



# **Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report 2023/24**

## **1 Introduction from Cabinet**

- 1.1 The Council is committed to improving quality of service and the experience of customers using our service. Whilst we aim to put the customer at the heart of everything we do, we know that on occasion our customers will have cause to complain.
- 1.2 When this happens, it is important that we have in place an effective and transparent complaints process and we share our complaints performance with the community. Therefore, this report sets out our annual complaints performance for 2023-24. It provides a summary of the different complaints we have received, how we have handled them and areas we want to improve to ensure we embed a positive complaint handling culture across the council and improve services for our customers.
- 1.3 This year, we have made some key changes to our Complaints Process to ensure we are working in line with both the Housing Ombudsman and Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman Complaint Handling Codes. We have also enhanced our complaints reporting to ensure we are quickly spotting new trends.
- 1.4 We can gain valuable feedback from our customers who have cause to complain. We will continue to gain insight from our complaints, undertaking more in-depth lessons learnt and case reviews to understand where we have gone wrong and identify the changes we need to make to put things right.

## **2 Executive Summary**

- 2.1 This report sets out the Council's annual complaints performance for 2023-24. It also summarises key lessons learned, compliance against the Ombudsman Complaint Handling Codes and proposed action plan to ensure improvements identified are implemented. Ombudsman cases are also considered.
- 2.2 The report is split into the following two key functions:
  - 2.2.1 Tenant & Leaseholder- related services; this includes complaints from tenants and leaseholders that fall within the Housing Ombudsman service.
  - 2.2.2 Council-related services; this includes complaints from customers that fall within the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.

## **3 Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code**

- 3.1.1 The Housing Ombudsman and Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman have a complaint handling code which provides best practice for complaint handling procedures.
- 3.1.2 The Council's complaints process has been reviewed this year to ensure compliance with the complaint handling codes, with changes approved by Cabinet in August 2024.



3.1.3 In addition, the Council is required to complete a self-assessment against the Housing Ombudsman each year to identify how we have complied. This was submitted in July 2024 and will be submitted to the Housing Ombudsman again, following publication of this annual report. Please refer to Appendix A for a copy of the updated self-assessment.

#### **4 Summary of the Council's Complaints Process**

4.1.1 The Council's priority is to resolve complaints 'first time right'; and as soon as they come to our attention. In line with Ombudsman guidelines, the Council has a two stage complaints process:

- a) Stage 1: Investigation and response within 10 Working Days of the complaint being acknowledged.
- b) Stage 2: Further Investigation and Review within 20 Working Days of the complaint being acknowledged. This is usually undertaken by an officer or manager more senior than the person who investigated the complaint at Stage 1, or by an officer of an equivalent level from an independent service.

