



Cheshire West and Chester Council

Corporate Complaints and Compliments

Annual Report
2023 – 2024

1. Introduction

This report provides information about the Council's handling of corporate complaints and compliments received during the period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024. In particular:

- Corporate Complaints (stage 1 and stage 2) and Compliments received by Cheshire West and Chester Council.
- Complaints received and decided by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.

The report gives details of the Council, and service-level, performance against our timescales for complaint handling at stage 1 and 2. It also outlines what improvements or revisions to services have been planned or implemented following our analysis of feedback from customers through the complaints and compliments processes.

The Council's Customer team, part of the Companies, Compliance and Assurance service within the Governance Directorate, was responsible for the council-wide coordination of complaints and compliments during this period. All Council services are responsible for the triage, investigation and responses to complaints and compliments. They must also satisfy themselves that any commissioned providers have also dealt with them appropriately and in line with any contractual or statutory requirements.

The Council has a 2-stage complaints process. Customers can raise a complaint via an online contact form, by email, post or via the telephone. Other options are available for customers requiring additional support.

All complaints are entered onto the Council's complaints system and are considered 'contact' at this stage. Customers have the option to pick the service they wish to complain about from a list of high-volume 'workspaces', which are managed by services. They are named to be more easily identifiable to customers e.g. 'Roads' rather than highways. If the customer is unsure, or the service area does not have a workspace because usually it does not receive a high-volume of contact then they select 'Any Other Service'. The Customer team coordinates responses to these with its network of 'GO TO' contacts who do not have their own workspace.

The service is expected to contact the customer to resolve the issue reported at stage 1 within 5 working days, usually by way of a 'triage' telephone call or visit. Where the customer is not contacted, the service must record a reason why.

After the 'triage' contact the service must record the outcome as one of the following:

- Formal complaint (provide a written answer within 20 working days)
- Urgent complaint (provide a written answer within 5 working days)
- Logged on Confirm – Service Request (our system for logging and managing most environmental reports)
- Routine business – request for service (for logging non-environmental reports)
- Routine business – early intervention (where the service can resolve the complaint at an early stage)
- Alternative path (where an exemption applies, or where there is a more appropriate right of appeal)

- Withdrawn by customer (the customer has indicated they do not wish to progress their complaint or, rarely, where this is a duplicate submission from the customer, or they are requesting escalation (so the original complaint record will be updated instead))

Only contact received and progressed at this stage as either a 'Formal' or 'Urgent' complaint is considered as a complaint for reporting purposes. Stage 1 complaints should usually be answered by a team leader or service manager within the service complained about.

Following their stage 1 complaint response, Customers may escalate their complaint for consideration at stage 2. This must be submitted within 20 working days of receipt of their stage 1 response. Very occasionally a complaint may be accepted at stage 2 without there being a stage 1 response, for example where there has already been extensive dialogue with the Council about the issue.

All requests for stage 2 are considered by the Customer team, who will decide whether the complainant has provided sufficient grounds to escalate the complaint e.g. evidence of outstanding personal injustice or insufficient remedy offer. The customer will be kept informed of the outcome of their stage 2 request, and either progress to the stage 2 investigation or be signposted to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman. The Council does not consider general dissatisfaction with the outcome of a complaint as grounds for escalation. The customer is expected to evidence where there is remaining fault or injustice that they consider has not been resolved satisfactorily.

For stage 2 complaints, a senior manager within the service must review the original stage 1 investigation and draft a response. The Customer team review all drafts at this stage and provide advice and support to services about the complaints process and reasonable outcomes or remedies to complaints.

All customers have a right of appeal to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman, although the Ombudsman will usually expect the customer's complaint to have completed the Council's complaints process before reviewing it.

All compliments are acknowledged at the point of submission and referred to the relevant service, where the Director or senior manager will decide whether a further response is necessary.

There are exemptions within the policy for some types of complaints. See the Council's published [Corporate Complaints Policy](#) for full details.

