

Annual Complaints Report

Corporate Complaints

1 April 2024 - 31 March 2025

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Summary of complaints received

Environment, Sustainability and Leisure

1738 Stage One Complaints Received
210 Stage Two Investigations Received
35 Ombudsman Cases Received

Resources

2435 Stage One Complaints Received
259 Stage Two Investigations Received
21 Ombudsman Cases Received

Housing

7866 Stage One Complaints Received
1577 Stage Two Investigations Received
210 Ombudsman Cases Received

Children and Adults

398 Stage One Complaints Received
77 Stage Two Investigations Received
35 Ombudsman Cases Received

Governance and Assurance

31 Stage One Complaints Received
4 Stage Two Investigations Received
0 Ombudsman Cases Received

Strategy and Communities

9 Stage Once Complaints Received
0 Stage Two Investigations Received
0 Ombudsman Cases Received

Preface

This report covers the four Directorates receiving the most Corporate Complaints for which the Corporate Complaints Policy applies. Governance and Assurance, and Strategy and Communities are comprised mainly of internal services, therefore the Corporate Complaints Policy does not apply to those services, they are therefore not discussed in great detail in this report.

Introduction

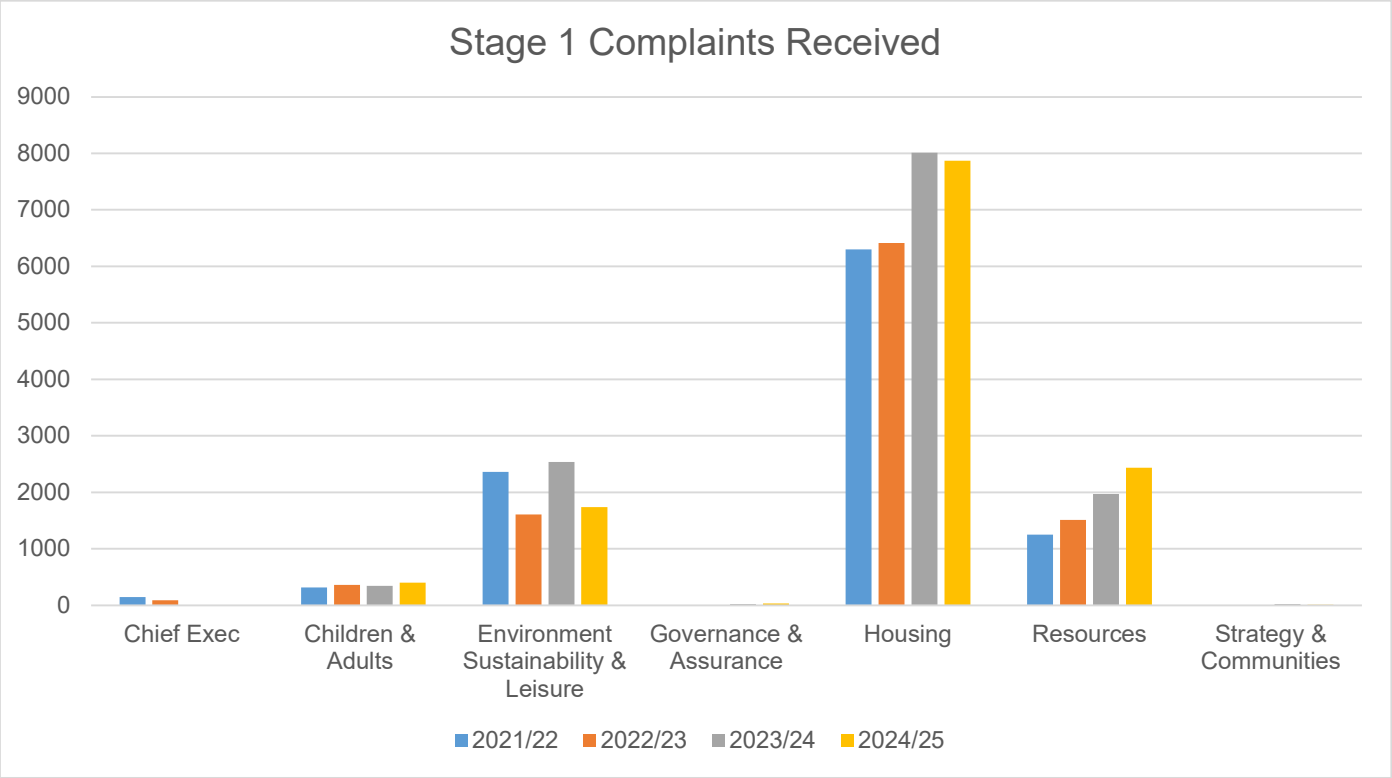
In line with the Ombudsman guidelines the Council actively encourages complaints and levels of dissatisfaction with the Council to enable ongoing learning and service improvements. The Council has reviewed the approach to complaints and recognises there remain significant improvements to be made in levels of responsiveness to ensure residents and those advocating on their behalf receive timely responses to issues. There have been particular challenges in some areas and changes have been made to ensure significant performance improvement is achieved in 2025/6.

This report outlines where there are performance challenges given the increased volumes of complaints in some areas. There remains a commitment at all levels within the organisation to tackle those issues head on and ensure that the customer experience is improved. In 2025 the Council will be refreshing its Customer Experience plan ensuring common standards are improved across the board and new technology is embraced ensuring ease of access to service delivery. The Council is also committed to maintaining support for those most vulnerable in our Communities.

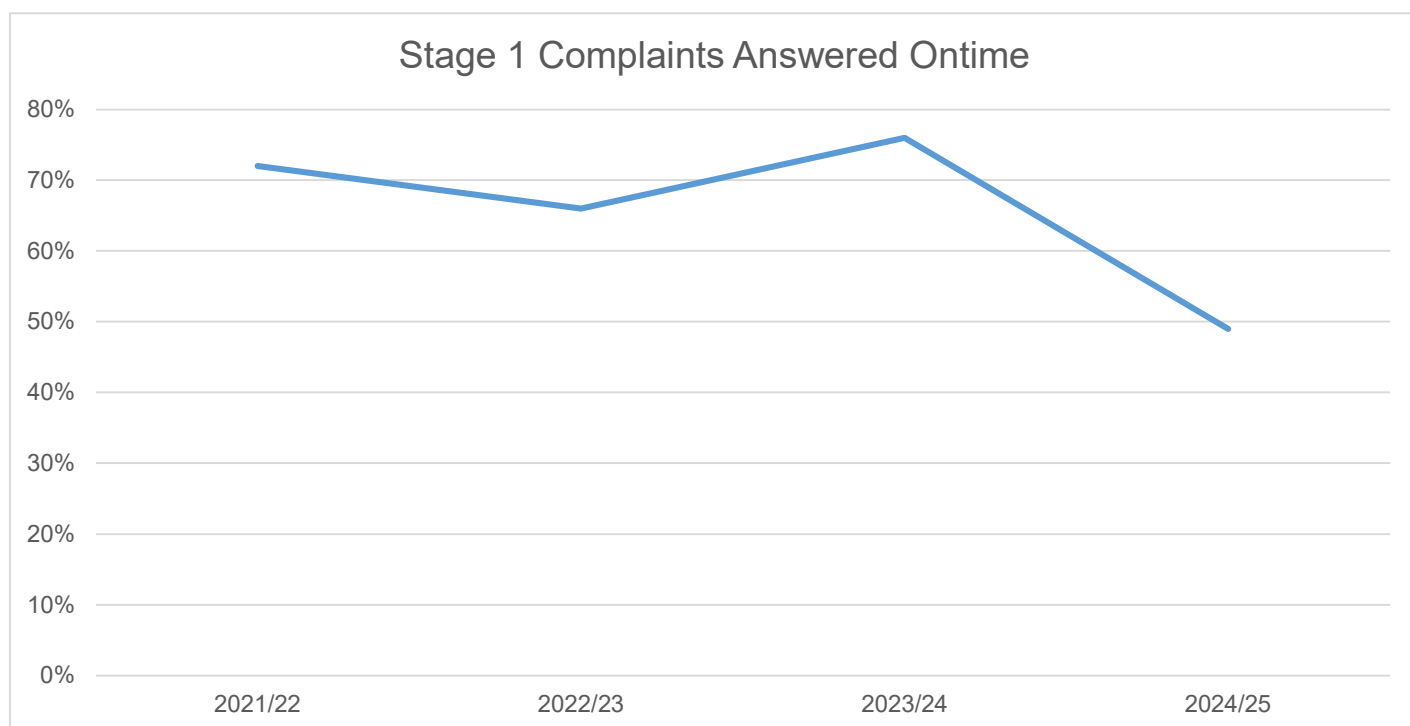
In those cases that are escalated to the Ombudsman the Council works closely with them to ensure we listen to independent reviews of our responses and learn from our mistakes.

Lastly its also important that we maintain the quality of our responses and the Council continues to work to maintain and improve the quality of our engagement with residents.

