



## ADJUDICATION & REVIEW COMMITTEE 30 JANUARY 2014

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>Subject Heading:</b>                   | Complaints Handling following the Merger of Homes in Havering and the Retained Housing Service                      |
| <b>CMT Lead:</b>                          | Joy Hollister – Group Director, Children, Adults and Housing  |
| <b>Report Author and contact details:</b> | Jonathan Geall<br>Housing Needs and Strategy Manager<br>tel: 01708 434606<br>e-mail: jonathan.geall@havering.gov.uk |
| <b>Policy context:</b>                    | Valuing and enhancing the lives of our residents  |
| <b>Financial summary:</b>                 | No specific financial implications arising from this report   |

### The subject matter of this report deals with the following Council Objectives

|  |                                     |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| Ensuring a clean, safe and green borough   | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Championing education and learning for all   | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Providing economic, social and cultural activity<br>in thriving towns and villages | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Valuing and enhancing the lives of our residents                                   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Delivering high customer satisfaction and a stable council tax                     | <input type="checkbox"/>            |

### SUMMARY

This report updates members of the Adjudications and Review Committee on actions taken to unify the complaints processes established by the former Homes in Havering and retained Housing Service following the reintegration of Homes in Havering.

Furthermore, this report outlines the proposal to restructure the complaints handling within the Children, Adults and Housing directorate which would see the complaints handling function moved from the Homes and Housing Service and repositioned in a single, directorate wide complaints team.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

That the Committee note that:

1. The two complaints teams within the former Homes in Havering and the retained Housing Service have now been combined.
2. Consultation is currently under way on the proposal to form a Children, Adults and Housing directorate-wide complaints function by moving the Housing Complaints Team from the Homes and Housing Service into the Business and Performance Service within the Children, Adults and Housing Directorate.
3. The draft Service Level Agreement (SLA), between Homes and Housing and Business and Performance is considered and observations made which can then be considered during the SLA's finalisation.

**REPORT DETAIL**

**Context**

1. The former Arm's Length Management Organisation, Homes in Havering, was formally reintegrated with the Council in October 2012. This triggered a series of reviews of how best to provide services and unify policies and procedures.
2. A major review of functions and structures culminated in a series of restructuring proposals covering the whole service. The proposals were consulted on during the summer of 2013 and agreed in their final form in September 2013.
3. During this time, work started to bring together the two previously separate complaints functions within Homes in Havering and the retained Housing Service – see below for more details. During the early stages of the preparation of the restructuring proposals, however, the Children, Adults and Housing directorate management team decided to bring together the various complaints handling functions across the directorate into one central, directorate-wide service. The consultation on this proposal is following a different timetable to the Homes and Housing restructure and so progress to realise the benefits of reintegration of the two housing services is aligned the new proposals affecting the whole department.

**Work to date to realise the benefits of the reintegration of Homes in Havering**

4. The Homes and Housing Service, regardless of where exactly the housing-related complaints function is placed, has been very keen to build on the best practice aspects of the former Homes in Havering and retained Service's way of dealing with complaints. As a result:
- the two teams have come together under one fifth tier manager. The former Homes in Havering Quality Assurance Manager has been assimilated into this post; this will ensure continuity of service
  - the Homes and Housing restructure, in advance of the move of the complaints team out of the service, established, under the manager, seven permanent posts
  - existing complaints staff on fixed term contracts were assimilated into the permanent posts to ensure maintenance of skills and experience. NOTE: two posts are currently covered by an internal secondment and a more recent fixed term contract pending recruitment
  - the officers in the new team now work across all areas of Homes and Housing, although there still remains some specialism within the team reflecting the previous split. It is anticipated that complete generic working will commence once the team relocates to the new director-wide service and is brought together in Mercury House
  - performance figures are now available at the Homes and Housing Service level.
5. The more 'joined up' way of working, which commenced in earnest in July 2013, has seen a steady increase in performance across the service, both in terms of complaints handled on time, albeit with a temporary dip in November, and responses to members' and MPs' enquiries on time.

| <b>Month</b>   | <b>% of complaints responded to within 10 working days</b> | <b>% of members' / MPs' enquiries responded to within 10 working days</b> |
|--|--|---|
| 2013/14 quarter 1                                      | 79.5%  | 70.8%   |
| July   | 84.0%  | 90.9%   |
| August   | 84.7%  | 100.0%  |
| September  | 93.6%  | 98.6%   |
| October  | 92.7%  | 92.6%   |
| November   | 79.8%  | 93.9%   |
| December   | 85.0%*   | 100.0%  |
| * Latest figure available; final figure will be higher |  |   |

