

Corporate Complaints Procedure

Annual Report

1 April 2022- 31 March 2023



With pride. With purpose. With you.

Contents

Purpose of the Report	3
What is the Corporate Complaints Procedure?	3
What is a Complaint?	3
Corporate Complaints Procedure - Flow chart	4
The Role of the Complaints Team	5
Classification of Complaints and Feedback	5
Learning From Complaints	6
Collection of Data	7
Making a Complaint	7
Categories of Feedback	7
Formal Complaints	9
Economy, Infrastructure and Skills	11
Corporate Operations	12
Families and Communities	13
Overview of Stage 1 Complaints	14
Overview of Stage 2 Reviews	16
Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman	18
Conclusion	22

Purpose of the Report

This report provides information on complaints and feedback received by Staffordshire County Council for the period April 2022 to March 2023 that relate to all services within the Council, excluding adults and children's social care. Complaints about those specific service areas managed by two different statutory processes and are subject to separate scrutiny.

What is the Corporate Complaints Procedure?

The aim of the Corporate Complaints Procedure is to make sure that:

- complaints are dealt with to a fair and consistent standard
- the Council responds to complaints in a reasonable timescale
- outcomes from complaints are documented and shared throughout the Council
- a 'do it once do it right' approach is taken to complaints

The Council has based its complaints procedure on guidance set out in the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's 'Guidance on Running a Complaints System 2009'. The guidance explains the principles underpinning a successful complaints procedure:

'Complaint systems are not mechanisms for apportioning blame but an important part of a council's learning and development. Complaints can be a rich source of information and learning about how a council's performance is perceived and how it can be improved. What we recommend is a clear, accessible and flexible process that forms part of service provision and does not overwhelm individuals, departments or other council processes. The purpose of a complaints system is to put right what has gone wrong and learn from it.'

What is a Complaint?

An expression of dissatisfaction about a council service (whether that service is provided directly by the council or by a contractor or partner) that requires a response.

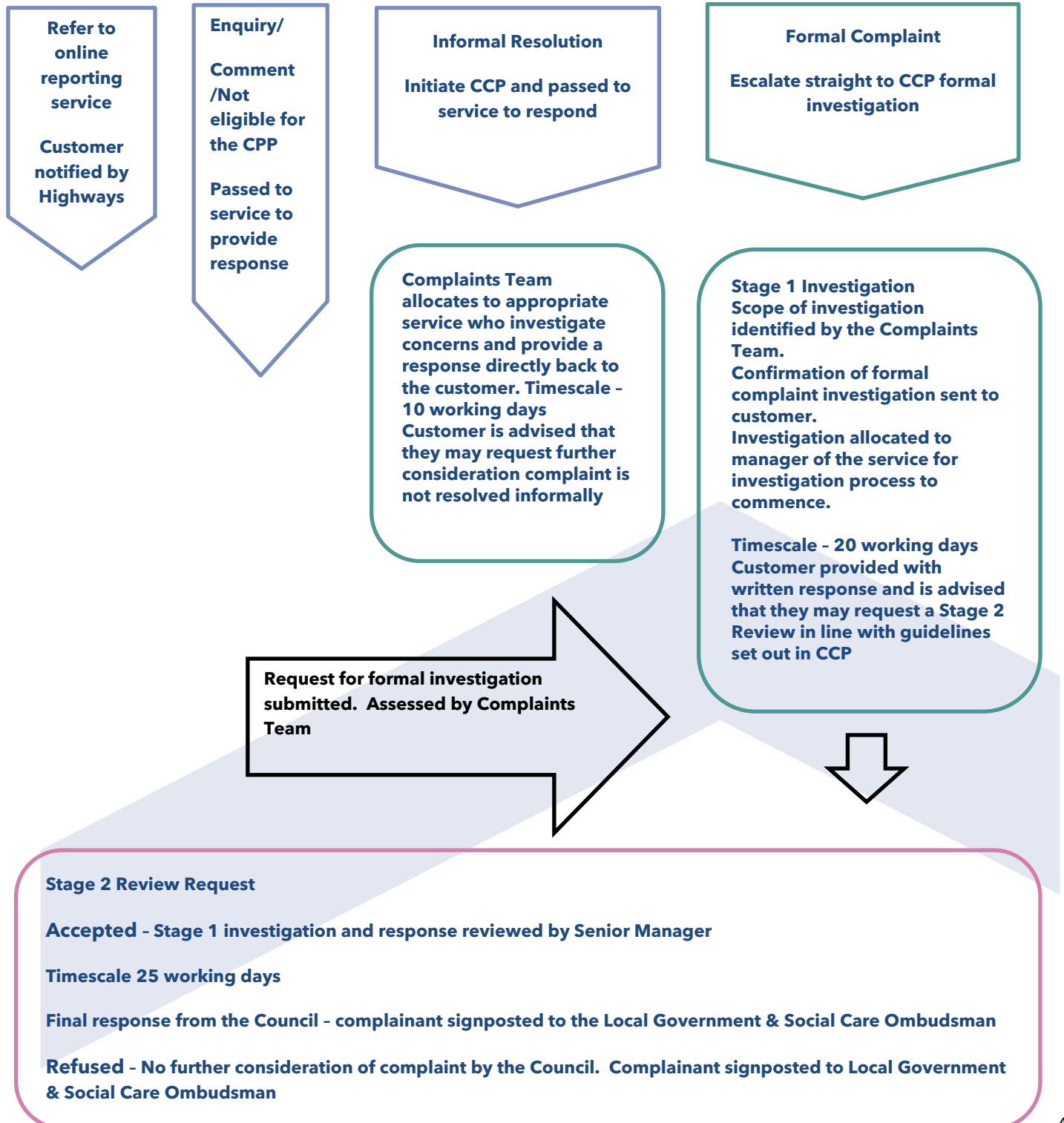
It is important to note that there are exclusions within the Corporate Complaints Procedure and not all complaints will be addressed under this procedure, even if the resident has identified their concerns as a complaint. The following are examples of exclusions under this procedure:

- First time request for service
- Certain highways issues
- Suggestions for improvements to council services
- Council action or lack of action that affects more than one individual, such as local highways or community issues
- Claims for damages
- Matters where an alternative and more appropriate course of action exists

The Corporate Complaints Procedure

Complaint/feedback received by the Council

Details of the complaint are assessed by the Complaints Team for allocation to the relevant process. The assessment can include reference to relevant policy/procedure/process, records held by the Council, information sought from the service area



The Role of the Complaints Team

The Corporate Complaints Procedure covers a wide range of Council services and infrastructure that are accessed and used by Staffordshire residents on a daily basis. The Complaints Team are responsible for assessing complaints and feedback about these services and screen each one to identify the most suitable way to address the issues raised.

