



## **Mayor and Cabinet**

### **Annual corporate complaints report 2024-25**

**Date:** 15 October 2025

**Key decision:** Yes

**Class:** Part 1

**Ward(s) affected:** All

**Contributors:** Lew McKenzie, Molly Lofas

### **Outline and recommendations**

The purpose of this report is to set out complaints and casework performance across the council in 2024-25, including at Ombudsman level, as well as the measures being put in place to improve complaint handling, performance and service delivery.

Mayor and Cabinet are asked to: note and approve the contents of the report; monitor performance and challenge services that are not compliant, publish a response to the Non-statutory Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report, as required by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's complaint-handling code; and continue to prioritise complaint-handling improvements (against both qualitative and quantitative metrics) across the council, including how we respond to Ombudsman complaints.

### **Timeline of engagement and decision-making**

Executive Management Team 12 November 2025

Cabinet Briefing 18 November 2025

Mayor and Cabinet Meeting 3 December 2025

## 1. Summary

- 1.1. This report sets out complaints and casework performance in 2024-25 as well as the measures being put in place to improve complaint handling performance and service delivery.
- 1.2. Complaints remain a key way in which we actively listen and respond to residents, demonstrate our commitment to the social model of disability, and gather intelligence about service delivery. There was a significant increase in complaints in 2024-25, the top 3 service areas with the highest number of upheld complaints being Housing repairs, Housing compliance and building safety, and Housing needs and refugee services.
- 1.3. Overall Council performance for 2024-25 has improved slightly on previous years, but the quality of our responses and record-keeping has been inconsistent. We should start to see the benefits of the complaint-handling improvement project, which delivered training and improved resources for our complaint-handlers, in 2025-26. But ultimately the success of this will depend on services implementing the improvements, and being challenged if they do not.
- 1.4. We upheld 33% of complaints at stage 1. In most cases the complainant was satisfied with our stage 1 response, but around 9% of complaints escalated to stage 2, and we upheld 70% of these. We do not often, however, provide a remedy which satisfies the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman. They upheld 88% of the complaints about us which they investigated. This is a slightly higher rate than that of similar authorities, although still a tiny proportion of the total complaints we receive.
- 1.5. The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman has concerns about delays in, and the quality of, our responses to their enquiries, and our failure to provide timely evidence of compliance with their recommendations. We need to address these issues.

## 2. Recommendations

- 2.1. To note and approve the contents of the report.
- 2.2. To publish a response to the Non-statutory Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report, as required by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's complaint-handling code.

2.3. To continue to prioritise complaint-handling improvements across the council, monitoring performance and challenging services which are not compliant, particularly with respect to how we respond to Ombudsman complaints.

### 3. Policy Context

3.1. This report aligns with Lewisham's Corporate Priorities, as set out in the Council's [Corporate Strategy \(2022-2026\)](#):

- Cleaner and Greener
- A Strong Local Economy
- Quality Housing
- Children and Young People
- Safer Communities
- Open Lewisham
- Health and Wellbeing

3.2. In particular, this report is closely aligned to priority Open Lewisham, because it summarises our performance in one of the key ways in which we actively listen to our residents, being responsive to their concerns and communicative in our approach.

3.3. Four complaints policies are relevant to this report:

3.4. **Corporate complaints** – we introduced a new, two-stage corporate complaints policy on 1 April 2024. This is in line with the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's complaint-handling code ("the LGSCO Code"), introduced on the same date. Responsibility for implementing the policy rests with each service. Our detailed corporate complaints report is attached at appendix 1.

3.5. **Housing complaints** – our two-stage housing complaints policy is in line with the requirements of the Housing Ombudsman Service's complaint-handling code ("the HOS Code"), which became statutory on 1 April 2024. Responsibility for implementing the policy rests with the Director of Housing Resident Engagement and Services. Our detailed housing complaints report is attached at appendix 2.

3.6. **Adult social care complaints** – these are considered in accordance with the Local Authority Social Services and National Health Service Complaints (England) Regulations 2009. This is a one-stage procedure and responsibility

for implementing it is delegated to the Director of Operations for Adult Social Care. Our adult social care complaints report is attached at appendix 3.