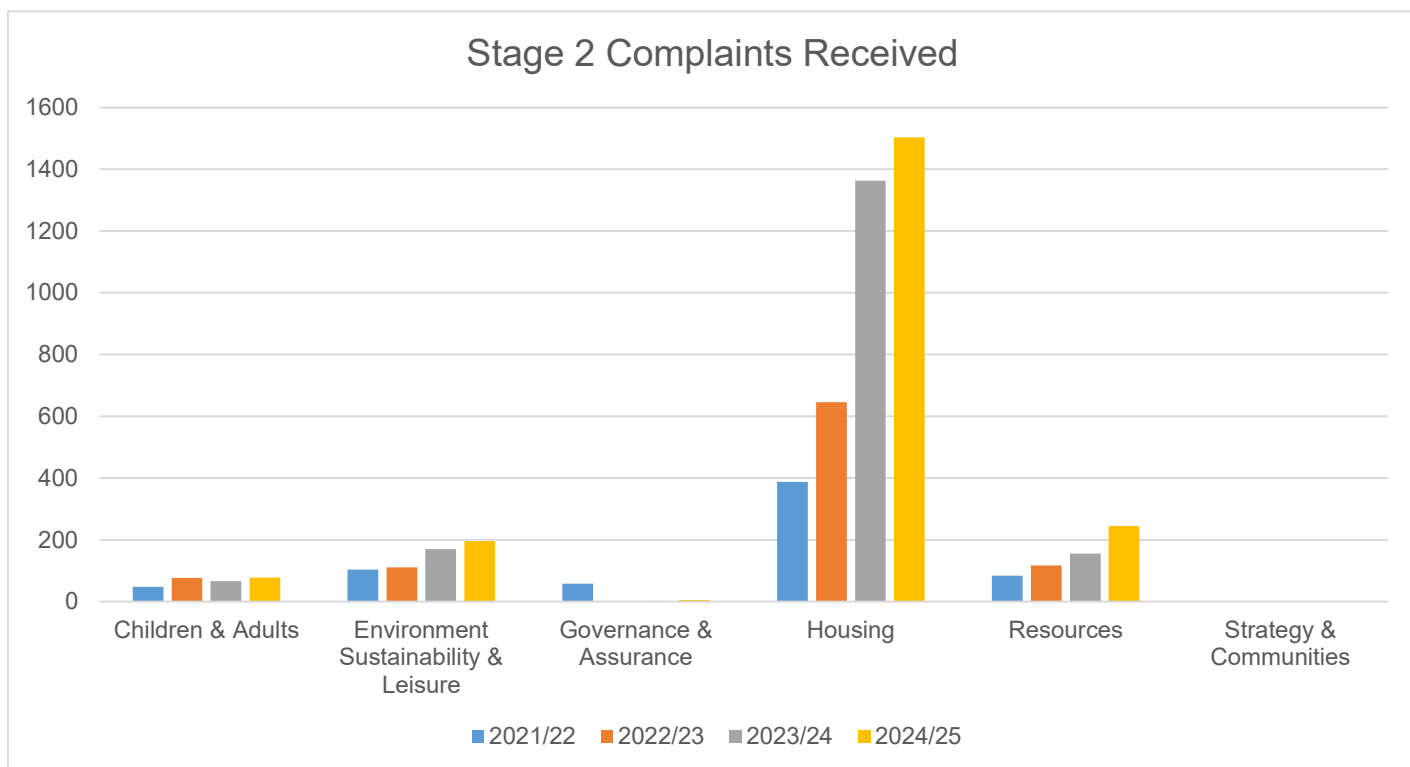
Council Wide Performance



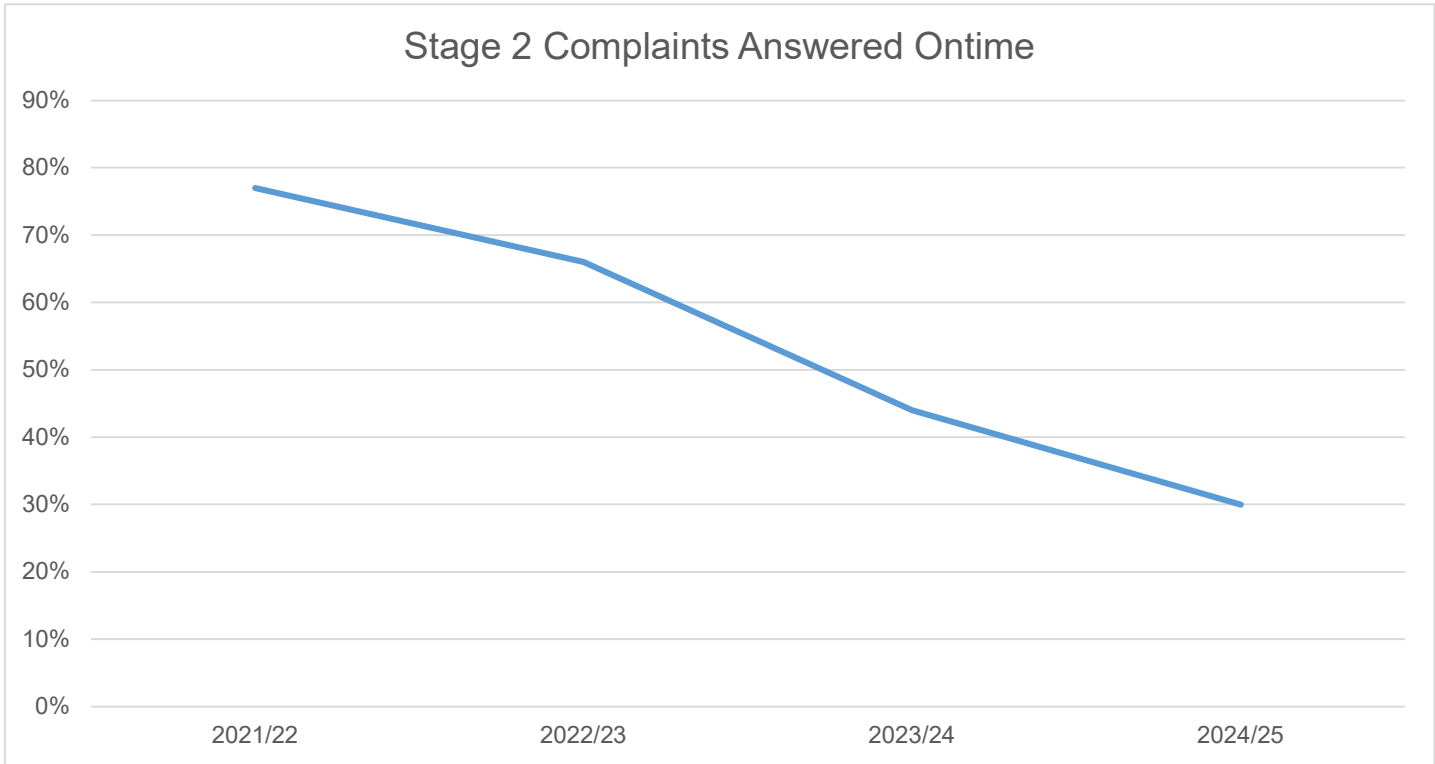
The Council received 12,311 complaints in 2024/25 compared to 12,599 in 2023/24, this is a 2.3% decrease. The numbers remain high in comparison to 2022/23 (9616).



Overall performance of responsiveness to complaints within timescale has fallen in 2024/25. Its worth noting that in July 2024 the council made the decision to move to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman new complaint handling code, which included responding to complaints within **10 working days**, this is in line with the Housing Ombudsman's complaint handling code. The code does not come into effect until April 2025 but the Council decided to align all services together. This has impacted the responded-on time performance, work continues to improve this performance.

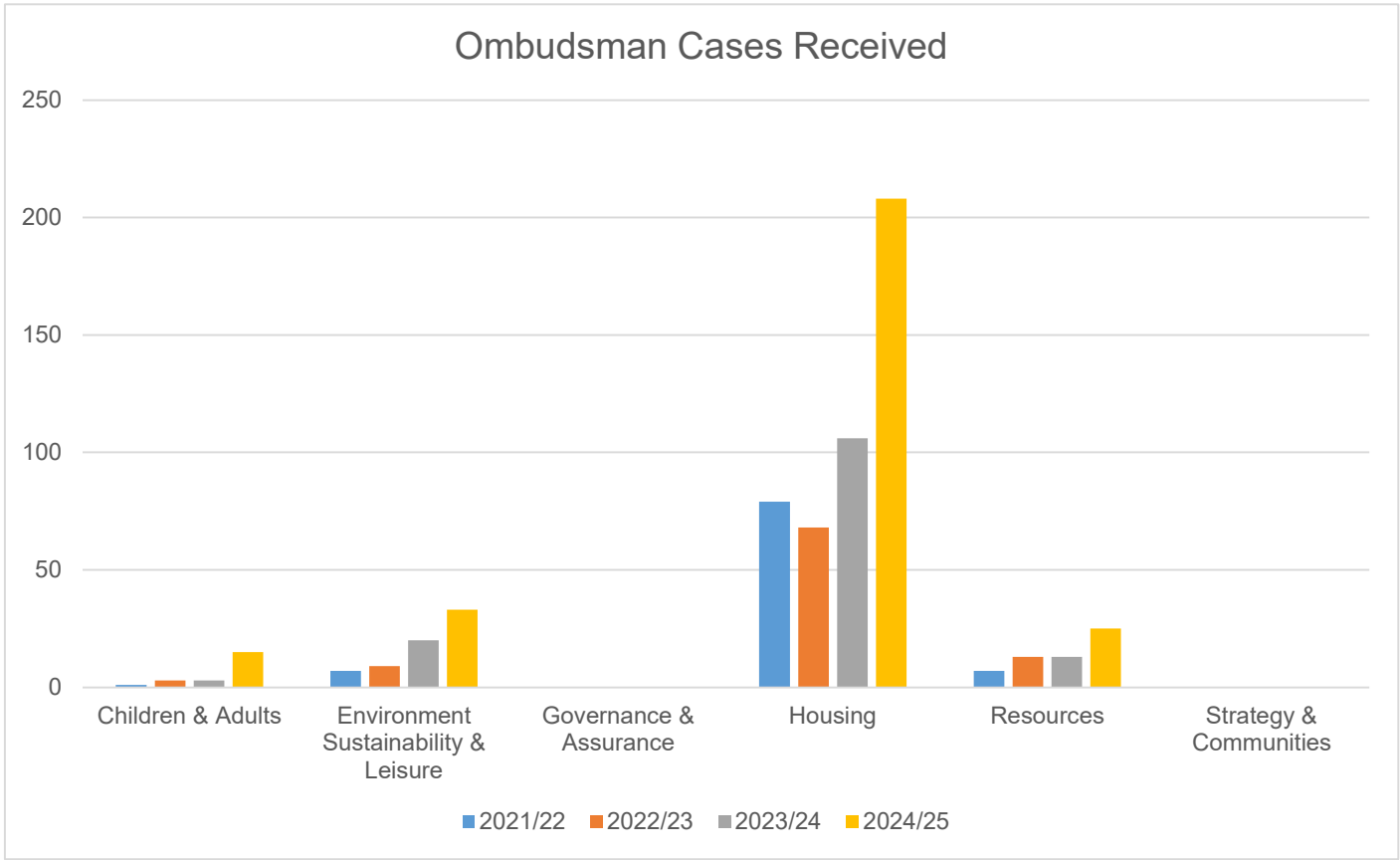


The Council received 1996 Stage 2 Complaints in 2024/25 a 15% increase compared to 2023/24 (1734). All departments received an increase in Stage 2 Complaints received.



