

Formal complaints

Annual report



2024-2025

Introduction

This report presents a summary of the complaints received through our formal complaint’s procedure for the period 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025.

Formal complaints form part of our ‘Have your say’ approach which covers Compliments, Comments, Concerns and Formal Complaints. We encourage residents to give us their views, and these are captured and reported through our digital platform, Liberty Create.

Unlike comments, concerns and compliments, there is a statutory process in place for formal complaints.

It is important to ensure our customers feel they will be:

- Listened to.
- Treated honestly, fairly, and politely.
- Given help and advice as quickly as we can.
- Individual needs and right to privacy will be respected.
- Kept informed about what is happening.

This annual report provides key information in respect of customers’ feedback when they have submitted a formal complaint to us and helps to inform our Customer Care Standards and our Council Plan (2025-2028) values of being.

- Open and honest
- Respectful
- Inclusive

This report includes complaints handled between 1 April 2024 and 30 September 2024, which were processed in accordance with the council’s previous Formal Complaints Policy.

A new Formal Complaints Policy was approved at Executive Committee in September 2024, to include the changes set out in the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman’s new complaints handling code. Details of the code can be found here: www.lgo.org.uk/information-centre/information-for-organisations-we-investigate/complaint-handling-code. This report therefore also refers to complaints processed between 1 October 2024 and 31 March 2025 in accordance with the new policy.

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1. Formal complaints

We let our customers know that we consider a formal complaint to be ‘an expression of dissatisfaction that requires a formal response about the standards of service, actions, or lack of action, by the council or our staff.’

Our formal complaints policy sets out what customers can expect from this two-stage process – including how we receive, manage, and respond to complaints.

Details contained in this report relate to both the previous complaint process (approved in 2021) and the current process (approved in 2024). The main difference between the two being the timeframe within which complaints must be responded to.

Previously, the 2021 policy was:

- **Stage one**- the complaint will be acknowledged within three working days and responded to fully by the relevant manager of the service within 20 working days.
- **Stage two**- if the customer is not satisfied with the stage one response, they may ask (within 30 working days) for the complaint to be reconsidered. An independent senior manager will be assigned to investigate the stage two complaint. We aim to respond fully within 20 working days.

The current 2024 policy is:

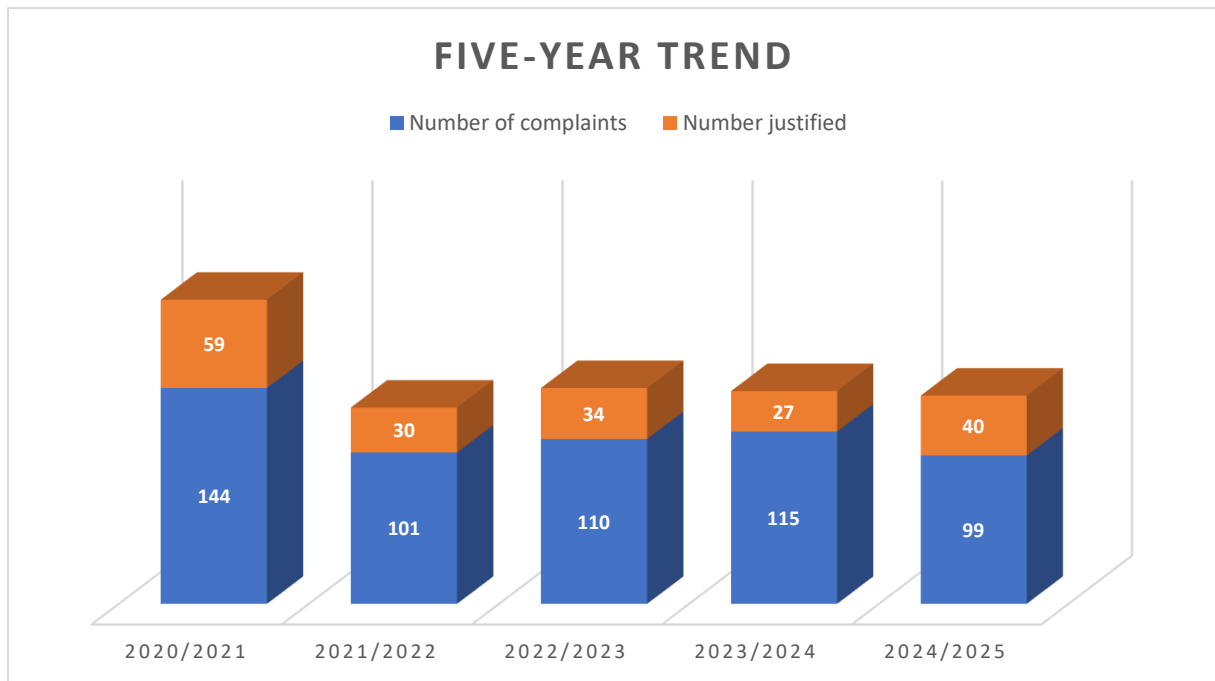
- **Stage one**- the complaint will be acknowledged within five working days and responded to fully by the relevant manager of the service within 10 working days.
- **Stage two**- if the customer is not satisfied with the stage one response, they may ask (within 30 calendar days) for the complaint to be reconsidered. A different officer than the one who considered the stage one complaint will be assigned to investigate the stage two complaint. We aim to acknowledge the stage two within five working days and respond fully within 20 working days.

