

Joint Audit and Governance Committee



Report of Director of Corporate Services Author: Sally Truman Telephone: 07717271893 Textphone: 18001 07717271893 E-mail: sally.truman@southandvale.gov.uk	
Cabinet member responsible: Mike Giles Tel: 07586 686315 E-mail: Mike.Giles@southoxon.gov.uk To: Joint Audit and Governance Committee DATE: 7 July 2026	Cabinet member responsible: Lucy Edwards Tel: 07718123061 E-mail: lucy.edwards@whitehorsedc.gov.uk

Annual Complaints Report 2025-2026

Recommendations:

1. That the committee notes:
 - (a) the formal complaints received in 2025-26 and the councils' performance in responding to complaints against timescales set out in our Corporate Complaints Policy and Procedure, as shown in **Appendix 1**
 - (b) the complaints received by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman relating to the councils in 2025-26, as shown in **Appendix 2**
 - (c) the councils' self-assessment as required by the Housing Ombudsman code of practice, as shown in **Appendix 3**
 - (d) the revised Corporate Complaints Policy and Procedure as set out in **Appendix 4**
2. That the committee agrees its formal response to the annual report and the Housing Ombudsman self-assessment as set out in **Appendix 5**.

Implications (further detail within the report)	Financial	Legal	Climate and Ecological	Equality and diversity
	No	Yes	No	No
Signing off officer		Nick Bennett		Mark Minion

Purpose of Report

1. The purpose of this report is to provide a review of formal complaints the councils' received during 2025-26 which were considered under the corporate complaints' procedure. This report is one mechanism by which our complaints-handling processes are scrutinised and staff responding to formal complaints are held to account in accordance with current good practice.
2. This year's report includes additional reporting on measures recommended by the Ombudsmen; this includes type of complaint, complaint outcomes and examples of lessons learned.
3. Each year the councils must complete a self-assessment against the Housing Ombudsman (HO) Statutory Code of Practice, and this is included for information.
4. Amendments have been made to the councils' Corporate Complaints Policy and Procedure in accordance with recommendations made by the HO following a review of our policy. The revised policy is included for information.

Strategic Objectives

5. This report sets out how the councils respond to and are adapting their processes to ensure that we continue to do so in line with best practice on complaints handling. More importantly where complaints are upheld this can lead to positive changes in how we provide services to our residents and other partners. It therefore underpins all the councils' respective Council Plan objectives and principles; and makes a specific contribution to *Working openly, transparently, responsibly, and in partnership* (Vale of White Horse) and *Participation, accessibility and accountability* (South Oxfordshire).

Background

6. In early 2024, both the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) and the HO published new Codes of Practice in relation to handling of formal complaints. The HO code is a statutory code meaning that the councils, as social landlords, must comply with its provisions. The LGSCO code is discretionary, however it sets out current good practice on complaint handling, with very similar provisions to the statutory HO code and the councils have adopted it as such.

Complaints and Compliments in 2025-26

7. The number of complaints received by each council during 2025-26 is set out below, with further detail included at **Appendix 1**.

South Oxfordshire District Council

8. During 2025-26, South Oxfordshire District Council received 93 stage one complaints, which is a decrease of six on the previous year. The noticeable difference is the decrease in stage one complaints received by Finance from 58 in 2024-25 to 48 in 2025-26. The number of complaints referred onwards to stage two has more than doubled from 14 in 2024-25 to 30 in 2025-26. Complaints relating to Planning showed the most significant increase, from 7 stage twos in 2024-25 to 14 in 2025-26, followed by Finance from 3 in 2024-25 to 9 in 2025-26.
9. We achieved the target response times for 80 percent of stage one responses and 63 percent of stage twos, with 19 stage one responses (20%) and 10 stage twos (37%) not meeting the target response times.

Vale of White Horse District Council

10. Vale of White Horse District Council has seen a decrease in stage one complaints in 2025-26, with 66 registered at stage one compared to 99 in 2024-25 (a decrease of 33%). The noticeable difference is the decrease in complaints received by Finance from 58 in 2024-25 to 44 in 2025-26; 22 complaints were referred to stage two, which is an increase of 4 on the previous year.
11. We achieved the target response times for 74 percent of stage one responses and 73 percent of stage twos, with 14 stage one responses (26%) and 14 stage twos (27%) not meeting the target response times.

Compliments

12. We have a facility on our websites for residents to provide comments and compliments should they wish to do so. This enables us to record compliments received council-

wide and provide balance in reporting of customer feedback. A selection of compliments which have been recorded via the online form or received by the Customer Service Centre during 2025-26 are included at **Appendix 1**.

Developments in reporting

13. We have recently implemented a new complaints module on our customer relationship management (CRM) system which, for the first time, provides us with the data required to report on many of the measures recommended by the Ombudsmen. Reporting on this has not proved as straightforward as expected, and staff are trialling use of AI and potentially Power Bi to improve reporting. Pending this much of the complaints data in **Appendix 1** has been collated and analysed manually using basic excel functionality.
14. Work is in progress to automate tracking of agreed actions through to conclusion following a complaint; and to identify improvements made to policies and processes consequently. It will be included in the next annual report. Some examples of where teams can demonstrate learning and change from complaints are included in **Appendix 1**.

Complaints referred to the Ombudsman

15. The LGSCO received 17 complaints relating to South Oxfordshire District Council, which is an increase of 11 on the previous year. During 2025-26 the LGSCO made 12 decisions relating to the council – one of these complaints was upheld. For Vale of White Horse District Council 9 complaints were received (a decrease of 4 on last year); 14 were decided and of these 3 were upheld. Further information on the LGSCO complaints is shown at **Appendix 2**.

The HO Self-assessment 2025-26

16. As the councils are now social landlords, we are required to complete an annual self-assessment of how our complaints handling complies with the mandatory HO Code. This must be submitted to the HO and published on our websites by 30 September each year. Our completed self-assessment is attached for information at **Appendix 3**. It shows that we are compliant with the Code.
17. As the body responsible for scrutiny and oversight of our complaints handling and in accordance with the HO Code, we are required to publish a response from JAGC to this report and the annual self-assessment. A draft response is attached at **Appendix 5** for the committee's approval.

New/revised policies

18. To respond to the changes required in the HO and LGSCO codes we carried out a full review of our Complaints Policy in 2024 and have continued to make minor revisions as we develop our understanding of best-practice complaint handling and in response to feedback from the Ombudsmen; a copy of the policy with revisions highlighted is attached at **Appendix 4**. The current policy is also published on our websites.

Financial Implications

19. There are no additional financial implications arising directly from this report. Where considered appropriate, and given the specific circumstances surrounding a formal

complaint, a service director may authorise a compensation payment to the complainant; and our Policy on this provides a framework for such considerations.

Legal Implications

20. This report sets out actions taken to comply with the HO and LGSCO codes, including a report of complaints received and performance against statutory targets as required by the codes. It is therefore managing the risk of challenge from the Ombudsman or findings against the councils in relation to the way we handle complaints.

Climate and ecological impact implications

21. This report is provided for information and approval of HO response only and has no climate and ecological impact implications.

Equalities implications

22. This report is for information and approval of HO response only and therefore there are no equalities implications. Equalities implications for those wishing to make a complaint are fully covered in our Complaints Policy and are considered on a case-by-case basis in handling individual complaints.

Risks

23. It is important that the councils have robust and efficient complaints handling processes in place to ensure that members of the public receive clear and fair responses to their queries and concerns; and to have oversight and review of the process. This provides transparency for customers and manages reputational risk. Good complaint handling means that we can resolve potential service failures early and prevents matters from escalating further and therefore helps prevent claims against the councils.

Conclusion

24. This report sets out a review of formal complaints received during 2025-26. The Committee is asked to review the complaints received, our outcomes from complaints and our response times. The Committee is also asked to comment on the self-assessment carried out in line with the requirements of the HO (**Appendix 3**), and on the revised policy included at **Appendix 4**.
25. The Committee is recommended to approve its formal response to this report and to the HO self-assessment as set out in **Appendix 5**.

Background Papers

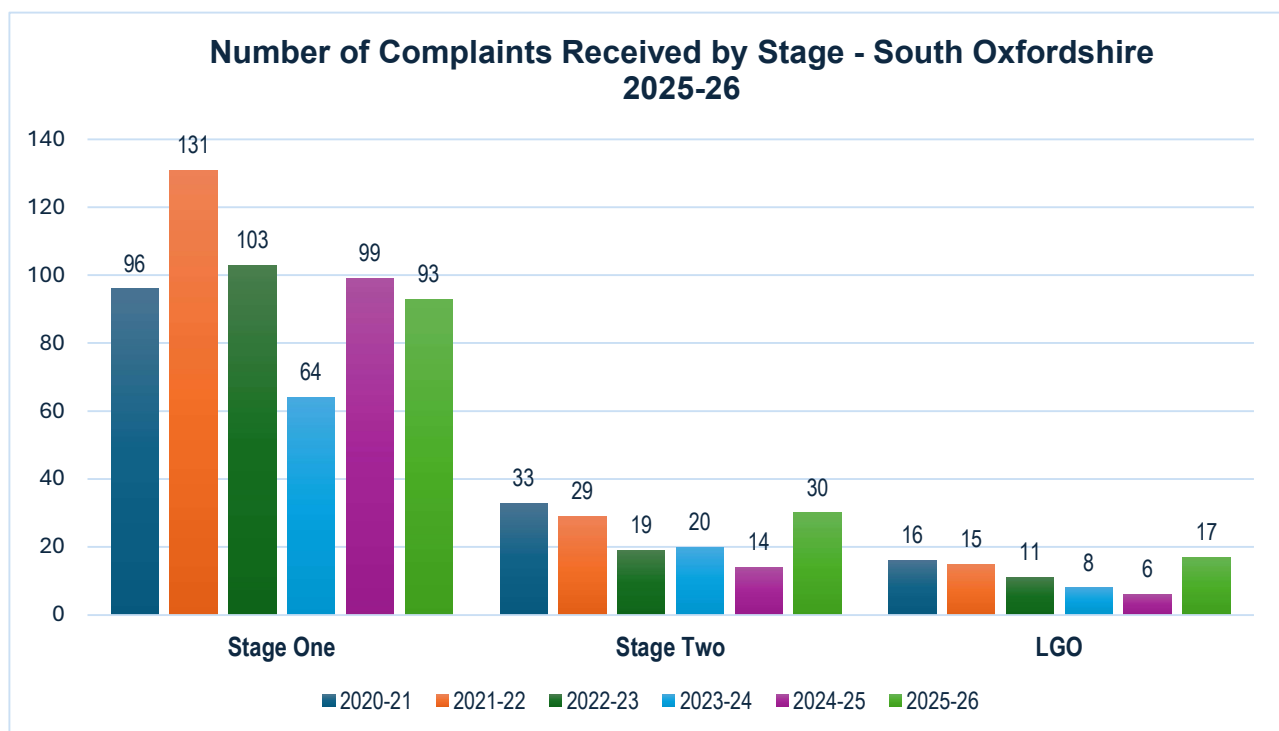
LGSCO, Complaint Handling Code
HO Service, Complaint Handling Code

Appendix 1 - Complaints and Compliments 2025-26

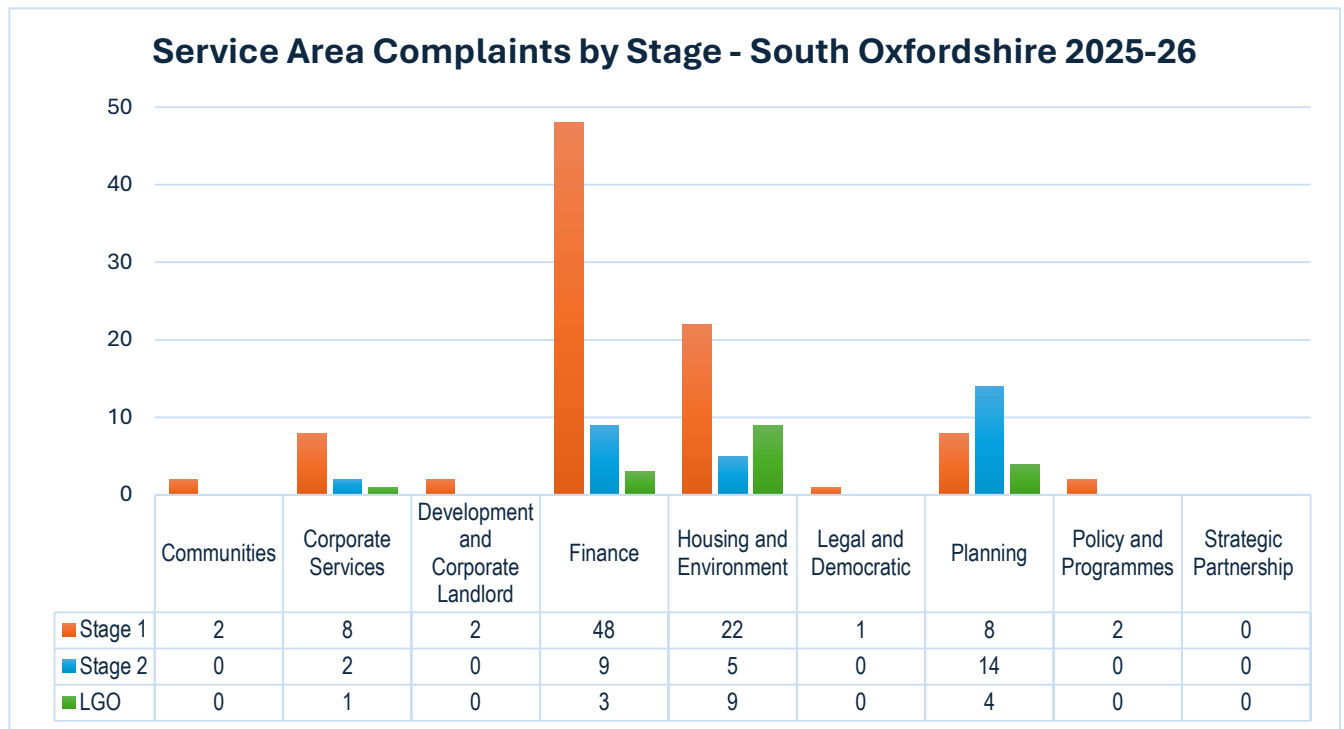
South Oxfordshire District Council

Complaints Received

1. The following chart shows the number of complaints received at each stage of the complaints process over the past six years. Whilst in recent years there has been an overall reduction in numbers of stage one and Ombudsman complaints received, the number of complaints which have been escalated to stage two has more than doubled from 14 in 2024-25 to 30 in 2025-26. (Note: the unusually high number in 2020-21 were due to legacy issues from Covid).



