

ANNUAL REPORT COMPLIMENTS AND COMPLAINTS

1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024



www.rotherham.gov.uk/complaints

CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION	3
2	KEY HEADLINES	5
3	OVERVIEW	6
4	PERFORMANCE	14
5	ADULT CARE, HOUSING AND PUBLIC HEALTH DIRECTORATE	15
	5.1 Adult Care	15
	5.2 Housing Services	18
	5.3 Public Health	22
6	CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SERVICES DIRECTORATE	23
7	REGENERATION AND ENVIRONMENT DIRECTORATE	26
8	FINANCE AND CUSTOMER SERVICES DIRECTORATE	29
9	ASSISTANT CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S DIRECTORATE	32
10	NEXT STEPS 2023/24	33
11	APPENDIX ONE: LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND SOCIAL CARE OMBUDSMAN DECISIONS 2022/23	34

I. INTRODUCTION

Rotherham Council is committed to being open and accountable, listening to the views of residents and communities and placing them at the heart of its services. Customer feedback through formal complaints and the way that the Council responds to complaints are vital indicators of the overall performance of the organisation. When the Council cannot resolve a problem straight away, our residents have the safety net of a formal complaint procedure through which they can find a resolution.

The Council can then also use the information gathered from the record of formal complaints, to consider how it delivers services. The Council is able to analyse trends, identifying learning and service improvements. This can then be used to improve customer care and make changes where necessary to our policy and procedures.

In 2023/24, the number of complaints received was below the number received in the previous year (2022/23) and the third highest received in the last five years.

Overall, in terms of the complaints' procedure, the Council continued to maintain a high level of performance and improved the quality of service offered to residents via our learning from complaints process (see sections five to nine of the report). There is a continued commitment to providing high quality, timely responses to formal complaints and the Council continues to learn and improve, based on the feedback received. Performance was just below the Council Plan target, with 82% of complaints being resolved in time.

The purpose of this report is to outline the complaints and compliments that the Council received between the 1st April 2023 and the 31st March 2024, highlighting key themes and trends. The report also explains how the Council has performed against the required standards and includes case studies demonstrating how services have learnt from complaints received. This is arguably the most important aspect of the complaints' process.

Feedback from the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board continues to be considered as part of these reports and in respect of the Council's handling of complaints throughout the year. The questions and queries raised are noted and subject to consideration.

Although customer feedback provides a valuable insight into how the Council is performing, complaints and compliments figures do not reflect the full picture. This report should, therefore, be understood within the context of the number of customers interacting with each service and any changes to those services that occurred within 2023/24.

In addition to this annual report, the Council's complaints' data features throughout the Council's Performance Management Framework from the Council Plan through to frontline teams. Complaints' information is included within service-level performance reports and is considered alongside other key performance indicators, by performance officers, senior managers, and service leaders to inform service and process improvements. The Complaints Manager also attends Directorate Leadership teams to ensure there is strategic oversight and holds specific lessons learnt workshops, so staff understand and take preventative action to avoid further issues.

Furthermore, building on the key developments in 2023/24, priority areas of focus in respect of the Council's response to formal complaints, for next year will include:

- New Housing Services complaint web page to include better information for tenants, including learning from complaints' case studies and satisfaction information.
- Continuing to review all customer complaint literature, including website information, easy read guidance and information for children and young people, to improve access to the Complaint Procedures for all residents.
- Ensuring compliance against benchmarked standards ahead of expected inspections in Adult Care, CYPs and Housing Services.

- Continuing to seek ways to deliver training to front line staff to allow them to understand the role and purpose of the complaint procedures.
- Continuing to provide bespoke training for Investigating Managers to allow them to provide a better investigation and response to formal complaints.
- Work with management meetings in all departments to create a better ‘learning from complaints’ programme. This will ensure that all learning is reported and is considered so that the impact of service improvement is understood and recorded.
- The Complaints Team will work with Council departments to see if there is anything more that can be done to resolve a complaint after notification that an Ombudsman investigation has been received.
- Working to improve the performance of complaint procedure timescales, to make sure it meets Council Plan target of 85%. This includes continued roll out of new reporting dashboards, so that managers have direct access to their complaints’ information.
- Increasing the number of compliments recorded: the Complaints Team to continue to work with managers to ensure that the process for recording and reporting compliments is improved. Benchmarking with other Local Authorities has taken place and their best practice approaches will be used to further increase the number of compliments received.

2. KEY HEADLINES – 2023/24

1,212
complaints
received

1,212 complaints were received.
(compared with 1,397 in 2022/23, this is a decrease of 13%.)

902 compliments were received.
(compared with 791 in 2022/23, this is a 14% increase.)



Fewer complaints were upheld.
(294 or 25% were upheld in 2023/24 compared to 443 or 32% in 2022/23.)

Fewer complaints were responded to within timescales.
(82% in 2023/24 compared with 85% in 2022/23.)



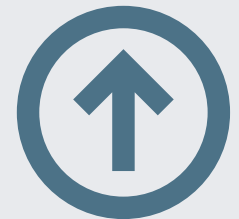
Six complaints were investigated by the Local Government Ombudsman.
This is a 14% reduction from 2022/23 when seven were investigated.

Fewer complaints were received regarding the quality of service.
(405 compared to 431 in 2022/23. This is a 6% decrease.)



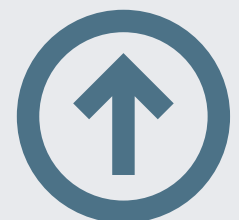
A slight increase in complaints regarding the behaviour and attitude of staff.
An increase of 1%.
(170 compared with 168 in 2022/23.)

More complaints were responded to in time by:
CYPS up to 89% from 64%.
Finance and Customer Service up to 91% from 90%.



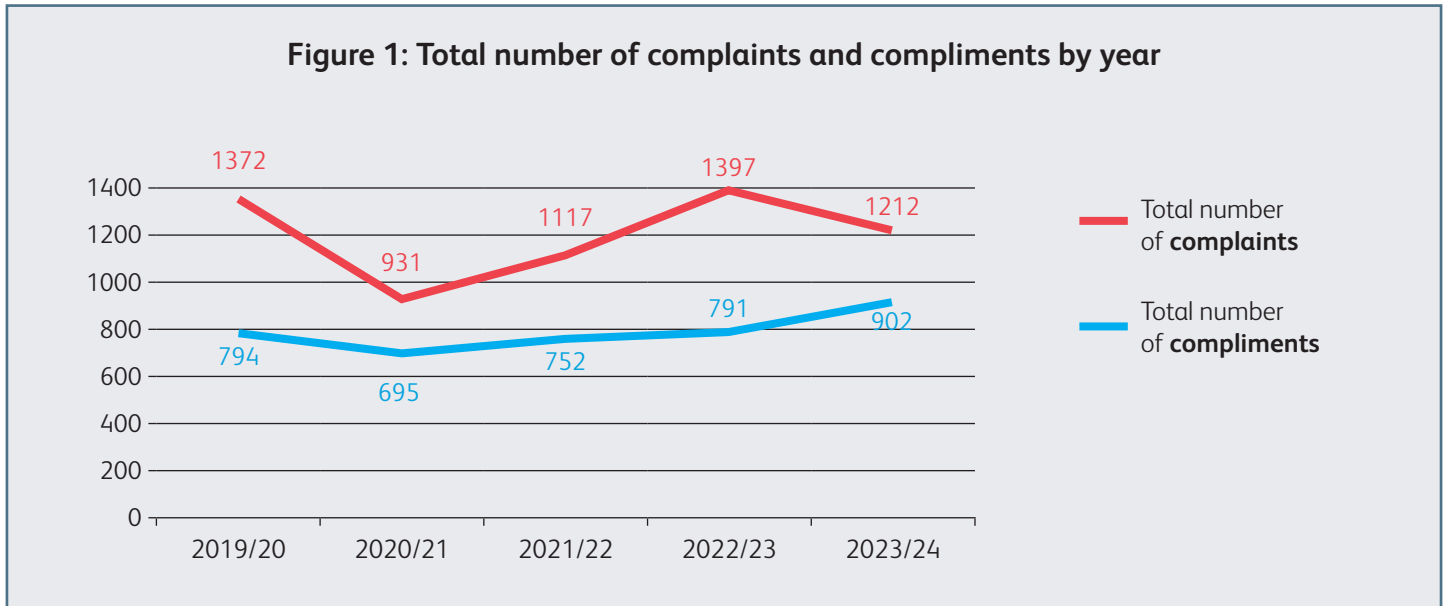
Fewer Complaints were responded to in time by:
Adult Services (75% from 78%).
Housing Services (81% from 87%).
R+E (84% from 79%).
Assistant Chief Executive (60% from 75%).

More escalations through the complaint procedure.
(37 or 3% were escalated to stage 2 compared to 24 or 2% in 2022/23.)



3. OVERVIEW

3.1 Summary



In 2023/24, the overall number of complaints received by the Council decreased by 13%, going from 1397 in 2022/23 to 1212. This is in contrast to the previous year when complaints had increased by 25% from 1117 in 2021/22, to 1397 2022/23. However, the overall number of complaints received in 2023/24 is the third highest number received in the last five years. It also should be noted that in the first three months of 2024/25, 281 complaints were received compared to 291 in the same period in 2023/24, which is a 4% decrease. Therefore, this slight downward trend has continued into the current year.

The Council provides a wide variety of services to over 271,200 residents. In this context, 1212 complaints are only a fraction of the number of customer interactions occurring each year. For example, the Council received more than 1.1m new web visitors in 2023/24.

The number of compliments recorded by the Council increased, from 791 in 2022/23 to 902 (an increase of 14 percent), a year-on-year increase. Continued efforts by Council departments to capture more of the positive feedback of residents is reflected in this increase. There is clearly better engagement of staff in the process of recording the compliments they received, staff have responded to requests that they make sure that all the compliments they receive are recorded.

It is recognised that both compliments and complaints procedures need to be easy and accessible for customers to allow them to provide valuable feedback.

A breakdown on the numbers of complaints received and how much they changed, by directorate or service is as follows:

- The largest absolute decrease was in Regeneration and Environment from 510 to 373, a percentage decrease of 27%.
- The second largest decrease was in Children and Young Peoples Services from 116 to 64, a percentage decrease of 45%.
- Finance and Customer Services also decreased, from 105 to 91, a percentage decrease of 13%.
- Other departments saw a small increase, the largest was in Adult Care services from 55 to 64, a percentage increase of 16%.

- The second largest increase was in the Housing service from 607 to 615, a percentage increase of 1%.
- Assistant Chief Executive's directorate also increased, from four to five.
- The Public Health service remained unchanged at zero complaints received

The following diagrams (Figure's 2 and 3) show the breakdown of complaints and compliments by Directorate in 2022/3 and 2023/24.