We aim to respond to 90% of formal complaints within the agreed timescale. This is monitored as a corporate ‘health check’ indicator through the Council Plan performance tracker, which is reported on a quarterly basis to our Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

If the customer remains dissatisfied after they have received their stage two response, they may contact the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO). A summary of LGSCO complaints can be found on page 7.



Summary of formal complaints

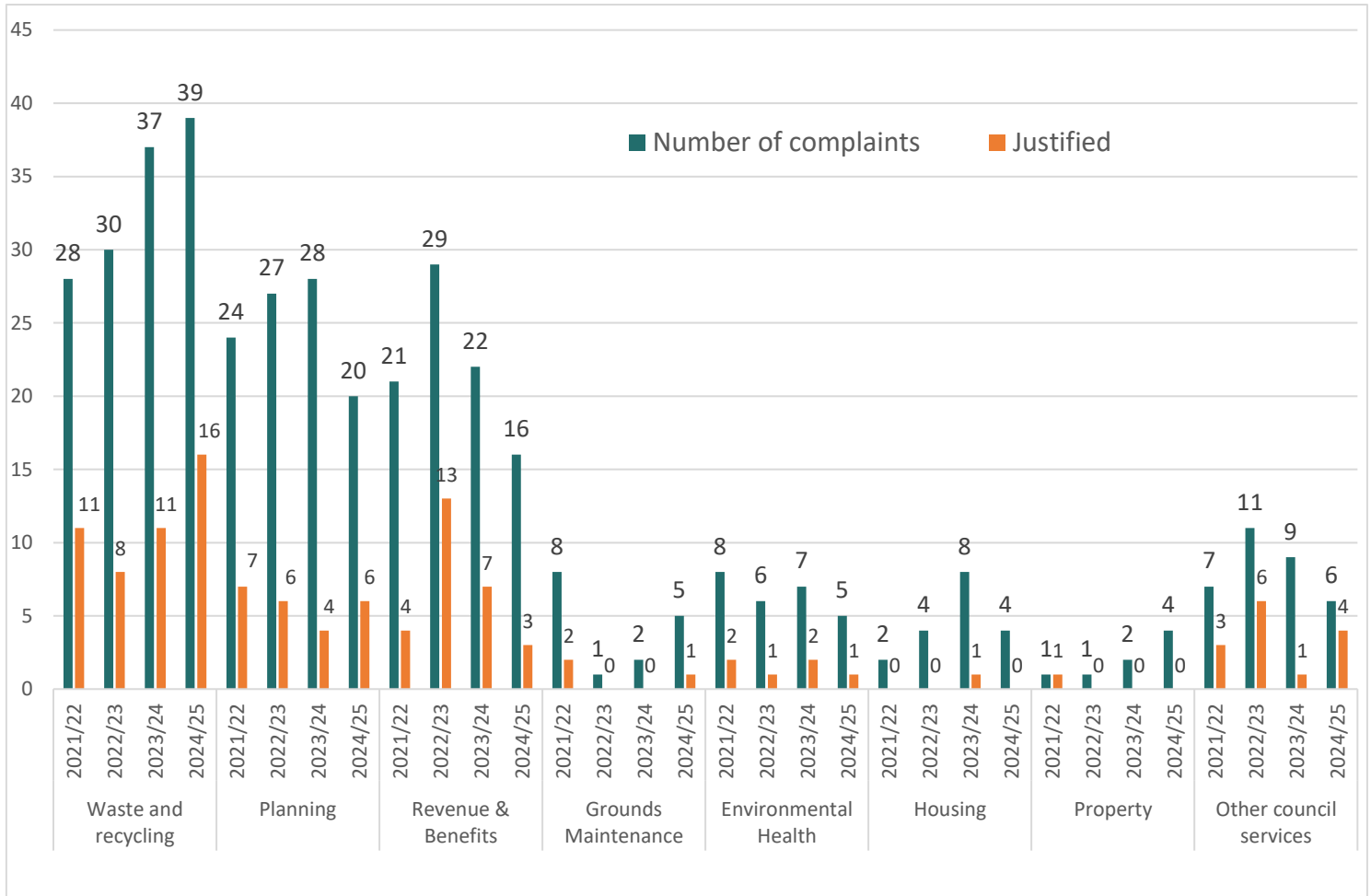


- 99 stage one complaints were received during 2024/25. 79 (80%) of these were responded to within the required timescale.
- 18 complaints were escalated to stage two. This is a decrease when compared to the 25 escalated in 2023/24.
- 40 of the 99 complaints investigated in 2024/25 found the council to be at fault.
