

City of London Corporation Committee Report

Committee(s): Policy and Resources Committee – For decision Court of Common Council – For decision	Dated: 19 February 2026 5 March 2026
Subject: Governance Efficiencies and Prioritisation	Public report: For Decision
This proposal: provides statutory duties and business enabling functions	
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	No
If so, how much?	£N/A
What is the source of Funding?	N/A
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain's Department?	N/A
Report of:	Deputy Town Clerk
Report author:	Polly Dunn, Assistant Town Clerk

Summary

This report seeks to respond to a growing challenge observed by both Officers and Members across various fora in relation to the need to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of governance and decision-making at the City Corporation. An initial analysis of some high-level data now available helps to support these observations.

In response to this, the report seeks Members' views on proposals as to how the organisation might start address these issues, including through the setting of a target for the overall reduction of meetings and the pursuit of other areas that will improve the efficiency of committee administration.

To help enable this work to take place, Members are also invited to support "quick wins" on changes to Governance & Member Services provision, which will further assist in alleviating capacity issues.

Finally, the report seeks approval on the prioritisation of strategic governance reviews led by (or heavily reliant upon) the Governance & Member Services Team, identifying the essential and desired areas in need of consideration, for the next three years. This will require onward consideration by the Court of Common Council.

Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to:

- 1) Consider and agree a target for the reduction of meetings either in percentage or actual terms e.g. 20% or 100 meetings, to be delivered through the activities set out in this report, by the 2027/28 civic year.
- 2) Consider and recommend the proposed list of governance review prioritisations to the Court of Common Council, for approval.
- 3) Support the proposed list of “quick win” service provision changes for the Governance & Member Services Team that have been identified as non-essential and non-strategic, alleviating capacity issues further (see Appendix 3 and 4).
- 4) Make any further suggestions/observations on areas where they feel could benefit from inclusion in this work.

