

## APPENDIX 1

### LONDON BOROUGH OF RICHMOND UPON THAMES CORPORATE COMPLAINTS REPORT FOR 2023-24

#### 1. MATTER FOR CONSIDERATION

##### RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1.1 Recommendation 1:** This report seeks endorsement of the new corporate complaints policy from 1 April 2025 to ensure the council will be fully compliant with the LGSCO/HOS Joint Complaints Handling Code.
- 1.2 Recommendation 2:** To reflect the reduction in time to complete investigations, this report is recommending a reduction in the Key Performance Indicator (KPI) for responding to stage 2 complaints from 80% on time to 70% on time.
- 1.3 Recommendation 3:** To review and note the report and associated appendices.

#### 2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2.1. The report provides statistics and context to the complaints received and closed by Richmond Council for all services during the year 2023/24. Wherever possible comparative analysis with previous years is included.
- 2.2. The report has been produced to keep Members and senior officers informed of the overall numbers of complaints made to the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames Council, to provide details of the complaints which have followed one of the three complaints procedures at local and statutory levels, all of which may ultimately result in an investigation by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO).
- 2.3. **Section 3** sets out the background to the complaints process and the role of the Complaints Team.
- 2.4. **Section 4** provides information on the new Complaints Handling Code. To ensure compliance, Members, through this report, are asked to endorse a new Corporate Complaints Policy that will reflect the requirements of the Joint Complaints Handling Code and reduce the Key Performance Indicator for stage 2 complaints on time from 80% to 70%. This will reflect the reduction in complaint timescales the new Code requires.

- 2.5. A key part of an effective complaints system is to highlight areas for learning from those complaints that can inform ongoing improvement of services. Learning is set out throughout this report including specific case directorate case studies which evidence where learning from complaints has directly resulted in service improvements.
- 2.6. This year Richmond Council closed 362 complaints which is a 20% decrease on the 453 complaints last year. It should be noted that only a very small proportion of interactions and contacts with the Council result in formal complaints, such context has been set out in greater detail in the report below.
- 2.7. The LGSCO made decisions on 56 Richmond cases which resulted in 14 detailed investigations. This is a 24% increase on the 45 decisions in 2022-23 and a 10% decrease on the 62 decisions in 2021-22. The number of detailed investigations has risen by 27% (from 11 in 2022-23 to 14 in 2023-24)
- 2.8. Across all stages and processes, this year 163 (45%) of complaints were not upheld, compared to 205 (45%) last year. 85 (23%) were upheld compared to 104 (23%) last year, and 114(32%) were partly upheld compared to 144 (32%) last year.
- 2.9. In line with previous trends, 'service delay or failure' was the most raised issue of complaint, raised in 59% of complaints, which proportionally is the same as last year. Next staff error/attitude was raised in 19% of complaints which is higher than previous years.
- 2.10. This year 266 (73%) of complaints at all stages and both corporate and statutory processes were responded to on time. Proportionately, this is 3% higher than the 317 (70%) complaints responded to on time last year.
- 2.11. Breakdowns by directorate are detailed in **Section 6** of this report which provide more analysis on performance, trends and learning outcomes.
- 2.12. **Section 7** of the report provides further analysis of LGSCO performance. Richmond's average upheld rate of 86% equates to **6.2 upheld decisions per 100,000 residents** compared to an average 8.2 per 100,000 residents of similar authorities.
- 2.13. The Council is still performing well in relation to similar sized local boroughs. The average 'upheld' rate for the three statistical neighbouring boroughs with the closest profile to Richmond (Kingston, Hammersmith and Fulham and Westminster) is 78% or 7.15 per 100,000 population.
- 2.14. This LGSCO upheld 86% of investigations for Richmond (or 12 complaints out of 14 cases investigated). This compares to an average of 85% of complaints across all London boroughs.
- 2.15. There were no new Public Reports issues this year and the Council achieved 100% compliance in satisfactorily implementing LGSCO recommendations which compares to 99% across all London boroughs.

- 2.16. The final part of this report sets out key achievements this year and describes how, in the forthcoming year, the Complaints Team will prioritise supporting directorates with the requirements of the new Joint Complaints Handling Code.

### **3. BACKGROUND**

- 3.1. The Corporate Complaints Team's role is to support the organisation to ensure that the Council has effective and efficient complaints procedures, in line with best practice and statutory requirements. The Complaints Team also have responsibility to train and support Council officers to respond effectively to complaints and ensure learning from complaints feeds directly into service improvement.
- 3.2. The Council's response to complaints it receives remains a key element of its approach to the delivery of quality services. Dealing positively and swiftly with complaints continues to be a high priority task for Directors, managers and staff at all levels. The Council encourages residents and businesses to provide feedback on services, to make a complaint or comment or to submit a suggestion, through various channels and online arrangements.
- 3.3. All councils in England and Wales are required to provide a complaints procedure for people who are in receipt of council services. In common with other councils, the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames follows three complaints procedures, summarised below:
- a) The Corporate complaints procedure, revised 1 January 2021 and 1 April 2023
  - b) The Local Authority Adult Social Services and National Health Services complaint regulations 2009
  - c) The Children Act 1989 complaints procedure
- 3.4. The Council has a statutory duty to produce an annual report for the Adults and Children's complaints' procedures at (b) and (c) above – these are submitted separately to Adult Social Services Health and Housing Committee members, Director's Board and Education and Children's Services Committee.
- 3.5. Data gathered for both the Adults and Children's Social Care annual reports has been included in this report to provide a complete picture of all complaints that the Council dealt with during the past year, from 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024.
- 3.6. There is a statutory duty on Monitoring Officers to report to Council Members where there has been maladministration or service failure. This annual corporate complaints' report details the organisation's performance against internal performance measures as well as steps being taken to continually improve.
- 3.7. The Council's corporate complaints procedure is available on the public webpages. A useful definition of a complaint is provided below, along with a description of other enquiries which have different procedures and are therefore not considered under the corporate complaints' procedure.

3.8. A complaint is:

*“...an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the organisation, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting an individual or group of individuals”.*

3.9. Other enquiries: In line with LGSCO guidance, the council now logs minor problems such as missed refuse collections, street related issues, abandoned vehicles, graffiti and fly tipping as ‘**faults**’ or ‘**service requests**’. They are often resolved quickly by the service or the relevant contractor. However, if the same issue occurs repeatedly (more than twice), it is elevated to the Council to address as a formal stage 1 complaint.

3.10. Some matters have a separate appeals procedure:

- Housing Benefit appeals
- Council Tax disputes
- Planning application appeals
- School admission appeals
- School exclusions
- Special Educational Needs decisions (Education, Health and Care Plan appeals)
- Penalty Charge Notice appeals
- Homelessness decisions

3.11. Wherever possible, a corporate complaint should be dealt with at stage 1. If, however, the complainant is not satisfied with the response received or the action taken, the matter can be referred to a senior manager for a review of the way the complaint was handled (stage 2). There are separate complaint regulations for Adult Social Care complaints and some statutory functions for Children’s Social Care.

3.12. The current timescale to respond at stage 1 is 20 working days and the review at stage 2 is currently 25 working days (total 35 days). Further recourse is open to the complainant through the LGSCO or the Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS), who may choose to investigate the matter to see if there has been evidence of fault leading to injustice by the Council or possible maladministration.

3.13. Complaints are counted in the year in which they were responded to or closed. Therefore 2023-24 complaint figures include complaints that will have been initiated in the previous year but then closed in the reporting year.

#### **4. JOINT COMPLAINTS HANDLING CODE**

4.1. In February 2024, the HOS and LGSCO announced the aligned joint complaints handling code is now in place. The code sets out best practice in complaints handling, supporting councils to respond to complaints effectively and fairly, resolve complaints promptly, use data to drive service improvements and encourage a positive culture of complaints.

- 4.2. The Code places leadership and governance as central to ensuring a good culture of complaints handling with an expectation that the Code will lead to high levels of complaints upheld at a local level with remedies already provided before they reach the Ombudsman. Councils will be required to annually self-assess compliance against the Code.
- 4.3. The HOS and LGSCO are clear that “high volumes of complaints must not be seen as a negative, as they can be indicative of a well-publicised and accessible complaints process”. The Code supports this change in culture through clear guidance on effective complaints handling.
- 4.4. The most significant change is that the published timescales in Richmond for corporate complaints will need to reduce from 20 to 10 days at stage 1, and from 25 days to 20 days at stage 2 (with options to extend in exceptional circumstances).
- 4.5. The reduction in timescales will be challenging to meet – previously the council had purposely placed most emphasis on having an extended period at the earliest stage (1) to investigate and full respond to, or rectify, a complaint. As such this change will cause challenges in meeting the current Key Performance Indicator (KPI) set at meeting 80% of stage 2 corporate complaints on time as set in April 2023 following an agreement by this committee. At that time, the timeframe for stage 2 responses increased from 15 working days to 25 working days.
- 4.6. By the end of year, on 31 March 2024, Richmond achieved a response rate of 72% within the target timeframe for stage 2 complaints. This is lower than the 80% target, indicating that directorates are facing challenges meeting such a high target amidst pressures on service delivery.
- 4.7. Given the Joint Complaints Handling code has now reduced **stage 2 response times to 20 working days**, reducing the KPI to **70%** is more realistic. This recommended adjustment aims to balance the need for timely responses with the practical constraints faced by the directorates. It is important to continually review and adjust these targets to ensure they are both challenging and achievable.
- 4.8. There are several implications and risks flowing from the introduction of the Joint Code, these are alongside existing capacity and complaint casework demands. The Joint Code will impact staffing capacity both within the central Complaints Team and in directorates. This stems from the changes in timescales to respond to complaints under the Joint Code at both stage 1 and 2. There are also, various other requirements the central Complaints Team needs to ensure are in place and consistently met so that the Council remains fully compliant to the Joint Code.

## 5. OVERVIEW OF COMPLAINTS

- 5.1. This section sets out the key messages regarding the number of complaints, the types of complaints, the timescales in which they were responded to, and a summary of the outcomes and learning.
- 5.2. Timescales and types of complaints for Adult and Children's statutory complaints have been separated as they follow a different process. Both Adult and Children's statutory complaints have a separate more detailed report as required by the complaint's legislation. These reports will go separately to the relevant Scrutiny Committees<sup>1</sup>.
- 5.3. Where available, specific learning examples are explored for each Directorate in **Section 6** below but some headline examples from stage 1 and 2 complaints this year are outlined below:
- **Environment & Community Services** are actively exploring advanced software solutions to generate weekly reports that identify recurring issues with street cleaning
  - The Council Tax Service within the **Finance Directorate** has sought to improve its complaints handling by reflecting on the importance of transparency and empathy, including the emotional impact on customers.
  - **Housing Regeneration Directorate** have strengthened the Housing Register Assessment Team in recent months and has engaged additional staffing resources to improve and reduce assessment times.
  - The **SEND** service in AfC will undertake a review with the Integrated Care Board (IBC) to consider if funding directed toward individual therapy packages might be better utilised in increasing local NHS provider contracts, to give greater control of how resources are deployed.
  - **Adult Social Care** have improved information on charging to ensure that when people are being discharged from hospital, they are clear about when they need to contribute towards the cost of their care
- 5.4. Appendix 2 to this report provides figures for the whole Council and shows all corporate complaints by type, level and time and includes information on complaints received via the statutory reporting processes and equalities data. Appendix 5 provides the learning arising from upheld LGSCO complaints. Appendix 6 provides the LGSCO Annual Review letter in respect of Richmond Borough Council. Appendix 7 provides examples of learning from upheld or partly upheld complaints across all directorates.
- 5.5. As **table 1 and chart 1** below show, the number of complaints resolved by Richmond Council in **2023-24 was 362**; this represents a 20% decrease or 91 less complaints than the previous year (2022-23) when the total was 453.

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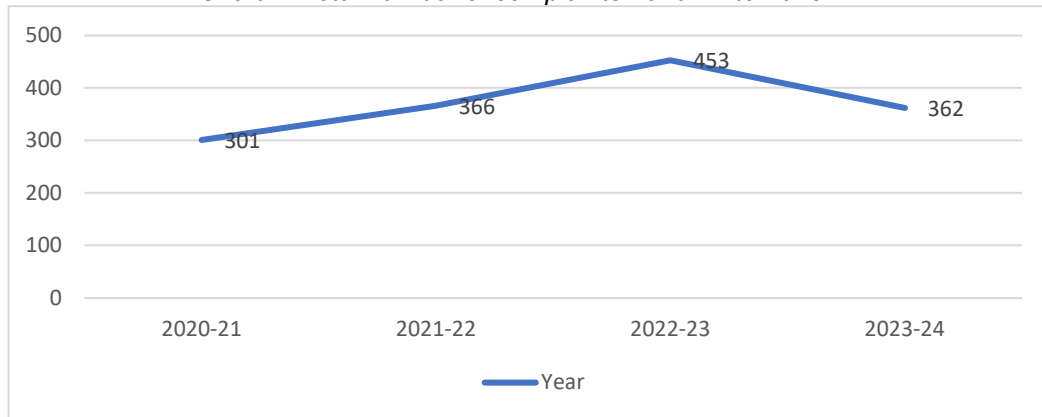
<sup>1</sup> Education and Children's Services Committee 24<sup>th</sup> October 2024 and Adult Health and Housing Committee 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2024

*Table 1: LBRuT total number of complaints 2020-21- to 2023-24*

Year	Number of Complaints
2020/21	301
2021/22	366
2022/23	453
2023/24	362

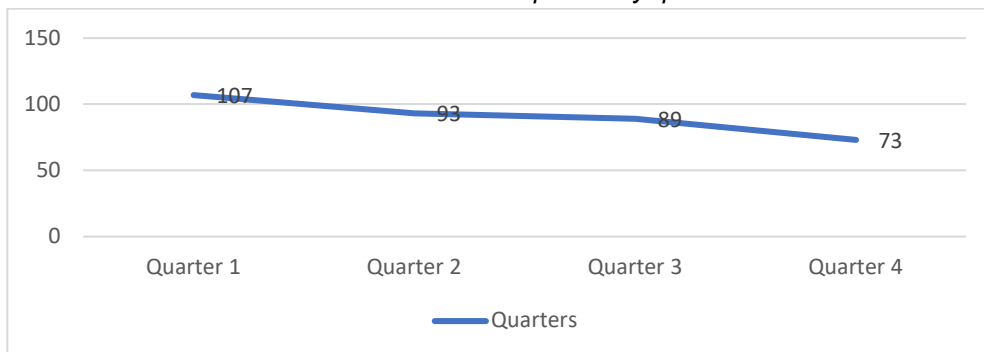
5.6. The volume of complaints should be set in context by looking at the overall level of contact and interaction the Council has with its residents and services users. For example, 362 complaints for 2023/24 is low given that Richmond Council's Customer Services handled 167,852 telephone contacts (including 615 callback requests), 51,328 emails and 5,132 webchats. This year Richmond Council also handled 2,928 Member Enquiries.

*Chart 1: Total number of complaints 2020-21 to 2023-24*



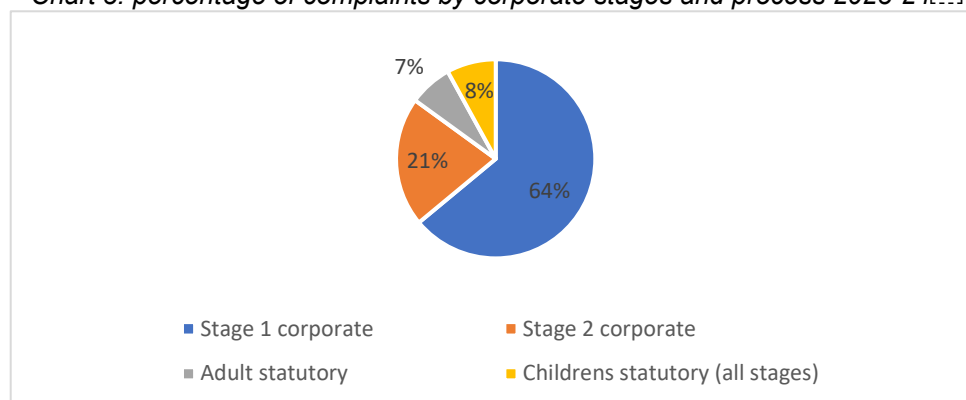
5.7. **Chart 2** below shows complaint numbers across the quarters. Whilst overall numbers have risen, most complaints were received in quarter 1.

