



Annual Complaints Review 2023-24

1. Introduction

This report presents complaints performance trends for 2023/24, and a comparison of performance between 2022/23 and 2023/24, where applicable across stage 1 and stage 2 of the corporate complaint's procedure. There is limited information on Children's and Adults Services statutory complaints and Housing Management complaints as this is covered in separate reports. It also includes a summary of the findings from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO).

2. Background

The Council's two stage complaints procedure is as follows:

All complaints must be acknowledged within 5 working days. From the date of acknowledgement, the following timescales apply.

Stage 1 - Complaints are addressed by the local service delivery manager (10 working day target turnaround).

Stage 2 - A review by a senior officer delegated by the Chief Executive can be requested (20 working day target turnaround).

Ombudsman - If the complainant remains dissatisfied with the stage 2 reply they can take their concerns to the relevant Ombudsman.

The Council's corporate complaint's procedure covers most Council services although Adults and Children's Social Care Services must adhere to separate statutory complaints procedures for some complaints as defined under the relevant legislation. There is limited information about statutory complaints within this report as separate reports are produced for Member and Officer oversight. Data about Children's Services complaints which can be addressed within the corporate complaint's procedure is included in this report.

The housing management service are also now required to publish their own annual complaints report in accordance with the new Housing Ombudsman Code of Practice which came into effect on 1 April 2024.

3. The Management of Complaints

All stage 1 complaints are investigated and responded to by the relevant service area.

The Housing Management service investigate and respond to their own stage 2 complaints. All other stage 2 complaints are handled by the Corporate Complaints team.

Since 1 April 2024 the housing management service have been using their own Microsoft Dynamics CRM to manage their complaints. All other Council services continue to use icasework.

4. **Headline findings**

Stage 1 Summary

The Housing sector has experienced significant pressures in the last 12-24 months particularly affected by post Pandemic recovery, the cost-of-living crisis, leading to rising rents or landlords selling properties, reducing the number of available rental properties, and more recently supporting refugees from Ukraine and Afghanistan. This has increased the demand for housing which is reflected in a significant increase in the number of homelessness applications and the number of people waiting to be housed through the housing register which has also affected resident experience and satisfaction.

Across Housing Management services, consultations launched on the consumer standards, the Housing Ombudsman Service's Complaint Handling Code and the Council's housing compensation give a strong indication that this has led to a significant increase in awareness of the complaints process which is a positive step forward in ensuring that residents are equipped with the right information and aimed at building transparency within communities about their right to good quality, safe and affordable accommodation. This has without doubt contributed to a 32.6% increase in the volume of complaints about housing and subsequently the overall increase in complaints received into the Council.

It is important to set out that capacity to address and respond to this significant and steep rise in new complaints was not proportionate to the level of demand and a rise in escalated complaints, which has impacted performance in relation to timeliness particularly in relation to stage 2 complaints.

Complaints received - 2858 stage 1 complaints were received which was an 21% increase on the previous year. This was mainly attributable to a significant increase in complaints about the Housing service (Needs and Management).

Response times –The 10-working day response target has been met in 57% of stage 1 complaints which is a 4% reduction on the previous year.

Complaint Learning – Section 5 provides examples of how complaint data has been used for complaint learning.

Stage 2 Summary

Complaints received – 534 stage 2 complaints were received which is 27% more than the previous year.

Response Times – 33% of stage 2 complaints were responded to within the target response time, against 47% in the preceding year.

Complaint Escalation Rate – Across all services the escalation rate from stage 1 to stage 2 is 19% which was a slight increase on the preceding year which was 18%.

Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO)

The LGSCO received 103 complaints about the Council in 2023/24. 70 of those were either referred back to the Council’s complaints procedure or the Ombudsman closed the case after initial enquiries were made. The remaining 33 were formally investigated and of those, 27 were upheld and 6 were not upheld. It should be noted that the Ombudsman does not use the outcome ‘partially upheld’. This equates to 82% which is lower than the average for similar organisations which was 85%.

Our compliance with the remedies was 100%.

In 2023/24 a total of £21,790 compensation was offered which was a significant increase from 2022/23 when a total of £13,115 was offered.

No formal public reports were published against the Council in 2023/24.

Number of complaints received across all Stages and Directorates

As indicated in **Table 1** 2858 stage 1 complaints and 534 stage 2 complaints have been recorded (withdrawn complaints not included). When all the statutory complaints are included, the totals are 2994 for all stage 1 complaints, 536 for all stage 2 complaints and 2 Children’s stage 3 complaints.

The statutory complaints procedure for Adults Services is a one stage process after which the complainant can escalate to the LGSCO. The statutory complaints procedure for Children’s services has three stages.

