Agenda Item 4

Resources and Fire & Rescue Overview and Scrutiny Committee

4 December 2024

Customer Feedback Annual Report
1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024

Recommendation

That the Resources and Fire & Rescue Overview and Scrutiny Committee considers and comments on the contents of this Report.

1. Executive Summary

1.1 This is the annual customer feedback report for Directorates relevant to the remit of the Resources and Fire and Rescue Overview and Scrutiny Committee covering the period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024.

1.2 The report summarises compliments, complaints, and comments received by services within the Resources Directorate and in the Fire and Rescue Service including learning and service improvement. Data, trends, and themes have been compared over the last three years. (See Appendix 1)

1.3 A new customer feedback system was implemented on 15 January 2024, part way through the reporting period, and consequently, information has been taken from both systems for the purposes of this report.

1.4 Following a review in 2023/24, Warwickshire County Council's Customer Complaints Policy, including the updated corporate policy approach, was approved by Cabinet on 15 February 2024. The revised policy is available on the Council's website here.

1.5 At an organisational level, overall feedback received has returned to pre-pandemic levels and in 2023/24 it is at the lowest over the last six years. The number of complaints decreased by 16% from 1809 in 2022/23 to 1520 in 2023/24. (See Appendix 1)

1.6 In Resources, the overall number of complaints have decreased 269 in 2021/22 to 187 in 2023/24, a reduction of 30%. In the Fire and Rescue Service, complaints have decreased from 3 in 2021/22 to 1 in 2023/24, a reduction of 67%.

2. Corporate Complaints Process

2.1 Warwickshire County Council takes all feedback seriously. The Council gives particular attention to complaints with the intention of ensuring that complainants are dealt with fairly, consistently and within timescales set out in

the relevant complaints process. All feedback should be dealt with efficiently and with an emphasis on learning and improvements.

2.2   Procedures relating to how the Council deals with and responds to complaints are explained in more detail in Warwickshire County Council's Complaints Policy.

2.3   The policy has been developed in line with best practice recommendations and legislation. In the policy, a complaint is defined as:

"… any expression of dissatisfaction with a service that the Council (or one of its partners or contractors) has provided, and that requires a response."

2.4   If a complainant remains unhappy after exhausting all stages of a complaints process, the complainant can take their complaint to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO). A complainant can access the LGSCO at any point during the complaint process; however, the LGSCO normally gives the Local Authority the opportunity to process a complaint through every stage of the appropriate complaint's procedure, before investigating it themselves. Complaints that are referred back to a Local Authority by the LGSCO to progress under the relevant complaints process are classed as 'premature' complaints. To note Warwickshire County Council has a very low upheld complaint rate on the Oflog metric compared to other councils.
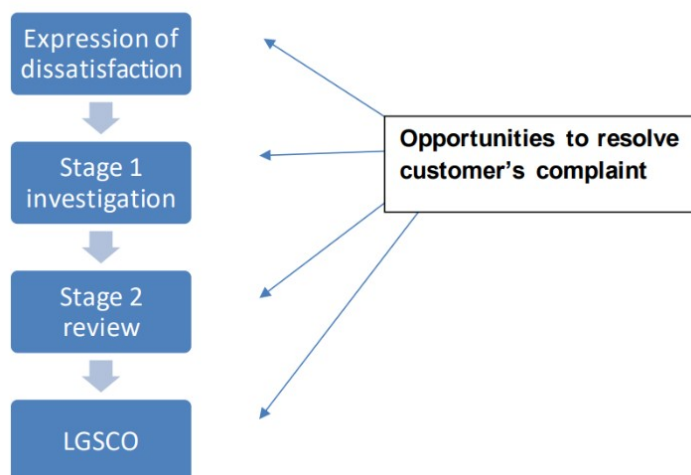
3.   Analysis of customer feedback received during 2023/24.

