

# Knowsley Council 'Have Your Say' Annual Report 2022-23

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## 1. Introduction

Every year, Knowsley Council publishes an annual report to provide a summary of the complaints and compliments the Council has received and how they have been dealt with.

Feedback from residents and service users is important to the Council. It is an opportunity to identify and address problems, learn from our mistakes and good practice, and continue to improve what we do.

### Why do we produce this report?

- To be open and transparent about the complaints we receive, how we have responded, and what we have done to put things right.
- To explain what we have learnt from the feedback we have received.
- To encourage people to get in touch to tell us about their experiences.

### What is a complaint?

A complaint is defined by the Council as an expression of dissatisfaction made about the Council, its services, staff, or an action of an organisation providing a service on behalf of the Council.

The Council's aim is to resolve complaints as quickly as possible, whilst ensuring a thorough and fair investigation.

The Council's **'Have your Say'** policy incorporates three areas.

- Corporate Complaints
- Adults Social Care Complaints
- Childrens Social Care Complaints

Each of these have an escalation stage to allow the complainant an opportunity to request further review if they remain dissatisfied following the first response. Once each stage of the process has been exhausted, the complainant may contact the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.

Comments and compliments are also captured through the process, providing service users with further options to engage with the Council and share their views.

A copy of the Council's 'Have Your Say' policy and procedures can be found on the Council's website by following link;

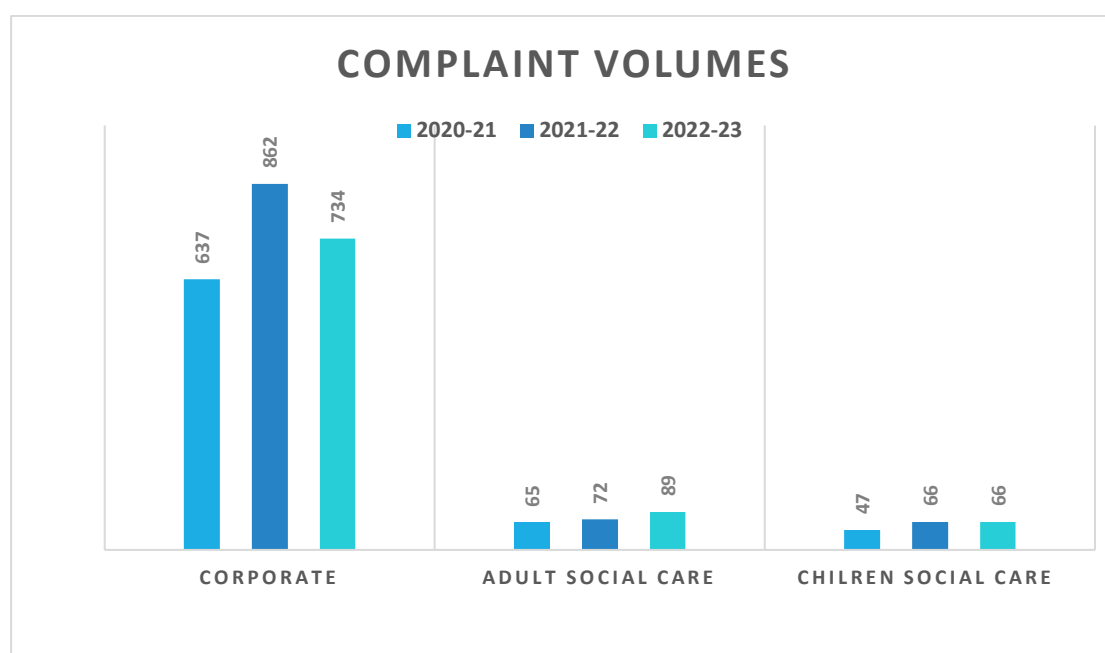
<https://secured.knowsley.gov.uk/haveyoursayform>.

## 2. Summary of complaints received in 2022-23

In 2022-23, the total number of complaints received by the Council was 889. This is a reduction of 111 from the previous year's total of 1,000.

The highest volume of complaints are dealt with through the Corporate Complaints process which includes all Council services, apart from Children's and Adult's Social Care.

Of the three areas incorporated within the process (Corporate, Adults and Children's), complaint volumes received for each and comparisons to previous years are shown below.



The percentage change in comparison to the previous reporting year is shown in the table below.

