

Annual Complaints Report 2023/2024

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. This report offers an overview of the Council's complaints performance across all departments, along with a summary of the findings from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) and the Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS) decisions.

Timely response to complaints

- 1.2. The Council has challenged itself to respond to 90% of complaints within 10 days for stage one and 20 days for stage two which is the LGSCO standard.
- 1.3. In 2022/23, 66% of complaints were handled on time at stage one, and 47% at stage two; and in 2023/24, 75% at stage one and 79% at stage two, were handled on time. A full breakdown by department is in section 3 of the report.

Number of complaints

- 1.4. In 2022/23, there were 1,674 accepted complaints. In 2023/24, the figure rose by 9% to 1,837 complaints at stage one.
- 1.5. Housing Management has had the highest increase, and they have provided commentary about what has caused this and what they are doing to manage this. A detailed summary of the Council's performance can be found in section 3 of the report.

Escalations

- 1.6. In 2022/23, the number of complaints escalated to stage two was 356 (21% of stage one complaints); and in 2023/24, the number of complaints escalated to stage two was 401 (22% of complaints). The number of complaints upheld by has gone from 62% in 2022/23 to 67% in 2023/24. More information can be found in sections 3.17-3.22 of the report.
- 1.7. The Council must improve its management of Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) enquiries by ensuring that they are responded to within the deadline dates provided.

Changes since last year to reporting complaints

- 1.8. Since the publication of the last Annual Report for the 2022/23 financial year, several changes have been made that may cause discrepancies between the figures reported then and those in this report:
- 1.9. A major restructure of the Council's Executive Directorates took place. As a result of this:

- A new directorate of Grenfell Partnerships, Communities and Transformation was set up, incorporating Communities (including Registration Services), which has moved from Environment and Communities.
- Environment and Communities became Environment and Neighbourhoods
- Libraries Services were moved into Children's Services.

- 1.10. Complaints received after 3 pm on any given day are logged as received on the following working day. Thereby granting services an additional day to respond, aligning with the expectations set for residents as per the Council's existing complaints policy. This change was not factored into previous years' Service Level Agreement (SLA) calculations but is considered in this report. It may have slightly improved SLA adherence for some complaints.
- 1.11. Previously, extensions for responses were allowed, meaning a complaint could exceed the corporate SLA of ten working days, but still be counted as 'within SLA', as would still be in line with LGSCO, HOS and statutory guidance. This has affected Children's Services, Adult Social Care and Health and Housing Management, based on their statutory complaints process. However, from 2023/24, this allowance is no longer applied for any reason, which may negatively affect the reported SLA adherence.

Changes made by the Council to handling complaints and improve service delivery

- 1.12. New co-designed service standards were introduced in November 2023. The purpose of this was for residents to set clear expectations of the Council. The Lead Member for Finance, Customer Services and Net Zero has helped drive the standards across the organisation, participating in lunch and learns and staff sessions, and promoting maturity assessments in departments. Maturity assessments have now taken place across 62 services, since February 2024. This has contributed to improved performance in handling complaints.
- 1.13. Appendix C includes a summary of complaints received and investigated by the LGSCO and HOS. The LGSCO received 89 complaints in 2023/24 and 27 of those cases proceeded to investigation stage. Of these, 20 were upheld by the Ombudsman, which represents a 74% uphold rate. In 2022/23, the LGSCO received 70 complaints and investigated 24 complaints of where 20 were upheld (83%).
- 1.14. In future annual complaints reports, the Council will benchmark itself by comparing the volume of complaints upheld per 100,000 residents with other London local authorities.

2. Background

- 2.1. The Corporate Complaints Team has been operational since September 2019, utilising iCasework as the main system for managing complaints. Although Housing Management previously used their own CRM system to manage complaints - since September 2023, they have also been using iCasework.
- 2.2. In April 2021, the Council streamlined its complaints process from a three-stage to a two-stage process making it easier and quicker for residents to file complaints and receive final responses.
- 2.3. In February 2024, the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman published their Complaints Handling Code, which requires Local Authorities to move to a two stage complaints process by 2026. The Council is in a strong position because we moved to a two-stage process three years ago and have already done work to improve complaints performance for residents, however the Council will review its corporate complaints policy to ensure that it aligns with the complaints policy proposed.
- 2.4. Over time, we anticipate seeing further improvements in the quality of responses, timeliness and overall service delivery. This is due to Managers and Heads of Service taking greater ownership of complaint investigation, along with the associated learning and improvements through collaboration and development in complaints handling with the Corporate Complaints Team and guidance from the Ombudsman services.

3. Performance Analysis 2023/24

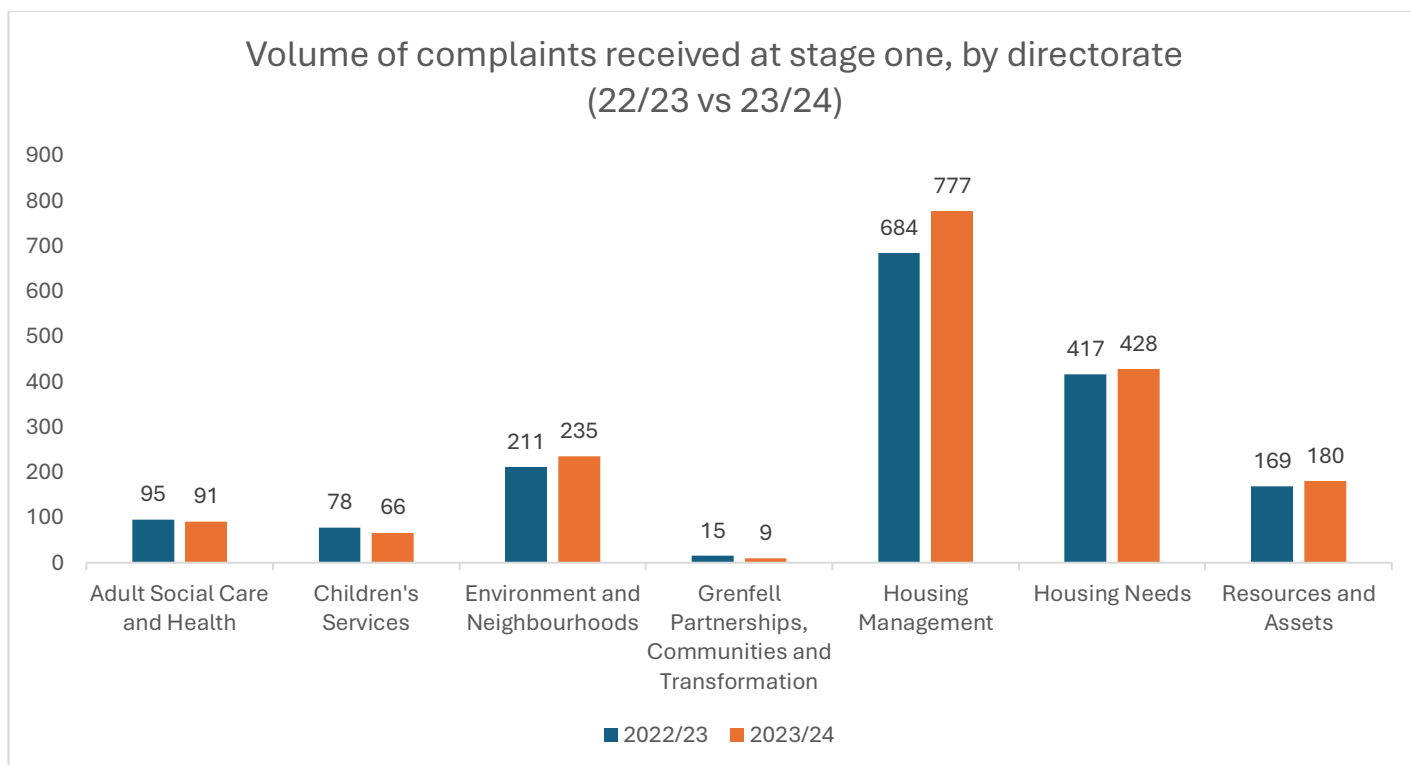
- 3.1. This section of the report offers a detailed analysis of complaint volumes, outcomes, response timeliness and the number of complaints escalated to stage two across departments. It concludes with a summary of the complaints received.
- 3.2. Complaints concerning statutory Adult Social Care services are handled under the framework of The Local Authority Social Services and National Health Service Complaints (England) Regulations 2009, rather than the Council's standard complaint procedure. This legislation applies to all Adult Social Care services, so we would reasonably expect all complaints regarding issues such as homecare providers, statutory care assessments and related decisions to follow this statutory process. Similarly, complaints about statutory Children's Social Care services are governed by the Children Act 1989, covering issues like children in need. Complaints that fall outside the statutory framework, such as those

related to special educational needs, foster carer registration or those that relate to Early Help Services are addressed through the Council's two stage complaints procedure.

