

Annual Customer Feedback Report 2022-23

Blackpool Council



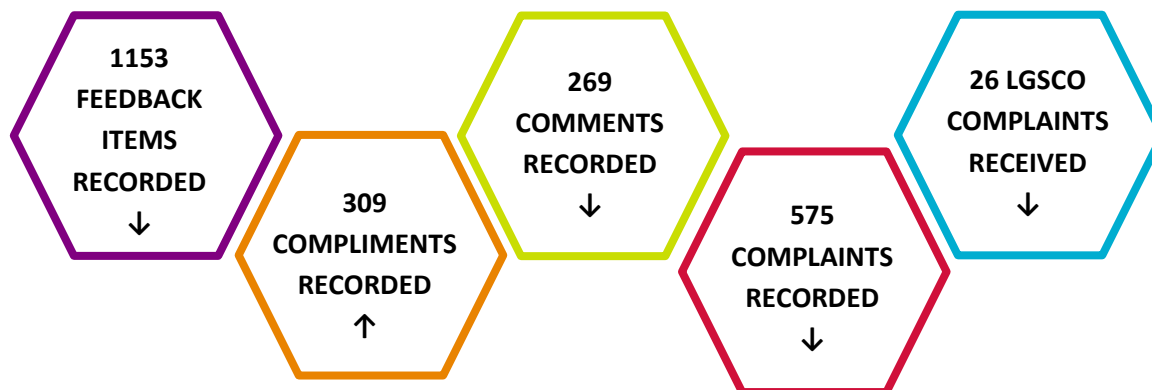
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1. KEY HEADLINES 2022-23



There has been a 6% increase in compliments recorded compared with 2021/22

The directorate with the highest proportion of compliments recorded is Adult Services (44%)

There has been a 26% decrease in complaints recorded compared with 2021/22*

The directorate with the highest proportion of complaints is Community and Environmental Services (25%)

56% of the complaints, which have been fully considered, have met the allocated timescale

39% of complaints, which have been fully considered, were upheld or partially upheld in some element

72% of the complaints investigated relate four key themes: Lack of Action (20%); Staff Conduct / Treatment of Customer (19%); Council Action (17%); Quality of Service (16%)

The number of complaints received by the LGSCO has decreased compared with 2021/22. 6 of the 26 complaints received progressed to the Ombudsman's formal investigation stage (21%) All 6 complaints formally investigated by the LGSCO were upheld (100%)

*Prior to this year, annual feedback figures included Blackpool Waste Services (Alley Gates, Street Cleansing, Waster Services and Parks and Open Spaces) – this should be considered when comparing the 2022/23 figures to the previous years.

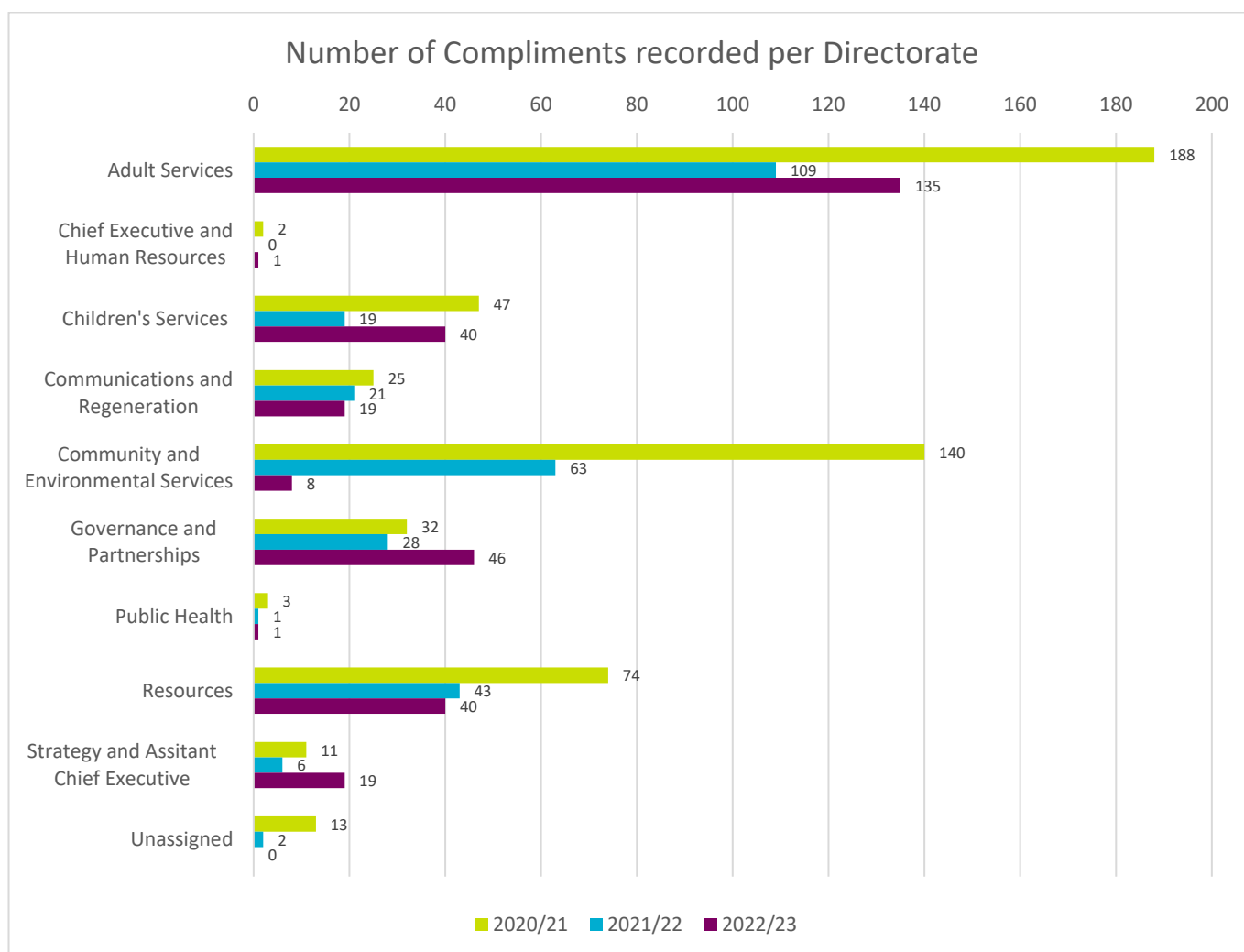
NB: The 2022/23 data in this report does not include feedback received for Blackpool Waste Services, Blackpool Coastal Housing and any other external organisations which have a separate procedure for handling customer feedback.

