

SMART CITIES AND ENABLING SERVICES DIRECTORATE

Annual Report

Compliments, Complaints & Feedback

**For the period:
April 2022 - March 2023**

Introduction

This report from the Complaints and Feedback Team covers the financial year, April 2022 - March 2023.

Together for Children (TfC) provide a six-monthly report on complaints regarding Children's Services, which is presented to the Children, Education and Skills Scrutiny Committee for detailed analysis.

Going forward, Sunderland Care and Support will provide an Annual overview for Scrutiny Committee. The first report was provided in April 2023.

Part A - of the report provides statistical data, presented in an updated, easy to view format.

Part B - of the report provides information on the different Compliments and Complaints Procedures that are used by the Council to handle customer feedback.

Part C - of the report includes further information on each service area within separate appendices.

Appendix 1 - Compliments

Appendix 2 - Ombudsman complaints

Appendix 3 - Corporate complaints

Appendix 4 - Adult Statutory complaints

Appendix 5 - Sample of complaints received

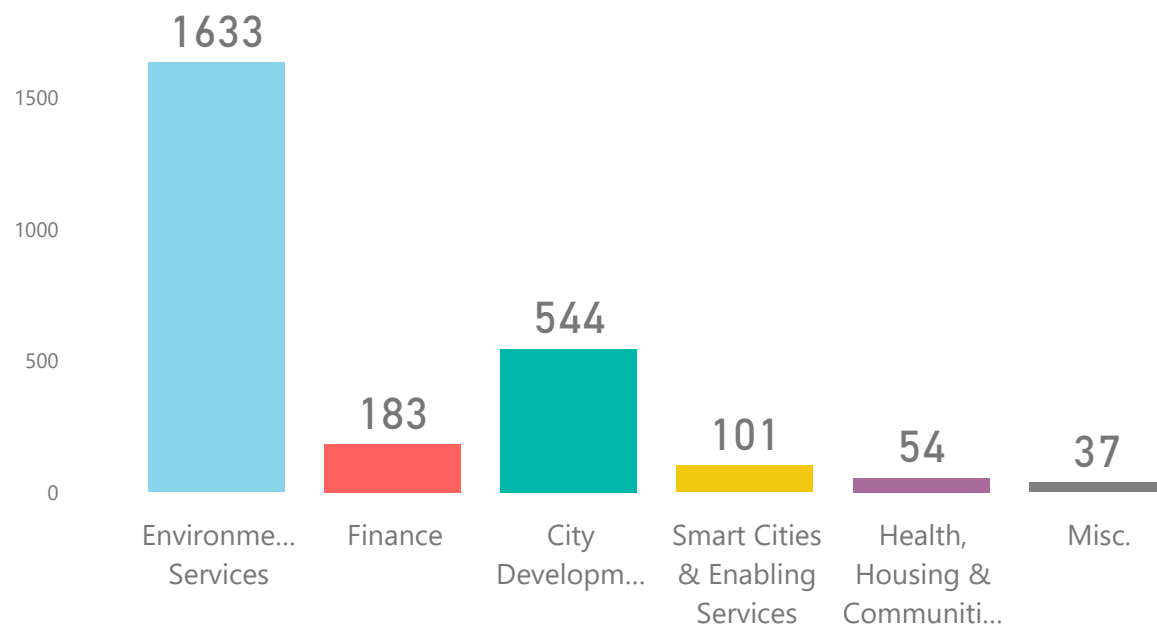
Appendix 6 - Together for Children

Complaints Overview

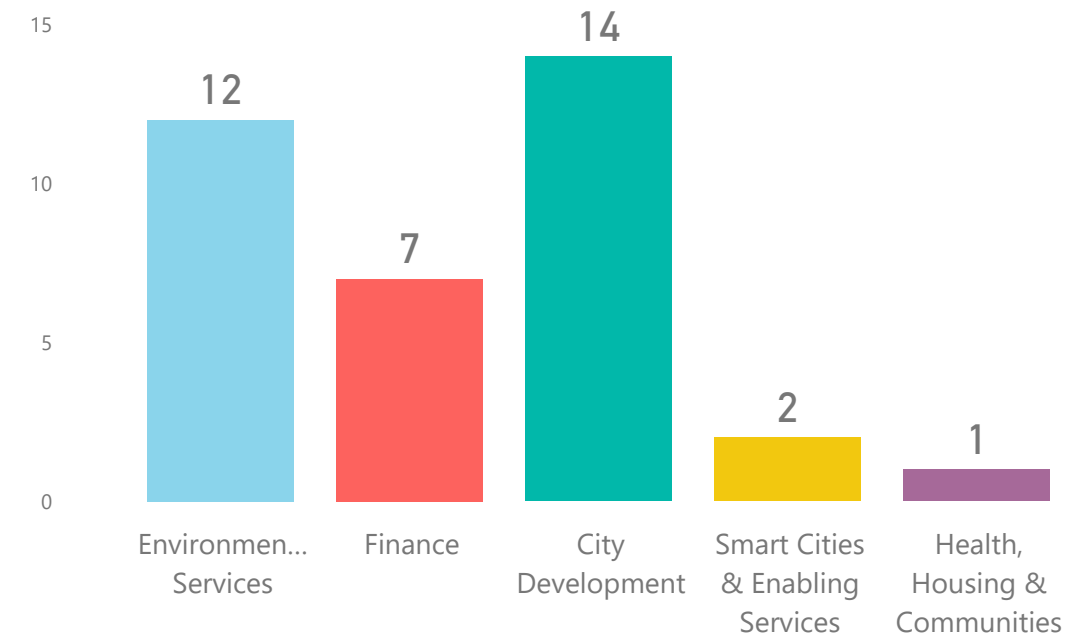
Ombudsman - 34



Corporate Stage One - 2552

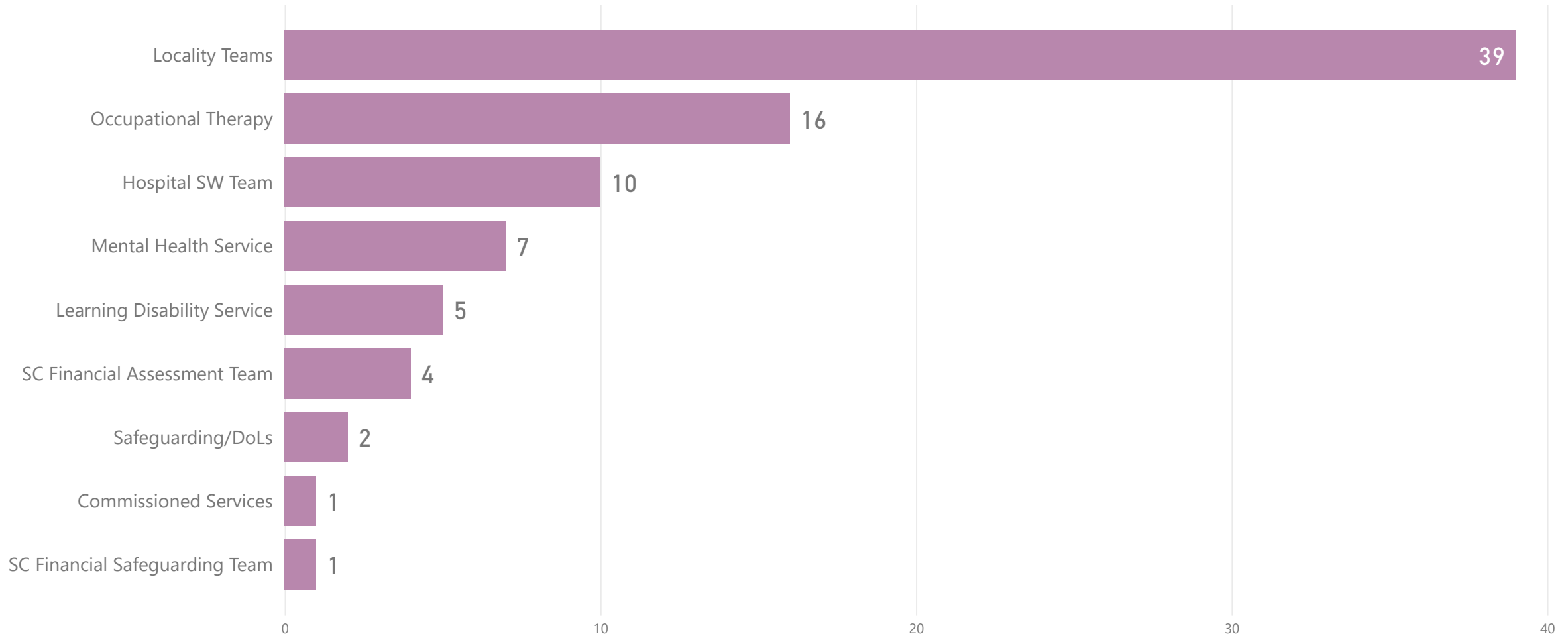


Corporate Stage Two - 36



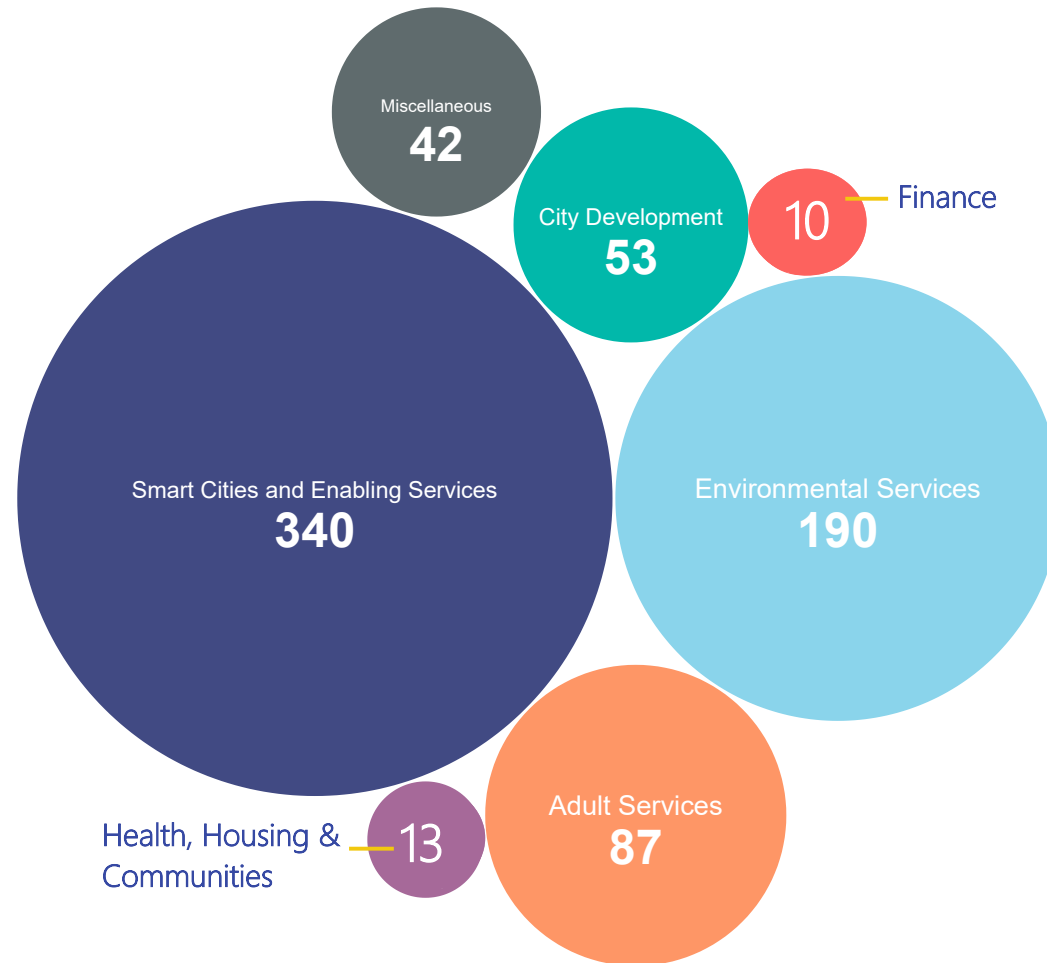
Complaints Overview

Adult Statutory Social Care - 85



Compliments

Compliments - 735



Customer by her own admission finds anything technical difficult but the worker took the time to help her. He was friendly and patient with her and she said he was a credit to the department

The road cleaner operator was very thorough in cleaning our street - he spent time ensuring he did a great job. We have a lot of trees, and the leaves were making the road slippery, so he did a great job.

