

# **Non statutory corporate complaints and customer feedback**

For the period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024



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## 1 Introduction

This report is for the period 1 April 2023 to the 31 March 2024 and covers corporate (non-statutory) complaints and compliments for all council direct provision and public health commissioned services. It reports on the corporate expressions of dissatisfaction/complaints/learning and compliments. Most feedback relates to Highways and Public Health.

This report does not cover the wider activity in responding to customer enquiries by other council teams such as the Customer Access Service or the Highways District Lead Team and excludes adult social care and children's complaints which are reported separately in their respective statutory complaints and feedback reports.

The council operates a 2-stage corporate complaints procedure. It can be found in full on our webpage here:

<https://www.lancashire.gov.uk/media/920209/corporate-complaints-procedure.pdf>

Not all issues which are reported to the complaints team in the first instance are considered 'complaints'. If the matter is a first report, and the council has not yet had a chance to put the situation right, the issue will usually be considered as a 'routine service issue' and directed into 'business as usual processes. If the matter is not the responsibility of the council, the customer will be signposted to the correct organisation, (for example District Council). If the matter is not a complaint but for action internally, the complaint team will also support the customer to be heard and receive a reply to their issue.

This report uses the terminology 'expression of dissatisfaction' (regardless of whether it is a formal complaint or not) for all issues which have been reported by customers to the complaints team.

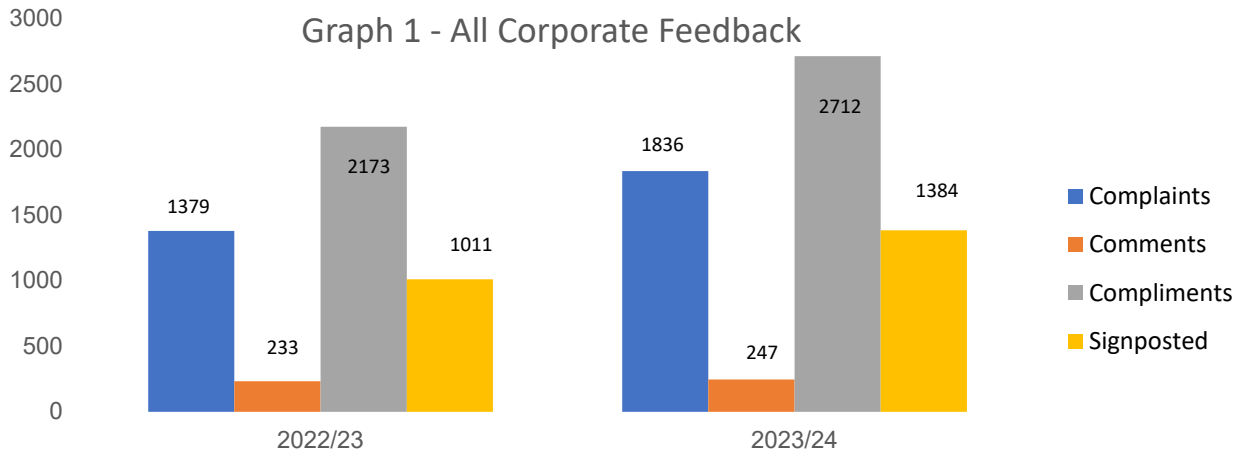
### The Ombudsman

All complainants have the right to approach the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (the Ombudsman) for a free and independent investigation if they remain unhappy with the council outcome after Stage 2.

*If you require any additional information, please contact the Complaints Team on 01772 539414 or email your request to [complaintsandfeedback@lancashire.gov.uk](mailto:complaintsandfeedback@lancashire.gov.uk)*



## 2. Summary of Corporate Feedback in 2023/24



Graph 1 shows that in 2023/24 a total of 1836 expressions of dissatisfaction (initial complaints) were received. Of these, 144 complaints were received by Public Health.

For every single complaint we have 1.5 compliments, but this is due to many public health related compliments (2280). The services provided through public health consistently collect the most compliments in the council.

Although Public Health complaints and compliments are included in the graph above, for the purposes of the rest of this report, public health complaints and compliments will be excluded in the figures. This is because these services are provided by many different commissioned organisations and data collection is not recorded consistently. The precise outcomes of their complaints are therefore unknown. Public health feedback will be dealt with specifically in section 3.

