

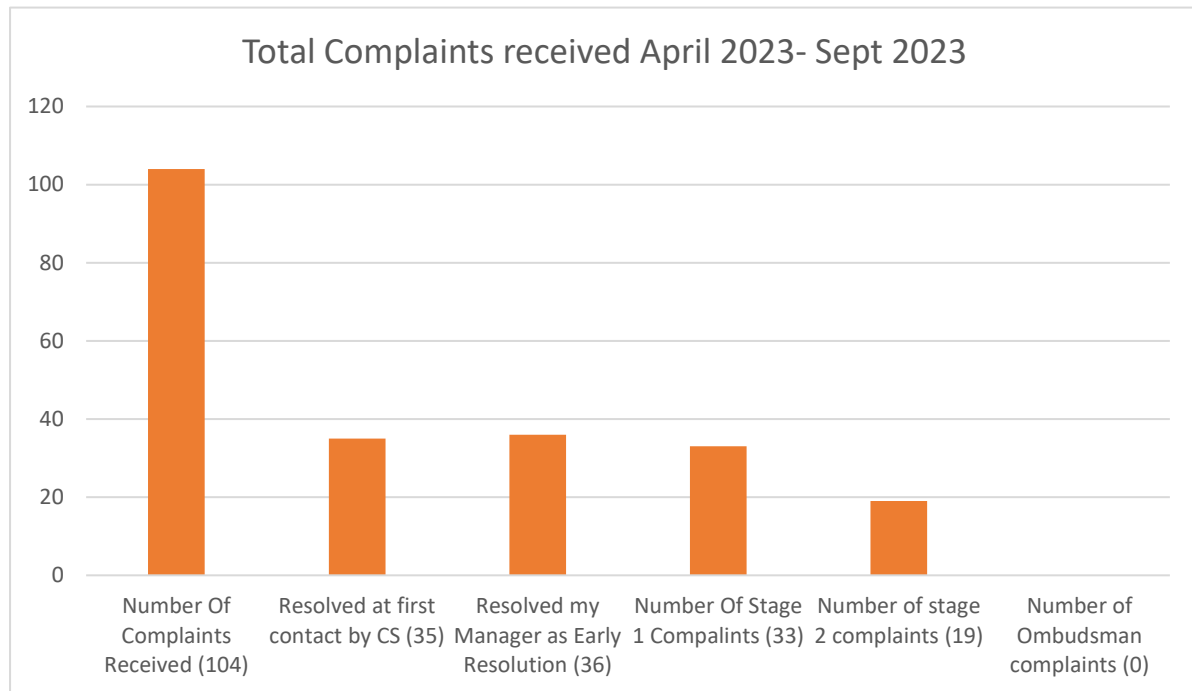
Bi-Annual Complaints Report April 2023 - September 2023

Introduction

The report summarises the Council's complaints performance during the 1st and 2nd quarter of 2023/2024 covering the period from 1st April 2023 to 30th September 2023.

The purpose of this report is to review the complaints received by the Council over a six-month period, looking at the statistical data, in order to provide information about complaint themes, trends and the effectiveness of our current complaint's procedure.

The Overall Picture



- The number of complaints received between 1st April 2023 to 30th Sept 2023 was 104
- 35 complaints were resolved at first point of contact by the Customer Service team which is an increase from 21 in the previous 6 month period.
- 36 complaints were resolved by managers as Early Resolution which is an increase from 30 in the previous 6 month period
- 33 complaints went through the formal complaints process and were investigated as Stage 1 complaints which is down from 42 in the previous 6 month period.
- 19 complaints were escalated to Stage 2
- 0 complaints were received by the Ombudsman

Monthly Breakdown for all complaints

Month	Number Received	Resolved By Customer Services (Early Resolution)	Resolved By Manager (Early Resolution)	Percentage (Early Resolution)	Stage 1 Received
Apr 23	12	5	3	67%	4
May 23	25	12	9	84%	4
June 23	19	4	8	63%	7
July 23	18	6	8	77%	4
Aug 23	21	3	5	38%	13
Sept 23	9	5	3	88%	1
Total	104	35	36	68%	33

The chart above shows the breakdown of how each complaint was handled. Overall, 68% of the complaints received were dealt with either by customer services or by early resolution without the need for an investigation and formal response. This is a much more effective, efficient and customer focused method of resolving customer complaints.

