

Meeting:	Decision Session – Combined Executive Member Decision Session
Meeting date:	02/12/2025
Report of:	Director of Housing and Communities
Portfolio of:	Councillor M Pavlovic

Decision Report: City of York Council Annual complaints performance and service improvement report April 2024 to March 2025

Subject of Report

1. This covering report presents the Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report April 2024 to March 2025 (ACP&SI) which is provided in full at Annex 1.

Benefits and Challenges

2. Ensuring the council has clear, consistent, and legally compliant processes for investigating and responding to complaints (corporate, adult social care, and children's social care), comments, compliments, concerns, and Ombudsman cases and can evidence compliance with Ombudsmen complaint handling codes, is essential for transparency, accountability, and continuous improvement.
3. The benefits are:
 - Improved public trust and confidence
 - Demonstrates fairness, openness, and responsiveness.
 - Builds confidence that residents' voices are heard and acted upon.
 - Legal and regulatory compliance
 - Reduces risk of non-compliance penalties or reputational damage.
 - Identifies issues early, preventing escalation to costly Ombudsman investigations or legal challenges.

- Reduces time and resources spent on prolonged disputes.
- Service improvement and learning
- Enables evidence-based decision-making and targeted improvements.
- Ensures concerns in adult and children's social care are addressed promptly.
- Positive reputation and community engagement
- Compliments and positive feedback can be used to showcase good practice.
- Strengthens relationships with residents and stakeholders.

4. The challenges are:

- Resource and capacity constraints
- High complaint volumes can strain staff and budgets.
- Requires skilled officers to manage complex cases, especially in social care.
- Risk of inconsistent responses across services
- Requires robust training and monitoring to maintain standards.
- Managing expectations
- Residents may expect immediate resolution or outcomes beyond council powers.
- Balancing transparency with confidentiality in sensitive cases.
- Complexity of social care complaints
- Reputational risk
- High-profile Ombudsman findings can attract media attention.
- Poor handling of complaints can erode trust and lead to scrutiny

Policy Basis for Decision

5. The Council, as a social housing landlord, owns and manages housing stock and delivers landlord services. In this capacity, the Council is the governing body with direct accountability for complaint handling performance and compliance with the Housing Ombudsman Service's (HOS) statutory complaint handling code.
6. The code requires landlords to:
- embed a positive complaint handling culture
 - undertake annual self-assessments
 - publish compliance reports to demonstrate transparency and learning.

7. To ensure these obligations are met, governance responsibilities rest with the Council's elected members and senior leadership, who are responsible for promoting openness, accountability, and continuous improvement in housing services.
8. This Committee plays a critical role in the Council's governance framework and is receiving the ACP&SI for information, as part of the Council's commitment to transparency, accountability and continuous improvement in complaint handling, in line with statutory requirements and best practice.

Financial Strategy Implications

9. Not applicable for this report.

Recommendation and Reasons

10. To note the performance details contained in this covering report and at Annex 1.
11. To note the outcomes of the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) and Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS) cases and published performance data.

Reason: So that Members and residents are provided with the LGSCO and HOS reports and findings to enable them to scrutinise complaints, comments, compliments and concerns to improve service delivery and ensure transparent, robust decision-making processes.

Background

12. The council produces and publishes an annual complaints performance and service improvement (ACP&SI) report which covers:
 - Complaints relating to adult social care services (including Public Health) and children's social care services, managed under two distinct legislative frameworks.
 - Complaints regarding other council services, handled through the council's corporate complaints and feedback procedures.
 - Cases referred to Ombudsman services, including the LGSCO and HOS.

