

COMPLAINTS REPORT APRIL 2025 - DECEMBER 2025

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Wards affected:	(All Wards);
Appendices (attached):	Appendix 1 – Tables of Statistics

Summary

This report details Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaints received by the Council from 01 April 2025 to 31 December 2025.

Recommendation (s)

The Committee is asked to:

- (1) **Note the contents of the report covering all complaints received by the Council between 01 April 2025 – 31 December 2025.**

1 Reason for Recommendation

- 1.1 To bring to the attention of the Committee all complaints received between April 2025 – December 2025 and to advise of any actions taken and lessons learned.

2 Background

- 2.1 A complaint is defined as an expression of dissatisfaction about something we said we would do and didn't, or a poor standard of service. This could either be by us, or a contractor acting on our behalf.
- 2.2 A complaint is not a request for service (e.g., noise problems) or a request for information or an explanation of our policy (e.g. level of Council Tax set). As an example, a one-off missed bin collection would result in a missed bin service request, however, repeated misses of the same bin at the same address would be logged as a complaint.

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- 2.3 In areas where there are independent tribunals for decisions to be referred to, for example, planning application outcomes, housing review applications and Penalty Charge Notices, these matters will be dealt with by the appropriate independent body and will therefore not fall within the Council's two-stage complaint process.
- 2.4 The council has 15 working days to respond to stage 1 complaints and 20 working days to respond to a stage 2 complaint. If a Stage 1 complaint is not responded to within timescales, the complainant can request escalation to Stage 2 without the Stage 1 response being completed.
- 2.5 The timeline for completion for stage 2 complaints was extended to 20 working days in January 2025; this is in line with the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman's new Complaint Handling code. Updates to the Complaint Policy and staff training have been completed to reflect this change.
- 2.6 Complaints fall under three main categories: service delivery, staff behaviour/conduct and policy failure.
- 2.7 Staff within service areas deal with their own complaints with the support of Customer Services, although there are instances where Customer Services will respond to complaints on behalf of a service area if they have the relevant information.
- 2.8 Once a complaint has been through the two-stage Council complaint process and the complainant is still unsatisfied, they are able to refer their complaint to the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO). This information is always included in the response to the complainant so that they are aware.
- 2.9 Complaints provide the Council with a good opportunity to review the decisions they have made and the service they have provided. Findings in complaint outcomes can be used to bring about service improvement through identifying and sharing lessons learned across all service areas.
- 2.10 Customer Services also work with managers to understand how they are learning from these complaints and how they are communicating complaint outcomes back to the staff, and if necessary, making changes to processes and procedures.

3 Complaints Received between 01 April 2025 – 31 December 2025

- 3.1 Appendix 1 contains four tables of statistics which are explained below.
- 3.2 Table 1 shows the total number of complaints broken down by service area and complaint stage, received between April 2025 and December 2025.
- 3.3 Table 2 shows the number of complaints broken down by service area team and complaint stage between April 2025 and December 2025.

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- 3.4 Table 3 shows the number of complaints by service area responded to in and out of time at both stage one and stage two between April 2025 and December 2025.
- 3.5 Table 4 shows the number of complaints upheld and not upheld by service area responded to between April 2025 and December 2025.

4 Operational Services

- 4.1 Due to the volume of work completed by Operational Services (approximately 500,000 bin collections per month), they invariably receive the highest number of complaints. The Customer Services team therefore provide some additional support and collaborate with Operational Services when responding to complaints. This differs to other service areas who generally respond to their own complaints.
- 4.2 Operational Services have seen a reduction in the actual number of complaints received, however, their overall share of complaints when compared with the rest of the organisation has increased by 10%. This could be explained by other service areas also having had a lower number of complaints than compared to last year.
- 4.3 The main reasons for these complaints were missed collections, bins not being set back properly, poor service received and staff behaviour. The complaint category split is service delivery failure 88%, staff behaviour/conduct 11%, and 1% policy failure. The 2024 figures followed a similar pattern with Service delivery failure being the main reason at 90% Staff behaviour/conduct at 9% and Policy failure at 1 %.
- 4.4 The upheld vs not upheld rates for stage 1 and 2 complaints differ from last year, with 88% of stage 1 complaints upheld this year compared to 78% last year. Stage 2 complaints saw 93% being upheld this year compared with 65% last year. The increase in upheld complaints could be attributed to known issues with resourcing the general waste and recycling collections as well as garden waste collections.
- 4.5 There has been a decline in the number of stage 1 complaints being resolved in time, with 48% this year, opposed to 67% last year. There was an improvement in the stage 2 response times with 100% being responded to on time this year compared with 75% last year.
- 4.6 A low percentage of stage 1 complaints escalated to stage 2, (8%), this indicates that generally complainants are satisfied with the outcome of their stage 1 complaint.
- 4.7 A lesson learned through complaints for the Street care Team is the importance of communicating at regular intervals with internal teams and/or residents, to ensure regular updates in case of unforeseen delays.
- 4.8 For example, there was an issue with the installation of a piece of street furniture. This issue wasn't communicated to the resident or the Contact

