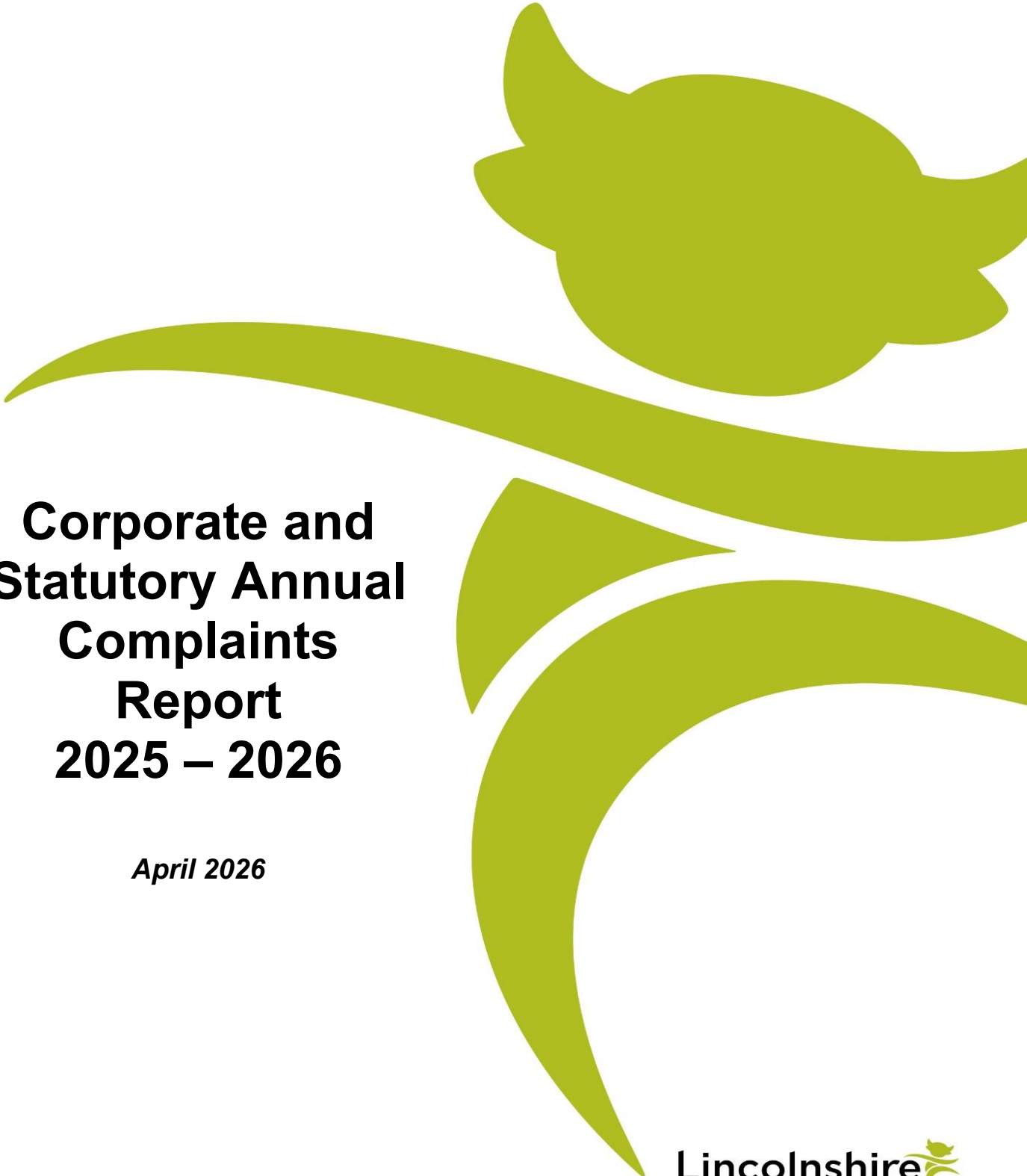




Corporate and Statutory Annual Complaints Report 2025 – 2026

April 2026

Introduction

This report provides an analysis of corporate and statutory complaints received by Lincolnshire County Council during the year 2025/2026. A countywide overview will determine any recurring themes across the council and additional analysis per service area will aim to pinpoint any specific areas of work.

The report also includes learning and recommendations for individual service areas, together with an overview of referrals to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman and concluding observations on the main areas for improvement and where provided any actions implemented. It is intended to support the Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) in understanding complaint performance across the authority and in considering where further action may be required to improve services.

Corporate and statutory complaints process

Lincolnshire County Council's Corporate and Adults complaints process has two formal stages, with statutory Children's complaints having three.

All complaints received now enter the formal process at Stage 1 due to the removal of formal attempts for early resolution in line with the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGO) Complaint Handling Code.

Once a response has been provided, those complainants wishing to escalate their complaint to the next stage must advise the complaints manager of the reasons they remain dissatisfied. For corporate and adult's complaints a further internal investigation is undertaken. Once complete, and a response sent, the complainant may contact the LGO.

For Children's statutory complaints an escalation to Stage 2 requires the commissioning of an Independent Investigator. Their investigation will be overseen by another Independent Officer and once complete, the Council will respond based on their findings. Should a complainant question the findings and Council's response they can request that the investigation be reviewed by an Independent Panel; this being Stage 3 of the statutory process. Once a panel has convened and a response provided the complainant may contact the LGO if they remain dissatisfied.

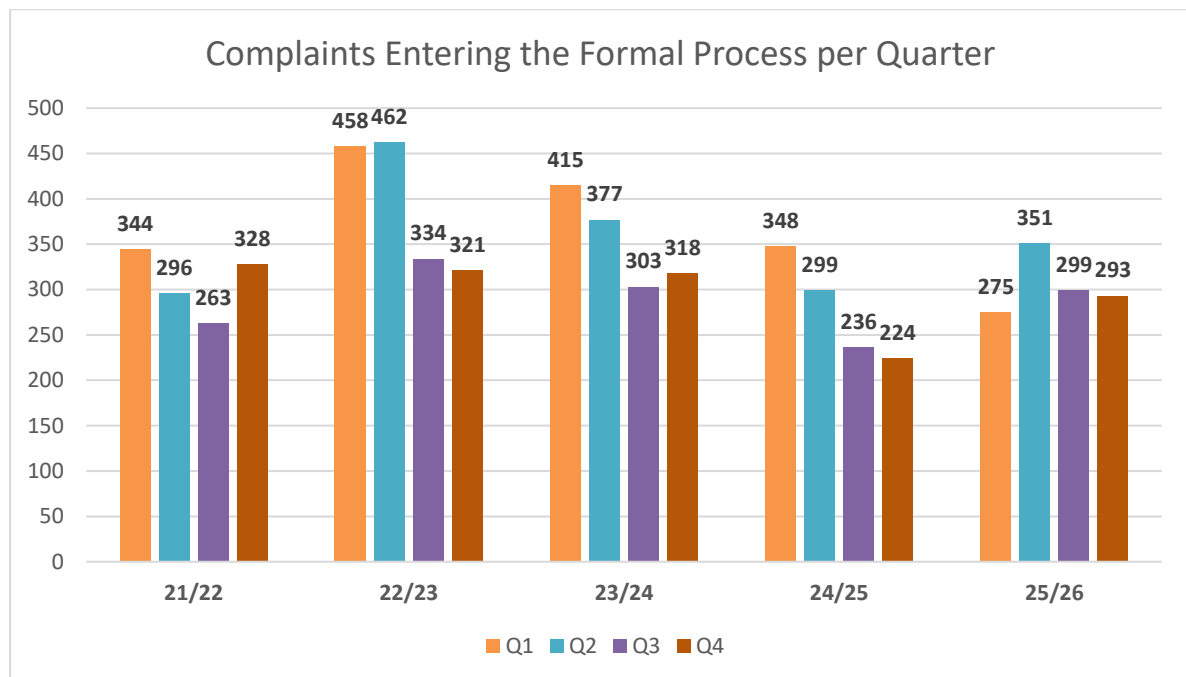
Council wide overview

In 2025/2026 the council received 1218 complaints* from the public to express dissatisfaction with the service(s) they had received or been provided with.

The first quarter of the year saw a decrease in the number of complaints received compared to the same quarter of the previous year. In comparison over the final three quarters of the year the number of complaints increased slightly.

