Lancashire County Council

Corporate Complaints and Customer Feedback

For the period 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026

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1 Introduction

This report is for the period 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026 and covers corporate (non-statutory) complaints and compliments for all council direct provision.

This report does not cover the wider activity in responding to customer enquiries by other council teams such as the Customer Access Service and excludes adult social care and children's complaints (including Special Educational Needs) 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:

corporate-complaints-procedure.pdf

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.

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

2. Background

This report considers highways data for the 12-month period 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026 and non-highways related feedback data from 1 April 2025 until 1 February 2026. When necessary, the report extrapolates the data for the full financial year 2025/2026. This report also includes Public Health feedback from commissioned services for the full period (section 4).

Following the implementation of a new complaints handling system on 2 February 2026, there have been limitations in reporting and data extraction which has impacted on the data required to produce this annual report. The new system has also created challenges in tracking and progressing complaint responses. As an interim measure, alternative tracking arrangements have been introduced to strengthen oversight and ensure complaints continue to be actively monitored.

The new system was introduced alongside new complaint handling arrangements with the Complaint Handling Code, (the Code) introduced by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman recently.

A complaint is now defined as:

"***an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the organisation, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting an individual or group of individuals.'***

The introduction of the Code has changed expectations around complaint handling, including clearer acceptance of complaints, tighter timescales, and increased scrutiny of performance. As a result, matters that may previously have been resolved informally or managed through longer internal processes now require formal logging, investigation, and responses within defined statutory standards.

This has resulted in an increased complaint workload for the council, in particular the Highways Complaints and Enquires Team, which is proving very challenging to manage (see section 3.3).

There has also been an increase in manual work for the Complaints Team, because of the limited reporting available on the new system, which has also impacted on its capacity to maintain previous recording and learning arrangements during this period.

Restoring effective shared learning arrangements is a priority. Work is ongoing to improve reporting functionality within the new system and once this is resolved, the learning from complaints, comments and compliments will again be systematically captured, shared and embedded across the council.

3. Summary of Corporate Feedback in 2025/26

In 2025/26 a total of 147 formal complaints were made at Stages 1 and 2 of the Corporate Complaints Procedure. In 2024/25, 93 formal complaints were made, so this is a rise of 58%.

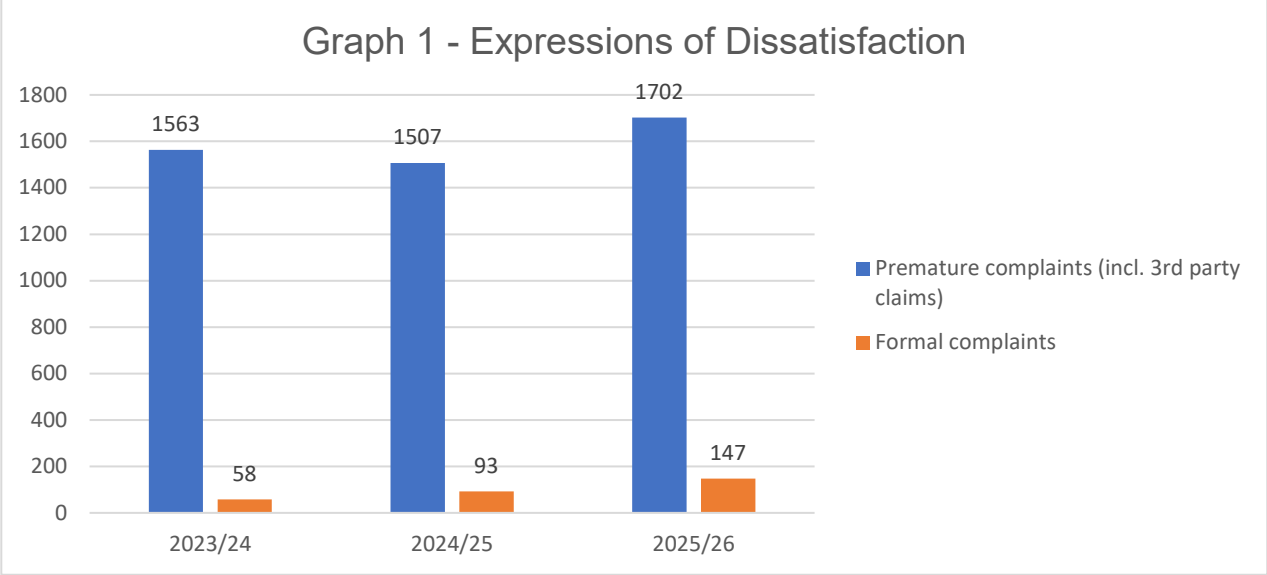
The number of 'views' of the complaint's pages on the LCC website was 14,356. This has gone up by 2% from 14,132 in 2024/25.

