

Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead

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Annual Complaints and Compliments Report **Formal Corporate Complaints**

2023-24

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1. Introduction

- 1.1. Every year the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead (RBWM) publishes an annual complaints and compliments report, which gives an overview of the complaints the Council has received and how they were dealt with. RBWM welcomes customer feedback, as it helps to identify and address problems for customers, and to improve services. This report, covering the period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024, details all compliments and complaints made by or on behalf of customers that are investigated under the:
 - Adults Statutory Complaints process
 - Children’s Statutory Complaints process
 - Children’s Corporate Complaints process
 - RBWM’s Formal Corporate Complaints policy
- 1.2. Whilst Local Authorities are required under statute to report complaints submitted on Adults and Children’s services, they are not required to produce an annual report on complaints relating to corporate activities, however the Compliments and Complaints team produces an annual report detailing the volumes of all complaints and compliments, including insights into response rates and the reasons for complaints. This allows the Council to assess how residents experience the Council in its entirety and can inform service improvement.
- 1.3. This report provides an overall summary of the contacts into RBWM, but only provides detailed information relating to the Formal Corporate complaints and compliments. A separate report relating to Children’s and Adults complaints has been produced and is available here [Annual Report - 2023-24 Childrens and Adults](#).

2. Summary of Council-wide activity

- 2.1. In 2023/24 the Council received 1,674 contacts from customers that were initially logged as complaints. This is an 18.9% increase in contacts to the compliments and complaints team from 2022/23 (1,408) but this is most likely explained by a change of internal process in the Complaints and Compliments Team, whereby all contacts are now logged and given reference numbers rather than some being dealt with informally, without being logged. Contacts that were not progressed as complaints were signposted to an alternative means of resolution, for example a service request or via a specific appeals process, such as parking appeals or statutory tribunals, or were withdrawn.
- 2.2. The total volume of complaints progressed through Stage 1 of the complaints process was 304 in 2023/24, a small increase of 13.0% on 2022/23 (269). Stage 2 and 3 complaints are escalations of Stage 1 and are therefore not counted as new complaints.
- 2.3. Table 1 summarises the total volume of complaints at Stage 1 over the year, that were recorded by the Complaints and Compliments team; these have been broken down by outcome. The table contains a comparison to 2022/23 (in brackets):

Table 1: 2023/24 Summary of complaints at Stage 1 (2022/23 in brackets)

Process	No. of complaints	Upheld	Partially Upheld	Not Upheld	No Finding	In progress at the time of reporting	Responded to within timescales
Adults Statutory	37 □ (16)	23%□ (25%)	31%□ (19%)	46%□ (56%)	0%□ (0%)	2	77% □ (50%)
Children's Statutory	8 □ (11)	13%□ (0%)	50%□ (82%)	38%□ (18%)	0%□ (0%)	0	63%□ (45%)
Children's Corporate	79 □ (74)	12%□ (22%)	40%□ (41%)	49%□ (38%)	0%□ (0%)	1	74%□ (39%)
RBWM Formal Corporate	180 □ (168)	21%□ (25%)	29%□ (25%)	50%□ (47%)	0%□ (3%)	17	56%□ (45%)
Overall	304 □ (269)	18%□ (23%)	33%□ (32%)	49%□ (44%)	0%□ (2%)	20	64%□ (44%)

Local Government Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) letter

- 2.4. The Local Government Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) received 55 complaints and enquiries about the Council in 2023/24 (Appendix A), an increase on 2022/23 (49). Table 12 details the breakdown as:

Table 2: LGSCO complaints received

Service	Complaints and enquiries
Adult Care Services	12
Benefits & Tax	2
Corporate & Other Services	1
Education & Children's Services	19
Environmental Services, Public Protection & Regulation	2
Highways & Transport	4
Housing	8
Other	1
Planning & Development	6
Total	55

- 2.5. Of these 55 complaints and enquiries received, the LGSCO went on to investigate 12. Appendix A shows the LGSCO's summary of these.