1.1. The objectives of this report are to:

- Be open and transparent about the Council's complaints and compliments handling.
- Produce an annual corporate complaints and compliments report to align with our separate statutory annual reporting requirements for Adults and Children's social care complaints.
- Provide clear and concise comparative data on complaints and compliments, broken down by service area and/or workspace.
- Use this customer feedback to take remedial actions, identify service improvements and demonstrate learning and improved practices and processes from these.

1.2. Key Performance Indicators

The Council had 2 indicators in the Council's Performance Management Framework for 2023/24:

- 6.13 Percentage of complaints that have been progressed to a formal Stage 1 are answered within 20 working days

This measure is important as it will show which services are compliant with the formal complaint deadlines and ensure effective Customer Service.

Ensuring compliance will also reduce demands on services with escalated cases. It also demonstrates that most contact received is **resolved** before progressing to a formal complaint.

- Percentage of corporate complaints that have been accepted as a formal Stage 2 that are answered within 40 working days.

Due to the timescale for reporting on complaints the Council reports in arrears covering 4 periods:

- Period 1 April-July 2023
- Period 2 August-September 2023
- Period 3 October-November 2023
- Period 4 December 2023-March 2024

The Council continues to maintain an ambitious target for compliance with complaints to highlight the value it places on ensuring a good customer experience and learning from complaints. 2023/24 targets were:

Indicator	PERIOD 1 2023/24	PERIOD 2 2023/24	PERIOD 3 2023/24	PERIOD 4 2023/24	2023/24	ACTUAL PERFORMANCE 2023/24
6.13 Percentage of complaints that have been progressed to a formal Stage 1 are answered within 20 working days	98%	99%	99%	99%	99%	66%
6.23 Percentage of corporate complaints that have	98%	98%	98%	98%	98%	89%

Indicator	PERIOD 1 2023/24	PERIOD 2 2023/24	PERIOD 3 2023/24	PERIOD 4 2023/24	2023/24	ACTUAL PERFORMANCE 2023/24
been accepted as a formal Stage 2 that are answered within 40 working days.						

2. PERFORMANCE ACTIVITY 2023/4

2.1. Stage 1 Corporate Complaints

A total of **2325** contacts were received this year. Of these **172** formal complaints were progressed. There were **0** complaints marked as urgent.

Of the remaining representations:

- **409** were Logged on Confirm – Service Request.
- **809** were Routine business – request for service (for logging non-environmental reports).
- **750** were Routine business – early intervention.
- **141** were Alternative path (where an exemption applies, where there is a more appropriate right of appeal etc).
- **43** were Withdrawn by customer.
- **1** was escalated straight to stage 2.

2.2. Comparison with Previous Years

Table 1 shows the number of contacts and progressed complaints for 2023/24 compared with the previous 2 years. The rate of complaints progressed formally remains steady at 7% despite a drop in total contact via the complaints form by 17%. This decrease in contact could be because of improved information on our website signposting customers to the correct service request forms, reducing the number of customers resorting to the ‘complaint’ form.

Table 1: Total number of contacts received and complaints progressed

Year	Total Contact	Contact progressed as a formal or urgent complaint	% of contact becoming a complaint
2023-2024	2325	172	7%
2022-2023	2812	205	7%
2021-2022	2210	175	8%

Our Customer Experience Leads arrived in post in September/October 2023 and their targeted support to services could be the cause of this reduced contact.

2.3. Complaint Outcomes – Stage 1

Table 2 below shows the outcomes of the **172** complaints investigated.

Table 2 - Outcomes and comparisons with previous years

Year	Upheld	Partially upheld	Not upheld	Not known/Blank	Total
2023-2024	71	38	63	0	172
2022-2023	74	41	76	14	205
2021-2022	69	20	79	7	175

The percentage of cases with an upheld outcome has increased by 5% on the previous year, despite the number of formal complaints reducing by 16%. An increase in upholding complaints could demonstrate improved complaints handling, with services keen to recognise and resolve fault to prevent further escalation through the complaint process.

