

OPEN

Audit & Governance Committee

29 July 2024

Annual Complaints and Compliments 2023-2024



Report of: Adele Taylor, Director of Finance and Customer Services

Report Reference No: AG/25/23-24

Ward(s) Affected: All

Purpose of Report

- 1 This report provides a summary and analysis of complaints and compliments received by the Council during the period 1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024.
- 2 The report highlights any areas of concern and examples of good practice. It provides assurance that matters raised as complaints by customers are being addressed; that action has been taken to rectify issues and that information arising from complaints has informed service improvements. Responsibility for services rests with the relevant service committee and members may wish to seek additional assurances from those service committees.
- 3 The report supports the strategic aims and objectives in the Council's Corporate Plan 2021-25 to become an open and enabling Council and specifically supports the objectives of the Council's Customer Experience Strategy.

Executive Summary

- 4 The Council provides the facility for customers to report compliments and complaints in relation to council services in an accessible and consistent way. Improvements have been made to the processes for these customer engagements following the approval of the Customer Experience Strategy by the Corporate Policy Committee in March 2021. As part of this approval the Committee continues to receive updated performance information on progress.
- 5 The Council provides in the region of 500 different services across a population of almost 400,000 residents. These range from place-based services, such as waste collection and highways management which are universal, to individual services such as social care and housing.

- 6 The Council received 3,051 complaints and 824 compliments in between April 2023 and March 2024 (see Appendix 8 for examples of compliments received). The figures for this report were run on the 22nd of March 2024.
- 7 In 2023/24, there was an increase of 16% in received complaints compared with 2022/23. There was a 15% decrease in compliments received compared to the previous year. Of the 3,051 complaints received in 2023/24, 225 were rejected, withdrawn or not pursued; and the remaining 2,826 were processed as official complaints.
- 8 Of the 2,826 processed complaints, 164 were Stage 2 complaints. There were 2 Stage 3 complaints in 2023/24.
- 9 The Council has a two-stage complaints procedure. Most complaints are resolved at Stage 1 where a complaint is investigated and responded to by a manager from the service being complained about. The council's Customer Charter sets a standard of 10 or 20 days to respond to a complaint (depending on the stage and whether statutory or non-statutory). The customer will generally receive a written response within 10 workings days, unless the matter has been resolved and the customer has been contacted directly by the service via telephone or email.
- 10 If the customer remains unhappy following the Stage 1 response and outcome, they can request that the complaint is considered at Stage 2. At this stage a review of the complaint is carried out by a manager who has not previously been involved with the complaint. It should be noted that the statutory complaints process for Children's Social Care has the option to go to Stage 3 if required.
- 11 Customer feedback is very important in the future development of services and this report provides data and activities related to feedback in the period 1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024, focusing on those services which received a comparatively high volume of complaints (compared with other services in the same committee); or where complaint volumes have significantly increased for a service. The Customer Services Team has continued to increase engagement with service leads throughout this period in line with the strategy. This has led to process changes, increased awareness, and insight as well as additional training.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Audit and Governance Committee is recommended to:

- 1 Note the Committee complaints and compliments data, and the briefing material in this report relating to 2023/24.
- 2 Note the issues raised and improvements made in respect to the management of complaints across the Council contained within the briefing material in this report.
- 3 Note the Council's compliance with the Corporate Complaints Policy, and with the recommendations of the Ombudsman.

Background

- 12 The Council has a Corporate Complaints Policy covering all complaints about Council services other than Adults & Health and Children's Social Care complaints, which each have a separate statutory complaints process.
- 13 The policy provides for members of the public to contact the Council in several different ways. Most complaints are received either by email, via the Customer Contact Centre or are self-logged via the Council's website. Appendix 9 shows the volume of telephone contact with the Council for each committee, as well as the specific contact count for customer feedback.
- 14 The Local Government Act 1974 established the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman. It empowers the Ombudsman to investigate complaints against councils and adult social care providers and to provide advice and guidance on good administrative practice. Once a complainant has exhausted the Council's complaints procedure, their next recourse, should they remain dissatisfied with the Council's response, is to contact the Ombudsman.
- 15 The Ombudsman will assess the merits of each case escalated to them and seek clarification from the Council as necessary before making the decision to investigate a complaint. Once the Ombudsman decides to investigate, they will try to ascertain if maladministration/Fault has occurred and whether there has been any resulting injustice to the complainant because of the maladministration/Fault.
- 16 In instances where maladministration/Fault with Injustice is found, the Ombudsman will usually make non-legally binding recommendations which they consider to be appropriate and reasonable. Although not legally binding, refusal to accept the Ombudsman's recommendation(s)

will trigger a Public Report. A Public Report is a detailed account of the complaint, outlining the failures by the Council in the investigation.