*Chart 2: Total number of complaints by quarter 2023-24*



- 5.8. The following data shows the proportion of the **362** complaints across stages 1 and 2 of the corporate process and both statutory processes:
- At stage 1 of the corporate process, 234 (or 64%) of complaints were completed
  - At stage 2 of the corporate process 75 (or 21%) were completed.
  - Statutory complaints for Children’s Services at all 3 stages accounted for 29 complaints (8%).
  - Statutory complaints for Adult Social Care accounted for 24 (7%) complaints.
- 5.9. The 362 complaints represent a 20% decrease on the 453 complaints last year. The decrease is from stage 1 corporate complaints which has dropped from 330 to 234 (-29%).
- 5.10. The 75 stage 2 corporate complaints closed represents a 4% increase on the 72 closed last year.
- 5.11. Overall, statutory complaints have remained consistent. There were 29 Children’s statutory complaints across all 3 stages which is a 7% increase on the 27 closed last year. 24 Adult statutory complaints were closed which is the same as the 24 closed last year. Statutory complaint numbers and trends are examined in detail in the two separate annual Adult and Children’s statutory complaint reports. **Chart 3** below show the percentage of complaints by corporate and statutory process.

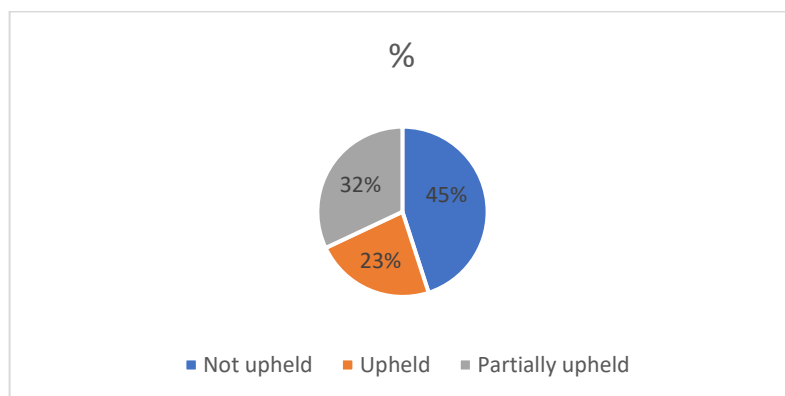
*Chart 3: percentage of complaints by corporate stages and process 2023-24*



- 5.12. Across all stages and processes, this year 163 (45%) of complaints were not upheld, compared to 205 (45%) last year. 85 (23%) were upheld compared to 104 (23%) last year, and 114(32%) were partly upheld compared to 144 (32%) last year. Despite the reduction in stage 1 complaints this year, the outcomes by percentage are the same as last year **Chart 4** below details of the split by percentage.



Chart 4 percentage of complaints by outcome across all stages and types 2023/24



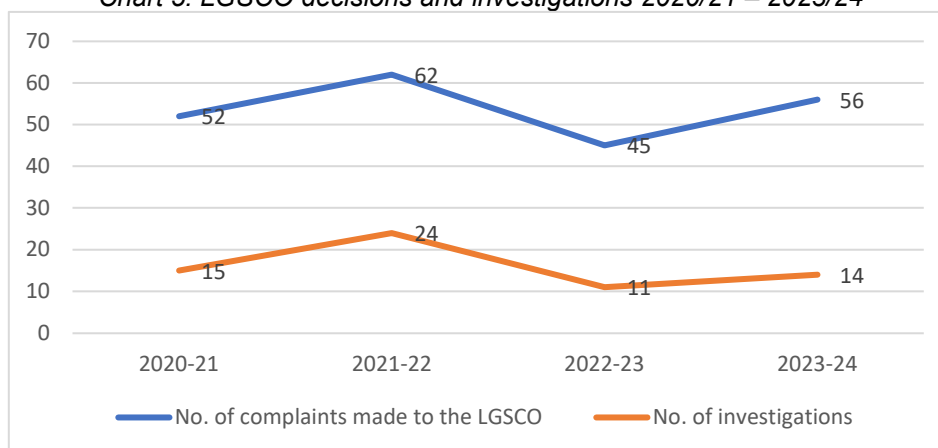
5.13. **Table 2** below shows outcome of complaints from for the past two years, following the removal of service requests from the complaints process. Across all three complaint outcomes, proportionally the numbers of complaints not upheld, upheld and partially upheld are similar.

Table 2: Outcome of complaints across all stages from 2020-21 to 2023/24

	2020/21		2021/22		2022/23		2023-24	
Upheld	61	19%	84	20%	104	23%	85	23%
Partially upheld	66	22%	101	22%	144	32%	114	32%
Not upheld	174	58%	181	58%	205	45%	163	45%
<b>Total</b>	<b>301</b>		<b>366</b>		<b>453</b>		<b>362</b>	

5.14. In 2023-24 the LGSCO again made decisions on 56 Richmond complaints which, following assessment, resulted in 14 complaints that warranted investigations; however, 4 of these investigations were halted as the LGSCO were satisfied that the Council had already provided suitable remedy. This is a 24% increase on the 45 complaints in 2022-23 and a 10% decrease on the 62 complaints in 2021-22. The LGSCO are now only investigating complaints where there is likely to be an injustice; this has resulted in a decrease in the number of LGSCO investigations, but an increase in the number of complaints upheld.

Chart 5: LGSCO decisions and investigations 2020/21 – 2023/24



### 5.15. Types of complaints by directorate

5.16. This section sets out the type of complaints received, and the categories used for recording. **Table 3** shows the types of issues raised within complaints but on review, for the first time, the table does not include statutory complaints as these are categorised differently. Complaint types for statutory Adult and Children’s social care complaints are analysed in detail within the 2023-24 Statutory Complaint reports. Therefore, analysis of the types of corporate complaints this year should be based on the proportion of times raised when compared to previous years.

5.17. In line with previous trends, ‘service delay or failure’ was the most raised issue of complaint, raised in 59% of complaints, which proportionally is the same as last year. Next staff error/attitude was raised in 19% of complaints which is higher than previous years.

5.18. It is recognised that ‘service delay or failure’ is a broad category and there may be a benefit of splitting this out in future years so we can be clearer if complaints are mostly about delays or failures to deliver services in accordance with council procedures.

Table 3: Types of corporate stage 1 & 2 complaints 2021-22 – 2023-24

Type of complaint	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24 <sup>2</sup>
Service delay or failure	211 (58%)	267 (59%)	182 (59%)
Outside service procedure	46 (13%)	26 (6%)	20 (6%)
Staff error/attitude	43 (12%)	62 (14%)	59 (19%)
Disagreement with/failure to implement assessment	27 (7%)	28 (6%)	12 (4%)
Financial charges/billings/costs	26 (7%)	22 (5%)	9 (3%)

<sup>2</sup> For 2023/24 taken from 294 stage 1 and 2 corporate complaints (excluding 53 statutory complaints)

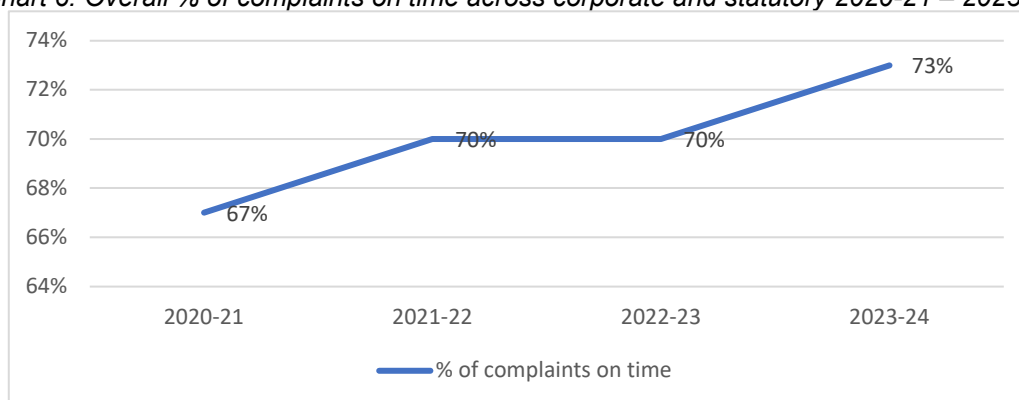
Poor/incorrect information	13 (4%)	48 (11%)	27 (9%)

- 5.19 It is difficult to compare complaint types with years prior to 2021-22 as new complaint categories were introduced when the new corporate complaints process went live in January 2021.
- 5.20 A more detailed breakdown of types of types of stage 1 and 2 corporate complaints by Directorate is provided further in the report.

**Timescales for responding to complaints**

- 5.21 This section sets out compliance against complaint timescales. As shown in **chart 6**, this year 266 (73%) of complaints at all stages and both corporate and statutory processes were responded to on time. Proportionately, this is 3% higher than the 317 (70%) complaints responded to on time last year.

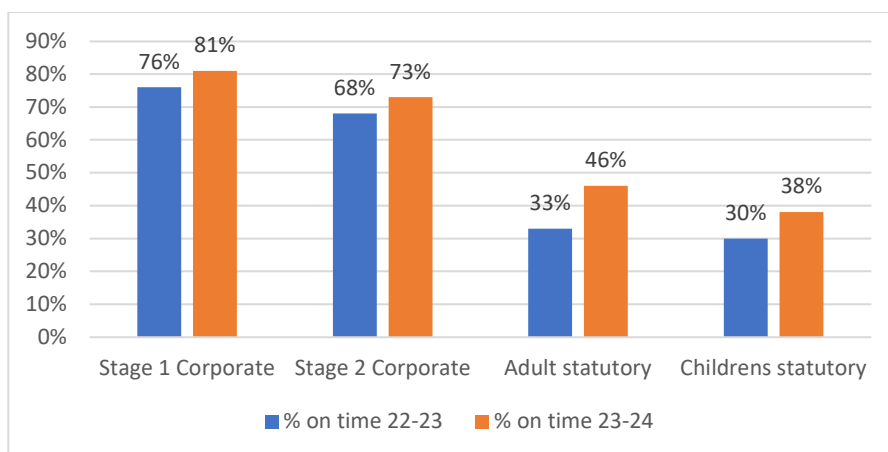
*Chart 6: Overall % of complaints on time across corporate and statutory 2020-21 – 2023-24*



- 5.22 Of the 234 stage 1 corporate complaints, 189 (81%) were on time compared to 252 (76%) last year.
- 5.23 Of the 75 stage 2 corporate complaints, 55 (73%) were on time compared to 49 (68%) last year.
- 5.24 Of the Social Care complaints completed, Adult Social Care responded to 11 (46%) within the local target of 25 working days, compared to 8 (33%) last year. However, these complaints are not outside of the statutory timescale of six months to fully resolve the complaint; and are measured against a local target. Adult social care complaints are complex, and often more time is needed to investigate concerns raised. At all times, complainants are consulted with by the Complaints Team, so they are aware of how the investigation.

5.25 Children’s Services (Achieving for Children) completed 11 (38%) statutory complaints on time compared to 8 (30%) last year<sup>3</sup>.

Chart 7: Number of complaints on time by stage and process 2022-23 and 2023-24



## 6 BREAKDOWN BY DIRECTORATE

6.1 This section focuses on the number of complaints, the timescales and the outcomes and learning for each of the Directorates.

### Number of complaints per Directorate

6.2 **Table 4** below shows the breakdown of complaints completed per directorate (and includes statutory complaints) from 2020/21 to 2023/24. The most significant reductions are for the ECS and Finance directorates.

6.3 Proportionally, the most significant increase at Directorate level is the increase in corporate complaints for Housing Regeneration Directorate, probably due to greater attention of housing issues in the public domain, but overall complaint numbers are still low because Richmond Council does not hold any housing stock.

<sup>3</sup> Two stage 2 statutory complaints withdrawn part way through the process have been recorded as ‘on time’ for the purposes of this report

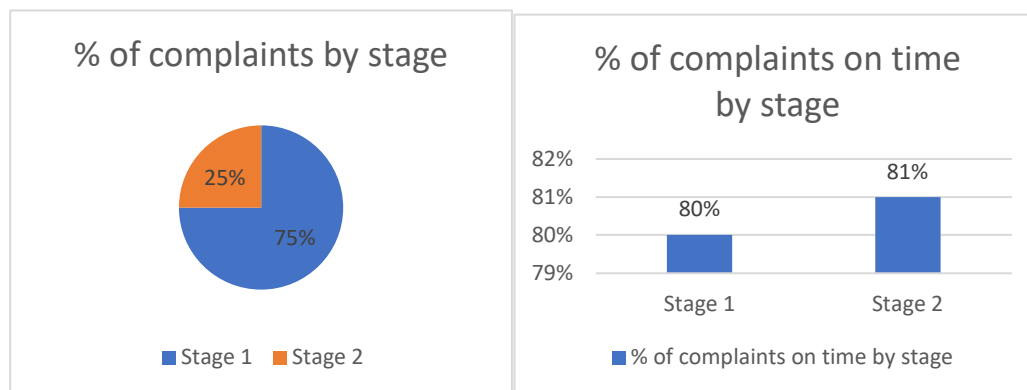
Table 4: Number of complaints – Directorate breakdown 2020/21 to 2023/24

	Directorate Totals				Directorate +/-% compared to last year	As a % of total complaints for LBRuT 23/24
	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24		
Environment and Community Services	88	163	185	122	-34%	34%
Finance	94	85	121	66	-45%	18%
Housing and Regeneration	17	15	26	40	+54%	11%
Children's Service (corporate and statutory combined pre 2022/23)	64					
Children's Services Corporate <sup>4</sup>		23	67	63	-6%	26%
Children's statutory		32	27	29	+7%	
Adult Social Care Corporate and statutory combined	37					
Adults Social Care - Statutory		39	24	24	0%	9%
Adult Social Care – Corporate		2	2	9	-	
Chief Executives Group	1	7	1	9	-	2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>301</b>	<b>366</b>	<b>453</b>	<b>362</b>		

<sup>4</sup> Numbers of corporate complaints for the adult and children's social care directorates were combined in previous reports up until 2021/22.

## Environment and Community Services (ECS)

Chart 8: Percentage of corporate complaints completed by stage and 'on time' for ESC 2023/24



- 6.4 This year ECS completed 122 complaints compared to 185 last year which is a 43% decrease. The 122 complaints represents 34% of all complaints completed for Richmond council.
- 6.5 91 (75%) were at stage 1, which is a 46% decrease on the 164 stage 1 complaints last year. 31 (25%) were at stage 2 which is a 48% increase on the 21 last year. ECS also handled 2,285 Member Enquiries.
- 6.6 In addition, 22 complaints for ECS were escalated to the LGSCO and following initial assessment, the LGSCO only formally investigated 2 of these complaints.
- 6.7 Across both stages, Environment responded to 76% of complaints on time compared to 77% last year.
- 6.8 Broken down, 73 (80%) of 91 stage 1 complaints were on time compared to 123 (75%) of 164 stage 1 complaints last year. 25 (81%) of the 31 stage 2 complaints were on time compared to 19 (90%) of the 21 stage 2 complaints last year.
- 6.9 For ECS Directorate, there was a reduction in complaints received for 2023/24 compared to previous two years. Areas that experienced a reduction in complaints were those services residents use on a regular basis, such as waste collection, parks and leisure centres.
- 6.10 The elevated number of complaints for ECS in 2022/23 was partly attributed to enhanced use of the borough's public spaces and related services such as parks and leisure centres, most notably over the summer months during the prolonged period of hot weather experienced, exacerbated by challenges faced in recruitment of staff.
- 6.11 The reduction in complaints will in part this reflect a focus by the Department in addressing key areas of public concern for service standards, particularly for waste collection and in public places such as parks and in leisure centres. This involves continued investment to

support better integration between the Council and council contractors and partners delivering vital front-line services.

- 6.12 There remain considerable challenges locally and nationally for recruitment to a variety of specialist and general staffing roles. A variety of approaches and service specific measures have been undertaken throughout 2023/24 to support the recruitment of new staff and retention of existing staff to ensure services can be maintained. which will have contributed to the reduction in complaints.

*Table 5: Type of complaints for ECS 2023-24*

Type of complaints	Times raised 2022-23	Times raised 2023-24
Service Delay or Failure	138 (75%)	65 (53%)
Outside Service Procedure	5 (3%)	2 (2%)
Staff Error/Attitude	22 (12%)	34 (28%)
Disagreement with/failure to implement assessment within timescales	2 (1%)	7 (6%)
Financial Charges/Billings/Costs	3 (2%)	3 (2%)
Poor/Incorrect Information	15 (8%)	11 (9%)
	<b>185</b>	<b>122</b>

**Case: Accessibility of planning enforcement processes (Stage 1)**

**Background:** A complaint was lodged regarding the Council’s handling of a planning enforcement investigation. The investigation related to an extension of an outbuilding that allegedly violated planning permission and encroached upon a communal access lane. The complainant highlighted several issues: the initial correspondence lacked specific timelines for site inspections, omitted details on appeal processes, and failed to accommodate the recipient’s age or disability. Additionally, the complainant expressed dissatisfaction with being informed that planning permission applications were exclusively online, as they lacked internet access.