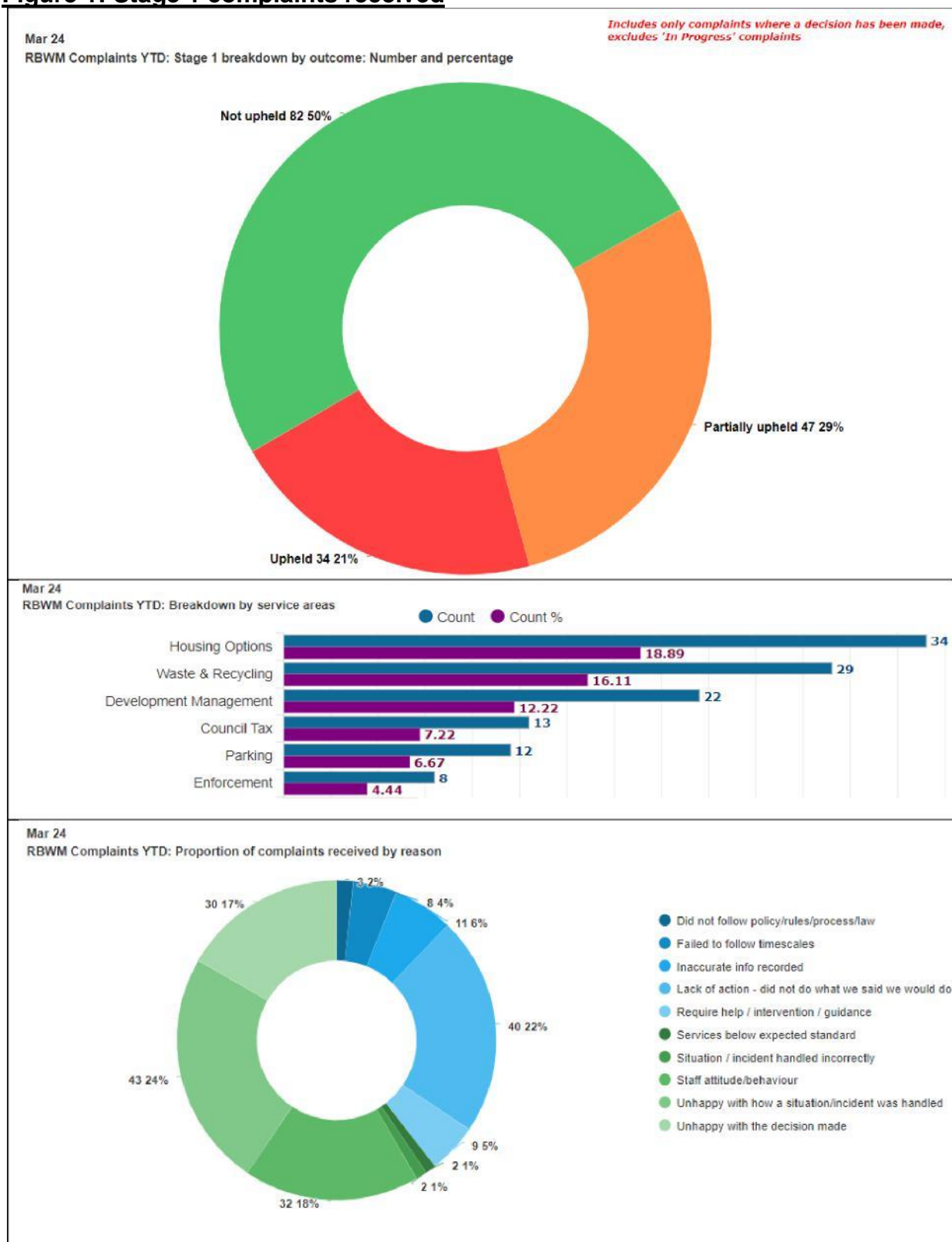
3. RBWM Formal Corporate complaints received**Stage 1 complaints received**

- 3.1. 180 Formal Corporate complaints were processed in 2023/24, which is an increase of 7.1% (168) on 2022/23. Half of these Stage 1 complaints (50%) were not upheld.
- 3.2. The greatest number of complaints received for one service area were for Housing Options, at 18.89%. This is likely linked to a number of factors; current demand for housing is high and availability of either social housing or temporary accommodation does not meet that demand. Additionally, the introduction of a new case management

system and staffing capacity/recruitment issues impacted the team’s ability to return contact as quickly as might have been desired. The service was aware of the position and has looked to mitigate some of the impact of this by recruiting a new, dedicated Complaints and Reviewing Officer, who started in December 2023.

3.3. Figure 1 shows the main reason for complaints was because a customer was ‘unhappy with how a situation/incident was handled’ (43, 24%).