2.4. Breakdown of contact received by Service Area

Table 3 – Breakdown of contact by workspace

Service Area	2021-22	% of contact	2022-23	% of contact	2023/24	% of contact
Adult social care	17	0.8	3	0.11	14	0.6
Any other service	80	3.6	169	6.01	112	4.8
Arts, museums and events	6	0.3	1	0.04	2	0.1
Benefits	46	2.1	55	1.96	25	1.1
Blue badge scheme	4	0.2	8	0.28	5	0.2
Building control and regulations	9	0.4	11	0.39	11	0.5
Bus passes and concessionary travel	5	0.2	5	0.18	0	0
Cemetery services	11	0.5	18	0.64	20	0.9
Children social care	13	0.6	31	1.10	9	0.4
Client Finance	0	-	2	0.07	14	0.6
Commissioning people	2	0.1	16	0.57	5	0.2
Commissioned school transport	0	-	5	0.18	24	1
Community Safety	0	0	0	0	7	0.3
Council property	11	0.5	9	0.32	11	0.5

Service Area	2021-22	% of contact	2022-23	% of contact	2023/24	% of contact
Council tax	104	4.7	240	8.53	189	8.1
Countryside and green spaces	13	0.6	9	0.32	5	0.2
Dog fouling and strays	3	0.1	7	0.25	1	0.04
Elections and voting	5	0.2	8	0.28	4	0.17
Early Help (Parenting, Domestic Abuse, TAF, Youth Service, Young People's Service)	0	0	0	0	1	0.04
Environmental health	45	2.0	54	1.92	56	2.41
Events	0	0	0	0	4	0.17
Footpaths and rights of way	20	0.9	0	2.17	0	0
Grass cutting	71	3.2	61	3.38	52	2.24
Housing Services	70	3.2	95	0.11	98	4.22
Libraries	6	0.3	3	0.64	10	0.43
Licensing	20	0.9	18	3.91	23	0.99
Parking including Park and Ride	130	5.9	110	0.21	140	6
Parks and gardens	8	0.4	6	2.42	5	0.22
Planning	62	2.8	68	0.25	56	2.41
Plans and policies	3	0.1	7	0.43	0	0
Public rights of way	6	0.3	12	0.07	23	0.99
Registration services (births, death, marriage and civil partnerships)	7	0.3	2	9.85	2	0.09
Roads	255	11.5	277	3.41	408	17.55
Schools (admissions, transport, SEN)	50	2.3	96	0.32	124	5.33
Staff conduct			5	0.18	3	0.12
Street cleaning	45	2.0	60	2.13	70	3.01
Street lighting	15	0.7	18	0.64	20	0.86
Trading standards	4	0.2	7	0.25	4	0.17
Transport (Strategy, Buses & Bus Passes (except schools), Bus Stops, Active Travel, Rail)	0	-	2	0.07	29	1.25
Transport and travel including Park and Ride	12	0.5	53	1.89	See Parking (incl Park and Ride)	
Trees, woods and hedges	39	1.8	43	1.53	54	2.32
Waste and recycling (waste collection, recycling, household)	1013	45.8	1217	43.28	685	29.46

Service Area	2021-22	% of contact	2022-23	% of contact	2023/24	% of contact
waste and recycling centres)						
Total	2210	100	2812	100	2325	100

TABLE 4 Top 10 services contacted.

	Top 10 services receiving contact 2021-22	Top 10 services receiving contact 2022-23	Top 10 services receiving contact 2023-24	Position on previous year
1.	Waste and recycling (waste collection, recycling, household waste and recycling centres)	Waste and recycling (waste collection, recycling, household waste and recycling centres)	Waste and recycling (waste collection, recycling, household waste and recycling centres)	No change
2.	Roads	Roads and footways	Roads and footways	No change
3.	Parking including Park and Ride	Council tax	Council tax	No change
4.	Council tax	Any other service	Schools (admissions, transport, SEN)	Up 2
5.	Any other service	Parking	Any other service	Down 1
6.	Grass cutting	Schools (admissions, transport, SEN)	Housing Services	Up 1
7.	Housing Services	Housing Services	Parking	Down 2
8.	Planning	Planning	Street cleaning	Up 2
9.	Schools (admissions, transport, SEN)	Grass cutting	Planning	Down 1
10	Benefits	Street cleaning	Environmental health	Up 2