3.7. **Children's social care complaints** – these are considered in accordance with The Children Act 1989 Representation Procedure (England) Regulations 2006. This is a three-stage procedure and responsibility for implementing it rests with the Director of Families, Quality and Commissioning. Our children's social care complaint report listed as appendix 4.

## 4. Background

4.1. Our priorities for action are to work with partners to:

- improve the well-being of the people of Lewisham
- develop and engage local communities
- improve public sector performance and delivery

4.2. Good complaint-handling is a way in which we can support those priorities. And as an organisation with a learning culture, we welcome customer feedback about our services and staff from residents and service users.

4.3. This annual report provides a comprehensive overview of our complaint-handling performance across the council in 2024-25. It includes qualitative and quantitative analysis, summaries of types of complaint, and data about enquiries to MPs, the Mayor, Councillors, and the Chief Executive, as well as General Enquiries. Data analysed by ward can be found in appendix 6.

4.4. Lewisham operates a dispersed complaint-handling system, where some 500 officers handle complaints and enquiries within their services without involving the Corporate Complaints and Casework team. We use this model because:

- Services can adjust staffing to demand, and provide quick resolution to complaints
- This system places ownership and accountability on services to manage complaints effectively and improve services.

4.5. The dispersed model does mean it can be challenging to ensure consistency across services, both in standards of response, and complaint data recording. So the Corporate Complaints and Casework team carry out regular quality monitoring of complaint-handling in Corporate Resources, Housing and Place Directorates, and feed back their findings to services. This will be extended to Childrens Social Care and CYP.

4.6. The Corporate Complaints and Casework team also co-ordinates, drafts and issues responses to:

- 'Multi-faceted' complaints about how different directorates within the council have interacted with each other
- MP enquiries
- Ombudsman enquiries (both LGSCO and HOS).

## 5. Complaint volumes

Case type (Lewisham Council)	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	% increase from 2023-24
<b>New complaints (stage 1 only)</b>	2,419	4,887	6,510	33%
<b>All enquiries</b> (general, MP, Member, Mayor, CEO)	5,817	6,980	7,971	14%
<b>Total</b>	8,236	11,867	14,481	22%

- 5.1. The total number of new complaints and enquiries received by Lewisham Council 2024-25 was 14,481 compared to 11,867 cases in 2023-24 (Lewisham Homes cases came back into Lewisham Council in October 2023).
- 5.2. Of the 6,510 new Stage 1 complaints received in 2024-25, 739 (11%) complaints escalated to Stage 2; 1 complaint escalated to Stage 3 (children's social care); and 83 cases referred to the Ombudsmen.
- 5.3. The volume of overall complaints and enquiries increased from the previous year with an increase of 9% (1,220) from 11,867 in 2023-24, to 14,481 in 2024-25.
- 5.4. New first stage complaints (6,510) accounted for 45% of all casework received in 2024-25.
- 5.5. There were 7,971 new enquiries received in 2024-25. 29% of these cases were general enquiries, 30% were Member enquiries and the remainder were MP, Mayor and CEO enquiries. The nature of general enquiries varies but can include a request for a service or advice and information.
- 5.6. Overall there was an increase of 22% in complaints and enquiries compared to last year.

## 6. Themes and trends

- 6.1. The table below shows the top 10 service areas receiving complaints. The services are all high-volume contact areas for the council.
- 6.2. Revenues issue 130,000 council tax notices to domestic properties. With 1,180 complaints for 2024-25 this equates to less than 1% of residents being dissatisfied with the service.
- 6.3. Street environment services collect 330,000 bins a week, so 1,549 complaints equates to the service failing on less than 1% of occasions.

	Service area	Complaints	% upheld
1	Street environment services	1,549	2%
2	Revenues	1,180	10%
3	Housing repairs	837	55%
4	Commercial operations and development*	339	11%
5	Housing needs & refugee services	356	31%
6	Parks, sport and leisure	224	18%
7	Strategic transport	223	2%
8	Highways	179	4%
9	Benefits	162	12%
10	Housing compliance & building safety	161	52%

\*Includes abandoned vehicles, bulky waste, commercial waste, disabled bays, garden waste.

