



OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Notice of a Meeting, to be held in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford, TN23 1PL on **Tuesday, 29th April, 2025 at 7.00 pm.**

The Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee are: -

Councillor Chilton (Chair)
Councillor Ledger (Vice-Chair)

Cllrs. Arnold, Bartlett, N Bell, Feacey, Gathern, Giles, McGeever, Michael, Shilton,
and Labour Vacancy

Agenda

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To receive Notification of Substitutes in accordance with Procedure Rule 1.2 (c)	
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To declare any interests, which fall under the following categories, as explained on the attached document:	
a) Disclosable Pecuniary Interests (DPI)	
b) Other Significant Interests (OSI)	
c) Voluntary Announcements of Other Interests	
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17 April 2025

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Declarations of Interest (see also “Advice to Members” below)

- (a) **Disclosable Pecuniary Interests (DPI)** under the Localism Act 2011, relating to items on this agenda. The nature as well as the existence of any such interest must be declared, and the agenda item(s) to which it relates must be stated.

A Member who declares a DPI in relation to any item will need to leave the meeting for that item (unless a relevant Dispensation has been granted).

- (b) **Other Significant Interests (OSI)** under the Kent Code of Conduct relating to items on this agenda. The nature as well as the existence of any such interest must be declared, and the agenda item(s) to which it relates must be stated.

A Member who declares an OSI in relation to any item will need to leave the meeting before the debate and vote on that item (unless a relevant Dispensation has been granted).

However, prior to leaving, the Member may address the Committee in the same way that a member of the public may do so.

- (c) **Voluntary Announcements of Other Interests** not required to be disclosed under (a) and (b), i.e. announcements made for transparency alone, such as:

- Membership of amenity societies, Town/Community/Parish Councils, residents' groups or other outside bodies that have expressed views or made representations, but the Member was not involved in compiling or making those views/representations, or
- Where a Member knows a person involved, but does not have a close association with that person, or
- Where an item would affect the well-being of a Member, relative, close associate, employer, etc. but not his/her financial position.

[Note: Where an item would be likely to affect the financial position of a Member, relative, close associate, employer, etc.; OR where an item is an application made by a Member, relative, close associate, employer, etc., there is likely to be an OSI or in some cases a DPI. ALSO, holding a committee position/office within an amenity society or other outside body, or having any involvement in compiling/making views/representations by such a body, may give rise to a perception of bias and require the Member to take no part in any motion or vote.]

Advice to Members on Declarations of Interest:

- (a) Government Guidance on DPI is available in DCLG's Guide for Councillors, at https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/5962/2193362.pdf
- (b) The Kent Code of Conduct was adopted by the Full Council on 19 July 2012, and a copy can be found in the Constitution alongside the Council's Good Practice Protocol for Councillors dealing with Planning Matters. See <https://www.ashford.gov.uk/media/2098/z-word5-democratic-services-constitution-2019-constitution-of-abc-may-2019-part-5.pdf>
- (c) Where a Member declares a committee position or office within, or membership of, an outside body that has expressed views or made representations, this will be taken as a statement that the Member was not involved in compiling or making them and has retained an open mind on the item(s) in question. If this is not the case, the situation must be explained.

If any Member has any doubt about any interest which he/she may have in any item on this agenda, he/she should seek advice from the Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer, or from other Solicitors in Legal and Democracy as early as possible, and in advance of the Meeting.

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Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of a Meeting of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee held in Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford on the **25th February 2025**.

Present:

Cllr. Chilton (Chair)

Cllr. Ledger (Vice-chair)

Cllrs. Arnold, Bartlett, Feacey, Gathern, Giles, McGeever, Michael, Shilton, Suddards.

In accordance with Procedure Rule 1.2(c), Cllr C Suddards attended as Substitute Member for Labour Vacancy.

Apology:

Cllr. Walder.

In attendance:

Cllrs. Betty, Nilsson

Assistant Director of Environment, Property & Recreation, Head of Policy & Performance, Safety and Wellbeing Manager, Commercial Portfolio Operations Manager, Interim Estates Officer, Specialist Valuer, Senior Estates Officer, Estates Officer, Specialist Management Support Officer (Safety and Wellbeing), Senior Governance & Data Protection Officer, Democratic Services & Ombudsman Liaison Officer.

Also in attendance virtually:

Cllrs. N. Bell, Hayward.

320 Declarations of Interest

Councillor	Interest	Minute No.
Feacey	Made a Voluntary Announcement that he was Chair of the Ashford Volunteer Centre, Ashford International Development Company and Vice – Chair of the Ashford Heritage & Memorial Charitable Foundation.	323 and 324

321 Minutes

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of this Committee held on the 28th January 2025 be approved and confirmed as a correct record.

322 Corporate Performance Report Q3

The Senior Governance & Data Protection Officer introduced the report, which summarised performance against the Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) reflecting the Borough Plan 2024-2028.