Table 4 shows that there has been little change to the ranking of services most contacted between 2021-2024. As expected, many of the services most contacted provide environmental services and this is most likely due to customers regarding what the Council would consider a first contact service request as a complaint e.g. a first report of a missed bin, littering etc. However, some services, though still in the top 10, have reduced their volumes and share of overall customer contact significantly. For example, waste contact via the complaint form has reduced by 44% (leading to a reduction in overall share of contact by 14%).

Conversely however, contact about roads has increased by 47% (and the overall share of contact by 14%). This could be due to the service policy of 'managed decline' of assets inevitably leading to an increase in complaints.

2.5. Breakdown of contact received by Service Area that progressed as a formal complaint

Table 5 shows the breakdown of formal complaints by workspace.

Service	Count of stage 1 complaints 2023-2024
Schools (admissions, transport, SEN)	66
Waste and recycling (waste collection, recycling, household waste and recycling centres)	39
Planning	20
Any other service	13
Client finance	8
Cemetery services	5
Roads and footways	3
Adult social care	3
Public rights of way	2
Housing Services	2
Environmental health	2
Trees, woods and hedges	1
Street cleaning	1
Parking	1
Building control and regulations	1
Transport (Strategy, Buses & Bus Passes (except schools), Bus Stops, Active Travel, Rail)	1
Council tax	1
Children social care	1
Countryside and green spaces	1
Benefits	1
Grand Total	172

2.6. Complaint Response Times

Table 6 shows the percentage of complaints that were answered within the stage 1 deadline of 20 working days. Compliance this year has shown a small but welcome improvement on the previous year but is still far short of our ambitious target of 99%.

Table 6

Year	Stage 1 Complaints	Stage 1 Complaints responded to within 0-20 Working Days	
		Number	Percentage
	Number	Number	Percentage

2023/24	172	113	65.69%
2022/23	205	131	63.90%
2021/22	176	122	69.32%

3. Stage 2 Corporate Complaints

In 2023/24 the Council received 77 requests for escalation to stage 2 of its corporate complaint process. The Council refused 12 of these and accepted 65. 58 of them were answered within 40 working days, a compliance rate of 89%. This is a significant improvement on the previous year, despite the volume of stage 2 complaints increasing by 59%. Whilst the volume of stage 2 complaints is low, we must recognise the impact of undertaking a stage 2 investigation, particularly when complex, on the service.

Table 7

Year	Stage 2 Complaints	Stage 2 Complaints responded to within 0-40 Working Days	
	Number	Number	Percentage
2023/24	65	58	89%
2022/23	41	24	58.54%
2021/22	39	27	69.23%

4. Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO)

The Ombudsman reports on local authority figures based on the number of cases it receives in the reporting year; the number of decisions it makes in the reporting year (which may include cases ongoing from the previous year) and the Council's compliance with any recommendations.

In 2023-2024 the Ombudsman:

- Received 76 complaints (an increase of 8.5% on the previous year)
- Made decisions on 77 complaints (an increase of 13% on the previous year)
- Upheld 13 complaints (an increase of 62.5%)

Table 8 shows the breakdown of **upheld** complaints by service compared to the previous year. There has been a significant increase in complaints against Education and Children's Services. These concerned:

- 2 Children's Social Care Complaints
- 1 Education complaint about alternative provision
- 3 Education complaints about SEN (Education and Health Care Plans)

Table 8

Service	2022-23	2023-24
Corporate and other services	1	0
Adults Social Care	3	3
Planning & Development	2	2
Benefits and Taxation	1	0
Education and Children's Services	1	6
Environmental Services and Public Protection and Regulation	0	2

