

Formal Complaints Report – 9 month summary April – December 2022

Audit Committee

13th March 2023



Formal Complaints | Executive Summary

Between quarters 1-3, 69% of complaints submitted were resolved without formal escalation to Stage 1. Across all stages, 30% of cases were upheld, 54% not upheld and 16% undecided.

Deliverables and business context for Qtrs. 1-3

- Complaints are complex and challenging:
 - ✓ Complaints often involve various stakeholders
 - ✓ Waiting lists for care commissioned services cause health reports to be delayed
 - ✓ Weather conditions – cold temperatures affecting road surfaces, tenant maintenance repairs
 - ✓ Media focus on particular talking points or one-off events e.g. mould and damp, care home costs, cause spikes in Service demand
- Place & Growth dedicate resource to streamline complaint management and improve customer experiences
- Three C writing workshops launch. These workshops focus on how officers communicate to customers.
- Housing Services received 48% of all complaints, which is higher than previous quarters. This rise links to the introduction of the new Housing complaints policy which removed the early resolution stage.
- 85% of all complaints resolved informally, related to Place & Growth. These cases concerned incidents that disrupted people's routines and/or resulted in poor one off experiences i.e. road/utility works causing traffic delays, rude construction workers, perceived lack of road work signage.

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The majority of complaints resolved at Stage 1 related to inadequate service or poor communication. When there is no evidence of fault in how a decision was made, the complainant favour escalation to Stage 2.

Directorate	Total Formal	Early Resolution
ASC	30	29
Chief Executive Office	8	33
Housing	135	6
Children's Services	52	29
Place & Growth	46	345
Resources & Assets	12	23
(258 Unique case)	283	465
TOTALS		

What is the learning...

- If early resolution cannot be achieved, then timely escalation to stage 1 should be actioned. Use letter templates and '3 C' writing guidance
- Remind officers of the resources available to them (templates and quality assessors) to ensure complaint responses align with the 3C values.
- Officers with experience of complaints and the Ombudsman, accelerate informed decision making.

Areas of focus for next quarter...

- Survey launched to gather customer/colleague feedback around the 3 C's principles, to respond with care, clarity and confidence – followed by a customer focus group
- Internal communication around what to do if you receive a complaint and signposting for support
- Promote Staff access to the interactive 3 C writing workshops.
- Assess results of the Highways & Transport Dynamics based CRM system; impact on complaint volumes.
- Quality assessors meet monthly to identify trends and solutions

Formal complaints | Insight



Environment

- In May 2022, Housing Services implemented a new complaints policy. This policy is in line with the Housing Ombudsman's guidance and requires all landlords to respond to complaints at Stage 1. The policy change has seen Housing Services make up a larger percentage of all complaints received; 48% as compared to averaging between 25-30% over 2021-22.
- Media reports of a toddler dying directly from mould exposure, highlighted the failings of a social housing provider. Awareness of the need to control damp grew, contributing to a rise in tenant service requests, at a time when workloads (boiler repairs) were already high from the cold season. To manage the impact on Service delivery, a new mould and damp policy will be introduced, once it is approved by the Tenants Panel.
- To better evaluate the volume of complaints received, this financial year's reporting will not include undecided cases raised in a previous quarter.



Ownership

- Greater transparency in responses; where something has gone wrong, we accept it, apologise, and advise what will be done to reduce the likelihood of a reoccurrence. This aligns with our customer charter.
- ASC recruited an Autism Lead to review the staff training programme and offer training on neurodiverse conditions and how this may impact delivery of service. This will assist in ensuring clients with neurodevelopmental conditions receive information they can access and understand.
- Complaints regarding poor service from the contractors managing the gardens at sheltered schemes, resulted in the Asset Management team collaborating with other teams to resolve the issues for tenants.



Customer Expectations

- Customers confuse a decision they find disagreeable, with poor performance. These complaints make up most Stage 2 escalations and are not usually upheld, but they do highlight opportunities to improve how we communicate.
- Tenant group meetings with officer attendance, has led to greater transparency of the Housing complaints policy. This approach has made the complaint process more accessible, enabling tenants to understand what they can expect from the Council.
- Customers have communicated their frustration with the new car park machines, finding the charging complicated and confusing. Signage on the payment method is being changed to improve clarity and confirm when Pre-Authorised payments are refunded to the customer's account

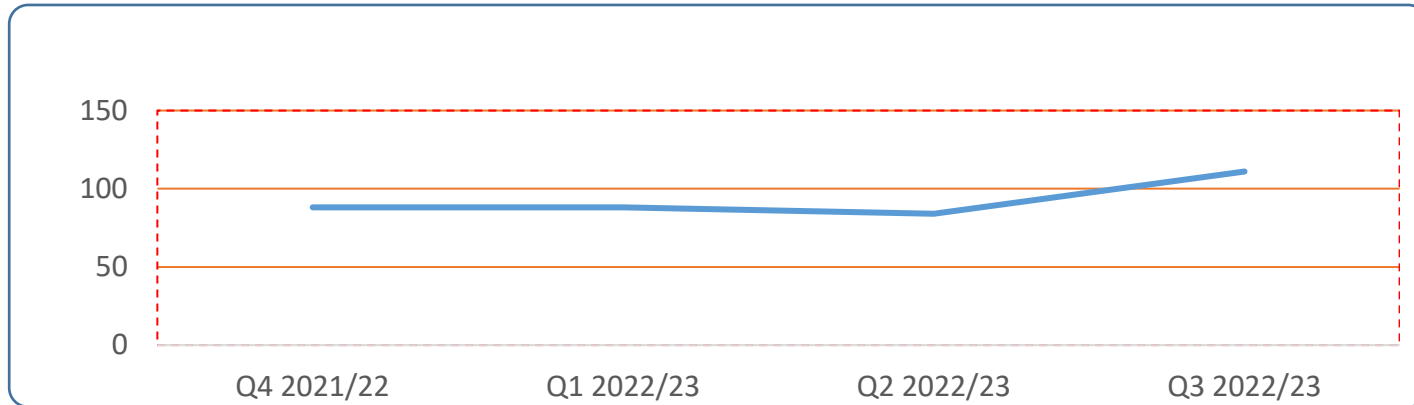


Suggested Improvements

- Directorate complaint representatives, attended a LGSCO workshop in May 2022 on effective complaints handling.
- Booking for Three C's Writing workshops is now live for staff.
- Regular internal communication on what tools and services are available to officers in managing complaints effectively e.g. Quality assessors

Formal Complaints | Volumes

Over the 3 quarters we have seen an average rise in complaints of 7%*.



