
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 and Cabinet Member for Growth

Officer Contact: Fran Lautman, Assistant Director for Customer Experience

Report Author: Leo Morgan, Complaints Manager

9 October 2025

Executive Summary

This report updates and finalises the version considered by Elected Members on 18 June 2025. It incorporates the LGSCO's final 2024/25 publications, which the Ombudsman releases in two parts: (1) the Annual Review letter to the Chief Executive setting out the Council's overall performance, and (2) the national Annual Review report and datasets/interactive performance map. No further letter was issued following the initial Chief Executive letter; the national publication provides the additional context reflected in this update.

At the conclusion of the Council's corporate, Adult Social Care, and Children's Social Care complaint processes, residents may approach the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) if they remain dissatisfied with the outcome. In line with our commitment to being resident-focused, we use the LGSCO's findings each year to strengthen early resolution, learn from feedback, and drive improvements in service quality.

In 2024/25, the LGSCO received 56 complaints and enquiries relating to Oldham Council, a decrease from 71 in 2023/24. This is in contrast to the national picture, where overall complaint volumes rose by 16% to a record 20,773 cases. The reduction suggests that the overall number of contacts the LGSCO received regarding Oldham Council remains relatively low when compared to the scale of contact handled directly by the Council's Complaints Team.

The Ombudsman issued 61 decisions concerning Oldham Council. Of these, 3 were closed after advice was given, 22 were referred back for local resolution, 23 were closed after initial enquiries, and 2 were recorded as incomplete or invalid. 11 cases proceeded to formal investigation, of which

8 were upheld and 3 were not upheld. This results in an uphold rate of 72.7%, a reduction from 86% in the previous reporting year and below both the 81% average for Metropolitan authorities and the 83% national average.

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 12% national average for all authorities and the 13% average for Metropolitan councils, demonstrating the Council's proactive approach to addressing and resolving issues at an early stage.

The Council achieved 100% compliance with the Ombudsman's recommendations, matching the high national compliance rate of 99.7%. 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 for Metropolitan councils and 6.2 per 100,000 nationally.

These figures reflect Oldham Council's continued commitment to resolving complaints efficiently, learning from outcomes, and working constructively with residents to deliver improvements in service quality.

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's Annual Review of Local Government Complaints 2024/25, published in July 2025, confirms that the Ombudsman received a record 20,773 complaints and enquiries during the year, the first-time volumes have exceeded 20,000, representing a 16% increase for the second consecutive year. The LGSCO completed 4,298 detailed investigations and upheld 83% of those cases, continuing a rising trend in both volumes and fault findings and signaling persistent challenges in local government service delivery and complaint resolution.
- 2.2 This increase follows 17,937 complaints and enquiries received in 2023/24, underlining a significant year-on-year rise in residents turning to the Ombudsman. The sustained high uphold rate demonstrates that, in the majority of cases taken forward to investigation, the Ombudsman continues to find maladministration or service failure.
- 2.3 The LGSCO's casework shows that pressures on core services – particularly housing, education, and adult social care – continue to drive the majority of upheld complaints. The Ombudsman highlights the serious impact on vulnerable individuals when councils do not respond promptly or appropriately, emphasising the importance of early and effective resolution at the local level.
- 2.4 In 2024/25, the Ombudsman upheld 91% of investigated complaints across Education and Children's Services, 85% in Housing, and 78% in Adult Social Care. Education/Children's and Housing are above the national overall uphold rate of 83%, while Adult Social Care is slightly below it.

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. Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) cases were a major contributor, with the Ombudsman noting the need for urgent national reform.
- **Housing** – Common issues include exclusion from housing registers, incorrect banding decisions, delays in responding to homelessness applications, and provision of unsuitable temporary accommodation.
- **Adult Social Care** – Themes include delays in assessment and care planning, poor communication with residents and families, and failure to take a person-centred approach.

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 performance in handling complaints. This letter is an important tool for Members in scrutinising complaint handling. 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 and can also be viewed 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 with those 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 uphold rates for GM authorities.