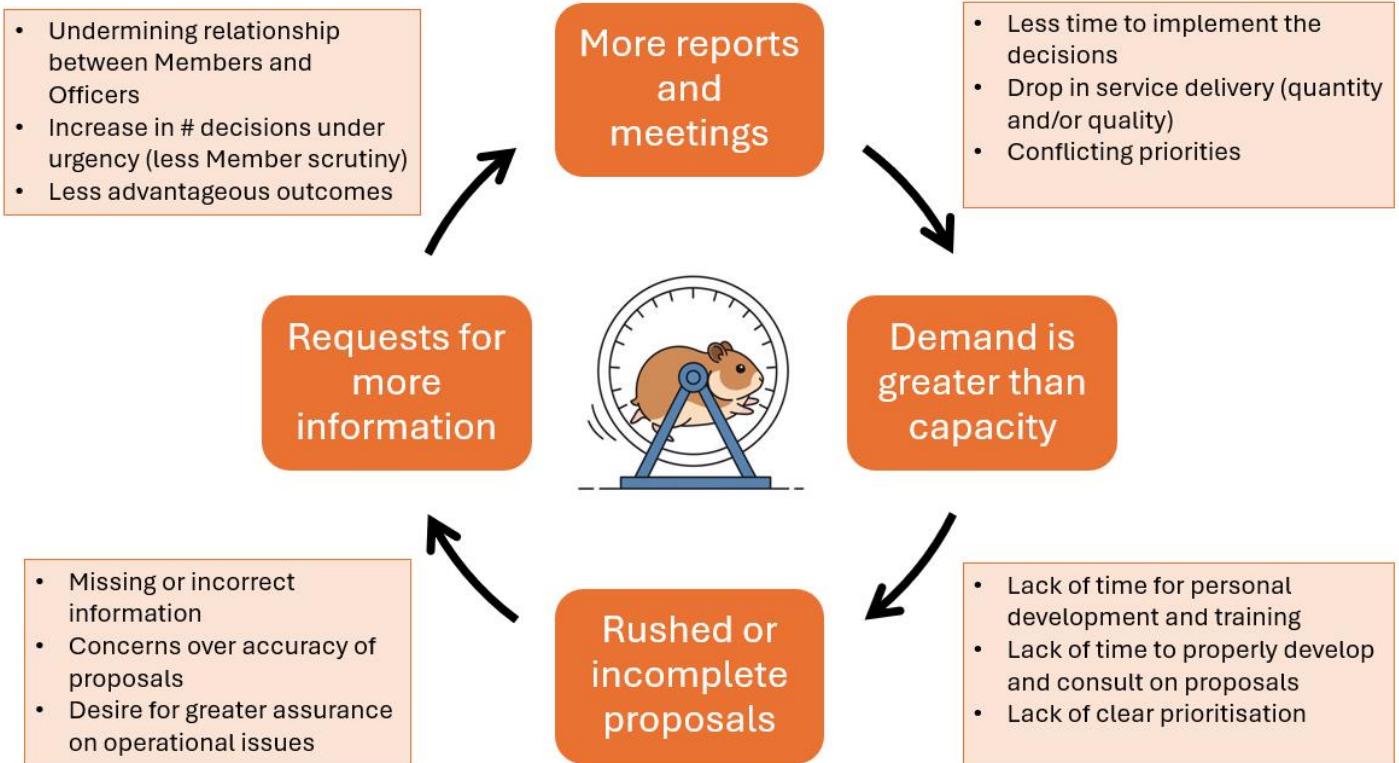
Main Report

Background

1. The City of London Corporation has a unique constitutional structure, as a consequence of its significant history and the various functions it performs. It is a corporation by prescription; it is not a local authority, although it performs many functions similar to those delivered by local authorities elsewhere in the country. The Corporation also discharges a wide range of private and charitable functions.
2. Given this, and the corresponding absence of a single constitution and the various capacities in which the Court of Common Council operates (Local Government; Police Authority; Port Health Authority; Trustee; and Private Corporation), its governance arrangements are inherently more complex than would be encountered in an organisation operating in a single capacity. Members and officers alike need to exercise sound and legal decision-making, which requires compliance across different statutory and regulatory frameworks issues, often at the same time.
3. Whilst the law (i.e. any legislation; charters; orders; etc.) is paramount, our internal corporate governance documents that are of key importance in terms of how we navigate this complex position are set out in Appendix 1, alongside which Departments and Member bodies are responsible for them. This list does not include key documents for the Court of Aldermen, nor Common Hall – both of which have their own governance arrangements as separate, distinct, executive bodies of the City Corporation.
4. Since 2020, a number of reviews impacting these documents have been undertaken and implemented. These are set out in Appendix 2. Once again, this does not include those conducted for the separate executive bodies.
5. Despite all this change, there continues to be considerable anecdotal feedback from Members and officers alike that the system is cumbersome, sometimes confusing and not as effective as it could or should be. These observations have been made through Informal Court (Members), the Policy & Resources Committee Away Day (Members) and Future Ambition 18 (Officers): the crucial point being that the same issues were being observed, albeit with different perspectives. It is

also anticipated that the forthcoming Local Government Association Peer Review will reflect similar observations.

6. The challenge, then, comes in providing options for solutions, particularly as the issues faced feed into somewhat of a vicious circle:



7. As a result of this, and in anticipation of the outcomes of a rapidly changing external climate (fair funding model; Local Government Associations (LGA) Peer Review outcomes) – we are keen to start taking action now, as the need for greater efficiencies is apparent.

Current Position

8. With that all in mind, it seems that one of the few levers available that could have immediate, positive, effect is to reduce the volume of meetings. This should, *in principle*, allow officers to produce better quality proposals. However, it is clear that we need to help officers navigate the system and then to constructively develop them and, where necessary, manage performance, to ensure that this is followed through. In that vein, work is already underway across the Governance & Member Services and the Learning & Development Teams, to develop a programme of training. Unfortunately, however, progress has been slow due to capacity constraints.

9. Whilst the Governance Review of 2021/22 saw the successful reduction of the number of committees, sub-committees and working parties from 120+ to less than 80; in real terms there has actually been no reduction in the overall number of meetings. In fact, in 2024, there was an increase. The concept that the reduction

in the number of committees in and of itself results in a streamlining of the decision-making process has, therefore, in terms of strict efficiencies, proven to be something of a red herring.