Complaint area	2021-22	2022-23	% change
Corporate	862	734	-14%
Adult Social Care	72	89	+19%
Childrens Social Care	66	66	static
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,000</b>	<b>889</b>	<b>-11%</b>

Overall complaints have reduced by 11% in the last 12 months. This includes a 14% reduction in Corporate Complaints and a 19% increase in Adult Social Care complaints.

Whilst Adult Social Care complaints have increased by 19% between 2021-22 and 2022-23, since 2017-18, the number of complaints received annually within Adult Social Care was between 72 and 100 complaints. This equates to less than 3% of the service user base.

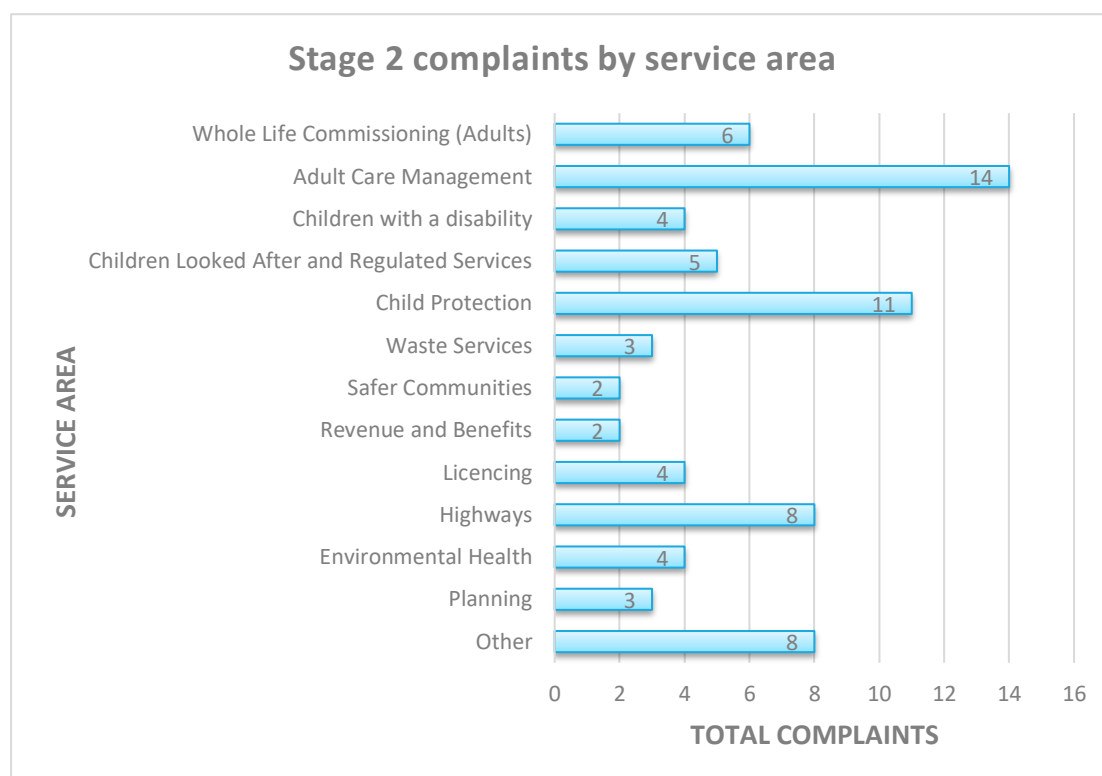
### Stage Two complaints

If a complainant is unhappy with the Council's response to their complaint, the complaint can be escalated to stage two of the complaint's procedure. This provides a further opportunity to review the issues raised by the complainant to ensure that the response at stage one has responded to all the concerns raised within the complaint and that the response is both proportionate and reasonable.

Of the 889 complaints received, 92% were resolved successfully at the first stage of the complaints process without the need for further review. This is a small improvement on the previous year's result of 91% resolved successfully at stage one. A total of 74 complaints were escalated to stage two.

Area	Total complaints	Complaints escalated to Stage 2	% of complaints escalated
Corporate	734	32	4%
Adult Social Care	89	21	24%
Childrens Social Care	66	21	32%

The table below shows a breakdown of stage two complaints by service area.



Escalation to stage two does not necessarily mean that there has been any failing on the part of the Council. It can simply mean that the complainant disagrees with the outcome of the stage one complaint. Further details on volume of complaints upheld can be found at [Section 5](#) of this report.