Thank you to OT team for the equipment that was given to make things easier in bathroom area. The staff were very kind and helpful listened to needs and got equipment in place very quickly.

I was really impressed with the speed of response to my request this week. The hedges in need of trimming were dealt with quickly and efficiently. Many thanks to all involved.

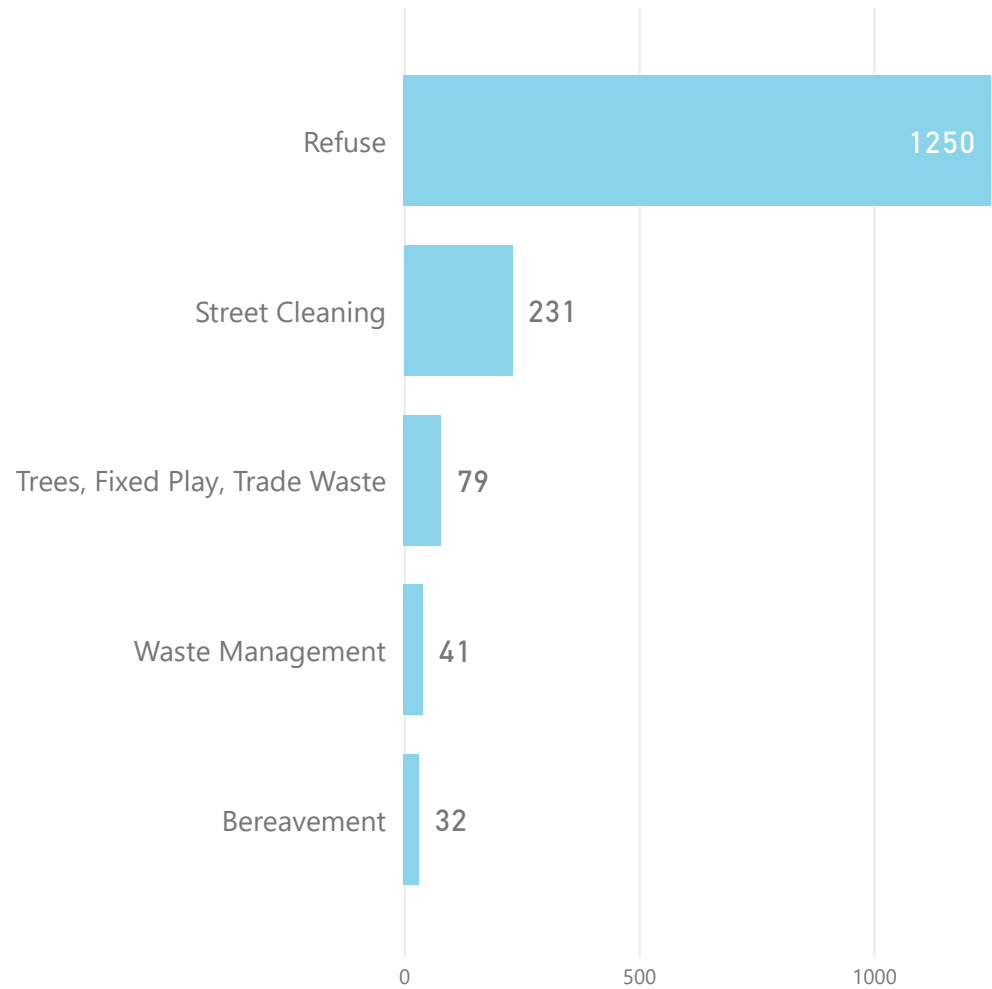
Customer passes on her positive comments and feedback relating recent changes to her husband's plot. She advised the edging was taken off and gravel removed and turfed. She is delighted with it.

Thanks to refuse team collecting blue bins today. Advised only two of them and usually more there to help. Left all the bins perfectly where they should be. Grateful that they're out doing a good job in all weathers

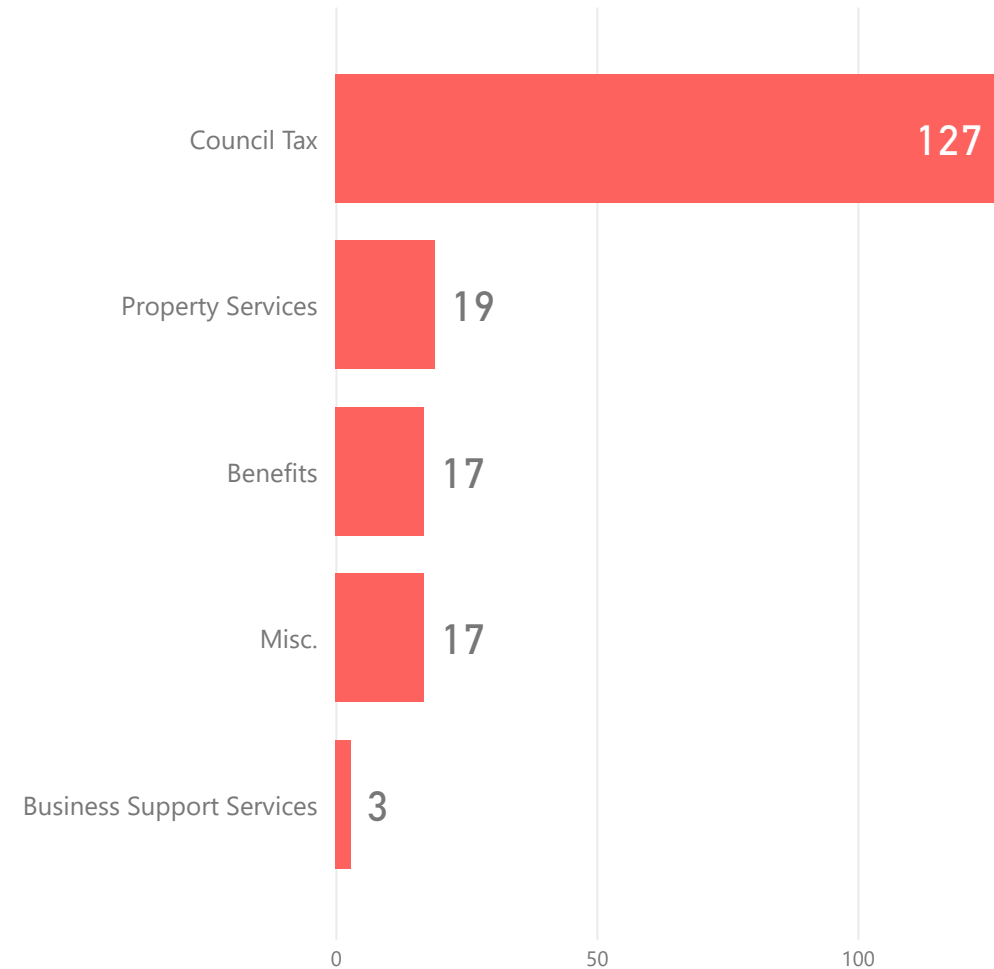
Just wanted to say a massive thank you. All of the French people loved what you did for them and it made our ceremony a lot more personal. We couldn't have asked for a better person to have as a registrar!