- 17 All complaints are a useful indicator of performance and provide the Council with an opportunity to review the quality of service provided and to make improvements. The Customer Relations Team within Customer Services reports the volume, outcome and time taken to resolve complaints to each Directorate on a quarterly basis. The volume of compliments, overall customer contact and, where appropriate, areas of concern and potential for service improvements are also reported.
- 18 During January 2024, we launched a complaints customer satisfaction survey, to gauge how customers who had made a complaint felt about the response they had received. The results from Quarter 4 (mid-January to end of March) are in Appendix 10. However, we do not yet have adequate meaningful data to start making improvements and changes to both the complaints service and the back-office departments – this will be done in the coming quarters.
- 19 Colleagues from several services have attended the in-house Customer Experience Training for Managers; and the feedback from the trainees via the training evaluation survey has been very positive.
- 20 At the start of Quarter 2, the Complaints Team introduced a ‘themes tracker’ to assist in understanding the root of complaints. This is referenced in the Briefing section below.
- 21 Data provided within this report relates to the ‘static’ SLAs – which are set out by the Charter. Two services (SEND and Development Management) currently have temporary Stage 1 complaint SLAs of 20 working days rather than 10 working days; and on occasion, services may agree a different SLA with the complainant / correspondent. Appendix 5 gives details of the static SLA data; Appendix 6 gives the ‘non-static’ SLA data – SLAs which have been agreed between the complainant and the responder which may fall outside the Charter’s SLAs.
- 22 The Adult Social Care Complaints policy has been reviewed; and one of the main changes is that the Stage 2 option has been removed. Relatively few adult social care complaints were escalated to Stage 2, with the majority being resolved at Stage 1. Instead, further work at Stage 1 – including the offer of a meeting and a further written response – will be completed where deemed necessary to provide further clarification to the complainant. They will then be referred to the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman if they remain dissatisfied. In anticipation of the new policy being implemented, as of October the 1st

2023, we ceased escalating any complaints to a formal Stage 2 review. The new policy was published on the 8th of March 2024.

- 23 The LGSCO published the results of their consultation on their Complaints Handling Code on the 8th of February 2024. The Ombudsman believes that a single code that applies to all councils in England will make it easier for customers to know what to expect in terms of how their complaint is going to be dealt with; and that it will improve complaints handling and standards, resulting in better services. The published code is advisory only, though in 2025/26 they intend to start applying the code to their casework. The Corporate Complaints Policy is currently being revised; and the LGSCO code will be used as a foundation.
- 24 The council's Special Contact Measures Policy requires that the Audit & Governance Committee are updated annually regarding the number of special contact arrangements that have been put into place during the year. In 2023/24, 8 individuals were placed into step 1 of the policy and 2 individuals were placed into step 2.

Briefing

Adults and Health

- 25 Adults and Health received 146 complaints in 2023/24, 5% of the total received by the council. Of these, 30 complaints were rejected, withdrawn, or not pursued; the remaining 116 were processed as official complaints.
- 26 2023/24 saw a 14% decrease in received complaints compared with 2022/23 (170). There were 3 Stage 2 complaints processed in 2023/24, compared with 16 in 2022/23 (a reduction of 81%).
- 27 64% of processed complaints were answered within the static SLAs, compared with 59% in 2022/23.
- 28 Eight service areas within Adults and Health responded to complaints between April 2023 and March 2024.
- 29 Social Care Business Support & Finance received 31 complaints - 21% of Adults and Health complaints, a decrease of 64% compared with 2022/23 (85). 80% of processed complaints were responded to within the 10-working day SLA. 53% of processed complaints were upheld or partly upheld. The following primary causes were recorded:

Communication	Service Quality	Payments or Disputed Charges	Service Failure	Staff Conduct	Policy and Procedure	Legal and Regulatory
3%	13%	71%	0%	13%	0%	0%

