

# **SMART CITIES AND ENABLING SERVICES DIRECTORATE**

**Annual Report**

**Compliments, Complaints & Feedback**

**For the period:**

**April 2023 - March 2024**

# Introduction

This report from the Complaints and Feedback Team includes information for Quarter 4 and covers the financial year, April 2023 - March 2024.

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.

Sunderland Care and Support provide a separate annual overview for Scrutiny Committee.

The first part of this report includes statistical data, which is presented in an updated, easy to view format.

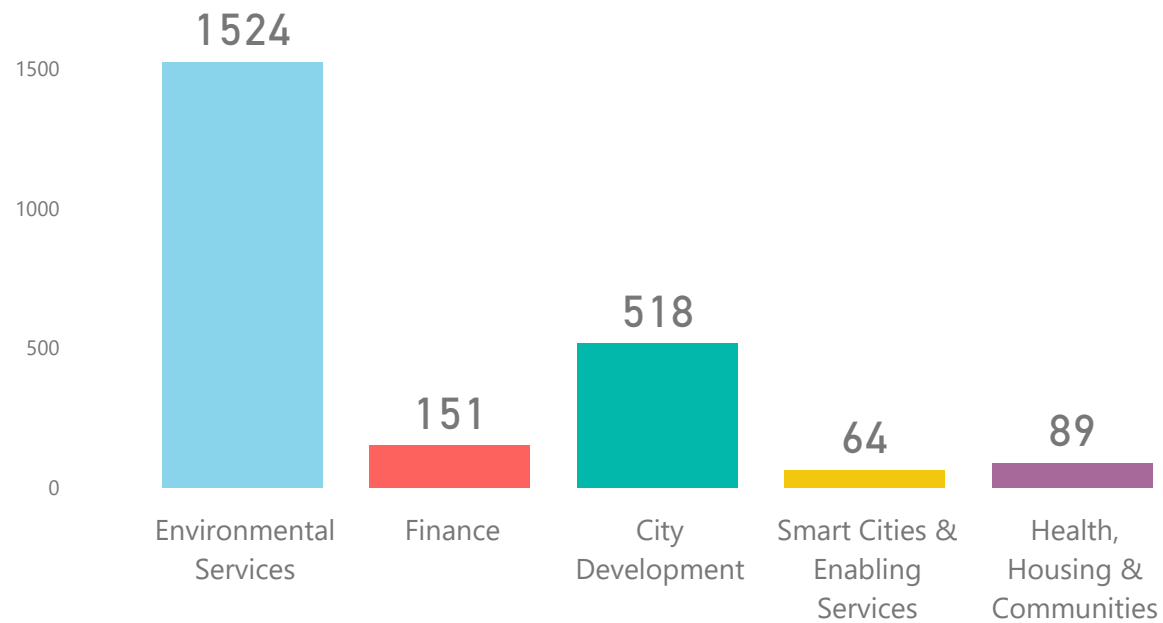
The report goes on to provide information on the different Compliments and Complaints Procedures that are used by the Council to handle customer feedback and also includes further information on each service area.

