

**Report to Governance, Strategy and Resources Scrutiny Board**

## **Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman: Annual Review of Complaints 2024/25**

**Portfolio Holder:** Councillor Arooj Shah, Leader & Cabinet Member for Growth

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**18 June 2025**

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### **Executive Summary**

At the conclusion of the Council's corporate, Adult Social Care, and Children's Social Care complaint processes, residents have the option to approach the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) if they remain dissatisfied with the outcome. Each year, the LGSCO provides an annual review of Local Authorities' performance.

In 2024/25, the LGSCO received 61 complaints and enquiries relating to Oldham Council, marking a positive decrease from 72 in 2023/24. This reduction indicates that the overall number of contacts the LGSCO received regarding Oldham Council remains relatively low when compared to the volume of contacts managed directly by the Council's Complaints Team.

Of the 71 decisions issued by the LGSCO concerning Oldham Council, 27 were deemed 'not for us' or not ready for investigation, and 23 were assessed and closed without further action. 11 cases proceeded to formal investigation, of which 8 were upheld and 3 were not upheld. This results in an upheld rate of 73%, a positive decrease from 86% in the previous reporting year.

Notably, in 4 out of the 8 upheld cases (50%), the Council had already provided a satisfactory remedy before the complaint reached the Ombudsman. This is significantly higher than the average satisfactory remedy rate of 13% among similar authorities, demonstrating the Council's proactive approach in addressing and resolving issues effectively with residents.

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Furthermore, the Council achieved a 100% compliance rate with the Ombudsman's recommendations, aligning with the average compliance rate for similar authorities. Adjusted for Oldham's population, the upheld decisions equate to 3.3 per 100,000 residents, compared to an average of 4.7 per 100,000 residents for similar authorities.

These figures reflect Oldham Council's commitment to resolving complaints efficiently and its responsiveness to feedback, ensuring continuous improvement in service delivery with a resident focus.

## **Recommendations**

It is recommended that Elected Members consider the report and comment as appropriate.

**Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Annual Review of Complaints 2024/25****1 Background**

Oldham Council manages complaints about its services in accordance with five separate legislative frameworks:

- The Local Government Act 1974 - Corporate complaints
- The Children Act 1989 - Children's Social Care complaints
- The Local Authority Social Services and NHS Complaints Regulations 2009 - Adult Social Care complaints
- The Housing Act 1996 - Housing complaints
- The Localism Act 2011 - Housing complaints

1.1 For Corporate, Adult Social Care, and Children's Social Care complaints, the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) acts as the final stage in the process. The Ombudsman investigates complaints where residents remain dissatisfied after the Council has completed its internal complaints procedures.

1.2 Each year, the LGSCO publishes an Annual Review of Complaints, setting out the volume and outcomes of complaints received about each Local Authority. This report is submitted to the Governance, Strategy and Resources Scrutiny Board to support oversight of the Council's complaint handling and responsiveness to external findings.

**2 Current Position****National Perspective**

2.1 The LGSCO is expected to publish its full Annual Review of Complaints for 2024/25 in July 2025. However, early commentary from the Ombudsman confirms a continued rise in the number of complaints received and upheld, signaling persistent challenges in local government service delivery and complaint resolution.

2.2 While full national statistics for 2024/25 have not yet been released, the LGSCO has publicly stated that the upward trend in both complaints received, and upheld decisions has continued this year. This follows a reported total of 17,937 complaints and enquiries received in 2023/24.

2.3 The LGSCO has also indicated that pressures on core services such as housing, education, and adult social care continue to drive the majority of upheld complaints, with significant concerns highlighted about the impact on vulnerable individuals when councils do not respond promptly or appropriately.

2.4 Although the full upheld rate for authorities nationally has not yet been confirmed for 2024/25, the Ombudsman has suggested that fault continues to be found in a high proportion of cases that proceed to formal investigation, reinforcing the need for local authorities to resolve issues at the earliest stage possible.

2.5 The LGSCO highlighted 3 key areas:

- Education and Children's Services: complaints frequently relate to delays in Education, Health and Care (EHC) Plan assessments and reviews, failures to deliver provision, and poor communication with parents.
- Housing: key issues include exclusion from housing registers, incorrect banding decisions, delays in responding to homelessness, and unsuitable temporary accommodation.
- Adult Social Care: concerns include delays in assessment and care planning, poor communication with residents and families, and failures to act in a person-centred way.