The rest of this report is based on a total of 1692 expressions of dissatisfaction being received and processed by the council. Just 58 formal complaints were eventually made at Stages 1 and 2 of the corporate complaint's procedure which means that 97% of issues were resolved outside of the formal complaint procedure.

Many issues initially reported to the complaints team are signposted outside of the corporate complaint's procedure and/or the council. Signposting internally covers issues which may be for People Services, or legal (claims), whistleblowing or contracts and procurement. Signposting externally covers issues which are typically the responsibility of other organisations such as schools, District Councils, Highways England or utility companies.

There were 1384 internally signposted matters (a 37% increase), mainly due to ongoing problems with the implementation of a new human resources, payroll, and finance system.

There was also an increase in the number of 'views' of the complaint's pages on the LCC website from 11,296 in 2022/23 to 14,508 in 2023/24 (29%). This is consistent with a rise in expressions of dissatisfaction of about a third on 2022/23 numbers.



Out of the 1621 closed matters (71 are still open at the time of writing this report), 72% related to Highways (1160 individual matters).

A total of 29 final decisions were made by the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (the Ombudsman) in 2023/24; of these, 20 investigations were specifically about Highways and Transport, and none were upheld.

Learning is outlined in Appendix 2. Improvements have been made to our processes, policies, procedures, and staff training has been provided. Updates / additions have been made to our public information and our website because of customer feedback.

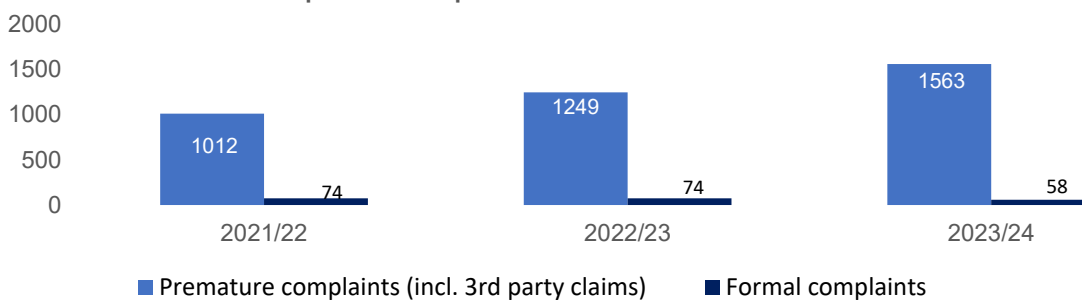
Comments are made when people want to give the council feedback but do not wish to make a complaint. There has been a small 6% increase in these from 233 to 247.

Compliments have increased by 25% from 2173 in 2022/23 to 2712 in 2023/24 mainly due to better recording and increases in public health feedback. See Appendix 1 for some examples of compliments made for highways, public health, libraries, registration, welfare rights and the appeals and complaints teams.

### 2.1 Breakdown of feedback

Graph 2 shows of the 1621 closed corporate related expressions of dissatisfaction, 96% (1563) were premature complaints and of those, 12% were third party claims, dealt with by our legal teams (202). They were resolved as part of ongoing business matters and by proactive management action. Just over 3% of matters (58) went on to become formal or informal complaints. The trend is upwards for the overall number of these expressions of dissatisfaction although there was a 22% reduction in the total number of formal complaints considered from 74 in 2022/23 to 58 in 2023/24.

Graph 2 - Expressions of dissatisfaction



### 2.2 What do people make corporate 'complaints' about?

Table 1 shows a breakdown of all the expressions of dissatisfaction. Highways and Transport continues to be the single most common reason for expressions of dissatisfaction with 1160 reports (72%). The reason that Highways attracts reports of dissatisfaction relates to the considerable size of the network and the fact that these



services impact upon the entire population of Lancashire and not just those in direct receipt of council services. This also includes complaints about highways matters dealt with by the Customer Access Service. There has been a slight increase of Highways and Transport expressions of dissatisfaction by 9% from 834 in 2022/23. The most common reason relates to poor communication and lack of updates.

