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**Annual**

**Complaints report**

2023 - 2024

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## 1. Foreword

### **Councillor Carl Johnson – Deputy Mayor; Lead Member for Customer Services and Member Responsible for Complaints.**

I am delighted to introduce the Annual Complaints Report, 2023-24, for North Tyneside Council. This report sets out customer complaints received by the Authority for the period April 2023 to March 2024 and is the Cabinet's response to the Annual Complaints Report.

This report details all complaint activity for the Authority, including oversight and scrutiny by myself and the Member Responsible for Housing Services Complaints, alongside the Authority's Cabinet – the Governing Body for Complaints.

Over the last twelve months there have been many changes to the way the Authority manages and responds to complaints. New Complaint Handling Codes, issued by both Ombudsman in February 2024, resulted in a new Corporate and Housing Complaint Handling Procedure for the Authority, agreed by the Governing body on 18 March 2024.

The Authority is part of a national, two-year pilot project with the LGSCO and 19 other Local Authorities, working collaboratively, to learn from one another about the implications of the new Complaint Handling Codes, ahead of its mandatory adoption requirement by all English Local Authorities in 2026. We are already learning and sharing a great deal from this work but there is still more to do, in particular, embedding an evidenced culture of learning from complaints and fully realising the benefits of the new complaint IT system launched earlier this year.

I am encouraged to see that complaint numbers continue to be very low as a proportion of the overall volume of services and transactions the Authority provides each and every day. The Authority has invested and had a particular focus over the past 5 years on continuous improvement of customer experience, delivering a successful customer service programme and investing in a dedicated Customer First Office. However, the Governing Body and I are not complacent and know that an organisation such as North Tyneside Council, should expect and indeed actively encourage customers to share their views and experiences

with us, both positive and negative. Each is an opportunity to engage, listen and learn from those we serve. The Governing Body and I will continue to keep close track of activity throughout the year, triangulating this with other sources of feedback.

96% of Stage 1 complaints were responded to within the required timescale ensuring customers received a timely response, in line with Ombudsman guidelines. There has been a slight reduction this year in the proportion of complaints resolved at Stage 1. Whilst this movement is minimal, I am keen to track progress on this throughout the year; the Governing Body and I are keen to see as many complaints as possible, resolved as quickly as possible.

The LGSCO issued their Annual Letter to the Authority in July 2024. Like the previous year, the LGSCO have stated they are less likely to carry out investigations into 'borderline' issues and therefore expect to find a higher proportion at fault. This is evident in the Annual Letter for 2023-24.

The Authority complied with all actions and recommendations issued by the LGSCO, for the 13 complaints it investigated.

This report was agreed by the Authority's Cabinet on 16 September 2024, who also agreed to it being published on the Authority's website. [This paragraph is subject to the agreement by Cabinet]

I would like to pay special thanks to our customers who have taken the time to raise complaints with us and thank them for their effort in doing so. Whilst complaints are of course often about what has gone wrong – they're also an opportunity for the council to listen, learn and improve.

## 2. Purpose and introduction

North Tyneside Council publishes an Annual Complaints Report which summarises the closed customer complaints it has received. This is the report for the year April 2023 to March 2024.

The aim of the report is to:

- review and share the complaints received, how they've been responded to and what has been done as a result
- learn from complaints so that the Authority can continually improve customer experience and outcomes
- encourage a culture of feedback, comments and suggestions, to support continuous service improvement
- assess the Authority's Corporate Complaint Procedure, evaluating and improving its effectiveness, and
- publicise and explain the Authority's Corporate and Housing Complaints Procedure.

From 2026 the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's (LGSCO) new Complaint Handling Code, will require all relevant Local Authorities to complete an annual complaints performance and service improvement report for scrutiny and challenge, including:

- an annual self-assessment against the Code
- a qualitative and quantitative analysis of the organisation's complaint handling performance
- any findings of non-compliance with the Code
- the service improvements made as a result of the learning from complaints
- the annual letter about the organisation's performance from the Ombudsman; and
- any other relevant reports or publications produced by the Ombudsman in relation to the work of the organisation.

This report contains many of those requirements and represents the significant progress made by the Authority since the new Code was launched in February 2024. A key part element of this year's priorities for complaints, will be further compliance the new Code, well in advance of the Ombudsman's required compliance date in 2026.

North Tyneside Council strives to deliver excellent customer service to the residents, businesses and visitors of the Borough to keep North Tyneside a great place to live, work and visit. Our customers are those people who use council services, including, residents, council home tenants (including ex-occupiers), businesses and visitors to the Borough.

The Authority's Customer Promise sets out what customers can expect of council services and what they can do if things don't go well. The Authority encourages comments and feedback about any of its services, both positive and negative; they provide the opportunity to learn and continually improve how things are done.

The Authority's Corporate and Housing Complaints Procedure was updated in April 2024 following changes to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) and Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS) Complaint Handling Codes. The Authority is part of an LGSCO pilot group alongside other local authorities, sharing information and documentation, and offering support to one another in working towards adopting the LGSCO Complaint Handling Code from 2026 onwards.

