



OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

Subject Heading:	Ombudsman Complaints 2024/25
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Policy context:	The council is committed to excellent customer service and learning from complaints.

SUMMARY

The council is committed to excellent customer service and is a member of the Institute of Customer Services.

In July 2024, Cabinet agreed the new Customer Service Strategy and Customer Service Standards. Followed by a revised new single Complaints policy on the 17th of September 2025 meeting. The Complaints Policy from July 2023 was reviewed to ensure it is fully in line with the changes required by the:

- Housing Ombudsman (HO) Complaints Handling Code 2024
- Local Government Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) complaints code, due to be implemented in April 2026, and
- the LGSCO Children's statutory Guidance 2023.

Customer service affects all residents, subsequently the O&S Board scrutinised the work that has taken place so far to implement the Customer Services Strategy at its July 2025 meeting.

Complaints are one indicator of the customer service experience and provide an opportunity to learn and improve delivery. There is a requirement to publish annual Ombudsman performance in this area, which is independently bench-marked, it is good practice for this performance to be reviewed by Scrutiny.

During 2024/25, the Ombudsman contacted the council on 120 occasions, regarding complaints; 88 of these went to formal investigation, 25 of these were upheld.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that O&S consider the report and identify any improvements.

REPORT DETAIL

Complaint Summary

The Council is passionate about providing the best services it can offer, despite the financial position and challenges. This is a clear priority in the corporate plan and is a whole council pledge.

The Council provides an enormous variety and volume of services to its residents and strives to deliver these services to the highest possible standards. Despite this, there are some occasions when we don't. The Council takes complaints seriously and takes actions to rectify and learn from them.

The Council defines a complaint as “an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the landlord, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting a resident or group of residents”.

For context complaint handling can include the different interactions between a customer and the council. E.g. the institute of customer services uses the term to refer to issues raised within a service area which may not have been made as a formal complaint and gone through the council's corporate complaint service.

This report covers those complaints that are deemed reportable under the Housing Ombudsman (HO), specifically for Housing Revenue funded services, and Local Government Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO). Each complaint is worked through in accordance with the new [complaint policy](#). It should be noted that there is a statutory three stage process for Children's and only one stage for Adults.

This report sets the context of how many complaints are made from all those received by the LGSCO and Housing Ombudsman. Whilst they are a very small number of the total received across the whole Council every effort is taken to address, rectify and learn from them.

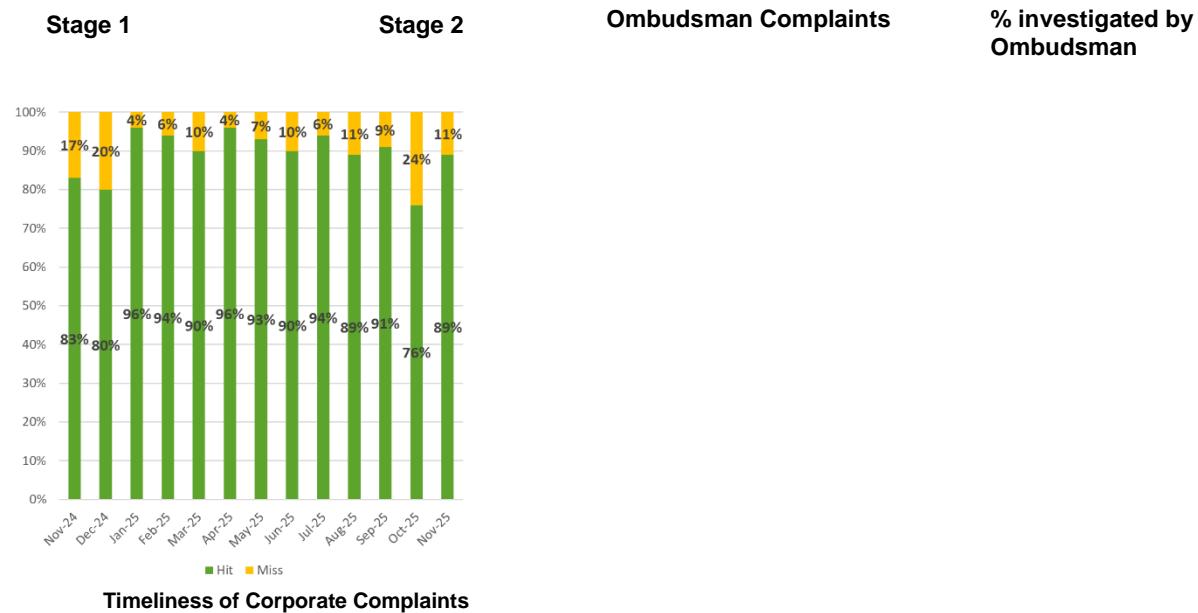
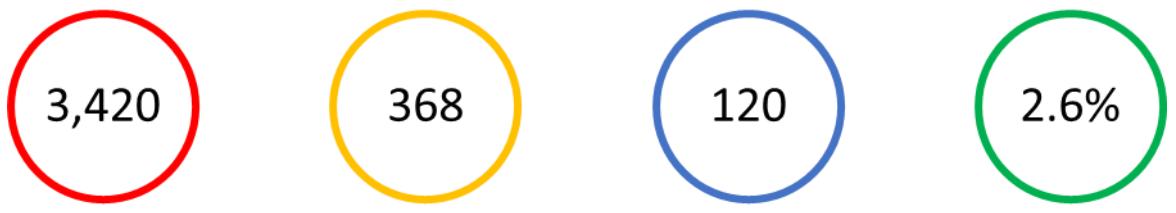
The implementation of the new complaints case tracker system in December 2023 has prevented a direct comparison between 2023/24 and 2024/25. Going forward 2025/26 will be compared directly with 2024/25.

