



Cheshire West
and Chester

Cheshire West and Chester Council

Corporate Complaints and Compliments

Annual Report
2024-2025

1. Introduction

This report provides information about the Council's handling of corporate complaints and compliments received during the period 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025. In particular:

- Corporate Complaints (stage 1 and stage 2) and Compliments received by Cheshire West and Chester Council.
- Complaints received and decided by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.

The report gives details of the Council, and service-level, performance against our timescales for complaint handling at stage 1 and 2. It also outlines what improvements or revisions to services have been planned or implemented following our analysis of feedback from customers through the complaints and compliments processes.

The Council's Customer team, part of the Companies, Compliance and Assurance service within the Governance Directorate, was responsible for the council-wide coordination of complaints and compliments during this period. All Council services are responsible for the triage, investigation and responses to complaints and compliments. They must also satisfy themselves that any commissioned providers have also dealt with them appropriately and in line with any contractual or statutory requirements.

The Council has a 2-stage complaints process. Customers can raise a complaint via an online contact form, by email, post or via the telephone. Other options are available for customers requiring additional support.

All complaints are entered onto the Council's complaints system and are considered 'contact' at this stage. Customers have the option to pick the service they wish to complain about from a list of high-volume 'workspaces', which are managed by services. They are named to be more easily identifiable to customers e.g. 'Roads' rather than highways. If the customer is unsure, or the service area does not have a workspace because usually it does not receive a high-volume of contact then they select 'Any Other Service'. The Customer team coordinates responses to these with its network of 'GO TO' contacts who do not have their own workspace.

The service is expected to contact the customer to resolve the issue reported at stage 1 within 5 working days, usually by way of a 'triage' telephone call or visit. Where the customer is not contacted, the service must record a reason why.

After the 'triage' contact the service must record the outcome as one of the following:

- Formal complaint (provide a written answer within 20 working days)
- Urgent complaint (provide a written answer within 5 working days)
- Logged on Confirm – Service Request (our system for logging and managing most environmental reports)
- Routine business – request for service (for logging non-environmental reports)
- Routine business – early intervention (where the service can resolve the complaint at an early stage)
- Alternative path (where an exemption applies, or where there is a more appropriate right of appeal)

- Withdrawn by customer (the customer has indicated they do not wish to progress their complaint or, rarely, where this is a duplicate submission from the customer, or they are requesting escalation (so the original complaint record will be updated instead)

Only contact received and progressed at this stage as either a 'Formal' or 'Urgent' complaint is considered as a complaint for reporting purposes. Stage 1 complaints should usually be answered by a team leader or service manager within the service complained about.

Following their stage 1 complaint response, Customers may escalate their complaint for consideration at stage 2. This must be submitted within 20 working days of receipt of their stage 1 response. Very occasionally a complaint may be accepted at stage 2 without there being a stage 1 response, for example where there has already been extensive dialogue with the Council about the issue.

All requests for stage 2 are considered by the Customer team, who will decide whether the complainant has provided sufficient grounds to escalate the complaint e.g. evidence of outstanding personal injustice or insufficient remedy offer. The customer will be kept informed of the outcome of their stage 2 request, and either progress to the stage 2 investigation or be signposted to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman. The Council does not consider general dissatisfaction with the outcome of a complaint as grounds for escalation. The customer is expected to evidence where there is remaining fault or injustice that they consider has not been resolved satisfactorily.

For stage 2 complaints, a manager within the service, independent of the original complaint, must review the original stage 1 investigation and draft a response. The Customer team review all drafts at this stage and provide advice and support to services about the complaints process and reasonable outcomes or remedies to complaints.

All customers have a right of appeal to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman, although the Ombudsman will usually expect the customer's complaint to have completed the Council's complaints process before reviewing it.

All compliments are acknowledged at the point of submission and referred to the relevant service, where the Director or senior manager will decide whether a further response is necessary.

There are exemptions within the policy for some types of complaints. See the Council's published [Corporate Complaints Policy](#) for full details.

From 2025-2026 the Council will transition to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code, with its full implementation from 1 April 2026.