The report was opened up to the Committee and the following responses were given to questions/comments: -

- A Member welcomed the programme for improvements to play areas. He also queried why the recycling rate had fallen to 46%. It was clarified that the rate was accumulative, and the drop occurred during the transition period when the contractor changed. It had since risen to 50%.
- A further request asking for restaurants to remove their 5-star rating on display in windows, after being downgraded for hygiene ratings, would be passed onto the Food Hygiene Team.
- New businesses were required to provide Green Travel Plans by the Planning Team and CP_KPI_06 was a measure currently being reviewed.
- A query was raised regarding Electric Vehicle Charging Points and whether the rate of charge was sufficient. It was confirmed that the chargers were installed to match the electrical supply, and the points in the Borough were a mixture of 7, 15 and 22 kw. An on-street project in collaboration with KCC was at the consultation stage and this would create a further 26 charging points.
- A written response would be sought in response to a query about increasing the scope of the Beacon Centre and the ZED PODS in relation to services for rough sleepers/homeless people.

Resolved:

That the report be received and noted.

323 Safeguarding Annual Report

The Safety & Wellbeing Manager introduced the report, which detailed the work undertaken to meet the Council's safeguarding obligations and activities that the Council had participated in or organised, in conjunction with external partners.

The report was opened up to the Committee and the following responses were given to questions/comments: -

- In response to a question about domestic abuse housing accreditation training and how many staff were already trained, the Safety and Wellbeing Manager explained that 96% of staff were compliant with level 1. Level 2 was for managers or people that worked in frontline roles within the organisation, and the training for that was face to face and delivered twice a year. The next training event was scheduled for March, after which a higher number of staff would be trained to level 2. Several Officers were meeting next week to provide a strategic overview of the accreditation process including training.
- The Chair referred to the Safeguarding Lead Officers Group and how the Officers that fulfilled all the functions were doing so on a volunteer basis. He queried whether this was a satisfactory position to be in and asked Members if they felt that ABC should be looking to allocate some more resource to this to give the Officers sufficient amount of time to undertake that role competently, and recompense them accordingly. Members agreed and spoke about the importance of clearly defined parameters of the safeguarding role and that Officers should be fairly remunerated for it. They considered what the views were from the safeguarding team and CSU. The Safety and Wellbeing Manager outlined the work that she and her colleagues undertook in relation to safeguarding and the reviews and checks that were undertaken throughout the year. The Officers specialised in the fields they were in and she felt that ABC had a good oversight in relation to how they responded to and managed safeguarding referrals. The type of referral would determine the level of involvement e.g. in cases concerning children, ABC would tend to make the referral but would not have a lot of involvement further from that point inwards because the referral would likely transfer to a child protection environment. ABC may be invited to attend meetings in relation to some cases, particularly if a housing issue was identified and the majority of ABC referrals were in relation to adults. A further point was made around responsibility and accountability, and that if anything were to go wrong, who would be held to account.
- A further query was raised regarding DBS checks for Councillors and the Committee discussed the option to make a recommendation to Cabinet. Members were informed that the HR Team oversaw that DBS Checking process and so it would be prudent to obtain a response from the HR team. A Member noted his surprise that Councillors were not automatically DBS checked and had to arrange their own.
- In response to a query around Martyn's Law (which required public venues to prepare for and protect against terrorist attacks) the Safety & Wellbeing Manager confirmed that she was attending a conference the following day, and would have more information after that conference.
- There were numerous reasons for the increase in the number of referrals. Improvements to the IT system had made processing of referrals easier and training enabled staff to be more alert to safeguarding issues. The cost of living crisis also continued to have an impact on safeguarding as there were continuing financial pressures on families.

- **Recommended:**
 - i) **That Cabinet consider looking at a form of DBS check for Members**
 - ii) **That Cabinet consider the appropriate compensation levels and formalisation of the current voluntary safeguarding roles**

324 Council Commercial Portfolio Update

The Assistant Director of Environment, Property & Recreation introduced this item, advising that the team had taken a lot of time and effort to put the report together. She introduced a few new members of the team which included the Surveyor, Senior Estates Officer and Estates Officer.

