

STATUTORY AND CORPORATE COMPLAINTS REPORT

SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL

2023-2024

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This annual report details the level of complaints received about services delivered by Slough Borough Council for the last year 1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024. It also looks at our key performance targets.

- 1) the number of agreed response targets met.
- 2) the number of complaints escalated after the initial response.
- 3) the percentage of cases successfully resolved at each stage.

This includes both statutory functions (Adult and Children's Social Care) as well as Corporate Complaints and Housing complaints. Slough Children's First produces yearly complaints report which will be made publicly available via their website, [Slough Children's First Complaints](#) the annual report for 2023-24 is currently awaiting senior management sign-off.

WHAT IS A COMPLAINT?

A complaint is defined as an expression of dissatisfaction about a council service that requires a response.

In summary:

- The Council received 773 stage 1 complaints and 47 Adults Social Care complaints during 2023/2024.
- 13% increase in service requests/ enquiries responded to, 1745 rising from 1540 in 2023/24. [Headline Figures – Complaints received](#)
- Housing Repairs continue to attract the most complaints with over 45% of the complaints being from this area.
- The main root cause for complaints continues to be communication delays and quality of service [Complaint Outcomes](#)
- 90% of complaints were resolved at stage 1 and did not progress to stage 2.
- During 2023/2024 the council had 47 complaints referred to the LGSCO, 4 were investigated, and all were upheld. [Referrals to the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman/ Housing Ombudsman](#)
- Departments continue to ensure that learnings are identified for upheld and partially upheld complaints. ([Learning from complaints](#))[Learning from Ombudsman Upheld Complaints](#)
- The Complaints Department endeavours to record each of those learnings to run reports providing oversight and the ability to monitor and assure those actions/outcomes.

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The Council provides a wide range of services to over 160,000 residents and hundreds of businesses, delivering these across various channels, including responding to over 250,000 telephone calls, online self-service, webchat, social media, and email, in person and by post. The Council ensures that any complaints related to the services it delivers can be received via several channels. We seek to learn from them and look for patterns of service failure. We continue to use the feedback we receive from our complaints to identify areas for service improvements. This is detailed further in Section 2 Organisational Learnings.
- 1.2 The Council works hard to view the complaints we receive as a positive opportunity for learning and service improvement whilst remaining focussed on trying to resolve them to the satisfaction of our residents as quickly as we can.
- 1.3 The Council has 3 complaints procedures. These are Corporate, Adult Social Care and Housing Services. Children's Services complaints are under the responsibility of Slough Children First (SCF).
- 1.4 There is a single report on all Council complaints covering stage 1, stage 2, and the Ombudsman with summary information on statutory adults and children's social care complaints (SCF). All Complaints for SCF are processed and managed by them directly, a detailed complaints report will be made available on their website once finalised. [Compliments & Complaints - Slough Children First](#)
- 1.5 We aim to resolve concerns raised by residents as quickly as possible. However, where not possible, we have a complaints policy and process to ensure that all complaints are dealt with fairly, swiftly, and within statutory guidelines where relevant. Issues raised that are not recorded as complaints are processed as service requests but are not reported on. This report focuses not only on the volumes and timeliness of complaint responses but also aims, when possible, to identify themes and lessons learnt that result in sustainable service improvements.
- 1.6 Our complaint procedure is designed to manage those complaints that require a formal documented response and therefore could not be satisfied earlier in the process. The complaints policy and procedure can be found here: [Corporate complaints process – Slough Borough Council](#)
- 1.7 The Audit & Corporate Governance Committee will be asked to note the Council's self-assessment against the Housing Ombudsman (HO) Complaint Handling Code of Practice. The Housing Ombudsman (HO) and Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) have recently consulted on a draft Joint Complaint Handling Code and the changes are due to be implemented in April 2026. It is now a statutory requirement of the council to demonstrate they are meeting the requirements of the code by completing a self-assessment on the code to the Housing Ombudsman at the same time as their tenant satisfaction measures (TSMs). A review against the LGSCO's code has been completed and included in the LGSCO upheld complaints and statutory and corporate complaints summary 2023-24. The council are currently non-compliant with both codes; however, we will be undertaking a root and branch review to address this. This report and the performance data within it relates to the policies in place during the period April 2023 to March 2024.

1.8 The main themes of non-compliance are around Policy and procedure and the need to develop a complaint handling culture within the organisation.

1.9 Under our governance arrangements we must report on and publish our performance on complaints to our website.

2. LEARNING FROM COMPLAINTS

2.1 Slough Borough Council welcomes and recognises the importance of complaints and all customer feedback. Departments are required to follow through with changes resulting from complaints within their areas, recording these and reporting on the outcome and actions taken. Part of the complaints process is that learning is requested on fully/ partially upheld complaints which becomes part of the complaint file. During 2023-24, 55% of complaints were because of lack of or poor communication, and delays to service delivery.

2.1.1 Managers are encouraged to be open and reflective when responding to complaints and to have discussions with complainants in their investigations. This aids in the focus towards early resolution and satisfactory remedies.

2.1.2 The timeliness of complaint investigations, especially at Stage 1, is below the standard we expect, and we will be addressing this further throughout 2024/25 by providing training and guidance to managers so they can support Heads of Service or equivalent in investigating complaints.

2.1.3 Any learning or training needs identified are followed through with relevant actions to be implemented to prevent further occurrences. Below are some identified themes, where learning was drawn.

TABLE 1 IDENTIFIED THEMES AND ACTIONS FROM LEARNING.

