under a separate statutory procedure.
- Disputes between tenants unless directly related to the handling of the dispute.
- Complaints raised about a Council Service through elected members (Councillors or MPs), which are handled as Member Enquiries.
- Complaints about Councillors, which are handled separately by the Monitoring Officer and Standards Committee.
- Matters outside the designated time frame or beyond the Council's control.

8.1. If Haringey Council determines a complaint does not fall within the scope of this policy, an explanation will be provided to the complainant setting out the reasons why.

8.2. Complainants retain the right to challenge this decision by escalating their complaint to the relevant Ombudsman, as advised in our response. The Ombudsman may instruct the Council to accept the complaint where appropriate.

9. Use of advocate or support person and consent

9.1. Residents may choose to have an advocate or support person to assist with their complaint.

9.2. Written consent is required if the resident wants the Council to liaise directly with the support person or advocate.

9.3. Haringey Council will:

- Aim to simplify the consent process.
- Ensure the process does not make it difficult for someone to make a complaint.

9.4 If written consent cannot be given, alternative options for obtaining consent or responding to the issue will be considered.

10. Complaints Handling Procedure

10.1 Our complaints handling procedure comprises two stages:

10.2 Stage 1 – Service Investigation:

- Upon receiving a complaint, we will acknowledge it within 5 working days and will provide a reference number.
- The complaint is assigned to the relevant department for investigation and resolution. We aim to resolve complaints within 10 working days of acknowledgement.
- If more time is needed for the investigation, we will let you know and give you a new response date.
- The complainant receives a written response detailing the resolution.
- Complaints about staff members are investigated by the officer's line manager in line with our employment policies. The outcome of this process will not be shared with the complainant in order to protect employee confidentiality.
- Where the complaint relates to a third-party contractor, we will refer the complaint to them to undertake the service investigation.

10.3 Stage 2 – Review:

- If the resident considers that all or part of the complaint has not been resolved to their satisfaction at stage 1, they may request that it be progressed to Stage 2, save that disagreement with Council policy cannot be escalated to Stage 2.
- The request should specify the reasons for the resident's dissatisfaction and their desired outcomes.
- We will acknowledge the request within 5 working days.
- We will give a written response within 20 working days of acknowledgement.
- If more time is needed for the review, a Senior Feedback & Resolutions Officer will let you know and give you a new response date.
- The Stage 1 response will be reviewed at Stage 2 by the Feedback & Resolutions team, not by the service who investigated the initial complaint.
- The Stage 2 response is the Council's final response.

10.4 Review by the Ombudsman:

- If the resident is dissatisfied after Stage 2, they can escalate the complaint to the relevant Ombudsman for an independent review.
- Although residents can complain directly to the Ombudsman at any point, completing the Council's complaints process first is encouraged.

11. Time limits for complaints

11.1 Haringey Council will not normally accept complaints made after 12 months, but exceptions may apply in exceptional circumstances.

11.2 An explanation for the delay with supporting evidence will normally be required.

11.3 Factors considered include:

- (1) Reasons for the delay;
- (2) Council responsibility for the delay;
- (3) Personal circumstances of the complainant; and
- (4) Any disability or vulnerability contributing to the delay.

11.4 Requests to escalate complaints to Stage 2 should be made within 6 months of the Stage 1 response.

12. Right to withdraw a complaint

12.1 Residents have the right to withdraw a complaint at any time.

12.2 Please contact the Feedback & Resolutions Team to withdraw your complaint.

13. Complaints made directly to the Chief Executive

13.1 Complaints raised directly with the Chief Executive are forwarded to the Feedback & Resolutions Team for acknowledgement and handling under the complaints process.

13.2 This ensures all complaints receive equitable treatment and access to the relevant Ombudsman if dissatisfied with the outcome.

14. Compliments and Suggestions

14.1 We value compliments received from residents when an officer has demonstrated exceptional service that is beyond their daily duties. Officers receiving compliments will be recognised with a letter of appreciation from their Head of Service.

14.2 Our preferred method for receiving compliments or suggestions is through our [e-form](#).

14.3 We acknowledge that not all residents may have access to this, so we will accept compliments and suggestions through the contact methods outlined in section 6.4 above.

14.4 We make reasonable adjustments to support residents who are unable to use alternative means of communication.

14.5 Suggestions received will be acknowledged, and appropriate action will be taken within 10 working days. The service officer will update the customer on the implementation of the suggestion or give reasons if it cannot be implemented.