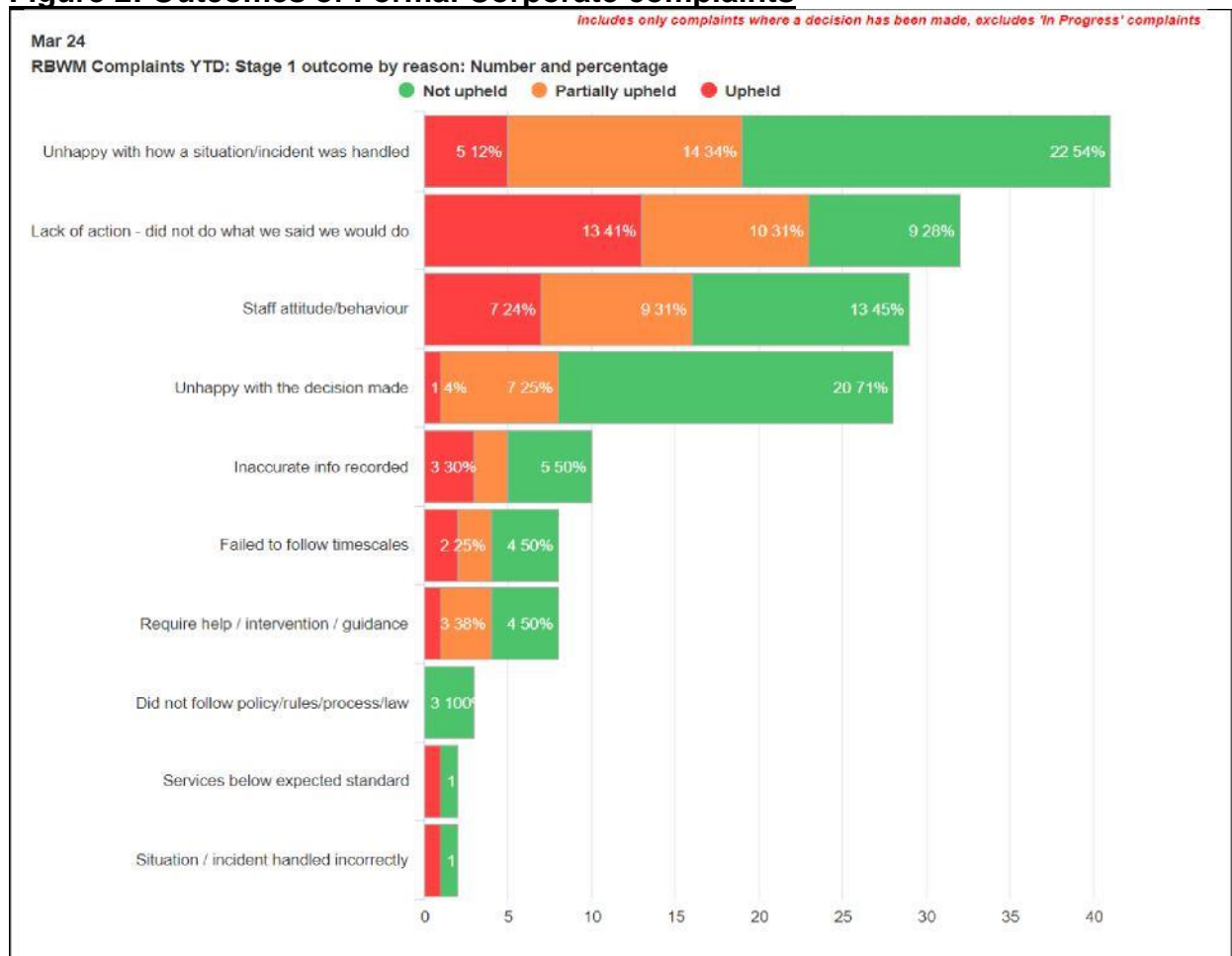
Figure 1: Stage 1 complaints received

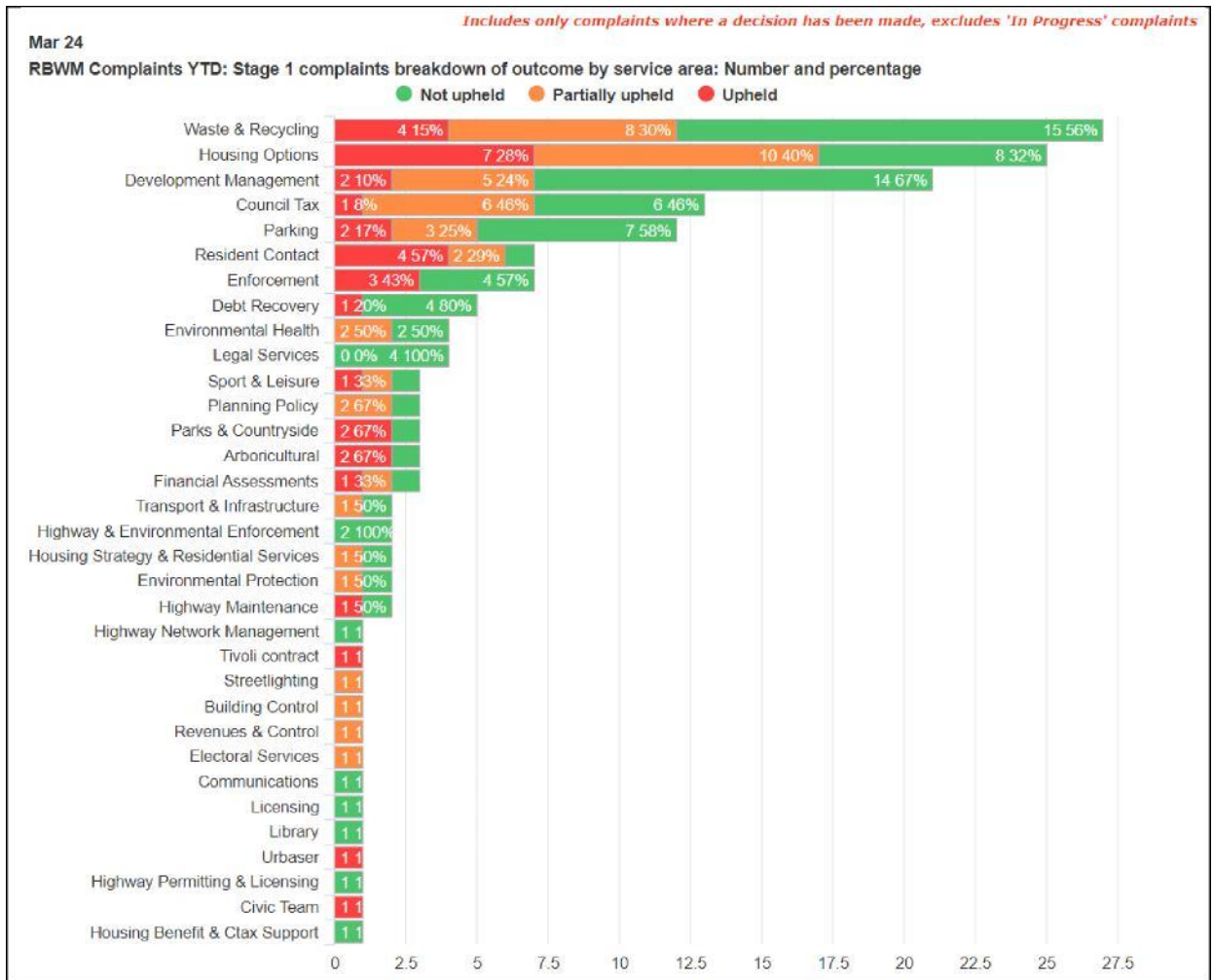


Stage 1 Outcomes

3.4 The greatest number of complaints were due to the customer being 'unhappy with how a situation/incident was handled', but the majority of these (54%) were not upheld. This category will include those who disagreed with a decision, which will not necessarily reflect whether or not the decision made was correct. The complaint reason with the largest proportion of upheld outcomes (41%) was 'lack of action – did not do what we said we would do'. This reason is more likely to be actual fault so it would be expected that a greater proportion in this category would be upheld. As detailed in Figure 2, the area with the most complaints that were upheld (7, 28%) and partially upheld (10, 40%), across all complaint reasons, was Housing Options. This is again mainly to do with staffing resource, with a number of vacancies /other absence. There tend to be a greater number of partially upheld outcomes in this area as the Housing complaints are often complex, spanning a number of different issues and areas, so are more likely to have some parts upheld and others not. These figures do not include complaints which were still in progress, as a decision had not yet been made on them.

