Corporate Governance Committee – 18th November 2026

Report by: Louise Sboui – Customer Services Complaints & Project Lead

Lead Cllr: Cllr Nathan Hunt
Executive Councillor for Resident Services & Corporate Performance

Wards	Open / Exempt	Key Decision?
All	Open	No

Annual Report of Complaints & Feedback

Executive Summary:

In line with the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's (LGSCO) Complaints Handling Code, a report is present to Elected Members each year setting out activity in respect of complaints and compliments received.

This report covers the period April 2025 to March 2026, detailing how complaints reduced across both stages compared with the previous year, while compliments remained broadly stable.

The report demonstrates how complaints continue to provide valuable learning opportunities and drive service improvement, with actions taken to strengthen processes, guidance, training, systems and communications. The report also outlines the progress made to ensure the Council's ongoing compliance with the LGSCO Complaints Handling Code.

Recommendations

The Corporate Governance Committee is recommended to:

- Note the 2025/26 complaints, compliments and Ombudsman performance data.
- Note the changes made to complaints policies and processes to ensure compliance with the LGSCO Complaints Handling Code.

	Key Corporate Plan Priorities
	The report outlines activity undertaken in relation to Priority 3 of the Corporate Plan: *Doing our core work well*, by demonstrating how complaints and customer feedback are used to support service quality, value for money, effective control and compliance with statutory obligations.

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PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 This report provides Members with an overview of complaints, compliments and Ombudsman activity for the period April 2025 to March 2026, together with an update on the changes made to support compliance with the LGSCO Complaints Handling Code.

1.2 Although this report is presented to Members annually, complaints are monitored throughout the year via the Performance and Efficiency Board, with more detailed updates provided to the Corporate Leadership Team (Governance) on a monthly basis.

2. WHY IS THIS REPORT NECESSARY

2.1 Huntingdonshire District Council values customer feedback as an important source of learning, accountability and service improvement. Effective complaint handling relies on clear processes, skilled staff and a positive organisational culture, enabling issues to be resolved early, customer relationships to be strengthened, and operational insight to be used to improve services.

2.2 The Council operates a two-stage complaints process; Where a customer remains dissatisfied following the Stage One response, they may escalate their complaint to Stage Two for review by the relevant senior manager, or by a manager independent of the service complained about. Customers are then signposted to the LGSCO where they remain dissatisfied.

2.3 This report provides Members with data on Stage One and Stage Two complaints and compliments received by service area, alongside a summary of the outcomes and the annual statistical summary from the LGSCO.

3. BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

3.1 The LGSCO's Complaint Handling Code sets out how organisations should embrace complaints, demonstrating how good complaint handling processes ensure that feedback from local residents and businesses can be used to deliver service improvements. The benefits of having an effective complaints process are set out as follows:

- Good complaint handling promotes a positive relationship between an organisation and service users.
- Complaints allow an issue to be resolved before it becomes worse. Those issues not resolved promptly can take significant resource and time to remedy.
- Involvement in complaint resolution develops staff ownership, decision-making and engagement.
- Complaints provide senior staff with essential insight into day-to-day operations, allowing them to assess effectiveness and drive a positive complaint handling culture.
- Data collected about complaints can be analysed and used to inform key business decisions to drive improvement in service provision.