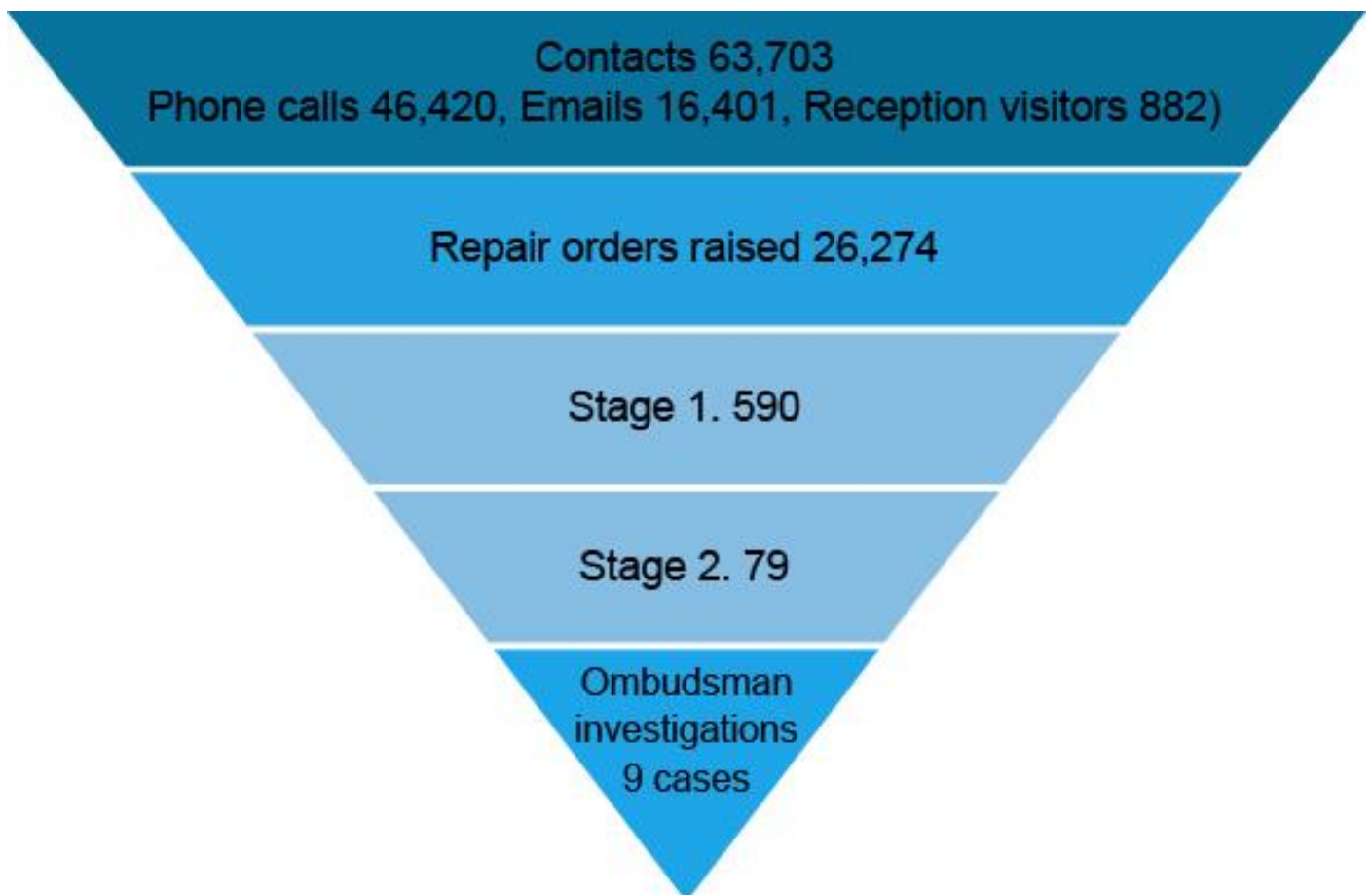
4.1.2 The Stage 2 response is the Council's final response and after this, the customer is advised to contact the relevant Ombudsman, should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint.



**5 Complaints Summary: Tenant and Leaseholder (Housing) – related services**

- 5.1 The councils Contact Centres and relevant service teams handle a large volume of contact from tenants and leaseholders on annual basis. The Council managed 10,168 properties in 2023-24. Contacts from tenants and leaseholders range from general enquiries, service requests through to complaints.
- 5.2 Typically, tenants and leaseholders contact the Council about repairs, rents, tenancy matters and rehousing.
- 5.3 Figure 1 below shows that in 2023-24, a total of 590 Stage 1 complaints were received and 79 Stage 2 complaints were received. Complaints make up less than 1% of total tenant and leaseholder contact. Whilst this is a small proportion, it is important to understand our complaints performance and use this feedback to make continuous improvements to our complaint handling and housing services.

