

MEETING	CUSTOMER AND COMMUNITY SCRUTINY PANEL (Councillors Begum (Chair), Muvvala, Ali, Brooker, Hussain, Kaur, M. Malik, S. Malik and Mohammad <u>Non-voting Co-opted Member</u> Trevor Pollard (Residents Panel Board)
DATE AND TIME:	THURSDAY, 20TH OCTOBER, 2022 AT 6.30 PM
VENUE:	COUNCIL CHAMBER - OBSERVATORY HOUSE, 25 WINDSOR ROAD, SL1 2EL
DEMOCRATIC SERVICES OFFICER: (for all enquiries)	MANIZE TALUKDAR 07871 982 919

SUPPLEMENTARY PAPERS

The following Papers have been added to the agenda for the above meeting:-

* Item 4 was not available for publication with the rest of the agenda.

PART 1

<u>AGENDA ITEM</u>	<u>REPORT TITLE</u>	<u>PAGE</u>	<u>WARD</u>
4.	Task & Finish Group: Complaints Handling	1 - 40	All

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SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Customer and Community Scrutiny Panel
DATE: 20 October 2022

CONTACT OFFICER: Alexander Polak, Head of Governance and Scrutiny
(For all Enquiries) alexander.polak@slough.gov.uk

WARD(S): all

PART I
FOR DECISION**TASK AND FINISH GROUP: COMPLAINTS HANDLING****1. Purpose of Report**

1.1 Complaints is a key area for Member attention and is central to the remit of the Customer and Community Scrutiny Panel. A Task and Finish Group is recommended to review the subject area and make recommendations building on the work reported in September 2022 to the Audit and Governance Committee (see Appendix A).

2. Recommendations:

1. That a 'Complaints Handling Task and Finish Group' be convened;
2. That the Panel commends to this Task and Finish Group the 'key lines of enquiry' set out at section 5.7, subject to any input from the committee in light of this report and its appendices; and
3. That this Group be made up of up to 5 members from the committee, ideally with cross-party input, and be expected to report their findings to the Customer and Community Scrutiny Panel within three months, subject to the discretion of the Panel Chair.

3. Commissioners' Review

Commissioners support this proposal and the approach suggested.

4. Report

4.1 On 28 September 2022 the Audit and Corporate Governance Committee received an [item about complaints](#). This report is included as an appendix to today's item. It includes:

- a [summary of decisions upheld by the Local Government and Social Care ombudsman](#) (ie where an independent body has upheld a complaint about the council)
- a [summary of complaints received by the Council](#)
- a [note of the themes identified](#) and the actions being taken to respond to these themes.

4.2 The following actions are summarised from section 3 of the report to Audit and Corporate Governance Committee (Appendix A) – a recommendation relating to this scrutiny item has been underlined:

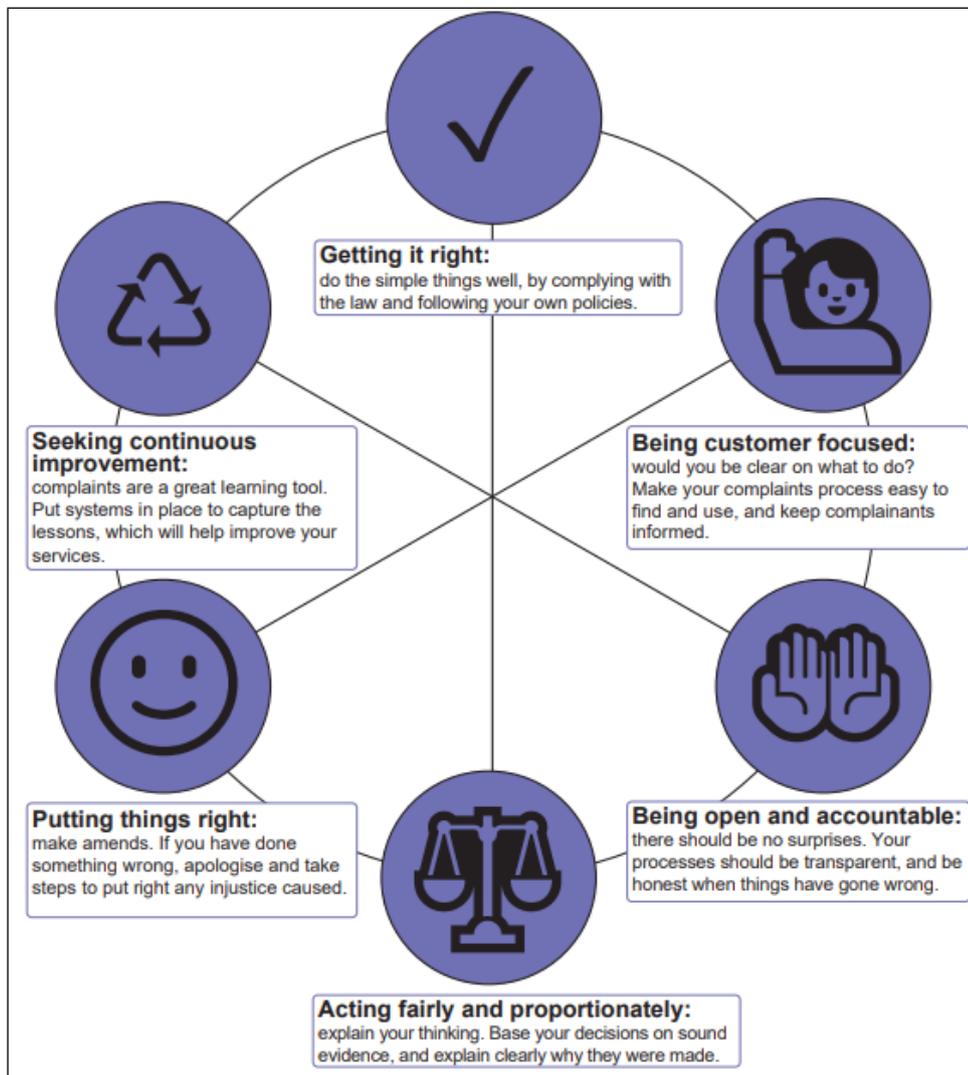
- *The Complaints Team intends to reduce their complaints process from a 3 stage process to 2 stage process.*
- *Officers are liaising with scrutiny members in relation to setting up a task & finish group to look at best practice guidance and the LGSCO's training programme to enable recommendations to be made to cabinet on improving the complaints process.*
- *When reporting about complaints, the Complaints Team wishes to move away from a focus on the number of complaints and timeliness of responding and towards focusing on capturing learning and trends.*
- *The Monitoring Officer has taken a lead on reviewing all cases which have been referred to the LGSCO to ensure the Council responds in an open and transparent manner and that options for early resolution are explored.*

4.3 Councillors have an important dual role signposting complaints on the behalf of members of the public, and scrutinising the delivery of local services. Councillors therefore have a unique perspective on the Council's complaints process, and many reasons to want to make sure it works effectively. It is critically important that Councillors have confidence in the arrangements which their own council has in place for handling residents' complaints on their behalf, as well as understanding the system and feeling an ownership of it.

4.4 Furthermore, there is an opportunity to learn about the Council's performance in all kinds of areas by looking at trends and themes in the complaints it receives. This makes complaints an important area for the overall governance of the authority and a valuable source of information for Overview and Scrutiny. As an example of the kinds of insights available, the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman has used its knowledge of complaints across the whole sector to develop [lists of questions](#) which it believes Overview and Scrutiny Members should be asking in every local authority when considering certain topics. By setting this example, they are showing that this should be an aspiration for every Council to do using their own complains data.

4.5 The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman is an independent body which has a role to investigate complaints about Council services, usually when the Council's own complaints process has failed to resolve the issue. It publishes advice and guidance about good practice handling of complaints.

4.6 For example, this diagram sets out the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's 'Principles of Effective Complaint Handling':



4.7 The proposed key lines of enquiry for the Task and Finish Group have been drawn from a publication by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman called [Effective Complaint Handling for Local Authorities](#). They should be considered draft until confirmed by the T&F Group itself, and are as follows:

Complaint handling

- How quickly does your authority respond to complaints?
- How quickly does your authority look to put things right when there is evidence of fault?
- How does your authority make sure all partners it commissions services from also have effective complaint handling processes?
- Does your authority's complaints process clearly signpost to the Ombudsman?

Complaints upheld:

- Does your authority uphold particularly high or low numbers of complaints in particular service areas?
- How does your uphold rate compare to the number of complaints made to your authority?

Our decisions:

- Do we refer a high number of complaints back to your authority to consider first? This may show that people are not being properly signposted to the local complaints process.
- Uphold rates show the proportion of investigations in which we find some fault and can indicate problems with services. Using our interactive map you can compare your uphold rate with that of similar authorities.

Putting things right:

- How often does your authority offer a suitable remedy for a complaint before it comes to us? This is a good sign that your authority is able to accept fault and offer appropriate ways to put things right for people.
- Use the interactive map to look at the service improvement recommendations your authority agrees to make following our investigations. How are they being implemented, and their impact monitored?
- What is your authority's compliance rate? This indicates our satisfaction with the evidence your authority has provided to implement a recommendation it has agreed to.

4.8 By considering these, or similar, lines of enquiry, it is anticipated that Councillors will be able to develop recommendations for the Panel to consider recommending on to the Cabinet. In order to resolve the work well before the end of the current administration and provide space for other T&F work it is proposed that an expectation of a three month duration be set by the Panel Chair.

