



IPSWICH
BOROUGH COUNCIL

**Complaints Performance
& Service Improvement
Annual Report**

April 2023 – March 2024

Contents

Introduction	3
Access and Awareness (Complaints).....	4
Equality and Diversity.....	4
Oversight and support provided by the Complaints Service	5
5CS (Complaints, Compliments, Comments, Corrections, Contact Us).....	6
Summary of Complaints	7
Summary of Compliments.....	14
Summary of Comments	15
Housing Ombudsman Service Complaints	16
Housing Ombudsman Service Cases	22
Local Government and Social Care Complaints	23
Local Government and Social Care Cases	23
Learning from Complaints	24
Service Performance and Improvements.....	27
Reflection.....	28
Summary.....	30
Appendix A – Previous 3-Stage Complaints Procedure	31
Appendix B – Sample of compliments 2023/24	32

Introduction

"In Ipswich, the population size has increased by 4.7%, from around 133,400 in 2011 to 139,700 in 2021.

There has been an increase of 16.5% in people aged 65 years and over, an increase of 1.5% in people aged 15 to 64 years, and an increase of 6.8% in children aged under 15 years."

***Census 2021**

All local authorities are required to provide a formal Complaints Policy and Procedure that informs how they record and respond to residents' dissatisfaction in an open and transparent way, within defined timescales and in accordance with legislation.

The purpose of this report is to outline the corporate complaints that Ipswich Borough Council has received in the period 1st April 2023 – 31st March 2024, highlighting key trends, lessons learnt and subsequent service improvements.

The report also explains how the Council has performed against the required standards set out in the Housing Ombudsman Service Code.

The Council welcomes complaints as an opportunity to maintain high quality performance and a gateway to consistently review and improve the quality of the services offered to individuals/residents. A complaint, as defined by the Housing Ombudsman, is defined as:

"An expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the landlord, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting a resident or group of residents."

This definition is deliberately broad to ensure that complaints are easily recognised, meaning they can then be addressed effectively and in a timely manner.

In the financial year 2023 to 2024, the Council were operating a 3-stage process.

From the **1st April 2024**, the Council adopted a **2-stage process** when handling complaints in unity with the Housing Ombudsman Service's Complaint Handling Code. This adaption has also been documented under Ipswich Borough Council's Complaints [Procedure](#). We proudly align with the statutory requirements dictated by the Housing Ombudsman regarding acknowledgement, response, and extension timeframes.

At all stages of the Complaints process we advise complainants of the relevant Ombudsman to contact if they are unsatisfied with the outcome or the way in which the complaint was managed.

The stages of the **old** Complaints Procedure can be found under [Appendix A](#).

Access and Awareness (Complaints)

Accessibility

Customers can access the complaints service across multiple channels including:

- Online at www.ipswich.gov.uk/contactus
- By telephone to our Customer Services team on 01473 432000
- In person by talking to a member of staff at any of our Council venues
- In writing to Customer Services at:

Ipswich Borough Council,
Grafton House,
15-17 Russell Road,
Ipswich,
Suffolk,
IP1 2DE

Social media should not be used to make a complaint. If a customer makes contact to complain in person, or by phone, they will be directed to complete the complaints online form or to send the complaint in writing. This is to ensure that there is a full audit trail of information captured to allow the Council to follow the Complaints Procedure, to conduct a thorough investigation and to provide a full response to the complainant.

Equality and Diversity

The Council values diversity and is committed to promoting equality of opportunity to ensure all residents are treated fairly.

The Council's [Equality & Diversity Policy](#) sets out our approach to promoting and upholding the principles of equality, diversity, fairness, and inclusion.

The Council is committed to promoting equality by ensuring equal access to our complaint's Procedure, including making reasonable adjustments to allow for flexibility in the Procedure to accommodate an individuals need. For example:

- If a customer requires assistance to take forward their complaint, they can appoint a representative to deal with their complaint on their behalf (verification will be sought before the complaint is investigated).
- Any individual representing or assisting a customer with a complaint can accompany them at any meeting with the Council if a meeting is required to consider the complaint.
- If a customer requires assistance with their complaint but do not have anyone to help them, they can let the Council know by contacting our customer service team on 01473 432000, where our Quality Assurance Complaints Officer will assist them in formulating their complaint.

Oversight and support provided by the Complaints Service

The Complaints team, situated within Customer Services, continues to support departments to both manage and learn from complaints. The key services offered by the team are:

1. Complaint advice and guidance
2. Production of performance reports
3. Liaison with the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman and Housing Ombudsman
4. Quality assurance of complaint responses
5. Complaint handling training for Complaint Champions and managers
6. Acting as a "critical friend" to challenge service practice
7. Support with managing unacceptable behaviour or complex complaints

Assistance is routinely provided to Complaint Champions and management in drafting comprehensive responses to complaint investigations. This helps ensure a consistency of response, and that both internal process and wider statutory legislation is followed.

Quarterly complaints reports are produced and presented to Departmental Management teams or Senior Leadership teams as appropriate. Through data, the Complaints Service team assist service areas to identify the root cause of complaints and aim to prevent reoccurrence.

With effect from April 2024, the newly appointed Quality Assurance Complaints Officer now assists in all open complaint cases and acts as a single point of contact within the Council. This enables the complaints service to protract disputes and ensure that complaint responses are consistent and compliant.

5CS (Complaints, Compliments, Comments, Corrections, Contact Us)

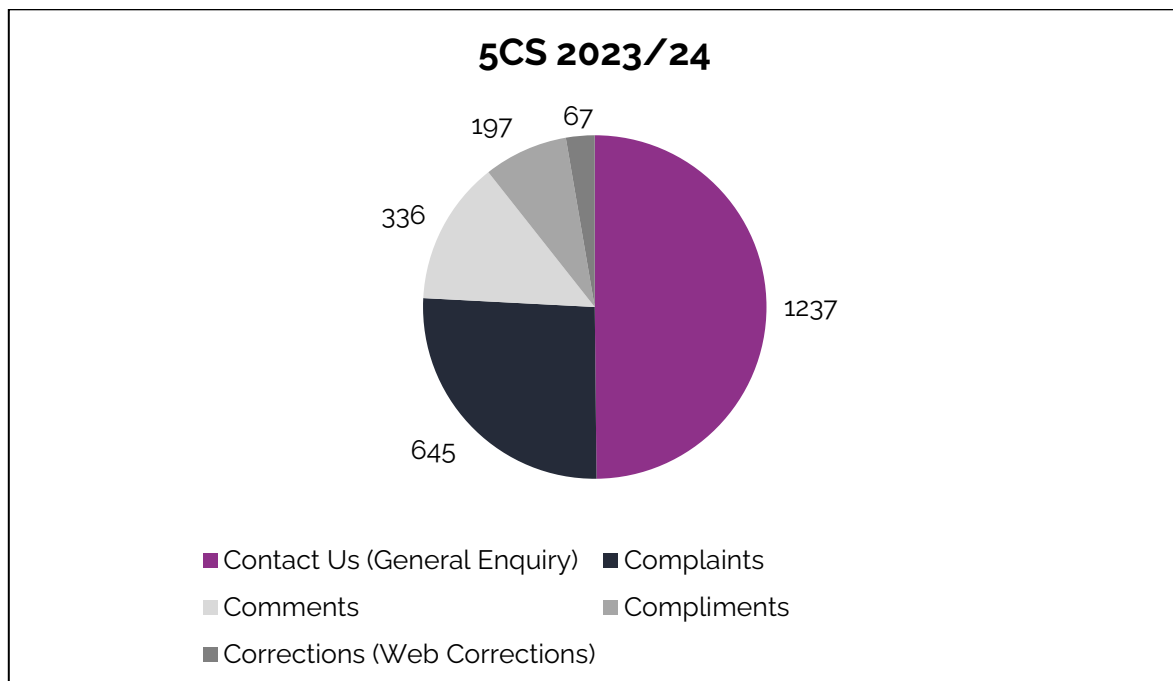
The Council's 5Cs model incorporates corporate Complaints, Compliments, Comments, Corrections and Contact Us and was introduced across the Council in 2017 as part of the Customer Access Strategy.

The Customer Access Strategy is based on the following key 5 priorities:

1. Digital by default
2. First point resolution
3. Online access to Council Services 24/7
4. Maximising the use of technology
5. Measuring customer experience and acting on feedback

The Council is committed to providing the best possible services for its customers, and continually updates these through complaint learning and feedback. A suite of online contact forms were created in 2017 for each enquiry type to allow customers to self-serve through the Council's customer portal – [My Ipswich](#) – where customers can request a service, report a problem, or contact us online 24/7.

Note: The 'Corrections' service was relabelled as 'Web Corrections' for clarity. The 'Contact Us' service was also relabelled as 'Contact Us – General Enquiry' where customers can contact the relevant service area with an enquiry that requires a response, as opposed to 'Comments' and 'Compliments' that do not need a response. The table below shows the popularity of each service used in 2023/24 with general enquiries being the highest.



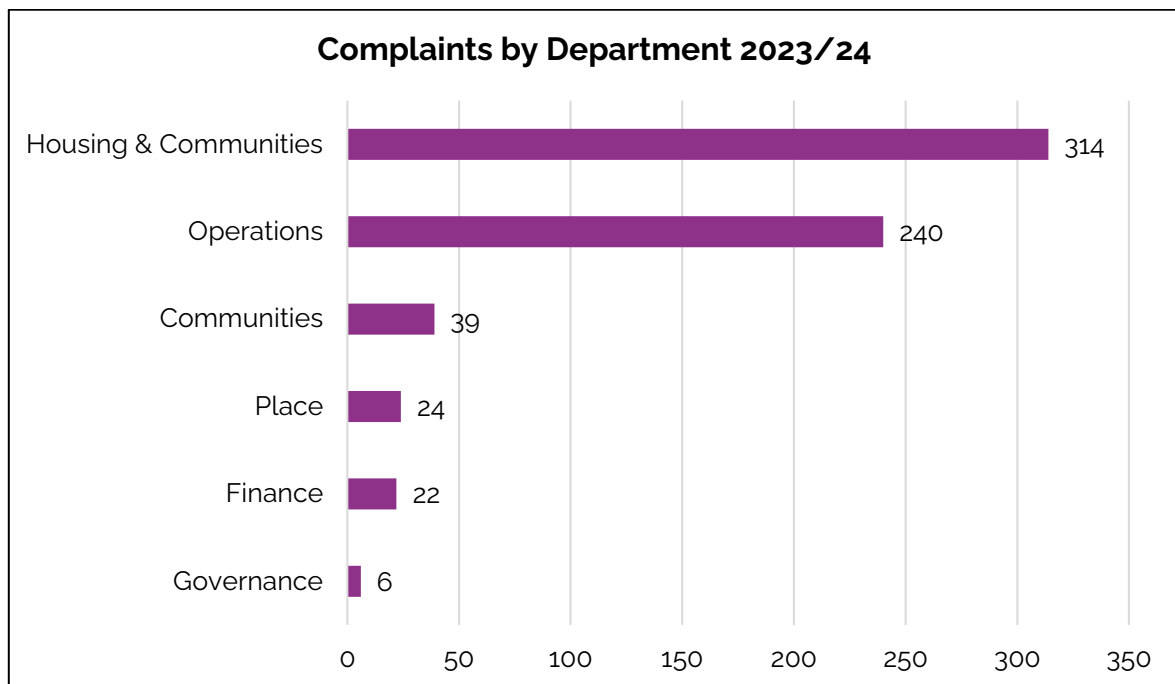
Unlike complaints, a significant number of enquiries do not need to be formally investigated. The public are instead assisted by the Quality Assurance Complaints Officer and the Performance and Projects team, both situated within Customer Services, to access the appropriate service and resolve any concerns they may have.