- 3.3. Due to these regulations, statutory complaints must be addressed according to the relevant legislation. Both departments strive to respond to all statutory complaints within ten working days. This annual report along with local departmental reports reflects performance aligned with the ten working day response target time.
- 3.4. There were 851 complaints that were not accepted in the complaints' procedure and some of the top reasons are show in the table below:

Reason that complaint could not be accepted	Volume of complaints
Service request/enquiry – not a complaint	529
Duplicate complaint	101
Anonymous complaints	52
Complaint not for this organization	43
Appeal not a complaint e.g., school admissions	20
Complaint subject to legal proceedings	8

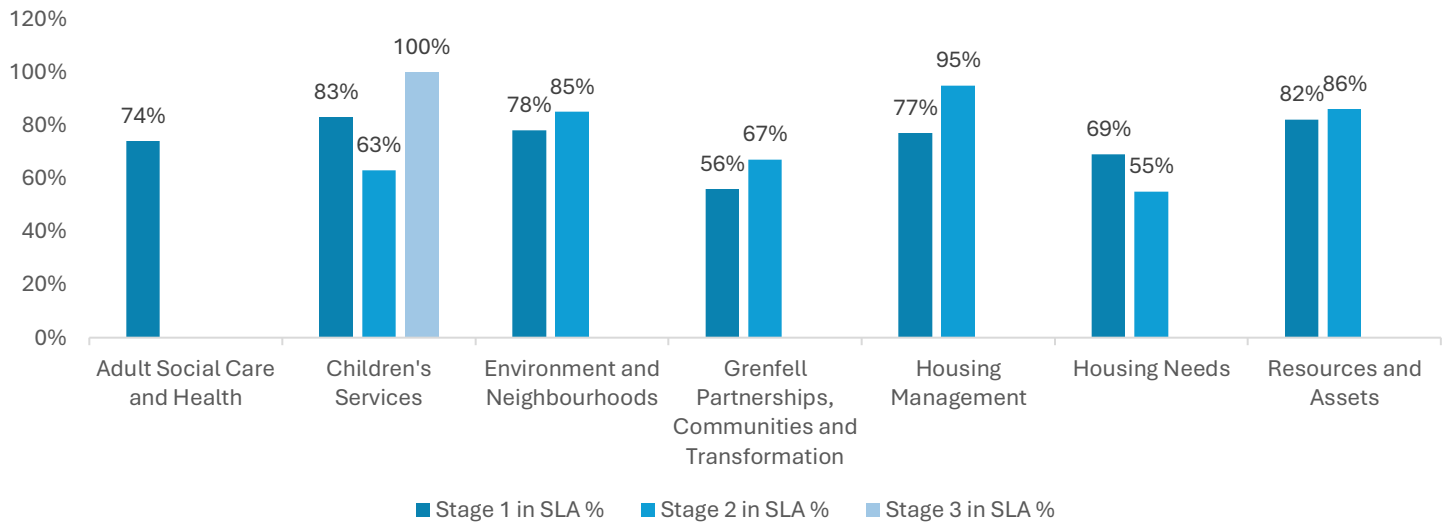
- 3.5. There has been a sharp rise in the number of complaints not accepted. This will have been affected by the Ombudsman services offering clearer distinction between what constitutes a complaint and a service request. Decisions to reject a complaint can be appealed and are treated as a Final Decision by the Ombudsman services. Referral rights to Ombudsman services should appear on any rejection letters.
- 3.6. The volume of accepted complaints across each Department in 2023/24 compared with 2022/23 are provided in the chart below. There has been an overall increase in the number of complaints received and accepted, from 1,674 to 1,837. Housing and Social Investment has seen the sharpest increase in complaints. This has been particularly apparent in Housing Management.



*Note, multi-service has been excluded from this graph and addressed later in the section.

- 3.7. The Council accepted 1,837 complaints. Most services have seen an increase in the volume of complaints received, except Adult Social Care, Children's Services and Grenfell Partnerships, Communities and Transformation.
- 3.8. The Council's two stage complaints procedure has been in place since 1 April 2021, with a ten working day response time for stage one complaints, and twenty working day response target for stage two complaints. This does not include statutory complaints about Adult Social Care and Children's Services (see 3.2 above).
- 3.9. In 2022/23 66% (1,105) of stage one complaints were answered on time; in 2023/24 this has improved to 74% (1,373) but remains below the Council's objective of 90% of complaints answered in ten working days.

Percentage of complaints answered on time at stages one, two and three,
by directorate (23/24)



Performance

3.10. Housing Needs saw a 3% increase in stage 1 complaints and a 21% increase in stage 2 complaints compared to 2022/23. 49% of these complaints were in relation to homelessness. Housing Needs significantly missed its complaint response time targets, achieving a 69% response rate at stage one and 55% at stage two, which has increased from last year. The main cause of delays in both stages were insufficient contact and a failure to follow up on agreed outcomes of corrective actions. Ombudsman data regarding Housing Needs is noted in Appendix A and is joint with Housing Management data.

3.10.1. To address these issues an improvement plan was introduced in September 2023, which includes a performance management framework to identify key trends and underlying problems. Managers have also enhanced case monitoring for their team members and now conduct weekly reviews to ensure that all agreed actions are completed. A dedicated resource has been allocated to monitor complaints to ensure performance and quality align with corporate standards.

3.11. In Environment and Neighbourhoods, 78% of complaints were responded to within the SLA at stage one and 85% at stage two within the SLA. There has been a 10% increase in response rates for stage one complaints. The most common areas of complaints were the Waste Enforcement Team (23%), Parking (20%) and Planning (10%). Additionally, 20% of complaints were related to the conduct of third-party contractors. The increase in service

complaints is due to a re-structure of the Waste Enforcement Team, which was understaffed for part of the year, resulting in a number of managerial level positions being left empty. The team is now fully staffed and trained, so it is anticipated complaints will be reduced in the coming year.

- 3.11.1. At the time of the re-structure, there were also several policy changes that contributed to the volume of complaints, in particular policy changes regarding the implementation of a zero-tolerance approach to littering and fly-tipping on streets that began in June 2023. This policy led to a rise in complaints about enforcement actions and increased scrutiny of fly-tipping on private properties. Although not all these private property cases fell within the Council's jurisdiction, they still required a response.
- 3.11.2. Despite the rise in stage one complaints, the number escalating to stage two decreased by 13%, indicating an enhanced focus on improving complaint handling. Complaint management is now a regular agenda item in team meetings, allowing for staff coaching. Additionally, training is provided to third-party contractors, and service improvements and implemented. There was also a decrease in Ombudsman cases, which were primarily related to third party contractors. These cases were investigated, and measures had been put in place to rectify the failings.
- 3.12. There have been 14 Grenfell related complaints, 12 at stage one and 2 at stage two, which were responded to by several teams across the Council: the Dedicated Service for the bereaved and survivors, Grenfell Housing Allocations and Grenfell Housing Services. Of the 12 stage one complaints, 10 were responded to on time. The topics for the stage one complaints were varied (repairs, major works, lack of permanent home or housing options). However, a few had a common theme about communications, the need to manage expectations and be clear about what can be done and provide regular updates during the process.