4.9 Officer support to this Task and Finish Group will be drawn from staff in the service who necessarily must continue to do the 'day job' during this time, facilitated by Democratic Services who will advise on best practice planning and execution of a scrutiny review and assist with the synthesis of the information gathered. Members must therefore be prepared to take an active role in shaping and leading the review. In the first meeting of the T&F, members will be assisted to confirm the scope of their review and to explore the range of information they might like to look at or witnesses they may wish to call in order to shape their ideas. This could include looking at the way in which other authorities manage the function, for example.

5. Legal and Financial Implications

5.1 Financial

5.1.1 None – resources for the Task and Finish Group will be drawn from the existing officer corps. There may be financial implications to any recommendations resulting from this process, which will be dealt with in any report produced by the Task and Finish Group.

5.2 Human Rights Act and Other Legal Implications

5.2.1 There are no legal implications to convening a Task and Finish Group to consider the council's complaints processes. There may be legal implications to any recommendations resulting from this process, which will be dealt with in any report produced by the Task and Finish Group.

5.2.2 The LGSCO is the independent body responsible for investigating complaints made against local authorities where it is alleged that there has been maladministration causing injustice. Under the Local Government Act 1974, the

LGSCO is responsible for investigating complaints against council and some other authorities, investigating complaints about adult social care providers from people who arrange or fund their own adult social care and for providing advice and guidance on good administrative practice.

5.2.3 The expectation is that a complainant will utilise a local authority's complaints process prior to referring the matter to the LGSCO, although the LGSCO can dispense with this requirement in specific cases. Complaints can be made by a member of the public, their authorised representative, a personal representative of a deceased person or a person deemed suitable to act on behalf of a member of the public if that person is unable to authorise them.

5.2.4 The LGSCO has the power to make recommendations to a local authority following a complaint on how to improve its services and to put things right for the complainant. The recommendations are not mandatory and the local authority does not have to accept or follow them. Remedies recommended by the LGSCO can include an apology, financial compensation, a review of procedures, staff training, and reconsideration of a decision and payment of money where this should have been paid.

5.2.5 Maladministration is not defined in the legislation, however case law has held that it includes bias, neglect, inattention, delay, incompetence, ineptitude, perversity, turpitude and arbitrariness. Examples of maladministration include excessive or unreasonable delay, making misleading or inaccurate statements, failing to follow a specified procedure, failing to consult or liaise, failing to provide information when requested to do so, not keeping adequate records and failing to investigate or reply to a query from a member of the public. The LGSCO is concerned with the manner in which the decision was reached, as opposed to the actual decision.

5.2.6 Personal injustice can include the time and trouble involving in pursuing a complaint against a public body, the loss of a right or service, costs associated with pursuing the complaint and inconvenience, worry, distress and hurt feelings.

5.2.7 Certain matters are outside the remit of the LGSCO. These include decisions where there is a statutory right of appeal, situations where the complainant has had a remedy by way of court proceedings and where the complainant has failed to make a complaint within 12 months of the matter complained of (although there is discretion to extend this time limit).

5.2.8 The LGSCO regularly publishes good practice guides both on complaints handling and on suggested remedies for specific complaints. These include guidance relating to council housing repairs, neighbour nuisance, council housing management and benefits.

6. **Conclusion**

6.1 Complaints is a key area for Member attention and is central to the remit of the Customer and Community Scrutiny Panel. A Task and Finish Group is recommended to review the subject area and make recommendations building on the work already reported to the Audit and Governance Committee.

7. **Appendices Attached**

'A' - Report to the Audit and Governance Committee (and appendices)

[Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Upheld Complaints and Statutory and Corporate Complaints Summary 2021/22](#)  PDF 127 KB

Additional documents:

- [LGSCO Appendix A - Summary of upheld decisions, item 6](#)  PDF 482 KB
- [LGSCO Appendix B - Annual letter from the LGSCO July 2021, item 6](#)  PDF 109 KB
- [LGSCO Appendix C - Annual letter from the LGSCO July 2022, item 6](#)  PDF 110 KB
- [Appendix D Statutory and Corporate Complaints report 2021-22, item 6](#)  PDF 1 MB

8. **Other public materials referred to**

[Effective Complaint Handling for Local Authorities \(Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman\)](#)

[Principles of Good Administrative Practice \(Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman\)](#)

Slough Borough Council

Report To:	Audit and Corporate Governance Committee
Date:	28 th September 2022
Subject:	Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) upheld complaints. Statutory & corporate complaints summary of 2021-2022
Chief Officer:	Stephen Brown – Corporate Operations Officer Sarah Wilson – Monitoring Officer
Contact Officer:	Finbar McSweeney - Complaints, Casework & FOI Lead
Ward(s):	All
Exempt:	NO
Appendices:	Appendix A – Summary of upheld LGSCO complaints received 1 April 2020- 31 March 2022 Appendix B – LGSCO Annual Review Letter July 2021 Appendix C – LGSCO Annual Review Letter July 2022 Appendix D – Statutory and Corporate Complaints Report 2021-22

1. Summary and Recommendations

This report sets out a summary of the upheld complaints determined by the LGSCO in 2020-22 and a summary of statutory & corporate complaints during 2021- 2022.

Recommendations:

Committee is recommended to:

- (a) Note the summary of upheld decisions by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman during 1st April 2020 - 31 March 2022 (Appendix A).
- (b) Note the summary of statutory and corporate complaints during 1st April 2021 – 31 March 2022.
- (c) Note the themes identified and the actions being taken to respond to these themes.

Reason:

1.1 Complaints are a free and valuable source of information and insight to enable the Council to focus on improvements to our processes and service delivery. This reports provides the Committee with information on complaints received in the past two years. In future the Council will report to the Committee at least annually.

1.2 Where complaints are upheld by the LGSCO, they recommend ways for authorities to put things right when faults have caused injustice. Their recommendations try to put individuals back in the position they were in before the fault. The LGSCO also monitor authorities to ensure compliance with their recommendations. Appendix A includes LGSCO recommendations for each upheld complaint.

1.3 In 2020-21, the LGSCO were satisfied that the council had successfully implemented agreed recommendations.

1.4 In 2021-2022, the LGSCO were again satisfied that the council had implemented agreed recommendations.

1.5 During the reporting period 2021-22, the LGSCO determined three cases of injustice regarding Slough Children First not investigating complaints on behalf of 3 young persons which were more than a year old from a 3rd party.

2 Alternative options considered and not recommended

2.1 The council could report individual findings of maladministration on a case by case basis. This is not recommended as it does not provide an opportunity to identify themes and learn from complaints, even when they are not upheld by the LGSCO.

2.3 By publicly reporting on complaints data and learning, the Committee has an opportunity to scrutinise how this data is used to inform the Council's risk management procedures and to ensure continuous improvement. This option is recommended as it allows the council to learn from complaints to continuously improve its services and increase resident satisfaction.

Commissioner Review

The report was reviewed by Commissioners who had no observations to make.

3 Background

LGSCO data

3.1 The Council currently operates a three-stage corporate complaints procedure:

- At Stage 1 the departmental manager deals with the complaint with the aim of resolving the complaint.
- At Stage 2 complaints which are not resolved at Stage 1 are reviewed by the relevant Head of Service or above.
- At Stage 3 complaints which are not resolved at Stage 2 are reviewed by the chief executive. This is the final stage of the corporate complaints process.

3.2 If the complainant remains dissatisfied after going through the Council's corporate complaints procedure, they may escalate the matter to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO). Where the matter relates to complaints about social housing then it falls under the jurisdiction of the Housing Ombudsman rather than LGSCO.

- 3.3 There are separate statutory processes in relation to social care complaints for Adult's and Children's services (termed 'statutory social care complaints'). Once the statutory procedure is exhausted the complainant has the right of recourse to the LGSCO.
- 3.4 The LGSCO reserves the right to accept and investigate a complaint even if it has not been through either our corporate or the statutory complaints procedures. This can occur when there are urgent issues (such as imminent homelessness), vulnerability, or if the complainant shows that they have complained to the council but have not received a response. However, in general the LGSCO expects complainants to utilise the internal complaints process first to give local authorities the opportunity to resolve the matter directly.
- 3.5 This report covers two reporting periods:
- 1 April 2020 - 31 March 2021; and
 - 1 April 2021 - 31 March 2022
- 3.6 Every July the LGSCO writes an annual review letter to every local authority which outlines the complaints and enquiries they have dealt with during the previous financial year. The annual letters received by Slough Borough Council for 2020-21 and 2021-22 can be found in Appendix B and C.
- 3.7 Officers have reviewed the annual letters from the LGSCO and noted that;
- In 2020-21, 1 of 2 investigations conducted by the LGSCO were upheld. Whilst the letters refer to percentages, the figures are based on a very small number of cases and therefore using percentages is potentially misleading. The figure compares well against the average figure of 63% (see appendix B) for similar authorities, but again the small number of cases makes this comparison potentially misleading.
 - In 2021-22, 4 of 5 investigations conducted by the LGSCO were upheld. This compares to an average of 64% in similar organisations. Three of the investigations related to one complaint concerning three individuals. The complaint related to services delivered by Slough Children First.
 - In all 5 cases over the two year period the LGSCO was satisfied that the council had successfully implemented agreed recommendations.
 - Since 2021-22 the LGSCO noted general concerns across all local authorities regarding the erosion of effective complaint functions. The Ombudsman noted that they are working to develop a new programme of work that will utilise complaints to drive improvements in both local complaints systems and services. This is something Slough Borough Council will be concentrating on starting with a review of the complaint process with a view of changing from a 3 stage to a 2 stage corporate complaint process as well as improving the internal reporting to CLT to ensure corporate leadership of complaints.
- 3.8 The table below shows the full breakdown of the outcomes of LGCSO complaints received during these two reporting periods (2020-21 and 2021-22) and comparison against the previously reported year (2019-20). Note: this includes cases where the LGSCO determined there was no further action and they chose not to progress the

complaint to an investigation as, for example, the complaint has not been through the corporate or statutory process, or the matter is outside the jurisdiction of the LGSCO.

