

Report title	Complaints and Compliments Quarter 4 and year end 2023/24
Report author	Clare Pinnock, Democratic Services Officer
Department	Law and Governance
Exempt?	No, apart from the exempt appendix
Exemption type	1) Information relating to any individual (personal data) 2) Information likely to identify an individual (personal data)
Reasons for exemption	The list of staff receiving compliments is exempt as it identifies individuals who may not have given explicit consent for this to be in the public domain

Purpose of report:

- **For information**

Synopsis of report:

To report on complaints and compliments recorded on the corporate registers between 1 January and 31 March 2024 (Quarter 4) and to summarise the year end statistics and any changes since the last meeting.

1. Context and background of report

1.1 The Council maintains corporate registers (spreadsheets) of formal complaints which have been recorded (and a separate register for those in which the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman and Housing Ombudsman (the Ombudsmen) have been involved), what they relate to and how they have been resolved. We maintain a similar spreadsheet for compliments.

2. Report and, where applicable, options considered and recommended

1.2 In February 2024, the Local Government Ombudsman and Housing Ombudsman issued the new separate, but aligned complaint handling codes. The Local Government Ombudsman’s complaint handling code and the Council’s updated complaints policy are due to be adopted by this Committee in July (deferred from this meeting, as agreed at the last special meeting in March 2024).

1.3 As at 31 March 2024 there were 27 entries in the complaints register and 13 in the compliments register.

1.4 Complaints Quarter 4 and year end 2023/24:

Business Centre	Quarter 1	Quarter 2	Quarter 3	Quarter 4	Year end
Assets and Regeneration	1	5	2	4	12
Community Services			2	1	3
Corporate Services					
Customer, Digital and Collection Services	2	1	1	1	5
Environmental Services	27	24	12	2	65
Financial Services		1			1
Housing	6	16	14	17	53
Human Resources					
Law and Governance	1	1	1	1	4
Planning, Economy and Built Environment	1	6	5	1	13
Total	38	54	37	27	156

2.4 The year end figure of 156 compares with 107 for 2022/23.

2.5 Of the 27 complaints listed; two have been withdrawn in respect of Housing and another is likely to be withdrawn regarding Planning and Built Economy with the residents being happy with our initial contacts to resolve so they could effectively be 'downgraded' to a service request. There were 9 complaints upheld and 7 not upheld. The remaining are all in progress and an update has been sought from the relevant business centres. In respect of the three in progress within Housing colleagues have advised that these have involved ongoing discussions with the people in question, for example to clarify the nature of their complaint and liaison with contractors.

2.6 In terms of specific complaints, an issue was identified with regard to the parking at Waitrose in Egham in the last quarter, it occurred again this quarter and the relevant Corporate Head has been actively making improvements to avoid any further problems.

2.7 Having one of the widest and most public facing services, Housing continues to have the highest number of complaints. These are across the different strands of Housing and several were about our contractors and/or the condition of their property.

2.8 It is anticipated that when the new CRM is launched any under-reporting will be corrected and the figures showing Housing as the highest may be more comparable

as more business centres are trained on the CRM and become familiar with the new policies and procedures for which guidance is being produced and training arranged.

- 2.9 Members will note the significant drop in complaints regarding refuse and recycling. This is mainly due to re-direction of 'complaints' to the 'report it' function which is in line with the new definition of complaints.
- 2.10 Many complaints are indicative of the volume of work that staff are dealing with leading to delays and the customer then chases their enquiries for progress.
- 2.11 In terms of compliments these were spread evenly between Customer Services and the DSO and details of individuals can be found in Exempt Appendix 'A'. The public appreciated staff who have helped them with a problem, responded quickly and efficiently to service requests, taken time to listen and empathise and shown a positive outlook.
- 2.12 The table below sets out compliments for the year 2023/24:

Business Centre	Quarter 1	Quarter 2	Quarter 3	Quarter 4	Year end
Assets and Regeneration					
Community Services	4	2	3	1	10
Corporate Services	1				1
Customer, Digital and Collection Services	3	5	3	6	17
Environmental Services	6	15	4	5	29
Financial Services		1	1		2
Housing	5	5	3	1	13
Human Resources					
Law and Governance			1		1
Planning, Economy and Built Environment	1	1	1		3
Total	20	29	16	13	78