10. Despite this high volume of meetings (2.5 per working day), the Town Clerk took over 180 decisions on behalf of committees (under relevant urgency procedures set out in Standing Orders 19 and 40) in the 2025 calendar year. This in turn further indicates that the high number of meetings does not necessarily result in greater scrutiny by Members.

11. Some key statistics include:

- Approximately 400+ formal meetings administered by Governance and Member Services in 2025 (an election year with approximately three months of little to no meetings); 500+ in 2024.
- 14 'Grand' Committees took (on average) less than three decisions per meeting in 2025¹; seven of these committees are established primarily for scrutiny purposes (see Appendix 3).
- The 2024 Staff Survey Results, the response to the statement "I think Members provide strategic leadership and good governance", was classed as a 'Lowlight'. The response was 22% favourable, 51% neutral and 27% unfavourable. "Leadership doesn't seem to understand issues from employees, they are more focussed on making the Members happy", was also teased out as a key theme.
- During this time it is also perhaps relevant to note that we have seen two all-out Common Councillor elections resulting in a turnover of membership of 60%.

12. Whist a target reduction is sought from this Committee (e.g. 20%), it is crucial that any attempt to reduce the number of meetings and working time committed to feeding the committee system, is not arbitrary or without justification. It is also essential that it in no way restricts Members having sight of the decisions they should be involved in, and/or information that they are required to scrutinise decisions taken.

13. Instead, an informed approach is required, which we believe can be achieved through a combination of activities:

- Continue to engage in conversations with Chairs, Chief Officers and Directors around the minimum essential cadence of meetings to deliver business over 2026 and 2027². The Chairman of the Finance Committee and the Chamberlain have already made proposals regarding this Committee; the Police Authority Board and Barbican Centre Board also made significant changes to the structure and approach of its meetings in a similar vein.
- Capture data relating to the number and nature of decisions taken by each Committee, identifying where the purpose is primarily one of scrutiny.

¹ Not including the approval of minutes; exclusion of the public; elections of chairs etc.

² Capacity for extraordinary meetings will remain, but will require a clear business case to be assessed by the Town Clerk in consultation with the Chair, Deputy Chair and relevant Chief Officer(s).

- A more comprehensive review of committee Terms of Reference – identifying and removing duplication, whilst ensuring that committee focus are sufficiently strategic to ensure the best utilisation of committee time/input.
- Seek input from lead officers and bring back proposals on any committee and sub-committee rationalisations and/or abolitions.
- Re-visit Lisvane outcomes, which related to the committee structure and committee-associated processes, that were previously either discounted or only partially implemented.
- Assess where Members/Committees have already expressed where delegations may be revised effectively, either granting decision-making powers to sub-committees or to officers.
- Re-visit and bring forward proposals for streamlining associated committee processes³: e.g. piloting with Chairs and Chief Officers the reduction or removal of “for information” reports, exploring alternative and more timely methods to share news or requested information (Member Briefing; Member Portal; emails).
- Develop, in consultation with key departments and Members, an updated Committee Report template, with the ambition of improving the presentation of decisions.
- Immediate directive to Chief Officers around the level of officer attendance in formal committee meetings.
- Continuous improvement on training offering for officers and Members on corporate governance and decision making.
- Develop a process for the commissioning of reports and triaging of ad-hoc requests.

14. If approved, implementation of the above will likely take at least one civic year to realise, noting other work commitments within the Governance Team and across the City Corporation. Success could, at that point, be measured through a few mechanisms:

- a reduction of the total number of meetings by the agreed target;
- a reduction of the total number of decisions taken under urgency procedures;
- improvement in Member/Officer relations as captured within staff surveys conducted after March 2027;
- proposed Member survey to be developed and issued by Governance & Member Services this Spring – with a further survey during the course of 2026/27 to measure and map any improvements or concerns.

15. The above work will all need to be driven and heavily informed by Governance and Member Services Team and elements will require significant consultation with Members and cross-departmentally. To undertake it, the Team needs sufficient capacity in the immediate short-term, otherwise progress will be stifled by high volumes of ‘business as usual’ and, ultimately, unsuccessful.