The highest volume of escalations to stage two were received in Adult Social Care and Children's Social Care. These were often received from residents who

are dissatisfied with the outcome of a decision made regarding care assessments, financial assessment or the Council intervening as part of their statutory safeguarding duties to protect children. The complaint process can also be used as an appeal process for Adult Social Care decisions rather than dissatisfaction of the service they have received.

### 3. Response Times

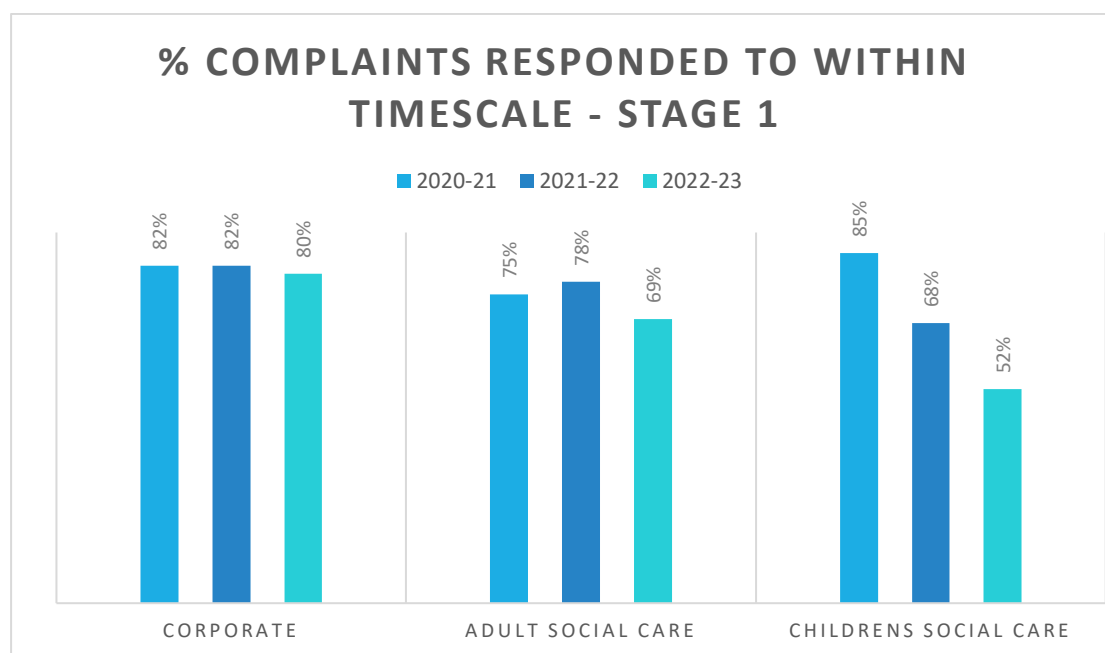
#### Stage one

The Council's response time targets for stage one complaints are as follows;

- Corporate Complaints – 15 working days
- Adults Social Care Complaints – 15 working days
- Childrens Social Care Complaints – 10 working days

All complaint processes have an option to extend the timescale should further time be required to investigate the matter thoroughly. If this is the case, the Council will write to the complainant to explain the reason why and provide the new response date.

The time taken to respond and resolve complaints in 2022-23 at stage one is shown in the table below and provides a comparison to the two previous reporting years.



Response to corporate complaints within 15 working days has remained relatively static during the last three reporting years.

There are reductions in the timeliness of Adult Social Care and Children's Social Care complaint responses compared to previous years. In 2022-23 Adult

Social Care complaints responded to within timescale dropped to 69% and Children’s Social Care to 52%.