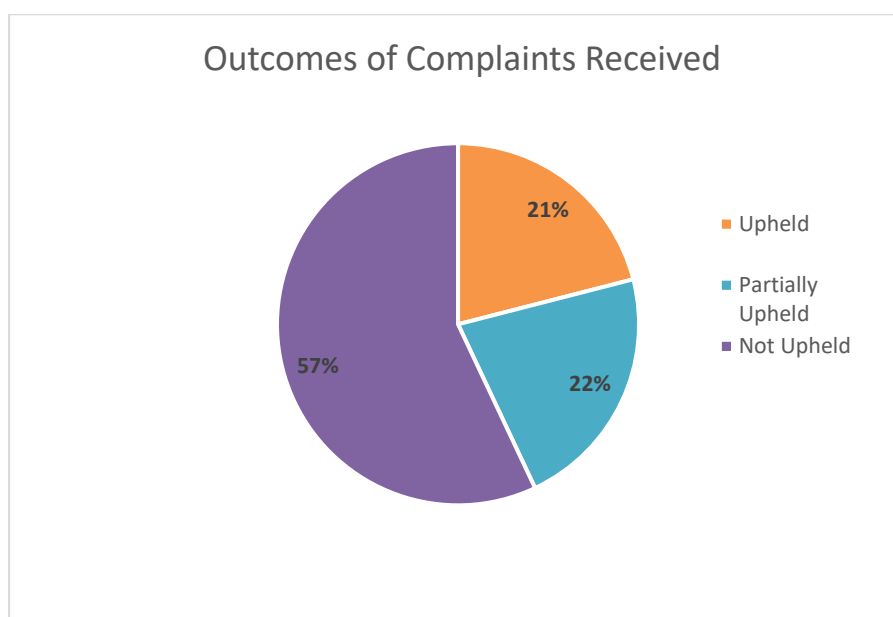
Overall, there was an increase of 10% in the number of complaints received by the authority in comparison to the previous year. It should be noted that the level of complaints received remains significantly less to those received in 2022/2023 (1575) and 2023/2024 (1413) and a notable success considering since April 2024 informal early resolution has been removed, meaning all complaints now go into the stage 1 process.

The following shows the total number of complaints entering the formal process per quarter from 2021/2022.



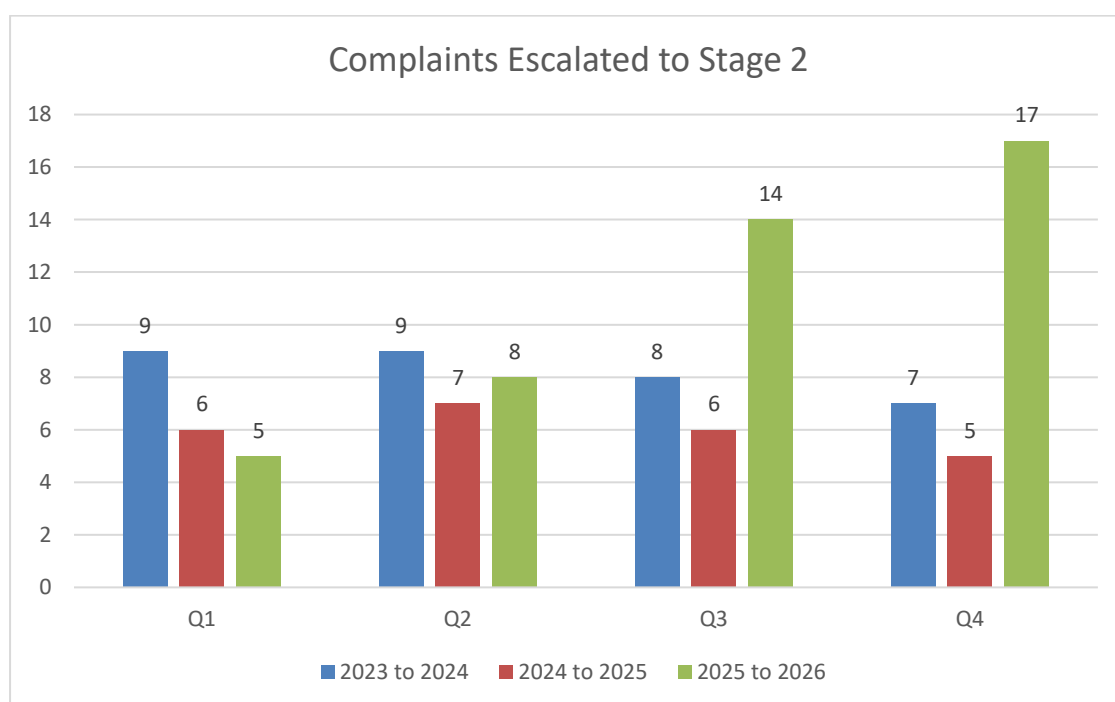
For all services, complaints which have been found to be either fully or partially upheld, have been analysed further to determine if there are any common factors which can be improved for future service provision. It is these cases that are being used to make recommendations to services on complaint themes which require work and/or improvement.

The following shows the overall outcomes of all formal complaints in 2025/2026.



In total 251 (21%) complaints were upheld throughout the course of the year with 273 (22%) partially upheld. The remaining 694 complaints (57%) were not upheld. In comparison to 2024/2025 not upheld has increased slightly from 56% to 57% and upheld has increased from 19% to 21%.

2025/2026 saw 44 cases escalated to the next stage of the complaints process.



Overall, cases escalated to Stage 2 of the complaints process increased by 83%. Therefore, although complaint numbers have only increased by 10% there has not been a similar proportionate increase in escalation to a stage 2, meaning more customers have remained dissatisfied with the response provided in comparison to the previous year. This may also be because of there being limited ability under the Complaint Handling Code for there to be challenge at the time an escalation is requested.

Performance against complaint handling code measures

The LGSCO Complaint Handling Code sets out expectation on how quickly a council should respond to a complaint at the various stages. There is no national benchmark set for an acceptable performance level, however LCC have set a target against which to measure its performance.

Measure	Target	LCC Target	2024/2025	2025/2026
Acknowledgement of complaint	Complaints acknowledged with 5 working days from receipt	100%	N/A	100%
Corporate Stage 1 Complaints	Complaints responded to within 10 working days of acknowledgement	90%	93%	86%
Corporate Stage 2 Complaints	Complaints responded to within 25 working days of acceptance of escalation	90%	96%	95%
Adults Stage 1 ** Statutory Complaints	Complaints responded to within 10 working days of receipt	90%	88%	78%
Children's Stage 1 Statutory Complaints	Complaints responded to within 10 working days of acknowledgement	90%	89%	77%

*** As from April 2026 the measure for complaints in Adult Care will be amended in line with recommendations from the LGSCO. A paper is being prepared to Adult Services to consider a range of KPI measurements.*

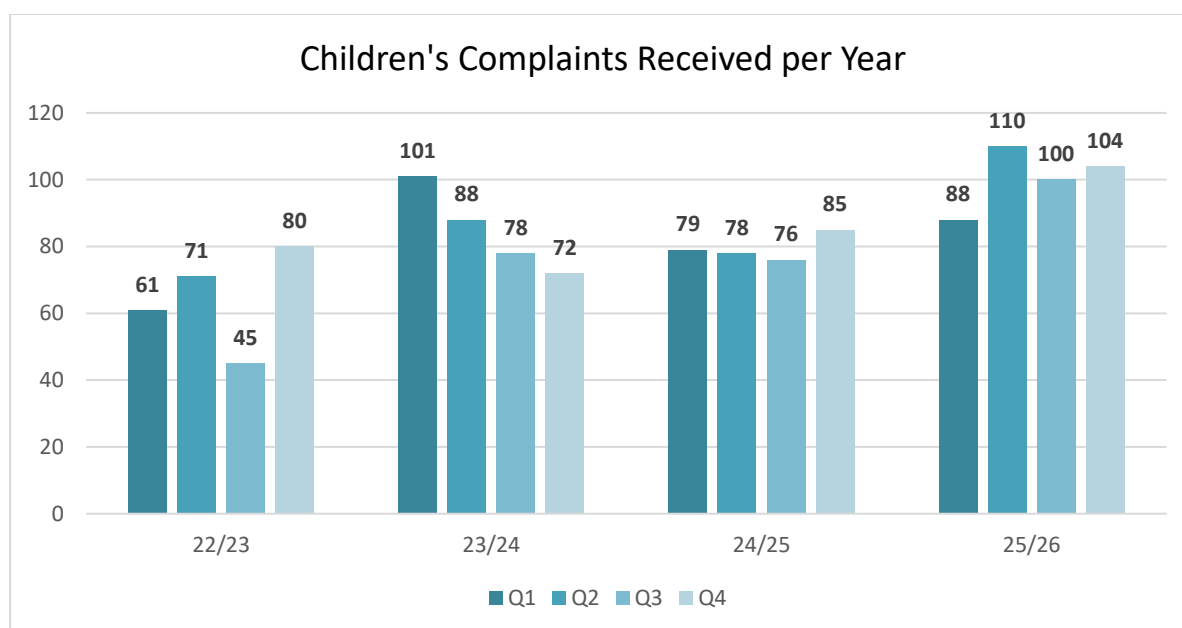
The above table demonstrates the impact even a small increase in complaints has on service area's ability to respond in a timely way. In all KPI areas set under the code performance has decreased in the last year, with evidence that this is due to capacity to reply within timescales but also the increasing complexity of the complaints that are being received by the council, particularly within Adult Care and Children's Services, which require a greater depth of investigation before a response can be provided back to the complainant.