LGSCO decision	Number of Complaints (% of total)							
	2019-20		2020-21		2021-22			
Investigated - Upheld	5	9%		1	4%		4	8%
Investigated –Not upheld	5	9%		1	4%		1	2%
No further action	45	82%		25	92%		46	90%
Total number of LGSCO complaints reported	55	100%		27	100%		51	100%

3.9 There was a significant increase in the number of Ombudsman cases received from 2021-22 compared to 2020-21. In March 2020 the LGSCO suspended casework for approximately three months due to the pandemic. This is likely to have impacted the number of cases and decisions they were able to reach and cases that they were able to fully investigate, and the data should be interpreted with this in mind.

Of the upheld complaints received by the LGSCO in 2021-22, three were in relation to Children’s Services (1 complaint in relation to 3 individuals) and the other a Planning matter. Further detail is provided in Appendix A.

3.10 This trend appears in-line with the national picture; the LGSCO’s [Review of Local Government Complaints 2020-21](#) the LGSCOs Review of Local Government Complaints 2020-21 noted that there was an increase in the uphold rate of all categories of complaint, other than environmental services and protection, which typically include complaints about refuse and recycling, noise, pollution and licensing.

Internal complaints data

3.11 In the period 1st April 2021- 31st March 2022 the council received and investigated 898 complaints at stage 1, 74 at stage 2 and 3 at stage 3. Of the stage 1 complaints received 44 were investigated under the statutory adult social care complaints process. The table below shows a breakdown of the number of complaints received by stages over the last 2 financial years. (Please refer to Appendix D for a detailed analysis of the Council’s Statutory and Corporate Complaints 2021-22).

	2020/21	2021/22
Stage 1	701	898
Stage 2	62	74
Stage 3	7	3
Total Complaints handled	770	975

3.12 42% of the complaints received were in relation to Osbornes our Housing Repairs Management partners, 15% were for Revenues and Benefits, 7% for Customer Services, 5% for Adult Social Care and 4% for Environmental services, the remaining were widely varied.

3.13 The main root causes for complaints were largely related to capacity and broadly centred on;

- Delays & Timeliness- This category relates to the time taken to carry out a service. The Council always seeks to avoid delays in service delivery however as many of the services we undertake are demand led, this is not always possible. Although each service would seek to prioritise more urgent areas or ensure the most urgent cases and people with the highest levels of need are prioritised, this can understandably still be dissatisfying for members of the public whose concerns are not prioritised.
- Communication- Lack of communication- these are generally 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.
- 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.

3.14 65 % of all complaints were partially or fully upheld, this is in line with the percentage of upheld cases investigated by the LGSCO countrywide for 2020-21, and their report for 2021-22 has not yet been published. Where time delays or lack of communication were established these were mostly upheld.

3.15 Some of the learnings we derived from complaints resulted in; changes to processes and procedures, additional training where a need was identified, feedback to staff individually and in team meetings, reminders to staff and partners (Enforcement agents, Osbornes, e.g.) of Standard Operation Procedures, adjustments to working practices, improvements to contract management, and more transparency and management of customer expectations around service delivery and capacity.

Learning and improvements

Complaints operate a 3 stage process and will be looking at reducing this to 2 stage. The LGSCO complaints highlight the need for quality of complaints instead of time being spent on various stages. Officers are liaising with scrutiny members in relation to setting up a task & finish group to look at best practice guidance and the LGSCO's training programme to enable recommendations to be made to cabinet on improving the complaints process.

Whilst data has been reported previously, this has sometimes focused on the number of complaints and timeliness of responding as opposed to focusing on capturing learning and trends. The Monitoring Officer is responsible for reporting maladministration to members and the post holder has taken a lead on reviewing all cases which have been referred to the LGSCO to ensure the Council responds in an open and transparent manner and that options for early resolution is explored.

4. Implications of the Recommendation

4.1 *Financial implications*

Payment of compensation is made on individual cases as directed by the LGSCO. Below shows the compensations awarded by the LGSCO.

2020-21 Planning - £2,150

2021-22 Planning - £2,000

4.2 *Legal implications*

4.2.1 The LGSCO is the independent body responsible for investigating complaints made against local authorities where it is alleged that there has been maladministration causing injustice. Under the Local Government Act 1974, the LGSCO is responsible for investigating complaints against council and some other authorities, investigating complaints about adult social care providers from people who arrange or fund their own adult social care and for providing advice and guidance on good administrative practice.

4.2.2 The expectation is that a complainant will utilise a local authority's complaints process prior to referring the matter to the LGSCO, although the LGSCO can dispense with this requirement in specific cases. Complaints can be made by a member of the public, their authorised representative, a personal representative of a deceased person or a person deemed suitable to act on behalf of a member of the public if that person is unable to authorise them.

4.2.3 The LGSCO has the power to make recommendations to a local authority following a complaint on how to improve its services and to put things right for the complainant. The recommendations are not mandatory and the local authority does not have to accept or follow them. Remedies recommended by the LGSCO can include an apology, financial compensation, a review of procedures, staff training, and reconsideration of a decision and payment of money where this should have been paid.

4.2.4 Maladministration is not defined in the legislation, however case law has held that it includes bias, neglect, inattention, delay, incompetence, ineptitude, perversity, turpitude and arbitrariness. Examples of maladministration include excessive or unreasonable delay, making misleading or inaccurate statements, failing to follow a specified procedure, failing to consult or liaise, failing to provide information when requested to do so, not keeping adequate records and failing to investigate or reply to a query from a member of the public. The LGSCO is concerned with the manner in which the decision was reached, as opposed to the actual decision.

4.2.5 Personal injustice can include the time and trouble involving in pursuing a complaint against a public body, the loss of a right or service, costs associated with pursuing the complaint and inconvenience, worry, distress and hurt feelings.

4.2.6 Certain matters are outside the remit of the LGSCO. These include decisions where there is a statutory right of appeal, situations where the complainant has had a remedy by way of court proceedings and where the complainant has failed to make a complaint within 12 months of the matter complained of (although there is discretion to extend this time limit).

4.2.7 The LGSCO regularly publishes good practice guides both on complaints handling and on suggested remedies for specific complaints. These include guidance relating to council housing repairs, neighbour nuisance, council housing management, benefits, school admissions, special educational needs, environmental health, planning and social care.

4.3 *Risk management implications*

4.3.1 Complaints can be an essential means by which the Council assures the quality of council service. By listening to complaints and looking at learning, taking improvement action where necessary, the Council minimises the risk of non-compliance with legal requirements as well as financial loss and ensures improved customer satisfaction.

4.4 *Environmental implications*

4.4.1 None

4.5 *Equality implications*

4.5.1 Learning from complaints also assists the Council in fulfilling its statutory duty under s149 of the Equality Act.

4.5.2 Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 sets out the Public-Sector Equality Duty which requires a public authority (or those exercising public functions) to have due regard to the need to:

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

5. Background Papers

None.

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Appendix A – Summary of upheld decisions by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) during 2020-21 and 2021- 2022.

Reporting period – 1st April 2020-31st March 2021					
Reference	Decision date	Service area	Complaint Description and finding	Response and Remedy	Compensation
19008017	30.01.20	Planning	<p>The Council did not properly consider the impact a development close to Ms C’s home would have on Ms C’s amenity. It has agreed to consider a suitable remedy, once a live application has been decided. Upheld: maladministration and injustice.</p> <p><i>The decision showed on the LGSCO’s records in 2019-20 and the Council’s in 2020-21 when the remedy was carried out and accepted by the LGSCO.</i></p>	<p>The Council agreed to carry out an assessment of the impact that its fault has had on Ms C’s amenity, within three months of the date of its planning application decision. It will then offer a suitable remedy to Ms C, in accordance with the Ombudsman’s guidance.</p>	£2,150

Reporting period – 1st April 2021-31st March 2022					
Reference	Decision date	Service area	Complaint Description and finding	Response and Remedy	Compensation
20 003 779	26.08.21	Planning	<p>Ms X complains about how the Council has dealt with her neighbour’s planning applications and its offer of £2000 to remedy its faults in the consideration of an earlier planning application. There is no fault in how the Council reached its</p>	<p>Send a written apology to Ms X for failing to provide sufficient information for her to understand why it</p>	£2000

			<p>decisions not to take enforcement action when it refused a retrospective planning application and no fault in its decision to consider a further planning application. There is also no evidence of fault in how the Council reached its decision that planning permission for the development is valid. The payment of £2000 is sufficient to remedy the injustice caused by the Council's fault in the consideration of the earlier planning application. However, the Council is at fault for failing to explain the basis for its payment and for failing to manage Ms X's expectations. The Council has agreed to apologise to Ms X for this fault. Upheld: maladministration and injustice.</p>	<p>considered a remedy of £2000 to be sufficient and for raising her expectations by not explaining the developer could have built extensions under the permitted development rules.</p>	
<p>20013809 20013810 20014040</p> <p><i>1 complainant on behalf of 3 individuals.</i></p>	24.09.21	Slough Children Trust	<p>Slough Children First refused to consider Mr D's complaint through the children's complaints procedure on the basis he made the complaint late. This has caused upset, time and trouble. The Council will now consider the complaint and apologise for failing to do so.</p>	<p>The Council will accept Mr D's complaint and consider it though its statutory children's complaints procedure. The Council will apologise for failing to accept the complaint following grounds arising in 2020 and for not giving a good reason for the rejection.</p>	

21 July 2021

By email

Ms Wragg
Chief Executive
Slough Borough Council

Dear Ms Wragg

Annual Review letter 2021

I write to you with our annual summary of statistics on the decisions made by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman about your authority for the year ending 31 March 2021. At the end of a challenging year, we maintain that good public administration is more important than ever and I hope this feedback provides you with both the opportunity to reflect on your Council's performance and plan for the future.