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2. COMPLIMENTS

309 compliments were recorded in 2022/23. This is a 6% increase compared to 2021/22, which prior to this year also included Blackpool Waste Services compliment figures.

The graph below shows a breakdown of the compliments recorded by directorate:



**Unassigned = Feedback that cannot be allocated to a specific service – this could be general feedback about Blackpool or feedback covering a number of service areas.*

Individuals and teams that are mentioned in recorded compliments are highlighted in a monthly news item on the Council’s intranet ‘the Hub’. We hope to provide recognition to staff for all their hard work and dedication and raise awareness on the importance of logging all customer feedback.

Feedback for Adult and Children’s Services is coordinated by the Customer Relations Team, who ensure that positive feedback from service users is captured and reported on a regular basis. Combine this with the nature of the services provided and the size and nature of the work of the department and this inevitably leads to a

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higher number of compliments recorded. It must however be noted that front line services also bear the brunt of many complaints received.

The lower level of compliments for other departments is not necessarily representative of poor quality service in these areas. Some departments carry out a higher proportion of back office duties, which can often result in less interaction with the public and therefore less opportunity to receive external feedback. Services are encouraged to report internal positive feedback, as well as compliments from service users.

Certain teams remain particularly good at recording compliments received; however, there are services that rarely pass on compliment data for reporting purposes. The reported figures may therefore not be a true reflection of compliments received by Council services and can only show the number of compliments which are officially recorded.

Below is a very small selection [*randomly selected*] of the many compliments received during this period:

I was recently visited and supported by Daniel from your team. As someone who has Asperger's and suffers with severe anxiety meeting and interacting with new people can be difficult/impossible at times. Daniel was brilliant and put me at complete ease. He was friendly and very helpful, and he made the whole process clear and simple for me to understand. The review was done quickly and easily and I was very pleased with the support and service provided by Daniel and I wish all such processes were as easy and quick.

[ADULT SERVICES: Adult Social Care - Direct Payments]

A card from three members of a family: "To Anna, we will forever be grateful for all of your constant support and guidance. Thank you for being in our corner, when at times it felt like no one else was. You have always believed and encouraged us, helping us to get to where we are today. I will never forget you and everything you have done for me. Love always" "Thank you for everything you have done for us." "Thank you so much for everything you have done for me and my family. You have been here for us the longest, and I am so grateful to have had you in our lives. You have helped us more than you know. Good luck with whatever the future has in store for you!"

[CHILDREN'S SERVICES: Safeguarding, Quality and Review - Independent Reviewing Officers]

I visited Bispham library with grandson this week. Chose books and then joined in a music and rhyme time which was a lovely extra we'd not booked on but there was room. We thoroughly enjoyed it. We were also given a bag of goodies one of which was book of rhymes and story with disc attached. He loved it. It really made his day. We've attended other activities usually on a Monday and just wanted to say how much we've enjoyed these events. The library staff always so friendly and helpful and the optional activities lovely. Thankyou **[COMMUNICATIONS AND REGENERATION: Libraries]**

Hello, I thought I'd email as it may be a rarity that the council receive an email of praise! (Many people are quick to complain but rarely take the time to say 'well done'.) So, a huge well-done on the new cycle path connecting Blackpool to Lytham St Annes. I cycled it for the first time yesterday and felt so much safer as opposed to the older cycle lane which had cars parked all over it (many times I've almost been hit off by driver's

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opening their doors without looking). Brilliant work and thank you to everyone involved. Have a good day!
[COMMUNITY AND ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES: Highways and Transport (Delivery)]

[Parents] A big thank you was received for the staff who undertook the burial of their baby's ashes. They said they didn't expect it to be such a dignified service, they were so pleased at how both staff members stood back from the grave and gave the time and space for them to grieve. They said they showed great respect at such a difficult time and that their actions made the burial so much easier for them.
[GOVERNANCE AND PARTNERSHIP SERVICES: Cemeteries and Crematorium]

A gentleman phoned the Customer First team to compliment the staff at Horizon, they have helped him get back into work, he was really complimentary of the level of service and support they have provided and he was really happy and glad to have worked with them. Specifically the staff that supported him
[PUBLIC HEALTH: Public Health]

Can you please extend mine and my mum's thanks to Vanessa? She went over and beyond helping sort out my mum's council tax bill and direct debit today. She really is an asset to Blackpool Council. Can you also apologise if we kept Vanessa working for longer than she should have. **[RESOURCES: Customer First (Service Advisors)]**

I would just like to make aware of the absolute excellent communication/ response empathy and hard work and dedication given to me by Housing Options. [Deborah] Since working with this employee I have gained confidence and the sense to help myself achieve the life I want. I have suffered with severe mental health for years and felt no one really understood this condition and the how debilitating this is to a person's life. Deborah has given me her time and understanding throughout and has not once made me feel I was a burden. She has communicated everything over and over until I felt satisfied in my mind I understand how housing works at each stage and what I had to do and what she would do for me. I never felt judged or embarrassed by her. Together with her support I have just secured my own tenancy in such a short time and she has supported me into employment. I have witnessed how demanding the housing service is and how hard work of the employee has ended in my positive outcome. I feel that in time of need everyone just needs someone who believe in them to achieve and I will always remember the hand up from that one person who has helped me onto the path of a brighter future. **[STRATEGY AND ASSISTANT CHIEF EXECUTIVE: Housing Options]**

3. COMMENTS

Comments are equally as important as complaints as they can help to shape and improve the quality of the services we provide. Comments can take the form of suggestions for improvement, customer observations, and in most cases the comments are initial requests for service. Ensuring that comments are dealt with and acted upon appropriately can avoid escalation to formal complaints. In total, **269** comments were received in 2022/23.