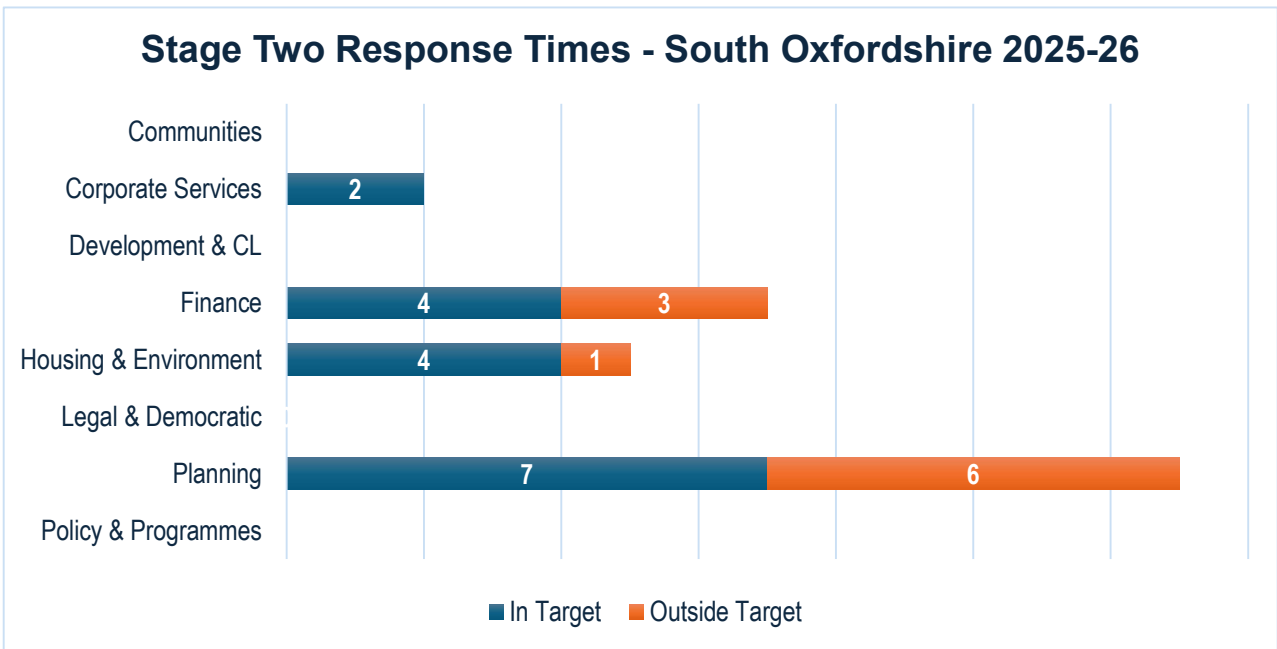
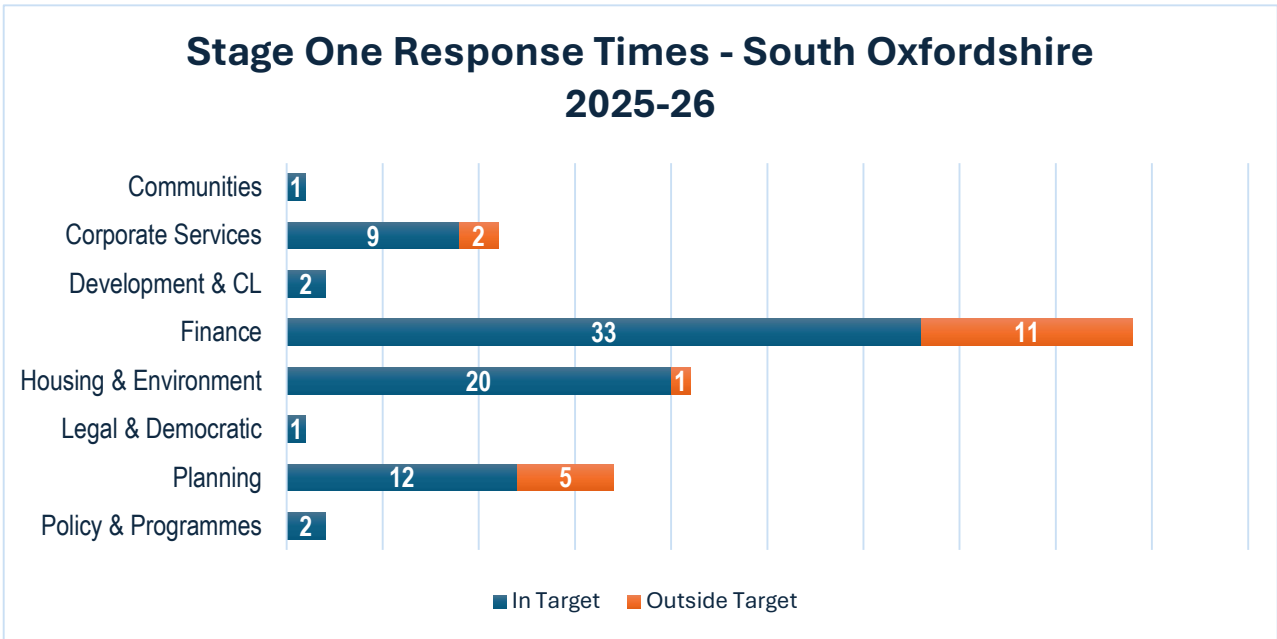
2. The chart below shows the number of complaints received in 2025-26 for each service area at each stage of the complaints process. As in previous years the highest number of stage one complaints relate to council tax/benefits, housing and environment and planning. Corporate Services has also seen an increase in stage one complaints in the year due to the implementation of the new garden waste permit scheme.



Response Times

3. The following charts show service area performance in providing stage one and two responses within the required timescales of 10 working days from acknowledgment for stage one and, 20 working days for stage two. We achieved the target for 80 percent of stage one responses and 63 percent of stage two, with 19 stage one responses (20%) and ten stage two (37%) not meeting the target response times.

(Please note that the variance in the total number of complaints received, compared with the numbers of complaints responded to in the given year is because a complaint received in late March will be reported as received in one year, and responded to in the following year.)



4. The average number of days taken to respond to stage one complaints was 15; and at stage two was 21. Note that due to the relatively small number of complaints received, one or two being over the deadline can significantly impact on average performance overall.
5. On the occasions that circumstances do not allow us to meet our deadline, an extension of time will be agreed with the complainant. These are recorded here as outside target because they have exceeded the required timescales as set out in the Ombudsman codes.
6. The table below shows the types of stage one complaints received by each service team. The largest category of complaints is 'Contractors' which makes up over 50 percent of the overall complaint types, the largest proportion of these are Finance related. 'Failure to take action' is the second most common type of complaint (22%), the majority of which related to Housing and Environment followed by Planning.

	Communities	Corporate Services	Development and Corporate Landlord	Finance	Housing and Environment	Legal and Democratic	Planning	Policy and Programmes
Contractors	0	1	0	40	7	0	0	0
Customer Service	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Failure to follow policy/ procedures	0	1	0	0	2	0	2	1
Failure to take action	1	1	2	2	8	1	4	1
Giving out misleading information	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Policy/ Procedure/ Decision	1	3	0	5	4	0	1	0
Poor Communication	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	0
Staff attitude	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0

7. The below table is a breakdown of the contractor-related complaints by contact nature.

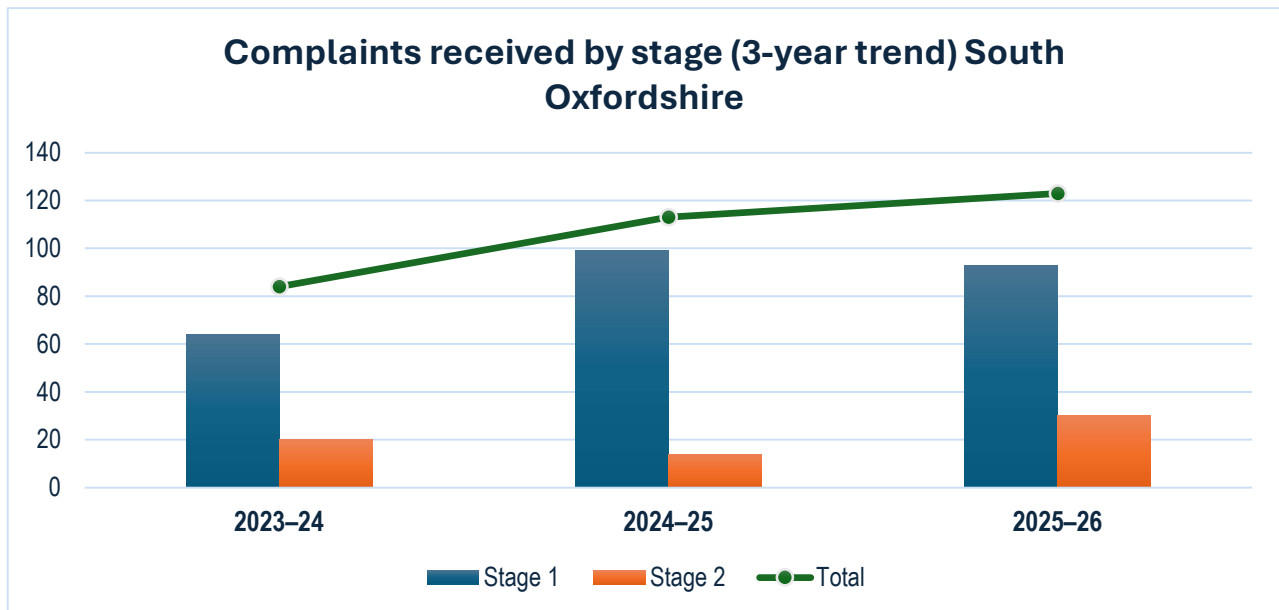
Of these complaints, the largest proportion was 'failure to follow policy/procedure' with 44%. For Housing and Environment, these complaints were related to the council's waste service and were about missed collections and street cleansing. In Finance these were related to Council Tax and covered a range of issues such as not updating customer accounts with relevant information, delays in processing requests, and communication issues. The complaint for Corporate Services was in relation to how a call was handled when calling through to Council Tax team.

It should be noted that both Council Tax and waste services as 'universal services' have the greatest number of customer contacts and interactions and therefore are likely to generate the highest number of complaints overall.

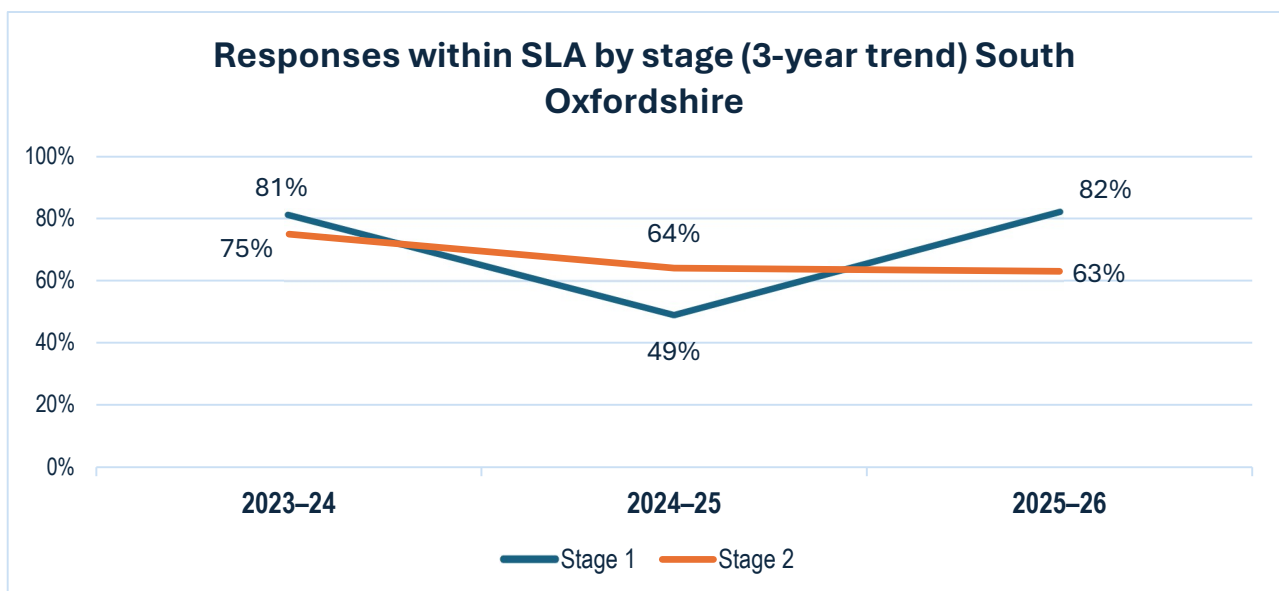
	Corporate services	Finance	Housing and Environment
Customer Service	1	2	
Failure to follow policy/ procedures		15	6
Failure to take action		9	
Giving out misleading information		1	
Policy/ Procedure/ Decision		4	1
Poor Communication		8	
Staff attitude		1	

8. Overall, the average time to respond to stage one complaints was 13 days, with the longest taking 249 days (Planning). For stage two the average time to respond was 21 days, with the longest taking 45 days (Planning). The below two charts show a three-year comparison of the number of complaints received by stage, and the number that have been responded to within the required timescales.

9. Overall complaint volumes increased across the three-year period. Stage two complaints rose in 2025–26 (to 30) following the much lower number in 2024–25 (14), with 29 percent (27) of stage one responses being escalated to stage two.



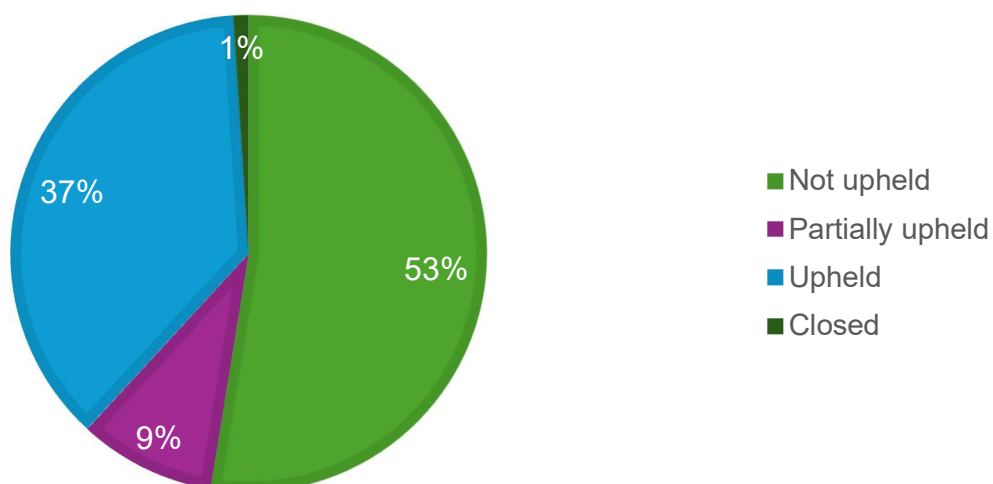
10. The chart below shows stage one complaints responded to within the required timescales increased to 82 percent in 2025–26 (from 49 percent in 2024–25), while for stage two performance declined slightly (from 75 percent to 63 percent in 2025-26).



