

London Borough of Barnet

# Appendix A:

## Corporate Complaints and Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO)

### Annual Report 2022/2023

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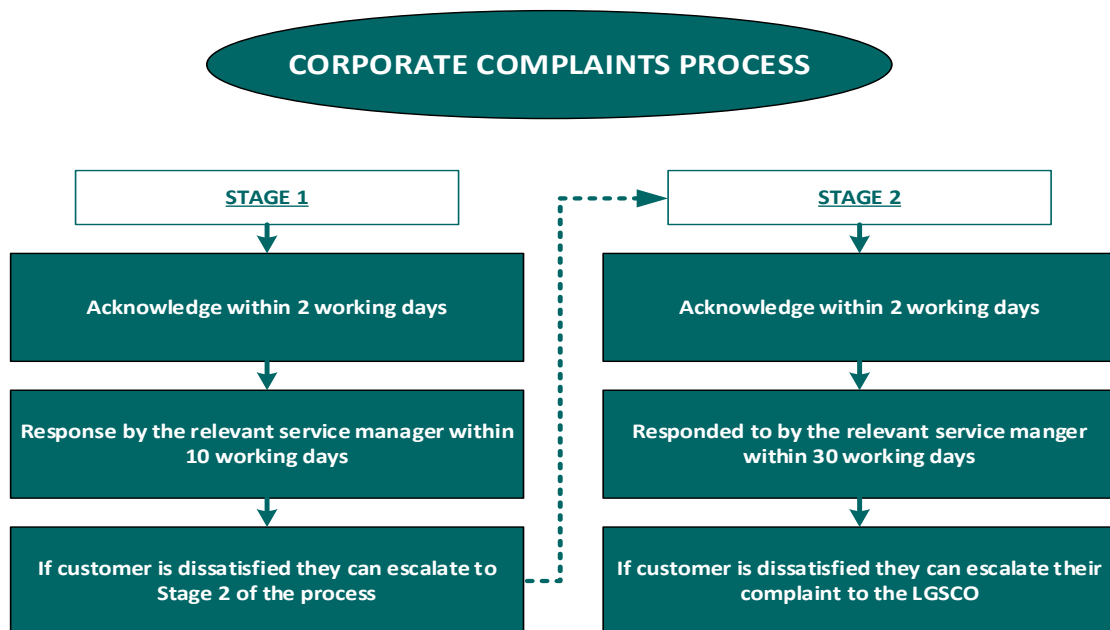
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## 1. Background and introduction

- 1.1 This annual report presents a summary of the Council's performance in relation to corporate complaints and Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) investigations for the period 1 April 2022 - 31 March 2023. This report, along with the Ombudsman's annual letter (Appendix B), forms part of the Council's management and oversight of the corporate complaints processes which also includes ongoing oversight of complaints through routine management reports and live performance dashboards. The Council utilises complaints as a valuable source of insight to improve services and the experiences of customers.
- 1.2 The Council operates a two-stage corporate complaints procedure (Figure 1):
- **Stage 1** - Complaints are investigated and responded to by the relevant service manager or equivalent of which the complaint concerns.
  - **Stage 2** - Where the complainant remains unhappy with their stage 1 response, they may escalate their complaint, which is investigated further and responded to by the relevant senior manager.

**Figure 1:** Corporate complaints process



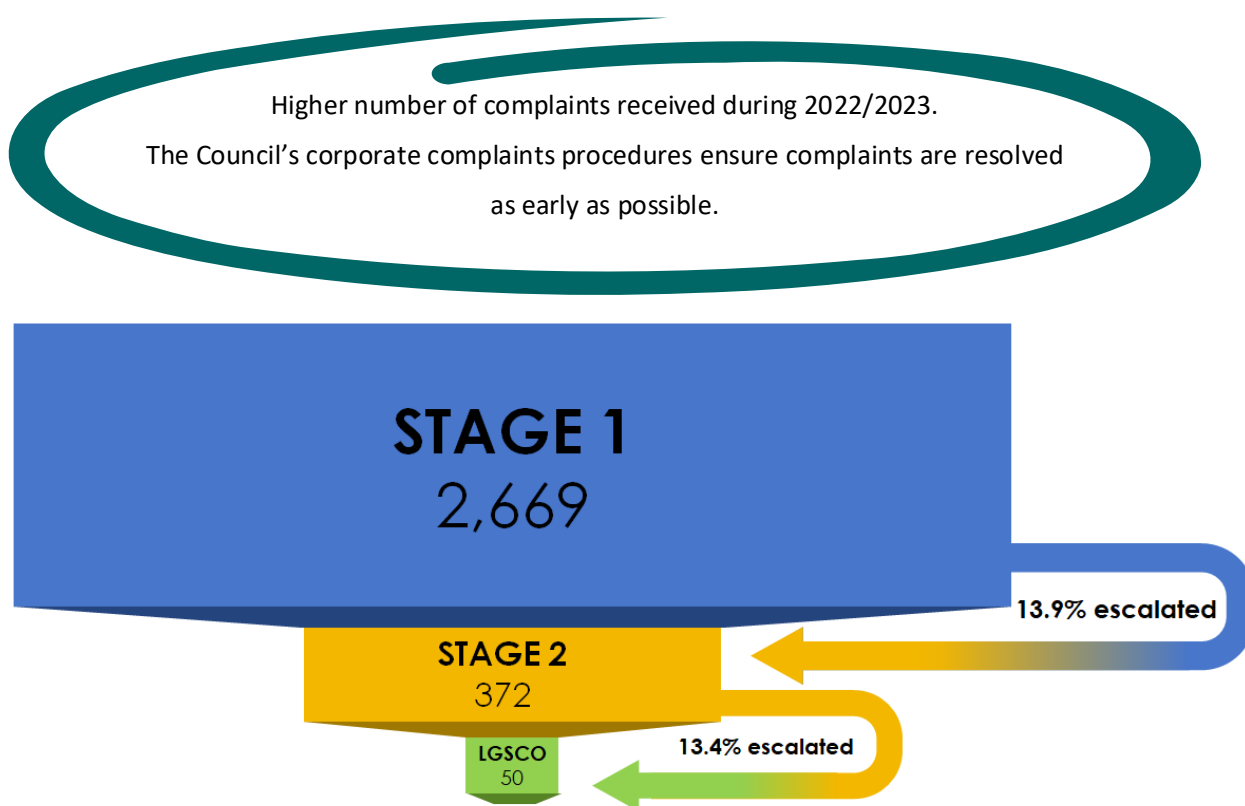
- 1.3 If the complainant remains dissatisfied after going through the Council's complaints procedure, they can escalate the matter to the LGSCO.
- 1.4 The Council aims to resolve customers' issues as quickly and professionally as possible, preferably without the need to escalate through stages of the complaints process and to the Ombudsman. This not only delivers better customer service and increases customer satisfaction, it also reduces the pressure on council resources that are required to administer complaints at later stages of the complaints process. We recognise, however, that the Council cannot resolve every issue to the complainants' full satisfaction, and it is not possible to eliminate all complaints.
- 1.5 There are separate statutory processes in relation to Social Care complaints for both Adult's and Children's Services. As per corporate complaints, once the statutory procedure is exhausted, the complainant has the right of escalation to the LGSCO.

1.6 An overview of the Council's complaints performance is presented in Section 2 of this report; more detailed information is provided in subsequent sections.

## 2. Executive summary

- 2.1 The Council values complaints feedback and monitors corporate complaints trends and performance through routine reports, and produces an annual corporate complaints report to be considered by the GARMS Committee.
- 2.2 In July each year the LGSCO writes an annual review letter to every local authority which outlines the complaints and enquiries they have dealt with during the previous financial year. The annual letter received by the London Borough of Barnet for 2022-2023 can be found in Appendix B.
- 2.3 The summary of the Council's performance, key trends, and relevant actions in relation to corporate complaints and LGSCO complaints for the fiscal year 2022-2023 include:

### 2.4 Corporate complaints numbers and escalation rates



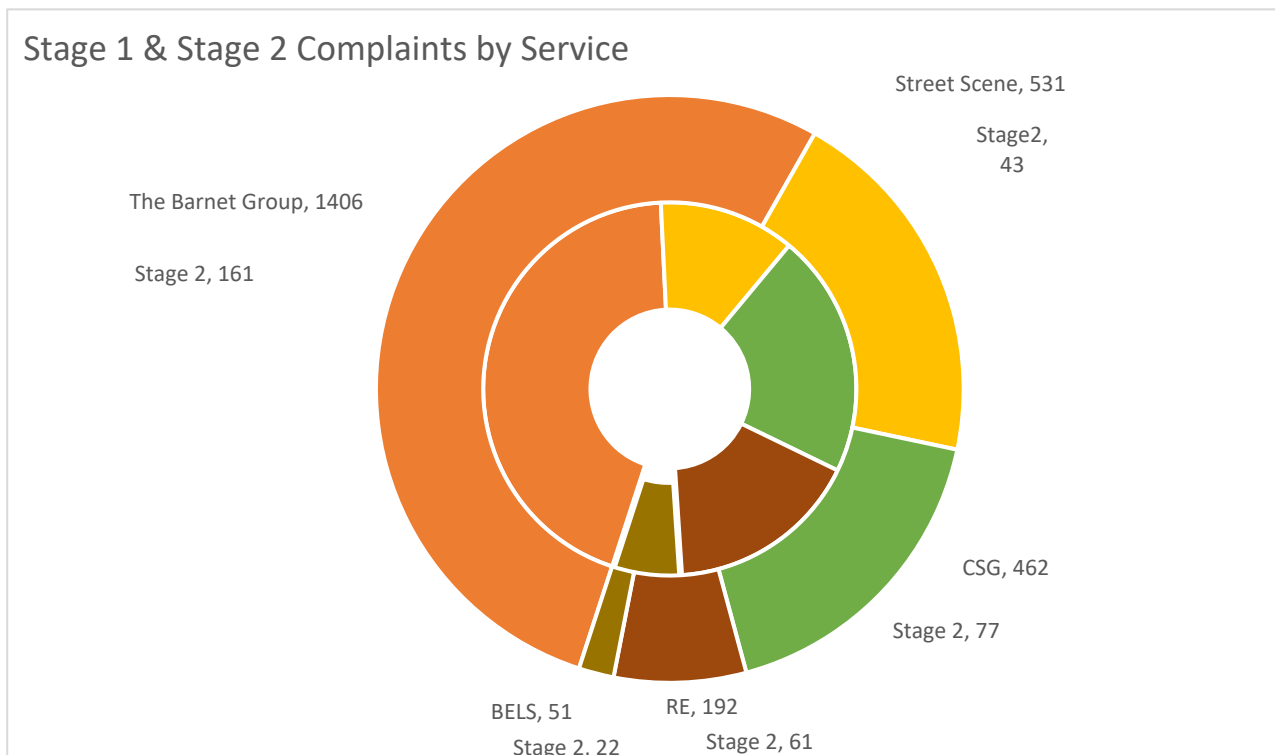
- 2.4.1 A total of 3,041 complaints received between 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023. This is an increase of 14.4% compared with the previous year. Whilst complaints provide evidence of resident dissatisfaction this could also be seen as evidence of resident engagement with the complaints process and that the Council is more effectively identifying and processing complaints.
- 2.4.2 Escalation rates were as follows:
  - The Council received 2,669 Stage 1 corporate complaints. 13.9% were escalated to Stage 2.
  - The Council received 372 Stage 2 corporate complaints. 13.4% were escalated which led to an LGSCO investigation.