	Theme	Actions
People	Issues relating to the behaviour or conduct of a member of staff	Formal reflections were completed with staff, and additional training where need was identified was conducted. Expanded capacity within teams and improved/ adjusted resource allocation. Provided staff with reminders both individually and in team meetings/121s. Reminded staff of Standard Operation Procedures (SOP) and expectations when communicating with members of the public. Improved management of customer expectations and customer care priorities.
Procedures	Changes to current procedures and working practice as a preventative measure	Changed working practices and amended procedures. Implemented transitional arrangements- including nominating a set point of contact. Implement systems for formal review.
Process and Performance	Issues relating to performance and processes	Reviewed existing processes and made amendments/improvements or implemented new processes.

		<p>Accepted/Acknowledged when fault was found with any of our processes and took remedial steps to avoid a repeat, with established learnings shared departmentally.</p> <p>Monetary compensation in some instances where multiple failings were noted. Partnership working with other LAs for best practice/guidance.</p>
Provider	Work with providers/ partners to review working practices, policies, and contract compliance where applicable	<p>Reported findings to providers (e.g., Enforcement Agents, Care Providers), reminded them of expected SOPs. Monitor quality and care being provided by a specific care provider.</p> <p>Improvement to Contract management through increased communication and engagement, (Housing Repairs)</p>

WHAT HAVE WE LEARNT AND WHAT DID WE DO?

Some specific examples of these learnings in action across individual departments are listed below.

2.2 Housing Repairs - is continuing to take steps towards improving complaint response through the hiring of complaint handlers as well as a specific multi-skilled operative to tackle the backlog of work. The team are working on further improving communication with residents throughout the repairs and complaints processes, to ensure they are updated with the status of their repairs. Cardo, our repairs partner, has recently employed a member of staff to aid in providing updates which has helped to reduce complaints and enquiries. The teams are using data on reported issues to establish trends and produce specific work programmes. This has helped to prevent complaints/service requests while addressing areas of concern early. (E.g., repeated reports of leaks and damp issues in the Priory Estate have resulted in pointing and sealing to external staircases).

2.3 Neighbourhood Services - has addressed customer service concerns by ensuring that they recirculated the Customer Service Standards. We have also through complaint investigation improved our understanding of the Environmental Protection Act to encompass nuisance caused by artificial light. This has been shared with the team.

2.4 Revenues & Benefits - Where administrative delays were established, the fault was acknowledged, and the teams were reminded of the need to ensure issues are fully investigated and resolved when identified and to escalate these, where unable to resolve individually. Key contacts were assigned in some instances due to the complexity of cases, and some teams (Council Tax and Housing Benefits) have amended their auto-acknowledgement emails or placed alerts on the council's website to help set and manage expectations on processing times.

2.5 Environmental Services- We continue to receive and respond to service requests/ enquiries and formal complaints relating to missed bin collections regarding recycled and residual waste, however, the number of complaints has reduced by 19% from 67 in the previous fiscal year to 54. The increase in service requests was because of the council's strong stance on the

contamination and overloading of bins, with bins being rejected if not in compliance with advertised standards for collection. Recycling rates are improving because of better information, publicity, and education. In addition, the type of plastic accepted for recycling has expanded to include a wider selection for recycling. In-cab technology will also be used in future to assist with missed bin complaints, which will track and record refuse rounds.

2.6 SEND- Corporate complaints cover those aspects of Children's Services work that are not statutory, with a key area being provision for children and young people with special educational needs (SEN). Slough Borough Council's SEN team like others across the country are still being impacted by the national shortage of Educational Psychologists, as a result, the team were suffering from a high staff turnover and unmanageable caseloads. To address this the team coproduced a communication charter which consulted parents/carers to improve how the service communicated with stakeholders and families. The team also increased its capacity to implement a manageable caseload. The team are also monitoring therapies not being delivered due to training constraints, this is to ensure that if required these will be delivered in a meaningful and purposeful way.

2.7 ASC- There was a recognition of the need to improve communications and processes, including providing regular feedback/updates, informing early on proposed changes, and confirming ahead of time the date of any service closures. Reports have been generated to inform on all care services completed to support timely invoicing. From a Home Care perspective, we have arranged for paired visits to avoid miscommunications, misinterpretation and upset. We have recognised the need to complete new assessments at the earliest opportunity with referrals to appropriate advocacy representation for (Deprivation of Liberty Safeguard Assessment) DoLs applications.

Complaints handling training was organised and completed with the LGSCO in February 2024; complaint handlers and key investigating managers were in attendance. This helped to improve how we approach complaints by centring the complainant and their concerns and resolving these at the earliest opportunity.

NEXT STEPS

We will conduct a root and branch review of complaints which will form part of our Target operating model. We will aim to put things right, and develop a culture of continuous feedback, learning and improvement. This will become embedded within our new ways of working and help build trust with residents.

COMPLAINTS PROCESSES

2.8 Slough Borough Council has 3 complaint procedures under which they work. These are Corporate, Adult Social Care and Housing.

CORPORATE PROCESS:

2.9 From the 14th of August 2023, the council implemented a new two-stage Corporate Complaints process.

Stage One: The Council will nominate an appropriate officer to respond to the complaint.

Stage Two: The stage two complaint needs to be in writing, stating which aspects of the previous response they are not happy with and what more they think we should do. This will then be sent to a more senior manager to respond; in most cases, this be the service Director or a designated officer.

2.9.1 Complainants unhappy with the internal complaints process are entitled to seek a further review by contacting the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) or the Housing Ombudsman (HO).

HEADLINE FIGURES – COMPLAINTS RECEIVED

2.10 In the period 2023/24, 2,508 contacts were received via the Complaints team from the public; to express dissatisfaction with the services, they had been provided. Of these, 773 were formally investigated via the complaints processes, with the remaining 1,735 managed as service requests (enquiries) through early resolution. This equated to 69% of all contacts received. Below is a breakdown of the top 10 areas that received the most service requests, these included reports on missed bin collections, first-time repair requests, reporting of potholes or clarification requests on council tax bills. A service request defined by the LGSCO is a ‘request that the organisation provides or improves a service, fixes a problem or reconsiders a decision.’