The below figures give a breakdown of the early resolution figures and the departments responsible.

Department	Number of complaints that were dealt with as Early resolution
ASB / Selective licensing	1
Benefits	2
Communications	1
Corporate Assets	8
Waste	12
Environmental Health	1
Electoral services	1
Housing	5
Planning	1
Revenues	4
Total Resolved by Early Resolution	36

The chart below shows the stage 1 complaint comparison from April – Sept 2022 and the current reporting period Q1 and Q2 (Apr 23-Sept 23) to show a more direct comparison between months.

April – Sept 2022**April – Sept 2023**

Month	Stage 1 complaints received	Month	Stage 1 complaints received
Apr 22	14	Apr 23	4
May 22	12	May 23	4
Jun 22	8	Jun 23	7
July 22	5	July 23	4
Aug 22	9	Aug 23	13
Sept 22	9	Sept 23	1
Total	57	Total	33

The chart below shows the stage 1 complaint comparison from Q3 and Q4 (Oct 22-Mar 23) to show a comparison with the previous reporting period.

**Previous reporting 6 months
Oct 22- Mar 2023****Current reporting 6 months
Apr – Sept 2023**

Month	Stage 1 complaints received	Month	Stage 1 complaints received
Oct 22	6	Apr 23	4
Nov 22	6	May 23	4
Dec 22	7	Jun 23	7
Jan 23	6	July 23	4
Feb 23	11	Aug 23	13
Mar 23	6	Sept 23	1
Total	42	Total	33

Stage 1 complaints have shown a decline, this is in part due to the proactive approach of early resolution where complaints are handled quickly eliminating the need for formal responses.

The chart below illustrates a direct comparison of Stage 2 complaints between April to September 2022 and the current reporting period encompassing Q1 and Q2 (April 23 to September 23).

April – Sept 2022**April – Sept 2023**

Month	Stage 2 complaints received	Month	Stage 2 complaints received
Apr 22	4	Apr 23	2
May 22	2	May 23	2
Jun 22	3	Jun 23	5
July 22	0	July 23	1
Aug 22	3	Aug 23	3
Sept 22	2	Sept 23	6
Total	14	Total	19

The chart below shows the stage 2 complaint comparison from Q3 and Q4 (Oct 22-Mar 23) to show a comparison with the previous reporting period.

Oct 2022 – March 2023

April 2023 - Sept 2023

Month	Stage 2 complaints received	Month	Stage 2 complaints received
Oct 22	6	Apr 23	2
Nov 22	6	May 23	2
Dec 22	7	Jun 23	5
Jan 23	0	July 23	1
Feb 23	3	Aug 23	3
Mar 23	3	Sept 23	6
Total	25	Total	28