From 1st April 2024 to 31st March 2025, Havering Council received a total of 3,420 complaints: 3,016 were corporate complaints (including Housing Revenue Funded Complaints), 107 concerned Adult Social Care (ASC) via the statutory process, and 297 related to Children's Social Care (CSC) through the statutory process, in-line with the complaints policy.

Overview & Scrutiny Committee, January 2026

Of all complaints, 368 (12%) advanced to Stage 2¹, specifically, 346 Corporate cases and 22 CSC statutory cases. Among those escalated, 120 cases (33%) were referred to the Ombudsman. The Ombudsman reached decisions on 88 out of these 120 cases (73%), representing 2.6% of all complaints received by the council. Ultimately, 25 of those cases (28%) were upheld (found against the council), and compliance was achieved in every instance.

The data highlights that majority of complaints are resolved quickly, with only 0.73% (25 out of 3,420), requiring a full investigation by the ombudsman before being upheld. Even though this low escalation rate highlights the importance of effective processes at every stage, some cases still need independent review. Ongoing external oversight helps ensure that lessons from complaints drive continuous improvement throughout all council departments.



LGSCO – Local Government Social Care Ombudsman²

As the statutory body for complaints regarding the actions of local authorities in England, the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) have a fundamental role to play in investigating individual complaints independently and to look at whether councils have made decisions in the right way.

¹ Please note that Adult Social Care has no Stage 2 process so can progress to ombudsman straight from stage 1

² LGSCO monitor their data on when the cases are closed. Havering Council monitor data on when the case is opened.

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Between April 2024 and March 2025, the LGSCO dealt with 118 complaints in relation to Havering. Of these:

- 41 complaints were taken to the Ombudsman before we were given the chance to consider.
- 58 complaints were closed following assessment because either the law prevents the Ombudsman from investigating them, or perusing an investigation would not be good or proportionate use of public funds.
- 19 investigations were undertaken where a decision was made.



Of those 19 investigations undertaken, 84% (16) were upheld, meaning that they found us to be at fault or we didn't provide a suitable remedy. 3 of these 16 cases (19%) the LGSCO found that we had provided a satisfactory remedy before the complaint reached them. 9 required an apology and 9 resulted in compensation being paid out to a total of **£9,185**.

Category	Reason	Compensation provided
Homelessness		£4,825
Housing		£2,500
Anti-social Behaviour		£1,000
Child Protection		£350
Parking and Penalties		£210
Safeguarding		£200 symbolic payment Cancelled ½ outstanding debt
Refuse and Recycling		£100
Planning applications		£0
Disability Facility Grant (DFG)		£0
Council Tax		£0
Charging		£0

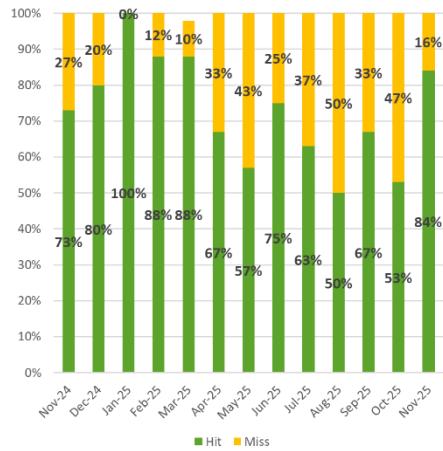
Key considerations

The letter received by the Chief Executive outlined that of the 14 recommendations we agreed to implement during the year “*in four of those cases recommendations were not completed within the agreed timescales. These delays ranged between seven and 59 days.*” We have been encouraged “to engage in discussion at the draft decision stage of our process if the timescales suggested for service improvement recommendations are not achievable or realistic. If the timescales we propose are not achievable, the Council needs to explain why this is the case before a decision is finalised.”