**Table 1**

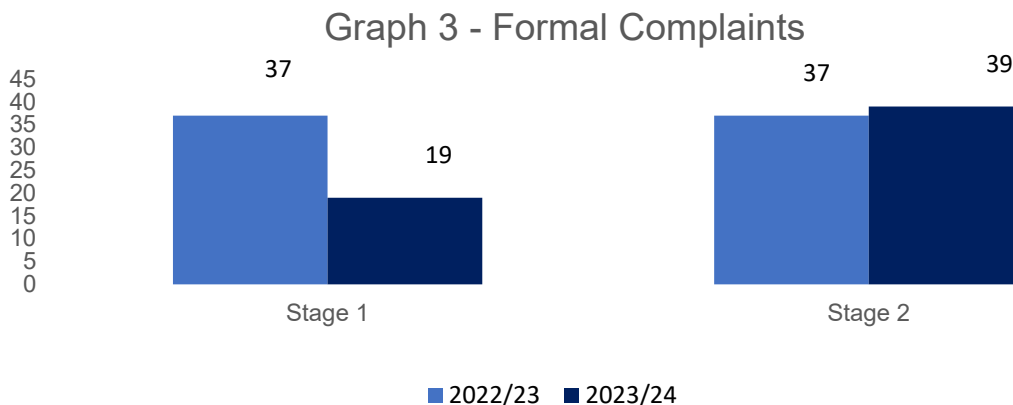
Service area / issue	2023/24
Highways (Inc Customer Access)	1160
Corporate Services	113
Public and Integrated Transport	69
Education & Skills	76
Growth, Environment & Planning	69
Closed after initial enquires. (External organisation)	169
Miscellaneous	36

169 matters were closed after initial enquires as they related to external organisations.

In 2022/23, there were 539 enquires signposted to the Highways Customer Access Service. This increased to 922 in 2023/24, which was a 71% rise in reports about Highways.

### 2.3 Formal Complaints by Stage

Only 3% of matters raised with the complaints team enter the formal stages. The proportion of formal Stage 2 complaints for 2023/24 has increased slightly from 2022/23. This is due to directing more Highways Correspondence issues into the complaints process when the complainant remains dissatisfied with the outcome. Please see Graph 3.



31% of complaints were found to have some aspect justified and were therefore either upheld in full or partly upheld.



Most complaints at Stage 2 are not upheld. Of the 39 Stage 2 complaints, 9 were upheld/partially upheld and 27 were not upheld (3 remained open at the end of the reporting period). Of the complaints that were not upheld, 24 were resolved at this final point (62%), the rest went to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.

### 2.4 Internal learning from complaints

We aim to learn from the customer voice and improve services as a result of upheld complaints. Many complaints can be avoided by providing regular communication with customers and by being empathetic, clear, factual, and honest in our interactions, as well as doing what we say we will do.

Some of the improvements made as a result of learning from complaints are outlined in Appendix 2. They include making improvements to our public information and to our policies and procedures. Customer feedback also informs local action plans.

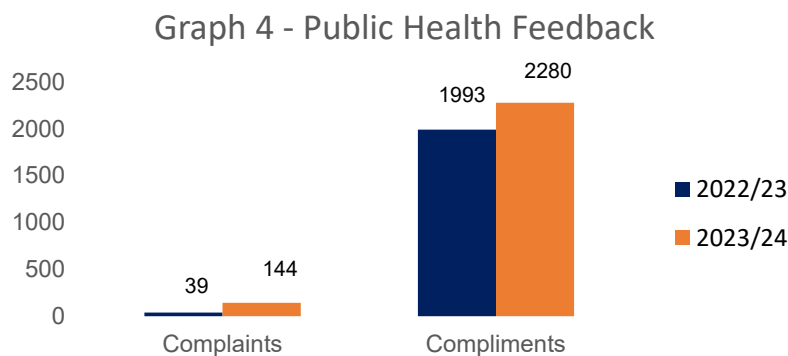
### 3. Public Health Commissioned Services

Public Health services are provided to the public through commissioned providers. However, as the council is responsible for the quality of these services, the performance of these contracts is monitored, and providers report back quarterly on their performance.

It is important to know about the performance of our contracts and that complaints procedures are accessible to the public.

Graph 4 shows that compliments have increased from 1993 in 2022/23 to 2280 in 2023/24 a welcome increase of 14%.

Graph 4 also shows that complaints have increased by over a factor of 3 from 39 in 2022/23 to 144 in 2023/24. However, this is probably due to better recording and the fact that commissioned providers are open to customer feedback and want to learn from customer experiences.



20% of all public health compliments were received by Lancaster University. They provide training in educational establishments to enable staff to support their own emotional and mental wellbeing and that of colleagues, and to identify and support and



respond to the emotional and mental wellbeing of students. They have received no formal complaints for the year.