Service	Stage one received	Stage one answered on time
Grenfell Housing Allocations	4	3
Grenfell Housing Services	6	6
Dedicated Services	2	1

The Grenfell Partnerships, Communities and Transformation directorate dealt with stage one complaints as follows:

Service	Stage one received	Stage one answered on time
Registration Services	3	2
Community Safety	3	2
Community Engagement	1	1
Dedicated Service	2	1

- 3.12.1 Grenfell-related complaints decreased by 29% at stage one and 25% at stage two. The reduction in stage one complaints relating to the Dedicated Service might be due to the work done with bereaved and survivors on the transition of the current service to a new model, and the increase in communication with individuals and groups during the consultation on the Future Grenfell support and the transition. Overall, the timeliness of complaint responses in Grenfell-related complaints has improved with 85% of stage one and 100% of stage two complaints being answered on time. This improvement in timeliness is due to better oversight, quick handovers to the relevant teams, regular follow-ups, and ongoing support. In Grenfell Housing Services and Grenfell Housing Allocations, there has been an increase in teams intervening early when they hear things are not going as they should.
- 3.12.2 There has been a low number of stage two complaints for Grenfell-related (2 complaints). Grenfell-related complaints are generally responded to by a manager with the Grenfell Partnerships Team keeping an eye on timescale and the response. This joint work enabled a timely response to a complaint and improved the quality of the response.
- 3.13. Resources saw a performance increase for complaint response times for stages one and two compared to 2022/23. Stage one responses improved from 78% to 85% and stage 2 responses rose from 73% to 86%. The number of Ombudsman cases remained flat on year, at 4 cases.
- 3.13.1. There was a 6% increase in stage one complaints compared to 2022/23. Recovery and Enforcement experienced the highest number of complaints, primarily due to objections to policy and enforcement actions, as customers question the Council's actions and associated fees. Despite this, the service remains proactive in addressing the needs of vulnerable customers and those facing extenuating circumstances.
- 3.13.2. Customer Services experienced an increase of 13 complaints compared to 2022/23, largely due to new staff undergoing cross-training on the parking permit application process. The primary issues were insufficient information and unclear or inaccurate requests. Staff members contributing to the rise in complaints have since been re-trained.

- 3.13.3. Stage two complaints increased by 21%, with the highest volumes reported in the Recovery and Enforcement Team and Customer Services face-to-face. The primary reason for escalation was issues related to parking applications and disagreements with the decisions made due to the response provided at stage one being inaccurate or insufficient. The team leaders handling stage one complaints received additional training from the complaints team, and the sign-off process for stage one complaints was revised to ensure responses are handled with greater quality.
- 3.13.4. There has been an increased emphasis on improving response times. Automated daily complaint reports are now being sent to managers and Directors to track and monitor response times. Additionally, the Customer Services team holds daily operations meetings to review the status of complaints, ensure timely investigation and responses, and offer support to those handling the complaints as needed. Many complaints centered on the quality of responses and insufficient communication. In response, Resources have defined and implemented Service Standards (being adopted by the rest of the Council) which were developed collaboratively by both staff and residents, with the goal of addressing and reducing complaints related to quality and communication.
- 3.14. Housing Management saw a 14% increase in the number of complaints in comparison to 2022/23. It should be noted that several teams within Housing Management saw a decrease in complaints, despite the overall trend being upward. The increase in the percentage of complaints upheld has also increased. 77% of stage one complaints, and 95% of stage two complaints were answered on time. There have been changes in personnel which may have contributed to the increase in complaints. In addition, the Housing Ombudsman Service outcomes have featured in the press frequently during 2023/24 and are likely to have brought awareness to residents of the complaints and ombudsman services.
- 3.14.1. Environmental Services, Estate Services and Repairs were teams which all saw an increase in the number of complaints, all equating to a mixture of communication problems, delays to responding to customers and a lack of follow up with the customers and contractors. There were areas which saw a decrease such as the Customer Services team, which saw a 47.5% decrease in the number of complaints, which can be associated with enhanced service delivery, better training, and more effective communication. Neighbourhood North and Neighbourhood South were among the teams which also saw a decrease in complaint numbers (71% and 60% decrease respectively). The stage one upheld rate saw an 8% decrease on 2022/23 figures, which has been attributed to improved initial resolutions and

enhanced complaint handling. Any cases that were upheld were due to communication issues and service delivery.

- 3.15. Adult Social Care received 91 complaints in 2023/24, compared to 92 investigated complaints in 2022/23. In 2022/23 the primary issues raised were service delays which accounted for 33 (35%) of the complaints, 19 regarding service quality (20%) and 14 about communication (15%). There were also 6 Ombudsman cases, with 4 being closed after preliminary investigation and two investigated and recommended actions completed by the department before being closed by the Ombudsman. In 2023/24, 40 (44%) of the complaints were related to assessment and care services, with concerns focused on service quality, objections to eligibility or assessment decisions, and communication. As the Adult Social Care complaints procedure is a single stage process, there is no escalation to stage two.
- 3.15.1. Overall, 74% (67 cases) of complaints were addressed within 10 working days, with an additional 14% (13 cases) resolved within 20 working days. This marks a notable improvement from the previous year, when only 49% (46 cases) of complaints were handled within 10 working days. The Customer Engagement Team is dedicated to ensuring complaints are investigated and resolved swiftly, with oversight through weekly monitoring by the Service Team.
- 3.15.2. The volume of stage one complaints upheld increased from 44 to 49 (11% increase), primarily concerning service quality or assessment outcomes. Some of these complaints involved external providers commissioned by the Council. To address this, the service is collaborating with care providers to review their policies and procedures, conducting unannounced observation visits, and receiving support from the Quality Assurance Team.
- 3.16. Children's Services saw an increase in complaints due to the inclusion of the libraries department under the Education Team. Social care complaints were only 53 of the 66 complaints received. This is lower than the 70 complaints received in 2022/23. These vary from communications delays with the Special Education Needs (SEN) Team and Social Care teams. An overall decrease in social care complaints can be attributed to thorough scrutiny of complaints received and actively engaging with complainants via meetings to resolve concerns as quickly as possible.
- 3.16.1. There was one reported stage three statutory complaint within Children's Services, and this was responded to as per the statutory process. The complaint was escalated from stage two as the complainant felt that the complaint process did not follow the correct

procedures due to missing meeting attendees. This complaint was not upheld as there was no evidence to support the allegation.

3.16.2. There was a decrease in stage two complaints due to the robust response procedure.

Quality assurance checks ensure that responses are transparent and take responsibility where things have not gone as they should. Additionally, a culture of being honest and transparent in managing the complainant's expectations may have contributed to fewer escalations. It is important that the complainant understands any limitations over what can be done to resolve a complaint.

Below shows the response rates of purely statutory complaints. Where complaints are statutory, Children's Services have 65 days to respond to stage two complaints.

Department	Stage One	Stage Two	Stage Three
Adult Social Care	74% in 10 working days 87% in 20 working days	N/A	
Children's Services	71% in 10 working days 100% in 20 working days	100% in 65 working days	100% in 50 working days

Escalation to stage two

3.17. In 2023/24, with the exception of Environment & Neighbourhoods and Adult Social Care, all services have seen an increase in escalations when compared with 2022/23. Across the services, there were 401 (21%) complaints that escalated to stage two, an increase from 356 (22%) in 2022/23. Even though the proportion of complaints has slightly decreased, there are still more than a fifth of complaints being escalated. Escalations prolong the time it takes to resolve a complaint overall, and negatively affect the relationship with the Council's residents. This level of escalations suggests that the quality of stage 1 responses is not up to standard and failing to achieve a "right first time" response.