A total of 33 final decisions were made by the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (the Ombudsman) in 2025/26; of these, 20 investigations were specifically about Highways and Transport, and only one was upheld. Further details are in section 5 of this report.

Recommendations have resulted in improvements to public information on our website, improved communication and engagement with customers and staff training has also been provided.

3.1 Breakdown of feedback

Graph 1 shows of the 1961 closed corporate related expressions of dissatisfaction and complaints, 87% (1702) were premature complaints. A complaint is considered to be premature if the council has not had a reasonable opportunity to deal with the issue through normal business as usual processes. Most of these were first time reports and were resolved as part of ongoing business matters and by proactive management action. Of the others, 6% were third party claims, dealt with by our legal teams (112). Just 147 (7%) of matters went on to become formal or informal complaints for the period. The trend is therefore upwards for the overall number of complaints between 2023/24 to 2025/26.



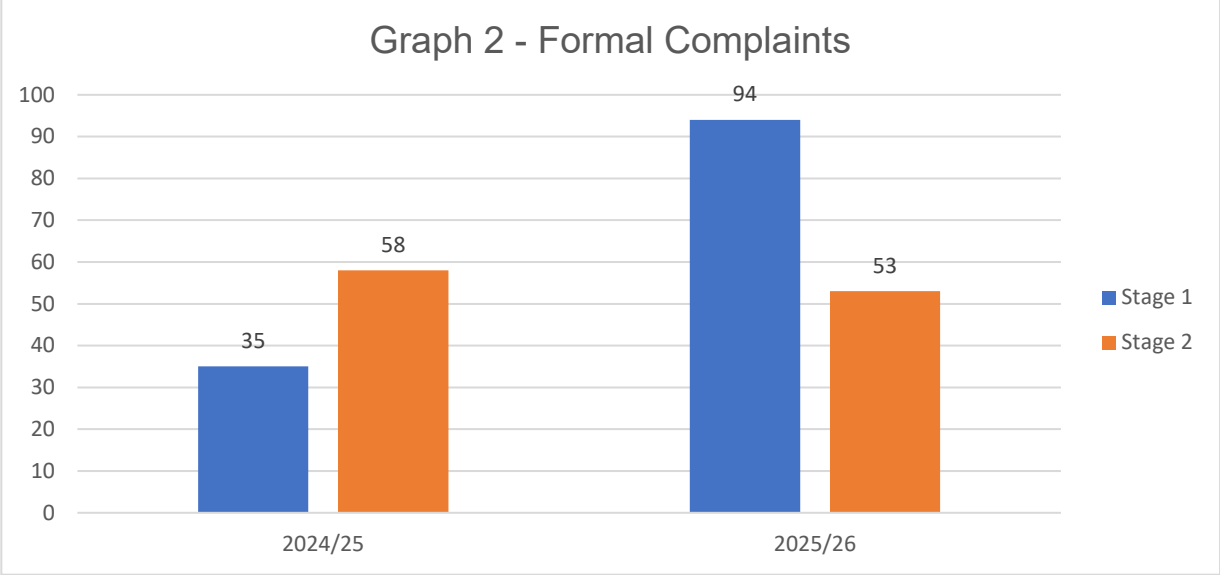
3.2 What do people make corporate complaints about?