TABLE 1 TOP 10 AREAS FOR SERVICE REQUESTS 2023-24

Environmental Services	313
Revenues & Benefits	199
Housing Management	176
Housing Repairs	175
Housing Services	125
Parking	107
Highways	72
Resilience & Enforcement	52
Building Control & Planning	47
Schools	43

2.11 We continued to see a variation in the number of contacts being resolved informally to the customer’s satisfaction, with 313 (18%) related to Environmental Services. This high volume of contact/enquiries being resolved informally confirms that there needs to be a continued focus on early resolution of cases.

2.12 Summary of complaints closed from April 2023 to March 2024 at all stages. (Figures in brackets are the previous year). Like many other local authorities, our focus over the last year has been to do the most we can with the resources we have, as a result, we are less likely to conduct investigations on requests which are not clear dissatisfaction of service. This allows for a more sustainable work approach; 90%* of the complaints received (excluding ASC complaints) were resolved at stage 1 and the remaining 10% or 78 were progressed to stage 2. The table below also confirms that only 1** progressed to stage 3, however, there was a change to the council’s corporate complaints procedure during this period.

TABLE 2 COMPLAINTS BY STAGE 2023- 2024

Complaint Stage	Number of Complaints	Complaints closed within the timescale	% Closed within the timescale	% of Complaints resolved
Stage 1	773 (836)	337 (305)	43% (37%)	90%*
Stage 2	78 (78)	14 (23)	18% (29%)	40%
Stage 3	1 (N/A)	(N/A)	(N/A)	1%**

2.13 Table 2 below shows a three-year “like for like” comparison of complaints received by the Council over the last 3 fiscal years but excludes complaints relating to Slough Children’s First.

TABLE 3 COMPLAINTS BY TAX YEAR (2021-2024)

Year	Number of Stage 1 Complaints	Percentage change (year on year)
2021-22	898	+ 28% (Previous year recorded 701 complaints)
2022-23	839	- 7 %
2023-24	773	- 8 %

2.14 The council received 726 stage 1 complaints and 47 Adult Social Care complaints for the 2023-2024 year, a decrease of 8% from the year before. 43% were completed within the relevant policy-stated response timescales. 78 (10%) were escalated to stage 2, where 18% were completed within the advertised timescale, and 38% of these were resolved. From the 47 (60% of stage 2 complaints) that were progressed to the LGSCO only 4 (9%) passed their test for an investigation. Only 1 stage 3 complaint was processed in the period 1st April- 13th August, prior to the new complaints process being implemented. There was an improvement of 11% of stage 1 complaints that responded within the timescale, while the percentage of stage 2 complaints that responded within the timescale, decreased by (-11%).

2.15 The decrease in complaints reflects the change to the Council’s Corporate Complaints process, which is more explicit on what is and is not dealt with under the complaints remit. This has resulted in some matters being directed to the appropriate channels in the first instance such as appeals. Below is a chart which shows the number of corporate complaints received in the period 2023/24 (this excludes Adult Social Care, and all complaints that fall under the Housing Services Complaints process) compared to the previous year. There were 320 stage 1 corporate complaints processed in 2023/24, compared to 367 from the previous year 2022/23.

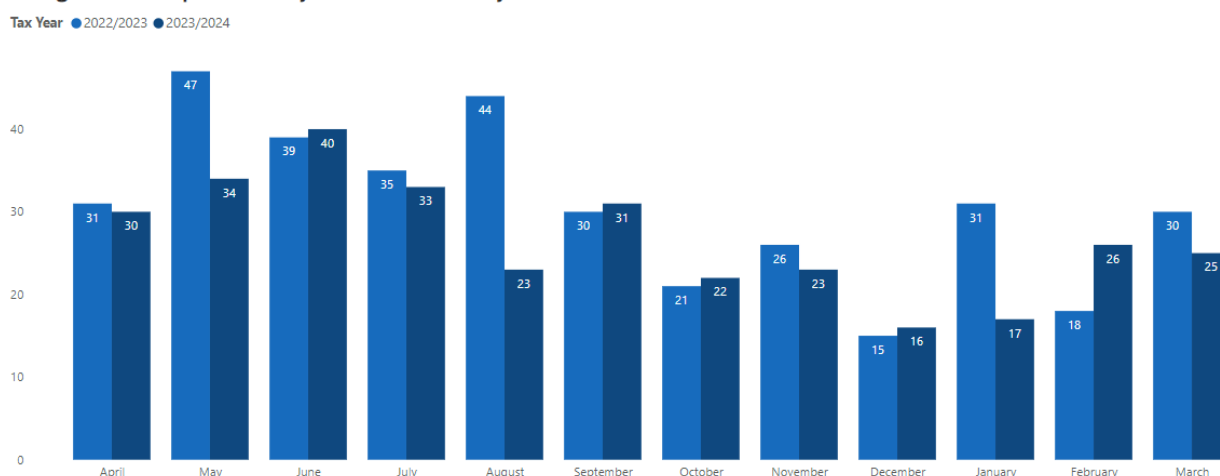
3. SERVICE BREAKDOWN OF COMPLAINTS DATA 2023-24

3.1 Stage 1 Complaints - a change in the Complaints process and extended response time for stage 1’s to 15 working days from 14th August 2023 shows we are now largely compliant for corporate complaints responses. Significant improvements have been achieved with focus across the whole Council ensuring complaints are a priority for each Directorate. There is bi-weekly reporting for open cases that are due or overdue and a weekly report for SEND in place for the last 12 months, to help improve performance. This ensures director awareness of all open cases, ensuring targeted approaches to cases closed in time.

3.2 Corporate Complaints - summary in isolation of Corporate Complaints volume processed monthly for the last two fiscal years – see charts below (Figures 1 and 2).

FIGURE 1 CORPORATE COMPLAINTS RECEIVED BY MONTH IN 2023/24 COMPARED WITH 2022/23.