The Authority is committed to doing everything possible to resolve complaints for its customers fairly, early and as efficiently as possible. The Customer First Office, introduced in 2022, reviewed their working practices for complaints in April 2024, in line with the new Complaints Procedure and the customer promise, demonstrating an Authority that listens and cares.

### 3. Headlines for 2023–24

- 589 complaints were investigated in 2023–24. Complaints continue to decrease year on year and have decreased by 55% since 2019–20.
- 54% of all complaints received in 2023–24 related to housing issues; 37% were corporate complaints. 6% were statutory adult social care complaints, and 3% were statutory children’s social care complaints.
- 47% of all complaint investigations in 2023–24 were upheld, either in part or in full. This represents an uphold rate of 1.3 per 1,000 population.
- Housing repairs; safeguarding and preventative services for children; Property Services investment programme; council tax; and refuse collection, were the top five services receiving the most complaints in 2023–24 (53%).
- 77% of complaints were resolved at Stage 1, and 96% of those were completed within timescale. 15% of complaints were resolved at Stage 2, and 92% of those were completed in timescale. 1% were considered by Regulation and Review Committee panel at Stage 3.
- The Housing Ombudsman Service investigated 8 complaints during the year; 1 resulted in a decision of severe maladministration.
- The Local Government Ombudsman (LGSCO) upheld 12 complaints for the Authority in 2023–24 (92%). Whilst higher than the average of other similar authorities of 80%, the proportion of those where the Authority had already provided a satisfactory remedy before the complaint reached the Ombudsman was higher than average at 33% (versus 14%).
- New Complaint Handling Codes were published by both Ombudsman in February 2024 and the Authority published their joint Corporate and Housing Complaint Procedure in April 2024 in response.

- The Authority's new Corporate Complaint Procedure details the changes as result of the new Ombudsman codes, fewer complaint stages, reduced response times, and greater scrutiny with the introduction of the Member Responsible for Complaints role.

#### **4. What is a complaint?**

The Authority's Corporate and Housing Complaint Procedure 2024, defines a complaint as ***"an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the services the Authority provides"***.

It can relate to the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the Authority, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting an individual resident or group of residents and which requires a response.

In addition to complaints, the CFO manages service requests; a request from a customer which requires action to be taken to put something right, but which is not categorised as a complaint. Service requests provide useful, additional information to the Authority about a customer's experience and help with service improvement.

#### **5. Complaint procedures**

The Authority introduced a joint Corporate and Housing Complaint Procedure in April 2024, following updates to the Codes for both the Local Government (LGSCO) and Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS). The Procedure ensures the Authority is providing a robust and consistent approach to managing customer complaints and follows both the Ombudsman Complaint Handling Codes. The Procedure is attached in appendix 1.

Separate procedures exist for both statutory adults and children's complaints.



- Childrens social care complaints are governed by the Childrens Act 1989 and the Authority has a supplementary but complimentary Procedure for managing these, that satisfies the requirements of the Act, the LGSCO, and associated regulators. The Procedure is attached in appendix 2.
- Adult social care complaints are governed by the Local Authority Social Services NHS Complaint Regulations (England) 2009 and the Authority has a supplementary but complimentary Procedure for these, that satisfies the requirements of the Regulations, LGSCO, and associated regulators. The Procedure is attached in appendix 3

## 6. Ombudsman

The Authority's Complaint Procedure is underpinned by guidance from both the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) and the Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS). The LGSCO can review and / or investigate complaints from members of the public who consider they have experienced injustice because of maladministration by the Authority, typically, once the complaint has exhausted the Authority's Complaint Procedures.

The Housing Ombudsman Service considers complaints about housing associations and some relevant complaints from Local Authority tenants. Occasionally a complaint may be considered by both Ombudsman schemes.

### a. Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO)

For the year 2023-24, the LGSCO notified the Authority they had received 40 complaints from North Tyneside customers.

<b>LGSCO outcome</b>	<b>2022-23</b>	<b>2023-24</b>
Closed after initial enquiry	14	15
Premature referred back to the Authority	11	10
Fault and/ or injustice identified:	10	10
<i>Authority already remedied</i>	2	3
<i>Authority required to take action</i>	7	7
Not investigated – Authority already remedied	0	2
No fault	1	1
Previously investigated – no action	0	1
Out of jurisdiction	0	1
Invalid or incomplete	2	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>40</b>

The complaints investigated, and the outcomes identified, are comparable with those received in 2022-23. However, there is an increase in the number of complaints where the Authority had already taken action to resolve the complaint, prior to the Ombudsman investigation.

*Note - due to the time taken for complaints to be investigated by the Ombudsman, the number of complaints listed below will differ to the number referred to in their Annual Complaint letter for 2023-24 in Appendix 4.*

The LGSCO issued their Annual Letter to the Authority in July 2024. Similar to the previous year, the LGSCO have stated that their intention is to focus their resource on investigating complaints which they feel are likely to be upheld; as a result, the proportion of their investigations upheld, is likely to increase.