2.4.3 The Council aims to resolve all complaints as early as possible, and have taken steps to reduce escalation rates including:

- Updating templates to improve adherence to best practice.
- Stage 2 responses reviewed by the Corporate Complaints Team for quality assurance and consistency.
- The Corporate Complaints Team meet with services where LGSCO have upheld a complaint to identify any missed opportunities to rectify issues earlier in the process and to implement appropriate corrective measures.
- Effective Complaints Handling courses delivered by the LGSCO to officers and managers responding to complaints.
- In-house training is to be complemented by the introduction of a more accessible e-learning training option.

## 2.5 Corporate complaints by service area

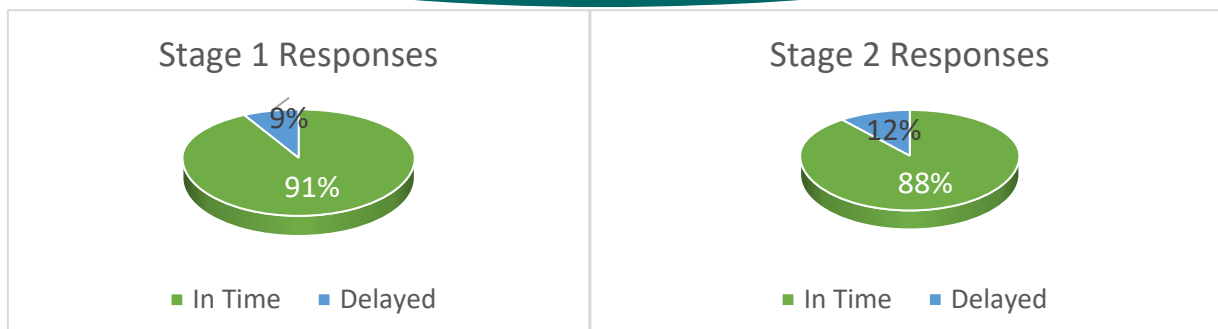
Ongoing trend of larger proportion of complaints concerning the Barnet Group, Street Scene and CSG service  
(this is to be expected considering the nature of these services)



Further detail is provided in Sections 2, 3, and 4 below.

## 2.6 Corporate Complaints Response Timescales

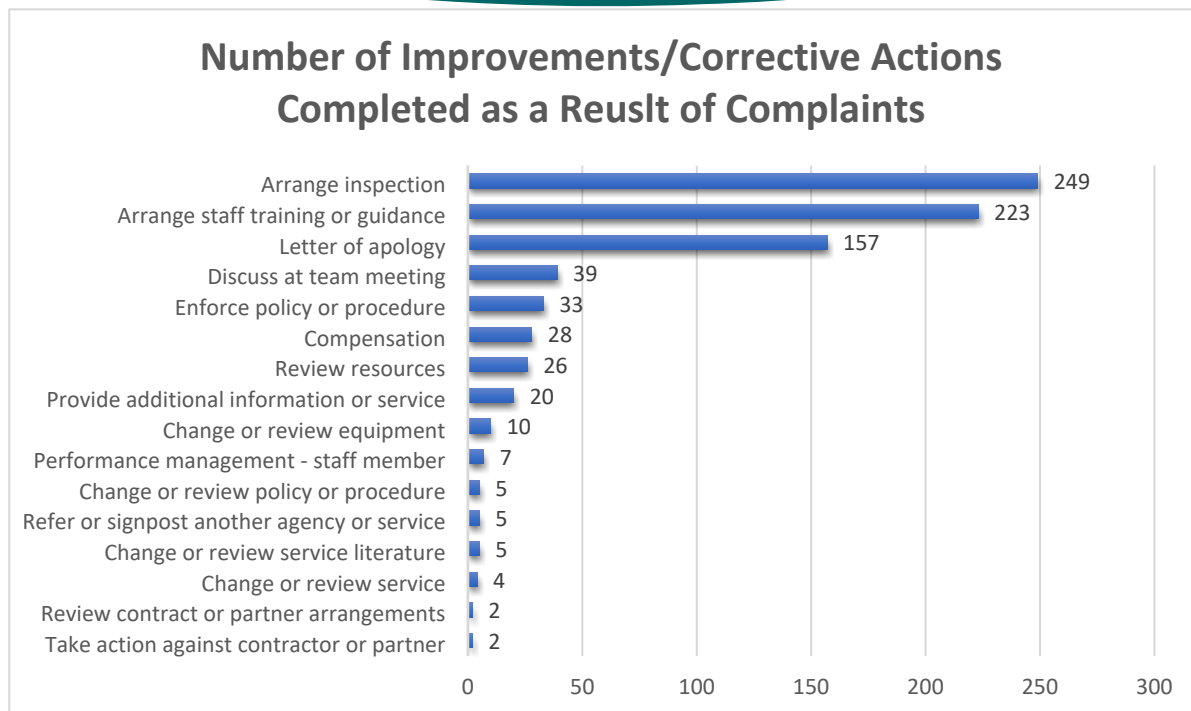
The Council maintained high level of compliance with the complaints handling timescales.



- 2.6.1 For Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaints The Council aims to respond within, respectively, 10 and 30 working days. We have an internal target of responding to 90% of complaints within these timescales, which accounts for some complaints being complex and cross-cutting and it may be beneficial to take time to give a comprehensive and well-considered response. For Stage 1 and Stage 2 respectively, 91% and 88% of complaints were responded to within timescales.
- 2.6.2 Main reasons for delays at Stage 2 were staff being absent or unavailable (33% of stage 2 complaint delays) and complex cases (27% of stage 2 complaint delays). This information enabled us to ensure there are nominated deputies for key staff to reduce the impact of key staff being absent. We are currently in the process of revising our Effective Complaints Management Guidance to assist complaints handlers with complex cases, including those which are cross cutting.

## 2.7 Corrective Actions Implemented

Complaints are acted upon by implementing appropriate remedies, and lessons are used to improve services.



