

OVERVIEW OF COMPLAINTS – 2024/2025 – ANNUAL OMBUDSMAN REPORT

REPORT OF:	DIRECTOR OF PEOPLE AND COMMERCIAL SERVICES
Contact Officer:	Simon Jones, Assistant Director for Digital and People Services simon.jones@midsussex.gov.uk
Wards Affected:	All
Key Decision:	No
Report to:	Scrutiny Committee for People and Communities 1 April 2026

Purpose of Report

1. To provide Members with annual information about formal complaints received by the council from 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025. It also summarises the complaints referred to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGO) during the same period.

Recommendations

2. The Committee is recommended to note and comment on the report.

Background

3. In 2024/25 the council received 35 formal complaints, a significant reduction from 105 in 2023/24. During the same period the council also received 233 compliments, compared to 237 in 2023/24.
4. Transparently reviewing and learning from our complaints and compliments data is a crucial step in ensuring we respond to feedback, identify opportunities for improvement, and learn from what works well. Complaints and compliments are discussed at the weekly Assistant Directors meeting to ensure learning takes place across all services.
5. In addition to the 35 formal complaints, the council handled 314 informal service requests which were proactively resolved with residents and/or passed to the relevant organisation for response, preventing further escalation. Service requests and complaints typically increase during periods of service change, including the introduction of charges, annual council tax letters, changes to service arrangements, or seasonal events. A service request is when someone is asking the Council to do something or put something right as part of normal service delivery (e.g., report a missed bin, ask for an update, ask for information, or ask for an explanation of a policy).
6. The council also dealt with approximately 9,000 emails enquiries in 2024/25 and received 67,443 telephone calls compared to 63,226 in 2023/24. The increase in customer contact reflects the more challenging operating environment, with enquiries typically involving complex issues. The significant reduction in formal complaints – from 105 to 35 – demonstrates that the council is successfully resolving service issues before they escalate. One of the council's customer journey project goals is to further reduce contact points by improving the availability of information and provide notifications, for example through the Mid Sussex App.

Service Area	Complaints 24/25	Service Area	Complaints 24/25
Housing	8	Estates	3
Revenues	6	Benefits	2
Planning	6	Environmental Health	2
Waste	4	Legal	1
Parking	3		

Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Referrals

7. The LGO's latest data specifically relating to MSDC's performance can be viewed via the following link: [Your Council's Statistics](#). The LGO has adopted a new Complaint Handling Code providing updated guidance to councils. In February 2025 they published good practice guides to support councils in adopting the Code, developed in consultation with councils that have been piloting it. The Code will be applied in LGO casework from April 2026.
8. MSDC is currently in the process of reviewing the new code and drafting any changes required to maintain compliance. Initial analysis shows that the council is already compliant with almost all the new code, with only small changes required.
9. Between 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2025, the LGO dealt with 15 complaints regarding MSDC.
10. The breakdown of how these were handled is as follows:
 Total dealt with – 15
 Of these:
 Not for the Ombudsman or not ready for investigation – 5
 Assessed and closed – 7
 Investigated – 3

 Of the 3 investigated:
 Not upheld – 2
 Upheld – 1
11. Therefore 33% of complaints the LGO investigated were upheld compared to an average of 66% in similar authorities. Adjusted for Mid Sussex's population, this equates to 0.6 upheld decisions per 100,000 residents compared to an average of 1.1 for authorities of this type.
12. It is notable that of the 15 complaints dealt with by the LGO, a significant majority (12) either did not meet the threshold for investigation or were not within the Ombudsman's remit. The low uphold rate and the fact that only 1 out of 15 escalations was ultimately upheld shows that the volume of complaints reaching the Ombudsman is not therefore indicative of increasing maladministration. This pattern indicates an increasing trend in residents escalating complaints to the Ombudsman, common for all councils, which the council will continue to monitor year on year.

