



Annual Complaints Report 2024/25

Governance Committee

1. Summary

1.1 This report outlines the complaints received in relation to housing services during the financial year 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025 and covers the following points:

- Number of complaints received
- Number of complaints handled at each stage of the process
- Complaints by type/service area
- Complaints Response Times
- Complaint Outcome
- Lessons Learnt

2. Complaints the Council Refused to Accept

2.1 The types of complaint that the Council did not accept under its adopted Complaints Policy in 2024/25 were as follows:

- Contacts considered to be a request for service and not a complaint.
- Complaints relating to staff behaviour as these engage a separate procedure

2.2 The majority of Service Requests are dealt with by the individual departments and form part of the normal day-to-day activities of the Council. The complaints team directly received 206 Service Requests during 2024/25. These were passed onto the services to respond to.

2.3 If the Council takes the decision not to accept a complaint, such as a complaint raising significant issues in respect of staff behaviour, an explanation will be provided to the complainant setting out the reasons why the matter is not suitable for the complaints process. Where an Ombudsman does not agree the Council may be instructed to accept the complaint.

3. Performance in 2024/25

3.1 The number of complaints opened at each stage in 2024/25 was as follows:

Complaints	2023/24	2024/25
Stage 1	277	473
Stage 2	67	84
Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman	12	8
Housing Ombudsman ¹	2	3

3.2 The number of complaints opened at each stage in 2024/25 by quarter is set out below as follows:

¹ In respect of the Housing Ombudsman, this covers Housing Management, Housing Repairs and Housing Rents. Housing Options and all other services fall under the Local Government and Social Care (LG&SC) Ombudsman.

1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025					
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
Service Request	57	48	23	78	206
Stage 1	117	103	101	152	473
Stage 2	24	12	25	23	84
Ombudsmen*	1	3	3	4	11

() As at the end of 31 March 2025. Ombudsmen cases relating to complaints in 2024/25 can still be opened in 2025/26.*

- 3.3 In keeping with the requirements of the Ombudsmen for 2024/25, we are reporting on the number of complaint cases opened in 2024/25 rather than the number of complaints closed. The figures reported to the Governance Committee for 2022/23, and previous years were based on cases closed during the period so do not offer a direct comparison.

Stage 1 Complaint Performance

- 3.4 The increase in Stage 1 complaints during 2024/25 was not unexpected given that Corporate Services have undertaken a number of steps to make it easier to find the complaints reporting mechanism on the website. Additionally, measures have been taken to ensure that complaints that enter the Council through means other than Corporate Services are captured and recorded on the system.
- 3.5 The main areas for Stage 1 complaints, showing those areas with 5 or more complaints received, are set out in detail in Appendix 1 of this report. The top five service areas for complaints are:
- Housing Repairs – 98 complaints (20.7%)
 - Waste Services - 94 complaints (19.9%)
 - Housing Management – 62 complaints (13.1%)
 - Housing Options - 47 complaints (9.9%)
 - Council Tax - 37 complaints (7.8%)
- 3.6 The top five service areas accounted for 71.5% of all Stage 1 complaints. This is not unexpected given the outward facing nature of the services. This is further demonstrated by Planning and Planning Enforcement being the sixth and seventh highest service areas.
- 3.7 A significant decrease in the number of complaints relating to Housing Options has seen it drop from the highest service area in 2023/24 to fourth highest in 2024/25. In contrast, Housing Repairs, Management and Council Tax have seen an increase in complaints in 2024/25.

