

**Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman – Annual Review 2023/24**

**Summary of report:**

The report provides Members of the Committee with details relating to the role of the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman, providing information on the number and range of complaints referred by the Ombudsman to the Council during the financial year 2023/24, and to submit for Committee's consideration the Ombudsman's annual letter for 2023/24 (Appendix 1 below).

**Background papers:**

None.

**Recommendation:**

1. To note the content of the report.

**1.0 Background**

The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (shortened in this report to LGSCO or the Ombudsman) investigates complaints escalated to them across a range of local authority functions and services, including commissioned services for example, registered adult social care providers.

**1.1 Procedures**

The Ombudsman's involvement in a complaint usually has 2 stages:

**1.1(i) Assessment - including Initial Enquiry and Initial Investigation**

Complaints received by the Ombudsman are considered initially by an assessment team, who try to establish whether the complaint has already been responded to via the council's own procedures and whether that internal complaint process has reached a conclusion.

The Ombudsman will expect a prompt response to any assessment stage enquiries, usually within 5 working days.

At this stage, the ombudsman would also consider the following:

- Is the issue something that the law allows them to investigate?
- Is there good reason for the Ombudsman to formally investigate the complaint?

Below are the outcomes which can occur at the assessment stage, which will be shared with both the complainant and the council:

- **Invalid or incomplete** – Ombudsman was not given enough information to consider the issue.
- **Advice given** – Ombudsman provided the complainant with early advice or explained where to go for the right help.
- **Referred back for local resolution** – the complaint has been brought to the Ombudsman prematurely before the council was given the chance to consider it first.
- **Closed after initial enquiries** – Ombudsman assessed the complaint but decided against completing a full investigation. This might be because the law says they are not allowed to investigate it, or because it would not be an effective use of public funds for them to investigate.

### 1.1(ii) Detailed Investigation

If, following its assessment stage, the Ombudsman decides to move on to a full investigation of the complaint, then the council will be sent detailed enquiries relating to the case and is expected to respond to those enquiries within a set timescale, usually within 20 working days.

The Ombudsman may ask for specific documents, comments from relevant council officers or members, or answers to specific questions on the matter.

Some complaint investigations can require a significant amount of documentation to enable the investigator to fully understand the details of the complaint.

Based on the findings of the investigation, the Ombudsman will then issue a draft decision which the council and the complainant are invited to comment on. Feedback is requested within a set timeframe, usually within 10 working days.

Following this, the Ombudsman will then issue a revised final decision letter to the council and the complainant with one of two potential outcomes:

**Upheld** – The Ombudsman found evidence of fault or found that the council accepted fault early on.

**Not upheld** - a detailed investigation was carried out but did not find evidence of fault on the part of the council.

The Ombudsman decides on whether the organisation was at fault by investigating what happened, and what should have happened, according to the laws and policies in place at the time. Where the Ombudsman has 'upheld' a complaint they will include recommended actions that the council should take within the final decision letter along with set timescales to complete the actions – usually between 1 and 3 months.

Some possible recommended actions / remedies that can be suggested are:

- An apology to the complainant.
- Financial payments – for time and trouble, or to reflect the impact of council service failure.
- A review of policies and procedures.

- Staff training.

The Ombudsman's decisions are published on their website 3 months after a case is closed and all recommended actions have been carried out. These decision notices will identify the council concerned, but otherwise are written to maintain the confidentiality of the complainant and other parties whose actions are described in the notice.

The LGSCO may, on rare occasions, issue a formal report, referenced as being in the 'public interest'. In cases where a formal report is issued, it must be considered by the Council, as set out in the Council's constitution.

