

## Formal Complaints – Annual Report Summary

**2022/23**



# Formal Complaints | Executive Summary

78% of complaints were resolved early without formal escalation to Stage 1. Across all stages, 32.5% were upheld/partially upheld, 55% not upheld and 12.5% undetermined.

## Deliverables and business context for 2022 - 23

- Complaints are complex and challenging:
    - Multiple stakeholders, require coordinated communication between the Council, utility companies, and residents
    - Waiting lists for care commissioned services, delay SEN health reports and EHC plans
    - Cold weather conditions, heavy rain and freezing conditions, saw a rise in potholes and delays in road maintenance. The weather also caused a rise in demand for tenant maintenance repairs
    - Media focus on one-off events and topical issues such as mould and potholes cause spikes in Service demand
  - Place & Growth dedicate resource to streamline complaint management and improve customer experiences
  - Housing Services received 51% of all complaints, which is higher than previous years. This is directly related to the introduction of the new Housing Ombudsman complaints policy which removed the early resolution stage. Prior to this policy change, Housing resolved most complaints informally.
- 22 Complaints about inadequate service or poor communication are usually resolved at Stage 1. Most Stage 2 complaints are not upheld because the decision was reached without fault.
- 79% of all complaints resolved early, related to Place & Growth services. These complaints reported incidents that disrupted people's routines and/or resulted in poor one-off experiences e.g. road/utility works causing traffic delays, rude construction workers, perceived lack of road work signage. Whilst no procedural failure was found, customers felt their interests were ignored.

Directorate	Total Formal	Early Resolution
ASC	35	32
Chief Executive Office	8	35
Housing	198	6 (from April 2022 only)
Children's Services	71	53
Place & Growth	65	587
Resources & Assets	14	33
<b>(344 Unique case) TOTALS</b>	<b>391</b>	<b>746</b>

## 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 3C values.
- There has been a continuous rise in cases resolved early. This suggests confidence in the complaints process, as more customers use it to have their frustrations heard and understood.

## Key actions completed 2022/23:

- 122 colleagues completed the 3 C workshops. This has improved the quality of complaint responses and with fewer Stage 2 escalations, higher customer satisfaction.
- Complaint policy re-written using 3 C principles.
- Successful implementation of the Housing Ombudsman complaint handling code.
- Improved customer/colleague awareness of the Council's complaint process.

## Areas of focus for 2023/24:

- Housing Ombudsman's 'Make things right' campaign.
- LGSCO complaint handling code introduction, that is earmarked for quarter 3.
- Consider impact of Ombudsman financial remedies.
- Consider data on timeliness of Council responses.

# Formal complaints | Insight



## Environment

- May 2022, Housing Services began managing complaints in line with the Housing Ombudsman's complaint handling code. This required the Council to respond to all complaints at Stage 1 and resulted in Housing Services making up a larger percentage of all complaints received by the Council; 51% as compared to averaging between 25-30% over 2021-22.
- The death of a 2-year-old boy, Awaab Ishak, in 2020 and a subsequent coroner report in November 2022, 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 was introduced.
- Adverse weather caused delays to planned pothole and road maintenance. The re-scheduling of these works was impacted by National Highways planned improvements on the M4 network. This meant the Council had to first seek agreement from National Highways on the closure of relevant motorway slip roads, before it made its own road closures. The postponement of these works caused frustration and a rise in complaints about pothole related vehicle damage.



## Ownership

- ASC recruited an Autism Lead to review the staff training programme on neurodiverse conditions and how this may impact delivery of service. This ensured clients with neurodevelopmental conditions receive information they can access and understand.
- The Children's Social Care team have managed to de-escalate complaints by being pro-active in addressing dissatisfaction early. The effort to understand the concerns of the complainant and agree on an appropriate resolution, mitigated the number of formal complaints submitted. Responses are also more transparent; where something has gone wrong, an apology is issued early with an explanation on what will be done to reduce a reoccurrence.
- 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 issue.



## 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, improved customer understanding of the Housing complaints policy and what they can expect when they complain.