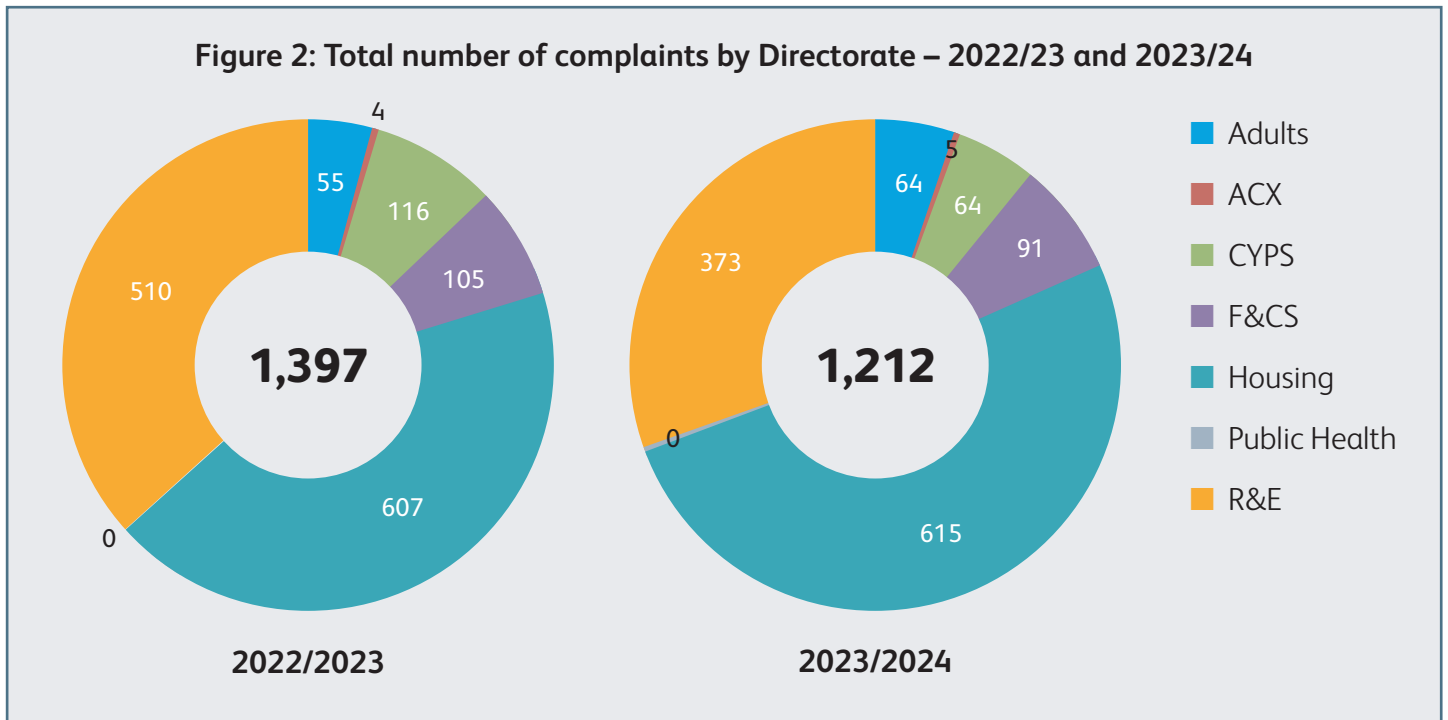


Figure 2 shows that the two highest areas for complaints were Housing Services and Regeneration and Environment. This is consistent with previous years' figures, as these areas typically receive the highest volume of complaints. They deal with the largest number of customers and are responsible for a high number of service transactions over the year.

The number of complaints received generally correlates with the number of residents that are served by the directorate. Therefore, a directorate receiving a higher volume of complaints is not necessarily reflective of poor performance and should be understood within the context of services provided.

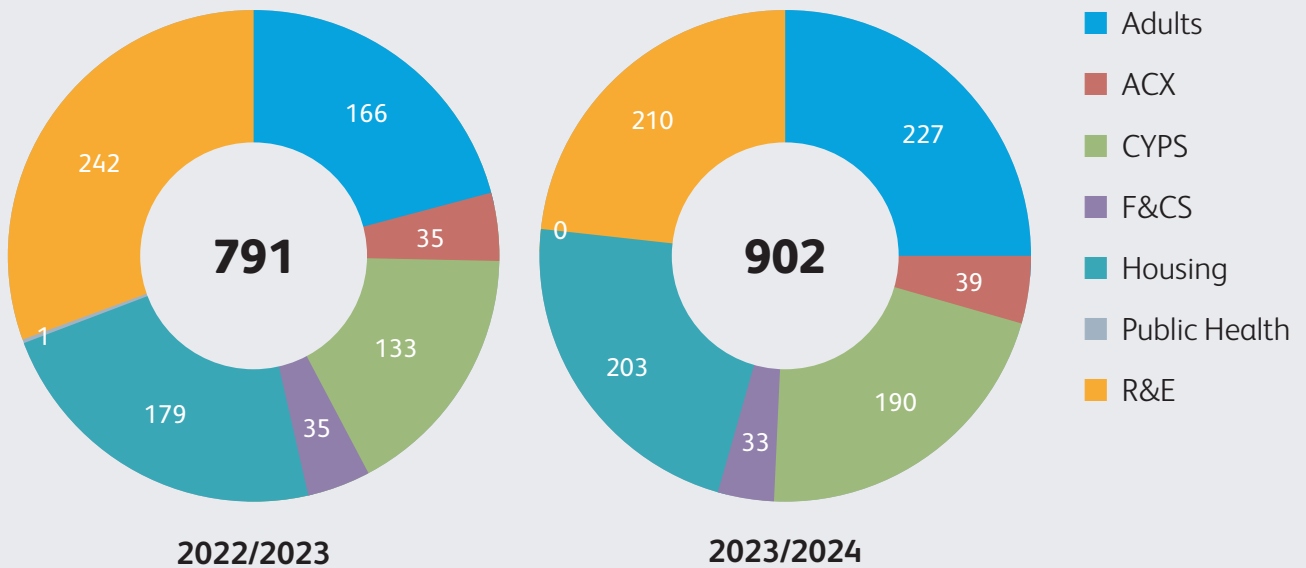
The decrease in Regeneration and Environment services complaints was primarily as a result of a decrease in Waste Management service complaints, from 237 to 165. The other notable decrease in complaints was in Childrens and Young People's Services, where complaints in their Education Health and Care Assessment Team (EHCAT) reduced from 48 to 14. Please see sections six and seven for further information.

Regarding the number of compliments received, Adult Care services saw the biggest absolute increase with 61 more received, followed by Children and Young People's service, with 57 more received. Housing services and Assistant Chief Executive's also saw a small increase.

Regeneration and Environment services, Finance and Customer Services and Public Health saw a small decrease in terms of the number of compliments received.

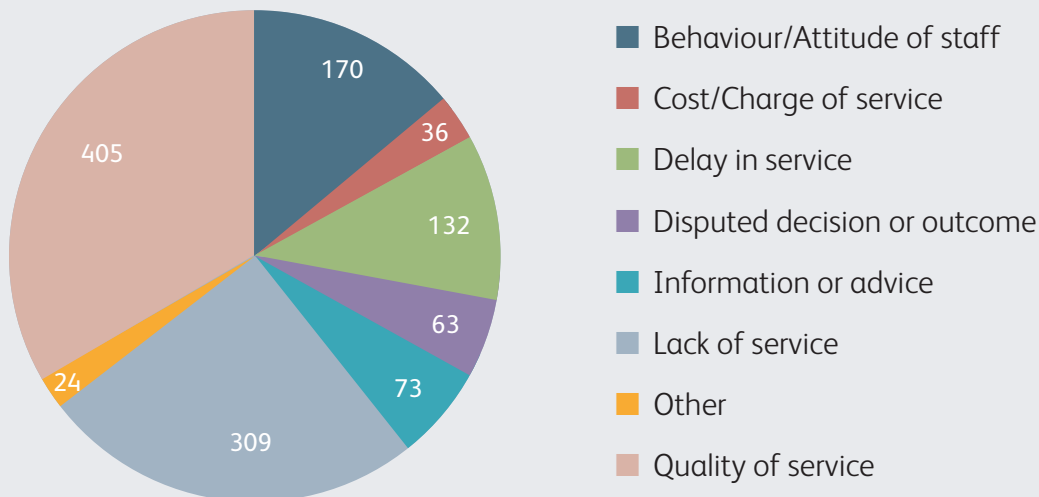
Although this overall increase is positive. The large changes in numbers received by some departments illustrates that there can be a better engagement in the compliment process by staff, to make sure that all positive feedback is captured including feedback from satisfaction surveys.

Figure 3: Total number of compliments by Directorate – 2022/23 and 2023/24



As part of the process of monitoring and handling customer feedback, the Complaints Team is responsible for categorising complaints based on the subject matter. The following diagram outlines the categories of complaints received in 2023/24:

Figure 4: Total number of complaints by category – 2023/24



The largest number of complaints received was in connection with the quality of service, with 405 (equating to 33%) of all complaints in this category. Complaints within this category have decreased in absolute terms from the 431 (equating to 31%) of all complaints received in 2022/23.

Lack of service accounted for the second highest category of complaints, with 309 of all complaints received (equating to 25%). Complaints within this category have decreased from 398 (equating to 28%) in 2022/23.

The third highest category of complaints was conduct / attitude of staff at 170 of all complaints received (equating to 14% of all complaints). Complaints within this category have increased slightly from 168 in 2022/23.

The numbers of complaints in the categories of quality of service and lack of service were significant across all directorates. In terms of quality of service, the majority were received in Housing Services at 235, with 72 of these received in Housing Property Services (who are responsible for programmed works and repairs inspections) and 93 of these received by Council repair contractors, out of the 405 total complaints in this category (see section 5.2).

The majority of the complaints categorised as lack of service were within Regeneration and Environment, with 170 of the 309 total complaints in this category (see section 7). Of the number received this can be further broken down with 118 in the Street Scene department, of which 82 were in Waste and Recycling.

In addition to reporting against general subject areas there is a need to report complaints in more detail to directorate and service management teams. To assist with this level of reporting, additional complaint classifications were developed, reviewed at year end, and updated. These are service specific and more accurately reflect the types of complaints received for the various areas of the Council.

Examples of the most common complaint types recorded by this classification are as follows:

- Attitude / Conduct
- General Practice/Competence
- Dispute Over Liability or Debt
- Lack of bill or invoice
- Lack of Financial Support/Eligibility
- Appeal/Inappropriate Enforcement Action
- Application/Assessment Outcome or Decision
- Impact of Service
- Social Care Decision - Child Protection
- Delay in Application/Assessment
- Delay in Response to Enquiry
- Incorrect/Inaccurate written or verbal advice
- Lack of Information/Advice
- Lack of Communication
- Missed Appointment/Service
- Refusal to Provide Service/Take Action
- Accessibility of Service/Facilities
- Damage to Property
- Quality/Standard of Work
- Standard of Care

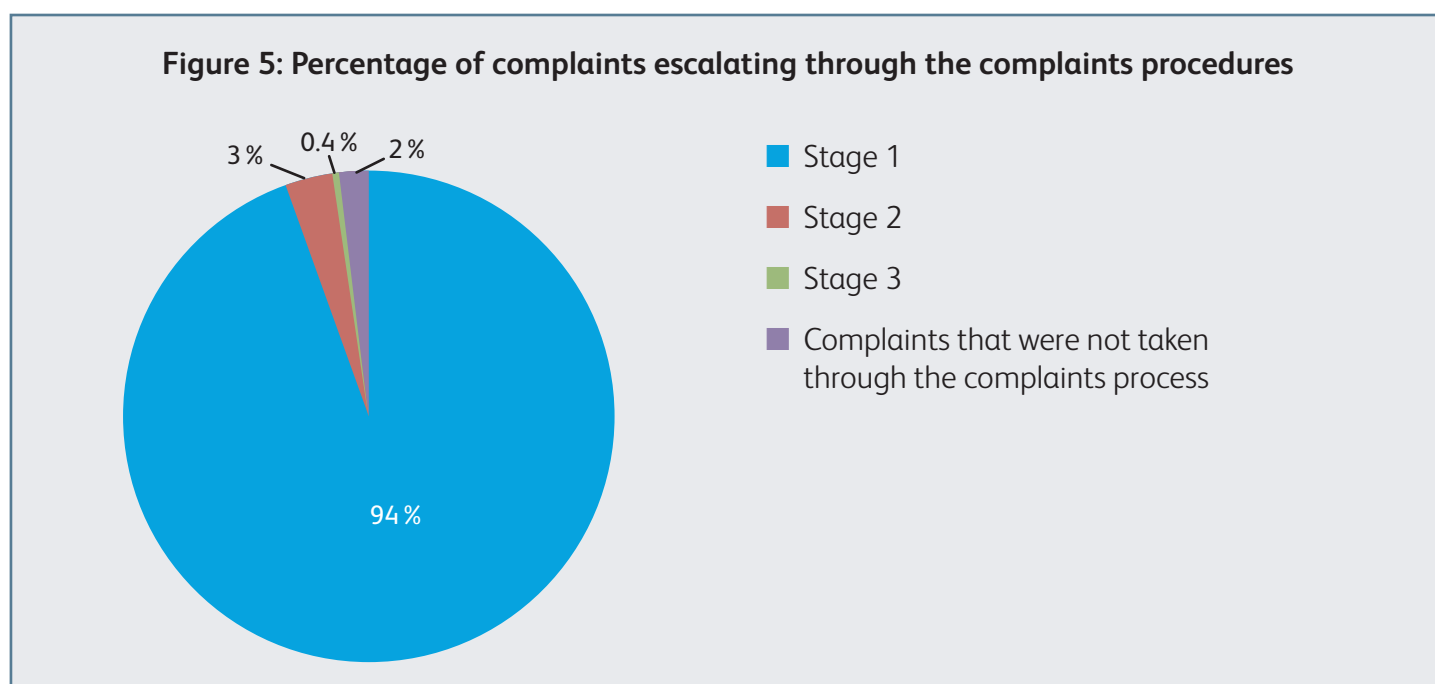
For further detail around directorate complaint trends please see sections 5 to 11 of the report.

