

Report to Cabinet

Subject: Review of complaints received by the Council and Annual Review Letter - Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman 2025/26

Date: 16 July 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 2025/26.

To update Members on the review of the Council's Unacceptable Behaviour Policy and to seek approval for amendments to the policy.

Key Decision

This is not a key decision.

Recommendation

THAT Cabinet:

- 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 2025/26.
- 2) Approves the amendments to the Council's Unacceptable Customer Behaviour Policy

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 has been reviewed and proposed amendments to the policy are shown at Appendix 2.
- 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 2025 and 31 March 2026, the Council received a total of 803 complaints, which is an increase from 537 complaints received in 2024/25. Of all complaints received 41% were upheld or partially upheld at stage 1, which is 2% more upheld than in 2024/25. The Council has received 404 compliments in 2025/26 this is a significant increase from the 284 received in 2024/25. The breakdown of complaints at stage 1 and compliments is set out below.

Service	Complaints received	Upheld/ partially upheld	Compliments
Benefits	4	0	1
Communications	1	0	0
Community Relations	1	1	15
Customer Services	11	7	12
Economic Growth and Regeneration	0	0	0
Elections and Member Services	3	0	1
Housing	25	0	2
ICT	1	1	0
Legal Services	3	1	0
Leisure	10	7	314
Organisational Development (Workforce)	1	1	0
Parks & Street Care	66	31	14
Planning	16	1	1
Property Services	6	1	1
Public Protection	36	6	4
Revenues Services	47	7	0
Transport Services	1	0	0
Waste	571	266	39
Total	803	330	404

- 1.4 In 2025/26, 109 (14%) of complaints related to equality matters this is an increase in 41 from the previous year but proportionally a 1% increase in the percentage of complaints relating to equality, diversity and inclusion. Details of these complaints are reported quarterly through the usual complaint review process, through the Strategic Equality and Diversity Group. The largest area of equality related complaints related to Waste Services where those reporting a disability complained about 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. Whilst there has been an increase in equality related complaints this links to the wider overall increase in complaints of missed collections to waste services and is a proportional increase.

1.5 The number of complaints across most departments have not really fluctuated from the previous year but complaints have halved in Welfare Services and there has been a significant reduction in complaints from Parks and Street Cleansing where complaints have reduce from 95 to 66 over the last two years. There has been an increase in complaints in Revenues (38-47) and Public Protection (27-36) the latter increase is due to increased enforcement activity and issuing of fixed penalty notices. The most significant change in complaint levels is within Waste Services with an increase from 295 to 571 over the last 2 years.

1.6 Complaints in Waste Services were significantly higher in quarter 1 and 2 of 2025/26 than in previous years and this was previously reported to Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny Committee who established a working group to look at the function. Waste complaints in quarter 1 have always been higher than the rest of the year and this is predominantly down to the commencement of the Garden Waste Service which can take a little time to embed as new customers join and routes have to be rapidly adapted. Complaints in quarters 1 and 2 totalled 394 and in quarters 3 and 4 totalled 177 which is more in line with average complaints numbers.

1.7 Whilst significant changes and improvements have been made to the waste service over the last year, including a new in cab software system, changes in management, changes to working conditions, significant changes to training and development and workforce culture, re-organisation of some routes, there was a drop in performance in the first half of the year particularly in relation to the roll out of garden waste in 2025/26. This was largely down to staff absence, long term sickness and a heavy reliance on agency staff particularly during the garden waste roll out for 2025/26 which led to a number of missed bin complaints. As the software system became embedded in quarter two, and absence management and performance improved complaints reduced in quarters 3 and 4.

1.8 In 2026/27 an improvement plan has been developed with waste services to ensure continued performance improvement and a reduction in complaints. This is a plan worked on with customer services and human resources to ensure the best outcomes for customers. Further route re-design is also planned in 2026/27 to improve collection rates.

1.9 In addition to complaints, it is also important to focus on the significant increase in compliments received in 2025/26. The majority of compliments fall within Leisure Services and reflect a fantastic performance throughout the service. Other compliments related to waste staff where one customer

wrote - *Good morning I would like to pass on a compliment to the bin waste team who collected our recycling this morning. They are always very efficient and tidy but I don't usually have the chance to engage with the staff. This morning I was showing my grandson the bin lorry going by and how the bins get emptied and it just struck me how friendly and engaging they were despite being so busy at their job! They waved to my grandson and were just so cheerful and friendly. Please pass on my compliments to the people concerned.*

1.10 Further compliments were received for Housing staff, Cemeteries staff and Customer Services, where staff were all praised for their professionalism and care.

1.11 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 complaints procedure. Between 1 April 2025 and 31st March 2026, 103 complaints were considered under stage 2, this is an increase from the 35 in the previous year but reflects the overall increase in complaint levels. Of these 51% of complaints were upheld at stage 2 (an increase from 34% upheld in 2024/25). The breakdown of stage 2 complaints is as follows.