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Centre (meaning the resident wasn't updated), This resulted in a complaint being submitted due to a perceived lack of action on this service request. Street care management have advised that they will be more proactive with updating regarding any delays and teams have been reminded of this and are looking to improve timescales

5 Housing and Communities

- 5.1 Housing and Communities received the second highest number of complaints within the Council, which follows from the same period last year.
- 5.2 Housing and Parking are both areas within which high tension situations between Officers and the Public can arise. For example, the issuing of a Penalty Charge Notice in a Council Car Park, or the Council's refusal to house a member of public. In situations such as these, the complaint can be unfairly made against the individual member of staff, rather than the policy or process.
- 5.3 The total number of complaints received across both stages has seen a 3% reduction when compared with the same period last year.
- 5.4 There were a similar percentage of complaints upheld at stage 1 this year (63%) when compared with last year (60%). Stage 2 complaints saw an increase in the number upheld with 60% this year, compared with 33% last year, however this is based on relatively low numbers.
- 5.5 There was a slight decrease in the percentage of complaints responded to on time at stage 1, with 58% this year, compared to 64% last year. There was an improvement in the number of stage 2 complaints responded to on time, with 50% this year compared with 0% last year.
- 5.6 The complaint category split this year is as follows; service delivery failure 72% which is an increase compared with last year, Staff behaviour/conduct 28% which is identical to last year, and Policy failure 0%, which is a reduction from last year (6%).
- 5.7 25% of complaints escalated to stage 2, which is more than last year, but this is based on relatively low numbers of complaints overall.
- 5.8 On lessons learned, during office hours trained enforcement officers carry out duties working on the front desk in the Ashley Centre Car Park. Experience has taught us the importance of a more diplomatic and customer friendly approach where a more pragmatic solution may be available to resolve the issue at hand. Conversations have taken place with officers where they are encouraged to reflect on how best to resolve an issue for the best outcome for all. The importance of allowing a customer to explain the problem rather than making a quick assumption on what the issue might be is encouraged.

6 Place Development

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- 6.1 It is worth noting that a complaint cannot be made about a planning application decision. The applicant should appeal directly to the Planning Inspectorate regarding the decision. Similarly, Planning Enforcement complaints are also dealt with separately and work to the process set out in the Council's "Planning Enforcement Plan".
- 6.2 Complaints regarding the service provided by the Planning/Enforcement staff, the process they have followed, or policy failures will be accepted by the Council.
- 6.3 This service area has seen a reduction in the number of complaints compared with the same period last year, decreasing from 15% of overall complaints to 7%. Last year saw a spike in the number of complaints for this service area due to a Planning Committee meeting that attracted several complaints but this year's figure closely matches that of the year before last (6%).
- 6.4 There has been an increase in the number of complaints that have been upheld at stage 1, with 27% this year compared to 9% last year. At the time of writing no stage 2 complaints have been upheld, which is a decrease from the 5% upheld last year.
- 6.5 Both stage 1 and stage 2 complaints saw 40% completed on time, this is an increase at stage one compared to last year (36%) and a decrease at stage two compared to last year (45%).
- 6.6 53% of complaints escalated from stage 1 to stage 2 which is similar to last year.
- 6.7 The complaint category split is 96% service delivery failure and 4% policy.
- 6.8 A lesson learned through complaints for the Place Development team is the importance of internal and external communication. In three of their complaints the cause of the dissatisfaction for the complainants was a lack of communication and updates. Response timescales for emails have been clarified and added to the relevant Team Charter to ensure all team members are aware of these response timescales.

7 Policy & Corporate Resources

- 7.1 This service area attracted 3% of all complaints, which matches the figure from last year.
- 7.2 The number of stage 1 complaints upheld this year has almost halved, with 33% upheld this year compared to 73% last year. There were no stage 2 complaints upheld this year, which is a decrease from 100% last year.