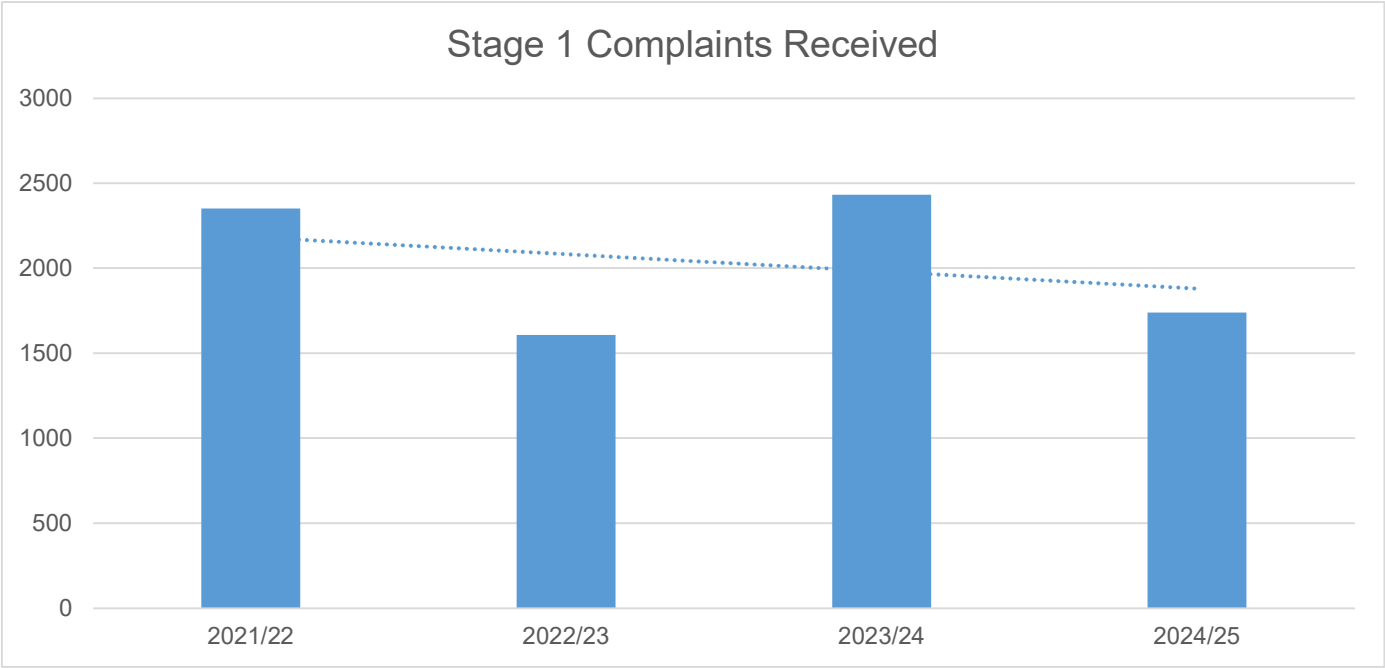
Overall performance in closing Stage 2 Complaints on time has dropped. This has coincided with a dramatic increase in cases received and a move to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman complaint handling code, moving the target timeframe from 25 working days to 20 working days.

In 2024/25 due to the sharp increase in Stage 2 Complaints extra resources were deployed to reduce 450 complaints. Work remains in progress to improve the number of complaints closed on time, while maintaining a high quality of responses and a low upheld rate at the Ombudsman stage.



The council received 281 ombudsman cases from both the Housing and Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman in 2024/25, this is an increase of 98% from 2023/24 (142). All areas received an increase in ombudsman cases in 2024/25. A further breakdown of the outcome of these cases can be found under the departments in the following report.

Environment, Sustainability and Leisure Stage One Complaints

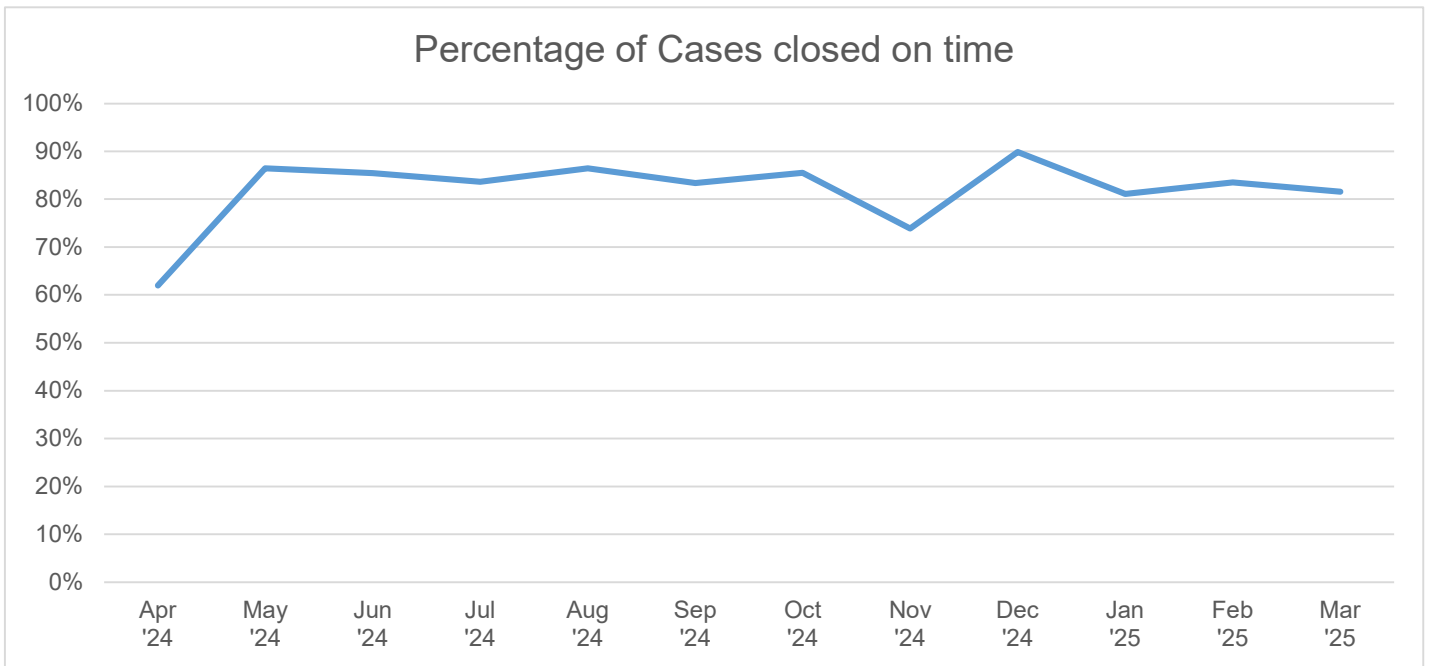


ESL received 39% fewer complaints in 2024/25.

Stage 1 complaints received by Division

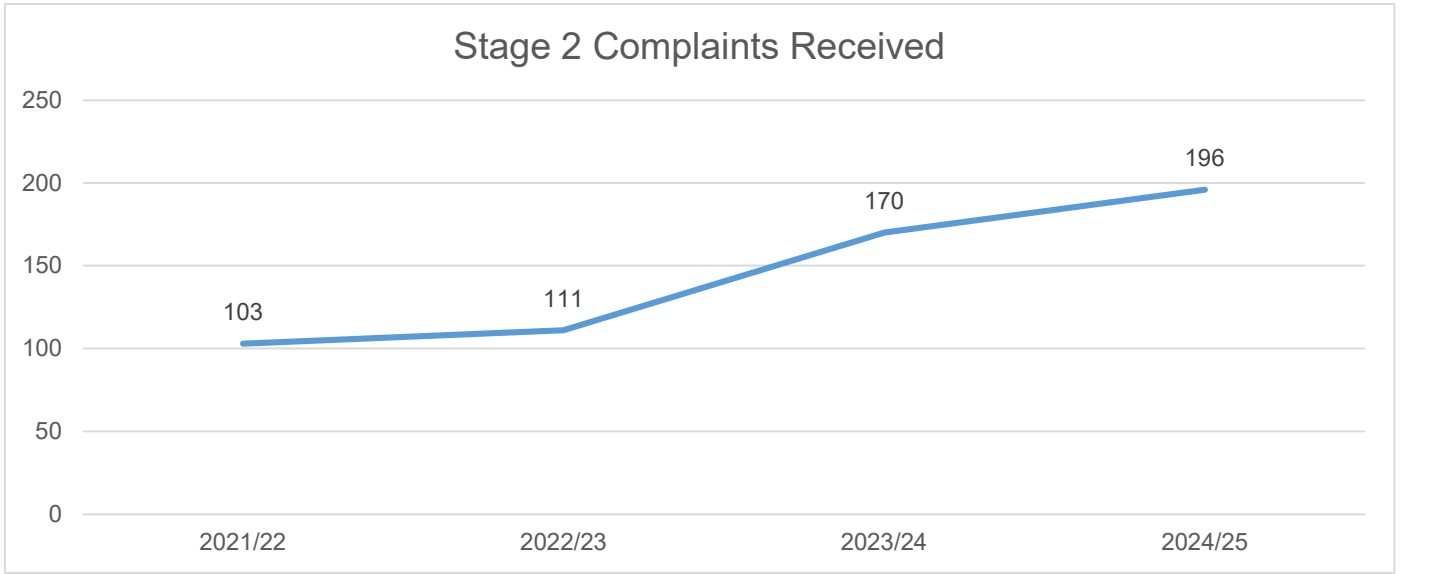
Division / Business Unit	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Climate Change	13	7	0	1
Highways	206	297	524	146
Leisure	213	179	319	236
Parking & Network Management	470	210	421	337
Regulatory Services	226	145	202	124
Stronger Neighbourhoods	34	3	17	26
Traded Services	208	156	157	116
Waste and Cleaning	981	609	792	752
Total	2351	1606	2432	1738

All divisions except Stronger Neighbourhoods and Climate Change had a reduction of complaints received in 2024/25, with Highways receiving 72% fewer complaints.



Except for April and November ESL have maintained above 70% of stage 1 complaints responded on time.

Environment, Sustainability and Leisure Stage Two Complaints Received



ESL has seen an increase year on year in cases escalated to stage 2 complaint. Despite a decrease in stage 1 complaints received, stage 2 escalations increased by 15% compared to 2023/24

Environment, Sustainability and Leisure

Escalation rate

DIVISION	s2 / s1	Omb / s2	Omb / s1
Climate Change			
Environment	11.24%	14.12%	1.59%
Leisure	10.64%	20.00%	2.13%
Stronger Neighbourhoods	33.33%		

Stronger neighbourhoods had the highest escalation rate from stage 1 to stage 2. Escalation rate from stage 1 to ombudsman is very low within ESL.