Summary of Complaints

In the 2023/24 reporting period, a total of **1065** complaints submissions were received. It is important to note that of this figure, some were dealt with as service requests, referred to other Local Authorities or were duplicate requests. Considering this, a total of **645** complaints were classified and dealt with as a formal complaint.

Important: The data and table below have been produced from Quarterly Reports and represents all complaints received within each of these quarters and their current position within the complaints process at the end of each quarter. In the future, we would look to run a report over the whole financial year to ensure closer accuracy. In 2023/24, the Council had a reorganisation of departments.

Formal complaints were received across all departments, as represented in the graphic below:

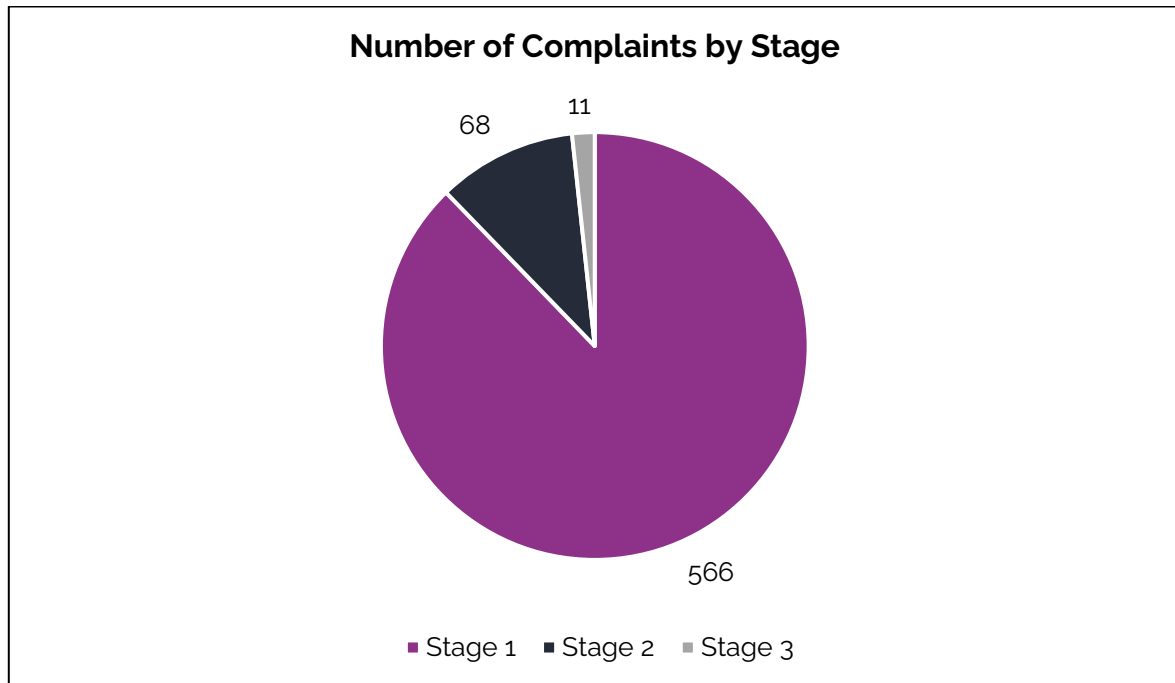


The following five service areas received the most complaints in the 2023/34 reporting period, as represented in the table below:

Service Area	2023/24
Housing Repairs (Council Tenants)	228
Regent Theatre & Corn Exchange	134
Housing (Council Tenants)	46
Parks & Open Spaces	38
Bins & Waste	33

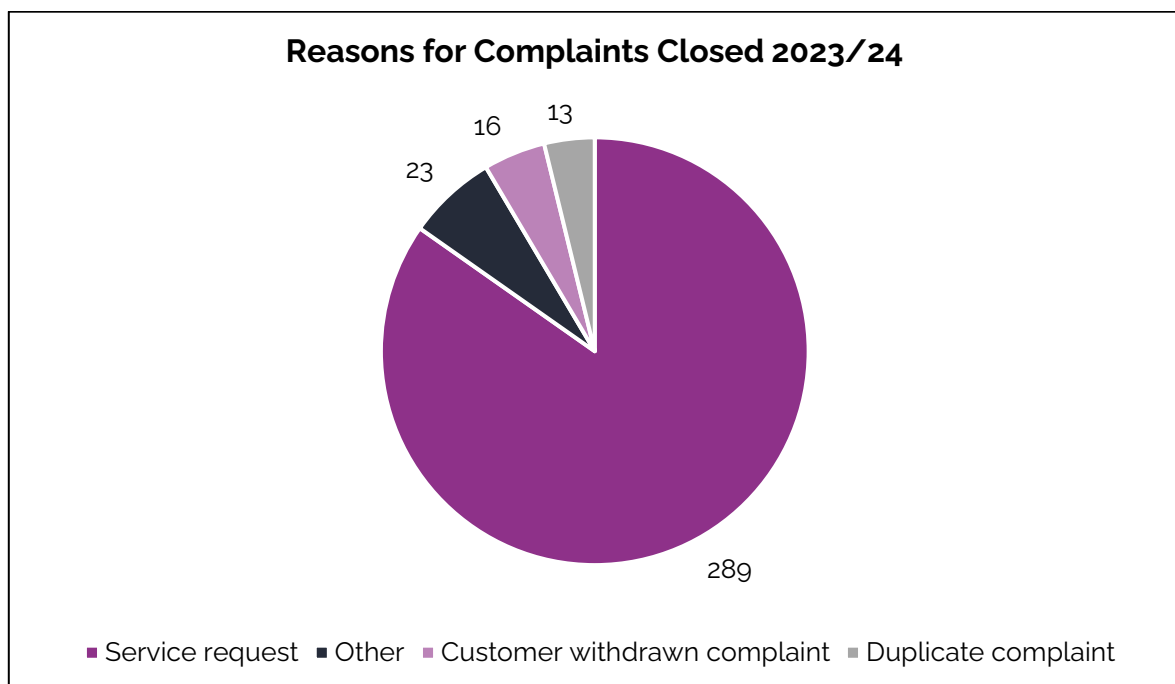
The graphic below demonstrates how many of these complaints were either at Stage 1, 2 or 3 within the complaints process. **88%** of complaints were resolved at Stage 1, **10%** of complaints were resolved at Stage 2 and **2%** of complaints were resolved at Stage 3.

Note: Ipswich Borough Council are operating a 2-stage process from 1 April 2024.



Service Requests

Of the **1065** complaints received in 2023/24, **289** of these were closed as a service request, which equates to **27%** of the submissions. **16** complainants had withdrawn their complaint, **13** complaints were duplicated and **23** complaints were closed as "other".



Other Reasons

There were **23** complaints that were closed under "other". These were largely closed as they fell outside of the complaints Policy. Some examples of the reasoning for closure are as follows:

Note: The Council's complaints Policy and Procedure both state that a Penalty Charge Notice (PCN) appeal is not considered as a complaint and is not covered under the Policy. The online complaints form refers to this also with the aim to divert customers accordingly. Other reasons for closing a complaint, as outlined in the complaints Policy, include but are not limited to: appeals against a Benefits decision or any service area where a formal appeals process exists, or any complaints that are filed where legal proceedings have commenced.

Examples:

"You are unable to make a complaint regarding a PCN appeal, you are able to make another appeal, as this is already a formal process within the parking penalty process - We have added your appeal on as another appeal to be considered."

Parking Services

Customer has stated that she disagrees with the local connection criteria rules, as published in the allocations Policy. This should be dealt with as a request for a change in allocations Policy rather than a complaint.

Housing (Choice Based Lettings/Gateway to Homechoice)

This complaint relates to enforcement agents and not Ipswich Borough Council. Whilst I sympathise with the situation you have described; the court appointed enforcement agents are required to attend the address of the registered keeper of the vehicle that received a PCN, as recorded with the DVLA, this not a process we have any control over.

Parking Services

This complaint relates to a third-party commercial event. Full details have been forwarded to the event organisers to respond directly.

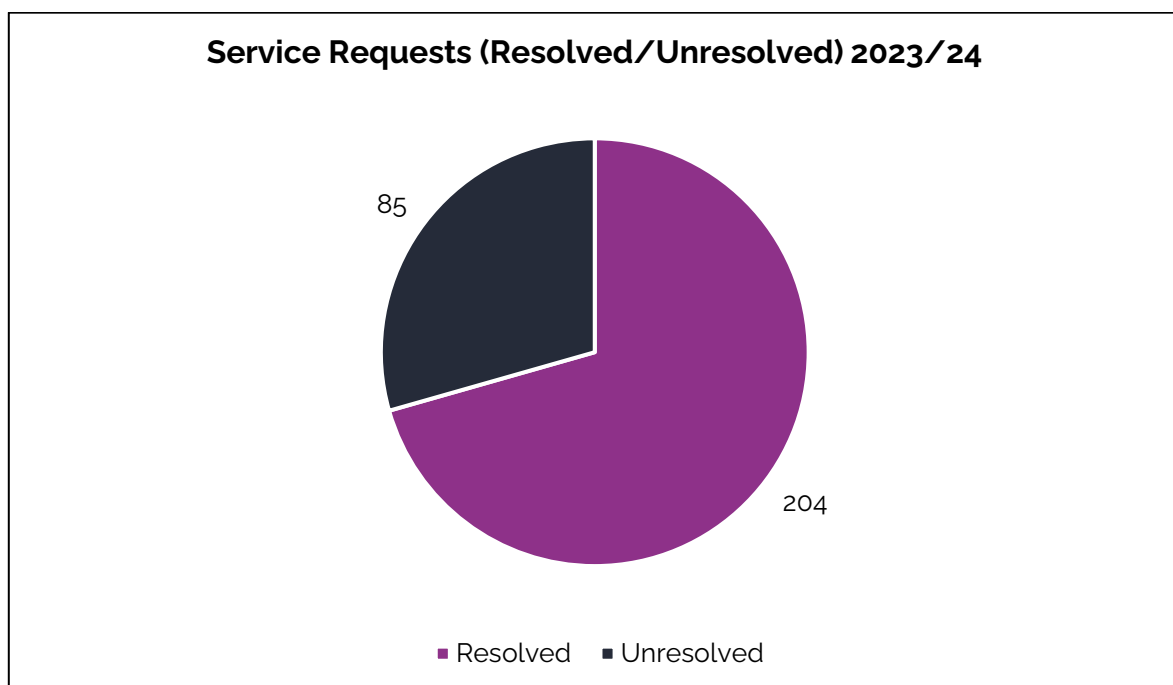
Events

Service Requests (Resolved/Unresolved)

In total, **289** complaints were closed as a service request in 2023/24. **204** of these service requests had already been resolved, which represents 71% of cases. **85** cases (29%) were reported as unresolved – meaning they would have been forwarded to the relevant service area to action.