15% of complaints were received from Change Grow Live East Lancs followed closely by Central & North with 9%. This service provides a recovery orientated community substance misuse treatment service for adults 18+ and their family/carers/supporting others. These services received 17 and 22 complaints respectively.

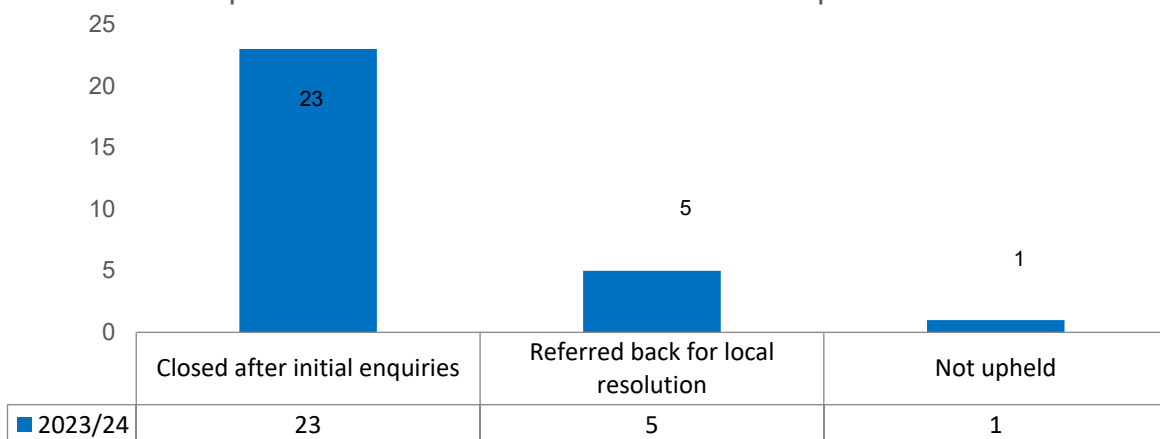
12% of the compliments were received from Positive Action in the Community (PAIC). They coordinate the delivery of Face to Face and Online Youth Mental Health and Suicide Prevention training. Offering this to those who live or work in the Lancashire area and work with Children and Young people (excluding BWD and Blackpool).

**4. Ombudsman Complaints**

Sometimes complaints are not upheld at Stage 2, and people remain dissatisfied. In total 29 separate corporate complaints were investigated by the Ombudsman in 2023/24 (32 separate corporate complaints were closed within the year in 2022/23). This is a slight decrease.

Graph 5 shows the outcome of complaints closed within the year (29 in total). It is very positive that of all the investigations undertaken, no complaints were upheld. Of the 29 complaints, 20 (69%) were about highways and transport, 7 were about corporate and other services and 2 were about planning and development. Out of all the corporate complaints that were considered by the Ombudsman, none were upheld. This is a very positive outcome which shows that our local processes for resolving customer reports of dissatisfaction and considering corporate complaints at Stages 1 and 2 are proportionate and fair.

Graph 5 - Final outcome of Ombudsman complaints 2023/24



There were no Ombudsman public reports in 2023/24 which is also very positive for the reputation of the council.





## Appendix 1: Examples of Compliments

### Public Health

*"The way in which I was spoken to by the psychologist and the level of trust within the meeting was excellent. It is extremely useful to discuss situations happening in school with somebody external. It gave me clarity and clear next steps."*

*"The psychologist seemed very knowledgeable, made me feel at ease and assured me that I was doing everything that I could in this situation. They listened and are going to look for services that may be able to help us."*

*"Following this meeting I feel much more confident that the nurturing approach I have as a teacher is the right way to be for the children in my care."*

*"It was a good opportunity to discuss and clarify our thinking. The identification of strategies and resources was also useful."*

### Libraries, Museums, Culture & Registrars

*Last week I came to the campus library and I needed assistance with my blue badge renewal application form. I was very pleased with the level of service received from Y, one of the librarians. I have today been notified that I have been given my blue badge. I would like to thank Y for her assistance as without her help I may not have received this. She deserves a medal for the level of service that I received. Lancashire County Council are very lucky to have such good employees".*

### Garstang Library Staff Libraries, Museums, Culture & Registrars

*"My work involves me travelling all over the country and much of the time I use libraries to do my email and computer work.*

*I just wanted to let you know what a BRILLIANT PLACE I have found GARSTANG LIBRARY to be!*