Table 1 – Complaints (both corporate and statutory) received across Stage 1 and Stage 2 for 2023/24

Directorate/ Division	Stage 1 totals for 2023/24	Stage 2 totals for 2023/24	Stage 3 totals for 2023/24
Finance and Resources	273	19	N/A
<i>Housing Benefit</i>	72	1	N/A
<i>Council Tax</i>	141	13	N/A
<i>Business Rates</i>	41	2	N/A
<i>Digital/Contact Centre</i>	7	1	N/A
<i>Corporate Property</i>	4	2	N/A
<i>Corporate Finance</i>	1	0	N/A
<i>Coroner Services</i>	5	0	N/A
<i>Electoral Services</i>	2	0	N/A
<i>Legal Services</i>	0	0	N/A
E&C	400	29	N/A
<i>Waste</i>	168	4	N/A
<i>Public Protection and Licensing</i>	107	12	N/A
<i>Parking Services</i>	98	12	N/A
<i>Highways and Public Realm</i>	27	1	N/A

Growth, Planning and Housing	2091	478	
<i>Development Planning</i>	27	7	N/A
<i>Housing Solutions Service</i>	280	48	N/A
<i>Housing Needs/Commissioning</i>	6	0	N/A
<i>Housing Management</i>	1774	423	N/A
<i>Regen & Economy</i>	4	0	N/A
<i>Westminster Employment Service (WES)</i>	0	0	N/A
Innovation and Change	30	2	
<i>City Promotions</i>	1	0	N/A
<i>Campaigns</i>	0	0	N/A
<i>Policy/Projects</i>	3	0	N/A
<i>Communities (Parks)</i>	10	0	N/A
<i>Communities (Sports & Leisure)</i>	16	2	N/A
WAES	2	0	N/A
Children's Services	62	6	N/A
Sub Total for all Corporate Complaints	2858	534	N/A
Children's Statutory Complaints	4	2	2
Adult Social Care Statutory Complaints	132	N/A	N/A

NB: The table shows the Directorates as they were at 1/4/23, however changes were made during the year which will be reflected in the report for 2024/25.

Table 2 – A comparison of corporate complaints received for 2021/22, 2022/23 and 2023/24 across all Directorates.

	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Stage 1	2198	2366	2858
Stage 2	422	419	534

5. Stage 1 complaints

Total number of Stage 1 Complaints received by directorate (withdrawn complaints not included) – 2858.

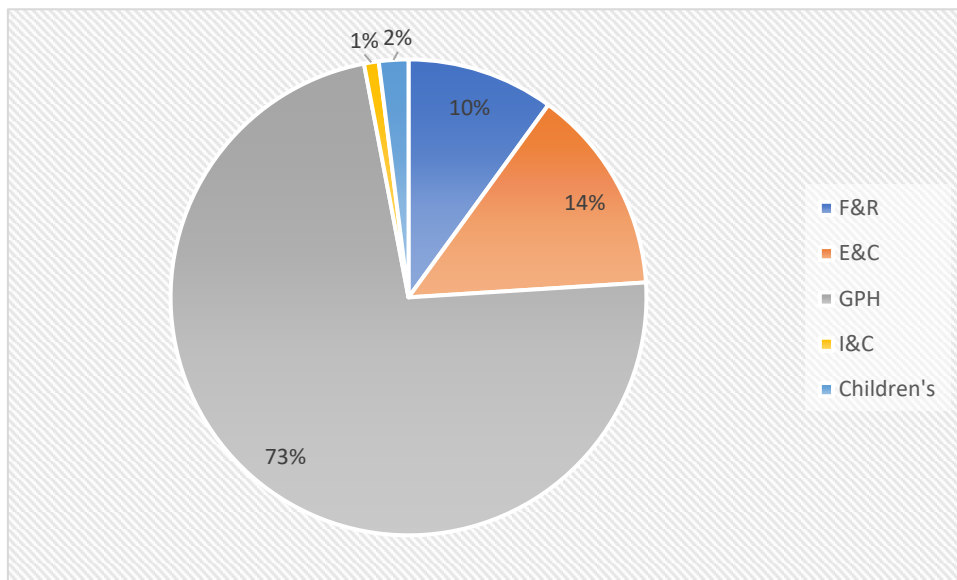
Table 3 – Comparison of number of Stage 1 complaints received by services within Directorates for 2022/23 and 2023/24. Adults and Children's statutory complaints data is not included.

Directorate/ Division	Stage 1 totals for 2022/23	Stage 1 totals for 2023/24	Variance
Finance and Resources	306	273	-33
<i>Housing Benefit</i>	82	72	-10
<i>Council Tax</i>	154	141	-13
<i>Business Rates</i>	54	41	-13
<i>Digital/Contact Centre</i>	0	7	7
<i>Corporate Property</i>	2	4	2
<i>Corporate Finance</i>	1	1	0
<i>Coroner Services</i>	6	5	-1

<i>Electoral Services</i>	2	2	0
<i>Legal Services</i>	5	0	-5
E&C	377	400	23
<i>Waste</i>	214	168	-46
<i>Public Protection and Licensing</i>	76	107	31
<i>Parking Services</i>	74	98	24
<i>Highways and Public Realm</i>	13	27	14
Growth, Planning and Housing	1575	2091	516
<i>Development Planning</i>	38	27	-11
<i>Housing Solutions Service</i>	196	280	84
<i>Housing Needs/Commissioning</i>	0	6	6
<i>Housing Management</i>	1338	1774	436
<i>Regen & Economy</i>	2	4	2
<i>Westminster Employment Service (WES)</i>	1	0	-1
Innovation and Change	37	30	-7
<i>City Promotions</i>	3	1	-2
<i>Campaigns</i>	3	0	-3
<i>Policy/Projects</i>	2	3	1
<i>Communities (Parks)</i>	8	10	2
<i>Communities (Sports & Leisure)</i>	21	16	-5
WAES	3	2	-1
Children's Services	68	62	-6
Sub Total for all Corporate Complaints	2366	2858	492

Table 3 (above) indicates that overall, there has been a significant increase in the number of stage 1 complaints (21%).