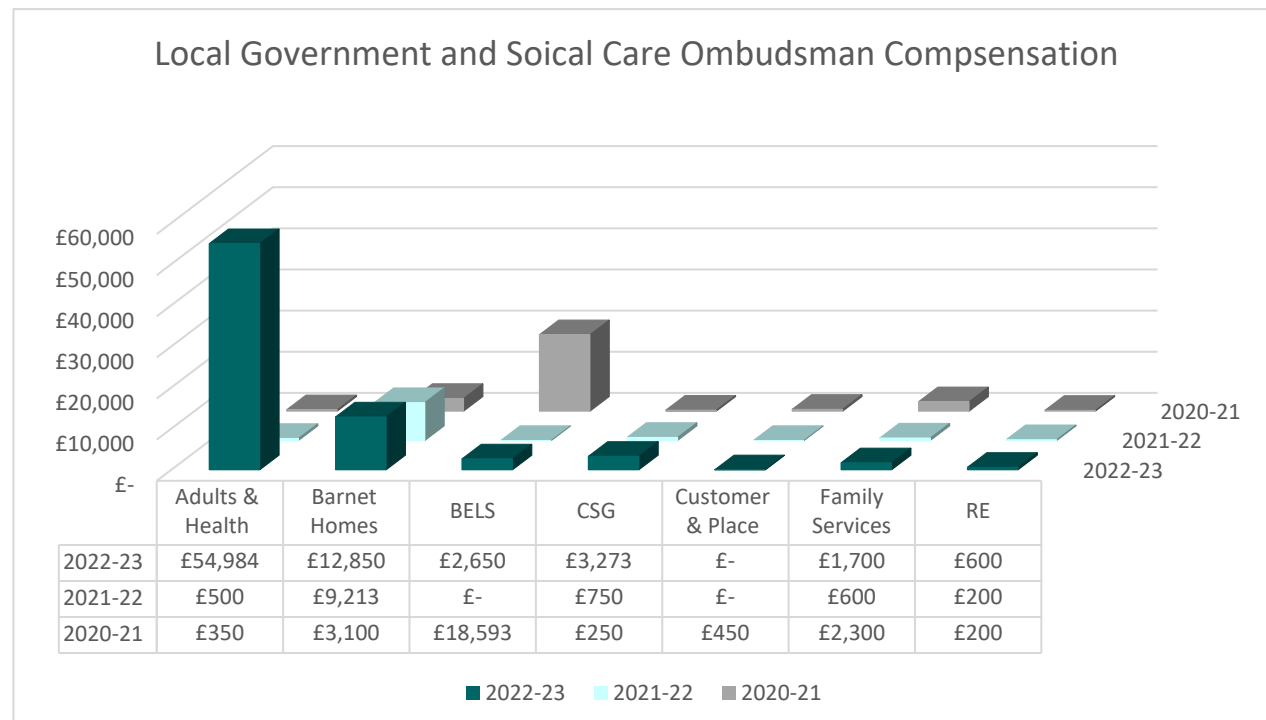
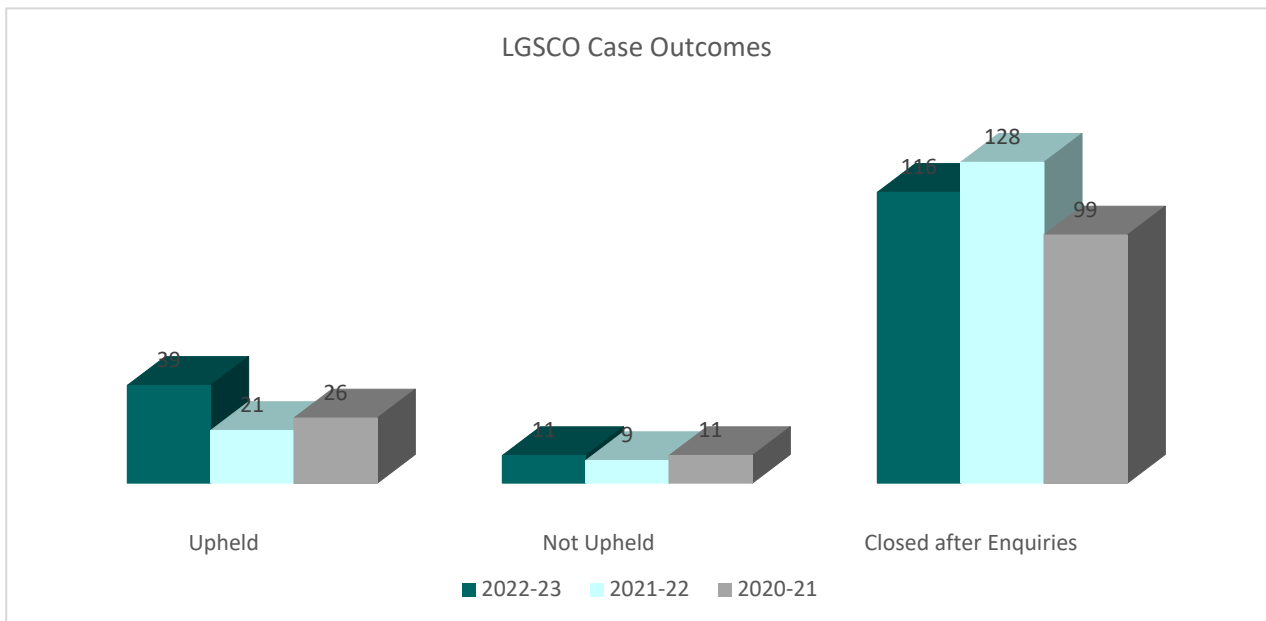
2.7.1 The Council has implemented 815 corrective actions resulting from complaints, with the greatest number of remedies defined as:

- arrange inspection (249 cases)
- arrange staff training or guidance (223 cases)
- issue a letter of apology (157 cases)



2.8 **LGSCO complaints**

Increase in the number of complaints is reflected in cases escalated to the LGSCO (166), escalation rate remained at 13.4%, demonstrating effectiveness of the Council's complaints process. Upheld rate increased in line with the revised LGSCO approach. There has been delays in dealing with some LGSCO cases (improvements implemented)

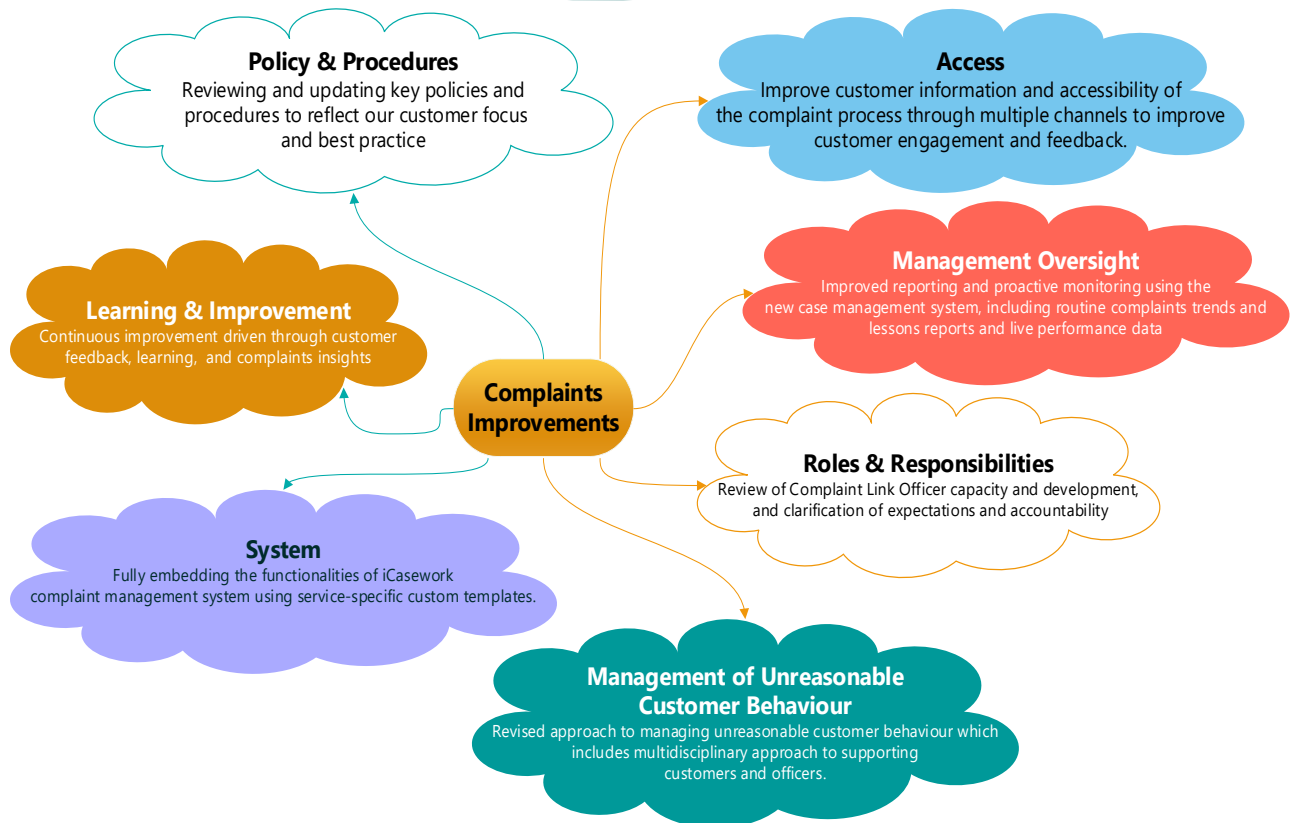


2.8.1 The LGSCO received 166 complaints during 2022/23 of which 50 proceeded to an investigation and 39 (78%) of these were upheld (77% in similar authorities).

- 2.8.2 The LGSCO advised that “In 2022-23 we changed our investigation processes, contributing towards an increase in the average uphold rate across all complaints. Consider comparing individual council uphold rates against the average rate rather than against previous years.”
- 2.8.3 The service with the most upheld complaints was Council Tax which has 12 upheld complaints, one of which led to a public report being issued (this was presented the GARMS Committee in July 2023). The rise in the number of council tax complaints relate to historic debt collection, which was put on hold during COVID, and has since recommenced.
- 2.8.4 The Council accepted all remedies proposed by the LGSCO in relation to the LGSCO upheld complaints; 100% of remedies have been actioned (99% for similar authorities).
- 2.8.5 During 2021/22 the Council paid a total of £11,563 in compensation as a result of complaints upheld by the LGSCO. The value in 2022-23 has increased to £76,057.
- 2.8.6 This year Adults & Health (Adult Social Care) paid out both the largest amount overall as well as for a single case (£49,084.28). This case related to failure to provide a care assessment for two years, therefore resulting in the resident having to pay for care directly themselves until the Council was able to provide support.
- 2.8.7 Within its annual review letter, the LGSCO noted concerns about the timeliness of the Council’s responses to the LGSCO’s enquiries and in completing remedies (22% of cases had late remedies compared to a national picture of 19%). 28 of the 39 cases upheld involved a delay during the investigation stage. The Council Management Team have considered these concerns and met with the LGSCO to discuss the issues outlined within the LGSCO’s annual letter.
- 2.8.8 The Council has reviewed the root causes of the delays and devised an action plan to prevent reoccurrence (Please see Section 7).

## 2.9 Comprehensive review of complaints processes

Comprehensive review of the corporate complaints and LGSCO complaints process is delivering improved performance, service offer and customer experience with themes as per the diagram below.



2.9.1 Assisted by the insight gathered from iCasework case management system we have undertaken a comprehensive review of the Corporate Complaints function, which focussed on customer care and learning and included the below workstreams:

- **Policy & Procedures** - Reviewing and updating key policies and procedures to reflect customer focus and best practice.
- **Access** - Improve customer information and accessibility of the complaint process through multiple channels to improve customer engagement and feedback.
- **Learning & Improvement** - Continuous improvement driven through customer feedback, learning, and complaints insights
- **Roles & Responsibilities** - Review of Complaint Link Officer capacity and development, and clarification of expectations and accountability.
- **System** - Fully embedding the functionalities of iCasework complaint management system using service-specific custom templates.