### Detailed breakdowns

#### Street environment services

Rank	Issue	Number of cases
1	Refuse	437
2	Missed collections	414
3	Recycling	256
4	Cleansing	176
5	Food waste	87
6	Fly tipping removal	68
7	Paid lumber collection	21

8	Bin delivery	15
9	Dog fouling	13
10	Street sweeping	10

#### Revenues

Rank	Issue	Number of cases
1	Account query	903
2	Discount/exemption	49
3	Notices issued (reminder/final)	32
4	Liability dispute	30
5	Refunds	28
6	Payments	28
7	Summons	27
8	On-line	24
9	Customer service	18
10	Post summons recovery action	9

#### Housing repairs

Rank	Issue	Number of cases
1	Plumbing	286
2	Damp	145
3	Appointments	127
4	Window repair/replacement	56
5	Roof repair/renewal	47
6	Carpentry repair	42
7	Electrical	34
8	Fencing	17
9	Communal area maintenance	14
10	Plastering	14

#### Commercial operations and development

Rank	Issue	Number of cases
1	PCNs	204

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2	Parking permits	134
3	Parking enforcement	80
4	Garden waste subscription	66
5	Enviro-enforcement (fly-tipping etc)	25
6	Abandoned vehicles	22
7	NSL (contractor)	15
8	Parking signs and lines (existing)	14
9	Parking designs	13
10	Pay and display	10

### Housing needs & refugee services

Rank	Issue	Number of cases
1	Homeless/part 7 application	71
2	Housing Options Centre service (front line)	69
3	Suitability of accommodation	48
4	Temporary accommodation (nightly paid)	27
5	Temporary accommodation (PSL)	21
6	Housing register/part 6 application	20
7	Temporary accommodation (hostel)	15
8	Suitability of accommodation	12
9	Homeless/part 7 application	11
10	Lewisham Find Your Home	11

### Top 5 complaint issues and outcomes

Issue	Number of cases	Resolved upon receipt	Not upheld	Partly upheld	Upheld (%)
Account query (revenues)	903	116	641	49	96 (11%)
Refuse (waste)	437	324	4	96	13 (2%)
Missed collections (waste)	414	403	3	8	0 (0%)
Plumbing (housing)	288	0	59	91	137

repairs)					(48%)
Recycling (waste)	256	242	1	7	6 (2%)

## 7. Complaint-handling performance

### Timeliness

(Figures do not map exactly onto complaint volume figures above because not all cases received progress to a stage 1 complaint)

	Stage 1	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 2	Enquiries	Enquiries
Year	Cases due	% On time	Cases due	% On time	Cases due	% On time
2022-23	3,611	77%	414	71%	7,071	65%
2023-24	5,582	80%	430	68%	7,679	68%
2024-25	6,951	85%	677	71%	8,142	71%
<b>Variance from 23/4 - 24/5</b>	<b>↑ 1,369</b>	<b>↑ 5%</b>	<b>↑ 247</b>	<b>↑ 3%</b>	<b>↑ 463</b>	<b>↑ 3%</b>