Corporate Complaints Breakdown for Stage 1

Environmental Services - 1633

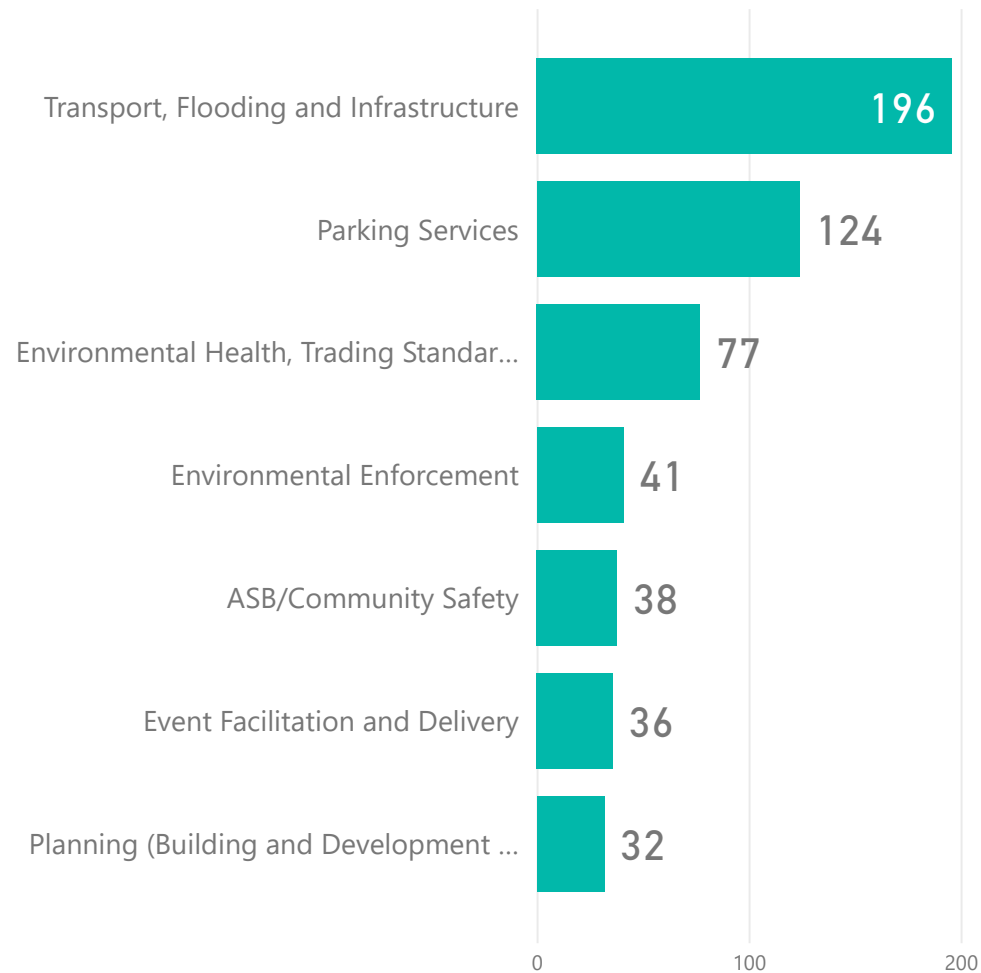


Finance - 183

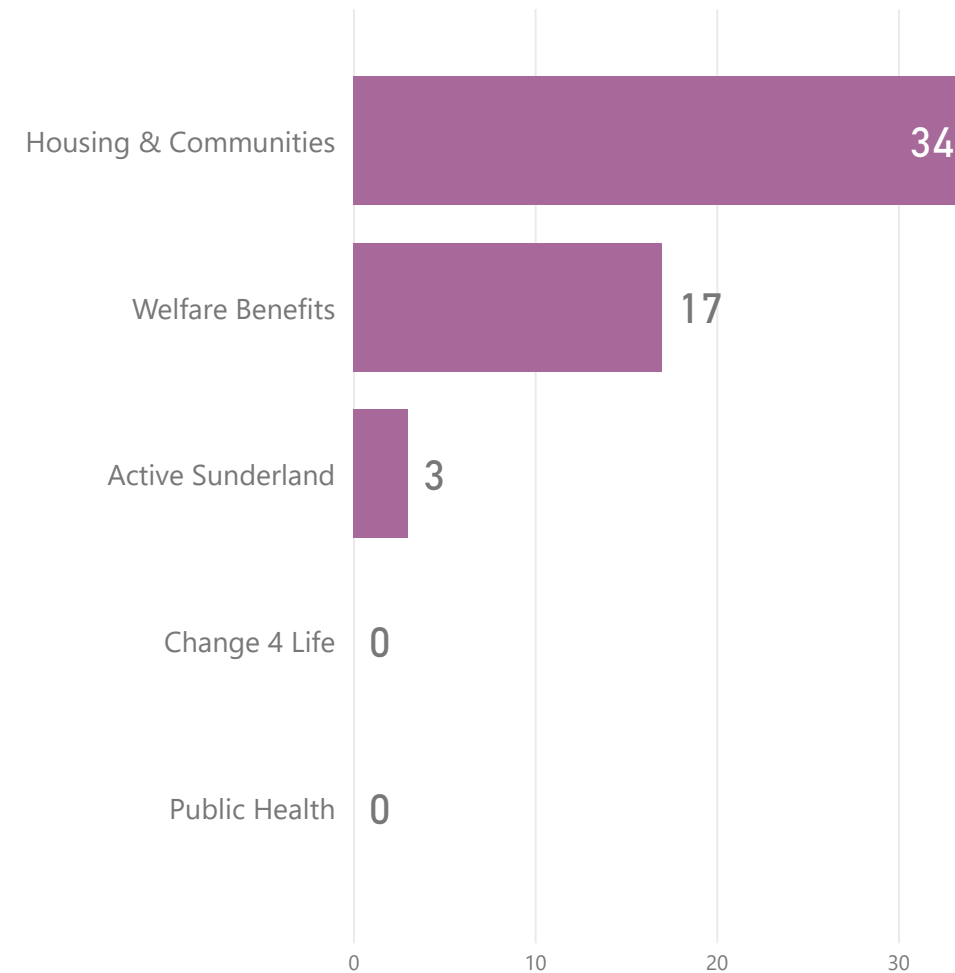


Corporate Complaints Breakdown for Stage 1

City Development - 544

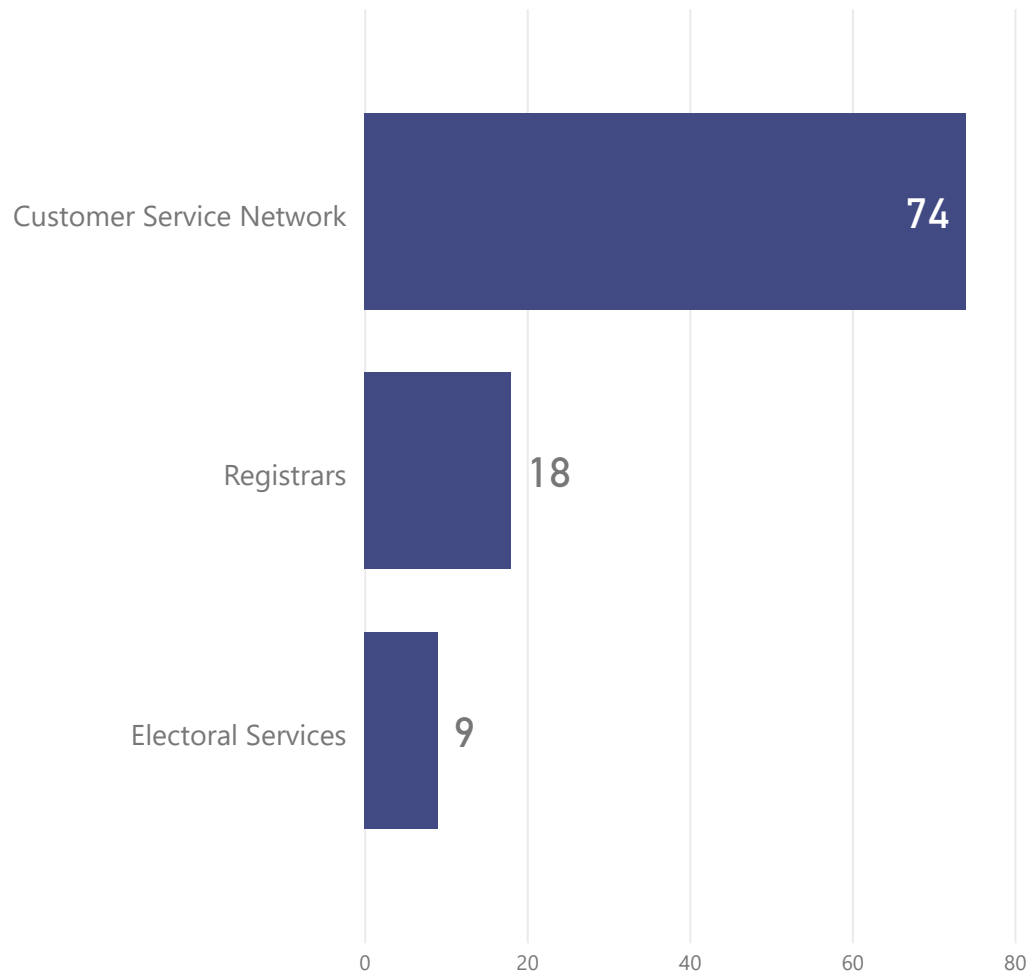


Health, Housing & Communities - 54



Corporate Complaints Breakdown for Stage 1

Smart Cities & Enabling Services - 101



PART B

Appendix 1 - Compliments tell us what people like best about the services they receive. We use this information to help us to continually improve levels of customer satisfaction.

Appendix 2 - The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman has a statutory responsibility for investigating complaints of maladministration about Local Councils. When a complaint has completed the Council's complaints process the complainant is advised of their right to escalate their complaint to the Ombudsman.

Appendix 3 - There are two stages to the Council's Corporate Complaints Procedure. Stage One complaints are handled by the relevant service area, with a response being provided to the customer within 25 working days. Should the complainant remain dissatisfied, they can escalate their complaint to stage two of the procedure. Stage Two is a Review undertaken by the Complaints and Feedback Team on behalf of the Chief Executive.

Appendix 4 – Adult Social Care Complaints. The Local Authority Social Services and National Health Service Complaints (England) Regulations 2009 provide for a single complaints process for all health and local authority *adult social care services* in England. There is one stage to this procedure. An appropriate manager within Adult Social Care considers the issues and provides a response to the complainant within 25 working days.

Appendix 5 – Sample of complaints received. This Appendix enables members to gain a sense of the content of the complaints, similar to what is provided regarding compliments.

Appendix 6 – Children's Services complaints. Statutory regulations were introduced by the Department for Education in 2006 entitled '*Getting the Best from Complaints – Social Care Complaints and Representations Procedure for Children and Young People*' to deal with complaints and representations made to Children's Services by children and young people. There are three stages to Together for Children's Complaints Procedure. Where a complainant remains dissatisfied, they can request escalation through each stage.

- Stage One focuses on local problem solving with a response being provided within 10 working days (with a possible extension to 20 working days in total).
- Stage Two is undertaken by an Investigating Officer who has not been involved with the case. An Independent Person must also be appointed. Investigations should be completed within 25 working days, although an extension of up to 65 working days is allowed.
- Stage Three is an Independent Review Panel, comprising of a chair and two panel members.

PART C

Appendix 1: Compliments

Compliments tell us what people like best about the services they receive. They also allow us to use this information to build those features into our services where possible and this helps us to continually improve levels of customer satisfaction.

	<i>2019-2020</i>	<i>2020-21</i>	<i>2021-22</i>	2022-23
Q1 - Apr-Jun	152	245	206	316
Q2 - Jul-Sep	176	210	235	190
Q3 - Oct-Dec	120	273	258	119
Q4 - Jan-Mar	115	181	360	110
	563	909	1059	735

The table below shows the service areas where compliments were received

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
Adult Services	20	27	14	26	87
Anti-Social -Behaviour			1	1	2
Bereavement Services			2	2	4
Council Tax	7		2		9
CSN	194	101	20	8	323
Environmental Health	2	4	4	2	12
Environmental Services	56	44	50	36	186
Highways / Network Management	17	5	6	7	35
Housing Benefits	1				1
Housing Options	2	3	1	7	13
Misc.	11	5	15	11	42
Parking Services	1		2	1	4
Registrars	5	1	2	9	17
	316	190	119	110	735

A sample of compliments received in Q4

Adult Services

I would like to thank the worker as she was very patient with me, she was caring and very helpful while going through the survey for adult services.

Customer would like to say thank you to OT team for the equipment that was given to make things easier in bathroom area. The staff who did assessment and delivered the equipment were very kind and helpful listen to needs and got equipment in place very quickly. Very pleasant experience.

Customer wanted to pass on his gratitude to wardens when they visited his home when a battery needed replacing. They did this quickly and efficiently.

Anti-Social Behaviour Team

You have arranged to get boulders placed more strategically around the area so now cars cannot get access via 2 routes. So much safer and it also means if motor bikes want to get through, they need to slow right down rather than whizzing through at speeds. Thanks to all involved it has not gone unnoticed!

Bereavement Services

A fantastic service provided by the Team, please pass on our heartfelt thanks for the great job that they do and for their kindness and consideration.

Customer would like to pass on her positive comments and feedback relating to her recent changes to her husband's plot. She advised that edging was taken off and gravel removed and turfed. She said she is delighted with it.

Customer Services

Thank you I would like to confirm that help I received was first class. In fact it was excellent.

Customer by her own admission finds anything technical difficult but the worker took the time to help her. He was friendly and patient with her and she said he was a credit to the department.

The line was cutting out the worker rang her back to complete the Blue Badge application. This meant that she did not have to wait in the queue to get back through to the team to continue the application. She was very grateful.

Customer spoke to council at 8.30 this morning regarding dumping of waste, he has advised it was cleared today and would like to say thank you for the way it was dealt with.

Derwent Hill

The level of training and hospitality provided by yourselves was outstanding. The kitchen staff couldn't do enough to provide a level of catering better than I've had in some expensive hotels. Then there's the food, wow is the only description. The equipment provided was more than enough to give us the confidence we needed for the activities, and everything was clean and comfortable.

Environmental Health

I'm writing to say a big 'Thank You' for helping us with our problem. Sunderland Council have dealt with the matter swiftly and appropriately. Both my wife and I extend our sincere thanks to yourself for your prompt action and steps taken to bring the matter to a successful end.

Environmental Services

The road cleaner operator was very thorough in cleaning our street - he spent time ensuring he did a great job. We have a lot of trees, and the leaves were making the road slippery, so he did a great job. Please ensure he receives this feedback.

The street looks fantastic after the street cleaning lads have swept it clean of litter and leaves today.

The footpath leading down to Ryhope beach (under the railway bridge) was recently cleaned up of dog fouling/urine/awful smell. It has made such an improvement and it made walking down there a much more pleasant experience. Thank you!

General thank you for removing a fridge freezer full of rotten food from the footpath on the customers street

I was really impressed with the speed of response to my request this week. The hedges in need of trimming were dealt with quickly and efficiently. Many thanks to all involved.

Highways

Thank you for the work on the drains yesterday, the resident was over the moon.

With reference to previous correspondence relating to the resurfacing - I am delighted that the work was completed last week. Many thanks to all concerned in arranging for this to be done. It is a joy now to use the back lane.

Housing

Thank you very much for all your hard work and endeavour it has taken to reach a really positive outcome.

Parking Services

Customer would like to thank the warden patrolling the problem parking in her street for the school drop offs. He was there a while and moved some cars on today.

Refuse

I was struggling to get my bin out and the bin man came and helped me get it out. I would like to say thank you very much.

Customer rang wanting to say thank you for the crew going back out to empty his green bin. He said that the lads were spot on.

Customer would like to thank the crew for their kindness and helpfulness in coming and quickly resolving her issue with the broken bin. They were very friendly, and she would like to pass on her praises to them.

Customer rang to thank everyone for the speedy delivery of his refuse container.

Customer called to thank refuse team collecting blue bins today. Advised only two of them and usually more there to help. Left all the bins perfectly in line and where they should be. Grateful that they're out doing a good job in all weathers.

Registrars

Can I start by saying it was nice to meet you today and very informative in the direction I need to go so I thank you for your valuable advice.