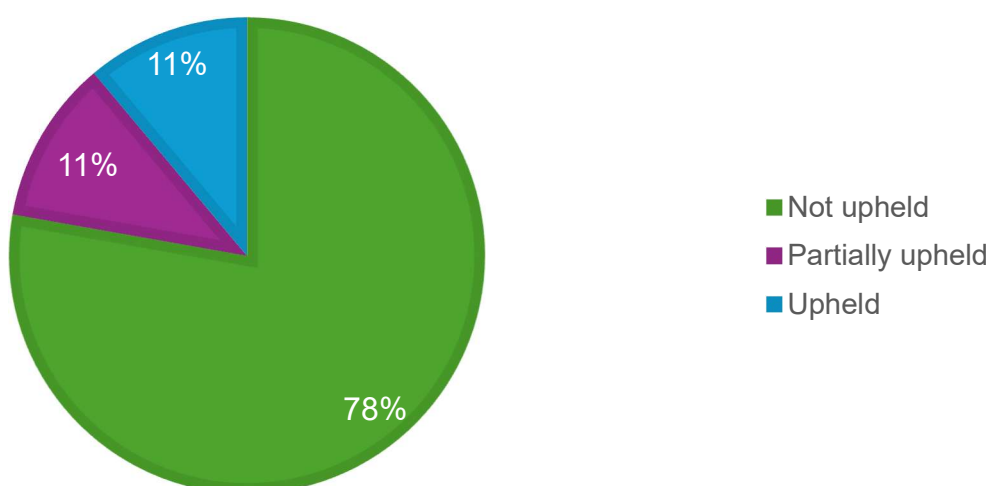
Complaints upheld

11. Key themes of the Ombudsman's new Codes of Practice are reporting on outcomes and learning from complaints. In 2025-26, 36 complaints (37%) were upheld in full at stage one, with 9 (9%) being partially upheld, 1 complaint was closed by the complainant after acknowledgement. The remaining 51 (53%) weren't upheld.
12. A total of 3 complaints (11%) were upheld in full at stage two and 3 were partially upheld, the remaining 21 (78%) weren't upheld.

**Stage One complaints upheld South Oxfordshire
2025-26**



**Stage Two complaints upheld South Oxfordshire
2025-26**

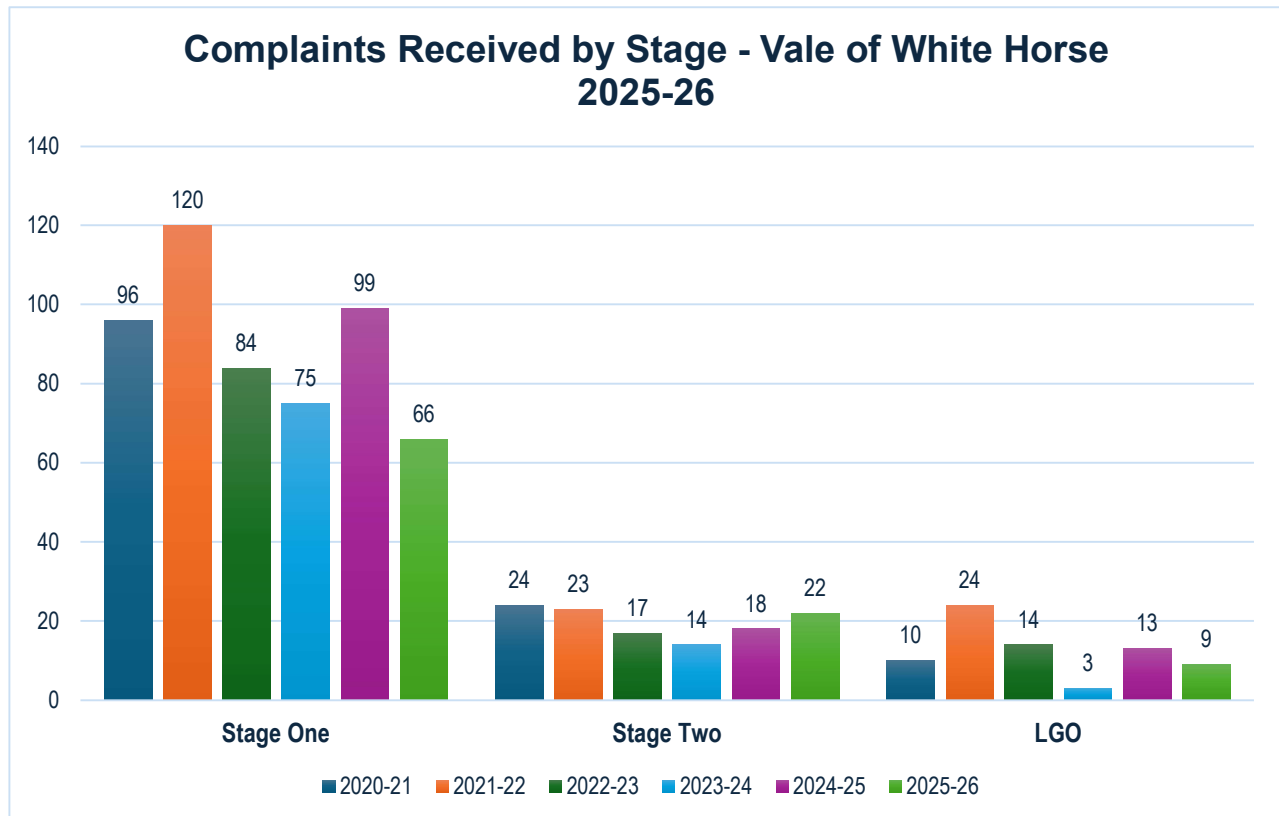


Vale of White Horse District Council

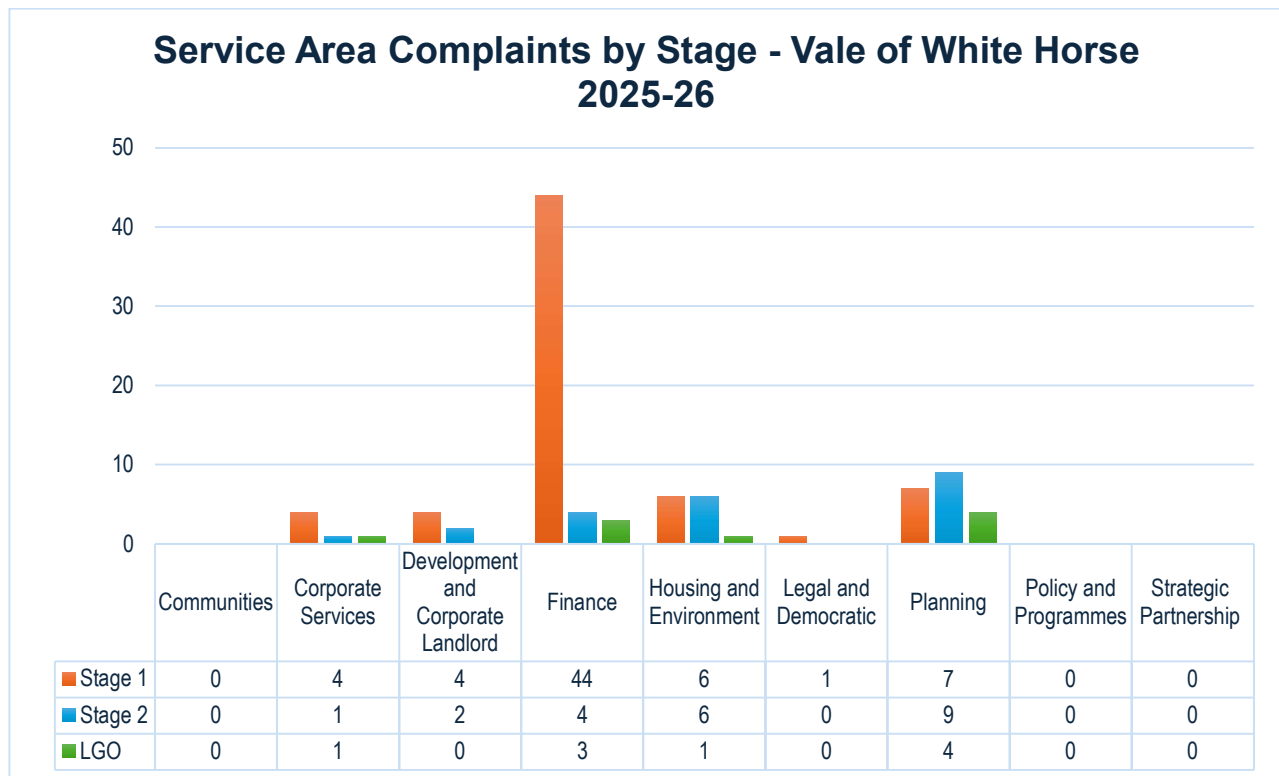
Complaints Received

1. The chart below shows the number of complaints received at each stage over the past five years. Vale of White Horse has seen a significant decrease in stage one and Ombudsman complaints, with 66 stage ones compared to 99 in 2024-25 (a decrease of 33%). Stage two complaints have increased slightly since last year from 18 in 2024-25 to 22 in 2025-26.

(Note: the unusually high number in 2021-22 were due to legacy issues from Covid.)



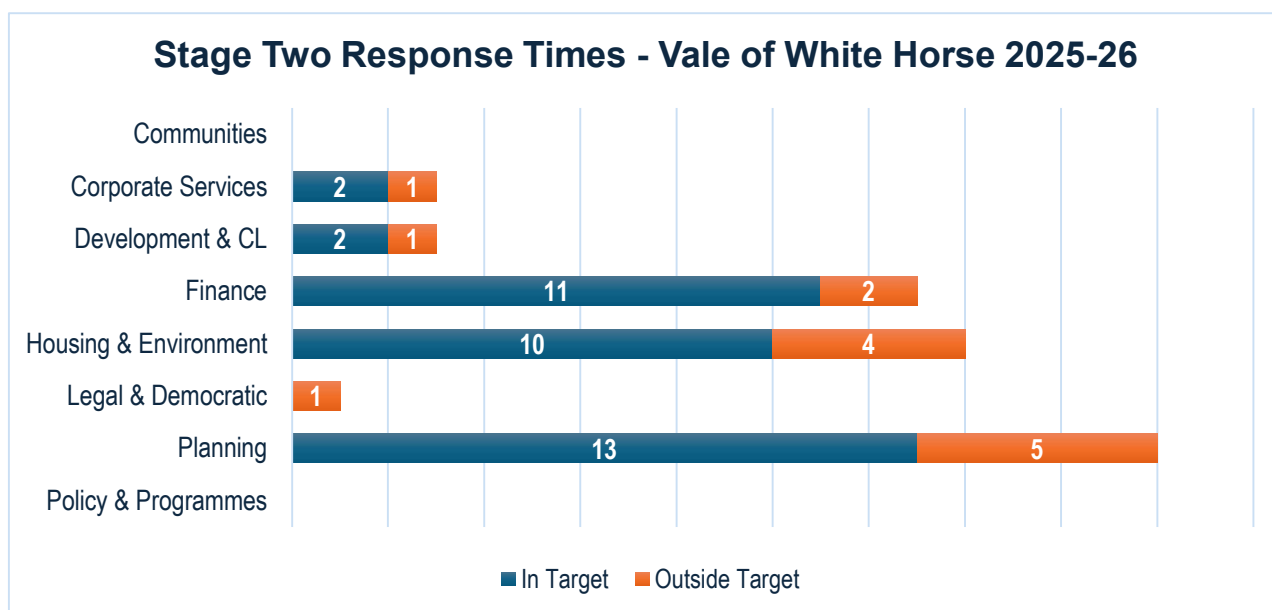
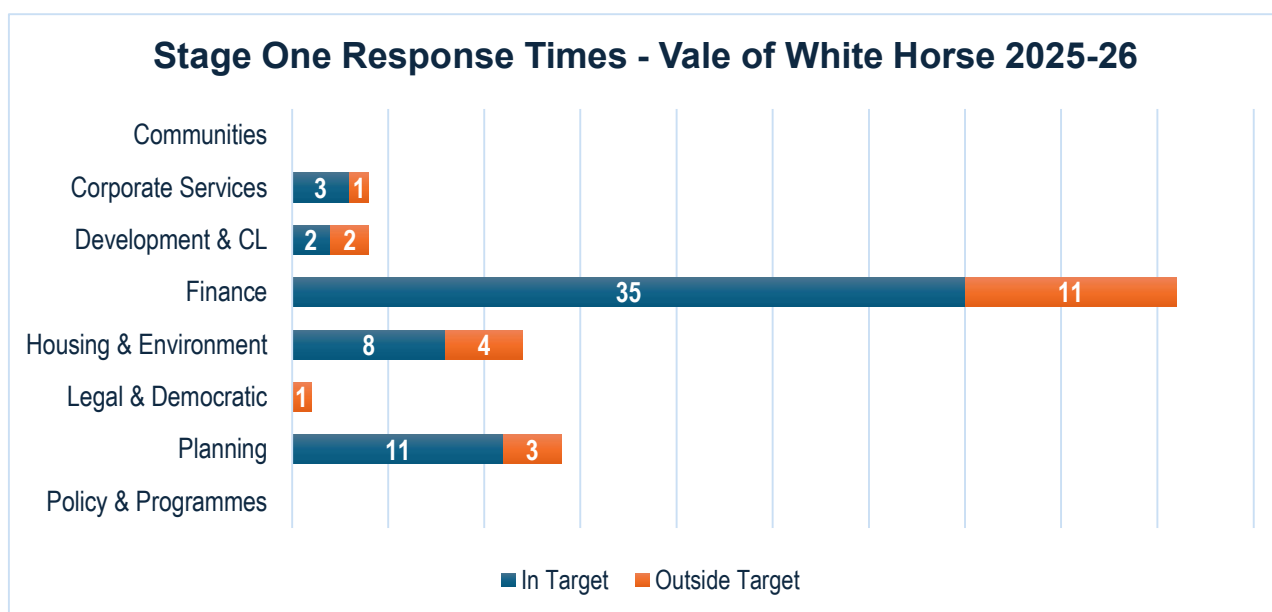
2. The chart below shows the number of complaints received in 2025-26 for each service area at each stage of the complaints process. As in previous years the highest number of stage one complaints related to council tax/benefits, followed by planning and housing and environment. It's notable that a high percentage of finance complaints were resolved at stage one rather than escalating, which suggests good practice in handling stage ones.