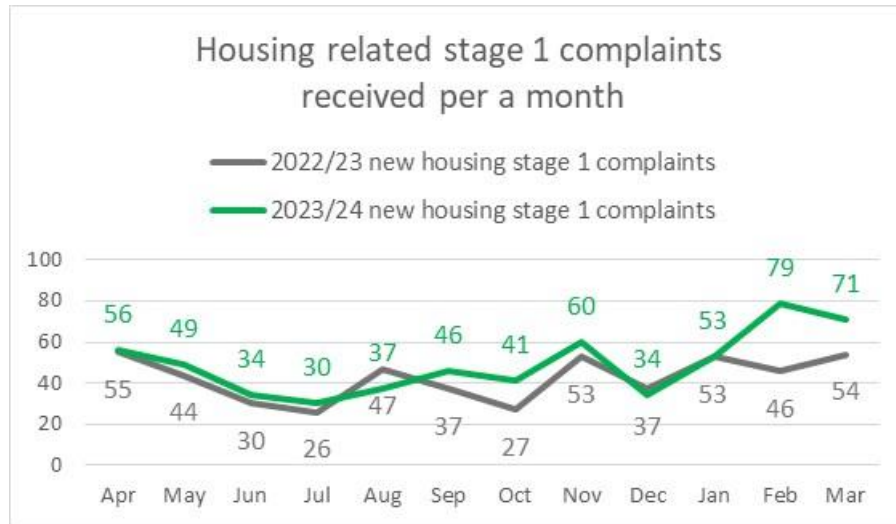
**Figure 1: Tenant and Leaseholder Contact 2023-24**





**Stage 1 Complaints**

**Figure 2: Stage 1 Complaints Received per Month**



**Figure 3: Stage 1 Complaints Received by Subject**

	2022/23	2023/24
Council housing planned works and safety	45	58
Council housing rents and arrears	10	4
Council housing repairs	393	467
Council housing tenancy matters	49	50
Council tenant rehousing	5	6
Leaseholders	4	3
Sheltered housing	3	2
<b>Total housing related complaints received at stage 1</b>	<b>509</b>	<b>590</b>

- 5.4 Responsive repairs is the area most complained about, making up 79% of the total complaints received in 2023-24. During 2023-24, 26,274 repairs orders were made, with only 1.5% of these resulting in formal complaints.
- 5.5 Whilst the number of complaints in Figure 3 are comparable between both years, there has been a 16% increase in complaints, most notably for repairs and during the months of February and March in 2024.
- 5.6 The Council's target is to investigate and respond to 95% of all Stage 1 Complaints within 10 Working Days. Within 2023-24, 63% of Stage 1 complaints were responded to on time. This is an increase in performance of 9% compared to the previous year.



5.7 72% of complainants cited ‘Incorrect or Poor Delivery of a Service’ as their reason for complaining. This is consistent with Lessons Learned, whereby most complaints have been closed, citing ‘Operational Service Delivery’ as the key lesson, closely followed by improved customer service and improved communication.

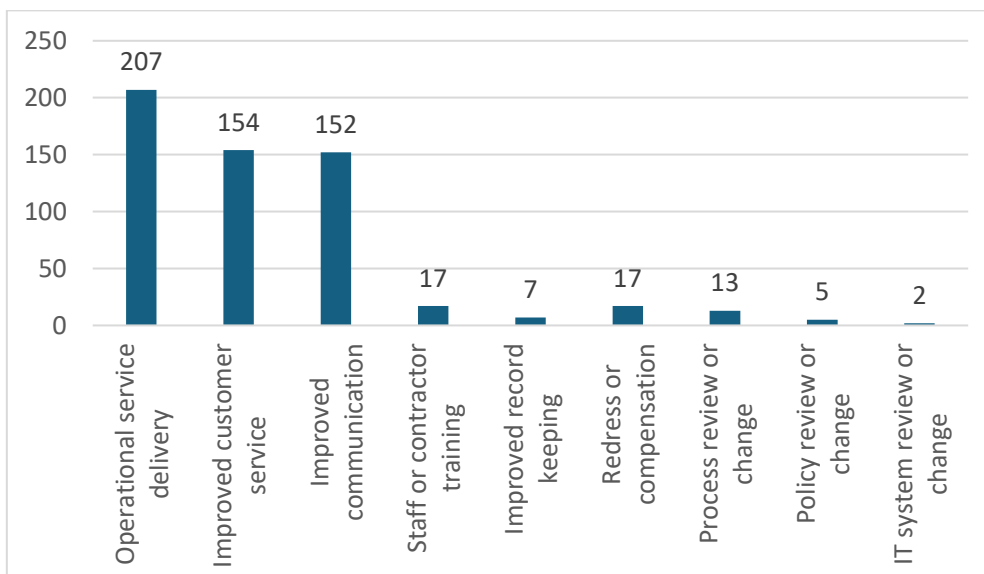
**Figure 4: Stage 1 Complaints Closed within Target**