Further details on how the LGSCO works can be found in the *Manual for Councils* issued to assist particularly in respect of the day to day working relationship between Ombudsman staff and each council's designated 'link officer'. This manual is available on the Ombudsman's website via this link: [Manual for Councils - Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman](#)

## 1.2 National and Local Context 2023/24

### 1.2.1 National Context:

Annually, the Ombudsman pulls together the national picture of trends and common issues that arise from LGSCO complaints. The [Annual Review of Local Government Complaints for 2023/24](#) highlighted the following key points nationally:

- a. **17,939** national complaints and enquiries were received in 2023/24, an increase of 16% on the 15,488 received in 2022/23.
- b. **17,126** complaints were decided, up from 15,845 in 2022/23.
- c. **80%** of investigated complaints were upheld (74% in 2022/23).
- d. All authorities, regardless of type, size, or geography, are facing sizeable issues, but some concerns stand out as systemic; in particular, the strain on Special Educational Needs (SEN) and Disability Services.
- e. LGSCO casework is dominated by complaints about special educational needs provision. Education complaints made up 26% of all the complaints received in 2023/24 and were 42% of all the cases upheld. The LGSCO found fault in 92% of the education cases it investigated, and the numbers are increasing rapidly.
- f. Adult social care services continue to be in significant demand. In 2023/24, 14% of all the complaints received by the Ombudsman were about adult social care and 80% of these complaints that were investigated were upheld.
- g. 27 Public Interest reports on local authorities were issued about cases that raised serious issues or highlighted matters of public interest that are given extra prominence.
- h. Compliance with the Ombudsman's recommendations in final decisions was at 99.5%, compared with 99.3% in 2022/23.
- i. New content in the 2023/24 annual letter highlights where there have been delays in responding to an investigator's requests for information. This aspect of activity has not been referenced previously.

During 2023/24, the LGSCO consulted on and published their [Complaint Handling Code](#) (the Code). This sets out a process that allows organisations to respond to complaints consistently, effectively and fairly. The Ombudsman have issued this

code as “advice and guidance” for all local councils in England under section 23(12A) of the Local Government Act 1974 and expect it to be followed when dealing with all non-statutory complaints and will start considering the Code as part of their processes from April 2026. Currently the Ombudsman is working with 20 Councils that are involved in the implementation pilot to understand the impact of the Code which will provide further guidance to the sector. The Council’s Customer Experience Centre is leading on the Council’s implementation of the Code.

### 1.2.2. Local Context:

- a. Walsall Council experienced a slight reduction in the number of complaints received and determined during the year, compared with 2022/23.
- b. As in 2022/23, the SEND service has experienced a rise in the number of complaint enquiries, in line with national trends. Locally there has been the additional factor of increased complaint activity from a locally based advocate for parents of SEND children. Of the 18 complaints upheld in 2023/24, 14 were in the area of Education and Children’s Services.
- c. Walsall’s performance against three key indicators used by the Ombudsman in its Annual Report is positive comparatively nationally and regionally in terms of compliance with the carrying out remedial actions and identifying remedies locally to avoid a formal investigation.
- d. Walsall Council’s comparative performance against the rate of upheld complaints following full investigation indicates that Walsall is higher than the overall national average, metropolitan borough council average, and West Midlands councils’ average.
- e. For the 10th consecutive year since the Ombudsman introduced its annual letter, Walsall Council was not the subject of a published report (public interest report), indicating no serious concerns about any service or complaint issues in the Council.

In the annual letter for Walsall Council, the Ombudsman has detailed that in nearly 60% of cases where they made enquiries there were delays in the council providing the requested information and in some instances information was incomplete. In part this has been related to the large volume of information being requested by the LGSCO, the steps required to ensure only the information requested is being provided, the complexity of information requested and where it is held (e.g. health, schools etc.) and the time taken for the information to be provided and quality assured before it is submitted. Link Officer responsibilities sit with the Assurance Team who are currently reviewing the processes for collation of information for an Ombudsman investigation to improve this performance.

### **1.3 Detail of Complaints received and determined in 2023/24**

The Annual Review Letter is attached as Appendix 1. The Ombudsman also produces an interactive map which shows the performance details for all councils [Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council - Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman](#)

#### **Headlines from this year’s annual letter:**

- Overall, the Ombudsman received 56 complaints relating to Walsall Council, down by 3 from 2022/23.

- In 2023/24 95% of complaints that were fully investigated were upheld (18 out of 19) compared to 84% (12 out of 14) in 2022/23.
- The Ombudsman recorded 100% satisfaction with the council's compliance in the cases where they recommended a remedy (based on 17 compliance outcomes).