13. The one upheld complaint related to a Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) which was a complex case with joint responsibility between MSDC and West Sussex County Council (WSCC). The findings identified that whilst the majority of fault lay with the County Council, the District Council had not intervened to help resolve the situation. A £250 payment was recommended to be made by Mid Sussex to acknowledge this shared responsibility and the impact on the resident. Following the decision, improvements have been made to joint working arrangements and the DFG process.
14. The council maintained its 100% compliance rate with any recommendations from the LGO, in line with an average of 100% in similar authorities.
15. The LGO states that they are reassured to see that compliance with their recommendations remains high which suggests that the system we have in place is in good health. They are also often impressed by authorities' commitment to significant service changes and reviews following detailed complaint investigations.
16. The council follows the LGO good practice guidance in dealing with complaints:
 - Ensuring reports are concise and written in plain English where possible to ensure they can be understood by a range of people.
 - Ensuring there is a record of how all key material planning considerations were considered.
 - Ensuring comments from local people and other bodies are summarised so people can see what was considered.
 - Clearly explaining what is being considered and the impact on any existing permissions and planning controls.
 - Using a system for recording reasons for decisions, even if the decision is that no action should be taken.
17. A local comparison for the number of complaints received by the LGO is as follows:

Adur	Arun	Crawley	Chichester	Horsham	Mid Sussex	Worthing	West Sussex County Council
15	17	21	13	12	15	13	202

18. A detailed breakdown of LGO decisions for each West Sussex authority is available on the LGO website at www.lgo.org.uk/your-councils-performance.
19. Upheld complaints are those where the LGO finds some fault in the way a council acted, even if it has agreed to put things right during the investigation or has accepted it needs to remedy the situation before the complainant made the complaint.

Complaints process and detail of LGO investigations

20. The Council has a formal complaints procedure (a link is available in the Background Papers section). If residents are not satisfied by the outcome of the complaints procedure, they may raise a complaint with the LGO directly. Heads of Service, Assistant Directors, and Directors are advised of complaints which are being investigated by the LGO.
21. There can be discrepancies between the number of complaints received for investigation and the number completed by the LGO as sometimes they are completed in the following fiscal year.

22. There were three detailed investigations undertaken by the LGO in 2024/25 into complaints by Mid Sussex residents. Of these three investigations, two were not upheld and one was upheld. Details of the upheld case, its resolution and improvement actions are shown below:
23. Further details on the two complaints that were investigated and not upheld, as well as the complaints reported by the Ombudsman as assessed and closed after initial enquiries are shown below. Please note that the Ombudsman do not publish all decisions, some cases will not appear publicly due to confidentiality:

Service	LGO Summary
Housing	Not upheld. The LGO found no fault with how the Council handled Miss X's homelessness application. Its actions were timely and in line with homelessness legislation and guidance. (Ref: 24 005 007)
Planning and development	Not upheld. X complained about the Council's decision to approve development on land near X's home. The LGO did not investigate further as it was unlikely to find fault or recommend a remedy. (Ref: 23 014 945)
Transport and highways	Closed after initial enquiries. Complaint that a Council payment machine overcharged for parking. The LGO decided the alleged injustice was not significant enough to justify an investigation. (Ref: 24 021 324)
Other – Councillor conduct	Closed after initial enquiries. Complaint about how the Council dealt with a complaint about the conduct of a councillor. The LGO was unlikely to find fault. (Ref: 24 019 930)
Benefits and tax	Closed after initial enquiries. Complaint about the availability of payment dates for council tax. The LGO found insufficient evidence of fault by the Council. (Ref: 24 008 491)
Environment and regulation	Closed after initial enquiries. Complaint about an area Tree Preservation Order (TPO) and the Council's decision not to revoke it. The complaint was late and there was not enough evidence of fault to warrant investigation. (Ref: 23 019 828)
Planning and development	Closed after initial enquiries. Complaint about the way the Council dealt with a planning application. The LGO did not consider the complainant had suffered sufficient personal injustice to warrant investigation. (Ref: 23 018 951)

Financial Implications

24. A payment of £250 was required for the upheld DFG case as described above.

Risk Management Implications

25. There are no specific risk management implications arising from this report, provided the committed communication improvements with WSCC are fully implemented and sustained.

Equality and Customer Service Implications

26. Complaints are an opportunity to learn and improve our services. Emphasis is placed on reviewing processes as much as the actual complaint, to ensure we don't miss any opportunities to improve, learn, and avoid similar outcomes in future.

Other Material Implications

27. There are no other material implications arising from this report.

Sustainability Implications

28. There are no sustainability implications arising from this report.

Background Papers

[MSDC Feedback page](#)

[MSDC Complaints Procedure](#)