

Report to Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Subject: Review of complaints received by the Council and Annual Review Letter - Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman 2024/25

Date: 12 January 2026

Author: Deputy Chief Executive and Monitoring Officer

Wards Affected

All Wards

Purpose

To inform Members of the receipt of the Annual review letter from the office of the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) and the complaints dealt with by the Council through the internal complaint's procedure during the year 2024/25.

Key Decision

This is not a key decision.

Recommendation

THAT Committee:

- 1) Notes the details of the Annual Review letter from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman and the information in relation to the number of complaints dealt with by the Council through the internal complaint's procedure in 2024/25.

1 Background

- 1.1 Members will be aware of the Council's arrangements for dealing with formal complaints, full details of which are available on the website and provided in the Council's Complaints, Compliments and Comments Policy ("the Policy"). This policy was reviewed and updated in October 2024 to align with the LGSCO Model Complaints Code; no further updates are required at this time. An Unacceptable Customer Behaviour Policy was adopted by Council

in 2022. This policy is currently under review to align with the Employee Protection Register and will be brought to a future meeting for approval.

- 1.2 The Council operates a two stage complaints process, initial complaints are handled at stage 1, if the complainant is not satisfied with the handling of the complaint, it can be escalated by the complainant to stage 2 and investigated by a more senior officer. Ultimately, if the complainant is not satisfied with the handling of the complaint at stage 2, the complaint can be escalated to the LGSCO, details of which are provided to the complainant. The departmental analysis of complaints and compliments appears below.
- 1.3 Between 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2025, the Council received a total of 537 complaints, which is an increase from 417 complaints received in 2023/24. Of all complaints received 39% were upheld or partially upheld at stage 1, which is the same as 2023/24. The Council has received 284 compliments in 2024/25 this is a significant increase from the 190 received in 2023/24. The breakdown of complaints and compliments is set out below.

Service	Complaints received	Upheld/ partially upheld	Compliments
Benefits	8	1	0
Communications	0	0	0
Community Relations	1	1	29
Customer Services	9	7	5
Economic Growth and Regeneration	0	0	0
Elections and Member Services	3	0	0
Housing	24	1	11
Legal Services	2	0	0
Leisure	12	8	180
Organisational Development	0	0	0
Parks & Street Care	95	67	19
Planning	15	3	7
Property Services	8	2	0
Public Protection	27	1	4
Revenues Services	38	11	2
Transport Services	0	0	0
Waste	295	105	27
Total	537	207	284

- 1.4 In 2024/25, 68 (13%) of complaints related to equality matters this is an increase in 21 from the previous year. Details of these complaints are reported quarterly through the usual complaint review process, through the Strategic Equality and Diversity Group and reported as part of the annual equality report to Cabinet later in the year. The largest area of equality related complaints related to Waste Services where those individuals requiring assisted collection were reporting missed bins. All assisted collections are now mapped on the Whitespace software management system with details of the location from which the bin can be collected. It is hoped this will assist crews in ensuring such collections are not missed in future.
- 1.5 The number of complaints across most departments have not really fluctuated from the previous year. The most significant change in complaint level is within Waste Services with an increase from 225-295 over the 2 years. There has also been increases in Parks and Street Care 64-95, Housing 19-24 and Revenues 22-38. Waste continues to have the highest level of complaints across all services. The performance of Waste Services is being monitored, and Cabinet have been updated in relation to performance issues being experienced as a result of a number of factors including changes to structures, implementation of new systems and processes, increased demand and sickness absence. The transformation of environmental operational services is ongoing across waste, parks, street care and fleet but will take some time to embed. The software management system Whitespace is already starting to provide much more effective data for crews and Customer Services in relation to managing customer queries and complaints.
- 1.6 In addition to complaints, it is also important to focus on the significant increase in compliments received in 2024/25. The majority of compliments fall within Leisure Services and reflect a fantastic performance throughout the service throughout 2024/25. In particular, positive feedback is received in relation to swimming lessons. Across all service areas comments repeatedly focus on the professionalism of staff and the many occasions where staff demonstrate thoughtfulness and care for customers, for example, the glass collection team making sure a customer's delivery package was returned to the glass box after emptying, the revenues officer demonstrating "compassion and care" towards a change in circumstances customer. In general terms, customers tend to be less inclined to provide positive feedback and as such it is important that the volume of such engagement is reported.
- 1.7 Where a complaint is not upheld in full or in part, the complainant may ask for it to be considered further under stage 2 of the complaint's procedure. Between 1 April 2024 and 31st March 2025, 35 complaints were considered under stage 2, this is an increase from the 22 in the previous year. Of these 12 or 34% of complaints were upheld at stage 2

(an increase from 33% upheld in 2023/24). The breakdown of stage 2 complaints is as follows.

Service	Stage 2 complaints	Upheld/ partially upheld	Not Upheld
Elections and member Services	1	0	1
Housing	2	1	1
Legal Services	1	0	0
Parks and Street Care	3	2	1
Planning	4	1	3
Property Services	1	0	1
Public Protection	8	0	8
Revenues Services	11	4	7
Waste Services	4	4	0
Total	35	12	23

- 1.7 Members should note that complaints and compliments data is analysed and reported to the Budget and Performance Board and Senior Leadership Team (SLT) quarterly as part of performance monitoring, to ensure that any trends can be identified and appropriate action taken. Details of complaints are also reported annually through the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Any complaints relating to equality matters are also considered by the Strategic Equality and Diversity Group to identify any equality related actions arising.
- 1.8 If the complainant is not happy with the response at stage 2, they are entitled to refer their complaint to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (“LGSCO”). Between 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2025, the Council received 11 complaints from the LGSCO (one fewer than the previous year). The LGSCO also received 6 complaints from residents which had not been through the Council’s complaints process so were rejected as premature and referred back through the Council’s complaints process, and one complaint where insufficient information was provided to log it to the Council. A summary of the decisions on complaints of the LGSCO made in 2024/25 appear in the table below.