- In addition to the 99 complaints, an additional 20 cases were received via the online complaints form, but these 20 cases were not accepted as complaints to investigate. This was because they were either not for Tewkesbury Borough Council e.g. related to a Gloucestershire County Council function, or they were service level complaints, as defined with the formal complaints policy.

Stage one

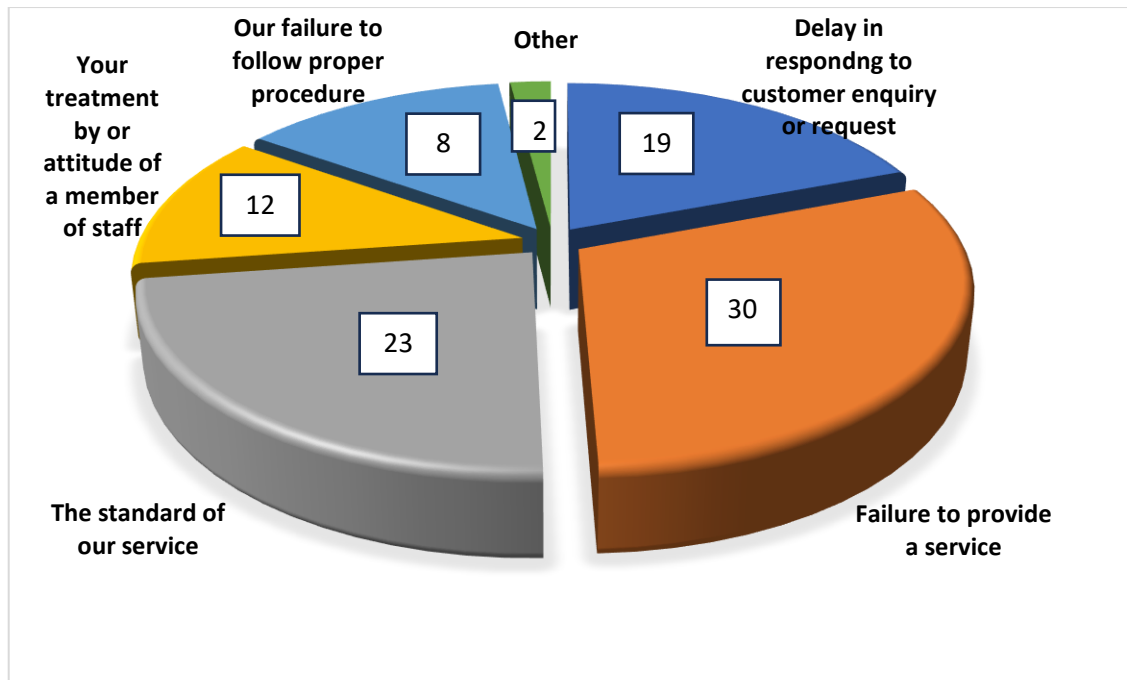
What service area did the complaint relate to and how many were justified?

The complaints were made to the following services:



- 'Other council services' includes Licensing, Land charges, Parking, Community Safety and Cemeteries.
- Of the 99 formal complaints received, 40 were justified at stage one, 24 were partially justified and 35 were not justified.
- It is not uncommon to see that the majority of the formal complaints received related to front line services, where high volumes of customer contact is received e.g. Waste and recycling, Planning, Revenue and Benefits, Environmental Health.