The investigation outlined the necessity of obtaining planning permission for construction projects and outlined the Council’s protocol for investigating suspected planning breaches. It was clarified that the correspondence in question was an informal stage 1 warning, with appeal rights becoming applicable only upon the issuance of an enforcement notice at a subsequent stage.

The investigator confirmed that while online submissions are the norm for planning applications, alternatives exist. Applications can be submitted in paper form, either by mail or in person, with forms accessible via the Council’s website. Acknowledging the importance of inclusive and accessible services, the Council partially upheld the complaint, extending an apology for any inconvenience caused.

**Learning:** Council officers received a reminder about the alternative submission methods available for planning applications, particularly for individuals without internet access. The significance of maintaining accessible services for diverse communication needs was emphasised during a weekly enforcement team meeting. Officers have since been instructed to inform residents of these alternatives when dealing with planning applications.

**Case Study: Enhancing Street Cleaning Operations through Collaborative Problem-Solving (stage 2)**

**Background:** A resident expressed dissatisfaction with the street cleaning standards in their area. Despite a Stage 1 investigation, the resident felt unresolved issues persisted due to the contractor’s inadequate response to multiple service failures. This prompted a Stage 2 review.

The Stage 2 review highlighted the necessity for the Street Cleansing service to maintain a close working relationship with the contractor. The objective was to address and understand the root causes of service issues to prevent future occurrences.

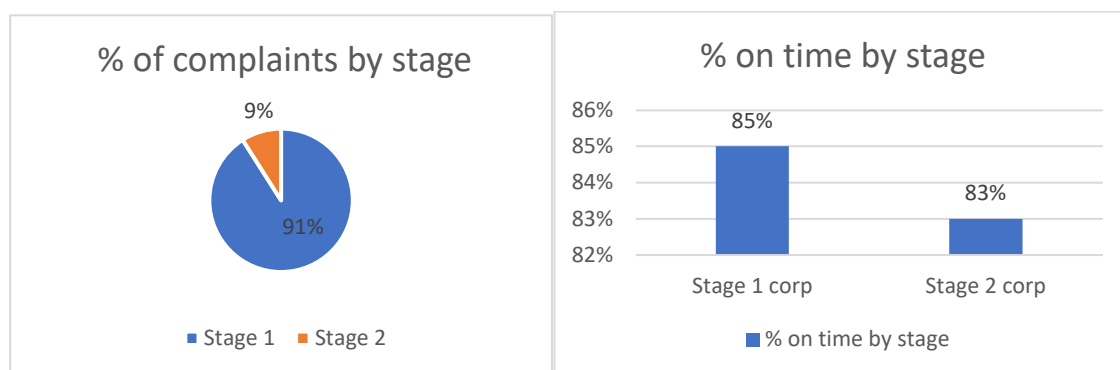
**Learning:** Post-complaint, significant strides have been made towards IT system integration between the Council and the contractor. This integration facilitates real-time communication, enhancing the contract monitoring team’s ability to oversee performance and resolve problems efficiently.

The service is actively exploring advanced software solutions to generate weekly reports that identify recurring issues. This proactive approach aims to improve monitoring and enable focused investigations, thereby improving the overall quality of the street cleaning service.



## Finance Directorate

Chart 9: Percentage of corporate complaints completed by stage and 'on time' for Finance 2023/24



- 6.13 For **Finance Directorate**, the main learning from the complaints completed during 2023/24 was in relation to individual officer training and reviewing the allocation of resources for peak periods or projects.
- 6.14 This year Finance completed 66 complaints compared to 121 last year which is a 45% decrease. The 66 complaints also represent 18% of complaints completed for Richmond this year.
- 60 (91%) were at stage 1 which is a 42% decrease on the 104 stage 1 complaints last year.
  - 6 (9%) were at stage 2 which is a 65% decrease on the 17 stage 2 complaints last year. As well as the 66 complaints, Finance completed 166 Member Enquiries.
- 6.15 Across both stages, Finance Directorate completed 56 (85%) of the 66 complaints on time. This compares to 95 (79%) of 121 complaints on time last year so performance has remained strong.
- 6.16 Broken down by stages 51 (85%) of 60 stage 1 complaints were on time, compared to 83 (80%) of 104 stage 1 complaints last year. 5 (83%) of the 6 stage 2 complaints were on time compared to 12 (71%) of 17 stage 2 complaints last year. No complaints for Finance were escalated to the LGSCO this year.
- 6.17 There has been a 45% decrease in the number of complaints received. A direct comparison to previous years cannot be made due to changes in the Directorate, which no longer includes Customer Services, Electoral Registration, HR and IT. Also, in Q1 2022/23 there was a large number of complaints in relation to delays in awarding various payments such as Covid Self Isolation and Fuel Support Payments which are no longer an issue.
- 6.18 The Finance Directorate resolved 66 complaints in 2023/24 yet this directorate is responsible for processing in excess of 53,000 parking permits annually (resident, business and visitors permits) and also deals with other high-volume areas including over 12,500 benefit claims, over 80,000 Council Tax accounts and over 6,000 Business rate accounts.

- 6.19 The highest number of complaints fell into the 'service delay or failure' category (32 complaints). For example, there were 12 regarding delays in processing Housing Benefit claims, Appeals or change in circumstances. It should be noted for context that over 40,000 changes in circumstances were processed last year. Other service delays included not responding to correspondence in a timely manner and delays issuing parking permits.
- 6.20 'Outside Service Procedure' (18 complaints) received the next highest level of complaints which related to issues such as being unhappy with recovery action taken, requests to waive Penalty Charge Notices or grant parking permits. This is followed by 'poor/ incorrect information' (8 complaints) which included receiving requests for information already provided or misinformation. The lowest number of complaints were in relation to 'staff error or attitude' (4 complaints) and 'finance charges/ billings/ costs' (4 complaints) that included disagreements with invoices.
- 6.21 Within Finance Directorate, Service Delay or Failure has been the main category of complaints and the learning outcome has been mainly related to providing individual staff training, along with reviewing administrative processes to ensure they are up to date. Additionally, managers have been reassessing resources for peak periods or projects.

*Table 6: Types of complaints for Finance Directorate 2023-24*

Type of complaints	Times raised 22-23	Times raised 2023-24
Service Delay or Failure	49 (41%)	32 (49%)
Outside Service Procedure	20 (17%)	18 (27%)
Staff Error/Attitude	16 (13%)	4 (6%)
Disagreement with/failure to implement assessment within timescales	2 (2%)	0
Financial Charges/Billings/Costs	17 (14%)	4 (6%)
Poor/Incorrect Information	17 (14%)	8 (12%)
	<b>121</b>	<b>66</b>

### Case study: Garden Waste charging (stage 1)

#### Learning for the Council

##### Background

A stage 1 complaint was made by a resident who, for a considerable period, had been billed twice for the green waste annual fee, once by direct debit and once through an invoice. The resident provided further evidence that there was an error as they had received two garden waste stickers and made a complaint as they had not been able to resolve the issue by contacting the Council.

The stage 1 investigation found that there had been a simple mistake in quoting the correct invoice number during a phone payment. The payment, without the correct reference, ended up in the Council's suspense account, leaving the invoice unpaid. This led to the resident being charged again, resulting in double billing.

##### Learning

This case prompted Transactional Services Team to review their telephone payment procedures. Now, officers ensure the correct reference is used, and additional checks are performed before raising invoices to prevent such duplications in the future. A small financial remedy was provided to recognise the time and trouble experienced by the complainant in trying to get this matter resolved.

### Case Study: Council Tax/Improved Complaints Handling (stage 2)

**Background:** A resident complained about the mishandling of their Council Tax account led to unwarranted recovery actions. Dissatisfied with the initial response, the resident escalated the issue, highlighting delays and seeking compensation.

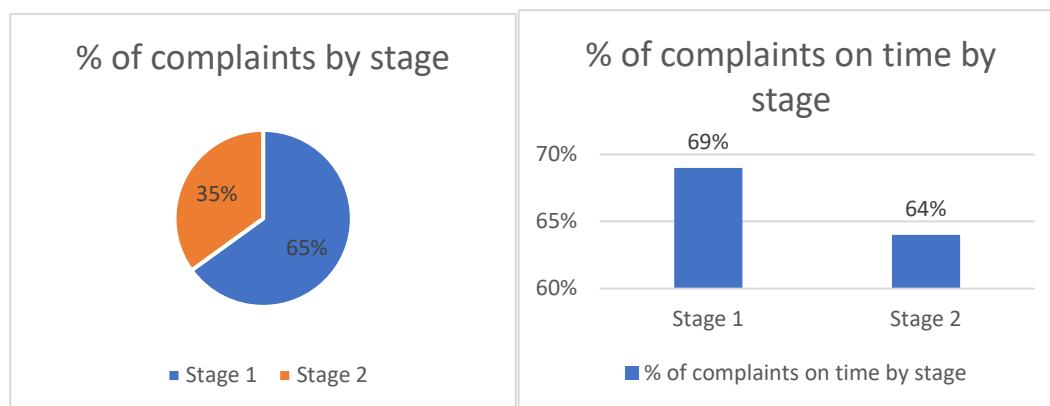
The subsequent review identified administrative errors in both the account management and the initial complaint handling. The Council Tax service had aimed for a swift resolution but did not communicate that the complaint was being addressed outside the standard procedure.

**Learning:** This case highlighted the importance of transparency and empathy in complaints handling including:

- **Clear Communication:** Services must inform residents when a complaint is being resolved outside the formal process to expedite resolution.
- **Empathetic Consideration:** When resolving complaints, the emotional impact on customers should be acknowledged, and an appropriate response, including potential compensation, should be considered.
- **Training Reinforcement:** The Complaints Team will conduct refresher training to ensure adherence to the Joint Complaints Handling Code.

## Housing and Regeneration Directorate

Chart 10: Percentage of corporate complaints completed by stage and 'on time' for Housing and Regeneration 2023/24



6.22 This year HRD completed 40 complaints compared to 26 last year which is a 54% increase. For context complaints mainly concerned issues raised by potentially homeless households or those in temporary accommodation, or those on the waiting list(s), which cumulatively number several thousand households. Additionally, HRD responded to 308 Member Enquiries. The 40 complaints represent 11% of the total number of complaints completed for Richmond this year.

- 26 (65%) were at stage 1 compared to 20 (77%) last year.
- 14 (35%) were at stage 2 compared to 6 (23%) last year.

6.23 Across both stages, HRD completed 27 (68%) of complaints on time compared to 19 (73%) last year.

6.24 Broken down by stages, 18 (69%) of the 26 stage 1 complaints were on time in 2023-24 compared to 14 (70%) of the 20 stage 1 complaints in the previous year. While for stage 2 complaints in 2023-24 5 (83%) of the 6 complaints were on time compared to 9 (64%) of the 14 stage 2 complaints in the previous year.

6.25 In addition, 10 complaints for HRD escalated to the LGSCO this year. Following initial assessment, the LGSCO decided to formally investigate 3 of these complaints.

6.26 It is worth acknowledging that 27 of 40 complaints were responded to on time (68%) across stage 1 and 2 within the Housing and Regeneration Directorate this year, compared to 19 of 26 from 2022/23 (73%). Although this marks a slight decrease from last year, the services have encountered a sharp increase (54%) in complaints. In Richmond the demand for housing continues to significantly outstrip the available supply.

6.27 For HRD, the main topics of complaint concerned issues with communication, such as a lack of communication with teams supporting complainants or receiving unsympathetic responses from officers. There were also complaints about assessments not being

undertaken in a timely manner following the submission of medical documents. Learning from the stage 1 and 2 corporate complaints received during 2023/24 was primarily focused around:

- Being clearer and more understanding in communication with customers.
- Communicating updates to applicants and ensuring applicants have a consistent point of contact.
- Strengthening the Housing Register Assessment team in recent months by engaging additional staffing resources to improve and reduce assessment times.
- Providing adequate training to the new officers that have been recruited to deal with the number of applications as the demand on services is very high.
- Continuing to use feedback to understand and improve customer experience.

6.28 The majority of complaints fell into the 'service delay or failure' category (40% or 16 complaints). The other notable area being 'staff error/attitude' (38% or 15 complaints).

6.29 Some of the topics that have been summarised in the category of 'Service Delay or Failure' are communication issues, such as a lack of communication with the clients, delays with the decision on client's cases, dissatisfaction with the way their cases have been handled. The common theme to be drawn from this is communication, and keeping clients updated effectively, but also the way they are communicating, as a lot of complaints this year were also in the 'staff error/attitude' category, with some complainants feeling staff were unsympathetic and felt their cases were not being handled right. This has formed a key part of learning this year in the department and will be considered throughout the next year.

*Table 7: Types of complaints for HRD 2023-24*

Type of complaints	Times raised 2022-23	Times raised 2023-24
Service Delay or Failure	11 (42)	16 (40%)
Outside Service Procedure	1 (4%)	0
Staff Error/Attitude	7 (27%)	15 (38%)
Disagreement with/failure to implement assessment within timescales	6 (23%)	4 (10%)
Financial Charges/Billings/Costs	0	1 (2%)
Poor/Incorrect Information	1 (4%)	4 (10%)
	<b>26</b>	<b>40</b>

### **Case Study: Enhancing Housing Application Processes (stage 1)**

**Background:** A family experiencing homelessness lodged a complaint regarding the lack of response to their housing application. Despite submitting medical documentation and completing two online applications for homelessness, they did not receive updates. The case highlighted the necessity for clear communication, a consistent contact point, and timely reassessments.

The investigation acknowledged the importance of communication and explained the establishment of a dedicated Housing Assessment Team. This team is responsible for assessing and updating housing register applications. Although some applications experienced delays, the expansion of the team and assignment of dedicated officers to specific applications have improved accountability and assessment accuracy.

**Learning:** Following the complaint, the Housing Assessment Team has been instructed to ensure timely updates and communication when changes in circumstances are reported. Deputy housing assessment managers have committed to case sampling to identify and address any shortcomings in the process. Officers requiring additional training will receive it to prevent future distress caused by similar oversights.

### **Case Study: Housing Register Application Error and Resolution (Stage 2)**

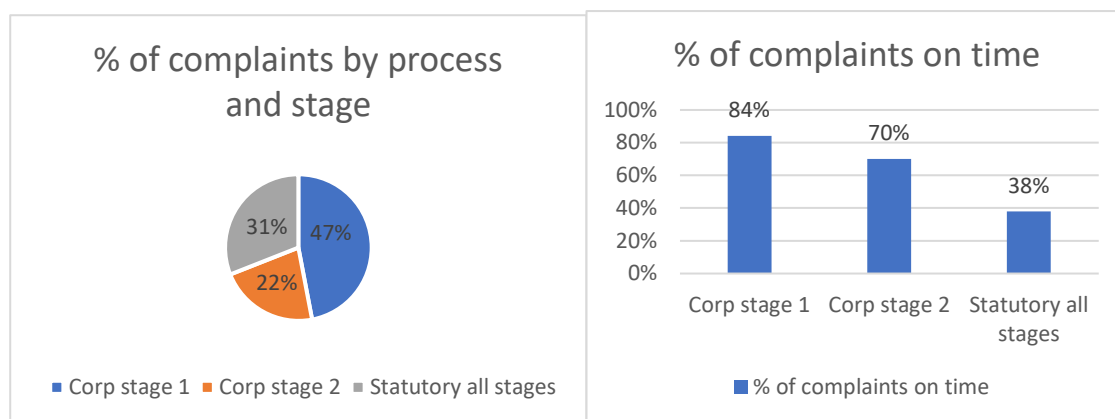
**Background:** An applicant encountered delays in receiving suitable accommodation due to errors in their housing register application. Despite the initial complaint being upheld at stage 1, the applicant remained dissatisfied with the explanation and apology provided.

The stage 2 review revealed that the error was a preventable human mistake, resulting in the applicant's case being erroneously placed in the Wandsworth queue instead of Richmond.

**Learning:** To prevent recurrence, the IT system was enhanced with safeguards against similar errors. Housing staff received directions to ensure correct queue placement for applications, emphasising the consequences of errors. A financial remedy was provided to acknowledge the distress caused to the resident. The incident now serves as a cautionary example to staff, highlighting the potential distress caused by such oversights.

## Education and Children's Services

Chart 11: Percentage of corporate complaints (by stage) and statutory complaints completed and 'on time' for Education and Children's Services 2023/24



6.30 This year Achieving for Children (AfC) completed 92 complaints compared to 94 last year which is a 2% decrease. The 92 complaints represent 26% of the total number of complaints completed for Richmond this year.