# Complaints Overview

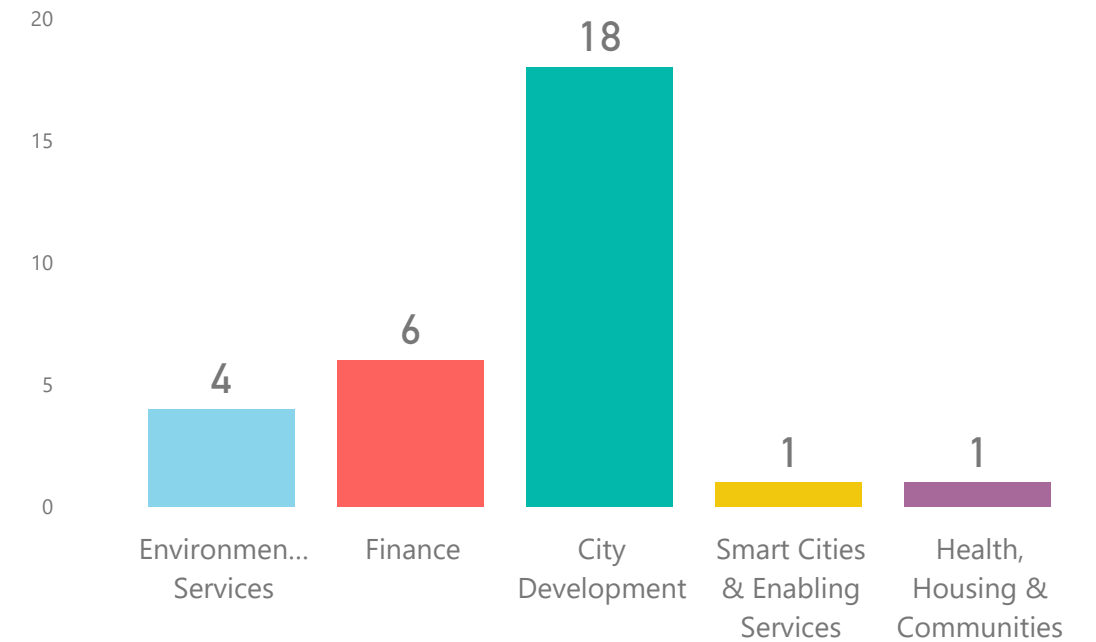
Ombudsman - 29



Corporate Stage One - 2346

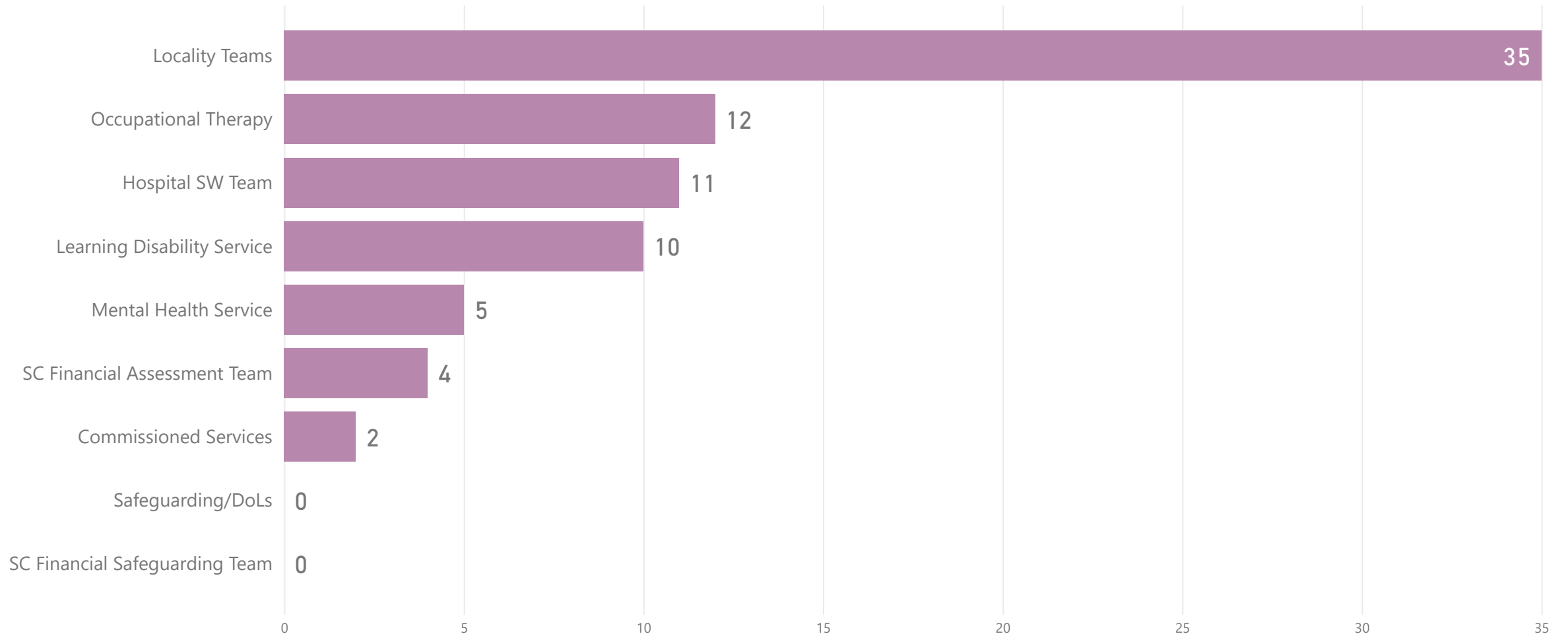


Corporate Stage Two - 30



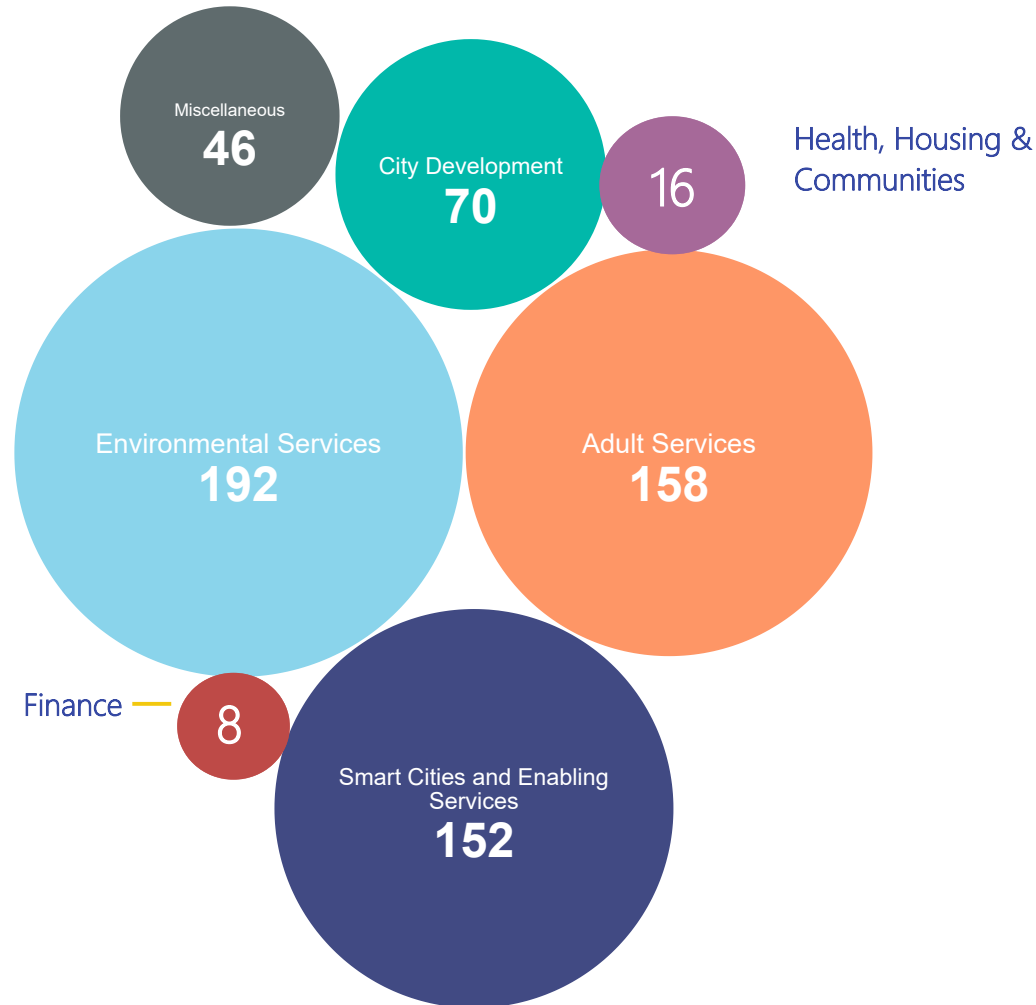
# Complaints Overview

## Adult Statutory Social Care - 79



# Compliments

Compliments - 642



*Customer wanted to extend her thanks and gratitude to the care home therapy team for their care, involvement, and input towards her mam. She said they have been excellent working with her mam*

*I called this morning very nervous and upset as financially I have been struggling and couldn't meet my bill, the lady was so calm and supportive and made it less awkward or upsetting.*

*Customer wanted to thank the team for coming out so quickly regarding the bollard that was knocked down behind his property, he said it was done very quickly and lads did a great job*

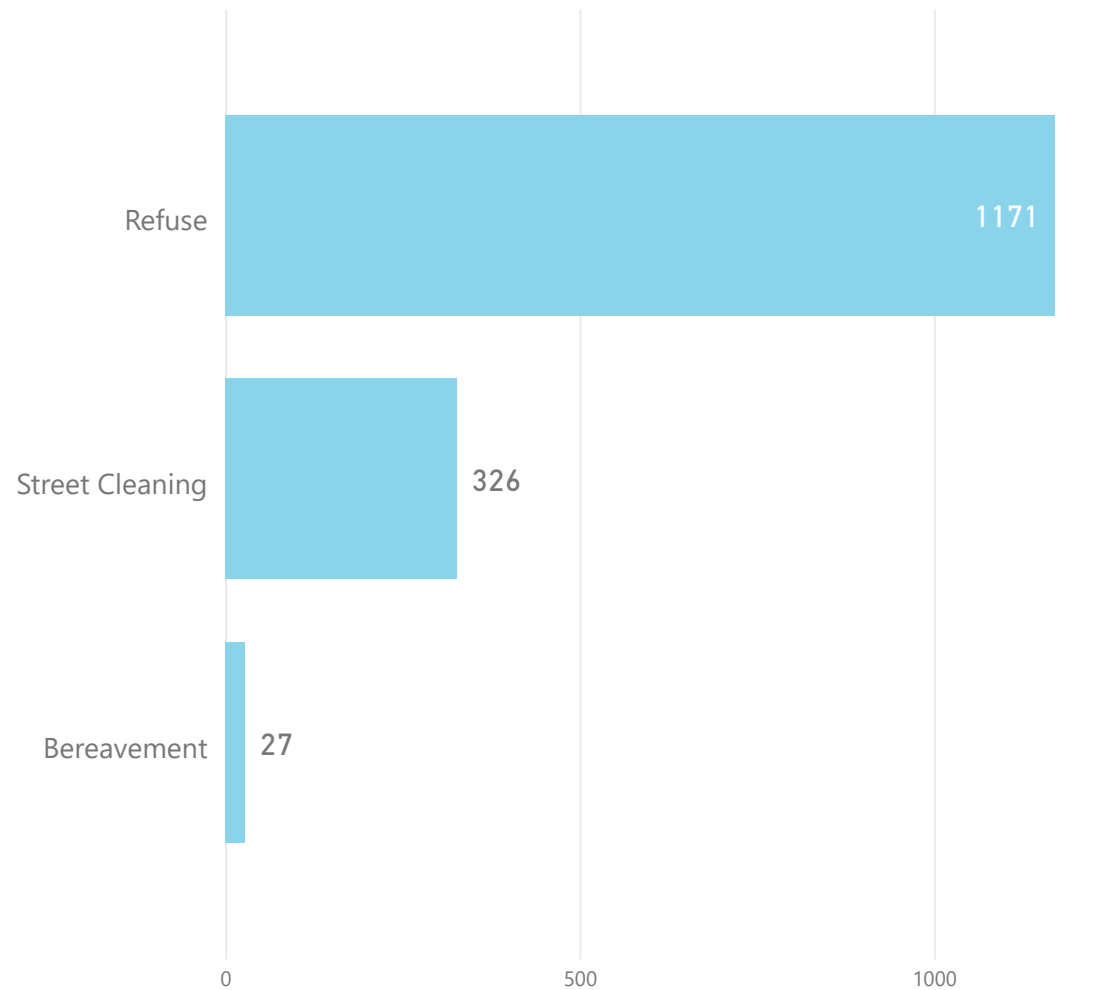
*Customer reported overgrown shrubs out the back of her property and the gentlemen came and did the job, cleaned up after themselves, and it was absolutely brilliant work that was done.*