Stage 1 Complaints by month & tax year



3.3 Summary of the top ten areas with the most complaints in 2023-24.

TABLE 4 TOP 10 AREAS FOR COMPLAINTS- TIMELINESS AND UPHOLD RATE.

Stage 1 Complaints	Complaints Received	Complaints Closed	Complaints closed within the timescale	% Closed within the timescale	% of Complaints resolved
Housing Repairs	328	327	87	26%	95%
Revenues & Benefits	100	100	73	73%	93%
SEND & Inclusion	57	57	31	27%	66%
Environmental Services	63	63	32	54%	89%
Neighbourhood Services	42	42	18	33%	95%
Adult Social Care	47	47	16	32%	94%**
Housing Services	36	36	14	35%	89%
Customer Services	29	29	23	79%	100%
Planning	16	16	4	31%	64%
Highways	11	11	9	82%	82%
Parking	11	11	6	55%	91%

****Adult Social Care statutory complaints have one stage, thereafter complainants may choose to progress their complaint to the LGSCO.**

3.4 Revenues and Benefits- the second highest area to have received complaints, saw 93%, 93 of the 100 stage 1 complaints being resolved at stage 1, with only 7 progressing to stage 2. The main root cause of these complaints centred on communication or service delays. 37% of these were in objection to the decisions made or the quality of work completed. Complaints

for Revenues & Benefits remain at a similar volume to the previous year, while the number of service requests decreased to 198, from 344 recorded in the previous year.

3.5 SEND- SEND complaints have increased significantly from the previous year by more than 200% from 24 to 57. This increase is a direct result of the national shortage in Education Psychologists, research indicates that 9 in 10 local authorities are struggling in this area with 96% of authorities reporting recruitment/ retention issues. Of the 57 stage 1 complaints investigated 68% were satisfied at stage 1, 18 of these progressed to stage 2, where 61% were remedied and the remaining 39% progressed to the LGSCO.

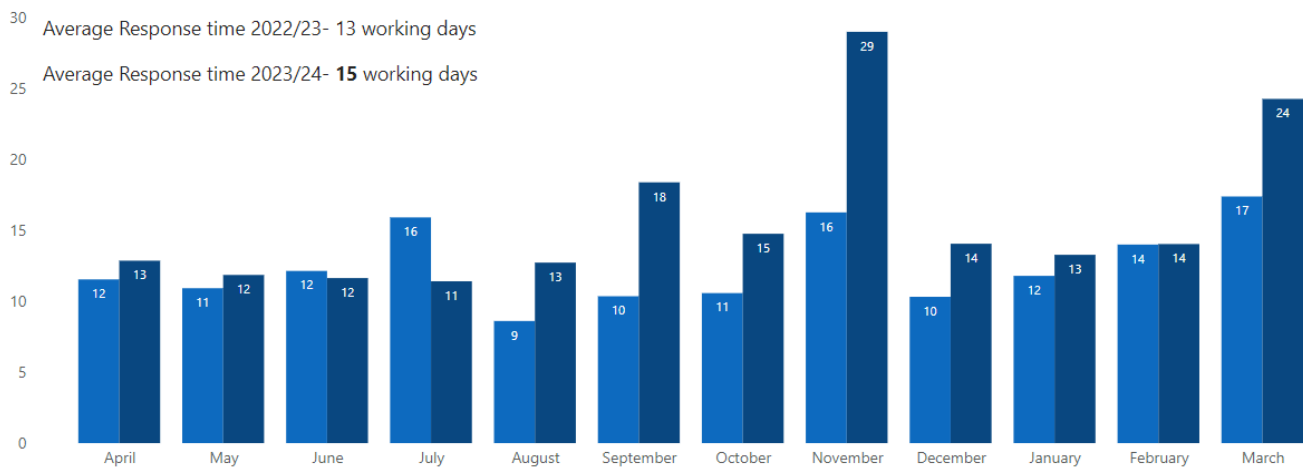
3.6 Environmental Services- Having received 7% of the stage 1 complaints over the last year, as anticipated the main causal factors unlike other areas were concerning the quality of service received, 53% of these complaints were because of this. On the 23rd of September 2022, the Cabinet approved the adoption of fortnightly bin collections from 26th June 2023. This service change proposed a £705k saving (pro-rata £424k) within Environmental Services. This saw an influx in service requests relating to this matter and contributing to an almost twofold increase by 94% of enquiries for this area from 161 to 313.

3.7 Figure 2 below reflects the average response time to stage 1 Corporate Complaints over the period 2023/24.

FIGURE 2 AVERAGE RESPONSE TIME TO CORPORATE COMPLAINTS IN 2023/24 COMPARED WITH 2022/23.