Reporting is compared to previous Quarter

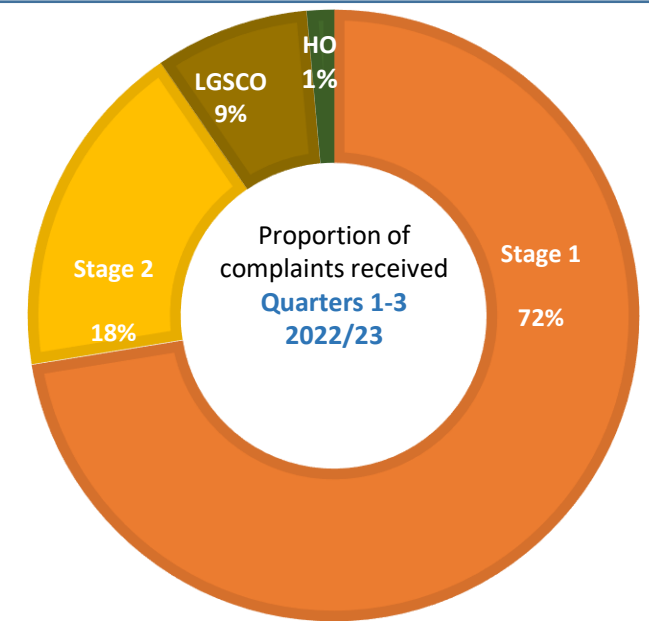
Period	Stage 1	Stage 2	TP ⁱ⁾	Stage 3 ⁱⁱ⁾	LGSCO	Housing ombudsman	Total	RAG Direction of Travel
Q1 2021/22	46	17	N/A	1	6	0	70	Green
Q2 2022/22	41	25	N/A	0	11	0	77	Red
Q3 2021/22	38	19	N/A	0	10	3	70	Green
Q4 2021/22	48	21	N/A	1	15	3	88	Red
Year end 2021/22	173	82	N/A	2	42	6	305	Blue
Q1 2022/23	64	18	0	0	6	0	88	Yellow
Q2 2022/23	57	12	0	0	13	2	84	Green
Q3 2022/23	84	21	0	0	4	2	111	Red
Q4 2022/23								
Year end 2022/23								

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ⁱ⁾Tenant complaint Panel ⁱⁱ⁾ Complaints at Stage 3 only apply to Children's statutory social care

*Average compared to the total at the end of Qtr. 4 2021-22 (88).

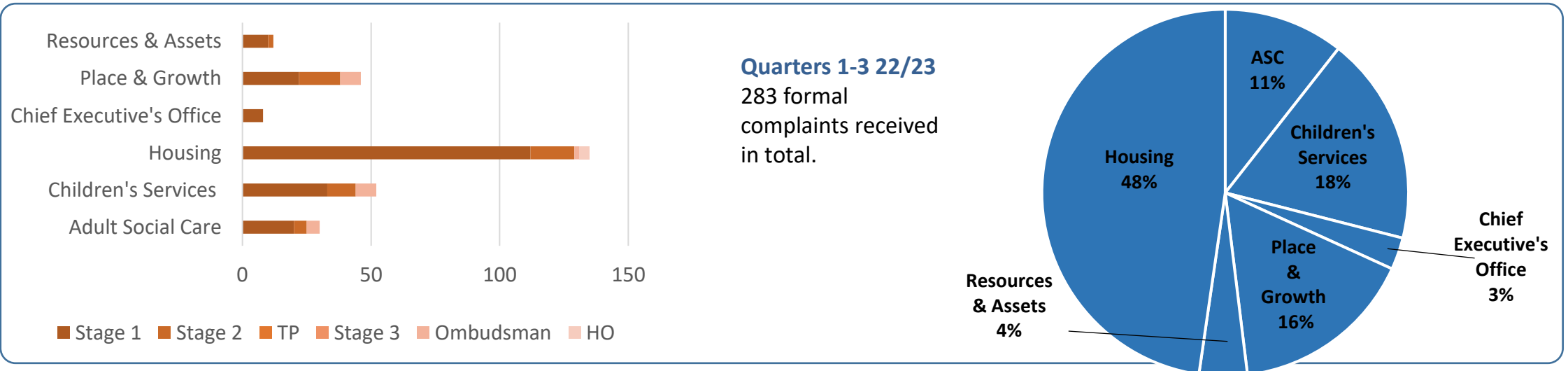
- The number of Stage 1's is 64% higher (impact of Housing complaints policy) and the number of Stage 2's approximately 16% lower, when compared to the same period in 2021-22.
- The LGSCO considered 23 cases. The Housing Ombudsman made 4 inquiries. The Council managed 258 unique cases.



Quarters 1-3
283 complaints
72% Stage 1
18% Stage 2
0% Tenant Panel
0% Stage 3
9% LGSCO
1% HO

Formal Complaints | Directorates and Service areas

Housing and Children's Services received the highest volume of complaints at 48% and 18% respectively. Since the introduction of the Housing Ombudsman complaints policy, Housing has increased its share of total formal complaints submitted.



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- **ASC** complaints totalled thirty, with twenty at Stage 1, five Stage 2 requests and five LGSCO cases.
- **Place and Growth** complaints totalled forty-six, with twenty-two at Stage 1, sixteen at Stage 2 and eight LGSCO cases.
- **Resources & Assets** complaints totalled twelve, with ten at Stage 1, and two escalating to Stage 2.
- **Housing** complaints totalled one hundred and thirty-five, with one hundred and twelve at Stage 1, seventeen Stage 2's, two LGSCO cases and two Housing Ombudsman inquiries.
- **Children's Services** complaints totalled fifty-two, with thirty-three Stage 1's, eleven at Stage 2 and eight LGSCO cases.
- **Chief Executive's Office** complaints totalled eight complaints, all at Stage 1.