*Thank you for your support and help with my getting a property, you've been amazing. Honestly, I can't thank you enough.*

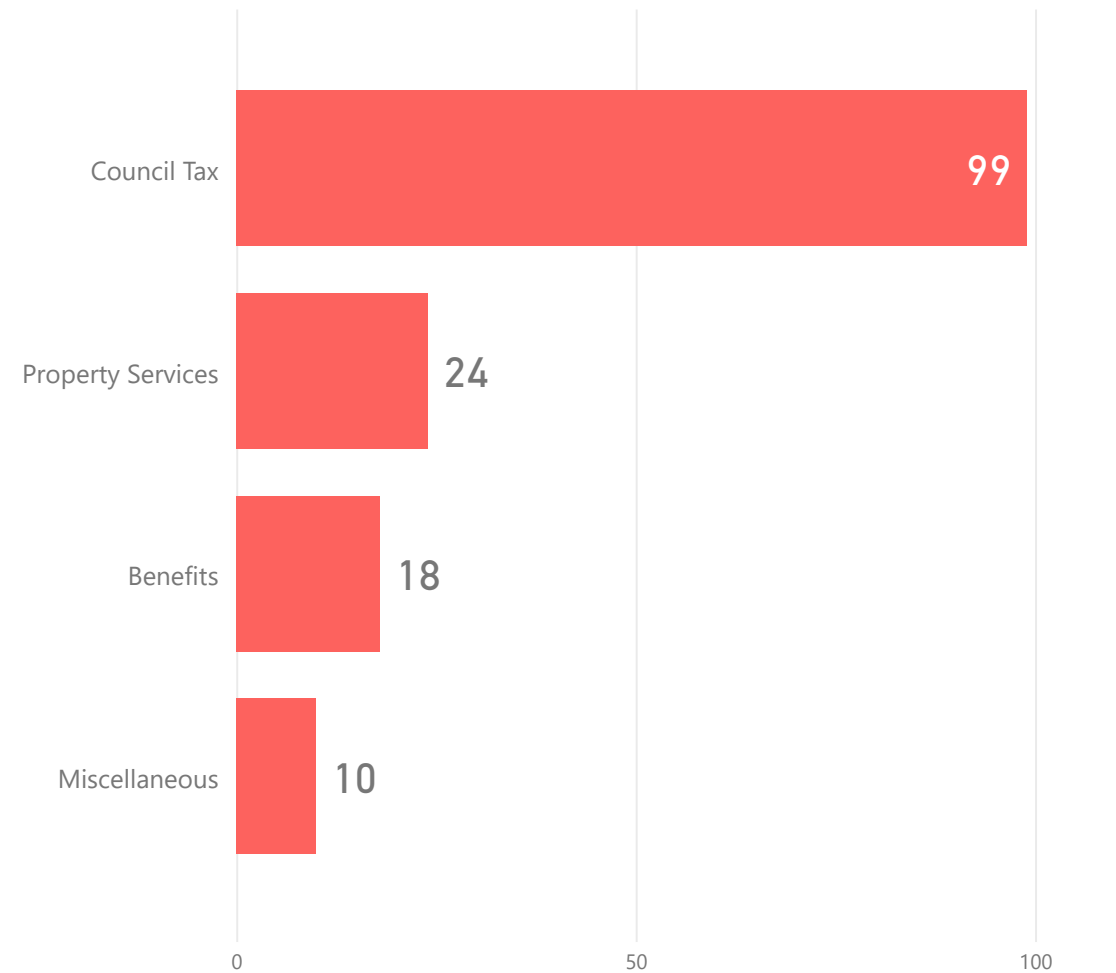
*I just wanted to say a huge thank you to the Council for all they are doing to improve the city. I am very proud to live in Sunderland and love what you are doing. I love our history and today I was in awe of the restoration of the Elephant tea rooms. Well done and a huge thank you.*

