

Annual review of complaints 2024-25

Meeting:	Standards and Audit Committee
Date:	8 October 2025
Cabinet portfolio:	Customers and Business Transformation
Directorate:	Digital, HR and Customer Services in consultation with the Monitoring Officer
For publication	

1.0 Purpose of the report

- 1.1 This report presents an overview of the complaints received and managed during the financial year 2024-25 under the remit of the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO). It includes key statistics, performance against response targets, analysis of upheld complaints and insights into the most common complaint themes. The report also includes details of the council's self-assessment against the LGSCO's complaints handling code. The aim of the report is to support transparency, accountability and continuous improvement in service delivery.
- 1.2 The report also provides details of the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's annual report in relation to the complaints it has received and investigated for Chesterfield Borough Council during 2024-25.
- 1.3 For completeness and transparency, the report also includes an appendix with information relating to the complaints received in 2024-25 which are under the remit of the Housing Ombudsman, and which are scrutinised separately by the council's Housing Advisory Board.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 To agree the council's self-assessment against the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's complaint handling code as set out in Appendix 1 of this report.
- 2.2 To consider and note the performance which has been achieved during 2024-25 in relation to complaints which fall under the remit of the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.

- 2.3 To consider and note the information submitted in the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's annual report, as set out in Appendix 2 and 2a of this report.
- 2.4 To note the information relating to complaints received in 2024-25 and which fall under the remit of the Housing Ombudsman, as set out in Appendix 3 of this report.

3.0 Reason for recommendations.

- 3.1 Having oversight of complaints means that elected members can be assured that appropriate actions are being taken to address service-related concerns, foster a culture of continuous service improvements and maintain high standards of governance.

4.0 Report details

The LGSCO complaints handling code

- 4.1 The LGSCO complaints handling code provides guidance on how local authorities should handle complaints effectively and consistently. It promotes openness and transparency in the complaints process, ensuring that residents understand how to make a complaint and what to expect in terms of response and resolution.
- 4.2 At the request of the LGSCO, Chesterfield Borough Council undertakes an annual self-assessment against the code, and this is attached to this report at Appendix 1. There are currently no gaps identified against each of the standards set out in the LGSCO complaints handling code.
- 4.3 In order to promote transparency, and to ensure the Council adheres to the code, it is intended that the self-assessment document is published in the complaints section of the Council's website.

Complaints management system.

- 4.4 The Council launched its revised complaints management system in November 2022 to enable it to comply with the complaint handling codes which were being introduced by the LGSCO and the Housing Ombudsman.
- 4.5 Continuous improvements have been made to this system, alongside reflecting minor changes which have been requested by the Housing Ombudsman and the LGSCO as their complaint handling codes were refined. Examples of such changes are:

- Updating the complaints management system to include 'follow up' and 'lessons learned' workflows. This has increased the level of positive, proactive actions being taken and the new workflows are intended to reduce levels of customer contact and strengthen customer satisfaction with complaint handling.
- Moving the end-to-end management of those complaints which fall under the remit of the Housing Ombudsman to the Housing Directorate from February 2025. This has ensured greater ownership and accountability for housing related complaints and ensured that the appropriate level of resource was being made available to manage complaints effectively.
- Providing front line employees with refresher training on complaints handling and ensuring that residents and businesses have an opportunity to raise a complaint when they express any form of dissatisfaction, in line with the code.
- Updating the system to identify whether complaints have been reclassified to service requests, in readiness for reporting this data to the Ombudsman in 2025-26.

Overview of complaints received under the remit of the LGO.

4.6 A total of 364 complaints were received during 2024-25, representing a 9.5% reduction compared to 2023-24. Increasing levels of complaints were seen in areas relating to bins and recycling, council tax and environmental services during 2024-25. The number of complaints for Street scene services reduced by 46% during the year.

