
Subject:	ANNUAL COMPLAINTS REPORT 2022/23
Meeting and Date:	Governance Committee – 7 December 2023
Report of:	Head of Corporate Services and Democracy
Classification:	UNRESTRICTED

Purpose of the report: This report documents the number of complaints dealt with through the corporate complaints process for the financial year 2022/23.

Recommendation: That the report be noted.

1. Summary

This report highlights the number of complaints received for each service provided by the Council, for the financial year from 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023 and indicates where the number has risen or decreased. It also details the number of complaints referred to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman and the Housing Ombudsman, with outcome, where received.

2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1 The Council has a two stage corporate complaints process. The first stage is for the relevant department to respond to the complaint. If the complainant remains dissatisfied, they can request a stage 2 review by Corporate Services. The report also details the numbers that have been referred to the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman or Housing Ombudsman. This is an independent free service for the public if they are unhappy with the way in which a local authority (not a town or parish council) has dealt with an issue. The Ombudsman would normally require the matter to have been through the Council's complaints process first.
- 2.2 The Council is in the process of changing its computer system for handling complaints to an in-house solution that offers better integration with the Council's website. This should be in place by the end of 2023.
- 2.3 The Council approved an amended Complaints Policy in July 2023 reflecting changes to move the Policy in line with Housing Ombudsman guidance. A further revision to the Policy may be needed in 2024 to reflect a new joint code of complaint handling being proposed by both Ombudsmen.

Complaints 2022/23

- 2.4 The number of complaints for the financial years 2021/22 and 2022/23 have been compared, as detailed in Appendix 1. Overall, the number of complaints received has fallen from 281 in 2021/22 to 267 in 2022/23, a reduction of 14 complaints. However, whilst pleasing, it does not in itself tell the complete story given the impact of complaints from waste services in 2021/22. The Council has seen a rise in complaints relating to a number of services and as part of this report, we have extracted some of the key themes in respect of these areas. It is difficult to extract trends given the small sample size of complaints in many cases, but Heads of Services and managers are

encouraged to review all complaints for potential lessons that can be learnt. It should also be recognised that not all complaints relate to a fault on the part of the Council.

Council Tax

- 2.5 The number of complaints relating to Council Tax has increased by 19, from 22 in 2021/22 to 41 in 2022/23. The majority of which were challenging decisions and querying accounts and recovery action. It is considered that the increase is due to the hardship that many residents are facing.

Housing Options

- 2.6 Housing Options has seen an increase in complaints of 22, from 14 in 2021/22 to 36 in 2022/23. This has been due to staff shortages and the implementation of the new database which has impacted on staff resources causing delays to medical assessments and the processing of applicants' information. This is being addressed by the Head of Service.

Housing Repairs

- 2.7 Housing Repairs has seen an increase in complaints of 38, from 26 in 2021/22 to 64 in 2022/23. The majority of the complaints relate to the length of time taken to carry out work (some of which related to reports made to East Kent Housing). The service has been working with our contractors to ensure any works around historic complaints are prioritised and that any new complaints are completed in the shortest possible time. There were 10 complaints relating to damp and mould. This is thought to be as a result of reports highlighted in the media, but the Repairs Team set up a system whereby tenants could report mould and damp, and inspections were prioritised in order to deal with this issue. There was also a number of complaints relating to work carried out to void properties. The repairs team now have additional resources and are constantly reviewing the process to allow for a more robust post inspection regime to eliminate the need for any post void works.

Waste Services

- 2.8 The number of complaints received in respect of Waste Services decreased from 120 in 2021/22 to 12 in 2022/23, returning to what we would consider as normal for this service. This follows the problems encountered in 2021/22 with regard to the new waste contract.

Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman

- 2.9 The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman received seventeen complaints in the 2022/23 financial against Dover District Council. Ten were closed after initial enquiries of the Council and five were referred to the Council for consideration through the Council's complaints process. Two complaints were upheld and these related to the Housing Options service. In the first case the Ombudsman found fault in the length of time taken to carry out medical assessments. The Council apologised to the applicant and steps were taken to manage applicants' expectations until such time as the response times improve. The Ombudsman found fault in the second case due to the length of time taken to offer an applicant suitable housing. The Council was ordered to make an apology and pay compensation for the time spent in unsuitable accommodation.

Housing Ombudsman

2.10 In the 2022/23 financial year the Council received one decision from the Housing Ombudsman relating to a complaint made to the District Council in the 2021/22 financial year. The case related to a decision by officers not to carry out a disabled adaptation. The decision was upheld by the Ombudsman and no finding was made against the Council.