# Corporate Complaints Breakdown for Stage 1

## Environmental Services - 1,524

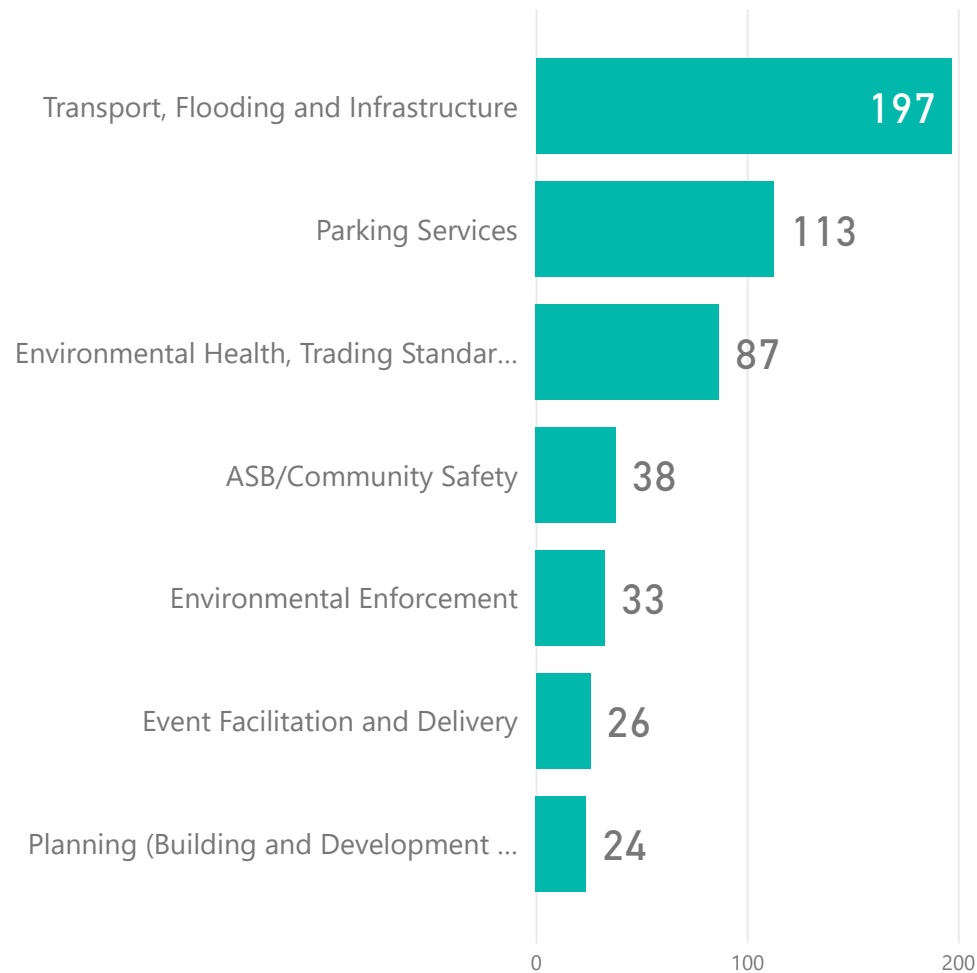


## Finance - 151

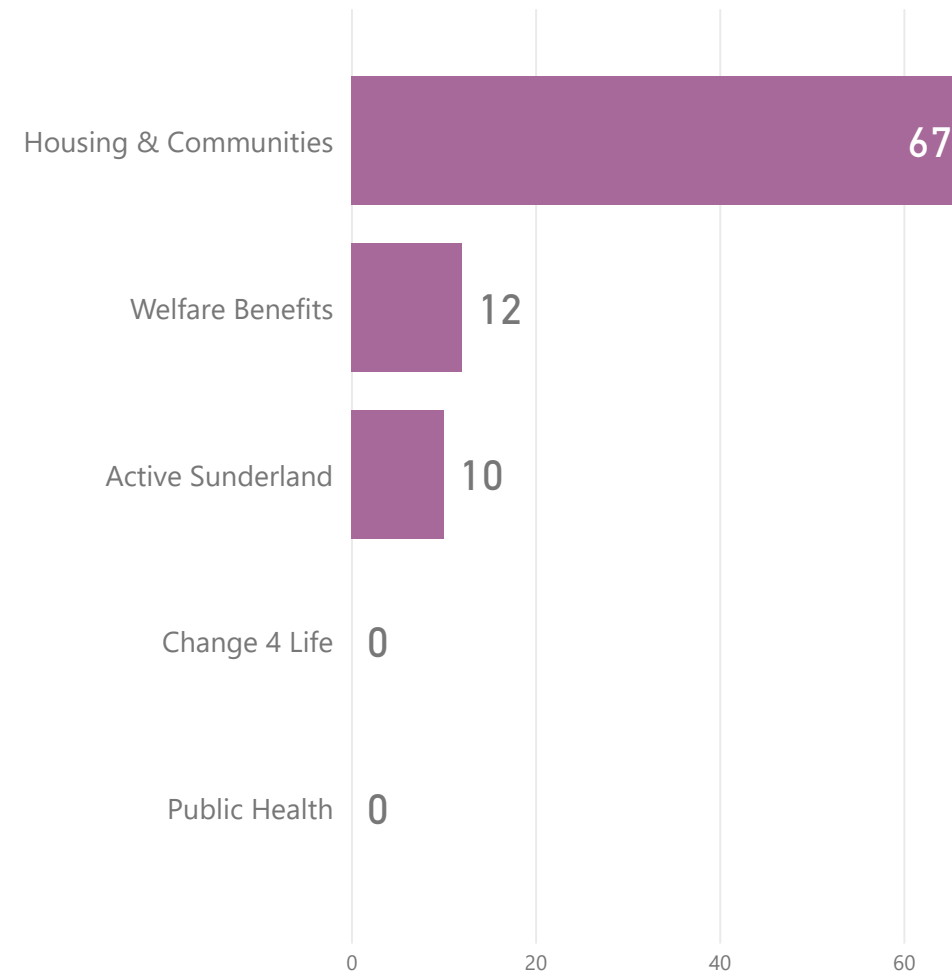


# Corporate Complaints Breakdown for Stage 1

## City Development - 518

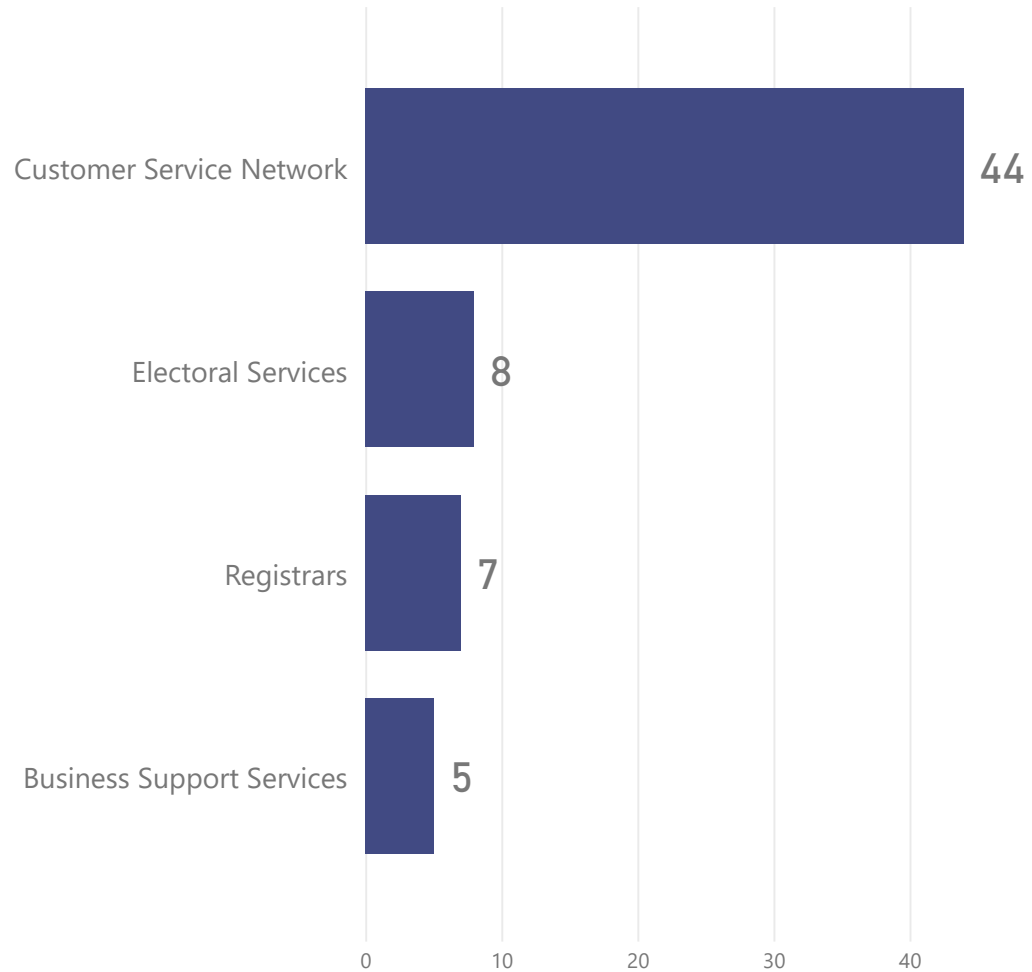


## Health, Housing & Communities – 89



# Corporate Complaints Breakdown for Stage 1

## Smart Cities & Enabling Services - 64





# 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.

The table below shows the number of compliments received by the Council together with comparative data for the previous three years.

