



# Annual Complaints Report 2023/24

Governance Committee

## 1. Summary

1.1 This report outlines the complaints received in relation to housing services during the financial year 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024 and covers the following points:

- Number of complaints received
- Number of complaints handled at each stage of the process
- Complaints by type/service area
- Complaints performance

## 2. Complaints the Council Refused to Accept

2.1 The types of complaint that the Council did not accept under its adopted Complaints Policy in 2023/24 were as follows:

- Contacts considered to be a request for service and not a complaint.
- Complaints relating to staff behaviour as these engage a separate procedure

2.2 The majority of Service Requests are dealt with by the individual departments and form part of the normal day-to-day activities of the Council. The complaints team directly received 74 Service Requests during 2023/24, the majority relating to Waste Services (46) and Housing (13). All were referred to the appropriate department for actioning.

2.3 If the Council takes the decision not to accept a complaint, an explanation will be provided to the complainant setting out the reasons why the matter is not suitable for the complaints process. Where an Ombudsman does not agree the Council may be instructed to accept the complaint.

## 3. Performance in 2023/24

3.1 The number of complaints opened at each stage in 2023/24 was as follows:

Complaints	2023/24 (OPENED)
Stage 1	277
Stage 2	67
Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman	12
Housing Ombudsman <sup>1</sup>	2

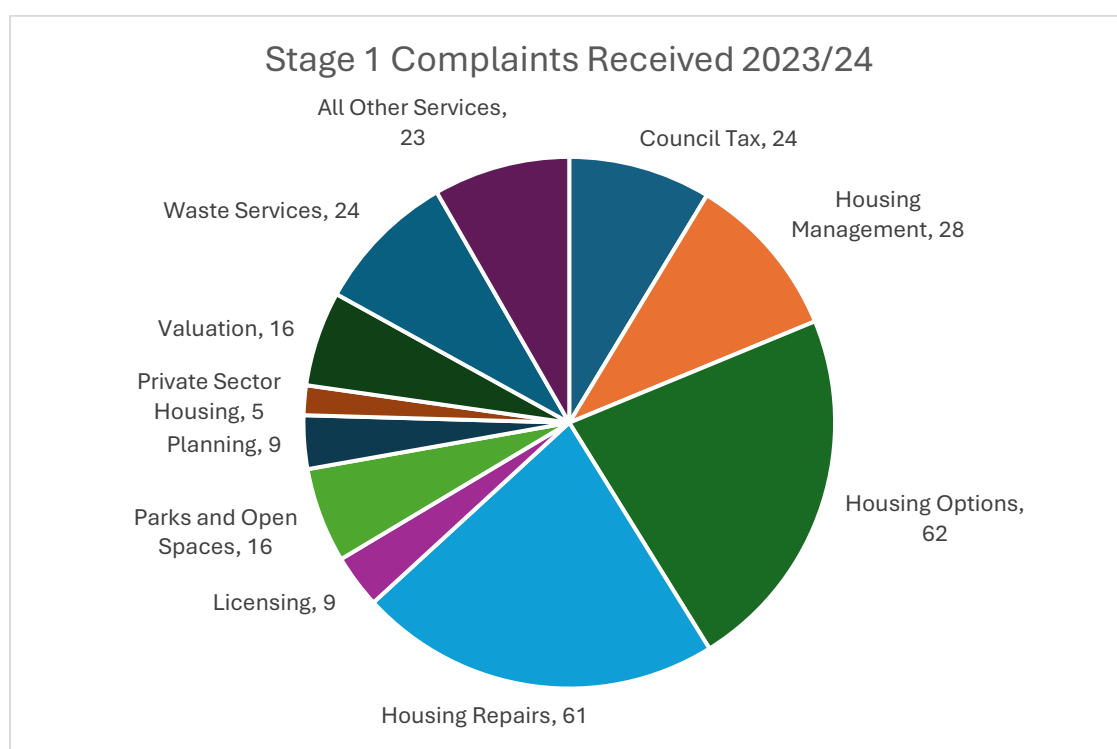
3.2 In keeping with the new requirements of the Ombudsmen for 2024/25, we are reporting on the number of complaint cases opened in 2023/24 rather than the number of complaints closed. The figures for 2022/23 and previous years are based on cases closed during the period. However, while this is expected to slightly inflate the number of complaints recorded for 2023/24 compared to 2022/23, as complaints opened in mid/late March 2024 would not have been closed by 1 April 2024 in most cases, we are not of the view that this figure is significantly inflated by the change of methodology.

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<sup>1</sup> In respect of the Housing Ombudsman, this covers Housing Management, Housing Repairs and Housing Rents. Housing Options and all other services fall under the Local Government and Social Care (LG&SC) Ombudsman.