Children's Services

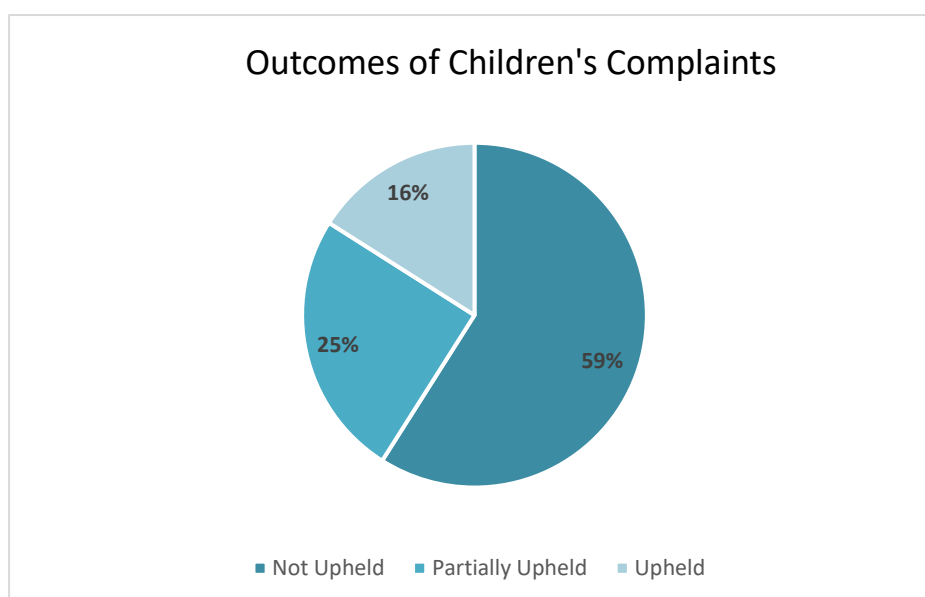
A total of 402 complaints were received in 2025/2026 in relation to Children's Services, both corporate and statutory, from the public expressing dissatisfaction with the services being delivered.

Overall, the year saw an increase of 26% in comparison to the previous year. The total complaints raised for Children's Services this year accounts for 33% of all complaints received.

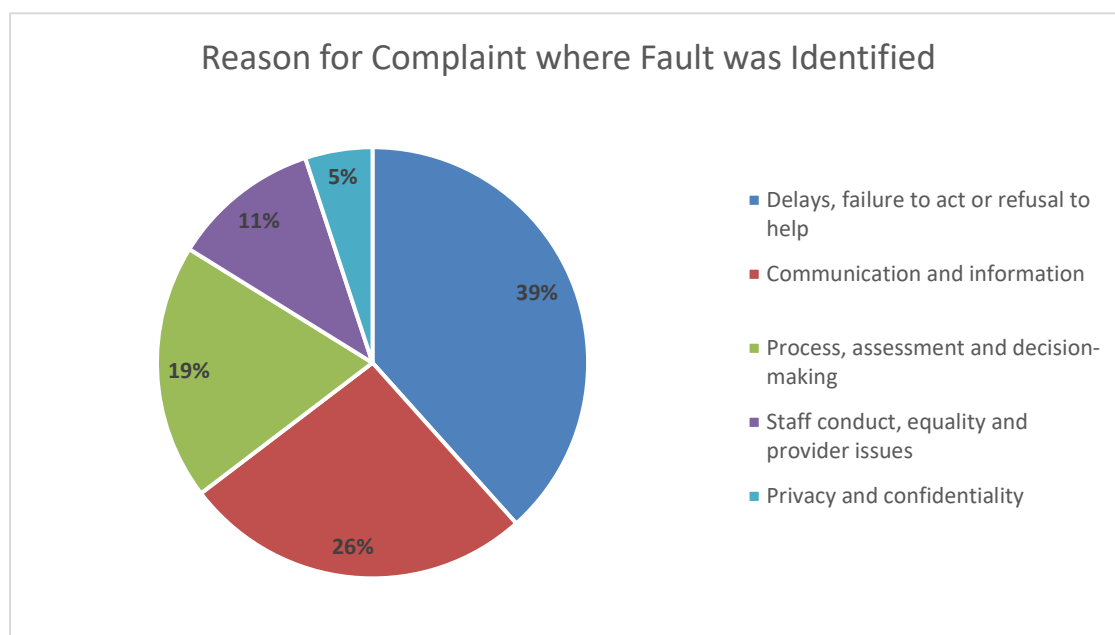
The following shows the comparison of formal complaints received for Children's services per year since 2022/2023.



Of the 402 complaints that entered the formal process, 236 (59%) found no fault in the way in which services were delivered. 101 (25%) complaints were partially upheld, and 65 (16%) were upheld. This performance is slightly better than the overall council average.



Analysis was undertaken on those complaints partially or fully upheld to determine if there were any trends or common factors. The following shows the reasons of all upheld complaints and the aspects of those complaints partially upheld, where fault was found.



All complaints that were fully or partially upheld were analysed and grouped into five key themes. The largest proportion related to delays, failure to act or refusal to help, accounting for 64 cases (39%), including issues such as delays in completing actions, failure to deliver services, and refusal to assist. This was followed by communication and information issues, with 43 cases (26%), primarily driven by customers reporting no communication received, delays in communication, or incorrect or insufficient information being provided.

Process, assessment and decision-making concerns accounted for 31 cases (19%), including procedures not being followed, errors in assessment, and dissatisfaction with decisions. Staff conduct, equality and provider-related issues made up 18 cases (11%), covering inappropriate behaviour, discrimination, and concerns relating to contracted providers. The smallest category was privacy and confidentiality, with 9 cases (5%), relating to breaches of personal data handling.

Overall, the data indicates that most complaints are linked to operational delivery issues (delays, failures, and communication), highlighting key areas for service improvement.

Context

Statutory Complaints

To understand complaint numbers and how they reflect the services being delivered, we have provided a comparison of the number of referrals and open social care cases within Children's Services, which can be seen below:

Team	Number of Open Social Care Cases as of 31 st March 2025	Number of Referrals for the year
Adoption	87	N/A
Boston	291	252
Children in Care	570	8
Children with Disabilities	250	23
East Lindsey North	300	235
East Lindsey South	270	170
Lincoln	487	336
North Kesteven	451	305
South Holland	369	321
South Kesteven	552	393
West Lindsey	398	311
	4025	2354

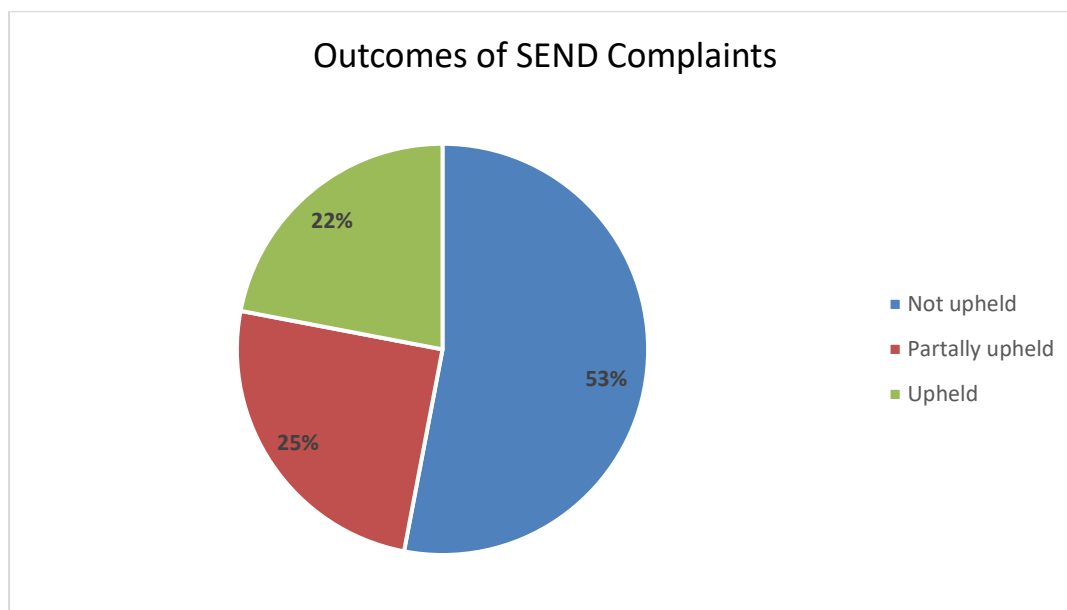
105 of the 402 complaints received related to statutory services. In comparison to the 4025 open cases this represents a 2.6% dissatisfaction rate.