A new approach to communication

We have been working to improve the way we communicate. The 3 C's principles have been designed following staff and customer feedback.

The aim is to bring the human touch back into our communication, particularly when we are responding to complaints.



We Bring Care

Did you:

- put their needs first, with the most important information upfront?
- show you know what's important to them and personalise the message where you can?
- write like you would talk to your neighbour, to sound human and warm?

Test the care

Read it out loud. Did it sound like you talking?

We Bring Clarity

Did you:

- use a clear format with headings, bullet points, short paragraphs, short sentences and white space?
- use clear words, with no jargon or technical language? Only use technical terms if you're certain your customer will understand them.
- use clear facts and figures that are as relevant, local and specific as possible to your customer?

Test the clarity

For the general public, aim for 65 or more on the readability test: www.thefirstword.co.uk/readabilitytest

We Bring Confidence

Did you:

- say what we can do, with positive statements and direct calls to action?
- say what you mean and stop there, with no waffle?
- write to you and say who's doing what using *I*, *we* and *they*, or names?

Test the confidence

Think about someone you know. Would they believe this message?

BRIDGING THE EMPATHY GAP

3 C's Workshop

- WBC's 'Tone of voice' and communication style explained.
- Officers learn how to communicate with Care, Clarity and Confidence.

Quality assessors

- Officers can have their responses assessed against the 3 C standards.

Impact

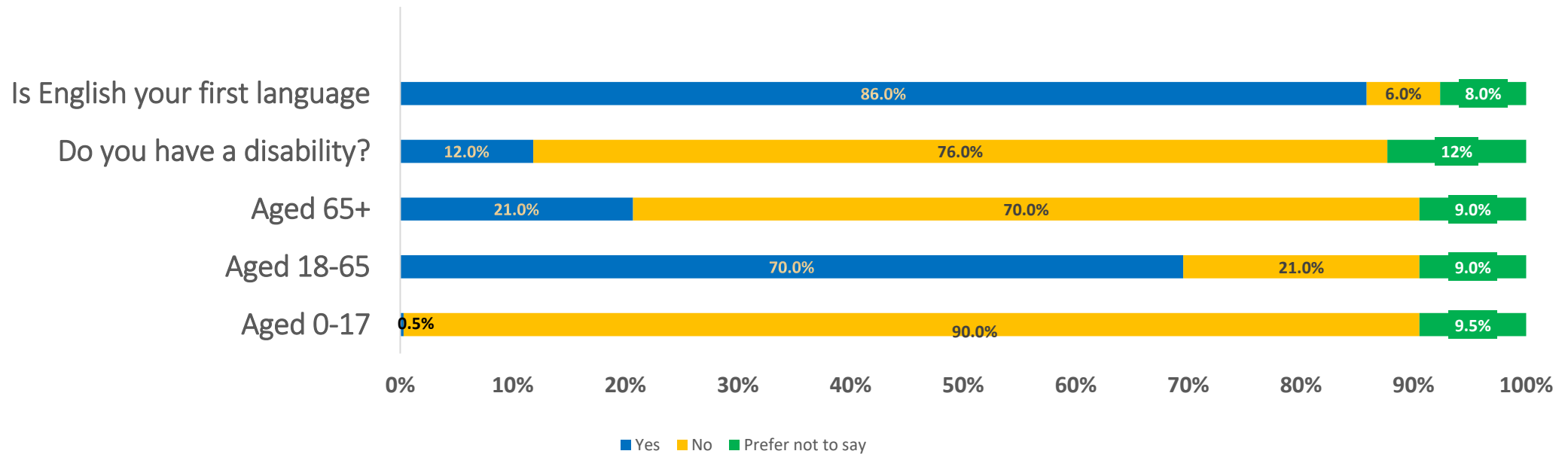
- Complaints process re-designed to make access simple and intuitive.
- Personalised complaint responses offers opportunities to resolve matters more effectively and efficiently.
- 77% of the 300 officers surveyed, prefer the '3 C' style of writing.
- Those who completed the 3 C workshop, scored it 4.7 out of 5.

Equality monitoring data | Quarters 1-3

The following data was collected from 982 completed/partially completed online complaint forms:

- 6% of the complaint forms were completed by customers with English not as a first language. This was consistent across all quarters.
- 12% of the complaint forms were completed by customers with a disability.
- 70% of the complaint forms were completed by those aged between 18-65.
- The results align with what is seen in the 2021 Census data for Wokingham.*

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*Data taken from Berkshire Observatory [Population - UTLA | Wokingham | Report Builder for ArcGIS \(berkshireobservatory.co.uk\)](https://www.berkshireobservatory.co.uk). The 2011 Census was used to compare the data for “Is English your first language?” result.

CUSTOMER COMPLIMENTS

"The sweeper turned up around 08:30 and did an amazing job. There was one parked vehicle which moved just as he was leaving the close so he turned round and completed that part. The speed of your response and his level of cleaning are both to be highly commended"

Clienting team December 2022

"All the parts that have been missed all year have been done and it looks so much better and tidier .. So on behalf of us all, thank you so so much to yourself and the maintenance team"

*Cleaner & Greener team
November 2022*

"I want to thank my social worker and my PA. They are such hard workers and they have helped me a lot I just love them and I just can't describe them by words. Finally I want to thank all the other personal advisers"

*Children's Social Care team
November 2022*

"The summary setting out what is needed to comply is clear, uncomplicated... I believe the summary you provided would save anyone considering solar panels much time and consternation"

*Development Management team
September 2022*

"I want to praise for your professional response and advice to make the process less complicated. I have encountered many planning officers in different boroughs, your positive attitude and patience is certainly exceptional in handling our application... Thank you"

*Development Management team
June 2022*

"It was first class, professional, kind and patient and understanding. The follow ups have been swift. Am so pleased"