Classification of Complaints and Feedback:

Refer to Online Reporting Service:

Any new issues such as highways defects, parking problems or rights of way concerns are not considered under the CPP and will be referred to the Council's online reporting systems. Examples can include:

- Notification of a new highways problem that has not been reported before
- Update on an existing issue
- Requests to re-open a closed report
- Problem parking on a residential street
- Blocked footpath that is a right of way
- Notify the Council of a claim for damages

Duty Enquiry/Comment/Not Eligible for Corporate Complaints Procedure):

The majority of matters received by the Complaints Team fall under these categories. The team will log and contact the service to obtain a response for the resident. Types of feedback for this category are:

- Roadworks causing delay or disruption/diversion route
- Follow up/query in respect of highways reports
- Standard of works completed
- A general comment or observation about a Council service
- Disagreement with a decision that has been made in line with council policy
- Suggestions for improvement
- Issues that affect a number of people, not an individual

Informal Resolution:

Complaints that are identified as Informal Resolution must be about issues that are eligible for the Corporate Complaints Procedure and can be resolved quickly and without the need for detailed investigation. There must be evidence of potential service failure but not to the extent that requires a formal investigation. The service must respond directly to the resident and endeavor to reach a suitable resolution. For example:

- Delay in receiving library book
- Problems with renewing Blue Badge or Bus Pass
- Difficulties in accessing online services

Formal Complaint:

An issue will be considered under the formal complaints procedure whereby there is evidence of potential service failure and that this has impacted directly on the person who is making the complaint. These can include:

- Blocked drain has not been inspected despite being reported to the Council. The situation has worsened, and water is encroaching on the residents property
- Roadworks have prevented a resident accessing their property
- Changes to the lighting provision outside a property has resulted in the light shining directly into the residents property and impacting on their day to day living
- Works not carried out despite being advised that they would take place
- Conduct of a member of staff towards a resident
- Affected resident not included in consultation of local project
- Evidence of an application for a service not considered properly

The Complaints Team will define the issues that require investigation from the information submitted by the complainant. This assists the process by:

- Identifying the key issues that require investigation
- Ensuring that each complaint is considered separately and provides the complainant with a clear decision as to whether their complaint has been upheld or not
- Captures themes and trends for reporting purposes

It is important that a complaint is dealt with via the correct process from the beginning to avoid any potential future maladministration. Issues that are not eligible for handling under the formal complaint's procedures will be directed as appropriate.

Complaints are directed to the relevant service area, and progress is monitored to ensure that a response is provided within corporate timescales. Complaints are responded to at the point of service delivery giving the service area subject of the complaint the opportunity to respond to any concerns raised about it. The manager of the service is also best placed to provide a knowledgeable and comprehensive response to the complaint. They can identify where things have gone wrong and propose a suitable remedy to the complainant.

The Complaints Team do not usually provide a response to complaints unless in exceptional circumstances. This is to provide the resident with confidence that the team offers an impartial service that can support them in making representation to the Council. The team provides advice to persons wishing to use these procedures and offers staff members support and guidance on how to appropriately handle and respond effectively to complaints about the Council.

Learning From Complaints

All officers investigating and responding to complaints are encouraged to document any identified learning that has arisen from the investigation in order that this information can be used to improve existing practices. Sharing details of the complaint and investigation are also done in team meetings to allow teams to contribute to future service improvements.

It is expected that in all circumstances, complaints are investigated properly and that complainants are treated fairly and with empathy. An apology will often be offered in recognition that the resident will have felt sufficiently aggrieved to contact the council to make a complaint, even in cases whereby the complaint has not been upheld.

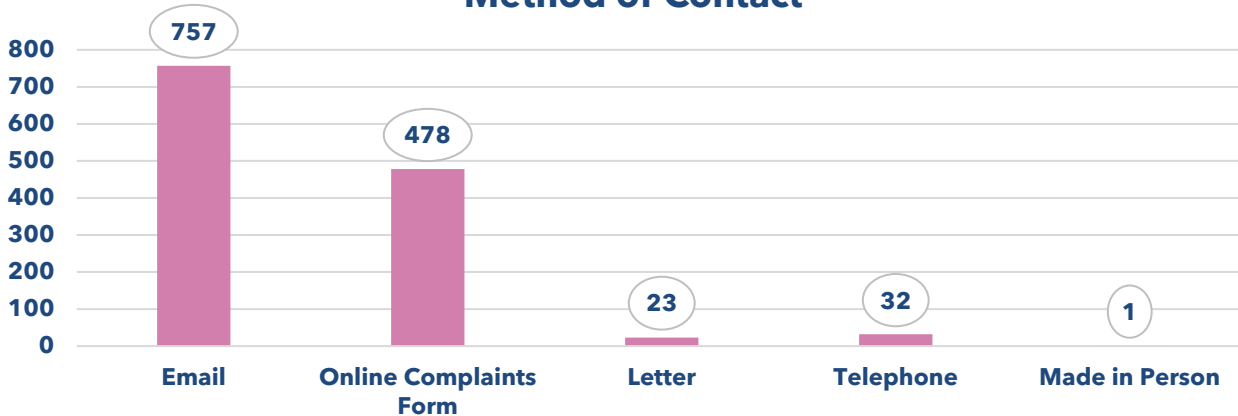
Collation of Data

Complaints are collated on a bespoke database that records details of the service subject of the complaint, the nature of the complaints raised, the outcome and remedies/learning.

Making a Complaint

In line with the Council’s digital strategy, residents can contact the Complaints Team via a designated email address and online form. However, we do recognise that in certain circumstances, residents wish to have a conversation with the team and therefore we also have a direct telephone line which is available Monday to Friday 10am to 2pm. The chart below shows the methods of contact used by residents to raise complaints/feedback with the Complaints Team.

Method of Contact

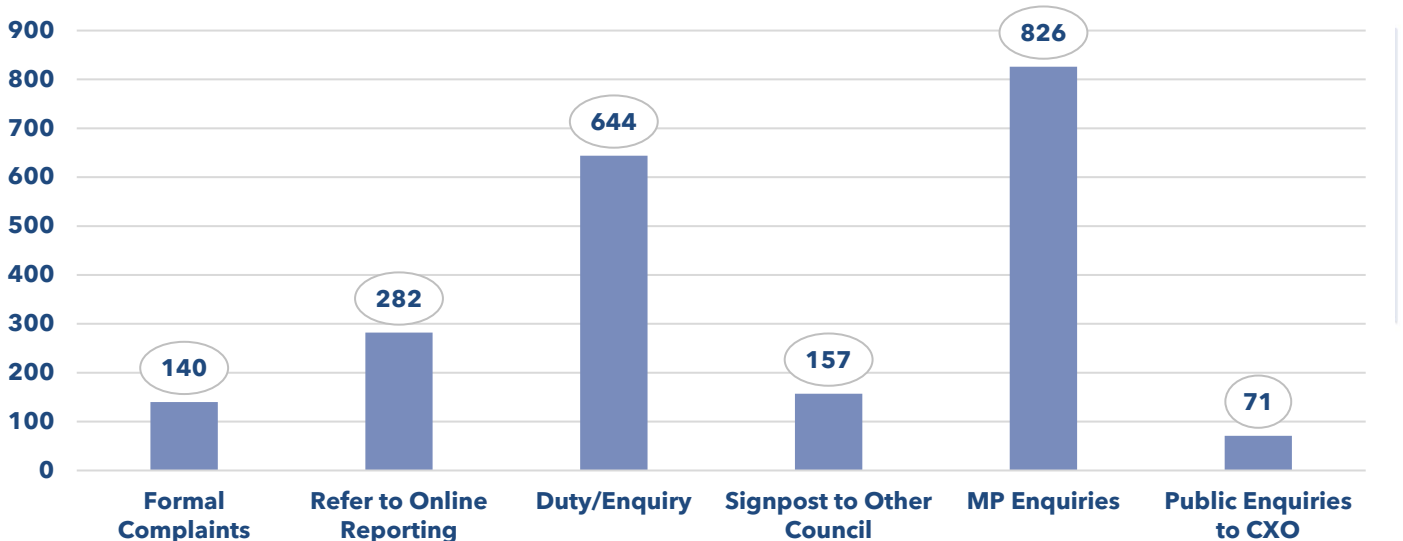


Although direct contact with the team is available, the above statistics indicate that the preferred method of making contact feedback is via a digital channel.

