

HOUSING OMBUDSMAN DETERMINATIONS

**To:**

Councillor Gerri Bird, Executive Councillor for Housing, Homelessness and Housing Scrutiny Committee 19th September 2023

Report by:

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Wards affected:

All

Not a Key Decision

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 The last time a report came to this committee detailing a finding of fault by the Ombudsman, in respect of a housing related service, against this authority was in 24th January 2023. Since then, there have been 1 case where fault has been found. This report provides elected members with some brief detail on this case, why fault was found and outlines the actions the council has taken to remedy the matter for the customer and identify areas for improvement in the future.
- 1.2 In these circumstances, the Head of Legal Services, as the council's Monitoring Officer, has an obligation to report the findings to the Executive. The Executive is obliged to set out what action has already been taken in respect of the findings, what action it intends to take and the reasons for taking the action.
- 1.3 The determinations highlighted in this report came from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.

2. Recommendations

The Executive Councillor is recommended to:

- 2.1 Note the information contained within this report
- 2.2 Approve the remedial actions outlined and measures established to reduce or eliminate the risk of repeat mistakes in future cases

3. Background

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- 3.1 The council's published Annual Complaints report for 2022-23 provides some useful contextual background. It states that:
 - The Housing Service manages close to 8460 properties within the City and has placed 391 households into temporary accommodation during the year. We have also handled 1005 homeless applications, had 872 new applicants join the Home-Link register and opened 2261 housing advice cases in the year
- 3.2 **The Case** was assessed by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO). Mrs X complained that the Council incorrectly advertised a property it offered her and failed to advise her about withdrawal rights in the process. As a result, she accepted the property and said she experienced distress and costs as a result.
- 3.3 The LGSCO concluded that there was fault which caused an injustice.
- 3.4 The council accepted the Ombudsman's findings and have complied with its suggested remedies; the Council should, within one month of the final decision:

Write Mrs F with its proposed remedy to:

- a) make a 50% financial contribution to the installation of a dropped kerb up to a maximum of £1,000, and prioritise a tenant alteration request from Mrs F. This would be subject to approval of the works by the County Council; or
- b) offer a direct let of a like for like property with off-street parking and make a £500 contribution toward any costs incurred.

Mrs F has accepted option A. £1000 has been credited into her rent account and works concluded.

- 3.5 Partly as a result of this case and, in addition to the remedies provided, the customer offer letter has been updated to include clear information advising the customer of their right to refuse an offer. The council has also expanded the lettings team and has new management in place. The manager is in the process of reviewing the current policies, end to end processes and procedures to look for areas of improvement. Going forward both the lettings team and the voids team will work together to improve information exchange, in terms of details of the property, so that the customer can see photographs of the specific property before they can decide if they would like to view the property. This will improve the customer experience and reduce officer time taken to carry out viewings.

a) Financial Implications

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The financial implications for the council are outlined in this report.

b) Staffing Implications

None

c) Equality and Poverty Implications

None.

d) Net Zero Carbon, Climate Change and Environmental Implications

None.

e) Procurement Implications

None.

f) Community Safety Implications

None.

4. Consultation and communication considerations

Please see 1.2 of this report. The council is obliged to publicly report any cases which have been to the Ombudsman where fault has been found but not remedied before it is investigated by the Ombudsman.

5. Background papers

No background papers were used in the preparation of this report.

6. Appendices

None

7. Inspection of papers

If you have a query on the report please contact Sean Cleary, Group Manager (Operations), City Services Group, Cambridge City Council
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