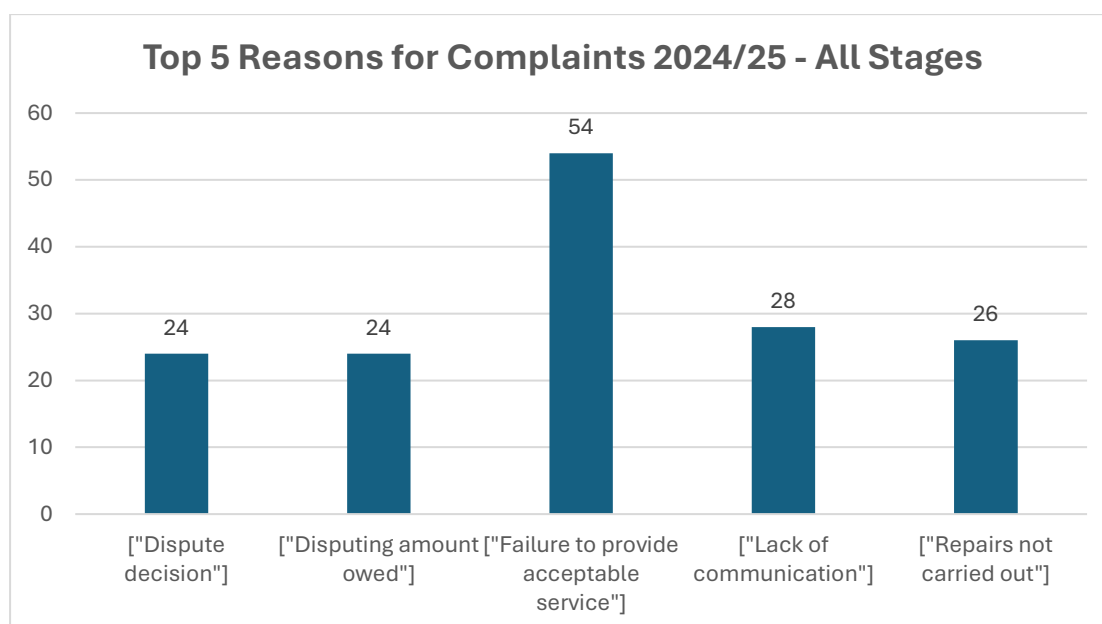
Stage 2 Complaint Performance

- 3.8 Although there has been a significant increase in the number of Stage 1 complaints received in 2024/25 compared to 2023/24, the number of Stage 2 complaints has increased at a far slower rate. For 2023/24, roughly 1 in 4 (24.19%) complaints at Stage 1 were escalated to Stage 2 but for 2024/25, this decreased to approximately 1 in 6 (17.76%) complaints at Stage 1 being escalated to Stage 2.

- 3.9 This is welcoming evidence to support the view expressed in respect of the 2023/24 data that the majority of complaints are being satisfactorily resolved at Stage 1 of the complaints process despite the overall increase in the number of Stage 1 complaints.
- 3.10 The main areas for Stage 2 complaints, showing those areas with 5 or more complaints received, are set out in detail in Appendix 1 of this report. The top five service areas for complaints are:
- Housing Repairs – 11 complaints (13.1%)
 - Housing Management - 10 complaints (11.9%)
 - Housing Options - 10 complaints (11.9%)
 - Waste Services - 9 complaints (10.7%)
 - There is a tie for fifth highest, with Council Tax, Planning and Planning Enforcement - 7 complaints each (8.3% each)
- 3.11 The highest Stage 2 service areas account for 72.6% of all Stage 2 complaints. Similar to the Stage 1 complaints this is not unexpected given the nature of the services.