Chart 1 - Profile of complaints received by directorate with a total of 10 complaints or over in 2023/24



As seen in **Chart 1** complaints from Growth Planning and Housing (GPH) represent 73% of all stage 1 complaints received, this is a slight increase on the previous year which was 66%.

Stage 1 response time by Directorate

The response time for replying to a stage 1 complaint is 10 working days and as an organisation we aim for 75% in target.

As indicated in **Table 4** (below) the average response time for all complaints completed within target response time across all directorates in 2023/24 is 57% against 61% for the preceding year. It is disappointing that performance has dipped this year and this needs to be a priority for services next year.

Table 4 - Percentage of Stage 1 complaints completed in target response time for the last 4 years.

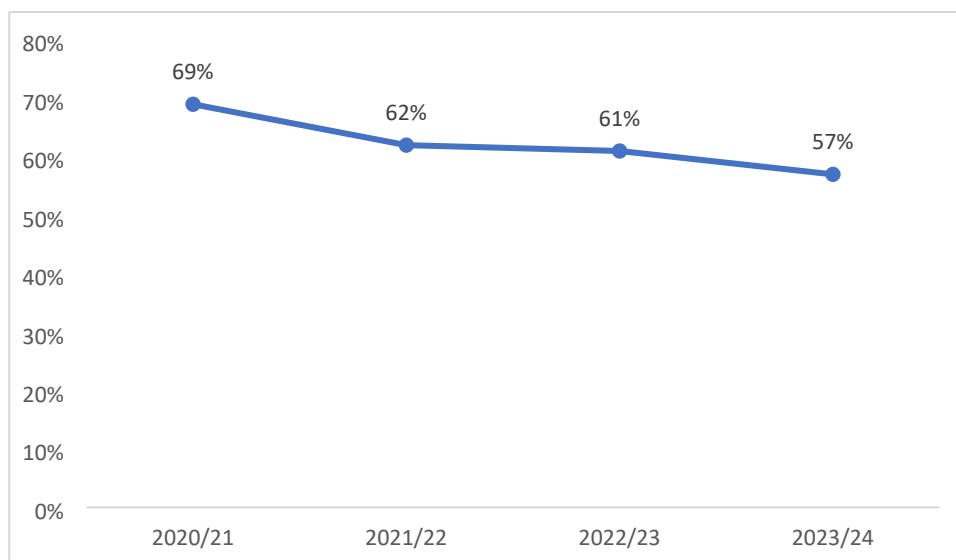


Table 5 - A breakdown of stage 1 response times for all directorates 2023/24

Directorate/ Division	Stage 1 totals for 2023/24	% in target time
Finance and Resources	273	
<i>Housing Benefit</i>	72	98%
<i>Council Tax</i>	141	80%
<i>Business Rates</i>	41	80%
<i>Digital/Contact Centre</i>	7	43%
<i>Corporate Property</i>	4	25%
<i>Corporate Finance</i>	1	100%
<i>Coroner Services</i>	5	20%
<i>Electoral Services</i>	2	100%
E&C	400	
<i>Waste</i>	168	71%
<i>Public Protection and Licensing</i>	107	52%
<i>Parking Services</i>	98	46%
<i>Highways and Public Realm</i>	27	41%
Growth, Planning and Housing	2091	
<i>Development Planning</i>	27	41%
<i>Housing Solutions Service</i>	280	88%
<i>Housing Needs/Commissioning</i>	6	33%
<i>Housing Management</i>	1774	41%
<i>Regen & Economy</i>	4	75%

Innovation and Change	30	
<i>City Promotions</i>	1	100%
<i>Policy/Projects</i>	3	0%
<i>Communities (Parks)</i>	10	50%
<i>Communities (Sports & Leisure)</i>	16	81%
WAES	2	50%
Children's Services	62	86%
Sub Total for all Corporate Complaints	2858	57%

Those services where performance was below 75% will be raised with the relevant service heads and ELT Director.

It should be noted that it is challenging for the Coroner Service to respond to complaints within 10 working days due to the complexity of the complaints and the time it can take for inquests to be completed.

Complaint Outcomes

Each complaint response should indicate what is the complaint outcome (finding), explain if the Council considers that anything went wrong and if it did what has/will be done to put it right. Complaint outcomes are usually expressed as Upheld, Not Upheld or Partially Upheld.

An Upheld decision indicates that we accept that there was fault. A Partially Upheld complaint decision is reached if the majority of the complaint concerns are Not Upheld, but there are some minor lapses in service delivery which did not have a significant impact in reaching the complaint decision. A Not Upheld complaint indicates that there has been no fault.

It is generally accepted that at stage 1 there will be a higher percentage of complaints that are upheld or partially upheld as the main purpose in investigating a complaint is to try and find any mistakes and put right any wrongs. This should then prevent the need for the complainant to escalate to the final stage of the complaint procedure.