Figure 2: Outcomes of Formal Corporate complaints

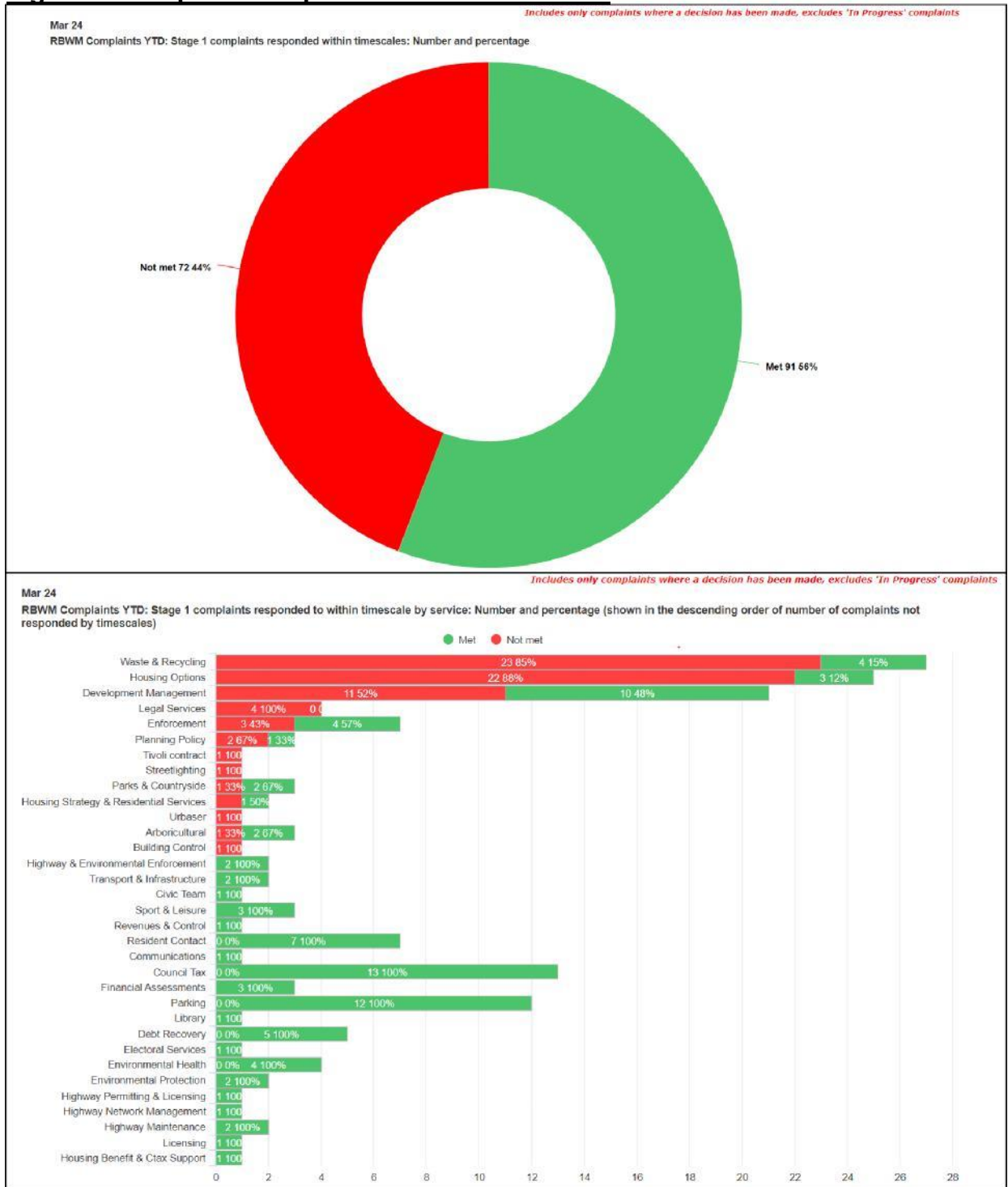




Stage 1 timescales

3.5 Timescales at Stage 1 were not met on 44% of occasions, as detailed in Figure 3, a decrease from 2022/23 (58%). The top three service areas where timescales were missed more often, are the teams who received the highest volumes of complaints and all three have struggled this year with capacity/recruitment issues within the teams. The waste & recycling service is one that impacts on every resident and household. As a result the number of complaints received by this service area would be expected to be high in comparison with other some service areas. With significant lack of resource in this area it has been difficult to respond within timescales.

