



Complaints received for the year 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026

Summary

1. The Authority wants to give people who make a complaint a fair, consistent and structured process that resolves the problems in the delivery of our services. This report identifies the key areas of complaint, any discrepancies in the figures and details actions that have been undertaken to improve performance and the recording of complaints for the year 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026.

Recommendations:

- a **Members note the content of the report and the key areas of complaint, the actions undertaken to improve performance and identify trends in coming years; and**
- b **Members support action to improve performance and suggest further areas for improvement.**

Background

2. The Authority delivers lots of different services through a variety of staff. We work in two Directorates. Each Directorate works towards our Vision and delivering our Business Plan.
3. Our customer service standards state that we are committed to providing excellent customer focused services. To this end we have put in place customer service standards which are available on our [website](#).

4. To always provide a high-quality service, we provide an easy-to-use complaints' procedure and collect and use feedback to improve our services. We have a two-stage complaints process. A copy of our complaints' procedure together with the definition of a complaint is available on our [website](#).
5. For the year beginning 1 April 2025 and ending 31 March 2026, the Authority received a total of 24 complaints. Details of those complaints that were upheld by the Authority can be found at Annex 1.
6. Following action undertaken over the last couple of years, an analysis of the figures shows that the Authority is now recording all complaints received in some areas of the business but there are issues in others that will be addressed in the coming year.
7. Further work is needed to continue to improve our response to complaints and the proposed actions are also contained at Annex 2.

Policy context

8. 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 Business Plan. Identifying trends (Annex 2) will enable us to see where we need to improve our service delivery.
9. As part of the Authority's Business Plan – Demonstrating a High-Performance Culture, 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 (Annex 2).

Options

10. Members are presented with the following options:

a) Members note the content of the report and note the key areas of complaint, the actions undertaken to improve performance and identify trends in coming years.

Members agree to the proposed areas of action to improve performance.

b) Members note the content of the report and the key areas of complaint, the actions undertaken to improve performance, and identify trends in coming years.

Members agree to the proposed areas of action to improve performance and suggest additional areas for improvement.

Proposals

11. Members note the content of the report, the key areas of complaint and the actions undertaken to improve performance and identify trends in coming years. Members support action to improve performance and suggest further areas for improvement.

Demonstrating best value

12. **Challenged** – This work must be done to ensure compliance with legislation and Local Government Ombudsman guidance. We have provided training, guidance, and template documents to Officers to assist them in responding to requests made as efficiently as possible.
13. **Compared** – the proposed approach is compliant with legislative provisions and LGO guidance.
14. **Consulted** – As this is a statutory requirement, there has been no consultation.
15. **Compete** – As compliance is a statutory requirement, this is irrelevant.

Finance considerations

16. The report has no finance considerations. However, Members should be aware that any matter that has not been dealt with to the satisfaction of complainants may be referred to the Local Government Ombudsman. 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.

Risk

17. 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.

Legal considerations

18. This report has no legal considerations.

Human resources

19. It is a requirement that we investigate and respond to any complaints made. This takes time from officers which cannot be mitigated.

Diversity implications

20. This report has no diversity implications.

Sustainability

21. There are not any significant environmental, economic and social effects.

Background papers	Legal Services matter files
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Date written	2 July 2026

Annex 1: Details of Complaints Upheld

	2020/21	2021/ 22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
Total Complaints Received for year	39	58	31	28	31	24
Complaints resolved at Stage 1	9	12	20	13	7	6
Complaints resolved at Stage 2	25	31	10	13	24	18
Complaints ongoing /unresolved/not justified	2	4	1	2	0	0
Referred to Ombudsman	3	11	3	1	3	4

1. The areas of complaint relate to the handling of planning applications (13) and planning enforcement (10) (96% of the 24 complaints received in total). Whilst the remaining complaint did not relate to a planning application or planning enforcement, it was planning related in that it related to the process followed for establishing a planning conservation area.
2. Planning complaints are often escalated straight to Stage 2. In deciding to do so we take into consideration factors such as the nature and issues of the complaint (e.g. legal or process matters), our ability (or otherwise) to address the complainant's concerns, and the importance of affording recourse to the Local Government Ombudsman. 17 complaints were escalated straight to stage 2. The figures should be interpreted with this in mind.