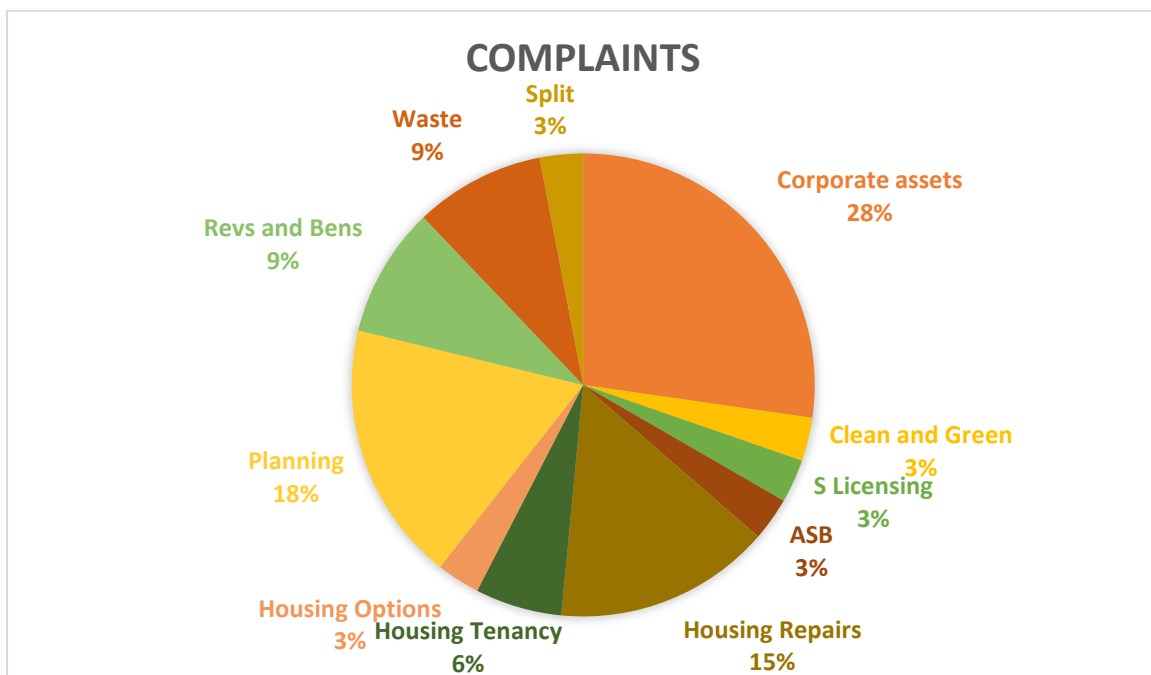
The comparison charts above show an increase in Stage 2 complaints. Whilst this is disappointing analysis shows this is primarily because the customer is unhappy with the stage 1 response. There are two main reason for this:

- The complainant believes their complaint should be upheld and the investigating manager rightly disagrees
- Ineffective investigation at stage 1

We recognise we will always receive un justified complaints so there is very little that can be done about the first reason. We are therefore focusing our efforts on better stage 1 complaints handling. Key managers/service areas have received 1:1 face to face training and all managers across the Council have completed our E learning Complaints Handling and investigation training.

Departmental Breakdown

The chart below shows all Stage 1 complaints received by each department.



Multi-faceted complaint

There was one complaint which was dealt with via the Environmental Health, Planning, Corporate assets, and legal team as it was a multi-faceted complaint. All other complaints appear in the departmental breakdowns below.

Law and Democracy

Area: Clean and Green & Corporate Assets

Stage 1 Complaints – 10 total

Area	Category	Overview	Upheld
Clean and Green	Green Space, lack of action	Overgrown green area, lack of maintenance	1x Not Upheld
Corporate Assets	Allotments, lack of action	Failure to respond to emails, maintenance issues, failure to provide information. Repeated requests for overgrown trees to be cut back.	1x Upheld 1x Upheld
Corporate Assets	Cemeteries condition of cemetery	General Untidiness Uncut Grass Vermin and rubbish/ closed toilets Damage to grave by strimmer	1x Not Upheld 1x Upheld 1x Upheld 1x Not Upheld
Corporate Assets	Parking	Permit system Car parking signage	1x Not Upheld 1x Not Upheld
Corporate Assets	Council Building	Building alarm & light issue	1x Not Upheld

Stage 2 Complaints – Total 2

Area	Category	Overview	Upheld
Corporate Assets	Allotment – Lack of Action	Unhappy with Level 1 Response	Not Upheld
Corporate Assets	Allotments lack of action– Overgrown Trees	Unhappy with Level 1 Response	Upheld – Maintenance Work to be Done
Corporate Assets	Condition of Cemetery	Unhappy with Level 1 Response	Upheld – Maintenance Work to be Done

Corporate Assets Manager – Commentary

A very busy first half of the year. Seasonal challenges in a challenging growing season have meant vegetation growing throughout and not having a prolonged dry period to stop growth.