The report was opened up to the Committee and the following responses were given to questions/comments: -

- In response to a question around what could be done with the land associated with unused garages, it was explained that a garage commercialisation strategy was put forward to Cabinet a few years prior and some had already been developed, whilst others were awaiting a Stodmarsh solution. Some sites were awaiting demolition to put units on for storage, and there were specific locations linked to housing sites that were worth retaining for ground source heat pump installation.
- The importance of considering the impact of displacing traffic and putting residential roads under immense pressure when removing garages was noted.
- A Member spoke about the concept of divesting some assets to Town or Parish Councils, and whether that was a process that ABC should consider. It was confirmed that condition surveys were being undertaken across the portfolios and they would help to form the planned maintenance programme, so that the budgets could be managed effectively moving forward. Additionally, the team would review some of those assets, and assess whether they met the aspirations of the Council and what they offered in terms of community value. Consideration would then be given to the amount of maintenance spend on that resource against the return value. It was anticipated that there would be some difficult decisions coming forward to Cabinet regarding those community assets and the financial pressure of retaining them. The Chair added that the Committee should recommend to Cabinet or to whomever the decisions were made that where an asset was being considered for disposal, the Ward Member must also be consulted.
- There was a query about the terms and conditions for the units at Elwick place. The next ERIAC meeting on 8th April would examine a strategy to move forward with current proposals and arrange tenants in place.
- Restrictions were in place on the Designer Outlet to ensure certain eateries were not duplicated from the Town Centre.

- The installation of solar panels at Ellingham Industrial Estate was discussed, and consideration was being given to hopefully offer tenants a better deal for their electricity, rather than taking it from the grid which would be a good incentive.
- There was some discussion around the failure of new startup businesses at Elwick Place and the Assistant Director of Environment, Property & Recreation highlighted the importance of the risk assessment undertaken for new businesses and whether prospective tenants had a strong covenant or not. This would also be discussed at the ERIAC meeting on 8th April to ensure informed decisions were made before executing any lease on that site.
- A Member spoke about the potential large financial liability that raising commercial sites to EPC rating A or B by 2030 would create for the Council. It was explained that many of the sites at Ellingham Industrial Estate were currently EPC rated E and D. The project to re-roof the units included PV installation and upgrades to insulation. Those units would then move to an EPC rating of B and tenants would then not have to experience further disruption later down the line. This would result in a marked difference to the EPC registers and that commitment in terms of funds had already been signed off by Cabinet.

Recommended:

- i) **That there is an update to the Garage Commercialisation strategy**
- ii) **To produce a written protocol stating that an initial consultation be held with the Ward Member for assets that are being considered for disposal**

325 Schedule of Key Cabinet Decisions

Resolved:

That the report be received and noted.

326 Work Programme and Tracker

The Chair introduced this item and the following points/comments were raised:

- A paper was being developed for Cabinet regarding the Tank in the Town Centre, so that would not need to be included on the Work Tracker.
- A Member said that at the previous Committee meeting, Section 106 monies were put forward as a topic to be added to the Tracker. The Head of Policy & Performance explained that a review of S106 monies had been undertaken a couple of years ago, and she would send that report on to Members. The Committee had reviewed the Section 106 process, and the planning team had subsequently fed back on all of the queries raised. Therefore, if it were to be put through the matrix again, it most likely would be highlighted as one that had been reviewed in recent years.

OSC

25.02.25

Resolved:

That the report be received and noted.

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Agenda Item No:

Report To: O&S/Cabinet

Date of Meeting: 29 April 2025/8th May 2025

Report Title: Corporate Complaints 2024/2025

Report Author: Michelle Pecci

Job Title:

Portfolio Holder: Heather Hayward, Portfolio Holder for Performance and

Portfolio Holder for: Direction

Summary:

This is the first report presented to Cabinet that outlines the complaints received corporately during the financial year from 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025.

The report details the number of complaints, the reasons for those complaints, the timescales for handling them and the associated staff and financial costs.

It is a requirement of our Complaints Handling Policy that this information is reported to Cabinet annually and reported on the council's website.

Key Decision: NO

Significantly Affected Wards:

Recommendations: **The Cabinet is recommended to: -**

- I. Note and comment on the Corporate Complaints 2024/2025 report.**

Policy Overview: The recently agreed Corporate Complaints Policy requires us to report to Cabinet annually on to publish performance on our website.

Financial

Implications:

Legal Implications:

Text agreed by [title of Legal Officer] on [date]

Equalities Impact Assessment:

Not required as this is a monitoring report.

Data Protection Impact

Assessment:	Not necessary as no large scale data processing carried out in the development of this report.
Risk Assessment (Risk Appetite Statement):	The council has a low risk appetite to compliance risks. Ensuring complaints are effectively handled has many benefits to us as service providers. It saves time, money and improves the customer experience. It also ensures we are compliant with the Ombudsman's Code and associated guidance.
Sustainability Implications:	None.
Other Material Implications:	
Exempt from Publication:	NO
Background Papers:	Housing Complaints Reports - The Housing Service reports on complaints performance in a separate report to ensure compliance with the Housing Ombudsman Handling Code, but this report will include data on housing complaints too in order to provide an overall picture of complaints received by Ashford Borough Council.
Contact:	
	Michelle.pecci@ashford.gov.uk – Tel: (01233) 330602