The remedies and recommended actions from these upheld complaints were:

Table 9

Reference	Category	Remedy	Service improvement recommendations	Total Cost of Remedy
22011819	Education & Childrens Services	Apology,Financial redress: Avoidable distress/time and trouble,Financial redress: Loss of service,Procedure or policy change/review,Provide training and/or guidance	The Council will remind its SEN staff to ensure the Council adheres to the timescales for the EHC Needs Assessments and the EHC plan process. The Council will remind its SEN staff of the Council's duty to provide Alternative Provision to children, or young people, who are unable to attend school due to health, or otherwise. This includes circumstances where adjustments and support by a school has not improved attendance. The Council will remind its SEN staff to respond to communication from parents without delay, and review whether its shared mailbox and staff recruitment have had the desired effect to improve the timeliness of its responses. The	£3,200

Reference	Category	Remedy	Service improvement recommendations	Total Cost of Remedy
			Council will review how it can ensure payments for personal budgets in EHC plans are paid in a timely manner to ensure provision can be arranged without delay.	
23001455	Education & Childrens Services	Apology,Financial redress: Avoidable distress/time and trouble,Financial redress: Loss of service,Procedure or policy change/review	The Council has agreed to review its policy and processes relating to alternative education for children and young people who are not attending school. The Council will ensure its policy reflects the relevant legislation and statutory guidance.	£2,350
23001896	Adult Care Services	Financial redress: Avoidable distress/time and trouble		
23002913	Education & Childrens Services	Apology,Financial redress: Avoidable distress/time and trouble,Provide training and/or guidance	The Council has agreed that it will issue a reminder to relevant staff to ensure it adheres to statutory timescales for reviewing EHCPs.	£500
23004863	Planning & Development			0
23006133	Education & Childrens Services	Apology,Financial redress: Avoidable distress/time and trouble,Financial redress: Loss of service		£4,100
23007346	Education & Childrens Services	New appeal/review or reconsidered decision,Provide services to person affected		0
23010642	Adult Care Services			0
23011366	Environmental Services & Public Protection & Regulation	Apology,Financial redress: Avoidable distress/time and trouble,Financial redress: Loss of service,Financial Redress: Quantifiable Loss,Provide information/advice to person	The Council agreed that it would draw up an action plan to make service improvements designed to avoid a repeat of the faults identified during	Linked to 22000465

Reference	Category	Remedy	Service improvement recommendations	Total Cost of Remedy
		affected, Procedure or policy change/review	investigation of this complaint. The action plan would include measures to avoid delays with legal advice slowing down planning enforcement investigations; to avoid delays in determining planning applications where a single issue is delaying a decision; to improve liaison between services when a hospitality business is said to cause nuisance to neighbours (including planning, environmental services and licensing); to co-ordinate investigations in such cases and improve communications with those reporting concerns to keep them informed of steps the Council is taking.	
23011725	Education & Childrens Services	New appeal/review or reconsidered decision		
21013884	Adult Care Services	Apology, Financial redress: Avoidable distress/time and trouble, Financial redress: Loss of service, Procedure or policy change/review, Provide training and/or guidance	The Council should send the Ombudsman an evidence based action plan of its progress towards the following service improvements: prioritise attending Care Programme Approach (CPA) meetings led by the NHS, as and when invited; ensure section 117 aftercare plans are available on each section 117 case and reviewed in a	

Reference	Category	Remedy	Service improvement recommendations	Total Cost of Remedy
			timely fashion;a phased implementation of a new section 117 aftercare plan from April 2023; and staff training on section 117 cases.	
21017937	Environmental Services & Public Protection & Regulation	Financial redress: Avoidable distress/time and trouble,Provide information/advice to person affected		£150
22000465	Planning & Development	Apology,Financial redress: Avoidable distress/time and trouble,Financial redress: Loss of service,Financial Redress: Quantifiable Loss,Provide information/advice to person affected,Procedure or policy change/review	The Council agreed that it would draw up an action plan to make service improvements designed to avoid a repeat of the faults identified during investigation of this complaint. The action plan would include measures to avoid delays with legal advice slowing down planning enforcement investigations; to avoid delays in determining planning applications where a single issue is delaying a decision; to improve liaison between services when a hospitality business is said to cause nuisance to neighbours (including planning, environmental services and licensing); to co-ordinate investigations in such cases and improve communications with those reporting concerns to keep them informed of steps	Linked to 23011366 £16,000