³ As recommended by the Lord Lisvane and/or in accordance with local authority law and practice as set out in “Knowles on Local Authority Meetings” alongside any further outcomes of the ongoing Charities Review.

16. We must, therefore, ask that Members a) consider what pieces of governance-focussed work are priority and b) consider making some further immediate changes to service provision which would help alleviate immediate capacity pressures and improve core service delivery.

17. With that in mind, an initial proposal for prioritisation for the next three years is set out below. These items have been assessed as a) matters that are required of us by law; and b) core governance matters that, if remedied/improved, are considered to assist in the expeditious progress against those de-prioritised elements.

- i. Respond to legislative changes (Planning and Standards Reform) and Parliamentary commitments (Ward Boundary Review);
- ii. Governance Efficiency Review (i.e. pursue proposals within this report)
- iii. Related, time sensitive, governance reform that has already been commissioned (e.g. Housing Governance and responding to the outcomes of the recent Local Government Association Peer Review)
- iv. Supporting the implementation of the outcomes of the ongoing Corporate Change programmes (e.g. Charities Review, Procurement Review, Ambition 25, etc.)
- v. Supporting Corporate Strategy outcomes by “Building Brilliant Basics” through a review of the suite of Corporate Governance documents.
- vi. Continued exploration at officer level of how technology, and better process, can streamline core delivery, releasing more capacity for strategic, service improvements. This includes potential cost savings through material expenses (such as AV and printing).

18. This will mean that the following areas of work previously commissioned by Members are de-prioritised, not because they will not be addressed, but that the work on the above will be fundamental to how they are conducted. These include:

- i. Review into Ward Committee compositions
- ii. Review of seating arrangements at Court of Common Council
- iii. Review into the composition of Policy & Resources Committee and associated chairing arrangements
- iv. Proposals for evening Meetings
- v. Review into the Seniority of Committees
- vi. Review into the Term lengths of Committee Chairs

19. As some of these areas of work have been commissioned and time-bound by the Court of Common Council, the Court’s approval may need to be sought on the final prioritisation list.

20. The timespan of three years has been set in line with the current electoral term and is considered realistic in terms of the volume of work required to successfully deliver such fundamental change to our Corporate Governance processes. Not least as other huge workstreams and “business as usual” (BAU) will continue alongside. We also have to allow for the likelihood of be critical unknown factors internally and externally, from (for example) as high staff turnover all the way through to major incident response. This does not, however, mean that work will

not be driven in earnest and at pace. Should the benefits be realised earlier than three-years, then of course the other areas for review will be brought forward.

21. Members are invited to consider the list of priorities and make amendments; however, it is not considered feasible to add to the priority list without de-prioritising another, unless additional senior level resource is identified. A bid for additional resource sufficient to deliver all these areas of work has not been explored in this report as it was considered counter-intuitive to the general principle of driving efficiencies.
22. In order to further facilitate progress over the coming civic year at pace, as proposed, it is recommended that in addition to the reduction of meetings, a few options for re-prioritisation of resource be explored, including:
 - a) Standardisation of an agreed level of support provided for each committee/sub-committee and its chairs (e.g. briefs, callovers, briefs, wash ups).
 - b) Reviewing provision of the hard-copy Pocketbook (under the purview of the Culture Heritage and Libraries Committee).
 - c) To remove, with immediate effect, Stage 3 of our Corporate Complaints Policy, in accordance with best practice as set by the Local Government Ombudsman (See amends at Appendix 4).
 - d) Review where staffing is provided as a benefit-in-kind, with a view to assessing whether this is sustainable and/or strategically necessary.
23. These changes, alongside a reduction in meetings, should see a positive improvement in outputs such as: timeliness of agenda distributions; timeliness of draft minute provision; more effective agenda planning/management; more informed briefings etc.

