

Public Report
Overview and Scrutiny Management Board

Committee Name and Date of Committee Meeting

Overview and Scrutiny Management Board – 12 November 2025

Report Title

Annual Compliments and Complaints Report 2024/25

Is this a Key Decision and has it been included on the Forward Plan?

No

Strategic Director Approving Submission of the Report

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Ward(s) Affected

Borough-Wide

Report Summary

The purpose of this report is to:

- a) Outline the complaints and compliments that the Council received in 2024/25 in line with statutory requirements.
- b) Identify key trends within complaints and compliments over a five-year period.

Recommendations

Members of Overview and Scrutiny Management Board are asked to:

- 1. Note the Annual Compliments and Complaints Report for 2024/25.

List of Appendices Included

- Appendix One Annual Compliments and Complaints Report, 2024/25
- Appendix Two Ombudsman Annual Review letter 2024/25
- Appendix Three Complaint procedures overview

Background Papers

Corporate Complaint Policy

Rotherham Council Rotherham Council - Complaints Policy

Consideration by any other Council Committee, Scrutiny or Advisory Panel

N/A

Council Approval Required

No

Exempt from the Press and Public

No

Annual Compliments and Complaints Report 2024-25

1. Background

- 1.1 All councils need to provide complaint procedures to respond to customer concerns in an open and transparent way within defined timescales and in accordance with legislation. The purpose of the annual complaint report is to outline the complaints and compliments that the Council received in the period 1st April 2024 - 31st March 2025, highlighting key themes and longer-term trends.
- 1.2 The report also explains how the Council has performed against the required standards and includes case studies demonstrating how services have learnt from complaints received.

2 Key Issues

2.1 The performance headlines outlined within the report include:

- 2.2 In 2024/25, the overall number of complaints received by the Council decreased by **1%**, reducing from **1,212** in 2023/24 to **1,198**. This maintains the trend of a declining number of complaints from **1,397** that were received in 2022/23. However, the overall number of complaints received in 2024/25 is still the third highest number received in the last five years.
- 2.3 Based on the data from the first three months of 2025/26, **324** complaints were received compared to **281** in the same period in 2024/25, which is a **15%** increase. Therefore, the downward trend of the last two years has not continued into the current year and an overall increase in 2025/26 is anticipated given this performance.
- 2.4 The largest absolute increase in complaints was in Regeneration and Environment, which increased from **373** in 2023/24 to **468** in 2024/25, a percentage increase of **25%**. The second largest absolute increase was in Children and Young Peoples Services increasing from **64** to **95**, a percentage increase of **48%**. Adult Care Services also increased from **64** to **69**, a percentage increase of **7%**. Finance and Customer Services slightly increased, from **91** to **92**, a percentage increase of **1%**. Housing Services saw the largest decrease in complaints from **615** to **471**, a percentage decrease of **23%**. Assistant Chief Executive's directorate decreased, from **5** to **3**. Public Health remained unchanged at zero complaints received.
- 2.5 The increase in Regeneration and Environment Directorate complaints was primarily due to an increase in Waste Management complaints, rising from **165** to **267**. The other notable increase in complaints was in Childrens and Young People's Services, where complaints in relation to Education Health and Care Assessments increased from **14** to **24**.
- 2.6 Performance has decreased to **81%** of complaint responses within the target timescale. It is slightly below the five-year average of **84%** and it has not met the Council Plan target of **85%**. 4 out of 7 service areas did not meet target. These were Adult Care, Assistant Chief Executive's, Housing Services and

Children and Young People's Services. There will be further efforts made across all those services who did not meet the target of performance to timescales.

- 2.7 More complaints were upheld in terms of the percentage of complaints responded to. This is where the Council has investigated and found a problem with the service provided, with **369 (31%)** of all complaints upheld. To put this into context, **294 (24%)** of all complaints were upheld in 2023/24 and **443 (32%)** were upheld in 2022/23.
- 2.8 The majority of complaints (**93.5%**) were resolved at Stage 1, only **42 (3.5%)** of all complaints, were escalated to Stage 2. This compares with **37 (3%)** in 2023/24. Only **4 (0.33%)** of all complaints received were considered at Stage 3, which is a Members Review Panel for corporate complaints.
- 2.9 **373 (31.1%)** of all complaints were categorised as quality of service, making this the greatest proportion of types of complaints. Complaints within this category have decreased in absolute terms from the **404 (33%)** complaints received in 2023/24. Lack of service accounted for the second highest category of complaints, with **353** of all complaints received (**29.5%**). Complaints within this category have increased from **309 (25%)** in 2023/24. The third highest category of complaints was conduct / attitude of staff which contributed to **133 (11.1%)** of all complaints received. Complaints within this category have decreased from **170** in 2023/24.
- 2.10 The number of compliments recorded by the Council increased, from **902** in 2023/24 to **1,309**, an increase of **45%**, and continues the pattern of a year-on-year increase. Adult Care Services saw the biggest absolute increase with **227** more received, followed by Regeneration and Environment Services, with **85** more received and Housing Services with **77** more received. This is the first time in the last five years that compliments received have exceeded the numbers of complaints received.
- 2.11 Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Annual Review letter**
- 2.12 The Annual Review letter from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) was received on 21st May 2025, setting out their records of referred complaint enquiries and investigations. In 2024/25 more complaints were investigated and upheld by the LGSCO than in the previous year, with **8** complaints investigated compared to **6** investigated in the previous year (2023/24). The increase is still within five-year average numbers investigated (**42** investigated over five years – average is **9** per year) and is the third highest number recorded in the last five years.
- 2.13 **6** complaints out of **8** investigations were upheld. This equates to an upheld rate of **75%**, which is below the Ombudsman's figure of the average uphold rate of similar authorities at **81%**. **3** upheld complaints were in Children's and Young People's Services, **2** in Adult Care Services and **1** in Regeneration and Environment.