Corporate complaints – SEND

Further analysis has been undertaken specifically on those corporate complaints that are related to SEND services. The data is shown below:

Open SEND Cases	Open Referrals (no plan)	Complaints Received	% complaints to Open Cases
9703	538	148	1.52%

Of the above complaints the below highlights the outcomes with 79 (53%) not upheld, 37 (25%) partially upheld and 32 (22%) upheld over 2025/2026.



Complaint learning and actions

We are pleased to note that the total number of complaints represents a very small proportion of the children and families we work with.

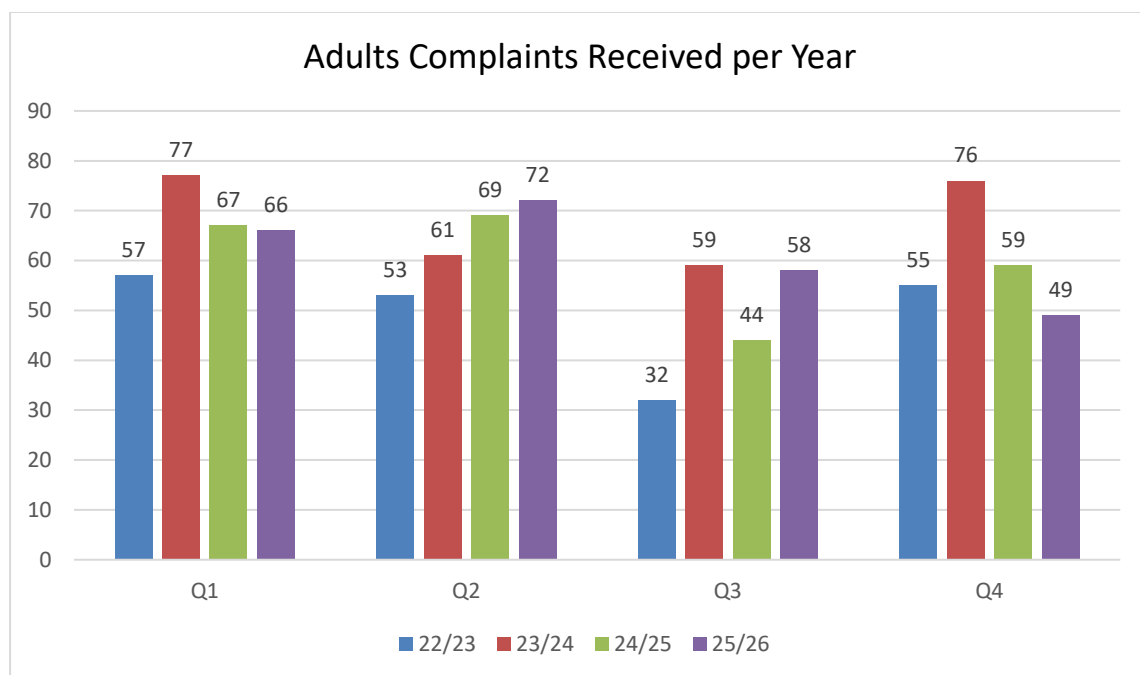
- Complaint reports are shared each quarter collectively with managers and a plan agreed to ensure any learning is addressed in a timely and consistent way.
- In all cases where fault has been identified, managers have taken relevant action to rectify the concerns raised which includes speaking with involved workers, changing processes, making relevant amendments and implementing communication plans.
- In relation to communication, there has been focus on workers addressing specifically with children and families, expectations around communication, such as frequency of contact, visits, and preferred methods of contact.
- Where particular themes are identified, these are addressed by senior leaders and a plan developed to progress these, which may include amending procedures and training for staff.
- Due to the increasing levels of SEND complaints in this area, specialist dedicated resource has been put in place to manage complaints through the corporate process, ensuring they are responded to in a timely way and any learning is captured and implemented.

Adults Care & Community Wellbeing

In 2025/2026, Adult Care & Community Wellbeing (ACCW) received 245 complaints from the public, who wished to express dissatisfaction with the services delivered.

Overall, this area has seen a 4% increase in the total number of complaints received in comparison to the previous year. The total complaints raised for Adult Care this year accounts for 20% of all complaints received.

The following shows the comparison of formal complaints received for Adult Care per year since 2022/2023.



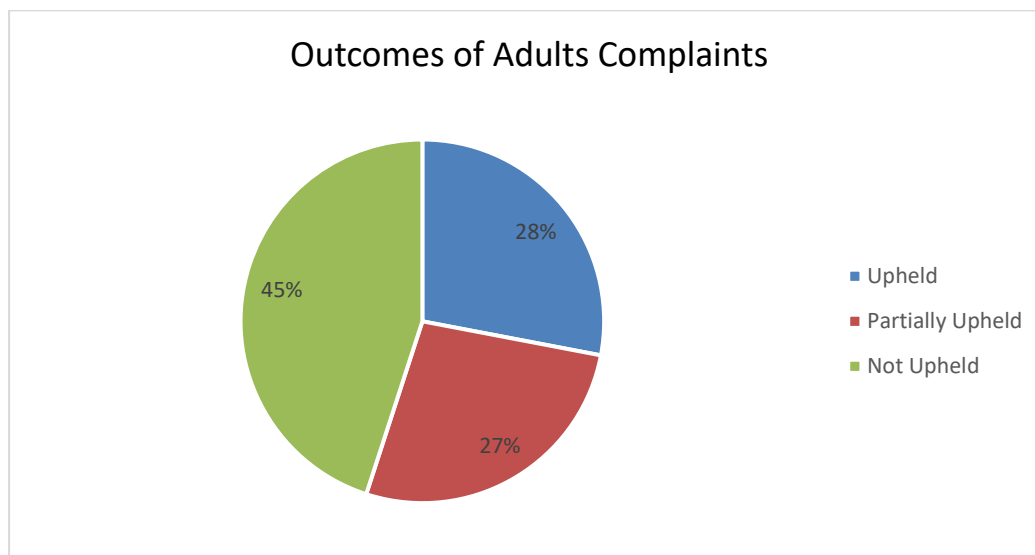
Context:

To understand complaint numbers and how they reflect the services being delivered, we have provided a comparison of the number of assessments, requests for services and open cases within Adult Social Care which can be seen below:

	Assessments	Requests	Open Cases	Total
Hospitals	2,338	8,628	855	11,821
ACWT (East)	3,154	1,410	134	4,698
ACWT (South)	3,056	1,386	633	5,075
ACWT (West)	2,643	1,078	74	3,795
LD	238	361	70	669
Mental Health	391	145	3,782	4,318
OT	14,295	1,036	312	15,643
PfT	110	17	0	127
Other	21,231	41,086	42,314	40815
	47,456	55,147	48,174	86,961

The 245 complaints received over the year equates to 0.51% of all open Adult Social Care cases. The complaints included in the 'Other' section above consist of Adult Finance, Residential Homes, Adult's Data Handling, Safeguarding and DoLS.

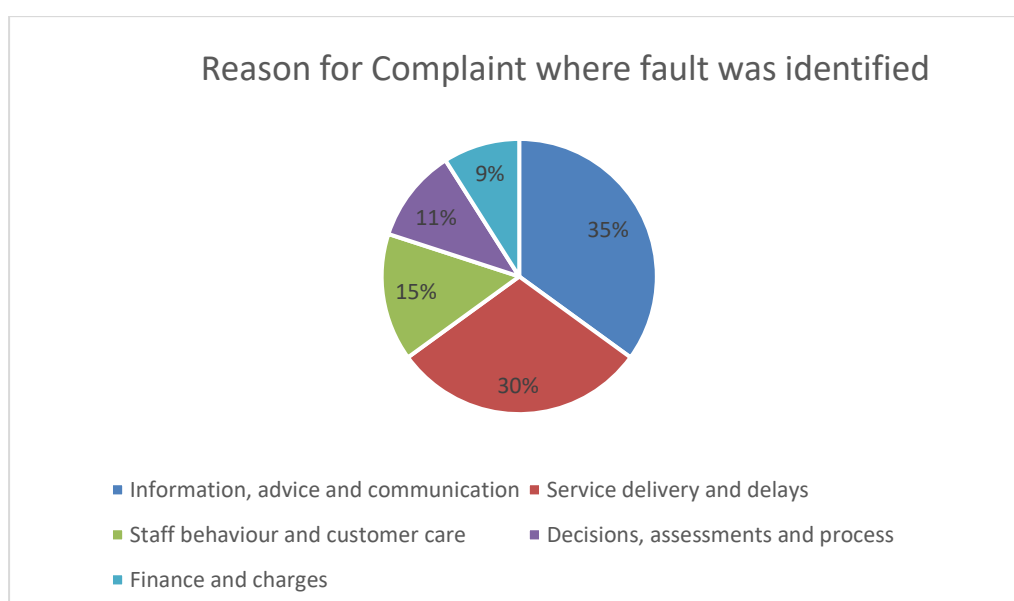
The following shows the outcomes of all complaints in this area.