### Complaints received during 2023/24

The Committee will note that there were 56 complaints received by the LGSCO relating to Walsall Council in 2023/24, a reduction from 59 complaints in 2022/23. These were categorised as per the following table:

Category	Numbers received <b>2023/24 (2022/23)</b>
Adult Care Services	<b>9 (7)</b>
Benefits & Tax	<b>4 (7)</b>
Corporate and Other Services	<b>2 (3)</b>
Education and Children's Services	<b>20 (16)</b>
Environment Services	<b>8 (4)</b>
Highways & Transport	<b>1 (3)</b>
Housing	<b>2 (2)</b>
Planning and Development	<b>9 (17)</b>
Other	<b>1(0)</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>56 (59)</b>

Members should note that the categories used here by the Ombudsman may not match exactly how the Council allocates different functions to service areas or directorates.

A significant drop was seen in the number of complaint enquiries received by the LGSCO relating to Planning issues; the 2 areas of notable increase are Environment Services (4 more) and Education & Children's Services (4 more).

### Complaints determined during 2023/24

During 2023/24 the Ombudsman determined 59 complaints (54 in 2022/23) relating to Walsall Council. The outcomes of the Ombudsman's decision are set out in the table below.

<b>Category (Determinations)</b>	<b>2023/24 (2022/23)</b>
Advice Given	1(0)
Incomplete or invalid	2(1)
Referred for local resolution	18(20)
Closed after Initial Enquiries	19 (19)
Detailed Investigations – Not Upheld	1(2)
Detailed Investigations - Upheld	18 (12)
Total Determinations	<b>59 (54)</b>
Uphold Rate	<b>95% (84%)</b>

Note: The totals shown in the received and determined tables do not match as there will be some cases determined in one year which were received in the previous year.

## 1.4 Upheld Complaints

The **18** (12 in 22/23) complaints that were categorised as 'upheld' in **2023/24** related to:

- Adult Care services **2** (3),
- Education and children's services **14** (5)
- Planning Services **1** (2),
- Corporate **1** (1),
- Highways and Transport **0** (1)

One upheld complaint (23-012-946) related to where the Council was seen to have already put things right prior to an Ombudsman investigation. These are still categorised as 'upheld' by the Ombudsman despite having already been satisfactorily addressed.

The Ombudsman has introduced a new measure in its performance data this year that provides the number of upheld decisions per 100,000 residents. Walsall had 6.3 upheld decisions per 100,000 residents compared to a national rate of 4.4%.

Details relating to the **18** complaints which were categorised as 'upheld' are set out below. The full decision notices are available on the relevant complaint link provided and on the Ombudsman's website. All notices are written in a way which protects the confidentiality of individuals concerned.

a) [21-017-943](#) 15 May 2023 - SEND

Summary: Mrs B complained that the Council did not deal with her daughter's education properly. The Council did not consider the provision of alternative education, failed to ensure Special Educational Needs (SEN) provision was made and did not fulfil its responsibilities regarding an annual review. Mrs B suffered avoidable distress, time and trouble. Her daughter missed educational and SEN provision.

Remedies: The Council agreed to apologise, pay Mrs B £2,550 in relation to lost education for her daughter, pay Mrs B £100 for avoidable distress and time and trouble, to provide guidance to staff relating to the EHCP annual review process and to provide a report to the Ombudsman following the director level review of the case.

b) [22-001-540](#) 21 May 2023 - SEND

Summary: Mrs B complained the Council did not deal with her daughter D's education properly. The Council did not properly consider the provision of alternative education and did not deal with Mrs B's complaints properly. D missed education provision and Mrs B suffered avoidable time and trouble complaining three times.

Remedies: The Council agreed to apologise, pay Mrs B £1,800 for D's lost education provision, pay Mrs B £100 for avoidable time and trouble and provide guidance to staff.

c) [22 016 805](#) 04-Jun-2023 - Other

Summary: Ms X complained the Council shared information about her noise complaint with the perpetrator, resulting in increased noise and distress. Further, it delayed addressing her complaint.

Remedies: Pay Ms X £100 for distress, £100 for time and trouble and write to Ms X explaining its delay and any action to prevent recurrence.

d) [22 011 832](#) – 06 June 2023 SEND

Summary: Ms X complained the Council failed to communicate its decision on her child's (Y)'s Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan following an annual review. The Council acknowledged fault.