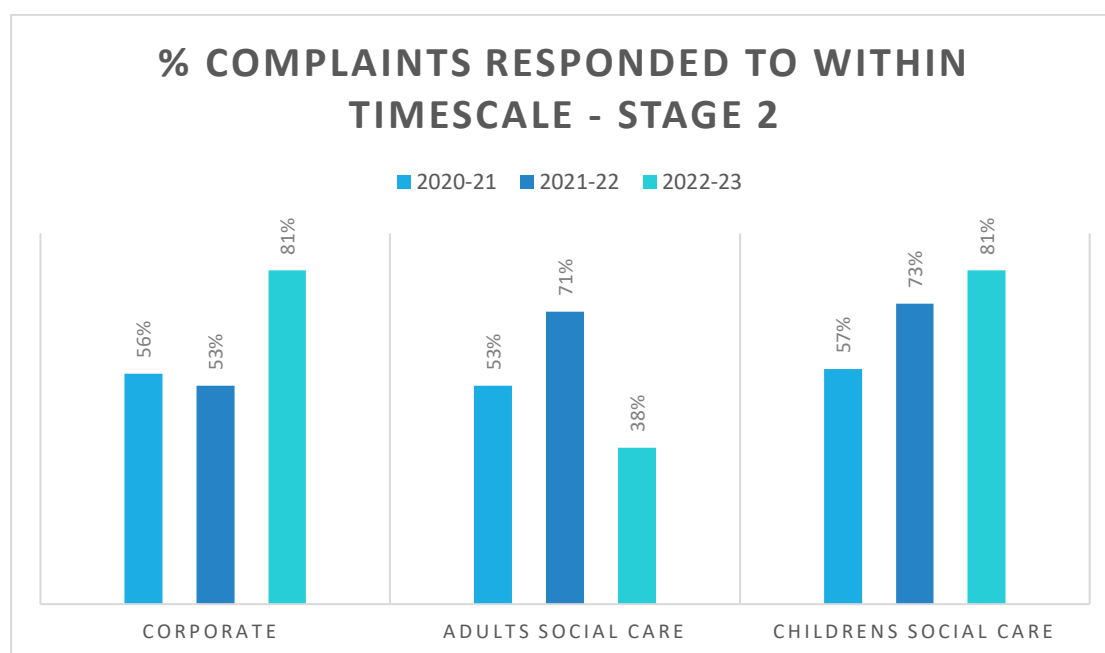
## Stage Two

The Council’s response time targets for stage two complaints are as follows;

- Corporate Complaints – 15 working days
- Adults Social Care Complaints – 15 working days
- Childrens Social Care Complaints – 25 working days

All complaint processes have an option to extend the timescale should further time be required to investigate the matter thoroughly. If this is the case, the Council will write to the complainant to explain the reason why and provide the new response date.

The time taken to respond and resolve complaints in 2022-23 at stage two is shown in the table below and provides a comparison to the two previous reporting years.



The response time for both Corporate and Children’s Social Care complaints at stage two improved in 2022-23. The complaints team issue regular reminders and support officers to ensure a timely and quality response is provided to the complainant.

However, the timeliness of responding to Adult Social Care complaints at Stage two fell considerably in 2022-23 with only 38% responded to within target.

Reduction in the timeliness of stage one responses within Adult and Children’s Social Care and stage two responses in Adult Social Care can, in part, be attributed to challenges associated with workforce sufficiency, including higher than average vacancy rates across the services. In addition, the increase in

complexity of service demand, resulting in an increase in the number of cases, and a resultant increase in waiting times for services.

A review of the complaints process has recently been undertaken to identify ways to improve the customer experience. The recommendations from the review should help the Council to investigate and respond to complaints in a timelier manner. More information about our review can be found in [Section 9](#) of this report.

### Childrens Social Care Complaints – Stage Three

Where stage two of the Children’s Social Care complaints procedure has been completed and the complainant remains dissatisfied, it is possible to request further consideration of the complaint by a Review Panel.

In 2022-23, one complaint progressed through an independent review panel hearing. The panel provided their findings and recommendations to the Council, which were accepted, and appropriate action was taken. The process was completed in full and within the agreed response timescale.

## 4. Types of Complaints

The table below provides a further breakdown of the complaint volumes received by service area.

Service	Volume
Waste Management	225
Childrens Services and Education	138
Adult Services	114
Highways	110
Licencing	75
Revenue and Benefits	60
Environmental Sustainability and Parks and Green Spaces	35
Street Scene	29
Environmental Health	25
Strategic Housing	15
Planning/Building Control	12
Safer Communities	11
Contact Centre	10
Insurance	6
Property & Development	4
Chief Executive	4
Street Lighting	3
Procurement	2
Cultural Museum and Galleries	2
Health & Safety	1



Employment Initiative	1
Knowsley Business Park	1
Major Projects	1
Town Centre Management	1
Elections	1
Human Resources	1
Information Governance	1
Libraries	1

## Corporate Complaints

Below is a summary of the top four services that received the highest number of corporate complaints:

1. Waste & Recycling, 225 complaints (31%)
2. Highways, 110 complaints (15%)
3. Licencing, 75 complaints (10%)
4. Revenue and Benefits services 60 (8%)

The highest number of corporate complaints received for this year related to Waste and Recycling. This area also received the highest volume of complaints in 2021/22. This can be attributed to the fact that there is a high number of service users, with every household and business in Knowsley accessing the service every week. The themes for this service area included missed collections, changes to collection routes and disputed charges for replacement bins.