Once the unresolved cases have been forwarded to the relevant service area, this then sits outside the Council's complaints system. We therefore have no accurate data to report detailing whether these were resolved and what action was taken.

In 2024/25, as part of the Quality Assurance Complaints Officer role, any conversions of complaints to service requests and the reasoning why are emailed to the officer for scrutiny and oversight. This is to ensure that conversions are made appropriately and in line with the Council's Policy, and that all concerns raised in the initial contact are either answered by the appropriate service area or redirected to the correct authority.



Example of resolved service request:

Whitehouse Road has been litter-picked. No sign of cuttings/branches present along the said mentioned stretch.

Clean My Street – Report It

The above example was pulled from the 204 resolved service requests in 2023/24. It shows the response that was issued by the service area to the customer. As it remained within the complaints process, it remained traceable.

Example of unresolved service request:

"There is a transit van parked on Hawthorn Drive near number ___ that has been there for at least two weeks and is a nuisance. The driver's mirror has already been hit. The Registration number is ____ ____. I think it is abandoned and need to be moved."

Environmental Health

The example was taken from the 85 unresolved service requests in 2023/24. Unresolved service requests occur where a complaint is converted and acknowledged as a service request. The service request is then forwarded by email to the relevant service area to resolve outside of the complaints process. The above changes for 2024/45, whereby all conversions to service requests are visible to the Quality Assurance Complaints Officer, hopes to resolve this oversight in future.

Complaint Deadlines

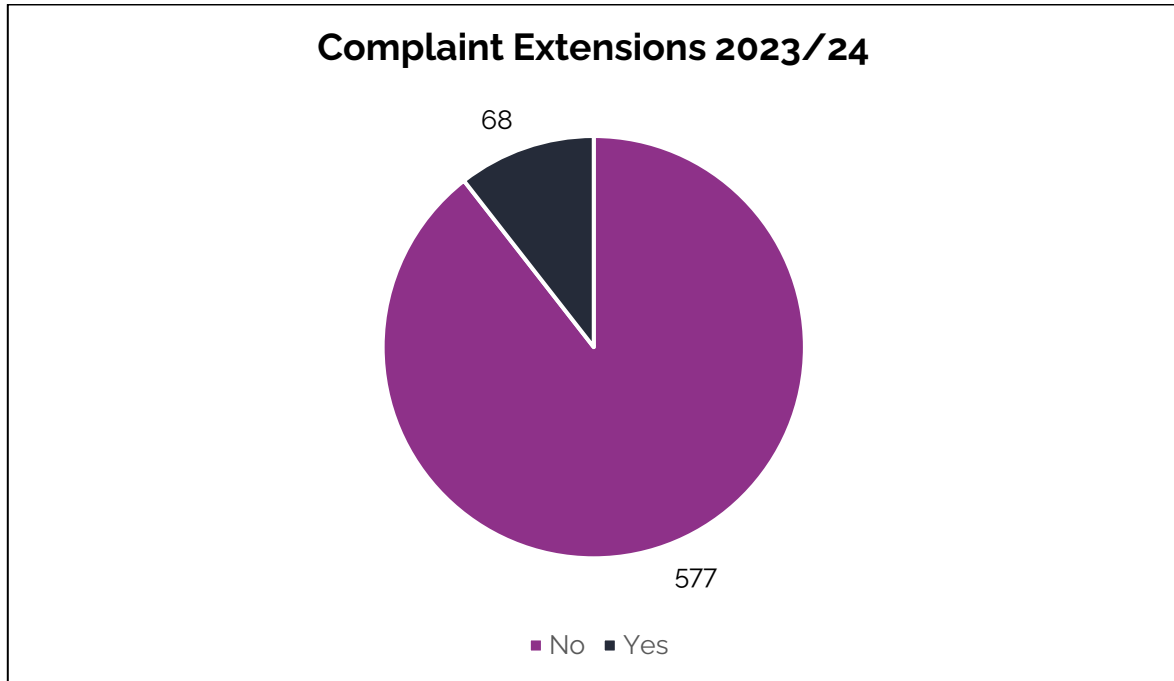
Of the **645** complaints recorded in 2023/24, **16** complaints missed the deadline, which represents **3%** of all complaints. The Council expected this figure to be higher, however it is noted that some service areas had completed responses outside of the complaints process without closing the complaint, meaning the Complaints Team then regrettably lost sight of these timeframes. The Complaints Team have since reiterated the importance of keeping the complaint journey within the specific complaints process.



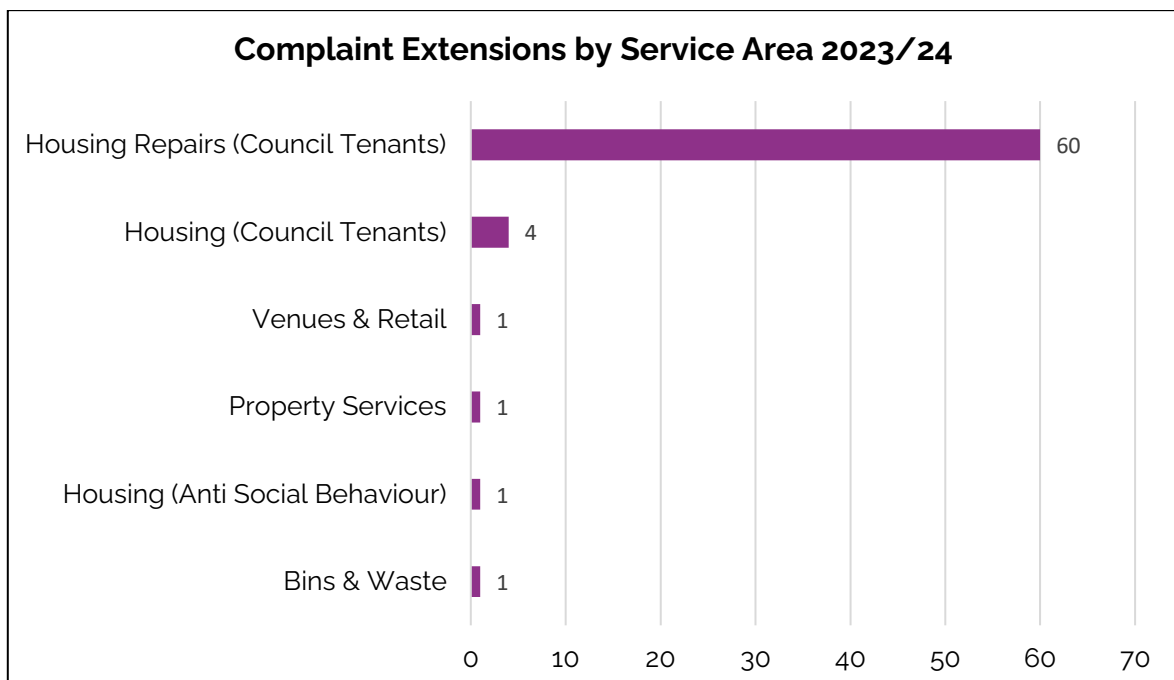
In the future, commencing year 2024/25, the complaints team aim to troubleshoot and improve the current reporting mechanisms and ensure that the complaints process time calculators are producing accurate deadline results. The new 2-stage complaints process now sends out regular automated reminder emails at every stage. The Quality Assurance Complaints Officer is also able to track and chase officers when required.

Complaint Extensions

As per the Council's complaint Procedure, Complaint Champions can request an extension providing they express a valid reason for doing so and that the complainant is notified. Of the 645 complaints recorded in 2023/24, 68 (12%) of these were extended.



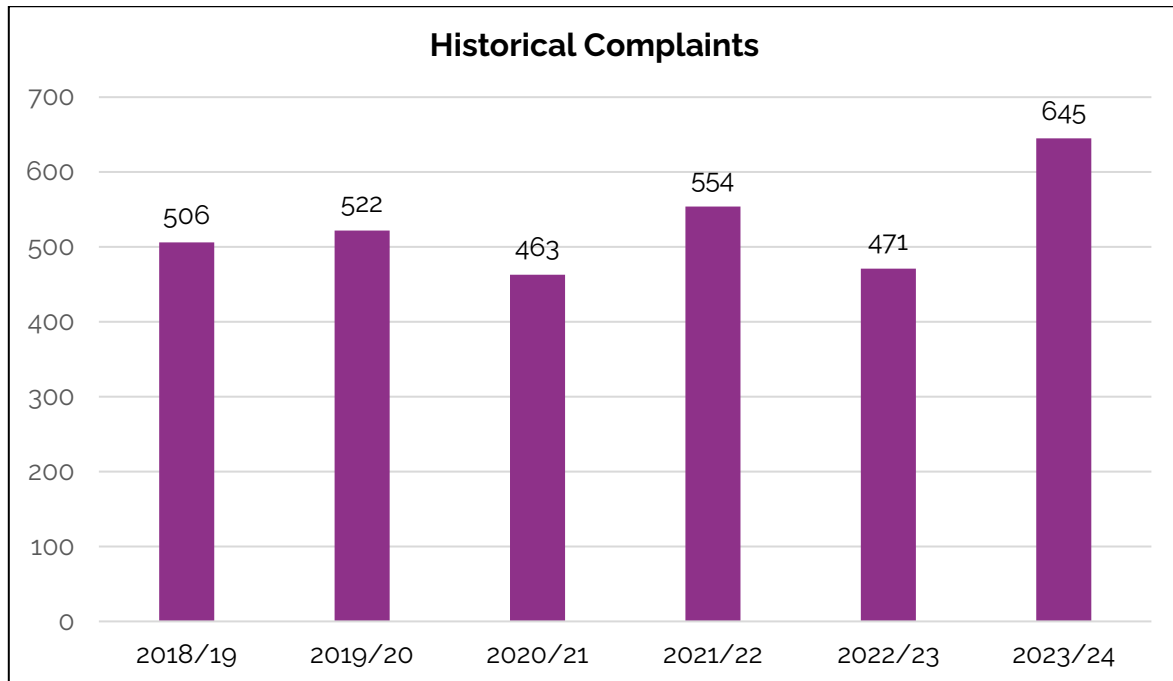
The below chart details the service areas who requested extensions. It is noted that majority of requests were for Housing Repairs. This can be attributed to several factors, as under "Lessons Learned", including high service demands, strain on resources, and the length of time required to ascertain details from both internal colleagues and external contractors. This is an area the Council is keen to improve upon and will be revisited in 2024/25.



