

Policy Committee Decision Report

Title of Report:	Annual Customer Voice Report – 2025/26
Date of Decision:	2 nd September 2026
Report To:	Strategy and Resources Policy Committee
Report Of:	Ajman Ali, Executive Director of Neighbourhood Services
Report Author:	Tom Smith, Director of Customer Experience and Communities

Executive Summary: Sheffield City Council's Customer Experience Strategy 2024-2028 sets out a vision to deliver great customer experiences for residents, communities and businesses by understanding their needs, making services easier to access, and ensuring customers reach the right solution first time.

This report is the Council's refreshed Annual Customer Voice report which moves beyond complaints and tells a more ambitious story about how Sheffield is listening, learning and acting on what residents tell us. It describes how Customer Voice is becoming a practical driver for better services, stronger accountability and improved trust.

It presents a new set of Customer Standards for agreement by Strategy and Resources Policy Committee, which will underpin the Council's customer improvement work.

The report also fulfils our statutory obligations in regard to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) and Housing Ombudsman and provides visibility and transparency in terms of the Council's overall Customer performance.



Council Plan outcomes:

[A place where all children belong and all young people can build a successful future](#)

[Great neighbourhoods that people are happy to call home](#)

[People live in caring, engaged communities that value diversity and support wellbeing](#)

[A creative and prosperous city full of culture, learning, and innovation](#)

[A city on the move – growing, connected and sustainable](#)

Policy Committee remit:

This report is to be considered by the Strategy and Resources Policy Committee as its remit includes: Lead responsibility for complaints including monitoring of complaint handling performance. [[Part 3C - 3.3 Matters Delegated to Committees March 2025.pdf](#)]

Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? [No]



Recommendations:

Strategy and Resources Policy Committee is recommended to:

1. Accept the 2025-26 Annual Customer Voice Report (detailed in Appendix 1) and agree that the recommended improvement actions as set out in Section 2.2 should form the basis of its written response to the Annual Complaints Report for publication.
2. Agree the proposed Customer Standards at section 2.3 (detailed in Appendix 3).
3. Endorse the 2025-26 Annual Report of Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman, and Housing Ombudsman Decisions in section 2.4 (detailed in Appendix 2) and agree that it is presented to Council by the Monitoring Officer in November 2026.
4. Endorse the items set out in section 2.5:
 - 2026 Housing Annual Complaint Service Improvement Report (detailed in Appendix 4a)
 - 2026 Housing Complaints Self-Assessment (detailed in Appendix 4b) and
 - 2026 Housing Governing Body statement (detailed in Appendix 4c)

Financial Implications: [No] [Approved by: Adrian Hart, Finance Officer]

Legal Implications: [Yes] [Approved by: Penny Hellewell & Rebecca Lambert, Legal Officers]

Equality and Inclusion Implications: [Yes] [Approved by: Ed Sexton, Equalities Officer]

[Initial Equalities Impact Assessment completed - EIA number: 3565]

Climate Change Implications: [No] [Approved by: Kathryn Warrington, Sustainability Officer]

Background Papers:

- Strategy and Resources decision to adopt the Sheffield City Council Customer Experience Strategy, April 2024: [Decision - Future Sheffield – Digital Strategy & Customer Experience Strategy | Sheffield City Council](#)
- [Complaint Handling Code - Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman \(LGSCO\)](#)
- [The Complaint Handling Code | Housing Ombudsman Service \(HO\)](#)
- Sheffield City Council's performance on the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's website: <https://www.lgo.org.uk/your-councils-performance/sheffield-city-council/statistics/>



Appendices:

Appendix 1: 2025-26 Annual Customer Voice Report

Appendix 2: 2025-26 Annual Report of Local Government and Social Care
Ombudsman, and Housing Ombudsman Decisions.

Appendix 3: Presentation - Customer Standards - The Way We Will Deliver
Sustained Change

Appendix 4a: 2026 Housing Annual Complaint Service Improvement Report

Appendix 4b: 2026 Housing Complaints Self-Assessment

Appendix 4c: 2026 Housing Governing Body statement



1. Background to the issue

Sheffield City Council's Customer Experience Strategy 2024-2028 sets out a vision to deliver great customer experiences for residents, communities and businesses by understanding their needs, making services easier to access, and ensuring customers reach the right solution first time. The strategy focuses on five key themes: empowering communities, expanding inclusive and accessible digital services, improving phone and face-to-face support for those who need it, creating a joined-up cross-council customer model, and using customer insight, data and feedback to continuously improve services. Through the Future Sheffield transformation programme, the Council aims to provide more seamless, personalised and efficient services while maintaining support for residents who cannot or choose not to use digital channels, ultimately creating a more responsive, customer-centred organisation.