It should also be noted that fewer complaints were upheld in terms of the percentage of complaints responded to. This is where the Council has investigated and found a problem with the service provided, with 294 or 24 % of all complaints upheld. In contrast, 443 or 32 % of all complaints were upheld in 2022/23 and 268 or 24 % upheld in 2021/22. Sections 5 to 11 contain more detail of upheld complaints by directorate and how the Council has learnt from upheld complaints.

3.2 Dealing with Complaints

The Council follows three different complaints' procedures: children's social care, adult social care, and the corporate complaints' procedure. The social care complaints' procedures are legislative and have individual statutory requirements about how complaints are dealt with.

A relatively small proportion of complaints are not taken through the formal complaints' procedure (referred to as informal complaints). These are complaints that are in relation to council policy or decisions that have been formally approved in Cabinet. In these cases, the complaint is not taken through the formal procedure as it cannot be upheld, however all complainants receive a formal (written) response. This report includes these complaints in the overall total figures. In 2023/24, this amounted to only 26 (two percent) out of a total of 1212 complaints. This is a slight increase on 2022/23 when this was nine (one percent) out of a total of 1397 complaints.

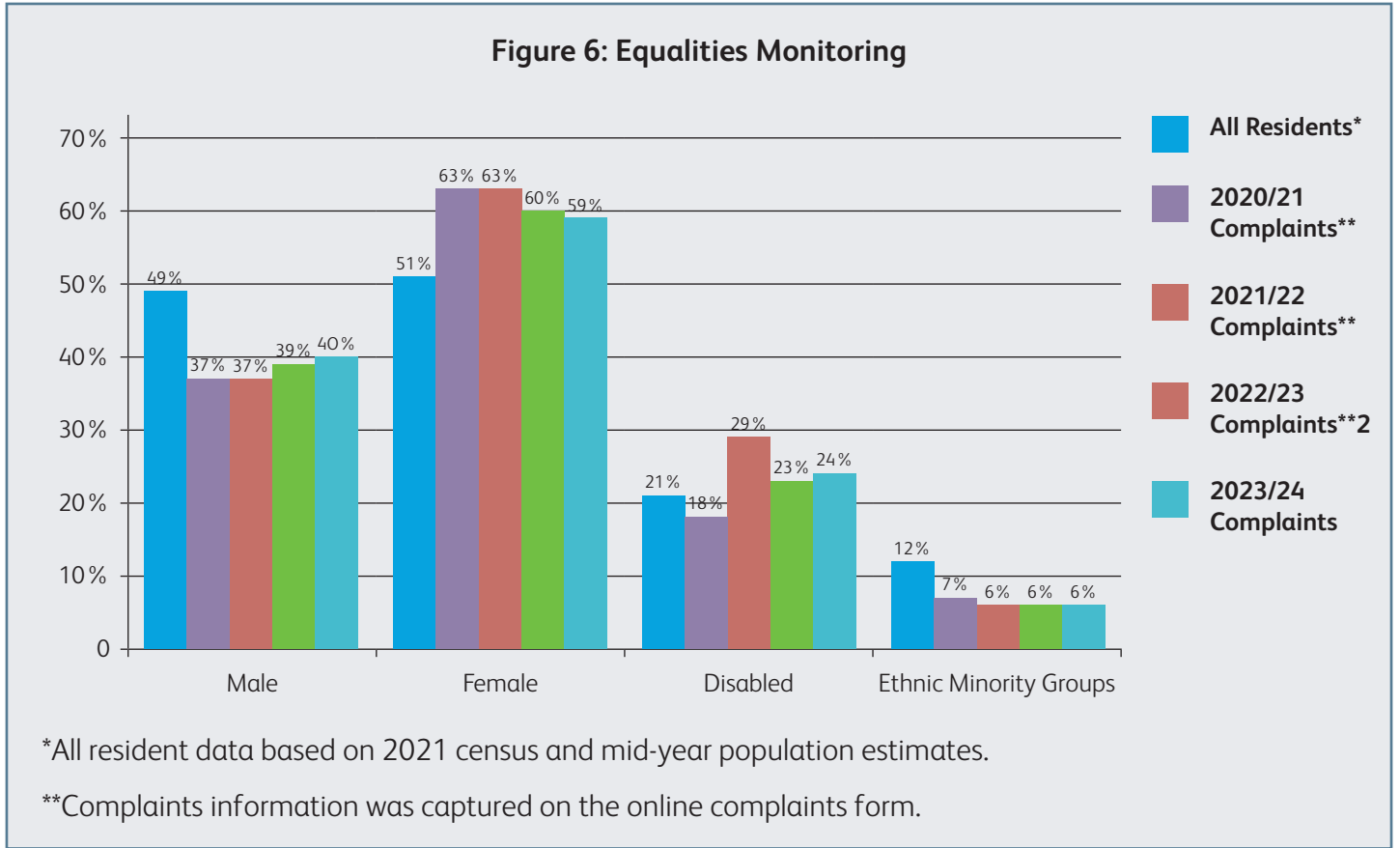


The diagram above outlines the number of complaints that reached the various stages of the complaint's procedures.

The extent to which complaints escalate through the complaints' procedure is an important measure, as it is preferable to find resolutions for customers at the earliest possible stage. As shown in figure 5, the majority of complaints (94%) were resolved at stage 1, only 37 or three percent of all complaints, were escalated to stage 2, compared with 24, or two percent, in 2022/23.

3.3 Equalities Monitoring

The Council collects equalities information via its online complaints' webform. This entails collecting the demographics of customers making formal complaints, this information is used to ensure that the complaints' process is fair and accessible for all customers.



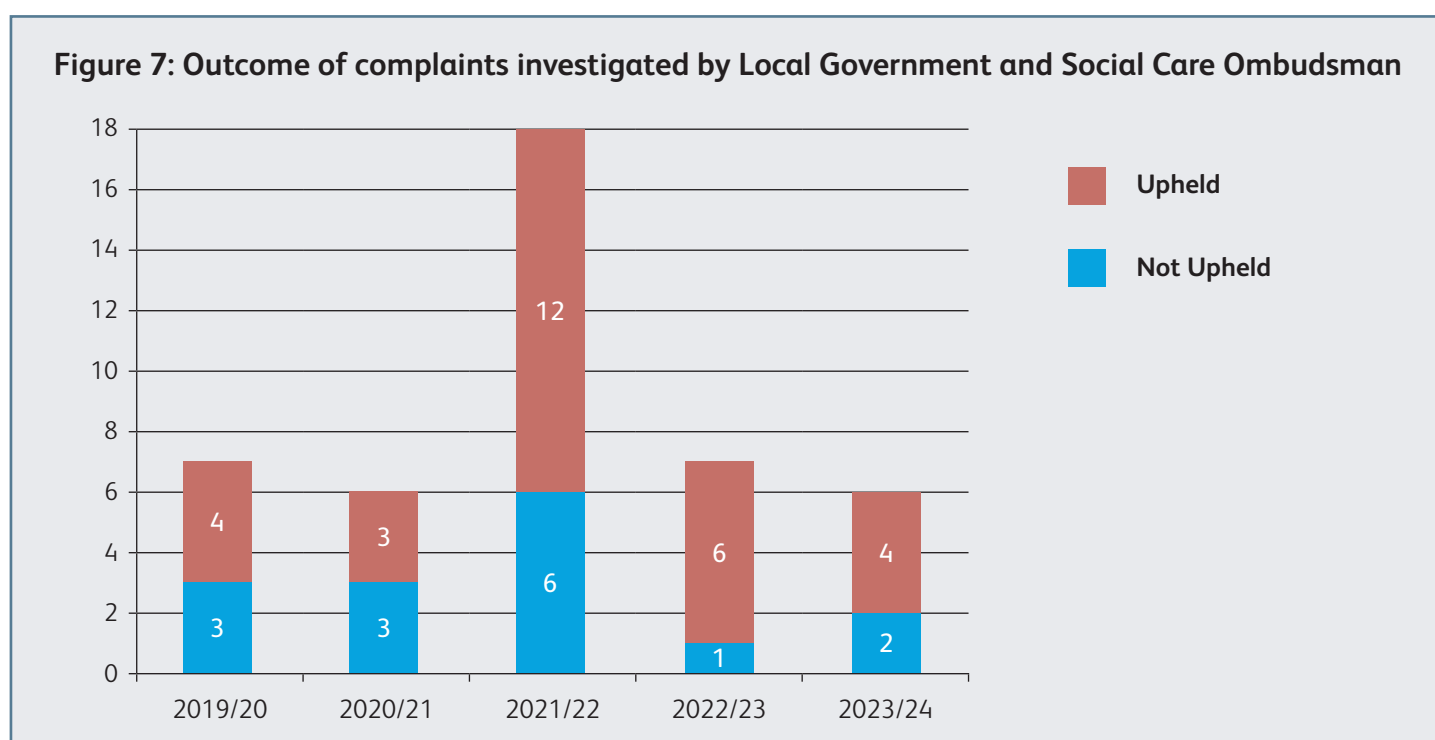
The information received indicates that significantly more female customers complained about Council services in 2023/24 and this is a consistent trend over the last three years. All directorates recorded a higher number of female complainants. For example, in Housing services the percentage of female complainants was 65% and Regeneration and Environment it was 60%.

It is also noted that numbers have increased for those customers who are disabled, but it is still only slightly above the average for all residents. In addition, the number of customers in ethnic minority groups who have made a complaint has remained the same and is still lower than the average all residents' figure.

3.4 Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman

If complainants are not satisfied with the outcome of their complaint as investigated through the Council's complaints' procedures, they can escalate their complaint to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO). 46 complaints' enquiries were directed to the LGSCO in 2023/24 (45 received in 2022/23) and of these, the LGSCO investigated six (seven were investigated in 2022/23). This is within the range of average numbers escalating to the Ombudsman, following an unprecedented number investigated in 2021/22. This increase was mainly due to the Ombudsman working through a backlog of cases caused by their temporary closure during the pandemic.

Figure 7 (see below) illustrates the number of complaints considered by the Ombudsman over the last five years. It shows that there have been 44 complaints investigated by the LGSCO, between the financial years of 2019/20 and 2023/24 with a five-year average of 8.8 per year.



In 2023/24, fewer complaints were investigated, and fewer complaints were upheld by the LGSCO than in the previous year. Six investigations compared to 1,212 complaints is 0.5% of formal complaints received that have escalated to the LGSCO.

Four complaints out of the six investigations were upheld, which means that the Ombudsman found fault and agreed with the complainant. This equates to an upheld rate of 67%, which is better than the Ombudsman's figure of the average upheld rate of similar authorities at 80%. Three upheld complaints were in Childrens and Young Peoples Services and one was in Adult Care services.

Appendix 1 outlines the LGSCO decisions for the Council for 2023/24 and how these compare with 16 statistical neighbour councils. In 2023/24, the Council is in the top quarter in terms of the numbers investigated and the numbers upheld. It ranks as fourth out of 16 of the total investigated and fourth out of 16 of those complaints that were upheld. In the previous year, 2022/23, the Council also benchmarked in the top quartile for the number investigated and number upheld.

Furthermore, it shows that the majority of complaints that were brought to the LGSCO (46 decided), were deemed invalid or incomplete and referred back for local resolution or closed after initial enquiries. This, along with the relatively low number of investigations (0.5 % escalation rate) positively reflects that the Council's complaints' procedures are working effectively, to find fair and appropriate local resolutions. In addition, it should be noted that the Council on occasion, for non social care or housing landlord complaints, will refer residents to the Ombudsman before the full completion of the complaint's procedure. This would be done on a case-by-case basis depending on the circumstances of the complaint. For example, the complaint has been upheld and the facts of the complaint have been confirmed but the Council is unable to agree a requested remedy for a complaint. In these cases, further investigation is not required but the complainant remains dissatisfied and would therefore benefit from a final decision from the Ombudsman.

3.5 Housing Ombudsman

From April 2013, the Housing Ombudsman has dealt with all complaints from tenants regarding social housing. There were four decisions made by the Housing Ombudsman in 2023/24 and they were all upheld in part. In comparison, there were two decisions in 2022/23, which were both not upheld.