When looking at the outcome of complaints in this area, 111 (45%) identified no fault in the services which were delivered and were not upheld. 66 (27%) of complaints were partially upheld, with 68 (28%) complaints upheld. In comparison to the LCC average data, upheld complaints are slightly higher and not upheld are lower.

Analysis was undertaken on those complaints partially or fully upheld to determine if there were any trends or common factors. This data was then provided to relevant staff within the service for additional review and decision on any areas of improvement.

The following shows where fault was found in complaints that were upheld and the founded aspects of those complaints that were partially upheld.



The analysis of Adult Care complaints highlights that 47 related to information, advice and communication (35%), followed closely by 41 relating to service delivery and delays (30%), meaning these two areas account for nearly two-thirds of all complaints. The most common individual issues were incorrect information or advice given, no communication received, and delays or failure in completing actions. 20 complaints related to staff behaviour and customer care (15%) highlight concerns around interactions with customers, including rudeness and refusal to assist. A further 15 (11%) of complaints were linked to decisions, assessments and processes, while 12 (9%) were related to finance and charging issues.

Complaint learning and actions:

Overall, the findings indicate that improving communication, ensuring accurate information is provided, and reducing delays in service delivery would have the greatest impact on reducing complaint volumes.

- **Communication quality:** Complaints are more likely where communication is delayed, unclear or lacks compassion.

Action taken: Expectations reinforced around timely responses, clear explanations of decisions and next steps, and professional tone through supervision, team meetings and management oversight.

- **Financial transparency and charging:** Finance related complaints continue to represent a high proportion of the total. This included delays in assessments, confusion over charges, and distress caused by invoices or reminder letters.

Action taken: Early, robust oversight of cases involving funding and support planning decisions, ensuring prompt escalation where decisions cannot be resolved in a person's favour. This learning will continue to be reinforced.

- **Record-keeping and system accuracy:** A number of complaints related to delayed system updates, inaccurate records and poor documentation of key decisions and financial discussions.

Action taken: Management checks on recording quality and ensure learning actions from complaints are clearly documented and followed up.

- **Joined-up working and accountability:** Several complaints reflect breakdowns between teams or partner services, with unclear ownership leading to delay and escalation.

Action taken: Reinforced clarity of responsibility during handovers and transitions,

particularly between care teams, finance and partner organisations.

- **Practice quality and supervision:** In some instances, complaints indicated variability in professional curiosity, understanding of legal frameworks and consistency of practice.

Action taken: Using supervision and appraisal processes to address individual learning needs and ensure improvements are sustained.

The Learning Dissemination & Governance Policy and procedure introduced in September 2025 includes learning from complaints in its scope. This will capture and support the service in embedding any cross cutting strategic complaint themes alongside other wider learning going forward.

The anticipated policy outcomes and benefits include:

- Enhances staff practice and improves outcomes for the people we support.
- Provides a flexible, tiered approach to sharing learning.
- Ensures transparency through a central record of decisions and actions.
- Responds quickly to internal and external changes and learning needs.
- Measures impact through evaluations such as surveys and audits.
- Supports staff development through supervision and tailored learning.
- Promotes a culture of continuous improvement and accountability.
- Demonstrates compliance with regulatory expectations.

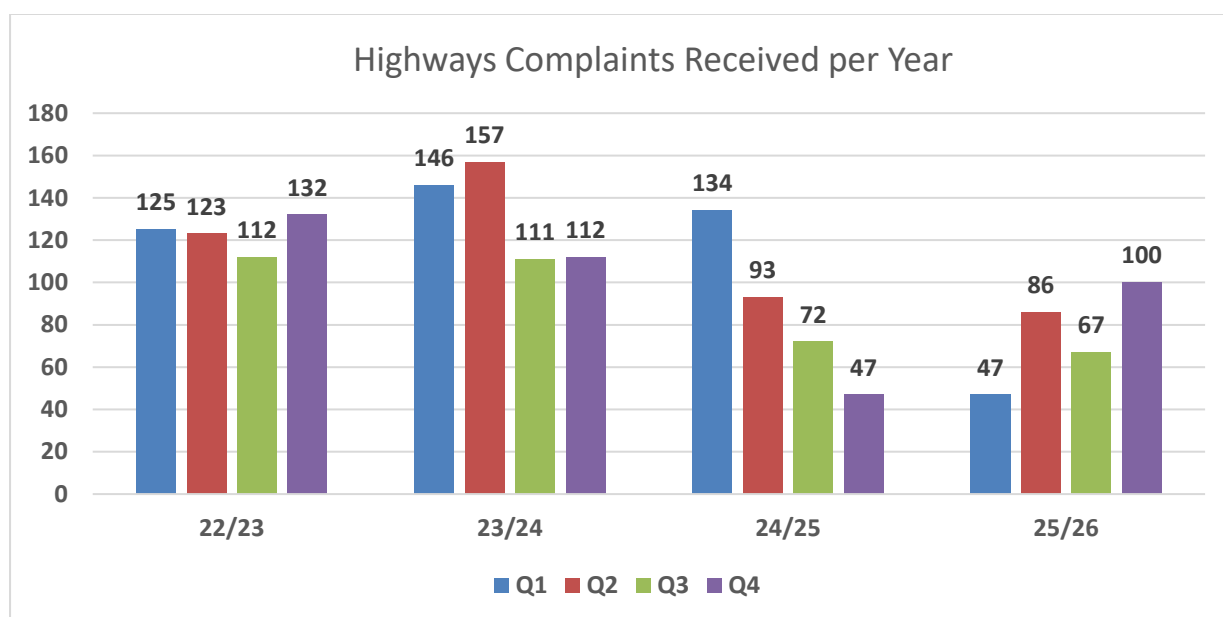
Overall, complaints evidence confirms that human factors, rather than system failure, remain the primary drivers of dissatisfaction. Strengthening oversight, professional curiosity, communication and learning assurance will reduce repeat complaints, improve people's experiences and provide strong evidence of learning.

Place

Highways

This year saw 300 complaints received from the public to express dissatisfaction with the services delivered by Highways. Overall, this area saw a 13% decrease in comparison to the number of complaints received in the previous year. The total complaints raised for Highways this year accounts for 25% of all complaints received by the council.

The following shows the comparison of formal complaints received for Highways since 2022/2023.



During 2025/2026, Highways saw the highest number of complaints during Q4. This can be explained due to the inclement weather over the period and a rise in complaints for road maintenance around the county.

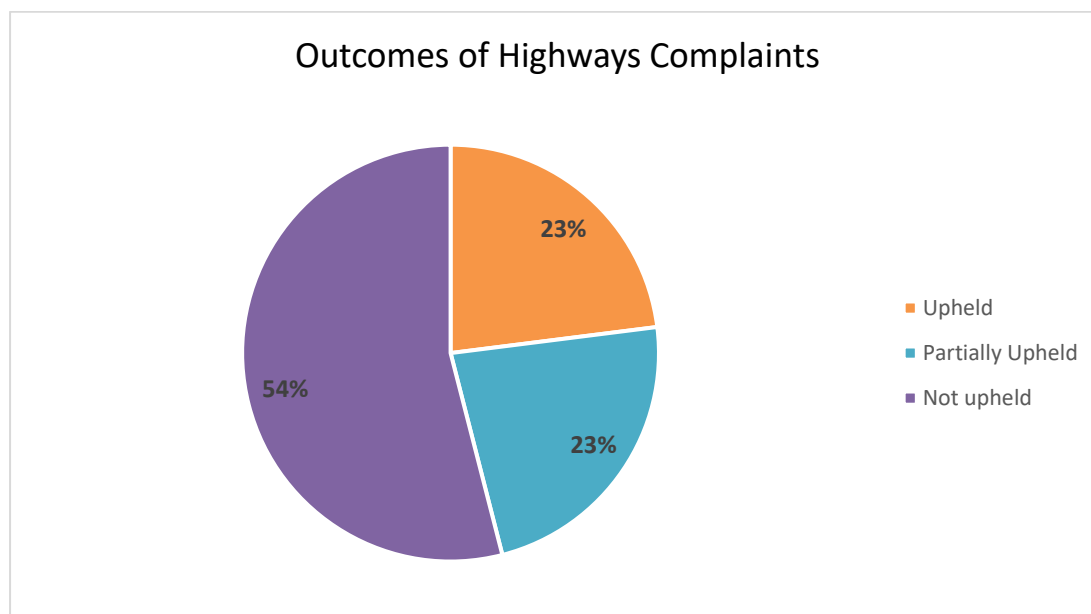
Context

Highway have provided the below data to show contacts received through the customer service centre, via email and calls as well as FixMyStreet contacts. Due to a system change, accurate call and email data was unavailable, 2024/2025 data was provided and noted that the numbers would be similar if not slightly higher due to an increase of correspondence in January to March 2026 around road maintenance.