15. Equality and Diversity

15.1 Equality and diversity are of fundamental importance to services provided regardless of a person's protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 (age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, religion, pregnancy and maternity, race, belief, or sex).

15.2 All must be treated with respect.

15.3 The Council treats everyone it houses, serves, and employs, fairly, and encourages others to do the same.

15.4 This policy provides assurance that compensation is offered in a fair and consistent way.

16. Data Protection

16.1 The Council is committed to ensuring that data is:

- Processed lawfully, fairly and in a transparent manner.
- Collected for a specific and legitimate purpose and not used for anything other than this stated purpose.

- Relevant and limited to whatever the requirements are for which the data is processed.
- Accurate, and where necessary, kept up to date. Any identified inaccuracies will be amended or removed without undue delay.
- Stored (only) for as long as required, as specified within the Retention Policy.
- Secured with appropriate solutions, which protect against unauthorised or unlawful processing, accidental loss, destruction, or damage.

17. Monitoring and Reporting

17.1 The Council has a responsibility to report on its complaints processes, including the number of complaints received, response times, and outcomes.

17.2 This information will be made publicly available.

18. Training and Development

18.1 Our staff will receive training on complaints handling, ensuring they are equipped to handle complaints effectively and in line with Ombudsman complaints handling codes.

19. Implementation and review

19.1 This policy will be implemented on 17th July 2024

19.2 It will be reviewed every three years to ensure its effectiveness and relevance in addressing residents' needs and concerns, or sooner to incorporate legislative and/or regulatory amendments, best practice developments, or to address any operational issues identified with the process.

19.3 The next Review date is July 2027

19.4 This policy is published on the Haringey website.

Appendices

[Appendix One - Complaints about Adult Social Care](#)

[Appendix Two - Complaints about Children and Young Peoples' Social Care](#)

Appendix One - Complaints about Adult Social Care

1. How we will deal with your complaint

We will:

- a. write to you to acknowledge your complaint within 5 working days.
- b. Assign your complaint to the relevant service or authority, who will conduct an investigation into your complaint.
- c. offer to discuss your complaint with you and explain how the complaint will be investigated.
- d. respond to your complaint with our decision in writing, where possible we will do this within 10 working days.

2. If you have an advocate

- a. If you have an advocate (someone who represents you), we will deal directly with them until the investigation into the complaint is completed. If you don't have an advocate, we will consider whether to appoint one.

3. High risk cases

- a. In high-risk cases, we will appoint an independent investigating officer. This is someone who:
 - does not work for us
 - is independent of the service involved
- b. In these cases, we will appoint an adjudicating officer to consider the independent investigating officer's findings. The adjudicating officer will respond to you explaining whether or not they accept the investigating officer's findings with clear explanations.
- c. The timescale may be extended in high risk or complex cases, and we will write to let you know if that is the case.

4. If we are unable to resolve the issue

- a. If we are unable to resolve the issue and you remain dissatisfied with the response, you can contact the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman. We will provide the relevant contact details when we respond to the complaint.

Appendix Two - Complaints about Children's Social Care

If you are a young person, you can get help with your complaint by contacting Barnardo's – advocacy services in Haringey.

They help young people who want to complain about children's social care services. You can also ask us to contact the organisations on your behalf.

1. **How we will deal with your complaint**

There are 3 stages to how we deal with your complaint.

2. **Stage 1 – local problem solving**

a. When we receive your complaint, we will try to sort out the problem straight away. If we can't, we will ask a senior manager to investigate and respond to you within 10 working days.

3. **Stage 2 – the formal stage**

- a. An independent investigating officer will investigate your complaint.
- b. The investigator will meet with you so that they can fully understand your complaint before they start the investigation.
- c. An independent person will also be appointed to make sure that your concerns are taken seriously and that you are treated fairly.
- d. The investigation should normally take between 25 to 65 working days.

4. **Stage 3 – the review panel**

- a. A review panel meeting will consider your complaint, which you will be invited to.
- b. The panel will be 3 independent people who will hear your complaint and consider how it can be resolved.
- c. You have the right to bring an advocate or representative to speak on your behalf.

5. **If we are unable to resolve the issue**

a. If we are unable to resolve the issue and you are dissatisfied with the response, you can contact the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman. We will provide the relevant contact details when we respond to the complaint.