The table below shows the breakdown.

Department	% escalated to stage two in 23/24	% escalated to stage two in 22/23
Grenfell-related	23%	18%
Housing Needs	28%	23%
Children's Social Care	24%	22%
Housing Management	24%	21%
Environment & Neighbourhoods	17%	21%
Resources	16%	13%
Adult Social Care & Health	N/A	N/A

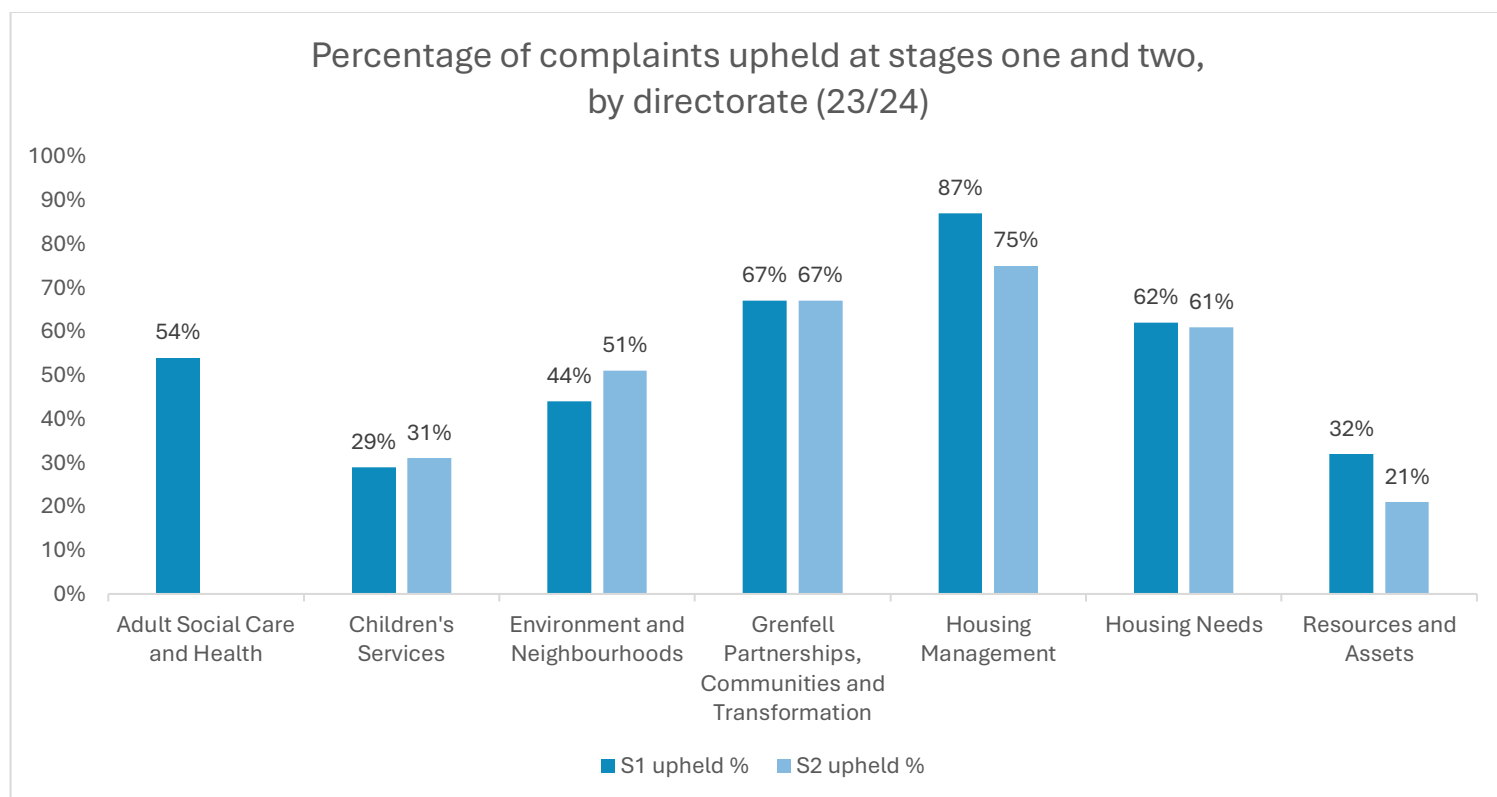
- 3.18. The main reasons for residents escalating their complaints were because they disagreed with the complaint outcome that was reached, or the response failed to address all the issues raised. These escalation reasons are consistent with escalation last year, demonstrating the Council has not improved within those areas. This further demonstrates the ‘phone-first’ approach has not been implemented to full effect across directorates and is something that will need to be focused on in the coming year. The table below shows the number of escalations recorded by each category.

Stage two escalation reason	Number of complaints
Disagree with decision	279
Failed to address all issues	150
Promised action not taken	20
Promised action insufficient	11
Delay in responding to complaint	9
Ignore relevant information	9
Inadequate explanation	6
Misleading or inaccurate response	6
Reason not clear	5
Inappropriate response	4
Promised action delayed	4
Inadequate compensation	2
Poorly written response	1

- 3.19. Delays in communications with residents at first contact are a primary reason for the initial complaint (stage one) to be submitted. Following on, stage one complaints not being responded to on time is a repeat theme for escalation to stage two.
- 3.20. A common cause of most complaints is due to the residents saying they have had an insufficient response or update to their concerns. This should be resolved by initial contact with the complainant prior to entering the investigation stage, and it is evident that this part of the process is being missed. Thereafter, the cause of complaints is around policy objections (typically the lack of explanation around decision-making) and residents not being given clear timescales about how long it will take the Council to do something. All these issues could and should be resolved at stage one of the process so there is clearly work for the organisation to do to ensure it is getting things right first time.

Outcome of complaints

- 3.21. In 2023/24, 1,868 complaints received an outcome at stage one, which include some residual complaints there were received in 2022/23 but where the response was due or sent after 31 March 2023. This is a 5% increase on 2022/23 figures. Overall, 67% of complaints were upheld either at stage one, two or both stages. The percentage of complaints upheld or partly upheld by each department is reflected below, compared to what was recorded in 2022/23. 51 complaints not upheld at stage one were subsequently upheld or partially upheld at stage two, equating to 8% of complaints being overturned.



- 3.22. Housing Needs saw a 12% decline in stage one uphold rates, and Grenfell-related services saw a 5% decline in comparison to 2022/23. All other services increased, except for Children's Services and Environment & Neighbourhoods which were flat on the year, with Adult Social Care increasing the most from 46% to 54% (8% points). Common themes include a lack of communication and not efficiently following an agreed action, with both customers and contractors. Across all services, there has been an increased awareness of the importance of communication and to attend department relevant training, such as Housing Needs attending Shelter training to familiarise their knowledge on case law and services being offered to residents.

Multi-service complaints

- 3.23. The Corporate Complaints Team is responsible for managing multi-service complaints, which involve issues affecting multiple service areas, either within a single department or different departments. In 2023/24, there were 51, making up 3% of all complaints received. Of these, 8 were escalated to stage two, representing 16% of the multi-service complaints. Response timeliness improved, with 56% of stage one complaints and 57% of stage two complaints being addressed on time. In comparison, 2022/23 saw 58 multi-service complaints, with an average on-time response rate of 50% for both stages.
- 3.24. The Contact Centre was the most common service across the multi-service complaints; however, this is expected as it is often the first point of call. The next most common services were Parking, Housing Management and Waste Action. 21% of complaints were a result of insufficient response, followed by internal communications failure and staff attitude.