Remedies: apologise to Ms X, provide the decision regarding Y's EHC plan annual review, make a payment of £400 in recognition of the frustration, uncertainty, time and trouble and to make service changes including implementing an improved process and system.

e) [22-013-875](#) – 20 June 2023 - Alternative Education Provision

Summary: Ms X complained the Council failed to provide any education for their child for 13½ weeks following exclusion from school; that their child missed free school meals during this time. Ms X also complained the Council failed to secure provision from their child's EHC Plan.

Remedies: The Council agreed to apologise to Ms X and pay her £100 for the distress, inconvenience and frustration caused, pay £1,350 for her child's missed education and £181.50 for missed free school meals.

f) [22-013-229](#) – 12 Oct 2023 SEND

Summary: Mrs X complained the Council unreasonably delayed amending Child Y's EHCP on separate occasions. She complained this meant Child Y did not have access to the provision they were entitled to.

Remedies: Apologise and pay the following financial remedies: pay child Y £1800 for the lost OT provision and the lost sensory support provision. Pay child Y £100 to acknowledge the impact of a missed holiday box; and pay Mrs X £300 for the distress and uncertainty caused to her and her child.

g) [23-001-803](#) – 08 Nov 2023 ASC Finance/Charging

Summary: The Council acknowledged it delayed issuing an invoice for Mrs X's care due to an error in its system; however, there is ample evidence the Council had explained charges would be made.

Remedies: The Council offered a payment plan and also the sum of £500 in recognition of the distress caused by its error.

h) [23-001-242](#) – 12 Dec 2023 SEND

Summary: Mr B complained the Council did not secure the provision in his son's, education, health, and care plan, delayed issuing a final plan, and did not tell him about his son's (C's) personal budget. Mr B said C missed provision and this impacted his health and his behaviour. We found the Council delayed the education,

health, and care plan review process and did not secure the physiotherapy provision in C's plan.

Remedies: Pay Mr B £500 for the uncertainty created by the Council's failure to secure physiotherapy input and pay £300 for the frustration caused by the Council's delay in the EHC plan review process. Also, the Council were to review procedures to ensure it meets its duties around EHC plan timescales and to issue schools with guidance about inviting all professionals/services named in EHC plan to review meetings and ensuring these meetings are minuted.

i) [23-002-105](#) [23-002-103](#) – 12 Jan 2024 SEND

Summary: Miss X complained the Council had not dealt properly with her daughter Y's special educational needs and delayed issuing Y's EHCP. It delayed Y's personal budget and did not make reasonable adjustments for Miss Y. Miss X and Y suffered avoidable distress. Y suffered loss of SEN provision.

Remedies: The Council should pay Miss X and Y £250 each for distress, pay Miss X £1,800 for missed SEN provision, produce an action plan to address meeting statutory timescales and review policy.

*Members should note the LGSCO issued two decisions on the one complaint which included the same remedies.*

j) [23-010-532](#) – 31 Jan 2024 School Transport

Summary: Miss X complained about the Council's decision to refuse free school transport for her daughter. There was fault in how the Council considered Miss X's appeal, but this did not result in a flawed decision.

Remedies: The Council's fault caused Miss X avoidable frustration, for which it will apologise. The Council will also remind staff of the test they should apply when considering free school transport appeals.

k) [23-005-518](#) – 01 Feb 2024 SEND

Summary: Mrs X complained about delays in the education, health and care plan process and lack of communication. This caused significant stress to Mrs X and her son was out of education.

Remedies: To apologise, make payments of £3,000 for missed education provision and £300 for distress caused and to remind staff of the relevant guidance.

l) [23-012-946](#) – 01 Feb 2024 ASC Domiciliary Care

Summary: The Ombudsman did not investigate this complaint about adult social care at home. The Council accepted failures in care support and in delaying its response to the complaint. The Council apologised and waived the care fees. It was unlikely an Ombudsman investigation would achieve anything further.

m) [23-008-852](#) - 02 Feb 2024 Alternative Education Provision

Summary: Ms X complained the Council failed to put in place alternative provision of education when her child was out of education and about the Council telling the school to treat her child's absence as truancy.