Response Times

3. The following charts show service area performance in providing a stage one response within the target of 10 working days of acknowledgement and a stage two response within 20 days of acknowledgement. We achieved the target for 72 percent of stage one responses and 73 percent of stage twos. A total of 22 finance stage one responses didn't meet the target response times, some of these responses are very complex and take time to investigate with thorough responses provided; this possibly links to a low escalation rate as shown above.

Please note you will see a variance in the total number of complaints received, compared with the numbers of complaints responded to in the given year. This is because a complaint received in late March will be reported as received in one year and responded to in the following.



4. The average number of days taken to respond to stage one complaints was 11; and at stage two was 20. Note that due to the relatively small number of complaints received, one or two being over the deadline can significantly impact on overall averages.
5. On the occasions that circumstances do not allow us to meet our deadline, an extension of time will be agreed with the complainant, although they are recorded as outside target because they have exceeded the required target of 10 working days for stage ones and 20 working days for stage twos as set out in our policy.
6. The table below shows the types of stage one complaints received by each service team. The largest category of complaints is 'contractors' which makes up 64 percent of the overall complaint types, the largest proportion of these are Finance related. 'Failure to take action' is the second most common type of complaint (12%), the majority of which related to Housing and Environment, Planning and Development and Corporate Landlord.

	Communities	Corporate Services	Development and Corporate Landlord	Finance	Housing and Environment	Legal and Democratic	Planning	Policy and Programmes
Contractors	0	0	0	40	2	0	0	0
Customer Service	0	3	0	1	0	0	0	0
Failure to follow policy/ procedures	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	0
Failure to take action	0	0	2	0	3	0	3	0
Giving out misleading information	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Policy/ Procedure/ Decision	0	0	1	2	0	0	1	0
Poor Communication	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0
Staff attitude	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0

7. The below table is a breakdown of the contractor-related complaints by contact nature.

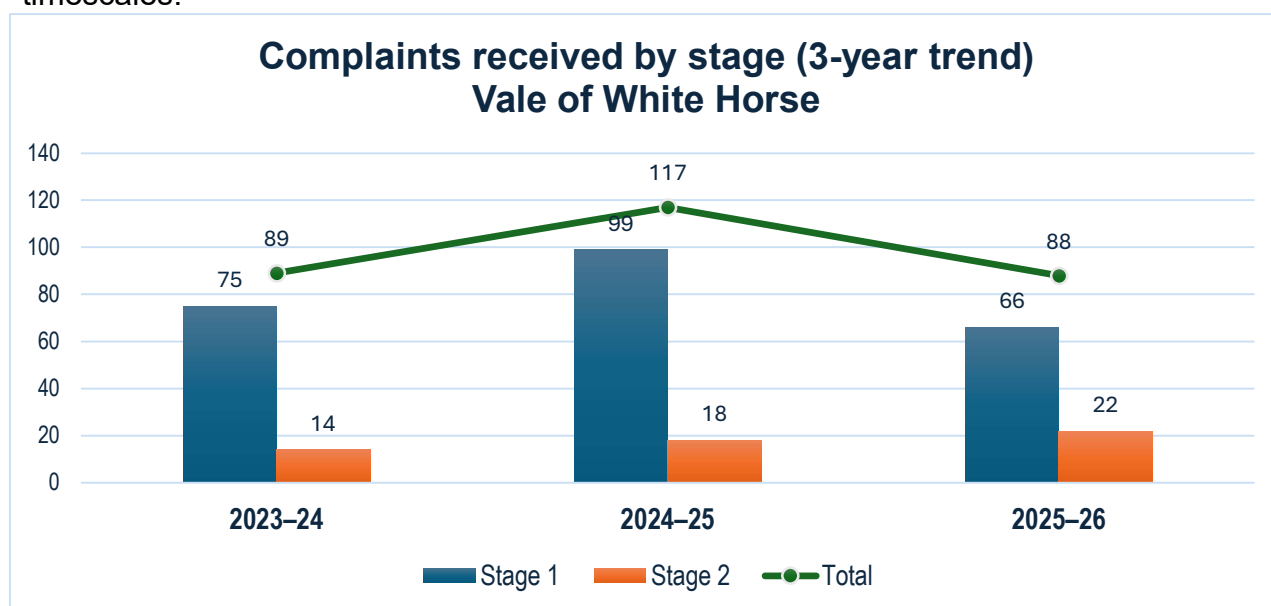
Of these complaints, the largest proportion was 'Failure to follow policy/procedures' with 56%. In Finance these were related to Council Tax and covered a range of issues such as not updating customer accounts with relevant information, delays in processing

requests, and communication issues. For Housing and Environment, these complaints were Waste related and about missed collections.

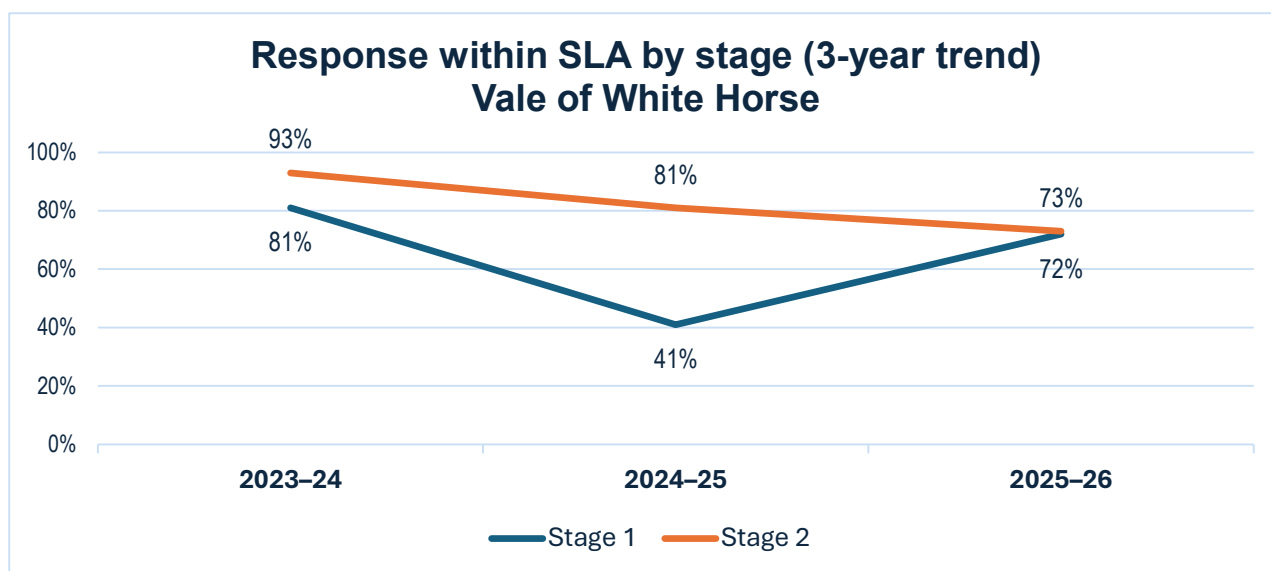
It should be noted that both Council Tax and waste services as ‘universal services’ have the greatest number of customer contacts and interactions and therefore are likely to generate the highest number of complaints overall.

	Finance	Housing and Environment
Customer Service	1	
Failure to follow policy/ procedures	24	2
Failure to take action	2	
Policy/ Procedure/ Decision	4	
Poor Communication	8	
Staff attitude	2	

8. Overall, the average time to respond to stage one complaints was 10 days, with the longest taking 44 days (Finance). For stage two the average time to respond was 18 days, with the longest taking 32 days (Planning).
9. The below two charts show a three-year comparison of the number of complaints received by stage, and the number that have been responded to within the required timescales.



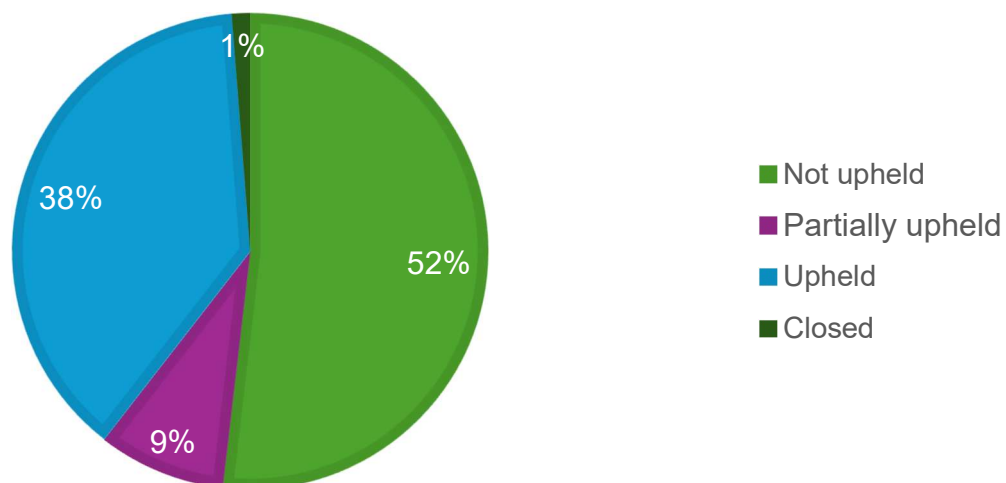
10. Overall complaint volumes decreased across the three-year period. Stage two complaints rose slightly in 2025–26 (from 18 in 2024–25 to 22), with 30 percent (20) of stage ones received in 2025–26 escalating to stage two.
11. The chart below shows stage one complaints responded to within the required timescales increased to 72 percent in 2025–26 (from 41% in 2024–25), while the number of stage twos responded to in time declined (93% to 73%).



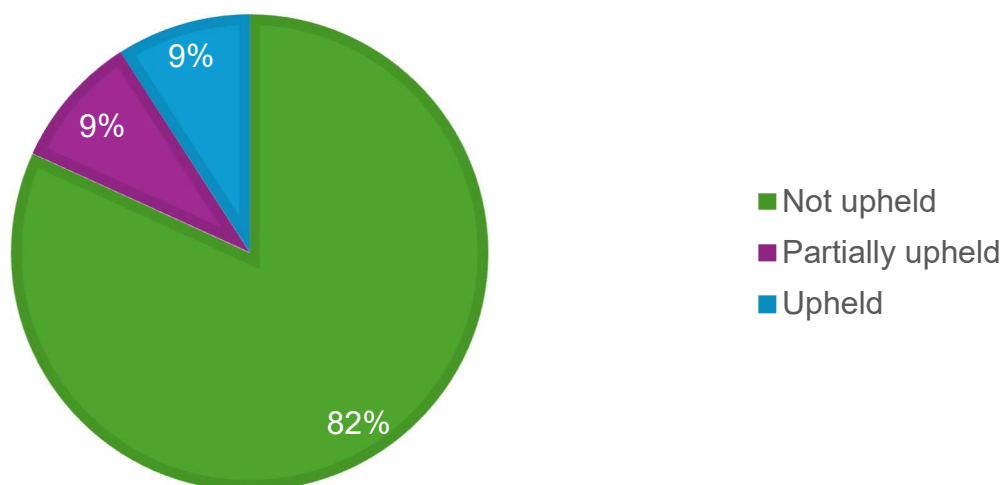
Complaints upheld

12. A key theme of the Ombudsman’s new Code of Practice is reporting and learning from complaints. In 2025-26, 31 complaints (38%) were upheld in full at stage one, with 7 (9%) being partially upheld. The remaining 42 (52%) weren’t upheld.
13. A total of 2 complaints (9%) were upheld in full at stage two, with 2 (9%) also being partially upheld. The remaining 18 (82%) weren’t upheld.

Stage one complaints upheld Vale of White Horse 2025-26



Stage two complaints upheld Vale of White Horse 2025-26



Learning from complaints – South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse

14. Whilst an apology is the most frequent remedy offered following a complaint that is upheld; sometimes this will also lead to improvements in service, policies or processes. Some examples of learning from complaints in 2025-26 are:

*Whilst investigating your complaint our team have become concerned with the confusion experienced by residents and our contractor on the correct presentation points for their waste bins in Marston Road. A few properties are presenting their bins at the front of their property whilst others are presenting around parked cars to the rear. This inconsistency raises the probability of missed collections that need to be addressed. The damaged and uneven surface of the car park area has also raised health and safety concerns for our waste collection operatives...our Waste Team are now looking to change the collection point for residents in Marston Road to ensure consistent and safe collections can take place. The team will communicate with residents in the coming weeks. **Waste team***

*I sorry that you had to repeatedly ask the agent to speak slowly and clearly so that you could hear him. Thank you for your patience; I note the agent did speak more clearly after several requests to do so, but the call would have been much easier if he'd done so sooner. I accept that this should be considered a reasonable adjustment under the Equalities Act as you say. I believe this to be a training issue, and I'll raise this with xx to avoid other customers having similar problems in future. I've upheld this part of your complaint. **Contractor***

*We will review the format of the equality impact assessment tool to specifically encourage the considerations around online forms, different channels for communication and digital accessibility as part of the evaluation process. We have also instigated an audit of current forms to update them to either provide more inclusive options with regards to salutation/title or to consider what data is required to be collected to ensure we only collect what is required to deliver that service. **Equalities, People and Culture team***

Compliments

15. To provide balance (and as previously requested by the committee), we also report on positive feedback and compliments received throughout the year. Below is a small selection of those received:

*Exceptional advice and help with tree work carried out in a conservation area. XX was especially helpful. **Trees (Planning)***

Avon Way has been swept by your street cleaner and how beautiful it looks. please thank your team.