The LGSCO completed 13 complaint investigations for North Tyneside during 2023-24 and upheld 12 (92%). Whilst higher than the average of other similar authorities of 80%, the numbers involved are small and this difference equates to just over 1 complaint. Encouragingly, the proportion of Ombudsman investigations where the Authority had already provided a satisfactory remedy, before the complaint reached the Ombudsman, was higher than average at 33% (versus 14%).

The Authority complied with all actions and recommendations issued by the Ombudsman.

The LGSCO also published their [Annual Review of Local Government Complaints in England for 2023-24](#). It details the national picture of trends and common issues that have arisen from their complaints over the last year. The Authority's response to this review is included in Appendix 5.

## b. The Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS)

The HOS publish data for Authorities who have had five or more referrals investigated. There was no data published for North Tyneside between 1 April 2023 – 31 March 2024. The HO has not published data from North Tyneside since 2019-20. Data for 2023-24 will be published by the HOS in December 2024, if they have investigated more than five referrals.

During 2023-24 the HOS notified the Authority they had received 8 complaints from North Tyneside housing customers.

<b>Ombudsman outcome</b>	<b>2022-23</b>	<b>2023-24</b>
No Maladministration	0	3
Maladministration	0	2
Closed after initial enquiries	0	1
Service Failure	1	1
Severe Maladministration	0	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>8</b>

Whilst the numbers remain small, there has been an increase in Ombudsman investigations in 2023-24. This is linked to increased demand and the Housing Ombudsman Service Business Plan 2024-25 states that since April 2023, there has been a step-change in the pace of determinations, as well as an increase in the number of cases referred to them for formal investigation; 2,000 more cases compared to the

prior year.

## 7. Activity and findings in 2023 – 24

North Tyneside Council delivers millions of services, support and transactions to its customers each year: residents, visitors and businesses.

In 2023-24 the Customer First Office received 1,452 contacts from customers who were dissatisfied with some form of service delivery by or experience with the Authority. 41% of these contacts went onto be investigated as a complaint; 59% were resolved by providing the customer with a service or resolution (service request); where the customer asked that we deal with their enquiry in that way.

863 service requests were received in 2023-24, 11% lower than in 2022-23. It is thought that this reduction is linked to improvements in data recording. The new complaint IT system will ensure that reporting of service requests is not only more consistent, but that themes and trends can be better understood in the future. Learning from service requests helps the organisation to understand where service improvements are needed.

589 complaints were investigated by the Authority in 2023-24. Since 2019-20, complaints have decreased by 55% from 1,069 to 589 in 2023-24. This ongoing reduction in complaints is attributed to:

- improved handling of customer dissatisfaction through local resolution with services themselves and service requests; saying sorry and fixing it quickly, and
- improvements across services, linked to the Customer Service Programme, in the way they communicate and work with customers to get things right first time.

Of the 589 complaints received in 2023-24, 54% were complaints relating to housing, property and repairs service. This is 4% higher than last year and 9% higher over the last three years. The majority of these complaints relate to housing repairs 69%.

Complaints about other council services, classed as corporate complaints, represent 37% of all complaints in 2023-24. The top five corporate complaints in 2023-24 were as follows.

- Safeguarding and Preventative Services for children
- Council Tax
- Refuse Collection
- Trees
- Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)

35 complaints regarding statutory adult social care were received in 2023–24. This is comparable with the previous year and consistent with complaints for this area over the last three–four years. 43% of these complaints related to social work assessment and planning teams.

19 complaints regarding statutory children’s social care were received in 2023–24. This is comparable with the previous year and consistent with complaints for this area over the last three–four years. The majority (74%) related to the safeguarding and preventative teams. A further 40 complaints were received for children’s social care during the year but did not fall into the ‘statutory’ category and these were recorded as ‘corporate’ complaints.

The key reasons for customers making complaints to the Authority in 2023–24 was consistent with the previous year. In over 50% of complaints customers were dissatisfied with either the quality of a service, a delay in receiving a service, or not receiving a service at all. Other customers were dissatisfied with an Authority policy or procedure, or with the quality of the customer service they received.

47% of all complaints received were upheld, either in part (24%) or in full (26%). This is slightly higher than the previous year and represents an uphold rate of 1.3 per 1,000 population.

Key areas of learning were identified from these complaints including improving communication with customers, and between staff, departments and other organisations, and improving data recording. Services identified additional training for teams, improvements in the information and advice offered to customers, and better record keeping as key actions.

77% of complaints were resolved at Stage 1, a slight decrease from the previous year (79%). This continues to be a focus for the year ahead; understanding how and if complaints can be resolved sooner for the customer and working with services to address and resolve complaints sooner. 96% of Stage 1 complaints were responded to within the required timescale.

A further 15% of complaints were resolved at Stage 2, which is now the final stage of the Authority’s complaint process, following changes to the procedure in April 2024. After Stage 2 customers who remain dissatisfied can refer their complaint to the relevant Ombudsman.

