

WEST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE COUNCIL CABINET

14th SEPTEMBER 2021

Portfolio Holder for HR and Corporate Services – Councillor Mike Hallam

Report Title	Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Annual Report Analysis 202-21
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List of Appendices

None

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to inform Cabinet of the findings of the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's (LGSCO) annual review into enquiries and complaints received about Northamptonshire County Council, Northampton Borough Council, South Northants Council and Daventry District Council between the 1st of April 2020 and the 31st of March 2021.

2. Executive Summary

2.1. Overall numbers of contacts received by the LGSCO, **by sovereign authority**:

Daventry District Council	11
Northampton Borough Council	31
Northamptonshire County Council	61
South Northamptonshire District Council	9
TOTAL	112

2.2. Overall numbers received, **by area of service, across all sovereign authorities**:

3. Adult Care Services	26
Benefits & Tax	6
Corporate & Other Services	4
Education & Childrens Services	27
Environmental Services & Public Protection & Regulation	12
Highways & Transport	5
Housing	10
Planning & Development	21
Other	1
TOTAL	112

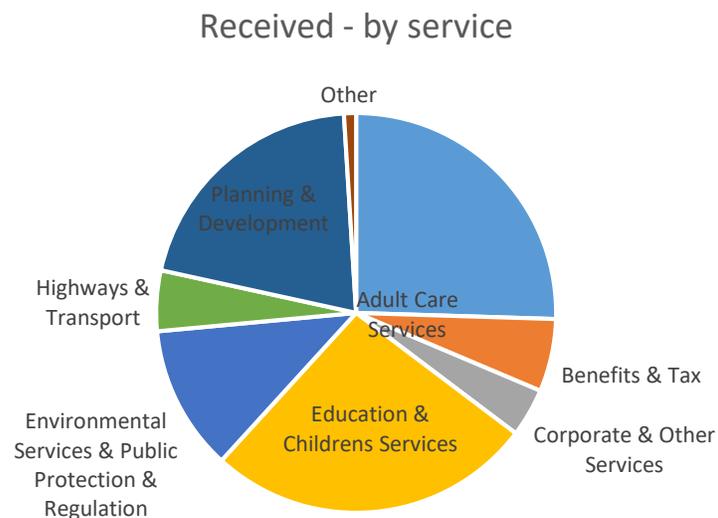


Fig. 1: LGSCO contacts received, by service area

2.3 Headlines from the National Review:

- 67% of complaints upheld, compared to 61% previous year
- Recommendations to remedy an injustice were up 2% on previous year
- Children's Services cases make up the largest proportion of workload – LGSCO is now upholding 77% of those complaints nationally

- The uphold rate increased across all categories of complaint, except Environmental Services

'I am concerned about the general erosion to the visibility, capacity, and status of complaint functions within councils. These concerns are not new and cannot be wholly attributed to the trials of the pandemic' Mike King, Ombudsman

- The increasing percentage of upheld complaints is a sustained trend
- The LGSCO believes that 10 years' worth of cuts have had a significant impact on the customer experience, and fears that the customer's voice is getting 'lost'
- The pandemic hasn't created new themes of complaint, but has magnified existing issues
- The main cause for upheld complaints is a failing of basic administration functions
- There needs to be an increased focus on 'getting the boring stuff right'
- He has commented on Complaints Teams struggling to get purchase within authorities and the importance of not seeing complaints as a 'negative'; Local Government culture really needs to support this function.

3. Recommendations

It is recommended that Cabinet note the content and recommendations of the Ombudsman's reports.

4. Reason for Recommendations

It is good practice to note the findings and recommendations of the Ombudsman and support their implementation across Council services, in order to improve customer experience, value for money and outcomes for residents.

5. Report Background

5.1. The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) notes that from the 1 April 2021 Northamptonshire County Council was abolished and its functions absorbed by the newly formed West Northamptonshire Council and North Northamptonshire Council. This data relates to 2020-21 and separate review letters were issued in respect of each authority as they existed during that year.