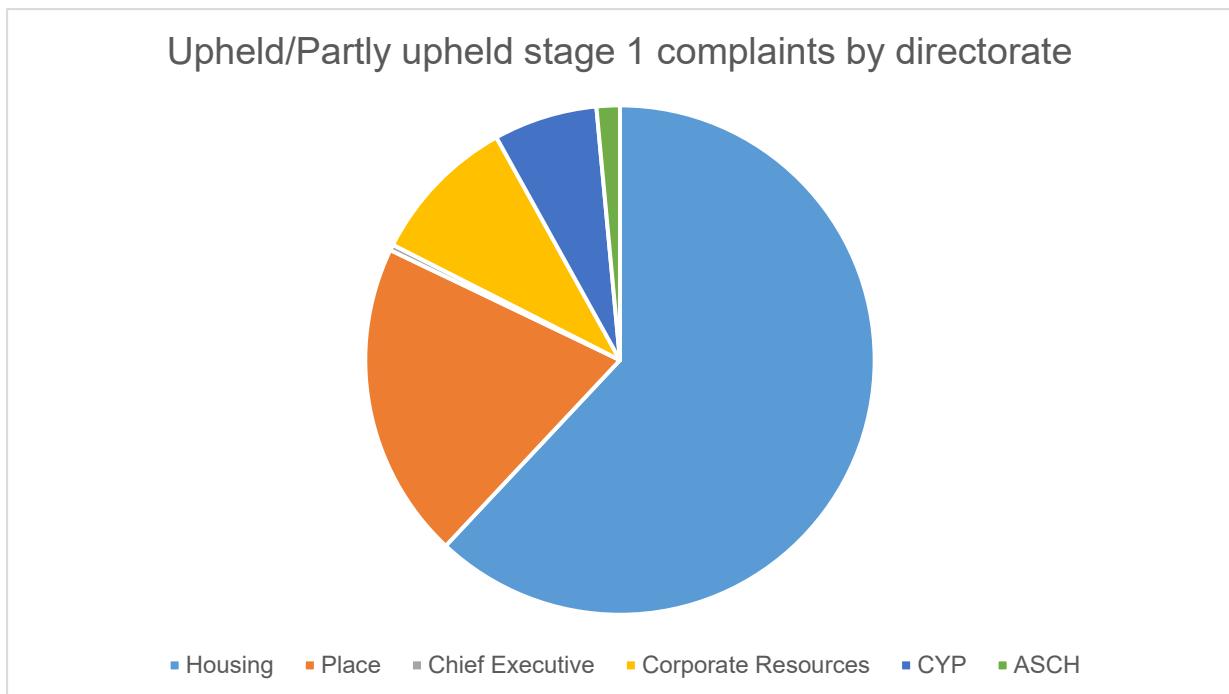
7.1. Despite a significant increase in volume of complaints and enquiries, performance has improved on the previous year. Completion rates of all casework is extremely high with 99% of all stage 1 complaints being answered within 9.3 days and 98% of enquiries being answered within 11.2 days.

### Outcomes

(Figures for cases received and closed in 2024-25 – so do not map exactly onto volume or timeliness figures)

Stage 1 complaint outcomes (all directorates, all types)	Number	%
Resolved at first point of contact (generally used when this is an issue we can fix immediately)	15	<1%
Resolved upon receipt (also used when this is an issue we can fix immediately – often these cases should properly be reclassified as	2,005	28%

enquiries)		
Not upheld	2,593	37%
Partly upheld	947	13%
Upheld	1,487	21%
Total	7,047	



7.2. Around 9% of complaints escalated to stage 2. Just over half (52%) of these resulted in a different outcome at stage 2. This figure should reduce, as complaint-handling and recording of outcomes improve.

Stage 2 complaint outcomes (all directorates, all types)	Number	%
Withdrawn	3	<1%
Not upheld	190	30%
Partly upheld	165	26%
Upheld	278	44%
Total	636	

7.3. Over 90% of upheld or partly upheld stage 2 complaints were in Housing.

## Compensation

- 7.4. Sometimes the remedy for an upheld complaint will include compensation, which we calculate in accordance with LGSCO's Guidance on Remedies (or, for Housing (landlord) complaints, in accordance with our housing compensation reimbursement and remedies policy and procedure). At present, services are not recording awards of compensation on iCasework in a way which allows us to collate the information into an overall figure. Recent training for complaint-handlers makes clear that this needs to change.
- 7.5. The Housing Ombudsman awarded compensation in 206 cases at a cost of £130,064. This works out as an average of £631.
- 7.6. The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman awarded compensation in 21 cases at a cost of £31,600. This works out as an average of £1,505.