- **Management of Unreasonable Customer Behaviour** - Revised approach to managing unreasonable customer behaviour which includes multidisciplinary approach to supporting customers and officers.
- **Management Oversight** - Improved reporting and proactive monitoring using the new case management system, including routine complaints trends and lessons reports and live performance data.

2.9.2 The corporate complaints review is overseen by the Assurance Management Team; progress updates will be included in future reports presented to the GARMS Committee.

### 3. Stage 1 Corporate Complaints

3.1 Table 1 gives a high-level summary of complaints performance at the Council

**Table 1:** Overview of corporate complaints received

	2021/22	2022/23
Total number of complaints	2658	3041 (↑14%)
Statutory Complaints	81	139 (↑72%)
Not Upheld	1117	1345 (↓44%)
Upheld	960	1191 (↑40%)
Partially Upheld	581	505 (↓16%)
Total number of LGSCO outcomes	158	166 (↑5%)
• of which were closed after initial enquiries/no further action	128	116 (↓9%)
• of which were investigated and upheld	21	39 (↑86%)
• of which were investigated and were not upheld	9	11 (↑22%)

3.2 The council received 2,669 Stage 1 complaints between the period of 1st April 2022 to 31st March 2023, which is an increase of 17% compared with the previous reporting year (2,279).

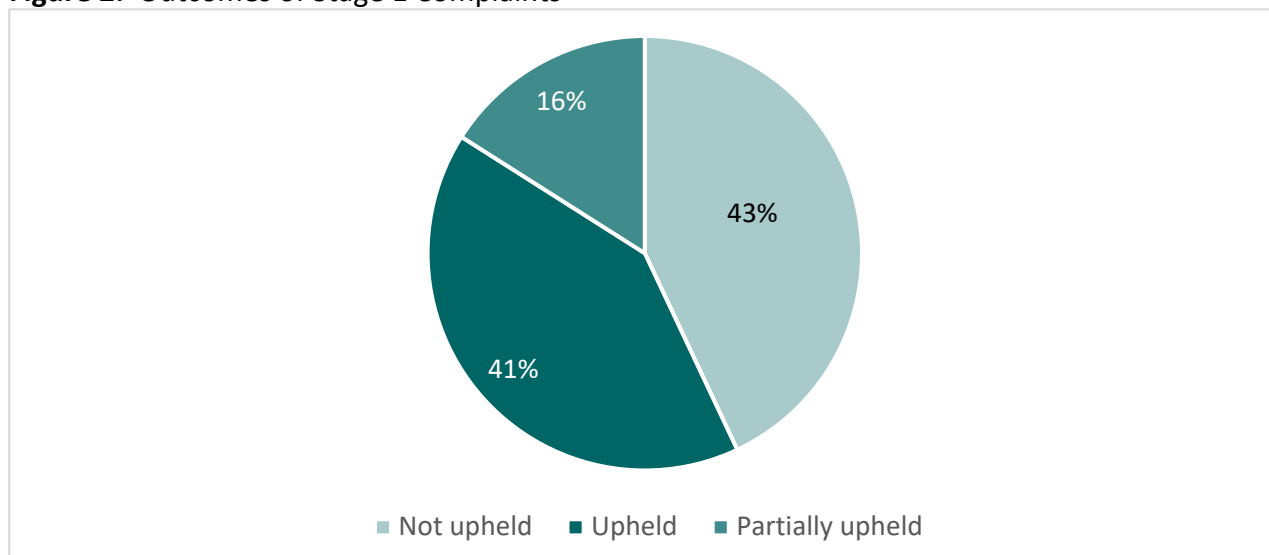
3.3 Whilst the Council aims to ensure all customers are satisfied with Council services and do not have cause to complain, all forms of feedback is indicative of resident engagement.

3.4 Over the last year, the council has worked to make the complaints process more accessible – making it easier for residents to make a complaint. This includes updating website content and the ability for customers to register their complaints directly with the service; using a webform, customers can self-define their complaint. This could be a contributing factor for the increase in number of complaints received during the reporting period. This gives the Council improved oversight of complaints using live data, as cases are created and updated on iCasework directly through the webform rather than requiring manual data entry.

3.5 Of these 2669 complaints, 43% were not upheld which indicates that, investigations of these complaints concluded that the Council has acted in accordance with its policies and standards in these cases (Figure 2).

3.6 41% of Stage 1 complaints were upheld and 16% were partially upheld, they offer valuable feedback and learning towards continuous improvement.

**Figure 2: Outcomes of Stage 1 Complaints**



3.7 The below Table 2 provides a breakdown by service area of Stage 1 complaints received along with the upheld rate (%).

**Table 2: Stage 1 Complaints by Service Area**

Service Area	Upheld		Partially upheld		Not upheld	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
<b>CSG</b>	63	14%	44	10%	352	77%
<b>BELS</b>	11	22%	14	27%	26	51%
<b>Assurance</b>	3	33%	3	33%	3	33%
<b>Adults &amp; Health (Green Spaces)</b>	1	17%	3	50%	2	33%
<b>Adult Social Care</b>	0	0%	0	0%	6	100%
<b>Customer and Place</b>	2	40%	0	0%	3	60%

3.8 Under Stage 1 of the complaints process, target timescales for responding to complaints is within 10 working days.

3.9 91% of complaints were responded to within 10 working days. Considering that services have received higher number of complaints during the reporting period, this shows that they are efficient in investigating and responding to complaints.

3.10 The introduction of the new complaints management system, iCasework, has allowed departments to easily track complaints through automated reminders and live dashboards, as well as facilitating learning from each case.

3.11 The 3 main reasons for the delays in responding to the remaining 9% of complaints were due to workload pressures at the time, complex nature of cases, and staff being absent or unavailable (Table 3).

**Table 3:** Top 3 Causes of Delays

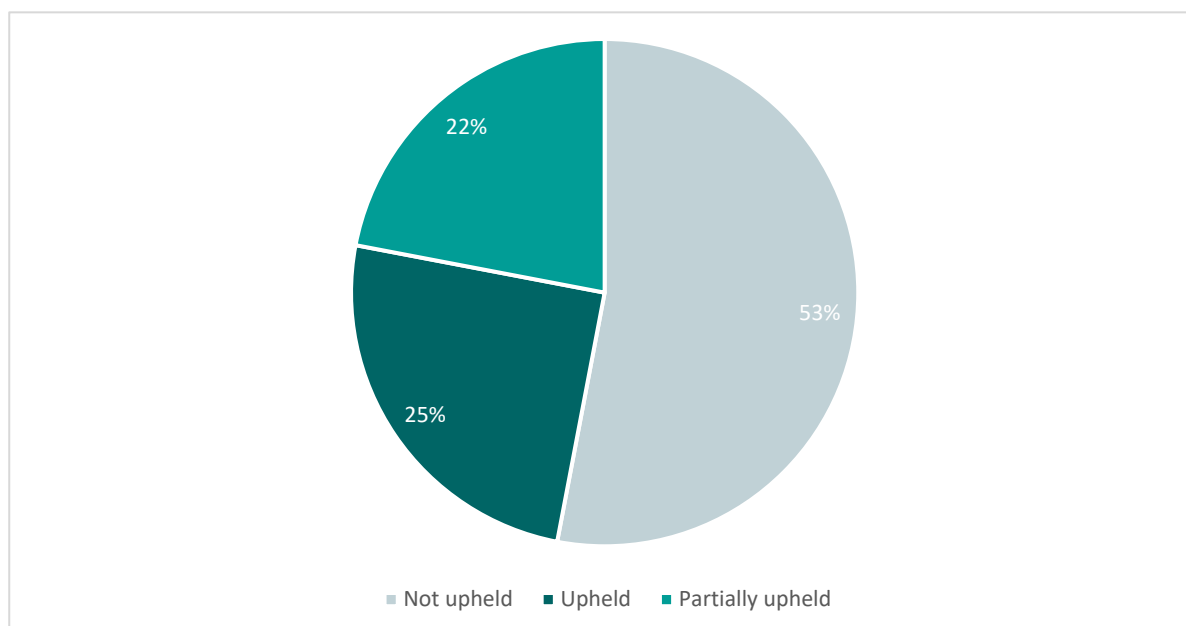
Stage 1 Delay Reasons	Number of Complaints (%)	Explanation
<b>Workload</b>	34 (25%)	The workload of the investigator or colleagues involved was high and therefore caused delays in the investigation.
<b>Complex Case</b>	25 (19%)	The case involved multiple service areas or was complex in nature and required longer than the stipulated timescale to investigate.
<b>Staff Absent or Unavailable</b>	13 (10%)	The staff required as part of the investigation of the complaint were unavailable or absent causing delays.

- 3.12 The Council has improved resilience within services to deal with complaints within timescales by ensuring there is nominated and trained officers to act as deputies for Complaint Link Officers to reduce the risk of reliance on single officers.
- 3.13 Of the 9% of stage 1 complaints answered outside of the timescales, 52% concerned council tax, and 19% related to housing benefits. The Corporate Complaints team has implemented regular meetings with key colleagues from these services to monitor late responses.

