



**Learning from Complaints. Special Highlight Report**

**Purpose**

This report summarises lessons learned from eight severe maladministration findings issued by the Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS) in 2024/25 year-to-date (YTD).

These cases involve critical service failures in areas such as responsive repairs, pest control, and complaint handling. The report identifies recurring themes and presents recommendations for improving service delivery within Lewisham's Housing Transformation Programme (HTP).

The case list can be found in Appendix A.

**Background**

The Social Housing Regulation Act (2023) and changes to the HOS and the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman, (LGSCO), Complaint Handling Codes introduced new standards for handling complaints.

The Housing Ombudsman Service now has expanded powers to issue wider orders to address systemic issues beyond individual complaints.

Lewisham has a high maladministration rate of 94%, with 33 severe maladministration findings so far in 2024/25. These cases reveal consistent failures in repair processes, complaint handling, and support for vulnerable residents.

This report reviews eight cases with severe maladministration determinations received in 2024/25 where the Housing Ombudsman Service have asked us to carry out a case review.

The cases cover issues such as leaks, damp, mould, and complaint handling failures.

The most common reasons for severe maladministration awards include:

- Persistent responsive repairs (especially regarding leaks, damp, and mould). Key themes identified include missed appointments, record-keeping failures, and poor contractor management.
- Poor complaint handling, including delayed responses and insufficient communication and compensation payments at Stages 1-3 of the process.
- Vulnerabilities of residents being overlooked in the handling of repairs.
- Inadequate pest control and failure to engage residents.

**1. Table Summary of Severe Maladministration Cases by the Housing Ombudsman Service**

Date Determination Received	Case Details (as categorised by the HOS)
29/04/2024	Responsive repairs – leaks / damp / mould, Engagement on the complaint

Date Determination Received	Case Details (as categorised by the HOS)
22/05/2024	Responsive repairs – leaks / damp / mould, Pest control (within property), Other poor handling of complaint
30/08/2024	Responsive repairs - general, Responsive repairs – leaks / damp / mould, Other poor handling of complaint, Engagement on the complaint
30/04/2024	Other poor handling of complaint, Responsive repairs – leaks / damp / mould, Pest control (within property)
29/05/2024	Responsive repairs – leaks / damp / mould, Responsive repairs - general, Other poor handling of complaint, Information held on file
28/06/2024	Responsive repairs – leaks / damp / mould, Responsive repairs - general, Delay in escalating or responding to complaint
19/06/2024	Responsive repairs – leaks / damp / mould, Engagement on the complaint
04/09/2024	Personal (e.g. harassment / discrimination), Responsive repairs – leaks / damp / mould, Pest control (within property)

**Most Common Reasons for Complaints**

- **Responsive repairs:** Leaks, damp, and mould were consistently reported.
- **Complaint handling failures:** Delayed responses and missed appointments.
- **Engagement with residents:** Poor communication during complaint resolution.
- **Pest infestations:** Inadequate pest control services.
- **Failure to address root causes:** Structural issues with properties went unresolved, leading to recurrent problems.

**Key Themes**

Theme	Description
Booking of Appointments	Missed or cancelled appointments led to delays in repairs – What is the process for follow-on works and abandoned jobs. Poor coordination with residents regarding availability. Appointments were booked without informing the resident. Unclear follow-up after appointments, leaving residents uncertain about repair statuses.

Theme	Description
Complaint Handling	<p>Slow responses and escalations: Delays in resolving complaints across multiple stages. In each of these cases, the complaints process was seemingly unable to resolve the issue. Are the complaints being dealt with at the right level of seniority and/or priority?</p> <p>Inconsistent acknowledgement of complaint severity, leading to inadequate compensation.</p> <p>Failure to learn from previous complaints, with recurring issues left unresolved.</p>
Record-Keeping	<p>Incomplete records of repair appointments and communications with residents.</p> <p>Failure to document communications, leading to disputes and confusion.</p> <p>Conflicting information between contractors and residents, damaging trust.</p>
Delayed and Incomplete Repairs	<p>Significant delays in addressing leaks, damp, mould, and pest control, causing ongoing damage to resident properties.</p> <p>Incomplete repairs often required additional work, leading to longer resolution times.</p>
Poor Communication	<p>Inadequate updates on repair statuses, leading to resident frustration.</p> <p>Poor coordination between contractors and housing officers, contributing to delays.</p>
Compensation Offers	<p>Offers often failed to reflect the full detriment and distress caused to residents. The Ombudsman often recommended higher compensation to reflect the severity of the impact.</p>
Impact on Vulnerable Residents	<p>Vulnerable residents, particularly those with disabilities or mental health issues, were disproportionately affected by delays in repairs and poor service delivery.</p>
Lack of Learning and Repeated Failures	<p>LBL did not seem to learn from previous findings, leading to repeated complaints about the same issues.</p>
Failure to Address Root Causes	<p>Many cases involved reactive repairs without addressing the underlying issues, such as structural faults.</p>