## 8. Quality monitoring

- 8.1. In October 2024 the Corporate Complaints and Casework team introduced quality monitoring. Each month the team randomly checks a proportion of corporate and housing complaints. The team reviews each case against the requirements of the relevant complaints policy, looking at content, outcome and timeliness. Between October 2024 and March 2025 we looked at 71 complaint responses.
- 8.2. 49 (69%) of cases checked were classed as fails, either because of the quality of the response or because of delays in complaint-handling. Of these, 19 were automatic fails, either because there was no iCasework record, or because of a failure to issue key correspondence on the case (acknowledgement or complaint response).
- 8.3. 22 (31%) of cases checked passed our quality checks. We expect this figure to improve as complaint-handling training embeds in practice.
- 8.4. Going forward, we are expanding our quality checks to include reviewing the quality of the data recorded on iCasework for each case we check.

## 9. Complaint-handling improvement project (CHIP)

- 9.1. To prepare for the introduction of LGSCO's complaint-handling code, Lewisham

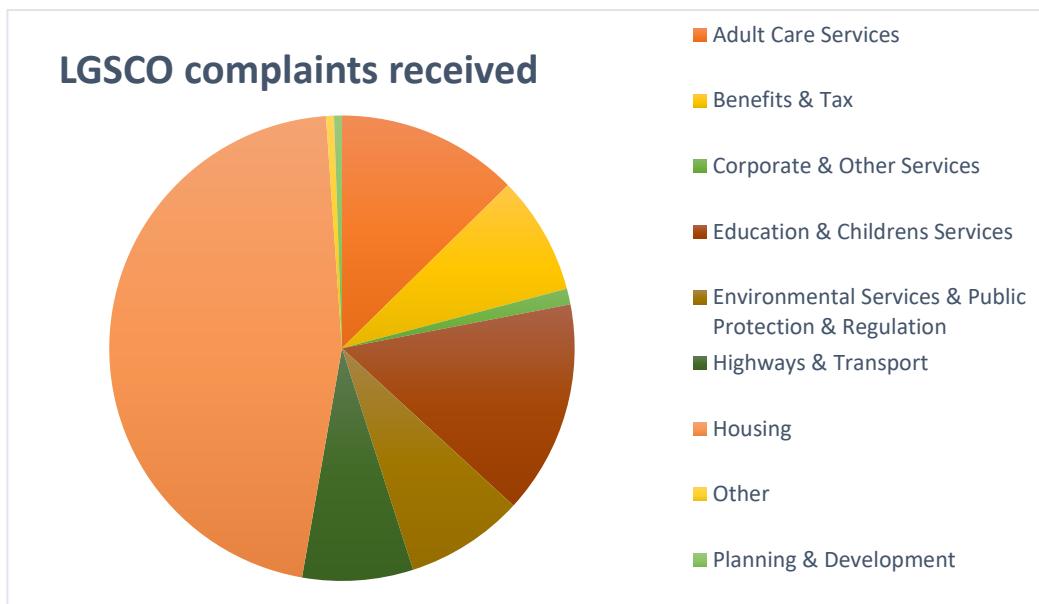
Council ran a complaint-handling improvement project throughout the 2024-25 financial year. This included:

- Revising the corporate complaints policy, and the policy for managing unreasonable complainant behaviour
- Upgrading the complaint-handling system, iCasework
- Amending the letter and email templates on iCasework
- Preparing how-to guides for all aspects of complaint-handling
- Creating new intranet pages to bring together all complaint-handling reference material
- Creating a suite of training modules for the council's 500 complaint-handlers, now available on Learning Academy
- Identifying those processes (such as internal appeals) which fall outside the corporate complaints process
- Devising a mechanism to capture and share the lessons learned from complaints.

- 9.2. Lewisham Council is also part of LGSCO's complaint-handling code pilot project, providing feedback to LGSCO about the implementation of the code, and sharing experiences with other London councils in the pilot project.
- 9.3. Although CHIP was primarily aimed at improving the handling of non-statutory complaints, it also has relevance for those working to other complaint-handling policies, particularly in housing. This work continues, and as complaint-handlers complete the training, we can start to assess how changes to our complaint-handling have benefited residents.