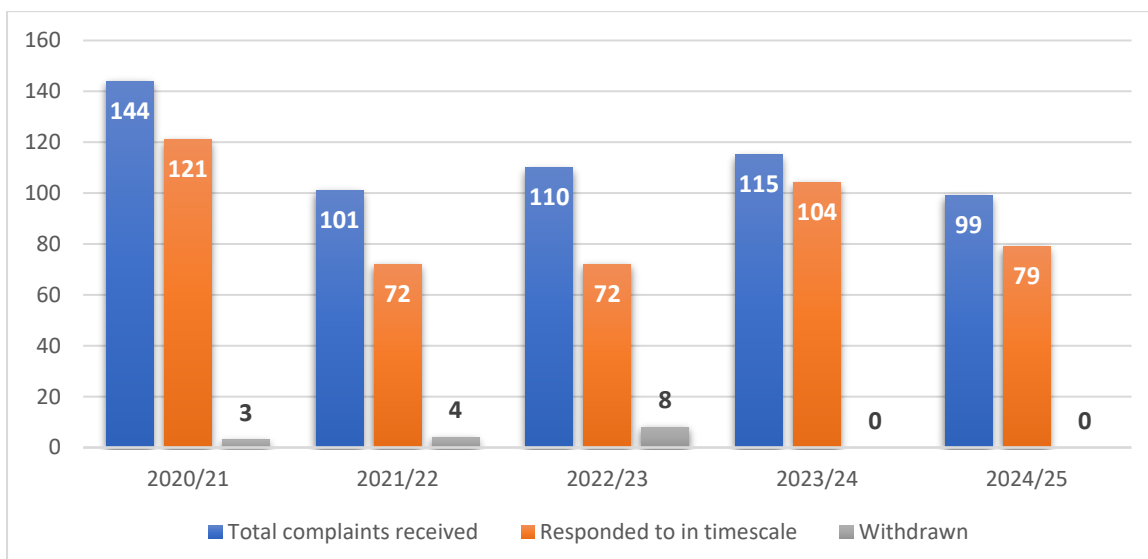
The nature of the complaint issues were:



Comparison against previous years:

Financial year	Delay in responding to your enquiry or request	Failure to provide a service	Our failure to follow proper procedure	The standard of our service	Your treatment by or attitude of a member of staff	Other	Total
2024/25	19	30	13	23	12	2	99
2023/24	8	37	18	41	11	0	115
2022/23	19	32	28	24	7	0	110
2021/22	20	32	17	25	8	0	102

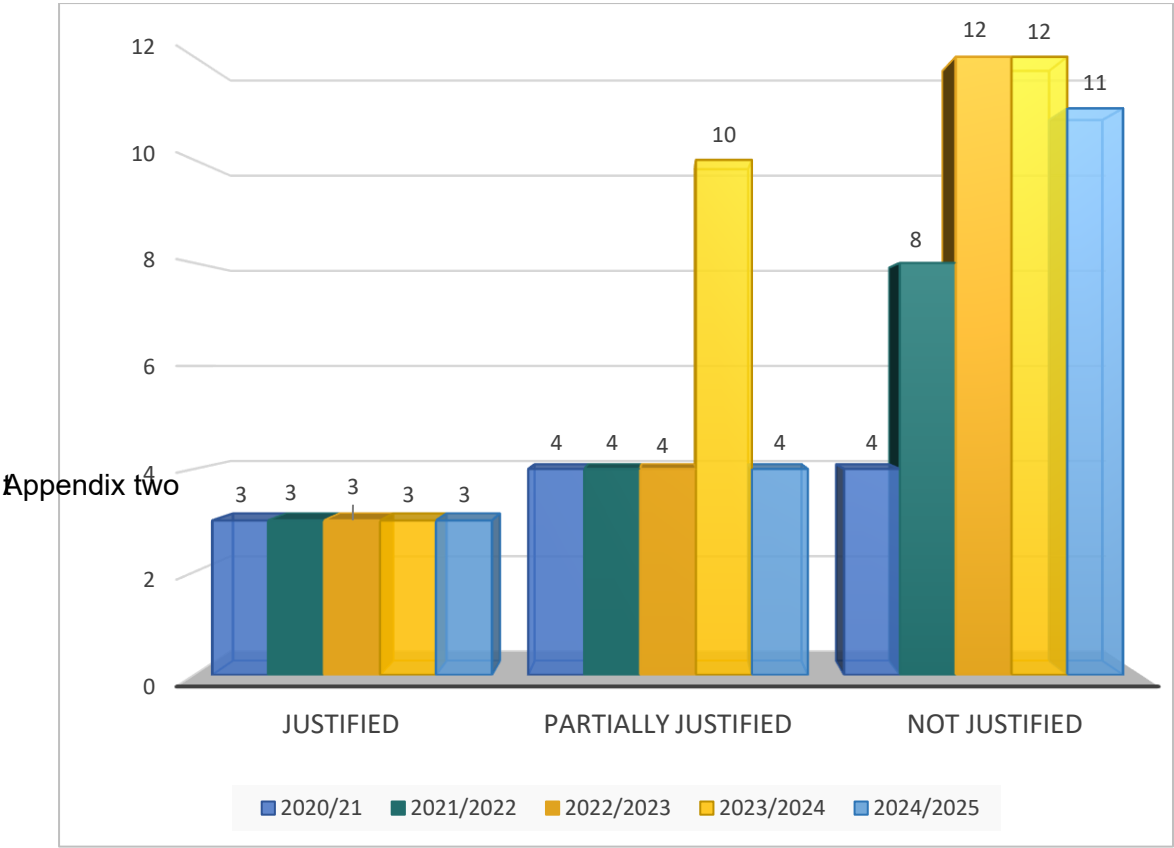
How many stage one complaints were answered on time?