3.1   During 2023/24 feedback from members of the public was recorded on both the previous 'Contact Us' system and from 15 January 2024 on the new customer feedback system.

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3.2 Feedback can be shared by customers through an online portal, by telephone, by post or via email and it is categorised into complaints, compliments, and comments. Questions from the public are not recorded on the system but are referred to be dealt with directly by the appropriate service.

3.3 The following analysis covers data, trends and themes compared over the last three years (See Appendix 1) and, where relevant, also examines the position before and after the pandemic. This offers a clearer understanding of changes in customer feedback during these periods.

Feedback cases over time – All Council Services
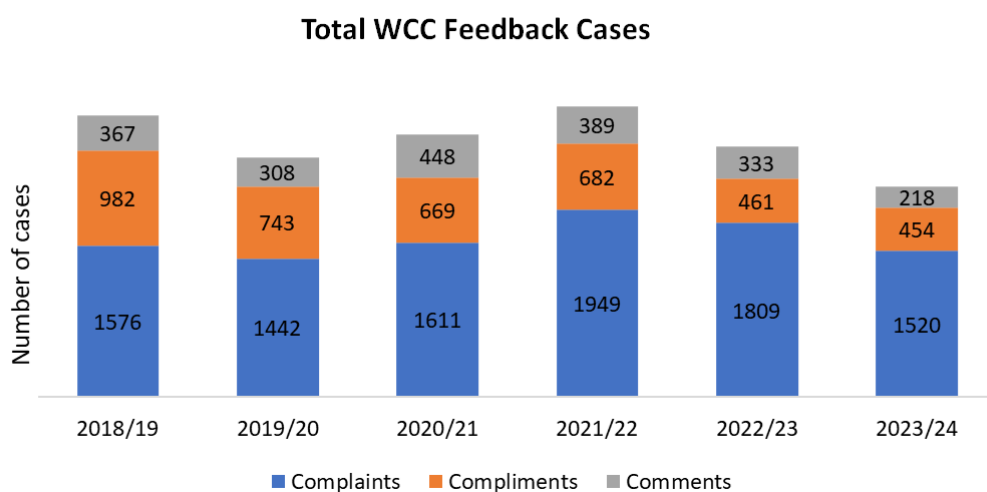
Total WCC Feedback Cases

Figure 1: Number of complaints, compliments and comments received from 2018/19 to 2023/24 across all WCC services.

Overall cases:
3.4 The total number of cases raised over the last three years decreased by 27% from 3,020 in 2021/22 to 2,192 in 2023/24. The total number of cases in 2023/24 is the lowest in the five years, with the second lowest number of complaints. As figure 1 indicates, overall feedback received has returned to pre-pandemic levels and in 2023/24 it is at the lowest over the last six years. (See Appendix 1)

Complaints:
3.5 Complaint numbers peaked in 2021/22 which is considered likely to reflect increased customer interaction following the end of the Covid restrictions. The number of complaints decreased by 16% from 1809 in 2022/23 to 1520 in 2023/24. (See Appendix 1)

Compliments:
3.6 The previous reduction in compliments over time has continued with a 33% decrease from 682 in 2021/22 to 454 in 2023/24. As figure 1 indicates, the number of compliments received across all services has reduced by 54% since 2018/19. (See Appendix 1)
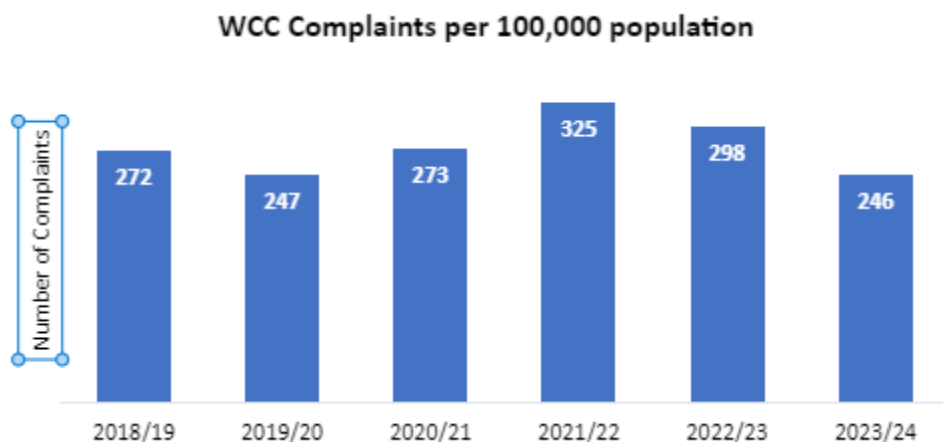
Complaints per population analysis:

WCC Complaints per 100,000 population

Figure 2: WCC complaints per 100,000 population of Warwickshire (as per Office of National Statistics) from 2018/19 to 2023/24.

3.7   When analysed against per 100,000 population it indicates a 0.25% complaint rate. The data show a trend of steady decline from 2021/22 0.33%, 2022/23 0.30%.

Feedback cases over time – Resources and Fire and Rescue

Total Feedback Cases for Resources and Fire & Rescue

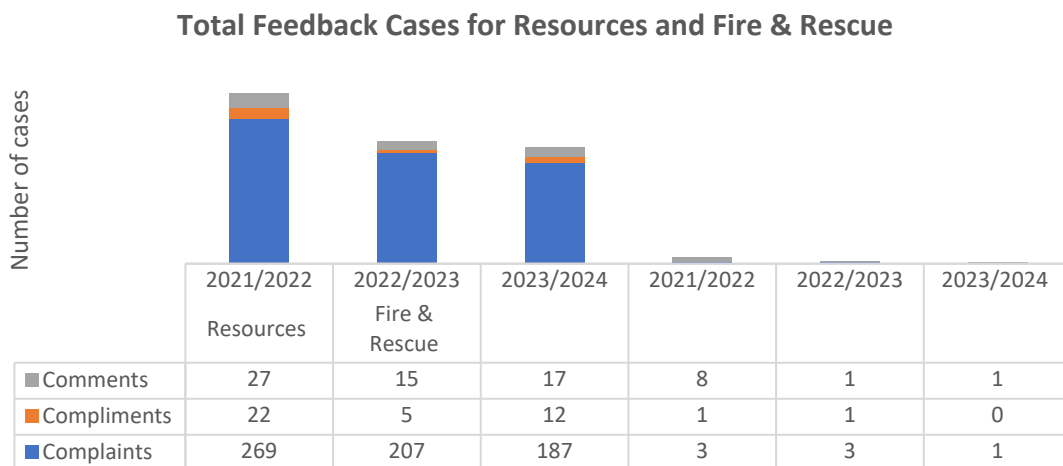|	2021/2022 Resources	2022/2023 Fire & Rescue	2023/2024	2021/2022	2022/2023	2023/2024
■Comments	27	15	17	8	1	1
■Compliments	22	5	12	1	1	0
■Complaints	269	207	187	3	3	1

Figure 3: Number of cases assigned to Resources and Fire & Rescue by type from 2021/22 to 2023/24.

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Resources:

Complaints:

3.8   The overall number of complaints in relation to Resources has decreased from 269 in 2021/22 to 187 in 2023/24 a decrease of 30%. The consistent downward trend in complaints suggests potential service improvements. Examples of service improvements made as a result of complaints made in relation to this area, include evaluation of complaints to ensure learning and improvements in communication, a focus on the customer and ensuring apologies are made where appropriate.

Compliments:

3.9   There has been a drop in the number of compliments from 22 in 2021/22 to 12 in 2023/24.

Fire and Rescue:

Complaints:

3.10   The overall number of complaints have decreased from 3 in 2021/22 to 1 in 2023/24 a decrease of 67%. The consistent downward trend in complaints suggests potential service improvements. The complaint recorded in 2023/24 was subsequently reclassified as a service request as noted below.

