



Governance and Audit Committee

Item
7(i)

16 December 2025

Report of	Head of Governance and Monitoring Officer	Author	Andrew Weavers
Title	Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman – Annual Review Letter 2024-25		
Wards affected	Not applicable		

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman produces an Annual Review Letter on the number of complaints it has received regarding each local authority. This report provides details of Colchester City Council's Annual Review Letter for 2024-25.

2. Recommended Decision

- 2.1 To note the contents of the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's Annual Review Letter for 2024-25.

3. Reasons for Recommended Decision

- 3.1 To inform the Committee of the contents of the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's Annual Review Letter relating to Colchester City Council for 2024-25.

3. Alternative Options

- 3.1 No alternative options are presented.

4. Supporting Information

- 4.1 The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman can investigate complaints about most council services, even if the service is outsourced to another organisation to provide. The Ombudsman issues an Annual Review Letter to each local authority. The Annual Review Letter for Colchester for the period ending 31 March 2025 is attached to this report at Appendix 1.
- 4.3 It is worth noting that anyone can choose to make a complaint to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman. Accordingly, the number of complaints is not an indicator of performance or level of customer service. In most instances there was no case to answer. The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman will normally insist that the Council has the opportunity to resolve the complaint locally through its own complaints procedure before commencing its own investigation.
- 4.4 This Committee has an overview of Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman investigations as part of its terms of reference. The contents of the Annual Review were reported to Cabinet at its meeting on 9 July 2025 when it noted the report. Ombudsman cases are reported to Principal Liaison meetings attended by senior staff from Colchester City Council and Colchester Borough Homes and to the Housing Portfolio Holder briefings ahead of publication.

5. Key Headlines

5.1 The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Annual Review Letter focuses on the outcomes of complaints and what can be learned from them. The statistics are on 3 key areas:

(i) Complaints upheld - The Ombudsman upholds complaints when it finds some form of fault in an authority's actions, including where the authority accepted fault before it investigated.

(ii) Compliance with recommendations - The Ombudsman recommends ways for authorities to put things right when faults have caused injustice and monitor their compliance with its recommendations. Failure to comply is rare and a compliance rate below 100% is a cause for concern.

(iii) Satisfactory remedies provided by the authority – In these cases, the authority upheld the complaint and the Ombudsman agreed with how the authority offered to put things right. The Ombudsman encourages the early resolution of complaints and credit authorities that accept fault and find appropriate ways to put things right.

The Ombudsman compares the three key annual statistics for each authority with similar types of authorities to work out an average level of performance.

	Period ending 31/03/25	Period ending 31/03/24	Period ending 31/03/23	Period ending 31/03/22	Period ending 31/03/21
Complaints Upheld	2	5	2	1	No detailed investigations carried out
Compliance with Ombudsman's recommendations	100%	100%	100%	100%	No recommendations due for compliance
Satisfactory remedies provided by the authority	0	3	0	0	No detailed investigations upheld

5.2 The Ombudsman upheld two complaints. One in relation to housing one in relation to anti-social behaviour. Neither of the upheld complaints had a finding of maladministration and no reports were issued.

5.3 The details of the upheld complaints are mostly published on the Ombudsman's website. The following is a high-level summary.

[Colchester City Council \(24 007 842\)](#)

The Ombudsman found injustice in the manner in which the Council handled Miss X's homelessness application. Miss X had complained that the Council had delayed in investigating her case and failed to provide temporary accommodation. The Ombudsman found the delays and failings in the way the Council dealt with Miss X's homeless application were fault and that this fault has caused Miss X an injustice.

Following the findings Colchester Borough Homes confirmed to the Ombudsman that they completed a full review of its practice and procedures and have advised all staff to treat all cases individually and not to take any blanket positions on any matter.

In addition, all officers have had a full two days training on Homelessness and PT VII of The Housing Act 1996 and the Homelessness Code of Guidance. The Ombudsman subsequently confirmed that they were content that all required actions had been satisfactorily completed.

The other case (23 011 755) has not been published on the Ombudsman’s website

The Ombudsman found fault in the manner in which the Council dealt with Mrs’s complaint of anti-social behaviour. Mrs X had complained that the Council failed to follow the correct procedure for an anti-social behaviour case review. She also said the Council did not follow the correct complaints procedure and failed to take account of her disability. The Ombudsman did not find the Council at fault for failing to consider Mrs X’s disability. The Ombudsman also did not find fault over the way the Council considered the anti-social behaviour case review or Mrs X’s complaint. However, it was at fault for delays. This caused Mrs X distress which the Council agreed to and has apologised for. There were no other required actions to be undertaken.

5.4 Whilst there was no finding of maladministration in either case, services have reviewed their processes in the light of the complaints and made the necessary service improvements as highlighted in the Annual Review letter.

5.5 The following table provides a comparison of complaints and enquires received. (NB. categories are those used by the Ombudsman)

Year	Benefits and Tax	Corporate and other services	Environmental Services & Public Protection & Regulation	Highways and Transport	Housing	Planning and Development	Other	Total
2024/25	3	3	3	1	11	6	1	28
2023/24	3	1	4	1	6	7	0	22
2022/23	2	0	0	0	4	4	0	10
2021/22	2	1	4	1	7	4	2	21
2020/21	2	1	4	4	1	3	0	15

5.6 The following table provides a comparison of enquires and decisions made by outcome.

Year	Not for us			Assessed and closed	Detailed Investigations			Total
	<i>Incomplete / Invalid</i>	<i>Advice Given</i>	<i>Referred back for Local Resolution</i>	<i>Closed after Initial Enquiries</i>	Not Upheld	Upheld	Uphold Rate	
2024/25		11		14	1	2	67%	28
2023/24	0	0	7	9	2	5	71%	23
2022/23	0	0	6	2	0	2	100%	10
2021/22	1	3	5	10	2	1	33%	22
2020/21	1	0	5	7	0	0	N/A	13

NB. Headings in bold are new category descriptions. Previous ones are included in italics for comparison purposes.

- 5.7 The following table shows Colchester’s performance compared with other Borough, City and District Councils in Essex.

Name	Complaints Upheld % (numbers)	Compliance with recommendations	Satisfactory remedies provided by Council (numbers)
Basildon	64% (7)	100%	0% (7)
Braintree	None	None	None
Brentwood	100% (3)	100%	33% (1)
Castle Point	None	None	None
Chelmsford	50% (2)	100%	0% (2)
Colchester	67% (2)	100%	0% (2)
Epping Forest	80% (4)	100%	25% (1)
Harlow	50% (1)	None	0% (1)
Maldon	None	None	None
Rochford	100% (1)	None	0% (1)
Tendring	67% (2)	100%	0% (2)
Uttlesford	75% (3)	100%	33% (1)

6. Strategic Plan References

- 6.1 The lessons learnt from complaints to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman link in with our Strategic Plan aims to be efficient accessible, customer focused and always looking to improve. Having an effective complaints process helps us to achieve the Strategic Plan’s themes of a Wellbeing, making Colchester an even better place to live and supporting those who need help most.

7. Publicity Considerations

- 7.1 Details of the Annual Review Letter are published on the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman’s website and will also be published on the Council’s website.

8. Financial, Equality, Diversity and Human Rights, Consultation, Community Safety, Health and Safety, Risk Management and Environmental and Sustainability and Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation Implications

- 8.1 No direct implications.