- 2.14 Appendix 1 of the Annual Complaint Report (Page 37) outlines the LGSCO decisions for the Council for 2024/25 and how these compare with **14** statistical neighbouring councils. In 2024/25, the Council is in the top quartile of the numbers investigated and the numbers upheld. It ranks as joint 2nd out of 15 for total investigated, joint 1st out of 15 for upheld and joint 4th for percentage upheld. This is based on the lower numbers received and the lower percentage of complaints upheld.
- 2.15 In the previous year, 2023/24, the Council also benchmarked in the top quarter for numbers investigated, numbers upheld (4th) and the percentage upheld (5th).
- 2.16 This shows that the Council is comparing better to similar Local Authorities in 2024/25, with comparatively less complaints investigated and less complaints upheld overall.
- 2.17 It also shows that the majority of complaints that were brought to the LGSCO (**52** decided) were deemed invalid or incomplete, referred back for local resolution or closed after initial enquiries. This, along with the relatively low number of investigations, reflects positively that the Council's complaints procedures are working effectively to find fair and appropriate local resolutions.
- 2.18 In addition, **4** Housing Ombudsman complaint decisions were received, they were all upheld in part (some complaint issues upheld, and some not upheld). This compares to **4** decisions that were not upheld in 2023/24.
- 2.19 Overall, the Annual Review letter presents a positive view of the Council's handling of formal complaints in 2024/25. The number of investigations increased within average numbers received, and the upheld rate is below average. There were also no Public Interest Reports in the year.
- 2.20 The Ombudsman's annual letter 2024/25 did not offer any criticism of the Council in terms of its response to its enquiries or its complaint handling in general. There was no specific reference to how the Council had engaged with its enquiries over the year, although the Ombudsman advised they would write separately in July 2023 to all organisations where they did have concerns. The Council did not receive a follow up letter in July 2025.
- 2.21 In terms of the published data on the Ombudsman website, as referred to in their letter, the Council is recorded as being **100%** compliant with the Ombudsman and has an upheld rate that is lower than the national average.
- 2.22 However, the Council continues to show that it is unsuccessful in resolving any complaints when formal notification of investigation is initially received from the Ombudsman. The Council has resolved **0%** of cases at the point of notification that the Ombudsman intends to investigate, compared to a national average of **11%**.
- 2.23 In response, the Complaints Team will continue to work with services to check to see if there is anything more that can be done to resolve a complaint after

notification of investigation is received. There are often a few weeks between notification and the start of the investigation and therefore there is a small window to try and resolve a case. Services need to be encouraged to consider if there is anything else that can be offered in order to resolve the complaint.

2.24 Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's complaint handling code

- 2.25 In addition, the Ombudsman have also provided an update in respect of its proposed Complaint Handling Code, which is due to be in place from April 2026.
- 2.26 The Code is non statutory, and the Ombudsman has no additional powers to enforce compliance. Effectively the Code is voluntary but will be considered when enquiries are investigated, and any compliance issues will be mentioned in its recommendations.
- 2.27 The Council has to take steps to ensure that its Corporate Complaints Procedure is in line with the Code. This will include the potential removal of the third stage in the Procedure, changing the Stage 2 complaint timescale to 20 working days (currently 25 working days) and reviewing published information, including online information.

3. Options considered and recommended proposal

- 3.1 The statistical analysis of the annual report and the departmental breakdowns should be considered and noted. In addition, consideration has been given as to how the Council can further improve its processes for dealing with complaints and compliments to drive improvements to the service for both residents and the Council.
- 3.2 Feedback from complainants regarding how the Council responds to complaints suggests that there should be strong emphasis on clear communications through the process, fairness and impartiality in investigation and decision making and assurance that outcome actions will take place and learning completed.
- 3.3 Building on the key developments in 2023/24, the Council will again apply particular focus to the following issues:
 - 3.3.1 Work to improve performance to complaint procedure timescales, to make sure it meets Council Plan target of 85%. This includes the continued roll out of new reporting dashboards so that managers have direct access to their complaint information.
 - 3.3.2 Continue to increase the number of compliments recorded across the Council, the Complaints Team will continue to work with managers to ensure that the process for recording and reporting compliments is improved.
 - 3.3.3 The Complaints Team will complete a self-assessment every 12 months, to ensure compliance with the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code

and from April 2026 the new Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code.