Under the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) Complaint Handling Code, councils are expected to have clear arrangements for performance reporting, self-assessment, governance oversight and publication of complaints information. The Code requires that an annual complaints performance and service improvement report should be reported through the organisation's governance arrangements and published on the section of its website relating to complaints with the response to the report from the relevant governance arrangement be published alongside this.

Council housing complaints are covered by a specific Housing Ombudsman Code, which is statutory and subject to formal compliance monitoring. Under that Code social landlords are required to:

- Complete an annual self-assessment against the Complaint Handling Code.
- Submit required compliance information to the Housing Ombudsman.
- Publish the self-assessment and complaints performance information so residents can access it.
- Appoint a Member Responsible for Complaints (MRC) to provide governance oversight.
- Ensure complaints data is scrutinised and used to drive service improvements.

At its meeting in April 2024 Strategy and Resources Policy Committee approved a revised Sheffield City Council Complaint Handling Policy. The current version, aligned with the Complaint Handling Codes of both the Housing Ombudsman (HO) and the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO), which has been in force since September 2024, provides consistent standards across corporate services for customers.



This report therefore meets the Council's obligations in terms of both Codes and provides an overarching position in terms of Customer Experience at Sheffield City Council.

2. Proposal

2.1 Annual Customer Voice Report 2025/26 (Appendix 1)

This is the first year the Council has published its refreshed Customer Voice report and a full copy of this can be found in Appendix 1. It moves beyond traditional complaints and tells a more ambitious story about how Sheffield is listening, learning and acting on what residents tell us. It brings together complaints, compliments, suggestions, learning and improvement actions, and shows how Customer Voice is becoming a practical driver for better services, stronger accountability and improved trust.

Over the last year Complaint volumes increased by 21% to 9,548. This should be understood within a wider national context: the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman reported a 33% increase in complaints about English authorities in 2025/26, with housing one of the largest and fastest-growing areas of demand. The Housing Ombudsman has also reported rising social housing complaint activity, with repairs and property condition continuing to dominate. Sheffield is not experiencing these pressures in isolation, but the local data is clear that Neighbourhoods and Repairs and Maintenance are the biggest drivers of demand and customer impact.

Stage 2 performance has improved significantly: 76% of responses met the 20-working-day benchmark, up from 46% last year, and 87% met the 40-working-day benchmark, up from 63%. This shows that stronger coordination and governance are having an impact. Stage 1 is now the central pressure point, with performance falling to 69% within 10 working days. Stabilising this first response is critical because it is where most residents expect quick resolution, reassurance and ownership.

Equality-related complaints increased significantly in quarters 3 and 4, particularly relating to disability and race. Most of the issues raised related to disability, accessibility barriers, and communication or process failures affecting residents. Forthcoming work to deliver on the Council's commitments particularly in terms of the Brown Envelope Code alongside improved staff development and guidance, will support improvements in this area.

The Council is capturing more learning from complaints, with 1,588 lessons learned logged. Compliments and suggestions have also increased, with 651 compliments and 398 suggestions recorded. This gives a richer evidence base: not just where services fall short, but what good looks like when staff communicate well, solve problems, show empathy and act quickly. The next



challenge is to make the link between feedback, service change and resident impact more visible.

The case studies set out in full in Appendix 1 (section 8a) show how customer feedback and complaints are being used to identify issues, redesign services and make practical improvements for residents, businesses and service users. They demonstrate a shift from responding to individual complaints in isolation towards using feedback to understand root causes, improve processes and evidence where the Council has listened and acted. In summary:

- The **My Account** case study shows how residents' feedback about fragmented online access, repeated contact and limited visibility of progress has driven digital improvements. My Account now gives residents a single place to manage enquiries, receive updates and track requests. Alongside improvements to the website and online forms, this has supported more than 11,000 registrations, 150 integrated forms, a 10% increase in online submissions and stronger performance against agreed response times.
- Other case studies show how complaints have led to visible changes in the physical environment and customer journeys. The **commercial waste pilot** responded to repeated concerns about bins obstructing public highways and affecting the city centre street scene. Through coordinated work with businesses, contractors and enforcement teams, the pilot improved waste management in problem locations and stopped complaints being received about those areas.
- Similarly, the **Fawcett Street access improvement** shows how tenant complaints about blocked access led to a practical fix, with a bollard installed to protect step-free access for wheelchair users and residents with prams.
- The case studies also highlight the importance of accessibility, vulnerability and reasonable adjustments. The **Motor Neurone Disease fast-track pathway** shows how learning from delays in support led to a redesigned pathway so people with rapidly changing needs can be identified earlier, prioritised and supported through clearer multi-agency coordination.
- The **reasonable adjustments in repairs appointments** case study reinforces similar learning in housing repairs, where unresolved repairs and unclear ownership affected a disabled tenant's independence and confidence in the service. The actions taken improved access and support wider learning about repeat repairs, vulnerability and cross-service accountability.
- The **Blue Badge and Travel Pass** example shows how feedback about confusing forms and guidance led to simpler, plain-English processes. This reduced enquiries, handling times and waiting times, showing how clearer communication can improve both customer experience and service efficiency.



Overall, the case studies show that customer insight is helping services move from complaint resolution to service improvement. The strongest examples are those where feedback has led to redesigned pathways, clearer communication, improved access, better digital routes or changes to the physical environment. Together, they support the wider message of the report: that Sheffield City Council is becoming more systematic in listening, learning and acting on customer voice, but now needs to keep strengthening evidence of impact, ownership and follow-through.

2.2 Improvement Priorities

The focus for the year ahead is to turn this insight into visible change through a clear set of priorities as set out below:

- **Stabilise Stage 1 performance:** improve first-response timeliness from the current baseline of 69% within 10 working days and 82% within 20 working days. The Q4 milestone is to reach 80% within 10 working days, 87% within 20 working days and reduce average response times towards 14 days. This will be supported through portfolio recovery plans, backlog management, earlier escalation before day 8 and oversight through Customer Voice governance.
- **Maintain Stage 2 performance:** sustain and improve the current baseline of 76% within 20 working days and 87% within 40 working days. The Q4 milestone is to achieve at least 80% within 20 working days and 90% within 40 working days, supported by pre-Stage 2 checks, earlier resolution and review of Ombudsman escalation themes.
- **Improve Housing and Repairs complaints:** focus on the highest-volume and highest-impact complaint areas, with a current baseline of 58% within 10 working days, 72% within 20 working days and 2,211 Repairs and Maintenance complaints. This will focus on improving Housing Repairs complaint handling and targeted customer journey improvements.
- **Strengthen equality and reasonable adjustments:** improve consistency in how vulnerability, accessibility and reasonable adjustments are recorded and acted on. The baseline is 252 equality-related complaints, including 65 upheld complaints and 158 issues related to race or disability. By Q4, sampled cases should show consistent consideration of vulnerability and adjustments, with equality learning reported through the annual update.
- **Improve complaint response quality:** increase corporate quality assurance performance from the current 81% baseline to the 85% corporate target. This will be supported by portfolio QA recovery plans, timely feedback where responses fall below standard, and targeted support for lower-performing portfolios.
- **Reduce avoidable delay:** address avoidable delay as the largest driver of financial remedies. The Q4 milestone is to evidence a reduction in avoidable delay risk.



- **Increase visibility of learning and service change:** make the link between complaints, lessons learned and service improvement clearer for services, customers and Members. The baseline is 1,588 lessons learned and 1,365 non-financial remedy actions recorded. By Q4, completed actions, impact evidence and remaining risks should be included in the annual report, supported by visible “You Said / We Changed” examples.
- **Deliver the Customer Voice consolidation and improvement project:** create a more consistent Customer Voice offer across the end-to-end feedback and complaints journey. This includes improved digital systems, clearer online routes, better reporting, reduced manual hand-offs, improved customer updates and stronger insight across services. By Q4, benefits should be delivered, remaining risks confirmed and the next phase agreed.
- **Embed Customer Experience Standards:** implement the new Customer Experience Standards so they are understood, adopted and evidenced through customer contact, complaint responses, quality assurance and service improvement activity. The Q4 milestone is for standards to be embedded in key customer-facing services, with measurable evidence from QA sampling, staff engagement, customer feedback and service improvement reporting.