The Authority was asked to review 50 complaints at Stage 3 of the complaints process in 2023–24. 3 were presented to the Regulation and Review Committee panel for final decision in 2023–24. Two complaints were not upheld and

one complaint was partially upheld and financial redress offered to the customer.

### a. All complaints and service requests

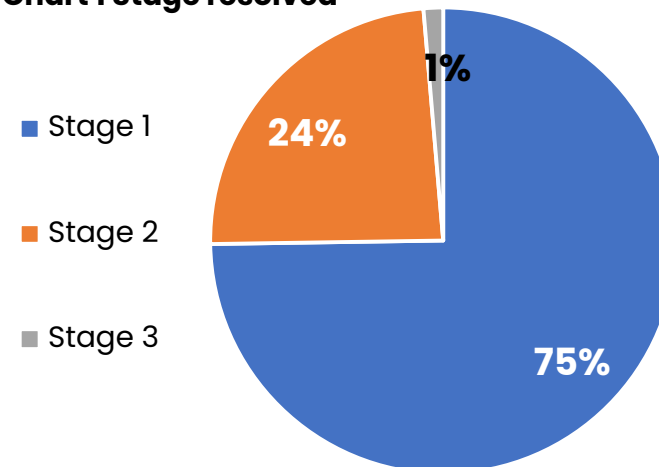
<b>Table 1 All activity</b>	<b>2020-21</b>	<b>2021-22</b>	<b>2022-23</b>	<b>2023-24</b>
Complaints		647	645	589
Service requests		1178	971	863
<b>Total</b>		<b>1825</b>	<b>1616</b>	<b>1452</b>
Complaints considered by LGSCO		48	38	40
Complaints considered by HOS	-	-	-	-
<b>Table 2 Complaint outcomes</b>				
Not Upheld	52%	46%	55%	52%
Upheld in Full	25%	33%	23%	23%
Upheld in Part	23%	21%	22%	25%
<b>Table 3 Complaints resolved at each Stage</b>				
Stage One	83%	81%	76%	77%
Stage Two	17%	19%	24%	22.5%
Stage Three	0	0	0	0.5%
<b>Table 4 Complaints not progressed to Stage Three</b>				
Number of requests	-	-	54	50

<b>Table 5 Complaints by directorate</b>	<b>2023-24</b>	<b>% of total</b>
Housing & Property Services	317	54%
Environmental Services	90	15%
Children, Young People & Learning	59	10%
Capita	36	6%
Equans	35	6%
Adult Social Care	34	6%
Public Health	8	1%
Regeneration & Economic Dev.	5	1%
Commissioning and Investment	4	1%
Resources	1	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>589</b>	<b>100%</b>

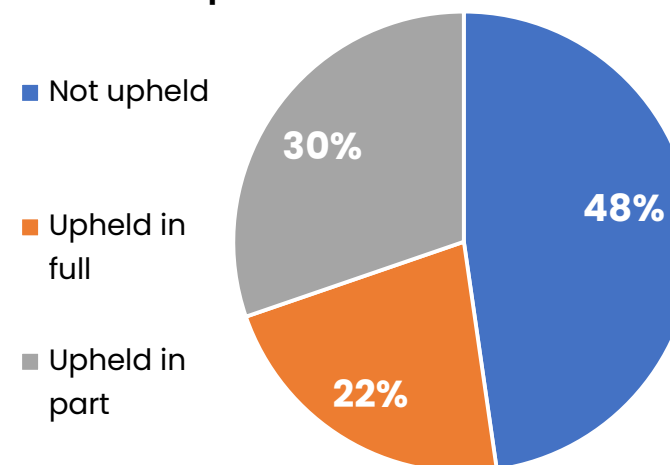
## b. Corporate complaints

<b>Table 6 Top 9 Service areas</b>	<b>2023-24</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>% change 1st yr</b>
Safeguarding & Preventative services	20	<b>9%</b>	+35%
Council Tax	19	<b>9%</b>	-16%
Refuse collection	19	<b>9%</b>	-42%
Trees	18	<b>8%</b>	-178%
SEND	15	<b>7%</b>	+60%
Parking	9	<b>4%</b>	-56%
Planning Development	9	<b>4%</b>	+44%
Benefits	8	<b>4%</b>	-13%
Customer Services	8	<b>4%</b>	+25%
<b>Table 7 Reason for complaint</b>			
Request for service	70	<b>32%</b>	-64%
Poor customer service	40	<b>18%</b>	33%
Communications	23	<b>11%</b>	-9%
Delay in providing service	20	<b>9%</b>	-100%
Complaint about policy or procedure	18	<b>8%</b>	-28%
Poor quality service or workmanship	8	<b>4%</b>	50%
Manner / attitude of staff	6	<b>3%</b>	-283%
Advice/Information request	4	<b>2%</b>	-75%
Other	29	<b>13%</b>	-34%