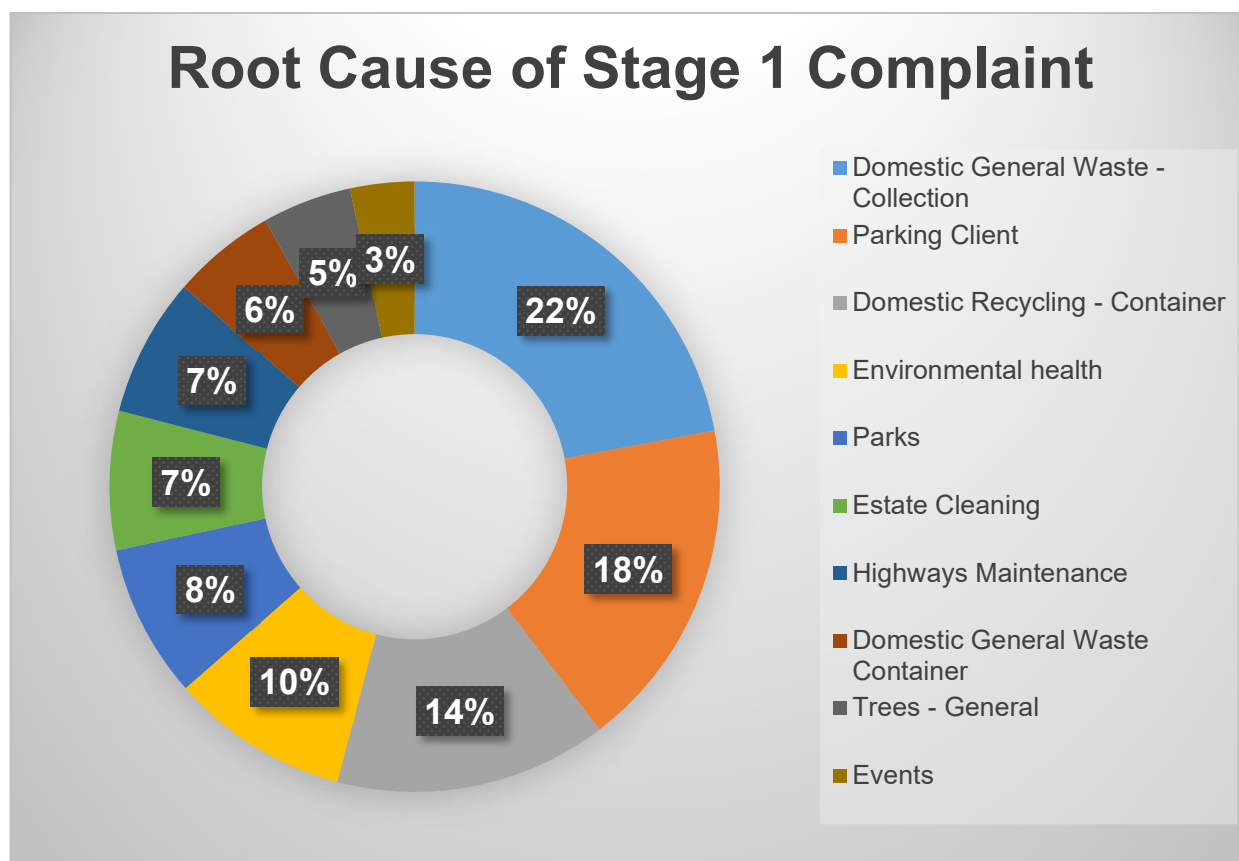
Environment, Sustainability and Leisure

Ombudsman

Row Labels	Closed after initial enquiries - invalid	Closed after initial enquiries - no injustice	Closed after initial enquiries - out of jurisdiction	Upheld: Maladministration and Injustice	Awaiting Decision	Grand Total
Highways		2	1			3
Parking & Network Management		9	3			12
Regulatory Services		1		1	1	3
Traded Services					1	1
Waste and Cleaning	1	3	1			5
Grand Total	1	15	5	1	2	24

ESL has received 1 finding of maladministration from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman, an upheld rate for 4%.

Environment, Sustainability and Leisure Root Cause Analyses



The above chart shows the top 10 classifications of stage 1 complaints for ESL.

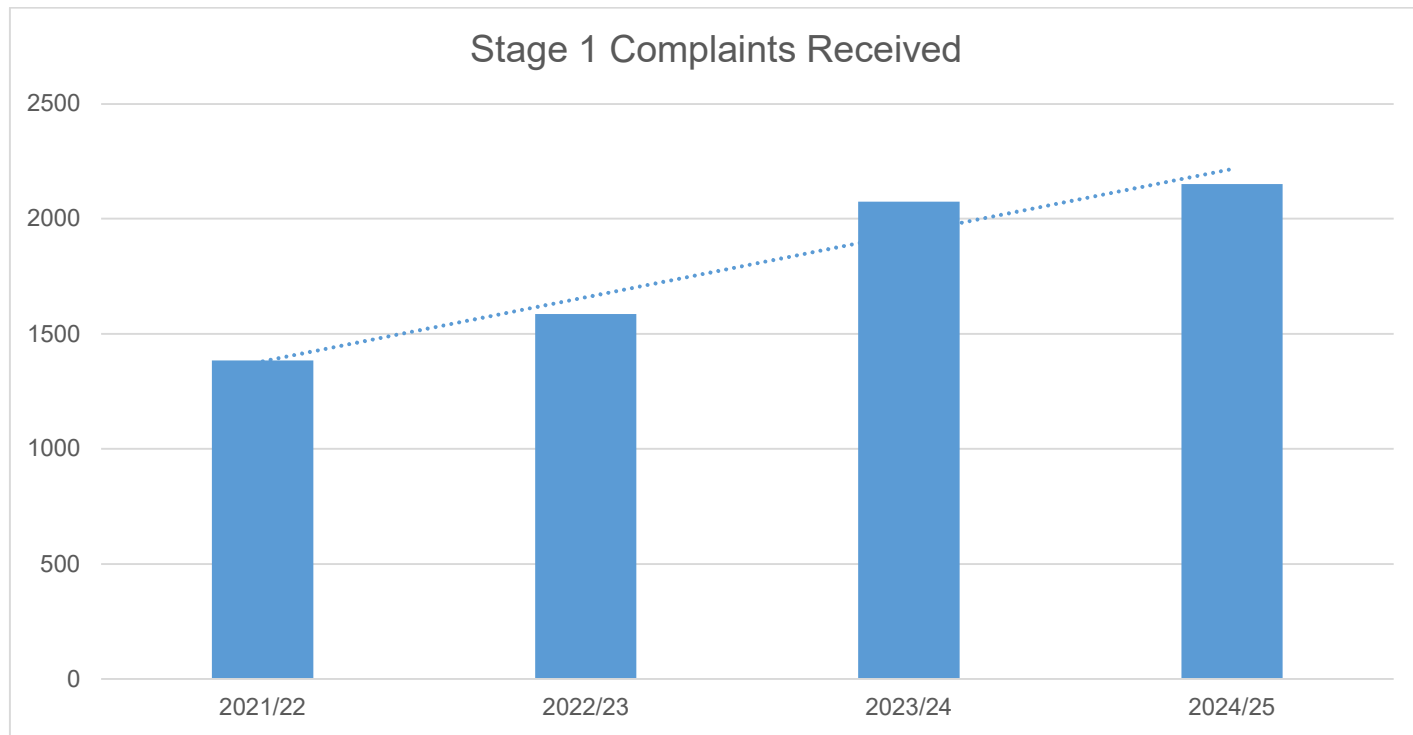
Environment, Sustainability and Leisure Learning from Complaints

Following investigations of complaints, the following are just some of the examples of learning from Complaints in which the service has carried out

- Quarterly reports with the top 5 classifications of complaints are presented Senior Management Team, high level discussions are had and actions taken away to ensure that avoidable complaints are prevented

- Following a number of complaints about container spillages within waste management, discussions were had with contractors around their contractual obligations and monitoring put in place.
- Following a dip in responsiveness to stage 1 complaints, weekly reports were issued with a checklist provided to services to ensure that performance increased. This has resulted in an improved response in target time.

Resources Stage One Complaints



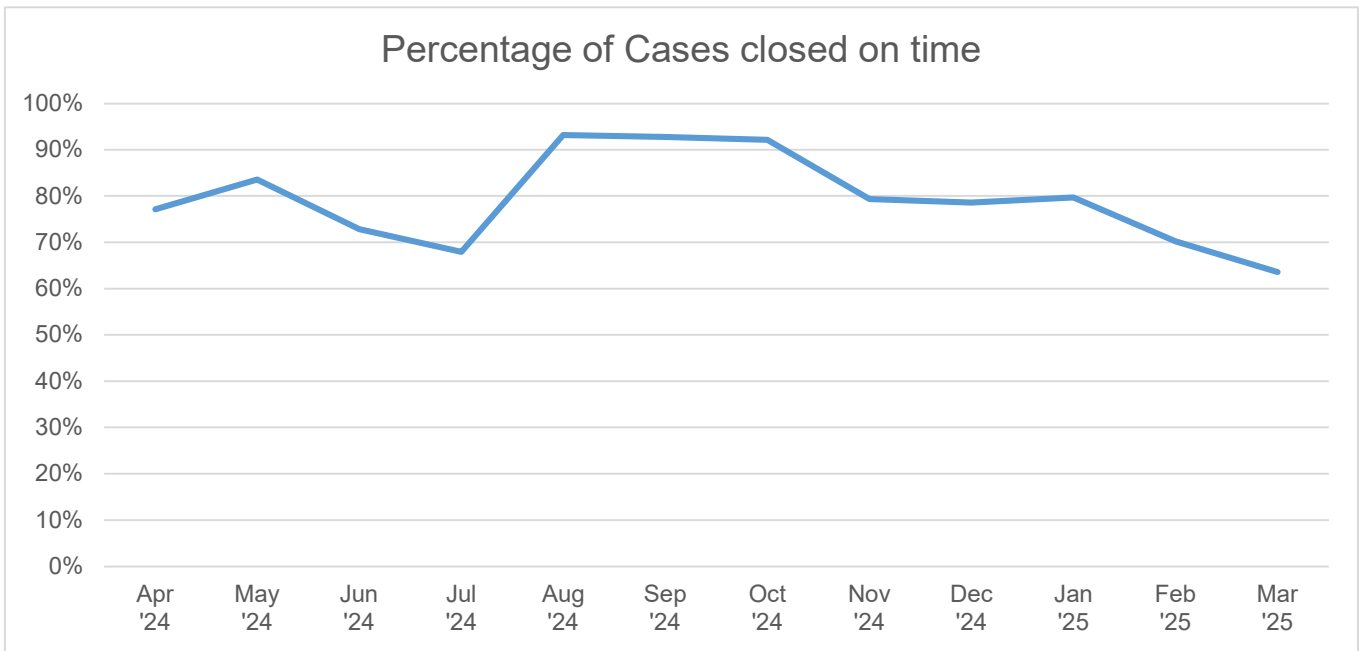
Resources received a slight increase (4%) in Stage 1 complaints received for 2024/25. Complaints received do remain high and continue to rise year on year.