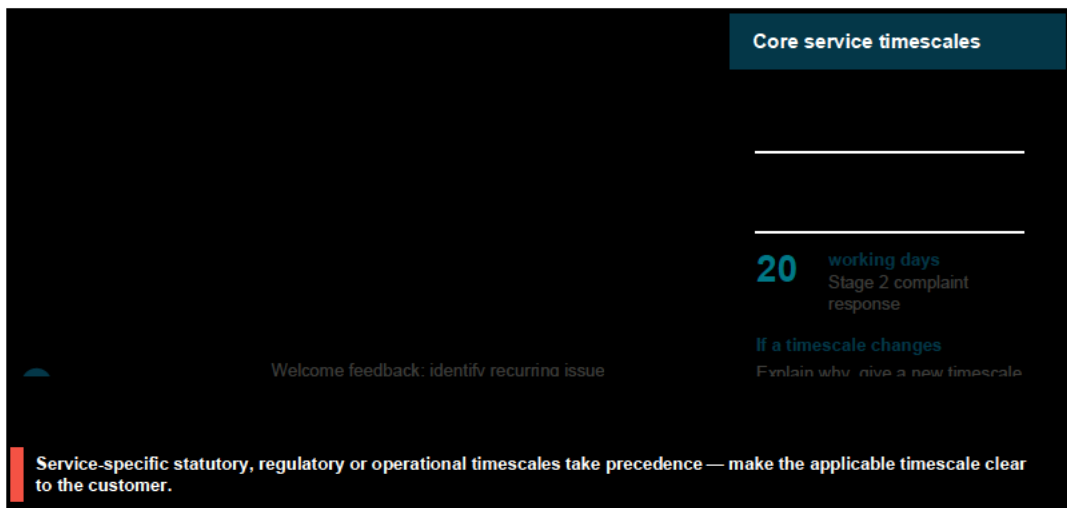
These actions will be delivered through the Customer Voice consolidation project and the wider Customer Experience Strategy, with a clear aim: to help Sheffield become a more consistent, responsive and listening organisation at a time when national demand and expectations are rising.

2.3 Proposed Customer Standards – Appendix 2

Rising demand, complaints and inconsistent experiences across services make the case for the Council developing a common set of Customer Standards, giving residents clear expectations and staff a consistent framework for reliable, accessible and compassionate service. The development of a specific set of Council-wide Customer Standards is a key action in our overall improvement plan.

The Customer standards have been developed from existing customer insight, complaints, performance data, existing values and customer-experience principles. These have then been refined through engagement with staff, managers, partners and frontline services to improve clarity, inclusion and practicality. Together, these standards define the brilliant basics our customers can expect from us. The proposed Standards are as follows:





Alongside these standards we have also developed a clear set of “asks” of our customers:

- Treat staff with respect
- Let us know if you need additional support
- Share the information needed to help
- Use online services where possible
- Let us know how we can improve

The standards are not intended to be a standalone communications product; they are designed to become part of how the Council works with residents, customers and communities every day. The approach recognises that sustained change will come from embedding behaviours and ways of working, not simply publishing a set of standards. Implementation will therefore focus on readiness checks, manager and team support, learning, practical tools, customer-facing messages, digital inclusion, and the use of complaints, feedback and insight to drive continuous improvement. This will help ensure the standards are used, learned from and improved over time, supporting a consistent, accessible and responsive customer experience across Sheffield City Council.

In June 2026 Full Council passed a motion to request the Strategy and Resources Policy Committee to consider adding the development of proposals for a Sheffield Neighbourhood Guarantee to its work programme. The agreement of the Customer Standards as set out in this report, will support the Neighbourhood Guarantee as it progresses.

2.4 2025-26 Annual Report of Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman, and Housing Ombudsman Decisions (Appendix 3)

In June 2026, the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) wrote only to organisations where there was exceptional practice or where there were concerns about an organisation's complaint handling. Sheffield City Council did not receive a letter, which indicates that there were no concerns about the Council's complaint handling. The LGSCO's findings were published on its website on 15th July 2026 (<https://www.lgo.org.uk/your-councils-performance/sheffield-city-council/statistics/>). Appendix 2 contains the detailed Annual Report of Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman, and Housing Ombudsman Decisions.