Service	Stage 2 complaints	Upheld/ partially upheld	Not Upheld
Communications	1	0	1
Customer Services	1	1	0
Housing	5	0	5
Legal Services	1	1	0
Parks and Street Care	7	3	2
Planning	2	0	2
Property Services	0	0	0
Public Protection	6	0	6
Revenues Services	11	1	10
Waste Services	69	47	21
Total	103	53	47

1.12 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. In 2026/27 complaints data will be reported to the Budget, performance and Risk board bi-monthly to ensure closer scrutiny of complaint trends.

- 1.13 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 2025 and 31 March 2026, the LGSCO received 15 complaints in relation to the Council. Of those, 11 were determined by the LGSCO in 2025/26 and 3 were determined in 2026/27 and will be reported in next year’s outcomes and one remains outstanding. Not all complaints were reported to the Council and of the eleven determined in 2025/26, three were dealt with without notification to the Council, this was due to the complaints being premature in that they had not been through the Council’s complaints system prior to reporting to the LGSCO. Below are the outcomes of the complaints from the LGSCO in 2025/26 which were determined and of which the Council were advised (8). This is a reduction in the 11 reported last year.

Service	Decision of LGO
Environmental Services and Public Protection (refuse and recycling)	Referred back for local resolution
Benefits and Tax	Closed after initial enquiries
Environmental Services and Public Protection (ASB)	Closed after initial enquiries
Planning and Development	Closed after initial enquiries
Environmental Services and Public Protection (pollution)	Closed after initial enquiries
Benefits and Tax	Closed after initial enquiries
Corporate and other services	Closed after initial enquiries
Corporate and other services	Closed after initial enquiries

- 1.14 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. There were two complaints decided in 2025/26 which had been reported to the LGSCO in the previous year (hence the LGSCO reported stat of 13 complaints handled). Those two complaints were both Council tax complaints and were closed after initial enquiries.

- 1.15 The Annual Review letter for the year ending 31 March 2026 is attached at Appendix 1. Members will note that of the complaints determined by the LGSCO in 2025/26, none were upheld and none were referred for investigation.
- 1.16 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.
- 1.17 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.
- 1.18 As part of the complaints handling process, it is essential that officers receive training to ensure effective handling of complaints. A training programme is currently being rolled out to all officers handling complaints starting with Waste Services. In addition the Council has recently undergone an internal audit in relation to complaints handling and received a substantial assurance for design and moderate assurance for effectiveness, this was mainly due to officers not always uploading responses on to the Council's complaints system. The complaints process is in the process of migrating onto the Council's Customer Relationship Management System and this will improve the consistency and efficiency of complaints handling providing a clear process and standard format for complaint responses and ensuring all data is retained centrally.

2 Proposal

- 2.1 It is proposed that Cabinet note the contents of the report in respect of complaints data and the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's annual letter for 2025/26.
- 2.2 It is proposed that Members also approve the amendments to the Council's Unacceptable Customer Behaviour Policy at Appendix 2. The Policy was initially adopted in 2022 following a rise in unacceptable behaviour towards staff by customers. The policy provides guidance for staff and managers on how to deal with unacceptable customer behaviour including persistent complainants. The policy aligns with Council's health and safety responsibilities towards staff and the Employee Protection

register Guidance. The policy has been reviewed and updated to reflect:

- Changes in job roles and responsibilities
- Stronger alignment with health and safety reporting requirements
- Clarity around review processes once sanctions have been imposed

A simplified flowchart has also been added to reflect the process and provide clarity for staff and customers.

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.

3.2 Members could reject the amendments to the Unacceptable Behaviour policy or suggest alternative amendments. This policy has been produced having regard to best practice, other similar policies from other organisations and is considered fit for purpose.

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.

The Council as an employer has a number of duties under health and safety Legislation to protect the health and wellbeing of employees. The Unacceptable Customer Behaviour Policy support that duty by providing guidance to staff and the public on how unacceptable behaviour will be managed.

Local Government Reorganisation (LGR)

- 6**
- 6.1 As part of the work to prepare the new Councils, consideration will need to be given to amalgamate policy and processes in the handling of complaints. The LGSCO Complaints Code does provide a standardised approach to complaint handling.

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. (EIA attached)

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.

Appendix 2 – Updated Unacceptable Customer Behaviour Policy

Appendix 3 – Equality Impact Assessment

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 2025/26 and to ensure the Unacceptable Customer behaviour policy remains fit for purpose.

Statutory Officer approval

Approved by:

Date:

On behalf of the Chief Financial Officer

Approved by:

Date:

On behalf of the Monitoring Officer