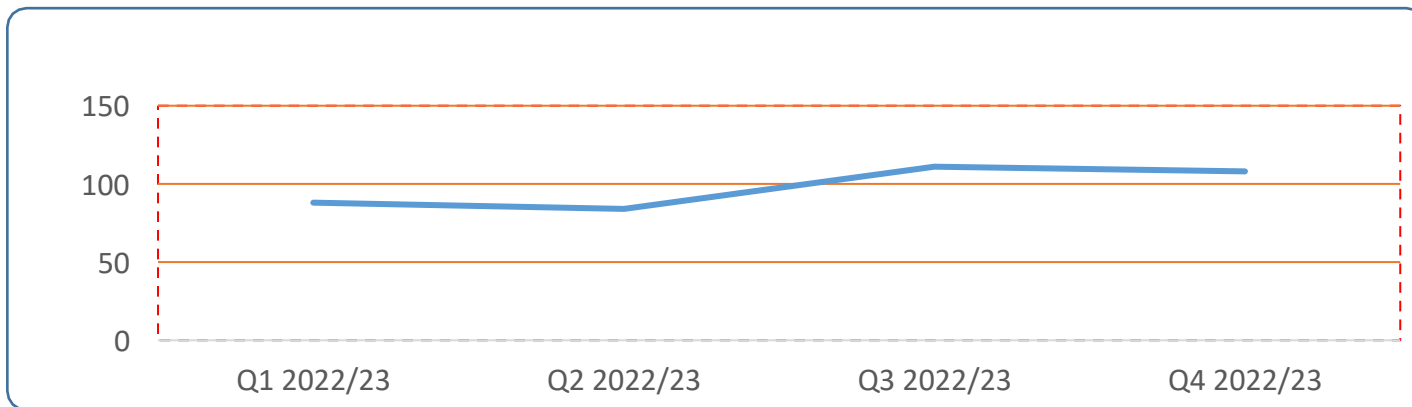


## Suggested Improvements

- To better evaluate the volume of complaints received, the reporting changed to not include undecided cases raised in a previous quarter. This reduced the number of cases recorded at the LGSCO/HO stage, because their investigations often exceeded 3 months.
- Directorate complaint representatives, attended a LGSCO workshop in May 2022 on effective complaints handling.
- Three C's Writing workshops were made available to all staff. By the end of the March 2023, 122 colleagues had completed the workshop.
- Regular internal communication on what tools and services are available to officers in managing complaints effectively e.g. Quality assessors .

# Formal Complaints | Volumes

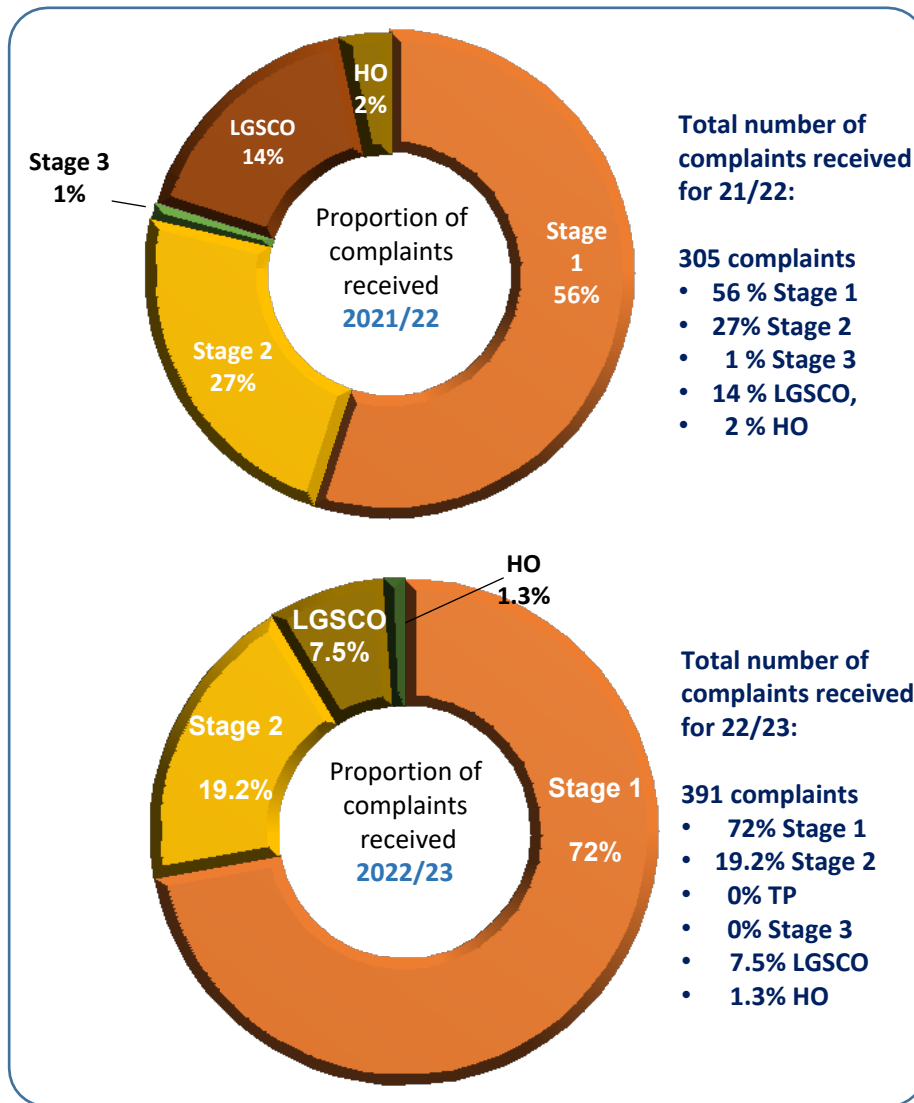
The number of formal complaints increased (28.2%). This was driven by the rise in Stage 1 complaints submitted (63%) and the change this year to only reporting on new cases received in any particular quarter.