	Target (% of cases investigated and responded to within 10 Working Days)	% in target
2022/23	95.0%	54%
2023/24	95.0%	63%

**Figure 5: Stage 1 Complaint Reasons**

	% 2023/24
A member of council staff (or any of our contractors or agents) behaving inappropriately	5.0%
Failure of council staff to follow the correct policy or procedure	9%
Incorrect or poor delivery of a service	72%
Refusal of the council to provide a service which it should be providing	14.0%
Grand Total	100.0%

**Figure 6: Stage 1 Summary Lessons Learned**





## Stage 2 Complaints

5.8 In 2023-24, 79 Stage 2 complaints were received in 2023-24, making up 13% of total Stage 1 complaints received in the same period. This is an increase of 72% compared to the previous year, with most Stage 2 relating to the repairs service.

**Figure 7: Stage 2 Cases Received Per Year**

	2022/23	2023/24
Council housing planned works and safety	4	6
Council housing rents and arrears	2	0
Council housing responsive repairs	37	66
Council housing tenancy matters	3	7
Council tenant rehousing	0	0
Leaseholders	0	0
Sheltered housing	0	0
Total housing related complaints received at stage 1	46	79

**Figure 8: Stage 2 Complaints Closed within Target**

	Target (% of cases investigated and responded to within 10 Working Days)	% in target
2022/23	95.0%	64%
2023/24	95.0%	56%

## Housing Ombudsman Cases

- 5.9 Customers can refer their complaint to the Housing Ombudsman at any point of the Council's complaints process. The Housing Ombudsman can investigate complaints that have completed the Council's complaints process, and the issue has not been resolved or help if the Council hasn't responded to a complaint or followed the complaints policy or the Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Codes.
- 5.10 The Housing Ombudsman published the council's 2023-24 performance in October. Nine cases were investigated, and the full landlord performance report can be found in Appendix B.
- 5.11 The cases investigated related to the following complaint categories:
- 5.11.1 Four cases relating to responsive repairs relating to leaks, damp & mould.