Highways received 15% of the complaints overall. Types of complaint included in this category relate to potholes, traffic controls, drainage, parking issues and disruption caused by roadworks. There are also complaints disputing the issue of parking enforcement notices.

Complaints were made to the Licencing Team because of delays in the issue of both new and renewal taxi licences. At the beginning of 2022, the Council's Licensing service started to experience extreme pressure following a sharp increase in new private hire driver applications as the economy and the taxi industry started to recover. The service area has since implemented new procedures to improve performance and the customer experience.

The Revenue and Benefits service received complaints relating to the collection of Council tax, enforcement notices, incorrect billing and change of circumstances.

## Adult's Social Care Complaints (ASC)

1. ASC Communication, 20 complaints (23%)
2. ASC Commissioned Service, 19 complaints (21%)
3. ASC Finance, 19 complaints (21%)
4. ASC Assessment and Care Plans 14 complaints (16%)

5. ASC Other, 11 complaint (12%)
6. ASC Safeguarding, 6 complaints (7%)

The largest proportion of complaints relate to communication. This can be requests for updates on current cases, disagreement with meeting minutes, and delays in receiving assessments or the factual content. This category also contains complaints regarding contact with staff for example not being able to contact a social worker by telephone, messages not returned, or letters not responded to in a timely manner. This is in part, a result of ongoing challenges associated with workforce sufficiency within the national social care sector, but one which the Council are committed to addressing via the new processes in place in Adult Social Care, to more effectively manage and learn from the complaints we receive.

Complaints about a commissioned service can include late or missed service calls by a Domiciliary Care Provider, inconsistency with the care assistants supplied, or the requirement of a specialist care worker. Commissioned complaints were also received about residential, nursing, or Elderly Mentally Infirm (EMI) Care Homes. Concerns will be raised due to visiting restrictions and general care.

Financial complaints relate to the client contribution to their care. This may include the lack of an explanation how a client is financially assessed. The category also includes the cost of care homes, day services and the amount of disability related expenditure awarded to a service user.

Complaints regarding assessments and care plans can be about the delivery of services, for example the reduction in a care package or the delay in providing care. In many of these cases, the changes to care packages have resulted from a change to the person's assessed need. The Council is not required to provide services to meet needs that are not considered eligible under the Care Act 2014.

The outcome of safeguarding investigations can result in complaints, whether a safeguarding enquiry reaches the correct threshold for investigation or how the outcome has been communicated to the family.

Many of these complaints are not upheld (see [Section 5](#)) as complaints are dissatisfied with the decision based on the Adult Social Care Charging Policy or the outcome of the Safeguarding investigation rather than dissatisfaction of the service received, and they use the complaints process to appeal the decision.

### **Childrens Social Care Complaints (CSC)**

1. Communication, 26 complaints (39%)
2. Child Protection, 22 complaints (34%)
3. Finance, 8 complaints (12%)
4. Other, 6 complaints (9%)
5. Contact and Access 4 complaints (6%)

Most complaints received are from parents or carers, rather than the child in care.

The highest volume of complaints received for Children's Social Care related to communication. These complaints include families requiring an update, disagreement with the contents of assessments, sharing of information between agencies, the lack of notice when scheduling meetings or meetings being cancelled at short notice. Complaints have also been received about contact with social workers, not being able to speak to a social worker by telephone, messages not being returned or letters unanswered. Every attempt is made for a social worker to speak to service users; however, social workers are not predominantly office based and it is not always possible to speak to a social worker as they may be out of the office on a visit.

Child protection complaints include allegations, placements, the actions and decisions of the Social Workers, assessments and support to children and families during these procedures. The amount of time a child may be placed on a child protection plan or the enforcement of a child protection plan.

Financial complaints relate to any payments provided by Children's Social Care. This could be the provision of a Fostering payment or a Special Guardianship Order payment. Complaints can link to the date of the assessment and payment, whether the qualifying criteria is met or when payments are stopped due to the child reaching the age of 18.

