

Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman Annual Report and Internal Complaints Summary 2023/24	
Executive Summary	Annual summary of complaint statistics from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman and NNDC for the year ending 31 March 2024.
Options considered	This report details the outcomes of complaints referred to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) 23/24, alongside those complaints recorded internally through the Council's Workbench system.
Consultation(s)	None
Recommendations	That Cabinet / Overview and Scrutiny notes the LGSCO's annual report and NNDC complaints figures and agrees that no significant issues are raised with respect to the Council's processes or service provision.
Reasons for recommendations	Of the 13 complaints escalated to the LGSCO only 3 were investigated and 2 of these upheld.
Background papers	Annual Review Letter 2023/24 from the LGSCO received 17 July 2024

Wards affected	All
Cabinet member(s)	Cllr Tim Adams, Leader of the Council
Contact Officer	Steve Blatch Chief Executive Steve.blatch@north-norfolk.gov.uk

Links to key documents:	
Corporate Plan:	<p>A Strong, Responsible and Accountable Council</p> <p>We will ensure the Council maintains a financially sound position, seeking to make best use of its assets and staff resources, effective partnership working and maximising the opportunities of external funding and income.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality Customer Service • Effective and Efficient Delivery
Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS)	None
Council Policies & Strategies	Council Complaints Policy

Corporate Governance:	
Is this a key decision	No
Has the public interest test been applied	No
Details of any previous decision(s) on this matter	None

1. Purpose of the report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to inform Members of the number of complaints referred to the LGSCO in 23/24 and the outcome of these referrals.
- 1.2 This report also looks at the complaints that have been through the internal complaints system within NNDC.

2. Introduction & Background

- 2.1 The Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) focuses on three key areas that help to assess the Council's commitment to putting things right when they go wrong:
 - 2.1.1 **Complaints upheld** – The LGSCO upholds complaints when they find fault in an organisation's actions, including where the organisation accepted fault before they investigated. They have included the total number of investigations completed to provide important context for the statistics. This year, they have also provided the number of upheld complaints per 100,000 population.
 - 2.1.2 **Compliance with recommendations** – The LGSCO recommends ways for the Council to put things right when faults have caused injustice and monitor our compliance with these recommendations.
 - 2.1.3 **Satisfactory remedy provided by the authority** - In these cases, the Council has upheld the complaint and the LGSCO were satisfied with how we offered to put things right.
- 2.2 These three key annual statistics for the Council are compared with similar authorities to provide an average marker of performance.

3. NNDC Annual LGSCO Report

- 3.1 The LGSCO received a total of 13 complaints regarding North Norfolk District Council in 2023/24, of these they resolved to investigate three cases further and of two of these (67%) were upheld. This compares to an average of 63% in similar organisations.
- 3.2 In both cases the LGSCO were satisfied that the Council had successfully implemented their recommendations.
 - In one case these had already been applied prior to the LGSCO's decision.
 - In the other case these related to:
 - Apology

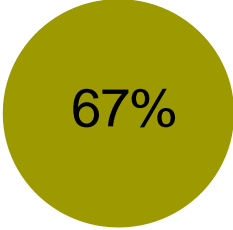
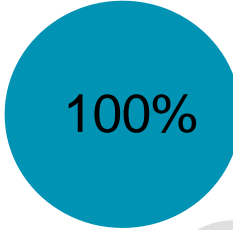
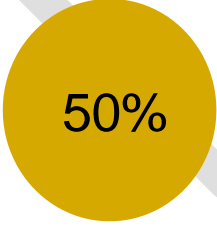
- Financial redress for avoidable distress/time and trouble.
- Procedural and Policy changes to prevent a recurrence.
- Training and guidance

4. Internal Complaints

- 4.1 Alongside the data we receive from the LGSCO we have also used this opportunity to look closely at our internal complaints process.
- 4.2 In 2023/24, NNDC received 87 Stage 1 complaints of these 31 (35%) were responded to within the 15-day timescale.
- 4.3 Of the 87 complaints, 27 were progressed to a Stage 2 complaint. 9 of the 27 complaints (33%) were responded to within the 15-day timescale.
- 4.4 The delays in responding to the Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaints has been assessed and is believed to be due to the overall workload being taken forward by the Council's staff and limited capacity given strong demand for services and focus on project delivery. Analysis of complaint handling doesn't identify any specific service area where complaint response is slow and so it is believed that there needs to be a wider reinforcement of the compliant handling process and timescales.
- 4.5 In this respect and as part of the complaints policy updates driven by the changing requirements for the LGSCO, the timescales for responding to complaints are changing. In the future NNDC will have 10 working days to respond to a Stage 1 complaint and 20 working days to respond to a stage 2 complaint – this reflects that by their very nature Stage 2 complaints often involve complex issues and a volume of evidence to review before a response can be provided
- 4.6 In order to improve the rate of response for complaints we will be providing additional training and complaint templates for Service Managers, Assistant Directors and Directors responsible for responding to complaints.
- 4.7 It is hoped that this additional training will enable complaints to be answered within the required timescales as this was mentioned within both of the upheld complaints from the LGSCO.