- 43 (47%) were at stage 1 of the corporate process compared to 39 (41%) last year. This is a 10% increase.
- 20 (22%) were at stage 2 of the corporate process compared to 28 (30%) last year. This is a 29% decrease.
- 29 (31%) complaints were children's statutory complaints compared to 27 last year which is a 7% increase.

6.31 Across both corporate and statutory complaints, Achieving for Children completed 61 (66%) complaints on time compared to 51 (54%) last year.

6.32 In addition, 11 complaints for Achieving for Children escalated to the LGSCO this year. Following initial assessment, the LGSCO decided to formally investigate 3 of these complaints.

6.33 Broken down by stages:

- 36 (84%) of the 43 stage 1 corporate complaints were on time compared to 30 (77%) of the 39 complaints last year.
- 14 (70%) of the 20 stage 2 corporate complaints were on time compared to 13 (46%) of the 28 stage 2 last year.
- 11 (38%) of the 29 statutory complaints were on time compared to 8 (30%) of the 27 statutory complaints last year<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> This includes two stage 2 statutory complaints which were withdrawn part-way through the process.

6.34 **Learning from Children's Services (AfC) complaints:** across statutory children's social care services, all learning from complaints is implemented and monitored through the Performance and Quality Improvement Board (P&QIB). Learning from statutory social care complaints is explored in more detail in the Statutory Annual Complaints report scheduled for Richmond Council's October 2024 committee cycle, however, key learning focused on:

- **Improving Communication Flow:** Implementing timely process to facilitate efficient communication, such as punctual dispatch of case closure letters/assessments and ensuring inclusive representation of both parents/guardians' perspectives.
- **Structured Communication Protocols:** Developing comprehensive written communication guidelines to clarify contact points, methods, and timings for parents/guardians, outlining their role and AfC's involvement in their child's care. This strategy is especially beneficial for managing disproportionate communication from parents/guardians, mitigating the risk of them being perceived as unreasonable and maintaining open communication channels.
- **Enhancing Child Protection Information:** Improving the standard of information and procedures for parents/guardians in Child Protection scenarios, including prompt distribution of child protection reports/assessments within statutory deadlines, providing parents/guardians ample time for review and preparation for the Child Protection Conference, clarifying the process, ensuring bi-weekly home visits, and aligning social workers with families' needs, particularly for children residing outside London, to guarantee consistent social work visits and ongoing communication with the parent/guardian.
- **Tailored Child Safety Plans:** Refining child safety plans to be age-appropriate, contextually relevant to the family's situation, and using correct pronouns, thereby enhancing the support provided to the children and families.
- **Direct Support for Young People:** Strengthening support for young people by formally acknowledging the emotional impact of challenging conversations, especially when opinions diverge, and ensuring follow-up in writing to validate their feelings and perspectives.

6.35 For SEND, learning from complaints was shared with the Parental Engagement Lead to ensure lessons learnt are built into the training schedule for SEN officers. In summary key learning focused on:

- **Enhanced Communication Strategy:** The significance of timely communication with parents and adherence to EHCP statutory timelines was reinforced through post-complaint reflection and discussion sessions.
- **SEND Service Training:** There was a commitment to ongoing training for coordinators on consistent communication and timely completion of statutory EHCNA's and Annual Review activity ensuring additional support, guidance, and focus on these areas to prevent future occurrences.
- **Process Monitoring:** Weekly meetings were introduced to monitor statutory performance in relation to live EHCNAs, focusing on compliance with statutory deadlines and enabling managerial intervention for problem-solving.



- **Policy Transparency:** The Home to School Travel policy was updated to clearly define child's home address when there is shared custody to determine travel eligibility, enhancing transparency and understanding of the assessment process.
- **Partnership working:** A review will be undertaken with the Integrated Care Board (ICB) to consider if funding directed toward individual therapy packages might be better utilised in increasing local NHS provider contracts, to give greater control of how resources are deployed. AfC will also consider co-designing an escalation route with the ICB for both parties to follow when a referral to the ICB is made due to required provision remaining unallocated when there are no approved providers available.

6.36 **Types of complaint for Achieving for Children:** For corporate stage 1 and 2 complaints, the majority of complaints fell to 'service delay or failure' (93%). This is because the majority of complaints were for SEND and about EHCP processes. Whilst types for statutory complaints have not included this year, as they are categorised differently, it is notable that complaints about staff behaviour have reduced.

6.37 In education, AfC are aware of delays or dissatisfaction with some of the statutory processes related to EHCP's, specifically duties placed on Local Authorities in terms of securing the provision outlined in plans. For example, complaints concerning a lack of therapy delivery remains a challenging area across health and education partners, and continues to be related to ongoing recruitment challenges within the Integrated Care System, and decreasing capacity within the independent market to meet the increasing demand, this is also impacted by the increase in requests for EHCP's and the broader shortage of specialist placements available nationally, the latter is something AfC is tackling in terms of developing local specialist provision which, overtime will come with increased capacity and local expertise.

Table 8: Types of complaints for Corporate stage 1 and 2 complaints 2023-24<sup>6</sup>

Type of complaints	Times raised 2022-23	Times raised 2023-24
	Corporate & statutory	Corporate only
Service Delay or Failure	60 (64%)	59 (93%)
Outside Service Procedure	0	0
Staff Error/Attitude	10 (11%)	2 (3%)
Disagreement with/failure to implement assessment within timescales	14 (15%)	1 (2%)
Financial Charges/Billings/Costs	0	0
Poor/Incorrect Information	10 (11%)	1 (2%)
	<b>94</b>	<b>63</b>

<sup>6</sup> For 2023/24, taken from 63 corporate complaints. Types of complaints for statutory social care complaints are analysed in the Statutory Complaints Report 2023-24

### **Case Study: Advocacy Support in Child Protection (stage 1)**

**Background:** A parent with a mental health condition raised concerns about not receiving advocacy support during a Child Protection conference. An investigation revealed that the social worker had made efforts to secure an advocate. However, the commissioned advocacy provider was unable to assist due to the specialised nature of the work, and another provider was at full capacity. Adult care services also confirmed that the parent did not meet the criteria for statutory advocacy support following a Care Act Screening Assessment. The investigation recognised the challenges faced by parents in child protection in obtaining advocacy support and noted the social worker's attempts to provide assistance.

**Learning and Actions:** In response to this challenge, Achieving for Children (AfC) committed to developing a resource pack for parents needing advocacy support in child protection conferences. Additionally, AfC pledged to enhance the understanding of conference chairs and social care managers regarding the effects of mental health conditions on affected parents/guardians. This initiative aims to improve support and engagement for these parents/guardians in future meetings.

### **Subject: Improving Efficiency and Communication in EHCP Issuance (stage 2)**

**Background:** A complaint was lodged by a parent concerning delays in the finalisation of their child's Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). The parent expressed concerns over the uncertainty regarding the support their child would receive. They cited a lack of coordination with the school and inadequate communication from the EHCP Coordinator. The parent's request to escalate the complaint to stage 2 stemmed from the ongoing uncertainty about the EHCP provision and the belief that the delays had restricted their ability to consider a comprehensive range of educational institutions. In response to the complaint, the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) service pledged to provide additional support, training, and guidance to prevent similar occurrences in the future. This commitment encompassed both service-wide training and individualised supervision.

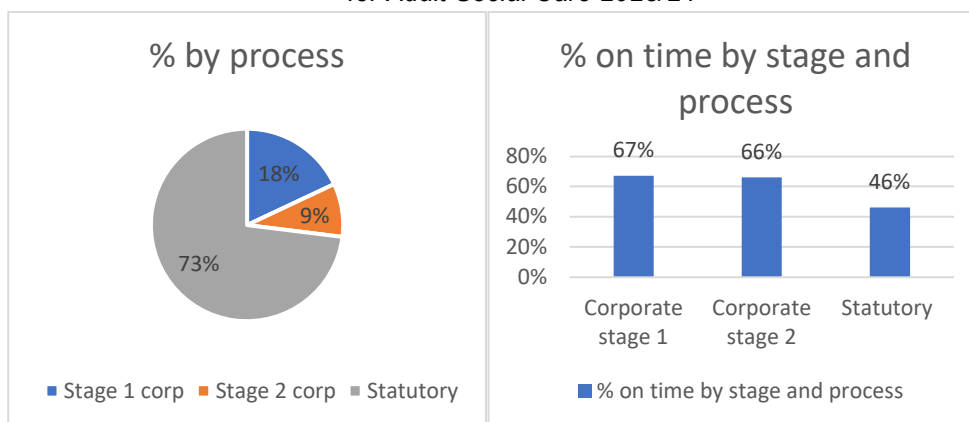
**Learning and Development:** The SEND Service has reinforced the importance of consistent communication with parents throughout the EHCP process and the timely completion of the Education, Health and Care Needs Assessment (EHCNA). As part of the training initiative, the importance of early contact with parents post-EHCNA request was revisited. This early engagement is crucial for confirming receipt, discussing the process and immediate next steps, and verifying contact details.

Furthermore, the SEND Service has instituted weekly meetings to monitor statutory performance concerning active EHCNAs, with a particular emphasis on adherence to statutory deadlines. This measure aims to ensure the prompt issuance of EHCPs and facilitate early identification of cases where the 20-week deadline may not be met, allowing for managerial intervention and problem-solving.

Post-complaint reflection sessions involving the SEND Service members associated with the child's case were conducted. These discussions aimed to identify potential improvements and foster staff understanding of the impact of complaints. Such reflections are vital for actively integrating key learnings into the SEND Service's practices, enhancing service delivery following the investigation and review of complaints.

## Adult Social Care and Public Health

Chart 12: Percentage of corporate (by stage) and statutory complaints completed and 'on time' for Adult Social Care 2023/24



6.38 This year Adult Social Care completed 33 complaints compared to 26 last year which is a 27% increase. There were no formal complaints for Public Health. The 33 complaints represent 9% of the total number of complaints completed for Richmond this year. As well as the 33 complaints, Adult Social Care handled 152 Member Enquiries.

- 6 (18%) were at stage 1 of the corporate process, compared to 2 completed last year.
- 3 (9%) escalated to stage 2 of the corporate complaints process. Last year there were no stage 2 corporate complaints.
- 24 (73%) complaints were statutory complaints which is the same as the 24 statutory complaints completed last year.

6.39 In addition, 8 complaints for Adult Social Care escalated to the LGSCO this year. Following initial assessment, the LGSCO decided to formally investigate 4 of these complaints.

6.40 Broken down by stages,

- 4 (67%) of the 6 stage 1 corporate complaints were on time and 2 (67%) of the 3 stage 2 corporate complaints were on time. Only 3 corporate complaints were late, and this should be noted if considering the overall percentage on time.
- 11 (46%) statutory complaints were completed within the 25-working day target compared to 10 (45%) last year. For the complaints that exceed 25 days, the average response time was 27 days, which is less than the average of 34 days last year, and well within the statutory timeframe

6.41 When considering the response times for Adult Social Care statutory complaints, the Adult Social Care Statutory complaints legislation does not provide a required timescale to respond to complaints, other than to risk assess complaints and respond within an appropriate timescale (full resolution should be achieved within six months). This recognises the complexity of Adult Social Care complaints, which often require input from multiple teams, and at times, partner organisations. The focus within Adult Social Care is the quality of responses and achieving resolution within this process with no defined stages.

6.42 The department receives two types of complaint and deals with them under separate processes:

- Corporate complaints: these relate to complaints from people who have contacted Adult Social Care but are not receiving statutory social care services.
- Adult statutory complaints relate to complaints made by a person in receipt of social care services under the Care Act 2014 (or their representative if they have consent and are acting in the person's best interests)<sup>7</sup>.

6.43 This year key learning, mostly from statutory complaints, is briefly summarised as:

- **Responding to delays in allocating/ completing assessments:** Staff have been reminded of the importance of exploring whether there are options that might be put in place to support people whilst they are waiting for a Care Act assessment. Additionally, supervisors will be closely monitoring the time it takes to complete assessments to ensure that there are no unnecessary delays (Mental Health).
- **Strengthening communication in our First Contact and Community Advice and Support teams:** Front door teams have been reminded about the importance of timely and clear communication with residents on the purpose of screening and any subsequent actions and decisions taken so that they are fully informed. The process for monitoring and prioritising incoming emails has also been reviewed to ensure that no priority actions are missed.
- **Improving information on charging:** Information about when a reablement service is free and when a home care service is chargeable, and the process of financial assessment has been improved so that people being discharged from hospital are clear about when they need to contribute towards the cost of their care. (Richmond Response and Rehabilitation Team)
- **Supporting unpaid carers:** Learning was shared to make sure that informal carers are supported, by ensuring that social care staff always provide clear information regarding respite options (Richmond and Barnes Locality Team).
- **Reasonable Adjustments:** Staff have strengthened their knowledge and confidence in recognising and adapting communication styles to suit the needs of neurodiverse people who draw on social care services (Occupational Therapy).
- **Strengthening financial procedures:** In response to an Ombudsman investigation, the staff guidance on Direct Payments was up-dated to provide stronger direction that when the Council decides to end a direct payment arrangement, it must write to the person concerned to confirm the arrangement has ended and set out the alternative arrangement it has put in place to ensure eligible, unmet social care needs continue to be met. (Payments Team)

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<sup>7</sup> A full breakdown and analysis of complains made through the Adult Statutory Process is in the Statutory Annual Report 2023/24

#### 6.44 Types of complaint for Adult Social Care

Table 9: Types of stage 1 and 2 corporate complaints for Adult Social Care 2023-24<sup>8</sup>

Type of complaints	Times raised 2022-23	Times raised 2023-24
	Corporate & statutory	Corporate only
Service Delay or Failure	9 (35%)	8 (89%)
Outside Service Procedure	0	0
Staff Error/Attitude	6 (23%)	1 (11%)
Disagreement with/failure to implement assessment within timescales	5 (19%)	0
Financial Charges/Billings/Costs	2 (8%)	0
Poor/Incorrect Information	4 (15%)	0
	<b>26</b>	<b>9</b>

#### Subject: Corporate Stage 2 review and response to family communication concerns in Adult Social Care

**Background:** A relative of a resident who receives social care services made a formal complaint about the communication from Adult Social Care about their relative's care. The complainant highlighted their unhappiness with the limited amount of information Adult Social Care could provide them with because their authorisation to represent their parent was under review by the Court of Protection. They were also unhappy about being excluded from the decision-making processes around their parent's best interests.

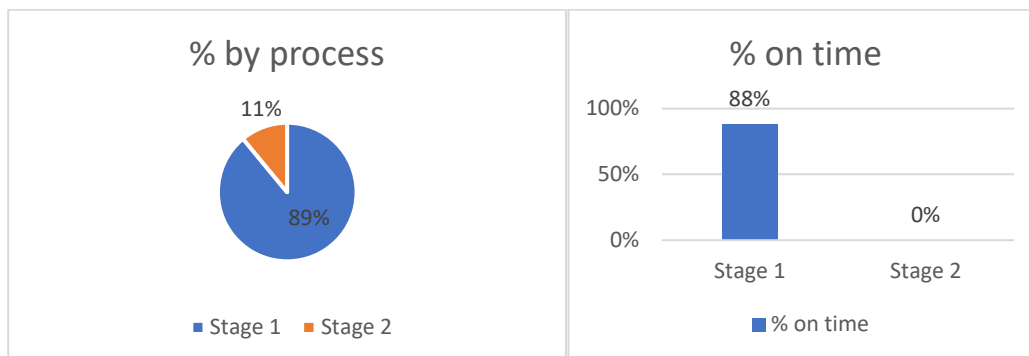
The investigation acknowledged the clear constraints on the information that could be shared but highlighted that there were lapses in responding promptly to emails asking for information and an explanation about what could and couldn't be shared. This lack of timely correspondence led to confusion and distress for the relative. An apology was extended, emphasising understanding of the important role of effective communication. It was acknowledged in the service that family dynamics require careful and considerate management, with sensitivity and transparency.

**Learning Outcomes:** The service reflected on the learning from the complaint and the impact that administrative processes can have on individuals advocating for their relatives. It was recognised that whilst Adult Social Care were correct in not sharing information, the necessity to adhere to legal protocols around confidentiality can be protracted and emotionally taxing for concerned families. Discussions took place to ensure that in future, the team involved is conscious of the emotional weight these procedures carry and takes steps to engage with family members proactively and empathetically and openly, to reduce the emotional burden of these challenging circumstances as much as possible.