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- 7.3 There has been a reduction in the number of stage 1 complaints responded to on time with 50% this year compared to 73% last year. 100% of stage 2 complaints were responded to on time this year which matches the figure from last year.
- 7.4 The conversion from stage 1 to stage 2 was higher this year with 50% of complaints escalating, compared to 8% last year, although this is based on a low number of complaints overall.
- 7.5 All complaints for this service area relate to service delivery failure.
- 7.6 A lesson learned for the contact centre when dealing with incoming emails was that a customer complaint was submitted about the progression of a PCN. The email was not logged by the contact centre as they assumed it was dealt with by the cc'd specific team. The team have been reminded in instances such as this, to check with the team in question that they have received the email, and if in doubt, it should be logged as incoming correspondence in line with their standard procedure for dealing with incoming emails.

8 Finance, Revenues and Benefits

- 8.1 This service area attracted 5% of all complaints which matches the overall figure for the same period last year.
- 8.2 There was a decrease in the number of stage 1 complaints upheld this year (15%) compared to the 25% last year. There were no upheld stage 2 complaints this year which follows from last year.
- 8.3 All stage 1 complaints were responded to on time this year, compared to (69%) last year. Stage 2 complaints responded to on time mirror last year at 33%.
- 8.4 The escalation to stage 2 is slightly higher than last year at 23%.
- 8.5 The main complaint category for this service area is 94% service delivery failure, with one complaint (6%) for discrimination which was not upheld.
- 8.6 An example of a lesson learned in this service area can be seen from a complaint that the Revenues Team received. The complaint involved an officer referencing historic information. This caused the resident distress as they believed that there had been a previous miscalculation. They complained about the distress and confusion. The team were reminded about the need to verify details. Officers have been reminded to be proactive in updating all account information where required. This is being monitored monthly as part of accuracy checks.

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9 ICT

- 9.1 This service area received one complaint which was resolved at stage 1, this mirrors last year. The complaint was responded to on time, and it was upheld under service delivery failure.

10 Property and Regeneration

- 10.1 This service area received one complaint which was resolved at stage 2, which is a reduction from the two complaints received last year. The complaint was responded to on time at stage 2 and the complaint was not upheld. The complaint category was service delivery failure.

11 Legal, Democratic and Electoral Services

- 11.1 No complaints received (reduction from 5 last year).

12 People and Organisational Development

- 12.1 No complaints received.

13 Summary

- 13.1 Overall complaint numbers have decreased year on year. This decrease is likely due to issues in the previous year with Garden Waste collections over the summer, and high-profile council meetings, both of which attracted an increased number of complaints.
- 13.2 The percentage of complaints upheld and not upheld follow a similar pattern to 2024, however there has been an increase in upheld complaints in Operational Services. Customer Services will be working with Operational Services to address this increase.
- 13.3 There has also been an increase in the number of complaints responded to out of time. Officer workload has been a factor in this increase. The majority of these come from Operational Services, where Customer Services have received delayed responses when assisting with their complaints.
- 13.4 Overall complaint categories are similar to last year, with 87% service delivery failure, 12% staff conduct, 0.5% policy failure and 0.5% discrimination.
- 13.5 Later this year Audit & Scrutiny Committee will be presented with the Local Government Ombudsman Annual Review Letter. Along with this, the Committee will also be presented with the council's self-assessment against the Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code.

14 Risk Assessment

Legal or other duties

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14.1 Equality Impact Assessment

14.1.1 No direct implications

14.2 Crime & Disorder

14.2.1 No direct implications

14.3 Safeguarding

14.3.1 No direct implications

14.4 Dependencies

14.4.1 No direct implications

14.5 Other

14.5.1 No direct implications

15 Financial Implications

15.1 **Section 151 Officer's comments:** There are no direct financial implications arising from this report; however, learning from upheld complaints and improving response times can help mitigate avoidable costs.

16 Legal Implications

16.1 **Legal Officer's comments:** None for the purposes of this report

17 Policies, Plans & Partnerships

17.1 **Council's Key Priorities:** The following Key Priorities are engaged:

- Effective Council

17.2 **Service Plans:** The matter is not included within the current Service Delivery Plan.

17.3 **Climate & Environmental Impact of recommendations:** No direct implications.

17.4 **Sustainability Policy & Community Safety Implications:** No direct implications.

17.5 **Partnerships:** No direct implications.

17.6 **Local Government Reorganisation Implications:** No direct implications.

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18 Background papers

18.1 The documents referred to in compiling this report are as follows:

Previous reports:

- Complaint Report April 2024 – December 2024.