Compliments:

3.11   There is a drop in the number of compliments from 1 in 2021/22 to 0 in 2022/23. This is aligned to the organisational trend and as above may in part be attributed to this type of feedback not being encouraged or recorded centrally.

Initial feedback contact method for Resources and Fire and Rescue
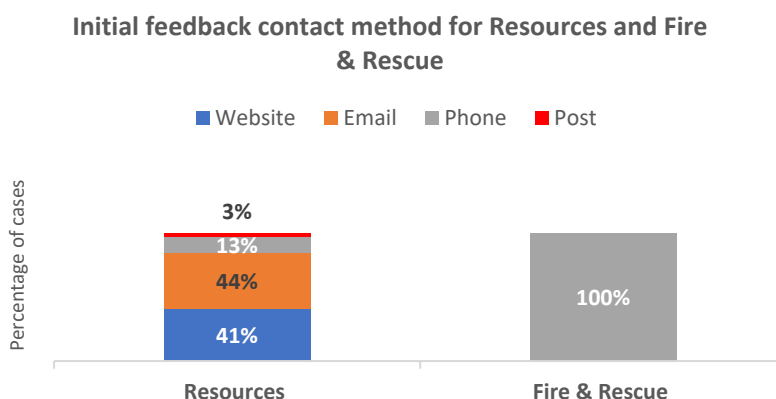

Figure 4: Percentage breakdown of original contact method for complaints, comments and compliments received since 15th January 2024.

3.12   The 'type of initial feedback contact method' (figure 4) is new data collected since 15 January 2024 due to improvements made when developing the new customer feedback system. There is, therefore, no comparative data and the figures below do not include all cases raised in these services in 2023/24.

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However, by using percentages of data held for January to March 2024, trends can still be identified.

3.13   For services in the Resources Directorate, most contacts are raised via either email (44%) or via the website (41%).   All contact methods are used.

3.14   Fire and Rescue is shown to receive all feedback via the phone.

3.15   In 2023/24, the Customer Relations Team continued to invest time speaking directly to prospective complainants, regardless of how the initial contact was made or the service that their feedback relates to. This proactive approach provides an important opportunity to build a trusting relationship with the complainant/service user, which is particularly critical when handling more complex complaints. This allows for a more thorough understanding of the concerns raised and desired outcomes, and in turn supports investigating managers to provide more precise and detailed responses.

3.16   Talking directly to customers in this way also ensures that where it is appropriate and possible concerns are resolved without the need to progress to the complaints process. This can prove to be a quicker and more beneficial means of resolution for all concerned and is in accordance with the LGSCO Complaint Handling Code published in February 2024.

Complaints data trends by month:

Number of complaints for Resources by month

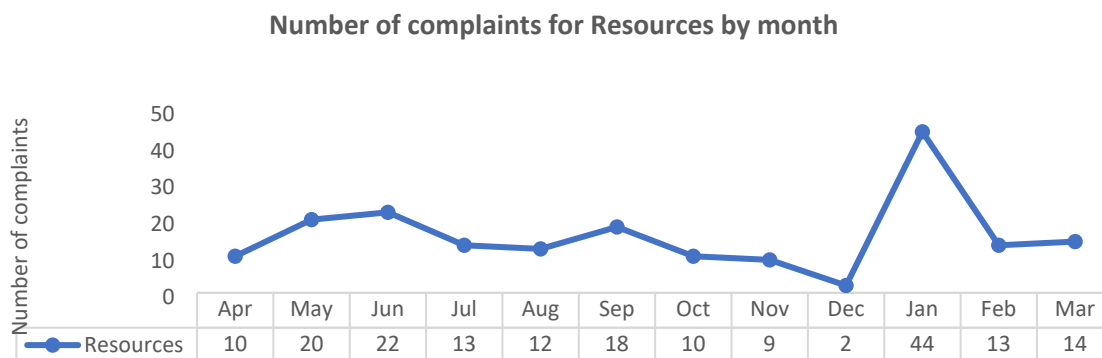|	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Resources	10	20	22	13	12	18	10	9	2	44	13	14

Figure 5: Number of complaints assigned to Resources by month for 2023/24.