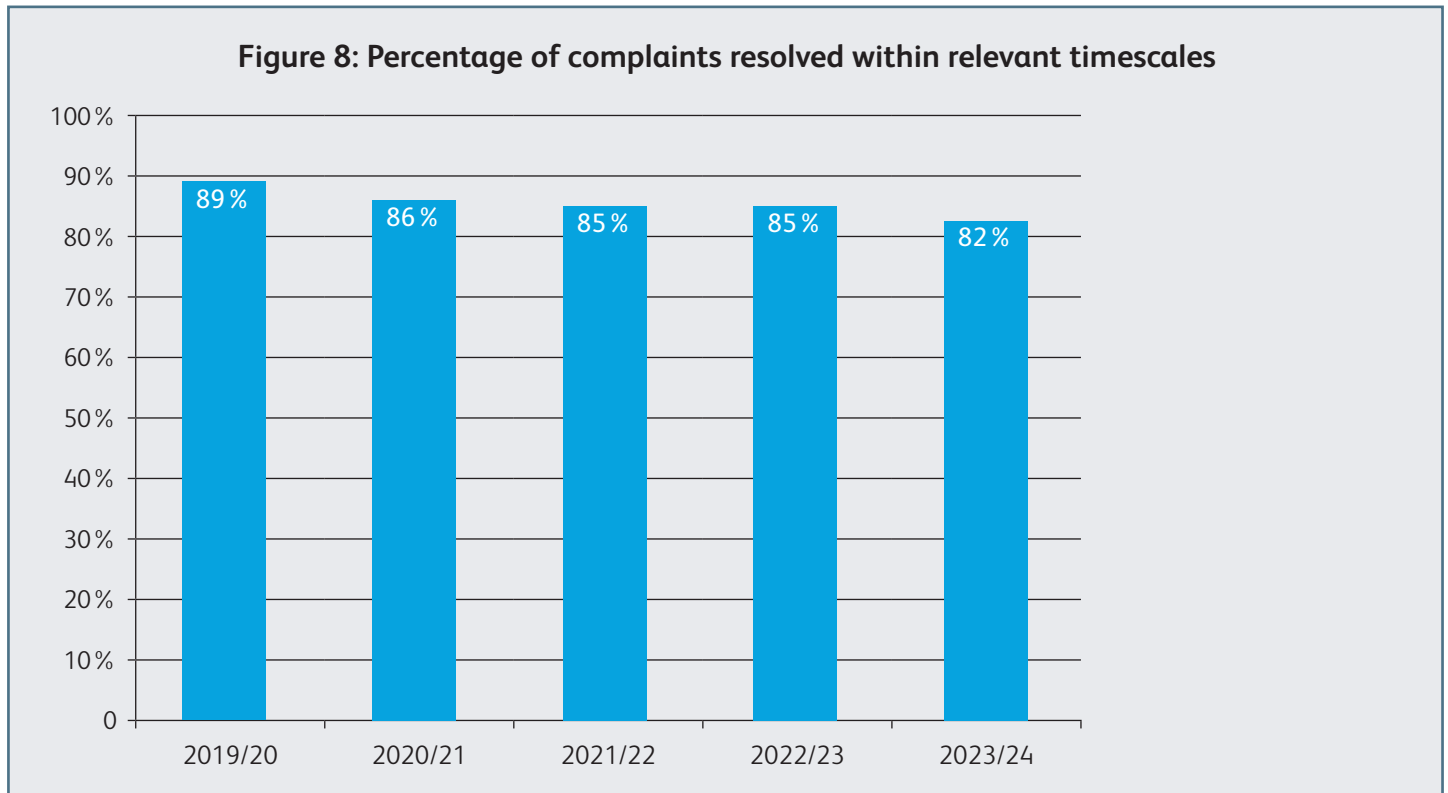
The complaints' issues in these decisions were regarding a tenancy succession, eviction from a tenancy, repairs / pest control and anti-social behaviour (ASB) / repairs.

4. PERFORMANCE

4.1 Performance Overview

Performance against the time allowed by the formal complaints' procedure is monitored through regular (weekly, monthly, and quarterly) performance reports presented to Council Directorate Leadership Team meetings and Service Management Team meetings.

The following graph compares the overall Council performance against timescales for the past five years:



Performance has decreased to 82% of complaint responses within the target timescale. It is slightly below the five-year average of 85% and it has not met the Council Plan target of 85%. Four out of six service areas did not meet target. There will be further efforts made across all those council services who did not meet the target of performance to timescales, see sections five to nine for the details of the service areas' individual performance.

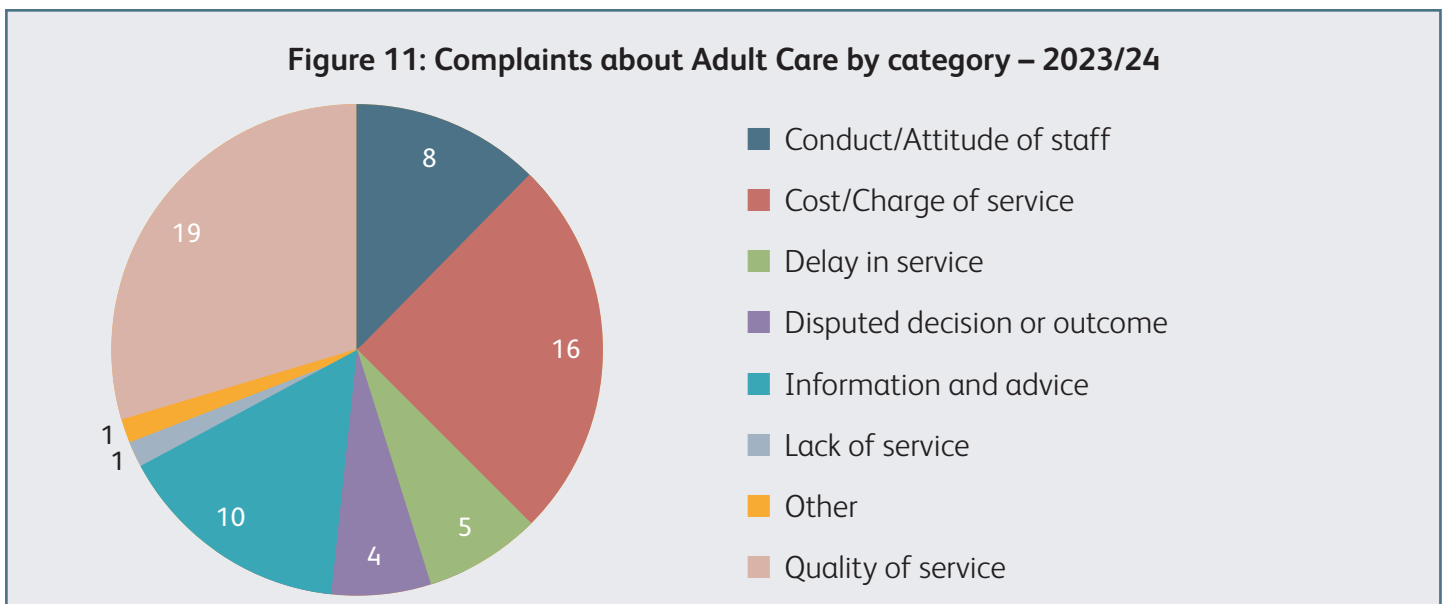
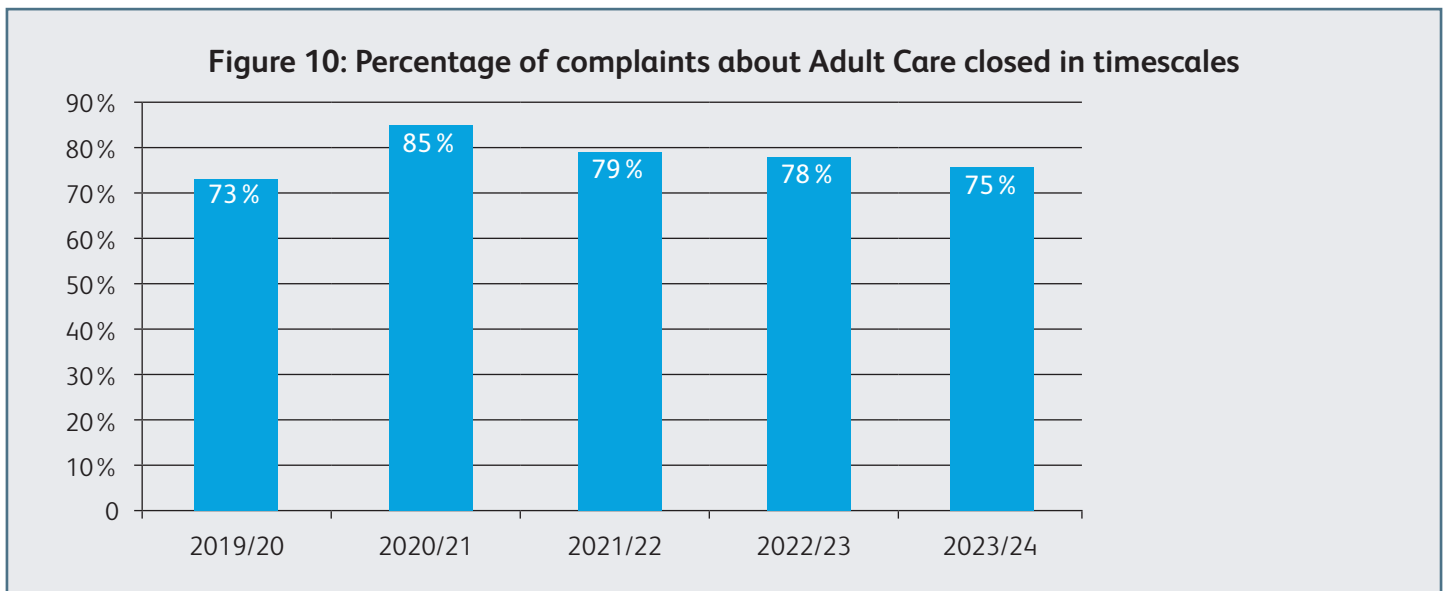
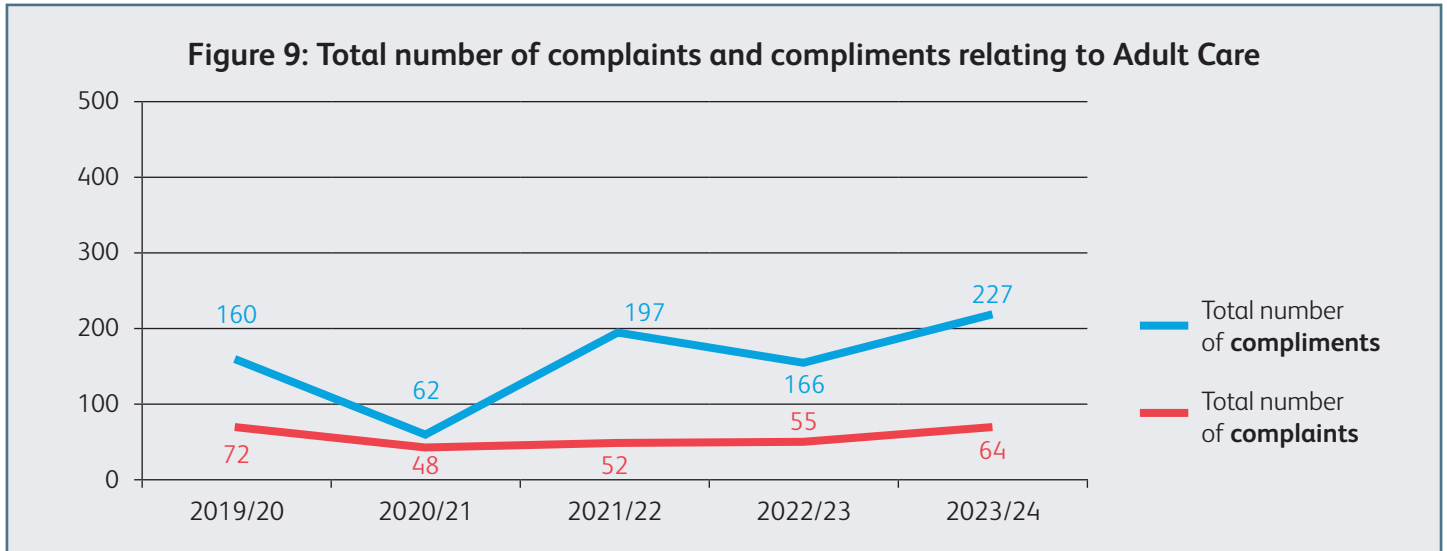
4.2 How we are improving

Improving the way that complaints are dealt with requires a whole Council approach, with services prioritising complaints and making improvements based on the feedback from customers. Therefore, it is the responsibility of every service to make responding to complaints and learning from customer feedback a priority.