Complaints in some part were a perception of maintenance standards, rather than a lack of maintenance.

Complaints relating to the Allotments were based on neighbours wishes and historic maintenance rather than any planned maintenance. Whilst the complainant had been contacted and given a guide as to when work would be carried out, it was always weather and resource based. The difficulty in getting a subcontractor to commit was an initial problem. When work was completed as originally requested, the expectation extended to more work required to close out the complaint.

The cemetery grass cutting was always within maintenance levels however at times the grass grew faster than the maintenance could be carried out. This led to a perception of lack of maintenance.

The toilets/facilities were addressed as part of discussions and a plan in place in agreement with the complainant.

Car parking issues relate to the regular subjects.

Area: Selective Licensing / Private Sector Housing

Stage 1 Complaints – Total 1

Area	Category	Overview	Upheld
Selective Licensing / Private Sector Housing	State of private housing, lack of support.	Concerns regarding house state of repair and landlady issues.	1x Not Upheld

Stage 2 Complaints – Total 1

Area	Category	Overview	Upheld
Selective Licensing / Private Sector Housing	State of private housing , lack of Support	Unhappy with Level 1 Response	Not Upheld

Regulatory Services Manager Commentary

Upon investigation it was that the team were supporting the private tenant well, The disrepair items reported have and continue to be tackled with the property owner. There were no record of telephone calls being ignored as alleged, in fact officers have been proactive in their approach.

Officers from the Council have provided support and advice to the occupier on the alleged harassment and no evidence has been forthcoming.

The discretionary housing payment application was not successful as the criteria were not met. An offer has been made to review this if she believes it is not correct. Officers have offered to continue to assist and support the resident.

Area: ASB

Stage 1 Complaints – Total 1

Area	Category	Overview	Upheld
Anti-Social Behaviour	Handling ASB case issue	Unhappy with ASB investigation and outcome.	1x Not Upheld

Community Safety and Wellbeing Manager Commentary

The resident was complaining about issues regarding his neighbour that were either historic and with the length of time passed, it would not have been proportionate to take action, this was explained to the customer at the time, therefore the complaint was not upheld.

Built Environment

Area: Housing Options

Stage 1 Complaints – Total 1

Area	Category	Overview	Upheld
Housing Options	Housing waiting list issue	Allegations of negligence in banding and allocation of properties.	1x Not Upheld

Area: Housing Repairs

Stage 1 Complaints – Total 5

Area	Category	Overview	Upheld
Housing Repairs	Staff Attitude	Alleged Rudeness	1x Not Upheld
Housing Repairs	Delays in getting works completed.	Failure of service by contractor	2x Not Upheld
	Missed appointment	Failure of service by contractor	1X Upheld
Housing Repairs	Outstanding repairs issues, lack of action	Lack of communication	1x Upheld

Area: Tenancy

Stage 1 Complaints – Total 2

Area	Category	Overview	Upheld
Housing Tenancy	Property issues	Overgrown Grass / Vegetation around property	1x Upheld
Housing Tenancy	ASB issues in property	Wants to move, unaware of longstanding ASB issues in area.	1x Not Upheld

Stage 2 Complaints – Total 6

Area	Category	Overview	Upheld
Housing Tenancy	ASB multiple issues	Unhappy with Level 1 Response	Not Upheld
Housing Tenancy	Garden- request for turfing of garden	Unhappy with Level 1 Response	Not upheld
Housing Tenancy	Lack of Support- Allegations of negligence in banding and allocation of properties.	Unhappy with Level 1 Response	Not Upheld
Housing Tenancy	ASB- Issues with property	Unhappy with Level 1 Response	Partially Upheld

Area	Category	Overview	Upheld
Housing Options & Repairs	Lack of Support or Communication	Unhappy with Level 1 Response	Upheld – Compensation Offered
Housing Repairs	Lack of Communication/ outstanding repairs issues	Unhappy with Level 1 Response	On-Going

Housing Manager - Commentary

There has been a significant reduction in the total number of complaints made against all sections of the Housing Department. The number of complaints for the same period last year has reduced from 25 in 2022 to 8 in 2023.