Table 1 – GM Authorities: Total complaints and enquiries received by the LGSCO

**Green shading indicates top performers on the metric shown (lower is better for volumes and uphold measures).*

Authority	2024/25	2023/24	Two-year average
Tameside	93	55	74
Bolton	73	59	66
Rochdale	55	60	57.5
Wigan	59	63	61

Trafford	68	69	68.5
Oldham	56	71	63.5
Stockport	70	75	72.5
Salford	70	75	72.5
Bury	100	78	89
Manchester	188	163	175.5
Total	832	768	800

Table 2 – GM Authorities - Upheld cases 2024/25

Authority	Number investigated	Not upheld	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

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

Authority	2024/25 uphold rate (%)	Two-year average uphold rate (%)	2024/25 upheld per 100,000	Two-year average upheld per 100,000
Trafford	80	76	5.1	4.5
Stockport	73.7	72	4.7	4.2
Manchester	78.6	78	3.8	4
Rochdale	84.6	84	4.8	3.5

Tameside	84.2	84	6.8	5.6
Oldham	72.7	80	3.3	4.1
Bury	71.4	80	5.1	8.4
Bolton	80	85	2.6	2.8
Wigan	100	100	3.8	3.1
Salford	81.8	91	3.2	3.6
Average	80.7	83	4.3	4.4

- 2.11 Four of the ten GM authorities saw an increase in the number of complaints and enquiries made to the LGSCO in 2024/25 compared to 2023/24 (Tameside, Bolton, Bury, Manchester). The remaining six recorded decreases.
- 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 Across GM, 123 complaints were upheld in 2024/25 out of 153 investigations (see Table 2). Individual uphold rates vary by authority (Table 3), reflecting differences in case mix and local service pressures.
- 2.14 The average uphold rate across GM authorities in 2024/25 was 80.7% (down slightly from the two-year average of 83%).
- 2.15 Now in its second year of reporting, the LGSCO's "upheld cases per 100,000 residents" continues to provide a useful proportional performance measure. In 2024/25, the GM average was 4.3 upheld cases per 100,000, broadly in line with last year's 4.4.

Local Perspective

- 2.16 The number of complaints and enquiries received by the LGSCO regarding Oldham Council decreased from 71 in 2023/24 to 56 in 2024/25. Regionally, four Greater Manchester authorities saw increases this year (Tameside, Bolton, Bury and Manchester), while six, including Oldham, saw decreases.
- 2.17 The distribution of LGSCO contacts about Oldham by service area in 2024/25 was as follows in Table 4 below:

Service	Total
Adult Social Care	14
Benefits and Tax	2
Corporate and Other Services	4
Education and Children's Services	9
Environmental Services, Public Protection and Regulation	9
Highways and Transport	2
Housing	9

Planning and Development	5
Other	2
Total	56

- 2.18 Within this mix, Education and Children's Services contacts reduced from 18 in 2023/24 to 9 in 2024/25. Other service areas saw smaller volumes with limited year-on-year change. Overall, fewer Oldham cases progressed to detailed investigation relative to total contacts.
- 2.19 Oldham Council saw a reduction in both the number of upheld decisions (from 12 to 8) and the uphold rate (from 86% in 2023/24 to 72.7% in 2024/25). Uphold rates can be influenced by the timing of decisions issued. On a two-year view, Oldham's average uphold rate is 79.5%, close to the Greater Manchester two-year average of 83%.
- 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 Oldham's upheld decisions had a suitable remedy already in place up from 42% in 2023/24 and significantly higher than both the national average (12%) and the Metropolitan authorities' average (13%). This indicates a strong early-resolution approach locally.
- 2.22 Oldham Council continues to prioritise early and effective resolution of complaints. The relatively low proportion of LGSCO investigations, and the frequency with which appropriate remedies are already in place before Ombudsman involvement, suggest a strong commitment to learning from complaints and working constructively with residents to resolve concerns.
- 2.23 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
Adult Care Services	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.
Adult Care Services	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.
Adult Care Services	Upheld	complained the Council did not carry out a proper financial assessment for her daughter, D, and wrongly sent her correspondence and invoices.
Adult Care Services	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.
Adult Care Services	Upheld	says the Council excluded him from information, meetings, and decisions about his relative (Ms C's) adult social care support.
Education & Childrens Services	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.