Compliments

- 3.25. The Council received 285 compliments regarding staff and services, an increase from 256 in 2022/23. Most compliments are in praise of provision of service. Children's Services received 60 compliments throughout 2023/24 (21% of the total number of compliments), and Adult Social Care accounted for 25 compliments, representing (10% of the total in 2023/24). Examples provided below:
- 3.25.1. Adult Social Care - From the sister of a service user about their Occupational Therapist: 'I would like to compliment the RBKC Occupational Therapist for doing a fantastic job with my brother by engaging well, setting clear goals and finding out what he needs to reach such goals he went from not walking with his prosthesis due to having blisters on his backside from the chair he was transferring from to wanting to stand up with his prosthesis and get up on his own to walk.'
- 3.25.2. Customer Service Centre – 'I am a resident of RBKC (address redacted). Not so often one enjoys excellent and exemplary service and care, and today I have been subject to such joyful treatment when I visit the Town Hall..... I hope my compliment will echo and positively impact all members of Town Hall.'

4. Complaints Process – key activity over 2023/24

- 4.1. In April 2024, the IT system was updated, making it mandatory for officers to record corrective actions or lessons learnt if a complaint was upheld or partly upheld. In 2022/23, 589 corrective actions were recorded. In 2023/24, 1,105 corrective actions were recorded, which is in-line with the number of complaints that were either partly or fully upheld (67%) demonstrating that service teams are responding to training and new ways of working.
- 4.2. The LGSCO carried out a consultation regarding their new Complaints Handling Code in Autumn 2023. The final code was published in February 2024. The Code defines complaints, giving a standard definition across all Local Authorities. The code emphasises the need for updates and clarity with service users and allows for escalation and referral to the Ombudsman service where local authorities reject a complaint or fail to meet timelines. There has been a change in the timelines that were originally mooted when the drafted Code was circulated during the consultation period. Prominence is also given to scrutiny of the complaints processes.
- 4.3. One of the Council's objectives is to answer 90% of all complaints on time. This year, 75% of complaints were responded to on time at stage one, and 80% of cases at stage two. Although various mechanisms are in place to support investigating managers to respond on time, this continues to be an area of underperformance for the organisation. Section 6 of this report sets out the priorities planned for the coming year to support the organisation to improve on timeliness.
- 4.4. The Corporate Complaints Team is a small team and has seen some significant changes in personnel over the year. This has seen some project work put on hold and delayed some team development actions.

5. Priorities for 2024/25

- 5.13. To enhance complaints management, the following priority activities are proposed for 2024/25.
- 5.14. Officers handling complaints must take greater responsibility to ensure complaints are resolved in accordance with the organisation's process and response times. In particular, complainants should be contacted by phone at the point the complaint is received to ensure all issues raised are properly understood and thoroughly addressed, and opportunities for learning and improvement are actively pursued. This will be driven and monitored by the Corporate Complaints, Learning and Improvement Team.

- 5.15. To stabilise the Corporate Complaints Team; ensuring that there is a permanent manager in place and a full complement of complaints officers in post.
- 5.16. In response to resident feedback, efforts will concentrate on raising awareness of the Corporate Complaints Team as an independent entity, enhancing visibility and access to the complaints process, and ensuring the process and policy are accessible to individuals with protected characteristics or for whom English is not their first language. This will include updating a leaflet first designed in 2021 and adding it to the Council's electronic noticeboard in its local libraries, community centres and places of worship.
- 5.17. We believe that new co-designed service standards have already improved complaints performance, but that further gains can be made. The Lead Member and the team will do more to promote and embed the standards across the organisation and communicate them externally to partners. Residents who participated in the co-design of the new service standards emphasised that a key performance indicator for their success would be a decrease in the number of complaints received. As a result, regular monitoring of annual complaints performance will remain a priority within the organisation.
- 5.18. The Corporate Complaints Team will ensure compliance with the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's Complaints Handling Code, using the self-assessment form issued by the Ombudsman to facilitate this process.
- 5.19. The Corporate Complaints Team will better support services with LGSCO cases to ensure consistent and efficient handling, offer expert guidance, streamline communications, mitigate reputational risk, and promote service improvements based on lessons learned. This will include sharing of LGSCO outcomes and deep dives into cases that have escalated with upheld outcomes.
- 5.20. A corporate complaints dashboard has been developed and will be shared with the organisation to provide a centralised, consistent view of complaints, ensuring improvements in accountability, decision making and service delivery across all departments. This dashboard will ensure complaints are handled consistently and uniformly across services, increase transparency and accountability, offer a council-wide perspective to identify broader issues, and enable better resource allocation. Additionally, it will enhance decision-making with real-time data, improve efficiency and timeliness in resolving complaints, and ensure compliance with regulatory reporting requirements.

- 5.21. The Corporate Complaints Team will monitor changes to the complaints sign-off process and provide targeted training and support as needed. This effort aims to reduce stage two escalations and uphold rates by resolving issues early and making any necessary adjustments to ensure complaints are handled effectively.

Appendices

Appendix A – Reports on departmental performance, learning opportunities and service improvement

Appendix B – share findings of the Local Government and Social Care and Housing Ombudsman services.

[Appendix C](#) – Local Government and Social Care’s Annual Review Letter 2024.

[Appendix D](#) - HOS Self-Assessment for 2023-24.

[Appendix E](#) – Landlord Performance Report 2023-24

Appendix A – Service Improvement

Below are some learning opportunities that have been taken by each Department in response to complaints, including service improvements that are expected to reduce avoidable complaints.

Adult Social Care

Lessons learned, actions and the themes drawn from complaints are represented regularly for discussion and challenge at performance meetings with Heads of Service and Operational Teams to improve the quality of social care practice.

Examples of the key learning themes linked to improving best practice were:

- Addressing delays in communication, actions and processes
- Ensuring accurate and up to date record keeping
- Improving the quality of information to service users/families and ensuring it is delivered at the earliest opportunity so they can make informed decisions
- Improving the quality of service and care delivery

Listed below are the actions taken as a result of complaints:

- The process to ensure service users leaving hospital are fully informed of the financial implications of their care at the earliest onset, both verbally and in writing, has been fully reviewed so that staff provide this information in a timely way and ensure it is recorded on the person’s case file.
- Information leaflets on Care Charges for Adult Social Care are provided to service users and their support networks to ensure individuals are fully aware of their rights and responsibilities.

- Where complaints learning has related to partner care providers and the quality of their care delivery, the care providers have confirmed the actions taken to improve service delivery by implementing further training for carers, reviewing their internal processes, and conducting unannounced observation visits. This is supported further through ongoing monitoring by the Quality Assurance Team.
- Increased training has been provided by the partner OT Equipment provider to its staff to ensure bed equipment such as bed rails is confirmed as suitable for the service user, with clinical oversight before making any adaptation.

Children's Service

- The due date is communicated at the point of sending the complaints to the service and complaint responders are reminded of the due date about 3 days before the response is due. We also work together with the responders to draft the response.
- Facilitating more meetings between service users and the teams involved in a bid to reduce complaint volumes or escalations.
- Service users' expectations could be better managed and continuous improvement on the relationships between service users and the social work teams.

Environment and Neighbourhoods

- Since the introduction of the Power BI dashboard in January 2024, timeliness has increased to above 90% so we expect the 78% to improve in the next financial year.
- Ensure calls are made as part of routine complaint handling to better understand complaints and avoid the risk of incorrectly interpreting the concerns or focusing on issues which are less important to the customer.
- Complaints to be a standing item at team and management meetings to enable staff coaching.

Grenfell Partnerships, Communities and Transformations

- An ongoing lesson from complaints is about the need to have effective and regular communication updates, particularly for processes that take a long time like a permanent move or major works and to manage resident's expectations.
- Staff were reminded about the need to communicate proactively and frequently with residents, and ensure they receive regular updates. For example, in relation to second

moves, the Grenfell Allocations team has implemented communication plans, ensuring residents are communicated in a way and at a frequency that works for them.