Reporting is compared to previous Quarter

Period	Stage 1	Stage 2	TP <sup>i)</sup>	Stage 3 <sup>ii)</sup>	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	77	24	0	0	6	1	108	Green
Year end 2022/23	282	75	0	0	29	5	391	Blue

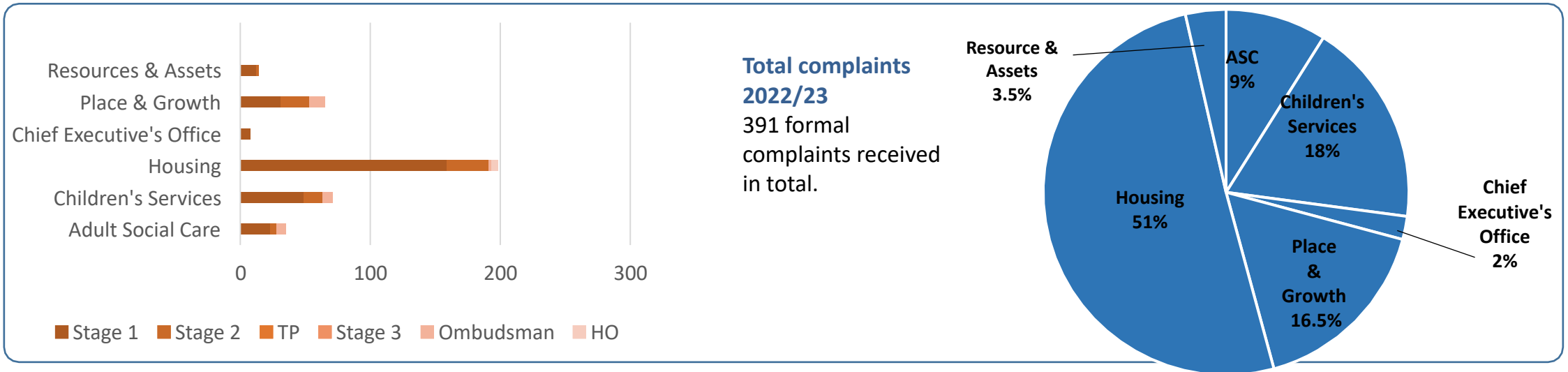
<sup>i)</sup>Tenant complaint Panel <sup>ii)</sup> Complaints at Stage 3 only apply to Children's statutory social care



- The number of Stage 1 complaints increased by 109 cases (63%). This rise resulted from the introduction of the Housing complaint handling code.
- There were seven fewer (8.5%) Stage 2 requests, thirteen fewer (31%) LGSCO cases and one less Housing Ombudsman inquiry. This is noteworthy as it indicates greater satisfaction with the management of complaints at early resolution and Stage 1.
- The Council managed 347 unique cases.

## Formal Complaints | Directorates and Service areas

Housing and Children's Services received the highest volume of complaints at 51% and 18% respectively. Since the introduction of the Housing Ombudsman complaint handling code, Housing increased its share of total formal complaints submitted.



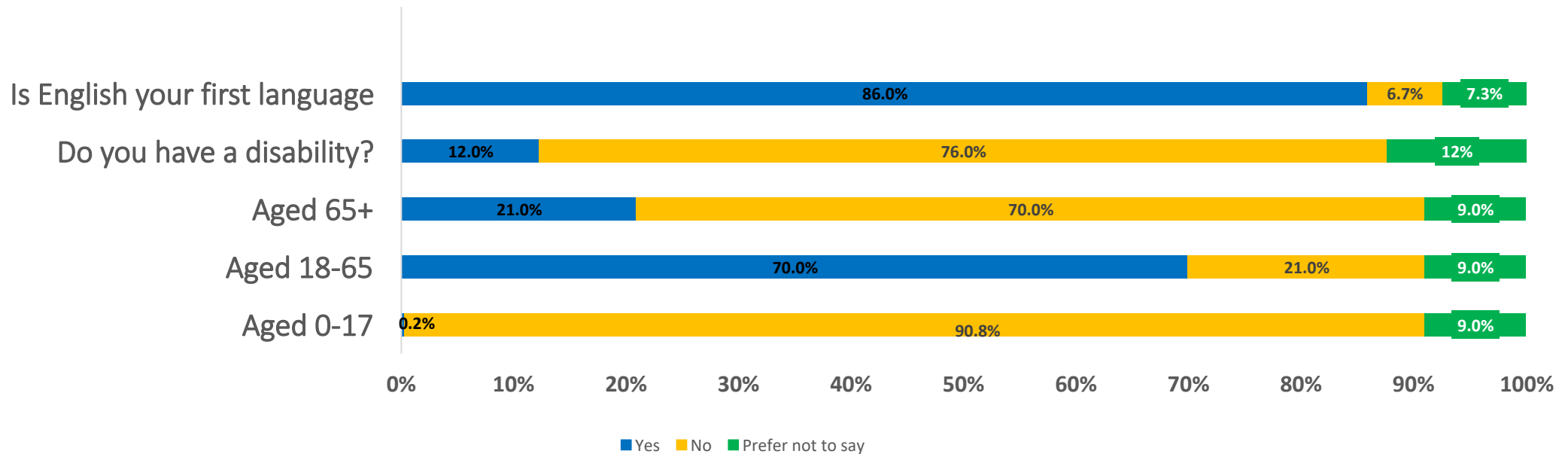
- **ASC** complaints totalled thirty-five, with twenty-three at Stage 1, five Stage 2 requests and seven LGSCO cases.
- **Place and Growth** complaints totalled sixty-five, with thirty-one at Stage 1, twenty-two at Stage 2 and twelve LGSCO cases.
- **Resources & Assets** complaints totalled fourteen, with twelve at Stage 1, and two escalating to Stage 2.
- **Housing** complaints totalled 198, with 159 at Stage 1, thirty-two Stage 2's, two LGSCO cases and five Housing Ombudsman inquiries.
- **Children's Services** complaints totalled seventy-one, with forty-nine Stage 1's, fourteen at Stage 2 and eight LGSCO cases.
- **Chief Executive's Office** complaints totalled eight complaints, all at Stage 1.