#### **4. Stage 2 Corporate Complaints**

- 4.1 A total of 372 Stage 2 complaints were received between 1st April 2022 and 31st March 2023.
- 4.2 Of these Stage 2 complaints, 53% (199) were not upheld, which gives assurance that in most cases services have followed the correct processes in accordance with the Council's service standards (Figure 3).
- 4.3 25% of the complaints escalated were upheld and 22% were partially upheld. This indicates that at Stage 2 of the process, investigating Senior Managers are thoroughly investigating complaints and admitting fault as appropriate.
- 4.4 An upheld complaint at Stage 2 represents a missed opportunity to resolve complaints at Stage 1 (See Section 5 for more details about escalation rates). We are currently revising our guidance on Effective Complaints Management and developing an on-line training module to further support officers involved in investigating and responding to complaints. This is in addition to the core complaints handling training (in-house and by the LGSCO), and ongoing Link Officer development.

**Figure 3: Stage 2 Complaints Outcomes**



4.5 The below Table 4 provide breakdowns by service area of stage 2 complaints received along with the upheld rate (%).

**Table 4: Stage 2 Complaints by Service Area**

Service Area	Upheld		Partially upheld		Not upheld	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
<b>CSG</b>	10	13%	8	10%	59	77%
<b>BELS</b>	5	23%	4	18%	13	59%
<b>Assurance</b>	0	0%	2	50%	2	50%
<b>Adults &amp; Health (Green Spaces)</b>	1	50%	0	0%	1	50%
<b>Adult Social Care</b>	0	0%	0	0%	6	100%
<b>Customer and Place</b>	0	0%	1	33%	2	67%

4.6 Under Stage 2 of the complaints process, the timescale set out to respond to complaints is within 30 working days. We had set ourselves a target of responding to 90% of complaints within this time frame. This year we achieved 88%, which fell short of our target by 2%.

4.7 The 3 main reasons for the delays were staff being absent or unavailable, workload and complex nature of cases. Table 5 provides a further explanation for the delays.

**Table 5:** Breakdown of top 3 categories for Stage 2 complaint delays

Stage 2 Delay Reasons	Number of Complaints (%)	Explanation
Staff Absent or Unavailable	10 (33%)	The staff required as part of the investigation of the complaint were unavailable or absent causing delays.
Complex Case	8 (27%)	The case involved numerous service areas or was complex in nature and required longer than the stipulated timescale to investigate.
Workload	2 (7%)	The workload of the investigator or colleagues involved was high and therefore caused delays in the investigation.

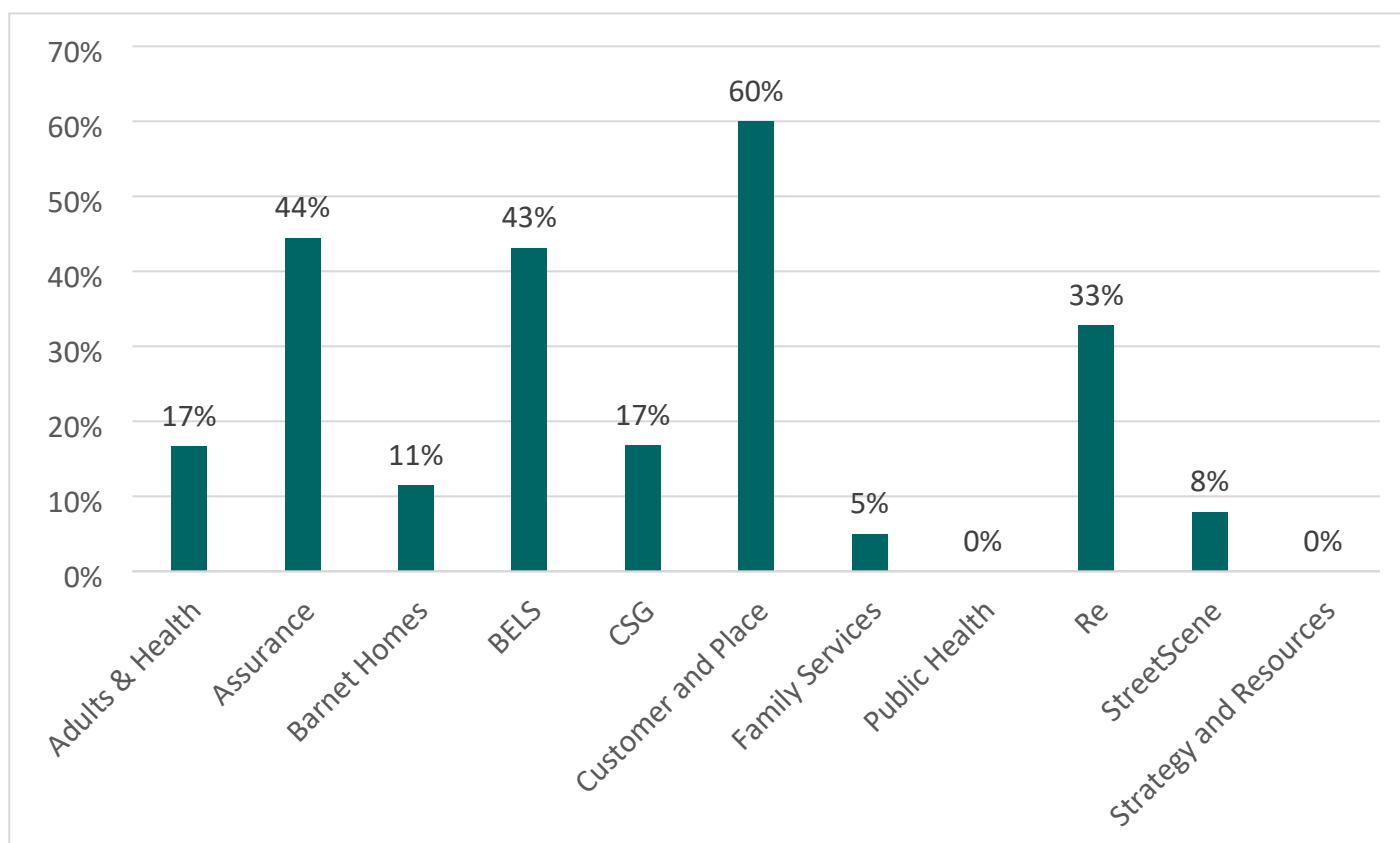
4.8 Using this information, we have explored options with services to nominate deputies for key staff to reduce the impact of key staff being absent. We are currently in the process of revising our Effective Complaints Management Guidance to assist complaints handlers with complex cases, including those which are cross cutting. We are building upon our Link Officers network to foster collaboration and sharing of learning between services.

## 5. Escalation Rates

- 5.1 The council received 2,669 Stage 1 corporate complaints in 2022/2023 of which 13.9% (372) were escalated to Stage 2.
- 5.2 Of the 166 cases escalated to the LGSCO, 50 cases were investigated, which is an escalation rate of 13.4%. This demonstrates the effectiveness of the Council's complaints process in resolving majority of the complaints at earlier stages of the process.
- 5.3 The Council aims to resolve all complaints at Stage 1. If a case is escalated to Stage 2 of the process, or subsequently to the LGSCO, this results in delays residents' issues being resolved and causes them further dissatisfaction, time, and trouble. Not resolving complaints at Stage 1 requires the Council to allocate further resources to investigate the matter at Stage 2.
- 5.4 Figure 4 shows escalation rates of complaints from Stage 1 to Stage 2 for each service area. The service areas with the highest escalation rates are Customer and Place (60%), Assurance (44%) and BELS (43%). Customer and Place and Assurance receive lower number of complaints (0.5% of total complaints received by the Council). Complaints received about BELS is often complex and challenging; the LGSCO commented in their Review of Local Government Complaints 2022-23 that all authorities face challenges in providing for Special Education Needs and Education. Re has an overall escalation rate of 33% (Planning: 54%, Highways: 18% and Environmental Health: 16%). These services have returned to the Council from Regional Enterprise (Capita) on 1 April 2023.



**Figure 4:** Escalation rates by service area



- 5.5 We have taken steps to reduce escalation rates, including updating the corporate complaints process and templates to ensuring adherence with current best practice. The Corporate Complaints Team now review all Stage 2 responses to ensure robustness of the process. The Corporate Complaint team meet with services where LGSCO have upheld a complaint; these meetings are utilised to identify any missed opportunities to rectify issues earlier in the process and to implement improvements.
- 5.6 At the end of 2022/2023 the LGSCO delivered two Effective Complaints Handling courses to officers and managers responding to complaints, and we are devising an e-learning training to support more effective complaints management across the organisation.
- 5.7 We are currently liaising with other London Boroughs to benchmark escalation rates for services which will allow us to set challenging escalation rates targets to continuously improve our performance.

## 6. Root Causes

- 6.1 Regardless of a complaint's outcome, we review the root causes of every complaint (the main reason for the complaint).
- 6.2 For Corporate Complaints (excluding Barnet Homes) the most commonly identified root cause was "failure to do something" (167 cases). This is in relation to failure to deliver standard services or failure to carry out an action as promised. The Corporate Complaints Team are working with services to ensure that actions promised through the complaints process are tracked and completed to prevent reoccurrence or an escalation of the issue.

- 6.3 The second identified root cause relates to charges and enforcement actions (147 cases) followed by “delay in doing something” (96 cases). Upon further investigation, we found that these complaints can arise from a lack of understanding and setting expectations regarding delays in doing something. We are ensuring service information is clear and accessible.
- 6.4 Root causes are specific to individual departments, based on the services they provide. As part of the new complaints health check process, the Corporate Complaints team will explore with services the root causes of their complaints, trends and resulting improvements.
- 6.5 Further information about learning and improvements is included in sections 9 and 10 below.

## 7. Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Complaints

- 7.1 The council received a total of 166 enquiries from the LGSCO of which 50 progressed to a full investigation (Figure 5). In 2022/23 we dealt with more LGSCO enquires than the previous reporting period (158).