Reference	Category	Remedy	Service improvement recommendations	Total Cost of Remedy
			the Council is taking.	

The value of remedial payments this year (£26,300) is significantly higher than the previous year (£9,050). Largely due to a very complex planning complaint and the SEN complaints. We will be working with services to improve our remedy offers for fault in the earlier stages of our own complaints process, based on the Ombudsman’s Guidance on Remedies.

We must also recognise that there has been a general increase in SEN complaints nationally which has been referenced in reports and news items issued by the Ombudsman over the past few years.

In fact, the Ombudsman’s Annual Report for 2023/24 stated:

‘We have repeatedly made our position clear. The system is simply not working for children, families or local authorities: the money available is not sufficient to provide the services that children are entitled to, many organisations are severely understaffed and in many areas suitable and affordable support does not exist. It means young people, and their families, don’t get the help they need and lose vital weeks, months and years of education and development as a result. They don’t get that time back. No-one wins in the current system. The issues within the wider special educational needs system are myriad and addressing them in isolation is not the answer. This crisis has been 10 years in the making; both councils and the government should have anticipated the issues, and planned for the future, when the Children and Families Act 2014 was brought in and demand for EHC Plans started to increase.

The required staff, including highly specialist roles like Educational Psychologists, cannot be trained overnight, and so this situation will not be resolved without significant input on a national scale.

The government must get a strong and comprehensive grip of this issue, right from reviewing the 2014 legislation through to ensuring the resources are in place, and retained, to support children how and when they need it. Special educational needs provision is an existential threat for the local authorities that provide children’s services and, most importantly, affects the lives of thousands of children having long term effects on their aspirations and contribution to society.’¹.

5. COMPLIMENTS RECEIVED

Table 9 shows a comparison of volumes of comments and compliments received between 2021/22 and 2023/24. Compliment levels for 2023/24 are reassuringly higher than last year with a general increase across services.

¹ [Annual Review of Local Government Complaints](#)

We are continuing to work with services, particularly within social care, on a simpler solution to recording compliments received directly to the service (e.g. thank you cards etc) rather than the customer completing a compliment form. We will also continue to promote our online compliment form to customers to encourage positive feedback. This insight is considered just as valuable as complaint data in order to share best practice across all of our Council services.

Table 9 Comments and Compliments

Row Labels	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023	Trend on previous year
Comment	557	309	425	↑
Compliment	413	52	325	↑
Grand Total	970	361	750	↑

Table 10 shows the breakdown of compliments received by workspace each year.

Table 10 Compliments by Workspace

Workspace	Compliment 2021/22	Compliment 2022/23	Compliment 2023/24	Trend
Blank e.g. no service recorded against the compliment	12	10	103	↑
Adult social care	175	1	80	↑
Waste and recycling (waste collection, recycling, household waste and recycling centres)	70	11	42	↑
Roads and footways	12	4	19	↑
Any other service	13	2	12	↑
Children social care	32	1	8	↑
Street cleaning	14	0	8	↑
Grass cutting	12	0	6	↑
Housing Services	7	0	6	↑
Trees, Woods and Hedges	4	0	5	↑

6. LEARNING AND SERVICE IMPROVEMENT

The Council has identified areas and opportunities from which learning can be taken from the complaints and the compliments process and used to improve future service delivery.

Whilst compliance at stage 1 still falls far below our ambition to achieve a near perfect rate, we are heading in the right direction and stage 2 complaints have made significant progress. We will continue to highlight that the bulk of contact received as complaints is resolved outside of the formal complaint process, which demonstrates that services are keen to recognise and resolve fault at the earliest opportunity.