Trend increases:

3.17   There is a spike in complaints in January because of migrating data between the old and new CRM systems. However, the overall trend is a slight decrease in complaints over the full year. This could be attributed to local service improvements.

Trend decreases:

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3.18   A decrease in complaint numbers is shown in months July, August, and December. This would align with decreased interaction during the Christmas period and summer holidays.

3.19   As Fire and Rescue only received one complaint in August 2023, they have not been included in the above monthly trend data.

Complaints data by stage for all Council services:

Complaint Stage	2021/2022	2022/2023	2023/2024
Stage 2	97	45	48

Figure 6: Breakdown complaints by stage 2 for 2021/22, 2022/23 & 2023/24 across all Council services.

3.20   All initial complaints once triaged (and confirmed as being the correct feedback type and complying with the complaints policy's definitions) are then allocated to the appropriate service area at Stage 1 for local resolution.

3.21   As per our policy if a customer remains dissatisfied, they can then request a Stage 2 review of the complaint, which is undertaken by the Customer Relations Team. Figure 6 shows a reduction of over 50% of Stage 2 complaints across all Council services from 2021/22 (97) to 2023/24 (48) The reduction is predominantly down to a reduction in customer interactions since the end of COVID.

3.22   The Customer Relations Team has worked to reduce the number of reviews by liaising with services to seek de-escalations, where it is felt that the issue could be resolved before a complaint is accepted as a Stage 2.

3.23   Customers can at any time in the process, approach the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) for them to consider their complaint. In this reporting period the rate of Local Government Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) upheld decisions per 100,000 residents was 2.3 for Warwickshire, which again is low compared to the average for county councils which was 4.5 per 100,000 residents in the period. The annual review and summary of upheld complaints issued by LGSCO in the financial year 2023/24 was recently taken to Cabinet on 5 September 2024. The report can be found Here.

Complaint categories by subject

3.24   The data in the table below indicates differing trends for service areas in terms of categories of concern, and facilitates more targeted, specific training in each of the services areas.

	Resources

	Number of complaints	%
WCC Service Standards	68	36%
Communication	41	22%
Financial Issues	19	10%
Protection of user	17	9%
Staff conduct	16	9%
Outside Complaints process	15	8%
Physical environment issues	7	4%
Policy	3	2%
Discrimination	1	1%
Commissioned Service Provision	0	0%
Total	187	100%

Figure 7: Breakdown of subject categories in Resources for 2023/24.

3.25 The top categories within the Resources Directorate are:

- WCC Service standards (36%). This is chosen when the customer believes the council has not provided a service that they feel they are entitled to or it relates to the quality of service provided. This is a trend increase for all the last 3 years, 2021/22 5% to 14% in 2022/23. (See Appendix 1)
- Communication (22%). This category is used when customers feel they have not had the expected level of contact with a member of staff. This category has decreased over the last 3 years from 47% in 2021/22 to 22% in 2023/24. (See Appendix 1)
- Financial issues (10%). This is attributed to the Income and Debt Recovery team, Financial Charging team and the Warwickshire Local Welfare Scheme. This has remained stable e.g. 2021/22 10% with a 2% increase in 2022/23. (See Appendix 1)

3.26 The complaint raised in Fire and Rescue was categorised as outside of Complaints processes, as this was a service request for a fire safety home visit which does not meet the definition of a complaint.