Of the total number of complaints received:

2 were upheld;

1 was partially upheld; and
21 were not upheld;
0 complaint was not pursued (unresolved);
0 complaint outcome unknown; and
0 was found to be unjustified.

3. An unjustified complaint is a complaint that is not appropriate as the matters complained of, are being dealt with or have been dealt with by a third party, such as another Authority or the National Trust, or means of another process such as a Parking Appeal Process, a court process or Planning Appeal.

	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
Complaints upheld	6	10	5	4	2	2
Complaints partially upheld	2	6	3	2	5	1
Complaints not justified	0	3	0	1	0	0
Complaints not upheld	29	37	21	20	24	21
Complaints not resolved	2	1	0	0	0	0
Outcome unknown	0	1	2	1	0	0

2. Details of the upheld complaints are found below:

Details of Complaint	Decision
The complainant submitted a planning application, however his plans were	There was fault. We did not check directly with the applicant that he had

deficient and the application was invalid. He appointed a plan-drawer to prepare plans. The plan-drawer submitted the plans to us. We asked the plan-drawer if he was now acting as Agent. He told us in writing that he was. We did not check with the applicant. The applicant tells us he had not approved the plan-drawer to act as his agent. The application was later withdrawn. The applicant tells us he had not agreed.	authorised someone else to act on his behalf before discussing the processing of the application with them. The result was a withdrawn application, we are told without the applicant's knowledge. We have provided advice to the applicant on how to reapply. We will pay the fee for one further application for the same development in the event of resubmission. UPHELD.
The complainant owns a listed building in the National Park. They have made a number of applications, some of which were refused. The complainant considers that communication with them about the applications was poor, and they perceive the handling of the applications as unfair and arbitrary.	There was fault in how we communicated about the first application. We identified issues with this proposal later in the application process. We immediately moved to refuse the application with little warning or communication, despite having earlier sought additional information which had led the applicant to believe the proposal was likely to be acceptable. Our communication in this respect was poor. Our decision making was however sound. There was no fault regarding the second application. PARTIALLY UPHELD
The complainant submitted three S211 tree work notifications in December 2025. They did not receive any further correspondence about their notifications. Two were determined in January, a third	There was fault. Because the notifications were submitted on paper, even though an email address was provided, the regulations do not allow us to assume the applicant had consented

was invalid and remained undetermined. On investigation it became apparent that the complainant's email address had been incorrectly transposed by our team, meaning emails were directed elsewhere.	to email communication. Failing to accurately record his email address then meant communication was misdirected. The team have been reminded paper submissions must get paper replies. Apology also given. UPHELD
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Annex 2: Trends and Actions

1. Having analysed the figures relating to complaints which were recorded on the Authority's complaints database, all complaints that are being formally submitted to the Authority via HQ are now being reported and recorded on the system. All responses are not being recorded in a timely manner. However, there are several complaints that are made directly to officers or via social media that are not being captured in our figures: they are being dealt with by a verbal response, corrective action, or comments via social media.
2. There have been some interesting trends over time
 - In 2025/26 the total number of complaints received decreased to the lowest level since 2017/18. This is despite a slight increase in the number of complaints last year.
 - The proportion of complaints resolved at Stage 2 remains relatively static this year. This is due to more complaints relating to those matters that fall within the scope of the Authority's Planning function.
 - Most complaints are not upheld, and this has been the case over time.
 - Four complaints have been escalated to the Local Government Ombudsman.
 - All complaints relate to the planning function of the Authority either as complaints about policy, applications or planning enforcement activity undertaken.
3. Officers continue to review what needs to be recorded as a complaint and refresher sessions continue to be organised as required.
4. As a result of our observations:-
 - We will continue to review the complaints database to make it more user-friendly.

- We have identified a few key administrators in each service area where complaints are received and will continue to provide training to them to record and review the complaints that are made within their service areas. Legal Services will continue to be responsible for the reporting of any data.
 - Training will be undertaken to ensure that officers are reminded of the complaints procedure and what they are required to do with any complaint they receive. This includes the recording of performance data.
 - Legal Services will continue to support the recording of information in respect of complaints and will also continue to provide advice to individual officers should they require it.
5. A review of the complaints received will continue to improve our customer service. In addition, we intend to take the following action in 2025/26:
- Within Development Management we will continue to review our ways of working, processes and resourcing to improve our response times and process.
- Within Legal Service we will undertake a review of the complaints process and explore a method to capture positive feedback made about our services.