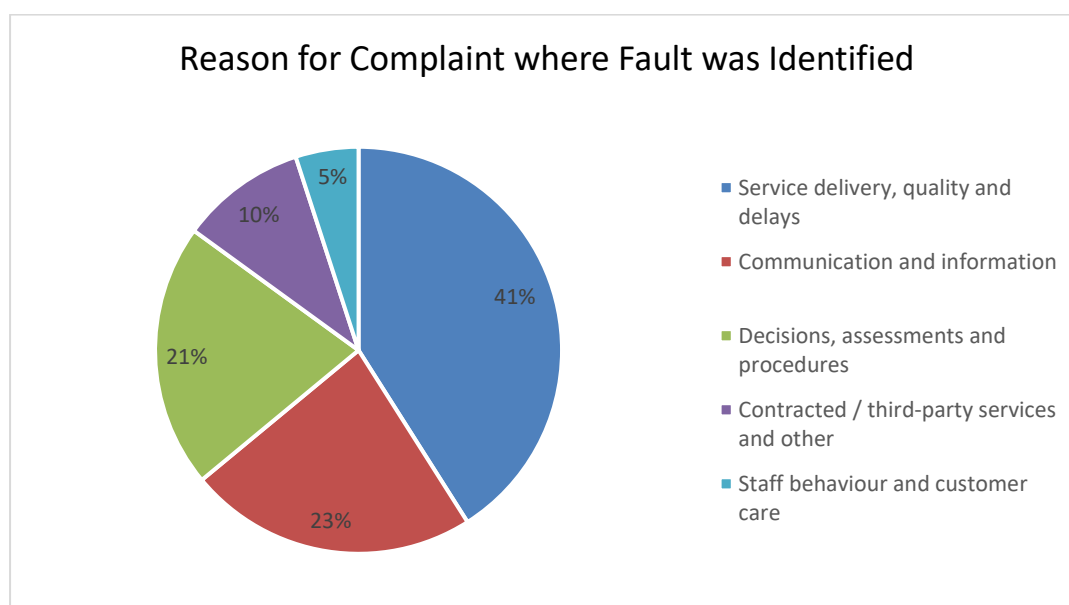
Method of Contact	Number of Contacts Received
Customer Service Centre (Calls) 24/25	19,031
Customer Service Centre (Emails) 24/25	10,093
Fix My Street	45,812

A comparison of complaints solely against Fix My Street reports demonstrates a dissatisfaction rate of only 0.65%.

Analysis was undertaken on those complaints partially or fully upheld to determine if there were any trends or common factors. The following shows where fault was found in complaints that were upheld and the aspects of those complaints partially upheld.



69 (23%) complaints received in 2025/2026 were fully upheld, with 69 (23%) partially upheld and 162 (54%) not upheld. Upheld complaints were slightly higher than the council average and not upheld slightly less.



Analysis of complaint reasons for complaints fully or partly upheld indicates that 57 relate to service delivery, quality and delays (41%), highlighting issues with the timeliness and standard of service provision, particularly around delays, incomplete actions, and poor-quality outcomes.

The second largest category, communication and information (23%), reflects 32 concerns regarding a lack of communication, delayed responses, and the provision of incorrect or

insufficient information to customers. 29 complaints were associated with decisions, assessments and procedures (21%) with customers expressing dissatisfaction with outcomes and raising concerns about assessment accuracy and adherence to processes.

Of the 138 upheld or partially upheld, 14 related to contracted or third-party services (10%) and 6 relate to staff behaviour and customer care (4%), though these still identify areas for improvement in external provider performance and customer interactions.

Complaint learning and actions:

Overall, the findings highlight the need to improve service delivery performance, strengthen communication practices, and ensure consistent and transparent decision-making to enhance the overall customer experience.

The Highways Service receives approximately 40,000 enquiries each year. Most enquiries involve multiple interactions with highways staff, including both LCC officers and Balfour Beatty operatives, resulting in an estimated 280,000 transactions and responses to members of the public. These responses are managed through status changes within the works order management system, which generates automated updates at key stages in the lifecycle of a works order.

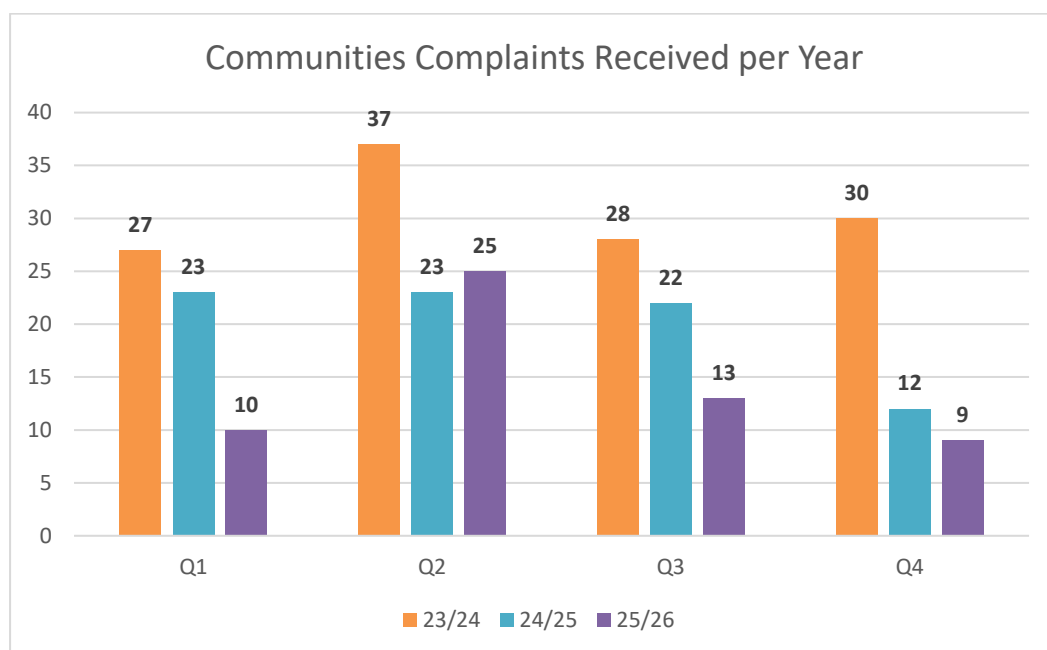
Over the last year, a number of improvement initiatives have been implemented to strengthen communication with the public and improve the quality and timeliness of responses.

- Responses to drainage enquiries have been reviewed and amended, with further work continuing to ensure they remain appropriate to the circumstances of each case.
- A process has been developed to allow the welcome and landing page to be updated quickly during emergency events, supported by holding responses that direct the public to the relevant authority.
- Operational processes have been reviewed with staff to ensure the correct status changes are applied at the appropriate stage of a works order.
- Bespoke responses have been introduced for selected work types to simplify messaging while also providing greater clarity and more relevant information at key stages of the process.
- A survey of Fix My Street users has been undertaken to gather feedback and identify opportunities for further improvement.
- Formal engagement has taken place with other authorities and suppliers to identify and apply examples of best practice.
- New Power BI dashboards have been developed to support real-time visibility of enquiries and improve the service's ability to respond promptly.

Transport

This year saw 57 complaints received from the public to express dissatisfaction with the services delivered about both public transport and educational transport. The total complaints raised for transport accounts for 6% of all complaints received.

As can be seen below, Transport Services have seen a steady decline in complaints received since the beginning of 2025/2026, with numbers continuing to decline during this year. This highlights the positive work being conducted by colleagues in Transport Services. As was expected the number of complaints showed a slight increase during Quarter 2 aligning with the beginning of a new school year and the number of transport applications received during this time.



Context:

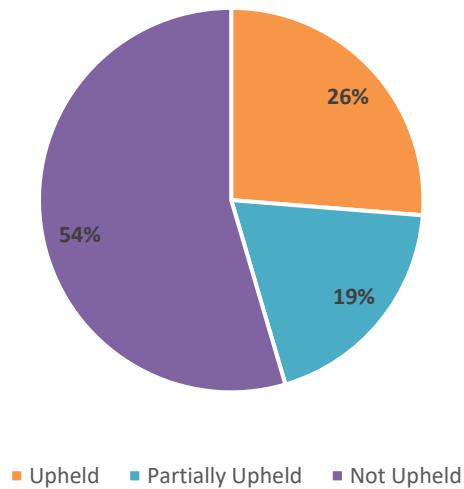
To understand the work being delivered regarding Educational Transport and the number of complaints received, the below shows the number of applications received over 2025/2026:

Number of Transport Applications Processed	Complaints received
11,000	57

11,000 applications were processed for educational transport over the year. Therefore, the 57 complaints received accounts for 0.63% of all eligible passengers.

The following shows where fault was found in complaints that were upheld and the aspects of those complaints partially upheld.