A number of service improvements have been made over the year based on feedback from our customers. Key themes of service improvements have included the training and performance management of staff, reviews of processes and policies and the revision of communication materials. Examples of case studies where service improvements have been made based on complaints, are outlined within each directorate section.

5. ADULT CARE, HOUSING AND PUBLIC HEALTH DIRECTORATE

5.1 Adult Care



5.1.1 Key Headlines

16%

more
complaints
received

More complaints were received about Adult Care.

(64 in 2023/24 compared to 55 in 2022/23.)

More compliments were received about Adult Care.

(227 in 2023/24 compared to 166.)

37%

more
compliments
received



Fewer complaints were upheld.

Nine complaints were upheld in 2023/24 compared with 12 in 2022/23.

This is a 25% decrease.

75% of complaints were responded to within timescales.

Compared with 79% in 2021/22.



Two Ombudsman complaints were received.

One was upheld.

19 of 64 complaints were regarding Quality of Service.

16 were regarding Cost/Charge for Service and 10 were regarding Information and Advice.



Prevalent themes which emerged specifically within upheld and partially upheld complaints for adult services complaints were:

- Dispute Over Liability or Debt
- Conduct
- Application/Assessment Outcome or Decision
- Lack of Information/Advice
- Delay in Service Being Provided/Action Taken
- Delay in Response to Enquiry

The increase in the number of formal complaints of 16%, is against the overall Council trend of a decrease of 13% in the total number of complaints received. The largest increase in complaints received was in the Integrated Discharge Team (Hospital Social Work Team), increasing from four to twelve complaints received. This indicates the overall pressures facing this service, dealing with complex and urgent cases, often being the first time someone has accessed Adult Care services. Community Occupational Therapy also experienced an increase in complaints received from four in the previous year, to six received in 2023/24. Provider Services also received two complaints in 23/24 and received no formal complaints in 2022/23 and Rothercare increased from two to six formal complaints received.

Other services saw no change or a small decrease in complaints received, Locality Social Work Teams, remained the same at 28 complaints. The 28 complaints were received across six teams and followed similar trends in terms of numbers received. The types of complaints received were regarding the outcome of assessment, delay and communication / information and advice. Revenue and Payments reduced significantly from seven in 2022/23 to one this year, representing a concerted effort to find quick local resolutions at the earliest opportunity. Also, the LD Review Team saw a reduction in complaints received, from two to one received.

In terms of Ombudsman investigations received, two were received and one was upheld. The upheld complaint was regarding providing care exactly as required by a care plan.

Examples of some of the compliments received for Adult Care in 2023/24:

Compliment for Adult Contact Team. “The staff member was extremely helpful, very informative and generally made the task of sorting additional aids for my family member an easy process. I wanted to message you to say she is a credit to your team and to send my personal thanks.”

Compliment for Community Occupational Therapy. “The staff member is a star she arrived on time, was very professional and explained everything that might make my life easier 10/10 well done.”

Compliment for the Integrated Discharge Team. “The staff member has been very supportive and compassionate around my family member’s needs.”

Compliment for Locality Social Work Team. “Thank you for everything you have done and still do, you are a diamond.”

5.1.2 Lessons Learned

Adult Care made several service improvements based on customer feedback in 2023/24. An example of these improvements is outlined in the case study below.

The Complaint

The resident and family were unhappy with the level of information about possible charges for care and the care options available to them.

What did the Council do?

Investigating the complaint, the Council reviewed the information and advice provided and the time when an assessment of care was completed. Through sharing the learning from this complaint and providing additional training and advice to key members of staff, the Service will now ensure they will provide better information and advice about the assessment process. In addition, it is developing a new easy read advice leaflet for customers and family members. This will ensure that there is a consistent and high-quality advice provided at first contact with the Service.

Who is better off?

Improvements to communication will benefit all current and future users of adult social services in Rotherham. Through a change in the advice that is available, the Council will ensure that problems experienced in this complaint will not reoccur and that services have been improved for all residents.

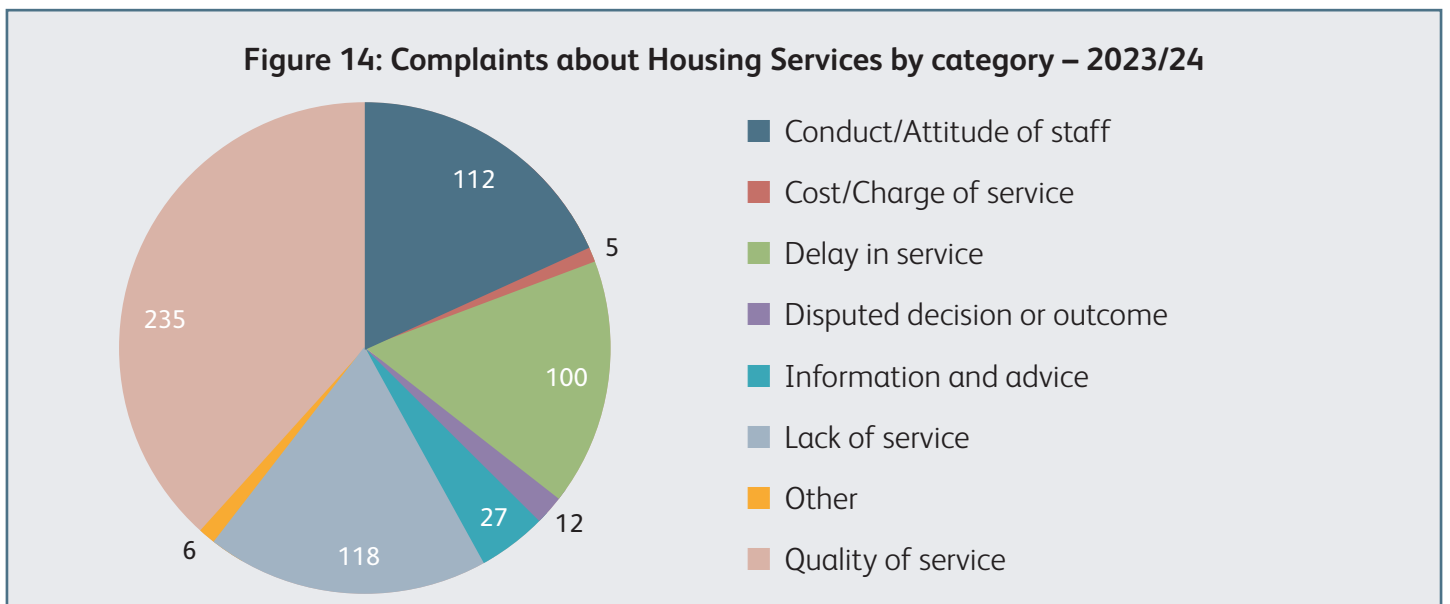
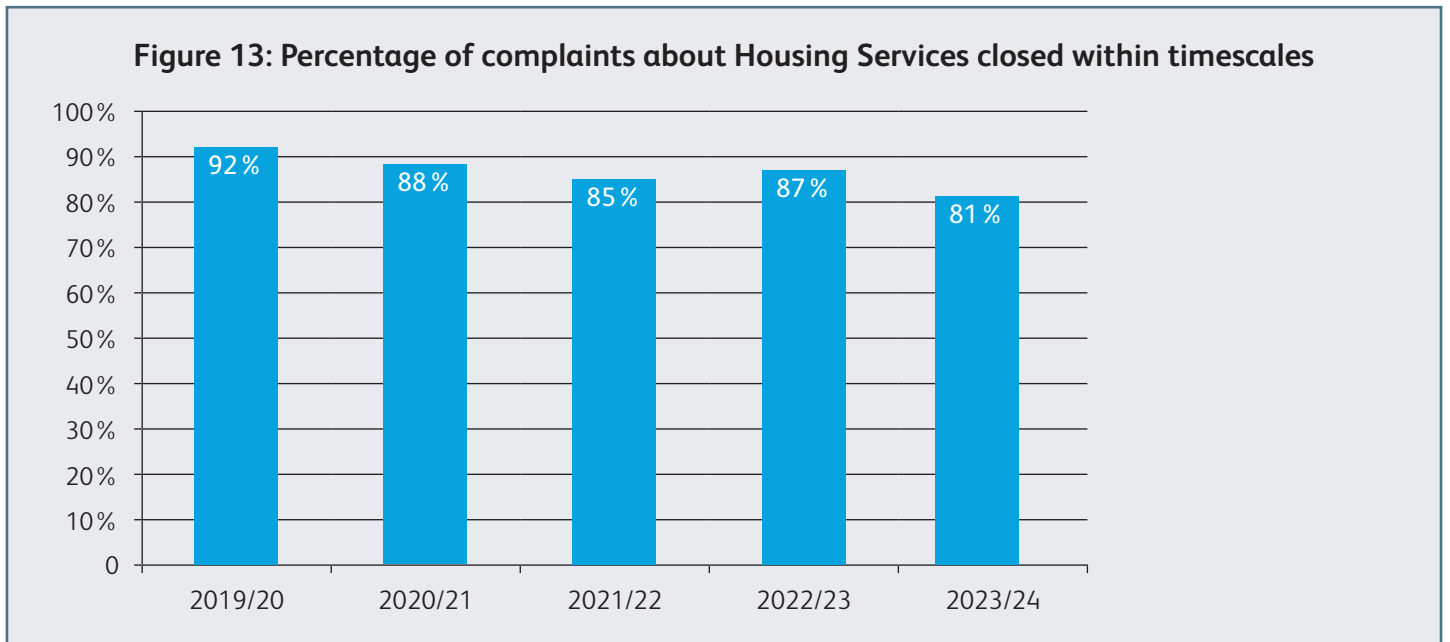
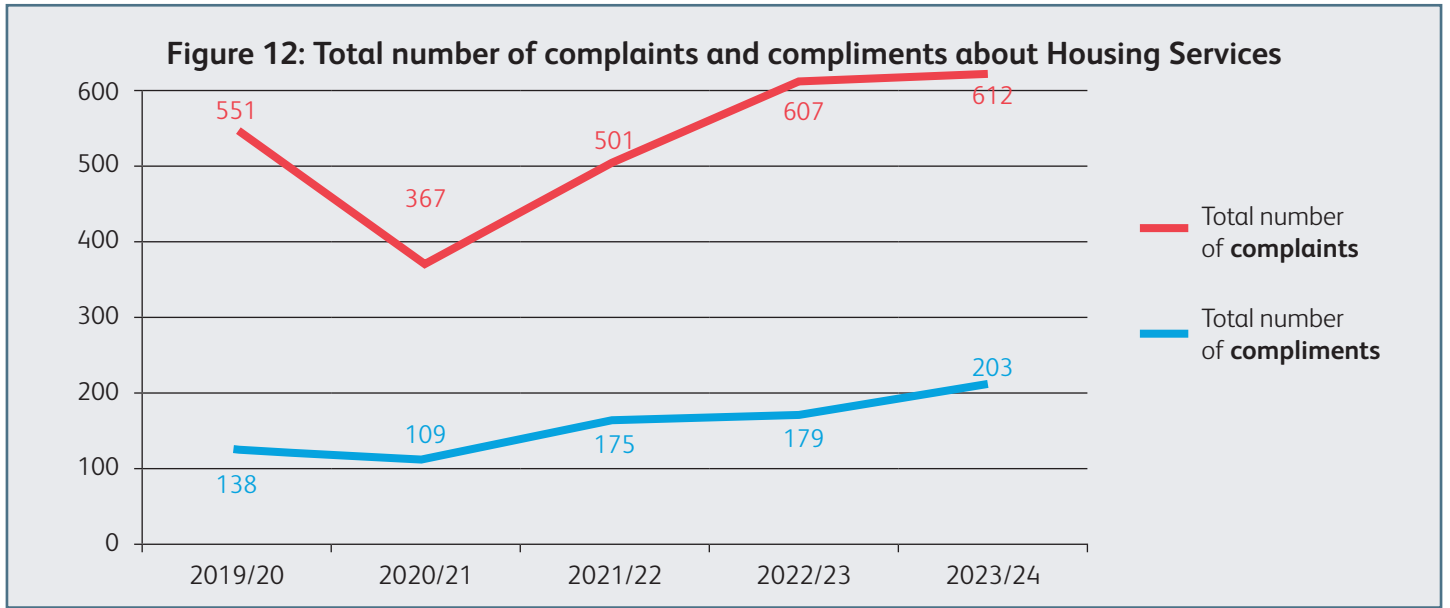
Other lessons learned from complaints.