Source: *LGSCO Complaints Handling Code*

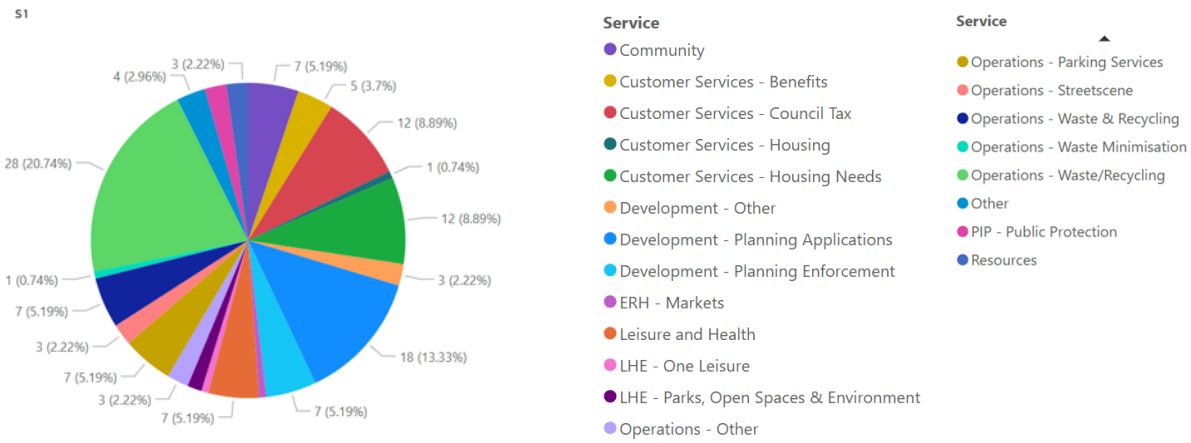
3.2 The Council delivers a wide range of services to residents and businesses across the district, involving a significant volume of customer contact and service transactions each year. Details regarding volumes are shown in the table in Appendix A. When considered in this context, the overall number of complaints received remain comparatively low.

Key findings:

- In 2025/26, the Council received 135 Stage One complaints, a reduction from 224 in 2024/25.
- In the same period, Stage Two complaints reduced to 34, compared with 42 in the previous year.
- The Council received 215 compliments, broadly similar compared with 217 in 2024/25.
- The highest number of complaints related to Operations, the vast majority in relation to missed bin collections, and Planning Services, primarily regarding dissatisfaction with decisions and delays. Overall complaint volumes remain low when considered alongside the high number of customer interactions and service transactions delivered by these areas.

COMPLAINTS AT STAGE ONE

3.2 The chart below shows Stage One complaints received by service area. Operations received the highest volume of Stage One complaints, although this should be considered in the context of the significant volume of service transactions delivered throughout the year.



COMPLAINTS AT STAGE TWO

3.3 Stage Two complaints reduced compared with the previous year. Planning, Infrastructure and Public Protection received the highest number of Stage Two complaints, primarily relating to planning applications.

3.4 The table in Appendix A summarises complaints by service area, including Stage One and Stage Two volumes, service context, key complaint themes and learning outcomes. For service areas with higher complaint volumes, transaction data has been included to allow consideration in proportion to overall service activity. Details of the proportion of complaints upheld/partially upheld are also provided.

Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman

3.5 The Ombudsman received 11 complaints relating to the Council and made 13 decisions during the year. Of these, 2 were not for the LGSCO or not ready for them to investigate. 8 complaints were assessed and closed, and 3 cases were formally investigated:

- One complaint relating to the handling of a complex Housing Benefit Claim was upheld. The findings and suggested remedy (a symbolic payment to recognise avoidable distress and uncertainty) were accepted, and improvements made to officer guidance.
- Two complaints were not upheld, relating to a missed bin collection and a Tree Preservation Order process. No service improvements were identified as a result of the investigation.

3.6 The LGSCO's report shows an upheld rate of 33% against an average of 74% upheld rate for similar Authorities. Further details can be found in Appendix B.

Performance Against Targets

3.7 Information published on the Council's website sets out the timescales for each stage of the complaints process. In 2025/26, the Council aimed to respond to all Stage One and Stage 2 complaints within 20 working days. These timescales are also reinforced in correspondence with customers, helping to manage expectations, build trust and reduce uncertainty while complaints are being considered.

3.8 The Council aims to respond to all complaints within target timescales, however despite best endeavours there are some occasions where delays are experienced. Subject matter complexity, further information is required from the complainant, the need to gather data from multiple teams or other organisations, and availability of key officers can all be factors which can impact on the timescale for response, although officers are encouraged to keep residents updated where response timescales are likely to be impacted.