Figure 3: Complaints responded within timescales



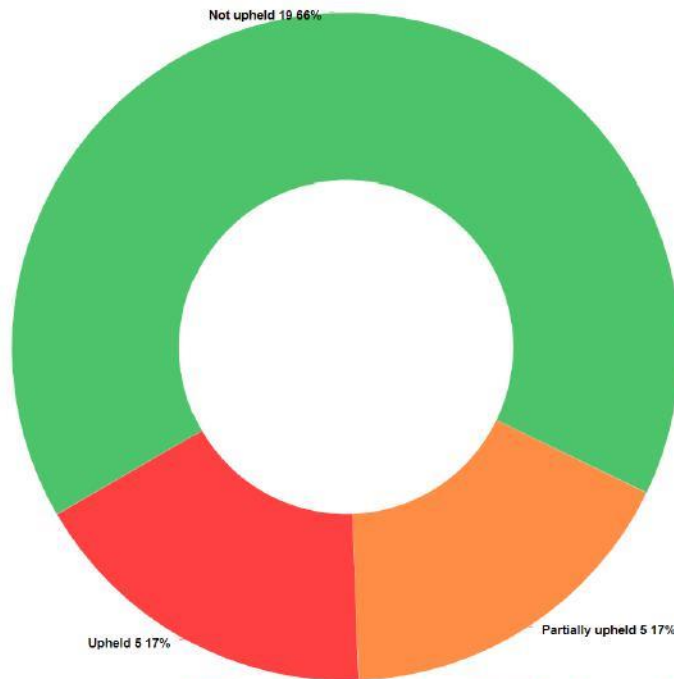
Stage 2 complaints received

3.6. Of the 180 Stage 1 complaints, 41 were progressed to Stage 2. Figure 4 shows that 66% of complaints at Stage 2 were not upheld, and that 48% were responded to within published timescales, which is a significant decrease on 2022/23 (100%). This is also likely to be due to lack of capacity.

Figure 4: Stage 2 complaints received

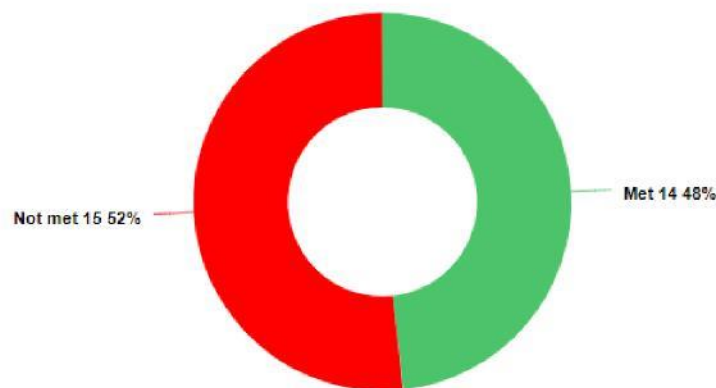
Includes only complaints where a decision has been made, excludes 'In Progress' complaints

Mar 24
RBWM Complaints YTD: Stage 2 breakdown by outcome



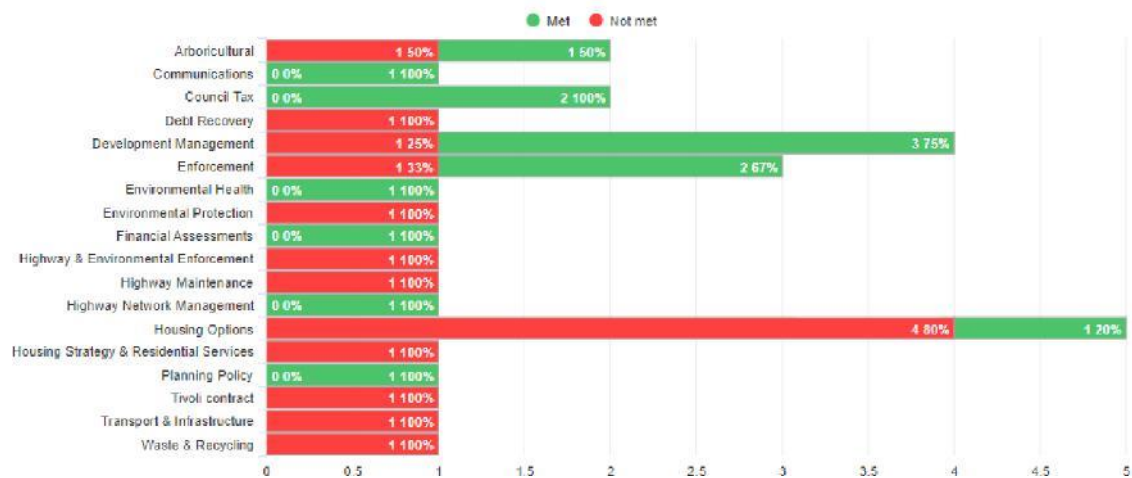
Includes only complaints where a decision has been made, excludes 'In Progress' complaints

Mar 24
RBWM Complaints YTD: Stage 2 complaints responded within timescales: Number and percentage



Includes only complaints where a decision has been made, excludes 'In Progress' complaints

Mar 24
RBWM Complaints YTD: Stage 2 complaints responded to within timescale by service: Number and percentage



4 Compliments received

- 4.1 In 2023/24 RBWM Corporate Services received 452 compliments. This is a 54% increase on 2022/23, when 293 compliments were logged for RBWM Corporate Services. This is a particularly positive message when compared to the 7.1% increase in formal corporate stage 1 complaints over the same period (section 3.1 above).
- 4.2 Figure 5 sets out the volume of compliments received and details the teams in receipt of the most compliments, with comparisons to 2022/23 figures (where available). These figures show that the services in receipt of more compliments are also generally the services which consistently receive the most compliments and tend to be the ones which impact a greater proportion of residents and households in the borough. The majority of these services have also seen an individual increase in the number of compliments received from 2022/23 to 2023/24. A selection of this year's compliments are quoted in Figure 6, to give an idea of some of the positive feedback received.
- 4.3 Work will be undertaken this year to look at the compliments received in more detail moving forward, with a view to drawing out key themes across the services.