Reasons for Complaints Opened in 2024/25

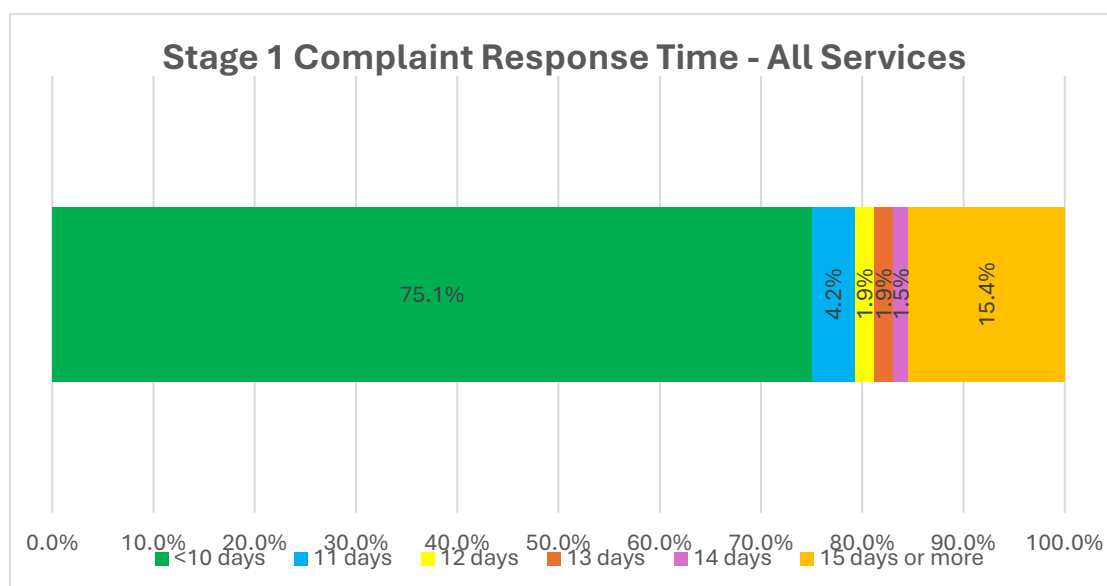
- 3.12 As part of the process of registering a complaint, the Corporate Services team will review the text of the complaint and assign one of a number of themes for the reason for the complaint based on the points raised in the complaint. At this stage no decision is made on the merit of the complaint, it is purely identifying the points raised in the complaint and then assigning one or more of the themes to the complaint. These themes are intended to provide a broad overview of the complaint to assist in identifying the main reasons for complaints.
- 3.13 A total of 85 themes that have been identified by Corporate Services based on an analysis of previous years complaints. The Top 5 reasons for complaints in 2024/25 were as follows:



- 3.14 Together these reasons represented a third of the total reasons given for complaints. The next highest reasons for complaints were contractor behaviour, missed bins and green waste.

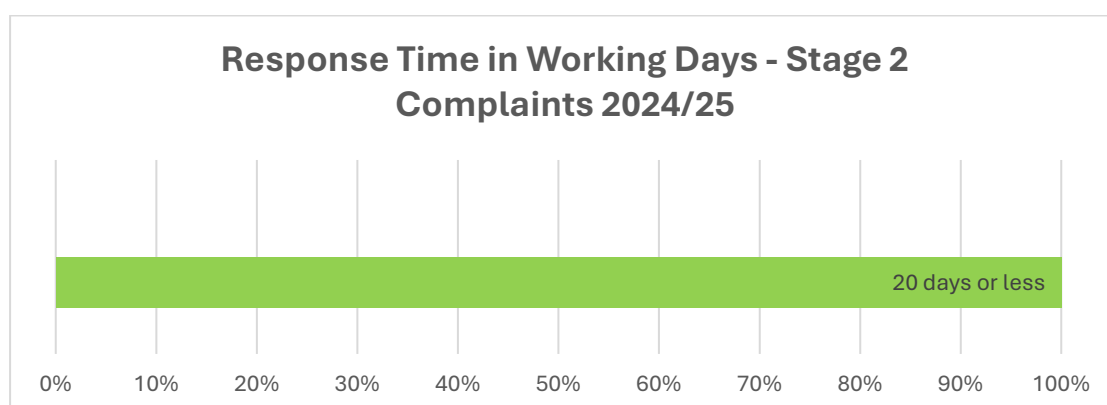
Response Time for Stage 1 Complaints, 2024/25

- 3.15 The average response time for Stage 1 complaints in 2024/25 was 10.5 working days, just outside the target of 10 working days. However, only 75.1% (355 cases) of all complaints were responded to within the target of 10 working days.
- 3.16 There were an additional 30 complaints that were subject to an extension of time, resulting in a total of 81.4% (385 cases) of Stage 1 complaints responded to within 10 working days or with an extension.