## **10. Ombudsman cases**

- 10.1. The LGSCO annual letter is attached at appendix 5. In summary:
  - LGSCO issued one complaint report about a homelessness case. There is a statutory process to follow when a complaint report is issued, and we took too long to comply with it.
  - LGSCO express concern about our failure to provide timely evidence of compliance with their recommendations on other cases.
  - And LGSCO is concerned about delays in, and the quality of, our responses to their enquiries.
- 10.2. LGSCO received 182 complaints about Lewisham Council in 2024-25. The majority were about homelessness, including temporary accommodation.



10.3. LGSCO decided 174 complaints about Lewisham Council in 2024-25. The outcomes were as follows (previous years included for comparison):

	2024-25	2023-24	2022-23
Not investigated	132	50	89
Upheld	37	22	21
Not upheld	5	1	10
Total	174	73	120

10.4. Of the 42 complaints which were investigated, 88% were upheld (12.4 per 100,000 residents). The average for similar authorities is 84% (9.1 per 100,000 residents).

10.5. In one of the 37 upheld cases, LGSCO considered that we had provided a satisfactory remedy before the complaint reached them. This 3% satisfactory remedy rate compares to an average of 12% in similar authorities.

10.6. Our previous 3-stage complaints process provided a safety net before complaints reached LGSCO. We should gradually see an improvement in our performance, as the learning and practices from CHIP embed across the council.

## 11. Financial implications

11.1. There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

11.2. The Council has no specific budgets for compensation payments, so the costs are absorbed by the relevant service as awarded.

## 12. Legal implications

- 12.1. There is a statutory requirement for the Council to have a complaints process in relation to certain established services. Further detail of this is set out in section 3 above.
- 12.2. The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman, set up under the Local Government Act 1974; and the Housing Ombudsman, under the Housing Act 1996, are independent and responsible for dealing with complaints about local authorities where there has been maladministration causing injustice or a service failure.
- 12.3. We have a statutory duty to comply with the HOS code, and the regulations governing complaints about adult and children's social care.
- 12.4. While there is no statutory duty to comply with the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) Code or to implement its recommendations, the LGSCO does expect clear and justifiable reasons for non-compliance with its recommendations in individual cases.

## 13. Risk Implications

Risk	Mitigation
There is reputational and financial risk from poor complaint-handling, as we expose ourselves to criticism and financial penalties from the ombudsmen.	When we successfully resolve complaints locally, they do not escalate to the ombudsmen; and we are less likely to incur criticism and financial penalties on those complaints which do escalate. We now have resources and training in place to improve our complaint-handling, but clear prioritisation of this improvement is essential if it is to be effective.

## 14. Equalities implications

- 14.1. The Council has a legal duty to consider the implications of anything we do on the basis of people's protected characteristics as set out in the Equality Act 2010. The nine protected characteristics are:

- age
- disability
- gender reassignment
- marriage and civil partnership
- being pregnant or on maternity leave
- race
- religion or belief
- sex (gender)
- sexual orientation

14.2. The Council has the ability to collect equalities monitoring information on the iCasework system. This information is not mandatory, but it can help the

Council to review the complaints process and to ensure that it remains accessible and to everyone.

14.3. The equalities data presented below is based on 10,077 contact records. In most of these contact records the equalities information was not disclosed.

- 75% of contacts did not provide their age data. Of the remaining 25%, more than half of the contacts were from people aged 25 – 54 years (62%).
- 98% of contacts did not disclose whether they had a disability or not.
- Our ethnicity data indicate 70% of those contacting us did not provide ethnicity details and of the remaining 30%, a large proportion of the responses were from the Bangladeshi community. We investigated this anomaly as our 2021 census data tells us that this community only make up 1% of Lewisham's population and have identified a recording error on our system. We reported this issue to our software provider, who has applied a fix. Unfortunately, we cannot retrospectively capture the ethnicity data.
- Almost 42% of contacts did not provide gender information. Of those who did respond, there were nearly twice as many female persons compared to male persons.
- 77% of contacts did not disclose their sexual orientation. Of the remainder, 939 of the respondents preferred not to say (9%) and almost 1,356 disclosed a heterosexual orientation (13%).