3.9 During the period in question, the Council maintained strong performance at Stage One, with 92.3% of complaints responded to within target timescales, exceeding the 90% target. Of the 135 Stage One complaints received, 10 were responded to outside the target response period. The average delay was 2.5 days over the target, with the longest delay being eight working days.

3.10 Stage Two performance fell below target, with 73.5% of complaints responded to within target timescales against the 90% target. Of the 34 Stage Two complaints received, 9 were responded to outside the target response period. Most of these were delayed by just one or two days, with the longest delay being four working days.

Freedom of Information Requests

3.11 There are occasions where complaints and Freedom of Information (FOI) requests overlap. A customer complaint may include a request for information that falls within the scope of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 or UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR), or information disclosed through an FOI response may inform a subsequent complaint.

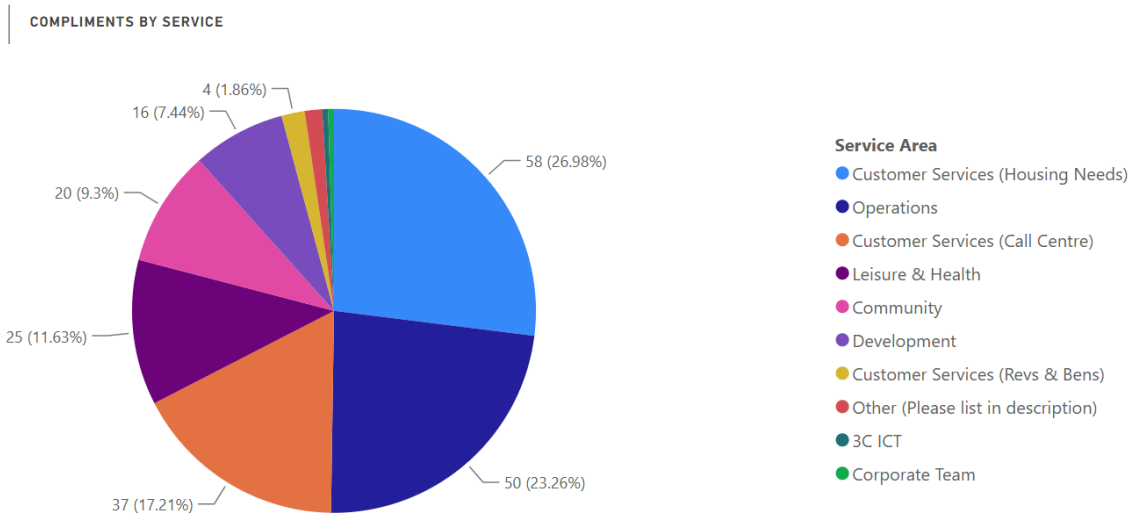
3.12 Although complaints and information requests are managed through separate statutory processes, crossover between the two can add complexity and, in some cases, affect the Council's ability to respond within target timescales.

Compliments Received

3.13 Feedback received through compliments provides an important balance to complaints data and helps to identify areas where services are working well. Positive feedback supports staff engagement, highlights good practice and provides further insight into the aspects of service delivery that customers value.

3.14 The number of compliments received in 2025/26 was 215, far exceeding the number of complaints received at 135.

3.15 The below chart shows the number of compliments received by service area. Housing, Operations and Call Centre received most compliments, but compliments also received for Planning, Community and Leisure. Further information can be found in Appendix E.



Changes to Complaints Handling 2026/27

3.15 A key area of work during 2025/26 has been preparing for compliance with the LGSCO Complaints Handling Code. Following a review of existing complaints processes and the Council's Customer Feedback Policy against the Code, a number of changes have been implemented, including:

- Reducing the Stage One response target from 20 to 10 working days.

- Introducing stricter requirements for complaint handling extensions, limited to no more than 10 working days.
- Improving arrangements for reasonable adjustments and accessibility by asking customers what support they may need.
- Strengthening third-party representation requirements through the introduction of a consent form.
- Updating website content, online forms, staff guidance, complaint templates and the Customer Feedback Policy.