- 30 There are 9 themes in the themes tracker for Social Care Business Support & Finance in quarters 2 - 4 of 2023/24. The top 5 themes are:

Theme	Up held	Partly Upheld	Not upheld	Ong oing	Reje cted	Not Pursu ed	Withd rawn
Social Care Contributions	2	2	2	0	0	0	0
Disagree with Financial Assessment	0	0	5	0	0	0	0
Overpayments	0	2	1	0	0	0	0
Unprofessional Behaviour	1	1	1	0	0	0	0
Home Care Costs	0	2	0	0	0	0	0

- 31 The Adults service received 20 complaints (14% of Adults and Health complaints), the same number as 2022/23. 80% of processed complaints were responded to within the 10-working day SLA. 27% of processed complaints were upheld or partly upheld. The following primary causes were recorded:

Communicatio n	Servic e Quality	Payment s or Disputed Charges	Servic e Failure	Staff Conduct	Policy and Procedur e	Legal and Regulator y
10%	30%	35%	10%	10%	5%	0%

- 32 There are 8 themes in the themes tracker for the Adults service in quarters 2 - 4 of 2023/24. The 5 key themes are:

Theme	Up held	Partly Uphel d	Not upheld	Ong oing	Reje cted	Not Pursu ed	With draw n
Care Home Costs	0	1	4	0	3	0	0
Complaint Against Individual Social Worker	0	0	2	0	0	0	0
Safeguarding	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Care Assessment Incorrectly Carried Out	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Disagree with Care Assessment	0	0	0	0	1	0	0

- 33 Adults Commissioning received 17 complaints (12% of Adults and Health complaints), a decrease of 11% compared to 2022/23 (19). 78% of processed complaints were responded to within the 10-working day SLA. 78% of processed complaints were upheld or partly upheld. The following primary causes were recorded:

Communication	Service Quality	Payments or Disputed Charges	Service Failure	Staff Conduct	Policy and Procedure	Legal and Regulatory
0%	76%	6%	0%	6%	12%	0%

- 34 There are 8 themes in the themes tracker for Adults Commissioning in quarters 2 - 4 of 2023/24. The 5 key themes are:

Theme	Upheld	Partly Upheld	Not upheld	Ongoing	Rejected	Not Pursued	Withdrawn
Failures at Multiple Points in Care Process	0	1	1	0	1	0	0
Closure of Stanley Centre	0	0	0	0	2	0	0
Care Home Costs	0	1	0	0	1	0	0
Safeguarding	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Quality of Care from 3rd Party Provider (Evolving Care)	0	1	0	0	0	0	0

- 35 Adults and Health received 364 compliments between April 2023 and March 2024, spread across 35 services. The Domiciliary Reablement North Team received the highest number (59); followed by the Domiciliary Reablement South Team (54) and the Dementia Reablement South Team (46).

Children and Families

- 36 Children and Families received 512 complaints in 2023/24, 17% of the total received by the council. Of these, 83 complaints were rejected, withdrawn, or not pursued; the remaining 429 were processed as official complaints.
- 37 2023/24 saw a 32% increase in received complaints compared with 2022/23 (388). There were 39 processed Stage 2 complaints in

2023/24, compared with 32 in 2022/23 (an increase of 22%). There were 2 processed Stage 3 complaints in both 2022/23 and 2023/24.

- 38 30% of processed complaints were answered within the static SLAs, compared with 25% in 2022/23. This percentage is impacted by SEN having a temporary 20-working day SLA at Stage 1. If this is considered, 68% of Children and Families complaints were answered within SLA.
- 39 Children’s Social Care and SEND staff have continued to deal with increasing demand which impacts on caseloads, which combined with staff turnover and absence has affected the ability to respond to complaints in a timely manner. The Customer Relations Team have been proactive in trying to help teams respond to complaints.
- 40 Fourteen service areas within Children and Families responded to complaints in 2023/24.
- 41 The SEND Team accounts for 46% of all Children and Families processed complaints (233), an increase of 23% compared with 2022/23 (190). 8% of complaints were responded to within the static 10-working day SLA; though as previously noted this service has a temporary SLA of 20 working days and 85% of responses were made within this SLA. 87% of complaints were upheld or partly upheld. The following primary causes were recorded:

Communication	Service Quality	Payments or Disputed Charges	Service Failure	Staff Conduct	Policy and Procedure	Legal and Regulatory
16%	50%	2%	25%	1%	5%	1%

42 There are 17 themes in the themes tracker for the SEND Team in quarters 2 - 4 of 2023/24. The top 5 themes are:

Theme	Up held	Partly Upheld	Not upheld	Ongoing	Rejected	Not Pursued	Withdrawn
School Placement	21	12	0	0	14	1	4
Required Support for EHCP Not Being Provided	7	12	6	0	5	2	1
EHP Inappropriate	5	10	5	1	4	0	1
Annual Review Timescales Not Being Met	11	7	1	0	3	1	2
EHCP Not Created	9	8	1	0	1	0	1

43 The SEND Team commenced using the new complaints process at the start of Quarter 3. No SEND complaints received in the latter 2 quarters of 2023/24 have been escalated to Stage 2.

44 CIN/CP Crewe complaints account for 11% of all Children and Families received complaints (56), an increase of 30% compared with 2022/23 (43). 33% of processed complaints were responded to within the 10-working day SLA. 62% of processed complaints were upheld or partly upheld. The following primary causes were recorded:

Communication	Service Quality	Payments or Disputed Charges	Service Failure	Staff Conduct	Policy and Procedure	Legal and Regulatory
11%	30%	0%	5%	36%	13%	5%

45 There are 10 themes in the themes tracker for CIN/CP Crewe in quarters 2 - 4 of 2023/24. The top 5 themes are:

Theme	Up held	Partly Upheld	Not upheld	Ongoing	Rejected	Not Pursued	Withdrawn
Complaint Against Individual Social Worker	1	4	2	0	2	1	0
Safeguarding	3	0	1	0	1	0	0

Failures at Multiple Points in Care Process	0	1	1	0	0	1	1
Section 47 Investigation	0	1	1	0	0	0	0
Child Taken into Care	0	0	1	1	1	1	0

46 Education Travel accounts for 10% of all Children and Families received complaints (49), an increase of 444% compared with 2022/23 (9). 82% of processed complaints were responded to within the 10-working day SLA. 78% of processed complaints were upheld or partly upheld. The following primary causes were recorded:

Communication	Service Quality	Payments or Disputed Charges	Service Failure	Staff Conduct	Policy and Procedure	Legal and Regulatory
15%	68%	8%	0%	4%	5%	0%

47 There are 11 themes in the themes tracker for Education Travel in quarters 2 - 4 of 2023/24. The top 5 themes are:

Theme	Upheld	Partly Upheld	Not upheld	Ongoing	Rejected	Not Pursued	Withdrawn
Transport Provision	8	3	7	0	0	1	0
Change of Operator	4	3	0	0	1	0	1
Child Safety	6	1	0	0	0	0	0
Application Process	4	1	0	0	0	0	1
Transport Scheduling	3	0	1	0	0	0	0

48 We have created customer journey maps throughout the year, and these have been shared with the service for comment and to make suggestions as to where improvements can be made. Members of the Continuous Improvement Team have met with colleagues from Educational Travel; and suggestions around improving the customer experience during peak times have been put forward. The Customer Relations Team will meet with Educational Travel to discuss the coming year, and anticipated complaints around changes in education travel policy. The Customer Relations Team have also offered to go through

the complaints in the themes tracker for Quarters 2 – 4 of 2023/24 with Education Travel to identify policy complaints and discuss standard wording for responses to these.

- 49 Cared for Children and Care Leavers Service complaints account for 10% of all Children and Families received complaints (53), an increase of 51% compared with 2022/23 (35). 55% of processed complaints were responded to within the 10-working day SLA. 45% of processed complaints were upheld or partly upheld. The following primary causes were recorded:

Communication	Service Quality	Payments or Disputed Charges	Service Failure	Staff Conduct	Policy and Procedure	Legal and Regulatory
12%	42%	2%	12%	26%	4%	2%

- 50 There are 15 themes in the themes tracker for the Cared for Children and Care Leavers Service in quarters 2 - 4 of 2023/24. The top 5 themes are:

Theme	Upheld	Partly Upheld	Not upheld	Ongoing	Rejected	Not Pursued	Withdrawn
Complaint Against Individual Social Worker	3	0	7	0	1	0	1
Contact with a Child	6	0	1	0	1	0	0
Failures at Multiple Points in Care Process	2	2	2	1	1	0	0
Child Taken into Care	0	0	1	0	2	0	0
Leaving Care Status	1	0	2	0	0	0	0

- 51 Children and Families received 167 compliments in 2023/24, spread across 10 services. Family Services received the highest number (71); followed by the SEN Team (70) and Education (8).