Remedies: The Council agreed to provide an apology to Ms X for its fault and pay her £750 for her child's missed education.

n) [23-004-716](#) - 29 Feb 2024 SEND

Summary: Mrs X complained about the time taken to provide her daughter with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHC Plan) and for a lack of educational provision. There was fault by the Council - the EHC process was delayed, and Mrs X's daughter was not provided with a suitable education while she was not able to attend school.

Remedies: The Council to apologise, make a payment of £3000 to reflect the impact of missed education and £300 for distress caused.

o) [23-004-475](#) - 01 Mar 2024 SEND

Summary: Miss X complained about the Council's handling of her son's (S's) Education, Health and Care Plan assessment. The Council failed to issue his plan within the statutory timescale and to deliver alternative provision to him. This fault caused injustice.

Remedies: Apologise, pay £750 for lack of provision, £600 for distress caused by delaying the issue of a plan and review its policies.

p) [22-012-545](#) - 15 Mar 2024 Alternative Education Provision

Summary: Ms X complained about how the Council dealt with her child's (Y), Education, Health and Care Plan annual review. There were faults by the Council with its delays in dealing with her annual review and with issuing her final Plan and in dealing with the complaint.

Remedies: Apologise and make a symbolic amount of £500 to recognise uncertainty caused by the Council's delay in holding an annual review meeting and in issuing an amended final EHC Plan and handling the complaint. Also remind staff of relevant procedures and the requirement to comply with them.

#### **1.4.1 Compliance with remedies**

The Ombudsman monitors whether councils have fulfilled the terms of recommended actions and remedies resulting from a complaint investigation. Annual Review Letters indicate where a council has complied with remedies within the Ombudsman's set timescale, is late complying, or where a council has not complied with the remedy.

In Walsall's case, there were 17 complaints where a remedy was set out for the council to carry out during 2023/24. The Annual Letter indicates that in **all cases**, the Ombudsman was satisfied that the council had implemented their recommendations, and that **all** were carried out within timescale.

## 1.5 Comparative figures and statistics

Data provided by the Ombudsman - [Local government complaint reviews - Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman](#) - as part of its Annual Report enables comparison to be made between Walsall and national outturns and with other local authorities. The comparative figures relating to neighbouring West Midland authorities are taken from the national and regional data in the link and are set out below.

Some of the headline comparisons for Walsall in 2023/24 taken from the LGSCO data are:

### National:

- 80% of complaints upheld nationally compared with **95%** for Walsall. [80% for all similar authorities – Metropolitan Borough Councils].
- In 14% of upheld cases, councils had already offered a suitable remedy before the complaint was made to the Ombudsman; the comparable figure for Walsall was **6%**.
- Compliance with recommendations remains high at 99.5% nationally (**100% for Walsall**).

### West Midlands:

- Walsall received fewer complaints and enquiries in 2023/24 than all West Midland authorities below except for Wolverhampton and Solihull.
- The percentage of complaints investigated and upheld by the Ombudsman was higher than all West Midland authorities except for Sandwell.
- The equivalent figures for the WM councils were:

	B'ham	Cov	Dudley	Sandwell	Solihull	Wolv	Walsall
Received	493	80	94	93	52	50	56
Investigated	142	8	22	14	5	7	19
Upheld	115	3	13	18	5	6	18
% Uphold rate	87%	38%	59%	78%	100%	86%	95%
Upheld per 100,000 residents	9.9	0.8	4.0	4.1	2.3	2.2	6.3

## 1.6 Good Practice

Committee is asked to note that the Ombudsman also has an important role in identifying, from the complaints that it receives from citizens and service users across the country and from its interaction with councils, particular issues and areas of concern which it shares with councils generally via bulletins, news releases and in particular specific focus reports. Focus Reports and Good Practice Guides collate case studies from our investigations to highlight either our most serious concerns or more specialist practitioner advice.

In 2023/24, the LGSCO issued the following:

- Parent Power – Personal Budgets in EHC Plans (Nov 2023)

- 'Not in my Backyard' – Local People and the Planning Process (Aug 2023)
- 'Out of Order' – learning lessons from complaints about anti-social behaviour (Aug 2023)
- 'Unsuitable temporary accommodation' (May 2023)

These, and other focus reports published in previous years and in the current year, are available for downloading on the LGSCO's website <https://www.LGSCO.org.uk/information-centre/reports>

- In addition, the LGSCO circulates a weekly list of decisions published that week in five service areas: benefits and taxation, adult social care, children and education, housing and planning.