You will be aware that, at the end of March 2020 we took the unprecedented step of temporarily stopping our casework, in the wider public interest, to allow authorities to concentrate efforts on vital frontline services during the first wave of the Covid-19 outbreak. We restarted casework in late June 2020, after a three month pause.

We listened to your feedback and decided it was unnecessary to pause our casework again during further waves of the pandemic. Instead, we have encouraged authorities to talk to us on an individual basis about difficulties responding to any stage of an investigation, including implementing our recommendations. We continue this approach and urge you to maintain clear communication with us.

Complaint statistics

This year, we continue to focus on the outcomes of complaints and what can be learned from them. We want to provide you with the most insightful information we can and have focused statistics on three key areas:

Complaints upheld - We uphold complaints when we find some form of fault in an authority's actions, including where the authority accepted fault before we investigated.

Compliance with recommendations - We recommend ways for authorities to put things right when faults have caused injustice and monitor their compliance with our recommendations. Failure to comply is rare and a compliance rate below 100% is a cause for concern.

Satisfactory remedy provided by the authority - In these cases, the authority upheld the complaint and we agreed with how it offered to put things right. We encourage the early resolution of complaints and credit authorities that accept fault and find appropriate ways to put things right.

Finally, we compare the three key annual statistics for your authority with similar types of authorities to work out an average level of performance. We do this for County Councils, District Councils, Metropolitan Boroughs, Unitary Councils, and London Boroughs.

Your annual data will be uploaded to our interactive map, [Your council's performance](#), along with a copy of this letter on 28 July 2021. This useful tool places all our data and information about councils in one place. You can find the decisions we have made about your Council, public reports we have issued, and the service improvements your Council has agreed to make as a result of our investigations, as well as previous annual review letters.

I would encourage you to share the resource with colleagues and elected members; the information can provide valuable insights into service areas, early warning signs of problems and is a key source of information for governance, audit, risk and scrutiny functions.

As you would expect, data has been impacted by the pause to casework in the first quarter of the year. This should be considered when making comparisons with previous year's data.

Supporting complaint and service improvement

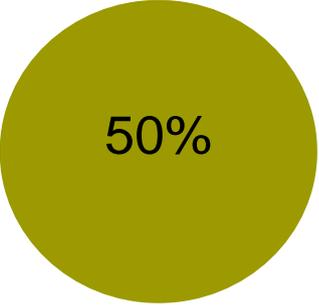
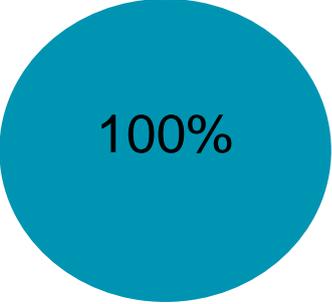
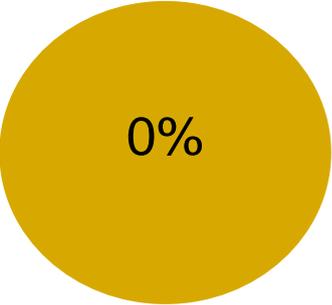
I am increasingly concerned about the evidence I see of the erosion of effective complaint functions in local authorities. While no doubt the result of considerable and prolonged budget and demand pressures, the Covid-19 pandemic appears to have amplified the problems and my concerns. With much greater frequency, we find poor local complaint handling practices when investigating substantive service issues and see evidence of reductions in the overall capacity, status and visibility of local redress systems.

With this context in mind, we are developing a new programme of work that will utilise complaints to drive improvements in both local complaint systems and services. We want to use the rich evidence of our casework to better identify authorities that need support to improve their complaint handling and target specific support to them. We are at the start of this ambitious work and there will be opportunities for local authorities to shape it over the coming months and years.

An already established tool we have for supporting improvements in local complaint handling is our successful training programme. During the year, we successfully adapted our face-to-face courses for online delivery. We provided 79 online workshops during the year, reaching more than 1,100 people. To find out more visit www.lgo.org.uk/training.

Yours sincerely,

Michael King
Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman
Chair, Commission for Local Administration in England

Complaints upheld		
	<p>50% of complaints we investigated were upheld.</p> <p>This compares to an average of 63% in similar authorities.</p>	<p>1 upheld decision</p> <p>Statistics are based on a total of 2 detailed investigations for the period between 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021</p>
Compliance with Ombudsman recommendations		
	<p>In 100% of cases we were satisfied the authority had successfully implemented our recommendations.</p> <p>This compares to an average of 99% in similar authorities.</p>	<p>Statistics are based on a total of 1 compliance outcome for the period between 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Failure to comply with our recommendations is rare. An authority with a compliance rate below 100% should scrutinise those complaints where it failed to comply and identify any learning.		
Satisfactory remedy provided by the authority		
	<p>In 0% of upheld cases we found the authority had provided a satisfactory remedy before the complaint reached the Ombudsman.</p> <p>This compares to an average of 10% in similar authorities.</p>	<p>0 satisfactory remedy decisions</p> <p>Statistics are based on a total of 2 detailed investigations for the period between 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021</p>

NOTE: To allow authorities to respond to the Covid-19 pandemic, we did not accept new complaints and stopped investigating existing cases between March and June 2020. This reduced the number of complaints we received and decided in the 20-21 year. Please consider this when comparing data from previous years.

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20 July 2022

By email

Mr Jones
Chief Executive
Slough Borough Council

Dear Mr Jones

Annual Review letter 2022

I write to you with your annual summary of complaint statistics from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman for the year ending 31 March 2022. The information offers valuable insight about your organisation's approach to complaints. As such, I have sought to share this letter with the Leader of your Council and Chair of the appropriate Scrutiny Committee, to encourage effective ownership and oversight of complaint outcomes, which offer such valuable opportunities to learn and improve.

Complaint statistics

Our statistics focus on three key areas that help to assess your organisation's commitment to putting things right when they go wrong:

Complaints upheld - We uphold complaints when we find fault in an organisation's actions, including where the organisation accepted fault before we investigated. We include the total number of investigations completed to provide important context for the statistic.

Compliance with recommendations - We recommend ways for organisations to put things right when faults have caused injustice and monitor their compliance with our recommendations. Failure to comply is rare and a compliance rate below 100% is a cause for concern.

Satisfactory remedy provided by the authority - In these cases, the organisation upheld the complaint and we agreed with how it offered to put things right. We encourage the early resolution of complaints and credit organisations that accept fault and find appropriate ways to put things right.

Finally, we compare the three key annual statistics for your organisation with similar authorities to provide an average marker of performance. We do this for County Councils, District Councils, Metropolitan Boroughs, Unitary Councils, and London Boroughs.

Your annual data, and a copy of this letter, will be uploaded to our interactive map, [Your council's performance](#), on 27 July 2022. This useful tool places all our data and information about councils in one place. You can find the detail of the decisions we have made about your Council, read the public reports we have issued, and view the service improvements your Council has agreed to make as a result of our investigations, as well as previous annual review letters.

Supporting complaint and service improvement

I know your organisation, like ours, will have been through a period of adaptation as the restrictions imposed by the pandemic lifted. While some pre-pandemic practices returned, many new ways of working are here to stay. It is my continued view that complaint functions have been under-resourced in recent years, a trend only exacerbated by the challenges of the pandemic. Through the lens of this recent upheaval and adjustment, I urge you to consider how your organisation prioritises complaints, particularly in terms of capacity and visibility. Properly resourced complaint functions that are well-connected and valued by service areas, management teams and elected members are capable of providing valuable insight about an organisation's performance, detecting early warning signs of problems and offering opportunities to improve service delivery.

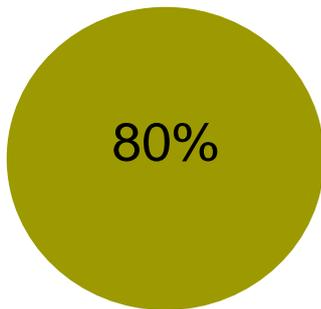
I want to support your organisation to harness the value of complaints and we continue to develop our programme of support. Significantly, we are working in partnership with the Housing Ombudsman Service to develop a joint complaint handling code. We are aiming to consolidate our approaches and therefore simplify guidance to enable organisations to provide an effective, quality response to each and every complaint. We will keep you informed as this work develops, and expect that, once launched, we will assess your compliance with the code during our investigations and report your performance via this letter.

An already established tool we have for supporting improvements in local complaint handling is our successful training programme. We adapted our courses during the Covid-19 pandemic to an online format and successfully delivered 122 online workshops during the year, reaching more than 1,600 people. To find out more visit www.lgo.org.uk/training.

Yours sincerely,

Michael King
Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman
Chair, Commission for Local Administration in England

Complaints upheld



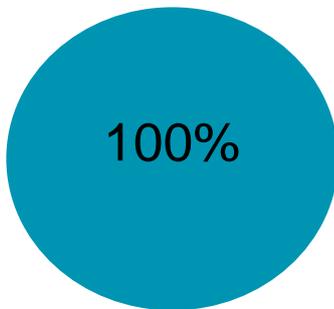
80% of complaints we investigated were upheld.