*ASC Sensory Needs
Service September
2022*

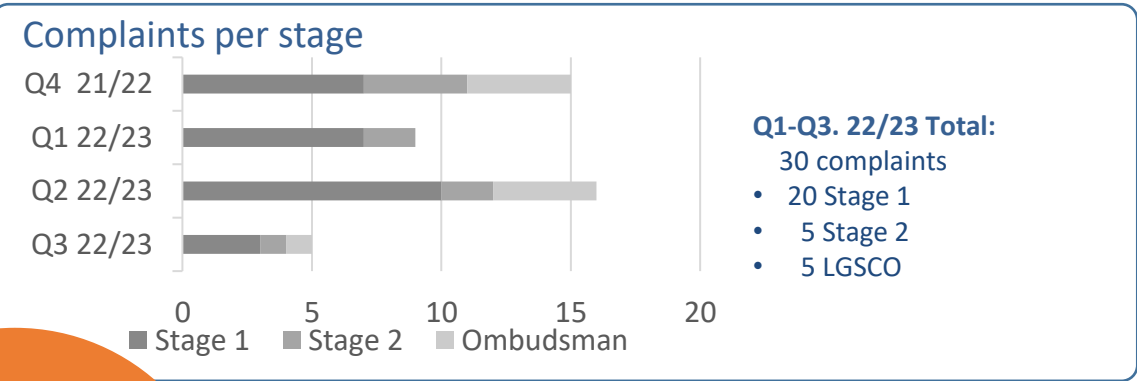
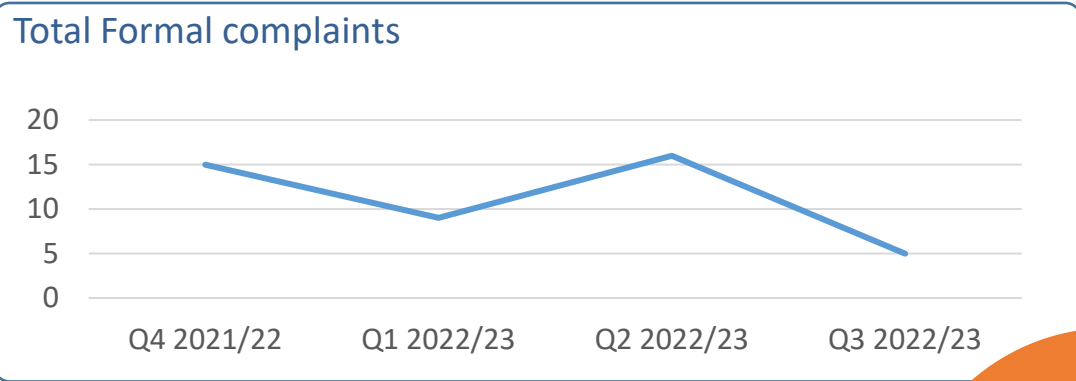
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"thanks to you for being so kind and grateful for all your help with everything"

ASC Payments team June 2022



Formal Complaints – Quarters 1-3 | ASC

29 complaints were closed at Early Resolution. There was a downward trend in the volume of complaints received. Of the 30 complaints received, 7 were upheld, 20 not upheld and 3 undecided.



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How did we receive the complaints?

- 10 Web form
- 20 Email

Which services were complaints submitted to?

Adult Social Care & Safeguarding (30)

What were our residents dissatisfied with?

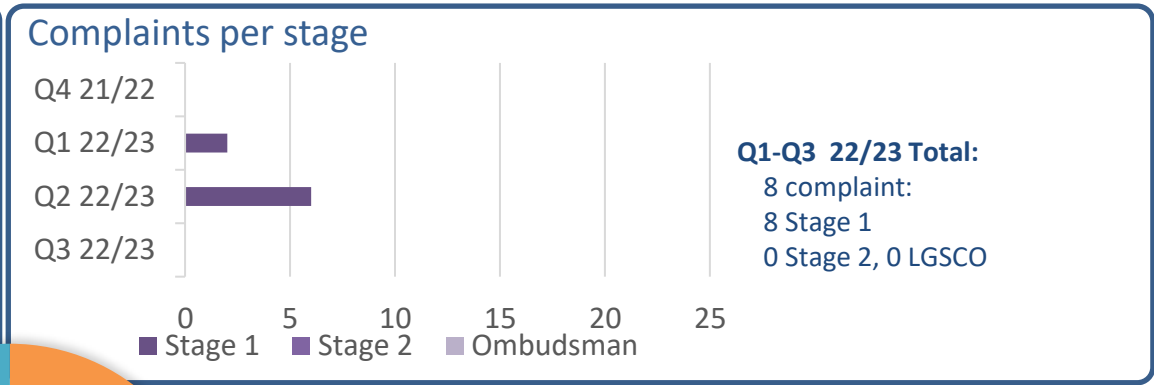
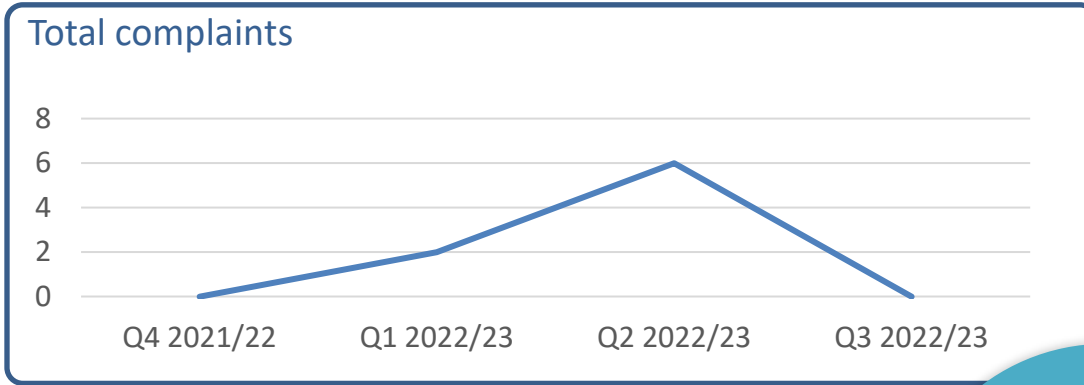
- 14
- 6
- 1
- 9