## Equality monitoring data | 2022-2023

The following data was collected from 1252 completed/partially completed online complaint forms:

- 6.7% 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.\*

26



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

# CUSTOMER COMPLIMENTS

"Since Brittany became involved, she has been very proactive in trying to action and support as well as working with us to find possible solutions, which we have been grateful for as I know she is very busy and has heavy case load"

*SEND team February 2023*

"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 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*

"Just to say what an amazing day we had last Wednesday planting trees. The children all loved it and most of them have memorised where their tree is and named it! The men were fantastic with them and have done a brilliant job!"

*Westende Junior School for  
work by Green Infrastructure  
team  
January 2023*

"very caring, understanding & highly professional. An absolute credit to her profession and to the position she holds at Wokingham Borough Council"

*ASC team February 2023*

27 "Please pass on my thanks and regards to the 'Sweepers'. They probably don't get too many thank-yous, so please let them know that I am really chuffed to have had all your help"

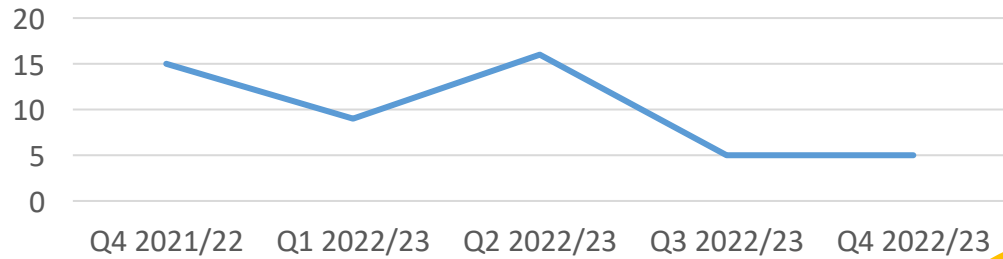
*Clienting team January 2023*



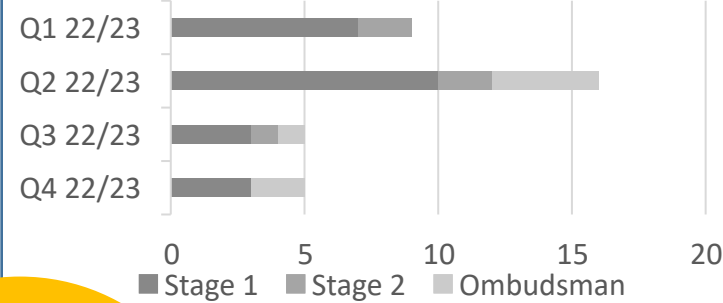
# Formal Complaints | ASC

32 complaints were closed at Early Resolution. ASC managed thirty-five formal complaints of which 10 were upheld/partially upheld and 25 not upheld.

Total Formal complaints



Complaints per stage



Total complaints 2021/22

- 34 complaints
- 21 Stage 1
- 9 Stage 2
- 4 LGSCO

Total complaints 2022/23

- 35 complaints
- 23 Stage 1
- 5 Stage 2
- 7 LGSCO

28

## How did we receive the complaints?



12

Web form



2

Email/Post

Which services were complaints submitted to?

**Adult Social Care & Safeguarding (35)**

## What were our residents dissatisfied with?

Safeguarding



1

Poor communication



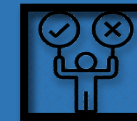
6

Financial assessment/decision



16

Decision



2

Inadequate Service



10

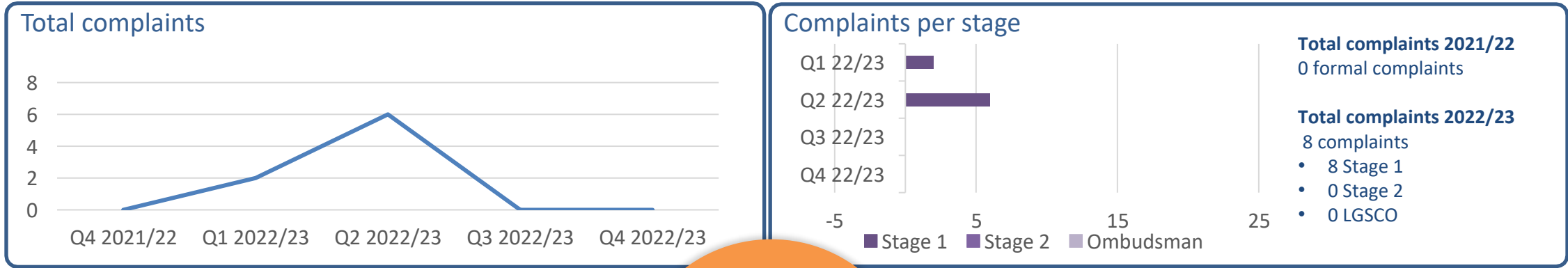
- The Service resolved **32** complaints outside the formal complaints process. The number of individual cases totalled 33. Over the year there was a downward trend in the volume of complaints received with the majority resolved at Stage 1. Of the Stage 2's, one case found fault in how the invoice payments were calculated.
- The complaints showed the importance of providing clear guidance and transparency around specialist housing/accommodation, and in how the Council determined it's discharge of duty rate. There were instances of insufficient collaboration between teams who assess and fund support. To remedy this, workers were 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.
- There were 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.
- 7 new Ombudsman inquiries were made in Quarter 2. Three cases were closed without investigation because there was no evidence of fault. On the other four cases, which related to safeguarding, care home options and the service offered to a neuro-diverse client, one case was upheld for an inaccurate assessment. The complaint from the previous year reached a decision and was upheld, resulting in an apology, procedural changes and a financial remedy.