**Figure 5:** Outcome of complaints received by the LGSCO in 2021-2022 and 2022-2023



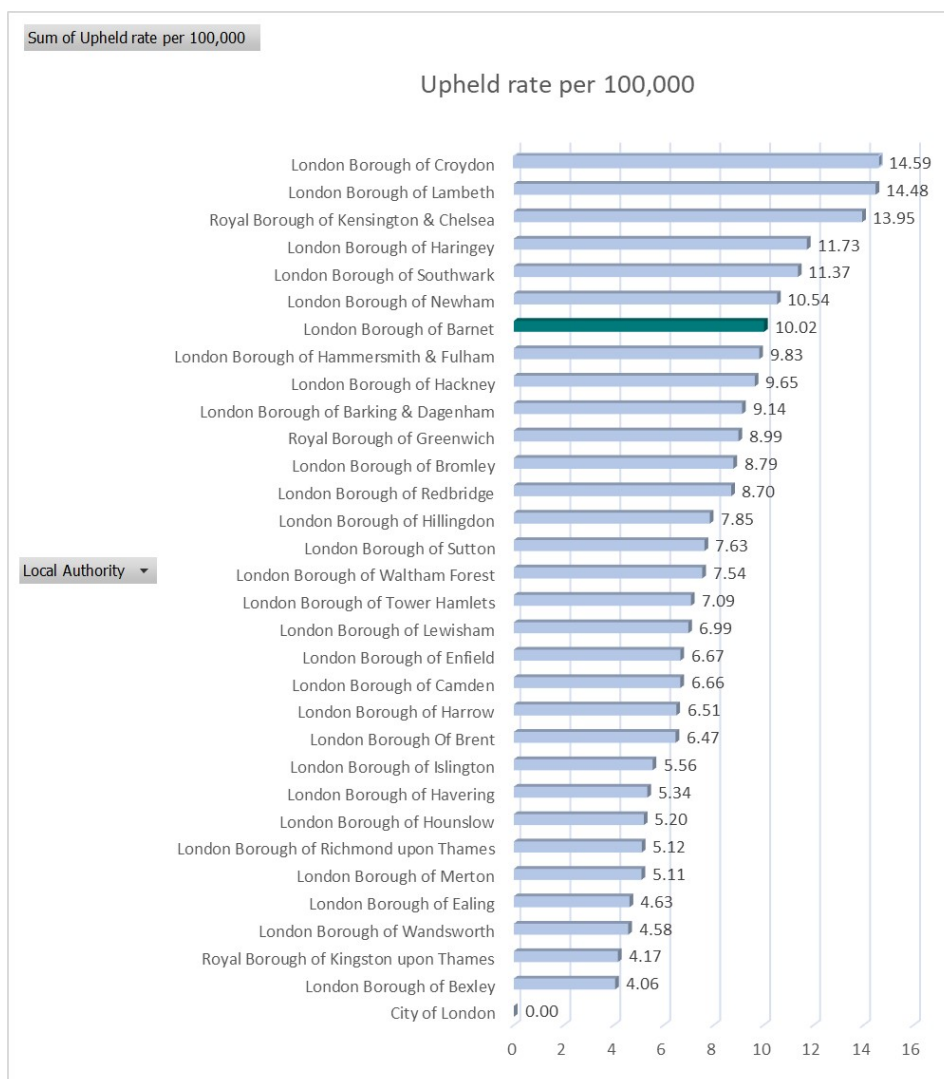
- 7.2 Whilst we have included previous years’ data for comparison, this year the LGSCO have announced they have taken a stricter approach when deciding whether to investigate complaints, choosing to only investigate complaints they believe they will find fault in. This therefore has increased the upheld rate in comparison to previous years. They advised:

*“In 2022-23 we changed our investigation processes, contributing towards an increase in the average uphold rate across all complaints. Consider comparing individual council uphold rates against the average rate rather than against previous years.”*

- 7.3 In the vast majority of LGSCO enquiries the LGSCO have stated there was no further action (116 cases, 70% of the total) and the Ombudsman ruled not to take the matter to a full investigation.

- 7.4 We had a total of 50 (13% escalation) cases investigated with 39 (78%) upheld. This upheld rate is compared to an average of 77% in similar authorities. In three of these cases the council had already upheld the complaint at Stage 2 and in six cases partially upheld the complaint.
- 7.5 There was a compliance rate of 100% with remedial measures compared to an average of 99% across similar authorities (see Appendix B for comparative data).
- 7.6 Of the 39 Complaints that were upheld, 3 (8%) cases had reached a satisfactory outcome before being investigated by the LGSCO.
- 7.7 Figure 6 shows number of upheld complaints per 100,000 residents in each London borough. The Council continues to use complaints insights to improve its services and customer satisfaction.

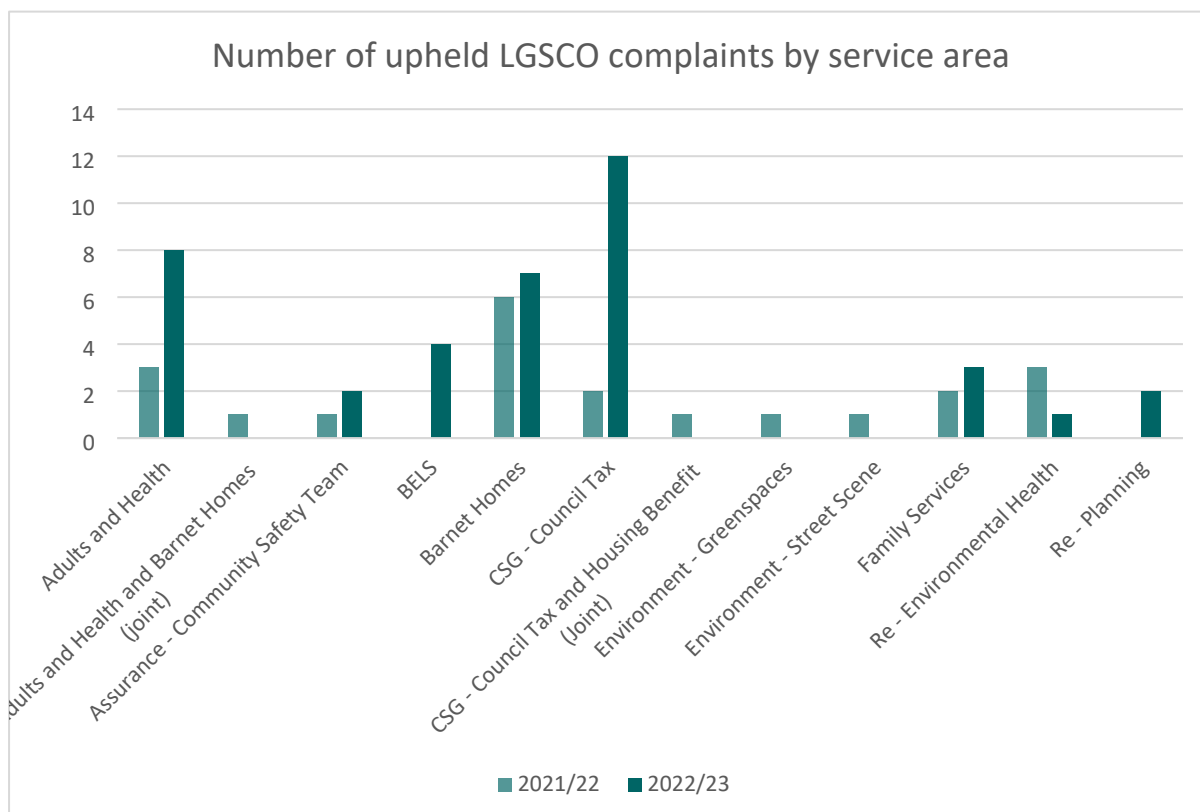
**Figure 6: Benchmarking table**



7.8 Figure 7 below shows breakdown of LGSCO complaints per directorate and includes the number of upheld complaints for the previous year (see Appendix C for more detail). The service with the most upheld complaints was Council Tax which has 12 upheld complaints. The rise in the number of these complaints relate to historic debt collection which was put on hold during COVID. Officers have been trained on effective complaints management and the service has introduced more quality checks of Stage 1 responses to compliment the quality reviews by the Corporate Complaints team at Stage 2. The service has updated their

procedures regarding historic debt collection to minimise risk of errors. The Corporate Complaints Team are regularly meeting with Customer Support Group and Strategy and Resources colleagues to discuss complaints performance, trends, and learning.

**Figure 7:** Breakdown of LGSCO upheld complaints for 2021/22 and 2022/23

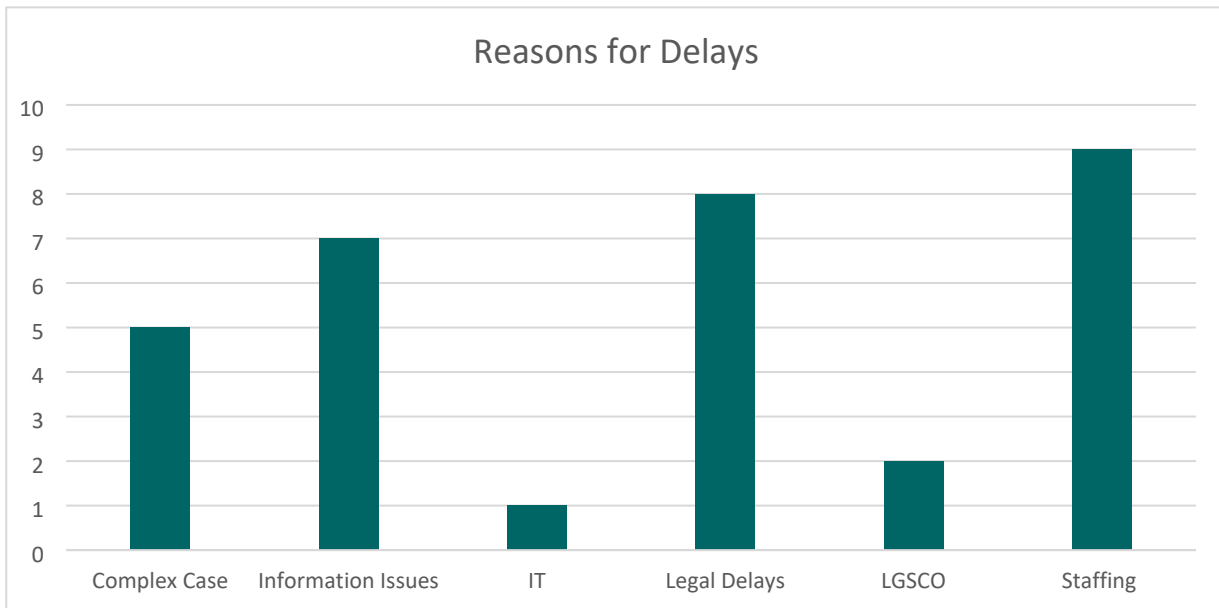


7.9 During the reporting period, the LGSCO issued a “Public Interest Report” for one case relating to Council Tax. This happens in cases when the fault (maladministration) identified is significant.

