



WEST OXFORDSHIRE
DISTRICT COUNCIL

WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Name and date of Committee	AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE – 26 SEPTEMBER 2024
Subject	ANNUAL SUMMARY OF COMPLAINTS STATISTICS FROM THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND SOCIAL CARE OMBUDSMAN – YEAR ENDING 31 MARCH 2024
Wards affected	All
Accountable member	CLlr Andy Graham, Leader of the Council Email: andy.graham@westoxon.gov.uk
Accountable officer	Giles Hughes, CEO Email: giles.hughes@westoxon.gov.uk
Report author	Cheryl Sloan, Business Manager, Governance, Risk & Business Continuity Email: cheryl.sloan@publicagroup.uk
Summary/Purpose	This report presents the Annual Complaints statistics as provided by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman for the year 1 st April 2023 – 31 st March 2024.
Annexes	Annex A – Annual Review Letter 2023 – 2024 Annex B – Upheld complaint by Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman
Recommendation(s)	That the Audit and Governance Committee: I. Note the content of the report and the Annual Review Letter 2023 – 2024.
Corporate priorities	All
Key Decision	No
Exempt	No
Consultees/ Consultation	NA

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1** At the end of each financial year, the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGO) write to the Chief Executive, Leader of the Council, and Chair of Scrutiny to provide an annual summary of the complaint statistics which have been received by the LGO in relation to the West Oxfordshire District Council (WODC).
- 1.2** The information is provided to give insight about the organisations approach to complaints, and for consideration as part of the Council corporate governance processes.
- 1.3** WODC has three stages to its' internal complaints process as detailed below. Once this is exhausted, if the complainant remains unsatisfied with the response provided, it is at this point that they can refer their complaint to the LGO.
 - Stage 1: Service Area Response
 - Stage 2: Independent Review
 - Stage 3: Appeal
- 1.4** The Annual Letter details the complaints which have been escalated to the LGO in relation to services provided by WODC.
- 1.5** It should be noted that in February, following a period of consultation, the LGO launched the Complaint Handling Code for councils, setting out a clear process for responding to complaints effectively and fairly. Councils are urged to adopt this Code without delay, they expect councils to carefully consider the Code when developing policies and procedures and will begin considering it as part of their processes from April 2026. A new policy and procedure have been produced which will change the complaints process from a three stage internal process, to a two-stage. This will be brought to the next Audit Committee for approval,

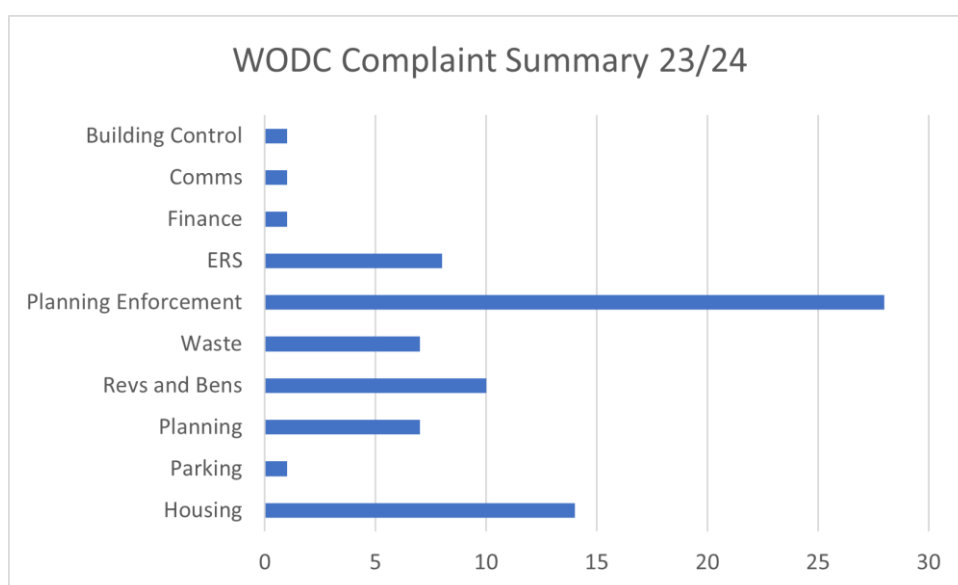
2. OVERVIEW

- 2.1** A total of 4 complaints were escalated to the LGO about services provided by WODC during financial year 2023 - 2024. This is a reduction of 9 compared to 2022-2023.
- 2.2** Of the 4 complaints received by the LGO, a total of 3 complaints were investigated, of which no complaints were 'upheld'.
- 2.3** The table below provides a summary of the 3 complaints investigated by the LGO, the complaint category (service area), the decision which has been made and the reason for the decision.