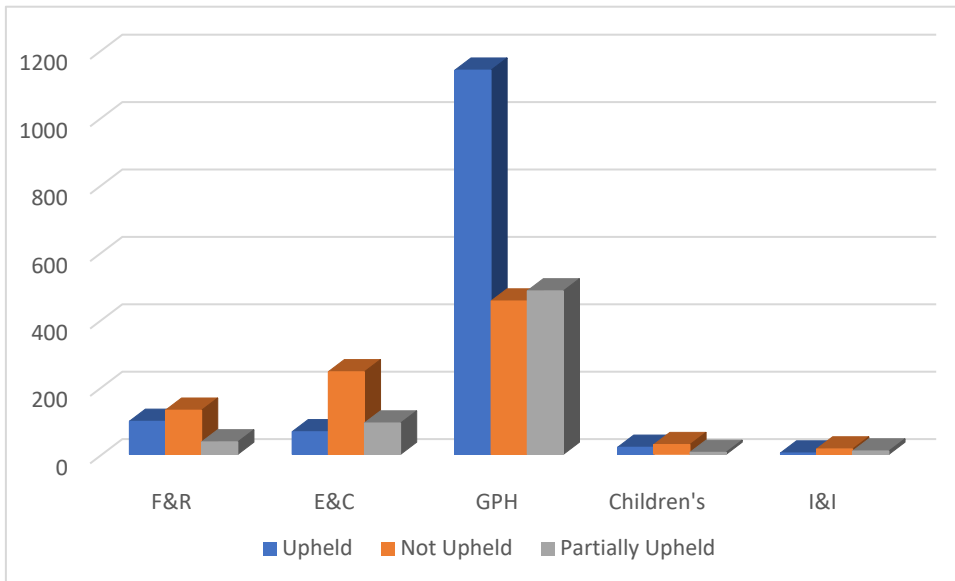
As seen in Table 6 below across all directorates the percentage of Upheld complaints has increased slightly.

Decisions on their own say little about the quality of the complaint response and should be viewed with the escalation rate from stage 1 to stage 2, as we expect small volumes escalating to the next stage of the complaints procedure if service faults found have been rectified at stage1. This issue is addressed under section 7.

Table 6 – A comparison of stage 1 outcomes for the last 4 years across all Directorates

	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Not Upheld	40%	33%	36%	32%
Partially Upheld	22%	21%	24%	22%
Upheld	37%	46%	40%	46%

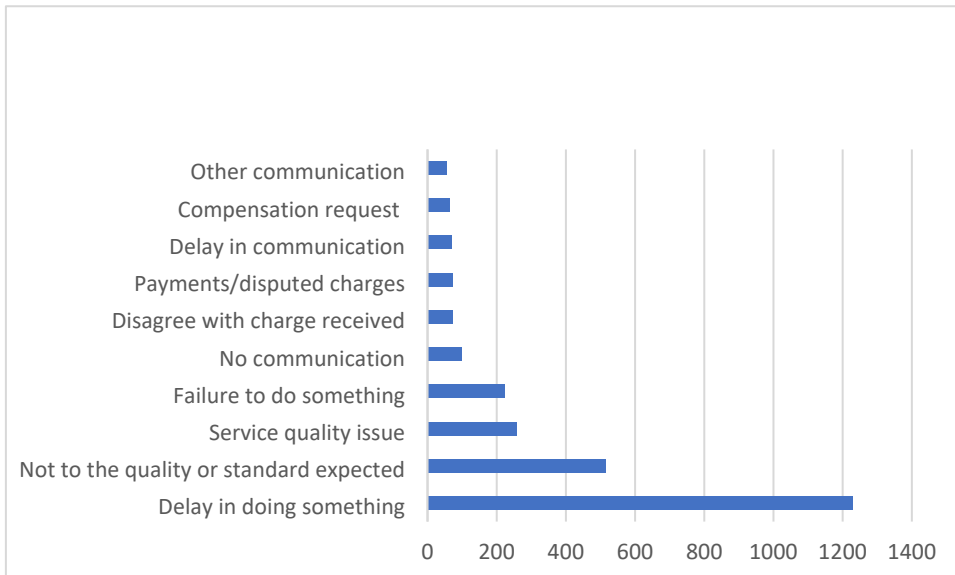
Figure 2 – Outcomes by Directorate at stage 1



All services (with the exception of Housing) have recorded a greater number of not upheld or partially upheld complaints.

Reasons for Complaining

Figure 3 - Cause of complaint where there were more than 50 complaints per cause.



In view of the complexity of all the different services offered by each directorate, generic causes are used so we can track at a corporate level the overarching cause of complaint. As seen in Figure 3 service quality, delay in doing something, and not done to the quality or service standard expected are the most common cause of complaint. The top 3 causes of complaint were the same as 2022/23 and will be mainly because of delays in completing repairs and the service provided not being to an acceptable standard.

Complaints Learning

The following Council-wide learning was identified:

- All services must use the standard complaints templates including the correct escalation text.
- Ensuring that stage 1 responses are of an excellent quality, address all points raised and offer a remedy where appropriate.
- Ensuring that holding responses are sent at stage 1 if there is a delay.
- Recommendations and agreed actions need to be tracked at stage 1 and stage 2 to ensure that we keep our promises to customers and reduce the escalation rate.
- The importance of communication and keeping customers updated, returning calls as promised and responding to correspondence and complaints in accordance with our SLAs.
- Ensuring that Council policy and procedures are followed.
- Ensuring that appropriate levels of compensation are awarded in line with the Ombudsman guidelines and payment is made in a timely fashion.