As set out above, for Highways, the data below refers to the 12-month period: 1 April 2025 - 31 March 2026. For all other services, the data refers to the 10-month period: 1 April 2025 - 1 February 2026.

There were 93 Stage 1 recorded complaints of which 87 were Highways and the other 6 complaints were: 3 planning and environment, 2 public rights of way, and 1 about equality rights. Based on the timeframes, it is estimated that there would have been 1 additional non-highways complaint if data was available for the full year, making an estimated total of 94.

There were 52 Stage 2 recorded complaints of which 39 were highways, 3 Legal, Governance and registration services, 2 data protection / freedom of information, 2 planning and environment, one trading standards, 2 estates, one equality, one public health and one about school safeguarding. Based on the timeframes, it is estimated that there would have been 1 additional non-highways complaint if data was available for the full year, making an estimated total of 53.

Graph 2 overleaf shows a breakdown of the147 complaints made at both stages. There has been a 58% rise in complaints since 2024/25, particularly at Stage 1 in the procedure as all expressions of dissatisfaction are now being counted as complaints in line with the Code.



Most complaints are upheld at Stage 1 (80%) with 20% not upheld. This shows that most people make complaints that are justified. At Stage 2 most complaints are not upheld (86%) with just 14% upheld. This shows that the council generally admits when things go wrong and tries to put the matter right at the first stage of the procedure.

3.3 Highways and Transport

Highways and Transport continue to be the service area with the most complaints. There were 126 complaints (87 Stage 1 and 39 Stage 2) for the 12-month period. These complaints account for 86% of all corporate complaints featured in this report.

The reason that Highways attracts so many 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. The most common reason for complaints against this service is poor communication and lack of updates.

The introduction of the new Code has had a big impact on the numbers of Highways complaints. Before the Code was introduced, in the first 10 months of 2025/26, formal complaints averaged at 7.5 complaints per month.

After the Code was launched (on 2 February until 31 March 2026), there were 51 formal complaints which averages 25.5 per month.

From these figures we can deduce that there was an overall 240% increase in Highways formal complaints in the first 2 months after the launch of the Code. This is because all matters of dissatisfaction which meet the new definition in the Code are considered to be complaints, rather than being referred directly back to the service for resolution.

Most highways and transport complaints are resolved at Stage 1 and do not progress to Stage 2. Stage 1 complaints went up from an average of 4.3 per month rising to 22 per month (a rise of 412%) but the full impact will only be appreciated in the 2026/27 figures, which are already evidencing a large rise in Highways related formal complaints.

This increase is therefore not a short-term fluctuation; it reflects a sustained change in demand and process requirements.

3.4 Internal learning from complaints

We aim to learn from the customer voice and improve services when complaints are upheld. 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. When complaint themes are identified, the Complaints Teams across the council work alongside senior managers in operational teams to address any common concerns.

3.5 Compliments

During the reporting period, there were 373 compliments recorded for corporate services. There were 280 compliments for Welfare Rights, 55 Registration Service, 26 compliments for Highways, and 12 for Cultural Services (which includes Libraries)

It is likely that this number represents under reporting of compliments, for the following reasons:

1. Many compliments are made directly or personally to individual staff, and these are often not formally captured by the council's systems
2. Capacity issues within the corporate complaints team meant that some compliments could not be captured by the team
3. It is difficult for customers to find how to make a compliment using the council website
4. The new compliments reporting pathway uses the complaints system and is more complicated to use than in the past.

3.6 Compliment Word Cloud

A word cloud from compliments is shown below. Appendix 1 details examples of compliments made for highways, public health, libraries and registration teams.