2.6 In addition to the Annual Review of Complaints, the LGSCO writes to each Local Authority's Chief Executive every year to set out the Council's annual performance in handling complaints. This is a useful starting point for Members to scrutinise performance. An interactive map setting out each Council's performance is also available on the LGSCO website. The letter sent to Oldham's Chief Executive is attached at Appendix 1. In addition, annual letters to the Chief Executive and details of the Council's performance can be found on the LGSCO website at <https://www.lgo.org.uk/your-councils-performance>.

2.7 The LGSCO is clear that the number of complaints and enquiries received should not be taken in isolation when reviewing a Local Authority's performance as this number can be affected by factors such as demographics, local conditions, the expectations of residents and the quality of signposting.

2.8 The upheld rate (i.e. how often fault is found when a complaint is investigated), the proportion of suitable remedies identified, and compliance rates are all factors to take into consideration.

### Regional Perspective

2.9 Table 1 compares the number of complaints and enquiries received by the LGSCO relating to Oldham Council to that of the other Greater Manchester (GM) Authorities in 2024/25 and 2023/24.

2.10 Tables 2 and 3 show a comparison of the number of upheld complaints and upheld rates for GM Authorities.

**Table 1 – GM Authorities - Total complaints and enquiries received by the LGSCO 2024/25 and 2023/24**

Authority	Complaints and enquiries 2024/25	Complaints and enquiries 2023/24	2 year average complaints and enquiries
Tameside	79	55	67
Bolton	71	59	65
Rochdale	65	60	62.5
Wigan	65	63	64
Trafford	75	69	72
<b>Oldham</b>	<b>61</b>	71	66
Stockport	69	75	72
Salford	66	75	70.5
Bury	89	78	83.5
Manchester	177	163	170

Total	817	768	747
Average	81.7	76.8	75

**Table 2 – GM Authorities - Upheld cases 2024/25**

Authority	Number Investigated	Number of Cases Not Upheld	Number of Cases Upheld
Rochdale	13	2	11
Wigan	13	0	13
Trafford	15	3	12
Bolton	10	2	8
Tameside	19	3	16
Salford	11	2	9
Stockport	19	5	14
Oldham	11	3	8
Bury	14	4	10
Manchester	28	6	22
Total	153	30	123
Average	15.3	3	12.3

**Table 3 – GM Authorities - Upheld rates 2024/25 and 2 year averages**

Authority	2024/25 uphold rate (%)	2 year average uphold rate (%)	2024/25 upheld cases per 100,000 people	2 year average upheld cases per 100,000 people
Trafford	80%	76%	5.1	4.5
Stockport	74%	72%	4.7	4.2
Manchester	79%	78%	3.8	4.0
Rochdale	85%	84%	4.8	3.5
Tameside	84%	84%	6.8	5.6
Oldham	73%	80%	3.3	4.1
Bury	71%	80%	5.1	8.4
Bolton	80%	85%	2.6	2.8
Wigan	100%	100%	3.8	3.1
Salford	82%	91%	3.2	3.6
Average	81%	83%	4.3	4.4

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- 2.11 Eight of the ten Greater Manchester authorities saw an increase in the number of complaints and enquiries made to the LGSCO in 2024/25 compared to 2023/24. This suggests a rising trend in residents escalating concerns to the Ombudsman.
- 2.12 The LGSCO receives and decides cases across different business years. Therefore, the decisions issued in 2024/25 relate to a mix of complaints received in that year and some carried over from previous years.
- 2.13 Seven of the ten Greater Manchester authorities experienced an increase in the number of upheld complaints in 2024/25. Six authorities also saw an increase in their uphold rate compared to the previous year.
- 2.14 The average upheld rate across Greater Manchester authorities in 2024/25 was 80.8%, a slight decrease from 85% in 2023/24.
- 2.15 Now in its second year of reporting, the LGSCO's upheld cases per 100,000 people continues to provide a useful proportional performance measure. In 2024/25, the Greater Manchester average was 4.3 upheld cases per 100,000 people, a small decrease from 4.44 per 100,000 in 2023/24.