Some additional examples on where we have improved are service are as follows.

The Rothercare FAQ document has been reviewed and improved. This will better explain what services are available.

Feedback / training has been provided to staff following a complaint to ensure prompt discussions are made regarding financial assessments and possible contributions during the assessment/ support planning process.

5.2 Housing Services



5.2.1 Key Headlines

1%

more
complaints
received

**More complaints about
Housing Services were
received.**

(615 in 2023/24
compared with
607 in 2022/23).

**Compliments have
increased.**

(203 in 2023/24
compared to
179 in 2022/23).

13%

more
compliments
received



**Lower proportion of
upheld complaints.**

21% (131/615) in
2023/24 compared
to 2022/23 27%
(163/607).

**81% of complaints were
responded to within
timescales.**

This is a decrease from
87% in 2022/23.



**Four Ombudsman
complaint decisions
were received.**

They were all upheld in
part.

**235 complaints were
regarding quality of
service.**

118 were regarding a lack
of service and 112 were
regarding the conduct/
attitude of staff.



Themes which emerged specifically within upheld and partially upheld complaints for Housing Services complaints were:

- Quality of service provided.
- Lack of service provided.
- Conduct / Attitude of staff.
- Delay in service being provided.

Complaints received for Housing Services increased by 1%. This is against the trend of a decrease of 13% in the total number of complaints the Council received.

Housing & Estates saw the greatest increase in complaints, growing by 13%, from 2022/23 to 2023/24 (120 to 135). 44% (59) of all complaints received were categorised as lack of service provided. In addition, 39% (52) of the 135 complaints received by Housing & Estates were regarding ASB Enforcement. Two other common themes were complaints regarding the quality of service provided 20% (27) and the conduct or attitude of staff 20% (27).

Repairs' Contractors had a 12% increase in complaints from 2022/23 to 2023/24 (137 to 154). 60% (93) of these complaints were categorised as relating to the quality of service provided. Another common theme identified from the 154 complaints that the service received was regarding a delay in service being provided, 12% (19). The repair issue that was received the most complaints was in relation to the roof / a leak.

Examples of some of the compliments received for Housing Services in 2023/24:

“You’ve been so wonderful, so good to the extent of making me feel speechless. Thanks for all your support, your concern and care is unquantifiable.”

“Thank you for the help and support I have received over the past 11 months. I want to say thanks for the empathy they have shown me. In a sensitive situation they have been so pleasant and approachable and most importantly, they have always called me back promptly when I have left a voice message. I cannot thank them enough for making my very difficult situation easier.”

“Thank you for your concerned listening and your kindness in explaining the present situation. It was gratifying to be able to speak with you and to be understood and I very much respect your time and conversation and your perspective on what matters. It is not often one chances upon a real human encounter.”

5.2.2 Lessons Learned

Housing Services, in addition to its ongoing and extensive change and improvement programme, made several service improvements based on customer feedback in 2023/24. An example of these improvements is outlined in the case study below.

The Complaint

The customer was charged an extra week's rent following the handing in of their keys to their Council property. Their rent account was terminated one week later as it was believed that the keys were not received until after the 12pm deadline for handing in keys.

What did we do?

An investigation found that the customer had posted their keys into the external Riverside House post-box outside office hours. Because of this, the Council could not determine exactly when the keys were received. The customer also had no evidence of this. As a gesture of goodwill, the week's rent was refunded to their bank account.

To ensure accuracy, the external Riverside House post-box has now been removed. Keys must now be handed in to Riverside House reception staff, where these are logged on a written log sheet. At the end of each working day, the written log sheet is then inputted onto the computer system and is then e-mailed to the Client Voids team who terminate the rent account.

Who is better off?

This will benefit all current and future Council tenants.

Other lessons learned from complaints.

An additional example on where we have improved our services is as follows.

A complaint that a garage termination could not be submitted online. The Council's tenancy management system has recently been updated and we are currently working with our IT department to make more forms available online. The complainant should have been advised that the form they needed to complete was available to be sent via email. Following this complaint, extra training has been provided to relevant staff members.

5.3 Public Health

It is a statutory requirement to report annually on the complaints received for Public Health services. Please note that the Public Health team predominantly commission services and it is the commissioned service providers who will respond to any formal complaints via their own complaint procedures. The information below relates compliments and to complaints responded to by the Public Health services directly under the Council's complaint procedure.

5.3.1 Key Headlines

- No complaints were received. (None in 2022/23)
- No compliments were recorded. (One in 2022/23)
- No complaints were upheld. (None upheld in 2022/23)
- No complaints were investigated by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.

5.3.2 Complaints

- None received

5.3.3 Compliments

Detail below.

Compliment for Public Health. "The memorial event was R's creation, and she has worked extremely hard to make it the success it is."

5.3.4 Service Requests

Two enquiries responded to outside the complaint procedure.

- A report about a Public Health service provider from their cleaning contractor.
- Request for advice about the Bell at Work award and asked for the website to be updated.

6. CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SERVICES DIRECTORATE

Figure 15: Total number of complaints and compliments about Children and Young People's Services

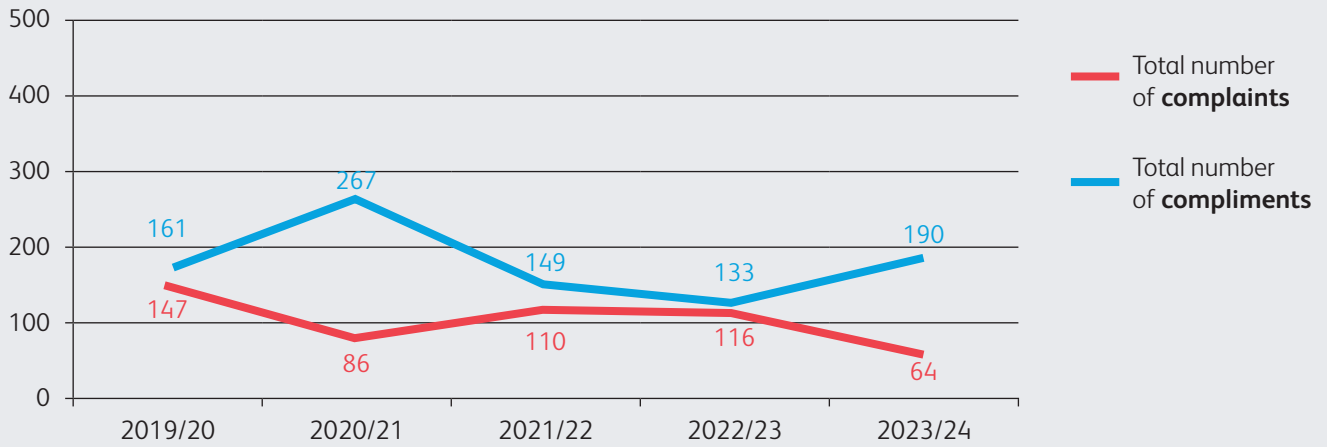


Figure 16: Percentage of complaints about Children and Young People's Services closed within timescales

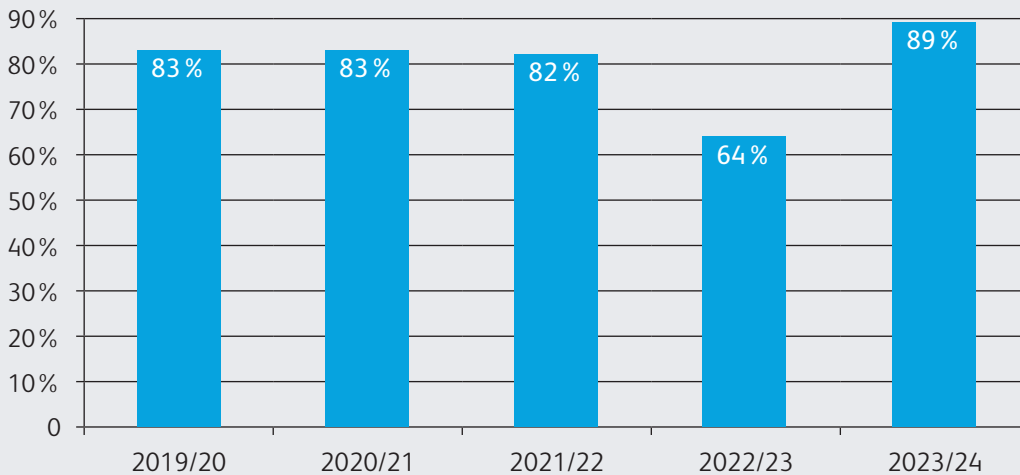
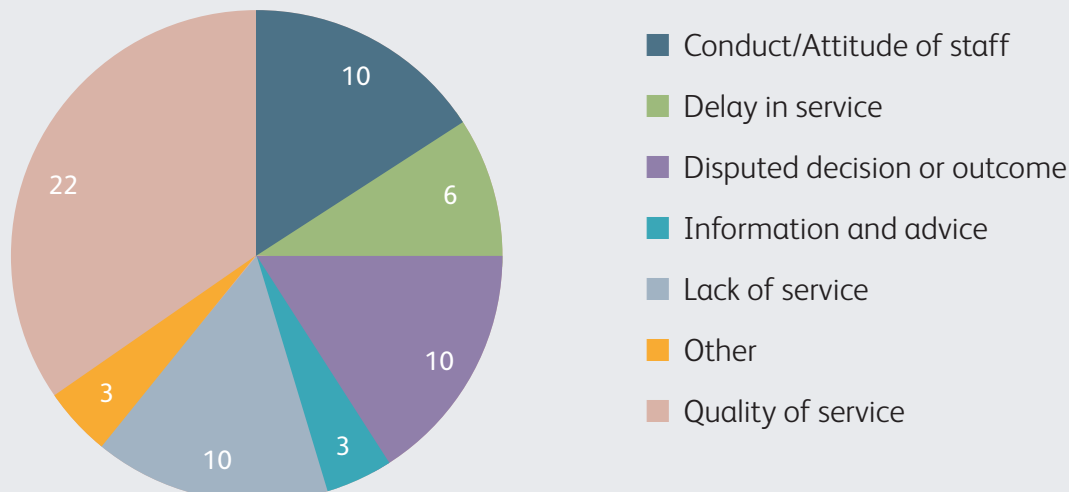


Figure 17: Complaints about Children and Young People's Services by category – 2023/24



6.1 Key Headlines

45%

fewer
complaints
received

Fewer complaints about Children and Young People's services were received

(64 in 2023/24 compared with 116 in 2022/23.)

More compliments were received about Children and Young People's services.

(190 in 2023/24 compared with 133 in 2022/23.)

43%

more
compliments
received



Fewer complaints were upheld.

(6 in 2023/24 compared with 42 in 2022/23.)

89% of complaints were responded to within timescales.

This is the first time in the last five years that the performance has exceeded 85%.



Three Ombudsman complaint decisions were received, the same as last year.

All of these were upheld.

Most complaints were regarding quality of service, 22 of 64.

Followed by conduct of staff, disputed decision, and lack of service.



Prevalent themes which emerged specifically within upheld and partially upheld complaints for Children and Young People's Services complaints were:

- Disagreements with decisions made and the outcome of assessment.
- Delays in finalising reports or assessments.
- Delays/difficulties with communication.

Managers have continued to be encouraged and supported to address concerns at the earliest opportunity, so that any concerns can be resolved before they enter the formal complaint procedure, which means formal complaint levels have reduced. Several 'Reframing Complaints' sessions have been delivered to colleagues in the directorate which focused on quality and timely responses as well as understanding how a restorative approach will not only be more likely to resolve the complaint but create a good working relationship. There is a direct correlation between the quality and timeliness of responses and escalating onwards through the complaint process and to the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman and all of these escalations have been reduced in Children and Young People's Services.

Some key learning and improvements from complaints:

- Needing to be clearer around timescales for work especially when waiting on information from stakeholders and ensuring this information is requested in a timely manner.