4.7 Table 1 below provides details of the number of complaints received each month.

Table 1 – complaints received during the financial year 2024-25

Month	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Number	40	33	32	34	39	24	23	25	27	27	29	31

4.8 With over 85,000 customer contacts recorded during the year, complaints accounted for just over 0.4% of all interactions, demonstrating that most customer engagements were resolved without escalation.

4.9 Table 2 below provides details of the complaints received by subject and whether the council upheld the complaint following investigation.

Table 2 – complaints received by subject and whether they were upheld

Complaints by subject	Total	Upheld	Partially Upheld	Not Upheld
Arts and venues	6	0	2	4
Benefits	4	1	1	2
Bins, recycling & waste	56	24	7	25
Business Rates	3	1	0	2
Council Tax	39	6	5	28
Customer Services & Careline	21	4	5	12
Elections	6	1	3	2
Environmental	36	8	6	22
Housing*	41	3	3	35
Licensing	0	0	0	0
Markets	3	0	2	1
Other**	55	10	4	41
Parking Services	20	6	1	13
Planning	10	0	0	10
Sport and leisure	24	9	7	8
Street scene	38	11	7	20
Tourism	2	0	0	2
Total	364	84	53	227

* Housing functions which do not fall under the Housing Ombudsman i.e. homeless prevention, allocations and private sector housing.

** a variety of smaller functions that it would not be practical or reasonable to list in full (e.g. fleet, legal, payroll)

Definitions:

- *Upheld* - we found that mistakes were made and/or we have provided a level of service below the standard we aim to achieve.
- *Partially upheld* - we found that we got some things wrong but also acted correctly in some areas of the complaint.

- *Not upheld* - we found that we acted correctly.

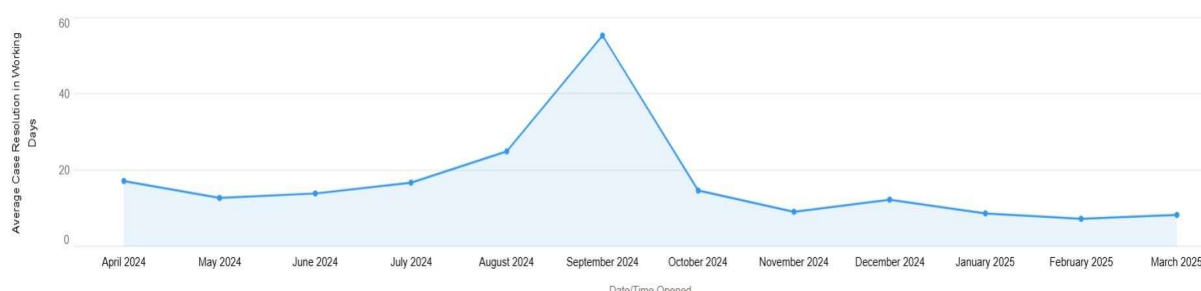
- 4.10 83.5% of complaints (304 complaints) were resolved at Stage 1 of the complaints process.
- 4.11 16.5% of complainants remained unhappy following the complaint response at Stage 1 and escalated this to stage 2 and/or to the LGSCO. Information relating to the LGSCO investigations is provided at section 4.26 to 4.31 of this report.

Response times

- 4.12 Stage 1 complaints should be acknowledged within 5 days and responded to within 10 days of acknowledgement. Of the complaints received, 81% were responded to within the required timeframe.
- 4.13 The mean average response time for stage 1 complaints during 2024-25 was 16.3 days. Table 3 below shows the average response time for complaints which were resolved during each month of the 2024-25 financial year.

Table 3 – average stage 1 complaint response times by month

Average S1 response audit report FY24



- 4.14 Some complaints were complex, resulting in us being unable to resolve the case within the target timescales.
- 4.15 The percentage of complaints managed within the 15 day acknowledgement and response period has increased by 13% from that achieved during the 2023-24 financial year (68% within timescale). Improved monitoring of cases has been implemented, which has improved the performance data in 2024-25, but this will continue to remain an area of focus in 2025-26.
- 4.16 For complaints which are referred to Stage 2, the average completion time is 61 days. 65% of Stage 2 complaints were completed within service standard.