Categories of Feedback

The chart below details how complaints and feedback have been categorised during 2022-23.

Corporate Categories 2022-23



A total of 1216 complaints and feedback were received during 2022-23. In addition to this, 826 MP Enquiries were received relating to the Council. Of the total received, 12% were addressed as formal complaint and Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Investigations.

Duty and Enquiry matters consistently continue to account for a significant portion corporate issues directed to the Complaints Team. Matters categorised as Duty are complaints that are outside the remit of the Corporate Complaints Procedure and work is undertaken by the Complaints Team to provide a response to the resident. Duty can also include general enquiries whereby the resident raises a query. The input by the Complaints Team can include consulting with the service area for background information and continued exchange of correspondence with the resident. Depending on complexity of the issues raised and the actions of the resident, this can take between one working day to several weeks of case management to conclude. Duty can often become a more complex matter to close due to it not being supported by a specific process.

In comparison with the previous reporting year, there have been the following increases:



Refer to Online Reporting - **Increase of 45%**



Signpost to Other Council - **Increase of 138%**



Duty/Enquiry - **Increase of 29%**



MP Enquiries - **Increase of 15%**



Stage 1 Complaints - **Increase of 94%**



Public Enquiries to CXO - **Reduction of 27%**

All main categories of feedback directed to the Complaints Team have seen an increase in number in comparison with the previous year.

The most significant increase is in respect of signposting to other local authorities. This can include general enquiries about bin collections and reports about environmental health matters. In addition the team also received complaints about planning matters that are relevant to local planning matters. Although this issue raised does not fall under the responsibility of the county council, the team will respond to the resident and provide the appropriate information and contact details to the resident so that they can direct their concerns to the correct authority.

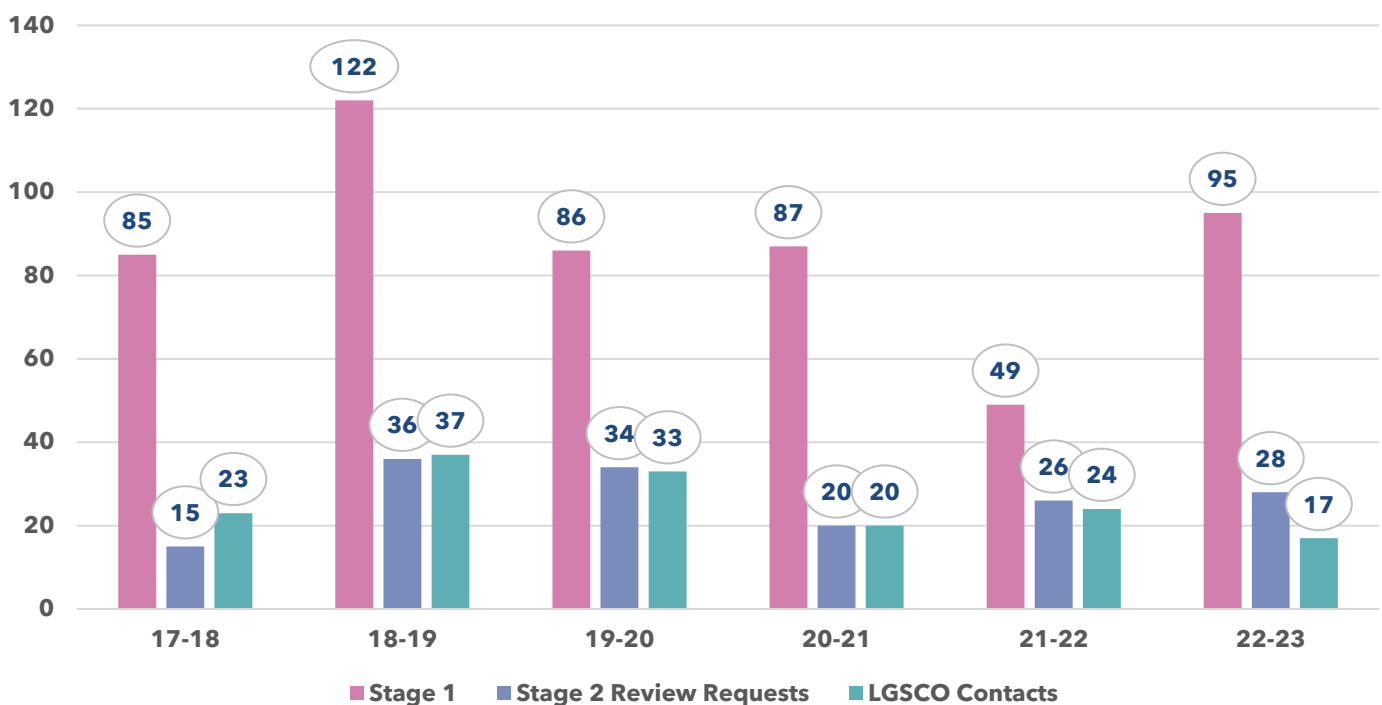
The Council's webpages contain information on how to report a variety of issues via our online services. This information is also included on the Complaints webpage and auto acknowledgement. However, the 45% increase in referring residents to the online services indicates that this information may not either be as clear or apparent as it could be and potentially the way in which this information is available could be reviewed.

A further increase has been seen in the number of Duty matters that the Complaints Team has dealt with in this reporting period. As advised previously in this report, Duty can take a significant amount of resource from the point of receipt to conclusion. The Complaints Team relies on information obtained from the relevant service area in order to respond to the issue however this does not always resolve the issue in the first instance.

Formal Complaints

The chart below provides information on the number of Stage 1 complaints carried out during 2022-23 together with the number of Stage 2 Review requests and Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman contacts during this time period.

