

City of London Corporation Committee Report

Committee(s): Policy and Resources Committee Court of Common Council	Dated: 03/07/2025 11/09/2025
Subject: Finding of Maladministration (Ombudsman Case ID – 24001090) - Emergency Support Scheme.	Public report: For Information
This proposal: Delivers Corporate Plan 2024-29 outcomes	Diverse Engaged Communities Vibrant Thriving Destination Providing Excellent Services
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	No
If so, how much?	£
What is the source of Funding?	n/a
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain's Department?	n/a
Report of: The Chamberlain Comptroller and City Solicitor and Deputy Chief Executive (Monitoring Officer)	Caroline Al-Beyerty Michael Cogher
Report author: Jacqui McKeating, Council Tax and Benefits Manager Financial Shared Services Division	

Summary

The Comptroller and City Solicitor is designated as the Corporation's Monitoring Officer under s.5 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 in respect of its local authority functions. The Monitoring Officer has a duty to report to the Court of Common Council where they are of the opinion that any proposal, decision or omission by the Court or its committees or officers has given rise or is likely to give rise to a contravention of any enactment or rule of law or any such maladministration or failure within the meaning of the Local Government Act 1974.

This report advises Members of a finding of Maladministration by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman ("the Ombudsman") dated 13th March 2025 a copy of which appears in the appendix.

The City of London delivers an Emergency Support Scheme to assist residents who are facing a crisis, emergency, or disaster and who are unable to afford essentials. The scheme provides help with the costs of food, clothing, household items, emergency travel and furniture (including white goods).

Since April 2013 London Borough of Lambeth have administered the Emergency Support Scheme on behalf of the City of London. The scheme is open to City of London residents and those living in temporary accommodation who are offered permanent accommodation in a City of London property.

To access the scheme residents must make an application and must meet the following criteria:

- be 16 years of age or over.
- live in the City of London or,
- be living in temporary accommodation provided by the City of London Corporation and have been offered permanent accommodation in a City Corporation property.
- not have savings of more than £6,000
- have an income of less than £30,000 per year or be in receipt of a qualifying benefit.

During the period relating to this complaint, the scheme provided a mixture of vouchers and reconditioned items.

On 20 April 2024 X complained to the Ombudsman that their award from the Emergency Support Scheme was not completely fulfilled and that there was a lack of response to emails when they followed up their application.

X advised the Ombudsman that they complained to Lambeth on 13 November 2023 about unfilled items from an award made on 1 June 2022.

Lambeth received a new application for help from the Emergency Support Scheme from X on 13 November 2023.

The Ombudsman has limited his investigation to the application made in November 2023. The City was notified by the Ombudsman of the complaint on 7 October 2024.

The Ombudsman found that there was fault in how the Council fulfilled the award it made to X under its Emergency Support Scheme in late 2023. This caused X some avoidable frustration but did not cause any further injustice. This report looks to review lessons learned in response to the above complaint.

Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to:

- Note the report.

Main Report

Background

1. During the 2023/24 budget year there were 72 applications for help from the Emergency Support Scheme. Of these only 22 were successful. A substantial proportion of the unsuccessful applicants failed to meet the residency requirements.
2. At the time of X's initial (May 2022) and second application (November 2023), the scheme provided support in the form of vouchers for smaller items and reconditioned goods (white goods/beds etc) from an organisation called Emmaus. The contract with Emmaus ended in December 2023.
3. Prior to December 2023 when Emmaus provided reconditioned goods, a sizeable proportion of Emergency Support Scheme awards were not completely fulfilled as a significant number of applicants opted not to take the reconditioned items.
4. X made a number of applications for help from the Emergency Support Scheme in 2023 and 2024.
5. X's original award made in June 2022 was not completely fulfilled. X only received the Paypoint vouchers included in the initial award. It appears X did not contact Emmaus to request the larger items following the award in June 2022, but this was not in the scope of the Ombudsman investigation.
6. In response to the additional Emergency Support Scheme applications submitted, X received £1240 worth of vouchers - £250 was awarded in November 2023 and a further £300 in April 2024 and £690 in May 2024.
7. The April 2024 and May 2024 awards were made in lieu of the items not received from Emmaus despite X being notified that she was eligible for the items and that they would be provided.
8. The Ombudsman found that not all emails from X received a response and that there was no follow-up enquires made to find out why the Emmaus items were not delivered and why an alternative option was not offered.
9. As a resident in out of borough temporary accommodation X was not eligible for help from the Emergency Support Scheme. This is because out of borough residents in temporary accommodation are only eligible for help when moving into secure City of London accommodation.
10. X's temporary accommodation was furnished, and it is unlikely that X had a need to apply for help with larger items such as a bed as this was provided in the temporary accommodation.
11. It is accepted by Lambeth Borough Council that there was a failure in how the case was assessed and managed, particularly in why X was found to be eligible to access the scheme.