Stage 1 Complaints received by Division

Division / Business Unit	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Customer and Exchequer	1217	1488	1949	2028
Pension Services	19	11	13	14
Professional Finance Services	4	6	9	17
Planning and Growth	145	81	103	92
Total	1385	1586	2074	2151

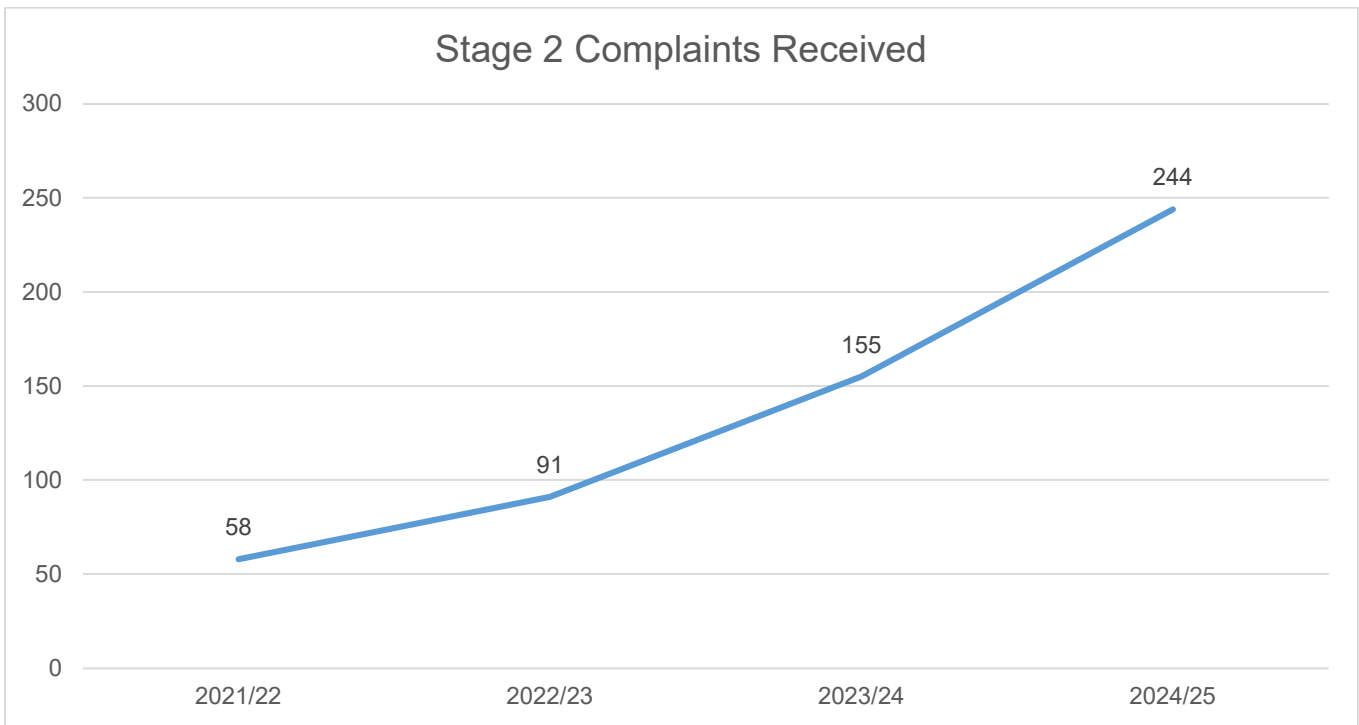
*Following a restructure in 2023 Resources absorbed Planning and Growth and Customer Services

All departments received an increase in stage 1 complaints received, with the exception of Planning and Growth.



Although performance against the 10-working day target has been above 90% for some months, the average performance for Resources was 68% for the whole year.

Resources Stage Two Complaints Received



Resources had a 57% increase in stage 2 escalations.

Resources Escalation Rate

DIVISION	s2 / s1	Omb / s2	Omb / s1
Customer & Exchequer	11.18%	9.29%	1.04%
Pensions Services	N/A	N/A	N/A
Planning & Growth	18.95%	33.33%	6.32%
Professional Finance Services	7.14%	N/A	N/A

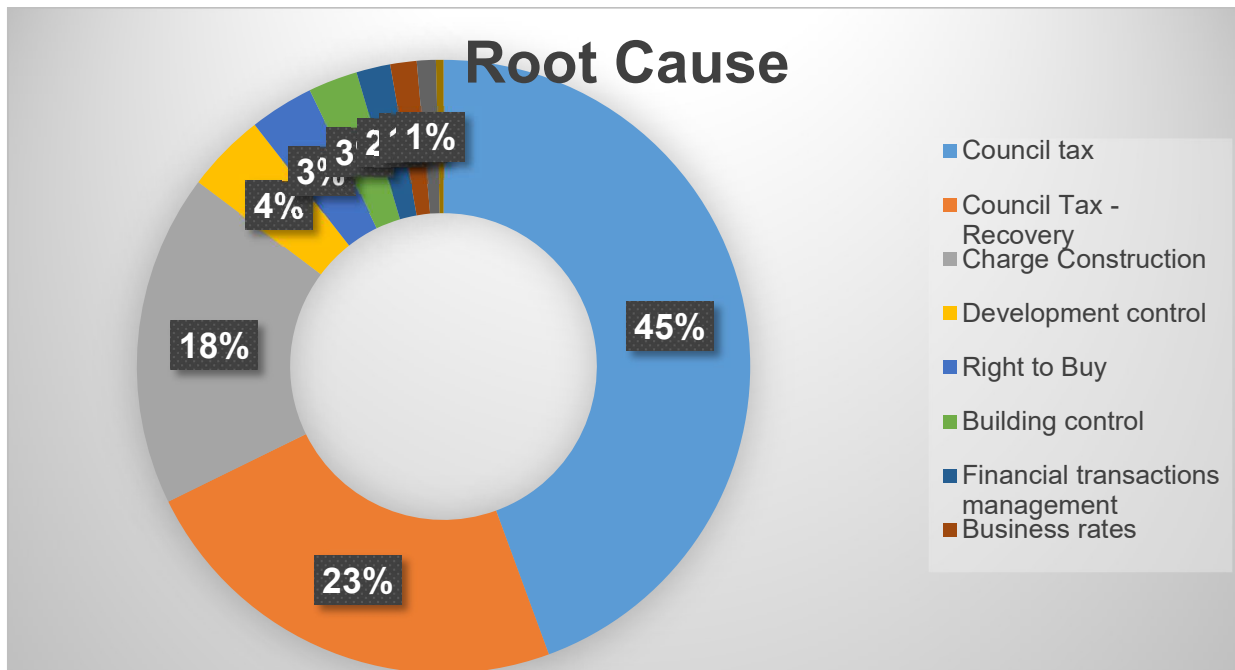
Customer and Exchequer have the highest number of complaints for the department but only 1% of the complaints were escalated to the ombudsman.

Resources Ombudsman Final Decisions

Row Labels	Closed after initial enquiries - no injustice	Closed after initial enquiries - out of jurisdiction	Service Failure	Upheld: Maladministration and Injustice	Awaiting Decision	Grand Total
Customer & Exchequer	12		1	1	4	18
Exchequer	1					1
Planning & Growth		2				2
Grand Total	13	2	1	1	4	21

Of the 17 cases that have been determined by the Housing and Local Government and Social Government Ombudsman 2 have found to have service failure/maladministration, an upheld rate of 11%.

Resources Root Cause



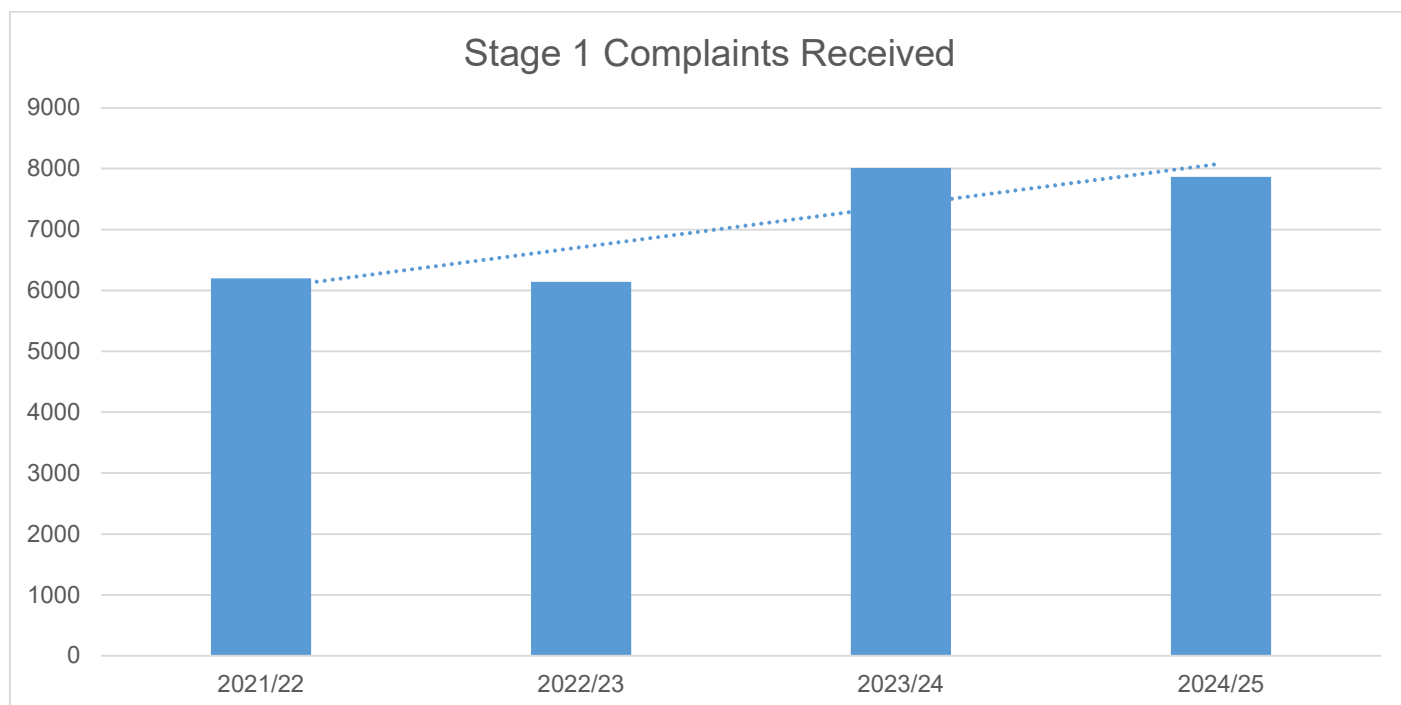
Council tax is responsible for 45% of the complaints received by Resources

Resources Learning from Complaints

Following investigations of complaints, the following are just some of the examples of learning from Complaints in which the service has carried out

- After a successful trial period, the Homeownership Service have rolled out making online appointments with homeowners to discuss issues they may have regarding their lease or service charge bills, this will lead to a reduction in complaints.
- Automation of the system Council Tax system means immediate changes to the system enables customers to see live current information held on our systems, reducing the need for avoidable contact and resolution of enquiries at the first point of contact.
- Automatic renewal of council tax reduction benefit once again removes the need for customers to contact us.
- Investment in new telephony system for our Contact System means live information is produced ensuring better queue management is in place, reducing call waiting times and related complaints.

Housing Stage One Complaints



Housing received a slight reduction in stage 1 complaints received (1.8%) compared to 2023/24, complaints received remain high compared to 2023/24.