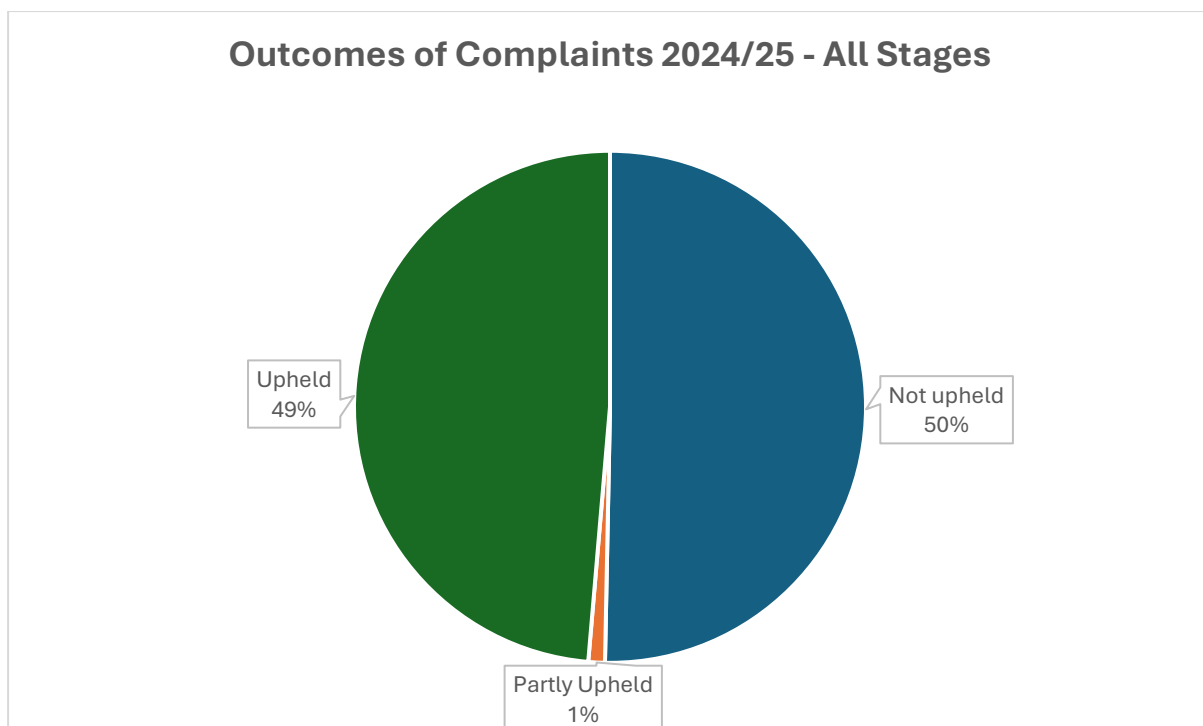
Response Time for Stage 2 Complaints, 2024/25

- 3.17 All Stage 2 complaints were responded to within 20 working days or with an extension.



Outcome for Complaints, 2024/25

- 3.18 Overall, the split between upheld/partly upheld and not upheld complaints at all stages was an equal 50/50 split. This is within expectations based on historical performance.
- 3.19 At Stage 1, for complaints that went no further into the complaints process, 54.8% of complaints were upheld or partly upheld. The remaining 45.2% were not upheld. This is again within expectations based on historical performance.
- 3.20 At Stage 2, the number of complaints upheld or partly upheld decreased to 32.1% with 67.9% not upheld. This is to be expected given that the complaints had already been through a first stage assessment.



- 3.21 In most cases where a complaint was upheld, there would either be an apology or an agreed course of action to restore the complaint back to the situation they should have been in.

Ombudsman Decisions – Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman 2023/24

- 3.22 The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman had determined 8 complaints during the year 2024/25. In total, the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman opened 12 cases during 2024/25, but not all of these had been decided during the year 2024/25. Those cases that were still open at the end of 2024/25 are not included within the figures provided for this report. Those cases determined after 31 March 2025, will be reported in the figures for determinations in 2025/26.
- 3.23 Of these 8 determined complaints, all were closed after initial investigation with no further action.