Avg. Response time in working days

Tax Year ● 2022/2023 ● 2023/2024



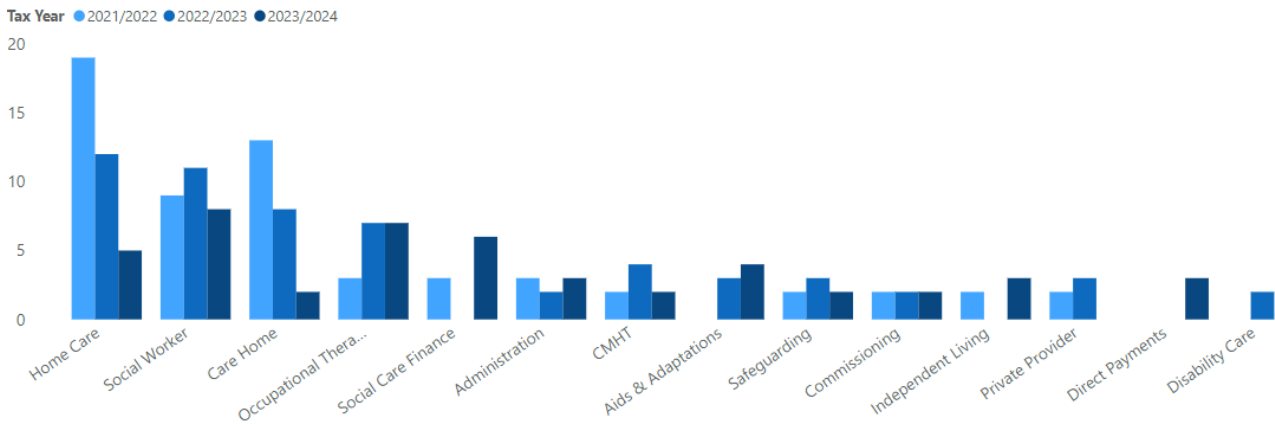
4. ADULT SOCIAL CARE COMPLAINTS

4.1 There were 47 statutory Adult Social Care (ASC) complaints investigated from 1st April 2023- 31st March 2024. This represents a decrease from the previous year by 18%.

4.2 Complaints were related to the following areas/services (Figure 3), The most complained about departments/areas were Social Worker; 8, Occupational Therapist; 7, and Social Care Finance; 6. This broke from the trend of the previous years, where Home Care and Care home concerns were the leading source for complaints about the service. Complaints relating to staff/social workers continue to be a relative factor and represent the highest percentage (17%) of complaints received in 2023/24.

FIGURE 3 ASC COMPLAINTS BY AREA/SERVICE FOR THE LAST 3 FINANCIAL YEARS

ASC complaints by area

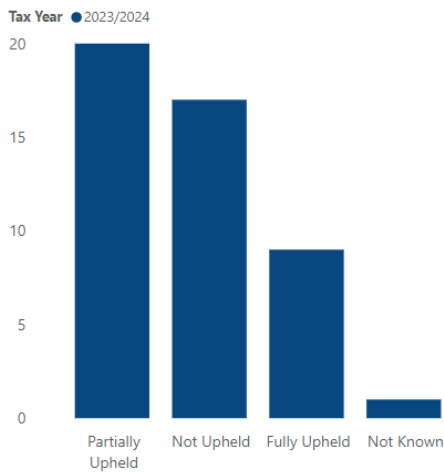


4.3 To better understand and implement learnings to complaints, it is helpful to know what triggers them being received in the first instance. The causal factors/ root cause for complaints in 2023-2024 was Service Failure – Quality of Work accounted for 40% of the ASC complaints, Figure 4 below shows how the breakdown of both root cause and complaint outcomes to the ASC complaints investigated.

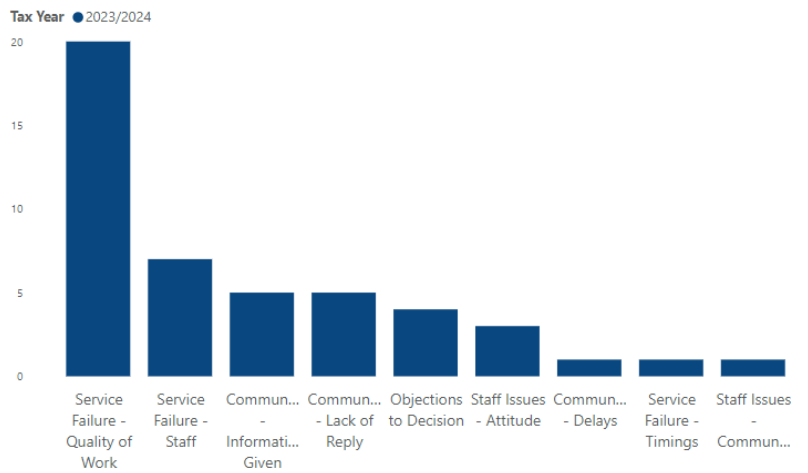
4.4 While 62% of complaints were upheld, 36% (17) were not upheld and 2% (1) were closed with an outcome of not known. 94% of the complaints were however remedied under the statutory Adult Social Care complaints procedure.

FIGURE 4 ASC COMPLAINT OUTCOME AND ROOT CAUSE 2023-24

Complaint Outcome - ASC



Complaints by Root Cause



5. SLOUGH CHILDREN FIRST – CHILDREN’S SOCIAL CARE COMPLAINTS

5.1 Slough Children First the council’s children’s social care provider partner operates under two distinct complaints processes. These are Statutory Complaints and Corporate Complaints, both have three stages. More information on these can be found [here](#). They received and processed the following complaints for the financial year 2023-224. There were no recorded stage 3 complaints in 2023-24 for Slough Children First.

TABLE 5 SLOUGH CHILDREN FIRST COMPLAINTS BY TYPE AND STAGES

Slough Children First	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 1 Complaints closed within the timescale	% Closed within the timescale	% of Complaints resolved at stage 1	% of Complaints resolved at stage 2
Statutory Complaints	21	0	12	57%	100%	NA
Corporate Complaints	38	4**	24	63%	89%	100%

5.2 Of the 21 Statutory complaints received and processed, none progressed beyond stage one, all were remedied, and reflects on the efforts being taken to engage with complainants throughout the investigatory process. 14 were fully or partially upheld, 3 were not upheld, and 2 were abandoned because the complainants failed to confirm the statement of complaint or did not respond to further contact. Of the other 2 received, 1 was withdrawn and the other suspended -where a matter has entered into court proceedings, under Social Care complaints legislation we cannot continue to investigate the complaint to not conflict with or prejudice any outcome. However, the complainant can have their complaint suspended and can ask for their complaint to be re-opened once court proceedings end.

5.3 Managers are encouraged to be open and reflective when responding to complaints and are required to discuss the complaints with the complainants in their investigations. This aids in the focus towards early resolution, concerns which do progress to Stage One are therefore more likely to be upheld or partially upheld.