The number of stage one complaints that were upheld was three, two of which were complaints relating to the delivery of service from our contractors and one was a complaint in which the team did not keep the tenant fully informed on the status of a repair job.

The number of stage two complaints totalled six. Four of these were not upheld and an additional one partly upheld and the remaining one fully upheld. The reason for the partly and fully upheld complaints was that information not available during stage one was presented at stage two altering the original findings.

Area: Planning

Stage 1 Complaints – Total 6

Area	Category	Overview	Upheld
Planning	Tree issues	Overgrown Tree , not our land	3x Not Upheld
Planning	Planning Application- Differing officer opinions Planning applications	Permission Refused	1x Not Upheld
		Delays in Decision	1x Not Upheld
		Objections to planning application.	1x Not Upheld

Stage 2 Complaints – Total 4

Area	Category	Overview	Upheld
Planning	Enforcement / Untidy Site/ overgrown tree	Unhappy with Level 1 Response	Not Upheld
Planning	Overgrown Trees- not our land	Unhappy with Level 1 Response	Not Upheld
Planning	Permission Refused	Unhappy with Level 1 Response	Not Upheld
Planning	Objections to planning application	Unhappy with Level 1 Response	Not Upheld

Planning Policy and Development Manager – Commentary

Given the nature of the Planning profession, complaints will be received when applicants are aggrieved with the outcomes and decisions that are being made by the Council. Two of the complaints received were relating to applicants being unhappy with the Council's refusal decision. When the Council receives proposals that are initially unsupportable, they will always work with the applicant in an attempt to amend the proposal to be supportable, and this takes time, however sometimes applicants do not want to change their proposals to the degree that the Council requires, hence why some proposals are ultimately refused.

A further complaint was received in relation to a planning proposal that the neighbour did not agree with. The suggestion was that the Council should not have allowed the proposal to be submitted due to legal covenants on the land. As with any proposal that is submitted, the Council will always assess it based on what has been submitted, and legal covenants on a piece of land are not necessarily material considerations when assessing proposals.

The three other complaints received were in relation to land ownership and trees / leaves causing a nuisance, a number of site visits were made to check the trees' structure and safety. In summary, the trees were not deemed an imminent safety hazard, and were not situated on Council land and therefore not the responsibility of the Council. Details were provided of the current landowners and passed onto the complainants.

Finance

Area: Revenues and Benefits

Stage 1 Complaints – Total 3

Area	Category	Overview	Upheld
Recovery	Recovery	Alleged Lack of Contact / Warning/summons	1x Not Upheld
	Bailiff issue	Incorrect Information Held	1x Upheld
Revenues	Revenues wrong information given	Staff Attitude / Lack of Support	1x Upheld

Stage 2 Complaints – Total 1

Area	Category	Overview	Upheld
Recovery	Incorrect Information Held/ Bailiff issue	Unhappy with Level 1 Offer of Compensation	Upheld – Additional Offer made

Revenues and Benefits Manager - Commentary

The Revenues and Benefits Team deal with a large volume of customer contacts and enquiries. The Senior Officers try to resolve complaints as quickly as possible to ensure we are delivering the best service to our customers.

I have reviewed all the complaints received within the last 6 months and I am satisfied that we have resolved any concerns or training issues identified from the outcome of upheld complaints.