### **Leaks, Damp and Mould**

The Housing Ombudsman prioritises cases involving leaks, damp, and mould due to the high risks these conditions pose, especially following the tragic death of Awaab Ishak and the impending introduction of Awaab's Law.

Awaab's Law will introduce statutory timescales for repairs in the social housing sector, highlighting the urgency of addressing such issues within a fixed period. The systemic issues identified in these cases—such as delayed repairs, poor communication, and inadequate record-keeping—could potentially impact all trades and affect residents across the Housing Services Directorate, not limited to secure tenants.

Given the potential for these challenges to affect the wider repairs service, further analysis should be conducted to assess whether similar failings occur across other areas, ensuring compliance with Awaab's Law and reducing risks to resident health and safety. This review should involve a comprehensive assessment of current repair processes, the effectiveness of contractor management, and the consistency of service delivery across trades and tenures.

### **Resident Feedback – Complaints Workshop**

At the recent residents' complaints workshop held in September 2024, several key concerns were raised regarding the handling of repairs and communication processes. A recurring theme was record-keeping, with residents expressing frustration about needing to repeat their issues each time they contacted a new person. There were also questions about whether post-inspections are conducted to verify the quality of work, particularly by contractors, and concerns that proposed remedies are not consistently followed through or tracked to completion.

Residents raised concerns about the behaviour and professionalism of subcontractors, including unnecessary jobs being added, poor workmanship, and inadequate cleaning up after repairs. There was also feedback that language barriers with some operatives can hinder effective communication, making it difficult for residents to understand or convey important information. Furthermore, the lack of quality assurance, accountability, and regular updates on appointments and annual checks were highlighted as issues.

## Key Recommendations

Findings	Recommendations
1. Missed or Cancelled Appointments	- <b>Review of Appointment Scheduling Process:</b> Define and improve end-to-end process for scheduling repairs. This includes adopting a <b>'Right First Time'</b> approach, reviewing the procedures/working instructions for booking follow-on works and abandoned jobs.
	- <b>Real-Time Repair Tracking:</b> Implement a system where residents can track repair appointments and receive automated reminders about scheduled visits.
	- <b>Contractor Performance Management:</b> Introduce SLAs with contractors that include penalties for missed or cancelled appointments without proper notice.
2. Slow Complaint Responses and Escalations	- <b>Robust Complaint Tracking System:</b> Implement updates to iCasework that tracks actions from complaints and assigns them to the relevant member of staff to ensure timely escalations and responses, as well as facilitate effective oversight, reporting and monitoring.
	- <b>Mandatory Complaint Handling Training:</b> Train staff on efficient complaint handling and early resolution techniques to avoid unnecessary escalation.
3. Poor Communication Between LBL and Residents	- <b>Improved Communication Protocols:</b> Establish clear communication channels and guidelines for providing updates to residents throughout the repair process, including the use of real-time systems (for repairs appointments).
	- <b>Mobile Solutions for Contractors:</b> Equip contractors with mobile tools to update job statuses in real-time and provide instant feedback to residents and housing staff.
4. Inconsistent Record-Keeping	- <b>Record Keeping and Note-Taking Training:</b> Train staff and operatives on maintaining accurate, real-time records for all repair visits, complaints, and communications.
	- <b>Single View/ Unified Dashboard for Complaints, Repairs, and Resident Data:</b> Integrate all relevant data into a single dashboard to improve oversight and ensure consistency in record-keeping.
5. Delayed and Incomplete Repairs	- <b>Real-Time Repair Tracking:</b> Invest in software that allows residents to track repair requests and follow-up actions to reduce uncertainty and ensure accountability.
6. Compensation Offers Not Reflecting the Detriment	- <b>Finalise Review into Remedies and Compensation Framework:</b> Finalise updates current compensation policies to ensure they are fair and align with the severity of the issues residents face. This is in progress.
7. Impact on Vulnerable Residents	- <b>Vulnerability Identification and Support Training:</b> Provide all staff with training on identifying and prioritising support for vulnerable residents in repairs and complaints.
	- <b>Implement a Vulnerability Assessment Tool:</b> Introduce a tool within the Housing IT system to flag vulnerable residents and ensure they receive prioritised service.
	- <b>Proactive Repairs Scheduling:</b> Shift to a proactive maintenance approach to prevent missed appointments by identifying high-risk properties ahead of time