Figure 5: Corporate Compliments received in 2023/24

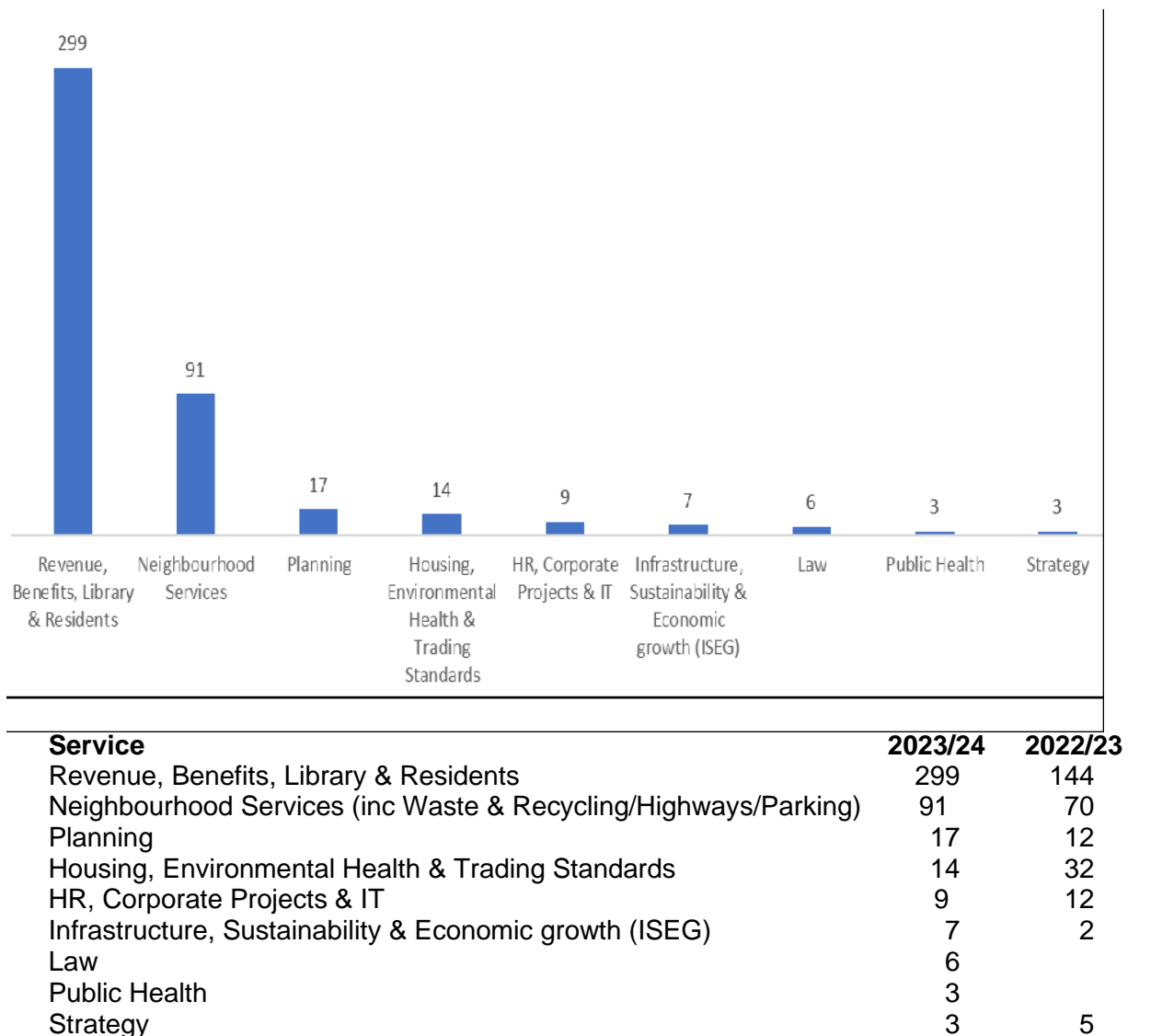


Figure 6: Sample of compliments received in 2023/24

“First of all would like to thank you for being patient with me and dealing with my case very professionally (5 star). Especially with all what I have been going through you handled me with sensitivity.”

“There so many great and supportive staff working at RBW&M. May I also take this opportunity to extend a big thank you to you [...] for the fantastic and professional services you have provided and continue to provide”

“On behalf of our concerned residents, I’m very pleased with the responsiveness and support received from RBWM on this matter, many thanks!”

“You have been so very patient and went beyond being helpful when we visited - I felt confident and relaxed when you walked me through everything.”

“You have been a life saver on this case.”

“Many thanks & I just wanted to say what a fantastic service I have received from RBWM.”

“I wanted to express my deep gratitude for your help and kindness. It is such a relief to know someone is "on their side"”

“I was so impressed with the speedy action of all involved and would like to say Well Done RBWM and Volker Highways, all done free of charge.”

“[...] just rang me to say he had a very good conversation with you and described you as the “best employee of RBWM he’s ever spoken to” .”

“Can I just say what a ray of sunshine you are. You have gone over and above to help us out and it is much appreciated. Very many thanks”

“I know I’ve said “thank you” on several occasions over the past many (aka numerous) months, but I just wanted to put on record how grateful [we] are, for your advice, guidance, commitment and copious amounts of patience.”

“Thank you again, your professionalism and compassion will always be remembered and very much appreciated.”