Formal Complaints



2021-2022	Stage 1	Stage 2 Review Requests	LGSCO Contacts
Economy, Infrastructure & Skills (inc Culture, Rural & Safer Communities)	78	Stage 2 Review - 24 Stage 2 Refusal - 3	Total Contacts 13 Investigation - 4 Not Investigating - 9
Families & Communities	3	Stage 2 Review - 1 Stage 2 Refusal - 0	Total Contacts 0
Corporate Operations	14	Stage 2 Review - 0	Total Contacts - 4 Investigation - 4
Total	95	28	17

Formal Complaints - Key Trends 2022-23:



**Increase in Stage 1
complaints by**

94%



**Increase in Stage 2
Requests by**

8%



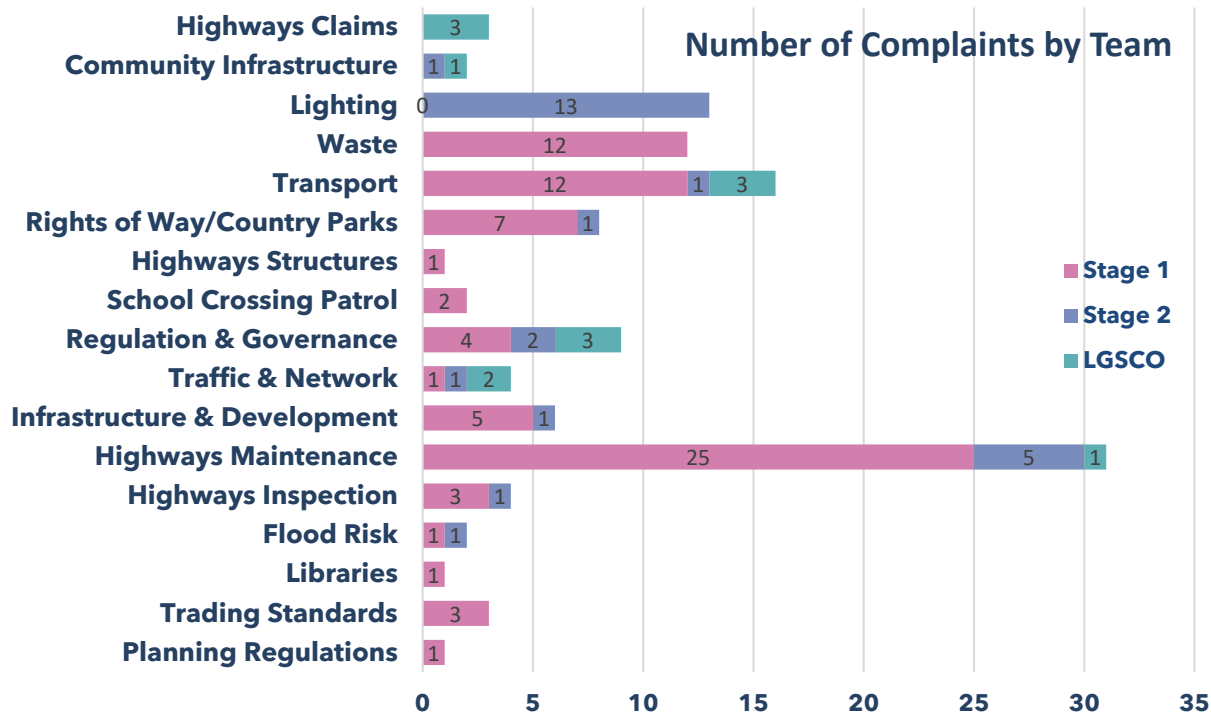
**Reduction in Ombudsman
contacts by**

29%



Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Directorate

The charts below provide data on complaints received during 2022-23 by team.



Investigation Outcomes:

	Stage 1	Stage 2	LGSCO
Upheld	25	7	3
Part Upheld	15	3	
Not Upheld	24	14	
Not Investigating		3	10
Resolved	2	-	
Response Not Provided	12	-	

Timescales:

	Stage 1	Stage 2
Within Timescale	38	21
Over Timescale	25	4
Response Not Provided	12	-

Stage 2 Reviews:

Stage 2 Review Requests Received - **28**

Stage 2 Review Requests Refused - **3**

Stage 2 Reviews carried out - **25**

LGSCO Contacts:

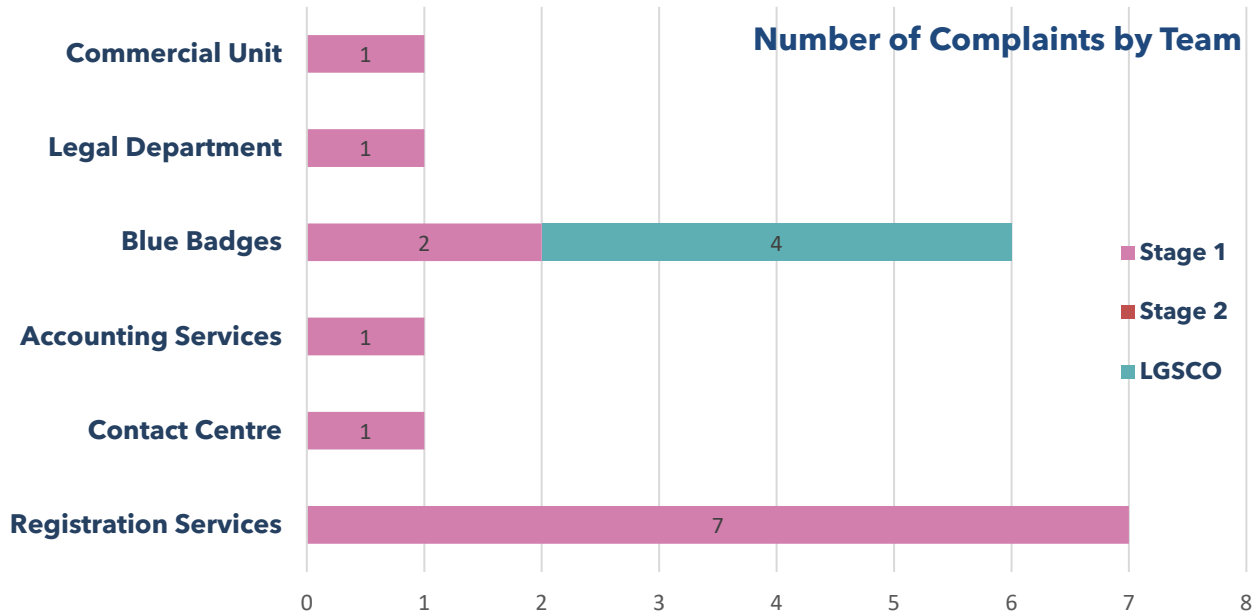
Highways & the Built County	10
Transport & the Connected County	3

Nature of Stage 1 Complaint



Corporate Operations Directorate

The charts below provide data on complaints received during 2022-23 by team.



Investigation Outcomes:

	Stage 1	Stage 2	LGSCO
Upheld	9	-	4
Part Upheld	-	-	-
Not Upheld	4	-	-
Complaint Withdrawn	1	-	-

Timescales:

	Stage 1	Stage 2
Within Timescale	12	-
Over Timescale	1	-

** 1 Stage 1 complaint was withdrawn

Stage 2 Reviews:

No Stage 2 Review requests were received during 2022-23

LGSCO Contacts:

Customer Services - Blue Badges	4
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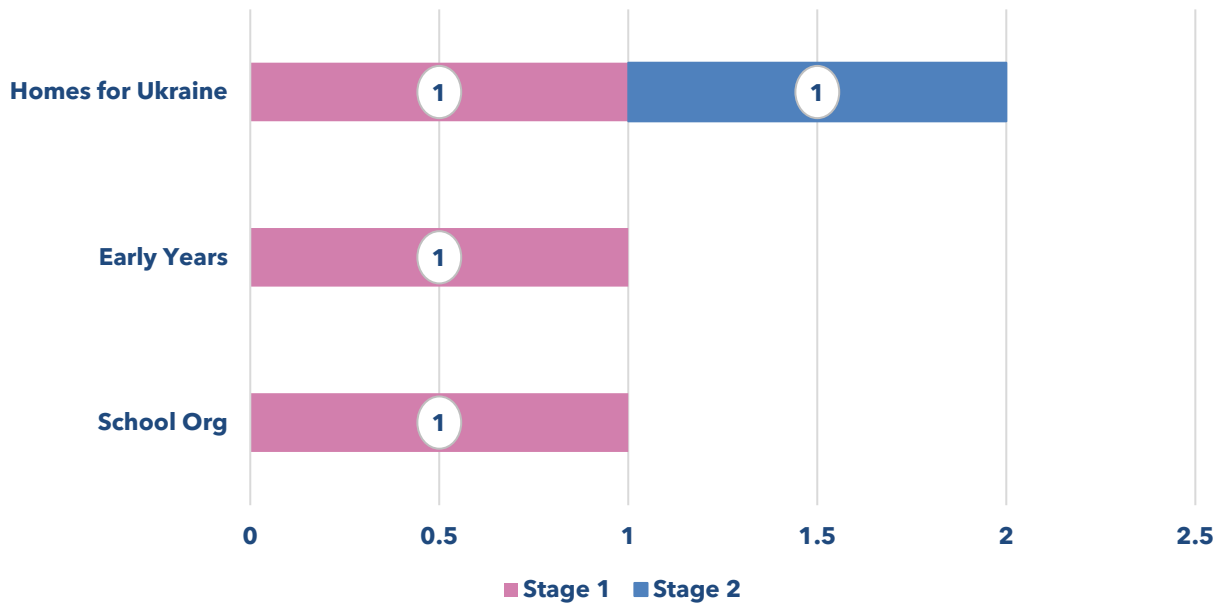
Nature of Stage 1 Complaint



Families and Communities Directorate

The charts below provide data on complaints received during 2022-23 by team.

Number of Complaints by Team



	Stage 1	Stage 2	LGSCO
Upheld	-	-	-
Part Upheld	-	-	-
Not Upheld	3	1	-

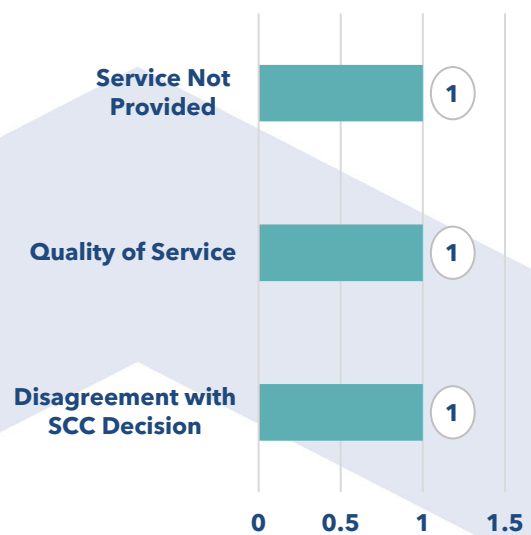
Timescales:

	Stage 1	Stage 2
Within Timescale	2	1
Over Timescale	1	-

LGSCO Contacts:

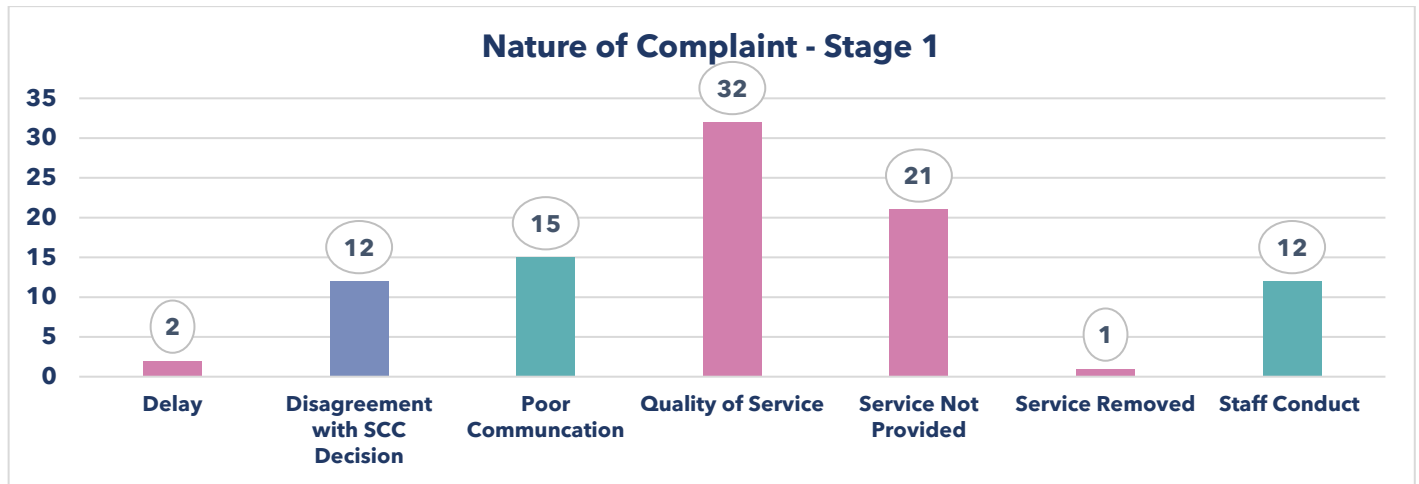
No cases

Nature of Stage 1 Complaints



Overview of Stage 1 Complaints

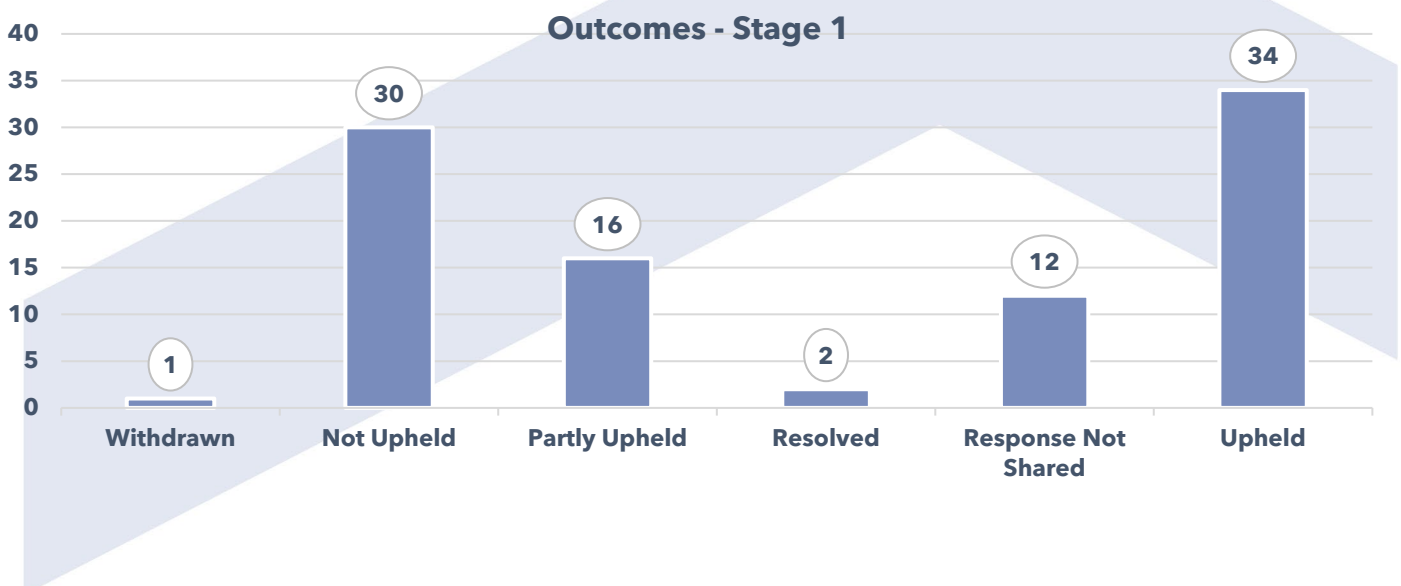
Below illustrates the nature of complaint received under Stage 1 of the Corporate Complaints Procedure.