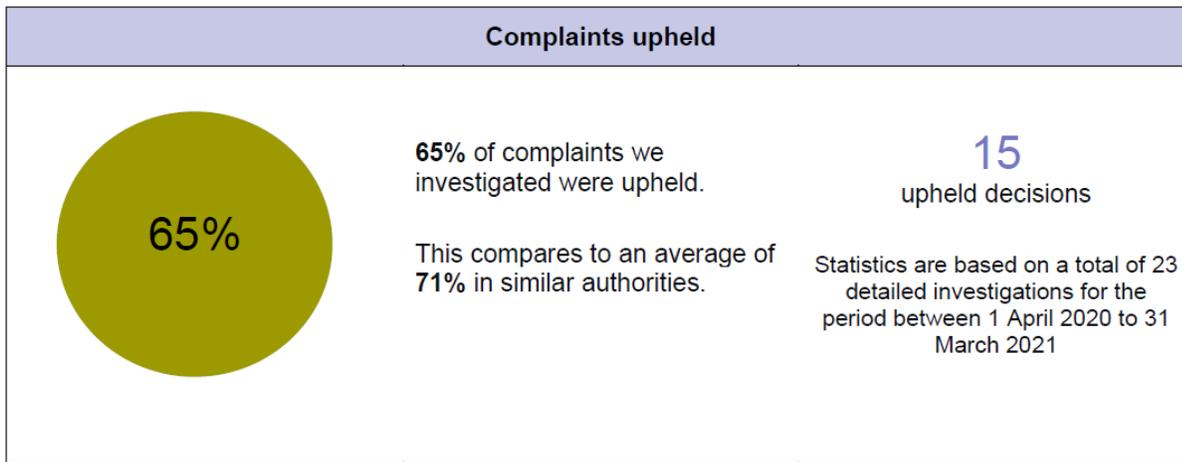
5.2. It should be noted that due to the COVID pandemic the LGSCO suspended all casework between March 2020 and late June.

6. Issues and Choices

6.1 NCC - Key performance data extracted from Annual Review letter:

61 contacts in relation to **Northamptonshire County Council**, of which:

- 23 detailed investigations compared to 29 (2019-20)
- 15 upheld decisions compared to 22 upheld decisions (2019-20)
- 65% Uphold rate has decreased from 76% (2019-20)



Compliance with Ombudsman recommendations

N/A

No recommendations were due for compliance in this period

Satisfactory remedies provided by the authority

0%

In 0% of upheld cases we found the authority had provided a satisfactory remedy before the complaint reached the Ombudsman.

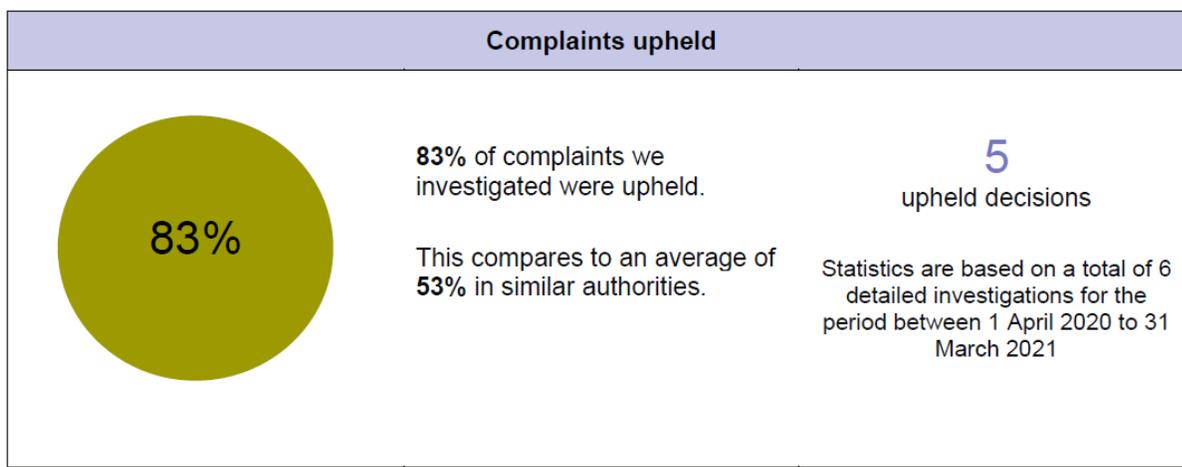
0 satisfactory remedy decisions
Statistics are based on a total of 23 detailed investigations for the period between 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021

This compares to an average of 8% in similar authorities.