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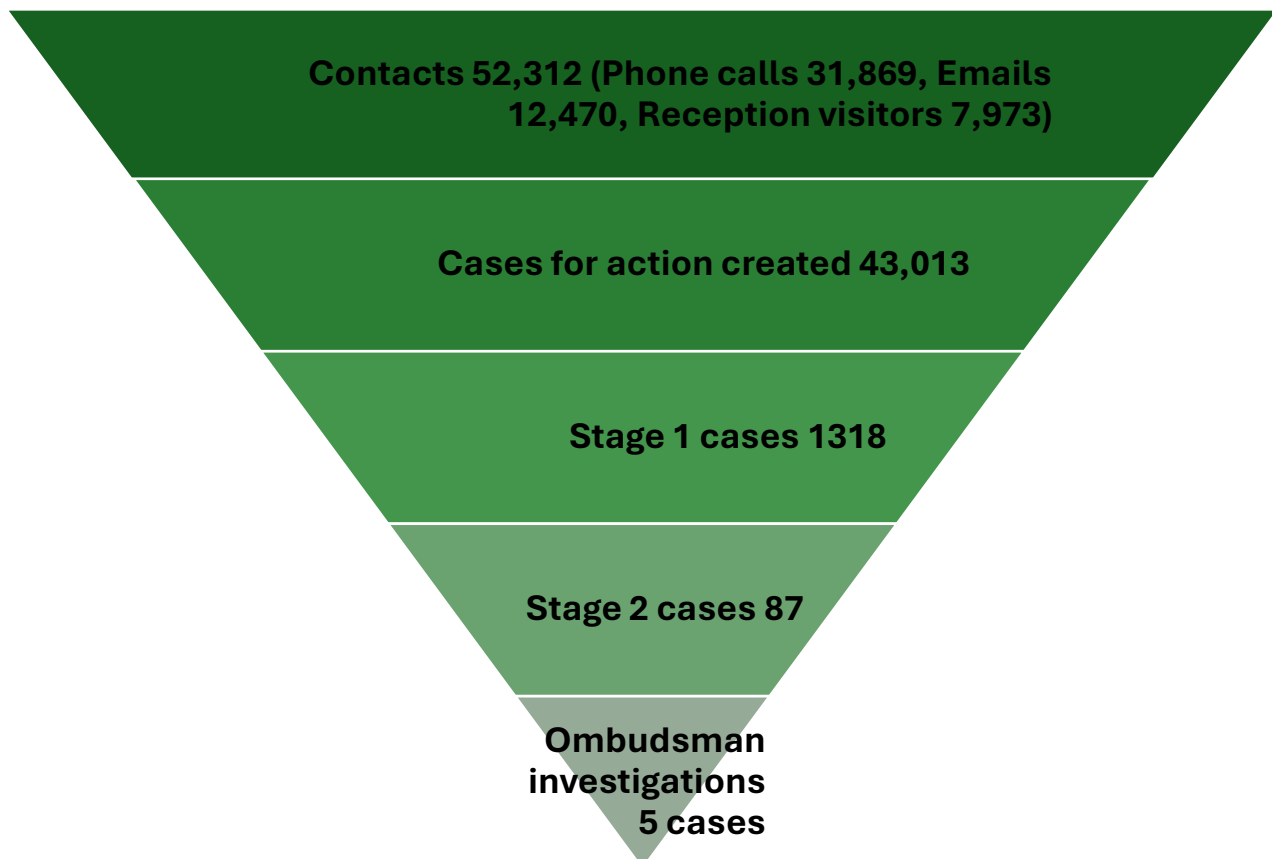
- 5.11.2 Three cases relating to general responsive repairs, of which one was found to be outside jurisdiction.
- 5.11.3 Two cases relating to staff conduct, of which one was found to be outside jurisdiction.
- 5.12 The Housing Ombudsman's report shows that we are performing similarly when compared to similar landlords by size and type.
- 5.13 We have accepted all findings by the Housing Ombudsman and have complied with 100% of all orders.
- 5.14 We are also making changes to make improvements to our complaints handling and repairs service. Refer to Section 7 of this report.



## 6 Complaints Summary: Council Services

- 6.1 The councils Contact Centres and relevant service teams handle a large volume of contact from customers on annual basis. These contacts range from general enquiries, service requests through to complaints.
- 6.2 Typically, customers contact us most about waste collection and recycling services, grounds maintenance and Council Tax and Benefits services.
- 6.3 Figure 9 below shows that in 2023-24, a total of 1,318 Stage 1 complaints were received and 87 Stage 2 complaints were received. Complaints make up less than 3% of total customer contact. Whilst this is a small proportion, it is important to understand our complaints performance and use this feedback to make continuous improvements to our complaint handling and council services.