3.16 The Council is required to maintain compliance with the Code and will complete an annual self-assessment to demonstrate this. The outcome will be included in the 2026/27 report.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND NOT RECOMMENDED

N/A

5. COMMENTS FROM OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY

N/A

6. POST DECISION IMPLEMENTATION

N/A

7. IMPLICATIONS OF THE DECISION

Council Key Priorities and Performance

7.1 Complaints and customer feedback link with Priority 3 within the Corporate Plan - Doing our core work well. Outcome - Delivering good quality, high value-for-money services with good control and compliance with statutory obligations.

7.2 Whilst the number of complaints received represents a small proportion of overall customer interactions, the Council recognises the value of customer feedback and remains committed to learning from complaints to improve services and outcomes for residents, as demonstrated in section 3 and Appendix A.

8. BACKGROUND PAPERS

LGSCO Complaint Handling Guidance

LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix A	Complaints by Service Area
Appendix B	LGSCO statistical information
Appendix C	LGSCO – neighbouring Authority Comparison
Appendix D	Complaint Volumes by Service – annual comparison
Appendix E	Compliments Recorded by Service

APPENDIX A – Complaints by Service Area 2025/26

Service area	Stage One	Stage Two	Total	% Upheld / Partially Upheld	Service volume / context	Key Complaint Themes	Key Learning Themes
Planning, Infrastructure and Public Protection	31	16	47	S1 - 35% S2 – 31.2%	2,782 planning decisions made; 308 enforcement cases registered.	• Delays in decision-making and responses • Dissatisfaction with planning and enforcement outcomes • Concerns about case handling and consultation processes	• Improved communication / expectation management • Strengthened processes and case management • Enhanced record-keeping • Reinforced staff awareness and training
Operations	40	4	44	S1 - 62% S2 - 50%	5,977,688 collections; 99.95% collection rate	• Missed collections • Garden waste subscriptions • Communal waste facilities • Grounds maintenance • Tree management • Officer conduct	• Improved communication / expectation management • Strengthened processes • Ensure customer-focused solutions • Increased collaboration with residents to improve local environmental outcomes.
Community and Operational Housing	20	3	23	S1 - 45% S2 – 0%	2,452 new or updated housing register applications submitted in 2025/26	• Housing delays • Disabled Facilities Grants allocation • Homelessness decisions • Temporary accommodation • ASB and environmental health case handling • Pest control and abandoned vehicle services.	• Improved communication / expectation management • Response timeliness • Decision-making • Improved internal processes • cross-service collaboration and policy/procedure review.

Service area	Stage One	Stage Two	Total	% Upheld / Partially Upheld	Service volume / context	Key Complaint Themes	Key Learning Themes
Customer Services, Revenues and Benefits	17	5	22	S1 - 53% S2 – 60%	Council Tax approx. 85,000 properties; Business Rates approx. 5,500 commercial properties. Around 8,300 benefit claims	• Benefits Assessment Delays • Entitlement decisions • Council Tax liability and discounts • Recovery and enforcement • Communication delays • Outcomes linked to the Valuation Office Agency.	• Improved communication • Staff training and awareness • Improved internal processes • Improved recording of customer needs and reasonable adjustments.
Economy, Regeneration and Housing Delivery	11	4	15	S1 - 36% S2 – 50%	n/a	• Parking enforcement • Permits and charging Parking equipment • Staff conduct • Trader permits • Pitch management Regeneration-related place-making changes.	• Improved internal processes • Improved information and guidance • Staff awareness and training • Improved partnership working to resolve issues and prevent recurrence.
Leisure and Health	11	2	13	S1 - 72% S2 – 100%	1,611,406 attendances	• Booking arrangements • Leisure facility condition and maintenance • Public space management • Accessibility • Event management • Resident/stakeholder communication.	• Improved communication • Improved internal processes and systems • Improvements to service quality standards and accessibility • Partnership working.