7.10 The Ombudsman highlighted failings throughout the complaints process along with service failures at points of contact with the resident. The council recognised and accepted these findings and has since completed the remedies recommended to put the complainant back in their original position. The Council has also implemented measures to prevent recurrence, including improvements made to the way the Council communicates with residents. This case costs the council £334 in compensation. LGSCO case ID 21 017 371 was presented to the Council’s Governance, Audit, Risk Management and Standards Committee held on 24 July 2023 (Agenda Item 5)

7.11 Within its annual review letter, the LGSCO noted concerns about the timeliness of the Council’s responses to the LGSCO’s enquiries and in completing remedies (22% of cases had late remedies compared to a national picture of 19%). 28 of the 39 cases upheld involved a delay during the investigation stage (Table 7). A breakdown is provided below in Figure 8.

**Figure 8:** Delays in responding to the LGSCO enquiries



7.12 Having reviewed the root causes for the delays we have devised an action plan to prevent recurrence of these issues (Table 3). This includes flagging response dates to senior managers including to Directors and where responses are late ensuring services review the root causes to prevent recurrence. The Council Management Team have considered these concerns and met with the LGSCO to discuss the issues outlined within the LGSCO’s annual letter.

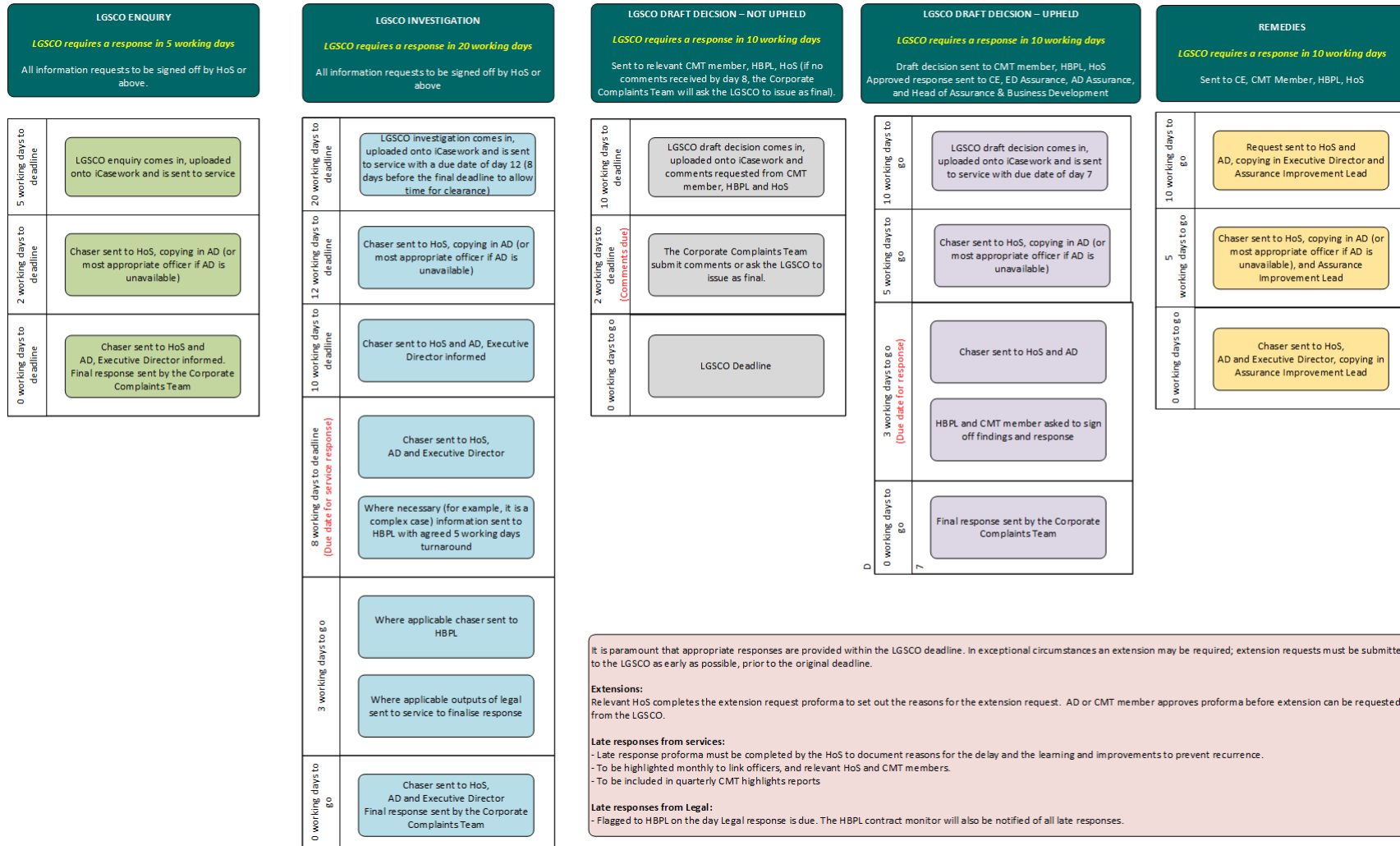
**Table 7:** Prevention Action Plan

Issue identified by Ombudsman	Prevention Actions
<p><b>Late responses to Ombudsman communications and remedy implementation</b></p> <p>Recommendations made in 7 out of 32 cases were not completed within the agreed timescales.</p> <p>Investigations were delayed on 28 occasions due to the council's failure to respond in a timely way to requests for information. Either no request to extend the deadline or the council failed to meet the requested extension of time.</p> <p>Response only received to enquiries after a threat of a witness summons was issued</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Detailed investigations and remedies due per week are sent to relevant Senior Managers (Assistant Director or above) by the Corporate Complaints Team.</li> <li>• Actions due on a particular day are chased and relevant member(s) of Council Management Team are informed.</li> <li>• Ombudsman to be made aware that there may be a delay in responding.</li> <li>• If late, Service must complete pro-forma as to why the action/remedy was delayed and further action to be taken to ensure there is no recurrence.</li> <li>• Quarterly Council Management Team to highlight report to include list of delayed investigations/actions with outcome of pro-forma.</li> <li>• Corporate Complaints Team to hold weekly meetings with a standing agenda item to discuss upcoming LGSCO deadlines and remedies for the next two weeks ahead.</li> <li>• See Figure 8 for the Proposed Process Chart</li> </ul>

Issue identified by Ombudsman	Prevention Actions
<p><b>Incorrect advice given.</b></p> <p>Cases where complainants have been incorrectly advised about the correct complaints' procedure (not being advised of escalation routes) to follow.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Corporate Complaints Manager to sample check a proportion of stage 1 and stage 2 complaints to ensure complaints are fully responded to and complainants have been informed of the correct escalation routes.</li> <li>• Corporate Complaints Manager now reviews all Stage 2 responses prior to release to ensure complaints have been appropriately investigated and responded to.</li> <li>• Outcome of sample reviews to be shared with services and CMT as part of quarterly highlight reports.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Incomplete responses</b></p> <p>Incomplete responses recorded in 6 cases, attributed to council not having correct processes in place to ensure responses are checked before they are sent out (see below for more details).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All responses to be signed off by relevant Head of Service.</li> <li>• All responses to be checked by Corporate Complaints Team before release.</li> </ul>

7.13 The aim for the current year is to reduce the number of investigated and upheld complaints. We have taken steps to do achieve this, including the comprehensive review of the complaints service. This includes reviewing key policies and guidance, information available to customers to make a complaint, reviewing complaints handling capacity in services, staff training, and full utilisation of the management reporting functions of the new complaints case management system. The process map below incorporates the improvements to prevent recurrence of issues mentioned in the LGSCO's annual letter (Figure 9).