**Proposed restructure to create a directorate wide complaints service**

6. The reintegration of the Arm's Length Management Organisation (ALMO) Homes in Havering back into the Council took place in October 2012. The senior management restructure that took place in early 2013 moved the Homes and Housing service from the Culture and Community directorate into Children, Adults and Housing. After this, a further decision was made in summer 2013 that the performance, complaints and information governance functions of the former ALMO and the Council's retained Housing service should transfer into the Business and Performance Division of Children's Adults and Housing in order to centralise all of the directorate's performance and complaints resources and expertise into a single service in which best practice can be shared for the benefit of all.
7. The proposal currently out to consultation is that the complaints team currently sitting within Homes and Housing will move into the Complaints, Information and Communications team within Business and Performance, with the Complaints Manager reporting to the Complaints, Information and Communications Team Manager. The Complaints Manager role will be re-designated as the Senior Complaints and Information Officer (Homes and Housing).
8. The officers working on housing-related complaints are entirely funded from the Housing Revenue Account, HRA. There is no proposal to reduce the number of staff working on housing complaints or to require these staff to work on non-housing complaints, which would breach the HRA ring fence. There are no HRA efficiencies accruing from this restructure.

**Service Level Agreement between Homes and Housing the directorate team**

9. In order to minimise any difficulties associated with having responsibility for responding to housing-related complaints move from the Head of Homes and Housing to the Head of Business and Performance, Children, Adults and Housing Directorate, a detailed Service Level Agreement, SLA, will be agreed between the two services. The current draft of the SLA is attached at Appendix 1.

**IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS**

**Financial implications and risks:**

There are no specific financial implications arising from the contents of this report.

**Legal implications and risks:**

There are no proposals to amend the way or timescales in which housing-related complaints are handled. Therefore, there are no specific legal implications arising from the contents of this report.

**Human Resources implications and risks:**

There are no specific human relations implications arising from the contents of this report.

**Equalities implications and risks:**

There are no proposals to amend the way or timescales in which housing-related complaints are handled. Therefore, there are no specific equalities implications arising from the contents of this report.

**BACKGROUND PAPERS**

None

**Appendix 1: SLA between Homes and Housing and Directorate Complaints Team: DRAFT v1**

**1. Stage 1 and 2 formal complaints – 10 days target time**

|  | <b>Number of day to complete tasks</b> | <b>Cumulative days from receipt</b> |
|--|--|-------------------------------------|
| Complaint received by Directorate Complaints Team  | 0                                      | 0                                   |
| Request for information made by Directorate Complaints Team to relevant officer(s) within Homes and Housing  | 1                                      | 1                                   |
| Information passed back from Homes and Housing   | 5                                      | 6                                   |
| Directorate Complaints Team produce a draft response and send to appropriate Head of Homes and Housing   | 1                                      | 7                                   |
| Sign off / amendments from Head of Homes and Housing   | 2                                      | 9                                   |
| <i>If amended version requires subsequent Homes and Housing sign off – (a) Directorate Complaints Team sends amended draft to Homes and Housing, (b) Homes and Housing sign off on same day and (c) Directorate Complaints Team sends out same day</i> | 1                                      | 10                                  |
| <i>If no amendments required to first draft, Directorate Complaints Team sends out</i>   | 1                                      | 10                                  |

**2. Stage 3 formal complaints and Ombudsman cases – target time provided by Democratic Services (table assumes 10 days target, but could be up to 15 days)**

|  | <b>Number of day to complete tasks</b> | <b>Cumulative days from receipt</b> |
|--|--|-------------------------------------|
| Complaint received by Directorate Complaints Team  | 0                                      | 0                                   |
| Request for information made by Directorate Complaints Team to relevant officer(s) within Homes and Housing  | 1                                      | 1                                   |
| Information passed back from Homes and Housing   | 5*                                     | 6                                   |
| Directorate Complaints Team produce a draft response and send to Head of Homes and Housing and appropriate third tier manager in Homes and Housing | 1*                                     | 7                                   |
| Sign off / amendments from Head of Homes and Housing and appropriate third tier manager in Homes and Housing                                       | 2*                                     | 9                                   |

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|  |    |    |
|--|----|----|
| <i>If amended version requires subsequent Homes and Housing sign off – (a) Directorate Complaints Team sends amended draft to Homes and Housing, (b) Homes and Housing sign off on same day and (c) Directorate Complaints Team sends out same day</i> | 1* | 10 |
| <i>If no amendments required to first draft, Directorate Complaints Team sends out</i>   | 1  | 10 |