Ombudsman Decisions – Housing Ombudsman 2024/25

- 3.24 There were three Housing Ombudsman cases determined in 2024/25 resulting in fifteen findings. All three of these cases were originally opened at Stage 1 in the 2023/24 year.
- 3.25 In addition to this, a number of complaints will have been referred to the Ombudsman in 2024/25 that have yet to be determined or were refused after initial assessment (such as for being outside of jurisdiction).
- 3.26 It should be noted that the Council did not have 5 or more findings in the previous two years, so this is the first year under the current arrangements in which the Housing Ombudsman has issued a Landlord Performance Report for the Council.

Complaint No.	Determinations	Maladministration	Order	Compensation	Recommendation	Service Failure
C23-028	0	5	7	£1,900.00	0	0
C23-094	0	4	4	£50.00	1	3
C23-147	3	1	2	£300.00	1	1

4. **Lessons Learnt**

4.1 The Council started to track lessons learnt from complaints during 2024/25. The following is a summary of lessons learnt:

- Improved communication with tenants/individuals
- Review training needs for officers
- Review procedures and policies

5. **Looking to the Future - Improving Data Quality on Complaint Categories**

5.1 In January 2024 the Council implemented a new in-house complaint management system that streamlines the complaint-handling process, provides for complaints data to be held in a single location and enables better reporting on data. The Council continues to refine and improve this data so that the complaints management system to deliver robust and effective data analysis.

5.2 The Council remains committed to further strengthening opportunities for learning and service improvement through review and self-assessment and this will be a useful tool to feed into service improvements by identifying common areas of upheld complaints in a single source.

Appendix 1 - Summary of Total Complaints Received by Service Area in 2024/25 compared to 2023/24