Service	Decision of LGO
Housing	Closed after initial enquiries
Planning and development	Closed after initial enquiries
Benefits and Tax	Closed after initial enquiries
Planning and Development	Upheld: injustice remedied during

	Council complaint process
Benefit and Tax	Closed after initial enquiries
Planning and Development	Closed after initial enquiries
Planning and Development	Closed after initial enquiries
Housing	Advice given signposted
Planning and Development	Closed after initial enquiries
Benefits and Tax	Upheld: injustice remedied during Council complaints process
Environmental Services and Public Protection	Closed after initial enquiries

- 1.9 As Members will note, a number of complaints were closed after initial enquiries, this means the LGSCO determined no further investigation into the Council's handling of the complaint was warranted.
- 1.10 Members will note that two of the complaints determined by the LGSCO in 2024/25 were upheld, however it was determined that the Council had addressed issues through the Council's complaints procedure and the LGSCO therefore deemed no further action necessary. In the decision notices issued the LGSCO indicated that they would not investigate either complaint. The first of these complaints was with regards to the handling of pre-planning application advice. The complainant alleged that there had been delays in receiving advice from planning officers. The Council had already issued an apology to the complainant for any delay and provided further advice without charge which was deemed adequate by the LGSCO. The second upheld complaint related to Revenues. In this instance enforcement action had been taken against a business incorrectly to recover monies owed to the Council. The Council had apologised and offered compensation for any costs incurred in the dispute, again the LGSCO deemed this acceptable.
- 1.11 The Annual Review letter for the year ending 31 March 2025 is attached at Appendix 1. Members will note that of the complaints determined by the LGSCO in 2024/25, two are referenced as upheld. These are the two complaints referenced in para 1.10. The percentage of complaints therefore upheld by the Ombudsman of those investigated was 2, 100%. This is above the average of 66% for similar size authorities. It should be noted however that there is no comparison in terms of the volume of complaints investigated at other similar size authorities, so other similar size authorities could have significantly larger volumes of investigations and larger numbers upheld but the percentage figure would be lower. It should also be noted that although the data published in the annual review records 2 investigations were undertaken, in the two decision notices issued by the LGSCO on the upheld complaints it was made clear that the LGSCO were not investigating.

- 1.12 Since April 2013, the LGSCO has been publishing all decisions on complaints they receive. Decision statements are published on the Ombudsman website at www.lgo.org.uk no earlier than three months after the date of the final decision. The information published does not name the complainant or any individual involved with the complaint. The LGSCO also retains discretion not to publish a decision, for example where it would not be in the interests of the person complaining to publish or where there's a reason in law not to.
- 1.13 The data contained in the Annual Review letter has been uploaded onto the Ombudsman's interactive map, also available on the LGSCO website, which shows the annual review data for all Councils.
- 1.14 As part of the complaints handling process, it is essential that officers receive training to ensure effective handling of complaints. Two of the Council's Assistant Directors attended complaint handling training delivered by the Ombudsman earlier this year and a training programme is currently being developed to cascade this information down. In addition the Council is currently reviewing complaint handling processes to determine whether there is a more efficient and effective way to manage complaints in a more corporate way rather than in silos.

2 Proposal

- 2.1 It is proposed that the Overview & Scrutiny Committee note the contents of the report in respect of complaints data and the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's annual letter for 2024/25.

3 Alternative Options

- 3.1 This information could no longer be reported to members, however, it is considered important that members are informed of the number and origin of complaints on an annual basis, including details of the Annual Review letter, to enable proper assessment of performance.

4 Financial Implications

- 4.1 In terms of the financial implications, there is an impact on resource where resource is utilised to investigate and manage complaints.

5 Legal Implications

- 5.1 The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman is the independent body responsible for investigating complaints made against public bodies where it is alleged there has been maladministration causing injustice. The powers of the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman come from the Local Government Act 1974. The LGSCO will generally only investigate a complaint against a public body where the complaint has firstly been taken through that body's internal complaints procedure. It is therefore essential that the Council maintains a robust complaints process. The LGSCO does have the power to make recommendations to a public authority following a complaint however the recommendations are not mandatory, findings and recommendations are however published by the LGSCO. Where the LGSCO makes a finding of maladministration with injustice following an investigation, by virtue of s.5A of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989, the Monitoring Officer is required to prepare a report to the Executive.

6 Equalities Implications

- 6.1 The Council's Complaints process is designed to enable accessibility for all as complaints are invited by a variety of methods, including; by telephone, in writing, by email, via a councillor, in person and online.
- 6.2 Complaints relating to equality are now categorised separately through the complaint's system so that any issues or trends can be identified and any necessary improvements made.

7 Carbon Reduction/Sustainability Implications

- 7.1 There are no carbon reduction/sustainability implications arising from this report.

8 Appendices

- 8.1 Appendix 1 – Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Annual review Letter.

9 Background Papers

- 9.1 [Complaint Handling Code \(lgo.org.uk\)](http://lgo.org.uk)

10 Reasons for Recommendations

- 10.1 To alert the Executive to the contents of the Local Government Ombudsman Annual Review Letter and raise awareness of the complaints received by the Council during 2024/25.

Statutory Officer approval

Approved by:

Date:

On behalf of the Chief Financial Officer

Approved by:

Date:

On behalf of the Monitoring Officer