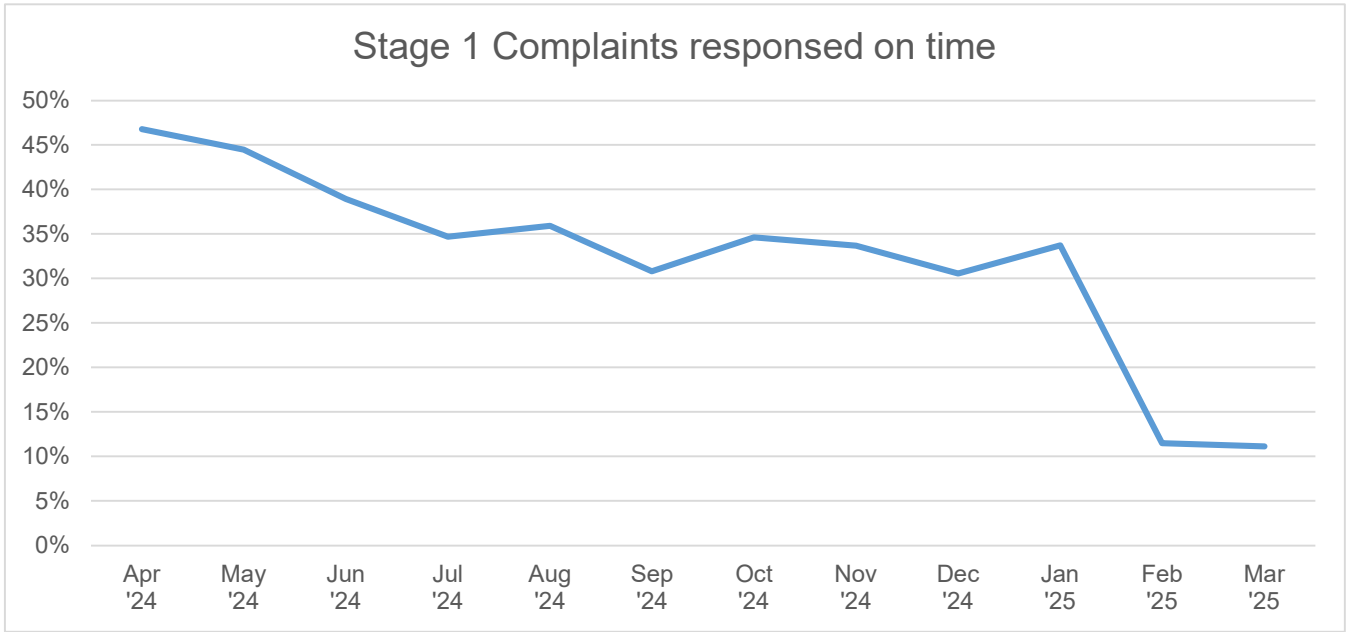
Stage 1 complaints received by Division

Division / Business Unit	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Asset Management	3806	3832	4327	4191
Customer Experience	541	125	N/A	N/A
New Homes	12	19	19	51
Housing Needs and Support	N/A	N/A	N/A	2973
Resident Services	1837	2165	3661	N/A
Landlord Service	N/A	N/A	N/A	647
Strategy & Business Support	5	2	5	4
Total	6201	6143	8012	7866

* Resident Services department was restructured in 2024/25 services were split into Housing Needs and Support and Landlord Services.

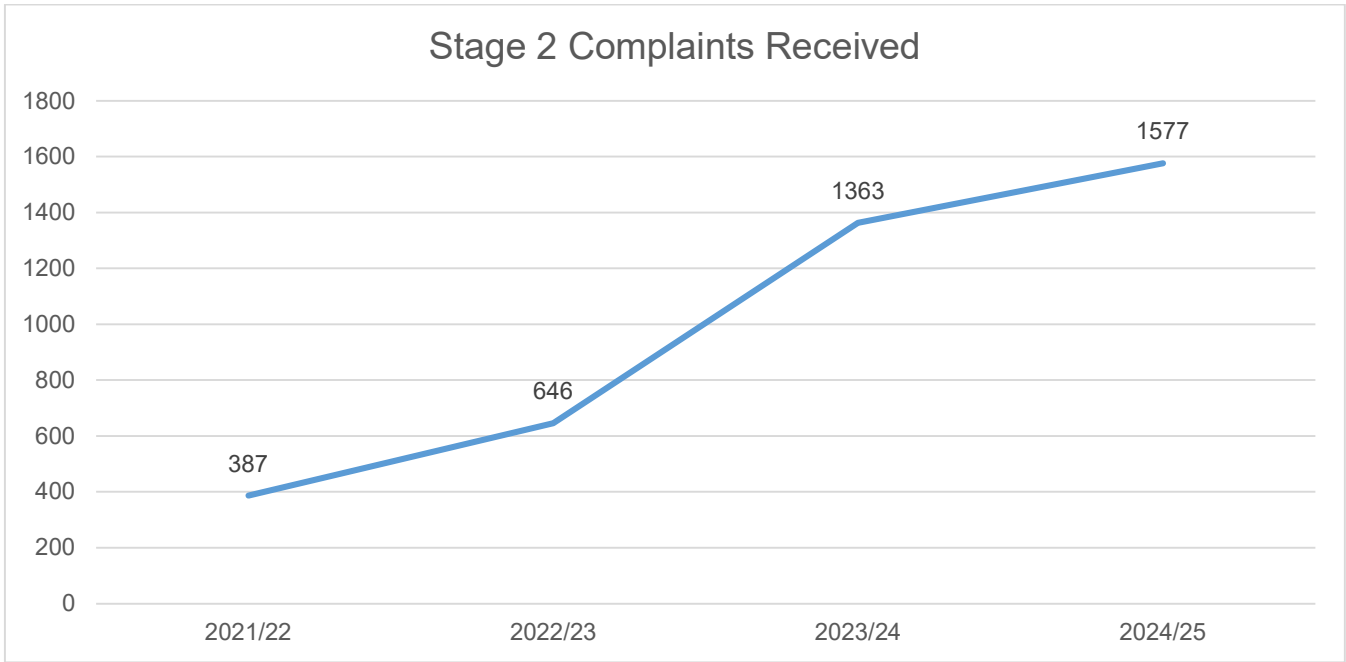
** Following a restructure in 2023 the Customer Experience department was dissolved and most functions moved into Customer and Exchequer, Resources.

New Homes received an increase in complaints received while Assessment Management received fewer complaints compared with 2023/24.



Housing performance in closing cases within 10 working days has declined in the last quarter of the year, and an overall average of 32% is the lowest in the Council.

Housing Stage Two Complaints



While stage 1 complaints received were reduced for 2024/25, stage 2 complaints received increased by 15% compared to 2023/24.

Housing Escalation Rate

DIVISION	s2 / s1	Omb / s2	Omb / s1
Asset Management	21.67%	6.41%	1.39%
Housing Needs & Support	11.06%		
Landlord Services	12.31%	3.03%	0.37%
New Homes	16.67%		
Repairs & Maintenance			
Resident Services	37.33%	13.13%	4.90%
Strategy & Business Support			

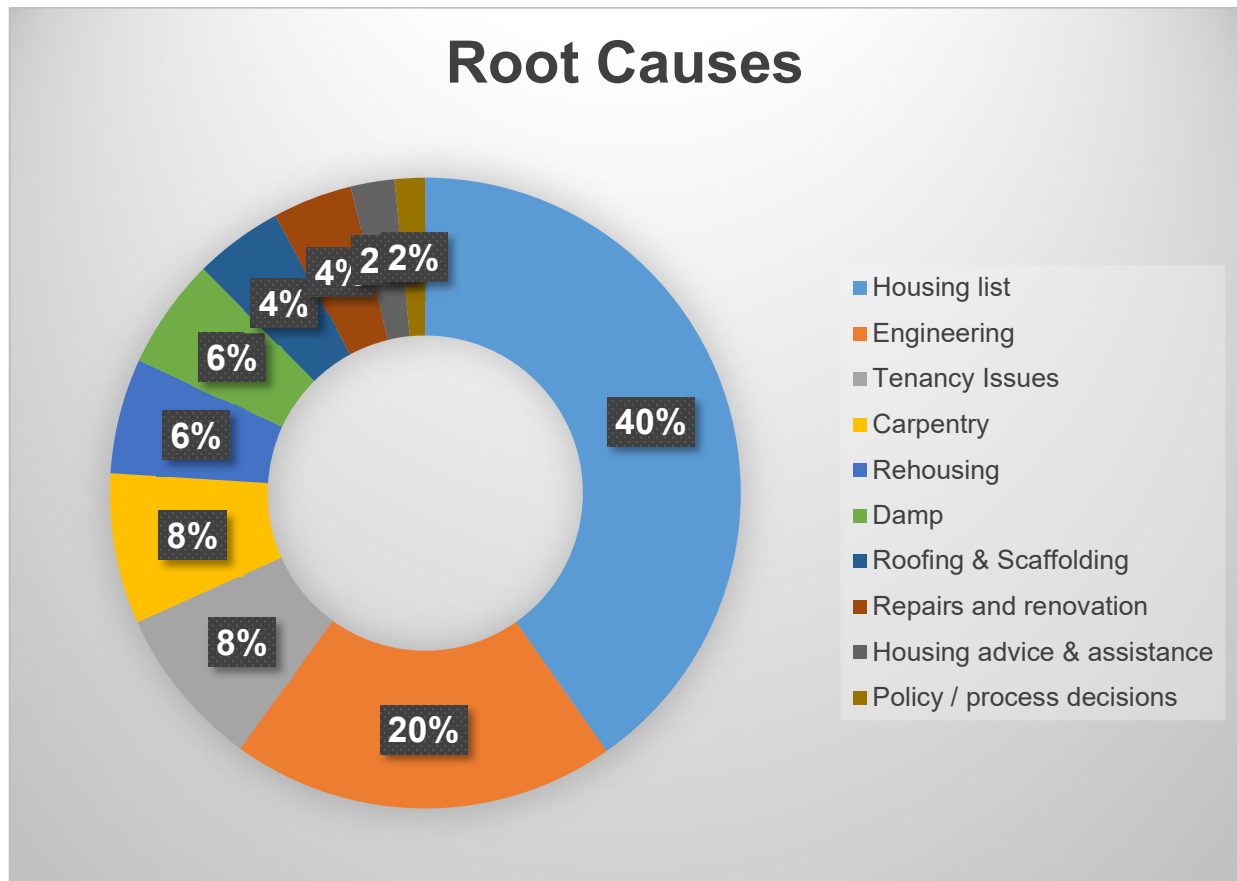
Resident Services (which includes Housing Needs and Support and Landlord Services) has the highest escalation to the ombudsman.

Housing Ombudsman Decisions

	Closed after initial enquiries - no	Closed after initial enquiries - out of	Maladministration	No Maladministration	Not upheld: No further action	Not upheld: No Maladministration	Outside of Jurisdiction	Referred back for local resolution	Service Failure	Severe Maladministration	Upheld: Maladministration and Injustice	Awaiting decision	Grand Total
Asset Management	1	2	10	3		1	1	4	3	4	2	85	117
Customer Services												1	1
Landlord Services		1								3			1
Resident Services	25	6	4	1	2	1		6			15	27	90
Grand Total	26	9	14	4	2	2	1	10	3	7	24	113	208

Housing has received the most Ombudsman cases, with a total of 208 for 2024/25. Of the 95 that have had determinations issued, 48 found service failure, maladministration and severe maladministration, an upheld rate of 50%. 7 of these cases found severe maladministration.

Housing Root Causes



Housing applications and repairs make up most of the top 10 classifications of complaints within Housing.