Thank you. Saturday couldn't have gone any better.

Just wanted to say a massive thank you. All of the French people loved what you did for them, and it made our ceremony a lot more personal. We couldn't have asked for a better person to have as a registrar!

Appendix 2

Complaints dealt with by the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman

There were 12 Ombudsman complaints in Q4 bringing the total for the year to 34.

The table below shows the number of complaints together with comparative data for previous years. The significant drop in 2020/21 was due to the effects of the Covid emergency. At the height of the first lockdown, the Ombudsman's office closed to new complaints and so in effect fewer complaints were registered in comparison to recent years.

Year	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Number of complaints	38	19	32	34

The table below shows the total number of complaints received for each Directorate to date, how many of those complaints the Ombudsman chose to investigate; and from those investigations how many were upheld.

	Total Ombudsman complaints	Number closed after initial enquiries	Number Investigated by Ombudsman	Outcome of Investigation	
				Number upheld	% Upheld rate
Adult Services	13	8	5	3	50%
Together for Children	12	10	2	1	
City Development	6	6	0	0	
Environmental Services	2	1	1	0	
Smart Cities & Enabling Services	1	1	0	0	
Total	34	26	8	4	

Detailed Investigations

Of the 8 detailed investigations, 4 were upheld, providing the outcome rate of 50%.

Comparative data from previous years is included in the table below.

Year	Number Investigated by Ombudsman	Number upheld	% Upheld rate
2019/20	11	7	64%
2020/21	3	1	33%
2021/22	12	9	74%
2022/23	8	4	50%

A short summary of the 4 upheld complaints is included below. The Ombudsman's reference is included in brackets and the full report can be found on their website; www.lgo.org.uk

Upheld Investigations (4)

Together for Children (21 005 119) a complaint that the Council delayed in assessing her son for an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) and then did not provide him with the provision listed in the plan.

Outcome: *Upheld – maladministration and injustice.*

The Council was at fault for delaying in finalising the EHCP and putting in place the provision listed in the plan.

Remedy: The Council apologised for the delay and paid compensation to remedy the lost SEN provision between June 2020 and October 2020.

Adult Services (22 001 205) - a complaint regarding the care provided to a relative, at a Council commissioned care home.

Outcome: *Upheld – fault and injustice.*

The care provider was at fault for not having proper records of the care it gave to Mrs Y. There was also fault in the care it gave to Mrs Y before she went to hospital. This impacted Mrs Y's dignity and comfort and caused Mrs X distress and uncertainty about the care provided. The care provider has acknowledged these concerns.

Remedy: - The Council has agreed to provide Mrs X and Mrs Y with a financial remedy (£150 each) to properly recognise the injustice and to take action to improve the care home's record keeping.

Adult Services (22 011 995) - A complaint that the Council failed to explain the costs for residential care and did not keep the family informed when making the placement permanent.

Outcome: *Upheld – fault and injustice.*

The Council was at fault as it failed to clearly explain the financial implications and failed to communicate properly with the family.

Remedy: - The Council has already revised the care charges, apologised, and offered to pay £700 to acknowledge the impact of the faults and this was considered by the Ombudsman to be an appropriate remedy.

Adult Services (22 005 590) - A complaint about poor care provided to a relative whilst at two Council-commissioned care homes.

Outcome: *Upheld – fault and injustice.*

There was fault in one care home's record keeping and in how the Council handled the complaint.

Remedy: - The Council has apologised for the frustration and uncertainty caused by the poor record keeping and its poor handling of the complaint. The Council's Commissioning Service will review the care home's record keeping as part of its next planned visit. The Council will also review its adult social care complaint handling procedures to ensure officers responding to complaints are appropriately trained to investigate complaints and provide comprehensive responses in line with its policy.

Appendix 3 - Corporate Complaints

Stage One

The table below shows the number of Stage One corporate complaints together with comparative data for the previous three years.

	<i>Number of complaints 2019-20</i>	<i>Number of complaints 2020-21</i>	<i>Number of complaints 2021-22</i>	<i>Number of complaints 2022-23</i>	<i>% change from same period last year</i>	<i>% responded to within timescale</i>
Q1	704	636	807	752	-6.5%	95%
Q2	770	804	790	730	-8%	90%
Q3	684	560	702	519	-29%	85%
Q4	502	689	540	551	+2%	85%
	2660	2689	2839	2552	-10%	

The 2552 complaints received are broken down into Directorates in the table below.

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
City Development	110	157	126	151	544
Finance	62	47	39	35	183
Environmental Services	523	481	318	311	1633
Health, Housing & Communities	5	14	11	24	54
Smart Cities	39	27	17	18	101
Misc.	13	4	8	12	37
	752	730	519	551	2552

City Development

Service Area	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
Planning (Building & Development Control)	3	7	3	19	32
Environmental Health, Trading Standards & Licensing	20	24	15	18	77
ASB/Community Safety	9	14	7	8	38
Parking Services	21	41	34	28	124
Environmental Enforcement	14	7	5	15	41
Culture, Event Facilitation and Delivery	2	14	19	1	36
Transport, Flooding, and Infrastructure	41	50	43	62	196
	110	157	126	151	544

Planning

Complaints about this service area were regarding issues to do with general planning issues, failure to follow processes, enforcement action.

Infrastructure & Transport

Complaints about this service area were regarding road resurfacing, footway repairs, traffic calming/restrictions and potholes.

Parking

Complaints about this service area were regarding car parks, the actions of the Civil

Enforcement Officers (CEO), lack of communication and Parking Permits.

Finance

Service Area	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
Council Tax	51	29	24	23	127
Benefits	6	6	1	4	17
Property Services	4	4	5	6	19
Business Support Services	1	0	1	1	3
Misc.	0	8	8	1	17
	62	47	39	35	183

Council Tax

Complaints about this service area were regarding general issues about Council Tax, incorrect information, Business Rates, payment issues and wrong action taken.

Environmental Services

Complaints in respect of Environmental Services make up 65% of the complaints made against the Council. The table below provides a breakdown of the service areas within Environmental Services.

Environmental Services	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
Refuse: <i>non/late delivery of bins & caddies/missed bins</i>	413	348	233	256	1250
Bereavement: <i>maintenance of cemeteries/crematorium</i>	6	11	10	5	32
Street Cleaning: <i>fly tipping/dog bins</i>	75	56	53	47	231
Trees, fixed play, trade waste: <i>grass cutting/tree pruning</i>	15	43	21	0	79
Waste Management: <i>Pallion Depot – staff attitude/permits</i>	14	23	1	3	41
	523	481	318	311	1633

Refuse Complaints

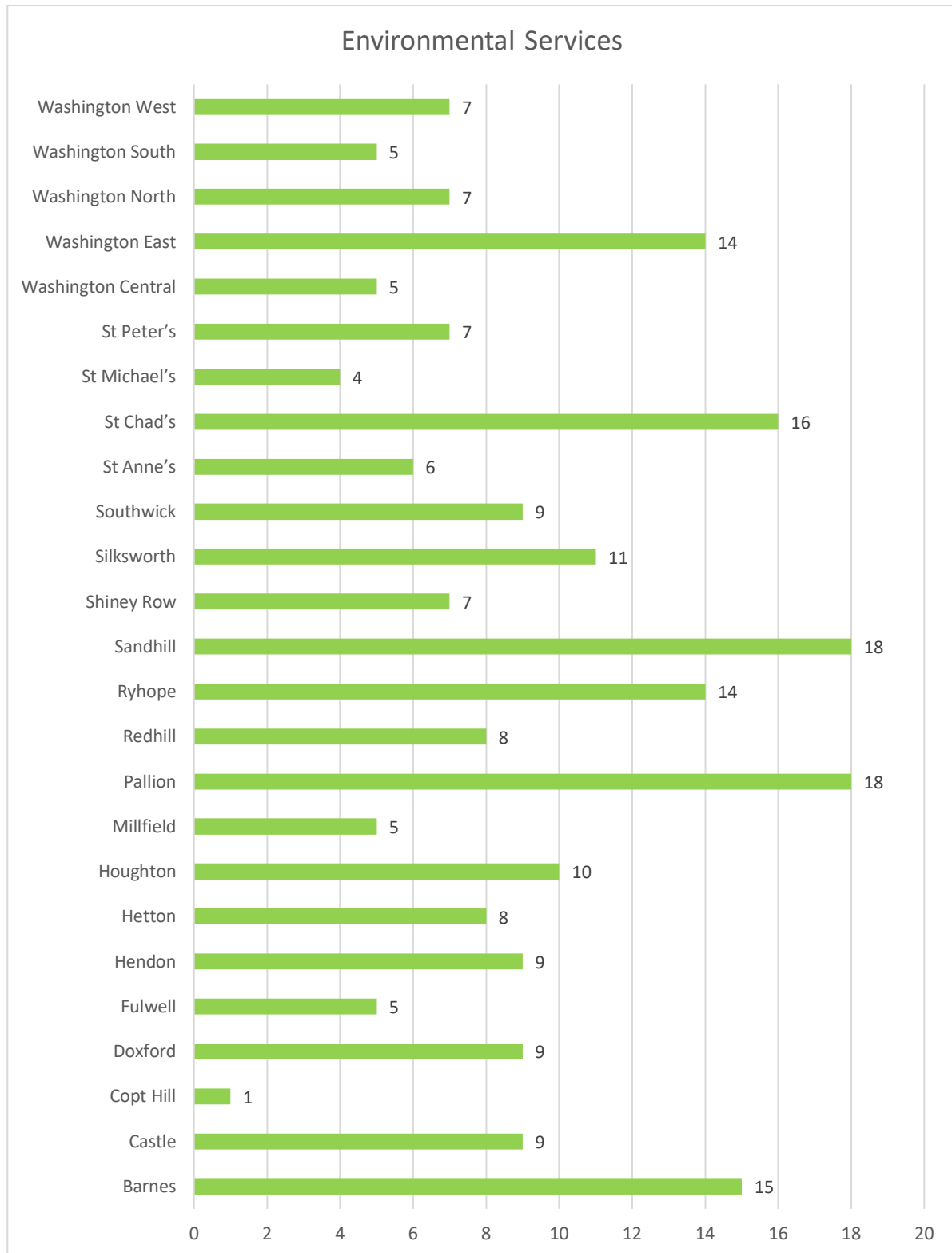
Of the 311 complaints received for Environmental Services, 256 (**82%**) were about issues to do with refuse collection. This should be viewed in context; in any quarter the Council will service approximately 1.6 million containers.

The table below contains data on complaints about refuse in relation to previous years.