Street cleansing – Biffa (Housing and Environment)

Xx I think you always provide an excellent service and your diligence in responding and looking for a positive outcome is a mark of the success you and the team provide. Well done as always! **Naming and Numbering (Corporate Services)**

Outstanding support from xx protected Trees officer
Trees (Planning)

Dear X, So nice to hear from you. Thanks for your email and the high level of service!
Customer Service Centre (Corporate Services)

Xx has been absolutely incredible in supporting me on a number of issues that have not been her area of work, but nevertheless has guided me and been so willing to help me, her messages always end in 'if I can be of any further assistance please let me know' I do and she does!!! Xx is an incredible asset to the Council's work and truly helps clients when they need it. She has never made me feel I am a nuisance or it is not her job and goes out of her way to help me. She has contacted others in the Council on my behalf to help me take action.....We live in a world where it's too easy to fob people off or ignore them or just be vague about helping. I've experienced a lot of that recently. That has never been the case with xx. I cannot sing her praises enough for everything she's done and I hope that in some way- this can be recognised and acknowledged by the Council.... I sing the praises of your Council to friends in other areas trying to cope with similar problems- that's meant a lot to them. From the bottom of my heart I am truly grateful to xx. **Revenues and Benefits (Finance)**

I would like to highlight the excellent support I recently received from a member of your staff...I was having difficulty accessing my online account. xx went above and beyond to help resolve the issue. He was professional, extremely helpful and very patient throughout. Thanks to his help the problem was sorted out quickly for which I was extremely grateful.
Revenues and Benefits (Capita)

We are very pleased with the service xx and xx have given us. It is so good to have someone listen to our views and do something about looking after our trees... Everyone that I know is saying what a fantastic achievement it by having a protection order. Well-done to all of you. **Trees (Planning)**

Dear X, I really appreciate your very clear and comprehensive help. Thank you very much!
Customer Service Centre (Corporate Services)

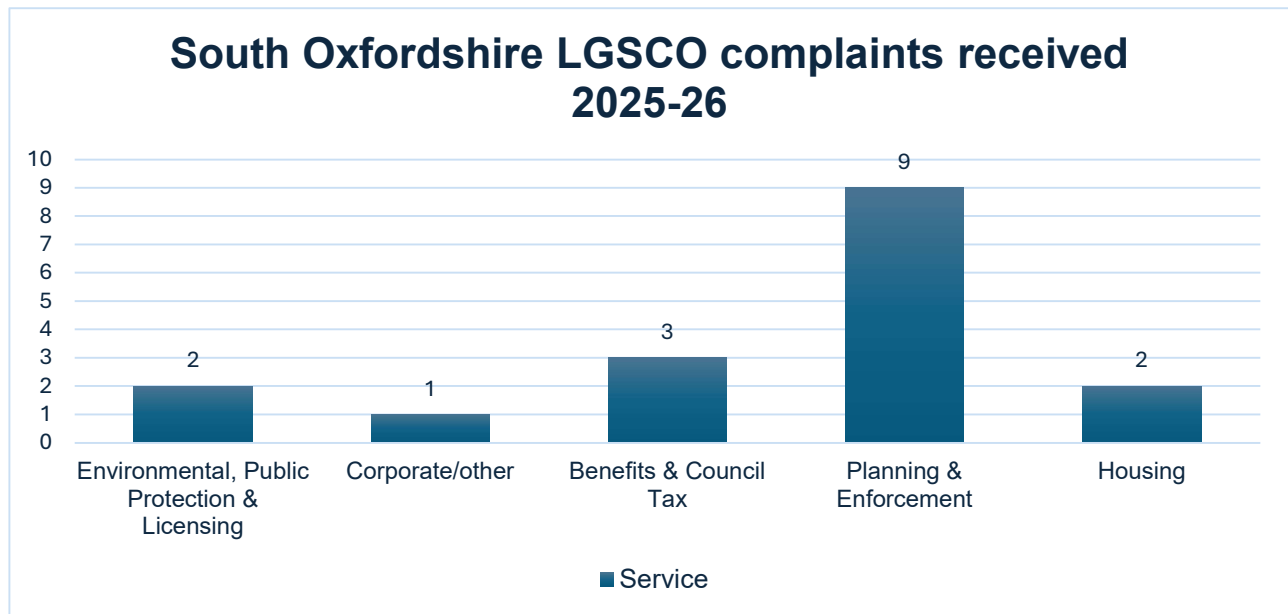
I wanted to say an absolutely huge thank you for having XXX last week. She absolutely loved her time with you all. You made her feel so welcome and comfortable. She's learned so much and definitely seems to have increased her confidence. Having this experience was so valuable, she wants to look at economics, maths or politics in the future, so this really was really informative for her.
People and Culture/Customer Service Centre (work experience student)

Appendix 2 - Ombudsman complaints 2025-26

South Oxfordshire District Council

Complaints Received by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO)

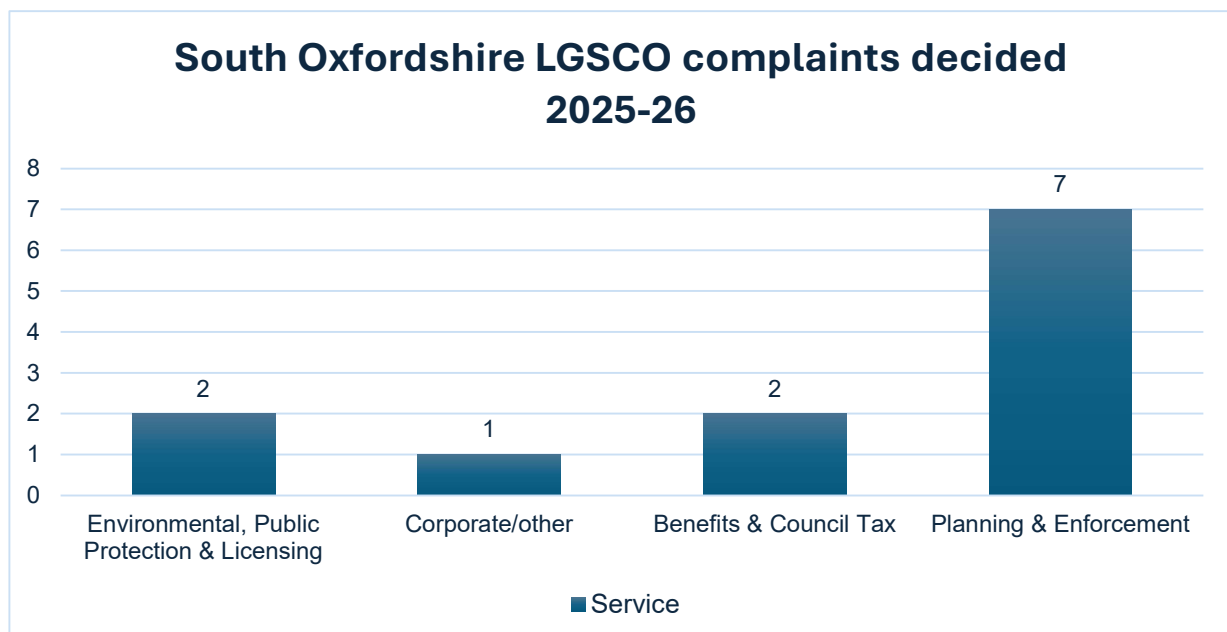
1. The LGSCO received 17 complaints in relation to South Oxfordshire District Council in 2025-26, these are shown below by service team.



LGSCO decisions

During the same period, the LGSCO made decisions on 12 complaints as shown below.

Note: these numbers will differ from the above chart as some complaints are received in one year but resolved in the next.



The outcome relating to these 12 complaints is shown below:



The complaint investigated, relating to planning enforcement, was upheld – see below for a summary of this decision.

Case: 0300 061 0614

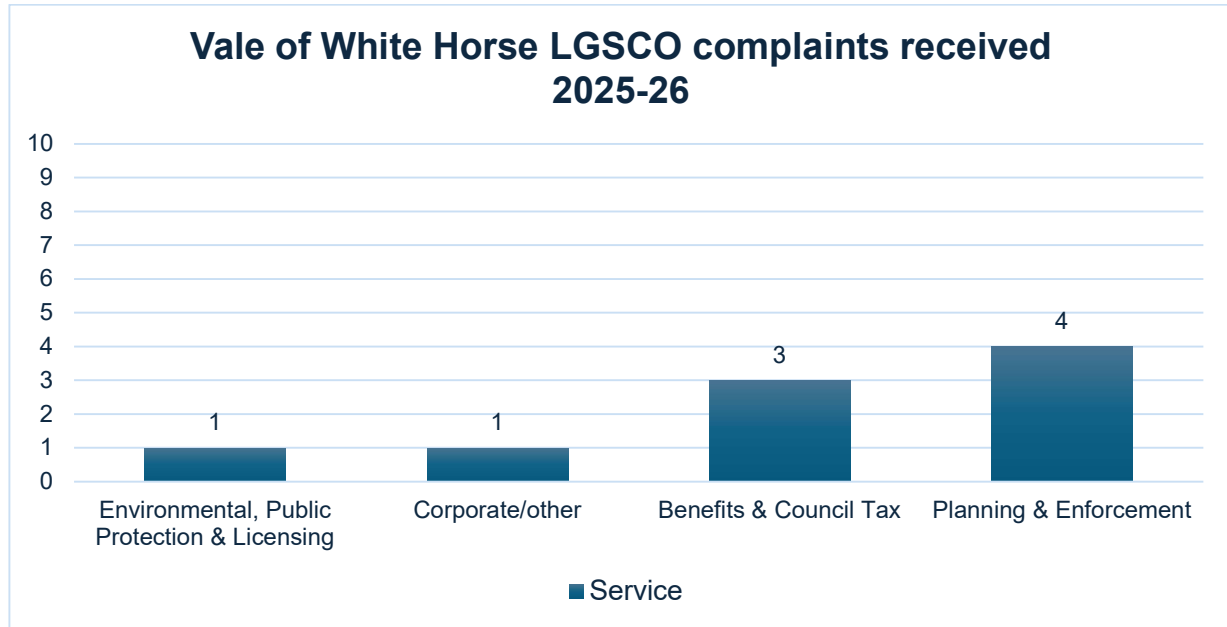
We will not investigate this complaint about the Council's handling of a planning enforcement case and the subsequent complaint process. There is insufficient evidence of fault in the way the Council reached its decision on the case, and the Council has provided a satisfactory response to the other issues raised. *(Whilst the complaint was upheld the finding was that the Council had provided a satisfactory remedy before the complaint reached the Ombudsman.)*

The full reports relating to this decision can be found at [Decision results - Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman](#).

Vale of White Horse District Council

Complaints Received by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO)

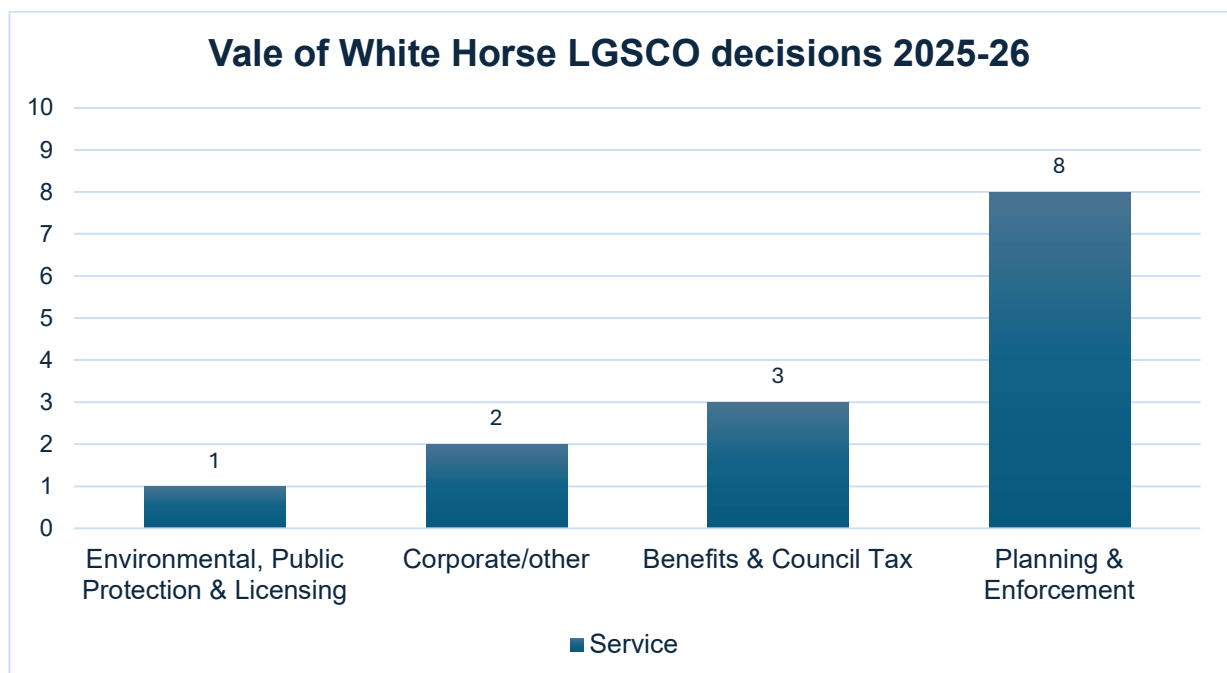
1. The LGSCO received nine complaints in relation to Vale of White Horse District Council in 2025-26, these are shown below by team.



LGSCO decisions

During the same period, the LGSCO made decisions on 13 complaints as shown below.

Note: these numbers will differ from the above chart as some complaints are received in one year but resolved in the next.



The outcome of these complaints is shown below:



Of the four complaints investigated three were upheld; two of these related to planning and one to council tax – see below for a summary of these decisions.

Case: 24 008 749

Miss X complained about the Council's handling of her planning application. She said she submitted a second application, incurring added costs for reports and assessments, on the Council's advice, but it would not succeed. Miss X said the Council has accepted this but has only offered to refund some costs. Miss X said the Council fault distressed her and impacted her financially. There was fault in the way the Council gave Miss X incorrect information, causing her additional costs. The Council has agreed to apologise and repay the costs it agreed Miss X incurred due to the Council fault.

Case: 24 019 037

Mr B complained that the Council delayed excessively in registering a planning application to regularise breaches of planning control on a site including Mr B's property and had failed to take enforcement action over a number of years. We found the Council delayed excessively in progressing the current application. The Council has agreed to apologise to Mr B and pay him £150.

Case: 25 011 627

We will not investigate this complaint about the Council's failure to set up a direct debit for Ms X's council tax payments. *(This is because the Council has agreed to resolve the complaint early by providing a proportionate remedy for the injustice caused to Ms X).*

The full reports relating to these decisions can be found at [Decision results - Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman](#).

National Comparisons

The LGSCO publishes a summary of performance for each council against the national picture, according to population size. In 2025-26 the average per council for upheld reports was 1 per 100,000 population. On this basis South Oxfordshire was slightly below the national average and Vale of White Horse slightly above. Both councils have implemented 100 percent of Ombudsman recommendations.

Complaints Received by the Housing Ombudsman (HO)

The Housing Ombudsman has jurisdiction over complaints made about the councils in their role as a landlord.

During 2025-26 no complaints were received by the HO, relating to South Oxfordshire or Vale of White Horse District Councils'; and no decisions were issued by the HO in the period.

Appendix 3 – Self-assessment against the Housing Ombudsman Code of Practice

Appendix A: Self-assessment form

This self-assessment form should be completed by the complaints officer, and it must be reviewed and approved by the landlord's governing body at least annually. Once approved, landlords must publish the self-assessment as part of the annual complaints performance and service improvement report on their website. The governing body's response to the report must be published alongside this. Landlords are required to complete the self-assessment in full and support all statements with evidence, with additional commentary as necessary. We recognise that there may be a small number of circumstances where landlords are unable to meet the requirements, for example, if they do not have a website. In these circumstances, we expect landlords to deliver the intentions of the Code in an alternative way, for example by publishing information in a public area so that it is easily accessible.