<sup>8</sup> Types of complaints for statutory complaints are analysed in the Adult Statutory Complaints Report 2023-24

## CHIEF EXECUTIVE’S DIRECTORATE

Chart 13: Percentage of corporate (by stage) and statutory complaints completed and ‘on time’ for Chief Executive’s Directorate 2023/24



6.45 This year there were 9 complaints for the Chief Executive’s directorate compared to only 1 last year. 8 were at stage 1 and the remaining complaint was at stage 2. In addition, 3 complaints for the Chief Executive’s Office were escalated to the LGSCO this year. Following initial enquiries, the LGSCO decided not to formally investigate any of these complaints. Additionally, the Chief Executive’s directorate responded to 17 Member Enquiries.

6.46 Of the 8 stage 1 complaints, 7 (88%) were on time. The single stage 2 complaint was not sent on time.

6.47 The complaints were for the following service areas:

- 4 were for Customer Services
- 3 were for the Climate Change, Policy and Communications service (this includes the stage 2 complaint)
- 1 was for the Complaints Service
- 1 was for Economic Development

Table 10: Types of stage 1 and 2 corporate complaints for Chief Executive’s Directorate 2023-24

Type of complaints	Times raised 2023-24
Service Delay or Failure	2 (23%)
Outside Service Procedure	0
Staff Error/Attitude	3 (33%)
Disagreement with/failure to implement assessment within timescales	0
Financial Charges/Billings/Costs	1 (11%)
Poor/Incorrect Information	3 (33%)
	<b>9</b>

## **7 LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND SOCIAL CARE OMBUDSMAN**

### **7.1 LGSCO decisions**

7.2 The LGSCO issued Richmond's Annual Review letter for 2023-24 on 17 July 2024 and all Councils' review letters were published on their website on 24 July 2024.

7.3 For most of the reporting year, Paul Najsarek, acted as Interim Ombudsman. In February 2024, Amerdeep Somal was appointed as the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman. In her Annual Letter, dated 17 July 2024, Amerdeep Somal highlighted awareness of the difficult financial and service demands that make continuous improvement from complaints a challenge for local councils, but they must still hold organisations to account by recommending actions to remedy injustice. The LGSCO continues to have great confidence in the value of the contribution that complaints and their swift resolution, provide to improve services for the public

7.4 In 2023/24 the LGSCO registered 17,937 complaints compared to 15,488 last year. Of these, 4,003 were investigated and 3,215 were upheld. The LGSCO issued 27 public interest reports which is lower than the 38 public interest reports last year.

7.5 Across all Local Authorities, 26% of complaints were for Education & Childrens Services, 16% were for Housing, 14% were for Adult Social Care, 12% were for Highways and Transport, 10% were for Planning and Development, 10% were for Environmental Regulation, 10% were for Planning & Development ,7% were for Benefits and Tax and 5% were for other Corporate Services. A more detailed breakdown is provided in the LGSCO Annual review 2023-24 <https://www.lgo.org.uk/assets/attach/6627/Annual-Review-of-Local-Government-Complaints-2023-24.pdf> [Annual Review of Local Government Complaints](#)

7.6 This year's Annual Letter reflected that in the last 12 months, the key areas of concern were about Special Educational Needs and Disabilities provision and Adult Social Care which is the same as last year. The LGSCO have acknowledged that the SEND system is not working as monies available are not sufficient and for Adult Social Care, discharging statutory requirements and delivering services that people are entitled to remains a significant challenging for Local Authorities across the country.

7.7 When broken down for London Boroughs, 4,187 complaints were made to the LGSCO and 852 were investigated. The most complaints upheld by category were Housing and Education and Children's Services. With regards to Housing the LGSCO recognised that the supply of suitable council housing and supporting people with the risk of homelessness is a theme across the country; however, in London, there is a particular issue with local authorities accepting their duty to provide homelessness relief and placing people and families in unsuitable temporary accommodation.

## LGSCO local level decisions and learning from complaints

- 7.8 The increase in LGSCO complaints this year as demonstrated on Chart 5 (Section 5), of this report, is in line with the increase nationally, with regards to the number of complaints the LGSCO have received and investigated across all councils.
- 7.9 The LGSCO received 56 complaints for Richmond which, following assessment, resulted in 14 that warranted investigations; however, 4 of these investigations were halted as the LGSCO were satisfied that the Council had already provided suitable remedy. This is a 24% increase on the 45 complaints in 2022-23 and a 10% decrease on the 62 complaints in 2021-22. Investigations have increased marginally to 14 this year compared to 11 last year which is a 27% increase. Fault was found in 12 of the 14 investigations which has led to an 86% upheld rate which is only marginally higher than the average upheld rate for all authorities of 85%.
- 7.10 Richmond's average upheld rate of 86% equates to **6.2 upheld decisions per 100,000 residents** which is lower than the average 8.2 per 100,000 residents of similar authorities.
- 7.11 The Council is still performing well in relation to similar sized local boroughs. The average 'upheld' rate for the three statistical neighbouring boroughs with the closest profile to Richmond (Kingston, Hammersmith and Fulham and Westminster) is 78% or 7.15 per 100,000 population. Whilst Richmond's uphold rate is 86%, the Council only received 14 investigations compared to an average of 18 across its statistical neighbours and the low number of investigations for Richmond does disproportionately push up the percentage of investigations upheld.
- 7.12 In 100% of the 10 compliance outcomes, the LGSCO were satisfied the Council had successfully implemented its recommendations. This compares to an average of 99% in similar organisations.
- 7.13 In 25% of the upheld cases (3 cases) the LGSCO found we had provided a satisfactory remedy before the complaint reached the Ombudsman. This compares to an average of 12% in similar organisations.
- 7.14 The number of Public Reports issued by the LGSCO against Richmond Council is in line with the average for its statistical neighbouring boroughs with 1 public report issued in the last five years. It was issued in 2019/20 regarding complaints about delays made by 3 families who were receiving SEND services from the Council. **In 2023-24 Richmond did not receive any new public reports.**
- 7.15 Learning from Ombudsman cases can be found in Appendix 5.
- 7.16 With regards to the 56 complaints received by the LGSCO, setting aside the 14 detailed investigations (12 upheld, 2 not upheld), 26 complaints were closed after initial enquiries, 9 were referred back for local resolution (premature) and 6 were closed following advice/signposting by the LGSCO and 1 case was invalid.



- 7.17 Some of the key practice changes from LGSCO investigations this year are:
- **Provided targeted training** to Housing staff responsible for managing homeless applications, to ensure the timely completion of assessments.
  - **Updated Early Years procedures** to ensure nursery charges align with government guidelines.
  - **Collaborated with the Integrated Care Board** to enhance the joint assessment process for Disabled Children for Continuing Health Care, reflecting the National Framework.
  - **Strengthened Adult Social Care procedures** for Direct Payments, ensuring clear communication when ending arrangements and outlining alternative care options.
  - **Enhanced Housing Directorate's complaint handling** by reminding staff to consider LGSCO remedies guidance when addressing maladministration in stage 1 corporate complaints.
  - **Developed localised procedures** for the Children Looked After team to create contingency plans for disrupted foster placements, reviewed with commissioning partners and internal fostering teams, to reinforce existing guidance and prevent potential disruptions.

- 7.18 There is duty under section 5(2) of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 for the Monitoring Officer to prepare a formal report to the Council where it appears that the authority, or any part of it, has acted or is likely to act in such a manner as to constitute maladministration or service failure, and where the LGSCO has conducted an investigation in relation to the matter. A detailed analysis of the 14 upheld cases in 2023/24 is provided as Appendix 5.

## 8 HOUSING OMBUDSMAN SERVICE

- 8.1 Under the Localism Act 2011, the Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS) had its jurisdiction extended to all social housing in England from 1 April 2013. The HOS offers impartial dispute resolution for those in rented social housing, working with others to improve landlord and tenant relations.
- 8.2 Richmond Council does not have any housing stock: it was sold and transferred to Richmond Housing Partnership (RHP) in 2000 and RHP continues to own and manage all of Richmond's ex-Council housing.

### Tenants' Champion

- 8.3 The role of Tenants' Champion was established by the Council in 2011, as part of the Council's commitment to better assist tenants and leaseholders living in housing association homes who may be experiencing unresolved issues with social landlords. The Tenants' Champion develops expertise in housing and builds relationships with Housing Association colleagues to help provide solutions to long term complaints. In 2023-24 the role was held by Councillor Paulina Vassileva.

- 8.4 In 2023/24, the Tenants' Champion service assisted 138 households compared with 166 in the previous year). Of these 116 were new cases (compared with 122 last year). The balance consisted of cases from previous years that continue to require ongoing support. 19 of the new cases were forwarded to the relevant ward councillor for help in the first instance.
- 8.5 Of the 116 new cases 58% (or 76) concerned repairs, 24% (or 32) concerned anti-social behaviour (ASB) and 18% (or 24) concerned transfers. Please note that some cases had more than one issue. The Tenants' Champion works with other partners to provide better outcomes for residents. It is important to note continuation of last year's trend the number of cases overall has gone down, but responses from housing associations and resolution times have taken longer. There is also an increase in the proportion of residents contacting the Tenants' Champion service for complex anti-social behaviour (ASB) cases that inherently command more time and a multi-faceted approach.
- 8.6 During 2023-24, in addition to casework Cllr Vassileva led the twice yearly Tenants' Champion Interagency Forum (which includes Housing Associations, Police, Fire service, Community Safety Team, Housing, Mental Health Social care, Mental Health Trust and Voluntary sector colleagues), attended CMARAC meetings and worked closely with other advocates such as Citizens Advice, RUILS, Richmond Aid and the borough's two MPs.

## 9. GOING FORWARD: KEY ACHIEVEMENTS AND PRIORITIES FOR 2024-25

- 9.1 The Complaints Team have made significant strides in improving our complaints handling process this year by:
- **Creation of a public-facing Adult Social Care complaints policy:** This new policy aims to provide more transparency about how decisions are made by the Complaints Team and how statutory regulations interact with other policies and procedures.
  - **Strengthened quarterly reporting:** To foster a positive culture of learning from complaints, we have enhanced reporting to all council's Senior Management Teams. We also plan to produce six-monthly complaints report for the Director's Board in addition to the annual report.
  - **Targeted collaborative work with the Housing Directorate:** In response to an increase in housing-related complaints, we have implemented a procedure to identify high-risk issues and themes. We've also strengthened partnership working between housing and social care teams for more cohesive complaints handling.
  - **Collaboration with the SEND teams in Achieving for Children:** Fortnightly meetings now take place to discuss current open complaints and provide support and guidance for the most complex cases. This has also significantly improved the number of complaints sent on time.
  - **Work to strengthen complaints practice and culture:** In consideration of the LGSCO and HOS Joint Complaints Handling Code, we have begun work to enhance complaints practice. This included amending timescales for Corporate Complaints under the HOS jurisdiction to commence on 1st April 2024, updating staff guidance on effective complaints handling, and updating information on the Council's complaints webpage.
  - **Continued comprehensive complaints training for staff:** This has included regular online training including a webinar on complaints handling, face-to-face complaints

training at an Adult Social Worker Forum and securing information about the complaint processes on staff induction for all new starters.

9.2 In 2024-25 our priorities will be:

- **Policy Development:** The establishment of a publicly accessible Statutory Children's Social Care complaints policy. This initiative aims to enhance transparency regarding the decision-making processes of the Complaints Team and the interplay between statutory regulations and other policies.

The launch of a new Corporate Complaints Policy from 1 April 2025 which is fully aligned with the Ombudsman Joint Complaints Handling Code.

- **Complaints Practice Enhancement:** To maintain our adherence to the Ombudsman Joint Complaints Handling Code, we will reinforce our robust complaints practice through:
  - **Continuous Staff Training:** Implementing an ongoing training programme on the requirements of the Code.
  - **Performance Management Integration:** Collaborating with Human Resources to incorporate complaints handling objectives into staff appraisal documents and job descriptions.
  - **Equality and Accessibility:** Partnering with the equality lead to refine our approach to recording and monitoring reasonable adjustments for individuals lodging complaints.
  - **Contractor Oversight:** Enhancing procedures to ensure that contractors and third-party service providers on behalf of the Council manage complaints effectively.
  - **Reporting Enhancements:** We will introduce biannual complaints reports to Executive Directors and Lead Members, supplementing the existing annual complaints reporting structure.

## 10. COMMENTS OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF FINANCE

10.1 The cost of dealing with all complaints is met from within existing approved resources.

## 11. COMMENTS OF THE MONITORING OFFICER

11.1 The Monitoring Officer maintains an oversight of decisions of the LGSCO where the complaint is upheld; in most cases, provided the recommendations of the LGSCO are followed, there will be no need for further action. In Richmond's case, all recommendations have been implemented. There have been no public reports, so it has not been necessary to refer any reports on individual complaint investigations to Full Council.

## **12. APPENDICES**

Appendix 2 – Data tables

Appendix 3 – New Corporate Complaints Policy from April 2025

Appendix 4 - Key changes to the new Corporate Complaints Policy

Appendix 5 – LGSCO Upheld Decisions 2021/22

Appendix 6 – LGSCO Annual Review Letter 2021/22

Appendix 7 – Learning from complaints

## **CONTACT**

Jon Evans

Assistant Chief Executive (Policy and Performance)

London Borough of Richmond upon Thames

Nancy Kurisa

Statutory and Corporate Complaints Manager

London Borough of Richmond upon Thames

## Corporate Stage 1 Complaint Data

### Total completed

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Grand Total
Adult Social Care - Corporate	1	2	1	2	6
Chief Executive's Office	3		4	1	8
Childrens Corporate	12	10	14	7	43
Environment & Community Services	33	30	13	15	91
Finance	16	9	20	15	60
Housing & Regeneration	10	4	6	6	26
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>234</b>

### Outcome

	Not Upheld	Partially Upheld	Upheld	Grand Total
Adult Social Care - Corporate	4		2	6
Chief Executive's Office	3	2	3	8
Childrens Corporate	5	22	16	43
Environment & Community Services	49	24	18	91
Finance	38	6	16	60
Housing & Regeneration	13	8	5	26
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>112</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>234</b>

### Complaints completed within timescales

	Y	N	Grand Total
Adult Social Care - Corporate	4	2	6
Chief Executive's Office	7	1	8
Childrens Corporate	36	7	43
Environment & Community Serv	73	18	91
Finance	51	9	60
Housing & Regeneration	18	8	26
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>189</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>234</b>

% completed in timescale: 81%

### Complaint Type

	Adult Social Care - Corporate	Chief Executive's Office	Childrens Corporate	Environment & Community Services	Finance	Housing & Regeneration	Grand Total
101 Service Delay or Failure	5	1	43	54	32	10	145
102 Outside Service Procedure					15		15
103 Staff Error/Attitude	1	3		26	4	13	47
104 Disagreement with/failure to implement assessment within timescales						2	2
105 Financial Charges/Billing/Costs		1		2	4		7
106 Poor/incorrect information		3		9	5	1	18
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>234</b>

## Equalities Data

### Ethnicity

	Adult Social Care - Corporate	Chief Executive's Office	Childrens Corporate	Environment & Community Services	Finance	Housing & Regeneration	Grand Total
400 White British (English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish)	2			17	7	1	27
404 White Other	1			8			9
407 Mixed White & Asian					1		1
408 Mixed Other				2			2
409 Indian						1	1
414 Black Caribbean					1	1	2
415 Black African						1	1
416 Other Black/Caribbean/African				1			1
Not disclosed	3	4	43	53	48	21	172
Prefer not to say		4		9	3	1	17
Asian				1			1
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>234</b>

### Religion

	Adult Social Care - Corporate	Chief Executive's Office	Childrens Corporate	Environment & Community Services	Finance	Housing & Regeneration	Grand Total
Christian	2			14	1	2	19
Hindu				1			1
No religion		1		8	4	2	15
Not disclosed	4	3	43	58	51	21	180
Prefer not to say		4		10	4	1	19
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>234</b>

### Sexuality

	Adult Social Care - Corporate	Chief Executive's Office	Childrens Corporate	Environment & Community Services	Finance	Housing & Regeneration	Grand Total
Bisexual				1	1		2
Gay/Lesbian					1		1
Heterosexual/straight	2	1		22	4	4	33
Not disclosed	4	4	43	58	51	21	181
Prefer not to say		3		10	3	1	17
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>234</b>

### Status

	Adult Social Care - Corporate	Chief Executive's Office	Childrens Corporate	Environment & Community Services	Finance	Housing & Regeneration	Grand Total
Married/Civil Partnership/Co-habiting				18	7	1	26
Not disclosed	6	4	43	58	47	22	180
Prefer not to say		4		10	1		15
Single				5	5	3	13
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>234</b>

### Disability

	Adult Social Care - Corporate	Chief Executive's Office	Childrens Corporate	Environment & Community Services	Finance	Housing & Regeneration	Grand Total
No	1			19	6	2	28
Not disclosed	3	3	43	60	47	21	177
Prefer not to say		3		7	1		11
Yes	2	2		5	6	3	18
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>234</b>