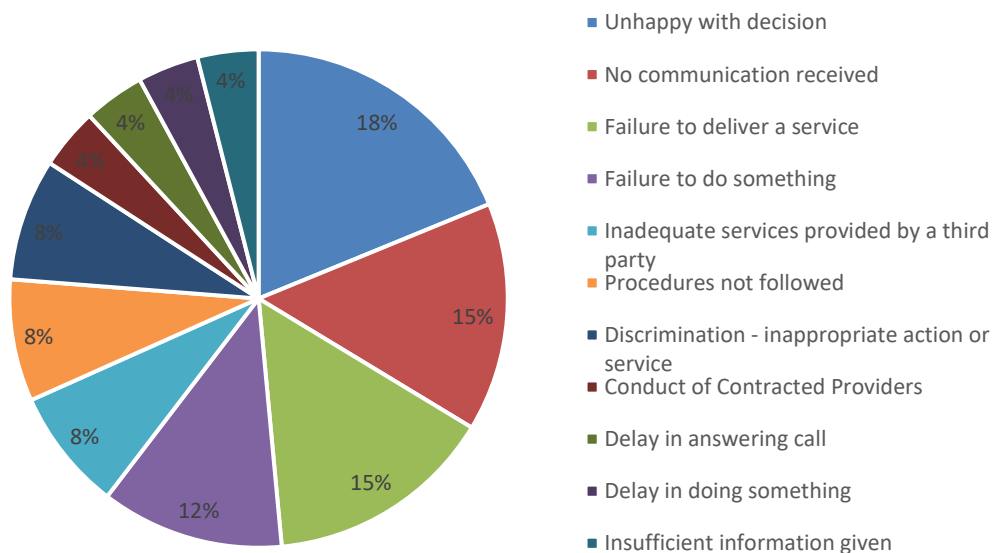
Outcomes of Transport Complaints



During 2025/2026, Transport saw 15 (26%) upheld, with 11 (19%) partially upheld and 31 (54%) not upheld. Again, upheld complaints were higher than the council average, whilst those not upheld were lower.

Further analysis of these complaints shows the below reasons where fault was identified with the service delivered.

Reason for Complaint where Fault was Identified



Analysis of the complaint reasons for fully and partly upheld complaints indicates that the most common reason for complaints was unhappiness with a decision (5 cases, 18%), followed by no communication received and failure to deliver a service (4 cases each, 15%). Failure to do something accounted for 3 cases (12%). Other themes, including third-party

service issues, procedures not followed, and discrimination, each represented 8% (2 cases), while conduct of contracted providers, delay in answering a call, delay in doing something, and insufficient information given accounted for 4% (1 case each).

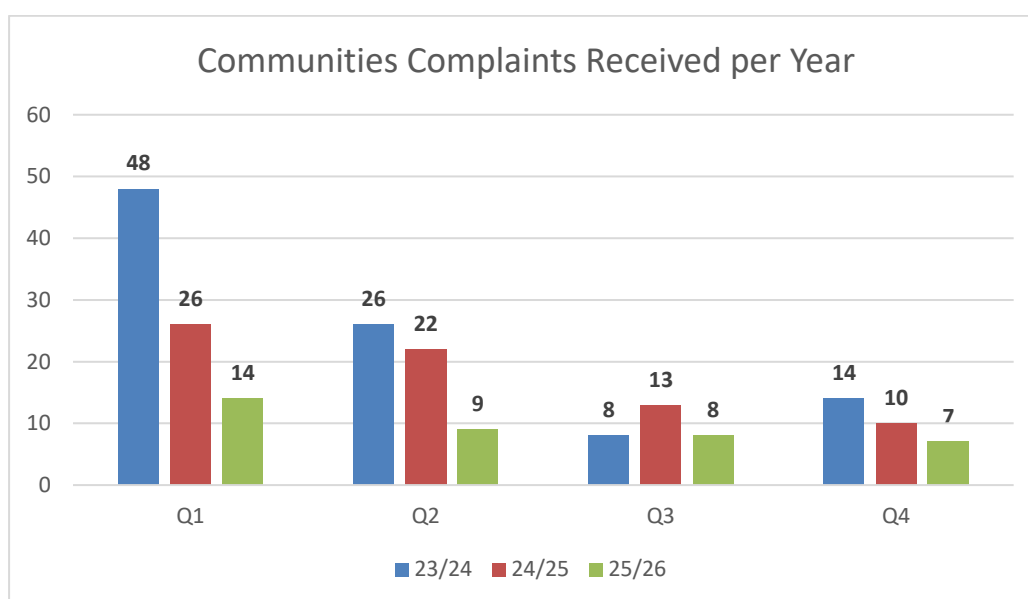
Complaint learning and actions:

Overall, the findings highlight that improving decision-making transparency, communication with customers, and service delivery performance would have the greatest impact on reducing complaints.

Despite the relatively low level of complaints, the team continue to explore improvement opportunities. These relate to continuous review and monthly checks on initial eligibility decisions to ensure adherence to policy is maintained, a focus on confirming eligibility decision are made as quickly as possible, close collaborative working with internal LCC teams to enhance and speed up processes and also continued focus on further improving messaging within the LCC website to improve visibility and understanding for parents before applications for transport are made.

Communities

This year saw 38 complaints received from the public to express dissatisfaction with the services delivered by Communities. This analysis includes Countryside Access, Cultural Services and Waste Services; excluding transport as summarised above. The total complaints raised for Communities accounts for 3% of all complaints received.



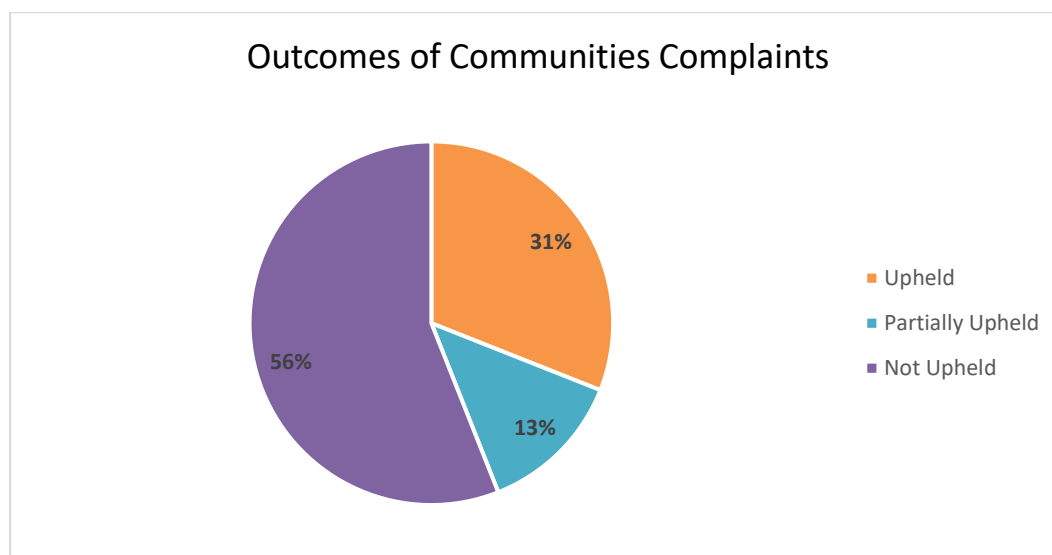
As can be seen above, Communities have seen a steady decline in complaints received since the beginning of 2025/2026. Service managers have been proactive in working alongside Customer Relations when trends have become apparent in this service area, particularly with regards to Waste Services.

Context

Waste Services Tonnage figures are showing for 2024/2025 as last year's data is not yet available for reporting.

HWRC	2024/2025 Tonnage	Complaints Received	Complaints per tonne
Tattershall	3302.20	4	1.21
Bourne	5352.83	2	0.37
Gainsborough	4278.86	2	0.47
Grantham	6625.21	2	0.30
Lincoln	9708.19	5	0.51
Market Rasen	3497.55	4	1.14
Sleaford	5547.43	4	0.72
Spalding	7807.51	1	0.12
Boston	6444.47	4	0.62
Louth	6961.13	2	0.28
Skegness	4954.44	1	0.20

If tonnage figures remain at comparable levels for 2025/26, this evidences the proportion of complaints received about Tattershall and Market Rasen are greater than other Household Waste Recycling Centres per tonnage of waste, whilst Spalding, Skegness and Louth perform well. The following shows where fault was found in complaints that were upheld and the aspects of those complaints partially upheld.



Over 2025/2026, 21 (56%) complaints raised did not identify any fault with the service that was delivered. However, 5 complaints (13%) were partially upheld, with 12 complaints (31%) fully upheld.

Further analysis of these complaints shows the below reasons where fault was identified with the service delivered.

Reason for Complaint where Fault was Identified



Analysis of complaint reasons shows the most common issue was staff rudeness (4 complaints, 25%), followed by refusal to assist/help (2, 13%), inappropriate behaviour (2, 13%), and conduct of contracted providers (2, 13%).

All remaining categories were reported at lower, equal levels, each accounting for 1 complaint (6%). These included delay in communication, failure to deliver a service, failure to do something, insufficient information given, delay in doing something, and procedures not followed.