It will also enable us to provide a more accurate comparison between 2023/24 and 2024/25 as both will be calculated on the same methodology.

- 3.3 This is further supported by the relatively modest increase in Stage 2 complaints recorded in 2023/24 compared to 2022/23 and the overall percentage of Stage 1 complaints that progressed to Stage 2 is down as a percentage (32% in 2022/23 compared to 24% in 2023/24). Similarly, the number of complaints accepted by the Ombudsman for investigation while slightly increased year-on-year remains a relatively small percentage of total complaints (6% in 2022/23 compared to 5% in 2023/24).
- 3.4 It should be noted that not all Ombudsman complaints opened in 2023/24 were closed within that financial year.
- 3.5 The main areas for complaints, showing those areas with 5 or more complaints received, are listed below.



- 3.6 A breakdown of complaints received at each stage of the complaints process by service area is set out at Table 1 later in this appendix.

### **Ombudsman Decisions – Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman 2023/24**

- 3.7 The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman determined 5 complaints during the year 2023/24. In total, the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman opened 12 cases during 2023/24 but not all of these would have been decided during the year 2023/24 and are therefore not contained within the figures provided by the Ombudsman. These will be reported in the figures for determinations in 2024/25.
- 3.8 Of these 4 complaints were upheld against the Council, although in 1 case, the Council provided a remedy that satisfied the Ombudsman prior to the complaint reaching the Ombudsman. In the case of 2 of the upheld complaints, the Council was required to

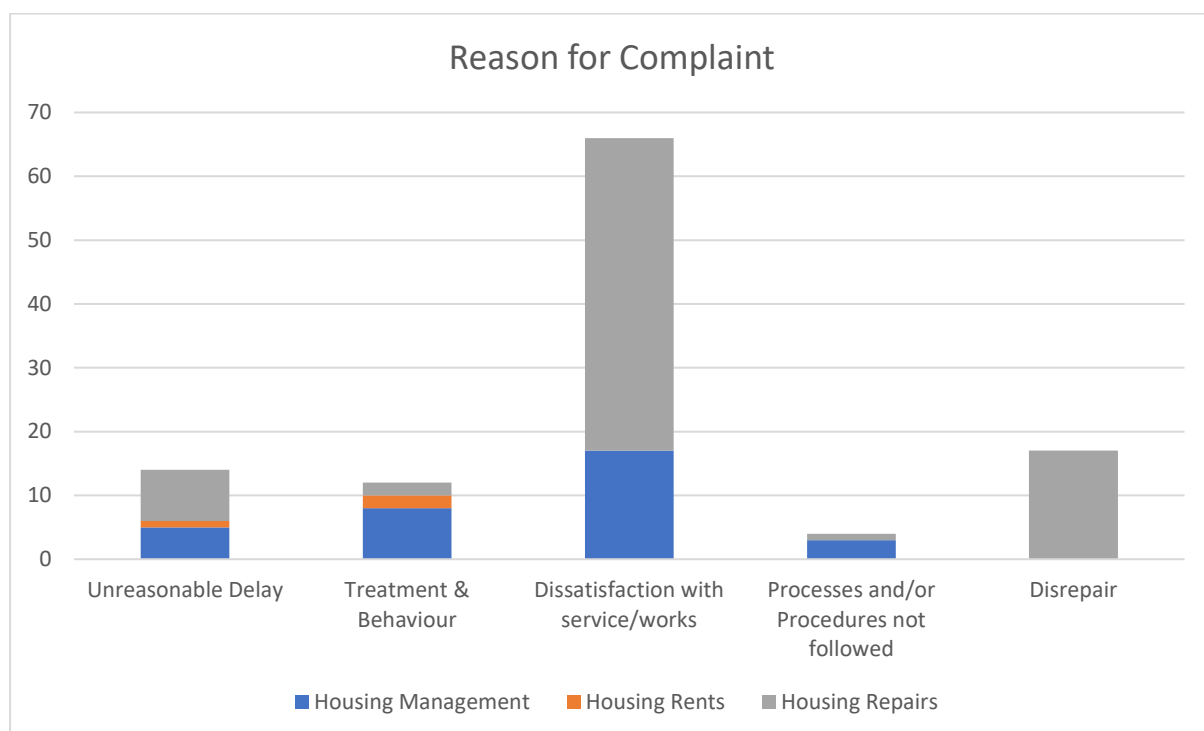
undertake an action proposed by the Ombudsman. In both instances the Council completed the required compliance actions to the satisfaction of the Ombudsman.