Historical Complaints

Over the past five years, the number of complaints recorded has grown, with 2023/24 receiving the highest number of complaints to date. This equates to a 37% increase when comparing 2022/23 against 2023/34.

Generally, the number of complaints has continued to grow year on year. This is with the exception of 2020/21, which is fair to ascribe to the Covid-19 pandemic, and 2022/23, which recorded a decrease in the number of complaints.

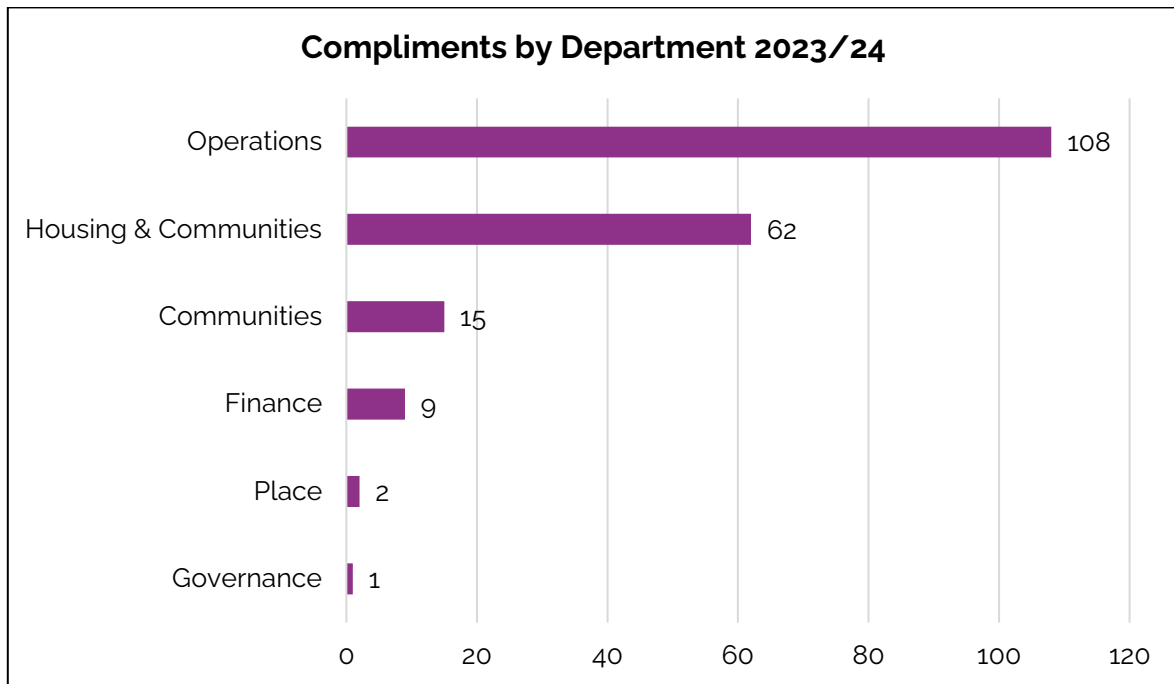


Complaints being received at a steady annual increase could also be attributed to several factors, including the increase in population within the Borough, as well as increased engagement with online services in line with our Customer Access Strategy. There has also been growing awareness of the complaints process propelled by service areas, such as a direct link to the complaints page being built into our CRM system to allow Customer Service Advisors to directly signpost telephony customers to our online services.

In line with the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code of April 2024, Ipswich Borough Council agrees that an increase in complaints is not inherently negative. There is an expectation that this figure may increase further still in 2024/25, with the implementation of the Quality Assurance Complaints Officer role who can assist customers in raising a complaint who previously may not have been able to do so online, in writing or with a third-party.

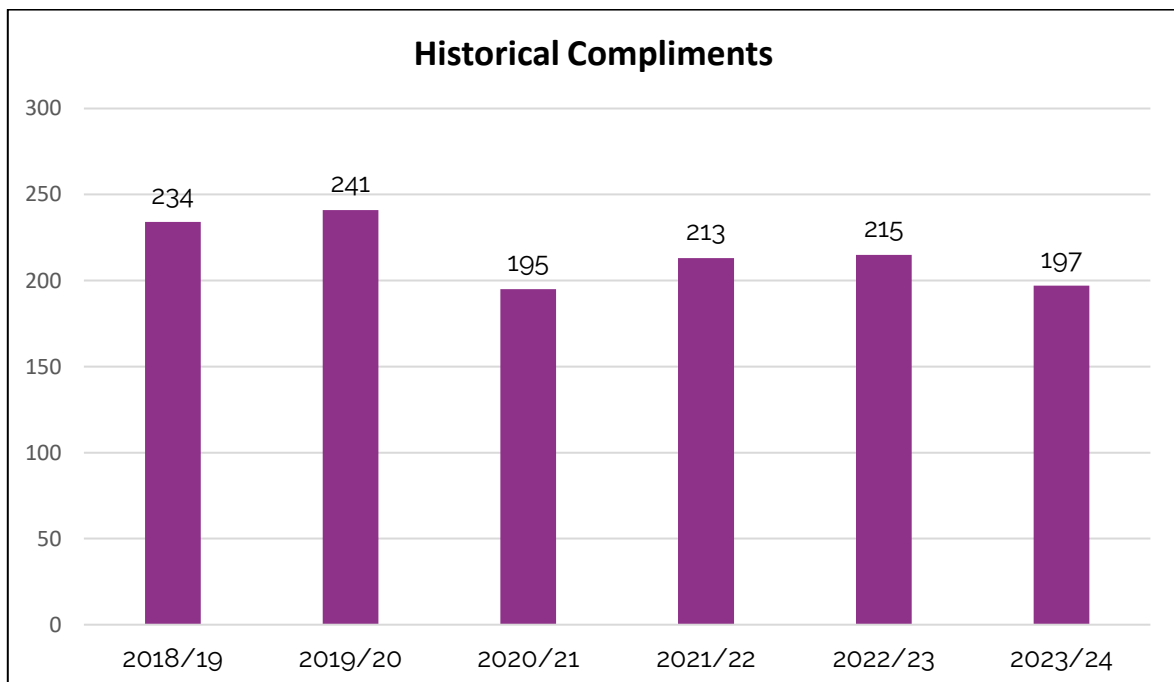
Summary of Compliments

The Council received a total of **197** compliments in 2023/24. A sample of compliments received in 2023/24 are detailed in **Appendix B**.



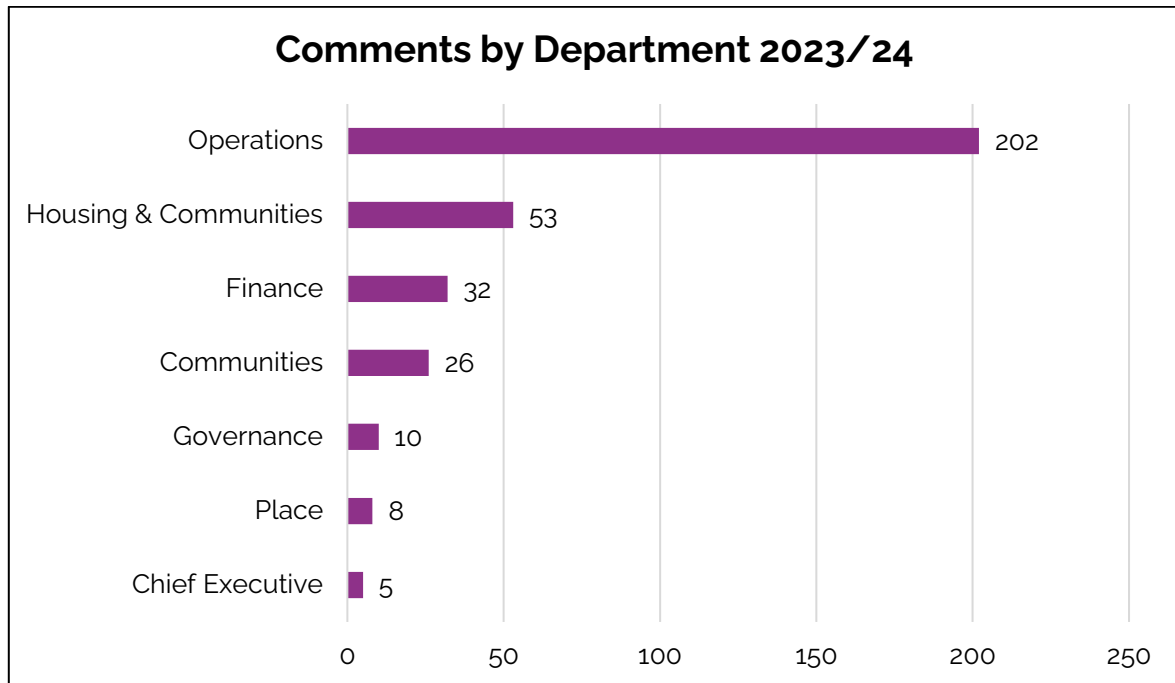
Historical Compliments

The Council has recorded a steady number of compliments year on year from 2018, with the smallest being **195** compliments during the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020/21 and the highest **241** in the year prior, 2019/20.



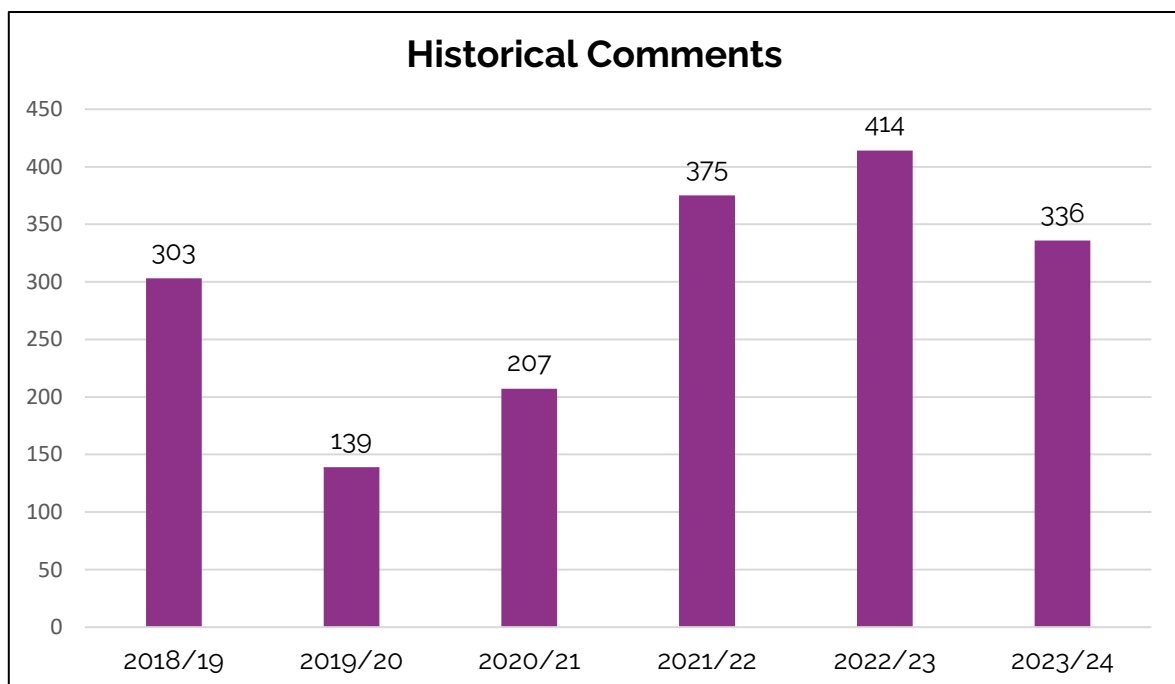
Summary of Comments

A comment is defined as “feedback about something or someone that has not met your expectations so we can learn from and improve our services”. There were a total of **336** comments received in 2023/24, as detailed below. The Chief Executive option has been removed from the process for 2024/25 due to its minimal and, at times incorrect, usage.