- Other types of feedback, such as compliments received.
13. The ACP&SI is also presented to the council's Governance Risk and Assurance Group (GRAG), the Corporate Management Team (CMT), and subsequently to the Audit and Governance Committee.
 14. The ACP&SI report has been compiled by the Corporate Governance Team (CGT), now known as the Information Governance Team (IGT). It covers the period prior to the transfer of the complaints, compliments, concerns, and comments functions to the Complaints, Feedback and Compliance Team (CFCT) within Customer Services, which took place in September 2025.
 15. The ACP&SI also confirms that the council has undertaken a self-assessment of its complaint handling processes. This provides assurance that the council's approach is fully compliant with the HOS complaint handling code and reflects best practice in delivering fair, transparent, and effective complaint resolution. Completing the self-assessment demonstrates the council's ongoing commitment to accountability and continuous improvement, ensuring residents receive a high standard of service and that concerns are addressed promptly and appropriately.
 16. Following the HOS consideration of the council's self-assessment submitted in September 2025, they required the council to complete four actions. These were completed and the evidence submitted to the HOS in their timescale. This included:
 - a statement would from Councillor Pavlovic as the 'Member Responsible for Complaints' (MRC). This can be found on the council's website [Signed MRC statement for ACP&SI report April to March 2025](#) and attached at Annex 2 for information.
 - updated, resubmitted and published the council's self-assessment which can be found at [Housing Ombudsman Service – complaint handling code – annual submission for year 2 \(2025/2026\)](#)

Consultation Analysis

17. No consultation was undertaken for the ACP&SI at Annex 1. However, feedback from regular performance reports to Audit and

Governance Committee, Corporate Management Team (CMT) and meetings and discussions with managers, informs the annual report.

18. It was also presented to the council's Governance Risk and Assurance Group (GRAG), the Corporate Management Team (CMT), and to the Corporate Scrutiny Committee (CSC) on Monday 10 November 2025.
19. CSC noted the following:
 - the report provides a comprehensive overview of complaints performance, including volumes, response times, outcomes, and learning from complaints.
 - service improvements identified through complaint learning have been implemented, with further actions planned to enhance customer experience.

Options Analysis and Evidential Basis

20. Members are asked to note the performance details and outcomes at Annex 1. An overview of the full report which was also provided to CSC is set out below

Children's social care complaints overview

21. Whilst the team reports on compliments received about these services in the annual report, we know that many more are received that are either not recorded or passed on to be recorded. However, some examples from section 7 in the annual report are shown below:
 - *Thank you so much. It's a relief talking with you today. You actually listened and that meant a lot to me. Thank you for going above and beyond. We're grateful.*
 - *A big thank you to your beautiful team for all your efforts, hard work, overtime into every child and young person you look after! You guys are such a solid and supportive team.*
 - *Thank you for how professional and easy you was to liaise. I wish all authority's had people like you in them then things would be straight forward and amicable thank you once again.*
 - *thank-you for fighting my corner. I was so scared when social services got involved as I love my children so much and I thought I was going to loose them when actually you've made me a stronger person and helped me more than you will ever know.*

- *professional and easy to liaise with. I wish all authority's had people like this.*
- *grateful for the help and support that we received. The dedication and willingness to listen and assist have made such a positive impact.*
- *I really appreciate all the help and visits you have done for me and my family and also being there at our difficult days which will not be forgotten!*

22. For children's social care complaints, the team conducts an initial assessment of the issues raised. This includes evaluating the severity and complexity of the complaint, potential risks to the individual and others, implications for the council, any history of similar complaints, and the likelihood of recurrence. Based on this assessment, complaints are graded into Stage 1, 2, or 3. Additional factors considered include the desired outcomes, who is best placed to investigate and respond effectively, and the complainant's preferences regarding how the complaint should be handled.
23. During 2024/2025, there was a reduction in the total number of complaints received under the children's social care procedure, falling from 40 in the previous year to 35.
24. It is important to note that the volume of complaints received can vary year to year. This fluctuation is typical of social care complaints across the Yorkshire and Humberside region.
25. Analysis of this decrease suggests several contributing factors. These include proactive measures taken by the council and the service area, such as ongoing staff training and awareness sessions. These initiatives aim to improve understanding of the complaints procedure and ensure that children and young people are aware of their rights and are supported in raising concerns.
26. Feedback from complaints, particularly where recurring themes are identified, provides valuable insight for service improvement. As in previous years, the most common themes relate to lack of action, inappropriate action, and the quality of advice or communication. Work continues with the service area to address and improve these persistent issues. Further details on lessons learned and service improvements are provided in Section 23 of the report at Annex 1.