Section 1: Definition of a complaint

Code provision	Code requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence	Commentary / explanation
1.2	A complaint must be defined as: <i>'an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the landlord, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting a resident or group of residents.'</i>	Yes	Point 9 in our Complaints Policy This is published on both complaints webpages South Oxfordshire Vale of White Horse	We have adopted the Housing Ombudsman definition for both a service request and a complaint.
1.3	A resident does not have to use the word 'complaint' for it to be treated as such. Whenever a resident expresses dissatisfaction landlords must give them the choice to make complaint. A complaint that is submitted via a third party or representative must be handled in line with the landlord's complaints policy.	Yes	Point 16 in our Complaints Policy	"Where a customer expresses dissatisfaction, whether identified as a service request, comment or otherwise, they will be informed of their right to raise a complaint and will be offered the opportunity to have the matter treated as a complaint at any stage"
1.4	Landlords must recognise the difference between a service request and a complaint. This must be set out in their complaints policy. A service request is a request from a resident to the landlord requiring action to be taken to	Yes	Point 9 in our Complaints Policy This is published on both complaints webpages South Oxfordshire Vale of White Horse	We have adopted the Housing Ombudsman definition for both a service request and a complaint.

	put something right. Service requests are not complaints, but must be recorded, monitored and reviewed regularly.			
1.5	A complaint must be raised when the resident expresses dissatisfaction with the response to their service request, even if the handling of the service request remains ongoing. Landlords must not stop their efforts to address the service request if the resident complains.	Yes	Point 16 & 17 in our Complaints Policy This is published on both complaints webpages South Oxfordshire Vale of White Horse	Complainants have the option at any time to escalate to the formal complaints procedure if they are dissatisfied with the response to a service request. A complaint will not stall, or impact any action needed to resolve an issue through a service request
1.6	An expression of dissatisfaction with services made through a survey is not defined as a complaint, though wherever possible, the person completing the survey should be made aware of how they can pursue a complaint if they wish to. Where landlords ask for wider feedback about their services, they also must provide details of how residents can complain.	Yes		Housing Compliance Team will respond to comments made on housing related surveys of satisfaction and contact tenants to discuss. We have just completed our Tenant Satisfaction Measures survey (May 26) and we received no expressions of dissatisfaction. Guidance for how to make a complaint is in the process of being added to all surveys (inc. non-landlord ones) hosted by Councils.

Section 2: Exclusions

Code provision	Code requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence	Commentary / explanation
2.1	Landlords must accept a complaint unless there is a valid reason not to do so. If landlords decide not to accept a complaint, they must be able to evidence their reasoning. Each complaint must be considered on its own merits	Yes	Point 15 in our Complaints Policy and Appendix 1 for examples of when our formal complaints procedure cannot be used.	This is stated in our complaints policy. Complaints are managed by the corporate complaints team in consultation with the service team.
2.2	A complaints policy must set out the circumstances in which a matter will not be considered as a complaint or escalated, and these	Yes	Point 15 in our Complaints Policy and Appendix 1 for examples of when our formal complaints	This is stated in our complaints policy. Complaints are managed by the corporate complaints

	circumstances must be fair and reasonable to residents. Acceptable exclusions include: • The issue giving rise to the complaint occurred over twelve months ago. • Legal proceedings have started. This is defined as details of the claim, such as the Claim Form and Particulars of Claim, having been filed at court. • Matters that have previously been considered under the complaints policy.		procedure cannot be used	team in consultation with the service team.
2.3	Landlords must accept complaints referred to them within 12 months of the issue occurring or the resident becoming aware of the issue, unless they are excluded on other grounds. Landlords must consider whether to apply discretion to accept complaints made outside this time limit where there are good reasons to do so.	Yes	Point 15 in our Complaints Policy and Appendix 1 – Point 9	We normally expect a complaint to be raised within 12 months of an issue occurring or the complainant becoming aware of the issue; however, we will consider complaints after this period if it is appropriate to do so and will consider each complaint according to its own circumstances.
2.4	If a landlord decides not to accept a complaint, an explanation must be provided to the resident setting out the reasons why the matter is not suitable for the complaints process and the right to take that decision to the Ombudsman. If the Ombudsman does not agree that the exclusion has been fairly applied, the Ombudsman may tell the landlord to take on the complaint.	Yes	Point 15 and Point 34 in our Complaints Policy	This is stated in our complaints policy. Complaints are managed by the corporate complaints team in consultation with the service team.
2.5	Landlords must not take a blanket approach to excluding complaints; they must consider the individual circumstances of each complaint.	Yes	Point 18 in our Complaints policy	Each complaint is assessed on its own basis following the process outlined in the policy.

Section 3: Accessibility and Awareness

Code provision	Code requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence	Commentary / explanation
3.1	Landlords must make it easy for residents to complain by providing different channels through which they can make a complaint. Landlords must consider their duties under the Equality Act 2010 and anticipate the needs and reasonable adjustments of residents who may need to access the complaints process.	Yes	Point 10-17 in our Complaints Policy . Reasonable adjustments - Point 11	Complaints can be made using our online form, over the phone, by email and in person. We offer assistance to make adjustments for those with accessibility needs. A complainant is able to have a complaint put forward by a third party with the permission and agreement of the tenant. Equality, disability, and discrimination training is a mandatory requirement for all council staff.
3.2	Residents must be able to raise their complaints in any way and with any member of staff. All staff must be aware of the complaints process and be able to pass details of the complaint to the appropriate person within the landlord.	Yes	Point 10 in our Complaints Policy .	Basic training on complaints and what to do if you receive one forms part of our staff induction process. We include a complaints module on our staff training site 'My Development' and make this mandatory for all staff to complete. All staff have been issued with guidance on how to handle complaints in our staff newsletter 'Team Talk'
3.3	High volumes of complaints must not be seen as a negative, as they can be indicative of a well-publicised and accessible complaints process. Low complaint volumes are potentially a sign that residents are unable to complain.	Yes	Point 1 in our Complaints Policy Included within our training for complaints handling staff	'Customer feedback (compliments, comments, and complaints) is important to us, and we want you to tell us when you think we have got something wrong, so we can endeavour to put it right and learn from it how we can improve our services in future'.
3.4	Landlords must make their complaint policy available in a clear and accessible format for all residents. This will detail the two stage process, what will happen at each stage, and the timeframes for responding. The policy	Yes	Point 11 & 12 in our Complaints Policy This is published on both complaints webpages South Oxfordshire Vale of White Horse	Our Complaints policy is available to all residents. It is published on our websites and details the two-stage process. Complaint information on where to find the policy, how to raise a complaint and how to contact the Ombudsman is included in tenant packs.

	must also be published on the landlord's website.			
3.5	The policy must explain how the landlord will publicise details of the complaints policy, including information about the Ombudsman and this Code.	Yes	Point 8 in our Complaints Policy Policy and information about the Ombudsman and code also on our Complaint's webpage South Oxfordshire Vale of White Horse	<i>"The Ombudsman</i> <i>If you are still not satisfied with the outcome, you can refer your complaint to the Ombudsman.</i> <i>For complaints related to services that the council provide (except housing where the property is owned and managed by the council) please contact the Local Government Ombudsman via their website www.lgo.org.uk or by calling 0300 061 0614.</i> For complaints related to council owned and managed housing please contact the Housing Ombudsman Service via their website www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk or by calling 0300 111 3000."
3.6	Landlords must give residents the opportunity to have a representative deal with their complaint on their behalf, and to be represented or accompanied at any meeting with the landlord.	Yes	Point 12 & 14 in our complaints policy	Complainants may be accompanied/represented by a friend or advocate at any time. With signed confirmation a complaint can be submitted on a complainants' behalf by their chosen representative.
3.7	Landlords must provide residents with information on their right to access the Ombudsman service and how the individual can engage with the Ombudsman about their complaint.	Yes	Point 32-35 in our complaints policy	Our standard response wording for all complaints at each stage includes this information, and all staff responding to complaints are required to use this wording which is published on our staff intranet. Complaint information on where to find the policy, how to raise a complaint and how to contact the Ombudsman included in tenant packs.

Section 4: Complaint Handling Staff

Code provision	Code requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence	Commentary / explanation
4.1	Landlords must have a person or team assigned to take responsibility for complaint handling, including liaison with the Ombudsman and ensuring complaints are reported to the governing body (or	Yes	This is our corporate complaints team – as part of training for staff they are made aware of this and our complaint-handling process, which requires that all complaints are referred to our corporate team to	Corporate complaints are handled by a dedicated team within the Customer Service Centre; a member of the team is the registered Link Officer who will liaise with the Ombudsman

	equivalent). This Code will refer to that person or team as the 'complaints officer'. This role may be in addition to other duties.		be managed in accordance with our policy.	
4.2	The complaints officer must have access to staff at all levels to facilitate the prompt resolution of complaints. They must also have the authority and autonomy to act to resolve disputes promptly and fairly.	Yes	This is part of our standard process and complaint-handling culture - it is demonstrated in practice by our weekly report of corporate complaints	Our Senior Management Team (SMT) provides oversight of our complaints and the complaints team reports to the senior management team on a weekly basis. Service Managers are authorised to respond to complaints, and our directors have formal authority to award compensation.
4.3	Landlords are expected to prioritise complaint handling and a culture of learning from complaints. All relevant staff must be suitably trained in the importance of complaint handling. It is important that complaints are seen as a core service and must be resourced to handle complaints effectively	Yes	Point 1 and 4 in our Complaints Policy	Included in mandatory training for all staff Our corporate complaints team, which is part of our The Customer Service Centre, (consisting of two 2 senior customer service officers and two customer service team leaders) all of whom are able to deputise for each other and manage complaints to avoid delay. All complaints made to the councils as a social landlord are assigned to the Housing Delivery manager at Stage One and Director of Housing and Environment at Stage Two.

Section 5: The Complaint Handling Process

Code provision	Code requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence	Commentary / explanation
5.1	Landlords must have a single policy in place for dealing with complaints covered by this Code. Residents must not be treated differently if they complain.	Yes	Point 1 and 4 in our Complaints Policy	
5.2	The early and local resolution of issues between landlords	Yes	Point 19 in our Complaints Policy	The formal complaints process is two stages.

	and residents is key to effective complaint handling. It is not appropriate to have extra named stages (such as 'stage 0' or 'informal complaint') as this causes unnecessary confusion.			Stage 1 and stage 2 is followed in accordance with the Code.
5.3	A process with more than two stages is not acceptable under any circumstances as this will make the complaint process unduly long and delay access to the Ombudsman.	Yes	Point 19 in our Complaints Policy	The formal complaints process is two stages. Stage 1 and stage 2 and is followed in accordance with the Code.
5.4	Where a landlord's complaint response is handled by a third party (e.g. a contractor or independent adjudicator) at any stage, it must form part of the two stage complaints process set out in this Code. Residents must not be expected to go through two complaints processes.	Yes	Point 19 in our Complaints Policy	Complaints will be investigated and responded to by the relevant service manager with input from our contractor or partner where relevant. Contractors/partners will be able to respond to service requests, but all complaints must be responded to by the relevant council team
5.5	Landlords are responsible for ensuring that any third parties handle complaints in line with the Code.	Yes	Point 19 in our Complaints Policy	Complaints will be investigated and responded to by the relevant service manager with input from our contractor or partner where relevant, not by the third party themselves. Contractors/partners will be able to respond to service requests, but all complaints must be responded to by the relevant council team
5.6	When a complaint is logged at Stage 1 or escalated to Stage 2, landlords must set out their understanding of the complaint and the outcomes the resident is seeking. The Code will refer to this as "the complaint definition". If any aspect of the complaint is unclear, the resident must be asked for clarification.	Yes	Point 20 in our Complaints Policy	When we acknowledge a complaint, we check to make sure that we have understood the complaint fully and we may seek clarity on the information provided, or extra information before the stage one or stage two investigation can begin.
5.7	When a complaint is acknowledged at either stage, landlords must be clear which aspects of the complaint they are, and are not, responsible	Yes	Point 18 in our Complaints Policy	

	for and clarify any areas where this is not clear.			
5.8	At each stage of the complaints process, complaint handlers must: a) deal with complaints on their merits, act independently, and have an open mind; b) give the resident a fair chance to set out their position; c) take measures to address any actual or perceived conflict of interest; and d) consider all relevant information and evidence carefully.	Yes		This is part of our complaints process and included within our training for complaints handling staff
5.9	Where a response to a complaint will fall outside the timescales set out in this Code, the landlord must agree with the resident suitable intervals for keeping them informed about their complaint.	Yes	Point 24 in our Complaints Policy	Managed by the Corporate complaints team who will write to the complainant before the deadline to inform of a revised date – any extension will be limited to 10 working days after the original due date. This will be managed through workflow on our complaints CRM module. For landlord complaints our Housing Team will agree suitable intervals for keeping them informed.
5.10	Landlords must make reasonable adjustments for residents where appropriate under the Equality Act 2010. Landlords must keep a record of any reasonable adjustments agreed, as well as a record of any disabilities a resident has disclosed. Any agreed reasonable adjustments must be kept under active review.	Yes	Point 10-17 in our Complaints Policy	Complaints can be made using our online form, over the phone, by email and in person. We offer assistance to make adjustments for those with accessibility needs. A complainant is able to have a complaint put forward by a third party with the permission and agreement of the tenant. Equality, disability, and Discrimination training is a mandatory requirement for all council staff. Any reasonable adjustments are

				recorded on our complaints CRM module
5.11	Landlords must not refuse to escalate a complaint through all stages of the complaints procedure unless it has valid reasons to do so. Landlords must clearly set out these reasons, and they must comply with the provisions set out in section 2 of this Code.	Yes	Point 25 in our Complaints Policy	In a small number of circumstances, the complaint may be escalated straight to stage two. This includes a complaint about the procedure followed during a Code of Conduct complaint, but not for review of the Monitoring Officer's decision.
5.12	A full record must be kept of the complaint, and the outcomes at each stage. This must include the original complaint and the date received, all correspondence with the resident, correspondence with other parties, and any relevant supporting documentation such as reports or surveys.	Yes	Staff are required to save all documentation relating to a complaint on the Complaints CRM Module	All correspondence at each stage is saved in the resident's complaint on our Complaints CRM module.
5.13	Landlords must have processes in place to ensure a complaint can be remedied at any stage of its complaints process. Landlords must ensure appropriate remedies can be provided at any stage of the complaints process without the need for escalation.	Yes		All complaints-handling staff have the authority to agree non-financial remedies and directors have authority to agree financial remedies. We have approved guidance for all staff in relation to awarding compensation or remedies, based on Housing Ombudsman guidance.
5.14	Landlords must have policies and procedures in place for managing unacceptable behaviour from residents and/or their representatives. Landlords must be able to evidence reasons for putting any restrictions in place and must keep restrictions under regular review.	Yes	Point 40 in our Complaints Policy	We have a Vexatious and unreasonable behaviour policy . This is published on both complaints webpages South Oxfordshire Vale of White Horse
5.15	Any restrictions placed on contact due to unacceptable behaviour must be proportionate and demonstrate regard for the provisions of the Equality Act 2010.	Yes	Point 4 – In the Vexatious and unreasonable behaviour policy	