5.4 From the 38 Slough Children First corporate complaints reported, 19 were fully or partially upheld, 16 were not upheld, 1 was abandoned and 2 were withdrawn. There were 4 which progressed to stage 2, for which 3 were fully or partially upheld and the other withdrawn.

6. HOUSING AND NEIGHBOURHOODS

6.1 The Housing Ombudsman Service is set up by law to look at complaints about the housing organisations that are registered with them. They resolve disputes involving the tenants and leaseholders of social landlords (housing associations and local authorities) and voluntary members (private landlords and letting agents who are committed to good service for their tenants).

6.1.1 In April 2024, the HO published its revised Complaint Handling Code, this sets out requirements for member landlords that will allow them to respond to complaints effectively and fairly.

6.1.2 The Code ensures complaint handling data is being used consistently across landlord members, promotes engagement at various levels within a landlord and sets out expectations for boards or equivalent governance, senior executives, and frontline staff. Compliance with the Code forms part of the membership obligations.

6.1.3 Members are obliged to complete the self-assessment to measure the level of compliance. When conducting a complaint investigation, the HO will consider whether the landlord dealt

with the complaint in accordance with the Code. Any failure identified could result in a finding of service failure, maladministration or severe maladministration for complaint handling and orders and recommendations will be made to put matters right and ensure compliance with the Code.

6.1.4 The council recently completed its annual self-assessment against the Housing Ombudsman Complaint handling code which can be found in Appendix E of the LGSCO Upheld Complaints- Statutory and Corporate complaints summary. The council are currently non-compliant with the code; however, we will be undertaking a root and branch review to address this. The Housing Ombudsman sent two letters stating non-compliance with the code as the council failed to complete the self-assessment on time and failed to communicate effectively about any delays being experienced in its completion.

6.2 Over 54% of stage 1 complaints were related to Housing and Neighbourhoods, and 13% were related to Revenues & Benefits. The figures for Housing and Neighbourhoods are broken down further below, with most stage 1 complaints relating to Housing Repairs. In 2023/24 the Repairs Service delivered 14,368 reactive repairs across our homes and 99.5% of emergency repairs were completed within 24 hours; 358 stage 1 and 2 complaints were received, equating to 2.4% service dissatisfaction. A further breakdown of the complaints is in the table below. 99.5 of emergencies were addressed within 24 hours.

6.3 Housing Repairs, Housing Services, and Neighbourhood Services complaints are processed under the [Housing Services Complaints policy](#). This two-stage process requires stage 1 complaints to be responded to within 10 working days and stage 2 within 20 working days.

TABLE 6 SUMMARY OF HOUSING AND NEIGHBOURHOODS COMPLAINTS 2023/24

All Housing	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 1 Complaints closed within the timescale	% Closed within the timescale	% of Stage 1 Complaints resolved
All Housing	406	36	113	27%	91%
Housing Repairs	328	30	84	26%	91%
Neighbourhood Services	42	2	18	33%	95%
Housing Services	36	4	14	35%	89%

6.4 There were 476 service requests received and processed via the housing areas (Housing Repairs 176, Neighbourhood Services 175, Housing Services 125), 197 of these were responded to within the council's aimed time of 10 working days. The average response time to these service requests was 37 working-days, compared to 50 working days for stage 1 complaints. The table below shows the top 5 areas that generate service requests to the housing areas compared to complaints. In these instances, the service requests were first-time approaches to the service submitted via the complaints team and therefore registered for active tracking and ownership. These were not managed under the complaints process.

TABLE 7 TOP 5 AREAS FOR SERVICE REQUEST COMPARED WITH COMPLAINTS WITHIN THE HOUSING AREAS

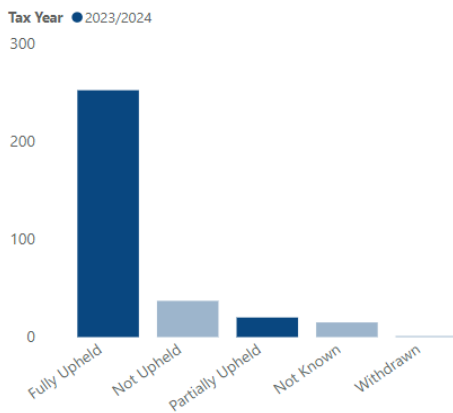
Record of Service Requests		Record of Complaints	
Neighbourhood Services		Neighbourhood Services	
Tenancy	31	Estate Services	11
Estate Services	29	Tenancy	6
Overgrown Trees	22	Right To Buy	6

Ground Maintenance	16	Leasehold	4
Leasehold	15	Service Charges	3
Housing Repairs		Housing Repairs	
Outstanding Works	66	Outstanding Works	196
Damp	20	Leaks	34
Leaks	20	Damp	24
Communal Repairs	15	Boilers	10
Fencing	12	Roof	7
Housing Services		Housing Services	
Housing Register	55	Temporary Accommodation	12
Temporary Accommodation	34	Housing Register	10
Housing Advice	23	Housing Advice	8
Homelessness	13	Homelessness	4

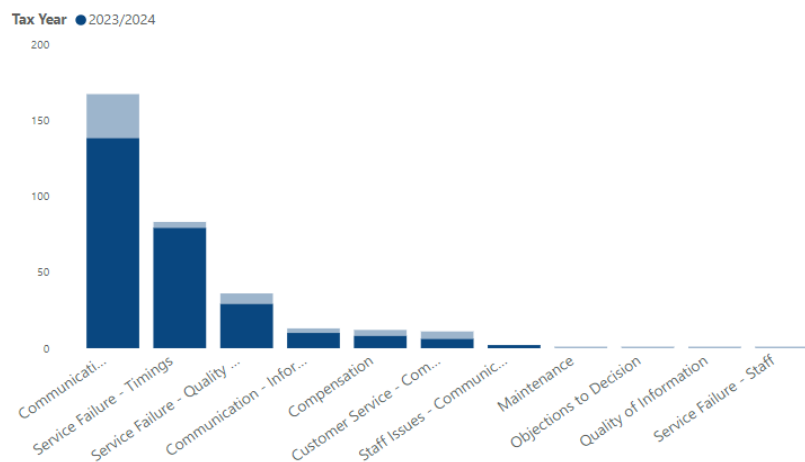
6.5 The average response time for complaints for all of Housing in the period 2023/24 was 46 working days, an improvement of 13 working days from the previous tax year. Much work has been done with the teams towards improvement in complaint handling, particularly around learning that can be derived from complaint investigations and response times, with regular updates on upcoming and overdue cases provided.