Historical Comments

The trend for comments had a two-year low before and during the Covid-19 pandemic and continued to rise from 2021/22 consistently until 2023/24, where we saw a drop in comments comparatively.

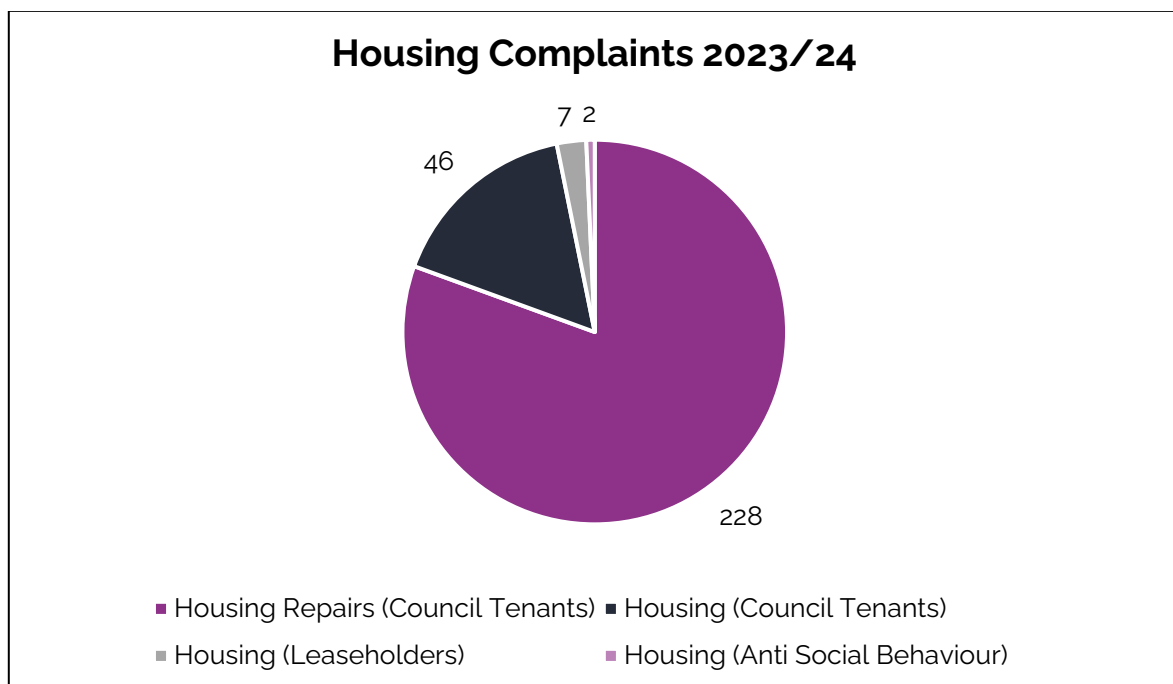


Housing Ombudsman Service Complaints

The following service areas fall under the Housing Ombudsman Service:

- Housing (Anti-Social Behaviour)
- Housing (Council Tenants)
- Housing (Leaseholders)
- Housing Repairs (Council Tenants)

In total, **283** complaints were recorded in 2023/24 under the Housing Ombudsman Service. The graph below demonstrates the volumes of complaints for each of the Housing Ombudsman Service areas:



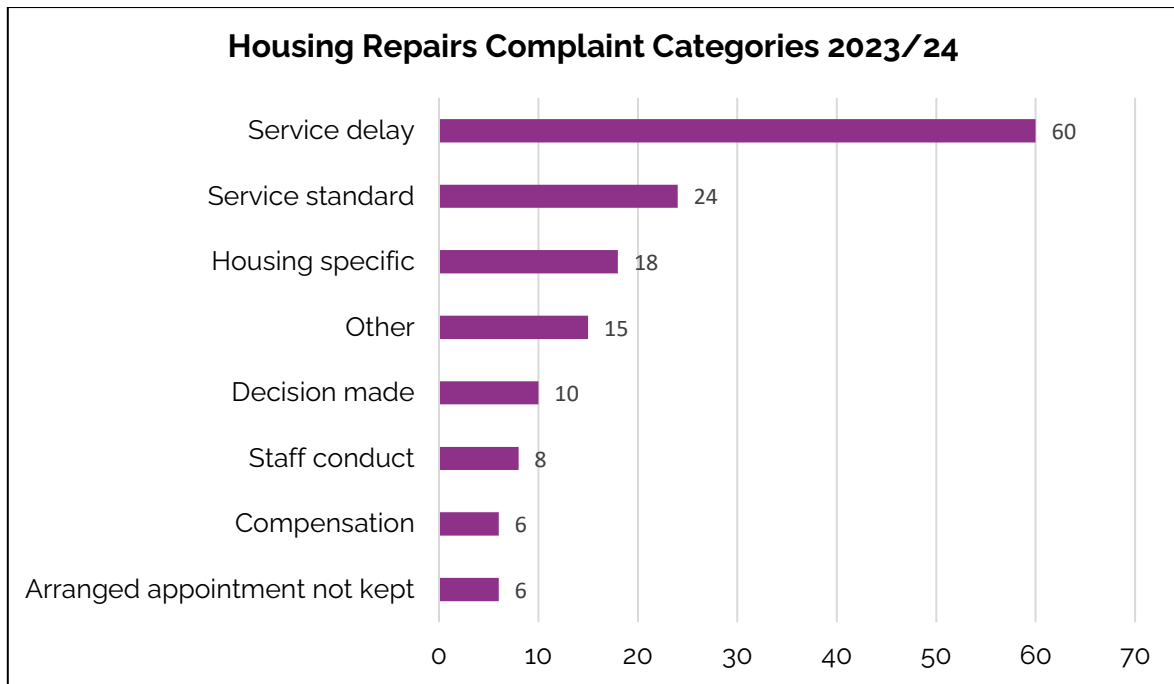
Housing Repairs (Council Tenants)

Housing Repairs (Council Tenants) represented 81% of the overall volume of complaints under the Housing Ombudsman Service, where the highest number of complaints were recorded – **228** for 2023/24.

The Council has a total of 7,839 properties within the borough. The Council introduced an online repairs portal in June 2023, which is accessed through the existing customer portal – [My Ipswich](#) – where Council tenants can sign up and authenticate their repairs account, creating an interconnected process.

With the introduction of the online repairs portal, the Housing Repairs service now enables residents to book, cancel, and reschedule a repair online. At the time of publication, 2,100 residents have signed up to the online Housing Repairs portal and are able to access this service online rather than telephoning Customer Services.

The complaint categories for Housing Repairs are detailed in the following graph for 2023/24. Service delay is the highest category with **60** complaints. Arranged appointment not kept has the lowest number of complaints in this category, where in **6** cases a tradesman did not attend an arranged appointment.



Although the Council recorded **228** complaints for Housing Repairs, there are only **147** categories. This is as the complaint data is currently only run on a monthly and quarterly basis, whereby the current state of the complaint may be incomplete or yet to be escalated to the following stage.

Where 'Other' has been selected as a category, some of the examples of these complaints are due to:

- Communication
- Human error
- Manufacturing delay
- Mistake

The type of service the Housing Repairs complaints were broken down as follows:

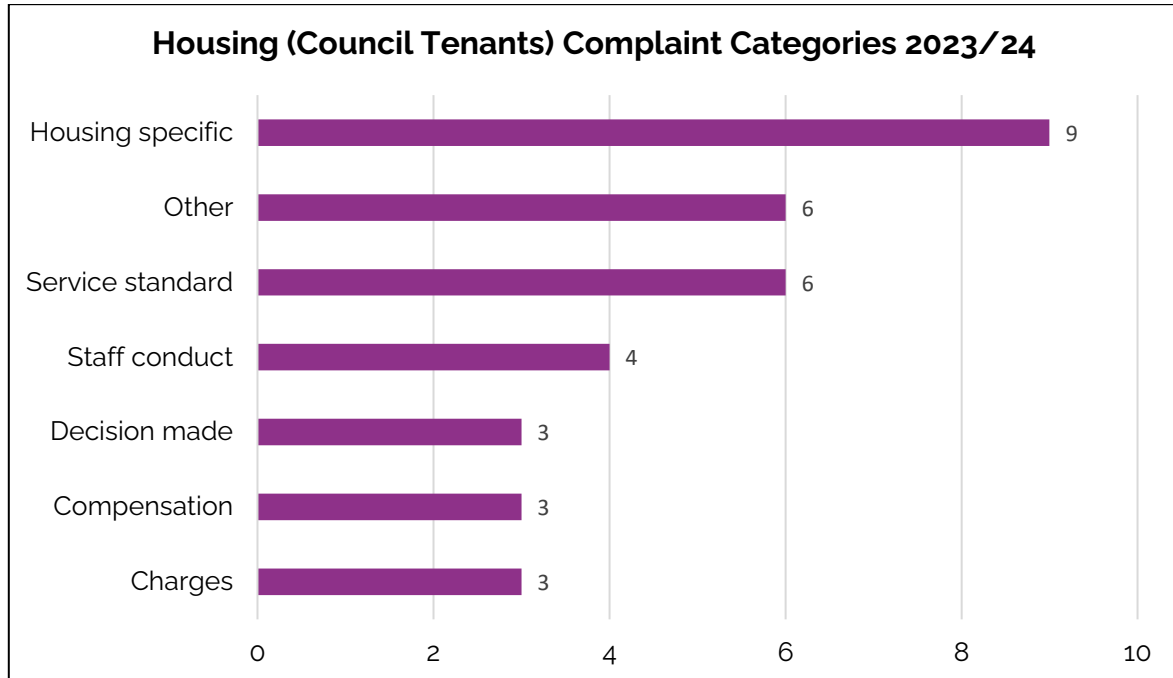
Repairs Service	Total
Repairs	86
Surveyors	28
Planned Maintenance	12
Mechanical & Electrical	11
Voids	4
Caretaking Services	2
Disabled Adaptions	2
Kitchen & Bathroom	2
Total	147

The highest number of complaints for Housing Repairs were regarding repair work, followed by Surveying.