1.1. The objectives of this report are to:

- Be open and transparent about the Council's complaints and compliments handling.
- Produce an annual corporate complaints and compliments report to align with our separate statutory annual reporting requirements for Adults and Children's social care complaints.
- Provide clear and concise comparative data on complaints and compliments, broken down by service area and/or workspace.

- Use this customer feedback to take remedial actions, identify service improvements and demonstrate learning and improved practices and processes from these.

1.2. Key Performance Indicators

The Council had 2 indicators in the Council's Performance Management Framework for 2024/25:

- 6.13 Percentage of complaints that have been progressed to a formal Stage 1 are answered within 20 working days

This measure is important as it will show which services are compliant with the formal complaint deadlines and ensure effective Customer Service.

Ensuring compliance will also reduce demands on services with escalated cases. It also demonstrates that most contact received is **resolved** before progressing to a formal complaint.

- Percentage of corporate complaints that have been accepted as a formal Stage 2 that are answered within 40 working days.

Due to the timescale for reporting on complaints the Council reports in arrears covering 4 periods:

- Period 1 April-July 2024
- Period 2 August-September 2024
- Period 3 October-November 2024
- Period 4 December 2024-March 2025

The Council continues to maintain an ambitious target for compliance with complaints to highlight the value it places on ensuring good customer experience and learning from complaints. 2024/25 targets were:

Indicator	PERIOD 1 2024/25	PERIOD 2 2024/25	PERIOD 3 2024/25	PERIOD 4 2024/25	2024/25	ACTUAL PERFORMANCE 2024/25
6.13 Percentag e of complaint s that have been progresse d to a formal Stage 1 are answered within 20	99%	99%	99%	99%	99%	60%

Indicator	PERIOD 1 2024/25	PERIOD 2 2024/25	PERIOD 3 2024/25	PERIOD 4 2024/25	2024/25	ACTUAL PERFORMANCE 2024/25
working days						
6.23 Percentage of corporate complaints that have been accepted as a formal Stage 2 that are answered within 40 working days.	98%	98%	98%	98%	98%	81%

2. PERFORMANCE ACTIVITY 2024/25

2.1. Stage 1 Corporate Complaints

A total of **2532** contacts were received this year. Of these **168** formal complaints were progressed.

Of the remaining representations:

- **423** were Logged on Confirm – Service Request.
- **868** were Routine business – request for service (for logging non-environmental reports).
- **624** were Routine business – early intervention.
- **91** were alternative path (where an exemption applies, where there is a more appropriate right of appeal etc).
- **47** were withdrawn by customer.
- **311** did not have an outcome recorded and we have assumed these were resolved under routine business early intervention

2.2. Comparison with Previous Years

Table 1 shows the number of contacts and progressed complaints for 2024/25 compared with the previous 2 years. The rate of complaints progressed formally remains steady at 7% despite an increase in contact received via the complaints form by 9%.

Table 1: Total number of contacts received and complaints progressed

Year	Total Contact	Contact progressed as a formal or urgent complaint	% of contact becoming a complaint
2024/2025	2532	168	7%
2023-2024	2325	172	7%
2022-2023	2812	205	7%

2.3. Complaint Outcomes – Stage 1

Table 2 below shows the outcomes of the **168** complaints investigated.

Table 2 - Outcomes and comparisons with previous years

Year	Upheld	Partially upheld	Not upheld	Not known/Blank	Total
2024/2025	52	28	83	5	168
2023-2024	71	38	63	0	172
2022-2023	74	41	76	14	205

The percentage of cases with an upheld outcome has decreased by 37% on the previous year, and a partially upheld outcome has decreased by a similar rate of 36%. Those complaints that were not upheld has increased by 32%. This is a welcome position as it demonstrates that in just under 50% of contact progressed as a formal complaint in 2024/25, we did not find fault in our service delivery.