Section 6: Complaints Stages

Stage 1

Code provision	Code requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence	Commentary / explanation
6.1	Landlords must have processes in place to consider which complaints can be responded to as early as possible, and which require further investigation. Landlords must consider factors such as the complexity of the complaint and whether the resident is vulnerable or at risk. Most stage 1 complaints can be resolved promptly, and an explanation, apology or resolution provided to the resident.	Yes	Point 23 & 30 in our Complaints Policy	Stage One responded to within 10 working days of our acknowledgement. Stage Two responded to within 20 working days of acknowledgement. This doesn't preclude staff from expediting complaints as soon as they have the relevant information
6.2	Complaints must be acknowledged, defined and logged at stage 1 of the complaints procedure <u>within five working days of the complaint being received.</u>	Yes	Point 23 in our Complaints Policy	This is managed through workflow on our dedicated CRM module
6.3	Landlords must issue a full response to stage 1 complaints <u>within 10 working days</u> of the complaint being acknowledged.	Yes	Point 23 in our Complaints policy	This is managed through workflow on our dedicated CRM module
6.4	Landlords must decide whether an extension to this timescale is needed when considering the complexity of the complaint and then inform the resident of the expected timescale for response. Any extension must be no more than 10 working days without good reason, and the reason(s) must be clearly explained to the resident.	Yes	Point 23 in our Complaints policy	Managed by the Corporate complaints team who will write to the complainant before the deadline to inform of a revised date and reasons for the extension – any extension will be limited to 10 working days after the original due date. This is managed through workflow on our complaints CRM module
6.5	When an organisation informs a resident about an extension to these timescales, they must be provided with the contact details of the Ombudsman.	Yes	Included within our standard wording template	This is included as part of our standard template wording that officers must use when responding to complaints at all stages.
6.6	A complaint response must be provided to the resident when the answer to the complaint is	Yes	Point 23 in our Complaints policy	Actions required are recorded on our dedicated complaints

	known, not when the outstanding actions required to address the issue are completed. Outstanding actions must still be tracked and actioned promptly with appropriate updates provided to the resident.			database and processes will be in place to ensure these actions are completed and a corporate record kept. Our Housing compliance team hold weekly meetings where they discuss any tenant actions outstanding
6.7	Landlords must address all points raised in the complaint definition and provide clear reasons for any decisions, referencing the relevant policy, law and good practice where appropriate.	Yes	Included within our standard wording template	This is included as part of our standard template wording that officers must use when responding to complaints.
6.8	Where residents raise additional complaints during the investigation, these must be incorporated into the stage 1 response if they are related and the stage 1 response has not been issued. Where the stage 1 response has been issued, the new issues are unrelated to the issues already being investigated or it would unreasonably delay the response, the new issues must be logged as a new complaint.	Yes	Point 26 in our Complaints policy	
6.9	Landlords must confirm the following in writing to the resident at the completion of stage 1 in clear, plain language: a) the complaint stage; b) the complaint definition; c) the decision on the complaint; d) the reasons for any decisions made; e) the details of any remedy offered to put things right; f) details of any outstanding actions; and g) details of how to escalate the matter to stage 2 if the individual is not satisfied with the response.	Yes	In our Complaints Policy	This is included as part of our standard template wording that officers must use when responding to Stage One complaints. All responses are checked and validated by a Corporate Complaints officer before sending.

Stage 2

Code provision	Code requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence	Commentary / explanation
6.10	If all or part of the complaint is not resolved to the resident's satisfaction at stage 1, it must be progressed to stage 2 of the landlord's procedure. Stage 2 is the landlord's final response.	Yes	Point 27 of our Complaints policy	
6.11	Requests for stage 2 must be acknowledged, defined and logged at stage 2 of the complaints procedure within five working days of the escalation request being received.	Yes	Point 30 of our Complaints policy	
6.12	Residents must not be required to explain their reasons for requesting a stage 2 consideration. Landlords are expected to make reasonable efforts to understand why a resident remains unhappy as part of its stage 2 response.	Yes	Point 27 of our Complaints policy	
6.13	The person considering the complaint at stage 2 must not be the same person that considered the complaint at stage 1.	Yes	Point 19, Point 21 and Point 22 in our Complaints policy	Stage One – Service Manager Stage Two – Service Director On the occasion an individual officer has had previous involvement in a matter, or a complaint is about that member of staff, it may be allocated to an alternative service manager or service director, at the discretion of the director of corporate services.
6.14	Landlords must issue a final response to the stage 2 <u>within 20 working days</u> of the complaint being acknowledged.	Yes	Point 30 of our Complaints policy	
6.15	Landlords must decide whether an extension to this timescale is needed when considering the complexity of the complaint and then inform the resident of the expected timescale for response. Any extension must be no more than 20 working days without good reason, and the reason(s) must be clearly explained to the resident.	Yes	Point 31 of our Complaints policy	Managed by the Corporate complaints team who will write to the complainant before the deadline to inform of a revised date and reasons for the extension – any extension will be limited to 10 working days after the original

				due date. This is managed through workflow on our complaints CRM module
6.16	When an organisation informs a resident about an extension to these timescales, they must be provided with the contact details of the Ombudsman.	Yes	Included within our standard wording template	This is included as part of our standard template wording that officers must use when responding to complaints.
6.17	A complaint response must be provided to the resident when the answer to the complaint is known, not when the outstanding actions required to address the issue are completed. Outstanding actions must still be tracked and actioned promptly with appropriate updates provided to the resident.	Yes	Point 23 in our Complaints policy	Actions required are recorded on our dedicated complaints database and processes will be in place to ensure these actions are completed and a corporate record is kept. Our Housing compliance team hold weekly meetings where they discuss any tenant actions outstanding
6.18	Landlords must address all points raised in the complaint definition and provide clear reasons for any decisions, referencing the relevant policy, law and good practice where appropriate.	Yes	Included within our standard wording template	This is included as part of our standard template wording that officers must use when responding to Stage Two complaints.
6.19	Landlords must confirm the following in writing to the resident at the completion of stage 2 in clear, plain language: a) the complaint stage; b) the complaint definition; c) the decision on the complaint; d) the reasons for any decisions made; e) the details of any remedy offered to put things right; f) details of any outstanding actions; and g) details of how to escalate the matter to the Ombudsman Service if the individual remains dissatisfied.	Yes	In our Complaints policy	This is included as part of our standard template wording that officers must use when responding to Stage Two complaints. All responses are checked and validated by a Corporate Complaints officer before sending.
6.20	Stage 2 is the landlord's final response and must involve all		In our complaints policy	Part of our standard process for Stage

	suitable staff members needed to issue such a response.			Two. Stage two is the final response before advising the complainant of their right to escalate to the Ombudsman.
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Section 7: Putting things right

Code provision	Code requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence	Commentary / explanation
7.1	Where something has gone wrong a landlord must acknowledge this and set out the actions it has already taken, or intends to take, to put things right. These can include: • Apologising; • Acknowledging where things have gone wrong; • Providing an explanation, assistance or reasons; • Taking action if there has been delay; • Reconsidering or changing a decision; • Amending a record or adding a correction or addendum; • Providing a financial remedy; • Changing policies, procedures or practices.	Yes	Point 36 & 37 of our Complaints policy	All responses are checked and validated by a Corporate Complaints officer before sending.
7.2	Any remedy offered must reflect the impact on the resident as a result of any fault identified.	Yes		All complaints-handling staff have the authority to agree non-financial remedies and HoS have authority to agree financial remedies. These are considered on a case-by-case basis. Compensation and remedies policy in place which includes the Housing Ombudsman guidance
7.3	The remedy offer must clearly set out what will happen and by when, in agreement with the resident where appropriate. Any remedy proposed must be followed through to completion.	Yes		This is managed through workflow on our complaints CRM module
7.4	Landlords must take account of the guidance issued by the Ombudsman when deciding on appropriate remedies.	Yes		Compensation and remedies policy in place which reflects the Housing

				Ombudsman guidance.
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Section 8: Self-assessment, reporting and compliance

Code provision	Code requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence	Commentary / explanation
8.1	Landlords must produce an annual complaints performance and service improvement report for scrutiny and challenge, which must include: a) the annual self-assessment against this Code to ensure their complaint handling policy remains in line with its requirements. b) a qualitative and quantitative analysis of the landlord's complaint handling performance. This must also include a) a summary of the types of complaints the landlord has refused to accept; b) any findings of non-compliance with this Code by the Ombudsman; c) the service improvements made as a result of the learning from complaints; d) any annual report about the landlord's performance from the Ombudsman; and e) any other relevant reports or publications produced by the Ombudsman in relation to the work of the landlord.	Yes	Point 41 in our Complaints policy Annual report to Joint Audit and Governance Committee as the body with oversight for our complaints handling – published on our website	No Housing Landlord complaints received for 2025/26
8.2	The annual complaints performance and service improvement report must be reported to the landlord's governing body (or equivalent) and published on the on the section of its website relating to complaints. The governing body's response to the report must be published alongside this.		This is published on Joint Audit and Governance Committee webpages. South JAGC Vale JAGC	Link to the published report on the website alongside the JAGC minutes
8.3	Landlords must also carry out a self-assessment following a significant restructure, merger and/or change in procedures.	Yes		This is standard practice of the councils
8.4	Landlords may be asked to review and update the self-	Yes		We would follow direction of the

	assessment following an Ombudsman investigation.			Ombudsman if requested to following an Ombudsman investigation.
8.5	If a landlord is unable to comply with the Code due to exceptional circumstances, such as a cyber incident, they must inform the Ombudsman, provide information to residents who may be affected, and publish this on their website Landlords must provide a timescale for returning to compliance with the Code.	Yes		This is included in our business continuity plan.

Section 9: Scrutiny & oversight: continuous learning and improvement

Code provision	Code requirement	Comply: Yes / No	Evidence	Commentary / explanation
9.1	Landlords must look beyond the circumstances of the individual complaint and consider whether service improvements can be made as a result of any learning from the complaint.	Yes		This is standard practice – any actions will be managed through workflow on our complaints CRM module
9.2	A positive complaint handling culture is integral to the effectiveness with which landlords resolve disputes. Landlords must use complaints as a source of intelligence to identify issues and introduce positive changes in service delivery.	Yes	Point 1 of our Complaints policy	
9.3	Accountability and transparency are also integral to a positive complaint handling culture. Landlords must report back on wider learning and improvements from complaints to stakeholders, such as residents' panels, staff and relevant committees.	Yes		We follow a corporate process, which involves internal quarterly review meetings.
9.4	Landlords must appoint a suitably senior lead person as accountable for their complaint handling. This person must assess any themes or trends to identify potential systemic issues, serious risks, or policies and procedures that require revision.	Yes		Our Housing Landlord Team Leader is responsible for monitoring these.
9.5	In addition to this a member of the governing body (or equivalent) must be appointed to have lead responsibility for complaints to support a positive complaint handling culture. This person is referred to as the	Yes		This is our Cabinet member for Customer Services.

	Member Responsible for Complaints ('the MRC').			
9.6	The MRC will be responsible for ensuring the governing body receives regular information on complaints that provides insight on the landlord's complaint handling performance. This person must have access to suitable information and staff to perform this role and report on their findings.	Yes		The Cabinet member for Customer Services will present this information as part of the councils' formal governance processes.
9.7	As a minimum, the MRC and the governing body (or equivalent) must receive: regular updates on the volume, categories and outcomes of complaints, alongside complaint handling performance; a) regular reviews of issues and trends arising from complaint handling; b) regular updates on the outcomes of the Ombudsman's investigations and progress made in complying with orders related to severe maladministration findings; and c) annual complaints performance and service improvement report.	Yes		For Housing, this is provided to the MRC monthly as part of our portfolio update. Our annual complaints report is considered by Joint Audit and Governance Committee as the governing body.
9.8	Landlords must have a standard objective in relation to complaint handling for all relevant employees or third parties that reflects the need to: a) have a collaborative and co-operative approach towards resolving complaints, working with colleagues across teams and departments; b) take collective responsibility for any shortfalls identified through complaints, rather than blaming others; and c) act within the professional standards for engaging with complaints as set by any relevant professional body.	Yes	Point 1 of our Complaints policy	

Appendix 4 – Revised complaints policy



Complaints Policy and Procedure

Last updated: **June 2026**

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Useful Definitions:

Working days – days the council is open to the public (not Saturdays, Sundays, Bank holidays and any other closures)

Relevant manager - the manager who oversees the team or service complained about

Ward councillor – the district councillor who is responsible for your area. You can find your councillor(s) on our websites: [Councillors - South Oxfordshire District Council](#)
[Councillors - Vale of White Horse District Council](#)

POLICY STATEMENT

1. South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District councils are committed to putting people at the centre of everything we do. We aim to provide a high standard of service and recognise we do not always get it right first time. Customer feedback (compliments, comments, and complaints) is important to us, and we want you to tell us when you

think we have got something wrong, so we can endeavour to put it right and learn from it how we can improve our services in future.

COMPLIMENTS AND COMMENTS

2. Compliments will be acknowledged within five working days, recorded and shared with the relevant service team(s).
3. Comments about services which are not complaints or compliments may be statements about how things could be improved and will be recorded to enable the councils to use suggestions to review the way our services are provided. People may express disappointment, disagreement, or observations about services without necessarily wanting to complain. Feedback of this nature will be recorded as a comment.
4. A reply in full will be made, where possible, within 10 working days. If we cannot reply within 10 working days, we will respond and say why and when you can expect a full response.

OUR CORPORATE COMPLAINTS POLICY

5. Having a council-wide procedure for dealing with complaints ensures that:
 - customers know what to do if they have a complaint and understand clearly how we will deal with it
 - staff know what to do when they receive a complaint
 - customers are treated fairly and equally
 - we can improve our services by reviewing the outcome of complaints and learning from them
6. The complaints policy is intended for the use of customers, residents, businesses and visitors, or their chosen representatives.
7. This policy covers all complaints made to the councils as set out in the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) and the Housing Ombudsman (HO) Codes of Practice on effective complaints handling.
8. The councils have a duty to comply with these codes which cover:

Housing Ombudsman – all complaints made to the councils as a social landlord e.g. by tenants of properties we own

Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman – all complaints made about other council services (except where specific exclusions apply – see Appendix one)
9. This complaints policy is published and maintained on the council's website www.southoxon.gov.uk/complaints and www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/complaints

DEFINITION OF A COMPLAINT

10. Effective complaint handling enables individuals to be heard and understood. The starting point for this is a shared understanding of what constitutes a service request

and what constitutes a complaint. For service requests we aim to put things right through normal service delivery processes. To do this we use the definition set out in the LGSCO and HO Codes:

A service request is a request that the organisation provides or improves a service, fixes a problem or reconsiders a decision.

