



# Finance and Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee

<b>Report for:</b>	Finance and Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee
<b>Title of report:</b>	Complaints Update
<b>Date:</b>	4 March 2025
<b>Report on behalf of:</b>	Councillor Caroline Smith-Wright (Portfolio Holder for People and Transformation)
<b>Part:</b>	I
<b>If Part II, reason:</b>	N/A
<b>Appendices:</b>	
<b>Background papers:</b>	Nil
<b>Glossary of acronyms and any other abbreviations used in this report:</b>	CLT - Corporate Leadership Team SLT - Strategic Leadership Team

### Report Author / Responsible Officer

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<b>Corporate Priorities</b>	Service improvement and delivery: Running the Council efficiently and putting residents at the heart of everything we do
<b>Wards affected</b>	All
<b>Purpose of the report:</b>	1. To provide the Finance and Resource Committee with insights on complaints and highlight work that has been undertaken to improve the complaints process.
<b>Recommendation (s) to the decision maker (s):</b>	N/A

## 1 Introduction/Background:

- 1.1. A corporate complaints policy exists ([Complaints Policy](#)) which governs how the Council responds to complaints.

The corporate complaints team are responsible for co-ordinating and allocating complaints to the relevant teams to respond to complaints whilst keeping oversight of performance at team level.

- 1.2. This report provides an overview of complaints performance for 2024, and highlights work that has been undertaken to improve the complaints process.

## 2 Key Issues

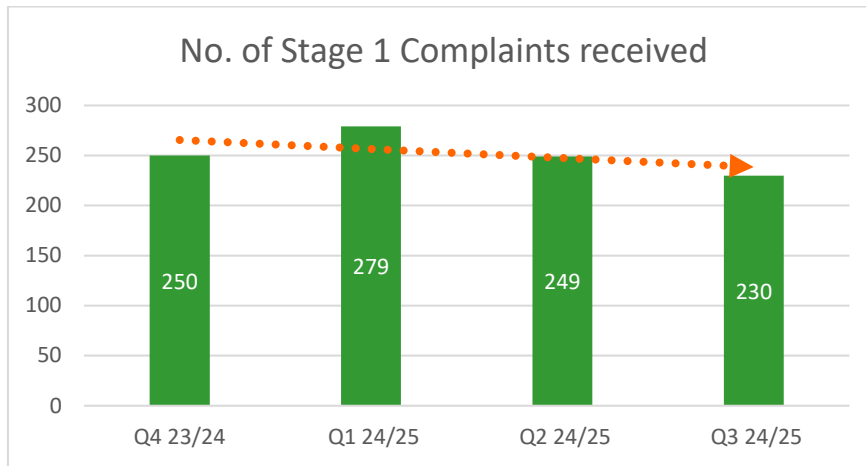
### Complaints data – January to December 2024

- 2.1 The Council's complaints policy sets out that Stage 1 complaints will be responded to within 10 working days of receipt of the complaint and Stage 2 complaints will be responded to within 20 working days of receipt of the complaint. Performance is measured via a Key Performance Indicator with a target of responding to at least 90% of stage 1 and stage 2 complaints within these policy timescales and is reported to Finance and Resources Scrutiny committee on a quarterly basis.
- 2.2 Performance of responding to complaints within policy times has steadily improved over 2024 and most recently, performance has been above target for Stage 1 complaints. Some headlines from this period include:
- a decrease in the number of Stage 1 complaints received,
  - a decrease in the number of complaints escalated to Stage 2,
  - and an increase in the number of complaints that were responded to within target.

