

Policy Committee Decision Report

Title of Report: Sheffield City Council's Annual Ombudsman Report – 2023/24

Date of Decision: 20th November 2024

Report To: Strategy & Resources Policy Committee

Report Of: Ajman Ali, Executive Director of Neighbourhood Services

Report Author: Corleen Bygraves-Paul – Joint Acting Head of Customer Services

Executive Summary: Further to the Corporate Annual Complaints Report for 2023/24 presented to this committee in July 2024 and following receipt of the Ombudsman's Annual Letters, this report outlines the complaints investigated by both the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) and the Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS) for Sheffield City Council in the 2023-24 reporting year.

The report identifies key feedback and areas for further improvement as well as benchmarking against similar local authorities.

Council Plan outcomes:

[People live in caring, engaged communities that value diversity and support wellbeing](#)

Policy Committee remit:

This report is to be considered by the Strategy and Resources Policy Committee as its remit includes [**Lead responsibility for complaints including monitoring of complaint handling performance:** [Part 3C - 3.3 Matters Delegated to Committees May 2024.pdf \(sheffield.gov.uk\)](#)]"

Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? [No]

If yes include the following: "The (report/appendix) is not for publication because it contains exempt information under Paragraph (insert relevant paragraph number) of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended)."

Recommendations:

Strategy & Resources Policy Committee is asked to:

1. Note the Annual Ombudsman Report and the learnings and service improvements that have resulted from Ombudsman investigations.
2. Continue to support the 2024-2026 Complaint Service Improvement Plan and endorse the improvements outlined in the Annual Ombudsman Report.
3. Note the links to 'Future Sheffield' and the 'Customer Experience Strategy', which will provide the fundamental support and direction needed to improve and transform the way Sheffield City Council handles and manages complaints.

Financial Implications: [No] [Approved by: **Adrian Hart** Finance Officer]

Legal Implications: [No] [Approved by: **Andrea Simpson** Legal Officer]

Equality and Inclusion Implications: [Yes] [Approved by: **Louise Nunn** Equalities Officer]

[Initial Equalities Impact Assessment completed - EIA number: 2744]

Climate Change Implications: [No] [Approved by: **Kathryn Warrington** Sustainability Officer]

Background Papers:

- 2023/24 Annual Corporate Complaints report

- Corporate Complaints Policy & Procedures: See - [Complain about a council service | Sheffield City Council](#)
- Customer Experience Strategy [Sheffield City Council Customer Experience Strategy DRAFT v1.0](#)

Appendix 1: 2023-24 Annual Ombudsman Complaint Report

1. Background to the issue

- 1.1 Further to the Corporate Annual Complaints Report for 2023/24 presented to this committee in July 2024 and following receipt of the Ombudsman's Annual Letters, this report outlines the complaints investigated by both the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) and the Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS) for Sheffield City Council in the 2023-24 reporting year.
- 1.2 The Report identifies key feedback and areas for further improvement as well as benchmarking against similar local authorities.

2. Proposal

- 2.1 The purpose of this report is to outline the complaints that were investigated by the LGSCO and HOS for Sheffield City Council during 1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024, highlighting the themes and trends.
- 2.2 The report also explains how Sheffield City Council has performed against the required standards and includes examples of how services have learned from complaints received - arguably a most valuable aspect of the complaints process.
- 2.3 Feedback from the former governance Committee (Audit & Standards) has been considered as part of these reports and in respect of complaints performance throughout the year. However, since May 2024, the Strategy & Resources Policy Committee now has lead responsibility for complaints including the monitoring of complaint handling performance on behalf of the Council.
- 2.4 The Complaint Handling Codes of both the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman and the Housing Ombudsman require that organisations should produce an annual complaints performance and service improvement report for scrutiny and challenge, which should include:

- an annual self-assessment against the Code to ensure its complaint handling policy remains in line with its requirements;
 - a qualitative and quantitative analysis of the organisation's complaint handling performance which should also include a summary of the types of complaints the organisation has refused to accept;
 - any findings of non-compliance with the Code;
 - the service improvements made as a result of the learning from complaints;
 - the annual letter about the organisation's performance from the Ombudsman; and
 - any other relevant reports or publications produced by the Ombudsman in relation to the work of the organisation.
- 2.5 The Codes further require that annual complaints performance and service improvement report should be reported through the organisation's governance arrangements and published on the section of its website relating to complaints with the response to the report from the relevant governance arrangement be published alongside this.
- 2.6 In addition to the 2023/24 annual corporate complaints report (which was reviewed and presented to this committee in July 2024); this report provides additional feedback following receipt of the annual ombudsman's letters. Ombudsman's complaints data is included as part of the Council's performance framework and is circulated on a regular basis to management for review and action.
- 2.7 Complaints Managers have continued to provide objective support and advice for Managers across the organisation. They have also attended quarterly Portfolio Leadership meetings to discuss performance and to inform service leaders on how improvements may be achieved.
- 2.8 The Complaints Managers have successfully built relationships with Complaint Service & Development Leads across the organisation to improve complaint management and response times and provided training sessions for all staff across the organisation to support improvement in the accuracy, recording and responses to complaints. From this, some services have identified and provided a dedicated person to support complaints monitoring and tracking i.e. Housing and Adult Services. This continues to be developed with other services.
- 2.9 To support the area which receives the highest volumes of complaints, the Customer Feedback & Complaints team led a Neighbourhoods Service Leadership event to provide senior managers with improved insight on complaint performance and handling, including knowledge of the forthcoming new Ombudsman complaint handling codes.