- The Service resolved **29** complaints outside the formal complaints process. The number of individual cases totalled **28**. Over the quarters there was a downward trend in the volume of complaints received with the majority resolved at Stage 1. Of the Stage 2's, one case found fault in how the invoice payments were calculated.
- The complaints showed the importance of providing clear guidance and transparency around specialist housing/accommodation, and in how the Council determined its discharge of duty rate. There were instances of insufficient collaboration between teams who assess and fund support. To remedy this, workers are reminded to regularly update the information they share with providers, especially when needs are high and where there are significant difficulties sourcing a suitable placement. When sourcing a placement is difficult, workers will be invited to attend a Placement Panel, so that an action plan can be agreed and committed to.
- Finance and Budget Holders have provided a series of training (Budget Reflection) sessions to all supervisors and managers to assist in the more complex aspects of support planning and placements.
- On concerns that Social Workers lacked awareness about people living with autism or neuro-divergent conditions. An Autism Lead was recruited to review the staff training programme and offer training on neurodiverse conditions and how this may impact delivery of service.
- 5 new Ombudsman inquiries were made in Quarter 2. Two cases were closed without investigation because there was no evidence of fault. The other 3 were still to be determined and related to safeguarding, care home options and the service offered to a neuro-diverse client. The Ombudsman reached a Final decision on a case raised in a previous Quarter. The complaint against Optalis was upheld, resulting in an apology, procedural action and a financial remedy.

Formal Complaints – Quarter 1-3 | Chief Executive’s Office

33 complaints were closed at Early Resolution. A single issue caused a dramatic rise in Qtr.2 and is not representative of the past and current trends seen in complaint volumes. Of the 8 complaints received, none were upheld.

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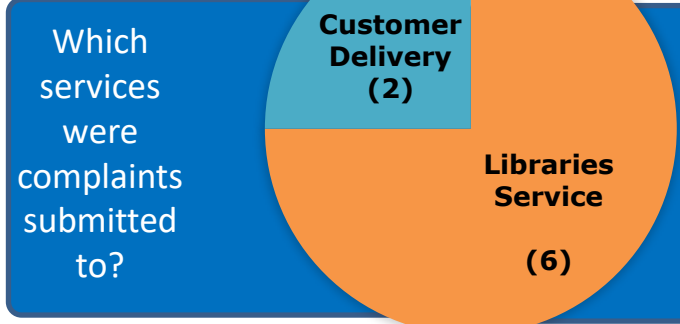
How did we receive the complaints?

0

Via phone

8

Via webform/email



What were our residents dissatisfied with?

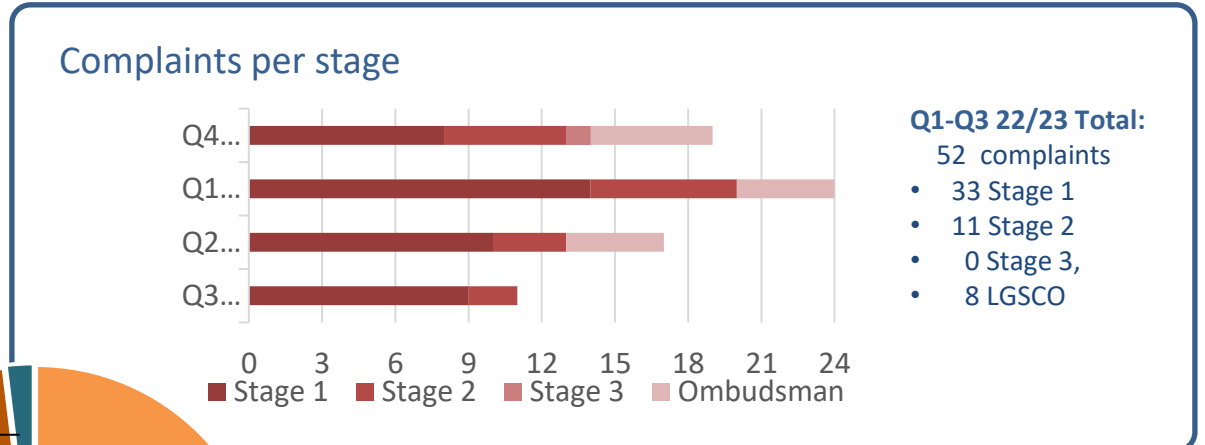
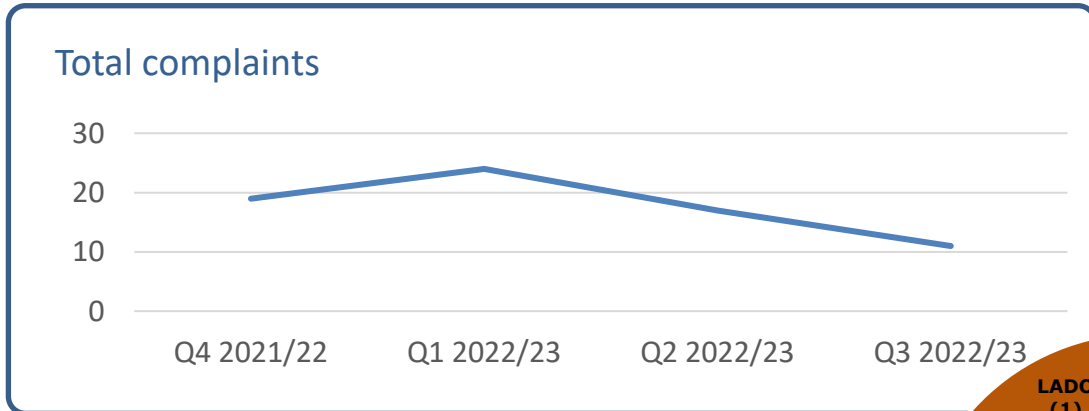
Decision

8

- **33** complaints were resolved outside the formal complaints process. The libraries Service formally managed **8** individual cases.
- Six Stage 1 complaints related to the Libraries Service hosting a series of diversity and inclusion performances. The complaints were not upheld, but offered an opportunity to explain more fully the reason behind hosting the performances and what safeguarding measures were taken to ensure they were age appropriate. As a result, the commissioning process requires the performer to submit their publicity to the Council for approval, prior to it being made public.
- The two other formal complaints, were also resolved at stage 1 and related to decisions made by the Customer Delivery team.
- Callers to the Customer Service team, are able to feedback on their experience and the quality of service received. The Registrar’s team achieved an overall satisfaction rating of ‘Good’. Blue Badges, General Enquiries and Libraries achieved an ‘Average’ overall satisfaction rating.
- No formal complaints were raised in Quarter 3.