- 2024/25 saw a decrease in the number of complaints being responded to on time when compared to 2023/24. The council experienced a cyber incident during Q3 which did have an impact on the ability for a number of complaints to be answered within the agreed timeframe.
- 20 complaints were responded to outside of time. These related to planning (5), Revenue and Benefits (3), Environmental Health (3), Waste and recycling (6), Property Services (1), Grounds maintenance (1) and Housing (1). Six of these were affected by the cyber incident.

Stage two

How many stage two complaints were received and what were the outcomes?



- 18 stage two complaints were received during 2024/25, this is a decrease when compared to the previous year.

	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Total stage two	11	15	19	25	18

- Three of the 18 stage two complaints were justified, this is comparative with the previous four years.

2. Local Government and Social Care

Ombudsman complaints

If complainants remain dissatisfied after the second stage of our formal complaints procedure, they can escalate their complaint to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO).

The LGSCO deal with complaints against all local government authorities in England (except parish and town councils) and certain other bodies.

On an annual basis, every council receives an Annual Review Letter from the LGSCO, which sets out the number of complaints it has received in the year, and the decisions made. These decisions are published on its website at www.lgo.org.uk/your-councils-performance/tewkesbury-borough-council/statistics but can also be found attached at appendix one.

In 2024/25, the LGSCO dealt with 7 complaints relating to our services –

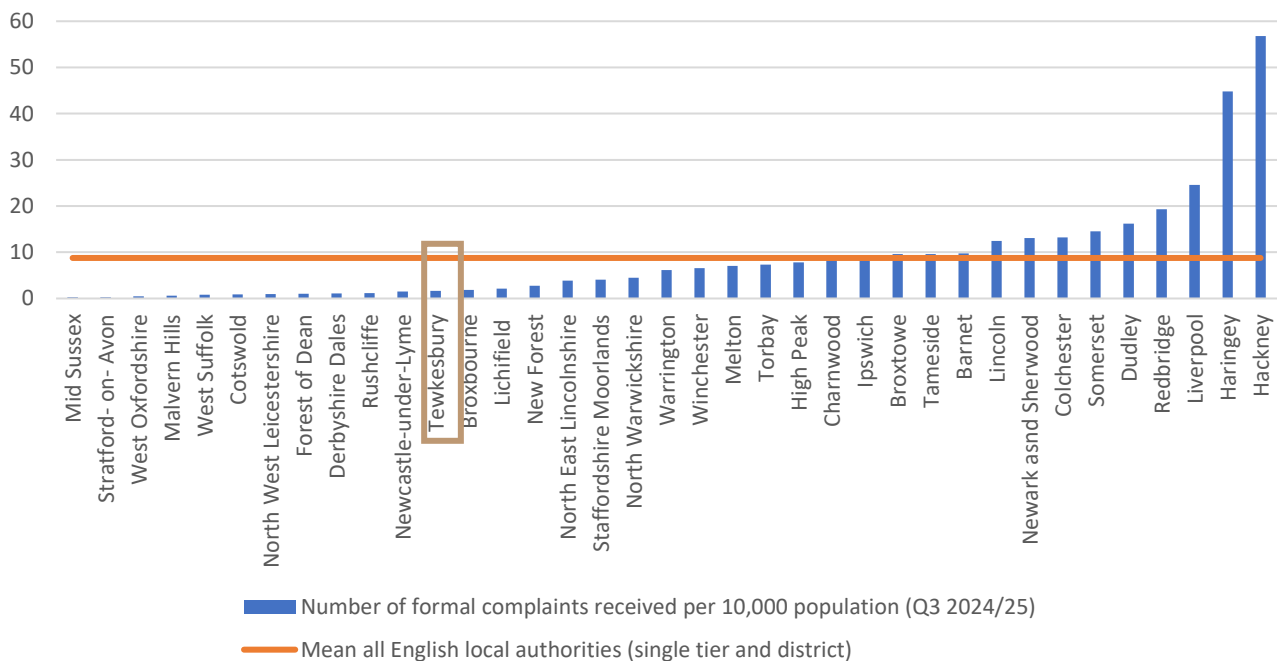
- Three were closed after initial enquiries.
- Two had insufficient information to proceed.
- Two were referred back for local resolution, as they had not been through our complaints process.