Children's Social Care manage contact orders, supervisions, and care orders. Complaints can be made about the perceived lack of contact with children, the venue for the contact to take place (i.e., in a children's centre or in the community) and whether contact is to be supervised. Cancellation of contact visits or change of venue, have also resulted in complaints.

## 5. Outcomes

A complaint is deemed to be upheld if the Council has investigated and finds evidence to support the claim or has had to take action to resolve the issue.

Of the 889 complaints received at stage 1, 37% were upheld or partially upheld. This is a slight increase compared to the previous year when 29% of the 1,000 complaints received were upheld.

74 complaints were escalated to stage two, with 23 upheld or partially upheld (31%), compared to a 20% upheld rate in 2021-22.

### Stage One

Area	Total complaints	Total Upheld	% upheld
Corporate	734	269	37%
Adult Social Care	89	37	42%
Childrens Social Care	66	20	30%
<b>Total</b>	<b>889</b>	<b>326</b>	<b>37%</b>

### Stage Two

Area	Total complaints	Total Upheld	% upheld
Corporate	32	10	31%
Adult Social Care	21	8	38%
Childrens Social Care	21	5	24%
<b>Total</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>31%</b>

## 6. Learning from complaints

Complaints are important to the Council. Feedback from service users tells us when things have gone wrong and provides an opportunity to learn from our mistakes and seek improvements.

A sample of positive improvements the Council has made is set out below.

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You said	We did
As taxi drivers we would like an option to meet face to face with an advisor when applying for a renewal or new taxi licence, not just offered the online service.	'Drop In' sessions are now available for applicants to help with applications. Notifications are sent by text/email to all drivers who have a licence that is due to expire.
I rang the Contact Centre and waited for so long before speaking to an advisor. I had no idea when the call would be answered.	We have introduced a call wait time announcement on our phone lines to let customers know how long their wait time will be. In addition, if the wait time is above our target, callers can leave their details, and an advisor will call them back on the same day.
The toddler swings have been removed in the play area in McGoldrick Park and my family used them regularly.	The swing had been vandalised, so we have replaced and reinstated a toddler swing seat within the park.
The streetlighting is too bright near the motorway and reflects into our homes.	We reviewed this and have now dimmed the setting on the lights and ordered new components to reduce the lighting further.
There are cars parking illegally and inconsiderately near my home.	Our team of Civil Enforcement Officers have been patrolling the area on a regular basis and have issued several fines. We continue to monitor the area.
I would like to speak to an advisor from the Contact Centre in person, not just on the phone or by webchat!	Our residents can now make an appointment to see an advisor in one of our Council libraries.
There has been a delay in my son receiving his trust fund money.	We have reviewed the process we follow for informing the Trust Fund when a child has ceased to be a looked after child. An appropriate status change form can be completed, and the trust fund or ISA transferred to the child, parents, or carers.
What styles of parenting do you promote for foster families?	Our Fostering Service will consider and review in the 22/23 training and development plan whether carers should adopt a specific parenting style.
No one told me that I'll be financially assessed for client contributions.	Team Managers engaged with their teams to ensure more effective and improved communication takes place with the finance team. This will help to improve the customer

	experience and the timeliness of completing financial assessments.
I phoned the Council to request an assessment and I believe there was an unnecessary delay between my phone call and getting the service I needed.	The First Response staff have been reminded a coordinated approach should be taken, to ensure we communicate effectively and in a timely manner.

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

If customers are not satisfied with the way their complaint has been handled by the Council, they can contact the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's office.

The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) can investigate individual complaints about councils, to consider if decisions have been made in the right way. A complaint is upheld when fault is found in an organisation's actions. The LGSCO will make recommendations to put things right when faults have caused injustice.

The LGSCO report that in the last two years they have reviewed internal practices to make best use of the resources they have available. One outcome is to be more selective about the complaints they investigate, prioritising those where it is in the public interest to do so. As the LGSCO are less likely to carry out investigations on borderline issues, they are naturally finding a higher proportion of fault overall.

The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman reported that it had investigated a total of two complaints for Knowsley Council in 2022-23. One complaint for Adult Social Care, and one for Education and Inclusion. Following investigation, only the Education and Inclusion complaint was upheld. Therefore, the percentage of complaints upheld is 50%. This compares favourably to 77% of complaints upheld in similar sized authorities.