Findings	Recommendations
8. Failure to Learn from Previous Complaints	- <b>Quarterly Root Cause Analysis of Complaints:</b> Conduct quarterly reviews of complaints to identify trends and recurring issues, helping reduce escalations. These can be reviewed at an appropriate senior management meeting and also shared with the Member Responsible for Complaints
	- <b>Learning Culture:</b> Foster a culture where learning from complaints is prioritised, and systems are adjusted based on recurring issues to prevent future occurrences. This will need clear and coordinated communication and staff training.
	- <b>Analyse Root Causes of Complaints:</b> Conduct quarterly reviews of complaints to identify trends and recurring issues, helping reduce escalations. These can be reviewed at an appropriate senior management meeting and also shared with the Member Responsible for Complaints
9. Failure to Address Root Causes (Reactive vs. Proactive Repairs)	- <b>Proactive Repairs Scheduling:</b> Implement proactive maintenance plans to address root causes, such as leaks and structural issues, before they lead to severe complaints. - Prioritising high-risk properties based on past complaint data and stock condition surveys.
	- <b>Predictive Analytics for Repairs:</b> Utilise data to predict recurring issues (e.g., damp, leaks) and prevent future complaints by addressing underlying problems early on.
10. Contractor Accountability and Quality of Work	- <b>Contractor Performance Management:</b> Monitor contractor performance through SLAs that enforce completion deadlines and quality of work, with penalties for non-compliance.
	- <b>Post-Inspection Procedure:</b> Establish a clear process for post-inspections to ensure the quality of work completed by contractors, with a focus on quality assurance and follow-up.
	- <b>Resident Feedback Post-Repair:</b> Gather resident feedback immediately after major repairs to ensure issues like poor workmanship or incomplete clean-up are addressed swiftly.

### Importance of Training and Communication on Process Changes

The successful implementation of the recommended improvements will heavily rely on comprehensive training for staff and operatives, ensuring they are fully equipped to adopt the new processes and procedures. Effective communication of these changes is essential, as it will help staff understand their roles and responsibilities in delivering a higher standard of service, particularly in light of new regulations such as Awaab's Law. This transformation will require careful planning and resourcing, with senior leadership playing a crucial role in providing their support.

To ensure the long-term success of these initiatives, senior leaders must invest in the development of their teams, allocating the necessary time and resources for training. This includes allowing officers the time and opportunity to undergo training sessions that will improve their skills in complaint handling, communication, record-keeping, and resident engagement. Currently, there is no formal budget or allocation for training within the housing service. However, given the impending regulatory changes, it is imperative that resources are allocated to this area to ensure compliance and the delivery of improved resident services. Without a commitment to staff development, the success of these process changes may be hindered.