59% of complaints received were about service-related issues. This is in keeping with last years statistics whereby 69% of complaints were about service-related issues. Examples include:

- Works raised by the Council to address flooding outside residents' property but no update provided to advise when the work will be carried out
- Delay in receiving death certificates impacting on next of kins ability to finalise deceased's affairs
- Issues reported to the Council about a bridleway have not been actioned
- Concerns about the level of capacity on a school bus and that the bus is often late
- The way in which Homes for Ukraine process has been handled

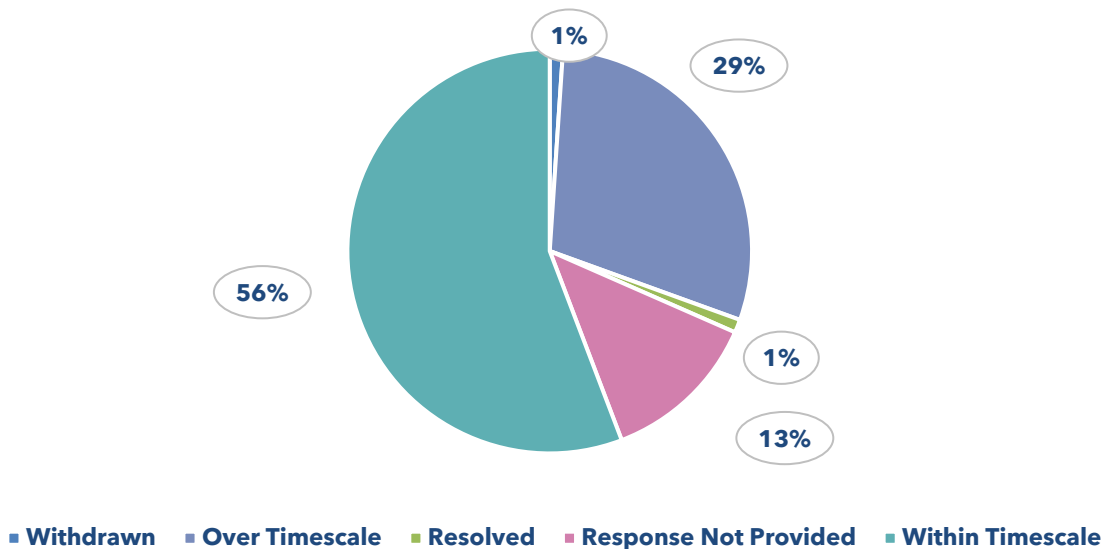
The chart below shows the outcomes of Stage 1 complaints during 2022-23. There has been a slight increase on upheld complaints in comparison with the previous reporting year - 30% in 2021-22 and 36% in 2022-23.



Performance:

Below details the compliance rate in respect of responding to complaints within the 20-working day timescale:

Response Timescales - Stage 1



The compliance rate for meeting the 20-working day deadline has decreased in comparison to the last reporting year from 69% to 56%

Learning From Stage 1 Complaints:

Below are examples of learning that have been extracted from Stage 1 response letters to complainants:

- Feedback and refresher training provided to member of staff
- The need to consider direct contact to discuss any location where there is uncertainty has been reinforced with the Highway Inspection Team to align with the statement made on the County Council's web site. If this subsequently has resource implications due to large numbers of such contacts being required, it may mean that this current statement, and associated commitment, may have to change in the future provided there is sufficient justification for doing so.
- The Council has identified the need to improve the verge inventory across the county to better inform our schedules of work and will be looking at options and funding opportunities to address this. In the meantime, the service lead for the operation has included this specific location in their local schedules.
- Staff have been spoken with to re-iterate the importance of our procedures, and all staff have been contacted as a general reminder of these procedures to ensure that this does not happen again.
- Updated search options on website to include how to pay for a blue badge and results will include telephone number so that contact can be made directly with the payments team - provision of service by Customer Service Team to take Blue badge payments re-instated - visible telephone number to be introduced for the Blue Badge Team so that the recipient will know who is calling -
- I have ensured all staff within registration and our contact centre are aware of our guidance concerning names following marriage/civil partnership, and our process for answering queries about certificates will be monitored by the team leaders to ensure future certificates are sent out in an accurate and timely manner. I would like to offer a refund for your certificate fee, as I believe we did not meet the high standards we set on this occasion. If you are happy for me to contact you to

arrange this, then please contact me to via email to confirm and I will be happy to arrange this with you.

- Having taken your comments on board regarding the information provided the timetable for Service 11s has been updated on our website to include further stops and timing points to assist parents and pupils when selecting their nearest stop to board the service. This change was implemented within 24 hours of this being brought to the transport teams' attention. Following this incident and the comments you have provided we will be updating the leaflet issued to pupils regarding home to school transport to include information advising pupils to inform the driver of any accidents or incidents before disembarking the vehicle so an accurate report can be made. This change will be made to the next batch of leaflets ordered.
- where there is an issue with drainage each job should now be assessed using a matrix to determine a priority and reported property flooding will form part of the assessment and, where present, will elevate the priority to avoid excessive delays before works are scheduled at such locations.
- We are undertaking a review of our training procedures for new staff and have appointed a Senior Transport Planner to oversee all new transport requests and ensure they are completed in a timely and professional manner whilst ensuring parents are kept informed. Transport is currently provided by XX, and I will request updates from my team regarding the service being provided by this operator
- Feedback will be shared with the Digital Team regarding improving the 'Report It' System and Programmes of work where possible will be provided on our website and updated. We will review the process relating to overgrown vegetation enforcement letters with our inspection team.

Stage 1 Complaints - Key Points from 2022-23

- That the importance of a good quality and comprehensive Stage 1 complaint response is recognised by services responding to formal complaints
- An improvement is made in respect of adhering to timescale when responding to complaints
- Whilst there has been an increase in stage 1 complaints of 94% in comparison to 2021-22, there has only been a slight increase in the number upheld - 6% increase compared to the previous year. It is important to look at the picture as a whole and not determine the Councils performance solely based on the numbers received
- The written response to 12 Stage 1 complaints have not been provided to the Complaints Team. Whilst this does not necessarily mean that the complaint has not been dealt with, part of the process is to provide a written response to the complainant. This number is significantly higher than previous years and we will look at way this can be improved
- Meaningful learning actions and recommendations continue to be recorded following the investigation of a Stage 1. This demonstrates that complaints are a valuable mechanism that can lead to change and better outcomes for residents

Overview of Stage 2 Reviews

2022-23 saw 28 Stage 2 Review Requests submitted to the Customer Feedback and Complaints Team. Of these 25 Stage 2 Reviews took place and three requests were refused.