Report Title: Corporate Complaints 2024/2025

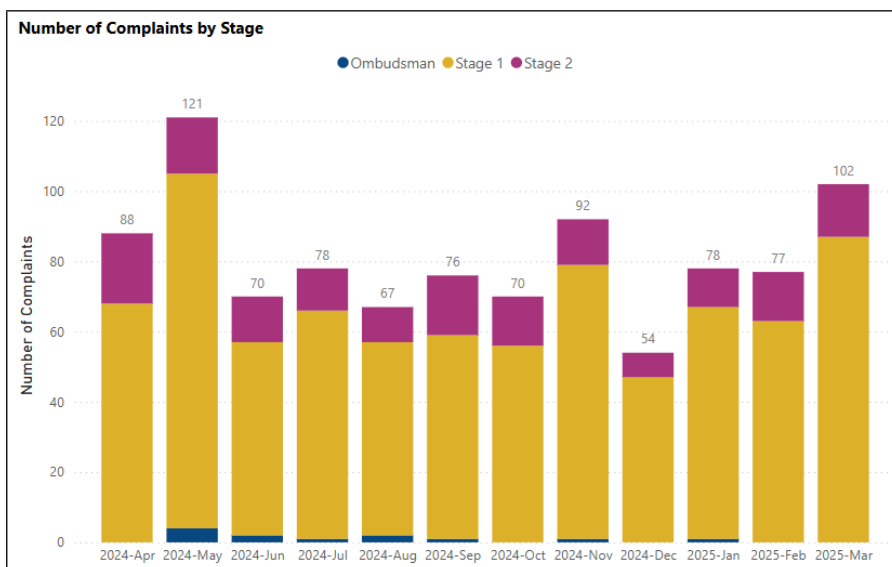
Introduction and Background

1. In March 2025 the Council adopted an updated Complaints Handling Policy that aligned with the guidance by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman and is consistent with mandatory Housing Ombudsman Handling Code.
2. The new policy identifies the council’s Cabinet as the governing body with oversight for the Complaints Handling Policy and requires performance for the previous financial year being reported to Cabinet by the end of June each year.
3. The Housing Service reports on complaints performance in a separate report to ensure compliance with the Housing Ombudsman Handling Code, but this report will include data on housing complaints too in order to provide an overall picture of complaints received by Ashford Borough Council.

Complaints 2024/2025

Complaints received

4. Between 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2025 received a total of 973 complaints, 82% of these were resolved at stage one (799 complaints) with 162 resolved at stage two. Twelve complaints were escalated to the Ombudsman during this period. 70% of complaints were considered justified or partially justified.
5. The table below provides a summary of complaint by stage for each month of 2024/25.



Complaints by Service

6. The tables below show the number and percentage of complaints by service, together with an indication of the service size as a percentage of headcount. This comparison is provided as context to the proportion of complaints to size of service area, but it should be noted that services with greater public-facing scope will attract a larger number of complaints.

Directorate/Service	Complaints	Percentage
⊕ Housing	629	64.65%
⊕ Environment Property and Recreation	226	23.23%
⊕ Planning and Development	52	5.34%
⊕ Finance	40	4.11%
⊕ People Communications and Technology	14	1.44%
⊕ Port Health	5	0.51%
⊕ Multiple or No Specific Service	4	0.41%
⊕ Legal and Democracy	2	0.21%
⊕ Development	1	0.10%
Total	973	100.00%

Port Health	24%
Housing	23%
Environment, Property & Recreation	15%
People Communications and Technology	10%
Planning & Development	9%
Finance	9%
Legal & Democracy	4%
Development	2%
Economic Development	2%
Policy and Performance	1%
Chief Executive and Support	1%