## PROJECT HIGHLIGHT REPORT



### Appendix A Case List

Table of severe maladministration cases where the HOS ordered

Date Determination Received	Case Details (as categorised by the HOS)	Compensation Award	HOS Findings	Case Review Order
29/04/2024	Responsive repairs – leaks / damp / mould, Engagement on the complaint	£2,300	Severe maladministration by the landlord in respect of its handling of the resident's reports of damp, water ingress, and repairs needed to the property.  Maladministration complaints handling	Within 8 weeks of the date of this report, the landlord is ordered to carry out a management review of the resident's case and provide a copy of the review to the resident and this Service. This should consider the evidence that was available (or may have been available at the time) in relation to the resident's reports, any missed opportunities there were to resolve the repair issues at an earlier date, points of learning that can be taken from the case, and actions it could take to improve its future response to similar cases.  It is recommended that the landlord considers its review of this case alongside its self-assessment against the recommendations made in the Ombudsman's Spotlight report on Knowledge and Information Management (provided to the Ombudsman in November 2023) to determine whether it has put satisfactory measures in place since the resident's complaint.
22/05/2024	Responsive repairs – leaks / damp / mould, Pest control (within property), Other poor handling of complaint	£5,900 (and CEO apology)	Severe maladministration in respect of the landlord's response to reports of leaks, damp and mould.  Maladministration in respect of the landlord's response to reports of rodents.  Maladministration in respect of the landlord's complaint handling.	In accordance with paragraph 54(g) of the Housing Ombudsman Scheme, the landlord is ordered to carry out a senior management review of the resident's case. It should provide a copy of the review to its senior leadership team and this Service within 8 weeks of the date of this report. The review should consider: a. The evidence that was available (or may have been available) regarding the cupboard leak diagnosis and any missed opportunities there were between December 2021 and February 2024. How it will ensure appointments are rescheduled if a resident advised of their unavailability. c. Its process for referring resident's to its insurer when items within the property have been damaged by leaks. d. How its systems can be improved to enable it to respond to resident's communications, particularly in respect of urgent issues, despite the resident's chosen communication method. e. Any staff training that may improve its future response to similar cases.
30/08/2024	Responsive repairs - general, Responsive repairs – leaks / damp / mould, Other poor handling of complaint,	£3,500 (and CEO apology)	Severe maladministration in the landlord's handling of the resident's reports of damp and mould.	Within 56 days of the date of this determination, the landlord must conduct a senior management case review in accordance with paragraph 54(g) of the Scheme to identify: a. why it failed to consider the vulnerabilities of the household in its approach to repairs. b. why it failed to consider how it could mitigate the property conditions during its delays. c. why the remedial works carried out in July 2022 were not effective in resolving the damp

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Date Determination Received	Case Details (as categorised by the HOS)	Compensation Award	HOS Findings	Case Review Order
	Engagement on the complaint		<p>Service failure in the landlord’s handling of the resident’s reports of responsive repairs.</p> <p>Maladministration in the landlord’s record-keeping.</p> <p>Maladministration in the landlord’s handling of the resident’s associated complaint.</p>	<p>and mould.</p> <p>d. why it failed to respond to the resident’s numerous requests to investigate and action repairs to the damp and mould.</p> <p>e. why it failed to identify the delays present during stage 1 and stage 2 of its complaint procedure.</p> <p>f. why it was unclear which repairs it had raised to its contractor in relation to the damp and mould, specifically, the rendering of the internal kitchen wall. This must include an investigation into any discrepancies between the findings of its surveys and the works raised to contractors.</p> <p>g. why the complaints procedure did not effectively manage the outstanding repairs or provide regular updates to the resident.</p> <p>h. why it failed to evidence it had progressed the matter to a director in April 2024.</p> <p>i. how it can prevent these issues from occurring in future.</p> <p>j. the landlord must share its findings with the resident and the Ombudsman. This must include any wider learning it has identified for its service provision and the associated timeframes in implementing this.</p>
30/04/2024	Other poor handling of complaint, Responsive repairs – leaks / damp / mould, Pest control (within property)	£4,885.46 (plus £650 from HOS case 202337128 for maladministration findings for repairs and complaint handling) (and CEO apology)	<p>Severe maladministration in the landlord’s response to the resident’s reports of damp and mould.</p> <p>Severe maladministration in the landlord’s response to the resident’s reports of a pest infestation.</p> <p>Maladministration in the landlord’s complaint handling.</p>	<p>Within 8 weeks of the date of the determination the landlord should:</p> <p>a. Review the case against the Housing Ombudsman’s spotlight report on:</p> <p>i. Damp and mould.</p> <p>ii. Attitudes, respect and rights, particularly in relation to vulnerability and the Equality Act 2010 and Human Rights Act.</p>
29/05/2024	Responsive repairs – leaks / damp / mould, Responsive repairs - general, Other poor handling of complaint,	£3,056 (and senior Director apology)	Maladministration in the landlord’s handling of repairs to the roof following the resident’s reports of water ingress.	In accordance with paragraph 54(g) of the Housing Ombudsman Scheme, within 8 weeks of this decision, the landlord should review the findings of this case and establish when and how it completes risk assessments of households when hazards are presenting. The outcome of this review should be presented to the senior leadership team and provided to the Ombudsman.