This covers minor service dissatisfaction or failures, for example a missed bin collection, are dealt with directly by the relevant service team. Some responses may come directly from our suppliers or partners. If you are not sure which team to contact, please use the general enquiries form on our website or email customer.service@southandvale.gov.uk.

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the organisation/Landlord, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting an individual/a resident or group of individuals/residents."

We will consider these in line with the process set out below.

HOW TO MAKE A COMPLAINT

11. Formal complaints can be submitted in a number of ways:

- via our online complaints form available on our websites at:
www.southoxon.gov.uk/complaints, or
www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/complaints,
- by email to complaints@southandvale.gov.uk
- by letter to Abbey House Abbey Close Abingdon OX14 3JE
- to any member of council staff or one of our contractors or partners – they will pass your complaint to our complaints team to manage

12. We have a duty to make reasonable adjustments for residents where appropriate, and as a landlord we must keep a record of any reasonable adjustments agreed with our tenants, as well as a record of any disabilities a tenant has disclosed. Please make us aware if you need support to make a service request or formal complaint. Please contact the complaints team if you would like this policy in an alternative format, you can email: complaints@southandvale.gov.uk or telephone 01235 422422.

13. If you are unable to use our online complaints form or you have difficulty in putting forward your complaint because of speech, language or other problems, you can contact our customer service centre on 01235 422422 or visit us at our Abbey House offices and a member of the team can complete the online form for you. You may be accompanied at any time by a friend or advocate to represent you.

14. When writing to us please include the following:

- Name, Address and Email address (if you have one)
- Details of complaint: A summary of what has or has not happened
- What do you feel has been the effect of the action or lack of action?

- What do you think the council could do to put it right? And any outcomes you are looking to achieve
- Have you been in contact with anyone in the council about this matter? If so, please advise with who and when
- Evidence for example emails, letters, or photographs
- Any reasonable adjustments or support you need to be able to make use of our complaints process

15. With signed confirmation from you, a complaint can be submitted on your behalf by your chosen representative. When a complaint is submitted by a group (more than one person), we will ask for a signed confirmation from all parties saying they are happy to be considered as a group. We will then agree with you how we will correspond with the group.

16. We will normally expect a complaint to be raised within 12 months of an issue occurring or the complainant becoming aware of the issue; however, we will consider complaints after this period if it is appropriate to do so and will consider each complaint according to its own circumstances. If we decide not to accept your complaint you can contact the LGSCO or HO as appropriate, their contact details are shown under section 32 of this policy.

17. Where a customer expresses dissatisfaction, whether identified as a service request, comment or otherwise, they will be informed of their right to raise a complaint and will be offered the opportunity to have the matter treated as a complaint at any stage

18. A complaint will not prevent, stall or impact any action needed to resolve an issue through a service request.

HOW WE WILL RESPOND TO YOUR COMPLAINT

19. We will acknowledge and define your complaint within five working days of receiving it and will let you know if we can progress it under the formal corporate complaints procedure. If we cannot progress your complaint under our formal complaints procedure we will explain the reasons for this. Before refusing to do so we will consider the individual circumstances of each complaint. Please refer to Appendix 1 for examples of when our formal complaints procedure cannot be used.

20. There are two stages to our formal complaints procedure, with a third independent stage:

Stage One: will be investigated and responded to by the relevant service manager with input from our contractor or partner where relevant

Stage Two: this is to review the way in which the stage one investigation was conducted and will be carried out by the relevant service director. It is not an opportunity to raise new issues or further points of representation.

LGSCO or HO: if you are dissatisfied with the outcome of our formal complaints procedure, you can refer your complaint to the relevant Ombudsman.

21. When we acknowledge your complaint, we will check to make sure that we have understood the complaint fully and may seek clarity on the information you have provided, or extra information before the stage one or stage two investigation can begin. The acknowledgement will set out the outcome you seek and will confirm which aspects the council are and are not responsible for.
22. On the occasion an individual officer has had previous involvement in a matter, or a complaint is about that member of staff, it may be allocated to an alternative service manager or service director, at the discretion of the director of corporate services.
23. Complaints which involve multiple service areas, will be handled with a coordinated approach and a response provided by the service area we consider most relevant.

STAGE ONE – SERVICE MANAGER

24. We will contact you within five working days of receipt to acknowledge and define your complaint and we will advise the name and job role of the service manager who will be responding and the date you can expect a response by. We will respond to your complaint within 10 working days of our acknowledgement. We will provide a response when an answer is known and not necessarily when all agreed actions have been completed.
25. If it is not possible for a response to be provided within the deadline set out in our acknowledgement, we will keep you informed before the deadline to let you know of a revised date and reason for the extension – any extension will be limited to 10 working days after the original due date. Should a response to a complaint about the council as a social landlord fall outside of the timescales for a response, we will agree appropriate intervals with you to keep you informed of the progress of your complaint until a full response is provided.
26. In a small number of circumstances, we will escalate your complaint straight to stage two. This includes a complaint about the procedure followed during a Code of Conduct complaint, but not for review of the Monitoring Officer's decision. Please note that this does not apply to complaints related to the council acting as a social landlord.
27. Should additional complaints be raised during stage one, and a stage one response has not been provided, these will be incorporated into a single stage one response if they are related. Where the stage one response has been provided, or the new issues are unrelated to the issues already being considered, or it would unreasonably delay the response, the new issues will be logged as a new complaint.

STAGE TWO – SERVICE DIRECTOR

28. Following the outcome of the stage one complaint, if you remain dissatisfied with any aspect of how your complaint was handled, you have a right to ask for your complaint to be reviewed under stage two. You are not required to provide reasoning when requesting for your complaint to escalate to stage two, however should you wish to

provide any reasons, this will assist the stage two investigator to identify and assess the matters you consider remain unresolved.

29. At stage two, the role of the service director is to review the response you were provided at stage one, and whether we have satisfactorily addressed the points you raised in your stage one complaint.
30. You must write to us within six weeks of the date of the stage one response to request your complaint is escalated to stage two.
31. We will contact you within five working days of receipt to acknowledge and define your complaint we will clarify our understanding of outstanding issues and the outcomes you are seeking; and advise the name and job role of the service director who will be responding and the date you can expect a response by. We will respond to your stage two complaint within 20 working days from the date we sent our acknowledgement of your stage two request. We will provide a response when an answer is known and not necessarily when all agreed actions have been completed
32. If it is not possible for a response to be provided within the deadline set out in our acknowledgement, we will keep you informed before the deadline to let you know a revised date and reason for the extension – any extension will be limited to 20 working days after the original due date.

THE ROLE OF THE OMBUDSMEN

33. The LGSCO/HO investigate complaints of alleged injustice concerning local authorities. Their service is free of charge.
34. If you remain dissatisfied following the outcome of our formal complaints procedure or are dissatisfied with the way the council is handling your complaint, including time taken to resolve it, you can contact the Ombudsman.
35. If the council at any stage has decided to not accept your complaint and you remain dissatisfied with this decision, you have the right to contact the Ombudsman.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT & SOCIAL CARE OMBUDSMAN	HOUSING OMBUDSMAN
www.lgo.org.uk	www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk http://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/residents/make-a-complaint/
Telephone 0300 061 0614	Telephone 0300 111 3000
Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman PO Box 4771 Coventry CV4 0EH	Housing Ombudsman Service PO Box 1484, Unit D, Preston, PR2 0ET

36. Before the LGSCO/HO will accept your complaint, you must **normally** first complete stages one and two of our complaints procedure, as set out in this policy.

Note: the law does not allow the Ombudsman to accept complaints made by an “authority constituted for the purposes of the public service”. This includes parish and town councils.

THE OUTCOME OF YOUR COMPLAINT

37. Where, as a result of our investigation, any part of your complaint is upheld we will acknowledge this and set this out in our response. **We will issue our response once our findings have been reached, even if any agreed actions have not yet been completed. Our response will detail the actions we have taken or intend to take.** These could include:

- an apology
- providing an explanation, assistance or reasons why the error occurred
- taking action if there has been delay
- reconsidering or changing a decision
- amending a record or adding a correction or addendum
- providing a financial remedy where appropriate
- changing policies, procedures or practices, or providing training to ensure it doesn't happen again

38. We will set out clearly what will happen and by when, in agreement with yourself where appropriate; and we will ensure that these actions are completed. **Where actions remain outstanding at the point we issue our response, we will keep you informed of progress and will provide regular updates until those actions have been completed.**

ANONYMOUS COMPLAINTS

2. Generally, we do not investigate anonymous complaints. Anonymous complaints will only be dealt with if they involve individual or public safety, corruption, waste or other impropriety and where there is sufficient information to allow an investigation to proceed.

VEXATIOUS AND UNREASONABLE COMPLAINANT BEHAVIOUR

3. In a minority of cases, complainants pursue matters in a way that can impede the investigation of their complaint or have significant resource issues for us.
4. We have a separate policy for dealing with vexatious and unreasonable behaviour, which can be found at: www.southoxon.gov.uk/complaints and www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/complaint

MONITORING AND REPORTING COMPLAINTS DATA

5. Under the LGSCO and HO Codes of Practice we are required to publish details of our complaint handling regularly to key councillors (a Cabinet member has responsibility for complaints at each council), the appropriate council meeting and on our website. This includes:
 - an annual self-assessment against the requirements of the Ombudsmen Codes
 - an analysis of our complaint handling performance
 - any findings of non-compliance with the Codes
 - the service improvements made as a result of the learning from complaints
 - the annual letter about our performance from the Ombudsman
6. We produce a report for our Joint Audit and Governance Committee each year, and their role is to provide oversight and scrutiny of how we handle complaints and compliance with the codes.

CONFIDENTIALITY

7. The identity of a complainant will only be revealed to those who need to consider it; their identity will not be made known to anyone else, nor will it be made public.
8. Files that contain confidential information may be subject to data subject access requests under the Data Protection Act 2018. Consideration of what can be released will be decided by the Data Protection Officer, who will consider the complainant's own rights and expectation of confidentiality.
9. Where there is an explicit request by you to do so and your consent has been given, your complaint and associated documentation/correspondence will be copied to your local district councillor(s).

APPENDIX 1 - WHEN OUR FORMAL COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE CANNOT BE USED

- For matters that have already exhausted our complaints procedure and/or have been investigated by the relevant Ombudsman.
- Complaints about parish or town councils should be sent directly to the relevant town or parish council using the contact information on their website.

- **Benefits:**

If you disagree with the way we have calculated your benefit entitlement, you can ask us to send their appeal to the Tribunal Service for review by an independent tribunal. To do this you should contact us within one calendar month of our decision by email to:

sodc.benefits@secure.capita.co.uk or
vowh.benefits@secure.capita.co.uk

or by writing to:

South Oxfordshire District Council	or Vale of White Horse District Council
PO Box 870	PO Box 880
Erith	Erith
DA8 1UN	DA8 1UN
Tel: 0345 302 2313	Tel: 0345 302 2315

- **Licensing:**

To appeal against a decision regarding licensing (premises, personal or taxi licences) you must lodge that appeal with the appropriate court within 21 days of the date of our decision. The written decision notice will give details of the relevant rights of appeal. For taxi penalty points, the route of appeal is detailed within the letter issuing points.

- **Planning Application and Enforcement Decisions:**

When a planning application is refused, an applicant has a legal right to appeal to the Planning Inspectorate.

The formal complaints procedure can only be used to investigate the procedures followed in determining an application, and not the decision itself. We will not investigate complaints from objectors who are simply unhappy that we have granted planning permission for a particular development, as we only have powers to revoke such a decision in exceptional circumstances.

Similarly, our corporate complaints procedure cannot be used if you are not happy with a planning enforcement triage or formal investigation decision. We can only accept a complaint if you think we have not followed due process, as set out in the council's Planning Enforcement Statement.

- **Excess charge notices (parking fines):**

If you want to dispute an excess charge notice (parking fine), you must do so in writing, preferably within the reduced payment period of the excess charge notice, either by email to carparks.southandvale.uk@sabagroup.com

or by writing to:

Car parks team
Saba Park Services Ltd.
For and on behalf of South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils
Abbey House
Abbey Close
Abingdon
OX14 3JE

- **Complaints about Elected Members:**

If the complaint is about the conduct of a district councillor, a member of one of the town or parish councils or a co-opted committee member, the complaint should be considered under the Code of Conduct complaints procedure by the Monitoring Officer. Please visit the Councillors' code of conduct page on our website for further information:

[Councillors' code of conduct - South Oxfordshire District Council](#)

[Councillors' code of conduct - Vale of White Horse District Council](#)

- **Complaints about responses issued under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA), Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (EIR) or the Data Protection Act 2018 and UKGDPR**

These are managed in accordance with the specific legislation and escalated to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) if unresolved. The response you have received should explain what to do if you are not happy and you can contact our Information Governance Team about FOI and EIR responses using either foi@southoxon.gov.uk for SODC or foi@whitehorsedc.gov.uk for VWHDC and using data.protection@southandvale.gov.uk for data protection queries.

- **What cannot be considered as a Housing complaint:**

- Anti-Social Behaviour reporting
- Complaints that are going through a court, tribunal or are within a legal process
- Dissatisfaction with a Housing Allocations decision
- If the issue giving rise to the complaint occurred over 12 months ago. However, these will be considered on a case-by-case basis and may be extended where safeguarding or health and safety issues are involved
- If the complainant has already been through the complaints process and has been provided with an in-depth formal response on the same issue

Appendix 5 - Joint Audit and Governance Committee response

South Oxfordshire District Council and Vale of White Horse District Council are committed to placing residents at the heart of everything we do. We strive to deliver a high standard of service and recognise that, on occasion, we may not achieve this at the first opportunity. Feedback from our residents—whether compliments, comments, or complaints—is essential to our continuous improvement. We actively encourage customers to share their concerns as this enables us to address issues promptly and learn from the experience to enhance our services in the future.

We welcome complaints from all residents and tenants and are committed to managing them in an independent, fair, and transparent manner. Our complaints process is designed to be accessible to everyone, and we make reasonable adjustments to ensure that no individual is disadvantaged when submitting a complaint.

As the governing body with oversight of complaints, we receive annual reports detailing the councils' overall performance in complaints handling, including those received in our capacity as landlord. In this year's report, it is noted that no complaints were received relating to the councils' role as landlord. This may reflect the limited size of the councils' housing stock and the proactive processes in place within the Housing team to resolve issues for tenants at an early stage.

We welcome the councils' consistent and thorough approach to complaint management and are assured that the appropriate policies, procedures, and practices are in place. We also welcome improvements in the level of reporting available to the Committee as part of this report; and note changes to our Complaints policy following Housing Ombudsman feedback. The Committee has reviewed the Landlord annual self-assessment on complaints and considers it to provide an accurate reflection of the current position based on available evidence.

We are satisfied that both the Corporate Complaints and Housing teams have the necessary resourcing to ensure compliance with the requirements of the Housing Ombudsman and the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Codes of Practice, as well as the councils' own complaint-handling policies.