FIGURE 5 HOUSING REPAIRS – COMPLAINT OUTCOMES AND ROOT CAUSE

Complaint Outcome- Housing Repairs



Complaints by Root Cause



6.6 More than 40% or 328 of the complaints received from 1st April 2023 - 31st March 2024 were related to **Housing Repairs** and remained the highest complained about area.

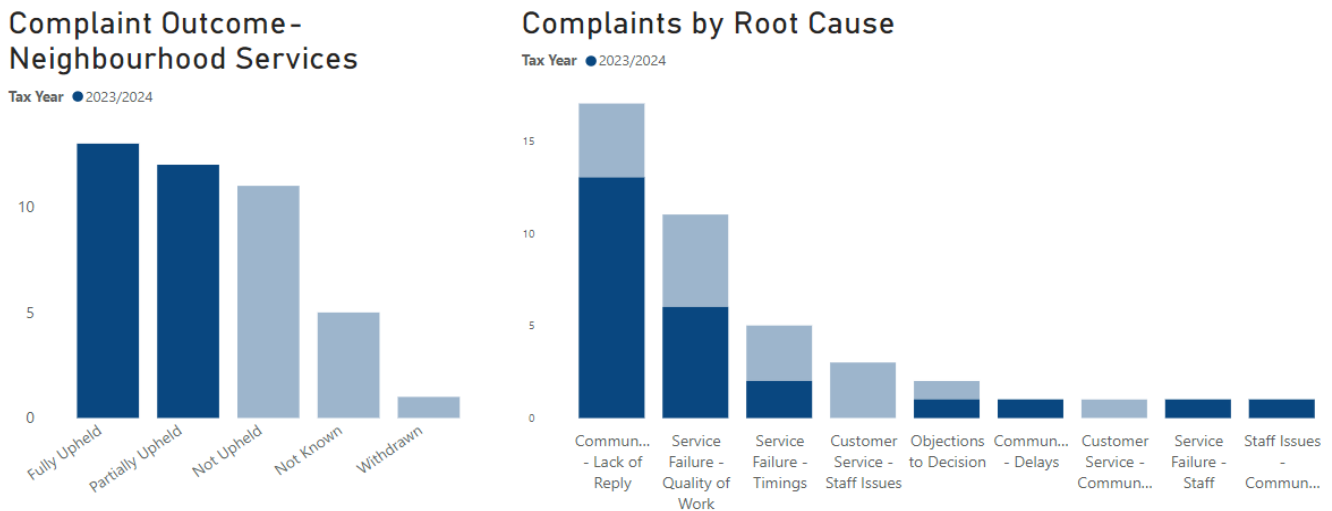
6.7 Of these, 272 were fully or partially upheld, with 217 having a causal factor centred on delays to either communication or service, and 29 were attributed to the quality of work completed. Complaints relating to 'damp' have reduced to 5 this year compared to the previous where 23 were reported. Following a high-profile case from Rochdale, resulting in the tragic death of a child from exposure to severe damp and mould reported on in November 2022, the Housing Repairs team has done significant work to address these concerns. To do this, a specific reporting channel was set up for residents, and letters were sent to all tenants to advise of this.

COMPENSATION

6.7.1 We also recognise that we must have understanding and empathy for our residents and we must consider their wellbeing as part of the impacts of a poor complaint or service resolution. Although compensation cannot change the past, we need to consider the impact delays in resolution may have caused. We recognise the crucial link between stable housing, a comfortable home environment and general wellbeing. We encourage our residents to actively engage with us. A total of £310 was awarded to three complainants linked to outstanding repairs complaints in 2023-24.

6.8 Neighbourhood Services received and processed 42 stage 1 complaints, communication delays/timings were the main causal factor, and service failure factors contributed to the complaints upheld (figure 6).

FIGURE 6 NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES – COMPLAINT OUTCOMES AND ROOT CAUSE



COMPLAINT ROOT CAUSES- ALL COMPLAINTS

6.9 The causal factor of the complaints received highlighted in Table 6, demonstrates that greater work needs to be done to address the lack of replies and delays in service delivery. Another outlier and area for improvement is the quality of work. These remain consistent with the root causes of complaints reported in the previous year. Figure 6 shows where fault was found in complaints that were upheld, which reflected the established trend noted above.

6.9.1 Delays & Timeliness- Most complaints relating to timeliness have been Upheld. This category relates to the time taken to conduct a service. The Council always seeks to avoid delays in service delivery, there are occasions where we need to reprioritise and give attention to putting things right in a timely way and seek early resolution to residents' concerns.

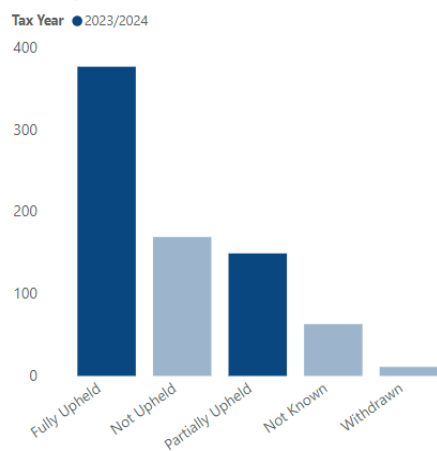
6.9.2 Communication- A high number of complaints due to lack of communication have been Upheld or Partially Upheld. These are between officers, teams, or departments within the Council. Where it is established, the council accepts fault, and both acknowledge and apologise for any inconvenience caused.