6.2 NBC - Key performance data extracted from Annual Review letter:

31 contacts in relation to **Northampton Borough Council**, of which:

- 6 detailed investigations compared to 11 (2019-20)
- 5 upheld decisions compared to 7 upheld decisions (2019-20)
- 83% Uphold rate has increased from 64% (2019-20)



Compliance with Ombudsman recommendations

N/A

This refers to cases where we were satisfied the authority had successfully implemented our recommendations.

No recommendations were due for compliance in this period

Satisfactory remedies provided by the authority

20%

In **20%** of upheld cases we found the authority had provided a satisfactory remedy before the complaint reached the Ombudsman.

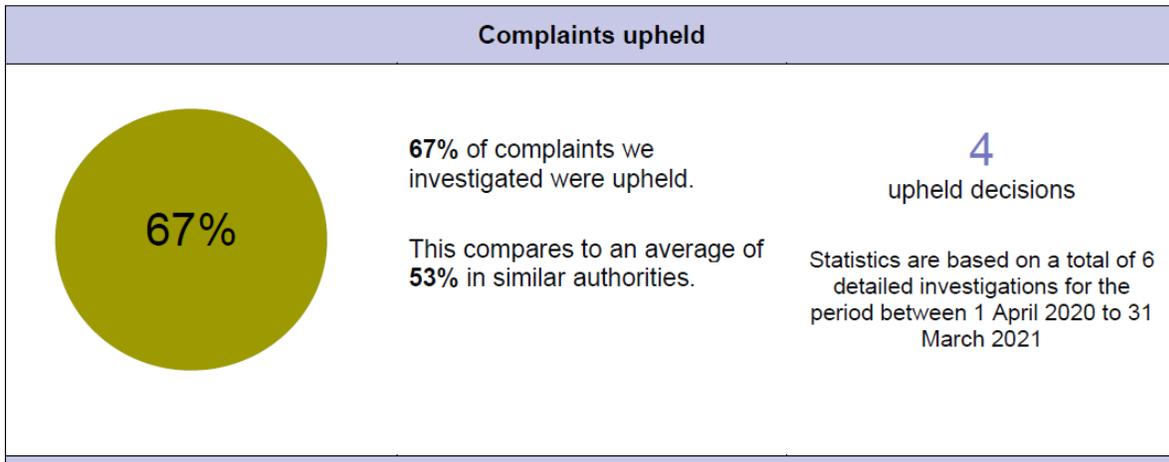
1 satisfactory remedy decisions
Statistics are based on a total of 6 detailed investigations for the period between 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021

This compares to an average of **16%** in similar authorities.

6.3 SNC - Key performance data extracted from Annual Review letter:

9 contacts received in relation to **South Northants District Council**, of which:

- 6 detailed investigations compared to 1 in (2019-20)
- 4 upheld decisions compared to 1 upheld decision (2019-20)
- **67%** Uphold rate has decreased from 100% (2019-20)



Compliance with Ombudsman recommendations

N/A

This refers to cases where we were satisfied the authority had successfully implemented our recommendations.

No recommendations were due for compliance in this period

Satisfactory remedies provided by the authority

50%

In **50%** of upheld cases we found the authority had provided a satisfactory remedy before the complaint reached the Ombudsman.