**Chart 1 Stage resolved**



**Chart 2 Complaint outcome**

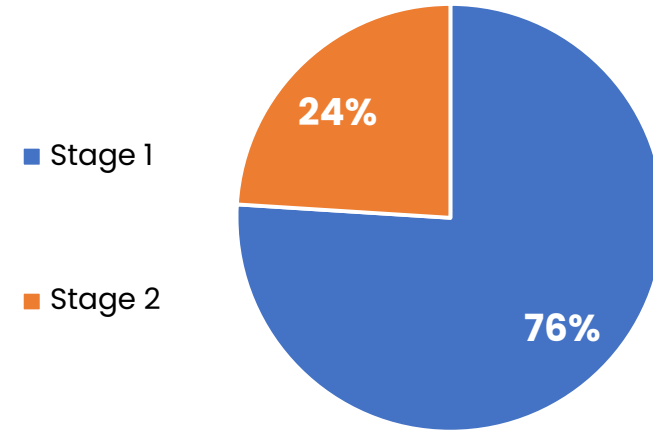




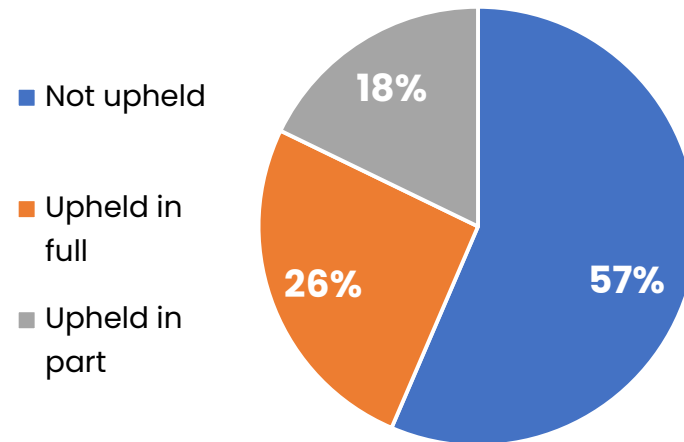
### c. Housing, property and repairs complaints

<b>Table 8 Service area</b>	<b>2023-24</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>% change 1st yr</b>
Repairs	219	<b>69%</b>	+29%
Neighbourhoods	24	<b>8%</b>	+8%
Investment	23	<b>7%</b>	-52%
Homefinder	20	<b>6%</b>	-25%
Income	9	<b>3%</b>	+56%
Gas	7	<b>2%</b>	-114%
Housing Advice	7	<b>2%</b>	+57%
Other/ various	8	<b>2%</b>	+50%
<b>Table 9 Reason for complaint</b>			
Request for Service	127	<b>40%</b>	+9%
Delay in Service	82	<b>26%</b>	+6%
Policy / procedure	37	<b>12%</b>	+35%
Manner/ attitude of staff	21	<b>7%</b>	+67%
Poor quality workmanship	13	<b>4%</b>	-46%
Refusal or non-provision of service	13	<b>4%</b>	+15%
Poor customer service	10	<b>3%</b>	-60%
Other/ various	14	<b>4%</b>	-43%

**Chart 3 Stage resolved**



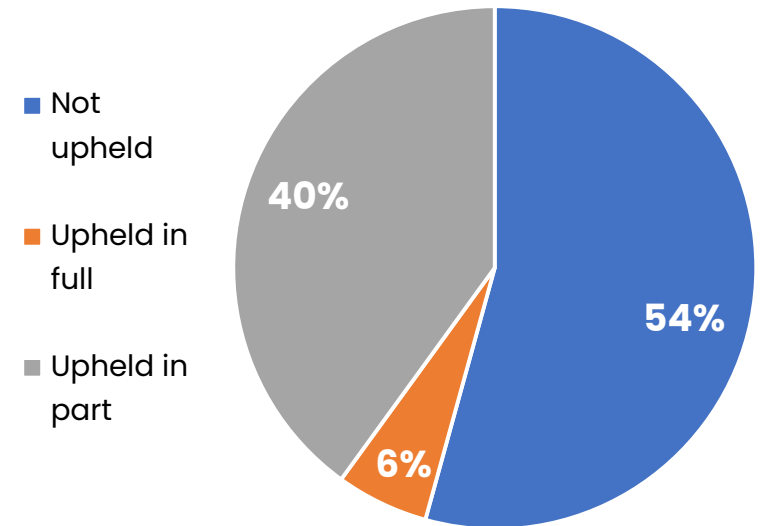
**Chart 4 Complaint outcomes**



#### d. Statutory Adult Social Care complaints

<b>Table 10 Service area</b>	<b>2023-24</b>	<b>% of total</b>	<b>% change 1st yr</b>
Personalisation/ Social work	15	<b>43%</b>	-21%
Commissioning OP/ PD	6	<b>17%</b>	+500%
Personalisation LD/ MH	5	<b>14%</b>	+25%
Integrated Services	4	<b>11%</b>	-56%
Social Work	2	<b>6%</b>	-
Adult Safeguarding	1	<b>3%</b>	-
Commissioning	1	<b>3%</b>	-
Finance & Administration	1	<b>3%</b>	-
<b>Table 11 Reason for complaint</b>			
Request for Service	9	<b>26%</b>	-22%
Advice / Information	9	<b>26%</b>	+44%
Other	7	<b>20%</b>	-
Poor customer service	3	<b>9%</b>	-
Delay in providing service	2	<b>6%</b>	+50%
Refusal or non-provision of service	2	<b>6%</b>	-200%
Communication	1	<b>3%</b>	-100%
Policy / Procedure	1	<b>3%</b>	-100%
Manner/ attitude of staff	1	<b>3%</b>	+100%