	<b>2023-24</b>	<i>2022-23</i>	<i>2021-22</i>	<i>2020-21</i>
Q1 - Apr-Jun	126	316	206	245
Q2 - Jul-Sep	139	190	235	210
Q3 - Oct-Dec	145	119	258	273
Q4 - Jan-Mar	232	110	360	181
	<b>642</b>	<i>735</i>	<i>1059</i>	<i>909</i>

The table below shows the service areas where compliments were received.

	<b>Q1</b>	<b>Q2</b>	<b>Q3</b>	<b>Q4</b>	<b>Total</b>
Adult Services	45	29	38	46	<b>158</b>
Council Tax	2	0	2	4	<b>8</b>
CSN	13	9	11	91	<b>124</b>
Environmental Health	2	1	4	5	<b>12</b>
Environmental Services	25	26	26	29	<b>106</b>
Environmental Services - Refuse	10	27	23	26	<b>86</b>
Highways / Network Management	10	16	15	10	<b>51</b>
Housing	3	5	5	3	<b>16</b>
Misc.	8	15	11	12	<b>46</b>
Parking Services	2	4	0	1	<b>7</b>
Registrars	6	7	10	5	<b>28</b>
	<b>126</b>	<b>139</b>	<b>145</b>	<b>232</b>	<b>642</b>

## A sample of compliments received in Q4

### Adult Services

Christmas card received from customer, noted inside "Thank you so much for your help this year".

The Occupational Therapist showed care and compassion towards my mother-in-law during all our contacts, asking for input which helped her feel totally involved. She was patient and professional, organising several helpful and necessary adjustments to improve her comfort and mobility within the home.

Customer wanted to extend her thanks and gratitude to the care home therapy team for their care, involvement, and input towards her mam. She said they have been excellent working with her mam.

### Bereavement Services

I finally had the opportunity to play around with your new online system and must be honest, I am very impressed! It does exactly what it says on the box and works really nicely. I think your team managed to take something fairly complicated and turn it into a workable format - it is a very well done.

### **Council Tax**

The worker was lovely and understanding of my situation.

I called this morning very nervous and upset as financially I have been struggling and couldn't meet my bill, the lady was so calm and supportive and made it less awkward or upsetting.

### **Environmental Health**

Customer would like to thank the pest operative that came to her house today, she said he explained things well and gave a thorough check through the house.

### **Environmental Services**

Customer would like to thank the team that went out to clear the rubbish that was fly tipped next to her home. She said that she only called this morning, and the rubbish has gone.

Customer reported overgrown shrubs out the back of her property and the gentlemen came and did the job, cleaned up after themselves, and it was absolutely brilliant work that was done.

Went to the new recycle centre on Monday and I thought it was excellent, well laid out and clean and tidy. The staff on site, from the guy on the gate to the lads on the skips were superb being polite, helpful, and friendly.

### **Highways**

Customer wanted to compliment the staff who gritted the road. She said that the service was excellent & residents are very grateful.

Customer wanted to thank the team for coming out so quickly regarding the bollard that was knocked down behind his property, he said it was done very quickly and lads did a great job.

Customer reported the mess left behind by the company that had laid cables in the street. Highways had been out today and cleared the cement from the pavements and road. Good job done!!!

Customer would like to thank the worker and team for their hard work and support in resolving the issue with flooding.

### **Housing**

I want to say thank you for all your support and caring. Now we settled in our home and all your supports are appreciated. Warm regards.

Just wanted to thank you for your support and help with my getting a property, you've been amazing. Honestly, I can't thank you enough.

### **Libraries**

The second time I've been helped by staff on the public computers in the City Hall. What a difference the worker made to me today. Thank you for going the extra mile, she was lovely.

I phoned the library with a family history enquiry and the lady was extremely helpful and got me some information about an ancestor who I couldn't find out about myself!

### **Museum, Heritage, and Arts**

I just wanted to say a huge thank you to the Council for all they are doing to improve the city. I am very proud to live in Sunderland and love what you are doing. I love our history and today I was in awe of the restoration of the Elephant tea rooms. Well done and a huge thank you.

## **Corporate Complaints Procedure**

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.

## Stage One

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

	<b>Number of complaints 2023-24</b>	% change from same period last year	% responded to within timescale	Number of complaints 2022-23	Number of complaints 2021-22	Number of complaints 2020-21
Q1	653	-13%	76%	752	807	636
Q2	629	-14%	84%	730	790	804
Q3	529	+2%	85%	519	702	560
Q4	535	-3%	93%	551	540	689
	<b>2346</b>	<b>-8%</b>	<b>85%</b>	<b>2552</b>	<b>2839</b>	<b>2689</b>

The 535 complaints received this quarter are broken down into Directorates in the table below.

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
City Development	134	123	136	125	518
Finance	46	39	32	34	151
Environmental Services	442	422	322	338	1524
Health, Housing & Communities	15	27	27	20	89
Smart Cities	16	18	12	18	64
	<b>653</b>	<b>629</b>	<b>529</b>	<b>535</b>	<b>2346</b>

## City Development

Service Area	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
Planning (Building & Development Control)	3	9	5	7	24
Environmental Health, Trading Standards & Licensing	22	26	22	17	87
ASB/Community Safety	4	7	13	14	38
Parking Services	26	29	33	25	113
Environmental Enforcement	13	4	7	9	33
Culture, Event Facilitation and Delivery	7	8	8	3	26
Transport, Flooding, and Infrastructure	59	40	48	50	197
	<b>134</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>136</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>518</b>

### Planning

Complaints about this service area were regarding concerns to do with general planning issues, failure to follow processes and 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**

<b>Service Area</b>	<b>Q1</b>	<b>Q2</b>	<b>Q3</b>	<b>Q4</b>	<b>Total</b>
Council Tax	27	26	26	20	99
Benefits	2	4	4	8	18
Property Services	9	8	2	5	24
Misc	8	1	0	1	10
	<b>46</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>151</b>

### 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 61% of the complaints made against the Council. The table below provides a breakdown of the service areas within Environmental Services.

<b>Environmental Services</b>	<b>Q1</b>	<b>Q2</b>	<b>Q3</b>	<b>Q4</b>	<b>Total</b>
Refuse: <i>non/late delivery of bins &amp; caddies/missed bins</i>	330	305	257	279	1171
Bereavement: <i>maintenance of cemeteries/ crematorium</i>	9	10	6	2	27
Street Cleaning: <i>fly tipping/dog bins</i>	103	107	59	57	326
	<b>442</b>	<b>422</b>	<b>322</b>	<b>338</b>	<b>1524</b>