### **Local Perspective**

- 2.16 The number of complaints and enquiries received by the LGSCO regarding Oldham Council decreased from 71 in 2023/24 to 61 in 2024/25. This is in contrast to most Greater Manchester authorities, which saw an increase in contacts this year.
- 2.17 The highest number of contacts related to Adult Social Care (16) and Education and Children's Services (10). These two areas continue to be the most common subjects of LGSCO enquiries concerning Oldham Council.
- 2.18 While there were reductions in Education and Children's Services (from 18 to 10), and smaller numbers in other service areas, the overall spread shows a diverse range of issues being escalated to the Ombudsman.
- 2.19 Oldham Council saw a reduction in both the number of upheld decisions (from 12 to 8) and in the uphold rate (from 86% in 2023/24 to 73% in 2024/25). However, it is important to note that uphold rates can be influenced by the timing of decisions issued, with some 2024/25 decisions relating to complaints first raised in previous years. Based on the two-year average, Oldham's uphold rate stands at 79.5%, close to the GM average of 82.6%.
- 2.20 The number of upheld decisions per 100,000 population in Oldham was 3.3 in 2024/25. This remains below the GM average of 4.3, and Oldham's two-year average stands at 4.1 upheld cases per 100,000, which is consistent with the regional trend.
- 2.21 The LGSCO monitors how often councils identify a suitable remedy before the Ombudsman intervenes. In 2024/25, **50%** of upheld decisions involving Oldham had a suitable remedy already in place — an increase from 42% in the previous year. Comparative data for other councils in 2024/25 has not yet been published, so Oldham's position relative to Greater Manchester and national averages is not yet known.
- 2.22 Oldham Council continues to prioritise early and effective resolution of complaints. The relatively low proportion of LGSCO investigations, and the fact that in many cases appropriate remedies are already in place before the Ombudsman intervenes, suggests a strong commitment to learning from complaints and working constructively with residents to resolve concerns.

- 2.23 Table 4 below shows the services against which decisions were issued following detailed investigation by the LGSCO.

**Table 4 – Oldham Council investigations and upheld cases 2023/24**

Service	Number of cases	Number of cases upheld	Number of cases not upheld	Number of cases outside formal process
Adult Social Care	16	5	1	10
Revenues	1	0	0	1
Education and Children's Services	10	1	0	9
Highways	3	0	0	3
Housing	9	0	0	9
Environmental Services	9	1	0	8
Planning	5	1	0	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>44</b>

- 2.24 There has been no change in the number of upheld decisions relating to Adult Social Care, which remained at five in both 2023/24 and 2024/25. However, a decrease is seen in Revenues and Benefits, falling from 2 upheld decisions in 2023/24 to none in 2024/25. Similarly, Highways, Housing, and Children's Services each saw upheld decisions in 2023/24 but none in 2024/25. Conversely, Environmental Services and Planning each had one upheld decision in 2024/25, matching the numbers seen the previous year. This indicates a more limited spread of upheld cases across service areas this year, with a greater proportion of contacts not progressing to formal investigation.

- 2.25 Further information on the upheld cases can be found in the table below.

**Table 5 – Issues identified as part of LGSCO investigations**

Service	Decision	Summary
<b>Adult Care Services</b>	Upheld	complains the Council failed to inform his mother, Mrs Z, of the amount she needed to contribute toward the costs of her residential placement.
<b>Adult Care Services</b>	Upheld	complains about delays and poor communication when the Council's supplier arranged, in 2023, for repair and replacement of specialist equipment she needs because of her disability.
<b>Adult Care Services</b>	Upheld	complained the Council did not carry out a proper financial assessment for her daughter, D, and wrongly sent her correspondence and invoices.
<b>Adult Care Services</b>	Upheld	complains the Council failed to provide her with adequate crisis care after her mother, Mrs Y had an accident and could not provide care.

<b>Adult Care Services</b>	Upheld	says the Council excluded him from information, meetings, and decisions about his relative (Ms C's) adult social care support.
<b>Education &amp; Childrens Services</b>	Upheld	complains the Council wrongly told her she would remain on the lowest banding of fostering payments due to being a connected persons foster carer.
<b>Environmental Services</b>	Upheld	says the Council has failed to collect and return her bins in line with the agreement it made for assisted collections. Mrs X also says the Council has threatened to remove her assisted collection.
<b>Planning &amp; Development</b>	Upheld	Council did not properly assess the impact of proposed development on his home. The Council also failed to deal with his reports of unsocial working hours while the development was built.