Reasons for complaints

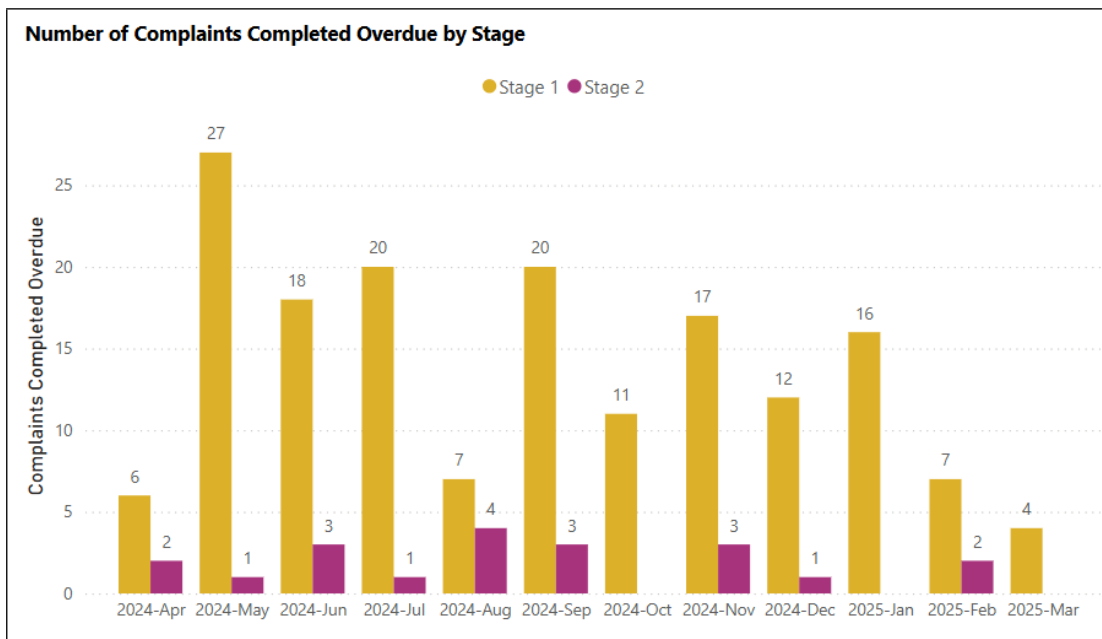
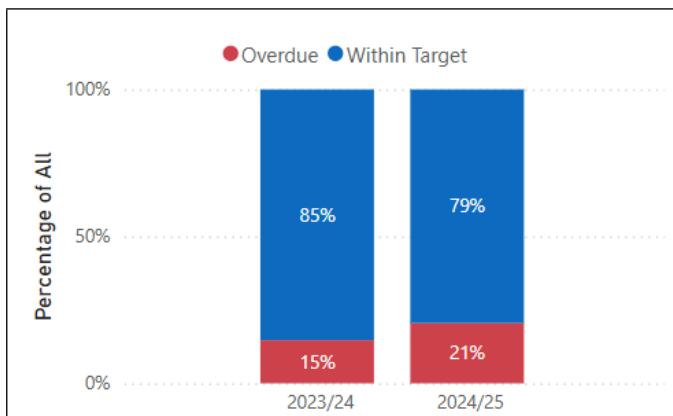
7. The next table provides the top 20 reasons for complaints in this period; the most common reasons being service failure, Timescale to deal with issues, and third party contractor. Some complaints were for multiple reasons and could fall into a number of categories.
8. As context, during Q1 2024/25 we experienced difficulties with our new waste contract which resulted in a peak of complaints in Q1 and Q2 about service failure and time taken to deal with issues. The final two quarters of the year have much improved figures.
9. Housing results for the largest number of complaints, this service is complex and has been subject to considerable, well reported, change and challenges this year, both in the HRA (repairs/landlord services) and General Fund, especially in relation to homelessness.
10. Planning and Development have had a third highest level of complaints, and over a third of these (36.5%) relate to 'inappropriate planning decision', there are other routes by which to appeal about these complaints but it is necessary to record and respond to complaints of this nature to ensure that wider issues are not lost through the proper appeal processes.

Top 20 Reasons for complaints

	2024/25 Q1	2024/25 Q2	2024/25 Q3	2024/25 Q4	Total
Complaint Reason	Number of Complaints	Number of Complaints	Number of Complaints	Number of Complaints	Number of Complaints
Service failure	126	51	13	12	202
Timescales to deal with issues	67	42	27	26	162
3rd party contractor	24	33	41	39	137
Policy/procedures	37	37	28	21	123
Service Standards		7	38	21	66
Miscellaneous	21	26	10	7	64
Heating/Hot Water		2	20	36	58
Staff attitude	17	21	9	10	57
Windows/Doors		8	23	22	53
Length of time waited	22	22	2	5	51
Damp/Mould		3	25	17	45
Staff error	14	12	10	6	42
Plumbing		4	22	7	33
Inaccurate information	9	3	4	11	27
Anti-social Behaviour		1	13	11	25
Loss of service	12	5	4	2	23
Inappropriate planning decision	3	4	9	3	19
Plastering		3	9	7	19
Roofing		4	12	2	18
Kitchens		1	8	6	15

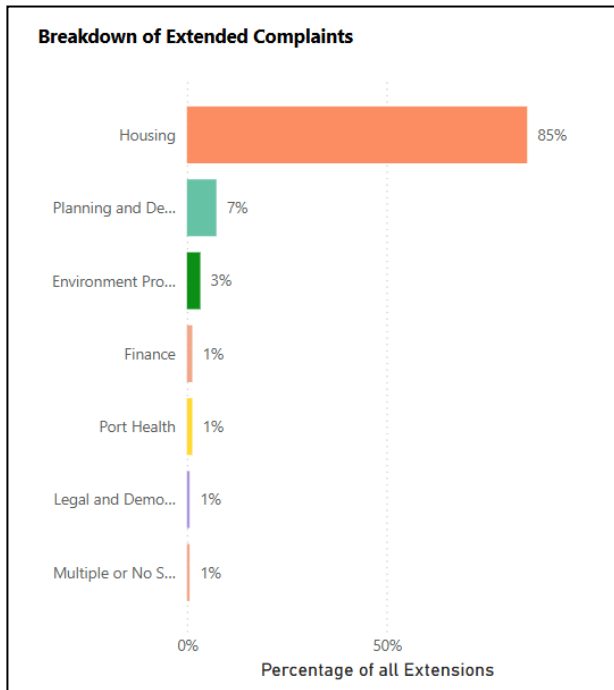
Complaints that were completed outside of specified timescale