Overall, the data shows that while a small number of themes make up the majority of complaints, there is a spread of individual issues contributing at lower levels.

Complaint learning and actions:

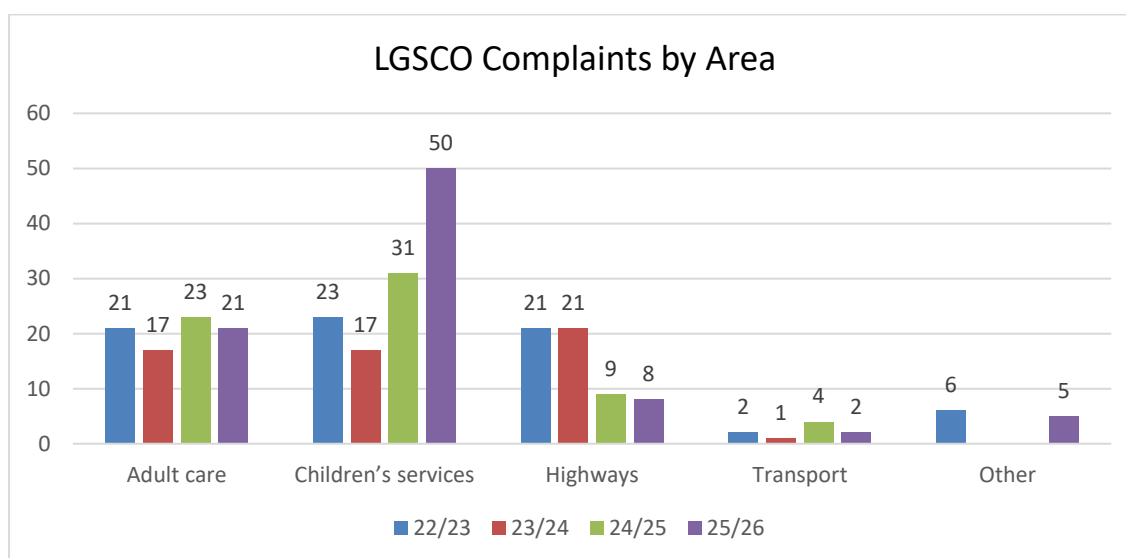
During 2025/2026, additional conflict resolution training was delivered at the Tattershall HWRC site managed directly by the Council, alongside significant work to strengthen customer relations. Staffing changes have also been made at the site following concerns about customer service. Those individuals have now left the authority, and newly recruited staff are already having a more positive impact on site operations.

The service has also been working with our contractors to improve customer service with further training around our provision and usage policy to ensure employees are more aware of the site rules to reduce any ambiguity between sites.

Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman

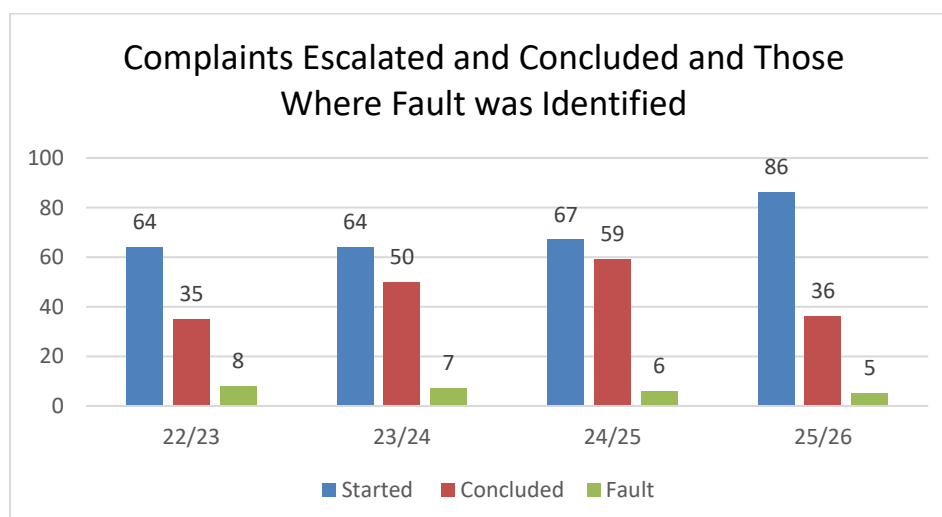
Should a customer exhaust the Local Authority's complaints process and remain dissatisfied with the response provided or feel that their concerns have not been resolved, they can escalate their complaint to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO).

A breakdown of the service areas which the complaints raised with the LGSCO over the last four years is shown below:



The primary increase in complaints to the LGSCO for Children's are in respect of SEND including themes across education provision and transport. The Ombudsman in the last several years has produced reports outlining the failings around SEND provision and those parents with children with SEND are becoming more aware of their rights to complain. The published reports around failings and increased national media coverage of the issues has likely affected the increase.

The following shows the number of complaints escalated to the LGSCO over the last 4 years, the number of those complaints the Ombudsman investigated and concluded and the number of those where fault was identified by the LGSCO.



Conclusion

Overall, 2025/2026 has seen a slight increase in the number of complaints received by Lincolnshire County Council, alongside a notable rise in escalation rates, indicating that a greater proportion of customers remain dissatisfied following initial responses. While the introduction of the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGO) Complaint Handling Code has ensured greater transparency and consistency in complaint handling, the volume and outcomes of complaints continue to provide valuable insight into where service improvements are required.

A consistent theme across all service areas is the prominence of communication issues and delays in service delivery. Ineffective or insufficient communication, including lack of updates, incorrect information, or failure to respond in a timely manner, remain key drivers of dissatisfaction. Similarly, delays in completing actions, providing services, or progressing cases continue to impact customer experience. Together, these operational factors account for the majority of upheld and partially upheld complaints across the authority, highlighting them as priority areas for improvement.

In addition, concerns relating to decision-making, processes, and customer interactions, particularly staff conduct and customer care in certain service areas, have also contributed to complaint volumes. While some services, such as Transport and Communities, have demonstrated positive reductions in complaint numbers, others have experienced increases, notably Children's Services, reflecting ongoing service pressures from demand.

Encouragingly, a significant proportion of complaints were not upheld, indicating that services are often being delivered in line with policy and expectations. However, where fault has been identified, the findings provide clear opportunities for ongoing learning and service development.

Moving forward, it is recommended that services prioritise improving communication practices, ensuring timely and accurate information is provided, and strengthening service delivery performance to reduce delays. Clearer expectation-setting with customer and explanation of decisions along with greater consistency in decision-making will also be essential. By focusing on these areas, the Council can improve overall customer satisfaction, reduce escalation rates, and enhance the quality and reliability of services provided.

** The other areas not covered in the report to make up the total numbers are Resources: 35 complaints predominantly related to data protection, commercial, digital, Blue Badge, Impy and legal services. Fire Rescue received 8 complaints and Public Protection 12 complaints linked to Registration, Trading Standards and Coroners. Regular reporting is in place into these service areas to feedback complaint themes.*

Executive Member Comments

As Executive Member, I recognise that complaints are an important source of feedback and a key part of how we understand residents' experiences of our services. This report shows that, during 2025/2026, the Council saw an overall increase in complaints and a notable rise in escalations beyond Stage 1. However, complaint volumes remain lower than in 2022/2023 and 2023/2024, despite all complaints now entering the formal process at Stage 1 following the removal of early resolution. That context is important, but so too is the clear message that more residents remained dissatisfied with their initial response and that we must continue to strengthen both the quality and timeliness of our complaint handling.

The report also provides a fuller picture of performance against complaint handling expectations and the Council's own KPI benchmarks. It is positive that performance has remained strong in some areas, including Corporate Stage 2 complaints, but the report also shows a decline in timeliness across a number of complaint categories, particularly within Adults and Children's statutory complaints. This reflects the pressures services are managing, including increased volumes and the growing complexity of cases, but it also underlines the need for sustained focus on capacity, responsiveness and consistency. Across the Council, the main causes of upheld and partially upheld complaints continue to be delays in service delivery, poor communication, and issues relating to decision-making and customer care.

These are matters that have a direct impact on residents and must remain central to improvement activity.

What is particularly important in this report is the stronger emphasis on learning from complaints and using that learning to improve practice. The service-level analysis and recommendations show that complaints are not being viewed in isolation, but are being used to identify common themes, reinforce good practice, improve processes and strengthen accountability. I welcome the steps being taken to embed this learning more systematically, including the use of governance arrangements, management oversight and service action to address recurring issues. Although referrals to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman have increased, the number of cases where fault has been identified remains low.

Looking ahead, our priority must be to use performance information, KPI monitoring and the lessons from complaints to reduce avoidable dissatisfaction, improve communication, provide timely and accurate responses, and ensure residents receive a fair, clear and consistent service throughout the complaints process.



*Councillor Robert Gibson
Deputy Leader of the Council*