There is a criteria that must be met when requesting a Stage 2 Review and a complainant must submit relevant evidence to support the request. A Review will not re-investigate the complaint but address any areas where it is felt that Stage 1 response was not comprehensive or did not consider certain information. If the request is based purely on the disagreement of the outcome of the Stage 1 and consists of personal opinion alone, then the request will be refused.

The chart below provides information on previous reporting period Stage 2 Review request data and outcomes:

	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
Number of Stage 2 Review Requests Received	34	20	29	28
Request for Stage 2 Review Granted	27	18	27	25
Request for Stage 2 Review Refused	21% (7)	10% (2)	7% (2)	11% (3)
Stage 2 Review - Upheld	11% (3)	5.5% (1)	14% (4)	25% (7)
Stage 2 Review - Partially Upheld	19% (5)	17% (3)	21% (6)	11% (3)
Stage 2 Review - Not Upheld	56% (15)	72% (13)	48% (14)	54% (15)

The table below provides an overview of the complaint and outcome.

Service	Nature of Complaint	Outcome
Homes for Ukraine	Disagreement with way in application was processed, lack of information and decision to withdraw host status	Not Upheld
Highways Community Infrastructure	Content of Stage 1 response and outcome of the investigation in respect of out of hours service	Upheld
Flood Risk Team	Disagreement with Flood Risk Strategy and overall lack of progress with implementation of the strategy	Partially Upheld
Highways Inspection	Content of Stage 1 response and failure to take action in respect of reported defect	Upheld
Highways Maintenance - 3	Lack of maintenance and delays in providing updates detailing if any action would be taken to address the issue	Upheld
	The Stage 1 response did not clearly set out the finding of the complaint and failed to meet the extended deadline to provide the response	Upheld
	Gulley maintenance and future maintenance, re-instatement of trench following utility works and lack of monitoring utility works, lack of follow up regarding enforcement letters	Not Upheld
Highways Infrastructure Development & Improvement	Lack of response to emails, SCC's position regarding planning	Partially Upheld
Lighting - 13	Disagreement with decision to change lighting - lighting column located outside or in close proximity to property and therefore impacting on day-to-day living	Not Upheld - 10 Upheld - 3
Regulation & Governance	Ironman - road closures, traffic regulation orders, lack of impact assessments	Not Upheld
Traffic and Network	Residents parking permit scheme - delay in implementation	Not Upheld
Rights of Way and Country Parks	Disagreement with SCC's position regarding a public right of way	Not Upheld
Transport	Concerns regarding SEND transport arrangements	Partially Upheld

Learning From Stage 2 Reviews:

Below are examples of learning that have been extracted from Stage 2 Review response letters to complainants.

- Eon instructed to switch off light in a trial over the winter months and this will be reviewed in March 2023 with a view to permanently removing the column

- Discuss this complaint in our next contract review meeting to ensure lessons are learnt and toolbox talks given to the operatives and managers dealing with the faults, to ensure issues such as these are avoided in the future.
- That Investigating Officers responding to a complaint clearly set out the finding of the complaint in line with process and procedure That any agreed timescale extensions must be met to ensure that no further delays are incurred by the complainant

Stage 2 Review - Key Points from 2022-23

- There has been a small increase in the number of Stage 2 Review requests submitted. Of the 28 received, three were refused on the grounds that insufficient reason was provided to justify further consideration
- A poor complaint response at Stage 1 accounted for two complaints escalating to Stage 2. This goes against the principle of good complaint handling at Stage 1.
- Lighting received 13 Stage 2 Reviews. The number is high in comparison with other services because the contractor Eon is required to initially respond to the complaint. Whilst all of the complaints were similar in nature (roll out of new lighting), they did not all receive the same outcome. This evidence that instead of the service taking a blanket approach, each complaint is considered on its own merits

Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman

The Ombudsman investigates complaints about the actions taken by or on behalf of a council or authority. The service is independent, free and impartial. The Local Government Act gives the Ombudsman the powers of the High Court to require the production of evidence or witnesses.

The main statutory functions for the Ombudsman are:

- to investigate complaints against councils and some other authorities
- to investigate complaints about adult social care providers from people who arrange or fund their adult social care (Health Act 2009)
- to provide advice and guidance on good administrative practice.

When investigating a complaint, the Ombudsman will look at whether there has been evidence of fault by the council and any injustice caused to the complainant. Following this the Ombudsman will recommend a proportionate appropriate and reasonable remedy to the complaint.

Enquiries - These instances are where the complainant has approached the Ombudsman with their complaint. The Ombudsman will then contact the Council to ask for further information to consider whether they will carry out a full investigation into the complaint. Should the Ombudsman decide that they will not carry out a detailed investigation, the complaint will be closed.

Not Investigating - On occasion, the Ombudsman may receive a complaint that it will not investigate. Reasons for this can be as follows:

- Alternative legal remedy
- Insufficient fault of justice
- Complaint referred to the Ombudsman over one year after the incident subject of the complaint occurred

Investigation - An investigation will take place if the Ombudsman is of the view that the issues raised meet the tests set out in its Assessment Code. The Council will be advised of the investigation and the

Ombudsman will specify what information it requires from the Council to investigate the complaint. Once the investigation has been completed, Draft Decision will be issued, and the Council and complainant will be invited to comment on this. The Ombudsman will then issue its Final Decision Statement on the complaint which details its findings and any recommendations that it expects the Council to implement. This can include changes to procedure or practice and financial payment to the complainant.

A total of 17 contacts from the Ombudsman were received during 2022-23. Further details about these can be found in the tables below. The categorisation is based on the information provided by the LGSCO.

Closed After Initial Enquiries		
Team	Complaint	LGSCO View
Regulation and Governance	Councils' decision to close a highway and divert traffic in Mr X's area.	Insufficient evidence of fault which would warrant an investigation
Highways Maintenance	Handling of reports of highways defects and subsequent complaints.	Complaint does not meet the tests in Assessment Code and it is reasonable to expect the complainant to use alternative court remedies available
Regulation and Governance	How the Council has dealt with the way in which the complainants property connects to the public surface water sewers and that the Council's actions have caused flooding and damage to their property	The matters complained about are better dealt with by the courts
Community Infrastructure	The Councils decision to install speed bumps	The complaint is late and it is unlikely that fault would be found
Highways Claims	Damage caused to vehicle after hitting a pothole	The complainant should take the matter to court to determine any liability owed by the Council
Highways Claims	Damage caused to vehicle after hitting raised ironwork on the public highway	The complainant should take the matter to court to determine any liability owed by the Council

Enquiry		
Team	Complaint	LGSCO View
Regulation and Governance	Evidence that the Council would adopt the road however this has not happened. The road needs to be maintained	Referred back to the Council as a Premature Complaint