Root causes and lessons learned

- 4.17 Following investigation, 137 complaints were upheld or partially upheld, representing 37.6% of the total received. This represents a slight increase from the 2023-24 position (36%).
- 4.18 The breakdown of reasons for upheld complaints is set out in Table 4 below.

Table 4 – reasons for upheld and partially upheld complaints

Reason	Number
The standard of service provided was not to an acceptable level.	42%
A service was requested from the council but was not provided.	23.5%
The council did not follow an agreed procedure.	5%
There were delays with works being undertaken.	6.5%
Inadequate or wrong information was given.	2%
Failure of an individual council officer.	15%
Other reasons	6%

- 4.19 The most frequent subjects of complaints were:

1 – Bins and Recycling – 56 complaints were received.

The main reasons for complaints were because of delays in receiving green bin stickers after payment, missed bins, disputes about heavy bins or contaminated bins and poor customer service interactions.

2 – Homelessness and Housing Allocation – 41 complaints

The main reasons for complaints were because of lack of communication and updates, processes not being followed, properties being offered which do not meet the needs of the individual and perceived lack of empathy from staff members.

3 – Council Tax – 39 complaints were received.

The main reasons for complaints were because of delays in applying discounts, inaccurate billing and the online portal not working.

4 – Street scene issues – 38 complaints

The main reasons for complaints were because of perceived poor park maintenance, broken park equipment, inadequate street cleaning, access in and out of parks, delays to completion of works and delays to responding to graffiti and vandalism

5 – Environmental problems – 36 complaints

The main reasons for complaints were because of perceived delays in resolving noise complaints and dog barking, rodent infestations and delays in communication or inaccurate communication.

4.20 The council treats complaints as valuable feedback, rather than just problems to resolve. Key steps have been implemented which help turn complaints into learning opportunities, including complaints being logged and consistently categorised to help identify patterns and recurring issues. Root cause analysis is completed to understand why the issue occurred and anonymised complaints are shared with frontline teams to encourage learning. In some instances, services have been redesigned with clearer communication or simpler processes.

4.21 Table 5 below provides details of a small number of service improvements which have been implemented as the council has learned from complaints. Lessons have been identified from each of the 137 complaints which have been upheld.

Table 5 – examples of service improvements

Issue	Improvement made
Green waste sticker delays	Process reviewed and revised for 2025-26 to avoid customer delays.
Concerns raised around the impact of pickleball on badminton players at Queens Park Sports Centre.	Low level barriers have been purchased and installed to segregate courts and avoid balls transferring across courts.
Incorrect rates applied to a benefit claim	The individual claim was corrected, and team reflection was undertaken following this complaint. This highlighted a need for additional training, which was carried out. The team also undertook a review of 31 similar benefit claims and reassessed them to ensure accurate benefit rates were being applied.

Communication breakdown across different departments who undertake estates management work.	Regular joint meetings implemented to task work effectively across teams.
Public toilets may not always available for use.	Signage has been updated to explain why a toilet may need to be temporarily closed (e.g. vandalism, or short-term staff absence).

- 4.21 Customer satisfaction measures relating to complaints are being implemented in 2025-26 following embedding of the complaints handling code.

Continuous improvement

- 4.22 The reduction of overall complaints and the increasing rate of timely responses are encouraging, and services will continue to focus on driving further improvements during 2025-26.
- 4.23 Typically, the level of complaints received within local government ranges between 1% and 5% of customer contact levels, so Chesterfield Borough Council is benchmarking well for those complaints under the remit of the LGO. However, the proportion of upheld complaints indicate that it is still possible to strengthen service quality and delivery. Targeted service reviews will continue to be conducted in areas with high upheld complaint rates. In addition, Customer Services will regularly undertake reviews of corporate wide complaint themes (e.g. delays, poor communication, service not delivered) and compare with performance data, to identify and address gaps between customer expectations and service delivery.
- 4.24 Senior officers will continue to work with front line staff to review the complaints received within their areas, reflecting what could have been done differently and translating learning into improved officer training or redesigned workflows.
- 4.25 The council will also celebrate improvements, recognising teams and individuals who respond well to complaints or who implement successful changes. In addition to complaints data helping to shape service improvements, the council regularly receives compliments on its services, and we will therefore use positive reinforcement to maintain a culture of learning and responsiveness. A small selection of anonymised compliments which have been received from residents during 2024-25 are set out below for awareness.