Service area	Stage One	Stage Two	Total	% Upheld / Partially Upheld	Service volume / context	Key Complaint Themes	Key Learning Themes
Finance and Corporate Services	4	0	4	100%	n/a	• Insurance response delays • Property damage claims • Estates response issues	• Review cases for improvement opportunities • Strengthen cross-service processes and collaboration • Reinforce timely communication and responsiveness.
Other	1	0	1	S1 - 0%	n/a	• Display of flags (The St George's flag)	• No wider learning theme identified from the information provided.
Total	**135**	**34**	**169**				

Appendix B LGSCO Local Authority Report – Huntingdonshire District Council

Complaints and Enquiries Received (by Category) 2025/2026

HDC	Benefits and Tax	Corporate and Other Services	Environment Services, Public Protection and Regulation	Planning and Development	Housing	Highways and Transport	Adult Care Services*	Total
2025/26	4	0	1	5	1	0		11
2024/25	2	1	8	8	1	1	0	21
2023/24	3	2	4	9	1	0	0	19

Complaints and Enquiries Decided (by Outcome) 2025/6

HDC	Upheld	Not upheld	Advice given	Closed after initial enquiry	Incomplete/ invalid	Referred back for local resolution	Total	Uphold rate (%)	Average uphold rate (%) of similar authorities*
2025/26	1	2	0	8	0	2	13	33%	74%
2024/25	1	0	0	10	2	4	17	6%	15%
2023/24	1	2	0	12	0	6	21	33%	63%

A number of cases will have been received and decided in different business years, this means the number of complaints and enquiries received will not always match the number of decisions made. *Uphold rate adjusted for Huntingdonshire District Council's population, this is 0.5 upheld decisions per 100,000 residents. The average for authorities of this type is 1 upheld decision per 100,000 residents. The LGO advice comparing individual council uphold rates against the average rate rather than against previous years.

Appendix C LGSCO Neighbouring Authority Statistics

Cambridgeshire Councils	Detailed investigations decided (by outcome) 2025/26		Uphold rate	Complaints and enquiries (Decided)
	Not upheld	Upheld		2025/26
Huntingdonshire (population 180,800)	**2**	**1**	**33%** (74%)	**13**
South Cambridgeshire (population 162,000)	0	1	100% (74%)	10
Fenland (population 102,500)	0	1	100% (74%)	12
East Cambridgeshire (population 87,700)	1	0	0% (74%)	2
* **Cambridge City** (population 145,700)	0	2	100% (74%)	24
Cambridgeshire County Council	2	49	96% (89%)	141
Peterborough City Council (Population 215,700)	2	8	80% (85%)	60

Cambridgeshire Insight – Population – Census 2021 – First Results

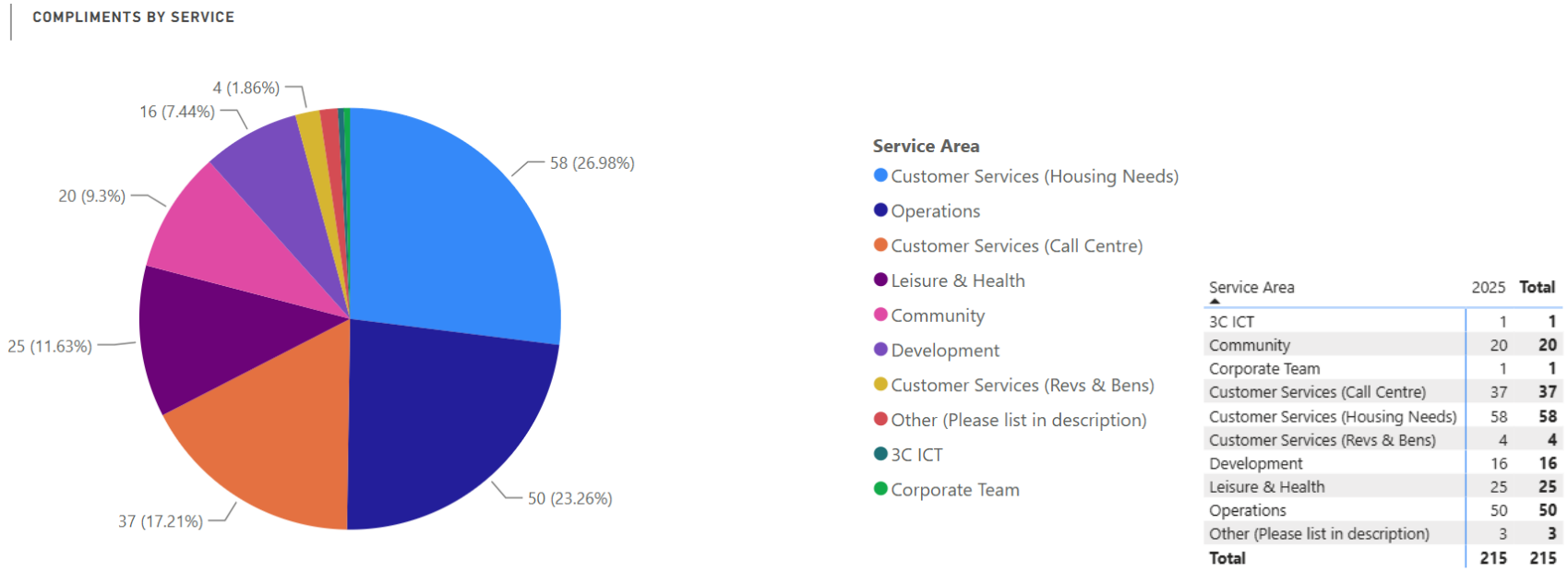
Appendix D - Complaint Volumes by Service – annual comparison

