

REPORT TO Cabinet

17 SEPTEMBER 2026

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF
CORPORATE SERVICES

LOCAL GOVERNMENT & SOCIAL CARE OMBUDSMAN ANNUAL COMPLAINTS REPORT 2025/26

Summary

The report provides details of the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's (LGSCO) annual review letter for 2025/26. The annual review letter details that there were 69 enquiries submitted to the Ombudsman during 2025/26, with the Ombudsman responding to 51 complaints (an increase from 30 the previous year), 7 met the threshold for a detailed investigation by the Ombudsman (this is a similar number to the 8 investigated in 2024/2025). All 7 of the investigations were upheld. All recommendations made by the Ombudsman, following their investigations, have been accepted and implemented by the Council. The Ombudsman was satisfied that the Council had remedied 3 of the 7 complaints prior to their investigation.

Recommendations

1. Cabinet to note the report.

Detail

1. Each year the Ombudsman publishes its annual letter and summary of statistics on the complaints and enquiries it has received about Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council and the decisions made. The Council has received the latest report for the financial year ending 31 March 2026.
2. Of the 51 complaints and enquiries responded to by the Ombudsman in 2025/26, 7 were progressed to investigation, with all 7 of the complaints being upheld. The number of complaints responded to by the Ombudsman has increased since the previous year (30 in 2024/25), however the number of complaints investigated by the Ombudsman has remained steady, suggesting that while more complainants are taking their complaints to the Ombudsman, a high number of complaints are being appropriately addressed locally without the need for investigation by the Ombudsman.
3. Of the 7 upheld Ombudsman complaint investigations, 2 related to Adults Services, 2 related to SEND and Inclusion, 2 related to Children's Social Care and 1 was regarding Community School Transport. The Ombudsman issued its findings in relation to 1 complaint as a public report. The complaint related to alternative education provision for a young person who has an Educational Health Care (EHC) Plan and was considered by Cabinet on 16 October 2025.

4. The annual report details that the Ombudsman was satisfied with the remedy offered by the Council (such as an apology, financial redress) in advance of the complainant raising the complaint with the Ombudsman, in 3 out of the 7 cases. Remedy guidance for officers undertaking complaint investigations, has been strengthened in the complaints training programme delivered by the Information Governance Team and was also included in the annual Complaints Officer Forum that was held on 13 May 2026.
5. A copy of the 2025/26 performance tables received from the Ombudsman is attached at **Appendix I** of this report. A useful guide to interpretation of the Ombudsman's statistics is available on the [LGSCO website](#).

Financial Implications

6. None as a direct result of this report. The financial implications of individual complaints would be dealt with separately as part of the responses to those complaints.

Legal Implications

7. There are no direct legal implications arising from the report. They may, however, arise on a case-by-case basis, depending on the particular circumstances of the complaint and related decision and Legal Service input is called upon in these cases. The Corporate Governance Group also has a Legal Service representative.

Risk Assessment

8. The Ombudsman complaint investigations and associated decision notices create public relations risks to the Council and can undermine resident confidence. The 3 Complaints Policies developed by the Council (Corporate, Children's Statutory and Adult Services Statutory) and associated procedures are designed to minimise these risks, and the oversight provided by the Complaints Team and Corporate Governance Group provide assurance to senior management and Members that complaints are taken seriously, corrective action is implemented and learning maximised. Councillor Paul Rowling is the Council's Member responsible for complaints considered within the corporate process, and receives periodic updates on complaint handling, including decisions the Ombudsman has upheld.

Wards Affected and Consultation with Ward/ Councillors

9. The Ombudsman complaints information does not indicate any significant ward specific information or trends.

Background Papers

10. The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's annual review of Local Government complaints for 2025/26 has been published and relevant extracts have been included in this report. A copy of the complete report can be viewed on the [LGSCO website](#).

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Appendix I - Stockton data from the annual report 2025/26

Complaints upheld	
100% of complaints investigated were upheld.	National average of 85% in similar organisations
7 upheld decisions	1 public report
3.4 upheld decisions per 100,000 residents	Average for authorities of Stockton's type is 5.6 upheld decisions per 100, 000
Statistics are based on a total of 7 investigations for the period between 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026	

Compliance with Ombudsman recommendations	
In 100% of cases the Ombudsman were satisfied with the actions taken by Stockton in response to their recommendations.	National average of 77% in similar organisations

Satisfactory remedy provided by the organisation	
In 43% of upheld cases the Ombudsman found the organisation had provided a satisfactory remedy before the complaint reached the Ombudsman	
3 satisfactory remedy decisions	
Statistics are based on a total of 7 upheld decisions for the period between 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026	