**Chart 5 Complaint outcomes**



### e. Statutory Childrens Social Care complaints

Table 12 Service area	2023-24	% of total	% change from last year
Safeguarding & Preventative Services	14	24%	-26%
Children with Disability team	3	5%	-
School Improvement Service	1	2%	-
Special Educational Needs	1	2%	0%

Table 13 Reason for complaint	2023-24
Communication	7
Poor quality service / workmanship	3
Delay in providing service	2
Other	2
Request for service	2
Policy / Procedure	1
Manner / attitude of staff	1
Poor customer service	1

Chart 6 Stage Resolved

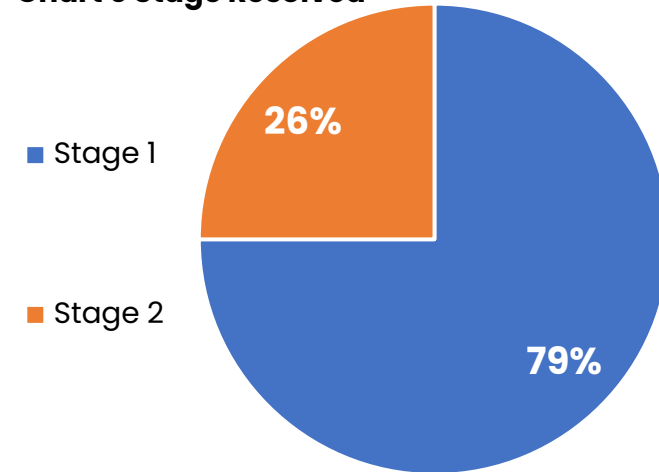
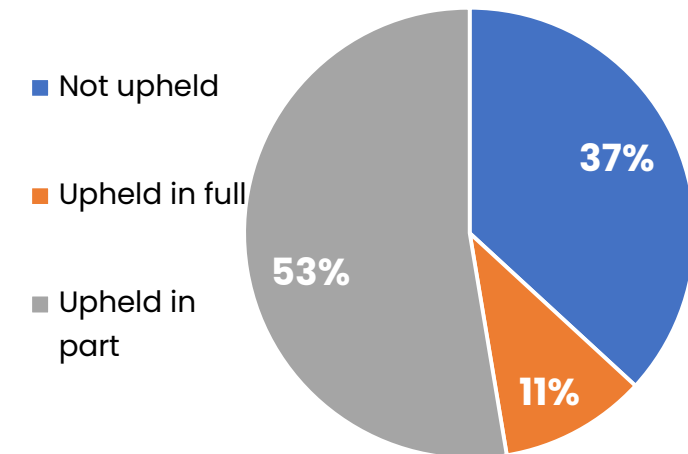


Chart 7 Complaint outcomes



## 8. Listening and learning from complaints

In order to understand, learn and then improve, the Authority's services reflect on each complaint they receive. Looking at the complaint as a whole, including the experience of the customer and the outcomes they wanted and then received, helps services to identify key areas of learning.

In 2023-24, 589 complaints were resolved. Lessons were identified from these complaints and the themes have been summarised below. These themes also inform priorities for the next 12 months and set out a clear direction for service improvement across the Authority.

Lessons Learned	Improvements made
<b>Adult Social Care</b>	
<p>Ensure that customers are given timely and accurate information about their care and support, including any costs for services</p> <p>Improve communication with customers, carers and family, keeping them updated on changes or progress.</p>	<p>The service has held practice issues sessions with teams focussed on ways to communicate better with customers and their families, how information is shared with customers, as well as improving quality of data recording on LAS and ensuring all conversations are recorded. Information and advice checklists have been updated to evidence communication around finance and charging and conversations regarding finances and charges are recorded on LAS.</p>
<b>Parking (Capita)</b>	
<p>Understand complaints raised about staff attitude.</p>	<p>Refresher training has taken place with teams about their commitment to customer care and the Authority's Customer Promise. Further sessions will take place with those teams about how they deliver currently the Authority's Customer Promise and what improvements can be made.</p>