**Complaints per team**

3.27 With the introduction of the new customer feedback system, the opportunity was taken to refine and update the structure of teams within the system. This is in its early days which means the analysis does not provide a direct comparison with previous years e.g. the Charging team has been split into two entities (charging and income and debt recovery) to allow more in-depth analysis. In the medium-term this will improve our ability to provide Members

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and senior officers with more robust information about complaints to drive improved performance and scrutiny.

Resources - Contact Us (1 Apr 2023 – 14 Jan 2024)	Complaints	%	Resources – Customer Feedback System (15 Jan 2024 – 31 Mar 2024)	Complaints	%
Customer Relations Team	71	61%	Customer Relations Team	56	61%
Warwickshire Local Welfare	18	16%	BAIC - Charging	9	24%
Libraries and One Stop Shop	10	9%	Web Team	1	3%
Registration	5	4%	Income and Debt Recovery	1	3%
E-Services	4	3%	Governance Services	2	3%
Strategic Asset Management	3	3%	Libraries	1	3%
Blue Badge	2	2%	Registration	1	3%
CSC Management	1	1%			
ICT Services	1	1%			
Maintenance & Minor Works & Engineering	1	1%			

Figure 8: Breakdown of complaints per team for Resources for 2023/24.

3.28 For the period April 23 to Jan 24, the team with the highest number of cases was the Customer Relations Team 61%. This is due to the service owning the Stage 2's and Stage 3's for all statutory and corporate complaints across the council regardless of the service area which is the subject of the complaint.

3.29 In the same period, the team with the second highest number of recorded complaints was Warwickshire's Local Welfare Scheme team, with Libraries and One Stop Shop third. These services have a high level of front-line direct customer interaction which can drive higher numbers statistically.

3.30 Since the introduction of the new system and revised team groupings, between 15th of January 2024 and 31st March 2024 the team with the second highest number of complaints was the Benefits Assessments & Income Control (BAIC) Charging team and thirdly the Web team.

Remedies:

3.31 When things have gone wrong, the council has the power to offer remedies to put things right. The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO)'s complaint handling code which the Council has to have regard to, says that organisations should have systems in place to ensure that a complaint can be remedied at any stage of the complaints process and

should ensure the appropriate remedies can be provided at any stage of the process.

3.32   Remedies can take many forms, including apologising, taking corrective action to put things right such as the service provided, a change in process or policy, or a quantifiable financial remedy.
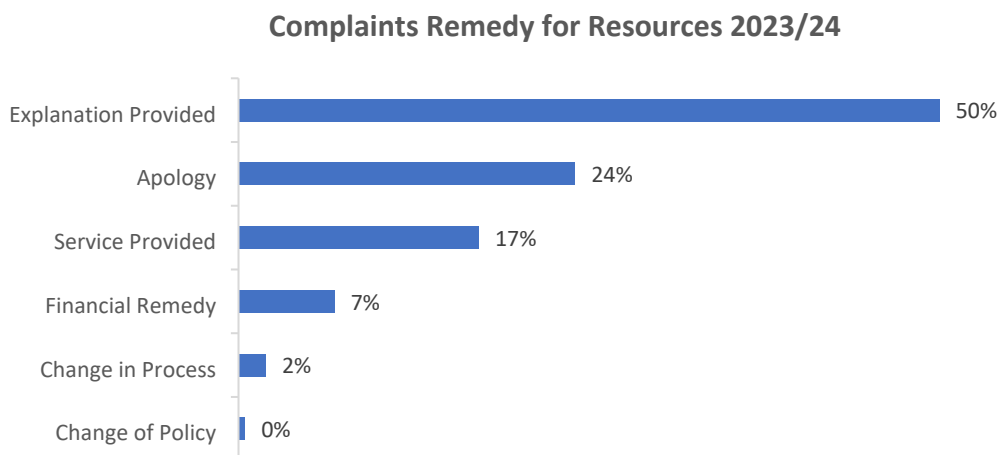
Complaints Remedy for Resources 2023/24

Remedy	Percentage
Explanation Provided	50%
Apology	24%
Service Provided	17%
Financial Remedy	7%
Change in Process	2%
Change of Policy	0%

Figure 9: Closed complaint remedies for Resources in 2023/24.