# Formal Complaints | 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.

29



### How did we receive the complaints?

- 0 Via phone
- 8 Via webform/email

### Which services were complaints submitted to?

**Libraries Service (8)**

### What were our residents dissatisfied with?

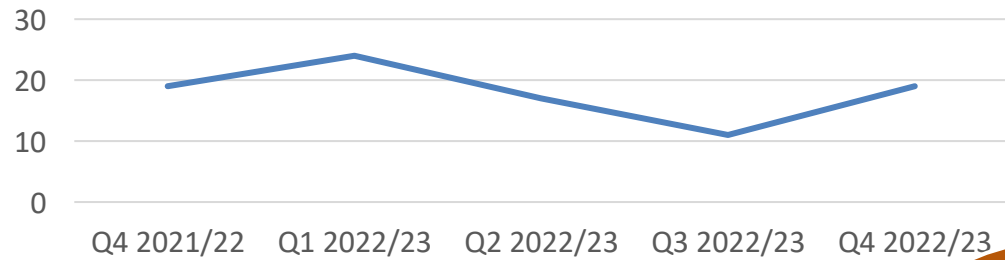
**Decision 8**

- 33 complaints were resolved outside the formal complaints process. The libraries Service formally managed 8 individual cases.
- Eight 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.
- Callers to the Customer Service team, can 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 Quarters 3 and 4.

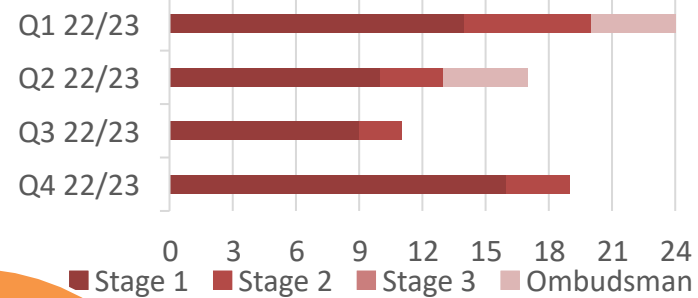
# Formal Complaints | Children's Services

53 complaints were closed at Early resolution. Children's Services managed seventy-one formal complaints, of which 33 were not upheld, 22 upheld/partially upheld and 16 undetermined.

Total complaints



Complaints per stage



Total complaints 2021/22

68 complaints

- 35 Stage 1
- 17 Stage 2
- 2 Stage 3
- 14 LGSCO

Total complaints 2022/23

71 complaints

- 49 Stage 1
- 14 Stage 2
- 0 Stage 3
- 8 LGSCO

How did we receive the complaints?

30



22

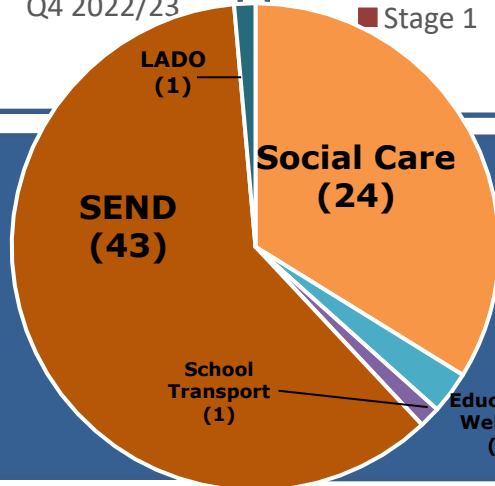
Web form



49

Email/post

Which services were complaints submitted to?



What were the key areas our residents were dissatisfied with?