Category	Decided	Decision	Decision Reason
Benefits & Tax	15/06/2023	Closed after initial enquiries	Other Agency better placed
Environmental Services & Public Protection & Regulation	15/09/2023	Referred back for local resolution	Premature Decision - referred to Organisation
Planning & Development	27/03/2024	Closed after initial enquiries	Not warranted by alleged fault

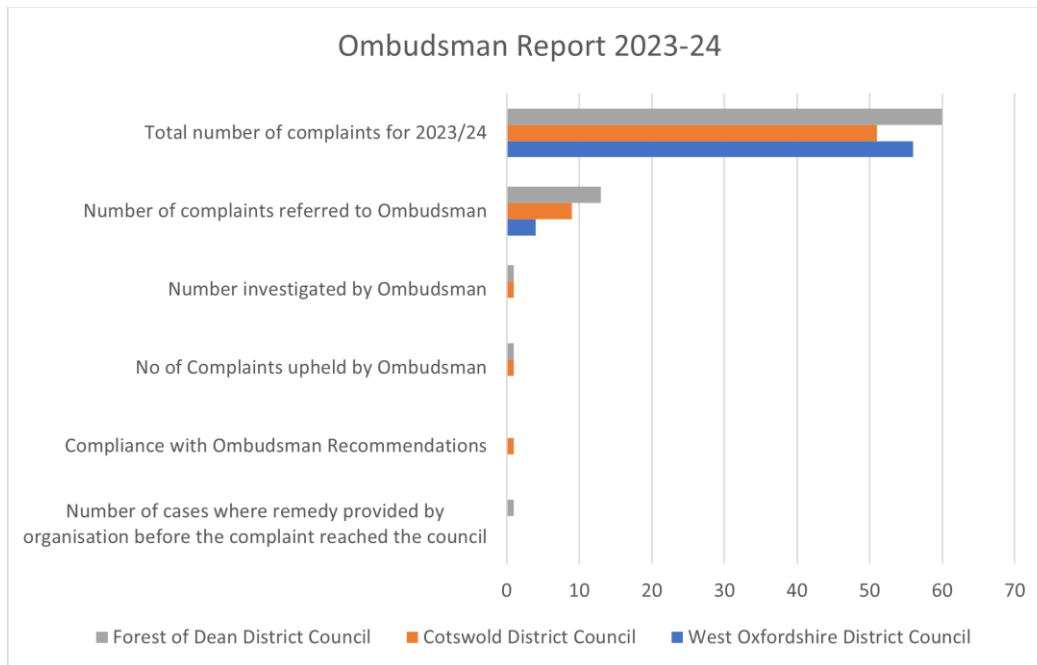
2.4 1 complaint was referred to the Council, this is due to the complainant having not exhausted the 3 stages of the internal complaints process, and 2 were closed after initial enquiries.

2.5 During 2023-2024, WODC recorded a total of 78 complaints, which equates to 5% being referred to the LGO. This is an improvement of 25% year on year. Below is a chart showing the complaints received by WODC during 23/24 by service area.



2.6 Whilst the council receives a wide range of complaints, the majority relate to where decisions have been made, as opposed to the standard of services provided. This includes decisions around planning, revenues and benefits and enforcement. A number of these complaints could be rejected by the Council as they are excluded under the Complaints policy, however, to try to mitigate residents' concerns, they are, in the main, still responded to under the complaints process.

2.7 Comparing this to our partner Councils; Cotswold District and Forest of Dean. Both Councils had one complaint investigated by the LGO and one complaint upheld. The graph below details the total number of complaints received by each Council during 23/24, and the breakdown of complaints referred to the LGO.



2.8 Comparative data for other similar Authorities, as provided by the LGO, was that an average of 63% of the complaints investigated were upheld.

2.9 Given the number of services provided by WODC, to have no complaints upheld by the LGO should be seen as a positive reflection of the way in which services are provided, and complaints are managed and subsequently rectified.

3. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

3.1 None

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

4.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

6. RISK ASSESSMENT

6.1 If the Council's governance arrangements are weak then the Council is at risk of failing to safeguard the use of public funds. In turn this would lead to poor external assessments, damaging the reputation of the Council.

7. EQUALITIES IMPACT

7.1 An equalities impact assessment is not required for this report

8. CLIMATE AND ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCIES IMPLICATIONS

8.1 There are no climate or ecological emergency implications arising directly from this report.

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

1.1 The following documents have been identified by the author of the report in accordance with section 100D.5(a) of the Local Government Act 1972 and are listed in accordance with section 100 D.1(a) for inspection by members of the public:

- Annual Complaints Statistics and Annual Letter from the LGO

9.1 These documents will be available for inspection online at www.westoxon.gov.uk or by contacting democratic services democratic.services@westoxon.gov.uk for a period of up to 4 years from the date of the meeting.