14.4. The lack of equalities data about people registering complaints means we cannot use this data to make a meaningful assessment of the accessibility of our complaints procedures. But we are satisfied that our complaints procedures are accessible to all, because they can be accessed in multiple ways:

- Via the complaints portal on our website.
- By phone. In 2024-25 we introduced a dedicated team in the contact centre for phone calls about complaints.
- In person, to any public-facing officer. In 2024-25 we provided training to all staff about how to respond when somebody says they want to complain.
- By email, to an officer or service already working with the person who wants to complain.
- By post. There are freepost addresses for complaints about housing and adult social care. Residents can also hand in a written complaint at any of our sites.
- Via elected members. In 2024-25 we introduced 'member complaints' for corporate and housing complaints. This allows members making a complaint on behalf of a resident to track the complaint in the same way they can track an enquiry. The complaint itself uses the appropriate complaints procedure.
- We also accept complaints made on behalf of someone else, provided the representative has sufficient authority or interest to act for the person affected.

14.5. Allowing people to make a complaint in the way which best suits them also demonstrates Lewisham Council's commitment to the social model of disability.

14.6. The training provided to our complaint-handlers emphasises the importance of writing clear complaint responses in Plain English. We have further training planned about understanding and recording reasonable adjustments.

## **15. Climate change and environmental implications**

15.1. Almost all complaint communications are conducted using email, so the climate and environment implications of our complaint-handling are minimal.

15.2. Officers are beginning to make more use of AI, which has a greater environmental impact, in drafting responses and interpreting complaints data. We do not yet have information about the environmental impact of this, either at the current minimal level of use, or if use of AI increases in the future.

## **16. Crime and disorder implications**

16.1. There are no anticipated crime and disorder implications, although intelligence from complaints can help us identify locations and types of crime and disorder in the borough.

## **17. Health and wellbeing implications**

17.1. There are no anticipated health and wellbeing implications.

## **18. Background papers**

18.1. [Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's complaint-handling code](https://lewisham.gov.uk/contact-us/send-us-feedback-on-our-reports)

- 18.2. [Housing Ombudsman Service's complaint-handling code](#)
- 18.3. [Local Authority Social Services and National Health Service Complaints \(England\) Regulations 2009](#)
- 18.4. [The Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure \(England\) Regulations 2006](#)
- 18.5. [Lewisham Council Corporate Complaints Policy](#)
- 18.6. [Lewisham Council Housing Complaints Policy](#)
- 18.7. [Lewisham Council Compensation Reimbursement and Remedies Policy and Procedure](#)
- 18.8. [Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's Guidance on Remedies](#)

## 19. Glossary

Term	Definition
LGSCO code	Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's complaint-handling code
HOS code	Housing Ombudsman Service's complaint-handling code

## 20. Report authors and contact

- 20.1. Lew McKenzie, Complaints & Casework Manager  
[lew.mckenzie@lewisham.gov.uk](mailto:lew.mckenzie@lewisham.gov.uk)
- 20.2. Molly Lofas, Complaint-handling Improvement Manager  
[molly.lofas@lewisham.gov.uk](mailto:molly.lofas@lewisham.gov.uk)
- 20.3. Comments for and on behalf of the Executive Director for Corporate Resources
- 20.4. Not applicable
- 20.5. Comments for and on behalf of the Director of Law and Corporate Governance
- 20.6. Melanie Dawson, Head of Legal Services, [melanie.dawson@lewisham.gov.uk](mailto:melanie.dawson@lewisham.gov.uk)

## 21. Appendices

- 21.1. Appendix 1  
Non-statutory complaints annual report 2024-25 (including appendix 1A LGSCO complaint-handling code self-assessment form) Lew McKenzie and Molly Lofas
- 21.2. Appendix 2  
Housing complaints annual report 2024-25 (including appendix 2A HOS complaint-handling code self-assessment form) Carol Hinvest

21.3. Appendix 3

Adult social care complaints annual report 2024-25 Mark Watson Gray

21.4. Appendix 4 (not provided to Corporate Complaints and Casework)

Children's social care complaints annual report 2024-25

21.5. Appendix 5

LGSCO annual letter 2024-25 (including appendix 5A, LGSCO annual statistics 2024-25)

21.6. Appendix 6

Ward data