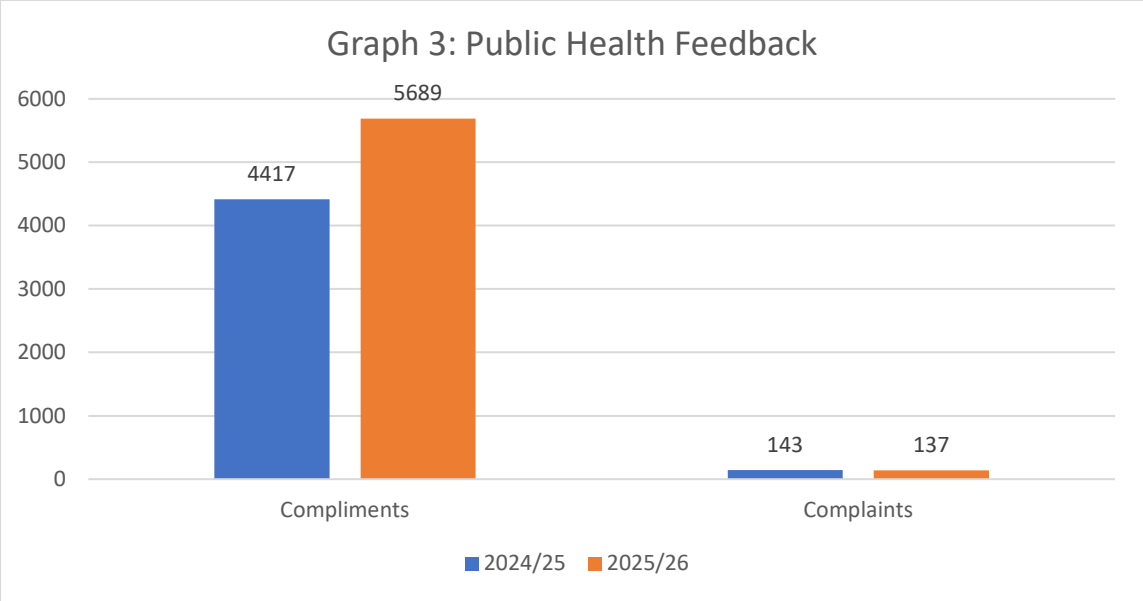
4. Public Health Commissioned Services

Public Health complaints are considered under [The NHS Bodies and Local Authorities (Partnership Arrangements, Care Trusts, Public Health and Local Healthwatch) Regulations 2012 (legislation.gov.uk)]

Public Health services are provided through commissioned providers. As part of contract monitoring arrangements, providers report complaints, compliments and learning outcomes throughout the year, therefore these figures are reported separately in this report. Monitoring feedback helps ensure services remain accessible, responsive and focused on continuous improvement.

4.1 Breakdown of feedback

Graph 3 below shows that during 2025/26, commissioned Public Health services recorded 5,689 compliments and 137 complaints. Compliments therefore significantly outweigh complaints and demonstrate positive experiences across a range of services. Feedback continues to be used by providers to improve service delivery and identify areas for learning.



4.2 Compliments

Most compliments (74%) are made for a small number of providers as follows:

- FCMS is a Social Enterprise health and wellbeing services provider, which runs NHS Health Checks in local communities, workplaces, and places of worship to help prevent illness and improve long-term health. In 2025/26 they received the highest proportion of compliments, accounting for 32% of all feedback (in 2024/25 this was 33% of all feedback). Feedback consistently highlighted the professionalism, friendliness and knowledge of staff, together with the accessible nature of the service. No formal complaints were reported during the year.

- Safenet and its partners received 13% of all compliments. Service users praised the support provided to individuals fleeing domestic abuse and valued the compassionate and person-centred approach taken by staff.

- National Childbirth Trust (NCT) received 9% of compliments. Feedback reflected the positive impact of infant feeding support provided to new parents, particularly assistance with breastfeeding and practical guidance during the early stages of parenthood.

- East Lancashire Hospitals Trust received 7% of compliments relating to the universal vision screening service. Parents highlighted efficient communication, timely follow-up and overall satisfaction with the service.

- Positive Action in the Community received 7% of compliments for its mental health and suicide awareness training programmes, with participants describing the training as engaging, informative and supportive.