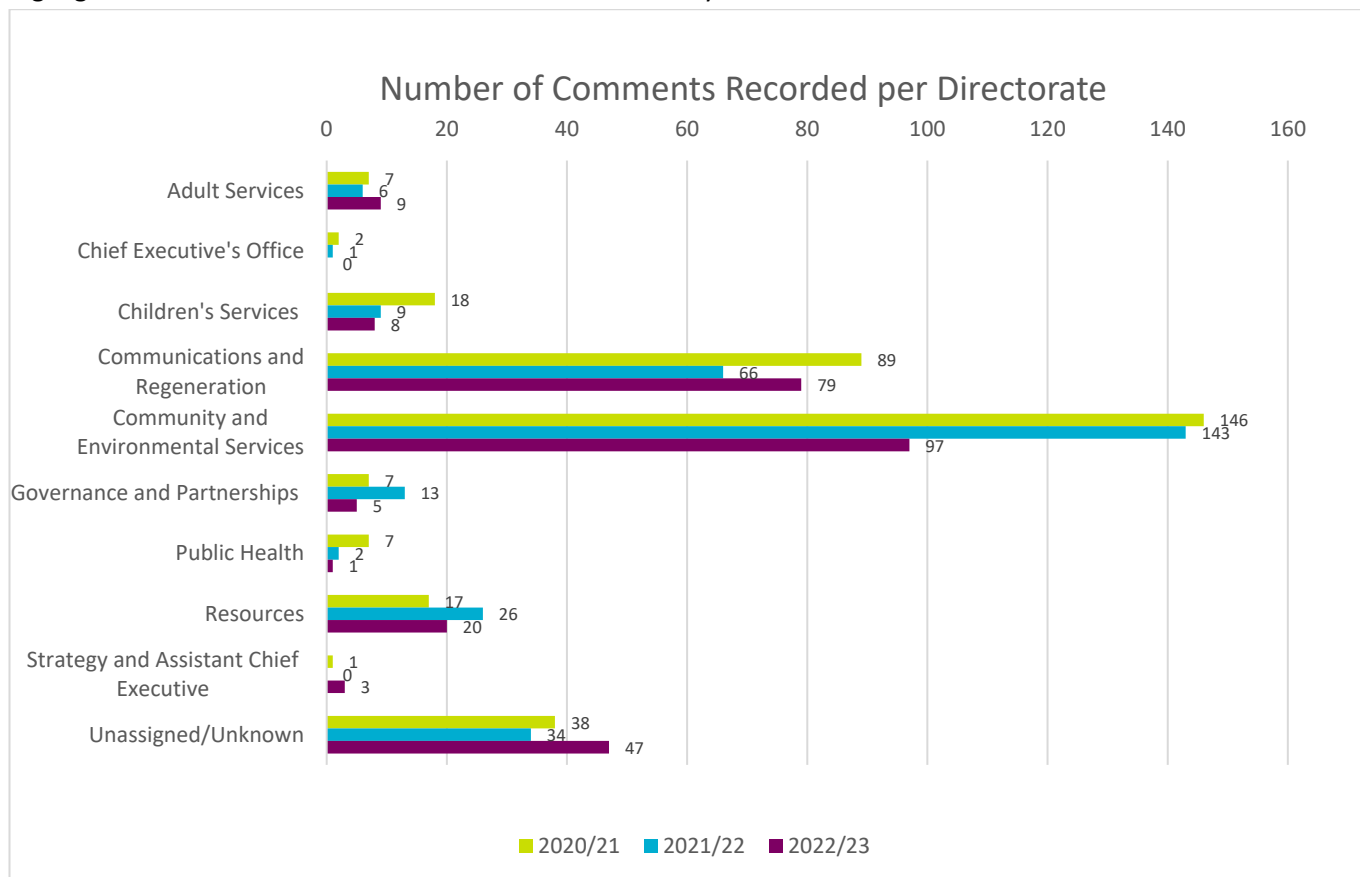
Community and Environmental Services previously included Blackpool Waste Services services and has therefore seen a reduction in the number of comments recorded in comparison to previous years. However, with a high proportion of the directorate's comments for Highways and Transport services and Public Protection, primarily initial requests for service, the department still accounts for the majority of comments received. Comments are usually received via the online feedback form directly from service users who have

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submitted the feedback as a 'complaint'. If upon initial review by the service it is identified that the feedback does not fall within the remit of the corporate complaint policy, the service can adjust the feedback 'type' to comment, for appropriate action.

There has been a significant amount of channel shift work around creating alternative ways for customers to report issues and submit requests for service and this work continues to influence the number of comments logged.

Services do not tend to record all comments received, as these are mainly dealt with as 'general business;' therefore, the figures may not be a true reflection of all comments received by Council services and can only highlight the number of comments that have been formally recorded.



*Unassigned = Feedback that cannot be allocated to a specific service – this could be general feedback about Blackpool or feedback covering a number of service areas.