Inaccurate recordkeeping



7

Inadequate communication



10

Decision



11

Inadequate service/delays



41

Staff Conduct

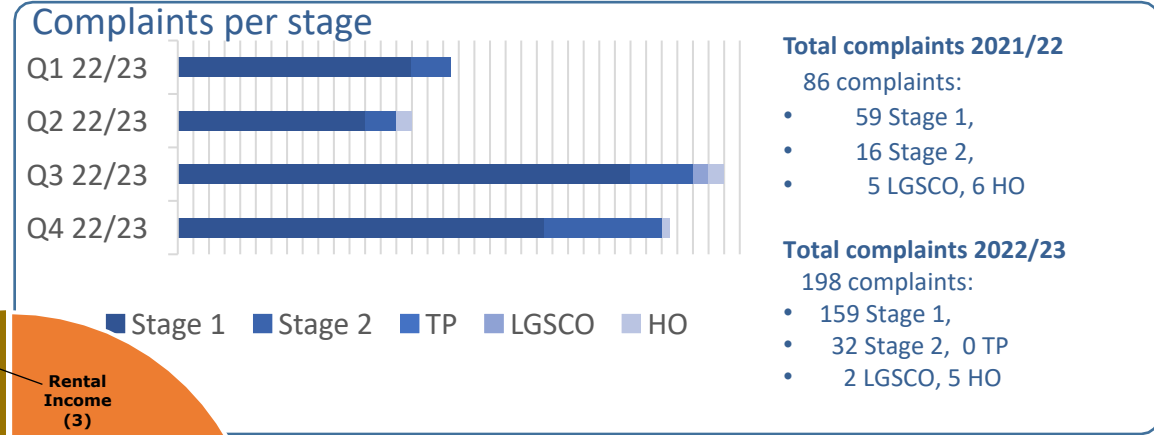
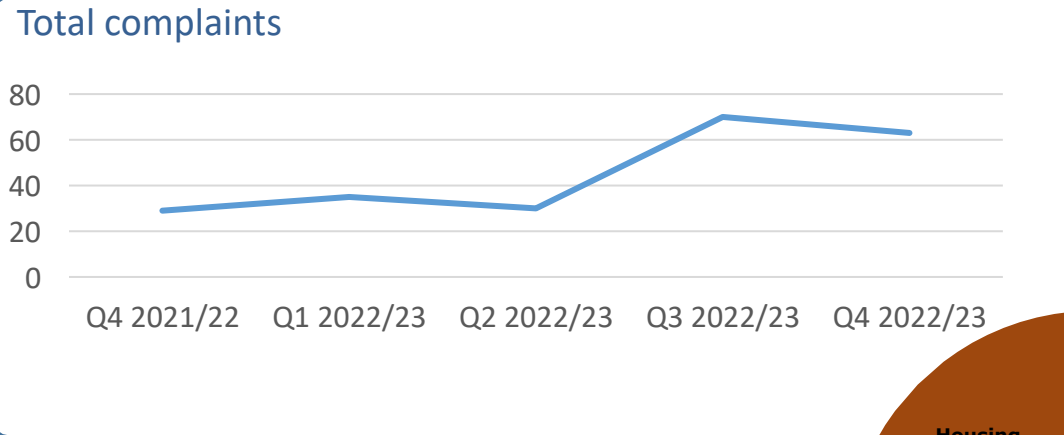


2

- 53 complaints were resolved outside the formal complaints process (24 social care and 29 Corporate). The Service managed 65 individual complaint cases.
- Childrens' Services Social care teams, responded to 16 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 positive feedback for being attentive to young person opinions and the comprehensiveness of reports/assessments presented at Initial Child Protection Conference (ICPC) meetings.
- SEND issued 31 Stage 1 responses with 9 cases escalating to Stage 2. The complaints related to delays in issuing and/or reviewing an Educational Health Care (EHC) plan. The delays were often caused by demand for health reports exceeding the capacity of the local NHS trust. The number of complaints received for the SEND Service represented 2.5% of the entire EHCP cohort.
- The other Corporate complaints were closed at Stage 1 and were not upheld, but there was an unnecessary delay in issuing one response. The fourth quarter saw a reduction in the number of cases escalating to Stage 2 and the LGSCO, suggesting greater satisfaction with Stage 1 responses.
- The Council received 8 LGSCO inquiries. 3 cases (one related to the LADO Service) were not investigated and one was still to be determined. 4 cases received a Final decision in Quarter 3 and found fault against SEN and the school transport service. Recommendations included an apologies, financial payments and a review of processes to ensure statutory obligations are met in relation to EHC plans.

# Formal Complaints | Housing

6 complaints were closed at Early Resolution and 159 at Stage 1. From 9<sup>th</sup> 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 198 complaints received, 88 were upheld/partially upheld, 80 not upheld and 30 undecided.

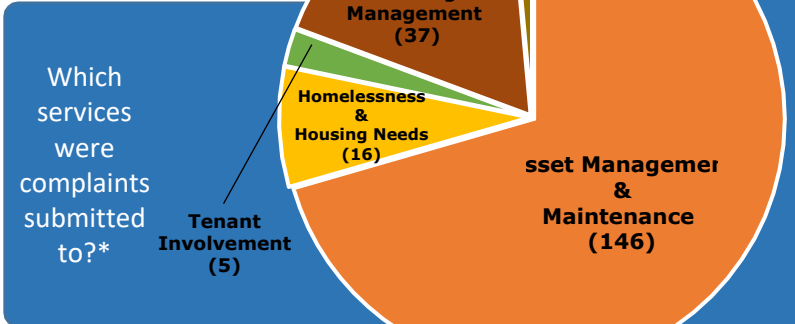
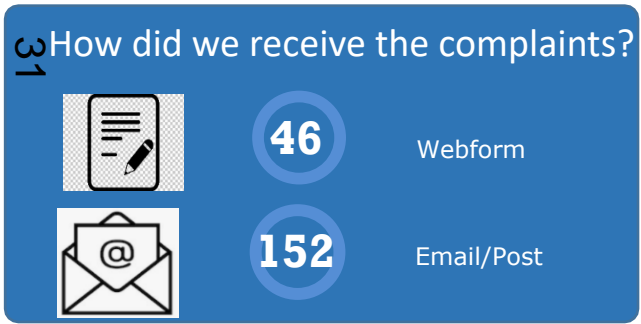