Between 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026, the LGSCO dealt with 182 Sheffield City Council complaints. Of these, 77 were not for the LGSCO or not ready for them to investigate. They assessed and closed 74 complaints. 31 complaints were investigated. This equates to 0.32% of all complaints requiring formal investigation by LGSCO (compared with 0.27% in 2024/25).

Of those 31 cases, 25 were upheld, compared to 16 cases in the previous year. The Council's upheld rate of 81% is lower than that of similar authorities – 83% and lower than the national average of 86%.

Twenty-five cases were recorded as requiring compliance outcomes. Sheffield City Council had a 100% compliance rate with these recommendations. This is in line with the average of 100% achieved by similar authorities and higher than the national compliance rate of 99.9%

The Housing Ombudsman formally investigated 14 cases during 2025/26. This resulted in a maladministration rate of 63.3% compared with 83% in the previous year, a significant improvement. There were no findings of severe maladministration in 2025/26 compared with 6 findings of severe maladministration in the previous year.

Significant improvements have been delivered within the Housing Service to improve their overall customer and complaints approach a number of which are described in the specific Housing Annual Complaint Service Improvement Report (see below and appendix 4a).

Officers are satisfied that the concerns from this reporting year and previous years raised by the Ombudsman have been appropriately addressed.

The Council's Monitoring Officer has a duty to report to Full Council matters giving rise to maladministration or service failure. In accordance with the guidance in the LGSCO's Manual for Councils it is proposed that the Annual Ombudsman Report be presented to Full Council by the Monitoring Officer.



2.5 Housing Annual Complaint Service Improvement Report, Complaints Self-Assessment and Governing Body statement (Appendix 4a, 4b and 4c)

The Housing and Repairs Service's Annual Complaint Service Improvement Report attached at Appendix 4a confirms the Council Housing Service's continued compliance with the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code, while recognising the need to improve Stage One response times and tenant satisfaction. It highlights key complaint trends, Ombudsman findings and the actions being taken through the Complaints Improvement Plan, alongside examples of service improvements made in response to tenant feedback.

A number of significant improvements to the way in which customers are supported have been delivered in Housing Services over the last year including:

- A New Vulnerability Policy – to help staff to identify vulnerability earlier and make sure tenants receive the support they need in a consistent and fair way.
- New Safeguarding Procedures – to set out how staff should respond to safeguarding concerns and help ensure that vulnerable residents receive the right support at the right time.
- Easier ways to report repairs - a 24-hour automated telephone service which allows tenants to report repairs at any time of the day or night without needing to wait to speak to an adviser.
- Better communication during contractor improvement work – more work-in-progress visits carried out by Council staff alongside contractors.
- Action on fly-tipping and neighbourhood cleanliness - taking a range of actions, including installing cameras and signage in known problem areas and carrying out environmental improvement works where residents had reported concerns.

The Housing Governing Body Statement reflects this progress, whilst acknowledging the work that is still to be done.

3. How does this decision contribute to the Council Plan?

Council Plan Outcomes

The Corporate Annual Complaints and Ombudsman reports have synergies with the Council Plan and the Council Values: putting people at the heart of what we do and ensuring that maximising outcomes for our customers is central to our work as a whole organisation. Because complaints handling



concerns putting right and improving delivery of all Council services, it supports all the Council Plan outcomes.

The Customer Experience Strategy will continue to support our complaint transformation journey, to ensure that we provide the best service we can to everyone who interacts with us when making a complaint. This strategy which focuses on delivering and improving customer experience (including complaints) will support learning from complaints and any associated service improvements needed.

The Council has continued to enhance its complaints handling and management, by adopting a revised Sheffield City Council Complaint Handling Policy incorporating the principles of the new Ombudsman Codes, implementing the Customer Voice consolidation project by improved transparency, accessibility, consistency and empathy in its approach; strengthening complaint handling governance and demonstrating that individuals are at the heart of its service delivery.

People – Prosperity - Planet

The review of the Council's Complaints Handling Policy is itself underpinned by the Council's policy triple-lock (People, Prosperity, and Planet) and as described above good complaints handling, resulting in improved service further supports those aims

4. What community or partner engagement has been undertaken and how has it informed the proposal?

No consultation is needed in respect of this report. By their nature, the complaints and feedback described in the Annual Complaints and Ombudsman Report are a reflection of residents' ongoing engagement with the Council.