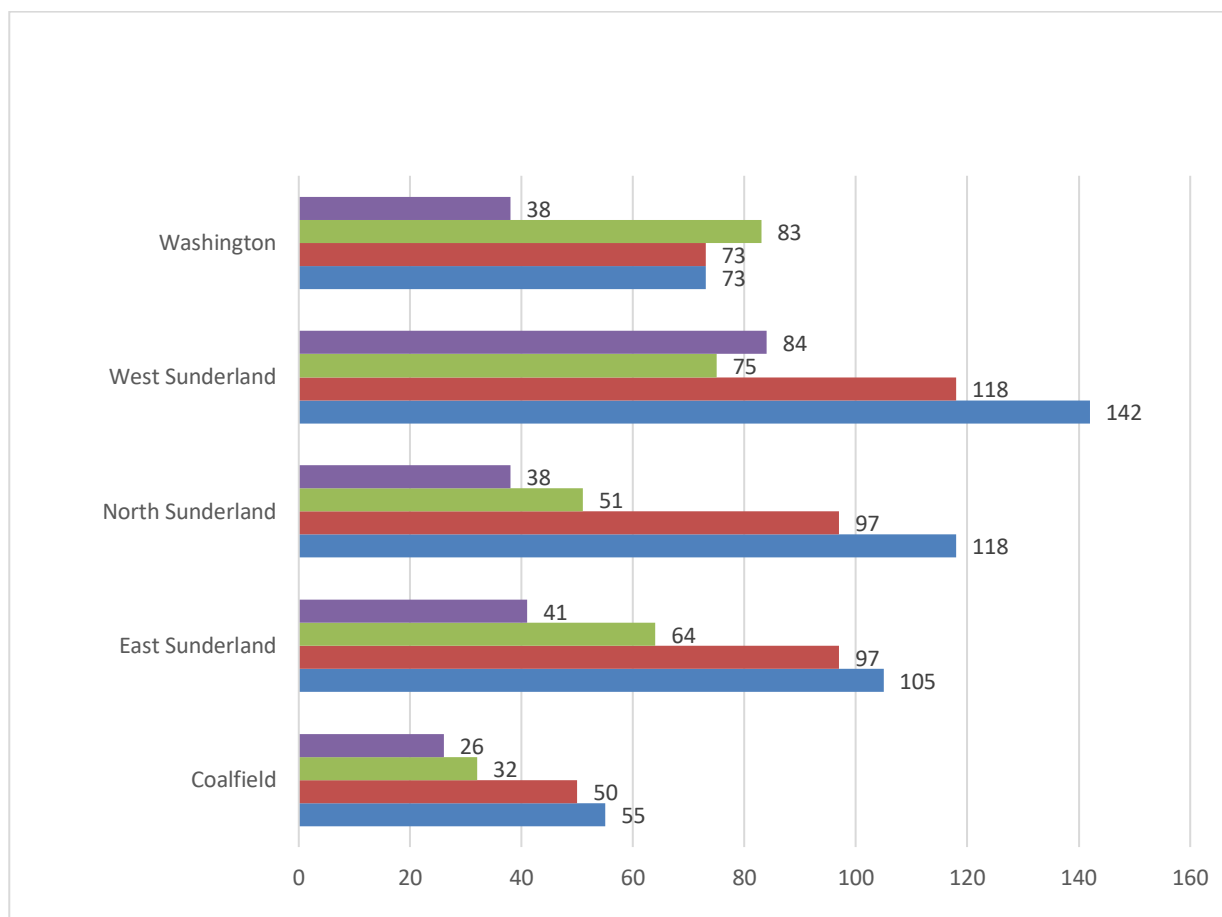
	Number of Complaints for 2019-20	Number of Complaints for 2020-21	Number of Complaints for 2021-22	Number of Complaints for 2022-23	% change from previous year
Q1	433	419	477	413	-13%
Q2	464	529	468	348	-26%
Q3	454	340	428	233	-46%
Q4	232	398	297	256	-18%
	1583	1676	1670	1250	-25%

At a previous Scrutiny Coordinating Committee, a request was made by Members for information to be provided about Environmental Services complaints by Ward area and also by Area Committee. Tables including this information are set out below.

Complaints about Environmental Services by Ward



Complaints about Environmental Services by Area Committee for 2022-23



Health, Housing & Communities

Service Area	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
Active Sunderland	0	1	0	2	3
Change 4 Life	0	0	0	0	0
Housing & Communities	5	9	8	12	34
Public Health	0	0	0	0	0
Welfare Benefits	0	4	3	10	17
	5	14	11	24	54

Smart Cities & Enabling Services

Service Area	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
Customer Service Network	27	21	15	11	74
Registrars	10	3	2	3	18
Electoral Services	2	3	0	4	9
	39	27	17	18	101

Customer Service Network

Complaints about this service area were regarding staff attitude, lack of communication and general issues around contact.

Stage Two - Review

Where customers remain dissatisfied with the response to their stage one complaint, they can request a review be undertaken by the Complaints and Feedback Team. The internal timescale for completing Reviews is 25 working days. More complex cases may require further time to complete with the aim of completing those within 65 working days.

Year	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Number of complaints	24	31	21	35	36
% Responded to within timescale	71%	81%	67%	74%	86%

The reviews were in respect of services within the following Directorates.

Directorate	Total	Outcome			
		Upheld	Partly Upheld	Not Upheld	Misc.*
City Development	15	0	3	10	2
Environmental Services	11	1	2	7	1
Finance	7	1	3	2	1
Health, Housing & Communities	1	0	0	1	0
Smart Cities & Enabling Services	2	0	0	2	0
	36	2	8	22	4

* unsubstantiated/not eligible

Summary of Stage 2 Reviews in Q4

City Development (4)

Building Control – the complainant disagreed with Building Control fees (*not upheld*)

Parking Services – a complaint about parking problems from a nearby school and lack of action from Parking Services (*not upheld*)

Highways – a complaint that the Council allowed the blocking/obstruction to a public right of way (*not upheld*)

Anti-Social Behaviour - a complaint about the actions of staff following allegations of anti-social behaviour (*not upheld*)

Environmental Services (1)

Refuse – a complaint regarding a missed bulky waste collection that resulted in vandalism (*upheld*)

Finance (1)

Insurance – a complaint about alleged officer conduct and incorrect information having been provided regarding the escalation of a complaint (*partly upheld*)

Health, Housing & Communities (1)

Homeless Team – a complaint about a lack of support from officers (*not upheld*)

Appendix 4: Adult Social Care

The table below shows the number of complaints received regarding adult social care services, together with comparative data for previous years.

85 complaints were received in 2022-23 which is a decrease of -4% on the previous year's 89 complaints.

Year	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Number of complaints	93	81	76	89	85
% Responded to within timescale	69%	59%	59%	49%	56%

The complaints were about the following issues.

Nature of Complaints	Total	Comparison Figures for previous year 2021-22
Actions of worker	11	17
Assessment Disagreement	7	13
Care Practice Issues	5	12
Communication	21	7
Delay	12	9
Finance	8	15
Lack of Choice	-	8
Quality Issues	11	8
Lack of help/support	10	-
	85	89

The table below shows the number of complaints made for each service area, together with the complaint outcomes.

	Total complaints	Complaint Outcomes				ongoing
		Upheld	Partly Upheld	Not Upheld	Misc.**	
Mental Health Service	7		2	5		
Hospital SW Team	10		1	4	5	
Learning Disabilities Service	5			5		
SW Locality Teams	39	7	8	16	3	5
Occupational Therapy Service	16	4	10		1	1
Financial Assessment Team	4	2	2			
Commissioned Services	1				1	
Financial Safeguarding Team	1			1		
Safeguarding/DoLS	2				1	1
Total	85	13	23	31	11	7
		15%	27%	37%	13%	8%

Summary information about the 2 upheld complaints received in Q4 is included below.

- A complaint about a lack of communication regarding a blue badge assessment.

There had been a lack of communication and some confusion in respect of the blue badge. The advocate who handled the initial contact was a new apprentice and has since received further coaching. An assessment was completed, and a Blue Badge was awarded. The customer was provided with an explanation regarding the complaint together with an apology which the customer accepted.

- *A complaint regarding the finances / costs incurred by a customer while they were a resident in a care home.*

The investigation found that there had been a delay in the completion of the CHC checklist, and the customer should have been entitled to their care fees being paid for a period of time. There was also an error within the financial assessment, and it was noted that some disregards which should have been applied had not been. In remedy, a refund was made to the customer and the financial assessment was amended.

Appendix 5: Complaints

A sample of stage one complaints received in Q4 is included below. Outcomes for the complaint are included in brackets.

Adult Services

Lack of support from Social Worker and documentation filled out incorrectly, without any family member being present. *(not upheld)*

Issues with costs of care and financial matters.

(upheld) It was identified that there had been a delay in the completion of the CHC checklist and the subsequent Decision Support Tool and the customer should have been entitled to her care fees being paid for a period of time. A refund was subsequently made to the customer.

Allotments

I have requested a call back from allotments but have not received one. There are dangerous trees touching my property and telephone cables. The fence panels are beginning to fail, and this could become a dangerous area. *(not upheld)*

Building Control

A complaint about a lack of communication regarding new constructions on a play area. *(not upheld)*

Business Support – Access to files

In accordance with GDPR, should an extension be required I should have been informed within the calendar month of the reasons. Unfortunately, I was not afforded that explanation within the allotted timeframe, so GDPR regulations have not been adhered to.

(partially upheld) Customer was spoken to and was happy with the information provided and actions put in place to get his information as soon as possible.

Council Tax

You have taken a payment on an account which had already been closed. I rang to query this and have been told that there is a four-to-six-week backlog and as such we cannot receive a refund. *(not upheld)*

I have been waiting since April 2022, for Sunderland City Council to sort out my council tax. After filling in forms, talking on the telephone, and many emails, I am still no further forward. *(upheld) The form had been allocated to the work tray of a member of staff not currently at work and therefore not processed. Issue now sorted and the manager has spoken to the customer who accepted an apology for the delay.*

Customer Services

Customer said she was told she would receive a marriage certificate in the post within 7 - 10 days and was not offered a fast-track service. The certificate was needed for a funeral to take place. *(not upheld)*

I have signed up for green waste collection, and I am still waiting for my bin sticker. My neighbours have received theirs. *(not upheld)*

Environmental Health

Customer had booked an appointment for someone to come out on to look at a potential rat problem. Customer received an email confirmation of the booking and stayed in all day, but no-one came, nor did they receive any contact about the appointment being cancelled. *(upheld) Appointment unfortunately missed. The customer was contacted, and apologies were offered as well as a rescheduled appointment at the customer's convenience.*

Environmental Services – Litter collections

There has not been a road sweeper around for some time and the area is covered in leaves.

(partially upheld) Manager spoke with resident and explained that the road sweeper that regularly sweeps that area has been off the road for some months and staff have to hand sweep the leaves up, but new sweeper is to be supplied shortly. Customer happy with response.

Customer has been requesting trees to be cut toward the back of her property for years now and no one has contacted her back or cut the trees down.

(partially upheld) Works were scheduled for March, resident had not been made aware, original works were to crown reduce but now updated that the trees are coming out as they have ADB.

Environmental Services - Cemeteries

Customer contacted to record their concerns regarding the perceived inability of Sunderland Council (whether it be Bereavement Services or Environmental Health) to deal with dog fouling within the boundaries of the Cemetery. Obviously, I appreciate that this is being perpetrated by inconsiderate dog owners, but they seem to be able to act with complete disregard for common decency.

(partially upheld) Advice given to customer.

Environmental Services - Trees

Boundary shrubs have all been cut right down but the customer is having issues with car lights shining in her home, she feels the shrubs did block this light from the roundabout traffic. Customer feels too much has been cut down.

(partially upheld) New plants have now been ordered. These plants will be located as soon as possible near the footpath between the direction of vehicle headlights and the customer's property to help with headlight diffusion.

Environmental Services - Refuse

On bin day, bins are placed up against garden wall as requested by yourselves. After collection however it is simply a case of where the staff throw them, leaving pathways impassable for disabled and their mobility aids.

(upheld) Manager has spoken to the crew and told them to put the bins back to where they have picked them up from and is to monitor this in the coming weeks.

You haven't emptied my green bin – I left it out at 07:30 and when I came back from work it hadn't been emptied. The bin is full, and someone needs to return and empty it prior to the next collection. *(not upheld)*

Customer had a bin delivery today but could not get the key for the back gate. The delivery man would not leave the bin as said he had to check the yard to see if there was already a bin on the premises. Customer said the delivery man was quite rude. *(not upheld)*

Environmental Services – Enforcement

Customer is very unhappy that she was issued a FPN in Mowbray Park when feeding the pigeons, she advised that she did not see the sign. She is unhappy about the attitude off the officer who gave her the ticket. *(not upheld)*

Housing

I submitted my application date explaining we were going to be homeless. I wasn't told till a month later that I had to fill out a homeless form. I have rung every week and been told I would be assigned someone/caseworker even that it would be raised to a manager and that they would call me. I am yet to receive a telephone call. *(not upheld)*

Housing Benefits

A complaint about a lack of communication and not answering emails. Customer said this had impacted them because they had not received benefits. *(not upheld)*

Customer said she had been told that her payment for HB was released on 02.02.23 and should be received by 06.02.23 at the latest. Payment has not been received despite system showing it was released. *(not upheld)*

Parking Services

I paid for 2 books of parking permits and have not received them, and this is now a matter of urgency as I have guests arriving.