### Age

	Adult Social Care - Corporate	Chief Executive's Office	Childrens Corporate	Environment & Community Services	Finance	Housing & Regeneration	Grand Total
18 - 24				2	2		4
25 - 34	1			3	3	1	8
35 - 44		1		10	6	1	18
45 - 54				6	9		15
55 - 64	2			8	3	2	15
65 - 74				2	4	1	7
75+				3	1		4
Not disclosed	3	4	43	52	31	21	154
Prefer not to say		3		5	1		9
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>234</b>

## Corporate Stage 2 Complaint Data

### Total completed

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Grand Total
Adult Social Care - Corporate		2		1	3
Chief Executive's Office				1	1
Childrens Corporate	2	6	5	7	20
Environment & Community Services	13	8	4	6	31
Finance	2	1	3		6
Housing & Regeneration		7	3	4	14
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>75</b>

### Complaint Categories

	Adult Social Care - Corporate	Chief Executive's Office	Childrens Corporate	Environment & Community Services	Finance	Housing & Regeneration
101 Service Delay or Failure	3	1	16	11		6
102 Outside Service Procedure				2	3	
103 Staff error/attitude			2	8		2
104 Disagreement with/failure to implement assessment within timescales			1	7		2
105 Financial Charges/Billing/Costs				1		1
106 Poor/incorrect information			1	2	3	3
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>14</b>

### Outcome

	Not upheld	Partially upheld	Upheld	Grand Total
Adult Social Care - Corporate	1	2		3
Chief Executive's Office		1		1
Childrens Corporate	5	9	6	20
Environment & Community Services	22	6	3	31
Finance	4	1	1	6
Housing & Regeneration	6	5	3	14
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>75</b>

### Timescales Met

	Y	N	Grand Total
Adult Social Care - Corporate	2	1	3
Chief Executive's Office		1	1
Childrens Corporate	14	6	20
Environment & Community Services	25	6	31
Finance	5	1	6
Housing & Regeneration	9	5	14
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>75</b>

% completed on time: 73%

## Statutory Adults Complaint Data

### Total completed

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Grand Total
Mental Health Assessments	1	0	2	2	5
Mental Health Reviews	3	0	1	0	4
Hospital Social Work Team	0	2	1	0	3
Learning Disabilities	0	1	2	0	3
Occupational Therapy	1	1	0	1	3
Richmond & Barnes Locality	1	0	1	0	2
Financial Assessments/Client Affairs	0	0	2	0	2
Teddington & Twickenham	0	0	0	1	1
Access	0	0	1	0	1
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>24</b>

### Complaint Type

	Primary	Total Issues
Communication	4	15
Lack of Support	7	14
Delays in Service	5	13
Quality of Care / Service	2	5
Quality of Assessment	3	4
Staff Behaviour	0	3
Finance / Charging	1	2
Safeguarding	2	2
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>58</b>

### Complainant Type

	Total
Parent/Guardian	18
Child/Young Person	2
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>20</b>

### Outcome

	Total
Not Upheld	8
Partially Upheld	8
Upheld	8
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>24</b>

### Complaints completed within timescales

	Y	N	Grand Total
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>24</b>

% completed in timescale: 46%



## Statutory Children's Stage 1 Complaint Data

### Total completed

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Grand Total
Referral & Assessment Service	3	3	2	0	8
Safeguarding	3	3	1	0	7
Children with Disabilities	1	0	1	0	2
Early Years & Intervention Support	1	0	0	0	1
Children Looked After	0	1	0	0	1
Family Youth & Resilience Service	0	0	1	0	1
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>20</b>

### Complaint Type

	Primary	Total Issues
Communication	1	17
Delays in Service	4	10
Lack of Support	0	10
Assessment: Quality/Process/Outcome	6	9
Failures in Service/Procedures	3	9
Staff Behaviour/Attitude	2	6
Disputing professional decisions	0	5
Quality of Recording/Minutes	2	3
Accommodation/Placement	1	1
Contact issues	1	1
Failures in Partnership working	0	1
Breach of Confidentiality	0	0
Finance	0	0
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>72</b>

### Complainant Type

	Total
Parent/Guardian	18
Child/Young Person	2
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>20</b>

### Outcome

	Total
Not Upheld	4
Partially Upheld	11
Upheld	5
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>20</b>

### Complaints completed within timescales

	Y	N	Grand Total
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>20</b>

% completed in timescale: 35%

## Statutory Children's Stage 2 Complaint Data

### Total completed

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Grand Total
Referral & Assessment Service	0	1	0	1	2
Safeguarding	1	2	1	2	6
Children with Disabilities	0	0	0	1	1
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>9</b>

### Outcome

	Not Upheld	Partially Upheld	Upheld	Withdrawn	Grand Total
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>9</b>

### complaints)

	Y	N	Grand Total
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>7</b>

% completed in timescale: 29%

## Statutory Children's Stage 3 Complaint Data

### Total completed

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Grand Total
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>

### Outcome

	Not Upheld	Partially Upheld	Upheld	Withdrawn	Grand Total
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>

### Complaints completed within timescales (not including withdrawn

	Y	N	Grand Total
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>

% completed in timescale: 0%  
 % completed in timescale across all 3 stages: 38%



# **Corporate Complaints Policy**



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## 1. Introduction

This policy covers Corporate Complaints where recourse is to the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO).

## 2. Our approach

At Richmond Borough Council we want to provide our residents, businesses and visitors with good quality services delivered in a helpful and efficient way. This document explains how we record and act upon this feedback, listening to the experiences of our customers - positive or negative - to make improvements in services.

We take a positive approach to complaints and value them as an important form of feedback on our services. We want to learn from complaints, and use the lessons learned to review and where necessary improve the services we offer and to help develop and train our staff.

The Council responds to complaints in line with the standards set out in the LGSCO Complaints Handling Code. We also carry out an annual self-assessment to make sure our complaints handling remains compliant with the code.

## 3. Complaints and Service Requests

### The Council's definition of a complaint

*"An expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the organisation, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting an individual or group of individuals".*

One way to make a complaint is by using the Council's online forms at [www.richmond.gov.uk/complaints](http://www.richmond.gov.uk/complaints)

### The definition of a fault or service request

*"a request that the organisation provides or improves a service, fixes a problem or reconsiders a decision."*

Issues such as missed bin collections, faulty streetlights or street cleaning issues may not, in the first instance, be treated as a formal complaint.

Most contacts about matters such as refuse collections, dog fouling, graffiti, fly tipping and street related issues will be dealt with as faults or service requests.

If you need to raise the same issue more than twice or are dissatisfied with how your service request has been handled, the issue can be dealt with as a formal Stage 1 complaint.

However, we can treat a service request as a Stage 1 complaint straight away if that is your preference.

You can make a service request or report a fault by using the Council's online form at [https://richmond.gov.uk/council/have\\_your\\_say/complaints/report\\_other\\_service\\_concerns](https://richmond.gov.uk/council/have_your_say/complaints/report_other_service_concerns), or by calling Customer Services on 020 8891 1411.

#### **4. What is a complaint?**

We will take the following points into consideration when assessing your complaint:

- the nature of the issue and whether the Council's Corporate Complaints Procedure is appropriate in the circumstances; and
- what you would like to happen next.

A complaint may concern one or more of the following:

- The Council has done something which you consider should not have been done
- The Council has failed to do something that you consider should have been done
- The service provided by the Council was not good enough; you received poor quality of service or there was poor communication
- There has been a failure or a delay in providing a service
- Mistakes were made in the way a decision has been reached
- The Council has given incorrect or misleading information
- Staff have been rude or unhelpful or behaved inappropriately

The above list is not exhaustive, and we will consider each issue individually.

#### **5. Exclusions from the Corporate Complaints Policy**

Services for which there is an alternative appeal or tribunal process will not be dealt with using the Corporate Complaints Procedure. These include for example:

- Refusal of planning permission
- Planning enforcement
- Parking tickets (parking control notices)
- Blue Badge decisions
- School admissions
- School exclusions

- Special Educational Need decisions (including decisions made as part of the Education, Health and Care Plan process)
- Housing Benefit disputes
- Council Tax disputes
- Homelessness decisions

The following matters will **not** be put through the Corporate Complaint Procedure:

- First time requests for services (faults/service requests) e.g. a dripping tap.
- Requests for information (these are dealt with under separate procedures: the Freedom of Information Act and Subject Access Requests)
- Data protection complaints as there is a separate complaints process and final recourse is the Information Commissioner's Office
- Data breach or security incidents as there is a separate reporting process and final recourse is the Information Commissioner's Office
- Matters for which there is a right of review, appeal, or an alternative complaints procedure.
- A complaint that has already been considered by the Council and completed both stages of the Corporate Complaints Procedure.
- A complaint where a decision has already been reached by a court, an appeal process, or an external independent tribunal
- A complaint where either the customer or the Council has started legal proceedings
- A complaint that is being, or has been investigated, by the LGSCO
- Any complaints that are made by people or organisations working with the Council in their professional capacity, e.g. another local authority or an external provider or contractor. This complaints process is for complaints made by members of the public.
- Matters that come under the Council's employment procedures
- Complaints about a registered housing provider outside the Council's jurisdiction.
- Complaints against an elected Councillor – there is a separate procedure (Appendix 1)
- Complaints about lawful decisions taken by a Committee of the Council
- Complaints about Children's or Adults Social Care – the statutory complaints procedure should be used for these (Appendix 1)
- Insurance claims against the Council.
- **Antisocial behaviour:** You should report antisocial behaviour to the police or your social housing provider.–Visit our antisocial behaviour page for more information

[https://www.richmond.gov.uk/services/community\\_safety/antisocial\\_behaviour](https://www.richmond.gov.uk/services/community_safety/antisocial_behaviour)

If we do not accept your complaint, we will tell you why the matter is not suitable for the Corporate Complaints Procedure and the right to take this decision to the LGSCO.

## 6. Who can make a complaint?

Anyone who uses or is affected by our services can make a complaint, including:

- Our residents
- People who work in the borough, local businesses
- People who visit the borough
- A representative acting on your behalf. This could be a relative, friend, carer, solicitor, or an advocate from an advice agency (please note that we usually require your consent for them to act on your behalf).

### Anonymous complaints

We will deal with anonymous complaints on an individual basis and determine whether further action is appropriate. The action we take will be dependent upon the substance of the matter and the amount of information provided.

## 7. Outsourced Services

Where the Council has outsourced a service, while it no longer provides that service directly, it remains responsible for it and for the actions of the organisation providing that service. We would usually expect you to submit a complaint direct to the organisation delivering the service and allow them to respond to your complaint. If you complete their complaints procedure and remain dissatisfied, you can contact the LGSCO straight away. You do not need to go through two complaint processes. However, you can contact the relevant service at the Council and ask for your complaint to be addressed under the Council's Corporate Complaints procedure if this is your preference.

## 8. How to make a complaint

You can raise your complaint in any way and with any member of staff. For example, in order to raise a complaint, you can do one of the following:

- Use the Council's online complaint form on our website [www.richmond.gov.uk/complaints](http://www.richmond.gov.uk/complaints)
- Send an email to the person you have been dealing with or the service that you are not happy with
- Write a letter to, or telephone, the person you have been dealing with or the service that you are not happy with.
- Speak to a staff member face to face, who will provide a summary of your complaint



## Details of your complaint

When making your complaint, please:

- Provide your contact details (and the details of the person you are making the complaint on behalf of, if appropriate)
- Include all the relevant points of your complaint.
- Be clear about what you hope to achieve and what will put the matter right. Your desired outcomes should be fair and proportionate to the issue raised
- We understand that you may feel strongly about your complaint but would ask that you are polite and refrain from being aggressive

## 9. The Corporate Complaints Procedure

This procedure covers all eligible complaints except where the subject of complaint is outside the scope of this procedure. Other useful information can be found in Appendix 1.

### Stage 1 – Investigation (10 working days\*)

- When you raise an issue, we will check to see whether we should treat it as a complaint under the Corporate Complaints Procedure.
- We will need clear details of your complaint and to know what outcome is required to assist the service in resolving the complaint.
- In some cases, further information may be needed about the complaint for the service to fully consider the matter. If further details are required, we will contact you and ask for more information. We may not be able to progress your complaint until this information is provided but we will let you know if this is the case.
- In some exceptional circumstances we may need to meet with you to discuss your complaint, or to see evidence in person, but this is not normally required
- We will acknowledge receipt of the complaint by email, post or phone within **five (5) working days**.
- A Service Manager from the service being complained about will oversee an investigation and come to a decision about your complaint.
- In some cases, we will contact you to discuss the complaint and explore how it might be resolved to your satisfaction. We will not always be able to take the action you wish but we will do our best to look at all available options.
- If the complaint is about the Service Manager, a more senior person will handle the complaint.
- We will provide a written response to a complaint within **ten (10) working days** from receipt of the acknowledgment.
- If your complaint is more complex and we are not able to do this, we may need to extend the timescale for **an additional 10 working days** and we contact you to explain why more time is needed.

## **Stage 2 – Review (20 working days)**

- If you remain dissatisfied following receipt of a Stage 1 response, you can request that your complaint is reviewed at Stage 2. Please try to submit your request within 20 working days of receiving the Stage 1 response.
- It is helpful if you can explain why the Stage 1 response has not resolved your complaint and what outcome you are seeking to resolve the matter at Stage 2. If we understand why you are not satisfied with the Stage 1 investigation, it will be easier for us to provide the resolution you are seeking.
- We will acknowledge receipt of the complaint by email, post or phone within **five (5) working days**.
- We will provide a written response, with a decision on your complaint, following a review at Stage 2 within **twenty (20) working days** from receipt of the acknowledgement. If your complaint is more complex and we are not able to do this, we may need to extend the timescale for an additional 20 working days and we will contact you to explain why more time is needed.
- Stage 2 will be a review of your complaint and the response you have received – it will not re-investigate the matter.
- This will be the Council's final decision and marks the end of the Corporate Complaints Procedure.

At the end of the Stage 2 response, you will be provided with the contact details of the LGSCO, as that would be your next and final recourse if you are still unhappy.

## **10. Time limits**

Complaints to the Council should be made within 12 months of a person becoming aware of the issue they want to make a complaint about. This is because it is easier to find out what happened and to put things right when complaints are received as close to the time that something happened. As time passes it becomes more difficult to investigate complaints fairly and fully, because staff members may have moved on, recollections may have changed, and records may no longer be available. We may accept complaints outside of this timescale in exceptional circumstances.

## **11. Remedies**

As far as possible, we aim to put you back in the position you would have been in if there had been no fault by the Council. There are a number of actions we can take to put things right. In some cases, the Council may offer financial remedy if you are out of pocket because of our mistakes, or if you have been caused undue hardship, inconvenience, or distress. We follow the remedies guidelines issued by the LGSCO in deciding the appropriate amount of financial redress.

## **12. The Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO)**

If you have been through both stages of our complaints procedure and remain unhappy, you can ask the LGSCO to consider your complaint. The LGSCO will look

at what the Council has done to see whether there have been any errors or failures and if so, how this has affected you.

The LGSCO investigates complaints in a fair and independent way, they do not take sides and provide a free service. The Ombudsman expects you to have given the Council a chance to deal with your complaint before you contact them. If you have not heard from us within a reasonable time, the Ombudsman may decide to look into your complaint anyway.

The LGSCO is the final stage for complaints about Councils and some other organisations providing local public services. It also investigates complaints about all adult social care providers (including care homes and home care agencies) for people who self-fund their care. The LGSCO will make their own assessment about whether a further investigation is needed and will keep you informed.

Website: <https://www.lgo.org.uk>

Telephone: **0300 061 0614**

### **13. Further help and support**

The following organisation may be able to offer general advice and guidance.

#### **Citizens Advice (CA)**

<https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk> or [www.citizensadvicerichmond.org](http://www.citizensadvicerichmond.org)

Citizens Advice Richmond Advice Line:

Telephone: **0808 278 7873** (Open Mon – Fridays 10am to 1pm)

Advice is also available in person at 1st floor, 94-102 High Street, Hampton Hill, TW12 1NY or one of their satellite advice venues. Please see website or phone for opening times and locations.

#### **Other Organisations Providing Assistance**

Assistance can also be obtained from a specialist advice or advocacy organisation, such as:

- Richmond Advice and Information on Disability (Richmond Aid) - [www.richmondaid.org.uk](http://www.richmondaid.org.uk)
- Richmond Borough MIND - [www.rbmind.org](http://www.rbmind.org)
- Age UK Richmond - [www.ageuk.org.uk/richmonduponthames/](http://www.ageuk.org.uk/richmonduponthames/)
- Multicultural Richmond – [multiculturalrichmond.org.uk](http://multiculturalrichmond.org.uk)

Please talk to a member of staff if you want more information about who can help you.