- Thank you to the lovely chap who came to clear the leaves, he waited while we raked all the leaves off the verges where possible and said he would return today to finish the job which he did do.
- My mum had a fall on Sunday evening in her bathroom, her carer found her and contacted Careline who responded immediately and in fact were with my mum before I was. They carried out observations on mum and made the decision to call an ambulance! We as a family are so grateful for the service provided by XXXXX & XXXXXX.
- Lady rang through to say how impressed she was with the waste service. She ordered a black caddy for her blue bin yesterday and it has arrived today. She wanted to pass on how happy she was with the service.
- Would like to pass on how helpful XXXX was by helping her fill out the online Council Tax Support claim form. Says she wouldn't have been able to do this herself without XXXX helping, going that extra mile to help a vulnerable customer who had recently lost her husband.
- On 2 April I contacted you to say I had not received a paper council tax bill nor the resident's discounted parking permit and asked that these be resent. This was logged as case 00XXXXXX. I received a very speedy response saying these would be resent, for which many thanks. I can now confirm that they arrived in the post. I want to compliment you for your excellent customer service.
- XXXX is amazing! Is there anything she can't do! And even ballet so gracefully that she added to our aerobics today. She is fab with all her classes. And she is fun. I go out of my way to try and book on the classes she runs.
- XXXX is 84. She looks out for the bin crew every morning because she says they are such a lovely bunch of people. This morning 12/02 at 7.50 AM she had a fall outside. She said one member of the bin crew ran to her assistance and shouted one of the others. They helped her up and stayed with her until they were sure she was ok. She wants to make sure her thanks and appreciation are passed onto these 2 employees.

The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman annual report

- 4.26 Each year local authorities are sent an annual review letter by the Ombudsman, providing statistics about the complaints they have received. The report for Chesterfield Borough Council for the financial year 2024-25 is attached at Appendix 2 and 2a of this report and can be found online at the following link.
- <https://www.lgo.org.uk/your-councils-performance>
- 4.27 The letter sets out that 15 complaints were made about the council to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman in 2024-25.
- 4.28 The Ombudsman decided that 7 of these complaints were not appropriate for them to investigate.
- 4.29 The Ombudsman closed a further 7 complaints with no further investigation.
- 4.30 The Ombudsman chose to investigate and subsequently upheld 1 complaint relating to planning enforcement. The Council has provided a remedy (an apology) in line with the Ombudsman recommendations. The complaint related to failures from the council around communication and keeping the resident informed of the investigation.
- 4.31 The number of complaints upheld by the LGSCO for Chesterfield Borough Council is 1 per 100,000 residents. The average number of complaints upheld for similar councils is 1.1 per 100,000 residents.

Complaints under the remit of the Housing Ombudsman

- 4.32 The Housing Ombudsman is required to ensure all landlords meet the standards set out in the complaint handling code, regardless of their size and operating model and the duty allows the Ombudsman to assess a landlord even if a complaint has not been received. This is to extend fairness across the sector and ensure that residents receive a quality complaint handling service.
- 4.33 Landlords must complete an annual submission of their performance against the code. In Chesterfield Borough Council, the Housing Advisory Board have oversight and scrutiny of complaints performance and agree the submissions which are made to the Housing Ombudsman on behalf of the council.
- 4.34 Appendix 3 of this report provides Standards and Audit Committee members with information on the annual complaint summary for the Housing Ombudsman.

5.0 Alternative options

- 5.1 No alternative options have been considered in the development of this report.