Environmental Services	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.
Planning & Development	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.

2.24 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.

2.25 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.

2.26 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

Oldham Council Complaints	Complaints received by Oldham Council in 2024/25	Complaints/enquiries received by the LGSCO
Number	398	56
Percentage	100%	14.1%

- 2.27 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	72.70%	81%

- 2.28 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.
- 2.29 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

- 2.30 Following a service review in summer 2024, the Complaints Team implemented changes to allocation and quality assurance. In 2024/25 (1 April 2024–31 March 2025), 36.6% of complaints were responded to within timescales, up from 32.9% in 2023/24 (1 April 2023–31 March 2024). Over the same periods, the average end-to-end handling time reduced from 62 days to 40 days, demonstrating early impact.
- 2.31 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.
- 2.32 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.
- 2.33 The Complaints Team, working with Strategy and Performance, launched two live complaints dashboard products in early August 2025: one for Cabinet Members, aligned to portfolio responsibilities and showing daily high-level metrics (volumes, timeliness, outcomes, trends and comparative performance); and one for Senior Officers, providing additional case-level detail alongside the same daily performance metrics. Both dashboards update daily and are now embedded in routine performance management.
- 2.34 Quality checks of responses drafted by services continue to be undertaken and feedback provided.
- 2.35 Representatives from the Complaints Team continue to attend the North West Complaints Forum where good practice is shared.

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- 2.36 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.
- 2.37 Representatives from the Complaints Team attend Quality Improvement Group meetings for Children's Social Care and Customer Experience meetings for Adult Social Care.
- 2.38 The Complaints Recovery Plan has been finalised and launched and was shared with and endorsed by Leadership. The plan sets clear service ownership and strengthens the resident voice and early resolution and embeds learning from complaints. Delivery is being tracked through the new dashboard and regular assurance reports.
- 2.39 Corporate KPIs for complaint performance have been introduced across each PAM area, strengthening accountability through regular performance monitoring and management oversight.
- 2.40 The service is currently reviewing the use of technology to better manage demand and improve triage, freeing up resource for complex casework.
- 2.41 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.
- 2.42 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.
- 2.43 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

- 2.44 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.
- 2.45 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

- 2.46 While Oldham Council saw a reduction in the overall number of complaints and enquiries escalated to the LGSCO in 2024/25, performance against key Ombudsman measures places Oldham among the best in Greater Manchester. Oldham recorded the second-lowest uphold rate in GM (72.7%) and the third-lowest number of upheld cases per 100,000 residents (3.3) better than the GM average (4.3) and below both the Metropolitan (4.7) and national (6.2) averages. Combined with 50% satisfactory remedies identified before LGSCO involvement and 100% compliance with recommendations, this indicates strong early resolution and robust learning from complaints, while we continue to focus on improving timeliness and responsiveness.

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- 2.47 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.
- 2.48 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 improvements are helping to embed a culture of early resolution, learning, and accountability.
- 2.49 Looking ahead, the Council will continue to prioritise complaint handling as a core element of our resident-focused approach, ensuring residents' voices are heard and acted upon. The Complaints Recovery Plan and investment in digital tools will be underpinned by clear corporate KPIs and strengthened performance management, including service reviews, monthly DMT and portfolio reporting to Senior Officers and Cabinet, using the new dashboards to drive improved timeliness and reduced end-to-end handling times, increase early resolution (and satisfactory remedies before LGSCO), keep upheld rates and upheld-per-capita below GM averages, and sustain 100% compliance with Ombudsman recommendations.

Recommendation

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

Appendices

- 3.1 LGSCO Letter to Chief Executive
3.2 LGSCO 2024/2025 Annual Report
3.3 LGSCO Complaints Received 24/25
3.4 LGSCO Complaints Decided 24/25
3.5 LGSCO Remedy & Compliance Outcomes 24/25

Local Government & Social Care OMBUDSMAN

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.

Yours sincerely,



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