Options

24. Fundamentally, the primary proposal within this report is whether Members agree that a reduction in meetings and an overall improvement in governance efficiencies would be beneficial to the organisation.
25. If the Committee is supportive of the need to take action to improve governance efficiencies, Members are invited scrutinise the initial proposals within this report, adopting them as proposed and/or with any suitable additions, amendments etc. It should be noted that all of the proposals within this report are in accordance with the observations and recommendations we anticipate arising from the LGA Peer Review.
26. If the Committee does not support the overall primary proposal, then there is an option to do nothing. Doing nothing would not, however, address the concerns raised within this report.

Proposals

27. Specifically Members are asked to:

- a) Agree a target for the reduction of meetings either in percentage or actual terms e.g. 20% or 100 meetings, to be delivered through the activities set out in this report, by the 2027/28 civic year.
- b) Recommend the proposed list of governance review prioritisations to the Court of Common Council, for approval.
- c) Support exploration the list of service provision that have been identified as non-essential and non-strategic, thus alleviating further capacity issues (see Appendix 3 and 4).
- d) Make any further suggestions/observations (either in the meeting of by email to the report author) on areas where they feel could benefit from inclusion in this work.

28. Members can be assured that all proposals requiring a Committee decision (e.g. changes to committee structure; any changes to current policies and/or governance documents) will be consulted upon appropriately with wider membership – before coming to Policy & Resources Committee and the Court of Common Council (where appropriate) for decision.

29. Where officers are already authorised to act (either independently or in consultation with the relevant Chair(s), this can commence immediately, e.g. engaging in conversations in the cadence of meetings; communication of information items; and development of training etc. Gaining the Committee's support does, however, give officers a greater impetus to progress.

Key Data

30. Key data is contained throughout this report and its appendices.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

31. Strategic implications – This proposal seeks to strengthen the City Corporation's governance processes through focussing attention on "Building Brilliant Basics"; and driving efficiencies. Supporting the recommendations will have the benefit of assisting delivery against these ambitions and, hopefully, better enabling the rest of the organisation in the efficient delivery of their own business plans, and key strategy outcomes.

32. Financial implications – There is no cost associated in supporting the proposals within this report. In fact, if the desired outcome is successfully achieved over the course of 2026/27, it should result in a financial benefit both in staff time released and in actual costs. It is challenging to put precise figures on this.

33. Support for this proposal will, in principle, be a driver to impact positively, the value for money demonstrated by the organisation through its decision-making activities – a fundamental function.

34. Resource implications – This entire proposal, if approved, will hopefully result in beneficial outcomes for staff resourcing, without the need to assign any additional resource in the short, medium or long term. If Members wish to explore adding additional resource to Governance & Member Services to increase the

pace at which this work within this report is delivered, they may do so. This option has not been explored in detail on the understanding that there is minimal discretionary resource available and that progress is feasible (albeit at a slower rate) without this additionality. As a result, a further report would be required to demonstrate this ask, if required.

35. Legal implications – In all of its capacities, the City Corporation is obliged to act within governance frameworks in a compliant manner. There are no immediate legal concerns but any and all changes presented in due course will need to satisfy our legal obligations in this respect.

36. Risk implications – failure to implement any solutions in the efficiency of decision-making risks the under delivery of our strategic objectives; risk exposure through human error caused by over-demand.

37. Equalities implications – the proposals within this report do not adversely impact or effect any group of people with protected characteristics under the Equalities Act 2010, or recognised characteristics (e.g. Social Mobility).

38. Climate implications – None at this time.

39. Security implications – None at this time.

Conclusion

40. In conclusion, Members are encouraged to use this report as an opportunity to commence discussions on how the organisation may identify and actively pursue efficiencies in its decision-making processes; and, if proposals contained within the report are agreeable, approve an initial way forward.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Suite of Governance Documents – Summary
- Appendix 2 – Summary of Reviews since 2020
- Appendix 3 – Governance and Member Services (G&MS) – “Quick win” proposals for changes to services
- Appendix 4 – Complaints Policy Revisions

Background Papers

- Copies of any relevant reports relating to reviews referenced in Appendix 2, can be made available upon request.