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Date Determination Received	Case Details (as categorised by the HOS)	Compensation Award	HOS Findings	Case Review Order
	Information held on file		<p>Severe maladministration in the landlord’s handling of the resident’s reports of damp and mould.</p> <p>No maladministration in the landlord’s complaint handling.</p> <p>Maladministration in the landlord’s record keeping.</p>	
28/06/2024	Responsive repairs – leaks / damp / mould, Responsive repairs - general, Delay in escalating or responding to complaint	£2,250 (and CEO apology)	<p>Severe maladministration by the landlord in respect of its handling of outstanding repairs to a toilet due to a leak and associated sewage leaks.</p> <p>Severe maladministration by the landlord in respect of its handling of repairs to the balcony door.</p> <p>Maladministration by the landlord in respect of its handling of the resident's complaint.</p>	<p>In accordance with paragraph 54(g) of the Housing Ombudsman Scheme, the landlord must conduct a senior management case review conducted by an independent person or team within 12 weeks of the report which includes consideration of why the landlord was unable to complete both repairs within its repairs policy timescales, why it offered repair dates in its complaint responses that were so far in the future, and an action plan as to how it will ensure:</p> <p>A. That its repairs service is able to respond urgently to sewage leaks and reports of dangerous door/window faults in future and</p> <p>B. That where it cannot resolve a health and safety repair on a first visit in the future, it conducts risk assessments to consider what interim measures are required pending completion of the works and a point of contact oversees such works.</p>
19/06/2024	Responsive repairs – leaks / damp / mould, Engagement on the complaint	£1,300	Severe maladministration in the way the landlord handled the resident’s report of a leak and ceiling collapse and subsequent repair issues.	<p>Recommendation - It is recommended that the landlord reviews how it handles repair reports to ensure they are appropriately raised and responded to.</p> <p>It is recommended that the landlord reviews its record handling practices to ensure it records when it attends repair appointments and when the work is completed.</p> <p>The landlord should review its complaint handling process to ensure it seeks to put a resolution to the substantive complaint issue at the earliest opportunity and it follows resolutions through to completion.</p>

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Date Determination Received	Case Details (as categorised by the HOS)	Compensation Award	HOS Findings	Case Review Order
			Maladministration in the way the landlord handled the complaint.	
04/09/2024	Personal (e.g. harassment / discrimination), Responsive repairs – leaks / damp / mould, Pest control (within property)	£2,828.33	<p>Maladministration by the landlord in its handling of the resident’s reports of spitting, littering, and racial abuse by neighbours.</p> <p>Severe maladministration by the landlord in its handling of the resident’s reports of damp and mould at his property.</p> <p>Maladministration by the landlord in its handling of the resident’s reports of a rat infestation at his property.</p>	<p>In accordance with paragraph 54g of the Housing Ombudsman Scheme, carry out a senior management review within 8 weeks of its handling of the resident’s reports of spitting, littering and racial abuse by neighbours, and of a rat infestation at his property. This is to identify exactly why its delays in handling his reports occurred, and to outline exactly how it proposes to prevent these from happening again in the future. The landlord shall present the review to its senior leadership team and provide the resident and the Ombudsman with a copy of its review. This review should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Its staff’s training needs in relation to the application of its ASB policy and procedure.</li> <li>b. Its staff’s training needs in relation to the application of its pest management policy.</li> </ul> <p>This is to ensure it provides timely responses to reports and considers vulnerabilities in every ASB case, and that it provides full, timely, and effective responses to reports in every relevant pest control case.</p>