This compares to an average of **64%** in similar organisations.

4
upheld decisions

Statistics are based on a total of **5** investigations for the period between 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022

Compliance with Ombudsman recommendations



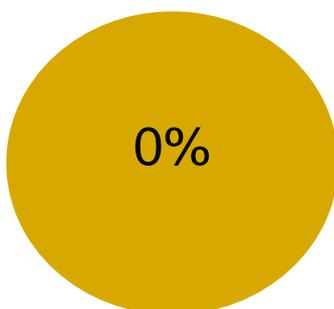
In **100%** of cases we were satisfied the organisation had successfully implemented our recommendations.

This compares to an average of **99%** in similar organisations.

Statistics are based on a total of **4** compliance outcomes for the period between 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022

- Failure to comply with our recommendations is rare. An organisation with a compliance rate below 100% should scrutinise those complaints where it failed to comply and identify any learning.

Satisfactory remedy provided by the organisation



In **0%** of upheld cases we found the organisation had provided a satisfactory remedy before the complaint reached the Ombudsman.

This compares to an average of **12%** in similar organisations.

0
satisfactory remedy decisions

Statistics are based on a total of **4** upheld decisions for the period between 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022

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STATUTORY AND CORPORATE COMPLAINTS REPORT

SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL

2021-2022

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This annual report details the level of complaints received in relation to services delivered by Slough Borough Council for the last year 1st April 2021 to 31st March 2022. This is inclusive of both statutory functions (Adult and Children's Social Care) as well as Corporate Complaints. Slough Children's First produces a yearly complaints report which will be made publicly available via their website, [Slough Children's First Complaints](#) the annual report for 2021-22 is currently awaiting senior management sign-off.

The council received 854 stage 1 complaints and 44 Adults Social Care complaints in this period.

The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman investigated 5 complaints against Slough Borough Council and upheld 4 of these complaints within this timeframe, with the other not upheld.

The Housing Ombudsman investigated 5 Complaints against Slough Borough Council and upheld/ partially upheld 3 and no fault with 2.

WHAT IS A COMPLAINT?

A complaint is defined as a written or verbal expression of dissatisfaction about the service provided by the Council.

We aim to log and acknowledge all complaints within two working days and to send a full written response within 10 working days for Corporate Complaints. Updates to Adult Social Care complaints are provided every 10 working days, for the duration of the complaint. Should the investigation proceed beyond this timescale, we will advise the complainant of any delay.

1. INTRODUCTION

The production of a complaints report is a statutory complaints requirement for adult social care to provide an overview of the complaints received and handled through the Council's statutory complaints procedure. This summary for Slough Borough Council Adult Social Care is designed to meet this requirement of adult social care and is a public document. This report provides information about adult social care complaints for the period 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022.

The Local Authority has a duty to ensure that any individual (or appropriate person acting on their behalf) who wishes to make a complaint about the actions, decisions or apparent failings of a local authority's social care provision have access to the Adults statutory complaints procedure.

2. ADULT SOCIAL CARE STATUTORY COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

The Council is required to operate a separate Statutory Complaints and Representations procedure, in accordance with the Local Authority Social Services and National Health Services Complaints (England) Regulations 2009 and the Local Authority Social Services and National Health Service Complaints (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2009 (hereby referred to as 'the Regulations'). Any complaint which does not fall under these requirements is considered under the Council's Corporate Complaints Procedure. All complainants that have exhausted the Council's Statutory Complaints Procedure retain the right to approach the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO).

The LGSCO are impartial and independent and act as the final stage for complaints about the Council, Social Care Providers, Care Homes and Home Care Agencies.

3. ACCESSING THE COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

The complaints process aims to be as accessible as possible. Complaints can be made by telephone, in writing, by email or using our online complaints form on the Slough Borough Council website. [Adult social care feedback and complaints – Slough Borough Council](#)

All complaints received are aimed to be acknowledged within 2 working days and we aim respond or send an update within 10 working days. More complex complaints may be responded to within 20 working days, with the complainant being kept informed during the process.

Our principles for responding to complaints in adult social care are that all complaints are dealt with efficiently.

- Complaints are properly investigated.
- Complainants receive a timely and appropriate response.
- Complainants are told the outcome regarding the investigation of the complaint.
- An apology is given if required.
- Appropriate response is taken where necessary.

The Adults Social Care statutory procedure starts with an internal investigation. A response will be sent from the manager within the service area. In the majority of cases, if a complaint is upheld or partially upheld, an apology will be offered and information will be given to the complainant outlining actions the service will take to ensure the situation does not arise again for the complainant or individuals in the future. The apology would be given by the manager on behalf of the service area complained about.

If the complainant is not happy with the outcome of their complaint, they can refer the matter to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman for consideration. Representations may be made to the LGSCO at any time and any member of the public is able to complain to the Ombudsman if they feel there has been maladministration or injustice, however, the LGSCO will not normally accept the complaint until the Council has had a chance to complete the investigation internally first.

4. OVERVIEW

Between 1 April 2021 and 31 March 2022, the Social Care Direct Team received: 12,018 contacts. In addition, Slough adult social care:

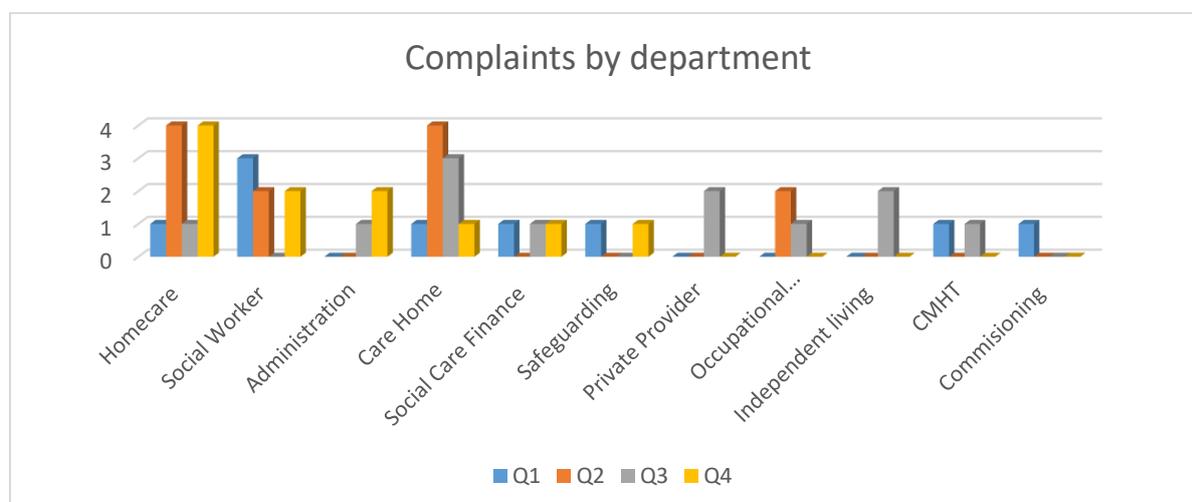
- carried out approximately 3,763 new statutory care and support assessments and approximately 721 reviews;
- investigated 251 safeguarding concerns and completed 269 safeguarding enquiries;
- supported 75 adults in residential care; 94 adults in nursing care; and 64 adults in supported living
- provided enablement to 314 people and homecare to 499 people through 758 care packages.
- supported over 1400 adults with a total of 2,501 care packages, including over 160 adults through direct payments, and 209 family carers.

The following adult social care complaints were received by the Council from service users, carers and/or their representatives. There were 44 statutory Adult Social Care complaints investigated from 1st April 2021- 31st March 2022. This represents an increase from previous years by over 50%. Table 1.below shows a representation of the statutory Adult Social Care Complaints investigated over the last 3 financial years.

Table 1. Adult Social Care complaints by tax year (2019-2022)

Year	Number of complaints	Percentage change (year on year)
2019-20	28	+ 7% (Previous year recorded 26 complaints)
2020-21	28	0
2021-22	44	+ 57%

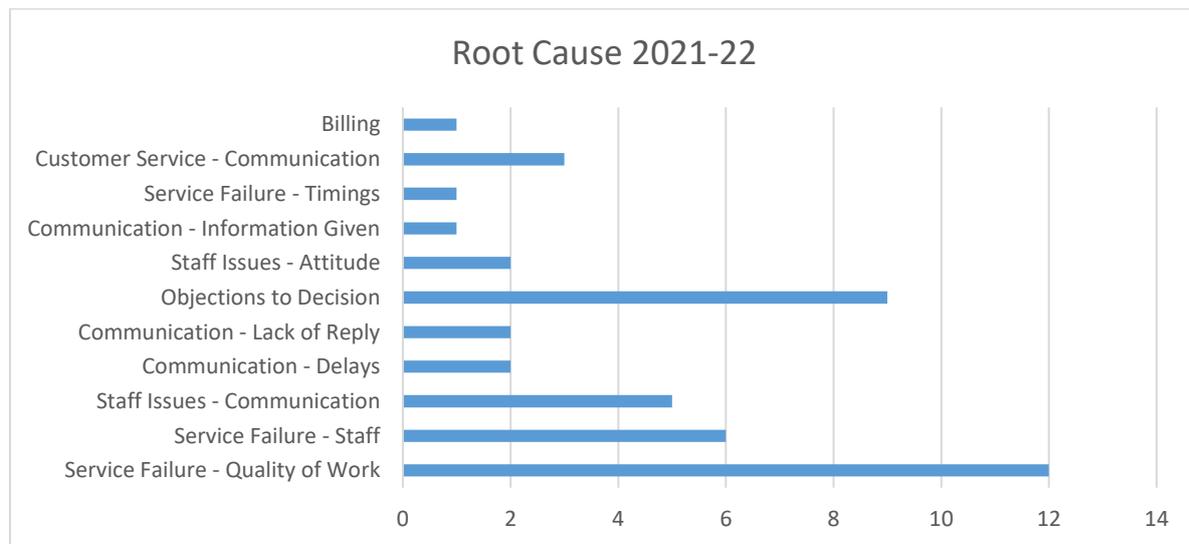
Fig 4.1 Adult Social Care Quarterly Complaints by department Apr 21- Mar 22



Breaking with the noticeable trend of the previous years where most complaints received and investigated were in the latter half of the year. The last financial year saw a more evenly spread of complaints with an average of 11 per quarter received. The most complained about departments/areas were Home Care (10), Care Home (9) and Social Worker (7). This is somewhat reflective of the previous years, as Homecare continues to be the leading source for complaints to the service. A notable change from previous year is that complaints relating to staff has increased once more with 7 of the 44 (16%) being with reference to social workers.