Corporate Policy

- 52 Corporate Policy received 262 complaints in 2023/24. 9% of the total received by the council. Of these, 14 complaints were rejected, withdrawn, or not pursued; the remaining 248 were processed as official complaints.

- 53 2023/24 saw an 18% decrease in received complaints compared with 2022/23 (319). There were 12 Stage 2 processed complaints in both 2022/23 and 2023/24.
- 54 82% of processed complaints were answered within the static 10-working day SLA, compared with 77% in 2022/23.
- 55 Sixteen service areas within Corporate Policy responded to complaints in 2023/24.

The Council Tax Billing and Collections team account for 44% of all received complaints (120), a decrease of 34% compared with 2022/23 (181). 88% of complaints were responded to within the 10-working day SLA. 35% of complaints were upheld or partly upheld. The following primary causes were recorded:

Communication	Service Quality	Payments or Disputed Charges	Service Failure	Staff Conduct	Policy and Procedure	Legal and Regulatory
24%	49%	23%	2%	0%	2%	0%

- 56 There are 20 themes in the themes tracker for the Council Tax Billing and Collections team in quarters 2 - 4 of 2023/24. The top 5 themes are:

Theme	Upheld	Partly Upheld	Not upheld	Ongoing	Rejected	Not Pursued	Withdrawn
Bailiff Involvement	10	0	6	0	0	0	0
Receipt of Reminder Letter	3	0	6	0	0	0	0
Receipt of Summons Letter	0	0	8	0	0	0	0
Council Tax Rebates	2	0	5	0	0	0	0
Council Tax Arrears	2	0	4	0	0	0	0

- 57 Customer Service Centres (Macclesfield & Crewe) account for 13% of received complaints (33), a decrease of 35% compared with 2022/23 (51). 93% of complaints were responded to within the 10-working day

SLA. 77% of complaints were upheld or partly upheld. The following primary causes were recorded:

Communication	Service Quality	Payments or Disputed Charges	Service Failure	Staff Conduct	Policy and Procedure	Legal and Regulatory
12%	36%	0%	4%	48%	0%	0%

58 There are 9 themes in the themes tracker for Customer Service Centres (Macclesfield & Crewe) in quarters 2 - 4 of 2023/24. The top 5 themes are:

Theme	Upheld	Partly Upheld	Not upheld	Ongoing	Rejected	Not Pursued	Withdrawn
Advisor - Rude / Abrupt Manner	6	3	3	0	0	0	0
Telephone - Line Cutting Off	2	0	1	0	0	0	1
Inter-departmental Communication	1	1	0	1	0	0	0
Inaccurate Information Provided	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Unprofessional Behaviour	0	0	2	0	0	0	0

59 Corporate Policy received 166 compliments in 2023/24, spread across 6 services. The Council Tax Billing and Collections team received the most compliments (98); followed by Customer Service Centres (36); and Business Rates Billing and Collection (29).

Economy and Growth

60 Economy and Growth received 68 complaints in 2023/24. 2% of the total received by the council. Of these, 7 complaints were rejected, withdrawn, or not pursued; the remaining 61 were processed as official complaints.

61 2023/24 saw a 19% increase in received complaints compared with 2022/23 (57). There were 3 Stage 2 complaints processed in 2023/24, compared with 6 in 2022/23, a decrease of 50%.