Therefore, no complaints were formally investigated between 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025 by the LGSCO.

How are we performing compared to other local authorities?

On a quarterly basis, outturn figures are reported to LG Inform. LG Inform is a dedicated database provided by the Local Government Association (LGA) and it includes a benchmarking tool. One of the indicators reported upon is the number of complaints received per 10,000 population. At the time of writing this report the data for 2024/25 had not been released on their website. However, the graph below shows how we compare against the 38 other authorities within England in Q3. The mean is recorded at 8.77 per 10,000 and Tewkesbury is significantly lower at 1.67 per 10,000 population.

Number of complaints received per 10,000 population
(Source: LG Inform)



LGSCO self- assessment

As part of the LGSCO's new Complaints Handling Code they recommend a self-assessment is carried out against our policy each year to ensure we are meeting the codes requirements. This is the first year we have carried this out and can confirm we are successfully meeting the criteria's set out within the code. The completed assessment can be found at appendix two.

3. Lessons learnt

We consider a 'lesson learnt' to be when 'knowledge or understanding is gained by an experience'. This could be as a direct result from a positive or negative experience. When it's positive, we will look to see if it can be applied elsewhere, and when it's negative, we want to ensure that the issue is not repeated.

The following are key learning points identified from the outcomes of the formal complaints investigated during 2024/25:

- Communication – most complaints had an element of needing improved communication from the service. (Note, this is not a reflection on the communications team).
- Staff training- customer care levels expected were not met i.e. not meeting the customer care standards timescales.

On an annual basis, a sample of justified complaints are checked at random, by the Audit and Governance team. This is to seek assurance that lessons learnt have been implemented. The following was found:

- A complaint relating to cemeteries where the laying of turf on a settled grave did not take and looked in a poor state due to hot weather conditions. As a result, the turf was removed and grass seed was relayed. In addition, we have introduced additional measures with twice monthly inspections now required. We are also now reseeding rather than turfing the graves as this gives a better result. The sexton is also required to monitor the works and report issues.
- Planning- a complaint identified that training was required for staff on the enforcement plan and customer care standards timescales for both the compliance and support services team. Whilst discussions took place with the team leaders no evidence to confirm the training had been undertaken was held and therefore will be taken forward as an action to be completed.
- Waste and recycling- a complaint identified that where bins had not been emptied, the customer had not been informed as to the reason, resulting in repeat non-collections. As a result, conversations took place with the council's waste contractor to remind crews to put the tags on bins that are not emptied to clearly identify what the issue is and explain why bins are not being collected. This reminder was cascaded to the team by the Manager of Ubico.
- Revenue and benefits- the complaint identified that the wrong information was provided to the complainant as a result of not taking into consideration another section of their database. Verbal assurance was provided to confirm the team are informed within their team's huddles of lessons being learnt following complaints there was no evidence to confirm this. Moving forward this will be also documented with the date this is carried out.

Sample checks will continue to take place and it is recognised that further work needs to continue on the recording and implementing of remedies, to ensure that we are learning from the lessons highlighted as part of the complaint.

Complaints training

Managers responsible for responding to complaints undertook training in January 2025, delivered by the LGSCO, on effective complaints handling. This provided practical skills, confidence and strategies to resolve complaints effectively.

At any time, in-house training sessions by our Audit and Governance team, are available for anyone who wishes to have a refresher on both the policy and the complaints handling framework.

Complaints policies and procedures

The council's complaints policy was recently reviewed and approved in September 2024 to incorporate the LGSCO's new Complaints Handling Code. The policy will continue to be reviewed by the Head of Audit and Governance every two years, or earlier if there is a change in applicable guidance or legislation.

4. What is next?

The council's new Formal Complaint Policy is now well established and consistently applied. The changes made within the policy ensure that the council is compliant with the new measures set out in the LGSCO complaints handling code. The changes to the complaints system itself, enables better oversight of remedies that require actioning following the closure of a complaint. This helps to ensure that any actions outstanding are fully resolved in a timely manner.

Although the LGSCO will not be applying the complaints handling code to their investigations until April 2026, by this time we will have had the code fully embedded into our process.

Further in-house refresher training sessions will be organised for those officers who respond to complaints. The team will continue to share LGSCO best practice guidelines and LGSCO decisions, so that lessons can be learnt from others too.