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Appendix 1 - Suite of Governance Documents - Summary

Document	Owned by (Department)	Owned by (Committee)
Standing Orders of the Court of Common Council	Governance & Member Services	Court of Common Council
Scheme of Delegations to Officers	Governance & Member Services	Court of Common Council
Terms of Reference of Grand Committees (also known as "Court Orders")	Governance & Member Services	Court of Common Council
Terms of Reference of Sub-Committees	Governance & Member Services	Appointing Committee
Member Code of Conduct	Governance & Member Services	Court of Common Council
Member Officer Charter	Governance & Member Services	Court of Common Council
Financial Regulations	Chamberlain's	Finance Committee
Procurement Code	Chamberlain's	Finance Committee
Project Procedure (P3 Framework)	Chamberlain's	Finance Committee
Policies managed by local services (e.g. HR) that set out when matters are to be escalated to committee level.	Various	Various

Appendix 2 – Various Governance-related Reviews from 2020

- The wholistic “Governance Review” of Committees and associated procedures undertaken by the Lord Lisvane (2021/22)
- The “Light Touch Governance Review” – intended to reflect upon any immediate issues arising from changes posed by the implementation of the Governance Review.
- Updates to the Officer Scheme of Delegations (BAU/ad-hoc)
- Annual Review of Terms of Reference – (BAU/ad-hoc)
- Standing Order Review (2024/25)
- Projects Review (2024/25)
- Procurement Code Review (ongoing)
- LGA Review into Member Behaviour (2023/24)
- LGA Peer Review (Ongoing)
- Charities Review and the Natural Environment Charities Review (ongoing)
- Housing Governance Review (commissioned to start in March 2026)
- Ward Boundary Review (due to commence this year)
- Planning Reform (due to be implemented this year)
- Standards Reform (“as soon as parliamentary time allows”)

(Delivery dates)

Appendix 3 – Governance and Member Services (G&MS) – “Quick win” proposals for changes to services

Problem	Proposal	Benefits	Risks and Mitigations
The Pocketbook is known to be out of date immediately following production as a result of constant changes in membership, meeting dates etc. It takes a considerable amount of staff time to produce (c. 1-3 weeks of 4+ Officers time).	Support the development of proposals to consider the cessation of the hard-copy Pocketbook for recommendation to the CHL Committee.	Time saved to be utilised on core service delivery; no longer out of date information in circulation; improved management of potential GDPR breaches (Member details)	No significant risks identified.
Corporate Complaints are currently overseen by G&MS. It requires a three-stage process from initial complaint to appeal. Currently, Stage 3 must be conducted by a Chief Officer or senior officer and can take 1-2 weeks of their time to undertake. This three-stage process is actually no longer in keeping with LGSCO Guidance	To remove, with immediate effect, Stage 3 of our Corporate Complaints Policy. See proposed amends at Appendix 4. This includes clarification that only service complaints relating to the City Corporation as a Local Authority, may be escalated to the LGSCO	Removal of an unnecessary and time-consuming process; improved compliance with the Local Government and Social Care (LGSCO) Ombudsman best practice.	No significant risks identified. <u>Current positive LGSCO statistics are reported online.</u> Whilst unexpected: If there is a detriment in complaints processing in future years as a result of this change – we can review further.
Where staffing is issued by G&MS as a business in kind and has increased without formal agreement/any additional resource: to review agreements with a view of withdrawing or reducing the provision.	Explore where staffing is provided as a business in kind, with a view to assessing whether this is sustainable. Bring back proposal(s) to Committee.	Release of G&MS capacity to focus on the delivery of COLC services.	Potential risks to stakeholder relationships – to be managed through constructive dialogue and risks assessed in consequent reports.
Challenges in managing differing Member expectations in relation to support provided for committee-related activity; then managing workloads effectively to meet those demands.	Explore options for the standardisation of an agreed level of support provided for each committee/sub-committee and its chairs (e.g. briefs, callovers, briefs, wash ups).	Provides consistency and fairness of support offered across all committees.	No significant risks identified.