(upheld) Contacted customer and apologised for delay. Customer had received scratch cards on the day complaint was submitted.

Planning and Development Control

You have erected two sets of barriers on a highly used cycle route and footpath. Now preventing people with wheel chairs, push chairs and mobility scooters from using the route.

(partially upheld) Council are not responsible and will contact National Highways to discuss.

Registrars

I ordered a birth certificate and paid for Fast Track on 23.01.23 - called today 31.01.23 as still not received. I was advised it was posted on 23.01.23 and if I wanted it sending again it would be another £35. Really disappointed in this service, I cannot even claim this cash back from Royal Mail as I am not the sender it would need to be yourselves that claim this.

(upheld) Another copy issued free of charge – customer to collect.

Together for Children Customer Feedback Annual Report 2022-2023



HIGHLIGHT SUMMARY 2022/23

What are our key achievements?

- We have received 189 compliments this year from children, young people, families, and professionals.
- We successfully helped 169 customers to receive satisfactory resolutions to their issues or concerns informally, without having to initiate a complaint.
- Overall, the number of complaints received has reduced by 14.8%.
- The number of complaint elements has reduced by 10% at stage one.
- Our refreshed complaint process is improving the customer experience and resolving concerns more quickly.

What are our areas of focus for 2022/23?

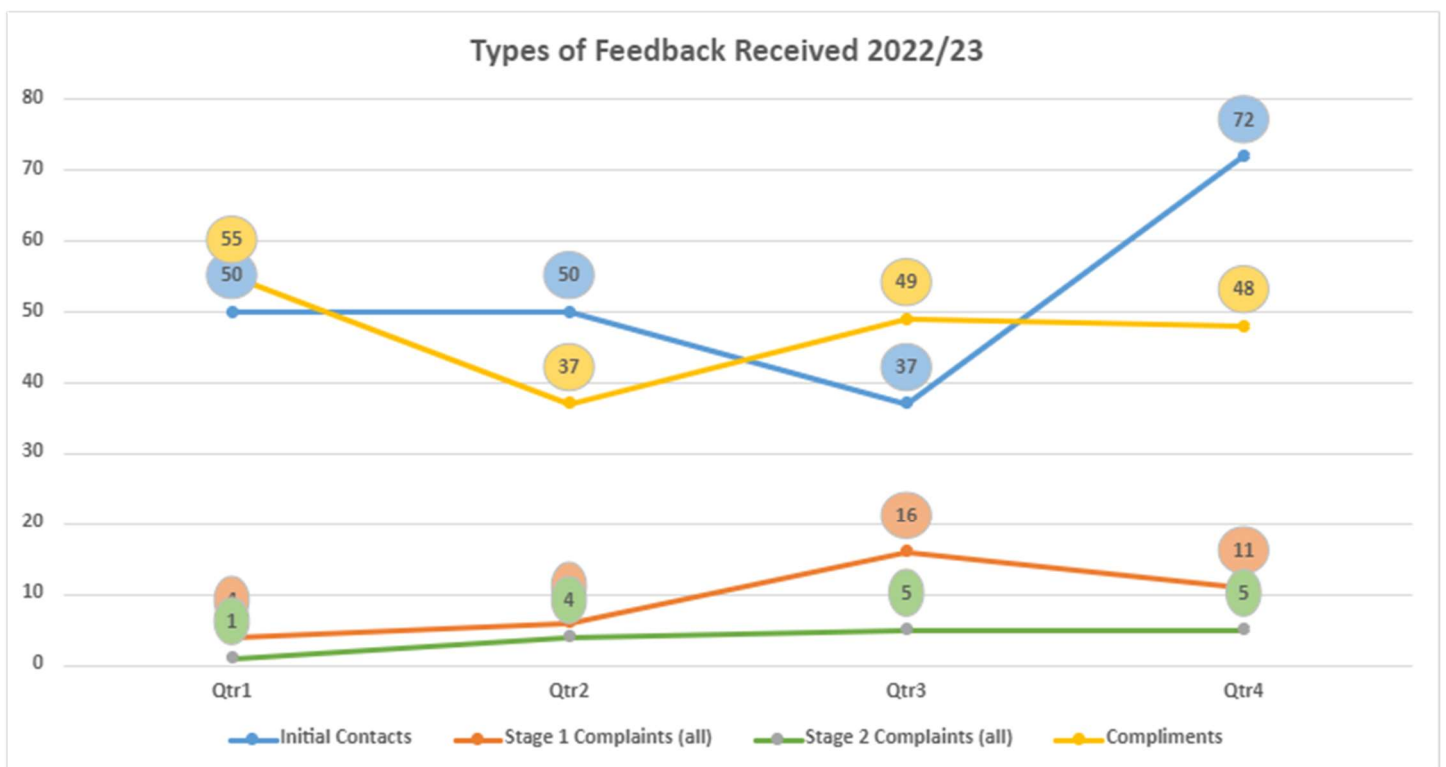
- Continue to focus on the timeliness and quality of complaints.
- Train and embed the small group of appointed TfC Independent Persons for Stage two Children's Social Care Complaints to work with Gateshead and South Tyneside Local Authorities in our regional arrangement.
- Implement the Apteon Respond complaints management system from May 2023 that will improve recording and provide greater analysis and insight through reporting.

1. PURPOSE OF THE ANNUAL REPORT

1.1. This report covers the period 1st April 2022 to 31st March 2023. Together for Children (TfC) welcomes all forms of feedback as a way of improving service delivery to children, young people, and families. The report provides an overview of customer feedback received throughout the year, identifying topics and trends in relation to complaints information and areas of organisational learning that have taken place in response to feedback received.

2. SUMMARY OF FEEDBACK

2.1. The Customer Feedback Team are responsible for receiving, recording, and responding to feedback received from children, young people and families regarding services delivered by Together for Children. The following graph shows the different types of feedback received in each quarter in 2022/23.



2.2. In addition to the above types of feedback, the Chief Executive, and Director of Children’s Services receives Member Enquiries. In 2022/23, we received 53 enquiries of which 40 were responded to within timescale. Most enquiries were in relation to education queries.

3. COMPLIMENTS

3.1. In 2022/23, we received 189 compliments from children and young people, parents and other family members, foster carers, external professionals, and staff within TfC. Compliments are communicated to workers and management structures of the relevant teams and is used to congratulate workers and teams and to inform service developments and best practice. Compliments are also shared more widely with the Senior Management Team and Communications Lead, so all staff can be recognised for their dedication and hard work. Below are some examples of the compliments we have received in 2022/23:

- **Adoption**
‘I just wanted to share feedback from Adoptive parents. They told me how amazing, brilliant and supportive X was during introductions and after. They wanted to let you both know how without her

support; they would have struggled during introductions and after Y was placed. They both sang X's praises and wanted to thank her for her ongoing support.'

- **Assessment Teams**

'I just wanted to say a big thank with all your support with X throughout your time working with us. There is still a long road ahead but hopefully all will fall into place.'

- **Careers and NEET**

'Thanks for all your amazing hard work with all our students, I haven't come across anyone who is more tenacious and hardworking when it comes to ensuring all young people in your care have a positive destination.'

- **Children's Homes**

'I would just like to say thank you for yesterday, X was terrified, and you made her feel relaxed and wanted. She was extremely grateful that you are going to move her in on Saturday and she couldn't believe how lovely Burlington Close was and that the flat was "going to be all hers". It must be a horrible feeling when nobody wants you, but she left your office yesterday happy and no longer worried.'

- **Children with Disabilities Team**

'A huge thank you from a parent for very well written assessment - in his feedback Dad has stated he was brought to tears in how 'beautifully written' X assessment was and said that in his job role as a teacher, he reads and writes but has never come across anything like this before.'

- **Child Protection Teams**

'I would like to thank social worker X for the invaluable help given to my precious daughter. Fortunately, despite a traumatic journey, it has concluded as a positive outcome. I firmly believe, it may have been a different outcome if X had not been allocated. Through her expertise and her belief in myself and my family, Y's mental health would have deteriorated further. Her approach from day one was so supportive. She listened to Y and always put her needs first. If other professionals became heavy handed, she was Y's advocate and stood firm with them. As time went by Y became trusting of professionals again and opened up to being helped. This was the turning point for her, and she became her happy self. I have my daughter back, for this, I am eternally grateful. Thank you for making a difference.'

- **Customer Feedback Team**

'I have found your organisation to be fantastic at dealing with complaints so professionally.'

- **Early Help Team**

'Just a massive thank you to X for being there from day one, all the calls when I needed a cry, fighting my corner with everyone and all the advice even if I went back a million times. I always knew I'd leave, just didn't know how or if I was ready to. It meant so much knowing she was always there when I felt like I had nowhere to turn.'

- **Fostering**

'It was agreed at panel today that I should write regarding the foster carers in the matching matter. Panel were in agreement that the foster carers report was one of the best we have read. It painted a wonderful picture as to how the children have developed while in their care from when they were first placed with them. It was much appreciated that X attended the panel to give more information about the children and her support for the couple as proposed adopters was of great assistance. Panel and myself express our thanks to X for the help she gave to us.'

'Mockingbird has helped me so much with my confidence and trust. X and Y made me feel really welcome from the 1st day I met them. Due to my past experience with Social Services down south I was always looked upon as being nothing but everyone in Mockingbird made me realise that I was something. They

made me feel part of a family, they didn't judge my past mistakes, they have given me a chance that nobody else did and from this my relationship with my son and his foster parents is the best it's ever been.'

- **ICRT**

'I would like to give positive feedback about X and her manager. They have gone out of their way to help and support me the past few days. I want them to know that I am grateful and that they are doing a lot to help me and I want them to be recognised for this.'

- **Children's Independent Reviewing Team (CIRT)**

'I just wanted to share with you long overdue praise for X. I was on a visit last night and observed a lovely relationship between the young people and X. She was warm, respectful and gave her full attention to the needs of the children. I have also worked on a couple of other cases with X and find her very approachable and lovely to work with, always being professional with the professionals, carers and children alike. I hope to continue to have many more cases with her.'

- **Next Steps**

'I just wanted to say thanks for the time you have spent with X one of our NQSWs from Coalfields. She spoke about how much she has learnt about the age assessment process and how kind you have been to her, it was lovely to hear her speak so positively about the experience and support of colleagues outside of her team.'

- **Performance**

'What a fantastic support X has and continues to be to me. What she doesn't know about spreadsheets is not worth knowing! Her approachable and kind manner has been so helpful to me and it is much appreciated.'

- **Permanence Teams**

'I would love to thank my social worker X as she has been so amazing and supportive. I couldn't ask for a better social worker. Thank you so much from me, Y and the kids, you have supported us so much.'

- **Pre-Birth Team**

'X and Y spoke at length about what a positive experience they have had with Together for Children and the support they have received from ATM and SW has been 'incredible!' They shared that they have been made to feel at ease, always kept in the loop and they even commented on how progressive, and child focused TfC's language and approach is overall. They said they completed their assessment and training with Cumbria and they have given written feedback to Cumbria in that they should model their practice on TfC's! X and Y have felt so supported and assured by the care planning for Z that if they were to ever adopt again, they would wish for this to be with TfC.'

- **SEND Team**

'I want X to know that I appreciate how challenging it was for her to find a suitable alternative provision regarding Y's education. I would like her to know that her tenacity and thinking outside of the box is noted and highly valued by myself. Y is thriving in his attendance with 'Outdoor Ambition.' He loves it and the staff are excellent in the way they manage and support him. This has led to Y's improved engagement with TFC and in him making steady progress in his day-to-day life skills.'

- **Targeted Youth Services**

'I just want to pass on my thanks to X and Y. I feel the joint operation went really well and feel the staff fully engaged with the local youths and offered advice around Wear Kids and the summer activities that are available. The patrols were carried out around the main ASB hotspot areas and a number of residents said they saw us during these patrols. The local youths fully engaged with all of us and wanted to ask us questions which was brilliant to see. I personally feel this would be something to maybe look at exploring again in the future.'