- 62 62% of processed complaints were answered within the static 10-working day SLA, compared with 53% in 2022/23.
- 63 Six service areas within Economy and Growth responded to complaints in 2023/24.
- 64 Strategic Housing accounted for 50% (34) of all Economy and Growth complaints received, a decrease of 6% compared with 2022/23 (36). 71% of processed complaints were responded to within the 10-working day SLA. 29% of processed complaints were upheld or partly upheld. The following primary causes were recorded:

Communication	Service Quality	Payments or Disputed Charges	Service Failure	Staff Conduct	Policy and Procedure	Legal and Regulatory
9%	65%	0%	0%	15%	0%	11%

- 65 There are 8 themes in the themes tracker for Strategic Housing in quarters 2 - 4 of 2023/24. The top 5 themes are:

Theme	Upheld	Partly Upheld	Not upheld	Ongoing	Rejected	Not Pursued	Withdrawn
Home Choice - Priority / Banding	0	1	7	0	0	0	0
Homelessness	2	0	3	0	0	0	0
Social Housing Eligibility	0	0	2	1	0	0	0
Home Adaptations	1	0	1	0	0	0	0
Disabled Facilities Grant	0	1	0	0	0	0	0

- 66 Assets & Property accounted for 34% (22) of all Economy and Growth complaints received, an increase of 29% compared with 2022/23 (17). 38% of processed complaints were responded to within the 10-working day SLA. 38% of complaints processed were upheld or partly upheld. The following primary causes were recorded:

Communication	Service Quality	Payments or Disputed Charges	Service Failure	Staff Conduct	Policy and Procedure	Legal and Regulatory
---------------	-----------------	------------------------------	-----------------	---------------	----------------------	----------------------

14%	59%	0%	18%	0%	9%	0%
-----	-----	----	-----	----	----	----

67 There are 9 themes in the themes tracker for Assets & Property in quarters 2 - 4 of 2023/24. The top 5 themes are:

Theme	Up held	Partly Upheld	Not upheld	Ong oing	Reje cted	Not Pursu ed	Withd rawn
No Response to Customer Contact	2	0	1	1	0	0	0
Maintenance of CEC Assets	2	0	1	1	0	0	0
Maintenance of Empty CEC Assets	1	0	0	1	0	0	0
Sale of CEC Assets	0	0	2	0	0	0	0
Boundary Responsibility	0	0	1	0	0	0	0

68 Economy and Growth received 2 compliments in 2023/24; Growth and Regeneration and Rural and Green Infrastructure received one each.

Environment and Communities

69 Environment and Communities received 1,678 complaints in 2023/24. 55% of the total received by the council. Of these, 53 complaints were rejected, withdrawn, or not pursued; the remaining 1,625 were processed as official complaints.

70 2023/24 saw a 36% increase in received complaints compared with 2022/23 (1,233). There were 95 Stage 2 complaints processed in 2023/24, compared with 60 in 2022/23, an increase of 58%.

71 70% of complaints were answered within the static 10-working day SLA, compared with 71% in 2022/23. This percentage is impacted by Development Management having a temporary 20-working day SLA. If this is considered, 79% of Environment and Communities complaints were answered within SLA.

72 Nineteen service areas within Environment and Communities responded to complaints in 2023/24.

73 Waste & Recycling accounted for 47% (790) of all Environment and Communities complaints received, an increase of 4% on the previous

year (758). 90% of processed complaints were responded to within the 10-working day SLA. 95% of processed complaints were upheld or partly upheld. The following primary causes were recorded:

Communication	Service Quality	Payments or Disputed Charges	Service Failure	Staff Conduct	Policy and Procedure	Legal and Regulatory
1%	34%	1%	61%	2%	1%	0%

74 There are 27 themes in the themes tracker for Waste & Recycling in quarters 2 - 4 of 2023/24. The top 3 are:

Theme	Upheld	Partly Upheld	Not upheld	Ongoing	Rejected	Not Pursued	Withdrawn
Multiple Missed Bin Collections	447	21	15	0	3	2	3
Missed Bin Not Returned for in 5 Working Days	71	3	2	1	0	0	0
Multiple Missed Bin – Assisted Collection	42	0	1	0	0	0	0

75 Environmental Services (Waste Strategy) accounted for 33% (546) of all Environment and Communities complaints received. The service saw an increase of 1409% in 2023/24 compared with 2022/23 (35). 60% of processed complaints were responded to within the 10-working day SLA. 36% of processed complaints were upheld or partly upheld. The following primary causes were recorded:

Communication	Service Quality	Payments or Disputed Charges	Service Failure	Staff Conduct	Policy and Procedure	Legal and Regulatory
8%	45%	16%	7%	0%	24%	0%

76 There are 41 themes in the themes tracker for Environmental Services (Waste Strategy) in quarters 2 - 4 of 2023/24. The top 3 themes are:

Theme	Upheld	Partly Upheld	Not upheld	Ongoing	Rejected	Not Pursued	Withdrawn
Damaged Bin Replacement Charge	100	2	106	0	1	4	1
Garden Bin Subscription Charge	4	5	133	0	0	5	0
Garden Waste Scheme	14	9	42	1	1	2	0

77 Development Management accounted for 11% of all received complaints for Environment and Communities (181), a decrease of 10% on 2022/23 (202). 29% of processed complaints were responded to within the static 10-working day SLA, though as previously noted this service has a temporary SLA of 20 working days and 91% of processed responses were made within this SLA. 56% of processed complaints were upheld or partly upheld. The following primary causes were recorded:

Communication	Service Quality	Payments or Disputed Charges	Service Failure	Staff Conduct	Policy and Procedure	Legal and Regulatory
31%	62%	1%	2%	3%	1%	0%

78 In the last quarter of 2022/23 and throughout 2023/24, Development Management have been working under the new complaints process. One of the key objectives being a reduction in Stage 2 complaints. 2023/24 saw a reduction of 24% for Stage 2 complaints, 38 compared with 50 in 2022/23. During this time, customer journey maps have been

created for the service; and these have been shared with the service for comment and to make suggestions as to where improvements can be made. Customer Services have also provided further training in using CRM, to ensure that colleagues in Development Management are aware of how the customer call back process works and that call backs are made within SLA.

79 There are 19 themes in the themes tracker for Development Management in quarters 2 - 4 of 2023/24. The top 3 are:

Theme	Up held	Partly Upheld	Not upheld	Ong oing	Reje cted	Not Pursu ed	Withd rawn
No Action - Planning Application	21	7	10	1	0	1	1
No Response to Customer Contact	17	12	6	0	0	2	0
Disagree with a Decision	1	14	11	0	2	0	0

80 Environment and Communities received 96 compliments in 2023/24, spread across 11 services. Waste and Recycling received the most compliments (44); followed by Grounds Maintenance (19); and Libraries (11).

Highways and Transport

81 Highways and Transport received 385 complaints in 2023/24. 13% of the total received by the council. Of these, 38 complaints were rejected, withdrawn, or not pursued; the remaining 347 were processed as official complaints.

82 2023/24 saw an 18% decrease in received complaints compared with 2022/23 (470). There were 17 Stage 2 complaints processed in 2023/24, compared with 30 in 2022/23, a decrease of 43%.

83 67% of complaints were answered within the static 10-working day SLA, compared with 71% in 2022/23.

84 Three service areas within Highways and Transport responded to complaints in 2023/24.

85 Highways accounted for 83% (320) of Highways and Transport complaints received, a decrease of 23% compared with 2022/23 (415). 79% of processed complaints were responded to within the 10-working

day SLA. 51% of processed complaints were upheld or partly upheld. The following primary causes were recorded:

Communication	Service Quality	Payments or Disputed Charges	Service Failure	Staff Conduct	Policy and Procedure	Legal and Regulatory
8%	82%	1%	3%	3%	3%	0%

86 There are 47 themes in the themes tracker for Highways in quarters 2 - 4 of 2023/24. The top 5 are:

Theme	Upheld	Partly Upheld	Not upheld	Ongoing	Rejected	Not Pursued	Withdrawn
Flooding	10	11	13	1	3	0	1
No Action - Reported Potholes	4	8	12	0	2	1	0
No Action - Street Lighting Issues	6	8	5	0	2	0	0
Gullies & Drain (Flooding)	5	6	7	0	1	0	0
No Action - Gullies and Drains	3	4	5	0	0	0	0

87 Highways and Transport received 26 compliments in 2023/24, spread across 3 services. Highways received the most compliments (23); and Parking Services (2) and Strategic Infrastructure (1).

Consultation and Engagement

- 88 Quarterly reports on complaints and compliments are provided to all directorates highlighting areas of concern and of good practice specific to their directorate. By recognising the key themes and primary causes of complaints, management teams are enabled to consider opportunities to drive improvements and to share best practice. This can form the basis of developing forward action plans to improve the service and its delivery. A key theme in complaints received across all directorates is communication with customers, and the work we are doing with customer service standards is important to making improvements.