Below are some examples of comments received during the year:

*I have started to come up from the South of UK on a regular basis for breaks and holidays; I cannot understand why there is a large long grand entrance to Blackpool Central Drive with charming old houses and a park and then many shops is all run down, I heard you are doing a massive entertainment complex at the town end of this road would it not make sense to make the whole of Central Drive a grand entrance to Blackpool, just my thinking nothing more love the town. Thank you **[Communications and Regeneration: Growth and Prosperity]***

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*Hi, yesterday we attended the fireworks in Blackpool, absolutely fabulous. We parked by the football stadium in the car park, South? It took an hour to actually reach the one car park exit on leaving, an hour on the M55 due to the volume of traffic and then the northbound junction on the M6 was closed. Everyone was in the same position in the car park, waiting, frustrated. Some with very young children. Would it not be possible to open other exits to this car park when there is a major event? Would it not be possible to have a park and ride further out of town? I believe there is one in the summer from the airport? One exit from a major car park is hardly acceptable given the numbers attending. I nearly turned into a Victor Meldrew clone. I hope you will improve it. **[Communications and Regeneration: Parking]***

*Attention to zebra crossings at promenade at St Chads Road. No yellow warning lights to draw attention to cars approaching crossing and white line very faded. This is a very busy crossing and cars drivers often don't know it's a Zebra Crossing when people are trying to cross over because they can't see any white lines or yellow warning lights. It's only a matter of time before there is a fatal accident. So the white lines want repainting and the yellow warning lights want fixing. There are dog walkers, the elderly, school children and tram passengers all taking their life in their own hands crossing at these crossings even worse when it's dark. **[Community and Environmental Services: Highways and Transport (delivery)]***

*I am an athletics coach and use the track on a fairly regular basis but probably not enough to justify getting a leisure passes for my athletes. As they therefore have to pay it is very frustrating that the Sports Centre reception does not have a contactless card payment facility. Not only is this inconvenient but also takes time when there are others waiting at reception. Perhaps you might consider implementing this payment system. **[Community and Environmental Services: Leisure]***

*You need to sort out your communications. I have tried to phone you up over 2 days, at different times of the day about Council Tax but your system just cuts you off with the message 'No one is available to take your call' and then has the affront to say 'Our phone lines are open 9am to 5pm'! If it cuts you off, Very frustrating!!!! As for that stupid text system, you just go around in circles. This is not good enough. If your resources are limited, how about employing more people? **[Resources: Customer First]***

*Customer called as she has been trying to contact Housing Options, she has left messages and nothing back. She has been given an eviction letter. She has a disabled son and she isn't doing very well with her mental health. She is asking if someone can please call her as soon as possible. She is very worried **[Strategy and Assistant Directorate: Housing Options]***

I cannot understand how the council has made part of church street a pedestrianized zone, apart from what should be taxis and buses. The number of times that I am in town and watch this area used as a rat run, with some drivers using it like a racing track. This Friday afternoon for whatever reason Topping Street and Cookson Street are extremely busy and cars and vans are avoiding the wait and using the church street area to avoid the wait. Preston council introduced a taxi and bus lane only on Fishergate, with camera's to catch offenders. Initially the council made a large revenue from offenders until people started to realize that fines were in place

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for offenders. Why doesn't Blackpool introduce this for this area. People's lives are being put at risk every day and you shouldn't wait until someone gets injured to rectify this important issue.
[Community and Environmental Services: Highways and Transport (delivery)]

4. COMPLAINTS

4.1 Types of Complaint

The Council has a three-stage process for dealing with corporate complaints:

- Stage 1** Investigation by the service
- Stage 2** Review by the relevant Director or delegated senior officer
- Stage 3** Review by the Complaints Panel on behalf of the Chief Executive (*if appropriate*)

The table below shows the number of **corporate complaints** logged for each stage during the period.

Stage	Total	
Stage 1	374	94%
Stage 2	25	6%
Stage 3	0	0%
	399	

The small number of Stage 2 and Stage 3 complaints recorded suggests that the majority of Stage 1 complaints are dealt with effectively, therefore preventing complaints from escalating. However, it is also possible that complaints have escalated to Stage 2, but these were not recorded on the Feedback System by the client department. There are planned updates to the feedback system which will make recording escalated complaints much easier and this should help encourage services to record complaints that proceed to stage 2.

There have been a small number of Stage 2 complaints where the complainant has requested escalation to Stage 3; however, it has been decided that it would not be beneficial for the Council to hold a Stage 3 Panel to review the matter further and we have recommended that the complainant contacts the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman. There are many reasons why Stage 3 would not be appropriate, some of the main reasons are listed below:

- The complaint was upheld at Stage 2 and further consideration would not help the complainant in terms of offering any further outcome
- The complaint is about a Council Policy and further consideration would not benefit the complainant in terms of offering any further outcome
- A review at Stage 3 would not seek to question the merits of a suitably qualified officer's decision to take action
- The outcome that the complainant is seeking could not be reached through a Stage 3 review

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A Stage 3 complaint Panel consists of 3/4 senior officers, Chaired by the Director of Governance and Partnerships with the Customer Relations Manager as the Panel Officer. If we are aware that a further review at Stage 3 would not provide a different outcome or the outcome sought by the complainant, it would be a poor use of Council resource to continue to Stage 3.

In 2022/23, **176** complaints were received relating to Adult or Children's Social Care statutory duties. Complaints of this nature are dealt with under separate statutory procedures, with different stages to the process and are not included in the figures above. The below sections do however **include** the Adult and Children's Social Care statutory complaints. *For further detail on Adult and Children's Services feedback, please refer to the separate Social Care annual reports.*

4.2 Directorates and Service Areas

The number of complaints logged has decreased this year, and whilst the removal of Blackpool Waste Services data has impacted considerably*, the overall trend is still lower than in previous years. For comparison, the previous three years are shown in the table below.