2.4. Breakdown of contact received by Service Area

Table 3 – Breakdown of contact by workspace

Service Area	2022-23	% of contact	2023/24	% of contact	2024/25	% of contact
Waste and recycling (waste collection, recycling, household waste and recycling centres)	1217	43.28	685	29.46	666	26.3
Roads	277	3.41	408	17.55	413	16.3
Council tax	240	8.53	189	8.1	214	8.5
Schools (admissions, transport, SEN)	96	0.32	124	5.33	177	7
Parking including Park and Ride	110	0.21	140	6	138	5.5
Any other service	169	6.01	112	4.8	125	4.9
Housing Services	95	0.11	98	4.22	121	4.8
Grass cutting	61	3.38	52	2.24	105	4.1
Street cleaning	60	2.13	70	3.01	71	2.8
Environmental health	54	1.92	56	2.41	60	2.4
Planning	68	0.25	56	2.41	59	2.3
Trees, woods and hedges	43	1.53	54	2.32	57	2.3
Benefits	55	1.96	25	1.1	31	1.2
Transport (Strategy, Buses & Bus Passes (except schools),	2	0.07	29	1.25	31	1.2

Service Area	2022-23	% of contact	2023/24	% of contact	2024/25	% of contact
Bus Stops, Active Travel, Rail)						
Street lighting	18	0.64	20	0.86	29	1.1
Children social care	31	1.10	9	0.4	25	1.0
Licensing	18	3.91	23	0.99	22	0.9
Adult social care	3	0.11	14	0.6	21	0.8
Client Finance	2	0.07	14	0.6	18	0.7
Public rights of way	12	0.07	23	0.99	15	0.6
Countryside and green spaces	9	0.32	5	0.2	13	0.5
Parks and gardens	6	2.42	5	0.22	13	0.5
Libraries	3	0.64	10	0.43	11	0.4
Council property	9	0.32	11	0.5	10	0.4
Elections and voting	8	0.28	4	0.17	8	0.3
Events	0	0	4	0.17	8	0.3
Community Safety	0	0	7	0.3	7	0.3
Staff conduct	5	0.18	3	0.12	7	0.3
Blue badge scheme	8	0.28	5	0.2	5	0.2
Trading standards	7	0.25	4	0.17	4	0.2
Early Help (Parenting, Domestic Abuse, TAF, Youth Service,	0	0	1	0.04	3	0.1

Service Area	2022-23	% of contact	2023/24	% of contact	2024/25	% of contact
Young People's Service)						
Dog fouling and strays	7	0.25	1	0.04	2	0.1
Commissioning people	16	0.57	5	0.2	1	0.0
Plans and policies	7	0.43	0	0	1	0.0
Registration services (births, death, marriage and civil partnerships)	2	9.85	2	0.09	1	0.0
Footpaths and rights of way	0	2.17	0	0	0	0
Transport and travel including Park and Ride	53	1.89	See Parking (incl Park and Ride)		0	0
Arts, museums and events	1	0.04	2	0.1	1	0.0
Building control and regulations	11	0.39	11	0.5	14	0.6
Bus passes and concessionary travel	5	0.18	0	0	0	0
Cemetery services	18	0.64	20	0.9	2	0.1
Commissioned school transport	5	0.18	24	1	23	0.9
Total	2812	100	2325	100	2532	100

Most services have received the same or similar volumes of contact, with the exception of Cemetery Services which dropped from 20 contacts in 2023/24 to only 2 in 2024/25. Conversely, Grass Cutting and Schools have seen an increase.

TABLE 4 Top 10 services contacted.

	Top 10 services receiving contact 2021-22	Top 10 services receiving contact 2022-23	Top 10 services receiving contact 2023-24	Top 10 services receiving contact 2024-25	Position on previous year
1.	Waste and recycling (waste collection, recycling, household waste and recycling centres)	Waste and recycling (waste collection, recycling, household waste and recycling centres)	Waste and recycling (waste collection, recycling, household waste and recycling centres)	Waste and recycling (waste collection, recycling, household waste and recycling centres)	No change
2.	Roads	Roads and footways	Roads and footways	Roads and footways	No change
3.	Parking including Park and Ride	Council tax	Council tax	Council tax	No change
4.	Council tax	Any other service	Schools (admissions, transport, SEN)	Schools (admissions, transport, SEN)	No Change
5.	Any other service	Parking	Any other service	Parking including Park and Ride	Up 2
6.	Grass cutting	Schools (admissions, transport, SEN)	Housing Services	Any other service	Down 1
7.	Housing Services	Housing Services	Parking	Housing Services	Down 1
8.	Planning	Planning	Street cleaning	Grass cutting	Down 2
9.	Schools (admissions, transport, SEN)	Grass cutting	Planning	Street cleaning	Down 1
10.	Benefits	Street cleaning	Environmental health	Environmental health	No change