Formal Complaints – Quarter 1-3 | Children’s Services

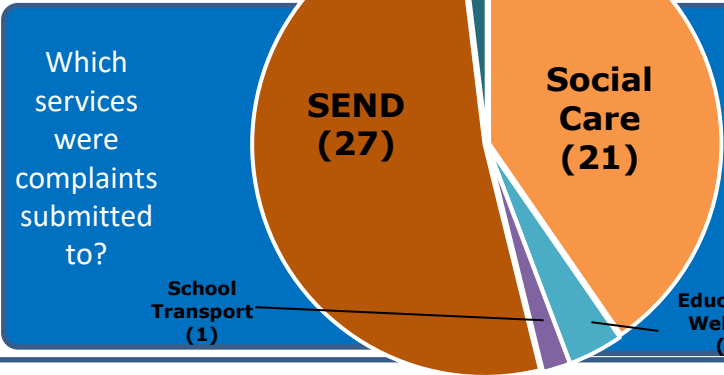
29 complaints were closed at Early resolution. There has been a downward trend in the volume of formal complaints submitted. Of the 52 complaints received 12 were upheld, 26 not upheld and 14 undecided.



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How did we receive the complaints?

- 10** Web form
- 42** Email/post



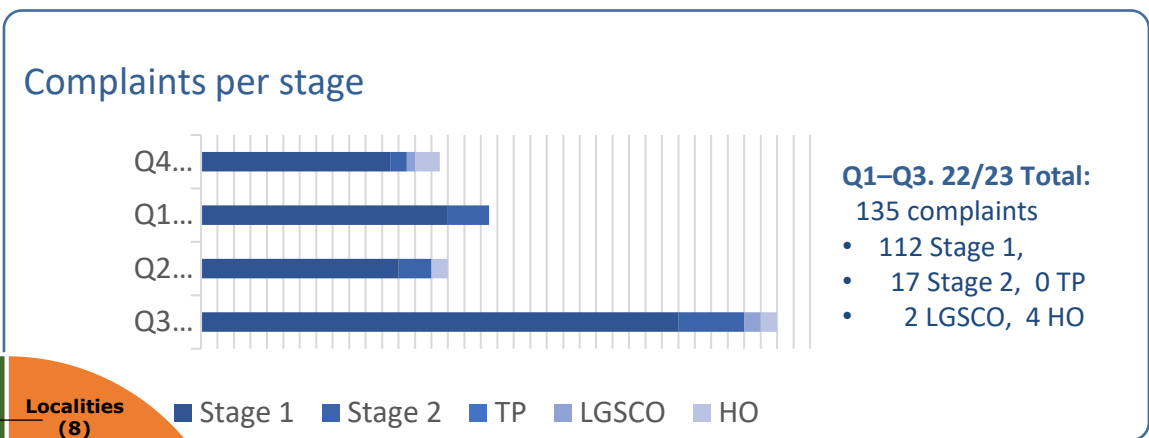
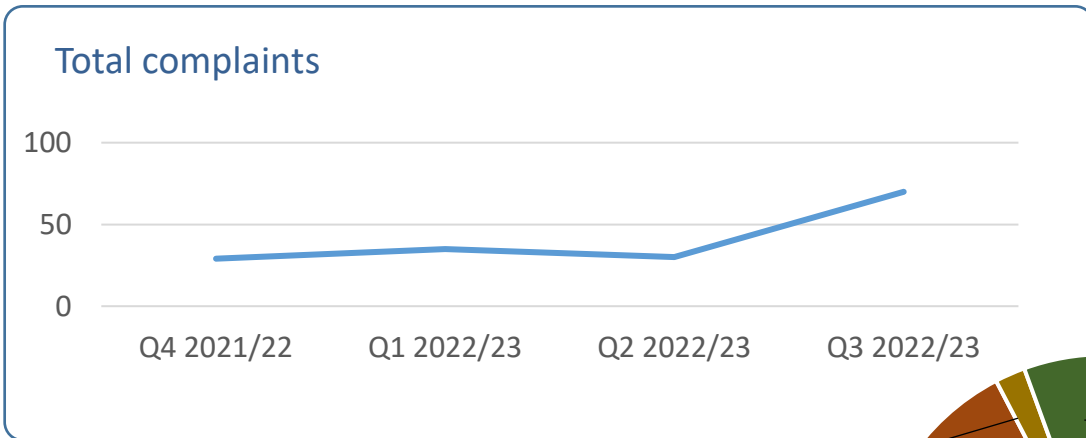
What were the key areas our residents were dissatisfied with?

- Inaccurate recordkeeping: **6**
- Decision: **8**
- Staff Conduct: **1**
- Inadequate service: **31**
- Inadequate communication: **6**

- 29 complaints were resolved outside the formal complaints process (11 social care and 18 Corporate). The Service formally managed **48 individual** complaint cases.
- Childrens’ Services Social care teams, responded to **13** complaints at Stage one and **5** cases at Stage two. These cases did not represent any identifiable trend, as the cause of dissatisfaction varied as well as the team which was seen to be at fault. Similarly, root causes were diverse; misunderstanding on what information needed to be amended in a report/assessment, alleged failure to respond to safeguarding concerns, alleged failure to fund support in a timely manner. The Social Care team received a lot of positive feedback regarding the attentiveness of staff to young persons opinions, the comprehensiveness of reports/assessments presented at Initial Child Protection Conference (ICPC) meetings.
- The SEND service received the majority of Corporate complaints. The SEND team issued 18 Stage 1 responses with 6 cases escalating to Stage 2. The complaints related to either delays in the issue or the outcome reached in an Educational Health Care (EHC) plan. Other complaints related to specialist school placement decisions. Apologies were offered for delays, but with lengthy health waiting lists, the matter was seen to be beyond the Council’s control. The other Corporate complaints were closed at Stage 1 and were not upheld, but there was an unnecessary delay in issuing one response.
- The Council received **8** LGSCO inquiries. 3 cases (one related to the LADO Service) were not investigated and two were still to be determined. 3 cases received a Final decision in Quarter 3 and found fault against the Specialist Educational Needs Service. Recommendations have included an apology, financial payments and a review of processes to ensure statutory obligations are met in relation to EHC plans.

