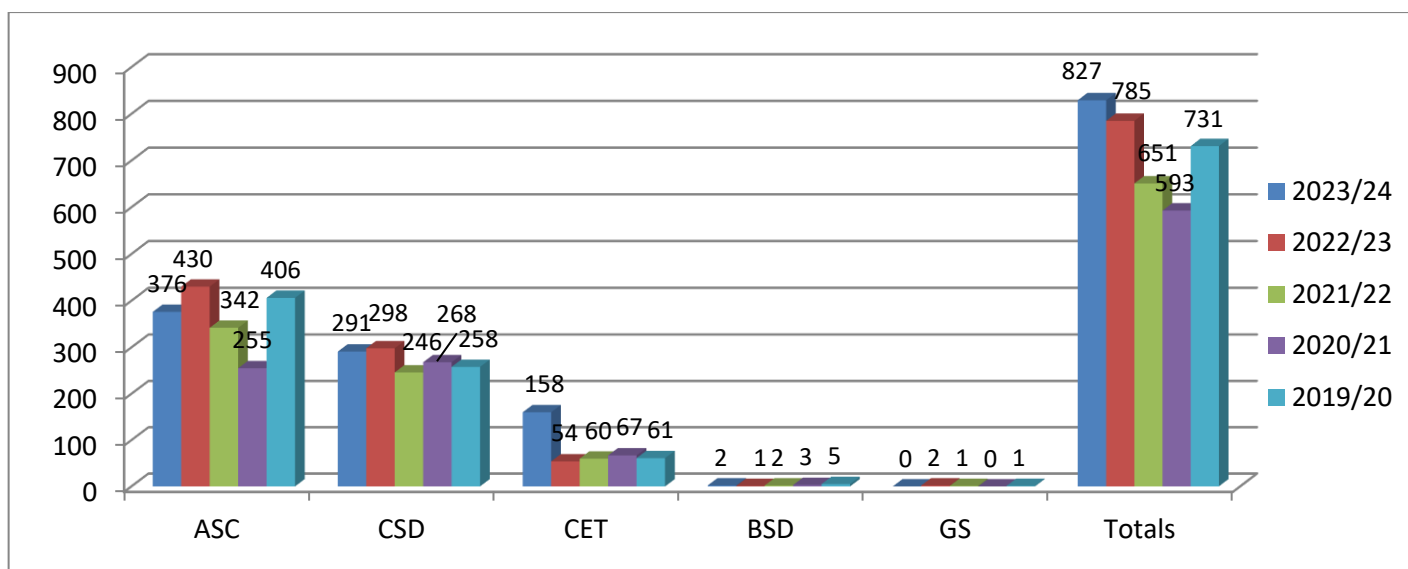


26 September 2024

Appendix 3 Complaints and compliments by department 2023/24

1. Summary

1.1 ESCC received 827 complaints in total in 2023/24, compared to 785 complaints in 2022/23, which represents an increase of 6%. The following graph shows the number of complaints received over the last five years by department and in total. Please note comparisons of complaints and compliments between departments are not valid due to the nature of the different services provided by each department.



1.2 The following table presents the total number of Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) complaints for ESCC where decisions were made, and the percentages of upheld complaints compared to similar authorities for the last three years.

Year	Investigated	Upheld	Not upheld	Not investigated	Total	ESCC uphold rate %	Average County Council uphold rate %
2023/24	32	28	4	54	86	88%	85%
2022/23	26	20	6	58	84	77%	80%
2021/22	38	25	13	51	89	66%	71%
2020/21	30	21	9	38	68	70%	71%

1.3 For upheld complaints for ESCC where there were remedies to carry out, ESCC received 100% satisfaction with compliance. The following is a breakdown of the remedies provided in 2023/24:

- Apology 17
- Financial Redress 30: Avoidable distress / time and trouble (20); loss of service (7); quantifiable loss (3)
- New appeal, review or reconsidered decision 3
- Procedure or policy review / change 7
- Reassessment 1

## 2. Adult Social Care and Health

	Change	2023/24	2022/23	2021/22
Number of complaints received	↓13%	376	430	342
Number of complaints upheld/partially upheld	↓23%	168	218	146
Number of compliments	↑50%	2,268	1,512	950

### 2.1 Summary

2.1.1 Adult Social Care (ASC) recorded a total of 376 complaints during the reporting period, down from 430 the previous year. In 2022/23, 51% of complaints were upheld/partially upheld, this year 45% were upheld/partially upheld.