2.26 The LGSCO made service-wide recommendations in respect of **two** upheld cases in 2024/25. In both instances, the Council accepted the recommendations and provided evidence of compliance. No cases were highlighted as having breached the timescales for implementation of the recommended actions.

2.27 Following the outcomes of the LGSCO's investigations and through the Council's own complaints learning process, the following service improvements have been agreed or are in progress to help prevent recurrence of the issues identified:

- The Council is reviewing how its commissioned equipment service promotes choice when arranging specialist items to meet assessed needs and ensuring appropriate procedures are in place for recording, preventative checks, and maintenance of 'special order' equipment.
- The Council is reviewing changes already implemented by its equipment supplier to ensure they adequately address the failings in care planning and contingency arrangements identified in the upheld complaint.
- The Council is taking steps to improve its complaint handling processes, including providing refresher training to relevant staff and ensuring complaints are clearly identified, investigated, and responded to in line with policy timeframes.
- The Planning service has been reminded of the need to clearly communicate time extensions when complaints are linked to ongoing investigations, and to maintain clarity in correspondence to avoid unnecessary delay or confusion for residents.

2.28 Table 6 sets out the total number of complaints received by Oldham Council and the number of complaints and enquiries that were received by the LGSCO in 2024/25. It should be noted that not all complaints and enquiries received by the LGSCO progressed to the detailed investigation stage.

**Table 6 - The number of LGSCO enquiries and Oldham Council complaints 2024/25**

<b>Oldham Council complaints</b>	<b>Complaints received by Oldham Council in 2024/25</b>	<b>Complaints/enquiries received by the LGSCO</b>
Number	398	61
Percentage	100%	15.3%

2.29 A snapshot of the decisions made by the LGSCO in respect of Oldham Council is set out at Table 7.



**Table 7 - LGSCO decisions made concerning Oldham Council**

Invalid or incomplete	Advice given	Referred back for local resolution	Closed after initial enquiries	Not upheld	Upheld	Total	Upheld rate (%)	Average upheld rate (%) of similar Authorities (nationally)
2	3	22	23	3	8	61	73%	81%

2.30 All customer feedback is important to the Council as part of our commitment to work with a resident focus. In addition to 398 complaints, the Council's Complaints Team also recorded 171 compliments.

2.31 Furthermore, the Complaints Team recorded 1,477 service requests, 100 Children's Services representations; the Complaints Team works with services to help resolve such contacts to customers' satisfaction at the earliest opportunity to prevent escalation.

### **Improvements**

2.32 Following a service review in summer 2024, the Complaints Team implemented changes to the way complaints are allocated and quality assured. These changes have led to an improvement in timeliness, with 36.6% of complaints now responded to within timescales, up from 32.9% in the previous year. In addition, the average complaint handling time has reduced from 62 days to 40 days, demonstrating the early impact of the changes.

2.33 Work is ongoing with the Customer Support Centre to reduce the volume of non-complaint-related contact received by the Complaints Team. As a result, the number of service requests handled by the team has reduced from 1,760 (23/24) to 1,477 (24/25), allowing greater capacity to focus on formal complaints. Further reductions are expected.

2.34 The frequency of internal complaint progress reporting has increased from monthly to weekly to help services maintain oversight of open complaints and outstanding actions. In addition, monthly performance reporting is being introduced at Directorate Management Team (DMT) meetings, and quarterly updates are presented to the Governance, Strategy and Resources Scrutiny Board to support wider accountability.

2.35 The Complaints Team is working closely with Strategy and Performance colleagues to implement a live dashboard to track complaint trends, timeliness, and areas for improvement. This remains in development and expected to be live by Q2 2025/26.

2.36 Quality checks of responses drafted by services continue to be undertaken and feedback provided.

2.37 Representatives from the Complaints Team continue to attend the North West Complaints Forum where good practice is shared.

2.38 Representatives from the Complaints Team continue to attend available workshops and conferences organised by the LGSCO to ensure we remain up to date with policy and guidance.

2.39 Representatives from the Complaints Team attend Quality Improvement Group meetings for Children's Social Care and Customer Experience meetings for Adult Social Care.