Waste

Area: Waste

Stage 1 Complaints – Total 3

Area	Category	Overview	Upheld
Waste	Large bin assessment issues	Unhappy with process	2x Not Upheld
		Alleged wrong information given about bin assessment	
Waste	Collection Issues	Alleged staff Rudeness	1x Not Upheld

Stage 2 Complaints – Total 3

Area	Category	Overview	Upheld
Waste	Staff Rudeness, alleged swearing	Unhappy with Stage 1 Response	Not Upheld
Waste	Treatment by Operatives- alleged staff rudeness	Unhappy with Stage 1 Response	Not Upheld
Waste	Larger Bin Assessment- unhappy with process.	Unhappy with Stage 1 Response	Not Upheld

Waste Manager – Commentary

We have number of requests for the large bin assessments each week. There is a process in place, where the crews assess the extra waste being presented for a period of 6 weeks to ensure that they are no recyclables in their domestic waste and the resident is recycling correctly. The assessment process only works if the resident complies. If households are not willing to present their waste for the 6-week assessment, we are unable to determine whether they are require for a large bin or not, in the complaints listed above, the process was explained to the customers but they were unwilling to present for the 6 week period, this lead to complaints being made about staff behaviour which after investigation, were found to be unjustified.

Complaints Review Meetings

The Customer Service Improvement team together with the Compliance and Policy Officer conduct a monthly review of complaints, aiming to identify recurring themes and emerging trends. This process is followed by monthly Complaints Review Meetings involving Service Area Managers who have recently handled complaints.

Every complaint is taken seriously, examining the reasons behind each one, extracting valuable lessons, and making sure we don't repeat the same mistakes. Response times are closely tracked as illustrated in the table below:

Month	Stage 1 Complaints (Target 10 days)	Stage 2 Complaints (Target 20 days)
April 23	11	18.5
May 23	5	11
June 23	11	17
July 23	5	20
Aug 23	7.5	10
Sept 23	6	18

Over this reporting period, there have been a few occasions where our response times did not meet our established targets. These delays are not attributable to a single cause; they may stem from varying workloads and the time-intensive nature of certain investigations.

To address these challenges, The Chief Executive attends the monthly complaints review meetings to improve participation and reduce response times in the future. As a result of this we have seen an increase in early resolutions, which is now a focal point for the Chief Executive. This is reflected in the significantly lower Stage 1 complaints figures compared to previous reporting periods.

Complaints Surveys

We continue to survey our customers that have submitted a complaint. This survey involves a comprehensive set of questions aimed at gauging customer satisfaction levels regarding the resolution of their complaint.

Between October March 2023 and September 2023, a total of twenty-two customers were surveyed, see the survey results below:

Treated Fairly

100% of customers surveyed said they were treated fairly during their complaint (22/22). This has remained consistent with the previous biannual report.



Complaint Outcome

86% customers surveyed were satisfied with the outcome to their complaint (19/22). This has improved from 80% on the previous biannual report.



Helpful and Polite

100% customers surveyed felt that staff were helpful and polite during their complaint (22/22). This has remained consistent from the previous biannual report.



Ease of complaint process

91% of customers surveyed were satisfied with how easy it was to make a complaint (20/22)



Handling of their complaint

95% of customers surveyed felt satisfied with the handling of their complaint (21/22). This has slightly dropped by 1% from previous biannual report.



Positive Comments

Between April 2023 and September 2023 there were 409 positive feedback, compliments and comments received.

This is an increase from 346 in the previous reporting period.