The below provides some service-specific examples of complaint learning.

Waste & Cleansing services

- Additional education to residents presenting food waste liners without the caddy/bin (which then attracted foxes, rats etc.).
- Improved working with housing estate management in terms of responsibilities for cleaning estate roads and paths.
- Service changes to reduce noise nuisance during the early morning when completing street flushing.
- Visibility of public toilets signage at Leicester Square public toilets enhanced after complaints from nearby businesses.
- One visitor to a public toilet had an allergic reaction to the cleaning agents used – alternative products now being tested.

Council Tax

- 121 refresher training has been provided and weekly quality checks have been carried out to ensure an officer isn't making the same errors or overlooking an action.
- Quality checks are undertaken weekly for all users working on the Council Tax contract.

Housing Benefit

- Continued emphasis has been placed upon maintaining good lines of communication with our customers so that enquiries are dealt with in a timely manner; an important contributory factor at keeping complaints to a minimum.
- We continue to proactively offer our customers home visits where appropriate and attempt to ensure that all correspondence received into the office is responded to within SLA's.

Adult Social Care

- A reminder was provided to the Multi-Disciplinary Team and Social Work team to ensure there is a clear understanding of roles and responsibilities, the need for planning safe discharges and clear and regular communication with families.

- A review of the duty System was also undertaken to ensure it is robust in picking up cases when social workers are on leave.

Children's Services

- The timeliness of EHCPs is 100% but recognize that the reviews are at 75% timeliness, and this is an area for improvement. Recent investment has been agreed to increase the capacity within the SEND team with the specific purpose of addressing the timeliness of EHCP reviews.
- There has been concerted work with schools to ensure that review meetings are carried out in good time and the commissioning of focused work with therapy providers to understand their capacity constraints linked to both EHCP needs assessments and annual reviews.
- The Assessment & Access team will ensure that they share assessment reports with the relevant parties and in a time frame that allows them to have an opportunity to comment and/or correct any factual inaccuracies.

Housing Needs

- As reflected earlier in the report, with a significant increase in the number of homelessness applications, caseworkers have had larger caseloads and this subsequently caused some delays in the time taken to assess the application and provide an outcome to the residents. To address this, the casework teams were reshaped, and additional roles were recruited to.
- The changes introduced have improved timeliness of assessing applications and provided a better resident experience and this is demonstrated by a reduction in the number of complaints about homeless applications which has dropped from 64% in April 2023, to 13% in February 2024.
- Complaints about temporary accommodation are also high with our duty to house more residents increasing. The number of people in temporary accommodation has increased by 16% from 2946 on 01/04/2023 to 3429 on 31/03/2024. Complaints about temporary accommodation are linked to a reduced supply and availability of suitable temporary accommodation, this pressure is being felt nationally but Housing Needs have developed plans to improve our supply of accommodation across 2024/25 to meet our Temporary Accommodation demand.
- As the number of people in temporary accommodation increases, this has meant that the number of people waiting on the housing register has increased by 20%, from 4344 on 01/04/2023 to 5232 on 01/04/2024
- We have incorporated feedback from residents who have made complaints about the length of time they are on the housing register, and this has been incorporated into our review of the housing allocations scheme.

6. Stage 2 complaints

Volume of complaints received by Directorate and Service Area.

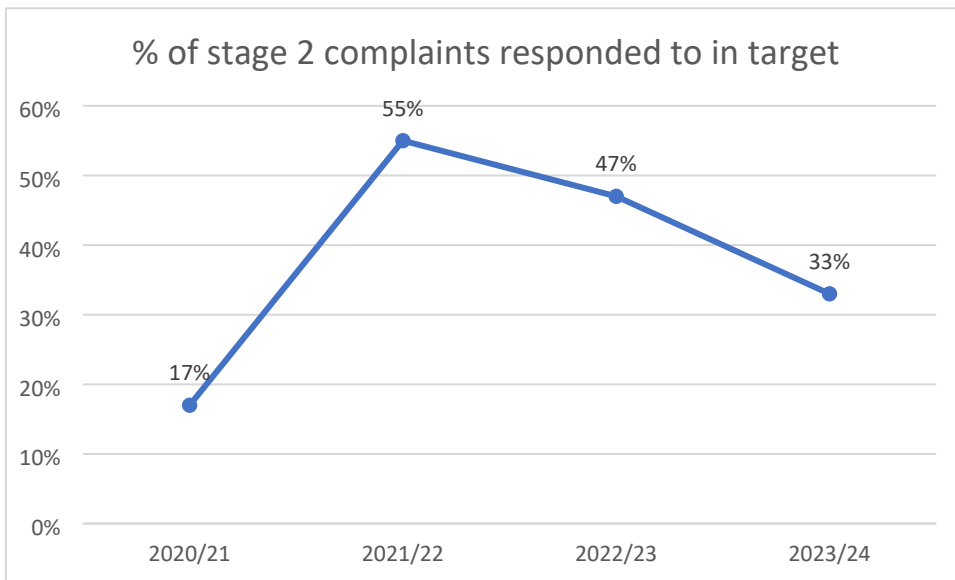
Total number of Stage 2 Complaints received in 2023/24 – **534** (withdrawn and statutory cases not included). There were **422** stage 2 complaints received in the preceding year and this represents a 27% increase.