#### Total complaints 2021/22

- 86 complaints:
- 59 Stage 1,
  - 16 Stage 2,
  - 5 LGSCO, 6 HO

#### Total complaints 2022/23

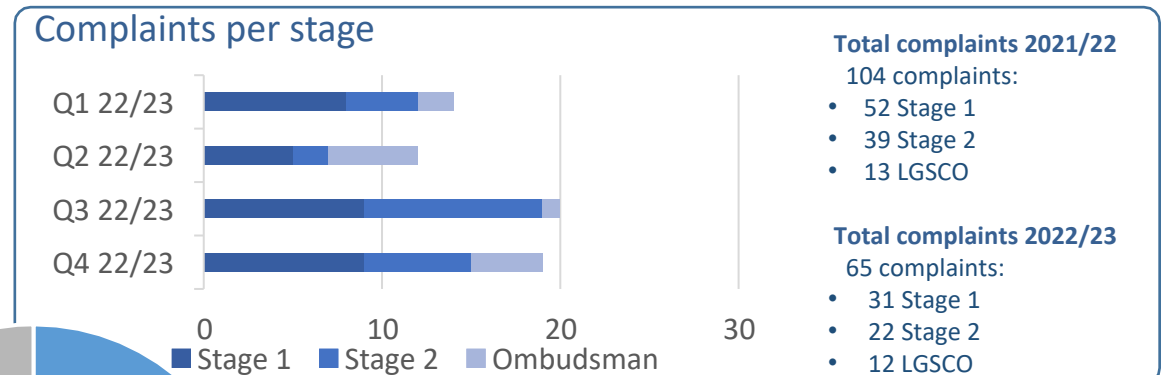
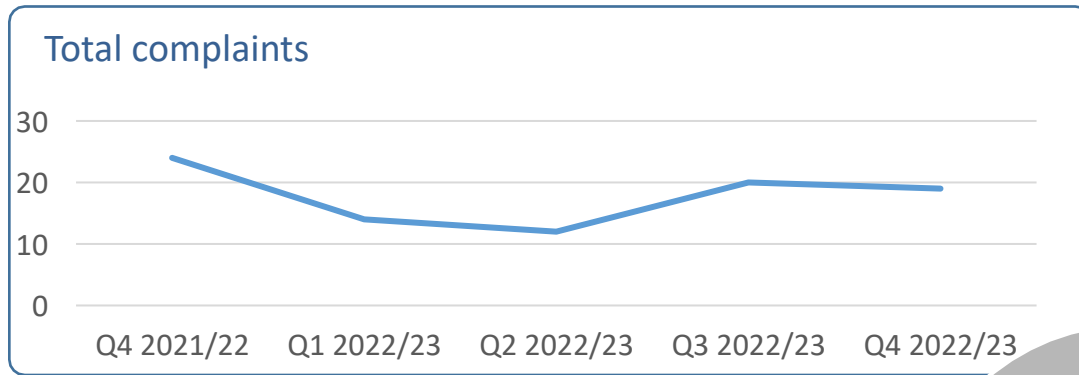
- 198 complaints:
- 159 Stage 1,
  - 32 Stage 2, 0 TP
  - 2 LGSCO, 5 HO



- The Service formally managed **171 individual** complaint cases and received 113 compliments. \* totals may not add up, as complex cases can involve more than one issue and Service.
- On 9<sup>th</sup> 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 tenant complaints dropped, but there was an increase in Cllr enquiries, FOIs and the amount of contact regarding a complaint that turned out to be a first request of service. This stretched the capacity of the Housing Services Customer Care team and was addressed with 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 Qtr.4, there were fewer Stage 1's, but more Stage 2's. because of delays in completing resolution outcomes at Stage 1. These delays arise from contractor's priorities shifting daily. The Customer Care team now closely monitor timeframes and request updates to remind Service teams of approaching deadline resolutions.
- The updated version of the Housing Complaints, Compliments and Compensation policy was approved by TLIP to ensure compliance with the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code. This policy update will be presented in a new accessible format (agreed with Tenant Volunteers) and will then be uploaded to the website.
- The 'Make things right' campaign was launched by the government and Department for Levelling up. This campaign has a strong presence on social media platforms and encourages tenants to raise complaints to the Housing Ombudsman. The Service are therefore prepared for an increase in complaint inquiries from the Housing Ombudsman.

# Formal Complaints | Place & Growth

587 complaints were closed at Early Resolution. Place & Growth managed sixty-five formal complaints, of which 5 were upheld/partially upheld, 59 not upheld and one still to be determined.



32

## How did we receive the complaints?



23

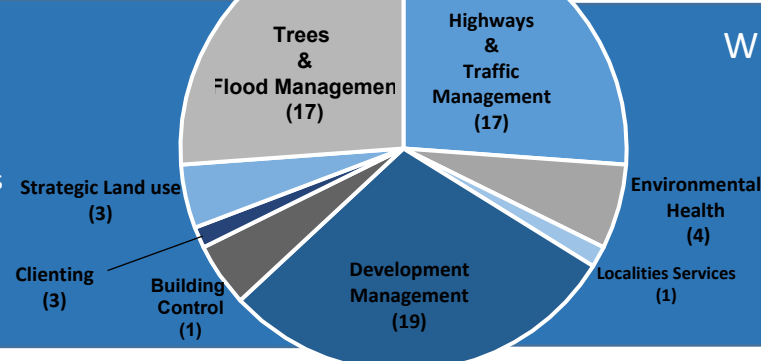
Web form



42

Email/Post

Which services were complaints submitted to?