### Refuse Complaints

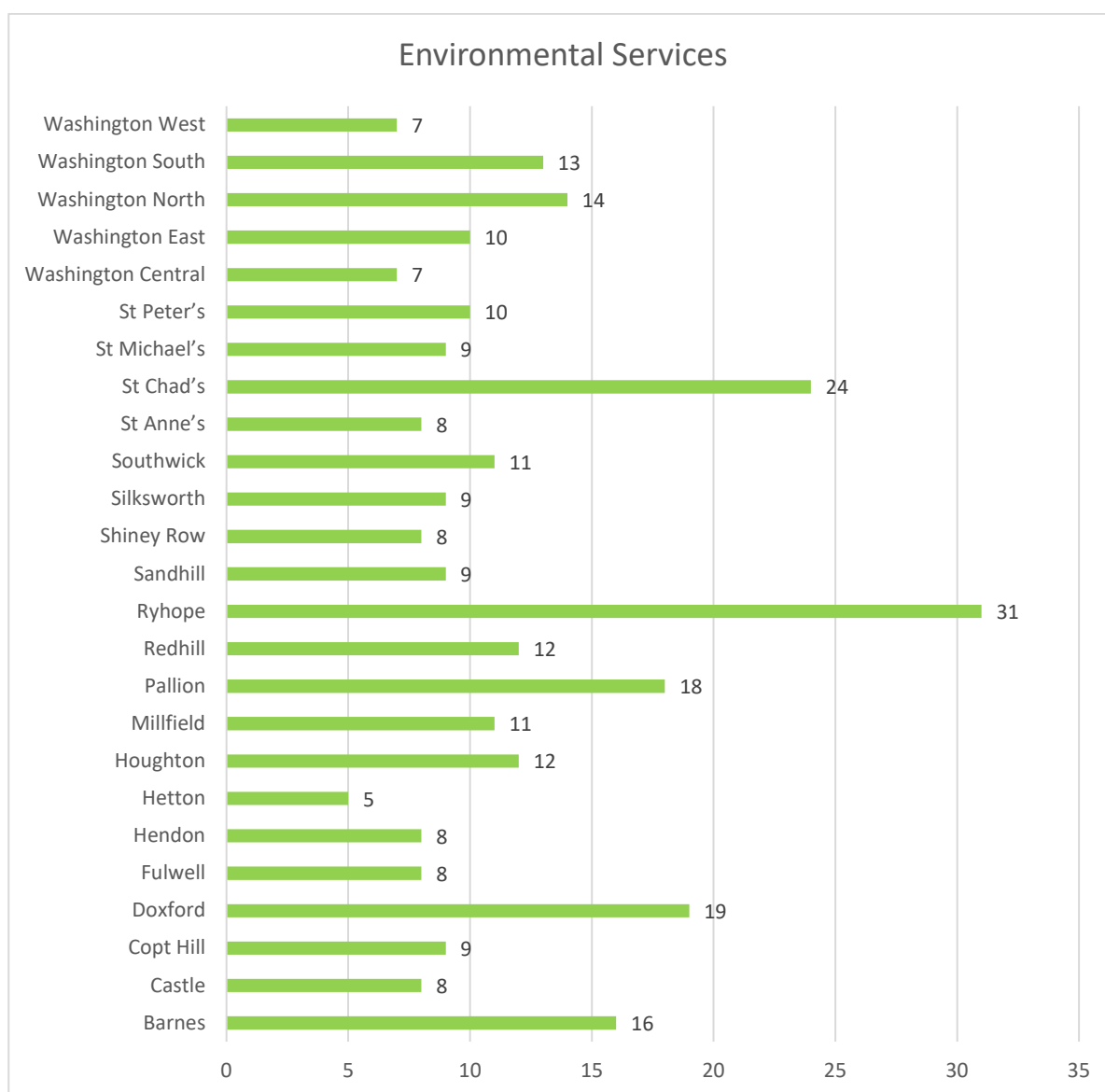
Of the 338 complaints received for Environmental Services, 279 (83%) were about issues to do with refuse collection. This should be viewed in context; in any quarter the Council will service approximately 1.6 million containers.

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

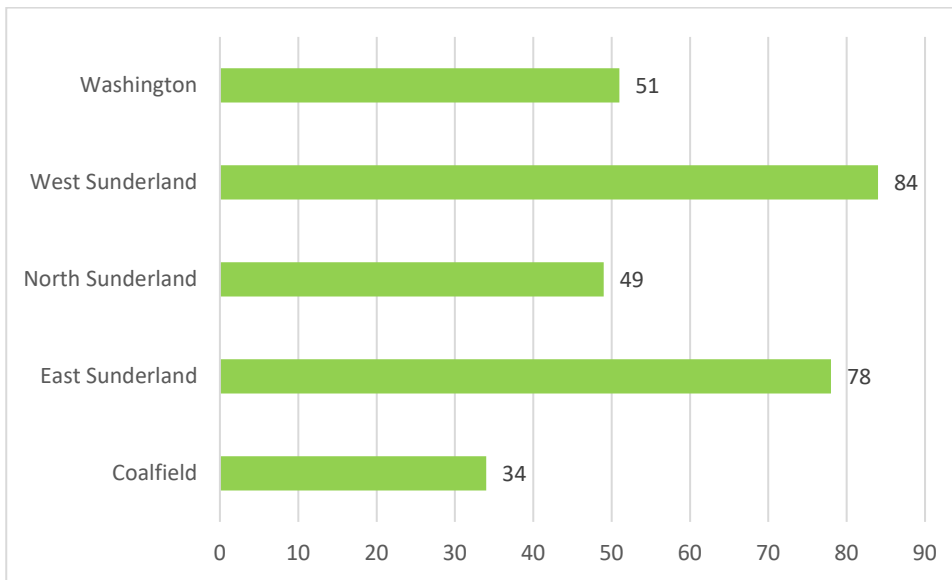
	<i>Number of Complaints for 2020-21</i>	<i>Number of Complaints for 2021-22</i>	<i>Number of Complaints for 2022-23</i>	<b>Number of Complaints for 2023-24</b>	% change from previous year
<b>Q1</b>	419	477	413	<b>330</b>	-20%
<b>Q2</b>	529	468	348	<b>305</b>	-13%
<b>Q3</b>	340	428	233	<b>257</b>	+10%
<b>Q4</b>	398	297	256	<b>279</b>	+9%
	1676	1670	1250	<b>1171</b>	-6%

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



## Health, Housing & Communities

Service Area	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
Active Sunderland	2	6	1	1	10
Housing & Communities	10	17	24	16	67
Welfare Benefits	3	4	2	3	12
	<b>15</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>89</b>

## Smart Cities & Enabling Services

Service Area	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
Customer Service Network	10	15	8	11	44
Registrars	1	2	2	2	7
Electoral Services	3	1	1	3	8
Business Support Services	2	0	1	2	5
	<b>16</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>64</b>

### 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	2023/24	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21
Number of complaints	30	36	35	21
% Responded to within timescale	90%	86%	74%	67%

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

Directorate	Total	Outcome			
		Upheld	Partly Upheld	Not Upheld	Misc.*
City Development	18	1	6	11	-
Environmental Services	4	-	3	-	1
Finance	6	2	-	4	-
Health, Housing & Communities	1	-	-	1	-
Smart Cities & Enabling Services	1	-	-	1	-
	30	3	9	17	1

\* unsubstantiated/not eligible

### **Summary of Stage 2 Reviews in Q4**

#### **City Development (3)**

Highways – a complaint about a lack of communication regarding a decision not to install H markings outside a property (partly upheld).

Planning – a complaint about a failure to follow process (not upheld).

Parking – customer was unhappy with the distribution of parking permits and the positioning of double yellow lines on one side of a back lane (not upheld).

#### **Environmental Services (1)**

Bereavement Services – a complaint that a memorial tree had been felled without notice (partly upheld).

# Sample of complaints received

This section enables members to gain a sense of the content of the complaints, similar to what is provided regarding compliments.

## **Adult Services**

I was informed that a relative was going to be undergoing a DOLS assessment. I rang the Council, and a note was to be put on the system that the DOLS assessor would ring me first before visiting my relative to do the assessment. Today, I got a call to say that the DOLS assessor had been out and done the assessment and I was not informed (partly upheld).

The customer stated she was given a huge fright when carers turned up late last night and let themselves into her property using the key from the key safe. Unfortunately, they were unaware that her husband's hospital discharge had been delayed (partly upheld).

