

Complaints to the Ombudsman for the Year 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025

1 Summary

- 1.1 The Authority endeavours to give people who make a complaint a fair, consistent, and structured process that resolves the problems in the delivery of our services. Where people do not feel that we have adequately addressed their complaints they may request that the Local Government Ombudsman review the matter.
- 1.2 This report identifies the complaints made to the Ombudsman and details the allegations, decisions, and lessons learned for Ombudsman complaints made during the year from 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025.

Recommendation that:	a Members note complaints made to the Ombudsman during the period 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025; and b Members make suggestions to improve the Authority's services in the future.
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2 Background

- 2.1 The Authority receives complaints each year relating to its work.
- 2.2 Our customer service standards state that we are committed to providing excellent customer-focused service and to this end we have put in place customer service standards and a complaints procedure to help us collect and use feedback to improve our services.
- 2.3 Where an individual has exhausted our complaints process and is still unhappy with the outcome, they have the right to complain to the Local Government Ombudsman. Their job is to investigate complaints in a fair and independent way. They can look at complaints about things that have gone wrong:
 - In the way a service has been delivered
 - If a service has not been delivered at all or
 - The way a decision has been made that has caused problems for a complainant.

They cannot question what an Authority has done simply because the complainant does not agree with it.

2.4 Examples of fault may be if the Authority:

- Took too long to do something,
- Did not follow its own rules or the law,
- Failed to meet expected standards of service,
- Gave the complainant incorrect information,
- Did not tell the complainant that he or she had a right of appeal against a decision, or
- Took a decision in the wrong way such as not taking all relevant information into account, considering irrelevant information, or not following its own procedures properly.

- 2.5 The Local Government Ombudsman will not normally investigate a complaint if they consider that the complainant has not suffered significant personal injustice or if the Authority has already taken, or is willing to take, satisfactory action to resolve it.
- 2.6 If the Authority is found to have done something wrong, and this has caused the complainant significant personal injustice, they can require that the Authority take action to put the matter right. What the Authority will be asked to do will depend upon the contents of the complaint, how serious the fault was and how the complainant has been affected by what has gone wrong.
- 2.7 The Authority may be asked to:
- Apologise to the complainant,
 - Provide a service the Authority should have had,
 - Take action or make a decision that it should have done before,
 - Reconsider a decision that it did not take properly in the first place,
 - Improve its procedures so that similar problems do not happen again, or
 - Make a payment, including reimbursing costs or losses the complainant may have suffered.

It should be noted that the Ombudsman has no legal power to force the Authority to follow their recommendations but this Authority endeavours to satisfy any recommendations as a matter of good practice.

- 2.8 The Local Government Ombudsman cannot investigate:
- A complaint received more than 12 months after the complainant became aware of the reason for the complaint,
 - Something that the complainant could appeal about to a Tribunal or a government minister such as a planning appeal or go to court about,
 - Something about which the complainant has already appealed to a Tribunal, a government minister or to a court,
 - Personnel matters, and
 - Some commercial or contractual matters with the Authority.
- 2.9 For the year beginning 1 April 2024 and ending 31 March 2025, three complaints were made to the Ombudsman about the conduct of the Authority. In two of the matters, the LGO determined it would not investigate the complaint because another organisation (the Planning Inspectorate or the Information Commissioners Office) was responsible for the final decision on the matter raised. On the third matter, the LGO determined it would not investigate the complaint about a planning application because the planning application had not been determined so any injustice was speculative.
- 2.10 Whilst there is no further action to be undertaken because of the Ombudsman's findings, the Authority will continue to regularly review the outcome of Ombudsman complaints.

3 Policy Context

- 3.1 Reviewing complaints and identifying trends over time will enable us to identify areas of concern where the Authority is not performing as well as it might against

the Vision and the Partnership Plan. Identifying trends will enable us to see where we need to improve our service delivery. [OBJ]

- 3.2 The review of complaints enables the Authority to improve its level of service to roll out training and review processes where this will improve the organisation's performance.

4 Options

- 4.1 Members simply note the complaints made to the Ombudsman.
- 4.2 Members note the complaints made to the Ombudsman and make further suggestions to improve the Authority's services in the future.

5 Proposals

- 5.1 Members note complaints made to the Ombudsman and make further suggestions to improve the Authority's services in the future.

6 Best Value Implications

- 6.1 The report has no Best Value implications.

7 Finance Considerations

- 7.1 The report has no finance considerations. However, Members should be aware that any complaint to the Ombudsman which is upheld may result in the Authority having to pay compensation to the complainant as may be considered reasonable by the Ombudsman.

8 Risk

- 8.1 The monitoring of complaints received by the Authority will help us to identify any areas of risk and enable the Authority to take appropriate steps to either negate or minimise that risk.

9 Legal Considerations

- 9.1 This report has no legal considerations.

10 Diversity Implications

- 10.1 This report has no diversity implications.

11 Sustainability

- 11.1 There are no significant environmental, economic, and social effects.

Background Papers

Author/Post
Responsible Director
Date Written

Legal Services Database and individual Legal Services matter files

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10 April 2025