\* If Democratic Services gives a longer target time, some/all of these deadlines can be extended

**3. Member/MP enquiries and FOI requests – 10 days target time**

|  | <b>Number of day to complete tasks</b> | <b>Cumulative days from receipt</b> |
|--|--|-------------------------------------|
| Complaint received by Directorate Complaints Team  | 0                                      | 0                                   |
| Decision by Directorate Complaints Team on whether there is a need to gather information from Homes and Housing<br>to Request for information made by Directorate Complaints Team to relevant officer(s) within Homes and Housing                      | 1                                      | 1                                   |
| <i>If no, send response</i>  | 9                                      | 10                                  |
| <i>If yes, follow the remaining steps (note: at any of the following steps the Directorate Complaints Team may decide that further Homes in Housing involvement / sign off is not required)</i>  |  |                                     |
| Request for information made by Directorate Complaints Team to relevant officer(s) within Homes and Housing  |  |                                     |
| Information passed back from Homes and Housing   | 5                                      | 6                                   |
| Directorate Complaints Team produce a draft response and send to Homes and Housing third tier manager  | 1                                      | 7                                   |
| Sign off / amendments from appropriate third tier manager in Homes and Housing   | 2                                      | 9                                   |
| <i>If amended version requires subsequent Homes and Housing sign off – (a) Directorate Complaints Team sends amended draft to Homes and Housing, (b) Homes and Housing sign off on same day and (c) Directorate Complaints Team sends out same day</i> | 1                                      | 10                                  |
| <i>If no amendments required to first draft, Directorate Complaints Team sends out</i>   | 1                                      | 10                                  |

**4. DPA requests – 10 days target time**

|   | <b>Number of day to complete tasks</b> | <b>Cumulative days from receipt</b> |
|---|--|-------------------------------------|
| Complaint received by Directorate Complaints Team   | 0                                      | 0                                   |
| Directorate Complaints Team interrogates Homes and Housing systems and/or directly approaches Homes and Housing staff and send copies of the file | 10                                     | 10                                  |

**5. Homes and Housing third tier managers**

The following managers will be deemed the ‘appropriate third tier manager within Homes and Housing’ for the following areas of service.

|  |   |
|--|---|
| Marina Crofts<br>Community Support Services Manager  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community engagement and resident involvement – council tenants</li> <li>• Support and social activities provided in the Council’s sheltered housing schemes</li> <li>• The condition of communal grounds on HRA land</li> <li>• Matters relating the BETRA, DELTA and PETRA tenant management organisations</li> </ul>  |
| Peter Doherty<br>Housing Services Manager            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rent collection and arrears collection – council tenants</li> <li>• Tenancy matters including enforcement of tenancy conditions</li> <li>• Evictions and other legal action taken against council tenants</li> <li>• Right-to-buy requests and processing of right-to-buy sales</li> <li>• Leaseholder issues (where the Council is the freeholder), including complaints regarding charges made to leaseholders</li> <li>• Anti-social behaviour relating to council tenants</li> </ul>   |
| Jonathan Geall<br>Housing Needs and Strategy Manager | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Applying for council / housing association housing</li> <li>• Management of the Housing Register (sometimes referred to as the Waiting List)</li> <li>• All matters relating to the allocation of council or housing association, including choice based lettings</li> <li>• Homelessness</li> <li>• Hostels</li> <li>• Private rented accommodation provided and/or managed by the Council, including complaints from or about tenants placed in private rented properties by the Council</li> <li>• New build housing and development sites where the</li> </ul> |



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|  | <p>building is being carried out by the Council or a housing association</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Disabled Facilities Grants</li><li>• Any grants and/or advice provided to an owner to bring an empty property back into use</li><li>• Careline, telecare or telehealth</li><li>• The Council's out-of-hours call-handling service, provided by GDIT</li><li>• The Council's out-of-hours public building alarm call monitoring, provided by Custodian</li></ul> |
| <p>Kevin Hazlewood<br/>Director of Property Services</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Decent Homes programme</li><li>• Improvements to HRA properties</li><li>• Day-to-day repairs to HRA properties</li><li>• Works carried out to void HRA properties</li><li>• Gas maintenance of HRA properties</li><li>• The conduct of contractors carried out works to HRA properties</li></ul>   |

**Jonathan Geall**

Housing Needs and Strategy Manager

November 2013