- 2.13 The year end figure of 78 compares with 87 for 2022/23 which is fairly consistent. However, it is considered that compliments may be under-reported in some areas of the Council and it is important to share where staff have performed above and beyond and their efforts have been appreciated by the public as well as take into account suggestions for improvement and best practice.
- 2.14 The breakdown of complaints and compliments for 2023/24 by Ward is set out below (- denotes complaints and + compliments)

Ward	Quarter 1		Quarter 2		Quarter 3		Quarter 4		Year end	
	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	+
Addlestone North	4	3	6	2	4				14	5
Addlestone South	2	3	4	2	3	1	8	2	17	8
Chertsey Riverside	2	1	1		5		4	1	12	2
Chertsey St Ann's	5	1	8	4	1		3	2	17	7
Egham Hythe	3	1	8	2	4	3			15	6
Egham Town	2	3	6	3	4	2	1	1	13	9
Englefield Green East	1			1					1	1
Englefield Green West	2	2	2			1	1	1	5	4
Longcross, Lyne and Chertsey South	1		2	1	2	1			5	2
New Haw	1	1	4	1	3	1	2	1	10	4
Ottershaw		1	3		3	1	1	2	7	4
Thorpe	2		2	1	1		2		7	1
Virginia Water			1						1	
Woodham and RowTown	5		1	1			2		8	1
Out of Borough	2	3	4	4	2	2	2	1	10	10
Unrecorded	6	1	2	7	5	4	1	2	14	14
Totals	38	20	54	29	37	16	27	13	156	78

3. Policy framework implications

- 3.1 The Corporate Business Plan 2022 – 2026 is relevant to this process as handling complaints is at the centre of how we interact with the public. Our values include being customer focused, striving for excellence, improving services, promoting equality and diversity, and delivering excellent value for money. Our goals include having satisfied customers. It is important that our processes are aligned with these strands of the plan.
- 3.2 The Corporate Service Review has reached the stage where the Corporate and Senior Leadership Teams are having a more in depth look at the workings of the CRM before it is launched.
- 3.3 We will start collating data where possible in preparation for more formal reporting with new Key Performance Indicators to be used from 2025/26 following those suggested by the Ombudsman. Future reports will inform the Committee on:
- Number of complaints received at stage 1
 - outcome of stage 1 complaints – upheld, not upheld, partially upheld
 - average number of working days to respond to complaints at stage 1 following acknowledgement
 - number of complaints escalated to stage 2 – upheld, not upheld, partially upheld

- outcome of complaints at stage 2
- average number of working days to respond to complaints at stage 2 following acknowledgement
- number of service improvements by service area or department

4. Resource implications/Value for Money

4.1 Complaints are dealt with across the business centres within existing resources. Where compensation has been paid there is no separate budget for this.

5. Legal implications

1.5 None identified.

6. Equality implications

6.1 The Council has a duty under the Equality Act 2010. Section 149 of the Act provides that we must have due regard to the need to;

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act
- to advance equality of opportunity
- foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share protected characteristics.

We should at all times act in a way that is non-discriminatory through our policies and procedures and interactions with people.

6.2 In the last reporting period there were three complaints that could be identified as relevant to disability, which were not upheld, one to age which was also not upheld and two relevant to race which are in progress. There were three compliments relevant to age.

7. Environmental/Sustainability/Biodiversity implications

1.6 None identified.

8. Risk Implications

8.1 There is reputational risk if complaints are not dealt with satisfactorily. If the complainant subsequently complains to the Ombudsman and they uphold the complaints; these are published on their website and there is an obligation on us to also report on them.

9. Other implications

9.1 None identified.

10. Timetable for Implementation

1.7 The next report to this Committee will be to present the updated Council's Complaints Policy and adoption of the Ombudsman's complaint handling code. It is

likely that a review of the unreasonable complainant behaviour protocol will also take place shortly, resources permitting.

- 1.8 Regular meetings between Digital Services, Democratic Services, Customer Services and Housing continue to take place, taking the project forward.
- 1.9 Training for stage 1 complaint handlers and other relevant staff overseeing the process has been arranged in liaison with the Ombudsman who provides an on-line course for up to 18 delegates delivered 'on site' to individual councils. It is likely that we will have up to 30 staff trained in the medium term.

11. Conclusions

- 1.10 The way we deal with complaints informs service improvement and accurate reporting shows a transparent approach to our governance arrangements.

12. Background papers

- Data contained in the corporate registers and across business centres (part exempt)

13. Appendices

- Exempt Appendix 'A' compliments received in Quarter 4