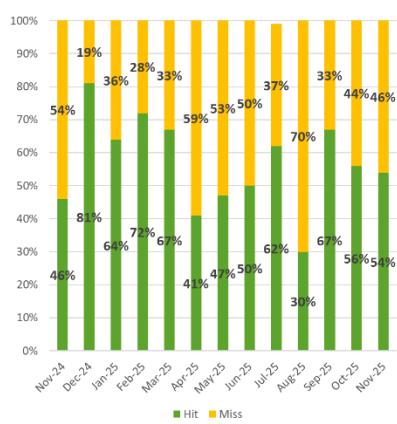
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The letter also highlighted that “During the year, we made enquiries on 17 cases. There were multiple cases where our investigations were delayed by your Council’s failure to respond to us in a timely manner.”

The main action that the LGSCO has requested we take is “to improve responses to our enquiries; both in terms of timeliness and quality and to respond to draft decisions in a timely manner.”



Timeliness of Adult Social Care Complaints



Timeliness of Children Social Care Complaints

The implementation of the new complaints and case handling system in December 2023 has enabled enhanced monitoring and follow up of individual complaints in line with service standard targets. The complaints board established in December 2025 will focus on learning to reduce delays in response times and ombudsman enquiries.

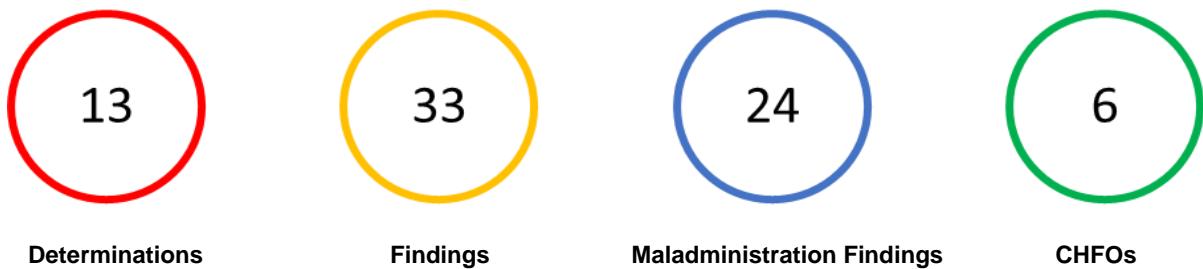
We have revised the remedy payment process. The complaints team now approve the payment rather than the service.

Housing Ombudsman – Housing Complaints³

The Housing Ombudsman looks at complaints about registered providers of social housing. The Housing Ombudsman is focused on helping to resolve individual complaints made by tenants, shared ownership and leaseholders about their landlord. They look beyond individual disputes and consider the wider and potentially systemic issues responsible for generating complaints.

Between April 2024 and March 2025, Havering was responsible for 12,168 properties. During this time the Housing Ombudsman decided upon 13 cases (determinations), which has resulted in 33 findings. Within these findings 24 (80%) were found to be Maladministration and 6 Complaint Handling Failure Orders (CHFOs) were issued (if the landlord fails to comply with the conditions of membership of the Housing Ombudsman Scheme). This compares to 12 Determinations at a Maladministration rate of 78% for 2023

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For context, when adjusted for the number of complaints made per 100,000 population Havering has 80% compared to 80% the National average.

In addition to this the Housing Ombudsman made an additional 5 Recommendations.

Of the Maladministration finding, the top reasons for the complaints, against the compensation ordered were for:

Category Reason	N.o	Compensation Ordered
Property Condition	11	£7,408.40
Complaint Handling*	10	£1,715.00
Moving to a property	0	£700.00
Anti-Social Behaviour	4	£600.00
Estate Management	0	£200.00

*Complaint handling doesn't relate to the complaint team, but the different interactions between a customer and the council.

When looking back at the complaints, 'Property condition' relating to damp and mould, leaks, flooding and blockages. Almost all of them also relate to the way the complaint was handled, and resulted in compensation being paid out, to a total of **£10,623.10**.

Similar to Havering, Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) is consistently in the Housing Ombudsman top 3 most complained about issues in London. London has the highest maladministration rate for ASB complaints at 73%. Where they found service failure, it is often around communication and a lack of perceived action.

Key Considerations

The orders from the complaints are mainly in the form of compensation as well as apologies, however it was requested that a damp and mould policy be thought about and a review of the compensation policy undertaken. A [damp and mould policy](#) has since been written and has been live on our website since April 2025.

Havering Council has completed a review of its Complaints Policy and Procedure (2023). The revised policy was published at the end of September 2025, reinforcing our commitment to transparency, fairness, and continuous improvement in complaint handling.