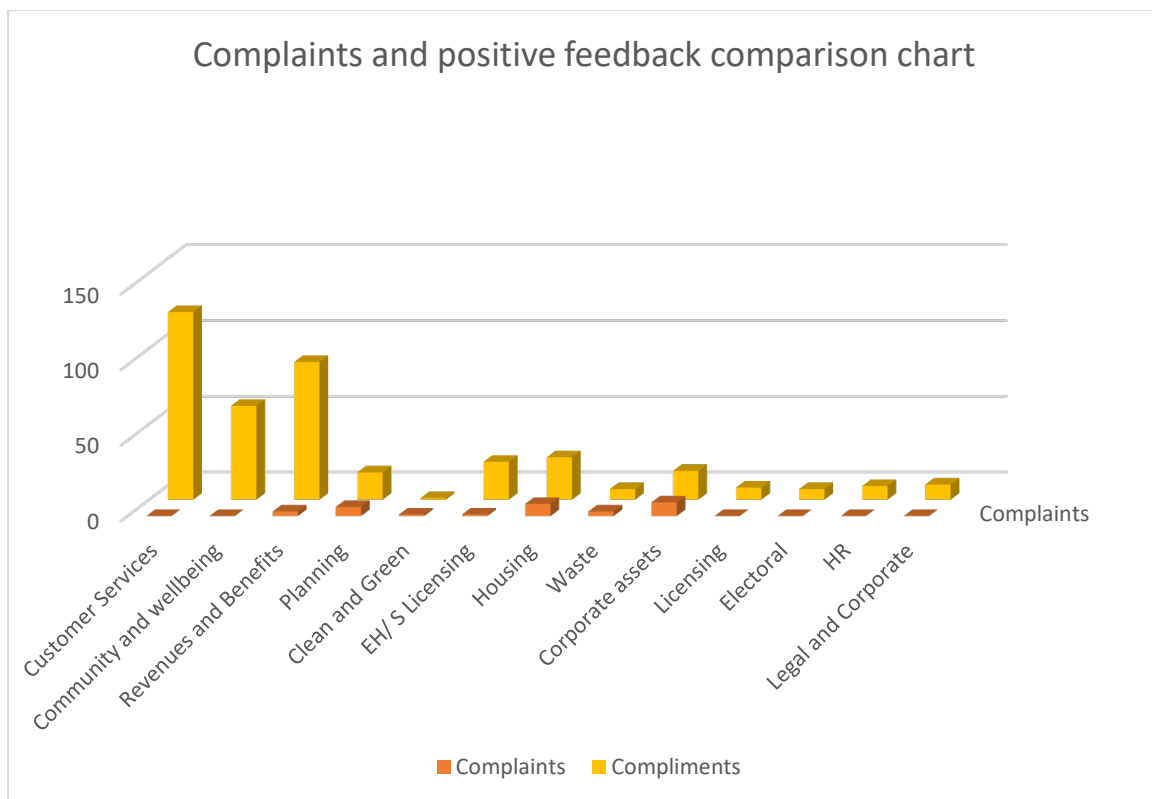
The Customer Services team (124) and the Revenues and Benefits team (91) received the highest amount of positive feedback due to the frontline nature of their services and their proactive participation in surveying customers.

Whenever we receive positive feedback, it is documented in a register.

These positive comments now form part of the complaints review meetings to provide balance.

The chart following shows the positive feedback received in comparison to the number of complaints for each department.

It illustrates that our service areas consistently receive a significantly higher amount of positive feedback than complaints.



The following departments received positive feedback and no complaints.

Customer services	124 Positive feedback comments
Community and Wellbeing	62 Positive feedback comments
Electoral Services	7 Positive feedback comments
Legal and corporate	10 Positive feedback comments
Licensing	8 Positive feedback comment

Examples of positive feedback received.

Community & Wellbeing

Walking Hockey is a highlight of my week. I have loved the sessions

Environmental Health

The Officer was excellent & professional. He listened to me & took action and his communication was great.

Corporate Assets

The Customer wanted to let the Cemetery Officers know what a fantastic job they did with the grave - she said it all looked lovely and so neat and she was so grateful to them for everything.



Compliance

Amazing service, really quick, clear and provided me with all I asked in a straightforward format. Thank you very much!

Housing Options

Thank you so much for all of your help and support throughout this process. I cannot put into words the immense relief at having this wonderful home and a secure tenancy. A big thank you once again to you and your colleagues.