## **Bereavement Services**

Huge fees for cremation. Spent two weeks building a tribute to my Mother. I'm furious to then be in the Crematorium and have that small bit of respect stained by broken TV screens (not upheld).

## **Council Tax**

I would like to log a complaint around the service and attitude of the worker who took my call, her attitude and manner is shocking. I received a final reminder regarding council tax I have no issue with this and was calling up to set up a plan however the attitude of the member of staff meant I didn't want to deal with her (upheld).

Customer visited City Hall and wanted a Housing Benefits and Council Tax support form printing for an elderly relative. He felt he went round in circles. He was informed there was no way to print this form and staff offered to fill form in with the customer if he can get all the details regarding his elderly relative (not upheld).

## **Customer Services**

Customer advised that they had not received the garden waste bin sticker but had paid for it in February (upheld).

I paid for brown bin collection in January, I've heard nothing from you, and not received my brown bin sticker (upheld).

## **Elections**

A bundle of Electoral Letters were left on a radiator in the foyer at an Independent Living Scheme. These letters should have been posted through the tenants' letter boxes. The tenants receive all their other post this way (partly upheld).

Customer said that the canvassers had posted a letter for the elections department today and did not post the letter through the letterbox fully and also left the gate open. Customer has a small dog and he said the dog could have got out (partly upheld).

## **Environmental Health**

Customer can hear a rat in his loft. I advised him of the next appointment date for pest control which was for the end of January. He refused to book this as he said it was too long to wait (partly upheld).

## **Environmental Services**

The rubbish in the streets in the Roker area is not cleared up and we do not have any street cleaners on a regular basis on the main streets and back lanes, and when the road cleaner does come round the back lanes it is on a bin day when the bins are out which prevents the back lane from getting a proper clean (not upheld).



New Years day - thousands of people at Roker/Seaburn. No toilets. Well done Sunderland council! (not upheld).

Not emptying the bins around Ayton Park – they are full and over-flowing. These bins are near a housing estate and park which is an issue. Especially when people with small children are passing (not upheld).

### **Environmental Services – Refuse**

Customer wants to make a complaint due to his green bin not been emptied due to extra bags. He states he was not aware crew can't take extra bags now and was not happy when advised of the policy (not upheld).

A bin man dragged a blue bin past and it smashed into the rear of my car smashing the light. My ring doorbell has caught it all and I have photos of the damaged caused (upheld).

Customer stated workers had not collected her bin again and gets her really anxious as she has assisted collections (upheld).

The blue bin was not taken as there was a bit of plastic put in by a member of the public, the customer claims they are good recyclers and thinks the bin should be taken away. They also got a sticker on the handle and letter about waste management through the door (not upheld).

30 bags of waste were not collected today - customer claims the dog waste was cleared and the path is clear for the crew to take the items away (not upheld).

Customer has 2 trade waste bins, and one was emptied, and the other bin was half emptied (partly upheld).

The green bin was emptied today and was left in the middle of the road behind parked cars (upheld).

The website is only offering Saturday and Sunday slots at Pallion, there are no weekday slots. The user journey to book a slot requires that all details are entered prior to the available slots being listed. It would be better to show and select available slots as the initial step in the user journey (partly upheld).

We are advised by Sunderland Council to separate our recycling paper in the caddy and the rest in the main body of the bin. I have watched the bin men on multiple occasions empty the content of the caddy into the bin and it all gets put into the wagon together (partly upheld).

Customer has been in touch as he thinks that it is very unfair that as a Sunderland resident, he is only allowed to use the Pallion/ Campground Sites. He feels that Sunderland Council are promoting fly tipping as he should be allowed to apply for a waste permit at the tip nearer him which is Shotton/ Seaham (not upheld).

### **Highways**

Customer states he has requested a few times to have some speed bumps installed on the road for cars speeding and the number of accidents that have occurred. He wishes to complain today as emails have been sent to Highways and the customer had no contact back and one time was advised they won't do anything to this road. Customer feels it is not acceptable (not upheld).

The underpass leading from the path behind Washington Academy school is in a terrible state. The entrance/exit at the village end is covered in thick mud and the storm drain beside it is also covered in thick mud (upheld).

Customer has been emailing the feasibility team regarding parking in her street. She is asking for a grassed area to be turned into a car parking area or parking bays. She has had no response (not upheld).

## **Housing**

I am street homeless; I was open to yourselves for help with housing. I advised my case worker not to email or to send letters as I can't access them. This was ignored and the case was closed without me knowing (not upheld).

## **Housing Benefits**

Customer received a letter offering condolences due to her relative's death and advising what the next steps are. Customer not happy she received letter so soon after the death (not upheld).

Customer filled in an application and is still waiting for a response. He was told he would qualify hence he accepted the property; however it has left him in debt as he has fallen behind with the rent (not upheld).

Customer would like to complain over the handling of this claim, having to make numerous phone calls, advised to attend an office that was closed, being offered different advice each time he called, and his claim being closed even though he had provided all requested information (upheld).

## **Licensing**

Customer had logged a complaint regarding a taxi fare and they have had no response to the request (upheld).

## **Parking Services**

I parked at St Marys car park this morning for 38 minutes and expected to pay for 1 hour. I was charged £3, the flat rate for the day. I was stunned and felt like I had been robbed! I think this charge for this amount of time is not right and certainly not fair (not upheld).

I applied for visitor parking permit in December and have still not received it. We rang the helpline 3 times about this issue (partly upheld).

I parked in St Mary's car park this afternoon however the machine has charged me three times rather than just once so I'd like to request a refund (not upheld).

## **Planning and Development**

I would like an official explanation as to how this application has managed to be approved when there were hundreds of public objections. It defies belief. The correspondence and communication from the council has been a disgrace and contradictory in many cases. (not upheld).

## **Property Services**

Just want to raise the issue that I tried 4 sets of public toilets yesterday - 2 in Roker Park and 2 on the sea front. They were all shut. This was causing issues for lots of people, and I don't think it's acceptable (not upheld).

## **Registrars**

I paid for a copy of my birth certificate which could not be provided, because it had been lost, so I ended up paying the GRO for a copy and I did not receive a refund from you (not upheld).

Customer visited City Hall to register the death of her relative and said that they found it quite upsetting as the registrar was not very sympathetic & her manner was quite abrupt. Customer feels that more empathy was needed at an already upsetting time for relatives (partly upheld).

## **Welfare Benefits**

I applied for the household support fund to be told that I am not entitled to it. It's an absolute joke how different you treat people (not upheld).

# Health and Social Care Complaints Procedure

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.

The table below shows the number of complaints received regarding adult social care services, together with comparative data for previous years. **79** complaints were received in 2023-24 which is a decrease of -7% on the 85 complaints received in the previous year.