## **2.0 Resource and legal considerations:**

There are no specific financial implications arising from this report. In some cases, the local settlement of particular complaints may include a financial element, for the complainant's 'time and trouble' in pursuing the matter, and in appropriate cases the payment of sums reflecting the impact of the council's failings on the complainant. Details of any financial redress recommended by the Ombudsman and agreed by the relevant service is provided alongside the summary of upheld complaints in **Section 1.4** above.

The Ombudsman service operates in accordance with provisions in the Local Government Act 1974, as amended by subsequent legislation. As noted above, the LGSCO has issued a new manual for councils setting out operational matters relating to its procedures available on its website.

## **3.0 Performance and Risk Management issues:**

The Ombudsman's annual letter and annual report provides details relating to the number of complaints received, and the outcome of complaints. See [www.LGSCO.org.uk/information-centre](http://www.LGSCO.org.uk/information-centre)

The Annual Letter no longer provides figures for the average time taken to provide a response to the Ombudsman's enquiries. The council's LGSCO link officer works with services to ensure that responses to Ombudsman enquiries are quality assured and made within expected timescales.

## **4.0 Equality Implications:**

Details relating to the Ombudsman service are available on the council website. The Ombudsman no longer produces its own complaint leaflets, contact details and methods are set out on its website. Where appropriate, council complaint responses include information regarding the right of complainants to approach the LGSCO and their contact information.

## **5.0 Consultation:**

There is no requirement to consult on this report.

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17 July 2024

*By email*

Ms Bennett  
Chief Executive  
Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council

Dear Ms Bennett

### **Annual Review letter 2023-24**

I write to you with your annual summary of complaint statistics from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman for the year ending 31 March 2024. The information offers valuable insight about your organisation's approach to complaints, and I know you will consider it as part of your corporate governance processes. As such, I have sought to share this letter with the Leader of your Council and Chair of the appropriate Scrutiny Committee, to ensure effective ownership and oversight of complaint outcomes, which offer valuable opportunities to learn and improve. In addition, this year, we have encouraged Monitoring Officers to register to receive the letter directly, supporting their role to report the decisions we uphold to their council.

For most of the reporting year, Paul Najsarek steered the organisation during his tenure as interim Ombudsman, and I was delighted to take up the role of Ombudsman in February 2024. I look forward to working with you and colleagues across the local government sector to ensure we continue to harness the value of individual complaints and drive and promote systemic change and improvement across the local government landscape.

While I know this ambition will align with your own, I am aware of the difficult financial circumstances and service demands that make continuous improvement a challenging focus for the sector. However, we will continue to hold organisations to account through our investigations and recommend proportionate actions to remedy injustice. Despite the challenges, I have great confidence that you recognise the valuable contribution and insight complaints, and their swift resolution, offer to improve services for the public.

### **Complaint statistics**

Our statistics focus on three key areas that help to assess your organisation's commitment to putting things right when they go wrong:

**Complaints upheld** - We uphold complaints when we find fault in an organisation's actions, including where the organisation accepted fault before we investigated. We include the total number of investigations completed to provide important context for the statistic. This year, we also provide the number of upheld complaints per 100,000 population.

**Compliance with recommendations** - We recommend ways for organisations to put things right when faults have caused injustice and monitor their compliance with our recommendations. Failure to comply is rare and a compliance rate below 100% is a cause for concern.

**Satisfactory remedy provided by the authority** - In these cases, the organisation upheld the complaint and we agreed with how it offered to put things right. We encourage the early resolution of complaints and give credit to organisations that accept fault and find appropriate ways to put things right.

Finally, we compare the three key annual statistics for your organisation with similar authorities to provide an average marker of performance. We do this for County Councils, District Councils, Metropolitan Boroughs, Unitary Councils, and London Boroughs.

Your annual data, and a copy of this letter, will be uploaded to our interactive map, [Your council's performance](#), on 24 July 2024. This useful tool places all our data and information about councils in one place. You can find the detail of the decisions we have made about your Council, read the public reports we have issued, and view the service improvements your Council has agreed to make as a result of our investigations, as well as previous annual review letters.