Service	Stage One			Stage Two			Total			LGO investigations		
	2023/24	2024/25	**2025/26**	2023/24	2024/25	**2025/26**	2023/24	2024/25	**2025/26**	2023/24	2024/25	**2024/25**
Community & Operational Housing	13	10	**20**	3	3	**3**	16	13	**23**			
Customer Services, Revenues & Benefits	28	30	**17**	3	5	**5**	31	35	**22**	1		**1**
Economy, Regeneration Housing Delivery	0	0	**11**	0	0	**4**	0	0	**15**			
Planning, Infrastructure & Public Protection	50	41	**31**	10	16	**16**	60	57	**47**	2		**1**
Operations	98	131	**40**	15	16	**4**	113	147	**44**			**1**
Finance & Resources	5	6	**4**	1	1	**0**	6	7	**4**		1	
Leisure and Health	10	4	**11**	1	1	**2**	11	5	**13**			
Shared Services 3CICT/building control/Legal	0	2	**0**	0	0	0	0	2	**0**			
Other (cross cutting)	2	0	**1**	0	0	0	2	0	**1**			
Total	206	224	**135**	33	42	**34**	239	266	**169**	3	1	**3**

Recent changes in Service structure:

Community & Operational Housing includes Housing, Resident Advice, Community Resilience.	**Customer Services, Revenues & Benefits** includes Council Tax, Benefits, and Customer Services/Call Centre, Fraud.	**Economy, Regeneration, Housing Delivery** includes Economic Development, Parking, Markets, Regeneration, Housing Delivery
Planning, Infrastructure & Public Protection includes Planning, Environmental Health, Licensing.	**Leisure & Health** includes One Leisure, Active Lifestyles, Parks, Open Spaces & Environment.	**Finance & Resources** includes Property & Facilities, Insurance, HR, Finance, Democratic Services, Audit.

Appendix E – Compliments received by Service – 2025/26



Service Area	2025	Total
3C ICT	1	**1**
Community	20	**20**
Corporate Team	1	**1**
Customer Services (Call Centre)	37	**37**
Customer Services (Housing Needs)	58	**58**
Customer Services (Revs & Bens)	4	**4**
Development	16	**16**
Leisure & Health	25	**25**
Operations	50	**50**
Other (Please list in description)	3	**3**
Total	**215**	**215**

Compliments Recived by year, vs Complaints

	2025/26	2024/25	2023/24	2022/23	2021/22
Compliments Received	215	217	206	233	276
Complaints Received	135	224	206	175	233