**Figure 9: Customer Contact 2023-24**



### Stage One Complaints

**Figure 10: Stage 1 Complaints Received per Month**





**Figure 11: Stage 1 Complaints Received by Subject**

	2022/23	2023/24
Household waste and recycling	655	590
Grounds maintenance and trees	146	186
Housing benefit, rates and council tax	149	160
Parking and car parks	73	109
Homelessness and housing needs	54	57
Various services - community, licensing, estate and pests	33	44
Anti-social behaviour and noise nuisance	43	39
Flytipping, graffiti, clearance of rubbish	32	36
Customer service and communications	20	33
Planning services	29	30
Contracted and lease customers	24	24
Cemetery or funeral services	3	10
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>1261</b>	<b>1318</b>

- 6.4 Household waste and recycling is the area most complained about, making up 45% of the total complaints received in 2023-24.
- 6.5 Whilst the number of complaints are comparable between both years, there has been a 5% increase in complaints in 2023-24, with the most notable increase in complaints about parking and car parks.
- 6.6 The Council’s target is to respond to 95% of all Stage 1 Complaints within 10 Working Days. Within 2023-24, 82% of Stage 1 complaints were responded to on time. This is comparable to the previous years’ performance of 84%.



6.7 72% of complainants cited 'Incorrect or Poor Delivery of a Service' as their reason for complaining. This is consistent with Lessons Learned, whereby most complaints have been closed, citing 'Operational Service Delivery' as the key lesson, closely followed by improved customer service and improved communication.

**Figure 12: Stage 1 Complaint Responses Closed within Target**

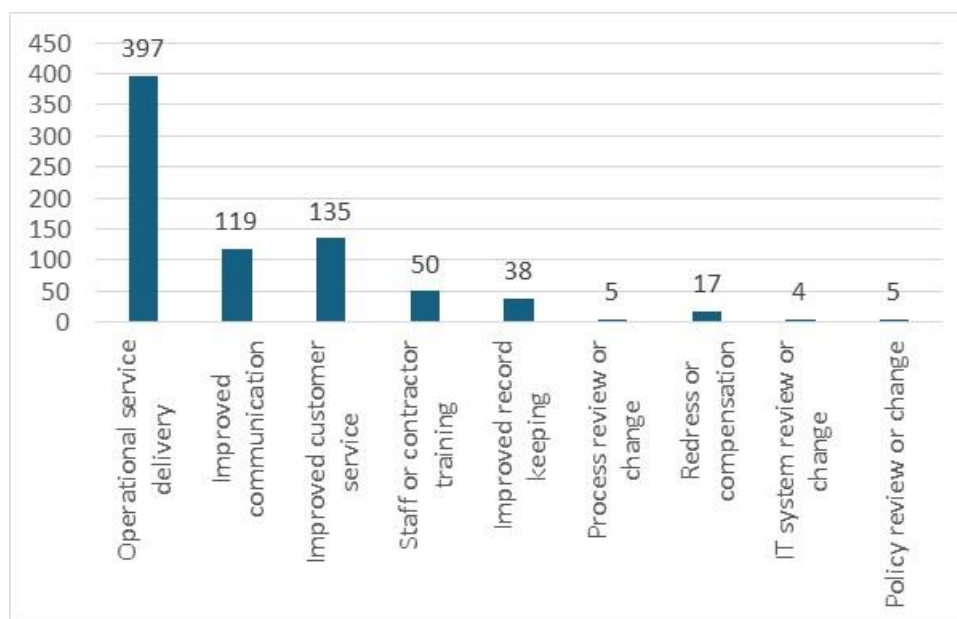
	Target (% of cases investigated and responded to within 10 Working Days)	% in target
2022/23	95.0%	84%
2023/24	95.0%	82%

**Figure 13: Complaint Reasons**

	% 2023/24
A member of council staff (or any of our contractors or agents) behaving inappropriately	5.5%
Failure of council staff to follow the correct policy or procedure	11.1%
Incorrect or poor delivery of a service	72.2%
Refusal of the council to provide a service which it should be providing	15.9%
Grand Total	100.0%



**Figure 14: Stage 1 Summary Lessons Learned**



## Stage 2 Complaints

6.8 In 2023-24, 99 Stage 2 complaints were received in 2023-24, making up 8% of total Stage 1 complaints received in the same period. This is a decrease of 15% compared to the previous year, with most Stage 2 relating to household waste collection and recycling.