2.1.2 Demand on services continues to rise and complaints continue to be multi-faceted, across services, providers, and organisations. The biggest area of complaints related to assessment (80), which was just under a quarter (24%) of all complaints received. Just over half of the complaints (41) in relation to assessment were upheld or partially upheld. Of these, just over a third (14 complaints) were in relation to a delay.

2.1.3 The second biggest area of complaints related to provision of service, which was just over a fifth (23%) of all complaints received (77 complaints). There were 36 complaints (47%) upheld or partially upheld in relation to provision of service. Of these, just over half (19 complaints) were in relation to the service not being to the quality or standard expected.

2.1.4 We have continued to strengthen our complaints duty function to provide a person centred and resolution focussed approach. The aim is to resolve matters before going into the complaints process. This year we resolved 547 enquiries out of 560. Just 13 (2%) enquiries could not be resolved through this triage approach and went into the complaints process.

2.1.5 ASC has recorded the highest ever number of compliments over a year, with 2,268 expressions of thanks and heartfelt praise for care and support services. There are significantly more compliments (2,268) about our services than complaints (376). The ratio per compliment to complaint is 6:1 compared with 4:1 last year. Our Joint Community Rehabilitation Service recorded over a 1,000 compliments (1,286). This was followed by our Carers Break/Dementia Service (375) and then our neighbourhood support teams (65).

### 2.2 Action taken to improve the service

2.2.1 In our 2022/23 report we reported the review of the Direct Payments process for care and support. The review considered the information shared with people to ensure it was provided at an earlier stage in the process and was informative and accessible. It also developed how teams worked together to achieve outcomes in a more timely and smooth way. This year we recorded six complaints about the Directs Payments process compared with 22 in 2022/23, this represents a 73% reduction.

2.2.2 To avoid delay and improve collaborative working, our Appointee and Deputyship Team have reviewed their process for circumstances where a person dies without being in contact with family and a funeral needs to take place.

2.2.3 Related to Domestic Abuse, Harassment and Stalking risk identification, we have revised the guidance in the Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) Operating Protocol that governs the MARAC process. It now makes it clear when letters that evidence a MARAC discussion, should be issued.

2.2.4 Work is underway to review waiting times for assessment. This includes supporting teams to operate a consistent approach to waiting lists and to provide helpful and consistent information to people who are waiting for an assessment.

### 2.3 Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO)

2.3.1 The table below sets out the LGSCO findings for complaints about ASCH.

Year	Investigations		Closed after initial enquiries	Invalid/incomplete	Referred back	Advice given	Total
	Upheld	Not upheld					
2023/24	13	2	8	1	8		32
2022/23	6	3	8	3	7	1	28
2021/22	17	4	7	4	6		38

2.3.2 Further analysis for ASCH of the LGSCO complaints will be provided in the department's Annual Complaints Report. The report will be available later in the year and published on the Council's website: [Comments, compliments and complaints annual report](#). This report is provided under the Local Authority Social Services and National Health Service Complaints (England) Regulations, 2009.

### 3. Children's Services

	Change	2023/24	2022/23	2022/21
Number of complaints received	↓ 2%	291	298	246
Number of complaints upheld/partially upheld	↓ 3%	148	153	97
Number of compliments	↑ 49%	496	332	326

#### 3.1 Summary

3.1.1 Children's Services received a total of 291 complaints during the reporting period, down from 298 complaints received in 2022/23. Contacts to the Complaints Service has increased from 769 in 2022/23 to 990 in 2023/24. The fall in complaints can be attributed to the significant time and effort made to resolve complaints early when possible.

3.1.2 Complaints from adults on behalf of children fell from 289 to 272, a decrease of 6%. The number of complaints from children and young people decreased from 9 to 4. The sample size is too small to be of statistical significance, although we do know that whilst formal complaints from young people are rare, our children's residential settings receive and resolve lower-level issues outside the regulated process.

3.1.3 In 2023/24, 51% of complaints were upheld/partially upheld. This is the same percentage as last year.

#### 3.2 Action taken to improve the service

3.2.1 Children's Services continues to use the learning from complaints and how people contact us as a tool in improving the services offered by the department and in improving our digital offer through our website. We have continued to track key themes and complaint types to make enhancements to our call and complaint handling process. The Customer Relations Manager regularly meets with senior managers across Children's Services to share outcomes from complaints and associated corrective actions. This ensures that learning is logged and tracked and that what we learn from complaints is having a positive impact on the services that the Council delivers. Below are examples of learning themes identified and improvement actions taken as a result of complaints.