6.9.3 Quality- These complaints relate to services provided directly by Council staff or relate to the quality or conduct of staff employed by service partners. Quality issues within any area services are addressed through the relevant line managements. Quality issues with provider services are addressed through the Council's contract management procedures.

COMPLAINT OUTCOMES

FIGURE 7 COMPLAINT OUTCOME FOR ALL UPHELD COMPLAINTS 2023-24

Complaint Outcome - All



Complaints by Root Cause

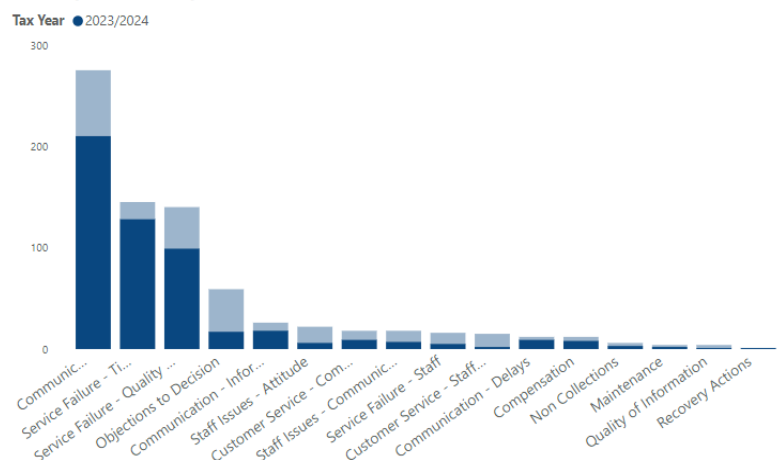


TABLE 7 ROOT CAUSES- ALL COMPLAINTS 2023-24

Root Cause	Count of Record No.
Communication - Lack of Reply	275
Service Failure - Timings	145
Service Failure - Quality of Work	140
Objections to Decision	59
Communication - Information Given	26
Staff Issues - Attitude	22
Customer Service - Communication	18
Staff Issues - Communication	18
Service Failure - Staff	16
Customer Service - Staff Issues	15
Communication - Delays	12
Compensation	12
Non Collections	6
Maintenance	4
Quality of Information	4
Recovery Actions	1
Total	773

7. REFERRALS TO THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT & SOCIAL CARE OMBUDSMAN/ HOUSING OMBUDSMAN

7.1 Complainants who remain dissatisfied with the response to their complaint at the local resolution level were able to request an independent review to be undertaken by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman. After receiving a final response from the council,

complainants are advised to contact the LGSCO if they remain unhappy. In 2023/24, the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman made 47 decisions regarding Slough Borough Council which can be shown in the table below.

Ombudsman	Investigated	Upheld	Not Upheld	Not Investigated
LGSCO	4	4	-	43
Housing Ombudsman	-	-	-	-

7.2 Complaints not investigated by the LGSCO include those; sign-posted (4), closed after initial enquiries (16), incomplete or invalid (2) and referred for local resolution (21). There were no complaints investigated by the Housing Ombudsman in 2023-24, they however, made 4 requests for action- to provide a service/response to residents' queries, 1 evidence-gathering exercise, 2 acknowledgements of cases closed that were being managed via the council's complaints procedures and 4 cases remain under assessment.

LEARNING FROM OMBUDSMAN UPHELD COMPLAINTS

7.3 Through the complaints investigated and upheld by the LGSCO, 3 were SEND-related and 1 was Council Tax, summarised below.

SEND

- Put in place a process to monitor the progress of EHC assessments and EHCP reviews so a senior manager is promptly made aware of any delay and can act accordingly.
- Provide training or guidance to complaint-handling staff to ensure they consider whether a payment is a suitable remedy for any upheld complaint.
- Failure to obtain professional advice identified during an EHC needs assessment as needed.
- Remind officers of the need to record and communicate decisions about virtual assessments to parents at the earliest opportunity which explain why it was made and what was considered when reaching it.
- Remind officers of the need to consider exercising discretion in all cases as not all will be suitable for a virtual assessment.
- Remind officers drafting EHCPs of the need for care to ensure they are accurate and error free throughout the assessment process.

Council Tax

Complaint upheld with no injustice. Findings noted:

The Council recognised the fault and conducted actions which were in line with what the LGSCO would recommend and remedied the injustice caused. The Council registered Mr X's complaint as a service request and not a complaint as the Council said it related to matters which happened more than 12 months ago, the complainant raised ongoing concerns.

8. CONCLUSION

8.1 It is of note that there is an increased focus in respect of the provision of public services. Whilst we strive to bring down the dissatisfaction with services being delivered, complaints continue

to provide data from which we can learn and improve as an organisation. As a result of the figures, and as mentioned earlier in this report, a continued focus must be placed on early resolution of concerns. This is an area where the LGSCO or Housing Ombudsman can find fault with the council. The change to the Corporate Complaints process from three stages to two stages with increased timings fostered and encouraged greater compliance with response timescales and placed a renewed focus on the quality of complaint responses. Through streamlined processes and staff engagement, the response rate for non-complex complaints has also improved and sustained. Learning from complaints is an integral part of the process and this has been managed and supported through increased internal reporting on complaints and quality assurance checks.

- 8.2 For all services, complaints that were fully or partially upheld have been analysed further to determine if there are any common factors which can be improved on for future service provision. It is these cases that are now being used to make recommendations to services, on areas which require work and improvement.