## 14. Reasonable Adjustments

We want to make it easy for anyone who wants to complain to do so and in line with the Equalities Act 2010 will consider reasonable adjustments for residents who may need access to the complaints process. For example, if you need an interpreter or sign language interpreter, need information translated into another language, in Braille, on audio tape or in electronic format, or are neurodivergent and require information to be more accessible to suit your needs, please tell us when you first make your complaint, so we can make appropriate arrangements for you. The Council will always do its best to meet the needs of customers.

### **Contact information:**

For more help or information, customers can contact the Corporate Complaints Team

Email: [corpcomplaints@richmondandwandsworth.gov.uk](mailto:corpcomplaints@richmondandwandsworth.gov.uk)

## 15. Data, Monitoring and Recording

### **Monitoring and Recording**

The Corporate Complaints Team and Council Directorates keep electronic logging sheets of all complaints and associated information such as:

- Complainant's details (and the details of any representatives if the complaint was made on a person's behalf)
- Complaint details (who, what and which service is being complained about)
- A record of any reasonable adjustments or disabilities a complainant or their representative has disclosed which will be kept under active review
- Documentation and correspondence related to the complaint

The Complaints Manager will monitor complaints on an ongoing basis to ensure that records are kept for each complaint received including the type of complaint, the outcome at each stage and whether the timescale was met.

An Annual Complaints Report will be presented to senior managers and elected Councillors through the relevant committee and will be published on the Council's website alongside our annual complaint handling self-assessment (which measures compliance against the LGSCO Complaint Handling Code).

The Complaints Manager will also aim to provide quarterly complaints performance reports to senior managers and a bi-weekly complaints tracker report.

## Confidentiality

The Council will do all it can to respect your privacy and to protect the personal information we acquire about you when you use our complaints service.

You may be asked to provide personal and equalities information when you first make a complaint. Please be assured we will treat this information in confidence. Any personal information you give on the online or paper complaint form you complete, or as part of your complaint, will only be used by the Council to:

- Help address and resolve your concerns
- Check whether our services and our complaints procedure are equally accessible to every member of the community; and
- Improve our complaints procedure.

Data protection law gives you a number of rights to control what personal information we can hold and how it is used by us. All complaints will be dealt with in accordance with the requirements of the General Data Protection Act 2018 and the Data Protection Act 2018. For further information on how the Council manages your personal data and your rights, please visit:

[https://richmond.gov.uk/council/open\\_richmond/data\\_protection/departmental\\_privacy\\_notices](https://richmond.gov.uk/council/open_richmond/data_protection/departmental_privacy_notices)

Information regarding your complaint will only be shared with others within the Council who are directly involved in the matters you have included in your complaint. They may need to be consulted in order to obtain information to assist with providing a full response to the concerns you have raised. You can ask for access to the information we hold on you in connection with your complaint by submitting a Subject Access Request (SAR). More information about the SAR process can be found here: [https://richmond.gov.uk/council/open\\_richmond/data\\_protection/make\\_a\\_subject\\_access\\_request](https://richmond.gov.uk/council/open_richmond/data_protection/make_a_subject_access_request)

Responses to complaints at both stages will be sent in writing to the email or home address you have given us, unless you have specifically requested otherwise.

## 16. Unreasonable Complainant Behaviour

The Council is committed to dealing with all customers fairly and impartially and to delivering high quality services. This includes to those who wish to complain, offer comments, or provide us with feedback.

Normally, people who wish to complain are allowed full access to the Council and all relevant services. However, there are a small number of complainants who, because of their behaviour and the way they approach Officers in the Council in relation to their complaint, may need to have their contact restricted. They may behave unacceptably or be unreasonably persistent in their contact. This can impede investigating their complaint(s) and can have significant resource implications. These actions can occur either while the complaint is being investigated, or once the Council has finished the complaint investigation.

Any restrictions placed on unacceptable behaviour will be proportionate and demonstrate regard for the provisions of the Equality Act 2010.

The Council has an Unreasonable Complainant Behaviour Policy which can be found on our complaints webpage

[https://richmond.gov.uk/council/have\\_your\\_say/complaints/make\\_a\\_complaint](https://richmond.gov.uk/council/have_your_say/complaints/make_a_complaint)

## Appendix 1

### Other useful information

#### Complaints against Councillors

These complaints are handled under a separate procedure. Complaints about Councillors are viewed as breaches under the Councillors' Code of Conduct and are responded to by the Council's Monitoring Officer. Further details on the process and contact details for the Monitoring Officer can be found at

[https://richmond.gov.uk/council/councillors/complain\\_about\\_a\\_councillor](https://richmond.gov.uk/council/councillors/complain_about_a_councillor)

#### Complaints about Children's or Adult Social Care

Most of these types of complaints will be handled under separate, statutory complaint procedures. If you are unhappy about the care or support, you or someone you know has received you should let us know as soon as possible. Further information can be found on the Council's website:

##### Richmond Children's Social Care:

[https://richmond.gov.uk/council/have\\_your\\_say/complaints/childrens\\_complaints](https://richmond.gov.uk/council/have_your_say/complaints/childrens_complaints)

##### Richmond Adult Social Care:

[https://richmond.gov.uk/services/adult\\_social\\_care/how\\_adult\\_social\\_care\\_works/tell\\_us\\_what\\_you\\_think\\_about\\_adult\\_social\\_care/asc\\_complaints](https://richmond.gov.uk/services/adult_social_care/how_adult_social_care_works/tell_us_what_you_think_about_adult_social_care/asc_complaints)

#### Complaints about other registered housing providers

Registered Housing Providers have their own individual complaints procedures, so you will need to contact your landlord or housing association if you wish to register a complaint about a housing related issue.

#### Freedom of Information requests - [Complain about a Freedom of Information request](#)

**Data protection** - If you want to complain about a data protection matter you should read our [data protection complaints procedure](#)

**Data breach or security incident** - You can [report a data breach or other security incident](#)

Document Name	Corporate Complaints Policy
Version No.	V4(March 2025)
Owner	Statutory and Corporate Complaints Manager
Approved by	Finance, Policy & Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Next review date	March 2026



## Appendix 1 – Key Changes to the new Corporate Complaints Policy to commence from 1 April 2025

### Substantive changes

New definition of a complaint and a service request; Complaints and Service requests (section 3)	Changed to new complaints and service request definition as per the new Joint Complaints Handling Code to assist officers with identifying the correct route for expressions of dissatisfaction.
Changes to timescales; (section 9)	Updated new timescales for stage 1 and 2 complaints, to ensure compliance with the new Joint Code. Updated wording around circumstances when a complaint might be extended.

### Best practice changes

Introduction added (section 1)	Provides information on the areas of complaint where recourse is to the Housing Ombudsman Services (HOS) as this is a new separate policy for these types of complaints.
What is a complaint? (section 4)	Updated wording to ensure compliance with new Joint Code.
Exclusions from the Corporate Complaints Policy (section 5)	Removed information not relevant to housing complaints. Added two bullet point to clarify 1) the complaints about committee decisions are not included in this policy and 2) the complaints process is for members of the public, not people working in their professional capacity.
Who can make a complaint (section 6)	Included existing wording on 'anonymous complaints' in this section, previously in Appendix 1.
Outsourced services (section 7)	Updated wording to ensure compliance with new Joint Code to emphasise that Residents can complain directly to an outsourced service if preferred.
How to make a complaint (section 8)	Updated wording to ensure compliance with new Joint Code; added that complainants can speak to a member of staff face to face to make a complaint if preferred.
Remedies (section 11)	Updated terminology to ensure compliance with new Joint Code, information was previously in Appendix 1.

Reasonable Adjustments (section 14)	Updated wording to ensure compliance with Joint Code and Equalities Act 2010.
Data, Monitoring and Recording (section 15)	<p>Added new information about how complaints are recorded and reported on. To ensure compliance with the Joint Code, have set out that the Annual Complaints Report and Self-Assessment will be put on the complaints page on the public website.</p> <p>Included existing information on confidentiality and information governance previously in Appendix 1.</p>
Unreasonable Complainant Behaviour (section 16)	New standalone section, previously part of Appendix 1
Appendix 1 (section 17)	Some information from Appendix 1 in the previous policy has been used to create the standalone information in the new sections as above. Information remaining in Appendix 1 has been updated and removed if not relevant to this new policy (i.e. how to complain about schools has been removed).

### Structural changes

Formatting	Contents page added and topics split into numbered sections.
Standalone sections added and contents page	New policy is now more user friendly as information can be located easily.

## Appendix : Richmond LGSCO complaints upheld 2023-24

Reference	Authority	Category	Decided	Decision	Remedy	Details	Service Improvements
22011112	London Borough of Richmond upon Thames	Education & Childrens Services	02/06/2023	Upheld	Apology. Financial redress for: avoidable distress/time and trouble. New appeal/review or reconsidered decision	<b>Complaint:</b> The Council's handling of their child's EHCP and SEN provision and associated communication failures. <b>Outcome:</b> The LGSCO found fault that the Council had failed to respond to the parent's requests regarding provision along with its confusing and contradictory communications regarding the child's EHCP. <b>Agreed Action:</b> The Council apologised and <b>paid £300</b> for the failings identified, backdated specialist SEN provision and amended the ECHP accordingly.	N/A
22013221	London Borough of Richmond upon Thames	Education & Childrens Services	25/09/2023	Upheld	LGSCO considered the Council had offered a suitable remedy.	<b>Complaint:</b> The Council had not refunded top-up nursery fees charged by nurseries when their child received the Free Early Education Entitlement (FEEE). <b>Outcome:</b> The LGSCO found that despite the Council originally failing to understand the complaint, it had subsequently rectified this and taken action to ensure a nursery's charges complied with Government guidance. <b>Agreed Action:</b> The Council accepted it had failed to understand the complaint and that it had taken too long to audit the nursery's charges. It had <b>offered £600 as a symbolic payment</b> for the delay which the LGSCO considered a suitable remedy.	N/A
22015631	London Borough of Richmond upon Thames	Housing	07/09/2023	Upheld	Apology. Financial redress for: avoidable distress/time and trouble. New appeal/review or reconsidered decision. Procedure or policy change/review	<b>Complaint:</b> The Council's handling of their housing application. <b>Outcome:</b> The LGSCO found that the Council had failed to: notify the complainant of its re-assessment of their application and their right to request a review of its decisions about their priority banding and bedroom need; refer them for an OT assessment when it had told them it had. <b>Agreed Action:</b> The Council apologised and paid £175 for the failings identified, offered the complainant a review of its decision about their housing application.	The Council also reviewed its Allocations Policy and policy regarding applicant notifications about decisions and the right for a review of those decisions. It also considered the actions needed to address the backlog of housing register assessments.
22016853	London Borough of Richmond upon Thames	Housing	18/09/2023	Upheld	Apology. Financial redress for: avoidable distress/time and trouble; quantifiable loss. Provide training and/or guidance	<b>Complaint:</b> The Council's handling of their homelessness application when they fled domestic violence and, providing incorrect information regarding their responsibilities in the temporary accommodation provided. <b>Outcome:</b> The LGSCO found that the Council poorly managed: the homelessness application, its communication with the complainant and its complaint handling. <b>Agreed Action:</b> The Council apologised and <b>paid £500</b> for the failings identified (+50% of the debt incurred by the complainant due to the incorrect information given).	The Council reminded housing staff managing complaints that where the Council identifies maladministration causing injustice, it should consider the LGSCO's guidance on remedies and whether a remedy is suitable.

22016884	London Borough of Richmond upon Thames	Education & Childrens Services	21/07/2023	Upheld	Apology. Financial redress for: avoidable distress/time and trouble. Procedure or policy change/review. New appeal/review or reconsidered decision	<b>Complaint:</b> The Council's handling of finding a new placement for the child/young person they were fostering when they gave the Council substantial notice due to health issues. <b>Outcome:</b> The LGSCO found that the Council failed to arrange another placement within the noticed period given which left the complainant and child/young person in the lurch, which caused a chaotic end to the placement. <b>Agreed Action:</b> The Council apologised and <b>paid £500</b> for the failings identified.	The Council reviewed its procedures for disrupted foster placements including its contingency plans for times when the Council is unable to find a foster placement in time.
22018050	London Borough of Richmond upon Thames	Adult Care Services	26/10/2023	Upheld	Apology. Financial redress for: avoidable distress/time and trouble. Procedure or policy change/review.	<b>Complaint:</b> The quality of the domiciliary care provided to their parent on behalf of the Council. <b>Outcome:</b> The LGSCO found fault with the Council as it: delayed in reviewing the parent's care and support needs; failed to exercise discretion to consider accepting the complainant's complaint on behalf of their parent and had caused confusion due to a lack of clarity in which process was being followed in its complaint responses. <b>Agreed Action:</b> The Council apologised and <b>paid £100</b> for the failings identified and, the time and trouble the complainant took to pursue the complaint,	The Council reminded staff involved with complaints that the Council is able to use discretion when considering whether to accept a complaint from a representative of a person who cannot consent and developed a procedure for dealing with adult social care complaints, which included how its complaints process interacts with those of commissioned care providers.
23005630	London Borough of Richmond upon Thames	Housing	14/11/2023	Upheld	Apology. Financial redress for delays experienced.	<b>Complaint:</b> The handling of housing support they received from the Council and associated delays in assessing their housing register application, when their private housing was no longer affordable. <b>Outcome:</b> Whilst upholding the complaint the LGSCO decided not to investigate as the Council had: accepted fault in its complaint response regarding the housing application and had offered a remedy in line with the LGSCO's Guidance on Remedies. It had also reviewed its housing support decision; and correctly directed the complainant to the County Court if they remained unhappy with that review outcome. <b>Action taken:</b> The Council had accepted fault in its complaint response regarding the housing application, apologised and <b>paid £1000</b> in line with the LGSCO's Guidance on Remedies for the delays incurred and, <b>paid £3600 towards £3600 in rent arrears accrued</b> due to delays in finding suitable accommodation due to the needs of the complainant.	N/A

23006666	London Borough of Richmond upon Thames	Adult Care Services	20/03/2024	Upheld	New appeal/review or reconsidered decision	<p><b>Complaint:</b> The Council's failures to provide suitable housing ready for hospital discharge and charged them for care home fees incorrectly.</p> <p><b>Outcome:</b> Whilst upholding the complaint, the LGSCO decided not to investigate this complaint as the Council had offered the complainant several different housing options which the complainant had declined. The Council had also agreed to investigate the care home fees issue.</p> <p><b>Action taken:</b> On investigation of the care home fees issue, the Council found that the complainant had been erroneously invoiced for the fees due to an error in data input, when arranging contingency accommodation in case no suitable housing had been found by the hospital discharge date.</p>	N/A
23007219	London Borough of Richmond upon Thames	Highways & Transport	27/09/2023	Upheld	Apology. Staff training.	<p><b>Complaint:</b> The Council's handling of parking in the complainant's street.</p> <p><b>Outcome:</b> Whilst upholding the complaint, the LGSCO decided not to investigate, as the Council had accepted some fault in its complaint response and taken action to correct the parking issues.</p> <p><b>Action Taken:</b> The Council apologised and took action to ensure terminology is utilised by staff to avoid any future confusion and, installed yellow lines where appropriate, and updated the website.</p>	N/A
23008845	London Borough of Richmond upon Thames	Housing	12/02/2024	Upheld	Apology	<p><b>Complaint:</b> The Council failed to properly respond to their complaints about disrepair at their private rental home.</p> <p><b>Outcome:</b> The LGSCO found service failure due to some communication issues and delays providing responses to the complainant. However, it found no fault in how the Council reached decisions about what action it should take.</p> <p><b>Agreed Action:</b> The Council apologised to the complainant for the communication issues identified.</p>	N/A
23016243	London Borough of Richmond upon Thames	Housing	21/02/2024	Upheld	Apology. Financial redress for: avoidable distress/time and trouble. Provide training and/or guidance	<p><b>Complaint:</b> The Council did not deal with their homelessness application properly.</p> <p><b>Outcome:</b> The LGSCO found fault with the Council as it delayed in assessing the circumstances leading to the complainant being homeless for some weeks.</p> <p><b>Agreed Action:</b> The Council apologised and <b>paid £450</b> for the failings identified.</p>	The Council provided training to staff who manage homelessness applications to ensure that there are no unnecessary delays in completing assessments.