- Grenfell related complaints are generally responded to by a manager with the Grenfell Partnerships Team keeping an eye on the timescale and the response. Joint working between teams (i.e., Dedicated Service and GHS for example) to respond to a complaint also helps the quality of the response.
- During the consultation and transition, the Dedicated Service had a lot of direct contact with individuals and groups that access the service and with advocates during this process. This has meant an increase in face-to-face contact with managers and senior leaders throughout and discussion around Dedicated Service and Future Support.
- Teams have worked hard over the last 6 months to ensure all support plans and RAGs are up to date and appropriate support and any outstanding actions have been worked through.

Housing Needs

- There are ongoing quarterly Ombudsman learning sessions across the service to address Ombudsman cases that are potential reputational risk or identifies systematic issues. The sessions in 2024 focused on the public interest report.
- Ensure stage two complaint responses are being quality assured by the complaints team to avoid potential escalations.
- Better Letter Writing sessions have been re-introduced for the third quarter of 2024, to address learning gaps and equip officers with the skillset to draft complaint responses. This should help improve performance as this will take the pressure of complaint writing from managers.
- Introduce working groups with representatives across the Service to address root causes of complaints and foster collaborative working.
- Promote the work of the Resident Reference Group (RRG) by incorporating a standardised paragraph within complaint response templates, to ensure residents can contribute to the development of the housing service.
- There is also ongoing Shelter Training across the service to increase case law knowledge and ensure there is good customer service being provided to our residents.

Housing Management

- Establish clear and proactive communication channels with residents to keep them informed about the status of their complaints and repairs.
- Implement a system for regular follow-up with both residents and contractors to ensure that repairs are completed satisfactorily and in a timely manner.
- Create regular feedback loops where residents can easily provide feedback on the services received, and ensure this feedback is acted upon promptly.
- Develop and monitor Key Performance Indicators for service delivery, particularly in areas with significant increases in complaints, to track progress and identify areas for improvement.
- Foster a culture of collaborative problem-solving among staff to address recurring issues and develop innovative solutions.
- iCasework has now been fully introduced across all services, and is the system used for recording all complaints. Training on the system should continue in order to build confidence with staff in using the iCasework and reporting systems. This will enable staff to better manage complaints, to gain oversight into the background of complaints and help improve performance and drive service improvements.

Resources

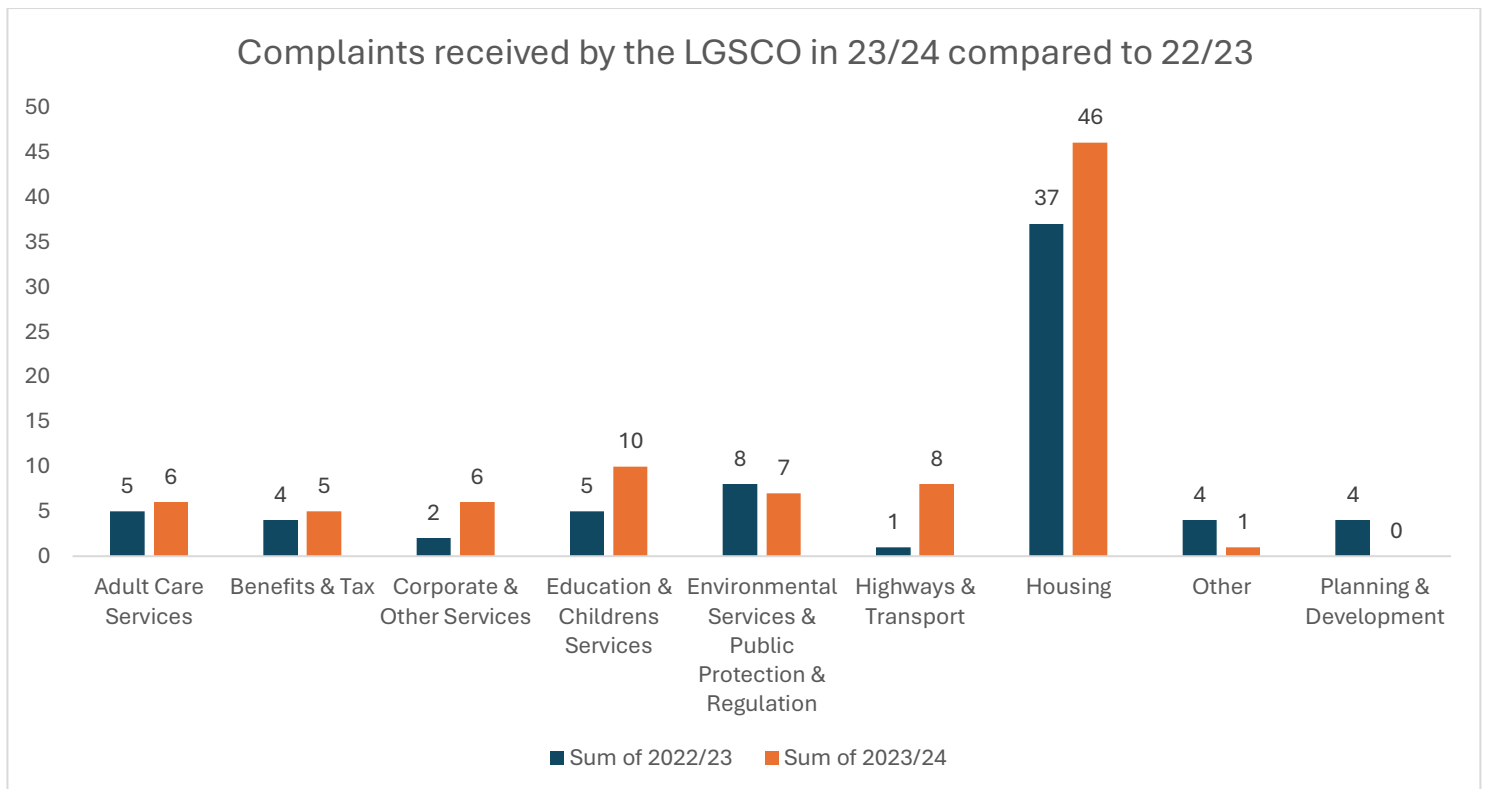
- The Customer Access Programme and Improvement Team has also delivered on key projects, for example developing the Council's contact commitments, and Council wide Service Standards. Both should support the organisation to provide a more effective, helpful, and resident focused experience, thereby helping to reduce complaint volumes.
- In our drive to become a consistently caring and competent Council, we have co-designed a set of Service Standards, commenced in November 2023, which will ensure residents know what to expect when they contact us and ensure they consistently receive the best possible service from us.
- We recognise our residents expect the best service when they interact with us, and they want to see that same high level of customer service being applied consistently across the Council.

- The Customer Access Strategy (CAS) Programme Team also routinely review complaints feedback to understand service specific issues and help to prioritise the programme of work. Feedback from residents through the CAS programme has highlighted the need for greater awareness that the RBKC Corporate Complaints Team operates independently of other council services, and complaints can be sent directly to them. Additionally, there is a need to raise awareness of the complaints' procedure by advertising in local communities and providing leaflets in different languages that outline the process.
- Staff in the Customer Services and Housing team were provided with additional customer soft skills training to improve their communication and empathy skills when supporting residents over the phone and in person. This has provided an opportunity to collaborate and improve the customer experience. There has been more training.
- The Customer Services team continue to cross-skill staff to cover multiple services to reduce the wait times across the contact centre. In addition, changes have been made and to sign off process for training to ensure staff are supported with embedding new knowledge.
- Customer Services has provided soft skills training to equip customer service advisors and managers with essential tools for navigating challenging conversations. Modification in the protocol for informing parking permit holders about outstanding balances. The resident parking permit web page was changed to make it clearer on how many days a parking permit application can be placed on hold for (whilst awaiting resident documentation) and the parking appeals web page was updated to reflect a process change for checking eligibility.