Complaints logged by Directorate	2022/23	% change since 21/22	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20
Adult Services	82	+28%	64	75	106
Chief Executive and Human Resources	0	-100%	2	0	0
Children's Services	128	-30%	182	173	175
Communications and Regeneration	88	-3%	91	53	87
Community and Environmental Services	141	-55%*	311	312	336
Governance and Partnerships	15	+67%	9	5	9
Public Health	0	-100%	3	2	4
Resources	84	+9%	77	57	101
Strategy and Assistant Directorate	19	+6%	18	12	14
Unassigned	18	+13%	16	8	4
Total	575	-26%	773	697	836

*Unassigned = Feedback that cannot be allocated to a specific service – this could be general feedback about Blackpool or feedback covering a number of service areas.

The table below shows the services with the highest number of complaints recorded in 2022/23:

Complaints - Service	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21	% change since 21/22
Children's Social Care	103 (18%)	142	158	-27%
Public Protection	69 (12%)	72	52	-3%
Parking	67 (12%)	66	31	+2%
Adult Social Care	56 (10%)	43	27	+30%
Council Tax	50 (9%)	42	18	+19%

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There are a number of services which have seen a noteworthy reduction in the number of complaints logged since 2021/22 and these can be seen in the table below:

Complaints - Service	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21	% reduction since 21/22
Business Rates	4	9	20	56%
Targeted Intervention – Children’s Services	7	12	5	42%
Highways and Transport (Delivery)	31	52	34	40%
Tourism	7	11	2	36%
Children's Social Care	103	142	158	27%

The reduction could be down to a number of factors, some of which are outlined below:

- The implementation of changes based on previous feedback and the continuous improvement to services.
- Further work on channel shift giving customers and service users alternative routes for reporting issues.
- The successful implementation channel shift projects and the implementation of new processes in services to manage the customer contact.
- The correct use of the customer feedback system, and matters that do not fall within the complaints procedure being downgraded to comments.
- Better communication with service users on the alternative routes available for reporting concerns.
- We do have to also consider that services have not recorded some complaints received on the customer feedback system

A full breakdown of the number of complaints received by service area can be found in **Appendix A**.

4.3 Complaint Themes

The table below highlights the predominant complaint themes. Following the same trend as the previous years, the majority of all complaints received (73%) relate to the following four themes: Council Action; Lack of Action; Quality of Service and Staff Conduct / Treatment of Customer.

Theme	2022/23	% of complaints this year	% reduction since 21/22
Staff Conduct/Treatment of Customer	125	22%	↓ -42%
Lack of Action	113	20%	↓ -17%
Quality of Service	93	16%	↓ -80%
Council Action	90	16%	↓ -49%
	421	73%	

‘Staff Conduct/Treatment of Customer’, continues as last year, as the most common complaint theme. This theme is used if a customer’s complaint focuses on the attitude or unprofessional conduct of a Council officer or if their complaint is focused on being unfairly treated/disadvantaged by a service when no other theme is predominant.

If a complaint has a number of aspects to it, it is often difficult to highlight one particular theme; therefore, ‘Quality of Service’ tends to be used.

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The new feedback system, currently in development, will provide a greater number of theme subcategories and the ability to choose more than one theme. This will help us to clearly identify and target trends for learning and monitoring purposes.

4.4 Response Timescales

We aim to respond to the majority of complaints at Stage 1 within 10 working days. If the complaint is going to take longer than this to complete, the Complainant will be informed of the expected date for response; this may be in the form of an interim letter.

If a complaint timescale has to be extended mid-investigation, the complaint will be classed as 'not meeting timescale;' the only exception to this is if the Complainant causes the need for extension, for example, by providing further information during the investigation process or if a meeting with the complainant is required and the complainant is unable to meet within the initial time frame.

Complaints relating to Adult Social Care and Children's Social Care are often covered by separate statutory legislation, and different timescales apply. The complaint system allows timescales to be amended based on what procedure is being followed.

Fully Considered Complaints	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21
Responded to within the initial timescale	263	426	429
Not responded to within the initial timescale	208*	243	210
Total	471	669	639

**includes 1 outstanding complaint as of 12.07.23*

In 56% of cases a response was sent to the Complainant by the client service within the initial timescale. This is unfortunately lower than the previous year, 64%.

It is the responsibility of the client service to set a reasonable investigation timescale (in line with the appropriate procedure), to communicate this information to the complainant and to ensure that the timescale is met.

General reasons for timescales not being met include:

- Increasing workloads on restricted resources means that it is not always possible to prioritise complaint responding / investigation within some service areas;
- Senior officers availability to respond within relevant timescales;
- Complex investigation work required, which may include multi-agency communication, can prolong the time it takes to respond to complaints;
- Key members of staff being unavailable to respond to complaints due to sickness or annual leave;
- Multiple complaints from the complainant regarding the same or different matters can cause delays in the investigation process.

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- Difficulties in being able to contact complainants using the contact details supplied can sometimes mean we are unable to inform them of the outcome of their complaint.
- The capacity of the Customer Relations Team to carry out regular monitoring of outstanding cases and to work with services to ensure that the majority of complaints are responded to on time.
- The failure to close cases down on the system once dealt with.

Further work will be undertaken to improve compliance with response timescales.

4.5 Outcomes

The table below details the outcomes of fully considered complaints during this period.

Outcome	2022/23		DoT*	2021/22 %
Upheld	69	15%	↑	13%
Partially Upheld	115	24%	↓	25%
Not Upheld	286	61%	↑	58%
Outstanding ~	1	0.2%	↓	4%
	471			

* Direction of travel in numbers compared to 2021/22

~ Outstanding as of 12.07.23

If a complaint is upheld or partially upheld it means that there was fault found – there is at least one element identified that could have been done better. It is reassuring to see that the percentage of not upheld complaints has increased since last year; there has however, also been a slight increase in the number of fully upheld complaints.