21017488	London Borough of Richmond upon Thames	Adult Care Services	21/09/2023	Upheld	<p>Apology. Financial redress for: avoidable distress/time and trouble. Provide training and/or guidance</p>	<p><b>Complaint:</b> The handling of charges for their parent's care and support.</p> <p><b>Outcome:</b> The LGSCO found fault with the Council's: delays in monitoring the direct payment arrangement for the care and support; poor communication around the decision to end the direct payment; a delay in refunding an overpayment of the client's contributions and, for the delay in dealing with the appeal about this.</p> <p><b>Agreed Action:</b> The Council apologised and <b>paid £300</b> for the uncertainty and frustration these failings caused.</p>	<p>The Council reviewed its procedures to ensure that when the Council decides to end a direct payment arrangement it writes to the person concerned to confirm the arrangement has ended and sets out the alternative arrangements it has put in place to ensure the adult's eligible needs for care and support continue to be met.</p>
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17 July 2024

*By email*

Mr Jackson  
Chief Executive  
London Borough of Richmond upon Thames

Dear Mr Jackson

### **Annual Review letter 2023-24**

I write to you with your annual summary of complaint statistics from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman for the year ending 31 March 2024. The information offers valuable insight about your organisation's approach to complaints, and I know you will consider it as part of your corporate governance processes. As such, I have sought to share this letter with the Leader of your Council and Chair of the appropriate Scrutiny Committee, to ensure effective ownership and oversight of complaint outcomes, which offer valuable opportunities to learn and improve. In addition, this year, we have encouraged Monitoring Officers to register to receive the letter directly, supporting their role to report the decisions we uphold to their council.

For most of the reporting year, Paul Najsarek steered the organisation during his tenure as interim Ombudsman, and I was delighted to take up the role of Ombudsman in February 2024. I look forward to working with you and colleagues across the local government sector to ensure we continue to harness the value of individual complaints and drive and promote systemic change and improvement across the local government landscape.

While I know this ambition will align with your own, I am aware of the difficult financial circumstances and service demands that make continuous improvement a challenging focus for the sector. However, we will continue to hold organisations to account through our investigations and recommend proportionate actions to remedy injustice. Despite the challenges, I have great confidence that you recognise the valuable contribution and insight complaints, and their swift resolution, offer to improve services for the public.

### **Complaint statistics**

Our statistics focus on three key areas that help to assess your organisation's commitment to putting things right when they go wrong:

**Complaints upheld** - We uphold complaints when we find fault in an organisation's actions, including where the organisation accepted fault before we investigated. We include the total number of investigations completed to provide important context for the statistic. This year, we also provide the number of upheld complaints per 100,000 population.

**Compliance with recommendations** - We recommend ways for organisations to put things right when faults have caused injustice and monitor their compliance with our recommendations. Failure to comply is rare and a compliance rate below 100% is a cause for concern.

**Satisfactory remedy provided by the authority** - In these cases, the organisation upheld the complaint and we agreed with how it offered to put things right. We encourage the early resolution of complaints and give credit to organisations that accept fault and find appropriate ways to put things right.

Finally, we compare the three key annual statistics for your organisation with similar authorities to provide an average marker of performance. We do this for County Councils, District Councils, Metropolitan Boroughs, Unitary Councils, and London Boroughs.

Your annual data, and a copy of this letter, will be uploaded to our interactive map, [Your council's performance](#), on 24 July 2024. This useful tool places all our data and information about councils in one place. You can find the detail of the decisions we have made about your Council, read the public reports we have issued, and view the service improvements your Council has agreed to make as a result of our investigations, as well as previous annual review letters.

### **Supporting complaint and service improvement**

In February, following a period of consultation, we launched the [Complaint Handling Code](#) for councils, setting out a clear process for responding to complaints effectively and fairly. It is aligned with the Code issued to housing authorities and landlords by the Housing Ombudsman Service and we encourage you to adopt the Code without undue delay. Twenty councils have volunteered to take part in an implementation pilot over the next two years that will develop further guidance and best practice.

The Code is issued to councils under our powers to provide guidance about good administrative practice. We expect councils to carefully consider the Code when developing policies and procedures and will begin considering it as part of our processes from April 2026 at the earliest.

The Code is considered good practice for all organisations we investigate (except where there are statutory complaint handling processes in place), and we may decide to issue it as guidance to other organisations in future.

Our successful complaint handling training programme continues to develop with new modules in Adult Social Care and Children's Services complaint handling available soon. All our courses include practical interactive workshops that help participants develop their complaint handling skills. We delivered 126 online workshops during the year, reaching more than 1,700 people. To find out more visit [www.lgo.org.uk/training](http://www.lgo.org.uk/training) or get in touch at [training@lgo.org.uk](mailto:training@lgo.org.uk).

We were pleased to deliver two online complaint handling courses to staff at Achieving for Children during the year. I welcome your Council's investment in good complaint handling training and trust the courses were useful to you.

Returning to the theme of continuous improvement, we recognise the importance of reflecting on our own performance. With that in mind I encourage you to share your view of our organisation via this survey: <https://www.smartsurvey.co.uk/s/ombudsman/>. Your responses will help us to assess our impact



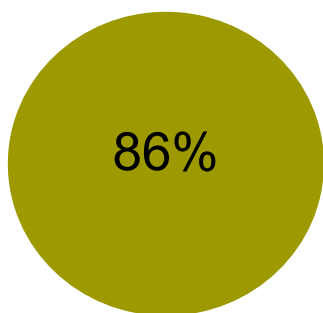
and improve our offer to you. We want to gather a range of views and welcome multiple responses from organisations, so please do share the link with relevant colleagues.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Amerdeep Somal', followed by a horizontal line.

Amerdeep Somal  
Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman  
Chair, Commission for Local Administration in England

### Complaints upheld



**86%** of complaints we investigated were upheld.

This compares to an average of **85%** in similar organisations.

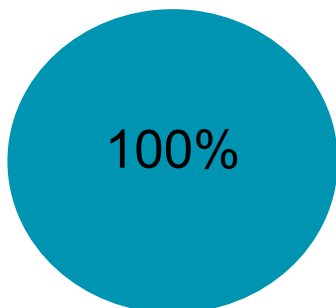
**12**  
upheld decisions

This is 6.2 upheld decisions per 100,000 residents.

The average for authorities of this type is 8.2 upheld decisions per 100,000 residents.

Statistics are based on a total of **14** investigations for the period between 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024

### Compliance with Ombudsman recommendations



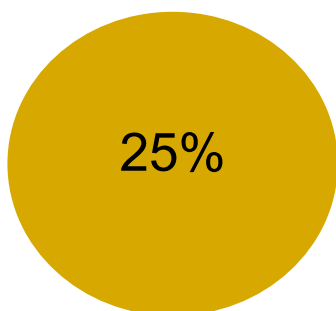
In **100%** of cases we were satisfied the organisation had successfully implemented our recommendations.

This compares to an average of **99%** in similar organisations.

Statistics are based on a total of **10** compliance outcomes for the period between 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024

- Failure to comply with our recommendations is rare. An organisation with a compliance rate below 100% should scrutinise those complaints where it failed to comply and identify any learning.

### Satisfactory remedy provided by the organisation



In **25%** of upheld cases we found the organisation had provided a satisfactory remedy before the complaint reached the Ombudsman.

This compares to an average of **12%** in similar organisations.

**3**  
satisfactory remedy decisions

Statistics are based on a total of **12** upheld decisions for the period between 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024

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KEY LEARNING SUMMARY FROM UPHELD AND PARTIALLY UPHELD CORPORATE COMPLAINTS at Stage 2 2023-24				
Service complained about	Outcome at S2	Complaint Summary	Learning/Issue needing addressing	Management response
<b>Adult Social Care - Corporate</b>				
Commissioning	Partially upheld	Believes that the Council's contracted advocacy service has not provided sufficient support under the Equality Act 2010 or addressed the issues regarding institutional and emotional abuse.	Communication & Monitoring of Processes	The advocacy service has implemented actions which included staff training and put in place a process to ensure open cases are reviewed regularly and communication is maintained with clients. Through contract meetings, the Council's Quality Assurance Team and Commissioning Team will continue to monitor the performance of the advocacy contractor to ensure these remain embedded within delivery of the advocacy services.
Teddington & Twickenham Locality Team	Partially upheld	The inadequate/lack of communication from the service regarding their parent's care, the lack of information given to them about their parent's care and the lack of their involvement in the decisions made regarding their parent's best interests.	Communication & Monitoring of Processes	The complaint highlighted how the Council's bureaucracy can be experienced by those seeking to support their loved ones. Whilst clear legal pathways must be followed, these can be slow and distressing for families. This has been discussed with the staff involved to ensure that they recognise the need to consider this in their interactions with family members and to respond in a proactive and sensitive way to limit, as far as possible, the impact of this on already difficult and stressful family situations. Effective communication is central to a successful support plan and where there is a family conflict this needs to be managed with great sensitivity and openness.
<b>CEX Group (Policy/Perf)</b>				
Climate Change and Sustainability	Partially upheld	Complaint about the handling of their application for energy efficiency works to be undertaken to their home as part of the Green Homes Grant Local Authority Delivery Scheme including: about the amount of time they have waited for improvements to be made to their property; the lack of clarity in the reasons that have been provided for not progressing improvements at property; and the poor communication and poor customer service received.	Communication & Statutory timelines	When carrying out future schemes of this nature, London Borough of Richmond upon Thames will ensure a better tracking of complaints from residents and ensure that clear expectations on customer service and responsiveness are set out as part of the commissioning of this work.

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<b>Children's (AFC) - Corporate</b>				
Permanency	Partially upheld	Complaint regarding their experience of the Special Guardian Team.	Process & procedural development.	The AfC Special Guardianship Team completed a guide that outlines the process involved in an assessment. It is to be made available to all applicants once it has been agreed that such an assessment is to take place. The service has undertaken training sessions to help improve performance further. The AfC Workforce Development Team aid the teams development of a language guide to be used during assessments of this nature.
Referral & assessment	Upheld	Dissatisfied with being given wrong information regarding their attendance as an advocate at core group meeting and rude attitude of member of staff	Communication & Process	Following this complaint, advice and guidance was provided to the social work teams and managers along with links to the guidance provided to parents/carers attending child protection conferences. Additionally, specific 1 to 1 training was given to the workers involved and the learning was shared with the whole service.
SEND	Partially upheld	Complaint regarding delays with the EHCP review process and the lack of educational provision outside of an establishment.	Communication & Process delays.	The Integrated Care Board (ICB) will provide greater clarity in its advice when considering funding of services by the Local Authority so that greater understanding of the statutory process that this is requested within is gained, along with consideration of the associated timescales the SEND service needs to work within. Greater collaboration between the ICB and SEND will be developed to include stronger communication channels.
SEND	Upheld	Complaint regarding breaches in EHCP annual review statutory duties and failure to provide therapy outlined in section F of EHCP.	Communication & Statutory timelines	A review of the existing communication processes and systems in place across the SEND Service and the Integrated Care Board (ICB) has taken place to ensure that independent providers are kept informed of when and whether provision needs to cease or continue in good time to prevent the communication failures experienced by this therapy provider. AfC continues to develop improvements in its responses and compliance regarding Annual Reviews, including procedural changes to ensure Coordinators prioritise the decision-making correctly, aided by the development of data reporting and termly meetings with school SENCos.

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SEND	Upheld	Complaint regarding a failure to secure Occupational Therapy Provision for child for several months, which is ongoing.	Provision of facilities, service or therapy	AfC and the Integrated Care Board (ICB) are reviewing whether the current process of funding individual packages of therapy for young people might be better used in increasing the capacity their contracts with local NHS providers to give greater control of how resources are deployed i.e.prioritising the statutory delivery of EHCP provision first before meeting the needs of other young people. SEND staff were reminded to ensure that they provide regular updates to parents and young people on the situation when there are issues in trying to provide a therapist who can give the provision required. AfC are also considering co-designing an escalation route with the ICB for both parties to follow when a referral to the ICB is made due to required provision remaining unallocated when there are no approved providers available.
Environment & Community Services				
Waste and Street Cleansing	Upheld	Complaint about poor standard of street cleaning in the road and the failure by the Council's contractor to properly respond to multiple service failures or why the pattern of underperformance was not picked up and acted upon by the contractor or the Council.	Impacts of delays and inaction	The Street Cleansing service will continue to work closely with the contractor to formally discuss cases that have caused issues, whatever the reason, with a view to understanding individual cases and to learn for the future. Officers are working with a contractor to integrate our system with their system, but there is still the potential for repeat problems to be missed until this work has been completed. Therefore, the service has looked at ways of establishing a weekly reporting system to flag repeat issues to the contract monitoring team.

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Service complained about	Outcome at S2	Complaint Summary	Learning/Issue needing addressing	Management response
Traffic and Parking Policy Team	Partially upheld	Raised various issues regarding dropped kerbs, markings for parking bays and signage	Communication & Process	There will be further scrutiny of the Engineering Group's procedures to improve the way parking consultations are managed in the future and ensure the service delivers on our commitments in responding to queries. The service will review how schemes are communicated internally to senior officers and Councillors for final approval to ensure appropriate decisions are made. In addition, there will be greater scrutiny of project procedures to ensure due process is being followed including the review and publication of drawings and communication of outcomes. The service will also explore amending the planning conditions so that property owners can be held responsible for removing the dropped kerbs when crossovers become redundant through the planning process and, give further consideration to the presentation of parking proposal drawings to scale or with dimensions shown.
Information and Planning Obligations Team	Partially upheld	Received an unhelpful response from the Council regarding historic Section 106 (S106) agreements to their property including the ambiguity of the response given within the S106 compliance letter and the impact of the case being placed under investigation with no timeline for resolution.	Communication & Process	The team have received training on how to operate within the corporate customer service standards framework in relation to their area of work. The team will be reminded of the importance to ensure actions and timeframes are communicated going forward.
<b>Finance</b>				
Council tax	Upheld	The delays experienced in closing their Council Tax account led to inappropriate recovery action being taken against them.	Accuracy of information and records held.	The service will provide clear reasoning in their responses to complainants when they are replying outside of the Council's complaint's procedure. When determining how to rectify any complaint, the service will give due consideration to any stress and anxiety the customer may have experienced, with an appropriate response given, which may or may not involve a financial remedy.

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Council Tax	Partially upheld	Complainant had been sent notices for non payment of Council Tax from enforcement agents on behalf of the Council for a property that they had never had any involvement with.	Accuracy of information and records held.	Council Tax Management have reviewed the process around cases returned by Enforcement Agents as "nulla bona", to ensure that appropriate adjustments are made regarding future action & impact. The process now includes a wider investigation to the facts and whether more detailed information may be required from Land Registry to aid that investigation to ensure that the correct details of laible parties are obtained.
<b>Housing &amp; Regeneration</b>				
Allocations and Provisions	Upheld	Complaint about the handling of the family's homelessness case, lack of engagement and communication from the service, and the severe impact on the mental and physical health of the whole family due to the temporary accommodation they have been in for several years.	Poor Customer Communications.	The Property Management Team will be reviewing engagement with clients to ensure that clients are kept adequately informed about their circumstances and housing options.
Assessment & Adaptation	Partially upheld	The handling of their housing register application and the impact this has had on them.	Empathetic customer support and communication	These assessments can be difficult and stressful for applicants, and manager has taken the opportunity to remind staff of the importance of undertaking this work with sensitivity whilst providing a service which is compassionate and treats all service users with respect and consideration.
Assessment & Adaptation	Partially upheld	Complaint regarding the handling of their homelessness application and the significant delay in processing it.	Delays & inaction	The Council has strengthened the Housing Register Assessment team in recent months and has engaged additional staffing resources to improve and reduce assessment times.
Homelessness Prevention & Solutions	Upheld	Complaint regarding the poor handling of their Housing Register application, which led to them being placed in the wrong housing queue.	Importance of data accuracy	The Council is working to upgrade its Housing IT system so that data input blocks can be implemented to ensure applications are placed on the correct housing queue. In the meantime, Housing staff will be issued with a reminder to ensure the correct housing queue code is entered when inputting a housing application.

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Homelessness Prevention & Solutions	Partially upheld	Complaint about the lack of responses to email contact, the lack of compassion and understanding for someone experiencing domestic abuse from Council officers, the excessive and unjustified wait times for decisions and the errors made which complainant advises put them at considerable risk.	Communication & Statutory timelines	The Housing IT system has been upgraded to ensure that details of a client's preferred method of contact is visible to all staff dealing with the case. The Council has also strengthened the housing service in recent months and engaged additional staffing resource to improve and reduce assessment times. Staff have been reminded that they need to be empathetic and understanding of a client's needs, particularly when they are vulnerable due to experiencing domestic abuse.
Housing Options	Partially upheld	Various issues with the handling of their homelessness	Empathetic customer support a	Staff will undergo appropriate training to ensure that the Issues around interviewing skills experienced by this client are not repeated. This is to ensure that a officers not only provide a service which supports clients going through difficult circumstances but is critically a service which is empathetic.