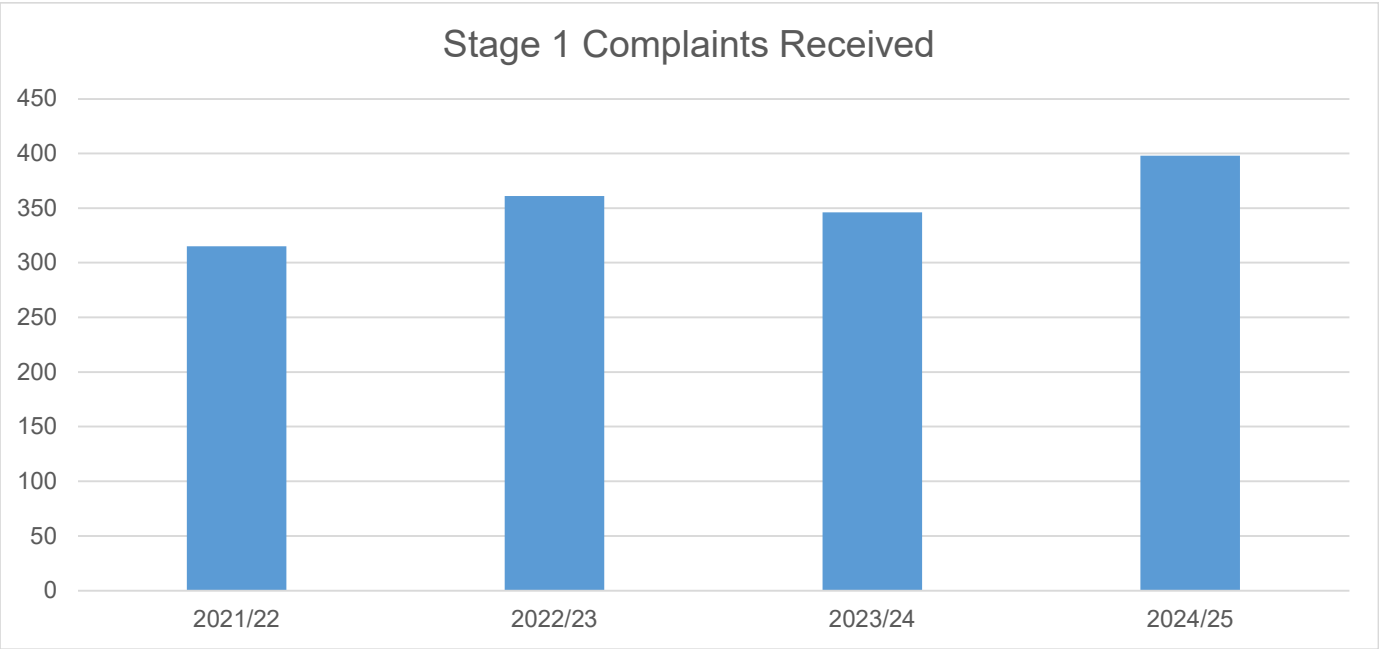
Housing Learning from Complaints

Following investigations of complaints, the following are just some of the examples of learning from Complaints in which the service has carried out

- Improved communication between departments, particularly between Repairs and Maintenance and Landlord Services. Ensuring complex cases (including access issues, multiple service coordination and individual resident needs) are managed in a process, with clear ownership and open communication channels.
- Restructure of the services receiving a high volume of complaints, Damp and Mould and Leaks from Above, meaning that resources were increased and better communication between the two services.

- The new Complaints and Quality Assurance department has supplied two focus reports to Repairs and Maintenance department focusing on Planned Maintenance and Building Safety and Compliance. Recommendations include
 - Improving and updating policies and procedures
 - Enhancing contractor oversight
 - Improving communication
 - Developing a tracking system for repairs

Children and Adults Stage One Complaints



In this period the use of the complaints process to administer appeals has developed and expanded.

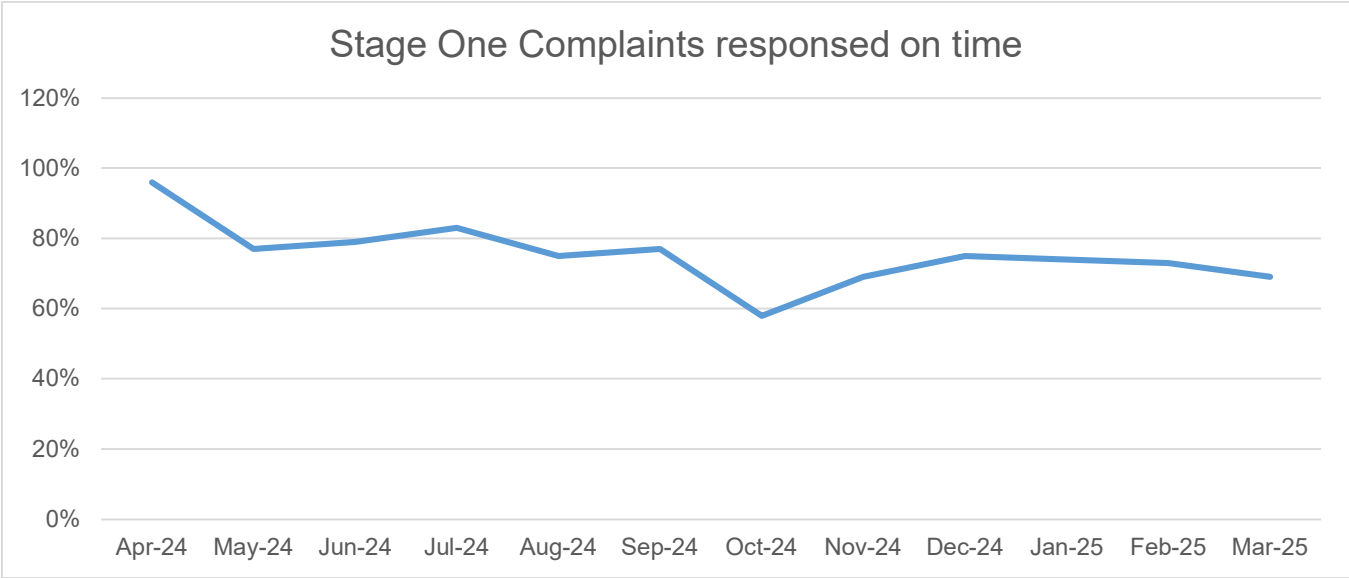
Stage 1 complaints received by Division

Division / Business Unit	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Childrens	146	157	104	132
Education	49	72	107	93
Adult Social Care	101	97	115	152
Integrated Health and Care	19	34	20	21
Public Health	n/a (E&L)	1	0	0
Total	315	361	346	398

Organisational structures have meant that some services moved from one Directorate to another and the figures provided reflect the arrangements that were in place at the time.

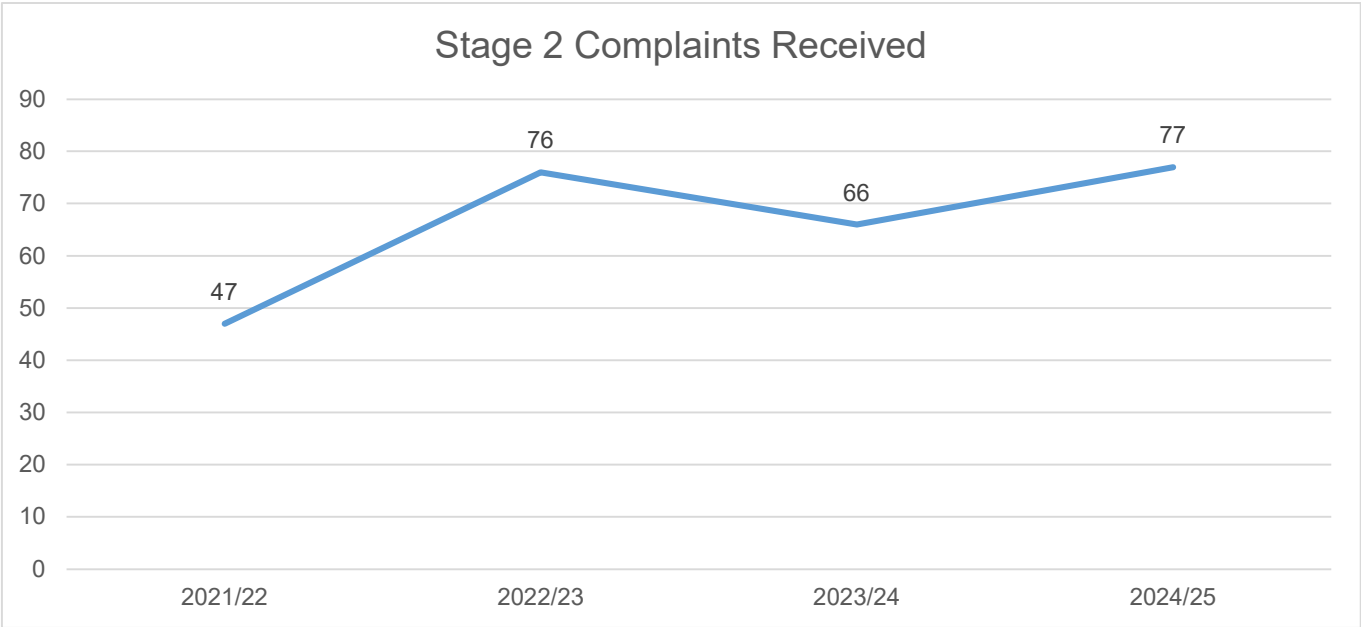
Integrated Health and Care were previously named Commissioning – providing Care at Home services and Care Homes.

In the separate annual report for Children and Adult Services, the figures published only ever relate to complaints closed. Where an alternative approach was found for cases otherwise qualifying as eligible complaints, those numbers are not included.



The performance on time rate is very similar from Directorate to Directorate.

Children and Adults Stage Two Complaints



It should be noted that stage two in this context refers to three entirely different processes, but each does represent the first escalation stage, following a stage one complaint. A significant proportion of the childrens stage two cases were resolved through ‘alternative dispute resolution’.

Children and Adults Escalation Rate

DIVISION	s2 / s1	Omb / s3	Omb / s2	Omb / s1
Childrens	18%	0%	43%	8%
Education	32%	n/a	37%	11%
Adult Social Care	21%	114%	27%	6%
Integrated Health & Care	0%	0%	0%	0%
Public Health	0%	n/a	0%	0%

The statutory Children Act procedure demands three stages and the Adult Social Care (incl. Integrated Health and Care) provides for three stages. The percentages here are complex owing to the fact that the decisions the Ombudsman issues do not necessarily correspond with complaints closed in this period.