3. Resource Implications

3.1 None.

4. Appendices

Appendix 1 – Summary of complaints received during 2021/22 and 2022/23

Appendix 2 – Number of Complaints per service, per quarter received during 2021/22 and 2022/23

Appendix 3 - Number of Stage 2 complaints per service, per quarter received during 2022/23

5. Background Papers

File C23/5 – Complaints

Contact Officer: Sue Carr, Corporate Services Officer

Summary of Total Complaints received during 2021/22 and 2022/23

Service	1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022 Resolved at:				1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023 Resolved at:				Increase/ Decrease
	Stage 1	Stage 2	Ombuds man	Total	Stage 1	Stage 2	Ombuds man	Total	
Benefits	4	0	1	5	6	1	0	7	+2
Building Control	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	-1
Community Services	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	-1
Council Tax & NNDR	13	7	2	22	37	3	1	41	+19
Corporate Services	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	+1
Customer Services	3	0	0	3	4	1	0	5	+2
Democratic Services	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	+1
Electoral Registration	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	2	+2
Environmental Health	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	0
Environmental Protection	3	0	0	3	0	1	0	1	-2
Finance	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	+1
Governance	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	0
Housing Services	14	3	1	18	15	6	1	22	+4
Housing Options	8	3	3	14	24	9	3	36	+22
Housing Repairs	23	2	1	26	46	18	0	64	+38
Housing Income	1	0	0	1	5	1	0	6	+5
Inward Investment	0	1	0	1	3	0	0	3	+2
Legal	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	-1
Licensing	1	4	0	5	2	0	0	2	-3
Parks & Open Spaces	2	3	0	5	3	2	0	5	0
Parking Services	1	2	0	3	7	1	0	8	+5
Private Sector Housing	4	1	0	5	1	2	0	3	-2
Planning	12	11	2	25	18	8	5	31	+6
Planning Enforcement	8	5	1	14	6	3	1	10	-4
Property Services	3	2	1	6	4	0	0	4	-2
Waste Services	108	10	2	120	8	4	0	12	-108
Total	209	58	14	281	194	62	11	267	-14

Number of Total Complaints per service, per quarter received during 2021/22 and 2022/23

Service	1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022					1 April 2022 to 31 October 2023				
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
Benefits	2	0	1	2	5	2	3	2	0	7
Building Control	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Community Services	0	1	0	1	2	0	0	0	0	0
Council Tax & NNDR	9	8	2	3	22	14	15	7	5	41
Corporate Services	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Customer Services	1	1	0	1	3	1	1	2	1	5
Democratic Services	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Electoral Registration	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	2	4
Environmental Health	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	1
Environmental Protection	0	0	1	2	3	0	1	0	0	1
Finance	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Governance	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	1
Housing Services	7	5	1	5	18	5	3	5	7	20
Housing Options	3	1	5	5	14	3	5	12	16	36
Housing Repairs	2	9	6	8	25	9	8	19	28	64
Housing Income	0	0	0	1	1	2	1	0	3	6
Inward Investment	0	0	0	1	1	0	2	1	0	3
Legal	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0
Licensing	0	5	0	0	5	2	0	0	0	2
Parks & Open Spaces	1	3	1	0	5	1	1	2	1	5
Parking Services	0	2	0	1	3	1	3	2	2	8
Private Sector Housing	0	1	0	4	5	1	0	1	1	3
Planning	4	11	5	5	25	2	9	13	7	31
Planning Enforcement	7	6	0	1	14	0	1	5	4	10
Property Services	2	2	1	1	6	2	0	1	1	4
Waste Services	47	57	2	14	120	6	0	1	5	12
TOTAL	86	112	26	57	281	52	57	74	84	267

Number of Stage 2 Complaints by Service 2022/23

Service	1 April 2022 to 31 October 2023				
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	TOTAL
Benefits	0	1	0	0	1
Building Control	0	0	0	0	0
Community Services	0	0	0	0	0
Council Tax & NNDR	0	2	1	0	3
Corporate Services	0	0	0	0	0
Customer Services	1	0	0	0	1
Democratic Services	0	0	0	0	0
Electoral Services	0	0	1	0	1
Environmental Health	0	0	0	0	0
Environmental Protection	0	1	1	0	2
Finance	0	0	1	0	1
Governance	0	0	0	0	0
Housing Services	1	3	1	2	7
Housing Options	4	0	0	4	8
Housing Repairs	2	3	6	8	19
Housing Income	0	0	0	1	1
Inward Investment	1	0	0	0	1
Legal	0	0	0	0	0
Licensing	0	0	0	0	0
Parks & Open Spaces	1	0	0	1	2
Parking Services	1	1	0	0	2
Private Sector Housing	1	0	1	0	2
Planning	3	1	5	1	10
Planning Enforcement	1	0	0	2	3
Property Services	0	1	0	0	1
Waste Services	3	1	1	0	5
TOTAL	19	14	18	19	70