11. The complaints policy requires us to respond to all Stage One complaints within 10 days, and Stage Two complaints within 20 days of receipt. Extensions to time a permitted for a number of limited reasons (e.g. the need to obtain information from third parties, complexity of the issues involved or the scale of complaint necessitating additional time). Where an extension of time is approved it is recorded as completed on time.
12. The first table below shows the number of complaints responded to within the target, and that were overdue, and the second table shows a breakdown per month for the 2024/25 reporting period.
13. A key reason for the higher numbers of overdue complaints at the start of the 2024/25 year is because proportionately there was a higher number of complaints received at that time. Staff were getting used to the introduction of new shorter timescales for all complaints; previously just housing had to adhere to 10 days for stage one, all other complaints to the council were dealt with in 15 days, this was revised in advance of the Complaints Handling Policy being adopted in April 2025 to improve the service complainants received more widely and to ensure consistency of treatment across all our customers.



Deadline extensions

14. As highlighted above, there are circumstances where a timescale can be extended. It is important to review the level of these extensions otherwise the set timescale becomes meaningless if all complaints are extended.
15. Extensions are permitted when there is a need to obtain information from third parties, if the complexity of the issues involved or the scale of complaint is such it is not possible to achieve the timescales. 2024/25 saw 16% of complaints having their timescales for response extended the table below shows which service areas had permitted time extensions.



Costs of complaints

16. In most instances when something has gone wrong there will be a range of remedies available, from written apologies to changing decisions, revising policies and other corrective or remedial actions.
17. There are occasions where a financial remedy is necessary. It is important that we have oversight of the level and frequency of financial remedy to ensure that payments are justified and not being made in lieu of corrective action for other customers.
18. It is also important to learn lessons to prevent further similar complaints to reduce the amount of time officer's spend responding to complaints. The table below shows both the value of financial remedies provided during the year and the cost of the officer time spent responding to complaints (officer costs are based on median pay rate for the typical officer responding to stage one, and stage two complaints).
19. In 2024/25 Housing complaints account for the 78% of the total payments and officer costs. This has been particularly high this year following the introduction of the new Housing Ombudsman Code, making it more transparent how to complain, and there have been many well reported challenges with the housing repairs service. It is encouraging to see that Q4 for this reporting period figures are reducing, this is encouraging as this was not the trend in the previous year.

Financial Year	Value of Payments	Employee Hours	Total Estimated Cost
2023/24	£15,059	£26,085	£41,144
2023/24 Q1	£2,986	£8,283	£11,269
2023/24 Q2	£2,705	£5,792	£8,497
2023/24 Q3	£2,285	£5,828	£8,113
2023/24 Q4	£7,083	£6,182	£13,265
2024/25	£26,778	£44,935	£71,713
2024/25 Q1	£7,803	£11,386	£19,189
2024/25 Q2	£5,874	£10,105	£15,979
2024/25 Q3	£8,584	£12,915	£21,499
2024/25 Q4	£4,517	£10,529	£15,046