Lessons Learned	Improvements made
<b>Children's Social Care</b>	
<p>Ensure that Childrens Care Homes are recording incidents appropriately and are including a record of them in the child's social care file as it is a significant event in their journey.</p> <p>Ensure accurate data recording.</p> <p>Ensure wider understanding Section 117 MHA After-care and how it is applied.</p>	<p>Managers and deputies are now required to send Serious Incident Notifications to the relevant social worker for the social worker to upload to the child's file.</p> <p>Senior Manager for Quality of Practice has reviewed practice standards in respect of case recording, and an audit activity was undertaken to ensure that these standards have been met.</p> <p>This process has been reviewed, and a refresh of guidance has taken place. The service will develop expertise in key staff members.</p>
<b>Special Educational Needs (SEND)</b>	
<p>Understand the reasons for SEN complaints based on feedback from parents, carers and families about timescales for reviews and understanding the process</p>	<p>The service has streamlined the team with 4 Senior Special Educational Need and Disability Officers in place overseeing key processes, including the Annual Review and Post-16 process. By September 2024, all young people should have had a review of their documentation to provide an up-to-date view of their need, outcomes and provision. There is now a focus within the team on building more successful relationships with providers, parents and the wider professional community to ensure more effective review of paperwork and identify any future concerns earlier.</p>

<b>Lessons Learned</b>	<b>Improvements made</b>
<p>Ensure schools and educational settings understand the annual review process.</p> <p>Ensure that children who move into the Borough with an existing EHCP are supported effectively.</p> <p>Ensure parents, carers and families are notified of any delay in receiving advice.</p>	<p>The SEND Team have revisited their processes and sent out procedure guidance to schools relating to the Annual Review process and how to complete this process, including when an Emergency Review is carried out.</p> <p>The service has improved it's processes for children who move into the Borough with an existing Education and Health Care Plan, ensuring their needs are addressed.</p> <p>The SEND Support Service worked with the Educational Psychology Service to provide a letter for parents explaining about potential delays. Since this started to be sent out the Educational Psychology Service (EPS) have recruited locum Educational Psychologists to support in addressing the backlog of assessments. The EPS has new staff starting in September 2024; both services will review the situation at the end of September 2024 to see if a letter is still required.</p>
<b>Housing &amp; Property services</b>	
<p>Ensure complaints within the service are fully investigated and suitably signed off by a qualified officer/ manager. Ensure Stage 2 complaints are discussed and agreed by senior managers/ leaders before informing the customer.</p>	<p>Weekly meetings are held between the Housing and Property Repairs dedicated Customer Relations Team, Service Managers and Team Leaders from the Responsive Repairs area to discuss and investigate Stage One complaints, to ensure responses are fully informed and agreed by suitably qualified officers prior to the resident receiving their decision letter. Meetings for Stage Two, and previously Stage Three complaints, include attendance from Director for Housing and Property Services, Heads of Service, Service Managers and Team Leaders, to ensure responses are fully informed and agreed by a suitably qualified officer prior to the resident receiving their Stage Two decision letter.</p>

<b>Lessons Learned</b>	<b>Improvements made</b>
<p>Increase the regularity of sharing the outcome of complaints and service requests with the management team.</p> <p>Consider ways to improve support to customers as a result of the volume of contacts about condensation, mould and damp.</p> <p>Improve information sharing across the service area for the benefit of customers.</p>	<p>Complaint and service enquiries contacts and outcomes are shared at management meetings. These meetings help to identify if a review of working practices and procedures is required, and any identified changes implemented.</p> <p>A video diagnosis tool has been introduced allowing the service to view a customer's home during their first report of issues and helping them to prioritise required work and plan follow up visits. The Repair Contact Centre Team are trained to assess and diagnosis using the tool. Resources have been increased within the Condensation, Mould, and Damp Team to include a Works Planner to co-ordinate survey work and appointments, and the number of Property Inspection Surveyors has been increased to three. A future role within the team will be the introduction of a Property Condition Manager. Condensation, mould, and damp awareness training has been developed and rolled out across the directorate, with a 'See It Report It' form developed for officers to complete and submit whilst at a property.</p> <p>Work is progressing with the development of a single IT system for Housing and Property Repairs. This will improve information that is held on both the property and the resident, and support information access and sharing between the directorate service areas. The system will include a customer portal so customers will be able to request and access services direct.</p>
<b>Highways (Capita)</b>	
<p>Understand the increase in complaints regarding the vehicle access crossing (VAX) process</p>	<p>The Highways team are reviewing and updating the vehicle access crossing (VAX) policy. They have created a new application form to alleviate the issues with VAXs being approved that do not meet the requirements/policy.</p>
<b>Environment</b>	