Formal Complaints - Quarter 1 - 3 | Housing

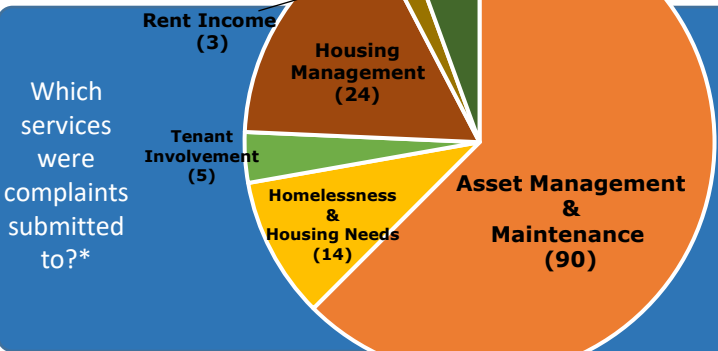
6 complaints were closed at Early Resolution and 112 at Stage 1. From 9th May 2022, the Service implemented, a new complaints, compliments and compensation policy. This policy requires all complaints to be issued a Stage 1 response. This contributed to the upward trend in cases requiring a formal response. Of the 135 complaints received, 58 were upheld, 47 not upheld and 30 undecided.



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How did we receive the complaints?

- 25 Letter or phone
- 110 Email



What were our residents dissatisfied with?*

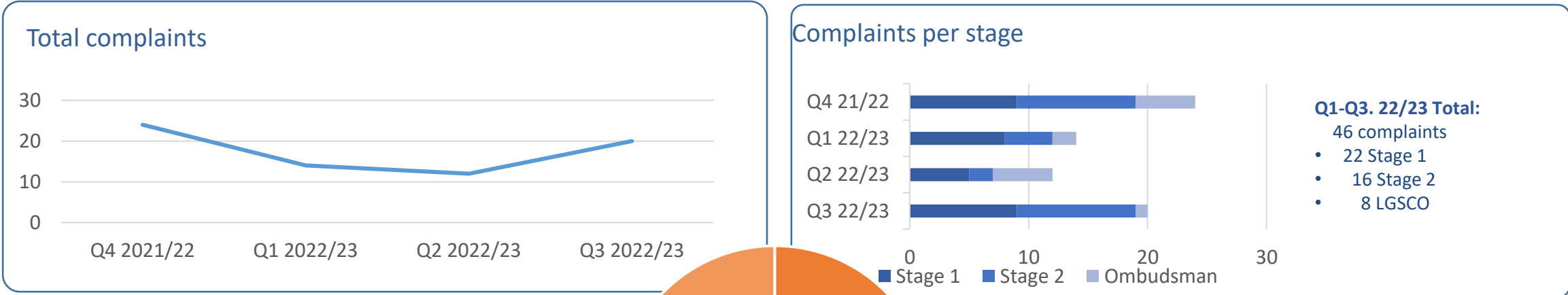
- Decision: 5
- Maintenance repairs: 53
- Inadequate service: 43
- Lack of communication: 32
- Staff Conduct: 14

- The Service formally managed **120 individual** complaint cases. * totals may not equate to complaint volumes, as complex cases require responses from more than one Service team.
- On 9th May 2022, a new Housing complaints policy was implemented. This policy removes the early resolution step and requires all cases to be issued a Stage 1 response.
- The impact of the new complaints policy cannot be underestimated; Qtr.1 saw a 30% rise in Stage 1 cases. This increase was centred around inadequate communication and service from the Asset & Management & Maintenance team. The number of complaints partially and fully upheld increased, with 10 out of 15 complaints closed in June identifying fault.
- In Qtr.2 tenants complaints dropped, but Cllr enquiries, FOIs and the amount of contact requests regarding a complaint that turned out to be a first request of service or not a complaint under the complaint policy, increased. This stretched the capacity of the Housing Services Customer Care team and was addressed with the allocation of additional resource.
- In Qtr.3, Housing Services managed 34 more Stage 1 complaints. This increase centred on complaints about the out of hours telephony service and mould/damp concerns. Whilst complaints about mould are not unusual, Qtr. 3 saw a substantial rise in tenants reporting this issue. National media coverage of a toddler's death from mould exposure within a home environment, contributed to the surge in demand to address such issues.
- In line with amendments made by the HO, the Customer Care Team are reviewing the Complaints Policy; consultation with the Tenant Volunteers and Tenant and Landlord Improvement Panel (TLIP), to determine processes for managing complaints made via social media.
- The Tenant Complaint Panel (TP) is trained and set up, with letter templates and telephone acknowledgements signed off by tenant volunteers. On a monthly basis, the TP will be presented with a performance framework report to assist with service improvement suggestions.

Formal Complaints - Quarter 1-3 | Place & Growth

345 complaints were closed at Early Resolution. There was an upward trend in the number of formal complaints submitted.

Of the 46 complaints received 2 were upheld, 43 not upheld and 1 undecided.



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How did we receive the complaints?



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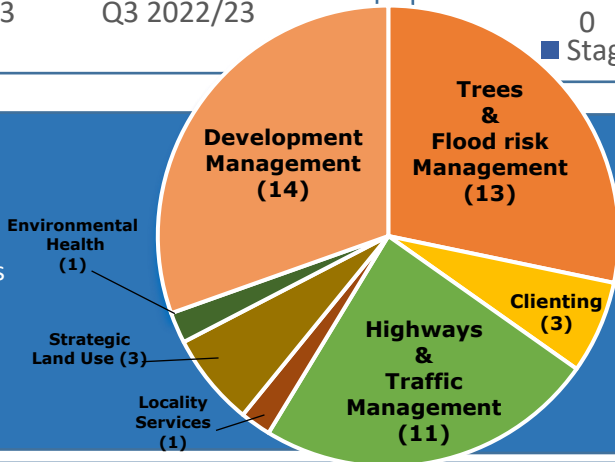
Web form



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email

Which services were complaints submitted to?



What were our residents dissatisfied with?