“I cannot praise you enough as the whole process from application to receipt was easy for me and efficiently and quickly dealt with by yourselves; definitely a job very well done by yourselves.”

“[...] was very patient, supportive and helpful. He gave me confidence to use computer. Thank you for a 5 service.”*

“thank you so much for what you have done, I am dealing with a few other councils and am not having a nice experience at all, this has been a very welcomed change!”

5 Lessons learned from complaints by service area

- 5.1 An important part of the complaints process is capturing the learnings and embedding good practice across the Council. Below are the learnings that have been identified by various service areas:

<p>Revenues, Benefits, Library and Resident Services</p>
<p>It is worth noting that, within the area of Revenues, Benefits, Library and Resident Services, the majority of complaints continue to be attributed to the area of council tax. This is inevitably once recovery action is initiated against residents who have failed to make the appropriate payments. However, the volume of complaints has decreased from 17 in 2022/23 to 13 in 2023/24 which is testament to the approach taken by staff when commencing recovery action, despite the cost of living crisis. Complaints continue to be received from a relatively small number of residents, including those referring to themselves as “freemen of the land”.</p>
<p>Planning</p>
<p>Planning is a statutory service with processes and timescales directed by statute. The nature of the planning processes, particularly in terms of decision making on planning applications, means that there will always be parties that are pleased with the decision and those that are not. The complaints received by the planning service primarily comprise two types; those related to the planning application process and decision making and those related to service delivery. The former type of complaint is ongoing, and we have little control over the number of complaints we receive on these matters. With regard to the latter type of complaints, relating to service delivery, we are listening to our customers and are in the process of introducing new ways of working to improve communications and speed up the processes.</p>
<p>Parking / Car parks management</p>
<p>The team work closely with the Complaints team to monitor progress and reduce the number of complaints not responded to within the set timeframes. Following the review of any complaint, recommendations are made to improve service delivery and customer experience.</p>
<p>Waste Management / Environmental Services</p>
<p>The waste service is one that impacts on every resident and household, as a result the number of complaints received by this service area would be expected to be high in comparison with other some service areas. This area is significantly impacted by lack of resource which has not been able to be addressed. Following the review of any complaint, recommendations are made to improve service delivery and customer experience.</p>
<p>Housing</p>
<p>The Housing service continues to face increasing demand for services. This is for a variety of reasons including issues relating to the cost of living and reduction in the private rented sector. Availability of both social housing units and temporary accommodation means that households may spend prolonged periods in temporary accommodation and wait years for a permanent social house to become available. Resourcing the service is problematic, with a number of vacant posts difficult to fill. This does result in delays in responding to general enquiries as well as complaints. The service is looking at a number of ways to address the issues and are working with the complaints team to recognise where improvements can be made to reduce complaint levels.</p>

6 Lessons learned - final summary

- 6.1. The Council welcomes and recognises the importance of complaints and all customer feedback. We use this in discussion at our leadership meetings and to help drive our services forward. Our complaints processes and procedures are regularly reviewed and, whilst found to be compliant, a small number of improvements have been made.
- 6.2. Our Formal Corporate Complaints Policy has been updated with some improvements to simplify the wording and make it easier to read. The team have worked hard with colleagues to make sure that the new CRM system is optimised to support the monitoring, management and reporting of complaints. This will also support a greater focus on learnings from complaint outcomes in the future.

7. Appendix A: LGSCO Annual Review 2024 letter



17 July 2024

By email

Mr Evans
Chief Executive
Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead Council

Dear Mr Evans

Annual Review letter 2023-24

I write to you with your annual summary of complaint statistics from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman for the year ending 31 March 2024. The information offers valuable insight about your organisation's approach to complaints, and I know you will consider it as part of your corporate governance processes. As such, I have sought to share this letter with the Leader of your Council and Chair of the appropriate Scrutiny Committee, to ensure effective ownership and oversight of complaint outcomes, which offer valuable opportunities to learn and improve. In addition, this year, we have encouraged Monitoring Officers to register to receive the letter directly, supporting their role to report the decisions we uphold to their council.

For most of the reporting year, Paul Najsarek steered the organisation during his tenure as interim Ombudsman, and I was delighted to take up the role of Ombudsman in February 2024. I look forward to working with you and colleagues across the local government sector to ensure we continue to harness the value of individual complaints and drive and promote systemic change and improvement across the local government landscape.

While I know this ambition will align with your own, I am aware of the difficult financial circumstances and service demands that make continuous improvement a challenging focus for the sector. However, we will continue to hold organisations to account through our investigations and recommend proportionate actions to remedy injustice. Despite the challenges, I have great confidence that you recognise the valuable contribution and insight complaints, and their swift resolution, offer to improve services for the public.

Complaint statistics

Our statistics focus on three key areas that help to assess your organisation's commitment to putting things right when they go wrong:

Complaints upheld - We uphold complaints when we find fault in an organisation's actions, including where the organisation accepted fault before we investigated. We include the total number of investigations completed to provide important context for the statistic. This year, we also provide the number of upheld complaints per 100,000 population.

Compliance with recommendations - We recommend ways for organisations to put things right when faults have caused injustice and monitor their compliance with our recommendations. Failure to comply is rare and a compliance rate below 100% is a cause for concern.

Satisfactory remedy provided by the authority - In these cases, the organisation upheld the complaint and we agreed with how it offered to put things right. We encourage the early resolution of complaints and give credit to organisations that accept fault and find appropriate ways to put things right.

Finally, we compare the three key annual statistics for your organisation with similar authorities to provide an average marker of performance. We do this for County Councils, District Councils, Metropolitan Boroughs, Unitary Councils, and London Boroughs.