Outcomes and actions taken as a result of a complaint are not often recorded on the customer feedback system, and this does make reporting difficult. Some of the general reasons for complaints being upheld over the year are detailed below:

- A lack of action and / or lengthy delays in delivering a service following a request from a customer;
- Errors in service delivery, such as not following correct policies and procedures;
- Failure to communicate with customers, for example, not informing them of a change of policy or action that has been taken in response to an earlier request;
- A combination of minor issues, which have overall resulted in a poor experience for the customer; and
- Staff attitude / behaviour towards customers, ranging from poor customer service to the use of rude or unprofessional language.

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4.6 Lessons Learned

Learning and reflection from individual complaints and the sharing of learning within the organisation, is a key part of the complaint process. Following the completion of the complaint process, managers are asked to identify any learning from the complaint, either for their own staff or team or with implications across the Directorate. Learning should also be shared through 1-1's and team/service meetings. It should be noted that not all complaints yield lessons to be learned; however, each case should be reviewed to ensure that any learning points are recorded and actioned where applicable. It must be noted that the complaint process is one of several ways in which services obtain valuable feedback to learn, improve and share best practice.

Below are some general examples of learning and actions taken, as a result of complaint reviews:

- Staff training to be provided
- Reminders to staff of duties and responsibilities
- The development of easy to read information for service users
- Internal review of service to be carried out
- A review of the information provided to service users
- A reminder to staff about the importance of effective communication
- Concerns to be addressed at monthly review meetings
- A review of staffing levels
- A review of current processes and procedures to see if improvements can be made

The customer feedback system does allow services to record if lessons have been learned and the detail of what actions have been taken as a result of the complaint; however, this is not part of the system that services regularly use. Only 39% of the upheld or partially upheld complaints have actions and lessons learned been recorded on the system; this is however a slight increase to 30% last year. It must be noted that over half of these cases are for Adult and Children's Services, whereby the Customer Relations Team monitors and coordinates the process.

We will continue to encourage the review of complaints to ensure that we learn from the feedback provided by our customers. The Customer Relations Team will be sharing a lessons learned report template with corporate services, which could be used to monitor actions required as a result of complaints at the relevant divisional manager meetings.

The ability of services to take the time to review complaints and implement changes to improve services will be continually inhibited by the increasing demand on services and the pressure on existing resources; however, if services can learn and improve as a result of complaints, this could reduce the number of complaints received about similar themes.

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5. Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO)

The LGSCO provides an [interactive map of council performance](#) on its website. The map shows annual performance data for all councils in England and links to LGSCO published decision statements, public interest reports, annual letters and information about service improvements that have been agreed by each council

This tool provides a useful snapshot of the service improvement recommendations that each authority has agreed to. It also highlights the wider outcomes of LGSCO investigations to the public, advocacy and advice organisations, and others who have a role in holding local councils to account.

The key highlights of the LGSCO data can be found in this report, however should you wish to explore the information in more detail please visit <https://www.lgo.org.uk/your-councils-performance/blackpool-borough-council/statistics>

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

- **Complaints upheld** – The LGSCO upholds complaints when fault is found in an organisation's actions, including where the organisation accepted fault before the LGSCO investigated. The data includes the total number of investigations completed to provide important context for the statistic.
- **Compliance with recommendations** – The LGSCO recommends 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 the LGSCO agreed with how it offered to put things right. The Ombudsman encourages the early resolution of complaints and credits organisations that accept fault and find appropriate ways to put things right.

Finally, the LGSCO compares the above three key annual statistics for an organisation with similar authorities, to provide an average marker of performance. They do this for County Councils, District Councils, Metropolitan Boroughs, Unitary Councils, and London Boroughs.

The statistics provided by the LGSCO may not necessarily align with the data that the authority holds. For example, LGSCO numbers include enquiries from people that were signposted back to the authority and some of these may choose not to pursue the matter further with the Council.

5.1 Complaints Received by the LGSCO

Throughout 2022/23, twenty six complaints were referred to the LGSCO by a Complainant. The following table below shows the number of complaints received by the LGSCO over the last three years, broken down by service area:

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Complaints and Enquiries Received	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	DoT*
Adult Care Services	6	9	8	↓
Benefits and Tax	1	0	1	↑
Corporate and Other Services	5	2	0	↓
Education and Children's Services	3	10	7	↓
Environmental Services, Public Protection and Regulation	4	7	2	↓
Highways and Transport	1	1	2	↑
Housing	3	3	5	↑
Other	0	1	0	↓
Planning and Development	3	2	1	↓
	26	35	26	

* Direction of travel compared to 2021/22

5.2 Decisions made by the LGSCO

The table below shows a breakdown of the decisions made by the LGSCO over the last three years.

Appendix B contains a definition of the types of decision made.

Decision Type		No. of Complaints		
		2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Complaints investigated by LGSCO	Complaint upheld	2	4	6
	Complaint not upheld	5	5	0
Complaints not investigated by LGSCO	Closed after initial enquiries	6	11	12
	Premature decision - Advice given	1	1	1
	Premature decision - Referred back for local resolution	10	15	7
	Incomplete / invalid	2	2	2
		26	38	28*

*The number of complaints decided can be different from the number of complaints received as it can include cases decided in the current year but received the year before.

Some Complainants prefer to contact the LGSCO in the first instance. The LGSCO will determine whether this is a premature complaint which must be directed back to the Council to investigate and respond to in the first instance or if they will commence an investigation based on the information provided by the Complainant.