4. INITIAL CONTACTS

4.1. Initial contacts presented by customers can be queries, concerns, information requests or issues that require a resolution. Whilst customers are provided with information about the complaints process and their rights to complain, we aim to achieve informal resolution at the earliest opportunity, in the best interests of customers for an improved customer experience. The table below shows the initial contact data for each quarter:

Initial Contacts	Q1 (Apr – Jun)	Q2 (Jul – Sep)	Q3 (Oct – Dec)	Q4 (Jan – Mar)	Total 2022/23	
Number Received	50	50	37	72	209	
Number Escalated to Stage 1	4	6	16	11	37	17.7%

4.2. In 2022/23 we received 209 initial contacts. Through responding to issues or concerns at the outset, we have helped 169 of our customers to receive satisfactory resolutions informally with just 37 (17.7%) initial contacts escalating to a formal stage one complaint.

An example of an initial contact:

A mother was unhappy with the level of communication and updates received regarding her child's EHCP plan and was wanting to the service to confirm the name of the school that her child would be attending. The case worker and manager from the SEND service arranged a time to speak to the parent and explained the reason for the delay and confirmed the school that her child would be attending. The manager apologised for the delay and any upset caused. The parent accepted the response and did not wish to pursue a formal complaint.

5. COMPLAINTS PROCESS

5.1. **Children's Social Care Complaints** - follows statutory guidance and is a 3-stage process as follows:

- **Stage One** – the initial stage of the process is investigated by an Officer in the Customer Feedback Team. It is hoped a local resolution can be achieved within 10 working days, however an extension of up to 20 working days can be requested for more complex cases.
- **Stage Two** – on receipt of the response to their stage one complaint, customers have 20 working days to request their complaint is progressed to stage two if they are unhappy with the initial outcome. At this stage, an Investigating Officer will be appointed to investigate the complaint and an Independent Person who will be involved in all aspects of consideration of the complaint. The investigation can take between 25-65 working days to complete.
- **Stage Three** – if the customer remains unhappy with the outcome of the stage two complaint, they have 20 working days to request their complaint is progressed to stage three. The review should take place within 30 days of the request. At stage three, a review panel will be appointed to review the complaint. This will consist of three independent people who will make recommendations to the Director of Children's Services.

5.2. If the customer remains unhappy, they can raise their complaint with the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.

5.3. **Corporate Complaints** - any complaints that do not relate to Statutory Children's Services, are handled under the corporate complaints procedure which consists of the following two formal stages.

- **Stage One** – the initial stage of the process is investigated by an Officer in the Customer Feedback Team. It is hoped a local resolution can be achieved within 10 working days; however, an extension can be requested for more complex cases.

- **Stage Two** – on receipt of the response to their stage one complaint, customers have 20 working days to request their complaint is progressed to stage two if they are unhappy with the initial outcome. At this stage, an Investigating Officer will be appointed to investigate the complaint within 25 working days; however, an extension can be requested for more complex cases.

5.4. If the customer remains unhappy, they can raise their complaint with the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.

6. COMPLAINTS RECEIVED

6.1. The table below shows the number of complaints we received under the Children’s Social Care and Corporate Complaints Policies, at each stage of the process.

	Q1 (Apr-Jun)		Q2 (Jul-Sep)		Q3 (Oct-Dec)		Q4 (Jan-Mar)		Totals	
	Social Care	Corporate	Social Care	Corporate	Social Care	Corporate	Social Care	Corporate	2022/23	
Stage 1	1	3	5	1	6	10	4	7	37	-5
Stage 2	0	1	2	2	3	2	1	4	15	-1
Stage 3	0	N/A	0	N/A	0	N/A	0	N/A	0	-3
Totals	1	4	7	3	9	12	5	11	52	-9
	-14	+2	-1	-1	-5	+10	-7	+7		

6.2. **Overall total** - in 2022/23 we received 52 complaints compared with 61 in 2021/22 which shows a decrease of 14.8%.

6.3. **Stage one complaints** - in 2022/23 we received 5 fewer stage one complaints. Of those there was a reduction of 52.9% relating to children’s social complaints and 162.5% increase relating to corporate complaints.

6.4. **Stage two complaints** - We received 6 children’s social care stage two complaints compared with 12 in the previous year, of which none progressed to stage three (compared with 3 in 2021/22). 9 of the corporate complaints progressed to stage two compared with 4 the year before.

Number of Complaints by Young People:

6.5. 1 complaint was received by a young person which is a decrease of 1 compared to the previous year.

6.6. Whilst we do not receive many formal complaints from children and young people, TfC collects regular feedback from children, young people, and their families about the services they are accessing. In addition, the Mind of My Own One and Express Tools allows young people accessing assessment, planning and intervention to share their views or concerns. In 2023/24 the Customer Feedback Team will provide an overview of this feedback within the Annual Report. All feedback is considered by the relevant services.

7. STAGE ONE COMPLAINTS

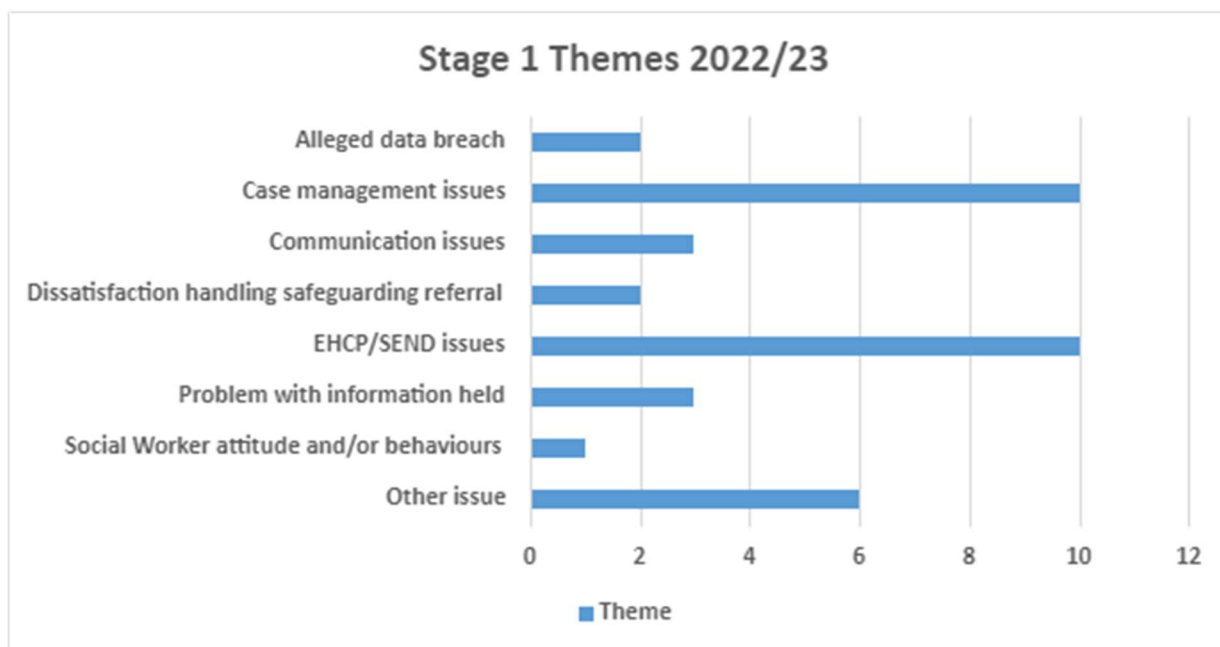
7.1. The table below shows the percentage of stage one complaints received by service area.

Team	Total 22/23	Total 22/23
SEND Team	12	32.4%
Child Protection Teams	6	16.2%
Assessment Teams	4	10.8%
Connected Carers	4	10.8%
Children with Disabilities Team	3	8.1%
Permanence Teams	3	8.1%
Next Steps	2	5.4%
Pre-Birth Team	1	2.7%
CIRT	1	2.7%
Supported Lodgings	1	2.7%
TOTAL	37	100.0%

7.2. 32.4% of stage one complaints received in 2022/23 relate to the SEND Team. This equates to increase from 4 in the previous year to 12 in 2022/23. 16.2% of stage one complaints received relate to the Child Protection Teams but there has been a decrease in the number of complaints from 10 to 6 when compared with the previous year.

Themes:

7.3. The main themes of the complaints completed at Stage One in 2022/23 are shown in the chart below:



7.4. Complaints relating to case management (sufficiency of support and decision making) together with complaints linked to EHCP/SEND issues make up the top two themes in 2022/23.

Timeliness of Response to Stage One Complaints:

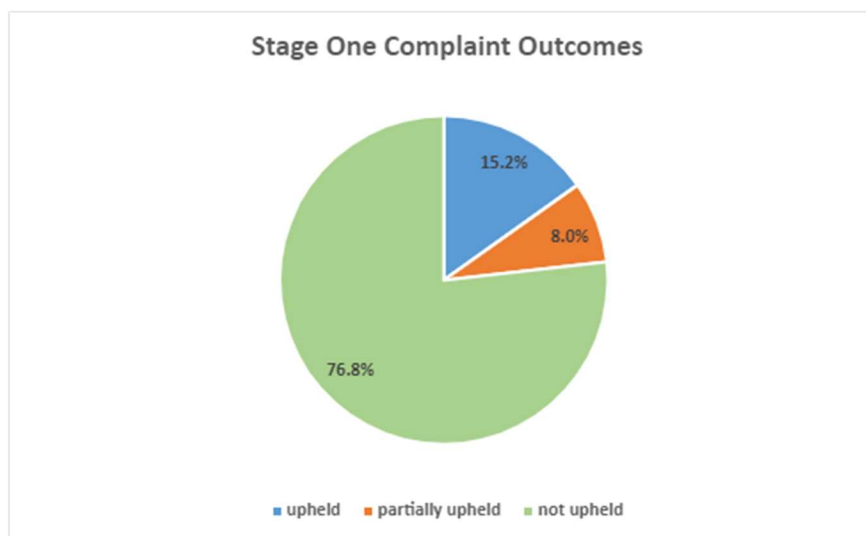
7.5. The timeliness of stage one complaints has fluctuated over the year but overall there has been a slight increase from 71% in the previous year to 75% in 2022/23. The Customer Feedback Team aim to resolve concerns at the

earliest stage for customers by providing a greater focus on customer conciliation and mediation, e.g., offering opportunities for customers to meet with workers and managers so they can listen, discuss, and resolve their issues rather than moving to the lengthier stage two process (where this is possible). Whilst this increases customer satisfaction, consequently it can take some complaints at stage one out of timescale.

% Of all stage 1 complaints responded to in timescale	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	YTD
	25%	100%	87.5%	60%	75%

Stage One Complaint Outcomes:

- 7.6. There were 112 elements of complaint identified within stage one complaints that concluded in 2022/23, compared with 124 elements of complaint in the previous year. The outcomes of all stage one complaint elements for the year are shown below.



- 7.7. Most complaint elements (equating to 76.8%) were not upheld.
- 7.8. Of the 112 elements of complaint, only 17 elements (15.2%) were upheld, and those elements related to case management, requests for information or services, a missed visit, inaccurate information, impact of TfC involvement and poor communication. A further 8.0% of elements were partially upheld.

An example of a stage one social care (statutory) complaint:

A complaint was received regarding an SGO payment not being made following an annual review of payments. The payment was stopped as the relevant paperwork had not been returned by the customer by the required timescale. The stage 1 complaint investigation did not find TfC at fault as reminders were sent however the manager and investigator did recognise that the postal strikes could have impacted the timeliness of paperwork. For this reason, the Manager contacted the customer to confirm the paperwork had been received and explained the next steps whereby the payments would be backdated, and a letter would be sent to confirm the payments. The customer was satisfied with the response and did not wish to escalate their complaint to stage two.