	<b>Number of complaints 2023-24</b>	% change from same period last year	% responded to within timescale	<i>Number of complaints 2022-23</i>	<i>Number of complaints 2021-22</i>	<i>Number of complaints 2020-21</i>
Apr-Jun	<b>20</b>	-14%	37%	22	19	10
Jul-Sep	<b>19</b>	+19%	74%	16	27	15
Oct-Dec	<b>24</b>	+4%	38%	23	24	32
Jan-Mar	<b>16</b>	-33%	51%	24	19	19
<b>Total</b>	<b>79</b>	-7%	50%	85	89	76

The complaints were about the following issues:

<b>Nature of Complaints</b>	<b>Q1</b>	<b>Q2</b>	<b>Q3</b>	<b>Q4</b>	<b>Total</b>	<i>Comparison for 2022-23</i>
Actions of worker	5	3	3	<b>3</b>	14	11
Assessment Disagreement	-	2	4	-	6	7
Care Practice Issues	3	3	3	-	9	5
Communication	3	1	-	<b>5</b>	9	21
Delay	-	1	2	<b>3</b>	6	12
Finance	3	5	7	<b>2</b>	17	8
Quality Issues	4	1	3	<b>2</b>	10	11
Lack of help/support	2	3	2	<b>1</b>	8	10
	<b>20</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>79</b>	85

The complaints were made regarding the following service areas:

<b>Service Area Involved</b>	<b>Q1</b>	<b>Q2</b>	<b>Q3</b>	<b>Q4</b>	<b>Total</b>	<i>Comparison for 2022-23</i>
Mental Health Service	1	2	-	<b>2</b>	5	7
Hospital SW Team	3	4	4	-	11	10
Learning Disabilities Service	2	2	5	<b>1</b>	10	5
SW Locality Teams	11	6	9	<b>9</b>	35	39
Occupational Therapy Service	2	3	4	<b>3</b>	12	16
Financial Assessment Team	1	2	1	-	4	4
Commissioned Services	-	-	1	<b>1</b>	2	1
Financial Safeguarding Team	-	-	-	-	0	1
Safeguarding Adults/DoLs	-	-	-	-	0	2
	<b>20</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>79</b>	85

## Outcome of complaints

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total	Comparison for 2022-23
Upheld in full	7	5	9	4	25	14
Upheld in part	8	5	6	3	22	27
Not Upheld	4	5	9	4	22	33
NE/WD/OTH**	1	4	0	3	8	11
Ongoing	0	0	0	2	2	0
	<b>20</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>85</b>

\*\*not eligible/withdrawn/other

Summary information about the 4 upheld complaints received in Q4 is included below.

- A customer complained that they had not received a timely response to their request for an appeal assessment regarding a car badge application.*  
The customer provided documentary evidence to confirm they had sent an email request for an appeal assessment. Unfortunately, and despite making several enquiries, it was not possible to establish if the email had been received at the address. Apologies were offered for the delay this had caused regarding the assessment appeal. An appeal assessment was arranged as a matter of urgency and the service is in the process of reviewing practice arrangements for this activity, to ensure the timely progression of appeals from initial enquiry to response.
- A complaint about the delay in the provision of a car badge.*  
Unfortunately, a system error led to the car badge application appearing on the system as though it was awaiting payment, when in fact payment had already been made. The issue was reported to the IT department and is now fixed. The car badge was then immediately issued, and apologies were offered for the delay.
- A complaint about a delay in providing a Blue Badge and a lack of contact.*  
At the time of application, it was established that proof of a name change was required. The customer was advised they would be contacted by the Council, and records note that three attempts were made, but without success. No further attempts were made. The Council offered its sincere apologies and is reviewing its processes to ensure in future there is a method to alert officers to any outstanding applications.
- A complaint about a delay in undertaking an adult social care assessment.*  
Following an initial referral and telephone conversation, the customer was identified as a medium priority and was awaiting allocation to a social worker. In this case the customer was not provided with an allocated worker within the expected 28-day timescale. This was due to extremely limited staff availability at that time. It was also acknowledged that there had been insufficient communication with the customer following the initial referral for which apologies were offered.

# Complaints dealt with by the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman

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

There were 9 Ombudsman complaints in Q4 bringing the total for the year to 29.

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	Number of Ombudsman Complaints Received	Number Investigated by Ombudsman	Number upheld	% Upheld rate
2023/24	29	12	11	92%
2022/23	34	8	4	50%
2021/22	32	12	9	74%
2020/21	19	3	1	33%

The table below shows the total number of complaints received in 2023/24 for each Directorate, how many of those complaints the Ombudsman chose to investigate; and from those investigations how many were upheld.

	Total Ombudsman complaints received	Number closed after initial enquiries	Number Investigated by Ombudsman	Outcome of Ombudsman Investigations				
				Not Upheld	Upheld but no injustice or fault	Upheld but already remedied	Upheld with injustice and fault	% upheld rate
Adult Services	14	6	8	1	-	4	3	88%
Together for Children	6	2	4	-	2	-	2	100%
City Development	8	8	0					
Finance	1	1	0					
<b>Total</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>92%</b>

## Detailed Investigations

Of the total 29 complaints received from the Ombudsman, 17 (59%) were closed after initial enquiries with 12 being investigated (41%).

Of the 12 detailed investigations, 11 were upheld, providing the outcome rate of 92%.

Regarding the upheld complaints. 2 were upheld but with no injustice or fault. In one complaint there had been slight delays in the investigation, which was fault, however, the delays were minimal and did not cause injustice and there was no fault in how the Council made decisions about the concerns raised. In the other complaint the ombudsman found

fault with the Council for its complaint handling process but there was no fault with other elements of the complaint.

4 complaints whilst upheld required no further action on the part of the Council as the ombudsman was satisfied with the Council's proposed actions to remedy the injustice.

#### **Ombudsman Complaints made in Q4**

Summary information about the 9 Ombudsman complaints made in Q4 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](http://www.lgo.org.uk)

**Adult Services (22 018 067)** – a complaint regarding a care home provider.

Outcome: *Upheld – fault and injustice*

The Council/Provider missed an opportunity to consider further support to reduce the risk of falling.

Remedy: The Council apologised for the uncertainty and frustration it had caused and paid £400 in compensation in recognition of the faults. The Council also ensured relevant staff were reminded of their responsibilities when considering requests for increased support for service users.

**Adult Services (23 012 909)** - a complaint about a meeting held in early 2022.

Outcome: Closed after initial enquiries – out of jurisdiction.

The Ombudsman would not investigate as the complaint was late and there were no good grounds to exercise discretion to consider it.

**Adult Services (23 015 181)** - a complaint about deprivation of capital regarding care charges.

Outcome: Closed after initial enquiries – no further action.

The Ombudsman would not investigate because there was not enough evidence of fault to justify an investigation.

**Adult Services (23 016 918)** - a complaint about a care home providing an inadequate service to a relative.

Outcome: *Upheld – no further action - already remedied*

The Ombudsman would not investigate because an investigation would not lead to different findings or outcomes.

**Adult Services (23 018 142)** - a complaint that the Council provided incorrect advice.

Outcome: *Upheld – no further action - already remedied*

The Ombudsman would not investigate the complaint as further investigation would not lead to a different outcome.

**Adult Services (23 018 490)** - a complaint that the Council had not taken direct debit payments.

Outcome: *Upheld – no further action - already remedied*

The Ombudsman would not investigate the complaint as it could not add to the Council's investigation and there was no different outcome that its investigation would achieve.

**Highways (23 018 273)** - a complaint about a road traffic accident.

Outcome: Closed after initial enquiries – no further action.

The Ombudsman would not investigate because another body was better placed to consider the complaint.

**Planning (23 004 929)** - a complaint about a planning application.

Outcome: Closed after initial enquiries – no further action.

The Ombudsman would not investigate as there was not enough evidence of fault by the Council causing injustice.

**Together for Children (23 007 572)** - a complaint about an Education, Health, and Care Plan.

Outcome: Closed after initial enquiries – out of jurisdiction.

The Ombudsman could not investigate as the complainant had used her right of appeal against the Plan and the law does not allow the Ombudsman to investigate complaints about any matters which may have affected its content.