5. Corporate Priorities

LGSCO Complaints data

Complaints upheld		
 <p>67%</p>	<p>The LGSCO received 13 complaints about NNDC and moved 3 cases to investigation. Of these:</p> <p>67% of complaints they investigated were upheld</p> <p>This compares to an average of 63% in similar organisations.</p>	<p>² upheld decisions</p> <p>This is 1.9 upheld decisions per 100,000 residents.</p> <p>The average for authorities of this type is 1.2 upheld decisions per 100,000 residents.</p> <p>Statistics are based on a total of 3 investigations for the period between 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024</p>
Compliance with Ombudsman recommendations		
 <p>100%</p>	<p>In 100% of cases, we were satisfied the organisation had successfully implemented our recommendations.</p> <p>This compares to an average of 99% in similar organisations.</p>	<p>Statistics are based on a total of 1 compliance outcome for the period between 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Failure to comply with our recommendations is rare. An organisation with a compliance rate below 100% should scrutinise those complaints where it failed to comply and identify any learning. 		
Satisfactory remedy provided by the organisation		
 <p>50%</p>	<p>In 50% of upheld cases we found the organisation had provided a satisfactory remedy before the complaint reached the Ombudsman.</p> <p>This compares to an average of 21% in similar organisations.</p>	<p>¹ satisfactory remedy decision</p> <p>Statistics are based on a total of 2 upheld decisions for the period between 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024</p>

- 5.1 As part of a Strong, Responsible & Accountable Council theme within the Corporate Plan, a key aim is to ensure that residents are provided with quality customer service.
- 5.2 Work has been ongoing this year, through the LGSCO complaints handling code pilot to further improve our response to resident complaints, helping to reduce the number of complaints reaching the ombudsman.

- 5.3 This has led to the Council's Corporate Complaints Policy and procedure being updated to ensure that we are responding to complaints in the way advised by the code. By ensuring that our complaints policy meets the expectations of the LGSCO means that fewer complaints should reach the ombudsman and those that are less likely to be upheld.
- 5.4 Following the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge the Council has introduced three Strategic Oversight Boards. The Performance and Productivity Oversight Board includes a responsibility to monitor trends in complaints and have oversight of the management of the complaints process including the LGSCO annual letter. The Board will have oversight of compliance with the Complaints procedure and the LGSCO Code of Practice and, where non-compliance is identified, will ensure accountability of Managers.

6. Financial and Resource Implications

- 6.1 Although there are no direct financial and resource implications from this report, if complaints are not handled appropriately, they can have a direct financial implication on the Authority in respect to compensation awards and officer time spent investigating and gathering evidence.

Comments from the S151 Officer

The S151 Officer will complete this section. They will set out the funding sources for any costs associated with implementing the recommendations. This will include resources such as staffing.

7. Legal Implications

- 7.1 Although there are no direct legal implications from this report, handling complaints effectively protects the Council's reputation and reduces the risk of further complaints.

Comments from the Monitoring Officer

The Monitoring Officer will complete this section. They will set out any legal implications arising from your report, together with a summary of any legal advice provided.

8. Risks

- 8.1 If complaints are not handled properly, there is a risk to the Council's reputation as well as financial implications both in redress for poor service and officer time spent dealing with the complaints.

9. Net Zero Target

- 9.1 None known

10. Equality, Diversity & Inclusion

- 10.1 None known

11. Community Safety issues

11.1 None known

12. Conclusion and Recommendations

That Cabinet / Overview and Scrutiny notes the LGSCO's annual report and NNDC's internal complaints data and agrees that no significant issues are raised with respect to the Council's processes or service provision.

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Complaints Received by Service Area

Reference	Category	Received
22017150	Benefits & Tax	03/05/2023
22017987	Benefits & Tax	08/08/2023
23000630	Environmental Services & Public Protection & Regulation	14/08/2023
23001005	Benefits & Tax	21/04/2023
23001934	Benefits & Tax	11/05/2023
23002074	Benefits & Tax	17/05/2023
23002223	Planning & Development	19/05/2023
23003016	Planning & Development	06/06/2023
23018599	Benefits & Tax	20/02/2024
23013752	Planning & Development	30/11/2023
23015520	Other	04/01/2024
23016729	Planning & Development	05/02/2024
23020779	Corporate & Other Services	26/03/2024