Table 7 - A comparison of stage 2 complaints received by Services for the last 3 years

Directorate/ Division	Stage 2 totals for 2021/22	Stage 2 totals for 2022/23	Stage 2 totals for 2023/24
Finance and Resources	22	17	19
<i>Housing Benefit</i>	4	2	1
<i>Council Tax</i>	4	9	13
<i>Business Rates</i>	12	6	2
<i>Corporate Property</i>	2	0	2
<i>Electoral Services</i>	0	0	0
<i>Coroner Services</i>	0	0	0
<i>Digital Services/Contact Centre</i>	0	0	1
E&C	32	22	29
<i>Waste</i>	3	4	4
<i>Public Protection and Licensing</i>	15	10	12
<i>Parking Services</i>	12	8	12
<i>Highways and Public Realm</i>	2	0	1
Growth, Planning and Housing	355	369	478
<i>Development Planning</i>	6	2	7
<i>Housing Solutions Service</i>	50	42	48
<i>Housing Needs/Commissioning</i>	0	2	0
<i>Housing Management</i>	299	322	423
<i>Westminster Employment Service (WES)</i>	0	1	0
Innovation and Change	5	4	2
<i>City Promotions</i>	0	1	0
<i>Campaigns</i>	0	0	0
<i>Communities (Parks)</i>	0	1	0
<i>Communities (Sports & Leisure)</i>	5	2	2
WAES	0	0	0
Children's Services	8	7	6
Sub Total for all Corporate Complaints	422	419	534
Children's Statutory Complaints	3	5	2
Adults Statutory Complaints	N/A	N/A	N/A

Stage 2 – Responses times

As indicated in **Chart 8** we have responded to fewer complaints within the target time of 20 working days in 2023/24. This was due to high volumes, delays in obtaining relevant information and some delays with the Director sign-off process.



Stage 2 Outcomes

As with stage 1 each stage 2 complaint response should indicate what the complaint outcome is.

Table 9 below, indicates that that the number of Upheld decisions for 2023/24 has increased when compared with 2022/23.

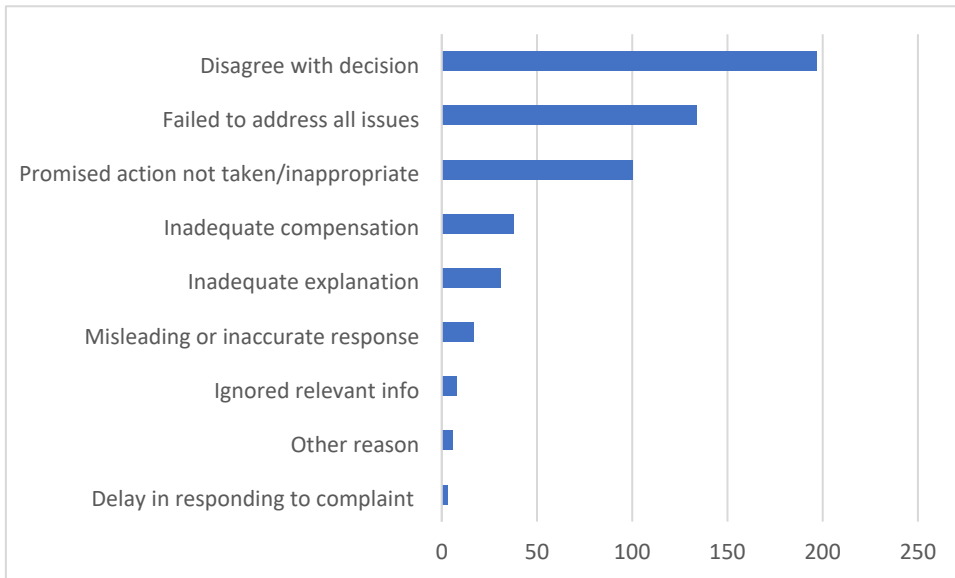
Table 9 – Outcomes at stage 2

Upheld	327
Partially Upheld	107
Not Upheld	92
Outstanding	8

Reasons for complaint escalation

The Council has an open complaints procedure and welcomes complaints even if the complainant does not fully explain their dissatisfaction with the stage 1 response.

Figure 4 – Reasons for complaint escalation to stage 2



The most common causes of complaint escalation is 'disagree with decision' and 'failed to address all issues'. Services need to ensure that stage 1 responses are good quality, address all points raised and explain clearly any decisions made. If a decision can't be overturned by the complaints process and there is an alternative appeals route then the matter should be exempt from the complaints process.

Table 10 – The escalation rate from stage 1 to stage 2 across all directorates for 2022/23

The table indicates that the escalation rate from stage 1 to stage 2 across all directorates, is 19%. This is considered as good performance given that there are only two stages in the complaint's procedure which makes it quick and easy to go through the complaints process, and the volume of stage 1 complaints. This is therefore a reasonable indicator that stage 1 complaint handling is effective, and faults are being identified and rectified at this stage.