3.33   The most frequent remedy provided by the Council was an "explanation provided". This would usually take the form of a fuller, more person-centred explanation, which may include clarifying of the process or language being used. This has remained the top remedy for all previous years (See Appendix 1).

3.34   An apology ranked second as the most used remedy. Recently, the Customer Relations team provided training to services emphasising the importance of timely apologies wherever appropriate.

3.35   "Service provided" is the third ranked remedy selected by services and is again consistent with previous years. This would be entered when the original service requested has been delivered or agreed following the complaint being received e.g. A service that was complained about as being delivered late is then provided (see Appendix 1).

3.36   As Fire and Rescue only had one complaint in 2023/24, this has not been included in the trend analysis above. The remedy associated with this complaint was Service provided, as it was a service request and not a complaint.

3.37   To note, the new Customer Feedback system allows multiple remedies for different stages of the complaint, so there may be different remedies. applied at different points e.g. Stage 1 results in an apology being given, Stage 2 results in a financial remedy being offered.

Outcomes:

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3.38   Categories of outcomes have changed in the new feedback system to improve data accuracy. The new feedback system allows for a reallocation if the wrong feedback type was initially selected, and outcomes are only recorded against complaints, which will improve the quality of data and insight provided.

3.39   The categories have been analysed in respect of the three standard reportable categories "upheld, not upheld and partially upheld". As the analysis**excludes** complaints in the old system that were closed as "questions answered" and any withdrawn complaints, this does mean the percentage calculates to less than 100%. This data has been analysed from both systems.

Resources:

Outcomes	Complaints	% of Stage 1 Complaints
Upheld	5	6%
Partially Upheld	9	10%
Not Upheld	16	18%

Figure 10: Complaints closed by outcome (excluding withdrawn complaints and questions).

3.40   During 2023/24 the highest category in Resources was "not upheld", and this indicates that 18% of complaints (16) had no failings identified following an investigation. However, the second highest outcome was "partially upheld", and accounts for a similar percentage of complaints at 10% (9), which shows after investigation some failings have been identified and a recommendation in the form of remedy and/or service improvement is likely to have been implemented. (See Appendix 1)

3.41   This is consistent with the trends in previous years (See Appendix 1).

Fire and Rescue:

3.42   During 2023/24, the complaint raised in Fire and Rescue was a service request and so an outcome was not made against the complaint.

Timescale compliance:

3.43   Timescales are different and dependent on the type of complaint type and process followed. The relevant timescales for each type of complaint are covered in the Council's Complaints Policy and associated procedures.
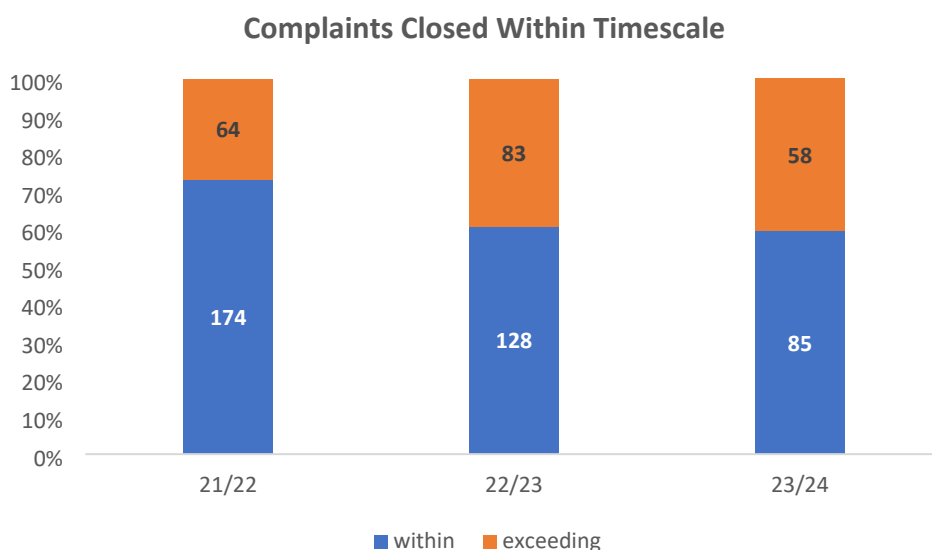
Complaints Closed Within Timescale