Over the past two years, the LGSCO has reviewed its processes to ensure they utilise their resources effectively. One outcome of this is that they are more selective about the complaints they look at in detail, prioritising where it is in the public interest to investigate. This has meant that changes in uphold rates this year are not solely down to the nature of the cases received by the LGSCO.

The LGSCO is less likely to carry out investigations on 'borderline' issues, so they are naturally finding a higher proportion of fault overall. Our average uphold rate for all investigations has increased this year and, in line with this, our uphold rate is higher than previous years.

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Of the twenty six complaints received by the LGSCO in 2022/23, six cases progressed on to the formal investigation stage. All of the complaints reaching this stage were upheld. This is disappointingly a higher figure compared to an average of 72% in similar authorities.

Twelve of the complaints were closed after initial enquiries and further information regarding the reasons for this can be found in **Appendix B**.

5.3 Compliance and Remedy

In line with the previous year, in 100% of cases, the LGSCO was satisfied Blackpool Council had successfully implemented its recommendations. This compares to an average of 99% in similar authorities.

With a significant improvement on last year, in 33% of upheld cases the LGSCO found that Blackpool Council had provided a satisfactory remedy before the complaint reached the Ombudsman. This compares to an average of 13% in similar authorities.

In addition to remedy by apology and financial redress, the LGSCO has the power to recommend service improvements where a fault or maladministration by the Council has caused injustice to a Complainant. Service improvements agreed and implemented by Blackpool Council in 2022/23 can be explored in **Appendix C**.

Senior management review these cases to explore the reasons why the complaints have been upheld and identify any actions that can be taken to reduce the number of upheld complaints in the future. As the majority of remedies and services improvements were recommended by the LGSCO, senior management will explore whether the Council missed opportunities to resolve complaints through the use of remedies at an earlier stage in the complaints process.

5.4 Public Reports

The LGSCO can also issue Public Reports for specific cases. There are many reasons why the Ombudsman might issue a public report. The main reason is because they believe that it is in the public interest to highlight particular issues or problems. They might also issue a public report because what went wrong is significant or because of the impact on the complainant/service user is significant. The Ombudsman will always issue a public report if an organisation does not agree with their findings or recommendations, or put things right to our satisfaction.

The Public Reports are issued to help to ensure that councils, and other organisations providing public services, remain accountable to people who use those services. By highlighting the learning from complaints it helps to improve services for others. In line with last year, Blackpool Council has not been issued with any Public Reports in 2022/23.

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6. Looking Forward

The Customer Relations Team will continue to offer support to staff involved in complaint handling to improve the timeliness and quality of responses, whilst aiming to reduce the need for secondary or follow up enquiries. The Complaints and Customer Feedback SharePoint site contains information and guidance materials, templates, policy documents and useful website links to support staff dealing with customer feedback. The site is updated regularly with any new information sourced, to assist with effective complaint handling.

We will continue to improve the recording and handling of complaints and the quality of responses; encouraging learning from complaints and compliments. We will look at developing a robust mechanism for sharing lessons learnt, best practice and potential development. The Senior Leadership Team will support with this work and will identify any key areas for improvement.

The Council has commissioned the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman to deliver Effective Complaint Handling online training to officers who deal with complaints as part of their role. We aim to commission further dates in due course if the training is well received.

A new council-wide customer feedback system is still in the pipeline, with the aim of providing a more user-friendly, straight forward approach of logging feedback. The systems improved reporting tools will allow essential feedback data to be provided to services on a more regular basis. It is hoped that the new system will empower services to take better control of complaint and feedback management and provide additional subcategories for complaint themes, so that trends can be clearly identified and acted upon. There has been a significant delay in progress of this project over the last few years, due to the pandemic and overall service capacity. The new system has however been tested by the Customer Relations Team and findings were reported back to Pentagull, so that minor adjustments can be made. Once the work by Pentagull is complete, further testing will be undertaken by a selection of other services, including Customer First, before full implementation.

The Customer Relations Manager, with the support of senior leadership and through the relevant management groups will:

- Encourage all Council services to use the customer feedback system
- Remind services that all feedback received, via whatever route, is appropriately and correctly recorded on the customer feedback system.
- Explore the use of KPI's to monitor complaint compliance across the Council
- Explore of the causes of complaints, especially within the Staff Conduct / Treatment of Customer and Quality of Service themes.
- Encourage services to capture learning where appropriate so that services can be improved as a result.
- Explore how we can share standard learning from complaints on a regular basis across the Council
- Communicate the importance of providing satisfactory remedy to fault and injustice identified, in line with the Ombudsman's guidance on remedies.

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Services are encouraged to continue to work with the Customer Relations Team, in order:

- To ensure that we acknowledge the importance and value of complaints and all customer feedback.
- To ensure that all feedback is appropriately and correctly recorded on the Customer Feedback System to enable greater accuracy in the analysis of data
- To ensure that complaints are handled in line with the Council's Customer Care Standards and any other relevant legal and policy requirements.
- To provide and detail a clear route by which customers can raise concerns about the service they have received from the Council.
- To ensure complaints are dealt with fairly, promptly, and sensitively.
- To learn from our mistakes and use feedback from customers to continuously improve services.
- To provide a satisfactory remedy to fault and injustice before the complaint reaches the Ombudsman.
- To use insight gained from compliments to share best practice.