Furthermore, the policy and lessons learnt from complaints will be subject to an internal audit as part of the councils 2025/26 Internal Audit plan. This will seek assurance that the policy meets the requirements of the new LGSCO Complaints Handling Code and that lessons are being learnt from complaints received. The findings of this audit will be presented to Audit and Governance Committee as part of the audit monitoring report.

We will also continue to report on a quarterly basis to Leadership Team, providing a summary report for each quarter.

21 May 2025

By email

Mr Cunningham OBE
Chief Executive
Tewkesbury Borough Council

Dear Mr Cunningham OBE

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,

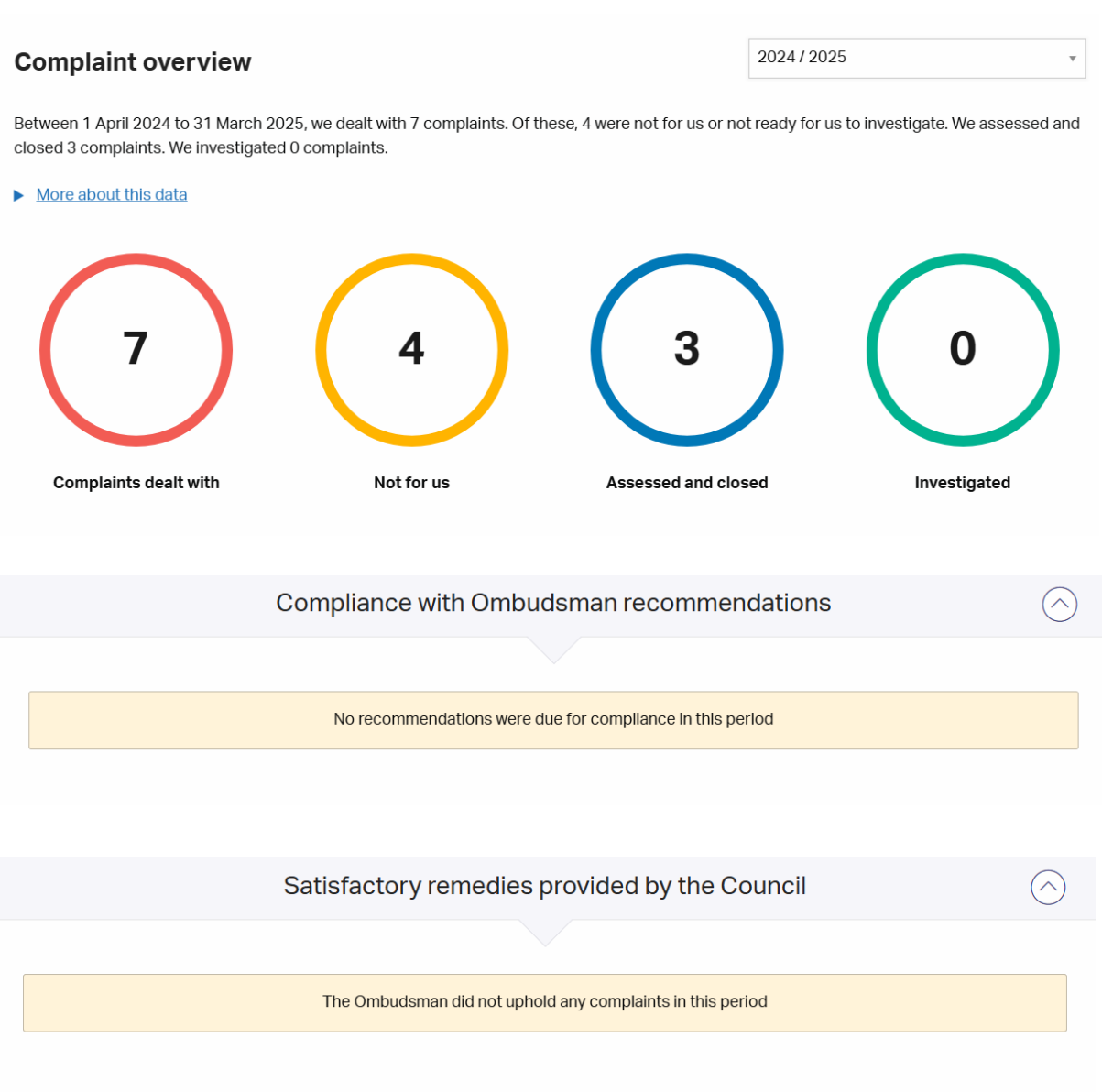


Amerdeep Somal
Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman
Chair, Commission for Local Administration in England

Appendix one

Source: Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman website

(<https://www.lgo.org.uk/your-councils-performance/tewkesbury-borough-council/statistics/#compliance-with-ombudsman-recommendations>)