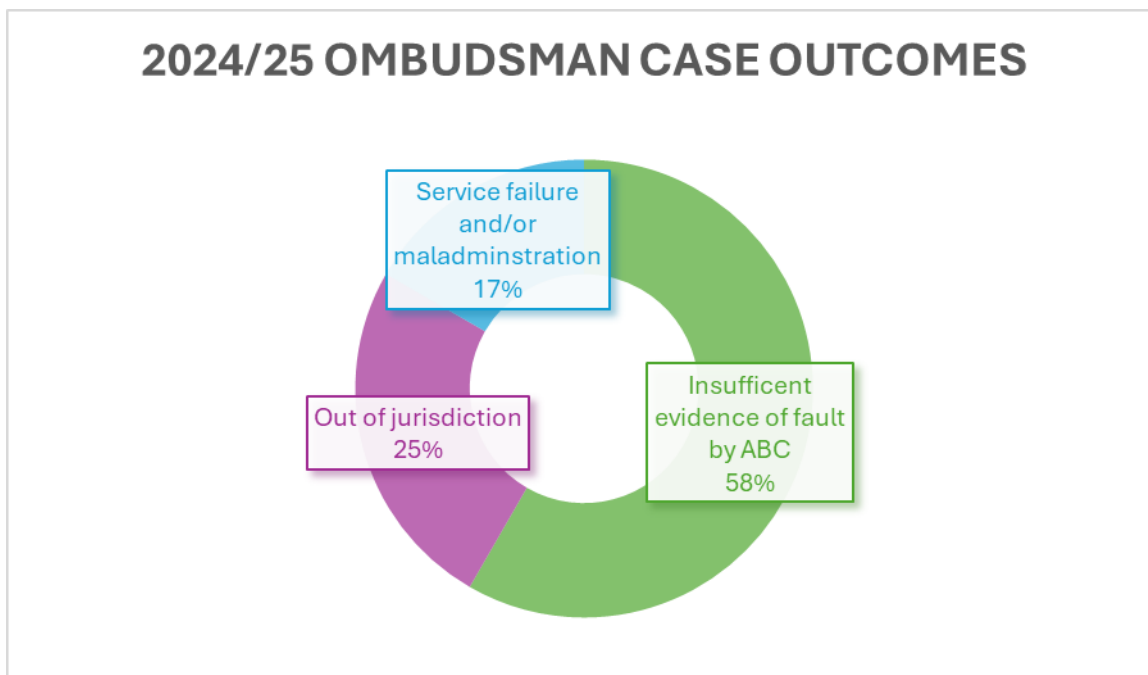
Ombudsman complaints

20. Ombudsman complaints are the final stage of our complaints process, where the complainant remains dissatisfied with our stage 1/stage 2 response. Cases referred to the Ombudsman vary in nature with some being determined quickly, whilst others are more complex investigations and can remain open for more than one year. Therefore, we will report on the number of current open cases to provide a picture of the volume of reporting and those where the Ombudsman has made a decision following their investigation.
21. Previously, complaints referred to the Ombudsman for the proceeding council year were reported to the Standards Committee in the first quarter of each calendar year. Going forward, Ombudsman cases will form part of this report to Overview and Scrutiny and Cabinet to avoid duplication and reduce the time between the year end and performance being reported. Due to this change, a report for 2023/24 was not made to the Standards Committee but a summary is provided here along with 2024/25 performance.

Ombudsman complaints 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025

22. In total, there were 25 investigations opened by the Ombudsman between **1st April 2024 and 31st March 2025**.
23. Of the 25 cases, 12 cases were determined/closed. Of those closed cases, two cases were upheld (had a finding in the complainant's favour) by the Housing Ombudsman and none by the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO). The remaining 10 closed cases were not investigated due to insufficient evidence /no fault found or because it was out of the Ombudsman jurisdiction. 13 cases were still open as of 31 March 2025 (one LGSCO and 12 Housing).
24. Of the upheld cases, the first related to the council's landlord responsibilities and how it responded to reports of repairs and maintenance problems.
25. The second upheld case related to the council's landlord responsibilities regarding the handling of reports of damp, mould and related works.

26. The Ombudsman's orders and recommendations to improve service we provide were implemented in full.



Ombudsman complaints 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024

27. In total there were 23 investigations opened by the Ombudsman between 1st April 2023 and 31st March 24.
28. Of those 23 cases, 15 were determined/closed by the Ombudsman. Of those closed cases, 2 were upheld by the LGSCO and 1 case was upheld by the Housing Ombudsman. The remaining 12 complaints were not investigated.
29. The first LGSCO upheld case related to the council's Planning and Development Service but no recommendations were made as the council had already provided remedial action.
30. The second LGSCO upheld case related to how the council had dealt with a complaint about anti-social behaviour.
31. The third case upheld was a matter relating to housing lettings. The Council was found to be at fault in the handling of a homelessness application as the Council did not take note of the applicant's full circumstances.
32. The Ombudsman's orders and recommendations to improve the services we provide were implemented in full.

Performance improvement measures

33. Management team receive six monthly updates on complaint performance, a number of ongoing activities result from these discussions including ensuring that complaints are monitored at the service level in departmental meetings,

and lessons learned are documented and implemented. There are improvements in processes where complaints are discussed as part of contract performance meetings. There is internal communication, briefings and updates on complaints for staff.

34. This year a new complaint management system has been rolled out, and this has enabled us to review and amending procedures, ensuring consistency of application of the policy so that the record more accurately reflect the complaints we receive.
35. Services also review the outcomes of complaints investigated by the ombudsman to identify systemic issues and to implement corrective action to prevent similar incidents in the future.
36. Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) on complaints are reported through the Corporate Performance Report to the Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny Committee quarterly. The KPIs keep a regular check on how well the council is doing in meeting its 10 day target for responding to stage 1 complaints and the 20 day target for stage 2 complaints. The number of complaints are also reported on.
37. From 2025/26, this [new] report will be overseen by the Cabinet as the specified governing body in by June each year, and a more detailed drill down on the Housing complaints will travel with this report each year too. Performance of complaints will be reported on the council's website.