5. What alternative options did we consider?

No other options were considered. This report is required in order to fulfil the Council's obligations in terms of the LGSCO's and Housing Ombudsman's Codes.

6. How has equality, diversity and inclusion been actively considered?

Investigations through the complaint procedure considers all relevant policy and legislation including those relating to equalities and human rights. An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA number: 3565) has been undertaken in support of this report.



7. Financial and Commercial Implications

There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

However, as the Council faces pressures on services due to the ongoing impact of national and local economic conditions, we are committed to using complaint information to transform services and assist where possible in delivering financial savings and to improve customer experiences.

8. Legal Implications

The Housing Ombudsman Scheme is approved by the Secretary of State under section 51 of and Schedule 2 to the Housing Act 1996. The Housing Act 1996 requires social landlords, as defined by section 51 (2) of the Act, to be members of an approved scheme. It is mandatory for all local authorities and registered social housing providers to be members of the Ombudsman Scheme.

Section 40 of the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 amended Schedule 2 paragraph (2) subparagraph (1) of the Housing Act 1996 to empower the Housing Ombudsman to issue a code of practice about the procedures members of the Scheme should have in place for considering complaints against them. The Housing Ombudsman issued its first statutory Complaint Handling Code ('the HO Code') with effect from 1 April 2024. The amendments also place a legal duty on the Housing Ombudsman to monitor compliance with the HO Code.

Section 8 of the HO Code places a requirement on Landlords to demonstrate compliance with the HO Code by:

- Producing an annual complaint handling and service improvement report, which includes the self-assessment against the Code
- Producing a response to the report from the governing body
- Publishing both documents on their website (or make this available through suitable alternative means if they do not have a website).

For example, Sections 8.1 and 8.2 of the HO Code include the following provisions:

- '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 summary of the types of complaints the landlord has refused to accept*
- c. any findings of non-compliance with this Code by the Ombudsman*
- d. the service improvements made as a result of the learning from complaints*
- e. any annual report about the landlord's performance from the Ombudsman*
- f. any other relevant reports or publications produced by the Ombudsman in relation to the work of the landlord*

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.'*

The Housing Ombudsman fulfils its statutory duty to monitor compliance by monitoring submissions from Landlords to ensure that all members provide the submissions required, The Housing Ombudsman will take action where submissions are not provided within the timescales set.

The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO), Complaint Handling Code ("the LGSCO Code") is issued under the powers to provide "guidance about good administrative practice" to organisations under section 23 (12A) of the Local Government Act 1974. For the LGSCO the LGSCO Code constitutes important advice and guidance to councils. Local authorities should follow the LGSCO Code unless there are good reasons not to.

Unlike the Housing Ombudsman, the LGSCO has no specific responsibility for monitoring compliance with the LGSCO Code. The LGSCO Code is however aligned to the HO Code, thus ensuring a common approach to complaint handling by either body.

Section 8.1 of the LGSCO Code states that:

'Organisations should produce an annual complaints performance and service improvement report for scrutiny and challenge, which should include:

- an annual self-assessment against this Code to ensure its complaint handling policy remains in line with its requirements.*
- a qualitative and quantitative analysis of the organisation's complaint handling performance. This should also include a summary of the types of complaints the organisation has refused to accept;*
- any findings of non-compliance with this Code;*
- the service improvements made as a result of the learning from complaints;*



- *the annual letter about the organisation's performance from the Ombudsman; and*
- *any other relevant reports or publications produced by the Ombudsman in relation to the work of the organisation.'*

9. Climate and Environmental Implications

There are no direct implications for CO2 Emissions and Climate Change arising from this report.

10. Other implications

Not applicable

11. Reasons for decision

Strategy and Resources Policy Committee has lead responsibility for Customer Experience, Customer Voice and complaints including the monitoring of complaint handling performance on behalf of the Council. The recommendations are required to support the continued delivery of improvements to the way in which Sheffield City Council supports it's customer, to fulfil our statutory obligations in regard to the LGSCO and the Housing Ombudsman, and to provide visibility and transparency in terms of the Council's overall Customer performance.