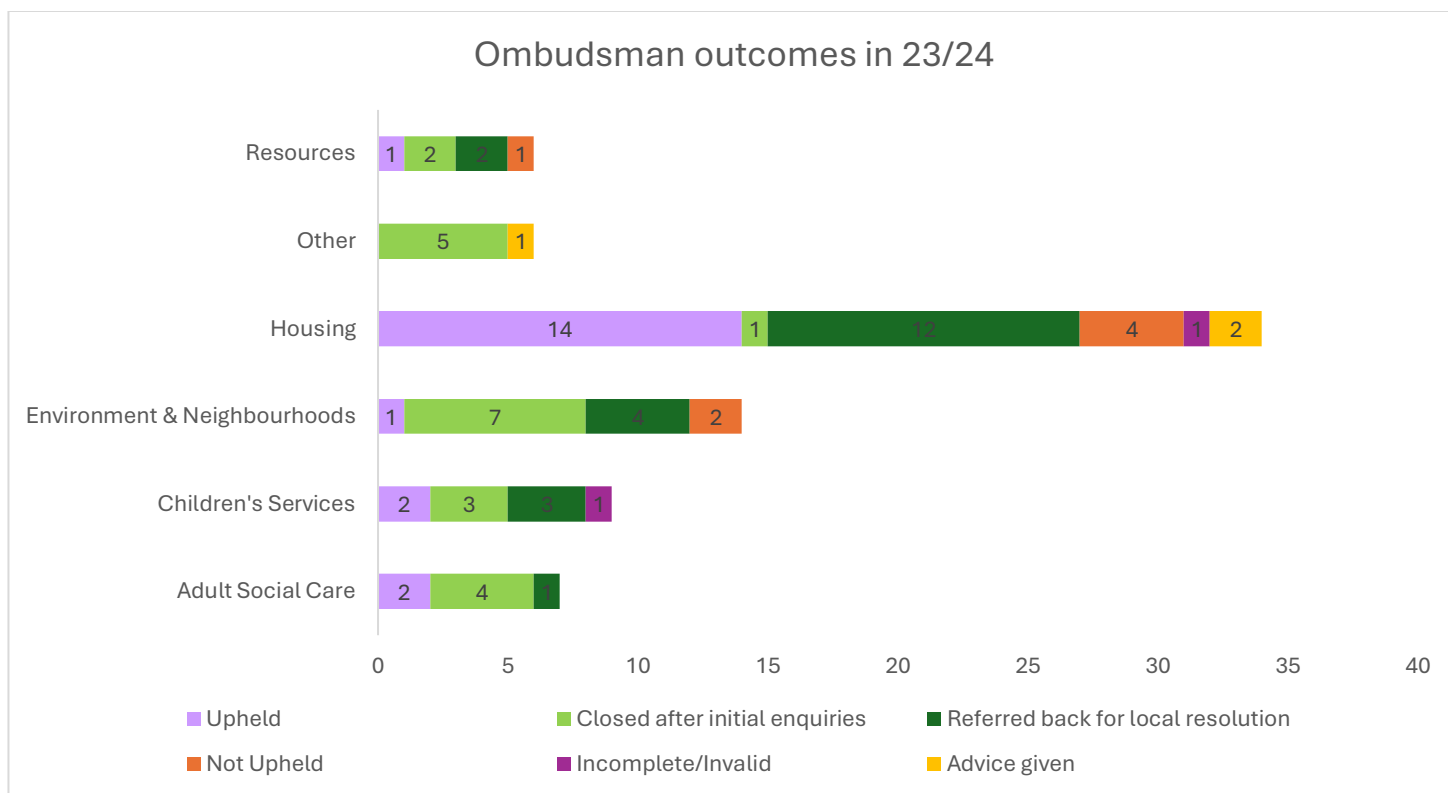
Appendix B – Complaints to the Ombudsman

1. This section focuses on the analysis of cases received and decided by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO). The data is published in the Ombudsman's annual report (Appendix C) to the council and is publicly available on their website. The end of this section provides some information on complaints escalated to the Housing Ombudsman Services.
2. The chart below shows the volume of cases received but the LGSCO in relation to each Service category, this includes enquiries that the Ombudsman received, but may not have contacted the Council about, usually because they are out of jurisdiction.

3. The LGSCO received 89 complaints in 2023/24, compared to 70 in 2022/23. In most areas, all have seen a slight increase in the volume of complaints, with Housing seeing the biggest increase at 24%.



4. The outcome of complaints is reflected in the chart below.



5. Of the 27 investigations, the table below shows the outcome of complaints by the Department. Complaints that have already been upheld and remedied by the Local Authority are still recorded as upheld cases. The Directorate breakdown in section 9 acknowledges how many complaints were appropriately remedied by the Council during its own investigation.

Department	Upheld	Not upheld	Total number of investigations
Adult Social Care	2	0	2
Children's Services	2	0	2
Environment and Communities	1	2	3
Housing Needs	14	4	18
Resources	1	1	2

* Please note the LGSCO did not publish one of the upheld decisions due to the sensitive nature of the complaint, therefore they are not accounted for in the above table.

6. Of the 85 complaints decided, 74% of complaints investigated were upheld. It is worth noting that in the LGSCO's Annual Review letter (published 17th July 2024), the Ombudsman states that the average uphold rates for similar organisations is 85%. This is also noted as the uphold rate has decreased from 83% in the 22/23 Ombudsman report.

7. The Ombudsman has reported that the Council accepted and complied with all recommendations on time. It notes that 15% of complaints were remedied during the Council's investigation of the issues, which has increased from 10% in 22/23. The average of similar local authorities in 23/24 is 12%.
8. The report outcomes have flipped from last year so now we have fewer percentage of reports being upheld from than last year, but a greater percentage had a higher level of remedies before the complaint reached the Ombudsman.
9. Of the upheld complaints, the information below summarises the recommendations that were made: (1 has been excluded due to the nature of the complaint)

Housing

Case 1

The Ombudsman set out agreed actions where the Council should:

- Apologise to Ms X
- Pay Ms X £5,800 in recognition of her time spend in unsuitable accommodation.
- Pay Ms X £300 a month until the Council provides suitable alternative accommodation or otherwise ends its main housing duty to Ms X.
- Pay Ms X a further £500 in recognition of the avoidable distress, frustration, and missed opportunities caused by the Council's poor communication.
- Remind relevant staff that the duty to provide suitable temporary accommodation is immediate, non-deferrable and unqualified.
- Remind staff with responsibility for responding to complaints about the timescales in the Council's complaint policy and to provide updates if there will be any delay in meeting those timescales.

Case 2

The Ombudsman set out agreed actions where the Council should:

- Apologise to Ms X in writing.
- Pay Ms X £1,000 for the months that she had to return to the family home, causing distress due to personal circumstances.
- Pay Ms X £350 for the month she spent without accommodation and without support from the Council to relieve her homelessness.

The Council now has an officer whose role includes ensuring the Council meets its legal duties to homeless applicants fleeing domestic abuse. Therefore, the Council should also take the following actions:

- Remind relevant staff of the immediate duty to provide interim accommodation when it has reason to believe someone is eligible, homeless and may be in priority need.
- Remind staff with responsibility for responding to complaints that when the Council finds fault in a complaint investigation, it should set out the injustice and the action it will take to put things right for the complainant, with regards to the Ombudsman's Guidance on Remedies.