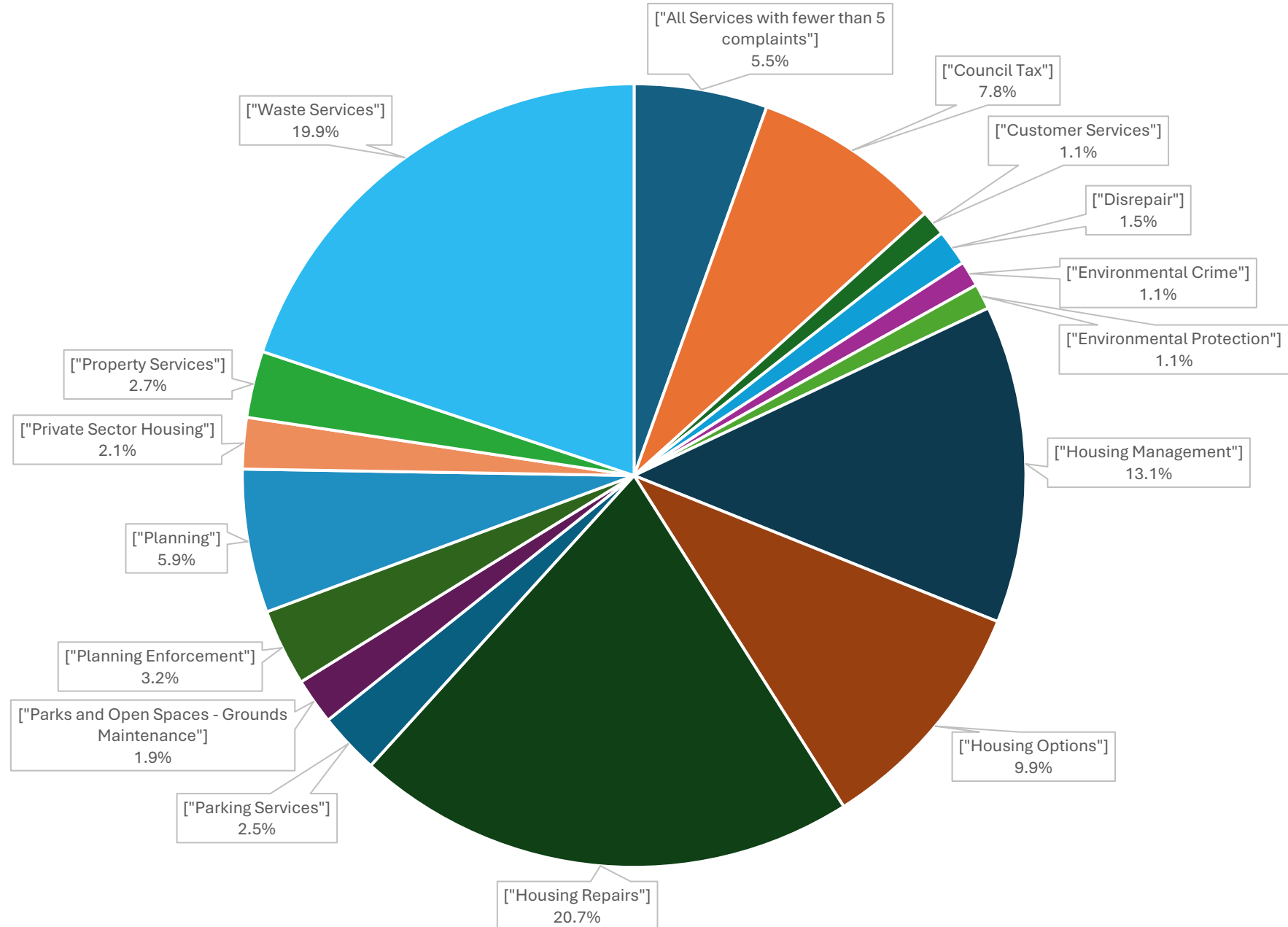
What department does your complaint relate to?	Stage 1		Stage 2	
	2024/25 (Opened)	2023/24 (Opened)	2024/25 (Opened)	2023/24 (Opened)
Anti-Social Behaviour CCTV and Community Safety	2	2	0	1
Benefits	2	0	1	1
Building Control	2	2	2	1
Business Rates	3	0	0	0
Community Services (including community grants and events)	0	0	0	0
Corporate Services	0	1	0	0
Council Tax	37	24	7	3
Creative Services (Design and Post Room)	0	0	0	0
Customer Services	5	3	0	0
Data Protection	1	0	0	0
Democratic Services	1	1	1	1
Disrepair*	7	-	0	-
Dover Museum	0	1	0	0
Economic Development (Major Projects and Inward Investment)	2	1	1	0
Economic Development (Tourism, VIC and Kearsney Café)	0	0	0	0
Electoral Services	1	2	0	0
Environmental Crime	5	0	1	0
Environmental Health	0	0	0	0
Environmental Protection	5	2	2	1
Finance	0	0	0	0
Housing Management	62	28	10	5
Housing Options	47	62	10	8
Housing Rents	3	2	0	1
Housing Repairs	98	61	11	14
Human Resources	0	1	0	0
IT and Website	1	0	0	0
Insurance Services	0	0	0	0
Legal Services	2	0	1	0

What department does your complaint relate to?	Stage 1		Stage 2	
	2022/23	2023/24		2023/24
Leisure Centre (Dover District Leisure Centre)	0	0	0	0
Tides Leisure Centre	0	0	0	0
Licensing	0	9	0	2
Parking Services	12	1	4	1
Parks and Open Spaces – Grounds Maintenance	9	16	1	11
Parks and Open Spaces – Kearsney Parks*	1	-	1	-
Parks and Open Spaces – Trees*	3	-	0	-
Planning	28	9	7	10
Planning Enforcement	15	3	7	0
Private Sector Housing	10	5	5	2
Property Services	13	1	4	0
Strategic Housing	1		0	
Valuation	0	16	0	2
Venues – Maison Dieu and Kearsney Café*	1	-	0	
Waste Services	94	24	9	3
TOTAL	473	277	84	67