#### **Ombudsman Decisions – Housing Ombudsman 2023/24**

- 3.9 As the number of Ombudsman decisions for the Housing Ombudsman is less than five, there is no published individual landlord performance report from the Ombudsman as they only produce these for landlords with **5 or more findings** determined between 1 April 2023 and March 2024. However, only 2 complaints were opened by the Housing Ombudsman during 2023/24 relating to Dover District Council.
- 3.10 Of these 2 complaints, 1 has been not yet been closed and one has been closed. In both cases, the complaint was partly upheld.
- 3.11 A further complaint opened in 2022/23 was determined by the Housing Ombudsman in 2023/24 and was not upheld.

#### **4. Looking to the Future - Improving Data Quality on Complaint Categories**

- 4.1 In January 2024 the Council implemented a new in-house complaint management system that streamlines the complaint-handling process, provides for complaints data to be held in a single location and enables better reporting on data. There is further on-going work following the implementation of the complaints management system to deliver robust and effective data analysis.
- 4.2 As part of the new Complaints Management System, the Council will review the categorisation of complaints to ensure they reflect the range of complaints received and to improve data insight and learning. This should also improve the quality of the data that can be provided to Members and managers.
- 4.3 An example of how this will look can be demonstrated in the Annual Complaints Performance Report for the Housing Ombudsman, where for the year 2023/24 information was being captured on reasons for housing complaints as follows:



- 4.4 For 2024/25 it is intended that this type of information will be available to report for all service areas.
- 4.5 When the new Corporate and Democratic Support Officer starts in post in early 2025, one of their initial tasks will be to continue the work that has been undertaken to date on ensuring that information on outcomes and lessons learnt are being effectively captured in the database for Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaints.
- 4.6 The Council remains committed to further strengthening opportunities for learning and service improvement through review and self-assessment and this will be a useful tool to feed into service improvements by identifying common areas of upheld complaints in a single source. As part of this, work is currently underway to provide Heads of Service with real time access to complaints performance information.

**Table 1 - Summary of Total Complaints Received by Service Area in 2023/24 compared to 2022/23**

What department does your complaint relate to?	Stage 1		Stage 2		Ombudsman Cases	
	2022/23 (Closed)	2023/24 (Opened)	2022/23 (Closed)	2023/24 (Opened)	2022/23	2023/24
Anti-Social Behaviour CCTV and Community Safety	0	2	0	1	0	0
Asylum and Resettlement	0	0	0	0	0	0
Benefits	6	0	1	1	0	0
Building Control	0	2	0	1	0	0
Business Rates	0	0	0	0	0	0
Community Services (including community grants and events)	0	0	0	0	0	0
Corporate Services	1	1	0	0	0	0
Council Tax	37	24	3	3	1	0
Creative Services (Design and Post Room)	0	0	0	0	0	0
Customer Services	4	3	1	0	0	0
Data Protection	0	0	0	0	0	0
Democratic Services	1	1	0	1	0	0
Dover Museum	0	1	0	0	0	0
Economic Development (Major Projects and Inward Investment)	3	1	0	0	0	0
Economic Development (Tourism, VIC and Kearsney Café)	0	0	0	0	0	0
Electoral Services	1	2	0	0	0	0
Environmental Crime	0	0	0	0	0	0
Environmental Health	1	0	0	0	0	0
Environmental Protection	0	2	1	1	0	1
Finance	0	0	1	0	0	0
Housing Management	15	28	6	5	0	0
Housing Options	24	62	9	8	3	2
Housing Rents	5	2	1	1	0	0
Housing Repairs	46	61	18	14	0	2
Human Resources	0	1	0	0	0	0
IT and Website	0	0	0	0	0	0
Insurance Services	0	0	0	0	0	0
Legal Services	0	0	0	0	0	1

What department does your complaint relate to?	Stage 1		Stage 2		Ombudsman Cases	
	2022/23	2023/24	2022/23	2023/24	2022/23	2023/24
Leisure Centre (Dover District Leisure Centre)	0	0	0	0	0	0
Licensing	0	0	0	0	0	0
Tides Leisure Centre	0	0	0	0	0	0
Licensing	2	9	0	2	0	0
Parking Services	7	1	1	1	0	0
Parks and Open Spaces	3	16	2	11	0	6
Planning	18	9	8	10	0	1
Planning Enforcement	6	3	3	0	5	1
Private Sector Housing	1	5	2	2	1	0
Property Services	4	1	0	0	0	0
Valuation	0	16	0	2	0	0
Waste Services	8	24	4	3	0	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>194</b>	<b>277</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>14</b>

It should be noted that the receipt or escalation of a complaint does not automatically equate to a fault on the part of the Council. All complainants have the right to take their complaint through the Council's two stage complaint process and then to the relevant Ombudsman.