Case 3

The Ombudsman set out agreed actions where the Council should:

- Apologise to Ms X for the distress, frustration and period in unsuitable accommodation that she and her children experienced.
- Pay Ms X £3850 to recognise the above.
- Due to its poor record keeping, write off the outstanding arrears that it says Ms X owes relating to any hotel accommodation she stayed in after being homeless.
- Pay Ms X £500 in recognition of the Council's poor communication. This should be instead of the £50 already offered.
- Provide the Ombudsman with details of its plans, or steps it has already taken, to prevent homeless families being placed in commercial hotels beyond the six weeks allowed in law.
- Show how it has improved its processes for recording applicants' stays in interim and temporary accommodation so that any requests for payment can be made promptly.
- Remind staff that PHPs should be kept under review, including when moving between duties, for instance from the relief duty to the main housing duty.

Case 4

The Ombudsman set out agreed actions where the Council should:

- Send a written apology to Ms X for the distress caused to her and her family by failing to provide suitable temporary accommodation.
- Make a symbolic payment of £3900 to Ms X to acknowledge that she and her family have lived in unsuitable temporary accommodation after February 2024.
- Consider if Ms X requires the installation of any additional security measures at property A whilst she is waiting to be offered suitable accommodation.
- Review Ms X's housing application to consider if Ms X's circumstances warrant the Council awarding serious risk of harm points or other priority points or making a direct offer to her.

Homelessness

Case 1

In investigating this complaint, the Ombudsman sought records from the Council which it could not provide. There was an agreed recommendation that the Council should improve its record keeping.

The agreed actions where the Council should:

- Write a personalised apology to Ms X for the faults identified.
- Pay Ms X £100 for the distress and frustration caused for failing to communicate with her regarding her possessions.
- Review the charges to Ms X for access to her property considering her circumstances.
- Remind all officers dealing with homelessness cases about the importance of attendance notes and record keeping, which had also been recommended in a previous complaint.

Case 2

- Ombudsman will not investigate this complaint about the Council's decision to end its main housing duty towards Miss X. This is because the Council has resolved the complaint early by providing a proportionate remedy for the injustice cause to Miss X.

Case 3

The Ombudsman set out agreed actions where the Council should:

- Apologise to Ms X and pay her £250 in recognition of the distress and confusion caused by the failings and errors identified.

The Ombudsman published guidance on remedies which sets out an expectation for how organisations should apologise effectively to remedy injustice. The Council should consider this guidance in making the apology recommended in the findings.

Case 4

The Ombudsman set out agreed actions where the Council should:

- Arrange for a senior manager to send Miss X a written apology.
- Pay £600 for the four months Miss X lived in the temporary accommodation with a persistent leak in the bathroom which caused damp and unhygienic conditions, depriving her use of the washbasin and shower.
- Pay for an additional £1,300 for the 13 weeks Miss X and her sons lived in a bed and breakfast accommodation with no cooking facilities beyond the six-week legal limit.

- Arrange for a senior Council manager responsible for procurement and management of temporary accommodation to meet a senior representative from the managing agents to discuss our findings and examine ways to improve liaison, information-sharing, and performance monitoring to ensure the agents meet the specified timescales and other service standards in the agreement.

Case 5

The Ombudsman set out agreed actions where the Council should:

- Send a written apology to Mr X to acknowledge the uncertainty and distress caused to him by the delay in issuing its decision to accept the prevention duty and personalised housing plan (PHP) and the failure to recognise he was personally connected to the alleged perpetrator of abuse.
- Make a symbolic payment of £300 to Mr X to acknowledge the distress and uncertainty caused to him.
- Ensure officers are aware of the definition of ‘personally connected’ and meaning of ‘relatives’ as set out in section 63 of the Family Law Act 1996.
- If it has not already done so, review the homelessness duty owed to Mr X and notify him of the decision and his rights to seek a review of that decision.
- Send written apologies to the applicants affected by the delays in issuing PHPs.
- Draw up an action plan, with clear timescales, for reducing the number of applicants waiting for a PHP and ensuring PHPs are issued without delay.

Private Housing

Case 1

The Ombudsman set out agreed actions where the Council should:

- Provide a written apology to Mr X.
- Make a symbolic payment of £300 to recognise the distress caused.
- Review the decision to close the case and contact Mr X about whether he is willing to engage further.
- Ensure it has appropriate systems in place to prevent similar faults occurring in the future.

Case 2

- Ombudsman will not investigate Mr X’s complaint about the Council’s decision not to prosecute his landlord for an offence, about delay in telling him its decision, and for not agreeing to help him with the cost of pursuing a private prosecution. This is because the Council has already provided a proportionate remedy to recognise the

injustice caused by the faults identified and an investigation would not lead to a different outcome.

Case 3

The Ombudsman set out agreed actions where the Council should:

- Provide a written apology to Ms X for the faults and injustice identified in this statement.
- Remind officers of the inspection procedure set out in the housing health and safety rating system operating guidance, and the need to ensure that defects and hazards are recorded in detail as a means to justify decision making and potential enforcement action.
- Pending agreement for access from Ms X, conduct an inspection of Ms X's home, against the HHSRS framework. The Council should clearly list any defects and categorise any hazards it observes.

Allocations

Case 1

The Ombudsman set out agreed actions where the Council should:

- Apologise to Miss X for the injustice identified above.
- Pay Miss X £250 to recognise the uncertainty caused by the delays in addressing her concerns and for not responding to her request for reimbursement for damage to her belongings.
- Write to Miss X setting out the Council's decision as to whether it will reimburse Miss X for the damaged belongings.
- Liaise with Miss X's landlord to reach a decision as to whether the remedial work identified in the inspection report December 2023 will be completed. If the decision is not to complete the work, the Council should offer to review the suitability of the accommodation for Miss X.

Case 2

The Ombudsman set out agreed actions where the Council should:

- Apologise to Mr X for wrongly suspending him from the housing register from April to October 2022.
- Apply its October 2021 concession for a further five months only from the date of this final decision.
- Pay Mr X £150 to reflect the distress and uncertainty caused by his suspension. This is a symbolic amount based on our guidance on remedies.

Children's Services

Case 1

The Ombudsman set out agreed actions where the Council should:

- In total pay, s D £5262.50, attributing to a combination of distress and uncertainty with the Council's service failure, acknowledgement of the loss of dyslexia support and to acknowledge the loss of other special educational needs provision X did not receive as set out in his EHC plan.
- Remind its SEND staff of the Council's duty to provide all the special educational needs provision set out in a child, or young persons, EHC plan. In circumstances where this is not available, alternative arrangements such as commissioned provision or a personal budget should be put in place.

Child Protection

Case 1

Miss X complained the Council did not properly follow the children's statutory complaint procedure when it considered complaints she made, and its remedies did not reflect the injustice she was caused by the complaints it did uphold. There was no fault in how the Council considered Miss X's complaint. The Council has taken appropriate action to remedy the injustice caused by faults it found during the children's statutory complaint procedure.

Environment & Communities

Planning & Development, Planning Applications

Case 1

Mrs D complained the Council failed to notify her about a planning application which included a bike store directly outside her home. The Council has already accepted the fault. We upheld the complaint and completed our investigation because the Council has already provided a suitable remedy.

Resources

Case 1

Mr B says the Council wrongly pursued him for council tax for a property he had sold to the Council. The Council accepts it should have updated its council tax department, has apologised and paid Mr B £200. That and a review of the acquisitions and disposal process is a satisfactory remedy.

Adult Social Care

Adult Care Services, Charging

Case 1

The Ombudsman's recommended actions were completed and satisfied to:

- Apologise to Mr X for not providing him with timely and appropriate written information about the charge for his care.
- Reduce the outstanding charge by £250 to reflect the avoidable distress and confusion.
- Remind social workers in the hospital team to give clients back to the Council for full Care Act social care needs assessments when clients require long-term care packages.

Case 2

The Council jointly with CNWL and ICB, apologised to the complainant for the difficulties caused by delay caused in moving the resident from the placement and agreed a refund of fees plus interest.