



Governance Committee

15 October 2025

Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code update report

Report by:
Monitoring Officer

Officer Contact:
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Purpose

To update members in relation to the Council's position relating to the adoption of the LGSCO complaint handling code and latest statistical information from the LGSCO.

Recommendations

1. That the report is noted.
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1. Background

- 1.1 The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) issued a new complaint handling code in February 2024. The LGSCO encourages Councils to adopt the Code as quickly as they are able to and has indicated that the Code will be considered in ombudsman casework from April 2026.
- 1.2 The code has been issued as “advice and guidance” for all local councils in England under section 23(12A) of the Local Government Act 1974. This means that councils should consider the Code when developing complaint handling policies and procedures and when responding to complaints. If a council decides not to follow the Code it is expected to have a good reason for doing so.
- 1.3 The Code only applies to complaints where there is no statutory process in place. So, for example, it does not apply to complaints about the behaviour of councillors although the ombudsman can consider how the Council has dealt with such a complaint.
- 1.4 The purpose of the Code is to enable the resolution of complaints raised by individuals promptly, and to use the data and learning from complaints to drive service improvements. It is also designed to help create a positive complaint handling culture amongst staff and individuals. The LGSCO has also provided guidance and training tools to support the Council in addressing how best to adopt and comply with the code.
- 1.5 There is also a separate Housing Ombudsman which has statutory reporting requirements and code. In relation to the Council’s homeless duties these fall under the LGSCO.

2. City Council adoption of the new Complaint handling code

- 2.1 The Council’s complaint policy and operational arrangements were broadly compliant with the complaint handling code, but steps to improve reporting and scrutiny arrangements have been necessary to ensure full compliance. The Council moved to a new complaint management system, the Feedback Hub and has been gearing up to adopt the complaints handling code.
- 2.2 Good progress has been made since the last report to Governance Committee in June as set out in the assurance self-assessment. The only further action to be implemented is to introduce the new annual report to Cabinet which would need to happen in 2026.
- 2.3 The following changes have been implemented because of the new code: -

Lead officer (Director of Connected Chelmsford) has been appointed

Lead Member (Deputy Leader) has been appointed

Quarterly reporting of performance in relation to complaints has been introduced. This includes circulation to the Lead Officer/Management Team, Statutory Officers meeting and Lead member.

Relevant amendments to the Complaints Policy that were identified have been made.

An annual Complaints Report will be introduced for Cabinet to scrutinise performance (exact timing to be confirmed).

- 2.4 The existing report from the LGSCO is already reported to Governance Committee annually and is attached to this report at appendix 1. It should be noted that the LGSCO has changed their approach to annual reporting. The data is provided to all Councils annually, but a detailed report is only issued where necessary.
- 2.5 An assurance report by way of a self-assessment in relation to compliance with the complaints handling code is attached at appendix 2.

List of Appendices

Appendix 1 - annual letter and statistical information provided by LGSCO

Appendix 2 - Self-assessment assurance report to Governance Committee

Background papers: Nil

Corporate Implications

Legal/Constitutional: The LGSCO will consider the new complaints handling code in case work from April 2026. Accordingly, the Council has been working towards adopting the complaint handling code and full compliance as quickly as possible. Good progress has been made, and the position will be monitored and reported in accordance with the agreed arrangements.

Financial: None

Potential impact on climate change and the environment: None

Contribution toward achieving a net zero carbon position by 2030: None

Personnel: None

Risk Management: None

Equality and Diversity: None

Health and Safety: None

Digital: None

Other: None

Consultees: None

Relevant Policies and Strategies:

Council Complaints Policy

21 May 2025

By email

Mr Eveleigh
Chief Executive
Chelmsford City Council

Dear Mr Eveleigh

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 1

Reference	Authority	Category	Subcategory	Received
23020992	Chelmsford City Council	Planning & Development	Enforcement - other	03/04/2024
24000650	Chelmsford City Council	Planning & Development	Enforcement-householder	22/04/2024
24000653	Chelmsford City Council	Planning & Development	Certificate Lawful use or developmt	19/04/2024
24004452	Chelmsford City Council	Housing	Homelessness	25/06/2024
24007163	Chelmsford City Council	Housing	Homelessness	24/07/2024
24007181	Chelmsford City Council	Environmental Services & Public Protection & Regulation	Antisocial behaviour	08/08/2024
24007646	Chelmsford City Council	Corporate & Other Services	Land	14/08/2024
24012027	Chelmsford City Council	Housing	Homelessness	09/10/2024
24013648	Chelmsford City Council	Housing	Homelessness	04/11/2024
24013658	Chelmsford City Council	Environmental Services & Public Protection & Regulation	Pollution	24/12/2024
24017837	Chelmsford City Council	Corporate & Other Services	Access to information	15/01/2025
24020705	Chelmsford City Council	Environmental Services & Public Protection & Regulation	Refuse & recycling	27/02/2025

Appendix 2 - Self-assessment against the requirements of the Complaints Handling Code

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	Complaints policy has been updated accordingly.
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	This is expressly set out at the end of the policy.
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	Complaints may be made online, by letter, by telephone or in person. Complainants are asked to contact us if they need further assistance to lodge a complaint and reasonable adjustments tailored to the needs of individuals are made as necessary.
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	Complaint handling is co-ordinated by the customer service centre staff who support services in managing complaints.

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	This is covered in the comments, compliments and complaints policy (referred to as the complaints policy). It is normal practice to signpost a person to the complaints policy where they express dissatisfaction with a service provided.
6: Complaints stages (Stage 1)	We process stage 1 complaints in line with timescales and processes set out in the Code.	Yes	This is covered in section 2 of the complaints policy
6: Complaints stages (Stage 2)	We process stage 2 complaints in line with timescales and processes set out in the Code.	Yes	This is covered in section 3 of the complaints policy. Minor updates to reflect current practice have been made to the policy.
7: Putting things right	When something has gone wrong we take action to put things right.	Yes	This is what happens in practice. Performance reporting will help to demonstrate this.
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	Appropriate arrangements have been made for annual performance reports to Cabinet and quarterly reporting to relevant officer(s) and member(s). Self-assessment against the code to be provided to Governance Committee in October 2025 alongside annual ombudsman complaint report. Officer training also being considered.

Code section	Action	Do we follow the Code: Yes/No	Explanations and Commentary
9: Scrutiny & Oversight	We have appropriate senior leadership and governance oversight of the complaints process and performance.	Almost complete (first annual report to Cabinet due 2026).	<p>Appropriate arrangements now in place as follows:-</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Lead officer - Louise Goodwin, 2. Lead Member – Deputy Leader 3. Annual performance report to Cabinet (first report due 2026). 4. Quarterly reports to lead officer, MT, lead member, informal cabinet and statutory officers 5. Assurance through self-assessment - to be included in annual report to Governance Committee 6. Annual ombudsman performance report – to be provided to relevant officers/members and included in reports to Cabinet and GC.