### Stage 1 Complaints

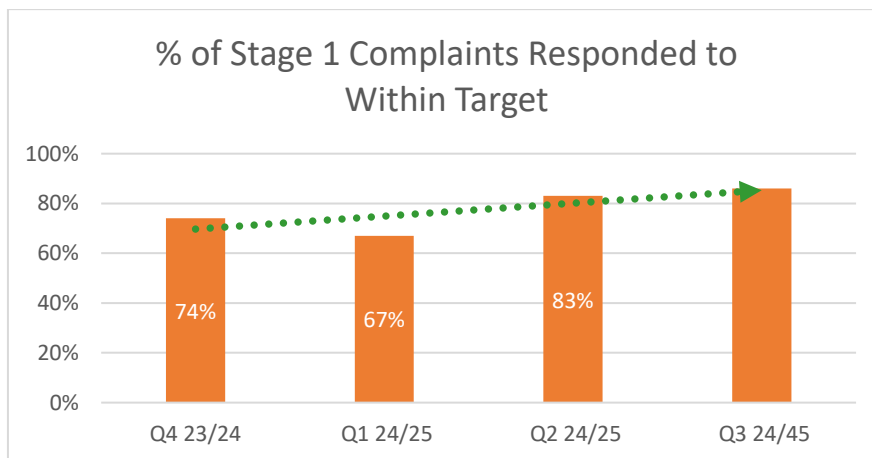
- 2.3 In 2024, DBC received 1,008 Stage 1 complaints in total. It is difficult to benchmark this against other authorities, as there is no requirement to publicly publish complaints data. A large proportion of these complaints related to Housing repairs, which is expected given the size of the housing stock owned by DBC, and the immediacy of the issues to the residents (e.g. damp and mould, leaks).
- 2.4 Overall, there was a downwards trend in the number of Stage 1 complaints received, with there being a steady decrease for three quarters in a row. Just under half (47%) of those complaints received were upheld or partially upheld.

2.5



2.6 Completing cases on time has been a challenge due to the volumes of complaints and resources available internally to manage them. Although performance levels were relatively low in the beginning of the year, there has been marked improvement in the number of Stage 1 complaints responded to within target. For the second half of the year, around 85% of Stage 1 complaints were responded to within target and in Q3 24/25, performance was above the 90% target.

2.7

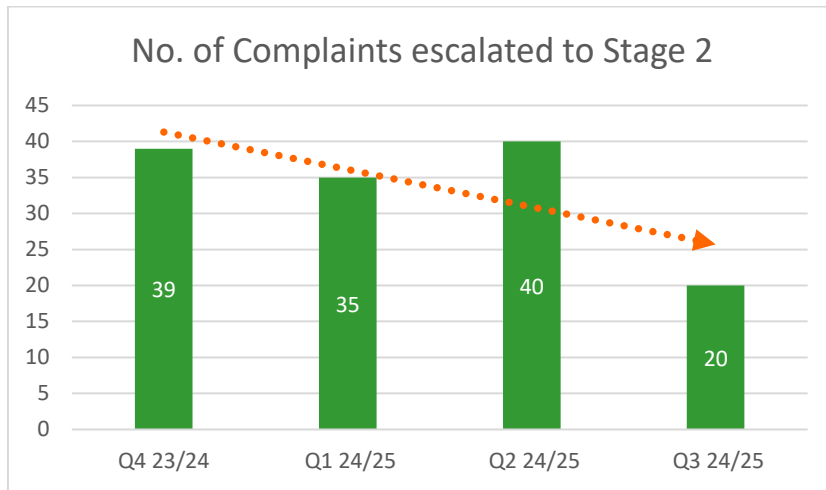


2.8 The Responsive Repairs team in Housing appointed a new Head of Service in 2024 who prioritised improving complaints performance within the team. The Head of Service implemented a number of changes including improved communication and data sharing protocols with the Councils repairs contractor, taking action around increasing individual officer responsibility and managing resident expectations. This resulted in improved performance levels within the team and fewer responsive repairs cases being escalated to stage 2 in the latter stages of 2024.