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- 2.40 A Complaints Recovery Plan is being developed to drive greater ownership of complaints within services and ensure the resident voice is central to how complaints are responded to and used for service improvement. A key focus is ensuring the timely and proactive management of issues raised.
- 2.41 Corporate KPIs for complaint performance have been introduced across each PAM area, strengthening accountability through regular performance monitoring and management oversight.
- 2.42 The service is currently reviewing the use of technology and AI to better manage demand and improve triage, freeing up resource for complex casework.
- 2.43 The Council's website and process for reporting waste-related concerns has been updated to help residents access the correct service more efficiently, reducing the likelihood of complaints and enabling faster resolution of common issues.
- 2.44 To manage increased demand and improve statutory compliance, temporary capacity has been added to the Complaints Team to support with Children's Services complaints, enabling a more timely and consistent response to residents.
- 2.45 In early 2025, Oldham Council launched its first Children's Residential Home Complaints Policy alongside a new database for capturing and analysing feedback. This ensures the voices of children and young people living in residential care are captured, heard, and responded to appropriately.

#### **Further information**

- 2.46 The LGSCO has moved away from a focus on the volume of complaints and pays more attention to the lessons that can be learned from complaints and the wider improvements that can be achieved for residents and this is now more widely publicised.
- 2.47 The LGSCO is keen that scrutiny Members play an active role in holding their Local Authority to account on complaints and has created a wide range of information to support scrutiny Members to carry out the scrutiny function for complaints handling. This can be found at <https://www.lgo.org.uk/for-advisors/scrutiny>.

#### **Conclusion**

- 2.48 While Oldham Council saw a reduction in the overall number of complaints and enquiries escalated to the LGSCO in 2024/25, the uphold rate remains relatively high at 73%. This reflects a continued willingness by the Ombudsman to investigate complaints raised, but also highlights areas where service delivery and responsiveness must continue to improve. The two-year average uphold rate of 79.5% places Oldham broadly in line with other Greater Manchester authorities, with a lower-than-average number of upheld decisions per 100,000 residents (3.3 in 2024/25 and 4.1 across the two-year period). This suggests that, proportionally, relatively few complaints escalate to fault findings.
- 2.49 Importantly, in half of the upheld cases this year, the Council had already identified a suitable remedy before the Ombudsman became involved. This is an encouraging indication that services are taking responsibility early and making efforts to resolve complaints fairly and appropriately.
- 2.50 The Complaints Team has made significant progress in implementing improvement activity following its 2024 service review. This has resulted in better timeliness, reduced handling times, and stronger performance monitoring across the organisation. These

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improvements are helping to embed a culture of early resolution, learning, and accountability.

- 2.51 Looking ahead, the Council will continue to prioritise complaint handling as a core part of being resident focused. The development of a Complaints Recovery Plan and investment in digital tools reflect a strong commitment to driving improvement, strengthening ownership within services, and ensuring residents' voices are heard and acted upon.

### **Recommendation**

- 2.52 It is recommended that Governance, Strategy and Resources Scrutiny Committee considers the report and comments as appropriate.

## **3 Appendices**

- 3.1 Appendix 1

21 May 2025

*By email*

Mrs Kipling  
Acting Chief Executive  
Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council

Dear Mrs Kipling

**Annual Review letter 2024-25**

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 2025. 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. We have listened to your feedback, and I am pleased to be able to share your annual statistics earlier in the year to better fit with local reporting cycles. I hope this proves helpful to you.

[Your annual statistics are available here.](#)

In addition, 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.

In a change to our approach, we will write to organisations in July where there is exceptional practice or where we have concerns about an organisation's complaint handling. Not all organisations will get a letter. If you do receive a letter it will be sent in advance of its publication on our website on 16 July 2025, alongside our annual Review of Local Government Complaints.

**Supporting complaint and service improvement**

In February we published [good practice guides](#) to support councils to adopt our [Complaint Handling Code](#). The guides were developed in consultation with councils that have been piloting the Code and are based on the real-life, front-line experience of people handling complaints day-to-day, including their experience of reporting to senior leaders and elected members. The guides were issued alongside free [training resources](#) organisations can use to make sure front-line staff understand what to do when someone raises a complaint. We will be applying the Code in our casework from April 2026 and we know a large number of councils have already adopted it into their local policies with positive results.

This year we relaunched our popular [complaint handling training](#) programme. The training is now more interactive than ever, providing delegates with an opportunity to consider a complaint from receipt to resolution. Early feedback has been extremely positive with delegates reporting an increase in confidence in handling complaints after completing the training. To find out more contact [training@lgo.org.uk](mailto:training@lgo.org.uk).

Yours sincerely,



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