The LGSCO report they are satisfied that Knowsley Council have successfully implemented and complied with all recommendations made following complaint investigation (100%).

The Council received an annual review letter from the LGSCO providing a summary of complaint performance for 2022-23. This can be viewed on the LGSCO website, [Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council - Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman](#)

An annual summary of complaint statistics for Councils is published on the LGSCO website on an interactive map called "Your Council's Performance". This is a useful snapshot of the service improvement recommendations Knowsley Council has agreed to implement following LGSCO investigations. You can view the information here [www.lgo.org.uk/your-councils-performance](http://www.lgo.org.uk/your-councils-performance)

## 8. Compliments

Year	Total
2020-21	200
2021-22	176
2022-23	166

A reduction of 6% has been seen in the number of compliments received compared to the previous year.

Compliments received by department is shown in the table below.

Department	Total
Directorate of Chief Executive	1
Children's Services	41
Communities & Neighbourhoods	42
Health & Social Care	29
Regeneration & Economic Development	17
Resources	36

Below are some examples of the compliments the Council have received during 2022-23.

*We have just had a lovely telephone call from a service user who asked me to pass on a big thank you to Adult Social Care for all your help with his brother. He said you were a very big help and very supportive and he just felt he*

*A resident would like to thank the street scene staff for completing the clean-up. It really made her day how quickly this was done, and she would like to thank the staff.*

*I would like to massively thank a Council Officer from Safer Communities who has endeavoured to resolve issues with a neighbour, I feel she has gone above and beyond, spent time and effort and truly made a difference to our standard of living. Attentive, contactable, quick to reply, thorough and did everything she has said she would. I honestly believe the issues we were having would never have been resolved without her support and persistence. Everything that we asked of her was delivered and more and in such a friendly, professional manner. She's an asset to your team and to our community. Thank you.*

*The Council officer helped me through a financial assessment for my mum who is now receiving memory care. She was immeasurably patient, kind, and informative as she walked me through the process.*

*A visually impaired service user received an audio waste calendar and wanted to*

*I'd like to thank the social worker. So helpful, you always come back to me. I would just like to add that your support has been transformative to my sense of confidence that we can successfully help our children. Thank you.*



*Our first meeting with Childrens Social Care was all so scary, but from start to finish you were all completely honest in what was going to happen and how you were going to help our family. We don't have any fault in how you all stepped in and helped us. We have become better people, better parents, and a stronger family from all the help and support we have all received, including the children. The children took to you straight away and built a trust and bond with you. Thank you so much for everything.*

## **9. Reporting, monitoring, and driving service improvement.**

It is important to know when things have gone right and when people are happy with the services they receive. However, when things go wrong, complaints are equally valuable.

Wherever possible, a proactive approach is taken to resolve concerns prior to the issue becoming a formal complaint.

Senior Officers are provided with a weekly update on all new complaints, to ensure that issues raised during the process are addressed. Progress against any actions resulting from complaint feedback is monitored by the service area and complaints team.

An Annual Complaints Report is produced for Senior Managers and Elected Members.

### **Complaints Review**

A review has recently been undertaken by the Customer Experience Team within the Council, in consultation with Departmental Management teams. The main objective was to identify ways to improve the quality and timeliness of complaint responses and to ensure that there is independent scrutiny of all complaints that are escalated. In addition, to better use complaints as a learning tool.

Several recommendations were agreed and are being implemented during 2023-24. The recommendations included;

- Independent scrutiny of all stage two corporate complaints.
- Extension of stage two timescale for corporate (and Adults) complaints to 20 working days to allow sufficient time for independent and thorough review.
- New operational meetings with nominated officers within each directorate to discuss complaint performance, areas of concern and options to improve.
- Mandatory complaint handling training sessions for all staff, covering key areas including the procedure and timescales, template letters and examples of best practice, aiming to improve and encourage a culture of openness and accountability, putting things right and seeking improvements.
- Additional quality checking processes introduced by the complaints team.
- Improved management oversight of complaints within Adult and Childrens Social Care with a view to improving timeliness and quality, reducing the number of complaints progressing to stage two of the process, and more effectively embedding learning from complaints across the Departments.

Knowsley Council is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially and aims to provide a quality, accessible service. We will continue to monitor feedback, and actively seek ways to use the information we receive to improve our resident's experience.