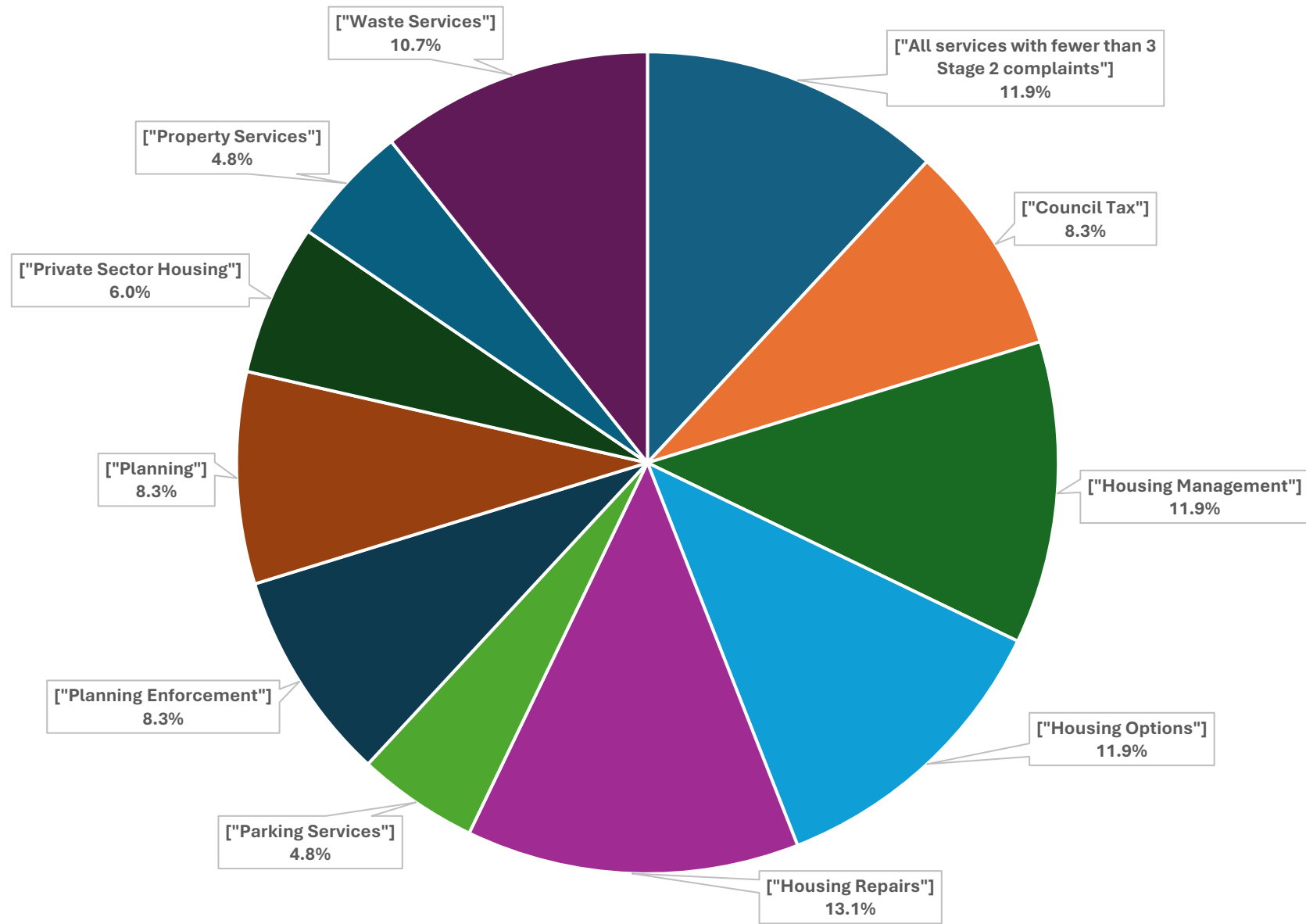
(*) New category created in 2024/25

It should be noted that the receipt or escalation of a complaint does not automatically equate to a fault on the part of the Council. All complainants have the right to take their complaint through the Council's two stage complaint process and then to the relevant Ombudsman.

Stage 1 Complaints 2024/25 by Service Area



Stage 2 Complaints 2024/25 by Service Area



Reasons for Complaints 2024/25 - All Stages