Figure 11: Timescales for closed complaints for Resources for the period 2021/22 to 2023/24. The table does not include the 33 closed migrated cases as they span two systems and timescale reporting data is incorrect.

Resources:

3.44   The percentage of complaints closed within timescale is decreasing over the years from 73% in 2021/22 to 59% in 2023/24. The Resources Directorate does contain the teams responsible for undertaking or commissioning out all Stage 2 reviews and Stage 2 investigations along with 3 Children Statutory panel hearings. These are often commissioned to external persons to complete and are often very complex in nature. This activity does consequently skew the timescale statistics. Internal improvements are being undertaken to mitigate this and improve timeliness in any event with processes being streamlined. (See Appendix 1)

Lessons learned and actions taken to improve services.

3.45   Identifying, actioning, recording, and sharing of 'lessons learned' is critical in improving customer experience with the Council's services. It is an opportunity for staff to reflect on how that case could have been prevented/gone better and how the Council can improve in future cases. These lessons are used for learning and training purposes for not only the team who have handled the case, but also for the wider Council.

3.46   Examples of lessons learned are covered in the list of learning outcomes below (these relate to the topmost complained about subject)

WCC service standards:
- Including relevant policies and letter templates for each case loaded to make complaint handling easier.

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- Updated policies and procedures to make it easier for both services and complainants to understand the complaints process.
- Day to day guidance for services on process and system-based issues.

Communication:
- Training on complaints is being undertaken by the Customer Relations Team in 2024/25.
- Updated letter templates for services to use to ensure consistency.
- To identify outcomes better e.g. Upheld, partially upheld.
- Clarity of processes to be given to customer.
- Climate change website has been included in the main website searches.

Financial issues:
- Ensure customer understands the social care language and terminology used.
- Clarity of processes to be given to customer.
- When a customer expresses dissatisfaction advises them of the complaint process and provide guidance.

Protection of user:

- Training for all Customer relations Team on helping neurodivergent customers.

Customer Platform:

3.47   The introduction of the new system has significantly improved our approach to handling complaints by streamlining processes and making data more accessible to managers. This system provides richer, more detailed data that allows managers to track patterns, identify root causes, and resolve issues more efficiently. With real-time analytics and enhanced reporting capabilities, managers can make informed decisions, prioritize cases, and provide quicker resolutions. In the long term, the system fosters transparency, improves accountability, and enhances customer satisfaction, ultimately reducing the number of recurring complaints and building trust with the public.

3.48   In addition, Business Intelligence have now provided a dashboard that allows oversight of trends of the data and allows real time implementation of support or resources if needed e.g. Complaints rise in a particular team, CRT can contact and ensure processes are being followed.

3.49   Executive directors have access to a dashboard covering their own directorate which helps to ensure that local oversight is given in real time. During 2024/25 steps will be taken to consider how a dashboard for members might be created.

4 Financial Implications

4.1 There are no additional financial implications arising from this report.

5 Environmental Implications

5.1 There are no direct environmental implications arising from this report.

Appendices
1. Appendix One Resources and Fire & Rescue OSC Feedback

Background Papers
1. None

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The report was circulated to the following members prior to publication:

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Other members:

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