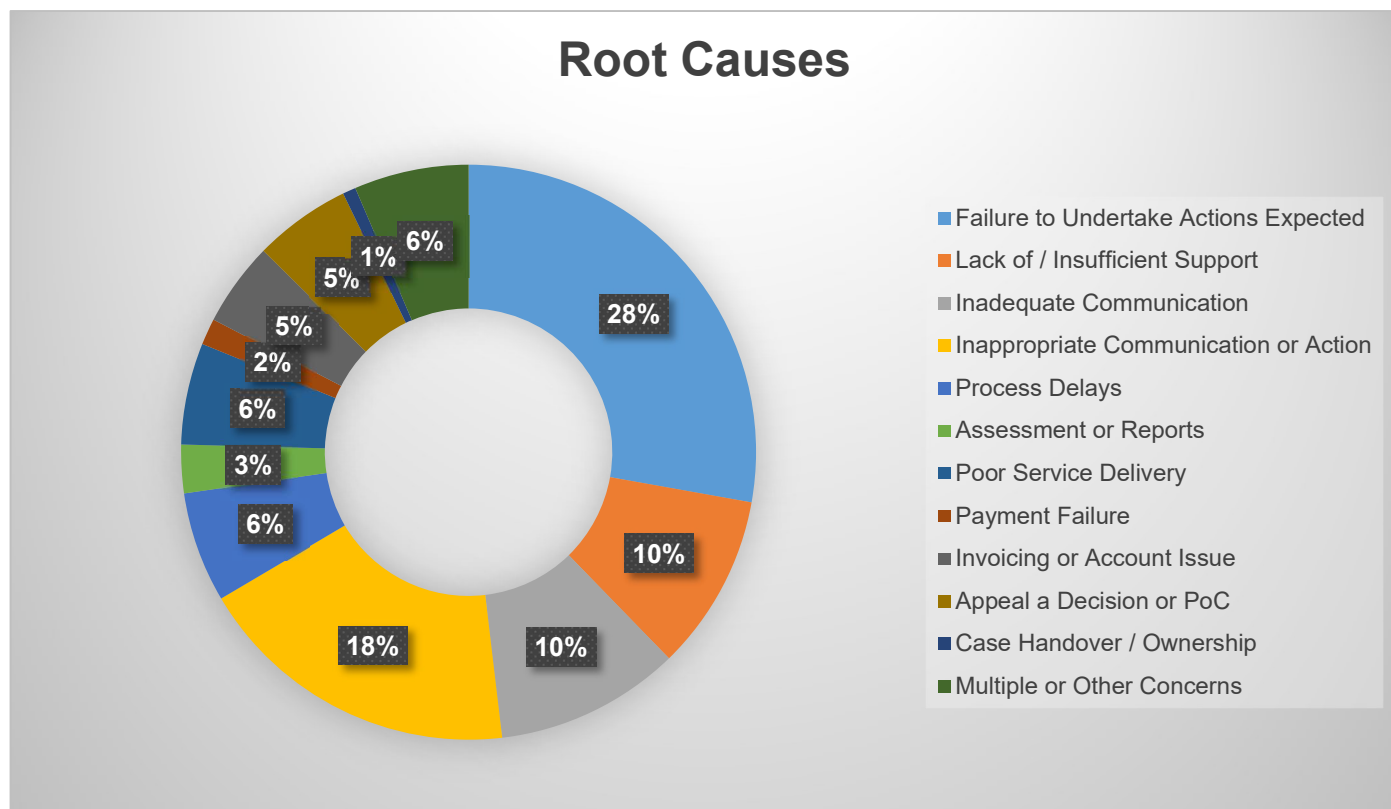
Children and Adults Ombudsman Decisions

	Closed after initial enquiries - no	Closed after initial enquiries - out of	Maladm inistrati on	No Maladm inistrati on	Not Upheld : No futher action	Not Upheld : No Maladm inistrati on	Outside of Jurisdi ction	Referre d back for local resoluti on	Service Failure	Severe Maladm inistrati on	Upheld :Malad ministr ation and Injustic e	Awaitin g decisio n	Grand Total
Childrens	4	4			1							1	10
Education	3	5							3			1	12
Adult Social Care	2	4							5			1	12
Integ. Health Care									1				1
Public Health													0
Grand Total	9	13	0	0	1	0	0	0	9	0	0	3	35

In the separate annual report for Children and Adult Services, the figure published highlights the number of final decisions published by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman, following an investigation. Owing to the relatively low number of complaints, it is believed this figure

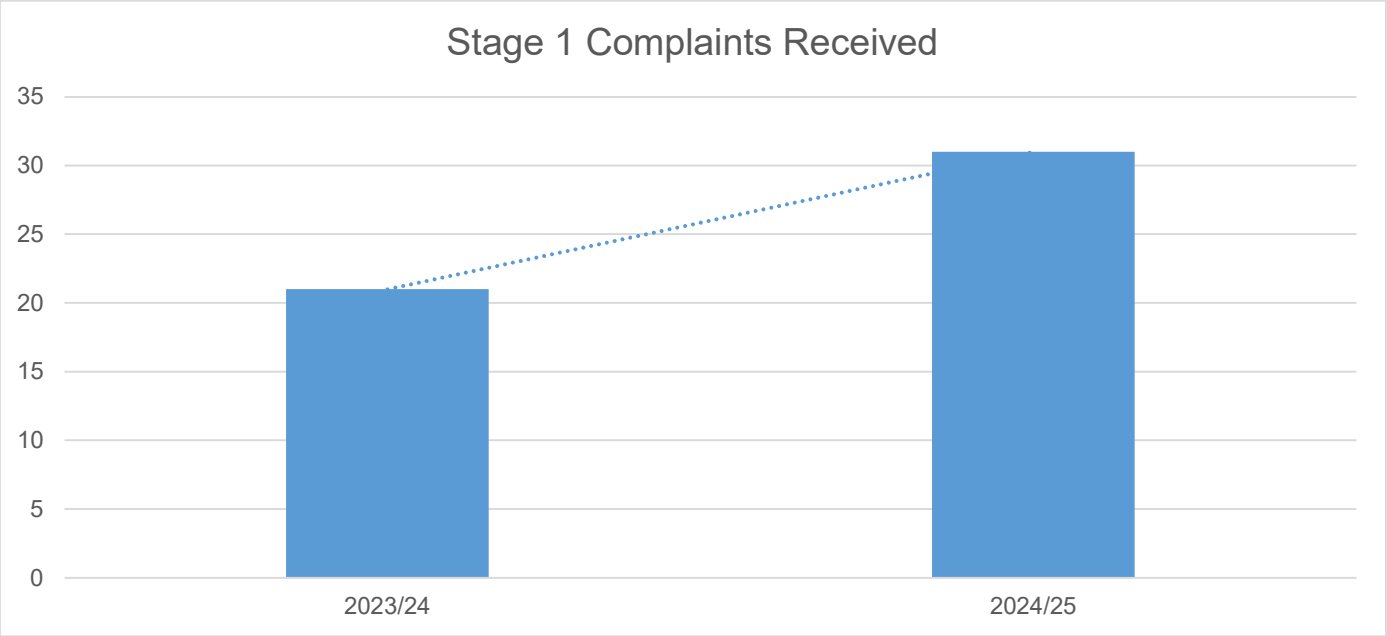
provides for the best opportunity to measure success in the year, and for a meaningful comparison over time.

Children and Adults Root Causes



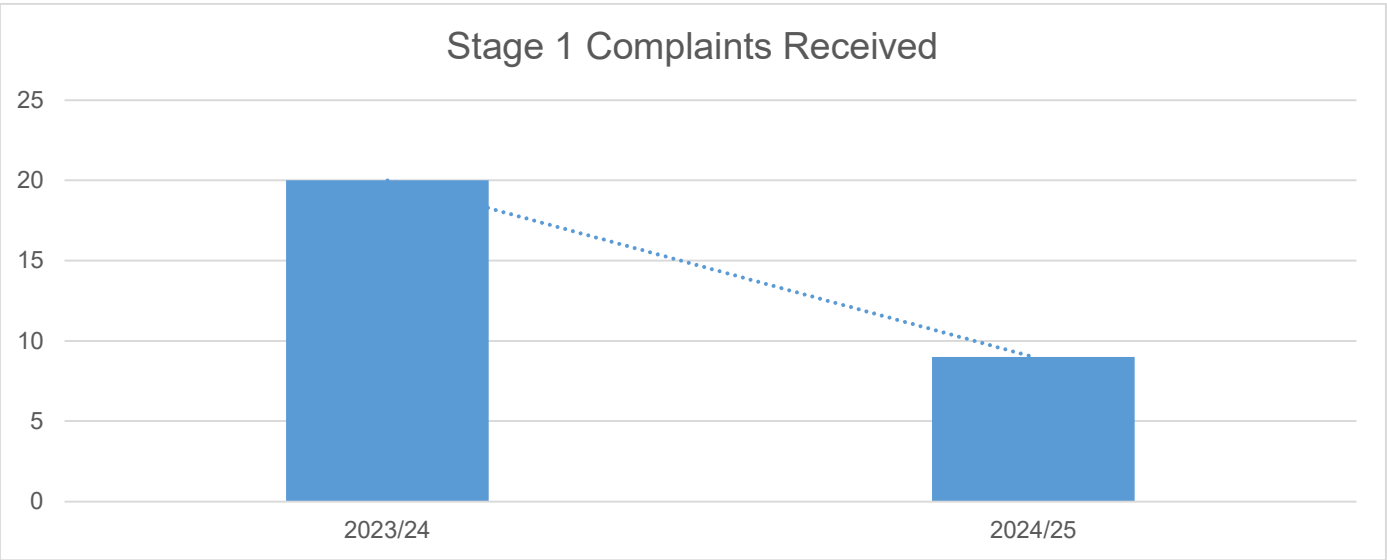
These root cause categories are bespoke to Children and Adults Services, having rationalised a very long list of categories used until April 2021.

Governance and Assurance



Formed in 2023 the Governance and Assurance’s services are mainly internal with most of the complaints received coming from the Electoral Services.

Strategy and Communities



Formed in 2023 the Strategy and Communities’ services are once again mainly internal and therefore they receive a very small number of complaints.

Learning from Complaints

Southwark Council do not see complaints as a negative form of feedback, however, escalations to stage 2 complaints and then on to the Ombudsman are areas in which we need to improve. The focus for 2025/26 for all departments remains to learn from complaints, to resolve complaints at stage 1 and to prevent avoidable escalation.

In 2024/25 the following improvements were made

- A Quality and Monitoring Team were created – the team, who report to the Complaints Manager in Customer and Exchequer, carry out a number of quality audits on complaints answered at Stage 1 of the complaints process. Reports are provided on individual cases, and then a monthly report to the Head of Service. We have seen a marked improvement in the quality of responses and engagement from services.
- Oversight of complaints – CMT (Corporate Management Team) now receive monthly reports on complaints performance in each department.
- Ownership – all Directors sign off all Stage 2 complaint responses, owning the issue and ensuring the matters are resolved
- Housing Complaints and Quality Assurance Team created – in January 2025 a dedicated complaints team was recruited to, demonstrating a commitment improving the complaints process for residents in Southwark Council
- Additional resources – have been committed within the corporate complaints team to assist with the increase in stage 2 escalations
- Complaints and Members Community – meetings held every 6 weeks in which managers of complaints from across the council meet to discuss good practices, issues arising and learning from complaints. This is then fed into the Complaints and Members Board in which Heads of Services and Directors listen to feedback and agree changes.