Conclusion

38. The Cabinet are the specified governing body for overseeing the application of the Complaints Handling Policy, adopted at the March 2025 Cabinet meeting. This first annual report shows a high number of complaints in key areas reflecting a number of challenges experienced throughout the year.
39. The early peak in the number complaints received as a result of issues in housing and waste inevitably led to resourcing issues as the peak was addressed, this resulted in a number of overdue complaints. The complaint numbers are levelling off and indications are that this will continue.
40. Regular reporting to Management team continues to ensure a culture of learning from complaints and provides further oversight on complaint performance.

Portfolio Holder's Views

41. To be given at the meetings.

Contact and Email

Michelle Pecci- michelle.pecci@ashford.gov.uk 01233 330602

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Work Programme 2024 to 2025

Report Title	Date due to O&S	Reporting Service	Scope of what is to be scrutinised
O&S Annual Report	June 2024	Policy and Performance	A report to summarise the work undertaken by the Committee during the last municipal year.
Waste Collection Service	June 2024	Environment, Property and Recreation	A report to provide information on the rollout of the new Waste Collection Service be bought to the Committee.
Annual Sickness Report	July 2024	HR, Customer Services, Communications and Digitalisation	A report providing the Committee with annual sickness information for the recent year.
Annual Performance Report	July 2024	Policy and Performance	A report to summarise the council's performance during the last municipal year.
Corporate Performance Report Q1	17 September 2024	Policy and Performance	Quarterly Performance Report in relation to Quarter 1. Information on what the Council has achieved through its decision making; key performance data and wider contextual information.
Planning performance and Arcus update	17 September 2024	Planning	Update on Arcus following scrutiny in 2023/24 and review of planning performance around backlog cases.
Budget Scrutiny Task Group Membership	17 September 2024	Policy and Performance	An item to agree Membership for the Budget Scrutiny Task Group.

Ashford Cinema	17 September 2024 following an all Member Briefing the same night starting at 6pm	Environment, Property and Recreation	To provide an overview of the Ashford Cinema arrangements and update the Committee on progress to date.
Waste contract implementation update	26 November 2024	Environment, Property and Recreation	An update on the performance and communication of the waste contract implementation.
Corporate Performance Report Q2	26 November 2024	Policy and Performance	Quarterly Performance Report in relation to Quarter 2. Information on what the Council has achieved through its decision making; key performance data and wider contextual information.
Community Safety Update	26 November 2024	Environment, Property and Recreation	An annual report will be brought forward to provide an update on Community Safety.
Budget Scrutiny Meetings 2025/26 Via Teams	December 2024 to January 2025	Finance, IT and Digital	Budget Scrutiny Meetings 2025/26
Final Report of the Budget Scrutiny Task Group	28 January 2025	Finance, IT and Digital	A final report and findings from the annual Budget Scrutiny Task Group will be submitted, including any recommendations for consideration by Cabinet.
Council Commercial Portfolio Update	25 February 2025	Environment, Property, and Recreation	The Budget Scrutiny Task Group recommended that a report is brought forward to provide an update on the results of the condition survey of the Councils Commercial Portfolio, and how this will inform future repairs and maintenance programmes and disposal strategy.
Safeguarding Update	25 February 2025	Environment, Property and Recreation	Annual update to the committee on the council's work on safeguarding adults and children at risk.
Corporate Performance Report Q3	25 February 2025	Policy and Performance	Quarterly Performance Report in relation to Quarter 3. Information on what the Council has achieved through its decision making; key performance data and wider contextual information.

Corporate & Housing complaints performance/update	April 2025	Housing/ Customer Services	To receive a report on the council's complaints performance in line with the Ombudsman's Code.
Annual Performance Report	June 2025	Policy and Performance	A report to summarise the council's performance during the last municipal year.
O&S Annual Report	June 2025	Policy and Performance	A report to summarise the work undertaken by the Committee during the last municipal year.
Allocations Policy	July 2025	Housing	Consideration of the draft Policy in advance of Cabinet.
Housing Compliance update	July 2025	Housing	An update on progress made towards compliance following the Housing Regulator's C3 statutory judgement in August 24.
Annual Sickness Report	July 2025	HR, Customer Services, Communications and Digitalisation	Performance report of the council's annual sickness.
Hybrid Working	July 2025	HR, Customer Services, Communications and Digitalisation	Topic suggested in 2023/24 Following the report received in early 2024, Members requested that the Committee revisited the topic in 12 months' time, as the Council would then have moved to International House and working patterns may have changed once again.
Enforcement Review	TBC	Environment, Property and Recreation	The findings of the enforcement review will be brought forward to the Committee once the review has concluded.
Planning response times for commercial premises	TBC	Planning/Economic Development	How we process planning applications from businesses to ensure economic development objectives for the borough are achieved.
Tenant Satisfaction	September/October (then six-monthly)	Housing/ Customer Services	Tenant satisfaction performance report.

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