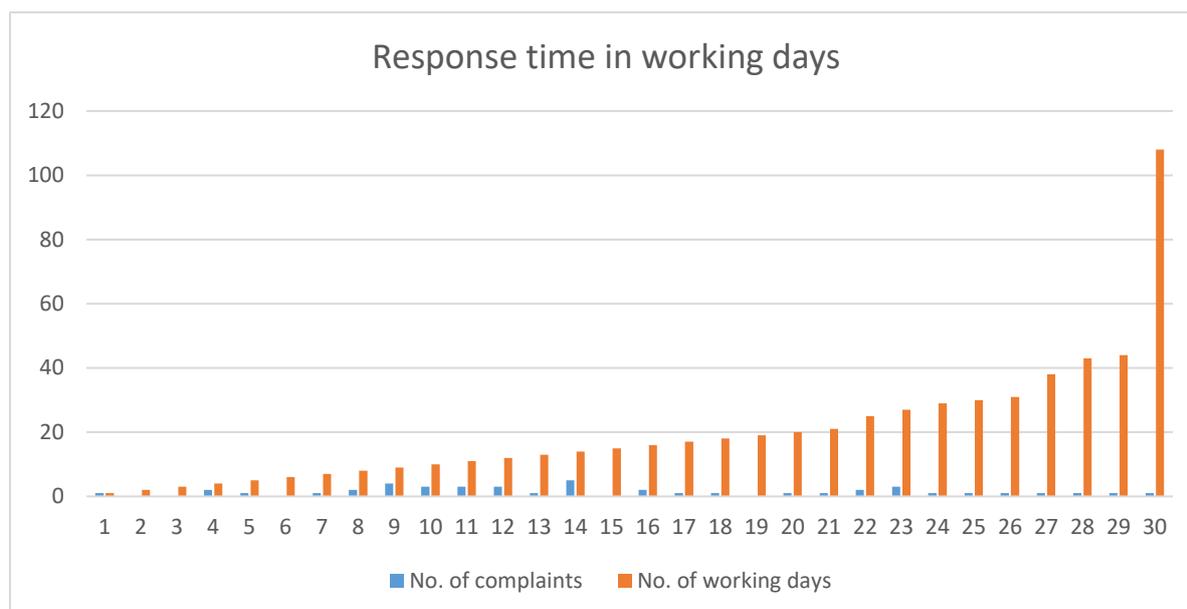
Fig 4.2 represents the trends of the complaints received over the 2021-22 period.

Fig 4.2 Complaints by Root Cause



To better understand and implement learnings to complaints it is helpful to know what triggers them being received in the first instance and thus we consider the causal factors. Although the root cause of the complaints received were varied, the main trend for complaints in 2021-2022 was Service Failure – Quality of Work 27% (12). A total of 19 (43%) of the 44 investigated complaints were attributed to service factors. A further, 20% (9) were attributed to an objection to decisions made and also notable is that 23% (10) were attributed to staff related factors (attitude, customer service and communication). The remaining 14% (6) were related to communication (5) or billing (1).

Fig 4.3 Response time by working days (Adult Social Care Complaints)



Of the 44 complaints investigated in 2021-22, 31% (14) were responded to on or after 20 working days. This timing was necessary as there were complex investigations required. 5 of these in particular exceeded 30 working days with 1 taking more than 100 days to be satisfactorily resolved.

31% (14) were responded to by the 10th working day, with 11 of these (25% of the total) being responded to in under 10 working days- the council's internal timescale for a response. Over 60% of the complaints were responded to after 10 working days, and whilst there isn't a specified timing for these to be responded the council's aims for responses within 10 working days was not met on most occasion and is reflective of the current challenges being faced by the Local Authority in recent years.

There are an increasing number of complaints which deal with integrated care; these are joint Adult Social Care/NHS complaints, and therefore require a multi-agency approach. This can have a detrimental impact on the Council's performance against its internal response target as the co-ordination of responses means that the Council may be obliged to work to the Statutory Social Care and National Health Service timescales, which allow a six-month timeframe for complaints to be investigated and responded to.

It is however standard practice to send holding replies prior to the target response date, to inform complainants of any anticipated delays and to advise of any revised deadlines. Investigating managers maintain communication with complainants (with their agreement), informing them of progress throughout the investigation of their complaint and offering support, guidance and advice prior to formal complaint resolution.

PROVIDER COMPLAINTS

Complaints regarding a commissioned service received directly by the council, are logged and processed in accordance with the statutory complaints procedure and referred to the Adult Social Care management. These are then either signposted to the provider's internal complaints process or managed through our complaints procedures on behalf of the

complainant. We do ask partner organisations to work within our timeframes; however, the Council has limited power to enforce this.

These do not include complaints by 'self-funders' who are able to complain directly to the care provider and/or Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman.

There were two complaints in relation to the service and communication of care providers.

COMPLAINT OUTCOMES

Fig 4.4 Outcome of complaints (Adult Social Care)

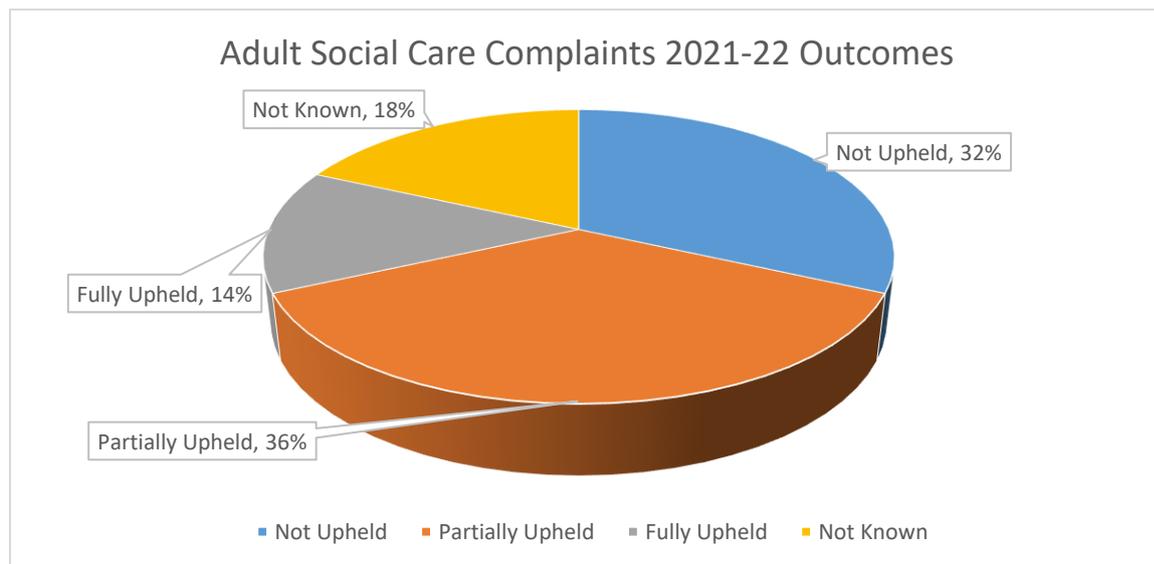


Fig 4.4 shows that 50% of the complaints received in 2021-22 were fully/ partially upheld, this represents a 15% drop on the previous year where 65% were fully/partially upheld. It also indicates that despite an increase by more than fifty percent in the number of complaints received, the authority's actions pertaining to these complaint in several instances was appropriate, thus being unable to accept fault. 32% were not upheld and 18% closed with no defined indication as to whether upheld or not.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT & SOCIAL CARE OMBUDSMAN COMPLAINTS

A complainant reserves the right to refer their complaint to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman at any time. However, in most instances, the Ombudsman will seek to ensure that the Local Authority has been provided with the opportunity to respond to the complaint in accordance with the Council's statutory complaints process.

Slough Borough Council received 3 Adult Social Care enquiries & complaints from the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman in 2021-22; 1 was classed as a premature and 2 were closed by the Ombudsman after their initial enquiries.

5. CORPORATE COMPLAINTS

COMPLAINTS PROCESSES

Slough Borough Council have 3 complaints procedures they work under. These are Corporate, Social Care and Neighbourhood Services. Children's Services complaints fall under the responsibility of Slough Children's Services Trust.

CORPORATE PROCESS:

Stage One: The complaint will be sent to the manager of the service that is being complained about.

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 the relevant service lead or director for a response.