2.10 The 2023-24 Annual Ombudsman Complaint Report is appended to this report as **Appendix 1**. The Customer Experience Strategy is a key driver in the delivery and success of making the necessary improvements in complaint handling. **Appendix A** to the Annual Report provides a breakdown of complaints/enquiries by category. **Sections 4-7** of the report includes an analysis and comparison data including:

- Section 4 - Number of Ombudsman Complaints/Enquiries
- Section 5 - Ombudsman Response Performance
- Section 6 - Outcomes
- Section 7 - Benchmarking

2.11 **Learnings:** Section 8 of the Annual Report highlights specific examples of the changes and service improvements made by Sheffield City Council following feedback from the Ombudsman. These include the review of the Council's Complaints Policy leading to the changes approved by Strategy and Resources Policy Committee in April 2024 and learning around record keeping and complaints management together with guidance issued to staff in a number of services across the Council. **Appendix B** to the Annual Report details the service improvements implemented relating to individual complaints upheld by the Ombudsman.

2.12 **Improvement Plan & Future Developments.** See section 9. The 2024-2026 Complaints Service Improvement Plan highlights how Sheffield City Council aims to continue to make incremental improvements to the handling and management of complaints, with an aim of improving customer satisfaction for customers when raising a complaint. Section 9 of the Annual Report sets out a summary of these improvements which evidences our commitment to improving complaint handling performance by early adoption of the new Ombudsman complaint handling codes and increasing support and focus on Stage 2 review investigations and responses, which should in turn reduce escalation to the Ombudsman.

The Customer Experience strategy and the associated programme of change will provide the driver for this change, ensuring our customers are at the heart of what we do and that we respond positively to the learning and insight gained from the feedback provided.

2.13 The 2023-2024 Annual Letters are included in **Appendix C & D** to the Annual Report. To support its function of having lead responsibility for complaints including monitoring of complaint handling performance the Strategy & Resources Policy Committee must be given regular information on complaints which provides insight on the organisation's complaint handling performance.

3. How does this decision contribute to the Council Plan?

- 3.1 The Corporate Annual Ombudsman report has synergies with the Council's Customer Experience Strategy, the Council Plan and the Council Values – putting people at the heart of what we do and ensuring that maximising outcomes for our customers is central to our work as a whole organisation.
- 3.2 The Customer Experience Strategy will support our complaint transformation journey, to ensure that we provide the best service we can to everyone who interacts with us when making a complaint. This strategy which focuses on delivering and improving customer experience (including complaints) will support learning from complaints and any associated service improvements needed.
- 3.3 The Council has continued to enhance its complaints handling and management, by adopting a revised Sheffield City Council Complaint Handling Policy incorporating the principles of the new Ombudsman Codes and by increased transparency, accessibility, and complaint handling governance; demonstrating that individuals are at the heart of its service delivery.

4. What community or partner engagement has been undertaken and how has it informed the proposal?

- 4.1 No consultation is needed in respect of this report. By their nature, the complaints described in the Annual Ombudsman Report provides feedback to the Council.

5. What alternative options did we consider?

Not applicable

6. How has equality, diversity and inclusion been actively considered?

- 6.1 Investigations through the complaint procedure considers all relevant policy and legislation including those relating to equalities and human rights.

7. Financial and Commercial Implications

- 7.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.
- 7.2 However, as the Council faces pressures on services due to the ongoing impact of national and local economic conditions, we are committed to using complaint



information to transform services and assist where possible in delivering financial savings and to improve customer experiences.

8. Legal Implications

8.1 There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

9. Climate and Environmental Implications

9.1 There are no direct implications for CO2 Emissions and Climate Change arising from this report.

9.2 Customers are able to complain relating to its approach to CO2 emissions and climate change which are addressed and formally considered through the complaint procedures.

10. Other implications

Not applicable

11. Reasons for decision

11.1 Strategy & Resources Policy Committee has lead responsibility for complaints including monitoring of complaint handling performance on behalf of the Council.

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