Your annual data, and a copy of this letter, will be uploaded to our interactive map, [Your council's performance](#), on 24 July 2024. This useful tool places all our data and information about councils in one place. You can find the detail of the decisions we have made about your Council, read the public reports we have issued, and view the service improvements your Council has agreed to make as a result of our investigations, as well as previous annual review letters.

Your organisation's performance

In last year's letter, concerns were raised about your Council's failure to respond on time to our investigation enquiries. I am pleased to report we have not encountered issues with late responses to enquiries this year.

However, there were four cases where the Council did not complete recommendations within the agreed timescales. In one case, stage three of the Children's complaint process was completed a month late, and in another, a planning enforcement investigation was completed three months after the deadline the Council had agreed. We share recommendations at the draft decision stage of our process and often propose a time period within which we expect any actions to be completed. It is important your Council engages fully with that process and is realistic in either confirming or seeking to negotiate the timeframe required to complete the actions.

I welcome the efforts made to improve the timeliness of responses to our enquiries and invite the Council to apply similar oversight to the remedy process.

Supporting complaint and service improvement

In February, following a period of consultation, we launched the Complaint Handling Code for councils, setting out a clear process for responding to complaints effectively and fairly. It is aligned with the Code issued to housing authorities and landlords by the Housing Ombudsman Service and we encourage you to adopt the Code without undue delay. Twenty councils have volunteered to take part in an implementation pilot over the next two years that will develop further guidance and best practice.

The Code is issued to councils under our powers to provide guidance about good administrative practice. We expect councils to carefully consider the Code when developing policies and procedures and will begin considering it as part of our processes from April 2026 at the earliest.

The Code is considered good practice for all organisations we investigate (except where there are statutory complaint handling processes in place), and we may decide to issue it as guidance to other organisations in future.

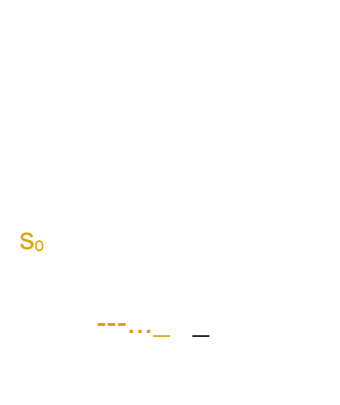
Our successful complaint handling training programme continues to develop with new modules in Adult Social Care and Children's Services complaint handling available soon. All our courses include practical interactive workshops that help participants develop their complaint handling skills. We delivered 126 online workshops during the year, reaching more than 1,700 people. To find out more visit www.lgo.org.uk/training or get in touch at training@lgo.org.uk.

We were pleased to deliver two online complaint handling courses to Achieving for Children staff during the year. I welcome your Council's investment in good complaint handling training and trust the course was useful to you.

Returning to the theme of continuous improvement, we recognise the importance of reflecting on our own performance. With that in mind I encourage you to share your view of our organisation via this survey: <https://www.smartsurvey.co.uk/s/ombudsman/>. Your responses will help us to assess our impact and improve our offer to you. We want to gather a range of views and welcome multiple responses from organisations, so please do share the link with relevant colleagues.

Yours sincerely,

Amerdeep Somal
Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman
Chair, Commission for Local Administration in England

Complaints upheld	
 <p>92%</p>	<p>92% of complaints we investigated were upheld.</p> <p>This compares to an average of 79% in similar organisations.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">11 upheld decisions</p> <p>This is 7.1 upheld decisions per 100,000 residents.</p> <p>The average for authorities of this type is 4.6 upheld decisions per 100,000 residents.</p> <p>Statistics are based on a total of 12 investigations for the period between 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024</p>
Compliance with Ombudsman recommendations	
<p>•</p> <p>41 organisations.</p> <p>2024 This compares to an average</p>	<p>In 100% of cases we were satisfied the organisation had successfully implemented our period recommendations.</p> <p>Statistics are based on a total of 9 compliance outcomes for the</p> <p style="text-align: right;">between 1 April 2023 to 31 March</p>
Satisfactory remedy provided by the organisation	
<p>So</p>  <p>27%</p>	<p>In 27% of upheld cases we found the organisation had provided a satisfactory remedy before the complaint reached the Ombudsman.</p> <p>This compares to an average of 13% in similar organisations.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">3 satisfactory remedy decisions</p> <p>Statistics are based on a total of 11 upheld decisions for the period between 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024</p>

8. Appendix B: Council's complaints processes

The stages of the Council's process is detailed in the table below:

Stages	Adult services complaints	Children's services complaints	Formal Corporate complaints	Not within the formal complaints process
Stage 1	Statutory No specific timescale but aim to respond within 10 working days. Response from Service Manager or higher.	Statutory Up to 10 working days. Can agree extension for a further 10 working days. Response from Head of Service.	Up to 20 working days. Can agree extension for a further 10 working days. Response from Head of Service.	N/A
Stage 2	N/A	Statutory 25-65 working days. Completed by independent complaints investigators and report produced. Adjudicating letter in response to report completed by Children's Director of Social Care.	Up to 20 working days. Review of stage 1 complaint and response by Director.	N/A
Stage 3	N/A	Statutory Stage 3 independent panel. Up to 70 working days. Panel of three independent members who produce a report. Letter in response to the report completed by the Directors of Children's Services.	N/A	N/A
LGSCO	Can complain to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman	Can complain to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman	Can complain to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman	N/A
Alternative appeal process	N/A	N/A	N/A	Customer given timescales for response