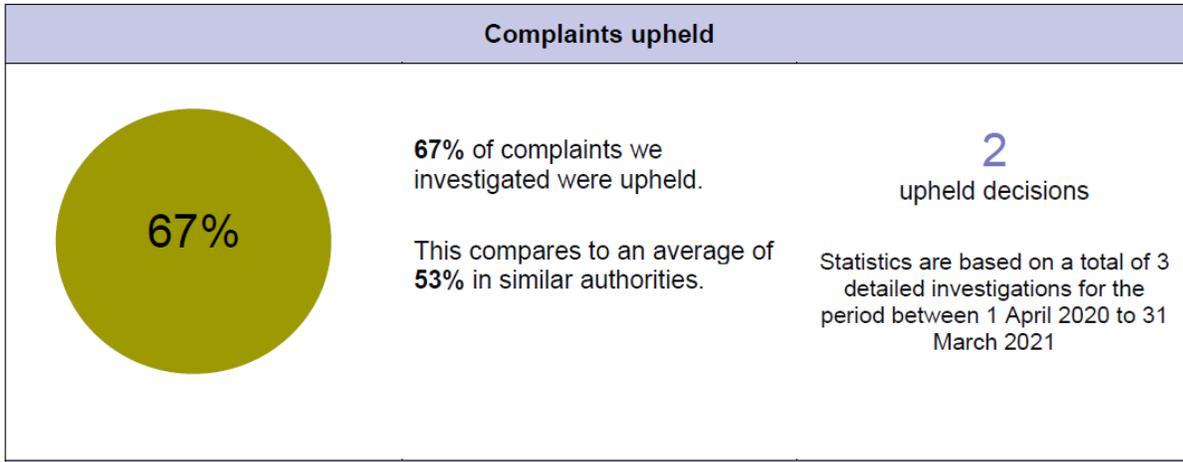
2 satisfactory remedy decisions
Statistics are based on a total of 6 detailed investigations for the period between 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021

This compares to an average of **16%** in similar authorities.

6.4 DDC - Key performance data extracted from Annual Review letter:

11 contacts in relation to **Daventry District Council**, of which:

- **3** detailed investigations compared to 10 (2019-20)
- **2** upheld decisions compared to 5 upheld decisions (2019-20)
- **67%** Uphold rate has increased from 50% (2019-20)



Compliance with Ombudsman recommendations

N/A

This refers to cases where we were satisfied the authority had successfully implemented our recommendations.

No recommendations were due for compliance in this period

Satisfactory remedies provided by the authority

0%

In **0%** of upheld cases we found the authority had provided a satisfactory remedy before the complaint reached the Ombudsman.

0 satisfactory remedy decisions
 Statistics are based on a total of 3 detailed investigations for the period between 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021

This compares to an average of **16%** in similar authorities.

7 Implications (including financial implications)

a. Resources and Financial

It is important to note that failure to implement and maintain high practice standards in the management of complaints, in line with LGSCO recommendations, can cost the Authority in remedies, reparation and also officer time. Failure to implement Ombudsman recommendations can also result in higher compensation and remedy payments.

b. Legal

There is a requirement for the Monitoring Officer to be sighted to cases where maladministration is identified. This is achieved through a process in place which ensures that there is communication between the Complaints Manager and the Monitoring Officer.

c. Risk

Failure to implement the recommendations and best practice promoted by the Ombudsman increases a number of corporate risks for the Council: reputational damage; un-forecasted financial pressure; increase in customer contacts and officer caseload; increase in the numbers of complaints raised.

d. Consultation

There are no public consultation requirements arising from the proposals.

e. Consideration by Overview and Scrutiny

This public document was considered by the WNC Executive Leadership Team.

f. Climate Impact

N/A

g. Community Impact

N/A

h. Communications

The Ombudsman's annual review is a published report and as such a public document. It is important to note that this year's review recognises the above average performance of the legacy councils, despite difficult operating conditions (pandemic, local government reorganisation).

7. Background Papers

National Review: [Review of Local Government Complaints 2020 21](#)

Your Council's Performance: [West Northamptonshire Council - Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman](#)