- Focusing upon how communication can be improved with families when sharing difficult information about children’s care plans.
- Viability assessment outcomes should always be shared with the individual, this should be done verbally and followed up by a written assessment. Checking that families understand the content of these, and the decisions made around these.

Examples of some of the compliments received for Children & Young People’s Services in 2023/24:

A father reported feeling very supported by the Social Worker, they have been helpful and supportive. He said they had made a massive difference. Described them as ‘absolutely brilliant’ and referred to them as outstanding. Always polite when visited, also checked it was convenient. Parent reported workers were very professional in their practice.

“I just wanted to get in touch to feedback my positive experience with your team. I always find Rotherham to be very helpful when I contact them for the purposes of safeguarding. The colleague I spoke with today was incredibly friendly, professional and helpful.”

A father complimented their Social Worker. Her approach has changed his and [his daughters] life. All social workers should aspire to be like to her.”

6.2 Lessons Learned

Children and Young People’s Services made several service improvements in 2023/24 following the feedback from customers. An example of this is outlined in the case study below.

The Complaint

The Council received a complaint via the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) stating that the Council did not do enough to support access to a mainstream education, did not engage in mediation forcing her to appeal to a tribunal and did not communicate with her properly.

What did we do?

The Council accepted in its response, that on this occasion the communication had been poor, apologised and offered a financial remedy. It was accepted by the LGSCO that whilst there was a delay in holding an annual review, there was not any injustice, but it was for the SEND Tribunal to decide whether the placement was appropriate. The lack of mediation was due to not having available staff as this occurred during the pandemic.

Who is better off?

The communication between families and the EHCP team has improved within the last financial year and the learning from each complaint is shared within a number of key meetings with colleagues.

SEND complaints have reduced against the previous year and benchmarking against other Councils, it is reassuring to see that the complaints’ numbers are significantly lower. The Tribunals & Resolutions Manager attached to the EHCP team ensures that any concerns are acted upon promptly and ensures the learning is acted upon in each case.

7. REGENERATION AND ENVIRONMENT DIRECTORATE

Figure 18: Total number of compliments and complaints about Regeneration and Environment

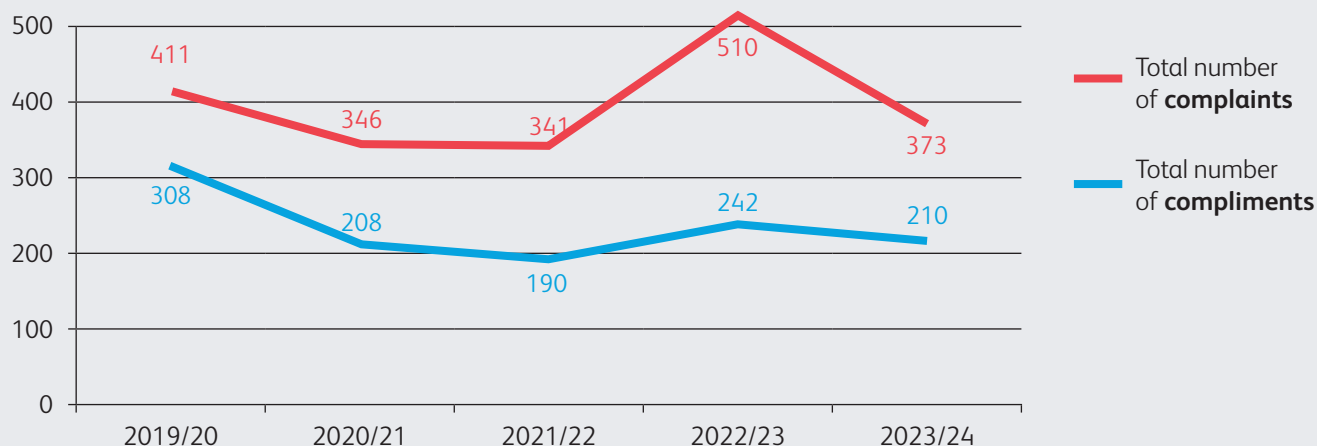


Figure 19: Percentage of complaints about Regeneration and Environment closed within timescales

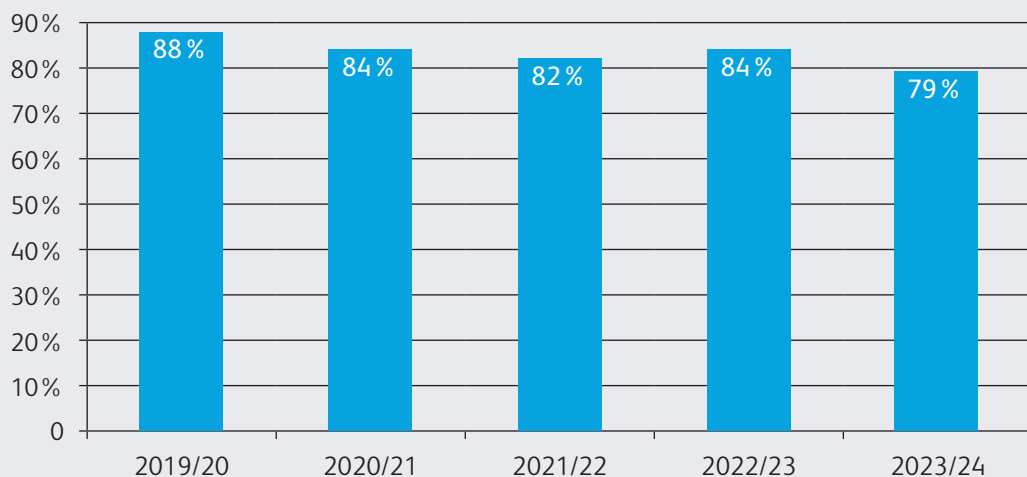
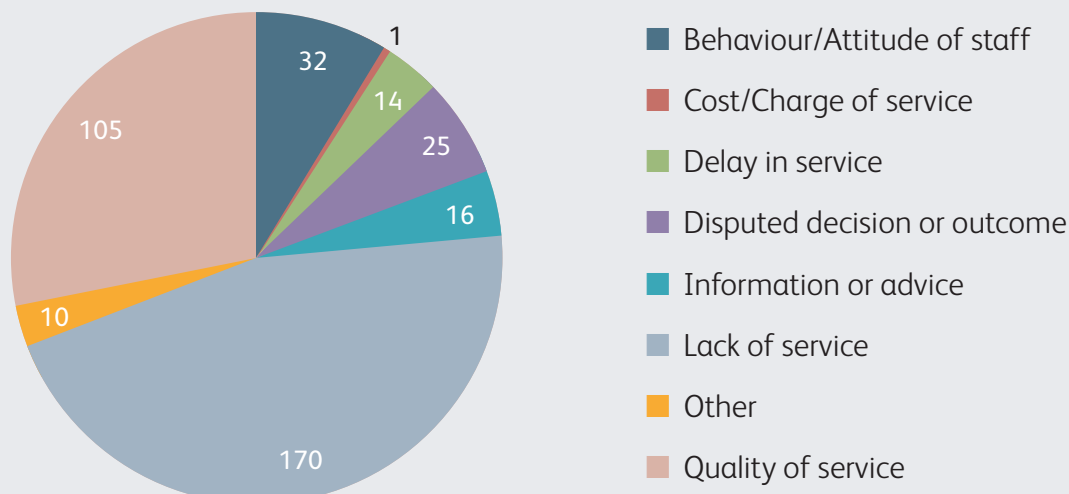


Figure 20: Complaints about Regeneration and Environment by category – 2023/24



7.1 Key Headlines

27%

fewer
complaints
received

Fewer complaints about Regeneration and Environment Services were received.

(373 in 2023/24 compared with 510 in 2022/23.)

Fewer compliments were received about Regeneration and Environment Services.

(210 in 2023/24 compared with 242 in 2022/23.)

13%

fewer
compliments
received



Fewer complaints were upheld.

(141 in 2023/24 compared with 316 in 2022/23.)

Fewer complaints responded to within timescales.

(79% in 2023/24 compared with 84% in 2022/23.)



One Ombudsman complaint decision was received.

It was not upheld. One received in 2022/23.

46% of complaints were regarding lack of service. 170 of 373 complaints.

105 complaints were regarding the quality of service.



Prevalent themes which emerged specifically within upheld and partially upheld complaints for Regeneration and Environment Services were:

- Missed bin collections and complaints about bins not being returned to the correction location.
- Lack of action or response to enquiries in relation to potholes and drainage issues.
- Quality and frequency of grass cutting.
- Lack of maintenance of trees following issues being reported to the Council.
- Issues relating to the planning application process and response to alleged breaches of planning control.

The largest number of complaints were regarding domestic waste and recycling collections in the Waste Management service, with 185 complaints received. However, this has reduced significantly from 261 received in previous year and is the biggest contributing factor in the reduction in the number of complaints for the directorate as a whole. Complaints for this service predominantly fell into the category of 'lack of service' reflecting the theme outlined above.

The remaining complaints for the directorate were distributed over a number of services in far less significant numbers with the other themes set out above represented less significant trends in complaints that were upheld.

Examples of some of the compliments received for Regeneration and Environment Services in 2023/24:

- “I would like to thank the people who dealt with our missed bin report and follow up query about why the bin may have been missed. The person who dealt with the query by email was very positive and helpful. We were in when the “missed bins” collection arrived, and I spoke briefly to the person who was dealing with my bin. He was also very positive and helpful. Thank you.”
- “We just wanted to express our gratitude for the support received from you when dealing with our case. Since you took the case, we felt that our problems and concerns were being heard and that something was being done about it. “
- “I just wanted to email to say a huge thank you for all your hard work and efforts in delivering both towns and villages and other client’s projects this year. The workload has been unprecedented, nothing has been too much trouble, every project has been approached with dedication and professionalism.
- “I would just like to thank the cast and the entire team that put on the pantomime (and every show). I am a regular visitor to the civic as it is my local theatre and provides quality productions and shows at a reasonable price. The pantomime was really good fun, the entire cast were brilliant, but I did love the ugly sisters, their humour and campness was brilliant. The volunteers who assist with the seating are lovely. Thank you for providing a valuable social experience, at a reasonable price for a small town.”

7.2 Lessons Learned

Regeneration and Environment Services made several service improvements based on customer feedback in 2023/24. An example of these improvements is outlined in the case study below:

The Complaint

Complaints were received regarding missed waste and recycling collections on a street in Rotherham.

What did we do?

The Council identified from the complaints that the narrow street, layout of the houses and parking of vehicles was regularly preventing the waste/recycling vehicle from accessing the street to collect the waste and recycling bins from the properties.

The Council had on each day, made several attempts to access the street but had been unable to do so.

The Council identified the need for a narrower vehicle to be able to access this street and other streets across the borough. The Council procured and implemented the use of a narrow access waste and recycling collection vehicle, which currently serves 721 properties across the borough.

Who is better off?

The use of this vehicle has improved access to narrower streets across the borough resulting in a significant reduction in complaints from those streets which were previously affected by access issues.