Adult social care complaints overview

27. Whilst the team reports on compliments received about these services in the annual report, we know that many more are received that are either not recorded or passed on to be recorded. However, some examples from section 24 in the annual report are shown below

- *Staff member has been very kind and helpful, and has gone over and above to help.*
- *Helped me get my parent moved to a safe, lovely, and caring place in York.*
- *Grateful for support of parent, they were happier than they had been in years.*
- *Social worker was really calm and great worked so well with family member, making a stressful situation easier to navigate.*
- *Kind considerate social worker, who has shown has a high standard of training and knowledge of dementia suffers.*
- *Worker is the most personable and helpful social worker we have worked with to date and in our opinion an excellent ambassador for your department.*
- *The care provided has been really good and has eliminate all risks to wellbeing.*

28. For adult social care complaints, the council is required to use the Department of Health's grading tool to assess the seriousness of each complaint and determine the appropriate response. This tool is outlined in Section 26 of the report at Annex 1.

29. In 2024/2025, the number of complaints handled under the statutory adult social care complaints procedure decreased from 44 in the previous year to 35.

30. It is important to note that a reduction in complaint numbers is consistent with the expected year-on-year variation. This does not indicate any barriers to accessing the complaints process, nor does it suggest that customers are unsupported in raising concerns that provide valuable feedback.

31. Complaint feedback, particularly where recurring themes are identified, offers essential insight for service improvement. This year's report highlights that previously implemented service improvements have contributed to a reduction in complaints not being responded to, which was a concern in the previous year. Further details on lessons learned and service improvements are provided in Section 39 of the report at Annex 1.

32. Complaints relating to services delivered under Public Health functions also fall within the scope of the Local Authority Social Services and National Health Service Complaints (England) Regulations 2009 and are therefore managed in the same way as adult social care complaints. No complaints were reported to the team for Public Health services during 2024/2025.

Corporate complaints, comments, compliments and concerns overview

33. The corporate 4Cs procedures are used for all complaints about council services where there is no statutory procedure or other legal or appeal process.
34. Whilst the team reports on compliments received about council services in the annual report, we know that many more are received that are either not recorded or passed onto the team to record. However, some examples from Section 41 in the annual report are shown below
- *Thank you for the hard work of the council for getting rewire and damp work done quickly.*
 - *Thanks to everyone involved in putting my house in order went above and beyond making our temporary move as easy as possible for which I am extremely grateful.*
 - *Thank you for helping while I was at James House.*
 - *Help and support from the Refugee Resettlement Team was so appreciated and really helped.*
 - *Thank you for replacing the street sign.*
 - *Very pleased with new LED downlighting street lights on our street. A big improvement.*
 - *Well done on the complete resurfacing of the road outside Morrisons, James street. Good job.*
 - *The traffic warden at Monk Bar is always so helpful and friendly.*
 - *The chaps that cut the grass did a great job.*
 - *Thanks for quick action from the crew to remove fallen tree branch.*
 - *Just a note to say what a great job your men have done on the alley.*
 - *Street/gully cleaning just been completed. Really good job from the team concerned.*
 - *Thanks for the support, empathy and professionalism given to me by the Blue Badge Dept while I was recently completing my renewal application.*

- *The Falls Prevention team was “absolutely fantastic,” and very, very happy with the service provided.*
- *Thank you to NEO for getting the noise reduced.*
- *The update restored our faith in the planning process and in local government.*
- *Thanks to the waste crew for helping clear rubbish strewn everywhere.*
- *Thanks to crews for stacking boxes after collection.*
- *Thank you for making the medical collection so easy.*
- *Thank you to the team who emptied our recycling boxes this morning. They worked hard, were very energetic about their tasks, left no spillage around, and we were impressed.*
- *Hazel Court staff were brilliant, really helpful and helped sort out which waste needed to go in which skip. They even helped taking items to the correct areas, making sure anything that could be recycled was.*
- *Parking team unbelievably helpful explaining the appeals process and making sure I had everything I needed to sort this issue out efficiently. I was never kept waiting on the phone more than a few minutes.*

35. The timescales for investigating and responding to corporate complaints during the time period for this annual report were

- Grade One - 20 working days (10 for Housing Complaints in line with the Housing Ombudsman guidance)
- Grade Two - 30 working days (20 for Housing Complaints in line with the Housing Ombudsman guidance)

36. In 2024/2025, a total of 1,132 complaints were received, compared with 1,391 in the previous year. This reflects a typical year-on-year fluctuation but is also from service improvements made in waste services where they go back out to collect missed green waste bins and replace lost or damaged during collection bins free of charge without a resident having to make a complaint.