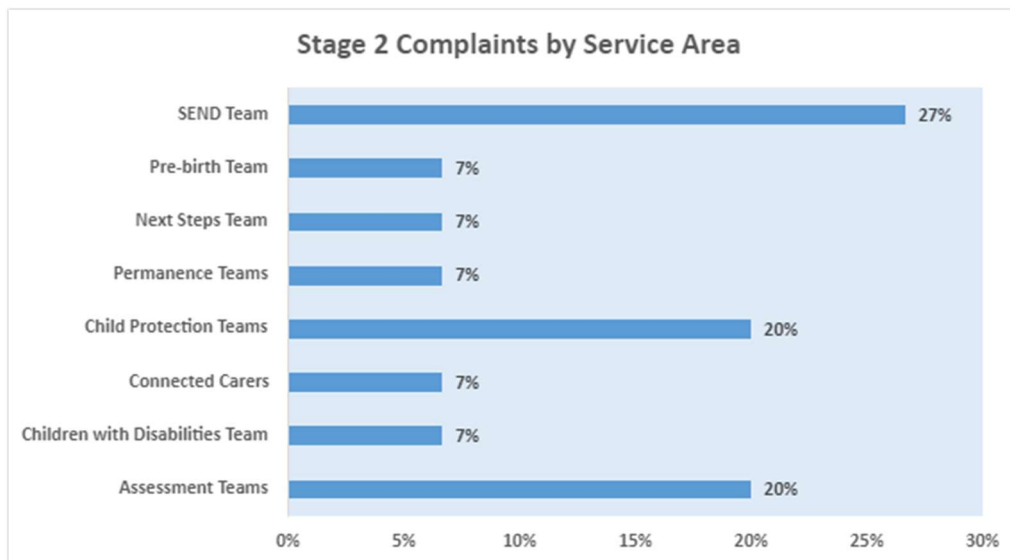
A second example of a stage one social care (statutory) complaint:

A complaint was received from a parent regarding inaccuracies in a report that described worries about their behaviours. The investigator found the complaint to be partially upheld as whilst it was essential that worries regarding the behaviours were documented and discussed, it was not 100% clear in the document that the behaviours related to allegations only. As a remedy, the Service Manager spoke with the parent and agreed to upload an email encompassing their views to the case management system and agreed to reinforce the message and learning within her teams about the importance of recording accurate reflections around allegations.

8. STAGE TWO COMPLAINTS

8.1. Overall, the number of stage two complaints completed has decreased by 1 when compared to last year, however the number of stage two elements investigated this year has significantly reduced by 54% suggesting learning and improvement actions are having a positive impact for our customers.

8.2. The chart below shows the number of all stage two complaints received by service area.



8.3. Of the 15 stage two complaints received, 27% related to the SEND Team, 20% to the Assessment Teams, and 20% to Child Protection Teams.

8.4. The top themes for stage two complaints related to case management and decision making and EHCP/SEND issues. For example, how information has been shared, timeliness of EHCP plans, accuracy of information, provision of education provision identified in EHCP, disagreement with alleged accusations, timeliness of assessments, decisions not to return child to parents, not agreeing with social worker involvement etc.

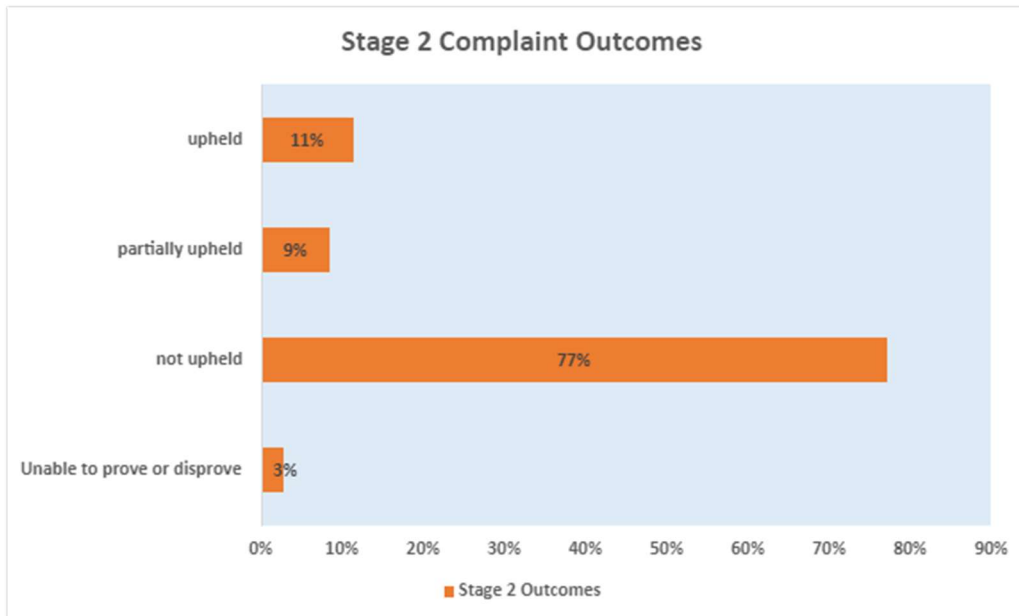
Timeliness of Response to Stage Two Complaints:

8.5. In 2022/23, 18 complaints concluded (*figures differ to numbers received, as there were complaints open at the start of the year from 2021/22 and complaints that remain open moving into 2022-23*). 11 of the stage two complaints related to children's social care and 7 were corporate complaints. 14 of the stage two complaints were completed within the 65 working-day timescale (78%). This is a significant improvement compared with 2021/22 where 9 (64%) of stage 2 complaints were completed in timescale.

8.6. The average days taken for investigation and adjudication of the complaints was 67 working days: down from an average of 87 working days in 2021/22. Whilst progress has been made, this will continue to be an area of focus for the Customer Feedback Team in 2023/24.

Stage Two Complaint Outcomes

8.7. There were 70 elements of complaint identified within all stage two complaints that concluded in 2022/23. The outcomes of stage two complaint elements for the year are shown below.



8.8. At stage two, most complaint elements equating to 77% were not upheld and a further 3% were unable to prove or disprove. 9% of elements were partially upheld and 11% were upheld. The main subject areas of elements upheld at stages two are as follows:

- Confidentiality linked to sharing information with young person
- Social worker speaking inappropriately about a parent
- Not providing a final EHCP within timescale
- Actions taken following a safeguarding concern
- Not processing Parent Carer Assessment within timescale
- Not adequately preparing Foster Carers
- Not advising parents of child missing from foster home
- Inadequate support during foster to adopt process

8.9. In comparison to previous years, there are fewer subject areas at stages two due to the significant reduction in complaint elements this year. Although the numbers are much lower to draw out definitive themes for improvement, the upheld elements are reviewed by relevant senior management teams. The Customer Feedback Team identifies any reoccurring complaint elements and feeds this back to managers through regular reporting.

An example of a stage two corporate complaint:

A parent complained about the delays to the completion of her child’s EHCP plan which she felt led to a delay in providing an appropriate level of education for her child. The Investigating Officer upheld the complaint relating to the timeliness of the EHCP as the delay was extensive, partly due to the school holidays. Whilst this delay did impact the timescale for alternative education provision, the Investigator found that appropriate temporary provision was provided in the current school setting whilst a change in school was being arranged. Therefore, the second element of complaint was not upheld. The Service Manager apologised to the parent for the delays to the EHCP plan and offered a payment of £500 for the time and trouble in raising her complaint.

9. OMBUDSMAN REFERRALS

9.1. There have been 14 complaints highlighted to the Customer Feedback Team by the Local Government Ombudsman so far this year; 1 was upheld, 11 were closed after initial enquiries, and 2 are in progress at the investigation stage.

10. COST OF COMPLAINTS

- 10.1. The total cost of investigating claims this year was £7,197.50 compared to £16,415 in the previous year. As per the new complaints process, all stage two investigations (where possible) are undertaken by TfC Investigating Officers rather than using external allocations, resulting in a significant saving. The costs therefore relate to the external recruitment of Independent Persons who work alongside the Investigating Officers in line with statutory guidance.
- 10.2. The compensation costs paid in relation to upheld complaints this year is £1,200 compared with £28,415 last year. The £1,200 relates to a SEND complaint.

11. PERSISTENT & UNREASONABLE COMPLAINANT BEHAVIOUR

- 11.1. The Customer Feedback Manager wrote to three customers this year regarding the content and frequency of their communications to our services. The matters did not escalate further.

12. LEARNING AND IMPROVEMENT

- 12.1. We continue to drive improvement from learning from the complaints and compliments raised. An action plan is maintained by the Customer Feedback Team which includes actions and recommendations from stage two investigations and stage three panels. The action plan is closely monitored by the team. Reminders are sent to managers with responsibility for the recommendations each month and reported into Senior Management Team meetings to ensure that the learning is shared across the whole service. Below are some examples of the recommendations undertaken this year:
- The importance of workers being transparent about the process in Foster to Adopt arrangements was reinforced across relevant teams.
 - Practice standards were updated to include workers seeking agreement with families regarding the best way to communicate sensitive information recognising this will be different for each family.
 - A reminder was sent to workers regarding the method of recording telephone calls within the case management system, and it was reinforced in the all-staff communications meeting and within the standard case management training.
 - Further training was arranged on the assessment guidelines, exploring strengths and safety within a family to manage and reduce harm.
 - Team Manager of EDT provided reminders to the team about contacting those with Parental Responsibility of any changes, should those changes occur during the times that EDT have responsibility for the child or young person.
 - A review was undertaken between the Fostering Team and Children's Social Care Teams, regarding the standards of information required to ensure that Foster Carers have all the relevant information to provide care from the start of the child or young person being in their care. The findings and recommendations were reported and implemented.
 - The Principal Social Worker, shared with staff, information from Community Care Inform about alienating behaviours. Training was also provided by colleagues within Legal Services in relation to this issue in the context of Private Law Proceedings.
 - A programme of mandatory training, regarding GDPR, was rolled out to all staff within TfC. Staff will be required to undertake GDPR training on an annual basis which will be monitored by Senior Management Teams.
 - A meeting was arranged with a young person to discuss who he wanted at his Cared for Meeting going forward and a process was put in place to ensure his advocate was provided with dates and times of meetings as early as possible to ensure attendance.
 - All recommendations from stage two adjudications are shared with all staff during monthly face-to-face meetings. Written notes are also taken by a minute taker and circulated across the service, so that those who cannot attend are also updated.

- 12.2. We have seen positive impacts from implementing recommendations identified following Stage two complaints through continued reductions in complaint numbers at stage one, a significant reduction in the number of complaint elements at all stages and a reduction in the reoccurring themes from last year.
- 12.3. We have continued to work with services to improve timeliness and responding more proactively to customer concerns. Although there is still work to do to continue to improve timeliness, we have received positive feedback from customers confirming that concerns are being resolved at an earlier stage and therefore customers are not having to proceed through the lengthier stages unnecessarily.
- 12.4. The Customer Feedback Team will continue to proactively work with services to analyse arising themes to identify learning and improvement opportunities. The Customer Feedback Team is also focused on developing skills with its team and each member of the team has attended training in 2022 including the LGO Effective Complaints Handling training in July and a 3-day Complaints Handling and Investigations training to achieve a BTEC Level 5 qualification in June 2022.
- 12.5. We continue to be part of a local arrangement for the recruitment of Independent Persons (IPs) for Stage two Children's Social Care complaints, working with Gateshead and South Tyneside local authorities. As a result of this arrangement, we are seeing a reduced delay in instigating the investigation process through a quicker appointment process. We have recruited our own small pool of IPs who can undertake the IP role in Gateshead and South Tyneside authorities where workers will be able to see practice in neighbouring authorities and add to their experience, learning and knowledge.
- 12.6. The Customer Feedback Team will be implementing the Apteon Respond complaints handling management system in May 2023. This will ensure our complaints data is more accessible, can be reported more easily and will assist with workflow management within the team. The system will provide greater insight into the identification of themes and areas for learning and improvement.
- 12.7. Two new Customer Feedback Officers joined the team in May 2022 to further strengthen our resources dedicated in the early initial contact stage and to ensure our Stage 1 complaint responses are robust and as timely as possible, to offer our customers the best possible service to resolve their concerns. Both Officers have thriving in their role and have brought fresh skills and knowledge to the team.