Table 4 shows that there has been little change to the ranking of services most contacted between 2021-2025. As expected, many of the services most contacted provide environmental services and this is most likely due to customers regarding what the Council would consider a first contact service request as a complaint e.g. a first report of a missed bin, littering etc.

2.5. Breakdown of contact received by Service Area that progressed as a formal complaint

Table 5 shows the breakdown of formal complaints by workspace.

TABLE 5 Breakdown of formal complaints by workspace

Service	Count of stage 1 complaints 2024-25
Schools (admissions, transport, SEN)	43
Waste and recycling (waste collection, recycling, household waste and recycling centres)	20
Planning	25
Any other service	25
Client finance	10
Roads and footways	5
Adult social care	3
Housing Services	1
Environmental health	6
Building control and regulations	4
Council tax	16
Children social care	3
Benefits	1
Blue Badge Scheme	1
Early Help (Parenting, Domestic Abuse, TAF, Youth Service, Young People's Service)	1
Events	2
Licensing	1
Parks and Gardens	1
Grand Total	168

Both Schools (down 35% from 55 complaints in 2023/4) and Waste (down 49% from 39 complaints in 2023/4) have seen a significant decrease in the number of formal complaints progressed.

2.6. Complaint Response Times

Table 6 shows the percentage of complaints that were answered within the stage 1 deadline of 20 working days. Compliance this year has shown a drop of around 6% on the previous year.

Table 6

	Stage 1 Complaints responded to within 0-20 Working Days		
	Number	Number	Percentage
2024/25	168	101	60.11%
2023/24	172	113	65.69%
2022/23	205	131	63.90%

3. Stage 2 Corporate Complaints

In 2024/25 the Council progressed 72 requests for escalation to stage 2 of its corporate complaint process, up from 65 the previous year. 58 of them were answered within 40 working days, a compliance rate of 81%. This is a decrease in compliance on the previous year but could be explained by numbers of stage 2 complaints increasing by 11% and/or the complaints being particularly complex.

Table 7 Stage 2 Complaints

Year	Stage 2 Complaints		Stage 2 Complaints responded to within 0-40 Working Days
	Number	Number	Percentage
2024/25	72	58	81%
2023/24	65	58	89%
2022/23	41	24	58.54%

4. Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO)

The Ombudsman reports on local authority figures based on the number of cases it receives in the reporting year; the number of decisions it makes in the reporting year (which may include cases ongoing from the previous year) and the Council's compliance with any recommendations.

In 2024/25, for Cheshire West and Chester Council, the Ombudsman:

- Received 84 complaints (an increase of 9.5% on the previous year)
- Made decisions on 78 complaints, about the same as the previous year (77)
- Upheld 10 complaints (a decrease of 23%)

Table 8 shows the breakdown of **upheld** complaints by service compared to the previous year. These concerned:

- 4 Education complaints about SEN (Education and Health Care Plans)
- 2 Housing Services
- 2 Adults Social Care Complaints
- 1 Education complaint about transport
- 1 Corporate and other services

Table 8 Breakdown of upheld complaints

Service	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Corporate and other services	1	0	1
Adults Social Care	3	3	2
Planning & Development	2	2	0
Benefits and Taxation	1	0	0
Education and Children's Services	1	6	5
Environmental Services and Public Protection and Regulation	0	2	0
Housing Services	0	0	2

The remedies and recommended actions from these upheld complaints were:

Table 9 Remedies

Reference	Category	Subcategory	Remedy	Value of remedy
23007342	Housing	Allocations	Apology, Financial redress: Avoidable distress/time and trouble, Provide training and/or guidance	£200
23017458	Education & Children's Services	Education Council: SEN Provision and EHC plans	Financial redress: Avoidable distress/time and trouble, Financial redress: Loss of service, Procedure or policy change/review	£2,500
23018187	Adult Care Services	Council: direct payments	Reassessment	0
23021245	Education & Childrens Services	Education Council: SEN Assessments and reviews	Apology, Financial redress: Avoidable distress/time and trouble, Financial redress: Loss of service	£1,750 and refund for equine therapy
24000233	Corporate & Other Services	Corp & Other Servs-other	Apology, New appeal/review or reconsidered decision	0
24004856	Education & Childrens Services	Education Council: SEN Provision and EHC plans	Apology, Financial redress: Loss of service, Financial redress: Avoidable distress/time and trouble, Provide services to person affected, Procedure or policy change/review	£1,400
24005393	Adult Care Services	Council: charging	Financial Redress: Quantifiable Loss	£8,117.06
24006494	Education & Childrens Services	Education Council: SEN Provision and EHC plans	Apology, Financial redress: Avoidable distress/time and trouble, Financial redress: Loss of service, Provide services to person	£6,500

			affected, Provide training and/or guidance	
24012731	Housing	Private landlord/tenant issues		0
24013559	Education & Childrens Services	Education Council: Transport	Apology, Procedure or policy change/review	0

The value of remedial payments this year (£20,467) is lower than the previous year (£26,300). This is probably due to the decrease in the number of upheld complaints this year, or services could be offering remedial actions at an earlier stage and resolving them before escalation to the Ombudsman.

5. COMPLIMENTS RECEIVED

Table 9 shows a comparison of volumes of comments and compliments received between 2021/22 and 2024/25. Both levels for 2024/25 have dropped.

Our promise of a simpler solution to recording compliments received directly to the service has been delayed but we will be focussing on this for 2025/26 to ensure that positive feedback is captured, shared and used to inform service delivery.

Table 9 Comments and Compliments

Row Labels		2022-2023	2023-2024	2024-25	Trend on previous year
Comment		309	425	342	↓
Compliment		52	325	299	↓
Grand Total		361	750	641	↓

6. LEARNING AND SERVICE IMPROVEMENT

The Council is disappointed that compliance at stage 1 and stage 2 has dropped since the previous year. However, 2024-2025 was a challenging year for the Customer team who focussed on bringing in its Customer Services Contact Centre. This meant that there was limited resource within the team to remind and/or support services with overdue complaints.

That has been addressed in early 2025/26 through recruitment of additional staff, including a customer services apprentice, and the development of a reporting dashboard. This dashboard is still being tested but once implemented will generate reports for all services to enable them to track compliance with casework more regularly.

The dashboard has been prompted by a general lack of trust from services in the data reported on for this year. There have been reports that the data the customer team rely upon from the complaints system does not always correlate with more local records held by services. This could be for several reasons including poor case management and system faults. We are working with services and our digital team to address this and build a more reliable and trustworthy reporting framework.

A new Customer Learning and Development training plan has been developed in 2025/26, and we will be rolling this out to ensure that all Council staff receive the most appropriate level and type of training to reflect their role in dealing with customer contact, comments, compliments and complaints. This will include targeted training for some areas, including Plain English, making effective and early resolution, accurate case management and using the Council's complaints system.

The Customer team have received Ombudsman training to ensure all are following updated code changes and can cascade this information. The creation of a Customer Operational Manager post and the on-boarding of Customer Services is allowing front line staff to signpost potential complainants to correct contact route.

We have been successful in joining the LGSCO Advisory Forum – a new forum to share best practice with Ombudsman overview. This will be an opportunity to look at other LA processes and implement best proactive practices to actively avoid complaints and foster positive engagement between parents /carers and Children's services practitioners.

Our new reporting dashboard aiming to go live in January 2026 will provide live data for compliance rates meaning unhappy complainants will receive outcomes in a timely fashion which should help with the overall customer experience.

Steps to improve compliance

The Council has delayed its plan to update its complaints policy and procedures in 2024/25 to reflect the good practice advice and guidance set out in the Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code. Instead, the Council will use the updated policy and procedures from April 2026, although there will be a gradual transition to this way of working, and reporting on complaints, in 2025/26.

End report