- 3.3.4 Improved Housing Services online complaint information to include more resources for tenants, including learning from complaints case studies and advice and guidance about making a complaint.
- 3.3.5 New internal “intranet” online information for Council staff to allow them to improve the way they investigate and respond to complaints. Including new staff guidance documents to improve the way the Council investigate complaints.
- 3.3.6 Continue to seek ways to deliver training to front line staff to allow them to understand the role and purpose of the complaint procedures.
- 3.3.7 Continue to provide bespoke training for Investigating Managers to allow them to provide a better investigation and response to formal complaints.
- 3.3.8 Continue to work with management meetings across the Council to help them find service improvement from complaint investigations and to ensure that all learning is considered, and the service improvements are recorded.
- 3.3.9 The Complaints Team will work with Council directorates to determine if there is anything more that can be done to resolve a complaint after notification that an Ombudsman investigation has been received.

4. Consultation on proposal

- 4.1 The complaint information contained in this report has been previously reported to each Directorate Leadership Team to enable key areas for improvement to be identified.
- 4.2 There has been no further consultation on this report beyond the requirements of internal processes, alongside consultation with the Cabinet member.

5. Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision

- 5.1 A simple timetable to show the stages and deadlines for implementing the proposed improvements outlined in Section 3 is to be actioned in 2025/26. Progress against these actions will be reported on as part of the annual report for 2025/26.
- 5.2 The Complaints Team will be accountable for leading on these improvements and for engaging with Directorates on how the approach to handling complaints can be improved. Each Directorate will be responsible for ensuring that the improvements identified are disseminated and implemented within each area of the organisation.

6. Financial and Procurement Advice and Implications

- 6.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. The provision of the compliments and complaints service is factored into the Council's budget. If a complaint about an error in a charge for a Council service is upheld, then an appropriate refund or compensation payment may be made in accordance with the Council's Finance and Procurement Procedure Rules.
- 6.2 There are no procurement implications arising from this report.

7. Legal Advice and Implications

- 7.1 The Council's approach to handling complaints is informed by the following key pieces of legislation:
- 7.2
- i. Local Authority Social Services and National Health Service Complaints (England) Regulations 2009 (Making Experiences Count).
 - ii. The Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006.
 - iii. The Housing Ombudsman Scheme which is approved by the Secretary of State under section 51 of, and Schedule 2 to, the Housing Act 1996 as amended by the Localism Act 2011, the Building Safety Act 2022, and the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 (the Act).¹¹ (for Housing Services complaints)
 - iv. The NHS Bodies and Local Authorities (Partnership Arrangements, Care Trusts, Public Health and Local Healthwatch) Regulations 2012.

8. Human Resources Advice and Implications

- 8.1 There are no direct staffing implications arising from this report. However, Human Resources will provide support on further developing the training offer on handling complaints for officers outside of the Complaints Team.

9. Implications for Children and Young People and Vulnerable Adults

- 9.1 The statutory complaints procedure for Children's and Adult Social Care provides an opportunity for children and young people and vulnerable adults to have their voices heard and to improve service delivery.

10. Equalities and Human Rights Advice and Implications

- 10.1 Investigations through the complaint procedure consider all relevant policy and legislation, including those relating to equalities and human rights.
- 10.2 Improvements have been made to the way that complaints are recorded to ensure that information relating to equality and diversity are captured where the complainant is comfortable to disclose this information.

11. Implications for CO2 Emissions and Climate Change

- 11.1 There are no direct implications for CO2 Emissions and Climate Change arising from this report.
- 11.2 However, it is possible for complaints to be made relating the Council's approach to CO2 Emissions and Climate Change and these matters can be formally considered through the Complaint Procedures.

12. Implications for Partners

- 12.1 As outlined in the annual report, improving the way that complaints are dealt with requires a whole-Council approach, with services committing to responding to complaints in a timely fashion and using the intelligence provided by the Complaints Team to make service improvements. It is the responsibility of every service to make responding to complaints and learning from customer feedback a priority.

13. Risks and Mitigation

- 13.1 The Council faces pressures on services due to the ongoing impact of national economic conditions as well as a continued ambition to transform services to deliver financial savings and improve customer experiences. It is vital that customer expectations around what is sustainable for the Council to deliver are properly managed.
- 13.2 To mitigate this, the Council is continuing to engage with the public as appropriate through regular communication, as well as where services are being proposed to be amended.

Accountable Officer

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