Appendix 4 – Complaints Policy Revisions

Additions in underlined text; deletions are ~~struck through~~

Complaints Policy

The City aims to be helpful, efficient and to deliver your services right first time. However, we know there are times you may not be happy or you may want to make a suggestion about how we can improve. We want to correct our mistakes quickly and always seek to enhance our service delivery. As part of this your feedback - comments, complaints and suggestions - are important to us.

A comment or suggestion is... We define a comment or suggestion as a matter which proposes an improvement / change to existing services to ensure more successful delivery, or as a request for a service that is made for the first time. All comments and suggestions will be used as part of planning the improvement and delivery of your services. We will not respond to comments and suggestions unless we have your contact details and need to clarify something with you.

A complaint is... We define a complaint as “A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction by the public, however made, about the conduct, standard of service, actions or lack of action by the City of London Corporation or its staff” and we deal with complaints through a simple ~~two~~ three-stage procedure.

Please note that this procedure is not intended for cases where the City of London has taken a decision in a proper manner but with which you disagree or where you wish to complain about other persons or organisations - unless they are working for the City of London. We will also not respond to or pursue feedback that is identified as frivolous or vexatious.

Making a concise complaint To ensure the quickest response you will need to email the relevant department’s complaint team directly. If you cannot find details for the relevant department you can contact the general complaints team who will be able to assist. To ensure complaints are quickly identified, we would be grateful if you could state **Complaint** in the subject line.

If we don't have all the information we need to deal with a complaint, we will have to contact you in order to request it. This will add to the overall time taken to resolve your complaint. Consequently, we recommend that before you make a complaint, you consider what needs to be included. Be specific and focus on the issue - what, why, when, where, who - and briefly explain all the relevant circumstances surrounding your complaint.

Stage one The best people to deal with a complaint are those who provide the service - please contact them first (details below). They will try to sort out the problem as quickly as possible - mistakes and misunderstandings can often be sorted out on the spot. Once you have made your complaint you can expect a full response within 10 working days. If we aren't able to investigate your complaint in full within this time, we will contact you to advise you of the delay and to let you know when you can expect a final response.

List of contacts

Department	Email address
Barbican Centre	Email Barbican Centre
City Surveyor	Email City Surveyor
Chamberlain's Department	Email Chamberlain's <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Council Tax• Business Rates• Sundry and Property
Community and Children's Services	Email Community and Children's Services
Comptroller and City Solicitor	Email Comptroller and City Solicitor
Environment Department	Email Environment Information
Compliance Team	Email Compliance Team <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Freedom of Information (including CCTV)• Environmental Information Regulations• Re-Use of Public Sector information• Data Protection

Housing Services

[Email Housing Services](#)

PCN Challenges

[Email PCN Challenges](#)

Remembrancer's Department

[Email Remembrancer's](#)

Wholesale Markets

[Email Wholesale Markets](#)

Stage two If you are not happy with the outcome from stage one, you can take the matter further. Please respond to the relevant department and they will arrange a review of your complaint by the Chief Officer of the department, or a nominated senior officer. Again, you can expect a full response within 10 working days, or we will contact you to advise you of the delay and to let you know when you can expect a final response.

Stage three ~~If you are still unhappy after the stage two investigation, you can contact the general complaints team. Our final review and response will be undertaken by the Town Clerk & Chief Executive, or a senior officer acting on his/her behalf and will be a completely independent investigation of stages one and two of your complaint. In your letter you should outline why you do not feel the responses at stages one and two were satisfactory and the remedial action you wish the City of London to take. As for the previous stages you can expect a full response within 10 working days, or we will contact you to advise of the delay and to let you know when you can expect a full response.~~

If the stage ~~three two~~ review doesn't resolve your complaint and you want to take it further you will ~~be advised on the next steps available to you. If you are complaining about a service provided by the City Corporation acting in its capacity as a Local Authority, you will be directed need~~ to contact the Local Government Ombudsman at this stage.

If after any stage you don't get back to us within four weeks of our response to you we will consider that you have been satisfied with the response you have received.

NB: *There are special arrangements and different policies/forms for complaints about:*

- *Adult Social Care services*
- *Family and Young People's services*
- *Schools*
- *Freedom of Information / Data Protection Act*
- *Policing*
- *Member Standards*