3.2.2 Actions taken to improve services in 2023/24 include the following:

##### Social care

##### Disagreement with family assessments

- Last year we saw an increase in complaints about delays in social care teams completing Family Assessments. This has now improved with fewer complaints about this issue this year. This year there has been an increase in complaints from people expressing disagreement with the information within Family Assessments. On closer inspection, a number of these complaints were from parents who had engaged with the process but had not been given an opportunity to meet with a social worker after the assessment was completed.
- The Customer Relations Manager met with social care managers to discuss this rise in complaints, the barriers to meeting with parents when the assessment period was over, and how to ensure that parents could share their views when they had received the completed assessment. As a result, in the last three months of the reporting year, six complaints about this issue were resolved and withdrawn. Further, every customer who complains about a family assessment is given the opportunity to add their statement to the records, to be read alongside the original information. This ensures that families' views are fairly heard and recorded. Work continues on improving the timeliness of Family Assessments.

## Education

### SEND Assessment and Planning

- In 2022/23, the Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Assessment and Planning team received most complaints about communication and delays during the statutory Education, Help and Care (EHC) Plan process. Customers complained that they did not receive timely responses and were not kept up to date with what was happening. Unfortunately, the Assessment and Planning Team had experienced significant staffing shortages and staff changes during the previous 18 months which had impacted on the service. This meant an increased workload for staff in post, with the additional pressure of more children needing assessment and support.
- In 2023/24, actions which have been taken to address this include:
  - A Training and Development Consultant has been appointed who oversees a refreshed induction programme for new starters
  - Additional training for all staff
  - Reallocation of some tasks to specialist teams to create capacity for communication
  - A review of all processes to streamline them and reduce the need for queries
  - A focus on quality not quantity, so that increased statutory demand does not reduce customer service.
- Although these changes were made in this year, there has already been a decrease in complaints about communication from the Assessment and Planning Team. This is a good example of learning from complaints being used to embed changes and improve services.

### 3.3 Compliments

3.3.1 In addition to the complaint-related contacts received, we also logged 496 compliments. Despite the increase in complaint-related contact, the high rise in compliments indicate that customers are also having positive experiences. This is 49% higher than the 332 compliments received in 2022/23. This increase can be attributed to a change in how compliments are collected. Compliments are often shared informally making them harder to collect and record centrally. This year, new systems were implemented to ensure that each division within the department was reliably sharing positive feedback. The changes were introduced in year and will be continued and embedded over the next year.

### 3.4 Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman

3.4.1 The table below sets out the LGSCO findings for complaints about Children's Services:

Year	Investigations						
	Upheld	Not upheld	Closed after initial enquiries	Invalid/incomplete	Referred back	Advice given	Total
2023/24	13	2	14		7		36
2022/23	11	2	15	1	10		39
2021/22	8	9	11	2	7	1	38

3.4.2 There is further analysis of these complaints in the Children’s Services Annual Complaints Report. The report has been published on the council’s website: [Children’s Services Annual Complaints Report](#). This report is required under The Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006.

#### 4. Communities, Economy & Transport (CET)

	Change	2023/24	2022/23	2021/22
Number of complaints received	↑ 193%	158	54	62
Number of complaints upheld/partially upheld	↑ 527%	94	15	18
Number of compliments	↓ 34%	270	409	430

##### 4.1 Summary

4.1.1 There were 158 complaints received in CET in 2023/24, compared to 54 complaints in 2022/23, and 62 complaints in 2021/22. Of the 158 complaints received in 2023/24, 94 were fully or partly upheld which was 59% of complaints received, compared to 28% of complaints being fully or partly upheld in 2022/23.

4.1.2 There were 67 complaints upheld or partly upheld in relation to issues with the quality of the service delivery and 24 complaints regarding poor communications with our customers. There with three complaints upheld or partly upheld regarding policy, for example where a Council policy was not followed.

4.1.3 For complaints where quality in service delivery was an issue these related to delays in works or repairs taking place, confusing or poor explanations, incorrectly entered contact details, confusing auto-responses received (which didn’t convey information needed or conflicting information about the enquiry), and issues with inspections or investigations that had taken place. These were sometimes due to, or in combination with, miscommunication between staff. For communications issues these related to lack of or delay in responses, and not keeping customers up to date.

4.1.4 The increase in complaints this year is due to an increase of complaints in relation to our Highways Service. This increase aligns significantly with the increase of potholes and defects on the highway network which has been worsened by the poor, and at times extreme weather in the county over recent years.