8. FINANCE AND CUSTOMER SERVICES DIRECTORATE

Figure 21: Total number of complaints and compliments about Finance and Customer Services

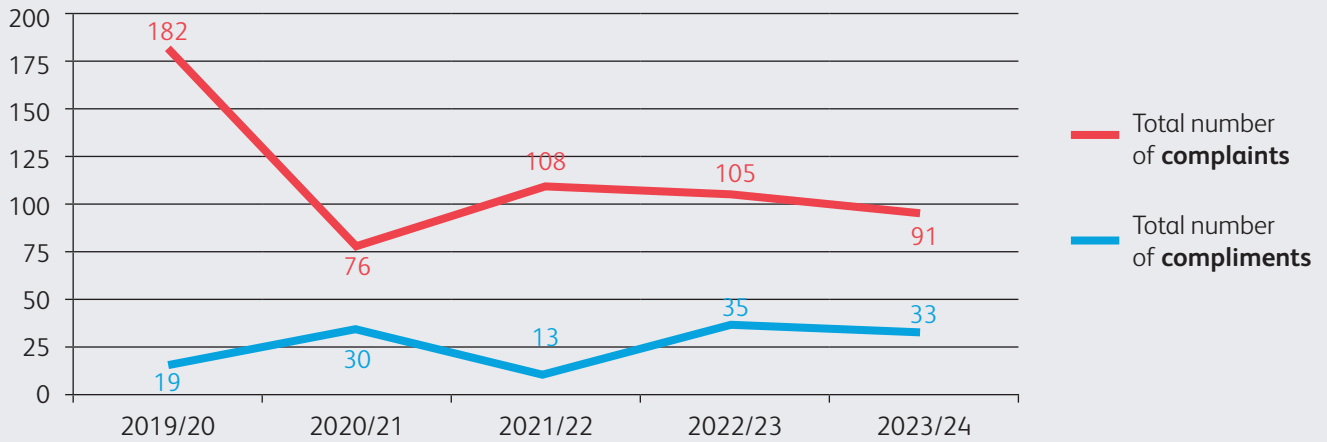


Figure 22: Percentage of complaints about Finance and Customer Services closed within timescales

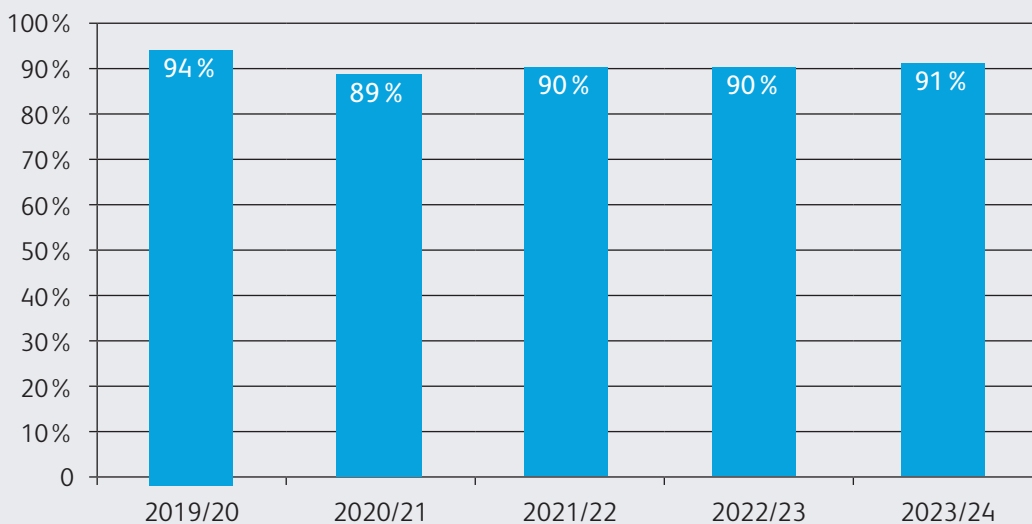
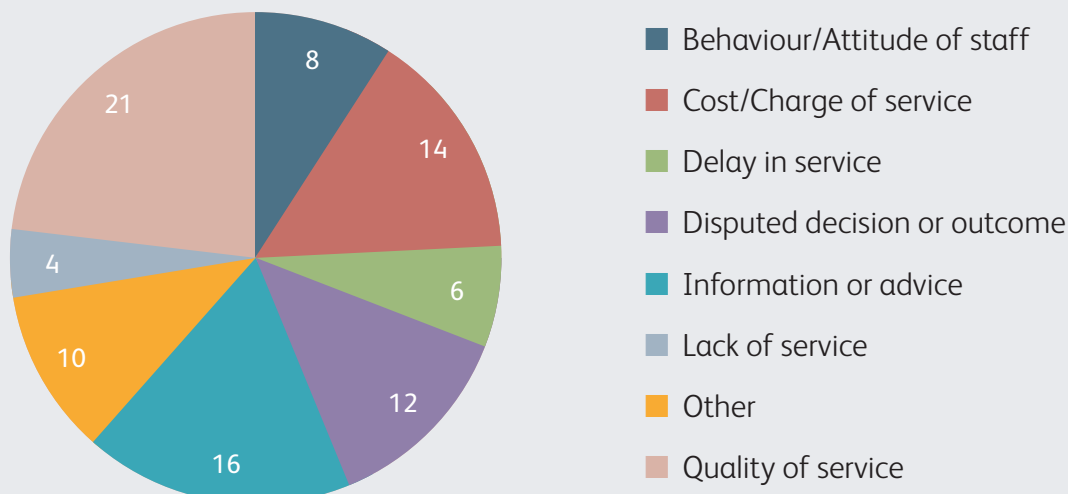


Figure 23: Complaints about Finance and Customer Services by category – 2023/24



8.1 Key Headlines

13%

fewer
complaints
received

Fewer complaints about Finance and Customer Services were received.

(91 in 2023/24 compared with 105 in 2022/23.)

Fewer compliments were received about Finance and Customer Services.

(33 in 2023/24 compared with 35 in 2022/23.)

6%

more
compliments
received



Fewer complaints were upheld.

(15 in 2023/24 compared with 24 in 2022/23.)

91% of complaints were responded to within timescales.

(This is above the 5-year average of 90% and is an improvement on the performance in 2022/23 of 90% for the service.)



No Ombudsman complaint decisions were received.

23% of complaints were regarding quality of service (21 out of 91) and 18% were regarding information and advice (16 out of 91).



Themes which emerged specifically within upheld and partially upheld complaints for Finance and Customer Services were:

- Significant reduction in complaints being received and upheld regarding call waiting times for Customer Services.
- Disputes regarding Council Tax liability and errors in administration of Council Tax accounts.

The directorate saw a decrease in the number of complaints received this year.

This is primarily down to a significant decrease in complaints for Customer Services which received 48% fewer complaints than the previous year. 24 complaints were received regarding Customer Services this year, compared to 46 in the previous financial year.

Complaints in relation to Council Tax increased slightly by 4% from 51 in the previous financial year, to 59 this year.

In addition, five complaints were received for Property and Facilities Services and only one complaint was received for Legal Services.

Examples of some of the compliments received for Finance and Customer Services in 2023/24:

- “She was really accommodating, and she made me feel comfortable and was a very nice person to speak to. I think people make complaints all the time and when someone has been so nice, I just want to say thank you, you made my day and thanks for sorting out all my issues.”
- “I had excellent customer service today from Customer Services for council house repairs. I was referring a tenant for banister rails. He was quick to pick up the urgency of the situation, and obtain a priority booking, and also made a really helpful suggestion about a fitting a different product to the one I had called to request.”
- “Just want to say I spoke to two separate gentlemen today one in benefits and one in over payments / recovery and both were absolutely first-class customer service so nice helpful and understanding you have two very good employees thank you so much for all your support.”

8.2 Lessons Learned

Finance and Customer Services made several service improvements in 2023/24 following the feedback from customers. An example of these is outlined in the case study below:

The Complaint

Customers had previously complained that it took them too long to get through to speak to a member of staff when they contacted the Council’s Customer Services by telephone.

What did we do?

The Council introduced a call-back service so that customers could request that the Council calls them rather than waiting in a queue for their call to be answered.

The Council introduced a wider range of web forms giving customers the opportunity to make their enquiry online and receive a response from the Council.

Who is better off?

The Council implemented a range of measures to achieve an average time waiting on the phone of six minutes. The Council achieved and exceeded this target with an average call waiting time of just over three minutes. This means that customers are receiving a more efficient service when contacting the Council via telephone.

Customers now have the option to request a call-back rather than waiting on the phone to speak to someone. This was used by over 21,000 customers in the year who on average received a return telephone call within 15 minutes.

The wider range of web forms means that customers can report more issues online and choose the right form for their enquiry; and receive an appropriate response. Almost 190,000 web forms were completed in 2023/24.

This has resulted in a significant decrease in the number of complaints received regarding call-waiting times with only four complaints being received regarding the issue in this financial year.

9. ASSISTANT CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S DIRECTORATE

9.1 Key Headlines

- Five complaints were received (Four in 2022/23).
- 39 compliments were recorded (35 in 2022/23).
- Three were stage 1 complaints. One at Stage 2. (One Informal)
- One complaint was upheld (Two upheld in 2022/23).
- No Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman decisions.
- 60% of complaints were resolved within statutory timescales (75%, in 2022/23).

9.2 Complaints

The subject matter of each complaint received is listed below:

Democratic Services

- Administration of an Independent Appeal Panel hearing.*
- Complaint about the handling of a petition by the Council.
- Issues with their school appeal.*

Complaints Team

- Delay in responding to a stage 2 complaint investigation.
- Multiple issues relating to Housing, CYPS and Adult Care services – Complaints Manager coordinated an informal complaint response .

**school appeals administration has now moved to School Planning, Admissions and Appeals in the CYPS Directorate.*

9.3 Compliments

Examples include:

Compliment for the Communications Team “Thank you for your work on this project. You were a pleasure to work with - professional, bags of experience and knowledge and you did what you said you would by the deadlines agreed. Thanks so much and I hope to work with you again in the future.”

Compliment for Democratic Services. “Thank you for the support you provided before Christmas to a parent. This really is a fantastic example of going the extra mile and taking personal responsibility for providing exceptional customer service.”

Compliment for Neighbourhoods. “Could not speak highly enough of the staff member and the work he’s doing to improve the Town Centre. Great to hear in such a forum.”

10. NEXT STEPS, 2024/25

During 2023/24 the numbers of complaints decreased slightly from the previous year's total, which still demonstrates the continuing challenges facing the Council and the pressures on the delivery of services.

The need to provide excellent customer services that are efficient and cost effective is fundamental to the management of the Council. Therefore, it is vital that complaints are responded to in a timely manner and the complaints procedures work effectively for both customers and staff.

The following are the planned actions in 2024/25, to ensure that the way the Council deals with complaints and responds to customer feedback continues to improve.

Key actions included:

- Complaints Team self-assessment completed every 12 months, to ensure compliance with the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code.
- Complaint satisfaction survey to be rolled out for Housing Services complaints.
- New Housing Services complaint web page to include better information for tenants, including learning from complaints case studies and satisfaction information.
- Continuing review of all customer complaint literature, including website information, easy read guidance and information for children and young people to improve access to the Complaint Procedures for all residents.
- Ensure compliance against benchmarked standards ahead of expected inspections in Adult Care, CYPS and Housing Services.
- Continue to seek ways to deliver training to front line staff to allow them to understand the role and purpose of the complaint procedures.
- Continue to provide bespoke training for Investigating Managers to allow them to provide a better investigation and response to formal complaints.
- Work with management meetings in all departments to create a better learning from complaints programme. That all learning reported is considered and the impact of service improvement is understood and recorded.
- The Complaints Team will work with Council departments to check to see if there is anything more that can be done to resolve a complaint after notification that an Ombudsman investigation has been received.
- Work to improve performance to complaint procedure timescales, to make sure it meets Council Plan target of 85%. This includes continued roll out of new reporting dashboards so that managers have direct access to their complaint information.
- Increase the number of compliments recorded, the Complaints Team will continue to work with managers to ensure that the process for recording and reporting compliments is improved. Benchmarking with other Local Authorities has taken place and their best practice approaches will be used to further increase the numbers of compliments received.
- Roll out of a new complaint management IT system to improve the way complaint web form enquiries are responded to.

APPENDIX ONE

Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman decisions 2023/24, Rotherham Council and statistical neighbours.

Authority Name	Invalid or Incomplete	Advice Given	Referred Back for Local Resolution	Closed after Initial Enquiries	Not Upheld	Upheld	Total Investigated	Total	Uphold rate (%)	Average uphold rate (%) of similar authorities
Halton Borough Council	1	1	7	15	1	1	2	26	50%	79%
Gateshead Metropolitan Borough Council	8	15	16	28	0	4	4	71	100%	80%
Telford & Wrekin Council	3	0	7	11	2	2	4	25	50%	79%
Rotherham Council	2	2	13	23	2	4	6	46	67%	80%
Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council	3	3	18	18	1	5	6	48	83%	80%
St Helens Metropolitan Borough Council	2	2	15	23	2	6	8	50	75%	80%
Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council	8	4	9	22	0	8	8	51	100%	80%
Bolton Metropolitan Borough Council	1	3	26	14	1	9	10	54	90%	80%
City of Doncaster Council	7	2	8	35	3	7	10	62	70%	80%
Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council	2	3	14	17	3	8	11	47	73%	80%
Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council	2	0	16	25	2	10	12	55	83%	80%
Wakefield City Council	3	0	19	29	4	8	12	63	67%	80%
Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council	2	0	6	23	5	8	13	44	62%	79%
Stoke-on-Trent City Council	7	2	29	37	3	13	16	91	81%	79%
Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council	2	1	18	19	1	18	19	59	95%	80%