For the 2023/24 reporting year we have had the benefit of 3 Customer Experience Leads for the last 6 months. They were recruited in September 2023 to work with and support services in identifying and taking forward learning and service improvements. This collaborative approach between services and the central customer team ensures that the customer voice is heard, and there is an ongoing commitment across the Council to continuously improving the customer experience. Examples of joint working to date are:

- Identifying and delivering service improvements
- Developed and grown a network of Customer Ambassadors to promote and embed good customer experience within services. Expanded the network to have representation across most Council services
- Launched and led on the coordination of a Councillor Portal. Whilst this does not directly relate to a reduction in complaints, it is another channel for keeping residents informed via their elected representatives
- Provided feedback for continuous improvement on letters sent to customers for a review on single person Council Tax to successfully improve the impact of the messaging.
- Redesigned the Highways webpages, working collaboratively with service to improve the management of customer expectations, increase key information, reducing volume of enquiries and increase in use of online reporting tools
- Re-designed the online reporting forms for Highways to improve self-service and transparency
- Designed and delivered customer survey to gain feedback for continuous improvement for Adult Social Care and Finance
- Delivered Customer slots to raise awareness at Council welcome meetings of the Customer at the heart of what we do
- Established relationships with representatives for the customer journey from our Age Friendly, Community Inspirer and Youth Senate representatives
- Facilitated and strengthened relationships and understanding of the internal customer dynamic (Businesses, Property, Highways, Customer Centre)
- Contributed to establishing the quarterly Customer focus meetings in Adult Social care
- Designed and scheduled customer conferences to strengthen networks
- Established a Respect for Workers group, which has produced tools and techniques to support colleagues
- Improved the Out of Hours FAQ's scripting for the external provider to better assist customers during emergency situations
- Co-designed and developed the Customer Commitment with the Customer Experience Ambassadors and Community Inspirers
- Improved cross service collaboration via regular group meetings to make efficiencies and improve customer/service crossover
- Strengthened connections between Highways and Call Centre teams to improve customer experience
- Customer Accessibility working group to enhance and support access to our services
- Early Help and Prevention workspace set up to enable better reporting for this service
- Early Help and Prevention Customer Experience group established to review the survey and feedback, as well as comments, compliments and complaints data
- Delivered a Complaints workshop within Education

Steps to improve compliance

- The Customer Experience leads will continue to work with services to support future improvement. This will include developing a learning and development package for all staff (from induction to refresher training) on what makes a good customer experience.
- The Council will update its complaints policy and procedures in 2024/25 to reflect the good practice advice and guidance set out in the Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code. The Code was launched in February 2024 and councils are encouraged to adopt the Code as soon as they are able to do so. We plan to use the updated policy and procedures from April 2025 to prepare for when the Ombudsman intends to start using the Code as part of their processes from April 2026.
- By adopting the Code there will be a change in the Council's corporate complaints reporting for data from April 2025-2026. It is intended to allow for more scrutiny and oversight on the complaint handling process. More information about progress towards the Code implementation will be provided in 2024/5 and 2025/6 annual reports.
- We are preparing to welcome our Customer Services contact centre back inhouse from 1 April 2025. Preparations for this have included a complete review of our customer vision, strategy, target operating model, KPIs, policies and processes. All of these will be updated following significant engagement and co-production opportunities with internal and external customers. This will then ensure that the customer is at the heart of everything the Council does.
- The Customer Team is working with its IT team to develop one single reporting dashboard on customer contact to enable services to have easier access to all customer data and insight to inform their service improvements and decision-making.
- We continue to develop our Respect for Workers toolkit to ensure that staff are signposted to appropriate support for managing unreasonable and unacceptable behaviour from customers. We are working collaboratively with our health and safety team to ensure that services know how to record abusive or aggressive incidents, and managers know how to sensitively manage the impact of this on their staff.

End report