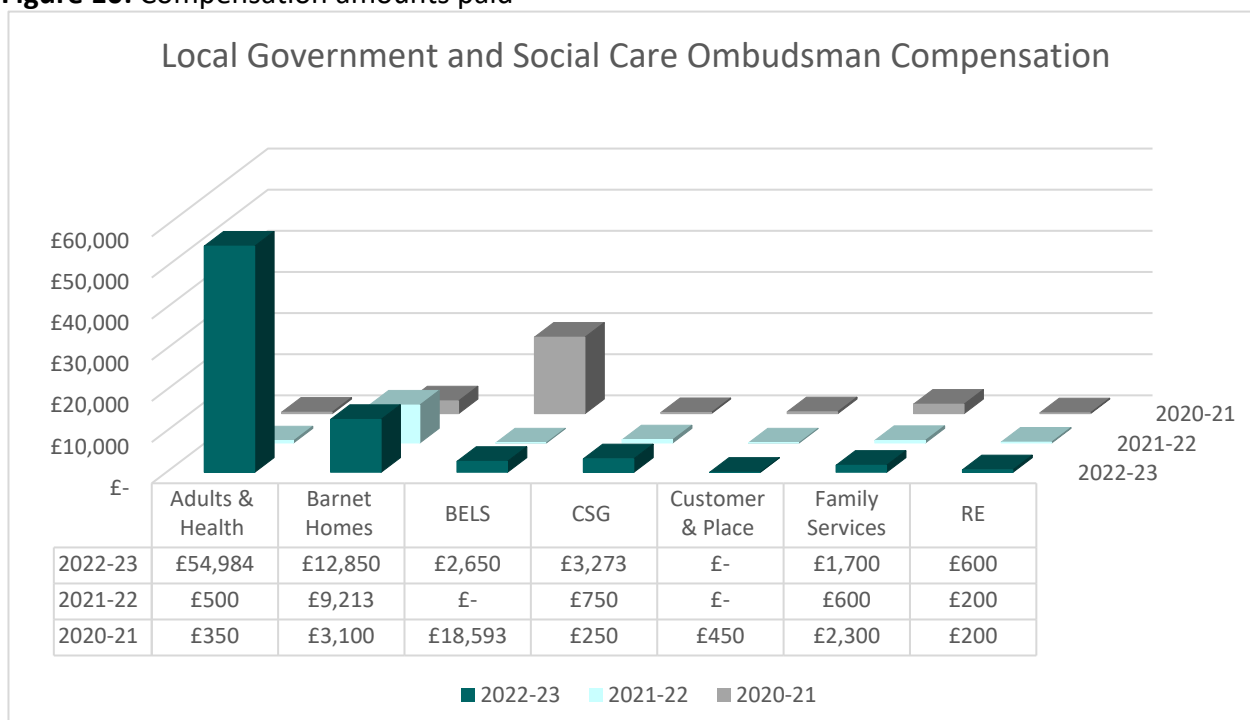
**Figure 9: Process map for LGSCO cases**



## 8. LGSCO Compensation

- 8.1 The annual cost of compensations varies each year, and it is usually impacted by individual cases that involve higher compensation payments as dictated by the LGSCO.
- 8.2 During 2021/2022 the Council paid a total of £11,563 in compensation as a result of complaints upheld by the LGSCO. The value in 2022-2023 has increased to £76,057 (Figure 10). This is in addition to £3,340 paid out as part of the corporate complaints process at Stage 1 and Stage 2. This information is now being collected within the complaints case management system and we can therefore present trends regarding complaints compensation in future reports.

**Figure 10:** Compensation amounts paid



- 8.3 This year Adults & Health (Adult Social Care) paid out both the largest amount overall as well as for a single case (£49,084.28). This case related to failure to provide a care assessment for two years, therefore resulting in the resident having to pay for care directly themselves until the Council was able to provide support.
- 8.4 These figures illustrate the importance of ensuring complaints are dealt with correctly throughout the complaints process, implementing corrective actions and ensuring lessons are learned from previous complaints to avoid recurrence, reduce pressure on human and financial resources.

## 9 Learning from complaints and making improvements

- 9.1 Learning is an imperative part of the complaints process and offers the opportunity to improve council services. Throughout the reporting year every complaint is used to identify learning opportunities to improve services and experiences of customers. Circumstances concerning each complaint and experiences of the customers complaining are often unique, however, general themes have been noted, for example ensuring customers are able to access services if they do not have access to the internet or email. We have delivered an awareness session to Complaints Link Officers, discussing key points from the LGSCOs Focus Report - *Equal access: Getting it right for people with disabilities*. Our Resident Support Team now support

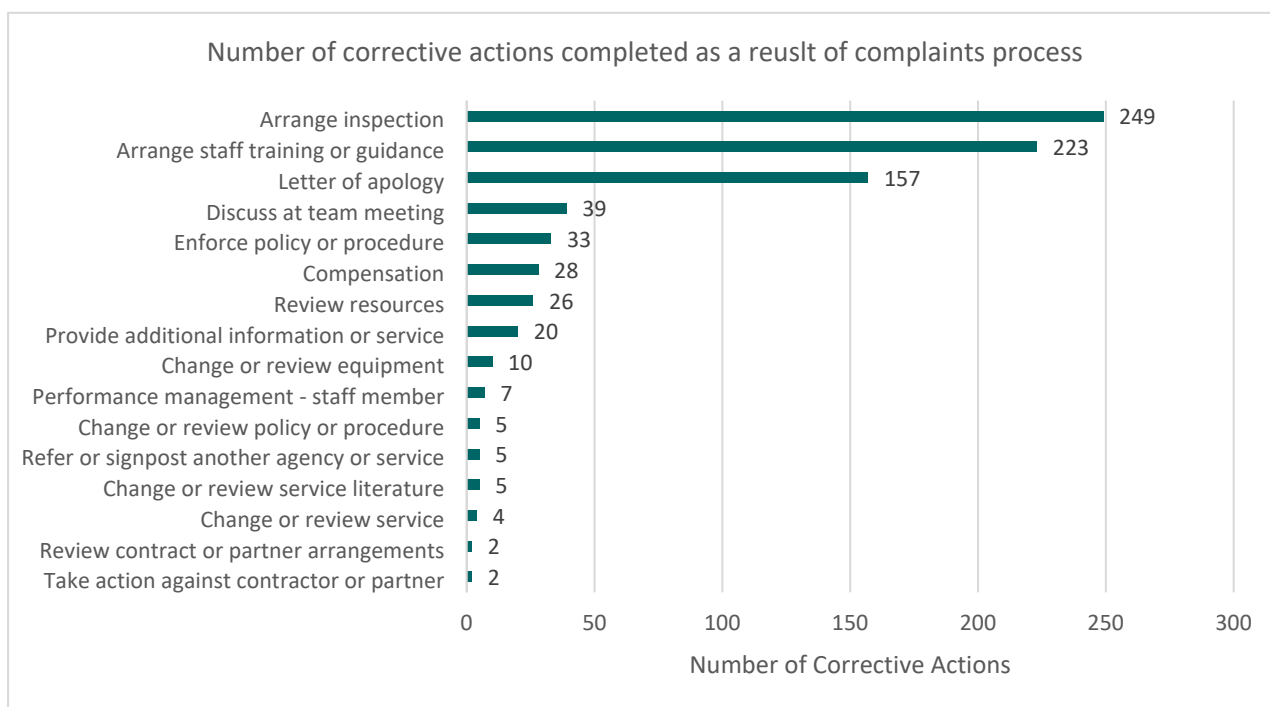


vulnerable and digitally excluded residents. Residents who are unable or prefer not to use digital channels of communication, can request to meet with a member of staff, face to face, who will help with their enquiry. Where relevant we share complaints outcomes with the Resident Experience Team so they can feed outcomes of complaints into resident journey design processes.

9.2 Our case management system shows that we implemented 815 corrective actions resulting complaints (Figure 11), with the greatest number of remedies being:

- arranging inspection (249 incidents)
- arranging staff training or guidance (233 incidents)
- offering a letter of apology (157 incidents).

**Figure 11:** Corrective actions completed.



9.3 One learning opportunity resulted from an LGSCO case, where they upheld a resident’s complaint as the Council had not made the resident aware of the Community Trigger process. In addition to actioning all LGSCO recommendations, the service has also designed a Community Trigger email signature to ensure residents are made aware of the process and provided a link to the relevant pages of the Council’s website (Figure 12).

**Figure 12:** Community trigger e-mail signature



9.4 The Street Scene service area took the opportunity when reviewing their complaints to make changes when they have noticed several complaints relating to damaged bins and

responsibility for cost of replacement bins. They updated the website to ensure expectations regarding paying for replacement damaged bins is clear for residents. They have also encouraged refuse collectors to immediately report where bins have been damaged by collectors so that replacements can be ordered in a timely manner.

- 9.5 Barnet, Education and Learning Service received a complaint where not all relevant documentation was sent to a resident. As a result, they have arranged staff training with caseworkers to ensure expectations were made clear and to prevent recurrence of the issues.
- 9.6 Council Tax received a case concerning the status of a live-in carer, with regard to calculation of council tax liabilities. The services provided further training to staff about how to treat live-in carers in this process.
- 9.7 The Contact Centre upheld a complaint regarding a telephone enquiry about Council Tax. The Customer Service Team considered there was learning beyond a discussion with the advisor and provided guidance for all advisors to remind them of recovery process and requested that the Training Team incorporated this into learning materials.
- 9.8 As a result of one complaint, Assisted Travel service has reviewed a case with a provider and clarified timeframes for blue badge and disabled freedom pass assessments.

## **10 Improvement Plan**

- 10.1 In order to ensure that we are continually improving our service, we have made improvements to the corporate complaints service.
- 10.2 These aim to ensure customer satisfaction and resolution of complaints at the earliest opportunity. They focus on:
  - clarifying procedures for staff and for customers
  - updating our guidance and providing training to officers involved in complaints management. This will include e-learning training and developing an onboarding system when new complaints link officers join the council.
  - making information and process of complaining/giving feedback easier and more accessible
  - ensuring good customer service and clear and timely communication with all parties
  - quality checking against complaints best practice
  - ensuring complaints are investigated and responded in accordance with the Council's policy and expected timescales.
  - Lessons are identified and shared.
  - Improvements and remedies are implemented to prevent recurrence of issues.
  - Utilising technology to effectively track progress of cases.
  - Management oversight of complaints at all appropriate levels
- 10.3 The complaints review is overseen by the Assurance management team; progress updates will be included in future reports presented to the GARMS Committee.

## **11 Conclusion**

11.1 This report documents the performance of corporate complaints management at the London Borough of Barnet and the steps which will be taken to improve complaints management and increase resident experience going forward. The GARMS committee will be updated on progress via future reports.