Not Investigating		
Team	Complaint	LGSCO
Highways Claims	Damage to vehicle caused by pothole	The complainant should take the matter to court to determine any liability owed by the Council
Parking Services	Handling of PCN charge that had been passed to bailiffs	Information provided to LGSCO however the Council has not been informed of the outcome

Investigating		
Team	Complaint	LGSCO View
Case 1 Blue Badges	The Council failed to properly consider Ms X's application to renew her Blue Badge	Fault and Injustice

Case 2 Blue Badges	The Council failed to properly consider Ms B's application to renew her Blue Badge	Fault and Injustice
Case 3 Blue Badges	The Council failed to properly consider Ms C's application to renew her Blue Badge	Fault and Injustice
Case 4 Blue Badges	The Council's failure to award a Blue Badge to Ms A despite the impact of her hidden disability	Fault and Injustice
Case 5 Transport	The Council's refusal to back-date an increase in Personal Travel Budget	Fault and Injustice
Case 6 Transport	The Council did not back-date an increase in Personal Travel Budget	Fault and Injustice
Case 7 Transport	That the new transport operator was not suitable and could not keep her son safe	No finding against the Council
Case 8 Regulation and Governance	Delayed implementation of residents permit parking scheme	Fault and Injustice

The following recommendations were made by the Ombudsman in respect of the complaints that they upheld:

Case 1:

- Apologise to Ms X for the faults highlighted in the investigation
- Review the application and offer Ms X the opportunity to provide more information/evidence. The Council should then consider what if anything has changed since the last application. If there is any doubt, then it should offer a face-face assessment and a mobility assessment

Case 2:

- Arrange a mobility assessment by an expert assessor who will consider all the difficulties with walking that Ms B has raised in her application, in particular the variability of the problems, the manner of her walking and the pain she experiences
- Remind staff processing blue badge applications of the need to address all the issues raised in an application and explain why it has discounted evidence provided by the applicant

Case 3:

- Write to Miss C to apologise for its failure to provide a clear and detailed explanation of the reasons it refused her application for a Blue Badge during its application process within one month of my final decision
- Ensure it provides a clear and detailed written explanation to Miss C for its decision in due course on her new application (and any subsequent review request)
- Review its procedures to ensure it provides applicants with a clear and detailed explanation of the reasons when deciding to refuse a Blue Badge application within three months of the final decision

Case 4:

- Arrangements to be made for an expert assessor to complete an assessment for Ms A.
- On receipt of the completed assessment the Council will re-assess the application

Case 5:

- Provide Miss X with a written apology for the identified faults
- Pay Miss X £100 for time and trouble
- Pay Miss X £100 for distress and uncertainty
- Backdate the increase to Miss X's PTB to 12 July 2022

- Amend its transport policy to include how it calculates the “fixed sum” per mile for the mileage allowance and how it will consider any complaints about this, including any request to backdate increases in the allowance
- Inform service users with a PTB of its updated policy.

Case 6:

- The Council agree to backdate Mrs M’s personal travel budget to May 2022 when she complained about the mileage allowance.

Case 7:

- During the investigation, the Council offered Mrs X a Personal Travel Budget for her son. Mrs X confirmed her complaint with the Council could be closed.

Case 8:

- Within one month of the final decision the Council has agreed to apologise to Mrs X to acknowledge the frustration caused by the Council’s failure to keep her updated about the progress of the scheme.

The Ombudsman has the power to issue recommendations to the Council following an investigation of a complaint about its services. The Council is required to provide evidence that the recommendations have been completed and within the timescale set by the Ombudsman in the Final Decision Statements. If the Council does not comply with the recommendations, then the Ombudsman can issue a Public Report about this.

In all cases where fault and injustice have resulted in recommendations, the Council has acted upon those recommendations and completed them to the Ombudsman satisfaction.

The Blue Badge Team should be recognised for their positive response to the Ombudsman investigation. During 2022-23, the team received four Ombudsman investigations which was the highest out of all Council services. They took the opportunity that the investigation presented to actively review working processes, even before the Ombudsman has issued the Final Decision. The team understood the importance and value of complaints and showed a commitment to the Ombudsman core principle for complaint handling which is:

‘Complaint systems are not mechanisms for apportioning blame but an important part of a council’s learning and development. Complaints can be a rich source of information and learning about how a council’s performance is perceived and how it can be improved. What we recommend is a clear, accessible and flexible process that forms part of service provision and does not overwhelm individuals, departments or other council processes. The purpose of a complaints system is to put right what has gone wrong and learn from it.’

The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman issue an Annual Review Letter each year. The Annual Review for Staffordshire County Council 2021-22 together with useful data in respect of Ombudsman Decision can be found at the following link [Staffordshire County Council - Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman](#)

The table below provides a breakdown of the Annual Letter:

	2022-23	2021-22	2020-21	2019-20	2018-19
Number of Decisions	117	115	105		
Number of detailed investigations*	49	46	40	44	50
Adults	14	11	15	21	26
Children and Families	27	17	21	16	16
Corporate	8	3	4	7	8
Upheld Decisions For Detailed Investigations	35 (71%)	31 (67%)	37 (92.5%)	26 (59%)	36 (72%)
Compliance with Ombudsman Recommendations	100%	100%	100%	100%	94%

** Detailed Investigation - Where a finding of upheld or not upheld is issued

- The Ombudsman received 123 contacts regarding Staffordshire County Council during 2022-23
- Of the 117 decisions made by the Ombudsman, the data shows that less than half (35%) progressed to a detailed investigation
- The upheld rate has increased in comparison to the previous reporting year however the Ombudsman have advised that there has been an increase in the upheld rate due to the change in Ombudsman processes in respect of what complaints they will accept
- 37 out of the 49 detailed investigations resulted in recommendations by the Ombudsman
- 34 decisions were Closed After Initial Enquiries. To assist the Ombudsman, the Council is required to provide extensive documentation and file records for the Investigator to consider prior to making a decision on whether to carry out a detailed investigation
- No formal reports have been issued by the LGSCO against Staffordshire during 2022-23

Conclusion:

- 2022-23 has seen a significant increase in not only complaints addressed under the formal complaints procedure but also matters that are outside the remit of this process.
- There is an opportunity to analyse this data further to understand why a high proportion of contacts to the team are for matters that the team does not handle. Information is available on the Complaints webpages to signpost residents to the appropriate process for issues that are outside of the Corporate Complaints Procedure. However, residents do continue to use the online form and direct emails to the Customer Feedback and Complaints Team regarding matters that the team is unable to assist with. Wherever possible, the team will advise the resident where they should direct their enquiry. This can include signposting to alternative contacts within the Council where online reporting facilities exist (highways and parking for example). If the concern is about an issue that is not in the remit of the Council, then the team will find out information from other sources and provide this to the resident so that they can refer the matter to the correct organisation.
- This reporting period has seen positive responses to complaints in terms of identifying where service improvements can be made, therefore underlining the value of the Council's Corporate Complaints Procedure. This approach needs to be further embedded across the organisation

This report contains high level complaint and feedback information. More detailed data is available on request. If you would like to receive more information, please contact the team directly complaints&customerfeedback@staffordshire.gov.uk