Part of the review of its complaint policy and our alignment with the Housing Ombudsman's Code, the Goodwill Gesture Policy has been temporarily withdrawn to allow for a comprehensive review, to address inconsistencies with other Havering policies and ensure a consistent, fair approach.

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Compensation

In total Havering paid out via the Ombudsman £19,808.40 (LGSCO- £9,185, and HO - £10,623.40) from 1st April 2024 to 31st March 2025⁴.

Improvement Actions Underway

A Complaints Board has been set up and met on the 18th December 2025 which reviews Ombudsman findings and drives service improvements. This Board will develop an improvement action plan that will include the following actions already underway:

- Weekly meetings are held with officers to review open Ombudsman cases and address any delays.
- New system implemented has improved performance monitoring and information, with a higher percentage of stage 1 and stage 2 complaints now sent on time.
- A new process has been introduced in the system to record reasons for extensions, helping us identify whether delays stem from the complaints team or service areas. This information is reported to services and ELT monthly.
- A review of the case tracker system to identify enhanced monitoring of Ombudsman responses.
- Enhanced tracking of service area delays, with work beginning to address these directly with services.
- A deep dive into Housing Ombudsman complaints is underway and reported to the complaints board
- The children's process has been reviewed and will be implemented with lessons learnt going to the Complaints Board. The introduction of the Remedy Policy
- Working with different teams within the council, including Waste team, planning, corporate parenting etc. to feedback learning from previous complaints to help improve services and reduce ombudsman

IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS

There is a corporate requirement to set out the implications and risks of the course of action being proposed, in the following areas

Financial implications and risks:

This report recommends that Overview and Scrutiny consider the annual Ombudsman performance information outlined above as well as identify any improvements.

There are no financial implications arising from the consideration of the report in and of itself, however, it is noted that the report contains information relating to the

⁴ Please note this doesn't include any compensation paid out through Stage 1 or Stage 2

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amount of compensation paid out over the course of 2024/25 in relation to upheld Ombudsman complaints totalling £19,808.40. These costs will have been met from the relevant service area's budgets (£9,185 from Social Care and £10,623.40 from Housing) and reported in 2024/25 outturn figures.

Due to the implementation of a new complaints system, comparative compensation payment data for 2023/24 isn't readily available, however, the 2025/26 figures will be able to be compared to 2024/25 this time next year.

It is noted that the Housing Ombudsman reports nationally on average compensation payments made per upheld complaint. In 2024/25 the average amount of compensation payment made per upheld complaint was £947. Havering's average compensation payment made per upheld complaint in 2024/25 was £664. It is assumed that the lower compensation payment amount reflects, at least in part, less severity/need for redress. The LGSCO do not provide data on compensation payment, but they do provide figures on upheld cases; out of 28 authorities Havering ranked 17th meaning only 11 authorities had a lower proportion of complaints upheld.

It is also noted that the Council has implemented a new complaints policy in September 2025 and a complaints board in December 2025. It is hope that this will not only help embed learning from recommendations and reduce the number of complaints but also improve customer/resident satisfaction and reduce the amount of compensation paid out in future.

Legal implications and risks:

This report sets out the Council's performance for complaint handling and there are no direct legal implications arising.

Effective complaints handling is an important part of a good corporate governance framework, enabling the Council to review feedback and identify areas for improvement to enhance the quality of its services.

Under s24A Local Government Act 1974, the Ombudsman may investigate complaints of "maladministration" and "service failure" and may recommend a proposed action or remedy if it is deemed that an injustice has been caused to the complainant.

Whilst the decisions and recommendations of the Ombudsman are not legally binding, they have been accepted by the Council. The Ombudsman's findings along with Havering's performance in addressing those recommendations, is being reported for transparency.

Human Resources implications and risks:

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The recommendations made in this report do not give rise to any identifiable HR risks or implications that would affect either the Council or its workforce.

Equalities implications and risks:

Equality and Health Impact Assessments (EHIA) involve anticipating the consequences of our strategies, policies and activities, making sure that any negative, detrimental, and discriminatory behaviours are eliminated. The EHIA is used to check that the design and approach to delivery of our commitments ensures that benefits and opportunities are realised by all our communities.

An Equality & Health Impact Assessment is not required for this briefing note as it does not impact on any of the nine protected characteristics or the two additional council equality implications (socio-economic status or health and wellbeing).

ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS

The Council has committed to acting towards the organisation and the borough becoming carbon neutral by 2040.

No significant detrimental climate change implications or risks are expected as a direct outcome of this report, however it is recommended that printing is kept to a minimum to reduce organisational CO₂ emissions.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

1. [LGSCO Annual Review Letter](#)
2. [Annual Review of Local Government Complaints 2024-2025](#)
3. [London Borough of Havering - Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman](#)
4. [Housing Ombudsman Annual Report](#)
5. [Housing Ombudsman Council Annual Report](#)