12. In investigating the complaint, the Ombudsman restricted themselves to examining the administration of the scheme and not the eligibility of the complainant as X was entitled to rely on the council's decision to accept the applications and make the awards.
13. The Ombudsman concluded that X suffered no financial loss and as they had received more than one award for two of the items resulting in X receiving an additional £300. However, the Ombudsman found that the overall administration of the application process caused X frustration and inconvenience due to the delays.
14. The Ombudsman recommended that the City make an apology to X for the delay and frustration and that no action should be taken to recover any amounts awarded.

Actions Taken

15. In response to the recommendation made by the Ombudsman the following action has been taken:
16. An apology has been issued to X for the delay and frustration and confirming that the City will not seek to recover any amounts from X.
17. The CoL website was updated on 22 April 2025 to make the residency requirements clearer and some additional information and links are due to be included for those who are not eligible to other sources of help.
18. An email reminder has been sent to CityAdvice and CoL teams who support and advise residents/clients to remind them of the eligibility requirements of the scheme.
19. The Council Tax and Benefits Manager and the Performance Manager for the Emergency Support Scheme in Lambeth met on 20 May 2025 to review the Ombudsman's findings and identify how to improve the service administration and prevent any future failures. Handling of complaints was discussed with the need to include the City at an earlier stage.
20. As a result of the review meeting, the Council Tax and Benefits Manager is in the process of putting together an information pack for Lambeth Emergency Support Scheme staff to help them to identify which temporary accommodation tenants are eligible for help and which are not. They will also be given contact details for the CoL Benefits Team who will confirm eligibility if requested.

Additional Actions

21. Prior to the final Ombudsman report this case was raised with the Corporate Anti-Fraud Manager. X was interviewed by the Corporate Anti-Fraud Manager about their applications to the Emergency Support Scheme as they had been provided furnished accommodation. Eligibility criteria were explained, and X was advised to

Speak with their Homelessness Officer if they had concerns about their accommodation or needed support going forward.

22. The Council Tax and Benefits Teams are taking part in a Fraud Awareness workshop on 25 June 2025 where this case will be discussed, and a Fraud Risk register will be drawn up which should include ways to identify and mitigate against these types of failures.

Financial Impact

23. There was no financial impact in relation to the complaint or the Ombudsman's conclusion other than the original cost of £1240 for the vouchers which had already been issued.

Legal Implications

24. The finding of Maladministration requires the Monitoring Officer to make a report to the Court of Common Council under s.5(aa) of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989. The Monitoring Officer is required to consult with the Head of Paid Service (Town Clerk and Chief Executive) and the s.151 Officer (Chamberlain) in the preparation of this report and has done so.

Conclusion

25. The case has highlighted weaknesses in the administration of the scheme in several areas:
26. *Identifying eligibility for Temporary Accommodation clients* - The information pack being produced for Lambeth will include copies of the different tenancy agreements applicants may present with and will have clear instructions on who is eligible and who is not. Additionally contact details for the CoL Benefits Team for use by Lambeth staff should resolve this.
27. *Failure in fulfilment of awards made by Emmaus* - The issue of failure by Emmaus is no longer relevant as that contract has ended. All awards are now made using Cash Perks.

Appendices

Ombudsman Final Decision

Report Author: Jacqui McKeating

Council Tax and Benefits Manager

T: 020 3834 7180

E: Jacqui.mckeating@cityoflondon.gov.uk