- Change Grow Live received 6% of compliments. Service users and family members described the recovery service as life-changing and recognised the commitment and support provided by staff.

Other assorted organisations accounted for the other quarter of all compliments.

4.3 Complaints and Learning

A total of 137 complaints were recorded during 2025/26, of which 22 (18%) were upheld, with none referred to Lancashire County Council for investigation.

The main learning from complaints was as follows:

- Safenet and partners received 40 complaints—one complaint related to information sharing between agencies. Following investigation, the provider demonstrated that seeking service user consent before releasing address details represented good safeguarding and confidentiality practice. This reinforced the importance of balancing information sharing with service user confidentiality.

- Change Grow Live recorded 48 complaints during the year. Themes included telephone access, communication and prescribing decisions. In response, a new telephone system was introduced from October 2025 to improve accessibility. Where complaints related to prescribing decisions, learning identified the need for clearer explanations and direct communication regarding clinical rationale.

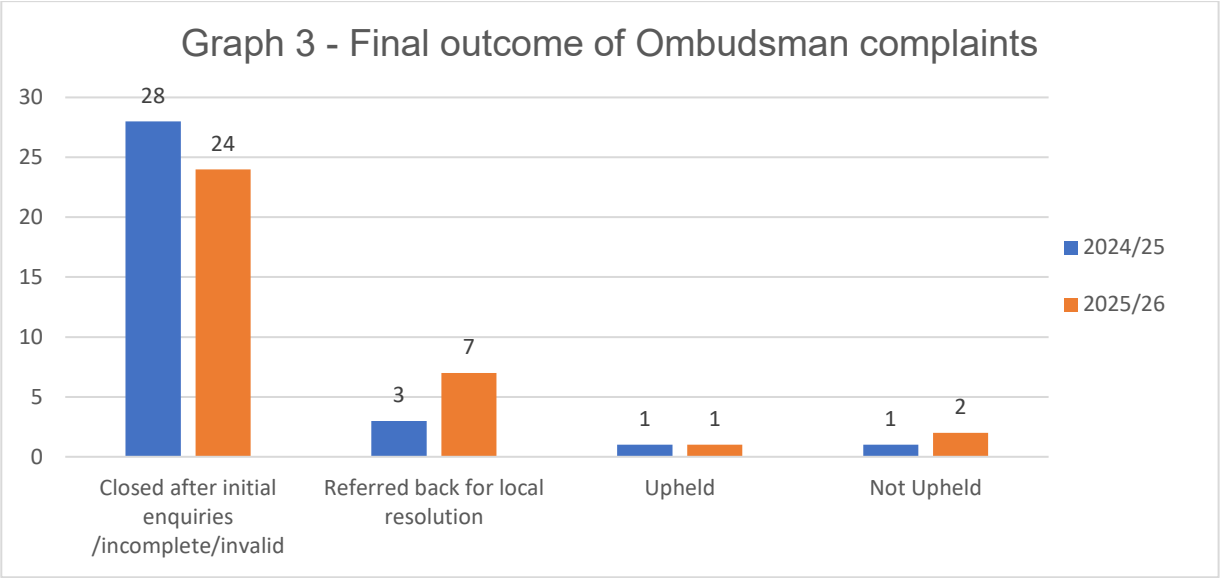
Other assorted organisations accounted for the other 49 complaints.

The council monitors activities, reviews complaints procedures and engages with service users to determine whether they feel confident and supported in raising complaints, and whether the process is accessible to them. Providers continue to use complaints as an opportunity to improve service quality, strengthen communication processes and ensure lessons learned are embedded within service delivery.

5. Ombudsman Complaints

Sometimes complaints are not upheld at Stage 2, and people remain dissatisfied. A total of 43 corporate complaint enquires were received by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman in 2025/26. Of these 34 separate corporate complaints were investigated (compared with 33 in 2024/25).

Graph 3 shows the outcome of corporate complaints closed within the year (34 in total).