**Figure 15: Stage 2 Cases Received Per Year**

	2022/23	2023/24
Anti-social behaviour and noise nuisance	6	9
Cemetery or funeral services	12	6
Contracted and lease customers	11	10
Customer service and communications	7	11
Flytipping, graffiti, clearance of rubbish	12	6
Grounds maintenance and trees	10	5
Homelessness and housing needs	6	5
Household waste and recycling	12	14
Housing benefit, rates and council tax	7	5
Parking and car parks	18	8
Planning services	8	10
Various services - community, licensing, estate and pests	7	10
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>116</b>	<b>99</b>



**Figure 16: Stage 2 Complaints Closed within Target**

	Target (% of cases investigated and responded to within 10 Working Days)	% in target
2022/23	95.00%	66%
2023/24	95.00%	60%

### **Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman**

- 6.9 Customers can refer their complaint Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) at any point of the Council’s complaints process. The Ombudsman can investigate complaints that have completed the Council’s complaints process, and the issue has not been resolved or help if the Council hasn’t responded to a complaint or followed the complaints policy or the Ombudsman’s Complaint Handling Codes.
- 6.10 The LGSCO published the council’s 2023-24 performance in September. Five cases were investigated, and the full landlord performance report can be found in Appendix C. 80% of complaints investigated were upheld, compared to the average of 63% when compared to other similar -sized local authorities.
- 6.11 We have accepted all findings by the LGSCO and are making changes to make improvements to our complaints handling. Refer to Section 7 of this report.

## **7 Improvement Action Plan**

- 7.1 This year, the following improvements have been made to the Council’s complaints process:
  - 7.1.1 Complaints policy has been updated to ensure compliance with the Ombudsman Complaint Handling Codes.
  - 7.1.2 A Vulnerable Person and Reasonable Adjustment policy has been introduced.
  - 7.1.3 Updates have been made to the council’s customer management system, Jadu to ensure the system processes match the policy updates.
  - 7.1.4 Updates have been made to the complaints form to ensure we capture what the customer wants us to do to put an issue right and provide the opportunity for the customer to tell us about their personal circumstances or any vulnerabilities they may have.
  - 7.1.5 Complaint satisfaction is now being measured with a survey sent to customers at the end of each stage of the complaints process. This went live in October 2024 and results will be published in future annual reports.
  - 7.1.6 A Complaints Insight Officer is now in post, with oversight of complaints performance across the Council and is responsible for the management of Ombudsman cases.



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- 7.1.7 A Complaints Resolution Officer is in post within the Housing Repairs team and is responsible for ensuring housing repairs complaints are investigated and responded to in line with the Council's Complaints Policy and Housing Ombudsman Complaints Handling Code.
- 7.1.8 Improvements in complaints reporting, with weekly performance reports sent to service teams, monthly performance reports considered by Senior Management Team and quarterly reports considered by Cabinet. Housing Complaints are also regularly discussed with Resident's Panel and Cabinet Housing Panel.
- 7.2 Further improvements are ongoing in:
- 7.2.1 Embedding positive complaints handling culture, challenging performance and assurance more robustly; This will be achieved through the circulation of more detailed performance reports across services, briefing the Executive Member for Housing and Executive Member for Community & Cultural Services on complaints performance monthly and sharing complaints data more regularly with Cabinet Housing Panel.
- 7.2.2 Increased quality assurance on complaints responses; ensuring corporate templates are being used, regular signposting to the Ombudsman is included and personal circumstances and vulnerabilities of customers are being considered.
- 7.2.3 Undertaking more in-depth Lessons Learned reporting; Using this data and complaint satisfaction survey feedback to review trends and identify areas for improvement in complaint handling and service delivery.
- 7.2.4 Staff Training; ensuring complaints training is covered as part of staff inductions for new starters, delivering regular refresher training on the Council's Complaints Policy, Jadu system and using external training providers to support with improved complaint response writing.