



**WEST OXFORDSHIRE
DISTRICT COUNCIL**

WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Name and date of Committee	AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE – 26 JUNE 2025
Subject	ANNUAL SUMMARY OF COMPLAINTS STATISTICS FROM THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND SOCIAL CARE OMBUDSMAN – YEAR ENDING 31 MARCH 2025
Wards affected	All
Accountable member	Cllr Andy Graham, Leader of the Council Email: andy.graham@westoxon.gov.uk
Accountable officer	Giles Hughes, Chief Executive Officer 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 April 2024 – 31 March 2025.
Annexes	Annex A – Annual Review Letter 2024 – 2025 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 Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman’s Annual Review Letter 2024 – 2025.
Corporate priorities	All
Key Decision	No
Exempt	No
Consultees/ Consultation	N/A

I. BACKGROUND

- I.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).
- I.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.
- I.3** In 2024 / 2025, WODC had three stages to its' internal complaints process as detailed below. Once this was exhausted, if the complainant remained unsatisfied with the response provided, it was at this point that they could refer their complaint to the LGO.
- Stage 1: Service Area Response
 - Stage 2: Independent Review
 - Stage 3: Appeal
- I.4** The Annual Letter details the complaints which have been escalated to the LGO in relation to services provided by WODC.
- I.5** Following a period of consultation, the LGO launched the Complaint Handling Code for Councils in February 2024, setting out a clear process for responding to complaints effectively and fairly. Councils were urged to adopt this Code without delay, as 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.
- I.6** As a result, a new Complaint's Policy and Procedure was produced and approved by the Audit and Governance Committee in November 2024 (minute number refers) This changed the complaints process from a three stage internal process, to a two-stage which went live on 1 April 2025. Therefore, next year's report will be against a two-stage process as shown below:
- Stage 1: Service Area Response
- Stage 2: Appeal and Final Decision Notice
- I.7** In addition, as part of the new Policy, next financial year, the Audit and Governance Committee will receive an annual complaints performance and service improvement report. This will include the following:

- a) the annual self-assessment against the Code to ensure our complaint handling policy remains in line with the Code requirements.
- b) a qualitative and quantitative analysis of the Council's complaint handling performance which will also include a summary of the types of complaints the Council has refused to accept;
- c) any findings of non-compliance with the Code;
- d) service improvements made as a result of the learning from complaints;
- e) presentation of the annual report about the Council's performance from the LGO; and
- f) any other relevant reports or publications produced by the LGO in relation to the work of the Council.

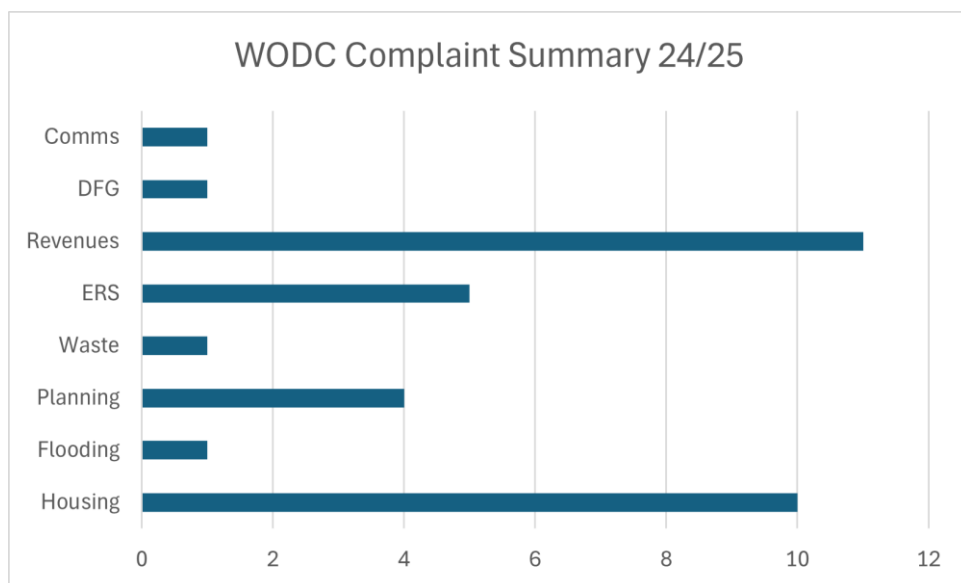
2. OVERVIEW

- 2.1** A total of 11 complaints were escalated to the LGO about services provided by WODC during financial year 2024 - 2025. This is an increase of 7 compared to 2023-2024.
- 2.2** Of the 11 complaints received by the LGO 6 were immediately dismissed, 4 had preliminary enquiries, and one was investigated, and this was upheld.
- 2.3** The table below provides a summary of the 5 complaints investigated by the LGO that weren't immediately dismissed, the complaint category (service area), the decision which has been made and the reason for the decision.

Category	Decided	Decision	Decision Reason
Revenues and Benefits	15/07/2025	Closed after initial enquiries	Cannot by law investigate
Homelessness	21/07/2025	Upheld	Found some fault which caused confusion with complainant
ERS	26/09/2024	Closed after initial enquiries	Another body better placed to investigate
Revenues and Benefits	15/10/2024	Closed after initial enquiries	Right of appeal to valuation tribunal
Housing	26/02/2025	Closed after initial enquiries	Insufficient evidence

- 2.4** 4 complaints were closed after initial enquiries, 3 of these were due to another body being better placed for the complaint, 1 was due to insufficient evidence.
- 2.5** The complaint, which was upheld, a summary of which is included in Annex B, related to a homeless application. As you will see, the majority of the complaint was not upheld, however, it was found that when the Council initially placed the complainant on silver banding, it did not explain what this banding meant. To mitigate this, the Council has reviewed its correspondence to ensure information is provided about what each banding means. The complaint has been closed by the Ombudsman following this mitigation and an apology being provided to the complainant.

- 2.6** During 2024-2025, WODC recorded a total of 34 complaints, which equates to 32% being referred to the LGO. This is an increase of 27% year on year. However, the total number of complaints received was down by over 50%. Below is a chart showing the complaints received by WODC during 23/24 by service area.



- 2.7** 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.
- 2.8** Comparative data for other similar Authorities, as provided by the LGO, was that an average of 66% of the complaints investigated were upheld.
- 2.9** Given the number of services provided by WODC, to only have 1 complaint 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

- 9.1** 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

- 9.2** 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.