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APPENDIX A – BREAKDOWN OF COMPLAINTS RECORDED* BY SERVICE AREA

KEY: ■ Same / Reduction ■ Increase <10 ■ Increase >10 or 101%

Last year's figures are provided in the RAG box

SCRUTINY: Climate Change and Environment – CCE; Levelling Up – LE; Children and Young People – CYP; Adult Social Care and Health - ASC

Department	Service	Number of complaints recorded		Relevant Scrutiny Committee	% of FC** complaints upheld in some element
Adult Services	Adult Social Care	56	43	ASC	56%
	Corporate - Resources	7	7	ASC	57%
	Care and Support	6	2	ASC	80%
	Commissioned Services - Adults	12	11	ASC	56%
	Unknown service	1	1	ASC	n/a
Chief Executive's Office	Exec Support	0	1	LU	n/a
	HR, Policy, and Comms	0	1	LU	n/a
Children's Services	Children's Social Care	103	142	CYP	55%
	Commissioned Services – Children's	0	2	CYP	n/a
	Early Help (Targeted Services)	7	12	CYP	50%
	SEND and Educational	8	10	CYP	88%
	School Standards and Effectiveness	5	3	CYP	33%
	Business Support and Resources	0	1	CYP	n/a
Unknown service	5	12	CYP	0%	
Community and Environmental Services	Catering Services including Café	3	n/a	LU	100%
	Coastal Services	0	0	CCE	n/a
	Facilities Management	0	0	LU	n/a
	Highways and Transport (delivery)	31	52	CCE	30%
	Transport Council Fleet	3	3	CCE	100%
	Integrated Transport	10	7	CCE	78%
	Leisure	12	11	LU	42%
	Parks Development (Council)	13	17	CCE	92%
	Public Protection	69	72	CCE	15%
Governance and Partnership Services	Cemeteries and Crematorium	1	1	CCE	0%
	Coroner Services	3	0	CCE	33%
	Customer Relations	1	1	LU	0%
	Governance Services	0	0	LU	n/a
	Information Governance	2	1	LU	0%
	Legal	4	2	LU	67%
	Registrars	4	4	CCE	100%
Communications and Regeneration	Arts	0	1	LU	n/a
	Beach Patrol	3	0	CCE	67%
	Building Control	2	1	LU	0%

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	Communications	0	0	LU	n/a
	Economic Development	1	2	LU	0%
	Growth and Prosperity	2	3	LU	50%
	Heritage	1	0	LU	0%
	Highways and Transport (policy)	0	0	LU	n/a
	Learning, Adult and Community	0	0	LU	n/a
	Libraries	2	2	LU	50%
	Parking	67	66	CCE	25%
	Planning	3	5	LU	0%
	Tourism	7	11	LU	14%
Public Health	Public Health	0	3	LU	n/a
	Community Engagement	0	0	LU	n/a
	Public Health Commissioned Service	0	0	LU	n/a
Resources	Benefits	6	9	LU	40%
	Business Rates	4	9	LU	0%
	Council Tax	50	42	LU	22%
	Customer First	19	15	LU	63%
	Debtors and Creditors	2	0	LU	100%
	Finance	0	0	LU	n/a
	ICT	0	0	LU	n/a
	Property and Asset Management	3	2	LU	50%
	Risk and Insurance	0	0	LU	n/a
Strategy and Assistant CEX	Housing Options	19	18	LU	24%
Unknown/Unallocated	Unknown/Unallocated	18	16	N/A	40%

*Complaints recorded includes cases which were withdrawn following review.

**FC = Fully considered complaints

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APPENDIX B – LGSCO Further Exploration

Definitions

Upheld - Where the LGSCO has decided that the Council is at fault in how it acted and that this fault may or may not have caused an injustice to the Complainant, or where the Council has accepted that it needs to remedy the complaint.

Not upheld - Where the LGSCO has investigated a complaint and decided that the Council was not at fault.

Advice given - Where the LGSCO advises a Complainant that their complaint does not fall within their jurisdiction or where the complaint has already been investigated by the LGSCO and therefore cannot be investigated again.

Closed after initial enquiries - Where the LGSCO has made an early decision that they could not or should not investigate a complaint. Details can be found below of the complaints that were closed after initial enquiries.

Incomplete / invalid - These are complaints where the Complainant has not provided the LGSCO with enough information to be able to decide what should happen with their complaint, or where the Complainant no longer wishes to pursue their complaint.

Referred back for local resolution - These are complaints which have been referred back to the Council by the LGSCO because the Council has not had an opportunity to resolve the issues through its own complaints procedure.

2022/23: Complaints closed after initial enquiries

- **Sch 5.1 court proceedings** - The Ombudsman cannot investigate the complaint. The matter is or has been considered by a court
- **26(6)(c) Court remedy** - The Ombudsman will not investigate as the complainant has/had a remedy against the council via any court of law
- **26B(2) not made in 12 months (x2)** - The Ombudsman has exercised discretion not to investigate. The complainant did not come to the Ombudsman within 12 months of becoming aware of the matter
- **Not warranted by alleged fault (x4)** - there is not enough evidence of fault in the Council's actions to justify investigating. From initial review, there is no evidence of fault in the way the Council made its decision.
- **Not warranted by alleged injustice** - The personal injustice caused is not sufficient to warrant the Ombudsman's involvement
- **Separated - Referred back to PHSO, Council case closed at assessment** – The complaint was regarding health services and no action from the Council was required
- **No worthwhile outcome achievable by investigation (x2)** - The Ombudsman will not investigate as they do not believe they can achieve a worthwhile outcome by investigating

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APPENDIX C – LGSCO Service Improvements

Four service improvements were agreed and are in the process of being implemented by Blackpool Council in 2022/23.

Service Area	Service Improvements	Satisfaction with Compliance
Adult Social Care	Review and amend policy to ensure it has a system in place to ensure correct invoices are issued to those paying the full cost of care.	Ongoing – not yet decided
	Review and amend its policy to ensure it includes details of how it will ensure charges do not amount to more than those charged by the care provider for those paying a contribution.	
	Write to all people potentially affected by its previous policy in the last financial year. It should inform them of the decision the Ombudsman has made about its policy and ask those who believe they may have been affected to contact the Council.	
	Review the invoices for the last financial year for all people who contacted it with concerns to determine if a refund is due.	

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