Lessons Learned	Improvements made
<p>Review the approach to Tree risk management.</p> <p>Improve the service offered to customers on the assisted bin lift service.</p> <p>Ensure all staff understand and meet the Customer Promise.</p> <p>Increase digitisation within the service to make it easier for customer to raise and report issues.</p>	<p>The service has worked with an independent Tree specialist company to review the approach to tree risk management. A new inspection operating procedure has been introduced. A new IT system for better data collection, record keeping, and decision making has been purchased. A review of the tree team and management of inspections will ensure tree works are more efficient, are better coordinated and support improved communication with customers.</p> <p>The IT and waste collection teams have reviewed the assisted bin lift information and carried out a data cleanse, which has improved the accuracy of the information held about who needs assistance, as well as reduced the number of unnecessary bins of the list. Whilst the service waits for full digitisation, they have reviewed their lists and ensured these have been recirculated to the frontline teams. Team Leaders review regularly and ensure new addresses are added as they come through.</p> <p>Staff training has continued to be delivered to frontline team inclusive of customer promise and engagement with residents.</p> <p>The digitisation of Environmental Services will be part of the next phase of developing the Customer Innovation Platform, due to start in Autumn 2024. This will allow the team to benefit from in cab technology and workflow of jobs to be managed in real time via handheld devices, which will make the service more responsive to customer reporting. QR codes have been installed on all bins making it quicker and easier for residents to report bins that need attention. All bins have now been digitally mapped and the data is being used to review servicing schedules and bin capacity in any given location.</p>



Learning from complaints is a key priority for the Authority. It demonstrates that we listen, and we care.

In 2024-25 the Authority will further develop their approach to learning from complaints introducing a range of ways we listen to complaints, learn from the customers experience, and make improvements to show we care.

## **9. What we said we would do in 2023 – 24**

The Authority strives to deliver the best for its customers and recognises the importance of delivering better for those who are dissatisfied with their experience.

In 2022-23 the Authority identified seven priorities for the year ahead to demonstrate how it will learn and improve based on customer experience; the table below demonstrates how these have been delivered.

### **1. Implement a new recording and administration system for Authority wide recording of complaint activity, improving the Authority's ability to listen and learn from complaints**

Development of a new complaints system started in summer 2023, going live in June 2024. The new system and process will ensure robust and effective recording of complaints.

### **2. Communicate the Authority's refreshed Complaint's Procedure, ensuring customers have clear and easy access to information on how to make a complaint.**

The Procedure has been shared with all relevant officers and managers. Customer information was updated to ensure they can access and understand how to make a complaint.

### **3. Continued close working between the CFO and housing, property and repairs customer experience function, to ensure customers receive a timely and effective complaint handling service.**

The teams work closely together; this year they have supported the development of the new system and introduction of a new joint Procedure across corporate and housing complaints.

**4. Embed the refreshed governance framework for complaints, ensuring good information and learning from complaints, informs future service delivery.**

The Framework will be live from September 2024 and learning from complaints is a key focus. Regular meetings with Service Directors are in place to discuss and monitor learning and service improvements.

**5. Review Stage 1 processes and sign off to ensure the Authority is doing everything possible to seek early resolution of complaint investigations.**

Stage 1 sign off is now completed by a manager within the service providing relevant oversight of the response. The Customer First Office offer quality assurance checks before the response is sent.

**6. Introduce and comply with any changes from the new Joint Code of Practice with the Housing Ombudsman Service and Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.**

The joint Corporate and Housing Complaint Procedure went live on 1 April in response to the new LGSCO and

Housing Ombudsman Service Codes launched in February. Housing and Property Services were compliant with the statutory Code for Landlords by 1 April 2024 as required, and the Authority is on track to be compliant with the LGSCO Code well ahead of the 2026 requirement.

**7. Full implementation of the quality assurance framework in the Customer First office, to demonstrate consistency, fairness and quality in complaint investigations and outcomes for customers.**

The Framework will be live from September 2024, with a range of quality monitoring activities to ensure that complaints are managed in a fair and consistent way. There has been a slight delay in the roll out of the Framework due to the new complaints IT system.

## 10. Key actions and learning for 2024 – 25

The priorities for the year ahead reflect the learning from this report and focus on embedding processes, practices and recording systems, which have recently been introduced. These priorities will support the Authority to learn and improve from the complaints it receives and ensuring it delivers a great customer experience.

<b>We will...</b>
1. Further embed the new Corporate Complaint Procedure and recently launched complaint IT system to ensure the Authority can provide the very best information and monitoring on its complaints handling processes, providing assurance to the MRC and Governing Body and meaningful information to relevant stakeholders
2. Continue to improve quality assurance of Stage 1 processes and sign off, including quality monitoring, to ensure the Authority is doing everything possible to seek early resolution of complaint investigations
3. Improve how the Authority demonstrates and evidences learning from complaints, and how it helps to improve services, through the introduction of learning, reflection and development activities across services and the wider organisation
4. Learn from Ombudsman reports and other Local Authorities and Housing Providers to help improve services locally
5. Ensure full compliance of the LGSCO Complaint Handling Code ahead of the 2026 requirement date, and active participation in the national pilot



## **11. Appendix 1**

[Joint Corporate and Housing Complaint Procedure – April 2024](#)

## **12. Appendix 2**

[Statutory Childrens Social Care Complaints Procedure](#)

## **13. Appendix 3**

[Statutory Adult Social Care Complaints Procedure](#)

## **14. Appendix 4**

[LGSCO Annual Complaint letter to North Tyneside – July 2024](#)

## **15. Appendix 5**

[North Tyneside Council response to the Annual Review of Local Government Complaints in England for 2023-24](#)