37. It is noted that 11 complaints did not receive a response during this reporting period. While this represents a significant improvement compared to previous years, it is a slight increase on last year's performance. Work continues to ensure every complaint is responded to even though it be out of time.

38. A total of 332 comments were logged during 2024/2025, compared with 642 in the preceding year.

39. It is important to note that higher volumes of complaints received by a particular service area is mostly likely due to their weekly services to every household in York. These services are among the most visible and frequently accessed, which naturally results in a greater number of complaints.
40. Complaints provide senior managers with valuable insight into how services are delivered, enabling targeted improvements. Collaborative work continues across council teams to ensure that learning from complaints leads to meaningful service enhancements, with evidence of completed actions being captured. Further details on lessons learned and service improvements are provided in Section 47 of the report at Annex 1.

Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) overview

41. The annual review of Local Government Complaints in England for 2024-2025 has been published by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO). It pulls together the national picture of trends and common issues that have arisen from their cases over the last year. You can find a copy on their website [Annual Review of Local Government Complaints 2024-2025](#)
42. The LGSCO's annual review is a key part of their work to share learning from their casework. The LGSCO received a record number of complaints in the last year, over 20,000 for the first time, marking a 16% increase in each of the last two years.
43. The LGSCO casework continues to be dominated by complaints about children and education, housing, and adult social care. With extremely high uphold rates in some areas (for example the LGSCO upheld 94% of complaints they investigated about special educational needs) in their view and set out in their annual review "*...points strongly to a local government system in crisis*".
44. Alongside their annual review, the LGSCO publishes complaints data at local authority level, which can be found on their website at [your council's performance](#). The data and reports for the council can be found at <https://www.lgo.org.uk/your-councils-performance/city-of-york-council/statistics> and in section 2 of the report at Annex 1

Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS) decided cases overview

45. The HOS publishes performance information about landlords on their website annually.
46. Whilst there was the same number of cases (determinations) in 2024/2025 as the previous year, there was a decrease in the number of findings (points of fault), maladministration findings and orders made for the council to put right compared with the previous year 2023/2024.
47. Further details about the HOS annual performance information and cases are set out in section 2 of the report at Annex 1.

HOS and LGSCO complaint handling codes Ombudsmen complaint handling codes overview

48. The council completed the HOS annual assessment and details can be found in section 2 of the report at Annex 1 and also on the website at [Housing Ombudsman Self Assessment – City of York Council](#)
49. Following the previous year's submission, the HOS made several recommendations to improve the council's corporate complaints procedure. All recommendations have been fully implemented within the timescales set by the Ombudsman.
50. Although not applicable to the time period for this annual report, it is timely to advise Committee that as the Housing Ombudsman Service's (HOS) complaint handling code became statutory on 1 April 2024 and as the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's (LGSCO) intends to consider their complaint handling code as part of their processes from April 2026, it was necessary to update the corporate 4Cs procedures to ensure full alignment with both complaint handling codes. The updates reflect best practice in complaint management and supports transparency, accountability, and continuous improvement.
51. It was also necessary to update parts of the procedures to meet all the recommendations the HOS made.
52. The updated procedures can be found at [Complaints, Concerns, Comments and Compliments policy and procedure – City of York Council](#)
53. Full details about the complaint handling codes can be found at

54. The key changes and additions to the procedures included the following key enhancements:
- Alignment with HOS and LGSCO Complaint Handling Codes.
 - Clear definition and scope of complaints.
 - Two-stage complaints process with defined response times.
These are:
 - Stage One – response in 10 working days
 - Stage Two – response in 20 working days
 - Escalation procedures to external Ombudsman services.
 - Comprehensive staff training framework on complaint handling.
 - Commitment to learning from complaints and publishing performance data.
55. The rationale for the updates is to ensure compliance with statutory requirements and regulatory codes. It will enhance service quality, improve customer satisfaction, and reduce the risk of maladministration. The policy also supports a culture of openness and continuous learning across the organisation.
56. There is ongoing work being taken forward by CFCT from these updates including:
- Ongoing communication of the 4Cs procedures to all staff and stakeholders.
 - Ongoing delivery of staff awareness and training sessions
 - Monitor compliance and report annually on complaints performance.