## What were our residents dissatisfied with?

Decision



32

Inadequate Service



11

Inadequate communication

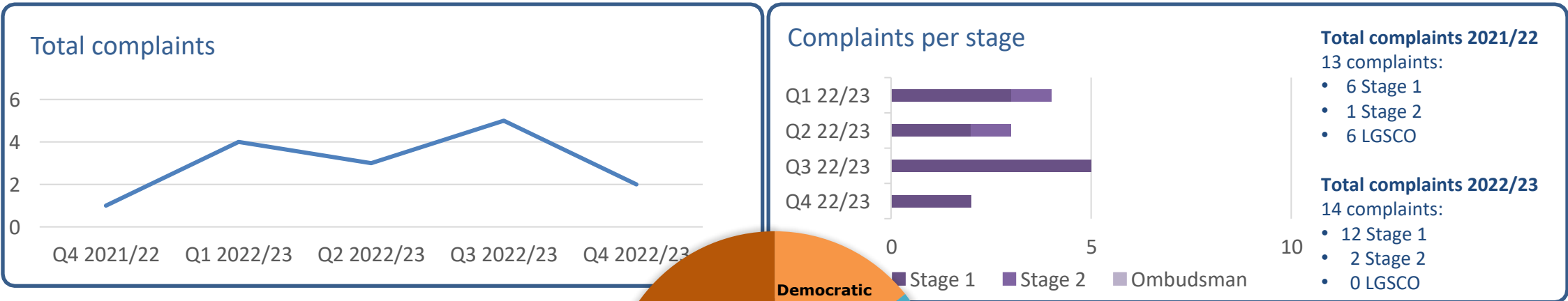


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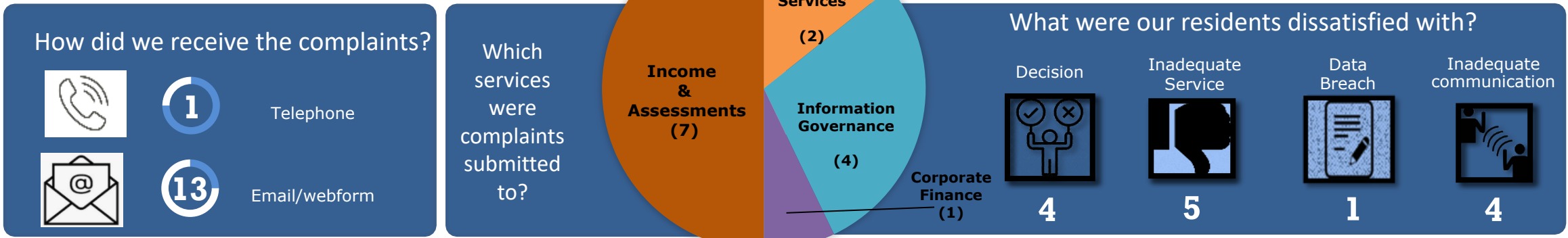
- 587 complaints, were resolved outside the formal complaints process. The Service formally managed 55 individual complaint cases.
- Compared to last year's total the volume of Early resolution complaints increased by 376%. These complaints centred on incidents that caused an immediate negative customer experience, with the majority allocated to the waste/recycling team and Highways. Regarding waste, many complaints centred on overflows at flat bin stores, garden collections deprioritised because of freezing weather and the behaviour of crews. Complaints were also raised about the blue bag rollout. For context, of the weekly collections made from 70,000 properties, 99.9% were completed successfully .
- Many complaints about road traffic diversions, were submitted with an acceptance that disruption was inevitable. These matters were resolved informally and shows a degree of customer confidence in having their voice heard through the complaints process. The high number of complaints resolved early by the Highways team, was down to improved complaint tracking that allowed for swifter replies and de-escalation.
- Of the thirty-one Stage 1 complaints, twenty-two escalated to Stage 2. Most of these complaints were not upheld and in the main related to unhappiness with a decision made without fault.
- Two formal complaints were upheld against Highways and Traffic Management and Environmental Health for inadequate communication. The Blue and Green infrastructure team plan to review the information online that details the application/procedural process, so that customer expectation are better managed.
- None of the Stage 2 cases were upheld.
- 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. One case remained undetermined. Two LGSO cases from the previous financial year were resolved without finding the Council at fault; breach of Planning control was "properly considered" and no injustice was caused by the issue of a Tree Preservation Order.

# Formal Complaints | Resources & Assets

33 complaints were closed at Early Resolution. Resources & Assets managed fourteen formal complaints, of which 4 were upheld and 10 not upheld.



33



- **33** complaints were resolved outside the formal complaints process. The Service managed **12 individual** cases.
- Of the four complaints upheld, all were at Stage 1 (three for Income & Assessments and one for Corporate Finance). They related to either inadequate service and/or poor communication. These were one-off instances and resulted in additional 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 recovery team have put processes in place to support those customers who have arrears or outstanding invoices on their accounts and are being affected by the rapid change in the cost of living. Customers are offered various payment options / support and where relevant signpost to debt advisers or key stakeholders.
- 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.
- The Service managed the delivery of over 70,000 annual council tax bills and 4,500 business rate bills. Payment grants have been administered of £400 and £200, to nearly five hundred eligible households totalling £145,600.

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