Stage Three: If the customer remains unhappy with their stage 2 response, they can ask for the chief executive to review and respond to their complaint.

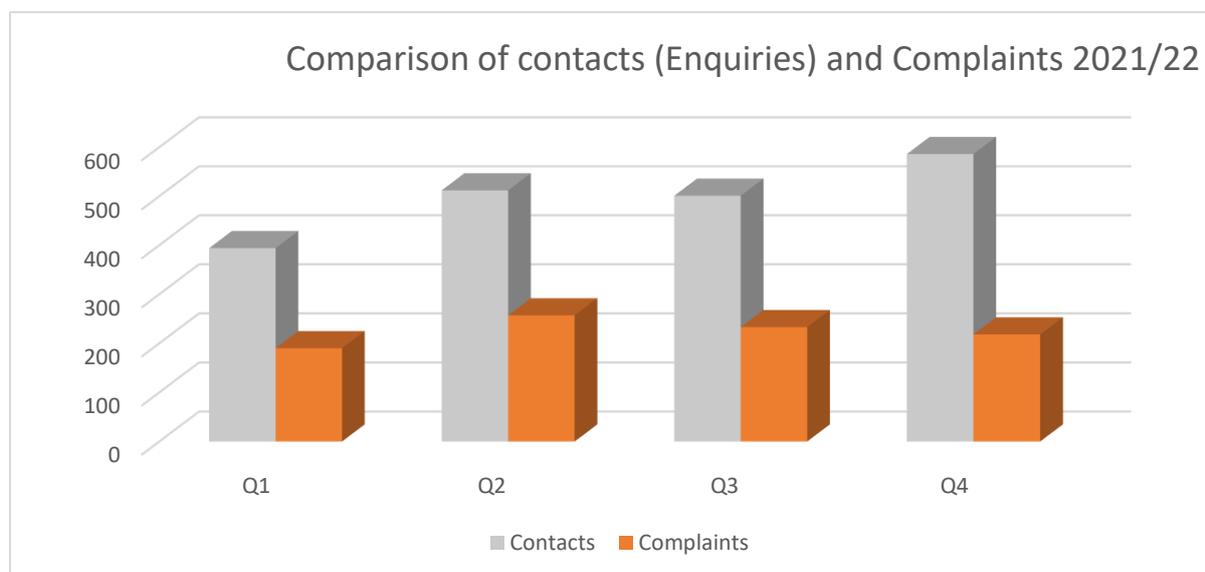
- Complainants who are unhappy with the internal complaints process are entitled to seek a further review by contacting the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) or the Housing Ombudsman.
- During 2021/22, the council had recently concluded an organisational wide restructure which commenced in the 2nd half of 2020 and culminated in Q1 of 2021, resulting in a reduction in overall resourcing, and a recruitment freeze.

HEADLINE FIGURES – COMPLAINTS RECEIVED

In the period 2021/22, 1993 contacts/enquiries were received via the Complaints team from the public; to express dissatisfaction with the services they had been provided. Of these, 898 were formally investigated via the complaints process, with the remaining 1095 being handled as service requests (enquires) through early resolution. This equated to 55% of all contacts received.

The substantial increase in contacts received from the end of quarter. We are continuing to see a variation in the number of contacts being resolved informally to the customer's satisfaction, with 317 (28 %) of these being related to the Place & Community Directorate which handles all housing and neighbourhoods related matters. This high volume of contact/enquiries being resolved informally confirms that there needs to be a continued focus placed on early resolution of cases. The following graph Fig 5.1, shows the total number of complaints received in 21/22, the number of contacts received in 21/22 and the number of those contacts entering the formal complaints process.

Fig 5.1 Contacts/enquiries and complaints by quarter 2021/22



Tables 2 and 3 below shows a three year “like for like” comparison of complaints received by the Council but excludes complaints relating to Slough Children’s First. Complaints usually have to go through each stage of the councils complaints process, though in some cases may, be dealt with at a later stage, usually at the direction of the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman.

Table 2. Complaints by Tax year (2019-2022)

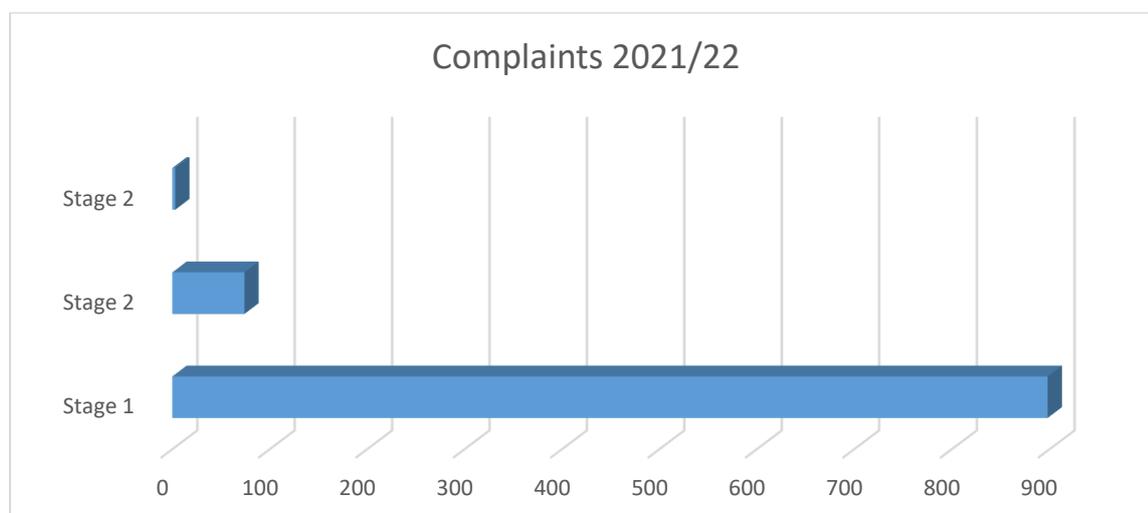
Year	Number of complaints	Percentage change (year on year)
2019-20	663	+ 18% (Previous year recorded 561complaints)
2020-21	701	+5.7%
2021-22	898	+ 28%

Table 3. Complaints by stages (2019-2022)

	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Stage 1	663	701	898
Stage 2	75	62	74
Stage 3	14	7	3
Total Complaints handled	752	770	975

The number of complaints handled has increased significantly from the previous year by over 28%, this is likely as a result of limited resourcing in some areas. Of the 898 Complaints investigated, 74 progressed to a stage 2 and only 3 of these progressing to a stage 3, a notable reduction from previous years.

Fig 5.2 Complaints by stages 1st April 2021-31st March 22



For all services, complaints which have been found to be either fully or partially upheld, have been analysed further to determine if there are any common factors which can be improved 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. Appendix A shows a breakdown of complaints received by departments and highlights the areas which received the most complaints within the period 1st April 2021- 31st March 2022.

Fig 5.2 shows that more than 40% (375) of the complaints received in the period 1st April 2021- 31st March 2022 were relating to Osborne’s, our Housing Repairs Management partners. Of these, 191 of the 375 (50%) complaints received for this area, had a causal factor which centred on delays to either communication or service, and a further 15% (55) were attributed to the quality of work completed. 72% (271) of all complaints received for this area were fully or partially upheld.

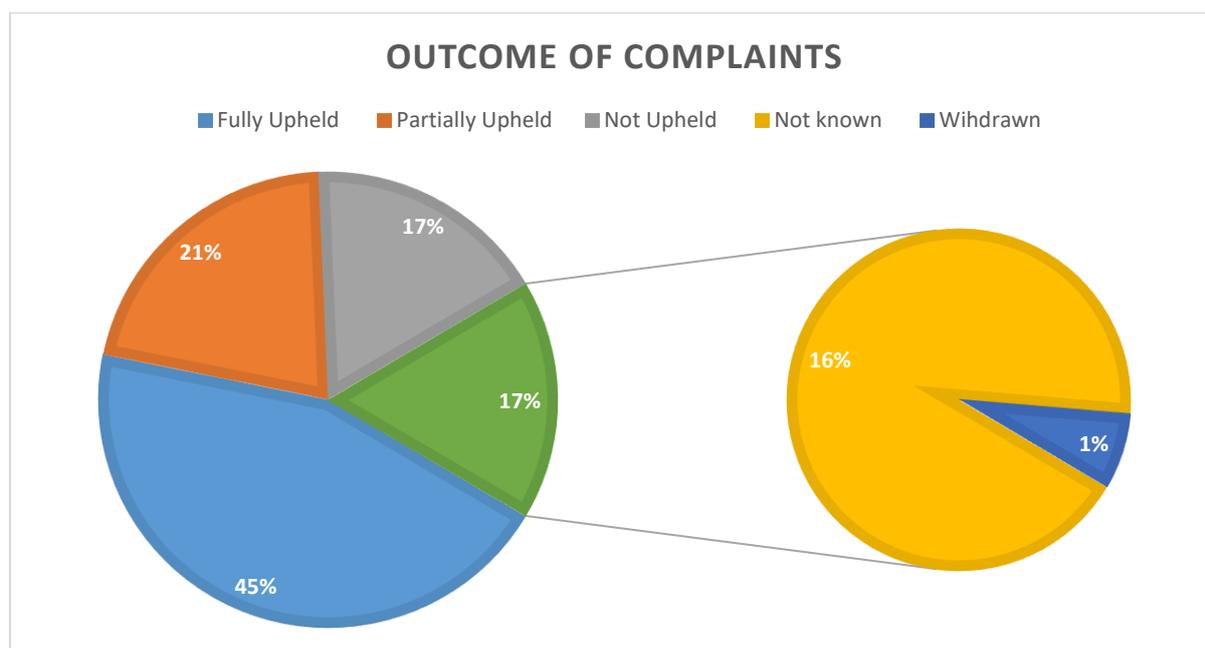
Revenues and Benefits- the second highest area to have received complaints saw 65%. 88 of the 136 complaints being fully or partially upheld, again the root causes centred on communication or service delays, although some 20% were in objection to the decisions made.