Directorate/ Division	Stage 1 totals for 2023/24	Stage 2 totals for 2023/24	% escalated to stage 2
Finance and Resources	273	19	7%
<i>Housing Benefit</i>	72	1	1%
<i>Council Tax</i>	141	13	9%
<i>Business Rates</i>	41	2	5%
<i>Digital/Contact Centre</i>	7	1	14%
<i>Corporate Property</i>	4	2	50%
<i>Corporate Finance</i>	1	0	0%
<i>Coroner Services</i>	5	0	0%
<i>Electoral Services</i>	2	0	0%
<i>Legal Services</i>	0	0	0%
E&C	400	29	7%
<i>Waste</i>	168	4	2%
<i>Public Protection and Licensing</i>	107	12	11%
<i>Parking Services</i>	98	12	12%
<i>Highways and Public Realm</i>	27	1	4%

Growth, Planning and Housing	2091	478	23%
<i>Development Planning</i>	27	7	26%
<i>Housing Solutions Service</i>	280	48	17%
<i>Housing Needs/Commissioning</i>	6	0	0%
<i>Housing Management</i>	1774	423	24%
<i>Regen & Economy</i>	4	0	0%
<i>Westminster Employment Service (WES)</i>	0	0	0%
Innovation and Change	30	2	7%
<i>City Promotions</i>	1	0	0%
<i>Campaigns</i>	0	0	0%
<i>Policy/Projects</i>	3	0	0%
<i>Communities (Parks)</i>	10	0	0%
<i>Communities (Sports & Leisure)</i>	16	2	13%
WAES	2	0	0
Children's Services	62	6	10%
Sub Total for all Corporate Complaints	2858	534	19%

7. Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO)

LGSCO Complaints and Determinations

The figures below are taken from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Annual Letter for 2023/24.

The Annual letter refers the reader to the statistical information available via a tool on the LGSCO web site. The LGSCO data will not match the data held by the Council as the LGSCO captures all the contacts, enquiries, and complaints made to them about a local authority and most of these complaints are not formally investigated by the LGSCO. Also, the LGSCO only reports on those cases decided in 2023/24, and some of those complaints were received by the Council in 2022/23. The Council tracks what it has received in a financial year and what is decided in that same year.

LGSCO data

There was a total of 103 complaints made to the Ombudsman in 2023/24. Of the 33 complaints that were investigated, 27 complaints were upheld, the other 70 were either not upheld, closed without further action, invalid, advice given or passed back to the Council to investigate. The upheld rate was 82% compared to 77% for similar organisations. It should be noted that the Ombudsman does not use the outcome 'partially upheld'.

Table 11 – a comparison of all the LGSCO complaint and enquiry determinations for the last 4 years

	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24

Total number of complaints and enquiries decided	79	108	111	103
Cases referred back to Council or advice given or cases not completed for valid reasons	38 (48%)	43 (40%)	41 (37%)	39 (38%)
Cases closed after initial enquiries made	18 (23%)	38 (35%)	36 (32%)	31 (30%)
Cases Upheld	12 (15%)	23 (21%)	28 (25%)	27 (26%)
Cases Not Upheld	11 (14%)	4 (4%)	6 (6%)	6 (6%)

The LGSCO either finds a complaint is Upheld or Not Upheld. When a complaint is Upheld, the Ombudsman will decide if there was injustice, or no injustice caused by the fault(s) they have found.

If a stage 1 or 2 complaint has been either upheld or partially upheld then the LGSCO decision will also find the complaint to be upheld, even if the matter has already been remedied.

It should also be noted that the LGSCO has reviewed its processes over the last 2 years to ensure they do the most they can with the resources they have. One outcome is that they are more selective about the complaints they look at in detail, prioritising where it is in the public interest to investigate. They are less likely to carry out investigations on 'borderline' issues.

Public Report

No public reports were issued against Westminster City Council in 2023/24.

Compliance

When a case is closed, and a remedy agreed the LGSCO will track whether the local authority completes the remedy, and if this was done in time. The statistics held on the LGSCO system indicates that we have complied with 100% of their recommendations (18 agreed remedies).

Compensation

The LGSCO can award financial payments as part of a remedy for the complaint. The term "injustice remedied" is used to describe decisions where the Council remedied or agreed to remedy any injustice to the LGSCO's satisfaction during the investigation so allowing the complaint to be closed. These remedies can include the payment of financial settlements.

A comparative breakdown of LGSCO financial remedies for 2022/23 and 2023/24 can be found below (**Table 12**).

Table 12 – Comparison of LGSCO compensation settlements

Financial Local Settlements	2022/23	Nos of complaints offering compensation	2023/24	Nos of complaints offering compensation
HSS	£10,365	11	£17,040	15
Planning	£0	0	£0	0
Adult Services	£800	2	£2100	2
Children's Services	£700	2	£1750	2
E&C - PPL	£1000	2	£0	0
Communities – Sports & Leisure	£250	1	£0	0
Business Rates	£0	0	£250	1
Corporate Property	£0	0	£650	1
Totals	£13,115	18	£21,790*	21

* This was the total offered, however not all payments were accepted by the complainants.