Of the 34 complaints, 25 investigations (74%) were about highways and transport. This is by far the biggest theme. Other investigations were about rights of way, planning, and parking.

Of the 34 investigations undertaken, only one complaint was upheld. It was about a significant delay to a Definitive Map Modification Order which was not submitted to the Planning Inspectorate. As a remedy the council referred the decision to the Environment, Economic Growth and Transport Scrutiny Committee in November 2025. It was resolved that the council be asked to consider*:*

- *Reviewing all Public Rights of Way processes to determine where appropriate if efficiencies could be made and to present these to a future scheduled meeting of the committee.*
- *If the former Local Delivery Scheme could be reintroduced to help support with the backlog.*

Most Ombudsman investigations (71%) are closed after initial enquiries. This is a very positive outcome which shows that our internal local processes for resolving customer reports of dissatisfaction and closing corporate complaints stand up to external audit and scrutiny.

There were no Ombudsman public reports in 2025/26 which is also positive for the reputation of the council. We therefore consider that our processes for considering corporate complaints at Stages 1 and 2 are proportionate and fair.

Appendix 1: Examples of Compliments

Welfare Rights

1. Not being aware of possible benefits due to us it was a pleasant surprise to be informed of considerable help that could come our way via the Welfare Rights Service. We would not have been able to negotiate our way through the form filling without expert help from Welfare staff.

2. Your Welfare Rights Service is excellent, plenty of compliments for K Y who has been excellent. Very good on the phone, so helpful and friendly. I wish all staff in the Welfare Rights Service all the best.

3. We are very impressed by and grateful to Welfare Rights. Your service has made a huge difference to our situation and lifestyle. We had no idea of our benefit entitlements or how to go about getting them. We would like to send special thanks to C P for her outstanding help, empathy and patience and for making us feel at ease she presents as a really nice, caring person who is very much doing a good job.

Registration Services

1. To all staff at Burnley Registration office, A very, very sincere 'thank you' to each one of you for always making it so easy for me to register Sisters' deaths. You are most helpful, courteous, caring and pleasant.

2. We would be grateful if you could pass on a big thank you to the celebrants/registrars S and D for their exceptional service during our marriage ceremony on 25 April 2025 at the Clitheroe Library Clocktower. Even though we had planned for a laid-back ceremony, we were nevertheless nervous. But D and S accommodated for our quirkiness with warmth and professionalism and they helped us navigate our wedding day with ease. They also went above and beyond by helping out with photo taking (and the photos turned out amazing!). We are incredibly grateful for the significant part they played in our celebration, and they really helped to make the day exceed our expectations.

3. Thank you again for all your help earlier this month! Please pass on thanks again from both of us to all the team from Lancaster who helped us a couple of weeks ago. Everyone we spoke to was incredibly helpful and made a real effort to make sure things got sorted for us. We were very grateful for all the support in what was a bit of a difficult and stressful situation**!**

Highways

1. I just wanted to thank you for the work carried out at my address to address the flooding issues we have had. I also wanted you to know that the gentlemen who came out were very professional.
2. Thank you so much for repairing the lamppost so promptly. We are very impressed.
3. The customer called to give his compliments as light has now been fixed and is working extremely well. The customer is happy with the service and wanted to give his thanks to Highways.
4. The customer called to provide a compliment to M. Customer very pleased that the problem with the noisy manhole cover outside his property was dealt with so quickly and thanked M and LCC for listening and acting so quickly to resolve the issue.
5. I just wanted to send a thank you to be passed on to the team who worked so hard on resurfacing Albany Road in Lytham St Annes especially the crew who tarmacked on Friday. They all worked incredibly hard and the road surface is so much better now the house doesn't shake anymore when a bus goes through the potholes

Public Health

1. The majority of compliments refer to the healthcare assistants as being pleasant and friendly yet professional.

2. It was a really good experience. The NCT team were very cooperative and guided me every single step.

3. Very happy with the follow-up call we received within 24 hours.

4. Thank you for all your help and support; you have given me a strength that I didn't know I had.