Council Plan

57. Compliance is aligned to the current and draft Council Plan which is part of the council's corporate code of governance. This also then aligns with the 10-year Plan (York 2032) such as performance management and service planning.

Organisational Impact and Implications

58. As the ACP&SI report is for Committee's information and to provide their comments and feedback, please see below comments regarding implications that were provided for the report to CSC. However, where required, work will be undertaken on any implications, including those areas where no comments were provided below, following this Committee's comments and feedback.

- **Financial** - there are no financial implications to this report
- **Human Resources (HR)** - there are not specific HR implications associated with the content of the report. However, the key officers will require training / awareness of changes as appropriate
- **Legal** - The Council must continue to comply with statutory complaints handling procedures where applicable and is working towards implementation of the LGSCO complaint handling code for all other types of complaint. Effective learning from complaints helps the Council to fulfil its duty to continuously improve.
- **Procurement** – No implications
- **Health and Wellbeing** – No implications
- **Environment and Climate action** – no implications
- **Affordability** – no direct implication although learning from complaint in Housing, will help improve performance in for example in Building Services to contribute to safe, secure and well-maintained warm homes,
- **Equalities and Human Rights** – similar to affordability implications no direct implications although learning from complaints with reflect inequalities in relation to service delivery will contribute in Housing to improved home environments and tenant experiences.
- **Data Protection and Privacy** - The completion of data protection impact assessment (DPIA) screening questions evidenced there would be no processing of personal data, special categories of personal data or criminal offence data processed for the purposes of this report and annex, so there is no requirement to complete a DPIA.
- **Communications** - Communications around this issue are likely to be primarily reactive and will be covered by media relations arrangements

- **Economy** – No implications

Risks and Mitigations

59. The Council has a statutory duty to comply with all relevant complaints-related legislation, Housing Ombudsman Service and Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman guidance and complaint handling codes. Failure to meet these obligations can result in significant consequences and actions including:

- Public reports and findings: Formal reports highlighting maladministration or service failure, often published on Ombudsman websites and shared via press releases.
- Financial remedies: Compensation payments to individuals for distress, inconvenience, or financial loss.
- Compliance monitoring: Increased scrutiny and follow-up investigations for persistent non-compliance.
- Referral to Parliament: In cases of serious or repeated failures, Ombudsmen may escalate matters to Parliament or issue special reports.
- Reputational consequences for councils failing to implement recommendations.

Wards Impacted

60. Not applicable for this report

Contact details

61. For further information please contact the authors of this Decision Report.

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Background papers

No background papers but listed below are links to background information in this report

- [Annual Review of Local Government Complaints 2024-2025 your council's performance](#)
- <https://www.lgo.org.uk/your-councils-performance/city-of-york-council/statistics>
- [Housing Ombudsman Self Assessment – City of York Council](#)
- [Housing Ombudsman Service – complaint handling code – annual submission for year 2 \(2025/2026\)](#)
- [Complaints, Concerns, Comments and Compliments policy and procedure – City of York Council](#)
- [The Complaint Handling Code | Housing Ombudsman Service](#)
- [Complaint Handling Code - Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman](#)
- [Signed MRC statement for ACP&SI report April to March 2025](#)

Annexes

Annex 1 - City of York Council Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvements Report April 2024 – March 2025

Annex 2 – Member Responsible for Complaints statement for ACP&SI report April 2024 to March 2025

Abbreviations

ACP&SI – Annual complaints performance and service improvement report

CMT – Corporate Management Team

CGT – Corporate Governance Team

IGT – Information Governance Team

CFCT – Complaints, Feedback and Compliance Team

HOS - Housing Ombudsman Service

LGSCO – Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman
MRC – Member Responsible for Complaints