Decision



21

Inadequate Communication



5

Inadequate Service



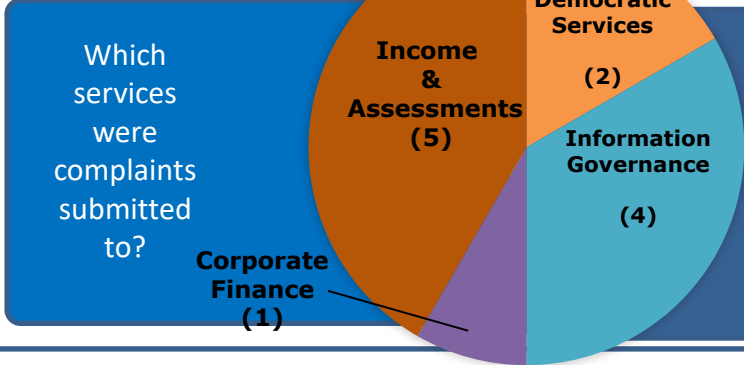
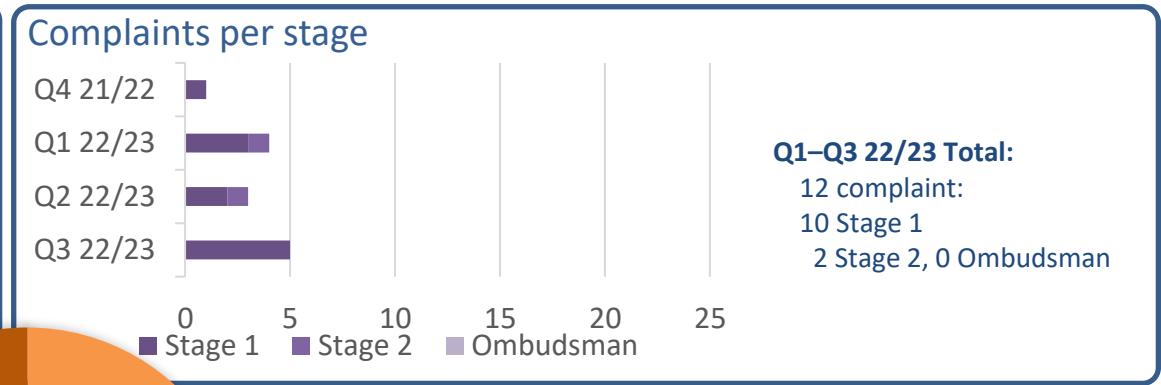
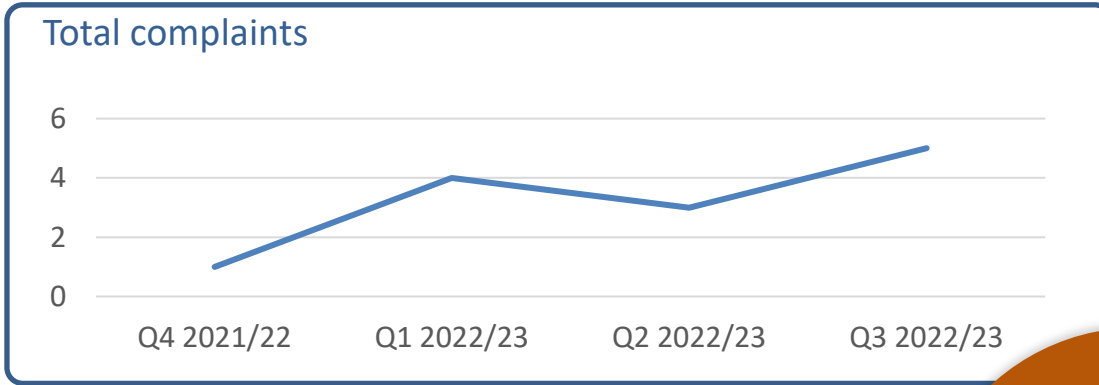
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- 345 complaints, were resolved outside the formal complaints process. The Service formally managed **36 individual** complaint cases.
- The volume of Early resolution complaints increased by 283% between quarters 1 and 2 and a further 70% in quarter 3. These complaints fell into the category of one-off incidents that by their nature have a negative impact (road/emergency utility works causing traffic and delays). The fact that these complaints did not escalate or seek a specific outcome, would suggest that submitting the complaint form was in itself a form of resolution to the matter. This conclusion is drawn from many complainants caveating their complaint with an understanding that some disruption was inevitable.
- The redesign of the complaints webpage may have contributed to the rise in these complaints about inconvenience. The webpage is now more accessible making it easier for customers to feedback their frustrations.
- The volume of Stage 1's was concentrated in Highways & Traffic Management (8) , Trees and Flood risk management (5) and Development Management (8). None of these complaints were upheld and in the main related to unhappiness with a decision made without fault. However, improvements have been identified in how to improve the tracking of complaints about trees and drainage issues. In addition to this, the Blue and Green infrastructure team plan to review the information online that details the application/procedural process. This is aimed to remove uncertainty and thereby better manage customer expectations.
- The LGSCO cases concerned Locality Services, Development Management, and Trees & Flood risk management. These cases were either not upheld or investigated due to insufficient evidence of fault. During this period, two other LGSO cases from the previous financial year were resolved without finding the Council at fault; breach of Planning control was "properly considered" and the issue of a Tree Preservation Order did not cause injustice.

Formal Complaints - Quarter 1-3 | Resources & Assets

23 complaints were closed at Early Resolution. There was an upward trend in the number of formal complaints managed. Of the 12 complaints received, 3 were upheld and 9 not upheld.

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- **23** complaints were resolved outside the formal complaints process. The Services managed **10** individual complaint cases.
- Three Stage 1 complaints, two for Income & Assessments and one for Corporate Finance team were upheld. They related to either inadequate service and/or poor communication. These were individual cases and led to customer service training, via the new online Customer Experience Learning Programme, or a reminder to officers on the purchase order process.
- None of the complaints regarding Democratic Services or Information Governance were upheld.
- The monthly recovery programme is underway to follow up on overdue accounts. The recent fall in real disposable incomes (cost of living emergency) has made negotiations particularly challenging, in resolving unpaid debt.
- By December, approximately 36,700 households received their energy rebate. £200,100 was paid out to vulnerable households under the discretionary energy rebate scheme and collection for Council tax and Business rates was on track. The Income & Assessments team received 141 'Good' ratings via phone feedback on Gov metrics.

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