When applicable compensation is usually paid by the relevant contractor/provider and not from the Council's purse.

It is difficult to make performance comparisons between financial years as each complaint is dealt with on its merits, however there was a significant increase in the amount of compensation being ordered by the LGSCO.

On several Housing Needs cases we were ordered to pay out significant sums of money for homeless applicants living in unsuitable accommodation. The calculation for unsuitable accommodation ranges from £150 - £300 per month and due to the demand issues on temporary accommodation, difficulties in securing suitable alternative accommodation led to this increase. There was a single compensation payment of £6,000 to one complainant due to failings by the contractor who met the compensation payment ordered on this case.

For other Council services there were 2 significant payments of over £1,000 as follows:

- Adult Social Care - £2,000 – for a delay in carrying out adaptations (sink tap) to the service user's home. This payment was not processed as the Ombudsman's decision was not accepted by the service user and the complaint has been closed.
- Children's - £1,250 – to cover provisions that had not been provided in a child's EHCP.

8. Housing Ombudsman

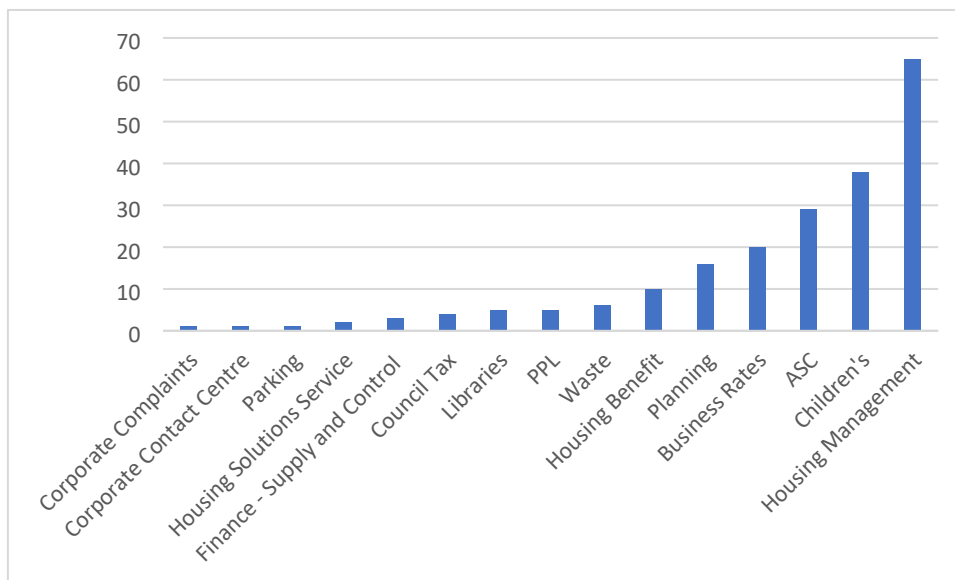
For information on determinations, compliance, analysis and learning please see the Housing Management Service annual complaints report.

9. Compliments

The Council recorded 206 compliments in 2023/24 which has increased from 112 in 2022/23.

Staff will continue to be reminded of the importance of recording compliments to celebrate good practice and ensure that we continue to deliver services that our communities deserve.

The breakdown of compliments by service area can be seen in the chart below.



10. Priorities for 2024/25

- Continue to prepare for the launch of the new LGSCO complaint handling code which goes live in 2026, working towards ensuring that our processes and systems comply with the new code. The main changes relate to definition of a complaint, exclusions, timescales for responding, extensions, communication and monitoring and reporting.
- Improve the quality and response times for stage 1 complaints.
- Ensure services are managing stage 1 complaints correctly and in a consistent way across the council.
- We will ensure that tools are in place for tracking recommendations made at stage 1, stage 2 and Ombudsman stage.
- Set up a service 'complaints lead' working group to share knowledge and good practice.
- Launch a corporate policy for the management of vexatious and persistent complainants.

11. Financial Implications

None

12. Legal Implications

There is a statutory requirement for the Council to have a complaints process in relation to certain established services, for example, Children's Services under the Children Act 1989 and Adult Social Care services under the Local Authority Social Services and National Health Service Complaints (England) Regulations 2009.

The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman, set up under the Local Government Act 1974; and the Housing Ombudsman, under the Housing Act 1996, are independent and responsible for dealing with complaints about local authorities that there has been maladministration causing injustice or a service failure.

The Housing Ombudsman, as set up under the Housing Act 1996, are responsible for dealing with social housing complaints and can make various determinations which include maladministration, severe maladministration and service failure and will provide a decision which will include recommendations the council will be required to implement.

From 1 April 2024, the Housing Ombudsman's complaint handling code is a statutory requirement for social landlords. The code introduces timescales for acknowledging and dealing with complaints, as well as a requirement for a 2-stage complaints process. The Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 requires the Housing Ombudsman to monitor social landlords' compliance with the code.

Section 5A of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 requires the Monitoring Officer to report annually on any relevant Ombudsman complaint decisions against the Council. The October 2020 Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman guide says the Ombudsman will support a flexible approach to how the council will discharge this duty as long as the intent is fulfilled in some meaningful way, and a council's performance in relation to Ombudsman investigations is properly communicated to elected members.

Zoe Evans
Complaints and Customer Manager