Housing (Council Tenants)

Housing (Council Tenants) represented 16% of the overall volume of complaints under the Housing Ombudsman Service, where **46** complaints were recorded for 2023/24.

The Council has a total of 9001 tenants within the Borough.



The complaint categories for Housing (Council Tenants) are detailed above for 2023/24. Housing specific was the highest category, with **9** complaints, followed by Other and Service standard.

Where 'Other' has been selected as a category, some of these were elaborated by the Complaint Champion as being related to:

- Communication
- Incorrect Information

The type of service the Housing (Council Tenants) complaints related to are detailed below:

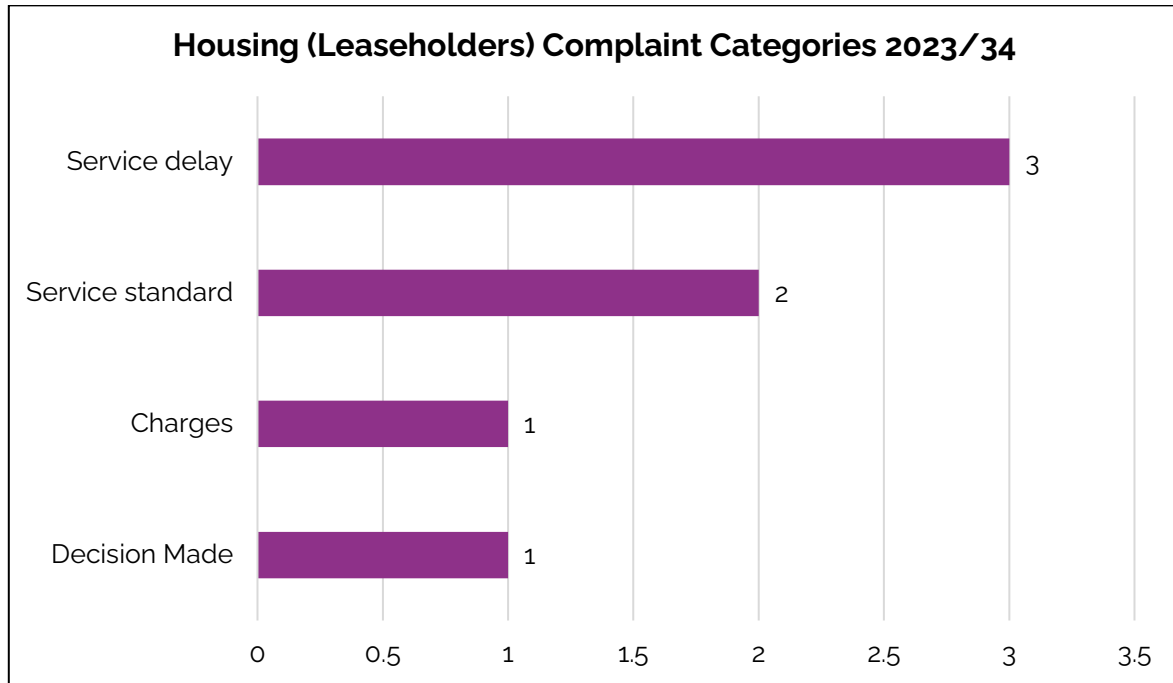
Tenancy Service	Total
Tenancy Management	30
Sheltered Housing	2
Accommodations	1
Voids	1
Total	34

The majority of complaints for Housing (Council Tenants) were due to the management of tenancies.

Housing (Leaseholders)

Housing (Leaseholders) represented 2% of the overall volume of complaints under the Housing Ombudsman Service, where **7** complaints were recorded for 2023/24.

As of June 2024, the Council has approximately 417 leaseholders based on sales and buybacks. The number of leaseholders with a forwarding address is approximately 164.



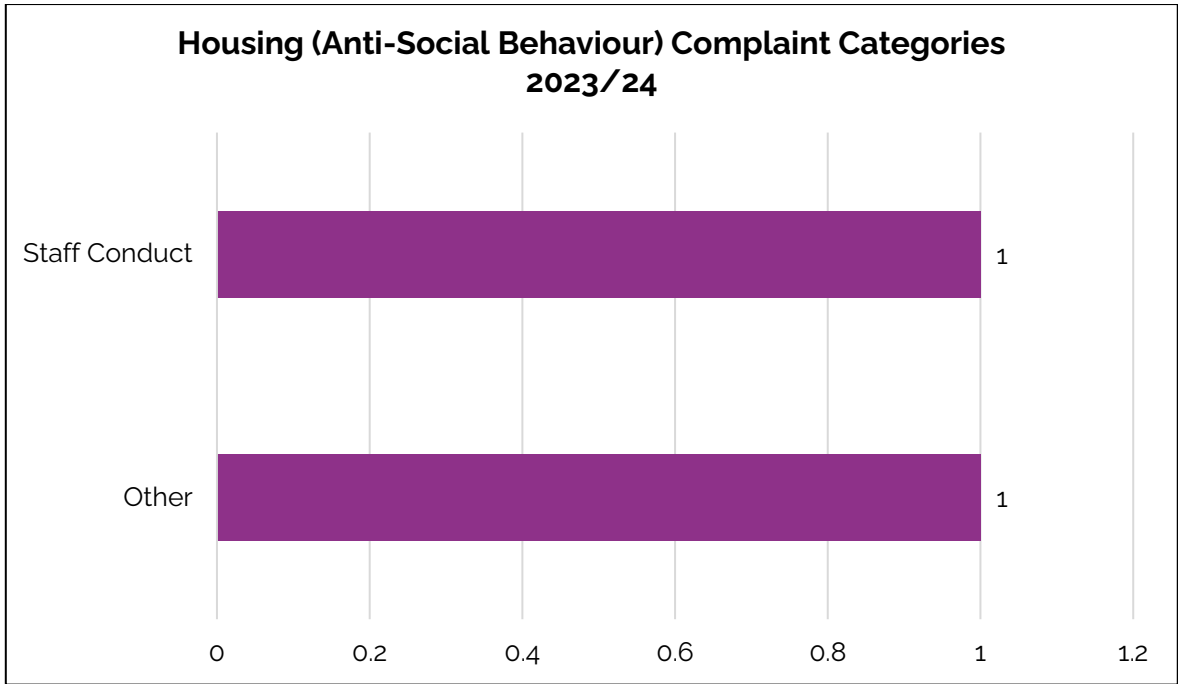
As detailed above, the complaint categories for Housing (Leaseholders) show that Service Delay was the biggest reason for complaint, relating to **3** complaints, closely followed by the remaining categories of Service Standard (**2**), Charges (**1**) and Decision Made (**1**).

The Council also has an online contact form, accessible at "[Housing – Leaseholder enquiry](#)", where leaseholders can submit an enquiry online. The form is to enable leaseholders to submit an observation in relation to the proposed agreement.

Housing (Anti-Social Behaviour)

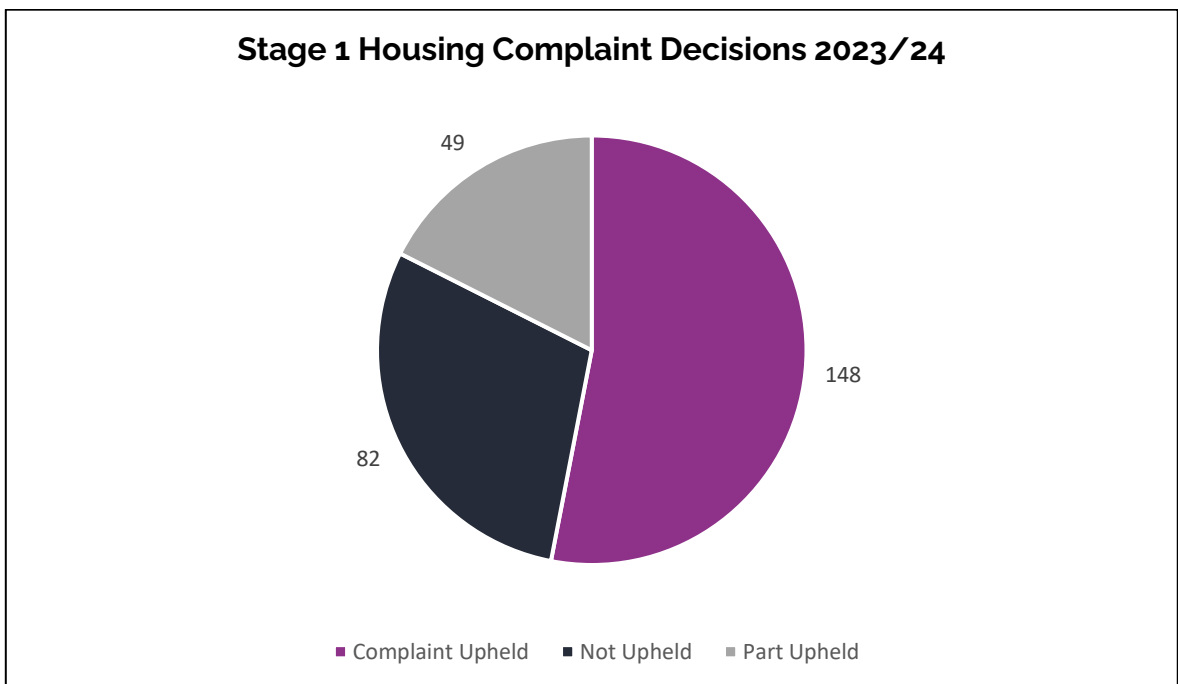
Housing (Anti-Social Behaviour) represented 0.7 % of the overall volume of complaints, where only **2** were recorded for 2023/24. Like the Housing Repairs service area, residents are able to report Anti-Social Behaviour using an online form on My Ipswich, accessible at "[Report It – Anti-Social Behaviour \(ASB\)](#)". The online report received 860 submissions for 2023/24, which are directed and dealt with by either Tenancy Services or Community Safety.

The complaint categories for Housing (Anti-Social Behaviour) are detailed below for 2023/24, where **1** complaint was classified as Staff Conduct. The second complaint was classified as 'Other'. This was due to collaboration from both Tenancy Services and the ASB team to resolve the complaint.