Appendix two

Self-assessment against the requirements of the Complaint Handling Code- August 2025

Code section	Action	Do we follow the Code: Yes/No	Explanations and Commentary
1: Definition of a service request and complaint	We recognise the difference between a service request and a complaint, and these are defined in our policies and procedures.	Yes	These are both defined on pages 1 and 2 of the council's formal complaints policy.
2: Exclusions	Our complaints policy sets out circumstances where we would not consider a complaint. These are reasonable and do not deny individuals access to redress.	Yes	<p>Issues that are not dealt with under our formal complaints policy are set out on page 2 and 3 of the policy.</p> <p>Email addresses are also provided where there is a separate process to follow.</p> <p>If there is a circumstance where the complaint is received but it falls within the exclusion categories, the council will always advise and assist with where they need to go or forward their details to the relevant service area to get in contact, with the permission of the complaint if this require personal details to be shared.</p>

Appendix two

Code section	Action	Do we follow the Code: Yes/No	Explanations and Commentary
3: Accessibility and awareness	We provide different channels through which individuals can make complaints. These are accessible and we can make reasonable adjustments where necessary	Yes	<p>We accept complaints in various different methods, this includes online form, email, telephone, writing to us or coming into the offices.</p> <p>We allow complainants to have representatives to act on their behalf.</p> <p>As part of the complaints form, we ask the question to the complainant, or their representative, as to whether they require any reasonable adjustments under the equalities act that we need to be made aware of. This is monitored by the audit and governance team.</p>
4: Complaint handling resources	We have designated, sufficient resource assigned to take responsibility for complaint handling. Complaints are viewed as a core service and resourced accordingly.	Yes	<p>We have a number of trained officers to investigate formal complaints who have undertaken LGSCO training.</p> <p>The monitoring of the complaints framework including complaints itself, the system and the policy and LGSCO complaints is carried out by the Corporate Governance Officer within the Audit and Governance Team.</p>

Code section	Action	Do we follow the Code: Yes/No	Explanations and Commentary
5: The complaint handling process	We have a single policy for dealing with complaints covered by the Code and individuals are given the option of raising a complaint where they express dissatisfaction that meets the definition of the complaint in our policy.	Yes	We have one single formal complaints policy.
6: Complaints stages (Stage 1)	We process stage 1 complaints in line with timescales and processes set out in the Code.	Yes	<p>Our system and policy reflect the changes set out within the code. To ensure stage one complaints are acknowledged within 5 working days and responded to in full within 10 working days.</p> <p>This is monitored by the Audit and Governance Team. Performance is reviewed on a quarterly basis and reported to Leadership Team to show timeframes and where areas are not meeting the required timescales.</p> <p>A key performance indicator is also reported to Overview and scrutiny committee on the timeliness of answering formal complaints.</p>

Appendix two

Code section	Action	Do we follow the Code: Yes/No	Explanations and Commentary
6: Complaints stages (Stage 2)	We process stage 2 complaints in line with timescales and processes set out in the Code.	Yes	<p>Our system and policy reflect the changes set out within the code. To ensure stage two complaints are acknowledged within 5 working days and responded to in full within 20 working days.</p> <p>This is monitored by the Audit and Governance Team. Performance is reviewed on a quarterly basis and reported to Leadership Team to show timeframes and where areas are not meeting the required timescales.</p> <p>A key performance indicator is also reported to Overview and scrutiny committee on the timeliness of answering formal complaints.</p>
7: Putting things right	When something has gone wrong we take action to put things right.	Yes	We ensure the remedies are recorded and if they have not yet been implemented these are monitored through the councils' complaints system.

Appendix two

Code section	Action	Do we follow the Code: Yes/No	Explanations and Commentary
8: Performance reporting and self-assessment	We produce an annual complaints performance and service improvement report for scrutiny and challenge which includes a self-assessment against the Code.	Yes	<p>Quarterly performance reports are created and reported to Leadership Team.</p> <p>In addition, an annual formal complaints report is reported to Audit and Governance Committee for members to scrutinise and challenge the findings within the report. A self-assessment against the code will also be attached to the report. With the first report since going live with the new policy going to Audit and Governance Committee in September 2025.</p>
9: Scrutiny & Oversight	We have appropriate senior leadership and governance oversight of the complaints process and performance.	Yes	<p>This is monitored by the Audit and Governance Team. Performance is reviewed on a quarterly basis and reported to Leadership Team to highlight issues and trends.</p> <p>A key performance indicator is also reported to Overview and scrutiny committee on the timeliness of answering formal complaints.</p>