4.1.5 East Sussex County Council (ESCC) is not unique in these circumstances as a Highways Authority. Nationally there has been an increasing number of reports of highways defects. As with all Councils as Highways Authorities, ESCC will continue to prioritise the maintenance where needed and focus on preventive measures where it can.

4.1.6 The highest number of fully or partly upheld complaints (49%) were in relation to Highways claims. The complaints policy does not cover complaints about the outcome of claims (which is by an appeal); it does cover the handling of claims. There was a combination of issues

around communication such as delays in responses and quality such as errors in the processing. Balfour Beatty Living Places have assured the ESCC they are committed to reducing the backlog and responding quickly and efficiently to the complaints regarding claims and providing responses to clarify outcomes and making payments for the claims, where they are being given.

## 4.2 Action taken to improve the service

4.2.1 Actions taken to improve services in 2023/24 as a result of complaints, include the following:

- Transport Hub Team identified where improvements could be made to internal communications regarding school transport and put in place new measures to improve communications with Children’s Services.
- Where complaints were regarding poor communication or customer service regarding complaints in the Highways Contact Centre, staff received training about the ESCC complaint process and further training on delivering excellent customer service.
- Improvements were made to records management in East Sussex Highways in order to improve service delivery and maintenance schedules.
- Training and guidance were provided to staff in the Library and Information Service to ensure the correct procedures were followed when issuing a parking permit.

## 4.3 Compliments

4.3.1 There were 270 compliments logged in CET in 2023/24, compared to 409 compliments in 2022/23. Compliment numbers continue to be higher than the number of complaints, which indicates that staff continue to deliver high quality services and show their commitment to customers. In 2023/24, CET received a high number of compliments from customers expressing their appreciation for the high quality of the services they received and the commitment from staff in providing those services.

4.3.2 There is often fluctuation in numbers of compliments received due to factors such as events, promotions, and works or developments taking place. For 2023/24, the number of compliments for East Sussex Highways began lower than usual; however, compliments increased quarter on quarter through the year for Highways as the backlog diminished and services improved.

## 4.4 Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman

4.4.1 The table below sets out the LGSCO findings for complaints about CET:

Year	Investigations		Closed after initial enquiries	Invalid/ incomplete	Referred back	Total
	Upheld	Not upheld				
2023/24	2		12	1	2	17
2022/23	2	1	11			14
2021/22	0	0	8	1	1	10

4.4.2 There were two upheld complaints in relation to CET services, and both were remedied during the LGSCO complaint process. One complaint was regarding the vibrations from heavy vehicles on a road which were disturbing the complainant. This was remedied by planning the resurfacing of the road. The other upheld complaint was regarding the delay in processing the payment of a Highways claim, and it was remedied by the claim and payment being processed. There were no themes to draw from such a low number of upheld complaints.

## 5. Business Services

	Change	2023/24	2022/23	2021/22
Number of complaints received	-	2	1	2
Number of complaints upheld/partially upheld	-	2	1	1
Number of compliments	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

## 5.1 Summary

5.1.1 There were two formal complaints for Business Services in 2023/24, and both were upheld. One complaint was upheld due to the inadequate services provided by a contracted third party. The other complaint was upheld due to lack of communications with the customer. There were no themes to draw from such a low number of complaints for Business Services.

## 5.2 Compliments

5.2.1 No compliments from external, individual customers were reported departmentally for Business Services in 2023/24.

## 5.3 Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman

5.3.1 There were no LGSCO complaints investigated about Business Services in 2023/24.

## 6. Governance Services

	Change	2023/24	2022/23	2021/22
Number of complaints received	-	0	2	1
Number of complaints upheld/partially upheld	-	0	0	0
Number of compliments	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

## 6.1 Summary

6.1.1 There were no complaints logged for Governance Services in 2023/24.

## 6.2 Compliments

6.2.1 No compliments were recorded in 2023/24.

## 6.3 Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman

6.3.1 The table below sets out the LGSCO findings for complaints about Governance Services:

Year	Investigations		Closed after initial enquiries	Invalid/incomplete	Referred back	Total
	Upheld	Not upheld				
2023/24			1			1
2022/23	1					1
2021/22						0

## 7. Chief Executive's Office

7.1 Customers often address their complaints to the Chief Executive (CE) or Leader and so they are received through the CE Office. However, the complaints are about issues with services provided by departments rather than the CE Office itself, so these are recorded by the relevant department and form part of their figures and analysis.