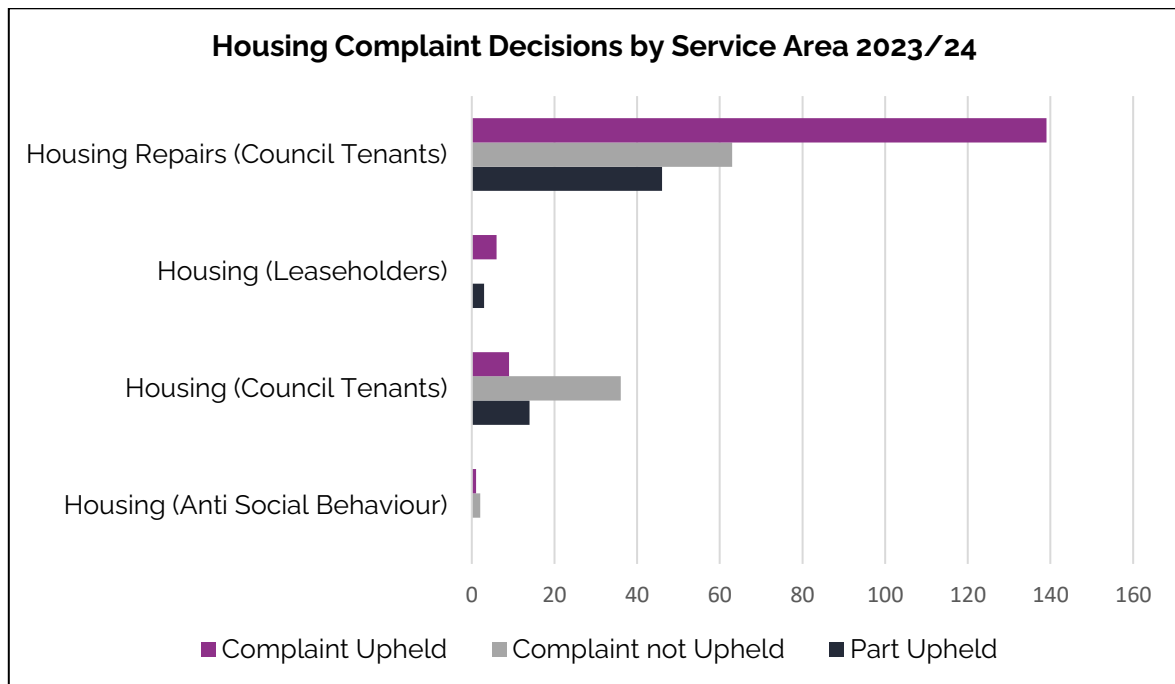
Housing Complaint Decisions

At each stage of the complaints process, the Complaint Champion is required to make a decision on the outcome of the complaint. From a total of **283** Housing complaints, **279** were recorded with a verifiable decision at Stage 1. **148** of these were upheld which equates to 52% of the decisions, and **82** were not upheld. The remaining **49** complaints were determined as partially upheld. This is detailed below:



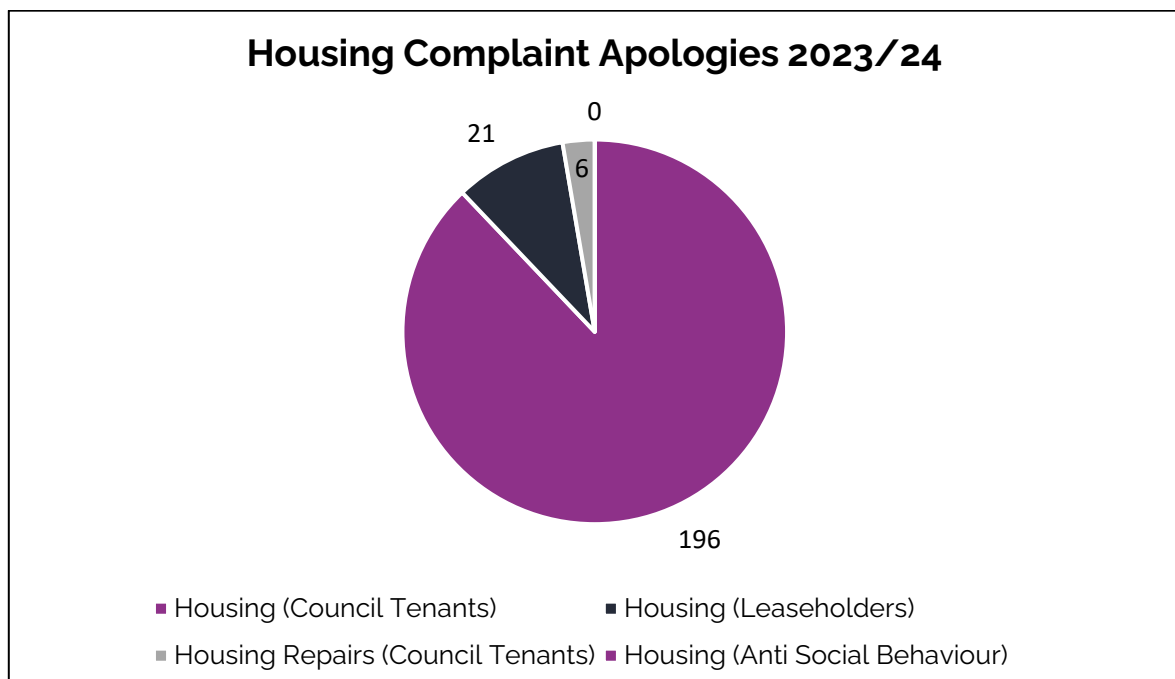
Of the **283** Housing complaints received, **34** were escalated to Stage 2. From the thirty-four complaints that were escalated to Stage 2, a further **6** were escalated to Stage 3.

The data across Stage 1 – Stage 3 has been further categorised by service area below:



Apology Made

Putting things right is a core priority in the Council's complaints process. Of **283** Housing complaints that were recorded, the Council apologised on **223** occasions. This could be due to some complaints not being upheld, however empathy and fairness should always be threaded throughout contact with the complainant. The Housing Ombudsman Code of April 2024 also reiterated the importance of an apology in putting things right, which the Council emulates in every response.



Housing Ombudsman Service Cases

The Housing Ombudsman has published decisions from 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024. They have stated:

"Housing Ombudsman decisions, full case details and investigation findings are published [online](#) as part of our commitment to being open and transparent. The decisions are anonymised, so residents' names are not used, but landlords are named. The decisions date from December 2020 and are published three months after the final decision date. In some cases, we may decide not to publish a decision if it is not in the resident's or landlord's interest, or the resident's anonymity may be compromised. You can read more in our guidance on decisions."

Ipswich Borough Council (202105577)

The landlord's response to reports of damp and mould within the resident's property. The landlord's response to the resident's request to be rehoused on medical grounds. The Ombudsman has also looked at the handling of the associated complaint.

Ipswich Borough Council (202119978)

The complaint is about: The condition of the property at the beginning of the tenancy. The landlord's handling of the complaint.

Local Government and Social Care Complaints

Should a complainant remain dissatisfied following internal consideration of their complaint, they can take their complaint to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman to seek independent investigation.

The Ombudsman will usually check with the Authority whether the complaint has exhausted the Local Authority's complaints Procedure. Where this has not been done, the Ombudsman will usually refer the complaint back to the Authority, to give us an opportunity to attempt to resolve the complainant's concerns through our internal complaints processes first.

The Ombudsman publishes some headline information on each Council's performance every year. This data is expected late July 2024.

Local Government and Social Care Cases

The Local decisions, full case details and investigation findings are published [online](#) as part of our commitment to being open and transparent. The Council had 3 cases for period 01/04/23 to 31/03/24:

Ipswich Borough Council (23 016 551)

Statement Closed after initial enquiries Other 06-Mar-2024

Summary: We will not investigate this complaint about how the Council dealt with a building control matter. It is unlikely we could achieve a worthwhile outcome for the complainant.

Ipswich Borough Council (23 015 036)

Statement Closed after initial enquiries Other 20-Dec-2023

Summary: We cannot investigate Mr X's complaint about the Council's decision to hold him liable for business rates. This is because the matter has been to court.

Ipswich Borough Council (23 004 500)

Statement Closed after initial enquiries Enforcement 22-Aug-2023

Summary: We will not investigate this complaint about the Council deciding not to take planning enforcement action against a developer for creating an earth mound and an untidy site. This is because the complaint does not meet the tests in our Assessment Code on how we decide which complaints to investigate. There is insufficient evidence of fault by the Council.

Learning from Complaints

Complaints are a valuable source of information that help us as a Local Authority to identify underlying problems and potential improvements. We know that numbers alone do not tell everything about the attitude towards complaints internally, or how the complaint journey is perceived by the customer. With this in mind, we believe it is arguably of more importance to understand the impact complaints, and their responses, have on people, which allows us to learn practical lessons, make corporate changes and consistently improve the experience for others.

Lessons can usually be learned from complaints that were upheld or, in some instances, where no fault was found but the Council recognises that improvements to services can be made.

Complaints are valuable sources of learning and enable us to identify areas for improvement within the Council. Therefore, we have selected a sample of learning from complaints across service areas that were received in 2023/24. These are as follow:

Housing (Choice Based Lettings/Gateway to Home choice)

"Better explanation"

"Case review with officers concerned"

"Discussion with case officer to advise what went wrong and what needs to be done better in future"

"Revising Procedures"

"Revising published material"

"Better communication required between Service areas to prevent delays in decisions"

"Clearer control measures between multi agency working"

"Continue to advertise how UC works and make affordable agreements to bring accounts into advance"

Housing (Leaseholders)

"Review the case in partnership with residents on site"

"Revising Procedures"

"Revising published material"

Housing Repairs (Council Tenants)

"Additional training for staff"

"Complete repairs in adequate timeframe"

"Reminder to staff of appropriate communication"

"Reminded all contractors to ensure residents are aware of work prior to start"

"The outcome will be highlighted to both the surveying team and the specialist contractor to ensure that any lessons can be learned"

"We will discuss/log communication as part of the next monthly contractor meeting agenda and monitor this to ensure planned letters are sent for pending works"

"The Planned Maintenance Team will be highlighting this complaint in our next monthly contractors meeting, and we will endeavour to reduce this issue from reoccurring"

"Guidance to be given to tenants that contact should be made to the landlord in instances of damage to the property"

Environmental Health

"Additional training for staff"

"Revising Procedures"

"Consideration given to how the original service request and subsequent enforcement action is dealt with"

"Importance of staff keeping copies of all emails with customers to refute complaints the future"

"Revising published materials"

A more extensive list can be found below:

Community Safety

- Signpost to right team
- Revising published material

Environmental Health

- Additional training for staff
- Consideration given to how the original service request and subsequent enforcement action is dealt with in Importance of staff keeping copies of all emails with customers to refute complaints the future.
- Revising Procedures
- Revising published material

Housing (Choice Based Lettings/Gateway to Home choice)

- Better explanation
- Case review with officers concerned
- Discussion with case officer to advise what went wrong and what needs to be done better in future
- Ensure properties are advertised correctly - learning for Tenancy services.
- make sure Contractor knows how the system works.
- Revising Procedures
- Revising published material
- Additional Training for staff and Agreed timescales for responses from DWP
- Better communication required between Service areas to prevent delays in decisions
- Careful with any discussions with tenants
- clear schedule of rates for recharging
- Clearer control measures between multi agency working
- Continue to advertise how UC works and make affordable agreements to bring accounts into advance
- Internal service areas need to communicate more effectively/ efficiently to prevent unnecessary delays in decision making