Stage 2 complaints

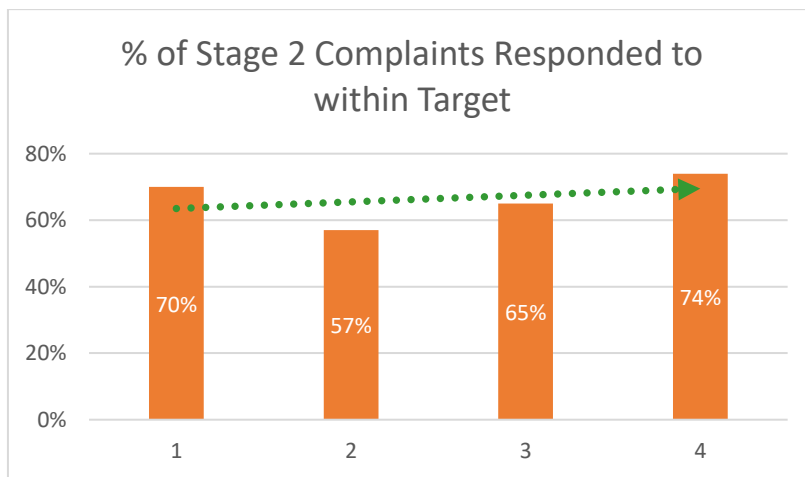
2.9 The number of complaints being escalated to stage 2 has also shown improvement. For the first three quarters of the year, the numbers being escalated remained relatively stable, but in the final quarter the number of escalations halved. On average for the year, 27% of Stage 2 complaints were upheld.

2.10



2.11 The percentage of Stage 2 complaints that were responded to within target followed a very similar pattern to Stage 1, with there being an improving trend overall.

2.12



2.13 The percentage responded to within target for Stage 2 was lower in general than for Stage 1 – reflective of the often more complex nature of Stage 2 complaints. Again, responsive repairs received the greatest number of escalations to stage 2, but as mentioned above, the work they have been undertaking has resulted in a significant reduction of escalations.

#### Transformation of the complaints process

2.14 In recent years, the complaints process has undergone transformation to improve performance and increase customer satisfaction. Complaints was centralised into a corporate area in 2023, with a dedicated complaints officer role established to support the Council manage complaints more effectively.

2.15 A new complaints policy was also introduced in 2023 as part of the Customer Strategy, which set out the definition of a complaint, timeframes for responses, how to complain, and our process. This policy has since seen modifications to comply with national guidelines.

2.16 In the wake of the Grenfell tragedy, the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 extended the powers of the Housing Ombudsman. The Housing Ombudsman developed a Complaint Handling Code which became statutory for members of the Housing Ombudsman Scheme in April 2024. This code sets out best practice for landlords to effectively handle complaints; the complaints policy was updated to

reflect this, and relevant training and governance structures were put in place to ensure compliance. Landlords on the scheme are required to submit an annual submission of their performance against the code, ensuring accountability and transparency.

- 2.17 The Complaints team have undertaken several actions over the last 18 months to improve performance levels across all services in Dacorum, including:
- 2.17.1 introducing consistent templates for complaints responses,
  - 2.17.2 training staff members to instil the importance of responding to complaints effectively and within target,
  - 2.17.3 increasing individual accountability around complaints, including regular meetings with Heads of Service to work through complaints with them and provide support in responding to them if there are complexities,
  - 2.17.4 Reporting complaint performance monthly to Corporate (CLT) and Strategic Leadership Team (SLT) meetings for increased oversight,
  - 2.17.5 Implementing a new process where Heads of Service must review and approve all stage 1 responses to enhance complaint response quality.
  - 2.17.6 where complaints are more complex, we have been encouraging services to communicate with the customer and agree an extension of time to enable a satisfactory outcome.
- 2.18 Housing and Property Services have been using CXFeedback to receive feedback and monitor customer satisfaction after the completion of an action, or the closure of a complaint. Findings are regularly reported on, and the use of CXFeedback is now being rolled out to all complaints sent to the Council. The use of CXFeedback may allow services to identify issues before they become complaints.
- 2.19 The complaints team also attended the Housing Open Day, providing residents with more information about the Customer Promise and our complaints process.
- 2.20 Looking forward, the complaints process is undergoing further transformation with the new Digital Platform which will work to automate the complaints process. The Digital Platform will decrease the levels of manual admin that characterise the current complaints process and will facilitate improved reporting, allowing for a data-insights based approach.

### **3 Conclusions:**

- 3.1 There has been a significant internal drive to improve the complaints process with the aim of increasing customer satisfaction. In the latter half of 2024, there were improvements in the number of complaints received, the number of escalations, and complaint response times. Moving the management of complaints onto the digital platform will enable further efficiencies in the process which should see further improvement in performance.