Environmental Services- Having received 7% of complaints over the last year. As anticipated the main causal factors unlike other areas mentioned were with reference to the quality of service being received with 40% of their complaints being as a result of this.

Within Customer Services the causal factors were once more with reference to delays. This is largely related to the Call Centre element of the service. Customer’s complaints were as a result of the long wait times being experienced. Whilst much was done to inform the public of the delays in this area through social media platforms and the council’s website.

The following shows the overall outcomes of all formal complaints in 21/22.

Fig 5.3 Outcome of complaints (1st April 2021- 31st March 2022)



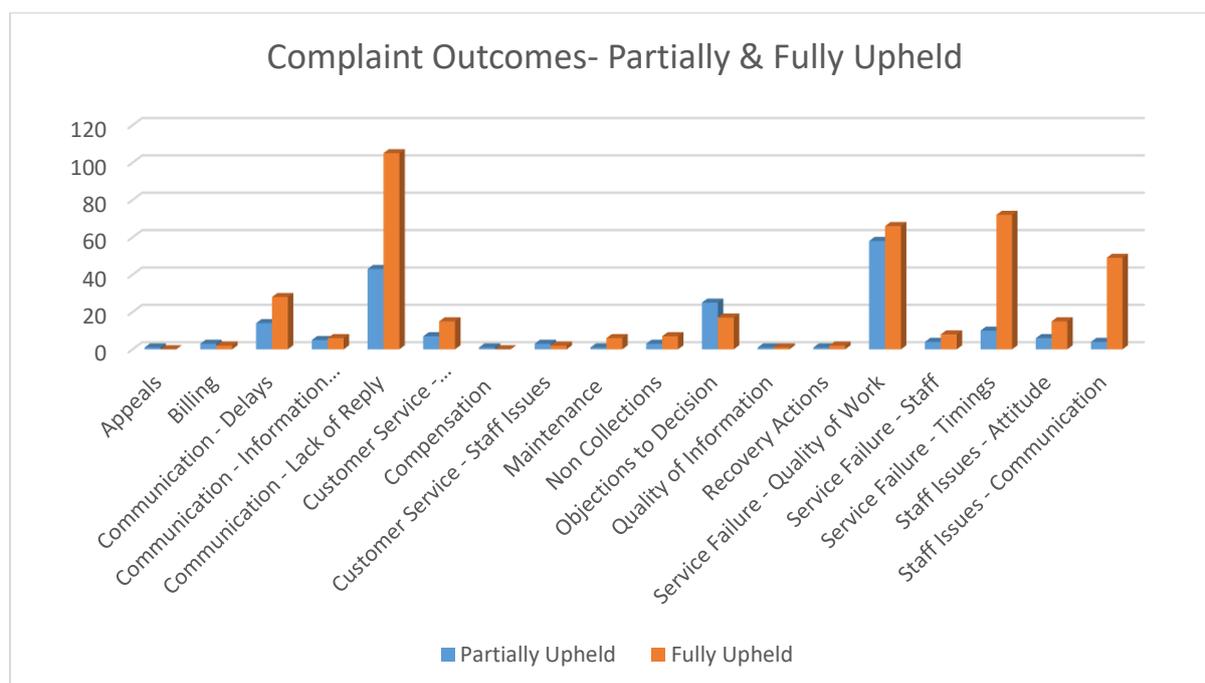
There were more complaints upheld this year than in previous years reported, with 45% of the complaints investigated in the period that this report covers being fully upheld compared to just 17% being not upheld. A further 21% were partially upheld and 1% withdrawn.

Table 4. Root Cause of Complaints

Root Cause/ Reasons for Complains	Number of Complaints
Appeals	1
Billing	12
Communication - Delays	59
Communication - Information Given	25
Communication - Lack of Reply	192
Customer Service - Communication	36
Compensation	2
Customer Service - Staff Issues	11
Maintenance	9
Non Collections	14
Objections to Decision	86
Quality of Information	5
Recovery Actions	6
Service Failure - Quality of Work	169
Service Failure - Staff	34
Service Failure - Timings	112
Staff Issues - Attitude	39
Staff Issues - Communication	86

The causal factor of the complaints received highlighted above, demonstrates that greater work needs to be done to address the lack of, and delays to communications, as well as delays to service delivery. Another outlier and area for improvement is with the quality of work. The following shows where fault was found in complaints that were upheld and the founded aspects of those complaints partially upheld and reflected the established trend noted above.

Fig 5.4. Complaint Outcomes- Partially and Fully Upheld (2021-22)



- Delays & Timeliness- Most complaints relating to timeliness have been Upheld. This category relates to the time taken to carry out a service. The Council always seeks to avoid delays in service delivery however as many of the services we undertake are demand led, this is not always possible. Although each service would seek to prioritise more urgent areas or ensure the most urgent cases and people with the highest levels of need are prioritised, this can understandably still be dissatisfying for members of the public whose concerns are not prioritised.
- Communication- A high number of complaints due to lack of communication have been Upheld or Partially Upheld. These are generally 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.
- 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.

6. LEARNING FROM COMPLAINTS

Slough Borough Council welcome and recognise the importance of complaints and all customer feedback. Learning from the complaints we have received provides us with an opportunity to ensure that improvements are made.

We seek to capture lessons learnt from complaints which are partially or fully upheld. 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 5. Identified themes from learning.

	Theme	Actions
People	Issues relating to the behaviour or conduct of a member of staff	Formal reflections completed with staff, conducted additional training where a need was identified. Provided staff with reminders both individually and in team meetings, Reminded staff of Standard Operation Procedures (SOP) and expectations when communicating with members of the public.
Procedures	Changes to current procedures and working practice as a preventative measure	Changed working practice, Amended procedures, Cultural changes made (see next section; What have we Learnt below)
Process and Performance	Issues relating to performance and processes	Accepted/Acknowledged when fault was found with any of our processes and remedial steps taken to ensure that this isn't repeated, with an established learning shared departmentally. Monetary compensation in some instances where multiple failings were noted.
Provider	Work with providers/ partners to review working practices, policies and contract compliance where applicable	Reported findings to providers (e.g. Enforcement Agents, Care Providers), reminded them of expected SOPs Improvement to Contract management through increased communication and engagement, (Osbornes)

WHAT HAVE WE LEARNT?

Some specific examples of these learnings in action as it pertains to individual departments are listed below;

Osbornes- As a result of the high number of complaints received within this area, it was noted that there were concerns around staff capacity. This has resulted in steps being taken by Osbornes to improve complaint response through the hiring of 2 additional complaint handlers as well as a specific multi-skilled operative to respond to complaints quicker. The Key Performance Indicators measure has been review with new targets aimed to measure quicker responses. The team have also implemented weekly team meetings to discuss outstanding cases, and have feedback issues from all complaints through operative tool box talk sessions.

Revenues & Benefits - Where administrative delays were established, fault was acknowledged and the teams reminded of the need to ensure issues are fully investigated and resolved when identified and to escalate these, where unable to resolve individually.

In instances where complaints were raised as result of enforcement actions, these were investigated and if there was any doubt or an established fault, steps were taken to remind them of their responsibilities to ensure that standard operating procedures are complied with.

There has been a change of culture in relation to how we view debt recovery within council tax, with staff being encouraged to improve the customer journey through engagement and an emphasis on conversations that will result in a win-win scenario outcome.

Environmental Services- Where several complaints were received regarding bins not being correctly replaced, the management created a quick reference refresher training guide referred to as a 'toolbox talk' which included - good and bad examples that can be referred to in the course of completing their work.

Customer Services – Having received complaints regarding the premature closure of enquiries reported, it was established that an incorrect status was being used on Jadu CRM (Customer Relationship Management). The system was updated to include a new status that could be used in instances where a query was being passed to a new department and a script communicated to staff that can be used to inform residents of the next course of action which will be taken.

Several departments (Highways, Transport, Customer Services, and Environmental Services) were suffering from a lack of capacity and greater effort has been made to increase resourcing through recruitment. They also sought to place a greater effort on transparency in communication and managing resident expectations in their interactions with residents. This has meant that these key departments had to be clear on the significance of resource prioritisation in addressing the most problematic areas or concerns.

As a result of the learnings, departments are looking at the way forward and how they can improve or do better to engage and resolve concerns promptly. As an example, the Planning department has advised that they are considering changes to the way they communicate, which will include updating the website with more information to allow for a greater level of automation and transparency to the planning process.

7. CONCLUSION

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, the increase provides additional data from which we are able to learn and improve as an organisation. As a result of the figures, and as mentioned earlier in this report, it is vital that a renewed focus be placed on early resolution of concerns. Whilst historically not included within reports an area currently being monitored is timescales in responding to complaints being met. This has not been an area of concern previously as compliance rates have been extremely positive. However, with difficulties faced this year, this compliance has seen a steady decline and is being monitored closely, with a drive to improve this figure. Currently this data is being shared with relevant heads of service in order to achieve this. Should this area continue to see a decline in figures information will be provided in future reporting, given this is an area where the LGSCO or Housing Ombudsman are able to find fault with the council.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX A- COMPLAINTS BY AREA/DEPARTMENT (1ST APRIL 2021- 31ST MARCH 22)