Housing (Leaseholders)

- Review the case in partnership with residents on site
- Revising Procedures
- Revising published material

Housing Repairs (Council Tenants)

- Additional training for staff (mentioned multiple times)
- Complete repairs in adequate timeframe
- Discussed with operative to ensure considerate parking
- Ensure the correct Procedures are followed for such works in the future
- Guidance to be given to tenants that contact should be made to the landlord in instances of damage to the property
- Reiterated driving Policy to involved staff member
- Reminded all contractors to ensure residents are aware of work prior to start
- Reminder to staff of appropriate communication
- The outcome will be highlighted to both the surveying team and the specialist contractor to ensure that any lessons can be learned
- The Planned Maintenance Team will be highlighting this complaint in our next monthly contractors meeting, and we will endeavour to reduce this issue from reoccurring
- We have discussed (and) requested we ensure the correct components are installed within the intended property and location. The project managers can assist and support the contractor there
- We will discuss/log communication as part of the next monthly contractor meeting agenda and monitor this to ensure planned letters are sent for pending works

Service Performance and Improvements

Further to the Housing complaint decisions that were made, there were additional observations completed in the following areas:

Service Area	Agreement to change practices, procedures or systems	Correction of an error	Explanation	Financial compensation	Other
Housing (Anti-Social Behaviour)	0	0	1	0	0
Housing (Council Tenants)	4	2	14	2	7
Housing (Leaseholders)	2	2	5	0	0
Housing Repairs (Council Tenants)	2	34	176	6	2
Total	8	38	196	8	9

Reflection

The following prompts were adapted from the webinar hosted by the Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS) on 22 May 2024. The answers have been collated after collaboration with Tenancy Services, Repairs (Council Tenants) and Customer Services.

Food for Thought

Are there opportunities to benchmark with other landlords (qualitative/quantitative)?

We have links with comparable roles in other local authorities. Tenancy Satisfaction Measures (TSMs) benchmark us with other Local Authorities and Housing Associations of similar size. For 2023/2024 Acuity, who collect TSM data in behalf of the Authority, advised us based on their intelligence we were broadly in the Upper Quartile for a number of individual Tenancy Satisfaction Measures.

How do complaints inform service improvements and changes?

For Housing, we are working to review the lessons learned under the new complaints reporting. This will enable our Service Area to ensure that any changes are completed, and lessons are learned and published where appropriate. We have introduced several new Policies and Procedures because of complaints that were made. Examples of these Policies include: Succession, Use and Occupation Policies/Procedure, changes to our ASB investigating and changes to our Void Improvement Plan.

What have been successes or challenges in complaint handling that complainants should be aware of?

One thing noted across the Council's complaints process is that complainants sometimes submit: "Compliment" and / or "Contact Us" instead of "Complaint", meaning we must raise this again as a complaint. Complainants may also sometimes send through multiple complaints at Stage 1, which can cause information to be captured across multiple and separate forums. By compiling these separate reports into one place, it ensures a more thorough investigation and a timelier response.

How is the residents' voice included in reporting?

The Council has a CEP (Customer Engagement Panel) of tenants who meet regularly to review our Policies and feedback from complaints. We have reintroduced Estate Inspections with Housing Officers, Tenants Reps, and Councillors. We are also looking to reintroduce 'Community Coffee Meets'.

Access and Awareness

Are alternative formats of documents needed and, if so, what?

Tenancy Services have some more commonly used documents pre-translated into numerous language options that align with the languages spoken by our residents. We are also in the process of improving the Council's knowledge of our tenants by collecting Protected Characteristics to ensure that we engage with our residents in the best way depending on their individual needs. We are also revising the Reasonable Adjustment Policy which is due for re-publication shortly.

Has the Council got “Hard to Reach” groups?

The above actions will help us to ensure we are aware of these groups. Housing Officers already have a good awareness and work with outside agencies to ensure the best engagement possible, for example through professionals' meetings.

Is there anything staff and stakeholders need to know?

Staff are aware of how to identify a complaint rather than a Service Request, as well as how to advise and support a tenant in making a complaint. This is enforced through our training presentations, the Council's complaints Policy & Procedure, and material from the Housing Ombudsman and Local Government Ombudsman.

Are there any opportunities through other publications, newsletters or meetings?

The Council publishes a quarterly “Tenants' Newsletter”, though this is under review as to whether it should be more regular or issued under an alternative format (i.e. video). A weekly newsletter for the Tenancy Services team is also produced and emailed out internally. Head of Services have regular meetings with Stakeholders/portfolio holders.

Actions from Learning

In reflection on the above quantitative and qualitative data, amassed with lessons learned and the new statutory Complaints Handling Code issued by the Housing Ombudsman (HOS) in April 2024, the following changes have been actioned at the time of publication, taking effect from 1 April 2024:

1. Ipswich Borough Council's complaints Procedure has been reduced from **3 Stages to 2 Stages**, ensuring complainants can reach resolution faster. Though complainants can contact the relevant Ombudsman at any stage of their complaint, having a 2-Stage complaints Procedure also allows the complainant to seek mediation and investigation sooner. This is positive for both the complainant and the Council, as putting things right is at the core of the Council's complaints Policy.
2. A **new complaints process** has been built commencing April 2024 to allow for this 2-Stage approach, ensuring every response has a built-in reference point to the relevant Ombudsman and that core components (i.e. lessons learned, outstanding actions, remedies offered) are captured more efficiently for future data collation.
3. The Council have **appointed new posts** to reinforce a positive complaint handling culture, including:
 - a. 1 Quality Assurance Complaints Officer (QA Officer)
 - b. 1 Senior Lead Person (SLP)
 - c. 1 Member Responsible for Complaints (MRC)
4. The Council have **revised both Policy and Procedure** to ensure compliance with the HOS Code, including clearer guidance for complainants in areas such as accessibility in line with the Equality Act 2010, exclusions within the complaints Procedure (i.e. insurance claims, appeals processes), and how to contact the relevant Ombudsman.

Summary

The previous 12 months have been challenging for some of the Council's service areas, notably in the Complaints team with the introduction of the new statutory Housing Ombudsman Service Code. The Code required Ipswich Borough Council to build a new complaints processing system, new reporting templates, a new self-assessment, and the extensive annual report for 2023/24.

For service area Complaint Champions, this meant that they have been handling complaints across two separate systems, ensuring responses are still of an exemplary standard and are issued to the complainant within a timely manner.

The Council have recruited a new post for the Quality Assurance Complaints Officer (QA) role, which has eased some of the pressure from other officers. In turn, the QA is active in monitoring and coaching officers to deliver improved responses, capture learning and follow up further actions.

This report has reiterated some points that the Council were aware of, such as Housing remaining one of the key areas for complaints. It has also brought to light other areas of focus, including the frequency of extensions and keeping a better log of service improvements that resulted directly from complaint learning. With this in mind, and considering the above actions under "Reflection", we intend to improve the handling of complaints across all service areas and enhance all future reporting templates in line with the Code.

Appendix A – Previous 3-Stage Complaints Procedure

Complaint - Stage 1

If you are not happy with any part of our service, the relevant service area will investigate and respond to you. The Council is committed to resolving complaints quickly when they have arisen, by putting things right or giving you a full explanation.

If a complaint is received, we will respond within:

- Acknowledgement – 3 working days from the date the complaint is received.
- Full response – 10 working days from the date the complaint is acknowledged (if it is not possible to respond in this timeframe you will receive an explanation with the date that the Stage 1 response will be responded by, which will be no longer than an additional 10 working days).

All correspondence to a complaint will be by email or letter.

Complaint - Stage 2

If you are not satisfied with the Stage 1 response you receive, you can escalate your complaint to a Stage 2 to be investigated further. This will need to be done within 20 working days from the Stage 1 response.

If a complaint is escalated to Stage 2, we will respond within:

Acknowledgement – 3 working days from the date the complaint escalation is received.

Full response – 20 working days from the date the complaint escalation is acknowledged (if it is not possible to respond in this timeframe you will receive an explanation with the date that the Stage 2 response will be responded by, which will be no longer than an additional 10 working days).

All correspondence to a complaint will be by email or letter.

Complaint - Stage 3

If you are unhappy with the Stage 2 response you receive, you can escalate this to our Chief Executive, who will fully investigate your complaint and the responses. This will need to be done within 20 working days from the Stage 2 response.

If a complaint is escalated to Stage 3, we will respond within:

Acknowledgement – 3 working days from the date the complaint escalation is received.

Full response – 20 working days from the date the complaint escalation is acknowledged.

All correspondence to a complaint will be by email or letter.

Appendix B – Sample of compliments 2023/24

"I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for acknowledging my situation and for taking the time to witness the severity of challenges I have faced for such a long time. I appreciate your help and understanding regarding this matter."

Housing (Council Tenants)

"Having just read the "what's on in Ipswich" email, I was really pleased to see that Ipswich has been awarded "tree city of the world" for the 3rd year in succession and how many trees you have planted it's really impressive, being someone who loves all horticultural areas it great to see you are planting them not cutting them down."

Parks & Open Spaces

"I had a very nice carpenter today, polite and very competent. Tidied up afterwards as though he hadn't even been. A job well done. Thanks."

Housing Repairs (Council Tenants)

"I recently attended a concert and at one point I lost my glasses but thanks to the kindness of your staff they managed to find them before the start of the show. Every staff member I met from the lady on the doors, bar staff, security and the people in the theatre were all very polite, switched on and helpful whenever I spoke to them."

Regent Theatre & Corn Exchange

"Advisor has answered me all the queries about changing payment option, moving address issues patiently, he has liaised all my message sent to Council to confirm me well received and gave me a clear picture of upcoming payment due, he solved my troubles in a very gentle manner. Thank you."

Customer Services

Just wanted to say what a pleasant experience I had today with one of your bin collectors. Just wanted to say what a polite and respectful man he was."

Bins & Waste

"I appreciate your call today and would like to express my gratitude. Your understanding and willingness to listen to our current situation is deeply appreciated. Thank you for the ability to keep an open channel of communication with you."

Housing (Choice Based Lettings/Gateway to Homechoice)

"I've had 2 lots of chaps round this morning to do some repairs. I want to say how great these chaps were today, very polite, very efficient, and very respectful. Well done and they are a credit to the repairs team. Bravo. Excellent work done!"

Housing Repairs (Council Tenants)

"I arrived to watch a show with my son and his Guide dog. The show was great, and the staff were absolutely amazing. They really went out of their way to make it a really wonderful night. Thanks to everyone for all your care and kindness it was really appreciated."

Regent Theatre & Corn Exchange

"Many Thanks for a great Music Day, I'm currently rather low on funds and still managed to have a nice day out in the park. Cheers."

Events

"I cannot thank the incredible team, who on Sunday morning assisted myself and many others after St Francis Tower flooded and we were evacuated. The response was amazing and above and beyond, thank you so so much."

Community Safety

"Thank you for your quick response to my complaint about large bin outside flats in Saturn Road near my property."

Bins & Waste