### **Your organisation's performance**

During the year, there were occasions when our investigations were delayed by your Council's failure to respond in a timely way to our requests for information; there was delay in nearly 60% of cases where we made enquiries. We request information is provided within 20 working days; in several cases the Council took over 30 days to provide its response. In one case we had to remind the Council of our power to issue a witness summons before we received the information we required.

In addition to the delays, there were instances of poor-quality and incomplete responses. This makes it difficult to progress investigations and increases the likelihood that we need to ask for more information.

I ask that you take action to improve responses to our enquiries; both in terms of timeliness and quality. It is important we are provided with the information we have asked for promptly, and that, where you encounter delays, you keep us informed. If there is any support my office can provide to help improve the situation, please do let me know.

### **Supporting complaint and service improvement**

In February, following a period of consultation, we launched the [Complaint Handling Code](#) for councils, setting out a clear process for responding to complaints effectively and fairly. It is aligned with the Code issued to housing authorities and landlords by the Housing Ombudsman Service and we encourage you to adopt the Code without undue delay. Twenty councils have volunteered to take part in an implementation pilot over the next two years that will develop further guidance and best practice.

The Code is issued to councils under our powers to provide guidance about good administrative practice. We expect councils to carefully consider the Code when developing policies and procedures and will begin considering it as part of our processes from April 2026 at the earliest.

The Code is considered good practice for all organisations we investigate (except where there are statutory complaint handling processes in place), and we may decide to issue it as guidance to other organisations in future.

Our successful complaint handling training programme continues to develop with new modules in Adult Social Care and Children's Services complaint handling available soon. All our courses include practical interactive workshops that help participants develop their complaint handling skills. We delivered 126 online workshops during the year, reaching more than 1,700 people. To find out more visit [www.lgo.org.uk/training](http://www.lgo.org.uk/training) or get in touch at [training@lgo.org.uk](mailto:training@lgo.org.uk).

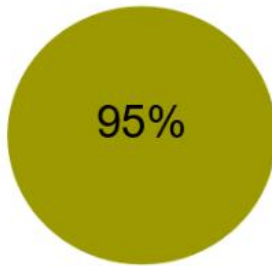
Returning to the theme of continuous improvement, we recognise the importance of reflecting on our own performance. With that in mind I encourage you to share your view of our organisation via this survey: <https://www.smartsurvey.co.uk/s/ombudsman/>. Your responses will help us to assess our impact and improve our offer to you. We want to gather a range of views and welcome multiple responses from organisations, so please do share the link with relevant colleagues.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Amerdeep Somal', followed by a horizontal line.

Amerdeep Somal  
Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman  
Chair, Commission for Local Administration in England

### Complaints upheld



**95%** of complaints we investigated were upheld.

This compares to an average of **80%** in similar organisations.

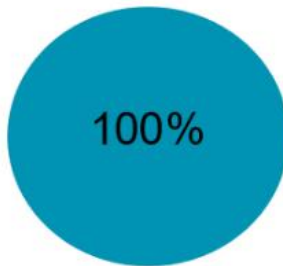
**18**  
upheld decisions

This is 6.3 upheld decisions per 100,000 residents.

The average for authorities of this type is 4.4 upheld decisions per 100,000 residents.

Statistics are based on a total of **19** investigations for the period between 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024

### Compliance with Ombudsman recommendations



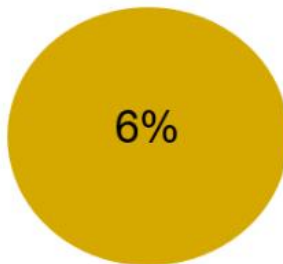
In **100%** of cases we were satisfied the organisation had successfully implemented our recommendations.

This compares to an average of **99%** in similar organisations.

Statistics are based on a total of **12** compliance outcomes for the period between 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024

- Failure to comply with our recommendations is rare. An organisation with a compliance rate below 100% should scrutinise those complaints where it failed to comply and identify any learning.

### Satisfactory remedy provided by the organisation



In **6%** of upheld cases we found the organisation had provided a satisfactory remedy before the complaint reached the Ombudsman.

This compares to an average of **14%** in similar organisations.

**1**  
satisfactory remedy decision

Statistics are based on a total of **18** upheld decisions for the period between 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024