6.0 Implications for consideration – Financial and value for money

- 6.1 Whilst the overall volume of complaints remains low relative to customer contacts (0.4%), the nature and outcomes of complaints have important financial and operational implications. Complaints that result in service rework, compensation or escalation can incur direct costs, while unresolved issues may impact public trust and increase future demand on services.
- 6.2 By analysing complaints and addressing root causes, such as delays, service failures and procedural errors, the Council can reduce inefficiencies and achieve better value for money.

7.0 Implications for consideration – Legal

- 7.1 Local authorities have a legal duty to handle complaints fairly, transparently and in accordance with established procedures. Under Section 23(12A) of the Local Government Act 1974, councils are expected to consider the complaint handling code issued by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman, launched in February 2024. They are also obliged by law to follow the Complaint Handling Code of the Housing Ombudsman under the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023.
- 7.2 The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman does not have specific responsibility for monitoring compliance against the code, unlike the Housing Ombudsman, however failure to follow fair and proportionate complaint procedures may expose the council to reputational risk, legal challenge or formal investigation by the LGO.

8.0 Implications for consideration – Human resources (HR)

- 8.1 The complaints data highlights several HR related considerations, particularly around staff performance, training and accountability. With 15% of upheld complaints attributed to individual actions, it is sensible to review and strengthen induction processes and reinforce service standards.

- 8.2 Front line staff have received additional complaints handling training during 2024-25 and this will continue to be delivered during 2025-26.
- 8.3 We recognise that complaints offer valuable insight into areas where staff may require additional support or clearer guidance, especially in high pressure service areas. We address these issues proactively when reviewing lessons learned following each complaint investigation, so that we are able to improve employee confidence, reduce repeat complaints and enhance overall service quality.

9.0 Implications for consideration – Council Plan

- 9.1 The complaints analysis undertaken provides valuable insight into how well the council is delivering against its strategic priorities, particularly those relating to customer experience and service quality. The council benchmarks well against other local authority performance.
- 9.2 Addressing the root causes of complaints will support the council's commitment to delivering responsive, efficient and inclusive services and embedding learning from complaints into service planning will help ensure that services remain focused on the outcomes that matter most to residents.

10.0 Implications for consideration – Climate change

- 10.1 Several complaint themes, such as waste management, street scene and environmental services, have a direct relevance to the council's climate change commitments. Issues raised by residents including missed bin collections, fly tipping and poor maintenance of green spaces can undermine efforts to promote sustainable living and environmental stewardship. Addressing these complaints effectively supports the council's wider climate change objectives. Furthermore, learning from complaints can help identify opportunities to embed low carbon practices into service delivery.

11.0 Implications for consideration – Equality and diversity

- 11.1 Complaints provide a critical lens through which to assess how inclusive and equitable council services are in practice. The Chesterfield Borough Council complaints process is accessible, inclusive and sensitive to the needs of diverse communities, including those who face barriers to engagement.

11.2 Non mandatory equality monitoring has been embedded into the council's complaints handling procedures and is reported annually on the Council's website at the following link [Microsoft Word - CCCs 2024](#)

12.0 Implications for consideration – Risk management

12.1 Regular complaints performance monitoring will help to ensure that risks are appropriately managed.

Risk	Impact	Likelihood	Mitigating actions	Impact	Likelihood
Failure to comply with ombudsman requirements	H	M	Self-assessment against the complaint handling code Regular scrutiny of complaints	H	L
Failure to learn from complaints	H	L	Updated complaints handling system to include learning Regular scrutiny of complaints	M	L
Individual staff failures	M	M	Refresher training Complaints built into performance management framework Targeted support provided in 121 discussions	M	L

Document information

Report author
Linda White, Customer Services Manager Carl Rawson – Customer Services Delivery Team Leader
Background documents
Complaints Policy
Appendix 1 - LGSCO Complaint Handling Code self-assessment Appendix 2 & 2a - LGSCO annual report for Chesterfield Borough Council 2024-25 Appendix 3 – Housing complaints performance report 2024-25