*It's a real joy to witness the superb staff, their kindness and ability to communicate with both young and old. I have so loved seeing the tiny tots being read too, with mums and dads, the older clients being looked after particularly when struggling a little with modern tec.*

*As I write this, I am having a warm coffee and witnessing a couple reading newspapers in a secure, warm, welcoming environment!*

*A sheer Joy. I am dyslexic (only diagnosed aged 59) if the libraries had been places like this when I was growing up I would have jumped for JOY! THANKYOU.*



*Thanks to your team and do please encourage this model in the UK."*

## **Complaints**

*"People are very quick to complain when things aren't right, so it's nice to be able to say thank you when people go the extra mile.*

*To confirm we are happy to withdraw our complaint now. "*

## **Welfare Rights**

*"The advice and support from A was faultless. Nothing was too much trouble for him. He answered all queries at a level that I could understand. He also understood the effect my illness had on me and tailored advice to it. My husband also had some interaction with A and thought the level of service was excellent. I honestly do not think I would have been successful in receiving PIP if it wasn't for A."*

## **Waste Management**

*"I just wanted to email about the experience I received whilst I was at Carnforth Recycling Centre a few weekends ago. I was clearing out my late husband's garage and I and S were working that weekend. They both really stood out as fantastic human beings. I wasn't sure where everything went but they pointed me in the right direction, I was quite emotional as my husband was only young and I was dreading clearing out his garage but just having I and S being helpful, supportive and just friendly made the whole experience more bearable."*

## **Highways Street Cleaning Team**

*"I reported a problem on Sunday about a blocked gully, and this morning International Rescue arrived in the form of a Lancashire County Council truck, or should I say Thunderbird 3.*

*A and V disembarked and proceeded to use hoses, suction equipment, hammers and scoops. On hands and knees, they removed rubble and bricks and washed it all down. Great men who were personable and super-efficient. When finished I watched Thunderbird 3 move off to sort out more issues around the village. Could not ask for better service. Well done everyone."*

## **Highways 'Treescapes' Team.'**

*"Officers of the above responded to my concerns about the loss of trees in my area, Aughton Village, by providing a site visit, then supporting and agreeing to replace trees that had been lost, and then also ensuring trees in the local area were inspected and confirmed as safe. Their work will have a positive impact on green spaces, wildlife, air quality and provide a legacy for the next generation in Aughton village. They were exemplary in their conduct and professionalism when dealing with me and a credit to public service. Thank you."*



## Appendix 2: Learning from Corporate complaints.

1. As a result of a complaint about our catering service team, Trading Standards undertook a review which resulted in a number of actions:
  - we updated a number of Health and Safety policies and procedures including a new allergen control policy for schools;
  - catering staff were informed of those changes;
  - training was provided to schools; and
  - the school concerned changed the way they served food to children with food intolerances and changed its menus.
  
2. Several changes were made to various webpages on the Council website as a result of outdated, inaccurate or incorrect information including information on residential parking and fines.
  
3. The complaints team agreed a protocol for the sharing of sensitive information with other council colleagues in response to a number of pictures and social media posts which the team received in relation to complaints about individuals and which needed to be shared carefully.
  
4. The complaints team also agreed a 'Reasonable adjustments for appellants and complainants' protocol in response to increasing numbers of complaints about breaches to the Equality Act (2010).
  
5. A public health service user was unhappy they had tried to contact their keyworker on their mobile and had not had a response. The staff member was off sick. A new process is now in place where service users are informed via text message when a worker is off unwell for more than 1 week and given contact details for the service to reach out if any support is needed prior to their next appointment. All staff also include in their voicemail if the caller does not receive a response within 48 hours to call the main hub and someone else will be able to support them.
  
6. A substance misuse service user raised a concern regarding Espranor. As a strict vegan, he was disappointed that he wasn't informed of the gelatine in his medication at the start of his treatment journey. As a result, apologies were made as well as changes to service delivery. Now each person who wishes to access opioid substitution therapy is given the necessary information about options and the appropriate is information given in respect of allergy advice, ethical values and religious practices.
  
7. The complaints team:
  - holds regular meetings with the Highways District Lead Team, Customer Access and Customer Access Highways teams,
  - amplifies the customer voice within services to ensure complainants are heard and areas of dissatisfaction are responded to,



- provides training and works closely with all council teams to resolve complaints at the lowest possible level in order to prevent escalation within the complaints process; and,
- works with services to identify and embed lessons learnt from upheld complaints.