Reasons for Recommendations

- 89 To ensure that the Committee is provided with assurances of service departments use of complaints to deliver service improvements in line with the Customer Experience Strategy.
- 90 To ensure that the Committee is kept informed of the Ombudsman's findings and to provide assurance that the Council is complying with the Corporate Complaints Policy and any recommendations made by the Ombudsman.

Option	Impact	Risk
Do nothing	Poor customer experience would not be addressed, lessons would not be learned and service improvements would not be made	Likely increase in complaints to Local Government Ombudsman with the potential for financial penalties and poor reputational impact

Implications and Comments

Monitoring Officer/Legal

- 91 Whilst there are no legal implications flowing directly from the content of this report, there are legal, reputational and resource implications in complaints that are taken through the corporate process and in addressing complaints which reach LGO and Public Report. Providing services with the data and trends is a means to influence and improve customer engagement.

Section 151 Officer/Finance

- 92 If Fault causing Injustice is found, the Council can be asked to pay compensation to a complainant, the level of which is determined on a case by-case basis. The cost of such compensation is paid for by the service at fault. In 12 cases where the Ombudsman found Fault with Injustice between April 2023 and March 2024, the Council was required to make compensation payments totalling £17,125. This represents a 339% increase on payments made between April 2022 and March 2023.
- 93 Two cases account for £13,275 of this compensation (£9,500 and £3,775). The remaining cases totalling £3,850.

Policy

- 94 Analysis of complaints enables services to identify and deliver improvements in service aligned with the Council's Customer Experience Strategy. If a high volume of complaints were received about a specific policy, a review of the relevant policy could be triggered and referred to the relevant service committee.

An open and enabling organisation	A council which empowers and cares about people	A thriving and sustainable place
1.Listen, learn and respond to our residents, promoting opportunities for a two-way conversation		

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

- 95 When responding to complaints, the Council must ensure that people are treated fairly and that we comply with the Equality Act 2010, making reasonable adjustments where necessary. This may include providing responses in large font, using coloured paper, or communicating by specific means such as email only.

Human Resources

- 96 Whilst the primary purpose of this report is to inform Members of the outcome of complaints and to seek to secure improvements in performance, resource implications arise from the high numbers of complaints. These relate to the increased demand upon officers in researching the background to complaints and responding appropriately. Where complaints relate to specific staff members, for

example because of behaviour or attitude, these are escalated to the appropriate manager.

Risk Management

97 If recommendations made by the Ombudsman are not followed, this could trigger a public report, as detailed in paragraphs 14 to 16.

Rural Communities

98 There are no direct implications for rural communities.

Children and Young People including Cared for Children, care leavers and Children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)

99 Implications for Children and Young people are included in paragraphs 38 and 39 of this report – particularly relating to lack SEND provision or social care support.

Public Health

100 *There are no direct implications for public health.*

Climate Change

101 There are no direct implications for climate change.

Access to Information

Contact Officer:

Jane Farnworth, Acting Head of Customer Services

Jane.farnworth@cheshireeast.gov.uk

Appendices:

Appendix 1 - Comparison of total complaints by committee 2022/23 and 2023/24

Appendix 2 - Comparison of complaint outcomes by committee 2022/23 and 2023/24

Appendix 3 - Comparison of complaint outcome distribution by committee 2022/23 and 2023/24

Appendix 4 - Processed complaint outcomes by committee, per complaint stage

Appendix 5 - Complaint response timeframe performance 2023/24 by committee (static)

Appendix 6 - Complaint response timeframe performance 2023/24 by committee (non-static)

Appendix 7 - Compliments received 2023/24 by committee

Appendix 8 - Examples of compliments received, by committee

Appendix 9 - Contact volumes 2023/24 by committee

Appendix 10 – Quarter 4 complaints survey report

Appendix 11 - Outcome of complaints to the LGSCO by committee

Appendix 12 - Summary of Recommended Actions from Ombudsman Decision Notices where Fault was found (as per Appendix 10)

Appendix 13 – Corporate Policy Committee Minute Extract

Appendix 14 – Responses to questions raised at the Corporate Policy Committee

Appendix 15 – Highways Customer Guide

	Appendix 16 – Reporting Highways matters – Members Appendix 17 – Reporting Highways matters – customers Appendix 18 – Highways Claims process
Background Papers:	N/A